

A LOOK INTO PORTUGAL – FULL-TIME WORK VS. PRECARIOUS WORKING CONDITIONS?

Claudia Dal-Bianco

On political level Portugal seems great regarding gender equality. It has already its fifth gender equality, citizenship and non-discrimination national plan, has a high percentage of women on the labour market working full time and was the first European country to sign the Istanbul Convention, a UN treaty on violence against women. But still the gender pay gap is high and political decision makers, academics and NGOs consider gender equality not to be satisfactory in Portugal. What are the causes for that? Did the economic crisis have an effect on the situation? What are the obstacles to increase gender equality?

Full-time employment – Solution for gender equality?

Portugal doesn't fit the South-European stereotype when it comes to the employment rate of women. Since the last 13 years Portugal had almost a full employment for women. The reasons for that are the colonial war and the emigration wave of the 1960s and 70s, says sociologist Sara Falcão Casaca, from the Lisbon School of Economics and Management. During that time, because the men were away, women had to provide for the household and became the breadwinners. The European Union set a goal in 2000 to reach 60% of women's employment in the labour market by 2010. Portugal already reached that goal when it was set.

But still the gender pay gap is 15,7%, according to Eurostat, and the equal pay day is March 6th, so women have to work 56 days more in Portugal to earn the same as men. Sara Falcão Casaca explains that gap with the differences between labour sectors. "Women don't work in high valued jobs, so they earn less", she says. Sandra Ribeiro, from the gender equality at work and employment commission (CITE), sees the in depth roots of discrimination of women also in the professional segregation. But this is not the only reason. "There is a penalty for those who have careers", says Sara Falcão Casaca. Sandra Ribeiro can agree with that: "The indirect discrimination is the problem. For example, men and women in Portugal don't share the same family responsibilities."

On average, men spend 96 minutes per day in unpaid work, when women rise up to 328 minutes per day. For Teresa Morais, deputy minister for Gender Equality, the causes for the persistent gender differences are cultural. They also explain why the number of women in high positions is still very low – in Europe only Malta is below the 7% of Portuguese women in leadership.

Lídia Fernandes – an activist from the Anti-Austerity-Campaign – says that it is a simplification that the situation of women is always worse than those of men because the labour market employment of both genders is almost the same. The problem of women is their precarious situation in the labour market. Social protection is very weak and the childcare system is minimal. There is less than 50% coverage, she says, and the mind-set is still a traditional one, according to which women have to take care of the children.

The changes after the economic crisis – are there any effects?

Sara Falcão Casaca sees dramatic changes in Portugal since the country is under the bailout program. "Most of the fundamental achievements are at stake. The economic independence of women is at risk", she says.

Helena Pinto, Member of Parliament for the Leftist Block (left wing), says that the effects of austerity are dangerous because they push women to their homes again. Underneath austerity measures, she believes, is an ideology that is conservative, putting pressure on women. Pedro Delgado Alves, Member of the Parliament for

the Socialist Party (centre-left), also thinks that the crisis had an effect on gender equality, especially on family life and the labour market.

The coalition in the government, between social democrats (centre-right) and Christian democrats (right), believes the crisis didn't have an effect on gender equality, especially not in the labour market. Teresa Morais argues that male unemployment was higher because the crisis hit especially the construction sector.

But, since 2008, 257.000 female jobs disappeared in the services sector, says Fátima Messias, from the Federation of Trade Unions CGTP-IN. Pedro Delgado Alves also says that there aren't more women in the labour market, but that the situation for men is worse than before.

Sara Falcão Casaca also thinks that the gender gap has been reduced due to degradation of men. During the crisis a lot of people lost their jobs, and people are still scared of losing them. The search for information regarding labour rights is now bigger, says Sandra Ribeiro, but the complaints are less since the crisis, even though the labour code changed and the new trend is flexibility.

Sara Falcão Casaca warns that 2011 Portugal had the lowest rate of women in the labour market since history and the decline in employment rate is concerning for women's empowerment and their economic independence. "The trend is that women don't leave their jobs and they go on taking precarious work. Sometimes they are even paid less than the minimum wage", states Lídia Fernandes.

The number of women who are dependent on the minimum wage (€485) is increasing. Around 15% of women and 9% of men earn the minimum wage, says Fátima Messias. Unemployment is a problem in Portugal: 1 out of 4 people at working age don't have a job and 44% of the people don't have social protection, because if you are unemployed for more than 3 years than you are not in the statistics anymore.

