

European Union of Women: Council meeting Poitiers 2013
Education, Culture and Science Commission
The impact of the Crisis on Women...Educational aspects

This crisis, silent and corrosive, has without doubt affected women. Organisations and institutions, the European Union Parliament and Commission, the Council of Europe and the United Nations among them, have analysed the data. We can say that at last women are now regarded as worthy of investigation.

"The financial crisis is expected to have serious, widespread impacts on the real economy and particularly on the lives of people already in poverty. Historically, economic recessions have placed a disproportionate burden on women. Women are more likely than men to be in vulnerable jobs, to be under-employed or without a job, to lack social protection, and to have limited access to and control over economic and financial resources. Policy responses to the financial crisis must take gender equality perspectives into account to ensure, for example, that women as well as men can benefit from employment creation and investments in social infrastructure."

-Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs at the UN

It is generally accepted that when a woman gains money, she will spend it on the education, health care and basic needs of her children. Women are also aware of the impact of education on their children and their future. As a consequence, the educational aspects of this crisis on women are crucial.

1. Research indicates that in some countries girls are being taken out of school as a result of the economic crisis in order to protect the education of boys or younger siblings.
2. As child care provision is cut and child allowance reduced, as social services reduce their provision, girls are dropping out of school to help the family in caring roles- younger children or elderly grandparents. The future of these girls is limited.
3. Women have left paid employment or reduced their hours in order to take over services which the state no longer provides or which they themselves can no longer afford. The money available for their children's education is therefore reduced.
4. Women can be the first to lose their jobs or face decreased wages in times of crisis. This affects their employment record, their career path, their pension contribution and developing their Curriculum Vitae.
5. Women are taking lower status, lower paid work out of necessity. An increasing number of women are taking part time jobs, apparently nearly three times the number of men in part time jobs.
6. Women in the public sector, where they make up on average nearly 70% of employees, are the main victims of budget cuts made by governments. In some countries civil service staff has been cut by as much as 25%, salaries cut or frozen in the public sector and fixed-term contracts are frequently not being renewed.
7. When times are hard it is always the education and training budgets which are cut first. Women are heavily employed in these areas and so this affects both those employed and those hoping to receive training.
8. Immigrant women are without the buffer of families and at a disadvantage in not speaking the host country's language, They depend on the funding of language courses. These are being reduced or eliminated.
9. Those women who were educated at tertiary level are comparatively shielded from dismissal in the crisis. The higher your education, the less likely you will be made unemployed. However, university education is reducing for all groups as costs rise, affecting girls more than boys.
10. Women who keep their jobs are often in jobs for which they are overqualified. Risk of deskilling is the price paid for remaining in employment. Fixed-term contracts or part-time work are becoming more common than permanent contracts.
11. Informal work acts as a refuge for some women, either because they can no longer cope with the burden of all these different responsibilities, or because their level of pay is too low to cope with higher taxes and cuts in social security benefits. They prefer therefore to leave the labour market and enter the informal economy.

There is a crucial need for all responsible governments and institutions to direct resources to maintain the opportunities for education, training and work of women. Such assistance will be an investment not just in the future of our economies but in the long-term future of women.

Margaret Hales and members of the Commission
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