

COMBATING GENDER GAPS THROUGH GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND POSITIVE ACTIONS Austria and Finland

1. EQUAL DEVELOPS NEW SOLUTIONS TO PERSISTING PROBLEMS

Over the last decade the EU's annual reports on gender equality have regularly been reporting about women's progress in education. Across the Union women are outperforming men in the successful completion of secondary school. Not only are they forming the majority of university students, but also 58% of tertiary level graduates. Moreover, they are increasingly breaking into male domains, such as mathematics, science and civil engineering. And yet: all those inroads are not yet mirrored by their position in the labour market. Almost half of the women (48%) gainfully employed in the EU are working in only four areas of activity: health care and social services; education; public administration and retailing. The Commission's 2005 Report¹ on gender equality for women and men shows no significant changes: both occupational and sectoral gender gaps remain high and so does the gender pay gap.

In its assessment of the most recent National Action Plans for Employment (NAPs), the Joint Employment Report 2004-2005² (JER) states a slowly increasing female employment rate, but it criticises the lack of policies to tackle the persisting gender disparities on the labour market: "The gender pay gap remains stubbornly high and weakly addressed. National targets only exist in half of the Member States. A gender mainstreaming policy is only visible in Sweden." This statement is a real déjà vu experience. For years³ EU Councils have addressed Recommendations to numerous Member States urging them to bridge the gender gaps in employment, unemployment and pay, to combat sectoral and occupational segregation and to strengthen gender mainstreaming.

An Austrian DP's⁴ message: We need gender mainstreaming in the world of work



The gender pay gap which on average shows that women working full-time are earning only 75% of the male cross-hourly wage is a highly complex phenomenon. It has many causes. However, experts agree⁵ that disparities in the sectoral and occupational structures are one of the roots that account for the persistence of pay discrimination.

EQUAL good practices are demonstrating effective ways to tackle those sectoral and occupational gender gaps and also to address the issue of equal pay. At the same time they are making a valuable contribution to mitigate the consequences of the "demographic time bomb" – i.e. a significant lack of labour supply and increasing skills gaps – which can already be felt in a number of economic sectors such as science, technology, engineering and construction, and also the health and care sectors. Developing

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

² Council of the European Union: [Joint Employment Report 2004-2005](#); 5824/05 SOC 24 ECOFIN 22 COM (2005)13 final

³ European Commission: Mid-term Evaluation of the European Employment Strategy: Impact Evaluation on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, 2002- Annex 1: Equal Opportunities Recommendations addressed to Member States by Themes.

⁴ Produced by DP „Women“ Gender Mainstreaming in der Arbeitswelt. Grundlagenwissen für Projekte, Unternehmen und Politik. (Only in German). Can be ordered at: <http://www.women.or.at/v2/buchpraesentation.html>

⁵ European Commission: Employment in Europe 2005, Chapter 4: Earning disparities, p. 13-16;

and applying gender mainstreaming in those highly segregated areas of the labour market is contributing to tipping the scales towards an improved gender balance.

2. STRENGTHENING DESEGREGATION POLICIES

Austria and Finland, two Member States, which had in the past received several Council Recommendations urging them to address persisting gender gaps have launched EQUAL National Thematic Networks (NTNs) that have been focusing on this challenge. Both countries were paying special attention to gender mainstreaming as a strategy that should – in the long run – enable the closing of gender gaps on the labour market and all other policy areas.

Both the Austrian and the Finnish NTN were led by EQUAL Development Partnerships (DPs). But whilst their objectives of transferring good practices related to gender equality into mainstream policies and practices were similar, the chosen methodologies differed. In the Austrian case there was a strong emphasis on strengthening individual DPs through an intensive exchange of ideas and experiences, thus enabling them to optimise their activities and their mainstreaming potential. In the Finnish NTN the (only) two gender equality DPs of EQUAL's first round played an important role as movers and shakers in a whole assembly of key players such as public authorities, social partner organisations, companies, NGOs and gender equality specialists and researchers. Here, the idea was rather to directly stimulate the different target audiences that are in position to introduce the EQUAL good practices into the regular systems of education, training and employment.

3. AUSTRIA: THE GENDER MAINSTREAMING CONNECTION

At a launch event of the Austrian National Thematic Networks (NTNs) that took place in Salzburg in fall 2002 two gender equality related NTNs were formed: one that was intended to concentrate on the reconciliation of work and family life and another on gender mainstreaming (GM).

Eight DPs joined the GM NTN. It turned out that they were all working under Theme H and mainly concentrating on horizontal desegregation and to a lesser degree on vertical desegregation. Only three of them were exclusively or predominantly focusing on GM, but all were using GM modules to strengthen their desegregation approaches.

3.1. MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

When closing its activities at a visibility event in Salzburg in spring 2005 the NTN could proudly present a number of changes which its work has enabled at national, regional and local level.



