

The Work on Gender Mainstreaming in the Ministry of Employment by Agnete Andersen, legal adviser

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The outset for the work on gender mainstreaming

Gender equality is a difficult bird because society has always considered the male as the norm for human beings and women's lives as secondary to that of men's. Bringing gender mainstreaming into play makes it natural to assess the characteristics of the two sexes independently of each other, and so saying without fixed frames in advance. Because of women's and men's different living conditions through the ages the sex often was decisive to the effect of a concrete effort. Gender mainstreaming may be an answer to this challenge.

These years gender mainstreaming is seen as a tool to speed up the work of gender equality and assist in keeping gender equality on the agenda of society. However, gender mainstreaming is a word and a concept difficult to understand, and to some degree it has kept people away from starting working with the concept. Many attempts have been done to find another word, but so far without result.

Gender mainstreaming helps to create better understanding of the characteristics of the two sexes and in that way gives new knowledge about the target groups who are affected by concrete actions. The different living conditions of the two sexes are of significance for their needs and attitudes to consumer goods and public services.

The publicity trade has always known that. Without knowing what attracts different segments of customers, also in this respect sex is the most important factor; every marketing initiative would be in the dark. It is not to promote gender equality, but that is another case.

Documentation about the different situation and behaviour of the two sexes may in itself urge considerations about new political goals which may contribute to a change of the conditions of the two sexes. The lack of expediency becomes evident. An open discussion of the conflicting reasons on an objective basis is possible, and it helps to qualify the debate.

History

The concept gender mainstreaming is mentioned for the first time in international texts after the 3rd United Nations World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985, in relation to the debate within the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) on the role of women in development. It was seen as a means of promoting the role of women in the field of development and of integrating women's values into development work.

The commitment of the governments to incorporate the Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women should be boosted. The Forward Looking Strategies to promote gender equality was the first gender equality policy on a world-wide basis because it was the first time all members of the UN agreed on a common basis for a policy on women covering all nations. It has neither been possible at the first World Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975 nor at the second World Conference on Women in Copenhagen in 1980.

The Forward Looking Strategies was a gender policy basis giving the CSW new opportunities to show other UN bodies what the work on gender equality was all about. The CSW was fully aware of the fact that gender equality cannot be implemented by equality experts alone. It was obvious that it would be an overwhelming task for the CSW to involve the other UN bodies without a tool facilitating that the UN bodies themselves were able to work with gender equality. Gender mainstreaming became the new tool which was to ensure that UN bodies could work with gender equality.

Actually, gender mainstreaming has developed out of necessity: a governmental commitment to implement the ideas of the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women had as a precondition that the UN organisations dealt with these strategies in their ordinary work.

At the UN World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995), the strategy of gender mainstreaming was explicitly endorsed by the Platform for Action which was adopted at the end of the conference. The Platform for Action calls for promotion of the policy of gender mainstreaming.

The Council of Europe

On the basis of the increasing interest in gender mainstreaming world wide, the Steering Committee on Gender Equality (CDEG) in the Council of Europe decided in 1995 to set up a group of specialists. The group prepared a conceptual framework and a methodology for mainstreaming gender equality.

The Council of Europe was the first international organisation to introduce a comprehensive definition of the concept and presented an overview of the use of the gender mainstreaming strategy in EU and in European countries. The report was submitted in 1998.

The definition of gender mainstreaming highlights the goal of gender mainstreaming, the process, the objects and active subjects of gender mainstreaming:

“Gender mainstreaming is the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making.”

The definition has as a prerequisite that data broken down by gender is available. The target group scoped for the initiative has to be divided on gender. The definition recognizes that it is impossible to take political decisions without knowing the characteristics of the target group. The definition does not figure out how obstacles to gender equality can be dealt with.

The European Union

Gender mainstreaming is the integration of the gender perspective into every stage of policy processes – design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – with a view to promoting equality between women and men.

It means assessing how policies impact on the life and position of both women and men – and taking responsibility to re-address them if necessary. This is the way to make gender equality a concrete reality in the lives of women and men creating space for everyone within the organisations as well as in communities - to contribute to the process of articulating a shared vision of sustainable

human development and translating it into reality.

The commitment to gender mainstreaming needs to be taken at high political level and needs to permeate the whole organisation, be it the European Commission or a national or regional civil service. It should not be dependent on a few dedicated individuals, but an automatic reflex throughout an organisational structure. It is important therefore that, at the policy level, the issue of gender equality becomes a visible and central concern in policy and planning.

Gender statistics, indicators and benchmarks, as well as statistics disaggregated by sex, play an essential role in promoting gender equality. They are a tool for gender mainstreaming and are needed to monitor progress in implementing the gender dimension in different policy fields, and towards the goal of equality between women and men. They make policy makers accountable towards citizens.

