



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S
LOBBY
EUROPÉEN DES FEMMES

European Women's Voice

The European Women's Lobby (EWL) is the largest umbrella organisation of women's associations in the European Union (EU), working to promote women's rights and equality between women and men. EWL membership extends to organisations in all 27 EU member states and three of the candidate countries, as well as to 20 European-wide bodies, representing a total of more than 2000 organisations.

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Editorial

By Brigitte Triems, EWL President
& Cécile Gréboval, EWL Secretary General

2012 is the European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. We have witnessed how the European debate has focused mainly on active *ageing*, that is, on ensuring that women and men work longer in order to sustain pension systems in our ageing societies. The European Women's Lobby (EWL) has raised its voice to add the gender equality perspective, which has been missing from the debate: in particular, we have drawn attention to the situation of older women and highlighted the complex issues relating to gender equality in pensions. We were happy to see that many of our concerns have been taken up by the European Commission in its recent proposals concerning pensions, and we hope this will have a positive impact on the lives of all the women living in Europe.

For the EWL, the European Year 2012 provides an opportunity to discuss gender equality issues from a life-cycle perspective and build solidarity between women and feminists across generations. This is why the third edition of our magazine *European Women's Voice*, is dedicated to discussing intergenerational solidarity from a gender equality perspective.

The articles included in this magazine invite us to look at a range of gender equality issues from care to pay and pensions from a life-cycle perspective, with the aim of understanding and improving the situation of women at all stages of their lives. This publication is the result of a dialogue between different generations of feminists. We hope that it will continue to feed into this dialogue, which we believe is crucial

It is therefore crucial to look at the *whole picture*: to trace the patterns that determine access to resources, to look at the periods that can be defined as the 'rush hour of life' and to identify the policies needed to support women at all stages of their lives. We also need to ask *whose* life cycle is currently leading the way and being used as the basis of policies.

Over and above a narrow gender equality framework, a life-course perspective picks up the pieces and makes the links between different policies and actors. It emphasises the need for an overall coherent policy framework, and it sheds light on coherence among the *actors* who are in a position to steer and mobilise resources and make changes happen. Such a holistic gender equality vision is necessary, as gender is a fundamental structuring element that shapes women's and men's lives, and policies to achieve equality between women and men cannot be addressed as a patchwork.

A coherent approach to gender equality is needed more than ever in the current socio-political context where macroeconomic policies shape political priorities. This is a challenge for gender equality, as we need to mobilise actors that are not used to making the links between budgetary and economic decisions and gender equality. Budgets and resources allocated to different policies mirror political priorities.

A life-cycle perspective on gender equality: care, pay and pensions

The first part of this magazine invites the reader to apply a life-cycle perspective to feminist issues such as women's economic independence and care. Prof. Ute Klammer's article brings us to the heart of the matter. In developing the first gender equality report in Germany in 2008, the expert Commission she chaired used a life-course approach to examine how and when women and men take decisions that have long-term effects in their working, family and professional lives. The results were used as the basis for a sustainable gender equality policy. The German model shows how the combination of political will and institutional mechanisms could make a difference.

The consequences of gender inequalities faced early in the life cycle determine women's economic independence throughout

their lives. This is particularly visible in pension systems, as pointed out by Anna Elomäki. The gender pay gap and other gender inequalities in the labour market have lifelong effects on women, and these effects become visible at retirement in the form of the gender pension gap. Pensions mirror the accumulation of gender inequalities through women's life cycle. When the reflexion in the mirror is distorted to such an extent as in Germany, where the gender pension gap is almost 60 %, it becomes obvious why a life-cycle approach is urgently needed. A life-cycle approach will ultimately challenge the criteria used to determine the 'norm' which defines social security systems, particularly if women's rights and gender equality are at stake.

Diane Elson provides an overview of unpaid work in an economic context and argues that the boundaries between paid and unpaid work are not clear-cut, as all sectors of the economy resort to both forms of work. She also questions the way in which the value of unpaid work is measured and how this should be used to advance gender equality. The underlying question we must consider is whether the visibility and recognition of unpaid work challenges or reinforces the gender division and gender inequalities, particularly with regard to care. Unpaid work should be distributed equally between women and men; the challenges of an ageing population provide an opportunity to make this happen.

The articles by Johanna Dahlin and Paola Villa describe shifts in the way care is distributed and redirected from the public sector to households. Their discussions on two often opposed models – the "progressive", Nordic model and the traditional model of the South – reveal similar patterns. Dahlin and Villa show the consequences that the privatisation of care work and making families responsible for intergenerational solidarity have on women's economic independence and gender equality. Unpaid care provided by families, as Diane Elson points out, patches up the holes in the worn-out social protection mechanisms. But the family is not a gender-neutral territory. This is where what Villa calls "women's intergenerational solidarity trap" is grounded.

The question of care and sustainability is also raised in the article by Catrin Becher on the concept of Green Economy, which, she argues, has failed to bring about profound

changes, as the idea of the green economy has developed as part of the entrenched, gender segregated labour market, to the exclusion of the issue of care. She argues that, in debates about the green economy, the focus is placed on the need to bring women into the so-called 'real economy', reiterating that the informal sector does not count. This echoes Diane Elson's arguments that "if something is not counted, it doesn't count".

Intergenerational solidarity from a feminist perspective

The second part of this magazine invites feminists from different generations to participate in an intergenerational dialogue. It also sheds light on how generational differences are visible in women's movements, and how they could be turned from a barrier into a resource.

Every generation of women builds on the achievements of the generations of women before them. Our interviews with long-standing and younger women activists remind us that women's history – *herstory* – including the history of women's movements, must be recorded. In the words of Fanny Filosof: "nothing has been given easily but everything can be taken away".

Women across generations share the same concerns: a world free of violence against women, more women in decision-making and women's real economic independence. The persistence of these concerns shows that while some progress has been made over time, there is still a feminist agenda to be won. All of the women who participated in our intergenerational dialogue expressed the necessity of having men on board. Gender equality can only become a reality when men are on our side.

While women from different generations may have similar concerns, their modes of expression and activism vary. Young women tend to engage in social media and mobilise en masse around issues that directly impact on their lives, as demonstrated by the success of Slut Walk protest marches. This leads Anne Moilanen to ask, in the Finnish context, why are young women less attracted to long-established feminist organisations?

Marie-José Jonzcy and Fanny Filosof provide some insight. On the one hand, the feminist agenda has seeped – slowly but surely – into

other settings: universities, public bodies and the political arena. On the other hand, many younger women focus on their professional life, and are therefore more interested in networking and developing professional contacts with their female peers than in volunteering in feminist organisations. An example of a feminist activity that addresses these needs is the intergenerational mentoring programme of the Soroptimist International of Europe, which builds solidarity and transfers skills to younger generations of women.

Nor should we lose sight of the fact that younger women also have values to transmit. Intergenerational dialogue must be strengthened and valued. Such a dialogue will enable women of all ages, throughout their life cycle, to challenge the way the male life cycle is still seen as the norm and to strive for an equal and sustainable society where the crucial role of care is recognised.

Broadening the horizon

Needless to say, a life-cycle approach to gender equality necessitates looking at the whole picture which encompasses also other issues than those addressed in this magazine. One such issue is violence against women, and how this impacts on women's economic independence and maintains the patriarchal division and subordination; another is the valuing of skills acquired in informal settings. Above all, we need to ensure that the rights of *all* women are at the core of this holistic approach. These broader issues remain crucial for further development in the life-cycle approach to women's rights and gender equality.

The articles in this magazine make apparent the need for a new gender contract and a new economic paradigm. The current 'male stream' economic model which sustains gender inequalities and devalues care is obsolete. It needs to be replaced by a sustainable model in which equal sharing of economic resources and equal caring for each other are fundamental principles that can be translated into tangible policies and actions. Strengthening women's voices across the generations is crucial to this process.

The average hourly pay gap between women and men in the EU is 16.4%. Women earn more than 25% less than men in Estonia, Austria and in Czech Republic.¹

The employment rate of women (between 25 and 49 yrs) with children under the age of 12 drops by 12.1 percentage points whereas it increases by 8.7 percentage points for men in the same situation.²

European women are four times more likely to work part-time: 31.9% of the women work part-time in the EU-27 versus 8.7% of men.³

In 2005 12.8 million women had care responsibilities for adult dependent persons (against 7.6 million men).⁴

On average in the EU-27, 28.3% of women with care responsibilities declare themselves either employed in part-time jobs or inactive due to the lack of care services for children and other dependent persons, 92.5% in Romania, 86.5 in Latvia and 68.6 in Greece.⁵

On average in the EU-27, 24.5% of women are at risk of poverty or social exclusion whereas 22.3 percent of men are.⁶

The employment rate for women aged 55-64 is 38.6%, 16 percentage points lower than men in the same age group.⁷

Women have lower pensions. In Western Germany, women's individual pension income is 63.8% lower than that of men's.⁸

In the EU-15, the gender gap in old-age income (including also other sources of income than individual pension income) ranges from 46.4 % in Greece to 16 in Denmark.⁹

The at-risk-of-poverty rate is significantly higher for women over 65 than for men at the same age (18.1 % vs. 12.9% in 2009).¹⁰

1 European Commission *Progress on equality between women and men in 2011, 2012*

2 *ibid*

3 *ibid*

4 Eurostat, *a Statistical Perspective on Women and Men in the EU 27, 2010:*

5 European Commission: *Progress on equality between women and men in 2011, 2012*

6 *ibid*

7 *ibid*

8 Federal ministry of Federal German Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth – The Gender Pension Gap (2012)

9 European Commission: *Progress on equality between women and men in 2011, 2012*

10 Federal ministry of Federal German Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth – The Gender Pension Gap (2012)



Towards a life-cycle approach to gender equality

The first part of this edition of *European Women's Voice* invites the reader to apply a life-cycle perspective to feminist issues such as women's economic independence, work, pay and care. The life-cycle approach is a forward-looking strategy which requires making links between different policies and actors.



Applying a life-course perspective to equality policies

By Prof. Ute Klammer, Chair of the expert commission to the German Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth for the First Report on Gender Equality in Germany

In Germany, efforts have been made to look at gender equality policy from a life-course perspective: to identify the political measures necessary at various stages and transition points in people's lives. The German case teaches us an important lesson about the necessity and the benefits of applying a life-course perspective to equality policies.

In 2008, the German Federal Government set up an expert commission to produce the first government report on gender equality in Germany. The commission, chaired by Prof. Ute Klammer, was given the task of investigating the situation of men and women in various life phases and at 'transition points' in their lives where they take decisions that have a long-term effect on their working and private/family situations. The commission's report identifies where transitions occur in people's lives and the framework conditions that apply to them. It also examines how social, economic, institutional and legal frameworks shape and condition individual choices. The aim of the report was to formulate recommendations

for ensuring equal opportunities for men and women in all phases of their lives.

The life-course perspective was the guiding principle followed by the commission in drafting its report. In recent years, this approach has been the explicit or implicit starting point for numerous reforms in education, employment and social policy – for example, it has formed the basis of the European Employment Strategy. The application of a life-course perspective specifically to gender equality policy, however, is still rare.

The life-course perspective means moving away from a strict focus on short-term solutions. Instead, it considers the cumulative effects of decisions on the entire course of people's lives and the way in which these, in turn, impact on society at large. In this way, the life-course perspective gives a view of the 'bigger picture'. Interventions in individual phases of people's lives are no longer considered in isolation, but rather in the context of their longer-term effects on subsequent life phases. This approach is representative of the shift to a sustainable

political philosophy inspired by long-term and permanent effects.

