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## Expanding the Public System of Household Assistance: a Pilot Experiment in Slovenia

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Irregular paid domestic workers with their activity in domestic sphere and domestic work, reorganize notions of welfare and the relationship between domestic and paid work in European societies in a fundamentally private, anti-egalitarian and exclusionary way. In the EU policies, the regulation of informal domestic work is deemed as a win-win situation: it addresses the needs for more and better home and family services, while at the same time provides for more and better quality jobs for hard-to-employ people. This paper, while discussing work - family conflict in Slovenia, confronts the situations of the two groups of women: on one hand, those doubly burdened by productive and reproductive work and hence forced to transfer part of reproductive labor to irregular domestic workers, on the other hand, long-term unemployed women who are facing social exclusion and poverty, so they undertake the work of other women in the grey economy. The focus of the paper is on the discussion of the potential impact of regulation of paid domestic services as policy measure for reducing the social exclusion of long-term unemployed women and work - family conflict.

**Key words:** domestic workers, labor market, intersectionality, gender (in)equality, welfare state, social exclusion, work - family conflict

### Introduction

Domestic work has a long history and today it is still (or again) a major topic on the EU's agenda, along with other related issues, such as the relationship between the family and the state, aging of the population, irregular work, (un)employment, economic cleavages, gender inequalities, feminization of migration, and citizenship. The undervaluing of care work within European citizenship practices (Hobson, 2000), combined with a growing commitment to gender equality and with the aging of the European population, led to the "crisis of reproductive work" (Gregson and Lowe, 1994) or "care deficit" (Lister et al., 2007) and increased the dependence of European middle-class households on the out-

sourcing of care and domestic work to people who are denied the full (social) citizenship rights (immigrants, unemployed, poor).

Although it is generally assumed that Eastern European countries are mainly the countries of origin of domestic workers seeking better life in the rich West, this is only one side of the coin. Deep structural changes that have been experienced in Eastern Europe during the (post)transition period, such as polarization between the well-offs and the poor, the high unemployment rate, the intensification of working conditions, changes in the welfare system, privatization of public care services, the already existing high rate of women's full-time employment and traditional gendered division of labor in the private sphere, influence the growing supply of,

and demand for paid domestic work. The informal evidence points to an increase in paid domestic work, including in East European middle-class households where it still remains an invisible phenomenon. As with regard to Slovenia, during the past decade, it was possible to observe an increase in the supply of, and demand for household cleaning services and childcare, signifying the type of work that had all but disappeared during the socialist era. Apart from the gendered division of domestic labor and the rapid aging of population, the main factor encouraging this phenomenon is social changes brought about by the capitalist system, particularly long working hours for professionals (including women) and the long-term structural unemployment caused by the restructuring of the economy (Hrženjak, 2007).

The study of the current growth in irregular paid domestic work in Slovenia, which is particularly acute in two-career couples with children and single-parent families, was carried out as part of the project *The System of Household Assistance* (SIPA) within the EQUAL Initiative of the European Social Fund. The project was accomplished as a research-application project trying to put to the test the idea that the introduction of a public system of household assistance would reduce the work - family conflict in households with pre-school children and enable the creation of new quality workplaces for the difficult-to-employ groups, long-term unemployed women in particular. Both groups have already turned to the black market for a solution. The empirical part of the study consisted of two questionnaires for two target groups (households with pre-school children and long-term unemployed women in the Ljubljana region) that were used to gauge the demand for paid domestic work and the interest to seek employment in the area of domestic work. Based on the analysis of the questionnaires, a pilot experiment on paid domestic work was organized, whereby five long-term unemployed women were employed for a period of six months in thirty households in Ljubljana. After the six months of the pilot experiment we used quantitative and qualitative evaluation in both target groups to detect the advantages and disadvantages of such a system of paid domestic work.

The first part of the paper presents the context of the pilot experiment confronting the situations of the two groups of women in Slovenia: women who are doubly burdened by productive and reproductive labor and hence forced to transfer part of reproductive labor to domes-

tic workers who sell these services on the black market, and long-term unemployed women who are facing social exclusion and poverty, so they undertake the work of other women, though paid, but under undefined working conditions and deprived of the rights and duties arising from labor relations. The paper then proceeds to give a more detailed presentation of the pilot experiment and the organization of paid family work in households with small children. Finally, the results of the pilot experiment are put into perspective through a critical assessment of the potential impact of the professionalization and regulation of paid domestic services as a policy measure for reducing both the social exclusion of long-term unemployed women and work - family conflict.

Many of the authors dealing with the issue of paid domestic and care work imply that the outsourcing of household work is unethical, arguing that the practice is uniquely exploitative and that to participate in it is to maintain the oppressive structures of gender, race and class (Lister et al., 2007; Lutz, 2007). In this paper, it is argued that it is not possible to ignore the empirical situation which reveals the increasing need for domestic help (not only because of the class and gender inequality in sharing domestic work, but also because of the professionalization of work, the introduction of the culture of long working days and population aging) and the fact that an army of unemployed, poor and immigrant women already work as domestic workers within the irregular domestic service market, because for them, that is the only means of survival in the current system. In contrast to the studies that examine paid domestic work starting from the norms of an ideal society, our point of departure is the actual empirical situation along with the norms of social justice and equality. It should be emphasized that paid domestic work is not an unvarying phenomenon, but it constitutes a domain where various social groups meet, various services are offered and various needs are satisfied. Therefore, a consideration of paid domestic work as a uniform concept would appear controversial. It is not possible to apply the same evaluation criteria to the purchase of domestic services dictated by the lifestyle of rich social classes, and that necessitated by disease, old age or debility. It is necessary to distinguish between the needs of, for example, a single mother who decides to hire a childcare service on a black market because kindergartens do not operate in the afternoon or during weekends, and the needs of rich couples without children

