

MAINSTREAMING EQUALITY

Introduction

Equal opportunities for men and women is a fundamental human right, which right is in fact specifically entrenched in our Constitution. Equality in all spheres of life is a factor which contributes to individual well-being and which raises the standard of living of the population.

Despite many efforts to promote equal opportunities, research shows that considerable disparities still exist in most areas. Mainstreaming is therefore an approach which seeks to redress this situation by challenging and redefining the principles and structures that we are traditionally accustomed to, and which often themselves lead to such discrimination.

Definition

Gender Mainstreaming has been defined as the integration *'of a gender perspective into all policies and programmes, so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men respectively'*.

Why mainstream?

Due to the fact that apparently neutral policies yield different results between men and women, specific action is sometimes introduced to allow women and men to adapt to the relative circumstances, by providing them with what they 'lacked'.

Gender mainstreaming thus aims at recognizing that existing structures are not gender-neutral but favour one sex or another in a variety of subtle and not so subtle ways. Thus, mainstreaming gender calls for policies that accommodate a diversity of circumstances.

Legal base

EU Directive 2002/73/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2002 amending Council Directive 76/207/EEC on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions states that :

1(a) Member States shall actively take into account the objective of equality between men and women when formulating and implementing laws, regulations, administrative provisions, policies and activities...

This article thus obliges all Member States to introduce gender mainstreaming as a strategy by October 2005 (date by which amended Directive must be implemented).

What areas?

A successful gender mainstreaming approach is one which introduces a gender perspective into the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies and actions to evaluate their impact on women and on men.

This due to the fact that, for instance, introducing a gender perspective into employment policies will have limited impact unless it is also introduced into fiscal and social security policies.