In its report, the expert commission examined the issue of gender equality in education, training and employment, as these domains have decisive effects on career paths and life courses and are also the keys to participation in other areas of society. Other issues touched on were the relative amounts of time spent by men and women in employment and carrying out care work, and social security for old age, which reflects the unequal opportunities in the area of employment over the course of people's lives.

In addition, the political application of a life-course perspective means recognising that the law shapes, supports, strengthens or weakens role models. Role models created or supported by the law shape the courses of action open to women and men and influence their decisions at the various stages and transition points in their lives. If behaviour that is consistent with role models in a given phase of a person's life leads to disadvantage at a later stage, and

if these consequences mainly affect one gender, then gender-equality policy must take action. The creation of consistent law, and the coordination of role expectations over the course of people's lives, from the perspective of equality between women and men, must be significant tasks for equality policy based on a life-course approach.

A life-course approach to equality policy requires consistency

Despite the considerable progress made in recent years, the expert commission came to the conclusion that there is a lack of common guiding principles for equality policy in Germany. Another problem it identified was that measures for various life phases and transitions points are not coordinated with each other. This lack of consistency leads to simultaneous incentives being created for very different life models, or to situations where the support in one life phase is stopped in the next phase, or the support changes its focus.

For example, women are being educated and trained better than before, but there are still strong social and political incentives in place that prevent women from adequately exploiting their potential in the labour market. Not only does this make it more difficult for women to provide for their own livelihood independently while they are of a working age, but it also makes it more difficult for them to build up an old-age pension that will protect them against poverty. Other examples of the lack of consistency are the fact that childcare and flexible working hours are not guaranteed once the parental allowance period is over, and that those in employment can switch from full-time to part-time work, but do not have adequate rights to switch back to full-time work again later.

These instances of inconsistency and lack of continuity, which are also typical of many other countries, are due to the fact that individual policy areas such as taxation, education, employment and family policies have developed historically. Different policy areas are organised and specialised according to a different and sometimes conflicting logic, and equality between women and men has not always had the same importance over the course of their development.

Gender-equality policy based on a life-course perspective must impact on many

specific policy areas that are responsible for certain 'situations' or 'life phases' and must coordinate the bodies and departments with responsibility for the various stages of individuals' lives.

Conclusion: support sustainable patterns of life for both women and men

The Expert Commission concludes that we need a consistent equality policy over the course of people's lives, based on the guiding principles of equal capabilities of men and women in the education, training and employment systems. This policy must also create space for unpaid care work that is societally important, for educational phases and for periods of personal time. It must allow for choices between various preferences in various life phases and, at the same time, must ensure that employment interruptions for societally recognised duties such as care work do not lead to disadvantage in the long run. This means that men and women need the same real – and not just formal – choices in structuring their lives. Policy that aims to create real equality of opportunities between women and men must prevent misleading incentives and ensure that decisions do not have negative short-term or long-term consequences for any particular population group or gender.

Actual equality between women and men cannot be achieved through new legal and institutional frameworks alone. What is required is a new way of thinking in the world of work. In other words, what is required is a new business culture that recognises the (potential) care obligations and other time requirements in the daily lives of employees over the course of their lives, and that values the corresponding life courses and employment patterns of men and women.

The priority in equality policy should be to support new patterns of life for both men and women. At the same time, equality policy is also an essential component of modern innovation policy. After all, companies become stronger and more flexible when all the potential available in society is tapped. Employment for women not only results in new economic demand, but also creates new jobs, particularly in the services sector. In addition, social welfare systems are stabilised when women become full contributors and do not only claim derived entitlements. The costs of the current inequality

far exceed the costs of a forward-looking equality policy.

Finally, in the context of the reorientation of institutions, it must be ensured that people who have planned their lives according to the framework of the old institutions and placed their faith in the continued existence of these institutions will not be disadvantaged. Indeed, in cases where people have no opportunity themselves to offset any potential disadvantages resulting from institutional changes, they must be able to rely on existing social entitlements. This particularly applies to old-age benefits, where entitlements cannot be built up retrospectively. Life courses that have been lived in the past deserve the same societal recognition and value as new life patterns.

Key recommendations of the expert commission

Law:

Modernise role models and base the law on the guiding principle of equality in a consistent manner.

Education and training:

Avoid downward spirals and promote choices in all life phases.

Working life:

Rectify misleading incentives, establish equality in pay and career opportunities.

How people's time is spent :

Allow for flexibility and strengthen different forms of work.

Old age:

Improve the credit awarded for nursing care work and ensure old-age benefits provide protection against poverty.

This article is an extract from the report entitled 'New Pathways – Equal Opportunities: Gender Equality over Women's and Men's Life Courses. Report by the Expert Commission to the German Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth for the First Report on Gender Equality in Germany. Central results and recommendations for action. 2011'. The full equality report consists of the expert commission's report and official comments by the government. This excerpt therefore does not reflect the German government's official position, but only that of the Expert Commission.



The gender pension gap – the mirror of life-long gender inequalities

By Anna Elomäki, EWL Communications and Media Officer

The slow progress towards equal pay and gender equality at home and in the labour market has life-long consequences for girls and women. The gender gap in pay produces an even greater gender gap in pensions and means poverty for many women in the later stages of their lives. Also young women for whom retirement is still distant on the horizon have reasons to be concerned.

The gender pay gap is a well-established means of measuring gender inequality. Since 2011 we have even been celebrating the European Equal Pay Day, an EU-wide awareness-raising event that marks the additional number of days women must work each year to match the amount of money earned by men. In 2012, the European Equal Pay Day fell on 02 March, meaning women earned on average 16.4% less than their male counterparts.¹

Until now, only little attention has been paid to the gender pension gap, the other side of the gender pay gap coin. The gender pension gap mirrors all the inequalities that women face throughout their lives, and it gives a concrete form – or a price tag – to the long-term economic consequences of these inequalities for women's lives.

There is no European-wide coherent data that would allow us to assess the gaps between women's and men's individual pension entitlements, or to make comparisons between the situations in different countries. The first ever study on the gender pension gap was published only in November 2011 in Germany. It reveals that in Germany women's individual pension entitlements are almost 60% less than men's². These figures help us to understand why old-age poverty has a female face. In the EU, 22% of women over the age of 65 live at-risk of poverty³.

Should today's working-age women worry about their future pension income? Should decision-makers do something to improve the situation, both of women who have already retired and of working-age women today? The answer to both questions is affirmative.

A shadow from the past or a problem for the future?

One obvious reason for the wide gender pension gap is that many women of the older generations have never been in paid

employment. However, women's increasing participation in the labour market will not be enough to close this gap, because women and men have different employment patterns.

Working-age women of today have shorter working lives; they work fewer hours and get paid less than men, and all this will have a visible impact on their pension cheques. One of the main reasons behind these differences is that the main responsibility for care of children and other dependents still falls on women's shoulders.

Because of unpaid care work, women's working lives tend to be shorter than men's. On one hand, even in more *gender equal* countries like Finland, many women stay at home with children for several years, as less than one-third of children under three years of age receive formal care. On the other hand, care responsibilities lead women to end their working lives before men. Care for the frail elderly is still provided mostly by relatives: in nine EU member states, less than 10% of the dependent elderly receive formal care in institutions⁴. Many of these caregivers are women in their fifties who leave their jobs in order to be there for their

² Federal ministry of Federal German Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth – The Gender Pension Gap (2012)

³ Eurostat, EU-SILC data for 2009

⁴ EIGE 2011. Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action : Women and Economy.

¹ European Commission, DG Justice website



parents or other relatives. Some women of this generation may also leave the labour market to care for their grandchildren when childcare services are not available.

Furthermore, women work fewer hours than men. In Europe almost one-third of women work part-time, and in the Netherlands the number of women working part-time exceeds 70%. Although part-time work is often a choice made to combine work with unpaid care responsibilities, studies show that women who shift to part-time rarely go back to full hours. These patterns of part-time work do not necessarily reflect the preferences of Europe's women. Rather, they reflect a lack of alternatives⁵.

Finally, due to the gender pay gap, women are paid less than men for every single hour that they work, including for the same work and work of equal value.

The small gains made to date to narrow down the gender pay gap and make labour markets and homes more gender equal are not enough to ensure equal pensions and sufficient old-age income for the women and girls of today.

Recent pension reforms enhance rather than fix inequalities

The recent debates about reforming pension systems promise little improvement to their gendered and unequal outcomes. In recent debates both at EU and national levels, the focus has been on the sustainability of pension systems in a situation, where the population is ageing rapidly. One of the solutions proposed is to tighten the link between pension contributions and future

pension benefits. The second often-heard proposal is to shift the emphasis away from public pension systems (so-called 'first pillar') to supplementary and mostly voluntary occupational and private pension schemes ('second pillar' and 'third pillar').

Both of these solutions risk broadening the gender pension gap. A stronger link between benefits and contributions means that women, who due to inequalities and discrimination contribute less, will be in an even weaker position when they retire, as contribution-based occupational pensions rarely take care-related career breaks into account, and women have fewer resources to save for private pension schemes.

Reforming pensions systems is high on the EU political agenda, and the long-awaited European Commission's White Paper 'Agenda for adequate, safe and sustainable pensions' was released in February 2012. Partly thanks to the EWL's advocacy, the White Paper acknowledges the need to close the gender pension gap. However, the Paper focuses on the second and third pillar pensions and remains silent about public pension systems. A lot remains to be done at EU level to address the root causes of the gender pension gap.

Gender equality in pensions requires a life-cycle approach

Making pension systems more gender equal is not possible without taking the needs of women of different ages into account. We need to address the needs of elderly women who have already retired, many of whom have not participated in the labour market and who face the full extent of the gender pension gap. We also need to be long-sighted and make sure that young women who begin their careers today will be entitled to

the same pension rights as men.

Although pension systems cannot wipe away past gender inequalities, they can help the older women of today by guaranteeing that every woman and man has an individual right to a decent, minimum old-age income. Pension systems also have a role to play in ensuring that women who are now in their twenties and thirties will be able to retire without facing the risk of poverty. We must eliminate discrimination from these systems and make them take women's life cycles into account. Credit for the time spent caring for children and other dependents is crucial here. In addition, we must close the gender gaps in employment that contribute to the gender pension gap, among other things, through increasing care services for children and other dependents.

It is not enough to reform pension systems in such a way that they compensate women for a life-course that is different from the male norm of continuous full-time employment. Rather, employment patterns involving some care periods and periods of caring combined with part-time work should be the norm for both women and men, and pension systems must ensure that such a life-course will be rewarded with a sufficient pension income.

As long as pension systems reward 40 years of continuous full-time employment and penalise those who have chosen or who have been forced to choose otherwise, they will perpetuate the gender pension gap. Compensating for caring time and changing the normative life course behind pension systems are necessary steps towards more equal pension income between women and men.

⁵ Eurostat 2012 Active ageing and solidarity between generations -A statistical portrait of the European Union 2012



Unpaid care work in an economic context

By Diane Elson, Emeritus Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Essex, UK

The role of informal care and other unpaid household work is at the very core of the problems that our societies face as a result of economic challenges to basic social infrastructure, such as care services. Diane Elson, a pioneer in the field of Care Economy, questions the way unpaid care work has been valued in our society so far. In this essay, she positions care as a core unit in the economy, highlights the gendered distribution of gains and costs created in this sector and in society at large, and invites us to join her in the search for sustainable solutions.

