

Work and gender equality: the Swedish experiment

Anne-Marie DAUNE-RICHARD

CNRS, Laboratoire d'Economie et
de Sociologie du Travail,
Aix en Provence

What makes the Swedish gender equality experiment interesting?

From the very start, the links between work and gender equality were regarded as a core social issue which had to be approached in terms of citizenship.

Gender Equality in Sweden

I- The Framework

How gender equality was conceived in Sweden

- During the sixties, it was assumed that men and women were both expected to fulfil their obligations equally as parents and workers.
- The aim was not only to liberate women from the world of home and family and to allow them to participate more fully in the world of markets and politics, it was also to free men to play their role of fathers more fully.

So women and men alike were required to play two roles simultaneously, as parents and as workers, with the strong support of the social democratic state.

From the seventies onwards, a **social “gender equality contract”** was implemented. The two pillars of this contract were :
improving childcare and promoting female employment

Childcare

The debate on childcare was based on two principles:

- the childcare burden should not prevent mothers and fathers from engaging in paid work
- childcare arrangements should be designed to ensure equality among all children and to promote their well-being.

The measures adopted to promote women's employment

- income tax measures (joint taxation for couples was abolished)
- measures designed to improve gender equality on the labour market (equal wages for both sexes, for example)
- extending full time conditions to part time work in order to promote the employment of women with children.

Gender Equality in Sweden

II-The measures adopted

- II-1 Measures designed to facilitate the balance between childcare and work
- II-2 Measures focused on the labour market.

II-1 Measures designed to facilitate the balance between childcare and work

- * **Parental leave from work.** The reform passed in 1974. Present ruling entitles parents to 480 days of parental leave, at least 60 of which must be taken by the father and 60 by the mother.
- 80% of the previous salary is paid during the first 390 days and a set rate is paid during the remaining 90 days
- 120 days' annual occasional leave per child (80% of parent's previous salary)

II-1 Measures designed to facilitate the balance between childcare and work (2)

- * **childcare reforms**
- up to the 60s, Swedish children only started school at the age of 7 and no public childcare arrangements were available up to that age
- Since 1995, town councils are legally obliged to provide childcare arrangements for every child aged one year or more whose parents are working or undergoing vocational training.

childcare reforms (2)

- Since January 2003, town councils are obliged to provide 4- and 5-year-old with 15 hours per week of pre-school activities free of charge. And a non-compulsory pre-primary classes was created in 2000 for 6-year-old children.
- 80-85% of Swedish children 1 to 5 years of age are catered for by childcare services, most of them public

II-2 Measures focused on the labour market.

First it is worth noting that the rates of activity and employment are much more similar between men and women in Sweden than in other European countries.

Employment indicators : Sweden
(% aged 15-64)

	Male		Female	
	1995	2005	1995	2005
Activity rate	79.6	80.9	74.6	76.3
Employment rate	73.1	74.4	68.8	70.4
Unemployment rate	9.7	7.9	7.8	7.7
Part time rate	7.3	11.5	35.8	39.6

Source: Eurostat, Employment in Europe

Although huge strides have been made towards equality in Sweden, it was recently observed that inequalities persist between men and women on the labour market and **stronger measures have been gradually introduced since 2000**

- Directives have been issued to the national statistical office (SCB) to improve the monitoring and analysis of gender differences and firms with more than 10 employees have to publish an annual salary statement accounting for gender-related differences.

- In order to reduce unequal conditions of employment and especially the wage differential, the **Ombudsman** was given greater responsibility and increased means for equal opportunity.

He has been developing suitable methods of assessing work and qualifications with a view to abolishing gender differences.

These methods are now available to firms and organizations.

The mainstreaming approach

- it looks as if the Swedish expected their newly developed model to fall into place automatically. The 90s made it clear it was not such an automatic process
- in addition to the specific measures just mentioned, public efforts to promote gender equality were re-organized using the mainstreaming approach:

The **mainstreaming approach** was adopted in 1994 and is now at the centre of a specific 2004-2009 action plan

In this framework, policy-makers, high-ranking civil servants and local orchestrators have been undergoing special equal opportunity training courses.

The Swedish gender equality model has not yet been completed

The model claims that men and women should share the burden of working and raising a family in equal proportions.

And from the 70s onwards the move has continued

But the average Swedish family now includes 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ bread-winners (husbands employed full time and wives employed $\frac{3}{4}$ of the time) rather than two equally matched bread-winners.

The policies adopted have focused on education and information, counting on the goodwill of the individual and collective players.

And it was only when the road to equality turned out to be unexpectedly long and difficult that more stringent measures began to be introduced.

And equality in academia ?

Among staff involved in teaching and research, the share of women is 40%.

The number of professors and the share of women among professors increased significantly (1995: 8%, 2005: 17%) due to a reform (1997) which allowed universities to promote qualified senior lecturers to professors.

And over the years, special effort were made to increase the necessary funds to allow women to complete their doctoral studies and being eligible to lecturer positions.