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Gender mainstreaming in Poland

Ania Plomien

Gender Institute, London School of Economics

1. Introduction

The socialist era in Poland, characterised by a top down approach to the polity, economy, and society ended in 1989. Socialism was associated with declarations of commitment to gender equality and since the 1950s the official ideology and legal framework stressed partnership and equality in public and private life. But, while the socialist state promoted high levels of female labour force participation and education and established institutional guarantees of realising work rights and social benefits, it did not lead to the transformation of gender relations and eradication of gender inequalities, such as in pay, access to positions of power, unpaid work and care, or gender based violence. The collapse of socialism was accompanied by changed political, economic, and social priorities with significant implications for gender equality policies and practices. After two decades of change the situation in Poland presents a mixed picture where certain gender gaps have narrowed while others widened.

Table 1 Select Gender (In)Equality Indicators in Poland, 2000-2009

| Category | | 2000 | 2004 | 2007 | 2009 |
|--|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Employment Rate (15-64) | M | 61.2 | 56.8 | 63.6 | 66.1 |
| | W | 48.9 | 46.1 | 50.6 | 52.8 |
| Unemployment Rate (15+) | M | 14.6 | 18.5 | 9.0 | 7.8 |
| | W | 18.3 | 19.8 | 10.3 | 8.7 |
| Gender Pay Gap* | | : | 7.5 | 7.5 | 9.8 |
| At-risk-of poverty rate after social transfers | M | 16 | 19.2 | 17.6 | 16.9 |
| | W | 16 | : | 17.1 | 17.4 |
| At-risk-of poverty rate after social transfers (65+) | M | 5 | : | 5.6 | 10.9 |
| | W | 9.1 | : | 9.2 | 16.5 |
| Share of W business leaders | | 32.7 | : | 35 | : |
| Share of W in lower house of parliament | | 13 | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| Early leavers from education and training | M | : | 7.3 | 6.2 | 6.6 |
| | W | : | 3.9 | 3.8 | 3.9 |
| Share of W among tertiary students | | 57.5 | 57.6 | 57.4 | : |
| Life expectancy at birth (years) | M | 69.64 | 70.61 | 70.96 | 71.54 |
| | W | 78.01 | 79.19 | 79.78 | 80.14 |

Source: Eurostat 2011; EC 2011¹

Notes: 'M' = men, 'W' = women, ':' = missing data; '**' = unadjusted gender pay gap for the whole economy

Table 1 includes some indicators illustrating the differences between men and women in the last few years. Some gaps have diminished – such as in registered unemployment; other inequalities have increased or remain significant - such as in

¹ Eurostat (2011) Statistics Database: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/eurostat/home/>; EC (2011) Report on Progress on Equality between Women and Men in 2010. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the EU.

employment rates or pay. Certain differences disadvantage women, as in the decision-making power with only about a third of women being business leaders (including self-employed without employees); only 12% participate in the highest decision making body of largest publically quoted companies (10 % in 2009); and in politics only 20% comprise the lower house of parliament and 25% the cabinet of senior ministers in the national government (EC 2011). On other dimensions the situation is reverse. For example women enjoy longer life expectancy and achieve higher levels of education than men. Generally speaking, women's position remains weaker than that of men, justifying a systematic, comprehensive, and multifaceted action for gender equality measures directed at both women and men. In this context, gender mainstreaming (GM) represents an appropriate approach to policies and programmes in Poland.

Despite the evident gender inequalities in many areas of public and private domains, the successive Polish governments have approached the issue in an uneven and limited manner, at times even contradictory to the principles of equality. National policies tend to fluctuate together with the political priorities of the ruling party, but there have been some notable exceptions, for instance where individual ministers within conservative-right leaning governments have pursued gender equality aims. Over time, attention to gender issues has gradually increased, but it is not usually understood in the context of attaining gender equality in its own right. More often it is treated instrumentally to face 'more pressing' social challenges, such as the demographic change of population ageing and falling fertility rates. At other times, gender equality or the status of women is synonymous with family wellbeing and reconciliation of work and family for women. This has its limits as it confines women to the family context and does not consider their needs in other areas of life, or does not engage men and their roles as well as needs in the transformation required to achieve a gender equal society. A clear trend is thus difficult to detect, although recent policy reforms and labour market developments, especially those associated with the membership in the EU, appear more consistent and merit a cautiously optimistic assessment. The tools of GM (discussed in the following section), gender budgeting and gender impact assessment are not, however, a firm policy feature in Poland.

