
Active Women 50+

Gender Issues and Employment under Hybrid Welfare Regime in Central and Eastern Europe

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1 | Overview

City, Country	Šumperk, Czech Republic
Main actors	BEC - Business and Employment Co-operative
Partners	No official partners, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was investor
Theme addresses	Employment, Gender issues
Target Group	Unemployed, Women
Development Stage	Implemented, Terminated December 2014
Place/ geographic scope	Local, Regional
Time	2012
Type of Organisation	Cooperative (company)
Size of Organisation	Micro (<10)

1.1 Social Innovation

BEC - Business and Employment Co-operative is a small company, whose main objective is to support rural employment through the implementation methodology BEC - entrepreneurial and employment centers. It operates in the Olomouc and Moravian-Silesian region, which is one of the regions with the highest unemployment rates in the country. The cooperative provides support for self-employment of people disadvantaged in the labour market based on principles of social economy and social entrepreneurship. The project “Active Women 50+ and their Relevance on Local Labour Market” was designed and initiated in line with the BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative’s defined methodology and goals, and benefited from support of the Operational Programme “Human Resources and Employment”. As its name implies, the project was designed for women over 50 years of age, who were in pre-retirement age as it considered specially this category of women as being the most endangered with unemployment and discrimination.

1.2 Context & Framework Conditions

Olomouc region is one of the 14 regions in the Czech Republic at the NUTS 3 level. Šumperk is one of the five districts of Olomouc region. The area of the district is 1,313.06 square kilometres, and has a population of 123,890 people (the population density is 94 people per km²). The district Šumperk has 78 municipalities, including 8 cities.



Figure 1-1. Šumperk is a district (depicted in red) in the Olomouc Region (depicted in orange and red) of the Czech Republic.

Statistics from the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs show that, the unemployment rate of persons above 50 years of age has been much higher than the overall unemployment rate in the country during the years leading to implementation of the project Active Women 50+, which started by the end of 2012 (see Table below).

Table 1 – Unemployment statistics during the years leading to the start of the project

year	Overall unemployment rate in the CR	Unemployment of 50+ persons in the CR	Unemployment of 50+ persons in Šumperk
2009	6.8%	26.8%	27.5%
2010	9.8%	27.7%	29.9%
2011	9.7%	26.0%	27.1%
2012	9.1%	26.5%	27.5%

Source: The Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

As it is visible from the table, the unemployment rate for the persons above 50 years of age has been always more than thrice that of overall unemployment in the country. According to the statistics from the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, during the last years leading to the start of the discussed project, the unemployment rate for women above 50 years of age has comprised more than 40% of the unemployed registered in the district for persons above 50 years of age.

One of the tools to achieve the goals of social inclusion is the social economy and the solutions it provides (e.g. social enterprises). Despite many years of discussion, still a specific legal form for social enterprises does not exist in the Czech Republic, and there are not any specific tax advantages. Social enterprises in the Czech Republic take various legal forms. Francova (2012) implies that, although the majority of existing social enterprises in the Czech Republic employ people with disabilities, but a trend exists and is on the rise regarding employing other socially disadvantaged people (and “not just” people with disabilities) in the Czech Republic.

Most of the existing social enterprises in the Czech Republic focus on employing disadvantaged people (these are work integration social enterprises – WISE) (Francova, *ibid*). As to the regional distribution of social enterprises in the country, besides Prague, the largest number of active social enterprises is found in the Ústí, Moravian-Silesian and Zlín regions. Conversely, the South Moravian, South Bohemian and Vysočina regions currently lag behind in terms of social enterprises activity (Francova, *ibid*).

Cooperatives were historically the predecessors of social enterprises in the Czech Republic, and are one of the most important organisations in the social economy. Cooperatives in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic have a tradition of more than 150 years, but not until the year 2000 did this combination of mutual entrepreneurship and empowerment of the disadvantaged take on a specific shape (Brančíková, 2008). According to the respective Czech laws:

(1) Cooperative is a non-exclusive community of people that is founded for the purpose of mutual support among its members or third parties, or for business purposes.

