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Exchange of good practices on gender equality

Implementation of gender mainstreaming

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Gender mainstreaming in Austria

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1. Introduction

In order to describe the chances for Austria to transfer good practices of gender mainstreaming (GM) of Sweden and Belgium we have to keep the following contextual aspects in mind:

- Although there have been many attempts to promote equal opportunities for women in Austria since the seventies, the social security system still contains incentives leading women and men in the direction of the roles provided by the breadwinner model.¹
- Looking on political statements for gender equality in Austria, there are trends of an increased focus on family policy within equality policy as well as a shift from women to gender equality policies. Measures to improve the reconciliation of work and family and lowering the gender pay gap are highly accepted by the different political parties. But under the guideline of individual freedom of choice this does not necessarily mean encouragement for female employment and economic independence.²
- The increasing national effort for an increasing labour market participation of women in recent years is influenced by the political goals of the EU, which were adopted by the national policy. Women could improve their employment position mainly by the increasing education of women and the positive development of the labour market. But the integration of women in employment only partly occurred, to reconcile family and work part time work has increased for women.³
- Although women's participation in gainful employment increased the pattern of unequal distribution of household and family-related tasks between men and women did not change a lot.⁴

2. Transferability issues

The good practices of Belgium and Sweden fulfil many advantages that are also anticipated with the approach of GM in Austria. But in a realistic manner it is hardly possible to transfer the gender mainstreaming approaches of Sweden or Belgium to Austria as a whole. As we know from other political fields the same measures or regulations can cause totally different effects because of different individual ways to handle it. This can be explained by the different social, cultural, political and economic

¹ Dackweiler R., Wohlfahrtsstaatliche Geschlechterpolitik am Beispiel Österreichs. Opladen 2003.

² Kreisky E., Löffler M., Frauenpolitische Entwicklungen und Brüche. In: BKA, Frauenbericht 2010, Wien 2011.

³ Leitner A., Frauenförderung im Wandel, Frankfurt/Main 2007.

⁴ Statistik Austria, Zeitverwendung 2008/09, Wien 2009.

background.⁵ So it is also a question of the preconditions whether regulations, measures, procedures provide the expected effects. According to evaluation results of Sweden and Belgium even in these countries there are many challenges, obstacles and constraints, although their preconditions are in some way much better than in Austria.

2.1. Strengths and weaknesses of the Austrian implementation of GM

For structuring the question of transferability of the good practices I will use the presented three parts of the Swedish gender equality policy (policy, theory and strategy) to analyse similarities and differences between the countries.

Strategy

In Austria, GM is formally based on four cabinet decisions:⁶

- The Inter-ministerial Working Group for Gender Mainstreaming (IMAG GM) was set up by the cabinet decision of 11 July 2000, for the purpose of implementing GM at the federal level.
- Based on the recommendations of the IMAG GM, the federal government took a cabinet decision on 3 April 2002, on a work program for the implementation of GM.
- The third cabinet decision on GM, of 9 March 2004, followed up the previous decisions and set out the requirements for a targeted implementation of GM at federal level.
- With the cabinet decision of 5 March 2008 the use of two guidelines in the drafting of laws and regulations and in budget drafting was reaffirmed.

The implementation of GM in Austria possesses elements that are also crucial for the good practices in Sweden and Belgium: a commitment for GM, institutional arrangements with GM-agents in the federal ministries and an inter-ministerial working group as well as standards for practical implementation of GM with a focus on legislation and gender budgeting (GB). The Guidelines for GM in Legislation provide users at federal, laender and municipal level with practice-oriented proposals on how to achieve the goals set. The Guidelines are supplemented by a checklist and a catalogue of questions.⁷ The Working Aid for GB is designed to foster the targeted and efficient implementation of GB in public administration. It is primarily addressed to the budget developers in individual ministries and also to those responsible for drawing up inter-ministerial budgets.⁸

⁵ Comparing the leave regulations for childcare between Denmark, Finland, Germany and Austria, the regulations for additional leaves are much more similar than one would expect when looking on the duration of work interruptions. But the individual ways to handle have different effects on working careers (Leitner A., Wroblewski, A. (2008), What can conservative welfare states learn from Nordic experience? Transitions between family work and employment from a comparative perspective, in: Anxo, Dominique; Erhel, Christin; Schippers, Joop (eds.), Labour Market Transitions and Time Adjustment over the Life Course, Dutch University Press.)

