

Training in gender impact assessments



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Gender Impact Assessment training in the city of Vantaa

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In brief

The city of Vantaa in Finland has provided basic training on gender equality for its staff (directors, experts, planners, etc.) since 2005. In addition, basic training has been made available for staff involved in service delivery, for example on how to develop gender sensitiveness.

The provision of hands-on, tailored training and support on specific gender mainstreaming methods and practices (e.g. gender impact assessment of budgeting) started in 2011. The training combines two half-days of classroom work with personal or group coaching, carried out by an in-house gender expert and external consultants.

Participants are chosen by their managers on the grounds that they need to know how to carry out a gender impact assessment to do their job in designing policies or service delivery methods, and it is compulsory for those selected. Trainees come from a number of municipal departments such as education health, social services and employment.

The training is paid for from the budgets of the departments concerned, with support from the ESF 'Gender mainstreaming into practice' project at the start. While most trainees say they are satisfied with the training, there is some dissent from individuals who feel that there is no need for it, or that the money spent could have been better spent addressing other problems such as poverty. However Vantaa found that carrying out a GIA can enable it to provide better services at lower cost.

Gender pay gap

Vantaa is a municipality on the outskirts of Helsinki with a population of 200,000, and is the fourth-largest in Finland. The city council is the largest employer in the town with almost 12,000 employees, nearly four-fifths of whom are women. There are some statistically important gender differences among them, especially in relation to pay, with the average woman's pay being considerably lower than that of men. This has been confirmed by the results of a survey carried out among employees in 2008, which found that 4.9% of employees had experienced sex-based discrimination.

Legislation on non-discrimination (2004) and gender equality (2005) acted as an impetus for the City of Vantaa to work towards achieving greater gender equality in decision-making and the services it provides. The training actions implemented since then are based on these laws. Vantaa's equality plan of 2006 consists of three separate, yet interlinked parts: an 'internal' plan for staff matters, an 'external' plan for political decision-making and services, and a work book (*Työkirja tasa-arvosta ja yhdenvertaisuudesta*) for departments and individuals to study either alone or together with colleagues. In 2007, the city signed the European Charter on Equality of Women and Men in Local Life, thereby publicly committing itself to promoting equality between women and men.

Vantaa's The Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination Development Plan (2009 - 2012) is in line with these developments. It stipulates that departmental directors (deputy mayors) are responsible for taking gender equality and non-discrimination into consideration in their work. It also specifies that gender equality and a non-discrimination perspective are integrated into induction training, advanced training of line managers and customer service training. Finally, it calls for the introduction of Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) training for selected members of staff, especially those involved in preparing budgets.

Classroom work plus coaching

The Gender Impact Assessment training is aimed at key staff members from different departments of the city, such as education, social, health and employment, who are in the position to design policies or service delivery methods, and thus should carry out GIAs as part of their work. The training is compulsory for the group of participants who are carefully selected by the directors to take part.

The main aim of training is to be as practical and close to the actual work of employees as possible. The methods combine classroom-based training on gender impact assessment – typically in a form of two half-day sessions, plus additional homework – with practical, on-the-job support for staff carrying out GIAs and drawing up gender equality action plans for the first time. This takes the form of one-to-one, on-the-job advice and consultancy, depending on the needs and assignments of each employee or unit. This support is provided by an in-house gender equality adviser and an external consultant in gender equality.

Drug rehabilitation works better at home

As a practical example, the finding related to a GIA undertaken as part of the training activities in the social and health care sector can be mentioned as an example of good practice. The GIA in this area revealed that women with illegal substance abuse problems in Vantaa did not attend drug rehabilitation services, because they did not want to admit publicly that they had a drug problem owing to the social stigma this would cause. Consequently, the city's health and social services department designed a service where female addicts did not have to attend an institution, but could receive similar support at home. As a result, more women have started to use this service. At the same time, it has been found that providing such support at home, instead of in an institution, is more cost-effective. This demonstrates that training on GIA – and gender mainstreaming in broader terms – can result in positive outcomes for both citizens and public authorities.

