



Final working group report:

# New skills and jobs and gender in the European Social Fund



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The European Community of Practice on Gender Mainstreaming (2010-2014) was a community dedicated to integrating the gender dimension into the European Social Fund (ESF) programmes (2014-2020) in relation to the EU 2020 strategy. The goal was that gender mainstreaming shall be an integral part of future ESF management – from planning, programming, implementing to monitoring and evaluation. The network was funded by the European Commission. Find out more on [www.gendercop.eu](http://www.gendercop.eu)

## INTRODUCTION

In the **Europe 2020 Strategy** the concept of inclusive growth is defined as *empowering people through high levels of employment, investing in skills, fighting poverty, and modernising labour markets, training and social protection systems so as to help people anticipate and manage change and build a cohesive society.*

The **Agenda for new skills and jobs** is a Commission initiative to help the EU reach its employment target for 2020: 75% of the working-age population (20–64 years) in work. Launched in 2010, it is part of the EU's overall strategy – Europe 2020 – to promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the next 10 years and beyond. Even though there is no explicit reference to gender, it is clear that the improvement of women's employment will be a key factor for achieving the 75% employment rate and succeeding with the EU 2020 development strategy.

In fact, in spite of progress, Europe's employment rates – 69% on average for those aged 20–64 – are still significantly lower than those in other parts of the world. Only 63% of women are in work compared to 76% of men. The employment rate of the population aged 20–64 should increase from the current 69% to at least 75%, through among other things the greater involvement of women and older workers and the better integration of migrants in the workforce.

However, it is important to point out that employment should not be improved at the cost of increasing inequality and labour market segmentation,<sup>1</sup> so while trying to reduce unemployment, all aspects of working life must be taken into consideration: job quality, wages, equality, etc.

As remarked in the **Agenda for new skills and jobs**<sup>2</sup> flexicurity policies are the best instrument to modernise labour markets by reducing segmentation and supporting gender equality through the elimination of gender gaps, measures to reconcile work and private life, gender mainstreaming, and actions for tackling gender-based segregation.

Structural funds regulations, and especially **ESF**, which is a major instrument for achieving the EU 2020 strategy, have stated the importance of promoting equality between men and women through mainstreaming with the aim of increasing the sustainable participation and progress of women in employment, thus combating the feminisation of poverty, reducing gender-based segregation, combating gender stereotypes in the labour market and in education and training, and promoting the reconciliation of work and personal life for all as well as the equal sharing of care responsibilities between men and women.<sup>3</sup>

Based upon those considerations, gendering the EU flagship “New Skills For Jobs” should be considered by Member States as a priority for reaching inclusive growth.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In the Flagship Initiative: An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs, it is stated, *Aims on national level include: To implement their national pathways for flexicurity, as agreed by the European Council, to reduce labour market segmentation and facilitate transitions as well as facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life*

<sup>3</sup> Art. 7, REGULATION (EU) No 1304/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 on the European Social Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006

<sup>4</sup> *EU2020 Strategy, Inclusive growth means empowering people through high levels of employment, investing in skills, fighting poverty and modernising labour markets, training and social protection systems so as to help*

## THE MAIN GENDER ISSUES

The analysis of data concerning the labour market, at EU level but also in relation to many Member States, together with the evidence and results produced by the conference organised by the Gender Mainstreaming Network on “Gendering the Flagship”<sup>5</sup> suggest that the main gender gaps and challenges to address are as follows:

### ***Gender differences in employment rates***

**Women’s employment rates** across the EU range from some 40% to 75%, but the EU average is 75.8% for men and 62.5% for women (2009).

Employment rates of older women vary considerably between the Member States. In 2005, the highest was in Northern European countries with more than 60%, the lowest in Southern European countries all of which were below 35%. Very young mothers with small children are a particularly vulnerable group as regards their entry into the labour market; their activity rates are much lower than for mothers older than 25.

So, to reach the [Europe 2020 target](#) of a 75% employment rate for both women and men, particular attention needs to be given to the labour market participation of older women, single parents, women with a disability, migrant women and women from ethnic minorities, and specific measures are needed to assess their employment and potential working conditions.

### ***Gender differences in relation to part-time work***

Women **work part-time** more than men (accounting for over 75% of part-timers), in less valued jobs and sectors. Moreover, it seems that female part-time workers invest their free time in non-paid domestic work. When taking into account the composite working hour indicators – i.e. the sum of the hours worked at the main job and at secondary jobs, plus the time spent on commuting and on household work – data shows that women in employment systematically work longer hours than men. Interestingly, referring to composite working hours, on average, women in part-time jobs work more hours than men in full-time jobs.

