

WIDENING VOCATIONAL CHOICES AND BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING for WOMEN'S CAREER ADVANCEMENT

GOOD PRACTICE AND STRATEGIC LESSONS FROM EQUAL

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*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 summarises outcomes from **EQUAL** Development Partnerships (DPs), and transnational and national thematic networks that have been concerned with desegregation of the labour market. This document includes annotated references to the EU policy context and relevant background material from **EQUAL** experience that can be accessed on-line through hyperlinks.*

1. THE BACKGROUND

1.1. THE CONTEXT

The European Commission's Gender Equality Report 2009¹ confirms the trend of recent years²: educational gender gaps are closing in the EU and in most Member States women are now acquiring better educational qualifications than men. Girls are less likely than boys to leave compulsory (lower secondary) school without gaining a certificate. In upper secondary education, more than half of the students are female. There are other very systematic tendencies across Europe. Young women are more often enrolled in general educational programmes, whilst boys tend to opt for vocational ones. Fewer women than men drop out of upper secondary education without successfully completing their studies. Consequently, more women than men go on to university and female students form the majority in both occupationally-oriented and academic programmes. Nearly 60% of graduates at first-level in the EU are female but their percentage of science and technology degrees remains much lower than that of men.

However, all the inroads mentioned above are not yet mirrored by women's position in the labour market. Whilst there has been a gradual increase over the last decade in women's participation in the labour market from 50% in 1997 to over 58% in 2007³, there are still disparities between women and men in employment. The employment gender gap stands at 14.2% in the EU [] and both sector specific and occupational segregation continue to be the major obstacles to the equal treatment of women and men in employment and pay. Almost half of the women gainfully employed in the EU work in only four sectors: health care and social services; education; public administration and retailing. By contrast only one third of men work in four sectors: construction; public administration, retailing and business services.

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, 2009; COMM (2009) 77 final;

² Eurostat: The life of women and men in Europe, A statistical portrait, 2002;

³ However, there are major differences between Member States, with figures varying from 37% to 73%.

Study choices still show a traditional gender stereotyped pattern. With proportions of between 70 and 80% men outnumber women in engineering, manufacturing and construction as well as in science, maths and computing. On the other hand more than two thirds of students in educational sciences and humanities, in arts, health and social work studies are women. In addition, even though EU- level figures show a larger female than male participation in continuing education and training, the access to those avenues to life-long learning is often difficult for women due to work-life-balance problems and a lack of suitable offers in the fields where they work.

1.2. THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S RESPONSE

These facts and figures show that much remains to be done if women are to realise their full potential and thereby make an even more significant contribution to economic development and growth. As part of the [European Employment Strategy](#), Guidelines are proposed by the Commission to be approved by the Council, and once approved these become common priorities to be reflected in the Member State's national employment policies. The current Guidelines are the [Integrated Guidelines 2008-2010](#). Guideline 17 encourages Member States to 'Implement employment policies aiming at achieving full employment, improving quality and productivity at work, and strengthening social and territorial cohesion.' This Guideline indicates that *"Special attention should be paid to substantially reducing the persistent employment gaps between women and men, and the gender pay gap."* Guideline 18 suggests that Member States should 'Promote a lifecycle approach to work' and one of the five measures that it proposes to achieve this objective is *"resolute action to increase female participation and reduce gender gaps in employment, unemployment and pay."*

At a practical rather than a policy level, the European Commission supports actions and projects that aim to improve career guidance for both women and men interested in pursuing non-traditional careers. It also funds initiatives, including through the European Social Fund (ESF), to improve women's level of qualifications, particularly in the scientific and technical fields and in new technologies, and to prepare women for better access to management posts in the public and private sectors. In addition as far as the ESF is concerned, Article 3 of the [Regulation \(EC\) No 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council](#) of 5 July 2006 commits the it to *"mainstreaming and specific action to improve access to employment, increase the sustainable participation and progress of women in employment and reduce gender based segregation in the labour market, including by addressing the root causes, direct and indirect, of gender pay gaps."* In addition, Article 6 on 'Gender equality and equal opportunities' states that *"The Member States shall ensure that (ESF) operational programmes include a description of how gender equality and equal opportunities are promoted in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of operational programmes. Member States shall promote a balanced participation of women and men in the management and implementation of operational programmes at local, regional and national level, as appropriate."*

1.3. THE CONTRIBUTION OF EQUAL

Through two calls for proposals for projects in the Member States a total of 275 Equal Development Partnerships (DPs) were chosen to work on the topic of 'Reducing gender gaps and desegregation' - 117 in 2001 and 158 in 2004. This 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 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.

