



European
Commission

CORDIS Results Pack on gender frontier research

A thematic collection of innovative EU-funded research results

November 2020

Advancing innovative ideas and perspectives on gender



*Research and
Innovation*

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Editorial

Advancing innovative ideas and perspectives on gender

Gender is much more than just the simple and traditional dichotomy between men and women. Gender issues impact all of our lives and the very concept of gender is being re-examined and redefined. This CORDIS Results Pack highlights some of the recent frontier research on issues relating to gender, funded by the European Research Council (ERC). It features the work of ERC grantees whose projects are working either within – or in several cases across – a multitude of academic fields within the humanities and social sciences.

The EU has made great strides over the past few decades in tackling gender discrimination through, among other means, specific and targeted equal treatment legislation. These measures have often been driven by organic social change, arising from the significant increase in women's participation in the formal workforce that began in the 1970s. Other contributing factors are more recent: such as social media campaigns to end violence against women and to break the silence about sexual harassment experienced in all types of workplaces, and in society at large.

Whilst there is still more work to be done to achieve real gender equality, much of the progress made has advanced and consolidated the rights of women. Today, a 'gender mainstreaming' approach to policymaking is broadly accepted. This method involves the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes.

For instance, the EU recently launched its Gender Equality Strategy for 2020-2025 which has, as its core objective: "A union where women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are free to pursue their chosen path in life, have equal opportunities to thrive and can equally participate in, and lead, our European society."

Much of the research set out in this Results Pack seeks to provide a fresh perspective on what equality and diversity look like, whether through a philosophical re-examination of pregnancy, a socio-historical account of influential women editors in Europe, or through a detailed analysis of the specific circumstances of female refugees.

Gender: a key variable in research

Gender is a significant variable in research, which is a factor that is all too often overlooked. The current COVID-19 pandemic highlights this fact: men seem to be at a higher risk of suffering severe complications when falling sick with the disease. Yet, it is women who are often more exposed to the wider social and economic impacts of the disease. They perform higher-risk jobs e.g., in retail or hospitality, and bear a disproportionately higher burden of caring for children and older relatives.

Gender dimensions have often been overlooked in 'research design', says Eveline Crone, vice-president of the ERC. "Yet, understanding all aspect of human diversity is crucial for advancing the frontier of knowledge and achieving true equality in society."

Exploring gender across disciplines

The common purpose of the 12 projects that feature in this CORDIS Results Pack is to challenge prevailing assumptions in mainstream science and society, and to shed new light on gender relations. This they do by harnessing a cross-cutting approach to gender that brings together perspectives of political science, sociology, history, international relations, law and philosophy.

This collection of projects provides a tantalising snapshot of some fascinating, recent research. The scholars behind these efforts help advance our understanding of sex and gender, and their impact on society and individuals. Their work allows us to better comprehend one of the fundamental elements of human experience.

Moving beyond stereotypes to understand masculinity in Africa

A project examining norms and practices of masculinity in three African countries has underlined the role of the state, the need to depart from Western-centred gender theories and, thus, the key importance of local context.

Men in Africa are often depicted in stereotypes. “Some stereotypes are similar to those about Western men,” explains Becoming Men (Performing responsible masculinities in contemporary urban Africa) principal investigator Eileen Moyer, associate professor of anthropology at the University of Amsterdam. “They are portrayed as being less emotional, less engaged in family care work, and more invested in the provider role.”

Moyer argues that such stereotypes are often amplified when describing African men. “The unspoken presumption is that we have solved inequality in the West,” she adds. “Western experts then attempt to teach African people about gender equality, with little attempt to understand existing norms and practices. There is the presumption that African gender norms and sexual practices are static, conservative and ‘backward’.”



Local contexts, local researchers

The 5-year ERC Becoming Men project, which was launched in September 2015, was driven in part by Moyer's frustration at this situation. The research sought to provide a fresh perspective on what equality looks like, how it should be achieved, and how it should be measured. The work examined various facets of masculinity in cities in Kenya, South Africa and Tanzania, in collaboration with African researchers, activists and policymakers.

"We began by looking at where these assumptions about gender and masculinity come from," says Moyer. "We discovered that assumptions about gendered violence, for example, were often

based on limited research; a few interviews, which were fed to the press by media-savvy development organisations."

The Becoming Men project sought to move beyond these preconceptions.

The acceptance of

gay men in public spaces for example was found to vary greatly across all three countries. Tanzania, a country that has been historically tolerant, has experienced a crackdown on gay men in recent years. This has suddenly placed pressure on them to hide their sexuality.

Research found that while the idea of gay male sexuality is often co-created in international spaces, lived experiences differ greatly on the ground. "What really came across was the importance of what happens at the national level," notes Moyer. "This is often missed by academics."

Another Becoming Men initiative investigated the surprising demand for medical male circumcision in Kenya, where it is widely promoted for HIV prevention.

