

# The National Implementation of EU Cohesion Policy: A Policy Instrument Approach

*A Case Study of Sweden's Implementation of EU Cohesion Policy through the European Social Fund*



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# Abstract

The EU cohesion policy is a key policy area of the Union which aims for sustainable development and socioeconomic growth in the regions of the Member States. However, in the current structure of the multi-level governance system, the EU is much reliant on the capacity of the national public administrations to execute and implement the cohesion policy and thereby achieve the intended EU policy objectives of regional development and socioeconomic growth. Yet, previous Europeanization scholarship, which has been concerned with analyzing the topic of national implementation of the cohesion policy framework, has paid little attention to investigate which enabling factors and conditions account for national public administration's capacity to implement EU cohesion policy. In light of this, the overall aim of this present study is to showcase how the theoretical concept of policy instruments can be viewed and understood as enabling factors which account for national public administration's capacity to implement EU cohesion policy, and through these instruments, achieve its intended policy objectives.

To this end, this case study analyzes the policy instruments used in Swedish implementation of the cohesion policy through the European Social Fund (ESF) which is one of the core components of the cohesion policy framework. As a part of this implementation process, the study specifically focuses on the policy instruments used to integrate a gender dimension when implementing the ESF which is an important feature of the cohesion policy implementation known as *gender mainstreaming*. Moreover, a policy instrument analysis is performed by using the NATO framework which categorizes policy instruments used for policy implementation based on four governance resources at the disposal of public authorities: **N**odality (information and knowledge resources), **A**uthority (regulatory resources), **T**reasury (financial resources) and **O**rganization (organizational resources).

Drawing from a document study and semi-structured interviews with Swedish civil servants, the results of the study reveal that the Swedish ESF implementation has adopted policy instruments stemming from all four of the NATO framework's governance dimensions. The study also concludes that the theorization on policy instruments and the NATO framework can, and should, be integrated within the Europeanization paradigm since it arguably allows for a more detailed and holistic investigation of how national public administrations can use its various governance resources and formal powers to efficiently deliver on the EU's public policy objectives at the national level

*Key words:* European Social Fund, cohesion policy implementation, policy instruments, gender mainstreaming, public administration, Europeanization, Sweden

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The Implementation of EU Cohesion Policy

The EU cohesion policy is the Union's primary investment policy aiming to reduce economic, social and territorial disparities between the Member States and their regions, hence contributing to an overall harmonious development in the process of European integration (Bouvet & Dall'erba, 2010). By aiming to reduce economic and social disparities, the overall objective of the cohesion policy framework is to ensure the long-term development and socioeconomic growth of the European regions (Farole et al., 2011). Within the EU's current budget framework of 2014-2020, approximately €352 billions were allocated to the cohesion policy to finance these growth goals. This figure roughly corresponds to 33% of the EU's total budget and hence denotes the fact that the EU cohesion policy is one of the most important macroeconomic redistributive policies of the Union (Teracciano & Graziano, 2016, p. 293).

Moreover, the EU's cohesion policy is implemented and executed in the Member States by financing local and regional development projects through the three cohesion funds: The European Social Fund (ESF); the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF); and the Cohesion Fund (CF). Under the cohesion policy framework, all European regions are eligible for the funding distributed through the cohesion funds (European Commission, 2012). And furthermore, both public, private and non-profit actors at the local and regional levels can apply for EU funding from the cohesion funds to organize EU-funded projects (Pascariu & Incaltarau, 2018). Together, the cohesion funds and the development projects funded therefrom contribute to the delivery of the EU's policy targets of employment, socioeconomic growth and sustainable regional development in the Member States (European Commission, 2020). Moreover, as an investment policy, the cohesion policy funds and the financial funding channeled through them to projects in the Member States and their regions constitute the investment framework applied by the EU to reach the policy objectives of the Europe2020 strategy, which sets ambitious policy goals for sustainable development and inclusive economic growth in Europe by year 2020 (European Commission, 2010, 2012, 2015). Against this background, the EU cohesion policy is one of the most important

policy tools to promote social and economic development in the regional and local communities in the Member States.

Moreover, in the European system of multi-level governance, the EU lacks full legal authority over the policy areas and policymaking procedures which are encompassed by the cohesion policy framework (Carlsson, 2019; Carlsson & Mukhtar-Landgren, 2018). This entails that the EU is much reliant on the capacity of the Member States to effectively execute and implement the cohesion policy at the national level (Carlsson, 2020; Surubaru, 2017). This further implies that in the national implementation of the EU cohesion policy, the public administration institutions in the Member States, which are responsible for the day-to-day management of the funds, have a key role to play in the execution and implementation of the policy and hence to ensure that the EU funded projects, which are implemented within local and regional areas, effectively contribute to the intended cohesion policy objectives set out by the EU (Teracciano & Graziano, 2016).

In terms of previous EU scholarship on cohesion policy implementation, the top-down Europeanization scholarship has been the predominant paradigm to investigate the phenomenon of cohesion policy implementation at the Member State level. However, the majority of this Europeanization scholarship has been preoccupied with understanding how the national implementation of EU cohesion policy has generated different shifts and alterations in the structures of governance at the Member State level (see Bache et al., 2011 & Blom-Hansen, 2005) or to what extent national Member States have transformed, been influenced by and adapted their national policies as a reaction to the implementation of European cohesion policies (see Andreou, 2006 & Ferry & McMaster, 2013) Thus, despite the fact that national public administrations have an acknowledged and essential role in terms of executing and implementing the framework of the cohesion policy, its role in EU policy implementation have not been subjected to any significant scholarly interest within the Europeanization paradigm.

In general, subscribers of the top-down Europeanization scholarship primarily to seek to identify scope conditions under which specific factors are more likely to influence the implementation of EU policies by the Member States (Panke & Börzel, 2016). As an extension of this, the Europeanization literature have, to some extent, acknowledged that the administrative capacity of the national bureaucracies, which execute and carry out EU policies on the national arena, is an important explanatory factor in terms of explaining coherent and successful EU policy implementation on behalf of the Member States (Börzel, 2002; Börzel & Risse, 2016; Knill, 2001). Yet, within the scope of this thesis, I argue that previous top-down Europeanization literature has paid little attention to investigate the specific enabling factors and conducive conditions which

account for the national public administration's capacity to implement EU cohesion policy effectively. Thus, the aim of this study is to approach and address this research gap.

In view of these theoretical elaborations, and within the scope of the previous top-down Europeanization literature, this study introduces a new research approach and analytical framework to the study of national public administration's ability and capacity to implement the EU cohesion policy framework. In more detail, a new analytical point of departure to the study of cohesion policy implementation in the Member States is introduced by deriving a theoretical and analytical framework from the public policy and public administration scholarship. Arguably, this strand of political science research offers a rich theory on the dynamics and instruments of policy implementation which can be applied to the study of national cohesion policy implementation. Thus, by doing so, this study aims to expand the theoretical and analytical scope of enquiry within the top-down Europeanization literature on the topic of cohesion policy implementation.

## 1.2 Research Questions and Research Aims

In the setting of EU's multi-level governance structure of the cohesion policy process, public administrations at the national level have a key role in executing and implementing the policy at the national level. However, given the fact that the academic body of top-down Europeanization literature have yet to investigate the conducive conditions under which national public administrations can effectively implement the cohesion policy, and thereby achieve the EU's intended policy objectives of socioeconomic growth and regional development, this study turns to the public administration literature to increase the understanding of the Member States implementation capacity. Within this strand of political science research, the theoretical concept of *policy instruments* is central to the study of public administration's capacity to engage in policy implementation. In more detail, the public policy and the public administration literature emphasizes that the examination and analysis of the adopted policy instruments or "governance instruments", (i.e., measures which are deployed by public administrations in the specific purpose of policy implementation and hence to achieve the intended policy objectives), are key determinants to understand the capacity of governments and public administration's ability to effectively execute and implement policies (Pierre et al., 2001). Therefore, in order to address this research gap and expand on the analytical scope of the Europeanization literature, this study addresses the following research question:



## **How can policy instruments be viewed and understood as enabling factors which account for a national public administration's capacity to implement EU cohesion policy?**

In light of this, the overall aim of this study is to provide a better understanding of how the Member States public administrations can deploy a certain set of policy instruments and draw from various governance resources in order to effectively implement the EU cohesion policy and ultimately deliver on the intended policy objectives of the EU. Subsequently, by adopting this analytical point of departure to this research enquiry, this study aims to make a theoretical contribution to the top-down Europeanization literature which have previously stressed the capacity of national public administrations as an important explanatory factor which accounts for the Member States' ability to execute and "download" supranational EU policy (Börzel, 2002, 2012; Börzel & Risse, 2005, 2016; Knill & Lehmkuhl, 2002). In light of this, I make the argument that in the previous literature and theories related to top-down Europeanization, the roles of the policy instruments deployed by public administrations to implement EU policies, have been largely overlooked as an important aspect which accounts for Member States ability to implement EU cohesion policy. Therefore, this study attempts to show how the public policy and the public administration's literature on policy instruments can be utilized to identify the scope conditions conducive to EU policy implementation at the national level. Thus, in this regard, an instrument-based research approach is motivated by the fact that it allows for further investigation of the capacity of a national administration "to make and implement policy" (Pierre et al., 2001, p. 42). In addition to this, by introducing a theoretical and analytical framework which draws from the public policy and public administration literature, and applying it to the study of the EU cohesion policy implementation, this study aims to show how the analytical scope of the top-down Europeanization literature can be expanded and widened by drawing from the public administration literature on policy instruments when studying the conducive conditions and enabling factors for EU policy implementation in the Member States.

### **1.3 Gender Mainstreaming in EU Cohesion Policy Implementation**

The subject of cohesion policy implementation is a vast research field which could be studied from various points of departure and from different analytical point of views. In order to answer the research question which has been proposed for this thesis, I have chosen to narrow the scope of the study by focusing on the national public administration's capacity to implement a certain

aspect and dimension of the cohesion policy framework: the integration of a gender equality dimension into the design and implementation of the EU cohesion policy at the national level. Moreover, integrating a gender dimension into the process of policy implementation is an internationally acknowledged policy strategy towards realizing gender equality which is known as *gender mainstreaming* (Hafner-Burton & Pollack, 2002). In more detail, adopting gender mainstreaming as a policy strategy at the EU level, is intended to create gender-responsive EU policies that effectively address and remedy gender-linked inequalities that persist in certain key policy fields of the EU (Ibid.). Thus, as a policy measure, gender mainstreaming has been defined as *“the re-organization, improvement and development of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated into all policies at all levels and at all stages, by actors normally involved in policymaking”* (Hafner-Burton & Pollack 2009, p.3),

As previously mentioned, the two main objectives of the cohesion policy are to ensure the long-term development of the European regions and to reduce economic and social disparities which persists between the Member States. To this end, the European Commission has acknowledged that the promotion of gender equality and using gender mainstreaming as a policy strategy to overcome gender inequalities within the policy fields encompassed by the cohesion policy, is crucial to secure socio-economic development and to materialize the policy objectives of sustainable development in the Europe 2020 strategy (Dauvellier et al., 2016). Due to this, as the cohesion funds are the EU’s main financial tools to foster regional development and socio-economic growth, they have also become acknowledged as an important resource in promoting gender equality and supporting the Member States to achieve progress towards gender equality and thereby secure sustainable regional growth (Carlsson, 2019, 2020). Because of this, the European Commission has made it mandatory for the Member States to promote gender equality as a horizontal policy objective in the implementation of the cohesion policy at the national level and hence for the projects which receive EU funding from the cohesion funds. Moreover, the Commission has consolidated gender mainstreaming as an important feature of the Member States cohesion policy implementation by establishing the following wording in the legal framework which outlines the conditions for the Member States’ implementation of the cohesion funds:

Member States shall ensure that equality between men and women and the integration of gender perspective are taken into account and promoted throughout the preparation and implementation of the cohesion policy [...]<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.