who hire cleaners to increase their spare time. Similarly, it is necessary to distinguish between the situations of unregistered migrant women, and, for example, that of younger retired women who from time to time help young families with childcare and household work for the purpose of social reintegration. This article does not look into paid domestic work in general, but into the concrete social context of two concrete social groups: families with pre-school children and long-term unemployed women in Slovenia. The aim of the pilot experiment was to contribute to the constructive attempts to overcome the precarious situation in the field of domestic service on the supply and demand side by introducing the public subsidized system of paid domestic help for both social groups, thus reinforcing the welfare state in that respect. The fundamental problems frequently identified in the field of paid domestic work are irregular live-in forms (Anderson, 2000), the global care-chain (Ehrenreich and Hohschild, 2003) and the privatization/commodification of care (Williams, in Lutz, 2007). The pilot project presented here introduces regulated paid domestic work under live-out arrangement; it disrupts the global care-chain by engaging long-term unemployed local women, and proposes the socialization of domestic work through development of public network of agencies, rather than its privatization and commodification.

## 1. Contextualization of pilot experiment

### 1.1. Women combating work/family conflict

In Slovenia, as elsewhere, domestic work is still to a large extent perceived as non-work, or as a "labor of love" performed by women, so that it is not considered a "real" work. Furthermore, as work performed within the private sphere, it is not a subject of public interest; it is viewed as non-productive work that does not produce surplus value, but is primarily oriented towards consumption and is not paid. The perception that domestic work is not work leads to the invisibility of the double burden shouldered by contemporary women i.e. that of paid productive work within the public sphere, and non-paid reproductive labor within the private sphere. There is a saying that behind every successful man there is a woman. More pertinent to our context would be to say that behind a successful woman there is another woman who does domestic work for her.

Slovenia is considered to be a country in which private and professional duties are well balanced, at least on the level of the relevant policies. In the research study *Combination Pressure: the Work-Family Balance in European Countries*, Slovenia is described as the "Sweden of the South," (Van der Lippe, 2006) thanks to the available and accessible network of publicly subsidized high quality kindergartens, one year long, 100% paid maternity and parental leaves, tax relieves for families with children and recent systematic promotion of active fatherhood and father's leave. Traditionally, the percentage of women participating in the labor market has been high, and women have pursued working patterns similar to those pursued by men. The full-time employment rate for women in Slovenia is one of the highest in Europe. In 2005, women accounted for 61.3% of the active women working population, which is a figure that exceeds the Lisbon target of 60% (European Commission, 2006). Only 11% of women had part-time jobs in 2004, compared to 7.9% men (CEDAW, 2006). Data on gender structure of employment in different groups of occupations show that although the highest share of women is among clerks (65,3%), service workers, shop and market workers (63,8%), it is also considerably high among professionals (60,2%) (Kanjuro Mrčela, 2006).

In the school year 2007/2008, there were 811 kindergartens in Slovenia catering for 68% of all children; of these, 787 were public kindergartens, and 24 were private ones. However, less than one third of 1 - 3 year old children were enrolled in kindergartens (The Statistical Office of the RS, calculation as of June 30, 2007). These data indicate that, despite of the adequate network of public kindergartens, parents with children in the age group 1 - 3 have problems with childcare, and the insufficient enrolment capacity of kindergartens is not the only reason for that. The more likely reasons are a conviction that a child so young needs domestic care resembling mother's care as much as possible, and the reluctance on the part of employers to grant sick leaves, which are often needed by parents with young children in kindergartens. Purchasing of childcare services on the black market is also stimulated by the fact that a child cannot be admitted to a kindergarten before he/she is 11 months old. However, although parents are entitled to a fully-paid childcare leave, given unequal sharing of childcare leaves between partners, and knowing that many women, particularly entrepreneur and professional women, cannot afford a one-year absence from work,

many need childcare services during the child's first year. Furthermore, the kindergartens opening hours (6.30 to 17.00) do not meet the needs of parents who work non-regular working hours, which is rather a rule than an exception in the world servicing a "24-hour society" (Cox, 2006). Accordingly, the most frequent arrangement employed is informal childcare for children aged 1 - 3 (grandparents, paid baby-sitters), while most children older than 3 receive institutional care in kindergartens (Kanjuo Mrčela in Stropnik, 2004: 23-24).

In Slovenia, the care for children and other members of family needing care is unequally divided between genders. Childcare leave is predominantly used by women in its entirety. According to the Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Affairs, in 2006 only 921 men shared the childcare leave with their partners, while in 2007, this figure rose to 1,008. The research *Parents between Work and Family* shows that only 3-4% of parents work part-time after the end of childcare leave; among those, however, 90% are women (Kanjuo Mrčela and Černigoj Sadar et al., 2005). According to the European Commission (2005) data, women spend 2 hours and 23 minutes a day with their pre-school children (under 6), while men spend only 56 minutes a day.

