

Training ministries in gender mainstreaming

Summary

Finland introduced training in gender mainstreaming for officials in all its national ministries. This was organised in three phases, which progressed from the general to the specific, and involved setting up working groups for gender equality in the ministries.

In phase 1, seminars were held first for 130 directors, and subsequently for 220 other staff, and a handbook and website were created. The accent was on simplicity and practicality, as previous training had attracted criticism for being too complex and theoretical.

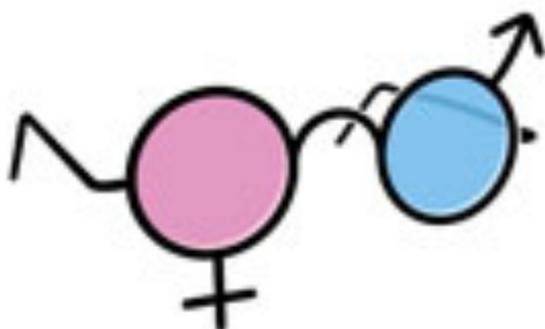
In phase 2, four thematic training seminars were held for 188 people, mainly members of the equality working groups in each ministry, though they were open to all staff.

Phase 3 concerned 100 people in three ministries: Education and Culture, Social Affairs and Health, and the Interior. Outside consultants were brought in to address each ministry's specific problems with managing schools, poverty statistics and security.

The first two phases of the initiative benefitted from EU support which overcame budget restrictions.

Gender mainstreaming still an issue

Even though Finland performs well in international comparative studies on gender equality, there are still some areas where further action is needed. These concern specific problems such as equal pay, as well as broader issues about translating gender mainstreaming theory into practice in all spheres of policy and decision-making. As a review by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in 2006 showed, one reason for this was the limited understanding ministries had of the objectives and methods of mainstreaming gender.¹



Taking this into consideration, gender mainstreaming has become a priority for the Finnish government. This is well reflected in the last three government action plans on gender equality, which highlight gender mainstreaming as a central part of policy. For example, the Gender Equality Action Plan (2008-2011) committed the government to ensuring that gender perspectives are included in all areas of decision-making and that gender mainstreaming is integrated into all the processes of

the national administration. It also encouraged ministries to organise training on gender mainstreaming for their directors and staff. The latest action plan (2012-2015), while having similar objectives, goes even further in that it states that gender mainstreaming is to be integrated into the induction training offered to all new civil servants, including directors.

¹ Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriö (2006), *Sukupuolinäkökulman valtavirtaistaminen Suomen valtionhallinnossa. Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriön selvityksiä 2009:77.*

Having said that, substantial barriers have been experienced in meeting the training objectives. For example, whereas all ministries have been requested to set up a working group on gender equality, it has been difficult to mobilise these groups and ensure that gender mainstreaming is integrated into the ministries' activities.² One of the most important challenges in tackling this issue has been the lack of resources dedicated to the action plan. This means that ministries had to find the money from their own budgets, which to a certain degree limited the range of measures that have been implemented.³ In this context, the Gender Glasses project is particularly important because its first two phases benefited from co-financing from the EU PROGRESS programme, and the third phase from funding from the Equality Unit at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

Progressing from generic to tailored training

The overall goals of the Gender Glasses project were to equip staff in the national administration with a basic understanding of gender mainstreaming principles and how to evaluate the gender impact of policy-making. The project also sought to develop and mainstream methods, guidance and training related to gender mainstreaming.

The specific objectives of the project were different for each of the three phases, becoming progressively more ambitious, advanced and tailored to the needs of each ministry taking part in the project. They are:

- Phase 1: to develop and deliver tailored training on gender mainstreaming for every ministry, and to develop supporting material;
- Phase 2: to support the launch and institutionalisation of new working groups for gender equality in the ministries;
- Phase 3: to strengthen knowledge and skills related to gender equality and mainstreaming by developing training, resources, and information tailored to the ministries' exact needs.

