



Bachelor Thesis

European Union's contribution to resolving gender inequalities on the German labour market

- a case study in NRW

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Abstract

Women in the European Union earn on average 16 percent less per hour than men do, although the principle of equal pay was introduced with the Treaty of Rome in 1957. To combat inequalities in employment, the EU has mainly introduced soft forms of governance in the last years, like the European Employment Strategy or the European Social Fund. Other studies have already looked at the effectiveness of these forms by quantitatively measuring newly introduced laws and regulations in the member states. However, there is a lack in literature on financial tools, such as the European Social Fund, in which gender equality is explicitly mentioned as an objective. To fill the gap, this study aims to learn which priority gender equality has within the European Social Fund and how the objective is implemented. Therefore, it asks: *How does the European Union with the European Social Fund contribute to resolving gender inequalities on the labour market in North Rhine-Westphalia?*

Using an exploratory, qualitative analysis of a single case, the influence of European interventions on promoting gender equality is investigated in this study. North Rhine-Westphalia is the most populous federal state in Germany and thus, has a large administrative apparatus, which makes it particularly interesting to study. In-depth interviews with policy makers and experts help to understand the implementation process. The results show that with setting gender equality as a horizontal objective within the ESF, the EU contributes to achieving this goal in the labour market. However, the issue does not maintain its emphasized status in the policy implementation process. Due to vague and very open guidelines, the main responsibility currently lies with the local policy makers.

Keywords: gender equality, European Social Fund, policy implementation, Germany

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List of abbreviations

European Economic Community	EEC
European Employment Strategy	EES
European Social Fund	ESF
European Union	EU
North Rhine-Westphalia	NRW
Open Method of Coordination	OMC
Operational Program	OP

1. Introduction

Significant discrepancies in the treatment of women and men appear to exist. In 2019, the Gender Pay Gap stands at 16%, which means that women earn on average 16% less per hour than men do (European Commission, 2019). Further, women tend to be employed in lower-paid sectors (OECD, 2017) and spend in total six hours more working (unpaid plus paid work) (Eurofund, 2017). Additional differences in the employment rate, part-time work, working conditions, and access to assets (European Institute for Gender Equality [EIGE], 2016) raise the question, whether the European Union's (EU) instruments are effective and practicable for member states at all. Due to the underutilization of skills and undervaluation of women's work, they do not have the same access to resources and lack economic independence. This is not just problematic for women but also results in less economic growth, less prosperity and less competitiveness of the whole EU (European Commission, 2018). Therefore, it is an important public administration issue, to look at the implementation of gender equality policies in order to diminish existing inequality structures in the employment sector.

The roots of the EU's commitment to gender equality on the employment sector date back to the Treaty of Rome 1957, which introduced the principle of equal pay. With the launch of the European Employment Strategy (EES) in 1997, significant progress towards a greater awareness of gender inequalities has been made. Since then, gender equality is a fixed target in employment policies. However, the main European instruments are forms of soft governance such as the European Social Fund (ESF). Member states can deal with such soft forms in different ways. As a result, the member states play a central role in shaping gendered employment patterns which produces inconsistent progress between the states in terms of gender equality (Tomlinson, 2011).

After the introduction of the EES, many scholars have discussed its effectiveness in tackling gender inequalities. Especially after 2005, when inequality no longer has been a priority in the EES, the changes and effects have been a widely discussed topic (Rubery, 2002; Smith & Villa, 2010; Thiel, 2006). However, after the loss of relevance of gender equality has been extensively studied, only a few scientists have studied European interventions to reduce gender equality in the European labour market anymore. To fill this lack about such interventions, the ESF is going to be analysed. The fund is an interesting subject of analysis, as it not only emphasises the relevance of gender equality but also has a well-established organisational structure in the member states.

Among others, the questions that arise from other studies and that have not been answered in the existing literature are: Which priority is given to gender equality in actual implementation

processes in the member states? What obstacles do policy makers face and what kind of alternatives do they propose to better address the issue of gender inequality? Do European policy mechanisms activate policy makers to take action against gender inequality?

Wöhl (2011) analyzed EU gender mainstreaming policies and their effects on employment policies in Germany and pointed out that further research is needed to examine how gender mainstreaming is “actually lived” (Woehl, 2011, p. 42). In that sense, this research aims to address this gap in the literature by looking at how the EU approach to gender equality implemented at the German regional level. Germany is the leading economy in the EU and with 3.4 million Euros, it has the largest share of EU’s gross domestic product (The World Bank, 2019). However, the result of the Gender Equality Index shows that it cannot defend this leadership position in terms of gender equality. Germany is below the European average on the twelfth position in the ranking (EIGE, 2019). The discrepancy between the above-average wealthy country on the one hand, and the below-average country in terms of equal rights on the other, makes Germany an interesting object of study. Since Germany has a federal structure, the focus must lay on one federal state.

This study aims to address the previously discussed issues with the following question: *“How does the European Union with the European Social Fund contribute to resolving gender inequalities on the labour market in North-Rhine-Westphalia?”*. In order to find an answer to the main research question, the following sub-questions will be addressed in the course of this research:

- a) In what ways does the EU promote gender equality in the labour markets of the member states?
- b) How are these European interventions to promote gender equality actually implemented at the regional level?
 - i. How do policy makers and experts assess the actual significance of gender equality during the implementation process of the ESF?
 - ii. How is the implementation of the ESF perceived by policy makers and assessed by experts?

In the second chapter, sub-question a) will be answered and provide the reader with fundamental background information about the EU’s mechanisms to tackle gender inequalities. This is followed by the theoretical framework in which different approaches to policy implementation are presented. To answer sub-question b), interviews are conducted whose results are presented in chapter five. In the sixth chapter, sub-question b) is answered and the ESF as a policy instrument is classified in one of the theoretical approaches from chapter 3.

Based on the analysis of the data, the main research question is answered in the conclusion and practical implications are given.

2. EU's mechanisms to tackle gender inequalities in employment

In this section, the ways in which the EU intervenes in the labour markets of the member states to promote gender equality will be illustrated, which answers sub-question a). After the different instruments have been clarified, the term “implementation” as the central element of this study is going to be conceptualized. After that, three different theories about implementation are introduced.

Different ways of harmonising law between the member states of the EU exist. In general, it can be distinguished between two types of law with fundamentally different characteristics. On the one hand, “hard law” stipulates uniform rules, which the member states must adopt or otherwise have to deal with sanctions by the EU. On the other hand, “soft law”¹ which develops guidelines, does not provide sanctions and is not justiciable (Trubek & Trubek, 2005). For both methods, there are representatives who say that one is better suited than the other to support the process of European integration.

2.1. Existing hard law instruments on gender equality in the EU

With article 119 in the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the principle of equal pay was introduced in the European legal framework. Almost twenty years later, in the mid-1970s, this commitment has been activated by directives on equal pay and equal treatment in employment (75/117/EEC, 9 2000/78/EC). Other existing directives regard equal treatment for part-time workers (97/81/EC), social security (79/7/EEC), parental leave (96/34/EC), and the working time directive (2003/88/EC). Not all directives have a specific gender equality approach but produce equality spin-off benefits (Fagan & Rubery, 2018). Despite the lack of many legally binding hard law instruments exist, gender equality legislation is part of the *acquis communautaire* and member states have to comply with it. New EU member states must accept all existing aquis and put in place mechanisms to adopt future elements of it (Miller, 2011). As a result, southern countries that wanted to become an EU member, reformed their gender equality legislation so that the gender equality framework functions as a catalyst for reform for countries applying for membership (Fagan & Rubery, 2018).

¹ Even though, it is not about a legally binding law, the term “soft law” is used to contrast it to “hard law”. One can speak about forms of “soft governance”, as well and both describe the same type of instruments.

2.2. Existing soft law instruments on gender equality in the EU

The EES was introduced in 1997 and used the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) to direct the member states' employment policies towards common objectives. The OMC does not require member states to amend their law and thus, offers a non-binding, and 'soft' intergovernmental instrument. Member states can carry out reforms required by the EES in line with their preferences as long as they are compatible with the European objectives (Stiller & van Gerven, 2012). Primarily, the EES is financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) (Eurofund, 2019).

