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Justice

Exchange of good practices on gender equality

Implementation of gender mainstreaming

Belgium, 17-18 May 2011

Summary report

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1. The good practice of the host country and associated country

The first exchange of good practices seminar was held in Brussels on the 17-18th May 2011 and focused on the implementation of gender mainstreaming. Two good practices were presented: one by the host country (Belgium) and one by the associated country (Sweden).

The good practice presented by **Belgium** is related to the **Law of 12 January 2007** – known as the “Gender Mainstreaming Law”. It is aimed at monitoring the application of the resolutions from the world conference on women held in Beijing in September 1995 and at integrating the gender perspective into the whole of the federal policies.

The law is the result of a long process of maturation which started immediately after the Beijing Conference with the adoption of a law by the Belgian Parliament on 6 March 1996. This first law aimed to ensure that the resolutions of the Beijing conference were applied. It provides that the federal government shall yearly submit a report to the parliament concerning the policies implemented in order to reach the objectives agreed in Beijing. The law recognises the transversal character of the gender dimension. However, this first law remains limited to reporting and projects and is not presenting a structured and integrated policy.

Following this, the “Strategic Plan for Equality Affairs” pilot project started at the end of 2000. It aimed at introducing gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting strategies on the federal level, stressing the importance of the cooperation of political and administrative actors and of gender awareness. The project was supported by a dedicated gender mainstreaming unit, staffed with academic experts. These experts liaised with both decision-makers and the civil service. The most innovative aspect of this pilot project was the generation of synergies between the academic experts (located in the gender mainstreaming unit), politicians as well as civil servants, since each party made important contributions, according to their different sets of skills and interests. Furthermore, the pilot project included work relating to gender budgeting, gender-based indicators and statistics.

When this project was evaluated, the need to institutionalise the gender mainstreaming process in a sustainable manner quickly became clear. Thus the need of a new Law able to systematise all domains of competence, urge political and administrative commitments to gender equality and facilitate deeper reforms through starting a long-term process under parliamentary control. The key priority of the Law of 12 January 2007 is to oblige ministers and their administrations to define objectives and develop a strategy (with several instruments) in order to correct and avoid inequalities between women and men in federal public policies. The aim is to work a priori to transform the process and prevent problems rather than to work a posteriori and correct the problems.

The law of 12 January 2007 imposes new obligations both on those responsible for policy making and on those responsible for federal administration. In concrete terms:

- The Law directs the government (at the start of the legislature, on the occasion of the government declaration) to propose strategic objectives for achieving the

equality of women and men that it aims to realise during its term of office for all of its policy lines. At the beginning of the period of office, when presenting its government policy statement, the federal government must present for all federal policies (e.g. social affairs, finance, mobility, some competencies in public health and employment, foreign affairs,...) the strategic gender equality objectives to be achieved in the course of the period of office. Besides specific policies geared to the achievement of equality between women and men the Law henceforth requires the **implementation of the transversal strategy of gender mainstreaming** (article 2.1) establishing the “integration of the dimension of gender equality into every measure, action and budgetary preparation”. The government informs the federal Parliament about the gender policy by means of an intermediary report and a final report at the end of the period of office.

- The Law states that each minister must integrate the gender dimension in all the policies, measures and actions that come under his/her responsibility. Each year, at the presentation of the note explaining the policy for the coming year, each minister has to present the policies, actions and measures he or she wants to take to contribute to the achievement of the **strategic objectives** from the government policy statement. In this way, every minister will be responsible for the operational implementation of these strategic objectives.
- Each minister, in collaboration with the top administrative executives, will ensure the integration of the gender dimension in all the strategic planning instruments. He/she is thus responsible for the integration of gender mainstreaming into the **management plans** of every federal public service (article 3.1).
- In addition, each minister is also responsible for drawing up **gender indicators** and ensuring that the statistics produced, collected and ordered by the federal administrations are disaggregated by sex (article 4).
- For each draft legislative and regulatory bill, the minister must carry out a '**gender test**' – i.e., an ex-ante appraisal of the impact of the proposed bill on the respective situations of men and women (gender-aware policy appraisal). The 'gender test' is an obligatory instrument that analyses the possible impact (beforehand) of the planned measure on the respective situations of men and women (article 3.2).
- The Law provides for the integration of the gender dimension into budget preparations (**gender budgeting**). A gender note must specify the amounts allocated to actions aimed at the realisation of gender equality in every federal department (gender budgeting process – article 2.1 and 2.2). Gender budgeting means that the budget is drawn up on the basis of a prior gender analysis.
- The Law advocates the integration of the gender dimension within the framework of the procedures for drawing up **procurement contracts and granting subsidies** (article 3.3). With regard to procurement contracts, the new legislation on government tenders states that the principle of gender equality can henceforth be set down explicitly in the modalities for implementation of the contracts. Moreover, the gender aspect can also be integrated into the selection and award criteria for government contracts.

