

SEGREGATION AND INCLUSION JUST DON'T MIX!

Frances Camilleri

Poverty is often understood as a situation characterised by multiple deprivation caused by lack of monetary resources, mainly income and consumption. Admittedly, monetary indicators do reflect the actual living conditions of persons and households, however, a number of key challenges, which Malta faces by way of eradicating poverty and promoting social cohesion, cannot be adequately measured in monetary terms. On the basis of available data, I shall be addressing a few of these non-monetary indicators or areas of exclusion in an attempt at providing a comparative analysis of the situation of social exclusion in Malta.

Education

One key risk factor to social inclusion within the remit of education is uncertified and unauthorized absenteeism. It is broadly recognized that absenteeism in so-called ex-opportunity classes and trade schools in Malta is fairly widespread. According to Education Statistics 2000, average days of absenteeism in these schools amounts to 13 to 14 days per girl pupil and 10 to 11 days per boy pupil. There is also emerging evidence that girls' absenteeism relates to house chores and sibling-care that is required while the parents are away at work.

Moving on to post secondary education, data issued by the Department Further Studies and Adult Education suggest that of the total student population following vocational courses during the scholastic year 2000/2001, only 33 per cent represent girls. Compounding the issue, whereas their male counterparts are spread evenly throughout vocational courses on offer, girls remain concentrated in feminized classes, such as hairdressing and beauty, secretarial, banking and insurance. Do we wonder why our labour market is gender-segmented? Are we surprised by the divide in Maltese families where girls and women are assigned responsibilities which boys and men are absolved of? Are we intrigued by a persistent division of labour whenever and everywhere? This may be the 'natural order of things', after all. However, as the title of the article suggests, segregation and inclusion just don't mix!

The overall objective of adult education is to reduce unemployment and educational gaps and increase prospects for economic growth. Drawing on Education Statistics 2000, the proportion of women registrants in adult education classes is indeed encouraging at 65 per cent of total population. However, a closer look points to yet another gender-divide. Whereas the majority of male participants are attending basic instruction in Maltese, Mathematics and English, 41 per cent of female participants are registered in parenting skills courses.

A crucial measure of social inclusion is the integration of children with disability into mainstream education systems. According to Rapport ta' Hidma 2000, the Kummissjoni Nazzjonali Persuni b'Disabilita' was about embark on a survey which seeks to identify

the number of students with disability in mainstream education and the measures of support meted out to them.

eInclusion

A study carried out by the National Statistics Office (NSO) and published in *Kultura 2000* seems to portray an unhappy picture of society's ICT skills. Of the total number of survey participants, 63 per cent of the men and 73 per cent of the women had never used a personal computer. Furthermore, of those not acquainted with computers, 57 per cent were in the 25 to 34 age bracket and the rate increases with age. Raising awareness on the potentiality of new technologies and services constitutes the first barrier to be tackled for an inclusive knowledge-based society. Indeed, the promotion of eInclusion is recognised as a strategy against the risk of excluding vulnerable groups such as older persons, women returning to education and employment and low-income groups.

Economic Activity

While employment is the best safeguard against social exclusion, the persistent slow trend in women's rate of market participation is once again reflected in the recent Labour Force Survey of December (LFS) 2001. While men's share of labour supply was an 81 per cent, women seems trapped by a sticky low 34 per cent.

Relatedly, self-employment amongst women in the labour force stands at 8.7 per cent compared with 17 per cent for men.

Drawing on yet another study published by the NSO in 2001, is a survey on Continuing Vocational Training (CVT). The objective of the study was to collect information on training provided by employers to their employees. Of the survey respondents, 70 per cent of male employees compared with only 30 per cent of their female contemporaries had been given opportunities for progression and personal growth and development by their employers.

Part time employment as a primary source of income remains highly feminized in that 68 per cent of the part time workforce as of December 2001 are women. That 17 per cent of women in employment are working part time compared with 3 per cent of men suggests that women's adaptation of their paid working lives still accommodates unpaid family work (European Commission, 2000), which in turn often results in persistent low pay and precarious employment conditions.

Once again, the integration of disabled persons in mainstream labour market is a key challenge to an inclusive society. The *Kummissjoni Persuni b'Disabilita* recommends a clause in Collective Agreements that places the onus on employers to provide equal opportunities to disabled persons.

Support Measures

Child and other dependent care ensure that people stay or move into employment. Such support measures also help towards integrating persons undergoing a rehabilitation programme.

Worth noting is that imbalances in support measures that are aimed at mothers and few at fathers are potential risk factors for social exclusion. One such example in the Maltese Public Service is women's entitlement to 5 weeks adoption leave on full pay compared with a 2-day entitlement to their male counterparts.

Unemployment

Another high risk factor for poverty and social exclusion is joblessness that ultimately leads to skills loss and low self-esteem. The LFS 2001 suggests a 6 per cent rate of unemployment amongst men and 8 per cent for women.

Inactivity

There seems to be a paradox in women's working life. Market participation stands at a low 34 per cent parallel to an 8 per cent unemployment rate. Where do the other women stand?

The LSF 2001 shows that women's inactivity rate stands at an overwhelming 72 per cent compared with men's 29 per cent. Furthermore, 67 per cent of the inactive population are married women and 62 per cent choose inactivity for familial and personal reasons. Inactivity is another exclusion marker and married women seem to head the list.

