

Social Inclusion Horizontal Principle Reporting Template

For the period Jan. to Dec. 2011

1. Name of Activity:

Positive Action to Promote Gender Equality No: ESF 2.8

2. What actions have taken place over the last year to incorporate the principle of social inclusion into the Activity?

There is a recognition that women's equality is a core part of the struggle for social inclusion in Ireland. The prevalence of the under-representation of women in well – paid employment and decision-making roles, the prevailing gender pay gap, as well as discrimination within employment, their over-representation in unpaid care and household work, in addition to women being at greater risk of poverty in all stages in their life cycle, impacts significantly on women in terms of disadvantage and social exclusion.

The Equality for Women Measure is a positive action programme for women, which aims to foster gender equality. It provides an opportunity to address areas of inequality in the labour market, career development within employment and entrepreneurship. It provides opportunities to women who are under-represented and those experiencing social exclusion.

Following a second open call for applications, a total of 42 projects were awarded funding of up to €50,000 in October 2010 and this was rolled over the following year.

This includes 31 projects focusing on access to employment, for those currently outside the labour market.

Many of these projects target women experiencing multiple disadvantages, for example, social isolation combined with low educational attainment and economic deprivation. This included lone parents, early school leavers, women with disabilities, women from the Traveller community, migrant women and older women. The largest intake of participants related to Strand 1 – Access to Employment – which focused on providing practical labour market supports, in order to strengthen the employment potential of disadvantaged women from a broad range of geographical areas. It also promoted actions aimed at recognising and removing barriers facing women in accessing employment.

Projects responded to the needs of women participants and course content included outreach work, pre-development work, capacity building, specific skills training, provision of personal supports, literacy supports, career guidance, mentoring services and networking. Research work carried out by Pobal Ltd (who administer the EWM on behalf of the Department of Justice and Equality) in 2011 entitled *Addressing Gender Barriers to the Labour Market*, discovered that a lack of confidence, poor self-esteem and fear of failure remains an ongoing challenge for many participants on

EWM projects. It was therefore incumbent on all EWM participating organisations to design interventions and approaches to address these issues in order for participants to progress into employment, entrepreneurship and career progression with the requisite skills. Addressing these issues was a significant element for some of the local projects at the outset. For others, the theme emerged as participants progressed and strategies were developed at that stage.

3. Progress against Indicators (where established):

EWM projects continue to attract women eager to undertake personal development and to move forward into employment or into further education and training. As a result of rising unemployment, many EWM training/education courses will continue to be oversubscribed, with some projects maintaining waiting lists. Accordingly, it is evident that the cumulative 2013 targets set in the AIP for ESF 2.8 will be exceeded.

Positive actions, undertaken under the individual strands of the Equality for Women Measure, are targeted at a broad range of women in Irish society. In 2011, the total number of women who have benefitted under the Measure included (Note – these data are not mutually exclusive):

- 1,341 unemployed women
- 851 inactive women

- 776 early school leavers
- 780 who have completed secondary education and have no further qualifications

- 274 young people
- 395 older people

- 101 Travellers
- 500 Migrants
- 81 Women with disabilities
- 923 Others¹

4. Taking account of the material presented under 2 and 3 above, what contribution is the Activity making to the promotion of social inclusion

Pobal research conducted in 2011, showed that a significant number of women engaging with projects funded by the EWM reported experiencing a lack of confidence, low self-esteem and to a lesser extent, a fear of failure. The on-line survey revealed that a total of 76% of participants and 91% of project co-ordinators identified that these were issues before the EWM project began. The lack of confidence, low self-esteem and fear of failure compound women's social isolation and exclusion. These experiences are as a result of a range of factors including:

¹ Disadvantaged women including lone parents, women with substance misuse, domestic violence, mental health difficulties, LGBT community, offenders and ex-offenders

- Socio-economic factors – low income, dependency on social protection and poverty;
- Life experiences – domestic violence and low education;
- Discrimination – experiences of groups such as Traveller women, migrants and lone parents;
- Distance from the labour market – the length of time unemployed;
- Poor education and low skill levels; and
- Age and length of time in isolated roles as carers.

Making the first step and deciding to access employment and training was difficult and the EWM projects were seen as a 'bridge' that created a safe environment from which women could plan to move on. The response of the EWM projects to address low levels of confidence and self-esteem included designing specific modules to address the matter, personal development modules, the provision of mentoring, peer networking, career guidance and the introduction of role models as a confidence building strategy. Included in this research is evidence from both participants and co-ordinators, indicating that the perception of confidence, self-esteem and fear of failure changed significantly from the time the projects began to their completion. It was reported that this change was attributed to the successful participation on the project and the associated project intervention.

In analysing the work of the EWM projects, it can be clearly delineated that progression can be seen from a social capital perspective, particularly in respect of women who are marginalised and experience social exclusion. As well as tangible outcomes (such as the 663 participants who participated in Strand 1-access to employment- courses in 2011 moving to employment or advancing to another educational/training programme at the end of EWM projects), many of the projects have indicated other positive outcomes. These include participants gaining benefits in terms of developing life skills, increased social and workplace skills and enhanced quality of life. Moreover, these outcomes in time provide a springboard to labour market engagement and progression as well as intergenerational outcomes in terms of labour market participation of vulnerable groups.

5. Identify any issues arising that need to be drawn to the attention of the Managing Authority, the Equal Opportunities and Social Inclusion Co-ordinating Committee or other Departments.²

In order to achieve the objectives of Europe 2020, namely smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, the potential and the talent pool of women need to be used more extensively and more efficiently. Additionally, the EU Gender Equality Strategy refers to the EU fostering the greater engagement of women to foster growth across EU member states. The Strategy has the economic independence of all women as a key goal. Economic independence impacts on women's personal welfare and avoidance of poverty. This requires initiatives to encourage women to return to the work force and/or progress in securing better education and training. The EWM can be described as a vehicle to provide women who are currently outside the labour

² The issues could relate to specific implementation concerns e.g. collection of data, or could relate to more general findings concerning the principle in question e.g. a particular policy in another department is obstructing your Activity from promoting the principle.

market with the skills and/or education and/or training to enable them to enter or return to the labour market. Consequently, the EWM accords with the goals of the Gender Equality Strategy and adheres to the programme of EU 2020.

In addition, many lone mothers in Ireland have no or minimal attachment to the labour market and are overly reliant on social welfare benefits. Many women in this group are early school leavers and require specially targeted measures to prepare them for work. This group are among those for which the Strategy seeks greater labour market attachment to avoid consistent poverty. As can be seen in 3 above, the presence of disadvantaged women, (including lone parents and those at risk of poverty) in 2011 EWM projects was substantial in number.

6. Please feel free to attach any relevant additional material to this reporting template.

None