



**Women's**  
**RESOURCE & DEVELOPMENT AGENCY**

*Supporting Women's Groups and Networks across Northern Ireland*

**Consultation – Northern Ireland EU Competitiveness  
and Employment Programme (2007-2013)  
from Women's Resource and Development Agency**

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:**

Margaret Ward  
WRDA  
Tel: 028 9023 0212  
Email: [margaret.ward@wrda.net](mailto:margaret.ward@wrda.net)

## **Northern Ireland EU Competitiveness and Employment Programme (2007-2013)**

### **Introduction**

The Women's Resource and Development Agency ("WRDA") was established in 1983 with the objective of advancing the participation, inclusion and equality of women, working for the benefit of their own communities and society in general.

The organisation continues to focus its efforts on working with and through women and community organisations located within disadvantaged and/or divided communities.

By strengthening the role and position of women in their own communities, it is anticipated that wider community change will be brought about, leading to the advancement of the broader vision for peace, reconciliation and social inclusion.

WRDA through its membership of over 60 groups recognise the importance of the following key areas in ensuring continuous progress: training, development, education, building community capacity and working towards social and policy change.

WRDA has received funding through Awards for All to organise a series of policy consultations on matters of importance to women in Northern Ireland. An event funded through Awards for All to discuss the NI EU Competitiveness and Employment Programme (2007-2013) was held in partnership with the Training for Women Network (TWN) at the TWN premises on 6 March 2007, attended by thirty individuals representing women's training and development groups from around Northern Ireland.

The following response is derived primarily from the discussions that took place at this event.

### **Labour market analysis**

The economic and labour market analysis that provides the rationale for the programme is one with which all would agree, in terms of a commitment to increase enterprise, increase the employment rate for all groups in the labour market, reduce the numbers of economically inactive and to improve the skill and qualifications of existing employees. However, we strongly urge that this analysis be gendered, so that the differential impact of all programmes upon women can be considered. If this is done, then the target groups for all programmes will become much clearer. For example, a common feature of all labour markets is the fact that women have higher rates of economic inactivity than men. In Northern Ireland, the male inactivity rate is around 23% while the

female rate is around 37%, a full 14 percentage points higher (Economic Inactivity, Research and Evaluation Branch, DEL). Just over one quarter of the economically inactive are those looking after the family or home and the vast majority – 80,000 are women. The Labour Force Survey has indicated that around a fifth or a quarter of this group would like a job if one was available. Approximately 14,000 women are therefore economically inactive and not necessarily seeking work but would like to work if that was possible.

We believe that if this fact were to be clearly stated in the Programme, then the necessity for having specific actions for women, such as the current Advancement of Women in the Building Sustainable Prosperity programme, becomes clear.

The goals of the Lisbon Agenda cannot be furthered unless women are targeted for inclusion in training and employment programmes. However, if this is to be successful, the reasons for their economic inactivity need to be addressed. Those who are not women, but who are disadvantaged through physical or mental disability, or who require essential skills training should be eligible for training, but the majority focus should be on women.

### **Childcare**

Lack of childcare provision remains one of the biggest barriers to employment for women. The need for childcare must be made central. Direct childcare provision must be available in employment and development programmes if women are to be able to access such programmes. Childcare projects should therefore be included in the C & E Programme.

### **Training courses**

One area of great concern is that of the different levels of training programmes eligible for funding. Many women's organisations offer non-accredited training, which has been proven to be an essential first step for many who do later progress to accredited training and employment. If non-accredited courses are not eligible for funding, then any possibility of moving economically inactive women into training and employment will fail.

Level 1 and 2 training is no longer considered eligible for government funding, which has posed a great strain on community-based groups as they attempt to access alternative funding sources. There was a consensus that responsibility for Level 1 and Level 2 training should remain with government, but that European funding should also include Levels 1 and 2. In addition, it was agreed that European funding should support a range of training programmes, enabling the development of a progression route from non-accredited courses up to Level 5. In this way an individual would be able to develop the necessary skills for the employment market while receiving the initial necessary support at community level.

**Match funding**

Match funding continues to pose a major obstacle for organisations, deterring many from making worthwhile applications. We accept that match funding can be beneficial in providing additional support to a project, but we would ask that serious consideration is given to the possibility of government departments finding or co-ordinating a register of potential match funding partners.

**Cross cutting themes**

It was agreed, in terms of a cross-cutting emphasis on equality, that gender equality should be at the heart of both programmes. We would draw attention to Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation and in particular, to Article 3, which enables member states to adopt positive action measures 'with a view to ensuring full equality in practice between men and women in working life.'