

GENDER EQUALITY ALLIANCES IN TERRITORIAL AND SECTORAL CONTEXTS

GOOD PRACTICE AND STRATEGIC LESSONS FROM EQUAL

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*This document has been prepared as part of a series of papers on **Strategic Lessons from the Equal Opportunities Strand of EQUAL**. The main purpose of these papers is to underpin and help to focus **transnational cooperation within the framework of the European Social Fund (ESF)**, as a means of promoting EQUAL principles and of mainstreaming EQUAL approaches that can be directly related to the new ESF priorities for action.*

These Strategic Lessons seek to highlight, from a European perspective, what has already been achieved by EQUAL in relation to the new ESF thematic priorities and to demonstrate those EQUAL approaches that have a potential for wider transfer within the Union. They could thus be helpful to those who are running, or are planning to set up, transnational networks in one of the thematic priority fields of the ESF.

This document summarises outcomes from EQUAL Development Partnerships (DPs) and transnational and national thematic networks that have been concerned with gender equality issues and alliances. This document includes annotated references to the EU policy context and relevant background material from EQUAL experience that can be accessed on-line through hyperlinks.

1. THE BACKGROUND

The Lisbon employment targets call for a 60% employment rate for women by 2010. At present, it is at 55.7% and is much lower (31.7%) for older women (55-64 years old). Women also have a higher unemployment rate than men (9.7% against 7.8%). In the light of these statistics, the European Commission is convinced that the gender dimension of [the Lisbon strategy for jobs and growth](#) must be strengthened. In 2000, Member States began working with common EU objectives to combat poverty and social exclusion. They have been asked to mainstream gender in their national action plans. Several Member States are progressively adapting their systems in accordance with existing Community law and in the light of the higher labour market participation of women and aspirations to greater gender equality. Gender equality is also an overarching objective in the new [Open Method of Coordination](#) covering social inclusion, pensions as well as health and long-term care.

The European Commission also calculates that women constitute, on average, 30% of entrepreneurs in the EU but they often face greater difficulties than men in starting up businesses and in accessing finance and training. The Commission has addressed the issue of female entrepreneurship in several instances including by providing financial support through the Structural Funds. With the Entrepreneurship Action Plan adopted in 2004, the Commission is again working with the Member States to address actions in the areas of finance, entrepreneurial networks and social security of new small business owners, including co-helping partners.

In its '[Roadmap for equality between women and men](#)' the Commission states "A key role is played by the Structural Funds, and in particular the European Social Fund which devoted 6% of its global amount for the period 2000-2006 to gender specific actions. Equality between women and men was also within the objectives of the four Community initiatives for 2000-2006: EQUAL, INTERREG, URBAN II and LEADER +."

1.1. THE CONTRIBUTION OF EQUAL

A large number of EQUAL Development Partnerships (DPs) attempted to capitalise on the wide range of local, regional and even national players involved and sought to forge sustainable alliances for equal opportunities. Particularly in southern Member States and in France, these coalitions were developed as **territorial or sectoral pacts** for work-life-balance. Also many **desegregation** projects had an involvement in such alliances. Whilst pursuing gender equality objectives, they made valuable contributions to territorial development. The idea was to use women's potential to generate innovation and economic growth, particularly in SMEs, thus building 'business cases' for equal opportunities.

Joining forces with other key players in their territories of operation helped both enterprises and Social Partner Organisations to reinforce their gender equality policies and practices and to improve the work-life balance of employees. EQUAL partnerships that helped employers to introduce reconciliation policies and municipalities to reduce unemployment in their local areas, managed to establish a broad variety of care and other family services. Costs were often shared between enterprises and public authorities and these services created hundreds of jobs for unemployed and inactive women.

Last, but not least, EQUAL enabled or strengthened cooperation between the business world and gender equality bodies and relevant NGOs. This was particularly important for SMEs, as unlike large corporations, they rarely have an in-house equality advisor. EQUAL DPs piloted new approaches to supporting women from all age groups and different educational and ethnic backgrounds in accessing the labour market and building a career. They also provided counselling and expertise to employers who were interested in tapping into the potential of women and/or helping their employees find a better balance between work and private life.

The examples that are mentioned in the remainder of this text represent only a fraction of the wealth of good practices generated by EQUAL throughout the EU. Based on these good practices, the [European Thematic Group on Equal Opportunities \(ETG 4\)](#) constructed the European Model of comprehensive approaches to gender equality, which combines strategies and concepts to dismantle the gender gaps and segregation of the labour market, to improve the reconciliation of working and private life for women and men and to overcome traditional gender roles and stereotypes. The model incorporates all the ingredients required to design and implement comprehensive gender equality policies and practices in a territorial context. It presents the 'ideal' composition of avenues to gender equality which, so far, cannot be found in any single Member State. The model serves as a blueprint for all policy makers who are committed to making gender equality a reality for the women and men of their territories. More information can be found on the [gender equality pages of the EQUAL website](#).

