



**Ministry of Health and Social Affairs**

***Policy objectives and a new government agency – effective governance of Swedish gender equality policy (SOU 2015:86)***

**Summary of the report by the Gender Equality Inquiry**

---

**Inquiry remit**

The remit of the Gender Equality Inquiry covered four areas. Firstly, we analysed and assessed gender equality progress over the last ten years. Secondly, we analysed how effectively gender equality policy has been implemented. Thirdly, we reviewed the gender equality policy objectives and indicators. Finally, the Inquiry considered changes to how gender equality policy should be organised and implemented.

**Gender equality progress**

The following is a summary of the principal findings of the Inquiry's analysis of the progress made over the last ten years.

**Power and influence**

*A better gender balance in politics...*

Politics is the most gender-balanced area of society in terms of leadership positions. Since the mid-1990s, the Riksdag (the Swedish Parliament) and the Government have comprised roughly the same number of women and men. In the European Parliament, the proportion of women among the Swedish members of parliament has exceeded 50 per cent in the last three elections. The proportion of women at regional level has also increased. The gender balance at municipal level is relatively even, although major differences exist between municipalities. In general, the gender balance is better in the directly elected political assemblies, where visibility prevails, than in non-directly elected assemblies.

However, major differences remain. The proportion of women in the Riksdag, for example, has decreased over the last two elections. Major differences exist between the political parties.

*... and in central government administration*

Central government administration belongs to the sphere of society in which gender balance in leadership positions has improved significantly. Between 2003 and 2014 the proportion of women heads of government agencies rose from 31 to 42 per cent. When clear targets are set, gender balance in leadership positions also improves.

*Significant differences in business, academia and the cultural sphere*

In the private sector, despite some progress, a high degree of male dominance persists on corporate boards and in management positions. The pattern is clear: the higher the position, the fewer the women. Male dominance increases in the top management positions, in management groups and on corporate boards.

Male dominance in academia is particularly pronounced. While the proportion of women among the country's professors has increased – from 14 to 24 per cent – there is still some way to go before gender balance is achieved.

The same pattern is evident in the cultural and media spheres: women participate at most levels but not at the top of the hierarchies.

**Economic equality between women and men***Women's working hours have increased*

Women's working hours have increased but more women than men continue to work part-time. The most common reason for women and men working part-time is the lack of suitable full-time work.

Part-time work affects the number of hours worked and provides a lower income, which in turn affects parental leave, unemployment and sickness benefits as well as pensions.

*The labour market has become slightly less gender-segregated*

Although participation in the labour market has increased for both women and men, they work in different sectors and occupations. And even if they are in the same sector and occupation, they often hold different positions. Thus segregation of the labour market is both horizontal and vertical.

Gender segregation by occupation has decreased slightly as more women now work in traditionally male-dominated occupations.

*Women continue to earn less than men*

Women continue to earn less than men. This is true whether we compare the average salary for women and men or the difference between different sectors and occupations.

The fact that women work fewer hours and that men and women largely work in different occupations are major factors in the gender pay gap. If we take into account that education, occupation, sector, age and working hours affect the pay a person receives, an unexplained pay gap of about 5.8 per cent remains between the sexes. The unexplained gap, or the standard weighted gap, has decreased by 1.0 percentage point since 1996.

*Work-related illness is higher among women, while men are more likely to have workplace accidents*

Clear differences exist between women and men with regard to work-related illness and sickness absence. Women are more likely than men to suffer from work-related health problems and are also off sick to a greater extent than men. Men are more likely than women to have workplace accidents that lead to sick leave or death.

*Girls perform better both in compulsory school and upper secondary school*

Boys perform less well than girls in compulsory school, especially in the subject of Swedish, which has consequences in the longer term. Literacy and reading comprehension skills are fundamental to learning in any area. Girls also perform better than boys in upper secondary school. However, girls at school suffer more stress and generally feel worse.

*Gender balance in upper secondary school remains uneven*

The gender balance in various programmes at upper secondary school remains uneven. Gender segregation is greater in vocational preparatory programmes than in preparatory programmes for higher education. However, the proportion of men on upper secondary school programmes in which women clearly predominate increased from 23 per cent to 38 per cent between 2001 and 2014.

