



MORE AND BETTER JOBS FOR WOMEN

EQUAL CONTRIBUTES TO GENDER CONSCIOUS EMPLOYMENT POLICIES AND PRACTICE

1. GENDER DISPARITIES IN THE EUROPEAN LABOUR MARKET

Whilst there has been a gradual increase in women's participation in the labour market over the last decade, from less than 50% to 55.6%, there are still disparities between women and men in employment¹. **The employment gender gap stands at 15.8% in the EU**, while the unemployment gender gap is 1.7 %. These overall figures may hide the fact that **disparities are much more alarming for certain target groups** such as women with low levels of education, older women and those with ethnic minority backgrounds².

Raising children does not seem to have much effect on male employment, but for women it makes a big difference. Some 90% of men between 20 and 49 years of age who are fathers are in gainful employment, whereas this is only the case for 57% of mothers. **On average, 37 % of women with care responsibilities for children are working part-time** compared to 17% of women with no such responsibilities and 6.5 % of men.

The **lack of adequate care services** is one of the most crucial obstacles to labour market access for women with care obligations for young children and/or ageing parents. In addition, the sharing of unpaid family duties is still far from being a reality for most couples, which in some countries causes women to either drop out of employment or to switch to part-time work after the birth of children. Often labour market systems are not flexible enough to allow women to move back to full-time work at a later stage of their lives.

EU POLICIES: TACKLING GENDER GAPS AND IMPROVING CARE SERVICES

The European Spring Summit 2005³ emphasised the importance of the gender dimension for employment growth. It confirmed the [Lisbon](#) target of an **overall employment rate of 70%** by 2010, which can only be reached if the **specific target of 60% for female employment** is achieved. By the same deadlines, the number of **childcare places** in each Member State should be increased to **33% for 0-3 year olds** and to **90% for children between 3 years of age and mandatory school age**. Whilst a number of countries are already attaining the childcare targets for pre-school children, the provision for babies and toddlers is alarmingly poor. In most cases, the existing services are meeting less than 10% of the demand. In view of the ageing population, care for elderly and frail people is becoming a policy priority throughout the EU. Between 2000 and 2010, the number of people aged 80 and over will increase by 35%. If no suitable solutions can be found, this will create the **risk of many women, who care for ageing parents or relatives, withdrawing from the labour market**.

2. EQUAL STRENGTHENS WOMEN'S POSITION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

EQUAL partnerships that focus on gender equality have developed [good practices](#) that can help to raise female employment rates. Successful approaches range from job creation in care and other growth sectors to introducing gender mainstreaming in employment policies and practices in local areas or even whole regions. In all these cases, cooperation with key players who are in a position to influence the transfer new approaches into mainstream provision was the most important strategy to be deployed. Those key players included not only employment offices and the responsible departments in local and regional governments, but also insertion companies and social economy

¹ Report from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on equality between women and men, 2005; COMM (2005) 44 final;

² The labour market participation of older women is barely over 30.0% whilst for their male counterparts it is around 50%. Employment rates of non-EU nationals are on average much lower than of EU citizens, but significantly more so for women (16.9 p.p. lower) than for men (11.0 p.p.).

³ [Council of the European Union](#), Brussels, 23 March 2005, OR fr, 7619/05, Concl1

enterprises that use public funding to help disadvantaged groups access the labour market. Moreover, agencies supporting small business creation and SMEs were often involved in the partnerships.

2.1. CARE AND FAMILY SERVICES – A JOB MACHINE FOR WOMEN

The creation of new care and family support services has generated **a double effect**: jobs for unemployed women with no or low formal qualifications and also labour market access for other women, unemployed or inactive, who previously could not seek gainful employment due to the lack of care services.

Particularly in [Belgium](#), [France](#), [Italy](#), Luxemburg and [Spain](#), EQUAL was able to create this kind of change by using a **multi-faceted approach** that consisted of various tried and tested elements. This included training that was adapted to the needs of different female target groups and support to set up micro businesses, small companies and/or social economy enterprises providing care and other family support services. Some of the approaches that were specific to long-term unemployed and inactive women were especially successful.