⁶ <http://ka.gv.at/site/6823/default.aspx>, 29 April 2011.

⁷ Gaster Karin, Leitfaden für Gender Mainstreaming in der Legistik, BKA 2007.

⁸ Frey R., Köhnen M, Arbeitshilfe für Gender Budgeting in der Verwaltung, BKA 2011, 2nd edition.

Regarding the practical implementation process of GM in Austria we could distinguish between two stages, an introduction stage and the institutionalization of GM. In the introduction stage there was a lot of interest in this new strategy and enriched gender equality policy. Austria got involved rather early with the approach of GM. For instance, during the Austrian EU presidency in 1998 the social ministry Lore Hostasch installed gender mainstreaming in the employment strategy and set up first steps for standards to handle it. The National Action Program for Employment 1998 was the first approach to follow the GM-concept in a systematic way.⁹ In consequence a coordination unit for GM (GeM) was installed in the year 2000 to support GM within the implemented measures of the European Social Funds. Besides offering a platform for discussion and exchange the GeM developed a toolbox based on four stages (GeM-4-Schritte-Methode) that became rather popular for the practical implementation of GM in Austria. An evaluation of GM of ESF measures showed that GM was anchored in the employment strategy and was in a leading position in the implementation of GM, at least in Austria.

In the ongoing process it comes to further commitments for GM on the federal level for all fields. Before the cabinet decision 2004 there was a report on the implementation of GM in the different resorts but neither the planned evaluation of pilot projects nor a comprehensive evaluation of the implementation was carried out.¹⁰ The guideline for regulations was only published in 2007. But because there was hardly any targeted training, its application seems to be rare. In 2004 GB became a main focus in GM. In this process an Inter-ministerial working group for GB (IMAG GB) was installed and in 2009 merged with the IMAG GM to IMAG GMB. It was GB which was promoted most within the Austrian GM-approach. Each resort had to implement compulsory pilot project for GB.

To sum up, the GM-approach was put into practice very heterogeneously in the different resorts on the federal level, in the laender and the municipalities.¹¹ In some resorts GM-working groups are still missing, in others there are GM-agents of the resort and GM-agents for each section. But whether planned activities are realized as well as their effects are unknown. According to the brief assessment in the “Women’s report 2010” the most recognized hindrances of the implementation are beside the unclear definition of GM, the missing legal regulation and the absence of a clear objective of gender equality. This supports the thesis, that GM in Austria is used as a technique but not as a targeted strategy. This enhances the risk that the implementation process stagnates because there are no clear political goals agreed. We would complement this assessment by the fact, that there is less knowledge about strengths and weaknesses of the practical implementation because of missing evaluations.

Policy – gender equality policy objectives

As mentioned in the introduction, there is no consistent goal of gender equality. In consequence the objective is defined and interpreted in different ways, depending on the political field, the ruling political party or other dominant political objectives. The missing consistent goal of gender equality enforces a reluctance to define an objective

⁹ Leitner A., Wroblewski A., Chancengleichheit und Gender-Mainstreaming. Ergebnisse des NAP, Reihe Soziologie No. 41, in: IHS Wien 2000.

