



Ombudsman for Equality

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THE FUTURE OF EUROPE: ENLARGEMENT

Line 1

Gender Equality

Mainstreaming

Gender equality

There is not one single definition of gender equality. According to one definition it means that - all people, women and men, are able to develop their capacities and abilities, make choices without being hampered by one's sex, that their different ways of behaviour, pursuits and their needs would be equally valued and given equal status.

Formal (de jure) equality means equal rights, prevention and prohibition of discrimination in legislation. Women and men are juridically in equal position. This does not, however, guarantee real equality in practice. Equality de facto goes further emphasizing the possibility to practise equal rights and equal opportunities.

Illusion of equality in Finland

The illusion of equality – which is reality in Finland - is largely a result of gender neutrality, which has led to gender blindness. Gender has become non-existing and this has mistakenly been taken as a sign of equality. But only a look at our society in the light of the statistics tells us where women stand in Finland in 2003. The pay gap between women and men still is, on the average, 20 – 25 %. Women are loaded with the double burden of work: the work outside home and domestic responsibilities. Women are not often seen in top positions in the business world.

Gender must be made visible, the differences between women and men must be recognized in order to promote equality between women and men. The objective of equality must be integrated into the strategies, structures and decision making of society. In this mainstreaming is needed.

What is 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 policymaking. (Council of Europe, Gender Mainstreaming, 1998)

The values of gender mainstreaming:

- better governance
- transparency
- better use of human resources
- saves economic resources
- makes equality issues visible
- improves the quality of decision making (legislation etc.)

Just to mention a few aspects.

The model of mainstreaming in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

The objective is to establish

- the appropriate administrative models and procedures needed to support the promotion of gender equality as a part of the Ministry's and authorities' actions;
- presupposes changed administrative processes and administrative culture, new co-operation relations and hearing agencies.

Mainstreaming does not compensate equality policy nor does it compensate separate equality organisations.

The steps taken in the Ministry:

1. Introduction of mainstreaming in the Ministry in 2001: informing the leadership (ministers, Permanent Secretary, heads of the departments) of the Ministry one by one; integration of the obligation to mainstream into the guidelines for preparing the annual action plan of the Ministry.
2. Instructions for mainstreaming by a decision of the Ministry together with a guide to gender impact assessment; starting the gender impact assessment of the legislation.
3. Training for the civil servants that are responsible for the drafting of legislation. The role of the equality unit of the Ministry is to support and give guidance, but the unit does not carry out the mainstreaming for other actors, however.
4. Pilot project in 2003: a working group formed, in which all the departments of the Ministry are represented, in order to secure the commitment of all of the Ministry and access to information. The critical areas of the mainstreaming project are the budget, target agreements, projects, strategies and the personnel policy of the Ministry as well as training of the civil servants.

The aim of the working group is to create a model of mainstreaming, which can be used largely in the government administration.

Workplace Equality planning as a tool in mainstreaming

The Finnish Act on Equality obliges all employers with at least 30 employees to include measures to further equality between women and men at the workplace in the annual personnel and training plan or the action programme for labour protection. An equality plan can also be made separately.

Measures promoting equality are workplace specific. Equality planning as a right and as a tool for mainstreaming means promotion of equality as an integral part of the operations and management of the workplace.

The first and the most important step in workplace equality planning is the commitment of the leadership and management. The second step is to carry out a comprehensive preliminary charting to learn about the equality status of the working community in question.

Some of the critical areas of equality planning:

- structure of personnel
- recruitment policies
- organisation and task structure of the workplace
- wages and the wage structure
- personnel training and occupational advancement
- use of family leaves
- working conditions
- workplace atmosphere
- setting of the objectives (be detailed!)
- concrete measures (be concrete!)
- follow up (don't forget!)

Mainstreaming does not just “happen”, it must be done!! It takes resources and effort!