



European Commission

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“PROM” PROJECT

Sweden inventory of good practices and policies

This paper is an internal document. It belongs to a transnational ENTP study on Gender. The paper deals with the project *promotion of the role of women at the local, institutional and economical level by the development of an integrated gender approach (PROM)*.

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NATIONAL LEVEL

Equality between women and men

Source: The web site of the Swedish government www.sweden.gov.se

In 2006 the Swedish parliament decided to implement new objectives concerning equality between women and men in Sweden. The main objective of this new policy is that "women and men shall have equal power to shape society and their own lives". A prerequisite to accomplish this is that women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all spheres of life.

Interim objectives

- An equal distribution of power and influence. Women and men shall have the same rights and opportunities to be active citizens and to shape the conditions of decision-making.
- Economic equality between women and men. Women and men shall have the same opportunities and conditions with regards to education and paid work that provide life long economic independence.
- An equal distribution of unpaid care and household work. Women and men shall take the same responsibility for household work and have the same opportunities to give and receive care on equal terms.
- Men's violence against women shall come to an end. Women and men, girls and boys, shall have equal rights and opportunities to physical integrity.

Adopted by the Swedish parliament (Riksdag) in 2006.

The law

- *The Equal Opportunities Act* (Jämställdhetslagen (1991:433) (The very first version of this law came in 1980) is promoting equal rights between women and men at work. The employer is obliged to deal actively with matters of equality. The law forbids direct or indirect discrimination and sexual harassments.
- Also *the Act of Local Authorities* (Kommunallagen 1991:900) forbids discrimination.
- Several other always deal with the matter of equality.

Work life balance = the jigsaw puzzle of life

“Same opportunities, rights, and responsibilities for women and men”, that is the principal aim of Sweden’s gender equality policy. One of the pillars of this policy is “shared responsibility for children and the home”. In other words: One purpose of this legislation is the facilitation of *work life balance* and *the promotion of the role of women at the local, institutional and economical level by the development of an integrated gender approach*.

(*Livspusslet* [The jigsaw puzzle of life] is a modern Swedish word for “work life balance”).

Gender mainstreaming

Source: The web site of the Swedish government www.sweden.gov.se

Gender mainstreaming is a government program. It involves running activities so that men and women have access to government services on equal terms.

A government committee is working on implementing gender mainstreaming in all fields of public policy making political decisions etc.

Gender mainstreaming is meant to promote gender emancipation also in a more general process in Swedish society.

State social insurance system

Sources:

The web site of the Swedish government www.sweden.gov.se

The web site of the Swedish Social Insurance Agency www.fk.se

Background: From charity to solidarity

A hundred years ago “relief for the poor” was mainly intended to counteract mass death and poverty on a large scale. In the middle of the 19th century Sweden started to become industrialised. Living conditions were very poor, work was heavy and dirty. As people became more dependent on income in the form of money and not of goods as in the peasant society, financial vulnerability increased in connection with ill health, accidents at work, old age and parenthood.

The aim of the social insurance system has changed since it started in the early 20th century. It has become a democratic welfare system which involves (almost) all Swedes. An important target is to promote social cohesion. Today the social insurance system is a source of income and/or a source of security for most people. Some parts of the system involves more people, other involves less. The parental insurance involves all Swedish families with small children. After WW II one major goal of Swedish welfare politics was to reduce economic and social gaps and, during the last decades, to promote equality between men and women. In the 1980th “solidarity” became a key term in legislation (social act).

Parental insurance. National parental benefit

Source: The web site of the Swedish Social Insurance Agency) www.fk.se

The National parental benefit of 1974 (föräldraförsäkringen), is one part of the Social insurance system - all founded on a idea of solidarity, people helping each other from birth to retirement by paying taxes.

The parental benefit is gender neutral. As a mother and a father you are entitled to parental leave if you give up gainful employment in order to look after your child. Parental benefit is payable for 480 days per parental couple and per kid.

This state allowance is 80% of a person’s salary, up to a certain level. (In March 2007 liberal Minister for Integration and Gender Equality Mrs. Nyamko Sabuni has discussed the possibility of skipping that “certain level” – in other words: an unlimited allowance.)

The days of parental benefit are shared equally between both parents. However, one parent may give up the right to parental benefit to the other parent, except for 60 days. That “forces” each parent to stay at home at least two months each in order obtain the full benefit.