To understand the role of unpaid care work in a national economy, it is useful to think of the economy as consisting of four sectors: the business sector, the public sector, the household sector and the non-profit sector. The economy involves the interaction of

all of these four sectors. Rather than seeing only the business sector as the wealth-creating sector, and the others as sectors that spend the wealth that is created by the business sector, I see all of them as wealth-creating. In popular ideology, a vision is often presented that it is only the business sector that creates wealth; and then households consume (or save) the wealth; and the state taxes away some of the profits of the business sector, and spends it in ways that are presumed to be less efficient than the business sector. Even the non-profit organisations can be seen as existing on the bounty of the business sector, which, through foundations, gives grants to them. And so these other sectors are often seen in popular ideology as wealth-spending sectors rather than as wealth-creating sectors. But in fact they all contribute to wealth creation. Turning now to the work performed in these

sectors, there is unpaid work as well as paid work in all of these sectors, although in different proportions. Let me start with the household sector. Most of the work in the household sector in European countries is unpaid care work for family members, especially children, sick people, disabled people and frail elderly people, but also able-bodied adults. There is also home-based paid work – everything from the high-paid person who works at home on his/her computer, to the very low-paid person who works at home on his / her sewing machine. Moreover, better-off households often pay others to work in their homes, cleaning and caring for children, for instance. So a certain amount of paid work takes place in the household sector, although most of the work is unpaid. Men and boys and women and girls all contribute to the unpaid care work, but women and girls make a substantially bigger contribution.

In the public sector, most of the work is paid and most of the workers have formal contracts, with social protection. In most European countries women make up more than 50% of public sector employees. But there is also unpaid work in the public sector, through the mobilisation of 'volunteer' workers. In the Netherlands, for instance, the public schools and public hospitals are highly dependent on the 'volunteer' work done by parents, and by relatives of patients. These 'volunteers' are predominantly women who work on an unpaid basis to ensure that the schools and the hospitals run.

In the non-profit institutions sector, including both secular and religious organisations, there are people with paid jobs who run the organisations and, also, many unpaid volunteer workers: people who give of their time to the organisation – often people who have recently retired and are still very healthy.

In the business sector, most work is paid, but there is some unpaid work. What are interns in the business sector if not unpaid workers? In countries with a large agricultural sector, there is a much larger group of people who are unpaid in the sense that they themselves do not receive any remuneration for their work, even though the fruits of their work are marketed. In many countries, the farmer's wife, the farmer's son and daughter, will fall into this category. This is a different kind of unpaid work: it is not non-market work, but the person doing the work does not get a pay cheque.

To summarise, there are different proportions and forms of paid and unpaid work in the four sectors of the economy. The unpaid work may be care work, volunteer work, or unremunerated market work.

The household sector as safety net of last resort

The four sectors are interdependent: none of them could produce any kind of wealth without interaction with the others. The household sector produces labour services for the other sectors; the business sector produces goods and services and payments for the other sectors; the public sector raises taxes and provides transfer payments (like public pensions) and public services and infrastructure. The non-profit institutions also provide goods and services for the other sectors. However, this interdependence is asymmetric: in a market economy, the

business sector dominates the other sectors. Its dominance stems from its ownership of the means of production and its competitive pursuit of profit, together with the technological innovation, the investment and the economic crises that this produces. So the sustainability of this system is by no means guaranteed. There are ongoing risks of crisis and of depletion of human capabilities, through lack of employment, ill-health, despair, and premature death. Many countries in Europe are experiencing some of these depletions right now. At the same time, cutbacks in public expenditure are making ever greater demands on unpaid care work.

The household sector is frequently called upon to play the role of safety net of last resort in this risky system, but if the demands that are made on the household sector to provide a safety net of last resort are too great, human capabilities will be depleted. Unpaid care labour in the household is not infinitely elastic; it cannot stretch to patch up all the holes in the safety nets that states used to be supposed to provide and increasingly do not. It is not possible for unpaid work to make good all the deficiencies in the rest of the system. So the fact that we recognise how unpaid care work contributes to the economy as a whole should not lead us to be too complacent about how much that unpaid care work can make compensate for deficiencies in the rest of the system.

We need to recognise that unpaid work can in itself be depleting, can be a form of drudgery that uses up people's energies, leaving them exhausted. If for long periods you are twenty-four hours on call, caring for somebody who is seriously ill or seriously disabled, then you yourself become sick, and you yourself become exhausted. That is why we make a demand for 'respite care' from publicly provided services.

Revaluing unpaid care work

In public policy, it is often the case that if something is not counted, it doesn't count. Unpaid work is not counted in the surveys from which measures of national output (GDP) are constructed. However, unpaid work can be measured through time-use surveys, which have now been conducted in many European countries. There are some problems with fully capturing the time spent caring for people, since it often overlaps with other activities. People report they

are doing housework or walking in the park, rather than that they are on call twenty-four hours a day to provide care for young children. Time spent caring for others tends to be under-reported.

It is possible to make a monetary valuation of unpaid work, by using market wages to value the time spent producing something, or market prices to value the output that is produced. There are different arguments about which wage you should use to value unpaid work. For instance, if you use the minimum wage to value all unpaid work, you will come up with a low figure. If you say, no, we must use the 'specialist wage' – for cooking, we must use the wage of a chef at a restaurant; for looking after children we must use the wage of the well-qualified nanny, or even of a child psychologist – you will come up with the higher figures. For South Africa, the monetary value of unpaid work has been estimated for 2000, using the input method, and as a percentage of GDP. It ranges from 11% to 50%, depending on which wages are used. An estimate has been made for the UK using data for 1999, and the output method, and including things like travel-to-work time as part of unpaid work; it found that the monetary value of unpaid work is equal to 77% of GDP in the UK.

There is no internationally agreed convention on how to put a monetary value on unpaid work. A range of methods have been used, which come up with different figures for the same country and non-comparable figures across countries. Similar issues arise in the calculation of the GDP: how do you value, in monetary terms, the services of an army, for instance? But international conventions have been agreed for GDP; therefore nobody produces a range of figures for GDP based on different conventions. Some people think we need an international agreement on how to place a monetary value on unpaid work. But we might also, of course, raise the question – what do we want measures of unpaid work for? The women's movement in many countries around the world has been arguing for the need for this data for twenty-five years. The question remains: how are we going to use it, and to what end? A growing number of countries have 'time-use' data, which covers unpaid work, but often nobody is using the data for any kind of policy analysis or in order to change things.

Unpaid work: societal gain and individual cost

There are big disadvantages to being the person specialising in unpaid work (almost all women), including a higher risk of poverty, stemming from lower earnings from paid work, and subsequently lower pensions. On the other hand unpaid work has advantages for both the business sector and the public sector. Unpaid care work subsidises private profit because the larger the amount of unpaid care work that is done, the lower need to be the wages that are paid out in order to secure the standard of living 'normal' for that time and place. Unpaid care work also helps to reconcile paid workers to returning to the workplace each day, enabling them to feel like human beings in a system that treats them like commodities.

Unpaid work furthermore subsidises the public sector by lowering the requirement for public expenditure. For instance, in South Africa and Barbados, researchers have found that government funding does not cover the full cost of refuges and shelters for women who have been subject to domestic violence. The government puts up some of the money for these refuges and shelters – very often the capital costs. But it does not cover the running costs – this is left to women's NGOs to cover, drawing upon unpaid volunteer work.

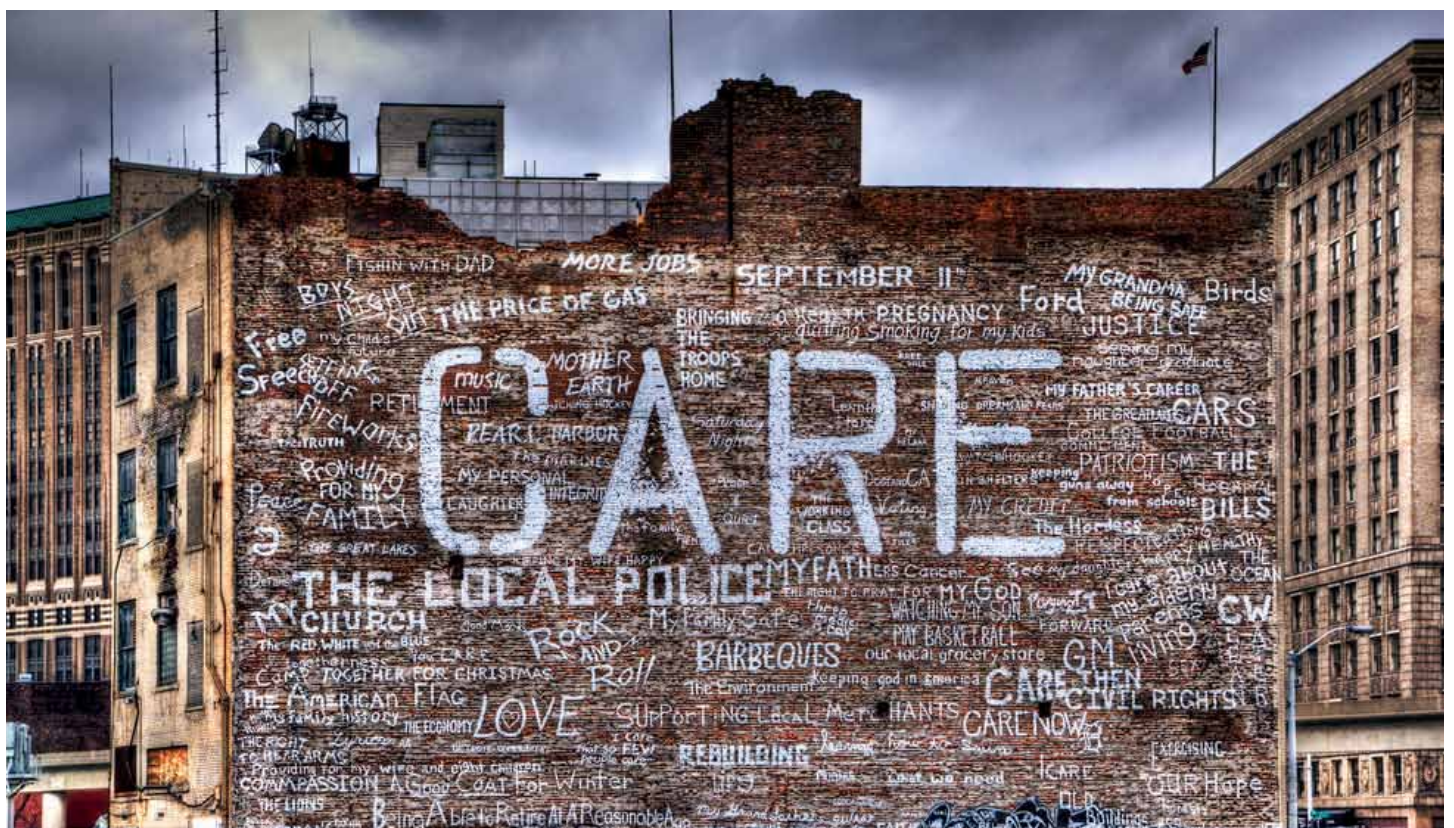
Dilemmas in the revaluation of unpaid care work

We do face some dilemmas about how we can recognise and value unpaid care work in public policy without reinforcing the current division of labour, which makes unpaid care work a largely female responsibility. For instance, should income-tax systems recognise the value of unpaid care work by providing taxpayers with allowances for non-earning dependents who do unpaid care work at home? There are large numbers of women in Europe, in Canada, and in the USA who find that is a viable way of recognising the unpaid work of women who are 'homemakers'. However, such a system of income tax perpetuates the polarisation between the male 'breadwinner' earner and the dependent, non-earning 'homemaker'. So are there other possible ways of recognising the contribution of unpaid care work? Can we recognise it through tax allowances or tax credits that provide some kind of compensation for the fact that you have to buy substitutes for some of that unpaid work if more than one person in the household is an 'earner'? An example of this would be childcare tax allowances or credits. The challenge is to design such a system in a way that does not continually reinforce the idea that it is solely the mother's responsibility to make sure that children get taken care of. Can public money provide childcare in

others ways that don't just give huge boosts to a new growth industry in the commercial provision of childcare – through the provision of free public nurseries, for example?

