



Opinion on  
**Gender dimension in the next programming  
period of the structural funds 2007-2013**



Advisory Committee  
on  
Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

The opinion of the Advisory Committee does not necessarily reflect the positions of the Member States and does not bind the Member States.



## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>The background of the gender perspective in the Structural Funds</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	<b>6</b>
General.....	6
Specific Issues.....	7
Improve all intervention phases quality .....	7
Building equal opportunities governance at local level.....	10
Learning and achieving through cooperation.....	10

## Introduction

On 14th July, 2004, the European Commission adopted **legislative proposals for Cohesion Policy 2007-2013**, which will serve as a catalyst in key sectors such as innovation and the knowledge economy, the environment and risk prevention, and overall economic services, and which, most importantly will lead to sustained economic growth, growth in employment opportunities and to greater social inclusion across the European Union in accordance with the Lisbon Strategy and the European Employment Strategy (EES) .

Proposals define a framework for the new programming cycle (2007-2013) with its main objectives set in a simplified and clearer- cut context than was the case for the previous cycle.

The “**Convergence**” objective – reflecting Objective 1 of the 2000/2006 programme cycle – aims at speeding up economic convergence in the less developed regions and Member States as they are the main beneficiaries of the Community cohesion policy.

The “**Competitiveness**” objective addresses the more economically advanced Members States. It proposes the following action: consolidation of competitiveness and attractiveness, increase in workers' and companies' adaptability and the affirmation of a labour market with social inclusion as its main focus.

With reference to the above-mentioned objectives, new programming gives great weight to human resources, and , above all, to the strong link there is between research/innovation and education/training .There is also emphasis on the eradication of social disparity through greater social inclusion and a higher standard of living ,through the promotion of quality public services, including reconciliation services.

Lastly, the new objective, “**Cooperation**”, - the result of the positive experience of the INTERREG programme seeks to bring about a balanced integration of issues of interest to the Community across its territory through cross border programmes and experience exchange networks.

The Cohesion policy can be financed by Structural Funds (ERSF) and the Cohesion Fund.

This current period has a key role in the future planning, both in outlining strategies and in financial resources allocation. For this reason the Committee has decided to elaborate this opinion which should give recommendations and identify important elements and future priorities for the Structural Funds in a gender equality perspective.

In addition, the publication of the European Commission's Road Map for Equality between women and men, together with the Gender Pact agreed at the spring 2006, European Council and the establishment of the European Gender Institute have given a timely new impetus to the debate on the achievement of true gender equality.

The opinion is constituted as follows:

- The background of the gender perspective in the Structural Funds.
- *Equal Opportunities and Gender mainstreaming* in new Regulations and in new Commission guidelines.





- General recommendations to ensuring the incorporation of a gender perspective at all stages of the new programming period of the Structural Funds and its support with effective institutional mechanisms.
- Specific recommendations in relation to areas requiring particular attention

## The background of the gender perspective in the Structural Funds

- The framework established for the current planning cycle of Structural Funds 2000-2006, considers the dual approach as a fundamental element: the differentiating and endorsing among equal opportunities (direct policies) and gender mainstreaming policies (indirect policies).
- In particular, the assumption of mainstreaming approach implies the adoption of vertical priorities (positive actions to permit women to overcome access barriers to services, training, labour market) and horizontal priorities. These latter priorities aim to integrate gender equality objectives in all policies and planning measures. The current planning period has been particularly crucial for the evolution of gender policies and approaches and for the removal of numerous existing obstacles to their implementation.
- The High Level Group for gender mainstreaming in structural funds has been told of successful experiences achieved by some member states showing the improvements carried out in the current EU schedule. Positive experiences were found in different fields, pertaining both to interventions planning and management and interventions specific typologies with a positive impact on gender mainstreaming. Moreover the general equal opportunities framework appears strongly differentiated according to the different territorial contexts in the European Union.
- Big gaps still exist among and inside Member States, as far as women's participation and employment are concerned. Gender mainstreaming perspective meets many resistances due to a different level of gender perception of national and local authorities, to the planning complexity (larger onus of infrastructural actions rather than actions addressed to individuals) and to the presence of several financing sources with different specific features. As far as the managerial/implementing level is concerned, the structure of equal opportunities governance presidiums in single administrations is not yet created.
- As for the specific approach for gender equality, the **Third Cohesion Report** confirms that "The Union's commitment to the promotion of gender equality means that the mainstreaming approach must be far-reaching so that the impact all policies have on the gender issue is fully considered when programming and implementing". The emphasis is on the need to guarantee the integration of actions in favour of gender equality in national and regional programmes. This general stance is to be found in article 14 of the **General Regulation** which confirms the gender equality principle. It lays out that the Commission and member States should take action to promote both gender equality and the integration of the gender perspective in the various stages of the Fund's activity. The **Regulation proposal for the European Social Fund** devotes article 6 to this issue, declaring that Member States should ensure that Operational Programmes include a description explaining how gender equality and equal opportunities policies are pursued in their programming, implementing, monitoring and evaluating phases. These Operational Programmes should also promote a balanced participation of women and men in their management and realization at local,



