

JUST WORK AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD

The Case of Europe

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In the EU, people experience a **restructuring of labour** and the labour market under neoliberal, free market policies. The global South is coming to the global North. The idea of secure and decent jobs, full employment (which was meant for the male breadwinner only, not for women) linked to the famous European social welfare model is gone.

Across the countries people face a shrinking of the labour market, an erosion of labour laws and of social protection, however to a different extend. Reasons for this are

a) Due to **high productivity** and technology less and **less people are needed** to produce an increasing amount of products. Even in countries with growth rates, it is mostly growth without jobs. The EU had aspired in its Lisboa Treaty to compensate the loss of jobs due to de-industrialisation through its service sector and knowledge industries. However, this did not materialise.

b) Growing competition in the global market and neoliberal policies of deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation put an enormous pressure to **reduce costs of labour**. This leads to an increase in informal, casual and precarious employment including reduction or freezing of wages, e.g. contract labour and temporary jobs with less social protection. Initially, women and migrants constituted a flexibility reserve. But now men and high-skilled professionals get effected by **flexibilisation** and **precarisation**, in particular academic youth.

c) Cutting costs is also the driving force behind the **dismantling of the public sector** which implies a decrease of jobs and a dismantling of social services. New public management deploys industrial principles of rationalisation, efficiency and growth to non-industrial sectors and social services which gives quantity preference over quality. Public services and infrastructure from transport and water supply to kindergardens have been privatised. Austerity policies make for further reduction of government investments in public goods and social services.

d) The increasing **lack of redistributive policies** with a melt down of social protection and a tax regime that eases the burden for the rich and puts more tax load on the workers including VAT is cushioned by a free market **ideology of self responsibility**: everybody is an entrepreneur of her/his life. Growing competition, less redistribution and less solidarity result in growing disparities of wages and income, **growing social inequalities** and an increase of working poor and of millionaires and superrich, amazingly even in the crisis.

e) The whole market economy functions only because outside of the market, in households and communities, people – majority of them women – take care of social reproduction. Europe faces a number of **crises in social reproduction**: growing need of care for the elderly, lack of public facilities for child care, an increasing number of workers who suffer from a burn-out effect or depression due to stress or unemployment, insecurity of pensions, high-cost health care services etc. Increasingly **migrant workers** fill the care gap for the elderly in Europe forming a **transnational care chain** based on informal, insecure and extremely low-paid employment. Women from Poland come to western Europe in a kind of shuttle migration while women from the Ukraine fill the care gaps in Poland at a lower level of payment.

f) The **crisis** exacerbates those tendencies – it does not create them. Crisis prone countries like Greece and Spain face an alarming increase in **unemployment**. 25 % of workers are unemployed, more than 50 % of youth. One third of the population lives below the poverty line. Working poverty and moonlighting - combination of 2 to 3 small jobs – is on an increase. Cut in wages and pensions, slashing down of public sector, break down of public health services undermine the livelihood of the majority of the population.

g) The crisis causes a **download** of social costs, risks and work **to the household**, community and subsistence economy. This requires more unpaid work, mostly done by women, to cushion the loss of jobs, income and social protection.

The overall feeling which the debt crisis has accentuated even in countries not hit that hard by the crisis is **insecurity** and precarisation of labour, livelihood and social protection.

Justice in an unjust world of labour

Towards drafting a concept for just work in this context I will explore criteria of justice with regard to women's work and in particular care work which intersects to a large extent with migrants' work. My background is the EU, however, it is easy to make some crossovers to the situation in Asian countries.

1) The first criteria for justice is the **distribution of labour and employment**, in particular the **gender division of labour**. It still holds true that men do two third of paid work and one third of unpaid work in society, while women do one third of paid and two third of unpaid work. EU-policies for gender equality aim at an "adult-worker-model". The objective that women's employment rate should reach 60 % in 2010 has been achieved, the next time target is 75 % in 2020. In the past decades, women in western and southern Europe entered the labour force in large numbers, however at a point of time when due to deregulation and liberalisation flexible and informal work were on an increase and the male-breadwinner-model eroded. In most of EU countries - except Scandinavia, Eastern Europe and France - it has been a paradox integration, inclusion at unequal and unfair terms. Most of women's jobs are part-time and so-called mini jobs, temporary and seasonal employment, many of them in low-paid service and care sectors while the glass ceiling to executive and boardroom positions persists. According to the ILO women constitute 70 percent of the working poor. There has been not much change with regard to the gender segmentation of the labour market, and to the gender pay gap which is on the average 15% in the EU, but e.g. 23 % in Germany and Austria.

In order to allow the reconciliation of paid work and care work in the family, the EU formulated in its so-called Barcelona objectives that in 2010 child care facilities for 1/3 of all children under three, and for 90 % of all pre-school children should be provided. This target was by far not been reached in western and southern Europe. Under the new austerity policies, social cuts and further privatisation will make public facilities shrink even more, meaning: they will put more pressure on the individual household, on women, to **reconcile** though some efforts have been made to introduce paternity leave in order to make young fathers participate in care work.