EQUAL good practices in overcoming the gender segregation in economic sectors and occupations made and, if continued, can still make, a valuable contribution to diversifying and improving the skills of the European workforce. In addition, the Commission's Communication presenting 'Integrated Guidelines for Jobs and Growth'⁴ emphasises that the EU should "*invest in knowledge to ensure the dynamism and vigour of the whole European economy. The realisation of the knowledge society, based on human capital, research, education and innovation policies is the key to boost (our) growth potential and prepare the future.*" EQUAL's approaches to overcoming traditional career choices and to educating and training both women and men in areas where they are underrepresented help to meet this challenge.

The EQUAL approaches that stimulated most change were those which have integrated different elements of successful desegregation policies. Many EQUAL DPs and Transnational Partnerships combined these different aspects to combat both horizontal and vertical segregation in training, education and the labour market and to develop more comprehensive approaches to equal opportunities.

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 desegregation and reconciliation 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 'A Single Labour Market for All - EQUAL promotes horizontal and vertical desegregation,' which identifies the key components of policies and practices that can promote more gender diversity at work.

2. WIDENING THE VOCATIONAL CHOICES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

In many Member States, EQUAL DPs emphasised the need to address gender stereotypes at an early age. During compulsory education and even in pre-school, different types of activities, behaviour and attitudes are fostered in boys, as compared to girls. Although much has changed in the past decades, many girls are still not encouraged to study 'male' subjects such as science, engineering or technologies. Actors in young people's social environments, including teachers, guidance counsellors, parents and also their peers, are often not equipped to take account of girls' and young women's specific needs and interests.

2.1. STARTING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND EVEN BEFORE

The most formative impressions of gender roles are created in early childhood. In addition to parents and the immediate social environment, childcare facilities can play a key role when it comes to avoiding gender stereotypes. In a few countries, EQUAL set out to break the predominantly female influence in kindergarten and pre-school education and thus, to challenge stereotypical attitudes. In Ireland, for instance, the [National Flexi-work](#) DP developed a training scheme that opened up jobs for men and older people in these childcare centres. The idea was to provide young children with new role models to promote positive attitudes towards gender equality, not only in the children, but also in the staff and parents. Children and adults are now seeing men and older people in a different environment and light: men in a caring role and older workers providing, as opposed to receiving, care. This is a particularly relevant experience for children who are being raised by lone mothers or when older members of the extended family are not part of the child's everyday life.

⁴Commission of the European Union: [Integrated Guidelines for Jobs and Growth \(2005-2008\)](#). Communication from the President in agreement with Vice-President Verheugen and Commissioners Almunia and Spidla; COM 2004 (141 final)

Two Finnish DPs started the de-stereotyping process even before primary education.

[Women IT](#) operated in **kindergartens**, using role play, games and toys to encourage and to inspire girls to work with technology. The children had the chance to play with construction toys, create animations and use technical devices such as computers and digital cameras. They also explored domestic work and presented the results in surveys of mothers' and fathers' tasks and they then discussed why these were divided in a gender specific way.

[Mirror](#) launched a campaign to stimulate the creativity and inventiveness of **girls and boys aged 6 to 12**, whilst at the same time enhancing their team building skills and persistence. Regional and national competitions were organised, in cooperation with Finnish Technology Industries, to design and construct a mobile toy of the future.

2.2. THE TEENAGE YEARS

DPs, concentrating on young women's transition to adult and working life, were well aware of the prevailing patterns. A number of DPs analysed the interconnections between female socialisation and learning approaches to mathematics and science. They developed teaching and learning methodologies to encourage girls and young women to explore technological subjects and to develop their hidden potential. ICT training and e-learning were high on the agenda and ensured equal access to the information and knowledge society. [Successful pilots](#) included specific ICT courses for girls, Internet clubs and summer camps for young female inventors or taster weeks in enterprises that were involved in the partnerships. Young women who had 'made it' into male-dominated occupations played an important part as role models and mentors.

The approaches developed for secondary schools resulted in more girls choosing non-traditional subjects, training or education and owed much of their success to their organisation as an on-going process, and not just as single events. This was achieved in Spain, for example, by creating innovative curricula, which challenged traditional gender roles and related stereotypes. Rather than offering extra general courses on equal opportunities, the programmes used household processes, such as cooking, baking or ironing to explain certain phenomena in chemistry and physics. Young people learned, for instance, about the different aggregate states of materials - solid, liquid or gas - by producing chocolate, cocoa and ice cream. At the same time, the [model](#) led boys to realise the value of unpaid female work and to accept more responsibility at home. The scheme created a lot of media attention and prompted a lot of discussion amongst teachers and parents, which, in turn, led the competent authorities to consider adopting EQUAL's approach.