The gender-stereotypical choices of upper secondary schools can be largely explained by the educational background of parents. Children of parents with low levels of education often choose vocational programmes with a distinct predominance of women or men, while children of highly educated parents often choose programmes that prepare them for higher education.

*More women than men in higher education*

More women than men choose to go on to higher education. The gender distribution of students in higher education has not changed and stands at 60 per cent women and 40 per cent men. Women and men in higher education largely pursue different fields of study. Hence their study choices remain consistently gender-stereotypical and continue to be so throughout their educational careers.

*Women's higher level of education has not had any obvious effects on their position in the workplace*

Although girls and women, whether born in Sweden or in another country, have a higher level of education than men, this has not had any obvious effects in terms of a better position in the labour market. Nor has it paid off financially in the form of correspondingly higher earnings. Return on human capital is therefore lower for women than for men.

**Even division of unpaid housework and care work**

*Gender-unequal use of parental leave*

Women take more parental leave than men, although their share has decreased from 83 per cent to 75 per cent.

Women are much more likely than men to spread out their parental leave. Women take parental leave for just over 13 months during the child's early years, and 9.5 of these are with parental benefits. The corresponding figures for men are 3.5 months, 2 of which are with parental benefits.

*Income affects the use of parental leave*

Middle-income earners take the highest number of days with parental benefits and the most parental leave. Fathers who earn a low income or no income at all, or who have weak links with the labour market, tend to take the least amount of parental benefits, if any.

This pattern also applies to women on low incomes. Women on low incomes do not abstain from parental benefits but they often take shorter than average leave. The conditions for taking advantage of the flexibility parental insurance offers therefore vary between women and men in different income groups.

*Slightly smaller differences in unpaid housework and care work*

Women and men do roughly the same amount of housework before they move in together. When they become parents, the total time women spend on housework increases considerably. Women do significantly more housework than men do. This work mainly includes cleaning, laundry and chores related to food, such as grocery shopping, cooking, laying the table and washing up.

However, the difference between the amount of time that women and men spend on housework has diminished over time. This is mainly because women spend less time on these chores.

## **Men's violence against women must stop**

### *Constant or possibly increasing exposure to violence*

Women's exposure to abuse has remained at roughly the same level over the past decade. This applies to exposure to violence both inside and outside intimate partner relationships. The number of reported cases of abuse against women has increased, with domestic violence increasing the most. The greatest increase is in the proportion of women who report being victims of sexual offences. At the same time, developments show that men's exposure to violence is decreasing or remains low.

Women and girls are also more often subjected to online abuse and threats of violence.

### *Greater gap between reporting and prosecution*

Overall, crime statistics show that the number of reports of crimes against women increased over the ten-year period, both assault and sexual offences, while decisions to prosecute do not show the same trend. The gap between reporting and prosecution decisions has consequently grown. One exception is reports of gross violation of a woman's integrity, where both the number of reports and decisions to prosecute are decreasing.

### *Lack of data on violence and oppression in the name of honour*

There are no comparable statistics over time on how many women and men are subjected to violence and oppression in the name of honour, which means that it is not possible to assess developments in this area.

### *The number of individuals in prostitution has decreased – availability has increased*

Street prostitution is estimated to have halved since 1995, while online availability has increased. However, surveys indicate that the number of individuals in prostitution has not increased. Reporting and prosecutions relating to the purchase of sexual services have increased, but no corresponding trend relating to human trafficking for sexual purposes can be discerned.

## **Health**

### *Gender differences in disease, pharmaceutical prescriptions and treatment*

The diseases that women and men suffer differ. Life expectancy is increasing, but more for men than for women. Differences also exist in the prescribing of pharmaceutical products. Women are more likely to suffer adverse reactions to pharmaceuticals.

Women overall report poorer health than men, particularly women with less education. In addition, women, especially young women, report to a greater extent than men that they suffer from anxiety, worry and fear.

Women are less likely than men to report that they receive enough information from their health care providers, while men are less likely to seek various types of screening. In general, men seek care to a lesser extent and at a later stage than women.

