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GENDER EQUALITY TRAINING BY „MOŽNOSŤ VOĽBY” PAVES THE WAY TOWARDS EQUALITY, RESPECT AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Adriana Mesochoritisová*

Our everyday reality as well as survey results prove that we are living in a society defined by gender inequality and ever-present discrimination of women in various spheres, with the ongoing discrimination at work and in the workplace, i.e. in the job market in general, being the most obvious one. This includes income inequality (gender pay gap), the small proportion of women in senior management roles, the unequal responsibility for household duties and childcare, the accumulation of women in low-income professions and the disregard for the importance of care provided by women. Systemic structural gender inequality also results in women being more likely to experience the risks of employment interruptions, unpaid labour, workplace sexual harassment or domestic violence. Consequently, this leads to undignified life in poverty and inability to achieve economic independence. The fact that Slovakia regularly occupies unflattering, last ranks of the Gender Equality Index, which measures the progress or the stagnation of EU countries regarding gender equality, proves how bad the situation in the country is. In reaction to this unfavourable situation, the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights together with its partner organization Možnosť voľby¹ realized “The Mainstreaming Work Life Balance and Gender Equality at Workplace” project².

Within this project, Možnosť voľby realized gender sensitization activities in the form of profound gender education of employers, having created and, subsequently, in 2023 and 2024, tested its new educational program “How to

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¹ The English translation of the organization's name is Freedom of Choice.

² More information about the project itself and the individual project activities can be found on the following website: <https://www.rodovestereotypy.com/>

support gender equality and the culture of tolerance in the workplace". The training focused on the enhancement and improvement of gender competencies³ of middle-level and senior management (especially HR personnel, people in charge of diversity management or marketing department personnel, etc.), aiming to reinforce gender equality in the workplace and to reduce the existing discrimination. It was intended for employers interested in the enhancement of gender equality in the workplace. The gender training, realized 3 x 2.5 days, gradually taught the participants how to support equal remuneration, flexible working or equal access to resources and opportunities in the workplace. The coaches also presented various tools which could help people find work-life balance, and fine-tuned the understanding of gender equality and key concepts in this domain (gender, sex, gender stereotypes and gender socialization). The educators introduced basic job market characteristics in terms of gender equality (especially horizontal and vertical segregation) and explained how these systemic inequalities influence workplaces, which are often adjusted to the needs and cycles of men.

The program created and realized by Možnosť voľby dedicated a lot of attention to effective prevention of workplace sexual harassment and gender discrimination and the options of how to transform a workplace so that it becomes a safe and comfortable space for everyone. The lecture team, which included Adriana Mesochoritsová, Marek Šimon and Ivana Klimentová, used interactive educational methods of effective learning to help the participants learn to form and implement gender-sensitive, non-discrimination employment policies. They also introduced a great tool which could help employers determine the actual state of gender equality in the workplace and subsequently formulate necessary measures – the gender audit. Sentiment and views analysis and shaping, too, received a lot of attention – the team focused on enhancing gender-sensitive and pro-human-rights views, which are crucial for gender competence. Last but not least, the training put emphasis on communication and the use of gender-balanced, non-discriminatory language in the workplace.

In the creative atmosphere of the interactive training the participants obtained

³ Gender competency is the ability to recognize and implement the human rights and gender perspective in everyday life, at work, at school, in our interactions and decisions. It is the ability to shape our actions with the aim to contribute to achieving gender equality and to support and protect human rights. It also means to learn how to promote gender equality and human rights in real life, how to prevent discrimination based on sex and gender, as well as other forms of discrimination, or how to cope with the impact of gender stereotypes (Mesochoritsová et al., 2019:7).

practical advice on how to prevent gender discrimination and how to deal with the impact of gender stereotypes. While learning how to implement gender equality in real life, they discussed possible ways of ensuring equal remuneration and supporting employees in various life and social situations. In an effort to teach the participants to apply the gender lens on employment policies and strategies, gender equality in recruitment and equal opportunities for career growth were analysed in detail, with the participants subsequently discussing and suggesting possibilities how to create suitable and non-discriminatory working conditions.

The lecture team put a lot of effort into tailoring the training to the needs of the participants. Before the start of the training the participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire, which helped to map their requirements and expectations, as well as the level of knowledge about the topic. The educators continued adjusting the expectations throughout the training cycles and used the feedback from the participants to create the structure of the training and the program itself, so that it would fulfil the group's educational needs and their application in real-life situations. After the training was concluded, anonymous questionnaires were used to evaluate the entire educational process and the fulfilment of the objectives. The lecturers were excited to learn that more than 43% of the participants achieved a significant improvement and 50% experienced a notable improvement in their knowledge about the topic of gender equality. As for the ability of the participants to employ various tools and solutions to achieve equality in the workplace, 50% of the participants stated they had experienced a substantial improvement and 37% marked the improvement as noteworthy. What is more, the training helped establish new friendships and alliances, and the family of people protecting human rights and gender equality grew in numbers once again. These new members will spread the acquired knowledge further, and thus contribute to the change of views and structures not only in their workplace, but in the entire society.

Možnosť voľby has been providing gender education for almost two decades now, and it offers a lot of quality educational programs and experience-based gender equality training (basic sensitizing training, training focusing on gender-based violence, CEDAW training, reproductive rights and health training, gender equality in the workplace training, etc.). Možnosť voľby is one of the most experienced organizations when it comes to providing gender education for adults in Slovakia. So far more than 2000 hours have been coached and more than 900 people from different target groups profoundly educated; people who are now spreading the ideals of equality and non-violence in their everyday lives

and in the workplace. Come and experience the creative atmosphere of the training.

References:

MESOCHORITISOVÁ, A. et al. 2019. *Rodová rovnosť pre politikov a političky*. Implemented within the project Together for Change: Innovating Strategies and Tools to Advocate for Gender Equality in V4 Countries. Erasmus+ Key Action 2: Strategic Partnerships. Coordinating organisation: Forum 50% (Czech Republic). Partner organisations: Freedom of Choice (Slovakia), Hungarian Women's Lobby (Hungary), Towarzystwo Edukacji Antydyskryminacyjnej (Poland).