

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY

GOOD PRACTICE AND STRATEGIC LESSONS FROM EQUAL

*This document has been prepared as part of a series of papers on **Strategic Lessons from the Equal Opportunities Strand of EQUAL**. The main purpose of these papers is to underpin and help to focus **transnational cooperation** within the framework of the **European Social Fund (ESF)**, as a means of promoting EQUAL principles and of mainstreaming EQUAL approaches that can be directly related to the new ESF priorities for action.*

These Strategic Lessons seek to highlight, from a European perspective, what has already been achieved by EQUAL in relation to the new ESF thematic priorities and to demonstrate those EQUAL approaches that have a potential for wider transfer within the Union. They could thus be helpful to those who are running, or are planning to set up, transnational networks in one of the thematic priority fields of the ESF.

This document provides an overview of EQUAL Development Partnerships (DPs), and transnational and national thematic networks that have been concerned with Equal Opportunities. This document includes annotated references to the EU policy context and to five strategic lessons, which have been based on the experience of Gender Equality DPs, which can be accessed on-line through hyperlinks.

1. BACKGROUND

The European Commission's [Roadmap for equality between women and men](#) outlines six priority areas for EU action on gender equality: equal economic independence for women and men; reconciliation of private and professional life; equal representation in decision-making; eradication of all forms of gender-based violence; elimination of gender stereotypes; and promotion of gender equality in external and development policies. It describes the situation in relation to attaining its four priority objectives that are particularly relevant to this Strategic Lesson as follows:

- *Achieving Equal Economic Independence for Women and Men*

The employment rate of women is still much lower than that of men, and women are more likely to work in less well-paid and less valued professions. For this reason, gender equality has been a key element of the European Employment Strategy since its launch in 1997. The Strategy aims at boosting women's employment by promoting the dual approach of gender mainstreaming and specific actions in the employment policy priorities that Member States detail each year in their National Reform Programmes. The European Commission has addressed the issue of female entrepreneurship in several instances including by providing financial support through the Structural Funds. With the Entrepreneurship Action Plan adopted in 2004, the Commission works with the Member States to address actions in the areas of finance, entrepreneurial networks and social security of new small business owners, including co-helping partners;

- *Enhancing Reconciliation of Work, Private and Family Life*

Women are still the main carers of children and other dependants such as the elderly, and the more children women have, the lower their employment rate. Moreover, women spend on average almost four hours per day on domestic work, while men devote a little over two hours. As for parental leave, although it is guaranteed by European legislation to both parents and the majority of men know they have a right to it, they do not take it. Lastly, experience shows that Member States with effective policies enabling both

women and men to balance work and family responsibilities have higher fertility rates and a higher employment rate for women. In light of this, reconciliation policies for both women and men are an important feature of the European Employment Strategy. The provision of care facilities for children in the context of the Barcelona targets, as well as for other dependants, is essential to a successful work-life balance as are flexible work arrangements;

- *Promoting Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making*

Despite considerable progress over the last few years, women are still under-represented in political and economic decision-making and in leadership positions in most EU countries. While there are major differences among countries, the Commission's database on women and men in decision-making shows that in 2005 women made up only an average of 22% of senior ministers, 23% of members of the lower house of parliament and 20% of the upper house. Results are also poor for the private sector, where women represent just 10% of the members of the highest decision-making bodies of the top 50 publicly quoted companies and only 3% of the presidents of these bodies. The promotion of gender equality in science is one of the areas where EU intervention has been most successful with strong political commitment and adequate human resources. In 1999, the Commission adopted an Action Plan on Women in Science, in cooperation with Member States and other key actors;

- *Eliminating Gender Stereotypes in Society*

Women and men still follow gender stereotyped education and training paths – often leading to a concentration of women in lower wage job sectors and a waste of human resources. In response to this, the European Commission has, over the years, been promoting a number of measures to fight gender stereotypes, including through educational and cultural programmes and sport. It engages in dialogue with stakeholders and the media, supports awareness-raising actions and promotes men's role in reconciliation policies, including by encouraging fathers to take parental leave and assume more responsibility in managing the household.

