

BELGIAN, DUTCH, LITHUANIAN AND PORTUGUESE WOMEN HAVE A SAY: COUNTRIES' SOCIAL POLICIES WITHIN EUROPE

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Abstract

Particularly in the last thirty to thirty-five years, concerns with gender equality in citizenship have given room to a great diversity of policies aimed at overcoming inequalities in the organization of labour, in the family and intimacy, in politics, and so forth. These policies have emerged worldwide and in the European Union, having been (re)contextualized in the national spaces. Building on talks with women from Belgium, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Portugal, this article gathers their views on the social policies in their countries within this European context. This article tries to analyse the ways social policies in these countries, have (or have not) taken into account the issue of gender equality as a right and a priority. First we will focus on the emergence of the gender concern and the consequent production of legislation in Europe. Then we move on to analyze effective constraints to the insertion of women into the labour market and the inherent social benefits, according to the countries' locations. Women voices give a glance into countries' policies, by referencing some specific examples.

Keywords: social policies, gender equality, citizenship.

Introduction

The opportunity for this reflection emerged from the interpretation of the contributions of women from different countries. It occurred in an Erasmus Intensive Programme called "WASPOLSS – Tracking New European Ways in Social Policy, Legal and Social Services", which involved higher education students from Belgium, Lithuania, The Netherlands and Portugal. Its aims are sharing and comparing social policies from different countries. Our group specifically worked on the subtopic of the situation of women in the labour market. Each student had to research the subtopic of their own country, in advance. Plenary sessions took place, involving the whole group, which was comprised of a total of 20 students (5 per country). A set of 12 focus group discussions, which took the starting point of individual experiences, embodied the "gender specialist sessions" with a total of 5 women—4 students and 1 tutor. This work led to the production of several tables, mind maps, and so forth, all of which resulted in a written report being put together.

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The use of the Focus Group Discussion, as a contextual research method allowed for the construction of transnational "knowledge" which was daily summarized and matched up with some statistical data. With this method, power is transferred to the participants who lead the discussion and decide what the most pertinent topics are. Part of the data gathered is used as starting point for this article.

Therefore, the object of this paper is a discussion of how women are in a fragile position in the labour market as a central concern in labour social policies. It analyses the attribution of social benefits to women and families, on the basis of women discussion.

Our research questions are: How did labour and family social policies for gender equality emerge and evolve in Europe? What measures were implemented in Belgium, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Portugal within the European context? How do women from each country interpret these policies?

In order to achieve this we start by focusing on how different countries with different locations in Europe, in geographic, power and development terms, manage to produce social policies that open the field for equal citizenship and rights. This problem gains greater pertinence within the context of fragmentation and destabilization of the labour market which does not provide the best context for work insertion and progression, either for the recognition or empowerment of women or men. Simultaneously, the international general economic and financial resection does not seem to provide room for the creation of jobs that would guarantee the human right of autonomous survival for all.

1. Emergence and Evolution of Gender Social Policies in Europe

Especially since the mid 90s, the European Union (as a cluster of countries) and the European countries (its member states) have concentrated on the production and implementation of social policies, which aim at promoting equality between women and men. This came as result of the recognition of gender equality as an important political issue, not only to guarantee women's citizenship enlargement but to promote democracy as well. Women's movements all over the world gathered at the Beijing Summit in 1995 and made the citizens and decision makers concentrate on gender issues as a problem of human development. The Beijing Summit brought to light that women rights are essential both in of themselves and in their role to edify peace and prosperity. It made governments and non-governmental international organizations move to try to develop a set of instruments to turn Beijing's claims into reality (Beijing, 1995).

According to Ruth Lister (2003), the Beijing Summit, as a process and an outcome, constitutes a milestone in the development of feminist citizenship internationalist praxis that is still currently being edified. Beijing expressed the will and thought of the feminist net that had preceded it. As Lister puts it, feminist intervention has been crucial to an international understanding that "human rights are women rights", it was collective international action on the part of women—recognized in 1993 in the United Nations Declaration—that lead to this conclusion in the Vienna Conference about human rights. In a similar line of thought, Rosiska Darcy de Oliveira (2009) attributes to the Beijing Summit the broadcasting of a different beginning to the twenty first Century, where the meaning of work, among other dimensions of human life, needs to be questioned.

