



Workshop 2: How Can Men Do Gender Equal Work?

This question was broadly discussed in the workshop held on 10 November 2011 in Brussels, where participants and experts from European countries pointed out the various approaches required in different countries with different backgrounds. In addition, good practices, pitfalls and difficulties were highlighted.

1. Making changes visible

Keynotes from experts in the field encouraged the working groups to focus on “making changes visible”.

Jeff Hearn outlined several macro trends on men, gender and work:

- 1) Education: historically, there is now greater equality, though some boys are losing out, especially those from lower social classes.
- 2) Vertical hierarchies and power and occupational segregation: these show uneven change, e.g. the proportion of men as senior officials and managers has decreased, even though they are still high; the proportion between women and men at middle management level is more even; finally, the proportion of male blue-collar workers has increased over the past 10 years.

Majda Hrženjak presented a general frame for looking at organisations/companies from a gender equality perspective. She pointed out two opposite effects organizational structures can generate: organizational structures, values and practices can strengthen the norms of traditional masculine identities or they can prompt men to see and present themselves in alternative ways. One example of organizational influence on gender at the workplace is the difference between workplaces in the public and private sectors. The gender pay gap and vertical segregation are significantly lower in the public than in the private sector. Thus the public sector can provide a socially important model of a gender equal restructuring of workplaces.

Elli Scambor explained that in many cases, organisational practices seem to be determined by “hegemonic masculinity” and rather traditional masculine standards with traditional gender role expectations, where men are still more likely to face breadwinner-role-expectations (e.g. in terms of flexibility and overtime work) than women.

Under these conditions “new” men are still neglected and ways and initiatives for men and gender equality are still to be found.

A short introduction into initiatives tackling segregation in the labour market was given by Marc Gärtner. He states that up to now men have been perceived mainly as obstacles for changes towards equality. The key question is whether men can positively contribute to gender equality, and what gender equality policies are to be developed to include men.

Some initiatives aiming at men can be found: e.g. Sweden has already developed initiatives on men in non-typical occupations since the 1970s. In Finland, the Subcommittee on Men’s Issues, appointed for the first time in 1988, contributes to achieving gender equality at work. In the Czech Republic, a similar unit on men and gender is about to be established.

Most initiatives focus on occupational segregation and professional orientation. However, vertical segregation should also be addressed if we don’t want to support “inequality traps”: if men enter female-dominated professions, they might tend to climb the ladder, while women stay stuck on the lower ranks.

2. Working groups

2.1 Overcoming gender inequality within the labour market

This working group focused on how to overcome horizontal labour market segregation. Doro-Thea Chwalek, from the German “Competence Center Technology-Diversity-Equal Chances”, presented the “New Paths for Boys” project. This project supports teachers and other specialists working with young people to realize activities for boys in view of expanding the range of male careers, fostering flexible models of masculinity and developing social abilities and soft skills (eg. Emotional intelligence, communication, language, etc). After intense discussions on options, possibilities and difficulties with implementing similar measures in other countries, the working group came to the conclusion that not all European countries are equally ready to adapt special programs for boys. Recommendations focused on good practices in European countries under the heading “diversifying career and work possibilities”.

Making non-traditional career choices more attractive also require changes at company level. A key element is to promote gender equal workplaces and men’s involvement in non-traditional occupations, raising the status and understanding of care, whether it is paid or unpaid formal or informal work. In this respect the motivation of employers for change should be promoted by showing them the benefits of diversity, like increasing the performance within the company.

2.2 Gender (in)equality and care in the workplace: costs and benefits

2.2.1 A roadmap to improve reconciliation for men

The Austrian campaign: “How can companies be encouraged to create “father friendly” workplaces?” was presented by Manuela Vollmann from abz*austria. This campaign aims to support companies in implementing paternity leave management as a standard within the HR management.

To achieve long term change, measures should be embedded in companies’ structures and be included in diversity and work life balance strategies in order to be sustainable.

A strong emphasis on working place arrangements allowing reconciliation for men should be given. Countries should develop strategies based on their specific conditions and developments. Strategies should include cooperation with social partners, researchers and NGOs and NPO’s with expertise in this field, acting as a turntable between policies and economy. It should also be made compulsory for countries to regularly report on their progress.

Companies should be supported through counseling and consulting to allow for adopting good practice and implementing HR tools for facilitating paternity leave.

2.2.2 Recognition of care as a key competence in organisations

In this working group, Sophia Bowlby, from the University of Reading, presented insights on processes and cultures of care in organizations.

The key question was how to take men on board to reach a better gender balance in organizations. Some priorities identified were broadening the scope of care, recognizing potentials of care within the workplace and adding professional value to care and caring activities. Care was highlighted as a competence to be recognized as a professional skill, which has to be addressed in recruiting processes as well as for career opportunities.

To call for employee-friendly rather than family-friendly policies it is necessary to tackle the mechanism of reproducing gender stereotypes such as those which focus on women as those being mainly responsible for caring and which do not lead to a more gender-balanced share of caring activities.

2.3 Gender equality initiatives: changing work, organisations and men: “put more life in men’s life”

Participants in this workshop discussed the aims and risks of establishing a governmental working group focusing on men in gender equality.

In Lucia Zachariasova, Head in Charge of the Czech Gender Equality Unit, presented the working group on “Men and Gender Equality” the Czech Republic’s Council for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men launched in 2010.

Conclusions of discussions focused on the need to promote a balanced life model. This requires changing mind sets and working on attitudes through governmental campaigns, awards for companies, as well as addressing individuals in their responsibility for a balanced life.

A broad approach was suggested by involving all levels from social partners, legislators and employers in helping to achieve a better gender balance in organizations and life.

3. Round table: How “future proof” are these policy recommendations?

The round table gathered experts who commented on the conclusions of the day from different European and research perspectives.

Jukka Lehtonen, from the University of Helsinki, emphasized the challenge to overcome the dual understanding of gender as a dichotomy between male and female when conducting events like boys or girls days. A diverse range of alternate gender constructions would lead to a continuity of diverse models.

The increasing needs of care were emphasised by Mary Collins, a representative of the European Women's Lobby. In the context of the ageing society and a growing collective responsibility for care, men have to be included. To face these growing demands, a new focus on caring responsibilities is necessary. A new concept of care will have to question low paid and unpaid care work and its unequal distribution between men and women to meet the challenge of closing the gender pay gap.

Paco Abril, from the Universidad de Girona, Spain, highlighted the importance of recognizing care as a competence. He emphasized to give more impact to the idea of diversity: including diversity dimensions within a new framing of care would not only appreciate the different cultural experiences, but also value the variety of diverse competences.

When focusing on companies, Katarzyna Wojnicka, from the Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland, pointed out that different working cultures and attitudes require different arguments to get employers on board. Besides strong arguments showing the benefits from investing in father and family friendly measures, incentives for implementing such measures should be given to companies.

Greet Vermeylen, from Eurofound, quoted results from the European Working Conditions Survey stressing the importance of work life balance for men and women. “Give more time for time!” she said. A multi-level approach including the EU, employers, social partners and individuals is crucial. At European level, best practices need to be transferred to other countries and should be accompanied by circulating cost and benefit analyses showing returns on investment.