

Equality of Opportunity – supporting guidance for Implementing Bodies

This guidance aims to assist Implementing Bodies involved with EU Structural Funds Programmes in meeting their obligations to address equality. These obligations come from two main sources:

Firstly, it is the law. In Northern Ireland, Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires a public authority in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need **to promote equality of opportunity between:-**

- (a) persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- (b) between men and women generally;
- (c) between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- (d) between persons with dependants and persons without.

A public authority is also required, in carrying out its functions, to have regard to the desirability of **promoting good relations** between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Secondly, equality of opportunity is one of the cross-cutting themes which guide the delivery of the 2007-2013 EU Structural Fund Programmes. Equality of opportunity must be considered in relation to all the Section 75 Groups listed above at all stages of the Programmes supported under the EU Structural Funds. The Funds themselves are an equality measure; they represent the EU's response to inequalities between regions across Europe.

Mainstreaming of Equality for Implementing Bodies

One way for Implementing Bodies to ensure the mainstreaming of equality through EU Structural Funds is to ensure that equality of opportunity is represented within the make-up of the Selection Panel.

The balanced participation of men and women and partnership with the local community are central themes and requirements of the EU Structural Funds Regulations. Section 75 strengthens the community and equality dimensions by identifying equality groups which go beyond, yet include, men and women and represent the community as a whole. The purpose is to promote equality of opportunity and to allow the community to participate in the decision-making processes of the EU Structural Funding arrangements.

The active involvement of bodies representing the wider equality interests is a crucial aspect of the quality and equality assurance of fund management. Selection Panels should therefore be broadly based, having a range of expertise, reflecting so far as is possible the Section 75 categories and should be properly trained to cover Section 75 requirements.

Everyone in the assessment process has a duty to ensure that equality of opportunity and other Horizontal Principles are fully addressed. In practice however, much of the responsibility for investigating applications is passed to members of the staff team who need to be well briefed on equality issues in order to be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of applications in this area.

Appendix 2 of the Department of Finance & Personnel Equality of Opportunity Guidance Note suggests factors which should be considered when scoring the equality cross-cutting theme. While not an exhaustive list, staff may find the points helpful in assessing applications from an equality perspective, or when exploring equality issues with applicants.

What does “mainstreaming equality of opportunity” mean?

Section 75

The Section 75 statutory duties make equality and good relations central to the whole range of public policy decision-making. This approach is often referred to as “mainstreaming”. The Council of Europe¹ has defined mainstreaming as:

“the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a[n] ... equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making”.

Mainstreaming equality is important for several reasons. Experience in Northern Ireland and elsewhere shows that questions of equality and good relations may easily become sidelined in organisations. Focused attention to mainstreaming addresses this problem by requiring all public authorities to engage directly with equality issues through all stages of policy making and service delivery. Section 75 is part of the public policy agenda which is ultimately aimed at developing policies and services that address the needs of all people, especially those experiencing inequalities. Mainstreaming goes beyond implementing anti-discrimination legislation as it involves identifying positive action measures to reduce inequalities.

What does this mean in practice?

In practice, mainstreaming means:

- Systematically considering equality of opportunity in every aspect of project application, appraisal systems, project delivery, how you monitor and evaluate and the long-term impacts on the wider community;
- Ensuring proposals are checked for equality impacts for all Section 75 categories and being concerned with balance and equality of opportunity between Section 75 categories;

¹ [Gender mainstreaming conceptual framework, methodology and presentation of good practices. Council of Europe, Strasbourg May 1998](#)

- Promoting the values of participation and consultation when we look at the equality impact of proposed programmes;
- Considering what support mechanisms for disadvantaged groups need to be in place for any proposed programme to be successful;
- Evidence also shows that the adoption of the “neutral” approach of stating that equality does not play a part in the programmes concerned, in effect ignores problems and may contribute to embedding them further;
- Requiring that equality of opportunity considerations constitute one of the fundamental issues to be addressed right from the start of any programme development.

Mainstreaming should:

- Contribute to better decisions being made by public authorities and other bodies involved in delivering EU Structural Funds;
- Encourage greater openness in government and greater transparency in decision making so everyone can understand what is going on;
- Assist public authorities and voluntary bodies to effectively and efficiently address issues of equality, target disadvantage and social need and promote social inclusion in policy development and implementation; and
- Assist public authorities in complying with the law.

Sustainability

Mainstreaming equality should also take into account the concept of sustainability which has related equality of opportunity implications. At the start of the 21st century countries across the world are facing up to the global threat of unsustainable development that risks causing damage to such an extent that the planet would no longer have the capacity for human life².

Unsustainable development across the world is overexploiting resources and creating pollution, changing habitats and driving species to extinction. It is

² [First Steps Towards Sustainability - A Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2006](#)

creating social problems which are exacerbated by the inequalities in health, wealth, education and employment which accompany it.