Moreover, within the framework of cohesion policy, the importance of increased gender equality and gender mainstreaming has been specifically emphasized with regards to the policy area of employment and labor market participation within the EU (Dauvellier et al.; Liebert, 2002). This policy area is encompassed by the EU's cohesion policy framework through the Member States implementation of the European Social Fund (ESF) which provides funding for projects that support access to the labor market for EU citizens (Carlsson & Mukhtar-Landgren, 2018). Under the cohesion policy framework, the aim of the ESF is to contribute to socioeconomic development in the regions by providing funding to public, private and non-profit actors which organize labor market-related projects to support access the labor market and provides opportunities for employment for EU citizens (Carlsson, 2020).

Against this background, the Commissions argues that the integration of a gender dimension in the Member States implementation of the ESF, and thus within the scope of the cohesion policy, is crucial to secure the long-term development of the regions (European Parliament, 2016b). The reason being that a considerable gender gap persists in the European labor market, which is considered an obstacle to ensure long-term economic growth and socioeconomic development in the Member States and the regions (Carlsson, 2020). For example, there is currently a considerable gender gap with regards to labor market activity and pay equality between men and women where the current gender employment gap in the European labor market is 11,6 %. As it is assumed that increased labor market participation by women and the formal participation of women in the EU economy will have a significant positive impact on sustainable economic growth in the European regions (EIGE, 2016, 2017), the integration of a gender dimension in the ESF implementation is an important policy measure for addressing gender inequalities in the European economy and labor market. To this end, the integration of a gender dimension by means of gender mainstreaming, is an important measure in the context of the cohesion policy implementation which ensures that the ESF funding is distributed and implemented by the Member States in such a way that women's labor market participation is addressed and supported (EIGE, 2017).

Against this backdrop, the failure to overcome gender disparities in the European labor market implies that the cohesion policy's objectives of growth and socioeconomic development in the regions cannot be fully achieved (European Parliament, 2018). Hence, in the pursuit of socioeconomic development across the European regions, the integration of a gender dimension is a core feature in the national public administration's implementation of the ESF and the cohesion policy. Because of this, and in light of the research question to be addressed in this study,

I have specifically chosen to focus the scope of enquiry on the national public administration's ability to engage in gender mainstreaming in the context of the ESF implementation and thereby achieve the intended EU policy goals of increased gender equality in the pursuit of regional development and socioeconomic growth. Hence, I argue that gender mainstreaming is an important feature of the implementation process which can be viewed as a specific "case of" cohesion policy implementation. Arguably, by narrowing the scope of research in this way, this allows for further investigation of the national public administration's capacity to implement EU cohesion policy and thereby achieve the EU's policy objective of increased gender equality within the European labor market.

Against this background, and in light of the research question which is to be addressed in this study, I will specifically investigate the policy instruments deployed at the national level to integrate a gender dimension in the ESF implementation and thus create a gender-responsive policy implementation of the cohesion policy framework.

## 1.4 Implementing the ESF & Cohesion Policy in Sweden

As the overall aim of this study is to further the knowledge of the preconditions and the conducive conditions under which national public administrations can implement EU cohesion policy, I have chosen to study Sweden as the main unit of analysis for this thesis. The reason for this being that Sweden, within the Europeanization scholarship, has been held up as an example of a Member State that is, overall, a successful "downloader", "taker" and implementer of EU policy, mainly due to its efficient public administration (Börzel & Risse, 2012). In parallel with this, Sweden has also been regarded as a Member State that has been notably successful in enforcing the EU's policy measure of gender mainstreaming in the context of the EU's cohesion policy and ESF implementation (Carlsson, 2019; Dauvellier et al.). In particular, several studies and evaluations have shown that the Swedish public authorities responsible for managing the ESF implementation have successfully managed to integrate a gender dimension in all of the stages of the domestic cohesion policy cycle, ranging from policy formulation to implementation (*Ibid.*).

As an extension of this, and considering that gender mainstreaming in EU cohesion policy implementation is manifested within administrative processes at the national level, the aim of this thesis is to investigate and explain how the Swedish public administration have managed to turn gender mainstreaming into an implementation practice in the context of implementing the ESF and the cohesion policy framework at the national level. To this end, I specifically investigate the

policy instruments deployed by the Swedish public administration to integrate a gender dimension as a part of the ESF implementation process. Hence, by studying Sweden's implementation of the ESF, with a particular focus on the instruments used for the integration of a gender dimension in the ESF implementation phase, I argue that this can provide more insights on how policy instruments can be viewed as enabling factors which account for a national public administration's capacity to implement EU cohesion policy and hence achieve the intended policy objective of increased gender equality within the framework of the cohesion policy.

### ***The Swedish National ESF Administration & Gender Mainstreaming***

Moreover, the public administration body and government agency that is responsible for implementing the ESF funding at the national level in Sweden is the Swedish ESF Council (*Svenska ESF-rådet*). This means that the ESF Council is responsible for enforcing the strategy of gender mainstreaming in the everyday management of the allocation of project funding through the ESF. As a governmental authority in Sweden, the Swedish ESF Council falls under the authority of the Ministry of Labor. The Swedish ESF Council has several management and organizational levels, consisting of a head office based in Stockholm and eight regional offices in the administrative provinces of Sweden<sup>2</sup>. Through these offices, public, private and non-profit entities can apply for funding to organize employment-related projects aimed at increasing labor market mobility and participation in the labor market for EU citizens in their regional and local communities. In addition, each regional ESF offices has its own personnel and policy officers, who are responsible for the administration of project applications for funding by the ESF (Mukhtar-Landgren & Fred, 2019).

Furthermore, all of the projects that are granted project funding through the ESF have to contribute to the following two key investment program areas of the ESF<sup>3</sup>: 1) *skills development*, for which ESF funding is provided by the ESF Council to projects that address skills development and competence development for EU citizens in Sweden to enter the labor market; and 2) *improved transitions to employment*, which is a funding program through which the ESF Council provides funding to projects that aim to improve employment opportunities for the long-term unemployed, newly arrived migrants, and persons who are on long-term sick leave (ESF Council, 2016). In light of this, the Swedish ESF Council and the various subnational actors that apply for ESF project

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.esf.se/Sidhuvud/The-swedish-ESF-council/> [2020-03-11]. Furthermore, the regional ESF offices are located in Luleå (serving Övre Norrland), Östersund (Mellersta Norrland), Gävle (Norra Mellansverige), Stockholm (Stockholms län), Örebro (Östra Mellansverige), Jönköping (Småland och öarna), Göteborg (Västra Götalands och Hallands län), and Malmö (Sydsverige).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.esf.se/Vara-fonder/Socialfonden1/Overgripande-information-om-socialfondsprogrammet/Programomraden/> [2020-03-11].

funding are the main implementing policy actors and policy addressees of the cohesion policy at the national level. With regards to gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the ESF, the ESF Council is the public administration body that is responsible for ensuring that the ESF projects that receive public funding within the scope of the two key ESF investment programs, incorporate a gender dimension into their projects as a part of the cohesion policy implementation (ESF Council, 2014).

## 1.5 Literature Review

This case study looks at the Swedish case as an example of EU cohesion implementation, albeit with specific attention paid gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to provide an overview of the main branches of research pertaining to the field of EU cohesion policy and its implementation in the EU's multi-level system of policymaking. As previously mentioned in the introduction, academics within the top-down Europeanization paradigm have studied the field of multi-level governance and national implementation of EU cohesion policy from different analytical angles and points of entry. In summary, the scholarly interest in this field and the previous literature produced on the topic can be categorized into thematic areas of research concerned with the impacts of EU cohesion policy on: (i) existing governance structures in the Member States that result from the EU introducing the so-called partnership principle; (ii) the processes of regionalization and the organization of local-level governance in the Member States; and (iii) Member States' labor market policies and regional development policies manifested through mechanisms of Europeanization.

Several scholarly studies have looked at the ways in which the implementation of EU cohesion policy has generated different shifts and alterations in the structures of governance at the Member State level. The seminal work was carried out by Lisbet Hooghe and Gary Marks (2001, 2004), who conceptualized the multi-level governance (MLG) framework, which was originally developed through the study of cohesion policy implementation and the cohesion funds at the EU level. Hooghe and Marks (2001 & 2004) specifically take into account the implications of the so-called partnership principle, which was introduced by the European Commission (EC) to include sub-national actors and interest groups in the implementation and decision-making related to the cohesion policy and the cohesion funds. The concept of the MLG framework is built on the idea that the partnership principle has empowered subnational governments and interest groups at the expense of the nation states, thereby weakening the "state-centric mode of governance" in the

realm of cohesion policy and regional development (Bache et al., 2011; Blom-Hansen, 2005; Marks, 1992; Marks & Hooghe, 2004; Pentland & Hooghe, 1997). Moreover, this reallocation of power and the formal invitation of subnational governments and interest groups to participate in the policymaking process have allowed the EC to circumvent the national governments in the context of European integration (*Ibid.*). However, criticism has been leveled at the MLG-school in this regard, with scholars contesting the notion that the partnership principle has yielded a different structure of governance in favor of regional governments in the Member States. For example, Blom-Hansen and Yesilkagit (2007) and Bachtler and Mendez (2007) have challenged the concept of the MLG framework and have argued that some Member States have been able to “absorb” EU cohesion policy within existing implementation structures, resulting in central governments having full control over the implementation and reallocation of EU funding. The MLG thesis has also been criticized in the belief that only the stronger regions, i.e., those with effective administrative and institutional capacities, appear to have benefited from the new modes of policymaking that the EU cohesion policy has introduced in the system of MLG (Bailey & De Propris, 2002; Cappelen et al., 2003).

Apart from the shifts in power dynamics that occur between institutional actors in the EU’s system of multi-level policymaking, there has also been interest in how Member States have adapted their labor market policies and regional development policies as a result of the EU cohesion policy now operating in these areas which have traditionally belonged in the realm of domestic policymaking. The main questions of interest within this field, is to what extent national Member States have transformed, been influenced by and adapted their policies as a reaction to the implementation of European cohesion policies. In this context, scholars have found significant evidence that the domestic policies of the Member States have indeed been subjected to Europeanization in the sense that EU incentives, policy objectives, norms, practices and discourses have become deeply embedded in national policies at both the local and regional levels (Andreou, 2006; Ferry & McMaster, 2013; Hudson & Rönnblom, 2007; Scherpereel, 2010).

Against this backdrop, within the field of EU cohesion policy implementation, little emphasis has been placed to date on the specific policy instruments and governance resources that national public administrations in the Member States can deploy to implement the cohesion policy and ultimately deliver on the intended EU policy objectives of regional development. Thus, instrument-based research studies can contribute to the theoretical understanding within the Europeanization scholarship and furthermore and provide an analytical framework to study the factors and policy measures which enable the Member States to implement the policy effectively at the domestic level.

## 1.6 Thesis Outline

This thesis is organized as follows. First, the theoretical and conceptual framework developed for the empirical analysis is presented. Here, the previous the public administration's literature and theorization on policy instruments used for policy implementation is specifically considered. Second, this is followed by a discussion of the methodological choices and underpinnings of this study. Finally, the results of the study are presented along with recommendations as to future directions for research on topics within this field.



## 2 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

As previously mentioned, the Europeanization literature has stressed the capacity of national public administrations as an important explanatory factor which account for the Member States' ability to execute and implement supranational EU policy (Börzel, 2002, 2012; Börzel & Risse, 2005, 2016; Knill & Lehmkuhl, 2002). In this context, however, the Europeanization literature has paid little attention to increase the understanding of the specific enabling factors and conducive conditions which accounts for the national administration's capacity to implement EU policy effectively at the national level. In light of this research gap, this chapter introduces a theoretical framework drawn from the public policy and public administration literature which arguably offers a rich theory and analytical framework which can be applied to answer the research question of this study. In this context, the public policy and the public administration scholarship argues that the ability and capacity of public administrations to implement public policy can be explained by examining the various policy instruments and governance resources which exists at their disposal. In this setting, policy instruments or "governance instruments" are key determinants to understand the capacity of governments and public administration's ability to effectively execute and implement public policies (McCormick & Vedung, 2019; Pierre et al., 2001).

Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to present and further explain the theorization on *policy instruments* which is the core theoretical concept which will be used in the empirical analysis of this study. Subsequently, the analytical framework which will be applied to the empirical analysis will be presented; in the setting of this thesis, the NATO framework for analyzing policy instruments used for policy implementation, presented by Hood and Margetts (2007), will be used to analyze how Sweden's public administration has enforced gender mainstreaming in the national ESF implementation.