Fathers and mothers have had equal access to paternity leave since 1974. Still fathers only take out 20 % of the parent days. Government officials confirm that this percentage could be better. In spite of several large propaganda campaigns, the relatively poor participation of fathers is constantly debated:

- What can encourage fathers to stay home more?
- Some leftist, liberal and/or feminist politicians and debaters want a compulsory fifty fifty split of days between mums and dads. In other words: Half of the days to the mother and half of the days to the father. However, there is no parliamentary majority support for such a proposal. In a few more years we will see the results of this on going debate.

Conservative morning daily Svenska Dagbladet represents a right wing opinion. The news paper is against a fifty – fifty split:

“The state and the collectives have too much power. While individuals and families are to limited to decide about there own lives. Lower taxes would give more room for normal families to organise there lives independently of public allowance.” (Editorial April 2005)

Pregnant women with physically demanding job demanding jobs are entitled to be transferred to other duties. If you have a heavy job and if your employer is unable to relocate you, you may be able to draw pregnancy cash benefit. You can draw pregnancy cash benefit for up to 50 days.

All pregnant women can start their parental leave already 60 days before expected delivery. **Dads and adoptive parents**, according to legislation fathers are entitled to ten paid days’ leave in connection with the birth of the child. Adoptive parents, get five days each. The state allowance is 80% of a person’s salary, up to a certain level.

A “successful” campaign that “failed”

Source: The web site of the Swedish Social Insurance Agency) www.fk.se



Already in the 1974 when the gender neutral parental leave was first introduced this picture of weight lifter Lennart "Hoa-Hoa" Dahlgren was used in a big state campaign to make dads go on parental leave. Hoa-Hoa became a very well known man, still remembered. Also the nation wide campaign as such became extremely famous. However the concrete results of this campaign was poor. In spite of all its good intentions and popularity it had very little effect on dads desire to go on parental leave.

According to Mr Robin Lapidus (Chief of Public Relations at the National Social Insurance Board) this campaign has had an impact on attitudes and will gradually and eventually change people's opinions. But that will take time. Today, 34 years after the start of this program, the dads are using 20% of their days. With this speed of development mums and dads will not be sharing the parental leave equality until year 2023.

However 97% of the Swedes think that parental leave should be split more equal between men and women. That shows that over the years the different campaigns have had effects: Peoples attitudes have changed more than people's behaviour. But eventually also the behaviour will change, according to Lapidus.

Gender and politics

There is a fundamental ideological difference between the two major political parties. That difference has an impact also when it comes to equality between men and women, and – indirectly - the facilitation of *work life balance* and *the promotion of the role of women at the local, institutional and economical level by the development of an integrated gender approach*.

- The Conservatives (*Moderaterna*) stresses the freedom of the individual to choose life style.
- The Social democrats (*Socialdemokraterna*) believe more in legislation as a tool to promote a change.
- None of these parties mention any thing about men in their official platforms.

Sources:

Website of the Conservative party www.moderat.se

Website of the Social Democratic party www.socialdemokraterna.se

Labour market

LO, the huge Swedish confederation of trade unions, with 1,8 million members and traditionally dominated by male workers and male trade unionists, a few years ago declared itself to be a feminist organisation.

In the report “Klass och kön” (LO 2006) (Class and gender) one theme is Work Life Balance or “The jigsaw puzzle of life” as we say in Sweden.

LO sees it as its task not only to fight for its members rights but also to change the entire society into more equality. To LO feminism is not only an issue of “women's rights” but also a matter of emancipation for men, fathers as well as non-fathers. In other words: LO wants us all to leave the old order where mothers take care of home and children and fathers go to work outside the home. To LO the promotion of the role of women at the local, institutional and economical level by the development of an integrated gender approach seems to be important.

A similar view comes from the employers: According to Mrs Kirsten Åkerman of the Confederation of Swedish Employers there is no conflict between men's and women's emancipation or liberation.

Comment:

A century of reforms for gender equality has improved life quality for both men and women. Women's liberation has also emancipated men. Important preconditions to achieve men's, as well as women's emancipation are for examples:

- Good social cohesion.
- A well working well fare state.
- Progressive employers and trade unions.

Sport

The Swedish Sports Confederation is the umbrella organisation of the Swedish sports movement. In the confederation the promotion of the role of women at all levels are important.

From their platform of equality:

- Sport is a matter of democracy
- Men and women have different values, knowledge, experiences and interests.
- Equal possibilities and priorities to girls and boys, women and men
- Equal influences. At least 40% of each sex in boards etc.

