

Handbook for Women's Resource Centres

Why and how WRCs can contribute to change



PHOTO: LANI NOREKE

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A gender (un)equal labour market and growth: why and how Women's Resource Centres can contribute to change the status quo

Introduction

The following chapter is aimed at providing a comprehensive though summarized picture of problems and issues at stake when considering gender inequality in its economic dimensions. Awareness and knowledge of such topics may constitute the baseline on which women's organizations such as Women's Resource Centres can build their own strategies to act as legitimated subjects working in favour of women's economic empowerment.

Data and figures are mainly those relevant for EU 27 countries as well as reference to policies is about EC and EU programmes and measures on employment, social inclusion and growth: even if this may appear as limiting, it is important to stress how Women's Resource Centres, strongly rooted within the European experience, may be an interesting, open and flexible model for gender equality actions worldwide¹.

Intersected dimensions of employment, work life balance, education and research, entrepreneurship and innovation are addressed in this chapter: all of them are crucial sites where gender inequality is rooted and there's broad room for WRCs to contribute. That's why, after describing the socio-economic context through available data, we chose to formulate some of the crucial questions about how to overcome existing unbalances and how organizations such as Women's Resource Centres can contribute towards this goal.

The final paragraph focuses on policies for regional growth in the framework of the Europe 2020 strategy and highlights some directions to interpret them with a gendered approach.

Employment

In the EU27 in 2009, the employment rate for women (age 25–54) without children was 75.8% and it showed a

decreasing pattern for those with one child (71.3%), for those with two children (69.2%) and those with three children or more (54.7%)².

Still, women's participation in the labour market is widely featured by a high and increasing share of part-time work. In 2008, the share of women employees working part-time was 31.1% in the EU-27 while it was only 7.9% for men.

Figures provided by Eurostat have clearly showed that due to the high prevalence of part-time employment among female workers, the employment rates measured in full-time equivalent have increased at a much slower pace than the traditional measure (in headcounts, which includes part time workers). Moreover, the gender gap between men's and women's employment's rates is even higher if measured in full-time equivalent; it slightly reduced over the last five years (from 21.2 percentage points in 2003 to 20.2 percentage points in 2008) and has even widened in some of the Member States (Poland, Slovakia, Sweden, Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania, Finland, the Czech Republic and Hungary).

Open questions

- How is it possible to concretely foster women's employment at national, regional and EU levels?
- Is it part time a free choice for women or a forced solution?
- Which counter side effects does part time prove to have in terms of income and pensions?
- How could we reduce the rate of women who are unemployed and/or part time employees?

WRCs role in improving the situation

- Women's Resource Centres can be useful tools to support women in finding a job: by offering a wide range of gender sensitive counselling and support services to women individuals who are looking for a job.
- WRCs actively link with Local/Regional Job Centres'services for matching demand/offer valuing women's skills and competences in the labour market.
- WRCs can actively raise women's awareness about the limits of part time employment and support them to negotiate with employers the opportunity of reversible part time schemes to be endorsed in periods in life when care duties are more demanding.

Reconciliation between work, private and family life

Parenthood and the care of children, elderly and/or people with disabilities have traditionally been considered a women's task. This is why care activities widely impact on women's participation in the labour market.

Under this respect an important factor is the availability of care services for children and other dependent persons. The EU set the Barcelona target of 33% of all children aged 0–3 to be offered available care services and the EU 25 share increased on average from 25% in 2005 to 30% in 2007. Nevertheless, this percentage varies significantly across countries and these services are not always available on a full-time basis or affordable to families and/or single parents. Statistics have proved that about 30% of working-age women having care responsibilities are inactive or work part-time (but would like to work more hours) due to the lack of care services for children, elderly people and/or people with disabilities.

Open Questions

- The recent and ongoing economic and financial crisis has led to further cuts in national budgets for public care services and has fostered the 'subsidiarity' approach in welfare policies calling for communities' and families' involvement and active participation in being responsible of care activities for the youngest, the elderly and disabled people. How is it possible to counteract potential unequal gendered effects of this trend? Which precautions may be taken to avoid increasing women's burden of care activities?
- How to stress the need for public, affordable and high quality care services as tools for improving women's employment rates and therefore national/European growth?
- How to continue promoting change in culture and opinions about women being the main carers within families?
- How to help women and families for a better management of their work-life balance?
- How to support women's businesses in the care sector so that they can offer high quality services?

