



European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Equal opportunities for women and men in services of general interest



Foundation paper



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Foreword

The aim behind the Foundation papers is to highlight knowledge and analysis from Foundation research over many years in the areas of employment, equal opportunities, social inclusion, time use and diversity. The objective is to make past, present and future work of the Foundation relevant and accessible in a concise format. The subject of each paper is linked to current social policy issues and therefore provides a timely contribution to the debate at European level

This paper considers information and analysis based on the Foundation's data and case study examples on the role of services of general interest in promoting women's quality employment in the European Union. It highlights the importance of equal opportunity policies in shaping and modernising these services in line with the current EU political agenda. The examples provided relate to services, such as education, healthcare, and social services which are seen as key to the equal participation of women in the labour force.

Willy Buschak
Acting Director

Introduction

Services of General Interest (SGI) are often described as a core component of European citizenship, and an integral part of the economic and social system of each Member State and the European Social Model as a whole. They play an essential role in the promotion of social and territorial cohesion and therefore guarantee certain basic principles such as universality of services, affordability, quality, and ensure consumer and user rights (European Commission, 2003a; European Parliament, 2003a). SGI also play an important role in promoting a high level of employment and social protection in the EU: they are a key element in reaching the objectives of the Lisbon strategy, of Europe becoming, by 2010, 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world; capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'.

The expansion of SGI has been a driving force in drawing more women into the labour force (Pillinger, 2000). As illustrated by the Barcelona European Council in 2002,¹ it is now increasingly acknowledged that the provision of available, affordable and good quality care facilities for children and other dependants is one practical measure with a direct impact on female participation in the workforce (European Commission, 2004i). Increasing availability of care services creates new job opportunities, often to the benefit of women (Report of the Employment Taskforce, 2003). Promoting equal access of women and men to goods and services is also recognised as a decisive step towards increasing participation of women in the workforce, as inequality in this area is considered to be a serious disincentive (European Commission, 2003d).

¹ The following objectives were adopted: To provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90% of children between three years old and the mandatory school age and for at least 33% of children under three years of age.

Context

As often highlighted by the Foundation's work in the field, European Union commitment to promote gender equality in labour market and, more recently, in non-labour market spheres, is an essential driver of change (Foundation Paper N. 3, 2002).

The EU has progressively acquired a growing role in regulating the provision of, and access to, services of general interest. This empowerment is now particularly apparent through a series of recent legislative initiatives whose implications for the objectives and functioning of the services concerned are far reaching. Specifically, these changes will impact on the terms and conditions of employment in these areas.

“The term “services of general interest” (SGI) is not found in the EC Treaty itself, nor in secondary legislation. It is derived in Community practice from the term “services of general economic interest”, which is used in Articles 16 and 86(2) of the Treaty. It is broader than the term “services of general economic interest” and covers both market and non-market services which the public authorities class as being of general interest and subject to specific public service obligations’ (European Commission, 2004c). Like the Green Paper, the White Paper focuses mainly, but not exclusively, on issues related to ‘services of general economic interest’.

For social services,² only those recognised by the public authorities as fulfilling a mission or task to benefit society as a whole can be considered as social services of general interest in the EU context. Public authorities can deliver services themselves or can invite other entities, either profit or non-profit, to implement social policy objectives.

Recent discussions on SGI received new impetus with the submission of the Commission's Green and White Papers and amendments proposed by the EU Constitutional Treaty (European Commission, 2003a, 2004c). This new policy debate is meant to give greater clarity and predictability to the impact of internal markets and competition rules with regard to the provision of social services.

The objectives of the Commission's initiatives are to:

² Defined in the White Paper as long term care, social security, social welfare and employment services

- Clarify and simplify the legal framework for the compensation of public service obligations
- Provide a clear and transparent framework for a selection of undertakings entrusted with SGI.

While the definition of SGI varies within Member States, Community internal market and competition rules impact on its use for the provision and financing of services. This impact is growing progressively. It is now established case law that services merely oriented towards social policy goals may fall under state-aid, anti-trust and internal market rules, insofar as these services are of economic interest and affect trade between Member States.³ In its White Paper on SGI, the Commission proposes, however, to exempt hospitals and social housing from state aid rules on public service compensation obligations.

Community powers in the area of SGI will be increased following amendments to Article 16 of the EC Treaty signed in Rome on 29 October 2004. The new Article III-6 reads: *'European laws will define principles and missions of services of general interest'*. Since women are over represented as providers and users of SGI, notably social services of general interest, developments and changes affecting such services have significant implications for women (European Commission, 2004g; Alber J., and Höhler, U., 2004).

