



Exchange of Good practices on gender equality

The role of men in
gender equality
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Meanings of gender equality policies in Lithuania: why men's engagement is limited?

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1. Introduction

The paper is based on analysis of Lithuania's policy discourses on gender equality, parental leave and reconciliation of family and work. It provides brief overview of academic literature on men's role in gender equality, discusses reports of NGOs to the international and European institutions and highlights the main critical issues of men's limited engagement into the changing gender norms in society.

This brief report suggests that policy actors address gender inequality issues from the perspective as problems most frequently experienced by women, therefore special measures to solve the disadvantage women's conditions are proposed in policies for employment, education and other public spheres. Men's role is mainly highlighted in the debates on paternity leave and child care responsibilities as an additional part of gender equality policies.

1.1. Men as part of overall gender equality policy

Regardless the progress of gender equality in Lithuania and constant efforts of the Government of Lithuania to improve the national and local governance in Lithuania with regard to gender advancement, gender mainstreaming is poorly integrated in the policy and decision-making process as well as institutional work culture. Lithuania approved legislation on equality of women and men, transposed the regulations of the EU directives into the national legislation, implemented three National programs on equal opportunities for women and men (2003-2004; 2005-2009; 2010-2014). However, data of the World Economic Forum proves reverse trends of gender equality advancement in Lithuania which dropped down from 14th position in 2007 to 28th in 2013.¹ In the developed European Gender Equality Index Lithuania is far below average on gender equality in Europe.²

Gender statistics in Lithuania show that men dominate in decision-making positions/structures. In 2012 elections, 107 men (76%) and 33 women (24%) were

¹ World Economic Forum (2013), The Global Gender Gap, 2013, p. 8, available at www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2013.pdf

² European Gender Equality Institute. Gender Equality index, available at: <http://eige.europa.eu/content/gender-equality-index>
<http://eige.europa.eu/content/gender-equality-index>

elected to the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania³. Eleven out of 15 parliamentary committees (73.3%) and nine out of 11 parliamentary commissions (81.2%) are chaired by men (consequently only four parliamentary committees (26.7%) and two commissions (18.2%) are chaired by women). In the Government of Lithuania 11 ministers out of 14 are men (78.6%) and 3 ministers are women. In 2011 municipal elections, 1,184 men and 345 women (22%) were elected to the municipal councils. Men make up to 90% mayors (54 out of 60) and women – only 10% (6 out of 60)⁴.

Studies on men and masculinities develop slowly in Lithuania. The rise of academic interests about men and masculinities could be identified during the period of 2000-2005 when single texts about men's identities and masculinities' crises occurred (Tereškinas 2001, 2004; Kublickienė 2003, 2004, Atviros Lietuvos fondas 2002). Interests about homophobia and heteronormative masculinities also developed in the period of 2005-2007. (Reingardė, 2007, 2007a, Zdanevičius, 2007, Tereškinas, 2007, 2008a, 2011) Few researchers systematically continue investigating the social and cultural issues of men and masculine identities in Lithuania (Tereškinas, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2011, Sumskaite, 2014, 2014a).

Though research on gender equality has been extended, the main concentration on women's conditions has prevailed. Many researchers investigating women's disadvantaged position in labour market, society and culture argue that Lithuania's society continues to prioritise traditional gender system and maintain traditional gender-role stereotypes such as women's duties as care-takers and men's as breadwinners (Bucaite-Vilke et al., 2012; Pilinkaite-Sotirovic, 2014). Developed policies on equal opportunities for women and men have encouraged women's public roles in employment rather than men's role in care work. If men take on parental leave this is strongly incorporated into their understanding about hegemonic masculinity norms (Sumskaite, 2014). Thus gender power hierarchies remain strongly enshrined in the public discourse and personal mindset.

