

GENDER EQUALITY IN EU-FUNDED PROGRAMS: GLOBAL AND REGIONAL ISSUES

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Abstract: *Gender equality is a key issue in EU policies explicitly targeted over 50 years. The reports for the entire period show that progress has been made in the situation for women through specific programs, but the results are always lower than expected. Thus, inequalities persist in several areas, and developments are the source of new challenges. The main objective of this article is to show how gender equality influences EU funded programs and what issues arise depending on the area in which it is applied. We intend to highlight the types of projects that have gender equality objectives and successful models, considering the context in which these projects were carried out and highlighting the determinants of their success. On the way to building a sustainable and inclusive Europe, gender equality encounter many obstacles, particularly in regions where the ideas of existence of disparities and imbalances are not accepted and documented.*

Keywords: gender equality; program; projects; European funds

Introduction

Among the objectives of the European Union it can be find the protection and development of the European society and the support of its citizen through social policy. From this point of view, one of the most important areas of discussion is the European social protection, especially with regard of equal opportunities, for both men and women.

To support the European citizen regarding gender equality, the European Union has developed a legislative framework, consisting of a series of directives aiming various problems caused by gender inequalities: from the principle of equal treatment in matters of social security, followed by the importance of parental leave and up to the methods of providing evidence in cases of discrimination.

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At the beginning of the establishment of the European Union combining the strengths of its founding treaties with the actions of the Community and its Member States, the situation of men and women in the EU has experienced changes in different areas.

Even so, in the process of balancing the gap between genders, the Union still encounters a number of problems in various domains and aspects of life, and in attempt to remediate the situation, over the years there have been implemented a number of programs and strategies that aimed to achieve a series of objectives, such as: equal economic independence for both men and women, reconciliation of the private and professional life, equal representation in decision-making, eradication of all forms of gender-based violence, elimination of gender stereotypes and promoting it within development and external policies (EC, 2010a).

1. Overview of relevant literature

In the specialized literature it is shown that equal opportunities and employment based on competence are absolute necessary for social balance. In the field of employment and promotion at the workplace – one of the most present topics in studies and reports in the field of equal opportunities - to promote this idea of equality, means that nobody should be denied employment and/or promotion based on age, race, gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs or on any other criteria irrelevant to the idea of performance demanded by the item in question. If these elements are not taken into account, reaching a form a discrimination is easy.

The categories of people most vulnerable to discrimination are ethnic/racial minorities; religious minorities, women, sexual minorities, people with disabilities and the elderly. Obviously, depending on the context, other categories can become vulnerable – for example, in the context of the economic crisis, young people could be considered a vulnerable category.

Gender equality as a horizontal objective of the Union programs, is based on the concept that all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and to choose what they do without limitation imposed by strict roles; the fact that different behaviors, aspirations and needs of women and men are taken into account, valued and favored equally means that women and men enjoy the same freedom to fulfill their aspirations.

Studies have shown that there are at least three major economic explanations for discrimination on the labor market: the “power” – derived form a group’s ability to make use of its power to obtain economic benefits on the expense of others; the “taste” – which is revealed when members of a group do not wish to be associated with members of another group; informational externalities – the use of statistical norms and clichés in hiring and promotion decisions.

These economic factors highlight the idea that in terms of discrimination we face not only with *direct/indirect* typology, but also with the typology which mentions the *conscious/ intentional* discrimination and the *unintentional* one and

also the *discrimination practiced at an individual/ group level* and the one *practiced at an institutional/ organizational level* (Mallick, 1995).

It also highlights a clear correlation between types of discrimination felt in terms of direct involvement, and social and demographic composition of the Eurobarometer. Thus, gender discrimination is identified differently, more by women (6%) compared to men (1%). The perception of discrimination is different in the countries of the European Union (EC, 2008). The highest percentages are occurring in countries such as Spain, Greece, Portugal, Sweden and Hungary (over 40%) and the lowest in Bulgaria, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Germany, Finland and Romania (under 25%)

Although it is reflected in different European regions and countries, the issue of gender equality was a permanent goal of the European policies. The latest strategies aimed at tackling problems caused by gender inequalities are: the Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010, continued by the Strategy of equality between men and women 2010-2015.

