



What is gender mainstreaming?

Gender Mainstreaming is the strategy of the European Union for the promotion of equal opportunities for women and men in institutions, organisations and politics. Gender mainstreaming was enshrined in the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam with the decision by the European Commission. It is considered a binding principle for all member states ever since.

Treaty of Amsterdam¹

Sec. 2

The Community shall have as its task, by establishing a common market and an economic and monetary union and by implementing common policies or activities referred to in Articles 3 and 4, to promote throughout the Community a harmonious, balanced and sustainable development of economic activities, a high level of employment and of social protection, equality between men and women, sustainable and non-inflationary growth, a high degree of competitiveness and convergence of economic performance, a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment, the raising of the standard of living and quality of life, and economic and social cohesion and solidarity among Member States.

Sec. 4

In all the activities referred to in (...), the Community shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women..

The principle of gender mainstreaming is based on the idea that gender issues provide essential criteria with regard to the solution of social, economic, political and organisation-related questions and problems.

The definition of gender mainstreaming by the Council of Europe is: „Gender mainstreaming is the (re)organisation, improvement, 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 players normally involved in policy-making.“²

The aim is to incorporate, dimensions of equal opportunities and gender equality for women and men in all the policies and activities of the European Community.

By specifying gender equality of men and women as a common objective, the legal basis for the implementation of the gender equality concept is reinforced on a European level. This ensures that the implementation of equal opportunities and gender equality becomes the central theme of political and organisational action. The idea of gender equality must be

¹ cited in Döge P. 2001a.

² Council of Europe 1998.

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taken into consideration during the planning phase as well as during the realisation, accompaniment and evaluation of state measures. And this must take place on all levels of responsibility in politics and administration.

The development of gender mainstreaming

The gender mainstreaming strategy can be attributed to the World Conferences on Women. The World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 is viewed as the key event. The roots of gender mainstreaming are found in the global network of women's movements, feminist movements and in discussions about the different forms and approaches in development policy. Measures for the promotion, equality or strengthening of women have long since become an integral part of development policy approaches in bi- and multilateral development cooperation of government and non-governmental players.

Into the 1970's, women were still mainly taken into consideration with charity measures that tied on to the "female" responsibility of reproduction. These primarily charitable measures ignored the sociopolitical issues of power and decision-making. The World Bank's discovery of the "invisible" woman brought about a paradigm shift in promotion: from the reproductive to the productive role of women. The development and modernisation policy aim became the "integration of women in development". To carry out this objective, development policy institutions set up Women-in-Development positions (WID). The increase in economic productivity and marketability of women by means of bank lending and income-generating activities was the central strategy. A further consequence was also intended: improvement of the social status for women and gender equality. The main objective was the efficient use of working potential that had been "under-used" by the market so far, and the allegedly invisible development resource "woman". The Women-in-Development positions in the developmental institutions carried out special women's promotion measures, or attached them to other sector programmes (the so-called women's component).



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However, it became increasingly clear and criticised by feminist development experts that the development process in itself hindered an equal participation of women. Thereupon, a renewed paradigm shift brought about the so-called gender-approach, in which sector programmes are based on gender-differentiated views and integrate measures that are oriented to women. This makes the gender-approach a cross-cutting task because the respective gender relations ought to be taken into account in every planning, realisation and evaluation sector.³

There are different ways of presenting the differences and similarities that are also pursued in the gender-political concepts of development cooperation. On the level of conceptual approaches and tools, the following chart puts the concepts of empowerment, equality or gender equity and gender-democracy next to each other. Gender mainstreaming as a strategy and tool can be found in the last two. Additions to the raster can certainly be made; it serves as an initial orientation.

Women's empowerment	Equality/ gender equity	Gender democracy
CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES		
Situation and condition of women	Situation and condition of women	Situation and conditions of women and men
Women's potential to change	Analysis and comparison of the initial conditions of the genders	Transfers responsibility and is directed towards the entire society
Individual and collective empowerment	Fairer gender relations	Structural change and modifications in the identities of women and men
	Gender equality/gender equity for women and men	Democratic gender relations on an interpersonal level, in a working environment, family and politics

³ cf. Rodenberg/Wichterich 1999, ,p. 23ff.



TOOLS		
Women's self-help support group	Gender analysis	Holistic gender analysis
Raising awareness	Specific measures for the promotion of women	Different measures for women and men in divided and mixed groups
Courses to strengthen self-confidence	Advancement plans for women/ gender equality plans	Dialogue and negotiation ability between genders
Encourage control of one's own sexuality and reproductive health	Information and awareness raising of men	Normative co-responsibility of men and women
Encourage personal and economic autonomy	Mainstreaming women and gender on institutional, state and sociopolitical level	Redistribution of resources and social welfare benefits
Networks against violence against women	Gender-budget	Achievement of work-life balance (public-private)
Conquest of spaces where power is exercised by women		Gender mainstreaming
		Campaign for the promotion of changes in culture and society

Source: Meentzen 2005

The Principles of Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming represents a top-down approach as an organisation-related strategy of change, i.e. the responsibility for the process of implementation is in the hands of female and male executives as well as with the entire staff. A further feature of gender mainstreaming is its concept as a double strategy, i.e. specific measures for the promotion of women are not superfluous, they are integrated in the gender mainstreaming strategy instead – similarly to specific measures for men.

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Contrary to previous gender-related policy, which was only directed at women, a *change of perspective* will be implemented by the new gender policies:

- Gender issues are not only related exclusively to women, gender relations are examined as a relationship between women and men.
- The responsibility for gender issues is no longer delegated to individual commissioners for women's affairs or equal opportunities offices, all the expert departments are responsible.