The European Commission introduced the OMC with the aim of "spreading best practice and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals" (European Commission, 2000, p. 2). Generally, the OMC is based on the following three steps: development of guidelines, translation of these objectives into national policies, monitoring and evaluation of the outcome including country specific recommendations formulated by the European Commission. These peer reviews and "best practice" advices should lead to a mutual learning process among the EU member states (Heidenreich & Bischoff, 2008). In that way, the OMC guides the member states' policy making cognitively by monitoring and evaluation which includes the exchange of good practices and a certain degree of group pressure between the states. Additionally, the OMC aims to guide policy activism normatively through the guidelines (Copeland & ter Haar, 2011).

In the beginning, the EES consisted of four pillars from which one dealt with equal opportunities in the labour market. Further, the principle of "gender mainstreaming" was determined as a requirement for all policies that followed from the EES. Gender mainstreaming means that "a gender equality perspective [must be] incorporated in all policies, at all levels and at all stages by the actors normally involved in policy-making" (Council of Europe 1998: 12). However, gender equality did not keep its high priority over the years. From 2002 on, the EES has been integrated into the broader economic guidelines and the internal market strategy. With this, gender equality became one of ten guidelines. In 2005, new guidelines have been adopted and gender equality was no longer visible as a specific target in the EES (Fagan & Rubery, 2018).

Even though the EES has lost its focus on gender equality, two legacies remain until today. First, increasing the employment rate of women is a standard objective of employment policies, as it is recognized to bring economic benefits. Second, care services are recognized as being inseparable to the employment sector and shifted the attention to the sufficient provision of childcare (Fagan & Rubery, 2018). However, most parts of the EES "remain either gender blind or provide examples where the gender equality goal has been subordinated to other agendas"

(Rubery, p. 303). Quantitative targets like increasing the employment rate for women are rather superficial and leave out the aspect of quality of work (Rubery, 2002).

Apart from the loss of importance at the central European level, the importance of gender equality at the local level should not be underestimated. The actual implementation of the EES is often problematic, as a report about gender mainstreaming of employment policies in thirty European countries has shown. Although countries have developed initiatives regarding gender equality policies, the focus often seems very narrow and the implementation differs (Rubery et al., 2008). Thus, gender equality has a weak position in the EES and is mainly ignored at the European and national level (Macrae, 2009; Rubery, 2002; Smith & Villa, 2010).

2.2.1. Financial tools

Other mechanisms still have gender equality on their agenda and are valuable to consider. These include the European Social Fund which has its roots in the principle of the free movement of people and is a major part of the European strategy to improve the economy (Brine, 1992). The principle of gender mainstreaming has been adopted in the ESF after the introduction of the EES in 1998. Financial incentives shall guide the member states in having a focus on gender issues and promoting equality. Consequently, gender equality was determined as an assessment criterion in the evaluation of the ESF from the planning through to evaluation of programs (European Commission, 1999). Every EU member state must formulate an Operational Program (OP) which has to be in line with the ESF and illustrates the overarching strategy, priorities and concrete actions. The fundamental legal documents for the OP are the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) regulation (Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013) and the ESF regulation (Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013). In Germany, ESF implementation falls in the remit of the national government and the federal states governments (German: “Länder”), so that the federal states also formulate their own OP’s (Ministry for Work, Health and Social Affairs of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, 2017).

The ESF aims to promote upskilling and employment schemes in the EU. In the current funding period from 2014-2020, projects to the tune of some 80 billion euros in EU member states are funded. In NRW, the total expenditure amounts some 627 million euros (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2019). Moreover, in this funding period, the promotion of equality between women and men is determined as a horizontal objective. As such an objective, it must be considered in planning and implementing policies in every kind of policy area (Federal Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, 2019). In the sense of a dual strategy (German: “Doppelansatz”), gender equality as a horizontal objective must not only be considered as an accompanying measure but also by funding specific programs.

Concluding, the EU uses different instruments to intervene in the European labour market and the instruments have varying degrees of impact on gender equality. The EES with the OMC as a form of soft governance has been a driving force in the creation of gender equality in its early years. Since many modifications have been made over the years, gender equality is no longer an explicit target and thus, the EES is no instrument that effects national implementation heavily. The ESF, however, explicitly states gender equality as a goal and can influence national policy making with it. Based on these findings, the ESF represents an interesting object of investigation, which can be used, to examine the policy implementation of European interventions at the national level.

3. Theoretical framework

As explained above, implementation of European gender policies can be problematic but what is meant by implementation and where are some general obstacles?

Policies can be understood as actions, designed to carry out authority's decisions. Legitimized actors, in this case, the EU, express their wishes and announce objectives that must be realized by policy makers. This process is called implementation (Matland, 1995). Even though central planners exist, they can only indirectly influence local policy-making which results in a "wide variation in how the same national policy is implemented at the local level" (Matland, 1995, p. 148). On the one hand, this is necessary and local level implementors need the freedom to adapt the program to local conditions. On the other hand, it leaves the implementation dependent on the willingness of the member states to promote gender equality policies (Woehl, 2011).

In the literature, the different policy implementation approaches that have evolved over the decades have been divided into three different generations of research (Howlett, 2019; Paudel, 2010; Treib & Pülzl, 2007). The first generation from the 1970s to 80s had a more systematic approach and discovered the problems that occur while implementing policies. After that, the second generation from the 1980s to the 90s had theory building and formulating clear hypotheses at the heart of its research (Treib & Pülzl, 2007). Lastly, the third generation has not been realized yet but should concentrate on using theories in practice (Paudel, 2010). For this research, theoretical frameworks of the second generation are most suitable and hence, its ideas are used.

3.1. Top-down and bottom-up approaches to policy implementation

Two different approaches in analysing policy implementation exist: top-down and bottom-up. Paudel (2010) has developed an overview of the contrary implementation perspectives, in which the main differences between the two approaches are illustrated (see Table 1).

The central analysis variables are fundamentally different from each other. While the top-down approach puts the decision made by central officials in focus and sees them as the most important actors, the bottom-up approach starts at the street-level bureaucrats. In contrast to the former one, the bottom-up approach involves local implementation structures and networks in the analysis and understands local level implementors as the important actors (Sabatier, 1986). Further reasons for this are, that they are seen to be much nearer to the real problem than central officials who define the policies. Following on from this, social problems are the starting point of analysis for bottom-uppers, while top-downers begin by looking at the statutory language (see Table 1). Moreover, the bottom-up approaches recognize that even a hierarchical chain of command and well-defined policies do not guarantee successful implementation (Treib & Pülzl, 2007). Therefore, they focus on a specific problem and put an emphasis on “describing what factors have caused difficulty in reaching stated goals” (Matland, 1995, p. 149). The aim is to give accurate empirical descriptions of problem-solving strategies and thus, come up with explicit policy recommendations, instead of generalizable advice. Bottom-uppers in general reject the idea, that the implementation process can be controlled from the top to the bottom. Following this thought, they see implementors in having a certain amount of discretion that allows them to shape policies themselves (Treib & Pülzl, 2007). Consequently, policies are highly influenced by the implementors themselves, which leads to decentral problem solving and different outcomes and results in, for instance, solving gender inequality. From a top-down perspective, implementors cannot make discretionary decisions, as all decision power lays on the top-level (see Table 1)

To sum up, the debate between the two contrary approaches is centered around whether implementation theories and policies should be developed from the view of policy makers at the top of the policy pyramid or from that of policy makers on the local level, the so called “street-level bureaucrats” (Howlett, 2019).