"When we looked a bit deeper, what we found was interesting," she says. "In Nairobi, street kids, who are normally bypassed by circumcision programmes, were showing up at the national referral hospital claiming their right as Kenyans to be circumcised. This had little to do with HIV prevention, but was because in their gang culture, circumcision was considered an important step to becoming a man."

The appearance of unruly and disruptive street kids initially concerned clinic staff. Moyer was impressed however at how they adapted protocols, doing follow-up visits in the streets and giving them clean underwear to prevent infections.

Important research legacies

A key lesson from the Becoming Men project, explains Moyer, is that there is no one model for understanding gender and masculinity. Academics should resist the temptation to apply their own values in research contexts.

A lesson that really struck home was that the state can play a critical role in shaping gender and sexuality, as the pushback against LGBT rights in Tanzania shows. "Countries can be reluctant to change if they feel that other countries are telling them what to do," she adds.

Becoming Men leaves behind another important legacy. The project worked in partnership with researchers from the target countries, several of whom have completed doctorates and are now teaching and running their own research and intervention projects.

"They are training a new cohort of African academics to think critically about gender and are better positioned to challenge donor presumptions," she concludes. "I think this is perhaps the most important result."

PROJECT

Becoming Men – Performing responsible masculinities in contemporary urban Africa

HOSTED BY

University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands

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H2020-ERC

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/647314

PROJECT WEBSITE

becoming-men.org



Pregnancy – rethinking popular assumptions

A philosophical re-examination of pregnancy has challenged certain prevailing assumptions. This could have important consequences for some of the legal and moral issues that surround pregnancy.



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Metaphysics, the branch of philosophy that deals with the fundamental nature of reality and touches on concepts such as being and identity, has spent surprisingly little time examining the phenomenon of pregnancy.

“Pregnancy hasn’t been completely ignored by philosophers,” notes BUMP (Better Understanding the Metaphysics of Pregnancy) project principal investigator Elselijn Kingma, associate professor in philosophy at the University of Southampton in the United

Kingdom. “Aristotle and other ancient Greeks discussed pregnancy, albeit before modern science. And phenomenologists (who study structures of experience and consciousness) have addressed the human experience of pregnancy.”

Nonetheless, metaphysical accounts of pregnancy remain few and far between. One possible reason, Kingma claims, is that philosophy has long been dominated by men. “Pregnancy may simply not have been seen as particularly salient or important,” she says. “Moreover, cultural depictions of pregnancy often obscure the ways in which the maternal organism and foetus are intertwined.”



A better understanding of the nature of pregnancy can inform reproductive technologies of the future.

It is also notable that society tends to focus on the moral questions surrounding pregnancy, such as abortion, reproductive choices and maternal obligations. When doing so, suggests Kingma, there is a tendency to treat pregnancy as if it involves two wholly distinct individuals.

“It is plausible that viewing future mothers as mere ‘foetal containers’ encourages a myopic focus on the status, rights and needs of the foetus, with a corresponding neglect of the status, rights and needs of the mother,” she adds.

Challenging prevalent assumptions

The ERC-funded BUMP project was launched to challenge these prevalent assumptions, and to force mainstream metaphysics to re-examine the ‘foetal container’ model. More broadly, the project team wanted to encourage new ways of thinking constructively and philosophically about the very nature of pregnancy.

“Our aim was to develop a philosophically sophisticated and empirically informed account of pregnancy according to which the foetus is ‘part’ of, and not merely contained within, the mother,” explains Kingma. “We can then start the process of rewriting our legal, social and moral language so that it better accommodates the real nature of pregnancy.”

The project drew on, and fed back into, accounts of organisms and individuality within the philosophy of biology, in order to address some of the most basic metaphysical questions about pregnancy (i.e. How are mother and foetus related? How many organisms exist during pregnancy?).

A final step was investigating whether and how these findings about the metaphysics of pregnancy could be translated into moral and legal domains.

Changing societal perceptions

It is hoped that the BUMP project will positively impact how we as a society think about pregnancy. For example, the research has shown that it can be misleading to think about or represent the foetus in isolation from any maternal organism.

“There will also be practical applications to come out of this research,” says Kingma. “We explored how a better understanding of the nature of pregnancy can inform reproductive technologies of the future, and improve our understanding of issues such as surrogacy.”

Beyond researchers in relevant philosophical and scientific fields therefore, the project results should be of great interest to experts in the fields of ethics, policy and law. “Reconfigurations of the pregnant organism-offspring relation might radically alter how we think about the scope of choices open to pregnant women,” adds Kingma. “Expecting families may welcome an alternative way of thinking about the important and life-transforming process they are experiencing.”

In fact, the project has already had an impact: Kingma was the only philosopher/ethicist consulted in the process of revising certain medical guidelines in the Netherlands.

