

PROMOTING GENDER MAINSTREAMING

GOOD PRACTICE AND STRATEGIC LESSONS FROM EQUAL

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1. THE BACKGROUND

Even if the ‘family photos’ of European Councils are no longer all male affairs and reflect more gender balance in Europe, disparities between the situations of women and men persist. This is true in almost all spheres of society and particularly in political and economic decision making, in education and training and in the labour market. More progress can be observed in the quantity and quality of childcare but in many Member States the existing provision simply does not meet the demand and also care services for the elderly leave much to be desired. No wonder women face continuing difficulties in reconciling professional and private life. Too few employers offer family friendly work organisation and the unequal division of domestic tasks adds to the problem. The solution chosen by many women is reflected in 33% of them working part-time, compared to 7% of men - a pattern that hampers female career prospects and financial security in old age.

1.1. THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION’S RESPONSE

Since the ratification of the Amsterdam Treaty¹, gender mainstreaming is an obligation for the Member States and European Institutions. The principle of this process of gender mainstreaming is to incorporate equal opportunities for women and men into all policies and activities. The relevant communication² defines the objectives and describes the appropriate methods and measures to be adopted: ‘Gender mainstreaming involves not restricting efforts to promote equality to the implementation of specific measures to help women, but mobilising all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality by actively and openly taking into account at the planning stage their possible effects on the respective situation of men and women (gender perspective). This means systematically examining measures and policies and taking into account such possible effects when defining and implementing them.’

Gender mainstreaming is a ‘difference-based’ approach, which presupposes the recognition of male and female identities and the willingness to establish a balanced distribution of responsibilities between women and men. This implies not only to achieve a quantitative gender balance in all societal spheres: ‘it is a question of promoting long-lasting changes in parental roles, family structures, institutional practices, the organisation of work and time, women and men’s personal development and independence (...)’. In the face of persisting inequalities, the European Commission has adopted the so-called Dual Approach which combines gender mainstreaming and specific actions for women.

The [Report on equality between women and men 2009](#) indicates some progress: slow, but steady, with occasional reversals. Although gender gaps in employment and unemployment are gradually disappearing, occupational and sectoral segregation and the gender pay gap have not changed in the last decade. Some progress can be observed in the quantity of childcare but in most Member States the existing provision simply does not meet the demand and also care services for the elderly leave much to be desired. No wonder women face continuing difficulties in reconciling professional, family and private life. Too few employers offer family friendly work organisation and the unequal division of domestic tasks adds to the problem. Clearly, there is an urgent need for comprehensive approaches to gender equality that address all of these problems

1 Legal basis: Article 2 of the EC Treaty: The promotion of equality between men and women is a task of the European Community; Article 3 of the EC Treaty: In all its activities the Community shall aim to eliminate inequalities and to promote equality between men and women. Article 23 (1) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union: ‘Equality between men and women must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay.’

2 ‘Incorporating equal opportunities for women and men into all Community policies and activities’ (COM(96)67final)

and challenges. There are many commitments such as the [Commission's Roadmap for Equality](#), the Member States' [European Pact on Gender Equality](#), the [Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs](#) as well as the regulations of the European [Structural Funds \(2007-2013\)](#) and the [ESF Regulation](#) in particular, which urge decision makers at all levels to integrate the gender dimension in their policies and practices. Yet, implementing gender equality in the daily working and private lives of women and men is far from being a reality.

1.2. THE CONTRIBUTION OF EQUAL

Across the EU, EQUAL Development Partnerships (DPs) and National Thematic Networks (NTNs) have tried and tested a multitude of strategies and approaches to integrating the gender dimension through gender mainstreaming (GM). Almost all of the 275 DPs that were working on the EQUAL theme of 'Reducing gender gaps and desegregation' worked on Gender Mainstreaming as did 13 of the DPs that were selected to work on the theme of 'Reconciling family and professional life.' This represents a considerable investment of money, time and effort and it 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.

The DPs found that the pathways that led from the decision on introducing GM to its actual implementation into a 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.

Four of the most important strategies used by DPs in their work on gender mainstreaming were:

- Preparing the ground
- Enabling Processes of Change
- Working with Gender Equality Bodies at Local and Regional Level
- Addressing Business Needs

These strategies are explained in the remainder of this text but the examples that are cited in support of the strategies represent only a small part of the wealth of good practices generated by EQUAL throughout Europe. At European level, a Thematic Group (ETG 4) was established early in EQUAL's life time to capitalise on and disseminate the outcomes of both the 'reconciliation' and 'desegregation' DPs. The Thematic Group created a 'European Model of Comprehensive Approaches to Equal Opportunities.' This is now one of the main legacies of EQUAL and it contains a section on 'EQUAL as a Driving Force for Gender Mainstreaming,' which outlines the key policies and practices that can promote gender mainstreaming.