Final NTN event in Salzburg

Successful outcomes include:

- Increased visibility and recognition of gender mainstreaming as a key strategy to dismantle gender gaps on the labour market and to make gender equality a reality in daily life;
- A professional expert network operating at national level whose members are encountering a rapidly growing demand for their counselling and support services as more and more public authorities and private organisations consider the introduction of gender mainstreaming;
- A comprehensive model to apply gender mainstreaming in a variety of contexts, including a training programme for so-called gender agents, i.e. resource people who are able to introduce, monitor and further develop the model in their own organisations;

- A publication entitled: [“Ah-gender! – Tipps and Tricks aus der österreichischen Gender Mainstreaming-Praxis”](#), which is highly practice oriented guidebook that assembles EQUAL good practices in gender mainstreaming and also makes a point of unveiling problems the DPs had had to face and of showing how to overcome them.

The funny sounding title is actually a pun, explains Elke Schmidt who is responsible for gender equality issues at the EQUAL National Support Structure (NSS). *“Whilst hinting at the process of gendering or integrating a gender dimension in all policy areas, the title also carries the message that gender issues should become common knowledge. When mentioning gender, everybody should react by saying ‘Ah! Gender’, and be knowing exactly what the term is all about.”* Members of the NTN presented the publication at specific events, which reinforced the visibility of gender issues in general and of GM in particular in many local areas and regions. The booklet was very much in demand, two weeks after its first appearance it was out of stock. It is available as down-load from the website of [NORA](#), the DP that was in charge of its editing and production.

3.2. OPTIMISING THE IMPACT OF EQUAL



According to the rules set up by the Austrian Management Authority NTN had each to nominate a DP as “Leading Partner”, which had the responsibility to manage and facilitate the network. The Styria based DP Just GeM was chosen to act in that capacity. The NTN met three to four times a year, member DPs had e-mail contact between the meetings, which were usually attended by more than just one partner per project.

During the lifespan of the NTN five clusters of issues were jointly explored by its members:

- Introducing a gender perspective in policies and practices of organisations;
- Implementing measures to promote GM;
- Analysing and reflecting the implementation of GM in their own DPs;
- Sustainability, Indicators, Evaluation;
- Dissemination, mainstreaming, building and securing further cooperation after the end of EQUAL.

The NTN agreed to undertake a peer review in order to identify and evaluate the most promising concepts and practices and – through this exercise – learn from each other.

3.2.1. Working with the magic triangle

In the beginning working together with a peer review approach has not been easy. It meant that participants of the group had to accept that other colleagues were analysing and eventually criticizing their working hypothesis, their concepts, activities and first achievements. It took time to overcome the perception of being competitors, which is actually the case, since, at least outside the world of EQUAL, the project promoters are trying to access the same sources of public funding. A lot of trust building was necessary to move from “window dressing” (*This is what we do and we do it with a lot of success!*) to real openness and transparency when exploring what has worked and what did not or was even a failure. *“Gender mainstreaming is often presented as a harmonious and well balanced process. This is quite untrue”,* state many participants, and they know what they are talking about: *“After all, gender mainstreaming aims at a shift of power. Sharing power or giving up male privileges usually involves serious struggles that were not always won by the EQUAL DPs.”*



Using the so-called magic triangle as a methodology, DP managers and staff eventually realised that they were all having their ups and downs and being challenged through critical questions helped to get new insights on success factors of and obstacles to the gender mainstreaming efforts.

The idea is that each side of the triangle represents a integral

part of gender mainstreaming. Only if all three parts are implemented will gender equality become a reality.



All action starts at the bottom with the so-called cultural activities. This includes education and training on gender mainstreaming, its history, legal framework, business cases in various contexts, mechanisms of planning, programming, implementing, monitoring and evaluation etc. The second part involves strategies to create a favourable environment through convincing key players who are in position to introduce gender mainstreaming and to make it a binding and sustainable obligation in their organisation or policy area. The third part aims at sustainable change of structures or systems which may either be male dominated or appear to be gender neutral, but often containing intrinsic discriminatory mechanisms.

Given that European GM legislation has been transposed into Austrian law, which is binding public authorities, there was usually no open resistance at that front against addressing the issue. All DPs assembled in the NTN implemented stage 1 of the triangle: awareness raising and basic GM training. The contexts were quite different and ranged from villages and small towns to larger cities, regional development agencies, schools and initial vocational training to private sector companies and organisations. Stage 1 was even implemented for senior and middle management of the Structural Funds Authorities in the region of Burgenland, Austria's only Objective- 1- Region.

Yet, when trying to sensitise local key players the EQUAL DPs encountered a lot of ignorance and disinterest. The DP ["frauenförderung + gendermainstreaming im burgenland"](#), for instance, took advantage of a seminar organised for 30 mayors and heads of local administrations in a regional district. Supported by the district's top decision-makers, GM was a priority on the agenda. Only a small group of six women and men signalled their interest in GM, but not during the open discussion, but through individually contacting the DP representative after the meeting. *"This hints at reticence or even fear to address gender equality issues in a professional context"*, states project manager Carmen Filz. *"In our experience, gender mainstreaming is seen as irrelevant to local policies, pioneers are rare and not well regarded."* Her colleague Sabine Jandl-Jobst sees things more optimistically and describes new prospects as a result of a multi-faceted concept that linked GM to strategies improving the quality of life in a remote rural area. The DP set up a GM working group assembling the members of the municipal council and NGOs and led face-to-face interviews with all families living in the area to find out about their needs and expectations in terms of better reconciliation of work and family life.



