



WOMEN AND HOME-BASED WORK IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

HOME-BASED WORK: A PRECARIOUS AND UNDERPAID OCCUPATION
CONCEALED WITHIN THE WALLS OF THE HOME, OR A FLEXIBLE OPTION
ENSURING LIFE-WORK BALANCE?

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WOMEN AND HOME-BASED WORK IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC:

Home-based work: a precarious and underpaid occupation concealed within the walls of the home, or a flexible option ensuring life-work balance?

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INTRODUCTION

As a phenomenon, home-based work usually arises in public discussion in two contexts. The first issue involving home-based work is the global increase in informal work. Off-shore production processes are related to a decline in working and social conditions and exert pressure on labour force flexibility. In this respect, home-based work, as the most frequent form of informal work carried out primarily by women is characterised as a worldwide trend with many disadvantages that result from its “invisibility”.¹ Second, home-based work is discussed (especially in the EU) in relation to efforts to establish equal opportunities for men and women in the labour market. Within this context, home-based work is promoted as a good way to combine work and family.

Is there a link between informal home-based work and flexible options that would enable parents to juggle child-care and career ambition? How many people work from home in the Czech Republic? What forms of home-based work exist in the Czech Republic? Are all of the people performing home-based work women? What are the benefits of home-based work, and what are its drawbacks?

These questions, along with many others, are the focus of the qualitative research presented in this paper. The pilot qualitative survey addressing the issue of women performing home-based work in the Czech Republic, carried out by the European Contact Group in the CR, o.s., is the first attempt ever to address this phenomenon in the Czech Republic. This research falls within a broader partner project Fifty-Fifty: Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, which takes as its general objective the task of combating discrimination in the labour market and helping disadvantaged social groups become integrated within the labour market. The above-mentioned project is part of the EQUAL programme run by the EU and co-financed by the European Social Fund (EU) and the state budget of the Czech Republic.

This research was not representative. Its objective was above all, to collect and for the first time analyse information about the types of home-based work that exist in the Czech Republic, to evaluate working conditions in the home-based workplace, and the motivations and social situations of women working from home. The study also addresses home-based work within the context of discrimination against women in the labour market as

well as assessing the possibilities of balancing work with childcare. It also looks at home-based work in relation to perceptions of gender roles in the family.

By way of conclusion, the European Contact Group in the CR wishes to thank all of the survey respondents for their kind participation, their time and the priceless information that they have provided. Their responses have proven to be indispensable to our research.

Ivana Šindlerová
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02

HOME-BASED WORK: DEFINITION AND GLOBAL CONTEXT

According to the ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions), home-based work is the most frequent form of informal work undertaken worldwide.² We define “informal work” as referring to work performed in the absence of any contract of employment or labour rights protection. In the Czech setting, it is often referred to as work that is completed “off the books”. While certain economies (such as India) have relied upon informal work as a traditional source of income for many years now, some other countries (such as the UK or Chile) have seen an increase in the numbers of informal workers as a result of globalisation and economic change in recent decades. As for the Central and Eastern European region, including the Czech Republic, these changes are linked to a growth in informal work related to the transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy, caused by the political changes following the end of state socialism.³

The expansion of informal and home-based work is closely related to the global trend in which production takes place off-shore in regions with a cheap labour force and insufficient human rights protection, especially in the third world. Entire industrial sectors are dependent on such work, including the textile, footwear and electronic manufacturing industries. However, home-based work occurs even in developed European countries. This activity, carried out by women in most cases, does not enjoy adequate legislative protection and therefore it is not covered by standard working conditions⁴. The work is “concealed” within the walls of the home, and although it contributes to financial well-being, it is not sufficiently remunerated.

This issue has not been researched in detail in the European context. There are only a few NGOs (Non-Government Organisations) or trade unions interested in home-based work as a phenomenon. Studies carried out in the UK, Lithuania, Bulgaria or Serbia show that in Europe too, it is mostly women who engage in this type of work. This research shows that women often perform home-based work because they lack better job opportunities due to discrimination stemming from sex or ethnicity (UK), or because of economic collapse following military conflict (Serbia), or because they find themselves subject to rapid economic uncertainty and growing unemployment (Lithuania, Bulgaria).⁶ Countless types of jobs were identified in home-based work studies. These include carpet weaving (Bolivia, Afghanistan), souvenir and jewellery

manufacturing (Lithuania), textile production (Serbia, Lithuania, Turkey, Bulgaria, India), automotive electronic component assembly (Germany) and food processing and preparation (UK), to name just a few.

In the Czech Republic, no data about home-based work had been examined prior to the completion of this study. Therefore, the research carried out by the European Contact Group is the first survey ever to address this issue. It was fundamental to the study and to the process of choosing appropriate respondents that we provide a precise definition to home-based work.

Our starting point was the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 177 from 1996, which defines home-based work as:

- Work **carried out at home** for remuneration, **other than** common everyday **housework**.
- Work carried out by persons who **do not have employee status** and do not enjoy any employee rights.
- Work which is **not registered as self-employment** and is carried out by persons who do not have any regular income.⁷

Taking into consideration labour practises common in the Czech Republic and the existence of flexible contracts of employment in the Czech context, such as “agreements to complete a job” or “agreements to perform work”, the definition of home-based work was extended to include potential respondents who carried out home-based work on a formal basis. For the purposes of this study, then, we define home-based work as work that is carried out **both informally (“off the books”) and within a formal employment relationship**, and we follow the ILO definition at the same time.

From the pool of potential respondents, we excluded those workers who had a trades licence or who make their living by any of the various forms of door-to-door selling (such as Herbalife or Avon), as we define such persons as being self-employed.

The reason that we opted for a broader definition was that this has been the first study ever to analyse the nature and meanings of home-based work in the Czech Republic. The characteristics specific to the individual groups of female home-based workers that may be relevant for any future surveys became apparent after the results were analysed.



03

METHODOLOGY

Participants were selected for the survey only if they engaged in home-based work as defined in Chapter 2. However, as home-based work often tends to be covert and informal, we were aware that some participants may have been concerned about or unmotivated to take part in the survey.⁸ The number of respondents needed for semi-structured interviews as the basis for the qualitative survey was fixed at fifteen. We drew up a consent form for potential participants that included a brief outline of the study objectives and a statement guaranteeing the anonymity of all respondents. The request was sent out by e-mail within our existing networks between partnership organisations (mostly non-government, non-profit organisations promoting equal opportunities for men and women), the public service and the media as well as via personal contacts, and addressees were asked to forward it to any other interested women. Moreover, we disseminated information about the research in advance by word of mouth among our colleagues and personal acquaintances. This method proved to be an efficient way of approaching the relevant target group. Some respondents contacted us (by telephone or e-mail) of their own volition and asked to participate in the research. Another group of respondents were recruited for the interviews by “snowball effect”: that is, respondents who had already been included in the study provided us with contact information for other women that they knew who engaged in home-based work. Still other participants were recruited via the assistance of their own friends or family who sought their consent and suggested that they might participate. These women (fifteen in total) constituted the basic respondent group.

The interviews took place between October 2005 and February 2006 and were conducted by two ECG workers. Each interview took one and a half to two hours. Interviews were based on a pre-determined set of questions broken down into four topic areas. The interviewer first asked questions about the demographic situation of the participant. Secondly, participants were asked about their working conditions and their jobs. Thirdly, questions about the social situation and labour market experience of the participant were asked. Finally, the interviewers asked about the participants role in their family and about gender stereotypes.

The interviews were conducted in a free manner with no substantial intervention by the interviewers, so that the women could describe, consider and assess their situations and life/work strategies. However, there was one exception to this rule in relation to questions pertaining to the issue of female discrimination in the labour market. To the question as to whether women are, in the respondents opinion, discriminated against in the labour market, some answered with a categorical “No”. In such instances, the discussion was extended by the interviewer to address issues such as discrimination in relation to parental leave or women with young children. After some reflection and having considered their own personal situation, some respondents mentioned having experienced discrimination and qualified or altered their previous answer.

Interviews were conducted in the respondents’ homes, workplaces, in cafés or in playgrounds. The depth, clarity and detail of their responses were significantly influenced by the interview setting and by the presence of other persons. In certain cases, the presence of family members including young children, husbands

or mothers-in-law at the time of the interview had an impact on the woman’s concentration and the openness of their statements (for instance, when asked about gender stereotypes or division of family roles). All interviews were recorded in writing or tape-recorded, then transcribed verbatim.

In addition to the statements delivered by the basic respondent group of fifteen, additional information was provided by two other women working from home. The two women, Jana and Kamila, agreed to participate in the interview, but only by completing a questionnaire. While their statements are brief compared with the personal interviews, they also contain useful information.

The researchers also consulted transcribed interviews used in previous research on home-based work in the Czech Republic, carried out in 2002. This initial survey with a small group of respondents (eight), focused on verifying the occurrence of home-based work in the Czech Republic and describing its forms. The results of that research had never been published. From this study, we made use of five interview transcripts (Mirka, Nela, Olga, Petra, Radka), especially in chapter five. This helped us extend our understanding of the range of jobs carried out by Czech home-based workers.

The researchers did not begin their research with an initial hypothesis. The research team simply concentrated on data collection and later on comparing statements and contexts. The main objective of the research was to collect data concerning job types, the working and social conditions of Czech female home-based workers and the benefits and constraints of home-based work. This is why the interviews were conducted on the basis of a rather general set of questions. Here again, the questions about discrimination in the labour market were an exception – they were included deliberately as a result of the findings from the 2002 survey, as seven out of the eight participants of that survey chose home-based work to overcome financial difficulties while receiving social/ parental and/or unemployment benefits from the state. They considered their jobs to be a temporary solution rather than a long-term career strategy and expressed their dissatisfaction with working conditions, wages and their relationship with their employer. At the same time, they mentioned having had difficulty finding a regular job due to their age, the age of their children or a disability. For those reasons, in the present research, we deliberately asked questions with a view to finding out the connection between the choice to accept home-based work and female discrimination in the labour market.

The data analysis showed that the group of respondents carrying out home-based work was very heterogeneous with regard to age, education, family status, job or social situation. It became apparent that the main indicator splitting the women in two groups was manual vs. knowledge-based work.⁹

While all the manual workers worked for lower income and experienced worse working conditions, the workers whose work depended on knowledge experienced greater flexibility in this respect and could control their own work momentum and working conditions. This in turn affected a whole range of other factors.

Based on these findings, basic respondent details were compiled in the table below:


Table 1. Basic Demographic Respondent Information

Alias	Job Type	Education	Age	Family Status	Children (dependent)	Social situation/ employment status	City Size
Alena	Manual	Secondary	55-60	Married	3 (0)	Used to be employed (now retired)	Capital
Barbora	Manual	Higher vocational	28	Divorced	-	Registered at the job centre, not entitled to unemployment benefits	Capital
Dana	Manual	Secondary	30- 40	Married	2 (2)	A limited liability company co-founder (but does not work in the company)	Capital
Eliška	Manual	University student	27	Lives with boyfriend	-	Student	Capital
Gita	Manual	Secondary vocational	35	Married	3 (3)	Parental leave	Village
Hana	Manual	Secondary vocational training	40 - 45	Married	4 (4)	Parental leave + Partial disability pension	Village
Ina	Manual	Secondary vocational training	35 - 40	Married	2 (2)	Partial disability pension + takes care of 2 family members (disabled daughter + grandmother)	Medium-sized town
Jana	Manual	Primary	54	Married	3 (3)	Partial disability pension	Village
Kamila	Manual	Secondary	25	Married	-		Village
Lea	Manual	Secondary	25	Married	1 (1)	Unemployed	Medium-sized town
Mirka	Manual	Secondary vocational training	50-55	Married	3 (1)	Employed	Medium-sized town
Nela	Manual	Secondary	30-35	Divorced	1 (1)	Employed (home-based work for extra income)	Medium-sized town
Olga	Manual	Primary	30-40	Divorced	3 (3)	Long-term unemployed	Medium-sized town
Petra	Manual	Secondary vocational training	35-40		1 (1)	Unemployed	Medium-sized town
Radka	Manual	Secondary vocational training	30-35	Married	1 (1)	Parental leave	Medium-sized town
Silvie	Knowledge	University	30-35	Married	2 (2)	Parental leave	Capital
Šárka	Knowledge	Secondary	40	Married	3 (3)	Employed	Capital
Theodora	Knowledge	University	35-40	Single	-	Founder of a limited liability company, trade license holder	Capital
Věra	Knowledge	Higher Vocational	30-35	Married	2 (2)	Parental leave	Capital
Wanda	Knowledge	University	40 - 45	Married	4 (4)	After parental leave	Capital
Yveta	Knowledge	University	27	Single	-	Total disability pension	Regional capital
Zdena	Knowledge	Secondary	35-40	Married	2 (2)	Parental leave	Medium-sized town

Note: Mirka, Nela, Olga, Petra and Radka took part in the pilot research in 2002.

