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CONSTRUCTING A SWEDISH GENDER EQUALITY INDEX FOR REGIONAL AND LOCAL COMPARISONS

Paper submitted by Sweden[1]

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to report on the ongoing endeavours at Statistics Sweden to build up a gender equality database containing statistics at the municipal (NUTS 5) and county (NUTS 3) levels. We intend subsequently to use the information in the database to create a gender equality index showing the status and development of gender equality in different parts of Sweden over the past 10–15 years.

Background

At the beginning of the 1990s, a gender equality index for the Swedish municipalities was developed at Statistics Sweden. This index was based on certain variables that could be linked to the definition of gender equality. The definition is as follows:

Women and men have equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities to:

- Have a job that gives them economic independence
- Take care of the home and children
- Take part in political, union and other activities in society.

The variables that the gender equality index was based on were:

- Economic activity rates for women and men in ages 20–44 and 45–64
- Percentage of women and men with higher education in ages 20–44 and 45–64
- Income from work for women and men in ages 20–44 and 45–64
- The share of days for which benefits from the parental insurance system were available used by women and men respectively
  - for taking care of young children
  - for taking care of sick children
- The sex distribution in municipal councils.

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The closer the women's and men's values were for different variables, the higher the municipality scored on that variable. Where the first three variables were concerned, we also took the total level into account. In other words, the higher the total share of people in gainful employment in each age group, the higher the share of people with higher education and the higher the overall income level were, the higher the municipality scored.

All the values for the different variables were then added up for each municipality. The municipalities were then ranked on the basis of their total scores and were divided into six groups, with group 1 comprising the municipalities with the best scores and group 6 those with the worst.

The municipalities never learned the results as exact values; instead, they were presented in the form of choropleth maps of the municipalities (with municipalities coloured according to value). The maps showed either all municipalities in Sweden or all municipalities in a particular county.

The analysis described above was undertaken for 4 years at the beginning of the 1990s. Clients who purchased another product, a 4-page fact sheet called "Women and men in your municipality", got a choropleth map of Sweden on the back of this fact sheet. They were then able to see on the map which group their municipality ended up in, and the other municipalities that belonged to the same group. Some counties also purchased maps covering the municipalities in their own county.

No other report was issued on the gender equality index nor was it disseminated to anyone other than the clients already mentioned.

New demand for annual update of the gender equality index

The annual updates of the index were discontinued in the mid-1990s because of a lack of resources. Now the demand for updates has grown again. For example, in the strategy for regional development presented in 1999, the Västra Götaland region (NUTS 3) set forth as its declared goal that within 10 years it should stand out as a pioneer region in the field of gender equality. This raises a demand for facts about women and men both in that region and in other regions in Sweden. In order to follow how gender equality has developed, time series are also needed.

Statistics Sweden has received a new commission

All the counties in Sweden – a total of 21 NUTS 3 regions – with Västra Götaland leading the way, have now asked Statistics Sweden to develop a new gender equality index based on municipal level data. The index is to be updated annually and contain data (as far as possible) from 1985 onwards (including as current data as possible). Statistics Sweden has recently started work on constructing this new index along the lines of the proposal I describe below.

Constructing and disseminating the new gender equality index

To begin with, I would like to call attention to a fact that is important in this connection, namely, that Sweden's Statistical Databases are available free of charge via Statistics Sweden's web site.

This has been the case since 1 January 2000. The databases contain a large quantity of information about the Swedish population, such as population distribution, education, work, the economy, social services, etc. Most of this information is available at the municipal level (NUTS 5). The user can download statistics using a special software program, PC-AXIS, which is also available at our web site. The statistics can then be further processed in MSExcel, for example.

Sweden's Statistical Databases thus contain a great deal of information that is important for studying gender equality at regional and local levels, and we are making use of this fact now, in developing the new gender equality index at Statistics Sweden. The solution we have chosen is therefore to construct a similar database for gender equality, providing the same opportunities for extracting statistics as are offered by Sweden's Statistical Databases. This will enable the user to download further information about the municipalities or counties in addition to "gender equality variables" and the gender equality index. Using the Internet as the channel for dissemination will also facilitate the updating and dissemination of data. No reports will need to be sent out.

The gender equality database will therefore be accessible via Statistics Sweden's web site. Either it will be available freely, like Sweden's Statistical Databases, or the purchaser, i.e. the counties, will be given a code that allows them access to the database so they can download their statistics.

A variety of display options

One improvement compared with the old gender equality index is that the new gender equality - database will offer a greater range of options for displaying data. We intend to test the following options:

- A table showing the user's choice of variable from the database for all municipalities/counties.
- A table showing the gender equality index for all municipalities/counties.
- A table showing several different variables for one specific municipality. The user will just have to click on the municipality on the map.
- A map showing the user's choice of variables for all municipalities/counties. Here a symbol map may be appropriate. In this type of map, a symbol is inserted in each municipality/county. Its form may for example show a time series. It is also possible to use the form and colour of the symbol to show two variables at the same time, e.g. a result variable and a background variable (I will say a little more about these later).
- A map showing the gender equality index for all municipalities/counties, e.g. a choropleth map (municipalities/counties coloured according to values).

Proposed contents of the new gender equality database

At the time of writing, the contents of the database have not been definitively settled. Our commission includes constructing a prototype with about 10 variables from different total population surveys. Municipal level data must be available for the variables, which must further be based on the definition of gender equality given above. In order to obtain additional information that is lacking in the total population surveys, one or more variables from a large sample survey will also be tested in the prototype. A breakdown and display of these variables will only be possible at the county level.

A few of the different proposed variables that we will test are listed below. For each variable a ratio of women to men will be established.

Proposed result variables at the municipal level
(all statistics are presented by sex)

Work giving economic independence
- Economic activity rate by age
- Percentage of economically active working part-time by age
- Percentage of population seeking jobs by age
- Percentage of population in labour market policy programmes by age
- Percentage of population with higher education by age
- Choice of programme in upper secondary school
- Income from work (or total earned income) by age
- Percentage receiving social assistance

Taking care of the home and children
- Use of parental insurance system (persons and days)

Political, union and other activities in society
- Sex distribution in municipal councils

Other
- Gender-related violence (municipal or county level)

Proposed result variables at the county level

Work giving economic independence
- Percentage of economically active working part-time (if the variable at the municipal level cannot be used)
- Percentage of economically active in temporary positions

Proposed background variables at the municipal level

- Average age
- Industrial structure
- Children in municipal daycare
- Ill health rates

Statistics Sweden will propose a gender equality index, i.e. a composite measure made up of 3–4 of the ratios from the result variables. But according to plan, users will also be able to construct their own gender equality index. A user may want to give greater emphasis to another variable or quite simply see whether a different combination of variables results in a new gender equality index.

Keeping the database up-to-date

We intend to update the database as soon as more current figures are available for a variable, i.e. on an ongoing basis throughout the year.

Timetable for the prototype

Work has begun and will enter an intensive phase in September. A consultative group consisting of a number of the counties ordering the service will submit their opinions on our proposals in August and September. According to our commission, a prototype is supposed to be ready for testing by all counties, i.e. all the clients, on 30 September 2000.

Future extension

Apart from extending the database by adding new variables to the Swedish base, future extension could also involve comparisons between different EU countries. The level for comparisons could be county (NUTS 3), but the national level would probably also be of interest. In the Nordic countries, there is a considerable amount of comparable data all the way down to the municipal level, which in Sweden corresponds to NUTS 5.