Table 1.*Differences between top-down and bottom-up implementation approaches*

Variables	Top-down perspective	Bottom perspective
Policy decision-maker	Policymakers	Street-level bureaucrats
Starting point	Statutory language	Social problems
Structure	Formal	Both formal and informal
Process	Purely administrative	Networking, including administrative
Authority	Centralization	Decentralization
Output/Outcomes	Prescriptive	Descriptive
Discretion	Top-level bureaucrats	Bottom-level bureaucrats

Source: (Paudel, 2010, p. 40)

3.2. Hybrid theories to policy implementation

Additional to the discussion of top-down and bottom-up approaches, a third model has developed that combines the two contrary movements. These so-called “hybrid theories” overcame the idea of a linear policy implementation process and adopted a more holistic approach (Treib & Pülzl, 2007). Sabatier (1986) established the “advocacy coalition framework” in which, in line with bottom-uppers, the policy implementors are the unit of analysis and starting point. In the spirit of top-downers, he argued that social and economic conditions and legal constraints may impact policy making (Sabatier, 1986). In line with this, other advocates of the hybrid approach theorists also argued that one is always in the middle of a process because circumstances are permanently changing. Thus, according to supporters of the hybrid approach, the implementation must be understood as an evolutionary process in which policies are constantly shaped and redefined (Majone & Wildavsky, 1978). Elmore (1980) introduced the implementation approaches of forward and backward mapping which can be assigned to the two contrary approaches discussed above. Based on the top-downers, he highlighted that central decisions are seen as the starting point of analysis but, apart from that, the incentive structure of implementors must be taken into account.

To date, different hybrid models have been developed by various representatives in which implementation is not modelled as a formal concept but as a dynamic process. According to (Lane, 1987), this point of view makes the understanding of policy implementation more complex and difficult but more valuable for analysis.

To link these approaches to the ESF, it can be said that the EU, as a central actor, plays a major role in determining the regulations based on which the OPs must be formulated. Nonetheless, member states formulate their own OP's and have a wide scope of action. This points to

decentralized authority and discretion of the street-level bureaucrats and hence, the bottom-up approach. Therefore, the ESF as a financial tool is assumed to follow more a bottom-up approach.

4. Methodology

This section presents the methodology of this research, including the research design, the unit of analysis and units of observation, the data collection method and operationalization.

4.1. Research design

The abovementioned descriptive and exploratory research question of this research has an inductive approach. Induction looks for patterns that can be derived from observations of the world (Ritchie & Lewis, 2010). For this approach, a qualitative design is suitable as it provides the opportunity to get enrichment of information about the policy implementation process. Besides, qualitative research distinguishes itself by having the aim to learn about participants' "social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories" which is also important for the approach to explore the implementation of EU mechanisms as it can be learned about experiences made by policy makers (Ritchie & Lewis, 2010, p. 5). Further, the underlying research design of this study is a case study design as the observations about the implementation process will be constructed from one single case, the German federal state North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW). A case study can be defined "as an intensive study of a single case (or a small set of cases) with an aim to generalize across a larger set of cases of the same general type" (Gerring, 2009, p. 65). Therefore, qualitative research lacks generalizability and the findings may not be representable for a larger population, in this case, for other countries (Maxwell, 2009). However, the possibility to extend findings only to a limited number of cases does not include the generated theory. One can talk about "transferability" of qualitative findings, which means that the theory can be transferred, instead of generalized on other cases (Guba & Lincoln, 2003, p. 241).

In this research, the focus is not on the European central decisions, but on the micro-level where a policy more directly affects people. This translates into conducting interviews with policy makers (Matland, 1995).

4.2. Unit of analysis and units of observation

As Germany is a federal system and no general regulation exists, one must focus on one state which in this case, is the federal state NRW. It is the most populous country and therefore has a large administrative apparatus, which makes it particularly interesting to study.

In order to answer the main research question, information about the implementation of the ESF need to be gathered. Therefore, in this study, policy makers who deal with the implementation of the goal to reduce gender inequality on the labour market are the units of observation. In Germany as a federal system, every state is obliged to formulate targets and objectives that shall be achieved within the employment sector. Responsible for the formulation is the respective Ministry, which in the case of the federal state of NRW is the Ministry for Labour, Health, and Social Affairs of North Rhine-Westphalia. For the implementation of the ESF, a complex organisational structure of seven separate institutions has been established within the Ministry.² For this reason, policy makers from these different institutions were selected for the purpose of this study.

As the research question is very concrete and deals with a highly specific policy field, not many people are eligible to consider for an interview. Another group of people that are expected to serve the purpose of getting insights about the ESF in Germany are experts outside the political sphere. Even though they are not assigned to implement policies, they have (scientific) expertise about the effectiveness.

Having made a pre-selection about important actors in the policy field, snowball sampling provided a way to identify further key members. Interviewees were asked to recommend people who they think are influential in this policy network (Farquharson, 2005). This enabled contacts with key informants who would be difficult to reach otherwise.³

Table 2 provides an overview of the interviewees. In total, seven interviews have been conducted, two with experts in the field and five with policy makers. As NRW can be divided into 16 regions a difference has been made between these regional and the local levels, which includes cities (MAGS NRW, 2020). Moreover, as can be seen in Table 2, the interviewees can be and are incorporated at the respective levels at which they mainly function. Further characteristics of their respective functions in the different institutions are explained.

² The designation and functions of such institutions derive from regulation No 1303/2013, articles 123-127. The managing authority is responsible for the overall management and proper implementation of the Operational Program. It is supported by a monitoring committee in which also a women interest group has a guaranteed seat. Additionally, a certifying authority actually implements the ESF by examining which programs shall be granted and which comply with European and national regulations. Two control institutions monitor whether the correct procedure is used and can give recommendations for improvements.

³ In order to ensure anonymity, this question, which was asked at the end of each interview, is not included in the transcripts in the appendix.

Table 2.*Overview of the interviewees*

Name	Level	Institution	Function
Expert 1	Germany	Agency	Consultation of ministries
Expert2	NRW	Agency	Consultation of all involved actors in NRW, including ministries
Policy maker 1	NRW	Ministry	ESF coordination
Policy maker 2	NRW	Working group	Lobbying for women's rights on the labour market
Policy maker 3	Regional	Regional agency	Interface between ministry and regional companies
Policy maker 4	Regional	Regional agency	Interface between ministry and regional companies
Policy maker 5	Local	Job center	Consultation of unemployed women

4.3. Data collection method

In-depth interviews with a limited number of respondents have been conducted. As not many institutions are involved in the implementation process, no new information could have been gathered after this number of interviews. Interviews are a flexible method of collecting qualitative data and allow the researcher to get a fuller and better understanding of a case (van Thiel, 2014). Since this research is designed to collect and analyze personal experiences and opinions of experts and policy makers, these features are especially useful in the present study. Given the current situation about the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews have been conducted by phone or skype and the audio was recorded. This avoidance of any physical and social interaction with the participants can hamper the flow of conversation and makes it more difficult for the interviewer and participant to understand each other, as no facial expressions can be transmitted. To adequately deal with these circumstances, the aim was to do as many interviews as possible via skype, which has been achieved. Further, the interviews were semi-structured, and the guidelines contained both, broad themes to be covered and specific questions. Simultaneously, sequences and questions can be changed depending on the answers which preserves a degree of openness (Kvale, 2007). The questions are derived from the theoretical framework and are adapted to the respective interview partners. Conversations with policy

makers focused on their practical experiences and with the experts, the focus has been more on an assessment from a scientific perspective. While preparing the questions, it was relevant to translate the theoretical knowledge into everyday language. Otherwise, the interviewee cannot understand them directly and would not be able to answer immediately and spontaneously (Kvale, 2007). The interview guides can be found in the annex. After the interviews have been transcribed, they were analysed using a coding scheme. In order to ensure a clear presentation of the generated codes, they are presented in tables in the analysis. Also, the frequencies of the codes were also included in these tables to show rough tendencies of the distribution.