The Commission first started work on gender mainstreaming in the early 1990s, developing a more consistent approach following the UN Women's Conference held in Beijing in 1995. Since then, gender mainstreaming has steadily grown in importance. It is at the heart of the thinking behind the European Commission's Framework Strategy on gender equality 2001-2005.

At organisational level, the commitment to gender equality at the highest level was expressed by the setting-up of a Group of Commissioners on Equal Opportunities for women and men, back in 1995, with the aim to achieve a cross-sectoral approach to gender equality. This decision at political level is reinforced through the setting-up of the Inter-Service Group on Gender Equality, whose main task is to develop the future gender mainstreaming activities in all Commission services, through the formulation of work programmes, and the monitoring of their implementation.

The commitment to equality between women and men and gender mainstreaming has resulted not only in changes in the internal structure of the Commission, but also in the relationship with Member States.

The High Level Group on gender mainstreaming is an informal group of high level representatives responsible for gender mainstreaming at national level in the Member States.

Gender mainstreaming has gone further in some policy areas than in others. Employment, social inclusion, economic and social cohesion policy, science and research and external relations provide some examples of good practice at EU level.

Through the years, the European Commission has done important work on gender statistics and indicators in cooperation with EUROSTAT. It has also helped the High Level Group on gender mainstreaming in the development of indicators for the follow-up of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The purpose of gender mainstreaming

The strategy of gender mainstreaming is to improve the quality and effectiveness of the ordinary work and in this manner to a higher degree meet the individual needs of men and women. It is well-known in education that women and men benefit from different pedagogical systems and their living conditions may often determine that their needs for training and further education are different. If the users are only seen in a gender neutral perspective, the offers of education will not

suit all the applicants. More women, especially elderly women, need more training than men, and tailor-made solutions for both sexes would improve the outcome.

Data

Data on the current situation on women and men, and on current gender relations, are absolutely necessary for gender mainstreaming. The problem is not only that data often are not segregated by sex, but also that data might be gender biased. Good statistics comprise data that are relevant for both women and men and are split up by sex as well as by other background variables.

Therefore there is a need to analyse the obstacles. There are many reasons for men's and women's different living conditions, and the analysis of the obstacles is to contribute to uncovering the situation.

Gender mainstreaming implies knowledge of the content of an area of politics. Therefore statistics on women's and men's living conditions and their mutual relations within a certain area of society are an important precondition in order to be able to mainstream.

The role of data related to the development of quality

The main function of data is to provide for a precise knowledge of the persons who are included in the mainstreaming initiative. The target group must be described carefully.

When the sex is carefully described together with all other relevant personal characteristics, it is better known what the scope of the initiative is. And the quality of the initiative is improved

Gender mainstreaming has as a prerequisite that it is possible to assess the conditions of persons. The claim for data implies that persons are put into meaningful groups related to the content of the assessment. The sex is always meaningful. Very often age, ethnicity, and educational background are necessary variables.

Number, distribution of sex, and characteristics of the most important indicators within a certain area of society is therefore an essential tool in the work on gender mainstreaming.

The break down of data by sex must also be implemented in such a way that gender stereotypes are removed. It is important that data show a true picture of the status of the two sexes in society.

In that respect it is important to identify and analyse the target group. The analysis of the target group on the basis of data is decisive to secure that the basis of decisions is sufficient in order to formulate the content of the initiative. A clear picture of the content of the initiative is necessary. At the same time it has to be made clear how the concerned persons are influenced by the initiative. I.e. is there more or less money available for the concerned persons when a public service is adjusted.

However, no conclusion is made on what it takes to promote gender equality. To promote gender equality implies that a gender policy is formulated and incorporated in the policy within the area in play.

What is the norm for data?

When data are to be cleared of gender stereotypes on the conditions of the two sexes in society, the reason is that the understanding of the position of the two sexes in society has its outset in the

assumption that the norm is male. Especially on the labour market all demands have their outset in the performance of men. The man becomes the unit of measurement, like the horse has been the unit of measurement for the performance of a car.

This approach to the problem has been discussed in relation to the ILO and its way of dealing with gender mainstreaming. Their way of perceiving the gender perspective may maintain the classical gender roles. The claim is that men and women live together and women's difficulties on the labour market are due to their family obligations. This approach maintains already established patterns and does not promote equal opportunities for women and men. A bias is in play from the outset. If women's family obligations are not taken into account, data may be collected without acknowledgment of what needs to be known if the obstacles of gender equality are to be removed.

What does it mean that the male is the norm? It means that women do not fit in. The design of collecting data has its starting point in the organisation of society and the lives of men.

Demands for data in the Ministry of Employment

The Ministry needs a profound knowledge about how gender equality influences the labour market. This knowledge must be updated regularly for the benefit of the Ministry's work on gender equality on the labour market to ensure that the debate on gender equality takes place on an objective and informed basis.