The following text is divided into eight chapters by topic (chapters four to eleven). Each chapter describes a different part of the respondents' work and family lives. However, we do not attempt to cover all aspects of home-based work, as the scope and method of the research did not allow for this. Further research in this field should be carried out, especially from a global perspective, and

it should take into account current pressures on flexible labour force participation in the context of the absence of any guarantee of labour rights protection. This research is urgently needed to help promote working conditions of a better quality and to ensure equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market.



04

04.01. Previous work experience and motivations for choosing home-based work; links with discrimination in the labour market.

In the chapter describing methodology, the type (category) of home-based work was mentioned as the key factor determining women's life strategies and their working conditions. The respondents can be split into two groups by the nature of their work: manual and knowledge-based work.

In most cases, manual work results in a finished or semi-finished product, while knowledge-based work tends to depend upon using specific knowledge or skills. The choice of either job type usually depends on education, previous work experience and the job opportunities in the regional labour market in general. In both groups, the women share common features in most categories covered by the research. The same applies to the motivations for choosing home-based work and their social background.

Typically, **manual workers** choose home-based work in reaction to temporary or long-term circumstances that prevent them from undertaking standard workplace-based employment. These workers seek an alternative and convenient form of income.

To be specific, the "circumstances" mentioned above are in fact the barriers that reduce women's chances of finding a job in the labour market. These barriers include external factors, personal factors or familial responsibility. Usually, a combination of some of the following factors contributes to the decision to take on home-based work:

1. low education (primary, secondary vocational training) and lack of appropriate job opportunities in the region
2. long-term unemployment
3. difficulty in acquiring new skills that are crucial for getting the job
4. frequent and recurring maternity and parental leave
5. partial or total disability
6. need to provide care for family members or relatives
7. non-residency status- foreigners without a valid work permit

The following statements highlight a range of connected reasons.

"Before 1989, I had a few administrative jobs and worked as an accountant. After the Revolution, it was hard to find a job. I couldn't keep up with all the changes happening in accounting, as hard as I tried. For some time, for about three years or so, I made a living at renting out rooms in our family house. Then I tried to work again. On several occasions, what happened was that

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I got a job and was fired after my probationary period. They (my employers) had high expectations and I was unable to meet them. They didn't give me a chance to get some practice (doing the job), and expected optimum performance from day one." ALENA

"I completed my secondary vocational training as a seamstress. Then I got married and went on maternity leave. After maternity leave I started working as a garment worker in a factory and stayed there for two years. Then I went on my second maternity leave. Then I got a job in another factory, part-time, because of the kids. In 2002 or so, the factory went bankrupt, and I got pregnant again, so I stayed at home on maternity leave... Then I started doing home-based work." GITA

"Me and my husband have been in the Czech Republic for two years now. At first, after opening a limited liability company¹⁰ when things were only getting started, I worked in a pizzeria on the side. But I left because I had conflicts with the cook who was a drunkard. We had no money so I answered an ad for home-based work." DANA

"I've been at home for ten years now, since having my first child. I had a son, and two and a half years later I had a daughter so I had to take another period of maternity leave. Then we found out that our daughter was disabled, that I needed to take care of grandma, and that I had health problems myself. They approved my disability pension, and I got care-of-a-relative benefits to take care of my daughter and grandma, so I just stayed at home. Before maternity leave I worked in a butcher's shop, and as a shop assistant, and even as a hospital attendant.

I would love to work with people again. But there is my daughter and grandma and I'm partially disabled myself, so it's not an option. If I got better health-wise, though, I'd love to go back to work. But it's impossible, and home-based work is better than nothing." INA

"I can't go to work and take care of my child at the same time, because the working hours start before the kindergarten opens. Basically, I guess nobody will ever give me a job in catering, which is my field, as I can't do morning shifts or twelve to fifteen hour shifts because of my child." LEA

Three women mentioned discrimination expressly as their primary motivation for looking for a home-based job:

"When I was 50 and looking for a job, I was discriminated against. For instance, I applied for a job as an invoice clerk and said that there were some things I couldn't do but wanted to learn, such as computer work. But they said no. I was frustrated, because I needed money and some peace in my life, so I chose home-based work." ALENA

"I've had a lot of experience with job hunting. But they often wanted to know who takes care of my children when they're sick, and they turned me down saying that I would frequently be absent from work. I felt I was discriminated against for having young children. Then I gave up and only looked for home-based work." HANA

“At interviews for jobs, they would often ask me if I wanted children or had any already. Today, in most situations, I deny the existence of my child, because it makes it easier for me to get jobs. On one occasion I protested against such a question and said they should not ask such things. They said: “Well, prove it”. I would never have thought a woman with children would not have been able to find a job in this country if it didn’t happen to me.” LEA

The women surveyed said that they started doing home-based work with the help of relatives or friends who worked at home too, or that they answered an advertisement. Some of them mentioned their experience of long-term unemployment, or with having been tricked into sending money to fraudulent companies, or of engaging in door-to-door selling. Indeed, there are many advertisements in ad-only publications and on websites describing home-based jobs in a very general manner and offering relatively high salaries. But according to many women, it is not easy to find a real job that can be carried out at home. To illustrate this point, it is telling that a few women from different Czech regions turned to us after we announced our intention to undertake research on home-based work, asking us to provide them with contact details of home-based work providers. They were mainly elderly unemployed women from the country experiencing financial difficulty.

For all **manual workers**, the main reason for doing home-based work was financial, i.e. to contribute to the family budget. However, this was not the only factor. There were other motivations, too.

Some women surveyed wanted to have financial independence from the men they lived with:

“At the time of our relationship crisis, I realized I was totally financially dependent on my husband wanted my own income, a bit of independence and some money for myself.” GITA (note: this statement was made during the GITA’S period of parental leave).

Other women respondents sought self-fulfilment and enjoyment from their work:

“Basically, I don’t do home-based work for the money. Well, I do, of course. But it’s a way to relax, and it makes my life more interesting. It’s not like I have nothing to do at home. But this really makes my life a bit more interesting...”

When you’re at home on maternity leave or on partial disability, it drives you crazy, being at home. When you’re at home all the time... you just can’t stand it.” INA

“I enjoy working with beads. It’s a personal thing for me and I started doing this work thanks to my younger sister who learned how to string beads when she was ill long-term. So I thought I would give it a try. It’s a way to relax and earn some money at the same time.” DANA

“I enjoy making rosary beads, as the work is spiritual too.” GITA

“I’m happy. Everybody thinks it’s drab, but I see it as a kind of meditation.” BARBORA

For **manual workers**, the need for self-actualisation is secondary and comes after the need for income which is the priority.

On the contrary, most workers surveyed whose work is **knowledge-based** chose home-based work deliberately and this had to do with their decision to start a family. Previously they had been career women, who perceived work as the central element in their lives and who earned a lot of money. However, the decision to have children and take care of the family themselves re-ordered their priorities and family came first. Their motivation to go back to their old jobs on the same terms as before was low or minimal. Home-based work provides a way for these women to combine family responsibility with self-actualisation and, of course, with income.

“When I graduated from university, I started working at a market research company... I was career-oriented and successful. The environment was extremely competitive and you just had to work

overtime and weekends. At that time, I made more money than my husband... When our child was born, I gradually changed my view of my career, and my husband helped me a lot there. I realised that a happy life with less money is more important and that there is no need to earn a lot... Home-based work is an ideal solution for me. I don’t have to go back to work, I can be with my family and I have more freedom...” SILVIE

“I worked in an international company. The work was very demanding and you had to be extremely flexible. On the other hand, it was well-paid, well above average at that time. My husband was in his last year at university and I supported him financially. Then we had three kids over a relatively short time period, so I have been at home for eleven years non-stop now... My priority is to spend more time with my children and less at work, so I tried to find a home-based job and nothing else... I started looking for a home-based job actively between the birth of my first and second child. I needed to get in touch with day-to-day reality after being isolated at home with my child for a relatively long period of time. After the birth of my third child I did the same... After all those years of wiping the children’s bums, I could earn some money again by working normally. So my main motivation was getting back in touch with people again. The money came in handy too, but it wasn’t my priority.” ŠÁRKA

“I worked as a graphic artist in an advertising company. It was a very good and well-paid job... After nine years I took my maternity leave and I’ve been at home for four years now. After the first two years I started working from home from time to time. Apart from financial incentive, I work to keep my contacts. I can’t imagine going to work... I wouldn’t know how to do it... It’s more appealing for me to work freelance.” VĚRA

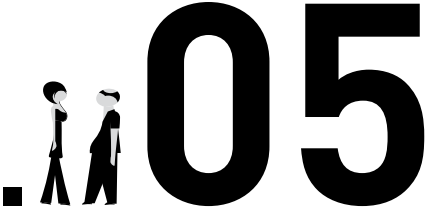
“I wanted a home-based job to fit in with my family responsibilities... I used to work full-time and had three children, and it was the worst time in my life... If you looked at our home, you could tell I worked seven a.m to five p.m. I always lagged behind with my housework, I would put the ironing and cleaning off until the weekends, and my weekends were for housework. Instead of spending my time with the family, I did household chores and cooked, and I didn’t like it. Spending time with my children is my priority. It was impossible for me to balance work and family. Although I loved my job, my fourth maternity leave was a great relief. Family comes first. If we had enough money I wouldn’t work at all.” WANDA

“Work provides self-fulfilment, it makes me happy. On parental leave I have peace of mind and I can do things that I didn’t have time for when I go to work Money is not my main motivation, but it helps and it’s useful. Earning money makes you feel stronger. You can show your partner that you can, for example, buy your own clothes – it’s a good argument. He contributes to the family, the children and the household, but I can manage on my own. It’s about autonomy and independence, but not completely, because I don’t make enough money.” ZDENA (kindergarten head teacher)

Similarly, among the workers whose work was knowledge-based, home-based work is a solution for those who need to combine their ambitions and the need for income with disability:

“I guess I will never have a great career, but I’d like to have my personal career – working on nice books. It makes me feel I’m doing something useful and can make my own living. Work brings me back to reality.” YVETA (editor)

In both groups, there are other factors influencing the decision to work from home, such as the overall social situation of the family, arrangements with their partner or their partner’s income. Moreover, it is relevant to analyse whether the women surveyed consider home-based work as a long-term or a short-term career strategy. All these points will be covered in the chapters below.



05

JOB CONTENT

05.01. Types of Work

Home-based work occurs in many sectors. Home-based workers are hired by both small businesses and big corporations (Czech as well as foreign companies with offices in the Czech Republic). Manual home-based workers are recruited in order to reduce the costs involved in setting up, equipping and running workshops. In some cases, employers avoid responsibility for their employees by maintaining a system of informal labour relations that are hard to monitor, and over which the state has little control because the work itself is conducted in worker's homes, i.e. in a private environment. Some female workers even carry out a number of different activities for different customers. In our surveys we identified, among others, the following types of work carried out by home-based workers:

- ▶ Making and assembling hair colour swatch charts for hairdressing salons and hair product retailers
- ▶ Lampworking (glass bead-making)
- ▶ Assembling adjustable date-stamps
- ▶ Rosary-making
- ▶ Making fashion and costume jewellery (metal and bead-setting)
- ▶ Making glass chandeliers
- ▶ Making hospital work-clothes, sleepwear and bed-linen
- ▶ Preparing vegetarian meals, cooking
- ▶ Arranging and sealing greeting card gift boxes
- ▶ Decorating Christmas tree ornaments
- ▶ Inserting/pasting inserts in magazines
- ▶ Assembling baby soothers
- ▶ Decorating tin miniatures
- ▶ Assembling promotional toys
- ▶ Shoe-designing and shoe-making
- ▶ Administrative work (accounting)
- ▶ Real-estate management support
- ▶ Editing
- ▶ Electronic library and website administration, research and technical translation
- ▶ Artwork: making colouring books and items for pre-school aged children
- ▶ Graphic design

05.02. Working Methods

Manual workers always make just a part of the product being produced. In other words, they are a link in a relatively long chain of workers. Home-based workers frequently work in isolation from one other. Knowledge-based work, on the other hand, is of an entirely different nature and usually results in a complete package of services being delivered to the employer. The next few paragraphs briefly describe working methods, as they are relevant to the following chapters detailing working conditions and occupational safety.

