

## AN UNUSUAL GENDER MAINSTREAMING ALLIANCE

### TRANSNATIONAL HORIZONS



What have the armed forces, police services, universities, local governments, training providers and women's NGOs all got in common? The [Gender@Work](#) Transnational Partnership (TP) which linked together EQUAL projects from [Austria](#), the [Netherlands](#), [Scotland](#) and [Sweden](#) is living proof that there are many aims and means to be shared when it comes to gender equality, or more explicitly, the lack of gender equality. Gender Mainstreaming (GM) must be applied to achieve equal opportunities and equal treatment for women and men, regardless of which sector or policy area. Activists, operating in fields as different and varied as those covered by Gender@Work, undertook a successful learning journey together and generated approaches and tools that can be used in many different contexts.

Whilst following the ambitious objective of producing a guide that could help any organisation to design, implement, monitor and evaluate its own GM strategy, the partners recognised that their transnational cooperation was a unique opportunity to widen horizons. The exchange of information and approaches was very much appreciated and the added value came from being able to:

- Share the realities of what was actually happening in the partner countries;
- Share the visions of those in other countries who worked on gender equality;
- Discuss challenges and possible solutions with people outside the national, regional or local gender equality networks.

### NEW INSIGHTS AND BENEFITS

*“The most striking insight was that the situation of gender equality is pretty much the same between all nations, even if our track records are different. These similarities have helped us to support each other's work in this area. The most important added value was to have good contacts for now and also for the future,”* says Per Anders from the Swedish Armed Forces who worked in the GenderForce project. Marcel Van Houten, the expert coordinating the Dutch counterpart, also called GenderForce, agrees. Marcel underlines the relevance of the intensive cooperation amongst the experts and the new insights he gained into the theoretical foundations of GM, as well as the various methods of working on gender related problems.

**GENDER  
FORCE!**

Sheryl Harvey, the Coordinator of Genderwise, a Scottish Development Partnership, provides an example of what this experience meant to her and her project: *“Sweden for instance is regarded as being extremely forward thinking in relation to gender equality. Yet even there, problems like occupational segregation continue to exist. Austria's particular problems in relation to school hours (almost no full day schools) were also new to all the Genderwise partners,”* she says, *“for most of our partners, especially in the smaller organisations, there was traditionally no budget available for visits to other European Countries and a wariness of the value of investing time in transnational activities. Due to the length of time spent with colleagues developing products, relationships of trust have emerged which we hope will be used in the future.”* According to Sheryl, it took two to three meetings before these relationships were sufficiently established and people felt that they could stop “selling” their countries as being well-developed in terms of

gender equality. They gradually began to look at their situations in relation to other EU countries and to see how good practice could be mixed and matched, taking into account differences in culture, to make a positive contribution to their own work. *“Many of our local partners gained confidence,”* Sheryl explains, *“by seeing the progress Scotland has made in certain areas and realising that in some areas we are doing OK, indeed better than other nations. It also highlighted areas where Scotland is extremely poor in gender equality thus, allowing partners to prioritise their work in new ways.”*



## TOOLS FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

---

The transnational partners set out to meet the ambitious challenge of finding and developing products, which were usable almost everywhere and innovative enough to complement the GM concepts which already existed in the different countries. However, this was not always possible because, for example, to have a single curriculum for GM training that fits all organisations, all fields of action and all levels of an organisation’s hierarchy would simply not have been possible. In fact, two groups were formed with one focusing on “gender in training” and the other on “gender in recruitment and retention.” Both groups targeted policy makers, senior managers, HR-Managers and HR-specialists and the goal was to increase the knowledge of these individuals about how to integrate a gender perspective into their work. It quickly became apparent that the key messages and steps, which must be an integral part of any GM training, would have to be adapted to the needs of different target audiences.

The groups made a point of involving seasoned practitioners in their work. Austria, for instance, which chaired and facilitated the working group on training, sent experts whose competences combined longstanding experiences in education and training with gender mainstreaming. Two people, who were trained as “gender agents” by the Austrian project and who work as HR-managers in Personnel Department of the City of Graz, made valuable inputs and, at the same time, benefited from the expertise of their transnational peers. *“First and foremost it was necessary to exchange experiences and to give some overview of the quantity and quality of gender mainstreaming activities and also of the social, political, and legal framework in each country,”* reports Heidi Gaube from the [POPUPGEM](#) project. Before agreeing *“on a concerted action,”* she recalls that *“it took many heated debates – to create our common cause.”*



There was also an intensive discussion on terminology. How to define gender, gender mainstreaming and gender equality and what is the gender perspective? Each group member had to gather loads of relevant material from their own country and from their own organisation. This was then reviewed and discussed before deciding to include it on the proposed website or DVD. The next task was to find attractive products, which provided information precisely and quickly, says Heidi: *“Together we also solved this problem and so we proudly presented our homepage and our DVD at the final conference in the Netherlands.”* Ulla Sladek who works at [Peripherie](#), an institute that focuses on gender research and a partner in the Austrian project, emphasises that *“it was very important that every expert in each of the groups did her or his homework carefully and came well prepared to the meetings. After all, we needed a basis from which we could work at each meeting.”* After proposals and drafts had been discussed and adapted to the interests and needs of each partner, all the material was submitted to a final review, proof read and then “filled” into the website by the staff of the Austrian project. The [Gender@Work website](#) answers almost any question related to gender mainstreaming, from [definitions](#), [objectives](#), [requirements for implementation](#), [actors](#) and [implementation](#) to [impact](#). It is a real hub that provides

- [basic knowledge and skills](#);
- [an inventory of what different categories of actors need to know](#);

- [good practices from the participating Member States.](#)

## SUCCESS FACTORS THAT MADE THINGS HAPPEN

---

The movers and shakers of the TP are now looking back and beginning to draw conclusions about what were the essential factors that made their cooperation successful.