### 2.1 Policy Instruments and Policy Implementation

According to the theorization within the public administration literature, public policies are "made and pursue their goals through policy instruments" (Capano & Howlett, 2020, p. 5). More specifically, scholars define policy instruments as the various governance resources which represent different ways in which government authorities and public administrations can mobilize

change in the implementing policy actors' behavior to "get people to do things that they might not otherwise do; or it enables people to do things they might not have done otherwise" (Ingram 1990, p.513). Policy instruments, in this regard, are thus understood as the tools used by governments to pursue a desired policy outcome (Pierre et al., 2001), as well as the techniques and resources public authorities and public administrations have at their disposal to achieve its public policy goals through policy implementation (Bemelmans-Videc et al., 2010) Hence, policy instruments, in this context, are also understood in the public administration literature as the tools and techniques through which government authorities can use their various governance resources to generate societal change when implementing public policy objectives (Bemelmans-Videc et al., 2010; Eliadis et al., 2005; M Howlett, 1991; Kassim & Le Galès, 2010; Lascoumes & Le Gales, 2007; McCormick & Vedung, 2019).

Moreover, the theoretical concepts of policy instruments and policy implementation are inherently interlinked in the public administration literature since the process of policy implementation is understood as "the use of [policy] instruments [...] that allow government policy to be made material and operational" (Kassim & Le Galès, 2010, p. 324). As an extension of this, these definitions of public policy instruments adopt an instrumental and functionalist view on policy instruments and policy implementation since the assumption is that public administrations derive a set of policy instruments, (which are subsequently directed towards the relevant policy actors involved in the policy implementation process), which have the highest probability of achieving the desired policy outcome (Howlett, 1991). Thus, applying the theoretical notion of policy instruments to the study of policy implementation, it implies the investigation of how public administrations use policy instruments to influence and affect the targeted policy actor's behaviors and how the deployed instruments affect these policy actor's capacity to achieve the desired public policy objectives in the process of policy implementation (Kassim & Le Galès, 2010).

Hence, by drawing from the public administration literature on policy instruments and applying an instrument-based research approach to the topic of this study, this implies that the study of gender mainstreaming involves the analysis of the various policy instruments which can be used by public administration's to integrate a gender dimension into the policymaking process to ensure that gender equality policy objectives are achieved through the policy implementation process (Halpern, Jacquot, & Le Galés, 2008). Moreover, in the setting of mainstreaming a gender dimension into policymaking and policy implementation processes, these policy instruments are furthermore understood in the literature as the means through which public authorities operationalize a gender mainstreaming strategy when implementing policy (Halpern, Jacquot, & Le Galès, 2008). Subsequently, in a more technical sense, these policy instruments are employed

by public authorities to ensure “the incorporation of a gender equality perspective into all policies, at all levels and at all stages by actors normally involved in policy-making” (Woodward, 2003).

## 2.2 The Policy Instruments of Gender Mainstreaming: An Analytical Framework

As understood in the context of this study, gender mainstreaming entails that public authorities, which are responsible for implementing public policy, must deploy a certain set of policy instruments to ensure that a gender equality perspective is integrated by the policy actors and stakeholders who participate in the policy implementation process. Against this background, this section will present the NATO framework as an analytical framework and its relevance in analyzing policy instruments used for gender mainstreaming and the integration of a gender dimension in the Swedish ESF implementation. In more detail, the NATO scheme draws upon the public administration literature and is a generic framework that categorizes the policy instruments and governance techniques of public authorities when engaging in policy implementation based on the following four resources at the disposal of governments and public authorities: **Nodality** (informational and knowledge resources); **Authority** (regulatory resources); **Treasury** (financial resources); and **Organization** (organizational resources). Finally, for the sake of clarity, the four dimensions of the NATO scheme represent specific techniques of governance that are subsequently operationalized by means of a specific set of policy instruments. Thus, each of the four governance techniques represented in the NATO scheme represent their own governance logic and resources, which are subsequently materialized into different sets of policy instruments that can be applied by public administrations to achieve the desired policy outcome (Knill & Tosun, 2012). In comparison to other typologies and classification schemes for policy instruments within the public administration literature, the NATO framework offers a broader set of governance dimensions from which policy instruments can be categorized and analyzed. For this reason, I chose the NATO typology as the main analytical framework for this study since it would provide opportunities for a more detailed and nuanced empirical analysis of policy instruments and policy implementation.

Moreover, the NATO framework will be presented on the basis of previous EU governance literature which have theorized on a certain set of measures (understood in this context as policy instruments and governance resources) which can be used by public authorities when engaging in gender mainstreaming in the context of EU policy implementation at the national level.

Furthermore, in combination with the literature on the multi-level governance of the EU cohesion policy, this section will make the argument that the NATO framework captures important features of the policy tools and instruments which can be deployed by public authorities to integrate a gender equality perspective in the ESF implementation in the national cohesion policy making process. To this end, I make the argument that the NATO scheme can serve as a fruitful analytical framework to gain a deeper understanding of the policy instruments deployed in the purpose of gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation in Sweden.

### 2.2.1 Nodality: Informational and Knowledge Instruments

In the NATO framework, Nodality signifies a type of governance technique that reflects the ability of public authorities to disseminate information and, thereby, increase knowledge as a way to influence policy actors' behaviors towards the desired policy outcomes (Hood & Margetts, 2007; Vabo & Røiseland, 2012). In this context, the NATO framework emphasizes that an important governance resource of public authorities is their access to information and expert knowledge, which can be used strategically to influence behaviors towards the actors subjected to governance (Knill & Tosun 2012, p.23). Moreover, the NATO model contends that public authorities also occupy a strategic position for spreading this information and, thereby, increase the knowledge levels of societal actors (*Ibid.*). This gives rise to a central "position of nodality" (which refers to the strategic position of a node within a network) for public authorities to spread knowledge and information as a form of governance to the targeted societal actors. In a similar manner, other scholars have designated this Nodality-based governance technique as "knowledge governance", as the production and dissemination of knowledge and information are central to directing policy actors' behaviors towards the desired goals and outcomes (Hirsa, 2007; Stehr, 2018). Typical examples of Nodality-based policy instruments based on information and knowledge as the primary governance resources are the publication of data and statistics, educational material, and information campaigns (Knill & Tosun 2012, p.23-24). The common denominator of these Nodality instruments is that they are based on an indirect governance logic through which they attempt to alter actors' behaviors by increasing their body of knowledge through information and education (*Ibid.*).

When attempting to mainstream a gender perspective in the implementation of EU public policy, the previous literature on EU governance stresses that the policy actors and stakeholders usually involved in the mainstreaming process within the implementation of a policy domain typically have little knowledge of issues of gender equality or how it is supposed to be integrated into the

policy area (Mergaert 2012, p.47; Woodward, 2003). Thus, in order to mainstream gender equality effectively in the implementation of the relevant policy field, public authorities must equip these actors and stakeholders with knowledge, information, skills and training that will enable the policy-implementing actors to perform their gender mainstreaming responsibilities within the policymaking process (Booth & Bennett, 2002; Jacquot, 2010; Liebert, 2002; Rittenhofer & Gatrell, 2012; Woehl, 2011). Indeed, as scholars have emphasized, a condition that is conducive to successful implementation of gender mainstreaming is increased knowledge of gender equality issues among policymaking actors who are not considered to have specific expertise in the gender equality field (Lombardo et al., 2017). In this context, a possible governance resource at the disposal of public authorities is to exploit its “nodality position” so as to transfer information and knowledge to the policy actors involved in the gender mainstreaming process when implementing EU policy in the Member States.

**Table 1:** *Nodality, Authority, Treasury and Organization as governance techniques in the NATO-framework.*

<b>Governance Components</b>	<b>Nodality</b>	<b>Authority</b>	<b>Treasury</b>	<b>Organization</b>
<b>Basic Resources</b>	Information & Knowledge	Command & Control	Money	Organizational structures and material capacities
<b>Governance Logic</b>	Stimulate change in actor behavior indirectly through dissemination of information and knowledge	Direct prescription of binding behavioral rules and requirements	Indirect stimulation of changes in actor behaviors by providing financial incentives	Reliance on formal organizational structures and material resources of public authorities to achieve policy objectives
<b>Typical Policy Instruments</b>	Publication of data and statistics, education and information material	Hierarchically prescribed rules and requirements involving penalties if non-compliant	Financial grants, tax subsidies	Provisioning of staff/personnel or equipment

Source: Hood & Margetts (2007) and Knill & Tosun (2012).

## 2.2.2 Authority: Regulatory Instruments

### ***“Hard” incentives for gender mainstreaming in policymaking and policy implementation***

The governance technique based on Authority is according to Hoods and Margetts (2007) based on public authorities being able to “command and control” the targeted policy actors involved in the policy implementation process. As such, an Authority-based governance technique typically involves the application of regulatory policy instruments through which the public authority “*hierarchically prescribes requirements that must be fulfilled by the regulatees, with failures to comply usually involving penalties*” (Knill & Tosun 2012, p. 23). Thus, the fundamental characteristic of these regulatory instruments, and the inherent governance logic they manifest, is that they aim to engage directly in behavioral changes by controlling and limiting the room to maneuver through the provision of “hard” incentives for compliance with the prescribed requirements and rules (Knill & Lehmkuhl, 2002).

Conversely, in the EU governance literature regarding the instruments commonly used for gender mainstreaming in European policymaking processes, (Mark A. Pollack & Hafner-Burton, 2000; Rees, 2005), it has been theorized that the gender mainstreaming process can exhibit an Authority-based governance technique by public authorities setting up a “*set of precise, binding and enforceable rules*” towards the policy actors who are engaging in the gender mainstreaming implementation process (Hafner-Burton & Pollack 2009, p.5). Thus, these rules and requirements allow public authorities to enforce more coercive actions with regards to steering and governing the policy actors involved in the gender mainstreaming implementation chain (Pollack & Hafner-Burton, 2010)..

## 2.2.3 Treasury: Financial Instruments

In the NATO typology of policy instruments, governance through Treasury entails using financial incentives to induce a certain behavior by societal policy actors which are targeted in the policy implementation process. A prominent Treasury-based instrument commonly adopted by government authorities can be a government grant or tax subsidy (Knill & Tosun 2012, p.24-25). In the context of ESF implementation within the cohesion policy, the project funding made available to local and regional actors in Sweden, which can subsequently use the ESF grants to organize projects, is a typical example of a financial instrument used by the EU to achieve its policy objectives in a multi-level governance setting (Carlsson & Mukhtar-Landgren, 2018;

Mukhtar-Landgren & Fred, 2019). However, in this regard, the national ESF administration sets the overall investment framework for the project funding, which means that it sets the direction for the EU policy targets with regards to employment, to be achieved by distributing and allocating the ESF funding at the national level (Carlsson, 2020; Mukhtar-Landgren & Fred, 2019). Nonetheless, few Member States have allocated ESF funding at the national level to address specifically gender-equality policy issues in the context of increased employment and labor market participation (European Parliament, 2016a).

Moreover, according to the EU regulations on gender mainstreaming within the cohesion policy implementation (nr. 1304/2013), each Member State is encouraged to set aside a part of the funding channeled through the ESF to fund local and regional projects that support increased gender equality between men and women with regards to employment and equal access to the labor market (Swedish ESF Council 2014, p. 180). Against this background, allocating ESF funding at the national level, with the specific objective of stimulating national policy actors to organize ESF projects that are designed to increase gender equality between women and men in terms of employment and labor market participation, I argue can be seen as an important treasury-based financial instrument for gender mainstreaming in the national ESF policy process. Therefore, a specific focus of the empirical analysis of this study is examining how the Swedish ESF Council has used project funding from the ESF as a financial policy instrument to foster gender equality in the contexts of employment and the labor market.

#### 2.2.4 Organization: Organizational Instruments

The organizational governance aspect of the NATO typology refers to “*the reliance on formal organizational structures in order to achieve policy objectives*” (Knill & Tosun 2012, p.25). As a governance technique, the organizational technique refers to the capacities and capabilities of public authorities to achieve policy objectives by means of their own material resources. This involves, for example, providing an individual set of skills, the provisioning of staff, properties, premises and equipment, and it indicates the ability of government authorities to act and achieve policy goals through their own material resources (Mukhtar-Landgren et al., 2019; Vabo & Røiseland 2012, p.12).

