

Improving workers' participation in equal opportunities policies

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Partners on the project:

The Trade Union of Textile, Footwear, Leather, Rubber of Croatia

The Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia

In contemporary Europe and in Croatia, the textile industry is facing extreme challenges. The former backbone of regional economies, employing predominantly female labour force, is in urgent need of serious restructuralisation, in order to preserve and increase productivity and competitiveness. Textile industry is important branch in several Croatian counties, often with century-long tradition. Today these local communities are characterized by high unemployment rates due to the collapse of textile industry

According to the study "Strategic determinants of the development of textile and clothing industry in Croatia for the period 2006-2015", written by the Economic Institute in April 2007, Workers in textile and clothing industry in Croatia have the smallest average salaries, and this industry is characterized by a constant fall of employment rate – by 2015 Croatian textile and clothing industry will face the loss of workplaces ranging between 30% and 40%. That means the loss between 11,000 and 15,000 workplaces, in majority occupied by women!

In the times when gender equality is considered one of the main values of modern societies, even employed women, workers are at a disadvantage due to effects of horizontal and vertical segregation and gender pay gap, discriminatory phenomena that disable the achievement of real, substantial equality between women and men.

Project Improving workers' participation in equal opportunities policies was created in order to promote the gender dimension of economic policies, disseminate information and knowledge on equal opportunities policies, empower union representatives and workers and strengthen their negotiating power in dialogue with employers and the local government.

Main activities of the project are: round table Gender equality in the time of economic crisis, educational seminars, consultancy sessions and a joint action with the union representatives and members of the Trade Union of Textile, Footwear, Leather, Rubber of Croatia. Based on these activities a manual with the guidelines for advocating the interests of female workers will be prepared and published.

Round table Gender equality in the time of economic crisis was held on March 20th 2009 from 9.30 am until 3.30pm at the Journalists' House in Zagreb. Addresses were given by Rada Borić (Executive Director of the Centre for Women's Studies), Željka Antunović (Vice President of the Croatian Parliament), Mary Collins (Social Policy Officer at the European Women's Lobby), Sonja Lokar (Member of the European Network of Women in Decision-making in Politics and the Economy), Nataša Milojević (President of the Social and democratic initiative Fund), Svjetlana Škarina (President of the Trade Union of Textile, Footwear, Leather, Rubber of Croatia) and Višnja Pavličić (Trade union representative at the Cotton industry Duga Resa).

Participants of the round table were mostly representatives of the textile trade union; politicians outside the parliament, representatives of state institutions, women's human right activists as well as individuals interested in political and economical theory and practice. The special contributions of the round table speakers were used for different articles and broadcasts by Croatian Radio-television, Open Television, Radio Sljeme, Novi list and Večernji list among others, and a review of the round table was published in the Institute of Economics' journal Economic trends and economic policy.

Round table photo gallery (pdf)

Educational seminars for the union representatives and members of the Trade Union of Textile, Footwear, Leather, Rubber of Croatia were held at Āakovec and Varaždin once a month. Three seminars were held within which different topics, such as communication, advocating rights and interests, sexual harassment, mobbing, health, dealing with stress and political activism were covered.

Educational seminar I: Āakovec 3rd March 2009, Varaždin 5th March 2009.

Educational seminar II: Āakovec 8th April 2009, Varaždin 6th April 2009.
Educational seminar III: Āakovec 5th May 2009, Varaždin 7th May 2009.

During the second seminar two news conferences in Varaždin and Āakovec were held. Ms. Svjetlana Škokić (The Trade Union of Textile, Footwear, Leather, Rubber of Croatia), Ms. Jagoda Milidrag (The Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia) and Ms. Sandra Prlenda (Centre for Women's Studies) answered journalist's queries on the project, its goals and main activities, the economic status of women in Croatia and more specific, of textile workers. The press conferences were covered by articles and broadcasts such as Broadcast on Television Varaždin and Croatian Radiotelevision – Studio Varaždin on April 6th and Television Āakovec on April 8th 2009 (television programs); Broadcast on Radio Varaždin and Radio Megaton on April 6th and Radio Hràk and Radio 1 on April 8th 2009 (radio programs); Articles published in Veèernji list on April 7th, Varaždinske vijesti on April 14th and Međimurske novine on April 16th 2009.

Consultancy sessions with the union representatives were held on July 1st and 3rd in Stubièke Toplice. A small group of union representatives (selected from the educational seminars' participants) were intensively trained in communication skills: how to prepare and present argumentation, how to negotiate union members' interest, how to prepare meetings etc.

Closing seminar and round table Endangerment of textile industry: consequences for local communities were held on November 16th 2009. Unlike the closing seminar which was intended for the purpose of project evaluation by union representatives and members of the Trade Union of Textile, Footwear, Leather, Rubber of Croatia, the round table which was open for the public, was held at the County Assembly Hall of the Varaždinska County in Varaždin from 3.30 pm until 6 pm. At this round table, whose purpose was to draw attention to the dramatic situation of the Croatian textile industry in the context of the global financial crisis as well as to the consequences that these have for the local communities (predominately those in the northern Croatia), addresses were given by Sandra Prlenda Perkovac (coordinator of the project Improving workers' participation in equal opportunities policies), Svjetlana Škokić (President of the Trade Union of Textile, Footwear, Leather, Rubber of Croatia), Jadranka Sermek (Trade union representative at MTĒ Linen Factory Āakovec) and Božica Ēiek-Mutavdžić (Trade union representative at Varteks). Opening address was given by the deputy county prefect of the Varaždinska County Blanka Glavica Jeèmenica.

Some 70 participants of the round table were mostly representatives of the textile trade union, representatives of state and local institutions as well as individuals interested in political, economical and gender issues. The holding of the round table was covered by radio and printed media such as Varaždinske vijesti, Vjesnik, Veèernji list, Kult radio, Radio Varaždin, Radio Sjeverozapad and Jutarnji list.

Round table photo gallery (pdf)

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