This clearly illustrates the “double role” increasingly played by women in the labour market and in the household.

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*people anticipate and manage change and build a cohesive society. It is also essential that the benefits of economic growth spread to all parts of the Union, including its outermost regions, thus strengthening territorial cohesion. It is about ensuring access and opportunities for all throughout the lifecycle. Europe needs to make full use of its labour potential to face the challenges of an ageing population and rising global competition. Policies to promote gender equality will be needed to increase labour force participation thus adding to growth and social cohesion.*

<sup>5</sup> The conference was held in Brussels in June 2012.

There is a need for greater recognition of the links between women's paid and unpaid work and their effects on women's health, including combined risk exposures and less free time, which are influenced by gender stereotypes.

### ***Gender differences in relation to education and vocational training***

Nearly 60% of **EU university graduates** are women, but they account for less than 33% of scientists and engineers across Europe, and represent nearly 80% of the total workforce in the health, education and welfare sectors. Plus, while 59% of EU graduate students in 2010 were female, only 20% of EU senior academicians were women.<sup>6</sup>

Gender gaps remain significant both in performance and in choice of subjects.

Horizontal segregation in education and training inevitably leads to segregation in the labour market.

### ***Gender differences in relation to family responsibilities***

The impact of parenthood on labour market participation is still very different for women and men; only 65.6% of women with children under 12 work, as opposed to 90.3% of men. This reflects the unequal sharing of family responsibilities, but also often signals a lack of opportunities for childcare and work-life balance. Research has shown that women and men exhibit very different behaviours when they become parents, with men generally able to choose their level of engagement to a higher degree than women. In fact, it is shown that in cases where women increase their number of paid working hours, men do not assume a greater share of the housework. Based on a study carried out in the Netherlands, Booth and van Ours (2010) found that there is a clear gender bias in the division of labour within the household.<sup>7</sup>

Family policies are often built on the conception of women as the main caregiver. This has led to the expression "women become parents and men fathers".

### ***Gender differences in professions and positions***

A gender-segregated labour market, the difficulty of balancing work and family life, and the undervaluation of female skills and work are some of the complex causes of the persistent gender pay gap. This means that women are typically over-represented in sectors or occupations that offer lower rates of pay.

### ***Gender differences in relation to working conditions***

[Women in the EU earn on average 17.1% less than men for each hour worked](#). The question of occupational safety and health (OSH) for women who work in the European Union (EU) is central to understanding their working environment. Research from the European Commission finds that already in 1995, women's ill health was close to or above half of all

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<sup>6</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/document\\_library/pdf\\_06/she-figures-2012\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/document_library/pdf_06/she-figures-2012_en.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Eurofound, Part time work in Europe, 2009.

cases and the situation has not improved. Further, “women’s jobs”, for instance within health care and social services or the retail and hospitality sector, have seen an increase in accident rates, including fatal accidents; women are more likely to be bullied and harassed at work, including sexual harassment; and they have to use ill-fitting personal protective equipment that is generally not sized for a smaller frame.

### ***Gender differences in relation to possibilities for economic independence***

Over recent decades, women have entered the labour market in great numbers. Inequalities remain, however, and have an impact on women’s economic independence and, as a consequence, the adequacy of their pensions.

In 2011, the EU launched the **first European Semester** and adopted its first Annual Growth Survey, anchored in the Europe 2020 Strategy. It highlighted the worryingly low labour market participation rate of **second earners** (the spouse who earns less in two-earner couples). Indeed, in many Member States, financial disincentives such as tax and benefit systems combined with excessive childcare costs make it more attractive for the spouse with relatively lower earnings (who tends in general to be a woman) to choose between either inactivity or limited activity. The labour supply of spouses is interconnected, and married women’s decisions to enter the labour market are often influenced by the total income of the household. As a result, women may enter or leave the workforce depending on family income needs. They are consequently more sensitive to policies affecting their participation in the labour market than policies addressing working hours. When pension systems were initially developed, men spent a lifetime in the labour market and women mostly stayed home. The resulting income inequality in pensions was addressed by allowing wives to draw on their husbands’ contributions.

## **THE BURNING ISSUES**

As we have seen, in discussing gender aspects of new initiatives for skills and jobs, central topics are the gender segregation of the labour market, flexicurity, and the different implications for women and men (including part-time and insecure employment), economic independence and job quality. Although the economy is changing, and we need more people with new skills who are willing to accept new ways of working, the needs of men and women must be taken into account to enable everyone to participate in the labour market and perform a desired job.