An analysis of the situation from which we start in 2006, shows the notable progress made up to that point, but also, the indicators that do not show noticeable improvement. Thus, 2006, has a favorable trend in terms of the level of employment of women, the employment rate increasing up to 0,7% from the previous year, also influencing the unemployment rate, which fell with 2.1 percent. Even so, in terms of management positions, only 32% of women occupied one of management and only 3% one of CEO. In addition, wage differentials have remained the same, approximately at 15% (EC, 2006).

Over the coming years it has been noticed a steady increase in the percentage of employment of women, from 56% (EC, 2007) up to 58,3% in 2009, although among the Member States there have been differences, from 35,7% in Malta to 72,3% in Denmark. In terms of salary, the difference grew during 2009, reaching an average of 17.4% (EC, 2009).

During the implementation of The Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010, the European Commission, to support all actions undertaken in the framework of this strategy appealed to a range of approaches to change the existing legislation, including those in the 23rd and 24th of March 2006, when “The European Pact for equality between men and women” was accepted, followed by the approval of the Regulation establishing the European Institute of Gender Equality in December 2006. At the same time, in 2009 a Directive regarding parental leave was adopted, followed by a revision process initiated by the Commission regarding existing laws on equal non-discriminatory payment.

In spite of all the initiatives of the Commission and the Member States, the European Union was forced to acknowledge the failure of reaching the proposed targets and, consequently, to continue the implementation of a program to combat gender inequalities. Thus, the Strategy of equality between men and women 2010-2015 which is still in place and covers the areas of interest of the Union aims to resolve different problems, such as: equal economic independence for women and men, reconciliation of the private and professional life, equality in decision making and so on.



Economic independence for women and men, joined by the reconciliation of the private and professional life is an actual problem that resolving may reduce the pressure on social protection and the finance system, increasing at the same time the base of human capital and encouraging competitiveness. In this aspect, so far, the involvement of women in the labor market has increased and that of men in housework chores, but in terms of the jobs occupied by each genre there are still problems. If women have made progress, managing to break into fields that not long ago were considered “make appropriate”, this progress has been more modest among men. Areas such as social care, primary education, health and care, especially for the elderly and those with disabilities are still considered “female appropriate” (EC, 2010b).

Problems regarding the difficulties of hiring and promoting women at the workplace can be included as general issues because they are taken into account when it comes to the process of employment, promotion or dismissal of staff. Thus, a study highlights the reasons for exclusion/redundancy/marginalization which “disguises” gender discrimination (Czarniawaska, 2006). About some former employees it is said that “they had difficult personalities and it was impossible to work with each other”, “they were immigrants and could not adapt to local culture”, “did not fully understand how the system works”, “were not talented enough or worked too little “and” were too sensitive, taking everything seriously and had no sense of humor”.

The rules of description of the ideal behavior at the workplace are considered deeply male (Kelly et. al, 2010), hence resulting in a persistence of a different valorization of men toward women in the process of promoting. Also, during periods of restructuration, the progress achieved in promoting the hired ones are lost due to the following reasons (Dencker, 2008): reduction in force slowed promotion rates for all managers, women began their careers in lower-status jobs to begin with, relative to men, and women’s promotion advantages were often short-lived. Another effect of gender discrimination is the unfair payment, the men being paid more on average than women. In a study carried out over an extended period of time (Giapponi and McEvony, 2006), supports the idea of perseverance of this discrepancy.

In terms of *equal representation in the decision-making process*, in most Member States women continue to be under represented, particularly at the highest decision-making level although they represent half of the population and more than half of the number of graduates of the higher education in the EU. In this aspect, Finland’s situation can be taken into account, being the only country of the European Union, where the majority of the Government officials are women – 52%, unlike Hungary which is the only European country with a Government made up entirely of men (EC, 2010c).

The main barriers identified in the literature regarding professional careers and getting a decision-making job refer to: the difficulty of balancing parenthood and career, interrupted trajectory and poor performance due to the maternity leave (Ward and Wolf -Wendel, 2004), the fear of “getting out in front” (Winchester, 2006), low professional autonomy isolation, culture and mismanagement at a department level

(Bagilhole, 2002) and last but not least women's managing skills, different from that of men, less accepted and recognized (White, 2003; Doherty and Manfredi, 2006).

