

Letter of Reference

The Community Initiative EQUAL in Portugal is promoting more effective models for employees' work-life and access to work, by fighting discrimination and exclusion on the basis of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Funded through the European Social Fund (ESF), EQUAL is being implemented in, and across, the Member States between 2001 and mid 2009.

Over the last 7 years, The EQUAL Programme in Portugal has supported around 200 Developing Partnerships with a budget of more than €150 million. In my capacities as Head of the EQUAL Managing Authority, a full member of the Commission's High level group on Gender Mainstreaming in the Structural Funds, and as the co-organiser of the European Conference on Social Innovation and Transnational Cooperation - the ESF delivering the Lisbon Strategy, I have become familiar with the achievements of the City Graz in making gender mainstreaming a reality in the work of its administration.

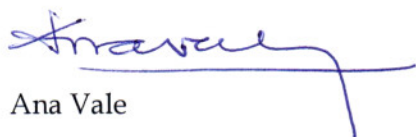
Between 2001 and 2007, the City of Graz participated as a leading partner in two consecutive projects on integrating a Gender mainstreaming approach in public administrations at a regional and local level. The results of these projects are impressive, and demonstrated that the City of Graz has at its disposal the decisive ingredients for implementing a gender mainstreaming approach successfully: political will and political support from the highest level, a strategy and action plan shared by all stakeholders, operational responsibilities in the administration, capacities and expertise to implement the strategy in a professional way.

I could see that my peers in the other Member States of the European Union have acknowledged the achievements of the City of Graz, such as the use of the Balanced Scorecard System as a central instrument for quality management, of Gender Budgeting at the level of administrative services, and of capacity building through certified Gender Agents. These have made the City of Graz a center of excellence in the field of gender mainstreaming at local level.

The European Social Fund actively supports transnational exchange and cooperation, and peer learning. The achievements of the City of Graz have been fed into a series of exchange events and learning networks at the European level and, as a consequence have been widely recognized by local and regional governments throughout Europe. To name a few at which I myself participated: the OPEN DAYS for European Regions and Cities, the biggest annual event for the EU Structural Funds; the ESF Community of Practice in Gender Mainstreaming, in the context of which the City of Graz, together with the Regional Government, organized a Peer Review around their approach and achievements; the ESF Social Innovation and Transnational Cooperation Conference "Powering a New Future The ESF Delivering the Lisbon Strategy", the Programme Committee from which the City of Graz was selected to present their achievements as a "winning story" under the ESF EQUAL Programme.

There is no doubt that the City of Graz has been widely recognized as a European center of reference for Gender mainstreaming at the local level. I am confident that the City of Graz will continue to participate actively in future exchange and cooperation actions in Europe, as it has been the first local authority that signed a Memorandum of Understanding, together with other ESF managing bodies at the regional and national level, committing itself to deepen and widen their gender mainstreaming approach, and to share their expertise and experience at the EU level.

EQUAL Managing Authority - Portugal



Ana Vale

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