

Session C2: LEVERAGING POLICIES AND LEGISLATION *The Norwegian experience duty*

Theme: Promoting structural change Wednesday 9 November 2011 09:45 - 11:15

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Policy approach at national level

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

It is very nice to be here in Brussels and to have the opportunity to take part in this session on gender in science.

We know a lot about women in academia – both about their contributions and also their minority positions. The topic is not new. We have for years discussed and tried out measures and actions. But it has been difficult to achieve our goals. This applies to all countries represented here today. This session therefore provides us with a chance to reassess our common challenges (I suppose we have set the same goals; gender equality in all aspects of science. And we do face some common challenges.

During this session new experiences and actions on promoting the gender dimension in research will be presented to you.

I am State Secretary in a ministry responsible for gender equality policies. I will share with you some of our visions, challenges and policies on gender equality in Norway.

But first I would like to emphasise the importance of gender in science. Gender research and gender balance are an important and integrated part of our gender equality policies.

It is about women's participation and gender balance. That is democracy, fairness and also power and influence.

It is also about making use of talents and resources in order to get the best results, to achieve innovation and excellence.

Gender in science includes many aspects – all of importance:

First of all, Gender knowledge – research on gender

Secondly, Gender mainstreaming expertise - a gender perspective in research

And thirdly Gender balance – numbers matters

The first main step in Norway was the establishment of a new discipline – gender research (in the 70's). Female scientists – and also a few men – wanted to study gender in all its aspects. What is the impact of a gendered society? Why is society so gendered? Distribution of power, suppression and citizenship were scrutinized.

Gender research soon got a strong position and gender research is now established at all our universities.

But equally important is the integration of a gender perspective into science and in all disciplines. This approach was met with considerable resistance. Science should be "neutral", - based on facts and objective research. Not affected by interests or political influence.

Reality, however, proved otherwise. Let us take for example the discipline of medicine. When the norm and standard patient is a man, the impact on a female patient may be dramatic! Implantation of the vocal cord is one (true!) Diagnosis of myocardial infarction is another. It is not well known among doctors that women and men behave differently from heart attack.

We also want balance when it comes to numbers. A project looking into recruitment was established in 1988 under the title: *Women in academia – intruders in a male culture?* It started as a project on Science and society. But the approach was too controversial. The same arguments were used. The suspicion of discrimination was controversial and not in line with the image of science as neutral and objective institutions.

The study did however confirm that the scientific community was not a gender neutral one. The report described academia as a culture dominated by men's culture. Women did meet barriers, especially in the humanities and medicine, and as professors.

This is a long time ago and hopefully the situation has changed. But it is interesting to note that at the same time as this report came the number of female students at colleges and universities equalled men. And during a period of 20 years the share of women increased to 59 per cent a dramatic change in a short time.

Today; at the universities) 56 per cent of the undergraduates are women. Among research students women are in minority, but they are now approaching 46 per cent.

Gender equality policies in Norway

Norway is known for its extensive set of regulations and legislation on gender equality. It has taken us 40-50 years to build our welfare state and to make fundamental improvements concerning gender equality. In this period substantial equality between the genders has come true, with tremendous/major/considerable changes in Norwegian culture, politics, economic life and science.

Norway is among the top nations in the world when it comes to female participation in work and political life. However, we still have not reached gender balance in leadership positions, neither in business nor in science. We also face shortcomings in the distribution of income and pay. Many women work part-time and their income and hourly pay are lower than for men.

Let me now give you a brief overview of our gender equality policies, our regulations and instruments.

The overriding goal of Norwegian policy has been to promote shared parenthood and real gender equality. This has been achieved over time through a wide range of legislation and welfare schemes.

This has made Norway into one of the least family-dependent and most individual societies. For instance individual taxation of spouses, individual rights in the social insurance scheme, gender equal marriage legislation and children rights law. The marriage act was changed in 1991, making it easier to get divorced and at the same time securing individual economic values. The family still remains a central social institution, but also infused with a moral logic of autonomy and equality.

Real choices in life require some basic structures and universal welfare systems, agreed upon by Government, parliament the corporate and business sector. An extensive web of legislation has been developed. It covers all sectors – giving rights and duties. These regulations are the fundament in achieving structural change.

Legislative work started in 1960's, loading with the ILO conventions on gender, equal pay, family issues; - the establishment of the National Insurance Scheme came in 1966. All parties (employers, employee and the State) pay taxes. Today the Insurance Scheme secures amongst others, paid parental leave, family allowance and pension rights during care for small children.

The Working Environment Act of 1977 secures both rights at the workplace and opens for flexibility related to family responsibilities.

