

## Flexicurity and Gender Mainstreaming: Deliberative Processes, Knowledge Networks and the European Labour Market<sup>1</sup>

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### *Flexicurity and Gender Mainstreaming: Converging Objectives for the European Labour Market?*

Gender mainstreaming and flexicurity have been adopted as separate labour market objectives in the European Union since the mid-1990s. It is remarkable that there has been a virtual absence of gender concerns in the deliberations on flexicurity for over a decade. When gender concerns were introduced into the flexicurity deliberations in 2007, they were incorporated in the 6<sup>th</sup> principle of flexicurity which “should support gender equality by promoting equal access to quality employment for women and men, and by offering possibilities to reconcile work and family life” (European Union 2007:10). The basic assumption was that the objectives of flexicurity and gender mainstreaming were compatible and even mutually supportive.

Flexicurity – the labour market policy that claims to combine and enhance both flexibility and security in the labour market – emerged as an important concept in the mid-1990s and is currently viewed by the European Commission as key to the “EU’s dilemma of how to maintain and improve competitiveness whilst preserving the European social model” (European Commission 2007). Consultations were undertaken with trade unions in 2007 with member states, business interests, NGOs and the public, and an important Stakeholder Conference was held on Flexicurity (April 20th 2007), focusing on the ways of exploring new ways of enhancing common principles of flexicurity. In June 2007, Vladimír Špidla (EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities) indicated that, “Flexicurity is the best way to ensure that European citizens can enjoy a high level of employment security so they can find a good job at every stage of their active life in a rapidly changing economic environment” (EU News 91/2007–2007/06/27). In December 2007, the member states of the European Union adopted eight common principles of flexicurity that were meant to promote “more open and responsive labour markets and more productive workplaces” (European Commission 2007). The deliberations on flexicurity, which began in the mid-1990s, have moved centre stage, and now appear to form the basis of a new social contract for workers in the European Union.

Gender mainstreaming was endorsed as a Key Principle of Action at the fourth United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, and several European countries and the European Union subsequently took initiatives to promote this policy. The European Union formally declared its commitment to this policy in 1996 and began

1 I would like to thank John Cameron, Karin Siegmann and Thanh-Dam Truong for their valuable comments on this paper.

programmes and projects to integrate a gender perspective and gender expertise into all the policies of the European Union. The European Union 1997 review of this policy focused on the integration of gender mainstreaming in national policies. The EU Amsterdam Treaty of 1999 gave “a formal legal status to mainstreaming through articles 2 and 3, which accepted the promotion of equality and the elimination of inequality – two key aspects relating to the labour market” (European Commission 2000:9). Within this policy, particular attention is given to gender-based imbalances in the labour market with regard to unemployment, reconciliation of family and working life, gender gaps and desegregation of the labour market.

While these two objectives – i.e., flexicurity and gender mainstreaming – were deliberated and developed over the same period, there has been little or no interaction between the different actors and networks involved at the European level. This paper examines the deliberations on flexicurity and gender mainstreaming, and analyses how these deliberations have been captured by the doxa associated with the neo-liberal agenda which, in effect, led to the dilution of opposition and political deliberation on the two labour market objectives. The neglect of gender in the deliberations on flexicurity deserves attention in view of the fact that women are disproportionately represented in relatively insecure and flexible work. Logically, the promotion of gender equality could involve supportive and interventionist policies that go against the spirit of increased flexible labour market policies. However, such concerns were not seriously addressed in the deliberation on flexicurity, and on the whole, the promotion of gender equality – as part of gender mainstreaming – was viewed mainly to be consistent with the concept of flexicurity.

The paper uses a framework developed by Cameron and Ojha (2007) to understand deliberative processes as part of rational ethical discourses and their potential to (re)produce deliberative deficits and to silence deliberative challenges in the context of unequal power relations. These discourses are then used to study the deliberations on flexicurity. Using Squires’ three-fold typology of gender mainstreaming strategies at the European level (inclusion, reversal and displacement), the paper analyses the deliberations and gendered knowledge that have been produced in these different networks/fields. The paper argues that there is a resonance between the deliberations associated with the “inclusive” strategy of gender mainstreaming and the deliberations on flexicurity. In line with the views put forward by Cameron and Ohja, Squires warns that “once accepted as a norm that resonates with the dominant policy frame, mainstreaming will be adopted as a technocratic tool in policy-making, de-politicising the issue of gender equality” (2005:374). The paper suggests that these (mainstream) interpretations of flexicurity and gender mainstreaming allow the sidelining of deliberations that demand gender transformation, thus allowing the neo-liberal agenda (narrowly focussed on economic productivity) at the European level to prevail.