"We also analysed how much time mayor and deputy mayor and also the council spent on various policy issues and how these issues affected women and men in a different way", reports Sabine Jandl-Jobst.

The Burgenland GM Team

"We organised a workshop on gender budgeting for council members and other decision- makers. We staged an interactive cabaret on traditional gender roles, lots of public events and discussions, and we staffed an information booth in the middle of the village whose offers addressed themes like childcare, vocational choices of young people, housing, mobility and public transport etc. In the end, the local government decided to adopt gender mainstreaming and become the very first local community in the Burgenland that integrates a gender dimension in its policies. Now it is up to decision-makers to select a policy area to begin with and make it happen. "

Most DPs also completed the second stage of the itinerary. They succeeded to bring top-level decision-makers on board and to gain their lasting commitment. In some cases those top people were setting an example and attended the GM kick-off workshops themselves, in others they sent a note to the next level of the organisational hierarchy emphasising that participation was seen as priority by the top. Thanks this kind of support, key actors at the middle management level who

always have a crucial role to play when it comes to change processes could be convinced to participate in GM training.

The programme introduced them to a six-stage model⁶, designed to help them take their organisation all the way from a gender impact assessment of a chosen policy area to the formulation of an action plan and through to implementing, monitoring and evaluating that plan.

Stumbling stones to putting that know-how into action in stage 3 were the lack of examples on how GM had improved not only the situation in terms of gender equality, but also had a positive impact on local development, HR management or the productivity and competitiveness of a company, a local area or a region.



“The third stage was a completely different ballgame”, says Heide Cortolezis from Just GeM. “Changing structures requires to ‘disturb’ long standing, deeply engrained patterns in organisations. The decision-makers of those systems tended to push the gender mainstreaming initiatives back to stage 1. Gender mainstreaming is such a complicated approach, they argued, before we can start a change process, there is still so much to learn...We need to be sure of the positive outcomes. Everybody has to come on board and fully understand what we are up to. If we had followed that idea we would have gone on and on and started from scratch as if nothing had happened. You have to keep the ball rolling.”

3.2.2. Gender agents and pilot schemes make all the difference

Using strategies and achievements of those DPs that focused on GM either exclusively or in major part-projects, helped, in some cases, to overcome those difficult situations and to move closer to the real implementation of GM.



The Just GeM DP's approach to enroot GM in Styrian employment policies and practices is a good example to show how to trigger a developmental process involving a series of concrete steps. This DP offered training that prepared senior staff from different organisations such as municipalities, local development agencies and employment offices, trade unions and companies to become “gender agents” within their organisations. The programme is modular and very practice-oriented, as whilst acquiring knowledge and skills, the participants also developed and implement their own pilot projects. Two different versions of the training package have been developed. The first was offered to women and men from those authorities that formulate the Styrian labour market policy, who are in charge of budgets and of allocating funds to chosen policy priorities.

The second version is targeted at organisations that implement labour market policy measures, as contractors of the authorities. Almost 100 key people from these organisations were undergoing training and more are still on the waiting list. This high demand is a direct consequence of the Regional Employment Office's strict ruling that gender mainstreaming must be adopted by all its contractors.

The second key element of Just GeM's strategy was to support the organisations to run pilot programmes testing GM in a chosen policy field or activity. *“These pilots are paramount to make gender mainstreaming sustainable and an integral part of the organisations' management and culture”,* says Heide Cortolezis. *“Offering funding, organising a call for proposals, requiring a dossier, complete with rationale, action plans, milestones and budgets and applying a strict selection procedure created a competitive edge and motivated the organisations to really invest time and energy into the ventures. As a result the pilots yielded many positive outcomes that laid the ground for developing further activities in the participating organisations.”*

⁶ See six-stage model developed by Just GeM: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/data/document/etg4-suc-justgem.pdf

For instance, municipalities were carrying out gender impact analyses of their services and embarking on gender budgeting to secure a fairer distribution of funding and/or subsidies in selected policy areas. The Graz City Government, for instance, developed tools and guidelines for gender mainstreaming in sports and family policies which clearly improved the delivery and quality of those services. The regional branch of the Austrian Trade Union Confederation analysed the gender impact of a number of collective agreements related to work-life-balance in order to analyse and reduce the risks of part-time work and provided training to help works councils identify and eliminate gender discrimination in the workplace.