### KEEPING THE WORK FOCUSED

The members of this unusual alliance are convinced that the rare mix of partner organisations was a special challenge, yet at the same time, it represented a rich seed bed for innovation. The difference in organisational cultures led to an endless flow of questions and to a deeper and deeper exploration of each others' commitments and beliefs in terms of gender issues. This helped to pave the way for assessing the national and European situations and the range of viable solutions to persistent problems. Eventually, the partners decided to concentrate on two major themes, which were GM in training and GM in recruitment and all projects in the Gender @Work TP participated in both of these working groups.

### BUILDING A PERMANENT AND RELIABLE TEAM



Although it was very difficult at the early stage, the partners tried to ensure a continuing and productive working process by involving the same experts and representatives over the full lifespan of the TP. In addition, Gender@Work members insisted that the quality of their input should be high and they were really motivated to share their knowledge and practical expertise. *“Our Austrian experts have a long experience in raising gender awareness and training people in gender mainstreaming, as well as in integrating the gender perspective into human resource management,”* reports Heidi Gaube and she adds, *“it was of great interest for us to exchange experiences in these fields with experts from other countries. This helped us to review and audit our own approaches and tools and eventually adapt them to new benchmarks that emerged from transnational work.”* For Ulla Sladek, part of this added value was also to learn *“how to promote team-working within a group of experts who came from different countries, very diverse contexts and who had different levels of expertise in the field of gender mainstreaming.”*

### INVOLVING DECISION-MAKERS AND SENIOR MANAGEMENT

The TP also found that the participation of senior staff and decision-makers, both at operational and strategic levels, proved to be an important success factor in the sustainability of their achievements at home.

## EXCHANGE AND TRANSFER GOING STRONG

---

Officially, Gender@Work ended after the high level visibility event hosted by the Dutch partner, at the end of 2006. However, in Sweden and Scotland where the lifespan of the EQUAL projects extends until the end of 2007 and also in Austria and the Netherlands, the organisations which formed the EQUAL partnerships are all maximising their achievements. This includes the transfer and adaptation of approaches, methods and tools that emerged during transnational cooperation. *“The benefits will be clear in the follow-up phase of this project,”* says Marcel Van Houten, *“and gender policies will be part of the training, recruitment and retention of staff. The Dutch are importing several good practices, which were tested and validated, especially in the Swedish Army.”* His colleague Per Anders from the Swedish Armed Forces is also looking forward to working with the two tools developed by the TP, *“we can use them later in training and education or information sessions.”* This future use was reinforced by statements made by the Ministries for Defence and Foreign Affairs at GenderForce's final conference. In the course of this event, both ministries made clear commitments to integrate the project's positive outcomes into their regular policies and practices.



Heidi Gaube makes a point about the successful exports from the Austrian project and underlines the encouragement and motivation of key players that has been triggered in her country: *“We exported our method of implementing gender mainstreaming through the Dutch experts to the Netherlands and we saw during our cross-border work that the Swedish project had similar approaches to ours. However, the implementation of Gender Mainstreaming in the Armed Forces is really new for Austria and the possibility of the integration of the gender dimension into this area has really attracted attention. It is a great experience for Austrian key actors, who work at the interface between labour market, economic and regional politics, to see that strategies and best practice that we have developed can be used in other countries and also that strategies and best practice from these countries can work here in Austria.”*

When asked about the lessons learned and those transnational benefits that might have lasting impact, Sheryl Harvey raises another crucial point. *“We wanted not only to bring ideas back,”* she says, *“but also to encourage our local partners to engage more with Europe and think beyond the issues on which they had traditionally focused, in Scotland. We encouraged them to build relationships and think laterally about what they could gain from participation in Gender@work.”* She explains that the approach to mentoring which was implemented in Sweden has already been included in the core work of [Engender](#). This is a Scottish sub-project that brings together actors who are in a position to mainstream mentoring in community planning procedures. In addition, the transnational DVD is being used by a working group participant in her new job within the Scottish Parliament. The leader of yet another sub-project, [Text2Lean](#) is now confident in working with other European countries and has gone on to engage in a variety of transnational meetings including one organised by the European Community of Practice on Gender Mainstreaming. The [older workers team](#) has also engaged in more European level activities and hosted a successful international conference, during 2007. *“Overall we believe that our strategy has been successful,”* confirms Sheryl, *“and that partners who wouldn’t have considered working outside of Scotland now feel confident both in working with other European partners and in going to Europe to look for solutions to Scottish problems.”*

Even if this is not true for every one of the transnational partners, as some already had strong international contacts and work relationships before EQUAL, they all agree that “going to Europe” for new solutions is a good strategy. This is particularly relevant when seeking to develop and implement innovative approaches to long-standing problems such as inequalities based on gender. Thus, the Gender@Work teams are looking forward to the new ESF programmes and further possibilities for transnational cooperation.

**Contact:**

Heide Cortolezis, Heidi Gaube  
NOWA - Netzwerk für Berufsausbildung  
Jakominiplatz 16  
A 8010 Graz  
Tel.: +43 0316 482600  
Fax: +43 0316 4826004  
E-mail: [heide.cortolezis@nowa.at](mailto:heide.cortolezis@nowa.at) [heidi.gaube@prisma-zam.at](mailto:heidi.gaube@prisma-zam.at)  
Website:  
<http://genderatwork.popupgem.at/cms/1070>  
<http://www.nowa.at/>  
<http://www.popupgem.at>