Making and assembling hair colour swatch charts

The worker shapes hair strands (dyed nylon swatches) as requested (curls, strips, tufts) and inserts them into openings in the catalogue sheets. She attaches them with hot glue using a welding gun. There are between five to thirty-five swatches on one sheet. Likewise, there are a different number of pages in each catalogue. Several women share the work on one product. Before the above-mentioned procedure takes place, the hair is wound together into strands and washed in the workshop. Finally, catalogues are produced from the finished sheets back in the workshop.

Lampworking

A lamp bead manufacturer needs a gas bottle, a burner (installed in the table), welding goggles, a fireproof headscarf, leather gloves, an elbow rest, a metal rod, a special fireproof table pad and glass rods. She dips the metal rod in a special solution and lets it dry. Then she heats a glass rod over the burner until it starts melting. The rod is long, propped up against the worker's head. She holds it with her left hand, resting her elbow on the elbow rest on the table. Meanwhile, she holds the metal rod in her right hand, winding molten glass upon it once the glass is soft enough. Moving her wrists, she rotates the metal rod regularly. The resulting glass bead, wound on the metal rod, is then taken off and placed on a special pad to cool down. Once the glass is molten, the worker must work non-stop, as repeated glass heating is time-consuming.

Assembling adjustable date-stamps

First of all, the worker must assemble rubber strips bearing the text elements (day-month-year). Then she puts cogwheels between the individual strips. Next, she clicks the parts together with a special device. Using another device, she inserts the body of the stamp into a plastic outer shell, fastening it properly. At this stage, the item is not yet ready – it lacks the inepad, an integral part of the stamp. But this is another worker's job. Process-wise, the home-based worker works in two stages. In step one, she joins the strips and the cogwheels, and in step two, she fits together the interior part of the stamp and the shell.

Rosary-making

The work consists of making strings of wooden beads, i.e. semi-finished products. Using special pliers (originally designed for electricians), the worker threads wire with loops at each end through the openings in the beads, joining the beads together. Later on, another worker hangs a cross on the rosary string.

Making jewellery and costume jewellery

The work consists in stringing together complex combinations of glass stones or gemstones into necklaces or hair clips. Metal and bead-setting involves embedding studs and decorative beads on a canvas (similar to a needlepoint canvas). For the next step, the worker uses a pattern to cut out various shapes from in between the beads. The decorations are used for making handbags or are sewn on clothes or shoes. Metal and bead-setting is done with a special device.

Making glass chandeliers

The chandeliers in question are ornamental, composed of strings or chains of cut glass beads. The beads come in different sizes and have an opening. The worker makes a string of beads by threading a wire through each stone opening and bending it at its end to make a loop for attaching the next stone. She needs to use special pliers. The number and the length of the bead chains depend on the particular chandelier type. The individual types are described in the manufacturer's catalogue, including the number of beads and chains. Once the chains are ready, they are packed in paper packages of various sizes and taken by another home-based worker or workshop employee to assemble into chandeliers.

Making hospital work-clothes, sleepwear and bed-linen

Home-based workers must have their own sewing machine to obtain this work. The worker receives a semi-finished product: pre-cut pieces of fabric that need to be sewn together, folded up and ironed "as smooth as a board." Later on, in the workshop, the sewing is completed, buttons sewn on and the button holes neatened.

Preparing vegetarian meals, cooking

Preparing and delivering vegetarian meals as ordered.

Arranging and sealing greeting cards gift boxes

The greeting cards are arranged in boxes and sealed in plastic wrap using a fusing gun.

Decorating Christmas tree ornaments

The worker spreads glue over clear glass Christmas balls in various

patterns and then sprinkles fine-grained coloured sand over the patterns to form shapes. Depending on the design, she repeats this several times on each ball. Some patterns are very complex, consisting of several layers. Finally, the worker lets the glass balls dry on a special rack and then she packs them into boxes. The decorator needs a special paintbrush. Later on, another worker fastens hooks onto the ornaments, and finishes the work.

Inserting/pasting inserts in foreign magazines

The worker glues inserts, stickers or small gifts (such as jigsaw puzzles) in foreign magazines. Then she packs the magazines into lots.

Assembling baby soothers

A baby's dummy consists of three parts that need to be joined together.

Decorating tin miniatures

This work involves hand-colouring tin soldiers for chess sets.

Assembling promotional toy cars

The worker assembles and glues together toy cars composed of several parts. The toys are used as souvenirs and given to automobile buyers.

Shoe-designing and shoe-making

The worker creates a design in a computer program, makes a paper model and helps with production.

Administrative work (accounting)

The worker keeps the books for her husband's company, helps raise resources and updates the company website.

Real-estate management support

The worker works for a property owner who is a foreigner. She does organisational work related to real-estate management, including coordinating repair works and cleaning, inspections and renting out the property to tourists. As the worker puts it, "I'm a maid-of-all-work."

Editing

The woman works as an editor for a technical publisher. Her tasks include text editing, page design and communicating with authors and reviewers.

Electronic library and website administration, research and technical translation

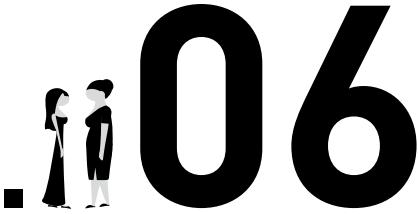
The worker searches for Russian and English-language technical articles on the internet and in journals and translates them into Czech and posts them on the company website.

Artwork: making colouring books and other items for pre-school aged children

The workers make materials for children and the instructions for their use which are later published in magazines specializing in activities for children.

Graphic design

Workers produce computer-generated posters, fliers and websites.



06

WORKING CONDITIONS

06.01. Working Hours

When asked about the benefits of home-based work, most women mention flexible working hours. People working from home can take care of young children and household chores. Home-based workers can also engage in hobbies or run errands in a manner that best suits the needs of the family. They can adjust their working hours to ensure that they can manage their time in a flexible manner. Some home-based workers may choose to work on weekends, for example. In most cases, the women can decide how much work they will take on, i.e. how many hours per day/week they want to work. However, this flexibility is not linked to wage rates and this is especially true of those workers who accept piece work rather than per hour. In fact, long working hours do not guarantee a high income at all (see Chapter 7). In addition, the number of hours worked depends on the overall family income and on whether the husband/partner helps with childcare and the household (see Chapter 9).

"I have no idea how many hours I work every day. I get up between 5 and 6 in the morning, I work a few hours, then I go to the gym or for a walk, and then I work again. In the evening I sometimes go to the gym again and when I come back, I work until 1 a.m." BARBORA

"In summer I tend to take on less work, as there is a lot to do in the garden and in the house, and in winter I work more. On average, I work 2 – 2.5 hours a day, and sometimes I work at night too." GITA

"I usually work at night, because I spent my time with the kids in the daytime and had a lot to do... At first, I would work as much as 12 hours a day, but then I cut it down to eight hours and less." DANA

"There is a lot of work nowadays ... but usually I do 3-4 hours a day. I start at 7 p.m. and I'm done at 10. I'm not about to sit there all night... We could decide how much we wanted to work and we wouldn't do more. Our manager tried to put pressure on us a bit, but she never pushed it too far. If you say you don't want to work this week, it's fine. It's all about relationships. It's a good way to combine childcare and work. As far as I know, women on maternity leave do it a lot." INA

"I always work at night when the kids are asleep. In the daytime I take care of them non-stop." VĚRA

"I work when my little son is asleep, or in the weekend when my husband or my older sons can take care of him, and I also work in the morning before the boy wakes up." WANDA

On the other hand, it sometimes happens that the women are pressured by managers, employers or customers to do additional work to meet a tight deadline, which requires them to work overtime, for a greater number of hours than they would like. But many women are dependent on their managers. Therefore, they cannot say no to work without risking losing their job or getting a "worse" assignment next time.

"Sometimes there was an urgent order, and then the company delivered the materials to my home (instead of collecting them herself). This often happened in weekends. If you protested and refused to do emergency jobs, you would get a worse job for less money next time." ALENA

"Sometimes they ask me to do jobs overnight. My husband helps me when this happens." MIRKA

"I had to do as much as they asked me to do. Sometimes they needed it quickly." HANA

In this context, it is questionable whether home-based work under the above-mentioned conditions really enables women to juggle home and work. Having to work at night after having taken care of children all day or having to meet tight deadlines within restricted child-free hours is not liberating for women. In some cases, it even seems that there is not much difference between working from home and having a regular second job, in the sense that the woman works one shift for her employer and another for her family. This issue will be covered in more detail in Chapter 9 dealing with the division of family roles and gender stereotypes.

The only aspect of home-based work that the women surveyed considered to be entirely positive is that they have some control over the pace at which they work. All other aspects of their work, including the way in which materials were supplied to them, their relationships with their employer and the poor remuneration that they received were problematic for them. These workers risked being exploited, discriminated against and were not protected by labour laws.. One participant, Lea, described this rather schizophrenic situation as follows: "The work is flexible but insecure".

06.02. Labour Relations with the Employer/Intermediary

Feelings of insecurity surrounding home-based work stem from many factors. Work of this kind is irregular and therefore so are wages, there is always the potential risk of job loss at any time, especially if the woman does not have a contract of employment. Most women working “off the books” and even some workers with contracts of employment are dependent on their work providers and remain unprotected against exploitation. The stories of BARBORA and WANDA are characteristic examples of this. Moreover, WANDA’s story is an example of discrimination against a mother on parental leave and is typical of many situations in which an employer tries to save on overhead costs by not providing an employee with standard employee benefits.

“The work provider promised me a contract of employment and three weeks holiday, but I’ve been working off the books so far (for about half a year). Until recently, work had been regular and there hadn’t been any problems getting paid. But a week ago he told me that we’ll take a break. I have no idea why, and I don’t know how long it will take, but I’m afraid I’ll have to look for another job.” (When we met up with Barbora about two weeks later, we found out that her worries had been realised. The so-called ‘break’ was really the end of her relationship with her employer and Barbora did not receive her leave entitlements or contract of employment).

“Three months after my fourth child was born, I started working from home and I returned to my part-time job after my parental leave. But the employer refused to have me back as a permanent employee, and offered me casual work by providing me with an ‘agreement to perform work’. It didn’t bother me, and I was happy to have a job. I had flexible working hours and I was paid per hour – in summer I worked about 40 hours a month and in winter 70 hours a month. Then we adjusted the numbers of hours with the accountant so as not to exceed the scope of the agreement. I worked for two and a half years on these terms. Often I felt they gave me the unappealing jobs that nobody else wanted to do, but I wanted to be helpful and accepted whatever work I was given. Currently I would like to amend my contract and be a permanent employee again. However my boss proposed terminating my contract. I found out that he couldn’t fire me over the last few years and I refused to leave. Eventually, he proposed a redundancy termination package... However, my employers said that they were still interested in my work, so we agreed that I would continue on an ‘agreement to perform work’ basis. I don’t know what to expect now... The general manager said that they might take me back on a permanent basis later. As it is now, I work about 80 hours a month and sometimes I go to work on Saturdays.”

Most of the women taking part in the research worked **without any contract of employment**, i.e. informally. An overwhelming majority of these women were manual workers (KAMILA, JANA, RADKA, NELA, PETRA, OLGA, LEA, BARBORA). The main reason that this is the case is that the work provider either did not offer any contract at all, or s/he promised a contract but did not honour the promise. But there are other factors too. Many of these women receive various kinds of social benefits from the state such as maternity benefits, disability pensions, unemployment benefits, etc., and they do not want to lose them, or want to avoid paying taxes or doing the paperwork involved in getting a trade license. The income derived from home-based work is low and it does not compensate for lost social benefits or higher rates of taxation.

VĚRA and SILVIE, whose work is knowledge-based, work off the books, too. They chose home-based work freely and were moti-

vated by the opportunity to keep their social benefits. Věra, a computer graphic artist, says:

“The social system is badly designed, and it makes women on maternity leave work off the books... If I were an official employee, I would lose my benefits... I’m not about to feel guilty for trying to make some extra money.”

ELIŠKA works unofficially too. She needs a trade licence to be able to do her job. But the trade licence that she uses belongs to her partner who allows not only Eliška, but also his retired parents and his grandmother to use it. Therefore, Eliška’s boyfriend is the only family member who works officially, while distributing the work among his relatives.

ALENA, MIRKA, HANA and ŠÁRKA worked under **official employment conditions**. However, as we found out, even an official employment contract does not necessarily ensure good working conditions for female home-based workers.

