

Gender gap in pensions in the European Union

Journalist Thematic Network
Riga, June 2015



This publication is a collection of articles written by the members of the Journalist Thematic Network (JTN) for the JTN meeting in Riga, June 2015, in order to discuss gender gaps in pensions in the EU Member States. All the articles and photos used for this publication are published upon agreement of their respective authors. The material contained in the publication does not necessarily reflect the opinion or position of the European Institute for Gender Equality.

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ABOUT THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTE FOR GENDER EQUALITY (EIGE)

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is an autonomous body of the European Union (EU), established to contribute to and strengthen the promotion of gender equality, including gender mainstreaming in all EU policies and the resulting national policies, and the fight against discrimination based on sex, as well as to raise EU citizens' awareness of gender equality. Further information can be found on the EIGE website (<http://eige.europa.eu>).

ABOUT THE JOURNALIST THEMATIC NETWORK (JTN)

As part of its mission to make equality between women and men a reality, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) coordinates a number of thematic networks. One of them is the Journalist Thematic Network (JTN). By hosting biannual meetings with journalists, communications experts and officials working with campaigns from across Europe, the JTN helps create impactful strategies and ideas to further the goals and values of EIGE. At the same time, the JTN is a powerful tool for spreading EIGE's messages.

The JTN actively engages experts and assists EIGE with valuable feedback when it comes to tailor-made communication. It also ensures that EIGE's key messages are clear and relevant — and reach beyond experts and policymakers. To that end, the JTN fosters collaboration between EIGE and EU media outlets.

The JTN advises EIGE on implementing its communication strategy, helping to build a large EU-wide media database and fostering ideas on promoting topics such as 'Women and climate change', 'Gender-based violence' and 'Women and economy' — complicated subjects that are made accessible to a broader audience thanks to the JTN. By conveying information to the media, which in turn conveys information to citizens, the JTN helps EIGE's vision for gender equality reach every corner of Europe and beyond.

Participants in the JTN include representatives from the largest national newspapers in Spain, Poland, Bulgaria and Cyprus; national news agencies from Portugal and Latvia; the largest online portals in Lithuania and Estonia; national news broadcasters from Sweden; and more.

ABOUT THE GENDER PENSION GAP IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Inequalities in access to economic resources in old age are immense, and women pensioners face higher risks of poverty in old age as compared to men. The gender gap in pensions throughout the EU is considerable: in 2012, the gender gap in pensions amounted to 38% in the EU on average. The gender gap in pensions can be understood as the sum of gender inequalities over a lifetime, including differences in the life course (motherhood penalty), segregated labour market and gendered social norms and stereotypes more generally. Therefore, it is important not only to illustrate this equation, but also to consider how the gender gap in pensions relates to wider gender inequalities in society. EIGE, whose role is to provide research and data that will support the Latvian Presidency of the EU Council in their preparation of Council conclusions, prepared a publication related to this theme: *Research note on the gender gap in pensions in the EU*. The publication in question is available on EIGE's website.

With the current publication, which is a collection of stories, articles, observations and opinions written by many journalists, the members of the Journalist Thematic Network, on the subject of gender gaps in pensions, EIGE wants to bring this area of its work to a wider audience and to make everyone reflect on how the current situation across Europe can be improved.



**EDITH
STOHL**
AUSTRIA

CURRENT AFFAIRS / DOCUMENTARIES
ORF — AUSTRIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

A typical woman in Austria will retire by the end of this year as she will turn 60. In Austria, this is the official retirement age for women, while for men it is 65. The retirement age for women has been the subject of constant discussion in recent years, with plans to make it the same as men's. It should be mentioned that the actual retirement age at present for women is 57 and for men is 59.

She will receive EUR 800 some 14 times a year, since employees in Austria get their wages 14 times a year. She is the mother of three daughters and worked part time almost all her life — first, as a waitress at the weekends when the kids were little, later in an office for 20 hours a week, and for the last couple of years in a museum shop. Even when she wanted to work full time, she could not get more than 30 hours a week.

She will be OK as she is in a good marriage. But if she wasn't, she would be dependent on social benefits after working for her entire life but doing a lot of work that was unpaid. At first, she was not able to work full time because of the lack of childcare facilities and later on she was not able to work full time because the management did not provide a full-time job. And now at the age of 60 she must pay the price.



**BARBARA
MATEJCIC**

CROATIA

FREELANCE REPORTER AND RESEARCHER

Future female pensioners face more poverty risks than men

A year ago, I gave an interview which was published on a Croatian feminist online portal, VoxFeminae. The headline was: 'I will be paying for my present freedom by presumable poverty in my old age'.

This was not bombastic hyperbole for the sake of a story, or the usual complaints in a time of crisis, or a pathetic attempt to get readers' attention. It was fact. And still is. I'm a freelance reporter. I gave up my post on a daily newspaper in order to avoid 'political games' in a newsroom. That was 6 years ago. Up until today, freelancing has been the only chance for me to work freely. Luckily, I'm self-employed and I can pay pension contributions and health insurance. Most freelance journalists in Croatia don't earn enough to pay for either of these things, and reporters in their thirties, forties and fifties are unemployed.