The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action (1995), the Convention to Eliminate all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979),¹ the Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)² about women, peace and safety, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, 2000) were based on one another to offer a detailed plan for the future, on the basis of freedom without fear and misery. It aimed at better access to work, as a guarantee for economic independence, autonomy and

¹ "The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, is often described as an international bill of rights for women. Consisting of a preamble and 30 articles, it defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. The Convention defines discrimination against women as "...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."

By accepting the Convention, EU member states commit themselves to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms, including: to incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women; to establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination; and to ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises."

CEDAW (1979). <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>>.

² Resolution 1325 (2000), Adopted by the Security Council at its 4213th meeting. 31 October 2000 <http://www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf>.

self fulfilment. These guidelines reflect the awareness that no progress will be made if women rights are not at the core of all these efforts (Beijing, 1995).

Access to the labour market, the possibility to earn a salary and to be involved in decision making about the use of their time, as a "resource of citizenship" (Lister, 1999), may embody and many times limit the exertion of political, economic, social as well as cultural rights (Lister, 2003). Therefore, the constraints imposed on women in the path towards occupying rightful positions in the labour market constitute a limit to their citizenship in terms of the possibility to choose a career or in between careers, within the view of happiness and self-fulfilment. This does happen, even though the Communitarian Right guidelines aim at implementing gender equality, as a law, and different member states have made an effort to translate it into rules and legislation (hard law) (Palma Ramalho, 2004).

Particularly in the 1990s and also in the 1980s, European gender specific policy has been sustained on the principle of equal opportunities in the labour market. As referred by Meier & Lombardo (2008: 481) "Equal opportunities was enshrined in Article 119 EC (now 141) on equal pay for equal work and in a number of legally binding directives in the areas of equal pay, equal treatment in employment and working conditions, and equal treatment in social security."

Though, as they refer to it, the concept of equal opportunities seems short to assure women with a desirable equality of outcome, a concept that other views contest due to its limits, as we will further see. Hence, the focus on equality of outcome arises in the EU as a consequence of litigation about this matter in the European Court of Justice. It opened the field for the emergence of political strategies, which include positive action measures and gender mainstreaming. The academic and political discussion around recognition, in the framework of the claim for cultural rights, is not alien to this either.

Therefore, there is a need to underline that gender equal citizenship should address "not only a formally equal legal status of men and women but also the elimination of barriers to a full participation in social life and of biases to an equal valorisation" (Meier, Lombardo, 2008: 482). According to this view, the struggle for equality must address different means, such as equality before the law, the implementation of positive actions or other differentiating treatment, and so forth, which would provide women with the opportunity to gain space in the public sphere and greater civic participation. In this sense, one may say that room seems to be opened to the attainment by women of a type of cultural citizenship embodied in communication and dialogue, within a communication-based society (Stevenson, 2003).

Though, whereas great progress can be observed in the legal arena, there are still great lacunae between the apparent protection of women, in juridical terms, and the effective social and economic conditions many women live in (Amaral, 2004). Their insertion in the labour market is seen as a nodal point in this article. To be noted that "EU formal definitions of citizenship based on the concept of equality, while promoting legal gender equality and acknowledging the existence of gender obstacles to the enjoyment of an equal citizenship for women, are not by definition translated into policy initiatives transformative of traditional gender roles" (Meier, Lombardo, 2008: 482).

Rosário Palma Ramalho (2004) summarizes in a useful manner the development of gender equality in the Communitarian Right, emphasising the development of six main areas since 1975. These areas articulate with work and denote a pertinent evolution. It started with the normative provision of the Roma Treaty, in article 119, which had a very limited character. It only established equality of remuneration between men and women. Therefore, the set of prerequisites in the primary and secondary Communitarian Right and the *acquis of soft law*, that today constitute the communitarian right for equality, comprise a great advancement.

As referred by this author, these areas include equal pay for equal work between women and men (Dir. 117/75, 10.02.75); equal access to employment, job conditions, career and professional training (Dir. 76/207, 09.02.76); equality in social security (Dir. 79/7, 19.12.87 and Dir. 86/378, 24.07.86); equal treatment in the universe of independent and rural workers, including maternity protection (Dir. 86/613, 11.12.86); maternity and paternity protection (Dir. 92/85, 19.10.85); parental leave (Dir. 96/34, 03.07.96); guarantee of effectivity of rights in terms of gender equality in what concerns the partition of the onus of proof in case of gender discrimination (Dir. 97/80, 15.12.97).

