

Briefly about women's situation on the Danish labour market

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Gap in wages grow

The discussion about equal rights and wages in Denmark are not central in the discussion in Denmark at the moment in despite of the fact that there is a growing gap between women's and men's wages. In our Union, HK, the average wages for women are 81% of men's wages. The gap is smaller if you are low-paid - 90% - and bigger if you work in leading positions and is well paid. Here women earn 71% of the men's wages.

In general women earn 76% of men's wages. It is worse in the private sector. The difference is double as big as in the public sector.

There has been no positive development in the last 20 years. This is very embarrassing for the Danish Government.

Pensions and qualifications

There is a trend at the moment that says that children are best off together with their mothers. I think, it is because 90% of all women in Denmark are on the labour market - the highest number in Europe - and it is very hard on the public economy to finance day care for all these children. On the other hand women are in a situation with much pressure to get an education and a career. Quite a lot of women takes leave from their jobs or from unemployment when their children are small, and that gives them trouble later, both to find a place to get back to and regarding their pensions.

In Denmark everybody get a public pension but more and more unions make agreement with the employers unions on labour pensions like in other EU countries. We have opposed against this, because the difference in wages gets much bigger when you retire. The unemployed, the sick, the ones on leave are the ones who pay. And most of them are women.

Health

An even bigger problem is women's position in the statistics of health damages: Muscular diseases are being rejected as work related in almost every case. There has been very much discussion about this in the last 10 years, but nothing is being done. The reason is that it will be very expensive for the public finances if the women should get compensation. And the unions haven't been strong enough to come forward with the demand. Recently our Minister of Labour has proposed that trades with a lot of injuries should pay more in insurance - but it is not clear if this will help the women. 58,4% of the early retired are women.

In researches, investigations and surveys it has been proved that working health and safety is one of the most important issues for the unions to deal with if you ask the members. Yet it is still very low prioritised in most unions. We have in many years worked hard to change this. The explanation could be that there is quite a lot of legislation about working health and the unions mostly work on an agreement basis.

Unemployment and developing of a "third labour market":

There are still more women than men unemployed: In 1995 9% of the men were unemployed and 12% of the women, in 1998 the numbers were 5,5% and 7,8%.

The Danish government has in the last 7 years made an effort to reduce the unemployment - with

some success but also by violating some basal human rights that makes you think of the 1930ties:
Forced labour with no union rights! And for a wage that is 10 DKr. more than the payment you get from the social welfare. And the work doesn't count so you can earn the right to support from the Union's unemployment fund.

A new survey shows that only 8,6% of the HK-members in “activation” got a job after the “activation”. Last year it was 10,4%.

Main disagreements in the unions at the time present are:

1. Consequences of Information Technology (IT): Tele working, working hours, free-lance and short time employment etc.

2. Health insurance in private hospitals

3. Privatisation

Other interesting numbers:

The labour market in 1985: 54,7% men, 45,3 women. In 1998: 53,8% men, 46,3% women.
In 1988 74% of all children were in kindergarten, in 1998 it was 90%.