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Gender Mainstreaming in the Use of Structural Funding

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Content:

Gender mainstreaming is a transversal dimension of the policy programming and implementation of all Structural Funds. The study outlines to what extent the gender mainstreaming has been taken into account in the 2000-2006 Structural Funds programming. Policy fields (and phases) where progress has been made and policy fields (and phases) where progress is still slow are highlighted. Major findings show that better results are achieved upstream the policy process, rather than downstream at implementation level. Overall, much has been done to gather the necessary conditions for successful gender mainstreaming over the 2007-2013 period. However, more could be done to translate broad and specific objectives into practice and effective actions.

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Executive summary

Gender mainstreaming is a policy approach which aims at integrating a gender perspective into every policy and into every step of policy processes, from design to implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It is based on the recognition that women and men do not have the same resources, needs and preferences and that many structures, systems and policies are not gender neutral, but treating men's experience as the norm.

Equal opportunities between men and women and the gender mainstreaming principle are expressly indicated in the Regulations of the Structural Funds as transversal dimensions of the policy programming and implementation.

Promoting gender mainstreaming is not only a formal requirement. It is important because of the strong positive correlation that emerges between economic growth and gender equality. The direction of causality goes mainly from economic growth to gender equality since a higher economic level is usually followed by increased education, democracy and greater gender equality. But there is also a positive link going from greater gender equality to economic growth: increased women's participation in the labour market increases gross domestic product as more human resources are involved in the production system. The inclusion of women in the labour market and in policy-making also contributes to an increase in the quality of life and in future growth due to their effects on child rearing.

There are therefore both equity and efficiency arguments to support gender mainstreaming. Discrimination and segregation entail inefficiency. The benefits for the (local) economy of eradicating discrimination come from the better utilisation of resources which may enhance the competitiveness of the (local) economy. When the economic role of individuals is defined by gender rather than merit or ability, there is inefficiency with under-utilisation of the skills of one group (women). Policies to reduce gender segregation in society and the economy may also help to develop a multi-skilled workforce and improve work organisation patterns. An increased and egalitarian participation of women in the economy may also improve the family conditions if the shared interest of women and children are supported by policies promoting balance between work and life.

This study tries to outline to what extent the gender mainstreaming dimension has been taken into account in the Structural Funds 2000-2006 programming period, with specific attention to Regional Development and Cohesion Funds, in order to highlight policy fields where progress has been made and discover policy fields where progress is slow. In this perspective useful lessons to strengthen the gender dimension in the new policy programming for 2007-2013 are derived.

The analysis is carried out through the review, from a gender perspective, of 122 Operational Programmes (OPs) for Objective 1 and Objective 2 regions in nine Member States (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom) and available secondary material, such as national and EU-wide evaluations, monitoring and planning documents, which allowed for an extension of the analysis to other European countries.

Major findings of the study show that better results are achieved upstream in the policy process (context analysis, definition of the overall strategy), rather than downstream at implementing stages (involving relevant expertise, representative organisations, monitoring, evaluation etc). Overall, the impression is that much has been done to set the necessary conditions for successful gender mainstreaming over the 2000-2006 period, in particular acknowledging the legitimacy of the gender mainstreaming strategy. However, the benefits seem not to have been reaped yet. More could be done to translate broad and specific objectives into practical and effective actions.

Major findings also show that within the European Union (EU), in the Structural Funds planning, Member States have different degrees of gender sensitivity and (gender) policy action is defined through differentiated approaches. Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon countries are usually more advanced in the mainstreaming of a gender dimension in policy-making, while Continental and Southern European countries are still mainly relying on specific *gender measures*, even if declaring the adoption of a dual approach. Some innovative approaches, tools and methodologies have been developed all along the policy cycle, but their use and dissemination have been limited by the lower awareness of the importance of gender equality for socio-economic growth among (local) policy makers and administrations

Specific findings, referring to the different phases of the Structural Funds programming 2000-2006, indicate the following situation.

- **Gender mainstreaming in the context diagnosis of the Structural Funds programming.** Regional Operational Programmes (ROP) widely take into account the gender dimension in the context analysis, through the adequate use of gender specific issues and indicators, with a special focus on the structure and dynamics of the labour market. Less well-grounded is the policy makers' capacity to include gender-relevant dimensions into those issues that are not 'immediately' related to women such as transport infrastructure and services not related to childcare or elderly care provisions, where European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Cohesion Fund are significantly involved.
- **Gender mainstreaming in strategy definition and design.** The formal commitment to gender mainstreaming is present in all the OPs, but only in some cases a specific Mainstreaming Strategy can be envisaged. Gender mainstreaming often emerges in equal opportunities general objectives, again finding in the labour market (and partially in community building) the most favourable ground to tackle the gender discrimination and disadvantages.
- **Gender mainstreaming in specific objectives and design of measures.** The design of the specific interventions in the programming shows even more clearly the two different approaches within the EU countries to the 'gender question'. On the one hand there is the approach to gender mainstreaming principle (Anglo-Saxon and Northern Countries), and on the other the dual approach combining gender mainstreaming with positive/affirmative actions (Continental and Southern Countries).