“This followed a case in which a midwife was struck off for attending several ‘risky’ home births, and where an article of mine was submitted as evidence in the successful defence,” notes Kingma. “We certainly hope that our research will prove similarly influential in other contexts and other countries in the coming years.”

PROJECT

BUMP – Better Understanding the Metaphysics of Pregnancy

HOSTED BY

University of Southampton in the United Kingdom

FUNDED UNDER

H2020-ERC

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/679586

PROJECT WEBSITE

southampton.ac.uk/philosophy/research/projects/bump.page



Understanding how migrants connect is key to fostering understanding

A look at how female migrant groups use digital technologies has underlined the complexities of migration and opened new opportunities for fostering greater empathy with migrants.

As increasing numbers of women migrate to and within Europe – to be reunited with their families, to work, or to flee war zones – migration is becoming feminised. The use of communication technologies such as smartphones can play a vital role in their lives. They enable migrants to reach across borders, overcome language barriers and connect to new markets.

“These technologies seem able to erase boundaries between nations, and transcend divides of race and gender,” says CONNECTINGEUROPE (Digital Crossings in Europe: Gender, Diaspora and Belonging) project coordinator Sandra Ponzanesi, professor of media, gender and postcolonial studies at Utrecht University in the Netherlands.



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"But while we all might embrace this idea of a globally connected citizen in a world free of borders, the recent migrant crisis of 2015 onwards has shown that our society also works very hard to keep people 'in place'. We strengthen borders, patrol our coastlines and monitor the seas."

This disconnect between our conception of a digitalised, globalised world on the one hand, and the persistence of exclusion and marginalisation on the other, has been explored through the lived experience of migrants, especially women.

The connected migrant

The ERC-supported CONNECTINGEUROPE project, launched in 2016, focused on how social media connects migrant groups and provides tools for participation and emancipation.

The research examined the experience of three migrant groups (Somalian, Romanian and Turkish) in three European cities (London, Amsterdam and Rome). "We wanted to counter the idea that migrants are digitally disenfranchised and disconnected," adds Ponzanesi. "Not only do smartphones keep them connected,

they also act as archives of photographs and memories. They are essential to a sense of selfhood and belonging."

Interviews were conducted with the different migrant groups in each city. One thing that became clear was that no group is homogenous,

and intersectional issues and questions of scalability always need to be addressed. Nonetheless, some common interesting patterns did emerge.

Among Turkish groups in London for example, declaring political affiliations online was avoided, in order to maintain conviviality and peaceful coexistence within the neighbourhood. Within young Somali groups, online connections with global youth culture were often as strong as links with their ethnic diaspora.

"We also noted among all groups how mothers with children left behind use Skype, Facetime or other extremely cheap forms of communication to stay in touch," explains Ponzanesi. "These technologies enable them to continue participating in daily routines, which lessens the feeling of separation."

Unity in diversity

A key success of the CONNECTINGEUROPE project has been to underline the importance of the emotional pull of migration, as well as the emotional toll this can take. Academic examinations of migration have often focused solely on political and economic factors. This project provides a timely rectification of this.

"We showed the ways in which connectivity is not just for the lucky few, but is accessible and available to all," says Ponzanesi. "This challenges the notion that digital media are just for the wealthy, and that the literacy, skills and competencies needed are irreconcilable with migrants."

The project has also given insights into what migrant women are interested in, and what apps they use frequently. This creates an opportunity for policymakers. Tips and educational tools could be developed to make migrant women aware of online opportunities and threats such as online hate and hacking. Healthcare providers could tap into the power of social media, to help migrants overcome depression, loneliness and isolation.

"Migrants and migration are not a problem to be solved, but a constitutive part of what Europe is and is becoming," notes Ponzanesi. "A new understanding of online networks and diasporas, which breaks with the myth of Fortress Europe and reinvigorates that endangered European motto: 'Unity in Diversity', would be a fantastic legacy."



We wanted to counter the idea that migrants are digitally disenfranchised and disconnected.

PROJECT

CONNECTINGEUROPE – Digital Crossings in Europe: Gender, Diaspora and Belonging

HOSTED BY

Utrecht University in the Netherlands

FUNDED UNDER

H2020-ERC

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/647737

PROJECT WEBSITE

connectingeuropeproject.eu



More national initiatives needed to protect the rights of domestic workers

The forces of globalisation greatly impact the social positions and opportunities of domestic workers. Using a cross-country comparison, DomEQUAL identified key influential factors in the promotion and enforcement of domestic workers' rights and analysed the role of gender.

There are 52.6 million domestic workers around the world, of which 43 million are women and 7 million children. The International Labour Organization's Convention 189 was initiated in 2011 to protect the rights of these domestic workers, which

had been long neglected. As the Convention makes domestic work an issue of global governance, it has triggered a wealth of activities at both the grassroots and policy levels.



