

GENDER GOES MAINSTREAM

The Austrian Development Partnership "Just GeM" is implanting the gender dimension into employment policies and practices in the region of Styria.

Coordinated by a non-profit organisation for regional development, the [partnership](#) has forged a coalition of all the policy makers who are in a position to turn its ambitious goal into a reality. It has assembled the Regional Ministry of Employment and Social affairs, the Regional Employment Office, Social Partner Organisations, Chambers of Commerce, the Municipality of Graz (the capital of Styria), several district governments, the Association of Styrian Innovation Centres and the region's largest charity. Then, at the level of practice, the DP has joined forces with six regional employment pacts, training and education providers, research institutions, gender equality bodies and women's NGOs from throughout the region.

COMMITTING TOP-LEVEL DECISION-MAKERS

However, even this powerful alliance cannot achieve gender equality without a clear top-down approach in the institutions and organisations that it is seeking to influence. From the beginning, the leadership of such agencies must be committed to the principle of gender mainstreaming and accept that the implementation of the related measures is one of its main priorities. "Just GeM" succeeded in convincing these key-players that comprehensive strategies for gender equality would improve both the delivery and effectiveness of labour market policies and thus, enhance economic development in the region. So, the DP's launch event was attended by the highest level political decision-makers who, under the watchful eyes of the media and the general public, committed their organisations to gender mainstreaming. In their pledges, they also nominated a senior member of staff to participate in the DP's training programme for "Gender Agents." This programme aims to create a group of in-house experts who are dedicated to introducing and coordinating the necessary changes.

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR CHANGE

As the next crucial step, the DP developed a six-stage model to enable the players in the field of labour market policy to move towards improved gender equality performance:

- The first stage involves a gender impact assessment of the chosen policy area, i.e. to find out how men and women are represented in the relevant decision-making processes and also how women, as compared to men, are benefiting from the various training and labour market integration policies. The exercise includes a screening not only of the respective budget allocations but also of other resources such as time, space and accessibility. In addition, the analysis must look into the differences between the life situations and circumstances of men and women and check if and how such differences have been taken into account by policies and practices. Another element of the gender impact assessment is to identify gender differences in societal rules and legal regulations and their relevance to equal treatment in the labour market. Then, based on all of the outcomes of the assessment, gender equality targets and a viable action plan are formulated.
- Stage two requires anticipation and analysis of the obstacles that are most likely to hamper progress towards the desired goal;
- The next stage groups a range of options that are considered to have the potential to overcome these obstacles;
- This is followed by a SWOT analysis that reduces the options agreed at Stage three to those that are the most realistic and viable solutions in terms of cost and benefits, available time and organisational context;
- Stage five presents the biggest challenge - during the implementation of the selected option(s), the gender dimension must be integrated into the management and control





system of the organisation. Only if this is achieved, can stumbling blocks and deviations be detected and action taken to readjust the implementation strategy to the needs of both the organisation and its female and male "customers";

- Last, but not least, Stage six establishes monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to measure progress between the situation of departure and the equality targets formulated at the end of Stage one.

GENDER AGENTS AS MOVERS AND SHAKERS

The DP's training programme prepares the future "gender agents" to initiate and manage this whole six stage process in their own organisations. The programme is modular and very practice-oriented, as whilst acquiring knowledge and skills, the participants also develop and implement their own pilot projects. Two different versions of the training package have been developed. The first is offered to 13 women and four men from those authorities that formulate the Styrian employment policy, who are in charge of budgets and of allocating funds to chosen policy priorities. The second version is targeted at organisations that implement labour market policy measures, as contractors of the authorities. A total of 16 key people from these organisations are currently undergoing training and a further 66 are on the waiting list. This high demand is a direct consequence of the Regional Employment Office's strict ruling that gender mainstreaming must be adopted by all its contractors.

VISIBLE CHANGES

Pilot projects are now mushrooming in Styria. Municipalities are carrying out gender impact analyses of their services and embarking on gender budgeting to secure a fairer distribution of funding and/or subsidies in selected policy areas. Tools and guidelines for gender mainstreaming in specific areas of local policies are being developed, and employees who are responsible for planning and implementing the various measures are now acquiring the necessary skills. In addition, the regional branch of the Austrian Trade Union Confederation is analysing the gender impact of a number of collective agreements and providing training to help works' councils identify and eliminate gender discrimination in their workplace. A group of enterprises is currently negotiating gender fair agreements with the Union which are expected to become models for future collective bargaining. At the same time, the umbrella organisation of innovation centres and business parks is working to incorporate a gender dimension into their services and infrastructures.

All these activities are being carefully monitored and evaluated. To measure progress on a regular basis, Just GeM constructed gender equality indicators that are being used in a benchmarking system called [Gender Radar](#) . It presents the levels of gender equality achieved in crucial areas such as education and training, employment, unemployment and political decision-making in the different districts of Styria. Scores range between "0" = absolute inequality and "1"= gender balance. The distance between an achieved score and 1 represents the gender gap that must be bridged, whereas the distance from 0 stands for the degree of equality achieved to date. The system enables comparisons to be made between all of the districts and all of the different policy areas. An indicator of the overall gender equality performance of districts can be also calculated and presented in graphic format. By comparing the indicators over several years, it is possible to identify and demonstrate progress in specific policy areas, as well as in general performance.

Gender mainstreaming in a huge and complex policy field such as employment and in a whole region is a colossal task. Thanks to EQUAL, this challenging process has taken root in Styria and is spreading through [transnational cooperation](#) (Climbing to Equality) to partners in [Italy](#), the [Netherlands](#) and [Spain](#).

Just GeM
Regionalentwicklungsverein/Regionalmanagement Graz und Graz-Umgebung
Bernd Gassler
Tel. +43 (316) 25 38 60
graz.umgebung@aon.at
www.justgem.at