Gender mainstreaming in surveys: Sweden

This is the Swedish contribution to the comparative analytical report on gender mainstreaming in surveys, coordinated via questionnaire by Anne-Marie Nicot from ANACT, France, and Irene Houtman from TNO, the Netherlands, for the European Working Conditions Observatory (EWCO). This report has not been subjected to the standard Foundation editorial procedures.

Q1: Who is responsible for administering national surveys in your country?
Is there a special unit in this institute dealing with gender statistics?
Please expand on the types of topics covered by this questionnaire/these questionnaires, and mention the year it started as a national survey, and whether this survey is a yearly exercise, every second year or has another periodicity.

The three surveys discussed in the Swedish survey data report are the:

- Work environment survey (Arbetsmiljöundersökningen, AMU), conducted by the central statistics office, Statistics Sweden (SCB), on a two-yearly basis since 1989;
- survey of Work-related disorders (Arbetsorsakade besvär), carried out annually by Statistics Sweden since 1991;
- Swedish information system for occupational accidents and work-related diseases (Informationssystemet för arbetsskador, ISA), which has been published annually since 1979.

Together, these statistical resources cover many key aspects of working life and chart their evolution over the years. The organisation responsible for the content of the reports is the Swedish Work Environment Authority (Arbetsmiljöverket), but the statistics are produced by Statistics Sweden (SCB) upon request from the Work Environment Authority¹.

This document is mainly based on information from the first two surveys.

The figure below shows the part of statistics production that Statistics Sweden is responsible for. In relation to quality of work and environment, the Swedish Work Environment Authority is the customer.

¹ In general, it can be said that 25 authorities (of which the Working Environment Authority is only one) are responsible for the content of various official surveys. Statistics Sweden is often the body that produces the statistics, but this is done following the instructions of the client. Therefore, the main responsibility of the gender sensitivity of the surveys rests on the various authorities, even though the equality unit in Statistics Sweden tries to give advice and to cooperate on making the surveys gender sensitive.
Coverage of surveys:
The Work environment survey: Number of women/men in the workplace, female/male supervisor, plans for the future, working time, working place, form of payment, development of working environment, risks at workplace, company-related healthcare, working conditions (physical), work organisation, atmosphere at workplace, work-related health problems, bullying/sexual harassment.

Work-related disorders survey: Occupational and commuting accidents, sick leave, health problems related to work, specific information such as ‘ache in arms’, ‘allergies’, etc. Also includes questions on the causes of health problems, such as vibration, noise, short repetitive tasks.

Information system for work-related accidents and diseases: A system for reporting and registration of occupational injuries.

Q2. In what way has the national survey(s) or questionnaire(s) on quality of working life (and health or employment) changed over the last decade(s)?

Which questions have been added, and which have been deleted in order to make the surveys more gender sensitive, and have any questions or topics changed (if so, in what way)?

Do you think that the survey(s) or questionnaire(s) have become more gender sensitive due to these changes?

According to sources in the equality unit in Statistics Sweden, contact with the Work Environment Authority has been good, and advice on gender sensitivity has been adopted. All the data are presented in sex-disaggregated format, and there is also discussion on how to interpret the findings in a gender sensitive way. All in all, the surveys analysed here can be seen as rather positive examples of successful gender mainstreaming.

The main change has been that the working environment survey has introduced questions on sexual harassment and bullying. These questions were included in 1995 and 1999. The questions on ‘sexual harassment by boss/work colleagues’ or ‘sexual harassment from other persons’ were introduced in 1995 and the question on ‘harassment from boss/work colleagues on basis of sex’ in 1999. This was mainly due to external pressure; requests for these figures kept being made by both the decision makers and the wider public. The work environment survey also includes interesting questions on overall time use (especially relevant for women with small children) and sick leave.

From 1997, all data in the work environment survey has been sex-disaggregated. The work-related diseases survey has made this distinction since 1995.
Q3. Please outline the way gender statistics are being produced and mainstreamed.

Who are the ‘users’ (e.g. policymakers or ministries, research institutions, gender issues advocates, etc)? How are they involved in the production process of gender statistics?

The users are ministries, the equality ombuds office and policymakers. In addition, research institutes use the data. According to sources within Statistics Sweden, increased pressure is coming from high-level policymakers for the availability of gender sensitive data, although this seems to vary upon individual interests from decision makers (some are more equality aware than others). Often, there is also lack of awareness from the client and user side, and this cannot be rectified so easily.

Are their needs collected in a systematic way?

No, but there seems to be a constant dialogue between the statistics producers (Statistics Sweden) and the decision makers. At the time of writing this report, one of my key informants was on secondment from Statistics Sweden to the Government Offices with the task of helping the government to adopt a strategy for the integration of gender equality into the Government Offices.

However, the relationships between different authorities can vary, with some being more cooperative and gender aware than others.

Are there any guidelines on how to produce engendered statistics?