As Rosário Palma Ramalho (2004) puts it, the principle of gender equality, produced on the basis of the European Community Treaty, (article 2), is considered today as one of the pillars of the European Union. This helps to underline the positive formulation and transversal character of this principle. Though, there is the need to insist on the difficulties to put this legal principle into practice.

Within the same concerns, Meier & Lombardo (2008: 484) also discuss "the limits of the concept of equal opportunities in bringing about equality of outcome." As they refer to the introduction of this problem in the EU arena legitimated positive action measures, which, in turn, resulted in the approval of a Communication on positive actions aimed at amending Directive 76/207/EEC and at including a

new provision in the Amsterdam Treaty. If this Directive proclaims the principle of gender equality in the access to employment, training, professional promotion and work conditions, in the same manner of article 141. 4 of the Amsterdam Treaty “sets the goal of equality of outcome and allows member states to introduce positive actions as a compensatory or preventive measure, thus recognising the discrimination women face as a collective and the need for a strategy of reversal.” And the new article 3.2 of this Treaty, with a focus on gender mainstreaming puts in place a more extensive concept of gender equality, by stating that in all its activities “the Community shall aim to eliminate inequalities and to promote equality between men and women” (ibid., see also CIG, 2007).

In its turn, Article II-23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU states that “equality between women and men must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay.” Nonetheless, as these authors illuminate, this represents a progress when “compared to an *acquis communautaire* mainly centred on equality at work, as it entails a more encompassing concept of gender equality” (Meier & Lombardo, 2008: 485).

In the next session we will give a short overview of the location and history of the four countries which were discussed by the group of women, in order to provide a clearer understanding of the ways they try to foster gender equality through social policies.

2. Countries’ Recent History and Current Position in Europe: Laws and Practices

A short overview of the recent history of Belgium, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Portugal helps to emphasize some parallel events which shape their current positions in Europe. Belgium and the Netherlands, in 1957, were part of the small group of signatory countries in the origin of the then European Economic Community (EEC). If, on one hand, such circumstances allowed these countries to participate effectively in the definition and construction of the EEC political fundamentals and terms of action, on the other, it gave them a long period to solidify their position among the member states. Portugal joined the community in 1985 in a quite fragile position, and had a small chance to intervene in the decision making process and had weak compliance to the European requisites. In its turn, Lithuania only joined the European Union in 2004, and made a significant effort to comply to the community at all levels. These different periods of European integration must necessarily have had an impact in the social policies in the different countries, namely in what concerns the earlier or later reflection and production of policies for gender equality within a European framework.

3. A Glance at Countries’ Policies: Some Examples

The policies for gender equality in the labour market and the inherent social security policies concerned with social support and redistribution are the main focus of this point.

Data showed that in the Netherlands the concern about gender equality has been present since 1986. Since then, men and women receive similar social security benefits, for instance, through the access to the same retirement pensions (Cattrysse, 2004). The social security system in Belgium has also developed efforts towards gender equality through legal measures and the contributions of beneficiaries. Though, inequalities still prevail at the level of unemployment and health funds and in peoples’ retirement pensions. This is due, in particular, to the atypical and precarious professional careers of women, which stand on the conciliation between part-time work and housework.

Portugal went through a very long period of 48 years of dictatorship—a totalitarian and oppressive fascist regime, which lasted up until the Carnation Revolution¹ of 25 April 1974. Only then some opportunities were opened to women in the labour market, and in social security policies as a result, which announced the principles of universality and equality, among others (Law 28/84, 14 August). In 1979, Decree-Law 392/79, 20 September, established the equality of opportunities and positioning between men and women in work and employment. Later on this was revoked by the Law 99/2003, 27 August (see CIG, 2007).

In its turn, Lithuania went through fifty years of Soviet Occupation (1940–1990), a period when it was subjected to a authoritarian, so-called socialist, state capitalist one party regime, which resulted in strong economic and citizenship recession that put at risk people’s social rights. Lithuania only started its process of democratic change after its rupture from the Soviet Union. According to the First Periodic Report on the Implementation of the Provisions of the Convention of the United Nations “on the

¹ The Portuguese revolution is called such due to the total absence of violence even though it was performed by the army with open support from the population.

elimination of all forms of discrimination against women” in Lithuania, “in compliance with the UN recommendations and EU guidelines on the issues related to equal opportunities, on 1 December 1998, the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania passed the Law on Equal Opportunities which came into force on 1 March 1999”¹. It defines and prohibits sexual discrimination, regulates relationships in labour market and education system, and prohibits sexual harassment.

