

# **European Women and Sport**

## **A New Strategy: Gender Mainstreaming**

**Paper presented by Teresa Rees  
at the 5<sup>th</sup> European Women and Sport Conference in Berlin,  
April 18<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> 2002  
Hotel Crowne Plaza, Berlin**

Prof. Teresa Rees BA Ph.D AcSS FRSA  
School of Social Sciences  
Glamorgan Building,  
Cardiff University,  
King Edward VII Avenue,  
Cardiff CF10 3WT  
Wales, UK

Tel 044 29 20 874803  
Fax 044 29 20 874175  
Email [ReesTL@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:ReesTL@cardiff.ac.uk)

## Summary

The European Commission and indeed the Member States of the European Union have made a commitment to gender mainstreaming in the 1990s as a new approach to promoting gender equality. However, there is considerable confusion as to what gender mainstreaming means and what it implies in terms of new policy approaches. My definition is as follows:

*Gender mainstreaming is the systematic integration of gender equality into all systems and structures; policies, programmes, processes and projects; into cultures and their organisations, into ways of seeing and doing.*

This paper explores the meaning of gender mainstreaming and how it might offer a new approach to developing policies to support and encourage women and sport. The paper compares gender mainstreaming with two earlier approaches to gender equality: equal treatment (which characterised the 1970s) and positive action (which characterised the 1980s). It looks at the principles underlining gender mainstreaming and the tools that can be used in a mainstreaming approach, for example, 'engendering budgets', which has been used successfully in sports policies in a number of countries.

## **Introduction**

This paper looks at gender mainstreaming as a new strategy for developing gender equality in sports policy in Europe. Both the European Union (EU) and member states have made a commitment to gender mainstreaming and yet there remains considerable confusion as to what it entails. The paper seeks to throw some light on the vexed question 'what is gender mainstreaming' by comparing it with two other approaches to equal opportunities: equal treatment and positive action. It then examines the principles behind mainstreaming and some of the tools of a mainstreaming approach. It concludes by suggesting that gender mainstreaming has much to offer sports policy if gender equality is to be successfully promoted.

## **What is gender mainstreaming?**

This seemingly simple question is hard to answer. Many different versions of what gender mainstreaming mean appear to co-exist. The complexity of the concept and its meaning is indicated by the fact that the word does not translate well from its original English into other languages (EC 1998a). In German, it takes about three lines! Most languages simply use the English.

Here is my definition:

*Gender mainstreaming is the systematic integration of gender equality into all systems and structures; policies, programs, processes and projects; into cultures and their organisations, into ways of seeing and doing.*

Mainstreaming seeks to identify the ways in which existing systems and structures are 'institutionally sexist' - however unintentionally and however sub-consciously - and to neutralise the gender bias. It is an approach to producing policies and processes that seeks to benefit men and women equally.

## **How does it compare with other equal opportunities approaches?**

'Equal treatment' characterised the 1970s legal measures to gender equality introduced in many EU Member States. Equal treatment is rooted in the idea that women and men should be treated *the same as each other*. However, in effect, this often meant women were treated *the same as men*. In other words, men are taken as the norm. Treating women and men the same is not the same as treating women and men equally. Indeed, there is a significant difference between treating people the same and treating them equally. In fact, sometimes you have to treat people differently in order to treat them equally. This becomes more obvious in mainstreaming disability equality than in mainstreaming gender equality. Hence, a major weakness with equal treatment is that it does not lead to equal outcome.

One example where equal treatment fails is the use of criteria such as seniority or number of years' continuous service for promotion. Women are treated the same as men in that if they too have had many years of continuous service, they too are eligible for promotion. In effect this is indirect discrimination, because there are far more men among those likely to have had uninterrupted service than women.