I pay a minimum pension rate because I can't afford to pay more, and so my pension benefits, if nothing changes, will be minimal too. After 35 working years, I can expect to get around EUR 270 per month. If you live alone, it's not possible to cover all your basic costs with that amount of money. So the equation is simple: I will be poor. Bearing that in my mind, I don't feel any different to the people who dig through rubbish bins every day in my street. They are not 'some others', those people who didn't want to work, who didn't try to assure themselves a decent living. Some of them worked for their entire lives but what 'welcomed' them after retirement wasn't enough to placidly enjoy their old age.

Since there is a lack of part-time jobs even for young people, the elderly have no other possibility than to look in garbage containers. It has become a key to the livelihood of many impoverished people in Croatia. And, most poignantly, garbage pickers are women. Aging women face a greater risk of poverty than their male counterparts. So it might be me in 30 years — with a university degree, decades of working life and my head in a rubbish bin in search of plastic bottles to earn my living.



On the official side: the Croatian law on pension insurance prescribes different age conditions for regular age-based retirement (60 years for women and 65 for men, and a minimum of 35 years of contributions for men and 30 for women) and for earlier retirement (55 for women and 60 for men). A comprehensive reform of the pension system in Croatia started in 1999 with the implementation of the Pension Insurance Act. The pure pay as you go (PAYG) system has been modified to become a 'three-pillar' system. The first pillar still functions like the PAYG defined-benefit scheme. The second pillar is a mandatory fully funded scheme with defined contributions and the third pillar is a voluntary fully funded scheme, also with defined contributions. The changes in the PAYG system included: increases in the official retirement age (65 years for men and 60 years for women) and the minimum age for early retirement (60 for men and 55 for women), an increase in the annual decrement for early retirement from 1.33% to 3.6% per year, a gradual widening of the benefit calculation period from the 10 best earning years to lifetime average earnings and changes in the pension benefit valorisation formula and the post-retirement benefit indexation.

As a result of legislative pressure, the average age of new pensioners has increased by between 3 and 5 years, depending on sex and the type of retirement. The retirement age for the old age pension will gradually increase for women from the present 60 to 65 by 2030, so both women and men will have the same age requirements when retiring. The Constitutional Court of the Republic of Croatia has taken a stand, pointing out that both women and men should have the same age requirements for retirement. The benefit calculation formula in the Croatian PAYG scheme is the same for men and women.

Nowadays there is a difference in pension benefits for men and women (lower retirement fares for women) that stems from the different ages at which men and women are eligible for early and statutory retirement, but also from a gender wage gap and occupational inequality. Women work far more frequently in non-typical contractual arrangements such as under temporary contracts, in part-time work or they are self-employed. This especially applies to young women today. They are at a greater risk of poverty by retirement age, making it most likely they will have to find a new career as garbage pickers.



**MILOSLAV
JANIK**

CZECH REPUBLIC

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
LIDOVÉ NOVINY**

It would be difficult without my wife

Mr Vladimír Kalivoda lives in Prague. He is 85 years old and has been retired for more than 20 years. He worked for his entire life as an engineer, technician and supervisor — the head of a department in charge of testing devices. He lives with his wife, who is also 85 years old.

He receives a pension of CZK 12 000 (approximately EUR 440) each month, and says he lives pretty well. There are two main reasons why he is satisfied with a relatively small pension. Firstly, he lives in his own private apartment, so he does not pay a high commercial rent. Secondly, he lives in the same household as his wife, who receives CZK 11 000 (EUR 410) a month.

‘[Between the two of us] we have about CZK 23 000 (EUR 850). We do not need that much any more so this income is enough for us, I think. We live in a cooperative apartment which is a great advantage, because we pay only a contribution towards the maintenance of the house. This is about CZK 2 000 per month (about EUR 75). Apart from that, we pay bills for electricity, gas, heating and other regular outgoings. That comes to about EUR 250 altogether each month,’ Mr Kalivoda says.

He says that if pensioners have no other financial obligations (such as, for example, alimony, or the cost of caring for other elderly or young members of the family) and if they live in their own apartment (or some kind of cooperative apartment), they can cope financially relatively well. Pensioners who have to pay commercial rents are in a much worse situation. Rents for a small apartment in Prague start at around CZK 7 000 (EUR 60) a month. And that is just basic rent.



If you live in an apartment, you also have to pay for electricity, water, gas and heating, and if you choose to do so, you may also need to pay for television, telephone and the Internet. Since these bills can easily come to EUR 250 a month, it is clear that the average pension is not enough, because the average pension in the Czech Republic amounts to about EUR 400.