The Roadmap points out that a key role is played by the Structural Funds, and especially the European Social Fund (ESF), which supports action, projects and transnational cooperation in relation to these priorities. It also states that the EQUAL initiative, in particular, has been promoting innovative approaches in these fields. Such references offer further support to the main purpose of these EQUAL Strategic Lessons, which is to transfer those innovative approaches, which have proved successful in EQUAL, into the implementation of the mainstream ESF Operational Programmes for 2007 to 2013.

2. THE SCALE OF EQUAL'S INVOLVEMENT IN GENDER EQUALITY

Through two calls for proposals for projects in the Member States a total of 463 Equal Opportunities Development Partnerships (DPs) were chosen – 188 to work on the topic of **'Reducing gender gaps and desegregation'** and 275 on **'Reconciling family and professional life.'** As the following table shows, all EU15 Member States selected Equal Opportunities DPs and the only EU10 country that had no DPs on this topic was Latvia but here the issue of Equal Opportunities was addressed in other ways. Because of national interest in this topic and also because of the high number of DPs that were selected, some of the most significant advances in terms of policies and practices were achieved in France, Italy, Luxemburg and Spain. In total, the sum of all the Member States achievements' represents a considerable investment of both money and time and is certainly the largest body of experience and knowledge on this topic that has been established and exploited by any single European Programme or Community Initiative.

EQUAL Development Partnerships selected to work on EQUAL Opportunities

EQUAL Community Initiative Programme	First Round (2002)		Second Round (2004)		Both Rounds		Total GE***
	R*	D**	R*	D**	R*	D**	
Austria	0	11	0	7	0	18	18
Belgium (fr & de)	3	0	1	0	4	0	4
Belgium (nl)	0	1	2	3	2	4	6
Cyprus	0	0	3	0	3	0	3
Czech Republic	1	0	4	4	5	4	9
Denmark	0	4	0	10	0	14	14
Estonia	0	0	7	0	7	0	7
Finland	0	2	0	7	0	9	9
France	25	0	14	0	39	0	39
Germany	5	5	8	9	13	14	27
Greece	0	4	5	3	5	7	12
Hungary	0	0	0	5	0	5	5
Ireland	2	0	2	0	4	0	4
Italy	0	34	0	27	0	61	61
Latvia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lithuania	0	0	7	0	7	0	7
Luxembourg	1	0	1	0	2	0	2
Malta	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
Netherlands	12	8	5	11	17	19	36
Poland	0	0	11	0	11	0	11
Portugal	5	5	9	4	14	9	23
Slovakia	0	0	0	14	0	14	14
Slovenia	0	0	0	4	0	4	4
Spain	22	33	31	36	53	69	122
Sweden	0	5	0	3	0	8	8
UK-Great Britain	0	4	1	6	1	10	11
UK-Northern Ireland	0	1	0	5	0	6	6
Total	76	117	112	158	188	275	463

* R = DPs working on the theme of reconciling family and professional life

** D = DPs working on the theme of reducing gender gaps and desegregation

*** EO = All gender equality DPs

Hyperlinks, where they exist, lead to a listing of these DPs and a further click on the any DP Id accesses a description of that DP and its intended activities

3. THE MAIN THEMES OF EQUAL'S WORK ON GENDER EQUALITY

The table below indicates how the five main themes covered by the series of EQUAL Strategic Lessons on Equal Opportunities relate directly to the four priority areas for EU action on gender equality that are outlined in Section 1, above.

Priority areas for EU action	EQUAL themes or sub-themes
Equal economic independence for women and men	Reducing gender gaps and desegregation Gender Mainstreaming Reconciling family and professional life Developing Gender Equality Alliances
Reconciliation of private and professional life	Reconciling family and professional life Developing Gender Equality Alliances
Equal representation in decision-making	Reducing gender gaps and desegregation Gender Mainstreaming
Elimination of gender stereotypes	Changing Attitudes Gender Mainstreaming

The five EQUAL themes are described briefly below and if you are interested in exploring any of them in greater detail and in finding out what EQUAL's practical experiences have achieved, then please click on the links that appear at the end of each sub-section.

