



Equinet
European Network
of Equality Bodies

EQUINET SEMINAR

Breaking the Glass Ceiling:
Career Progress for Women

SUMMARY OF LEARNINGS

13-14 November 2017
Tallinn, Estonia

Co-organised with the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment
Commissioner, Estonia

Easy to Read Summary



On 13 and 14 November 2017, Equinet and the **Estonian Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner** organized a seminar. A seminar is a big meeting. The seminar was organized in Tallinn, Estonia.



At the seminar we talked about why **women have an unfair disadvantage at work compared to men**. Disadvantage is when a person starts from a worse position than another person. We also talked about what we can do to change that.



Women often spend a lot of **time caring for their families**. They may have less time to be at work. This can be a disadvantage if the workplace feels the women don't spend enough time at work.

TYPES OF FLEXIBLE WORKING



We learned how workplaces can support women and **get help to think in a fairer way**. They can also try and introduce more **flexible ways of working**.



We also talked about what happens if **robots make decisions or do jobs that women used to do**. It is important for everyone to think about this because it is going to happen more in the future.

ABOUT THE SEMINAR

On 13 and 14 November 2017, **Equinet** and the [Estonian Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner](#) co-organised a capacity-building seminar on **Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Career Progress for Women**. The event took place in Tallinn, Estonia. The Seminar was attended by 34 equality bodies' staff members and experts.

The main objective of the Seminar was to **build individual capacity of equality bodies' staff members** to promote career progress for women. In particular, the Seminar aimed to:

- Provide an introduction to the reasons behind women's lack of career progress compared to their male peers and discuss the consequences of this gender gap on the labour market;
- Assist those seeking to promote gender equality in career progress by providing arguments supporting the utility of equal opportunities in career progress;
- Look at good practice examples where the inequality experienced by women throughout the course of their working lives has been effectively addressed; and
- Identify tools that can be used to address discrimination women may face in access to promotions and career progress.

The present document is a compilation of the main conclusions of the Seminar for the work of equality bodies.

Seminar organization and summary: Katrine Steinfeld

Pictures: Annika Haas



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SUMMARY



The Equinet seminar hosted by the Estonian Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner sought to unpack why women may experience obstacles and discrimination in making career progress compared to their male peers, and what equality bodies can do about it, **Equinet Chair Tena Šimonović Einwalter** reminded. For effective action, it is necessary to enumerate the many factors at play. **The relationship between women's economic participation, unequal time spent**

on caring responsibilities, the situation on the labour market, including discrimination and unequal pay, all play a part in determining women's equal access to career progress. This complexity is reflected in the indicators Eurostat has chosen to use when monitoring Europe's progress toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal number 5 to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. The indicators include the number of women in economic decision-making, the gender pay gap, the gender employment gap, and time spent on caring responsibilities.

Discussions at the seminar confirmed that **women continue to have (un)equal opportunities in terms of career progress in Europe.** The issue is not just about "a glass ceiling," **Barbara Limanowska from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)** reminded us. If women experience that they hit a glass ceiling while trying to climb the career ladder, then it is not enough to investigate what this ceiling comprises. We need to re-examine the whole house, including its very foundations. If the ceiling has certain flaws, that is because the whole structure is built in such a way and if women cannot progress beyond a certain point, that is because "organizations are not gender neutral," Ms Limanowska highlighted. EIGE has done substantive work on deeply engrained organizational practices that fail to take women's skills and experiences into account



There are a number of tools available to review the practices of organizations, but a precondition for any assessment is often transparency. **Katrin Höövelson from the European Commission's Representation** therefore stressed the **need for transparent procedures in line with the European Commission's Recommendation on Pay Transparency (2014).**

Some **sectors of the labour market may provide a more favourable environment for equality**, with less differences between men and women working there. The public sector in Croatia was discussed as an example where better work-life balance policies compared to the private sector meant women had better changes. But **Martina Strunjak** from the **Croatian Ombudswoman for Gender Equality** says the ceiling is still present, even if it is a “slightly higher glass ceiling than the private sector.



Promoting work-life balance, including a more equal division of care responsibilities lies at the heart of the European Commission’s recent initiative on work-life balance for parents and carers, released in April 2017. This is also a focus area for trade unions, as **Barbara Helfferich** **Advisor to the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)** reminded, along with the issues of equal pay, and persistent pregnancy and motherhood related discrimination.

In the private sector, the **German Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (FADA)** has a **self-monitoring tool for companies** to use. **Charlotte Kastner** underlined that the self-monitoring tool looks at all the relevant processes in a company, including job advertisements, selection procedures, employment conditions, working hours, training opportunities, and appraisal methods. There are currently a number of large employers in Germany piloting the tool, and it is hoped that more will join.



