

Exchange of good practices on gender equality

The Role of Men in Gender Equality

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Discussion Paper - Finland

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The Role of Men in Gender Equality

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Discussion paper on Finnish practices

Introduction

Discussing good practices on gender equality cannot be done without contextualising these practices and their origins, i.e. the historical contexts of the nation that have given rise to specific societal structures, policies and practices that are already taking place, presently discussed on the governmental level or in the process of becoming established practices.

Finland is an example case of a Nordic welfare society with relatively low social class differences and by many measures, a relatively high level of gender equality. Finland has a high level of women's participation in public life, including a woman as the previous president, two female prime ministers within a short period of time and roughly half the cabinet consists of women. Finland also has a history of gender mainstreaming, 'state feminism', and important state support for women (for example, universal child day care). Finland again ranked second in the world in the World Economic Forum's gender gap report (Hausmann et al, 2013) and therefore one could consider Finland as a kind of "gender paradise".

At the same time, Finland has a highly gender-segregated employment structure, domination of management by men, especially in the private sector, and relatively high levels of violence against women by male perpetrators. (Hearn and Niemi, 2011) To fully grasp the present day situation in terms of gender equality and good practices in Finland, one needs to know some historical background. The historical nationalist project to achieve independence from Russia included both women and men, and led to Finland becoming the first country to give all citizens full political rights in 1906. There has also been a tradition of joint organising by men and women on and around gender equality questions (here it is important to point out that this does not mean that men would have had any more favourable attitude towards gender equality). Therefore some men in Finland have become relatively visible as actors in interventions on gender equality, and on men and gender equality (Hearn and Niemi, 2011). According to the Gender Equality Barometer 2008 (Nieminen, 2008), 85% of Finnish men believe that they will also benefit from an increase in gender equality. Men's opinion has not changed since 2004 when this question was first asked. However, more women (90%) currently believe that men will also benefit from equality than was the case in 2004 (84%).

Another interesting and relevant feature in Finland is the high degree of involvement of men in state and governmental gender policy development. One of the most important impacts of the Men's Subcommittee (part of the national, governmental gender equality machinery) has been its long struggle for parental leave quotas for men, which were finally introduced in the beginning of 2003 and recently further revised 2013. In fact this discussion paper uses a recent report by the Men's

subcommittee that is outlining and discussing the most important policy and practice development areas (both those that are already taking place and those that are still on the level of suggestion) in terms of increasing gender equality for all but more specifically for men, addressing the men specific equality questions in order to further include men. The level of involvement by men can be understood in terms of close historical connections of the politics of gender with the nationalist project, and the specific form of Nordic “social democratic” welfare politics, with emphasis on “gender neutrality” as developed in Finland (Rantalaiho and Heiskanen, 1997; Hearn et al., 2006).

This discussion paper provides an overview, for the basis of the discussion, of the role of men in, gender equality, and good practices in Finland using governmental reports and existing research by others and by the CROME research group.

1. Background and policy context

1.1. Institutional background

Finland is committed to promoting gender equality through both legislation and gender equality policy. The European Union, international conventions and international gender equality policy also oblige the Finnish government to pursue gender equality actively.

Over the past 10 to 15 years, Government Programmes have included explicit gender equality goals. The gender equality agenda has remained basically the same: increasing the proportion of women among decision-makers, addressing gender equality issues in working life (including narrowing the gender pay gap), more equal distribution of family leaves and combating violence against women. These have been addressed in several Government Programmes. Governments have adopted Action Plans for Gender Equality to translate gender equality goals into practice, with all ministries involved in implementing these Action Plans. The latest one outlines the governmental equality related work until 2020.

Issues related to men and gender equality have been discussed in Finnish gender equality policy for several decades. A significant step was taken in 1988 when the Council for Gender Equality set up the first Men and Gender Equality Subcommittee. Internationally, Finland also led the way by introducing the theme of men and gender equality into EU debate during the Finnish Presidency of the EU in 2006.