Expected outcomes and impact were not explicitly specified and no quantitative targets were set. However the results are positive. In the short term, the training has improved the general awareness among staff and directors of the principles, terms and methods related to gender mainstreaming, and made supporting tools and materials more easily available. It has re-activated the gender equality working groups, for instance by increasing their members' motivation and sharpening their objectives and working methods. Strategic work on gender mainstreaming and systems to monitor progress has started, links between gender equality actors in different ministries have been strengthened, and gender mainstreaming is more visible. The creation of tools to support the work of gender equality coordinators and working groups in the ministries and the strengthening of the assessment of gender impacts when drawing up new or modifying existing legislation is for the longer term.

The first two phases were aimed at all ministries and the final phase was aimed only at the three ministries that decided to take part in it. Overall, all civil servants employed in these ministries were targeted by the project activities, but some tailored training and training materials were also developed for specific groups of employees (e.g. directors, all staff, gender equality working group members).

² Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriö (2009), *Sukupuolisilmäläsit käyttöön, Loppuraportti. Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriön selvityksiä 2009:43.*

³ Final progress report on Finland's Gender Equality Action Plan 2008-2011: http://www.stm.fi/julkaisut/nayta/_julkaisu/1559221#fi

Three phases

Due to its length and progressive nature, the training project used a range of different training techniques, such as seminars, information events, meetings and training materials.

- **Phase 1 'Introducing gender glasses!' (*Sukupuolisilmäläsit käyttöön!*): 2007-2008**

In phase 1, the training consisted of general awareness raising and training in all of the ministries. It took the form of large-scale seminars, with the first set of seminars held with the ministry leadership and the second with the rest of the staff.

In addition, a background brochure on gender mainstreaming was prepared and disseminated to all staff in the central administration. It provides tools, a checklist and key questions to take into consideration when integrating a gender perspective into the work of ministries. A website (<http://www.sukupuolisilmalaset.fi>) was also developed to provide practical information. By using simple language and giving numerous practical examples it aims to remedy a weakness of past training sessions and materials, which were criticised as being complex and impractical.

- **Phase 2 'Using gender glasses' (*Sukupuolisilmäläsit käytössä*): 2008-2009**

In phase 2, four thematic training seminars were held, mainly for members of the equality working groups in each ministry. They were however open to all staff interested in the topic. Each seminar had a different focus, for example on what the national action plan requires the ministries to do. The final seminar was aimed at individuals in charge of budgeting within the ministries. A practical handbook on the development of gender mainstreaming within ministries was also prepared.

- **Phase 3 'Better results with gender glasses' (*Sukupuolisilmäläseilla hyviin tuloksiin*): 2011**

Phase 3 was slightly different, as it only concerned three ministries: the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of the Interior. Training and consulting services were provided by a specialist consultancy Ekvälita Ab and affiliated experts and academics. The training was designed after a consultation and needs assessment carried out within each ministry. At the Ministry of Education the training focused on methods of instruction and the promotion of gender equality in the performance management of agencies under the ministry's jurisdiction (e.g. how to treat boys and girls in a gender-sensitive manner). At the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health the training focused on looking at the importance of gender in poverty, health problems and exclusion, specifically through statistics. This approach was to help the ministry to integrate a gender perspective into the national flagship programme to combat poverty and social exclusion that was being developed. At the Ministry of Interior, the training focused on violence, security and gender, and exploring the new security plan from a gender perspective.

In addition, two joint training sessions were organised: one for the focal points of the gender equality working groups, and the second for all members of the gender equality working groups to plan their work for the next year.

New working and training methods and practices were also piloted, which can be used by the gender equality working groups in their own training. For example, the 'future initiative' exercise in the last training seminar aimed to encourage participants to 'dream' and freely come up with ideal scenarios about the future while forgetting the barriers related to public administration. It resulted in many new and innovative ideas.

The need for practical tools

The project relied mainly on self-evaluation:

- The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health prepared a final report at the end of Phase 2. This concluded that the training materials and training itself received mainly positive feedback from participants. The beneficiaries praised the colourful and succinct form of the materials, though they recommended that in future more practical examples that are directly relevant to the work of officials in different ministries could be included. This was taken into consideration in the second and third phases of the project. The project also succeeded in raising the visibility of the topic among those colleagues who took part in different training sessions. Further practical support in implementing gender mainstreaming in the everyday work of ministries and more support for gender equality working groups was requested.
- Consultancy Ekvälita Ab prepared a final report at the end of Phase 3. This concluded that the objectives of the project had been achieved and that the third phase of the project had a particularly positive impact on the gender equality working groups, as the activities implemented during the project helped to activate and motivate them. It was also highlighted that all ministries still need practical support to integrate gender mainstreaming into their core activities.
- Feedback was also obtained from the beneficiaries of the training through online surveys. Overall, the training matched their expectations. They were satisfied that it was useful for their work, although quite a few participants during the first phase (when the training was aimed at all staff), felt that gender mainstreaming was not relevant to them.⁴ The results also showed that training has to be developed according to specific ministry needs and that the needs assessment carried out at the start of Phase 3 (before launching any training or other support activities) proved particularly useful in this regard. Participants also emphasised the need for practical, concrete tools and good practice example and this was taken into consideration in all phases of the project.

The beneficiaries who took part in the training included 130 directors and 220 staff during Phase 1; 188 participants, mainly members of gender equality working groups in ministries, during Phase 2; and over 100 staff (mainly, but not exclusively, members of gender equality working groups) during Phase 3.

Gender training must attract senior officials

Three design factors made the training a success:

- Training sessions were designed to be short (from around an hour to a half a day), providing a realistic reflection of time available among staff to attend such training.
- The training sessions were designed to be progressively more elaborate, tailored and practical as the project went on, starting with the basics and moving to the provision of individualised training in the form of consultancy support for individual working groups and ministries.
- The project built into learning accrued during previous phases of the project.

The main obstacles encountered were that gender mainstreaming remains a responsibility of a few individuals in the ministries, often members or secretaries of gender equality working groups. In addition, implementation was somewhat slowed down by general bureaucracy in public administration in terms of rules and procedures that have to be followed. In addition, the project found it difficult to attract senior staff, and especially men. Better ways to entice senior male staff could be taken into consideration in the design and conception of future training activities in this field.

⁴ Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriö (2009) *Sukupuolisilmälasi käyttöön! Loppuraportti. Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriön selvitys* 2009:43

The lack of funding has an implication for future training activities in the ministries. While the National Gender Equality Action Plan emphasises the importance of gender training, no separate budget is devoted to it and each ministry has to find its own funds to carry out further work in this field.

The lessons learned from the process are that:

- Training on gender mainstreaming in national administrations must attract senior officials and those directly in a position of drafting budgets, laws and programmes in order to ensure that gender mainstreaming is integrated into everyday practice at the ministries.
- It is important that training programmes on gender mainstreaming take the evolving needs of participants (in this case, ministry officials) into consideration and progress from fairly generic, basic forms of training to more individualised approaches.
- Gender training benefits from the inclusion of practical examples, which are linked as closely as possible to the actual work of participants.

Contact:

Reetta Siukola
Equality Unit (Tasa-Arvoyksikkö)
Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (Sosiaalija Terveys Ministeriö)
PO Box 33
00023 Government
Finland
+358 295 160 01
reetta.siukola@stm.fi

Malin Gustavsson, Ekvälita Ab
Kulmahuone
Siltasaarencatu 15
00530 Helsinki
Finland
+358 45 128 9878
malin.gustavsson@ekvalita.fi

Further information:

Gender glasses website: http://www.stm.fi/en/gender_equality/gender_glasses

Gender Glasses! Final report. Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriö (2009) *Sukupuolisilmäläsit käyttöön! Loppuraportti. 2009:43* (Finnish): <http://www.stm.fi/julkaisut/nayta/-/julkaisu/1440201#fi>

Final report at the end of Phase 3: Ekvälita Ab (2012) *Sukupuolisilmäläseilla hyvin tuloksiin -hanke 15.2.-31.12.2011. Loppuraportti* (Finnish): http://www.stm.fi/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=833479&name=DLFE-18351.pdf

Gender Glasses! handbook (Finnish): Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriö (2009) *Sukupuolisilmäläsit käytössä. Käsikirja ministeriöiden tasaarvotyön tueksi. Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriön julkaisuja 2009:13*: http://www.stm.fi/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=39503&name=DLFE-10430.pdf

Gender Glasses in Use handbook (English):
http://www.coe.int/t/DGHL/STANDARDSETTING/EQUALITY/07genderbudgeting/Documents/Gender%20Glasses_en.pdf

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