This means that a pensioner who lives alone and pays commercial rent has no money left for food, clothing, medicine and furnishings. 'Sometimes [this] can be alleviated with the help of the authorities, but it's not so simple. Those who live alone have a big problem — even if this person has a good income,' Mr Kalivoda says.

He is happy that he owns a furnished apartment and that he and his wife do not need to spend money on new equipment. 'We no longer need a lot of new things for the household. Every few years, for example, we have to buy a new refrigerator, and recently we bought a new TV, but such purchases do not happen often. Fortunately, we do not have to pay too much money for a doctor, so we live quite well.'

He is also happy that he can go abroad on holiday sometimes. 'I love traveling. I'm healthy so from time to time we try to go to the sea. The price is of course very important. I cannot pay more than EUR 350 for a holiday,' he says.



**ANNA-MARIA
PENU**
ESTONIA

JOURNALIST

DELFI AS, EESTI AJALEHD AS

Today's dreadful pay gap leads to poorer pensioners

Every morning Ellen enjoys her cup of coffee while listening to the radio show where people send birthday wishes and dedicate songs to their dear ones. On her 60th birthday, Ellen received one such dedication, which was made by her relatives. Thinking about it makes her smile as she looks, with her blue eyes, at the fresh grass in the back garden of her home. After decades of voices, laughter and screaming filling up all this space, she now lives alone in her big house in the middle of the Estonian woods. Her daughter is in Israel. Her son works in Norway. Unfortunately, her husband passed away a long time ago. Sixty-eight-year-old Ellen can only count on her own income.

Last night she had to work again. The night shifts are the most demanding ones and no one really applies for them, so the company hires retired people to take up these posts. They accept these opportunities to work with somewhat mixed feelings. There is, on one hand, the compelling feeling of being useful and needed again, but on the other hand, the feeling of being forced to earn their living to add to their scarce pension. They hardly have a choice.

A few years ago, when the time to enjoy her supposedly carefree retirement finally came, Ellen was astonished at how little income she had to make do with after more than 45 years of working. She had suffered a violent first marriage, with her two children and grandson. The little boy's parents' alcohol problems had forced her to take custody of him. Now he was a grown man, studying to be a prison warden with costs covered by the state, and Ellen has to cope with a pension of EUR 303.38 per month.

At first she tried, but it was impossible. All the money went on food and obligatory taxes; there was nothing left for other expenses. Ellen had to look for a solution to make ends meet, and she found one: a part-time job as a night-guard in a factory and a seasonal summer job as a cook in a holiday resort with 13-hour shifts.



It is tough, but Ellen prefers to work and to have more financial means, while her friend Tiina, with the same pension, has decided not to work ever again. For her health, for her peace of mind, and to enjoy life as much as her pension allows.

Today, 80% of working Estonians hope to earn extra money in the future to complement their state pension. The reality is that only 39% can find a job like this or keep working after the age of retirement. Most pensioners have to count on the common income for both spouses, on savings, or on their own children. Retirees who live alone, mostly women, due to a much higher life expectancy (for women it is 82 years, for men 72 years, one of the biggest differences in the EU), have the highest rates of relative poverty (71%).

This year, the average pension in Estonia is EUR 374 per month. This figure is very near to the relative poverty limit (EUR 358 per month), which means that the percentage of people over 65 living in relative poverty in Estonia is 31.8%. It is high, but it keeps them from falling into absolute poverty, which by European standards means to have to live with less than EUR 205 per month (2.2% of the elderly).

However, things are not looking good for future retirees, especially for women who account for more than two thirds of graduates, and with a relatively high employment rate (65%) the pay gap in Estonia is the biggest in the European Union with the difference at 29.9% (Eurostat). This is a strategic inflection point which will also lead Estonian women to receive lower pensions and to experience worse living conditions in just one decade, if nothing is done to remedy the situation.



**MICHALIS
STANGOS**

GREECE

**PRESIDENT AND CEO
MSCOMM**

Pensions and salary differences: the other side of the coin

The reality is that if it did not directly affect my own family, I would personally hold a different point of view. I am talking about the retirement ages for men and women in Greece. The most recent retirement act leveled the age at 67 for both women and men whereas previous legislation favoured women, who could retire 5years earlier at the age of 62.

‘So what?’ one might wonder. ‘Won’t this contribute to the equality of the sexes?’ That would be my first thought, forgetting conveniently that even in western societies women — wives and mothers — are the ones who carry the burden of family obligations. Until recently the government recognised this differentiation and the role of women in society, giving them the aforementioned 5-year retirement advantage.

My thinking would have remained unchanged had my mother not submitted the papers needed to get her pension. No longer being eligible for the 5-year ‘bonus’, she discovered that the extra years she was required to work would actually diminish her pension! The explanation is quite simple. In a country where gender pay inequality officially reaches 22%, my mother was earning less money, which affected her pension plan.

