

# Did you say women unemployment?

LEMONDE.FR | 29.12.11 |

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The publication of unemployment figures is regularly commented in the media. Repeatedly, the analysis focuses on the overall evolution of youth unemployment, over-fifties or long-term unemployment, which are indeed noticeable/remarkable categories.

But, who ever speaks about women's unemployment? Far more than men's unemployment, no matter which age group. If, because of the financial crisis, which first affected the industrial sector, women's unemployment rate was temporarily caught up to by men's unemployment rate in 2009, since 2010 it is back its first place.

The tendency is similar in Europe. In the latest data published by Eurostat in November 2011, the Eurozone's unemployment rate has reached 10,3 %. "*Unemployment firstly affects young people and seniors*", the media unanimously point out. However, as usual, it affects women particularly harshly, and does not appear to give rise to any comment. The average rate of 10,3 % *comes in various figures* : 10,6 % for women and 10,0 % for men, that is to say 0.6 point gap *unfavorably for women*. A similar gap, even higher, is found in the countries most affected by unemployment and the financial crisis : 0.5 points in Spain for a global unemployment rate of 22.8 %, or 0.7 points in Portugal (unemployment : 12.9 %) or else 1.5 points in Italy. In France, the gap between men and women is 1.2 points and the unemployment rate is 9.8 % on average. It's in Greece that the « *higher unemployment* » of women reaches a true record with a 6.6 points gap!

Regarding young people, commentators rightly draw our attention on the highest unemployment rate of the under 25's. Lately, it reached 48.9 % in Spain and 45.1 % in Greece unsaid is that the Greek young women's unemployment tops the absolute record of 52.3 %, that is to say... 12.9 points above the young men's! In France, the young women's « *higher-unemployment* » is, in comparison, of "*only*" 3.1 points with a rate of 25.9 %. This situation is more than abnormal, since young women have been more qualified than men for decades and should therefore much more easily join the workplace.

For many years in France, various plans have been following one another for youth employment, for seniors, and also - occasionally - for "*youth diversity*". Whether appropriate or not, they do however reflect a political concern. No such concern exists with women's employment. As Margaret Maruani, a CNRS sociologist, already pointed out 15 years ago, there is a social tolerance towards women's unemployment, which seems to be less serious than men's unemployment. Women's right to employment is still not fully recognized!

This tolerance becomes all the more intolerable today that the crisis and the austerity strike women more harshly. More than unemployment, under-employment has strongly risen everywhere: women, with a higher representation in part-time jobs, have undergone cuts in work length and wages. This partial unemployment seldom appears in regularly published stats. Civil/Public service being predominantly female, women are also more affected by staff and/or wages cuts, applied to civil/public servants in many countries. All over Europe, women are on the front row for growing job insecurity and for low wages, as several international reports have analyzed (they remain rather confidential). In a resolution from June 2010, the European Parliament had even alerted the European Council and Commission: « *The crisis has an especially negative impact on women, more exposed to the lack of job security and to lay-offs and less **covered** by social security systems.* » An alert which went unheeded

The aim here is not to depict women as victims, but to lament the fact that their employment be ignored, neglected, absent from the political scene. Neither the Right nor the Left, nor by the way most unions, take on this key issue as a national debate. Nothing new about the Right, hardly expected to be worrying about the increase of inequalities caused by its own politics. We do not either see the Right driven by the argument of social justice. To this Right celebrating the profitability as to all of those persuaded of the benefits of a growth economy, we can coldly argue for a certain economic rationality: women are on average more educated than men and less employed. They represent an economic potential which remains largely wasted. The European Commission stresses the fact that employment equality between women and men has a positive impact which would lead to, according to certain studies, a 30% rise of GDP (European Commission report on employment from 2010). Enough to call the growth enthusiasts attention, especially in times of recession and shake their lack of interest regarding women's unemployment.

The response from the Left is all the more expected, on a social and political level. Women's employment is much more than just profitable, it is a society's challenge. Women, who make up more than half of the population, and incidentally half of the voters – will undoubtedly pay a lot of attention to the way the Left parties will handle this question.

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