Later, on 1 January 2003, in an attempt to get closer to Western European law, parity was consolidated in the new Lithuanian Labour Code. Interestingly, in 2007, the Global Economic Forum considered Lithuania the country with the greatest degree of progress in the field of “sexual” (sic) equality, in what concerned employment of women and men. It got an honourable third place, straight after Finland and Sweden (*Saukienė*, 2008). Finally, at the end of 2009 the European Institute of Gender Equality was launched in Vilnius.

4. Social Benefits Attributed to Women and to Families: Building on Empirical Data

Social benefits attributed to women and families, within the diverse areas under the scope of social security and social assistance, are another relevant aspect to point out in order to understand the conditions behind insertion of women into the labour market. Table 1 brings into evidence women’s views about the social benefits attributed to them in their different roles, in terms of its adequacy or lack of it. At first sight it becomes clear that social benefits vary widely in between the central countries and the (semi)peripheral countries. Social systems in Belgium and in the Netherlands are described by women as powerful, well developed, and consistent, when compared with Lithuania and Portugal.

Table 1. Women diagnose of the social benefits attributed to women and families in Belgium, the Netherlands, Lithuania and Portugal

Countries Areas	Belgium	The Netherlands	Lithuania	Portugal
	Coverage			
Health	High	High	Average	Average
Education	High-average	High	Average	High
Single Mothers	High-average	High-average	Low	Average
Elderly Women	High	Average	Low	Low-average
Children	High	High	Average	Low
Retirement Pensions	High	High	Low	Low
Training and Qualification	Average	Not applicable	Average	High
Maternity Support	High	High	High	High
Support to People with Disabilities	Average	High	Average	Low-average
Unemployment Fund	Low-average	High	Low	Low

Source: Focus Group Discussion (04-2008)

A global view of this table gathers representations of women and brings to light that central countries are perceived to have higher levels of social protection. Concerning Portugal, participants only attributed the best level to Education (because compulsory education is free for all), Training and Qualification (an area that has been subject to quite an investment in the last few years), and support during Maternity. Other social benefits are described as medium, medium-low and low. Social benefits coverage is seen by Lithuanian women as poor, in most cases, except for the protection to maternity. This is contrary to the representatives of the central countries whose view of the social policies in their home countries is very positive in all areas. Education is mainly seen as a public benefit and health is located in between the private and public responsibility in the four countries (information not introduced on the table).

It is important to note that the provision of adult qualification and training, a social milestone in Portugal and in Lithuania, lacks applicability in the Netherlands due to the high level of qualifications of the population, and as a result of the high loans and public subsidies to education. As a matter of fact,

¹ <<http://www.hadobaan.com/convention-elimination-forms/53277/Convention-on-the-Elimination-of-all-forms-of-Discrimination.html>.10.07.2010>

particularly in the last decade, in Portugal, state investment in free adult training has increased significantly. Centres for Second Opportunities have been opened, according to Dispatch n. 11, 203/2007, which recognize, validate and certify workers' qualification and professional improvement.¹ Though, costs for higher education charged by public education institutions are still very high. Even though high educational costs are common to the four countries, state support has a positive correlation to educational costs. This means that the higher the costs, the higher the support. As central countries have the higher costs, their public support is higher than in Lithuania or Portugal (OCDE, 2007).

Maternity benefits and day care, which are seen as social measures that promote gender equality and parity over family responsibilities, also deserved attention. As a matter of fact, the principle of conciliation between professional and personal life, which is reinforced by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, arises as one of the greatest obstacles to labour equality of condition.

If many women give up their professional careers in order to become mothers that have time to educate and care for their children as well as for housekeeping, many other women have to give up having or starting their families in order to take over their professional work, for a variety of reasons, sustenance of family income in particular. Pregnancy frequently comes together with the family's concern of being able to ensure their children a decent life. In this sense, social benefits attributed to women in the central countries as well as the possibility to work part time were seen as positive for women as they assure better life quality. Women from (semi)peripheral countries are not entitled to the same "choice" as they have to contribute to the financial support of their families.