My understanding of this situation is that we are now facing two huge levels of inequality in Greece as a society. The labour market and wider society allow for discrimination and prejudice in the way in which women, firstly, are being paid for their work and, secondly, are ‘rewarded’ as elderly people with much smaller pensions.

This also reflects something else, equally important in my opinion. Namely, it means that the retirement system in Greece, with all its discrimination and deficiencies, is a reflection of how the state views its citizens. Hence, if we really want to discuss retirement plan inequalities we should primarily determine how we want to look at things: ‘holistically’ or arithmetically. And by ‘we’ I am referring to men.



**VIKTÓRIA
SERDÜLT**
HUNGARY

JOURNALIST
ORIGO.HU

When I think of how much money I will have when I retire, I remember my grandfather telling my grandma: 'As long as I live, you will never have to worry about money'. Well, he died at the age of 63. And it was then that it turned out that even though they had worked together for decades in the little tailor shop behind the kitchen, he had never officially employed my grandmother. Her job was to help him and to cater for the family's every need; her salary was the love she got from them. Little did she know that it would mean having to live on a widower's pension for 25 years.

Being able to live fully each and every day is something I will admire her for forever. She never ever complained. When Christmas came, she went back to that little tailor shop behind the kitchen and mended clothes for the neighbours. She spent the extra money on our presents.

Her story is the story of thousands of people in Hungary today. Although my grandmother's situation was special, there was nothing extraordinary in it. If we take a closer look at her friends, living on around HUF 100 000 a month (roughly EUR 330) is not considered bad. In fact, my grandma received around EUR 280 a month. That is less than EUR 10 a day — I spend much more on a night out with my friends.

I fear the day when I have to follow in her footsteps. I am 34, and I consider myself a person who is conscientious about her own money. Of course, I am used to a certain standard of living: travelling round the world and being able to afford a glass of wine and the occasional dinner at a restaurant is normal. As is having the little black dress in my wardrobe that I fell in love with last week.

I know I should restart my pension contributions. I stopped paying them when I was in a financial crisis last year. But even if I do, I know I cannot expect a lot when I grow old. This is surely an overstatement. In fact, I fear I will not even have the chance to buy Christmas presents for my grandchildren like my grandma did. Of course, I won't have to pay the mortgage by then. I may even have some savings in the bank. But still, there is a chance I will be one of those pensioners who stand in the queue in the nearby park when the government gives out free bags of potatoes before Christmas.

In Hungary, the pension gap is estimated at around EUR 9.5 billion per year. It means that I am one of those 5 million people who should be saving at least EUR 1 900 a year to be able to live comfortably in their old age. Even though I know it is essential, I do not have this amount of money to spare for my future savings.

My generation in Hungary has two choices: to live a more or less normal life now and not care about the future, or to just make ends meet now and continue to live the same way after retirement. Most of us choose the first option. And although we know it is not right, we hope that times will change for the better — at least by the time we retire.



**ALEXANDRA
ZALAFÖLDI**
HUNGARY

**FREELANCE JOURNALIST
KITEKINTŐ (OUTLOOKER)**

There is nothing which I have been told I should take

‘My name is Anna and I live on EUR 110 a month,’ says the old lady living alone in one of the suburbs of Budapest.

In response to my question on how she manages each month, she replies, ‘Look, everything is tidy: the TV is on, there are neat blankets on the bed, there’s a cat-carrier on the floor, there are several pictures on the wall’. The one-bedroom flat on the first floor is owned by the local government — Anna got it with the help of different institutions specialising in helping those in need. Before that, she had lived on the street for 6 years and made her living by begging.

The monthly rent for the flat is around EUR 18. After paying this, the remaining EUR 92 is spent on water (EUR 7.50 for 2 months), TV and electricity (EUR 19 during the winter). A few weeks ago prepaid water meters were installed — to recharge the card she needs to go to a newsagent’s or a petrol station. Anna has recently topped it up with EUR 10. She regularly checks the screen, watching how low the kilowatts are running. Anna uses wood for heating. In winter, the local government helped with some supplies that lasted for hardly 2 months. Fortunately, she also received wood from a carpenter and a social help organisation.

Anna does not spend money on medicines. ‘There is nothing which I have been told I should take,’ she says. Coughing badly, feeling the pain in her back, she promises to go to a doctor. She is 65 years old now, but looks at least 10 years older. I do not even dare to ask about her dietary habits, but she brings up the subject herself. Sometimes she cooks goulash with meat or bean soup with pork knuckle but she does not say how often. Her latest favourite dish is potatoes with Brussels sprouts.

From the total of EUR 110 she is also trying very hard to save some money, because ‘anything can happen’. She says with conviction, ‘Those who do not appreciate the small things do not deserve the great ones’. A fine example of this is the lifestyle of her grandparents, who were farmers, and ‘were able to live on their money regardless of the amount from harvest to harvest’. Anna, just like them, also worked all her life — as a sweeper, in catering and as a caretaker, and besides that she nursed her mother in her final years.