1.2. Men and care work

1.2.1. Fathers on parental leave

In Lithuania child-care leave is fully institutionalised and aligned with workforce participation of women and men. The Law on Sickness and Maternity Social Insurance define the principles of paid child-care leave and provides the fixed duration for maternity leave (fifty six calendar days for mothers after the child's birth), paternity leave (one month for a father from the birth of child till child's one month age) and parental leave (under the choice of a parent or guardian until a child reaches one year or two years old age).⁵ Parental leave allows a parent to choose

³ The Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania (*Lietuvos Respublikos vyriausioji rinkimų komisija*), Candidates by sex, age and nationality, (2012 m. Lietuvos Respublikos rinkimuose išrinktų kandidatų pasiskirstymas pagal lytį, amžių ir tautybę), 2012, available at: www.vrk.lt/lt/2012_seimo_rinkimai/statistika.html

⁴ Lithuania, Ministry of Social Security and Labour (*Socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministerija*) (2012), Statistics of equality of women and men (*Moterų ir vyrų lygybės statistika*), available at: www.socmin.lt/index.php?2044783319.

⁵ Parliament of Lithuania (2013) Ligos ir motinystės socialinio draudimo įstatymas (Law on Sickness and Maternity Social Insurance) 2013-05-09, No. IX-110 available at http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=449689

either one-year fully paid child care leave without possibility to work or two—years leave with the possibility for part-time work during the second year of leave, distributing social benefits as to 70 % of compensated salary in the first year, and 40 % – in the second year. However, statistics demonstrate that the allocation of child-care leave between women and men remains very uneven. Only 30 percent of fathers take one month fully paid fathers leave immediately after the child's birth and share child care together with the mother (Department of Statistics, 2011). In 2013, only 11.3 % men took the parental leave in comparison to 88.7 % women.⁶ Women continue being the main carers in the family.

Prevailing public attitudes in society are reserved to men's engagement to parental leave. Demographic decline in Lithuania strengthened paternalistic attitudes towards care work that strove to protect motherhood by developing favourable child leave schemes and encouraging mothers to devote themselves to childcare. Research has shown that the population highly values women's involvement in care work and strongly believes that mothers should devote themselves to child care during a child's first years (Maslauskaitė, 2004, 2013, Pilinkaite-Sotirovic 2014). Population survey on the attitudes on family and work showed that women and men identify family and work as very important institutions in their life-course. However certain inconsistencies showing traditional roles could be identified in the survey. In 2009 - 52 % of men agree that men should have priority over women to get job and women should better take care of the family. Women's attitudes differ significantly – 61 % women disagree that men would be privileged over women in getting jobs. However, to the question whether women choose job or family, 39 % of women said their preferences to family. Similarly, attitudes of men are expressed they would prefer a family where women would not work. (Purvanekienė, 2009).

The most common explanation for men not taking paternity leave is financial: men usually earn more than women; consequently, women have to stay at home. However, deeper cultural and ideological factors about gender roles and parenthood are at play here too. For most men, taking such a leave is not a part of their male and father's identity. "Child care" is usually assumed to be a gendered occupation, a "woman's job". Qualitative research on fatherhood practices demonstrates strong correlation of fatherhood and masculine identity. Breadwinners' role is highly internalised in men's perception about fatherhood. Leadership is the other strong aspect of normative masculinity which is interwoven in practices of men as a career. Masculine norms of fathers are strongly supported by men, their partners and society in general (Tereškinas 2011. Sumskaitė, 2014, 2014a)

In sum, the scientists in Lithuania argue that gendered imbalance of sharing unpaid duties is not problematised and inequality in private sphere is not considered in policy discourse.

1.2.2. Reconciliation of family and work

The tendencies of gender imbalance in care work are reinforced by political actors in the language of legal acts and policy making. Inquiry into policy documents that address work and care commitments suggests that the discourse focuses on women and their family duties. It is women who face a problem of reconciliation,

⁶ Lithuania, State Social Insurance Fund Board (*Valstybinė Socialinio Draudimo Fondo Valdyba*), (2013) Statistics on Receivers of Benefits on Sickness and Moterinty (Ligos ir motinystės išmokų atvejai), 2013, available at: <http://atvira.sodra.lt/>

which hinders them to participate in the labour market. For example, in the National Program on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2005-2009 and 2010-2014 women (not men) are encouraged actively participate in active labour market. In the policy documents the problems are identified as following: due to long maternity /paternity leave and other care duties women lose their professional competences, experience discrimination in recruitment process, changing jobs and searching for career opportunities (for example, they are not promoted and not encouraged to take part in the professional training). The reasons for these problems in labour market are formulated in providing evidence on absence of proper measures to reconcile family and work. The solution for the better reconciliation is seen in developing criteria on family-friendly work environment and encouraging employers to apply them at jobs. However, these measures do not influence improvement of infrastructure of labour market and measures are left for employers' voluntarily will.