Household work is also unequally divided between genders: women spend 4 hours and 57 minutes doing domestic work, while men spend only 2 hours and 39 minutes (Kanjuo Mrčela, 2005). Households with pre-school children do not receive public assistance with domestic work unless they care for an older and sick person as well. The Social Security Act ([www.mddsz.si](http://www.mddsz.si)) contains a provision on family assistance which includes family support services, assistance at home, and social services. Centers for social work and some other actors (social enterprises) are offering domestic help services as part of social care through public work mechanisms engaging various target groups of hard-to-employ persons. This is an important element of social policy, but restricted to social care for elderly and disabled people, in an effort to replace institutional protection. The standards in that case require that the employee be a nurse, housewife or nurse-attendant. This service comprises domestic help, assistance in maintaining personal hygiene and assistance in maintaining social contacts. On average, during the first half of 2007, a person providing direct social care for a user did it 16.3 times a month, producing on average 66.4 minutes of effective work per visit (Smolej et al., 2008). Given the growing trend towards

population aging (in 2020, 20% of the population will be over 65) and the fact that more than half of the older people who need full care, entirely depend on informal social networks, particularly their families, the state's assistance in the care for the elderly is utterly important, but in Slovenia it is deficient. The care for the elderly and the sick is shouldered primarily by women. The data on the use of sick leave to look after family members, either children or the elderly in need of special care show that the burden is mostly on women - women in Slovenia are six times more often absent from work than men, due to caring for family members (*Basis for the Resolution on the National Program for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men*).

The empirical research (Hrženjak, 2007) that included 400 households with pre-school children in Ljubljana and Maribor showed that the support provided by social networks is mainly limited to parental support. On average, parents provide 16 hours a month of help with domestic work. However, many cannot hope to receive help from their parents for various reasons: because of geographical distance, or because their parents stay active in old age, or are debilitated, or the problem is the relationship and the like. In attempting to reduce the time needed for housework, women continue to resort to, or have been returning to, domestic workers to relieve them from the burden of housework at least several hours a week. Yet this conclusion applies only to women who can afford that financially. Seventeen percent of respondents in 400 households with pre-school children stated that they are already hiring domestic services; most of these were women in managerial positions, educated women and women still involved in the process of education. The largest percent, 66,2%, hired domestic workers for occasional cleaning; 42,6% occasionally hired child minders, a further 11,8% hired child minders on a daily basis, and 2,9% hired daily domestic help. The rest of the 83% of women stated that they would need occasional cleaning and tidying up services, followed by ironing and washing services, childcare, cooking, fetching children from kindergartens and assorted other tasks (Hrženjak, 2007). One respondent said:

*"I have three children, so we already have a lady who helps - usually once a week. That seems to be quite necessary, if you have a family and a job on top of that. My husband also helps; we share work, so usually I undertake certain tasks and he others, but there is*

*always something left undone, so I think that a third person must be there for general help once a week.*"

Another respondent said:

*"We used to hire students who came to tidy up once a week or once a fortnight. We were satisfied, including with the price."*

Therefore, the majority of economically active women in Slovenia work full-time (rather than, for instance, choosing to work part-time or take longer breaks in their careers because of childcare) and they are faced with the traditional asymmetrical distribution of domestic and care work between partners. Men's inclusion in the division of labor within the private sphere through the concepts of "new fatherhood" propounded by modern family policies is an especially slow process and a "protracted" revolution (Hochschild, 2003) in Slovenia, too. The intensification of work, employment uncertainty, and the "ethic of paid work", which is the result of the transition to the capitalist system, have had an effect both on men and women. But as women carry most of the burden of domestic work, this new social situation has brought them into a particularly unenviable position (Rudd, 2000; Pascal, Manning, 2000; Šadl, 2006).

## 1.2. Long-term unemployed women and irregular paid domestic work

The change from the socialist system to the capitalist one, in the early 1990s was also marked by the restructuring of the predominantly industrial, state-owned economy into the private market economy. Many companies went out of business during this process, with the textile industry, which traditionally employed mostly women, suffering especially hard blows. The "turbo-capitalist" management logic led to massive layoffs of older women in particular, even in companies which did not collapse. Job advertisements began to feature a new requirement – "preferred age up to 35." Unemployment during the transition period especially affected older women with low education levels, and their unemployment continues to be a structural problem of long-term unemployment in Slovenia. The following data show that one among the very vulnerable groups of women on the labor market is older women with low education, living in urban areas. According to the Employment Service criteria, a

long-term unemployed person is a person who has been out of employment for 12 months within the period of the last 18 months, or, in case of persons younger than 25, for 6 months within the last 8 months. According to the Employment Service data, at the end of October 2006, there were 81,302 unemployed persons registered with the Service, of these, 44,938 were women. The long-term-unemployed group comprised 40,955 persons, of these, 22,696 were women; 12,117 were older than 40; 9,246 long-term unemployed women had level I education, and only around 1,538 had VI or VII educational level. In Slovenia, 9,966 long-term-unemployed women have less than 5 years of employment. The greatest number of long-term-unemployed women is registered with the Employment Service local branches in the largest urban areas: Ljubljana, Maribor, Celje and Murska Sobota. According to the Employment Service data, the group of long-term-unemployed women includes 494 foreigners, with the majority of these coming from ex-Yugoslav countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro in particular (Employment Service of Slovenia, 2006). There exist significant gender differences in employment rates for older population (55 – 64): while in 2004 the male employment rate in this age group was 40.9%, the rate for women was only 17.8% (Kanjuo Mrčela, 2006).

Contemporary informal household workers in Slovenia belong to various social groups. Many are younger retired women, employed working class women, unemployed women who never sought a regular job, and students. What they have in common is that, for them, paid household work is not a means of livelihood, but a source of extra income that to a certain extent may enhance their economic situation and quality of life. However, a large number of contemporary household workers are long-term unemployed women for whom this work is the only means of survival.