### **Gender Segregation**

High participation rates of women do not automatically imply gender equality on the labour market. Occupational segregation as well as labour market segmentation (horizontal and vertical) have tended to disproportionately place women in the low-paying categories of

work often associated with more vulnerable terms and conditions of work. Studies have shown that typical women's jobs are associated with low pay, insecure job status, poor working conditions, inadequate social coverage and limited possibilities for promotion and upward mobility (Kurian 2010).

Therefore gender segregation is a root problem of many others; it often determines the working conditions for women and is the main factor in the gender pay gap.

For the EU as a whole, the level of segregation, as measured by the IP index, is still relatively high, with a value of 25.3% for occupational segregation and 18.3% for sectoral segregation out of a maximum of 50% (Bettio and Verashchagina, 2009).

Horizontal segregation is understood as under- (or over-) representation of a given group in occupations or sectors not ordered according to any definite criterion, and is often referred to as segregation *tout court*. Vertical segregation denotes the under- (or over-) representation of a group in occupations or sectors at the top of an ordering based on "desirable" attributes – income, prestige, job stability, etc. Finally, hierarchical segregation stands for under- (or over-) representation of a group at the top of occupation-specific ladders (Bettio and Verashchagina, 2009).

There are, of course, differences in gender segregation in the labour market in different EU countries, depending on several different factors: scale of women's employment, the division of work in households, cultural differences, etc. Nevertheless, almost half the women in the European Union are employed in health and social services, retailing, education and public administration (Kurian 2010).

At the same time, the economy is changing. Health care and social services are expected to be the driving forces in the economy in the near future, which will also change the distribution of jobs. New branches of the economy – green energy most notably – will also need new knowledge and skills. This means that both women and men have to reorient themselves in the labour market, which can also present an opportunity to change the gender distributions in different sectors.

There are many theories trying to explain the segregation, but in recent research priority is given to four sets of factors: stereotypes; choice of field of study; the demand for shorter or flexible working hours because of the unequal care burden and differential income roles; and covert barriers and biases in organisational practices, including collective bargaining procedures (Bettio and Verashchagina, 2009). All these factors are actually closely connected to gender roles, stereotypes, and values, and comprise a set of factors that need time and constant work to change.

## Part-time jobs

The incidence of part-time work differs significantly between men and women. Just under one third (32.1%) of women aged 15–64 who were employed in the EU-28 worked on a part-time basis in 2013, a much higher proportion than the corresponding share for men (8.8%). The highest proportions of part-time work are found amongst women with children, probably because part-time work is seen as a way to reconcile work and family life. In 2011 in the EU27, almost a third (32%) of employed women aged 25 to 54 with a child of less than six years worked part-time, while for employed women with three children or more, where the youngest is aged six or less, half (50%) worked part-time. For employed men, the rates were significantly lower (5% and 7% respectively). It is important to point out that, while the proportion of women working part-time increases when they have children and also with the number of children, the proportion of men remains relatively stable.<sup>8</sup>

In 2010 the level of part-time work among working women was higher than that among men in all countries, but especially in Continental and Northern countries and in the Anglo-Saxon countries. The highest level of part-time work among women was recorded by the Netherlands (76%); in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Austria, United Kingdom, Sweden and Norway it was about 40%. Instead, levels of part-time work are low in many Eastern and Baltic countries, both for women and men. Overall, part-time employment maintained its upward trend in 2010. Part-time employment as a percentage of total employment reached 18.5% in the EU, up by 0.4 p.p. from 2009. Among EU countries it was highest in the Netherlands (48.3%) and lowest in Bulgaria (2.2%) and Slovakia (3.8%) (Eurostat 2011).

The different levels and types of women's involvement in paid work are indeed strongly connected to the gendered allocation of family obligations and responsibilities. Unlike for men, women's labour market participation is markedly "elastic" in relation to family circumstances and events.

Women might adjust their labour supply in different ways: they might withdraw from the labour market, they might move to part-time jobs, they might be able to find a new temporary contract if it ends around the date when they will give birth, or they might more often than men be hired on a temporary basis under the assumption that they will invest less in their career for family reasons (female individual flexibility).

Such adjustments are not neutral for women's current and subsequent careers, wages, and living conditions. This is especially true in those contexts where part-time is the only available public resource to reconciliation, and where part-time work has been constructed as a secondary and female labour market, with low wages, low protections, low human capital investments, and a high risk of entrapment.

