

*Workshop C3: Comprehensive  
Work-life-balance Policies (elderly care)*

## Against all the odds

Female unemployment rates in the central and southern parts of the Burgenland Region are higher than in any other Austrian region. There is a lack of easily accessible, affordable quality care for children and other family members. In addition, the area is not well served by public transport and many women feel that it does not make sense for them to accept a job offer because of the additional expense involved. At the end of the day, they say, the cost of travelling to work, of childcare or of care for elderly relatives would be higher than the prospective income, especially if it was only a part-time job. These difficulties are more severe for women with few, or no, formal qualifications. For them jobs are even harder to come by. Those jobs that do exist usually have rigid work schedules and fail to meet the needs of women with care responsibilities. Accessing job opportunities outside the region is only an option for highly qualified people, who often commute to major centres such as Vienna and Graz. No wonder that the women at the lower end of the skills hierarchy tend to work in the shadow economy, which exacerbates their problems: no social security coverage, no job security, no possibility of providing for retirement and old age.

The Development Partnership (DP) “plan:b”, which stands for “Zukunft ist planbar” (the Future can be Planned), is developing and testing a model of comprehensive approaches that will help the Burgenland women access the labour market and build a career – against all possible odds.

### Five modules for change

Led by the Women’s Bureau of the Regional Government and the regional development agency Regionalmanagement Burgenland GmbH, 30 organisations have joined forces and committed themselves to finding viable solutions to these multi-faceted problems. Partners include municipalities, training and adult education providers, women’s counselling and resource centres, gender equality bodies and social partner organisations. With a view to gender mainstreaming, the project seeks to bring about structural change that will result in equal opportunities for, and equal treatment of, women and men in the regional and local labour markets. The DP is experimenting



with five interlinked modules that form a model that integrates the key strategies that might achieve its goal.

#### **MODULE 1: maximising a work-life-balance package**

The rationale behind this first module is that to avoid re-inventing the wheel, it is necessary to collect good practices related to new flexible working time arrangements and innovative solutions to care and transport problems from all parts of Austria and from throughout the EU. Based on these findings, a team of researchers and practitioners develops new concepts that are adapted to the specific context and needs of the territory. These concepts will then be tested in the other four modules and the results, including the assessment of the women beneficiaries, will be fed back to the team that, in turn, will further improve these new approaches.

#### **MODULE 2: women’s activation forum**

The second component involves a series of workshops to be held in ten local communities. In the course of these workshops, the women participants are supported in the use of a self-assessment tool and in documenting all their informally acquired knowledge and skills. This will be followed by further activities in an assessment centre run by experts, which, together with the successful completion of four workshops, will lead to the award of a recognised certificate that provides access to training and employment.

#### **MODULE 3: bringing employers on board**

Module 3 targets companies with the aim of convincing them of the value and relevance of new, flexible and family-friendly working time arrangements. The enterprises are offered counselling and support by business consultants who are specialised in innovative work organisation. The idea is also to disseminate models of Corporate Social Responsibility that have an integrated gender dimension and to introduce an au-

dit for excellence in gender equality performance. At the same time, job descriptions and personnel development plans from the different companies will be analysed and used as a basis for the development of career planning and tailored education and training programmes.

#### **MODULE 4: job and mobility management**

Two local work-life-balance alliances are being developed in this module. They are intended to help women with low educational attainments, in particular, to reconcile their job and care responsibilities. They will offer guidance and counselling in job search and also in identifying the most suitable training, be it inside, or outside, the project. Employers, local authorities, women's counselling centres and NGOs are all working together to develop family-friendly work organisation. They are creating and/or adapting care services for children and frail or disabled family members and are trying to find solutions to transport and mobility problems which will suit the needs of both employees and employers.

#### **MODULE 5: empowerment through basic and vocational training and education**

The last module is dedicated to comprehensive training programmes that combine transversal and vocational skills and are also tailored to the needs and prior learning experiences of participants. These programmes motivate women to understand and use life-long learning opportunities and enhance the ability for self organisation so that the participants can take their lives into their own hands. Individual coaching supports the women in making this move from guided learning to designing, implementing and constantly assessing their own educational itinerary.

### **Synergies are the key to success**

All the modules are interlinked and designed so that there is a mutual reinforcement of efficiency and impact. The first module is as a kind of superstructure, relentlessly improving the modules and enhancing the synergies between the different elements. The Mayors of the two municipalities of Neutal and Stegersbach that are taking the lead in the Job and Mobility Management Module are encouraging their counterparts in other local areas

to promote the multi-faceted approach of the project. They emphasise the relevance of creating a supportive environment to foster women's employment and careers. "Training alone is not enough", they said at the press conference held at the launch of their activities, " tackling mobility problems and creating satisfying solutions to care needs are just as important."

To enable the transfer of the DP's achievements into existing policies and practices, a mainstreaming strategy group has been established that ensures a constant dialogue between plan:b and policy makers in Burgenland. Depending on the issues at stake, this group may consist of the following decision-makers: the Regional Prime Minister, members of the Regional Government, different departments of the Regional Government Administration and policy makers in local communities. The Women's Bureau of the Regional Government acts as an interface between the DP and the members of this group and guarantees continual communication. One of the first results of this strategy was the launch of "Zukunftsgespräche" (Dialogues for the Future) that are focused on "The labour market situation of women in the Burgenland". These discussions are being organised by the Women's Bureau and bring together the plan:b partners and all the relevant organisations that can benefit from the acquired knowledge and experience of the project. The DP's new ways of tackling mobility and care problems and its new models of working time arrangements for women will be showcased and strategies for sustainability and mainstreaming will be discussed by all partners of plan:b on an on-going basis.

**Total cost of DP:** 2.000.000,00 Euro

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