The legislation to support maternity and paternity, which allows couples to choose who will take the maternity and paternity leave, is another positive example of a social benefit that is contributing towards the change in the gender order. Based on women's discussion, only in Portugal maternity benefits were considered medium. Even though equality of rights and obligations between fathers and mothers has been predicted in the Portuguese Constitution (art.68) and has been required since 1984 (Law 4/84, 5 April), which consecrates that "Parents are equal in rights and obligations in what concerns children support and education," only in 1999 (Law 142/99, 31 August) the maternity leave was increased to 120 days. During this period mothers are entitled to receive their total salary. Recently, in 2009, aiming to reinforce equal gender equality in couples, the social protection system elected the incentive to give birth as a priority, reinforcing the rights of the father and implementing the sharing of parental leave by the couple (Decree – Law 91/2009, 9 April). According to this decree, parents may choose to keep the 120 leave or they may prolong it to 150 days, with 100% subsidy when the leave is shared by both parents, or even 180 days, with a subsidy of 83%. During pregnancy women are also entitled to free doctor appointments, medical examinations and hospitalization (APF, n/d). This new decree also increased men's paternity leave from 5 to 10 compulsory days (5 before and 5 after birth) and ten non-compulsory days in the first month during the parental subsidy. Though, couples may choose who is going to enjoy the leave when they both work. When fathers opt to use the 120 days of leave, it is compulsory for women to return to work 6 weeks after birth (CIG, 2007).

In Lithuania, women are entitled to 2 years of maternity leave (Law X-1400, 20 December 2007), in the 1st year they receive their total salary, and then it decreases to 85%. Starting in July 2010, maternity leave will suffer constraints. It will decrease to 90% in the first year, and to 75% in the 2nd. The paternity leave lasts for 1 month with a full salary (MSSL, 2010). After their maternity leave period, women may try to be reintegrated in their former work posts. Though, employer willingness to reintegrate them after two years of absence and distancing from the competitive structure is to be questioned.

In the Netherlands, women are entitled to 16 weeks of maternity leave, 6 before and 10 after birth, keeping the same wage, whereas in Belgium they are only entitled to 15 weeks of maternity leave. They receive 82% of their total wage in the first four weeks, and this is reduced to 75% from then on (Missoc, 2006). Paternity leave is extremely limited in these countries, 3 compulsory days for Belgian fathers and 2 days for Dutch fathers, full paid. Interestingly, Lithuania is the country that seems to provide better maternity benefits and for a longer period.

If, on the one hand, the social benefits introduce new forms of support to the family organization, and try to deconstruct gender stereotypes in the private sphere, on the other, reality shows that most "care" work is attributed to women. Day care is quite frequent in central countries that promulgate laws to support families, which make accountable the government and employers. Since 2007, in the Netherlands, employers have to contribute to day care services as they are to attribute fathers and mother a subsidy for children nurseries. Young fathers and mothers that are still studying or looking for

¹ See http://www.cenfim.pt/oportunidades_main_en.htm for detailed information. "CENFIM integrates the network of the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences Centres (CRVCC) accredited by the National Accreditation System of the Directorate General for Vocational Training (DGFV), Ministry of Education."

a job are the ones that most benefit from this, as they are issued a special subsidy by the *Belastingdienst*, a Dutch organization supported by contributor taxes. Belgium is also very aware of this problem and has developed several efforts to support birth and child development. They have invested in the restructuring and renewal of day care infrastructures, and have focused particular attention on policies aimed at female and male conciliation between work and family.

Whereas in the two central countries employers and the government have promoted actions to support families, in Portugal and Lithuania the day care system is seen as very expensive and underdeveloped. Yet, in Portugal, even though day care is diluted in a net of public, private and cooperative (mix) systems, the public pre-school educational system seems to be a good example of the Portuguese efforts to support families. The public pre-school system was officialised in 1980, Decree-Law 542/79, 31 December, which was aimed at contributing towards the correction of the discriminatory effects of socio-cultural conditions in the access to the school system (art.1b). Since then, this system has been exempting or reducing school fees according to the family income. Though, the state infrastructures are not enough to ensure each child a place in these public institutions. This still constitutes a serious problem for young couples with children, which articulates with their allocation in structures of class, social and professional status. This helps to emphasize the pertinence of state provision of day care to help families in their search for employment, to increase the birth rate and, in particular, for our interests, to promote for women equality of condition in the access and progression within the public sphere of paid work and other fields of social life.