An equality unit within Statistics Sweden screens the surveys for their gender sensitivity. This procedure is due to the influence of the Official Statistics Ordinance (2001:100, according to the ‘Women and men in Sweden’ booklet) where there is a paragraph in the section ‘Availability’: Article 14. ‘Official statistics related to individuals should be disaggregated by sex, unless there are special reasons for not doing so’.

Statistics Sweden has produced advice and guidelines for work with statistics disaggregated by sex (CBM 2004:1). The book can be ordered from Statistics Sweden or downloaded from the website.

The equality unit in Statistics Sweden has also received a small budget for raising awareness of gender sensitivity among its clients.

Are there any formal procedures to assess statistics produced with a gender perspective?

See above.

Are there specific publications dealing with gender that present and interpret topical data on women and men in a form suitable for a wide range of non-technical users?

Yes, a publication called ‘Women and men in Sweden’, which has been produced since 1984. Sweden was the first country to publish such a compact and easily accessible booklet, and 40 countries have followed the example. The booklet is widely distributed to many organisations and ministries, and provides comprehensible figures on women’s and men’s situation in different spheres of life.

Is there a publication on working conditions or quality of work and employment issues that takes into account gender issues?

- The ‘Women and men in Sweden’ booklet covers wage issues, working times, education and childcare, which can be seen as an active component for quality of work and employment.
- The Work environment survey report and the ‘Work-related disorders’ report both take into account the gender dimension, but this is no specific publication that deals with only gender.

Are statistics on individuals collected and presented or reported by gender?

Yes always.
What strategies have been put in place in order to produce, present and disseminate gender sensitive statistics?

See above.

Q4. What development(s) or causes may have been responsible for these changes in national statistics on quality of work and health in employment?

You are asked to comment briefly on major driving forces related to: 1) demographic changes, ageing of the work force; 2) the economy, such as recession; 3) legislative changes (acts or regulations that came into force); or 4) technical developments that have raised awareness of gender sensitive issues in your country.

Demographic changes: Fewer children are being born (1.7 children for every woman and 1.6 children for every man in 2003) and both women and men are living longer (life expectancy for girls who were born in 2003 is 82 years, and for boys 78 years). Women have become a vital part of the labour force, partly due to necessity as there is a need for more people in the workforce, especially in the future. Indeed, this will be specifically the case among female dominated areas of employment such as care. Women’s position in the labour force has also developed partly due to cultural changes, as it is more accepted and a norm nowadays that women work outside the home.

Another key factor is political will: the governments led by social democrats have, with the consensus of other parties, strongly striven for initiatives that enable equal participation in employment for both sexes. In 2003, 79% of women aged 20–64 years worked, while 3% were unemployed. The corresponding figures for men were 84% and 4%, respectively (Women and men in Sweden, 2004).

Regarding economic developments, the recession of the 1990s did not markedly discriminate according to sex. Both men and women suffered, and this is well documented in various reports and statistics (Working environment studies, 2003; Women and men in Sweden, 2004).

In relation to legislative changes, the following have been introduced:

1955 Three months paid maternity leave for working women on birth of child.
1971 Separate income tax assessment for wife and husband.
1974 Parents entitled to share parental allowances upon childbirth.
1977 Agreement between employers and unions on equal opportunities.
1979 Right to six-hour day for parents of small children.
1980 Law against sex discrimination in employment; spouse means test for student loan abolished; equal opportunities agreement with municipal and county governments.
1983 New equal opportunities agreement between employers and unions; all occupations open to women, including armed forces.
1984 The State Sector Equal Opportunities Ordinance.
1988 National five year plan of action to promote equal opportunities.
1994 Revised Equal Opportunities Act; new national policy for equal opportunities; gender statistics made part of Sweden’s official statistics.
2001 A more stringent version of the Equal Opportunities Act comes into force on 1 January.

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A critical view would say that they have always been a vital part of the labour force, but perhaps not so well recognised.
2002 Parental leave: Number of days increases by 30 sickness benefit days to reach a total of 480 days, 60 of which are reserved for each parent and cannot be transferred.

2004 A project is set up to review the gender equality policy.

2004 The Swedish Government adopts a strategy for the integration of gender equality into the Government Offices.

Q5. Can you provide (quantitative) information on gender sensitive indicators and their effects/outcomes?

You are asked to indicate which gender sensitive indicators are implemented in the national survey(s), and to provide this quantitative information for the workforce as a whole, as well as for both men and women.

Areas which these indicators may refer to are:

- gender specific working conditions, or gender specific ‘female’ or ‘male’ job characteristics (aesthetic, emotional demands) as identified by horizontal segregation, and/or female/health conditions, discrimination issues;
- gender pay gap;
- gender specific time preferences, working times or working time arrangements;
- care, work–family balance/work home interference, based on family information, caring responsibilities of workers and, possibly, availability of care infrastructure;
- or more generally unpaid work, and different attitudes/roles for men and women towards work and/or preferences;
- other (complex) indicators that may be present.

