

Women's Council in Denmark / Kvinderådet

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Comments by the Women's Council in Denmark (Kvinderådet) on the Response from the Danish Government on Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Outcome of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000)

The Women's Council in Denmark (hereafter "WCD") representing 46 organisations working within different fields of gender equality, welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft of the Danish report.

As we have only had three days from receiving the draft report to our deadline of submission of comments, we have had no time to distribute and receive inputs from our member organisations. We also find the deadline set by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for commenting on the final report unacceptable and accordingly have refrained from further comments.

We furthermore regret that the draft report sent to us to comment on was not comprehensive as no text was to be found under the headings "A. Women and poverty" and "E. Women in armed Conflict", leaving no opportunity for NGOs to comment on these issues.

Before commenting in depth on some of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for action (part two of the report), we would like to draw special attention to the following overall situation of gender equality in a Danish setting.

We cannot recognise the report's description of the governmental work for gender equality according to which: "The mainstreaming strategy means that in principle there are now 19 Ministers for Gender Equality - each within their field of competence responsible of integrating the gender and equality perspective in all policies and activities". Over the last years commissions have been established to look into different areas of the Danish welfare system, all commissions publishing reports on recommendations – none of them gender mainstreamed.

We would like to draw special attention to:

Unequal pay. Denmark is rated low in rankings of gender pay gaps compared to other European countries, and the gap is widening.

Unequal representation. In municipalities women only hold 27 % of the seats and only 8 of 98 mayors are women. In the private sector women account for 5.4% of senior executives (2007).

Weak institutional mechanisms. Denmark has no independent gender institute which can monitor and take action to secure gender equality, provide documentation and statistics within the area of gender discrimination, support public debate and stimulate the processes of gender mainstreaming.

Lack of funding. The WCD would like to see more funds allocated to governmental work on gender equality including funds allocated to NGOs. Recently the Government withdrew its funding of the NGOs participation in the UN General Assembly.

Part 1: Overview of achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

Policy on gender equality

A former Minister for Gender Equality, Ms. H. Kjær, closed down the Danish Knowledge Centre for Gender Equality, thereby demolishing one of the three pillars which governmental equality work rested upon. By this act the Minister saw to that gender equality work in Denmark lost an independent body to promote and qualify the debate on gender equality.

Implementing the gender mainstreaming strategy

As specified in the report the gender mainstreaming strategy has been implemented in all ministries (with different rates of success, it should be mentioned), but it is not mentioned that no action plan has been formulated for/at the municipality level.

As mentioned in the report all public authorities and municipalities are required to draw up a report on gender equality every second year to be submitted to the Minister for Gender Equality.

Unfortunately no indication of the reported results of the municipalities is highlighted in the official report. As the WCD finds the reported figures on the advancement of gender mainstreaming in the municipalities highly alarming, not least seen in relation to section 4 of the Act on Gender Equality we would like to draw the attention to some of the findings (Deloitte, "Ligestillingsredegørelser for kommuner, regioner og stat 2007", 2008) the official report fails to mention:

- In relation to gender mainstreaming at municipality level only 6% of the municipalities have a concerted strategy for working with gender mainstreaming, 7% of municipalities have a strategy in the making while 76% do not have a strategy and 9% answer that they do not know.
- When asked to what extent they are mainstreaming new initiatives (i.e. communication, political decisions, campaigns) 71 municipalities – of a total of 98 – answer that they do not. 20 municipalities have not answered or do not know, 7 municipalities are mainstreaming some initiatives, while not a single municipality state that most new initiatives are being gender mainstreamed.

Reasons for this poor performance could be found in the fact that only 2 municipalities have initiated initiatives to bring skills and knowledge on gender mainstreaming to their employees, while the rest, 96 municipalities, have indicated that there have been no training, or have not answered.

With only 2 municipalities having initiated initiatives to the building of competencies among staff in the subject matter it seems easy to understand why municipalities score so low. The official Danish report to the CEDAW committee states "... municipalities are responsible for the work to promote gender equality within their own field". The question seems to be if they are capable of doing it. The figures from the municipalities clearly show that the staffs are not. A concerted effort headed by the Minister for Gender Equality to bring gender mainstreaming to the forefront at municipality level has to be initiated.

Partnerships with NGOs

Two years ago the Government withdrew its more than decade long tradition of funding some NGOs participation in the UN General Assembly. Consequently the WCD has had no representative in the delegation to the UN general assembly for the last couple of years. Thus, the reports'

statement that “NGOs participate in the official Danish delegation to UN conferences and meetings” is no longer true in regards of the participation of non wealthy NGOs to the UN general assembly.

Part II: Progress in implementation of the critical areas of concern of the PFA.

A. Women and Poverty

There is no governmental text in the draft report. It is our hope that the text from the government will mention:

- Poverty among ethnic minority women in Denmark.

