

## September, 2006

FEM (Female Entrepreneurs' Meetings) is a Baltic Sea Region Interreg IIIB project.

The aim of FEM is to strengthen the structures which support the entrepreneurship of women through co-operation, exchange of knowledge and experiences as well as best practises. FEM started in August 2004 and will run to August 2007. The participating countries are Finland, Sweden, Norway, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

This is the first FEM newsletter. You will find more information about FEM activities and participants in [www.feminfo.net](http://www.feminfo.net). Overall co-ordination of the FEM: [laura.perheentupa@intermin.fi](mailto:laura.perheentupa@intermin.fi), [leena.heiskala@palvelupartio.inet.fi](mailto:leena.heiskala@palvelupartio.inet.fi)

### Securing future financing is important



In June, the General Assembly Meeting of the new European Association of women's resource centres, Winnet Europe, took place in Brussels. The Baltic Sea countries showed great interest and were well represented at the meeting.

Four of the six representatives in the new elected board (Interim) in Winnet Europe are from the Baltic Sea region: Sweden, Finland, Poland and Germany.

One of the most important issues of the FEM project is to start networking between the resource centres in different countries. It will help the centres survive after the FEM-project finishes next year.

A report shall be drawn about a joint strategy for the resource centres and a plan for possibilities of future financing.

The secretariat of Winnet Europe will be virtual and the webportal [www.winneteurope.eu](http://www.winneteurope.eu) will be the tool for communication and exchange of experiences.

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### Scepticism turned into enthusiasm



Last year the women from the Mäetaguse rural municipality in Estonia met people from the FEM project for the first time. This meeting started a chain of events that transformed the Mäetaguse women.

ETNA Estonia organised seminars, after which the women, a bit sceptical at first, decided to continue working together. Now 16 women have formed a non-profit organisation that sells and makes patchwork quilts.

-We did everything backwards, dashing first off to foreign markets. If we had relied on our own wisdom, progress would have been much more difficult, says Ruth Linnard.

The women from Orava municipality in south-east Estonia started studying local traditional cuisine and now cook and sell them.

In Paistu, Viljandi county, small business owners have formed a mentor group to support others.

-Women have found the will to act and realize their dreams, says Valentina Väli, a flower shop owner and mentor. -Support is extremely important.

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### Study, learn and begin, then help others



In Latvia the FEM project has been carried out by three partners: The Latvia University of Agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Association of Rural Women of Latvia.

The members of local organisations participate in seminars about eg. microcredits (small business loans), mentoring, e-commerce and basic management skills. After that, step by step, women can start their own businesses and later on they can help others to do the same.

The most active local organisations have used their knowledge to start up resource centres for helping new entrepreneurs. They also act as meeting places. The resource centres have used the Swedish centres as a model and there are now four Latvian resource centres. The centres need support from the state government to be able to fulfill modern demands. Regular training is also needed for the people running the centres.

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## Networking and entertainment



In June the Taurage Women's information and resource centre (WIRC) in Lithuania organized an event called "Fashion, poetry and Theatre". There were a hundred participants and guests from Lithuania, Poland, Sweden and Norway.

The programme consisted of entertainment and useful information.

Lisbeth Holmquist-Arbrandt, leader of the Swedish WIRC, told the audience about her work experience, discussed the problems of the resource centre in Lithuania and helped find possible solutions to them.

Individual meetings with entrepreneurs were set up and the event was a good opportunity for women from rural areas to get new business contacts.

In addition to serious business talks, there was also a day of role play, fashion show, music and poetry. Participants also had the chance to buy the produce of different artisans and craftsmen.

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## Encouragement leads to new businesses



In Lebork, Poland, the employment office also advises women in how to start up a new business.

The resource centre helps women deal with all the formalities and obtain subsidies for starting up a new business. The centre was established under the FEM project.

-We also organise language courses which are very popular. The women form a good group and support each other in the search for jobs. We also help them write CV's, says Elzbieta Rekowska-Klassa, manager of the Information and European Matters Department from Lebork City Hall.

-The women have started to believe in themselves.

Krystyna Kujawska was unemployed for five years. Now she is opening a small shop selling second hand clothes.

-I managed to do it and I encourage all women to start their own business. Don't be afraid, Kujawska says.

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## Finding ways to do international business



In Northern Carelia in Finland there is a pilot group whose intention it is to find out the challenges and needs that face small businesses run by women. The group is organised by Karellikeskus - women's resource centre. There are 12 female entrepreneurs active in different branches in the pilot group. They share the interest and will to establish and make their businesses grow by mapping or finding the possibilities to do business internationally.

The pilot group also produces information for the FEM project. The recent adviser services respond to the internationalizing needs of small entrepreneurs at a concrete level as well as produce new tools and models to be used in international co-operation in the FEM countries.

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