

Ann Boman's intro to JämStöds final report:

## **Support for the Future: Gender mainstreaming and its prerequisites**

Final report of the Swedish Gender Mainstreaming Support Committee (JämStöd)  
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The report is available in Swedish at <http://www.regeringen.se>

### *Introduction*

Despite gender-neutral laws and regulations, it happens every day: people are treated according to their sex and not on the basis of their individual needs.

Hip-joint fractures are a common ailment among patients at emergency hospitals, and three such patients out of four are women. At Sahlgrenska University Hospital in Göteborg, a study shows that among elderly women who suffer fractured hip-joints, one in ten are given painkillers in the ambulance. The corresponding figure for men is four in ten. Another study shows that men are more likely than women to be rushed to hospital with the blue light and siren on. Women's ailments are considered less pressing.

Most people get upset when they read about the kinds of injustices outlined above and agree that gender mainstreaming would seem to be a good and reasonable strategy for improving public services from a gender equality viewpoint. Gender mainstreaming is one of the truly important challenges that Swedish public services face. For surely we cannot continue allowing it to remain a matter of choice whether the services provided by the public sector are attuned to women's needs as well as to men's? As far as I can see, the only solution is to embark on a systematic, long-term effort to ensure public-service provision on equal terms.

Such an endeavour has been under way in Sweden for the past few years. At the Swedish Government Offices, active development work has been in progress since 2003, and the gender mainstreaming support committee, JämStöd, has played a vital part in it. As a result, many government ministries and agencies have begun working towards a greater gender balance in their activities.

While they have been largely successful, efforts in this field must be intensified and broadened to include all actors – agencies, municipalities, entrepreneurs and state-owned companies – that are financed out of public funds and which provide services to the general public or otherwise deal with it. People mainly come into contact with public institutions at local or regional level – at social insurance or employment offices, in the public transport system, in schools, in health services and in elderly care facilities etc. It is here that both general perceptions of gender and one's own perceptions may create inequalities in public service provision. This is why extensive efforts must be made at both local and regional level if Sweden's gender equality policy is to succeed.

Gender equality is an issue that arouses strong feelings. Why? The realisation that people are graded according to their sex, and that this relationship is a fundamental one in our society, is not easy to digest. It represents a challenge to established thinking about what the world should look like. The argument that this power structure survives because you and I allow it to may sound extreme, but it is nevertheless worth considering. Structures cannot maintain themselves – it is we women and men living in the community who maintain them. This means we can also choose to do things differently, to build new structures.

While gender equality is a challenging issue in itself, gender mainstreaming often represents an even greater challenge. It is after all a strategy that is supposed to lead to action – new forms of action. As a result, conflicts arise that would never have arisen when gender equality work was confined to special women's projects or took the form of a subsidiary activity. Asking how an operation is run from a gender equality perspective almost always yields fresh insights. Such insights have developed in many organisations. But it is not until they are put to use in changing an organisation's day-to-day activities that gender equality in society comes a step closer. We now know that systematic and ongoing efforts are required to this end.

JämStöd has built up a support programme for gender mainstreaming. Ministries and agencies have been equipped with methods and tools, but also with an awareness of what opportunities exist and how strategies for change can be applied. We have had numerous partners in this endeavour, which means that exponents of the JämStöd approach are now to be found in many areas of central government administration.

The proposals outlined in the report are intended to reach actors financed out of public funds. A supporting structure is needed that can help sustain work at all levels – national, regional and local. If we are to move from words to deeds without losing momentum, vigorous efforts will be required, both in depth and across the board.

What might be the outcome of such an undertaking? Gender equality in labour market programmes. Gender equality in social insurance provision. Gender equality in schools. Gender equality in health care. In short: Gender equality in public services.

JämStöd herewith concludes its work by presenting proposals for how activities in support of gender mainstreaming might be organised in the years to come.

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Chair of inquiry