

Care Work in Lithuania: Recognition, Pension Rights and Gender Equality. Childcare, Elder Care and Women's Economic Security

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Why Does Care Work Matter?

Across Europe, unpaid care work is increasingly recognised as one of the invisible foundations of our economies.

Every society depends on people who raise children, support family members with disabilities, and care for ageing parents and other relatives. Yet much of this work remains invisible in economic statistics and is still primarily performed by women.

Lithuania is no exception.

Today, I will briefly discuss:

how childcare and elder care are organised in Lithuania;

how caring responsibilities are recognised within the social security and pension systems;

and what this means for women's economic security.



Women Provide More Care

- Women are more likely to provide intensive care for family members.
 - Women spend more time on household work.
 - Men report having more leisure time.
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Lithuania in the European Context

Lithuania presents an interesting case.

On the one hand:

- female employment is relatively high compared with many EU countries;
- parents have access to relatively extensive childcare leave and benefits;
- periods of childcare are connected to social insurance protection.

On the other hand:

- Lithuania's population is ageing;
- the demand for long-term care is increasing;
- families still provide a significant share of informal care.

Like many European countries, Lithuania is gradually moving from a situation where childcare is the main concern towards one where the growing need for elder care is becoming increasingly important.

What Does Lithuania Do Well?

- Paid parental leave and childcare benefits.
 - Social insurance protection during childcare.
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- Relatively high employment.
 - Relatively strong social protection for childcare.

Lithuania has made significant progress in supporting parents.

Parents are entitled to childcare leave and childcare benefits. Under the current system, parents can choose whether to receive the benefit until the child reaches 18 or 24 months of age. Each parent also has a number of non-transferable childcare months.

This means that childcare is, to a certain extent, integrated into the social insurance system and does not result in the same level of loss of social protection as completely leaving the labour market without social insurance coverage.

However, longer career interruptions can still reduce lifetime earnings, limit career opportunities and affect future pension income.

The Next Challenge: Population Ageing

Lithuania has developed a relatively strong system of social protection for childcare.

However, another important policy challenge is the recognition of informal elder care.

Elder Care – A Growing Challenge

Lithuania's population is ageing, and the demand for long-term care is increasing.

When public services cannot fully meet this growing demand, a significant share of care falls on families.

As a result:

- family members provide a large share of informal care;
- women often provide most of this care;
- some women reduce their working hours or leave employment altogether.

Unlike childcare, informal care for adults and older people is not as extensively integrated into the social insurance system.

As a result, significant economic inequalities may emerge over the long term.

What Works?

- Paid childcare leave and benefits.
 - Social insurance protection.
 - Relatively high employment.
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Consequences for Women

The economic consequences accumulate throughout the life course.

Women who provide significant amounts of unpaid care may experience:

- career interruptions;
- lower lifetime earnings;
- lower social insurance contributions;
- a higher risk of poverty in old age.

In other words:

Unpaid care today can mean lower income tomorrow.

Care Is Not Only a Private Responsibility. It Is Social Infrastructure.

If societies rely on unpaid care work, social protection and pension systems should properly recognise the people who provide it.

How Do Women Balance Work and Care?

Women use different strategies to balance employment and family care responsibilities.

Some:

- move to part-time or flexible employment;
- rely on grandparents or other family members for support;
- purchase private care services if they can afford them;
- leave the labour market altogether.

Each of these strategies helps families manage everyday care responsibilities, but the economic cost of care is often transferred to women themselves.

Lithuania: Three Key Messages

What Works?

- paid childcare leave and benefits;
 - social insurance protection;
 - relatively high employment.
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Where Do Gaps Remain?

- recognition of informal elder care;
- fragmented long-term care services;
- career interruptions;
- unequal sharing of care between women and men.

What Could Be Improved?

In Lithuania and across Europe, several policy directions are receiving increasing attention:

- expanding long-term care services;
- better recognising informal carers within social protection and pension systems;
- increasing access to flexible working arrangements;
- encouraging greater involvement of men in unpaid care.

These measures would benefit not only women but society as a whole.

Care Is Not Only a Private Responsibility. It Is Social Infrastructure. Conclusion

Care work is not only a private family responsibility.

It is an **essential part of social infrastructure**.

Recognising care work within social protection and pension systems is not simply a gender equality issue.

It is an investment in:

- sustainable labour markets;
- healthy and dignified ageing;
- women's economic security;
- social cohesion.

Thank you very much for your attention