



Equal opportunities – a way to social welfare

Laila Balga, project manager, Women's Rights Institute, administrative body,
Julie Wolman, advisor at the Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers

Reporting date 15/11/2021

Project start date **01/11/2019**, project end date **31/10/2021**



Project report summary

Category	The project is delivering	Comments
Quality	with challenges	The quality of the project was diminished by the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic, which prevented participants from meeting in face-to-face meetings.
Time	with major challenges	Due to the pandemic, the project implementation period had to be extended by one year.
Budget	with major challenges	Due to the cancellation of travel during the pandemic, the project funding was reduced by 15%.
Objectives	as expected	The tasks of the project were implemented and the goals were achieved.
Deliverables	as expected	Dissemination of project results was as planned.



1. PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT, STRATEGIC LINK, OBJECTIVES AND BENEFIT

a. Amendments

The amendments have not been made to the project's background, problem, purpose, scope, and target group, and to the project strategic links to co-operation programmes, the Nordic vision, the Nordic advantage, and the cross-sectoral strategies of sustainability, children and young people, and gender equality. The amendments have not been made to project objectives/sub-objectives, success criteria, and how these have been measured.

b. Outcomes

The project overall objective deepened the understanding of the role of civil society and empowered the NGOs to contribute to the strengthening of equal opportunities of women and men by using the social rights' instruments. The project strengthened 8 NGOs, which are operating in the Baltic Sea region network, by improving their knowledge that will be used in advocacy of NGO interests in cooperation with the state institutions and local municipalities in decision-making. The need for this project was determined by the economic and political situation in Russia, Belarus, the Baltic States and Poland, where women's opportunities and incomes significantly differ from men's (for example, in Latvia women's wages are 22% lower than men's wages in 2021, there is also a segregation on the labour market). By using the European Pillar of Social Rights and other instruments of social rights the partners built their capacity in order to positively influence the policy of equal opportunities in the region. The success of this project are resulted in the change of attitude and activation processes within the region's population, NGOs and legislators, when respect for equal opportunities will significantly contribute to the improvement of social welfare.

The project target groups consisted of NGO experts and decision-makers in the educational, social, entrepreneurship and media sector who work in 8 partner countries: Latvia, Russia (Kaliningrad region), Belarus, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Denmark and Norway. The project implemented the following tasks: 1) improving the knowledge and skills of the target group on the available social rights' instruments, including EPSR, and on their use in order to promote the equal opportunities for women and men; 2) improving the knowledge of the target group regarding the advocacy of interests on gender equality in the social and working life; 3) summarizing and disseminating NGO conclusions on the role of gender equality to increase social welfare. Completing these tasks will have an impact on the opportunities of this NGO network to influence the legislative processes, which strengthen the social welfare of the Baltic Sea region countries.

The pandemic emergency in Europe since March 2020 has prevented project partners from sharing practical experience on the ground in their own countries.

The participation of partners from Nordic countries was mutually beneficial for two organizations from Denmark and Norway, for three organizations from Baltic States and from Poland,



Kaliningrad region and Belarus. Cooperation between the Women's Rights Institute and its partners (Eesti People to People, Lithuanian Multiple Sclerosis Union, Stowarzyszenie "Vesuvio", Odense Aftenskole, People to People Norway, Union of Women of the Kaliningrad Region and the Local Foundation for Promotion of International Dialogue and Cooperation "Interakcia") was directly aimed at fostering democracy and protection of equal rights of women and men in the Baltic Sea region with the help of Nordic countries. The positive experience in legislative processes of Denmark and Norway was useful in order to comprehensively develop equal opportunities to promote the increase of the social welfare. The proclamation of EPSR in the Nordic country (Sweden, November 2017) symbolically shows the direction of development for the equal opportunities, which is recommended also to other Member States of the European Union, as well as to their neighbouring countries – Russia and Belarus. The expanded participation and exchange of experience within the NGO network during this project affected the balanced development of society and strengthened the social welfare in the Baltic Sea region.