Several DPs recognised the need to organise **girl-specific activities** based on **female ways of learning** such as acquiring knowledge and skills in a coherent context and for a specifically defined purpose that meets the learners' needs, rather than assimilating technical or isolated information for which they must detect a suitable use. Some DPs also concentrated on initial vocational training in male domains such as construction, transport and certain segments of ICT and worked mainly **to improve the training environment in vocational schools**

In Germany, the '[Gender Mainstreaming in the Information Society](#)' DP (GM InfSo) produced a series of **e-Learning materials** for girls and their teachers to help them develop media competences in an interdisciplinary way. Another German DP, '[Frauen in t.i.m.e](#)' set up **computer clubs** specifically targeting girls, aged 14-15, who had few opportunities to access ICT. The main objectives of these clubs was to increase the girls' technological and media skills and enhance their self-confidence and social skills.

The Finnish DP [Women IT](#) also developed science, mathematics and technology clubs, as well numerous **curricular activities** to influence current and future teaching practice related to ICT. In rare cases, these initiatives were also open to boys.

[JIVE](#)'s partners developed a model of best practice promoting hands-on events for girls in engineering, construction and technology. The DP promoted and transferred these events more widely within the engineering and construction industries and also to learning providers.

In Sweden, the [Libra](#) partnership developed a multiple approach to de-stereotyping vocational training in the construction sector. The approach was based on all girl classes because it was felt that the presence of boys could hold girls back in their learning progress. It also used drama and interactive theatre to demonstrate the realities of life on construction sites and to stimulate discussions on attitudes towards race, gender and desegregation

Most of these EQUAL activities were complemented by measures that also involved parents. DPs usually concentrated on providing information about science, technology and information and communication that were presented as promising career paths.

2.3. TURNING TEACHERS, TRAINERS AND GUIDANCE STAFF INTO AGENTS OF CHANGE

EQUAL worked successfully towards changing the attitudes of people who are playing vital roles in the process of career choices and development. Although, in many countries, the issue of equal opportunities is included in the training of career advisers, evidence suggests that it is not transferred to the work situation. Often, guidance provided to young women and men is '**gender blind**' or in other words the procedure is believed to be neutral, but intrinsically reflects unhelpful gender stereotypes. To develop '**gender conscious**' counselling and guidance, continuing education was provided for career advisors and for those who would train future counsellors. In [Denmark](#), EQUAL good practice inspired political decision-makers when they were drafting and passing the new Danish Act on Educational and Vocational Guidance, in 2003, and it provided input for the new diploma for vocational counsellors implemented, in 2004.

Many DPs recognise that it is crucial not only to target girls and young women, but also their counsellors, teachers and trainers. In many cases, activities focused on the development of methodologies to be used in primary and secondary schools to diversify academic and vocational options for both girls and boys. They were geared towards changing staff attitudes and to making staff more aware of the importance of diversification.

In Finland, the [Mirror](#) course on Network Technologies for Women prepared **female teachers and other educational staff** to use ICT and information networks in everyday teaching activities. The objective of the course was to learn how to apply various tools in developing e-learning materials. Another sub-project was based on research into the relationship between gender and science teaching and learning in schools, in particular, on the types of approaches and tools that are required to motivate girls to consider science and technology, as a subject or career option.

The [JIVE](#) DP developed new **teacher training** modules, materials and methods, which were geared specifically to teaching ICT to women. The modules were based on the results of preliminary research which had demonstrated the need for training in technical trouble-shooting and problem-solving skills for ICT tutors and learning methods, tools and approaches for ICT teaching, including e-learning.

EQUAL gender equality courses enabled managers, lecturers, trainers and support staff from further and higher education and work-based training, **to meet the learning needs of women studying in male domains**. For example, 400 career counsellors and 500 lecturers and trainers in 100 organisations throughout the UK were trained to create a learning environment which was conducive to women. The [training](#) package examined the learning styles of women, curriculum content and recruitment and provided examples of practice that enhanced self-esteem and confidence. The package met with a huge demand from training providers that had to comply with national targets for workforce development, which included gender and diversity.

2.4. FOCUSING ON GUIDANCE AND TRANSITION

Most of the efforts of DPs to broaden girls' vocational choices were centred on career paths in science, technology, ICT and other male-dominated growth areas or in economic sectors facing skill shortages. Many projects focused on the transition from school to vocational training or tertiary education and developed a huge variety of methods and activities such as information

days, school-industry links, taster courses, summer camps, work-experience placements, group discussions and mentoring. It is important to note that these DPs treated the transition process as starting during the final years of compulsory education and not just during the last year or term.