### *Deliberative processes and unequal power relations*

The notion of collective deliberation, as developed by Cameron and Ojha (2007), provides a useful framework to analyse the particular type of gendered knowledge that is being institutionalised in the discussions on flexicurity in Europe and the implications this holds for unequal and gendered relations in society. In their paper on “A deliberative ethic for development” (2007) the authors – using the writings of Kant, Habermas, Dewey and Bourdieu – discuss the possibility of “centre-staging deliberative processes in development ethics”. They analyse the nature of ethical discourse, its enablement through deliberative processes, with the idealistic concerns being potentially subverted in the process of deliberation in situations of unequal power relations. The framework of analysis developed in this process throws light on improvements and deficits in the deliberation process, including the ways in which class, gender and other inequalities are treated as natural or inevitable, and as such not taken on board in the deliberation.

Developing the ideas on substantive ethics put forward by Kant and Habermas, Cameron and Ohja view deliberation to be “a conscious exercise of communicative competence by social beings to understand, negotiate and transform human relations and ethical norms” (2007:77). The authors use Bourdieu’s work – and in particular his concepts of doxa and habitus – to understand the limits placed on open deliberative processes. According to Bourdieu, the decisions of social agents are determined by their beliefs, values and assumptions – which he refers to as the doxa, which is secured in day-to-day practices, the habitus. The logic of doxa and the practice of habitus in social fields reflect differing power relations in society which place some people in a systematically advanced position over others in the process of deliberation (Cameron and Ohja 2007:69). At the same time, Bourdieu suggests that deliberative deficits are evident not only with regard to open coercion or submission but also with regard to two types of restrictions on high quality deliberation. The first type of restriction stems from the fact that the practice of deliberation is strategically oriented through rationally constructed existing interests even if the terminology of deliberation suggests disinterest. The second type refers to interests reflecting the largely unconscious functioning of doxa in historical patterns of habituses – the day-to-day practices that represent the norms of certain groups (as opposed to other groups) in society.

The following sections analyse the interaction between deliberations on flexicurity and gender mainstreaming using this framework, exploring how technocratic and bureaucratic norms in both fields have allowed the continuation of deliberative deficits.

#### The flexicurity field/network

Within the neo-liberal perspective, flexibility restores equilibrium in the labour market, including solving the problem of involuntary unemployment while improving productivity and profitability. This so-called “objective rationale” was promoted in the

1990s in Europe in spite of evidence from previous experiences with flexibility which showed that while some people benefited from better jobs in the high-tech sector, there was a growth of “poor” flexible work which consisted largely of “inferior, insecure contingent jobs and interrupted, discontinuous employment” often associated with female employment (Dickens 2004:595-596). While the concept of flexibility had previously emphasised numerical flexibility – workforce adjustment) (Atkinson 1984; Atkinson & Meager 1986), – the European Union’s White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment in 1993 had focused on different types of flexibility, including increased wage flexibility, labour mobility, removal or reduction of welfare policy measures (flexible costs of production) and more localised collective bargaining regimes. The Extraordinary European Job Summit in Luxembourg in November 1997 – the so-called “Jobs Summit” – and the subsequent Employment Report of Europe 1998 also highlighted the need for improvements in “employability” and flexibility; the report underscored the importance of appropriate flexibility in working patterns, wages and salaries, geographical and occupational mobility. The prioritisation of global competitiveness was further underlined at the meeting of the European Council in Lisbon March 2000.

The challenge in the 1990s for European policy processes – which were in the main, as we have just seen, moving in favour of a more neo-liberal agenda – was to persuade workers, trade unions and women’s lobbies that an increase in flexibility did not automatically translate into lowering security; that on the contrary, flexibility and security could be attained simultaneously. Flexicurity appeared to play a critical role in realizing this win-win scenario.

Scholars and practitioners from the mid-1990s have interpreted the concept of flexicurity in different ways.<sup>2</sup> The initial – and in some cases, continuing – concern has been to link flexible labour markets with the provision of security to weaker groups in society. Subsequent discussions have taken on a more abstract nature, generalising the form and nature of the concept, and the choices available with regard to different combinations of flexibility and security in a technical economic language. An example of this view is that of Wilthagen and Rogowski who speak of the “double character” of the concept, associating a typical form of flexibility and a typical form of security. In elucidating this theme Wilthagen and Tros have (re)defined the concept as follows:

Flexicurity is (1) a degree of job, employment, income and combination security that facilitates the labour market careers and biographies of workers with a relatively weak position and allows for enduring and high quality labour market participation and social inclusion, while at the same time providing (2) a degree of numerical (both external and internal), functional and wage flexibility that allows for labour markets’ (and individual companies’) timely and adequate adjustment to changing conditions in order to maintain and enhance competitiveness and productivity (Wilthagen and Tros 2004).

2 References suggest that the concept was initially introduced in 1995 by the sociologist Hans Adriaansens, member of the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) and who associated it essentially as a shift from job security to employment security, this concept being taken up and modified in 1998 by Wilthagen (1998a).

In many ways such a definition could be viewed as a good example of technocratic closure looking to bureaucratic action. In this definition, the term “relatively weak position” of workers is an even neutral interpretation of the existing segmentation in the labour market, which has resulted in involuntary unemployment, particularly of certain vulnerable categories of workers such as poor women, ethnic minorities and refugees. The promotion of “numerical, functional and wage flexibility” says very little about the content either of the job or about the quality of the employment that is being generated. An important conceptual change in labour market policy, however, was the replacement of *specific, legal, job security* by *general, potential employment security*. The basic idea was to get each member of the workforce to accept lower levels of security (safety) with regard to a particular job, in return for the increased possibility of an alternative job – these processes resulting in an overall high macro-aggregate but volatile micro-level employment.