Women's (re)integration into labour market is strongly supported in the programming document in Lithuania, presenting this issue as women's interest and needs. For example, the European Structural Fund program in 2007-2013 on Reconciliation of Family and Work prioritised the projects which would help women after maternity leave, mothers with small children and vulnerable women to reintegrate into labour market. Proposed solution through various projects activities implemented by non-governmental organizations both feminists (Women's Information Centre, Women's Information and Employment Centre and some others) and catholic (Blessed Jurgis Matulaitis Family Support Centre, Caritas and other) targeted women only and helped to improve their professional skills and employability through flexible childcare services (CEDAW, 2011 p. 46-47). This kind of project activities suggests viewing and categorizing women as flexible actors in the labour market. The focus on women as contributors rather than equal actors to the labour market highlights the role of women in economy (Meier, Peterson, Tertinegg, Zentai, 2007: 109-140). Women should catch up with men and the masculine norm regarding the functioning of the labour market is not questioned.

Men's role in reconciliation frame of more equal parenting roles between women and men in Lithuania received interpretation as a way to strengthen traditional family values in policy discourse. Men's role on sharing family duties and reconciling paid labor and care work is almost absent in the National Program on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2005-2009 and 2010-2014. As a solution for better reconciliation men *are encouraged* to share their care responsibilities through awareness raising campaigns on positive fatherhood and complementary dialogue (*lygiavertis bendravimas*). These soft policy measures do not aim at deconstructing traditional gender roles and challenging structural obstacle of gender inequality.

In sum, analysis of policy discourse on reconciliation of paid labour and family work in Lithuania suggests that policy measures target women and their role to get equal footing with men in paid labour. Women's care duties are not questioned or problematized as well as men's role to share care work on equal ground with women is not targeted. Men are encouraged to do some care work and support women in sharing care work but this is not articulated as their duty.

1.3. Men at work: gendered segregations

1.3.1. Men do not enter “feminised work sectors”

Economic transition of Lithuanian society since 1991 made a huge impact on changing social and economic structure of society and consequently on the position of women and men in labour market. Researchers of masculine studies and gender equality in Lithuania have argued that paid work for men “*is a source of power and resources, a central life interest and a medium of identity. It is also a means of ordinary everyday yet structural resistance to gender equality*” (Reingardė, Tereškinas, 2006, Šumskaitė, 2014). Men and women are engaged in different areas of activities indicating that the traditional patterns of men’s and women’s jobs are still prevailing. Statistics illustrate the existing vertical and horizontal segregation of the labour market along gender lines and highlight disadvantaged women’s position. Women are mainly occupied in the fields of education, health care, social provision and services where wages are lower in comparison to the average wage in other economies occupied by men (Reingardė, Tereškinas, 2006; Department of Statistics, 2012, 2014). Women employees in 2012 continued to earn up to 14% less than men employees.⁷ Men traditionally are engaged in construction industries, transport, agriculture and other heavy industries.

Researchers demonstrate the tendencies that regardless patriarchal norms, values and gendered roles in society women try to break the existing practices to work in “feminized” sectors and move to “masculine” sectors such as financial entrepreneurship, transport or construction industries (Daukantienė, 2006, Bagdonas et al. 2007). However, there is no in depth investigation of men’s choices in occupation market or men’s employment trajectories and their move from “masculine” to “feminine” occupations.

