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# European Social Fund (2007 -2013) support Gender Equality

## 1. Background

Equality between women and men is a requirement for a European Union of growth, prosperity and solidarity in an equal and democratic society, in keeping with the new Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs.

Equal opportunities are also a **horizontal priority** for actions undertaken not only by the ESF but **by all Structural Funds** in the current period. This means that all programmes co-financed include indicators and project selection criteria to ensure that they are equally open to men and women. As far as ESF programmes are concerned, a two-pronged approach has been adopted: on the one hand, specific measures to support gender equality; on the other hand, a wider commitment to mainstreaming equal opportunities across all ESF actions and programme priorities. Integration of a gender perspective in a policy initiative or measure (gender mainstreaming) is a part of the majority of on-going activities supported by the Commission.

The **ESF supports measures to increase the involvement of women in the labour market**, thereby contributing towards attainment of the Lisbon target for a female employment rate of 60% by 2010. Activities supported include career development, access to new job opportunities, start-up of businesses, and the reduction of vertical and horizontal segregation of the labour market on the basis of sex. ESF also finances accompanying measures aiming at providing care services for children and other dependents so that women and men can participate in training and other skills-upgrading activities. Support is furthermore provided for ensuring greater flexibility in delivery arrangements for education and training, and specific targeting of activities for women (e.g. business start-ups).

Additionally, **Specific measures for women** aim at reducing inequalities. The Daphne II Programme (2004 - 2008) aims at supporting organisations that develop measures and actions to prevent or to combat all types of violence against children, young people and women and to protect victims and at-risk groups. The new **Integrated Action Programme Lifelong Learning** in education and culture (2007-2013), which federates the previous programs Socrates and Leonard and the program Youth in Action, acts in line to support equality and gender mainstreaming in all different projects. Moreover, in the face of these persisting inequalities the Commission has proposed a “**Roadmap for**

**equality between women and men – 2006-2010**<sup>1</sup>, which was approved by the European Spring Council that also agreed to establish a European Pact for Gender Equality. It includes setting up a new €50 million **European Institute for Gender Equality** improving governance for gender equality, reviewing all existing EU gender equality law, increasing awareness of gender inequality, ensuring gender equality is considered in all policies and pressing for better statistics. The roadmap aims, inter alia, to tackle a number of labour market related imbalances such as the pay gap between men and women, equal participation of women and men in decision making, the differences in economic independence for women and men and the persisting dilemma of reconciling work and private life.

This document aims at providing some information on the possibilities offered by the ESF for supporting gender equality and gender mainstreaming actions in the context of the new programming period 2007 – 2013.

## **2. Legal basis for support**

### **The Treaty**

Equality of women and men is a fundamental principle of Community Law and as such enshrined in the Treaty. According to **Article 2** of the Treaty it is one of the tasks **to be promoted by the Community**. **Article 3** lays down the principle of gender mainstreaming by stating that "in all its activities referred to in this Article, the Community shall aim to eliminate inequalities and to promote equality, between men and women". Furthermore, **Article 13** provides for pro-active measures "to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion and belief, disability, age or sexual orientation". Finally, **Article 137 and 141** stipulates that each Member State shall ensure that "equality between men and women with regard to labour market opportunities and treatment at work" such as "to ensure that the principle of equal pay for male and female workers for equal work or work of equal value" are applied.

According to **the Treaty of Amsterdam** (1997), the gender equality approach is founded on two pillars: **specific actions** (in legislation and program financing) and gender **mainstreaming** adopted as a tool to better achieve the objectives of European Employment Strategy by integration of the gender issue into every step of the policy processes, the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes of structural funds.

In the framework of the reformed EES and integration into the new Community Lisbon Programme, the Integrated Guidelines for growth and jobs (2005-2008)<sup>2</sup>, as well as the Community Strategic Guidelines 2007-2013<sup>3</sup> highlight that equal opportunities, combating discrimination and promoting gender mainstreaming are essential for making progress towards achieving full employment, and reducing unemployment and inactivity.