*Impact of masculinity norms*

Norms surrounding masculinity and manliness have a negative impact on men's mental, physical and sexual health insofar as they influence men to seek care less often and to take more risks than women.

**The Government's 2007–2014 gender equality initiative**

The following is a summary of the Inquiry's analysis of the Government's 2007–2014 gender equality initiative.

*Most funding to target 4: Men's violence against women must end*

Almost 70 agencies have undertaken measures within the framework of the Government's gender equality initiative. A total of approximately SEK 2.1 billion has been spent on more than 200 measures. More than half of the funding has been used for measures related to target 4: Men's violence against women must end. With organisations also taking part in the initiative, funding to the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions for the Sustainable Gender Equality programme represents the largest investment. The county administrative boards have received the most funding, in connection with the investment in target 4: Men's violence against women must end. The Government has developed three action plans in this area.

*Focus on increasing knowledge and developing new methods*

Measures have first and foremost aimed to increase knowledge about gender equality and develop new working methods. A large share of the measures has focused on municipalities, county councils and organisations.

*Effects at societal level unclear but greater knowledge, new methods and practices*

There are few, if any, reported effects at societal level of the special gender equality initiative to suggest that the various measures have enhanced gender equality. However, this should be viewed from the perspective that the impact of long-term effects can only be studied after a longer period of time and that it is difficult to isolate the effects from other factors than the measures included in the initiative.

There are several reported effects such as increased knowledge, and new methods and practices in the activities of government agencies.

*Support to government agencies' gender mainstreaming efforts*

Support to government agencies to mainstream a gender perspective into their activities was developed between 2007 and 2014. Since 2013, 41 agencies have been tasked with developing a plan for gender mainstreaming and for how they will contribute to achievement of the gender equality policy objectives (the Gender Equality in Government Agencies programme).

*Efforts of county administrative boards strengthened*

A programme called County administrative boards advance gender equality was one component of the gender equality initiative. The programme's own monitoring and external evaluations show that this programme has had a positive effect in that county administrative boards' gender equality mandate has been clarified and developed.

*Effective gender mainstreaming in local government activities*

The Sustainable Gender Equality programme has supported municipalities, county councils, regions and other individual providers in developing gender equal services. This programme has been effective in that knowledge has increased, new methods have been developed and municipalities taking part in the programme see a continued need to further develop knowledge and new methods.

**Management of gender equality policy**

The following is a summary of the Inquiry's analysis of how equality policy has been managed.

*Gender mainstreaming in the internal work of agencies*

A number of government agencies regard gender equality work as inherent in the agency's role as employer. The agencies that took part in the Gender Equality in Government Agencies programme report more integration of their gender equality work into the regular leadership and management of activities than other agencies.

*Request for clearer feedback and more analysis*

Government agencies feel they have received inadequate feedback from the Government concerning the assignments they have been given in the area of gender equality. One view is that the Government has not sufficiently analysed and given feedback regarding the conclusions it draws from the various assignments. The agencies would also like more clarity on the results expected from the assignments.

*Targeted assignments have clarified gender equality work*

The agencies report that the targeted gender equality assignments have helped clarify gender equality work. For several agencies involved in the Gender Equality in Government Agencies programme, the targeted assignments have provided a basis for developing a gender mainstreaming plan.

*County administrative boards see the need for more monitoring and evaluation*

According to the Inquiry's survey, the county administrative boards identify a lack of sustainability in gender equality work. The county administrative boards believe that this can be strengthened by making greater use of them in the monitoring of gender equality policy and through clearer requirements for evaluations of gender equality measures.

The agencies' reporting has been extensive. In a number of cases, special follow-ups and evaluations have been conducted. However, few of the evaluations have included any impact evaluations of a comprehensive nature.

*Need for continued support*

Both the county administrative boards and other agencies see the need for continued support for efforts to mainstreaming a gender equality perspective. The agencies report that efforts need to have the support of managers and staff. Representatives of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions also cite the need for support for these efforts.