regional and national level<sup>1</sup>. The **Regulation proposal for the European Regional Development Fund** establishes, with reference to Cooperation objective, (article 6) the financing of initiatives addressed to promote gender equality and equal opportunities. The ERDF intervention focuses on strategic priorities particularly relevant in relation to gender mainstreaming impacts.

## Recommendations

### General

Bearing all this in mind, the Advisory Committee wishes to make the following recommendations which seem to be of particular relevance. While this paper is in the first instance addressed to the Commission, the achievement of the recommendations is dependent upon the willingness of the Commission, the Member States and civil society to work in partnership to further advance of gender equality, both through mainstreaming and positive actions:

- Although there have been meaningful improvements in the present programme cycle, **the inclusion of mainstreaming policies in Structural Funds must be perfected and strengthened.** A more thorough, holistic approach is needed to ensure that ongoing activities are not isolated and therefore unable to produce a significant impact in terms of gender equality. The objective must be to design a development process able to eliminate the gender neutrality when defining the interventions, providing a strategy addressed to the system and not only to individuals.

As well as the horizontal integration of equal opportunities, there is still the need for specific measures to support women to overcome particular conditions of inequality and try to put an end to situations which border on states of emergency – for example, the low rate of female activity in those regions included in the Convergence Objective.

Thus, the **dual approach** - the combination of mainstreaming strategies and strategies addressed at the under-represented gender - **has to be confirmed and renewed with greater emphasis in future programming.**

- The provision of a **financial reserve** within each fund for equal opportunity activities should be considered with additional support for cross programmes and other special initiatives being funded separately under technical assistance. In this way direct actions (institutional activities and technical assistance) and indirect actions (gender mainstreaming) could be effectively combined in order to obtain results which are concrete, measurable, transferable and reproducible.

In the Advisory Committee's opinion this could be the right way to exploit and enhance the important progress made in this planning phase on equal opportunities objectives.

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<sup>1</sup> The European Policy of rural development will not anymore belong to Structural Funds, but both policies will cooperate and will sustain the diversification of rural economy. In particular, the target of improvement of life quality in rural areas and diversification of rural economy outline the supply of services essential for rural population as a priority action with particular attention to services which facilitate young people and women access to labour market.



Thus, technical assistance might also be used for territorial sensitization and research. This would allow equal opportunity Institutions and public and private female Management to develop high-level quality projects to be offered to potential promoters.

- **Targeted Selection Criteria** are proposed, as a way to contribute to the improvement of the quality and quantity of gender equality interventions, with evaluation marks awarded specifically to measure the level of gender inclusion in the project proposals. These would help reach predefined objectives which could be evaluated through gender auditing procedures allowing for the evaluation of the impact of the financial costs for both genders.
- **Appropriate coordination mechanisms** should be set up in order to monitor gender inclusion within programmes, measures and projects. Moreover, it could be considered the opportunity enabling Managing Authorities to identify failures and to set new objectives to address deficit.

## Specific Issues

### Improve all intervention phases quality

Since the onset of the present cycle of cohesion policies, European legislation requires the promotion of equality through the general integration of the gender dimension in all programming, implementation and evaluation phases (gender mainstreaming approach). In order to improve the quality of the projects is deemed necessary to increase the quality of every planning phase.