The Styrian Sozialhilfeverband, an agency that is – as part of the public sector – responsible for social policies, including care and support for senior citizens and people with disabilities, carried out a pilot scheme that explored how to take better account of the gender dimension concerning the needs of both the carers and the people cared for. For Jacob Kabas, the coordinator of those services which are provided by charities, private companies, medical doctors and hospitals both the training as gender agent and the pilot functioned as eye opener. He reports about a key experience with one of the growing number of men who got interested in care work, thanks to the visibility of the DP. *“One day a butcher came looking for a job in elderly care. He was quite enthusiastic, but when he heard about the salary, he decided to stick with his current occupation”,* he says. *“Afterwards I became really angry with the segregated labour market system we continue to live with. Because it is regarded as a men’s job, taking care of dead meat pays significantly more than caring for people who need help.”* Kabas is pushing to improve the qualification level, working conditions and pay of carers. As a first step the Sozialhilfeverband developed and tested inter-agency approaches that enabled cooperation amongst the different providers of care services. *“Only if we all learn how to work together”,* says he, *“will we be able to face the huge challenges of the care sector: the demographic changes that result in more and more old and frail people relying on institutional care; the need for qualified staff which can only be met if care work ceases to be a typical women’s job, that is highly demanding, badly paid and often carried out as atypical work.”*

Another example comes from the business world. It shows how the Tyrol based [WOMEN DP](#) succeeded first to convince three companies to undergo a “gender check” and then to set up action plans for gender equality with an emphasis on reconciliation. Based on gender specific data on the situation of women and men in three enterprises, Innsbruck Public Transport, Tyrol Savings Bank and a Real Estate and Housing Company, the action plans covered different priorities. They included gender mainstreaming training for senior management, the integration of the gender dimension into recruitment and promotion procedures to collective agreements, which introduced flexible working time arrangements with a life-cycle-perspective and concepts to combat sexual harassment. In addition, Innsbruck transport is now running regular “taster trainings” to attract female apprentices, the housing company established an emergency childcare service for both its employees and customers and the bank has “purchased” places in a full-day childcare facility to enable a better work-life-balance for members of staff.

3.3. PROGRESS IS TAKING ROOT

Asked seven months after the closure of the network most members agreed that their participation has generated personal growth and organisational advantages. Sharing knowledge and skills with other the DPs was assessed as a successful continuing education programme and a decisive step toward life-long learning in the field of gender equality.

The NTN has developed a pool of knowledge and expertise that is now increasingly in demand. Obviously, EQUAL’s partnership approach played a key role in creating that interest. Given that Austrian DPs have both operational partners and strategic partners, the achievements of the NTN reached a huge number of policy makers and practitioners throughout the country who then disseminated the information to counterparts that had not been involved in EQUAL.

The [NORA DP](#) that was run by three of the 38 members of the [National Network of Austrian Counselling and Resource Centres for Girls and Women](#) is a good example for that snow-ball-effect. NORA posted reports and NTN outcomes on the network’s website, so that all counselling centres and their staff had access to this information. Outstanding good practices from other projects were presented in team meetings and also conveyed to interested strategic partners and policy makers via personalised e-mail. [An exhibit](#) on gender gaps in employment and pay, jointly produced by NORA and its transnational partner from Spain, was shown in many locations and keeps being in demand by NGOs, gender equality bodies, local and regional governments.



Itta Tenschert, one of the NORA project managers, is convinced: “*EQUAL is, in fact, a major driving force to disseminate not only the idea of GM but also successfully tested concepts for its implementation. The NTN has contributed to raise the awareness of gender issues of policy makers and the public-at-large. The EQUAL DPs that formed the network were piloting GM in many different policy areas for which they generated specific know-how and skills. Thanks to the activities of the NTN these qualifications are now increasingly recognised as key skills that public and private organisations are striving to acquire.*”

So, horizontal mainstreaming is underway: Public and private organisations are seeking to introduce GM and eager to use the EQUAL achievements. According to NORA and the NTN Lead Partner Just GeM the biggest demand comes from the area of social policy. But education and training institutions and more and more local authorities are also taking the first steps towards GM. The certificate awarded for successful completion of Just GeM's training scheme for gender agents has gained national reputation. NOWA, a women's training centre and regional association for gender equality, which, as a partner in Just GeM, developed the course is almost overwhelmed by the demand of women and men who want to earn the certificate.

Many follow-up activities are taking place within the professional network that grew from the former NTN. Lists of speakers, trainers, GM experts and all the tools created by the members of the NTN are being exchanged and the idea of “lending” key people as role models to each other is a lasting success. For instance, around 20 mayors from the Carinthian valley of Rosental who participated in GM awareness raising and training are now keen to take the next steps of introducing GM in their villages. Through the NTN they had heard about the commitment of the city of Graz and the crucial role of the (male!) head of the municipal administration who is dedicating two hours of his weekly working time to the implementation of gender equality. The village mayors have adopted him as their role model and are carefully following actions and results in Graz. It may take some time, until GM is applied throughout the country, but undeniably EQUAL has triggered a process that has taken root, even in remote rural areas.