- The law is vital for the implemented structures. A key institutional arrangement for implementing the law is the **interdepartmental coordination group (CIG)**, which was established by royal decree in 2010. It is composed of representatives of ministers' private offices, nominated by the relevant minister, civil servants from each administration and representatives from the Gender Institute. The civil servants play a coordination role within their ministerial department, and are nominated by the senior manager of the department.
- The **Institute for the equality of women and men**, created in 2001 as an independent body in charge of gender issues, is entrusted with supervising and supporting the whole process of integrating the gender dimension into government policies.

It is in this respect that the implementation of the Law of 12 January 2007 provides a double opportunity in terms of:

- placing the Belgian Federal State at the forefront of European and worldwide commitment to the concrete achievement of equality between women and men; and
- modernising its mode of operation by defining clear policy objectives and assessing their level of achievement.

Currently, the law is in its first stage of implementation with the creation of the coordination group and the first application of gender budgeting. The Institute for the equality of women and men has also developed a series of tools to facilitate the concrete implementation of gender mainstreaming (manual with check-lists, database of gender experts, gender trainings, gender studies). However, it is clear that several challenges regarding the implementation of a gender mainstreaming strategy are present such as:

- maintaining gender mainstreaming as a process, a strategy and not transform it in a goal in itself;
- defining clearly gender differences and gender inequalities and when a difference becomes an inequality. This is particularly important in the design of a gender test to be used by people who are not experts in the matter;
- implementing a performance-based analysis (focused on outputs and outcomes) in a decision-making process based on inputs (gender budgeting);
- difficulties of implementing a horizontal strategy in a rather vertical organisation of structures;
- commitment of the political level and hierarchy: define the right level of responsibility.

Moreover it is worth saying that the law does not provide for a specific budget, but for a specific annual budget of the Institute (60,000 €) to support the process and design tools regarding gender mainstreaming (data bases, training, manuals, etc.).

As associated country, Sweden presented its long-standing approach to gender mainstreaming on national policy level and on regional operational level.

Gender mainstreaming has been the guiding principle for how to achieve gender equality since 1994, when the gender equality bill “Shared Power – Shared Responsibility” came into force. The bill describes the Swedish government’s main strategy to ensure that a gender equality perspective and analysis is part of all policy making, with a view to achieve the policy goals set out for Swedish gender equality policy.

At the national level of government offices this is done through a systematic integration of a gender equality perspective in all policy areas, at all levels and stages, by the actors usually involved in the policy-making processes.

Starting from the general objective stating that women and men shall have equal power to shape society and their own lives, national policy objectives for gender equality in Sweden include:

- an equal distribution of power and influence;
- economic equality between women and men;
- an equal distribution of unpaid care- and household work;
- men's violence against women must come to an end.

The overall framework for gender mainstreaming in the government offices is a seven year **Plan for gender mainstreaming** (the first was adopted in 2004). In this policy document main goals and key processes within the government offices were defined, identifying the governmental processes most essential for the successful implementation of gender mainstreaming. The plan is supplemented by yearly action programmes with concrete targets for the government offices as a whole. Moreover, organisational support structures for gender mainstreaming are present within the government offices, and key roles at each ministry were stipulated. On this basis, each ministry outlines its individual yearly action plan for gender mainstreaming within the ministry, based on the principles and priorities outlined in the plan and the yearly action programme.

