

Gender Mainstreaming in the Public Employment Service

Statements and Comments

Alf Vanags
BICEPS

1 Introductory comments

Karen Sjørup offers a lucid discussion paper of an intriguing policy experiment in the Danish Public Employment Service. The gender mainstreaming project is a new kind of gender oriented policy, certainly it would be so in the Latvian context, in that it is motivated by the desire to more efficiently match 'demand and supply in the labour market rather than [by] a concern for social justice, fairness, social sustainability or diversity in the labour market'. The gender division of labour is regarded as a 'hindrance to a smooth and well-functioning labour market'. The instrument chosen to address this perceived market failure is the work practices and attitudes of all staff within the PES – 'the goal is that gender equality work is taken into consideration in the ordinary work at all levels and in all fields of policy'.

Monitoring and measurement are regarded as an important part of the project but to date this has been confined to considering the impact of the project on the flows of men and women to less gender stereotyped jobs. Some of the results have been impressive: eg when compared with the country as a whole the pilot regions have reduced the gap between the share of women in registered unemployment and the share of jobs allocated by the PES to women from 16% to 9%. Another achievement is in the category of 'unspecified job' where the national share of women in this unemployment category is 63% but they get just 35% of vacant jobs. This is claimed as evidence of 'discrimination in the PES system', though this claim needs deeper investigation in order to be sustained. Nevertheless in the two pilot regions the allocated share of women to unspecified jobs was 56% and 49% as against 68% and 67% shares of women registered as unemployed in this category. Thus the pilot regions significantly outperformed the country as a whole with respect to this indicator. However, I have a problem of interpretation here – does 'allocation of a job' mean that a PES consultant has sent a given person to a vacancy or does it mean that the person has actually got the job?

A broader problem pointed out by Karen Sjørup is that in some cases simply breaking down gender stereotypes can lead to questionable results – she cites the case of a male industrial worker who was encouraged to change profession and become a health and social worker; and a male pizza baker who became a health and social assistant. In these cases it might have been better to give the jobs to people trained in the field who were most likely to be women. More generally, one can question the gain from giving 'low-skilled jobs, usually given to women, to men, especially as the unemployment rate among the relevant group of women is higher than that of men'.

These comments are not just quibbles – the National Labour Authority itself is at pains to point out that 'measurement is a precondition of success with regard to the application of the mainstreaming strategy'.

It seems to me that existing measurement efforts have been focussed largely on the internal concerns of the PES and that it would be desirable to measure the broader impact of the policy. Examples of information that would be useful to have include the following:

- What is the view of the unemployed about the new approach?
- What is the view of employers? In the Aarhus region the PES targeted 100 companies and got a positive response. What do employers think ex post?
- Has the strategy had the effect of 'reducing bottlenecks and prevent[ing] imbalances in the labour market', as it was claimed it would do by the former head of the PES?

Since the ultimate aim of the policy is to make the labour market more efficient it should in principle be amenable to evaluation in economic terms ie has labour market efficiency been improved? If so, then by how much? To date nothing like this has been done and if the economic impact is to be investigated then it would be desirable to involve professional economists/econometricians in the exercise.

Finally, there is the question of pay. The PES is concerned with placing people in jobs rather than with pay but gender equality is also about income and pay and in both Denmark and Latvia a gender pay gap exists and persists, Actually the gap is very similar in the two countries – in 2003 it was 15% in Denmark and 16% in Latvia. One mechanism that is used to maintain the pay gap is to appoint men at higher points in the salary scale or at a higher grade. This is something that could be addressed within the framework of the gender mainstreaming policy by carrying out job evaluations and framing job descriptions in a way that minimises the possibility to gender discriminate through appointing men and women a different levels for doing the same job.

2 The Latvian context

The status of women in the Latvian labour market is by no means the worst in the EU. For example, the employment rate of women has been rising and in 2003 stood at 57.9% of economically active women. This compares with an EU-15 average of 56% and a EU-25 average of 55.1%. This high employment rate is based on a female activity rate of 64.7%, which is also high by EU levels.

In terms of the unemployment gender gap, female unemployment as measured by the Labour Force Survey (LFS) has, until 2003, been consistently less than male unemployment. In 2003 both male and female unemployment fell sharply in response to the buoyant economy and the gap reversed with the female unemployment rate being 0.4 percentage points higher than male unemployment. In Denmark by contrast the female unemployment rate has consistently exceeded male unemployment and in the EU-15 the female unemployment rate has also been consistently higher than the male (in 2003 by 1.6 percentage points). However, in Latvia there have always been more women than men among the registered unemployed – so, as in Denmark, the State Employment Agency (SEA) has a majority of women clients.

Finally, as has already been mentioned, the Latvian gender pay gap which measures the percentage of male hourly earnings by which male earnings exceed female earnings in 2003 was

16% - exactly the same as the estimated EU-15 average and just one percentage point higher than in Denmark.

These figures back up what would probably be the typical view among its inhabitants that Latvia does not have a significant 'gender equality' problem.

In many respects the situation facing the Latvian SEA is similar to its Danish counterpart in that the SEA operates largely in the same segment of the labour market – namely low-skilled workers, often also workers who have poor general prospects for finding work. However, in contrast to Denmark the proportion of SEA clients who are women and the proportion of women in those placed in jobs has for the last few years been more or less the same in the range 57% to 59%. Thus at the aggregate level there appears to be no gender imbalance in the SEA.