As we are nearing the end of our conversation, the ‘owner’ of the cat-carrier appears in the inner courtyard of the tenement house. A nice cat indeed, silver-grey, its fur healthy and shiny...



**MARINA
LALOVIC**

ITALY

**JOURNALIST
RADIO RAI 3**

‘My name is Rodolfo C. and I’m 72. For 35 years I was employed as a sanitary operator in a hospital, and I worked as a carpenter at the same time, because we never had enough money. For the second job, I did not receive a contract. I retired in 2001 and now I receive EUR 1 240 per month. My wife and I live on EUR 15 a day.’

Vittoria G., Rodolfo’s wife, is 72. She’s always been a housewife and was never employed outside the home. That’s the reason why she couldn’t obtain a pension in her own right.. For the last 10 years she has been granted a disability pension because of her illness, which amounts to EUR 362 a month.

Like many other European countries, Italy still has a very significant pension gap between men and women. The reason is well known. Given the lack of appropriate welfare state measures, Italian women are obliged to take significant periods of time away from their full-time work (for maternity leave, etc.). The direct consequence is that both pension savings and the eligibility of Italian women for the full state pension are inevitably reduced. Women pensioners nowadays see themselves as coming from a generation of women who often stayed at home with their family. But the picture hasn’t changed much today. Women are still challenged by the same choice: career or family. Reconciliation between the two is not an actual option for working class women in Italy.

According to the latest analysis (provided by the official Italian statistical institute), 50.5% of retired women manage with less than EUR 1 000 per month, while only 31 % of men live on this particular pension level. Pensions in Italy show significant gender discordance. The pension gap between men and women is as high as 32%. The total number of pensioners in Italy is 16.4 million, 200 000 fewer than in 2012. An average pension amounts to EUR 16 638 per year, EUR 323 more than in 2012.

Big changes are required to solve this particular issue. Maybe the solution lies in improving the welfare state and investing in women’s access to the labour market, or maybe (even better) in trying not to force women to make a choice between being a mother and a businesswoman, allowing them to be both.



**ANNETTE
DUSCHINGER**

LUXEMBOURG

**JOURNALIST
LËTZEBUERGER JOURNAL**

‘Ten years ago when I got divorced at the age of 52, I thought that I would face no financial problems in old age. It was only after the divorce that I realised that giving up my professional career after getting married and starting the family was the most foolish thing I could have ever done. My husband and I once agreed that I would stay at home and raise the children, while he would work full time and support the family. That was fine with me, because at that time it was the normal thing to do as a couple. Nobody had told me that I could face the risk of poverty should the marriage ever break up, and that I should have insisted on paying contributions to my own social security — marriages at that time were never meant to end.

The judge told me to go and find a job, and later I learned that I had no proper entitlement to a pension. My husband had acquired his own rights only and they could not be split between us. What a shock! On top of that, you have to contribute to the social insurance scheme for at least 10 years in order to have the right to a minimum pension — impossible, since my last professional experience as an accountant dates back to the 1980s. Who would ever employ me? Even a programme offered by a women’s organisation could not bring me any further. My social insurance rights have thus always been derived from my husband’s. So I now wait for him to die, because then I can claim his pension benefits as the surviving ex-partner. Until then, I will have to live off social welfare benefits — what a humiliation and a poor living.’

For decades, family and tax policies have set strong incentives to pursue the traditional family model, keeping women out of employment through generous allowances for maternity and education, as well as child benefits. In addition, the lack of daycare facilities for children resulted in women staying out of employment for a couple of years, or only working part time. For 20 years, organisations like the National Women’s Council have claimed to have been introducing individual rights for the non-working partner in the social security system. Until this day — and even after the reform of the pension system in 2012 — nothing has changed. Today, the divorce rate in Luxembourg is one of the highest in the EU, predominantly for marriages that have lasted longer than 20 years. Different governments have been working on a reform of civil law pertaining to divorce for 13 years now, but discussions are still going on. One of the main issues concerns equal distribution of the pension benefits between both partners to protect the one who stayed at home to care for the family.

The numbers speak for themselves: while 71.7% of men work full time, the same applies to only 47.8% of women (2010). And while the average pension of men in 2013 was EUR 2 159 a month, it was EUR 1 458 a month for women.



**AUDRONE
URBONAITE**

LITHUANIA

**JOURNALIST
LIETUVOS RYTAS**

Gender inequality in the labour market crushes women

‘I kept my nose to the grindstone, but my lazy man receives a bigger pension’

‘Why do I have to live poorly if I worked harder than a man? There is no equality between men and women. I kept my nose to the grindstone, but my lazy man receives a bigger pension,’ Danute Butkiene, aged 69, says with irony.

The European Commission’s ‘Europe 2020’ Strategy emphasises giving both men and women equal pay. Considering purchasing power parity, the average for women’s wages in the EU is 20% lower than for men. The same applies to pensions. Journalists from all Member States have been invited to pick a couple of retired people and find out their views on the issue.