A further example of the dilemmas is the provision of pension credits for people who leave the labour market to take care of others (children or frail elderly relatives, for example). This maintains their pension contributions while they are out of the labour market, but again this is something that could be likely to reinforce the current division of responsibilities between women and men, and do nothing to encourage men to take on more of these responsibilities.

Women's movements have fought for the recognition of unpaid domestic work, and for the reduction of some of it, through the provision of public services and infrastructure. We also have to fight for the redistribution of unpaid domestic work, so that men can share more of the burden, and the pleasures, of this work. The challenges presented by the rapidly aging population make these considerations ever more urgent.





The increased burden of informal care for the elderly – a matter of gender equality

By Johanna Dahlin, the Swedish Women's Lobby

In Sweden, funding for public care services for the elderly has decreased significantly. The increased load of informal care for older relatives compromises women's economic independence and has serious consequences for their everyday lives. Middle-aged women are paying the price.

The relatively accessible public care service system has given women in Sweden greater opportunities to participate in the paid work force, compared with women in other European countries. However, despite the growing proportion of elderly people, publicly funded geriatric care has faced major cutbacks in the last couple of decades.

As a result, individuals often experience difficulty in reconciling work demands with the responsibility of caring for elderly parents and other relatives, and it is particularly middle-age women who are affected. Women in Sweden take far more responsibility for the care of their elderly relatives than men. This is especially evident within the 45-60 age group. Part-time working and long career breaks are common among middle-aged women, and some are even forced to withdraw from working life entirely. It is not unusual for people staying in the paid work force to use vacation or sick days in order to care for parents.

The increased burden of informal care for elderly relatives has serious consequences for women's economic independence, as well as their everyday lives. Not only does it cause a severe reduction in income; it also affects their social position and pension payouts. Economic gender equality throughout a person's life-cycle, as well as ensuring that both women and men have equal opportunities for combining paid work with family life, are both part of the gender-equality objectives of the Swedish government. Even so, the informal care of relatives, and particularly its effects on women's economic independence and working circumstances, remains unaddressed. The position of the Swedish

Women's Lobby is that gender equality objectives are hindered by increased care responsibilities, and that this crucial issue must be brought up for discussion.

Ideological shifts and financial cuts

The Swedish elderly care system underwent a series of changes during the 1990s. Since then, public care for the elderly has been mainly the responsibility of municipalities. The objective of this reform was to allow elderly people to live in their own home as long as possible. In accordance with the official objectives, the geriatric care service in Sweden continues to be publicly funded and not stratified by social class or gender. It is generally agreed that the needs of the elderly, not the finances of the municipalities, should determine the level of care.

In recent years, Sweden has experienced ideological shifts that have affected the organisation of elderly care as well as other areas of the welfare system. The role of the public sector as the main provider of care services has been questioned, and alternative modes of operation have rapidly increased in scope. This applies to the informal and voluntary sector, as well as to the market sector. Private providers of geriatric care have recently attracted negative attention. They have been particularly criticised for substandard hygiene procedures and stressed personnel, as well as for channeling their profits to tax havens.¹

As average life expectancy in Sweden rises, so does the need for elderly care. However, geriatric care resources, in terms of both financial resources and personnel, have not kept pace with the ageing population. In fact, a recent report from the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union shows that resources spent on publicly funded elderly care have declined significantly since 1980. The proportion of elderly people (aged 80 or older) receiving publicly funded care has fallen from 62 to 35 per cent. Public investment in care has declined both in the amount of money spent (corrected for inflation), and in percentage of GDP. In addition, the number of employees in geriatric care has fallen by 10 per cent.²

1 See: <http://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=2054&artikel=4800762>

2 Lorentzi, Ulrika (2011).

These cuts in the care service sector, combined with a growing number of older people no longer covered by public elderly care, have been accompanied by an increase in informal care. 100,000 people are estimated to have stopped working completely or partially in order to care for a relative, and two-thirds of the elderly in need of help receive it from a relative or friend they do not live with.³ This means that relatives offer twice as many hours of care as 30 years ago. This increase is likely to be the result of the inaccessible and unattractive care offered. In addition to the fact that care has become more expensive, the lack of resources makes it less flexible and of lower quality; it is hard to meet the needs of the individual. In this context, it is important to note that the majority of the elderly in Sweden do not want to depend on the care of their children or other relatives, but would rather receive help from publicly funded care services.⁴

Middle-aged women are paying the price

Data consistently shows that it is mainly women who have increased their informal care provision. Women are three times more likely than men to provide elderly relatives with care, and several studies have shown that daughters of the elderly account for the largest proportion of the increase in informal care. While middle-aged women are providing more informal care than before, the amount of care provided by men within the same age group remains unchanged. In addition, helping tasks that are traditionally viewed as belonging to the male domain, such as yard and repair work, are undertaken predominantly by middle-age women, and it is more likely for women to help the elderly parents of their partners than for their sons to contribute.⁵ Women provide about 70 per cent of informal family care.⁶

Of the middle-aged women providing comprehensive care to older relatives, 40 per cent are outside the labour force. Compared to men, women are nine times more likely to work part-time or not at all, so that they can

3 A report to the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs drawn up by Szebehely, Marta & Ulmanen, Petra (2009).

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 At present, the formal geriatric care sector is also gender-segregated. Women provide more than 90 per cent of public elderly care.

provide care. Given current demographic trends, these negative consequences are likely to increase.⁷ Despite this, the ongoing political discussion on care is completely devoid of gender analysis.

It is evident that middle-aged women pay the biggest price for the inadequate care available to the elderly. Career breaks and part-time working cause an immediate financial loss in the short term, and lead to an inferior position in the social security system in the long term. With salary being the main component of a pensionable income, breaks for the purpose of providing elderly care have severe negative effects on women's economic situation. Furthermore, informal care can be a very long-lasting commitment, and can influence the caregiver's relationship with the labour market over several years. It may for instance limit an individual's chances of returning to paid work or increasing their working hours when their caring responsibilities have come to an end.⁸

Financial support for informal care

In recent years, some attempts have been made to address the increased informal care provided by relatives. In Sweden it is possible, in some cases, to receive financial compensation when one gives up work in order to care for a family member. Since 2009 the municipalities have been responsible for offering support to individuals who are looking after a relative.⁹ The issue of reconciling care with paid work, however, has not been part of the discussion.

Financial support for informal care is a controversial issue. Some argue it commits women to care, weakening their position in the labour market and exposing them economically, while others view it as compensation for lost income or a symbolic expression of society's appreciation of caregiving. Regardless of where one might stand on the issue, there are some obvious risks. Not only is the amount of the compensation often inadequate in relation to the labour

7 Lorentzi, Ulrika (2011); Szebehely, Marta & Ulmanen, Petra (2009).

8 Szebehely, Marta & Ulmanen, Petra (2009).

9 This requirement is regulated by the Social Security Act, available at: http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/Dokument-Lagar/Lagar/Svenskforfattningssamling/Socialtjanstlag-2001453_sfs-2001-453/?bet=2001:453



input; in addition, money alone can never bridge the gap between the carer and the labour market. Ultimately, financial support may reinforce norms whereby women are the main care-givers.

What should be done?

The lack of resources in the elderly care sector is a huge obstacle blocking women's path to full economic independence. The fact that individuals, and particularly women, are forced to give up paid work owing to the lack of quality care is unacceptable. Not only is informal care a severe blow to the financial situation of the individuals concerned; the national economy is also likely to suffer from the increase in unpaid care work. More people in the paid workforce would increase

tax incomes and enable the state to afford publicly funded welfare services of a high standard. The Swedish Municipal Workers' Union estimates that if the approximately 100,000 people who are currently caring for a relative instead of working increased their working time by just 25 per cent, this would generate a tax income of 2.3 billion SEK per year (250 million EUR).¹⁰

It is important for family care to be given voluntarily and for the caregiver not to be forced to jeopardize her professional life and long-term economic independence. In order to offer individuals the opportunity to continue to work even if a need of care should arise, easily accessible and high-quality services are needed. Such care

¹⁰ Lorentzi, Ulrika (2011).

services maximise freedom of choice, both for those who are in need of care and for their relatives. Ensuring that informal care for elderly people will not lead to poverty nor to exclusion from the social security system requires putting in place a safety net for those carers who fail to combine care-giving with employment. Ultimately, the care of the elderly should be the responsibility of the state or the municipality, not the individual.

The Swedish Women's Lobby calls for a debate about who should be responsible for the care and security of our elderly, and who should finance it. We call for gender roles and stereotypes in relation to care-giving to be challenged. Domestic and care responsibilities still fall mainly on women, and it is important for men to be encouraged to increase their efforts. For this objective to be met, individualising parental leave is an essential step forward.

Most importantly, in order to make paid as well as unpaid care work more evenly distributed between women and men, high-quality geriatric care must be available to all members of society when requested. Overcoming the lack of resources in geriatric care is crucial in order to enable every member of Swedish society to lead a self-sufficient, independent life, regardless of individual circumstances. Greater investment in care and easier accessibility are a prerequisite for equality between women and men.

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For more information on the Swedish Women's Lobby, please visit: <http://www.sverigeskvinnolobby.se/>



“Club Med” – issues for gender equality and intergenerational solidarity in Mediterranean countries

By Paola Villa, Professor, Faculty of Economics, University of Trento, Italy

Young women in Mediterranean countries are caught up in what may be called the ‘intergenerational solidarity trap’. They find it difficult to combine motherhood with employment, owing to segmented labour markets, familistic welfare regimes and traditional gender roles within families.

Segregated labour markets and a familistic welfare system – challenges for women

Recent comparative research has identified common features in the labour markets and welfare institutions of southern European countries – Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal (Karamessini 2008) – which make it difficult for young women to combine choices about motherhood with the choice of economic independence through employment.

The first common feature is the employment model, which is characterised by pronounced labour market segmentation. The southern employment model involves high rates of self-employment, high percentages of people employed in small firms and a high degree of employment protection for employees on open-ended contracts, employed either in medium-large manufacturing firms or in the public sector, combined with a high degree of flexibility achieved to a large extent through the underground

economy combined with an increasing number of atypical contracts. All these factors give rise to the segmentation associated with extreme fragmentation in the social security system and marked differences in employment protection (depending on different factors: public or private sector, firm size, employment contract, and formal or informal work). As a result, young people, women and migrants are at a considerable disadvantage in gaining access to jobs with adequate rights and social security provisions.

The second important feature is the familistic character of the welfare regime: in these countries, the family plays a central role in the provision of care and assistance to its members. Southern European countries share a tradition in which families are expected to support their own members (even beyond the nuclear family) when the latter are in need of some kind of support, without intervention by the state. Accordingly, state family policies are underdeveloped in comparison with those of other EU countries, and income maintenance systems are inadequate, especially for young people (unemployed or in atypical jobs). This feature is mirrored in a low share of social expenditure in relation to family and children, housing and social exclusion, and a high risk of poverty after social transfer (Villa 2009).

