

On the occasion of Women's Day: a new, innovative proposal from 9 European regions.

Regional Equality Plans

Featured by the Women's Support Centres

Popi Sourmaidou Ergani centre, Greece

The European objectives regarding Gender Equality have not been achieved yet. This is a fact verified by statistics: lack of participation in decision-making centres, in the labour market, lack in equal payment, in the possession of capital and resources, in entrepreneurship, in research and innovation, in sharing family responsibilities, in balancing professional and personal life. Even today, European societies cannot fully provide a dynamic role to women.

Moreover, there are specific groups of women experiencing many difficulties in their lives: women in rural areas, those with low competences, without professional expertise, those with long term absence from the labour market due to obligations pertaining to taking care of their children or other family members, single mothers, members of cultural or ethnic minorities, victims of domestic violence. Stereotypes keep younger as well as more mature women unemployed and conventional standards drive women to adopt traditional roles in traditional sectors.

In Ergani Centre, we support women to achieve their professional goals for the last 20 years; we confront the complexity of women's problems everyday. These women often express their embarrassment and frustration due to the lack of outlets and alternatives in their lives.

After implementing for 20 years now European and national programs and projects related to the promotion of gender equality, it is obvious that we are far from the expected results and maybe it's about time we made a meaningful assessment of what has happened in the past and what should be done in the future. Is there a new form of struggling? Is there a way to take advantage of the benefits of the past, to consolidate any success, to profit from diversity, to capitalize on the results, to evaluate the impact, to think and to get away from the problems and the restrictions? Is there a unique way, a unique truth, a unique opinion?

Ergani Centre, the Region of Western Macedonia and our 18 partners of the WINNET 8 project, from 8 European countries and 9 regions believe that there are no magic, ready - or pre-made solutions. There is only another way, the way of collaboration, synthesis and synergies, of transferring good practices, of capitalizing on the experiences, of using the multiplying and different proposals, of networking at all levels. **These regions can provide solutions to the problems of women with a new planning process** that should include:

- Participation and suggestions in each region from all stakeholders of the 'quadruple helix': the public sector, the educational and research



- community, the private sector and finally from the Civil society at large
- Networking and cooperation at European level with other regions for the constant renewal of the proposals and for the most innovative approach
- the continuous monitoring and evaluation of the results aiming at lasting improvement.

regional development as new resources which unfortunately until now were partially decommissioned and wasted.

WINNET 8 project started in January 2010 and will be completed by the end of 2011.

The objective of a Regional Policy for Equality is twofold: on the one hand there are **the improvement of the position of women in society** and the elimination of inequalities and on the other hand is **the regional development through the utilization of all human resources** in the region. Is this goal attainable? The answer of the WINNET 8 project partners is enthusiastically positive.

The WINNET8 project is funded by the INTERREG IV C.

In Greece a pilot project is implemented in Western Macedonia by Ergani Centre and the Region of Western Macedonia.

The main objective is the drawing of nine Regional Action Plans for Gender Equality, for the first time in Europe. Our work, ideas, proposals and actions will be used as an input to the European structural funds for the next programming period. The experience of Women Resources Centres (WRCs) and the accumulated good practices from the implementation of co-financed programs and projects from the past will be used as a basis. The WRCs take advantage of the dynamics of women so these will be incorporated in the