

Brussels, 14 July 2003

OPINION

of the
Committee of the Regions
of 2 July 2003

on the

**Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament,
the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the
Implementation of gender mainstreaming in the Structural Funds
programming documents 2000-2006**

COM(2002) 748 final

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

Having regard to the Communication to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the *Implementation of gender mainstreaming in the Structural Funds programming documents 2000-2006* (COM(2002) 748 final),

Having regard to the decision of the European Commission of 20 December 2002 to consult it on this subject, under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community,

Having regard to the decision of its Bureau of 14 May 2002 to instruct its Commission for Economic and Social Policy to draw up an opinion on this subject,

Having regard to its draft opinion (CdR 83/2003 rev. 1) adopted on 29 April 2003 by the Commission for Economic and Social Policy (rapporteur: **Ms Irene Oldfather**, Member of the Scottish Parliament, (UK/PES)),

Whereas:

1) Structural Funding as the main EU tool for re-distribution of resources in the European Union is crucial in tackling social deprivation.

2) The fight against social exclusion needs to be strengthened in the Structural Funds' programmes in order to fight poverty in Europe. Specific focus should be given to women who constitute the majority of poor people in Europe.

3) It is a democratic right that women and men have equal access to the Structural Funds' resources,

adopted the following opinion unanimously at its 50th plenary session, held on 2 and 3 July 2003 (meeting of 2 July).

1. The Committee of the Regions' views

The Committee of the Regions

1. **welcomes** the communication from the commission, which gives a comprehensive inventory of progress of the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the Structural Funds, and supports the recommendations;
2. **welcomes** the opportunity that Structural Funding Programmes gives local and regional government in promoting gender equality in the European Union;
3. **shares** the commission's concerns about the balanced participation of men and women in all the decision-making bodies relating to the Structural Funds, and believes that without equal participation in planning, decision-making and evaluation, women's access to the Structural Funds' resources cannot be ensured;
4. **believes** that gender mainstreaming should be seen as fundamental to eliminating social deprivation in Europe, as it enables the many remaining pockets of discrimination against women to be pinpointed more easily.

2. The Committee of the Regions' recommendations

The Committee of the Regions

1. **calls** for the important role that local and regional government play in the implementation of Structural Funding to be acknowledged; particularly in developing ways to share good practice that is timely, practical and accessible;
2. **calls** for the active and committed support of leaders nationally and locally to gender mainstreaming because without the use of the sanctions gender mainstreaming will not succeed;
3. **proposes** that more fundamental measures need to be consistently applied and expertise grown in gender mainstreaming and high quality and continuous awareness training provided for those who might have a direct or indirect influence over the effectiveness of any implementation strategy;
4. **calls** for adequate resources to be made available to support gender mainstreaming and the range of capacity building that is required;
5. **calls** for capacity building and support for organisations representing gender perspectives and asks that more information on tapping into the Structural Funds is provided to smaller organisations working with women and that local and regional government have a role in supporting this process;
6. **recommends** that Structural Funding programmes should specifically demonstrate their contribution to the achievements of the objectives in the European Employment Strategy, in particular the Lisbon EC target to increase the current female employment rate to 60% by 2010, and also those set at Barcelona to provide childcare to at least 90% of children between three years and school age, and at least 33% of children younger than three;
7. **shares** the commission's concern about current programmes reinforcing gender stereotypes and asks that further work is commissioned in this area under 2004 Action Plan which focuses on gender stereotyping;
8. **calls** for a review of Objective 1 and 2 programmes in order to strengthen the gender-equality scope of these interventions;
9. **asks** that Gender Impact Assessments are developed and made compulsory for all three objectives;

10. **rejects** the notion that spatial planning issues e.g. infrastructure investment, is gender neutral and therefore calls for the ex ante assessments that are required in the regulations (Article 41 §2c) to be comprehensively applied;
11. **calls** for use to be made of gender budgeting to shape budgets so that they are actively promoting gender equality, starting with the EU budget;
12. **advocates** that gender specific programmes are more robustly developed in order to deliver gender mainstreaming in the Structural Funds;
13. **believes** that there needs to be an increased involvement of people who are aware of gender and equalities' issues, women NGOs and gender experts, at all stages of programming, implementation and monitoring; this must involve partnership with local and regional governments who have the contacts to support this;
14. **calls** for all monitoring and statistical surveys, conducted at European level or by Member States, to give a gender breakdown of data, so that it is easier to ascertain and assess whether or not there has been any real progress in equality.

Brussels, 2 July 2003.

The President
of the
Committee of the Regions

The Secretary-General
of the
Committee of the Regions

Albert Bore

Vincenzo Falcone

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