

## EQUALS IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

In 1946, the programming of ENIAC, which was the world's first mainframe digital computer, was an all female affair. This is in stark contrast to the situation almost 60 years later, as information and communication technology is now a male dominated domain. An EQUAL Development Partnership (DP) is working to establish a gender balance in the ICT sector and to increase women's influence in shaping the information and knowledge society.

To help it attain these ambitious objectives the "[Gender Mainstreaming in the Information Society](#)" DP has forged a strong coalition of agencies in the Berlin region, in Germany. This coalition links training providers, NGOs representing disadvantaged groups such as female immigrants, a large ICT corporation, SMEs, local and regional authorities, employment offices and the relevant Social Partner organisations. FrauenComputerZentrumBerlin ([FCZB](#)), a centre that has accumulated a lot of experience in responding to the needs of women for training in ICT, is coordinating the partnership. The DP has adopted a "biographical" approach, which means that its multi-fold activities address the crossroads in women's paths of life when otherwise a pattern of gender segregation might be established. [A range of sub-projects](#) target these crucial points that occur along the route from primary and secondary education, through the transition from school to work or tertiary education and into women and men's jobs and careers.

### A HEAD-START FOR GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

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It is generally accepted that the earlier children and young people learn to master ICT, the better they are prepared for adult and working life. However, when it comes to initiating young people into using computers or the Internet, training offers seem to target boys rather than girls. The sub-projects of the DP are joining forces with schools, career services and mainstream training providers to ensure that girls have more opportunities to learn or to practice IT related skills. Needs-tailored counselling, guidance and pre-training for girls and young women from different social, ethnic and educational backgrounds are the major foci for such DP activities. These can include workshops providing hands-on experience, taster weeks in enterprises and summer camps at universities, all set up to motivate and support beneficiaries to enter non-traditional occupations in the technology sector and also in crafts, environmental protection and sciences. As initial training in Germany is mainly carried out within the "dual system" that involves cooperation between companies and vocational schools, the DP decided to make a complementary offer. It is providing additional and on-going support to girls during their apprenticeships or their first crucial stages of employment in these male dominated sectors. Besides setting up an employer network, the DP is helping companies to develop gender sensitive recruitment practices and to implement gender mainstreaming systems. In parallel, teachers, trainers and guidance staff are being encouraged and trained to explain and demonstrate to young women that they have a wider range of career options than the traditional stereotypes to which both they and their parents may have become accustomed.

### AN INTERCULTURAL INFORMATION SOCIETY

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Another of the DP's sub-projects addresses the needs of women immigrants who have been largely excluded from using ICT. Unemployed women immigrants, who have a teaching diploma or other relevant professional experience, are targeted as potential "bridging agents" between their ethnic communities and the German training and employment system. To prepare them for this "profession", they receive training in a broad range of ICT uses and applications combined with training in intercultural guidance and educational/training methods. This mix of skills is expected to open up new job opportunities for them as trainers or counsellors in mainstream institutions and NGOs. The DP hopes that, whilst helping young immigrants to broaden their career options, their "graduates" will act as role models for young women from different ethnic minority backgrounds.

## **ICT SKILLS FOR MATURE WOMEN**

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Another cluster of activities concentrates on long-term, unemployed women with no or low formal qualifications and women seeking jobs after lengthy career breaks, due to family responsibilities, illness or disability. They all receive training in digital literacy and various ICT skills and through the provision of integrated pathways, these women are supported in their quest to make a new start in the labour market. In addition, unemployed women who are university graduates are being prepared to become experts in Knowledge-Management. The training, developed by the FCZB, is designed to bridge the skills-gaps, which emerge from the growing awareness of businesses and organisations that successful performance depends on their capacity to mobilise and use the information and knowledge that is globally available. This training package links methods enabling research, retrieval, categorisation and systematisation of knowledge with the requisite ICT skills. Personal development modules are another crucial component and these are designed to strengthen self-confidence and other key competences, such as multi-tasking, time management, communication and team building skills. The package also includes work experience placements and individual project work.

## **RECONCILING CAREER AMBITIONS AND PARENTING**

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The "biographical" approach of the DP has also resulted in the creation of services for dual career couples with young children. In the highly competitive ICT sector, irregular working hours seem to be part of the job. The model childcare centre that is being established by the DP is based in a business centre which houses a range of start-up companies mainly operating in the multimedia and advertising sector. The idea is to explore the viability of a flexible, quality childcare provision, tailored to the needs of SMEs that, unlike larger companies, cannot afford to provide this kind of service for their employees. The DPDPs are working to ensure the sustainability of the model through a public-private partnership, a strategy that is fully in line with national and regional family and employment policies. Both the Federal Government and the Länder in Germany recognise the need to increase female participation in the labour market and are committed to the expansion of childcare provision involving an active contribution from employers.

## **DEVELOPING THE POTENTIAL OF WOMEN EMPLOYEES IN LARGE AND SMALL ENTERPRISES**

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Integrating equal opportunities into the corporate culture and making it an asset for the firm is the aim of yet another sub-project of the DP. It is led by Telekom, which is one of the major employers in the ICT sector in Germany. Being very aware of the diversity of its customers and the demands of the global market, the corporation is introducing both gender mainstreaming and diversity management, as methods of reflecting the different circumstances of its customers and suppliers and of responding to their different requirements. This implies the offer of work-life-balance packages for both female and male employees and the development of gender and ethnically sensitive recruitment and promotion practices. Given the huge gender gaps in senior management positions, the project offers mentoring schemes to help women managers to develop their full potential and climb the corporate ladder. The DP will introduce a system of diversity reporting and benchmarking of equality measures in the different departments of the company. This system will measure and highlight both the career progress of groups that until now have been underrepresented in the company's workforce and the business advantages that have been gained through exploiting their potential. Successful concepts will be disseminated both within and outside the DP and, in particular, to German SMEs that are operating in the ICT sector.

## **A TRANSNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP PRODUCING ADDED-VALUE**

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In its [Transnational Partnership](#) (TP), the DP cooperates with two partners, one in [France](#) and one in the [United Kingdom](#). Both focus on horizontal desegregation and have an emphasis on ICT and also on other economic sectors where women are underrepresented. The TP combines import, export and joint development activities. The German DP will import methods for the accreditation of informal learning and also training materials to tackle gender and ethnic stereotyping from the UK and then adapt them to the German context. At the same time, it will export its e-learning methodologies and tools to the British and French partners. All partners will

jointly develop mentoring models to support women's access to, and survival in, male dominated working cultures. Developing guidelines for the implementation of gender mainstreaming plans in companies and organisations is also part of the transnational agenda.

**Gender Mainstreaming in der Informationsgesellschaft**

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