Over the last few decades, women have greatly improved their educational attainment, and their labour market ambitions have increased accordingly. Along with the increase in female educational attainment, the employment rate of women (especially mothers) has increased significantly. Nevertheless, gender gaps in employment and unemployment rates remain amongst the highest in the EU27. Thus either women are not fully integrated into the labour market or they remain on its periphery (especially in Greece, Spain and southern Italy).

Family system based on traditional gender roles

In Mediterranean countries, the family employment system is based on rather traditional gender roles, with men employed full-time in secure jobs throughout their working life, mainly responsible for earning enough for the economic wellbeing of the whole family, while women have responsibility for family caring and domestic work. Of course, reality is more diverse

than this stylised model, but this was the model around which labour market policies and personnel management practices have been constructed and implemented. In short, the male breadwinner model of the family remains dominant.

This explains, on the one hand, the high proportion of inactive mothers (especially in Greece, Italy and Spain) and, on the other, the pervasive discrimination against maternity, reflected in gender inequalities in the labour market (access to secure jobs is more difficult for young women than young men, and female unemployment rate is much higher). At the same time, support for combining motherhood and paid work remains weak: services for the family are insufficiently developed, family-friendly organisations are few, and gender roles in the family lead to a very asymmetric distribution of tasks.

In short, young women are caught in the intergenerational solidarity trap: because of the lack of appropriate family policies and the unfavourable context for working mothers and, in general, for women with family responsibilities, they have to choose between taking care of dependent family members and employment. Because women are still the main providers of domestic services and care, when they experience motherhood, child-bearing is seen to exacerbate an already heavy and unbalanced division of household labour. This tends to limit women's intentions to have children.

Low fertility owing to gender inequalities

In the post-war decades, in almost all developed countries, fertility measured by the total fertility rate (TFR, or the average number of children per woman) has fallen below the replacement rate (TFR = 2.1), that is, the rate necessary to ensure generational replacement. In Europe, the fall in fertility has become an increasing concern in southern countries because it has dropped well below the replacement level for a long time. Coupled with a rapidly ageing population and a shrinking of the working-age population, this has serious long-term consequences. In particular, "lowest-low fertility" (i.e., TFR under 1.5) has been experienced by Italy, Spain and Greece since the 1990s and more recently also by Portugal. Conversely, other European countries (Denmark, Sweden, Finland, UK, France and Norway), which

experienced falling fertility in the 1970s and 1980s, later recovered or maintained considerably higher levels of fertility, close to the replacement rate. And, somewhat surprisingly, this resumption of fertility is observed in conjunction with high and / or rising female employment rates.

It has recently been suggested that gender inequality is a key factor behind the phenomenon of lowest-low fertility typical of southern countries (McDonald 2006; Mills 2008). The paradox of the Mediterranean model, with low female employment rates associated with low fertility rates, highlighted in the mid-1990s (Bettio, Villa 1998), proves to be persistent. The explanation for this is the lack of progress towards equal treatment in society, in the labour market and in the family.

Pronounced gender inequalities, combined with the lack of affordable services, have created a situation in which women bear the burden of ensuring the welfare of extended family members, precluding labour force participation and limiting the time for child-bearing. On the one hand, it is still common for young women (especially those with low educational levels) to exit active life permanently after marriage or child-bearing; on the other hand, young women – experiencing gender discrimination in the labour market and the personal costs of the double burden – may be deterred from having further children as they expect that this may compromise their future employment opportunities and/or further impair their living conditions (Villa 2010).

In recent decades, the employment rate of mothers of young children has increased in the Mediterranean countries too. Nevertheless, the measures needed for combining work and family responsibilities have not been adequately developed, and the familistic welfare regime typical of these countries has maintained its features over time.

Precarious working conditions postpone motherhood

At the same time, the labour market regulatory system has changed quite significantly in these southern European countries, and labour market segmentation, associated with the spread of atypical and precarious jobs, has undoubtedly strengthened over the past 15-20 years (Karamessini 2008). Some forms of flexibility have been

introduced to offset the rigidity of the standard employment contract. The shift towards more employment flexibility has been relatively diversified across these countries, though with similar outcomes. On the one hand, labour market reforms have promoted flexibility 'at the margin', changing the contractual arrangements for first-job seekers.

The incidence of fixed-term contracts is now widespread, especially among youngsters and women; moreover, different forms of 'concealed dependent work' (freelancers, employees working for one employer) has been on the increase in the past decade, disproportionately affecting the weakest section of the labour force (i.e. young women). At the same time, the underground economy has continued to act as an informal policy tool (especially for SMEs) to for adjusting employment requirements rapidly, and has also fuelled mass immigration.

The precariousness of working conditions not only has heavy repercussions on the economic conditions of the younger generation; it also has negative effects on the processes of family formation, making it even more difficult than in the past for women to make the desired choices about motherhood. Research on the postponement of motherhood shows that the choices are made not simultaneously but in chronological order: first

women enter the labour market, then they try to obtain a solid job (secure over time and with adequate protection rights), and then they think about maternity (Gustafsson, Kenjoh, Worku 2003). We can therefore expect to observe a negative relationship between precarious work and fertility, as shown by Modena and Sabatini (2011) for Italy and De la Rica (2005) for Spain.

Conclusion

The combination of lowest-low fertility rates and relatively low female employment rates in southern European countries is linked to the gap between young women's aspirations to gender equality and self-fulfilment and the difficulties they face in realising their aspirations as mothers and workers. A crucial problem, ignored by policy makers, is the absence of adequate safeguards and economic security in the event of motherhood for young women employed in precarious jobs.

The increasing flexibility of labour markets induces young women to look with tenacity for secure jobs, before potentially facing maternity leave. There is no doubt that the shortage of good jobs and the high degree of insecurity associated with atypical jobs, alongside the inadequate provision of childcare services, play a leading role in the postponement of maternity decisions. A reading of low fertility, and its association

with a low female employment rate, should prompt questioning about the difficulties that young women face in all stages of their transition to adult life, first and foremost in obtaining a good job capable of guaranteeing them economic independence and self-realisation through work.

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The economic independence of women in the 21st century France: How and why?

By Marie-Christine Rousselin, President of Union Nationale des Femmes Actives et Foyer



While acknowledging that there is a diversity of family models, the issue of women's economic independence also arises in so-called "traditional" families. The President of the French member organisation of the European Federation of Parents and Carers at Home (FEFAF) reflects on women's needs and responsibilities in this area.

In 50 years, the face and the role of women in French society have changed. A major component of this evolution has been, and still is, the question of money and the financial independence of women

In today's France, girls have the same opportunities as boys: all schools are open for both, all jobs are available for them and their skills and abilities are recognised. This

hard-won battle for equal rights is a great victory. In a formal sense, both girls and boys have equal rights to develop their skills and use them for the benefit of society. Both women and men need financial resources to live free and independent lives. Everyone has the right to earn their living through their own work.

The parameters of independence and freedom change when a couple is formed. It becomes important to discuss financial matters because it is rare that both spouses have the same salary, especially since the gender pay gap in France is as high as 17.1%. Currently, since in the vast majority of cases both partners work, financial independence may not be a major problem, at least not at the beginning. But life is more complicated than that: during their formative

years children and adolescents need the time, energy and presence of the person who can understand them best, the person most concerned by their well-being, in short: their mother or father. Such a discussion therefore becomes all the more essential with the arrival of children, because the difference in salaries can have an impact on decisions about who will stop or reduce their paid work in order to focus on these other priorities of life.

Why and how should women be economically independent?

In 2012, 80% of women work in France; a good number of them, however, make the voluntary or involuntary choice to work part-time. This is precisely because they may be torn between two roles and can have as much desire to raise their children as to have an interesting and well-paid job. One solution would be to recognise the time spent with children, so that women and men who reduce their working hours to care for others are not punished and their economic independence is not compromised.

It is possible to return to work after a period of 10 or 15 years with the wisdom, skills and competencies ready to invest in employment, sharpened by the tasks undertaken at home. This may not necessarily be the same job, but one that suits at that time. Nevertheless, while some employers may fully appreciate the value of skills developed during care periods, a lot of work remains to be done to value and recognise qualifications obtained in the informal sector.

It is important to earn money, achieve self-fulfillment in professional life and have a status in the society. Taking care of one's happiness and that of others is important, too. Society should value women's contribution in whatever form it takes throughout their lives and regardless of their status.



The concept of a 'green economy', gender equality and intergenerational solidarity

By Catrin Becher, Policy Officer for International Gender Equality, National Council of German Women's Organizations (NCGWO)

The concept of a green economy is gaining ground in political debates at all levels. A gender-equality perspective is still missing from the mainstream understanding of the concept, which is based on a traditional interpretation of the economy, focusing on growth while ignoring the value of care work.

Gender equality as a touchstone for a sustainable, green economy

Sustainability and the green economy are notions that have become prominent in the context of the global economic and environmental crises. For the United Nations and European Union these concepts are

a high priority: the green economy will be one of the central themes of the UN Rio +20 conference on sustainable development in June 2012, while the Europe 2020 Strategy, the EU's long-term economic strategy, has set 'sustainable growth' as an objective with the aim of building a green and resource-efficient economy.

A green economy is also one of the priority issues for the National Council of German Women's Organizations (NCGWO). The NCGWO stresses that "an economy based solely on a credo of growth will destroy the earth, the atmosphere and the basis of life for billions of people worldwide. The assumption underlying economic policies – that growth automatically brings prosperity, or for that matter, greater justice – has proven to be false. Scientists, politicians and many people active in NGOs have therefore been searching for new economic strategies. Common to all of these strategies are the goals of sustainability, environmental protection and energy efficiency".¹

There are many different concepts of sustainable development and green economy. Some of them call for ecological and social change; some focus on a new relationship between North and South, and poor and rich; others call for the regulation of the financial markets. A gender equality perspective is missing from most of these concepts (Roehr 2011). The NCGWO stresses that green economy concepts will not be successful unless far-reaching changes are made in order to bring about truly equal opportunities for women and men to participate in all societal, economic and political areas. Gender equality is a crucial touchstone for sustainability in a green economy. The green economy also has the potential to be a conceptual starting point for making women's contributions to society and the economy visible, and revaluing them. For this potential to emerge, however, the concept must be rethought from a gender perspective.

A green economy with a 'care ethic'

The concept of a green economy focuses primarily on the intersection between environment and economy. It calls for new economic models which are not focused solely on growth, as the current indicators for growth (such as the gross national / domestic product) do not take into account either the value and cost of the natural environment, or of unpaid care work (for example, the societal cost of the loss of biodiversity and clean air, or increasing poverty, in particular the poverty of women and children).

Nevertheless, there are reasons to fear that the concept of a green economy is being used to 'green wash' unsustainable economic practices which are leading to inequalities and infringing on the rights of certain groups of people now, as well as those of future generations. This is because the notion of a green economy does not fundamentally and adequately challenge and transform the current economic paradigm.

The current mainstream understanding of economic development is problematic from a gender perspective, because it connotes values traditionally seen as male. It implies a dual structure where only the activities taking place in the market are considered productive and valuable: on the one hand, there is the 'productive', gainful economy, on the other the 'unproductive' economy oriented towards individuals and services (paid or unpaid). The latter is accepted as a basis for an economy, but is not acknowledged as being a vital part of it. Thus care work and nature are both overlooked and, at the same time, used and exploited.