While MIRKA and ŠÁRKA say they are happy with their employers, ALENA and HANA describe some negative experiences:

“I was employed full-time for one year and then they cut my hours down to part-time. They just did it and there was nothing I could do about it. They wanted to save money. When there were fewer orders, they didn’t need to pay us high salaries if we worked part-time. But a lot of women worked much more anyway... If I hadn’t accepted it, I would have lost the job. I worked there for eight years, and then I couldn’t keep up anymore, and finally I was made redundant... Women are left at the mercy of the employer.” ALENA

“I had a standard contract of employment with reduced working hours (because of a partial disability pension). One day, I found out that I was entitled to an allowance to help buy a new sewing machine (to make hospital work-clothes), but they refused... I was entitled to take days off, but I was often unable to take them because there were orders to be taken care of, so they would transfer the days to the next year or pay me compensation... But I was not entitled to take leave to care for family members– they said I did my work at home anyway... When I tried to suggest a pay rise or higher benefit compensation, it was impossible to negotiate. They said I could go if I didn’t like it.” HANA

“**Agreements to complete a job**” or “**agreements to perform work**” were other forms of employment that we encountered in our survey. These are very flexible forms of legal employment that require no or limited responsibility to the employee, such as the provision of social and health insurance benefits, holiday leave, overtime hours, leave to take care of family members etc. There is a limit on income and hours worked attached to these contracts. INA and GITA worked under such conditions for several years. It would have been more useful for these women to have a standard employment relationship. While an agreement to compete a job is advantageous to the employer (low taxation, no responsibility, conformity with the law) and the employee (the income limit allows them to receive social benefits), it does not provide the employees with any protection or security.

“We can make 20,000 crowns a year without paying taxes. The agreement is concluded for one year, but we work more than that so we have to split it, so my husband has an agreement too.” INA

On the other hand, YVETA (an editor) preferred to accept an agreement to perform work rather than obtain a trade licence as requested by her employer. She works part-time and is happy with this arrangement.

DANA and THEODORA are exceptions among the group of women we studied. Both are limited liability company founders and co-owners without being businesswomen as such. The two

women share something in common— they are both foreigners. Establishing a limited liability company seems to be the easiest way to obtain a legal work permit and thereby a residency permit in the Czech Republic. Therefore, starting a limited liability company is a migration-related survival solution that is not primarily business-motivated but allows the person to get a residency permit. However, DANA, who co-owns her firm with her husband, is limited by her company in the sense that being an owner or employee of the company, she cannot be employed elsewhere because her work permit is tied to her own business. This applies even if the company is inactive or makes no profit.

THEODORA owns a limited liability company entitling her to a residency permit that she renews every year. As there are many bureaucratic constraints to her work and THEODORA cannot leave the Czech Republic without a visa to buy material and make business contacts, the limited liability company is, just as in Dana's case, a tool to legalize her residency.

Home-based work and migration should be covered in more detail in future research, as it is a very common phenomenon in certain regions, such as some Western European countries.¹¹ Informal home-based work is one of the few forms of work that provide migrants, both legal and illegal, who face discrimination and work permit related red tape, with a relatively safe income. On the other hand, however, such workers often become victims of exploitation and have no opportunity of defending themselves, either because they are illegal immigrants or due to discrimination in the job market in general, making it difficult for them to find regular jobs.

06.03. Work Regularity and Job Stability

Given that the availability of work is irregular and that the materials needed to complete home-based work are not always available, the income of home-based workers is irregular, and this was a significant problem for the women surveyed. As mentioned above, the women can, to a certain extent influence the amount of work they want to do every week or month. However, this is only true in situations where there is enough work for them. The women have no control over shortfalls in demand for finished goods or lack of materials to produce them, which makes them entirely subject to the decisions made by their work provider. If the work provider is also a workshop owner employing workshop workers, he will always give preference to his own staff, putting the home-workers temporarily out of work. This precarious situation is typical for **manual home-based workers** who typically have no daily contact with their work provider.

"Work is irregular. But mostly they try to give us at least fifteen jobs (making chandeliers) per week, so that every woman can do at least two or three. They try to send something at least. Our work provider said that if there is a glut of this particular product we will only make rosary beads. That's why we took it on, to always have at least some work." INA

"The work was irregular. I had to do as much as they asked me to do. Sometimes they needed it quickly, and sometimes there was no work at all. The company had its own workshop with about thirty female workers and ten or twelve women from the area worked from home. If there was too little work, the workshop women got it." HANA

"There was a lot of time when I was idle, as the links in the (hair-swatch) catalogue manufacturing chain were mutually dependent. I either lacked materials or swatches. I would go sometimes two months without work." ALENA

06.04. Occupational Health and Safety

A vast majority of the women surveyed said that work has a negative impact on their health. Most of the problems experienced are related to back pain, caused by prolonged sitting and repetitious movement. Eye related problems resulted from night work and computer work. These symptoms are no different from common work related health problems and they are not specific to home-based work environments. However, some women working from home work with hazardous chemicals. In such cases, the employer or work provider bears no responsibility for any potential consequences and s/he does not need to meet his/her obligation to provide protective equipment. In addition, many women work in apartments or houses in the presence of other family members, including children, exposing them to the hazardous substances too.

"My wrists are ruined, but you must get used to it and have quality working equipment. I do not have a fume hood, so I have breathing problems because I inhale the fumes (when melting bead-making glass). The boss says it's not harmful... He says I should work with the window open, but I can't do that because the beads crack. It would be best to have a big fume cupboard to exhaust the fumes... The boss promised to give me an adjustable chair, but I still haven't got one." BARBORA

"The firm said that no parts (of the date-stamp machines) contained harmful substances. But I did have health problems. First of all, my fingers were covered in cuts that bled from the cogwheels that you put in between the number strips. The strips were impregnated with a substance that caused headaches and dry skin and that made the blood vessels in my eyes stand out. Once the piece was ready I would leave the room." ELIŠKA

"Christmas balls are decorated with glue. I suck the glue in a pipette and then I use it to make patterns on the balls." MIRKA

"When you make rosary beads, your arms hurt, your back hurts and your legs become swollen. It was like this when I was a garment worker." GITA



07

REMUNERATION

07.01. An Hourly Wage vs. a Piecework Wage

Remuneration is one of the main motivations for choosing home-based work for women who, for the above-mentioned reasons, cannot or do not want to have regular jobs. The difference between an hourly wage and a piecework wage is a crucial factor determining the amount earned by each woman. Again, it is important to differentiate between manual and knowledge-based work. Most manual workers are paid by piece rate, while knowledge-based workers are paid per hour or per assignment.

The situation of the women paid by piece rate is well characterised by GITA's statement: "Home-based work is not well-paid, you have to work a lot."

Most suppliers specify a minimum number of pieces to be made within a certain period of time, usually one or two weeks. According to the women, the requirements were not impossible to meet, and each worker could decide if she wanted to work more. "It was up to me to decide how much I wanted to earn, and therefore how much time I wanted to spend working." ALENA

The women were paid only on a piece-work basis. In most cases, their pay did not reflect the time spent collecting or organising their materials, or packing or delivering the finished products to the work provider's contact point. Similarly it did not reflect the related transport costs or the cost of purchasing manufacturing tools. Therefore, the opportunity to determine their own earnings as mentioned above is only theoretical given that the piece rate for the work that they do is typically so low that even if they work eight hours a day, in most instances they do not earn the minimum wage.

"I would pick up the materials from the company at the other end of town. It took a lot of time. I usually got a heavy load, so I bought a handcart later on and eventually I had my husband help me with the collection and delivery... I used public transport... I didn't receive any travel expense reimbursement, so I didn't even consider using my car." ALENA

"We would drive to town for the materials and we had to drive back again with the finished products. It's about 70 km, and we paid for our own petrol. Often it was not possible to get materials for a new assignment when we came there with a delivery, so we had to make two trips. Maybe in one half of the cases we managed to combine both and save one trip." ELIŠKA

INA, who uses her own car to collect materials in the neighbouring town and distribute them among six other women in the area, describes the work that she is not paid for as follows: "I'm paid for the work (the number of pieces I produce). For taking the materials back and forth, I get some money from the girls and we also get a petrol contribution from the employer, but I don't keep it - I distribute it among the girls again. As it is now, I do it all for free. I drive to town, I open and divide the materials here, and it can take two or three hours, and then I pack them in boxes again and take them back, and I do it all for free... The company contributes 140 crowns per month. It's not a lot, but it's better than nothing. I guess they're not rolling in money either." Note: INA drives to town once a week and one trip costs about 50 crowns).

INA also describes how she went about getting the tools needed for her work: "The worst thing about this job is getting the pliers. That's a big problem. They are chromium-plated and they cost 600 crowns. Ordinary pincers cost 120 crowns, and I had to rub them off. Everybody has to do it, because no pincers in the shops are thin enough. The company doesn't provide them, so you must get them on your own. A pair of pliers lasts half a year."

On the other hand, some work providers covered at least a part of the production-related costs.

"I drove to town every week to collect material and deliver the rosary beads I had made. They did not pay my travel expenses... I got special electrician's pliers for threading and bending the hooks." GITA

"I had to come by car to collect my work, and they paid for the petrol. I received contributions for electricity and threads too, depending on how much I sewed every month. It was about 200 crowns a month... But they did not pay for the trips or the time I spent sorting the material." HANA

The work done by workers whose work is knowledge-based is of a different character. They own their production tools such as a computer, computer program, a telephone and art supplies. When they work for an employer, they can seek reimbursement for their expenses. (YVETA and ŠÁRKA)

"I need a computer and a phone for my work. My phone supports Internet access, so I can send e-mails wherever I am. If I didn't have it, my boss would buy it for me anyway..." ŠÁRKA

Needless to say, the amount earned differs for each woman. It depends on the number of pieces and the hours worked. Interestingly, some of the women paid by piece rate had never won-

dered how much they earned per hour. After talking to us, some of the women converted their earnings into hourly wage for the first time. This enabled them to evaluate the real value of their work and to determine whether they were being paid at least the minimum wage. They had probably suspected that their hourly wage was very low and did not want to face the reality of being poorly paid for the work they did. Instead, they were focused on the total amount earned per week or per month, which seemed more reasonable. The earnings usually ranged from 1000 to 4000 crowns per month, depending on the hours worked. In one case, a worker was paid 8000 crowns month, and the highest amount earned was 18,500 crowns net (the work was informal, without a contract, i.e. no taxes were paid). Because home-based workers are paid by piece rate, they must work considerably more hours than a regular full-time worker earning the same wage.

"We are paid by piece rate. The prices vary between 30, 50, 90 and 170 crowns per hour, but we did the 170-crown piece only once. We usually complete one or one-and-a-half chandeliers a day between the two of us (note: with her husband)."

Do you know how much you earn per hour?

"I prefer not to know. We work three or four hours a day and we make one piece for 90 crowns. So I earn 90 crowns a day. It's net but I pay for the petrol... It's about 1,000 – 1,500 crowns a month." INA

"One piece used to pay 1.10 crowns. After two years they made it 1.15. I've never converted it to hours. I've always known it was unprofitable... On average, I can make 70 pieces in an hour. I could do 100. The important thing is to organise my work well to avoid long and unnecessary delays... I received 1 crown net. That was 3000 a month. The pay did not correspond to the work I had put in." ELIŠKA

"I never converted it to hours, but it would have been something like 30 crowns per hour. I worked about six hours a day to meet the standard, sometimes more. I would get about 20 crowns for a shirt. On average, I earned 3000 a month net." HANA

"The standard was five dozen sets of rosary beads per week. I managed to make seven dozen a week on average, depending on my family responsibilities. I earned about 1000 crowns a month. I got 30 to 35 crowns per dozen... I calculated it was about 10 crowns per hour, because it took me about three hours to make a dozen." GITA

"The price paid was between 0.38 to 0.45 crowns for every hair strand glued, depending on the length and shape. The short ones, the so-called tufts, cost the least, about 0.14 crowns. I made about 45 crowns net per hour, which was about 8,000 a month on average... At first I would work fourteen hours a day, then I got more efficient and worked less... I could glue in about 2000 swatches per day maximum." ALENA

"The standard was 30 pieces an hour... That would be about 110 crowns. Whether you could meet the standard or not depended on the glass quality. If all went well, I made about 18,500 crowns net a month. When I had less time, I earned about 12,000 crowns." BARBORA

"The standard is about 10,000 pieces a week. You get 0.07 crowns for one (baby soother). I can make about 1,300 pieces a day, even though the standard says I should do 2,000. I work 8 hours a day, and I work weekends, too. I earn 700 crowns a week." RADKA¹²

The earnings of home-based workers whose work is knowledge-based are similar to the earnings of home-based manual workers, ranging from between 2,500 to 6,000 Czech crowns per month depending on the hours worked. These workers possess a better idea about the value of their work, which is due mainly to the

fact that they are remunerated per hour. SILVIE is the only worker who does not know exactly how much she earns per hour, as her work consists in providing administrative and organisational support in her husband's business.