(2) has at least 3 team members.

(3) The company shall give the term "cooperative".

2 | DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Idea & Problem Addressed

The statistics clearly confirm that jobseekers aged over 50 make up the largest and most critical group in the Šumperk district. This problem is also visible when women in the above-mentioned age range are considered (see section 1.2). Accordingly, there is a need for promotion of the opportunities for this disadvantaged group in the labour market, so that they themselves and the society can benefit from their participation in the economic activities.

The project “Active Women 50+” provided to 31 women over 50 years of age from Šumperk district an opportunity to obtain new knowledge and skills to improve their position in the labour market. The target group were offered training on various entrepreneurial competences, e.g. “Business Basics”, financial literacy and basic computer user skills. By becoming a member of the cooperative, their entrepreneurial ideas will be supported for a period of time in order to give it a chance for “take-off”.

The chairman of BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative, Mr. Ivo Škrabal, had met about ten years ago some international project partners from France and Sweden, during which they discussed a methodology called Business and Employment Cooperative Initiative, which mainly concerns creating self-employment for unemployed people. Ivo Škrabal found the method interesting and decided to try it in the Czech Republic. Later, Ivo Škrabal who is also director of Non-profit Organization CCO (Centre for Community Organizing Moravian-Silesian Region) created a project called Business and Employment Cooperative in 2009. It was a pilot project and dealt with 15 unemployed people from Šumperk district, and tried to change their position in the labour market by helping them for self-employment.

The methodology includes educating the target group in creating real business plan and start own business. At the next step, the people who have created their business plan become members of the cooperative as employees to test their business plan in real world. The support in the form of employment in the cooperative will range from minimum of 6 months to maximum of 12 months. After this period the target group can become independent entrepreneurs or members of the cooperative. Based on the experience of this project of CCO, Ivo Škrabal established also BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative as a business company in 2012. After

establishment of the company, the project Active Women 50+ has been the basic activity of this company, and it also uses BEC methodology.

2.2 Motivation & Core Solution

Mr. Ivo Škrabal, the chairman of the BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative is also director of the CCO - Centre for Community Organizing Moravian-Silesian Region (in Czech: Centrum pro komunitní práci Moravskoslezského kraje). Though the CCO, Ivo Škrabal had already had experience with projects and programmes supporting job creation and entrepreneurship for young graduates and also long-time unemployed people, where there has been a wide range of age groups of participants and applicants for support. However, according to BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative, the most challenging and needy group of the unemployed according had been older applicants with various particularities. This group is considered as the most needy of support.

The project “Active Women 50+ and their Relevance on Local Labour Market” aimed to find, stress and present the work assets of women aged over 50 from the perspective of prime age as a person’s added value. The aim was to introduce measures for fulfilling the principles of equal opportunities for women 50+, removing obstacles between employers and women of this age group, enable discovering their potential, and raise their confidence and thus their chances to find suitable forms of employment or develop their own business careers.

So it can be said that the project combines the innovation types of new services (to the unemployed people), new organization (multiplication of cooperatives), and new method of provision of services (employment). Moreover, the target group always receive new competences through the education they get in the projects based on BEC methodology.

The main target group for the project were women over 50 in pre-retirement age who:

- were unemployed or in danger of losing their jobs,
- were considering changing their jobs,
- did not have enough courage to start their own business career

Although in this project the target group and beneficiaries of the project are the above-mentioned groups of women, but the BEC methodology has been implemented in other projects of BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative and the

NGO CCO as well. Hence, it can be said that the wider framework within which this SI is posited, has as its target group all the disadvantaged social groups in the labour market who need activation measures and support to overcome their difficult situation in this market.

This SI has a specific geographical delimitation, which is Šumperk district in the Olomouc Region of Czech Republic. 90% of the participating women in the project were from the city of Šumperk, although at the beginning of the project the intention was to have more diversified audience with regard to the municipalities from which the participants come.

