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Labour

17 July 2015

GENDER EQUALITY IN THE LABOUR MARKET

Twenty years since the [Beijing Platform](#) and gender equality is still a relevant topic. In spite of appearances that much has been done, gender discrimination is still present at many levels. That much has yet to be done is evident if we analyse [the report on the EU strategy for equality between men and women post-2015](#), and the proposals that it includes.

In the labour market, gender inequality is present at all stages of employment, from recruitment, to career progression, to remuneration, to termination of employment. As for each one of these stages, there are already a number of legal instruments - albeit not as known as they should be - which seek to eliminate inadequate practices.

However, if we had to choose only one measure to efficiently fight gender inequality, then priority should be given to those instruments that promote the fair allocation between men and women of time spent on family and domestic matters. This, in fact, is the warning of the OCDE report of December 2014, "[Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes](#)". The reason for this is simple: statistically, women tend to bear the main brunt of bringing up children and caring for the elderly. Culturally, this role is internalized and perpetuated as a task that falls mostly to women. In countries in which families tend not to give up on



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two salaries, this results in carefully managed timetables, so as not to jeopardize women's availability and performance at work.

At the same time, we are seeing the unavoidable strengthening of protection of parenting rights. The exercise of said rights sometimes results in prolonged absences from work, which would not be a cause for concern if these did not primarily fall to women, and, in turn, questions, albeit unspoken, about a female candidate's future family plans still persist in the recruitment process. Any selection process is already hindered, since the recruitment of women brings with it the potential of absences from work, whether they be long or short. So, what can be done? Promoting the recourse to legal instruments that change this tendency, incentivizing men to opt for more flexible working conditions – e.g. working from home or on a part-time basis -, or, although this would require a legislative amendment, providing for a more equitable distribution of parenting leave.

Only the normalization of such a distribution will allow to eliminate unwanted differences and to do away with rooted prejudices: apart from absences related to the pregnancy and recovery after giving birth, not considering the odd exception, the division of family responsibilities should be as equitable as possible. Once the difference that triggers the prejudice has been attenuated, gender equality would overcome a large obstacle that is preventing its full coming into force.

And why should we be committed to a society where gender equality is a fact and not an objective? Because we should, without the need for any further justifications. If, however, the case still needs to be made, it should be noted that gender equality is also a good management move: making certain professions harder to access for half of the world's population is a



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waste of investment and talent. It is a bad decision because it excludes regardless of merit. But also because women are consumers, and, as such, it is efficient to have as diverse a sample as possible in companies. Moreover, it is the most rational option: the countries with the best gender equality records are also those with the highest productivity rates. And also because, where there is a lack of gender equality women tend to sacrifice their personal fulfilment for their professional one: consequently, without gender equality there can be no sustainability in terms of birth rates and social security. Finally, because only in this way can a virtuous circle be created: men and women who are socially and professionally engaged and committed are responsible for shaping future generations that are more inclusive and tolerant.

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