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### **Purple Economy**

## ***A Strategy for Women's Equal Economic Participation towards Sustainable Cities***



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If one were asked to associate a color with the concept of "sustainable cities," the first to come to mind would be probably green. Not surprising, given that the issue of sustainability originated out of concerns for the environmental crisis and the **green economy** was proposed as a vision of an environmentally sustainable economy. Today it is widely acknowledged that an additional challenge to sustainability has to do with inequalities in the economic and social sphere. Gender is an important crosscutting dimension of multi-layered inequalities. Hence I would like to propose another color to associate with the concept of sustainable cities and sustainable economies, complementing the green: Purple, the symbolic color of the women's movement in Turkey and in many countries around the world.

The **purple economy** entails the vision of a gender egalitarian and hence a socially sustainable economy. It starts from the premise that the root cause of obstacles to women's equal economic participation lies within the gender imbalances in the distribution of caring labor. Caring labor entails provisioning of goods and services to care-dependent groups such as children, elderly, ill and people with disabilities as well as healthy adults necessary for their physical, social, mental and

emotional wellbeing. These are wide-ranging from one-to-one relational tasks such as feeding a child or bathing a bed-bound elderly person to supporting domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning, washing, shopping, household repair and maintenance. Provisioning of care as such takes place predominantly through women's unpaid domestic labor, rather than men's unpaid domestic labor or paid market services. While this holds true for most countries, comparative time-use data from around the world shows that Turkey has the highest gender gap in unpaid labor: Women's unpaid domestic work time in Turkey is five times that of men (an average of 30 hours of unpaid domestic work per week for women versus only 6 hours for men), while the OECD average gender gap is 2.2 times (an average of 24 hours unpaid domestic work per week for women versus 11 hours for men).

Given that 'time' is a limited resource, the imbalanced gender distribution of the burden of unpaid work determines the extent to and the ways in which women can participate in paid work and earn income, pursue educational opportunities, participate in public pursuits such as politics and civil society, enjoy time for leisure and self-development and claim equal standing with men. To the extent that women engage in the labor market to become income earners, they continue to be primarily responsible for unpaid care. Hence access to income earning comes at the cost of longer working hours -paid and unpaid combined- and growing tensions as women attempt to reconcile their new roles as paid workers with their traditional roles as carers. Employed women in Turkey have the longest total combined unpaid and paid work hours (working 28% more hours than full-time homemakers and 10% more hours than employed men); and enjoy the least amount of leisure time (at 39% of full-time homemakers and 77% of employed men).

Given the immense time requirements of unpaid work, women either do not remain in the labor market or to the extent that they do, they choose the type of jobs that enable them to reconcile market work with unpaid work; such as part-time jobs, or jobs with lower requirement of irregular

work hours, travel and responsibility. These are usually also jobs with lower pay and no career ladders. These participation patterns materialize themselves in the form of the gender employment gap, gender jobs segregation and the gender wage gap.

The imbalanced distribution of caring labor determines shapes inequalities in economic participation not only by gender but also by class. Women of higher education backgrounds and higher income households have more opportunities to substitute market services at least for some unpaid caring labor; such as sending their children to preschools or hiring domestic servants for household work; hence enjoy better options regarding making choices as to remain in the labor market.

### Gender Economic Gap in İstanbul

In Istanbul for example, less than one third of women participate in the labor market versus three quarters of men. Beyond this huge gender economic gap, there are also substantial gaps amongst women by marital status (reflective of the magnitude of the care burden they face) and by education level (reflective of their potential wages and ability to afford market substitutes for unpaid care). While 59% of single women with primary school education in İstanbul participate in the labour market, this rate drops to 16% for married women with primary school education. The gap is somewhat lower for high school graduate women (59% participation rate for singles versus 27% for married); and lowest at 14 points for single versus married women with a university degree. For men, on the other hand, there is no such divergence in labor market participation by marital status and education level.

The huge gaps in labor force participation of women by marital status point to an important problem of labor market attachment of married women. While a majority of single (never-married) women in İstanbul (approximately two thirds) enter the labour market, this is not sustainable particularly for women with high school or lower education, as

they end up having to quit their jobs upon marriage, childbirth or a household member becoming dependent (through old age, illness or disability). The material returns from participating in the labour market (wage earnings) remain below the cost of market substitutes for unpaid care. In the absence of affordable and quality care services, leaving the labour market after getting married and having children becomes the only option for many women.