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4. GENDER EQUALITY IN FINLAND: ... AND IT MOVES – EVER SO SLOWLY, FASTER THROUGH EQUAL

In Finland the EQUAL Management Authorities have entrusted the leading role in the National Thematic Network (NTN) on Desegregation to the two EQUAL Development Partnerships (DPs) that have been focusing on that theme during the first round of the Community Initiative. One of them, the DP named WomenIT, had also the responsibility of coordinating and managing the network.

When announcing the activities of the NTN the two DPs made a joint statement: “*20 % of engineers with a polytechnic degree are women and less than 18 % of the people in the nursing profession are men. The difference in salaries between men and women is approximately 20 %. Educational choices ruled by gender have in part had a powerful influence on the division of working life into male and female dominated fields. This process has continued despite the numerous projects carried out during the existence of the Equality Act. The aim of all these*

projects has been to dismantle segregation by supporting both women and men to seek education in atypical fields.”

The two EQUAL DPs were clearly working in that same tradition and undertaking the same difficult tasks:

WomenIT – Women in Industry and Technology- is a training, research and development project and aims at eradicating the gender segregation in working life into women’s and men’s jobs and tasks. The DP seeks to change national and European structures, operating procedures and policies that maintain segregation and cause inequalities in many parts of the society. The project develops gender-sensitive teaching and guidance methods for different levels of education and promotes the implementation of gender equality in employment and pay.



To that end it operates in childcare centres, schools, upper secondary education institutions, universities, enterprises and labour market organisations. In the framework of EQUAL, these organisations have created more than 40 clubs, training courses, research and development activities that encourage girls and women to master and to make technology their career choice or use it to advance in their career.

The WomenIT project is coordinated by the Kajaani University Consortium of the University of Oulu. The DP was launched in autumn 2001 and will end in

March 2006.



The Mirror DP aims at increasing the number of female workers in industrial occupations, in particular in the metal and electronics industry and to make those sectors more attractive to women.

The project develops strategies to motivate girls and young women to study mathematics, science and technology and also teaching and training methods and contents that support those choices at all levels of education.

In addition, the DP is working to increase the knowledge of young people, their parents, teachers and guidance counsellors about technology and the educational and employment opportunities in that sector.

The Mirror project was implemented as a network of eight independent sub-projects which were coordinated by SET Ry, the Federation of Finnish Electrical and Electronics Industry. It was completed in May 2005.

4.1. ASSEMBLING AND COMMITTING KEY PLAYERS

The overall objective of the NTN was to identify new solutions to the persisting problem of segregation by analysing training, development and research projects which were currently taking place or had taken place in the past. This included good practices achieved by EQUAL DPs and other EU-funded projects, but also by researchers and experts.

The general idea of the thematic work was to create networks and to offer debate forums for different categories of actors, always in a perspective to initiating a genuine dialogue on the following questions: *What must be changed? Which practices must be strengthened and in which way, in education as well as in working life in order to obtain sustainable results in terms of desegregation.*

NTN members included DP staff, equality counsellors, experts and researchers as well as political decision-makers, representatives of public authorities and administrations, but also officials from trade unions and employers organisations. All these key players had a dual role to play. They were contributing their expertise to designing a mainstreaming strategy whilst at the same time acting as change agents, i.e. using their position and influence to transfer the tested and proven good practices into the regular education and training system and into working life.

Bringing on board top level key players who are in a position to introduce change in their organisations and beyond has not always been easy. *“Whilst being interested to raise their gender equality profile, the chair persons of social partner organisations, for instance, tended to send their equality advisors as replacements”*, says Marja-Leena Haataja who is the coordinator of both the WomenIT project and the NTN. *“On the other hand, since in Finland we have equality legislation that has become stricter over the years, it is an advantage for an organisation to show that they are active in equality questions in their recruitment and human resources policy.”*

4.2. VISIBILITY, DISSEMINATION AND SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Launched in 2002 and closing at the end of 2005, the Desegregation NTN was led by a Steering Group, which was supported by permanent secretariat based at WomenIT. To compile the most recent findings of research undertaken inside and outside of Finland and to ensure monitoring and evaluation of the DPs with their sub-projects, the NTN ran both a research group and a researcher network. At the same time it organised a myriad of seminars, workshops and group meetings and published an Internet newspaper on desegregation and a research bulletin. The multi-fold seminars and events staged by the two EQUAL DPs were always used as dissemination and visibility platforms involving the members of the network.



Marja-Leena Haataja

In addition, thanks to the proactive participation of key players such as for instance representatives of teachers and employers organisations in both the Steering group of the NTN and in the DPs, working contacts with key institutions were initiated and special meetings to present EQUAL good practices arranged. This strategy to channel promising results towards the mainstream was particularly successful, reports Marja-Leena Haataja: *“In WomenIT we used a so-called bi-partite principle; the key players and the employees of the project presented the results and suggested actions together, for instance, in the Finnish Board of Education or to the Minister of Education. (...) Thinking of future needs for funding and of setting goals for policy development; we have also presented the results to the funding parties.”*

4.2.1. Exploring key factors of progress in a long-term perspective



Kirsti Miettinen

An essential part of the thematic work was the huge research project, which focused on finding models and functioning equality practices that were developed by past and current projects. The goal of this study is also to highlight effective mainstreaming strategies that have resulted in transferring good practices into the regular education, training and labour market systems. The main challenge, however, to be addressed by the NTN was to identify the barriers and stumbling blocks that have so far prevented to overcome segregation in both education and training and on the labour market.