WRCs' role for change

- WRCs may be among the actors that lobby supranational, national and regional institutions and spread awareness to continue supporting welfare state services and to be aware of potential gendered counter side effects of privatising processes.
- Women's Resource Centres can be active both in raising awareness activities with couples and families to promote an equal share of care tasks between men and women and to integrate these specific issues in their counselling activities for women looking for a job and/or employed ones and/or entrepreneurs.
- WRCs can sensitise young people and students by way of cooperating with schools and educational institutions to promote change on gender stereotypes and care work.
- WRCs have the capacities to work in cooperation with Regional and Local Governments, Trade Unions and Employers Organizations to counsel and support women entrepreneurs who are active in the care sector and raise their awareness on quality standards in care services.

Education and research

In the last decades women have reached men's level in educational attainment and young women (20-24) record a higher level than men in almost all Member States. On average, 81.3% of young women (20- 24) reached at least upper secondary school in the EU in 2008, against only 75.6% of young men. Furthermore, women represent as much as 59% of university graduates in the EU. The percentage is higher than 50% in all Member States and even higher than 65% in Hungary, Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia³.

At present, being highly skilled didn't help women in improving their employment patterns. The gender gap in employment rates is lower among women and men having tertiary education than for lower levels of education and still the level of education seems to have a limited influence on gender gaps: gender gaps in employment, part-time work and pay tend to rise between the age of 25 and the age of 35, reflecting the high impact of family responsibilities on female employment.

Last but not least, it's important to stress how in spite of the fact that women now outnumber men among university graduates, they are underrepresented among researchers and academic staff as women represent only 18% of professors in public universities. Horizontal segregation in education and academy is visible as men outnumber women among PhD students and graduates, especially in science, mathematics and computing and for engineering, manufacturing and construction.

Open Questions

- How to tackle and contrast gender stereotypes and discrimination in education from kindergartens to the University and involving both institutions and students and their parents?
- How to deconstruct the myth of hard sciences and technologies as masculine domains?
- How to raise awareness of employers' and their organizations on lost talents and potentials of highly skilled girls who are not employed due to gender discrimination in recruitment processes?
- How to attract more girls to scientific and technological curricula and how to support them in their school-employment transition?
- How to attract more boys to care professions and related studies?

WRC's Role for Change

- Women's Resource Centres can run specific projects on gender in education at various level and together with institutional actors from the education sectors (ministerial agencies, universities, schools) bringing in their gender expertise with focus on the economy and employment.
- Women's Resource Centres can counsel girls and boys on their study choices and perspective careers.
- Women's Resource Centres dedicated to educational matters and gender pedagogies may be set up to support schools and teachers in tackling gender stereotypes and discriminations.

Entrepreneurship

With a broad definition women's entrepreneurship and associated indicators may be identified as:

- percentage of women who are self-employed
- percentage of women-owned business
- entrepreneurship rate of women.

Research⁴ showed that in EU countries women constitute just 34.4% of the EU's self-employed workforce, therefore there is potential for developing more women led businesses. Surveys showed how 39.4% of women would choose to be self-employed compared to 50.2% of men and this means that women are more reluctant to become entrepreneurs.

In general, women seem to be less attracted by self employment: from recent surveys more women (66%) than men (57%) have never thought about setting up a business or taking steps to realise that end, and more men (38%) than women (26%) consider the possibility of becoming an entrepreneur as something feasible.

For women an important drive seems to be the possibility of developing their personal interests and having an interesting job, the freedom to choose the place and time of working and having better income prospects.

Discouraging factors to entrepreneurship for women seem to be not having the security of a fixed income, having to work long hours and lack of social security provision.

About access to finance, more women (77%) than men (73%) agree with the statement "It is difficult to start one's own business due to a lack of available financial support". Women are also more likely to place the emphasis on the need for necessary financial means (83% of women compare to 78% of men consider this important).

Regarding entrepreneurship skills, more women (53%) than men (43%) agree with the statement "one should not start a business if there is a risk it might fail". On the other hand, lack of business ideas is quoted less by women than by men, revealing how women's entrepreneurial creativity could be a triggering element for female-guided businesses.