This economic paradigm has been questioned by feminist economists. Building on the views of women from the global South, many feminist takes on the economy are based on the idea that women should not be forced to adapt to a *homo economicus* oriented towards gain and money, but that people should stop thinking in terms of markets, growth and the accumulation of wealth.² A sustainable life can only be attained through a comprehensive socio-ecological transformation of society and through *de facto* societal equity in terms of wealth and gender.

To make up for the shortcomings of current definitions, the NCGWO is calling for a green economy with a new 'care ethic', a social philosophy of fair, shared care. This requires a new social definition of work, which needs to be shared fairly between the genders and the different generations. New models for ensuring a decent livelihood must be developed and introduced to enable people to make socially responsible decisions.

The NCGWO is part of a project called Green Economy Gender_Just, which stresses that our economic model still implies that socially essential care work has to be provided in the private sphere. In many cases, unpaid care work remains unperformed because of time

pressure, and as gainful employment, care is usually underpaid. Well-educated working women in the global West increasingly free themselves from care responsibilities and delegate care work to the market alternatives. This means that a new, global division of labour between women is emerging, leading to new forms of social inequality.³

The concept of a sustainable economy

The limitations of the concept of a green economy have led to proposals not to use the term "green economy", but to speak instead about a "sustainable, equitable economy".⁴

The guiding principles of a sustainable economy were defined by the World Commission for Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987. Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. It is based on two key concepts. The first is that of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given. The second is the idea of the limitations that technology and social organisation impose on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.

Sustainability is an equality concept in a dual sense. It requires the present generation to ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy the same conditions (intergenerational equity). It also means ensuring that everyone in the present generation can at least fulfill their needs (intragenerational equity). Gender equality is a vital element in both these concepts.⁵

The concept of sustainability recognises the need to care for others and take their needs and rights into account – be it for current or for future generations. This principle questions short-term economic reasoning, which recognises only the accumulation of

1 National Council of German Women's Organizations – NCGWO (2011).

2 Wichterich (2001).

3 Discussion paper on Green Economy: Gender_Just! 2011, Prepared by Genanet – Focal Point on Gender, Environment, Sustainability, National Council of German Women's Organizations, Women's Political Council, State of Brandenburg and Association of German Women Entrepreneurs.

4 Women's Major Group Submission, UNCSO Rio+20.

5 Biesecker (2011).

marketable values.⁶ It takes into account global relations and the underlying inequalities between North and South and between the genders, and calls for a new distribution of work between the genders and the generations, and for a new gender order.

The definition of a green economy in the context of the forthcoming United Nations Rio +20 conference addresses both inter-generational and intragenerational equity. In addition, this definition stresses the importance of democratic decision-making processes at all levels.

Intergenerational links and global solidarity

In order to achieve a sustainable, equitable economy, it is crucial to develop participatory models that accommodate different interests and facilitate real change, and to create the conditions for their effective functioning. We need public debates on how to shape a sustainable future, and to this end we must make use of existing civil society bodies.⁷ This means ensuring civil society participation at all levels of global decision-making, and strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations. In particular, global women's movements must be strengthened.

6 Since 1992, the caring economy network has brought together German-speaking economists, social scientists, horticulturalists, architects, natural scientists, politicians, etc. to think about caring economies. See: www.vorsorgendewirtschaft.de

7 NCGWO (2001).

The NCGWO calls on women to unite in the awareness that we cannot continue pursuing material growth at the expense of the well-being of current or future generations. We must support women around the world in their struggles to put a sustainable, equitable economy on the political agenda at national and international levels. Ahead of the Rio 20+ conference we must support women's vision of an equitable, sustainable world which encompasses equality between women and men in all spheres of life, respect for human rights and social justice, concern for the environment and the protection of human health. We should also contribute to building the institutional framework for sustainable development, for instance through strengthening and adequately financing UN Women. The NCGWO addressed these issues at the briefing of German-speaking NGOs which took place during the 56th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in February/March 2012.

“A green economy with a new ‘care ethic’ requires a new social definition of work, which needs to be shared fairly between the genders and the different generations.”

At EU level, the NCGWO calls for a critical evaluation of EU gender-equality policy and the EU 2020 strategy with its sustainable growth objective. This is very important, as EU policies are based on a narrow ‘male-stream’ concept of economic growth. In terms of gender equality, they focus generally on the labour market and on how women can be integrated into it, rather than on how to value informal work according to its societal importance. It is symptomatic of the pervasiveness of this narrow concept of economy that even in a public hearing on the role of women in a green economy, organised by the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) at the European Parliament, one could hear that women work mostly in the informal sector and have to be brought into the “real economy”: as if the informal economy were not a vital part of the “real” economy.

Further reading

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Women's Major Group Submission, UNCSD Rio+20



Women's voices – Dialogue across generations

The second part of this edition of *European Women's Voice* invites feminists from different generations to an intergenerational dialogue. The articles and interviews shed light on generational differences in women's organisations and suggest how these differences could be turned from a barrier into a resource.



Recording Herstory – keeping women's struggle alive

Interview with Fanny Filosof on intergenerational transmission between feminists

As part of a dialogue between generations, Mary Collins from the European Women's Lobby invited Fanny Filosof¹, a Belgian feminist active since the 1970s, to share her experiences with today's women and girls on what to carry in their 'suitcase of life'.

Mary Collins: You wrote "if it is historically important to restore the truth, simply because this is fair, it's above all essential to leave a mark of our struggle for women of future generations. We must dare to say that the ethical, cultural, sexual and political revolution that occurred during the

last quarter of this century, with women making their entrance from the 'private' domain into the 'public' one, is the result of women's struggle." Could you elaborate more on this?

Fanny Filosof: This sentence is an excerpt from an article that was published in 'la Chronique féministe de l'Université des femmes'², almost twenty years ago. In fact, I was expressing my anger towards the numerous publications in which people pretended to write the history of the struggle for the decriminalisation of abortion in Belgium without mentioning the women

who took the lead. This struggle was essentially driven by women; they were the ones able to convince the medical and the legal professionals as well as the politicians that decisions on pregnancy had to be women's own choices. Without women and without their struggle, without Women's Days, their demonstrations and their gatherings in front of the Brussels Palace of Justice; without their presence in the courtroom and the pressure they exerted on politicians, the law would probably not have been modified.

We have to remember this struggle. For what we have won from it: abortion was partly decriminalised. But also for what we did not obtain: abortion removed from

1 Editor of la *Chronique féministe de l'Université des femmes* 1982/1998

2 *Chronique féministe* n°46-décembre 1992/janvier 1993

the Penal Code. We have to remember the struggle in order to remain vigilant in the face of the ongoing risk of a backlash. We always have to keep in mind that nothing has been given to us, and that everything can be taken away.

We also have to ask ourselves: has history forgotten women? And if so, why? Is it because women did not leave 'names' behind them, because they led a collective struggle without a hierarchy, without membership to know how many they were and without financial resources to keep the movement afloat, or is it simply because they forgot to write their own – herstory?

Concerning this particular experience, we are referring to the women's movement of the 1970's-1980's, but the movement spread over time and space. Did feminist movements take into account other 'truths', other experiences?

The women's movement is like the sea, it has its high and its low tides. It's a movement without any obligation other than what each one is prepared to give, it is a movement made up of diverse feminisms, and different trends, comprising of differences of opinions, tensions and solidarity in struggle.

Indeed it can also be a movement with conflicting truths, but over time, they can end up forming a whole. This struck me during the first International Day against Violence against Women. As the question of female circumcision was raised, I remember being shocked by the reaction of women coming from countries where this practice was considered the norm: they were accusing European women of lecturing them, or even of being neo-colonialists. For them, they had other priorities at that time other than the proscription of female circumcision and said so to western feminists who classified this as a form of violence against women. Today? Well, sometimes we are still called – and sometimes justifiably – neo-colonialists, but the proscription of female circumcision is a struggle that is led by women from all continents.

How did you build a collective identity and what are the elements that have left their trace, forever and for the entire society?

We started by ourselves, between women, by highlighting what we had in common in our own lives. The movement collectivised

the anxieties and disquiet felt by so many women on their own. In our 'consciousness-raising groups', we said that what society was expecting from us did not suit us, that another life was possible, a more fulfilling life, and a more autonomous one, without violence, without discrimination and without stupid stereotypes.

Then, we moved beyond ourselves and started to occupy a bigger space to denounce what was unacceptable in our lives and in the lives of women. And when you condemn the same facts ten times, twenty times, and when this is echoed by thousands of voices, there will inevitably be a moment when you will be heard. You're listened to and even if change is not happening as fast as you would like no one can no longer pretend to ignore domestic violence, rape, incest, backstreet abortions, wage discrimination, employment, education, household, child-care... I think that this is probably the biggest part of the heritage we pass on to women, whether they claim to be feminists or not, and to men, whether they are resisting to change or not.

You say that political activism should, at some point, move to another step. What are the elements of this 'transformation'? Do you think that women's struggle is 'hijacked' in the process?

I wouldn't say it was 'hijacked', but it is true that there has been a shift from more loose forms of political activism to institutionalisation.

In order to condemn violence against women and to act with women subjected to violence, some of us opened shelters for abused women. Through this, we were condemning the silence and changed the way society perceived women experiencing violence and the impunity of those who commit it. This was something very intense, something new. But at the same time, it was not possible to go on like this. The feminists who were supporting these shelters also had their own jobs and, in the long run, pursuing a – very time consuming – political action in tandem with professional and family life was becoming complicated. We called it the 'triple working day'. From the moment when political activism reaches its goal, it has to be relayed and taken up by society. Consequently, professionals have been replacing activists. It would be perfect (well, if I may use the term 'perfect' which

obviously means that no violence would exist anymore) if the shelters were run in the same spirit, i.e. without judging the victims, without any complaisance towards the perpetrator; it would be perfect if funding was sufficient so that shelters were not closed and that new ones could open when needed.

This brings us to the subject of intergenerational transmission. You and your fore-sisters prepared the ground. Do you think that young women have understood that what they have today is the result of a struggle back then, a women's collective struggle?

I am always a little perplexed with the issue of transmission. Let me give an example, I'm ill, I go to the doctor and pay, I receive a receipt to be reimbursed by the social security: do I think about those who fought for this right, sixty years ago? No. But if I feel threatened that this right is in danger of being taken away, I will certainly think about those who fought for it and find a written trace proving that it exists. Similarly, should the women who decide to have an abortion feel obliged to be grateful to the feminists who fought for the right in the 1970's - 1980's? No more than in the previous example. It seems to me that what we have to convey is the duty to remain vigilant for the preservation of our rights to prevent any step backwards. And since we aren't immortal, the years pass by but the written word remains, that's why it is crucial to write our herstory.

Today, feminism is no longer or rarely to be found in the streets. It can be found in other places such as organisations, universities, publications. It's hard (for me) to follow the many works of reflexion and analysis of young feminists, to participate in their questioning, to follow their approaches. One question however raised by a young feminist researcher is very important, she asks: 'What about us? Don't we have anything to convey?'³. Actually, she is right; transmission from a generation to another cannot be a one-way street. There are so many outstanding ideas and written material that question us but few of them lead to action. And this reality is not only particular to feminism.

3 Florence Degavre et Sophie Stoffel in LES Cahiers du CEDREF n°13 – 2005 *Transmission et renouveau*. L'université des femmes à Bruxelles



“Nothing has been given to us, and everything can be taken away.”

As far as I am concerned, I think that young feminists, the new generation, as we call them, have other struggles to lead as well as continuing ours... without burdening themselves with the past, which they have integrated. And we, the older ones, have to respect what they are doing. This is the best means to exchange with them, to establish a bridge between the past and the present with those who are going to build the future.