Regarding gender mainstreamed fields of intervention, Enterprise and Innovation, Strategic Development Opportunities, Sustainable Communities, Development of rural area seem to be the ones where Structural Funds Programmes drew the major policy makers' attention. Regarding affirmative actions, fields of intervention are exclusively focused on training and labour market policies.

- **Gender mainstreaming and resources allocation.** The assessment of resource allocation in the Structural Funds is a difficult aspect to deal with in a mainstreaming perspective since it is difficult to have an allocated budget for mainstreaming (while affirmative actions are more likely to have). The development of specific tools, such as gender budgeting, to be used also in the Structural Funds programming could be widespread and supported as a common framework to assess the amount of financial resources allocated to gender mainstreaming within the programmes.
- **Gender mainstreaming and (envisaged) procedures for the selection of projects.** Gender selection criteria mentioned in the OPs show that, at an operational level, Structural Funds are less gender-oriented. Indeed, all the OPs envisage gender criteria for the selection of the projects (i.e. gateway criteria, additional scores, coherence with cross cutting themes, explicit female target etc.) but their operational content is often weak and approximate: more specific and tailor-made criteria should be designed.
- **Gender mainstreaming and monitoring and evaluation of the programme.** In an overall assessment, on the one hand the OPs show a good effort in designing gender indicators connected with the monitoring and the evaluation of specific measures, even though the effort is often limited to the consideration of data broken down by gender. On the other hand, comprehensive Programme Evaluation from a gender mainstreaming perspective (along with connected methodologies and tools) do not seem to be adequately considered. In this respect the availability of gender-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive monitoring systems is a central question.
- **Gender mainstreaming and managing organisations.** At a general level, managing organisations have started to take into account the necessity of involving bodies that, at different levels, are responsible for equal opportunities, as well as gender experts. This involvement is still at a formal level and often limited to consultative roles.

The above mentioned advancements show that there have been meaningful improvements in the 2000-2006 programming period but also show that the inclusion of mainstreaming policies in Structural Funds should be perfected and strengthened in the perspective of the 2007-2013 period.

The main risk is that all the elements and issues in some way connected to gender mainstreaming will be considered as a mere formality to be complied with and not as an important tool to enhance and improve Europe and its citizens (both men and women).

Another concern (also confirmed by the few references to gender equality in ERDF Regulations) is that a gender perspective will be used only with reference to actions towards people and human capital (like those financed by the European Social Fund) and not in all the actions that Structural Funds are intended to support. The latter could really diminish the force of the gender mainstreaming concept through all the policies and in all their policy phases, contributing to isolating and therefore not enabling gender mainstreaming to produce a significant impact in terms of gender equality.

The objective must be to design a development process able to eliminate gender neutrality when defining the interventions, providing a strategy addressed to the system and not only to individuals. Probably, as well as the horizontal integration of equal opportunities, there is still the need for specific measures to support women to overcome particular conditions of inequality and to properly integrate interventions directed at people with those directed at infrastructures, in order to achieve strong and effective results.

A specific political stance is required for this to happen, together with a greater awareness of the importance of gender equality for socio-economic growth within the political and administrative culture and an improved capacity to concretely address these issues and involve the local actors. A greater attention to the connection between gender mainstreaming and socio-economic growth could be the starting point to overcome the design of strategies where women are only the 'passive' beneficiaries of the intervention.

To achieve the goal, there are two main focuses.

On the one hand it is necessary to deal with some difficulties that have characterized gender mainstreaming in the 2000-2006 programming such as a still grounded confusion on the actual meaning of gender mainstreaming, too often interpreted as the mere promotion of positive actions, the lack of adequate instruments and dedicated resources (human and financial) for the effective implementation of gender mainstreaming and the operational difficulty of putting into practice gender mainstreaming in development policies that are not directly addressed to individuals.

On the other hand, lessons learned from the 2000-2006 programming period and suggestions for further supporting gender mainstreaming indicate the following dimensions as priorities:

- Building equal opportunities governance. If equal opportunity objectives are to become an integral part of growth and development policies, effective 'equality governance' is a prerequisite.
- Improve management and implementation skills. Appropriate procedures for internalising the gender mainstreaming perspective in the selection criteria; implementation methods and indicator systems; technical assistance teams to support gender mainstreaming in carrying out project interventions; equal opportunities expertise in programme/project management should be reinforced as they account for the quality of results and outcomes of the overall programmes.
- Improving monitoring and evaluation tools. The definition and dissemination of guidelines, criteria, methods and techniques, at European and national/local level, in order to further develop the tools and indicators that have been implemented in 2000-2006 is a crucial priority.
- Supporting institutional learning through cooperation and exchange of good practices as a key tool to successfully promote institutional learning across and within Member States with explicit reference to gendered programming and implementation of projects.
- Improving communication strategies to increase the awareness among all key players and to emphasise gender issues and programme achievements, including the socio-economic role of women.