

PROJECT: LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS AGAINST SOCIAL EXCLUSION: MENTORING FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Overviews of the different experience in training women entrepreneurs and mentoring practices in Bulgaria, Slovakia and Turkey

These overviews were developed within the joint project: Learning Partnerships against Social Exclusion: Mentoring for Women Entrepreneurs, implemented by the Center of Women's Studies and Policies Foundation – Sofia, the Center of Women's Studies and Policies Association – Bratislava and KADER Association for Supporting and Training Women Candidates – Ankara during the period of 1 August 2005 to 31 July 2006. The project is financed by the Socrates/ Grundtvig 2 Learning Partnerships Subprogram.

The project aims at exchanging knowledge and good practices about mentoring for women entrepreneurs as an alternative learning form, and promoting mentoring for women entrepreneurs as a way to overcome gender disparities, social exclusion and poverty by empowering women to participate more actively in national economy.

The overviews answer some key question in order to analyse the existing gender disparities and/or inequalities in Bulgaria, Slovakia and Turkey, concerning the economic activity of men and women by preparing the overviews of the different experience in training women in entrepreneurship in these countries, which will be used for exchange of experience and good practices in mentoring for women entrepreneurs and serve as a basis for starting mentoring training programmes in Bulgaria and Turkey.

The overviews are prepared by:

Bulgaria: Magdanela Delinesheva, Center of Women's Studies and Policies Foundation – Sofia; Annexed “Report on the inquiry with women entrepreneurs”, prepared by Mariana Draganova, PHD, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Slovakia: Elvira Chadimova, PHD, Eva Shishkova, Top Center of Business Women Association (Top Centrum Podnikateľiek), Bratislava

Turkey: Ceren Isat, Association for Supporting and Training Women Candidates (KADER)

FOREWORD

The aims and objectives of the project: *Learning Partnerships against Social Exclusion: Mentoring for Women Entrepreneurs* respond to the overall goals of the European Union policy to encourage and fully involve the creative and entrepreneurial potential of women as a latent source of economic growth and new jobs.

In order to facilitate the creation of businesses by women, the EEA Member states (European Union and most European Free Trade Area countries) have taken various measures addressing issues such as start-ups, funding, training, mentoring, information/advice and networks. The European Commission has addressed the issue of female entrepreneurship within the framework of various policies and initiatives –the Structural Funds, the European Employment Strategy, the fourth Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, the Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005), the 3rd Multiannual Programme for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the European Union), the Multiannual Programme for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship in particular for SMEs (2001-2006). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has also dealt with this issue on various occasions, in particular through two conferences on Women Entrepreneurs and SMEs. A positive step, taken by the European Commission in facilitating the exchanges of good practice on policy to promote entrepreneurship among women is achieved through the *WES Network*¹, which brings together government officials with responsibility for promoting women entrepreneurs.

There are considerably fewer female than male entrepreneurs in Europe, proportions of self-employed women ranging from 16% in Ireland to 40% in Portugal. The percentage of female entrepreneurs in Europe still remains low in relation to that of male entrepreneurs and to the percentage of women in the population.² Women entrepreneurs face the difficulties commonly faced by all entrepreneurs, but in certain cases these issues, for example raising finance, appear to be more significant for them. Women also frequently lack the necessary confidence and skills to successfully start and run a business. There are a variety of reasons for this including the choice of activity, information gaps, perceived discrimination, lack of networks or difficulties in combining work with family obligations.³ Therefore, a key issue is how these specific problems faced by women entrepreneurs in setting up in should be overcome.

The creative and entrepreneurial potential of women is a latent source of economic growth and new jobs and should be encouraged by creating favourable conditions, support facilities and mechanisms and providing them with relevant training opportunities. One of the best ways to stimulate business development and personal growth is through mentors, who support small business managers.

The mentoring programmes for women entrepreneurs aim to contribute to the formation and success of new enterprises through the provision of a support network for new and potential entrepreneurs. Positive role-models are of key importance. The programmes focus on the development of skills required for successful business management through offering advisory

¹ Further information at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/entrepreneurship/craft/craft-women/wes.htm>

² "Benchmarking of Business Incubators", European Commission, February 2002

³ Best Project on "Promoting entrepreneurship amongst women" and the study "Young Entrepreneurs, Women Entrepreneurs, Co-Entrepreneurs and Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurs in the European Union and Central and Eastern Europe", European Commission, July 2000.

services, entrepreneurial training courses, information events and networking opportunities. Through mentoring programmes new entrepreneurs are assigned a personal mentor. Mentors are experienced and successful business-women who understand the problems encountered during the early stages of business development and are able to offer individually tailored advice and support. The benefits of using experienced women entrepreneurs to provide support for start up and developing businesses is seen as important especially in gaining business skills.

Mentoring in businesses offers women the chance to develop a relationship with one or more successful entrepreneurs. It may be implemented at the workplace and include different forms like tutoring, job shadowing, career exploration and role playing. The commitment of the mentor is mostly needed for a certain period of starting business.

What are the benefits of mentoring? It helps women face problems they have in starting their own economic activity and develops career and economic skills and knowledge. In this way mentoring supports women to stay motivated and focused and provides a positive way for making difference in their life and opportunities. On the other hand, it is beneficial for the mentors as well because this process and the relationship that is created with the mentees allow them to look at their own business from another angle.

A new form emerging with the development of the information and communication technologies is the e-mentoring, which takes place via the Internet and gives opportunities for mentors and mentees develop their relationship by exchanging messages online. This form makes mentoring available to mentors and mentees who otherwise might not be able to meet easily because of time or travel constraints. It helps mentees learn more about high-tech communications and improve their skills. A very important aspect of e-mentoring is that it offers women a way to find out about potential careers and overcome social exclusion. It enables women to work with mentors on special projects and to establish such relationships even across borders.