

## WRC, the historical background and their role and mission today



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### Women's Resource Centres, the historical background and their role and mission today

*Women's Resource Centres have their roots in Sweden and have existed for about 20 years. Nowadays, WRCs can be found all over Europe. Here, we describe some WRCs in Europe, as examples of the diversity in structure and design of WRCs according to needs and the structure of society. Efforts are ongoing to ensure acceptance of the women's resource centre approach within the EU and the idea that Women's Resource Centres should be seen as a tool in realising EU 2020 and cohesion policy 2013-2020. And, like rings on water, the ideas are spreading to discussions about using the Women's Resource Centre model in South Africa, Turkey, Chile, Armenia ...*

## The history of WRCs

### Swedish roots

Resource Centres for women have their roots in Sweden and among women living in rural areas, who have long experience of networking. During the 1980s women's rights enthusiasts were working proactively with local village development and women's issues. This included work within the framework of the countryside campaign called "Let all Sweden live", which was part of regional development policy. Some women formed a group that initiated various cooperative projects, conferences and network-building efforts. The group was linked to the Swedish National Rural Development Delegation at the Ministry of Labour from 1988 to 1992. The women's group sought to ensure that regional policies were given a women's perspective through lobbying activities concerning the distribution of funds for regional policies and the unequal gender division in regional policy issues.

*Women's Power* was a three-year project that started in 1992 where the women's group had left off. It was linked organisationally to the Swedish National Rural Development Agency, which, together with the Ministry of Labour, financed the project. An administrative office

was set up in Stockholm. Women's Power conferences were held all over the country. The goal was to create Regional Resource Centres for women and to create a National Resource Centre for women in Stockholm.

Women's Power achieved these goals when the government decided in June 1994 to give the County Administrative Boards the responsibility to prioritise means of establishing Regional Resource Centres for women. The Parliament also decided to give the Swedish Business Development Agency (NUTEK) and the Swedish National Rural Development Agency the mission to set up a National Resource Centre for women at NUTEK.

From the start of 1994 the role of the County Administrative Boards was to be a motor, to stimulate, support and assist in the exchange of experience, and to take the initiative to collaboration and the establishment of networks. An increasing number of women discovered that working with a WRC was a meaningful way of working. In this way regional WRCs grew up across the entire country. The scope of the activities grew and many projects were carried out by WRCs.

The government successively prolonged the NRC project until 1999. The main task for the NRC was to support and coordinate the work of the Women's Resource Centres nationwide. The NRC developed a variety of educational courses, produced research and investigation reports, published the news pamphlet "Women's Power" and organised conferences. When the NRC's project term was over, the project was wound up and the staff was disbanded. NUTEK was to integrate the work NRC staff had previously done into NUTEK's other operations – i.e. mainstreaming. (The name of NUTEK has been changed and is now Tillväxtverket, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth).

The board of the NRC felt that the knowledge, competence and experience built up in the NRC project should be put to good use. Accordingly the board decided to create a non-profit association. On the 16th of December 1999, *the Swedish National Federation of Resource Centres for Women*, NRC was founded. The name of the national federation of Women's Resource Centres was changed to Winnet Sweden in 2010.



There are about 150 local and regional WRCs all over Sweden. Most of them are NGOs while others may be run by public authorities or other organisations.

### **The European movement**

The Swedish WRC model has been successfully disseminated, leading to the start-up and running of around 400 hundred organisations all over Europe.

### **Winnet Europe**

W.IN.NET – an INTERREG IIIC project 2003-2006, was conducted to develop a European network for Women's Resource Centres. In the W.IN.NET project, contacts were created between the organisations involved so that women participated in development work throughout the entire EU. The project led to the formation of the European WRC, Winnet Europe. Winnet Europe, the European Association of Women's Resource Centres, was established in June 2006. The name Winnet Europe stands for Women In Net in Europe.

## **The WRCs' role and mission today**

### **Women's Resource Centres in Europe**

Women's Resource Centres serve as key tools for women's active participation in regional development and growth, innovation and entrepreneurship, as well as in building sustainable and gender equal regions in the European Union.

Winnet Europe has, in 2010, member organisations in 10 of the 27 EU Member States. There are also prospective future members from outside the European Union. The member organisations of Winnet Europe are National WRCs, Federal state WRCs, Regional WRCs, Local WRCs and supporting members, [www.winneteurope.org](http://www.winneteurope.org)

The Annual General Meeting, AGM, is the Association's highest decision-making organ which elects the Board

of Winnet Europe, comprising the president, 10 full members and 10 proxies. The President of Winnet Europe is Ms Britt-Marie S. Torstensson, Sweden.