4.4. Operationalization

After the transcription of the interviews, the next step was to reduce, select, and decide what information to use, while preserving the participants' meanings. Since this is a policy implementation analysis (Ritchie & Lewis, 2010), the data analysis aims to understand the context of gender equality policies, how they are applied in the employment sector and aims to identify potential problems. As qualitative analysis can be understood as a recursive process (Swanson & Holton, 2005), data collection and analysis have been carried out simultaneously. The newly acquired knowledge can thus be applied in the following interviews. According to Ruona (Swanson & Holton, 2005), four stages of data analysis can be identified which will be used in this research.

(1) Data Preparation

The interviews have been transcribed and the data has been anonymized.

(2) Familiarization

This process has already started in the previous stage and has been continued through re-reading the data and trying to make sense of it.

(3) Coding

In this stage, information has been organized into meaningful and more general categories. Data-driven codes are created inductively from the collected data and are not based on prior-research or theories. With the help of the software "ATLAS ti." patterns in experiences with the implementation of gender policies, as well as patterns in attitudes about its effectiveness could thus be abstracted and discovered. Meaning coding has been used which means that keywords have been attached to text segments in order to detect patterns and search important meanings (Kvale, 2007).

(4) Generating meaning

During the last stage, the data and codes have been generalized and theorized as far as possible. It was about relating the data to the whole and interpreting it while avoiding speculations.

5. Findings/ Data

The purpose of this chapter is to present the data that was generated in the interviews in order to answer how policy makers and experts at the different policy levels in NRW assess the implementation of the ESF. In the first step, respondents' assessments about the priority of gender equality within the ESF, in general, will be presented. On this basis, the data about its implementation follows in the second step.

5.1. Role of gender equality: theory vs. praxis

As discussed in Chapter 2, according to the European regulations, gender equality is a horizontal objective in the ESF. To find out whether this theoretical relevance is impactful in practice, interviewees were asked to describe their experiences regarding the significance of gender equality within the ESF.

As far as the position of the interviewed experts is concerned, one interviewee emphasised that he/she sees a significant influence of the ESF on the subordinate level. Furthermore, he/she believed that without the ESF, Germany would be even more a "*developing country in terms of gender equality*" (expert 1; p. 2; line 70-71). Although according to Expert 2, the gender equality aspect is well formulated as a strategy, in practice, there is no legal enforcement and the interventions are more likely to be in the field of prose (expert 2).

In contrast to the experts interviewed, most interviewed policy makers emphasised that it would not be feasible for every involved actor to implement the ESF as a horizontal objective, since it would be not concrete enough (policy maker 3). Moreover, one policy maker compared the ESF with a "*drop in the ocean*" that might be a good beginning but not encompassing enough to play a significant role (policy maker 5; p. 2; line 61). Moreover, an important decision-maker in the ESF structure in NRW made clear, that although gender equality is an objective within the fund, it does not automatically receive special attention. For example, he/she stated that within his/her organization the target is met to the extent required by the broad EU requirements, but no more and no less. In this vein, another policy maker attributed gender equality to an insignificant role in the ESF as it would only be a "*small wheel within the bigger picture*" (policy maker 1; p. 6; line 224).

The results show that respondents' assessments of the significance of gender equality within the ESF seem to differ between experts and policy makers. While most experts stressed that gender equality plays an important role in the ESF and has traditionally always done so (expert 1), a majority of policy makers stressed that the role of gender equality is rather insignificant.

5.2. Implementation

In this section, the positive aspects, challenges, and perspectives for reform mentioned by the interview partners about the implementation of European interventions will be illustrated. The individual codes are ranked and explained according to the frequency they occur. Additionally, the frequencies can be found in the respective Tables 3-5.

5.2.1. Positive Aspects

When implementing European interventions, the policy makers interviewed also emphasized that they gained positive experiences and identified three main aspects. They acknowledge that **gender equality** is even mentioned as a **horizontal objective**, as it shows a certain awareness of the problem among decision-makers and an openness to solve it (policy maker 2). Furthermore, they reported positively that as soon as concrete requirements exist, all involved actors like the administration, sponsorships and companies will do their bests to implement them. Hence, implementers are willing to comply with **clearly stated objectives**. This operating principle has been illustrated by one of the policy makers as follows:

“So then, if it [the gender equality aspect] is actually explicitly named, it is also considered quite well. It is always not considered if there is nothing concretely specified.” (policy maker 2; p. 5; lines 176-178).

An interview with a policy maker working in the administration for the ministry in NRW confirmed this statement. He/she argued that the inclusion of gender equality in justifications of ESF programs is expected by the EU. Consequently, the ministry in NRW takes the issue into account (policy maker 1; p.2; lines 61-62). However, anything that goes beyond the concrete requirements and would mean more effort is not considered by the administration. According to expert 1, it is exactly done what needs to be done. Lastly, the policy makers described that **networks facilitate policy implementation**. Those networks have been established between the different actors that are assigned to implementing ESF guidelines. Certainly, this does not exist in every region to the same extent but in cities or regions where an extensive network exists, yet, policy makers described it as very beneficial. Through these networks with important actors in a city, policy makers have access to many institutions and thus, can bring the gender aspect to bear on many different levels (policy maker 3).

Table 3.*Overview of the Positive Aspects*

Code	Frequency
Gender equality as a horizontal objective in the ESF	11
Implementers are willing to comply with clearly stated objectives	9
Networks facilitate implementation	7

5.2.2. Challenges

As can be seen in Table 4, a total of eight challenges that hamper implementing gender equality within the ESF can be identified from the discussion with the interviewees.

Interviewees experienced that the success of **implementation is highly dependent on the individual motivation and knowledge of individual actors**. All interviewees have experiences with situations, where gender equality has or has not been promoted because of the engagement of the involved actors. Interviewees observed this phenomenon at all different levels which will be shown in the following examples.

According to policy maker 1, the resources of the ESF are used in different ways and with different levels of engagement to promote gender equality in every EU member state (policy maker 1). Representatives of the European Commission, who are part of monitoring committees and are assigned with controlling the implementation, have the freedom to put a strong focus on gender equality by controlling more strictly or not (expert 1). Within Germany, the programs funded by the ESF are different in their regulation and implementation in every federal state (expert 2). Different federal state governments in NRW mean different acting people and OPs with a different emphasis on gender equality (policy maker 2). Moreover, sponsorships that aim to realize the ESF projects either pay attention to gender equality sponsor projects that support women, or they ignore the subject completely. (expert 2). Besides, according to some policy makers, people on the regional or local level can be very motivated. This can be seen from the fact that they initiate their own working groups, have created a large network and try to incorporate the gender equality aspect as often as possible (policy maker 3, 5). Nonetheless, it is also possible, that people do not associate themselves with gender equality and have a different focus on their work. That does not necessarily mean malicious intent or missing interest, but often caused by missing knowledge (expert 2).

Based on an analysis of all ESF projects, expert 1 stated during the interview that he/she has created a typology of involved actors. In his/her view, 10 percent would be so-called “*complete*

objectors” (German: “Komplettverweigerer”), who do not answer any surveys and calls, do not join networking meetings and talk disparaging about gender equality. The next group includes those 30 percent, who would fulfil their duty. They do what they have to, but without special motivation or own interest. The last group consists of 60 percent, of very motivated people who have great expertise in gender equality policies. This typology would not be empirically supported but would still give a tendency about the different types of actors and their different levels of motivation to promote gender equality (expert 1; p. 9; lines 341-365).

The second challenge that was mentioned is that **gender mainstreaming is not concrete enough**. As elaborated in Chapter 2, gender mainstreaming is one element of the double-strategy mentioned in the ESF regulations and requires that every policy decision shall incorporate gender equality principles. According to the experts, the term “gender mainstreaming” often pose a challenge at their consultation meetings with ministries and involved actors, as some policy makers do not even know what gender mainstreaming actually is (expert 1). Furthermore, according to the interviewed policy makers, some involved actors lack of knowledge about how they can incorporate gender aspects into their program. That would make implementing gender equality measures in practice very difficult. Additionally, one policy maker mentioned that the term “gender” and thus “gender mainstreaming” would have a negative connotation for many policy makers in Germany because it is seen as unnecessary and too complicated. This negative connotation can also be observed in policy maker 1’s statement on gender mainstreaming. The interviewee referred to “*the gender mainstreaming thing*” (policy maker 1; p. 2; line 50) as a measure for “*those who are enthusiastic about it*” (policy maker 1; p. 5; line 200).

