

GENDER GOES MAINSTREAM

The Austrian Bundesland of Styria has quite a reputation for promoting gender equality in the labour market. For instance, the Styrian Pact for Employment, which binds the regional government and the employment services to jointly plan labour market policies, incorporates gender mainstreaming as a guiding principle. The same applies to six sub-regional pacts whose remit is to tailor training and employment measures as closely as possible to the needs of their regional districts and local areas. Those sub-regional pacts each have a steering group representing employment services, social partner organisations and public authorities. Each group must include a gender equality adviser to ensure that its activities are assessed from a gender perspective. The role of this advisor is to propose how a gender dimension should be integrated but the responsibility for making it all happen lies with the decision-makers in the relevant organisations and authorities.



However, the [“Just GeM”](#) Development Partnership (DP) did not believe that this approach would really encourage a sustainable process of gender mainstreaming. The DP found that even if specific gender equality goals were formulated for each pact, in most cases these had no influence on the daily practices of the various players involved in the delivery of employment policies. *“This is sometimes due to a lack of political will,”* says Herta Kindermann-Wlasak, the Deputy Director of the Regional Employment Office, *“but mostly it is due to the fact that gender mainstreaming is a highly complex concept and its implementation requires a lot of knowledge and expertise that is often not available in the different institutions.”*

A REGIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Coordinated by a non-profit organisation for regional development and with major input from NOWA, a regional association committed to gender equality, Just GeM set out to make gender equality an integral part of mainstream labour market policies in Styria, so that women and men could benefit equally.

DEVELOPING A SIX-STAGE MODEL

The DP developed a six-stage model enabling the key players to look at every step in the process of changing policies, from their design to their evaluation.

- The first stage involves a gender impact assessment to find out how men and women are represented in the relevant decision-making processes and also how women, as compared to men, are benefiting from the various training and labour market integration policies. The exercise includes a screening not only of the respective budget allocations but also of the other resources such as time, space and accessibility which are devoted to individual policies. In addition, the analysis looks into the differences between the life situations and circumstances of men and women and checks if and how such differences have been taken into account by the policies and practices. Based on all of the outcomes of the assessment, gender equality targets are formulated and a viable action plan is developed to attain these targets;
- Stage two requires the anticipation and analysis of the obstacles that are most likely to hamper progress towards the desired goals;
- The next Stage groups a range of options that are considered to have the potential to overcome any obstacles;

- This is followed by a SWOT analysis that reduces the options agreed at Stage three to those that are the most realistic and viable solutions in terms of cost and benefits, available time and organisational context;
- Stage five presents the biggest challenge, as during the implementation of the selected option(s), the gender dimension must be integrated into the management and control systems of each organisation. Only if this is achieved, can stumbling blocks and deviations be detected and action taken to readjust the implementation strategy to the needs of both the organisation and its female and male clients;
- Last, but not least, Stage six establishes monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to measure progress that is compared to the situation at departure and to the equality targets formulated at the end of Stage one.

TRAINING GENDER AGENTS

To apply the model to all the relevant institutions, the DP trained 'Gender Agents' to initiate and manage this six stage process within their own organisations. The programme aimed to create a group of in-house experts who together would be dedicated to introducing and coordinating the necessary changes. The programme was modular and very practice-oriented, as whilst acquiring relevant knowledge and skills, the participants also developed and implemented their own pilot projects. Two different versions of the training package were created. The first was offered to 13 women and 4 men from those authorities that formulate the Styrian employment policy and who were in charge of budgets and of allocating funds to the policy priorities. The second version was targeted at organisations that implement labour market policy measures, as sub-contractors of the authorities. A total of 32 key people from these organisations were undergoing training and a further 50 were on the waiting list. This high demand is a direct consequence of the Regional Employment Office's strict ruling that gender mainstreaming must be adopted by all its sub-contractors.

As a result, pilot projects launched by the new Gender Agents have been mushrooming in Styria. Municipalities are carrying out gender impact analyses of their services and embarking on gender budgeting to secure a fairer distribution of funding and/or subsidies in selected policy areas. The Graz City Government, for instance, developed tools and guidelines for gender mainstreaming in sports and family policies. *"This training programme was a real asset,"* says Martin Haidvogel, the Director of the Municipal Administration of the City Council, *"thanks to our new Gender Agent, we can now ensure that employees who are responsible for planning and implementing the various measures acquire the necessary skills. We are also producing a handbook to help other municipalities to apply gender mainstreaming to all areas of local policies."* In addition, the regional branch of the Austrian Trade Union Confederation analysed the gender impact of a number of collective agreements and provided training to help works councils identify and eliminate gender discrimination in the workplace. A group of members of works councils is currently developing a model for gender fair collective agreements which the union expects to be able to negotiate with a number of enterprises. At the same time, the Association of Styrian Innovation Centres and Business Parks is working to incorporate a gender dimension into their members' services and infrastructures.