The mission of Winnet Europe is to strengthen the role of WRCs as key actors in regional growth and support the participation of women in regional development. Winnet Europe, in a collaborative effort among national, federal/regional and local organisations in EU Member States, aims to support and reinforce the activities of WRCs and/or other similar women's organisations to work to advocate that:

- Women claim their share of society's resources
- Women's competence is utilised in society
- Women's and men's efforts are valued equally in society

WRCs in the regions of Europe actively participate in partnerships and some of their key thematic focus areas are:

1. Gender Equality Perspectives in Regional and Local Policies
2. Women's Entrepreneurship and SME Development
3. Gender Equality Perspective on Innovation and ICT
4. Social Inclusion and Women's Opportunities on the Labour Market

### **Winnet Sweden**

Winnet Sweden is the National Women's Resource Centre in Sweden. Winnet Sweden is a non-profit organisation that was formed in December 1999. Local and Regional Women's Resource Centres and women's networks can apply for membership. Private individuals who support the work of Winnet Sweden can become supporting members. The mission is, through coordinating and supporting regional and local resource centres and networks, to work to ensure that

- women claim their share of society's resources
- women's competence is utilised by society
- efforts made by women and men are equally valued.

Winnet Sweden generates public opinion and spreads information about women's life situation. Winnet Sweden shall, through influencing and cooperating with organisations and authorities, nationally and internationally, promote a society in which women's

potential, rights and obligations are upheld. Winnet Sweden works to ensure that women and men have the same conditions and opportunities concerning work, working conditions, development potential and entrepreneurship and to promote an equal gender division in respect of power and influence. [www.winnetsverige.se](http://www.winnetsverige.se)

### **The ongoing work in Sweden**

The work of WRCs can be summarised in the concepts 'make visible' and 'make possible'. This means making women, both Swedish and immigrants, and their competence, visible. Making competence development and business contacts possible is another task. Making visible also means working to ensure that women participate in regional and local development and in the work with regional growth programmes, that women's perspective is taken into account and that women receive their share of the resources available. Regional WRCs are often represented in partnerships for regional growth programmes, regional development programmes, in equality councils and in groups for the development of rural areas.

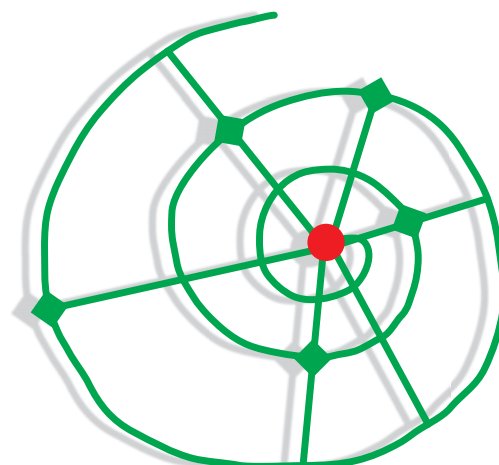
The target group is all women who wish to and are able to work actively to contribute to improving women's conditions and opportunities within regional and local growth and development and thereby contribute to integration and equality. This applies to entrepreneurship, health, a gender-divided labour market, education, the life situation for young women etc.

Strategies include creating meeting places for contact and development, cooperating in networks for women and collaborating with the authorities and organisations. Important tools in this work are network-building, competence development and development projects.

### **National collaboration in Sweden**

Tillväxtverket, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth and Winnet Sweden have intensified their collaboration and in May 2005 it was agreed to draw up a common declaration of intent for the continued work and for to obtain further resources for the growth work taking place in the country's local and regional WRCs. The declaration of intent can be found in English on the website [www.winnetsverige.se](http://www.winnetsverige.se)

## **Network Women's Resource Centre in Mecklenburg-Westpomerania**



The Network Women's Resource Centre is a common project for supporting female entrepreneurs of the Institute for Data processing and Management GmbH in cooperation with the association Women into business in Rostock

- 1999 start of the activities of the first Women's Resource Centre in Rostock
- 2002–2004 development of the existing network and start of the activities of 5 Local Women's Resource Centres in rural areas (Sternberg, Bad Doberan, Grimmen, Wolgast, Stavenhagen)
- 2005–2006 continuation of the activities of the 5 WRCs and the establishment of 3 new WRCs in Rostock, Hagenow und Pasewalk
- 2007–2008 3 Local WRCs in Güstrow, Rostock and Stavenhagen
- 2009-2011 Local Women's Resource Centre in Parchim

### **Objectives of the Network Women's Resource Centre in Mecklenburg-Westpomerania**

- to increase the proportion of female entrepreneurs
- to develop the business and personal competences of women and the use of them for local and regional development
- to motivate women for the takeover of a business
- to help women get more chances and opportunities, giving them more influence in regional and social development processes, in the same way as men have to get support in starting up their own business, and to help them establish contacts with other businesswomen

- to have a community with the Network Women's Resource Centre in order to exchange experience
- to sensitise the partners in the network of local authorities, banks for the special needs and situation of female entrepreneurs