2. LINKING RECONCILIATION AND DESEGREGATION STRATEGIES

The persistent obstacles to the equal treatment of women and men in the labour market form a complex maze which requires multi-faceted strategies to tackle its interlinked stumbling blocks for both women and men. These strategies include systemic approaches targeted at dismantling discriminatory mechanisms in education, training and labour market systems, which are based on traditional gender roles and the male breadwinner model. At the same time, they need to address deep-rooted perceptions of gender roles in private and working life as well as in society in general.

Whatever the strategies entail in terms of awareness raising and active participation of all relevant players, they must also link the two big challenges of reconciliation and desegregation. Without an improved articulation of the timing of women's responsibilities and an overall provision of accessible, affordable quality care for children and other dependants, promoting a gender balance in all economic sectors and occupations and at all levels of corporate hierarchies will fail. A large number of EQUAL DPs and Transnational Partnerships (TPs) incorporated this dual approach and chose to act locally or regionally to achieve their objectives.

An Irish DP, which was coordinated by the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies at Dublin's Trinity College, is a good example for that kind of synergy. The DP brought on board NGOs, companies, Social Partner Organisations and the National Training Authority. Whilst some partners operated at national level, others were players at regional and local levels. One of its pilot projects combined reconciliation and desegregation approaches by experimenting with flexible working for female and male management personnel.

The DP worked with employers to encourage them to identify managers, both male and female, who wished to retain their management positions, but to work more flexibly. This entailed working a shorter working week through job sharing, part-time work or reduced hours, flexible hours and some e-working from home. The idea was for the employee and employer to find an optimal package of flexible working that suited both. This pilot project also made an impact on desegregation, since it sought to encourage and retain women in management positions, which helps to desegregate the labour market.

[National Flexi-Work-Partnership, IE-19](#)

3. LINKING GENDER EQUALITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

EQUAL territorial alliances for equal opportunities linked their activities to local or regional economic development, and sought to plead business cases for gender equality. These projects joined forces with companies, economic development agencies and public authorities and tried to move beyond the original equal opportunities approach that was built on arguments based on social justice and democracy. It had become clear that these arguments were not necessarily the best starting point for an open dialogue with employers and other economic players and so the DPs were very aware that a new and fresh approach was needed, particularly as some key players viewed equal opportunities as favouring women at the expense of men.

3.1. INVOLVING THE RIGHT PARTNERS AND MAINTAINING THEIR COMMITMENT

To be able to exploit potential synergies between equal opportunities and economic development, DPs carefully observed and evaluated the impact of economic and social trends on female and male employment in their territories. At the same time, they explored how large and small enterprises, both public and private, could benefit from gender equality and diversity oriented personnel strategies.

Echopool Ltd, a multi media company, which was a partner in the 'Gender Mainstreaming in der Informationsgesellschaft' DP, based its work on the trend for more and more flexibility in the workplace. It aimed to improve the situation of parents whilst supporting SMEs to develop a financing model for flexible provision of quality childcare, in Berlin. Companies and federal administrations that moved to the city after German unification backed the parents' demands, and made 'needs-tailored' care packages one of their requirements when considering investing in Berlin.

Thanks to early dissemination activities Echopool was invited to become a permanent member of the 'Committee for the Promotion of Flexible Child Care in Berlin,' which was initiated by the Regional Ministry for Economy, Labour and Women. At the same time, Echopool developed a constant dialogue with Berlin's Youth Authority (Landesjugendamt) to promote the idea that child care should be flexible enough to allow mothers AND fathers to combine parenting and working life. Dismantling bureaucratic hurdles and making it as easy as possible for employers to support their employees through organising adequate childcare was part of the strategy. EQUAL good practices, including those emerging from transnational cooperation, were used to create innovative and flexible ways to organise and finance this child care.

[Gender Mainstreaming in der Informationsgesellschaft, DE-EA-31910](#)

Through the involvement of the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), an Irish DP promoted flexible working arrangements for male and female managers. This countered the

perception that senior managers cannot work on a flexi-time basis and shows the importance of valuing and maintaining contacts once they have been established.

IBEC's Director of Social Policy sat on the DP's steering committee and this added to the DP's credibility in the business world. An important part of the strategy was to win over 'hard nosed' business people who often could not see the possible synergies of equal opportunities and business development. The main plank in the DP's platform was that diversity (including gender) in an organisation is a source of competitive advantage. However, true diversity can only happen if applicants are attracted from the total talent pool, when individuals have the opportunity to develop their full potential and progress on merit and this, in turn, makes it possible to retain people in whom the employer has invested. On a wider level, such policies and practices contribute to a company's PR image and engender a more imaginative and creative ethos in the company.

