

# Employment, Family and Community activities: A new balance for women and men

## *Summary of the German national report*

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The project examined work in household services and the effect of different political measures on such work in the Federal Republic of Germany. It was concerned with those groups of people who work in this field, with the nature and quality of their work, working conditions, the qualifications they held and with establishing any differences in working conditions, experience of women and men in the sector, and in their employment status and promotion opportunities. The project also focussed on identifying measures at political and company level which enable workers in the sector better to balance out their family responsibilities or to participate in community activities. These issues were examined with the aid of local studies in Berlin and surveys among experts and workers in the field.

Domestic work is increasingly seen as a way of creating new jobs in this sector and of achieving greater equality of opportunity between men and women. In fact, any new division of labour is primarily to be found among women - for example, household helps taking care of domestic tasks for other women. In this context, repeated reference is made to the need for public subsidies. On the other hand, in view of the current policy on such support, concern is expressed that this employment sector, which is generally low paid, could become cemented into the low-paid sector.

While therefore it is felt that there are new employment opportunities for the unemployed in the sector of household services, there is also a danger that the sector, which is primarily a typically female one, involving low wages and insecure employment conditions, could have a negative effect not only on those employed in it but also on other sectors.

Employment trends in the primary and secondary sectors are downwards, despite the increasing number of people working. The new employment opportunities for women are to be found in production and consumer services, but therefore also in areas dominated by temporary, part-time and marginal employment.

Our research was restricted to household services concerned with the care of the elderly and of children, catering and meals on wheels, cleaning, minor repair work and gardening.

The situation as regards data on household services in Germany is exceptionally bad. No specific statistics are held on household or personal services, and nor is any official data available at local level which would allow reliable conclusions to be drawn. Nonetheless, trends are visible, and these were confirmed by our surveys.

In comparison with the secondary sector, the service sector in the Federal Republic accounts for a markedly small proportion of employment. Recent estimates suggest that around 7 million people are employed in **personal** services; of those, approximately 75% are women. An increase in jobs of around 200 000 is expected here. It is estimated that approximately 4 million people work in **household** services, 2 million undeclared.

Between 1961 and 1987 employment in laundry services and cleaning increased by 5-8%, in catering by 47% and in childcare by 204%. As regards care of the elderly, several tens of thousands of jobs were created as a result of the introduction of new legislation on care and nursing.

Young women are less and less inclined to direct their lives towards a role limited to partnership and family. Most young women now regard education and employment as the way of life most well-regarded by society. The poor image of domestic occupations is contrast

starkly with this new lifestyle. An improvement in the substance of the work, professionalisation and a general upgrading of such activities and occupations would be necessary for household services to continue to be attractive to young people.

The most important political measures in this field at national level include anti-discrimination and employment policy measures. Services centres and agencies also help to expand the sector. The introduction of household cheques proved not to be a success, while it will be some time before service cheques, which are intended to increase demand, will be introduced, so that little impact can be expected from such measures for the time being.

The state of Berlin has its own political and statutory instruments to effect an impact on the sector. The study includes a comparison not only of the eastern and western parts of the city, but also of two districts: Friedrichshain and Wedding. Details are given of the employment structures in the different districts, traditions as regards women's employment, the high level of unemployment among men in particular, the ethnic composition of the population and the composition of households. Despite the often striking differences between the two districts, the economic and social problems they encounter differ only to an insignificant extent. The services structures in the private and voluntary sectors are remarkably similar; in the public sector they are miles apart.

While services remain at a low level in the city, they have increased by 7% since the beginning of the 1990s. With regard to employment prospects for women in Berlin in the year 2000, it is noted that:

- demand for labour from private and voluntary organisations has increased;
- there has been a fall in employment in the other sectors, and thus no noticeable difference in the employment rate among women since 1993.

While the public sector is engaged in radical cost-cutting in childcare and care of the elderly, the number of jobs with voluntary organisations, especially those providing non-residential services, has not fallen. In the private sector, specialised service providers predominate; the economic position of small enterprises is very insecure in certain segments here (e.g. health and advice centres). Individual innovative projects, such as the BERLIN SERVICE pilot project, have a greater impact at company and local level than federal legislative moves in this field. After all, more than 60 jobs have been created or preserved as a result of this initiative, and a nationwide network of service pools has been established. Experts and those concerned believe that federal policies either have little effect or a negative effect in this field (cf. for example the “630 Mark” and “Bogus self-employment” legislation). At the moment local alliances or partnerships in household services are still uncommon. The newly established partnerships in the districts of Friedrichshain, Newkölln, Prenzlauer Berg and Wedding, which are involved in this field and in the community services field, are exceptions.

Given appropriate support, the report “Dienstleistung als Chance” (service as opportunity) expects a direct increase in employment of 500 000 jobs in this field over the next ten years. Given the economic recession currently affecting the city of Berlin, this gives rise to legitimate hope, but doubts have been expressed as to whether that hope can be fulfilled. Moreover, the Senate's economic policy appears to be concentrated on production services, although the authorities responsible for employment are nevertheless promoting and giving a higher profile to household services performed by women

The variety of employers is in line with the many different types of work household services can entail. Workers also vary enormously, sometimes having to be very skilled. The field offers opportunities for new jobs in both quantitative and qualitative terms. If market prices were subsidised, employment could be increased fourfold, while the trend towards multifunctional combined services and social communication services is giving rise to innovations which have a positive effect not only on the employment situation but on the equal division of household responsibilities.

The work involved is physically and sometimes also emotionally stressful; it is not particularly well, and sometimes badly, paid, and up to 90% of it is performed by women, as it always has been. Employment conditions vary, however, according to which economic sector or labour market segment the job is in. In order to improve the situation it is not so much an increase in demand that is required as a quality offensive or quality improvement. As far as private businesses are concerned, that means that the issues of acquisition, flexibility and mobility must be dealt with, as must the problem of undeclared work. New arrangements regarding qualifications in this field constitute one barrier to the expansion and upgrading of household services which should not be underestimated.

The right to childcare, the establishment of equal rights bodies, particularly in the public services, and improved legislation on citizenship all help bring about fair opportunities. Nevertheless, much remains to be done before equal opportunities will exist either for women or foreign nationals.

For one thing, the integration of women and foreign nationals in the labour market is dependent on subsidies being paid in this employment sector. Any expansion of the field by discretionary tax relief would have a direct and positive effect on demand for work. Specific employment promotion measures, such as the service pools in Berlin, directly increase or stabilise employment volume. Issuing service cheques would be more likely to boost demand for household services than the household cheques model.

The residents of a district, in particular those who are not of German origin, could be more involved in social enterprises than they have been to date. Only by increasing demand for household services while at the same time increasing and diversifying supply can the field be expanded and fair opportunities in the competition with men and German nationals as a whole be improved. As work in this field also results in the “ownership” of housework becoming more public, the double burden on women in households is likely to be reduced, though that is not necessarily to say that men will be more involved in domestic duties, paid or unpaid.

**EF/00/109/EN**