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The transnational cooperation within four Equal Programme: Gender Street project

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The four different national Equal projects: LIFE – *Libertà Femminile (Female Freedom)* (Italy), *Strada: Recupero socio-lavorativo delle donne oggetto di tratta (Street: Social and work recovery of trafficked women)* (Italy), Improving Future Job Opportunities for Victims of Trafficking in Persons (the Netherlands), and SILA – Low Threshold Access to Counselling and Qualification for Female Sex Workers (Austria), established in 2002 a multi-national cooperation project, with the name of Gender Street. The final publication and results of this co-operation during the last 2 years will be presented in the following.

The national development partnerships, part of the transnational partnership of the Gender Street project, shared the necessity to work together and to confront, through the synergy of the action, the good practices and experience carried out in the framework of Equal national programmes in Italy, Austria and the Netherlands. The national partner projects,(the four national Equal projects, that will be presented later) that are based on the national platforms of local NGOs, GOs and Local Governments are focussed on the development of targeted activities for social protection programmes and social and work integration for victims of trafficking and for migrant sex workers. The access to the civil society, to labour market, to social inclusion, to opening of life opportunities and to empowerment of the person are the mainstream and common objectives of the Gender Street programme.

The basic philosophy of the transnational cooperation partnership is that support and protection programmes for the victims of trafficking and migrant sex workers are based on the protection of individual human rights effectuated in various forms. These programmes of social protection and fight against social exclusion of trafficked women and migrant sex workers, independently if these women are officially recognised as witnesses in the criminal procedures against their traffickers or exploiters are based on the principle of offering help in the process of self-determination and of supporting migrant sex-workers who want to free themselves from the situation of exploitation and coercion. Our manner of work is based on the principle of empowerment of the person and on creation of a paradigm of options tailored according to the individual situation of these persons and with full respect of their will and their choice.

In order to reach the objective of empowerment of a given person with respect of her human rights - more tools and multidisciplinary strategies, including broad international networking, research, lobbying activities and cooperation between public and private sectors are needed.

The Gender Street partners adopted –both a national and transnational levels- common approaches in their actions and programmes to the issues of the social and labour inclusion of trafficked women and migrant sex workers. The major elements of this methodological and political approach are:

- *Rights based approach:* Any activity aimed at the social and labour inclusion of migrant sex workers and/or trafficked women should be based on the protection of their human, social, economic, and civil rights. Thus, these target groups should have access to safe and

appropriate accommodation, counselling, health care, free legal assistance, education, vocational and employment opportunities.

- *Empowerment approach*: Trafficked women and migrant sex workers must be considered as active subjects and not merely as passive objects of intervention. The partners' goal was to facilitate the widest range of life options and future opportunities to the target groups, according to the women's own needs, ideas and capabilities.
- *Holistic approach*: In order to adequately respond to the complex needs of the target groups, a comprehensive system must be established to promote and support the process of empowerment and self-determination, and to provide new life perspectives in general. Such a system must be composed of all actors and agencies that provide any type of service and assistance to the target groups to support their process of social and labour inclusion in the residence country or, if they decide to join a voluntary assisted repatriation programme, in their country of origin.

Common working principles ;

From these main approaches the Strategies and actions of social and labour inclusion implemented through the Gender Street project partners at national and transnational levels are based on a common framework of working principles in their execution:

- Women as active subjects are the ones that make decisions about their own lives, they should be respected and supported.
- A tailor-made approach is adopted: all interventions are based on a comprehensive assessment of needs, interests and skills of each woman.
- Protection measures are accessible to all victims of trafficking and/or women in situation of dependency, regardless of their will to be witnesses in a legal proceeding.
- A rights based approach is adopted: human rights standards are at the basis of all policies and interventions.
- An integrated and multidisciplinary approach is used: protection and social support programmes include different types of intervention strategies, activities, and service components: outreach, cultural mediation, legal assistance, shelter, social support and counseling, education and employment assistance and other.
- A multi-sector approach is implemented: positive co-operation and networking between governments, NGOs, social and health care agencies, service institutions (i.e. labour agencies, educational institutions and private enterprises), and law enforcement agencies.

