Women in low-skill work

Presentation of the study
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The team

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Objectives of the study

• Description + quantified analysis of low-skill work from a gender perspective

• Identification of best practices in the various national contexts and sectors

• Guidelines and recommendations for improving the social recognition and professional status of low-skill work and low-skilled workers
Selection of countries: CZ, DE, UK

- **Limited selection**
- But representing a *broad range* of diverging institutional settings and patterns of female employment – e.g. in
  - the level and structure of welfare state services and benefits
  - wage distribution and levels
  - the volume and share of service employment
  - female employment rates (+ part-time share)
Methodology

- Review of previous studies and literature on relevant issues
- Preparation of country reviews including pay data
- Comparative data analysis with the Labour Force Survey
  - Employment trends 1995-2005
  - Job quality in selected low-skill occupations
- Interviews with stakeholders
Structure of the final report

1. Trends in female labour market participation
2. Low-skill service sector – job prospects for (low-skilled) women?
3. Job quality in female dominated ‘low-skill‘ service occupations
4. Trends and best practices
5. Recommendations
1. Female labour market participation (a)
1. Female labour market participation (b) – female part-time rates
1. Female labour market participation (c)

- **Lower participation rates** for low-skilled women, particularly those with children
- Considerable **differences in part-time rates**
- **Institutional environment** in each country frames the extent and structure of women’s economic activity
  - i.e. the tax system, regulation of part-time work, the childcare facilities and the patterns of parental leave
2. Low-skill work – job prospects for women? (a)

- Employment in low-skill occupations has been increasing less (or decreasing more strongly) than employment in the other skill segments.

- Exception: UK – relatively strong growth of low-skill segment between 2000 and 2005
  - But not accompanied by increasing job opportunities for low-skilled employees.
2. Low-skill work – job prospects for women? (b)

- **Women have increased their employment in low-skill occupations** but
  - these gains are frequently largely attributable to the growth in part-time work
  - and have benefited women with low levels of formal qualifications to only a limited extent

→ It is too simple to equate **low-skill work** with employment opportunities for **low-skilled** (women)
3. Job quality in low-skill occupations (a)

- The three national reviews draw on **key dimensions of job quality** – namely
  - remuneration
  - workers’ voice
  - vocational training and skill development
  - working time flexibility and work-life balance
3. Job quality in low-skill occupations (b)

- Female-dominated low-skill jobs frequently go hand in hand with
  - low pay
  - unfavourable working and employment conditions
  - limited prospects for career development

- Reinforced by the predominant responsibility of women for the reconciliation of paid work and family life
4. Trends and best practices (a)

- **Remuneration**
  - national minimum wages (or other standards)
  - higher valuation of typical female occupations
  - Elimination of discrimination against part-timers

- **Industrial relations / workers’ voice**
  - Improving pay and working conditions on industry or establishment level
  - Agreements on training, working time and work-life balance for both men and women
4. Trends and best practices (b)

• **Vocational training and skill development**
  – Low skill level = high risk of low pay and poor working conditions
  – Training schemes + minimum standards for skill composition

• **Working-time flexibility + work-life balance**
  – according to the employees’ needs
  – Increasing availability (+ quality) of childcare facilities
  – Part-time strategies ambivalent from a gender-perspective
4. Trends and best practices (c)

• **Social recognition**
  – Closely related to pay and job quality
  – Term „low-skill work“ implies a devaluation of female-dominated occupations

• **Labour market policies**
  – Focus not only on the unemployed but also (or even more) on inactive people + returners
  – Training schemes for the low-skilled
  – Subsidies for low paid jobs may have negative impacts from a gender-perspective
5. Recommendations (a)

- Due to **several ambivalences** of encouraging "women in low-skill work" it is recommended
  - to focus not solely on the low-skill segment
  - to pay more attention on job quality + the general conditions framing female employment

- **Best practices** are inspiring but also limited
  - As most of them intend solely to facilitate but not to challenge women’s dual role
  - frequently not easily transferable to other countries
5. Recommendations (b)

- **Promotion of low paid work** in order to increase employment tends to disregard **gender-specific impacts** of such strategies.

- **Increased awareness of low job-quality as a problem** or crucial issue among stakeholders is essential for more effective measures to improve women’s labour market position.
5. Recommendations (c)

- There is a need for both
  - an increasing number of **good practice examples** and
  - considerable **changes in the national frameworks** shaping the patterns and conditions of female employment
    - in the political sphere
    - among stakeholders on the industry and establishment level
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