

Non discrimination and gender equality: European year of equal opportunities for all 2007

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In May 2006 the European Parliament and the Council adopted a Decision to designate 2007 as the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All – Towards a Just Society (EYEO). In accordance with this Decision, this Communication reports on the results and achievements of the EYEO, assesses the extent to which it met its objectives and examines the results to see if they are sustainable.

In particular, the report focuses on the following areas:

1) Underlying challenges and corresponding objectives which the EYEO was intended to meet: the EYEO Decision set out to address the challenges through four objectives: these were the 'four "R"s', namely 'Rights' (corresponding to the legislative challenges), 'Representation', 'Recognition' and 'Respect' (corresponding to the policy challenges). The co-legislators also set out the three implementation principles: (i) balanced treatment of grounds with the focus on multiple discrimination and an obligation to mainstream gender across all activities; (ii) decentralised implementation through national plans and action taking national, regional and local differences into account; and (iii) close involvement of civil society and social partners.

The results of the EYEO must therefore be assessed in the light of those objectives and principles and in terms of their sustainability.

2) Implementation of the EYEO at national and EU level:

At national level:

- 30 participating countries;
- 434 Implemented Actions by around 1 000 Action Leaders and their Partners, which delivered 1 600 outputs, consisting of more than 1 000 meetings and events, circa 440 national-level campaigns and over 120 studies and surveys;
- over 1700 activities included in the EYEO's objectives (meetings and events, campaigns and studies, etc).

At EU level:

The EYEO Decision provided for an **Advisory Committee** to be set up with members from each of the 30 participating countries. It met seven times from June 2006 to July 2008. Through advocacy and awareness-raising activities, organisations representing and defending people exposed to discrimination play a vital role in making anti-discrimination rights effective. Involving civil society in the design and implementation of the EYEO activities was therefore crucial. The Commission held regular discussions with **NGOs and social partners** within an **Advisory Group**, which met six times from June 2006 to July 2008.

In addition, both the European Parliament and individual MEPs from a number of committees and political groups played a crucial role in the EYEO. Parliament and the Commission jointly organised a 'European Parliament of Equal Opportunities for All', a forum for dialogue with civil society on eliminating discrimination and promoting equal opportunities for all in employment and outside.

The EYEO also produced inter alia the following:

- 530 participants in the launching conference in Berlin and over 700 in the closing conference in Lisbon
- The website was visited by overall 894 934 viewers
- The stand set up at the Eurovision Village in Helsinki, Finland, during Eurovision week (5-12 May), attracted 320 000 visitors
- At least 3 611 media clippings, largely in the form of clippings in print, which achieved over at least 370 million contacts altogether
- 700 deliveries of printed information, promotional material and stands to NIBs, national correspondents, NGOs and public authorities.

Financial implementation: the co-legislators set a global budget for the EYEO of **€15 million** of which €7.65 million was allocated to activities at national level. The participating countries had to match the amount received from the EU from public or private sources, bringing the overall estimated budget for the 27 Member States up to €15.30 million. While most of the 30 participating countries decided to match the Commission's 50% co-funding, some planned to provide even more than the requisite 50%, resulting in a combined estimated budget of around €18.5 million. Ultimately, final expenditure on the 434 actions implemented at national level amounted to €15.9 million, or 86% of the original estimated budget. All 30 participating countries at least matched the EU national grant, with the overall percentage amounting to more than 57%. As a result of overestimating the costs, coupled with delays in the planning phase, in the start of the actions and in the receipt of funding, some countries spent less than the amount budgeted: overall, this was offset by additional resources supplied by seven countries.

3) EYEO's sustainable results at national and EU level to assess how these can be applied to take up the heightened challenges facing the EU: at EU level a firm, practical policy commitment is needed. In December 2007, the EPSCO Council adopted a comprehensive Resolution on follow-up to the EYEO, which welcomed the initiatives started and set priorities for the future. The December 2007 European Council endorsed the results of the EYEO and added a specific focus on the need for the EU and the Member States to step up work on promoting Roma inclusion. On 2 July 2008, as part of the renewed Social Agenda the Commission adopted a **set of measures to combat discrimination** comprising:

- a new proposal for a **directive** on equal treatment prohibiting discrimination on grounds of age, disability, sexual orientation and religion or belief outside the field of employment;
- a **Communication** 'Non-discrimination and equal opportunities: A renewed commitment', which sets out a comprehensive approach to stepping up action against discrimination;
- a Commission **Decision** setting up a **non-discrimination governmental expert group** to examine the impact of national and EU-level non-discrimination measures, validate good practice through peer learning and develop benchmarks to evaluate the effectiveness of non-discrimination policies;
- a Commission Staff Working Paper on Community instruments and policies for Roma inclusion.

Conclusion: the EYEO managed to fulfil the requirements set in terms of budget execution and material implementation principles (balanced treatment of grounds, decentralisation, involvement of civil society and the social partners and a focus on multiple discrimination and gender mainstreaming) and generated an impressive number of financially and morally supported actions. The most important factor in the EYEO's success was the **political commitment** of the Member States, the European institutions and civil society. The Commission carried out its task of establishing a framework for implementation with the political backing of the European Parliament and the Council. Civil society at EU and national level fully embraced the project and allocated a significant proportion of their scarce resources to its implementation.

In addition to meeting the overall aim of raising awareness of rights and obligations in the existing legal framework, the EYEO triggered a debate on breaking down the barriers between the discrimination grounds. The debate fed into the **Commission's decision to adopt a new proposal for an Article 13**

directive to even out the protection afforded across the grounds and fostered a standing debate with the Member States and the stakeholders that will help the EU to develop a policy to achieve equality and allow each individual to realise his or her potential.