2. Assessment of Gender Mainstreaming Policy Transferability

GM is a demanding strategy, requiring substantial resources, knowledge, and a systematic, comprehensive, and long-term commitment. But, the approach holds a transformative potential capable of delivering gender equality. Some features of the demands and potential of GM are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2 Gender Mainstreaming Demands and Potential

| GM requirements | GM promise |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - political will, awareness, and ownership - specific gender equality policy - institutional infrastructure - financial resources - knowledge of gender relations - gender disaggregated statistics / indicators - expertise of administration / training - women and men in decision making - policy process analysis and monitoring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o gender impact assessment o gender budgeting - policy redesign to promote gender equality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - potentially transformative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o relational: shifts power relations - progressive and innovative - challenges institutionalised inequality - accepts similarity and difference <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o <i>between</i> and <i>among</i> women and men - dual approach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o specific and general / horizontal policy method - can be combined with equal treatment and positive action - context specific |

Sources: Rees (2005), Woodward (2008), EC (2008)²

Based on these criteria, the Swedish and Belgian experiences demonstrate a number of accomplishments and challenges in implementing GM policies and mechanisms. The Swedish approach to GM is based on a long-term (since 1994) broad political agreement and commitment to gender equality. Its features include:

- national policy for gender equality in decision-making, economic life, unpaid work and care, and violence;
- a systematic analysis of gender equality trends and patterns (in part based on gender disaggregated statistics) and ways of improving the situation (3R method);
- allocation of funds to local authorities for developing a GM approach;
- training of government officials;
- GM structures and policies across all ministries.

While some of these aspects are well developed, there are still challenges to the successful implementation of GM strategy in Sweden, such as little understanding of what GM should involve, lack of clearly defined goals, and loss of momentum and limited monitoring / progress.³

The Belgian approach to GM is rooted in gender equality policies developed in the 1980s and a law adopted in 1996, to culminate in a 2007 federal law on gender mainstreaming. Over the years the GM process included:

- pilot project: Strategic Plan for Equality Affairs;
 - ministry-level departmental training and strategic plans for equality
 - GM units with expertise of academics, policy-makers, and civil servants
- gender budgeting, impact assessment, disaggregated data;

² Rees, T. (2005) 'Reflections on the uneven development of gender mainstreaming in Europe' *International Journal of Feminist Politics*, 7 (4): 555-574; Woodward, A (2008) 'Too late for gender mainstreaming? Taking stock in Brussels' *European Social Policy* (2008) Vol.18:3 289-302; EC (2008) *Manual for Gender Mainstreaming*, Luxembourg: OOEPEC.

³ Based on C. Alpkvist 2011 'Implementation of gender mainstreaming in Sweden'.

- strategic gender quality objectives;
 - equality in employment (pay gap, segregation...), decision making; problems of poverty, domestic violence...
- regular monitoring / reporting on progress;
- Institute for Equality of Women and Men – established as an independent body.

The Belgian case too represents a mixed picture with a number of exemplary solutions as well as remaining challenge, such as the allocation of a small annual budget to the Gender Institute, an uneven progress in various governmental ministries / agencies, or the focus on the policy process, routines and procedures with a risk of losing sight of addressing processes underlying gender inequality.⁴

In this context, one of the main challenges of successfully transferring a Swedish or Belgian GM policy approach in Poland is **weak institutionalisation** of gender equality principles related to problems of sustained **broad political commitment** and **resources**. The Swedish and Belgian examples and the wider theoretical and empirical literature on policy making highlight commitment to equality goals and institutionalisation of GM as important to the success of the strategy – both in terms of the existence of a specific body or unit as well as policies and laws (institution in a narrow sense) and in terms of a broad political and societal agreement / approval (institution in a broader, socio-cultural sense). In Poland it is possible to trace national policy approach to gender equality in a zigzagging pattern, oscillating between retreat and progress, depending on the political orientation of the governing parties.⁵ For example, the 1993 -97 government promoted gender equality and developed a National Action Plan for Women for 1997-2000, but the 1997 elections brought about a policy shift and the right-wing coalition did not implement the programme. The next change of administration in 2001 (left wing coalition) saw the establishment of the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Women and Men (PRRS) to promote equal treatment of women and men. This office developed a second phase of the NAP for Women (2003-05), which too was abandoned after the 2005 elections and a right-wing government in power. In addition the institutional base for gender equality has weakened as the office for equal status was downsize to the post of a deputy-minister in the Department for Women, Family and Counteracting Discrimination (DKR) within the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MPiPS). In January 2010 this Department has been dissolved, and some of its tasks incorporated into the Department for Economic Analysis and Forecast. Examples of work undertaken there are: legislation on nurseries, campaign promoting fatherhood, or training of civil servants in gender mainstreaming. However, there is none or little visibility of gender issues on the Ministry's website (except for links to EC web-pages).

The main institution dealing with equality issues, including gender, is the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment (PRdsRS) established in 2008 within the Chancellery of the Prime Minister. The office is to coordinate inter-departmental activities with respect to equal treatment, issue opinions on proposed legislation, conduct legal analyses and evaluations, initiate amendments if regulations do not comply with equal treatment rules, monitor equal status, and promote equal treatment.⁶ While potentially a positive development, given the history of a volatile approach to gender equality Policy in Poland this is a major concern as the office is a governmental

⁴ Based on N. Wuiame 2011 'Implementation of gender mainstreaming in Belgium'.

⁵ A. Plomien 2010 Gender and the Labour Market in Poland: Domestic Barriers to Europeanization. VDM Verlag.

