

Women and the crisis

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On behalf of Atria, institute on gender equality and women's history I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address the gender aspects of the financial and economic crisis in Europe and in the Netherlands during this discussion.

First of all I would like to mention a resolution, adopted by the [European Parliament](#) last March. The press release sent out afterwards by the European Parliament was aptly titled: *Poverty has a female face: economic crisis hits women hardest*.

In this resolution the Parliament concludes that women suffer more than men from crisis-driven budget and social spending cuts. The, unfortunately non-binding advice given by the Parliament in its resolution was: This must be offset by investing in job training and female entrepreneurship.

I quote: "Women are facing a silent crisis which worsens and weakens their condition. Before the economic crisis unemployment, precarious work, part-time work, low salaries and slow career paths already affected women more than men. Today, with the effects of austerity policies, they are suffering a double punishment," . This was said by rapporteur Elisabeth Morin-Chartier during the debate in the Parliament.

With respect to the resolution Atria analyzed a [European Report](#), called *The impact of the economic crisis on the situation of men and women and on gender equality policies*. We published this analysis on our website in Dutch, unfortunately for you who do not speak or read my language. And drew some conclusions for the Netherlands out of this report.

It drew 4 main conclusions I would like to mention to you before I will talk about the Netherlands and the role of Atria.

The main conclusions of the Brodolini report were:

1. There has been a levelling down of gender gaps in employment, unemployment, wages and poverty over the crisis. This however does not reflect progress in gender equality as it is based on lower rates of employment, higher rates of unemployment and reduced earnings for both men and women. In the first years of the crisis labour market segregation has effectively sheltered women's employment, labour market activity and pay during the crisis

to date. This segregation involves over-representation of women in service employment (including public sector jobs) and under-representation in manufacturing, construction and male dominated branches of the financial sector. The overall level of segregation in a country associates positively and significantly with the difference in employment losses for men and women.

2. The second main conclusion of this report is that the labour market behaviour of women over the crisis has been similar to that of men. The traditional view that women behave as employment buffers, called in when demand expands but pushed back when it contracts, has been challenged for previous crises, but has been definitely refuted by the experience of this crisis. The contemporary 'buffers' are young men and women on temporary employment contracts and migrant workers.
3. Thirdly: Fiscal consolidation poses a risk for gender equality. The consolidation measures likely to have the most impact on gender equality include wage freezes or wage cuts in the public sector; staffing freezes or personnel cuts in the public sector; pension reforms; cuts and restrictions in care related benefits/allowances and facilities; reduction of housing benefits or family benefits; tightening of eligibility criteria for unemployment and assistance benefits or reductions in replacement rates; tax measures; VAT increases; and increases in fees for publicly subsidized services. The specific impact of fiscal consolidation on gender equality varies considerably among countries in Europe. While in some countries the impact is modest and not consistently pro-inequality, in others considerable retrenchment in employment, social transfers and social services may be rolling back past progress. It cannot be ruled out that disparities in gender equality within Europe may widen back as an unintended consequence.
4. The fourth main conclusion of this report is that in the vast majority of countries gender mainstreaming has not been implemented in policy design and policy implementation over the crisis. Neither recovery nor consolidation measures have been assessed from a gender perspective in the vast majority of cases.

What about the situation in the Netherlands? Late last year the Dutch Statistical Bureau published the latest figures on labour participation of men and women and economic independence. In the Netherlands 48.5 percent of all women can be called economically independent. So little over half of all women over 15 are economically not independent. Meaning they do not earn at least 70 percent of the average minimum wage (which is about 900 euros per month for my country by the way). They earn less or are dependent on their partner, their family or the government.

The good news was this figure shows a slight growth of 0.4 percent. Good news meaning more women can call themselves economically independent. However one has to take into account the effect of the crisis as concluded so clearly by the Brodolini report I mentioned earlier. By the end of the 1st quarter of last year the labour participation of men in the Netherlands shrunk by 1.6 percent while that of women shrunk with 0.7 percent. So women did not do better, men did worse. The Dutch Ministry of Gender Equality will start a project to promote economic independence of women the coming two years. Our minister has made this issue one of her key priorities. Atria is one of the advisors of the Ministry in this project.

The European Parliament called for the promotion of entrepreneurship. Atria asked the University of Rotterdam to write a state of the art paper on female entrepreneurship. They compared existent

literature and performed a secondary analysis of available data. In the Netherlands women are underrepresented as entrepreneurs. Of all women who work a mere 8.4 percent is self-employed and only 2.8 percent of women are entrepreneurs, meaning they lead a business and have employees on their pay roll. So these figures will tell you, opportunities might lay ahead for women. Atria will publish a factsheet later this Winter about this state of the art paper in which recommendations for women who are interested in becoming entrepreneurs as well as policy makers who would like to stimulate women to become so.

I would like to conclude my short presentation by saying that in general one can conclude women are not hit so much by the economic crisis itself but much more by the measures taken by governments to face the crisis. We are advocating governments to use gender mainstreaming tools and gender budgeting analyses to make the effects of policies and measures visible.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Resources

- Bettio, F., Corsi, M., D'Ippoliti, C., Lyberaki, A., Samek Lodovici, M. & Verashchagina, A. (2012). [*The Impact of the Economic Crisis on the Situation of Women and Men and on Gender Equality Policies. Synthesis Report*](#). European Network of Experts on Gender Equality (ENEGE), Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini (FGB) and Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale (IRS).
- European Parliament (2013). [*European Parliament Resolution of 12 March 2013 on the Impact of the Economic Crisis on Gender Equality and Women's Rights \(2012/2301\(INI\)\)*](#).
- Mc Cracken, K., Jessoula, M., Lyberaki, A., Bartlett, W. & Kusidel, E. (2013). [*Gender Aspects of the Effects of the Economic Downturn and Financial Crisis on Welfare Systems*](#). European Parliament, Policy Department C: Citizen's Rights and Constitutional Affairs.