But the language continued to take on a technocratic form, linked as we have discussed previously, with the Cameron and Ohja’s second level of decision-making practices (2007:71). The deliberative processes in this context attempt to sort out tensions and to subsume oppositional power relations, by using technical and rational language – moving between doxic rules and habitus pragmatics. In line with this logic, Wilthagen developed a matrix to analyse flexibility with security – a framework for analysing flexicurity policies. He identified four key areas of flexibility (functional flexibility, internal numerical flexibility, external numerical flexibility, and wage flexibility) and four domains of security (job security, employment security, income security, and ‘combination security’, or the work-life balance), resulting in 16 possible types of relations between flexibility and security. These relationships can be initiated and implemented by various national, regional, local industry or company level agencies. The agencies involved thus include state, regional and local government representatives, social partners, individual firms and individual employees, and the resulting strategies can be codified in laws, collective labour agreements, social pacts, social plans, individual contracts and HRM policies (Wilthagen 2004: 4).

The highly publicised report of the European Union Employment Task Force in 2003, entitled perhaps not surprisingly “Jobs, Jobs, Jobs; Creating More Employment in Europe,” also carried the same message. This was also the message of the more recent report “Towards Common Principles of Flexicurity: More and better jobs through flexibility and security” (June 2007), where there are clear deliberative implications for attaining a mix of flexibility and security on the labour market. The four policy components of flexicurity policies were (a) flexible and reliable contractual arrangements, (b) comprehensive lifelong learning strategies, (c) effective active labour market policies, and (d) modern social security systems (European Union 2007:6). The basic argument put forward is that “good unemployment benefits, effective active labour market policies and dynamic labour markets increase people’s feeling of security” (European Union 2007:8).

A successful flexicurity strategy has to balance carefully the income insurance function of the unemployment benefit system with an appropriate “activation” strategy designed to facilitate transitions into

employment and boost career development. Empirical evidence suggests that workers feel better protected by adequate unemployment benefits than by strict protection against dismissal. Active labour market policies, too, have appositve effects on the feeling of security among workers (European Union 2007:8)

There is a conspicuous absence of gender in most of the deliberations on flexicurity. Very recently the European Union has articulated the link between flexicurity and the promotion of gender equality, and has included it as one of the eight principles of flexicurity. As with the discussion on the other principles, there is an assumption that flexicurity is in line with the objectives of gender equality. The principle is stated as follows:

(6) Flexicurity should support gender equality by promoting equal access to quality employment for women and men, and by offering possibilities to reconcile work and family life (European Commission 2007:10).

As we shall see, this sentiment is echoed in the more integrationist and technocratic deliberations on the promotion of gender equality in the European Union.

The following sections study the ways in which the dominant production and networks of gender knowledge on gender mainstreaming have resonated with the thrust of the flexicurity discussions in pursuing a more neo-liberal agenda through neutralising critical and political gender concerns, and disregarding the reality of low-income groups (women, migrants, refugees, etc.) who struggle for security rather than deal with the balancing of work and family life.

#### The political roots of the Gender Mainstreaming field in the European Union

While the importance of gender equality has been acknowledged by the European Union since its inception, the focus of this policy in the Treaty of Rome in 1957 was mainly through the promotion of Article 119 which dealt with the provision of equal pay for equivalent work for women and men (Hoskyns 1996). Women, within this framework, were viewed primarily as (passive) recipients of support and assistance, and in charge of the caring and other responsibilities within the household. However, the deliberations to promote gender equality in the 1970s and 1980s assumed a more political momentum, challenging the basis of the labour market policies that existed, and providing a broader platform for the promotion of gender equality and gender rights, leading to the formal adoption of “gender mainstreaming” as a policy in the European Union in 1996.

The formal adoption of an EU policy of gender mainstreaming was directly linked to the political mobilisation associated with the Fourth UN World Conference on Women at Beijing in 1995, where gender mainstreaming was declared to be a key strategy for the promotion of gender equality. According to the Beijing Platform:

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is

a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality (United Nations 1997).

Such a perspective was the outcome of the deliberations undertaken over the previous two decades, and stimulated by the growing politicisation of the international women's movement and the series of United Nations World Conferences on Women in Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and 1995 (Beijing).<sup>3</sup> While there were differences between participants in setting priorities at the conferences, they were important fora for deliberations, bringing together women and men with varying backgrounds and interests. They also performed an important function of sharing, informing and shaping opinions and policies on gender equality.<sup>4</sup> The adoption of gender mainstreaming as a strategy for gender equality in the European Union also assumed this political momentum and saw the immediate setting up of five commissioners for the Equality Portfolio under the chairmanship of the President of European Union in 1996. Following this lead, the 1998 Council of Europe adopted a policy of gender mainstreaming defining it as:

(re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making (Council of Europe 1999:4).

