

# EU Dialogue, Local Solutions

## **Briefing for the Seminar on Gender Equality in Sweden**



Joint project by the European  
social partners in local and regional  
government



with the financial support of the European Commission



## Introduction

To mark a decade and a half of the European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Local and Regional Government, and to raise grassroots awareness about the resources provided by European dialogue, EPSU and CEMR have launched a project to promote their work in three key areas:

- third-party violence harassment at work
- migration
- gender equality

Gender equality was one of the first challenges jointly addressed by the newly formed European social dialogue committee for local and regional government. It is therefore only right that, as part of the present project to celebrate and evaluate the work of the last fifteen years, that gender equality be one of the three issues discussed. To this end, social partners from Sweden introduced the topic as part of the 'Kick-Off Webinar' held online in December 2020.<sup>1</sup> The issue will be analysed in greater depth in an online meeting in June 2021, where Swedish social partners will present their national actions to tackle inequalities between men and women in their workplaces.

The present briefing outlines some of the current situation of gender inequality in European workplaces, what action social partners in local and regional government have taken and finally will provide some background for the national case studies to be highlighted in the online webinar. Following this event, a more detail report will be published to expand on those examples and provide additional information.

## Gender Pay Gap

In 2005, the cross-sectoral social partners agreed a framework of actions to tackle gender inequality at work in Europe.<sup>2</sup> Sixteen years on, the four areas of action it identifies – addressing gender roles, promoting women in decision-making, supporting work-life balance and tackling the gender pay gap – remain as pertinent in debates about gender equality as they were then.

Some progress has been made: the gender pay gap in the EU-27 grew following the crisis but has fallen year-on-year since 2012.<sup>3</sup> However, progress is slow, with the ETUC estimating that, at the current rate of decline, the EU gender pay gap will not close until 2104, unless more action is taken.<sup>4</sup> Whilst the gender pay gap is generally smaller in the public sector, austerity measures imposed during the economic crisis had a greater impact, meaning that the gap only began to narrow again in 2016, and then at a much slower rate than in the wider economy.<sup>5</sup>

The European Commission, for its part, has proposed a directive on gender pay transparency which would introduce binding pay transparency measures, ban employers from asking about job applicants' previous pay and give an enhanced role of workers' representatives.<sup>6</sup>



## Work-Life Balance

Improving work-life balance is essential to foster a more equitable division of household work and childcare between men and women, and improving women's access to quality employment. The European Union has sought to address the issue through the Directive on work-life balance for parents,<sup>7</sup> which the Commission characterises as a key deliverable of the European Pillar of Social Rights.<sup>8</sup> Whilst the 10 days of parental leave for secondary parents, carers' leave and the extension of the right to request flexible working are steps forward, strengthening of these minimums usually falls to social partners.<sup>9</sup> One recent example is France, where legislation has recently been implemented which doubled the number of paternity leave days from 14 to 28,<sup>10</sup> after a long period of engagement on the issue from sectoral and cross-sectoral social partners.<sup>11</sup>

## Strengthening Social Dialogue

Throughout Europe, there exists 'a strong correlation between robust social dialogue, better gender equality and good work-life balance,' as detailed by the recent *Rebalance* report.<sup>12</sup> It further underlines the importance of social dialogue and social-partner capacity at different levels to enact measures that strengthen gender equality. And whilst collective bargaining remains a competence for national social partners, European social partners do play a role in fostering an enabling environment for social dialogue that leads to effective national collective bargaining. This is important because the gender pay gap tends to be lower where a national or sectoral pay agreement is in place, as opposed to no agreement.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the lower coverage of low-paid, female-dominated professionals in sectoral collective bargaining in many countries, there are moves to redress this balance through social partnership. In Ireland, for example, the government has recently proposed a tripartite body to set wages in childcare to compensate for the lack of sectoral bargaining in that sector. This will provide a space for unions and employers' associations to 'engage in negotiations on [...] which could ultimately establish long-awaited binding rates of pay and conditions for the sector'.<sup>14</sup>

CEMR has made repeated calls for action at European level and elaborated a detailed action plan,<sup>15</sup> as well as encouraging national employers to sign up to a series of principles and policy approached through a European Charter for Equality between Men and Women.<sup>16</sup> Having signed the charter, many municipalities and regions have then gone on to implement gender equality action plans, for example in France.<sup>17</sup>

The inclusion of gender equality in the present project, and particularly the analysis of the interplay between CEMR and EPSU's guidelines and national and local initiatives, can be seen as a positive response to these calls from both employers and unions.



## CEMR/EPSU Gender Equality Guidelines

Building on the abovementioned cross-sectoral action plan, and the work of unions and employers' organisations, the social partners in local and regional government agreed their first guidelines on gender equality in 2007.