WRI project activity was characterized by two cross-sectoral strategies: 1) the sustainability will be ensured by the stable cooperation between the Network organizations with common goal - creation of strong NGOs areas, in which there is a need to ensure respect for equal opportunities, also by complying with the EPSR; empowering such NGOs the partners require national political decisions that understand and support the forms of activity, to which NGOs have been contributing for many years in areas of education, social care and health, entrepreneurship and media; the sustainability will get on funding for NGO activities from the EU, the Nordic and other funds; 2) the partners unequivocally support gender equality in society; however, practice shows that in the partner countries a large majority of NGO members - no less than 80% are women; the partners see this as a positive factor because of an increasing influence of women to venture into political decision-making processes and to be appointed members of institutions; within the framework of the project the gender equality aspect was to be highlighted by ensuring the equal participation of men and women.

2. DELIVERABLES AND ACTIVITIES

a. Amendments

The project Activity 2 - Project opening, a conference - took place 22-23 November 2019 in Riga, Latvia. On January-February 2020 a seminar was planned to organize in Kaliningrad, Russia as Activity 3; the dates of 18-20 March 2020 were approved, however, the implementation of the Activity 3 did not take place.

In the light of the pandemic emergency in Europe, the project was not implemented in 2020. After coordination with the Nordic Council of Ministers, the schedule for the implementation of the project activities was changed 30 March 2020 and the project implementation deadline was extended until 31 October 2021. From April 2021, the project partners started implementing



activities in a remote format; all partners had the right skills and high-quality digital technology. From February 2021, the leading partner of the project, the Women's Rights Institute, started to organize administrative meetings of the partners in a remote format.

On 25 November 2020, the Status Report was prepared for the period 01/11/2019 – 30/04/2020.

However, based on the continuation of the pandemic emergency and the reluctance to travel to partner countries, the project activities were modified in agreement with the Nordic Council of Ministers on 21 May 2021 to include additional local activities in each partner country.

b. Outcomes

During the 24 months, a target group of 8 organizations was involved in the project activities, consisting of a significant number of NGO experts, NGO participants and decision-makers from 8 partner countries.

The following activities were organized for the target group in the project:

Activity 1. The administration and audit of the project, dissemination of results, publicity measures in the period from 1 November 2019 to 31 October 2021 were provided by the leading partner, the Women's Rights Institute in Latvia; from February 2021, the administrative process was organized remotely (10/02, 03/03, 24/03, 06/05, 15/06, 06/07, 12/08, 09/09). One coordinator, one manager, one accountant and one IT manager from Latvia were involved in project management. The office was run and managed by 8 partner organizations in their countries. Communication between the partners was provided in English and Russian.

Activity 2. Riga, 22-23 November 2019. Project opening and conference "Reference budgets and reduction of inequality. Ready?" and a meeting of NGO experts and decision-makers on the project objectives were organized by WRI. The meetings in Riga were attended by 16 experts from 8 partner organizations, 6 decision-makers and 18 members of non-governmental organizations from Latvia. The representatives and experts took part in the conference from the Office of the President, Parliament of Latvia, Ombudsman's Office, Ministry of Welfare, University of Latvia, Fontes Management Consulting Research Group, the Central Statistical Bureau, the Political Research Center "Providus", Latvian Free Trade Union Confederation and Latvian Anti Poverty Network. The Project opening meeting was chaired by Laila Balga, WRI Project Coordinator.

Activity 3. Kaliningrad, 25 May 2021. A webinar of NGO participants and decision-makers on "Relations between Social Rights and Social Entrepreneurship" on the basic principles of EPSR was organized by the Union of Women of the Kaliningrad Region (Russia). It was attended by 26 participants from Kaliningrad, Latvian, Polish and Lithuanian NGOs, public authorities and private companies. Three NGO specialists on social rights and gender equality took place from Latvia and Russia. The specialists took part from the Department Center of Innovations in the



Social Sphere, Kaliningrad regional public organization of disabled people "Ark" and ANO CRK – Center for cultural development. The webinar was opened by Marina Matiunina, Project Manager of the Union of Women of the Kaliningrad Region.

Activity 4. Minsk, 30 July 2021. The webinar "Pillar of European Social Rights and Project Tasks of the Nordic Council of Ministers" was organized by the Local Foundation for the Promotion of International Dialogue and Cooperation "Interakcia" (Belarus). It was attended by 17 participants from NGOs from Belarus, Latvia, Kaliningrad, Poland, Estonia and Lithuania. Three NGO specialists on social rights and gender equality took place from Latvia and Belarus. The webinar was chaired by Marina Borisova, Project Manager of Interakcia Foundation.