A Gender Equality Act was implemented in 1979 stating women's rights and protection against discrimination. But also the necessity and duty of special measures targeting women, applied to private and public sector. Along with the legislation "National machinery" for gender equality was established. That is different institutions with the mandate to actively promote gender equality.

A Nordic institute on women in academia and gender research was established (NIKK). It took both aspects in its mandate; how to recruit more women and how to secure a gender perspective in science.

And as I mentioned a Children's Act and a Marriage Act both with a gender perspective.

Most recent and important is a law securing full coverage for children aged 1-5 years in kindergarten.

Last but not least - the most controversial regulation; gender balance in the board room, both in public and private sector.

Talents are equally distributed between men and women. A majority of university graduates are women, and increasingly also from business schools. In 2003 Public Limited Companies (PLC) recruited only 7 per cent women to their boardrooms. Competent women were not seen – not recruited. Today women have taken at least 40 per cent of the boardroom positions in the companies affected by the regulation.

This is the result of our law adopted by a large majority in the Parliament and introduced in 2003, making it mandatory for all State owned companies, the inter-municipal companies and the Public Limited Companies to have at least 40 per cent of both genders in company boards. .

The law came into force in 2008, after 2 years transitional.

The companies affected by the law are the largest companies. The law does not apply to privately owned limited companies. Most of these are small and medium sized family enterprises.

Let me also clarify that these rules do not apply to management positions in the sense of the daily running of the business. They regulate the appointment of board representatives who are involved in the overall strategic decision-making of enterprises.

No new laws regarding enforcement have been passed. The rules are enforced through the normal control routines and legal systems (of 1977). We have a central register and a company board will not be registered if its composition does not meet the requirements. In fact, it may be dissolved by the court – but this has not happened. It has not been difficult to find enough qualified women.

The legislation is a forceful measure, but it has gone hand in hand with other instruments. Both the main business federation and the financial sector have developed a programme and network for talented women. And women's competence has become more visible through databases and these networking platforms.

Quotas in our family policy

We want a better balance between family life and working life. As I mentioned mothers are still the main caretaker at home. They often work part-time and have a lower income than men (and their husbands).

One main welfare scheme is the parental leave. Parents are entitled to one year of paid leave.

The father's quota was introduced in 1993. Today, 12 weeks are reserved for father. This cannot be transferred to the mother. Few parents want to lose these 12 precious weeks. It is both an incentive and a sanction. This regulation has certainly changed the role of mothers and fathers. It has made it easier for women to re-enter work life. And more normal for the father to push the pram.

When all these laws on quotas were introduced we saw heated discussions in the media, in business circles and among mothers. Not so much among the fathers though! Much of the resistance has now vanished. The often mentioned fear of not finding enough qualified women to fill board seats has also proved unfounded. According to a recent study (by the Norwegian Institute for Social Research (ISF)), women joining corporate boards are "just as qualified as the men," in terms of education and professional experience. In fact the women were on average more educated and younger, and with a more diversified educational background.

The stereotype image of women not wanting to take on such responsibilities has likewise proved untrue.

And we see that fathers very much want their father's leave too. 90 per cent make use of the quota and increasingly more fathers take more than the 12 weeks.

Women also seem to be recruited for board elections in the same manner as men - mostly through professional networks. The law has succeeded in forcing/encouraging the nomination committees to cast their nets wider, before setting up lists for the General Assembly to elect from. The whole process of constructing boards has become more democratic and more representative.

The same arguments apply for science and the research sector. In 2000 Norway introduced earmarking of scientific positions for women. Norway is not a EU member but part of the EEA (). A complaint was sent to ESA on illegal use of affirmative action and discrimination against men. Following a ruling in 2003 in the EFTA court the earmarked professorships came to a disappointing end.

We now have to find other measures for the same goal. Later in this session a committee dealing with gender balance in research will be presented for you

To sum up:

Norway is a rich country with heavy investments in the oil industry . This has helped to maintain and develop our welfare system. At the same time, we have also invested in gender equality, women's education and talent. We have strong indications showing that gender equality leads to higher female workforce participation, economic growth and prosperity.

Women's participation in science is a question of fairness. It is about democracy and equal rights to participate in society. But it is also about increased diversity, quality and new perspectives and innovation

Given the current deep economic crisis, the topic of this conference – quality research and innovation through equality - is highly relevant. In order to solve new problems we need new approaches and new points of view.

Women of today continue to remain an untapped and much needed resource.

I look forward to listening to new ideas in this field and to taking part in these discussions.

Thank you.