They outlined a dual strategy of action to address gender equalities in the sector:

- **Positive action:** 'specific policies to address gender inequalities and promote equal opportunities'
- **Gender mainstreaming:** 'active steps are taken to have gender equality incorporated into all areas of policy, in all areas of activity and at all levels'.<sup>18</sup>

This approach advocates for both specific measures to redress gender imbalances as well as the inclusion of gender as an issue into every area of an organisation's work.

A key component for implementing the guidelines on the ground was through gender equality action plans, which in some countries are mandated by law. However, even where this is the case, these action plans were often not implemented in practice.<sup>19</sup> To address this issue, European social partners agreed on joint guidelines for the format and methodology of action plans. The guidelines also provide a comprehensive equality checklist to evaluate the steps to take within a workplace.

The guidelines, updated in 2017,<sup>20</sup> emphasised the importance of collecting quality data and then addressing the areas of inequality between men and women highlighted by such an evaluation. They also strengthened the guidance for follow-up and assessing the implementation of action plans.

## Gender Equality in Swedish Local and Regional Government

Gender equality is both 'a fundamental constitutional norm' in Sweden and has been recognised and pursued a policy priority since the 1970s. Gender mainstreaming, one of the key planks of the CEMR-EPSU gender equality guidelines, has been central to gender equality policy since 1994.<sup>21</sup> The unadjusted gender pay gap in Sweden for the whole economy was 11.8% in 2019 and is declining.<sup>22</sup> In 2018, the pay gap in the public sector was lower than in the economy as a whole and lower than the EU average, at 9.2%, dropping to 5.2% in 'public administration'.<sup>23</sup> However, this still means that men earn significantly more than women, even in those areas which have made the greatest progress. Furthermore, women have less opportunities than men when it comes to power and influence on the labour market, a significantly larger proportion of women than men work part-time, and women take considerably more parental leave than men. As elsewhere, women are still responsible for the vast majority of the unpaid domestic and care work and the rate of sickness absence is far higher for women. The labour market is strongly segregated with respect to gender and female-dominated professions have fewer career paths.



Social partners in local and regional government in Sweden have long been taking steps to address these ongoing issues.<sup>24</sup> As well as collaborating with the country's gender equality agency on gender mainstreaming and other initiatives,<sup>25</sup> social partners have sought innovative solutions to some of the specific causes of persistent gender inequality in the Swedish labour market. One such initiative is increasing 'wage spread' in female-dominated professions.

### **What is wage spread and why does it matter?**

Wage spread is the difference in pay within an occupational group within workplace, for example a sanitation worker, care assistant or administrative role. The difference must be objectively justified on the basis of criteria established between unions and employers in the workplace. This could take the form of a collective agreements, job or role descriptions, salary scales, or several of these. The idea is that a workers' career development, training, skills, length of service and seniority be reflected in their remuneration. The aim of increasing the wage spread is to create (average) increases in pay levels and build incentives for professional development, whilst recognising skills and experience and promoting retention.

While the term 'wage spread' seems to be most widely used in Sweden, the logic of increasing career opportunities, and recognising these through pay differentials, is more common. In the UK, for example, the 2018-2020 agreement between social partners in local government restructured the pay scale in order to ensure that gaps between different pay points were equal and that job-evaluated pay differentials were maintained. This was necessary because of the success in implementing a living wage in local authorities. However, lifting pay at the bottom distorted pay differentials that were meant to reflect skills, training and seniority, and caused many grades to 'bunch' near the bottom. The new pay scale sets the living wage at the minimum and introduces an equalised pay structure that recognises job-evaluated differentials, in effect creating greater 'wage spread' whilst lifting pay. As a result, the gender pay gap has narrowed from 5.3% to 2.7%.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Full-Time Journey**

Increasing hourly pay is essential, but gender inequality in the workplace can also be tackled by encouraging full-time work and reversing the long-standing divide that sees women working fewer hours than men, often to their detriment. Working part-time means women earn less money, end up with lower pensions, and miss out on training and promotions. To tackle this



problem, SALAR and Kommunal have been running a project called 'The Full-Time Journey', aimed at making full-time work the norm in the Swedish care and welfare sector.<sup>27</sup> The trend is already towards full-time work, which benefits employers, who cover more hours with less employees and lower training and recruitment costs, and workers, who receive higher pay, benefits and pensions. The Full-Time Journey has three objectives, to be implemented through an action plan from every municipality, county council and region:

- All employees who are newly hired must be employed full-time
- All part-time employees should be offered full-time work
- More of those who already have a full-time job, but for various reasons work part-time in the current situation, shall strive for full-time work

For the social partners, increasing full-time work is a gender equality issue: significantly more women work part-time and 4 out of 5 municipal employees are women. These workers often feel compelled to work part-time to be able to undertake unpaid domestic labour or childcare. If full-time work becomes the norm in local government, it should encourage a more equal distribution of household work and childcare, mean women are bringing in a larger portion of household income and incentivise a more balanced use of parental leave.