Were women of earlier times able to convey the message you have just evoked were they able to engage in dialogue between them to know what they wanted? Through a series of other variables (social class, ethnic minority, etc.), can we still talk about women's equality or are we in competition with men, do we want to be like men?

In forty years, women have changed but the economic situation has not changed and even risks becoming worse. The difference lies on the knowledge that discrimination exists and persists. How can we feel good when 'decent' employment can be restricted to a third time job, when the salaries remain a pittance, when child care places are lacking?

Your question on equality represents a broad and important issue. The objective of the women's movement was never about adjusting to men. On the contrary, the goal was to introduce women's experiences and aspirations to build a society that would be fairer and more humane, including sharing domestic tasks and child rearing. And if the claim 'equal pay for equal work' is as

meaningful as it ever was, feminist thinking should set limits and should seek decent salaries for all as the salaries offered today are despicable.

I also think about this very difficult situation we face: the pay gap between women themselves: those that see the 'glass ceiling' and those that are stuck on the 'minimum wage floor' as the gap between them widens. Therefore, we have to ask ourselves; what type of equality do we want? This brings me back to the beginning of the movement of the 1970s, when we tried to estimate the value of unpaid household work – which costs a small fortune! When we 'outsource' this work (usually to other women) and compare the salaries offered, I can't help asking are we becoming masculinised.

I will not dwell upon the religious question, even if it is a current issue and one that divides us. Let me just say what we have always said, and some of us continue to say: no monotheist religion is kind to women.

On the other hand, we can question the alleged neutrality of the French language, which undermines and hides gender inequality. Even if 'one swallow doesn't make a summer', one word is enough to show how gender equality is undermined: the term cohabitant '*le cohabitant*' is conjugated in the masculine form, when we know that 95% of cohabitants are in fact '*cohabitantes*' i.e. women. It is not a coincidence when equality starts being discriminating.

Do you think that young women are aware

of what has yet to be done, that they are the carriers of a gender equal society?

All young women? No. Not any more today than all the women who were not feminists and carriers of a gender equal society of the past. However, whether they claim themselves as feminists or not, women today occupy a space in every field. As Françoise Colin wrote: "*all women who create something, even if they are not feminists, work for feminism.*"⁴

All young feminists? Yes. The problem is that they are not huge numbers and that there is so much to do. We have to trust young women; they struggle with intelligence and are here to stay.

Since you started with a sentence I wrote a long time ago, I will end with another one I wrote also some time ago: "*feminism has acquired a status, which has filtered into each and every discipline, it occupies a space, still too small, in every university, but, above all, it has been given as a cultural inheritance to all the new generation of girls. They should hold on to this inheritance and maintain the high standards of their own demands, which today are maybe different from ours.*"⁵

That is what they are doing.

4 Françoise Colin, Irène Kaufer, *Parcours féministe*, Éditions Labor, 2005

5 *Chronique féministe* n°46-décembre 1992 / janvier 1993



Is the Finnish feminist movement becoming a movement of older women?

By Anne Moilanen, Editor in Chief of *Tulva Magazine*
& Anna Elomäki, EWL Communications and Media Officer

Feminists come in all shapes and colours, but in the main Finnish feminist organisation, the Feminist Association Unioni, it is not easy to see this diversity. Unioni's active members are mainly older women. At the same time, new forms of feminist activism, such as the 'SlutWalk' protest march, attract women and men of all ages. Given the interest in feminist issues, why is the number of members of the main feminist association stagnating?

The Feminist Association Unioni is a non-governmental women's organisation founded in 1892, and it promotes gender equality and women's rights across a broad range of issues. It influences political decision-making and public debate whilst also providing a platform for various feminist activities. With some 2500 individual members, *Unioni* is the main explicitly feminist organisation in Finland.

As the most well-known feminist NGO in the country, *Unioni* is in a position to give a face to both the present and the future of Finnish feminism. But whose voice does it represent? In recent years, the organisation's annual meetings have been attended by a handful of older feminists, while young women have been in the minority – or even completely absent – when important decisions about the future of the organisation and that of Finnish feminism have been made.



Different ages, different needs

According to Henna Leppämäki, the previous President, *Unioni* has indeed become an organisation of older women. Leppämäki, herself 31 years old, says that most new members who join the organisation are young, but for some reason it is difficult to engage them in its activities and decision-making bodies.

According to Leppämäki, ageing is not a problem for *Unioni* only, but is typical of the whole Finnish women's movement. The activities of traditional women's organisations and other associations do not interest young women to the same extent as before.

To Irma Soiniemi, an active member of *Unioni*, the situation does not seem as problematic as it does to Leppämäki. Soiniemi, 66, considers the participation of older women in the activities of the organisation as a positive aspect and recalls that in the early 2000s the situation was the reverse: almost all the active members were young.

And indeed, back in the early 2000s, many young women were participating in *Unioni*'s activities, creating new structures and modes of action. One of these was the founding of *Tulva* in Spring 2002. *Tulva* is a quarterly magazine that deals with social issues, politics and culture from a feminist perspective, and is mailed to all members of the organisation. It has won several awards for its journalistic quality.

The feminists who created *Tulva* are no longer part of the group of people in charge of the magazine, and they have also disappeared from *Unioni* itself. Most of these feminists, now in their thirties, are now regular members of the association. They pay their membership fees but do not take part in steering the association forward.

Why are young women joining *Unioni* if they do not want to take part in its activities? Soiniemi suspects that these women join the organisation because they want to support a good cause and because they are interested in *Tulva*. On the other hand, she acknowledges that the magazine plays a smaller role for the older members, many of whom enjoy the discussion groups, and



appreciate the services provided and the use of the organisation's premises.

It would seem that the different age groups join the organisation for different reasons and also have different expectations of its work.

'SlutWalk' attracts young feminists

While young Finnish feminists may be almost absent from the annual meetings and decision-making bodies of traditional women's associations, they were definitely present at the SlutWalk protest marches organised in August 2011. In Helsinki, over 3500 people protested against explaining or excusing rape by referring to any aspect of a woman's appearance. SlutWalks were

also held in other cities in Finland, attracting more than 6000 participants. This is two and a half times the number of members in *Unioni*.

Why are the young women who take part in the SlutWalk and other similar events not joining women's organisations? Elsa James, a 19 year-old secondary school student, who was one of the organisers of the march, sees no reason why they should not. She has a positive image of *Unioni*, although she admits that she does not know much about it.

James does not think that young women in general are disinterested in associations. Many of her friends belong to or do face-to-face work for various NGOs. The SlutWalk, however, was something different. She believes that the reason so many young women were drawn to it, was because they felt that the issues it raised had immediate relevance to their daily lives. From her perspective, the most appealing thing about the SlutWalk was the feeling of doing something together.

Unioni supported the Slut Walk by letting the organisers use its office for meetings and providing them with a photocopier and telephone access. The actual meetings of the organisers were attended by around 15 people only, but a much higher number were involved through social media. Using the Facebook-group, blog and Google-group set up for the purpose, as many as 70-80 people took part in organising the event.

Ad hoc activities, contacts through the social media, blogs, informal networks ... young feminist activists work in a different way from established women's organisations. James is not able to specify what activities *Unioni* should organise in order to attract the 'Slut Walk' crowds, but she says that more information about the organisation and more media coverage could help.

One of *Unioni's* main activities is to offer its premises to various groups for their meetings, and it encourages its own members to form new groups or join existing ones, which include, among others, feminist mothers, bi-women and a group of young women. *Unioni* issues public statements, publishes expert opinions on women's issues and comments on pending legislations. But do its current activities generate the kind of media coverage that young feminists would find attractive?

It seems that its activities used to be more radical. Leena Ruusuvoori, who worked in *Unioni* in the 1990s, recalls a group called 'Black Eyes' which drew attention to violence against women by walking in the streets with their eyes painted black and dressed in black rubbish bags. The 'Free from Porn' group that was active in the same time period created plenty of public controversy.

Broadening the membership?

Most of *Unioni's* active members are satisfied with its current 2500 woman-strong membership, despite its financial difficulties and dwindling activities. Indeed, compared to the 1980s and early 2000s, the situation is better. For a long time, the number of members stagnated at around 1000 people.

Anne Moilanen, the editor-in-chief of *Tulva*, finds that the general satisfaction with the current amount of members strange, as there is potential for more. Not only are young women interested in feminist adhoc events like the SlutWalk, but non-feminist women's organisations too are experiencing a revival. 'The Martha Organisation,' a Finnish home economic association whose membership consists mainly of women and which was founded at around the same time as *Unioni*, has over 40 000 members, and young, urban women are increasingly joining its ranks.

Broadening *Unioni's* membership would solve many problems: there would inevitably be more activities, and a higher income from membership fees, a benefit that, in the current financial situation, would be more than welcome. The problem is, however, that increasing the membership in an efficient way is just not possible without a campaign, which would require money. In recent years, the *Unioni* has made no efforts either to broaden its membership base, or to engage in publicity campaigns. In a time of crisis, the organisation has been forced to focus on spending cuts.

Promoting dialogue between generations within the feminist movement is one of the main goals of the newly elected President of *Unioni*, Outi Pajala. Pajala, 33, aims to create an atmosphere that would allow women of different ages to feel that *Unioni*, Finland's feminist association, is their organisation.

This article is an edited translation of an article published in *Tulva* magazine 4/2011



Sarah Vermeulen
and her mentor
Ingrid Ghys

Fostering solidarity between generations in professional life through mentoring

By Renate Smith, Soroptimist International of Europe

Soroptimist International of Europe's mentoring programme, Advancing Women, transfers skills and fosters solidarity between younger and older women both in and out of the workplace.

Looking at the modern workplace, we see the progress that women have made in improving their position in professional

life. Some barriers remain, however, and there is still a great number of women who have untapped resources for professional fulfilment. Overcoming the remaining barriers requires a change of perspective, and fostering solidarity between generations by linking older, experienced women with young women who want to advance in their careers can help in this task.

Why mentoring?

One of the current goals of Soroptimist International of Europe (SIE) is to improve the lives and status of women and girls through education, empowerment and enabling opportunities. One activity organised to achieve this goal is its European Mentoring Programme, Advancing Women.

Qualification and engagement are necessary for women's professional success, and SIE believes that mentoring is an important accelerator of success. At the origin of the European Mentoring Programme is the idea that Soroptimist International represents a large pool of highly qualified women with untapped potential and can provide networks for sharing this potential with those further down the ladder.

The European Mentoring Programme is based on the experience of a similar programme in Germany, initiated by SI Germany in 2003. The idea of the German programme was to support young women with leadership potential, prepare these women for management positions, assure them that it is possible to combine a career with a family and strengthen networking among women. So far, some 60 women have participated.

Fundamental changes in the mentalities of companies, men and women are essential in order to improve women's position in professional life. Companies will have to redefine the qualifications required for accessing strategic posts, diversify the profiles of their managers and create a new management model in which masculine and feminine values are in equilibrium.

For their part, women will have to stop downplaying their successes, learn to take more risks, and put themselves forward in a more decisive manner. In short, they will have to be more aware of their abilities and qualities. This is where mentoring plays a role.

SIE's Advancing Women in practice

Advancing Women, SIE's European Mentoring Programme, was built on three pillars: mentoring, qualification and networking. The programme was targeted at young women with three to five years of professional experience who aim for leadership roles, wish to take civil responsibility in society and would like to network among women.

Active mentoring started in summer 2010. Twenty-five tandems (mentor and mentee) from four countries participated (twelve tandems from Germany, six from Sweden, four from Belgium and three from Luxembourg). Mentors were experienced members of SI in leading professional positions.