In the context of gender mainstreaming in EU policy implementation, previous studies have emphasized that an important organizational instrument and resource of public authorities is to

appoint specific gender experts and gender equality-trained civil servants at different levels of the public administration unit responsible for gender mainstreaming implementation in a specific policy area (Meier & Celis, 2011; Woodward, 2003). These gender-trained officials and personnel, who are appointed on the basis of their specific expertise with gender issues, are used in the gender mainstreaming process as “gender-focal points”. They provide support and resources to the actors involved in the gender mainstreaming process (*Ibid.*). According to several studies, having a high degree of gender expertise in-house, among civil servants and the staff of a government authority, is an important organizational resource, as usually the actors involved in the bureaucratic mainstreaming implementation have a low level of gender expertise (Meier & Celis, 2011; Woodward, 2003). Therefore, the participation of gender experts is a key factor in ensuring that the policymaking process is based on good knowledge of gender equality (Lombardo et al., 2017).

Moreover, in the context of implementing EU cohesion policy through the cohesion funds, evaluations conducted by EU agencies have shown that gender mainstreaming can be ably supported by having gender expertise present within the public institution that is responsible for implementing the gender mainstreaming strategy in various policy domains (Dauvellier et al., 2016). In light of this, and in line with the NATO framework, gender expertise can be used as an organizational resource within public institutions to coordinate, support, and supervise the gender mainstreaming implementation process in the process of policy implementation (Jacquot 2010, p. 124).

### 2.3 Using the NATO Typology for Policy Instrument Analysis

To summarize, the NATO model, as applied in this thesis, presents a conceptual and theoretical framework to analyze the policy instruments which the Swedish public administration (i.e. the ESF Council in this case) can deploy to enforce gender mainstreaming in the context of the ESF implementation. In light of this, the Swedish ESF Council and the various subnational actors that apply for ESF project funding, are understood as the main implementing policy actors and policy addressees of the cohesion policy at the national level. With regards to enforcing gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the ESF, the ESF Council is the public administration body that is responsible for ensuring that the ESF projects that receive public funding from the ESF, incorporate a gender dimension into their projects as a part of enforcing gender mainstreaming in the cohesion policy implementation (ESF Council, 2014). In light of this, I will apply the NATO framework in order to analyze the policy instruments which are used by the ESF



Council to ensure that the ESF projects integrates a gender dimension when organizing and managing ESF projects in the regional areas of Sweden.

In conclusion, the Nodality-based policy instruments used for the purpose of gender mainstreaming, can be understood as a “soft” policy instrument which provides the necessary knowledge and information towards the policy actors involved in the ESF implementation. In contrast, authority-based policy instruments in the shape of precise and binding rules and requirements, aim to govern the implementing actors by providing “hard” and coercive incentives to integrate a gender equality perspective in the implementation process. The treasury-based governance technique for gender mainstreaming, understood in the ESF implementation setting, would entail that Swedish public authorities has allocated project funding in the purpose of furthering gender equality between men and women in the Swedish labor market. And finally, the organizational instruments entail a further investigation of the organizational structures in terms of staff expertise which are used in order to facilitate gender mainstreaming in the process of implementing the ESF.

## 3 Research Design & Methodology

### 3.1 Qualitative Case Study Design

In order to analyze the policy instruments used to enforce gender mainstreaming in the Swedish implementation of the ESF, this study applies a single qualitative case-study approach as its overall research design. Qualitative methodologists argue that the single case-study methodology is a preferable choice when the main objective of the research objective is to provide a detailed and in-depth understanding or description of certain processes or another empirical phenomenon. Furthermore, the qualitative case-study approach is also relevant to apply in a research setting in which the variables of interest are not quantifiable (Levy, 2008; Ridder, 2017). More specifically, scholars argue that the relevance of a single case-study can be identified when: “[t]he aim is to describe, explain, interpret, and/or understand a single case in itself rather than as a vehicle for developing broader theoretical generalizations (Levy 2008, p.4). Against this background, I argue that a qualitative single case-study approach is the preferable methodological choice with regards to the research aim of this study since it allows for a more detailed and in-depth investigation of the policy implementation process and the policy instruments deployed as a part of this process.

Moreover, scholars differ between two sub-sets of case studies: idiographic case studies which use a theoretical framework pointing out the specific theoretical aspects to be the focus of attention in the case. The case is subsequently analyzed and understood in light of the theoretical framework as an end in itself (Esaïsson et al., 2012, p. 41). In contrast to the theory-guided idiographic case studies, hypothesis-testing case studies usually studies one or more cases in order to draw more generalizable conclusions across cases and beyond the data collected in the specific cases. Specifically, political scientists argue that the hypotheses testing “crucial case studies” using the most or the least likely case design when comparing cases, provide a strong basis for theory construction (Esaïsson et al., 2012,p. 114-117; Levy, 2008). Considering that the research objective of this case study is descriptive in nature, aiming to understand the process of gender mainstreaming by looking at the certain policy instruments and techniques of governance, this thesis adopts a theory-guided idiographic case study methodology primarily using qualitative means for data collection. In accordance with the above-mentioned methodological discussion,

the thesis is hence guided by the theoretical framework of the NATO framework derived from the public administration literature in order to understanding the conducive conditions for gender mainstreaming by looking at the specific policy instruments deployed for this purpose.

### 3.2 Qualitative Sampling Strategy for Case Selection

Sampling strategies used for case selection in qualitative research entail choosing a subset of the population from which the empirical data are to be collected (Shakir, 2002). In qualitative case-study research, certain sampling strategies can be employed by the researcher when selecting single cases from the broader population of cases that can be studied in the relevant field of interest. For this thesis, Sweden, as a Member State of the EU, has been chosen as the main unit of analysis using an intensity sampling strategy.

The intensive sampling strategy entails that the researcher looks at a broader set of the population (in this context, the populations of EU Member States that are obliged to engage in gender mainstreaming in the subnational implementation of the ESF), and specifies a case in which the phenomenon of interest is manifested intensively (i.e., a Member State that has developed a set of policy instruments and procedures used for gender mainstreaming and manifests this in the ESF management), thereby providing valuable information on the phenomenon to be studied (Knafl 1991, p.182-183; Shakir, 2002). However, this sampling method presupposes that the researcher has some knowledge regarding the variation of the phenomenon of interest in the population of cases that can be studied (*Ibid.*). Against this background, the main argument for choosing Sweden as an “intensive case” (i.e., one that, arguably, intensively manifests the procedures and instruments used for gender mainstreaming) is that comparative assessments made at the EU level frequently show that Sweden is one of the Member States that have developed a strong set of procedures and instruments to support gender mainstreaming implementation in all aspects of the national ESF policy process (Dauvellier et al., 2016). In addition to Sweden, Spain is highlighted in the literature as one of the Member States that have been successful in terms of gender mainstreaming implementation, so it could have also been an option for this study (Carlsson, 2019). However, bearing in mind that my knowledge of the Spanish language is limited (whereas Swedish is my mother tongue), these factors were taken into account when choosing Sweden as the subject for the analysis in this study

### 3.3 Data Collection and Empirical Material

In order to analyze the policy instruments used for gender mainstreaming and the integration of a gender dimension in the national ESF implementation process, the qualitative data for this study were derived from two main sources: key-informant interviews with public officials employed at the various regional offices of the ESF Council in Sweden; and a structured policy document analysis. As a first step of the data collection process, a policy document analysis was performed. The purpose of this analysis was to map out strategically the policy instruments used for gender mainstreaming on the basis of the theoretical NATO framework. After the policy document analysis, 12 interviews were conducted with public officials (hereinafter referred to as “ESF policy officers”) employed at the various regional ESF offices in Sweden. In the interviews, I attempted to gain a better understanding of how the ESF Council has used these policy instruments (which were found in the policy document analysis) to ensure effective enforcement of gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation. Furthermore, the following section provides a more detailed account of how the policy document analysis and the interviews were conducted.

#### 3.3.1 Policy Document Analysis

According to Bowen (2009, p. 28), a policy document analysis used as a qualitative research methodology involves a “*systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents- both printed and electronic (computer-based and internet-transmitted)*”. Since the aim of this study is to categorize and identify policy instruments, and through this process provide an increased understanding of the ESF implementation as an empirical phenomenon, I argue that document analysis functions as a suitable research method. As an extension of this, a document study has been emphasized as particularly applicable in a single qualitative case study design as it provides opportunities for “rich description of a single phenomenon” (Bowen 2009, p.29). Thus, arguably, by analyzing the formal policy documents produced by the ESF Council, which further describes the formal implementation procedures of the ESF in Sweden (with regards to the integration of a gender dimension), it is possible to provide a detailed description of the various policy instruments adopted in this implementation process and hence to achieve the intended EU policy objectives in Sweden.

In more detail, a document analysis is usually used in combination with other qualitative means of data collection, for the purpose of data triangulation (Esaïsson et al., 2012, p. 323). In this case, the document analysis was combined with key-informant interviews in order to triangulate and corroborate the qualitative data. For the purpose of the present study, the document study was applied as a first step in the data collection process. The overall goal of reviewing and analyzing available policy documents was to gain a broader and initial understanding of the policy instruments that the Swedish ESF Council has deployed to enforce gender mainstreaming in the national ESF implementation process.

**Table 2** *Sample of Analyzed Policy Documents and Data Analyzed*

Policy Documents Selected	Data Analyzed
Fact sheet on gender mainstreaming implementation in the ESF in Sweden	Purpose and objectives with the gender mainstreaming in context of the Swedish ESF implementation
Best-practice guidebook gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation (European standard on gender mainstreaming i)	Data were collected regarding the practical measures which the ESF Council recommends that the ESF project organizers use in order to integrate a gender dimension in their project management
ESF Council's Assessment Protocol for ESF projects applying for ESF funding	Binding requirements and criteria for integrating a gender equality dimension in the ESF projects in order to be granted funding by the ESF Council
The National Program Document for the ESF implementation in Sweden	Data were collected regarding how the implementation of the ESF in Sweden shall contribute to gender equality in the context of labour market and employment
ESF Council's annual reports to the Swedish Government (Ministry of Labour)	Data were collected on various measures taken by the ESF Council to support gender mainstreaming on the national ESF policy process
ESF Council's Regional Implementation Strategies for the ESF	Data were collected on how the regional ESF offices have invested the ESF funding in their regional invest plans and towards what policy objectives

This initial “mapping” of policy instruments served as inspiration and guidance for the interview questions for the key-informants, the second step in the data collection process. In practical terms, I retrieved the policy documents in two ways: 1) the majority of the policy documents were collected through a structured review of the ESF Council's electronic webpage and electronic databases; and 2) a subset of the reviewed policy documents was sent to me by employees of the ESF Council who I contacted by email and asked them to send me any available documentation regarding their work on gender mainstreaming in their daily operational work with the ESF. In more detail, table 2 provides a sample of the analyzed policy documents and the qualitative data

that were collected through this process. For a full list of the policy documents analyzed in this study, see Appendix 7.1. Furthermore, as an analytical method that is used in qualitative research projects, a policy document analysis requires that the data must be “*examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge*” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). To this end, in order to perform a theoretically guided thematic analysis of the policy documents, and thereby understand which policy instruments have been used to implement gender mainstreaming, I operationalized the NATO framework into a set of five questions (see Table 3), which were posed as a part of the content analysis of the policy documents. By relying on this set of questions, I was able to perform a more focused and structured review of the qualitative data and subsequently code and categorize the data. This facilitated the development of an empirical understanding of the policy instruments used to enforce gender mainstreaming and to integrate a gender dimension in the national ESF policy implementation process in accordance with the categories and governance dimensions of the NATO framework.