‘Men earn more’

Danute is 3 years older than her husband, Ricardas. They both worked as manual workers: as groundskeepers, janitors, auxiliary workers in construction and even renovating Vilnius infrastructure.

‘We have both worked as hard as we could, but I receive significantly less than my husband. When I run out of money for pharmaceuticals or anything else I always have to ask Ricardas,’ claims Danute.

Danute receives a monthly pension that is EUR 45 lower than that of her husband, Ricardas, who is 66. The couple moved into Danute’s parents’ home after her mother passed away. Danute is unwell. One of her sons died in childhood and the other two have emigrated to Ireland. The house needs to be renovated, but Danute has no savings as she has given the small amount that she did manage to put by to the youngest son and his family. Ricardas has never had savings, even though he has earned more throughout his entire life.

‘Ricardas has always bought what he wanted for himself and I had to provide for our sons. However, even if he had been generous to the family it is still unfair that my pension is smaller,’ Danute explains.

When questioned about why she thinks this is unfair, she continues, ‘I have raised children and carried the load at home on my own. Yes, my husband has more experience, but he has never given birth and has not been sick and I could hardly convince him to spend time with the children or fix a utensil at home. My husband has only been sick because of the partying, while my reasons were ... chronic overstrain at home and work.’



‘Could not work more’

‘When I was young I used to work as a janitor in the kindergarten. I helped the cook to move a pot of boiling water and suffered a miscarriage. I needed treatment for a long time as I was hit by infection and septicaemia after the surgery. The kindergarten was not a bad place, but no one was interested in waiting until I recovered. After 6 months they asked me to leave voluntarily as they wanted to employ a relative. I quit and my experience stopped accumulating. I failed to find a new job as fast as I expected,’ Danute says.

Not long after she found a job in the city’s park, she got pregnant again. It became too hard for her to lift boxes of seedlings and she had to give up work after she fainted in the heat in the middle of summer.

Her first child was born with a heart disorder and was constantly sick.

‘Such a child cannot attend kindergarten, even though we tried. The childcare and housework were my duties alone. My husband was not a drunk, but sometimes, when drinking beer with his friends, he would brag about his financial input and me being a princess at home. He didn’t have the slightest idea that I would have swapped places in a second,’ Danute explains.

The boy died at the age of 3.

Did no harm, but did not help either

‘After two more children were born, one after another, I could not even think of working, as no employer would even consider employing such a worker.’

Danute found a permanent job only after her sons turned 3 and 4 respectively.

‘Once, when the boys were younger, I got a great offer to clean some very expensive medical equipment. I would have really liked to do that, as it seemed to me it would be very interesting to work among doctors. I suggested that my husband work as a security guard at night and look after the children in the daytime so I would be able to work too, instead of constantly being at home. I explained I needed to accumulate a work record, but he simply laughed and answered that housekeeping duties were assigned to women by God,’ Danute says.

Spouse blames tradition

‘Why didn’t you agree to your wife working when she was younger and accumulating the required work record? Would you swap places with her right now?’ I asked Ricardas.

‘When we were young, it was very unusual for a man to swap or even quit a job just because his wife wanted to work too. When the kids got older she found a job. Moreover, no one was thinking that the social structure would change and pensions would reflect what one had actually earned,’ Ricardas says.

‘What should the state do to ensure that men and women are cared for on an equal basis when they grow old?’

‘I have no idea. I guess it’s fair that a man could take parental leave too, as well as contribute more at home. Though men of my generation would disagree. The thought never crossed my mind to ask our sons whether they’d temporarily quit their jobs if their wives were worried about their work record and careers. I’m not sure. Unless of course the state would coerce us to leave and raise children. I don’t really know.’ says Ricardas.

What will Europe do for women?

According to data from 2010, EU women’s participation in the labour market, in a full-day equivalent, is 41 % on average, while for men the rate is 56%. The lowest participation was recorded in Malta, and the highest in Sweden.

The ‘Europe 2020’ Strategy hopes to achieve a target of 75% of people aged 20 to 64 (both men and women) having a job.

This is one of the priorities for Europe so that gender equality advances. A lot of attention will be devoted to legislation and means to help men’s inclusion in childcare and care of other family members as well as to ways of ensuring a better balance of work and personal commitments.



**SOFIA
BRANCO**
PORTUGAL

JOURNALIST
AGÊNCIA LUSA — PORTUGUESE NEWS AGENCY

Marília Sousa counts on EUR 9 per day

‘My name is Marília Sousa. I am 74 years old and I live on EUR 274.79 a month, which means EUR 9 a day.

How can I live on only that money when my house rent is EUR 140 and I pay EUR 130 a month for electricity and another EUR 20 for water? And these are the fixed expenses only, to which I have to add the three kinds of medicine I inevitably need, costing me EUR 40 a month.

