



Parental Childcare and Employment Policies
“Collision or Complementary?”
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Renegotiating gender relations – Putting care on the political agenda

On behalf of the European Women's Lobby (EWL), I would like to thank the Czech Presidency for inviting me to the Round Table discussion with my NGO colleagues and to address the Ministerial Conference on Childcare and Employment Policies.

Founded in 1990, the European Women's Lobby is a non-governmental organisation that brings together women's organisations from the 27 Member States – including the Czech Women's Lobby (Česká ženská lobby) and three accession countries (Croatia, Turkey and the Former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia) along with 20 European-wide organisations. Our mission is to work together to achieve equality between women and men, to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, to ensure the respect of women's human rights, to eradicate male violence against women and to ensure that gender equality is taken into consideration in all European Union policies.

The title of the conference itself invites us to reflect upon **the key issue of care**. The question posed as to whether there is a conflict between, on the one hand, parental childcare and, on the other hand, employment policies (hence are they in collision or do they complement each other), cannot be answered in a one-dimensional way but necessitates a deconstruction of the concepts that require further clarification. First of all, caring for others and being cared for at different stages of our lives is one of the central emotional experiences of our shared humanity. Therefore, caring is a principle of **solidarity**: among and between women and men and between generations.

As a women's organisation, we realise that we need to clarify our **position** in relation to the **family**. Historically, feminists have been accused of ignoring the family by concentrating on women's rights and, indirectly to the detriment of family life. This couldn't be further from the truth. Feminists care about families; they form families and they care for families. At the same time, they are highly sensitive to the fact that the family is not always a unit of equal partners, in which all members are on an equal standing. Not only are the unequal power relationships between women and men inherent within family structures, there are many forms of families, the diversity of which needs to be recognised and acknowledged in public policy and debate. Therefore, the generic family policy concept requires different and complex measures and policies to ensure that all families in their diversity are included in this concept.



Feminists are above all actively seeking **true equality of outcome between women and men** and are aware that this requires examining the interaction between the private (family) and the public sphere (in which the labour market is situated). The link between the gendered division of tasks in the home and women's engagement in the labour-market and other areas of public life call into question the gender relations and the necessity to renegotiate the implicit gender contract that regulates these relationships in all areas of life including in the private sphere.

Women have careers, jobs, and professional responsibilities and at the same time women continue to be in large part responsible for their children, housework and the care of dependent family members. Therefore, we need to ask the question: Who Cares?

Issues of reconciliation of private and professional life and of demographic challenges are not solely issues for women but for society as a whole, and this includes men. They need to recognise and take fully into account that the impact of care work currently and primarily impacts in a disproportionate way on women. Policy action in the area of care services, social benefits, family law and employment must have as an ultimate goal the achievement of equality between women and men, in the home, in employment and in the public sphere at large.

Similarly, **childcare services and policies** cannot only be focused on working parents. The benefits for children who socialise with their peers early in their lives show that they learn **life skills** and therefore, childcare provision should be considered as an **investment** for the future and not solely a means of enabling their parents to work.

In order for women to have a real choice in their lives whether they stay at home to care for their children or enter the labour market, there are **conditions** that must be seen as **perquisites** for them to have the same opportunities as their male counterparts. These are:

- ❑ More equal sharing of caring responsibilities with men;
- ❑ Better legislation on maternity, paternity and parental leave;
- ❑ Sufficient provision of publicly funded affordable and high quality care services, that take into account the needs and human rights of care recipients, including disabled women and men.

In 2006, the **EWL "Who Cares?" Campaign** highlighted the need for actions in a number of areas, addressing both national and European policy-makers and stakeholders. The recommendations highlighted then remain more than ever urgent and relevant today; these include:

The provision of **affordable, accessible** and **high quality** care services:

- ❑ **Renewal of the commitment to achieve the Barcelona Targets on Childcare** - there can be no turning back on this commitment. In this context, the EWL urgently calls for and expects a confirmation of this commitment.



- ❑ **Guarantee sustainable public funding for quality care services for all children** – not only those whose parents work – as well as for women and men with additional support needs.
- ❑ **Costs – must be affordable for all women and men** in situations where they are required to contribute financially and in situations of disadvantage (single parents) Member States must provide financial aid.

Strengthen **EU legislation** in relation to:

- ❑ **Maternity Directive**¹: guarantee women who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding **24 weeks fully paid maternity leave guarantee the 6 weeks compulsory leave** currently proposed in the draft amended Directive of 1992 regardless of whether they qualify in terms of eligibility. It should be pointed out that the **nature of working contracts** particularly with regards to women (part-time, atypical patterns of work) **exclude many women from the eligibility** criteria to avail of full maternity leave provisions and therefore **at a minimum** the compulsory period must be guaranteed. Protect women for up to **one year from dismissal on return to work** following maternity leave.
- ❑ **Parental Leave**:² remove all barriers that work against men's take-up of parental leave by guaranteeing non-transferable periods of leave between parents including same sex couples and de-facto parents. Guarantee full pay during parental leave and protection from dismissal for up to one year on return to work.
- ❑ **Paternity Leave**:³ guarantee one month paid leave at birth or adoption to all men and partners of same sex couples in all countries of the EU. The EWL is proposing that a clause on paternity leave is added to the forthcoming renewed Parental Leave Directive currently being negotiated by the Social Partners.
- ❑ **Self-employed workers and assisting spouses/life partners**⁴: guarantee the social protection of assisting spouses/life partners and self employed workers and improve their access to maternity, paternity and parental leave.

Other measures must include:

- ❑ Ensure equality amongst **all women** to guarantee that all women have the same rights and that their freedom to choose is possible:
- ❑ Notably, **migrant women** who for reasons of non recognition of their qualifications obtained in third countries, coupled with the lack of affordable, accessible and high quality child care and other dependent care services, are filling the gaps in private

¹ See EWL's proposals for amendments to the European Commission's proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Directive 92/85/EEC – January 2009

² The Platform of European Social NGOs (Social Platform) "Common position for amendments on the revision of the Council Directive 96/34/EC of 3 June 1996 on the Framework agreement on parental leave", 19 January 2009

³ Idem, see proposal in Social Platform document "proposal for a new Clause 3 on paternity leave"

⁴ See Proposals for amendments from the European Women's Lobby in relation to the draft Directive on the application of the principle of equal treatment between women and men engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity and repealing Directive 86/613/EEC



- homes without enabling them to engage in the formal labour market and in accessing social protection benefits and rights.
- ❑ **Single parents**, the majority of whom are women are restricted in their freedom to choose and in their equality of opportunity to partake fully in the labour market if that is their choice without child and dependent family care structures and policies.
 - ❑ Because the issue of care is under valued and unequally shared, this is also reflected in **divorce laws** and therefore the impact on women in these situations is greater.
 - ❑ **Women** who choose to stay **at home** are equally penalised due to the continuous (male life-cycle) model of working life within which pension rights and other social protection benefits are modelled on an uninterrupted professional record which rarely reflects the reality of many women's lives and leads to the feminisation of poverty particularly in older age.

These issues are inherent to the current gender relations and they need to be renegotiated as women and men cross the traditional boundaries of the private and public spheres of life. The **Barcelona Targets on Childcare** is intrinsic to the restructuring of the gender contract.

The European Women's Lobby looks forward to working with the current and forthcoming EU Presidencies in maintaining and placing these issues higher on the European political agenda.