Eradication of all forms of gender-based violence is also one of the main directions of involvement of the Union. One out of three European women have lived an experience of physical or psychological violence until the age of 15 and a number of approximately 500.000 women had suffered from mutilations, based on an analysis carried out by the European Commission. In the 2010-2014 period of time in hopes of bringing to the public's knowledge the current situation, the European Union financed numerous informative campaigns conducted in partnership with non-governmental organizations and beginning with 2014, funds continued to be used through the implementation of the "Rights and Citizenship Equality" program, initiated by the European Court of Justice (EC, 2015).

Overall, the European Union and its institutions aimed to eliminate gender inequalities caused both within the Community as well as in the policy of development and external relations, in the idea that all the candidate countries have to accept the fundamental principle of equality between women and men, while monitoring the transposition and implementation of legislation, remaining a priority for the European Union.

2. Programs and gender specific tools

Gender equality is a horizontal objective included in development area, thus it is aimed to integrate the gender dimension in all EU policies and develop specific measures in order to remedy the inequalities. Including this objective into EU policies is ensured by the process of assessing the implications for both the women and men considering any planned action, including legislation, policy programs, in all areas and at all levels. There is a strategy to collect experiences and concerns of women and men within a each special stage of the project, implementation, monitoring and policies and programs evaluation in all political, economic and social domains, in order for women and men to equally benefit and not perpetuate inequalities. The ultimate goal is to solve gender equality issues.

From a methodological point of view, the EU has adopted a dual approach: one focused (positive action oriented to women or men, respectively to the group that is in a negative situation of inequality) and one cross approach (gender equality is systematically integrated in all actions). Special measures for encouraging women's participation in different situations in which women suffer from exclusion or there is a lack of women participation are implemented through positive actions. Through general equality actions, needs of men and women are identified and the participation is separately recorded aiming at maintaining equality in fact.

According to European Commission (EU, 2011), the main programs designed by EU in order to allocate funds for gender equality in 2007-2013 were:

- European Social Fund which targeted the issues of employment, pay differences, the promotion of equal opportunities at workplace.



- European Regional Development Fund which targeted to develop childcare facilities in order to help women to return faster at work and also gender requirements considering innovation issues
- Progress – a programme that has five specific objectives, among which one has considered the gender equality issue; thus over 12% of the funds were allocated for gender equality (approx. 90 mil. Euro).
- Daphne III which is a programme that addresses to the non-governmental sector and the Government institutions and focuses on legislative issues.

There are also other European initiatives that are moving towards this issue - for example, through the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area (EEA) (2009-2014), the program "Promoting gender equality and balance between work and private life" has also offered financial support.

It has been seen that different countries/regions approach the projects in this area differently. For example a successful strategic project developed during 11 years in Germany, financed by the ESF, is "Future Prospects for Girls". Through this project women are encouraged to work in areas that were traditionally chosen by men. Thus Girl's Day event has been developed, and that particular day became an opportunity for girls to visit companies in technological, research and high-tech industry. Following the success of this project, the same day became also "The Boys Day", as the boys started to visit organization which activate in fields that are dominated by women, such as health care and social assistance.

3. Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to systematically present the gender issues that influence EU programs considering specific problems that may occur depending on the domain or region where programs are implemented. The paper also highlights the types of projects that had gender equality objectives and briefly presents the results of ten largest projects, analyzing the context in which these projects were carried out.

In order to illustrate how Romania has tried to address the gender equality topic within European funded projects, a documentary research has been conducted. Most of the data were gathered from the official online database of projects funded through European Social Fund (ESF), Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resource Development (SOP HRD) 2007-2013, the "Promoting equal opportunities on labor market" Axis. Given the fact that the most information were presented very briefly we also analysed the projects' websites. An exploratory research was also conducted in order to gain some insights considering difficulties encountered in project implementation stage, issues that could not be identified within paper reports. The informants were consultants that help funded recipients to implement their projects or that are responsible for project auditing and findings helped us to develop the conclusion of the paper. The approach is mostly descriptive, however in the end some recommendations are proposed.

In order to gather the data the official website of structural project was used, considering that each beneficiary has the obligation to register the project online.

Fiftyfive projects were first identified. These projects comprise over 141 mil. Euros, of which 133 mil. Euro are non-refundable amounts. However two large projects which were in the top ten, considering their total value, were annulled at the end of April, so the final number of analysed project was 53. The total amount requested non-refundable thus reached almost 128 mil. Euro.