The Commission has also proposed a Directive on services in the internal market (European Commission, 2000c; 2002e). The objective is to create a well-functioning Internal Market for services by the establishment of cross-border service provision (European Commission, 2004e; 2004f). While this proposal should not affect the freedom of the Member States to define SGI and how it functions, it has raised much controversy in relation to the following issues:

- impact on the quality of the services provided;
- impact on the quality of work and employment in services.

It must also be mentioned that the recent, and courageous, decision to apply EU equal treatment rules to women and men in terms of access to, and supply of, goods and services, will also impact on the functioning and strategic objectives of the services sector (European Commission, 2003e).

As highlighted by this brief overview, these recent EU initiatives set new challenges for SGI: in order to make equal opportunities between women and men a real option for all, more may need to be done.

³ See the Altmark case, C-280/00

Overview of Foundation research

The Foundation has worked over many years to identify policy initiatives in SGI specifically aimed at promoting women's participation in the labour market. This can be achieved either through the promotion of gender equality measures at the workplace or facilitating access to services.

Foundation work on SGI

The aim of the Foundation's work on SGI is to provide relevant and timely expertise in this important domain. This paper provides information and analysis based on the Foundation's data and case study examples on the role of services of general interest in promoting women's quality employment in the European Union. It highlights the importance of equal opportunity policies in shaping and modernising these services in line with the current EU political agenda. The examples provided relate to services,⁴ such as education, healthcare, and social services.⁵

The paper is in four parts. The first part assesses the growing role of the European Union in regulating the provision of services of general interest. It also points to the potential implications for terms and conditions of employment in these services. Second, it looks into the strategic and promising position of services of general interest in the EU economy and society. Third, it assesses conditions of work and employment in the services concerned and highlights measures and initiatives, notably by social partners and public authorities, to promote equal opportunities between women and men in SGI. The paper concludes by highlighting the main issues and challenges faced by services of general interest in relation to equal opportunities between women and men.

The strategic – and promising – position of the services sector in EU economy and society

Services of General Interest are an essential component of the EU welfare architecture(s) and the services sector as a whole plays a central role in the EU economy.

⁴ Such services are offered to the general public, and have been assigned a specific role in the public interest. While funded (directly or indirectly) by public authorities they are not necessarily delivered by the public sector (government, regional, local or central authorities or public enterprise): they may also be delivered by voluntary or private providers.

⁵ Social welfare, healthcare, social security, employment – services put in place in order to respond to specific needs of vulnerable groups.

The employment structure of working-age population, within the enlarged EU, the then EU15 and AC10 in 2003, is characterised by a dominant services sector with 66.4% as compared to 28.3% in industry and 5.3% in agriculture (European Commission, 2004g). A comparison of new Member States (hereafter NMS) with that of the EU15, shows that NMS have a larger proportion of employment in agriculture (12.4% versus 4%), a higher share in industry (31.9 versus 27.6%) but a markedly lower share of employment in services (55.6 versus 68.3).

Employment structure in the education sector in EU25 is 7.1% of total employment, in EU15, 6.9% and in NMS 7.7%. Health and safety constitutes 9.5% of total employment in EU25, 10% in EU15 and 6.2% in NMS. Other community, social and personal care sectors represent 4.6% of total employment in EU25, 4.7% in EU15 and 3.8% in NMS.

This data underestimates the role of services in the EU economy, not least because statistics are based on obsolete distinctions between services, manufacturing, and primary sectors (European Commission, 2004f).

Despite a recent slowdown, the services sector remains the driver behind the continued, albeit moderate, expansion in overall employment in the EU. Between 1997 and 2002, services accounted for approximately 11.4 million new jobs, representing 96% of job creation. For industry as a whole it was 1.5% (3% growth). Meanwhile employment in agriculture decreased by about 0.9 million (13%) for the EU as whole (European Commission, 2003f). The services sector has created more jobs during the current slowdown than it did during that of the early 1990s. The second largest increase in employment has been in 'health and social work' (up 1.7 million). In 2003, overall employment in services increased in all NMS except Poland and saw an employment rise in health and social work. It is therefore clear that services are playing a vital role in the EU economy. Service job creation will need to continue to reach the Lisbon 70% employment target which represents 22 million extra jobs within the EU25 by 2010.