#### Gender mainstreaming from the mid 1990s

While the feminist politics of the period propelled the policy of gender mainstreaming in the European Union, the actual deliberations on gender mainstreaming in the sub-

- 3 The Mexican conference of 1975 (which took place at the same year as the International Women's Year) took up the issue of equality, development and peace for women, and underscored the importance of viewing women as full and equal partners with men in relation to rights and resources, calling for "securing equal access for women to resources such as education, employment opportunities, political participation, health services, housing, nutrition and family planning." Building on these concerns, the Copenhagen Conference called for equal access to education, employment opportunities and adequate health care services as needing particular attention. The Nairobi Conference in 1985 developed the Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to meet the goals put out in the Conferences in Mexico and Copenhagen. It also declared for the first time that all problems faced by humanity were disproportionately also problems for women, forwarding a legitimate right to participate in the decision-making process and in managing human affairs.
- 4 They were important inputs for the adoption in 1970 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) – often referred to as the Women's Bill of Rights. This was followed in Vienna in 1993 at the World Conference which held that the "human rights of women and of the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. The full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life, at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex are priority objectives of the international community" (United Nations 1993).

sequent period have assumed different approaches and priorities, as will shown below. Numerous authors have written on the gender mainstreaming policy in the European Union. Walby, for example, has theorised on the gender regime in the European Union which consists of different levels, forms and domains, giving rise to different moments of deliberation in the promotion of gender equality (Walby 2004:10-11). Rees has identified three approaches in the development of gender equality policies in the European Union, which she refers to as “tinkering”, “tailoring” and “transforming”. Rees associated these different approaches with the promotion of equal treatment in the 1970s, positive action in the 1980s, and gender mainstreaming in the 1990s, respectively (Rees 1998:28, 2002, 2000). From her point of view gender mainstreaming is a sequential strategy, built on and accompanied by policies of equal treatment legislation and positive action. Other authors have taken on a more critical approach. Some have argued that different approaches have, at times, led to a dilution of the political message leading some to conclude that the policy of gender mainstreaming has been only partially successful (Lombardo and Meier 2006). Woodward (2001) has maintained that with gender mainstreaming, the gender policy which had been the purview of a department, did not exist for long, and there was no guarantee that a similar perspective would be taken up in a similar manner by other policy departments. Furthermore there was a lack of knowledge at the highest levels of decision making on what gender mainstreaming implied (Woodward 2001:69, 74-75). Along the same line, Stratigaki (2005) has argued that *de jure* gender mainstreaming, when it is articulated in terms of expertise with regard to gender indicators, can be used *de facto* to neutralise positive action in favour of women in light of their enhanced political power as well as technical, human and financial resources.

For the purposes of our analysis, the framework adopted by Squires is particularly useful as it highlights the importance of deliberations in the development of strategies. Squires has argued that, in practice, the three approaches identified by Rees (tinkering, tailoring and transforming) co-exist at the policy level within gender mainstreaming and are associated with specific strategies which she groups as inclusion, reversal and displacement strategies. The following table indicates the different strategies and their associated actors, aims, indicators, strengths and weaknesses.



### Mainstreaming Strategies

<b>Mainstreaming Strategies</b>	<b>Inclusion</b>	<b>Reversal</b>	<b>Displacement</b>
<b>Model</b>	<b>Integrationist</b>	<b>Agenda-Setting</b>	<b>Transformative</b>
<b>Actors</b>	Experts	Identity groups	Political citizens
<b>Aims</b>	Neutral policy-making	Recognising marginalised voices	Denaturalising and thereby politicising policy norms
<b>Processes</b>	Bureaucratic	Consultative	Deliberative
<b>Indicators</b>	Policy instruments	Politics of presence	Cultural transformation
<b>Strengths</b>	Effective integration	Group perspectives recognised	Sensitive to diversity
<b>Weaknesses</b>	Rhetorical entrapment	Reification of identities	Complexity, lack of specificity

Source: Squires 2005:374.

Squires' classification can be used to distinguish three equality approaches associated with distinct fields/networks of gendered knowledge production. The inclusion strategy, which uses an integrationist model, is characterised by the dominance of gender experts as key players, who evolve "effective" and gender neutral policies. This approach to gender mainstreaming aspires to objectivity, and views individuals as autonomous agents making decisions promoting the formal equality between the genders, a terrain and policy typically promoted by liberal feminists. The Reversal Strategy is linked with an interpretative methodology, and, while it recognises the voices of the marginalised, focuses on the concerns of women. Associated with more radical feminists, it tries to mainstream women's voices and seeks recognition for female identity. The displacement strategy advocates diversity politics, and politicises policy norms. Mainstreaming within this perspective is a more open-ended deliberative project, which is concerned with deconstructing the discourse and transformation of diverse forms of marginalisation in society. The policies for gender equality therefore cannot be separated from other forms of inequality (Squires 2005:376). Squires argues for diversity mainstreaming as "an institutional manifestation of deliberative democracy" (ibid.: 367), indicating that the transformative model of mainstreaming is best suited to address the diversity agenda by making privileged norms visible.

