

GENDERING PRE-VOCATIONAL TRAINING

A TRANSVERSAL PRINCIPLE



The German Development Partnership (DP) [MEMBER](#) aimed to give disadvantaged young people a head start in working life. The project operated in the two neighbouring Federal States of Brandenburg and Berlin under the full title of “Media Competences and Qualification Modules in Pre-vocational Training”. It sought to facilitate the transition from school to training and to employment, in particular, for young (ex)-offenders, both male and female. Nine sub-projects have been developing innovative strategies and piloting these in prisons and other correctional institutions. Also all of the activities of the DP were geared to promoting equal opportunities for women and men. Gender mainstreaming (GM) was applied as a transversal principle in the project using the so-called “dual approach.” This means that the gender dimension is integrated into the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all the work whilst, at the same time, the DP is implementing positive actions for women.

This was neither a token commitment nor a duty that had to be fulfilled. *“We have made gender equality a priority”,* said Christian Pfeffer-Hoffman, the Project Manager, who works at the Institute for Education in the Information Society (IBI) which is the coordinating organisation of the partnership. Christian indicated that *“this is mirrored in the finances allocated to the relevant sub-projects and also in the firm top-down approach and backing from the DP leadership.”*

Renate Wielpütz, the Director of Frauen Computer Zentrum Berlin (FCZB), who had been in charge of the gender related activities, added that more funding was being spent on positive actions dedicated to women offenders than the statistics would suggest. *“After all there are more male than female prison inmates”,* she explains, *“but the partnership followed FCZB’s proposal to set an example in remedying past discrimination. Usually women have far fewer opportunities when it comes to vocational preparation in prison. This is due to the women being relatively small in number and receiving relatively short sentences, which means that it is difficult to bring them together in continuous learning groups.”* Close cooperation with those responsible for the coordination of the project and with the evaluation team really helped to make things happen. Renate reported that *“we established goals and milestones for each sub-project, and these are carefully monitored by an evaluator and, if the need arises, they are changed. It is also important to mention that in our DP gender mainstreaming efforts are being implemented by both women and men. That means equality strategies are being visibly moved out of the women’s niche.”*

TWO TRACKS – ONE GOAL

Following its dual remit the GM team from FCZB set out to overcome gender blindness and to incorporate equality for women and men as an integral part of the DP. The team had to work with all participating organisations and the different sub-projects to create a new, holistic model for vocational preparation. This included not only pre-vocational qualification in a specific occupational field, but also the acquisition of personal and social skills that are needed to find a

transversally and in the specific, positive actions for women. The table below shows how this exploration addressed different levels of action:

Organisational Level		
Key issues	Lead questions	Sub-project: facts, figures, tools & strategies
Corporate Identity (CID)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is GM or diversity management part of CID? ▪ How does the organisation address its target audiences? ▪ What are its services? How are these offered or marketed? ▪ Is the gender dimension integrated into these fields? If not, why not? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intended organisational pattern & implementation ▪ Participating customers/clients: Gendered data linked to targets, themes and intended methods ▪ Specific needs of target groups as point of departure
Personnel management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gender dimension in recruitment system? ▪ Gender balance in the organisation and in senior management? ▪ Gender perspective in other management positions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Obstacles to GM and gender equality in general ▪ Assessment of possible solutions to overcome the obstacles
Personal Level		
GM experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Awareness raising, training, counselling received? In which context & with which results? ▪ Experience with positive actions or other forms of equality policies? ▪ Expertise in anti-discrimination and/or anti-bias work? ▪ Diversity management? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Issues of personal interests and needs to be addressed ▪ Acquiring more gender knowledge ▪ Tailoring gender competences to the person's position within the organisation and the sub-project
GM in (selected) thematic areas of the sub-project		
Points of departure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ State-of-play according to gender specific indicators? ▪ Gender dimension in needs assessment of target groups? ▪ Existing or intended training materials and publications? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fill gaps if necessary ▪ Identify levels of intended actions (trainers, management, decision-makers) and specific provisions ▪ Gender proofing

The information in the table is a “taster,” which only shows the first part of the guidelines. The subsequent sections go into more detail including assessing, for instance, the existing gender knowledge of the staff involved, and then, based on the results, the need for additional training and support. Gender attitudes, perceptions of gender roles, their possible impact on the intended measures and the willingness to take action for change were other subjects which have been tackled.

This whole process resulted in a joint effort, as the sub-project Managers and GM experts worked together to establish gender equality targets. Also, the exercise helped to detect the need for further counselling and coaching in each sub-project.

