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Beleva, Iskra

2010

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/52665/>
MPRA Paper No. 52665, posted 07 Jan 2014 14:41 UTC

EFFECTS OF TRANSITION ON GENDER EQUALITY AND FEMALE EMPLOYMENT IN BULGARIA

Author: Iskra Beleva, Senior Research Fellow, Ph.D. in Economics

The pre-transition gender equality and female employment

Studying the effects of transition on gender equality and female employment one should remember that during the communism women and man were obliged to be in employment and their equality in it was guaranteed by the Constitution and the labour law. The equality meant no differences regarding access to employment and payment, working time and working conditions, etc. Some groups of women e.g. pregnant women and mothers with small children, had some privileges regarding female working conditions and working time.

In spite of that, there was a gender inequality caused by the distribution of male and female labour among economic sectors, branches and activities. Thus, in 1988, an year before the radical political and socio-economical transformations women presented 49,9% of total employment, 49,3% of employment in Industry; 47,5% of employment in Agriculture; 57% of employment in Administration, but only 20% of employment in Construction and 21,5% of employment in Transport. Female employment was overrepresented in Trade (65.0%); Education (75,8%); Health (73,8%); Finance and Insurance (82.2%).¹ The concentration of female labour in branches and activities where labour was lower paid reflected the level of female wages. The lower level of payment of female employment was due to, as well, to the lower positions women had in the administrative hierarchy.

From unequal female employment to female unemployment during the first years of transition

For the period 1989-2007 female employment had decreased by 26.2% compared with 25% decrease for male employment. The dynamic of changes differed depending on the speed of economic restructuring and the branches under restructuring. Thus, during the first years of the transition (1989-1997) female employment decrease was higher compared with male employment decrease, while after 1998 male employment started to decrease faster. The restructuring of the so called “heavy industries” i.e. mining and quarrying of energy-producing materials” pushed up male employment, while the closure of textile, clothing, and foods enterprises reduced female employment.

As result unemployment jumped up for both sex, however, during the period prior to the economic growth (after 2000) female unemployment leaved behind male unemployment.

The economic growth after 2002 return many women, but more man, back in employment

The increase in total employment after 2002 (by nearly half a million people)) absorbed many women as a result of which female unemployment went below male unemployment. Nevertheless, employment growth for the period 2002-2007 for men was 17%, while that for women –14.5%. This means that the employment friendly economic growth created employment for about 260 thousand men compared to 194 thousand women.

¹ Workers and state employee, Central Statistical Office, 1989, p.13.

Moderate changes in the pattern of female employment

The economic growth since 2000 has increased employment opportunities significantly and, as a result, - unemployment went down to 6,6% in mid 2008. However, the sector and branch distribution of labour does not change significantly with regard to the pattern of female employment. The sectors, where female employment dominated e.g. education (79,1%) hotel and restaurants (62,5%), financial intermediation (67,5%) and health and social workers (77,9%) are almost the same. Male employment prevails significantly in other sectors e.g. construction, transport, electricity and gas, etc. Something more, the gender sectoral segregation index for the period 2001-2005² pointed out an upward tendency.

Within the existing gender and occupational segregation as a positive feature should be outlined the lowering of the gender pay gap during the last eight years. To a high extent this fact reflects the more consistent income policy and the promoted policies for gender equality in employment and mainly in career development.

The governmental employment policy, introduced in the present years aims at promoting gender equality and encouraging women's employment. Since 2002 a number of national activities were implemented, incl. strategic and annual planning of gender equality, developing annual national programs and promoting gender mainstreaming.

The main fields of intervention of the governmental policy for encouraging gender equality and for guaranteeing equal opportunities related to increasing female employability by training and education, opportunities for more flexible employment patents so as to easy the combining of family and professional obligations, programs for gender equality in the public administration, as well as development of mechanisms for observing and evaluation the effectiveness of gender equality policy. An important aim of policy intervention is to diminish the existing stereotypes about the role of men and women in the social and economic life.

Several programs and projects could be pointed in this respect: e.g. The national program "Supporting maternity" creates opportunities for employment reintegration of young mothers; "Improving the capacity of the executive power bodies for guaranteeing the gender equality (2006-2007)",³ Project "The youth thinks globally, acts locally on the issues of gender equality"⁴; Project "Gender budgeting"⁵ –Project "Gender evaluation of the Bulgarian employment strategy"⁶ etc.

The present crisis and its' effects on gender employment

With regard to the current crisis and its' effects on female employment the expectations differed in a large scale between "very pessimistic and quite optimistic". The optimism is based on the economic growth of about 6% in 2008 and although declining, but still positive economic growth in 2009. The pessimism follows from the expected production decline as a result of shrinking internal and external markets. There is no doubt that many sectors were female employment dominate will be effected negatively like textile, clothing, financial

² See in National Thematic Report "Gender Segregation on the Labour Market: Roots, Implications and Policy Responses in Bulgaria", External report commissioned by and presented to the EU Directorate-General Employment and Social Affairs, Unit G1 'Equality between women and men'.

³ 127 representatives of the central and local power, legal system, organizations, social partners, media, have been trained.

⁴ 4 youth forums and international final conference have been carried out.

⁵ 6 regional training seminars and international final conference have been carried out.

⁶ 4 seminars and a national survey for implementing measures for encouraging the economic activity of parents with small children are carried out.

intermediation, hotels and restaurants, etc. In respect with these expectations the Government in collaboration with the social partners prepared an anti-crisis program envisaging a package of measures to protect employment. Some of these measures include reduced working time for enterprises and branches with production decline instead of dismissals. On behalf of the state budget employees will be compensate so as to keep their wage level for a certain period. Female employment, dominating in the public sector – health, education, administration, is supposed to be preserved by projects funded by the state budget. The same pattern is supposed to be of help in some “male dominated sectors” like construction and transport.

So, at this stage of the crisis, which is still at its initial stage in Bulgaria, the effects on employment started to occurred but with no specific gender dimensions.

December 2009