B. Education and training of women

The WCD welcomes the initiatives of the Ministry of Education aimed at enhancing equality in primary and lower secondary education.

The WCD regrets that the situation at University level is not mentioned, as one of the main problems in relation to equality and education is to be found in this setting. Documentation shows that a mere 10% of professorships are occupied by women and 52% of committees for appointment of professors, associated professors and assistant professors (1998-2000) consisted exclusively of male members. WCD has pointed at three possible areas for intervention. Firstly, a repetition of the FREJA programme allocating funds for research projects led by outstanding female researchers. Importance must be paid to embed the project at the university setting at the end of the programme. Secondly, targets and timeframes regarding female occupation of a specified percentage of professorships must be stated in the contract of each university. Thirdly, creation of more professorships in female dominated areas is needed.

C. Women and health

Please refer to comments under D. Violence against Women and Trafficking

D. Violence against women (page 6-8)

The two National Action Plans aimed at combating violence against women are indeed a big step forward. However, WCD finds the aim of the action plans too narrow. The focus of the action plans is domestic violence, but from our perspective violence against women includes many sorts of violence, i.e. domestic violence, rape, violence against prostitutes, violence at the work place etc. It is of great importance that the many initiatives resulting from the action plans become permanent. National campaigns and special projects are very useful in order to raise awareness and develop methods. The municipalities, however, are the key actors as regards social services to victims of violence including children, and a more comprehensive support requires allocation of additional funding.

We will emphasize the need for free access to long-term psychological treatment for both women and their children, whether or not they are in contact with a shelter.

We call for more research regarding the long-term psychological effects of physical and mental violence.

We would like to see much more effort in the area of primary prevention of violence. This should be seen in the context of gender mainstreaming the educational system, the health system and the social service system.

Not mentioned in the report is the act on aliens with a time-limited residence permit who have been subjected to violence by a spouse. Unfortunately this act needs special attention, as

WCD is deeply concerned about the fact that a number of foreign women who are exposed to domestic violence are forced to leave the country, because the residence permit depends on the marriage. It goes without saying that a battered woman needs help from the country of residence, and if she applies for a time-limited residence permit she has a serious reason to do so. In conclusion we find that the restrictive Danish practice is more a result of immigration policy than a result of care for women exposed to violence.

Trafficking in women

As stated in the report one of the action areas of the new action plan is “preventing human trafficking by limiting demand” (third bullet). The WCD hopes this campaign will prove successful, but fears that there will be an increase in the demand for trafficked women as Norway recently has banned the purchase of sexual services as Sweden did in 1999. This alongside the steady increase in the number of prostituted women in Denmark could lead to Denmark being even more attractive as a country of destination for traffickers. Also, it should be remembered that a nationwide information campaigns of the former action plan targeted at the potential customers to our knowledge resulted in neither a decrease on the demand side nor a decrease of trafficked women into Denmark.

Commending the extended reflection period, the WCD regrets that this is only given to women who decide to co-operate with the authorities to return voluntarily to the country of origin. Women who are scared to return to their home countries should not be sent out of Denmark and should not be refused the 100 days of reflection during which they could have received appropriate medical care and other services. As a society we have the duty to help trafficked women regardless of whether they dare to return to their home countries or not. The WCD would like to see victims of trafficking receiving residence permits on grounds of trafficking.

Importance should be paid to the fact that the issue of compensation is not dealt with in the Danish action plan. Only very few and small compensations have been given to victims of trafficking.

Regrettably, the government report does not mention the existence of a circular on the issue of the use of women in prostitution by persons with disabilities. This circular gives the State the bizarre role of a pimp, as it gives staff working with persons with disabilities the right to call for and make arrangements with women in prostitution (of which some could be victims of trafficking) and further help with the logistics. The WCD obviously recognises the sexual needs of persons with disabilities but can in no way support the circular. Having one disadvantaged group to serve and cater for the needs of another disadvantaged group seems cruel. Furthermore it puts the sexual needs of persons with disabilities above the work towards gender equality.

Finally, WCD would like to see even more attention to the prevention of trafficking, amongst others steps to minimize the demand for women in prostitution in general.

E. Women and armed conflict

There is no governmental text in the draft report.

F. Women and the economy

The gender segregated labour market and the pay differentials

Denmark is ranked low both in international and EU rankings on gender pay gaps, and the gender pay gap in Denmark is widening in spite of a huge number of seminars, reports, surveys, meetings etc. on this issue.

In Denmark female dominated jobs are valued lower than male dominated. The inequality is obvious both across sectors and within sectors. Women working in the health, social services and other service sectors are paid less than men working in jobs with comparable levels of education and responsibility. This indicates that a core problem is to meet the principle of equal pay for work of equal value.

