

## Women on the labour market in Denmark

Agnete Andersen  
The Ministry of Employment

### Women's position on the labour market

It is a long time ago, that the return of women to the labour market was an issue in Denmark. Having said that it is characteristic that women between 25 and 34, when most women have their children, have a higher unemployment rate than others. But mothers are catching up.

Denmark has an equality-friendly labour market. Women's participation rates are high and their working hours increasing.

But a number of imbalances still exist and call for continued action. These years, the measures are concentrated on the issues of equal pay, the gender-segregated labour market and reconciling work and family life.

These three fields of action are inter-connected, as the gender-segregated labour market is the single main cause of wage differentials between women and men. Female-dominated occupational sectors, on the other hand, often have more welfare benefits such as paid maternity leave, a higher degree of job security, etc.

Today, it is a generally accepted fact that there are differences between men and women. Men and women have different jobs, different education and different pay. Similarly, it is generally accepted that an effective employment policy is based on knowledge of the labour market and of the various groups of wage earners.

The role of the Government is to ensure that the legal framework within the equality policy and the labour market policy does not create obstacles to women and men's participation on the labour market. The overarching governmental objective is to promote occupational participation for everybody. When we look at the figures, it is clear that the effort has been successful.

The gender equality policy is seen as one of the means to achieving an efficient labour market policy.

The work takes place in a dialogue with enterprises and the social partners, and the most recent knowledge of equal opportunities on the labour market is made available through seminars, conferences and in reports. The intention is that this knowledge should be used in actual practice in the enterprises. To the widest extent possible, the experience obtained will be made available in databases for the purpose of inspiration and exchange of experience for both enterprises and the labour market organisations.

Women's economic independence has been a decisive goal of gender equality from the outset of promoting gender equality. The organisation of the legislation on the labour market supports the economic independence of the individual.

When you look at the gender equality goals on the labour market, you see that they are intimately connected. Desegregation of the gender-segregated labour market is the main single factor if you want to reduce the pay differentials between women and men. And there is no doubt that women's use of maternity leave and parental leave influences the mothers' pay negatively. The lack of reconciliation between working life and family life, a gender divided working life, and gender discrimination influence women's employment negatively.

Of course the legislation of the Ministry of Employment is gender neutral as it has been for nearly 30 years, and all new legislation is gender neutral too. The legislation of the Ministry of Employment has to prevent gender discrimination on the labour market. Accordingly, an internal control has taken place for many years to make sure that the Ministry lives up to its goals.

The Ministry initiates special initiatives to reach the targets. All employees have the task to make sure that gender targets are met in the daily work on labour market policy initiatives.

The supply of labour is a very important political issue in Denmark because of the very low unemployment rate. Both men and women are needed on the labour market. Therefore, the labour market policy is designed to meet the demands of the enterprises. If you are unemployed and receive unemployment benefits you must apply for jobs, otherwise you lose your unemployment benefits. As housewives as such are a nearly unknown category in Denmark it is becoming more and more difficult to be outside the labour market unless you are ill or on a pension scheme.

### **The employment rate**

Women constitute 47.8 percent of the entire workforce in 2007. The workforce has been increasing in 2007.

Women's employment rate is lower than men's. From 1997 to 2007 the participation rate for women was stable on 72-74 percent. In comparison, men's employment rate has been about 80 pct. In 2007 the employment rate was 79.8 percent for men and 73.7 percent for women.

### **The unemployment rate**

In general, women's unemployment rate is higher than men's. The trend is that men's and women's unemployment rate follows the same pattern. Unemployment for both men and women has basically been decreasing since 2003. In September 2008, the unemployment rate among women was 1.7 per cent whereas 1.6 per cent of men in the workforce were unemployed.

### **The maternity issue and reconciliation of working life and family life**

Women are entitled to 18 weeks' maternity leave and men are entitled to 2 weeks' paternity leave. Both parents are entitled to 32 weeks parental leave each. Public benefits constitute payment for 52 weeks: 18 weeks for the mother, 2 weeks for the father and 32 weeks which the parents have to share.

The leave scheme is very flexible and it makes it much easier to design their absence from work in accordance with the needs of their family. It contributes to women's easy return to their jobs after maternity leave.

On average women received benefits in 37.2 weeks in 2006, whereas men received benefits in 3.7 weeks on average. Men's paternity leave constitutes 8 per cent of the entire leave.

In some cases the mother and father get their full salary from their employer in connection with confinement. In these cases, public benefits are paid to the employer.

As mentioned in the discussion paper it is for the parents to get their children into day care. Good and affordable day care facilities are considered a prerequisite for parents' participation on the labour market, and there is a political consensus on the issue.

Flexible working hours and working schemes have developed in recent years and are rolled out within different occupations.

### **The gender-segregated labour market**

A little more than half of female employees and about 21 per cent of men are employed in the public sector. A larger number of men are employed in the private sector. In local government there are more than three times as many female as male employees. By contrast there are slightly more men than women employed in the state sector.

Efforts are made in order to make companies see the advantage of using men and women in jobs where their gender is not usual in order to achieve greater flexibility in the organisation of work.

### **The pay gap - pay development for women and men**

On average, men earn more than women. The naked pay differentials reflect among other things differences in the trades they work in, differences in the jobs they perform and differences in the personal characteristics such as educational level and work experience. Nowadays discrimination is a minor problem.

The pay differentials between women and men have not changed much during the last 10 years even though great efforts are made to reduce the pay differentials

### **Sex discrimination**

Sex discrimination is forbidden in all walks of life since the year 2000. On the labour market sex discrimination has been forbidden since 1978. Both direct and indirect discrimination is forbidden. Especially discrimination during pregnancy and maternity leave is forbidden and enforced very effectively.

An equality board considers complaints from citizens so it is inexpensive and easy to get a case tried.

### **The mainstreaming strategy**

The goal is to develop the use of gender mainstreaming in the key services wherever it is possible in a convincing way to improve the quality of the services at the same time. Gender mainstreaming is an excellent tool for achieving knowledge about what you are doing and why.

Relevant gender and equality aspects must show that the gender impact assessment is to contribute to avoiding unintended effects of a political initiative. In the Ministry of Employment gender mainstreaming is especially used in new law proposals in order to make sure that the gender perspective is taken into account so that women and men are urged to participate on the labour market.