As a 74-year-old pensioner, I cannot afford all my living costs with my very low pension, and so I depend on my husband’s pension, which is more than double mine.

Looking at my pension, you could think that I stayed at home and ‘only’ did the domestic work. But that was not the case. In fact, I started working as a seamstress when I was only 12 years old.

The problem is I never had a contract and my employers never made social security payments for me, not even when I worked for the biggest sewing business in Porto, making coats and dresses for ladies, where two men managed more than 200 women workers.

Apart from not having a contract, we also did not have fixed working hours. We only knew we had to start working at 9 a.m. sharp, but the finishing time for the day was never quite so certain...

Only much later did I decide to start making my own social security payments. My pension represents only 19 years of work, when, in reality, I have worked for 40 years, since I was 12.

‘If I was alone, with no husband, it would be a disaster...’, Marília mourns. Even together, the couple have to rely on the help of their older son for some extra expenses.



**CÉU
NEVES**
PORTUGAL

**GRANDE REPÓRTER
DIÁRIO DE NOTÍCIAS**

Nowadays, the money goes on living and helping the children

Fernando Marques, 72, retired accountant
Olga Marques, 68, housewife

‘We have always lived on my salary alone. I was a chartered accountant and I worked really hard. I did extra hours and took work home with me, just to earn a little bit more. After that, I put off retiring until I was 67 so I could do a little more. I managed to get the pension scheme office in Portugal to include some of what I earned elsewhere. I get EUR 1 500 net but there are months where that’s not enough and I have to help my children. One had a civil-engineering business and had to close it down. Nowadays, the money goes on living and helping the children, not on savings’, says Fernando Marques, 72. He is married to Olga Marques, a dressmaker, who gave up work when their children were born. ‘I got married and dedicated myself to my family. I always preferred being at home and I had to raise three children. And I didn’t earn much — it wasn’t enough to pay for transport and childcare. Also, there weren’t many places for them in those days. My eldest daughter is 47, the others are 44 and 36. These days, there are more childcare options but everything is so expensive, and salaries are low.’

The couple live in Benfica, a suburb of Lisbon, and have three children, five grandchildren and a great-grandchild. They have a car and have been living for more than 40 years in a rented house which costs less than EUR 100 per month. Fernando receives a pension of approximately EUR 400 per month, which is well above the national average. But his pension is the only household monthly income and he is currently helping his children, a situation which is increasingly common in Portugal with the rise in unemployment. However, there have been pension cuts, which means that pensioners are a group where debt has risen the most and one which makes use of the Debt Support Office of the DECO, the Portuguese Association for Consumer Protection, often to pay the debts of their children. They are also their guarantors, most often for the purchase of a house.



‘It’s an average pension for an accountant. I spent my last 20 years of work in a financial institution linked to the banking sector and that’s where I really improved my situation. But I spend everything and, in the months where I have to pay insurance and other expenses, it’s not enough,’ says Fernando Marques. His wife adds, ‘We also have to spend on medicine, on our health. I’ve already had 13 operations.’

Illnesses do not seem apparent from their faces, nor do the months of greater financial squeezing seem to show for the couple who are on their way back home, hand in hand, after a short shopping trip. Olga took care of her children, her grandchildren until they were one year old and went to pre-school, and she is getting ready to take care of her great-granddaughter who is one month old. ‘I always liked being a housewife and raising the children.’



**MARINA
CONSTANTINOIU**

ROMANIA

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
JURNALUL NATIONAL**

My name is Lenuta and I live on only 7 loaves of bread a month

Autumn 1989

Nicolae Ceausescu decides that Romania's high-school graduates who fail the admission test for a college or university have to go out to work immediately. What's more, high-school students who want to become vets cannot be admitted to university unless they have graduated from a high school that specialises in agriculture or have worked during their school holidays on a communist-type cooperative farm.

M.C., a graduate, fails to be admitted to the veterinary college on these grounds, and thus she is forced to work in one of these types of cooperatives in order to be able to attend the next year's examination at the university. On the farm, M.C. realises what working in a place like this really means. Working as a mechanic she soon learns about the real life of the 'cooperative' peasants. She has to face brutal reality: exhaustion, both for women and men, being paid 'by production', living on the equivalent of just 1 EUR a day.

For such an employee, a future pension is something precious. However, the 'points' accumulated for the hard work in the fields, according to the pension system in Romania, turn out worthless. The pension gap between a worker in a factory and a peasant from a communist-style farm is huge. The difference is made worse by the brutalisation of peasants' lives. None of them look their age. They look much older.

2014, Calarasi, Romania, an EU Member State

An old woman in Dichiseni, Calarasi, lives on what amounts to virtually cents. A widow without children, she survives with only RON 7 (EUR 1.50) a month. Each month, the mail worker knocks on the door and brings the money. 'Only RON 7,' cries Elena Smadu. Fortunately, she has a niece who takes care of her from time to time.