It is also important that the collected data has such a nature that it may be used concretely and actively. The Ministry must always have preparedness both factually and politically.

The demand is that the data collection takes place on several levels. Everybody working with employment initiatives must know that the initiatives influence the two sexes differently.

The units in the Ministry are responsible for establishing supplementary data within their own area, so they are able to deliver the analysis necessary for the bills in order to live up to the obligation of presenting supplementary memos on gender equality memos.

The data collection may therefore be divided from the following angles:

- Common surveillance – create consciousness on gender and its significance for a labour policy
- Gender divided statistics for all the labour market to promote gender equality
- Gender divided statistics in all units in order to monitor their key services for the benefit of gender assessment of bills and identification of needs for gender mainstreaming of key services

National initiatives

The Danish Gender Equality Act contains a section on gender mainstreaming. This section has led to the inter-ministerial gender mainstreaming project which deals with all ministries work on gender mainstreaming.

Inter-ministerial Project within the Department of Gender Equality

The implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy is based on the Act on Gender Equality passed on 30 May 2000.

Section 4 of the Act stipulates that:

”Public authorities shall, within their portfolio, work for gender equality and integrate gender equality in all planning and administration (mainstreaming).”

Gender mainstreaming work entails integration of the gender and gender equality perspective in core areas in the public sector. This requires courage of innovation and courage to look at routine tasks from a new angle.

In 2001, the Minister for Gender Equality launched “The inter-ministerial gender mainstreaming project” for the purpose of implementing the gender mainstreaming strategy into central administration. The project was embarked on by taking gender mainstreaming initiatives in practically all ministries.

Overall objectives of inter-ministerial gender mainstreaming project:

- The gender and gender equality perspective must be included naturally in and form an integral part of central elements of ministerial core tasks; and
- Ministries must in their work be able to perceive society’s gender equality challenges in the context of their own policy areas.

Key elements of the inter-ministerial gender mainstreaming project:

- The organisation of the inter-ministerial gender mainstreaming project centres on a steering committee appointed by the Minister for Gender Equality to manage the work. Also a network is established to support, train and provide inspiration for employees working on the implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy.
- Many ministries have already launched exciting gender mainstreaming initiatives. The first results are now beginning to emerge, while other initiatives are still in the planning phase.
- An action plan for the years 2002-2006 containing objectives and a timetable for the project has been adopted by the steering committee. The action plan provides a framework for the progress of the project.
- A website has been created to enhance communication and serve as inspiration.
- Vision and strategy
The Government wants to create equal opportunities for women and men. Their goals are that women and men should be seen as equals and have equal opportunities for making their choices. With this in mind, the Government will strive to break down the barriers preventing individual women and men from living the life they want. The Government wants respect for diversity and respect for the individual’s personal choice. Gender equality is an essential aspect of Denmark’s democracy.”

The Ministry of Employment

The Ministry has formulated a gender policy within its area. For the Ministry of Employment the goals are very clear:

- Disaggregate the gender-segregated labour market
- Equal treatment

- Reduce the pay differentials between women and men
- Reduce women's extra unemployment
- Reconcile family life and working life

Denmark has an equality-friendly labour market. Women's participation rates are high and their working hours increasing.

But a number of imbalances still exist and call for continued action. These years, the measures are concentrated on the issues of equal pay, the gender-segregated labour market and reconciling work and family life.

These three fields of action are inter-connected, as the gender-segregated labour market is the single main cause of wage differentials between women and men. Female-dominated occupational sectors, on the other hand, often have more welfare benefits such as paid maternity leave, a higher degree of job security, etc.

Today, it is a generally accepted fact that there are differences between men and women. Men and women have different jobs, different education and different pay. Similarly, it is generally accepted that an effective employment policy is based on knowledge of the labour market and of the various groups of wage earners.

The role of the Government is to ensure that the legal framework within the equality policy and the labour market policy does not create obstacles to women and men's participation on the labour market. The overarching governmental objective is to promote occupational participation for everybody. When we look at the figures, it is clear that the effort has been successful.

The gender equality policy is seen as one of the means to achieve an efficient labour market policy.

The work takes place in a dialogue with the enterprises and the social partners, and the most recent knowledge of equal opportunities on the labour market is made available at seminars, conferences and in reports. The intention is that this knowledge should be used in actual practice in the enterprises. To the widest extent possible, the experience obtained will be made available in databases for the purpose of inspiration and exchange of experience for both enterprises and the labour market organisations.

Women's economic independence has been a decisive goal of gender equality from the outset of promoting gender equality. The organisation of the legislation on the labour market supports the economic independence of the individual. The Danish labour market is friendly towards gender equality, often based on decisions taken decades ago.