There was a cluster of DPs that concentrated on the **individual support of young women**. These DPs, on occasions, also involved their parents, potential employers, social partners and mainstream training institutions. Their activities included:

- A variety of strategies to encourage girls and young women to consider vocational training or university-level education in male domains. Approaches ranged from ‘taster weeks’ in enterprises, through workshops and summer camps at higher educational institutions to media campaigns and chat rooms on the Internet;
- Support through pre-training that prepared young women to undertake the normal initial training for their career and group work and individual tutoring to help them cope with the male-dominated work environment;
- Awareness raising schemes and gender training for teachers, trainers and human resource development staff.

Accompanying the learning progress of young women in [non-traditional initial training](#) and tertiary education significantly reduced drop-out rates and increased the number moving directly from training to employment. [Mentoring programmes](#) providing professional and personal support in the early stages of training and/or employment emerged as potent methods of promoting desegregation.

In a small number of countries, EQUAL’s educational efforts were entirely focused on young men. Often these efforts were built on research which had indicated that the current male students had a more egalitarian vision than the previous generation, when it came to role and task sharing at home. In the Netherlands, EQUAL tested ways of addressing parenthood and gender roles in secondary and tertiary education. A group of engineers who were actually combining work and care was trained as ‘[ambassadors](#)’ for a **new male role model**. As ‘visiting lecturers,’ they passed on their experience to the students. These experiences were synthesised and integrated into teaching materials and tools and these new resources are now in great demand in a growing number of educational institutions.

[GM InfSo](#) encouraged networking between key actors in the field of careers guidance and training in technical jobs, manual trades and the ICT sector. These included secondary school teachers, careers advisers from employment offices and trainers and human resources managers. [Frauen in t.i.m.e.](#) also cooperated with Chambers of Commerce to identify female role models from the ICT sector that could be presented at various information events.

The [Mirror](#) model called ‘7-8-9’ was a programme that targeted Finnish children aged 13 to 15 and placed a specific emphasis on girls. The programme was delivered in three different stages:

- Hands-on taster courses in vocational schools and mathematics exercises based on real life cases in industry (grade 7);
- Practical activities in physics, chemistry and mathematics at the Museum of Technology (grade 8);
- Female tutors from industry explained jobs in engineering and electronics (grade 9).

A few DPs focused explicitly on the **role of career advisors and counsellors** and combined several lines of action. These included pushing for regulations that would require all guidance staff to follow modules on gender issues as a normal part of their training, developing material for continuing training such as the application of gender mainstreaming or gender sensitive counselling and tests and finally, developing practical tools to help break down stereotypical patterns. Some of these tools were designed as interactive electronic games that could be used in different settings. The idea was that horizontal segregation resulting from vocational choice should no longer be dealt with as a typically women’s or girls’ issue.

In Denmark, the ‘[Get A Life, Engineer](#)’ DP ran seminars for career advisors in universities and high schools. These seminars considered the influence of gender and learning and power

relationships on the learning experiences of women engineering students. Another line of action was 'future scenario' workshops that brought together pupils, engineering students and adults engineers to create a vision of how life should be and to develop pupils' choices for the future.

The [Women IT](#) DP organised a series of 8-day courses on Gender Sensitive Career Guidance, Recruitment and Counselling for counsellors and employment office staff. In addition to their formative dimension, these courses were perceived as an empowerment tool for those who were in charge of running Women IT sub-projects.

[JIVE](#) trained trainers to deliver Continuing Professional Development training to careers teachers and guidance professionals. This training focused on how to overcome gender stereotyping in careers education and guidance. Using case studies, role plays and interactive exercises, it aimed to equip guidance professionals with the awareness they required to overcome their own stereotyping and with arguments to challenge such stereotyping in the behaviour of others.

After studying the perception of gender in the daily practice of school-based career counsellors and also young people's experiences of vocational guidance, the Danish DP '[Youth, Gender and Career](#)' developed and organised further education courses for guidance staff and teachers and also held awareness raising seminars for parents.

3. HELPING ADULT WOMEN AND MEN TO ENTER GENDER SEGREGATED SECTORS AND OCCUPATIONS

The largest number of horizontal desegregation DPs catered for the needs of adult women. Whilst aiming to exploit job opportunities in future growth sectors and male dominated occupations, they tended to develop highly individualised training and support measures. These covered the itinerary from the first information and counselling contact to the labour market integration of participants.

3.1. ENHANCING THE GENDER DIMENSION IN CONTINUING TRAINING AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

Two approaches can be detected amongst those DPs that focused on women's training in non-traditional occupations. The first aimed to **train women in mixed groups** whilst ensuring that:

- Gender sensitive methodologies were developed, tested and used;
- Trainers were sensitised to women's needs and also trained in equal opportunities;
- Flanking measures such as childcare and family friendly schedules were in place.