DISCUSSION: Equality, economic growth and good health

Paternity leave schemes in Scandinavia are among the most generous in the world. Recent research shows that the system benefits to society.

According to the Swedish government gender equality also contribute to economic growth. Equal people work harder and are more involved. Livia Oláh, University of Stockholm, and Ann Månsdotter University of Umeå, show that paternity leave leads to more and happier children, fewer divorces, better health, and longer life. However working class fathers are underrepresented when it comes to paternity leave. (Svenska Dagbladet, 2004)

DISCUSSION: Double-working mothers

Sometimes you hear immigrant women, and others with a foreign perspective, criticize the "Swedish model of gender emancipation". They mean that the "abolition" of the house wife and women's large scale entrance on the labour market (often working full time) did not emancipated women, on the contrary.

Women's lib has led to many "double working" mothers. After a day of 8 hours of paid work, another work starts: Shopping food, cooking, helping kids with home work, organizing the families "jig saw puzzle of life", help old relatives. Many mothers seem to have a *Double-work*.

Marcello Ferrada-Noli, professor of health psychology at the Stockholm Karolinska Institute claims that mother's double work is a major explanation to high seek leave among women.

DISCUSSION: Backlash for emancipation

During the 1970s and the 1980s the number of men working at pre schools in Sweden increased. But a few pederast scandals (and lots of false rumours) in the early 1990s put an end to that positive trend. Suspiciousness and absurd accusations made many male pre school teachers leave there jobs. Still today there are much less men working with little children than 10-20 years ago.

REGIONAL LEVEL

Sweden is one of the most homogenous countries in Europe. There are very little ethnic differences between various regions.

Therefore talking about a regional level might be less relevant here than in other countries.

However, Sweden is divided into 21 counties. Each county is headed by a board. The board is appointed by the government in Stockholm.

In cooperation with the European Social Fund, the Stockholm county council has started a program for Gender Equality and Regional Development called “Sthlm Jämt” (Stockholm gender equality)

“Sthlm Jämt” is a regional platform for long-term strategic initiatives to achieve gender equality in the county.

The vision is a county with gender equality.

The County Board is also responsible for coordinating the regional growth and in the Stockholm region.

An important task is to integrate gender equality in regional development to increase international competitiveness.

LOCAL LEVEL

Hässelby-Vällingby is part of the city of Stockholm. The Stockholm City District of Hässelby-Vällingby is the home of close to 60.000 people. The district is “governed” by the city district council. The district council is appointed by the city council of Stockholm. The district council is in charge of pre-schools, care of old and disabled people, social services, anti-jobless programs and the maintenance of park.

Some 3000 employees work for the Hässelby-Vällingby city district council.

The Hässelby-Vällingby “Document of equality and diversity” is based on the City of Stockholm general policy of equality, diversity etc. as well as on national legislation.

In Hässelby-Vällingby gender and equality between men and women is nothing new on the agenda. We have been dealing with these issues and been active partners in various joint projects on this theme since the early 90ies. This job has been carried out together with the city of Stockholm and the county of Stockholm and (partly) financed with state (government) money.

Our “Document of equality and diversity” (Jämställdhets- och mångfaldsplan. Hässelby-Vällingby stadsdelsnämnd. 2007) is an official municipality regulation of the responsibilities of the municipality as the employer to 3000 people.

The document (8 pages) deals with

- equality between men and women
- equality between people and people (age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, handicap/disability)
- diversity, discrimination etc

The document contains a chapter about how Hässelby-Vällingby should act as an employer to facilitate Work Life balance and promote the role of women among municipality workers in Hässelby-Vällingby.

- Facilitate for employees to combine work and family life.
- Flexible work hours
- Employees on parental leave should be invited to meetings at work.
- Activities (programs) of reintroduction to facilitate for parents when they return to work after end of leave.
- Yes to vacation during minority holidays.
- Attitudes on parenting and family vs work should be on the agenda at work meeting.
- Local yearly statistics on parental leave etc

The City of Stockholm (incl. Hässelby-Vällingby) has an overall responsibility to promote an attitude of equality among staff vis-à-vis customers, clients, pupils, patients and other users and receivers of public services.

(**Source:** Equal Opportunities Policy for the City of Stockholm www.stockholm.se)

One incitation for us to be part of the PROM project is to develop and broaden our gender work in Hässelby-Vällingby as well as sharing our experiences with European friends and colleagues.