*Efforts to combat men's violence against women have been consolidated*

Efforts to prevent and prosecute violence against women have been consolidated as a result of the Government's gender equality initiative.

Efforts require agencies to take action in several areas, including the legal system, health care and education. Municipalities, county councils and civil society organisations also have important responsibilities. Despite better collaboration and increased efforts, weaknesses remain, including in the work of the municipalities and county councils. Overlaps also exist in the support and coordination by agencies in the area.

*Our findings and conclusions*

Our main findings and conclusions regarding progress can be summarised as follows.

*Progress in gender equality*

While progress is being made in the area of gender equality, some findings show that in some respects, progress has come to a standstill or has reversed. Overall, progress on the gender equality targets shows that the objectives have not yet been achieved.



Our main conclusions are:

- Clear targets for more even gender distribution have an impact. This is evident in politics and in the gender distribution of heads of government agencies, but also in business.
- More work is needed to achieve a better gender balance in leadership positions. This is particularly true in relation to foreign-born women and men.
- Despite a slightly less gender-segregated labour market, continued efforts are needed to break gender stereotypes. Action is also needed to strengthen establishment in the labour market for foreign-born women.
- Study choices at upper secondary school and in higher education need to become less gender-segregated. Gender-stereotypical choices are closely tied to the educational background of parents.
- The State has an important normative role to play in reducing income disparities between women and men.
- More gender-equal use of parental leave also helps to strengthen gender equality in other areas. The use of parental benefits is highly influenced by men's income levels.
- Despite the fact that men's violence against women does not appear to be decreasing, cautiously positive progress is discernible in the work of relevant social actors in the area. Continued efforts are crucial if this progress is also to have impact in the form of reduced exposure to violence.
- The increasing gap between reporting and prosecution decisions needs to be emphasised in the work of law enforcement authorities.
- Unexplained gender disparities in health care need to be given attention.

We would like to highlight the following factors which, in our view, should serve to shape gender equality policy.

Firstly, gender equality policy should continue to aim to reduce inequalities between women and men in the areas addressed by the policy's current targets. Education and health should also be given more attention. The overall objective should still be to achieve both substantive and formal equality between women and men.

Secondly, the gender equality policy needs to recognise the gaps and differences that exist between different groups of women and men. These include differences related to socioeconomic factors as well as other power relations associated with, for example, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, age and ethnicity. We need a stronger intersectional perspective in the implementation and following up of gender equality policy.

Thirdly, knowledge about masculinity norms needs to be given greater emphasis in the understanding of the differences that exist in

different areas. We believe that masculinity norms are a serious obstacle in efforts to achieve gender equality with regard to power and influence, economic status and the division of unpaid work, and bringing an end to men's violence against women.

### *Implementation of gender equality policy*

The Government's 2007–2014 gender equality initiative and the Government's management of gender equality policy in general have had an impact in society in that knowledge about gender equality has increased and methods and practices have been developed through gender equality work at different levels of society. However, there has been insufficient data in the form of analyses and evaluations to enable an understanding of how these have affected gender equality.

Our main conclusions are:

- The body of knowledge on gender equality and gender equality work needs to be used more extensively in the management of gender equality policy.
- The Government's management needs to be clearer and cover more agencies and areas than is currently the case.
- Agencies, municipalities, county councils and regions need assistance in developing gender equal services.
- A greater focus on the results of gender equality policy is required.
- Permanent coordination of certain gender equality policy initiatives is required, not least initiatives to achieve the target *Men's violence against women must end*.

Overall, more coherent management of gender equality policy is required to provide the conditions for monitoring and analysing gender equality progress in society. In our view, there is also a need for strategic monitoring and analysis of the results of various initiatives and the extent to which the management of gender equality policy works to achieve the gender equality objectives. In addition, gender equality policy needs to be coordinated and continued support given to government agencies, municipalities, county councils and other actors in their efforts to develop gender equal services.

In this way, the initiatives of the last ten years can be used and developed. The increased knowledge and experience gained from gender equality work could thereby have an impact in society and help to strengthen gender equality.

We wish to emphasise that this is not only the responsibility of the Government, municipalities and county councils. The social partners, the business community, civil society organisations and other social actors must continue to be highly engaged and take responsibility.