To accommodate the needs of inexperienced learners, **the schemes were modular** and shorter than regular training, but by no means a low-level version of the established syllabus. They were focused on care for specific age groups of children. For instance, training for after-school care was explicitly designed to enable women to run attractive programmes for school children, including subjects such as environmental protection, gardening, recycling, handiwork, music, theatre, body expression, popular games and sports. Training in care for the elderly, gave mature women the skills to carry out tasks such as basic nursing, preparing dietary meals or doing housework, which are complementary to mainstream care services.

The schemes were highly **work-based** and **combined practical training with theoretical instruction**. Work placements in either existing care facilities or in new infrastructures, set up thanks to EQUAL, enabled women to immediately apply their new competences and interact with more experienced care staff. On-going supervision, networks for exchange and support amongst colleagues and - in the case of care for the elderly - meetings with the professional care-providers who had helped the same old person or couple further strengthened the performance of the new carers. These meetings also created a sound basis for a lasting relationship with the “customers”, i.e. senior citizens or parents. Frequently, the schemes helped older women to return to the labour market after years of absence. As their children had grown up and left home, these women were prepared to work irregular hours and this improved their job prospects.

To prevent disadvantaged women from falling back into unemployment or inactivity, the projects managed to get the new facilities up and running just before the training was completed. Positive outcomes were greatly facilitated by **involving not only the social service and employment departments, but also those responsible for economic development**. These departments' insistence on skills gaps and company needs influenced municipalities to favour increased, and better, care. EQUAL partners successfully convinced authorities to extend the opening hours of their care facilities and to open new centres for very small children and/or elderly people. In Spain, for instance, a **partnership** linking several municipalities supported women in setting up small private companies providing care for children and senior citizens in private homes and in community centres. Subsidies provided by EQUAL were used as seed capital and facilitated the start-up of the new enterprises.

Besides accommodating the specific needs of individual women with entrepreneurial potential, EQUAL has encouraged local NGOs to launch service cooperatives to avoid placing excessive business responsibilities on groups of women who are ill-equipped to take on that challenge.

In addition to care, **the organisation of other family support services has boosted female employment and helped improve the work-life-balance of parents**. Providing services to alleviate daily housework and provide suitable transport proved very effective in achieving this goal. Professionally led service agencies, set up in [France](#), [Italy](#) and [Spain](#), turned **domestic tasks into regular jobs that have normal social security cover**. The same approach worked successfully for so-called odd jobs, ranging from minor household repairs to accompanying children or old people to leisure activities or doctors' appointments. The service agencies have an increasing demand for many small tasks and they hire the service workers for regular part-time or full-time jobs. Another solution is

to help the women find customers, and then to help these customers with the necessary administrative procedures, such as calculating wages and formulating work contracts.

In areas that are not well served by public transport, EQUAL has supported **new ways of commuting**. In one [remote rural area](#) an EQUAL partnership bought mini vans and trained unemployed women as drivers in order to help them start a regular transport service. A similar venture was launched in France, but it also introduced car sharing and bicycle rental as low-budget alternatives. In both cases, jobs were created and filled with formerly unemployed women (and men), whilst increased mobility opened up employment prospects for others.

2.2. VALUING AND DEVELOPING THE POTENTIAL OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN

The increasing lack of human resources in the health and care sector and the fact that the first generation of immigrants has entered retirement age led EQUAL projects to develop services that take account of cultural and linguistic aspects.

A [Swedish partnership](#) designed a curriculum that links regular training and education in the care of the elderly to Swedish language learning and complementary modules that are developed and taught by organisations representing **people of another ethnic origin** and charities that operate in the **social economy sector**. Participants also gained practical experience through work placements in care institutions. As a result, some of the women were hired by mainstream care institutions and others found work at care providers in the social economy that – thanks to EQUAL – have developed specific services for senior citizens from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Other EQUAL partnerships focused on the development of the untapped potential of **highly qualified immigrant women** and succeeded in turning their cultural background and experience of migration into an asset for new careers. To address the needs of immigrant women who have been largely excluded from the use of ICT, a German project has targeted unemployed women immigrants who have a teaching diploma or other relevant professional experience, as **“bridging agents”** between their ethnic communities and the German training and employment system. To prepare them for this “profession”, they received training in a broad range of ICT applications combined with training in intercultural guidance and educational/training methods. This mix of skills opened up new jobs for them as trainers or counsellors in mainstream institutions and NGOs. To help young immigrants to broaden their career options, the EQUAL “graduates” are now acting as **role models for young women** from different ethnic communities.