Because of shortages in the workforce due to demographic and societal changes and, in order to reduce the economic dependency ratio, governments are introducing measures to enable people to work longer and to attract more women into the labour market (EMCC, 2003). In the former EU15, 6.4 million women of working-age are not in paid employment in addition to the 6.6 million unemployed women. It is thus clear that the scale of unrealised potential of women in the workforce is considerable (Report of the Employment Taskforce, 2003). The Foundation has also identified and analysed numerous companies' initiatives throughout the EU, in particular EU15, aimed at recruiting and retaining female workers (Olgiati and Shapiro, 2002; <http://www.emcc.eurofound.eu.int/exchange.htm>).

As women enter the workforce in increasing numbers there will be a shortage in family care for the elderly thereby creating a demand for public or private care (EMCC, 2004; Fahey and Spéder, 2004). In terms of expenditure, health outlays claim sizeable parts of public budgets, coming second only to retirement provisions (Alber and Köhler, 2004).

At the Barcelona European Council in 2002, Member States agreed targets for childcare provision. Childcare should be provided for at least 90% of children between three years and the mandatory school starting age and at least 33% of children under three years by 2010. Few Member States come close to the Barcelona targets, with the exception of the Nordic countries. The rare available data shows that countries with low availability of childcare such as Italy and Spain display correspondingly low female employment rates and countries with high employment rates such as Sweden, Denmark and Finland provide wide access to childcare facilities. Moreover, women are more likely to work part-time where childcare services are not so widely available, as for instance, in The Netherlands, Germany and Austria (Report of the Employment Taskforce, 2003). Historically, tasks pertaining to the 'care' domain were considered a private matter to be addressed through family arrangements. The concept of childcare as an individual responsibility is gradually evolving, though it still impacts on existing care structures in some Member States. In some Member States care issues were linked to social equity as it was acknowledged that low income and single-parent families tend to experience greater difficulties in accessing high quality care services.

The Foundation's recent research on household services, covering the elderly and childcare, confirms that there is a large unmet need for such services, which will continue to grow. Interestingly, this study also emphasises that these demands may not be met by the emergence of new services and the creation of new jobs, since there are many obstacles to their development (Cancedda, 2001).

Conditions of work and employment in services of general interest in the EU

One of the most important reforms identified by the EU in employment is job creation potential in the services sector, notably by increasing the labour market participation of women. The European Employment Strategy (EES) places a responsibility on Member States to monitor and tackle gender gaps in labour markets. It is not generally accepted that the EES has had a dramatic impact on most 'gender gaps' in terms of participation, pay, occupations, etc. However, it is perceived as a useful tool for developing policy and has helped establish priorities on gender equality (Magnusson et al, 2003).

‘Making women’s work pay’, using both financial and non-financial incentives, will necessarily require changes in the conditions of work and employment in SGI as well as changes in the conditions of access to these services.

Gender gaps: Challenges and responses

Based on the transformation of work, traditionally carried out by women inside the home, into paid employment, the increase in female participation in the labour force from 56.6% to 60.2% between 1995 and 2001 was primarily in the services sectors (European Commission, 2003f; Cancedda, A, 2001). Women in the former EU15 predominantly work in services while a large proportion of men are still employed in industry (Table 1). In the former EU15, male employment represents 60.5% of the total, 84.4% for female. In the EU25, male employment constitutes 58.4% of total employment as compared to 82% for females (European Commission, 2004g). In each Member State, there is a clear link between women’s participation rates in the labour market and the importance of the social service sector (Morales et al, 2004).

Table 1: Gender segregation by industrial sector in the former EU15

% of the jobs in each sector occupied by men and women in full-time and part-time work

NACE Sectors	Men			Women			Total
	FT	PT	All	FT	PT	All	
Construction	86	5	91	6	3	9	100
Extraction	82	2	84	16	-	16	100
Utilities	78	6	84	13	3	16	100
Transport & communications	68	7	75	16	9	25	100
Manufacturing	68	5	73	20	7	27	100
Agriculture	55	10	66	24	10	34	100
Financial services	51	7	58	27	15	42	100
Public administration	51	5	56	30	14	44	100
Sales, hotels & catering	41	6	47	30	23	53	100
Other community services	36	8	44	29	27	56	100
Health & education	19	6	25	40	35	75	100
Private households and extra-territorial	2	3	5	35	60	95	100
All employment	50	6	56	26	18	44	100

Notes: Sectors are ranked by the degree of male-dominated segregation. - indicates less than 0.5%.

