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On the 10th of February, last, former minister of social affairs and social security, Ásta Ragnheiður Jóhannesdóttir, formed a committee responsible for putting forth perceived implications of the financial crisis' differing effects on men and women.

From the beginning of the financial crisis it has been apparent that government will, over the coming years, have to reduce expenditure and create jobs. In taking on this immense task it is absolutely vital that a gender perspective is taken into consideration.

The primary assignment/obligation of the Gender Equality Monitor was to deliver a status-report to the minister of social affairs and social security, laying out it's suggestions. The report was handed in, in March 2009. The report predict what government should emphasize in relation to implementing a gender perspective with regards to decisions made concerning reaction to the crisis.

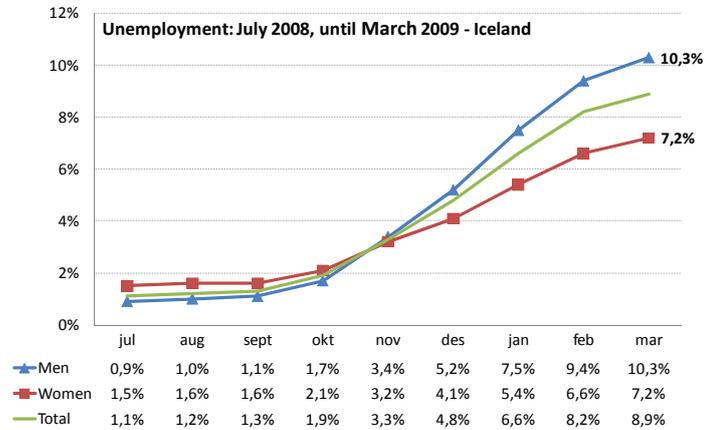
In an effort to achieve gender equality, the gender equality Act (in Iceland) underscores the importance of equal rights for men and women. Common definitions then further stipulate rights, obligations and opportunity of both men and women in society. In this short presentation I will touch upon a few of these issues and in an effort to achieve structure, I wish partition this talk by asking three questions.

The first two questions concern directly the issued looked into by the Gender Equality Monitor. The third question follows, as it relates to the mandate of the committee, advising on policy areas in which gender mainstreaming should be implemented, and I feel it is important we discuss.

- 1. In what way will/does the economic crisis, differently effect men and women in the labour market**
- 2. In what way will/does the economic crisis effect gender based violence**
- 3. Is the Icelandic public sector capable of implementing gender mainstreaming in different policy areas**

Firstly:

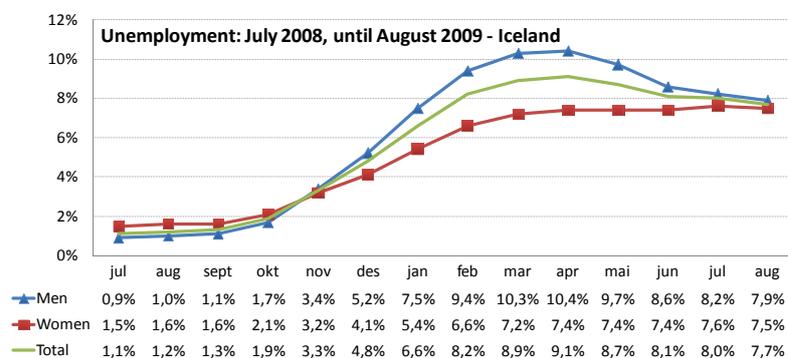
1. In what way will/does the economic crisis, differently effect men and women in the labour market



On the first slide, we see a time-series, taken from the status rapport, showing unemployment in Iceland. It show the development from July 2008, where it is apparent that unemployment is almost non existent (measuring 0,9% for men and 1,5% for women).

In March 2009 unemployment had reached 10,3% for men and women at the same time measured 7,2%. This portrays a sharp increase over only a half-year period.

Behind these numbers is a story, well documented, which we can portray simply by saying that men have been more effected in the first months after the collapse in Iceland. We know for example that from September in 2008 there has been a surge of layoffs in the building industry, at the same time as layoffs resulted from the collapse of the banking sector. Statistics form the directorate of labour tells that 70% of all those laid off in February, because of downsizing, were men.



In this slide we see what has happened after Mach and until August, this year. It seems as though men to a greater extend then women have been getting their jobs back. Especially during the summer-months. At the same time unemployment for women seems to be more stable throughout the period March/August.

Experience from other countries tells us that women remain unemployed for longer periods after

an increase in total unemployment – as now seen in Iceland. Women do not re-enter the labour market as quickly as men, and are to a greater extent part-time employed or employed less than they would like to be. Of course it is not advisable to over-interpret this picture, as we can expect that a part of it is explained by foreign workers, which have increasingly left the country. But in any case we should monitor this development very closely.

