

Project: **Development and implementation of strategies for the foundation and optimisation of local instances of gender equality**



Report

International Seminar 07–09 December 2007

Elewijt, Belgium

Project Partners:

Base –Frente Unitaria de trabalhadores (BASE-FUT) / Portugal

Arbeitnehmer-Zentrum Königswinter (AZK) / Germany

Lithuanian Work Federation (LDF) / Lithuania

Centro Social de Trabajadores (C.S.T.) / Spain

Arbeiter-, Freizeit- und Bildungsverein (AFB) / Italy (South Tyrol)

Democratic Trade Union Confederation of Romania (CSDR) / Romania

Fondazione Luigi Clerici (FLC) / Italy

Koepel Van Christelijke Werknemersorganisaties (ACW) / Belgium



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1) Context of the seminar

Since the founding of the European Economic Community in 1957, the principle of gender equality has been codified in the treaties of the European Union.

The project "Development and implementation of strategies for the foundation and optimisation of local instances of gender equality", supported by the European Commission, aims at promoting gender equality and addressing special challenges like gender-related pay gap, participation of women in the labour market or vocational training, participation in decision-making and the reconciliation of work and family life for both genders.

The primary objective of the project is to raise awareness of the importance of local gender equality issues for social life and the establishment of the respective structures and instances. The European approaches to employment and gender equality and to local gender equality issues shall be promoted, while knowledge of the "European Employment Strategy" shall be spread.

The beginning of the project was marked by an inventory of the local situation with regard to gender equality and an analysis of the framework conditions for local gender equality activities to be able to develop strategies for sustainable action. After pooling the information about the different points of departure, possible solutions and alternatives for action were supposed to be discussed, coordinating the activities of the project partners in their respective countries.

Above all, the project shall reach stakeholders in the field of schools, nurseries and companies at local level plus persons involved in the Social Dialogue. For this purpose, during previous activities, an educational strategy concept has been developed and recommendations for action have been made.

2) Seminar content

- 1. *Current project status***
- 2. *Evaluation of the global conference in Portimao and general evaluation of the overall project***
- 3. *Product description: charts, guidelines for local participants***
- 4. *Presentation of the action recommendations and action plans***
- 5. *Agenda of the next meeting***

Current project status

Kris Houthys, ACW project manager, began by giving the participants an insight into the gender specific history of the ACW and its current work in this field, in addition to briefly outlining the programme and clarifying some organisational details. The project director, Sabine Möller, then went on to welcome the participants on behalf of the EZA, giving a brief overview of the seminar's set tasks and items on the agenda. The evaluation and the collated results in particular were the main focal point of the seminar. It was expected that the project products would be completed during this seminar to bring forward publication. The further use of the materials and the results produced was supposed to be established within a common framework to ensure the best possible use of the project results.

Evaluation of the global conference in Portimao and general evaluation of the overall project

Zsuzsanna Dietrich presented the evaluation of the conference in Portugal, supported by feedback from the participants as well as by her own assessment. During the course of this she was able to systematically run thorough the individual phases of the project and the seminars.

In particular she emphasized that the feedback on the whole had been positive and that the negative points in particular would be used to lay the foundations for possible future improvements and to learn from the experiences. The overall assessment was that the expectations of the project were variable.

The country reports and best practice examples were on the whole found to be qualitative, with the best practice examples of the individual partners being more favourable. It was noted in the appraisal of the Vilnius seminar that besides a good assessment, a more comprehensive definition of common targets and aspects could have avoided any misunderstandings and conflicts. The educational concepts established in the framework of this seminar were assessed as good but the third working group was adjudged to be poor in relation to preparation and effectiveness.

The cause in this case was the problems of cooperation between partners in the preliminary stages of the seminar. The preparation of the educational concepts during the seminar in Bucharest received a positive assessment. Once again there were occasions when the third working party were dissatisfied with their working conditions, however the overall work in the party was judged to be qualitative.

The expectations of the conference in Portimão were for the most part met. As a point of criticism it was noted that the discussions did not adhere closely to the agenda and too little time was given to the exchange of ideas. The presentations were considered at times to be lengthy and a lack of time for the working parties was criticized. The potential of the participants could have been further developed. In spite of these criticisms the time represented a significant and mutual step in the right direction, bringing the partners closer together in their work and therefore proving extremely useful to the continued progress of the project.

Questions and opinions on the aforementioned evaluation were collected in conclusion to the presentation by the evaluator Zsuzsanna Detrich.