When asked about the contribution that their wage makes within the family budget, the women provided estimate figures. The percentage is usually low, in the order of ten to thirty per cent of the total. The significance of their earnings is also determined by their husband's income, other family income and social assistance contributions. For the single women with no children surveyed, home-based-work provides fifty to one hundred per cent of their total income (YVETA, BARBORA). It is interesting to observe how the women described the significance of their own earnings, and to see how their earnings sometimes influenced their relationships and their views on gender roles within the family.

"My husband earns about 16,000 crowns net, so he can provide for the family. My income is used for the extra things. My income covers the luxuries, such as an afternoon in the swimming pool with our child, clothes for the child, etc." LEA

"I earn five to six thousand crowns per month. With the child benefits and the social benefits, it's about 10,000. My earnings form one fifth of the family income, as my husband's salary is 25,000 crowns. We try to live a modestly, but still we don't have enough money. When I sit at the computer and the room is full of unironed laundry, my husband is not too happy. But he realizes how important my income is for the family budget." WANDA (note: there are 4 dependant children in the family)

"I keep the money I earn for the things I need in life (clothes, culture or trips). I don't ask my husband for it. It makes me feel better. Otherwise I would feel bad about blowing the money he earns. It feels better to spend my own money... OK, I do steal the money for myself. I keep an expense book, just for the good feeling of it. But sometimes I show it to my guy for him to see. I say, I have 3,500 crowns in maternity benefits, and with the child benefits and alimony it is 4,500, and, according to my calculations, I earn my average of 2,500 per month from my work. In fact, I contribute 7,500 crowns every month. The money does not correspond to my skills, but it's enough for me, and for my husband too in fact." ZDENA

"Even if it was only 500 crowns a month, it would come in handy – the kids could use it for the bus or something." GITA

"It's just a contribution – it's not much, something like 1,000 to 1,500 crowns per month – but it's not like money grows on trees. It helps our family budget." INA

"My husband earns 14,000 crowns and I earn about 3000 to 4000. In my last job before taking maternity leave, I had a 20,000 salary, and still it was me who went on maternity leave. I knew very well we would have very little money. We wouldn't make it without my earnings, because my husband's income is not enough to cover all the family expenses. We have no car – we can't afford it. But my husband thinks his salary would have been enough, and he doesn't want me to work... I prefer to make some extra money to counting the pennies." VĚRA

07.02. Income Satisfaction: What is the Ideal?

Income satisfaction varied. The women's statements were often contradictory: on the one hand they said they were happy and liked their work; and on the other, they realised that the wages did not correspond to the time invested. We asked them to think about their ideal situation. Each woman took a different approach to answering the question, and here again, their answers

reflected various motivations and expectations related to home-based work, as well as the different social conditions of each woman. Some answers revealed the respondents' view of their female role in the family and pointed to a traditional division of gender roles, while others reflected the woman's career ambitions and their desire to deal with the obstacles preventing them from doing more profitable work. Yet another group of responses show a relatively low self-valuation level in terms of ideal income. One reason for this has to do with the overall situation in Czech regions, where the wages of female manual workers tend to be at minimum wage level or only slightly above. Another reason for this stems from the lack of opportunity to find a better-paid job. Finally, some respondents consider their present situation to be ideal.

"I'd like to continue working freelance. But my office would have to be well separated from the living area in the house in order to prevent my work from interfering with my private life." VĚRA

"The ideal situation? Even 4 – 5,000 crowns per month... or if they gave more money to the guys and let the women be at home, that would be even better." HANA

"It would be nice to have at least 2,000 crowns per month. Working in the cowshed would have been better than home-based work (note: Gita occasionally works in the local cow house, covering for other workers on holiday or sick leave. She would like to obtain employment there after her maternity leave ends). The money is better and you get in touch with people – it's a nice change for a mother on maternity leave. Money-wise, we struggle to make ends meet. Thanks to my occasional cowshed work, I can buy things for the kids and spoil them a bit. If they employed me, I wouldn't think twice about it. When you're at home, you don't know what's going on outside, you are uninformed and you have no time to study." GITTA

"My ideal work would be transcribing or word-processing with a computer in a quiet home where you can concentrate. I don't want to do home-based work again." ALENA (note: Alena makes hair colour swatch charts)

"My ideal income? Twenty thousand would be alright." BARBORA

"Part-time work split between my home and the company, a regular contract of employment, and flexible working hours. My idea of an ideal salary is 15,000 crowns net full-time." WANDA

"Mornings free to work without my child around and stable and regular deadlines. The ideal salary? I don't know. A monthly average? I don't think it's all about money. I want to be happy, do my work and get paid. I'm not money driven." ZDENA

"The ideal situation? I'm not sure. Well, I think that the companies and employers should come to terms with the fact that women have children, and they should adapt the situation accordingly. Ideally, the working hours could be from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. while kindergartens and company childcare facilities are open, so that the kids would be taken care of when you're at work." LEA

"Home-based work is an ideal solution for me. I don't have to go back to work, I can be with my family and I have more freedom. Life is hectic, but children are part of that... At first me and my husband had to learn how to cooperate, because I had been used to making decisions and managing people at work... Today, my husband is the boss both at work and at home. But he has to give me freedom. We are a perfect team now. We wouldn't manage to do anything without each other. I am happy with our current financial situation and I hope it continues this way... The money is not important for me." SILVIE

"I'd like to continue working on the same basis, at home, only with books that are more interesting... A job in the non-profit sector would be nice too, Maybe I could work with people with

the same diagnosis. But whatever I do, I can do nothing except home-based part-time work because I tend to get tired and need to take breaks and rest during the day. I couldn't work more than that." YVETA

"It's hard to 'run a business' in the Czech Republic with all the red tape and corruption. If I managed to get permanent residence, I'd like to do something else, maybe even find employment. Then I would keep the bead-making as an occasional extra job." DANA

Some of the women who realize how low their income is and complain about it openly have a rather paradoxical view with regard to their work strategy. On the one hand, they perceive their work as a temporary solution, saying that they will get another job as soon as a better opportunity comes along or their situation changes. On the other, they say they have been doing this kind of work for several years.

How long have you been working from home?

JANA: "For seven years."

Is this work a temporary, or a regular long-term source of income for you?

JANA: "It's a temporary way to earn some extra money."

In fact, those respondents who perceived home-based work as a temporary solution feel that there is no need to be too concerned about their employer/work provider and are happy with their monthly income, and have no compulsion to see that they are vulnerable to exploitation or that they are inadequately remunerated for what they do. For example, when we pointed out to INA that in comparison with her partial disability pension, the child benefits and social benefits she receives, and her husband's income, her pay for four hours of home-based work per day forms a negligible part of the family budget, INA said: "Oh well. It's better than nothing." Their perception of the work being "temporary", together with their limited opportunities of getting another job combined with their need to generate income, probably leads them put up with poor working conditions and low wages. With the exception of two of the women surveyed, none of those who expressed dissatisfaction with some of the conditions of their work discussed ways of negotiating with their employer/work provider, the existence of trade unions or any possibility of improving their working conditions.



08

08.01. Familiarity with the Work Provider/Employer

There is a considerable difference between manual workers and workers whose work is knowledge-based in terms of their relationships with their work provider/employer. The workers whose work is knowledge-based are in closer contact with the work provider, are better informed about the company or person they work for, and many of them describe these relationships as being good. On the other hand, the manual workers have less access to information about their work providers with whom they have little contact, because many of them work for intermediaries. Particularly in the regional areas of the Czech Republic, a lot of manual work is assigned to large networks of intermediaries who distribute the individual tasks within the production chain, which includes home-based workers. However, some women collect their work directly from the company and some firms even have workshops where the pieces are finalized. The women's understanding of the companies that they work for is very sketchy and almost none of them know the market price of the goods that they have a role in producing. Interestingly, most of them say that the products they make are meant for foreign markets. Some companies are owned by foreigners, and this is true of knowledge-based work too. INA summed up the attitude of many manual workers to their work providers as follows: "There is some kind of workshop in town with Ukrainians mostly. And I don't know if they assemble it there or if they check it, pack it and send it abroad. I have never wondered. I'm happy to have a job."¹³ As the women do not know very much about their employer/work provider and because they often work informally, they put themselves in an insecure situation and are unable to negotiate a rise on their piece rate or a production cost reimbursement. Therefore, what frequently happens is that the work provider/employer sets the rules and the women either adapt to these rules or do not have a job. Moreover, most of the women know other people in the region doing the same kind of work. This could mean that the number of persons making a living through home-based work is considerable. Significantly female home-based workers from the same firm typically know each other, or at least know of each other and they could use their mutual contacts for collective bargaining. However, none of the respondents mentioned such initiatives.

"The office supplies manufacturer often uses home-based workers. They are their principal manufacturing workforce. Most orders were completed for foreign clients, and some were even to be exported outside of Europe. The clients were almost never Czech. You could tell by the text... I know of about ten other people. We would meet up at quality of work meetings organised by the firm... They might have had more home-based workers who met at other times." ELIŠKA

"At the XY company we have a contact who is based in the neighbouring town, but they ship their products to another place to have Ukrainians assemble everything. I don't know what happens next. They definitely send everything abroad. Nothing stays here. I guess everything is for export and then they bring it back here again, probably. I don't know how it works... The woman from town (the work provider) is great, you can talk to her... She does it too. First, she got the job for herself. Then other girls started asking her about it, so the company said she should find more people and they gave her all the work."

Do you have an idea about how many people in the area do it?

"A lot. There are various providers. Dozens of people... For example, I know a man who has had spinal surgery who works lying down – he puts it on his belly and he works."

HOME-BASED WORK PROVIDERS

Who are the other female home-based workers that you know?

"One is on maternity leave, one is unemployed, two are retired, one works and I have partial disability." INA

"The company is in the neighbouring town... They have their own workshop employing thirty women, and about ten or twelve women from the area work from home." HANA

"We make the rosary beads for XY company. The intermediary is a woman who works as a nurse... Then the beads are sent to the company and shipped abroad to places of pilgrimage." GITA

"It's a family business owned by foreigners, a married couple. I'm the only one in the Czech Republic who works for them... They have only one more employee, a Ukrainian who takes the goods from me and ships everything abroad. The owner's wife finishes the decoration." BARBORA

"A lot of people do it, especially in the factory village. It's a foreign company... even though apparently it's forbidden as home-based work for hygiene reasons... I did my other home-based work, the swatch charts, for a woman from a town further away. She would bring it here. That was for export too." RADKA

"I worked for a local business owner who sold chess-sets abroad." PETRA

"There is a workshop in town owned by a married couple. I went to try my hand at it there first and then I went there to collect the materials. The toy cars are shipped abroad, and the materials come from abroad, too." NELA

"I worked in a factory at first, then I worked from home, then the factory split into several small firms and I work for one of them now... Another thirty women work in the workshop and there are many home-based workers. All the products are sent abroad; nothing stays in the Czech Republic." MIRKA

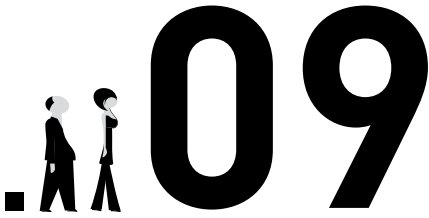
"It's a family business, and it's big, they have about 100 workers... Most of them are women (on maternity leave). They sell the jewellery abroad and in the Czech Republic. I've never been treated badly, quite the opposite. Apart from making jewellery, I also sell it in Christmas and Easter market stands." DANA

And the women whose home-based work is knowledge-based stated:...