2) The second criteria for justice I would like to explore is: how is work valued and remunerated. The crisis unveiled in a drastic way the huge **disparities in wages and income** in Europe: on the one hand obscene boni payments for bankers and brokers, on the other hand precarious employment, mini jobs and working poverty e.g. in the care sector, cleaners, nurses for old people, domestic labourers, many of them migrants. 2009, all the EU-

governments invested huge amounts of public money to rescue those sectors which were called “relevant to the system” (or “too big to fail”), in particular banks and export industries. At the peak of the crisis, German kindergarden employees whose care work is miserably paid and was not covered by a minimum wage regime, went on strike and asked whether their work is not relevant to the functioning of the system.

This triggered an unprecedented **feminisation of labour struggles**: increasingly care workers, caretakers in old age homes, midwives, and teachers protest and demand both, recognition and better pay for their work which is indispensable to the reproduction of society and the economy. In Spain and Portugal precarious workers (*precarias*) organised across various sectors from domestic labour over sex work to call centres agency and explored new non-trade-unionist ways of protest in order to get visibility and recognition.

Those protests highlight that care work is considered to be of low value because it is considered to be typically female, not much productivity increase is possible, meaning it is only profitable if low wages are paid. The protests and strikes by care workers point at the **need to reevaluate work** and economic sectors.

3) **Work outside of the market**, in the household and the community, for subsistence and social reproduction, unpaid and voluntary is **not considered to be “proper” labour**. Care work is perceived as unproductive and not value creating, just a “natural” female skill. Even in future, unpaid and voluntary work will be necessary for social reproduction and the functioning of the economy. The increase in flexible and precarious work makes it impossible to still draw clear lines between formal and informal, secure and insecure, paid and unpaid work.

Voluntary and solidarity work is an indispensable survival and support strategy in particular in a crisis situation. It can be a nucleus for another economic paradigm which heads towards an economy of solidarity. For this it is a precondition and a matter of justice to consider and **appreciate all work**, outside of the market whether unpaid care, subsistence or voluntary community work **as productive and valuable** because they produce, sustain & reproduce life and secure social protection.

Recommendations

In this multiple crisis situation - crisis of gainful employment and crisis of social reproduction – societies have to reorganise and reconfigure their systems of labour and need new concepts of securing livelihoods, basic needs, basic income and social protection. From a feminist perspective a u-turn in European history to so-called full employment and the wage labour based social welfare system is neither possible nor desirable because women and migrants were excluded to a large extent.

When drafting political recommendations for just work and sustainable livelihoods we must think boldly and much more outside of the box, even going beyond conventional demands which focus on the market and wage labour only.

- **Care and social reproduction are not private but political** because they are about the survival of each society. Labour outside of the markets has to be appreciated and revaluated. A common denominator of the German kindergarden employees and the *precarias* in Spain, the domestic workers all over the world who drafted the ILO convention on domestic work, and the network of South Asian women who recently in Negombo phrased in their declaration: “all women are workers and are entitled to social security” is that **care work** – whether paid, unpaid or voluntary - should be **recognised as proper labour, as valuable and productive work**. Two concrete

political **demands** are linked to this: a) Unpaid care and subsistence work should be entitled to social protection. b) Depreciarisation of care work means full labour rights for paid care workers, including migrant workers!

- **Policies should balance production and social reproduction**, the market and the household economies, and not leave the task of reconciliation to the private households, in particular to women. A coherent equal opportunity policy has to reach across the labour market and households, across the paid and the unpaid economy. **Affordable and accessible public infrastructure** for social reproduction are a global social right. Care institutions including education and health facilities should be public and not subjected to the neoliberal logic of efficiency, meaning: No to privatization of schools and water supply! No commodification of commons but reclaim commons into public hands!
- If we want to **change the whole unequal and unfair system** of valuation and distribution of labour, both ends or both sides have to be addressed. Minimum wages for miserably paid care workers are necessary but not sufficient. There should not only be a **floor to wages** but also a **cap to income**, maximum wages through a progressive tax system have to correspond to the minimum wages in order to get the whole value system more balanced and social inequality narrowed down. No work justice without tax justice!
- If we demand equal opportunities and equal pay for **women in the labour market**, we should ask equal opportunities and equal pay for **men in the care economy**, women in board rooms and men changing nappies and taking care of their old parents. A right to care taking means: paid time-off for all employees, women & men, including non-transferable paternity leave for fathers. A core mechanism of coherent equality policies would be a redistribution of paid and unpaid work between gender and between social classes embedded in a comprehensive public care system. Unpaid and paid care work have to be **shared more equally between men & women**, between individuals & the collective/communities, thereby breaking up gender stereotypes and mechanisms of devaluation of women, of migrant workers and of care work. **No work justice without gender justice!**

To sum up: there is an urgent need for a triple R concept with regard to labour which implies a **redefinition**, a **revaluation** and a **redistribution of labour** based on a **new social contract**. For this we demand a change in policies but we need a change of our mindsets likewise. It is our task as civil society organisations to work, to negotiate and to struggle for such new social contracts which include and value all the labour which is necessary in each society.