In the sections below, the paper analyses the gendered knowledge and networks associated with the inclusion, reversal and displacement strategies with regard to gender mainstreaming, suggesting how the dominant doxa and habitus are aligned with the integrationist/inclusive strategy, which is in turn is closely linked to the neo-liberal agenda and the dominant interpretation of flexicurity policies.

## Case I – The hegemonic neo-liberal ideology at the European Union, the pressures for increased and gendered flexibility and the decision making within the doxa

Gender equality is a fundamental right, a common value of the EU, and a necessary condition for the achievement of the EU objectives of growth, employment and social cohesion. One of the main challenges for the EU is to increase women's employment, to improve women's situation on the labour market and eliminate gender gaps (European Commission 2007: 2).

Women are often obliged to choose between having children or a career, due to the lack of care services, of flexible working arrangements, the persistence of gender stereotypes and an unequal share of family responsibilities with men. Progress made by women, including in key areas of the Lisbon Strategy such as education and research, are not fully reflected in women's position on the labour market. This is a waste of human capital that the EU cannot afford (European Commission 2007:2).

These two quotes come from a Manual for Gender Mainstreaming of Employment policies (European Commission, July 2007) of the European Commission, which is based on the advice of the Expert Group on Gender, Social Inclusion and Employment (EGGSIE) which provides external expertise to the European Commission on gender issues. The quotes reflect the close link perceived between the needs for increased labour market flexibility and the women's involvement in flexible work or part-time work.<sup>5</sup> The particular form of gendered knowledge produced in this network/field promoting this "inclusive" strategy suggests the importance of getting the involvement and commitment of different stakeholders to encourage gender equality as "gender equality is argued to be better for both women and men, to improve productivity, and to facilitate better, more modern, government" (Squires 2005:374). Implicitly it is also acknowledged that there are economic costs entailed by discrimination and that it is important for efficiency reasons to promote gender equality.

As noted by Danuta Hübner, European Commissioner for regional policy,

Equality between men and women is one of the EU's fundamental objectives, and we have a responsibility to see that it is taken into account in the area of regional policy, which accounts for one third of the EU budget and is one of the most visible policies for citizens. Gender mainstreaming is also part of the Lisbon strategy, because gender discrimination, both overt and latent, equates to a great waste of human resources. Eliminating discrimination will lead to gains in both employment and productivity (Hübner 1995 IP/05/610).

The European Commission recognised the need for gender experts in implementing the strategy of gender mainstreaming.

For attaining success, expertise might also be readily available by gender equality units and/or bodies, research institutes, women's organization, or external experts. Cooperation might be helped by the allocation of a specific budget for gender training and gender expert assistance (European Commission 2008:4).

Gender experts within the European Union play an important role in developing the norms that inform labour policies. Within the doxa, the inclusive strategy on gender

<sup>5</sup> While women's employment in the European Union increased steadily from 45,951,000 in 1975 to 68,964,000 in 2001, this employment was mainly in the flexible part-time work.

mainstreaming, as we have seen, usually implies a position where gender equality is viewed to be better for women and men, and is in line with improving productivity and competitiveness, and a more modern government. However, this type of gendered knowledge, through the use of so-called expert and neutral policies, ignores critical and political concerns of gender mainstreaming and thus has limitations with regard to the potential of gender mainstreaming as a political or transformative strategy.

This demand to limit the scope of mainstreaming tools such that they fit easily within existing policy processes potentially delimits the potential of mainstreaming itself. It raises questions about the political accountability of experts, reduces the scope for wider consultation with “non-experts,” and so reduces the likelihood that the policy agenda will reflect the particular experiences and concerns of women that do not resonate with the pre-existing policy framework. Its strength lies in its ability to realize effective integration; its weakness lies in its tendency to fall into rhetorical entrapment (Squires 2005:374).

An illustration of this is seen in the abovementioned manual, which is concerned with how gender mainstreaming could improve the European Commission’s Roadmap for Equality between men and women (2006-2010) by prioritising the economic independence of women and reconciling work and family life. Efforts to stimulate progress in this direction included increasing the employment of women, promoting female entrepreneurship, stimulating member states to improve the care services. The manual proposes a four-step methodology (getting organised, learning about gender differences, assessing the policy impact and redesigning policy) for this purpose (European Commission July 2007:3).

It is interesting to note that, as we have seen in the previous discussions on flexicurity, gender concerns were not seriously considered within the framework of flexicurity. It was only in 2007 that gender mainstreaming discussions at the European level considered the impact of flexicurity on women. However, it was, in the first place, viewed as a novel approach by the Expert Group on Gender, Social Inclusion and Employment (EGGSIE).

It is important to note that flexicurity does not involve entirely new policy measures; rather its novelty lies in the combination of simultaneously introduced measures in the field of both flexibility and security (European Commission 2007:15).

