

PRESS RELEASE

On 22 November 2022 the PENELOPE Project - Innovative and pioneer cluster-based approach to foster and integrate gender mainstreaming strategies in European Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) - funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ programme was kicked-off in Aix-Les-Bains, France.

Why this acronym?

It was chosen by the project partners to honour the memory of Penelope Ruiz, who, when her husband passed away in 1975, took over one of the most prosperous furniture industries in the southeast of Spain, becoming the 1st entrepreneur of the sector implementing gender equality principles in 1975.

Undeniably, women play an important role in EU countries' path towards a higher level of industrialization. It is also important to point out that industrial development is not a gender-neutral process, and that it may have differentiating impacts on men and women if gender considerations are not considered to ensure equal outcomes with respect to the development and promotion of industrialization, technology and innovation.

Why clusters?

With almost 3000 innovation clusters in Europe, they can act as tools of change creating impact and shaping EU's future, as it is estimated that improvements in gender equality would lead to an additional 10.5 million jobs in 2050¹, benefitting both women and men.

Industrial clusters in Europe account for 61.8 million jobs or about half (46.4%) of employment in exporting industries and for almost 1 out of 4 jobs in total employment (23.4%).² Since clusters are one of the main drivers of the competitiveness of EU economy due to their reticular impact on SMEs, it is essential to equip cluster organizations' staff with the understanding of core gender mainstreaming principles that can be used to customize development interventions so that adverse gender impacts are mitigated, and current gender inequalities in the EU industry are addressed.

It was natural for the PENELOPE project to pioneer in channelling the gender equality approach into the European industrial tissue of SMEs through clusters.

What is the purpose of PENELOPE?

The project aims to develop, transfer, and implement innovative practices, following a cluster-based approach, to gender mainstreaming strategies in EU SMEs focusing on the critical factors for the advancement of gender-inclusive industries in the EU.

In order to accomplish this, PENELOPE will work towards

¹ Morais Maceira, H. Economic Benefits of Gender Equality in the EU. Intereconomics 52, 178–183 (2017).

² https://clustercollaboration.eu/sites/default/files/news_attachment/european_panorama_2020.pdf

- defining specific guidelines for cluster organizations' staff towards gender mainstreaming, promoting equality among women and men and contributing to a more modern, dynamic, committed and professional environment inside organisations;
- supporting SMEs in building their gender-inclusive cultures through innovative tools on gender equality strategies;
- facilitating online cooperation and blended learning opportunities among European industry clusters and SMEs to ensure successful gender mainstreaming in their everyday work, through new approaches to better support competitiveness and employment development, mainly at local and regional levels;
- developing a methodology for European clusters, following attractive training programmes based on participatory approaches and digital methodologies, in line with individual needs and expectations.

What will PENELOPE do?

- Identify good practices among EU clusters and policy makers at regional, national and European levels
- Develop a Guidebook of Tools for a pan-European Gender Mainstreaming Approach based on interviews
- Develop a training handbook and evaluation methods
- Create a set of video pills as useful resources and information sources on gender mainstreaming and on how companies can increase and keep female participation in the labour market
- Develop a Virtual Learning Environment, free of charge for five years, offering adaptive trainings that will tailor content for each user according to their previous learning achievements, profile, etc. using gamification techniques
- Piloting tests of training workshops
- A training guide methodology
- A guide for trainers and facilitators
- A training workshop toolkit
- And overarching, a very intense sharing and promotion of all activities, not only in the partners' countries, but in the very broad European cluster community.

Who is behind PENELOPE?

Five highly dedicated partners from France, Spain, Romania and Austria are committed to bring in their experience, knowledge and expertise, and especially their networks into a collaborative process to develop innovative formats for capacity building of cluster managers, company managers, cluster policy makers, among other types of stakeholders.



From left to right: Lucia Seel (Lucia Seel International Consulting GmbH), Audrey Demore (OXALIS), Raquel Ortega Martinez (AMUEBLA Cluster), Christine André (OXALIS), Liat Or Wechsler (Romanian Textile Concept Cluster), Lisa Besnard (France Clusters), Mirela Greti Puiu (Romanian Textile Concept Cluster). The team acknowledges that the image is not gender-balanced and it does not reflect the real gender structure of the project team.

How long will PENELOPE be active?

From 19 November 2021 until 18 November 2024.

For more information, please contact lisa.besnard@franceclusters.fr

The PENELOPE website and further communication materials are under development.

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