



European Forum on Female Entrepreneurship

(Brussels, 28th March 2003)

PROCEEDINGS

The European Forum on Female Entrepreneurship, organised by the European Commission's Enterprise Directorate General, took place in Brussels (Belgium) on 28th March 2003. The main aim of this conference was to present the results of the Best project on "Promoting Entrepreneurship amongst Women" launched by the Commission in 2001

(<http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/entrepreneurship/craft/craft-women/bestproject-women.htm>)

This project aimed at the identification and evaluation of national measures such as start-ups, information/advice, funding, training, mentoring and networks particularly concerning the promotion of female entrepreneurship. The research was carried out by the "Austrian Institute for Small Business Research" for the Commission and led to the identification of 132 measures related to the promotion of female entrepreneurship in the EU and EFTA/EEA countries. These measures were evaluated in order to identify good practices. Relevant good practices implemented in other OECD countries (USA, Canada, Japan, New Zealand and Australia) were also registered.

400 participants from 31 countries and several international organisations attended this event. They represented European Institutions, professional organisations, national and regional administrations including the members of WES ("European Network to promote Women's Entrepreneurship"), academics, research institutes, Chambers of Commerce, banks, EICs, consultants, NGOs and entrepreneurs, from the EU and from EFTA/EEA, accession and neighbouring countries.

The **objectives** of the Forum were the following:

- To present the results of the Study "Good Practices in the promotion of female entrepreneurship", namely:
 - a publication entitled "Good Practices in the Promotion of Female Entrepreneurship" containing a list of 132 identified measures and a detailed description of good practices (available in English and French);
 - a database on "Female Entrepreneurship" containing detailed information of all identified measures (available in English, on a CD-ROM, MS Access software);
 - a Guide on "Evaluating Actions and Measures Promoting Female Entrepreneurship" (available in English)
- To generate broad debate on female entrepreneurship issues
- To explore the way forward

The conference started with a video message from Mr Erkki LIIKANEN, the European Commissioner responsible for Enterprise and the Information Society. He expressed his commitment to promoting female entrepreneurship and requested participants to contribute actively to the dialogue about the future of entrepreneurship in Europe, initiated by the Green Paper “Entrepreneurship in Europe”.

This message was followed by the speech of Mr Timo SUMMA, Director for the Promotion of Entrepreneurship and SME Envoy. In his speech, Mr Summa highlighted the Commission’s intention to actively promote female entrepreneurship, to encourage Member States to learn from each other and to adopt the good practices identified. He appealed to women entrepreneurs’ organisations to contribute to the consultation launched through the Green Paper.

During the morning session, several speakers took the floor starting with Mrs Sonja SHEIKH, from the “Austrian Institute for Small Business Research”. This speaker explained the main features and findings of the research carried out into the identification and evaluation of national measures in the promotion of female entrepreneurship. She presented the methodology that was followed, the terminology issues and tools used in the survey, the work programme and the products delivered.

This was followed by a presentation of the WES network, by its co-ordinator, Mrs Marianne KARLBERG, from the organisation NUTEK (the Swedish authority for industrial policy issues). Mrs Karlberg focussed her presentation on the need to improve networking among administrations and professional organisations and the importance of learning from others’ good practices.

After this, a first round of cases of good practice was presented, as follows:

- 1) **“On line course for Female Enterprise Starters”** (“Online Kurs zur Existenzgründung von Frauen”) by Ms Tamara BRAEUER, Germany;
- 2) **“Guarantee Fund for the Creation, the Take-over or the Development of Enterprises on the Initiative of Women”** (“Fonds de Garantie pour la Création, la Reprise ou le Développement d’Enterprises à l’Initiative des Femmes”) by Ms Danièle CLAIR, France;
- 3) **“The Women’s Institute Services – Empresarias-Net Programme”** (“Los servicios del Instituto de la Mujer – Programa Empresarias-Net”) by Ms Laura MARTIN, Spain;
- 4) **“Women into the Network”** by Ms Dinah BENNETT, United Kingdom;
- 5) **“Women’s Enterprise Agency”** by Ms Ritva NYBERG, Finland;
- 6) **“Business Advisers for Women”** by Mr Lars NYBERG, Sweden.

