

*Consultation for the PES Manifesto for the European elections 2009*

## **Inclusion of women in the labour market**

Without improving the position of women in the labour market, it is hard to create a socially coherent Europe. A fundamental step in this direction is the inclusion of women in the labour market. Today the employment level of women differs across the Union, but the level is in general lower than it is for men. **That is why an increased inclusion of women in the labour market must be an important principle in the PES manifesto for the 2009 European elections. The goal should be the elimination of differences in employment level between women and men.**

During the last decades women in general have gained a stronger economic position, but they have not received the same economic independence as men. The social environment in our society influences the economic equality between women and men; this is in particular true when it comes to the conditions in the labour market and in the educational system. The design of the transfer system and the allocation of unpaid work (at home) are other important influences.

However, an increased inclusion of women in the labour market is not without problems. In the beginning of the PES discussion paper *A new social Europe* it is pointed out that more and more women are having no children or just one child, due to the difficulties of combining work and family life, economic insecurity and low support for child-rearing and childcare. The point is: at many times a woman does not make the free choice not to work, instead the circumstances force her to choose an unpaid work. In addition, women are usually – in comparison to men – carrying a heavy burden when it comes to the care of elderly family members. Taken all in all, women are often forced to choose between family life and work. This is a choice men usually do not have to make.

From a European perspective it is unacceptable that so many citizens of the Union are forced to make this choice, because both options results in negative consequences. If women opt out from work the labour market loses potential labour; this at a time when many member states faces labour shortage. Furthermore, such a decision tends to maintain structural inequality between women and men. If women instead opt out from family life, the birth rate might drop even further. This is not only negative for society; the personal and social cost for the individual tends to get very high.

A substantial increase in the employment level of women, without diminished conditions for family life, requires a common European approach on a number of matters. The necessity of childcare is only one example. Success is not possible without giving matters as childcare, the social insurance system et cetera a higher status. Such matters should be given the same political weight as other important parts of the infrastructure of the labour market. What is the

point of investments in roads, Broadband Internet access or public transportation if the workforce stays at home because of the lack of childcare?

**Finally, a higher employment level for women does not automatically give equality between women and men, but it would help.**