The activities done within the project can be divided to seven parts as follows:

- 1- Recruiting candidates, and first and initial analysis of individual needs
2. Educational programs for women 50+
3. Activation of the third phase of Job clubs
4. Implementation phase – implementing of Job Bourse
5. Dissemination of the project outputs, awareness raising and dissemination of results
6. Monitoring and Evaluation
7. Establishing cooperation with the local government

As to the conflict with institutional setting, a notable one for the project was that, according to the rules of the Operational Programme dictated by the Ministry, self-employed people could not participate in the project, which was considered a limit for the project, because some part of the target group of the project were women who despite having self-employment, were interested in the trainings provided by the project and could benefit from the project. Another limitation was related to the limit in implementing the project budget for direct support of employment positions' wages, which if was higher share of the project budget, the support could be provided to more individuals from the target group.

3 | IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 Resources & Business Strategy

BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative, the company which has been running the project Active Women 50+ since December 2012, is registered as a “cooperative” in the Czech Republic. The company BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative itself was founded in 2012 as an outcome of the projects using BEC methodology (Business and Employment Cooperatives) by Non-profit Organization CCO (Centre for Community Organizing Moravian-Silesian Region).

The official project part, funded from the sources of ESF through the Operational Programme Human Resources and Employment and from the CR state budget, was terminated on 30 November 2014. The amount of budget dedicated to the project has been about 3.5 million CZK (equivalent to about € 128,000).

Notable milestones from December 2012 (start of the project) till present includes:

- December 2012 - March 2013: Information campaign
- March - May 2013: Initial meetings
- Balance diagnostics
- April - June 2013: Course “Active Woman 50+”
- June 2013 present: Job Clubs
- September - November 2013: Course “Basics of Business (Entrepreneurship)”
- February 2014: 1st JOB MARKET in Šumperk
- 2014: Creating 8 jobs
- November 2014: 2nd JOB MARKET in Šumperk
- Establishing the organization “Active Woman from Šumperk”.

The strategy to sustain and optimize the flow of resources can be considered as built-in within the BEC methodology, as this methodology (which was also implemented in the Active Women 50+ project) supports entrepreneurial endeavours at their initiation phase and then the potential successful entrepreneur can become a member of the cooperative. Within the project Active Women 50+, an NGO has been created which itself also has defined supporting start-ups as one of its main lines of activity.

As to the human resources for the project, access to the required trainers is considered to have been sufficient and successful. In addition to external trainers, four of the participating women were partly employed by BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative to coordinate the Job Clubs, mostly during the year 2014. In addition, these four women used their rich experience in specific fields like PR, photography, financial literacy, basic courses on using computer, social media etc. to educate the

other participants or assist the BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative in accomplishing the project activities. The four coordinators also became active members of the NGO founded during the project, called Active Women of Šumperk.

A key element of knowledge and competencies necessary for the success of the project, which was given at the beginning of the innovation process, was experience with implementation of BEC methodology. Since the BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative and its staff already had conducted projects implementing this methodology, this key element of knowledge and competencies was available already. What was missing (the gap) was complementary skills necessary to train the target group with regard to the needed entrepreneurial skills, which was filled by benefiting from external as well as internal trainers (i.e. some of the participants themselves) during the project.

The organization team of the project was composed of: 1-Project coordinator (Eva Škrabalová), 2-administrative assistant, 3-consultant and supervisor (Ivo Škrabal, the chairman of BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative), 4-expert on equal opportunities, 5-external trainers and consultants, 6-financial manager, 7-job club coordinators from active women 50+.

Each year on average 5 to 6 entrepreneurs come under the umbrella of BEC methodology. Since April 2015 BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative has 5 more employees, because of another round of support programmes which includes supporting 5 new entrepreneurial experiments. These 5 persons will be employed by the company for either 6 or 9 months, and meanwhile will test their entrepreneurial ideas in the real market conditions.

The main sectors involved in realization of the project included private sector (by having the role of ideation and implementation) and public sector (by having the role of financing).

