

The issue of gender equality is presently being analysed by many experts at various qualitative levels and with different (sometimes counterproductive) effects on social practice. In light of this claim it is important to stress the undeniably pioneering role of the Institute for Public Affairs when it comes to genuine sociological „capture“ of this agenda, focus on its current implementation effects and continuous monitoring of its reflection in everyday lives of men and women.

The publication of the editor and author Zora Bútorová (and a team of five other authors: Jana Andruchová, Janka Debrecéniová, Lýdia Marošiová, Martina Sekulová and Sylvia Šumšalová) *Here and Now: Probes into the Lives of Women 45+* is instantly likeable thanks to its original and pleasant form and visual adaptation. The chosen format and type of binding, authentic photograph on the front page, many stories and statements illustrating the experience of real women – these features are a testimony of authors' research aims and beliefs and suggest that the target group of potential readers is larger than just experts specialising in these topics. It needs to be pointed out that this study was published as part of the project Plus for Women 45+ by the EQUAL Community Initiative with altogether six planned publications.

The aim of the project is to „contribute to a fuller understanding of professional status and overall situation of women of 45+ years of age, as well as capturing the specific combination of gender and age stereotypes within various environments of the Slovak society“. The research results will be used in gender training – i.e. educational activities, but also to make society more perceptive towards gender and age issues within the framework of a directed social campaign. The aim of the complex of activities is also „to form a public policy that will serve to use labour potential of women over 45 and to strengthen their position in the labour market as well as within the society in general“.

*Here and Now: Probes into the Lives of Women 45+* is the second of six research studies and consists of four autonomous but at the same time in several ways complementary case studies. In any case, they have more in common than „only“ the qualitative approach: in-depth, semi-standardised interviews with different female respondents.

Sylvia Šumšalová in her study *When a hobby becomes a business: the experience of women from the Lučenec area* examines „the work and family lives of businesswomen over 45“ in the marginalised region of Novohrad in connection with the existence and assistance provided by the Happy Hand centre supporting female entrepreneurs in Lučenec (a branch of the Integra Foundation). The study describes the situation in the labour market in Lučenec and its surroundings (demographic characteristics of the region, unemployment, specific conditions for local businesses) and the activities of the Integra Foundation including assistance programmes for businesswomen and contents of individual training courses provided. Part of this study is a summary of common features or moments of the individual and in itself unique stories of businesswomen (the motivation to do business, independence, self-realisation, financial circumstances, the need to study and learn, age as a potential advantage in doing business...)

Lýdia Marošiová – Janka Debrecéniová – Zora Bútorová in their case study *Working conditions of seamstresses in Northern Slovakia*, *On the true price of the clothes we may be wearing right now* concentrate on „the working conditions of seamstresses employed at clothing and household textile firms in one of the regions of Northern Slovakia“ with particular

focus on „similarities and differences in the working conditions of seamstresses of a higher age compared with their younger colleagues“. This case study too is based on in-depth semi-standardised interviews with employees and female owners of private textile and clothing companies. The study analyses working conditions of seamstresses (remuneration, working hours, attendance requirements, organisation and standardisation of work, working environment, redundancies, employee rights protection) and describes the situation of female employees over 45 from their own viewpoint as well as that of business owners. „Women who have contracted lasting occupational diseases behind their sewing machine – for example asthma, impaired vision, spine deformations, neuroses or stomach ulcers – often feel frustration and anger towards their employer. At the same time, however, they feel at a dead end: they realise that, at their age, there is little chance that they will be able to work for another employer or find a different job. The interviews have shown that not one of the surveyed companies introduced system measured that would take into account changing needs of female employees as they get older.“

The case study by Martina Sekalová *When seasonality matters...* (employment situation of women in a tourist region) deals with working conditions and lives of women over 45 in another marginalised region of Northern Slovakia. Typical feature of this area is developing active tourism with specific implications on local labour market and effects on lives of women. Due to the seasonality of local labour market, lack of permanent and sufficiently well-paid job opportunities, many men as well as women see the solution in daily or even weekly commuting to work or more permanent migration. The respondents could see future opportunities mainly „... in tourism that may be making their lives more complicated these days, however compared with women in other regions it also provides new opportunities. They believe that incoming tourists and regional development will create conditions for the stabilisation of local labour market.“

Last case study by Jana Andruchová and Zora Bútorová *Situation of women from the Humenné district in the context of labour migration abroad* deals with „situation of women over 45 in the labour market in the district of Humenné in the context of migration abroad due to lack of job opportunities in the region“ (characteristics of labour market in the district, turning point in terms of job security after 1989, unemployment trauma and the decision to look for a job abroad, men leaving to work abroad, contents and conditions of work of women abroad, opinion of women who have stayed at home while family members work abroad, work migration and its personal effects as well as those on families...). „The decision of women to work abroad usually brings about changes in their self-esteem as well as their relationship with partners: some respondents stated that they have become more self-confident, economically stronger and thus less dependent and submissive with respect to their partners.“ Other common characteristics of respondents were for instance strong motivation to provide financially for their families thanks to a job abroad, the importance of appreciation of their work by their employers, feeling of usefulness and satisfaction, widening one's horizons and improving language skills...

All authors indicated, monitored, analysed, evaluated and reflected solutions for specific real-life stories containing age and gender discrimination. However they also paid attention to the dimension of being at disadvantage due to low or inadequate qualification, working conditions, regional or local identity or the risk of possible personal passiveness, resignation and loss of self-confidence. It is obvious that it is this continually reproduced and distributed aggregation, layering, multiplication of restrictions, barriers and stereotypes at various levels

that cause seemingly irresolvable situations in terms of individual perception. Ideas, scenarios, plans for useful solutions will continue to require synergies in cooperation, research and influence of all those involved.

Already now we can say that the project Plus for Women 45+ considerably exceeds the ambitions and output of many other comparable projects and development partnerships, and not only in terms of quantity. In other words – publications, case studies, interviews that have been carried out and further acquired empirical material can serve as best practices not only with regard to praiseworthy progress and evolution of the agenda; in this case this is also a proof that EU funding can be used purposefully with clear and sustainable theoretical and practical effects.

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