

Gender goes mainstream



The Austrian region of Styria has experience in promoting gender equality in the labour market. A local "Pact for Employment" binds the regional government and employment services to jointly plan labour

market policies and incorporates gender mainstreaming as a guiding principle. But this approach has not yet encouraged a sustainable process of gender mainstreaming. An EQUAL-funded Development Partnership found that even where specific gender equality goals were formulated, these usually did not impact on the daily practices of the various players involved in the delivery of employment policies.

Coordinated by a non-profit organisation for regional development and with major input from a regional gender equality association, "Just GeM" set out to make gender equality an integral part of labour market policies in Styria, so that women and men could benefit equally.

A model for mainstreaming

The project developed a six-stage model enabling the key players to look at every step in the process of mainstreaming of policies, from their design to their evaluation. It starts with a gender impact assessment to find out how men and women are represented in the relevant decision-making processes and how they benefit from various training and employment policies. Based on the outcome, gender equality targets are formulated and a viable action plan is developed to attain them.

During the implementation of the action plan, the gender dimension must be integrated into the management and control systems of each organisation. Finally, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms measure the progress achieved as compared to the situation at departure and the agreed targets.

To apply the model to all relevant institutions, the DP trained "gender agents" to initiate and manage the mainstreaming process within their own organisations. The aim was to create a group of in-house experts dedicated to introducing and coordinating the necessary changes.

Agents for change

As a result, pilot projects launched by the new gender agents have been mushrooming in Styria. Municipalities are carrying out gender impact analyses of their services and embarking on gender budgeting to secure a fairer distribution of funding and subsidies in selected policy areas.

The city of Graz, for instance, developed tools and guidelines for gender mainstreaming in sports and family policies. *"This training programme was a real asset,"* says Martin Haidvogel, the Director of Administration, *"thanks to our new gender agent, we can now ensure that employees who are responsible for planning and implementing the various measures acquire the necessary skills. We are also producing a handbook to help other municipalities to apply gender mainstreaming to all areas of local policies."*

In addition, the regional branch of the Austrian Trade Union Confederation analysed the gender impact of a number of collective agreements and provided training to help works councils identify and eliminate gender discrimination in the workplace. At the same time, the Association of Styrian Innovation Centres and Business Parks is working to incorporate a gender dimension into their members' services and infrastructures.

Benchmarking progress

To measure progress on a regular basis, Just GeM constructed gender equality indicators that are being used in a benchmarking system called Gender Radar. This system presents the levels of gender equality achieved in crucial areas such as education and training, employment and decision-making in the different districts of Styria. It enables comparisons to be made between districts and between different policy areas while measuring progress over time.

The visibility of their gender equality performance has led local decision-makers to become more conscious of their own policies and practices and the gender gaps they still need to tackle. As a result, both the six-stage model developed by Just GeM and the training programme for gender agents are now in great demand.

Just GeM succeeded in convincing key players that comprehensive strategies for gender equality would help to develop the employability and skills levels of women and men and to improve both the delivery and effectiveness of labour market policies.

Partnership was key

The DP feels that the EQUAL partnership approach was the most important success factor in moving towards gender mainstreaming. Just GeM forged a coalition of all the policy makers in a position to turn its ambitious goals into reality, bringing together the regional government, the regional employment office, social partners, chambers of commerce, local municipalities and the region's largest charity.

Gender mainstreaming is a major challenge but the process has taken root in Styria. A second round EQUAL project is now dedicated to further mainstreaming and the authorities and agencies that have benefited from Just GeM's activities are taking a much more pro-active role in this new DP. Building on their experiences of introducing gender mainstreaming, they will train and support other peers to follow suit. For instance, municipalities will coach their counterparts in other Austrian regions and the Styrian branch of the Austrian Trade Union Federation will team up with other regional branches and its headquarters in Vienna.

Companies can use untapped potential

In addition, private companies, including market leaders, have come to recognise the added-value of gender mainstreaming. Facing skills gaps due to demographic changes, they are now eager to use the untapped potential of women and are aware that this requires more than just opportunities for part-time work. In the framework of the new EQUAL project and with the support of in-house gender agents, they will develop work-life balance policies for their employees, gender fair recruitment, selection and career development procedures and initial training for young women and men in those occupations where they are under-represented. Thus, thanks to EQUAL, gender mainstreaming is also being transferred from the public to private sector in this Austrian region.

A more detailed version and other EQUAL success stories can be found at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/activities/search_en.cfm



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