Within the framework of the structural funds, in the **Current period (2000-2006)** the ESF **Regulation 1784/1999 Art. 2, (b)** specifies "promoting equal opportunities for all in accessing the labour market, with particular emphasis on those exposed to social

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<sup>1</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: [A roadmap for equality between women and men – 2006-2010](#) (Com (2006) 92 final).

<sup>2</sup> COM(2005)141

<sup>3</sup> COM(2005)299

exclusion", (e) "specific measures to improve women's access to and participation in the labour market, including their career development, their access to new job opportunities and to starting up of business, and to reduce vertical and horizontal segregation on the basis of sex in the labour market" and (c) "equal opportunities for women and men as part of the mainstreaming approach" and supports measures to prevent and combat unemployment, to develop human resources and social integration into the labour market in order to promote a high level of employment, equality between men and women, sustainable development, and economic and social cohesion. Additionally, the basic **Regulation (EC) No. 1260/1999 on the Structural Funds** provides for the contribution of the Structural Funds to the promotion of equality between men and women. **Articles 1 and 2** read that "in its efforts to strengthen economic and social cohesion through the Structural Funds, the Community also seeks to promote (...) equality between men and women", and that the Structural Funds must "help to eliminate inequalities and promote equality between men and women".

### **Structural Funds *Future period (2007-2013)***

The draft **European Social Fund Regulation (ESF)**, **Articles 2 and 4.5** refer to the promotion of gender equality. **Art. 3, (b), (iii)**, specifies "mainstreaming and specific action to improve access to employment and increase sustainable participation and progress of women in employment, and to eliminate direct and indirect gender-based segregation in the labour market *inter alia* by addressing the root causes of the gender pay gaps". **Art. 6** requests Member States to promote, in their operational programmes, gender equality and equal opportunities and to include a description on how this is organised throughout the policy cycle, i.e. in preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In addition, the proposed **Art. 10** contains an obligation for Member States to report on the implementation of gender mainstreaming and of any gender specific action.

The draft **General Regulation for the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund** dedicates a specific article (**Art.16**) to "Equality between men and women and non discrimination". This proposed Article, laying down general provision for the structural funds, states that the Member States and the Commission shall ensure that equality between women and men and the integration of gender perspective is promoted during the various stages of implementing the funds.

Despite this comprehensive legal framework and advances, gender gaps in terms of education, training, pay, employment, unemployment and career development still exist and progress differs among Member States. Furthermore, women continue to be the primary victims of violence and trafficking. A growing number of women, mainly single mothers, elderly and immigrant women, suffer from poverty and social exclusion. The elimination of gender gaps is therefore a question of both social justice and economic necessity. Gender equality is a key element to generate strong growth and job creation. It is vital to meet the current demographic challenges of an ageing population, shrinking workforce, and falling fertility rates and it can help to ensure the financial sustainability of social welfare systems. It enables women and men to work and to have fulfilling private lives

### 3. Main differences compared with the current programming period

The current regulations propose an integrated equality strategy consisting of specific measures for women and gender mainstreaming in the programmes. This exhaustive, global approach is required in order to ensure that the activities undertaken are not merely isolated measures with limited impact on the general situation in terms of equality.

The future ESF regulation reflects more strongly the EU's commitment to the elimination of inequalities between women and men: specific actions aimed at women are combined with a strong gender mainstreaming approach, that means not only having specific activities for women in different fields, but incorporating the gender dimension to all stages of programming and implementation in order to increase women's participation and progress in the world of work. These ESF provisions complement a new specific principle on gender equality in the draft regulation common to all Funds.

The aim is to ensure that gender mainstreaming is applied in all ESF priorities within the frame of structural approach to gender equality. This differentiates the future ESF regulations from those currently in force. Gender equality issues are no more to be addressed as a separate specific priority, within which positive action oriented activities are developed, but as a cross – cutting principle applicable to all ESF priorities.

