



TA Consultants United

HAPPY INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY TO ALL OUR FEMALE COLLEAGUES!

Well, today is International Women's Day and if you live in a country where this is not celebrated (shamefully, a lot) and you wonder what it's all about, you can find everything you could want to know at the [Wikipedia entry](#).

We decided to mark the occasion by circulating the report prepared by one of our supporters, British expert Gail Warrander, on the subject beneath.

Please send me any comments you may have and we will take these into account before sending a final version to EuropeAid, as requested by them when we met in November.

In the meantime, we want to express our gratitude to Gail for doing an excellent job. Thanks Gail!

Stephen Dewar

SOA&E – WOMEN AND EU PROJECTS

INTRODUCTION

This paper was written taking into account feedback from members of the community of experts who have signed the petition.

There are no accurate figures on the percentage of women consultants in EU EuropeAid projects. Based on anecdotal ad hoc reviews of projects and the proportion of consultants in the SOAE project, women are estimated to make up around 15% of consultants.

This low representation is disappointing from an equal opportunities' perspective for women consultants. It is also a concern because women consultants present role models in developing countries or regions such as Afghanistan or Africa.

Discussions with women experts indicated that there was no overt discrimination in the system but that there is some indirect discrimination.

Development work abroad is simply not a viable career for those with pre-school or school-age children.

That said, some experts reported back that they had managed to undertake long-term projects, even as a single parent, by taking their children with them to missions in safer countries.

These experts had some practical suggestions as to how to make this more viable.

In addition there was complete consensus that there is some development work that can feasibly be done by consultants in their home country and that the EU rules did not permit this and that the EU rigidity in this area was not in line with the flexible working and family-friendly approach that the EU otherwise espouses.

By adopting flexibility for women during their child-caring years, women can be encouraged to stay in the development consultancy profession and later may be more able to return to spend longer periods in the field.

Finally several women noted that the rigidity of the EU specifications for consultants discriminated indirectly against women who have taken time out for children and there were some suggestions on how tendering criteria could be changed to allow more women to (re) enter the development consultant profession.

It was noted that EU projects generally seem to have a much lower proportion of women consultants than USAID projects in some countries.

USAID often favours longer-term projects, recognises more home-working days and encourages in its selection criteria contractors with a large, constant employee base, rather than fluctuating body-shopping.

Therefore there may be some lessons to be learnt from their approaches.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE EU “DAYS IN COUNTRY” REQUIREMENT – NEED FOR MORE FAMILY FRIENDLY POLICIES, RECOGNISING THE MODERN AGE

It is recognised that where projects involve country knowledge or hands-on capacity building then experts need to be in-country for material periods of time. This does not however necessarily apply for all types of work or all elements of a mission. Material parts of missions involve report writing or planning e.g. by team leaders which could be undertaken back home. Moreover even in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Kenya, Ghana etc there are now good internet connections with many of the beneficiaries and use of technologies such as Skype are widespread, making conference calls with beneficiaries and the remainder of the team a viable option. Furthermore, some specialist work e.g. drafting of laws, technical manuals or drawing up of plans, TORs does not need to be done in country.

The author of this report is aware of several women lawyer consultants with specialist background and language skills such as Farsi and Urdu who could viably travel to Pakistan, Afghanistan for a few days to meet with beneficiaries and then return home to draft laws or TORs but cannot take up work with EU projects because the projects specifically require experts to be in country for the entire project.

The current PRAG/EU requirement and most TORs require experts to spend a considerable amount of days in-country.

Special permission is required for home working and is rarely granted. The EU Delegations take an overly rigid approach to this.

This inevitably discriminates indirectly against women who need to spend more time at home for ante-natal checkups, IVF or due to child-care arrangements.

A more flexible approach would benefit not only women but all consultants with families who need to return to care for children, elderly, family members who are sick e.g. during an operation or for other family emergencies back home.

This approach could also be cost-saving as it would save on accommodation and per diems.

It was generally felt that a greater shift to output-focussed TORs would encourage more home working and flexibility as then the EU Delegation would move away from micro-managing how and where days are spent to concentrating on the achievements and deliverables of the consultants.

As far as the beneficiary is concerned it is not important for example how a law or TOR is produced but the quality and timeliness of the output.

2. ENCOURAGING THE CONSULTANT COMPANIES TO MAKE MORE FAMILY-FRIENDLY LONG TERM EXPERT ARRANGEMENTS

Several women experts noted that they had managed to undertake long-term missions and take their children with them. They explained that this had been possible either through their own determination or with a rare forward-thinking consultancy company.

Generally the feedback, however, was that the consultancy companies regarded consultants who needed to make childcare or schooling arrangements as problematic and provided little or no support for relocation or in finding schooling. One suggestion was that consultant companies should be persuaded to provide relocation support just like the EU does itself with its delegation staff.

A rule requiring a contribution to this could be introduced. The overall structure of the EU projects however encourages sub-contracting and little/no investment by consultants in their staff. Consultancy companies are profit-maximising.

Some thought needs to be given as to how the EU system can encourage or reward consultancy firms for family friendly policies or how EU law on contractors etc and employment protection can be better enforced against consultancy companies.



3. SELECTION CRITERIA/ SPECIFICATIONS FOR CONSULTANTS – AVOIDING INDIRECT DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

The rigidity of the criteria for consultants can discriminate in practice against women. For example TORs often request ten years experience, often in the region which will not be viable for those who have taken time out with children. It is questionable whether such a requirement is always necessary. It also discriminates in general against new entrants and makes for a more rigid profession, perpetuating the use of existing consultants, rather than those with skills in parallel regions or areas of work.

The same requirement of extended experience in similar projects in the relevant region usually also applies for Framework Contract assignments, one of the possible entry doors to the system that could otherwise be used to test new talent. So, there are not many ways to penetrate in the system and those that exist are, in practice for the indicated reasons, even less actionable for interested and qualified women. In this respect it can be useful to remind that the practice consistently followed in competitive exams for administrator positions at EU institutions allows for time spent away from work due to family care requirements to replace years of professional experience for eligibility purposes.

4. SOAE ELIGIBILITY/BLACKLISTING SHOULD NOT BE USED WHERE THERE ARE VALID PERSONAL REASONS

The SOAE is often used by either the EU Delegation or as an internal document via the consultancy profession to threaten to blacklist consultants who are unable to commit. A consultant should be able to cite personal reasons which should include family or childcare issues which are not predictable and not just illness of the consultant himself/herself. This practice has a greater impact on women in practice as they are juggling the family and work life.

Gail Warrander

Gail Warrander is a solicitor qualified in England and Wales and also a Sloan Fellowship graduate of London Business School. She worked in the UK for a City law firm and for Reuters before moving to Kosovo. There and in other parts of the Balkans she has worked for the European Agency for Reconstruction (managing EU tenders), then on projects for various donors (including Swiss Development Agency, KFW, USAID, UKAID and the EU). Mostly, however, she undertakes private work relating to foreign investors. She works with SMEs and in the financial/banking, insurance, telco, infrastructure/energy and water sectors.

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