At a general level, gender mainstreaming work is based on a model (known as **METS Checklist**) which comprises four central components:

- **Management and control** through formal (government decisions, follow-ups and evaluations) and informal (management asking for results of gender analyses; education and training) steering mechanisms.
- **Education and training** on National gender equality policy and goals; how to conduct a gender equality analysis of each area of responsibility; basic awareness of gender equality issues; methods and tools.

- Tools and Methods considering sex disaggregated statistics as an essential tool that should be used as a part of the basic analysis to support implementation of gender mainstreaming.
- Support, coordination and organisation at different levels (Minister for Gender Equality; Division for Gender Equality; Gender equality coordinators at each ministry).

Yearly quantitative evaluations of the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the government offices are conducted by Statistics Sweden, by analysing various publications and bills presented by the Government. These evaluations show that results vary over time in terms of analysis and integration of a gender equality perspective.

A comprehensive qualitative evaluation of gender mainstreaming implementation at the government offices based on the plan for 2004-2010 has recently been presented to the Government. It will constitute an important base for the coming development of structure and organisation of gender mainstreaming within the government offices.

At **regional level** a **Programme for gender mainstreaming** is run by the SALAR which represents the governmental, professional and employer-related interests of Sweden's 290 municipalities, 18 county councils and two regions.

The goal of the programme is to support municipalities and county councils that develop gender equal services for all citizens. This support is mainly done through governmental funding of projects designed to develop and improve services in which gender mainstreaming is used as a strategy. The aim is to create tangible and permanent improvements of services provided by municipalities and county councils. The guiding principle for the programme is that services provided by the public sector should treat citizen equally, services must be designed and resources distributed without prejudice, in response to conditions and needs of women and men equally.

Through the programme:

- funds for gender mainstreaming are distributed;
- an Internet portal is created – www.jamstall.nu;
- research and training programmes targeting gender equality officers are financed;
- the exchange of experiences is facilitated.

An evaluation of the regional programme shows that commitment and support from top management is essential for successful implementation of gender equality projects. Furthermore, the evaluation reveals that: i) the programmes' projects have had a concrete impact on the quality on services provided, for example through a rise in the use of statistics disaggregated by sex; ii) gender equality analysis is to a higher degree conducted as part of the decision making processes, in addition to a raised awareness among key stakeholders, such as decision makers, politicians, as well as civil servants.

The Government's funding of the regional programme for gender mainstreaming amounts to 225 million SEK (more than 25 million EUR) for both the implementation of the programme and for projects in municipalities and county councils.

2. The situation in the participating countries

In addition to Belgium and Sweden, the following countries participated in the seminar: Austria, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and the UK. These countries have implemented gender mainstreaming at different levels and to different degrees¹. It is, however, possible to identify four groups of countries showing similar patterns.

A **first group** is composed of **countries which are in a first phase of gender mainstreaming implementation**. They have started to implement gender mainstreaming in strict relation with EU equal treatment directives and/or with other international instruments such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the UN's Beijing Platform. This group is mainly composed of **post-socialist countries** including the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovenia, Estonia, Lithuania, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, **but also Malta and Cyprus**.

Generally speaking, those countries have little infrastructure for the implementation of gender mainstreaming, especially at local level and no systematic gender equality policy. The post-socialist countries had in most cases declarations of commitment to gender equality. Still, their whole policy was characterised by a top-down approach which did not lead to the transformation of gender relations and eradication of gender inequalities.

In these countries, the integration of gender equality issues within national policies and interventions and the building of a national infrastructure to support gender mainstreaming are mainly associated with the membership in the EU. Slovenia is in this group an exception as the gradual development of the gender mainstreaming approach started somewhat earlier.

In all countries of this group the shift to the real implementation of a gender mainstreaming strategy remained slow and is characterised by a rather unsystematic implementation addressing only legislation and positive action. To some extent, this is also the case in Poland, where there is an increasingly well structured system to support the implementation of gender mainstreaming.