Most DPs that concentrated on horizontal desegregation believed that positive action was required to open up jobs in economic sectors and occupations that have huge gender imbalances. This second approach involved **women only measures** which contained all the elements mentioned above but, in addition, ensured that:

- Female trainers predominated and acted as role models for beneficiaries;
- The training built on the previously acquired skills and know-how (both formal and informal) of the participants;
- The most effective methods of women's learning were used;
- The training included working on small projects, in a step-by-step approach;
- Science and technological subjects were demystified;
- Work placements were included in the programme;
- Networks and support groups were designed to continue after the end of the DPs' lifespan.

Helping women acquire a wide variety of ICT skills was the concern of many DPs and TPs. Most of them prepared beneficiaries for new occupations which required skills that link ICT to other key qualifications. These so-called interface occupations are in demand in growth areas such as advertising, multi-media, environmental protection, tourism and cultural management. Some DPs

argued that typically female skills or abilities such as communication, multi-tasking or teamwork should be valued and used in this context. Again, their training programmes were combined with work experience placements. They also included project learning during which trainees designed, negotiated and 'sold' a product that was based on the specific needs of a potential customer. Such products might have included websites, databases or tools for a marketing strategy.

DPs were also concerned with the needs of women immigrants who had largely been excluded from using ICT. Some supported women in acquiring the European Computer Driving Licence whilst others provided training for those who had university degrees or relevant professional experience. In a number of cases, programmes combined training in ICT and Internet skills with intercultural guidance and educational/training methods. The idea was that this combination would open up job opportunities for 'intercultural bridging agents' who could be employed as trainers or counsellors and, at the same time, act as role models for young women immigrants. Sometimes the explicit objective was to change the role of NGOs by using the DPs' training packages and methodologies to offer ICT and Internet skills to their members so that crucial know-how could reach females who were reluctant to enrol in regular training institutions.

In Spain, [TECNICA](#) used research data to design training modules in new technologies and technology-related fields tailored to both the needs of the local firms and the profiles of different target groups. After an orientation phase, participants were trained in computer literacy, renewable energies, e-content management, logistics software and website programming. Then, they were able to choose between a period of work experience or producing a feasibility study for establishing their own businesses. Finally, they had the possibility of either finding a job, with counselling and support from TECNICA or undertaking a placement in a 'mother' or 'mentor' company before starting their own businesses. TECNICA has also identified environmental protection and the development of renewable energies as a growth area in its region and trained women in the practical applications of solar energy. TECNICA also set up a follow-up system through which individuals were coached during their training and work experience.

In the Netherlands, the [Equal-in-Tech](#) DP catered for women who wished to work by taking on odd jobs in and around other people's houses. Training in the four different technical branches of painting, construction/carpentry, electrical engineering and domestic engineering was offered to unemployed women aged between 18 and 50. They were selected as a result of a rigorous four-day assessment procedure that was designed to measure their motivation and suitability. Occupational health and safety played an important role in the training through a module entitled 'Think safe and act safe.' Any woman who wished to start her own business after the training then received direct support from one of the partner organisations in the DP.

[GM InfSo](#) developed training courses to prepare unemployed female university graduates for careers as Knowledge-Management experts. Knowledge management is an example of a new occupational profile which is based on the growing awareness in businesses and organisations that successful performance depends on their capacity to mobilise and use the knowledge of their staff more effectively. A demand for these skills and services was identified in large companies and SMEs and also in the consulting sector, education, training and research institutions and large NGOs, such as organisations for developmental cooperation.

Before working directly with participants, many DPs began by training the trainers and up-dated their knowledge and skills to help them advise and train the target groups in different ways.

Working with a network of universities, [Red Aldaba](#) set up a **virtual campus** to teach a social mediation master's course through a programme designed from a gender perspective. In Spain, social mediation is a new professional profile based on an inter-disciplinary approach to social problems, as they are experienced by individuals in firms, municipalities and organisations. These problems are often handled in a bureaucratic or technocratic way, whilst social mediation attempts to address them from the perspectives of the individuals who are involved. Training included ICT, gender mainstreaming and research methods, all taught by external experts.

[JIVE](#) trained ten tutors to deliver specialised training material to learning providers and careers professionals. The DP provided one-day training programmes for lecturers and tutors on how to

create conducive learning environments for women. The main focus of the training was on inclusive learning and it was based on good practice from various educational and training initiatives within the engineering, construction and technology sectors. It was designed in packages so that it could be adapted to meet the needs of individual institutions or provided in a more general staff development course.

[Frauen in t.i.m.e.](#) supported experienced female trainers in becoming Online-Trainers. This 9-week training course focused on skills related to autonomous planning and the implementation of e-Learning courses. The topics included the operation of e-Learning platforms, time and project management, establishing and leading virtual groups and gender mainstreaming in the new media. The training was completed by the design of an online course and a practical exam.

