

High-level Segment of ECOSOC 2006.

Roundtable 4:

“Innovation at work: national strategies to achieve gender equality in employment”

Statement by Anne Kathrine Slungård, Chair Statoil Boards of Elections, Norway.

It's a great pleasure an honour to be present here today.

Not only Norway, both Europe are facing two main challenges in the years ahead. The first is to ensure that more children are born. The second is to ensure that more people work and that more people work longer. The solution to these challenges lies in viewing family and equality policy in close conjunction with labour market policy. We must both increase the birth rate and achieve an inclusive working life.

Norway has good public arrangements for families with small children, which have been introduced precisely to make it possible for both mothers and fathers to combine work with child care.

Flexibility is a key word. We have a long period of paid parental leave and a father's quota which is six weeks now; two weeks were added last Sunday! From January next year it will be easier for parents to combine part time work with paid parental leave.

The Government gives high priority to providing full day care coverage. Organised after-school activities come in addition to this.

43 per cent of employed women work part-time. Men work full time, and many of them work a great deal of overtime. This means that we are a long way from full equality on the labour market, in the division of power and care and in terms of income and promotion.

It is impossible to exploit the workforce potential represented by women unless men take their share of child care. Workplaces must notice that men are parents! The Government will therefore increase the father's quota to ten weeks by extending the total period of paid leave. This may hopefully, in the longer term, promote somewhat more equal distributions of care responsibilities and more equal distribution of work and care between men and women.

During 2007 the Government will present a White Paper to the Parliament on “Men and Gender Equality”. I believe, the first in its kind in the world.

Equal parenthood is the key to equality at work. Equality at work, where both men and women take part in the labour force and contribute their expertise, experience and skills is, in turn, the key to increased productivity and economic growth.

But, this is not enough. We realize that gender equality in work life much is a question of who is on the top. To adress this challenge, a large majority of the Norwegian Parliament in December 2003 adopted a new law which says that 40 per cent of board members are to be women. From January 2006 times started running; the companies have to start recruiting more women into board-rooms. And they only have two years to complete this. If not, they may be dissolved.

Why is this decided, what kind of firms are affected and will it actually be possible to implement it?

Why?

We need more diversity in our management and board rooms. And we have to use all the human resources in the country, not just half of it!

Diversity strengthens the companies’ possibilities to rapid adjustments and improves the management of the companies.

In Norway, there are a high number of women in paid work, and Norwegian women are also highly educated. For several years, more women then men have finished a higher education.

Almost 65 per cent of the students at universities and university colleges are women.

The problem is not that we don’t have qualified women. The challenge is to recruit our highly qualified women into leadership positions and make use of their competence.

What kind of firms are affected?

Companies that are 100 per cent state owned.

Privately owned *public* limited liability companies (ASA)

Private limited liability companies (AS)

The rules does not concern the administrative management of the companies, but the supervisory boards, consisting of members elected by the general assembly.

Enforcement.

No new laws regarding enforcement have been passed.

Company legislation provides for the enforcement of the rules regarding the composition of the board. The rules regarding gender representation will have a natural place in these provisions.

According to the rules on enforcement, a company which does not have a board that fulfils the statutory requirements will be dissolved automatically by order of the Court if they don't fulfil the legal demands within the given time-limits.

Dissolution has been a part of the legal system since 1077, in almost 30 years, and has not caused any problems so far. Experience shows that most companies where discrepancies are pointed out, correct these in due time. Therefore, it is unlikely that any companies will be dissolved by the court on account of the gender representation rule.

Norwegian companies are these days very active in recruiting women both to boards positions and into the administrative management of the companies. We should all take seriously that half of the competence that companies need to maintain position in international competition is found among women. So, achieving gender equality is both a question of justice and a question of productivity and economic growth. These are not just fine words, they are harsh realities that we must accept.

Thank you for your attention.