Similarities to this first group can be found in the **second group** composed of mostly **Southern countries** including Italy, Greece, Portugal and Spain **but also Ireland**. In these cases EU Structural Funds constituted the driving force and **external factor providing the opportunity to start implementing gender mainstreaming**.

¹ Please, refer to the respective country reports ("reaction papers") for details on each single participating country. http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/tools/good-practices/review-seminars/index_en.htm

All these countries have relatively good legislative and institutional frameworks in the area of gender equality and equal opportunities with specific laws and relevant gender equality structures (also at regional and local level). In Italy for example, equality councillors are present at the national, regional and provincial level. Portugal has local equality counsellors and information centres for women in several municipalities.

However, equal treatment legislation started in a limited number of policy areas and is mainly “confined” to labour market issues activating, for example, positive actions in favour of women at the workplace and/or other measures in the area of reconciliation between work and private life.

The real starting point for the mentioning of a gender mainstreaming strategy dates back to the early 2000s when the ESF 2000-2006 Programming Period began.

The high dependence on EU Structural Funds (mainly ESF) has strongly contributed to the concentration of the policy efforts on labour market policy. There have been more difficulties in integrating the gender perspective in every policy as the gender mainstreaming strategy would impose. It has also contributed, in some ways, to “isolate” gender mainstreaming in a field, those of structural funds, with more difficulties in spreading the concept nationally and at a less specific and technical level.

Furthermore, there are problems related to the sustainability of actions nearly exclusively paid by the Structural Funds and not by national funds as well as some difficulties to secure strong political commitment which seems to be a common variable in countries where the policy driving force in this area is mostly external.

Even if in these countries gender equality policies and measures significantly increased in number and scope since 2000, gender mainstreaming does not seem to be effectively implemented and, in many cases, often remained dormant.

A **third group** is composed of **Austria and France and, to some extent, the UK**. This group is characterised by a **rather early approach to gender mainstreaming in an institutionalised way and the diffusion of several tools and practical instruments**.

The implementation of gender mainstreaming in Austria possesses elements that are also crucial for the good practices in Sweden and Belgium: a commitment to gender mainstreaming (GM), institutional arrangements with GM-agents in the federal ministries, an inter-ministerial working group and standards for the practical implementation of gender mainstreaming with a focus on legislation and gender budgeting. The guidelines for gender mainstreaming in legislation provide users at federal, Länder and municipal level with practice-oriented proposals on how to achieve the set goals.

In a similar way, France has some good practices regarding gender mainstreaming, such as the development of gendered statistics in areas such as employment, education, sport, etc.; signing of relevant agreements with different institutions and ministries; and the launching of gender budgeting (jaune budgétaire). These decisions also led to regional and sometimes even local approaches regarding gender mainstreaming.

However, in both cases, **gender mainstreaming seems to need further implementation and a new impetus to “capitalise” the efforts made in the past.** Challenges are mainly related to:

- the creation of a less fragmented and scattered implementation;
- the measurement of the effectiveness of policies;
- the agreement on a common interpretation of the objectives of gender mainstreaming;
- the connection between the legislative framework on gender equality and the implementation of a more transversal and ongoing gender mainstreaming approach.

During the seminar there was some debate whether gender equality should be incorporated into a broader equality framework or whether this would result in a risk of diluting gender equality in other priorities. In the UK this incorporation is seen positively and the “gender lens” is considered crucial to understand and deal with other inequalities, for example discrimination based on race, disability or age.

The **last group** represented in the seminar consists of the **Nordic/Scandinavian countries**. This group is characterised by a **strong and long tradition and history in approaching gender equality and introducing gender mainstreaming supported by strong institutionalisation and commitment.**

As in Sweden, gender mainstreaming has a long history in Finland, dating back to the 1980ies when it was known as the ‘equality permeation principle’. This approach is present both in the country’s gender equality legislation and in governmental programmes and binds the actions of the government.