As part of the SIPA project, 16 long-term unemployed women have been interviewed in focus groups at the local Employment Service office in Ljubljana. The purpose in conducting the focus groups was to find out whether the target group of long-term unemployed women was truly interested in regular jobs within the domestic services sector and which negative and positive sides they associated with that kind of work. It turned out that many among the long-term unemployed women already worked as domestic workers within the grey economy sector.

*Veronika has been registered with the Employment Service since 1991. When she found herself without work and income, she asked a local shop owner if he knew someone who was looking for domestic help. It took only half an hour to make all the arrangements. The family owned two surgeries; her workday was to be 8 hours long; on Saturdays they needed a little help now and then, and Sundays were to be off days. The monthly wage was approx. 625 euros in cash. However, she ended up as a "Jill of all trades" as she put it. She tidied up the house and the surgeries, washed, looked after a 14-month old baby, cooked separate meals for the child, the family and their dog, and so forth. Her work day sometimes extended to 10 or 11 hours, and she also had to work on Sundays. In the three weeks she persisted with that household, she lost 6 kilos.*

Below is the story of Lidija, who earns her living as a live-in household worker. She found herself in the no-escape position following an illness and the resulting loss of her job.

*Lidija has been registered with the Employment Service for one and a half years. She had worked for six years as a cleaner for a private cleaning service when she fell ill and had to have a surgery. Her limited-term contract expired while she was on sick leave, and her employer refused to extend it. She has now recovered and has been looking for steady work. However, the first question from every prospective employer is why she lost her job, and as soon as they learned that she was seriously ill, the job interview was over. At the moment, she receives social aid amounting to 150 euros; she pays 29 euros per month for social insurance and 59 euros for pension contribution. She has a rich experience of household cleaning jobs, some of them bad, some of them good. Some households paid well, others cheated her, and some "exploited her to the last drop." Her rates are 5 to 5.5 euros per hour for ironing, window cleaning and general cleaning, and from 3.3 to 4.2 euros for tidying up. She especially likes to do master cleaning and has become known for it. Usually, the family leaves her the keys on Fridays, when they go away for the weekend, and collect them from the post-box or at the neighbors' on Sundays when they return to the clean apartment. Lidija lost her tenant right in the process of denationalization, so she has been working for an older, ill gentleman with alcohol problem, in exchange for free accommodation and food. She looks after him*

*day and night. Her concluding thought was: "My dears, I'll never get another regular job."*

All but four respondents have already provided, and still provide, domestic help services in households, and/or have had experience in providing care for older people or care for a sick relative.<sup>1</sup> Their experiences are mixed, both positive and negative. Positive experiences mainly stem from the employer's responsible attitude, involving agreed payment and work defined in advance, and a respectful attitude of household members towards domestic workers. Negative experiences mainly relate to exploitative attitude that involves low or delayed payments, imposing of additional work and sexual harassment. Speaking about the main problem arising from unregulated domestic work offered on the black market, the respondents highlighted the lack of definition of the scope of work, which is a basis for exploitation. The interviewees emphasized the necessity of regulation which would comprise a work contract, social protection and an agency in organizing work. When asked whether they would perform domestic work in households if it were regulated and its scope defined, their answers reflected mixed feelings – some would accept such work, others would not. The most important reservations involve low pay, exploitation in the sense of work overload, and low respect for their work on the part of household members. At the same time, their answers revealed their overall view that domestic work services were socially undervalued and equated with the cleaning job, which gives it a negative sense, and to which our respondents attached the lowest value.<sup>2</sup>

Social, economic, and demographic changes in Slovenia, just like in other European countries, give rise to bigger demands for services of paid domestic and care work. In Slovenia, the purchase of domestic services is generally not a status symbol but rather a need arising from the time deficit in two-career households with children. For the time being, people buy and sell services of this kind on the black market, which involves quite some risks for both sides. It leads to the invisibility of reproductive work as socially relevant work that especially burdens certain segments of society. For domestic work-

1 In Slovenia paid domestic work is a hidden social phenomenon which neither those who perform domestic work nor those who hire domestic workers are keen to discuss. This fact undoubtedly makes research difficult.

2 In Slovenia, the job of a cleaner in public places is associated with the image of migrant women from ex-Yugoslavia.

ers this means undefined working conditions and absence of social security, plus total social invisibility. Although reducing undeclared work has become a priority within the national employment strategy, still not enough attention has been focused on the sector of domestic work where undeclared feminine work is really high.

## 2. The Pilot Experiment of Paid Domestic Work in Households with Small Children

### 2.1. Logistics of the Pilot Experiment

To find out if the introduction of the public system of household assistance would reduce the work - family conflict in households with pre-school children and create new quality workplaces for the long-term unemployed women, the SIPA project used the financial support provided by the EU Program EQUAL to organize a six-month pilot experiment. During that period we organized paid domestic work for thirty households with pre-school children living in Ljubljana.<sup>3</sup> The social enterprise Centerkontura, which took over the execution and coordination of the pilot experiment, employed five domestic workers for the period of six months, four of them full-time and one part-time, paying them a fixed net monthly salary of €443<sup>4</sup>, plus travel and subsistence costs. In Slovenia, this amount comfortably fits into the range of wages for care work calculated according to the public scheme defined in collective agreements, and in 2006 it was considered a decent living wage. The working conditions were as follows: temporary employment for the period of six months, an eight-hour working day consisted of five hours of effective work plus three hours for transport and lunch, and flexible working time.