The situation on the labour market is not the only aspect causing gender inequalities. Lídia Fernandes adds the privatization of social care led by the government. "This means three decades of backlash for gender equality. The topic of health care is critical, we don't want social care to be seen as a women's problem but it affects women more than men", she believes.

Cuts on health, education, etc. hit women because they are still the care takers. "The basis for welfare state is shaking now", says Bernardo Coelho, researcher at the Investigation Centre for Social Studies. Also Pedro Delgado Alves sees an indirect influence on gender equality. Childcare systems are a problem, he says. "The society is still traditional. Women have to do the care work." Sofia Roque, from the social movement Precários Inflexíveis, recalls that "when we think of women's emancipation the social state was important".

Change of working conditions – Precariousness or insecurity at all levels of live?

Bernardo Coelho sees gender equality at stake because it is linked to living conditions. How can you build gender equality if your whole live is at stake? "Insecurity means to be between the limb of unemployment and precarious work", sums up Sophia Roque.

Precarious working conditions means having a monthly or weekly contract or not having a regularly working schedule. Fátima Messias says that only 46% of women have regular working hours, which means people's lives are deregulated. Especially the younger generation is suffering from precarious working conditions, 60% of women between 16 to 25 years and 33% of women between 25 to 34 years have a precarious job in some form. Bernardo Coelho knows that women are active in the labour market but a new situation is that they are the only providers. Researchers call it a new family model in which women are the breadwinners, but at the same time responsible for care and housework, which results in a new overburden of women.

Long-term effects of the crisis?

"Before the crisis, social rights were under attack and now fundamental rights are attacked", says Fátima Messias. Data shows that the public health services are in crisis and it is getting worse. The child mortality today is higher than in 1974. "This all happens in the name of paying the debt on time. But it is destroying our future", warns Fátima Messias.

Before the bailout, in 2010, 1.530 couples were without a job, but in 2013 the number increased up to 13.187 couples. Women lose their power and men are in a dramatic situation being without a job. "We have an identity crisis", states Sara Falcão Casaca.

The sustainability of Portugal is at risk because the fertility rate is very low. "In 1960 we had more than 219.000 births registered and 2013 less than 83.000 births", compares Fátima Messias. The Portuguese population is aging and Sara Falcão Casaca believes the main causes for a lot of couples are not having a job. "How can they have family planning projects?" she asks. Bernardo Coelho also sees the fertility rate as a problem related to the unemployment rate. "If you talk about austerity you have to talk about employment and family planning", he says. It is a problem for the social system.

The government takes the problem of the fertility rate as an important issue and is analysing policies to promote conciliation between life and work, which can include, in the future, part-time work and other flexible solutions.

Helena Pinto fears a backlash when it comes to discussions on how to increase the fertility rate because which political way you go on this topic sets a new trend.

In Sara Falcão Casaca's opinion, part-time is the main pattern of sex segregation in the labour market, especially in careers development. "This is a trap for women and reinforces traditional structures", she says. Also Helena Pinto thinks that part-time pushes women to their homes. Fátima Messias says that "this is a placebo effect of policies from the government which doesn't tackle the structure of the problems". Trade union federation CGTP-IN is against promoting part-time jobs.

The history is repeating itself, Fátima Messias says. The emigration rate is high. "We are returning to the poor Portugal from the 1960s", agrees Sara Falcão Casaca. In 2011/2012 222.396 people were leaving the country. "Those figures deny the principals of the democratic revolution. Young people are going abroad because they cannot live and work with dignity. There is a lack of hope", she goes on. The most qualified Portuguese generation is going to other European countries or ex-colonies (Angola, Mozambique, Brazil).

What are the solutions?

Helena Pinto's first goal is to stop austerity. In her opinion, you cannot develop Portugal when you cut salaries by almost 30%. Parliamentarian Pedro Delgado Alves says that different measures are needed, because austerity has economic consequences which mean less growth, unemployment, less tax income. Public investments are necessary. Therefore, the deadline for the payment should be longer than three years.

Fátima Messias says that social protection should be given to everyone, the minimum wage should be at least €515, and the working hours should be reduced to 35 hours/week. Sara Falcão Casaca sees also the alternative to solve the problem in reducing working time.

Sandra Ribeiro and Teresa Morais say that you need to work in the field of education so women don't choose stereotypical jobs.