'Positive action' characterised the 1980s approach adopted by the European Commission (EC) and many Member States. This model is based on recognition that while there are similarities between women and men, there are also differences. In recognising that men and women are different in some respects, it seeks to accommodate, or 'make up for' those differences that are construed as deficits or 'special needs' in women. It involves addressing past disadvantages or indeed discrimination experienced by women and to 'make good'. This can be construed as a deficit model of women. For example, women-only training courses were provided for women seeking entry to male-dominated occupations or professions, especially senior management. The EC co-funded many such training initiatives. Such positive action measures have been the source of many examples of good practice in training and employment for women. However, positive action projects tend to be piecemeal, temporary and precariously funded. They also leave the 'mainstream' unaffected. In other words, the sources of women's disadvantage remain intact.

It is also the case that some positive action measures are designed, in effect, to assist women to become more like men. For example, training courses for women in middle management intended to groom them for senior management included on the curriculum 'how to develop a killer instinct, how to get yourself heard in meetings, how to deal with the "office Romeo"', and so on (Rees 1992). In other words, they are geared towards making round women more able to fit into square shapes.

Other positive action measures seek to address 'blockages' by giving women, in effect, prescribed preferential treatment. This may be in the form of targets or indeed quotas designed to enhance women's chances of success where they are severely under-represented. Enforced quotas constitute positive discrimination, which remains illegal in the EU because of the Equal Treatment Directive. However, measures designed to encourage more women into male-dominated areas, by creating a 'level playing field' or 'untying the hand behind the back' to use the well-worn (sportist) clichés, can be described as positive action. They seek to assist women to the 'starting line' on the same basis as men.

'Mainstreaming', started to receive significant attention in Europe in the 1990s, (although measures began in the Nordic states before this). It turns attention away from individuals and their rights, or their deficiencies and disadvantages, and focuses instead on those systems and structures that produce those deficiencies and disadvantages in the first place. It seeks to integrate equality into those systems and structures. Mainstreaming is a long-term strategic approach to gender equality. It complements, rather than substitutes for the legal right to equal treatment or the need to address women's 'deficiencies' or kick-start obstinate blockages through positive action.

### **What has been happening with gender mainstreaming?**

The EC published a Communication to the Council of Ministers on gender mainstreaming in 1996: this committed the Commission to incorporate a gender dimension in all its work (EC 1996). This was followed by a commitment to gender mainstreaming in the Amsterdam Treaty as well as equal treatment on six equality

dimensions: sex, race and ethnic origin, disability, age, sexual orientation and religious and political belief (EC 1999). The annual reports on the EC's own attempts to adopt gender mainstreaming all report the same problems: lack of awareness; lack of expertise, lack of money: these are clear, consistent messages, year after year (CEC 1998).

Various other international organisations have also shown a keen interest in gender mainstreaming. The Council of Europe, for example, set up an expert group, published a series of reports (Council of Europe 1998) and held a major conference in Athens in 1999. The OECD held a major conference in Paris in 2000 at which countries were asked to provide responses to a questionnaire on what they were doing on gender mainstreaming. The International Labour Office has also shown an interest.

### **Where is the focus of gender mainstreaming for an organisation?**

The focus for gender mainstreaming it is argued should be both internal – in the organisation as an employer - and external, in the 'business' of the organisation, whatever that business may be. Hence, for the public sector for example, gender mainstreaming is as much about the delivery of goods and services as it is about recruitment, promotion and work organisation. Frequently, employers that say they are mainstreaming gender equality focus only on the first, the internal arrangements. Mainstreaming equality in service delivery entails considering the gender dimension of a project or policy systematically, from inception to design, implementation and review. It is a new way of doing things, rather than an add-on or an extra.

### **What are the principles behind gender mainstreaming?**

To my mind, there are three principles that appear to underlie much that is done in the name of mainstreaming. These principles could arguably underlie mainstreaming of any equality dimension; however, it is important to stress that the *tools* to achieve mainstreaming would be quite different.