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<sup>8</sup> [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Employment\\_statistics](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Employment_statistics)

## RESOURCES (study reports, data...)

[EC report “New skills and jobs in Europe: Pathways towards full employment”](#) (2012)

[Progress on equality between women and men in 2013](#)

[An Agenda for new skills and jobs: A European contribution towards full employment](#)

[Gender segregation in labour market: Root causes, implications and policy responses in the EU](#). Francesca Bettio and Alina Verashchagina, 2009

[“Equal economic independence: The contribution of women to achieving the Europe 2020 targets”](#) Fondazione G. Brodolini, 2011

[“Horizontal and vertical segregation”](#) Meta-analysis of gender and science research – Topic report. Danièle Meulders, Robert Plasman, Audrey Rigo, Síle O’Dorchai, 2010

[Flexicurity and Gender Mainstreaming: Deliberative Processes, Knowledge Networks and the European Labour Market](#) Rachel Kurian, 2010

[Undervaluing women’s work](#). Damian Grimshaw and Jill Rubery, 2007

<http://eige.europa.eu/content/gender-stereotypes>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The adoption of a fully-integrated gender perspective is necessary, both in the planning and monitoring of labour market policies. It is necessary for both women and men to have the right skills for desired and suitable jobs, acceptable working conditions, and a salary that grants economic independence. Not just any job, but a decent job should be the goal of labour market measures.

**On the policy level:**

**Analysis**

Every policy document or planned intervention should include an impact analysis: how the planned intervention will affect men and women. A preliminary step would be to gather gender-disaggregated data and answer the following questions: Does the policy initiative, programme etc. influence the everyday life of men and women? In the area of the initiative, are there any differences between sexes concerning rights, resources, values, and participation?

### **Include Gender experts in the analyses.**

Many gender issues in the labour market are rooted in gender stereotypes, and also in gender blindness. To avoid being trapped by stereotypes when performing the analysis, take advice from gender experts.

### **Make a statement about segregation on OP level**

As segregation is often rooted in stereotypes and tradition, it is important to make reducing the segregation (or at least not increasing it) an explicit goal. Otherwise this aspect can be overlooked.

### **Implementation level**

Have a support system for your implementers

Carry out research and evaluation projects to support your implementers with expert knowledge and **data**. It is very difficult to set objectives and indicators if there is no data to set a baseline and understand the existing situation

### **Project level:**

Analyse the planned actions from gender perspective. *How it is done* is just as important as *what is done*.

Have specific gender indicators for projects whose activities include training in new skills, to enable hidden gender issues to be recognized.

## GOOD PRACTICES

### Policy level:

In the Polish national ESF OP (2007–2013) a special assessment criterion was applied in the form of a [list of questions](#) for checking whether gender equality has been sufficiently incorporated within each intervention, e.g. at the stages of diagnosis and needs assessment, actions planned, results to be achieved or the project’s management procedures. Therefore all of the projects should have taken into account different dimensions of gender equality, e.g. reducing segregation or gender stereotypes (but they could vary depending on the extent, intensity, scope of these actions etc.). In guidance documents for the project providers it was also recommended that all forms of support for unemployed women and men should not be based on any segregation, for instance into “female” and “male” professions; and furthermore, work-advisers (or other counselors e.g. in schools) should recognize individuals’ skills and offer job opportunities without applying gender stereotypes.

In the Polish national ESF OP (2007–2013) there was also a special scheme for supporting part-time work. This support is offered to businesses to promote the idea of equal opportunities for men and women and to create incentives to develop gender-equality action plans and manage diversity in the workplace. It also encourages the dissemination and promotion of flexible and alternative methods of work organization and forms of employment to make employees’ working time more flexible and allow for reconciliation of work with private life.

The support focuses mainly on promotion for employers about the forms of work e.g. part-time work, e-work, rotating work schedules, and division of work within one workplace (job sharing). Measures in this area will not only help enhance the competitiveness of businesses, but also help workplaces maintain an equilibrium between flexibility and competitiveness on the one hand, and security of employment on the other (*flexicurity*).

### Implementation level:

In order to integrate the gender perspective into your ESF activities, you should support your implementers with expert knowledge and data

### ***Support structure***

The Finnish gender mainstreaming development programme [Valtava](#) (supported by ESF and coordinated by the Ministry of Employment and the Economy in Finland) is a national development project that supports and develops the expertise of project actors and funders through training and consulting. The programme involves the production of a [guidebook](#) on mainstreaming the gender perspective – a summary of good practices in gender-equality projects for application in various environments. Its activities aim at dismantling gender segregation in education and work, supporting the expertise of gender equality actors and project funders, increasing general knowledge of the gender perspective, and supporting resource centres to promote women’s entrepreneurial potential.

