

Interview with Dominique Saillard, representative of OREKA SAREA

1. Why is Oreka Sarea taking part in an observatory on the fair distribution of wealth?

At Oreka Sarea, we have been working for 15 years in areas related to equality policies, citizen participation and development cooperation. We accompany organisations and teams seeking support in the planning and management of change from a gender perspective.

For us, the collaboration with the ToShare Observatory stems from our initial participation in a work team led by Ángel Elías, with the aim of designing and presenting a European research project. This process was a nice example of an initiative that did not bear the expected fruits at first, but which, thanks to the determination of the UPV/EHU team, was able to transform itself into the space for exchange and creation of knowledge that the Observatory is now.

We are a small entity, three women work in Oreka Sarea, and our daily work places us directly in front of the consequences of inequality in the distribution of power and wealth. Whether we advise institutions on public policies, work with social intervention organisations, trade unions or NGOs, or whether we are responsible for planning or carrying out studies, we are always faced with the same reality: there is also an unfair distribution of poverty, which continues to affect women and people who do not respond to the mandates of heteronormativity in a disproportionate way.

Having access to the contacts, analyses and documentation that the Observatory gathers gives us the opportunity to share and contrast our impressions and intuitions from the field with the latest research, and to echo proposals for the transformation of a profoundly unjust economic and social model.

2. Why is the accumulation of wealth and the resulting inequality it generates a problem?

We saw it when the previous economic-financial crisis broke out, we are seeing it now in the current health crisis, we have been seeing it for decades with the unperturbed advance of the climate crisis: we are not facing temporary situations. In reality, "the crisis is the system", in the words of feminist economist Amaia Pérez Orozco. And this structural and multidimensional crisis, she says, is fundamentally a crisis of social reproduction, which prevents part of the population from achieving their expectations of material and emotional wellbeing.

Through our work, we find the effects of what is already evident: when some of the multiple expressions of this systemic crisis worsen, it is usually women who, in one way or another, end up serving as an adjustment variable. As workers, when redundancies in the highly feminised service sector increase and public employment shrinks; as the main beneficiaries of social benefits; and as those in charge of replacing, through unpaid work, the services that the state cuts or that families can no longer afford on the market.

Women, who were already in a more vulnerable position in the market, have increasingly seen their level of welfare deteriorate, with long-term consequences as well, due to the difficulty in reaching sufficient years and level of contributions to reach decent contributory pensions.

A study we carried out a few years ago on the feminisation of poverty in the cuadrillas of Alava (except Vitoria-Gasteiz) allowed us to analyse the situation of women from different angles - average income, economic activity and employment, social benefits, housing, etc. - and the statistics we were able to gather at the time showed that the situation was still very

unfavourable. We also saw that two things weighed particularly heavily in the balance: the care economy and the experience of male violence.

In the first case, dependency, whether their own or someone else's, generates a greater risk of precariousness for those who have fewer resources of their own: on the one hand, there is the additional economic cost that dependents and their families have to bear in order to obtain technical aids, certain medicines or other services that are not reimbursed or available through the public health or dependency system. On the other hand, there is the enormous opportunity cost borne by many family carers who have to devote a large proportion of their time to unpaid care. And for them, the situation and sense of precariousness is not only measured in economic terms, it also has a significant impact on their health. In addition to caring for elderly or disabled family members, another task makes women's economic autonomy very difficult: caring for young children is a complex task, particularly in rural areas, where the issue of transport increases the economic cost and the need for family coordination. In addition, the number of "sandwich women", i.e. women who take care of their descendants and ascendants at the same time, is increasing. Finally, the job insecurity of those who work in the highly feminised care sector is well known, especially when they have to work in the black economy.

On the other hand, male violence, in particular that experienced at the hands of a partner or ex-partner, affects women from all social strata, but is particularly closely related to social exclusion and poverty. The interaction operates at different levels. Access to resources and employment is hindered, as gender-based violence itself can alienate victims from the world of work, due to the aggressor's blockade to isolate. Likewise, the fact of not being economically independent can cause gender violence to be perpetuated over time. Whether or not they verbalise the violence to the outside world, victims are not always able to embark on separation processes, which are complicated and often cut short, largely due to a lack of their own resources, especially when the aggressor himself has made sure to keep his victim isolated socially and economically.

3. What solutions are proposed?

Just as we cannot talk about inequalities as if they were the same and had the same impact on everyone, neither should we propose solutions that have not studied in as much detail as possible the effects of existing inequalities on the initial situation of those who benefit from them.

A proposal as necessary and promising as the Unconditional Basic Income is by no means gender-neutral and, precisely because of its transcendence, it must pass a rigorous filter in terms of its differentiated impact on women and men (adding all the other intersectional filters of equal relevance).

We already know that the neoliberal and heteropatriarchal system that surrounds us has surprisingly elastic properties. Just when we were wondering whether the painful health crisis of the last year was not going to contribute, at least, to uncovering its profound unsustainability in a more brutal way than ever, we are receiving all kinds of proposals that augur a return to the "new normal", i.e. the same as always, but worse. Without going very far, a very recent study by the "Fondation des Femmes" in France concludes that the state plan for the recovery of COVID "forgets" about women and will probably significantly increase the already existing inequalities. Despite the fact that they have been mobilised on the front line as essential workers (in the health system, in nursing homes, for home care, as cleaners, as cashiers) and that feminised sectors (including the informal sector) are among the most affected, the report notes that of the 35 billion euros promised in June 2020, only 7 billion were earmarked for jobs occupied by women.

At the same time, the same report noted that during the first confinement, 40% of women spent more than 4 hours a day caring for their children, twice as many as men. 21% stopped working in order to care for their families. In other words, confinement has not contributed to the desired redistribution of domestic and care tasks in households.

Under these conditions, the great effort made by the Observatory and different social platforms to disseminate information, organise debates and make concrete proposals on basic income is essential. Its potential to help break with systems based on the centrality of employment is undoubtedly one of its most interesting advantages from a gender perspective. The principle of individuality would also make it possible to improve women's access to economic resources, insofar as in many households it cannot be assumed that there is an equitable distribution among its members. And its contribution to generating greater economic independence for people who suffer from male violence can help many victims to get out of situations that put their health, their lives and those of other people around them at risk.

In our opinion, what remains to be analysed in much more detail is the impact that the implementation of a basic income will have on an economic system that is still far from having placed care and sustainability of life at the centre of public policy. We all agree that basic income should not be seen as a sort of magic wand and that complementary measures of different kinds need to be articulated so that it can unfold its full potential. As always when it comes to gender analysis, the devil is in the detail: how to make sure that applying a universal measure to unequal starting situations will not have some counterproductive effects, in the short or medium term, such as precarious female workers leaving the labour market to devote themselves to family care or the cheapening of contracts in feminised and poorly organised sectors. It is in order to be able to join forces, compare views and develop proposals that we will continue to keep a close eye on all the resources and networks that the Observatory has been making available to us since its creation.