This situation is further exacerbated by the conditions of the labor market, which offer a poor work-family reconciliation environment: Employed women have only limited access to care leave, while for men the legal right to care leave is virtually inexistent. Moreover, Turkey retains the longest workplace hours in the OECD. With de facto working hours at 50+ for most employees, and adding the commute hours in urban metropolitan contexts, engaging in full time employment permits hardly any time for self-care, leave alone time to care for others. This poor context for work-family reconciliation underlies gender discrimination by employers in hiring, promotion and pay. A recent survey of private workplaces in Istanbul found that employers prefer men for more than one-third of vacant jobs while they prefer women only for one tenth of vacant jobs. The survey also found that such gendered preferences are less binding for workplaces, which provide childcare facilities and transportation to their employees.

Given these patterns, it is not surprising that there is a very strong gender-based occupational segregation in the Istanbul labour market. Out of 2,961 occupations identified by the Istanbul survey, almost half (1,282) are predominated exclusively by men. Women are concentrated in only a few occupations while men are more evenly distributed across the spectrum. Meanwhile, the fact that employers do not have any specific gender preference for almost half of vacant jobs makes for a potential for boosting women's employment.

Beyond these supply and demand restrictions at the microeconomic level, there is also the macro question whether there would be sufficient labor

demand if women were to enter and remain in the labor market at higher rates. There are already more than half a million unemployed workers (women and men) in the Istanbul labor market. There are about 2 million women in Istanbul who are of prime working age, currently not employed or seeking a job, but could potentially enter the labor market. If half of these women were to join the labour force, at least 1.5 million new jobs would be needed. Hence employment generation stands as a fundamental challenge to women's equal economic participation.

The purple economy offers an economic model, which stands on three pillars that enable reduction of women's unpaid care work and hence equal opportunities for their participation in the market sphere:

1. Provisioning of affordable, accessible and quality care services for children, the elderly, the disabled and the sick;
2. Regulation of the labor market to enable work and family life based on equal conditions and incentives for men and women;
3. Promotion of decent jobs generation as the primary objective of macroeconomic growth policies.

The first pillar requires that building a social care service infrastructure and hence allocation of necessary public funds. This entails a web of institutions including childcare centres, preschools, after school study programs, day care centres and residential homes for elderly and disabled, home-based professional care services for the ill, elderly or disabled. Such a care service infrastructure enables the reduction of women's unpaid care burden through its redistribution to paid work through public services.

The second pillar complements the first one in building a comprehensive, egalitarian care economy infrastructure through the following labor market regulatory interventions:

- legal rights and access to paid and unpaid care leave for child care as well as other dependent care on equal terms for both men and women;
- regulation and reduction of full-time workplace hours within decent job standards enabling work-family life balance;
- flexible workplace practices (such as shifting work schedules, concentrated work weeks, partial work from home) providing improved options for employees to reconcile paid and unpaid work requirements; and
- regulation of labor market to eliminate gender discriminatory practices in hiring, promotion and pay.

These regulatory interventions enable the reduction of women's unpaid care burden by shifting part of the burden to men's unpaid care work by improving incentives and options for men to engage in unpaid work, simultaneously improving options for women to engage in paid work.

While the first two pillars promote equal economic participation of women and men at the level of the household and the workplace, it is essential that the macroeconomic environment provide sufficient number of jobs. The third pillar foresees economic growth policy aimed at jobs generation. It should be noted that the first pillar –i.e. public investments in the social care services sector will bring along at least a partial solution jobs generation. Increased public investments in the social care service sector will both reduce women's unpaid care burden and generate new job opportunities at the same time.

In a context of the global economic crisis, the green economy vision was extended to entail solutions also for the economic crisis and the problem of rising unemployment through green jobs. In a parallel fashion, the vision of the purple economy presents a gender egalitarian solution to the economic crisis through purple jobs.

The green economy acknowledges that our wellbeing depends heavily on earth's natural

resources, and therefore we must create an economic system that respects the integrity of ecosystems. The purple economy, on the other hand, acknowledges that we depend on caring labor as an indispensable component of human well-being, and hence we must create an economic system that acknowledges the care economy, and enables its functioning in a sustainable and gender egalitarian manner.

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