[National Flexi-Work-Partnership, IE-19](#)

3.2. PRESENTING BUSINESS CASES FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Many DPs aiming to convince economic key players of the value of exploiting the synergies between gender equality policies and economic growth concentrated their strategies on the advantages employers could gain by recruiting a more diverse workforce and by adapting training and working conditions to the needs of women.

In Italy, the 'Raedes-A.Cant.O.' DP worked with focus groups that aimed to analyse and reflect on the obstacles to gender equality in the construction sector, to explore the benefits of linking gender and technical competences, and to convince key people of the added value to be gained by gender specific approaches.

Facilitated by construction and gender equality experts, the focus groups are designed as a guided journey through which participants can express and confront their points of view and then jointly develop solutions to persisting discrimination as identified by the preliminary research of the DP. The groups were open to all players and allowing direct contact between male and female workers, employers and practitioners from construction sites. The choice of the focus group methodology, which stimulates exchange and comparisons, responded to the DP's conviction that the only possible way to promote equal opportunities and to fight gender discrimination was a direct and lasting contact with the sector's key players. Encouraging them to consider the business advantages that qualified women were able to generate in the different working contexts of the building sector, particularly if the message is conveyed by other employers, proved to be the best strategy to reach the DP's goal.

[Raedes-A.Cant.O. IT-S-MDL 225](#)

Other DPs addressed the demographic challenge, counting on the fact that in most Member States the massive movement of older workers towards retirement and the shrinking numbers of new entrants to the labour market would require employers to develop forward looking strategies to ensure future labour supply and qualification levels of human resources. The construction industry is a sector where lack of qualified labour and skills gaps are becoming an important concern.

In Sweden, this staunch domain of 'white males' was facing a dramatic reduction in its traditional labour supply. It was estimated that the industry would need to fill 90.000 job vacancies in the coming decade. Similarly, the trade unions in this sector would need to attract 120.000 new members if they were to maintain their status and role as social partners. The LIBRA DP forged a strong coalition between the Swedish Construction Federation, the Building Workers Union, the Union of Clerical and Technical Employees, Galaxen that was a rehabilitation organisation and Ynsab, a service enterprise for vocational training. All these partners were in a position to disseminate and mainstream the DP's outcomes and this powerful inner circle was further strengthened by strategically chosen partners, ranging from the National Labour Market Administration (AMS), to small and large companies, including market leaders such as Skanska, NCC, Peab and JM.

A number of DPs focused their business cases for equal opportunities on the implications of globalisation, particularly for large companies. In the past companies would often operate on a regional or national basis having a relatively homogeneous client-base. Clients were quite well known in terms of their expectations, likes and dislikes. Economic globalisation has led to a diversification of markets and an increasing number of competitors. Mergers can be the springboard for change, as well as the need to identify suitable business partners in other geographical areas and other markets. These changes, however, bring different cultures into the company and management has to deal with these changes in order to maintain and advance the competitiveness of the company.

This was the case for the German Telekom Corporation, which was a member of a large Berlin based DP focused on desegregation in the ICT sector. The company, which used to be one of the country's largest public employers, was privatised and was turning increasingly into a global player. Striving to reinforce its international market position, Telekom AG aimed to value and to strengthen the diversity of its workforce. Thanks to EQUAL, the corporation's Diversity Manager developed new approaches, which integrated gender equality into diversity management.

To tap into the so far unused female potential, the DP established a mentoring programme, which equipped female managers with specific management techniques that the company was keen to introduce. The scheme enhanced women's opportunities to access senior management. At the same time, a benchmarking exercise was applied to this and other equality measures implemented in the different departments of the German Telekom's hub, in Berlin. In addition, the DP experimented with 'cross-mentoring' that involved mentors and mentees from different companies, organisations and public administrations working together. The idea was to assess the situation of female employees and to measure the effectiveness of equality policies in terms of business advantages gained. The results were used to underline the need for gender mainstreaming to be included in Telekom's corporate identity.

[Gender Mainstreaming in der Informationsgesellschaft, DE-EA-31910](#)

Another avenue for emphasising the economic relevance of gender equality policies and practices is to use female entrepreneurship to the advantage of a local community or a region. Family support services can be an important component of economic development, since they increase both the availability and flexibility of workers with care responsibilities. EQUAL DPs helped unemployed women to set up small companies and social economy enterprises providing childcare or elderly care, transport and domestic services and also businesses in other promising market niches.

One of the main objectives of the Deloa Group was to generate employment for rural women as well as to encourage the creation and promotion of small businesses. Four women were stimulated by the success of a social economy enterprise, which was both growing and selling plants to wholesalers. They decided to set up a retail nursery and a basic maintenance service for gardens that they called Trebore-Gardening and this business offers its products and services to private customers. During one year, the DP provided with the women with training courses to acquire both gardening and entrepreneurial skills and supported them in setting up their small business, which may, over time, yield even more jobs for other women.