2. GM STRATEGY N°1: PREPARING THE GROUND

Careful preparation is required to introduce gender mainstreaming as well as to enhance 'traditional' equality policies such as positive actions for women. DPs explored and implemented a number of concepts that were crucial to creating a supportive environment for their intended actions. This included:

- to emphasise the possible advantages an organisation, public or private, can gain from introducing gender policies and to create win-win situations strengthening both the organisation and gender equality;
- to link their strategies to current policy priorities and make use of 'the right moment in time' to introduce gender mainstreaming;

- to bring top-level decision-makers on board and to secure their lasting support to concepts and implementation;
- to enable all partners of the DP to make a maximum contribution to launching, implementing, monitoring the intended activities and to evaluating both process and results.

2.1. EMPHASISING WIN-WIN SITUATIONS

Most DPs found that pleading the business case for gender equality was the best strategy to convince decision-makers of the organisations they were targeting. In particular, private sector enterprises, although they were often in favour of the DPs' endeavours 'in principle' required a robust business case before committing valuable resources.

The Fuiric Transport Development Partnership (FTDP) decided to fully inform all private sector partners of the moral and legal case for the project, but overlaying this with a 'bottom line' business case for their involvement.

The case of the Dutch DP 'Bridging the gender gap at Universities' shows that 'business advantages' are also a major driving force in the public sector. Current changes and challenges in the academic world are forcing universities to develop a more competitive edge to both attracting students and faculty members. At the same time the pressure to secure funding for education and research is growing. To involve three universities in its endeavour of gender mainstreaming, the DP used the following arguments.

2.2. THE IMPORTANCE OF TIMING

Linking the introduction of gender mainstreaming to current policy priorities and development proved to be successful. Two DPs were strategically targeting change processes that were underway in their countries.

The Danish project [Unge, køn og karriere](#) (Youth Gender and Career), for instance, was conceived and implemented during the discussion and drafting of new legislation on educational and vocational counselling. Clearly, the DP has influenced the new legislation. In April 2003 the Danish Parliament passed the new Act that came into force on 1st August 2004. This law is reorganising the existing counselling provision in primary and secondary schools and also the vocational guidance services for young people and adults. In addition, a new education for all career advisors was introduced in the autumn of 2004.

In the Netherlands, the DP Breaking Gender Gaps at Universities also took advantage of an important change process: the merger between the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) and the Christelijke Hogeschool Windesheim. At the planning stage of the EQUAL project, preparations for the merger had just started and a Joint Executive Board had been formed from the executive boards of each institution. The VU, a partner in the DP, opted for applying gender mainstreaming to the process.

2.3. INVOLVING TOP-LEVEL DECISION-MAKERS

Both gender mainstreaming and specific actions require a top-down approach, i.e. the top level decision-makers in any institution or organisation must be committed to the principle and enforce the implementation of the appropriate measures as a major priority. For the EQUAL DPs, this often meant to develop bottom-up strategies that would reach those top level decision-makers and convince them of the validity of gender equality strategies and their capacity to further the interests of the organisation.

The Irish [WLBN](#) project, which is promoting work-life-balance for female and male employees, sees its activities as a strategy to instil a culture of diversity in both the public and the private sector. Generating this kind of change in its six partner organisations, including the national Civil Service, semi-state and private sector enterprises and a municipal authority, would have been unthinkable without the visible backing of their highest decision-making levels. Acting in a similar vein, the Austrian DP Just GeM started off with an event for the highest level political decision-makers that are responsible for employment policies in the Region of Styria.

Besides providing information and know-how, DPs were also concerned with stimulating a personal commitment of the people they wished to involve. Specific sensitising and training activities were organised to bring about attitudinal changes, i.e. the willingness to let go of familiar and deeply rooted beliefs and become more open to adopting new options for dealing with gender issues. To engage senior managers in the British transport industry the FTDP project chose a 'theatrical' approach: interactive events delivered by actors, illustrating issues of gender inequality, work-life-balance, glass ceilings and other aspects of diversity. Participating managers were asked to contribute to a role-play situation, where the audience controlled the actors. The events were quite provocative and have stimulated interest in issues related to diversity and the workforce within a safe environment, which was very successful in engaging the commitment of senior managers to the project.

The [PROMOCIONA](#) DP that is aiming to strengthen the status and impact of gender equality agents in the two Spanish regions of Asturias and Galicia sought to establish the support of local policy makers and key players through advertisement campaign in local newspapers and ample coverage of its activities in major radio stations, awareness raising and training for mayors, elected members of city councils and their senior and technical staff. Key people from the local employment agencies and from existing gender equality bodies were also participating

For the Swedish DP [Gender Equality Developers](#) (GED) the process of internalisation is a pre-condition to challenging the traditional gender perceptions at institutional and societal level. The DP assessed gender equality practices in Sweden and found that they mainly consisted of educational efforts at a 'superficial level', and that no real changes were achieved. Gender equality plans in public and private organisations were not seldom carried out just to comply with legal obligations, but without a deeper insight of why the actions should take place and how they could benefit employers and employees. According to GED there are two choices in working towards gender equality: the first is to give power to persons with the relevant knowledge and the second is to give knowledge to persons with power. The DP chose the second option and identified people with real power in each of its participating organisations. They were offered a special four-week training programme. The aim was that they should learn to apply gender mainstreaming not only as a technical method, but with growing insight, based on knowledge about gender, power, roles and expectations etc.