The project enabled the participants to discover their potential through innovative tools of the project, which were called Job Club and Job Bourse. "Job clubs" were self-help groups, within which so-called "Ten advantages of active women 50+" was created. This declaration aims to help the participants to present their personality strengths and advantages as beneficial human resources for the companies. The publication of this declaration on the internet serves also as a social network for the target group, as well as for employers. "Job Bourses" were job fairs, which served to establish contact between employers and the target group (SI users in the

project). Job Clubs and Job Bourse were also implemented during the period of October to December 2013, when there was a 3 months course on “Basics of Business”.

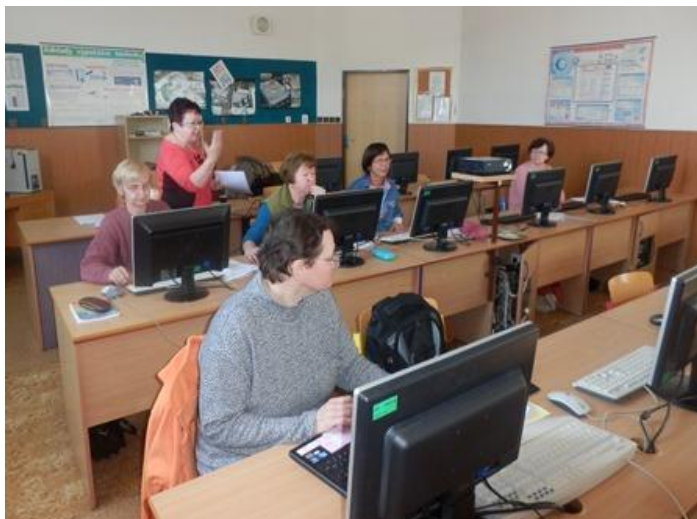


Figure 3-1. Job Club with the theme of computers. Courtesy of BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative.



Figure 3-2. Participants attending the course "Basics of Business". Courtesy of BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative.



Figure 3-3. Job Bourse organized within the project. Courtesy of BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative.



Figure 3-4. The establishment of the Association Šumperk Active Women. Courtesy of BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative.

3.2 The Network – Governance, Support & Obstacles

Business and Employment Co-operative has been the initiator and main driving actor in this project, and it has not had any official partner in the project. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic has been the investor of the project Active Women 50+. There has been cooperation during the project with labour offices in Šumperk and other municipalities in the district. These offices in the municipalities have helped the BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative to contact the target group across the region. Also during the information campaign at the beginning of the project, the municipalities at the Šumperk district have helped BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative to spread the word about the project in their respective municipalities. Also during different phases of the project, some partners have joined the project, e.g. Center for Social Innovation which is another project of CCO, and Culture House, which helped with regard to communication platform and also provided space for the regional “job exchange” activities in the project.

There was not a deep and direct cooperation with other projects during this project, but there was active attendance by the project managers in related conferences and workshops, presenting the methodology and the outputs of the Active Women 50+ project.

As to the need for political links, the project used the municipalities in the Šumperk district for communicating the message of the project to its target group living within the district. Hence, the municipalities played enabling role for bringing the project to the attention of the public. In addition, the Czech ministry of Labour and Social Affairs financed the project through ESF Operational Programme Human Resources and Employment, which was another necessary political support for the project. However, according to the project implementer BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative, some of the strict rules dictated by the Ministry regarding the implementation of the project, had limited them in optimizing the programme according to the exact needs of the target group.

The project could be considered as a result of perceived absence of related public policy measures, if we take to account the role that state can have in promoting gender and age equality in the labour market through introducing or enforcing respective measures. However, till the time the state is reluctant in such interventions

in the (labour) market (specifically in transition from communism to (neo)-liberalist policies), it would be not easy to attribute the project with being a result of “failure” of the state in addressing the social issue concerned.

To secure some of the key human resources regarding training of the users in the project, important social networks have been contacts with external trainers and also the skills of some of the participants who were able to educate the users. As to the economic resources, the most important supporter of the project has been the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs who has funded the project through European Social Fund’s Operational Programme “Human Resources and Employment”.