"I work for a foreigner who owns property in the Czech Republic and has a limited liability company. My boss lives partly in the Czech Republic, partly abroad... It's based on mutual trust... I have access to the company bank account and take my own wage." ŠÁRKA

"I work for a technical publisher. Our relationship is good; at first they checked on me a lot, but now it's OK." YVETA

What do these statements say about companies providing home-based work in the Czech Republic? With such a limited number of answers it is not possible to come up with a universal conclusion. However, it seems that manual home-based work reflects a general trend whereby foreign companies, either through Czech intermediaries or directly, employ a cheap Czech labour force. But Czech firms hire home-based workers too. As mentioned above, their common motivation is low labour costs due to non-existent or flexible employment relationships and reduced investment costs. As for the workers whose work is knowledge-based, most of their work resembles that of sole traders fulfilling tasks or working on assignments rather than work done by ordinary employees. However, most of them do not consider having a trade licence and completing the related paperwork as a good option. Some respondents receive social benefits from the state and they do not want to run the risk of losing them, or they simply refuse to do their own business administration and pay taxes on their relatively low incomes.



09

09.01. Juggling Work and Family Responsibilities: A Home as a Workplace

The respondents express a range of different attitudes to the possibility of working from home on a daily basis. Firstly, they tend to interpret home-based work as being preferable as it makes it possible to juggle work and family responsibility or it saves time that would otherwise be spent commuting. However, during the course of the interviews, many respondents mentioned a number of negative aspects related to working from home. Paradoxically, the main problem that they experience is juggling family responsibilities and work and finding a balance between the two. This contradicts their initial view of home-based work as being advantageous and as symbolising flexibility. In some cases, there are conflicts between the woman who wishes to do more work and her husband who has to take over her family responsibilities:

“When you work at home, your work clashes with childcare and family responsibilities. The children suffer when the mother works. And the older children need much more attention. If mothers on maternity leave received at least as much as the minimum wage, they wouldn’t have to look for jobs.” GITA

“At first I was thrilled – I thought I’d be able to accomplish much more if I worked at home. But now that I do work at home, I’m trying to work as much as I can and I do more than I should.” HANA

“When I work, my family responsibilities must wait, but only to some extent. But on the other hand, why not? I can work too, it’s not only my husband’s privilege... I would run off every time I had a spare half-hour to continue my work. I was a bit nervous. But I made my husband accept it – with the work he did, he could take care of our child in the afternoon. His support was partial. It was difficult to juggle everything.” ZDENA

“It would be great if I could do more real work and my husband helped me more at home.” SILVIE

“In the weekend, my husband helps with the kids, but he can’t do it in weekdays. My work stresses me out.” WANDA

“My work interferes with my private life, the two are impossible to separate. I’d like to continue working at home, but my office would have to be well separated from the living area in the house.” VERA
Moreover, they mention that they feel isolated:

“When I work, I’m shut in at home all the time. I work in the evenings or at night, so I often go a whole day without stepping out of the house. I can’t separate my private life from work. I have no life – I only have my computer. When I start working on an assignment, I sometimes do go out, but then the work gradually fills up my whole life and there is no time or opportunity for anything else... Eventually I just work and my life is virtual, not real. I had my Internet access disconnected, because I didn’t go out at all. Now I must go to an internet café, which makes me get out of the house. When you work at home, you are unable to set limits and you work all the time.” THEODORA

“I can have a rest whenever I need to because I work in my own environment. On the other hand, I lack social contacts, and it costs me a lot of money to socialize.” YVETA

The physical locations in which women work play an important part in their efforts to juggle work and family responsibility.

HOME-BASED WORK AND FAMILY

Most of them do not have a separate workroom or office and work in communal areas of the house including kitchens and living rooms. This is why they cannot avoid contact with the rest of the family, which causes many distractions. Moreover, the other family members get involved in the woman’s work. The over-lap between work and family life is complete. In some instances this means that the health of the family members is at risk, for example in the case of home-based work that requires the use of chemicals. In addition, home-based workers need to continually clear away their work to free up space for everyday family life.

“I didn’t need a workroom. I worked at the living room table and in the kitchen, because there is a lino floor (which is easier to clean when you work with glue). My husband helped me in the evenings. While watching TV, he prepared the hair strands and put them in the openings, and I did the gluing later.” ALENA

“Stringing work leaves no mess, so I can work wherever in the house and I don’t need a special workroom.” GITA

What does your working environment look like?

“It’s terrible. Everything is everywhere, all over the place. Nothing is private.” ZDENA

“I made the jewellery on a foldaway table – I would fold it up and put it away whenever I needed to.” DANA

“A lot of female home-based workers, including me, involve the entire family in their work, even their children. For instance, my family helped me insert elastic bands into pyjamas.” HANA

“The entire family, my husband and my son, take part in my work sometimes. Previously grandpa helped too when I did metal-setting. He enjoyed it, but now he doesn’t. I do most of the work. My husband helps when he comes back from work. And my son helps me when he feels like it.” INA

09.02. Female Homeworkers and the Division of Family Roles

To a large extent, the fact that the home-based female worker is physically present at home all day predetermines her increased responsibility for the household and childcare, although she must also concentrate on her work. In families with young children, the division of family roles follows the traditional model whereby the man is the breadwinner and the woman takes care of the children and the household, even though she works too and contributes to the family budget with her income. If the woman is a home-based worker, this traditional stereotype is even stronger compared with women who have regular jobs in a formal work setting. The fact that the women perceive their home-based income as secondary to the main income generated by her husband, only confirms this. It seems that being present at home makes the women assume all the responsibilities involved in family and household care. Therefore, if the woman works full-time, she finds herself in a “double shift” situation – she is not only responsible for her work but also for the entire household. However, according to the statements of the respondents, most women consider this model natural and, more often than not as the way things should be. However, their opinions diverge in relation to their approaches to their partner’s participation in household management. In this respect, there seem to be three different approaches:

- The woman has chosen the traditional role, is happy with it and sees it as their life priority.
- The woman, forced by circumstance, has more or less resigned herself to the traditional division of roles.
- The woman tries, with varying degrees of success, to make her husband become more involved in family and household life on a daily basis in order to be able to pursue her work and need for self-actualisation.

"We have divided our roles the natural way. My husband leaves family and household care up to me... Everybody should know what their role is... Naturally, mums are meant to take care of children, and the man can join in... My home comes first, then I can think about self-actualisation..." ŠÁRKA

"If a woman is at home, she should take care of the household first, and then she can work and make things if she wants. But the household comes first. In my family, it works like that. The household comes first, and then work. It's not like I put my household aside and work... But it's not only my responsibility; my husband helps me." INA

"I take care of the children, that's what a mum is supposed to do." HANA

"I take care of the children, the household and the cooking, and my husband takes care of keeping the household financially. Sometimes he cooks though... From the very start, I've been alone with the kids, while my husband has worked in the garden and at our relatives' farm, making money... My husband is not the kind of guy who likes playing with kids or taking them on excursions, so mostly it's just me and the kids..." GITTA

"My husband works from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., so he does not help with the household at all. I guess he has less stamina... But it was my choice and I don't mind. That's why we had our fourth child, as a guarantee for another fifteen years... and then we'll have grandchildren." WANDA

"My husband was not too keen on housework, but because we live in a block of flats where there is no house maintenance to do, we came to an agreement." LEA

"The household is my responsibility... Guys are lazy by nature and it's hard to make a man take part in housework... My husband mostly does house maintenance tasks." ALENA

"The usual housework is my responsibility. My husband thinks a lot of it is pointless. When I'm not at home, he has his own way of dealing with the situation: he asks his mother to come over and take care of the household... It's me who takes care of the children most of the time, even though he realizes he should spend more time with them. The father role is about being the ultimate idol, an authority figure safeguarding values, the one who leads the way and opens new horizons. The mother ensures everyday life and a happy home... The woman takes care of the children and the household and the man earns money and organises the balance between work and family time. But it is very difficult to find a balance. I'd like to earn more and I'd appreciate if my husband could help more with the kids and cook from time to time..." SILVIE

"My husband says he helps with the household, but he could do more... I never sleep, not even on the weekends... Today's guys are weak, a woman can take much more. I can see it all around me... It's some kind of natural phenomena that the man comes home and he sprawls on the bed. He can't understand that after a whole day with two kids, I'm more tired than if I had worked in peace... My husband takes care of the kids sometimes, but he's unable to do it all day. He can mind the children, but it's me who has to dress them and cook for them... I appreciate men who control themselves and don't complain... My husband says he can't work properly if he hasn't slept and eaten well. But when do I sleep and eat in peace? My man says that women are just made that way... I'm half emancipated, half not." VĚRA

The inner conflict experienced by women who are torn between the traditional role of a woman as a family carer, her own ambi-

ons and efforts to involve her husband in a fair way are influenced by external circumstances, especially by her partners workload. This conflict is well described by ZDENA:

"My husband earns the money. I've come to understand this only recently, a bit late maybe... At first, I tended to reproach him for being at work and having less to worry about, no cooking, no cleaning... I'm all stressed-out here. I told him I can't take a break, and he's at work, he makes some money and thinks it's enough. But it's not enough, I wanted more. I was being selfish I guess. It was hard. Today, I think differently. I reconsidered the situation. My husband is responsible for earning money and I'm responsible for the family. Now that I know this, I have peace of mind. It took me three years. The thing is also that my husband has a new job now. He used to have more time, but now he's gone all day and he comes home late and does absolutely nothing. So I get the message... But I didn't want to go to work. He offered to stay at home to allow me to work, but I didn't want to. I did realize that he earned more, but that wasn't the main thing. I just didn't want to go back to work. I wanted to be with the baby, take a break from my job, enjoy the child, calm down and take my mind off everything else. Actually, our role division, my husband as the breadwinner and me as the homemaker, is the only option - it's impossible for him to work and have time for the family."

Childless women and women who do not share their home with a partner commented on the division of family roles hypothetically. Those who want to have children in the future mention the importance of a mutual agreement with their partners and their ideal is a fair division of the tasks related to childcare and housework.

"A woman's role is to make her home feel like a home. But both (partners) must come to an agreement that is acceptable for both. A relationship must be equal. The woman may do more housework, but the man should help her and take care of things." ELIŠKA

"I don't see why the woman should have a job and be responsible for the household. If the guy helps you with nothing, why keep him?" THEODORA

As for the men, their attitudes to the way their partners juggle their family responsibilities and home-based work differ. Some are happy for the extra money and they support their women in their work activities...

"My husband agrees with my work and he supports me. He sees it mostly as my way of self-actualisation, but he's also happy when I bring some money home." ZDENA

...some tolerate the situation but disapprove of the woman being busy when it is to the detriment of the family and/or when their wages are low:

"If it was up to my husband to decide, he would want me to be at home, cooking and cleaning. But we have problems managing financially, so he is happy I make some extra money." LEA

When I sit at the computer and the room is full of unironed laundry, my husband is not too happy. But he realizes how important my income is for the family budget." WANDA

"At first, my husband was glad I got the job, but then he was annoyed at it." HANA

...and some men disapprove completely about the work of their partners, preferring her to be a full-time homemaker, even if it resulted in a lower family income:

"My husband hates it. He wants me to devote my time to nothing but him. He doesn't want me to work, and he mistakenly believes we would manage to live on his salary alone." VĚRA

In most families of female home-based workers, gender stereotypes apply, characterised by a traditional view of the female/male role division and the division of the tasks related to these roles. As the woman is physically present at home, her "natural" female role becomes even more distinct. Accordingly, her home-based work is not taken into account in most cases and it does not translate into the husband's participation in child and household care.



10

DISCRIMINATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET AND HOME-BASED WORK

10.01. Awareness of Female Discrimination in the Job Market and Personal Experiences

The respondents' view of female discrimination in the labour market and their general awareness of the phenomenon depend on their personal experiences or those of their family and friends. Most of them share the opinion that women are a disadvantaged group in the labour market and they are familiar with the term "discrimination". However, their degree of familiarity with this issue varies, as does their awareness of the potentially discriminatory nature of the practices they encounter. Some women express a clear opinion about the situation of women in the labour market and about the existence of discrimination.

"There is discrimination, definitely. Women must put themselves forward much more, they must perform better and prove their qualities all the time. If a woman fails, the consequences are worse than if she was a man. Women are being disregarded. That creates enormous pressure and it's stressful. Men have everything fall into their laps." ELIŠKA

"Women are disadvantaged in every respect." ŠÁRKA

Other women are less certain that discrimination exists:

"I guess discrimination does exist, but I have no means of comparison because my field is only female. Compared with other professions, I felt I was underpaid." ZDENA (kindergarten teacher)

As has been mentioned in Chapter 4, repeated personal experience with discrimination in the job market lead ALENA, HANA and LEA to decide to only look for home-based work in the future. ALENA was discriminated against because of her age, while the other two women experienced discrimination because they had young children. Therefore, all three women chose home-based work as the only source of income they could obtain, even though they would have preferred to have regular jobs. All three do manual work. LEA works "off the books". She describes her decision as follows:

"I do what I do, and I'm not ashamed at all... It's no problem to find work illegally. But finding a well-paid job that is legal and being able to commute and pay the fare, or finding a less-well paid job in my town that would allow me to take our child to kindergarten in the morning, well that's a big problem... What is more, my husband's salary isn't high enough for me to look for a job actively, because this involves paying for the phone calls and the car trips. We can't even afford Internet access."