Many DPs highlighted the fact that encouraging women to enter male domains requires individual empowerment. Making sure that women take charge of their learning processes is seen as one element in a process of empowerment. DPs developed methods to strengthen commitment and self-confidence, aspects that are vital to success in later employment. Managing and organising one's personal and family life to balance with the commitments of the training course was another element. Through active support with childcare, time-management and transport, DPs helped women prepare for the reality of work and, more importantly, for a job in a non-traditional sector.

Integrated pathways⁵ which combine skills assessment, counselling, guidance, training, coaching and work placements provided the most effective approach to helping mature women access employment in a male domain. Training was tailored to the skills requirements of companies, but also acknowledged prior learning and informal competences.

For example, in [Germany](#), EQUAL demonstrated how training unemployed university graduates as experts in knowledge management, by covering the technical aspects related to retrieval, categorisation and systematisation of knowledge in a course, could build on the women's capacities for multi-tasking, communication and team work. These skills proved to be a solid base for stimulating and guiding learning processes. Work experience placements convinced employers, and most participants received job offers before the end of the programme.

It is often difficult for women who are juggling work and family tasks to participate in continuing training and thus, to broaden and up-date their skills and hold on to their jobs. A French DP called '[ACTION ET VIGILANCE](#)' solved the problems of women working in precarious jobs within a large supermarket chain. To increase both the quality of work and job security, the project offered basic ICT training to the employees to help them meet the most essential skills requirements for cashiers and stock-clerks. However, the women explained that they could not afford the time necessary for this training. An innovative scheme changed this situation as it enabled employees to barter each hour they spent on training for an hour of housework, supplied by a local social economy enterprise and paid for by the company.

3.2. IMPROVING INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE FOR ADULT WOMEN

Many DPs aiming to improve vocational information and guidance for mature women focused explicitly on the roles of career advisors and counsellors and **networking with other key actors in their territories** was a central feature of their work.

In Italy, [SVI.P.O](#) set up a rural network of 12 **Women's Information Centres** based in the offices of the Regional Equal Opportunity Commission and in the nine participating municipalities. The centres functioned as one-stop shops offering not only vocational guidance but also a forum

⁵ See also EQUAL Strategic Lesson on [Pathways to Integration and \(Re-Entry\) into Employment for Disadvantaged People](#)

where women, institutions, enterprises and trade unions could meet to talk and discuss their views and strategies on local development from a gender equality perspective.

In Spain, [Red Adalba](#) formed a **research, analysis and action group** to help guidance counsellors in employment agencies, guidance services and human resource departments become more aware of gender issues. Equal opportunities experts shared the strategies and tools that they used to facilitate gender desegregation and such sessions included role play, project work and performance analysis and a practical guide for counsellors was also produced.

3.3. ADDRESSING GENDER GAPS IN RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Only a few DPs sought to do for men what most horizontal desegregation projects did for women. They **attracted men to typically female careers**, for instance in the care sector. They were mainly focused on the care of the elderly, which due to massive demographic changes is beginning to generate a huge demand for additional qualified staff. DPs aimed to renew this sector, which suffers from a poor image in terms of working conditions and pay.

To fill the alarming skills gaps, [SOS-MX](#) partners, in Denmark, a group of male care workers was trained as 'ambassadors' to dismantle myths about women being predestined for this kind of work. A combination of awareness raising and training for vocational counsellors, teachers and senior care staff, succeeded in introducing changes and showed how a push for the recruitment of men to teaching positions and on-the-job guidance can increase the presence of male role models, which was a pre-condition for overcoming gender segregation in this sector.

3.4. SUPPORTING BENEFICIARIES IN CROSSING THE JOB THRESHOLD

All DPs and TPs focusing on horizontal desegregation included **support packages for job search, preparation for job interviews and survival strategies for the first crucial stage after recruitment - the move into a male working environment**. DPs catering for women with no formal qualifications appeared to favour **modular approaches**. One example was the building of a **skills portfolio** that provided a potential employer with a detailed profile of the employee and her achievements. Such methods also allowed the individuals to assess and become conscious of their skills, competences and qualifications, thereby increasing self-confidence and the desire to continue to develop competences, even during a lengthy period of job search. At the same time, working with employers and '**pleading the business case**' helped companies to understand the **possible benefits of a more gender-balanced workforce**.