The pilot experiment organized paid family work using the system of vouchers and mediation, while ensuring relative constancy of each worker and reserving a time-slot with the household for her services. The households received the vouchers at the beginning of the pilot experiment. One voucher covered one paid hour

of family work, and the households received 15 vouchers every month.<sup>5</sup> When the work was finished, households gave the appropriate number of vouchers to the workers, who brought them to the coordinator at the end of each month. The vouchers enabled the coordinator to keep track both of the housework done in each household and of the amount of paid hours completed by each domestic worker. The mediation (coordination) between the households and the domestic workers enabled the arrangement of working hours, changes in the schedules, and the replacements of workers when they were absent or dissatisfied with working conditions, as well as the resolution of conflicts, etc. Even though much of the arranging was done directly between the households and the workers, the mediation gave both sides a very important feeling of security and trust, and it simultaneously enabled supervision and organization.

### 2.2. Recruitment troubles

The research study that covered 100 long-term unemployed women in Ljubljana showed that 64% of them would accept employment in this area for a respectable payment. Agency-provided jobs were preferred by 35% of women, while 15% would opt for self-employment status; 12% of respondents would work for someone they already know, and only 3% would choose to be entrepreneurs themselves and organize domestic work. During the early stages of the pilot project organization, we faced great difficulties in recruiting workers, which threatened the progress of study. Since the goal was to employ persons from the target group of long-term unemployed women, we initially tried to engage households and women from the group of job seekers who participated in the survey. When they were presented the employment opportunity within the pilot project, 11 women out of 23 who attended the presentation meeting (out of 100 invited) at the local Employment Agency expressed interest, but only 6 of these attended the related training organized by the *Sezam* association<sup>6</sup>. Initially, *Centerkontura* was able to re-

3 The households that were provided with help with domestic work were drawn from a sample of households participating in the empirical study described above, who were ready to take part in the pilot experiment, too. The total number of households at the beginning was 30. The period of the pilot experiment was from April 14, 2006 to October 15, 2006.

4 In December 2006, the average net salary in Slovenia amounted to €780 and the minimum one to €261.

5 The households got 15 hours a month of free domestic work during the pilot experiment. One hour's price for the domestic worker which burdened the project was €10.94, including material and coordination costs.

6 That was an ad hoc training in the form of one-day workshop on first aid, hygienic minimum in households and communication with households. The organizer of that training, *Sezam*, offers sporadic childcare services on the market.

recruit only three women, so there were only three domestic workers participating in the project during the first two months. We succeeded in finding a fourth employee two months later, and the fifth, who worked part-time, four months later. For these reasons, the average number of hours per month was below 15 per household, while workers worked somewhat more than 5 effective hours per day. The realization of the project in terms of working hours was approximately 2/3 – there were 2700 hours of domestic work anticipated within the period of six months, compared to the actual 1813 hours worked.

Many of the reasons for declining the job offer are understandable and arise from the conception and organization of the project. First, the term of the project was too short, because a person re-registering with the Employment Service after being six months in employment is not entitled to unemployment allowances any more. In that case, the reason for turning down the job offer is what Cox (2006: 48) conceptualizes as “poverty trap,” whereby it is difficult for long term unemployed women to enter the paid workforce because of the benefits they would lose. Therefore, they prefer to continue to work “off the books”. Second, as it turned out later, our demand for flexible working hours was not quite realistic, since a large portion of domestic work could be organized within the time frame of regular working hours, and this was a feature seen as extremely unattractive by prospective workers. It is possible that the interest would have been greater if our selection had been more targeted (e.g. a focus on long-term unemployed women who already work as domestic workers within the gray sector and would like to have regular employment), and had we been able to offer a one-year job with predictable working hours and more comprehensive training beforehand.

### 2.3. Observations

#### *Schedule coordination and travel logistics*

One of the main problems within the sector of paid domestic work is the incompatibility of demands for flexible working hours with quality working conditions. Domestic workers who offer their services on the black market usually work long, dispersed and unpredictable hours (Anderson, 2000; Cox, 2006; Lutz, 2007; Lister et al., 2007). In organizing the pilot project, we tackled this challenge by limiting from the outset

the number of hours to which a household was entitled, while also offering one or two afternoon or night shifts. The workers therefore enjoyed a relatively predictable and orderly working time; they could work for two households several days a week, 3 or 4 hours a day, thus exceeding an 8-hours working day and then having one work-free day, or they worked two days for one household 4 hours a day. The greatest part of domestic work was accomplished between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. Only 9% of hours were worked after 4 p.m. or at night. No work was required during weekends and holidays. The pilot project revealed that the households wished not only for steady workers but also for fixed time schedules, as a rule, during the morning hours. By including the option of an afternoon shift once or twice a month (e.g. to take care of children or escort them), the job of domestic workers was organized within a predictable and orderly time schedule.

Travel logistics also proved very important. Only one worker used her own car, while others depended on public transport. This proved to be extremely time consuming and represented physical burden for workers. The time used for traveling from one household to another was considered a part of the working time. Accordingly, services had to be organized in such a way that one worker covered households in the same district, which made easier her moving from one household to the next.