## **Our proposals**

The following are our proposals concerning gender equality policy objectives and management.

### *Objectives of gender equality policy*

- Overall objective. Women and men must have the same power to shape society and their own lives.

Five sub goals are proposed:

- Equal distribution of power and influence. Women and men must have the same rights and opportunities to be active citizens and to shape the conditions for decision-making in all sectors of society.
- Economic gender equality. Women and men must have the same opportunities and conditions for paid work that provide economic independence throughout life. Women and men must take equal responsibility for unpaid housework and care work and have the same opportunities to combine paid work with family life.
- Gender equality in education. Women and men and girls and boys must have the same opportunities and conditions with regard to lifelong learning and personal development.
- Men’s violence against women must stop. Women and men and girls and boys must have the same rights and access to physical integrity.
- Gender equality in health, care and social services. Women and men and girls and boys must have the same opportunities and conditions with regard to health, care and social services throughout their lives.

Our proposal for the overall objective is the same as that underlying the current gender equality policy. Compared with the current targets of the gender equality policy, the proposed targets contain certain differences. Gender equal education and gender equal health, care and social services are separate targets. It is proposed that current target 3, *An even division of unpaid housework and care work*, be included in targets 2 and 5 as outlined above.

### *Responsibility of agencies to promote gender equality objectives*

Gender equality policy should be managed based on how government agencies and activities are generally managed. Gender mainstreaming as the main strategy should remain unchanged. We therefore propose the following:

- responsibility for gender equality should be regulated in the instructions to government agencies or, where appropriate, in other ordinances,

- more agencies should be tasked with mainstreaming a gender perspective into their activities and agencies' responsibilities for gender equality should be aligned with their activities,
- as a rule, agencies reporting individual-based statistics should report gender-disaggregated statistics unless there are special reasons for not doing so,
- strategies and action plans should be developed for each gender equality sub goal, and
- gender mainstreaming in the Government Offices should be further developed through enhanced monitoring and a clearer impact on work related to the budget, appropriation directions and regulatory dialogues.

#### *Government agency for gender equality*

We propose that a government agency for gender equality be set up. The agency's responsibilities would include:

- analysing gender equality progress in society and following up efforts to achieve the gender equality policy objectives,
- coordinating gender equality policy tasks, including those relating to the target *Men's violence against women must end*,
- supporting the gender mainstreaming efforts of government agencies, municipalities, county councils and regions, and
- otherwise assisting the Government in other matters concerning gender equality policy, including in the EU and other forms of international cooperation.

The agency should be responsible for national expertise and coordination that the County Administrative Board in Östergötland is responsible for under target 4: *Men's violence against women must end*. It should also be responsible for the task of the University of Gothenburg (Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research) to support the gender mainstreaming efforts of government agencies. Similarly, the agency should be responsible for distributing grants under the Ordinance on government grants for gender equality projects (2006:390), currently the responsibility of the Agency for Youth and Civil Services.

Furthermore, we propose that the division of responsibility between the new agency for gender equality and agencies responsible for national expertise and coordination in the area of violence against women should be reviewed to ensure effective collaboration between the agencies. The review would involve the Stockholm County Administrative Board, the National Board of Health and Welfare and Uppsala University (National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence Against Women).

The agency should be established by 1 July 2017 and receive appropriations equivalent to SEK 41 million per year.

*Mandate and responsibilities of county administrative boards*

The county administrative boards should continue to support and coordinate regional efforts to ensure the impact of the national gender equality policy objectives and coordinate efforts related to target 4, *Men's violence against women must end*. We propose that the Ordinance containing the instructions for county administrative boards (2007:825) be clarified by the addition of the following:

The county administrative board must coordinate and monitor the regional efforts to achieve the objectives of the gender equality policy. The county administrative board must provide the gender equality agency with data and consult with the agency concerning reporting requirements (addition to Section 5).

To emphasise that the county administrative boards' responsibilities in the area of gender equality are important for the boards as a whole, the instructions for county administrative boards should no longer contain a provision regarding a special adviser on gender equality issues (current Section 44).