2.4. SUPPORTING ALL PARTNERS IN MAKING A MAXIMUM CONTRIBUTION

After the initial agreement of the top, DPs invested a lot of time and energy to ensure the active participation of all partners through various information and training events. In Austria, Just GeM organised workshops for managers and senior staff of the organisations, which had been committed to gender mainstreaming by the decisions of their board of directors. All these organisations have a public mandate in the field of employment policies. The idea was to offer this target group an opportunity to become more familiar with the concept of gender mainstreaming, whilst the DP had the chance to get an impression of the general attitude towards gender equality in the different organisations. Moreover, the DP sought to assess the specific relevance of each organisation in the context of regional employment policies. Gender mainstreaming was presented as a process which can improve organisational development in terms of better performance and customer service.

Participative working and decision-making structures were key to success. The Irish WLBN DP created structures, at both DP and partner level, to ensure cooperation and transparency in the process of development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In each of its participating organisations the DP set up a working group representing management, unions and staff. The composition of the group ensured that all stakeholders' voices were heard and that they could all take ownership of the implementation phase. This, in turn, guaranteed a greater level of 'buy-in' and support for project initiatives, and be equally responsible and participate in the monitoring and evaluation of the proposed actions.

Specific structures enabling partners to fully cooperate in the project were also created by the Dutch DP that is working with universities.

Other approaches to building a stable and performing partnership took account of the fact, that some of the DP partners were working for the first time in the framework of a European

programme. The FTDP project in the UK, for instance, which is assembling very different categories of road, sea and air transport companies, based throughout the country, ensured that all partners were aware of not just the aims the DP and the business case for gender equality and diversity, but that they also fully understood all aspects of ESF funded projects.

The Just GeM DP assumes that to be really committed, people must take ownership, not only as representatives of their organisations, but also as individuals. In practice, that meant that the DP identified people, who might be able to influence decisions in favour of gender mainstreaming. To discuss the rationale of the project they were invited to meetings together with other players that were much less likely to do so. The idea was to emphasise the necessary co-existence of change and preservation, since a constructive development process needs both qualities.

3. GM STRATEGY N°2: ENABLING PROCESSES OF CHANGE

3.1. INTRODUCING GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

After the introductory stages explained above, the DPs focusing on gender mainstreaming in public authorities and institutions moved to the next step: the gender impact assessment³. This involved to find out whether the policies and practices they were targeting had a different impact on women and men, and also to do a similar exercise for their own intended activities.

Based on the results of the analysis, DPs developed equality targets, which were agreed amongst partners, but often also with external players having joined their activities.

In many cases, the implementation phase comprises training programmes for future change agents and also a series of pilot projects that were carefully monitored and evaluated. The task of those agents is to support organisations in designing and implementing gender mainstreaming in a way that is most suitable to their needs and interests, whilst at the same generating progress in their gender equality performance

The Austrian Just GeM DP has developed a model with six steps to move from the gender impact assessment to the various stages of implementation. This model has been applied to planning and implementing all activities of the DP and is also being used to train the equality agents for the participating authorities and organisations. It was further disseminated at EU level through the Gender Mainstreaming Community of Practice. The six steps include

³ More detailed information: http://ec.europa.eu/comm/employment_social/equ_opp/gender/gender_en.pdf

The six steps model

- *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.*

3.2. ESTABLISHING MEASURING AND MONITORING PROCEDURES

Gender mainstreaming is long-term process which requires procedures and tools to measure and monitor change at regular intervals. To start monitoring, it is necessary to establish a basis of data reflecting the situation of depart. Just GeM, for instance, collected gender-disaggregated data related to population, economy, education and training, employment and political-decision-making for the whole region of Styria. The DP also constructed gender equality indicators that are being used in a monitoring and benchmarking system, called Gender Radar, which presents the levels of gender equality achieved in a number of crucial areas such as education and training, employment, unemployment and political decision-making in the different districts of Styria. Scores are 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 reached so far. The system allows presenting both a comparison of the districts and the different areas. Moreover, an indicator of the overall gender equality performance of districts can be calculated and visualised. Through comparing the performance indicators from several years it is possible to show progress in the crucial areas and general performance.

Unlike data produced by national or regional statistical offices, figures to illustrate gender gaps in organisations were not always easily accessible and extra efforts were needed to collect them. This was the case at the Dutch universities. One of the objectives of the Equal project was to establish the exact numbers of men and women in the various positions and hierarchy levels of the institutions. This has not been done before, and the exercise revealed that some of the figures are that are supposed to form an important base for personnel decisions are quite patchy. The figures were used to draw attention to the fact that women and employees from ethnic minorities are underrepresented at the higher levels of staff and to calculate the Glass Ceiling Index for the different Faculties at the university and the departments at the Hogeschool. The scores for this Index are an excellent tool to benchmark the different faculties and departments.