#### *Regarding the individual as a whole person*

The first principle is about regarding the individual as a 'whole person'. As such, it challenges head on the notion that the male is the breadwinner, and that the woman's participation in the work force is marginal which underpins a whole range of policy areas and is a major barrier to equality. Regarding the individual as a whole person means that individuals need to be treated as people who might also be parents or who might have elderly relatives to look after but at the same time, you do not make stereotypical assumptions about them. It means that looking at men and women as people who may or may not have caring responsibilities. So, it means attaching much more importance to family-friendly arrangements, child-care, parental leave, flexible hours, and all those work/life balance issues without, at the same time, assuming that everyone is heterosexual or necessarily lives in a conventional idea of nuclear family with gender stereotypical roles.

It also means looking at employees as people who may have a role they wish to develop in a trade union or the local community or in civic or public life, or have a personal commitment to a sport or keeping fit, or to lifelong learning or whatever. This means that

work/life balance is an issue for all employees. Not just for those with caring responsibilities.

This principle also means that men and women should be afforded equal status and therefore careful attention needs to be paid to the issue of the dignity of the individual. This can be addressed by developing a 'values' statement for the organisation, setting out in broad terms how employees, clients, customers and so on should expect to be treated, and by the same token, should treat others. This can be codified into examples of behaviour that are seen as living up to that values statement, and of course examples of those forms of behaving that do not. At the root of many cases of bullying and harassment appears to be a genuine belief on the part of the perpetrator that the behaviour being complained of is acceptable and indeed normal. Policies promoting respect for and protection of the dignity of the individual at work target unacceptable sexual and racial harassment, bullying and discrimination. They can also respond on equal terms to the needs of people with disabilities. They can also be a helpful background factor in seeking to introduce pay claims on the basis of equal value by 'valuing' women more.

In essence, regarding the individual as a whole person means challenging stereotypical assumptions and accommodating difference, as an employer and as a deliverer of services. It means treating people as individuals, rather than necessarily typical of their sex.

#### *Democracy*

The second principle is democracy, highly important to mainstreaming. Some public bodies are concerned to consult and encourage participation in the shaping, framing, designing and delivery of policies. This is about allocating scarce resources on the basis of need, both expressed and unexpressed, rather than on the basis of historical patterns. Hence, there is a concern to try to create cultures and organisations where men and women feel comfortable in expressing their views and needs.

So, this democratic principle essentially involves encouraging democratic participation. It links gender mainstreaming with the idea of modernising government, by ensuring that resources are allocated according to evidence-based need. Hence it is linked with conducting community profiles to provide socio-economic and demographic data on the population being served and carrying out public consultation exercises, to elicit the views of the public. It implies considering the implications of new measures from the perspective of as many groups as possible, including those whose views are rarely heard, and indeed to take steps to hear those voices. This puts an emphasis on communication to all groups, remembering here the importance of large font size for the visually impaired and providing translation of important documents into minority languages. It involves open government and transparency in procedures, processes and outcomes.

The principle also means having a gender balance in decision making, using if necessary devices to seek to achieve this.

### *Fairness, justice and equity*

The third principle or rather set of principles underlying gender mainstreaming revolves around the concepts of fairness, justice and equity. This is the heart of the ‘social justice’ driver of mainstreaming. This social justice driver means that gender mainstreaming fits well with current European agendas such as ‘social inclusion’. It entails adhering to ideas of social justice in the allocation of resources. This means developing progressive measures, designed to re-allocate resources to those who need them most.

### **What tools can be used to deliver a gender mainstreaming approach?**

Seven tools of gender mainstreaming are briefly identified here. It should be re-emphasised that while these tools may be suitable for mainstreaming *gender* equality, they would not necessarily be appropriate for other equality dimensions. Some of these tools have been tried and tested in many countries, others are in the process of being developed. Few organisations, if any, appear to be using all of them.

### *Gender-disaggregated statistics*

The first is gender-disaggregated statistics. It is astonishing how few organisations use gender-disaggregated statistics as a management tool to review the effectiveness of their policies, to establish patterns in the allocation of resources, or to monitor performance, whether or not they are committed to gender mainstreaming. Gender-disaggregated statistics can be used for all three. Public sector authorities have a duty to know who benefits from their services and who does not.