However, making gender equality exclusively a cross- cutting principle may bear the risk of overlooking the need for positive actions. Taking gender mainstreaming seriously suggests therefore adopting **a combination of both**. To ensure that the different life situations, needs and interests of women and men are taken into account throughout the programmes, it is necessary to carry out a gender impact assessment in order to identify the possible impact of the intended priorities on women as compared to men. The results of the assessment may reveal huge gender gaps whose bridging is – as outlined earlier - being urged by the proposed ESF Regulation, the EES and the reformed Lisbon Process. It may therefore be necessary, especially in the new MS, to also establish a framework for positive actions targeted at women and in some cases also at men.

### 4. Programming options and implementation consequences

The European Commission will support for the new programming period 2007-2013 the links between the ESF and the policy framework- the European Employment Strategy- and the employment objectives and targets of the Lisbon strategy for Growth and Jobs. Gender equality policies are essential to reach the objectives of full employment, quality and productivity at work, social cohesion and social inclusion.

In this framework, the programming strategy of a Member State should integrate gender mainstreaming into every step of policy processes, and should be applied as a cross-cutting, horizontal principle, incorporating the gender dimension to all stages of programming, implementation and evaluation process. In practical terms this should mean that the plans of National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) or the Operational Programme (OP) will contain information on how gender equality is presented under the different priority axis of some of the OPs (e.g. projects' selection criteria taking into account the gender equality and gender mainstreaming approach, etc). This means that MS should be encouraged to adopt appropriate measures to ensure the improvement of gender equality by ESF activities.

Some of the areas within which gender equality may be incorporated include:

- Access to and participation at all levels in the labour market. Removing all employment gaps on the labour market and promoting women's economic independence, promoting Women's Entrepreneurship, increasing the participation of women in science and technology, in particular in decision making positions, reconciling work, private and family life, giving a fair chance to immigrant women etc.
- Education, training particularly concerning vocational skills and qualifications and Long Life Learning, by encouraging and guiding girls and boys to choose 'non-traditional' education sectors, combating gender stereotypes in professions, providing the exchange of good practices between Member States on ICT, Gender Best Practices by seminars, conferences, set-up of networks and other activities.
- Ensuring the respect of women's rights, ensuring the reconciliation of work and family life and the full enforcement of EU legislation, supporting balanced participation in decision making, supporting research on gender inequalities within discriminated groups and promoting the exchange of good practices.
- Supporting administrative capacity, networking with NGOs, particularly those representing equal opportunity interests for set-up of networks, training of members etc.

Some illustrative examples of how ESF can contribute to improve equality are given in **Table 1- Annex I**.

The following checklist indicates some useful information on gender equality to include in the plan of the NSRF or OP.

- Gender –disaggregated data and information wherever possible, particularly concerning participation in the labour market, unemployment rates, services provisions, education and training etc.
- Description of the objectives on reduced inequalities and improved equality between women and men and how the choice of priority axis will contribute to the equality objectives.
- Indication, if relevant, of financial allocation for addressing gender mainstreaming issues.
- Presentation of specific indicators and targets for monitoring improved equality
- Presentation of specific arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the gender mainstreaming action by the Management Authorities.
- Presentation of the measures taken for the publicity of the priorities undertaken and for information of organisations and other bodies concerned.

Member States or other bodies interested in programming and implementing NSRF, OPs and projects within a gender mainstreaming approach can consult the report developed by the ad hoc working group of Equal Managing Authorities "**A Framework for integrating the principle of Gender Equality in the new ESF programmes**". Checklists in **Annex 1 of the report**, summarises the principal requirements concerning the integration of gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the new programming

documents (NSRF and OP's). **Examples of good practices are given in the Annex 2 of the report.**

## **5. Potential problematic issues**

Where gender – segregated statistics are not available, it is impossible to have an overview of the implementation of the different gender actions. Further development of indicators and comparable data on gender equality and statistics broken down by sex for all European Member States is necessary to ensure accurate evaluation of actions for gender equality in all European countries.