3.3. GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

DPs in the EQUAL GM working group used various methods of scientific research to assess the gender gaps they aimed to tackle. The Just GeM project has imported the famous '3R-Model'⁴ that had been developed in Sweden and adapted it to the Austrian context.

The 3R-Model

- **Representation:**

- ⇒ How many women and men are involved in the decision-making concerning the policies and practices that are to be assessed (governments, public authorities, consultative bodies etc.);

- ⇒ How many women and men are benefiting from the services and provisions related to employment supplied in the territory;

- ⇒ What is the percentage of measures that are predominantly benefiting women or men (education and training, active labour market policies, childcare and elderly care, support to business creation and SMEs, etc.)

- **Resources:**

- ⇒ How are different resources such as time, space, money being distributed to women and men?

- ⇒ How much money is being spent on female and male activities in different policy areas (such as training, employment, research)?

- ⇒ How are the relevant public budgets distributed between women and men? Who is benefiting most from those budget allocations?

- ⇒ How much space is being dedicated to female and male activities?

- **Reality:**

- ⇒ What are the differences in the life circumstances of the women and men who are the beneficiaries of the policies and practices under observation

- **Rules:**

- ⇒ What are the gender differences in terms of societal rules and legal regulations?

Based on the emerging differences between women and men, gender equality targets are formulated.

3.4. TRAINING SPECIALISTS FOR GENDER MAINSTREAMING

To introduce a gender dimension into policies and practices in an organisation or territory, specific competencies are needed at different levels of the hierarchy. In recent years, a market for gender mainstreaming specialists has been emerging in many Member States of the European Union. A number of DPs followed this trend and have developed qualification profiles for those specialists and designed new training programmes. The idea is to enroot gender mainstreaming not only in the organisational development of public administrations and agencies, which are striving to comply with European and national legislation, but also to influence the personnel policies of private companies and organisations.

The 'Gender Agents' course developed by the Austrian Just GeM DP is a modular training package in two different versions. The first is offered to the authorities which formulate the Styrian employment policy and are in charge of the budget and of allocating funds to chosen policy priorities. The second programme targets organisations that implement active labour market policy measures as sub-contractors of the authorities.

⁴ Swedish Association of Local Authorities: The 3-Rs-Tool for gender equality in local government. On gender mainstreaming and the 3R method in Swedish municipalities. Stockholm 1999. Under the headings 'Representation, Resources Realities' this model is assessing all policy fields in a municipality or region.

Four Training Modules

The training programme is structured in four modules and highly work-based, i.e. whilst acquiring knowledge and skills the new gender agents are already setting up their pilots in the respective organisations.

Module I: Gender Mainstreaming and the Function of a Gender Agent: *In this module, the theme of equal opportunities for men and women is examined from a range of very different angles. Whilst studying the historical development of equal opportunities and of gender mainstreaming, participants focus on their personal and institutional approach to gender equality. They learn how to look at their professional context in a 'gender perspective'. In addition, the role and tasks of a 'gender agent' within the organisation are defined and discussed in the group.*

Module II: Implementation of Gender Mainstreaming and Project Management: *The implementation of Gender mainstreaming is carried out via pilot projects which apply the approach to development, planning and organisation of the Styrian employment policies. This module teaches the necessary project management know-how. From planning through to evaluation, participants acquire all the practical skills and then put their new expertise to immediate use in their own projects. Apart from project management, the module addresses the status of gender agents as in-house consultants.*

Module III: Gender Mainstreaming within the Organisational Context: *Implementing gender mainstreaming requires a potential for change in the organisation. Based on the systemic approach of the DP, this module supports participants to examine developmental stages of their projects and which kind of change those stages will have to address. Trainees learn also how to anticipate and deal with the resistance that every process of change entails.*

Module IV: Gender Mainstreaming as a Process (Tools, Methodology): *On-going analysis, monitoring and evaluation must be an integral part of gender mainstreaming. This module introduces participants to various tools and processes and their applications. Furthermore, the collection and use of available data and a critical approach to interpreting those figures was covered.*

Besides training top level decision-makers as described earlier, the Swedish GED DP offered training to 35 middle managers from its partner organisations. As for the top decision-makers, the scheme was conceived as an in-depth personal experience for each individual participant. It was structured in four phases (modules) of four days each and lasting over a period of six months. This timing was considered as important to give trainees ample opportunity to reflect and find their own way in handling the complex questions about gender and gender impact of decisions on individuals, groups, such as work teams, but also families and on organisations. Between the different training phases the participants had to do homework, which further stimulated the individual process of reflection. While the first three seminars concentrated on the three levels mentioned above, the fourth focused on methods and tools that can help participants to disseminate and further develop the acquired knowledge and skills in order to start gender equality projects in their own organisations. The DP describes the result of the training as 'enlightening and inspiring' for all participants. Many things that they had taken for granted in their views on women and men were shattered and the GEDs recognised them as myths that are socially constructed and therefore could be changed.

