

Synopsis of the conference's conclusions and results ¹

Both women and men must be considered as part of the economy. Yet their share in its wealth is very unequal. With regard to economic policies, the EU strategy of gender mainstreaming is conceptionally poorly developed and implemented only to a very limited extent. The Lisbon strategy provides some positive elements for the attempt to match social and economic policies and for the aim of improving women's position in the labour market. But neither are these policies coherent nor does a concept for implementing gender issues in all parts of economics exist. In addition, there is a contradiction between the written goals of the Amsterdam Treaty and common practice. Although competitiveness has no priority over gender mainstreaming and non-discrimination in the Treaty, it does so in reality.

In fact, gender impacts should be taken into account from the very outset of developing policies and measures in EU economic, financial and trade politics. Measures on women's empowerment are still necessary and are an important element of the two pillar strategy for achieving gender democracy. In addition, the EU member states are recommended to install a voluntary exchange on good practices of gender mainstreaming in those areas of social politics where the EU has no competence (yet).

At the conference, it was recommended that gender budgeting be introduced on all political levels. Though it is known that public spending and revenues have different effects on women and men, poor and rich, young and old people et cetera, these effects are still insufficiently taken into account when planning and executing budgets. Without gendered budgets, it is difficult to establish precise indicators for policy effectiveness, or a case for indication of the impact of equality initiatives.

For this to be possible it is necessary to build up both capacity and capability to undertake gender budgeting. It takes time and money to develop the necessary series data and to build revenue and expenditure systems that are capable of being analysed through a gender lens. Existing statistics must be routinely disaggregated by gender, but additionally, it is necessary to analyse the wider context of gender difference in order to identify where new statistics are required.

Though gender mainstreaming strategy is applied to the European structural funds, it is very weak. The so called criteria of "gender neutrality" is contra-productive. A binding definition for what is meant by gender mainstreaming is needed, as is strategic planning for implementing it into all programmes and established criteria for those who implement and control the measures. In particular, the monitoring of the implementation of gender mainstreaming has to be intensified.

¹ The following synopsis of the proceedings and conclusions reached at the conference "Better Business – Creating a Gender-Equal Europe!" was presented at the United Nations Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Beijing +10 Review held in Geneva from 14–15 December 2004. We should like to express our particular thanks for the excellent and close cooperation involved to Ewa Ruminska-Zimny, Senior Social Affairs Officer, UNECE, and coordinator of the Beijing +10 Regional Preparatory Meeting.

It is important to be in dialogue with entrepreneurs about equal opportunities of women and men at the working place. It is economically inefficient not to use women's full qualifications – either because they remain in the lower echelons or because of long parental leave (as is the case in Austria and Germany) or because they are ousted by men (as in Central and Eastern European countries).

In this respect the strategies of women's empowerment, gender mainstreaming and managing diversity have to be reconsidered and their positive effects on women (and the respective companies) evaluated. At the same time, the political agenda ought to include legislation on equal opportunities in the private sector.

In Germany in particular, there are substantial deficiencies for women (and men) wishing to combine work and family life. Substantial efforts must be made to establish an adequate system of childcare. Additionally, men have to be brought to take responsibility for care work.

In the former socialist countries self-employment and starting one's own business have been important strategies women have used to support themselves and their children. Studies from France, Switzerland and the United States prove the extraordinary dynamism of woman enterprises and their stimulating effects on the economy in general. Women's entrepreneurship has to be encouraged. To support favourable conditions for woman entrepreneurs in the EU there should be:

- *coordination of all activities between politicians, local business promotion, banks, chambers of commerce and woman entrepreneurs*
- *support of woman entrepreneurs networks and women's enterprise centres as well as their national and European networking, and an exchange of experiences and good practices. An example for good practice in Germany is the network of women business centres, e.g. WeiberWirtschaft Berlin, INNEN-HOF Hamm, Frauenstadthaus Bremen.*

Economic theories neglect important facts which influence economic dynamics. Of special importance are gender relations. Without recognising different social and economic conditions for women and men and the power relations between the sexes, economic models will lead to wrong conclusions. A recent example is the crisis of the care economy in all European countries.

A European research institute for feminist economic theory and feminist economics could conduct systematic research and support networks of researchers and practitioners on these topics.

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