Above all the good summary of work in groups and seminars was found to be positive. Although the attitudes vary greatly amongst the countries it should however be mentioned that there are many similarities. For this reason, the overlapping of the countries was supposed to be represented and taken advantage of. In particular the social aspect in this forum was supposed to be emphasized. Perhaps a more efficient combination of the groups would have been more appropriate, bringing together partners from very different countries with different contexts and their various experiences in this field, problems. It proved in many cases to be a difficult starting point as individuals had on the one hand a great deal of experience with regards to previous experience with the theme whilst others on the other hand had scarcely any.

The poor exchange with the male and female multiplier agents, which should have been emphasised, was considered a negative aspect of the conference in Portimão. Consequently some participants had no access to the issue of the day to be discussed once the concepts had been translated. The discussion, which by this time had already been prepared, could not be reformulated and opinions could not be included in the discussion. In the conference evaluation, the differences in the evaluations of the individual seminars were supposed to be emphasised, since these various results were supposed to be shown and were structured differently, to show the possible difficulties facing a working party at conference. This way the conference was supposed to be seen more as a political event with a necessary forum to give it the political seal and less like an in-house event.

Would a less isolated location have been an advantage? It appeared that the focus group and the conference technology were unsuitable. The high level of preparation was not evident in the work of those male and female multiplier agents who were invited. The quality of the experts was variable and a place further as Spain and Portugal would have been desirable. The circumstances were confounded by an event taking place at the same time in Lisbon, resulting in the withdrawal of previously selected experts. A more international scenario would have been more suitable.

Overall criticism was made of an unclear objective. Contexts and experts were too lengthy and some participants would have liked a clearer definition.

With regard to the question of cooperation during the course of the project, the remarkable achievement in the levels of cooperation came strongly to the fore, especially given the numerous languages and in spite of the various starting points and difficulties. However, at times, communication and the necessary translation within the groups hindered the aim to reach higher targets at a higher level. The question was raised as to whether a more sensitive approach with regard to communication should have been introduced in the preparation. However even the various starting points of the participants, many of whom were voluntarily or professionally integrated into the project led to differing priorities.

Occasionally unsatisfactory levels of coordination between the individual partners partially came about due language obstacles, which together with the speech barriers and also given differences in backgrounds proved to be a hindrance. It was noted that the organisers could have sent linguistically experienced colleagues to the seminar, although that would have led to the exclusion of that the local participants at grass root level.

Some participants would have liked the EZA to play a more significant coordinating role. In response to the criticism of partly unclear objectives and concepts, it was stated that the EZA was particularly concerned with the common objectives and their realisation. A future openness with regard to possible problems or criticisms on the part of the participant would be gladly accepted and welcomed. During the discussion it emerged that differing expectations and backgrounds had led on numerous occasions to communicative misunderstandings, which could have been averted by clearer definitions. In many cases once the educational concepts had been put forward the next stage of work was unclear despite the final product being displayed in the first flyer.

Some participants would have liked a stronger focus on group work instead of the plenary meetings.

With regard to future cooperation, reference was made to the international Platform for Equal Opportunities meeting in Königswinter, where it was discussed how a platform relating to this project's theme could be created. This would allow the main emphasis to be placed on the cooperation with other (international) organisations. The final product target groups were not only supposed to come from the European Commission but also from other European and International organisations. The partners should use their contacts to distribute the project results as widely as possible. With this aim in view the products are also published in English to guarantee a wider distribution.

Likewise the concepts were supposed to have been translated earlier in order to highlight possible areas for improvement. This would have made it possible for the products in this project to have been handed to the male and female multiplier agents as an intermediary step in order for them to check where the material could be inserted.

It was suggested that this step be used in the evaluation six months to a year after the end of the project. It was strongly emphasised that the project would not be concluded in February, as further use for the project will be found through the distribution of its results and prepared materials.

The question of sustainability is particularly pertinent to EZA, as the EZA has to be validated by the Commission through feedback from the partners. The return from the aforementioned project was assessed as very positive. Communication (via the

platform?), therefore, should be an important factor, even after the conclusion of the project. An effective project was very important. Furthermore it was emphasised that the commissioned project had not been rejected due to the content but on the contrary the content had been very well received.

