Gender equality: Community framework strategy, programme 2001-2005

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The purpose of this Communication is to present the final evaluation report on the framework strategy and Community action programme on gender equality 2001 -2006.

The aim of the Community framework strategy on gender equality was to establish a single coordinated framework for all the Commission's activities in this field. The strategy sets out five priority objectives: gender equality in economic life; equal participation and representation in decision-making; equal participation and representation in decision-making; equal access to social rights; gender equality in civil life; and the overcoming of gender stereotypes.

The Community action programme, established in 2001, was drawn up to support the implementation of the framework strategy through across-the-board and coordination activities for a total budget of € 61 742 241 spread over the three strands of activity. **Strand 3** – cooperation between the parties concerned – absorbed the largest share of the budget (45%), followed **by Strand 1** – raising awareness of the Community dimension of equality (38%) – and **Strand 2** – Analysis and evaluation (16%).

The main findings of the report are as follows:

- In the field of **employment**, the work of the experts helped strengthen the Community dimension of policy on gender equality among national policies through the analysis of national employment plans and the availability of statistics.
- The framework strategy has also clearly resulted in progress on **promoting equality in participation and representation** at Community level.
- Activities to **promote equal access to social rights** made it possible to accompany the implementation of equality objectives in the open method of coordination in the field of social protection and inclusion, particularly through the work of experts.
- Various initiatives have been taken in the field of **equality in civil life**.
- Efforts to overcome **gender stereotypes** were also backed up by activities geared to the respective roles of women and men in society.
- The framework strategy and the programme have made a considerable contribution to improving **governance** at European level.

To conclude, the aims of the framework strategy were ambitious as they required account to be taken of the principles of equality in all the Union's policies. The five policy areas identified for structuring the framework for Community action corresponded with the main challenges to be taken up in order to support the equality objectives. By presenting this overall framework, the Commission has created the requisite conditions for coordinated implementation of the various instruments. The structural funds have been a crucial financial tool for ensuring that equality is taken into account in the policies of the Member States. Targeted Community activities have increased the effectiveness of legislation on equality and supported the various institutions and civil society in effectively promoting equality in all the areas in question.

The programme has demonstrated its value through its ability to support the implementation of the equality objectives and to strengthen the coordination mechanisms and governance at European level. The measures that have supported the promotion of values and improved understanding of equality questions are very useful for Community action.

Despite this positive assessment, there are still major gender inequalities. In March 2006, the Commission adopted an equality roadmap in order to take up these challenges. This is aimed at combating gender inequality in six priority areas. In order to flesh out its commitments, the Commission is identifying the activities for which it is competent in the various fields and the corresponding deadlines, and strengthening the governance and monitoring mechanisms. The funding for work on equality under the new programme – 'PROGRESS (2007-2013)' – will make it possible to support the Commission in the implementation of the roadmap activities. By merging the previous programmes into a single programme, PROGRESS also makes it possible to take better account of gender equality in all its activities.

There are still many challenges to be taken up in the field of gender equality that will require the commitment of all the parties concerned. The Commission has undertaken to strengthen its framework for action while calling on the others to play their part. Employers and employees at European level have undertaken to implement their framework for action on equality. Civil society and the NGOs are also determined to strive to eliminate gender inequality. Making progress on gender equality is also a task for the Member States. In March 2006, the European Council gave a clear political signal to the Heads of State and Government by laying down the priorities of equality policy in the European Pact for Gender Equality.