Anna Wilthew from the **Equality and Human Rights Commission in Great Britain** explained how her equality body had stepped outside its enforcement mandate to **promote greater awareness of pregnancy related discrimination and provide concrete support to companies** in creating an enabling environment.

Because once discrimination has taken place, **enforcing sanctions and obtaining redress** is often a missing piece of the puzzle, **Anu Laas** from the **European Network of Legal Experts** reminded.





But “structural inequality requires structural change,” **Arja Lehto** from the **Swedish Equality Ombudsman** reminded, reflecting on the fact that currently the support tools available focus and depend on the goodwill and participation of the individual employer. To secure awareness and participation at a large scale, the new legislation in force in Sweden shifts the focus away from reporting on individual measures. Instead, it seeks to recognize that **achieving gender equality at any level is a continuous “work in progress”** by asking organizations and employers to continuously update and report on their long term plans for achieving equality.

Gender mainstreaming measures were highlighted as a necessary tool by several speakers, acknowledging that getting meaningful outcomes from gender mainstreaming measures is in many cases dependent on the intentions of those implementing. Our speakers agreed that cultural change is needed at the societal and organizational levels to ensure gender equality in practice. Such a shift in the cultural mindset was experienced as both a precondition and a result of sustained and meaningful application of different gender mainstreaming measures. Additionally, knowledge of change management can be a barrier to progress, according to **Arja Lehto**.

Independent expert **Niall Crowley** stressed that in addition to the necessary prohibition against discrimination, there is a need to move beyond prohibition to a proactive approach to ensure substantive equality in practice. Part of that is also taking an intersectional perspective, as **Erika Kispeter from Warwick University** reminded, because not all women experience the glass ceiling in the same way. There are for instance very few black women in academia in the UK, or one would have to look far to find a Roma woman in a decision-making position.



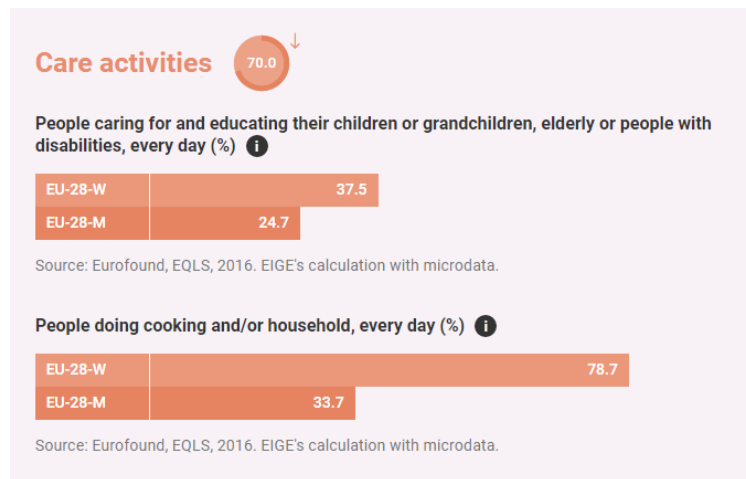
A proactive approach to equality can include the **use of quotas**, though **Professor Morten Huse** underlined that quotas in and of themselves are not enough: one would need to use them in combination with work-life balance policies aimed at both women and men. **Arja Lehto** from the **Swedish Equality Ombudsman** raised the issue that quantitative goals are easier to monitor, but the question is how to monitor qualitative goals?

There is a new domain for which current tools to ensure equality have not yet been adapted, and that is the **field of digitalization and automation**. These domains will have a significant impact on the labour markets of tomorrow and current trends indicate that these changes will have a gendered impact, according to **Liisa Pakosta, the Estonian Commissioner for Gender Equality and Equal Treatment**.



“Gender equality has not yet been taught to computers,” **Linnar Viik** stressed at the seminar. “It may currently be illegal to use discriminatory criteria, but with machine learning computers learn to discriminate by themselves.” If equality bodies “leave computers to IT experts” and don’t **engage with gender equality in the digital domain**, the prospects for achieving equality in the future could be negatively impacted.

[EIGE’s Gender Equality Index](#) was released shortly before the seminar, and confirmed that progress toward gender equality in Europe is moving “at a snail’s pace.” One area where men and women have become less equal is in the way they spend their time, as women have started to spend more time than before on care responsibilities and housework than ten years ago.



Equinet will therefore continue to support and follow up initiatives aimed at correcting inequality in women’s opportunities, including by supporting the European Commission’s initiative on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers in 2018, **Equinet Director Anne Gaspard** assured as she closed the seminar.

Equinet would like to thank all the speakers and participants for contributing to the success of the seminar!

Presentations and pictures of the event are available on the [Equinet website](#).

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