In the context of mainstreamed approach, there is a need for improvement of monitoring and reporting on the impact of ESF. Efficient monitoring needs an appropriate definition of objectives by M.S. on the designing of the NSRF and selection criteria for projects on the OP level. Proper indicators and benchmarks should be set and evaluation procedures (internal or external) should take into account the improvement of gender issues.

## **6. Relevant reference papers and links**

- The Regulation (EC) No. 1784/1999 on the European Social Fund (ESF)
- The Regulation (EC) No. 1260/1999 on the Structural Funds
- The draft Regulations for ESF and the General Regulation for Structural Funds
- Commission Staff Working Document. Work Programme for 2005 for the implementation of the Framework Strategy on Gender Equality, SEC (2005)1044
- A roadmap for equality between women and men, COM(2006) 92 final ([europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/gender\\_equality/index\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/gender_equality/index_en.html) )
- A Framework for integrating the principle of gender Equality in the new ESF programmes. Report by the ad hoc group on gender equality and gender mainstreaming of the ESF Committee. EQUAL Managing Authorities of Austria, Belgium (FR,NI), Estonia, Finland, Spain. April 2006.
- ESF Database (site: [europa.eu.int](http://europa.eu.int))
- For the current period a technical paper was prepared on this issue (see link [http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/working/doc/mainst\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/working/doc/mainst_en.pdf)), which contains detailed requirements for gender equality.
- Equal Database ([europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/equal/index\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/index_en.html))
- Council of the European Union (23/24 April 2006)7775/06: Presidency conclusions
- Institute for Gender Equality ([europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/news/2005/mar/genderinstitute\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2005/mar/genderinstitute_en.html))

**ANNEX I – Table 1: Possible contributions of ESF to Gender Equality**

<p><i>Improved access to, and participation at all levels, in labour market.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved participation of women in labour market measures leading to employment in technical professions;</li> <li>• Support to companies and organisations which develop and implement employment equality plans;</li> <li>• Support to companies to improve the qualifications and working conditions of part-time and atypical workers;</li> <li>• Promotion of women as employees and managers in research and development, technology and innovation;</li> <li>• Promotion of men into service professions through training and labour market measures.</li> <li>• Measures to support the increased participation of women at all professional levels in growth sectors, such as tourism, environment, telecommunications and biotechnology.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Improved equality in education and training, particularly in vocational skills and qualifications.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved participation of women in vocational training measures leading to technical qualifications and professions;</li> <li>• Improved participation of women in IT training courses particularly at higher levels;</li> <li>• Promotion of men's participation in training measures leading to service sector employment;</li> <li>• Improved flexibility of delivery of education and vocational training measures to reach women in rural areas or without easy access to transport.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Improved participation of women in enterprise creation and growth</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness-raising and training measures on equality for managers and advisors of enterprise support services;</li> <li>• Re-orientation and design of SME support services (financial and technical) to better meet the needs of women wishing to start and develop a business;</li> <li>• Improved financial services for women starting and developing businesses;</li> <li>• Support for networks and associations of women business owners, and for mentoring activities by and for women;</li> <li>• Special support to women to establish and develop businesses in telecommunications and high technology fields;</li> <li>• Support for women as promoters and managers of social economy initiatives.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Reconciliation of work and family life</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for care services for children and other dependants and for the training and qualification of care workers;</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support to employers who offer their employees career breaks, childcare and other family support services;</li> <li>• Improved access to training and job opportunities for women and men with restricted mobility, through support for teleworking or homeworking etc.</li> </ul>
<i>Improved participation of women in decision-making.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balanced participation of women and men in monitoring committees and partnerships responsible for managing Programming Documents.</li> <li>• Involvement of equality bodies and women's organisations in monitoring committees, partnerships and other forum during the programming period.</li> <li>• Promotion of women into managerial and decision-making positions in the structures for managing assistance and implementing operations.</li> <li>• Regular consultation with organisations representing equality interests throughout the programming period.</li> <li>• Provision of information and support to women's organisations and networks to encourage participation as project promoters.</li> </ul>