**Table 3:** Operationalization of the NATO framework used for the theoretical thematic analysis of policy documents

Governance Resources	Questions guiding the empirical content analysis of policy documents
<b>Nodality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Q1:</b> Does the ESF Council provide knowledge, education and information on how to integrate a gender equality perspective in the context of the ESF implementation? If so, how is this knowledge, education and informational material being disseminated towards the stakeholders/actors running ESF projects?</li> </ul>
<b>Authority</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Q2:</b> Does the ESF Council prescribe rules and binding requirements on the integration of gender equality in the ESF implementation? If so, how?</li> </ul>
<b>Treasury</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Q3:</b> When implementing the ESF in Sweden, does the ESF Council use the ESF funding to further gender equality in the Swedish labor market? If so, how?</li> </ul>
<b>Organization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Q4:</b> How does the ESF Council use its material resources and organizational structure to enable gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Q5:</b> Are organizational resources such as gender trained staff/personnel being used in the process of gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation? If so, how?</li> </ul>

### 3.3.2 Key-Informant Interviews

Following the content analysis of the policy documents which served as an initial mapping of policy instruments, I conducted 12 semi-structured key-informant interviews with ESF policy officers (ESF-handläggare) working at the regional offices at the ESF Council. The purpose of these interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of the policy instruments used to enforce gender mainstreaming in the national ESF policy process and how the deployment of these instruments contributed to a gender sensitive policy response of the ESF at the national level. As a part of the data collection process, I drafted an interview guide for semi-structured key informant-interviews (see appendix 7.3) which was based on the previous findings on policy instruments in the policy document analysis. Therefore, I used the questions asked in the interview guide to gain more knowledge in terms of how these policy instruments were used and applied in the ESF policy implementation process (which the review of policy documents, although guided by the operationalized NATO framework would not allow for further investigation of). To this end, I structured the interview guide based on two thematic interview themes: the first part of the interview guide included questions which allowed me to follow up on the various policy instruments which I had identified during the document analysis. Therefore, in the interview guide, these questions are structured and categorized in accordance with the dimensions of the NATO framework (see appendix 7.3). As the second interview theme, I specifically asked questions which related to the various objectives and specific aims of the deployed instruments for gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation. By doing so, this allowed me to gain more knowledge in terms of how the instruments has contributed to create a gender sensitive policy response as a result of the ESF implementation in Sweden.

Moreover, in the qualitative methodology literature, the purpose of conducting key-informant interviews in research is to acquire information from “centrally placed sources” on the phenomenon or process that is of interest for the study (Esaïsson et al., 2012, p. 258). For this, qualitative methodologists argue that the selection of interviewees should be guided by the *principle of centrality (centralitetsprincipen)*. In brief, the principle of centrality for interviewee selection argues that the researcher should aim to interview individuals who have expert knowledge or expertise of the events of process due to their “central” position in an organization (*Ibid.*). Thus, considering that the aim of this study is to analyze and understand policy

instruments and their roles in implementing gender mainstreaming in a domestic policy setting, it was important to conduct interviews with individuals who could provide key insights into how gender mainstreaming is materialized within the Swedish ESF policy process and could provide more information in terms of how a gender-sensitive ESF policy is enforced and materialized through the administrative actions of the ESF Council. On this basis, I designated two main criteria for the selection of interview subjects for the study:

- i) I selected ESF policy officers who were working at the ESF Council's regional offices in Sweden due to their executive roles in enforcing and implementing the ESF in various regional areas in Sweden within the ESF national implementation process.
- ii) Within this group of policy officers, I specifically selected four ESF policy officers who also have specific gender equality expertise based on the assumption that these policy officers would also be able to provide me with more expert knowledge regarding the actions taken by the ESF Council to engage in gender mainstreaming.

Since I had no prior knowledge of the ESF Council's organization or their employees, I received much help from a personal contact of mine who is an employee of the ESF Council. This person directed me to the appropriate individuals with specific knowledge (e.g., policy officers with gender equality expertise) within the ESF Council who I could interview. Thus, the applied interview sampling technique also adopted the snowball sampling strategy for interviewee selection (Esaïsson et al., 2012, p. 332). In total, I conducted 12 interviews, and 4 of these interviews were with ESF policy officers who have gender equality expertise (for more details on this, see appendix 7.2).

All of the interviews were conducted over the telephone and transcribed using the oTranscribe software. In addition to this, a majority of the interviewees preferred to remain anonymous in the context of this study. The main reason being that many of the interviewees felt nervous about providing factual statements about their everyday work in terms of implementing the ESF in the Swedish regions (which could potentially turn out to be factually incorrect or a breach of the in-house protocol and routines of the ESF Council). Due to this, many of the interviewees were concerned with the potential risk that a supervisor within the ESF Council might read their interview statements where they (potentially) could have provided incorrect information. Based on these sentiments which were frequently expressed by the interviewees, I made the decision that all the interview extracts presented in the empirical analysis have been anonymized.



### 3.4 Limitations and Weaknesses of the Study

As outlined by qualitative methodologists, document analysis as a qualitative research method is advantageous since it allows for a detailed examination and interpretation of the data (in accordance with the adopted theoretical framework of choice) in order to gain and develop empirical knowledge of the phenomenon of interest (Bowen, 2009). However, this chosen method, like any other, are inherently encompassed by various shortcomings which the researcher has to take into account and attempt to mitigate. For example, several limitations and potential flaws have been acknowledged in this context: first, since the documents which are studied by the researcher have not been produced for the specific purpose of research, there is an inherent risk that the documents might not provide the sufficient amount of information which is necessary to answer the research question which is to be addressed. Second, an incomplete collection of documents within the scope of the document study inevitably poses a risk for *biased selectivity* in the empirical material from which conclusions are to be drawn by the researcher (Bowen 2009, p. 32).

As such, these methodological shortcomings and the above-mentioned limitations reflect the broader limitations and weaknesses of this study. However, within the scope of this study, I argue that the combination of policy document analysis with qualitative in-depth interviews provided opportunity to mitigate the effects and reduce the risk of potential bias and incomplete information. To this end, the in-depth interviews, which were conducted on the basis of the findings of the document study, allowed for a more detailed research on policy instruments by providing me with a more comprehensive set of qualitative data which I could compare and corroborate with regards to the data gathered through the document analysis. Thus, I argue that this combination of qualitative methods for data collection, as opposed to relying on document analysis as a stand-alone method to answer the research question, provides a more substantial empirical basis from which conclusions about policy instruments and their purpose in the ESF implementation could be drawn.

## 4 Empirical Analysis and Results

### 4.1 Gender Mainstreaming in the national implementation of the ESF in Sweden

The following chapter will discuss and elaborate on the primary findings and results of the empirical analysis of the key-informant interviews and the policy document analysis. Within the context of this study, policy instruments are understood as the specific measures which are deployed by public administrations in the specific purpose of policy implementation and hence to achieve the intended policy objectives. Thus, policy instruments are the key determinants to understand the capacity of governments and public administration's ability to effectively execute and implement policies (Pierre et al., 2001) Therefore, as the primary aim of this study is to understand how the concept of policy instruments can be viewed and understood as enabling factors which account for a national public administration's capacity to implement the EU cohesion policy, and thereby achieve the intended EU policy objectives (by specifically looking at the enforcement of gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation as a case of "cohesion policy implementation"), emphasis will be placed on describing how the adopted policy instruments have resulted in a gender-responsive policy response of the ESF implementation in Sweden (which is the main intention of gender mainstreaming in the context of the Member States' implementation of the cohesion policy framework).

Moreover, the identified policy instruments and governance techniques used by the ESF Council to enforce gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation, and hence ensure it materializes into a gender sensitive policy response in Sweden, will be discussed and explained in the light of the NATO framework which has been applied to the empirical analysis. Furthermore, the policy instruments and governance techniques identified in the empirical analysis are categorized and explained on the basis of the NATO framework's governance dimensions as presented in the theoretical section. Against this background, the first section will describe the identified Authority-based policy instruments which have been adopted by the ESF Council as the responsible public administration body to implement the EU's policy approach of gender

mainstreaming in the execution of the cohesion policy. Second, the Nodality-based governance technique and policy instruments will be discussed followed by the Treasury-and Organization-based instruments.

## 4.2 Authority: Binding Administrative Rules & Procedures as Instruments for Gender Mainstreaming in ESF Projects

### *“Hard” requirements for gender mainstreaming in the project application procedure*

According to the NATO framework, the governance technique based on Authority entails that public administrations are able to “command and control” the targeted policy actors which are involved in the policy implementation process. As such, an Authority-based governance technique typically involves the application of regulatory and “hard” policy instruments through which public administrations “*hierarchically prescribes requirements that must be fulfilled by the regulatees, with failures to comply usually involving penalties*” (Knill & Tosun 2012, p. 23).

In light of this, and as the responsible public administration body of implementing the ESF funding in Sweden, one of the ways in which the ESF Council primarily exercises its formal authority by means of prescribing rules and requirements which must be complied with, is through the administrative application procedure through which projects are selected and granted ESF funding. In this context, the analysis finds that the ESF Council shows attention to gender equality in the ESF implementation by incorporating gender mainstreaming, and thus the integration of a gender dimension, as a formal project selection criterion in the application procedure for the ESF funding. These binding project selection criteria, and the strict demands on gender mainstreaming they place on actors applying for ESF funding through the application procedure, arguably function as a coercive Authority-based policy instruments providing “hard” incentives for subnational actors applying for ESF funding, to integrate a gender equality dimension in their ESF projects.

In more detail, when actors apply for ESF funding, they are obliged to submit a written application according to the rules of the ESF Council’s formal project selection procedure. This application should describe the project intervention and provide a project outline specifying the different intervention or measures it intends to create in order to support increased employment in Sweden (e.g. initiate an education program for unemployed immigrant women). Moreover, each of the

regional ESF offices are responsible for administrating the applications within their region and the ESF officers working at each regional office are responsible for administrating the applications. These officers hence make the decisions to grant or deny ESF project funding on the basis of the application submitted. In order to evaluate and assess the submitted applications, the ESF officers are obliged to follow an assessment protocol which sets up the different application criteria. Hence, this assessment protocol is a key policy document which the ESF Council uses to govern the application procedure with regards to the integration of gender equality. With regards to gender mainstreaming, the assessment protocol sets up the following criteria which the project applicants must fulfill in their application in order to be granted ESF funding:

**Table 4** *Criteria for gender mainstreaming and the integration of a gender dimension in the ESF Council's application procedure for ESF funding.*

<b>Analysis</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A gender equality analysis is included in the problem description</li> <li>- Gender patterns are described using qualitative and quantitative data</li> <li>- The analysis is based on program objectives as well as national or regional gender equality objectives</li> </ul>
<b>Activities and Implementation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The project has enunciated its own gender-equality objectives that show how the project contributes to promoting gender equality within its own focus area.</li> <li>- The project's gender-equality objectives are linked to gender-equality goals in the programe or national or regional gender-equality goals.</li> </ul>
<b>Gender Competence</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gender-equality competence is available, internally or externally, within the project.</li> </ul>
<b>Monitoring and Evaluation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is a description of how gender equality goals/results/outcomes shall be monitored internally and remedied if they don't go according to plan.</li> <li>- The project describes how goals, results and outcomes for gender equality will be externally evaluated.</li> </ul>

Source: Swedish ESF Council's assessment protocol (see appendix 7.1).

As shown in table 4, the assessment protocol sets up extensive requirements on the incorporation of a gender dimension which the project application for ESF funding must include in their application. These requirements include a gender equality analysis of the problem intervention area (e.g. analyzing the different obstacles for women and women to access the labor market in Sweden) and describing these gender patterns using qualitative and quantitative data. In addition,

the project must set up specific gender-equality objectives in their focus area which should also be coherent with regional gender-equality policy goals. Furthermore, the assessment protocol requires that the policy actors responsible for the project must have specific knowledge on gender issues. Finally, the project must also describe in the application how the gender-equality goals and results will be monitored and assessed within the project.

Hence, in the application procedure, the regional ESF officers arguably use this assessment protocol as a policy instrument for steering the projects to integrate a gender equality dimension in their project management and project implementation. These are binding requirements which the project applicants must fulfill or otherwise the application for ESF funding will be denied, and no funding will be granted from the ESF. This aspect of the ESF implementation was specifically stressed in an interview with one of the ESF policy officers:

*It is not possible to get a funding application through unless these requirements are fulfilled. Just as the project's budget have to be approved by us, the projects have to take the gender dimension and the gender mainstreaming requirements into account (ESF Officer, Regional Office of Southern Sweden)*

Moreover, the importance of providing “hard” incentives and requirements on integrating the gender equality dimensions in the project selection procedure, was stressed in one of the interviews with an ESF officer:

*When we make these kinds of demands, it becomes more visible for the projects. If we don't make these demands, no one would work with this issue [referring to the gender equality issue]. If we don't set up these kinds of requirements, no one would work on these issues on a voluntary basis (ESF Policy Officer, Regional Office of Mid-North Sweden).*

Thus, according to these interview statements, the application procedure exhibits the necessary coercive elements for the ESF projects to engage in gender mainstreaming since failure to comply with the above-mentioned requirements results in being denied funding from the ESF. In light of this, the application procedure is categorized as an Authority-based policy instrument employed by the ESF Council for the purpose of gender mainstreaming.

