

Institutional Transformation

Discourse level

Gender, gender equality and gender mainstreaming are contested concepts. In many EU member states there are political actors or certain media with a strong reservation regarding gender issues. The digital space is a constant source of myths and rumours about gender and its related concepts. For example, gender is referred to as “ideology” or gender mainstreaming is labelled as a strategy of re-education.

Although these reports are flawed and often false (Frey/Gärtner et al. 2014), they do have an influence on inner institutional processes of change. Actors may take these myths and false assertions for granted – in which case it is important to provide facts and figures – or they may politically reject the idea of gender equality, using these arguments as a discursive resource to utter their resistance.

Booklet: Resistance against gender mainstreaming

The Swedish Jämtland County Administrative Board has published a booklet on how to deal with resistance with practical examples and illustrations: “Facing Resistance – managing gender mainstreaming in organisations”

How to deal with resistance on a discourse level

There are also actors who dismiss gender equality and gender mainstreaming as “feminist ideologies”. This is often a strategy to undermine gender equality as a political goal. In this case, it is important to scrutinise the sources of these kinds of arguments. With good knowledge of the origins of gender mainstreaming, its goals and benefits, these kinds of arguments can be disproved. At this point, it is also important to note that not everybody within an institution has to be completely convinced of the need to implement gender equality – as long as there is a critical mass who will support the process.

Some arguments against gender mainstreaming and gender equality are difficult to deal with because they are based in deeply-rooted beliefs. There still exists, for example, the notion that women and men are essentially different beings. This is based on the assumption that there are static biological differences between women and men that cannot and also should not be changed. In this case, it is important to clarify the difference between sameness (which is not the aim of gender equality) and gender equality as equal rights and therefore a basic human right.

Using Facts and Figures to overcome resistance

Resistance is also caused by a lack of knowledge. It is therefore important to introduce key facts and figures. A possible way to do this is with a gender quiz. You can find an example quiz in the module #>quiz#. Questions and answers which are adapted to suit the target group's knowledge and field of experience are even more appealing and effective. For example, a quiz also showing gender disparities in one's own organisation or in sectorial fields of the organisation may lead to "Aha!" Experience.