According to the interviewees, interventions to promote **gender equality** in the German labour market also **contradict other laws** and interests. Policy maker 3 made the experience that companies only want to generate full-time jobs. Moreover, he/she argued that people working in job centres prefer to offer full-time positions because finding a job for someone in part-time does not generate the same statistics as finding someone in full-time (policy maker 3). As a consequence of this, women who are mothers and want to work part-time have no chance of getting a job. People working in job centres would prefer to offer full-time positions because finding a job for someone in part-time does not generate the same statistics as finding someone in full-time (policy maker 3). Moreover, he/she argued that, according to German law, women with children under the age of three are not obligated to be available to the labour market. Hence, this law would contribute to the problem that women with small children are not employed and do not participate in ESF programs (policy maker 5). According to expert 2, the

unequal contribution of care-work contradicts with the aims of the EU to support women to work. Moreover, expert 2 argued that it will not be possible to integrate women as much as men into the labour market if women continue to do the main care-work (expert 2). According to expert 2, a type of comprehensive legal cooperation would be missing and instead, different European and national laws torpedo each other. An example of this is child and youth protection. Youth welfare offices (German: “Jugendämter”) control whether adequate childcare is given for working mothers differently than for those who are not employed. The reason for this, according to expert 2, is that when a mother is gainfully employed, a child’s welfare is assumed to be more likely threatened. Besides, laws like the “tax splitting for married couples” (German: “Ehegattensplitting”) hamper the equality of women on the employment market and support traditional gender roles. According to expert 2, the different parts of the labour market do not correspond, and the legislative instances do not operate jointly. For expert 2, this would be one reason why progress in gender equality cannot be made.

Another challenge, which was mainly mentioned by the policy makers, is that **other labour market issues are treated with higher priority** by some policy makers (e.g., the decline in long-term unemployment). For example, policy maker 2 claimed that some decision-makers would give priority to more pressing issues and largely ignore the issue of gender inequalities also because they perceive it as an unnecessary burden to pay additional attention to this issue. Moreover, one interviewee highlighted that gender equality would not be at the center of labour market policy in NRW and would therefore not be the main objective of the ministry in implementing the ESF. Policy maker 1 described the situation as follows:

“In this environment of different interests and expectations towards us, one element in the further course of the processing is of course also to take the question of gender and equality into account. So that's not something that shapes my everyday work.” [...] “But from this perspective, we are more likely to be dealing with people who are struggling to get back to work and who have certain handicaps. And I do not perceive gender at this point as one of the central handicaps.” (policy maker 1; p. 4; lines 160-167)

As the next challenge, interviewees mentioned **gender role stereotypes as hard to overcome** and explain that this problem causes many of the others. According to expert 2 they influence children from small on and cause segregation of employment biographies and thus, segregation of the labour market because women and men would tend to choose different career paths (expert 2). As said by expert 2, these underlying stereotypes can influence consultants in job centers, as well. Policy maker 5 gave an example and explained that fewer women are invited

to counseling than men, as the male sole-earner model (German: “männliches Alleinverdienermodell”) (policy maker 5; p.5; line 195-196) would be still dominant. In German, relationships in which both, man and women work, are called “dual-earner” (German: “Doppelterverdiener”). Expert 1 claims, that the creation and use of a specific word for this relationship symbolizes the strangeness associated with women working. For men, this word is not used but as soon as a woman is employed, it is seen as something unusual and worth mentioning. According to expert 1, men are seen to have the natural right to be in work, while women still have to explain themselves (expert 1). Moreover, policy maker 2 highlighted that existing stereotypes about gender roles can not only influence the concrete job decisions of men and women but also can shape the prevailing family image in society. In Germany, advocates of the prevailing view would believe that women are responsible for care work and men are responsible for gainful employment. According to policy maker 2, this might have an influence on how women can benefit from the labour market and how women can benefit from ESF programs (p.7).

According to the interviewees, another challenge are **missing sanctions** at the European level. Expert 1 questioned the EU’s enforcement capacity in general and described it as “*bizarre*” that member states can ignore European interventions without fear of sanctions (expert 1; p. 6; line 251). In line with this, expert 2 stressed that without financial sanctions, member states will not change anything to promote gender equality more strongly because “*good words*” are not enough (expert 2; p. 8; line 327).

In addition to the absence of sanctions, interviewees highlighted the **lack of data** on gender equality in the ESF programs as a challenge for the implementation of the ESF. There is no transparency about how many women and men participated and how successful programs are in general (policy maker 3). According to policy maker 3, the statistics have been becoming better in the last years, however, the numbers often not describe the regional level and only view Germany as a whole. In his/her view, data is often only generated for the first year after the end of a program. The lack of long-term and meaningful data on the outcomes of the programs, therefore, impedes effective public relations work. For example, in order to convince companies to launch a certain project, numbers are needed to prove its success. According to policy maker 3, this is a problem in all programs and not only in those, from which mainly women benefit. Policy maker 5 emphasized that the question about what actually needs to be measured in statistics is problematic in all ESF programs. For individual women, it may be a great success of an integrational program if they are able to travel alone by bus. However, this individual achievement is difficult to measure within the official statistics in an integrational

program. In many cases, the success of an integration program is only determined by whether or not someone has a new job after an integrational project (policy maker 5). Expert 2 mentioned that official statistics not always provide these differentiated numbers and important data are missing. Data cannot be seen as simple numbers stresses expert 1, because “*finances depend on these numbers.*” (expert 1; p. 4; line 154).

The last challenge that has been mentioned by the interviewees was about **short-term measures**. Policy maker 5 is on the local level and is implementing the ESF most directly by advising women in terms of ESF programs. The interviewee criticized the fact that the programs financed by the ESF usually contain only short-term measures. Once a project with a duration time of two years is considered to have been completed and closed, there is no broad transfer of success or good practices. According to policy maker 5, after such a short time no real success of the programs can be determined due to two reasons. On the one hand, not many women and other possible future participants can know about the programs financed by the ESF after such a short time, and on the other hand, not many institutions learn about these programs. In addition, policy maker 5 argued that one “*highlight project*” would not be encompassing enough to lead to a major change in society and bring about more than just selective changes (policy maker 5; p. 2; lines 69-71).

Table 4.

Overview of the Challenges

Code	Frequency
Implementation depends on motivation and knowledge of individual actors	17
Gender mainstreaming is not concrete enough	11
Other laws contradict the goal of gender equality (e.g. Ehegattensplitting)	11
Other issues are treated with higher priority	13
Gender stereotype are hard to overcome	10
Missing sanctions	8
Lack of Data	8
Short-term measures	3

5.2.3. Perspectives for reform: mandatory gender budgeting

After the challenges have been elaborated, perspectives on how to facilitate the implementation process of the ESF have been discussed with the interviewees and will be presented in the following section.

The **European Union** has been mentioned most frequently as a perspective by the interviewees as it could **strengthens its guidelines**. According to policy maker 2, the role of the sponsor predisposes the EU to take a stronger position on this issue. As soon as the EU sets clear targets, they will inevitably be implemented by all involved actors (policy maker 1). The EU could be more restrictive and make support for women within the ESF programs obligatory, which means that a certain proportion is reserved for women's measures. According to policy maker 1, clearer guidelines would be feasible and easy to implement for the administration in the ministry (policy maker 1). Furthermore, the EU could no longer define gender equality as a horizontal objective, but instead set more concrete targets. Thus, the horizontal objective could be broken down into more application-oriented sub-objectives, which might make dealing with gender equality in the labour market simpler for all stakeholders concerned. According to policy maker 3, those who are already strongly committed to the issue and promoting it in every way are no longer feel that they bear the full responsibility (German: “den Hut aufhaben”) as they receive stronger support from the European side (policy maker 3). According to policy maker 2 the assigned actors implement everything loyally, as long as the EU makes clear regulations. In that sense, expert 1 argued that the EU has the opportunity, to define what is state-of-the-art in the field of gender equality policy in the EU labour market and to show a stronger commitment to the regulations.

