



## Press Release

### Gender, care and labour

Athens, 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2022

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 2022, the Centre for Gender Studies of Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences organized an online lecture for the [ProGender](#) project entitled “**From work-life balance to the care economy: gender equality policy after the Covid-19 pandemic**”. The lecture was given by **Maria Karamessini** (Professor of Labour Economics and Economics of the Welfare State, Former President and Governor of the Greek Public Employment Agency (OAED), Director of the Centre for Gender Studies and Head of the Gender Equality Committee of Panteion University).

The aim of the lecture was to present a feminist proposal for the care economy, to analyze how this differs from the traditional policies of work-life balance and to recommend policies and measures on the care economy to be implemented during and after the end of the pandemic. During the lecture, Maria Karamessini discussed the following issues:

1. The historical emergence of the policies on work-life balance at the national level and their significance for gender equality policies more broadly.
2. The EU policies on work-life balance in the context of the European Employment Strategy and the Lisbon Strategy.
3. The impact of the 2007-2008 global financial crisis and the austerity policies on work-life balance in the EU.
4. The positive developments that took place in Greece in the period 2015-2019, between the financial and the pandemic crises.
5. The impact of the pandemic crisis that brought to the forefront of the EU policy agenda the care economy for the post-pandemic era.

The historical overview started with an analysis of the policies for the reconciliation of professional and family life of women in Sweden in the 1960s. This policy became an integral part of the EU gender equality policy, an approach that was strengthened especially in the 1990s with the European Employment Strategy. However, this policy promoted gender equality only at the labour market, not at home. It did not address gender inequalities in care and did not consider full equality as the feminist movement had been demanding since the 1970s and 1980s. There were two important moments during the

course of European integration for the development of social policy on gender equality: the Lisbon Strategy (2000) and the Barcelona European Council (2002). In Barcelona, the EU set the targets for all Member States regarding work-life balance, including the percentage of children in childcare services, giving impetus to the expansion of these services at the national level.

One of the impacts of the Great Recession (2008-2014) on EU Member States was the reduction of all social expenditure, including on care services, due to the austerity policies, while there were no other developments regarding care at the European level, apart from the adoption of a revised Directive (2010) on parental leave. In the period 2015-2019, at the international level, the UN adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, whose 5<sup>th</sup> goal was Gender Equality. According to the Agenda, to achieve this goal EU Member States should adopt a feminist perspective based on the need for equal distribution of care between men and women. At the EU level, the most significant development during this period was the inclusion of gender equality in the European Pillar of Social Rights and the adoption by the EU of the Directive on the reconciliation of work, family and private life, half a year before the coronavirus pandemic.

The pandemic crisis revealed the need for a care economy and the need for a care deal. The pandemic is often described as a triple crisis (health, economic, ecological), but feminists maintain also that it is part of a long-standing crisis of social reproduction in our ageing and gender unequal societies.

From a social and gender perspective, the pandemic has revealed the centrality of care-giving for the survival of societies, the key role of women in social reproduction, the enormous value of care work to society despite the social undervaluation reflected in the low wages of care workers, social inequalities in access to care and the inequalities between Member states regarding their ability to cover citizens' care needs.

The need to create a care economy is even more urgent today. A care economy should be a universal social right, supported by the state. It should be available to all members of society who need it, not only children, the elderly and people with disabilities. Care work should be recognized as having economic value and distributed equally between men and women. The feminist proposal for a care economy should urge all Member States to make major investments in the health and care sectors, to improve wages in (female) care work, to promote the equal distribution of unpaid work between men and women and to combat undeclared work among domestic workers. Finally, the pandemic crisis is an opportunity for a European Agreement on Care alongside the European Agreement on Green Growth.

The video is available on Facebook @[ProGenderproject](https://www.facebook.com/ProGenderproject)

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