3.1. RECONCILING FAMILY AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

EQUAL DPs that focused on gender equality developed good practices that helped to facilitate reconciliation between the different spheres of an individual's life. In many cases, DPs **combined a number of activities that addressed the different obstacles** to establishing a more satisfying work-life-balance. These included:

- Creating more, and better, care services for children and other dependents;
- Setting up family support services;
- Developing flexible, family-friendly working time arrangements and other work-life-balance policies in public and private organisations;
- Forging territorial alliances for reconciliation, in particular through harmonising the opening hours of local authorities, childcare facilities, schools, stores and service providers and relating them to the schedules of the public transport systems;
- Enabling men and women to overcome traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

Please click on this link to access the EQUAL Strategic Lesson on Improving the Work-Life-Balance of Women and Men.

3.2. REDUCING GENDER GAPS AND DESEGREGATION

EQUAL DPs that worked on this theme amassed a wealth of new approaches to help both women and men develop their full potential. EQUAL's concepts on **overcoming traditional career choices** and educating and training both women and men in areas where they are underrepresented offer a valuable contribution to European and national policies aimed at diversifying and improving the skills of the European workforce. In many countries, those good practices incorporated strategies to change traditional gender attitudes of boys and girls, women and men, and also those of key players such as teachers, trainers, career counsellors and political decision-makers. To promote **vertical desegregation**, the DPs helped women to enter management and middle management positions, developed strategies to open up senior management posts to women and increased the participation of women in decision-making in social partner organisations, local and regional development and politics. They also reinforced

women's role in economic development by supporting women's business creation and entrepreneurship, particularly in sectors where female entrepreneurs were still in a minority.

Please click on this link to access the EQUAL Strategic Lesson on Widening Vocational Choices and Breaking the Glass Ceiling

3.3. GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Across the EU, EQUAL Development Partnerships tried and tested a multitude of approaches to gender mainstreaming. These DPs found that the pathways that led from the decision to introduce GM to its actual implementation by the company or organisation varied, but they always incorporated a number of crucial steps. The first step involved a **gender impact assessment** of the chosen policy field and this procedure required gender disaggregated data that usually revealed gender gaps and discriminatory practices. From that basis, **gender equality targets** were formulated and **action plans** drawn up. The next stage involved the anticipation and analysis of obstacles that were most likely to hamper progress and a consideration of options that had the potential to reduce or remove the obstacles. Often this was followed by a **SWOT analysis** or another method that aimed to find the most **realistic and viable solutions** in terms of cost benefits, available time and organisational context. **Implementation** of the selected option was the next step, which in the most successful cases **integrated the gender dimension into the management and control systems** of the participating organisations. Last, but not least, effective **monitoring and evaluation** were key ingredients, which ensured an on-going improvement of gender equality performance.

Please click on this link to access the EQUAL Strategic Lesson on Gender Mainstreaming.

3.4. CHANGING ATTITUDES

Whilst in the first EQUAL selection Round in 2002, working on attitudinal changes was the single focus of only a few of these DPs, in second Round it became a transversal activity in many projects. Some DPs developed integrated approaches, involving educational schemes, television programmes and media to address the needs of their target groups. In others, media and publicity campaigns to change gender stereotypes were an active ingredient of their work programmes. For example, they were used in the newer Member States, as follows:

- In Malta, television programmes were the main vehicle to promote gender equality;
- In Latvia, as part of a mix of activities to link labour market measures and strategies to address human rights issues;
- In Poland, to increase the visibility of 'women friendly' enterprises and to encourage others to follow suit;
- In Slovakia, to create the right climate in the business world and in the public-at-large.

In the course of EQUAL, over 50 DPs focused on raising awareness, changing attitudes and working with media.

Please click on this link to access the EQUAL Strategic Lesson on Dismantling Gender Stereotypes.