### ***Studies and analyses***

The Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health co-financed ESF projects aiming to reduce gender segregation in the labour market. Projects (both ESF supported and nationally funded) are mainly research projects on **equal pay projects** were carried out by either NGOs or educational organisations. As a result, there are reports and guidelines on the issue of equal pay. Both ESF funded and nationally funded work have good practices; e.g. the Equality Act and the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality entrust the authorities with planning their own initiatives for gender mainstreaming. All ministries are charged with setting up equality working groups to plan and carry out mainstreaming. Publications include:

[Welfare, Health and Equality. Survey for 2012–2015 \(3.5.2013\)](#)

[Government Action Plan for Gender Equality 2012–2015 \(23.8.2012\)](#)

In Estonia, ESF supported an extensive **pay gap study** carried out by the Praxis Center for Policy Studies and Ministry of Social Affairs. As part of this study, questions of labour market segregation and working hours (including part-time jobs) were emphasised and made visible to the public. The study has served as a baseline for many initiatives and public discussion on this matter, for example in the government’s action plan to reduce gender inequality and the pay gap.

### **Project level:**

Gender segregation in the labour market, i.e. women working in different professions than men, is largely brought about by gender stereotypes and perceived gender roles.

### ***Stereotypes and awareness raising***

One possibility for tackling the stereotypes is awareness raising. While awareness raising alone will not make a huge difference, it can still be a good starting point for discussion. So the aim of an awareness-raising activity should not necessarily be to change stereotypes, but rather to raise awareness about the existing stereotypes and how they influence our everyday life or that of others, so that people will begin questioning the status quo. An example of this is an [Estonian media campaign](#), in which six videoclips were used to illustrate everyday situations that many people could relate to. The clips were not explicitly trying to change attitudes; they just showed the unfairness of stereotypical approaches and their consequences for individuals. The campaign was supported with a [webpage](#), and information days were organised in schools to introduce non-traditional career choices to boys and girls

### **Stereotypes in everyday practice**

Stereotypes are also reinforced by everyday practices – often including the language and pictures we use. Rethinking language and visual representation in media, textbooks, informational brochures etc. can help remove unconscious gender assumptions, thereby reducing gender inequalities. This **Dutch project**, carried out by the University of Antwerp, Agoria (an organisation representing the technology sector), VDAB (public employment service), and Karel de Grote University College, took notice of recent empirical studies that showed how the language (verbs, adjectives, job titles) used to describe STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) training courses and jobs determines how attractive girls and women find the training or job at hand. Traditional descriptions make the STEM sector unattractive to many girls and women. This vocabulary forms a structural barrier that prevents women and girls from choosing a career in a STEM sector. Therefore the project prepared a set of tools (brochure, web, training) to improve training providers' skills in using gender-sensitive language in course brochures and vacancy advertisements.

### **Men and women (re)-entering the labour market**

Germany's current policy of promoting gender equality throughout the entire course of life is represented by the flagship project "**Vocational Reintegration as a Perspective**". This supports women who have withdrawn from employment for a number of years for family reasons and are now seeking to re-enter the labour market. One of the main aims of "Perspektive Wiedereinstieg" is to help rebalance the roles within the family and overcome the prevailing view that the man is the sole breadwinner, while the woman cares for children and older relatives, as this results in far fewer women than men in paid work.

The German ESF programme "**MORE Men in ECEC**" (early-childhood education and care) is made up of 16 projects comprising 1,300 kindergartens in 13 federal states, funded with

some 13 million euro. By the end of the programme in 2013, it had succeeded in finding ways to increase the amount of qualified male personnel in kindergartens.

Finland had a similar project for recruiting male students into health care education by organising mentoring (by older male practitioners in health care occupations) for male students. The mentors helped the students develop their professional identity by discussing their experiences of working in care occupations and studying in a traditionally female area. The basic curriculum was reformed to include “male-specific pedagogics”. This project succeeded in recruiting far more male students into three-year nursing education programmes than into the traditional ones in education. This model is now on the way to being implemented in the teaching programmes of several other educational institutions.

The goal of the Czech project “**Equal Opportunities for women and men**” is to minimise the impact of the high unemployment rate in the Moravian-Silesian Region and to integrate socially excluded groups into the labour market in accordance with current labour market demand. The project places particular emphasis on gender equality by encouraging women to train and retrain themselves in gender non-typical professions.