Moreover, according to the national Action Plan for Employment (NAPE) the SEA 'observes the gender equality principle by considering the male/female balance in active labour market measures (ALMs)' Table 1 in the Annex illustrates how the SEA manages the gender split in its (ALMs) where it can be seen that in two sets of activities have a more or less 50-50 gender split, while in the other two there is a female preponderance at 70% or a little less.

Table 2 in the Annex shows that among the training programmes managed by the SEA there is a very strong stereotyping of professions. Thus in 2003 all but one of the 276 persons who trained as a florist were female. On the other hand of 179 who trained as woodworking machinists only three were women. There is also the category of 'other programmes' where nearly 1500 people were trained of whom only about 22% were women.

The general policy context in Latvia for gender equality has much improved in recent years. In March 2002 a Gender Equality Council was established, and in July 2003 a Gender Equality Unit was created at the Ministry of Welfare. The latter is the main executive institution for gender equality policy within the Latvian administration, while the Gender Equality Council has a consultative role and also a role in co-ordination gender policy between different ministries. This institutional development has been accompanied by various policy papers and initiatives, such as the so called *Concept on Gender Equality* (this is a policy paper) and the *Programme for the Implementation of Gender Equality 2005-2006* (this is an action plan). The Latvian government even before accession was participating in the EU's *Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality 2001-2005*. The parliamentary committee on human rights also has a sub-committee devoted to gender equality issues. The principle of equal gender treatment is also enshrined in the 2002 Labour Law. Thus both legal and institutional frameworks exist in Latvia for the promotion of gender equality.

3 Transferability

There is no obvious reason why this policy should not be transferable to the Latvian SEA. It appears to be not expensive, which is always a factor in Latvia, though we do not know how inexpensive. Just in human resource terms the SEA is much smaller than the Danish PES, which in 2003 had 2300 employees (of whom 1500 worked directly with the unemployed and employers) as against the Latvian SEA 2002 workforce of about 550. The load of the Danish PES was 160,000 unemployed as against about 90,000 in Latvia.

Transferring the Danish policy to Latvia would involve training SEA workers, but we do not know what is involved in such training – nor who would do it. However, several recent projects in Latvia have made a start in raising awareness of gender issues in the public sector including in local authorities and also in providing training materials. For example the Phare Twinning Light Project 'Administrative Capacity Building of Governmental Bodies and Social Partners in Gender Mainstreaming Development and Implementation' in which the Danish Research Centre on Gender Equality was an external partner, contained a 'training the trainers' component within which two publications have been produced in Latvian – one a manual for potential trainers and the other a course book for participants. So there is a solid base on which to develop something more specific to the SEA.

Another potentially favourable factor regarding transferability in the Latvian context is that the SEA has yet to develop its IT system, so in principle it could be developed in a way that would make measurement of the gender policy relatively straightforward. Though here it must be said that first one should be clear about what it is that needs to be measured and on this the Danish project is somewhat fragmented and unclear.

In the context of the Latvian NAPE current measures under Guideline 6 on Gender Equality are rather thin – being largely confined to awareness raising measures. Implementation of something like the Danish scheme offers a potentially concrete measure to include here, especially as it is not expensive

Then there is a question of timing: over the next few years the SEA will have a much expanded load as the key institution for delivering a variety of European Social Fund measures. In this context it might be too much to expect it to absorb a radical change in work practices at all levels.

4 Concluding remarks

The evidence suggests that at the aggregate level Latvian women do quite well in the labour market as compared with the EU average. Moreover, the Latvian SEA has succeeded in matching the share of women in job placements with women's share of registered unemployed.

At the same time both in terms of employment structure of the economy and of the detailed training measures of the SEA considerable gender stereotyping exists and persists. Can a Danish type scheme within the SEA be a solution to this? The answer must be – at best only partially. Gender stereotyping runs deep through all levels of Latvian society but, as in Denmark, the SEA deals with just a segment of the labour market and no amount of attitude change in the work practices of the SEA will have much impact on the culture of the whole country.

At a more prosaic level, before going full steam ahead with introducing the Danish scheme in Latvia, I would like to see the Danish policy more developed, more fine-tuned, and above all more seriously empirically tested.

Annex

Table 1: SEA active measures by gender

Activities	2003				2004 first 7 months			
	Total	W	M	W: % total	Total	W	M	W: % total
Temporary community work	17,372	8,971	8,401	52%	9,804	4,657	5,147	48%
Professional education, training, retraining	6,971	4,674	2,297	67%	1,392	988	404	71%
Activities to increase of competitiveness in labour market	29,180	21,155	8,025	72%	15,236	11,440	3,796	75%
Activities for special groups of individuals (handicapped, youth, pre-pension age, persons who are not competitive in the labour market)	1,199	601	598	50%	842	434	408	52%

Table 2: SEA professional training 2003

Programme	Number of trainees	
	Total	Of whom women
Florists	276	275
Computer graphics	119	98
Latvian language (level 1)	22	10
Latvian language (level 2)	11	8
Practical project management	318	241
Insurance representative	30	28
Computerised accounting; accounting	485	464
Building manager	75	46
Secretary	271	270
Computer studies	1192	936
Computer mechanic; network administrator	84	10
Woodworking operator; sawmill operator; forest worker	179	3
Child minder	43	43
Barmen, waiters, cooks	622	533
Travel agent	31	31
Consumer services	742	713
Sales person	573	548
Drivers	255	77
Security work; alarm system fitter	198	15
Other programmes	1445	317
Total:	6971	4666

Source: SEA