Item 9.e
Equality Pays Off (EPO) project

This note aims to inform the Member of the HLG about the project "Equality Pays Off" (EPO) and invites them to disseminate this information to the companies and relevant stakeholders at national level who could be potentially interested in participating in the activities.

1. Background

One of the actions proposed in the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015 within the "Equal pay" priority is to support equal pay initiatives at the workplace. For this reason, in June 2011, the Commission published a call for tenders concerning awareness-raising activities on equal pay and the gender pay gap in companies.

Within this framework, the project Equality Pays Off was launched in August. The purpose of the project is to raise awareness of companies about the gender pay gap, its causes and consequences and to support them in their efforts to tackle it and to promote gender equality in their organisations.

It will do so through the organisation of training activities and preparation of tools for companies to raise awareness on the "business case" for gender equality and to show how to attract and retain a more suitable staff for their organisations by enlarging the potential recruitment base, mainly composed by women.

Moreover, once a year, around the European Equal Pay Day, a business forum will be organised in Brussels. It will be a platform of knowledge exchange for companies on actions to foster gender equality.

These activities should help companies to understand the benefits of promoting gender equality and to improve their knowledge and ability to act in this area. More concretely, the project should highlight the business case for utilising the labour force potential of women in a better way and support companies in successfully accessing this potential and attracting top talent in a context of demographic changes and skill shortages.

In both activities, training and business forums, the focus will in particular be put on actions that directly (pay audits, job evaluation methods) but also indirectly (recruitment and career evaluation methods free of gender bias, work-life balance actions, etc.) aim at tackling the gender pay gap.
The project is in line with the Europe 2020 Strategy target of raising the employment rate to 75% for which greater participation of women in the labour market is essential.

The implementation of the contract will be done in two periods of two years each. The first period, 2012-2013, addresses large companies\(^1\). In a second period, 2014-2015, the project could focus on small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

The project covers all EU Member States, EU candidate (Croatia, FYROM, Turkey) and pre-candidate (Serbia) countries, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

2. State of play

Concerning the training activities, the **one-day training events** will be organised in every participating country so as to reach up to 50 representatives (the target group is decision-makers in management) from large companies. These trainings are also open to the most relevant organisations and stakeholders able to circulate the messages and tools to the companies. The ultimate objective is to raise awareness of as many companies as possible. We have finalised the preparation of training materials and we are contacting potential participants to the trainings. The first trainings will start at the end of September 2012 and will last until September 2013. A provisional workshop calendar for 2012 is:

- 27.09. Croatia – already conducted
- 29.10. Macedonia, tbc
- 15.11. Hungary
- Probably week 46 (12 to 16 November) Czech Republic
- 20.11. Poland
- Probably week 48 (26 to 30 November) Serbia
- 06.12. Slovenia
- 13.12. Germany

The **first business forum** will take place in 2013, around the European Equal Pay Day, in Brussels. We are preparing the concept and structure, as well as the logistical issues. Up to 150 representatives from large companies are foreseen to participate, they will be chosen so as to ensure a geographical and sectorial balance.


The social partners at European and national level have been duly informed about these activities.

The members of the HLG are invited to circulate information on the project to organisations and companies who could be interested in participating.

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\(^1\) **Definition of large company:** a) Headcount: Annual Work Unit: >250 and b) Annual turnover: > €50 million or c) Annual balance sheet total: > €43 million. However, depending on the size and investment climate of the country, the sizes of companies involved can vary, and these thresholds could be smaller in some of them.
Website: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/equality-pays-off

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