Swedish regional authorities have developed software packages to assess who benefits from services on a regular basis. It may, of course, be perfectly acceptable that one sex rather than another should benefit more from specific services or budgets, so long as this reflects evidence-based need, rather than being simply demand-led or worse, the consequence of chance or indirect discrimination. Canada and many EU Member States publish annual booklets of gender-disaggregated statistics that are disseminated widely to the general public. By contrast, few UK public bodies are able to provide a gender breakdown of who benefits from their services. Such figures could be used as a management tool for targeting.

### *Equality indicators*

Raw data even when disaggregated by gender, are of course limited in what they show. There is much work to be done in developing gender equality indicators. Baseline statistics are needed against which performance targets can be measured. But equality indicators are likely to be made up of a combination of variables. They are essential for benchmarking purposes, as raw data can be meaningless for making comparisons.

### *Gender impact assessments*

Gender impact assessments are designed to assess in advance the impact of any proposed policy (or indeed legislation) on men and women respectively and to address any undesirable differences that may be anticipated. Gender impact assessments are routinely used in some Nordic countries. The approach has been described as wearing a ‘gender lens’ or having a ‘gender reflex’.

For example, Lindsten (2000) describes the ‘gender reflex’ as focusing on answering three questions (called the three ‘Rs’) in relation to any proposed policy:

- representation (what is the gender distribution of relevant decision-making bodies?)
- resources (what is the distribution of /access to resources for men and women?) and
- reality (do men and women profit from the measure? Who gets what, why and on what conditions?)

The EC has published a guide to gender impact assessments (EC 1998b). It should be noted that some organisations using gender impact assessments are of the view that this alone constitutes a gender mainstreaming approach, whereas in my view, it is merely one tool that needs to be used, alongside the others.

#### *Monitoring, evaluating, auditing*

Fourthly, gender monitoring, evaluation and auditing are essential. How can we tell if mainstreaming is delivering without monitoring, evaluating and auditing policies?

Gender equality needs to be regarded as a performance indicator, and treated the same way for evaluation purposes as, say, balancing the books.

One area of auditing on a gender basis that has started to see some activity is gender pay reviews. Legislation for equal pay was brought in the 1970s, and yet there is still a significant pay gap between men and women. This is in part explained by differences in industry, rank and qualifications, but the rest, the residue, is thought to be a consequence of discrimination, in particular, discriminatory pay grading schemes, where the sex of the majority of workers on that grading system determines how it is valued. Gender pay reviews, however, can show where the gender of the worker, rather than the value of the job, is playing an undue role in the setting of salaries.

#### *Gender balance in decision-making*

A gender balance in decision-making is needed to address the democratic principle of gender mainstreaming. It is noticeable that in only three Member States is there legislation to ensure a gender balance on public bodies. In order to ensure a gender balance in decision-making, legislation may be needed. However, targets can also be helpful provided there are sanctions imposed for not reaching them

#### *Engendering budgets*

Sixthly, budgets need to be ‘engendered’. This tool has been developed in Canada and again in Sweden and Norway in particular. It is legitimate to ask what proportion of public budgets are spent on men and women and indeed girls and boys respectively. One country found for example that ambulances, that are very expensive, are used disproportionately by men. It may be that this is regarded as an appropriate imbalance in use of resource, but equally, it might be argued that it is any imbalance needs to be examined carefully. Above all, it is essential to have that data as a management tool to ensure resources are directed strategically and equitably.

In some states of the US, the engendering of budgets has had a particularly noticeable impact upon facilities and support for women’s sport.

### *'Visioning'*

The final tool to be mentioned here is what I call 'visioning'. It is probably the most difficult element of mainstreaming. Through it, we seek to understand and address how existing practice and institutional arrangements, however inadvertently, however subconsciously, disadvantage more women than men (or indeed, vice versa). Visioning is at the heart of mainstreaming.

