

Gender equality and the EU Structural Funds

Equality between men and women, a «plus» for cohesion

By Muriel Mackenzie ⁽¹⁾

By encouraging gender to be taken into account in the different projects (mainstreaming) while at the same time financing specific actions in this field, the Structural Funds help to generalise equality between women and men.



A Hungarian National Development Agency work meeting.

There is often a belief that gender equality has become less of an issue in regional development - women are highly visible in public life and in the labour market. However, gender inequality persists: gender stereotyping, the gender pay gap and occupational segregation continue to be real issues, particularly in key areas identified by the Lisbon Strategy such as employment, education, research and innovation, and business growth.

Gender mainstreaming requires a paradigm shift. It is about understanding that gender is a key variable in public policy design, delivery and outcomes. Misunderstandings abound as to what mainstreaming means and consequently a risk that mainstreaming can become tokenistic, and that gender equality becomes everybody's – and nobody's – responsibility,

and that there is strong public commitment to gender equality, but little real activity. The challenge is to translate concepts of mainstreaming into practice. The Structural Funds' 'twin-track' approach which combines funding for specific actions, while encouraging mainstreaming of equality in all funded projects, can help to avoid marginalisation of gender equality.

Gender Mainstreaming is a key element of the European Employment Strategy and the EU Structural Funds Programmes. Structural Funds play a key role in addressing many of the priority areas identified by the European Commission in their 'Roadmap for equality between men and women' published in 2006.

The Roadmap aims to 'reach Lisbon employment targets and to eliminate the gender pay gap'. Structural Funds projects

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provide training to combat occupational segregation; help with childcare and dependent care; and encourage business start-ups in under-represented occupational sectors.

ESF has funded projects which directly tackled the gender pay gap, for example the Close the Gap Development Partnership funded through EQUAL. This works with employers, employees and trade unions to address the gender pay gap in Scotland. Significantly, this project has now been mainstreamed.



ESF and ERDF projects aim to address gender imbalance in areas such as ICT and science and technology through careers support and advice, working with information providers/careers staff in schools and communities as well as providing training in under-represented occupations and sectors.

A European Roadmap for equality between the genders, 2006-2010

Adopted by the Commission on 1 March 2006, the "Roadmap for equality between men and women"⁽¹⁾ sets six priorities for the 2006-2010 period:

- 1) Equal economic independence for women and men. This includes achieving the Lisbon objectives for employment, eliminating the pay gap and supporting women entrepreneurs.
- 2) Reconciliation of work and private life.
- 3) Equal representation in decision-making.
- 4) Eradicating gender-based violence and trafficking.
- 5) Eliminating gender stereotypes.
- 6) Promoting gender equality in external and development policies

Pursuing these priorities necessarily involves better governance. Drawing inspiration from the experience of the 2001-2005 framework strategy for gender equality⁽²⁾, the Roadmap maintains the 'twin-track' approach consisting of gender mainstreaming in all EU policies on one hand and implementing specific measures on the other.

The Structural Funds can contribute to implementation of the Roadmap – in particular for priorities 1), 2), 3) and 5) – in terms of both these aspects. It can also contribute in terms of method, by taking account of gender equality when drawing up and implementing programmes, project selection criteria, and follow-up and evaluation indicators, etc. The Commission and Member States will seek to encourage gender equality in Structural Funds' intervention in the 2007-2013 period, including by allocating the appropriate resources.

(1) COM(2006) 92 final
http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2006/com2006_0092fr01.pdf

(2) COM(2000) 335
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2000/com2000_0335fr02.pdf

A European pact for equality between the genders

Following the Commission's adoption of the Roadmap for equality between women and men, the European Council adopted on 24 March 2006 the "European Pact for Gender Equality"⁽¹⁾ which encourages Member States and the Union to implement, in the framework of a strategy for growth and jobs, a series of measures linked to the need to:

- Contribute to the full realisation of the EU's ambitions as laid down in the Treaty in the field of gender equality;
- Eliminate the gap between women and men in terms of employment and social protection, by helping to draw full benefit from the European workforce's productive potential, and
- Helping to meet demographic challenges by promoting a better balance between working and private life.

(1) Annexe II of the Presidency Conclusions, European Brussels Council, 23-24 March 2006:

http://www.eu2006.at/fr/News/Council_Conclusions/2403EuropeanCouncil.pdf

Meeting different needs

The Roadmap also highlights the low rate of women entrepreneurs. Projects which support business start-ups and encourage business growth need to be aware that women entrepreneurs often have differing needs from their male counterparts: they may require start-up costs, so 'micro-credit' grant or loan schemes may be more appropriate; women may prefer enterprise support and training in the evenings, at weekends, to fit with care responsibilities and part-time work.



An haute couture house in Frederikshavn Denmark).

The Roadmap recognises the gender dimension in health and combating poverty. Structural Funds Programmes have a key role in encouraging regional development activity which takes account of women and men's needs, building awareness of gender equality into regeneration, local economic development and sustainable development strategies. For example women make up the majority of people on benefits, and lone parents and lone pensioners are particularly vulnerable to poverty. Many projects are now more aware of the need to reconcile work, private and family life through flexible hours for training and support, through direct provision or information on childcare and dependent care.



Language instruction for immigrants in Vienna (Austria).

Ethnic minority groups and disabled people have lower rates of employment generally, in particular women. Women and men also suffer discrimination as a result of their age and sexual orientation. Structural Funds give us the potential to support specific actions to challenge issues of multiple disadvantage, and how and in what ways this interacts with gender.