Gender equality is being promoted by the Finnish Government through a dual strategy. This includes both specific actions to remove obstacles to gender equality via specific policy e.g. extended paternity leave or funding special projects e.g. Ministry of Education’s Valtava-programme promoting gender mainstreaming and equality in working life (2007-2013, extended to last during 2014), as well as mainstreaming the gender perspective in all decision-making and its preparations. Gender mainstreaming in practice means reorganising, improving, developing and evaluating both the political and administrative processes of governance in such a manner that the possible impacts of policies and practices to both genders are considered at all levels and during every stage of work.

The government is presently paying more attention to the relationship between men and gender equality and sees this as a possible way to increase the contribution of

men to the promotion of gender equality, as well as to address some problems that men in particular are facing. This, can then in turn, have a positive impact on gender equality and the status of women: aim is to create positive attitudes towards gender equality issues and enhance the use of existing resources. Increased awareness and knowledge of the gender aspects will also help to avoid stereotypical treatment of both men and women in all levels and fields of society.

From the Finnish governmental perspective there are two key angles on the relationship between men and gender equality: gender equality needs men and men need gender equality. The general strategic governmental objective is to better incorporate men into the field of gender equality policy. The Finnish government is trying to achieve this by:

- increasing the number of gender equality policy projects focusing on men;
- promoting participation of men in the gender equality policy debate;
- continuing efforts towards gender mainstreaming while emphasising that this affects both men and women;
- establishing the special attention given to men as standard procedure in gender equality policy.

The most important already established institutional level good practices include:

Council for Gender Equality

The Council for Gender Equality in Finland has been focusing its attention on both women and men since its inception in 1972. Actual men-related programmes started in the mid 1980's and the sub-committee on men's issues was set up in 1988. In general, in Finland the concept of the role of men in the area of gender equality started to receive more attention in the 1990's. In this context, men's studies and discussion of the role of men arose and grassroots groups in which men talked about their experiences or feelings began to spring up.

The Council for Gender Equality just recently outlined its latest views on the most central issues in Finland in terms of equality work and presented it for the Parliament in the end of September 2014. The following areas were considered most important and following actions were suggested:

- The government should have a concrete equality programme and it should make sure that there are necessary resources available for the equality work.
- There should be a monitoring group ensuring that the goals of the equality programme will be met.
- Equality should have a more central role in the teacher training and pedagogical further education. This is the best way to unpack the segregation of the Finnish education (and labour market) system.
- The 6+6+6 sharing model for the parental leaves (to be introduced later in this paper) promotes more active fatherhood and a tighter relationship between the

child and the father during the baby years and also helps to equalise the situation of men and women in the labour market.

- Preventing gendered violence. “Safe housing” should be more available for those crisis situations/victims of violence. The Finnish system should meet the international requirements.

It remains to be seen what the new government does with these suggestions.

2006 Finnish Presidency strategy on the role of men in gender equality

Under the 2006 Finnish Presidency of the Council of the EU, the Finnish government published a strategy on the relationship between men and gender equality. This strategy was carried out in the context of the EU-presidency conference on men and gender equality. The Conference highlighted specific themes in relation to men and gender equality, including: 1) reduction of segregation in education and training, 2) gender mainstreaming in health policies and practices, 3) violence, and 4) reconciliation of work and family life.

Strategy for incorporating men into the core of gender equality policy:

- Men must be incorporated both as active participants and as an object of attention, a focus area;
- This needs to be done with dedicated initiatives as well as by mainstreaming the general gender equality policy;
- Increasing gender equality policy action aimed at and affecting men;
- Gender equality work with men should take account of the general situation between the genders;
- Emphasis should be placed on the ways in which gender equality benefits men and boys;
- Greater well-being among men and boys should be recognised as a desired objective in promoting gender equality;
- The diversity of men’s situations and circumstances must be recognised;
- Ensuring more male participation in the gender equality debate;
- Changing practices so as to involve men more;
- Requests for opinions from men’s organisations;
- Men must be invited to seminars;
- Employing men as official and unofficial experts;
- Paying attention to men in gender equality policy rhetoric;

- Men are an essential part of the audience whenever equality is talked about;
- Noting the complexity of men's situations;
- It is essential to underline the benefits to men of gender equality;
- Gaining more profound expertise on men and gender equality;
- Establishing the theme of "men and gender equality" in the preparation of national gender equality policy;
- Financial support for men's organisations;
- Supporting gender mainstreaming.

