

Equal opportunities in Norway: Present situation and future challenges

Subject to changes

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1. NATIONAL CONTEXT



Small, young and rural nation

- Young nation, independent since 1905.
- Big country, 325.000 km² – 12,3 hab. pr km²
- Small population, 4,8 million inhabitants
- Only 5 municipalities with more than 100.000 habitants in 2006.
- Oslo: 540.000, Bergen: 242.000
- 75% of the population live on the coast in small and medium towns

Rich and industrialized

- GNP per capita = 52.047 US\$
- High productivity
- Main economic sectors: Industry including energy and petrol: 40.5%
- Government including health and education: 19.9%.
- Agriculture, forestry and fishing: only 1.5%.

High fertility rate

- The fertility rate is 1,96 – number 4 in Europe
- The sustainable rate is 2.1.
- Expected lifespan at birth is 82,7 years for women, 78,2 years for men.
- The ageing of the population represents a challenge for social security, employment and economy – as in all European countries
- A homogeneous population with regard to ethnicity and religion.
- Relatively small differences with regard to salaries – implying that all services are expensive, e.g. taxis, restaurants, domestic help etc.

High level of education and employment

- 46% of the population has completed secondary school (totally 13 years of education), 49% men, 42 % women.
- 32,9% has completed tertiary education, i.e. university or college, 36% women, 29% men.
- Employment rate: 74% women, 79% men.
- Unemployment rate: 2,5%

Divided labour market

Salary gap between men and women: 15.7% due to

- Different education and profession, nurses versus engineers
- Different arenas: women in the public sector, men in the private
- Part time work for 31,6% women, 10,5% men



Poverty mainly among the unemployed

- Relative concept: persons with less than 50% of the average income.
- Poverty in Norway is mainly found in families that are outside the labour market
- The majority of the poor have a low educational level, 42,8% have not completed secondary school.
- Regional differences re. poverty

Flexible labour market

- “Flexicurity”: a secure and universal well fare system - combined with a flexible labour market
- “Nordic Model”: dialogue and consensus between employers and employees
- Labour culture: based on confidence in the employees and their competence, not on control.
- Flexible working hours – when possible. Core hours 9:00h -14:00h, flexible coming and going, electronic registration of hours, flexible saving and spending of extra hours – some hours, a day, or a week off

The continuous working day: 30 minutes lunch break



2. PERSPECTIVES AND CONCEPTS



Multiple perspectives on equality

- 1: **The Rights** : of all women and men
- 2: **The resources**: the full use of all resources of women and men – at home and at work
- 3: **The men**: the integration of their perspectives
- 4: **The economy**: Balance between men and women is an advantage for national demographic and economic development – and for economic flexibility in times of financial crisis

High participation in politics by women

- High participation by women in politics since 1970, 40% quota since 1972 for political committees
- Cooperation between women in civil society, in politics and in public administration
- Now more than 30% women at all political level: Local Government 37%, Parliament 38%, Government 52%
- Important: critical mass at all levels for change – and for recruitment

The use of simple language

- Equal rights or equal opportunities.
- Include all groups: men and women as well as persons of different ethnic origin, sexual or religious orientation etc.
- The term “gender” is only used in an academic context
- It is possible that the use of a simple terminology has contributed to the general acceptance of equal rights and opportunities

3. LEGISLATION BASED ON SOLIDARITY



Children: the responsibility of society as a whole

- **Child Benefit Act 1946:** Monthly grant for all children until 16 years, paid to the mother. For single parents for 1 extra child.
- **Child Rearing Benefit Act 1955:** Automatic monthly payment from divorced parent to parent with whom the child is living, according to salary and time spent with the child.
- **Social Insurance Act 2006:** 46 week maternal leave + 10 weeks paternal leave, with 100% salary - or longer leave with lower % salary pay. Cash sum for mothers without salary.

General service for children

- **The Kindergarten Act 1975:** All children aged 1-5 have the right to a kindergarten place in their home municipality - at a fixed price and with municipal coordination, private or municipal.
- **Alternative: The Cash Benefit Act 1998:** for children 1-2 years who do not use kindergartens
- **Education Act, 1977:** Right to 13 years of free education for all, including 3 years of secondary school. Also loans/grants for University and education for adults.

Gender Equality

- **Gender Equality Act, 1978:** Prohibits gender discrimination and promotes gender equality. Additions from 1980/1990s set a 40% quota for all public committees.
- **Act of Gender Representation in Private Company Boards, 2003:** A 40% quota for members of all listed private company boards.
- **Act on Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud and Tribunal, 2006:** Institutions that monitor that Norwegian laws and practices are in line with CEDAW and other international conventions.

Social Security Network

- **Social Security Act 1966:**
Security net for persons without income, with handicap or in case of the death of the breadwinner.
- The right of a pension for all inhabitants at the age of 67
– a minimum pension as well as additional allowances according to salary and number of working years.

Regulated labour market

- **Working Environment Act 1977:** Protects workers' rights and limits overtime. The Act also prohibits sexual harassment.
- Gives special rights to women during pregnancy and after giving birth- and gives both parents 10 days paid leave in case of illness of the child or the person caring for the child.
- Workers with small children have the right to flexible working hours – and to refuse overtime.

4. INITIATIVES AND SERVICES



Initiatives at different levels

- National level: general legislation and benefits + financial framework for local and regional governments.
- Regional level: Secondary schools and special services for groups with special needs
- Local level: kindergartens, after-school care, care for the elderly and the handicapped in their homes and in institutions

Equality at home

- Paternal leave increase from 6 to weeks from 1.7.2009 .
- 90% of men use this right which strengthens the bond between men and their children
- The house work is generally done by the family members – rarely by domestic help
- Men participate increasingly in domestic work – but in most cases women still have the main responsibility and do most of the work

5. POSITIVE RESULTS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES



Important future challenges

- Kindergartens versus cash grant
- The responsibility for the elderly – professional and private
- The situation for immigrant women
- Stereotypic choice of education and profession
- The part time divide
- The salary gap – and the pension gap
- The total use of time: professional and domestic work for men and women

**Challenge for all: economy,
society, family, women and men!**