Non-Market Work

The inactivity rate brings me to the concept of non-market work and here I draw on a study I concluded on behalf of the Workers' Participation Development Centre, University of Malta for the Commission for the Advancement of Women. One major finding in *A Day in her Life (2001)* suggests a daily 11-hour average of unpaid tasks which women undertake for the care and benefit of others. The UN contends that if unpaid activities worldwide were treated as market transactions at prevailing wages they would yield huge monetary valuations estimated at around 70 per cent of global output.

I am quite aware of the controversial stand on the monetization of non-market work and the eyebrows it tends to raise. I, therefore, hasten to add that giving an exchange value is not meant to imply that women would have to be paid for non-market work, as this would have to change the entire wage structure if all activities entered the market. However, the UN argues that rather than rely on husband benevolence, giving a value to unpaid work would entitle women to direct bank credit access and social security benefits, both considered crucial social inclusion markers.

Notwithstanding the reality that men's paid work might not be possible if women did not stay at home looking after house chores and children, the failure to value women's invisible contribution reduces them to virtual non-entities in most economic transactions. The European Commission warns that the absence of employment record is recognized a key risk factor especially when combined with a family break up. Single elderly women too are at risk where pension depends on work record.

Social Protection

Our social protection system plays a key role in the fight against exclusion and is of fundamental importance in particular to lone parents the majority of whom are women. Data communicated to me by the Department of Health Information shows that 65 per cent of teenage mothers in 2000 were single women between 15 and 19 years of age; 4 of the single mothers were under 15 years when they gave birth.

A study on the feminization of poverty in Malta by Steffi Anzinger suggests that the majority of single parents are women raising two to five children and who are dependent on social assistance, family members and friends or church and related institutions.

Housing

Based on data forwarded to me by the Housing Authority, 173 applicants are today living in certified dangerous premises and seeking alternative accommodation. Included in the total are 74 single women, 24 single men and 75 couples. Living with these 173 applicants in similar sad conditions are just over 200 children.

Indeed, lack of affordable housing is a primary cause of homelessness, which in turn is an extreme manifestation of social exclusion.

Homelessness

A YMCA survey published in September 2001 identifies 121 women, 26 men and 64 children living in a state of homelessness. These figures are only indicative as they are bound to under-represent the potentially most socially excluded parts of the population. We do not know how many homeless persons are living with other families or who choose to remain out of sight living in dilapidated buildings or inside (and underneath!) cars, for fear of being reprimanded by the police. Accurate information about both the magnitude and the nature of the problem is difficult to elicit, as many tend to be deeply suspicious of official enquiries.

Compounding the problem is the relationship between homelessness, prostitution and drug abuse among homeless women. Women's shelters with direct access facility are lacking, except for victims of domestic violence.

Health

Indicators included in this area cover diverse aspects such as mental care, domestic violence, alcoholism and drug addiction.

According to information communicated to me by the Department Policy and Planning within the Health Division, it is estimated that 2.2 per cent of the population i.e. 8,000 persons in Malta and Gozo, suffer from recurrent episodes of serious mental disorder. Serious mental disorder includes cases of schizophrenia, paranoid psychosis, effective disorder including depression, severe neurosis and borderline personality disorder. Important to add that the percentage quoted excludes immediate families who would also need support. The Department is currently reviewing research needs and mental care is one research proposal due to be submitted for EU funding, shortly.

Moreover, subsequent to the pilot project in Qormi a new national initiative that provides mental health service is about to be launched this month. Rather than elbowing vulnerable groups out of society by resorting to mental institutions, the forthcoming project aims to address mental health needs and developing better provision of outreach.

Children growing up in households affected by domestic violence are perceived as being at great risk of poverty and social exclusion. Meantime, victims of domestic violence eagerly await legal protection, rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators and the training of law enforcement staff.

Alcoholism and drug abuse are two health-related issues that fall under key challenges to social inclusion. Seventy-three per cent of those who referred to Sedqa Alcohol Community Services between November 2001 and April 2002, were men. Similarly, men represented 87 per cent of persons who attended the Sedqa Out Patient Centre between November and April 2002 and 50 per cent of them were in the 20 to 29 age interval.

Ethnicity

Another worrying concern for Malta is ethnicity. I am here translating ethnicity to include the whole migratory movement of persons from south to north and who may ultimately be induced by local demand for cheap (exploitative?) labour. Simply mentioning the inability to communicate in the official language is a factor of exclusion from overall society both socially and economically.

Pathways towards social inclusion

The research for this article represents a modest contribution to the challenges Malta faces towards social inclusion. Some gender imbalances require a more in-depth review of assumptions underlying our social system.

However, I shall recapitulate the discussion with a brief mention of pathways towards social cohesion: (1) Tackling educational disadvantage and adapting the educational system so that schools respond to the needs of persons from disadvantaged backgrounds,

preventing truancy and early dropouts and extending lifelong learning with customized education and training for vulnerable groups; (2) Developing an inclusive labour market and guaranteeing adequate income and resources by reviewing existing policy systems. The challenge is to develop policies, which promote employability for those least able to access mainstream market work as well as adequate and affordable measures for work/life reconciliation; (3) Monetizing unpaid labour is more than a question of justice. It concerns the economic status of women in society and such restructuring would liberate both women and men from artificial and restrictive social roles. For husbands to share income with their wives will become an act of entitlement rather than benevolence; (4) ensuring good accommodation for all and improving delivery of health services related to factors of vulnerability.

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Ms Frances Camilleri serves as Adviser on Gender Issues at the Ministry for Social Policy. Email: frances.camilleri-cassar@gov.mt