



## CEMR Seminar on “The European Charter for Equality of women and men in local life after 10 years: Results and Ways Forward”

**Mr Anders Knappe**

Nicosia, 22 April 2016

Dear colleagues, elected representatives and dear experts:

Thank you for inviting me to this seminar. I'm here as the Executive President of CEMR. But I am also the Chair of the City Council of Karlstad and vice President of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR).

Since the launch of the European Charter for equality of women and men in local life in 2006, I have been a firm supporter of its implementation. I strongly believe that the Charter is a valuable instrument to encourage local and regional authorities to make a political commitment in favour of gender equality in local life.

### SALAR and the Charter

SALAR is one of the few national organisations to have signed the Charter, doing so within a month of the Charter's 2006 launch in Innsbruck. All our 310 members: municipalities, county councils and regions, received a letter from the board where they were invited to sign the Charter and work to implement it. Today 116 members have signed the Charter and that covers around 90 % of the Swedish population since big municipalities and regions have signed it.

In SALAR's congress document, that governs the work of the organisation, gender equality is one of four perspectives that should permeate the work. The others are equality, diversity and EU. SALAR has its own CEMR-action plan for managers, co-workers and politicians with the objective to support the members in their work for gender equality in their political role, their role as employers and as service providers for women and men, girls and boys.

The dual approach, specific actions and gender mainstreaming, is essential. **Sex disaggregated statistics is a necessary tool to raise visibility and monitor progress. If you can't measure it, you can't improve it!** Training is also offered to the signatories on how to write a CEMR action plan. This sounds good, but SALAR is far from perfect; the work for gender equality must always be on the agenda. It's a process of change that takes time, the changes must be implemented in ordinary working routines and steering processes and needs to have support from the top management. And of course resources for the work.

### Economy and gender equality

Women and men do not have the same opportunities in Sweden or other parts of Europe. There is still a lot of work to do. Essentially, **gender equality is a human right, regardless of**



**whether it is profitable or not.** Pragmatically, it can be concluded that the benefits of the utilitarian argument are greater than the disadvantages.

Extensive research has shown in a multitude of contexts that when women have equal chances with men to be socially and politically active, economies and societies thrive. Women's more balanced participation in decision-making contributes to positive transformative processes for societies, such as changes in laws, policies, services, institutions, and social norms. The essential contribution of women to communities, societies and economies, as well as the high costs of gender inequality need to be fully recognised.

- If participation rates for women were to reach those of men by 2030, there would be a 12% increase in GDP<sup>1</sup>
- Equality between women and men is not just a question of fairness, but also an economic objective. The potential income of non-working women on the basis of education, age and other sociodemographic characteristics, the latest Eurofound figures estimate that the gender employment gap costs 325 billion euros to the EU, i.e., 2,5 % of the EU GDP.<sup>2</sup>
- The World Bank Group takes as its starting point that no country, community, or economy can achieve its potential or meet the challenges of the 21st century without the full and equal participation of women and men, girls and boys. Failure to fully unleash women's productive potential meanwhile represents a major missed opportunity with significant consequences for individuals, families, and economies.

Gender equality is a core development objective in its own right. But greater gender equality is also smart economics, enhancing productivity and improving other development outcomes, including prospects for the next generation and for the quality of societal policies and institutions.<sup>3</sup>

#### Gender based violence and gender equality

- Violence against women remains widespread in all CEMR member states, with devastating consequences for women, societies and economies. Opened for signature in May 2011, the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention) is the most far-reaching international treaty to tackle this serious violation of human rights. The EU Commission now suggests that EU should ratify the convention within the limits of its jurisdiction. That would mean a better mandate to collect statistics of the extent and nature of the violence against women. It would also show how the convention is applied

<sup>1</sup> (Source: *Closing the Gender Gap - Act Now*, OECD, 2012)

<sup>2</sup> (Source: *Eurofound presentation to informal EPSCO meeting*, July 2015)

<sup>3</sup> (Source: *World development report*, World Bank, 2012)



and implemented in different member states through the reports to GREVIO, an independent group of experts will monitor the implementation of the Convention.