The next stage provided both task-related advice and training sessions which were tailored to the needs of the participating organisations including prisons and training providers. These training packages on organisational and human resource development and the integration of the gender perspective into actions and quality criteria for the production of gender sensitive e-learning materials were embedded into the aims and strategies of each sub-project's materials.

POSITIVE ACTIONS – A LIFELINE FOR WOMEN

Amongst all the DP's [sub-projects](#) one was exclusively dedicated to positive actions for women. [SP4](#) has introduced a flexible approach to offering a vocational perspective to young inmates of the women's prison in Berlin. FCZB has developed and tested a modular training concept which enabled the women to enter the programme individually, at any given time. The first step of this programme is a personal assessment and diagnosis which then provided the basis for the establishment of an individualised learning plan.



Rasha and Nadine were both 19 years old and had been living in the secluded world of prison for 17 months. Both were serving time because they had been involved in violent attacks against male oppressors. In Rasha's case, it was her father who had been terrorising her mother and her five siblings for as long as she can remember. Participating in the training has helped her immensely and now she can face the endless days and focus her mind on issues related to the future. She has met other women and could talk to her trainers about her earlier life, the process of accepting guilt – even if

there were so many reasons to finally fight back – and her hopes and fears for the future. *“In the beginning, it is such a shock to be confined here in this place”,* she said and explained how she felt that outside the world was moving on – without her. *“I longed to be away, but meanwhile I am no longer so sure. I may not be able to cope. Even if I were released after two thirds of my sentence, I would still have to live here for almost two years. I wish to achieve something during this time, I am eager to learn. The ITC training is a really important step.”*

The group of learners, which changed all the time because women were being released or transferred to other correctional institutions, agreed that whatever career path they would undertake ICT skills are a must. In fact, the modules of the training have taken some women from very basic to advanced skills and even to programming. Every participant was supported to develop her individual learning plan. For Nadine who had been sentenced to four years' imprisonment, a decision against which she lodged an appeal, sharing the learning exercise with others was a kind of lifeline. The appeal was pending for a long time and participating in the course for three days each week kept her mind busy with things other than her court case.

The learning modules were complemented by information and guidance about training and job opportunities inside and outside of prison. Both Rasha and Nadine were committed to going back to school and to sitting the secondary school leaving exam. Nadine was keen to embark on initial vocational training and, eventually, acquire the German Berufsabschluss which certifies the completion. Rasha was not sure whether she should opt for initial training which would take three years or just look for a job as soon as she returned to normal life. *“When I was younger”,* she said *“my dream was to be a hairdresser or beautician. Now I think I would love to work in childcare. As the eldest daughter, I was second mother to my younger sisters and brothers and I think I have many useful skills for childcare. But because of my record this will not be possible and so I will probably end up working in a shop...”* There might, however, be other options. Silke Faubel, her trainer thought that with her excellent language capacities in German and Arabic, Rasha should take her time and explore more career paths. In the end she decided to apply for a so-called “open scheme.” This combines psychotherapy and preparation for “life afterwards” with going to a regular school or participating in initial training outside prison and then returning to the institution to spend the night.



Trainers and resource people from the FCZB found it difficult to imagine that with the completion of the EQUAL project, their contact with the women would also come to an end. *“We have provided training to the staff here – in parallel to the programme that targeted the women inmates”,* reported Silke Faubel. *“I am happy to say, that the developments that we have pioneered will become*

part of the regular training and support that is offered in this institution”, she added. The new approach that has been established thanks to EQUAL requires considerable coordinating abilities and a strong commitment on the part of the prison staff. However, training, advice and coaching sessions have prepared them to take over this work.

UNLEARNING STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICES

Closely linked to the positive action is another sub-project that targets both young female and young male offenders. It has been developed by two teams, one working in the women's prison

and the other in the Berlin correctional institution for young, and young adult, male offenders. Triggered by appalling gender and ethnic stereotypes in both institutions, the MEMBER teams created a cooperative approach which was based on the principle of diversity. The modular programme enabled young women and young men to learn about gender and cultural differences and to eventually respect differences in terms of gender, family situation, age, social and educational background, colour of skin, physical ability, religion, sexual orientation and cultural convictions.

This reflection on personal awareness and perceptions of differences was seen as one of the cornerstones in counteracting conflict and aggression within, and between, the diverse communities of the prisons. In each institution, participation was voluntary and the programme started with a consideration of issues such as “who I am and where have I come from”, daily life in prison, but also gender relations, love, parenting, (“what it takes to be a good father”) or future working and private life. The male and female groups discussed their experiences and opinions exclusively via an Internet platform. They used nick names and never saw each other face-to-face.