A small team of researchers undertook an in-depth analysis that produced a wealth of data for future equality projects as well as for political and administrative decision-making. The study revealed that during the past three decades more than 300 equality projects focusing on education, training and the development of a more equal society have been funded in Finland. *“So how come that inequality still persists? “*, ask Marja-Leena Haataja and Kirsti Miettinen, the two EQUAL project coordinators, in their foreword to the publication of the study.

The report⁷ is a fascinating read that shows how concepts to remedy various aspects of gender inequalities and discrimination have been developed by projects that were carried out more than 20 or even 30 years ago – through measures that are very similar to what is now being undertaken by EQUAL DPs. This is certainly true for the experimental activities launched in the 1980s to widen the career choices of girls and boys. These activities emphasised the necessity of “building bridges” between the world of work and the school system, which was perceived as reproducing traditional gender roles and stereotypes, and consequently gender specific vocational choices. A similar observation can be made for projects labelled as “working life equality projects” that were targeted at increasing women’s access to and equal treatment on the labour market. This category included activities aimed at closing the gender pay gap, supporting women to break into male occupations and leadership positions, but also sensitising and training employers and HR personnel in equality issues, training and supporting equality counsellors and formulating equality plans in companies as required by the Finnish legislation.

Only a very small number of projects have worked towards change in men’s education, training and career choices. The few which were implemented sought to attract men to female dominated sectors such as health and social care.

However, the persistence of huge gender gaps in occupations, economic sectors and pay indicate that progress has been slow and sometimes barely visible. The researchers identified a number of reasons for this sluggish advancement, including the lack of political will, a pattern in political decision-making that kept favouring one theme for a time and then switched to another without really having ensured that new models and achievements had actually taken root and made it into the mainstream. It appears that this pattern is related to the fact that gender equality policies and activists were often confined to a kind of niche, did not carry enough political weight and were not closely enough linked to and supported by the top level decision-makers.

Since Finland joined the European Union in 1995 funding from the EU Structural Funds, particularly the ESF, was used to finance projects aimed at labour market desegregation. Some of the early project activists found it quite frustrating that the new funding sources were actually flowing into a kind of actions they had been trying to implement years ago. *“Progress? And sometimes it annoys you so much ’cause you don’t feel like going on and on about the same things”*, said Monica, one of the interviewees in the framework of the NTN’s research. *“Recently, especially with EU projects and others, they’ve been using the same terms to talk about things as we did ten years ago. We were at it too early. Now we’d get funding for projects that we were proposing then. Now they themselves have started to say that someone could launch a project like this.”*

Yet, the NTN’s study also reveals that over the years certain approaches yielded more progress than others:

- Multi-dimensional projects which address several interlinked barriers to gender equality through a mix of well orchestrated actions.
- Building partnerships with key players and enabling inter-agency approaches.
- Integrating strategies to change attitudes and stereotypes related to gender roles into all project activities.

The researchers underline that some of these earlier attempts to create multi-dimensional projects in partnership with relevant key actors were undertaken in the framework of EMPLOYMENT-NOW and that the EQUAL partnership approach has strengthened the mainstreaming capacity of this type of projects. The two first round EQUAL DPs working on desegregation have clearly contributed to anchor these principles in more and different contexts. They sought to establish equal opportunities for women and men in employment as well as in education which requires support for women and girls towards choices that are non-traditional for their gender, but also changing learning environments, curricula and teaching methodologies,

⁷ Kristina Brunila, Mervi Heikkinen, Pirkko Hynninen: Difficult but doable – good practices for equality work, 2005. To be downloaded from: http://www.womenit.info/difficult_but_doable.pdf

training of key people such as teachers, trainers, guidance staff and HR managers. The implementation of all those dimensions was carried out in numerous sub-projects taking place at local, regional and in a few cases also at national level.

4.2.2. Developed, tested and here to stay

WomenIT⁸ has created sub-projects which involved more than 40 childcare centres, primary and secondary schools, vocational schools, polytechnics and universities. Awareness raising, teaching and training methodologies and materials were developed and tested, which in many cases have meanwhile become part of the regular syllabus and daily practice in all those institutions.

This includes the “girls’ only” courses that were teaching physics, chemistry, electronics and technical crafts as elective subjects in schools and as special offers of clubs and community centres. Even though according to the PISA study girls in Finland are as successful in mathematics and science as boys, they tend not to choose those subjects and career options to the same degree as their male peers. The EQUAL schemes have not only led participants to master a whole range of skills they had before regarded as being beyond their capabilities, but also visibly widened vocational choices.