⁶ www.rownetraktowanie.gov.pl

agency and therefore does not have a politically independent status. Indeed, the political commitment of the office to the principles of progressive gender equality issues is often challenged by women's groups' organisations.

A new Equal Treatment Act⁷ (in force since January 2011), redressing Poland's inadequate transposition of EU equality directives, goes some way towards developing an equality agenda – for example it requires the PRdsRS to:

- draw up an annual National Action Plan for Equal Treatment encompassing raising public awareness, counteracting violation of equal treatment principles, and cooperation with social partners and NGOs;
- report annually on the implementation of the NAP for Equal Treatment.

But, based on past trends, the potential of the Act and the PRdsRS office to make substantial progress in achieving gender equality is uncertain. On the one hand, the Act falls short of establishing effective mechanisms of a stable and independent pursuit of (gender) equality objectives. It does not overcome the political dependency of the office on governing parties – whose gender politics and policies change. On the other hand, the requirement to construct a national level policy framework for equal treatment – the NAP for Equal Treatment – presents an opportunity to define and pursue national level equality objectives, and to make them transparent and thus open to debate. Currently there is no information available on the status and content of the plan, and the Act requires the PRdsRS to present its first report on activities by end of March 2012, and on the implementation of the NAP for Equal Status by end of March 2013.

The second, and related, challenge for Poland to adopt Swedish or Belgian style approaches to GM is insufficient **financial** and **human resources**, especially given Poland's low starting points and gender inequality trends in numerous areas. A detailed gendered analysis of the patterns and underlining processes is still required to describe and understand the persistence of gender inequalities within the Polish society. This is both an immediate and a medium-term challenge as the infrastructure for gender equality and gender policies is weak and might take some time to develop. This is a wide, systematic, cross- institutional problem - many government departments and agencies do not have adequate expertise and do not pay sufficient attention to gender issues. The exception has been the DKR (and the PRRS in earlier years) which has been an active unit taking on many gender equality initiatives related to the labour market as well as the wider position of women and men in society. Over the course of several years officials from the department have developed a range of programmes and policies and have engaged in GM of policies (such as the Human Resources Operational Programme or some editions of the NAP for employment). But this commitment and expertise seems to vanish when new governments implement new approaches – highlighting the need for institutional stability. Taking stock of the last few years (since Poland joined the EU in 2004) GM, gender budgeting, or gender impact assessments are not a feature of policy-making and implementing and there is a need to make them more widely applied and more visible throughout the policy process.

⁷ Dz.U. Nr 254, Poz. 1700. (2010) Ustawa z dnia 3 grudnia 2010r. o wdrożeniu niektórych przepisów Unii Europejskiej w zakresie równego traktowania.

3. Gender Mainstreaming Policy Debate

As indicated above, GM is a strategy that is relevant in the Polish context, especially as gender inequalities persist and gender specific policy measures have been uneven. The mainstreaming of gender in all policy stages and measures as well as implementing specific gender programmes and activities – the dual approach - is thus of high importance. Generally, over the last few years debate and policy developments on gender issues have gained some prominence, particularly in light of the demographic challenge of rapidly ageing population and low fertility rates. Discussions in the media, informational campaigns, competitions, meetings or conferences focused on gender equality issues raise its visibility and improve the awareness of gender issues among the wider society. But, debates and policies that include gender issues do not necessarily employ a GM perspective.

One such policy area which includes gender in debate and practice has been reconciliation of work and family life. Here, the goal of raising employment rates for women and improving the social inclusion aspects of children from under-privileged backgrounds are the main elements of the rationale to expand care facilities for younger children (below the age of 3) as well as pre-schoolers. Recent policy reforms also encourage fathers to participate in family life by establishing paternity leave (first of 1, then 2 weeks duration). However, given the low starting points in both childcare coverage and paternity leave take up, efforts in these and other areas require further and sustained attention – especially in encouraging men to take on a more equal share of family responsibilities and in involving the employers and other social partners in setting and driving the agenda for a more equal society.

At national level, GM debate is not strongly visible – for example a recent major policy strategy document⁸ does not refer to gender equality or its mainstreaming: women are mentioned only in the context of being among weaker labour market groups requiring labour market activating measures, and the situation of men (e.g. in health or education) is not made explicit. In macro-economic sections of the strategy there is no evidence that GM has been applied. So, while gender and wider equality issues have a place in policy debates and actions, attention to them is not linear, the infrastructure for gender equality and gender policies remains inadequate, and government agencies require strengthening commitment and expertise in this area. The Swedish and Belgian lessons of: political commitment, institutional robustness (agencies and national policy frameworks), financial and knowledge resources (training and dissemination), cooperation of wider actors (academic and social partners) in policy debates and design, gender based analysis and monitoring, and iterative approach to policy making and implementation in response to evaluation or changing circumstances (but in view of specific gender equality goals) are the necessary basics for establishing a GM strategy in Poland.

⁸ National Reform Programme (2011).