This was followed by a presentation about the EQUAL initiative (business creation pillar) made by Mrs Barbara HELFFERICH, member of the cabinet of Commissioner Anna DIAMANTOPOULOU, responsible for Employment and Social affairs.

These presentations were followed by a fruitful debate. Several issues were discussed, such as the need to continue improving the business environment for small companies, the lack of reliable statistics in relation to existing women entrepreneurs and co-entrepreneurs, the need to promote networking among professional organisations of women entrepreneurs, the problem of the transfer of businesses (which is vital for co-entrepreneurs) and the need to improve the communication channels with banks in order to facilitate the access of women entrepreneurs to micro-loans.

During the afternoon session, the Report “Women in industrial research” was presented by Ms Helga EBELING, from Research Directorate General, of the European Commission.

A second round of cases of good practice was presented, as follows:

- 1) **“AUDUR: Creating Wealth with Women’s Vitality”** by Ms Halla TOMASDOTTIR, Iceland;
- 2) **“Enterprise Creation Shop”** (“Sportello Fare Impresa”) by Ms Margherita MACULAN CARRETTA, Italy;
- 3) **“Women in Focus”** by Ms Aud-Rolseth SANNER, Norway;
- 4) **“Support of Female Entrepreneurship”** (“Apoio ao Empreendedorismo Feminino”) by Ms Manuela MARINHO, Portugal;
- 5) **“Reinforcement of Female Entrepreneurship”** by Ms Nicoletta AVGOUSTIDOU, Greece;
- 6) **“The Flying Entrepreneur”** (“De Vliegende Ondernemer”) by Ms Katrien DESCHRIJVER, Belgium;
- 7) **“The Business Women Centre”** (“Businessfrauencenter”) by Ms Sylvia FULLMANN, Austria.

The debate that followed these presentations was focussed on the need to improve access to finance and to assess the impact of Basel II on enterprises managed by women. WES requested to be actively involved in the work carried out by the Commission in the framework of Basel II.

The question of the importance of education for entrepreneurship was also raised, as was the need to improve mentoring and coaching schemes that increase the self-confidence of would-be entrepreneurs to engage in enterprise activities.

The closing remarks of the Forum were made by Mr Franco IANNIELLO, Head of the Unit for Crafts, Small Businesses, Co-operatives and Mutuals at the European Commission’s Enterprise Directorate General, as follows:

Improving information

- The Commission will disseminate the results of the Study, and the Good Practices identified, to the public and decision-makers in the EU and EFTA/EEA, accession countries and through the International organisations such as the OECD, ILO and UN. The fruitful co-operation with these International organisations will continue.
- The dissemination of information will be done via the creation of a special Internet website where interesting initiatives, projects and networks related to the promotion of female entrepreneurship will be presented. In this respect, the Commission will assist professional organisations and networks to improve their communication, mainly by posting their websites and contact details on this special Internet website.
- The Commission intends to intensify co-operation with the accession and Mediterranean countries in order to disseminate its experiences in the field of female entrepreneurship and to profit from theirs.
- At the internal level, co-operation with other Commission services will be intensified in order to ensure that the special needs of women entrepreneurs (or would-be entrepreneurs) are duly taken into account when designing, implementing and monitoring other Community initiatives and programmes, in particular the Structural Funds. This co-operation will also be pursued in the fields of start-ups, education for entrepreneurship and access to new technologies.

Facilitating networking

- First of all, the Commission will continue its co-operation with the WES network and will take part in its efforts to enlarge to accession countries.
- The Commission will continue, and intensify, the co-operation with professional organisations representing women entrepreneurs. In this respect, the creation of the Internet website will be an important step towards better communication and networking among professional organisations.

Access to finance

- The Commission commits itself to explore, in co-operation with relevant actors, new approaches that may contribute to facilitate the access to finance for women entrepreneurs and would-be entrepreneurs.

Finally, Mr Ianniello highlighted that it is necessary:

- To encourage women entrepreneurs to make use of support measures and services in order to improve the viability and performance of their enterprises.
- To promote initiatives that increase the self-confidence of would-be entrepreneurs in order to engage in business activities.
- To encourage Member States to carry out research leading to reliable statistics in this field.