In 2002, women earned on average 83% of men’s wage for the same job, and decision making was largely in the hands of men – at least when in the private sector: only 19% of managers in the private sector were women in 2002. Statistics on wage developments between sexes are very defined and detailed. In the political arena, the division is more equal, for example 45% of parliament ministers are women.

Regarding pensionable income, women still lag behind in pension accumulation, which is a factor that is likely to cast its shadow well beyond their active years. For example, most of those receiving only a basic pension, ‘folkpension’, are women.

Some 89% of care workers are women, 85% of engineers are men, 91% of nurses are women, and 98% of machine drivers are men, just to mention a few examples. The ‘Women and men in Sweden’ booklet provides ample examples on all these and many other gender-related figures.

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3 This percentage includes all sectors. The value would be 92% if differences in age, education, working times, working sectors and professional groups were included.
These figures have clearly been used as a background in designing the government’s current equality strategy. The government has made a clear statement of what should be prioritised when it comes to gender equality policy:

*The government therefore considers it important that gender equality be integrated into all policy areas (gender mainstreaming). In addition to this, the government during its term of office (2002–2006) will focus on the following:*

- Representation: an equal distribution of power and influence;
- Equal pay for equal work and work of equal value;
- Men’s violence against women; prostitution, and trafficking in women for sexual purposes;
- Men and gender equality;
- Sexualisation of the public arena.


(See also answer under Q2.)

*Comment on gaps you identify in the survey(s) concerning its gender sensitivity.*

All the surveys discussed in this contribution provide quantitative information for the workforce as a whole. No major gaps are identified in the surveys. However, the question ‘Work has caused disorders due to….short, repetitive tasks’ in the survey on Work-related diseases could perhaps be developed further. Women are often subject to longer-interval
repetition, and this question seems to refer more directly to a ‘conveyor-belt’ type of situation; thus relevant information on women might be excluded.

Q6. Can you, in a more qualitative way, reflect on the quality of employment of men and women, and the political, societal or other discussion on the degree of, or need for gender mainstreaming in general in your country. 

Is it an issue at all, or maybe even a topical issue?

It seems an issue that is frequently on the agenda of political debate. There appears to be a political will to increase gender equality, although it is hard to judge how much of this is ‘lip-service’ (it seems to be fashionable to bring up gender equality) and how much is a genuine will to act. A minister of equality in the government is specifically appointed for the task of coordinating government policies on equality between women and men. In addition, all of the ministers are responsible for equality issues within their area. However, inequalities still persist. The Swedish labour market remains one of the most gender-segregated in the EU in both horizontal and vertical terms, and women still receive less pay for the same work.

Sometimes it seems that because Sweden is often regarded as an exemplary country when it comes to gender equality issues, a certain attitude prevails – at least at grass roots level – that enough has been done already and that gender equality will somehow take care of itself without extensive and active measures. However, gendered attitudes naturally still persist and cultural norms are hard to change, and the fact that this is not fully recognised can be detrimental for equality work.

Do the potential users of the gender statistics show any interest in learning about gender issues relating to quality of (working) life and employment, and are needs formulated on this topic? If so, what are these needs?

The users show varied interest. Some high-level policymakers are very committed, while others seem to assume that enough has been done already in the area and further measures are not necessary. Lower-level decision makers seem, on the whole, less interested.

If relevant, do you think the topic of gender mainstreaming is approached somewhat differently in your country, using different concepts?

There do not seem to be any major differences here in comparison with other countries.

Q7. Can any lessons be learned from the gender mainstreaming in surveys within your country for European level?

A group of key individuals persist in bringing forward the issues. This can be both positive and negative: it is good that individuals are committed to gender equality work and it seems indeed that some of the key individuals have really made a difference. However, if the interest is not wide enough, the work might cease when the individual retires or changes jobs. Therefore, it seems vital that equality work is continuously promoted with a wide group of individuals trained on relevant issues to ensure that a wide basis of engaged individuals actively strive for equality.

Funding is important. Changing key questions in large surveys is expensive and therefore money has to be made available for this. Furthermore, training people and keeping their gender-knowledge up to date takes financial commitment.

The attitude that ‘We are already there’ is dangerous, i.e. the assumption that gender equality or at least sensitivity has already been reached. This attitude assumes that no more work in the area is needed and that gender-equality will just somehow take care of itself. This also relates to the passive resistance that is often encountered at different levels, the attitude that assumes that there is no more need for additional gender-talk.

Sometimes a small thing – for example, the ‘Women and men in Sweden booklet’ – can achieve a lot. It is a popular booklet that is widely distributed, and it gives comprehensive
information on women’s and men’s situation in Sweden. Such easily accessible information can activate previously passive individuals when it comes to equality thinking and work.

References

Websites of key organisations referred to:
Statistics Sweden
Swedish Working Environment Authority