Since 1986 legislation imposes the balanced nomination of women and men to various representative bodies binding de facto all decision-making at the national and sub-national (municipal) levels. Gender budgeting has been included since 2006 into the Finance Ministry’s regulations concerning action plans and budget planning of all ministries.

3. Summary of the discussions at the exchange meeting

During the discussions at the exchange seminar particular importance was given to the possibility of transferring specific elements of the Belgian and Swedish approaches to other countries or, at least, inspiring future policy design and interventions.

All participating countries agreed that **both the Swedish and Belgian experiences were interesting examples of implementation of gender mainstreaming.** Those experiences also demonstrated a number of accomplishments and challenges in

implementing gender mainstreaming through policies, institutional mechanisms and tools.

The discussion also stressed **the importance of considering the different starting points of each country especially with regard to the political and cultural values given to gender equality.**

Many countries have still a long way to go to in order to achieve the **long-term broad political agreement and commitment to gender equality** present in countries such as Sweden where this commitment was recently reaffirmed by the clear overall and interim objectives for gender equality adopted by the parliament. At the same time this long-term commitment seems to be the basis for the full implementation of gender mainstreaming. The seminar provided the opportunity for the participating countries to share their experiences in working towards the achievement of this goal.

Both in Belgium and in Sweden the first step in the introduction of gender mainstreaming was the adoption of a specific law (in the Belgian case) or legislative provision (in the Swedish case). However, both practices demonstrate that explicit and continuous political commitment is necessary for the success of any initiative to promote and develop gender mainstreaming. In Belgium, the 2007 Federal Law introduced the obligation for all ministries and their administration to explicitly take up a gender mainstreaming approach when drawing up a policy measure. In Sweden, a governmental decision was made in 1994, with the enactment of the Gender Equality Law, adopting gender mainstreaming as the guiding principle for the achievement of gender equality. The fact that Sweden has been working on gender mainstreaming since the mid-1990s suggests that **it is important to have a sustained approach over time.** Furthermore, a **strong legal framework needs to be in place.**

However, the latter is of course no warrantee of success. The institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming alone is no sufficient condition for ensuring an improvement in the quality of policies incorporating a genuine gender perspective with the goal of eliminating gender inequalities. Many participating countries have already implemented several laws on gender equality issues. The question is whether these laws are fully respected and include any legal sanctions. During the discussion several countries stressed the importance of the valuable role that **legal obligations can play in stimulating and sustaining gender mainstreaming.**

In some countries, introducing a legal obligation for gender mainstreaming in public policies was considered to be rather premature, in others necessary and essential. Nevertheless, some elements of the key institutional arrangements of the Belgian law, for example, were considered to be indeed transferable to other countries and institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming was regarded to be important for a successful implementation.

This would mean the enactment of legal provisions (such as the federal law on gender mainstreaming in Belgium) providing for the evaluation of all bills and regulations from a gender perspective in order to prevent and correct any detrimental effects on gender equality and possibly reducing existing gender inequalities. But it implies also **increasing networking and synergies among different ministries and departments.** Again, the example of the Belgian good practice concerning the establishment of an interdepartmental coordination group composed of high-ranking

members of ministerial cabinets, was considered to be crucial in order to introduce the gender equality perspective into all policies, promote the collaboration within the federal departments (favouring also the exchange of good practices) as well as the production and utilisation of instruments and tools (such as manuals and the gender test) within the ministries.

The Belgium experience shows that a strategic approach to gender equality ensuring that all proposed federal policies have strategic objectives for gender equality, appears to have had a positive impact regarding ministerial acceptance and integration of a gender dimension into the federal public service.

Besides the political agreement and commitment to gender equality, the Swedish experience showed the **importance of a strong citizen awareness** on the fact that gender equality is necessary (and desirable) for an equitable and just society. Changes in people's mentality and not only those of policy makers are thus required to apply a model such as that presented by Sweden, while gender blindness (both in the population and among policy makers) based on cultural barriers and traditional attitudes versus social and family behaviours still exist in most of the countries participating in the seminar. It is therefore important to allocate resources and efforts to positively influence public opinion and those of policy makers.