Scientific inquiry into working class experiences demonstrates their social exclusion, difficulties to adapt to the economic challenges, particularly unwillingness to shift towards more feminised service-based economy. Regardless their age many working class men expressed their disappointment of their current situation, disrespect by others, fear to lose job, uncertainties about future and limited possibilities to survive in present moment. Many of them experienced unemployment, work without contracts and long hours and exploitation. However, the study shows that heteronormative masculinities continue prevailing in the attitudes of working class men. Physical strength of man’s body, active agency, potency and toughness are identified as man’s characteristics regardless the discrepancies between imagined masculinities and experienced realities. (Tereskinas 2011). The issues of inequalities, social isolation and public/social exclusion are usually silenced by working men.

⁷ Lithuanian Department of Statistics (2012), *Moterys ir vyrai Lietuvoje (Women and men in Lithuania)*, available at www.stat.gov.lt/lt/pages/view/?id=1304&PHPSESSID=d36e8c4e520910b27db0e7176ea7804f
<http://osp.stat.gov.lt/temines-lenteles19>

Lithuanian Department of Statistics (2014), *Moterys ir vyrai Lietuvoje (Women and men in Lithuania)* available at:
http://osp.stat.gov.lt/documents/10180/130368/Moterys_vyrai_Lietuvoje_2013.pdf/e43268fd-d009-4531-8bf4-518bd81cd73d

1.3.2. Gender stereotypes and occupational choices

Analysis on gender roles stereotypes in labour market has demonstrated that society imposes the pressure on individuals through the constructions of expectations about what is “feminine” and “masculine”. This is evident, for example, in the occupational orientation of women and men in Lithuania. Recent study on women’s career in natural and technological sciences analysed the social-cultural obstacles, gendered stereotypes and cultural prejudices about women’s role in society from school up to university and scientific community. The study argues that traditional attitudes and patriarchal norms about gender relations and system which persist in Lithuanian society significantly influence girls’ professional orientation and their limited choices for natural and technological sciences. (Novelskaite, Purvaneckiene, 2011).

Women scientists argue that segregation of occupations in the universities shows the tendency that social sciences are more often chosen by women than technical and natural sciences. Though the growth of number of women (not men) could be noticed in technical and natural sciences through the period 2001-2009, however, men are still in leading positions of the educational and scientific structures. (Novelskaitė, Purvaneckienė, 2011) Data on attitudes of school students towards professional orientation also shows that women are hardly motivated to choose technical and natural sciences for their career. They usually devalue their own abilities and consider themselves as incapable to study technical and natural sciences. Gender stereotypes that persist in society, family and school directly and indirectly influence women and, consequently, men’s choices in their occupation (Urboniene, 2011).

Research on occupation of boys and men and their choices of academic programs is limited in Lithuania.

2. Policy debate: family policies versus gender equality

In post-accession period, Lithuanian policy discourses on gender equality articulate traditional gender roles in family and society as legitimate, acceptable and good for the society. By using European Union concepts on child-care, shared parental responsibilities and possibilities of choice for women in labour market, national policy makers converge the traditional family ideals, heteronormativity and patriarchal power relations to the unique value system of Lithuanian national identity, and through policy discourses strengthen the articulation of dichotomy between spheres of public and public along gender lines.

Analysis of policy documents (legal acts, national programs, action plans) and debates in the parliament⁸ on child care and reconciliation of family and work show

⁸ Parliament of Lithuania (2007) *Paramos šeimai pagrindų įstatymo projektas* (Bill on Family Support) 2007 09 18 No. XP-2526

Parliament of Lithuania, 2007, *Valstybinė šeimos politikos koncepcija* (Law on state family policy and exemplary note No. X-1569, 3 June, 2008

http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter/w5_show?p_r=5477&p_k=1

Parliament of Lithuania. 2006, *Minutes* of the Forty three (247) session December 7, 2006, that parliament express their contradictory opinions on marriage and single parenthood

Parliament of Lithuania, 2008, *Minutes* of the seventeenth (279) session, 2007-04-05 on debating amendments to the Law on sickness and maternity (paternity) leave art. 6,19, 20, 21. Available at

that these issues are separated from gender equality, because the emphasis is on family. The discourse on child and family welfare is integrated in the discourse of keeping women at home and assigning to women child and family care responsibilities. Men are hardly addressed and conceptualised as care-givers. Emphasis on traditional family values, the revival of nationalistic ideals, and marriage as a state policy goal demonstrate the imbalance of gender power relations.