The training aims to raise awareness of gender mainstreaming and methods and tools associated with it, and to train employees so that they can take gender mainstreaming forward practically, for instance by learning how to conduct gender impact assessments, to develop gender equality plans and to take the gender dimension into account in the municipal planning and budgeting.

Its expected outcomes include improving the capability of the municipality staff to conduct gender impact assessments (GIAs) and to develop gender equality planning, increasing the number and improving the quality of GIAs and gender equality plans undertaken, and raising awareness of possibilities to improve effectiveness and customer satisfaction through gender mainstreaming.

The main short-term results of the training are an increase in the number and quality of GIAs carried out as part of policy-making and service delivery planning processes. In the medium and long term this is expected to lead to greater equality between men and women, in both decision-making and services. GIAs will become a mainstream part of drawing up, implementing and assessing service delivery plans, and potential negative impacts of policies and services on one gender will be minimised.

The training has not been formally evaluated mainly because of the small scale of this initiative, which only covers employees in one municipality and consequently faces budget restrictions. However its impact has been monitored informally, for example in relation to how the staff started using the skills they have learnt in practice. This means that the quality of the GIAs carried out by the beneficiaries of the training have been monitored.

Generally, the individuals involved in the initiative are satisfied with the results they have achieved. Because of the nature of the training provided there are no significant improvement plans or demands for significant changes: the training has been linked to concrete actions and activities that employees have to deliver.

Work-related pressures and the consequent lack of time to dedicate to training has been identified as the main challenge associated with the provision of gender training (this however applies to other types of training too).

The training has been integrated into the city's practice and will continue to be provided as needed. There is no specific budget, but the training funds come from mainstream budgets of individual departments. During the period 2010-2012, the training was partially funded by the ESF 'Gender mainstreaming into practice' project.

A practical, needs-based and targeted approach

The initiative's success results from:

- The practicality of the training provided. The classroom-based training on GIAs was followed by practical, on-the-job support for the staff carrying out GIAs. This ensured that the employees do not only learn the theory but also how to apply it in their actual jobs. It has been found that generic gender training does not produce the same results.
- Training and support are based on a needs assessment. An initial self-assessment led to the conclusion that the city has neglected gender equality issues. This revealed the need for relevant and practice-orientated training for employees in key positions in relation to budgets, service delivery and policy and programme making.
- The precise selection of training participants. The staff chosen to take part in the training were handpicked by the directors, with support from gender equality advisers. In this way, employees who can have the greatest impact on gender mainstreaming were identified (e.g. planners and other individuals in charge of drafting policies, services and programmes). The compulsory nature of the training for the selected group of participants helped to ensure high levels of participation.
- The training and support was piloted in certain sectors before it was introduced more broadly within the municipality.

The main obstacles the initiative faces are a subtle resistance to the issue of gender equality among some individuals. According to some opinions, there are no important problems in this field, and other more important or urgent problems, such as poverty, should be addressed instead. There are also concerns over responsibility for gender mainstreaming. Some employees do not think or know that gender mainstreaming is their responsibility. They believe that it is something that should be addressed only by gender equality experts.

The training is transferable and could be replicated by other larger councils. However for smaller councils, the cost of employing an in-house expert as well as buying in some external expertise could be a limitation. In such cases, collaboration with other councils could be considered as a solution.

Two factors are needed for the success of such an initiative. Firstly, the public commitment of the most senior officials from the city to achieving greater gender equality in decision-making and within the services it provides raises the profile of the issue and ensures that it is taken seriously. Secondly, having an in-house person who both understands the institutional situation and has expertise on gender equality matters is of key importance.

Contacts/Further Information

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Further information

Workbook on equality and non-discrimination (Työkirja tasaarvosta ja yhdenvertaisuudesta),
City of Vantaa (Finnish)



Guidelines / action plan for gender equality and non-discrimination in the City of Vantaa, 2009-
2012 (Tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuussuunnittelun kehittämistoimen linjaukset vuosina 2009-
2012) (Finnish)



Presentation



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City crest from Vantaa City's webpage: www.vantaa.fi

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<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vantaa.vaakuna.svg>

More good practices

EIGE's collection of good practices



EIGE's approach to good practices



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Training in gender impact assessments - Finland

EN (PDF, 98.75 KB)

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