#### *Objectives and contents of the projects*

It is necessary to implement and improve the use of project and evaluation tools. Moreover, tools which can analyse in detail the socio-economic context with a gender perspective are also necessary. Below a feasible outline of these elements is given: For the *definition phase* of programmes/interventions it is necessary:

- to “internalise” the gender dimension in the analysis of the context of the referring region and/or the sector. The aim here is to underline the conditions of the female population in relation to the characteristics of the territory/sector and typologies of intervention to be introduced, highlighting problems/needs and potential.
- identify / verify the value of gender interventions through an analysis of their potential impact. This allows for the interpretation of interventions from the equality and mainstreaming perspective. Thus if necessary, gender interventions can be strengthened and social partners can be made aware of their responsibilities.

Where pre-requisites exist for the introductions of programmes/ development interventions of specific actions, it is opportune to identify priority areas/ objectives. Direct actions could then be aimed at these areas:- the improvement of social infrastructures, the promotion of access to employment and social services, the



promotion of female entrepreneurship, and the reconciliation of work and family life. Some considerations regarding proposals can be made with regard to specific issues such as:

- social inclusion – it is widely recognised that women are at far greater risk of social exclusion than men, are more likely to be victims of multiple discrimination and to suffer either as immigrants and/or as members of ethnic minorities
- local development - which can be defined as a series of processes aimed at sustainable development so as to maximise the mobilisation of underexploited resources and develop social capital at local level
- the advancement of women in the work place and female entrepreneurship, including innovative financing methods specifically for women entrepreneurs
- use of traditional energy resources –as women are primary users of energy sources in many countries and can therefore promote the efficient use of alternative energy sources
- cross border cooperation

#### *Management and implementation*

In the implementation phase the focus is on management modes and the implementation of interventions through:

- specific gender training should be given to personnel engaged in the management of programmes and the selection/evaluation of the projects
- the programme/project cycle management authorities must contain both female professionals and management mechanisms that see gender perspective as a qualifying element to reach set goals.
- the use of appropriate procedures to internalise the gender mainstreaming perspective in the introduction of interventions (selection criteria, implementation methods and indicator systems)
- a “gender-sensitive” monitoring system to provide continuous feedback on the reaching of equality objectives so as to encourage and support the continuing of good practices already in use.

Finally programme/intervention evaluation stages must be defined to ascertain the actual effect of equal opportunity measures with specific reference to *what extent and how* they have affected the female population.

Specific work / technical assistance groups (European, national, local, and linked as appropriate to the European Gender Institute) as support to further the equal opportunity cause in the carrying out of project interventions can back up this whole process. These aids to:

- allow for the development of specific competence in gender project management thanks to either their internal training or external expertise. This role is two-fold in that it allows for the introduction of gender-orientated





interventions and creates a widespread awareness of the equal opportunity issue.

- define clear-cut procedures to integrate gender policies in all phases of the policy cycle.
- Create specific administration sectors for the inclusion of the gender perspective within policy cycles.

This management system should be supported by a financial reserve within the Structural Funds.

### *Monitoring and evaluation*

Evaluation is a process which takes place in all phases of political cycle: it aims both to verify political results and impacts and to support the planning and implementation of interventions. Its importance has been endorsed in the provisions of art. 10 of the new ESF Regulation which requires Member States to take greater cognisance of and report upon the gender focus of their activities and actually.

It is therefore essential to:

- Take into consideration gender perspective evaluation not only in the context of thematic evaluations but also in all phases of evaluation process. This target could be achieved by making gender evaluation compulsory, according to an agreed framework. Gender evaluation needs to be validated at national level in order to gain strength and to not depend by local administration perception;
- Use gender perspective evaluation not only in the context of interventions addressed to women, but also according to other policies.

Ex-ante evaluation (analysis of strength/weakness points, objectives and strategy coherence, expected impact of established priorities, etc), supporting the planning of Structural Funds, should take into consideration equal opportunities between women and men. The specific ex-ante evaluations must be realized taking into account equal opportunities in labour market, in training and educational system, in entrepreneurship and in re-conciliation between work and family life.