In 2011 the Constitutional Court ruled out that the concept of family based on marriage between woman and man as defined in the Law on State Family Concept is not in compliance with the provisions of the Constitution (Constitutional Court, 2011). The right-wing forces in the parliament were unwilling to accept the ruling of the Constitutional Court and initiated the amendment of the Constitution to set up the definition of the family as a conjugal couple composed by free will of woman and man. To make the stronger impact on population the Ministry of Social Security and Labour initiated awareness raising campaign “Let’s protect marriage – and we will secure Lithuania” (Apsaugokime santuoką – išsaugosime Lietuvą). The billboards depicting young heterosexual couples with two small children in the nice environment on the seaside were located in 15 cities in Lithuania.



Let's defend marriage – we will save Lithuania

The aim of the campaign was to strengthen families composed by married women and men, because marriage ensures stability in family relations, demographic growth and security of the national state.⁹ Though some critical comments on the

http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=295158&p_query=t%EBvyst%EBs%20ato stogos&p_tr2=2;

Explanatory Note, 2008, to the amendments of the articles 4, 5, 6, 16, 18, 18¹, 18³, 19, 21 of the law on Sickness and Maternity (paternity leave). Available at:

http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=333177&p_query=&p_tr2=2

Human rights monitoring institute, 2007, *Petition of nine human rights NGOs to the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania on discriminatory provisions of the bill on state family policy and bill on family support*. 9 October, 2007.

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http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter2/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=305770

⁹ Baltic news service.2012. *SADM užsakė plakatų su šūkiu „Apsaugokime santuoką, išsaugosime Lietuvą už 247 tūkst. Litų* (Ministry of Social Security and Labour financed campaign „Lets secure marriage and we will safe Lithuania“) <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/sadm-uzsake-plakatu-su-sukiu-apsaugokime-santuoka-issaugosime-lietuva-uz-247-tukst-lt.d?id=56684577#ixzz27J3yErYn>

campaign by liberal voices were expressed in the Parliament (Parliament of Lithuania, 2012) this did not inspire any broader debates or discussion to questioning gender roles in family and society. Discourses on women's traditional role as wife, mother and care-giver continues to frame family policy discourses in Lithuania.

3. Transferability issues

It should be noted that the context, described above, in which practices could be transferred is very important. This brief paper revealed the articulation of conservative discourse on traditional family values and heteronormative masculinity in Lithuania. The challenge remains on both policy and practical levels: what concepts should be used to make men allies rather than opponents on the road to gender equality and how the rhetoric should be changed from heteronormative masculinities towards caring masculinities.

Examples of Austria, Finland and Iceland suggest that practices of fathers on longer child-care leave would hardly develop without legal and policy initiatives. Favourable legal and policy schemes could become the starting point for the broadening discussions on gender inequalities which still exist due to the divisions between labour and care, and paid and unpaid work. Good practices of three states suggest debating the state policies about the issues how recognition of men's care maintain or challenge a traditional gender division of labour, what values are attributed to the unpaid work of care and the extent to which policies facilitate the equal sharing between women and men.

Icelandic good practice about non-transferable right of a father to take parental leave is very important in encouraging men to make this right as their duty. This could contribute to shifting focus from them as individuals towards public discourse on well-being of a child where men undertake care duties. These might also accelerate debates on attitudes about masculine identity which would encompass child care/caring as a quality of masculine identity.

The Finnish paper on good practices highlighted the necessity of strengthening the expertise on men's position within equality politics and their active engagement into gender equality work. Men's experiences are overlooked in the gender mainstreaming and equality policies. Engaging men, reflecting their problems of experienced inequality and providing solutions for them in the policy documents might broaden understanding that gender equality is not only about women and encourage men's alliances developing transformative approach to gender equality policies.

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