One of the key observations of the strategy was that mainstreaming a gender perspective is a significant way of highlighting men's problems.

There were also some proposals for concrete actions in the strategy. These included:

- developing family leaves in order to support fatherhood;
- supporting work with fathers in maternal and child health clinics;
- promoting gender mainstreaming in health care;
- promoting men's studies;
- carrying out a survey of men as victims and perpetrators of violence;
- developing gender statistics;
- organising an information campaign to the clients of prostitution.

Finnish Government Action Plans on gender equality

The last two government Action Plans on gender equality have included some men related issues. The Action Plan for Gender Equality 2012-2015 collates the most important measures used by the government to promote equality between women and men and combating gender-based discrimination. The Action Plan is an instrument to coordinate the government's gender equality policy, and it incorporates measures for all the government ministries. The Action Plan is based on the Government Programme and the first Government Report on Gender Equality drawn up in 2010. The Action Plan also aims to implement the policy outlined in the said report.

The government is committed to promoting gender equality in all its decision-making. The Action Plan for Gender Equality includes a specific component on gender mainstreaming, which applies to all the ministries. The ministries continue mainstreaming of the gender perspective in legislative drafting, budget preparation and other activities with major implications for gender equality. Furthermore, each

ministry continues the work of their respective working groups on gender equality and will, inter alia, mainstream a gender perspective in at least one significant branch or project. In addition to gender mainstreaming, the Action Plan contains objectives and actions in several theme areas. These priority areas include gender equality legislation, working life and reconciliation of work and family life, decision-making and promotion of women's careers, education and research, promotion of democracy and integration policy, economic policy, promotion of men's and women's inclusion and health, and combating intimate partner violence and domestic violence, violence against women and sexual violence. In addition, the Action Plan sets out the organisation and development of the work for gender equality.

The most essential measures related to men in the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality 2012–2015 are:

- Increase the amount of leave days earmarked for fathers, provide more flexibility to how and when fathers use their family leave, and enable home childcare for longer, supported by the parental allowance.
- Put single-parent, non-residential parent, adoptive, multiple-birth, rainbow and foster families on an equal footing with other families.
- The different paths to social exclusion, taken by young women and men, as well as their needs for support, will be taken into account.
- Projects intended to narrow health differences between socio-economic population groups and between men and women will be entered as a focus point for health promotion appropriations.
- Dialogue between well-being experts and health experts, gender equality experts and men's organisations, will be highlighted in order to give greater prominence to the male dimension in the promotion and monitoring of health and wellbeing and in social and health services.
- The use of gender aggregated statistics in the social welfare and healthcare sectors, as well as in the accrual of databases, will be enhanced specifically to improve our awareness and understanding of men's wellbeing problems.
- Expertise on the status of men in gender equality policy and participation of men in the promotion of gender equality will be enhanced.

As is visible from this outline of the main institutional practices there is a strengthening governmental aim towards including men into the gender equality promotion. There is also a relatively long tradition in this and these institutional practices form a backbone for a variety of policy making processes, gender mainstreaming actions and a variety of government and EU funded project work (mostly performed by the third sector) that then carries these institutional practices into the everyday life practices of Finnish citizens on different levels ranging from fathers deciding on the length of their paternity leaves into ministerial employees having to consider the varying implications gender might have for their budget proposals.