It is therefore fundamental to elaborate and disseminate guide-lines, criteria, methods and techniques, both at European and national level, aiming to the monitoring and evaluation of equal opportunities interventions, in order to:

- Set up specific indicators to evaluate the gender impact of interventions, supporting Managing Authorities of Structural Funds in defining a gender monitoring system for co-financed interventions;
- Enlarge and disseminate qualitative monitoring activities considering gender perspective;
- Complete an evaluation examining the interventions and processes impacts/results, in order to overcome the critical aspects arise from the effective implementation of the planned interventions;



- Promote a participative evaluation, involving a broad range of key stakeholders present in the national territory;
- Encourage the dissemination of good practices at local, national and European level;
- Define how previous evaluations have influenced the current planning choices.

### **Building equal opportunities governance at local level**

Equal opportunity objectives are to become an integral part of growth and development policies as a whole, concrete and effective **"equality governance"** is a prerequisite. Thus there is an urgent need to adopt certain initiatives as listed below:

- European Commission would periodically arrange high level conferences bringing together international experts and key stakeholders, including the managing authorities of cohesion funds. This would foster awareness and promote further development of key initiatives which might then be adopted by other Member States;
- Ensure that gender expertise is established within Government Departments and other agencies which implement measures within the cohesion and structural funds and using that expertise to influence broader thinking on gender within the full range of the department/agencies activities;
- Make sure that equal opportunity Institutions are updated, involved and participate in initiatives for potential Structural Funds financing above all when regarding local development;
- Adopt procedures to favour a high number of female participants at all levels in local development initiatives which are co-financed by structural funds thus not limiting their presence to gender specific activities but widening it to social and institutional partnerships;
- Support the participation of women in decision-making roles and involve successful women in development support initiatives. In this context equal opportunities expertise could be enriched and spread by instituting training and refresher courses held at national or regional level and could also encourage the exchange of good practices. Civil society could contribute to these activities.
- Managing authorities should encourage the establishment of local networks, linked as appropriate with the equal opportunity institutions in order to provide information on projects proposals which could be financed by structural funds and ascertain their relevance to gender mainstreaming. They could encourage promoters to include the mainstreaming objective by showing its benefits which are also related to their potential financing.

### **Learning and achieving through cooperation**



The Structural funds have been successful in promoting the transfer of learning between Member States and between regions and this should be fostered in relation to experiences and achievements on gender equality.

The new programme should continue to support cross border initiatives in relation to gender equality. This can be achieved by:

- **Cross border cooperation:** a defined and integrated approach is required beyond the national borders. In terms of gender mainstreaming the objectives could be declined as follows:
  - Promoting the best practices exchange with a particular attention to those experimentations able to improve the quality of the life of men and women
  - Promoting the diffusion of competences that are functional to a gender-oriented development
  - Promoting gender integration in cross border cooperation strategies by integrating gender dimension in thematic and technical analysis (also in capacity building) and in evaluation
- **Trans-national cooperation:** it is necessary to strengthen the social economical integration and cohesion
  - Exploiting the female participation to the social and economical partnership
  - Increase the suitability for human living of the territories with the objective of favouring the female participation to the economic life
  - Promoting women's organisations and networks
- **Inter-regional cooperation:** the priorities are the growth and occupation agenda
  - Exchange of best practices on female occupability, life and work reconciliation policies
  - Increase the information data base on women social and economical situation in order to be able to plan interventions that are coherent of the real territorial needs.
- **Improve communication by making better use of information technology and support structures**

Communication strategies have two main aims:

- To increase the awareness among all key players within the European Union, including the European institutions and the Member States, and particularly those involved in the implementation of cohesion policies that the principle of equal opportunity has to play a key role in all interventions.
- To promote widespread information about the availability of financial resources offered by structural funds to meet equal opportunity objectives.

Politicians and decision makers must be fully briefed on all issues and activities in relation to gender equality emerging from the implementation of cohesion and structural funds and



elsewhere in order to influence their decision making across the full range of their responsibilities.

Publicity campaigns launched by the Managing Authorities should be used to emphasise gender issues and programme achievements including the socio-economic role of women, the importance of making all services accessible and the promotion of increased female participation to the social and economic life.

Such campaigns should become an integral part of Structural Funds Communication Strategy nationally and regionally – with clear-cut, effective objectives aimed at eradicating stereotypes and prejudice whilst also promoting the principle of equal opportunity.

Information Technology should be used as appropriate.