Activity 5. Odense, 19 April 2021. A webinar of NGO experts on equal opportunities for women and men (education) was organized by Odense Aftenskole (Denmark). It was attended by 25 participants from non-governmental organizations and private educational companies from Denmark, Latvia, Kaliningrad, Belarus, Estonia and Poland. The experts presented topics from Odense VUC and private company of psychologists, the Eesti People to People, Union of Women of the Kaliningrad Region and Interakcia Foundation. The webinar was chaired by Jan Johansen, Project Manager of Odense Aftenskole.

Activity 6. Bergen, 1 October 2021. A webinar of NGO experts on equal opportunities for women and men (social care and health) was organized by People to People Norway (Norway). It was attended by 12 participants from non-governmental organizations and a private healthcare company in Norway, Latvia, Kaliningrad, Belarus, Lithuania and Poland. The experts presented topics from the Women's Rights Institute, People to People Norway and the Lithuanian Multiple Sclerosis Union. The webinar was chaired by Olga Gravem, Project Manager of People to People Norway.

Activity 7. Rzeszow, 14 July 2021. A webinar of NGO experts on equal opportunities for women and men (entrepreneurship) was organized by the Stowarzyszenie "Vesuvio" (Poland). It was attended by 11 participants from non-governmental organizations from Poland, Latvia, Kaliningrad, Belarus and Denmark. The experts presented topics from the Stowarzyszenie "Vesuvio" and Interakcia Foundation. The webinar was chaired by Alina Stadnik, Project Manager of the Stowarzyszenie "Vesuvio".

Activity 8. Tallinn, 21 May 2021. A webinar of NGO experts on equal opportunities for women and men (in the media) was organized by the Eesti People to People (Estonia). It was attended by 12 participants from non-governmental organizations from Estonia, Latvia, Kaliningrad, Belarus and Norway. The experts presented topics from the Eesti People to People, People to People Norway, Union of Women of the Kaliningrad Region and Interakcia Foundation. The webinar was chaired by Ruta Pels, Project Manager of the Eesti People to People.

Activity 9. Vilnius, 7 October 2021. The NGO expert webinar and project evaluation meeting was organized by the Lithuanian Multiple Sclerosis Union (Lithuania). It was attended by



11 participants from non-governmental organizations from Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus, Denmark and Estonia. The experts presented topics from the Lithuanian Multiple Sclerosis Union, the Eesti People to People and the Women's Rights Institute in Latvia. The webinar was chaired by Aldona Droseikiene, Project Manager of the Lithuanian Multiple Sclerosis Union.

The participants of the activities shared their experiences, debated, improved their knowledge and gathered information on the empowering of NGOs in order to provide advocacy in social and employment sector, including in the field of gender equality, developing cooperation with local state institutions and municipalities, as well as businesses and NGOs. The content of activities was based on promoting compliance with the EPSR principles in decision-making processes both in the non-governmental sector and in public administration. A draft of NGO proposals on equal opportunities for women and men was prepared for the brochure. After each activity its evaluation was ensured by conducting a survey.

LOCAL ACTIONS OF THE PARTNERS

During the period of 10 months (01/01/2021 – 31/10/2021), a target group of 8 organizations was involved in the local actions, consisting of a significant number of NGO experts, NGO participants and decision-makers in 8 partner countries. The project coordinator received from the partners and accepted local action plans related to the achievement of the project objectives and dissemination of information to the public.

According to the plans, the project partners implemented the following measures:

- 1) meetings of NGO experts on social security measures in relation to pandemic;
- 2) discussion meeting of NGO managers on poverty and gender equality experts engagement in social inclusion measures;
- 3) discussions and awareness raising of women's organizations and NGO experts on gender equality and basic principles of the EPSR;
- 4) discussion by experts of judicial practice on issues related to discrimination of women in their rights;
- 5) seminar of NGO experts and decision-makers on the basic principles of the EPSR;
- 6) discussion of NGO experts on partners' and stakeholders' involvement for the training on gender equality;
- 7) discussion of NGO experts on promoting gender equality in the People Experiencing Poverty program;
- 8) discussions with women's organizations and women-deputies of various levels for the development of gender equality and creating the recommendations;
- 9) meeting of women's organizations on the issue of social support for women with children, the disabled, pensioners etc. during the pandemic;
- 10) internal team meetings and webinars for NGOs on preparation the annual report, including contribution to Sustainable Development Goals and particularly SDG10 Reducing Inequalities;