The question was posed to the evaluator at the end of the discussion as to whether it might have been prudent in the compilation of the questionnaires to question the opinions of male and female participants. Such a division would have been interesting on the level of empirical social progress. This was however rejected. The equal treatment of men should play a greater role in future projects. In response to the question as to whether men had perhaps less time for such a project on the grounds of their increased responsibility in the workplace, it was established that men in other positions played no part. Indeed only a few men could be convinced or even found to take part in such a project. In the future attention should be paid to ensure men are better integrated in such fields.

Product Description: Charts, Guidelines for local participants

Grit Terborg (project coordinator) presented the results of the aforementioned products and the planned amplification. The products were sent to the individual participants two weeks before the beginning of the seminar to obtain feedback before going to print. The changes commented on by those taking part were favourably accepted. The translations which were prepared by the VC state translators should however be checked by native speakers and possibly in the future also be translated by native speakers.

Currently the products are being set. The charts, apart from the Rumanian version which was still not finished, were submitted to the participants during the seminar. They were asked to check the charts thoroughly, paying particular attention to the layout and language for any possible mistakes. Corrected versions should be returned to the coordinators at the end of the seminar.

The finished brochure will include a group photo (from Portimão or Varenna).

Unfortunately the completion of the charts was delayed, although it is assumed that they will go to print before Christmas. The folders prepared in Portimão can not be printed in the current form as the adhesive corners on the charts must be manually attached, which has proved to be time consuming.

The corrected version was subsequently presented and approved as recommendation.

With regard to the compilation of a CD, it was noted that this idea should be further investigated; however its translation depends on the resources available after project completion. The opinion was that said CD could represent an important medium which could have an advantage over the newly created folders. Since the educational concept is supposed to be displayed fully on the EZA internet pages this would be a good alternative. In some countries the rare use of computers could present an obstacle for the use of the CDs. In addition a translation of the detailed educational concepts into all languages is not feasible. At this time only an English version of the educational concepts is available which is mostly extensive. The folder is easy to

distribute and in the light of experience from the previous project is a good source of reading material which can be well received.

Due to costs the number of copies for each organisation was set at 100 folders, with a view to an additional 50 folders in English. If on the completion of the project more resources remained than estimated, then the number of folders per organisation will increase to 150. The Rumanian organisation likewise would be given more of the English versions to allow them to distribute them to European partners (parliament etc.)

With regard to the question as to whether a press review is planned it was noted that press representatives from the individual countries were supposed to have attended the conference in Portimão.

The representatives from South Tyrol reported of their efforts to use on the spot local press. In this sense it would be important for partners to consult their local press offices with regard to any information. Future projects would then be better coordinated. In the course of this and the next seminar a precise timetable should be compiled to avoid any misunderstandings. The project partners should promote themselves and exchange various projects via communications.

Presentation of the action recommendations and action plans

At the time of the seminar there were two action plans submitted. Since the action plans in Portimão had already been drawn up the question remained as to how they should be published. Initially the action plan from the second working group was revised and approved.

The timeframe for the action plan was supposed to be expanded to January-February 2008; the action plan was supposed to come into force initially at the beginning of 2008 (end of February) and last for six months to simplify the organisation of the project control. A possible deadline was set to coincide with a gender seminar in September which would allow arrangements and reviews to be made.

Initially only the two different action plans without a date for publication in the folders were summarized and an additional column for individual use inserted. This was a question of layout for publication and not content. The different plans should be combined. As no objections were forthcoming it was unanimously agreed to make the change.

The further development of the project, however, was also supposed to be discussed which surpasses the project timeframe. This should be considered for future projects. Follow on projects should stem however from the European Commission but at national levels. The individual organisations should develop more self initiatives and take on national projects.

Finally a strategy paper for the groups was compiled. The individual countries briefly discussed how the ideas could be transferred to their own individual countries following a brief brain storming session.

Following on from the discussion, ideas were collected in the plenary with regard to the meeting in South Tyrol: who, what, how, with whom, and from when, until when. The question as to the scale on which the actions plans could be transferred was submitted and to what extent the individual organisations could achieve this.

The scope should be based on the capabilities of each partner and within their framework. Since each organisation has its own activities there was a possibility that the results in these projects be marginally transferred. i.e. gender specific language.

As an example the activities of the AFB, already active in this field, were presented. It has been planned to devote half a day to the results of this project in a seminar taking place in May 2008. Materials, folders and experiences found in this field were collected throughout the entire course of the aforementioned project. Furthermore on a political level it is planned to establish contact with the National Councils and to present the publications. Employers, local government associations and education departments are to be contacted. In the Schools and the Commission for Equal Opportunities contact is to be made and material distributed. Information pertaining to the results of the projects is to be made available to the unions.