Private sector initiatives

Traditionally pre schools in Sweden have been operated by local councils (=municipalities). As a result of political liberalisation in recent decades local councils, (including the municipality of Stockholm and the city district council of Hässelby-Vällingby) have invited private entrepreneurs to operate in various fields where traditionally only public sector were allowed to operate. One third of preschools in Hässelby-Vällingby are run by independent entrepreneurs. They are however financed in the same way as preschools run by the municipality, (namely by tax payers money).

“Pysslingen” is one leading private preschool company in the field of out sourced child care/education. In Hässelby-Vällingby Pysslingen run two pre schools.

Does Pysslingen represent an interesting alternative to traditional public pre schools? Does Pysslingen promote a better work life balance? Or is Pysslingen only interested in making a good profit for their stockholders (owners)? These are important political topics in Sweden today.

Pysslingen preschools and schools is an independent entrepreneur working for local councils all over Sweden as contractors in education and child care. Pysslingen gender document talks in more general terms about equality and is not targeting fathers or men.

However when Pysslingen Hässelby-Vällingby manager Mrs Lena Borgh describes their methods with the kids she shows a great deal of gender awareness: “The gender perspective is constantly on the agenda at Pysslingen”, says Lena who has been working with children since the 1970-ies. Lena and her employers emphasize on equality. It is important to avoid stereotypes. For example: (girls) vanity should not be (over) encouraged. The same goes with boys... Don’t encourage “toughness” etc. After decades in the business Lena claims that her methods give results.

Pysslingen preschools operate on a market. Children are placed at Pysslingen preschool as result of their parent’s active choice. Lena says that the gender issue is relevant to many important families when they choose preschool.

The Pysslingen experience shows that a progressive gender policy is not just a matter for the public sector (municipalities etc). A progressive policy can attract costumers and can give advantages to private child care companies operating on a market economy.

Like in all preschools in Sweden Pysslingen suffers from a shortage of male staff.

GENERAL

Comments. Attitudes

In spite of all progressive politics and other good intentions the world is full of invisible contra forces. Examples:

- Fathers earn more money than men without children. But mothers earn less money than women with out children. (Source: The Swedish National Institute of Public Health)
- In Sweden some people say that fathers’ parental leave is a gift and a privilege. As a father you seem to have more of a choice than the mother. Fathers can chose weather to go home on paternity leave or stay at work. For mothers it seems to be a different story: - For mothers parental leave seems to be more linked to responsibility and duty. Even the government has expressed this critical view in a official report (Source: SOU 2005:66)

Men’s role

The conclusions are:

1. The political left (more than the political right) stresses active politics and public policies are essential in order to achieve “emancipation of men”, including the facilitation for fathers to reach a *work life balance* and *the promotion of the role of women*.
2. It does not have to be a conflict between the emancipation of man and the emancipation of woman. On the contrary - men is gaining from women’s emancipation and vice versa. This goes for all kinds of men and women – not only fathers and mothers. (Klass och kön. Landsorganisationen i Sverige = Confederation of Trade unions. Report about Class and gender 2006)
3. Work life balance of fathers (men) has a significant impact on women’s potential for career, personal development, institutional involvement etc (Klass och kön.

Landsorganisationen i Sverige = Confederation of Trade unions. Report about Class and gender 2006)

Legislation: On vacation (holidays)

In the sixties many Swedes were surprised when they heard the Beatles singing about retirement in “When I am sixty four...”

In those days most Swedes did not retire until the age of 67. Today the average age of retirement has been lowered but still is one of the highest in Europe. Late retirement age is however compensated by longer vacations. Working Swedes have the legal right to five weeks vacation. (Longer vacations are common.) During long light summer vacations (often combined with parental leave) lots of Swedish dads and their children get a chance to spend happy days together. In other words: From point of view of the work year the generous vacation legislation facilitated a better balance between work life and give fathers more time to spend with families.

Legislation: Maintenance support

A divorced parent living with children (often the mother) is entitled to maintenance support from the “other” parent (often the father) in order to help provide for the child’s upkeep by paying maintenance. If the parents fail to reach an agreement concerning the child’s maintenance the matter can be decided by a court.

If the “other” parent (often the father) can’t or refuses to pay the National State Insurance Office may pay maintenance support to the “first” parent (often the mother).

Maintenance support is payable until the child reaches the age of 18.