



# Gender mainstreaming in the EQUAL Community Initiative

## Understanding gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is a tool to better understand the causes of inequalities between women and men in our societies and come up with appropriate strategies to tackle them.

But the concept has left many confused. It has been criticised for being too abstract and difficult to understand especially for non-English speakers.

What does it actually mean? How will I benefit as an organisation or even as an individual? Is this just another administrative requirement that I have to comply with?

### Gender mainstreaming is not:

- a Women only issue,
- it is not just about improving access or of balancing the statistics,
- about blaming anybody for the inequalities which exist,
- about only women taking action or benefiting from it,
- about stopping or replacing gender specific policies and projects, targeted at either women or men.

Gender mainstreaming starts by analysing the everyday life situation of women and men. It makes their differing needs and problems visible and examines what this means for specific policy areas. In this way, it ensures policies and practices are not based on incorrect assumptions and stereotypes.

It recognises that gender is one of the most fundamental organising features in society and affects our lives from the moment we are born.

The focus is the social differences or roles allotted to women and men - differences that are learned, changeable over time and can vary within and between cultures. They are shaped by our sex but also by our religion, ethnicity, education, disability, sexual orientation, class and so on.

It looks at social structures, institutions, values and beliefs which create and perpetuate the imbalance between women and men.

It challenges mainstream policies and resource allocations which determine who gets what. It does not seek to “add” women to various processes but to reshape these processes to create the space for women’s and men’s involvement.

The goal of gender mainstreaming is equality ensuring that differences between women and men are equally valued and favoured in our societies.

### Gender mainstreaming covers the full policy cycle:

- policy design,
- decision-making,
- access to resources,
- procedures and practices,
- methodology,
- implementation,
- monitoring and evaluation.

### It means:

- asking the right question to see where limited resources should be best diverted,
- that differences between women and men may never be used as a ground for discrimination,
- more attention to men and their role in creating a more equal society,
- long-lasting changes in society that transform parental roles, family structures, and the organisation of work, time and even institutional practices,
- reshaping the mainstream rather than adding activities for women at the margins,
- responding to the root causes of inequality and putting remedial action in place,
- a partnership between women and men to ensure both participate fully in society’s development and benefit equally from society’s resources.

## The result

Gender mainstreaming can clear the way to seek common ground and meet the needs of each person, as a group and as an individual. It avoids a vision of the world that is defined solely by the dominant culture.



Part of the problem is that equality is often perceived as a struggle between one group, in this case men, giving up power and advantage in favour of another group, in this case women. The real challenge is to show that all can benefit from a more equal society build on recognition of difference, which addresses and values individual and group needs.

#### **In short, gender mainstreaming:**

- represents a further step in the search for equality,
- targets major economic and social policies that deliver major resources,
- makes good economic sense ensuring that women as well as men are active, using 100% of the productive labour force,
- recognises that differences exist in men's and women's lives and therefore their needs, experiences and priorities are different,
- involves a willingness to establish a balanced distribution of responsibilities between women and men,
- is a pro-active process designed to tackle inequalities which can and do discriminate against either sex,
- needs determined political action and support with clear indicators and targets,
- will not happen overnight, it is a continuous process.

## **The link with the EQUAL Community Initiative**

Gender mainstreaming is an integral part of EQUAL which is exploring new ways of tackling the problems common to different types of discrimination and inequality.

Under the EQUAL Community Initiative, gender mainstreaming is not optional. It cannot be something you add on to make your application more acceptable by saying for example "we don't discriminate" or "we treat everyone the same" or "we are an equality project so this does not apply to us" or that "men and women are working together, so there is no need to focus separately on their respective needs."

It should be a guiding principle for all Development Partnerships (DP), irrespective of the thematic priority chosen, and for those managing the EQUAL national programmes.

You cannot strive to tackle inequalities without embracing the gender mainstreaming concept. Whether you are the coordinator or a partner, you will need to gain sufficient understanding of what it means.

The result is that you will gain time and improve quality as you can better target your project and its activities and results.

## **An EQUAL Guide on Gender Mainstreaming**

The European Commission has published a guide on gender mainstreaming primarily for those involved in the EQUAL Community Initiative. However, it can be used more generally by all individuals or organisations interested in learning more about this process.

It covers DP planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It can help DP partners start and can accompany them as they become more familiar with the gender mainstreaming process and the huge potential it has for making the DP more effective.

The guide is the result of the work of the European Commission's Gender Mainstreaming Working Group set up within the framework of the EQUAL Community Initiative. Rebecca Franceskides compiled and wrote it.

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An electronic version of the EQUAL Guide on Gender Mainstreaming is available on the EQUAL website [http://europa.eu.int/comm/equal/about/key-doc\\_en.cfm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/equal/about/key-doc_en.cfm)

The EQUAL web site and the EQUAL common database (ECDB):

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/equal>

EQUAL extranet:

<http://forum.europa.eu.int/Public/irc/empl/Home/main>



## Explaining some of the terms

**Sex:** the biological difference between women and men that is universal.

**Gender:** the social differences or roles allotted to women and to men, roles that are learned as we are growing up, change over time, and depend on our culture, ethnic origin, religion, education, class and the geographical, economic and political environment we live in. These models of behaviour set the standard and influence who we are apart from our sex. They form our social identity. An identity that differs from culture to culture and at different periods in history.

**Gender equality:** that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are equally valued and favoured and do not give rise to different consequences that reinforce inequalities.

**Gender relations:** the interdependent relations between women and men. This implies that changes for women will require changes for men and vice versa.

**Mainstream:** the principal, dominant ideas, attitudes, practices or trends. It is where choices are considered and decisions are made that effect economic, social and political options. It is where things happen. The mainstream determines who gets what and provides a rationale for the allocation of resources and opportunities.

**Gender mainstreaming:** to make gender equality part of this dominant (mainstream) trend in society so that women and men benefit equally. It means looking at every step of policy – design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – with the aim of promoting equality between women and men.

**Gender impact analysis/assessment:** examines policies and practices to ensure they have equally beneficial effects on women and men. It identifies the existence and extent of differences between women and men and the implications of these differences for specific policy areas. It assesses policies and practices to see whether they will affect women and men differently so as to neutralise discrimination and provide equality. Where possible, it needs to use statistics and indicators disaggregated by sex.

**Specific/positive actions:** favour particular groups of women or men. They target specific inequalities or address particularly resistant problems. They are required in addition to gender mainstreaming policies.