1.2. Men's involvement in reconciliation of work and family life

The major goals and aims of the Finnish societal politics in relation to families and parenting have been the same for some time now, at least for the past decade. The governmental goal has been to create a safe environment for the children to grow up and to try to keep the costs societally as equal as possible. A strong part of the official agenda has been that both parents would have equal opportunities to care for their children. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2006 and 2014)

Part of this overall agenda has also been the renewal of the parental leave system so that it would better support the increasingly difficult work and family reconciliation and to encourage fathers to use at least part of the parental leave. Having a family has a great impact on the division of labour and use of time within Finnish families but mostly it still seems to have more of an impact on the mothers' use of time. The usage of the parental leaves suggests that men's involvement in the domestic and care work is not equal to women. This is also evident in the Statistics Finland's National Time-Use Survey results. Whether they have children or not, men tend to only spend around 45 minutes per day on non-paid work (in this case specifically household tasks) whereas women's similar figures are 1 hour 36 minutes per day without children and 2 hours 32 minutes with children. (Statistics Finland, National Time-Use Survey, 2009)

Also the attempts towards the more equal sharing of the parental leave between men and women have shown that men mostly use the leave meant for them, often so that the mother is also home so that they don't get any real responsibility to care. The challenges in creating quotas are however taking into account the equality of single-parent, non-residential parent, adoptive, multiple-birth, rainbow and foster parents. Other challenges regarding equality and family leaves are the complicated nature of the system, financial situation of the families with children as well as the worsening situation of women's careers in the labour market due to their longer parental leaves.

As the situation stands the majority of mothers still use the entire maternity leave as well as the entire parental leave and available care leaves that follow it. Statutory maternity leave in Finland lasts for 105 days, to be taken by the mother. Parental leave lasts for 158 weekdays, and can be divided among the parents according to their joint decision with some restrictions. The division can be done periodically (12 days at least) and there can be only 2 separate periods of leave for each carer, the parental leave cannot be taken at the same time. Additionally, since 1.1.2013 fathers are now entitled to new form of father's leave of 9 weeks/ 54 working days. Three weeks of this can be taken at the same time with the mother after the baby is born and the rest have to be used separately after the parental leave (until the child is 2 years old). These leaves can then be followed by a care leave, as an optional extra to parental leave. During care leave either the father or the mother can stay at home full time or part time without losing their job, up to the child's age of three.

Roughly 80% of families with children under three years of age have taken at least some form or amount of care leave. Even though it is possible to share the care leave between the father and the mother it has in practice mostly (over 90%) been the mother who takes the care leave. Parental leave is also mostly used by women and this has not really changed since 1995. The average figure has been 2-3%/per year of fathers taking the parental leave but in 2012 only 1.9% of the fathers shared

the parental leave with the mother. (THL/Statistics Finland, 2012) The availability of the father's month has, however, increased the use of parental leave by the fathers. The number of fathers taking the fathers month has grown to be five times as high as it was when the father's month policy was introduced in 2003 (statistics from 2003-2012/Statistics Finland). Still during 2012 only 32% of the fathers took their fathers month (18716 fathers). Much like during the early years of the father's month, most of them were highly educated fathers with highly educated wives/partners. (THL/Statistics Finland, 2012)

The new governmental policy on family structures splits the possibility to stay at home and care for children equally between mother and father. This is a concrete practice that will improve gender equality in these issues. The old policies will be abandoned gradually in order to move into the 6+6+6 model in terms of the parental leave. This means that the parental leave will be 18 months long and that it can freely be divided into three periods of six months (6+6+6) where one period would be used by each parent at the time and one would be shared between parents. The leaves would be available until the child is three years old. During the parental leave the allowance of the caring parent would be 80% of the previous earnings. (STM, 2014)

A pressing matter calling for special policy and practice attention is the division of parental rights and the decisions on children in the case of divorce / break up. Also the policies and practices related to e.g. birth, maternity clinics, day care and schools are not updated to equally include the variety of different family situations. For example receiving the governmental maternity package (<http://www.kela.fi/web/en/maternitypackage>) is not possible if the child's mother has not lived in Finland for six months before the birth. Having a Finnish father does not help in this situation as the government agency (KELA) only recognises the mother and the package is called maternity package.