### Activity profile of the Women's Resource Centre

Support in the process of starting up and consolidation of a business:

- information and guidance in respect of starting-up a business and consolidating an existing business (idea, business fields, regional conditions, partners)
- analysis of ideas and common problems in business life (financial strategy, situation on the market, chances of success)
- seminars on business objectives under special consideration of the situation of women
- meetings of the regional networks (participants in the project and other regional partners) and all networks throughout the country
- workshops
- round tables
- launching of regional products on the market
- arrangement of help and support for other businesswomen of the network, e.g. by giving a practical training which can lead to the creation of a new job
- mentoring through pairing a successful businesswomen with a female entrepreneur
- gender training for partners of the network about how work for businesswomen and men
- development of a supporting structure to realise gender equality in all business fields

### Special topics on the basis of Gender Mainstreaming are

- the change of role from employee or unemployed woman to businesswoman
- learning to realise the difference between the particular life roles as woman, businesswoman, mother, daughter, wife and girlfriend
- the special development as child in education of gender stereotypes
- the support of the life partner and the family in the process of starting up a business and the development of a supportive structure

- how to find balance in managing business and family tasks,
- individual coaching according to the special needs in the start-up process and further consolidation such as promotion or financial advice

### Results of the activities of the Resource Centre from 2002–2008

- 4 496 participants, 2 596 women (57.7 %)
- Start-ups 1 434, 822 women (57.3 %)
- Females starting businesses are around 45-50 years old when they start their own enterprises
- 60 regional meetings of the Network Women's Resource Centre

### Contact

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## FRAU & ARBEIT in Salzburg, Austria



Frau & Arbeit is an NGO, established in 1995 and from 2010 onwards working as a non-profit limited company. Frau & Arbeit has 23 employees in five offices in the regions Salzburg, Hallein, Bischofshofen, Zell am See and Tamsweg in Austria.

The work in Salzburg is supported by the Employment Service Salzburg, Federal Government Salzburg, Chamber of Labour, City of Salzburg, Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth, Federal Chancellery: Women, ESF and EFRE. Frau & Arbeit cooperates very closely with the Employment Service in all regions of Salzburg and in some cases the offices are located in the same building. The essential political will to drive the organisation can be seen at all levels. Important in this context both for Frau & Arbeit and for the customers is a very good network with all regional organisations based in Salzburg and accordingly a common platform. This gives the customers the best possible broad overall support and is a solid foundation for Frau & Arbeit.

### Main Areas

Frau & Arbeit mainly works in two areas: firstly, Frau & Arbeit offers coaching, consulting, training and networking for women who are seeking changes in their occupation or career; the second area is developing, designing and coordinating women-orientated EU projects.

### Target Groups

The services are offered to women who

- are unemployed
- are returning to the labour market after maternity leave or other family-related breaks
- want to change their occupation/career
- want to start or have started their own business

### Services

The services include

- compact information
- professional coaching
- creative solutions
- practice-orientated workshops
- strategic networking
- services on the www (arbeiten-in-salzburg.at, die-unternehmerinnen-info.at)

### Current EU projects being run by Frau & Arbeit

- FIT – Frauen in die Technik (integration of Women into technical fields of work)
- InterregIVA: “Unternehmerinnenschaffenmehrwert” (transnational project with Bavaria, Networking amongst entrepreneurs, Internet-marketplace, micro-financing)
- InterregIVA: “ProFiT” – Family and work (transnational project with Italy regarding work-life balance in touristic areas)
- Women 45+

- Integration of women with migration background in the labour market
- Prevention counselling and labour market advice for female sexworkers
- ISS: Internet-Service Site: Information for job-seekers
- Regional Coordination offices for TEP “Territorial Employment Pact” and implementation of Gender Mainstreaming
- Transit workers project: “Compulsory school assistants” in the Salzburg region
- Collaboration as experts in InterregIVC, WINNET8

### Completed (EU) Projects

- Information centre for younger woman
- Employment NOW: Berta (female entrepreneurship, work-life-balance, vocational training of low qualified women)
- InterregIIA: Frauen imBusiness (Women business centre)
- LEONARDO: Multiply now (know-how-transfer and networking of woman's foundation centres)
- InterregIIIA: MAP: Mentoring as an instrument of Human resources development
- Equal 1: Technik A. (integration of women in technical fields of work)
- Ziel2: Vocational training for female job returnees in rural areas
- Equal: Technik.A
- InterregIII B: Women Alpnet (Network of women's resource centres in the alpine space)
- InterregIIIA: WIN – Women's Job and business Net
- Equal 2: “Sichtwechsel” – Women 45+
- Equal 2: Flu Equal – Regional dialogue processes for integration of asylum seekers

### Contact

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Swedish National Federation  
of Resource Centres for women



SWEDISH AGENCY FOR ECONOMIC AND REGIONAL GROWTH