In an interview published in one of WomenIT’s transnational publications⁹, Eja, Katja and Annika, students at Kajaani Vocational School, state to be now fully convinced that women can do as well as men. *“The visits we made to different science centres, laboratories and electronic companies were really interesting. On the other hand we remember from the guidance counselling at comprehensive school that amongst those who do not go on to high-school (i.e. upper secondary-level), the boys will be directed towards car mechanics and the girls towards nursing. People do not talk about how girls could go and study in a field that has traditionally been for men – or vice versa. I think there should be more choices and much more information about them.”* Asked about their plans for the future, the three young women said that they are contemplating to become entrepreneurs, work in a shop – or to go on studying. *“Unfortunately, the employment situation in our area is bad and it is really difficult to find work.”* But, full of self-confidence, they say that they might have to move to Southern Finland.

The Mirror DP developed a working structure that linked university departments and faculties in the fields of science, engineering and technology to schools at lower and upper level secondary schools. The activities included teacher training and continuing education as well as the development of new teaching and learning methods involving e-learning, but also tutoring, coaching and mentoring. Some sub-projects were building on existing networks created by former ESF- and NOW projects that link regional schools and enterprises in the metal, electronic and engineering industries.

It is important to note that the new gender sensitive teaching models that were developed by the two DPs are now becoming an integral part of the regular training for teachers, trainers and guidance counsellors. Training programmes enabling HR staff and management of large and small enterprises to develop and introduce a gender dimension into personnel policies and practices will continue to be offered.

4.2.3. Mainstreaming as a joint venture of DP and NTN members

Project staff and partners working in the two DPs and key players as members of the NTN joined forces to convince other institutions and organisations that were not involved in EQUAL to consider the adoption of the new models. The fact that the activities on the ground were based on up-to-date research and always carefully monitored and evaluated proved to be a good strategy to stimulate this transfer of good practices.

Gender sensitive guidance promoted by the NTN as a key concept to overcome traditional career choices of young women and men is a good example to demonstrate this approach. As a first

⁸ Detailed information in: Equal Practices in Education, Guidance and Working Life. Print product and downloadable from: <http://www.womenit.info/equalpractices.php>

⁹ Breaking the Barriers, European Examples of Good Practice in Careers Guidance, 2004

step brand new research results¹⁰ on gender and guidance produced by a member of the NTN's research network were disseminated widely. Päivi-Katriina Juutilainen who is a lecturer in the methodology of guidance in the career counsellor education programme at the University of Joensuu is the author of the publication. *"My doctoral dissertation research", she says, "indicates that paradoxically enough student guidance in schools seems to simultaneously reinforce and defy persistent stereotypes. Although girls with a mathematic bent were encouraged to choose non-traditional fields, they were nonetheless considered to be more suitable for education and teaching than for instance management positions or a career in research. The support for boys towards non-traditional choices was less solid and traits such as 'leadership' were 'naturally' associated with boys. "*

In the group of guidance and career counsellors, planners and vocational psychologists that participated in a continuing education programme on "equality in guidance" offered by the WomenIT many felt uncertain as of what to gain from that course. Did they not provide guidance equally to boys and girls and did they really have need for improvement? Juutilainen's findings triggered discussions and new thinking, even more so when one of the participants confirmed the pattern described by the researcher with personal experiences. The year-long training which was delivered in eight modules of one day helped the guidance counsellors to acquire more theoretical knowledge in gender socialisation and equality legislation and enabled them to take better account of the fact that in many aspects the world is different for boys and girls. After a year the participants who had been supported monitor their counselling work had clearly gone through processes that improved their perception of gender and equality issues.

Since the new national curriculum for comprehensive schools (i.e. primary and lower secondary level) stipulates that guidance should be provided throughout the years of basic education by both teachers and careers counsellors, there is now a demand for the EQUAL achievements in gender sensitive counselling. Thanks to the NTN the methodological approach, the training and teaching materials developed by WomenIT were not only widely disseminated throughout the country, but also recommended on a peer to peer basis.

A similar mushrooming effect can be observed for other EQUAL results and products, which are meanwhile taking root as part of regular practices in schools, universities and enterprises. Again, referring to an existing national legislative framework significantly raised the interest and willingness to introduce and adapt the good practices generated by EQUAL. For instance, guidelines and a support scheme to design, establish and monitor an equality plan developed by the DPs and promoted by the NTN are one of the "top sellers" when it comes to transferring tested and proven tools to new users. In fact, whilst for public and private enterprises introducing equality plans has been a must since 1995, the new Equality Act from 2005¹¹ makes equality plans also a binding obligation for educational institutions, with the exception of comprehensive schools. Equality plans are required to be reviewed at regular intervals, at least every three years, but preferably annually. The reviewed plan must contain an evaluation of action taken and results thereof. This is a new challenge to all institutions of secondary and tertiary education, which – according to the law – have to draft their equality plans, involving both staff and students' representatives, and ensuring that it provides a status-quo report and proposed actions for the future. Using EQUAL good practices is helping them to meet the challenge.

