

## **Position paper of the European Federation for Family Employment**

### **Gender equality: supporting home employment to ensure women's access to the labour market**

Although the European Union has included gender equality among its fundamental values since its creation, many efforts need to be made to fully achieve it. Despite the progress made in recent years, child and elderly care are still largely provided by women in European households, even though many disparities exist between Member States. As a result, inequalities between women and men remain strong, especially regarding employment opportunities. Since they are often interrupted by maternity or family responsibilities, women's careers do not evolve at the same pace as those of men. A limited access to employment, a greater job insecurity and a difficult access to leading positions are direct consequences identified on the labour market.

Home employment provides an efficient response to the reconciliation of work and family life by giving European households the possibility to entrust declared and paid domestic workers with care and non-care tasks. If well-structured and supported, it also provides realistic solutions to women's overwork situations and avoids their partial or total disengagement from the labour market. Considering demographic trends and the growing need for skilled workers in the coming years, home employment would enable the creation of many valuable, non-relocable and high-quality jobs.

In order to promote gender equality in all Member States, the European Commission should therefore encourage them to support this sector in order to bring domestic workers out of the shadow. It should take into consideration the millions of domestic workers across Europe, who regularly suffer from poor working conditions. A better structuration of the sector would definitely give them access to declared jobs. Furthermore, they would benefit from social rights, namely social protection and access to professionalisation, just as other workers in Europe.

EFFE highlights the need to better structure and promote home employment at the European level. EFFE is also committed to supporting European decision-makers in their definition of social policies that are just, inclusive, fair and that fully meet citizens' needs.

### **Family responsibilities considered to be the origin of professional inequalities**

Despite numerous awareness and education campaigns, women still do not have equal status with men on the labour market. The reproduction of traditional family models does barely allow an equitable sharing of family responsibilities. Besides, it fuels the stereotypes, which reduce women to their roles as mothers and make their profiles less attractive on the labour market.

Among the 308 million people aged between 18 and 64 living in the European Union, 106 million (34%) reported family responsibilities in 2018, according to Eurostat<sup>1</sup>. As expected, more women (37%) than men (32%) declared having such responsibilities. This gap even increases when considering those who have to adapt their jobs to their family responsibilities, with 39% of women and only 17% of men among the population surveyed. The low use of childcare services due to the lack of affordable solutions is one of the main reasons for this discrepancy. In fact, only 28% of those with parental responsibilities reported using such services.

47% of people who do not use childcare services in the EU reported having made their own arrangements: either a reduction in working time (10%), a change of job or employer (3%), or family leave (3%).

In addition to childcare, carers, i.e. those who provide help to their ageing, sick or dependent parents at home, are also more likely to be women. Depending on the Member States and the family model, they are already in contract and are often mothers. The accumulation of these roles and the achievement of the tasks that they require can lead to exhaustion and to slowing down or stopping work.

Outsourcing some of the care and support tasks to a skilled worker, is a major issue in ensuring gender equality in Europe. Structuring the sector and implementing appropriate public policies is the only way to provide female carers with affordable solutions and guarantee them respite.

## Home employment, a virtuous model of gender equality

The measures taken by the EU executive in recent years, such as the directive on work-life balance, are a step forward to the right direction but are not enough. Thus, the gender employment gap was 11.5 percentage points in 2017<sup>2</sup>. In spite of a gradual decrease, this difference is also found among the employed. In fact, among employed women aged 15-64 in 2018, 35% were working part-time, compared with only 9.6% of employed men in the same age group<sup>3</sup>. Ideological and cultural barriers are partly responsible for this imbalance but can be circumvented.

In this respect, home employment contributes to women's participation in the labour market. It responds to the need to reconcile work, private and family life by enabling women to outsource some of their family and domestic tasks to third parties. Improving women's living comfort is not the only advantage of using such services. It gives them access to new professional opportunities, which leads to an increasing financial autonomy during and after their professional careers. Above all, the use of home employment offers them the freedom to choose and define the contours of their own work-life balance.