Gender budgeting is an opportunity to monitor how finances are distributed among the genders and who benefits from what. It is not only about looking at the absolute numbers of who participated in a program but also about how expensive each program is. In that way, the gender perspective can be incorporated at all levels of a budgetary process (EIGE, 2020). **Mandatory gender budgeting** is considered as a good perspective for reform because revealing the monetary flows is seen to be vital by policy maker 2. According to expert 2, the instrument of finances can be used as leverage and ensure an appropriate amount of resources is used for gender equality. Through that, the topic can gain additional clout, and pressure is exerted on decision-makers (expert 2). On the national level, gender budgeting exists but for the federal states, it is voluntary, and no one has introduced the budgeting yet. According to expert 1, technically it is no problem to do so. Nonetheless, he/she argued that it is not wanted politically because then, the data would unmask gender inequalities. From then on, the public would have a strong eye on the issue. Hence, the federal government would be forced to change things and introduce new measures (expert 1, 2). These expert assessments are verified and confirmed by the statements of policy maker 1:

“Yes, [gender budgeting] is possible, but most of the time you get more problems with it because questions are asked where the unequal distribution of money comes from.” (p. 3; lines 86-87)

Furthermore, policy maker 1 doubted that better substantive decisions could be made based on the data on gender budgeting. The other interviewees confirmed this assumption, that gender budgeting is possible but not wanted politically.

Another perspective for reform is a program that is solely for women in the labour market. In NRW, no **specific program** exists **that supports exclusively women** or can be seen as a program with the purpose to promote gender equality. Consequently, expert 2 argued that the ESF double-strategy is not de facto realized in NRW. Especially in contrast to gender mainstreaming, specific programs are seen as an opportunity to promote women concretely, because everyone can imagine what it could be about (policy maker 1). If actors would have a concrete project in mind with which they can work, it would be easier to implement and follow the horizontal objective, explains expert 2.

Solving the problem of a lack of sanctions, respondents highlighted the importance of finances as a way to provide incentives for member states or federal states to promote gender equality. In contrast to sanctions, **improving financial incentives** would be less radical. If the allocation of financial benefits were linked to progress in the promotion of gender equality, this would provide enough incentives to do so. According to expert 2, having gender equality as a voluntary aspect is not encompassing enough, to motivate decision-makers to do it. On the one hand, these incentives could come from the national government itself, for example, by granting advantages to companies if they promote gender equality. On the other hand, the EU, as a sponsor, could also set these incentives and link the allocation of funds to the commitment to gender equality (policy maker 1).

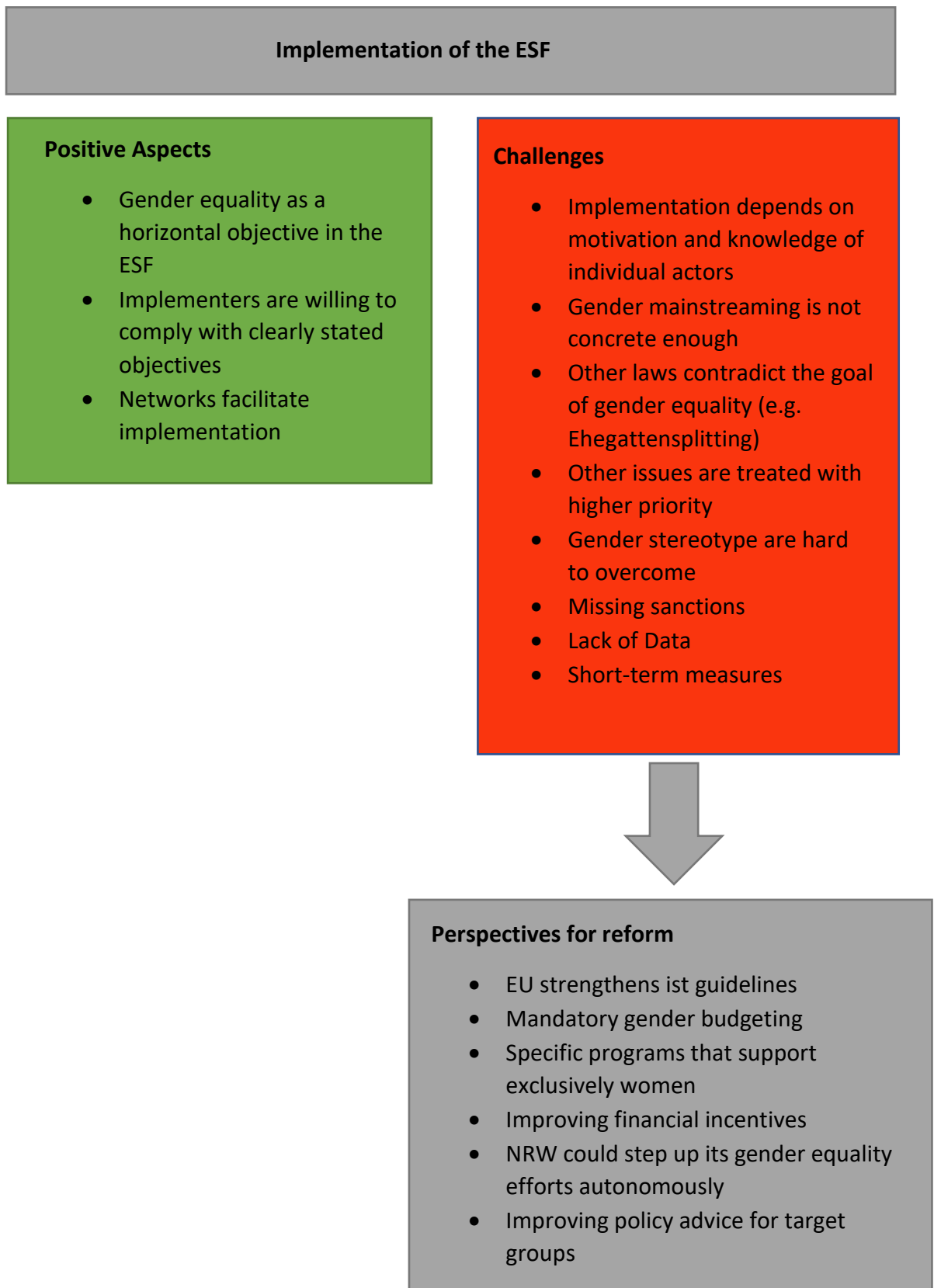
The federal government of **NRW** itself is seen by the interviewees as a great opportunity that can help to support gender equality more strongly within the ESF. As explained before, some interviewees highlighted that gender budgeting could be easily implemented in theory (expert 1, 2) but that its practical implementation is hampered by the fact that it is currently not wanted by the state government in NRW (policy maker 1). Besides, according to the interviewees, the responsible ministry has a big scope for action and can design and formulate the OP and program fetches at their discretion. Simply put, the state government in NRW could place greater emphasis on gender equality in all strategies and concepts affecting the labour market and adopt stricter regulations (policy maker 3).

As the last perspective, further **policy advice for the target groups** is mentioned by the experts. During meetings with involved actors, the interviewed experts made the experiences that a lot of actors struggled with the topic of gender equality itself. They often do not know what “gender” even means or how to identify challenges and opportunities of inequality in their own company. Also, they do not have the time to gain the expertise or where to start. Hence, according to the experts, a well-developed consultation structure would help to support companies, sponsorships and institutions in implementing the horizontal objective of the ESF (expert 1, 2).

Table 5.