[DELOA – ES-188](#)

4. GENDERING THE USE OF TIME

A large part of the working population is under constant time pressure. Working hours tend to become more and more irregular, but the 'times of the city' or, in other words, the opening hours of local authorities, stores and other service providers, childcare facilities and schools and the schedules of public transport systems, are slow to follow suit. This makes it difficult for people to balance the conflicting pressures of their daily lives. Women with care responsibilities for children and/or other dependants suffer more from this daily battle against time than men. Coping with a

job and managing a family leaves no time for social, cultural or civic activities, and "personal time" is often out of the question. High levels of stress and frustration are the norm, and not the exception, for many working women and obviously, this can have an impact on their job performance and productivity. Clearly, introducing positive changes to balance work and private life requires local and company-level approaches.

4.1. TIME BUREAUS OR AGENCIES

Time Bureaus or Agencies, created and/or strengthened by EQUAL, particularly in France, Italy and Spain, produced solutions to the dilemma of juggling conflicting time pressures life times by:

- Harmonising "city times";
- Introducing more flexible work organisation benefiting both employees and employers;
- Providing flexible care and other family support services; and
- Changing attitudes to promote a more even sharing of unpaid work in the home.

Achievements in these four areas made a real difference to the daily lives of women and men, whilst at the same helping to enhance the 'soft factors' for economic development such as the general quality of life.

Creating local powerful, pro-active alliances was the most important factor for efficient and successful Time Agencies and four strategies proved to be particularly effective:

- **Placing the agencies under the direct responsibility of a mayor** or high-level regional decision-maker helped to emphasise the policy priority accorded to eliminating gender disparities in the use of time;
- Pleading **business cases** for the approach was essential to develop a common vision of the benefits to the region and also to each partner and their respective institutions;
- Convening commissions **assembling the top decision-makers**. All the practical details of the different institutions' contributions were elaborated by smaller teams of practitioners in the field of work organisation, transport, education, social care and culture. The intensive cooperation of decision makers and practitioners paved the way to **inter-agency approaches**, which were crucial to the success of these activities;
- **Involving various groups of citizens** in surveys that identified the most alarming 'time eaters' in their daily lives. In parallel, studies were carried out to explore the needs and constraints of companies in terms of more flexible work organisation. Information campaigns, town meetings and round tables created a **new "societal dialogue" in the territory**.

Time Agencies considerably improved the 'time management' capacities of key players at local and regional level, and a substantial number of EQUAL methods and tools are available to support territorial policy makers and authorities when embarking on similar ventures.

4.2. ONE-STOP-SHOPS

Based in a single location, one-stop-shops help people save precious time by catering for almost every type of demand from getting a copy of a birth certificate, through using health and social care services, to setting up an appointment with a careers guidance or placement officer.

- *In France, EQUAL was instrumental in the emergence of 'neighbourhood town halls' that had opening hours that suited the work schedules of the population.*
- *The DP '[Rennes Egalité des Temps](#)' created another kind of one-stop-shop. These centres specialised in early childhood and educational activities, financial aid and health issues like family planning, pregnancy care and supporting couples in crisis situations. In some locations this impressive variety of services was complemented by an emergency childcare centre, a leisure time hub for kids, a toy library and a unit for daily life advice.*
- *A very specific one-stop-shop was developed in the city of Poitiers by the '[Coordination des temps de vie dans les territoires](#)' DP, which has now been adopted by many other cities. The approach centred on the start of the school year and before the school began, parents could find all the relevant information in one place. Everything that had previously taken two half days, could be dealt with in less than 45 minutes and, in addition, parents could enrol their children in extra-curricular activities, buy transport coupons and get luncheon vouchers.*

These 'guichets uniques' were also a showcase for non-profit organisations and an opportunity to welcome newcomers to the city.

- The Italian [Con-Tempo](#) DP created community centres in six cities in the Lombardy region. The centres not only provided support and services to women and men with care responsibilities, but also to enterprises, co-operatives and job centres. In addition, each centre developed a 'specialty' and these included: a Time Bank where people could barter time and services instead of paying money; a family desk at a local health department; a one-stop-shop for female entrepreneurship; childcare services tailored to the needs of women shift workers; and intercultural mediation.

4.3. SMARTER TRANSPORT SOLUTIONS

Commuting from home to work to kindergarten or school, and to shopping and other service areas was identified by EQUAL partnerships as one of the most time consuming and unproductive daily tasks. For years, gender equality bodies and NGOs have been pushing to adapt bus and train services to the needs of working women - in most cases unsuccessfully. EQUAL helped to link that goal to both the policy priorities of local or regional governments, and to the business interests of transport companies. This was very much in line with the aim of governments to reduce environmental pollution and traffic jams through minimising individual car travel.