The easiest examples to give of visioning refer to measures that fail to accommodate physical differences between women and men. For example, on a six-week, mixed recruitment and selection course for the armed services in the UK women outperformed men on many of the tests. However, they experienced difficulties with the daily 'square-bashing' – the marching drills. Many developed inflamed pelvises; indeed some dislocated their pelvises. The reason for this, it transpired, was that the regulation stride length was the average stride length of the average male. Women were marching to the male stride! Having to march to the male stride is, in a sense, a metaphor for what gender mainstreaming is seeking to combat.

### **What are the prerequisites for mainstreaming?**

Principles and tools are not sufficient for the successful implementation of gender mainstreaming. There is a set of organisational prerequisites. These include:

- a legally backed, public duty to promote equality;
- appropriate institutional arrangements;
- awareness raising;
- training;
- expertise, ('flying experts' are used in many countries);
- reporting mechanisms;
- commitment from the top;
- incentives to 'build ownership';
- sanctions, and finally,
- resources.

A legal imperative to promote equality can have a clear impact on the extent to which gender mainstreaming is taken seriously. The *Government of Wales Act* that set up the National Assembly for Wales includes a clause that makes it incumbent upon the Assembly to have 'due regard' to equality of opportunity for all in all that it does. There is mounting evidence that suggests that the progress that has been made in Wales with for example, pay reviews in the public sector, would not have happened without that public duty.

Institutional arrangements that ensure gender equality is mainstreamed are essential. This involves clear allocation of responsibility as appropriate, such as a committee supported by an equality unit, with reporting mechanisms and sanctions. It would entail inclusion of reference to gender mainstreaming in corporate plans, with aims and objectives, and specification as to how they would be met.

Many people have been given responsibility for gender mainstreaming without any awareness raising, training, tool-kits or guidelines. As Agneta Stark, the Swedish expert on mainstreaming says, if a manager were suddenly given responsibility for budgeting, they would not be expected to exercise that function without training and without expertise to hand. And yet people are expected to mainstream gender equality without being clear about what it is. Both awareness raising and training are needed, commitment from the leaders is absolutely vital, and ownership by staff all the way through the organisation is essential.

Building ownership can be encouraged by providing financial incentives to achieve targets (this has been tried in the private sector), integrating equality into performance review systems and by organisational and cultural change. Liisa Horelli, the Finnish mainstreaming expert, argues that you need a team comprising a substantive expert (e.g. human resources director; transport director etc), a gender mainstreaming expert, and a 'change agent' to introduce gender mainstreaming successfully. Appropriate resources are rarely allocated for mainstreaming. This is a major problem, because equality is seen primarily as a cost – little consideration is given to the financial and opportunity cost of *not* mainstreaming gender equality properly.

### **Is the mainstreaming approach transferable to other equality dimensions?**

So far, the focus of this paper has been exclusively on gender mainstreaming, but the mainstreaming approach can be applied to the other equality dimensions that are in the horizontal Directive pursuant to the Amsterdam Treaty: race and ethnic origin, age, disability, sexual orientation and religious and political belief. After all, the same *principles* apply. However, not all the *tools* identified for gender mainstreaming would be appropriate for other equality dimensions. Statistical monitoring would not be appropriate for mainstreaming on the grounds of sexual orientation for example: it would involve 'outing' people.

'Mainstreaming' as an approach can also be applied to other agendas such as environmental improvement, sustainability and so on.

### **What is happening in the name of mainstreaming?**

On the basis of a recent review of progress in the EU since Beijing, it seems to be possible to identify six different statuses among EU Member States and their employing organisations such as regional or local authorities. In some, there is *commitment and action*. Secondly, there are employers where there is *commitment but limited action*; perhaps the commitment is not backed up by expertise, or visioning or training. Thirdly, there are examples of *commitment and the occasional use of the odd tool*, like gender-disaggregated statistics or gender impact assessments. Fourthly, there is the '*tick and bash*' approach to mainstreaming. This is where a piece of paper is attached to all policy documents and the question posed – 'has this proposed policy any implications for men or women? If not, tick here'. In this particular kind of institutional culture, which characterises some of the EC Directorates, mainstreaming is reduced to a paper exercise. However, the very existence of the exercise may invoke complacency. Then, fifthly, there are organisations that have *apparent commitment, but do nothing*. Finally, and worst of

all, there are those organisations, such as local authorities, expressing *apparent commitment* but are in the process of *dismantling equality units, firing equality experts, and getting rid of their special budgets for equality, because, after all, 'we are all mainstreaming now'*. That is going backwards.