Overview of the perspectives for reform

Code	Frequency
EU strengthens guidelines	18
Mandatory gender budgeting	12
Specific programs that support exclusively women	11
Improving financial incentives	10
NRW could step up its gender equality efforts autonomously	8
Improving policy advice for target groups	6



Graph 1.
Overview of the Findings/Data

6. Discussion

In the previous section, the findings have been descriptively presented to create a deeper understanding of how the implementation of European interventions works in NRW. These findings serve to answer the sub-questions in the following.

According to the European ESF regulations, gender equality is highly significant and must be constantly considered in the implementation. But how do involved actors experience the real importance of gender equality? From a scientific perspective, the experts confirmed this theoretical significance of gender equality, that is laid down in the ESF regulations. Nevertheless, having practical knowledge, as well, they agree with the policy makers that gender equality is not significantly implemented because it does not matter in practice. This assessment is particularly confirmed by one policy maker, who has a high position within the implementation in NRW and clearly states that gender equality is insignificant in his/her daily work. Hence, a discrepancy between the influence of the ESF in theory and its actual implementation in practice can be observed. Involved actors do not experience such great importance in practice. Therefore, gender equality does not maintain its high priority in the implementation process of the ESF in NRW.

The second sub-question of how policy makers and experts assess the implementation can be answered by looking at the positive aspects, challenges and perspectives for reform that have been mentioned and relating them to different implementation approaches.

The interviewees described that strict EU requirements regarding gender equality would automatically make implementors to follow them. Consequently, everything that is regulated, is implemented. This observation supports top-down approaches on policy implementation which identify the power monopoly in the center. Accordingly, the implementors would realize everything as required by the EU and the implementation outcomes would correspond exactly with the initial policy decision (Treib & Pülzl, 2007). However, the findings regarding the significance of gender equality within the ESF indicated, that this is not the case. Even though gender equality is a horizontal objective within the ESF, no regulations or indicators on how it shall be actually achieved are made by the EU. Therefore, the implementors make use of their scope of action in this relatively unregulated system. One fruitful use of the scope of action is the creation of networks, that has been mentioned as a positive aspect by the interviewees. Actors create joint working groups or projects and can have a much greater impact and promote gender equality more strongly together.

The negative outcome of this scope is the challenge of different motivations and knowledge of actors. Multiple levels lay between the EU and the local implementors and hence, multiple different actors exist that are involved in the policy implementation process. The reports of the interviewees indicate that all these different actors have different knowledge and most importantly, different motivations to promote gender equality. Paired with a relatively large scope of action, the promotion of gender equality within the ESF is therefore highly dependent on the willingness of the individual actors. This finding supports the approach of bottom-up theorists and the ESF as a financial tool is clearly construed according to this approach. During the interviews, it was really striking, that on higher decision-making levels in NRW, a lack of prioritization of gender inequality does exist. Interviewed policy makers on levels with less decision-making power have already assumed that, but the explicit statements of an actor with central decision-making power confirmed that it is not just a subjective assessment. His/her prioritization of a horizontal objective shows, that the ESF implementation process is not controlled from the top and depends therefore on the implementors.

The interviewees have put a strong emphasis on the EU and its responsibility as the central decision maker and main sponsor of the ESF. Thus, the central decision-making level is understood to be liable by the interviewees, which supports top-down approaches. For example, the interviewee, who is at the top of the policy pyramid in NRW confirmed that NRW as the central level could take responsibility and introduce gender budgeting (policy maker 1). In line with the top-down approach, some interviewed policy makers have explained, that as soon as clear guidelines exist, the implementors will follow them. Following this thought, the EU would be responsible for introducing mandatory gender budgeting, which is seen as a beneficial instrument to promote gender equality. However, it is not wanted politically which is an indicator, that gender budgeting is presumably very effective in monitoring ESF finances. One reason to not implement it might be, that the government is not really interested in changing the current structures on the labour market and in private life. The capitalist economy would not work if almost all women would work full-time and are not responsible for most of the care work anymore. The current allocation of gender roles and thus, inequalities in the labour market are maintained. However, the introduction of this instrument seems to be indispensable.

Bottom-up, as well as top-down approaches, have been confirmed by the data. Consequently, the policy implementation of the ESF must be seen as a complex process that should be analysed from different directions. Following a simple and linear understanding of policy implementation is not sufficient to represent the many different levels, actors and influences of the ESF. On the one hand, the EU as the central decision-maker is responsible for promoting

gender equality in the labour market. Missing sanctions and hard law, missing data and the complex concept of gender mainstreaming are major challenges for the implementation of gender equality and could be solved by the EU. On the other hand, the EU is not solely responsible, and its inputs will be inevitably changed by the implementors. The ESF as an intervention does not create one standardized outcome because the actors have a significant influence on the implementation, as well. Especially in the current environment, where the central decision-makers have not prescribed strict guidelines.

Concluding, policy makers and experts see similar challenges and opportunities in policy implementation. Both recognize the EU and NRW as the main challenges and the actors which possess opportunities to promote gender equality further at the same time. Thus, the main responsibility is currently seen with actors at the central level by the interviewees. However, those findings do not mean that the ESF implementation process can be seen as a purely top-down or bottom-up approach. Due to the lack of guidelines and the general bottom-up approach that the ESF follows, the implementors are responsible for promoting gender equality effectively.

The assumption from the theory section is confirmed but must be extended. Initially, the ESF follows a bottom-up approach and puts the main responsibility for promoting gender equality in the hands of policy implementors on the local level. However, the central levels are seen as the greatest opportunity to make a difference and promote gender equality more. The promotion of gender equality within the ESF is an interaction between all the different actors. Hence, hybrid approaches that include an analysis of all actors are most suitable to analyse the ESF. The implementation is characterised on the one hand by inaccurate regulations by the EU and, as a result, by a high degree of dependence on the implementers.

6.1. Limitations of the research

This research is limited by the small sample size. The results are not generally valid and can only give a tendency about the implementation process. Besides, some perspectives might be missing because not all involved actors in NRW have been interviewed. However, qualitative studies like the present one do not aim at confirming a finding as they are based on individual experiences and opinions.

Further difficulties can be caused by translation errors. As the interviews have been conducted in German and have been translated in English for this research, further difficulties can occur through the language. This can result in a loss of meaning as some quotations may have different

connotations after the translation. By giving the German translation, it has been tried to avoid a different meaning at least for the German readers.

7. Conclusion

This study aimed to find an answer to the question of how the European Union with the ESF contributes to resolving gender inequalities in the labour market in NRW. With setting gender equality as a horizontal objective within the ESF, the EU contributes to achieving this goal in the European labour market. However, the issue does not maintain its emphasized status in policy implementation. Due to vague and very open guidelines, the main responsibility lies with the local policy makers. As mentioned before, the ESF is only one fragment in the system of regulations that promote gender equality in the labour market in NRW. Other European interventions, national regulations and societal gender role stereotypes also contribute to still existing gender inequalities on the labour market. Nevertheless, setting gender equality as a horizontal objective demonstrates a certain awareness of the problem within the EU. If the political will is strong enough and if decision makers recognize inequality as a structural problem, the EU can make more use of its role as the central actor and can contribute more to overcoming gender inequalities. Therefore, special emphasis is put on the following practical implications resulting from this research and mainly concerning the EU.

The practical implications of this study can be derived from the perspectives for reform that interviewees mentioned to further promote gender equality in NRW. First of all, from the interviews, it can be derived that gender budgeting should be implemented in NRW. The ESF is aimed at all genders and hence, everyone must be able to benefit from it equally. Consequently, it is important to monitor to what extent ESF finances actually benefit women and that is what gender budgeting is for. Secondly, this research has shown that the EU must make binding requirements for gender equality within the ESF. To put it in concrete terms, the double-strategy should be expanded with mandatory requirements about the resources spend on women's' programs. Another concrete instrument are financial incentives. The EU could provide financial incentives for member states which promote gender equality beyond the legal requirements. Moreover, NRW could set these financial incentives for companies, who participate in ESF programs for women beyond the required guidelines. The goal of these measures should, therefore, be to make gender equality as tangible and feasible as possible. In that way, actors who do not have a great deal of expertise with the subject can implement it, too.