Open questions

- How to make EU, national and regional policies supportive of women's entrepreneurship, both targeting prospective women's starts up and existing women led businesses?
- How to enhance gender sensitiveness of the main regional development's actors such as regional development agencies, employers organizations, chambers of commerce, banks and the credit system?

- Which services are the most useful in order to support and/or give visibility to women entrepreneurs?
- How to identify and meet women's entrepreneurs needs for specific trainings, mentoring and networking?
- How to counsel women who wants to start up their own business and those who are already managing a firm?

WRC's role for change

- WRCs are constantly raising awareness on these issues at supranational and regional levels through their networks and associations. By developing Regional and European projects they can promote measures such as for example financial support to women's starts up, incubators for women's enterprises, favourable credit conditions based on agreements or codes of conduct undersigned by banks.
- Entrepreneurship is actually one of the most advanced and successful field of activities for Women's Resource Centres in Europe which offers qualified services and support to women's starts up and to well established businesswomen.
- WRC's have and can transfer their expertise in organizing training, mentoring sessions and networking activities for women entrepreneurs, such as cross border study visits.

Innovation

As far as women's entrepreneurial drive and innovation are concerned, EU figures highlight that⁵:

- Only 8.3% of patents awarded by the European Patent Office are awarded to women
- Only 20.3% of businesses started with venture capital belong to female entrepreneurs
- Women score less than men when assessing the level of innovation of their own business
- Only 5%-15% of high-tech business is owned by women

The meaning of the concept 'innovation' has recently changed: it was linked to 'radical change and novelty' and it is now considered as a complex and incremental process introducing in the market either a new product, or/and a new service, a new production process and/or use and/or a new organizational structure.

Moreover, traditionally innovation has been identified with technology and science and this has led to gender bias and have added a male connotation to its meaning, excluding from its definition sectors and fields where women have given and are still giving a major contribution like the third sector economy and the services market⁶.

Gender horizontal and vertical segregation affecting ITC as well as STEM (Science, Technologies and Mathematics) is definitely a serious problem of wasted talents and dispersed women's human capital with enormous negative impact on innovation itself, supposed that Europe has to build its future as one of the major players in a globalized economy of knowledge. There are enormous opportunities to be caught within innovative sectors of the economy such as the green jobs in renewable energy sources and in general within businesses and services aimed at making the economic system more sustainable and less polluting: women has always showed a big sensitivity towards these issues and have a lot to contribute to⁷.

Policies and studies at all level often assume a gender biased perspective on innovation and women's actual and potential contributions to innovation processes is often concealed. The issue is both one of valuing women's researchers and innovators' contribution and of considering women's needs and interests when supporting innovation processes and/or designing innovative products. Innovation in organizational cultures and patterns would also benefit from paying attention to work life balance issues, and gender/diversity in human resources management.

Fostering gender equality in innovation processes means that new approaches have to be thought of when supporting changes in economic and social systems.

Luleå University together with WINNET Sweden and Resource Centres for Women have proposed the 'Quadruple Helix model' in the process of raising national support for women's contribution to innovation on a regional level. This vision requires that civil society sector and women's civil society has to be included in innovation policies and definitions, together with the productive sector, the public one and the academy. The ideas are now being further tested through the INTERREG IVC project WINNET⁸.

Even if the issue is one of big complexity and would definitely need a systemic approach to be tackled, unfortunately EC policies within the Europe 2020 Strategy⁹ are still very poor regarding to gender. Although they mention dual career and the need for gender statistics in innovation they did not produce concrete indicators and concrete initiatives yet. All the 3 flagship initiatives devoted to innovation and the knowledge economy and to achieving a 'Smart Growth' within the Europe 2020 strategy would need to be interpreted in a gendered way: Youth on the move, for being able to address girls and boys needs and guide them in their future working lives and careers against all stereotypes; Innovation Union, and the Digital Agenda for all issues and arguments already mentioned in previous paragraphs. Women's international organizations are striving to enhance a gendered dimension throughout all these topics and WRCs are working on this too through their national and European associations¹⁰.

Open Questions

- How can we change and broaden the meanings and definitions of innovation so that we include women's needs and approaches?
- Which are the most useful strategies to support innovation and growth in a systemic and cooperative way, the economic sectors, civil society, public authorities and academia ensuring that a gender perspective is taken into account?
- How can we support women innovators and researchers?