Among the Member States, there is considerable variability in approaches to gender mainstreaming. The Nordic countries are clearly leading the way, especially in developing and disseminating gender-disaggregated statistics and using gender impact assessments. Some very innovative mainstreaming measures have been developed, particularly in regional and economic development. Italy has some innovative examples of visioning, particularly in Modena and Venice where the authorities have 're-conceptualised' time and public transport, drawing on consultation exercises with women about what sort of public transport time-tabling and what sort of opening hours of public facilities they would like to suit their lives. Finland, Sweden and Italy it will be remembered, have addressed the gender balance in decision making issue through national laws that say they must have a minimum of 30% or 40% of both sexes on all public bodies.

### **Gender mainstreaming: A new strategy for sports policy?**

Gender mainstreaming, in my view, is potentially a highly effective long-term strategy to promote gender equality that complements the effects of equal treatment and positive action. It represents a paradigm shift in thinking about gender equality. It puts the promotion of gender equality at the heart of policies. What might it mean for women and sports and the engendering of sports policies?

Firstly, it would mean that organisations that fund and deliver sports policies would need to ensure that sex-disaggregated statistics are kept, for example, on the use made of sports facilities, and used as a management tool.

Secondly, it would mean developing equality indicators, as appropriate, to assess the performance in gender mainstreaming of bodies responsible for sports policies.

Thirdly, it would mean conducting gender impact assessments of proposed policies to anticipate their consequences on the two genders, making adjustments if necessary.

Fourthly, it would mean building a gender dimensions into monitoring, evaluation and review procedures.

Fifthly, it would mean ensuring a gender balance on important sporting committees, especially those that have responsibility for making decisions about the allocation of funding for sports.

Sixthly, it would mean engendering budgets, and ensuring that differences in the allocation between women and men and boys and girls can be justified.

Seventhly, it would mean taking a ‘visioning’ approach to policy review and development, to seek to identify hidden gender biases and to address them

If these gender-mainstreaming tools were to be introduced by bodies responsible for sports, we might have a greater degree of assurance that they were promoting gender equality.

## References

- Commission of the European Communities (1998) *Progress Report from Commission on the follow-up of the Communication: "Incorporating equal opportunities for women and men into all Community policies and activities"* COM (1998) 122 Final, Brussels: Commission of the European Communities
- Council of Europe (1998) *Gender Mainstreaming: Conceptual framework, methodology and presentation of good practice* Final report of Activities of the Group of Specialists on Mainstreaming (EG-S-MS) Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing
- European Commission (1996) *Incorporating equal opportunities for women and men into all Community Policies and activities* Communication from the Commission COM (96) 67 final Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities (The ‘Mainstreaming’ Communication)
- European Commission (1998a) *One hundred words for equality: A glossary of terms on equality between women and men* Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities
- European Commission (1998b) *A guide to gender impact assessment* Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities
- European Commission (1999) *Communication on Article 13* COM (1999) 564 final Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities
- European Commission (2000) *Implementation by the European Community of the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 1996* Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities
- Lindsten, S. (2000) *The Gender Reflex* Götaland: County Administration of Västra (pamphlet)
- Nordic Council of Ministers (2000) *Compendium of National Approaches: Country responses to the Questionnaire on Gender Mainstreaming* prepared for OECD Conference ‘Gender Mainstreaming: Competitiveness and Growth, 23-24 November 2000’ Paris: OECD
- Rees, T (1992) *Women and the Labour Market* London: Routledge
- Rees, T (1998) *Mainstreaming Equality in the European Union* London: Routledge