## References

- <sup>1</sup> <https://ccre.org/bibliotheques/getFile/e765dc563e393182a1a288c772ad9a01a11258f9>
- <sup>2</sup> [https://www.etuc.org/sites/default/files/framework\\_of\\_actions\\_gender\\_equality\\_010305-2\\_2.pdf](https://www.etuc.org/sites/default/files/framework_of_actions_gender_equality_010305-2_2.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg\\_05\\_20/default/line?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_05_20/default/line?lang=en)
- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.etuc.org/en/pressrelease/eu-gender-pay-gap-wont-end-until-2104-without-action>
- <sup>5</sup> [https://www.epsu.org/sites/default/files/article/files/Guide\\_GPG\\_EN\\_0.pdf](https://www.epsu.org/sites/default/files/article/files/Guide_GPG_EN_0.pdf), p. 3
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-a-new-push-for-european-democracy/file-binding-pay-transparency-measures>
- <sup>7</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32019L1158#PP4Contents>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1311&langId=en>
- <sup>9</sup> <https://socialeurope.eu/work-life-balance-from-legal-texts-to-real-progress-for-working-people>
- <sup>10</sup> <https://www.gouvernement.fr/les-actions-du-gouvernement/sante-famille-handicap/28-jours-de-conge-paternite-pour-plus-de-temps>
- <sup>11</sup> <https://www.juritravail.com/Actualite/droits-obligations-salariee-enceinte/Id/6784>
- <sup>12</sup> <https://www.etuc.org/sites/default/files/publication/file/2019-10/743-Rebalance-long-EN-web.pdf>, p. 75.
- <sup>13</sup> [https://www.epsu.org/sites/default/files/article/files/Guide\\_GPG\\_EN\\_0.pdf](https://www.epsu.org/sites/default/files/article/files/Guide_GPG_EN_0.pdf), p. 8.
- <sup>14</sup> [https://www.siptu.ie/media/pressreleases2019/featurednews/fullstory\\_22328\\_en.html](https://www.siptu.ie/media/pressreleases2019/featurednews/fullstory_22328_en.html)
- <sup>15</sup> [https://ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR\\_Gender\\_equality\\_position\\_paper\\_and\\_action\\_plan\\_EN.pdf](https://ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR_Gender_equality_position_paper_and_action_plan_EN.pdf)
- <sup>16</sup> [http://www.ccre.org/docs/banner\\_charter\\_en.doc](http://www.ccre.org/docs/banner_charter_en.doc)
- <sup>17</sup> <http://afccre.org/fr/dossiers-thematiques/egalite-femmes-hommes/bonnes-pratiques#.V3KQQLILTIU>
- <sup>18</sup> [https://www.epsu.org/sites/default/files/article/files/gender\\_guidelines\\_EN\\_final\\_version.pdf](https://www.epsu.org/sites/default/files/article/files/gender_guidelines_EN_final_version.pdf)
- <sup>19</sup> See, for example, Spain, where unions are working for better coordination to ensure the legal obligation for an action plan is fulfilled: [https://fsc.ccoo.es/noticia:577022--Creamos\\_un\\_buzon\\_de\\_correo\\_para\\_canalizar\\_las\\_comunicaciones\\_sobre\\_planes\\_de\\_igualdad&opc\\_id=3505806d1e9420ce14f68ddba402ce62](https://fsc.ccoo.es/noticia:577022--Creamos_un_buzon_de_correo_para_canalizar_las_comunicaciones_sobre_planes_de_igualdad&opc_id=3505806d1e9420ce14f68ddba402ce62)
- <sup>20</sup> [https://ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR\\_EPSU\\_gender\\_equality\\_guidelines\\_EN.pdf](https://ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR_EPSU_gender_equality_guidelines_EN.pdf)
- <sup>21</sup> <https://www.jamstalldhetsmyndigheten.se/en/about-gender-equality/swedens-gender-equality-policy>
- <sup>22</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg\\_05\\_20/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_05_20/default/table?lang=en)
- <sup>23</sup> See p. 14 for public sector figures, p. 85 for breakdown into subsectors (these figures relate to 2017) <https://www.epsu.org/sites/default/files/article/files/GPGreport.pdf>
- <sup>24</sup> For one example, from an employers' perspective, see SALAR's nine-point gender equality programme: <https://webbutik.skr.se/sv/artiklar/en-jamstalld-arbetsgivarpolitik.html>
- <sup>25</sup> <https://www.jamstalldhetsmyndigheten.se/en>
- <sup>26</sup> <https://www.epsu.org/sites/default/files/article/files/GPGreport.pdf>, pp. 78-79.
- <sup>27</sup> <https://webbutik.skr.se/bilder/artiklar/pdf/5467.pdf>



with the financial support of the European Commission