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<sup>1</sup> Eurostat (2019), *Communiqué de presse : conciliation de la vie professionnelle et de la vie familiale*. See on: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/10157127/3-10102019-AP-FR.pdf/f2ee298c-dcd9-dc41-740d-2ca0d834e4bc>

<sup>2</sup> European Commission (2019), *2019 Report on equality between women and men in the EU*, p9, Luxembourg. Available on: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy\\_en#annual-report-on-equality-between-women-and-men](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en#annual-report-on-equality-between-women-and-men)

<sup>3</sup> Eurostat (2020), *Part-Time employment as percentage of the total employment, by sex, age and country of birth (%)*. See on: <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>

Considering the disparities observed between Member States, only a joint initiative can meet the issues raised by the insufficient employment rate of women.

## **A sector creating professional opportunities**

The jobs included in the home employment sector are mainly occupied by females (94%), with migrant backgrounds (50% intra and extra EU-community). Many of these workers are not declared, since several Member States do not recognize and support them. Therefore, it is difficult to establish quality statistics on this sector. According to the estimation made by the actors of the sector, only 8 around the 18 million domestic workers in the European Union are legally declared.

Considering the workplace, private homes, and the tasks they have to assume, they often work part-time, in several households, have a low level of qualification and carry out several activities.

Since they fall outside the legal framework subject to labour law, these jobs cannot be included in European statistics. Furthermore, these women suffer from both social and economic insecurity. They earn less than declared workers and cannot choose their working times. This situation is of course accentuated when the workers do not have any identity documents.

A European framework of the sector would have positive effects on women's employment. On the one hand, it would give women that have to reconcile their working and private life access to respite situations; on the other hand, it would promote the creation of declared and qualified jobs.

In addition to that, it would represent the opportunity to determine standards in terms of remuneration, working conditions and access to social protection and appropriate professionalisation. A European harmonisation and the emergence of a European social dialogue would make the sector even more attractive. It would also enable domestic workers to get out of precariousness.

## **A significant social contribution**

Moreover, home employment offers a significant contribution to society as it enables people in a dependent situation to stay at home in good conditions for as long as possible. The overcrowding of care facilities for the elderly and disabled obliges states to review their personal assistance policies. Structuring this sector would therefore allow them to provide solutions to citizens' needs, even in the most isolated areas of the European Union. Such an initiative would be in line with the objectives of the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and would be a major step towards a more social Europe.

## **EFFE's proposals**

Regarding these observations, EFFE urges the European Commission to take the home employment sector into account when defining its public policies supporting gender equality

in Europe. This is only through the creation of a European reference framework that benefits to both the Member States and all domestic employers and employees that significant progress will be observed.

The aim of such a framework would not be to force Member States to develop home employment, or even to promote its expansion. In fact, it would provide access to alternative solutions and ensure the rights of women “employers” and employees, while taking account of the national social policies.

EFFE therefore proposes the following:

1. **Enable an administrative simplification:** through the development of simplified digital tools to enable employing households to declare their employees and **the development of social and fiscal incentives in favour of home employers.** The creation of an affordable and simplified offer for all European citizens, especially women, is the first step towards access to respite solutions and to fight against undeclared work which is predominant in this sector.
2. **Giving domestic workers an access to professionalisation** through adequate training programmes based on the skills required to meet the needs of European citizens (e.g. green and digital skills) or recognition programmes focusing on the skills acquired throughout life. This would offer prospects for professional and salary evolution, which is essential in a sector marked by the stagnation of its workers.
3. **Guarantee social rights to domestic workers.** These rights should protect them against the risks of accident, illness or even unemployment. This is also essential to provide them with a decent pension and give them access to training in order to avoid accidents and burnout.
4. **Allow the recognition of a European status for home employers and employees,** enabling them to be included in European statistical nomenclatures. The EU could therefore benefit from tangible and usable data providing Member States with a real vision of the return on investment from such public policies.