Change of perspective means the ability and willingness to put oneself in the position of the respectively other gender. Prerequisite is the affirmation of one's own position, for example within the scope of a gender training programme. Changes of perspective contribute to a mutual understanding, and not to adaptation.

On a *political* level gender mainstreaming refers to the contentual and expert realisation of programmes, action plans, tasks and allocation of funds. This means that all the players in politics, administration and other organisations ought to possess the competencies needed to integrate gender-related aspects and contents in their work.

On a *legislative* level gender mainstreaming concerns both the European Union, the federal level, the federal states, the municipalities and non-governmental organisations, for instance organisations, associations, unions and others. The Treaty of Amsterdam greatly strengthens the legal basis for the realisation of the idea of gender equality, by defining gender equality as a common task and common objective. This means that projects that are funded by the EU, have to prove that they meet the principles of gender mainstreaming.

This makes gender mainstreaming a central theme of political action in the planning, realisation, monitoring and assessment or evaluation of government measures. The integration of gender-differentiated aspects takes place on the *structural level*, for example through HR development and/or an organisation development that is connected to it.



What does gender mainstreaming contribute?

The value of gender mainstreaming for politics, society and corporations is one of the most frequently asked questions in the context of [gender mainstreaming] implementation. For Marianne Weg, organisational consultant for gender mainstreaming, the essential benefits are the promotion of democracy and social equality and that a new quality of social innovation can be achieved (Weg 2001). She sums up the benefits as follows:

- ▶ More gender equality policy efficiency is achieved: all political decisions and measures are enhanced with equal opportunities; all responsible entities are responsible in the top-down process.
- ▶ Existing disadvantages for *both*⁴ genders are dismantled.
- ▶ Gender equality measures become more efficient, because gender aspects are incorporated from the start: prevention is more (cost-)efficient than the subsequent dismantling of disadvantages incurred.
- ▶ It is an act of economic rationality: it furthers the economic change of structure.

The following benefits can be summarised for the organisational level:

- ▶ The use of gender mainstreaming leads to an amelioration of the concept of democracy within organisations and society. An organisation becomes more democratic, if women and men in their diversity equally shape, develop and participate in the results.
- ▶ Organisations develop gender democracy with the implementation of gender mainstreaming, and put national and European requirements into practice, for example laws or directives.
- ▶ The use of gender mainstreaming ensures foresighted and lasting policies by adjusting to the concepts of life and work of the employees as well as the diverse interests and initial situations of men and women (competitiveness).
- ▶ Gender-sensitivity and the use of gender-political issues in expert work increases gender competence and improves leadership behaviour (HR policy).
- ▶ The social and expert qualification of female and male executives is increased through gender competence. Corporate culture improves when approaches regarded as "feminine" and "masculine" receive similar appreciation.

⁴ Ms Weg emphasises here that it applies to both genders. Against the background of debates about construction and deconstruction (queer, transgender, etc.) we feel it is better to speak of all genders. This does not foster dichotomous/biological views and it becomes clear that "gender is consequently regarded as a social category":



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- ▶ Discrimination becomes visible and can be dismantled.
- ▶ The integration of gender-political perspectives in expert work increases their quality and efficiency (efficiency and gender as quality development tool). Teamwork profits from different approaches by women and men provided they are acknowledged and appreciated as such.
- ▶ Gender orientation can help corporations work out better target group concepts (gender as acquisition strategy).
- ▶ Organisations and corporations improve their image, when clients are addressed in a differentiated manner in their diversity.
- ▶ Trends are foreseen and recognised in good time (international comparison, public image).
- ▶ The organisation is modern by means of taking diverse gender interests into account. The job appeal as employer or as organisation is increased.

Requirements for an overall strategy for the implementation of gender mainstreaming:

- ▶ Sensitivity for gender issues on the awareness and organisational level must be established.
- ▶ An organisation-specific concept on the basis of a top-down process must be developed, i.e. acceptance of responsibility by male and female executives.
- ▶ The meaning of gender-differentiated data collection and evaluation must be defined for everyone.
- ▶ Resources for the allocation and processing of this data must be provided.
- ▶ For the organisation, specific, manageable tools must be developed for organisation development (gender mainstreaming implementation), for the development of human resources (gender competence for executives and employees) and on the expert level (gender competence).
- ▶ The procedure will need to be transparent, i.e. it must be clear whether an overall strategy or a partial strategy is developed. This makes the level on which the concept sets in perceptible.
- ▶ The employees need the support of the executives and, if necessary, assistance from "flying experts", gender commissioners or internal gender teams.



Summary

Gender mainstreaming is a gender-political strategy and thus a path to more gender democracy, gender equity or equal opportunities for women and men. How these gender-political objectives are defined and filled with content is a dispute that will have to continue on the most diverse political levels.

The strategy of gender mainstreaming is based on the underlying assumption that the living conditions of men and women (in their diversity) differ. Reasons for this are amongst other things social and cultural developments, for instance gender-based division of labour. However, the existing gender relations in society and organisations can be influenced and changed. In turn, these changes can have a positive effect on organisations and society.

The category gender provides essential criteria for the solution of economic, social and political issues and problems. In doing so, the European Union relies on the implementation of gender mainstreaming, on taking a gender-related perspective into account during the planning, realisation and evaluation of political action. Promotion of women measures and the upholding of women-policy infrastructure are not obsolete; they continue to be necessary instead. The gender knowledge that women and gender equality commissioners possess ought to be used to integrate gender from the very start in all decision-making processes, expert fields and tasks.

To introduce gender mainstreaming as an innovative approach in organisations and institutions, a political or organisation-political intent must be formulated so that a strategy and organisation-specific procedure (concept) can be developed. This means that in a "top-down process" the executives will be held accountable.