The Expert group recognised the need to have a gender mainstreaming approach inform the flexicurity policies. It indicated that such an approach would “recognize the role of gender in reinforcing inequalities associated with flexible working and in shaping flexible working patterns; address the reconciliation needs of employees with care commitments while recognizing the risks of extending working hours or unsocial hours scheduling; support pathways out of non-standard work and working times to avoid the risks of long term traps and segmentation of women into disadvantaged employment forms” (European Commission 2007:15-16). To deal with these problems it suggested a check list on the gender mainstreaming of flexicurity policies. This is given below.

*Gender mainstreaming of flexicurity policies*

**Step 1. Getting organized**

- Are there any guidelines or targets set with regard to flexicurity policies?
- Are all relevant stakeholders aware of the gender equality issues?
- Is there a clear structure of responsibilities?
- Are training facilities in gender equality issues available and/or is it possible to make use of external expertise?

**Step 2. Learning about gender differences**

- Are all relevant statistics differentiated by gender?
- What is the gender division of typical and atypical contract?
- What is the gender division of fulltime and part-time working hours?
- What are the trends in this respect?

**Step 3. Assessing the policy impact**

- Are flexible time arrangements compatible with women's needs?
- Is the development of flexible working time compatible or incompatible with domestic care responsibilities?
- Are the programmes/policies aimed at men as well as women?
- Do those on flexible contracts have access to training?
- Are there measures to reduce the risk of segregation associated with flexible and part-time working (for example rights to return to full-time work)?
- Are adaptability policies compatible with promoting the closure of the gender gaps (including gender pay gaps)?

**Step 4. Redesigning policy**

- Given the results of step 1, 2 and 3 identify ways in which the policy could be redesigned to promote gender equality. Take into account that gender mainstreaming calls for a more joined up approach, which may involve more than one policy area or department.

Source: European Commission, July 2007:16

The language used in the above box, identifying the steps involved in the mainstreaming of flexicurity policies, suggests a technocratic solution and closure looking for bureaucratic action. While there is awareness that women are often disadvantaged in flexible work that they take, the underlying assumptions for such a division of labour are not addressed. The proposed checklist is reflective of the deficit in deliberative democracy both within and between the fields/networks of flexicurity and gender mainstreaming at the European level. In many ways, this technocratic approach invokes little proactive intervention. As the EU labour market is generally showing increased levels of female economic activity, partially associated with flexible jobs, policy intervention is often not a priority, except to counter some of the unequal relations on the labour market between men and women. The possibilities that an increased labour supply of women might imply lower wages, and that the working conditions associated with employment security might be problematic, are simply not seriously

deliberated but viewed rather as natural, inevitable and even rational. Essentially, such a perspective also depoliticises the issue of gender equality.

One could also argue that such an approach supports the doxa that allows policies to ignore the underlying constraints of labour market participation of women and men on an equal footing – a core element of which is the uneven distribution of reproductive responsibilities – fundamental to patriarchal power relations in society.

## Case II: Challenging differing gender power relations on the labour market

The political message that stemmed from the historical roots of gender mainstreaming were taken up by several other gendered knowledge networks, who in turn took up associated approaches and strategies to promote gender equality. As previously noted the links between the doxa and the habitus in policy-making fields reflect differing power relations in society, placing some people in systematically advanced positions over others in the process of deliberation (Cameron and Ohja 2007:69). In this section we concentrate on the “reversal” strategy, which focuses on changing the male-domination in the gender power relations on the labour market. According to Squires’ typology, the reversal strategies are linked to those wishing to counter the disadvantages that women have historically experienced, and focus on the female gendered identity. The weakness of this strategy is that it obscures intra-group divisions (Squires 1999; 2005:370-375).

The focus of the deliberations within this gendered knowledge field is on trying to challenge the doxa with regard to part-time and flexible work, highlighting the ways in which women are disadvantaged with regard to certain types of flexible work in order to put forward “reversal” strategies to promote gender mainstreaming. Amongst the arguments put forward were that high participation rates of women in the industrialised countries did not automatically imply gender equality on the labour market. Occupational segregation as well as labour market segmentation (horizontal and vertical) have tended to disproportionately place women in the low-paying categories of work often associated with more vulnerable terms and conditions of work. As noted by the European Commission:

Gender discrimination remains a fundamental component pervading the labour market. New policies to desegregate the labour market are needed which bear on both supply and demand factors. Activities to promote labour market desegregation often consist of isolated and dispersed actions without a programmatic framework and which fail to achieve a substantial impact (European Commission, Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the European Union, Annual Report 1997, p. 56).