- In Barcelona the [Tempora](#) DP worked with the Metropolitan Transport Corporation and the bus services of the neighbouring local communities to integrate the different systems, which had been operating independently. The pilot actions developed thanks to EQUAL included the analysis of an urban bus line, to check if and how its route connects the areas and services which are most crucial to people with family responsibilities. Other pilots facilitated the mobility between the communities where people live and their places of work in industrial zones, and the transport between the different municipalities and the commercial areas.
- In the Spanish province of A Coruña, the mayors of seven local communities joined forces to improve the mobility of the population. Thanks to persistent awareness raising and lobbying of the regional administration and, in particular, the General Transport Management of the Xunta de Galicia, a Decree is now underway, that will allow for more needs-tailored, flexible rural transport systems in the area. Meanwhile, under the name of Trebore Transporte [DELOA's](#) own transport service is acting as a social economy enterprise and doing business with rural tourism operators and school communities. It was classified by the Regional Government as a "rural employment initiative" and received public funding at the beginning.
- In Italy, the municipality of Prato participated in the '[Il Laboratorio del Tempo](#)' partnership and joined forces with the employers' consortium of a huge industrial zone. The consortium was keen to reduce the pollution caused by the daily traffic jam of its employees driving to work. Car sharing and a transport system using electric and low-emission cars were introduced. Whilst the municipality invested in the cars, the consortium covered the running costs of the new service, significantly reducing both pollution and the employees' commuting time.

5. CREATING AND/OR STRENGTHENING BRIDGING FUNCTIONS

Both reconciliation and desegregation DPs that set up territorial alliances tended to design and test 'bridging functions' and to create programmes to train 'agents of change' such as equality advisors, diversity and work-life-balance experts. While their profiles were different, they all shared a strong element of mediation. Their role was also to reconcile different needs and interests of employees and employers, public authorities and citizens or even different generations.

5.1. GENDER EQUALITY BODIES

In some countries DPs found that the current provision lacked visibility or was not sufficiently well explained to the various players who have a crucial role in the implementation of diversity, equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming. To improve their visibility and professional standing, a German DP developed a support programme for local and regional equality counsellors and women working in NGOs and projects.

The Equality Office of the city of Göttingen, a partner in a German DP, offered a training course for gender equality advisors and experts. The week long programme taught advanced ICT and also presentation and communication skills. At the end of the week participants were able to establish or improve their organisation's appearance on the Internet. Follow-up modules and individual support improved their skills and products. The scheme was also intended to increase the number of women and gender equality specific websites on the World Wide Web and to adapt this medium to the needs of female users.

[Frauen in t.i.m.e. DE-EA-14811](#)

Coordinated by KETHI, the National Gender Institute, a Greek DP worked to link existing public gender equality bodies with new company based equality units. The DP designed a training and support programme, which was implemented in Athens and six of the 12 Greek regions.

The 30 trainees came from three large corporations (banking, transport, mass media/new technologies) based in the capital and from regional centres supporting female employment and entrepreneurship. The training includes the most recent developments in equal opportunities policies, with a special emphasis on the labour market and also methodological knowledge and skills to plan, implement and monitor gender equality action plans in companies. In the three corporations in Athens it was paramount to establish a supportive environment for their endeavours and to present a credible business case for equal opportunities. Participants coming from the regions committed themselves to work with at least two companies. Their main task was to encourage and support employers in launching initiatives that ensure equal opportunities for women and men in their companies. In addition, the women acted as local resource persons on all issues related to equality in the labour market.

[Andromeda – GR-200955](#)

5.2. SOCIAL AND LABOUR MARKET MEDIATION

To reconcile the interests and needs of both municipalities and disadvantaged people the Red Adalba DP set up 'Research and Mediation Agencies for Employability and Equal Opportunities' (AIMPEI) and introduced 'Social Mediation' as a new professional profile.

The DP saw Social Mediation as a tool to find, document and transfer relevant information in multiple directions: bottom-up, top-down, or any other route of access. This broad knowledge base helped to find more adequate solutions, to make resources more profitable, and to improve political and administrative processes, adjusting them to social change. The Agencies were conceived as pluralistic, independent and interdisciplinary 'entrepreneurial structures' connected through networks, established in or related to universities. They offered economically viable expert services to public authorities, supporting them in tackling the complex problems derived from inequality and in creating jobs for vulnerable groups. They also ensured that those groups had a say and that their voices were heard in the appropriate places. The Social Mediation training targeted graduates in Human and Social Sciences, Law and Economics. They were offered a post-graduate course enabling them to work as a mediator. They studied the use of relevant tools such as ICT and participatory action research and learned to apply them when analysing the obstacles to equal treatment in employment.

[RED ADALBA, ES-187](#)

5.3. INTERGENERATIONAL MEDIATION

Mediating between the needs and interests of different generations was the objective of the VIVER DP in Portugal. It aimed to transform existing care facilities into social centres with a clear intergenerational dimension. To strengthen intergenerational relationships the DP sought to reconcile the traditional values of the extended family with current social needs.