#### *Scope of work*

The participating workers kept a diary, recording the tasks accomplished, and analysis of these records revealed the types of work that were most frequently required. Obviously, the services required were not related to lifestyle maintenance of household (Anderson, 1997, 2001; Cox, 2006), but involved activities needed to maintain basic household hygiene and tidying up, meaning the tasks that were never in short supply in households with small children. The list is topped by vacuum cleaning, cleaning of the bathroom, ironing, dusting, kitchen cleaning, washing up, window cleaning, garbage disposal and washing of clothes. In addition to these most frequent tasks, there was also cooking, garbage sorting, and shopping for the household. There was a lot of floor cleaning, clothes hanging, collecting and putting away, wardrobe and door cleaning, oven and cooker cleaning, general kitchen cleaning including the cleaning of the fridge. It is evident from the diaries that



the majority of duties were repetitive cleaning tasks, meaning labor intensive activities that are the most physically strenuous and the most time-consuming category of domestic labor. The evaluation of the pilot project showed that master cleaning was a major source of workers' dissatisfaction with work. They perceive it as physically very hard work that should be evaluated separately and that requires a special organization of work activities.

The domestic work in this pilot was not limited only to household chores but also included attendance of and escorting children. However, the service of childminding amounted to no more than 10% of all the accomplished tasks in the pilot experiment. The interviewed households said that they needed domestic services primarily to be able to maintain basic household hygiene and do away with ironing and cleaning so that they can dedicate a few afternoon and evening hours to children.

Since most of employments are mainly inflexible and do not adjust to the needs of families in any aspect, the reconciliation of work and family life is a unidirectional process, meaning that the family adjusts to the employment entirely. Our respondents asserted that the issue here was the balancing of household tasks and time spent with children, and by no means the balancing of work and family life. A member of one household stated:

*"Cleaning is a problem when children are around. I don't know if anyone can do cleaning when kids are at home. In our home, one went out with the kids while the other did the cleaning. But that leads to partners increasingly drawing apart. I no longer saw my wife. All you can do is say 'hi' at around 10 p.m. when you sit down to watch TV, exchange a few sentences and you are already asleep. You have 10 minutes a day to spend with your partner, and that is the main problem."*

Partners are forced to choose whether they will use a few spare hours during late afternoons and evenings to be with children or to tidy up. Usually they choose to spend time with children and postpone household work until weekend. Or, one partner (usually father) spends time with children, while the other does urgent household work. Slovenian parents of pre-school children who are forced to choose between household work and socializing with children, which is at the heart of the reconciliation of work and family life, give priority to children. Those who

can afford it, increasingly choose to outsource household work. As one respondent said:

*"We want to spend afternoons with children, because in the morning, they are in kindergarten anyway. Those few afternoon hours, in fact not many, to hire a childcarer for these hours, it is actually unnecessary and in my opinion even harmful... It's really fine when you don't have to worry about the hygiene of the apartment; otherwise, it is postponed until Saturday morning."*

Apart from showing that parents prioritize socializing with children over tidying up, our experiment also revealed that some parents already hire a childcare service instead of sending their children to kindergartens. As domestic workers who met childcarers during morning hours explained, these are mainly students or younger retired women, who:

*"... do not do anything else but only look after the child; they make food only for the child and do not even need to collect toys. I first have to pack away toys before I can start vacuuming or washing the floor. This takes me more than half an hour."*

This indicates that there exists a certain social hierarchy of childcarers and cleaners. However, it is interesting that childcarers' hourly rates on the black market are radically lower than those of cleaners (which may be quite high).

## Relations

Literature on paid domestic work gives extensive reports on patronization, exploitation, discrimination and humiliation, which occasionally turn into real abuse and slave-like relationship (Anti-Slavery International, 2006; Fish, 2006; Skřivánková, 2006; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Parreñas, 2001; Chang, 2000; Anderson, 2000; Chin, 1998; Schester, 1998; Bakan et al., 1997; Heyzer et al., 1994; Thornton, 1994; Sanjek et al., 1990; Rollins, 1985; Cock, 1980). Our coordination and agency in organizing paid domestic work for this pilot project had positive influence on the relationship between household members and domestic workers. Both parties found it easier to establish needed trust and limit exploitation. Sixty-six percent of households thought that they had established a pleasant relationship with the

domestic workers. Asked about the relationship they established with the domestic worker, one respondent said:

*"A friendly attitude. More than once I told her, 'Now take a cigarette break', because Ana had back problem and I did not want her to strain too much. We had quite a friendly relationship. She has a grandson the same age as my son, so we talked a lot about it..."*

However, in focus group discussions, workers frequently spoke of exploitative attitudes, although some said that they were well accepted within the household. It transpired that the difference in the perception of the relationships between the workers and households lies primarily in their different perception of the content of work. The household members held that the tasks performed by domestic workers were mainly everyday household tasks, but domestic workers had the impression that they primarily did master cleaning. There is certainly a link between the relationship that develops in the household and the type of work a domestic worker performs. Focus group interviews revealed that the feeling of being exploited was mainly linked with master cleaning tasks, since the workers expected easier, everyday tidying up work. A precise definition of domestic worker's tasks beforehand would definitely reduce such misunderstandings. Some domestic workers established friendly relationships during the term of the project, and assessed these as the element that most contributes to satisfaction with work. One domestic worker thus described her positive experience:

*"I am really surprised; today, for example, I got cake, coffee and a juice. They really accept you like that, I mean, they wait for you. Interesting."*

The other added:

*"That makes you willing to work, motivates you."*

Another domestic worker had a different experience:

*"During the first week it was really hard, and you also look a lot into yourself, thinking, what was that? Was it all right? It's strange when you begin, do you believe me? You come to a family; you don't know where to look for the vacuum cleaner, where everything is. I don't know,*

*and at this lady's, when I arrived they said 'the cleaner has arrived.' I told them, 'listen, I'm not a cleaner.' It was hard for me there sometimes."*

The quality of a domestic worker's job largely depends on the culture of the household, on the relationship that develops, and in particular, how a household values their work. Households greatly vary in that respect.