### ***Monitoring the integration of gender equality in the projects' implementation phase***

Subsequently, if the project application gets approved in accordance with the gender equality requirements as stated in the assessment protocol, the project subsequently enters its implementation phase. In this phase, the project's interventions and measures are drawn up and

implemented. As exemplified before, this could entail that the project establishes an education program which provides the target group with necessary skills and training needed to enter the labor market. In the implementation phase, the ESF Council also applies an administrative procedure which aims to monitor and assess the projects integration of a gender equality dimension. In this phase, the ESF officers at the regional offices engage in performance monitoring of the projects with regards to gender mainstreaming in the project activities. As an important part of this, the projects must submit, on a regular basis, a written report which describes the gender mainstreaming measures it has taken during the implementation phase. Based on the reports which are submitted by the projects, the ESF officers assess whether or not these measures are done to an adequate extent. If not, the project might be decommissioned by the ESF Council:

*When the projects enter the implementation phase, they must send written reports to us describing their gender mainstreaming actions and how they incorporate a gender dimension. Based on the reports, we make an assessment if this is enough in order for them to continue with the project (ESF Officer, Regional ESF Office of West Sweden).*

Thus, taken together, the application procedure and the monitoring procedure during the projects' implementation phase carried out by the ESF council as the managing public administration authority (as summarized in table 5), prescribe clear rules for gender equality integration which the ESF projects must comply with- hence constituting an Authority-based governance technique in accordance with the NATO framework.

**Table 5** Authority-based policy instruments used for gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation.

Authority	Policy Instruments	Governance Logic
<p><b>Hierarchically prescribed rules and requirements involving penalties for implementing policy actors if non-compliant</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application procedure with binding requirements on gender equality integration to receive ESF funding</li> <li>• Monitoring and assessment procedure on gender equality integration in the implementation phase</li> </ul>	<p>Providing “hard” requirements for the ESF projects to comply with gender mainstreaming and the integration of a gender dimension in the project management with clear sanctions enforced if non-compliant</p>

To conclude, two important policy instruments used for gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation, can be attributed to the application procedure which prescribes binding criteria on gender equality integration as a project selection criterion for ESF funding. Together with the monitoring procedure during the project's implementation phase, these are categorized and understood as two authority-based policy instruments through which the ESF Council provides

hard incentives for the project applicants to integrate a gender equality dimension in the ESF implementation in Sweden. Failing to comply with these prescribed rules results in being denied funding and also the risk of the project getting shut down by the ESF Council if a gender equality dimension is not integrated in the project implementation phase to a sufficient extent.

### 4.3 Nodality: Knowledge Dissemination to Enable Gender Mainstreaming in ESF projects

This section will account for the ways in which the ESF Council has used a Nodality-based governance technique for the purpose of gender mainstreaming and the identified policy instruments deployed within this governance technique. As previously mentioned, the NATO framework emphasize that public authorities' dissemination of knowledge and information is the key aspect in the Nodality-based governance technique to achieve the desired public policy objectives. Moreover, in this context, the NATO framework emphasizes that an important governance resource of public authorities is their access to information and expert knowledge, which can be used strategically to influence behaviors towards the actors subjected to governance. Thus, the following instrument which will be elaborated on in this section, have been classified and understood as Nodality-based policy instrument due to the fact that it has been used by the ESF Council in order to disseminate knowledge and information on how a gender equality perspective can be integrated in the ESF projects and ultimately ensure that Swedish cohesion policy implementation is gender mainstreamed.

Moreover, as one of the key-result of the interviews and policy document analysis, the ESF Council has used its gender expertise to provide information and knowledge on how a gender dimension can be integrated in the ESF projects and strategically found venues to spread and disseminate this knowledge towards the local and regional actors which are organizing ESF projects. Hence, when striving towards greater gender equality integration in the ESF projects and hence in the implementation of the EU cohesion policy in Sweden through the ESF, the ESF Council has used its gender expertise to produce an education material and best practice guidebook which aims to educate and inform the projects in terms of how a gender dimension can be integrated in the ESF projects in an operative sense. Specifically, an important education material and best practice guidebook on gender mainstreaming which was frequently mentioned in the interviews and found in the policy document analysis, is the so-called *standard for gender mainstreaming*.

In short, the standard for gender mainstreaming is a key education material and best practice guidebook which describes a specific standardized methodology which can be used by the ESF projects to integrate a gender dimension in their specific area of intervention and in their project management (ESF Council, 2014). Moreover, the standard for gender mainstreaming was furthermore developed by policy officers in the ESF Council which have specific knowledge and gender expertise on policy issues pertaining to gender equality. In the interview with one of the ESF policy officers who was responsible for creating the standard (now working as a policy advisor on gender equality at the government ministry of employment), the rationale behind drafting this best-practice guidebook was to enable a coherent procedure for gender mainstreaming which defined a standardized methodology for all the ESF projects describing how the integration of a gender perspective can by operatively be performed in the ESF implementation:

*We created the standard because there was a lack of coherence and mutual understanding within the authority of what gender mainstreaming was and how it should be performed [...] there was a need for coherence and a standardized procedure for gender mainstreaming in the ESF projects [...] the whole standard is basically built on best practice methods to support the projects in gender mainstreaming (Policy Advisor on Gender Equality, Government Ministry of Employment- former ESF Policy Officer at the Stockholm Office)*

Moreover, according to the interviews, the standard was also created as an instrument which aims to support local and regional actors to integrate a gender equality perspective when applying for ESF project funding. Like the previous section has already explained, the ESF Council's application procedure for ESF funding sets up certain criteria on gender equality integration which the project applications must fulfill in order to be granted funding. In light of this, the standard for gender mainstreaming, and the methodology for gender integration in the project application it prescribes, is strategically disseminated by the ESF Council's online webpage to local and regional actors when preparing their application. The idea is that the projects access the standard through the ESF Council's website and uses its prescribed gender mainstreaming methodology as a supportive tool when writing their application for funding which will subsequently be approved or denied by the ESF Council on the basis of certain gender integration criteria (see table 5).

Hence, as mentioned in one of the interviews, an important aspect of creating and disseminating the standard to local and regional actors applying for ESF funding, is that these actors have different levels of knowledge when it comes to working with gender mainstreaming in ESF projects and working with gender issues in general:



*The knowledge of the project organizers on gender issues varies a lot. We have a wide range of project applications and some of these actors have in-house competence to work with these issues in the application procedure. They have a completely different way of writing an application compared to smaller actors from the NGO-sector who are not used to working with these issues in the same way[...] the standard becomes a tool for those actors who don't have enough knowledge on gender mainstreaming (ESF Officer, Regional Office of West Sweden)*

Thus, the standard for gender mainstreaming aims to establish a “minimum baseline” for gender mainstreaming by teaching the projects a standardized procedure and providing “knowledge tools” to integrate a gender equality dimension in their application for ESF-funding. Hence, the standard contributes to a minimum level of knowledge of gender mainstreaming among the actors who are applying for ESF funding in order to support actors who don't have experience in working with gender issues in an ESF context.

In more detail, the standard prescribes a three-step procedure through which three methods are urged to be used by the ESF projects to integrate a gender equality perspective in their application: a gender equality analysis, using gender-disaggregated statistics to describe gender patterns and creating gender specific ESF project goals. As previously mentioned, these are also a criterion which is included in the assessment protocol used by the ESF Council during the application procedure (see table 5). As a first step, the standard teaches the ESF projects how to perform a gender equality analysis in their area of intervention (see also the criteria for a gender equality analysis in the application procedure in table 5). According to the wording of the standard, the gender-equality analysis have the following purpose for the ESF projects:

*For a project to contribute to achieving the EU-2020 objectives for inclusive growth, it is necessary to have detailed knowledge about the problems that the project aims to affect. A gender-equality analysis reveals gaps between men's and women's situations within the labor market and identifies their causes. It makes projects more efficient and enables them to carry out activities that satisfy the target group's needs, problems and expectations (Standard for gender mainstreaming created by the ESF Council, 2014).*

In the interviews, the ESF policy officers stressed the importance that projects carry out a gender equality analysis in order to gain more knowledge of the local and regional labor market conditions, and how they relate to women and men's employment, in order draft effective project measures and efficient labor market interventions through their projects. Specifically, the issue of a gender segregated labor market in Sweden was highlighted as a problem which is assumed to be addressed by teaching the ESF projects to carry out a gender equality analysis as a part of their project intervention. This was expressed in one of the interviews with an ESF officer accordingly:

*Women tend to work in low paid jobs the public sector, in healthcare or within the education sector whereas as men tend to work in the industry, the IT-sector or in the private sector. But we want it [the labor market] to be more equal in order to make it more efficient [...] so this tool [referring to the gender equality analysis] helps the projects to make the gender issues visible in the different sectors of the labor market where the projects want to make an impact (ESF Officer, Regional Office of North-Mid Sweden).*

Moreover, the gender segregated labor market in Sweden was frequently mentioned in the interviews as a structural issue which aims to be addressed by integrating a gender perspective in the ESF projects through a gender equality analysis. As the interview extraction shows, the assumption is that the gender equality analysis helps the ESF projects to detect gender segregated sectors in their area of intervention and, from this, design project measures which aims to give women and men more equal representation in the labor market sectors. As an example, this could entail that an ESF project creates an education program which enables for women to enter the IT-sector (where few women currently are employed) or a program aiming to educate men in order to find employment in the health care sector (where few men are currently employed). Thus, by conducting a gender equality analysis and designing the project interventions according to the findings of the analysis, the underlying assumption is that it enables the ESF projects to create project interventions which will contribute to increased gender equality in the Swedish labor market by reducing its gender segregation (ESF Council, 2014, pp. 7–9).

As a second step in the gender mainstreaming procedure, which is prescribed by the standard, the ESF projects must create gender-equality project objectives on the basis of the findings in the gender equality analysis. The project's gender equality objective must describe how the project aims to contribute to gender equality in their area of intervention (e.g. strengthening women's ability to find employment in male-dominated sectors or industries by initiating an education program which provides the necessary skills to enter these sectors). Third, in order to facilitate the formulation of these gender equality objectives, the projects are also urged through the standard to use gender-disaggregated statistics as a tool to gain more knowledge of the project's target groups. By using gender-disaggregated statistics the ESF projects must collect quantitative data which for example describes the education levels of women and men or their employment levels in different sectors (ESF Council, 2014, p. 19)

To conclude, the standard for gender mainstreaming has been found to have the two following purposes as a policy instrument for gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation: first, by disseminating and spreading the standard through the website, it provides access to a level of knowledge on gender mainstreaming for actors applying for ESF funding but who don't have previous experience on working

with gender issues. Hence, the standard is understood and identified as an important policy instrument which assists these actors when applying for funding in order to meet the gender mainstreaming criteria in the application procedure. Second, the gender mainstreaming methodology prescribed by the standard, aims to enable the ESF projects to create project interventions which will contribute to increased gender equality in the Swedish labor market by reducing gender segregation in its various sectors.

**Table 6** *Nodality-based policy instruments used for gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation*

Nodality	Policy Instruments	Governance Logic
<p><b>Stimulate change in actor behavior through the dissemination of information and knowledge</b></p>	<p>The standard for gender mainstreaming created by gender experts within the ESF Council as the managing government authority</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prescribing a methodology for gender mainstreaming making gender-equality issues in the labor market visible in order to design efficient ESF project interventions</li> <li>• Providing knowledge on gender mainstreaming to project applicants who don't have experience working with gender equality issues</li> </ul>

In light of this discussion, I argue that the standard for gender mainstreaming can be categorized and understood as a Nodality-based policy instrument since it arguably demonstrates a governance technique which is based on the dissemination of knowledge as an important measure to enforce gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation in Sweden. Moreover, as an important precondition for creating the standard, the ESF Council relied on its specific expert knowledge on gender equality demonstrated by the fact that gender equality experts within the ESF Council was responsible for creating the standard and the methodology it prescribes for gender mainstreaming in the ESF projects.