"Gender mainstreaming": the origins of a concept with a global vocation

In 1985 in Nairobi, at the 3rd World Conference of women, organized by the UN, the term "gender mainstreaming" was mentioned for the first time during a debate on the status of women and their role in development. This concept was taken up 10 years later by the action Platform established at the 4th United Nations World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995).

In 1998, the Council of Europe put forward the following definition: "Gender mainstreaming is the (re)organisation, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making."⁽¹⁾

The European Commission, which initiated work on gender mainstreaming at the beginning of the 90s, has continued to make its approach to this concept⁽²⁾ more coherent after the Beijing Conference on women.

(1) Council of Europe report (EG-S-MS(98)2).

(2) More information: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/gender_equality/gender_mainstreaming/general_overview_en.html

Structural Fund Programmes as key drivers

Our work in the 2000-2006 Programmes has shown that Structural Funds can be a key driver in mainstreaming gender equality. In Scotland we work to develop a systematic approach to mainstreaming; through gender balance on Programme Committees and groups, through awareness raising and provision of guidance and 'toolkits'; an emphasis on identifying and sharing good practice examples; and encouraging project-to-project transfer of experience and expertise.

Partnership plays a key part in mainstreaming, bringing together organisations and individuals with expertise and experience of collecting meaningful data, of engaging individuals and groups in communities, and of understanding the needs of women and men and the barriers they face in accessing opportunities. Mainstreaming needs to 'make sense' to regional development actors. Project sponsors need robust data to show the need for and relevance of gender mainstreaming, and it has to be seen to bring tangible benefits for organisations and projects.



At a child care centre in Leipzig (Germany).



The approach taken in Structural Funds Programmes has shown that gender mainstreaming is about the differing needs of women and men. There have been a range of projects that tackle occupational segregation, and therefore challenge the gender pay gap. While the majority of positive action projects focus on training women for higher level, higher paid jobs, in growth areas such as ICT and science, engineering and technology, ESF projects have also trained men in occupations where they are under-represented, and this assists in challenging gender stereotyping for both women and men. In Scotland, only 4% of childcare workers are male, yet a study showed that 27% of men would consider working in childcare. Projects training men in child and social care occupations have reported large numbers of men interested in their recruitment drives and radio and newspaper advertising.

Plans to open a European Gender Institute in Vilnius

Following the expression of support by the European Council on 17-18 June 2004, the Commission announced on 8 March 2005 that it would be setting up a European Gender Institute. The proposal for a regulation⁽¹⁾, presented by the Commission, is currently the subject of an interinstitutional debate. Following a decision of the Employment and Social Affairs Council of 1 December 2006, it is now known that the new institute will be based in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania.

What will be its role? According to the Commission's feasibility study⁽²⁾, such an institute will have a clear role to play in fulfilling certain tasks not covered by existing bodies or institutional mechanisms, particularly in terms of coordinating, centralising and disseminating information, increasing awareness and providing tools, without any risk of duplication. The European Women's Lobby (EWL) insists that the institute should have sufficient means to exercise this role and assist the European institutions and Member States in the context of a European framework strategy for equal opportunities

(1) COM(2005) 81 final:
http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/news/2005/mar/genderinstitute_en.pdf

(2) Available for downloading from: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equ_opp/documents_en.html
Annexe E gives the list of bodies and organisations concerned. See also the study drawn up for the European Parliament:
<http://www.yellowwindow.be/assets/free/r-finalreport-EN.doc>

Direct and indirect discriminations

Gender equality is not just an issue for ESF funded projects. Our experience of sharing good practice has shown a deepening understanding in ERDF projects of how to address inequality in patterns of self-employment. We encourage projects to look at project life cycle to identify opportunities for mainstreaming at all stages, from design and consultation through to evaluation, addressing issues of direct and indirect discrimination. Projects consider whether women and men use their services in the same way, and have addressed areas of indirect discrimination, such as availability of child-care, accessibility by public transport (women have less access to private cars), safety and lighting, timing and provision of support services for businesses and business start-up. Positive images of women and men and more inclusive language are being used in project publicity and marketing.



Research on fish feed in Swedish Lapland.

It is critical to build an awareness of gender equality issues into all strategic planning on employment and business growth, and raise awareness of the effects (and solutions to) indirect and direct discrimination. There is no one single cause of gender inequality, however Structural Funds Programmes can challenge the multi-faceted nature of inequality. Mainstreaming gender equality requires commitment of time, resources and leadership. This commitment is vital if we want to avoid the adoption of policies and practices that reproduce discrimination and exacerbate existing inequalities.

Action to reduce the gender pay gap

On 18 July 2007, the European Commission adopted a Communication⁽¹⁾ on possible actions to combat the pay gap between women and men. The document states that, on average, women in the EU earn 15% less than men and that there are no signs of any significant narrowing of this pay gap. The gap measures the relative difference in average gross hourly earnings between women and men across all economic sectors. It also reflects many other discriminations and inequalities which mainly affect women on the labour market

(1) http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/gender_equality/gender_mainstreaming/equalpay/equal_pay_en.html
Experts report «The Gender Pay Gap – Origins and Policy Responses»
http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/publications/2006/ke7606200_en.pdf
Experts report «Legal aspects of the gender pay gap»
http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/gender_equality/legislation/report_equal_pay.pdf