### *Empowerment*

In addition to coordinating schedules, handling travel logistics and mediating between the households and domestic workers, the coordinator of the pilot experiment also promoted the empowerment of domestic workers in situation when they could not decide whether or not to reject the required work. The coordinator encouraged women to take a 5-minute break every two hours, to ask for assistance with hard physical labor (e.g. moving of a sofa), to reject tasks that seemed dangerous (e.g. cleaning of outer blinds on higher floors), and to limit the overload of work. In so doing, she expected workers to negotiate the terms of work on the spot and intervened in favor of a domestic worker only if the household turned down her proposals. The coordinator was continually accessible on mobile phone, so the workers could call her whenever they found themselves in a predicament. The mobile phones for workers were provided to meet that specific purpose and were paid out of the project fund.

## **2.4. Evaluation**

It has to be pointed out that both samples (households with small children and domestic workers) were drawn from the respondents who expressed their readiness to take part in the pilot study, so it is not possible to speak of random or representative samples. Hence the results of the pilot project cannot be generalized to the whole population of Slovenian households with small children and long term unemployed women, but can still be a good indicator of a potential empirical situation. The pilot experiment did not unfold ideally and it revealed various problems involved in the regulation of paid domestic work, which continues to be the only precarious sector, even when regulated. Domestic work is physically strenuous and perceived as inferior by wider society. That explains the small number

of participants in the experiment, which caused difficulties at the time of recruitment and when a worker needed a sick leave, and made schedule coordination and travel logistics more complicated. Both sides, the households and domestic workers, listed several reasons why this type of work should remain unregulated. The participating households saw its advantages in greater flexibility, servility, domestic worker's motivation and lower costs of labor, all being features that arise from the relationship of dependence on the private employer. Domestic workers, for their part, saw advantages in organizing the work according to their own needs and wishes, and in a higher income unburdened by taxes and social and pension insurance.

Despite the qualms mentioned above, both parties assessed the experiment in very positive terms. In evaluation, we used two approaches: quantitative, using the questionnaire, and qualitative, involving focus groups composed of the majority of households and participating domestic workers. The participating households assessed the project and the idea of affordable domestic services as very positive. The majority (80%) said that their expectations were fulfilled. The problems mentioned included the lack of flexibility as a result of the small number of participating workers. On the other hand, 86,7% of households stated that they found the most suitable type of arrangement to be a fixed one, meaning regular daily and time schedules. That is to say that the flexibility mentioned above did not relate as much to flexible schedules as to the situations when a worker needed to be replaced. In the conversation conducted within the focus group, some admitted that they were not completely satisfied with the quality of work, particularly if they compared it to the services previously hired on the black market. In their opinion, the main reason was lower motivation among regularly employed domestic workers. As a solution, they proposed dividing a worker's payment into a fixed and variable part, with the latter depending on the satisfaction of an employer.

Domestic workers stated that their decision to take part in the pilot project was motivated primarily by financial reasons and by the need for communication, socialization and other activities associated with employment. They identified three main problems with the organization of the pilot project: insufficient number of domestic workers compared to the number of participating households; geographical dispersion of households and schedule-related problems when there was a few hours gap between

works in individual households. Because of the too few available workers, our travel logistics and schedule coordination occasionally failed. As to the positive sides of this work, the most often emphasized were good relationships with the household members and their respect for their work. Four out of five long-term-unemployed participants stated at the end of the pilot project that they would accept a domestic worker job if it involved regular employment including social security and pension insurance. The one who would reject such job stated that she did not feel comfortable in an intimate atmosphere of private homes, so she preferred cleaning jobs in public institutions. The privacy and intimacy aspects of paid domestic work definitely testify to its special character (Lutz, 2007).

The specific kind of organization employed in this pilot experiment was obviously chosen to resolve the specific problem of our target group, i.e. to balance work and family life in households with children. By contrast, the servicing of the growing EU population of older people needing care would require a different type of organization and services. Paid domestic work in households with children can be organized under modernized (Katzman, 1978; Thornton Dill, 1994; Ozyegin, 2001) live-out terms, while older people in need of care frequently require attendance 24-hours a day, meaning a live-in care worker. These workers are in the shortest supply in the EU countries.

### 3. Paid domestic work – the same as any other job?

In the EU, the transformation of unpaid work traditionally carried out in the private homes by women is increasingly seen by policy makers as having a potential for job creation (*Regulating domestic help*, A5-0301/2000). Developing domestic services is viewed as a means of creating jobs for those workers whom technological innovation had rendered redundant in industrial production. The regulation and professionalization of informal domestic work is seen as a win-win situation: it addresses the need for more and better home and family services in Europe, while at the same time it provides more and better quality jobs for hard-to-employ people. Regulation of paid domestic work would lead into creating new job opportunities for hard-to-employ people and into their social inclusion, as well as represent a measure taken up to help managing work - family conflict and ageing of popula-

tion. Undoubtedly, the idea opens up as many problems as solutions. Windebank (2007), for instance, argues that these services reinforce the gender stereotyping surrounding domestic work by transferring it from more well-off to less well-off women. The idea of opening up the new job opportunities in the field of domestic services and consequently the social inclusion of hard-to-employ people could be highly contradictory not only from gender equality perspectives but also from domestic workers' perspectives. Namely, it reaffirms the existing social relations by creating hard, poorly defined and low-paid jobs that are held in low social esteem and do not offer promotion options for marginalized social groups starting from weak social and economic positions. It is clear that unless appropriate action is taken through policy and workplace measures, the majority of jobs created will be of low skilled, poorly-paid, precarious and low status.