One boundary for the project was that, although at the beginning of the project, the driving actor of the project (BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative) expected to have participation of women from both Šumperk town and other municipalities in the district, in reality this did not happen, and hence, all the events during the project had to be organized in Šumperk town, because almost 90% of the participants were from this town. This limited the project with regard to its geographical outreach.

4 | SOCIAL INNOVATION EFFECTS

4.1 Outcomes & Impact

According to the BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative, the main created values by the projects include the social ones, as the project intended to change the situation of the target group in the labour market, activate them and promote their advantages as a labour force. To make the project more successful, according to the BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative, the Ministry shall give more space to the actor implementing the idea (i.e. BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative) in designing the programmes for the target group and adapting to the needs of the participants. In addition, self-employed women could be made eligible to participate and benefit from the project, as many of them in the district are interested in participating in such projects in order to develop their businesses more.

Key achievements of the project included:

- individual needs analysis - work and balance diagnostics (30 female participants),
- specialized course “Active Woman 50+” (completed by 24 out of 30 participants)
- retraining educational course “Basics of Business (Entrepreneurship)” (completed by 11 out of 18 participants),
- self-help work groups “job clubs”,
- 2 regional markets of work opportunities - Job Bourses (February and November 2014),
- cooperation with employers and state administration,
- 8 part-time and full-time jobs (0,7 - 1,0) with 7 employers for 6-9 months, and supporting one of the participants for starting her own business.

As an outstanding outcome of the project, the non-profit organization “Šumperk Active Woman” was launched, which is a direct follow-up of the project activities, and is expected to help increase the outcomes of the project, by helping the target group in the region in their entrepreneurial endeavours. In addition, the BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative intends to apply for another round of support with similar concept of the project.

Publicity tools has been also created to provide information about the project and relevant information for the target group and broader audience:

- Project website www.aktivnizena50.cz,
- Project www.facebook.com/aktivnizena50,
- Facebook group www.facebook.com/groups/366908210101543/?fref=ts

4.2 Measurement

The amount of budget dedicated to the project has been about 3.5 million CZK (equivalent to about € 128,000). 30% of the budget was dedicated to direct help for employment of the unemployed women for 60 months, which BEC expected this to be broken down to 6 positions for a duration of 10 months. What happened was the following supported employments at seven employers;

- office worker, for a period of 1.0 to 9 months,
- store manager, for a period of 1.0 to 9 months,
- accounting position, for a period of 0.7 to 9 months,
- Administrative and filing worker, for a period of 0.75 to 6 months
- Administration - Accounting work, for a period of 1.0 to 9 months,
- Social care worker: for a period of 0.75 to 6 months
- social worker, for a period of 1.0 to 6 months
- vendor- for a period of 1.0 to 6 months.

Also the following 4 products are considered as notable outcomes of the project:

- Methodology "Ten advantages of active women 50+" in the labour market.
- Methodology "Active women 50+ and their life stories."
- A video documentary "My career - Confession women 50+" - a collection of 10 videos.
- Online social network - a discussion forum, a website and a Facebook group.

Establishment of the NGO Šumperk Active Women is considered as one of the most important enduring outcomes of the project, which will be active in supporting women entrepreneurs in the district, in addition to organizing workshops and seminars related to this topic. The project coordinator of the Active Women 50+ from the BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative herself has also become a member of this NGO, and the cooperative supports the NGO e.g. by providing them space for their activities in the co-working center. Furthermore, the Cooperative intends to develop and implement another project concerning women 50+.

5 | CONCLUSION

The project Active Women 50+ involves **components** from private (BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative) and public sector (Ministry and municipalities). The sole main **actor** in the project, however, has been the BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative, which is based in Šumperk town, the main seat of the Šumperk district government. This main actor, however, has the root of its activities in formal civil society actors (NGOs). The political actor has supported the project at the national level (the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs). The political actor has provided the economic **resources** (capital) for the project, while the civil-economic actor (the cooperative) has provided the personal and social resources like knowledge, leadership and education for the users from the target group.