The societal debates on the position of fathers in custody conflicts in Finland have for some time now been rather unanimous in portraying the position of fathers as poor or at least poorer than the position of mothers. However, a study by the National Research Institute of Legal Policy (Valkama & Litmala, 2006) examined the situation by going over a series of custody court cases during 2005-2006 and they argue that the situation of the fathers is not as bad as it used to be. According to their research fathers were active, capable actors in these processes and in at least half the cases the entire legal process over custody had been activated by the father. At the same time, even though in 65% of the cases the mother got the full custody, in a third of the cases it was the father who got full custody. Their results seem to suggest that in court cases concerning custody and care conflicts the fathers have a better chance in gaining equal parenting rights than through social services. Care conflicts and care arrangements, as well as new family arrangements are all areas where more critical, gendered research and good practices are needed. (Valkama & Litmala, 2006)

Finnish women spend more hours than men on domestic care work, however, in comparison with many other European countries motherhood in Finland does not seem to stop women from working, at least not for a very long time. This is, however, not due to equal sharing of domestic and care work but due to the extensive societal system of practices such as maternity leave, parental leave, care leave and the national day care system, which all make it possible for women to return to work when the children are around 1.5-2.5 years old. Simultaneously the latest statistics on families with more than one child (Statistics Finland 2013) show

that the unemployment rates of the mothers are going up whereas the employment/unemployment rates of the fathers are not really affected at all suggesting that the overwhelming trend still is that particularly in families with more than one child it is the mother whom stays at home.

Good practices:

- Further increase the amount of leave days earmarked for fathers, provide more flexibility to how and when fathers use their family leave, and enable home childcare for longer, supported by the parental allowance. The move into the 6+6+6 model. This means that the parental leave will be 18 months long and that it can freely be divided into three periods of six months (6+6+6) where one period would be used by each parent at the time and one would be shared between parents. The leaves would be available until the child is three years old. During the parental leave the allowance of the caring parent would be 80% of the previous earnings
- Put single-parent, non-residential parent, adoptive, multiple-birth, rainbow and foster families on an equal footing (on all societal levels) with other families. This work is in progress as the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Foreign Affairs for example are financially supporting a NGO raising awareness and campaigning for more variety in family structures i.e. rainbow families. (<http://www.sateenkaariperheet.fi/index.php>)

1.3. Overcoming segregation in education

The educational level of both women and men in Finland has been rising continuously. Currently, women, all the way into their 60s, are increasingly better educated than men. Thus Finnish women have very good prerequisites for attaining equality in society and working life. According to research all the fields of education are, however, still markedly gender-segregated, and there have been no major changes over the last ten years. Both researchers and government officials stress that gender neutrality in education is not enough but rather there is a need for a more gender sensitive school and teaching system. (e.g. http://www.oph.fi/instancedata/prime_product_julkaisu/oph/embeds/30194_sukupuoli_koulussa.pdf)

The topic of gender in school has received an increased level of societal focus over the past few years. The gendered structures of basic education were a specific concern of the previous governments and one of the previous Ministers of Education, Henna Virkkunen (until May 2011), established a special committee consisting of and consulting various experts of the educational field whose task was to plan how schools and fields of education in general could be used in diminishing gender segregation. (<http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2010/liitteet/okmtr18.pdf?lang=en>)

The committee discovered for example that the existing legal text regarding basic education in Finland stresses the different needs of boys and girls thus including an underlying assumption that boys and girls are homogenous categories and that they have homogenous needs regarding education. Thus instead of diminishing gender segregation the law enforces the gender stereotypes and segregation. Diminishing gender segregation is a necessary and long overdue task and to successfully attain

this within education requires goal oriented and concrete actions from a variety of governing bodies not just the Ministry of Education.

The committee suggested the following good practices:

- All the governmental programmes should in the future include a listing of variety of different measures for different sectors within their area, all aimed at diminishing the gender segregation.
- Recommended discovering the real national costs resulting from gender segregation.
- Called for a move away from the constant chain of projects towards more continuous practices was seen as crucial in order to move towards more continuous work on unpacking the gender segregation.
- The already gathered knowledge and good practices from the previous projects should, however, be carefully analysed and taken into consideration when planning onwards.
- Diminishing segregation and gender mainstreaming have to become part of decision-making and governance in the Ministry of Education.
- In Finland education, teaching and the practices at all levels of schooling should be designed to actively promote equality and non-discriminating behaviour.
- All the inequality promoting practices should be unpacked and removed.
- The teaching practices should be further developed to support equal and individual learning and growth whilst considering the social and cultural constructions of gender.
- All students and pupils should be provided with equal opportunities to gain knowledge and skills needed in the society and working life.
- Girls and boys should be supported via teaching and pupil counselling in a manner that allows them to make educated choices regarding their subjects, further education and career based on their individual qualities, strengths and motivation not their gender.