2.3. IMPROVING WORKING CONDITIONS AND JOB QUALITY

In some Member States, EQUAL managed to up-grade typical female jobs, whilst at the same time helping women to reconcile work and family obligations. In France, EQUAL partnerships were, for instance, linking new work schedules to a process of **(re)assessing and reorganising work environments and job contents**.

The Rennes City Government set an impressive example for other employers – both public and private. It ran a model programme that made a real difference to the lives of the predominantly female cleaning staff of its municipal buildings which are scattered throughout the city. The scheme succeeded in dismantling the “broken shifts” that were the usual pattern for this kind of work. Previously, to make enough income the women had to work two shifts, one in the early morning and another at night. Thanks to EQUAL, they now have full-time jobs and can either opt for a schedule from 7.30 to 15.30 or from 10.45 to 18.45. Team work is a key element of the new model. Whilst in the past one person was assigned a certain number of square metres, two women are now sharing the work in a slightly larger space. Moreover, the new scheme provided training to **open up career prospects** and also enabled the women to swap workplaces so that they live closer to work and need less time to commute. As a result of the whole arrangement **absenteeism has dropped by 40%**.

2.4. A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO GENDER EQUALITY IN EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

In many countries EQUAL has promoted the introduction of gender mainstreaming into employment policies through awareness raising and training for both decision-makers and practitioners.

In its quest to promote equality for women and men in employment, a partnership working in the [Austrian region of Styria](#) teamed up with the regional government, the regional employment office and a large number of districts and municipalities. The partners developed a **six-stage model of gender mainstreaming** which takes the relevant institutions all the way through from a first gender impact assessment of their current policies and practices to the integration of the gender dimension into the planning, programming and implementation of their different activities. At the same time, mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation are also established. The project has convinced two categories of high level decision-makers of the validity of this systematic approach: those in charge of formulating employment policies and allocating the necessary budgets and the contractors who are entrusted with the delivery of the various measures. Moreover, these leaders had to nominate key people from their staff who were trained as “**gender agents**” to initiate and manage the whole six stage process in their own organisations. The programme resulted in the creation of a group of in-house experts who, together, are dedicated to introducing and coordinating the necessary changes.

3. THE ADDED-VALUE OF WIDER PARTNERSHIPS

To maximise the benefit of their new approaches, EQUAL partners involved key players from outside the arena of employment policy. Some of them were “natural allies” in improving job and career opportunities for women whilst others could be brought on board because they had come to better understand the advantages to be gained from using the so far untapped female potential.

- Besides offering information, counselling and support to female job seekers and employed women, **gender equality bodies and women’s NGOs** provided knowledge and skills as input to awareness raising and training of guidance and placement staff in employment offices and/or HR staff in companies. Often, they also played an important role in [introducing gender aspects into local or regional development plans](#) and employment pacts.
- Close cooperation with **educational and training institutions** was crucial in helping EQUAL partnerships prevent the risk of splitting the labour market into two tiers by introducing a job category for care workers with lower qualification levels. To counteract this tendency, EQUAL developed basic care training that led to recognised educational credentials for a target group that did not meet the requirements for regular care training provided by tertiary education. This approach included the assessment and validation of informal skills, such as raising a family and running a household. These “low threshold access routes” are now becoming stepping stones to other and more qualified career paths in the social and health care sector.
- Winning over **employers and social partner organisations** as partners has helped to improve job and career opportunities for participants in EQUAL training and labour market integration schemes. Hard data on the effects of the so-called demographic time bomb was a real eye opener for the key players in the business world. With the support of EQUAL, companies developed [new recruitment and selection procedures](#) and benefited from pilot schemes geared to making gender equality an integral part of their personnel policies. In many cases, gender equality plans were launched and included in collective agreements.

The examples mentioned above represent only a small part of the wealth of good practices generated by EQUAL throughout Europe. Based on these good practices, the **European Thematic Group on Equal Opportunities (ETG 4)** has 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 Member State. The model can serve as a blueprint for all policy makers who are committed to making gender equality a reality for women and men in their territories. More information can be found on the [gender equality pages of the EQUAL website](#).

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/activities/etg4_en.cfm