The strategy was centred on the new professional profile of the 'intergenerational animator,' which was designed to bridge the gap between the needs of working parents, and those of their children and dependant relatives. The underlying principle was that

quality care in early childhood and in old age is not only a crucial support to working parents, but forms a key element in children's early development and learning, and older persons' fulfilment and satisfaction. In addition, professionals in health and social care normally have no academic education or specific training to perform intergenerational activities. The training offered by the DP was a combination of formal learning and on-the-job training, organised in modules and involving participants from many backgrounds such as psychology, sociology, social care and socio-cultural animation. All have experience in working with children or older people. To ensure that the new activities carried on after the end of the VIVER project, participants chosen for the training were professionals employed by the partner institutions of the DP.

VIVER, PT-2001-169

6. GENDER EQUALITY AUDITS AND AWARD SYSTEMS

A number of DPs and TPs developed and tested auditing and award systems for equal opportunities performance, often including ethnic diversity. Obviously, the results of those audits can provide a solid base for any employer to develop needs-tailored actions, which may enhance their compliance with existing legislation and strengthen their business priorities.

The JIVE DP in the UK emphasised the advantages to be gained by national training organisations when committing themselves to gender equality and diversity.

The Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB) was seeking to integrate gender equality and diversity into its largest training programme, the National Apprenticeship Scheme for Engineering Construction (NASEC). JIVE supported the ECITB's endeavours to attract and recruit more young women and ethnic minorities into the sector by auditing recruitment processes and training environments as well as companies that offered placements for the women apprentices. Documentation from this audit informed the content of training materials for the ECITB recruitment field staff, administration teams and management. In addition, JIVE worked with the Property Services National Training Organisation (PSNTO) to develop and test cultural audits with a number of organisations across four regions. The audits provided an opportunity for employers to review their working practices and to look where they could develop policies and practices that were more women friendly. In order to focus follow up actions, a range of JIVE tools were developed for use by employer liaison consultants who were working with companies to develop good practice.

JIVE, UKgb-25

A small group of DPs sought to integrate gender equality into existing quality management programmes or other systems of business excellence. Those projects tended to believe that an audit and award system entirely dedicated to gender equality might turn into a 'women-only niche' and not be very attractive to employers. Some DPs based their approaches on the Green Paper of the European Commission on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)¹. This Green Paper indicates that "In this context, relevant measures could include lifelong learning, empowerment of employees, better information throughout the company, better balance between work, family, and leisure, greater work force diversity, equal pay and career prospects for women, profit sharing and share ownership schemes."

The Italian DP 'Tenere il Tempo' which operated in five local communities in a remote mountain area developed such an approach. It experimented with the Social Accountability (SA) 8000²

¹ Promoting a European Framework for Corporate Social Responsibility, Green Paper, Brussels 2001, http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-dial/csr/greenpaper_en.pdf

² Social Accountability 8000 is a voluntary standard for workers rights as part of corporate social responsibility. It was launched in 1997 by the Council of the Economic Priorities Accreditation Agency (CEPAA), recently renamed Social Accountability International (SAI), and focuses mainly on labour practices, e.g., child labour, freedom of association, hours of works and wages.

system, which incorporates a code of conduct³ modelled on ISO 9000. This includes the accreditation of auditors and independent monitoring.

The ultimate objective of the DP was to commit employers to take action to protect workers from all forms of discrimination, including gender discrimination, and to join the SA 8000 system. After having compiled relevant research and good practice, the DP started a discussion process with local and regional stakeholders and organised a series of information events to stimulate public and private companies to seriously consider an on-going assessment and improvement of their personnel policies. To facilitate the process, the DP introduced three different levels of indicators that it distributed as a part of a tool kit, which also contains information about relevant legislation and existing incentives for firms, including those promoting equal opportunities. The project team also ran training workshops for key people from companies and organisations preparing them to participate in the auditing process. There were different levels of certification that could be achieved year by year and the idea to make these awards an integral part of the policies of local bodies.

[Tenere il Tempo, IT-IT-G-PIE-025](#)

7. DEVELOPING ASSESSMENT, MONITORING AND BENCHMARKING TOOLS

Any comprehensive approach to establishing a local, regional or national plan to make gender equality a reality must rely on an in-depth analysis of the current situation. Thus, many DPs embarked on the creation of observatories to measure, monitor and benchmark the gender equality performance of local communities, regions or even Member States. In many cases they linked both reconciliation and desegregation issues and emphasised the interconnections.

In Italy, the SVIPO DP developed an observatory to examine gender policies and their impact on real life. The observatory used a bottom-up approach, involving the target groups through an Internet Forum. The idea was to use indicators based on the so-called VISPO system of monitoring and evaluating gender policies, and to confirm or refute them through the debate held within the Forum. The Internet Fora were set up on both the DP's national website and on the common website of its transnational partnership. Specific discussions were also led by focus groups at in each national DP on 'macro-subjects' such as reconciliation, women entrepreneurs and Equal Opportunities.