There is today a wide range of available materials (material both for teaching and for educating the teachers themselves, research, statistics, etc.) for teachers on different levels of the schooling system most of them offered by some government funded NGO's and other third sector actors e.g. (<http://www.tasa-arvokasvatuksessa.fi/english>, http://www.minna.fi/web/guest/koulutus_tiede_tutkimus) thus the work towards more permanent change of the structures is on going. A still valid question is whether this all then turns into long term changes in practices/creates good practices that stay and slowly cause a change within the educational and societal structures in Finland.

Statistics Finland publication Gender in Finland (2014) still makes it very evident that although there are roughly the same percentages of both women and men educated

on all levels of education system and nearly 70% of both women and men have some type of degree, women still have slightly higher percentages in terms of gained university degrees (a bachelors degree: 10.4% women and 8.6% men). However, when it comes to working life these degrees do not turn into higher wages or better careers but rather women still earn less and employment in Finland is very much segregated in terms of women still doing the majority of low paid care work (88.8% women and 11.2% men) and men technology related work (16.1% women and 83.9% men). However, there are government funded/coordinated development programmes tackling this too e.g. VALTAVA (https://www.tem.fi/en/ministry/gender_equality/development_programme_valtava) and Valtava includes several small projects e.g. Power to Care II programme that is aiming at increasing the hiring of more men into the care sector and creating male-specific pedagogical solutions and operating methods that would permanently transform the activities of educational institutions. Amongst the aims are also enhancing men's commitment to studying and reducing their drop-out rates. The aim is also to producing new products during the project:

- A teaching model ensuring male-specific implementation;
- A male mentor model.

These will be implemented together with the existing network of actors and existing services will be used in further developing them. Operating methods will be tested during the project, and their functionality and cost-efficiency will be assessed. The aim is for these models to become transferable, for them to form a part of existing services. (https://www.tem.fi/en/ministry/gender_equality/development_programme_valtava/power_to_care_ii)

There are also government funded/supported youth projects supporting specifically boys and girls outside the schooling system and initiatives such as the Poikien Talo (The House of the Boys's) have proven to be popular (<http://poikientalo.fi/kaikkea-ei-kannata-hautoa-vainomassa-päässä>). The general idea is to offer easy to access advice and support and a place to spend time at for adolescent boys, particularly aiming at those boys in danger to be socially excluded. However, these are also projects, funded for four years at the time and thus as such not forming permanent good practice but rather offering a temporary solution.

2. The Ministerial Working Group on the role of men in gender equality

In January 2013, the Minister for gender equality appointed a working group to address men's issues in gender equality policy. The Working Group is composed of men's organisations, LGBT Rights organisation and four ministries. The mandate of the Working Group ends on 15 October 2014.

The Working Group's tasks include

- Identifying men's issues and further clarifying issues already known;
- Speeding up measures relating to the role of men in the government's action plan for gender equality;

- Developing interaction between officials of the ministries and the men's organisations;
- Organising a seminar on men and gender equality.

The Working Group aims to introduce measures that will enhance gender equality in order to resolve the problems that men face, creating a space for men's diversity. The Working Group focuses on several themes, including social and healthcare services, supporting fatherhood, reconciliation of work and family life, early/pre-school education and education, marginalisation of boys and male youth, image of men and its plurality, prevention of violence and common gender equality policy.

In preparation of the final report to be published in October 2014, an interim report of the Working Group was published in February 2014. The interim report gives an overview of the activities of the Working Group carried out so far, the experts they have heard and the themes discussed. In addition, it provides advice on ongoing processes, such as the Government's Action Plan on Gender Equality. The interim reports main purpose was to facilitate a discussion with focal interest groups. Members of the group are not necessarily committed to individual debate openings because there was not a purpose to reach consensus among the members of the group. The issues that the Working Group has presented were openings for a debate - not proposals of the Working Group. The proposals and recommendations for the future from the male perspective will be released in the final report.

