The objectives of gender equality using the structural Funds

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PURPOSE : to present a communication on the implementation of the gender mainstreaming in the Structural Funds programming documents 2000-2006. CONTENT : this Communication provides an overview of the extent to which the gender mainstreaming dimension has been taken into account in the Structural Funds programming 2000-2006. It gives an inventory of progress and includes examples of good practice, and also identifies areas where progress is slow. The purpose of this document is to give an input to the Structural Funds' mid-term review when the allocation of the performance reserve is determined, along with any revisions concerning financial allocations, targets, priorities and measures. The report states that gender mainstreaming in the Structural Funds involves ensuring that all general measures and interventions openly and actively take into account - during planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation - their effects on the respective situations of women and men. It also involves the complementary design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of specific measures and operations, to promote equality and to assist women to participate and benefit equally from the Structural Funds and, more generally, from economic and social cohesion. Experience shows that gender equality is a complex policy area, and that there are a number of obstacles to the successful implementation of a dual approach involving both specific measures and mainstreaming. The Commission makes the following recommendations which are designed to address the above obstacles immediately. It invites the Member States to : - encourage, through Managing Authorities, Monitoring Committees, local programme and project managers, especially in the short term, the use of gender equality expertise, and to ensure the presence of representatives of equality bodies and research institutions in Structural Funds Monitoring Committees ; - establish awareness-raising measures and training in gender mainstreaming for Managing Authorities, members of Monitoring Committees, programme and project managers and partners. All policies are improved with ex-ante evaluation and impact assessment. In thecontext of gender mainstreaming, ex-ante evaluation relies on the availability of analysis using sex-disaggregated statistics. Gender impact assessment needs clear qualitative and quantitative gender equality indicators for monitoring and evaluating output and results. Member States are urged to ensure, notably through their Managing Authorities, that sex-disaggregated statistics and gender impact assessment become an inherent component of Structural Funds interventions, including in "non-traditional" gender equality domains such as infrastructure, transport or environment. - appoint a high-level representative to coordinate the national strategy for gender equality, to contribute to the co-ordination of the EU strategy, and to participate in a high level group to support the implementation of gender mainstreaming in Structural Funds interventions. The findings and recommendations stemming from the current programming period of the Structural Funds address deep-rooted issues that can only be dealt with over the longer term; therefore, they will, in substance, also remain valid for future Structural Funds interventions. In particular the allocation of funding for gender equality activities must be retained and even increased in most programmes. A number of issues arise for further examination when looking at the future promotion of gender equality in the Union. The Commission considers the following as the most important ones: - equal opportunities between women and men must remain a priority with the dual approach - gender mainstreaming and specific actions - which has proved its effectiveness, being continued. - investment in human and social capital in the knowledge society will form the basis of long-term growth of Europe. Consequently, future interventions should focus on preventing the exclusion of women from these areas by giving particular attention to encouraging high quality training and employment in the ICT and R&D sector, in tandem with a wider commitment to promoting female entrepreneurship, life-long learning, training, skills and qualifications for women in non-traditional areas. - the Structural Funds should play an important role in the specific context of the forthcoming enlargement of the Union, especially in combating the potential

risks faced by women in new Member States, particularly those who are exposed to the adverse effects of economic and social restructuring, such as the increase of unemployment and the decrease of childcare provision.