Gender occupational segregation has resulted in women being disproportionately represented in certain categories of employment.<sup>6</sup> Almost half the women in the European Union are employed in health and social services, retailing, education and public administration, four sectors that accounted for under a third of total employment. Studies have shown that typically women's jobs are associated with low pay, precarious job status with poor working conditions, inadequate social coverage and limited possibilities for promotion and upward mobility. Women experience higher unemployment (12.4 %) than men (9.4 %) do (Rubery, Smith and Fagan 1996). There is some evidence to suggest that women tend to be in more transient jobs than men are.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, men tend to have significantly higher permanent contracts than women, although once in the labour market on temporary contracts, they both stand equal chances of getting permanent contracts. Such flexible jobs are associated with lower earnings than permanent jobs, as well as job insecurity (Remery, van Doorne-Huiskes and Schippers 2002:491). Thus, while there has been an increase in the 1980s and the 1990s in women's activity rates (the so-called feminisation of the labour force, represented by the increasing share of women in the labour force), this has not broken down the sexual division of labour and the associated gender segregation between and within occupations, across sectors and at all levels of work (Plantenga 1997:89). All these factors have given rise to the problem that women's involvement in flexible and insecure work is, in many ways, a manifestation of their weaker labour market position in times of high unemployment, their largest share being in secondary jobs in the low-skilled occupations with women having higher rates of temporary work than men (de Grip, Hoevenberg and Willems 1997).

While these deliberations sought to criticise flexible policies through highlighting the experiences of women in the labour market, there was less emphasis on the differences between different groups of women (the class and ethnic factors) as well as on the implications that flexible policies hold for other vulnerable groups. The demand was for adequate policies to be put into place to ensure that policies promoting gender equality should counter the disadvantages that women had historically faced on the labour market. While this message was important in criticising the mainstream policies promoting flexibility on the labour market, it did not challenge the system.

6 Even the Nordic/Scandinavian countries – which have relatively high rates of female employment (75 % in 1992) and where women occupy nearly 50 % of the labour market – have gender-segmented labour markets, with women occupying the expanding services sector (clerical, commercial, health care and social work) and a continuance of the wage gap between men and women. Over 70 % of women in Sweden in 1998 were employed in female-dominated occupations (60-100 % women) while over 75 % of men were in male-dominated jobs (0-40 % women) (Nyberg 1998:15-16). A study in Britain of women's female employment between 1981 and 1991 confirms that much of this increase has taken place in occupations where they were employed in 1981, with all the increase in part-time work for women being in these occupations (Bruegel and Perrons 1998).

7 A study of the British labour market in 1985 and 1990 suggests that around 25 % of men and 41 % of women are in jobs lasting less than five years. At the same time, 25 % of men and 12 % of women are likely to be in jobs which they will hold for over 30 years (Burgess and Rees 1997).

### Case III: Challenging the Doxa through the “transformatory” approach and “displacement” strategy

The displacement strategy, most closely aligned with the Cameron-Ohja framework on deliberative democracy, is concerned with deconstructing the discursive regimes involved in the different deliberations (Squires 1999, 2005:370-375). Squires posits that it is necessary to link gender equality to other forms of equality – including those relating to sexual orientation, age, religion, race, and disability – through the promotion of inclusive deliberation. Under these circumstances, she, like Cameron and Ohja, argues for inclusive deliberation which “transforms mainstreaming from a technocratic tool into an institution manifestation of deliberative democracy” (Squires 2005:367).

These deliberations on gender mainstreaming were associated with gender knowledge and networks that continued the political message of the international women’s movement but took it beyond correcting the system while challenging its basis with regard to power and distribution. As we have seen, the deliberations and political contestations prior to and during the Beijing Conference recognised differences and disadvantages that exist between women and men, and pressured for positive and corrective action, including the combination of political opportunities, strategic framing and resource mobilization that have contributed to the promotion of the gender rights agenda in the European Union (Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000). In many instances, pressures were placed at different levels by feminist movements in civil society, women representatives in parliament and government administrative bureaucracies (Vargas and Wieringa 1998). Deliberative claims pursued a more inclusive democratic form in the decision-making process. Labour market concerns within these deliberations on gender mainstreaming went beyond trying to reverse the situation but trying rather to transform the system, with the real potential of reversing what Bourdieu calls the doxic order.

In dealing with the labour market, the deliberations suggested that it was not sufficient to develop “reversal” and corrective strategies but to challenge the basis of the system itself. For example, they highlighted the role of the unpaid work in the households, communities and civil society in general, which was not recognised as a contribution to the economy in the GDP statistics and which gave rise to disadvantages and discrimination for women in the labour market. Under these circumstances, the promotion of labour market flexibility could shift more work to the unpaid labour segment as women continue to be largely responsible for the care work in the household. The promotion of flexicurity without addressing this issue could result in increased vulnerability for women in both the paid and unpaid sectors of work. The claims used economic language to question the basis of macro-economic policies and the implications that they held for men and women. As noted by the European Women’s Lobby:

It is rarely recognised that many cuts in public services and reductions of public expenditure, merely represent a shift in costs from the paid to the unpaid sector. Unpaid care and domestic work can in principle be done by men or women, but this work has been socially constituted as a responsibility of

women and often thought of as a social role rather than economic activity. Policy makers must make explicit their assumptions, which underpin macro-economic policies and must recognize the need to establish the costs of ignoring unpaid work and women's time use in these activities (European Women's Lobby (<http://www.womenlobby.org/site/1abstract>)).