#### 4.4 Treasury: Gender Equality Dimension in Regional ESF Investment Plans

As previously mentioned, the national ESF administrations sets the overall investment framework for the project funding, which means that it sets the direction for the EU policy targets with regards to employment, to be achieved by distributing and allocating the ESF funding at the national level (Carlsson, 2020; Mukhtar-Landgren & Fred, 2019). As mentioned in the theoretical section, I argued, in light of the NATO framework, that providing ESF funding with the purpose of increasing gender equality can be viewed as a financial policy instrument which can be adopted

by the national ESF administration in their attempts to integrate a gender dimension in the domestic ESF implementation process.

As part of ESF implementation in Sweden, each of the eight regional ESF offices to which the ESF funding is channeled approves funding to projects on the basis of the policy objectives laid down in a regional investment plan for the ESF. The regional investment plan establishes certain regional development objectives pertaining to employment and economic growth, to which the ESF funding should contribute within the regions. On the basis of these regional investment plans, the funding from the ESF is allocated to projects that aim to create interventions and measures to achieve these regional policy goals (Carlsson, 2020).

A key finding of the present study is that two of the eight ESF regions have integrated a gender-equality dimension in their regional investment plans by focusing on supporting immigrant women to enter the labor market. This is a regional policy objective to which the ESF funding should contribute. Another policy objective laid out in the regional investment plans is support for gender equality in the Swedish labor market using ESF funding to combat the gender-segregated labor market in Sweden, in which it is argued that women are typically employed in low-pay sectors such as the public sector, whereas men tend to work in industry or as entrepreneurs (ESF Council, 2015). To address these issues, the regional ESF offices have allocated funding to projects that specifically contribute to the employment of women and reduce occupational segregation by sex in the regional labor markets of Sweden. As an example, the regional ESF offices of West Sweden and Småland with Islands (*Småland och Öarna*)<sup>4</sup>, have issued calls for funding that invite local and regional actors to apply for project funding through the ESF for supporting increased labor market participation for immigrant women and to develop methods to reduce traditional gender segregation in the labor market sectors. These funding calls issued by the regional ESF offices function as Treasury-based financial policy instruments to steer societal actors to pay attention to gender equality as a policy issue in the context of the EU's labor market and employment policy.

As an example, the regional office of West Sweden has issued a specific call with 30 MSEK of ESF project funding available (ESF Council, 2017). This funding was made available for local and regional actors to support the access of immigrant women to employment. The call conditions attached to receiving the funding include the statements:

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<sup>4</sup> See the official names of the offices:  
<https://www.esf.se/Documents/In%20english/Communication%20Plan%20for%20the%20European%20Social%20Fund%20in%20Sweden%202007-2013.pdf>

*This funding call provides a possibility for projects to increase employment for women who are currently outside of the labor market. A specific emphasis will be placed on project measures which strengthens employment opportunities for immigrant women who are long-term unemployed. This call for funding is specifically made available for actors in the private, public or the NGO-sector who wishes to contribute to increase immigrant women's labor market participation (Issued ESF funding call 2017, p.1, ESF Regional Office West Sweden).*

Similarly, the ESF Regional Office Småland with islands issued a funding call, with up to 25 MSEK in ESF project funding available, which aimed to support the employment of immigrant women:

*Projects within this funding call shall create project measures which strengthens immigrant women, and immigrant women who have been long-term unemployed, to enter the labor market. The role of the projects is to contribute to strengthen the region's ability to attract and integrate immigrant women. The projects should strengthen the individual participant's ability to enter the labor market for example by providing internships or validation of skills (Issued funding call 2015, p.1; ESF Regional Office Småland with Islands).*

The importance of these funding calls, which aim to steer and incentivize actors towards supporting the employment of immigrant women, are described by the interviewees as an important financial policy instrument to ensure a gender dimension in the ESF implementation:

*Through our calls for funding we can steer project actors to focus on supporting unemployed immigrant women [...] we have tried to steer towards these women as a target group. For example, if we allocate 100 million of the ESF funding through our funding calls to work with this target group, we have tried make sure that these women receive the education and training they need to get a job. So, we have tried to focus on this specific target group through our calls for ESF funding (ESF Policy Officer, ESF Regional Office Middle North Sweden).*

Additional examples of how a gender-equality perspective is integrated into the ESF implementation through these gender-oriented funding calls (understood in this context to be Treasury-based policy instruments) are the funding calls issued by the regional ESF offices. These aim to provide financial incentives and opportunities for actors to initiate projects that contribute to the development of a gender-equal labor market in the regions of Sweden:

*The main purpose of the projects is to create long-term initiatives which contributes to the development of a gender equal and inclusive labor market in order to strengthen regional growth [...] the region must develop its ability to attract and make use of individuals potential in an optimal way. In order to increase regional growth, there is a need for more knowledge on how a gender*

*equal labor market generates profit for individuals, companies and society at large [...] this funding call is available for ESF projects aiming to identify and develop methods to reduce the traditionally gender-segregation in industries and sectors* (Issued funding call 2015, p.1-2; ESF Regional Office Småland with islands)

The main motivation for issuing this funding call for ESF projects was that the geographic areas of the region (involving the counties of Jönköping, Kronoberg, Kalmar and Gotland) were faced with the challenge of gender inequality, manifested as a highly gender-segregated labor market in which women were predominantly employed in the low-pay public sector and men in the high-pay private sector (ESF Council, 2015).

**Table 7** *Treasury-based policy instruments used for gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation*

Treasury	Policy Instruments	Governance Logic
<p><b>Financial incentives to stimulate change in actor behavior</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESF funding calls for ESF projects supporting increased labor market participation for immigrant women.</li> <li>• ESF funding calls for ESF projects supporting the development of gender equal labor markets in the Swedish regions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing financial incentives for local and regional actors to initiate projects which increases women's labor market participation.</li> <li>• Providing financial incentives for local and regional actors to initiate projects aiming to reduce gender-segregation in traditional industries and sectors</li> </ul>

In conclusion, and as illustrated in table 7, these gender equality-oriented funding calls, which specifically aims to create ESF projects which strengthens the employability of immigrant women and supporting the development of less gender-segregated markets in the Swedish regions, can be understood as Treasury-based policy instruments used by the ESF Council to enforce gender mainstreaming and hence ensure that the ESF implementation results in a gender-sensitive policy response.

## 4.5 Organization: The Organizational Capacity for Gender Mainstreaming in the ESF implementation

### *The Role of Gender Experts in Supporting Gender Mainstreaming in the ESF Implementation*

As previously elaborated on, the NATO scheme contends that governance through Organization entails that public authorities use their own material resources and capabilities as a means to

achieve their policy objectives (Knill & Tosun 2012, p.25). As an example, these organizational resources can be attributed to the provisioning of personnel and staff with a certain skillset, or the provision of equipment and properties, hence denoting the ability of public authorities to achieve policy objectives through its own material resources (Ibid.). In the context of gender mainstreaming EU policy, previous governance literature emphasizes the importance of having gender-trained staff and personnel present within the public administration authority which is responsible for executing and enforcing gender mainstreaming in a specific policy field. The underlying assumption of their importance, is the fact that the actors involved in the policy implementation and who are the addressees of the specific policy, typically have little experience with and knowledge of gender issues-, hence the need for specific gender competence and expertise as an organizational resource within the responsible public administration body responsible for gender mainstreaming (Lombardo et al., 2017).

Against this background, a key finding of this study is that the ESF Council has established an organizational structure which provides the necessary capacity and knowledge to enforce gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation. This organizational structure manifests in the fact that the ESF Council has appointed staff and personnel, which have specific knowledge, education and expertise on gender equality policy issues, within each of the eight regional ESF offices in Sweden. These individuals have been appointed with a specific responsibility to support other colleagues at the regional ESF offices who don't have the same gender expertise. For example, as mentioned in one of the interviews, these gender experts assist the assessments made during the project application procedure when the selection and allocation of ESF funding to projects is made on the basis of the gender equality project selection criteria:

*In every region, the ESF Council has an appointed contact person which we call "spiders". They have expert knowledge on gender equality issues [...] they help other colleagues when assessing the project applications from a gender equality perspective (ESF Officer, Regional Office of Mid-North Sweden)*

In another interview, the presence of these gender experts at the regional offices of the ESF Council, was emphasized as an important factor to maintain "in-house" knowledge on gender equality issues within the ESF Council as the responsible public administration body of the ESF:

*We have a network within the authority with colleagues in the different regional offices who are competent on gender issues, their role is to support and help other colleagues who don't have the same competence. So, we try to achieve in-house learning and good in-house knowledge on these issues (ESF Officer, Regional Office of West Sweden).*

In light of these interview findings, these appointed gender experts are interpreted as an important organizational resource and policy instrument with regards to assisting other areas of the ESF Council's enforcement of gender mainstreaming (e.g. the project selection procedure where selection of projects to receive funding is based on certain gender equality criteria).

**Table 8** *Organizational policy instrument used for gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation*

Organization	Policy Instruments	Governance Logic
<p><b>Reliance on formal organizational structures and material resources</b></p>	<p>Gender trained personnel located at the regional levels within the ESF Council responsible for supporting and executing the enforcement gender mainstreaming</p>	<p>Provides the necessary organizational capacity and knowledge to execute gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation</p>

Hence, these gender experts are an important organizational resource within the ESF Council which can be viewed as an important precondition for ensuring that the project selection procedure (i.e. an authority-based policy instrument) is carried out effectively and that the gender-equality conditions are applied and assessed correctly at each of the regional ESF offices in Sweden. In addition to this, by appointing these gender experts at each of the regional offices, it ensures a harmonized degree of knowledge on gender equality issues in each of the eight regional ESF offices as a part of enforcing gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation.

## 4.6 Summary of Results

Within the framework of the cohesion policy, the ESF and the projects funded therefrom are an important resource in promoting gender equality and to address the existing gender disparities within the labor markets of the Member States. Thus, the ability to enforce gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation in the purpose of creating a gender-sensitive policy response at the national level, is arguably an important feature of the Member States implementation of the cohesion policy framework. The main reason being that the promotion of gender equality, through the implementation of the cohesion funds, is considered essential in promoting socioeconomic development and ensuring the long-term development of the region-which is the two main objectives of the EU's cohesion policy framework (Dauvellier et al., 2016). Moreover, since this study is concerned with elaborating on how policy instruments, a concept drawn from the public administration literature, can be viewed and understood as enabling factors which account for a



national public administration's capacity to implement EU cohesion policy and its intended policy objectives, this study adopted the NATO typology for the purpose of analyzing the policy instruments which the Swedish ESF Council has used to enforce gender mainstreaming in the national ESF implementation process (and hence ensure that the funding allocated to projects from ESF addresses gender-linked inequalities within the Swedish labor market as the main policy objective).

**Table 9** Summary of policy instruments used for gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation.

Governance Components	Nodality	Authority	Treasury	Organization
<b>Policy Instruments</b>	Standard for gender mainstreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application procedure with binding requirements on gender mainstreaming</li> <li>• Monitoring procedure on gender mainstreaming in project implementation phase</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding calls for projects improving the labor market participation and employment of immigrant women in Sweden</li> <li>• Funding calls contributing to a less-gender-segregated labor market in Sweden</li> </ul>	Gender trained personnel located at the regional ESF offices within the ESF Council as the responsible public administration body
<b>Governance Logic</b>	Provides knowledge and a methodology for gender mainstreaming in the ESF projects aimed at making gender-equality issues in the labor market visible for the ESF projects	Provides hard requirements for the ESF projects to comply with gender-equality integration in the project management, with sanctions for non-compliance	Provides financial incentives for national actors to support the level of labor market participation by women and to reduce gender segregation in the labor market	Provides the necessary organizational capacity and skills to enforce gender mainstreaming in the national ESF regions

In light of this, the policy instruments used in Swedish implementation of the ESF has been analyzed by drawing from the four governance resources of the NATO framework: Nodality, Authority, Treasury and Organization. In summary, the main findings of this study show that the ESF Council has adopted policy instruments which draws from all of the four governance dimensions as proposed by the NATO scheme. As an extension of this, the identified Authority-based policy instruments are constituted by the application procedure in which the ESF Council has set up binding rules and criteria on gender mainstreaming for the ESF project applicants which must be fulfilled in order to receive ESF funding. In the interviews, these requirements were emphasized by the ESF policy officers as an important instrument for gender mainstreaming based on the assumption that gender equality issues are rarely addressed by the organizers of ESF projects on a voluntary basis, hence the need for providing “hard” incentives to secure compliance

in this regard. Subsequently, the monitoring procedure performed by the ESF Council in the project's implementation phase, is also regarded in this study as an important Authority-based instrument which ensures that the ESF projects are consistent with incorporating a gender dimension when carrying out their project activities and interventions. Hence, the gender sensitive selection criteria, which the applicants must fulfill in order to be granted ESF funding, together with the monitoring procedure which aims to ensure that the ESF projects are consistent with taking the gender dimension into account, can be seen as instruments used to ensure a strong outcome of the ESF implementation in terms of increased gender equality in the economy and society.