- 11) strategic planning workshop for NGO staff with a focus on integration of social inclusion and gender equality principles;
- 12) workshops for staff members on the inclusion of social inequality and gender mainstreaming aspects into the preparation of project proposals;
- 13) workshop of the NGO experts and local authorities' associations on the integration of the gender equality component into the international projects;
- 14) workshops for local residents on the topic of sustainable development and local initiatives with particular attention to equal opportunities and gender;
- 15) webinars for representatives of local authorities on how to organize awareness raising campaigns on energy and climate issues, with a focus on gender mainstreaming;
- 16) discussions of the representatives of the police on domestic violence;
- 17) disability barriers and challenges inclusion to social life during promotional breaks in trolleybuses;
- 18) workshop with participation of the big companies on social business as future opportunities for disabled people's organizations;
- 19) workshop with participation of people and health professionals from regions on the challenge of social and cultural norms that lead to women's vulnerability;
- 20) discussion of people with disabilities and local authorities on family engagement in the community life and community partnerships;
- 21) summer camp for people with disabilities with focus on experiences that generate strong insights and practical tools in digital world;
- 22) discussions with seniors on social inclusion in labour market;
- 23) meetings and study visits for young people on social inclusion and equal opportunities for women and men in their own entrepreneurship;
- 24) workshop for women on inclusion of women with low education to be the assistant in mineral spring water treatment;
- 25) discussions of the staff from entities and associations about teaching / learning about the entrepreneurship, getting know the real problems for women about creating business;
- 26) workshop with staff of NGOs on mutual exchange entrepreneurship experiences;
- 27) proposals preparation to decision-makers to support socially vulnerable people;
- 28) round-table discussion with representatives of NGOs on equal opportunities on the labour market and the recommendations for decision-makers;
- 29) round-table discussion with Members of Parliament - NGOs means of overcoming social exclusion;
- 30) workshop of NGO experts for preparation of proposals to the Parliament and Government on benefits for unemployed women, pensioners, the disabled, etc.
- 31) workshop of NGO experts on preparation of proposals to the European Commission and the European Parliament, the local Parliaments and Governments to reduce social inequality;
- 32) internal team meetings for NGO staff on the project results; the project information dissemination to local NGOs and other public.



As a result of local activities, the project partners increased the knowledge and understanding of the project staff in relation to the promotion of gender equality in the social inclusion process for the staff of their organizations, NGO experts, members of other non-governmental organizations, decision-makers and stakeholders; strengthened the culture of discussion among NGO participants, in particular by ensuring the participation of disadvantaged groups; promoted sustainable planning of NGO activities; prepared recommendations for NGOs to decision-making bodies at national and European Union level regarding the elimination of discrimination against women and the strengthening of gender equality in employment, as well as with regard to vulnerable groups; regularly disseminated information on the project objectives and achieved results to the non-governmental sector and public bodies.

3. COMMUNICATION

a. Amendments

The amendments were not made to communication activities, channels, messages, and the stakeholders the project has worked with.

b. Outcomes

During and after the project, the implementation of a communication and visibility plan for direct and indirect target groups was promoted. 8 organizations in the partner countries took responsibility for it.

Communication on the European Pillar of Social Rights and other social rights instruments, on cooperation with state and municipal institutions and legislators, on topical social issues and gender equality, on previous developments in these areas, on opportunities for mutual cooperation between NGO experts in the Baltic Sea Region to implement NGO proposals were strengthened between the direct target group of NGO experts of equality of women and men in education, social care and health, entrepreneurship and in media. The communication knowledge and skills of NGO experts for advocacy in the social field and promotion of gender equality were improved.