The project represents a situation in which social innovation gives birth to social / economic **institution** and itself is born from that as well. The BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative was born out of an innovative project in the country (implementing BEC methodology) and then developed Active Women 50+ project, from which an NGO is born named Šumperk Active Women, which intends to support women entrepreneurs in the region.

While social **objectives** of empowerment, equality and participation in society (labour market) constituted the main motivations of the main actor (BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative) in the project, it was supported by the political objectives of inclusion, discharge of public budget and welfare maximisation pursued by the Ministry and the municipalities in the district. The economic objectives are not absent, but rather long-term objectives in this kind of projects, whose immediate outcome is oriented towards empowerment of the target group and their inclusion. In line with this objectives pursued by the main actor and the supporters, their allocation of resources has been also more oriented toward empowerment, rather than short-term exploitation of the resources (evidenced in e.g. only 30% of the project budget dedicated to direct support of 60 person-months of wages, which is expressed as a limit by the main actor). Accordingly, the **mode of efficiency** in this SI has been cooperation between private and public sector designed more towards achieving short-term social goals and long-term economic goals by both sides of the cooperation. This has also led to the role of subsidy overcoming autonomy of

the driving actor during the project, however, as it had to stick with the strict rules by the Ministry, without of which, according to the driving actor, the efficiency during the project might have been improved even more.

Mode of governance in this SI project has been co-regulation (governance with government) as the Ministry which has dedicated resources from the ESF Operational Programme has had considerable influence and determined the rules of implementing the resources and designing the project, while the private actor (the cooperative) has designed the methodology and implemented it in the project. This characteristic (governance with government) is in line with hybrid characteristic of the Czech welfare state, which implies that welfare measures are *state-enabled* (cf. Cerami and Stubbs, 2011).

It seems difficult to find a direct relation between “State’s withdrawal” and the discussed SI, as the unemployment of the women aged over 50 is rather an open labour market phenomena that occurs in many (if not all) countries. However, this does not mean that the state does not have any means through which it can intervene indirectly and influence the matter. For instance, equality in employment policies implemented by the state itself, and so-called positive discrimination which is put in the legislation in some countries (e.g. Norway) provide the state some means to influence the gender issues concerning women in the labour market. If these measures and specifically their communist era equivalents are taken into account, then one might consider the discussed SI as a result of state’s withdrawal from direct labour market intervention after the fall of communist regime in the country. However, introduction of such measures by the state regarding the labour market, would decrease the freedom perceived by the private sector, as it would mean partial “shift of power” to the state. The private sector might in fact consider those measures as having more social rather than economic objectives (for their businesses). The “ten principles” identified in the discussed project as advantages of the women aged over 50 in the labour market, hence, needs real “demonstration cases” and publicity in order to show to the private sector that such perception of contradiction between social and economic goals are not necessarily correct always.

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Appendix I: Mapping the Egocentric Actor Network

The following table is utilised to study actors' relations in the innovation process.

ID	Name	Type of Actor	Location			Role	Involvement		Intensity
			Country	Region	City		Date	Duration	
1	BEC-Business and Employment Cooperative	2	CZ	CZ071	Šumperk	1,2,5	12/2012	24	5
2	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	1	CZ	CZ010	Prague	4	12/2012	24	1
3	Individuals from target group of Women aged over 50	5	CZ	CZ071	Šumperk	3	12/2012	24	4

Remarks

- (1) *Type of Actor*: 1 = Public, 2 = Private, 3 = Third Sector, 4 = Civil Society, 5 = Individual, 6 = Non-profit
- (2) *Location*: Country (NUTS code), region (NUTS code), city (name in English)
- (3) *Role*: 1 = Initiator, 2 = Idea provider, 3 = User, 4 = Investor, 5 = Promotor, 6 = Design, 7 = Production, 8 = Marketing, 9 = Contractual issues, 10 = Reseller
- (4) *Date of Involvement*: Month/Year (MM/YYYY)
- (5) *Duration of Involvement*: month
- (6) *Intensity*: 1 = one occasion, 2 = less than monthly, 3 = monthly, 4 = weekly, 5 = daily