It all started after her husband died. Before that, they used to have some land, raised animals and worked hard. For 19 years, 'Tanti Lenuta', as people call her, has been living alone. What's more, for 9 years she's been suffering because of an open wound in her leg. Since she has no money for treatment, she endures pain all the time. All in all, on the money she gets, she can only buy 7 loaves of bread a month.

Her case became a media sensation. But soon after, the same media discovered several similar cases — hundreds of pensioners living in this cruel way in an EU Member State.

Tanti Lenuta didn't complete her 10 years of pension contributions. She did not achieve this because she worked on a communist farm where the points had 'special' status. Tanti Lenuta has amassed a pile of documents and now hopes to get some social support from the City Hall.

2015, Bucharest, the same EU country, Romania

M.C., who used to work on the same communist farm as Tanti Lenuta, in the meantime studied journalism at the University of Bucharest. She graduated and has been working as a journalist for 25 years.

Until 2007, all her employers in the media found it 'normal' to pay her only a minimum wage with a contract and, for other tasks, some fees, which means she forfeited at least half of her pension contributions.

Time is passing

The difference between the old lady from the farm and the experienced journalist in Bucharest, taking the pension system in Romania into account, is not so significant. Neither is the hard work on the fields, the years in school or the experience as a journalist when confronted with cold calculations at the Pensions' Office. The system makes calculations with no feelings. And it couldn't care less about personal dramas.



**MARIA
SAHUQUILLO**

SPAIN

**JOURNALIST
EL PAÍS**

My EUR 600 pension hardly gets me through the month

Antonia Vázquez received her first salary late in her life. She started working as a cleaner in an office building at the age of 45. By that time her daughters were more than grown up. Now, at the age of 78, and 13 years after she retired, she receives a pension of EUR 400 a month. 'If you add up the additional benefits, it reaches around EUR 600. This isn't enough to pay my housing expenses and bills or to survive until the end of the month. And now, because of the recession, it is even worse ... but we manage somehow,' admits this lady from Extremadura. This case clearly illustrates the salary gap registered in Spain, a country where, according to Eurostat data, women earn 19.3% less than men per hour, and so, in order to receive the exact same salary, need to work 79 days more than their male colleagues.

The difference with pensions is even greater. Antonia's pension is only EUR 659, which is the same as the average pension for women pensioners; 38% less than the average EUR 1 067 that men receive. It means that for a woman to receive the same pension as a man, she must work 11.5 years longer than a man doing the same work. 'This imbalance is due to the fact that women pay less contributions to social security, they are employed less than men, their working conditions are more precarious, their salaries are inferior, they work more on part-time contracts and have longer and more frequent interruptions to their career than men because of family leave or other reasons,' explains Almudena Fontecha, the chief equality officer of the UGT, a Spanish trade union.

Like Antonia, who worked part time most of her life, 'I wanted more hours, and it wouldn't have been a bad thing to have had better wages, but I wasn't ever offered the possibility. At least I had a job ... if not, I don't know where I'd be today without a pension, I would have probably had to go and live with my daughters.' She proudly adds that all of her offspring have studied, just as she would have liked them to and that she also has five granddaughters. 'This is a family of women,' she adds. 'And I do hope, for their sake, that we as a family don't lose what we have gained.'



This 'x-ray' of retirement pensions offers a very clear image of Spain's social reality and even its history. For Spanish women, it's more common to receive a widow's pension than a retirement pension; 2.2 million women receive remuneration for being a widow, thanks to their husband's contributions; meanwhile less than 2 million get a retirement pension for their own contributions to social security. These numbers are due to the heritage of Franco's dictatorship (1939–75), a time when married women were forbidden to work. It wasn't until 1960 that the ban was eliminated and even then it was only done in some cases and for some professions.

Consequently, men in Spain work on average for 43.4 years whereas women have managed to have a proper paid job for an average of only 12.8 years; one of the lowest numbers in the EU. This gap, caused by the current imbalance where women still don't earn as much as men for the same work, will carry on in the future. The expert, Almudena Fontecha, says, 'We must act and start taking measures to eliminate the pay gap between men and women and reform the system. One of the many solutions is to eliminate penalties for voluntary reduction of work time and long-term leave, following the example of those countries where women don't need to contribute for as many years as men to retire.' She also adds: 'We must solve this problem, not only for equality in itself but also because the less equal our women's situation is, the less they will contribute to the system. And the wheel of inequality will never stop.'

European Institute for Gender Equality
Gedimino pr. 16
LT-01103 Vilnius
Lithuania

MH-01-15-125-EN-N

Tel. +370 52157444

E-mail: eige.sec@eige.europa.eu

<http://www.eige.europa.eu>

<http://www.twitter.com/eurogender>

<http://www.facebook.com/eige.europa.eu>

<http://www.youtube.com/eurogender>



Making equality between women and men
a reality for all Europeans and beyond