The most widely known definition of sustainable development is *Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*³

³ [Our Common Future \(The Brundtland Report\) Report of the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development](#)

Case Studies

You might find it useful to consider the equality implications for these examples of projects. Think about the barriers facing the potential beneficiaries of the project and the factors that the applicants need to consider. Our examples are:

Case Study 1 - Cross Community Working

An application has been received for a new community centre to replace an old run-down centre beside an urban interface area. There is an imbalance in representation of the catholic/protestant communities in this area. However, there is also a sizeable travelling community which could also get value from use of the facilities.

The applicant is a Government department who will receive the grant and manage the construction. However, the proposed long term management of the project post-construction will be by the local community group which mainly represents the majority community.

The main issue to consider here is inclusion and how to encourage participation from all communities:

- Representation on the management committee of all communities in the area the community centre is serving
- Accessible advertising – provision of different formats e.g. Braille, different languages, large print
- Physical accessibility of the building to older people/people with a disability
- Monitoring and encouraging usage where necessary, particularly in terms of the various communities

Case Study 2 - Rural Women's Groups

A women's training organisation has been successful in applying for a grant for a major peace and reconciliation training programme for women. The project's constituent groups are from throughout Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland. This project involves a wide range of women's organisations including rural women's groups, church based women's groups, women's education and development groups, women's groups in urban interface areas and women's empowerment groups.

Good practice Equality issues to note / consider:

- Encouraging participation of both rural and urban based groups
- Extending the geographical remit encourages participation from both communities
- Including different women's groups encourages the promotion of opportunities to women from different backgrounds and with different experiences, including race and age
- Accessibility of services is improved by using locally based community venues
- Timing of training to accommodate the different needs of women who are working and/or have caring responsibilities
- Provision of childcare

Case Study 3 – Cross Community Youth Activity Centre

A local authority is taking the lead in a project to build a youth activity centre in its area that is accessible to youth in the north and south of Ireland. One of the partners in this project is a youth body whose membership is mainly from one community and is part of an international umbrella organisation. In Northern Ireland there is a separate body affiliated to the same international youth organisation that represents the other community. However, this body is not represented on the partnership which has submitted the application.

Equality Issues to consider:

- Include representation from both communities on project team to ensure all views are taken on board from the application stage.
- Advertising and promotion – will this be provided in different languages and formats?
- Will the staff working in the Youth Centre be representative of the surrounding communities and trained in Section 75?
- Physical accessibility of the youth centre and availability of large print signs and hearing loops.
- Accessibility in terms of transport to the centre.

Case Study 4 - Consultation on Leisure Facilities

A Local Council would like to consult in relation to leisure facilities in the area and have decided to arrange some open forums.

A number of issues need to be considered in relation to accessibility of these forums and advertising to all Section 75 groups:

- How and where to advertise including advising in different languages – i.e. local papers, local groups notice boards, libraries, GP surgeries;
- To advertise well in advance to give plenty of notice;
- Forum would need to be open to all under Section 75;
- Need to consider venue – would need to be accessible to all including any with disabilities including parking;
- Timing – to cover both day and evening to accommodate all especially those with caring responsibilities;
- Crèche facilities if needed; and
- Employing an interpreter.

Case Study 5 - Helping Women in Employment

A local community group are trying to help women without Essential Skills qualifications return to employment.

- + Are woman being targeted because they are under represented in the working population?
- + Provision of crèche facilities if the course cannot run at a time when crèche facilities are not needed – evening, weekend?
- + Accessibility of facilities to people with disabilities – not just car parking and wheelchair access but large print signs, Braille directions, loop system for hearing aids?
- + Advertisement of the programme that does not disadvantage women with reading difficulties
- + Availability of advertising in different languages
- + Use of a signer for deaf/partially hearing on the course
- + Interpreters for those who have difficulty understanding English?
- + Are older women being targeted as well as younger women?

Case Study 6 - Environmental Skills for All

An environmental group is hoping to set up a programme to provide skills to the employed in the areas of horticulture and environmental conservation. These skills would include activities such as tree planting, creation of ponds and chain saw training.

For this project equality issues should be considered in relation to accessibility of the training, such as: -

- Possible gender bias in manual/outdoor work, Are women being encouraged to participate?

- Will there be anything to encourage older participants as the programme may be suited more to younger age groups due to the physical activities involved?
- Those with a physical disability will be disadvantaged due to where the training is taking place – fields, meadows, ponds and also heavy lifting element – trees, gravel, stones.
- Transportation - is the minibus which is provided wheelchair friendly?
- Possible issues with childminding due to the long hours spent travelling to and from areas the times at which the activities will take place.
- Are verbal instructions given in other languages, including sign language?