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**The role of the European Employment
Strategy in the promotion of gender
equality in the labour market.
A critical appraisal**

Paola Villa

Università degli Studi di Trento

paola.villa@unitn.it

1. Introduction

The EES, launched in 1997, has been reformulated in 2003, in 2005 and again in 2010 → **high level of employment**

Original commitment: **promote equal opportunities**

Two possible distinct aims for commitment to promote equal opportunities (within the EES):

1. promote gender equality *per se* (social justice)
2. promote gender equality *as instrumental* to increase the overall employment rate (economic efficiency)

The evolution in the formulation of the EES: progressive loss of visibility of equal opportunities (with gender mainstreaming progressively loosing ground)

QUESTION: has the concern moved away from **equity** (i.e. gender equality issues) to **efficiency** (i.e. female ER)?

2. Demographic trends and the European social model

- Changes in the demographic structure (in 2050):
 - Population: stationary
 - Fertility: from 1.5 up to 1.6 (well below 2.1)
 - Life expectancy: on the increase (for both M and W)
 - Natural change in population: expected to decline
 - Net migration: expected to increase (but not enough ...)
 - Old age dependency rate: expected to double
- Key issue: the sustainability of the “European social model” (pension system, health system, long-term care, ...)
- There is a need for modernizing the welfare state model: from the *male breadwinner model* to the *adult worker model*
- There is a need for a new gender contract:
 - eradicating inequalities in the labour market → employment policies
 - reducing asymmetries in the household → family policies

The EU has a role to play: setting the agenda (via the EES)

3. The debate behind the EES

- high (structural) unemployment in the early 1990s in Europe (Euroclerosis)
- shift of focus: from (high) unemployment rates to (low) employment rates
- low employment rate and increasing dependency ratio (population ageing, population decline)
- sustainability of the “European social model”

Problem: how to foster employment growth in the EU

Proposal: through the coordination of employment policies of the Member States

Diagnosis: the high structural unemployment was symptomatic of insufficient ability of the labour market to adapt to change:

→ need to **modify the behaviour of the unemployed/ inactive**
through **structural reforms of the labour market**

The EES the TREATY of Amsterdam

The EES was launched in 1997 (Luxembourg “Job Summit” of the EU), following the Amsterdam Summit (October 1997) which included a new Employment Title in the revised Treaty on the European Union (The Treaty of Amsterdam):

- “high level of employment” (art. 2)
- “equality between men and women” (art. 2)
- “Member States and the Community shall ... work towards developing a coordinated strategy for employment” (art. 125)
- employment policies have to be “consistent with the broad guidelines of the economic policies” (art. 126) (consistent with the overall coordination of economic strategy as defined by the BEPGs)

4. The supply-side approach of the EES

The EES is the process for the coordination of national labour market policies on the basis of agreed employment guidelines (EGLs), that have to be consistent with BEPGs.

The EGLs identify what are perceived as “**problematic areas**” of the European LM and suggest direction of change to be adopted by national policy makers.

The ultimate goal of the EES is to increase employment. The approach taken is through **LM reforms** that encourage labour market participation of groups at the margin:

⇒ **ACTIVATION: a supply-side approach aiming to change the behaviour of the unemployed/ inactive**

The formulation of the EES has been revised (since its launch in 1997) but this feature (supply-side orientation) has been maintained.

... ultimate goal, method and assumptions

Objective: “... to promote ... a high level of employment and social protection” (art. 2)

Method. Open Method of Coordination (OPC). The EES is developed in the form of “recommendations” (EGLs): it has a legal basis, but failure to carry out recommendations (MSs not enacting /implementing labour market policies according to EGLs) is not subject to sanctions.

Assumptions. The EES reflect a supply-side orientation, but it pays attention to the potential negative consequences of certain policy responses and the interconnections between employment and social protection policies.

It is explicitly acknowledged that success in employment facilitates success in social protection (art. 2).

5. The EU and gender equality

The EU: acknowledged as a major proponent of gender equality

- Treaty on the EU (art. 2)
- European Court of Justice
- Directives
- Communications
- Soft law instruments: OMC, Gender Mainstreaming

The OMC and its potentialities

- EES
- Social Inclusion



labour market policies
family policies
social policies

- * recommendations: no sanctions for MSs, but CSRs (and PtW)
- * no priorities (but quantitative targets for the EU as a whole)

6. The EES and gender equality

The promotion of gender equality through the development of equal opportunities policies has been an explicit objective of the EES since its launch in 1997, while gender mainstreaming (GM) was added as a horizontal GL in 1999.

The EES and the role of female employment

- population decline, population ageing → financial sustainability
- need to expand the labour supply → increase the participation rate
- the largest potential labour supply → inactive women

- implicit assumption: —→

**move from the male breadwinner
family model towards the dual earner
household (adult worker model)**

but this requires => **reducing gender inequalities in the LM**

=> sharing responsibilities between partners

7. The evolution of the EES

1st phase (1998-2002): Four pillars and some 20 EGLs

Within the context of the EES the promotion of equal opportunities enjoys a central status as one of the 4 main pillars.

2^o phase (2003-2004): 10 EGLs

The 4 Pillars were replaced by 10 priorities for action (the new EGLs)

The promotion of equal opportunities constitutes **one** of the 10 new EGLs

3^o phase (2005-2008; 2008-2010): Integrated guidelines and NRPs (8 EGLs)

The Lisbon Strategy has been “relaunched, streamlined and simplified”. The BEPGs and the EGLs are presented jointly in a single annual set on “Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs”

- 8 EGLs (**none** on equal opportunities)
- the Lisbon targets (ER_{mf} 70%, ER_f 60% by 2010) and the Barcelona target (childcare, aged < 3: 33%) have been retained

4 ° phase (2010-...) – The new strategy Europe 2020

Smart growth - developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation.