3.5. RUNNING GM PILOT PROJECTS

Running pilot actions to test the validity of the equality goals and plans that were emerging from the gender impact assessments and also the effectiveness of the training programmes for gender agents was a crucial step within the intended processes of change.

Nijmegen Universiteit, which is one of the partners of the Dutch DP Bridging the Gender gap at Universities, ran a pilot programme to improve the recruitment procedures for academic staff and higher management. The rationale was to make 'hidden' procedures and implicit arguments visible that are often influencing the selection or rejection of candidates. The background and reason for the pilot scheme is the poor quality of recruitment and selection procedures at

universities and the under-representation of women in higher academic positions. The activities follow the development stages that the DP has laid down in its Manual for Gender Mainstreaming.

The Austrian pilot actions were undertaken in public authorities and organisations that have the decision-making power to fund and out-contract training and active labour market policy measures. 31 organisations from throughout the region applied for a pilot project; 11 were chosen by the steering group of JUST GeM. Given this huge demand, the DP was in a position to apply strict selection criteria:

- Total cost/subsidies ratio of EQUAL funding and the financial and other resources contributed by the participating organisation;
- Impact on all policy fields covered by the organisation, i.e. a commitment to extend gender mainstreaming to all departments;
- Sustainability of the project in the organisation;
- Impact on Employment Policy;
- Mainstreaming and dissemination potential.

After their training the Swedish 'gender equality developers' embarked on their local pilot projects. In the Swedish police, examples of those actions include 'friendlier' police uniforms for women and men, a survey on absenteeism and sick leave rates of women and men, a training programme helping support persons who are working with crime victims to integrate a gender perspective. In the Armed Forces the new GEDs launched an analysis of the gender implications in international operations. As a result of this initiative, a new EQUAL partnership was formed that put forward a second round proposal. Other pilots addressed gender issues in institutions that belong to the typical female domains of the public sector (hospitals and schools). New teaching materials and tools to be widely disseminated were also produced. It is important to note that although these local projects are within the realm of the DP, their content and implementation depend on the performance of participants and the willingness of their organisations to embark on a process of change.

4. GM STRATEGY N°3: WORKING WITH GENDER EQUALITY BODIES AT LOCAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL

Many EQUAL DPs working in the framework of the Equal Opportunities Pillar have been building on the experiences and achievements of gender equality bodies and/or gender equality counsellors. This is also the case of the Spanish Promociona and the Italian Ri.Do. (Risorse Donne Venezia Gender) DPs. Both DPs were aiming to strengthen existing infrastructures and also to create new resource centres. The idea was to support the equality experts working in those institutions to launch and improve positive actions for specific target groups of women, to take better account of the needs and roles of men and to lay the foundations for gender mainstreaming actions in their territories.

4.1. LINKING SPECIFIC ACTIONS AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING

The Spanish DP Promociona working in Asturias and Galicia sought to integrate the gender perspective in the policies and practices of local governments through the work of equality agents. The project was convinced that that in order to do that both the status and the role of equality agents in local policies must be strengthened. The DP hired eight equality agents to develop and implement strategies to tackle gender disparities in local policies and services. At the same time, a network of equality agents was set up to foster cooperation between the agents and their local communities. Promociona linked three major strands of activities:

- **Strengthening position and impact of equality agents**

The best way to empower equality agents is that the City Governments hire them in the capacity of a regular staff member responsible for gender equality. Placing them under the direct responsibility of the Mayor is the best way to enhance their work; they are close to the political decision makers and can also influence the various departments of the City Government in order to improve the different social services by taking better account of the different needs and interests of men and women

- **Preparing municipalities for gender mainstreaming**

To encourage the City Councils to include a gender dimension in their different policies and practices, the DP offered financial incentives. Thanks to EQUAL, in addition to paying the salaries, technical and financial resources are also allocated to each equality agent. In fact, these incentives were a decisive factor for the municipalities to join the activities of the project.

- **Building capacity for gender mainstreaming**

Training seminars and working groups were organised to help the equality agents up-date their knowledge and skills. This included introducing gender mainstreaming in employment and social services in its territories of operation. To that end DP developed specific teaching materials that are were used as a tool by the equality advisors who carried out training for career counsellors, social workers and local development agents, but also members of other EQUAL partnerships. Building lasting gender equality alliances with these territorial key actors was an important part of the approach. To make this inter-agency work sustainable 'Cooperation Agreements' were drawn up that had to be signed by all participants.

4.2. LINKING GENDER EQUALITY TO LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

The Italian Ri.Do DP, which is operating in the Province of Venice developed permanent infrastructures for gender equality at local and provincial level, the so-called Women's Resource Centres (WRCs). For Ri.Do. developing the potential of women means contributing to local development. Compared to equal opportunities, local development policies have more influence and impact, since they are operated by permanent structures with decision-making power and adequate resources. To achieve a similar kind of sustainability and status, Ri.DO. created a link between gender equality and local development policies and fostered synergies among decision makers and staff in the two policy areas.