Communication on the European Pillar of Social Rights and other social rights instruments, on the role of NGOs and on the capabilities of NGO experts in the implementation of social rights, including gender equality, on topical social issues, on the role of NGOs and strengthened cooperation with NGO experts in the field of social affairs and gender equality in the Baltic Sea Region, as well as communication on cooperation between NGOs and legislators between the direct target groups of NGO participants - employees and volunteers and executives and employees of local institutions in social and employment field and for gender equality. The communication knowledge of NGO employees and volunteers on the activities of NGOs in advocacy of interests in the social field and for gender equality was improved.



Communication on the European Pillar of Social Rights and other social rights instruments, on the role of NGOs and on the capabilities of NGO experts in the implementation of social rights, including gender equality, on topical social issues, on cooperation between NGOs and legislators, including the Parliamentary institutions in the social and human rights field, were strengthened among the indirect target groups - heads of public administration institutions and employees in social and employment field and for gender equality and legislators of Parliaments. The communication skills of heads of public administration institutions and employees and members of the Parliament in the social field and for gender equality were improved.

During the project the dissemination of the project information and results was provided by

1) the WRI section of the website http://www.eapn.lv/baltic_project_3/

2) the social networks:

<https://www.facebook.com/laila.balga/>

<https://www.facebook.com/Stowarzyszenie-Vesuvio-101078061535872>, etc.;

3) the monthly newsletter "News" ("Jaunumi") http://www.eapn.lv/par_mums.php

4) informative materials at the meetings in Riga 22-23/11/2019;

5) information at the administrative meetings (webinars) 2021;

6) PP presentations and informative materials at the webinars 2021;

7) the partners websites:

<http://pilflet.dk/om-odense-aftenskole/>

<http://www.ptpest.ee/enidp.html>

8) participation in Latvian TV program (in Russian) 21/11/2019.

Communication between partners has taken place by e-mails and phone in English and Russian.

4. EXPERIENCE AND CONTINUED POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The project of the Women's Rights Institute and its partners was implemented in conditions that were not previously experienced in the practice of organizations. Analyzing the results of the project, it can be concluded that with the pandemic situation in 2020-2021 significant adjustments were made in the project implementation planning, involvement of partner organizations and attraction of participants, as well as in the use of funds. Such risks could not have been foreseen when planning the project application in the beginning of 2019.

However, the project management methods used in exceptional circumstances (high personal responsibility of managers, regular communication and exchange of information, timely coordination of activities, adherence and deepening of thematic content, involvement of more participants, etc.) and modern technologies provided by partners allowed successfully implement the project activities in a remote format and fulfill the set tasks in relation to the target groups.



Of course, during the evaluation activities, the partners reiterated the practical importance of face-to-face meetings and exchanges of experience (referring to the inaugural meetings in Riga in November 2019), but during this period none of the partners undertook to organize a meeting in their own country.

However, despite the fact that the 15% grant was waived, the partners consider the Nordic Council of Ministers' support for WRI's proposal to invest part of the funding received in local actions to be very positive, thus further enhancing the effectiveness of the project's tasks.

This was the last project implemented by the partners under the leadership of WRI, as from December 2021, after 24 years, WRI will cease to operate in the non-governmental sector. Nevertheless, the policy of protection of women's rights and issues of strengthening gender equality will be addressed with the resources of another non-governmental organization in Latvia - IWO International Women's Organization. This organization will continue cooperation with the European Anti Poverty Network - Latvia and the Latvian Women's NGO Network, without losing partners in the Baltic Sea region.

These organizations intend to take over the work of the Women's Rights Institute to develop new projects in the Baltic Sea region. For example, already in June 2021, the IWO presented to the Nordic Council of Ministers its project "A stepping stone for women in emergency situation with the help of NGOs", which was prepared in partnership with NGOs in Finland, Norway, Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg. As a member of the Women's Network, IWO is part of the European Commission's Erasmus + Accreditation Project and works with Icelandic NGOs. EAPN-Latvia, of which IWO is a member, continues to plan a project in the Nordplus program this autumn in cooperation with Estonian, Lithuanian and Swedish NGOs on the observance of social rights in social entrepreneurship.

The results of the WRI and partners project have a significant impact on the continued operation of the NGO network in the Baltic Sea Region.



APPENDICES

Financial statement

Declaration of public auditing

Meetings schedule

Website information http://www.eapn.lv/baltic_project_3/