- To recognise the costs of gender inequality, gender based violence is a clear example. EIGE, the European Institute of Gender Equality, has made a report on how to estimate the costs of gender-based violence in the European Union with all the different impacts the violence has in different areas of society.<sup>4</sup>
- The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare has made an estimation of the costs. The difficulties of estimating the costs are many. Some estimates are safer than others and several aspects have not been possible to include. The uncertainty of the available data - and sometimes the lack of data - the analysis can only be said to be a conservative estimate of the economic costs.
- An estimation is that men's violence against women in close relations each year costs the community over 300 million Euros, a figure which rises with double or more for other violence against women, such as assault, stalking and rape by unknown perpetrator included. There are direct costs such as the judicial system and health care and indirect costs such as loss of productivity and sick leave. Then there is of course suffering and loss of quality of life and the costs of children witnessing the violence.<sup>5</sup>

### Men and gender equality

How local and regional governments design their services and how they act as employers is of vital importance to women's and men's living conditions and opportunities to live gender equal lives.

Despite the fact that men's involvement is crucial for the realisation of gender equality, men have been too absent in the gender equality work. There are organisations of men working for gender equality, but equality work has largely been done by women's organisations or by individual women.

There has also been a lack of overall strategic work involving men and boys as target groups. Inequality is a result of norms and structures maintained by both women and men. Thus, a gender equality work should include also men.

Men as a group have privileges in our societies. But we know that destructive masculinity norms also have negative consequences for men, partly manifested in the form of illness and increased mortality. Conversely, an equal lifestyle is positive for health, relationships and

<sup>4</sup> Source: <http://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/MH0414745ENC.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Source: *Kostnader för våld mot kvinnor - En samhällsekonomisk analys*, Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, 2006: [http://www.socialstyrelsen.se/Lists/Artikelkatalog/Attachments/9744/2006-131-34\\_200613134.pdf](http://www.socialstyrelsen.se/Lists/Artikelkatalog/Attachments/9744/2006-131-34_200613134.pdf)





parenting, which in turn has positive implications for women and children and ultimately society as a whole.

We have in previous projects seen how boys' school performance is increased when the active work conducted just questions the prevailing norms of masculinity. This is an essential knowledge and experience as we know that boys' school performance drops at an alarming rate.

If men take more responsibility for unpaid care and household work women's skills can be utilised to a greater extent in the labour market, men may instead closer relationships with their children and so on. Good welfare, child and elderly care, an inclusive labour market and equivalent educational system are needed for women and men to shape the society and their own lives.

#### Europe, the Charter and the Observatory

In spite of the success of the Charter at European level, many of the signatories—lacking examples of best practice and expertise—have had a hard time fulfilling their commitments and drawing up action plans. Signatories also demand concrete examples of good practices that could serve as ideas in the development of activities. CEMR noticed this request of support. In order to respond to this need, the establishment of the Observatory was important and the reason why SALAR decided to finance this project for a period of three years.

The website of the Observatory is a useful tool for the follow-up of the implementation of the Charter. As a platform for exchange: it provides support on how to draw action plans and give examples of good practice. It shows an atlas over the signatories and provide examples of action plans. Now there are also the indicators that make it possible to measure how your own work for gender equality develops and also to benchmark with other signatories. The website needs to be taken care of, it needs resources, both human and technical.

The Observatory is more than the website. It's all of us who can make this work! The Standing Committee, national coordinators, all the signatories and the CEMR Observatory Secretariat! You all do an extremely important job but as we say here in Sweden when things take time: Rome wasn't built in a day.

Soon we will celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Charter. The CEMR Charter on Gender Equality is, today, one of the corner stones of the work of CEMR. The Standing Committee on Equality and CEMR members faces new challenges to support the Observatory in the implementation of the Charter and to work for the sustainability of the Observatory.

I call all the members of CEMR to support and finance a sustainable economic plan for the Observatory so we have the means to advance but also to prove that we are committed to gender equality! 10 years and yet many actions to be taken!