3.5. DEVELOPING GENDER EQUALITY ALLIANCES

A large number of EQUAL Development Partnerships (DPs) attempted to capitalise on the wide range of local, regional and even national players involved and sought to forge sustainable alliances for gender equality. Particularly in southern Member States and in France, these coalitions were developed as **territorial or sectoral pacts** for work-life-balance. Joining forces with other key players in their territories of operation helped both enterprises and Social Partner Organisations to reinforce their gender equality policies and practices and to improve the work-life balance of employees. EQUAL DPs that helped employers to introduce reconciliation policies and municipalities to reduce unemployment in their local areas, managed to establish a broad variety of care and other family services. EQUAL also strengthened cooperation between the business world, gender equality bodies and NGOs. This sharing of experience was particularly

important for SMEs, as unlike large corporations, they rarely have an in-house equality advisor. DPs also provided counselling and expertise to employers who were interested in tapping into the potential of women and/or helping their employees find a better balance between work and private life.

Please click on this link to access the EQUAL Strategic Lesson on Gender Equality Alliances in Territorial and Sectoral Contexts.

4. SOME CONCLUSIONS FOR ESF OP DESIGNERS AND IMPLEMENTERS

The EQUAL achievements presented in this series of Strategic Lessons on Promoting Gender Equality are based on a number of success factors, including the implementation of the EQUAL principles of innovation, partnership, gender mainstreaming and transnationality. These principles greatly enhanced the potential of the EQUAL Development Partnerships to transfer their good practices into mainstream policies and practices.

Social innovation: comprehensive approaches to work-life-balances for women and men

New needs-tailored services developed through EQUAL were particularly successful. The most important aspect of these innovative services is that they were offered at local or regional level, where women (and men) were undertaking their daily efforts to find appropriate training or employment and then, to juggle their working and private lives. These comprehensive territorial approaches orchestrated counselling, training and employment activities with care services and family-friendly working time arrangements. Showing employers that harnessing untapped female potential and providing support for employees caring for relatives made good business sense, and offering them appropriate advice and training was another important part of these holistic EQUAL strategies.

Pilot programmes were the pointers towards lasting change. EQUAL offered a unique chance for key players, particularly those committed to gender equality and reconciliation policies, such as gender equality advisors or NGOs, to work together with other partners or employers that were much less convinced of the benefits of their approaches. For instance, EQUAL stimulated employers to experiment with new personnel policies that helped them attract and retain qualified staff. In many cases, those test runs of flexible working time arrangements to accommodate the needs of parents and other workers with care responsibilities turned out to be a real success story that benefited both employees and employers. Absenteeism and unwanted turnover decreased, whilst there was visible growth of work satisfaction and productivity which led to the permanent adoption of the innovative schemes.

Partnership: Joining forces for change

In line with the ESF Regulation for 2007–2013, the EQUAL partnership approach proved to be optimal to enabling all players to come together ‘for reform in the fields of employment and inclusion.’ These included political decision-makers, public authorities, social partners, employers, representatives of civil society and citizens. Investing time and resources to carefully prepare the ground for the multi-faceted actions helped to create local alliances for reconciliation, backed by sustainable infrastructures. Placing the activities under the direct responsibility of a mayor or high-level regional decision-maker was particularly effective and helped to emphasise the policy priority accorded to EO measures.

Another fruitful strategy, which enhanced both the political credibility and sustainability of the new actions, was that of involving various groups of citizens. For instance, in EQUAL, they participated in surveys that identified the most alarming problems in their daily lives. In parallel, studies were carried out to explore the needs and constraints of companies and information campaigns, meetings and round tables further enhanced motivation to be part of the change process and created a new ‘societal dialogue’ that went beyond the traditional social dialogue between employers and trade unions.