In Lithuania, in compliance with the provisions of the Law on Social Services, in 2007, provision of social long-term (short-term) and day care was started in municipalities to almost 4 thousand people, out of whom almost a half (45 percent) comprised of children deprived of parental care and children at social risk (Six Report, 163). According to the SocReport 2006-2007 (MSSL, 2007), services provided by children day care centers are considered to be essential in helping to deal with and decrease the number of socially dysfunctional families. As referred in this document "According to the data of the Children and Youth Division of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, ... in 2006, about 4,200 children visited children day care centers, including 3,600 children who received social and educational services on a continuous basis. Children day care centers provided services to 2,500 families, including 2,100 families that received such services on a continuous basis" (MSSL, 2007: 114). As a result of these statements, we may infer that day care in Lithuania is not yet generalized to the overall population but has had to invest in priority areas, in a time of generalized world crisis.

Conclusions

The comparative study of labour market policies setting and implementation in what concerns providing women with the possibility not only to work but to focus on the development of their professional career arose some interesting features. First of all, the study helped to emphasize the difference between establishing European orientations and national policies and its effective implementation in peoples' daily life and well being. Even though several policies have formally been put into action, in the four different countries, in what concerns women's insertion in this unsettled field of social life, it seems that there is still a lot to be done in this area. In general terms, even though some juridical efforts have been made in recent years to support families, to make parents accountable for their children and, somehow, support insertion of women into the labour market, it seems that great structural changes are still needed to provide for effective gender equality. For example, in so-called developed countries like Belgium and the Netherlands, measures have been developed and implemented to support families, as well as in respect to child and elderly care, so this is releasing women from this traditionally female job. In newer EU Member States these policies are still emerging. In this specific case, Portugal has rhetorically adopted such a care policy but did not manage to implement it fully yet, whereas, in Lithuania, care is still considered to be a woman's job and priority areas such as children at risk and dysfunctional families are increasingly being addressed. In general terms, one must infer that nowadays a growing number of women (and also an increasing number of men) in Europe have to deal with different but difficult challenges in their daily life and work.

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BELGIJOS, OLANDIJOS, LIETUVOS IR PORTUGALIJOS MOTERŲ BALSAS: ŠALIŲ SOCIALINĖ POLITIKA EUROPOJE

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Santrauka

Per paskutiniuosius 30–35 metus susirūpinimas lyčių lygiomis teisėmis pilietiškumo aspektu lėmė politikų įvairovę, kurių tikslas sumažinti nelygybę darbo rinkoje, šeimoje, politikoje ir t. t. Tokios politikos atsirado visame pasaulyje, įskaitant Europos Sąjungą, ir buvo pritaikytos nacionalinėse erdvėse. Remiantis dokumentų analize ir pokalbiais su moterimis Belgijoje, Lietuvoje, Olandijoje bei Portugalijoje, šiame straipsnyje analizuojamas moterų požiūris į jų šalyse vykdomą Europos socialinę politiką ir bandoma atskleisti, kokiais būdais ši politika kiekvienoje šalyje atsižvelgia į moterų lygias teises kaip prioritetinę sritį. Pirmiausia straipsnyje rašoma apie lyčių problemos atsiradimą ir teisinės bazės Europoje kūrimą. Po to analizuojamos efektyvios moterų įtraukimo į darbo rinką priemonės ir socialinė pagalba, priklausomai nuo šalies. Moterų pasakojimai, paremti konkrečiais pavyzdžiais, atskleidžia šalių socialinę politiką.

Empiriniai duomenys, kuriais remiamasi šiame straipsnyje, buvo surinkti Fokus grupės diskusijos metu. Pradžioje buvo aptariamasi asmeninės patirtys, vėliau surinkta medžiaga buvo perkeliama į lentelės, minčių žemėlapius ir galiausiai apibendrinta ataskaitoje. Fokus grupių diskusijų metodas yra kontekstinis tyrimo metodas, leidžiantis konstruoti informaciją bendradarbiaujant grupėje, kai įgaliojimai yra perduodami dalyviams, vadovaujantiems diskusijoms ir nusprendžiantiems, kokios temos yra labiausiai tinkamos. Todėl atrodo šis metodas būtų tinkamiausias siekiant paskleisti moterų nuomonę.

Straipsnyje keliami šie tyrimo klausimai: Kaip Europoje atsirado ir plėtojosi darbo ir šeimos socialinės politikos, orientuotos į lyčių lygybę? Kokios politikos priemonės buvo įgyvendintos Belgijoje, Lietuvoje, Nyderlanduose ir Portugalijoje, atsižvelgiant į Europos aktualijas? Kaip atitinkamų šalių moterys interpretuoja šias politikos kryptis?

Pagrindinės sąvokos: socialinė politika, lyčių lygios teisės, pilietiškumas.

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