Key: FT = Full-time PT = Part-time (under 35-hours per week) All = FT+PT

Source: The European Working Conditions Survey, 2000

The Foundation’s research also underlines the high concentration of women in the public sector (Table 2). Public national, regional and local authorities in their role as employers have a particularly large influence on the working conditions of women. 32% of employed women work in the public sector or

in a state-owned company, compared to 19% of men. Conversely men are more likely to be employed in medium or large private sector companies (Fagan et al 2002).

Table 2: Concentration of women and men's employment in the public and private sectors

% concentration of employees across workplaces			
	Men	Women	All
Public-sector or state-owned company	19	32	25
Private sector	81	68	75

Source: Third European Working Conditions Survey 2000.

For the most part, women work mainly in private households or personal domestic services, health, education and other care-related activities as well as in sales, hotels and catering. Men predominate in construction, manufacture, transport, agriculture and financial services (Table 1). Thus most people work in jobs which are carried out mainly or entirely by their own sex, so that we can largely categorise jobs according to whether they are 'male-dominated' or 'female-dominated', with only a small proportion of employment which can be considered as 'mixed' (Fagan, et al, 2002).

In 2000, almost half of women in employment in the EU (48%) worked in just four main areas of activity: healthcare and social services, education, public administration and retailing. Some 17% of women were employed in healthcare and services alone, while another 18% worked in education and public administration (Eurostat, 2002).

In childcare, eldercare and domestic cleaning, the percentage of women remains at 90% and often reaches 98–100% (e.g. among nursery teachers in Portugal; childcare generally in the UK, and home helps in France and Finland). Feminisation is less striking in the laundry and dry cleaning sector at 60–70%. Gender segregation is less marked in catering occupations. In some countries (Portugal and UK) the percentage of women is 63–67%, while in Italy, where there is a slight prevalence of men, women account for only 44.6%. Only a few countries have data on domestic maintenance employment. These occupations are strongly male-dominated. Women account for only 4% of gardening workers in the UK and 8.6% in the Netherlands; the percentage of women working in the exterior cleaning of buildings is only 4.2% in Portugal and is even lower in Finland (Cancedda, 2001).

In Portugal between 1991 and 1998, the percentage of women childminders, home helps and allied workers increased from 81.8% to 92.8%, while the percentage of female nursery teachers rose from 97.3% to 100%

Slight trends towards desegregation were found mostly where female dominance is less marked. The percentage of women in the laundry sector,

for example, dropped from 71% to 65% between 1993 and 1996 in the Netherlands, and from 69% to 59% between 1992 and 1998 in the UK. Between 1992 and 1998, there was an 80% increase in the number of male workers in childcare services in the UK. The percentage of men in catering rose in the UK between 1992 and 1998 from 32% to 37% and in Austria from 31% to 40% in 1992–1997. It decreased, however in 1991–1998 in both Portugal (from 44% to 33%) and Italy (46% to 45%) (Cancedda, 2001).

It is interesting to note that the workforce structure of the services sector in the NMS shows some comparable elements, especially in relation to the public versus private sector. Transition to market economies has brought major expansion of employment in the sector. The total is almost at EU15 levels for employment figures, although Romania and Poland are lower (Table 2). While private service employment has expanded everywhere as a result of the emphasis on privatisation in the transition period, the public sector has not. The process identified shows a predominance of female workers in the public sector. Women are more significantly over represented in the public services than their counterparts in the EU15 (Pollert and Fodor, to be published).

Table 3. Central and eastern European countries (CEEC) – Gender segregation by industrial sector 2001, and EU15, 2000.

NACE sectors	CEEC Men	EU15 Men	CEEC-Women	EU15 Women
Construction	87.8	91	12.2	9
Fishing	85.0	n/a	15.0	n/a
Mining	82.7	84	17.3	16
Electricity, Gas, Water Supply	77.6	84	22.4	25
Transport, Storage and Communications	69.1	75	30.9	25
Agriculture	63.9	66	36.1	34
Manufacturing	59.4	73	40.6	27
Real Estate, Renting, Business	55.3		44.7	
Public Administration, Defence, Compulsory Social Security	54.3	56	45.7	44
Wholesale & Retail Trade	47.1	(47)	52.9	(53)
Other Community Social and Personal Service Activities	41.0	44	59.0	56
Financial Intermediation	36.6	58	63.4	42
Hotels and Restaurants	34.5	(47)	65.5	(53)
Education	23.8	(25)	76.2	(75)
Health and Social Work	21.2	(25)	79.8	(75)
All	55.9	56	44.1	44

Notes: Sectors are ranked by the degree of male-dominated segregation.