Another crucial aspect identified during the discussion is related to the **importance of reaching a common and shared knowledge of concepts and definitions**. Both the experiences presented by Belgium and Sweden are based on the awareness that gender mainstreaming is a process to encompass all stages of the policy making with the final goal to achieve gender equality. This does not seem to be very clear or, at least, so explicit, in many participating countries. Nevertheless, during the debate, it was pointed out several times that the adoption and use of a theoretical framework for analysing gender differences and inequalities is a necessary step to improve the efficiency and outcomes of the gender mainstreaming endeavour.

Several participating countries stressed the importance of **education and training in gender equality issues**. The Swedish experience implemented by SALAR consisting of a huge amount of training both at national and local level, was considered to be very impressive. It was also seen as an absolutely necessary passage towards gender mainstreaming and most countries ought to systematise regular and systematic training to all administration staff.

The importance of training was considered to be closely connected to the **importance of specific and technical expertise in dealing with gender instruments and tools**. Both Belgium and Sweden presented interesting tools to be applied. In the Belgium case this includes the gender test as a part of the legal and regulatory assessment of new projects. The gender test is carried out through a prior evaluation of the impact of a project on women and men. Similarly, the introduction of a gender budgeting process, through the introduction of a gender note, is a very positive development that could be replicated in other countries.

In the Swedish case, the 3R Method² for gender impact analysis and evaluation of administrative operations and in public provision of services and resources and the METS checklist for organising gender mainstreaming work were also considered very interesting tools.

Expertise building was mentioned to be another essential issue for the implementation of gender mainstreaming. As many government departments and agencies do not have adequate expertise and do not pay sufficient attention to gender issues, this constitutes a wide, systematic and cross-institutional problem. A detailed gendered analysis of the patterns and underlying processes – through, for example, the provision of data disaggregated by gender - is required to describe and understand the persistence of gender inequalities. Still, in order to achieve this, **human and financial resources are needed**. From the Swedish experience it was clear that the focus given to gender mainstreaming through the allocation of a specific budget for gender mainstreaming projects has been crucial in building capacity, achieving gender equality goals and has been a prerequisite for gender mainstreaming. Human and financial resources may also allow the increase of **follow-up activities, monitoring and evaluation** which again were considered to be crucial. In both the Belgium and Swedish case a lot has been learned from the evaluation of pilot projects and continuous monitoring which is important in contributing to the achievement of a shared knowledge.

Closely connected to the latter points is the **use and role of equality bodies and/or institutes**. In Belgium, the equality body, the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men, monitors gender mainstreaming and supports the integration of the gender dimension into law proposals, public policy and action programmes at the national level. Particular attention was dedicated during the debate to **the importance of the independence of such institutions from the Government**. An independent support and monitoring body responsible also for gender training and research was considered to be most effective, especially in the context of a lack of implementation of gender mainstreaming. The good practices in Sweden and Belgium show that organisational support structures are essential in order to develop the necessary expertise, to support gender mainstreaming and to monitor the process.

Organisational support structures for gender mainstreaming were thus considered to play a key role also in relation to the local dissemination and implementation of **gender mainstreaming at local level**.

The Swedish experience led by SALAR was considered by participating countries to be a particularly useful element in terms of possible transferability. It includes developing gender mainstreaming in local and county councils through public funding of projects designed to develop and improve gender equal services for all citizens, building a web-based knowledge bank for disseminating experiences and examples, and introducing a management system that incorporates equality.

² The main purpose of the 3R method is to systematise a gender equality analysis. Its primary testing ground has been in municipal operations in Sweden. It was used to aid the survey and analysis of a given operation from a gender equality perspective. The survey seeks to answer the question: Who gets what, and on what terms? (1R+2R) The analysis answers the question: How can we improve matters? (3R). For more information, please refer to the Swedish discussion paper for this seminar.

This experience shows the need for involving elected representatives as well as staff at local level. Political will is decisive, as are good knowledge and skills in this area. At the same time, the Swedish experience also shows that if the “Sustainable Gender Equality Project” is incorporated in everyone’s activities, gender equality work is carried out habitually, in normal structures and in all political fields.