4. VERTICAL DESEGREGATION: BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING

Vertical segregation is not only related to senior management, as in many cases women's advancement is blocked by the 'glass ceiling' during the early stages of their careers. Blockages may occur even begin in initial recruitment, as companies do not necessarily recruit a mixed pool of management trainees. Another problem women face is the fact that the posts below senior management are often related to the central production areas of the company. The lack of women in such posts means that only a few gain the access, networking and credibility that are so vital in selection for the highest levels. This is particularly true for those sectors that are traditionally male dominated but the 'glass ceiling' seems to be less impenetrable in the public sector. This is probably because the public sector largely comprises health care and education and both of these services have substantial numbers of female employees.

The number of DPs and TPs that concentrate exclusively on vertical desegregation is much smaller than those with a horizontal desegregation focus. Building business cases for equal opportunities by convincing stakeholders of the benefits of using female potential is at the core of those projects that tested and implemented a variety of concepts including introducing:

- **Diversity management** as a strategy to break the glass ceiling and, at the same time, to strengthen companies' positions in rapidly changing markets. This involved the anticipation of

skills requirements, the gender sensitive assessment of the human resource potential and the development of training programmes for both male and female managers;

- **Experts with ‘bridging’ functions** such as equality counsellors, work-life-balance agents and intercultural mediators who analyse the personnel profile of companies and mechanisms and strategies used in recruitment, working conditions, job assessment, training and career progression. Together with the company, the experts devise an action plan that is integrated into the company’s human resources policy;
- **Positive action plans** to promote equal opportunities at company level, taking that company’s realities on board. In some cases, these plans went beyond the individual enterprise and included local or regional clusters of companies or even economic sectors;
- **Continuing training** to equip women with new management skills such as quality management, European and international marketing and product development allied with **counselling, coaching, mentoring and networking**;
- **Gender and diversity concepts into quality control systems**;

Some DPs supported the **self-employment of ‘gender consultants’** as they expected employers to need external expertise in the introduction of change processes and some DPs also helped SMEs that can rarely afford this kind of expertise .

4.1. ENHANCING CAREER AMBITIONS FROM EARLY ON

EQUAL DPs that tackled vertical segregation emphasised that female career ambitions should be encouraged from as early an age as possible, and that combating gender stereotypes in vocational guidance should go as far as female expectations of becoming senior managers.

In Portugal, [Agir para a Igualdade](#) used a three pronged approach to bring equal opportunities into schools. The model catered for young people, trainers and trade unions, and was implemented by raising the awareness and improving the skills of teachers, helping them to develop an Equal Opportunities curriculum and providing on-going support in its delivery.

In the UK, the [Fuirich Transport](#) DP established a forward looking strategy to improve female career opportunities in the **transport sector**, by integrating a gender approach into a major national scheme of initial vocational training - the Modern Apprenticeship programme. This gender module was structured into 6 sessions of 1.5 hours’ duration that covered stereotyping, discrimination, prejudice and awareness raising about the issues, including demographics to ensure that the participants understood the reasons for tackling skill shortages. The module was formally accredited to enable it to be mainstreamed into the Modern Apprenticeship programme both nationally and cross-sectorally.

4.2. SUPPORTING WOMEN’S ACCESS TO MANAGEMENT POSITIONS

Other DPs were concerned with women who had acquired high-level qualifications in certain economic sectors but despite their credentials and skills, became stuck at the threshold to senior positions, whilst their male counterparts climbed above them on the career ladder.

Research that highlighted the absence of women in the upper levels of the job hierarchy in **science, engineering and technology**, led a Spanish DP to focus on training existing female employees to become managers. The [EMATEK](#) project drew up three occupational profiles and then designed training that would provide women with the necessary competences to drive innovation and technological development and to disseminate technological knowledge to the industries and organisations in the region. The 300 women, who were already extremely competent in their respective technical areas, were divided into three training groups depending on their levels of seniority. The most innovative aspects of this process were the focus on competences instead of functions, the integration of the gender perspective in profiles’ definition and an holistic approach involving technical, personal, relational and managerial aspects to the relevant competences. EMATEK also set up a coaching programme for 100 women who were

intending to break into non-traditional careers. This programme aimed to improve their negotiation skills, boost their self-esteem and increase their self-control through a competence based approach.

Research that revealed the absence of women at the top of the **tourism industry** led a [Greek partnership](#) to open up management positions for women. According to male managers, there were two main obstacles to the progression of women, which were their perceived lack of mobility and the fact that they are clustered in hotel functions, such as housekeeping, that do not naturally lead to management positions. With the support of Trade Unions and Employers' Organisations, the DP designed tailor-made equality plans for the human resource strategies of the tourist companies and hotels, and then evaluated the effectiveness and efficiency of their implementation.