4. Main findings

After analysing the identified projects (53 projects) it was found that although the programme Axis 6.3. refers to the “promotion of equal opportunities on the labor market”, 52 projects approached the issues on gender equality (only one was addressed only other vulnerable groups), fact that was highlighted including in the title. One of the reasons may be the funding authority requirements that consider women category to be direct beneficiaries of projects. Out of the 53 projects analyzed, 58.49% were won by NGOs and unions or union groups, 22.64% by SMEs and other private companies from continuous development field and 18.87% by the public institutions and private education sector. Regarding the percentages describing each category of funded recipients, it seems that they are similar to the percentages described. However, there was a slight decrease of the percentage for NGOs (54.95% vs. 58.49%) and a higher percentage (about 5% more) for the third category, public institutions and private education (24.08% vs. 18.87%). This situation may occur due to either difficulties encountered by NGOs to prove financial capacity in order to implement the project or the difficulty of ensuring the 2% amount for co-funding.

The further results will take into consideration the analysis of the first 10 projects that aimed at promoting gender equality, projects that were chosen based on the total project amount. Regarding the type of the beneficiary, we can state that five of them were NGOs and trade union organizations, three were public institutions and private educational entities and two were SMEs. All projects were implemented over a period of 36 months and their total budget is between 20,9 mil. and 17,78 mil. RON. Although the projects were conducted at national level, in order to fullfill the funding requirements, it had been seen that project promoters entities were particularly from South and West regions of the country. North-East region was represented by Iasi and Suceava cities, but their main role was to help gather the direct beneficiaries of the project.

As a result of the projects’ activities analysed, it has been found that same types of interventions were used by most of the projects: conducting at least a national study on gender equality, offering certified courses on technical aspects and soft skills for women and other vulnerable groups, organising national awareness campaigns on gender equality issues, to promote women success stories and to develop information materials, including information guidebooks. For the entities that developed the project in partnership with organizations from other countries, some exchange visits were organised in countries like Italy or Spain.

It was also found that five out of ten chosen projects aimed at supporting women to open their own businesses. The support consisted in providing entrepreneurial training sessions, presenting women success stories, creating a



framework for networking and communication and also providing paper assistance in order to open a business. However, out of the five projects, only one had as result indicator, the number of opened businesses, the other four projects mentioning only the number of women assisted.

It has been also observed that the issue of gender equality has been addressed from several perspectives, depending on the target group:

- for women: professional courses to help them become competitive on the labor market; courses for the development of key or transversal skills; courses to increase the financial independence- entrepreneurship; information campaigns on the human rights, law and the way that they can protect from physical and psychical violence at the workplace; creating childcare facilities; presentation of women models and success stories; networking and information&communication platforms.
- for representatives of the media: law information in order to eliminate discrimination made in media productions.
- for employees of public institutions: exchanges to raise awareness of the status of women and the need to offer personalized services.
- for community in general: antidiscrimination information campaign; law changes proposals.

Conclusions

EU reports prove certain progress in gender equality, but they also mention that the proposed target was not reached and further specific efforts are needed. Over the time, differences in approach of funding programmes have highlighted the need for innovation in order to improve to problems that persist in time, determined by the structural religious and cultural dimensions.

Addressing the gender equality issues in a preliminary stage, the programming one, allows ensuring the availability of relevant statistical reference data on gender equality, in the defining specific programme's objectives stage. Although a program may not include specific interventions, the gender mainstreaming should be taken into account in the programming stage and relevant indicators setting. Thus the integration of equality can be ensured in all phases of implementation of projects funded, resulting in a positive contribution to improving the region's gender problems.

For applicants for project funding, the inclusion of gender equality both in the documentation project stage (defining the project's idea and detailed planning of the project actions) and in the end of the project, at the evaluation stage, and especially in the post-implementation period - to measure the effectiveness of measures implemented by the project by using relevant indicators - it is an aspect that can contribute decisively to emphasize the quality of interventions.

Increased and effective dissemination of specific ways that gender equality can be address through projects, would lead to a better integration of this objective within all actions taken by all stakeholders and to a great increase in the achievement of specific objectives.

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