4. Conclusions

The exchange of good practices seminar has helped to reflect on possible ways to implement gender mainstreaming. The debate made clear that the implementation of gender mainstreaming is a long and complex process and requires a considerable effort to involve the different actors needed (politicians, other stakeholders, civil servants, gender experts, but also citizens).

In the last ten years quite some progress has been made by several countries, but there is still a lot more to achieve. Several tools and instruments have been designed and tested, but in many cases pilot projects did not become stable and formally recognised and/or widespread in all policy areas. Overall the impression is that much has been done to predispose the necessary conditions for successful gender mainstreaming, acknowledging the legitimacy of such a strategy and developing the necessary tools to concretely apply this principle to policy making. Thus the implementation of gender mainstreaming must be perfected and strengthened, and more should be done to translate broad and specific objectives into practice and effective actions.

A more holistic approach addressing all the phases of the policy cycle and developing operative tools and procedures is needed to ensure that ongoing activities are able to produce a significant impact in terms of gender equality and socio-economic development. There are both equity and efficiency arguments to support women’s presence in the economy and in policy making. Discrimination and segregation entail inefficiency. The benefits for the economy of the eradication of discrimination come from the better utilisation of resources which may enhance the competitiveness of the economy. When the economic role of individuals is defined by gender, rather than merit or ability, there is inefficiency with under-utilisation of the skills of one group (women). Policies to reduce gender segregation in society and the economy help develop a multi-skilled workforce and to improve work organisation patterns.

The two good practices presented and discussed during the seminar showed both that actions can be taken and good results achieved.

The Belgian approach to gender mainstreaming is focused on legislation: the process started in a first law adopted in 1996 and culminated in a 2007 federal law on gender mainstreaming. Over the years the gender mainstreaming process included:

- the implementation of pilot projects;
- the identification of strategic gender equality objectives within all policies;

- the acknowledgment of gender mainstreaming as a strategy and not as a mere procedural tool;
- the cooperation among different ministries;
- the design of several tools and methods such as gender budgeting and impact assessment test as well as the wider attention on the use of sex disaggregated data;
- a regular monitoring / reporting on progress;
- the establishment of an independent body, the Institute for Equality of Women and Men.

The Belgian case thus represents a number of exemplary solutions, but, at the same time many challenges prevail 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.

The Swedish experience puts even more emphasis on the characteristics of gender mainstreaming as a long-term process which has to become part of any country culture. The experience presented showed that along years, gender mainstreaming in Sweden included:

- national policy for gender equality and internalisation of a gender perspective into all;
- a systematic analysis of gender equality trends and patterns (based on gender disaggregated statistics) and ways of improving the situation (3R method);
- allocation of funds to local authorities for developing a gender mainstreaming approach;
- training of government officials and civil servants;
- gender mainstreaming structures and policies across all ministries.

Important factors for success were identified in the awareness that:

- policy makers should make decisions to systematically implement gender mainstreaming;
- a gender perspective should be included into management systems;
- the top management should take responsibility for setting goals, offering resources, following up processes;

- training in the areas of gender equality is crucial both for policy makers and civil servants in order to obtain sustainable change.

Several pre-conditions for the effective implementation of gender mainstreaming work have been singled out both in Sweden and in Belgium. The lack of these pre-conditions undermines the effective adoption of a gender equality perspective in the decision-making process.

Among the pre-conditions defined during the seminar the following have to be mentioned:

- awareness among decision makers and politicians about gender inequalities and the non-neutrality of policies;
- top management commitment and support, essential for successful implementation of gender mainstreaming;
- a specific budget for the implementation of gender mainstreaming (i.e. to finance activities, tools and projects) at the national and/or regional/provincial level;
- availability of specific internal and/or external expertise (correct use of indicators, gender impact assessment, gender budgeting, etc.) to support the work of decision-makers;
- importance and availability of sex disaggregated statistics;
- use of sex disaggregated statistics and of gender analysis in the ex ante gender impact assessment of policy measures.