4.3. GENDERING LOCAL SERVICES FOR DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

Gender mainstreaming implies that a gender dimension is introduced in all policies and services that are targeting different groups of women and men. In the framework of the Promociona one partner developed a number of actions applying a gender approach to empowerment and support schemes for people with disabilities, which worked as an 'eye opener' for those implementing gender equality policies.

5. GM STRATEGY N° 4: ADDRESSING BUSINESS NEEDS

Introducing a gender dimension into the personnel policies of private and/or public companies was a major part of the activities of several EQUAL DPs. In most cases this involved specific actions for women, but also some of the components of the gender mainstreaming process described above for the public sector.

It is important to note that in many Member States those policies are increasingly becoming part of diversity management concepts that companies adopt to develop and use the full potential of all their employees and thus to be able to respond to the demands of more diverse and global markets. DPs focusing on reconciliation or desegregation in private or public companies were also using this concept. Their efforts were geared to raising the awareness of management and work councils to gender issues related to desegregation and/or work-life-balance and to turn those key people into advocates of gender equality and/or diversity.

5.1. SUPPORTING COMPANIES TO ASSESS THEIR GENDER EQUALITY PERFORMANCE

The French DP in Finistère was aiming to combat gender discrimination in agribusiness and the food industry in Brittany, a sector with productions system that entail broken work days and other forms of precarious employment, but also high levels of turn-over and difficulties to attract and retain a qualified workforce. Through emphasising the possible impact of gender equality policies on tackling burning needs of HR development, the project succeeded to convince the employers

to become EQUAL partners. To generate a clear picture of the situation of depart the DP undertook two different exercises.

The first step was a study was carried out by external experts who interviewed all workers (of which 85% are women) and analysed personnel data. Results revealed that gender gaps are considerable. Concerning the personnel policies, it was found that the existing human resource potential was being neglected and that work organisation discriminated against women. The second step was to support the firms to comply with the French gender equality legislation. The DP provided the enterprises with a set of detailed grids facilitating the collection of data and a guidebook with lead questions helping employers and personnel managers to interpret the data and to detect direct and indirect discrimination. Companies were encouraged to fill in an in-depth version of the grids which are also looking into recruitment and promotion criteria, reasons for absenteeism and quitting jobs, access to different levels and types of training, etc. The results of both exercises were discussed with the employers, before drawing up action plans to improve the situation.

In [Denmark](#), HK, the Trade Union of Commercial and Clerical Employees, played a crucial role in tipping the scales in favour of improved gender balance in senior management. An HK-led EQUAL partnership focused on eliminating one of main the reasons for this gender gap - the limited pool of female human resources in middle management from which recruits are drawn. Women working at this level of the corporate hierarchy were offered training and coaching designed to develop leadership skills, personal growth and a strong will to promote their careers. Participation in the programme was free, but the women's employers had to make a financial commitment in kind by granting their employees 28 working days to be spent on the programme's training and coaching sessions. Coaching was carried out by specialists who had a nationwide reputation as management consultants and 'master coaches'. They also trained trade union staff to become coaches, which produced a mainstreaming effect within HK itself and a certain peer pressure for other unions to follow suit

A [Portuguese Partnership](#), coordinated by the National Trade Union Federation, assessed the realities of working life for men and women in 19 companies. In most cases, women suffered from discrimination as a result of factors such as restricted access to certain jobs, fewer career opportunities, lower pay and loss of workers' rights as a result of taking maternity leave. At first, the employers refused to accept the existence of any discriminatory practices. However, two companies that had previously been partners in an ESF project were able to demonstrate how recruiting women with good educational credentials for technical jobs had greatly improved their performance and productivity. This [example](#) of good practice provided by peers helped the other employers to understand that personnel policies based on gender equality could generate business advantages. As a result, the Management Boards of all 19 organisations successfully negotiated collective agreements with their Works Councils and trade unions.

The WLB Partnership in Ireland produced a 'Diagnostic Pack' to support its member companies and organisations to assess their status in terms of enabling a satisfying work-life-balance for women and men and to plan future development actions. The Diagnostic Pack was based on research, undertaken by the DP, on the current state-of-the-art in work-life-balance initiatives on both an international level and within the organisations forming WLBN. The pack consists of:

- A review of current literature and published training material and associated action programmes, obstacles, stages of development and tools of change management in the area of work-life-balance.
- Seven case studies on successful work-life-balance programmes in public and private organisations and a review of relevant websites and links.
- Data from the performance assessment of the WLBN members and output of search conferences organised by the DP. This material acts as an internal benchmark and baseline against which to initiate change.
- A framework that sets out an evolutionary work-life-balance-model, called the continuum of change involves specific criteria and development stages. Diagnostic check-lists were

produced that assist the organisations to recognise the stage of each continuum they are at and the most appropriate action to take to promote development.