Like their counterparts in other EU Member States, Dutch universities still have a major problem, as only 6 to 8% of the professors are female, while more than half of the students are women. The '[Bridging the Gender Gap at Universities](#)' DP gathered relevant facts and figures and then presented them in a very visible graphic form that showed the under-representation of women professors. In addition, the project **supported selection committees** by defining each job profile very clearly and also producing a checklist of what each job required. Awareness and ownership was achieved through coaching personnel officers and/or chairs of selection committees, by establishing an exchange platform and holding an annual working conference for university staff. Support tools were also developed for aspects of the recruitment procedures.

4.3. INCREASING FEMALE INFLUENCE IN POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING

Careers in politics are another area in which the glass ceiling really blocks women's access. In addition, the low levels of women's participation in political decision-making can be seen as a threat to true democracy, as over half of the population is not adequately represented. Just 25.4% of all of the parliamentary seats throughout the EU are occupied by women. But supporting women's access to elected office is only one small part of an overall strategy to increase their influence at the centres of power of political development and decision-making.

The Italian DP [Esserci](#) addressed this crucial issue through a number of interlinked activities. An Observatory was established on the presence of women in decision-making and the ultimate aim was to identify the dynamics underlying the poor representation of women. To back up this analysis, a sample survey was carried out amongst slightly more than 1000 adults over the age of 18, 650 people aged between 16 and 17 and 3000 women in managerial positions. The results were then used to apply pressure in a number of areas.

Around 8.200 students in technical or vocational schools all over Italy took part in the 'Political laboratory of male and female citizens' This was a short course that covered citizenship and gender, rights, duties and opportunities, rules and targets for an equal democracy and Italian and EU law. Students also took part in a competition to create an advertising slogan of no more than 160 characters, aimed at promoting equality in democracy.

The last strand of Esserci was an awareness raising campaign in two stages. The message "Democracy - in the masculine form, it is a mistake" was displayed in Rome and Milan airports for 90 days at the end of 2003. Then, a second stage targeted the 2004 elections to the European Parliament with the message "Democracy needs women" and the slogan "More Italian women into the European Parliament" printed on a fan that showed the distribution of seats in the Parliament by gender. In June 2004, Italian voters sent 16 women to the European Parliament (out of a total of 78), compared to 10 out of 80 five years ago, i.e. raising the percentage of women from 11.5% to an encouraging 20.5%.

5. SOME CONCLUSIONS FOR ESF OP DESIGNERS AND IMPLEMENTERS

Through its Development Partnerships, EQUAL has successfully launched a process which incorporates key elements of desegregation into education, training and employment policies and

practices in public and private organisations. EQUAL DPs have demonstrated that it is possible to win over top level decision-makers and to get their lasting commitment to social and cultural change.

Forging partnerships with other local, regional and even national players has clearly maximised the impact of EQUAL on education and training. Wider cooperation has often helped to improve the delivery and effectiveness of the existing mainstream provision - not only for the benefit of women but also of men. Successful examples include:

- **Linking new education and training approaches to the priorities of territorial employment policies** resulted in a smoother transition for women (and men) from education/training to work. Involving local or regional employment offices and other relevant public authorities from an early stage enabled EQUAL partnerships to tailor their training and education schemes to existing skills gaps and labour shortages. This greatly enhanced job opportunities for the EQUAL target groups. At the same time, these alliances led key players in the field of employment to value and use the potential of women and men to broaden the skills-base of the workforce in gender segregated areas of the labour market;
- **Cooperating with companies, employers' organisations and trade unions** helped to secure work-experience placements for students and/or trainees. Often those placements proved to be real stepping-stones to a career in a non-traditional sector or area. Other companies donated time with managers or technical specialists acting as teachers or trainers in some EQUAL projects. All these activities helped employers to attract more women to form a greater part of the workforce of the future and this is a valuable asset in terms of dealing with the problem of demographic change;
- **Gender equality bodies and NGOs were important partners for teachers, trainers and career counsellors** when it came to designing and implementing strategies to reach the target groups whose needs EQUAL sought to address. In particular, women from ethnic minority communities who are often difficult to reach through 'official channels' could be contacted through networks and meeting points which had been established by gender equality bodies, women's organisations and grass root groups. Moreover, when incorporating a gender dimension into training and education schemes, EQUAL partnerships in many countries benefited from the knowledge and expertise of these agencies and groupings.

Thus, ESF Managing Authorities could extend the [partnership principle](#) used in EQUAL to create, or to participate in, national or regional consortia of education and training agencies, equality bodies, NGOs, employers and social partner organisations that would explore how the EQUAL good practices, materials and tools could be used to promote further horizontal and vertical desegregation in the labour market.

Transnational cooperation could speed up this process by providing structured opportunities for mutual learning involving those who are responsible for the implementation of ESF operational programmes and other strategic stakeholders such as those mentioned above.