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Eva Fodor
Central European University

In recent years several large reports have been compiled to assess the situation of working women in post-communist societies in eastern, and south eastern Europe. These include reports by the *World Bank*, the *UNECE* paper on the website for this meeting, as well as a project I also contributed to, initiated by *UNIFEM* and entitled "The Story Behind the Numbers: Women's Employment Opportunities in eastern Europe."

I will point out four of the crucial issues that came out from these reports concerning women and work in post communist societies that I feel policy making should address more extensively.

First, while women in western Europe have growing access to paid jobs, women in post-communist societies experienced a sharp drop in the availability of employment. Many fewer women work now than did 15 years ago. And while in the past five years there's been a slight increase in women's employment rates in at least some of the countries, the unavailability of paid work is still a major problem for many women, especially for older women, women without skills or women living in remote rural areas with little access to transportation.

We often don't meet these women in labor statistics, because they are classified as "inactive" and thus fall outside of the competence of labor surveys. We have very little information about them because they do not boost the unemployment numbers. But they still need jobs and an income!

Second, women are disadvantaged even if they do have jobs. The pay gap and job segregation indices may not have increased in absolute size since the fall of the communist regimes, but the consequences of having a low prestige, underpaid job, have become more onerous. If an average woman makes 25% less than a similar average men, this today - unlike 15 years ago - is likely to mean that she will be living in poverty and will have trouble supporting her children.

Looking at pay and job segregation figures together we find that women are often squeezed out of, or face special discrimination in growth sectors. The financial sector provides a classic example. This is the sector where average wages are the highest in many of the countries, yet in several east European countries it is also here that the wage gap is twice as high as in other sectors. In other words, men occupy the most elite segment of the financial sector and women do the grunt work for significantly less money. The more prestigious and well paid a job, or a sector, the more disadvantage women face.

Third, and as a result, women (often even highly qualified women: doctors, teachers) take up low quality, unstable, informal work, which barely provide a livelihood and offer almost no security for the future. More and more women work in sweatshop-like conditions in eastern Europe, or in “outsourced jobs”, spending their lives leaning over sewing machines in their own homes. Isolated from others and having no political voice, they are forced to accept temporary and non-binding labor contracts without benefits and are subject – without any protection- to the whims of not only the market but also their employers.

Fourth and to summarize: both job availability and especially job *quality* is a major problem for women all over eastern Europe and little improvement have been seen in this regard in the region in the past decade. Yet at the same time, the vast differences in the experience of women from different countries, and even among women with different resources within a single country must also be acknowledged and policies should target special needs in special areas.

The Beijing Platform for Action emphasized the need to reduce gender inequalities and improve women’s opportunities in paid work. Much remains to be done in the eastern and south eastern part of Europe. Let me direct your attention to three ways in which, I believe policy making could become more effective.

First, I believe we should re-emphasize the need for more dialogue between women in the east and west. Women in many east European countries benefit – at least to some extent- from the fact that western women managed to place gender inequality and discrimination on the agenda of most international organizations. However, we should also acknowledge that at least some of the positive changes in western women’s political and labor market outcomes may in fact be tied to the *weakening* of women’s labor force position in the East: through the availability of cheap immigrant work, goods assembled and sold at a low price, companies bent on making a profit from exploiting women moving east, the brain drain, etc. This story behind the numbers should be considered if we want to build alliances among women: we must acknowledge that women of different classes, or different ethnicities and nationalities may have differing interests as well.

Second, I would find it important to focus policy attention not only on securing jobs for more women, but also on trying to improve the quality of employment- formal and less formal alike. To this end, more data should be collected (and analyzed) especially from parts of Europe where gender-sensitive indicators are less available, such as the South East and on issues which are not conventionally included in data collection efforts: on for example, domestic, unpaid, and informal work. Several organizations including UNIFEM – one that I know of - is already doing this, but I believe this is particularly important if we want to make an impact.

Third and finally, to finish on a somewhat more personal note: I’m an academic, a sociologist who has been studying this issue for years, but I also worked for policy making organizations as well as for NGO’s in Hungary. I am strongly convinced that there’s not enough exchange among these different types of institutions: often we speak

different languages and to different crowds, even if our agenda might be similar. Intensifying the dialogue amongst us should make policy making efforts much easier, better targeted and more efficient.

Thank you.