WRC's role for change

- WRCs can be active subjects within innovation networks, according to the above mentioned quadruple helix model.
- WRCs can liaise with the academy, other civil society members, governmental authorities and the private sectors for innovation and sustainable development with a gender perspective.
- WRCs can create and coordinate customized projects around innovative women's starts up.
- They can support and counsel women's innovators and inventors in their career paths.
- Specialized WRC on ICT and technologies may work in training women returners and with young girls and schools.

Conclusion: gendered regional development policies

Several studies have estimated the impact of an increase in female employment (or of a reduction of the gender gaps in employment) on economic growth. One of the most recent ones¹¹ estimates that there could be a gain in GDP of almost 30% for the EU as a whole if gender gaps were eliminated. Even if the limitations of these calculations and the risk of overestimation are recognised in such a study, these figures show the great economic potential of reducing gender gaps (not only in employment rates but also in part-time working and in pay) in all EU Member States.

Regional Development policies necessarily include measures for promoting a sustainable and just economic and social development based on all above-mentioned areas, from boosting entrepreneurship to promoting innovation, enhancing employment and work life balance, promoting human capital through education.

The Structural Funds are EU resources devoted to regional growth and cohesion and they represent 1/3 of the EU budget; they are divided into ESF (the European Social Fund in line with the Employment Strategy) and ERDF (the European Regional Development Fund support programmes addressing regional development, economic change, enhanced competitiveness and territorial cooperation). Funding priorities include research, innovation, environmental protection and risk prevention, while infrastructure investment retains an important role, especially in the least developed regions and the Cohesion Fund (interventions on environment and transportation). The EU is now in the middle of its decision making phase for next programming phase (2013–2020) and women are lobbying across several organizations and groups in order to influence such a process and make it less gender blind.

In the closing programming period experience has proved that although gender equality was indicated as a crosscutting theme both in EU Policy documents and was integrated in goals and objectives within National and Regional Programming Documents for FESR and

ESF funds¹², this type of discursive mainstreaming often doesn't correspond to concrete actions and projects in favour of women.

Important inputs are coming from international women's organizations such as the European Community of Practices on Gender Mainstreaming¹³ for increasing quality standards and the accountability of gender mainstreaming strategies in Structural Funds.

Nevertheless, it is important to continue to stress how important it is to invest on positive actions for women in regional development, as gender mainstreaming by itself still presents several pitfalls and risks¹⁴. This is what Winnet Europe, the European Association of Women's Resource Centres is trying to do together with partners from the Winnet8 Project: a consultation process has been launched at the European level to collect hints and suggestions on how to innovate gender equality policies and make growth policies more effective and sustainable through a gender approach. Results from the consultation process and from regional Round Tables organized within Winnet8 and leading to Regional Action Plans will form a participatory baseline to shape policy recommendations.

In recent years, interesting projects on gender equality in regional development have been funded by the European Commission/DG Regional Policies and Women's Resource Centres have been leading actors in carrying them out: these were concrete actions that have been put in place to support regional development policies with a gender equal approach and have shown how WRCs can contribute to the debate and implement actions and initiatives to empower women's role in regional economies.

Examples

FEM

FEM project, a Baltic Sea Region Interreg III B project 2004–2007 (Lead Partner Finland, partners from Sweden, Norway, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland). The overall aim of the FEM project was to build up a structure for the support of women's entrepreneurship in the Baltic Sea Region. The result promised was to strengthen the role of women in local and regional development and to

promote the access of women into the labour market. Training, meeting-places and networking were considered main tools to tackle these obstacles and Women's Resource Centres were the structures identified for having a role in carrying them out.

W.IN.NET

Interreg III C W.IN.NET 2003–2005, a European Network of Women's Resource Centres (Lead Partner Sweden, partners from France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia). W.IN.NET was promoted with the aim of creating a European network of Women's Resource Centres, through interregional cooperation, able to increase and improve policies and tools for Equal Opportunities between men and women at the local, regional and European level, promoting women's role in development. The model of the European Network of Women's Resource Centres has been developed focusing on the following subjects:

- 1 Modelling of Resource Centres for Women, as promoters of regional and local development
- 2 Women entrepreneurs
- 3 Territorial systems on gender equality and local development
- 4 Services and activities for unemployed women and women in difficulty
- 5 Women and new technologies.