¹⁰ The reported results are based on a short assessment of gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting in the “Women’s report 2010” (BKA 2011, 402ff).
http://www.frauen.bka.gv.at/studien/frauenbericht2010/Frauenbericht_Teil2_1Kreisky.pdf

¹¹ The IMAG offers an overview on the activities concerning GM in the federal ministries and in the laender. <http://www.imag-gendermainstreaming.at/>

for gender mainstreaming. In consequence, the goals of GM remain unclear and without commitment.¹²

Theory – Gender Power structure

The theory of gender equality policy is connected to its objectives. The focus on reconciliation of family and work and the freedom of choice still favours a difference approach of gender relations. That means that the different interests and living conditions of women are seen as reasons for disadvantages of women. Social processes for different interests or situations (doing gender processes) are less relevant in the political thinking. This perception of gender relations forces stereotypes and gender role expectations instead of a reflection of separation and hierarchies. This theoretical perspective is not just relevant from an academic point of view, but has its consequences for gender analysis and therefore for the problems which should be solved. Whenever differences between men and women are reduced to different interests there is hardly any chance to change.

2.2. Transferable parts of good practices

To conclude, in Austria the IMAG GMB is installed for a federal GM implementation and has developed standards for implementing GM by guidelines for drafting laws and regulations and drafting budgets. But there are hindrances concerning the transfer of the methods to the relevant actors, concerning the commitment and understanding of the goals for gender equality policy as well as concerning procedures for gender analysis and monitoring or evaluating of GM. Austria could improve its GM strategy especially with a transfer of the following parts of the good practices.

- Commitment of a general objective on gender equality policy with interim objectives: Clear objectives are an essential precondition for an ongoing implementation process of GM and for a transfer of this top down-strategy and a coordinated implementation. It would also disburden the budget, when e.g. one side would not promote long employment interruptions of women there would not be high demand for cost intensive qualification measurements for female returners to the labour market by the other side. But it seems to be a big challenge for policy to define a clear goal for different areas that guarantees economic independence for men and women. So the political chances for this seem to be small.
- Training for central and regional government administrators, especially targeted trainings for the use of the guidelines offered by the IMAG GMB. It seems that there was more interest in training in the introduction phase of GM. At least part of the trainings were dominated by the discussion of the meaning and the philosophy of GM whereas the methods of implementations were too short mentioned. The question is, whether the administrators, especially those of higher positions, can be interested for targeted training.
- Improvement of gender differentiated statistics by an Act of gender differentiated statistics: Statistics disaggregated by sex is a prerequisite for gender mainstreaming, in special for gender analysis and gender monitoring. Although there were some efforts to improve statistics there is still a lack of representative

¹² This explains the more successful implementation of gender mainstreaming in the employment strategy, because there the objectives of gender equality are more clear

and statistics segregated by gender, e.g. for the area of unpaid work. Of course this is time and money demanding, and this seems to be the main hindrance against it.

- Evaluation. As we see from the Belgium and Swedish case they have learned a lot from the evaluation of the pilot projects or of a continuous monitoring. In Austria there is little knowledge what effects the implemented GM-measures have. External evaluation of GM could improve the results and should be a standardized stage of the GM process, like it was formulated by the “4-stages method” of the GeM.

3. Policy debate

Because of the focus on gender budgeting in Austria there is a discussion whether this restricts the strategy of GM or makes it to a more effective. On the one hand there is the fear that GB pushes the aspect to use GM as a technique and not as a targeted strategy. This would mean that gender budget analysis is done without obvious effects on the distribution of money. On the other hand there is the hope that GB can create money for gender equality even within austerity budgets because of its redistribution effects.

Another point of discussion is the evaluation of the GM implementation. This is not only related to the lost chances of lessons learned that are given by evaluations. But also on the possibilities to evaluate effects of GM. E.g. in the German society for evaluation (DeGEval) a working group is discussing regularly methods and experiences of GM evaluation.

And last but not least the discussion on the hopes and risks of GM concerning its stimulating or weakening effect on equality policy is still going on. The peak of this discussion was already in the starting phase of GM. In some sense we got used to this neutralized strategy of equality policy. Can GM have effects in a country where it is political correct to promote gender equality but should not cost too much, respectively it should not change power relations.