But unequal pay is not limited to certain parts of the labour market. The gender segregated labour market plays a critical role in this connection. The WCD supports initiatives to break down the gender segregation through campaigns and guidance in schools. However, the Government has itself removed a very important tool that could be extremely useful in the efforts to bridge the gender pay gap; in 2003 Parliament abolished the former Government's bill regarding gender disaggregated wages statistics. This means that now only big companies are obliged to produce gender disaggregated statistics and few employees are included due to the fact that the Danish labour market is characterised by many small and medium sized companies.

The Government and the municipalities have an important role to play as employers. They have the opportunity to be in the forefront in the effort to narrow the gender pay gap. Until now we have seen very little action in this regard. The counties and municipalities as public employers in sectors heavily dominated by women could do much to raise women's pay. Therefore the WCD recommends the Government, employers, employees and trade unions to take action in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action in its call to "review, analyse and, where appropriate, reformulate the wage structures in female-dominated professions, such as teaching, nursing and child care, with a view to raising their low status and earnings".

Maternity, paternity and parental leave

The report clearly shows the imbalanced share of the parental leave. This leaves women as less attractive employees than men from the perspective of the employer. The state equalisation scheme in connection with childbirth introduced in 2006 was a step forward, but has not solved the problem. The WCD would like to see a model like that of Iceland, with a more equal share of the leave i.e. an independent right of fathers to at least 3 months of paternity leave.

Women Entrepreneurs

Today, women make up 25 % of all people who are self-employed. However, if one looks specifically at women under the age of 30 they make up only 1.5 % of the self-employed. Women start up their own business later than men and account for only 10 % of the growth-entrepreneurs. The Government has decided not to implement special measures to support women when they attempt to set up their own business. A number of courses targeted at female entrepreneurs have been closed down or are no longer offered.

One of the major problems for younger women is that there is no proper maternity scheme for self-employed women. They can either take full or half maternity leave on a public scheme and get paid the equivalent of unemployment benefit. Self-employed women need special terms for maternity leave. It is not possible for them to close down their business completely during periods of leave. Hence they need flexible arrangements.

Another important problem is access to resources. There are no specific loans available for female entrepreneurs. A survey from year 2000 concluded that it was not a case of discrimination when women had their loan requests turned down more often than men. Men got the loans because they could offer better security in the form of property. In other words, women's lack of access to economic resources hampers their chances of being able to set up a business.

There is a need to undertake research into what drives and motivates female entrepreneurs and self-employed women. In Denmark a lot of emphasis is put on growth and innovation, and it seems strange that there is no research that attempts to explain why women do not work in accordance with traditional concepts of growth.

G. Women in power and decision making

Representation of women in local politics

The statistics on women elected to local municipalities and female mayors are depressing. Even more depressing is the lack of progress. The proportion of women in local politics has remained unchanged at 27% from the election in 2001 to that in 2005. In fact the number has barely changed the last 20 years since 1989, when it stood at 26%. The proportion of female mayors has been declining since 1997 coming down to less than 10% today.

Both in regards to the poor representation of women and the general lack of focus on gender mainstreaming at municipality level, municipalities ought to be an area of concern and developments in these areas should be followed very closely.

Women in management

In an effort to boost the depressing statistics on women in management, every year sees a new initiative as outlined in the report. Senior Executive Camps, appointment of "ambassadors", charters for companies, workshops, mentor programmes etc. have been launched. However, the statistics on women in management are still depressing and much lower than ones expectations should be. According to EUROSTAT Denmark ranks among the EU countries close to bottom in statistics regarding women in top management.

The WCD finds that we have reached the point where quotas should be used as the mean to start moving things ahead. Quotas are not about giving women preferential treatment; quotas are about giving women and men equal opportunities. It would suit the Minister for Gender Equality to get this point of view into the board rooms and general public.

L. The Girl Child

see D. Violence against women.

Part III: Institutional developments

Seen from the outside the governmental work for gender equality seems to lack sufficient funds and staffing. The WCD would like to see more funds allocated to governmental work on gender equality.

At yet another level the willingness in government to use temporary special measures as catered for by the CEDAW unfortunately appears to be lacking. According to WCD one of the main tasks of administration should be to ensure that all governmental circulars, bills, reports etc. have passed a gender analysis and been mainstreamed in relation to the gender perspective – presently this is too often missing.

Part IV: Main challenges and actions to address them

The WCD welcomes the Government's Action Plan for Gender Equality. However, no concrete goals are developed, which the effort can be measured against in 2015 – how many percentage of women should be senior executives in the private sector in 2015, for the Action Plan and its interventions to be a success or failure? How much parental leave should fathers take in 2015 compared to today, for the government's ambitions to be met? And so forth... No real targets to evaluate the outcome of the Governments effort have been developed and put in place, which is a shame for the work towards gender equality in Denmark.

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