The AZK would like to organise a gender course for school boys and girls within the framework of Girls Day which investigates and questions stereotypes and language (April). A suitable gender division of the target groups is planned. The second project also in April is supposed to be held as specific gender training for male and female nursery teachers and male and female teachers and focus in particular on the gender suitability of language and methodology.

The male and female colleagues of the CDSR would like the results of the project to have an influence on the different projects as before. A meeting with representatives from local unions is planned from March, in which information and material is to be distributed. As with the snowball system, the unions are requested to distribute this information to others. The information is to be widely distributed wherever possible. The National Agency for Equal Opportunities is to receive this as soon as the material is ready. A round table with social partners is planned. The results of the project are also to be published on the internet. Male and female teachers are to be informed of a subsequent project to transfer the equal opportunity into schools (e.g. in the Teachers Unions meetings).

FLC is an educational institute and aims to pass on the results of the working groups through a teacher's conference. Councillors are supposed to be deployed to distribute the results at regional level. Materials are to be distributed at meetings organised at association level and additional information made available on the website. This theme is to be adopted in a brochure on International Work. Further means are to be investigated on national and international levels and active male and female students trained by FLC. The time frame for these projects shall be to be sent to the EZA office by the middle of January.

ACW aims to further promote and transfer the social dialogue with regard to Equal Opportunities. To this end Seminars on Sensitization are held which together with Equality will be debated at local levels. There are specific brochures which likewise are to play a significant role. The ACW works together with a wider variety of organisations. On Woman's day 08.03.2008 will see the start of a Sensitization

campaign, discussing the needs of women and examining the political measures. In addition a campaign will be introduced using pictures and other media stereotypes. In particular worthy of mention here is the balance between family and work, as well as pay differences and heavy involvement of women in these choices.

BASE-FUT would like to distribute information through the male and female multiplier agents. Above all schools and local authorities play an important role in this and are to be informed of the nationwide projects on Stereotypes (March). In May a conference will be held on this theme with voluntary participants and social partners.

C.S.T, is in contact with associations, schools and private companies. Information should be made available to this target group to promote equal opportunity. Campaigns are conducted with the support at national level from Trade Unions and Family Associations at local level. Some actions and initiatives specifically in primary schools have already been introduced. Information on childcare and other themes were widely made available to both men and women. Women and men with issues were accompanied. Attention was paid to ensure an equal distribution of participants and provisions.

LDF wished to inform the separate organisations at national level and make materials available. The organisation together with the local authority and family centres wished to bring people to the seminar and to distribute material. The main emphasis was placed on violence in the family and compatibility between family and work. The press played an important role here. These projects will be continued until May. The material from the conference as well as further information will be available on the organisations website.

EZA circulates reports documents and other material on its own website. The distribution is extended through the member centres. In a possible follow on project the aforementioned results will be more widely circulated.

The network, other media e.g. the newsletter as well as the seminars represent a wide target group to whom material and information will be sent.

On the question of how the gender suitable language can be introduced into the EZA office it was noted that the theme of equal opportunities has for some time run through the work. This is hoped to encourage other organisations to pay attention to equal opportunities in their own field.

Evaluation

Particularly noticeable was the fact that this seminar was able to produce concrete results.

With an overview of the entire project it was added that in spite of the departure of the former coordinator of the EZA, the new coordinator Grit Terborg, had successfully counterbalanced the departure. Thanks were also given to the male and female experts on behalf of the organisations. It was stressed that their work had brought much to this project. The coordinators and experts worked together in tandem, creating a harmonious balance of cooperation. Heartfelt thanks went to the project leader Sabine Möller.

The evaluation on the day before the conference was also an important element of the work. Here thanks went to Zsuzsanna Dietrich for the evaluation and Julia Rieck for the report. The ACW were thanked for their good seminar work.

The sustainability of the aforementioned achievements is also an important element and is to be taken a main focal point in the individual countries.

Agenda of the next Meeting

Where and when:

Brixen, South Tyrol, Italy

Dates:

14.01.2008 "Roadmap" from each country (brief summary of the previous brainstorm results)

26 + 27.01.2008: Meeting in Brixen for the Coordinators

30.04.2008: Brief feedback on previous tasks (10 rows)

30.06.2008: Second brief feedback (10 rows)

September 2008: Women's seminar in Königswinter (AZK)