[SVI.P.O. IT-G-BAS-026](#)

In Spain, a DP involved a 'Gender Group' as a member of its large partnership, which is observing the implementation of equality policies in the region of Sierra Mágina. The group was created to encourage citizens to keep a watchful eye on the development of gender equality in the daily reality of their communities. Group members belong to the Rural Development Association Sierra Mágina, which is a network of volunteers. The group quickly discovered that none of the city councils had an equal opportunities programme, and units or departments working on women's issues did not exist. Given this result and similar findings of women's groups in the region, the Gender Group conceived the First Gender Equality Plan of Sierra Mágina. It was promoted to all the city councils as a 4-year exercise. Each council was encouraged to select and adopt a number of measures, which it deemed relevant. These were then implemented over a period of three years whilst being carefully observed by the Gender Group. The fourth year was dedicated to the assessment and follow – up of the plan.

[RED ADALBA, ES-187](#)

In transnational cooperation, observatories gain an additional dimension, since they allow for comparison between European Member States. Given the Employment Guidelines of the EES which are linked to numerical targets, EQUAL observatories can create a competitive edge for

³ A code of conduct is a formal statement of the values and business practices of a company and sometimes its suppliers. It is a statement of minimum standards together with a pledge by the company to observe them.

Governments at all levels through an on-going process of peer reviews and benchmarking, indicating the gaps between the European level targets⁴ and their own track records.

One of the objectives of a Transnational Partnership linking major European cities in a network supporting reconciliation was creating a Knowledge Centre, which would record both reconciliation and time-related good practices. Madrid City Hall, the Vervey-Jonker Institute (Netherlands) and [Viver](#), led by Byweb Formação e Informatica, an SME based in Santa Maria da Feira (Portugal), were the major players in this part of the TP's work programme. To collect the good practices and to make them comparable, the partners conceived templates on four themes of common interest: family services, mobility, societal dialogue and training. Each template was structured to provide information on the context, programme design and programme implementation and impact.

[European Cities Network for Conciliation, TCA 531](#)

8. EQUALITY PLANS AND PACTS

Forging territorial equality plans and pacts requires a strong and multifaceted alliance of players, that can contribute the necessary expertise such as training providers, equality bodies, women's organisations and grass roots groups together with others who are in a position to enhance the sustainability of the plan, like policy makers, public authorities at local, regional and national level, employment services, employers and social partner organisations. This mix prevails in geographical partnerships as well as in sectoral partnerships focusing on an economic sector or occupational field. Most DPs forged their gender equality alliances in the framework of relevant public policy priorities as opposed to a 'policy niche' dedicated only to equal opportunities, and they clearly favoured a decentralised approach. The experience of French EQUAL partnership confirms this approach:

The starting point was that public policies must be developed on a territorial basis in a region, a province, a city, or even a district of a city – certainly not at national level. The second basic principle was that local public policies must be the result of dialogue and negotiation between all the different stakeholders including the beneficiaries of these policies. Finally, it was crucial to involve companies in this process that must go beyond collective bargaining. This included the negotiation and development of new services enabling the articulation of work and private life, which were not only catering for the companies' staff, but also for the entire population living in their territorial environment. Besides promoting 'societal dialogue' in the different French locations where it operated, the DP also organised a transnational exchange of relevant good practice related this dialogue.

[Coordination des temps de vie dans les territoires FR-NAT-2001-1433](#)

A Spanish DP had a similar vision. Besides establishing an Internet based Forum, it tried to relay the more traditional forms of dialogue that it was leading in its territory, which was the Barcelona agglomeration.

Based on the results of a study covering 100 companies, the DP developed a work-life-balance model and selected ten companies from the sample to run pilot projects. The idea was to involve enterprises that could be pioneers in this field, for instance members of the OPTIMA⁵ network. Using the outcomes of the pilot, the DP introduced new solutions to reconciling work and family life into collective bargaining and organising

⁴ Guidelines 17 and 18 set targets to achieve, by 2010, an average employment rate for the European Union (EU) of at least 60 % for women, childcare places available for 33% of 0-3 year olds and 90% of those from 3 years to mandatory school age, and a substantial reduction of the persistent employment gaps between women and men and of the gender pay gap.

⁵ Gender equality auditing and award system

courses for Trade Union officials, members of work committees and shop stewards. All the municipalities in the DP evaluated their existing family support systems and the needs of the population and, based on the results, developed new flexible care services for children and other dependants. In many cases this included training women to become carers and/or supporting them to set up small business or social economy enterprises in the care sector.