5.2. ACTION PLANS FOR EQUALITY / DIVERSITY

Based on the outcomes of the screening process, DPs set up equality and/or diversity targets and supported the companies to draw up action plans. Again, ownership and active participation of in-house players in this process was paramount. Projects designed and implemented awareness raising events and training targeting senior and middle management, and members of work councils. Eventually, the action plans were agreed and so were the roles and tasks of the different players.

The French DP co-operating with the food industry in the Finistère region signed an agreement with each enterprise that had committed itself to a change process towards improved gender equality performance. The agreement included the placement of an advisor, an analysis of strong and weak points of recruitment practices, guidelines for skills assessment and appraisals of female employees are established and the re-organisation of work teams, support to the application for gender equality state subsidies

Based on the outcomes of a gender impact assessment in 100 companies in the Barcelona region, a [Trade Union-led project](#) developed a [work-life balance model](#). Ten large companies were selected for test runs, which included more flexible, family-friendly working time arrangements, leave schemes and a 'lights off' policy after 8.00 p.m. to ensure that overtime did not conflict with family responsibilities. In addition a variety of direct services were offered to employees. These included washing, shopping and home deliveries, home maintenance and repair and also childcare, support for elderly dependents and transport facilities. Accompanied by awareness raising and training seminars for managers and trade union representatives, the schemes improved the job performance of women with care responsibilities and reduced absenteeism. These new solutions to reconciling work and family life were introduced into collective agreements.

In [Finland](#), EQUAL initiated a joint venture between social partners in the technology industries and supported companies in introducing the kind of equality planning that was required by national legislation. Guided by equality experts, the enterprises used a six-stage model that led to an on-going process of improving the working life of women and men. Step 1 required the formation of an equality team bringing together male and female employees from all job categories and age groups. This team played a key role that included carrying out an analysis of the organisation's gender equality performance and specifying the areas of equality promotion. The next stages involved setting up an equality plan with goals and timetables for two years. Priority issues were zero tolerance policies to combat gender based and sexual harassment, equal pay and gender fair recruitment and promotion procedures. Managers were made responsible for taking things forward in their respective areas and were carefully monitored by the equality team. After the two years, the results were evaluated and necessary corrections and new targets and measures are being implemented in a follow-up plan. [Companies](#) have come to appreciate that equality planning can improve the social climate and wellbeing in the workplace, whilst increasing the productivity and the income of the enterprises.

In the case of WLBN the action plans of participating companies and organisations were embedded in the framework of the four stages of the 'continuum of change' approach: formative, broadening, deepening and mature. Whilst at the first stage a company may be complying with the relevant legislation and offering a small number of family-friendly measures mainly for women with children, the second stage is likely to extend those measures to a wider group, involving fathers or more generally people with care responsibilities. Measures are still unconnected, not systematically monitored and often reluctantly granted after demands of employees and/or work councils. During the deepening stage a more consistent bundle of policies is emerging and becoming available to all categories of staff. Policies are now seen as a response to business needs and to attract and retain staff. At this point relevant HR skills are being developed and the up-take of programmes monitored. When reaching the mature stage an enterprise is meeting its organisational goals and its employees' work-life-needs without either suffering.

5.3. TESTING NEW APPROACHES

Pilot actions of both reconciliation and desegregation DPs are being implemented which test the validity and impact of gender equality policies on productivity and competitiveness of companies. Positive outcomes are already becoming visible and, sometimes, tend to make the new approaches sustainable.

In France, a [Partnership](#) was initiated by a major hotel chain that was seeking to reduce the alarming turnover and absenteeism of its female staff. This company piloted new work schedules geared to tackling disadvantages resulting from the high level of flexibility, which is often a requirement of jobs in this sector. For example, a new solution was found for receptionists who had to cover two rush periods – one in the morning when guests were checking out and another in the evening when new arrivals were piling up. The free hours in between did not really help to improve family life, since employees had to leave for their second shift just as their children or partners were returning home. A multi-skills programme changed the situation. Employees were trained for more than one job and, as a result, a person can, on the same day, work first as a receptionist and then as a waiter. HR managers now offer full days instead of ‘broken’ schedules, and this approach helps employees to develop their career and earn more pay.

One of the pilot projects of the FTDP DP in the UK integrated a gender approach into a major national scheme of initial vocational training: the Modern Apprenticeship programme. This learning intervention has been developed to promote the business needs and benefits of diversifying the workforce to the potential managers of the future and to make them aware of how their actions can affect their peer group. All beneficiaries were in the 16 to 24 year old age range. The module was structured into 6 sessions of 1.5 hours duration. Content included stereotyping, discrimination, prejudice and awareness raising of the issues, including year 2010 demographics, to ensure participants understand the diversity reasons for tackling skill shortages. The pilot has been evaluated on an on-going basis and key reasons for its success identified: business games to illustrate key stereotyping messages; television and video to illustrate stereotypical role models and images of equality such as bullying at work; and interactive topic groups to discuss issues such as ‘women are taking men’s jobs’.

