

BRIDGING GENDER GAPS IN THE ICT SECTOR

The aim of the German Development Partnership (DP) "Frauen in t.i.m.e" is to ensure that women can benefit from employment growth and career opportunities in the ICT sector. The word "t.i.m.e." with its distinct dots is a shorthand representation of the project's main action lines: telecommunications, information, multimedia and e-learning.

The DP operates in two semi-urban areas in Lower Saxony, where women are underrepresented in both initial vocational training and employment in ICT and its related sectors. For instance, only one in seven of the apprentices in the four core occupations of the ICT industry are female. When the DP was designed in 2001, the ICT sector in Lower Saxony was suffering from a large skills gap and looking for qualified staff. Since then, the sector's growth rates have been adjusted downwards but the DP considers that despite this economic slump, women will benefit from ICT training, as they will be able to compete for the remaining job openings and to develop a career in the sector.



Coordinated by the Volkshochschule (VHS) Göttingen, which is a local branch of Germany's biggest provider of adult education, the DP involves ICT specific training institutions, local and regional authorities, equality bodies and advocacy groups representing women and immigrants.

SUPPORTING WOMEN DURING THE CRUCIAL STAGES OF THEIR CAREER PATHS

The multifaceted programmes developed by "Frauen in t.i.m.e" follow a biographical approach. They start at school level and then address the vocational training needs that arise at different stages of women's lives. Candidates for the DP's various training schemes are offered a careful assessment of their formal and informal skills. The aim is to get a clear picture of each individual's current vocational ("hard") and transversal ("soft") skills, her strong and weak points in terms of maximising her potential and her suitability for different ICT or ICT related occupations. After an introduction to the hardware and software that is being used, the assessment centre applies both individual tests and group assessments and observes the way the women tackle tasks in different areas in which ICT is being applied. The results are documented and explained and recommendations for appropriate continuing education and training are discussed with each of the participants.

WIDENING THE VOCATIONAL CHOICES OF GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

This cluster of activities includes, for instance, a Computer Club that targets girls who have very little experience of dealing with ICT and the Internet and who don't have a computer and Internet access at home. The main idea is to attract 9th grade students of the "Hauptschule" (girls between 14-15 years in the lower level branch of German secondary schools) who often have difficulties finding an apprenticeship in the Dual System. The Club offers weekly meetings and holiday courses for girls who can't attend during term-time because of the lack of suitable public transport. Some 50 percent of participants are young women immigrants. The DPDPis also providing input during the regular vocational information events held for school leavers by the Chambers of Commerce, and is following up these school- based sessions with peer counselling and "job talks" given by female "role models".

FACILITATING THE CAREER START OF FEMALE IMMIGRANTS

Through a pre-training scheme, the DP is addressing the specific needs of young women immigrants who are unemployed or receiving welfare benefits and whose educational attainments may not be recognised by the German educational system. The scheme prepares participants for either retraining or initial training. It is divided into a six-month introductory phase and a one-year main phase. The latter includes eight months of work placement in a company, during which the women can apply and enhance their new skills. During the preparatory phase, beneficiaries attend German language training and acquire ICT skills. In addition, they benefit

from counselling and guidance that has an emphasis on job profiles in the ICT domain. Catching up in mathematics, developing learning skills and finding solutions to reconciliation problems are also on the scheme's agenda.

HELPING MOTHERS RETURN TO THE LABOUR MARKET

Another line of action targets women university graduates and those who interrupted their studies to raise a family and are now seeking employment. The DP is supporting them to find employment at the level of a qualified assistant, preferably in their own field of study. The most difficult step for the participants was to stop thinking about a purely academic career and to overcome the perception of the training as a "down-grading" of their knowledge and skills. This course teaches advanced ICT skills, computer-based office communication and project management, business administration, business English and writing skills including minute taking. Each week, the women are given a specific task that they have to complete independently with the aid of the teaching materials available from the DP's learning platform. Participants are also offered ten-week work experiences placements in companies or institutions.

SECURING THE JOBS OF EMPLOYED WOMEN

"Frauen in t.i.m.e." offers on-line training for employed women, particularly those working in SMEs that are facing structural and technological change. The idea is to help participants retain their jobs and/or to prepare them for a career move. The project succeeded in convincing employers of the business advantages to be gained through the participation of their employees in the scheme. The fact that up-to-date, ICT skills are being offered and that the women can follow the training without leaving their work places triggered a lot of interest. However, the "deal" is that in return, the companies will allow participants to learn for ten hours per week during working time and pay one Euro per hour as a fee. In addition, companies can benefit from a thorough assessment of their ICT and training needs and from additional training packages tailored to their specific requirements.

IMPROVING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF SELF-EMPLOYED WOMEN

The DP is also creating a new interesting field of work for experienced female trainers in adult education. This nine-week programme targets women trainers who run their own micro business or are self-employed. The major part of the training is on-line and the women can schedule their training sessions in their own time and at their own pace. On only three weekends is their presence required and attendance is compulsory. To complete the training successfully and earn a certificate, participants have to develop and test an on-line course and then sit a practical exam. The programme is expected to improve e-learning as a teaching method and to provide a multiplier effect. The "graduates" will offer training to other on-line trainers and thus, disseminate the project's methodology to many other educational institutions.

STRENGTHENING ALL PLAYERS THROUGH TRANSVERSAL ACTION

Using the expertise of some partners, the DP has established additional programmes that are open and sometimes compulsory for its staff and/or beneficiaries. Before launching any activities for the target groups, all the other partners required to attend seminars that were organised by the equality bodies in the DP. These focus on gender equality, in general, and on gender mainstreaming, in particular. Similarly, everybody involved in the DP agreed to enrol in the diversity and anti-racism training, organised by the Göttingen Municipal Office for the Integration of Immigrants and Refugees.

In addition, a hotline run by one of the NGOs partners offers ICT related counselling and technical support concerning further training needs. It also provides advice on selecting and purchasing the most suitable hardware and software and the personalised configuration of computers. Also, the DP's E-learning Platform is constantly being consulted by all the sub-projects that use its methodology. The Platform is expected to become a permanent facility that will be maintained by the regional umbrella organisation of VHS.

USING TRANSNATIONALITY TO THE BENEFIT OF DISADVANTAGED WOMEN

Frauen in t.i.m.e works in a Transnational Partnership (TP) called "[Women NL ES D](#)". along with a DP in [Spain](#) and another in [the Netherlands](#). This TP aims to promote horizontal desegregation, particularly in the ICT sector. The [Dutch DP](#) is coordinated by an Amsterdam based NGOs that was set up, and is being run, by immigrant women. The Spanish partner links 14 municipalities in the rural areas surrounding the city of Toledo. Under the name of "E-merge," it is supporting rural women in enhancing their ICT skills and in turning their informal activities in the grey economy into regular businesses.

Frauen in t.i.m.e.

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