4.2.4. Influencing policy development

"Unfortunately time has not allowed a more extensive exploitation of the results of the NTN. Now we should have a chance to continue from where we just left off", says Marja-Leena Haataja who feels that the seedlings implanted by DPs and network need further tending and follow-up. "The process of bringing about change has started and we only have some hints of our influence. But now and then the matter of desegregation emerges in everyday politics. Next year, Finland will be in charge of the EU presidency, and the Finnish Equality Authorities wish to present and disseminate the NTN's research as well as the publications and materials produced by WomenIT and Mirror. We also hope that, for instance, the national authorities that are responsible for the

¹⁰ Päivi-Katriina Juutilainen: Guidance towards life or towards gender, 2003.

¹¹ Furthermore, the new legislation makes the prohibition of gender-based discrimination stricter by clarifying the definition of discriminatory action on grounds of gender, pregnancy, childbirth, parenthood, family status and responsibilities.

education and training system, when embarking on the development of new curricula, will use both the EQUAL results and our actors as experts.

We have been invited a lot to speak about the mainstreaming of our work, to provide training in equality planning in public authorities and private enterprises and to develop an equality certificate for companies. We have suggested that politicians and officials should be trained in gender equality and gender mainstreaming. Several times we have pushed our way into the Finnish Parliament, i.e. we managed to have ourselves invited to visits and we informed the relevant committees first about what we were doing and then about our results. Later we kept asking whether anything has happened to be useful for policy development. But now our projects are ending; who will continue from here?"

This is, in fact, a rhetorical question. A glance at the second generation of EQUAL shows that the seven DPs focusing on gender equality are building on what has been achieved at project and NTN level during the first round. Addressing gender gaps and segregation in training and education and on the labour market remain predominant activities. Yet, based on the outcomes of the NTN's research, the projects appear to be even more specifically targeted at future growth areas: not only on ICT, but also on transport and logistics, research and development. They also tend to include female entrepreneurship in male domains. In addition, many of those DPs take account of the recommendation of a prominent advocate of the EQUAL desegregation strategies. Praising the inroads that the projects made in terms of vocational guidance, education and training Marjo Matikainen-Kallström, who served as a Member of the European Parliament from 1996 to 2004 and herself a graduate engineer, said in her message to all those involved in EQUAL DPs focusing on women's access to non-traditional careers: "It is not enough that women are tempted to study technology and industrial occupations. In addition to this, special solutions are needed within the working life in order for women to stay in the jobs within industry and technology." This message is mirrored in the design of the new projects. They intend to improve the work-life-balance for both women and men, to develop life-cycle approaches to career development and to further intergenerational learning, whilst striving at the same to make the glass ceiling penetrable and to support companies to benefit from gender equality plans and diversity management.

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5. GOOD PRACTICES TO INSPIRE NATIONAL THEMATIC WORK

The two DP led NTNs presented above can offer a number of strategies that have a proven potential to mobilise key players whose contribution is essential to bring about change.

The Austrian network developed a strong bottom-up approach that enabled the projects, their teams and partners to empower each other. As a result, the DPs' strategies to win over various categories of key players as advocates for gender mainstreaming became more multi-fold and increasingly involved people who were willing to act as role models and coaches to peers in public administrations or private companies. Thanks to close cooperation within the NTN the role and reputation of change agents for gender equality was enhanced. The fact, that most NTN members joined the professional network of gender mainstreaming experts that emerged from the thematic work will help to further develop this kind of "talent bank for mentoring and support amongst key actors", which is key to engendering structural change.

In the Finnish case this process was more directly incorporated into the work of the NTN, i.e. key players met counterparts who explained about the value and impact of the EQUAL good

practices from their own experience as partners in the DPs. The transfer of EQUAL models to institutions and enterprises that had not been involved in the projects shows that this mechanism has been very effective.

The most striking feature of the Finnish NTN is probably the predominant role of research. Not only has the NTN ensured that EQUAL could tap into existing networks of researchers who are specialising in gender equality and whose work is focussing particularly on gender gaps and segregation, so that the developmental work of the project could always be based on the most recent research. The NTN, has, in addition, carried out its own huge research project. Besides assembling an impressive body of evidence on how several generations of projects have laboured to dismantle gender gaps in education, training and employment, this research gained a highly political dimension. It confronts both political decision makers and administrations with the question why despite of all those efforts Finland is still amongst the countries with the most segregated labour markets in the EU.

What is even more important: the study reveals that projects that addressed several interlinked obstacles to gender equality through approaches involving different players and stakeholders tended to entail more lasting systemic change. This finding leads inevitably to EQUAL with its multi-dimensional and partnership approaches. Through the work of the NTN these principles have gained visibility and triggered a political debate about future programming for gender equality and how it can take advantage of the EQUAL achievements. The movers and shakers from the NTN are confident that it will not take another 30 years and an additional study to unveil that very little has changed when it comes to gender equality. There are just too many skills gaps to be bridged in the coming years, due to the rapid demographic changes, and without using the full potential of women Finland's competitiveness as a European and global player may suffer.