In some cases, the women's decision to start home-based work was a consequence of the impossibility of finding regular

employment due to discrimination. Paradoxically, where the respondent had been discriminated against for having small children, (for example, in the case of the employer who feared that a female worker would take frequent leave to care for sick-children) she perceived this as the primary reason to opt for home-based work.

While DANA, INA, ZDENA, VĚRA, SYLVIE, ŠÁRKA and YVETA did not experience discrimination directly, they often mentioned the experiences of their friends or relatives. On the other hand, LEA, BARBORA and ELIŠKA talked about the discriminatory practices they encountered when looking for a job:

"Me and my mother, who was about 45, went to a job interview at a company looking for people to assemble machine parts. My mother was told she was too old to learn new things. And I was told that I was going to want to start a family so my prospects in the company were poor. So we were both turned down. We just had to laugh at that." LEA

"I've experienced discrimination several times. For instance, when I worked in an animation studio the men's salaries were considerably higher. Even men with worse qualifications earned several thousand more than qualified women. The men got a higher salary right off automatically, while the women had to fight for it..." BARBORA

"I encountered discrimination at job interviews. They asked if I was planning on starting a family and how long I had lived with my boyfriend." ELIŠKA

WANDA also experienced discrimination. After a three-year period of parental leave during which time her employment was protected, she was dismissed. Her employer said he was still interested in her services, but only on the basis of an agreement to perform work (the case is described in Chapter 6). Wanda comments on this situation:

"I feel discriminated against because they sacked me after my parental leave protective period. Otherwise they wouldn't have done it. The firm is full of retired people who still go to work... I still hope they will take me back as a regular employee."

THEODORA feels discriminated against too, because of the many bureaucratic barriers she has to face as a foreigner. These barriers make it impossible for her to do the work she wants to do, even though she owns a company. Her biggest constraint is that she is not allowed to travel abroad to buy materials from her foreign partners because of visa duties, as she is a citizen of a non-EU member state. Another problem is that as a foreigner without permanent residence, she cannot get a bank loan for investments. THEODORA states:

"The bureaucracy makes you do what you don't want to do. You can't

work in your field. As a designer with fifteen years experience, I can do cleaning or design glasses. It even makes people work illegally... I'm discriminated against as a foreigner, not as a woman."

Some women, especially mothers with children and middle-aged women, react to labour-market discrimination with resignation or with a realistic estimation of their own situation, and they try to adapt to the discriminatory practices. For example ŠÁRKA and WANDA state:

"I'm aware of my drawbacks. When you're older than forty, you are of no use. Guys have better chances at work at any age, but not women." ŠÁRKA

"I feel I don't have a lot of chances at my age of 45... I guess I can't be too picky. I'll sacrifice my qualifications and do some low-skilled work close to my home." WANDA

The need to take time away from work in order to care for sick children, one of the main reasons for female discrimination in the labour market, is mentioned often by the respondents. All of the respondents with children automatically considered taking care of sick children as their responsibility. With the exception of HANA, none of the women mentioned the possibility of their child being taken care of by their partners. Some thought that grandmothers could do it. HANA confirms this stereotype when she states: "My husband has never wanted to take sick-child leave."

ZDENA and INA express their understanding of the reasons behind behaviour by employers that results in discrimination against female workers.. INA considers the clash between career and family as a personal problem of a particular woman and she does not perceive it as discriminatory. She did not consider the possibility of entering into an agreement with her partner or a fair division of the family responsibilities. This particular opinion reflects the general situation in the Czech Republic. Due to the lack of flexible working hours and part-time jobs, taking turns in providing care for children is very difficult even for the couples that would like to do it.

"Sick children are a handicap for women. The employers prefer not to take them (women with children) on. It's logical when you think about it really. You would not employ a person who takes care of his old mother, even if he is a guy. You are a business manager, not a social worker. You want to employ somebody who doesn't need to take care of anybody. That's logical. But what is not logical is that the state does nothing and it does not help women. That doesn't make sense. I mean, if you want to breastfeed on the street you can't because there are no boxes for breastfeeding and changing nappies, and there are no baby change-tables in public places either... That's discrimination for sure." ZDENA

Do you think women are discriminated against in the labour market?

INA: "No. A woman who wants to earn a lot and make it big has no time for family. If a woman wants to have a family, to have children, she will usually look for a less demanding job in order to manage."

And what about women returning to work after parental leave?

INA: "OK, that's discrimination. You have children and you must take care of them. And what if they fall ill and you miss work. It's a bummer. Getting a job is easier for a single or married woman without children than for a mother with children. That's a fact. I do understand the managers (position), because when kids are ill, their mum must stay home with them. If there are no grandmothers, there is no other solution. So I do understand them in this respect... Every woman must make her choice. It's

either to have a career but unfortunately no children, or to have no career because you prefer to raise children. And then you have problems finding a job."

SILVIE too considers juggling family and work as a personal problem:

"My personal problem is that I can't combine family care with a regular job. It has to do with my lack of adaptability... I've never thought that an employer could offer me the same conditions for childcare and work as I have with my home-based work, or that it would be possible to juggle family and work if I worked outside of my home"

10.02. Experiences with Job Centres

While the study did not primarily focus on women's job centre-related experiences, a question concerning the respondents' experience with job centres was included to get a complete picture about real job opportunities. The answers to this question showed that the role of job centres as employment intermediaries depended entirely on the individual approach of each staff member. However, where respondents had been to job centres, their success rate in finding work through the centres was close to zero.

"I was registered at the job centre several times. My last registration lasted for four years non-stop. I'm on partial disability pension, so I think this must be the reason they never offered me a job or retraining." HANA

"After my secondary school-leaving exam, I registered at the job centre and they offered me a job in a restaurant. But after the first month, I didn't get paid my salary, and my situation was such that I had to live on my own and provide for myself, so it was really hard. So I went back to the job centre to complain, and they said I should stop whining and be happy to have a job." LEA

"The job centre did what they could, but they offered me jobs I didn't want, like those I'd have had to commute to." ALENA

"The job centre people have always been nice to me." JANA

"My experiences with the job centre are good, they offered me retraining." KAMILA

Some respondents said that their retraining applications were rejected, and so they remained on the waiting list without getting a job.

"My experience with the job centre has been very poor. They rejected my retraining application several times. For instance, I wanted to complete massage training, but the staff member said there were too many self-employed people in town and she said I couldn't do the class. Then I asked for a contribution to get an enamelling furnace in order to be able to make mugs, and they said no again, for the same reason. The jobs they offered me were bad. They wanted me to be a supermarket check-out assistant. I begged the coordinator to offer me an administrative job because I had done this kind of work before. She said no. She said I had insufficient qualifications and that I should be happy she was not offering me a job as a cleaning lady." BARBORA (note: Barbora studied at a school of animation)

"I was registered at the job centre twice and my experiences have been very bad. I did not get any retraining offers. I applied to do a retraining course to become an accountant and they said I wasn't entitled to do it. The staff was unfriendly. For example, they offered me a job as a postwoman, but that was at the other end of town. I had to pretend I was an idiot so that they wouldn't take me on. They didn't care about the long trips I would have had to make every day and the three schoolchildren I have to take care of." ŠÁRKA

The rest of the women had no experience with job centre assisted job-hunting.



HOME-BASED WORK- PROS AND CONS: A SUMMARY

The following table sums up the advantages and disadvantages of home-based work as seen by the individual respondents. It should be noted that some aspects of home-based work described initially as beneficial proved to be rather controversial in follow-up interviews. In such cases, a brief explanatory note is added on the left of the page. For the purposes of clarity, we added our comments to some other statements, too.

Table 2 Home-Based Work Pros and Cons Perception Broken Down by Respondent

Alias	Advantages of Home-Based Work	Disadvantages of Home-Based Work	Notes
Alena	"Freedom, time flexibility."	"Being dependent on the employer, health problems. We were left at the mercy of the employer."	Flexibility is mentioned as an advantage by most female home-based workers. On the other hand, many manual workers work by piece and they must complete required numbers of pieces within a certain time frame. In case of urgent assignments they work overtime, while at other times they have fewer assignments and no work. Therefore, in a lot of the cases, this time flexibility is only theoretical. Some women do not fully realize their actual situation.
Barbora	"I can plan my day on my own, the working hours are great, it's very comfortable."	"The insecurity – but I don't think about it too much. The health problems – my wrists are ruined, but you must get used to it and get quality working tools."	Barbora works informally without a contract of employment.
Dana	"The flexibility, and there's no boss telling me what to do. I decide how much I want to work. I can use my own ideas when I make the jewellery."	"The impacts on my health, my eyes and my back."	
Eliška	"The advantages include time flexibility and the possibility to organize your own time."	"Especially the health consequences, the need to take long trips to pick up the work and the disparity between the time spent and the money earned."	
Gita	"I work at home and I don't have to leave the children. I can organise my time and combine work and cooking. Stringing rosary beads leaves no mess, so I can work wherever in the house without needing a workroom."	"Your arms hurt, your back hurts, your legs become swollen. When you work at home, your work clashes with childcare and family responsibilities. The children suffer when the mother works."	Here, the statements contradict each other, and this is typical of several women. On the one hand, home-based work allows them to organise their work according to the family needs (picking up children from school, cooking, dealing with authorities), but on the other, they often make up for this time by working at night, often pressed by tight deadlines determined by their work providers. Another common problem relates to juggling childcare and work in practice: many women often switch between the two all the time, which is stressful for them.
Hana	"I don't need to commute and spend money on bus fares."	"Too little time for my family, I try to work as much as I can. Back pain. Little money."	
Ina	"You are at home. You don't have to get up in the morning – you get up whenever you want, and you do your work whenever you have time. You can even take a week off and relax for a few days."	"I don't know. Low wages. It's an under-paid job. But otherwise, I don't know."	

Alias	Advantages of Home-Based Work	Disadvantages of Home-Based Work	Notes
Jana	"I organise my time as I need. I save on commuting expenses. I spend more time with family."	"The work is repetitive, the income is low or irregular and it's time-consuming."	
Kamila	"I can organize my own time. My work is also my hobby. I spend more time with family."	"The irregular income and the repetitiveness."	
Lea	"The main advantage is flexibility – we always arrange it according to what suits all of us best."	"But the flexibility can be a disadvantage too, because not all arrangements are certain and sometimes they call me to say they have found a cheaper worker, even though they had agreed to hire me."	Lea works informally without a contract of employment.
Silvie	"Home-based work is an ideal solution for me. In a regular company, you can't say no when there is an assignment and you must work overtime, at night and in weekends. Nobody cares if your children are sick. When I work at home, I set my own limits and my children and family are a part of my work."	No statement.	
Šárka	"I have time flexibility, I plan my own workday, I can take care of my family, I get a good wage and my job is legal. The job is advantageous in all respects."	"I must be available 24 hours a day. My boss requires me to be there for him all the time. Sometimes he makes me do pointless things to be sure I'm not a slacker while he pays me. Sometimes I can tell he takes delight in being my superior and he bosses me around."	
Theodora	No statement.	"I'm unable to separate my work and my private life and set my limits, so I work all the time. I have no life – I only have my computer. It results in isolation."	
Věra	"I can make my own choices, nobody is ordering me about and I'm my own boss."	"My work interferes with my private life and they are impossible to separate. So I can't plan when exactly I'll do the work."	
Wanda	"I can take care of my family at the same time and have flexible working hours."	"My dependence on the employer."	Wanda combined home-based work with parental leave. She had had the same job prior to taking maternity leave. The reason that she perceived her dependence on her employer to be a disadvantage is because she realized that home-based work weakened her position in the company and she could tell that this translated into less attractive assignments. At the time of the final interview, her worries materialized, because she was dismissed at the end of her parental leave protective period.
Yveta	"I can have a rest whenever I need. I work in my own environment."	"I lack social contacts, and it costs me a lot of money to socialize."	
Zdena	"The advantage of home-based work is that I can do it whenever I have time – in the daytime, in the night time and whenever my child falls asleep. I have all my tools at home. It's something I can do on maternity leave, I earn some money and I'm not excluded from society as useless. I have new contacts and I get to know new environments and meet people. My husband appreciates it too, because the responsibility of earning money for the family is not only on his shoulders. And this makes me happy."	"I never work longer than for a short while, so my work isn't continuous. I must interrupt it whenever I'm disturbed. I don't have enough space or my own table where I can leave work all the time. At work I had a more inspiring environment and my colleagues assessed my work. I miss their feedback."	