PARTNERSHIP AMONGST TOP LEVEL DECISION- MAKERS

The DP feels that the EQUAL partnership approach was the most important success factor in moving towards gender mainstreaming. Just GeM has forged a coalition of all the policy makers who are in a position to turn its ambitious goals into reality. It has brought together the Regional Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Regional Employment Office, Social Partner Organisations, Chambers of Commerce, the Municipality of Graz (the capital of Styria), several district governments, the Association of Styrian Innovation Centres and the region's largest charity. Then, at the level of practice, the DP has joined forces with the six sub-regional employment pacts, training and education providers, research institutions, gender equality bodies and women's NGOs from throughout the region. *"We were, however, very aware that even this powerful alliance would achieve nothing without a clear top-down approach in the organisations that we were seeking to influence."* explains Heide Cortolezis, one of the project managers.

“From the beginning, we tried to commit the managers in all the agencies to the principle of gender mainstreaming and to make them accept that the implementation of the related measures was one of their main organisational priorities.” As a result, the DP’s launch event was attended by the highest level political decision-makers who committed their organisations to gender mainstreaming. In their pledges, they also nominated a senior member of staff to participate in the DP’s training programme for Gender Agents. In fact, Just GeM succeeded in convincing these key-players that comprehensive strategies for gender equality would help to develop the employability and skills levels of women and men and to improve both the delivery and effectiveness of labour market policies. *“The policy makers also came to understand that their working in partnership would enhance the soft factors that promote economic development in the region,”* says Cortolezis, *“Ensuring that women are trained to meet the skills requirements of local employers is one thing, but if the women have care responsibilities for children or ageing parents, there is a second pressing issue that must be tackled. And this is reliable provision of easily accessible, flexible care services of good quality. Training providers, companies, municipalities and charities have now learned to work together on this issue.”*

AN INNOVATIVE TOOL FOR BENCHMARKING GENDER EQUALITY PERFORMANCE

To measure progress on a regular basis, Just GeM constructed gender equality indicators that are being used in a benchmarking system called *Gender Radar*. This system presents the levels of gender equality achieved in crucial areas such as education and training, employment, unemployment and political decision-making in the different districts of Styria. Scores range between 0 that equals absolute inequality and 1 which represents gender balance. The distance between an achieved score and 1 indicates the gender gap that must be bridged, whereas the distance from 0 indicates the degree of equality achieved to date. The system enables comparisons to be made between all of the districts and all of the different policy areas. An indicator of the overall gender equality performance of districts can be also calculated and presented in a graphic format. By comparing the indicators over several years, it is possible to identify and demonstrate progress in specific policy areas, as well as in general performance within geographical areas.

The DP’s Gender Radar has helped to create and enhance a climate that is favourable to experimentation and innovation. The visibility of their gender equality performance has led decision-makers in regional districts and local areas to become more conscious of their own policies and practices and the gender gaps they still need to tackle. As a result, both the six-stage model developed by Just GeM and the training programme for Gender Agents are now in great demand.

MAINSTREAMING IS UNDERWAY

Gender mainstreaming in a complex policy field such as employment and throughout a whole region is a colossal undertaking but this challenging process has taken root in Styria. Training of Gender Agents was adopted as a regular task by the leaders of the Regional Employment Pact. A second round EQUAL project is now dedicated to further mainstreaming and all the labour market authorities and agencies that have benefited from Just GeM’s activities are taking a much more pro-active role in this new DP. Building on their experiences of the introduction of gender mainstreaming, they will train and support other peers to follow suit. For instance, municipalities will coach their counterparts in other Austrian regions and the Styrian branch of the Austrian Trade Union Federation will team up with other regional branches and also with its headquarters in Vienna.

Moreover, a group of companies, including market leaders, came to recognise the added-value of gender mainstreaming. Facing skills gaps due to demographic changes, they are now eager to use the un-tapped potential of women and they are also aware that this requires more than just opportunities for part-time work. In the framework of the new EQUAL project and with the support of in-house Gender Agents, they will develop work-life-balance policies for their employees, gender fair recruitment, selection and career development procedures and initial training for

young women and men in those occupations where they are underrepresented. Thus, thanks to EQUAL, gender mainstreaming is being transferred from the public to private sector in this Austrian region.

Contact

Just GeM -

Heide Cortolezis

NOWA

Rudolf-Hans-Bartsch-Straße 15-17

AT – 8042 Graz

Tel.: 0316/48-26-00/23

Fax: 0316/48-26-00/4

E-mail: cortolezis@nowa.at

Link to EQUAL data base *description* : [AT-5-18/14](#)

A short version of this "Success story" and other "Success stories" are available on the [EQUAL website](#)