Moreover, the standard for gender mainstreaming which was drafted by gender experts within the ESF Council, is an important Nodality-based policy instrument in the Swedish ESF implementation. This is due to its focus on disseminating knowledge by teaching the ESF projects a methodology for gender mainstreaming in the ESF project management. In turn, the methodology enables the projects to create more efficient project interventions by taking the gender-segregation of the Swedish labor market into consideration in order to further gender equality in Sweden through their project measures and interventions. Moreover, as an important precondition for creating the standard, the ESF Council relied on its specific expert knowledge on gender equality demonstrated by the fact that gender equality experts within the ESF Council (identified as an organization-based policy instrument) was responsible for creating the standard and the methodology it prescribes for gender mainstreaming in the ESF projects.

In addition to this, the funding calls issued by the regional ESF offices to support increased employment for immigrant women and developing less gender-segregated labor markets in the regional areas of Sweden, constitute important financial incentives and opportunities for local and regional actors in Sweden to initiate ESF projects which supports this cause. As mentioned in the interviews with the ESF policy officers, channeling the ESF funding to support women's labor market participation is an important measure to ensure that gender equality is addressed as an EU cohesion policy target at the national level.

Finally, the gender equality experts appointed at the regional ESF offices are an important organizational resource and policy instrument. As shown in the analysis, these experts have supported gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation by using their expertise to create the standard for gender mainstreaming which provides the ESF projects with increased knowledge on gender mainstreaming in their projects. According to the interviews, these experts also have an important role in supporting other colleagues at the regional ESF offices when assessing the

project applications in accordance with the assessment protocol and its gender mainstreaming criteria.

To conclude, by analyzing the various measures adopted by the ESF Council to enforce gender mainstreaming in the ESF implementation, (understood in light of the NATO framework as policy instruments), I argue that an instrument-based research approach has provided a detailed account of the enabling factors which account for the ESF Council's capacity to implement the cohesion policy and its intended policy objective of increased gender equality (by means of gender mainstreaming). In the Swedish case which has been the subject of analysis within this study, the enforcement of gender mainstreaming has thus been enabled by various policy instruments which have, in various ways, contributed to the integration of a gender dimension and thus to a gender sensitive policy response of the ESF implementation. In a broader view, I argue that the analysis of these instruments illustrates and highlights the necessary resources, competences, as well as the various ways in which a national public administration can use its formal powers to effectively implement the framework of the cohesion policy and thereby achieve its intended policy objectives at the national level.

## 5 Conclusions & Discussion

The aim of the present study has been to showcase how the theoretical concept of policy instruments, as conceptualized in the public administration literature, can provide a detailed account for a national public administration's capacity to implement EU cohesion policy and its intended policy objectives. For this purpose, this study has addressed the following research question:

**How can policy instruments be viewed and understood as enabling factors which account for a national public administration's capacity to implement EU cohesion policy?**

Furthermore, the theoretical point of departure for this study was based on the fact that the top-down Europeanization literature has stressed the capacity of national public administrations as an important explanatory factor which account for the Member States' ability to execute and implement supranational EU policy (Börzel, 2002, 2012; Börzel & Risse, 2005, 2016; Knill & Lehmkuhl, 2002). In this context, however, the Europeanization literature has paid little attention to increase the understanding of the specific enabling factors and conducive conditions which accounts for the national administration's capacity to implement EU cohesion policy effectively at the national level. Thus, in this regard, I have made the argument that a policy instrument-based research approach is motivated by the fact that it allows for further investigation of the capacity of a national administration "to make and implement policy" (Pierre et al., 2001, p. 42). Hence, by introducing the theorization on policy instruments from the public administration literature, this study has aimed to expand the theoretical and analytical scope of enquiry within the top-down Europeanization literature on the topic of cohesion policy implementation.

Subsequently, in order to address the research question of the study, this thesis adopted a qualitative case study design which analyzed Sweden's implementation of the ESF as "case of" national cohesion policy implementation. To narrow the scope of the study even further, and to showcase the theoretical application of policy instruments and its relevance, I specifically focused on the various measures and policy instruments adopted by the Swedish public administration to integrate a gender dimension and to engage in gender mainstreaming as an important feature of the ESF implementation. As an extension of this, I adopted the NATO framework, (as derived from the public administration literature theorization on policy instruments), as an analytical

framework around which the empirical analysis was structured. To conclude, the main results of the policy instrument analysis reveal that the enforcement of gender mainstreaming has been enabled by various policy instruments which have contributed to the integration of a gender dimension and thus enabled a gender sensitive policy response of the ESF implementation in various ways. In a broader view, I have made the argument that the analysis of these instruments, which was enabled by introducing the NATO framework, arguably allows for a more detailed investigation of how national public administrations can use its various governance resources to efficiently deliver on the EU's public policy objectives at the national level. In the context of this study, the NATO framework has illustrated and highlighted the necessary resources, competences, knowledge resources, as well as the various ways in which a national public administration can use its formal powers to effectively implement the framework of the cohesion policy and thereby achieve its intended policy objectives at the national level.

## 5.1 Recommendations for Future Research

In light of the fact that previous top-down Europeanization research scholarship primarily seek to identify scope conditions under which specific factors are more likely to influence the “downloading” and implementation of EU policies by the Member States, instrument-based research studies can contribute to the theoretical understanding within the top-down Europeanization scholarship and furthermore provide an analytical framework to study the factors and policy measures which enable the Member States to implement the policy effectively at the national level. For this purpose, future research attempts within the Europeanization paradigm could make use of the NATO framework and, thus the theorization on policy instruments, to further investigate the enabling factors and conditions which enable the Member States to implement EU policy and its intended policy objectives.

As a suggestion, the NATO framework could arguably be embraced within the top-down Europeanization scholarship and be used as a suitable tool for comparative case studies to compare the usage of policy instruments adopted within the Member States implementation procedures. Hence in the future, emphasis can be placed on examining the variation on the usage of various policy instruments, across EU policy fields and across Member States, in their pursuit to achieve the same policy objectives as established at the EU level (e.g. by means of the most similar system design for comparative studies). Thus, comparative instrument-based research studies provide an

interesting case for comparing variation of policy instruments to reach common policy objectives in the setting of EU's system of multi-level policymaking.

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## 7 Appendices

### 7.1 List of Policy Documents Analyzed

Policy Documents Selected	Data Analyzed
Fact sheet on gender mainstreaming implementation in the ESF in Sweden	Purpose and objectives with the gender mainstreaming implementation in context of the Swedish ESF policy process
Best practice guidebook gender mainstreaming implementation (European standard on gender mainstreaming implementation)	Data were collected regarding the practical measures which the ESF Council recommends that the ESF project organizers use in order to integrate a gender dimension in their project management
ESF Council's Assessment Protocol for ESF projects applying for ESF funding	Binding requirements and criteria for integrating a gender equality dimension in the ESF projects in order to be granted funding by the ESF Council
The National Programme Document for the ESF implementation in Sweden	Data were collected regarding how the implementation of the ESF in Sweden shall contribute to gender equality in the context of labour market and employment
ESF Council's annual reports to the Swedish government (Ministry of Labour)	Data were collected on various measures taken by the ESF Council to support gender mainstreaming implementation on the national ESF policy process
ESF Council's Regional Implementations Strategies for the ESF	Data were collected on how the regional ESF offices have invested the ESF funding in their regional invest plans and towards what policy objectives
ESF Council's national selection criteria for project funding	Data were collected on the binding requirements and criteria which have to be fulfilled on behalf of the project applicants in order to be granted funding
Funding call for Småland and the Islands – "Increased opportunities for employment for foreign born women".	Data were collected on how the regional ESF office of Småland and the Islands have invested the ESF funding to strengthen gender equality and women's position on the labour market
Funding call for for Western Sweden-"Increased transitions to the labour market for foreign born women".	Data were collected on how the regional ESF office of Småland and the Islands have invested the ESF funding to strengthen gender equality and women's position on the labour market

## 7.2 List of Interviewees

<b>Interview No.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Position at the ESF Council/ Government Department</b>	<b>Interview length</b>
1.	2020-03-16	ESF Policy Officer, <i>Regional Office of Southern Sweden (gender equality expertise)</i>	55 min
2.	2020-03-18	ESF Policy Officer, <i>Regional Office of Mid-North Sweden</i>	45 min
3.	2020-03-18	ESF Policy Officer <i>Regional Office of West Sweden (gender equality expertise)</i>	53 min
4.	2020-03-18	ESF Policy Officer, <i>Regional Office of Småland with Islands</i>	35 min
5.	2020-03-18	<i>Policy Advisor on Gender Equality, Government Ministry of Employment ( former ESF Policy Officer, Regional Office of Stockholm) (gender equality expertise)</i>	42 min
6.	2020-03-19	ESF Policy Officer, <i>Regional Office of West Sweden</i>	47 min
7.	2020-03-20	ESF Policy Officer, ESF Policy Officer <i>Regional Office of West Sweden</i>	50 min
8.	2020-03-25	ESF Policy Officer, ESF Policy Officer, <i>Regional Office of Mid-North Sweden (gender equality expertise)</i>	60 min
9.	2020-03-26	ESF Policy Officer, ESF Policy Officer, <i>Regional Office of East-Mid Sweden</i>	57 min
10.	2020-03-26	ESF Policy Officer, <i>Regional Office of Mid-North Sweden (gender equality expertise)</i>	52 min
11.	2020-03-27	ESF Policy Officer, ESF Policy Officer, <i>Regional Office of Southern Sweden</i>	45 min
12.	2020-04-08	ESF Policy Officer, <i>Regional Office of Stockholm</i>	41 min
<b>Total</b>			582 min

## 7.3 Interview Guide in English

### Interview Guide: Key- Informant Interviews, ESF Policy Officers in Sweden

#### **Theme 1: Policy Instruments used for Gender Mainstreaming in the implementation of the European Social Fund**

##### **Nodality:**

- How would you describe the ways in which the ESF Council attempts to spread information and knowledge regarding gender mainstreaming towards the projects?
- How would you describe purpose of the standard on gender mainstreaming? How has it been applied in the ESF implementation?

##### **Authority:**

- How would you describe the ways in which the ESF Council uses checklists and follow up protocols when assessing the projects' progress on gender mainstreaming?
- In what ways do you use different types of assessment criteria and protocols on gender mainstreaming when subnational actors apply for funding? What are the objectives that the projects must achieve in order to be granted funding?

##### **Treasury:**

- In the implementation of the ESF in Sweden, is EU funding specifically allocated through the ESF in order to strengthen women's position in the labour market and employment? If so, how?

##### **Organization:**

- How would you explain the role of the ESF officers working at the regional offices in terms of ensuring that a gender perspective is integrated in the ESF implementation by means of gender mainstreaming?

#### **Theme 2: Aims and Objectives of the Deployed Policy Instruments for Gender Mainstreaming in the ESF Implementation**

- In what ways would you say that these instruments attempt to make the projects better at integrating a gender perspective in their project management?
- According to you, which instrument for gender mainstreaming has been the most important one in order to achieve the EU2020 strategy's objective of inclusive growth and inclusive labour market?