Gender mainstreaming: towards parity

EQUAL's principle of integrating the gender dimension led projects committed to reconciliation to redress the perception of care and family work as a 'woman's problem.' Throughout the EU, members of Development Partnerships were schooled to use gender mainstreaming as a tool to better uncover and understand the causes of inequalities between women and men in our societies and come up with appropriate strategies to tackle them. Preliminary research and surveys were part of this endeavour and helped to explore 'who does what' when it comes to care and domestic tasks and also how women and men envisaged more task sharing at home. As a result, two categories of strategies emerged which are fully in line with the so-called dual-track approach that is applied by the European Commission and most Member States: the integration of the gender equality objective into all policies that have a direct or indirect impact on the lives of women and men, and in parallel, as long as persistent inequalities continue to exist, the implementation of specific actions in favour of women, and in certain contexts, also of men.

Consequently, EQUAL created and strengthened strategies and concepts that were not only targeting women as main providers of care and daily housework but also men. EQUAL organised positive actions that taught men to manage care and different kinds of domestic tasks, thus bridging the gender gaps in the unpaid work at home.

Transnational cooperation: learning together and from each other

The need for developing new policies to mitigate the effects of the demographic changes has created a renewed interest on the part of many Member States in strategies and practices of other countries that appear to be more advanced in capitalising on the potential of women. Across Europe, EQUAL has facilitated the exchange of ideas and the transfer of good practices, which engendered mainstreaming effects at national, regional and local level. In fact, in EQUAL, working together and learning from each other often created a competitive edge. For instance, policy makers became aware that their regions' or cities' track records in terms of gender equality compared poorly to counterparts in other Member States. They felt compelled to adopt EQUAL approaches to achieve better benchmarks in the future.

The **business cases developed in EQUAL** worked best when the good practices were **recommended by another company, public administration or political decision-makers**, as they were perceived as being more credible when presented by counterparts. For instance, a Scottish model that had involved local policy makers in the extension of broadband and in establishing 'communities of practice' in rural areas was transferred to Spain. The idea of **making learning more accessible** to those that are disadvantaged on the job market was 'sold' by Scottish mayors to their Spanish equivalents. Thanks to **peer advice and support** the gender dimension was integrated into this spread of broadband. This furthered equality of access for women, whilst promoting economic development through equipping companies to take advantage of e-business opportunities and local government to keep in contact with its rural communities. In similar ways, new forms of flexible childcare passed from France to Italy and methodologies to assess and recognise informal learning from the United Kingdom to the new Member States.

Mainstreaming: influencing regular policies and practices

Clearly, all these EQUAL achievements respond to European and national policy priorities that link gender equality on the labour market with improving quality and productivity at work, and thus to enhancing the competitiveness of the European economy. Strengthening this link and convincing key players that are in a position to influence the transfer of the new approaches into the mainstream provision of its potential proved to be a powerful driver for change. The fact that work-life-balance policies have, in a number of countries, become an important component of collective agreements or that companies that were not involved in EQUAL are now lining up to join territorial alliances for reconciliation are only two examples indicating sustainability and lasting impact.

Last, but not least, EQUAL enabled mainstreaming with a European dimension. Partnerships in France, Spain, the Netherlands and Portugal established a permanent European Cities Network for Conciliation. The core members are the 20 cities or local/regional areas that worked together within EQUAL, but the network has been attracting new town councils and local authorities ever since. This cross-border alliance is continuing to promote viable solutions to balancing working and private life at the level of neighbourhoods, cities and wider areas, whether these are primarily rural or urban. European Cities Network for Conciliation also lobbies to ensure that the issue of

reconciliation is moving towards the top of the policy agendas at local, regional, national and, of course, European level.

The EQUAL achievements include a wealth of curricula, methodologies and tools that can support administrations at national, regional and local level and also public and private organisations in improving their gender equality policies and practices. Each of the five Strategic Lessons that can be accessed through the hyperlinks contained above, end with a Section entitled 'Some Conclusions for ESF OP Designers and Implementers.' These Sections offer suggestions on how those responsible for the implementation of ESF OPs might use the resources and the principles of EQUAL to work with bodies responsible for the delivery of their OPs to promote Gender Equality both within the ESF and society, in general.