An example: This story was used to trigger a reflection on, and debate about, gender roles:

Abigail and Gregor loved each other passionately, but lived at opposite sides of a river. Coming together was impossible. Abigail sought a way to meet her lover. She found Sinbad, the only man in the area who owned a boat. He was willing to ferry her to the other shore for a price: Abigail should have sex with him. She declined his outrageous offer and looked for other solutions but in vain. But her desire to be with Gregor was so intense, that she eventually gave in. She slept with the boatman who kept his promise and rowed her across. The couple spend a wonderful day together, but on the next morning Abigail felt she had to share her dreadful experience with Gregor. He called her a slut and finished the relationship. Abigail was heartbroken. In her desperation she met Slug, a young man who found Gregor's behaviour revolting. He traced Gregor and beat him up. Watching from afar Abigail laughed.

The task of each group member was to think about the story and consider with which protagonist they sympathised and why. The men's statements were entirely in favour of Sinbad and Gregor. They called Sinbad a smart guy because he made a good deal. They also felt that Gregor was entitled to dump Abigail and to label her as dishonoured. The women came up with a different perspective, trying to understand the decisions of all actors. They saw Sinbad's blackmailing as the worst thing that happened and agreed that “*even if it might have been wrong that Abigail sold her body to a man she did not love, it is obvious that men think they own women and always blame them.*”

As in this case, statements about other issues were exchanged and discussed between the two groups over the Internet platform. According to Silke Faubel and her colleagues the young women appeared to be more open and willing to listen to what other people had to say. But they also harboured more romantic ideas about life. They believed in love and were convinced that their partners would faithfully wait for them but then had to face the reality of the young men's views which were “*you can't really believe that!*” and “*we think most men wouldn't wait at all.*”

A second module was developed to help participants develop self-esteem and be able to present themselves and their life histories to the others. The idea was to increase understanding of the root causes of stereotypes and prejudices and also to raise awareness about, and respect for, each other. Through this work, common ideas and experiences were detected and new interests and contacts created.

The third and last module focused on counteracting discrimination. Together the two groups explored personal experiences as victims, discriminators, and passive onlookers or with active interventionists. Based on this process, they could identify factors which reinforce or reduce discrimination. The pedagogical teams found that this module enabled the young women and men to stand up to discrimination and violence in the future.

SUSTAINABILITY AND LASTING IMPACT

The DP's lifespan ran until the end of 2007. Perspectives for future sustainability and lasting impact are good. The Project Manager Christian Pfeffer-Hoffman and Renate Wielpütz who heads up the GM team can list the following successes:

- The integration of [GM into staff training and personnel development](#) at the women's prisons and correctional institutions and the fact that the training and coaching measures developed thanks to EQUAL will continue to be part of the in-house programmes of further education;
- The training materials developed together with craft masters in the [IBI sub-project](#) are very much appreciated by the training providers involved in the project. These organisations offer their services both inside and outside of prisons and will keep on applying the EQUAL achievements;
- Training concepts developed, tested and gender-proofed have been transferred to the pedagogical institutes of the Brandenburg and Berlin Länder and have become part of these institutions' provision for the training of trainers;
- The inter-agency approach of which value and efficiency have been demonstrated is being further developed, in particular, through the networks that were set up by the project. These link chambers of commerce, employers and training providers and have taken root in a growing number of districts in Brandenburg and also in Berlin.
- An experimental e-learning tool for disadvantaged young people produced on a CD ROM became part of the regular programme of the publisher involved in the [Cornelsen sub-project](#) . Needless to say, these products boast an integrated gender dimension;
- Tools and concepts for developing competences in the use of the media continue life in the framework of the XENOS programme. For instance, a training of trainers programme providing skills and expertise on how to address hate crimes is being further developed and disseminated. EQUAL tools have also become part of the provision of the Federal Institute for Civic Education.

Asked about the success factors that have been keys to engendering all these outcomes, Christian Pfeffer-Hoffman refers to the well-structured approach of GM as a transversal strategy and the strict system of milestones and targets. Renate Wielpütz underlines the fact that the latter would not have been possible without close cooperation with the evaluator who took part in the regular GM monitoring meetings. Gabriele Grote-Kux, head of the "European networks and personnel development unit" at Berlin's Justice Ministry sums up how GM within MEMBER has brought about change in her fields of responsibility. For instance, in the women's prison the approaches are now firmly enrooted: "A large number of staff from all hierarchy levels acquired gender knowledge. They are aware of gender specific discrimination and have the skills to combat it by launching the right measures. At the same time the EQUAL project helped the women inmates to gain a more realistic view of their personal competencies and how to develop and use their potential. I think they have learned to stand up for their interests and needs – inside and outside of prison."

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