Sustainable growth - promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy

Inclusive growth - fostering a high-employment economy delivering economic, social and territorial cohesion.

10 integrated GLs, of which **4 EGLs** (**none** on equal opportunities):

GL7: Increasing labour market participation and reducing structural unemployment

GL8: Developing a skilled workforce responding to labour market needs promoting job quality and lifelong learning

GL9: Improving the performance of education and training systems at all levels and increasing the participation in tertiary education

GL10: Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty

1st phase: 1998-2002

During the first five years (1998-2002), some 20 guidelines for national labour market policies were established, organised on a four-pillar structure that expressed the four main policy objectives.

The four *Pillars* they were chosen to reflect the four main perceived weaknesses of European labour markets:

employability \Rightarrow the skill gap

entrepreneurship \Rightarrow the job creation gap

adaptability \Rightarrow the adjustment gap

equal opportunities \Rightarrow the gender gap

1st phase 1998-2002

Increasing awareness ...

When the EES was launched in 1997, an explicit gender-equality perspective was adopted, setting equal opportunities as one of the four “pillars” of the agreed EGLs

The EU's role has been crucial: it has placed equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming firmly in the policy agenda both within EU policy and at the Member State level.

The central role assigned to the promotion of gender equality within the EES is related to the increasing awareness that the achievement of the employment goals established by the EES was critically dependent on the behaviour of women:

- 1999: Gender Mainstreaming (as an horizontal GL)
- 2000: Lisbon targets: overall 70%, female 60%
- 2002: Barcelona target for the expansion of childcare services (33%)

Acknowledgement of the role of women, but ...

The EES and the 2000 Lisbon targets (employment rates by 2010):

MF 70%; F 60%; old workers 50%

→ acknowledgement of the role of female employment within the EES

The approach taken towards equal opportunities at the Member State level has been shaped by the agenda of the EES:

"This approach can be at best be considered partial and incomplete; at worst it can be considered a policy which values the contribution of women's employment simply as a means of achieving quantitative targets in the employment sphere" (Rubery 2002: 516)

This remark was made before the renewal of the EES (and Kok's report). It was stressed the danger of a different interpretation:

→ promotion of women's employment without attention to job quality: gender equality issues, as such, are ignored

2° and 3° phase: the progressive loss of visibility of equal opportunities

- EU15, EU25 and national female employment rates: progress towards the Lisbon target (60%) and in closing the gender gap
- 2003 Reform: from the Pillar on EO to 1 GL (out of 10)
- 2005 Reform: from NAP to NRP (integrated guidelines)
 - EES: 8 GLs (out of 24 integrated GLs)
 - 3 priority areas: attracting and retaining more people in employment, improve adaptability, human capital
 - No guideline on equal opportunities, but **2 lines** (out of 10 pages)

“Equal opportunities and combating discrimination are essential for progress. Gender mainstreaming and the promotion of gender equality should be ensured in all action taken”

4° phase: the new strategy “Europe 2020”

5 EU headline targets, of which 3 are included in the EES:

to bring by 2020 to 75% the employment rate for women and men aged 20-60 including through the greater participation of youth, older workers and low skilled workers and the better integration of legal migrants.

to reduce the drop out rate to 10%, whilst increasing the share of the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 40% in 2020.

to reduce by 25% the number of Europeans living below the national poverty lines, lifting over 20 million people out of poverty.

=> no gender specific targets

While equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming were stressed in the preamble to the 2005-08 and 2008-10 employment guidelines, the new EGLs have replaced mainstreaming with a “*visible gender equality perspective, integrated into all relevant policy areas,*” (CEC 2010: 8)

=> no gender mainstreaming

The EES and gender equality

from “equity issues” to “economic efficiency”

Gender equality and the EES: the focus is on employment policies. This helps to explain the shift of focus (from the very beginning): from family policies (and equal sharing of family responsibilities) to childcare provision (and women’s ability to combine paid work and family work).

How to foster higher female employment rates



Recommendations: remove obstacles (for inactive women)



Reconciliation of work and family life

more “flexible” work
conditions (PT, atypical
employment)

Childcare
services

Evidence on CSR /PtW on gender issues

Since 2000, the Commission has issued country specific recommendations (CSR) to the MSs for corrective actions:

2002 (NAPs): **11** CSR on gender issues (15 MSs)

...

2007 (NRPs): **3** CSR on gender issues (25 MSs), plus **10** PTW (8 of which on childcare)

2008 (NRPs): **1** CSR on gender issues (27 MSs), plus **13** PTW (9 of which on childcare)

2009 (NRPs): the CSRs that relate to the labour market show that gender-specific recommendations are very rare: only **3** (NL, MT); there were no PtW in 2009

2010 (NRPs): there were no CSR in 2010 (because of the implementation of the EERP during the crisis).

EES and Feminist Economics

Equity



gender equality in the LM



Main problem: **inequality** in the LM (segregation, pay gap, ..)



need for a **gender contract**



Family policies (favouring a more equal sharing between partners)

Efficiency



high overall ER,
high female ER



Main problem: **inactivity**



need for a change in **behaviour**
(activation)



Reconciliation of work and family life: remove obstacles
(flexible forms of work, childcare services)