In the framework of the Transnational Co-operation Gender Street we strived to achieve the following objectives :

- to reduce the barriers to the social inclusion of victims of trafficking and migrant sexworkers
- to support the access to the labour market in the receiving countries and in the countries of origin of the women
- to reduce the situation of dependency, exploitation and discrimination of the victims of trafficking and the sex workers in the situation of coercion
- to improve the working conditions of sex workers who work upon their own decision
- to create an European network with the capacity of implementation and dissemination of international good practices
- to dialogue with public institutions at local, national and European levels
- to formulate recommendations and guidelines for policy makers

These objectives might seem very ambitious due to the limits of time and resources of these specific national Equal projects, but it is important to know that the organisations that are in charge of execution of Gender Street programme, are already active members of wide international network structures involved in offering services and in carrying out social protection programmes for trafficked women and migrant sex workers. These networks share common tools, employ common methodology and work out specific projects also in the countries of origin of migrant sex workers and trafficked women. These broad platforms of public and private sectors all over the Europe form the framework of this specific Equal programme, also as far as the transnational cooperation of Gender Street is concerned. In this way, the national programmes and the transnational cooperation offer a specific models of interventions that can be easily implemented in other countries. In order to achieve the above mentioned objectives, the partners developed and implemented the following activities:

- Research on and comparison of the obstacles to the social and labour inclusion of victims of trafficking and migrant sex workers, which focused on:
 - national and local legislation, in terms of criteria for obtaining a residence permit and the access to protection measures;
 - conditions required to access social services and health care facilities;
 - obstacles to enter the labour market, educational and vocational training, and housing facilities;
 - situation of co-operation and networking between public and private institutions;
 - stigmatisation of the target groups;
 - individual backgrounds of the target groups;
 - social, economic and cultural situation in the countries of destination.
- Research on and comparison of networking and mainstreaming activities, that focused on:
 - objectives of the networking models of each partner's project;
 - players involved;
 - networking processes and activities;
 - strong strengths and weaknesses of models of co-operation;
 - gauging results;
 - identification of good practices of each partner's project and their exchange.

In practical way these activities will have led to the creation of a model of specific intervention based on an example of good practices concerning the cooperation between public and private sectors and the identification of factors (juridical and social) that influence the effects this intervention.

After sharing research findings, the partners identified the practices carried out by each national project to overcome the obstacles to the social and labour inclusion of the target groups and to implement networking and mainstreaming activities. Then, out of the total of the practices collected, each partner selected two or three practices that led to good results, in terms of efficiency, transferability and sustainability. Such practices were described, presented and discussed during the last transnational meeting held in Pisa and have been included in this publication. This example of the goods practices will not cover all activities of the 4 Equal projects, and it will not mean that the other practices are less good, we chose to present some examples of the “innovative” and “experimental” components of the services. The partners discussed the planning, implementation and evaluation of the project activities during four transnational meetings organised between November 2002 and January 2004.

During each meeting, the partners also visited some local projects and assisted in the implementation of the identified practices. This part of the visits and sharing and gathering knowledge of each context of the project partners was also a valuable part of our transnational cooperation. It was not only to share in words but also to see and enter in each different context was an important steps for understandings and profiting from all different elements. This was also an absolutely lessons learned experience.

Results and added value of the Gender Street transnational co-operation

The Gender Street co-operation process experimented with the difficulties of working groups composed of public and private organisations with different experiences and backgrounds. The partners greatly benefited from the co-operation established, in particular because the partners:

- shared and compared different methods of intervention;
- established an international co-operation that provided a wider view on the phenomenon tackled, methods and practices of intervention;
- visited associations and institutions, through which valuable information was collected from people working directly with the target groups in different areas and in distinct political and geographical contexts;
- exchanged new ideas through approaches experimented on and implemented by other organisations;
- met other professionals;
- elaborated and shared a unique work methodology, which can be transferred to other projects;
- strengthened the international network and diffused information outside their local context.

and finally, the true result: empowering each other in the capacity to support and guide women in the situation of vulnerability, dependency and coercion towards building up of their self-determination, autonomy and better life perspectives.