Source: CEEC, Country Reports using LFS (Final Report, Table VI).

EU15, Foundation. Figures in brackets show NACE categories which have been amalgamated (Fagan and Burchell, 2002: 24).

Women and men are unequally represented in particular occupations relative to their overall share of employment. Broadly speaking, women's jobs involve caring, nurturing and service activities, while men monopolise management, manual and technical jobs associated with machinery or physical products which are considered to be 'heavy' or 'complex' (Fagan, 2002). In health and care services, for instance, women predominantly work as nurses, men as doctors; in education, they work as teachers not college principals. Men represent 72% of legislators and senior officials as compared to 28% for women; women account for 65% of teachers compared to 35% for men. 68% of office clerks are women as compared to 32% of men (Fagan, 2002).

Gender segregation, both sectoral and occupational, has a detrimental impact on working conditions and pay levels. Jobs in 'female sectors' such as care or household services, are undervalued types of work which have been unpaid in the past.

The public services are often leaders in good gender equality practices in the workplace with, for example, equal pay for women and men (Deakin, 1995; Pillinger, 2000; 2004). Thus in many countries the gender wage gap has been narrower than in the private sector as government policies and legislation have contributed to a reduced wage gap. The gender pay gap remains on average 16% in the EU. There is, as observed, a lower pay gap in the public sector (12%) compared to the private sector (21%) (European Commission, 2004a).

The Foundation's work highlights an interesting paradox. While the issue of gender equality is one of the most regulated areas of the labour market, gender equality has not been achieved in all European countries. This could indicate a difficulty in enforcing the law and that the measures introduced by employers and policymakers have not been effective. In the Nordic countries, the high degree of labour market segregation is often blamed for hindering effective gender equality. In southern Europe, the low participation rate of women in the labour market and the use of 'atypical' forms of employment is a problem. In some of the NMS of central and eastern Europe gender equality per se is regarded as less of a problem than the integration of minority ethnic groups and migrant workers (EIRO, 2002; 2004).

The Foundation's research has identified a variety of strategies and initiatives throughout the EU aimed at promoting women's employment and tackling gender gaps.

In Sweden, for instance, the growth of social service provision was directly related to providing employment opportunities for women. The Swedish social democratic model is based on full employment, women's

participation, active labour market policies, universal benefits based on notions of citizenship and entitlement, and social corporatism typified by social partnership approaches to policymaking and bargaining.

In other Member States, local authorities have given a high priority to equal opportunity issues. For example, in the Commune of Bologna in Italy, a Women's Committee for City Governance has played an important role in developing training for social and health employees on gender issues. The Equal Opportunities Committee for staff has introduced a number of projects on working time and working hours. In Valencia, Spain, an equal opportunities training and development programme has trained managers and the social partners in equal opportunities in order to improve the position of women in employment in the public services. Other examples include experiments in a number of UK local authorities in introducing Strategic Equality Plans in Service Delivery (STEPS), and gender mainstreaming programmes in the public sector in the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Finland, particularly important in identifying the gender impact of national, regional and local government policies. In France, all government ministries are now required to identify the gender impact of new and existing legislation. This has led to particular attention being given to women's career opportunities and pay (Pillinger, 2000).

In Austria, the legislation introduced in 1993 sought employment promotion measures for women in cases of under-representation in particular areas, where the employment share for women is below 40%. All ministries have to establish a 'promotion plan', containing measures aimed at overcoming such under representation. In cases of equal qualification, there is an obligation to give female applicants preference for jobs until their share of 40% is reached. The same applies to advancement in the administrative hierarchy. Other countries, such as Italy and Greece, have also introduced measures to promote women in the public sector.

In the UK, the government has set a target of 6% male representation in the childcare workforce. Tackling gender segregation involves encouraging measures for more males to enter employment within this sector whilst ensuring better conditions and pay levels for women already working in the sector.