As a sustainable outcome of the project, the Winnet Europe Association was founded in 2007

www.winneteurope.org

WINNET8

Interreg IV C WINNET8 2009–2011 (Lead Partner Sweden, partners from Greece, Italy, Finland, UK, Bulgaria, Poland, Portugal). Winnet8 goal is to contribute to regional growth by improving women's participation in the labour market focusing on horizontally segregated labour markets, the lack of women in innovation and technology and the lack of women in entrepreneurship.

The project aims at shaping regional, national and EU-level policies and development programmes that relate to women's status in the labour market and ensure these policies are integrated into mainstream provisions.

Good practices developed mainly by Women's Resource Centres and identified in previous projects for attracting women into non traditional fields are selected and action plans will be developed which will address the ways the status of women in the labour market can be improved (more on www.winnnet8.eu).

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- 1 See some already existing examples: the AWFDF Resource Centre in Ghana <http://www.awdf.org/browse/1055>; The Women's Research and Resource Centre (WRRC) Limbe, Cameroon <http://www.worldpulse.com/node/21189>; Asia Japan Women's Resource Center (AJWRC) Japan <http://www.aworc.org/org/ajwrc/ajwrc.html>; Centro de recursos Generar Igualdad, Consejo Nacional Mujeres Argentina <http://www.cnm.gov.ar/generarigualdad/index.php>, the Tashkent WRC in Uzbekistan <http://www.civilsoc.org/nisorgs/uzbek/wmrsrctr.htm>.
- 2 EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2009). SEC(2009) 1706. COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT accompanying document to the REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS Equality between women and men – 2010.
- 3 EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2009). SEC(2009) 1706. COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT accompanying document to the REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS Equality between women and men – 2010.
- 4 The EuroBarometer Survey on Entrepreneurship Sources: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/enterprise_policy/survey/eurobarometer_intro.htm; EC, DG Enterprise and Industry (2008). Evaluation on policy: promotion of women innovators and entrepreneurship. E E C (GHK, Technopolis).
- 5 EC, DG Enterprise and Industry (2008). Evaluation on policy: promotion of women innovators and entrepreneurship. E E C (GHK, Technopolis).
- 6 Lindberg M (2007). Deconstructing gender and innovation – four regional networks challenging Sweden's innovation policy. Paper presented at the conference Past, present and future at Umeå University, Sweden, 14–17 June 2007. Inger Danilda & Jennie Granat Thorslund (2011). Innovation and Gender. VINNOVA Information V, Vasteras, Sweden.
- 7 Arshad Rab, Lisa Rustico & Selma Terzimehic (eds). 2010. Women in green economy. A human capital perspective. Dossier from the WiRES Project (Women in Renewable Energy Sector), a project co-funded by the European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, budget heading 04.03.03.01, Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue.
- 8 Inger Danilda, Malin Lindberg and Britt-Marie Torstensson (2009). Women Resource Centres – A Quattro Helix Innovation System on the European Agenda, HSS09, 1–3 June 2009, Luleå Tekniska Universitet
- 9 http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm
- 10 Winnet Sweden organized an important Nordic seminar on Gender and ICT in November 2010; the Winnet8 Interreg IVC Project and the Winnet Europe Association recently promoted a consultation on Innovation in gender equality policies which will outcome in a series of policy recommendations to the European Commission (see the portals www.winneteurope.org and www.winnnet8.eu). Another European association such as the ECWT presented a Position paper on Gender in the Digital Agenda for Europe (www.womenandtechnology.eu).
- 11 A. Löfgren, Gender equality, economic growth and employment, 2009. This report was presented at the conference held under the Swedish Presidency 'What does gender equality mean for growth and employment?', Stockholm, 15-16 October 2009.
- 12 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=3988&langId=en>
- 13 Read the Position Paper on the Next Funding Period on the web site www.gendercop.com
- 14 Woodward, A. (2008). European Gender Mainstreaming: Promises and Pitfalls of Transformative Policy, Review of Policy Research Volume 20, Issue 1, pages 65–88, March 2003. Benschop, Y. & Mieke Verloo, (2006). Sisyphus' Sisters: Can Gender Mainstreaming Escape the Genderedness of Organizations? Journal of Gender Studies, Volume 15, Number 1, Number 1/March 2006, pp. 19–33(15).

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Swedish National Federation
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