As this research has shown, improvements must not only start at the central level (top-down) and instead, individual actors bear a great deal of responsibility. Thus, individual actors at different levels must be encouraged by the EU to promote gender equality more. In addition, however, the issue of gender inequality cannot be solved by a European fund like the ESF solely. As other mentioned challenges indicate, gender inequality is a result of structural discrimination caused by stereotypes and conservative role images. As every actor and every institution is responsible for upholding gender inequalities by against discriminating women, everyone can evade responsibility at the same time. Every single actor can change something while implementing the ESF. But to ensure that everyone is committed to it, and not just those who are already highly motivated, the EU must set stringent standards. That is why a holistic approach by the EU is needed, starting at all points. Instead of making the significance of gender equality in policy implementation dependent on the motivation of the street-level bureaucrats, the EU should take on more responsibility by making gender budgeting mandatory as a first step.

With these findings, this study fills the existing gap in the literature about European financial tools and gives insights about its implementation in the member states. However, the question arises whether these findings apply in other federal states in Germany or other European member states. Therefore, further research with other cases needs to be done to increase the reliability of this study and investigate the tendency of decentral problem solving further. In that sense, more policy makers could be interviewed to confirm the results. Moreover, similar studies could be carried out in other EU countries and compare how implementation varies from one Member State to another. Following, a more quantitative approach that reaches more people by addressing policy makers with questionnaires, could be used. Also, a closer look needs to be taken on policy implementation itself to fill the lack of literature and develop comprehensive theoretical frameworks, on which other researchers can base their case studies.

Equality in the labour market is fundamental for the possibility to have an equal life standard for males and females similarly and enable economic independence. Establishing European interventions that promote such independence and carrying out these interventions at all levels of policy implementation is necessary. Instead of making the significance of gender equality in policy implementation dependent on the motivation of the street-level bureaucrats, the EU should take on more responsibility by making gender budgeting mandatory as a first step.

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9. Annexes

A. Interview Guide

As stated before, the guide will differ a lot, depending on the interviewee and his/her function/tasks/expertise. Moreover, the guide is in German because all the interviews are going to be conducted in German.

(1) Interview with policy maker

Thema	Fragen
Einleitung	<i>Ziel der Studie: Herausfinden, wie europäische Richtlinien das nationale policy making hinsichtlich von Gleichberechtigung der Geschlechter auf dem Arbeitsmarkt beeinflusst (Schwierigkeiten, Möglichkeiten)</i> <i>Einwilligung zur Aufnahme des Interviews</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anonym, Möglichkeit die Aufnahme zu stoppen
	Könnten Sie sich zuerst einmal vorstellen, wer Sie sind, wo Sie arbeiten und was Sie beruflich machen. Was sind die Aufgaben Ihrer Organisation? Was sind Ihre Aufgaben in der Organisation?
Die jeweilige Institution & die EU	<i>Die jeweiligen Institutionen existieren entweder direkt oder indirekt auf rechtlicher Grundlage der EU. Wie erlebt die Person den Einfluss der EU?</i> Können Sie mir beschreiben, welche Vorgaben der EU sie einhalten müssen? Wie erleben Sie diese Umsetzung? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sind die umzusetzenden Ziele und Vorgaben seitens der EU deutlich?• Erleben Sie die Aufgabenbereiche als klar eingeteilt?• Wie erleben Sie die Organisationsstruktur? Was sind die größten Herausforderungen bei der Einhaltung dieser Vorgaben? Welche Schwierigkeiten erleben Sie bei der Umsetzung? Welchen Handlungsspielraum haben Sie noch? Was würde Ihnen Ihre Arbeit erleichtern?

Gender equality als Ziel der Arbeit	<p><i>Gender equality ist ein fest verankertes Ziel der EU. Im ESF ist es sogar als Querschnittsziel definiert und soll also bei jeder Entscheidung mitbedacht werden. Wie präsent ist es in der Arbeit der lokalen policy-makers?</i></p>
	<p>Inwiefern haben Sie persönlich in Ihrem Arbeitsalltag etwas mit der Förderung von Gleichberechtigung zu tun? Erleben Sie in Ihrer Arbeit, dass die Richtlinien/Fördermittel der EU, der Gleichstellung zwischen den Geschlechtern zugutekommen?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wenn ja, wie? • Wenn nein, warum nicht? <p>Was denken Sie, könnte die EU machen, um im Rahmen der Beschäftigungsstrategie einen stärkeren Fokus auf Gleichberechtigung zu setzen?</p> <p>Was könnte das Land NRW machen, um einen stärkeren Fokus auf Gleichberechtigung zu setzen?</p>
Abschluss	<p>Gibt es sonst noch etwas, was Ihnen eingefallen ist und was Sie loswerden möchten?</p> <p>Können Sie mir weitere Personen nennen, von denen Sie denken, dass Sie hilfreich für meine Thematik sein könnten?</p>

(2) Interview with an expert

Thema	Fragen
Einleitung	<p><i>Ziel der Studie: Herausfinden, wie europäische Richtlinien das nationale policy making hinsichtlich von Gleichberechtigung der Geschlechter auf dem Arbeitsmarkt beeinflusst (Schwierigkeiten, Möglichkeiten)</i></p> <p><i>Einwilligung zur Aufnahme des Interviews</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anonym, Möglichkeit die Aufnahme zu stoppen <p>Könnten Sie sich zuerst einmal vorstellen, wer Sie sind, wo Sie arbeiten und was Sie beruflich machen.</p> <p>Was sind die Aufgaben Ihrer Organisation?</p>

	Was sind Ihre Aufgaben in der Organisation?
Die jeweilige Institution & die EU	<p><i>Die Person ist Expert*in im Bezug auf EU und Gleichberechtigung auf dem Arbeitsmarkt. Wie schätzt die Person den Einfluss der EU von einer wissenschaftlichen Perspektive aus ein?</i></p> <p>Können Sie mir beschreiben, wie die Umsetzung der Querschnittziele des ESF in Deutschland abläuft?</p> <p>Wie schätzen Sie die Richtlinien der EU ein?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sind die umzusetzenden Ziele und Vorgaben seitens der EU deutlich? • Sind sie zu frei formuliert? • Sind sie zu ambitioniert? <p>Wie erleben Sie die Umsetzung der Richtlinien?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was funktioniert gut? • Was funktioniert weniger gut? • Wie erleben Sie die Organisationsstruktur? <p>Wo sehen Sie die größten Herausforderungen bei der Einhaltung dieser Vorgaben?</p> <p>Wo sehen Sie Defizite seitens der Vorgaben der EU?</p> <p>Was würde es nationalen Akteur*innen erleichtern, ihre Arbeit umzusetzen?</p>
Gender equality als Ziel der Arbeit	<p><i>Gender equality ist ein fest verankertes Ziel der EU. Im ESF ist es sogar als Querschnittsziel definiert und soll also bei jeder Entscheidung mitbedacht werden. Wie schätzen Sie den tatsächlichen Einfluss ein?</i></p> <p>Inwiefern wird Gleichberechtigung konkret als Querschnittsziel mitbedacht?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Können Sie einige Beispiele nennen? • Inwiefern kommen Richtlinien/Fördermittel der EU, der Gleichstellung zwischen den Geschlechtern zugutekommen? <p>Was denken Sie, könnte die EU machen, um im Rahmen der Beschäftigungsstrategie einen stärkeren Fokus auf Gleichberechtigung zu setzen?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denken Sie, die aktuellen Maßnahmen sind ausreichend?

	Was könnte das Land NRW machen, um einen stärkeren Fokus auf Gleichberechtigung zu setzen?
Abschluss	Gibt es sonst noch etwas, was Ihnen eingefallen ist und was Sie loswerden möchten?
	Können Sie mir weitere Personen nennen, von denen Sie denken, dass Sie hilfreich für meine Thematik sein könnten?

B. Interview Transcripts

In this Annex, the Interview transcripts are presented. To arrange the quotations clearly, each document has a self-contained page numbering.