

# Women's Resource Centres, WRCs

In order for a country to grow and develop it is essential to utilise the entire population's knowledge and competence. This means that all individuals, both men and women, are allowed the possibility to develop their talents within those particular areas where they have the best prerequisites. Equality between women and men is therefore an important factor in ensuring a good life and growth in society.

The work within Women's Resource Centres gives women scope to design operations based on women's needs. This results in activities designed by women for women. Women's Resource Centres give women the possibility to use their knowledge and competence and represent women's interests in regional and local development work.



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## Grassroots perspective

The activities of Women's Resource Centres take as their starting point local needs and prevailing conditions, seen from the grassroots perspective, and develop activities accordingly. Empowerment, the power of the individual, a belief in knowledge, and the power of individuals to influence their own situation in society, are trademarks of the activities of WRCs.

## The principle of Empowerment

The mobilisation of women's own resources is an important foundation for the work carried out in WRCs. Taking

responsibility for one's own life and work is a fundamental concept. Within the framework of WRCs women are given scope to develop their ideas, dreams and wishes. It is not the aim of a WRC to take care of women who seek their help, but rather to give them guidance towards self-help. The task of a WRC is to support women's ideas and help them find ways of developing them.

**Empowerment: when people gain the power and status to take control over their own lives and use their own resources.**

## Development

When women work together on their own terms, and together identify problems and solutions, a development process is started that enhances women's potential for participating in society. When a WRC is established women get more opportunities to run organisations and development projects, which can in turn lead to developments on women's terms in the world of work, commerce and living environment.

## Meeting place

A WRC is a meeting place for women that is based on women's needs and wishes. Work within the WRC may include guidance, competence development, social meetings, personal development, family matters, job creation, breaking isolation, security, information, IT, entrepreneurship, exchange of experience, business advice, mentorship, lectures, seminars and courses. The WRC is intended to be an open and neutral actor. For the efficient use of existing resources, the work needs to be monitored from the viewpoint of the needs and situations of the women concerned.

## Networking

The working model used by WRCs is networking on various levels, local, regional and transnational. The networks explore ideas and potential areas for collaborative projects. When participants have some common interest, cooperation is easy. The driving forces of the women themselves and the needs conditioned by their own reality can in this case be utilised. Empowerment becomes reality.

## How to start a Women's Resource Centre

A group of women meet and establish the need for efforts to facilitate development, and for a meeting place for women. Together they itemise the needs of a WRC in the local area, which could, for example be a village or a town. The task of a WRC might, in addition to providing support for individual women and their development, be to develop the local area, be part of a lobby group for gender equality or be involved in social and cultural efforts. The group also needs to establish cooperation and collaboration with other organisations, local government and public authorities.

There is a need to work in an organised and structured manner to ensure that women gain exactly the same conditions and preconditions as men in matters of work, working conditions, scope for development and entrepreneurship.

The work needs to be formalised with statutes or rules of procedure.

## Organisation

To earn legitimacy as a representative for women's interests and to obtain financial resources for their operations, it is

often necessary for the work to be organised in a formal fashion, for example as a voluntary association, an NGO. Other organisational forms could be a cooperative, or as part of another organisation's activities.

Basic principles for work in a WRC are:

- it must be open to all women in the geographical area, or professional/vocational group or branch of trade or industry
- it must be run on democratic principles; one person, one vote
- management must be by women for women
- men who share the same values of gender equality as the WRC are welcome to participate
- it should work to promote a gender equal society, a gender equal labour market and a gender equal world of business and industry
- it should work to promote gender equal and sustainable development for growth.

## The work of the WRC

The WRC is a meeting place for women, that is founded on women's needs and wishes. The WRC therefore comes to act as a focal point for knowledge and experience about women's lives and living situations, which is of great value in the development of society. The WRC can be a centre for information and documentation, for opinion making in gender equality issues and a tool for gender equality work in the area. WRCs act as a watchdog on women's interests in regional and local development work.

It is also of great value to have this type of knowledge of society, which makes it possible to help women identify the means (financial or/and other) for realising their personal development and professional aims.

Empowerment strategy involves special interpersonal techniques which are necessary for WRC personnel to master. These techniques are grounded in basic ethics of respect and equality between all people regardless of education, status, age etc. One such basic technique includes focusing on the strengths and not on the weaknesses of every single woman.

## Winnet Europe

The European network Women's Resource Centres was established in June 2006. The name Winnet Europe stands for Women In Net in Europe [www.winneturope.org](http://www.winneturope.org)

## Winnet Sweden

Winnet Sweden is the Swedish National Federation of Resource Centres for women and was established in 1999 [www.winnet.se](http://www.winnet.se)