The kick-off meeting took place in Germany in September 2010 in the presence of the

mentors and the mentees. The personal and professional status quo of the mentees was assessed, goals were set and the mentoring relationships were initiated. Subsequent seminars covered professional training in areas such as communications and rhetorical skills. The programme concluded with a three-day workshop in Sweden in May 2011, which revolved around the exchange of experience and career planning.

An important aspect of this programme was the use of the European-wide organisation in forming the networks. The need to speak foreign languages, to be able to adapt to different cultures and working styles and to learn from each other is obvious to the younger as well as the older generation.

In their personal accounts, those who took part in the programme speak about their participation with enthusiasm. "I am looking forward to more mentoring programmes", says German mentor Birgit Menzel.

All aspects of the programme were well received by the participants. In fact, the majority of the mentors and mentees intend to pursue their relationship. "I have been particularly impressed by how the mentees have formed a strong network across borders, which has also included the mentors and the national coordinators", says EAF Board member and soroptimist Dr Helga Lukoschat. Indeed, this networking among mentees was seen as one of the highlights of the programme, and the group as a whole plans to stay in touch.

Interestingly, some two-thirds of participants changed jobs during the programme, either by getting a promotion or moving on into their 'dream jobs'. For many mentees, it was thanks to the programme that they found the courage to make these changes. Belgian mentee Liesbeth De Waele summed up the experience: "The mentoring programme made me realise that my possibilities are endless, if I just believe that I can achieve anything".

Mentoring and intergenerational solidarity

In our societies, solidarity in the workplace is often not emphasised enough, and through the European Mentoring Programme SIE forges intergenerational solidarity for furthering the empowerment of women. This solidarity extends beyond the workplace – in

any mentor/mentee relationship between women, aspects of work-life balance are also addressed.

Relationships between mentors and mentees create the opportunity for experienced women to empower young women to define, use and believe in their own potential and to have more confidence in themselves and their abilities.

The transfer of skills from the experienced professional to the relative novice is often seen as the key outcome of mentoring. However, the mentors also benefit from the experience. The seasoned professional will often find that her contact with the younger person enriches her own working life and gives her new insights, which help her reflect critically upon her own practices and attitudes in the workplace. Finally, the younger women will be the ones to create the world the mentors will be inhabiting in the future.

Inspired by the positive response to its first European Mentoring Programme, SIE will launch another cycle of it in 2012. Meanwhile, the programme's concept is already spreading internationally. The Advancing Women programme contributes to the advancement of women in leadership, and the initiative is worth developing further as the results are both worthwhile and sustainable. Mentoring is an important tool in enabling younger generations of women to shape the future and create a better world.

"The mentoring programme made me realise that my possibilities are endless, if I just believe that I can achieve anything"



Gabriella Heller

Women's voices across the generations – intergenerational dialogue between EWL members

By Mary Collins, EWL Policy Officer and Signe Noordgard, EWL Assistant Policy Officer

On 16 March 2012, three EWL members from different generations came together for an experimental Skype dialogue to discuss their thoughts, hopes, knowledge and priorities. The *European Women's Voice* asked them five questions about intergenerational solidarity from a feminist perspective.

The participants were: Gabriella Heller, active in WAGGGS, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts in Hungary; Iliana Stoicheva, experienced women's rights activist and coordinator of the Bulgarian Women's Lobby; and Marie-José Jonczy, retired Doctor of Law and Vice President of University Women of Europe. With their diverse backgrounds and rich experience as promoters of gender equality in Europe, they offer unique perspectives on the state of European feminism today.

What are the key challenges and issues for women's rights and gender equality today?

"The challenges depend on circumstances, cultures and regions," Gabriella begins. "In the EU there are significant differences between countries." For her, the main issues are decision-making and employment, including maternity leave. "In Hungary, women can take maternity leave for the first three years of a child's life. The good thing is

that they are legally protected against losing their job during this period. The problem is that there is no infrastructure – no crèches or kindergartens – allowing women to return to work sooner. So many women lose their skills and find it difficult to return to work after this three-year period.”

She explains that the situation in Hungary is about to get worse. The new labour code, which will take effect in summer 2012, will remove the protection against women losing their jobs during maternity leave. “No-one talks about this upcoming change and it is not mentioned in the media. It is very likely that many women do not know about it,” she concludes.

Iliana agrees with Gabriella that maternity is an issue, although she has passed the stage of her life when it would have been relevant for her personally. “I was lucky,” she notes. “I was working in an NGO and I had the opportunity to have a very flexible work-schedule.”

For Iliana, the key challenges are related to decision-making, media and violence. “Although during the last decade Bulgaria has adopted several legal instruments on gender equality, we still do not have equal representation of women and men in leading positions. In the media, women are mainly represented as sexual objects and every fourth woman is a victim of domestic violence.” She is particularly shocked that half the population sees the option of practicing prostitution as part of women’s sexual rights. “They do not understand that this is not part of a women’s rights agenda, nor is practicing prostitution an element of gender equality.”



Iliana Stoicheva



Marie-José Jonczy

Marie-José finds that there is still a lot to do especially with regards to women’s economic independence. “A lot has been achieved, but there seems to be a sense that all has been done, and this is not the case,” she argues. Marie-José points to the fact that there are still many challenges for young women today such as equality in public and political life, and the issue of women on corporate boards. “These issues need to be resolved. We must keep up the pressure, particularly with the EWL’s 50/50 Campaign. We are still in a glass ceiling-sticky floor situation.”

Marie-José herself was a pioneer in this regard. “In my own professional career, I was the second woman in a legal position in the legal services of the European Commission (35 years ago) and the first woman to plead before the European Court of Justice; there were only male judges! There were no women in top positions.” Despite the challenging circumstances, there were some advantages to being the only woman around. “My experience and the fact that I was visible as the only woman subsequently helped me when I pleaded cases relating to gender equality.”

How is feminism perceived in your society?

Iliana tells that, in Bulgaria, one is not taken seriously if one calls oneself a feminist. “The reaction is, ‘What is wrong with you?’” She explains that one cannot talk from a feminist standpoint, even about topics related to violence against women, an issue where there is parliamentary willingness to act. “The public discourse in Bulgaria says that women and men are equal, but in subtle ways women are told to stay in their place.”

Gabriella agrees that the use of the word ‘feminist’ is difficult and Marie-José also finds the use of this word challenging. “My own feeling is that this word is outdated. I am a feminist, and it is normal to describe oneself as such when one works on women’s issues. In other circles, the word ‘feminist’ is harder to accept, even if in reality those who do not like to use it could be defined as feminists.” Marie-José admits that she may be pointing to a contradiction by defining herself as a feminist while saying the word is old-fashioned. “It is a question of language and not of the meaning of the word.”

What are your thoughts on men's role in gender equality issues?

Gabriella has concrete experience with the involvement of men, as this is a vital part of the work of WAGGGS. "In our organisation we involve young men with the aim of engaging them in creating change. We cannot involve millions, but, for example, every month we show a film related to gender equality for both girls and boys. We have fruitful discussions afterwards, and we really sense the changes in the men's attitudes during these talks."

Whereas men of Gabriella's generation can talk about gender equality, it is more difficult to engage the men of Iliana's generation. Iliana explains that the possibility of dialogue depends on the issue. "Take for instance domestic violence. You can gain the trust of some men, but it is not easy to involve all of them." In contrast, in matters of quotas, almost all men are against. Regarding prostitution, however, there are some well-educated men in top positions who are against legalisation. "Women's movements have been successful in showing that prostitution is not about sexual rights," she concludes. "This is an achievement."

Gabriella and Iliana agree that women's movements have been crucial and successful, but men must be involved if further progress is to be made. Marie-José is also convinced that equality cannot be achieved without the involvement of men. "We must work together hand-in-hand; it is with men that we need to construct equality. We need to educate men and boys – women play a big part in this, but society as a whole is responsible."

She notes that there is some resistance. "Older men are more difficult to convince. There are of course exceptions, but younger men are more open to change and understand that gender equality is in everybody's interest." She stresses the need to get men to aspire to new forms of work-life balance: "Women have been conforming to the male norm, but men should also start thinking about work patterns that leave them time to be involved in other areas of life. This must be part of our work for change," she concludes.

What does intergenerational solidarity mean to you?

Based on your experience and knowledge, what are the key messages that you want to pass on to other generations of women?

Iliana stresses the importance of women from different age groups building relationships and standing together. In her view, women's organisations should take advantage of the public interest in intergenerational solidarity and steer this debate away from demographics and pensions towards gender equality and making social systems more woman friendly.

Gabriella agrees that intergenerational solidarity is indispensable for achieving gender equality and thereby real democracy. "Today's societies cannot afford the luxury of not using women's energy, experience and expertise, whatever their age." Her concept of intergenerational solidarity is very much influenced by her experience of being a girl guide. "It is about establishing a real partnership between young people and adults in a situation where both recognise that they can learn from each other. This partnership implies mutual respect." She adds that intergenerational partnerships also mean developing specific methods which can support both older and young women, such as networks, mentoring, coaching and training.

Gabriella explains that voluntary youth organisations are among the best places for generating intergenerational partnerships, and that by volunteering for a youth movement, she has had good experiences with such relationships. "My organisation supports girls and young women in developing their leadership and life-skills, and this cannot happen without the energy, experience and knowledge of older women."

Marie-José notes that intergenerational dialogue has a role in breaking down barriers, such as negative stereotypes of older women, and older women having an 'I know it all' attitude. "In my own organisation, there are many older women and very few young women. Younger generations are more likely to balance work-life responsibilities, which makes engaging in activities such as those of women's movements difficult. The result is that movements are now occupied by older women, usually retired, who still have lots of energy, and can give their time."

According to Marie-José, young professional women are seeking more professional organisations which provide the opportunity for them to develop networks and improve their own professional status. Traditional women's movements are less attractive because they function on a more ideological basis. "We have more difficulty recruiting young women for our organisation," she notes. She proposes that one way to bridge the generation gap would be for older women to share their experiences and provide professional networking contacts for younger women. "This is something that we have started to do in my organisation. It is a very good resource for younger women and seems to meet their needs."

From the point of view of your stage of life, what would you like to see achieved five years from now, with regards to women's rights and gender equality?

Iliana hopes that the next five years will bring about a society free from gender-based violence and sexual discrimination in the workplace. "I also dream of seeing more women's NGO's with more resources to work for women's human rights. Lastly, I dream of effective instruments at institutional level to tackle violence against women and to address the gender pay gap."

Gabriella would love to see a change in society's attitude to gender equality issues, particularly regarding women in the labour market, girls in education, and equality in decision-making. She also hopes that the gender pay gap will decrease and disappear within 10-15 years, and that, in the future, girls and women can live free from every form of violence – in a world where the human dignity of each woman is valued. "I want to see empowered women of all ages, all over Europe, who have been given the chance to develop to their full potential, applying their skills for the development of society." She adds that she wants to see a more democratic society. "To reach this goal, we should not forget the role of education and the bottom-up initiatives of civil society and the key role of education. These initiatives need support."

Marie-José says that she now has a granddaughter. "I want her to be fully independent economically, to live without stereotypes, to be a feminist even if I find the word is 'dépassé', and to have the freedom to

make decisions concerning her own life." She stresses that her granddaughter has to be educated and encouraged to accomplish what she wants without constraints, rigid gender roles and expectations. "This

is something I want for all young girls today. Violence against women, prostitution, and discrimination do not provide this form of freedom."



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