Meagher (2000), on the other hand, argues that most of the studies of contemporary paid domestic services are focusing either on global macro level or on individual micro level. In the first case, the studies discuss the global structural oppression and constrain thinking about remedies largely to the wholesale transformation of society. On the other hand, the predominantly micro level analyses of experiences and strategies focus on domestic workers' and women's individual responses to the plight of economic and cultural problems in their working lives. What is absent in the literature, argues Meagher, is the meso-level of institutional analysis. Remedies to domestic workers' problems that can be pursued through institutional innovation remain relatively unexplored, although strategies aimed at changing the distribution of domestic and care work between the market, state, households and civil society as well as strategies aimed at removing the discriminatory barriers that excluded ethnicized and gendered groups confront in the labor market could be highly relevant to the problems of paid household work. Nevertheless, she recognizes that although varieties of formalization can remedy many of the problems workers are vulnerable to in informal paid housework (fair contracting, protect against personal mistreatment of workers by householders and to various extent increase pay rates), domestic occupations retain a social stigma (Meagher, 2003: 133).

The dilemmas arising from the attempts to regulate paid domestic work are many. Should professionalization of paid domestic work be executed through occupational qualifications that require time-consuming procedures, an elabo-

rate system of education, of promotion, etc? Or should it be in the large scale a creation of new, unskilled job positions? Should specialized or integrated services be offered? How can the de-feminization of this work area be achieved? What measures should be adopted to support supply and demand? How should the supply on the black market be countered? The conclusions arising from the pilot project can contribute some recommendations to the consideration of the regulation of paid domestic work in Slovenia.

- The creation of new jobs through subsidies that would amount to approximately 50% of the gross wage of a domestic worker and of coordination and education costs would reduce the price of these services, make them more accessible, and would also create regular, organized labor relations for domestic workers. The subsidy would enable the survival of public social organization that carry out recruitment, education, and employment and the market promotion of these services.
- The wages of domestic workers should be attractive; otherwise they would not be competitive with earnings on the black market. At the same time, they should remain within certain limits in order to keep the prices down and make domestic services accessible to a wider circle of users, not only wealthy social classes. Having that in mind, it is recommendable to consider selective subsidies on the side of the demand (e.g. within the framework of family policies).
- The domestic work services should be defined accurately, including their content, working hours and rates. Both specific services (e.g. master cleaning) and integral services (e.g. shopping, cooking, escorting of children) can be offered.
- The quality of workplace is the most important element when creating new jobs within the service sector. Since domestic work involves harder physical labor, and since domestic workers are mainly long-term-unemployed women, frequently at an advanced age, effective work should be limited to 5 or 6 hours a day; the time used for transport from one workplace to another should be considered a part of working hours.
- Since this segment anticipates work with hard-to-employ persons, education should include motivation for work, the elements of psycho-social integration, and special stress should be placed on knowledge of the worker's rights and methods to implement them.

It should also devote attention to work/socializing with children.

- Coordination must be professional, accessible, and flexible and must be based on modern communication technologies. Both domestic workers and household members should have a feeling of confidence and organization. It should comprise mediation in conflict situations, advocacy, help with networking, self-organization etc. It should enable self-organization of domestic workers in the form of cooperatives. It should aspire towards the standardization of paid domestic work, towards quality working condition and de-feminization of this area.

Household services as public social services have the potentials for challenging mar-

ket norms in an inclusive way on both sides: for domestic workers in need of quality jobs and for households in need of quality services. These jobs need to be transformed into well-paid jobs involving democratic employer-worker-consumer relations, high-quality service and opportunities for occupational mobility. That way, the redistribution of domestic and care work between state, households, market and civil society would not rely on the existence/creation of servant underclass. The existing attempts to organize a public system of domestic and care assistance in private homes and regulate paid domestic work (Cancedda, 2001; Hrženjak 2007) show that professionalization and democratization of paid domestic work require commitment, including financial subsidies, on the part of the state.

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## Širenje javnog sustava pomoći u kućanstvu: pilot projekt u Sloveniji

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### Sažetak

Neregularno plaćene kućne pomoćnice svojom djelatnošću u sferi kućanstva i kućanskih poslova preustrojavaju značenje socijalne države, te odnos između kućanskog i plaćenog rada u europskim društvima na temeljno privatno, neravnopravno i isključujući način. U okvirima politika EU, regulaciju neformalnih kućanskih poslova smatra se situacijom bez gubitnika jer odgovara na potrebe za sve većim i boljim uslugama u kućanstvu i obitelji, dok istodobno pruža više kvalitetnijih poslova za teško zaposlivo osobe. Raspravljajući o sukobu posao-obitelj u Sloveniji, članak uspoređuje situaciju dviju skupina žena: s jedne strane onih koje su dvostruko opterećene proizvodnim i reproduktivnim radom te su zbog toga primorane dio reproduktivnog rada prebaciti na neregularne kućne pomoćnice i pomoćnike, a s druge strane dugoročno nezaposlenih žena koje su suočene sa socijalnom isključenošću i siromaštvom te stoga preuzimaju posao drugih žena u sivoj ekonomiji. Članak se usredotočuje na raspravu o potencijalnom utjecaju reguliranja plaćenih kućanskih usluga kao političke mjere reduiranja socijalne isključenosti dugoročno nezaposlenih žena i sukoba posao-obitelj.

**Ključne riječi:** kućne pomoćnice, tržište rada, intersekcionalnost, rodna (ne)jednakost, socijalna država, socijalna isključenost, sukob posao-obitelj