The associated deliberations on such claims also critically looked at the wider policies of the European Union. Standing has argued that increased involvement of women in the labour market during periods of recession in the industrialised countries was associated with the growth of income insecurity (Standing 1999:584). The latter has been partly the outcome of the targeting of state benefits, resulting in fewer people having entitlements with the more vulnerable categories undertaking precarious forms of work to earn their income. In addition, the governments often allowed the weakening of employment security regulations and the easing of downsizing of enterprises. Under these circumstances, employers often found it possible to dismiss (costly) full-time (male) workers and for cheaper (usually female and part-time) labour.

The transformatory approach and the displacement strategy also argued that flexible work could strengthen class divisions between women, as a minority of women find themselves in an advantaged labour segment working full time (Rubery, Smith and Fagan 1998). Flexibility in labour market policies promoted by governments to make the unemployed more "employable" could have the undesired consequence of increased *inflexibility* on choices of occupations for women due to their role in the unpaid care and domestic work. Such flexibility could therefore promote the feminisation of non-standard work, with the resulting lack of flexibility for women to take up the more lucrative flexible jobs (due to their care responsibilities in the household). These disadvantages were again brought up in the different political lobbies.

Part time work doesn't provide sufficient income to have economic autonomy and provides less social security rights. It must also be acknowledged that many part-time women workers actually want to work full time. Part time work is also considered to be the solution for the reconciliation of work and family life, and is considered to be an issue that mainly concerns women. Such a view strongly limits women's choices in the labour market and cements the unequal sharing of family responsibilities between women and men (European Women's Lobby (<http://www.womenlobby.org/site/1abstract>)).

Another concern questioned the very nature of labour market forces and whether they could function as corrective institution in dealing with the problems of gender inequality. Labour markets are, as argued by Elson (1999), not neutral arenas where buyers and sellers interact, but rather social institutions that are "bearers of gender". Seen as operating at the intersection of productive and reproductive sectors of the economy, they reflect social norms and stereotypes, including associated masculine and feminine behaviour and patterns of work, as well as existing problems of gender domination and subordination. According to Elson,

The formal and informal rules which structure the operation of labour markets are instantiations of the gender relations of the society in which the labour market is embedded. They reflect existing problems of gender domination and subordination, and also the tensions, contradictions and potential for changes which is characteristic of any pattern of gender relations, no matter how unequally power is distributed (Elson 1999: 612).



As such, when women enter the labour market, they are confronted by a framework of behaviour and division of work that reflects the predominant values in society. Within her framework, Elson has argued that issues such as labour legislation, government labour standards inspectorates, trade unions, professional and business networks, system of job evaluation, systems of organisation of work, pay determination structures all are bearers of gender even if there is no overt discourse on issues of gender equality and differentiation. Thus, the ideology and its impact on the labour market can result in women being unable to be on equal terms with men on the labour market resulting in women's "weak position in terms of earnings and potential" (Elson 1999:612). In addition, flexibility can lead to the weakening of these institutions which do not imply improvement of women's positions in the labour market.

Underlying these deliberations is a fundamental confrontation with the doxa and habitus which sustains patriarchal and class power relations in society through challenging the assumptions of the system itself from the viewpoint of gender equality.

#### Flexicurity: Containing the crisis through symbolic violence

We have seen that flexicurity is currently being promoted by the European Commission as the key means of providing employment and security in a competitive global economy through the promotion of more open and responsive labour markets and more productive workplaces (European Commission 2007). At the same time, the normative insertion of gender issues in the 6<sup>th</sup> principle of flexicurity suggests that such a policy is beneficial to women workers, through providing greater scope for employment and reconciling family and working life. Within this perspective, improvements in gender equality (discrimination being considered a waste of human resources) are closely linked with increased employment, productivity and efficiency. This "common rationality" between the objectives of flexicurity and the inclusive strategy of gender mainstreaming, manifested through "neutral" policies (and indicators) has imparted a degree of objectivity to the deliberations, continuing deliberative deficits through its strategic link with the neo-liberal agenda even if the terminology of deliberation suggests disinterest.

The coalescence and capturing of the deliberations in flexicurity and gender mainstreaming has allowed for the marginalisation and dilution of some of the more political and transformatory deliberations with regard to both these policies. It also raises serious questions on the potential of mainstreaming as a strategy, as it forces the framework of action into a narrow field of interventions, while also limiting the scope for wider consultations and the involvement of "non-experts". In these ways, it is also possible that the strategy is likely to be biased in favour of the experiences of women as understood by those involved in the policy-making structure.

One could further argue that the political challenges underpinning the reversal and displacement strategies had the potential to lead to a "crisis" and destabilise the doxa. Such a situation provoked the need for symbolic violence from those who dominate

the power relations on the labour market. This was not done through physical coercion. In many ways flexicurity is a solution if it can succeed in foreclosing any political and fundamental interrogation of the system. In addition, such a lack of deliberative democracy also supports another doxa – that which accepts the uneven distribution of reproductive responsibilities – the core of the patriarchal power relations in society.

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