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CONCLUSION

Although the research on home-based work was qualitative and it included a limited number of respondents, it can be concluded that formal and informal home-based work occurs in many sectors in the Czech Republic. The contrast between manual and knowledge-based work, rather than the type of labour relation to the employer or the work provider (i.e. whether the job is legal or illegal), was identified as the fundamental criterion for a general outline of home-based working conditions. Dependent manual work, or home-based work proper, is underpaid and unprotected, carried out mostly by women with rather low education levels. Its covert character and the virtual impossibility of enforcing the protection of labour rights make it an issue worldwide. On the other hand, home-based knowledge dependent work can be considered as a tool to juggle work and family responsibilities, as it is carried out by women with higher education who make a deliberate choice to give preference to childcare over their careers. This division into the two groups is supported by the similarities in the answers of the respondents. Any further research on home-based work, as defined in our survey, should take this division into account. An advisable approach would be to study each of the respondent groups separately in order to collect more extensive and more detailed information and propose solutions to the problems faced by the women in both categories.

While all the respondents were female, it would be incorrect to say that all Czech home-based workers are women. The respondent statements showed that men engage in home-based work too, both as helpers and on their own. Female home-based workers usually say their work provides a way for them to earn extra money and is a form of self-actualisation. Their main income consists in social benefits from the state, be it unemployment benefits, parental allowances, disability or old-age pension or care-of-a-relative benefits. However, some women say they work for financial reasons only and that if they had enough money, they would not work from home. In most cases, as they perceive their wages as providing “extra money”, and as they stay at home, organising their own working time and usually working less than eight hours a day, the women are not aware of the real extent

of their workload. The respondents, especially the manual workers, do not fully realize how low their rate of pay really is, or that it falls well under the minimum wage level in many cases. This is typical mainly for piece-rate workers, because the minimum wage is calculated on the basis of the hours worked. Some women have a very vague idea about their hourly wage, while others only found out what it was as they calculated it during our interview. In spite of all that, they perform manual work, which involves a number of other drawbacks such as insufficient reimbursement of work-related expenses or the irregular supply of work. The work makes them feel that they contribute to the family budget, that they are needed and that they are partly independent of their partners. Knowledge-based workers have the same reasons for choosing home-based work, except that they have a better chance of influencing their working conditions. They usually work for a client who is known to them on clearly specified terms, or within their family. Their work does not consist of complying with standards but involves completing jobs or assignments.

The possibility of juggling childcare/household and work in practice is a major concern in both respondent groups. Clearly, home-based work is not an automatic and self-evident solution to the problem. The women perceive the family/work balance issue as an exclusively female concern without specifying the role of the partner. As they are present at home all day long, most women automatically assume all the responsibilities involved in household management and childcare and their role is deeply rooted in gender stereotypes. The women’s views of their roles differ, ranging from satisfaction to resignation and to protests accompanied by efforts to involve the partner. The fact that the respondents work is secondary to their presence at home. The demands made on the women by their partners correspond to the demands made of housewives rather than home-based workers. Paradoxically, flexible working hours and the possibility to adapt work to the needs of the family are the most frequently mentioned benefits of home-based work in our study. However, further interviews reveal that our respondents often worked during the night or on weekends in order to catch up with their work, as

separating family from work poses a considerable problem. Indisputably, the solution to this problem lies in the increased involvement of partners in daily family and household responsibilities. Some women who recognise this to be the case try to push for this solution with various degrees of success. Other women have resigned themselves to things staying as they are, perceiving family care as their exclusive responsibility.

Referring back to the subtitle of this study, i.e. the question as to whether home-based work in the Czech Republic is a relatively precarious and underpaid activity concealed within the walls of households or a flexible option ensuring life/work balance, the answer should be that it is both. Clearly, no general conclusions can be drawn from a pilot qualitative research that looks into this phenomenon for the first time. However, the extent to which home-based work is a real solution for juggling family and work life remains questionable – especially where the women work at night after having taken care of their children all day long, especially where they work under the pressure of tight deadlines set by their work provider or the stress of their “double-shift” as they attempt to manage their household and work at the same time.

The respondents seem to have chosen dependent manual work out of necessity, both because their family income is insufficient and as a result of the difficulty of finding a different and better-paid job offering better working conditions. Because their labour relationships are informal and their working conditions impossible to change, the work is a bad bargain indeed. Basically, the workers have two choices: either they carry out the work under the existing unfavourable conditions, or they earn no money at all. Unfortunately, there are several factors making it impossible to find a solution to this situation. First of all, there are no associations of home-based workers fighting for better working conditions for their members. And even if these existed, they would currently not be able to help the informal workers anyway, since they would expose them to the risk of legal sanctions. Trade unions could have a part to play, too, but as it is now, their activities in this area are limited due to the “invisibility” of the phenomenon, their lack of familiarity with the issue, the lack of information about the working conditions of home-based workers and the fragmented character of home-based work. Best practices from other countries show however, that encouraging home-based workers to establish associations and lobby for better working conditions is important.

Efforts to reconcile work and family life are visible mostly within the group of workers whose work is knowledge based. Nevertheless, it should be noted that providing optimal conditions for work/family balance is not the concern of employers or work providers, but is a purely private concern held by the respondents themselves. Some of the difficulties of juggling work and family mentioned frequently by the respondents can be resolved through a fairer division of family responsibilities between both male and female partners and a gradual breaking down of gender stereotypes. This is true in relation to respondents from all social groups.

In any case, home-based work in the Czech Republic needs further attention. It would be useful in the future to study female trade-licence holders who attempt to combine self-employment with parental leave. Another survey could address the manner in which flexible working hours and telecommuting are used in practice, as they are offered to women on maternity leave by certain international companies as a part of their equal opportunities programmes. Therefore, this pilot research on home-based work carried out by the ECG could be the starting point for further surveys and efforts to find ways of achieving equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market by improving the working conditions and status of home-based workers.

Notes:

¹ The term invisibility primarily refers to the covert character of the work. As the women work for their work providers from their homes, no labour standards such as occupational safety, fixed working hours or minimum wage apply; Konning, M.: *Odbory pro ženy, ženy pro odbory – od lokální akce k mezinárodnímu hnutí*. In: *Ženy na trhu práce – jak na nezaměstnanost a diskriminaci*. EKS, Praha 2004.

² Konning, M.: *Odbory pro ženy, ženy pro odbory – od lokální akce k mezinárodnímu hnutí*. In: *Ženy na trhu práce – jak na nezaměstnanost a diskriminaci*, EKS, Praha 2004.

³ *We work at home*. Homeworkers Worldwide, Leeds 2003.

⁴ *We work at home*. Homeworkers Worldwide, Leeds 2003.

⁵ For instance the associations representing home-based workers: National Group on Homeworking and Women Working Worldwide (UK), Felicitas (Serbia), International Labour Contact Net (Lithuania), or organisations campaigning for better working conditions in the informal sector: Clean Clothes Campaign, Labour behind the label, Oxfam or certain trade unions within the ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions).

⁶ Sikosek, M.: *Práce z domova v zemích střední a východní Evropy – tradice i nový fenomén v globalizovaném světě*. In: *Ženy na trhu práce – jak na nezaměstnanost a diskriminaci*, EKS, Praha 2004.

⁷ Convention 177, ILO, 1996.

⁸ In 2002, ECG carried out the first pilot survey concerning home-based work in the Czech Republic with a small group of respondents (8 women). Its objective was to find out whether home-based work occurs in the Czech Republic, and if it does what are its forms. At that time respondent recruitment proved to be a problem for two reasons: First, female home-based workers are often isolated, working in flats or houses “behind closed doors” and unobserved by any interest group. Second, many of them work informally, “off the books”, which is why they are cautious and unwilling to talk about their work and working conditions openly.

⁹ Manual work is defined as an activity resulting in the completion of a piece, product or semi-finished product and it is mostly dependent on a work provider. Knowledge-based work, on the other hand, is a less dependent activity drawing on the workers’ intellectual skills (such as computer work or organisational activities).

¹⁰ Establishing a limited liability company is probably the easiest way for a foreigner to get a Czech work permit – see Chapter 6.

¹¹ This is confirmed by the results of a home-based working survey conducted in the UK. The study showed that fifty per cent of the respondents were immigrants or members of ethnic minority groups. Brill, L: *Homeworking in Britain: Flexible working or Exploited labour?* NGH 2004, UK

¹² This data comes from the 2002 research. However, wages in this sector have probably stayed approximately on the same level.

¹³ We chose not to disclose any company names or the cities in which they are based because we do not want the women who were willing to share their experiences for the purposes of this study to be exposed to the risk of losing their jobs..



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APPENDIX USEFUL LINKS

In English:

Full text of the International Labour Organisation Convention 177 on home-based work:

<http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/convdisp1.htm>

Information about some foreign organisations dealing with home-based work:

<http://www.homeworkersww.org.uk>

<http://www.homeworking.gn.apc.org>

<http://www.irene-network.nl>

<http://www.felicitas.org.yu>

<http://www.ilo.org>

<http://www.cleanclothes.org>

<http://www.women-ww.org>

Bibliography:

We Work at Home. Homeworkers Worldwide. Leeds 2003.

Brill, L. (2004): Homeworking in Britain: Flexible working or Exploited labour? NGH, UK.

Rowbotham, S. (1993). Homeworkers Worldwide. London.

In Czech:

(2004). Ženy na trhu práce – jak na nezaměstnanost a diskriminaci. EKS. Praha. (The volume contains the full text of the International Labour Organisation Convention 177 in Czech and provides information about home-based work in Central and Eastern Europe).

Gender Studies, o.p.s.



Gender Studies, o.p.s. is a non-governmental non-profit organisation that has performed the function of an information, consultation and education centre in the area of relations between women and men and their position in society. The goal of the organisation is to gather, analyze, work with and disseminate further information related to gender-relevant issues. Through specific projects, GS actively influences change concerning equal opportunities in different areas such as institutional mechanisms, labour markets, women's political participation, information technologies etc. GS also runs a library containing a variety of publications and materials related to feminism, gender studies, women's and men's rights etc.

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CAREER – FAMILY – EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES: STUDIES ON WOMEN AND MEN IN THE CZECH LABOUR MARKET

In autumn 2006, Gender Studies, o.p.s. issued a publication summing up research concerning the position of women and men in the Czech labour market. The surveys were carried out as a part of the EU Equal project Fifty - fifty: Equal Opportunities for Women and Men coordinated by Gender Studies, o.p.s. The studies focus on issues that had not been covered in detail or at all in the past.

THE PUBLICATION INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING PAPERS:

EMPLOYMENT AND EARLY CHILDCARE: PARENTS' AND EMPLOYERS' PERSPECTIVE

Věra Kuchařová, Sylva Ettlerová, Olga Nešporová, Kamila Svobodová – Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs

RELATIVE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE CZECH LABOUR MARKET: A RESEARCH SUMMARY

Štěpán Jurajda, Daniel Münich – Center for Economic Research and Graduate Education of Charles University

DEVELOPING EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND MEN: A STUDY ON HR MANAGERS' NEEDS, THE CONSTRAINTS AND THE OPTIONS

Kateřina Machovcová – Gender Studies, o.p.s.

European Contact Group in the Czech Republic (EKS)

is a nongovernmental organisation, which is focused primarily on the social and economic impacts of transformation and globalisation on women and their role and position in the society.

The central themes of our work are:

- ▶ unemployment and discrimination in the labour market
- ▶ migrant women and women from ethnic minorities
- ▶ informal women's labour and homebased work as a growing phenomenon in Europe
- ▶ the role of women in small and large communities
- ▶ partnership and cooperation between women's organisations on local, national and international level as a key strategy for tackling common problems European women face

Activities

- ▶ we support cooperation, networking, exchange of know-how and experience among women's organisations in Central and East European countries and EU.
- ▶ we aim to combat racism and discrimination against black and migrant women and women from ethnic minorities.
- ▶ we raise public awareness on the issue of women and the labour market.
- ▶ we help women NGO's to enhance and develop their capacities by organising conferences, seminars, workshops and trainings.
- ▶ we provide links to European organisations for women NGO's and support their involvement in international activities.

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