While interpreting these pictures it is also very important that we take into consideration the differing forms of employment/employment patterns. Employment can vary due to seasonal change. But that goes only further to emphasize a gender segregated labour market. That will then also give us a reason to believe that any special projects to increase employment will differently benefit men and women.

It is very important that we take into consideration that from 2010 it is foreseeable that layoffs will begin to take effect in the public sector. If downsizing does not take into consideration the gender segregation of the labour market, it will result in more women losing their jobs, due to the overrepresentation of women in the public sector.

Much of the work carried out by the Gender Equality Monitor involved communication and the seeking of opinions of professionals, specialists and academics, asking for views on differing effects of the crisis on men and women. We got information confirming that men have a tendency to experience a greater shock, when losing their job, than do women. Research also shows that men seem to relate more of their self-image/identity to vocation or occupation.

Men seeking jobs are more inclined to apply only for jobs within their former field of work. Men are also less likely to take part in organised activities for unemployed people. Women the other hand are more open to apply for jobs that do not fall within their experience. Women, unlike men, are also more likely to participate in organized activities.

The Gender Equality Monitor emphasises that those responsible for planning organised activities for unemployed people, take into consideration the differing needs of men and women.

And now:

2. In what way will/does the economic crisis effect gender based violence

Experience of crisis in other countries has shown that we can expect to see an increase in crime and criminal activity in relation with the financial crisis in Iceland.

If this will be the case, it will most likely also manifest itself in an increase in gender based violence and domestic violence. However, according to information gathered by the Gender Equality Monitor, there was not a confirmed increase in the number of reported incidents of gender based violence last winter. Numbers for the whole of last year were then not available.

Academics which were consulted pointed out that higher levels of reported gender based violence strongly correlates with people's increased personal debt, financial problems as well as unemployment.

With women's increased unemployment so too does the risk increase, for those also victims of violence, that they become socially isolated. Thus less likely to report abuse and seek help.

Another manifestation of the relationship between financial problems and gender based violence can be seen in currently weak housing/real estate market. It was pointed out that women-victims of domestic violence might feel pressured to stay in troubled relationships because of fewer possibilities to sell their current property. It is the reality for many in Iceland, that personal debt/household debt has risen so dramatically that it functions as a type of "prison" people can't get

out of.

It is therefore truly sad, that at the same time women are increasingly using counselling centres, for survivors of sexual violence and/or gender based violence, such centres must lay off employees and cut costs.

In Iceland there is one operating counselling-alternative for men that have anger management problems or have a history of domestic violence. It has proven hard to secure funding for this program and it seems as though it will become even harder in future.

The Gender Equality Monitor firmly proposes that government, as well as local authorities, secure future funding for those counselling alternative that we already have in place.

And then:

3. Is the Icelandic public sector capable of implementing gender mainstreaming in different policy areas

Integration of gender perspectives in public sector policies and/or decision making, known as: Gender mainstreaming has been a central strategy in some of the Nordic countries for some time now. For the last years this method for equality assessment had also been implemented in budgeting, known as: Gender budgeting.

It can be said that a general finding of the committee for monitoring gender equality was that, in coming years, it is of utmost importance that the public sector utilize available and proven methods for implementing gender equality at all levels.

The Icelandic gender equality Act states that all ministries, within central government, shall take into consideration issues of gender equality within their field of operation. All ministries shall have a special gender representative, responsible for the implementation of gender mainstreaming. The gender representative shall also be responsible for reporting to the centre for gender equality on progress within his respective ministry.

To be honest, integration of gender perspectives within the public sector does not exist as a practiced method of governance. On the one hand, the centre for gender equality is to blame for this- we should be making stricter demands. But on the other hand the blame lies with a historic disinterest (I stress: Lack of interest) and lack of competence, regarding active implementation of gender mainstreaming.

It can be costly for some organizations to implement gender mainstreaming. And cost can surely be attributed as one of the reasons for a lack of interest. Gender mainstreaming also requires a level of insight and ability that takes time to attain. But this can not be a valid excuse.

Last autumn Iceland experienced interesting times. Although much of what took place was negative; collapse, bankruptcy and riots, there was an apparent desire for a critical assessment of our values. A need for change. The general discourse demonstrated an eagerness to get rid of a value-system that for so many years has ignored gender equality.

One of the most important prerequisites for attaining “a change”, is a shared understanding of where we are headed. But as important is the credibility of those leading, it is important that they achieve what they proclaim. A new government has on many occasions acknowledged an understanding of matters concerning gender equality. However, proclamations have not been followed by a political will. I urge government to initiate their intentions as quickly as possible.