When you look at the gender equality goals on the labour market, you see that they are intimately connected. Desegregation of the gender-segregated labour market is the main single factor if you want to reduce the pay differentials between women and men. And there is no doubt that women's use of maternity leave and parental leave influences the pay negatively. The lack of reconciliation between working life and family life, a gender divided working life and gender discrimination influences women's unemployment negatively. It is characteristic that women between 25 and 34 when most women have their children have a higher unemployment than others.

Of course the legislation of the Ministry of Employment is gender neutral as it has been for nearly 30 years, and it is secured that all new legislation is gender neutral too. The legislation of the ministry of employment has to prevent gender discrimination on the labour market. Accordingly, an internal control has taken place for many years to make sure that the Ministry lives up to its goals.

The Ministry initiates special initiatives to reach the targets. All employees have the task to make sure that gender targets are met in the daily work with labour market policy initiatives.

Gender assessment of bills in the Ministry of Employment

Since 1995 all bills on active labour market initiatives and leave schemes have been gender assessed. Since then the arrangement has been extended to all bills in the ministry. All bills are accompanied by a memo since 2005.

The purpose of the memo is to uncover if there are relevant gender and equality aspects of the bill, and it must appear from the memo. Sometimes the bill is of greater importance for one sex than the other. The memo must contribute to avoiding unintended effects.

The memos contain the background to the bill. What is the occasion for presenting the bill. Is the bill part of an agreement in Parliament or part of the Government's policy basis.

The purpose of the bill. What problem is to be solved and how is the current situation changed?

The target group of the bill is especially important. You must know who is influenced by the bill. Their number, the division between women and men, their age, their educational background, their connection to the labour market give a clear picture of the affected persons. In the Ministry of Employment it is very often persons who get public allowances.

The memo must show what political interests are at play. Taking into account the different position of women and men on the labour market, it is very necessary to know how they are affected.

It has also appeared that it has not always been given priority how many persons are affected by a bill. When you consider how much that means for the costs of a bill, it is very strange indeed. But it is clear that the memos help to correct this situation.

The civil servants who are responsible for the work on bills must themselves write the memos on gender equality. Of course they have guidelines at hand telling them how to do. As mentioned earlier, gender divided statistics are at hand, but they must find out how many persons who are affected by a bill.

A preliminary evaluation shows that it still causes problems, so next year the guidelines will be updated in order to solve the problem.

Gender Mainstreaming in the Public Employment Service

The overall objective of the strategy is to improve the PES service to persons seeking employment or attending an educational/training course through the incorporation of equal opportunities considerations. Gradually, this experience is to be used in other services within the organisation in accordance with needs exposed in the documentation of the services' distribution and use when it comes to the gender perspective.

This will contribute to promoting an inclusive and more flexible labour market, increasing the supply of qualified labour and getting more people into employment.

Essential elements of the strategy include that management and the political level work actively to ensure that the equal opportunities work is performed by the entire staff. This is done by setting up a number of steering committees at different levels of the organisation of the Ministry of Employment.

Emphasis has therefore been placed on:

- The development and testing of tools as well as ordinary work flows which incorporate equal opportunities in relation to the core services of the PES;
- The development and testing of methods of measurement which incorporate equal opportunities in relation to the core services of the PES

The work on equal opportunities has thus been approached from a very operational and concrete angle. As a result, equal opportunities have become widely accepted in the pilot regions. The pilot project showed that if the PES changes routines, it can influence the unemployed persons' choice of job, the opinion of the companies in relation to gender and the staff of the PES in the placement of men and women in specific jobs.

New methods have been developed for measuring the PES equal opportunities initiative making it possible to monitor the PES placement and activation initiatives broken down by gender and profession. The level is chosen because gender segregation arises here. The new statistics measure effects and results of the placement and activation work. Aspects of the process up to the point of placement have also been measured. For instance, the number of women and men who the placement officers call in or refer to an interview with companies has been measured as well.

These statistics make it possible to evaluate whether any of the PES placement procedures induce a noticeable pre-discarding of the underrepresented gender and whether, in relation to the action plan interview, women and men are maintained in gender traditional directions of employment which cannot be founded in the qualifications of the individual.

Management thus has the opportunity to evaluate whether the possible lack of desired effects of the placement and activation work is, for example, due to inappropriate views and administrative routines in the daily performance of tasks.

It is possible to find examples which in a very simple way show the difference in the organisation of work. - "Earlier we worked in that way and now we are doing it this way, which has improved the quality of our services and promoted gender equality."

Future work on gender mainstreaming in the Ministry of Employment

The goal is to develop the use of gender mainstreaming in the key services where ever it is possible at the same time in a convincing way to improve quality of the services. Gender mainstreaming is an excellent tool for achieving knowledge about what you are doing and why.