[TEMPORA, ES-437](#)

9. CREATING AND ENHANCING EQUALITY NETWORKS

Equality networks have been mushrooming in Europe and in many cases their creation was supported by European funding. Content wise there is marked shift away from equal opportunities being granted to women as a legal requirement to making the advantages of a gender balanced and satisfied workforce more visible. This new approach to equality networks often shaped the building process of the DPs. This was the case of the VIVER DP in Portugal.

This first core group sent out an open invitation to all institutions in the country that might be interested in cooperating offering them the opportunity to run their own sub-project. Candidates had to present a project with a strong potential to contributing to VIVER's main goals and to meet a number of requirements. The rationale of this strategy of building a network was based on several guiding principles which resulted from the preliminary research and developmental work of the first group of partners. They felt it was paramount to choose 'projects' with a clear focus on concrete local needs as opposed to 'institutions.' Also, the first core group assumed that additional partners selected through an application process would be more committed than those "simply invited" to join and have a keener interest in setting up local networks. In the end, five projects with different innovative approaches to intergenerational support and work-life-balance solutions were chosen as additional partners.

[VIVER, PT-2001-169](#)

As in earlier European programmes, many TPs set up European networks for equal opportunities and one built a network of major cities in six Member States⁶.

True to its name, the TP 'European Cities Network for Conciliation' was a permanent transnational network of 20 cities and territories working to develop viable solutions to reconciling work and private life at the level of neighbourhoods, cities and wider areas. The Network is elaborating a "charter" aimed at developing and sharing common expertise, methodologies, a 'Knowledge Centre' and a lobby driven by elected officials of the network cities. This Charter was signed by the founding members and submitted to other local or regional governments that wanted to develop or initiate reconciliation policies.

[European Cities Network for Conciliation, TCA 531](#)

Within EQUAL the snowball effect of this transnational partnership was evident. For instance, the Italian DP 'Con-Tempo' that created local Resource Centres for Equal Opportunities in six cities joined the network and all these cities signed the 'European Cities' Charter for Reconciliation.'

The European dimension of the network enriched and strengthened the work of Con-Tempo's local resource centres through exchanging and importing new ideas and good practices related to maximising the use of the local resources and socio-economic factors associated with each specific territory and launching family friendly and work-life-balance oriented actions These included: information and awareness raising, needs-tailored

⁶ Madrid por la igualdad (ES-354); Coordination des temps de vie dans les territoires (FR-NAT-2001-1433) ; Création de services de proximité (FR-LIM-2001-11162); CON-TEMPO-LE CITTA in Rete per la conciliazione dei tempi di vita e di lavoro (IT-IT-G-LOM-016); Europese Mannen Leren Onderzoekers (EMLO)(NL-2001/EQG/0010); Developing Creative Intergenerational Relations (VIVER PT-2001-169).

approaches for different groups of women; counselling for families; development of new services; consultancy to companies and NGOs; training and incubation schemes for associations, co-operatives and businesses.

[Con-Tempo, IT-G-LOM-016](#)

10. SOME CONCLUSIONS FOR ESF OP DESIGNERS AND IMPLEMENTERS

New needs-tailored policies and services developed through EQUAL packaged as holistic work-life-balance strategies were particularly successful in promoting gender equality. These comprehensive territorial approaches orchestrated home-based and institutional care with more family-friendly working time arrangements leave schemes, a variety of domestic tasks and the availability of transport services. Frequently they also contained training to help women, who have been absent from the labour market as a result of care responsibilities, to (re)-access gainful employment. Showing employers that promoting diversity and providing support for employees caring for relatives made good business sense, and providing them with the necessary advice and materials that they needed for such activities was another important part of the holistic EQUAL work-life-balance strategies.

These EQUAL good practices, including a wealth of methodologies and tools, are available to support employers and trade unions to make their companies a better place to work and also to governments at national, regional and local level that seek to make their territories a better place to live.

In line with the ESF Regulation for 2007–2013, the EQUAL partnership approach proved to be optimal in enabling all players - political decision-makers, public authorities, social partners, employers, representatives of the civil society and citizens - to come together *“for reform in the fields of employment and inclusion.”* Thus, ESF Managing Authorities could extend the [partnership principle](#) used in EQUAL to create or to participate in regional consortia or territorial alliances that would explore how the EQUAL good practices, materials and tools could be used to promote gender equality.

Transnational cooperation could speed up this process by providing structured opportunities for mutual learning involving those who are responsible for the implementation of ESF operational programmes and other strategic stakeholders. In particular, EQUAL experience has shown that working together transnationally often creates a competitive edge. For instance, when policy-makers become aware that their regions' or cities' track record in terms of gender equality compares poorly to counterparts in other Member States, they are more willing to adopt the type of approaches that have been tried and tested in EQUAL and in other ESF mainstream projects and programmes. Similarly, Social Partner Organisations can be encouraged to integrate gender equality and its promotion into the process of collective bargaining.