Measures aimed at the reconciliation of work with family commitments and community activities have a decisive impact on women's choices in the labour market. This has led to experiments in making working time more flexible in Swedish municipalities and in the health and social care sectors in The Netherlands. In these countries, the collective reduction and reorganisation of working time has become strategically important to achieving equality and the sharing of work and family life (Pillinger, 2000). In Italy, as a general rule, employment in household service offers a

flexibility that facilitates the reconciliation of work and family life (Cancedda, 2000). Measures aimed at promoting women's participation in the labour market also include adjustment of service provision to working women in flexible working-time patterns. This was the objective of a Finnish initiative 'Care around the clock' and changes in school-opening hours in some Italian Regions (Boulin, 1999).

Measures taken in order to improve conditions of work and employment in services also concern the somewhat surprising emergence of flexible forms of employment contracts and working time.

Addressing changing patterns of employment contracts

It is interesting to note that recent developments are affecting conditions of employment in the public service sector. There is a higher share of female fixed-term and temporary employees, which seems to offset the higher employment stability of permanent employment in the public sector, most notably in Belgium, France, Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands, Italy and Portugal (European Commission, 2003f). As for working time, there is a very significant increase in part-time work in the service sectors, notably in health, education and other community services. The increase in part-time jobs, mostly taken up by women, represents more than 40% of all jobs created between 1997 and 2002 (European Commission, 2003f).

The Foundation's work has also identified interesting initiatives in the EU15 particularly concerning the development of temporary employment conditions.

The situation at the beginning of 2002 in Spain indicates a very high level of temporary employment, especially among women. The public sector is a major employer of women and its female employees are much more likely than their male colleagues to work on temporary contracts. In its labour market reform legislation in March 2001, the Spanish government included other aspects of the Directive (Directive on fixed-term work) such as the principle of equal treatment for workers on fixed-term and open-ended contracts, and the right for the former to be informed of vacancies. In April 1997, an inter-sectoral agreement aimed at promoting employment stability was signed by the main employers' organisations and trade union confederations.

In Austria, Amandas Matz was the first employment advice bureau to be specifically dedicated to young women who are unemployed or who face the threat of unemployment. It is run by a staff of four part-time advisers, all of them women, drawn from various professions. Staff turnover is very low. The project is funded by the Labour Market Service, the European Social Fund, and the City of Vienna Youth Centres Association. Staff

turnover is very low. Amandas Matz offers a broad range of services, including individual counselling, group work and information sessions. Some of the latter are intended for careers advisers and youth leaders so that they can receive and pass on information on the facilities offered by the advice bureau and about the current state of the labour market. The main emphasis is on careers and training advice, job seeking, planning for the future, providing assistance in difficult circumstances, developing strategies to combat discrimination against women in the labour market, providing initial information on new legal provisions, job search training and establishing office infrastructure. The available range of services undergoes constant change as clients' needs evolve.

Discussion and Proposals

The Foundation's work and analysis of concrete experiences underline the crucial role of SGI in women's employment and social inclusion. This is highlighted either through equal opportunities measures aimed at promoting gender equality at the workplace or by facilitating working women's access to services, notably social services. Under the impetus of the Lisbon strategy, tapping the potential of female participation is increasingly conceived as both an issue of gender equality and a matter of economic effectiveness. Employment strategies of SGI will therefore be crucial for the successful achievement of the Lisbon targets.

This paper raises the central question of the role of public authorities and social partners in guaranteeing equality values and equity in a market economy. It also raises the question of the sustainability of female participation rates in SGI considering the difficult conditions of work and employment provided by some sub-service sectors such as household services for instance. Another matter of concern relates to the relationship between women's participation in the labour market and the role of services as a provider and an employer. What will be the impact of ongoing restructuring, privatisation and reduced public finances?

The EU has now embarked on a major re-definition and review exercise of the regulatory conditions surrounding the economic and non-economic activities of SGI in the EU. As pointed out by this paper, EU regulations will increasingly impact on the provision of SGI, in general, and social services of general interest, in particular. In the course of 2005, the Commission will issue a Communication which will focus particularly on social services, including the area of healthcare and social policy. In its White Paper on SGI, the Commission also announced its intention to monitor and evaluate the performance of services of general interest within the EU. At this stage, the primary question is: which indicators will be used to measure this performance? Will the promotion of equal opportunities for women and men be used as an indicator in the assessment exercise? If not, what would then be the relevance of the gender mainstreaming principle enshrined in the EC Treaties? What would also be the relevance of the equal opportunities challenges identified in the Lisbon Strategy? It would appear that the issue of equal opportunities between women and men may pose significant challenges to the new EU reforms.

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