The same DP also piloted a ‘brokerage service’ aimed at tackling gender gaps in the transport sector. The scheme addressed the well known situation of women not finding regular employment after having been trained in a non-traditional occupation. The service was based on sharing information and circulating CVs of female candidates between the partners in the network. The concept of sharing information is not new, but the DP developed the idea to incorporate data about individual partner recruitment of women into male dominated occupations to help other partners to meet their diversity recruitment targets.

6. SOME CONCLUSIONS FOR ESF OP DESIGNERS AND IMPLEMENTERS

At the end of 2006, several Member States - [Belgium \(Flanders\)](#), [Ireland](#), [Italy](#), [Portugal](#), [Spain](#) and [Austria \(Styria\)](#) joined forces in a group led by [Finland](#) that aimed to share and disseminate EQUAL achievements in gender mainstreaming and anchor GM in the next programming period of the ESF (2007-2013). Communities of Practice (CoP) are defined as ‘*groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an ongoing basis*’. [A communication and networking platform](#) became the hub for those involved in implementing the ESF at all levels - namely ESF programme managers, gender equality bodies and experts, policy makers and ESF promoters. This platform soon developed into a real gender mainstreaming warehouse, stocking tools and experiences from almost every Member State.

In addition, a number of peer review meetings involved key players associated with the CoP in the analysis and validation of those good practices that have emerged from EQUAL projects and national thematic networks. These reviews focused on:

- implementing a gender mainstreaming approach in regional development with a special emphasis on employment and inclusion policies (Styria);
- overcoming gender stereotypes through media campaigns (Flanders);
- empowering enterprises and social partners to implement gender practices (Italy);
- capacity building to promote and facilitate gender mainstreaming (Ireland).

The peer reviews followed the [methodology](#) developed under the European Employment Strategy. According to this approach, these learning opportunities bring together practitioners and evaluators from the host country, who are the advocates of the EQUAL good practices, and potential users or decision makers from other Member States, who are the peer reviewers.

A final Peer review was organised in Warsaw in June 2008 on 'Gender Mainstreaming - Learning for Institutional Change'. The choice of title conveyed a clear message. To integrate gender equality into the new ESF programmes (2007-2013) as a transversal principle, all players and organisations involved in programme implementation must embark on a change process. In the context of EQUAL, Poland had developed and tested a model promoting this kind of process through awareness raising and training in gender mainstreaming. Needs-tailored programmes have been provided to four groups of key players: managers in intermediary bodies; decision-makers at regional level; project assessors; and project promoters. At this Peer Review, the team of movers and shakers that designed and ran the scheme during the life time of EQUAL demonstrated it with many examples and described its impact. The most important of the scheme's outcomes was the fact that this model was to become a regular part of the implementation arrangements for the Polish Operational Programmes.

Counterparts from other Member States – Germany (Baden-Württemberg, Bremen), Spain, France and Portugal – presented their approaches and methods and discussed how to cooperate in order to carry gender mainstreaming further.

GM is a complex and long-term process which requires an innovative spirit, persistence and the firm political will to move from the test bed into mainstream policies and practices. Although the aim of the EU is to apply GM to all policy areas and all levels of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, experience shows that this cannot take place all at once through a single process.

To **mainstream GM** and to engender lasting impact, all key players must **identify the policy areas that are marked by particularly huge gender gaps and most in need of GM**. Working towards improved gender balance and integrating the gender dimension into all actions can be greatly reinforced through **EQUAL's transversal principles or building blocks**. At local, regional or national level, policy makers and leaders within the realms of business, education or research can benefit from using these principles in combination with GM, as outlined below, to achieve sustainable progress and improved governance in their respective areas of operation.

Forming pro-active **partnerships for GM** strengthens the commitment of all players and the sustainability of change in the chosen policy field. The success stories on territorial pacts for equal opportunities that engendered local and regional development are the living proof of how political decision-makers, senior and middle managers in administrations, enterprises and social partner organisations can cooperate to make large cities, smaller towns and even whole regions better places to live and work, whilst increasing the innovative potential, productivity and competitiveness of the territory.

Making the most of **transnationality** optimises gender equality policies. There is a wealth of good practice that can help policy makers and other stakeholders learn about the positive results of importing GM approaches from other countries and about embarking on future transnational cooperation to induce transfer, adaptation and mainstreaming.

Including GM in strategies and programmes for **innovation** opens up fresh perspectives from a gender viewpoint. New models of employment and career policies, work-life-balance for women and men, and solutions to childcare and elderly care that combine institutional and home-based approaches would not have emerged without a commitment to GM.

Stimulating the **empowerment** of women and men so that they can develop their full potential is not only about individual advancement. Using GM empowers the different players to becoming change agents working towards a more egalitarian and diverse society and also create a pool of expertise that can offer advice and assistance to a range of organisations and enterprises.