The working group considers the following measures and themes as the most important issues in terms of men's equality:

- Carry out gender impact assessment in social and health services, in order to better recognise men's needs for services and improve services for men;
- Promote fatherhood in acknowledgement of a child, in parenthood and in a divorce situation by state authorities;
- Create equal opportunities for women and men in reconciling work and family life;
- Reduce segregation and traditional gender expectations in education and training;
- Focus on prevention and early intervention in an inhibition of men's social exclusion by supporting children and youths in kindergarten and comprehensive school education;
- Diversify the image of men, e.g. in the media;
- Promote non-violent solutions in conflicts.

However, the working group gives no specific suggestions in terms of concrete action, potential practices, at least not yet. The working group started its work in January 2013. The mandate of the Working Group ends on 15 October 2014 and there will be a final report published summarising the work in the beginning of November 2014.

3. Assessment of the Finnish approach to involving men in gender equality

Finland is, when compared internationally, a relatively gender equal society. Gender-specific interventions and practices on, by and around men have direct and indirect impacts on the climate of discussion on gender and feminism in Finland. They contribute to public debate, and even with the differences that emerge this may contribute to prospects for change. In some cases at least, they highlight gender issues and contribute to discussion on the politics of gender, and sometimes even shed light on existing gender systems. On the other hand, there is always the possibility of backlash emerging from these debates. Traditionally patriarchal ways of being men still persist alongside notions of “neutral” citizenship and late modern ways, inspired by the information society. (see for example Heiskanen and Hearn, 2004) A rather strong gender-neutral ideology of gender equality and citizenship continues to exist in tension with gender-specific interventions, policies, and debates. In order to advance gender equality much work remains to be done, here some of the areas needing attention, for example:

- There should be more gender sensitive statistical information on all levels and areas of society.
- The educational system should be under the regulation of equality laws (this is, at least partly, included in the forthcoming change in the equality law) including the requirement to evaluate the effects it has based on gender.
- Work against social exclusion of men should be supported and further developed starting from the young boys/youth work. (Projects like the Poikien Talo (House of The Boys) should turn into permanent good practices)
- There is a need for more education for the health care professionals in the maternity care and social services for them to be better equipped to meet fathers and boys.
- The male and female labour market participation should be re-evaluated and the gender segregation of the employment should really be met with good policy and practice instead of projects.

Also questions of men and gender equality are very often bound by other legislation, not just the equality laws. For example the military conscription (a must for men, optional for women) is outside the bounds of equality laws and thus seen as a practice that is not legally discriminating. Men’s duty to participate in military service is written into the conscription law. Simultaneously divorce, separation crisis and custody questions are not within the bounds of equality law as that law does not extend to family members or to the private sphere.

Laws or policy and norm guidance are thus not the only instrument when it comes to men’s gender equality. More central than ever when working towards an improved gender equality and wellbeing of men and women is, however, the division of resources as well as guidance with information, both of which have been given a role in the governmental equality programme (e.g. Valtava project).

However, the challenge is that when presently most of the concrete work is done via the third sector actors and in the form of projects, the good practices and knowledge gained through these programmes and projects do not automatically turn into permanent policies and good practices. A key future challenge is to change this.

4. Main questions and issues for debate at the meeting

- How to include men into the equality work on all levels, how to make the equality question relevant for men too?
- How to really alter the long remaining structures of employment?
- How to keep all this policy work pro-feminist and include critical studies on men i.e. how to really work towards improved equality of both women and men?
- How to widen the discussions and the actual policy making on men's equality questions to other areas than just fatherhood & segregation? What about men's violence and violence experienced by men and health issues?
- How to turn good projects and initiatives into permanent policies and good practices?
- Is it possible to really adopt practices from different cultural/societal backgrounds?
- If so what types of practices would be the kinds of practices that do travel best?

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