Taking advantage of this dynamic situation, the ERC-supported DomEQUAL (A Global Approach to Paid Domestic Work and Social Inequalities) project conducted a socio-economic and legal comparison of domestic workers across three continents:

South America, Europe and Asia.

To better understand domestic workers' conditions and how they mobilise for their rights, DomEQUAL adopted an intersectional approach, exploring how social and political identities influence experiences of discrimination and privilege.

"We found that organisations mobilising for domestic workers'

rights engage a wide range of stakeholders, such as women from very different sociocultural backgrounds," says principal investigator Sabrina Marchetti from the Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy. "Attracting the attention of large portions of society gives those movements a powerful political voice."

Workers' rights and feminism

The researchers conducted over 200 interviews in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Germany, India, Italy, Spain, Taiwan and the Philippines. These countries were chosen based on their varying globalisation experiences, their specific sociocultural contexts and because they have all experienced organised mobilisation for domestic workers' rights.

During a year's fieldwork DomEQUAL country-experts interviewed policymakers, activists, trade unionists, academics and other experts about domestic workers' conditions and movements seeking to advance their rights.

A key finding relates to the relationships between domestic workers and feminist groups, between which they found few alliances. "The lack of formal lines of solidarity between them was one of our most unexpected findings," adds Marchetti. "Despite long-standing questions about the relationship between these two movements, opportunities to tackle it across such a wide range of countries and with such richness of sources, hadn't existed before."

With domestic workers heavily influenced by feminist critiques, especially regarding gender roles and reproductive labour, the researchers suggest more formal alliances may pave the way forward for increased political impact.

Comparative sociopolitical contexts

Domestic workers' movements were found to be most effective when part of wider social transformation, such as movements against inequality and gender discrimination or for social justice. This is especially true with national domestic workers and so considered representative of working-class minorities deserving of social advancement.

For example, the researchers found that at the beginning of the 2010s in Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador, domestic workers who were mainly Afro-descendant women and women from indigenous backgrounds, successfully increased their rights under the law.

Conversely, during the same years it has proven to be more difficult to achieve similar advancement for domestic workers in countries like Germany, Italy, Spain and Taiwan, where they are usually foreign workers and not nationals of the country in which they work.

Regarding the European case studies, Spain has not yet formally ratified C189. In Germany and Italy where C189 has been ratified, the researchers are concerned that it has not been followed through with effective implementation.

"We hope our work contributes to the implementation of the European Parliament's Resolution on the rights of women domestic workers and carers. While these rights have been promoted, they are still not being adequately supported by national initiatives," concludes Marchetti.

PROJECT

DomEQUAL – A Global Approach to Paid Domestic Work and Social Inequalities

HOSTED BY

Ca' Foscari University of Venice in Italy

FUNDED UNDER

H2020-ERC

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/678783

PROJECT WEBSITE

domequal.eu



We found that organisations mobilising for domestic workers' rights engage a wide range of stakeholders, such as women from very different sociocultural backgrounds.

Evidence-based policymaking through socio-economic analysis

Socio-economic inequality is a pressing issue around the world, with attention usually placed on factors like trade or globalisation to compare development across countries. To enrich the discussion, *EQUALIZE* explored the demographic determinants of inequalities, such as gender, within countries. The project considered education and, more precisely, the reverse gender gap.

Over the last few decades, inequalities caused by factors such as poverty and gender discrimination have been shrinking worldwide. At the same time, new social phenomena are emerging around issues such as healthy ageing, or the attainment of high-quality education and skills. This can cause greater inequality or, in the case of the reverse gender gap, can reduce it.

Demographic dynamics and family arrangements have the potential to tilt the balance of these inequalities towards more equality or less. Trends such as the appearance of high-skilled dual-earning couples and the increase in divorce and lone parenthood can all lead to increased inequality. Conversely, the



reversal of the gender education gap in favour of women can reduce disparities.

The ERC-supported project EQUALIZE (Equalizing or disequalizing? Opposing socio-demographic determinants of the spatial distribution of welfare) set out to examine these dynamics to map the direction of travel for social equality. "Understanding how these opposing forces shape the distribution of welfare is crucial for researchers and policymakers concerned with global justice in the 21st century," says Iñaki Permanyer, principal researcher.

The project's findings have already contributed to work by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), including the Human Development Report (2019).

The SHDI

Despite its strengths, the Human Development Index cannot cater for variations in income, health and education, within countries. For this reason, EQUALIZE contributed to the creation of the Subnational Human Development Index (SHDI), containing indices for over 1 600 regions within 160 countries.

"By enabling policymakers to investigate global socio-economic change in unprecedented detail, our new SHDI can improve efforts to

monitor progress, such as the Sustainable Development Goals," adds Permanyer. Project analysis of the index found that income, health and education variation is especially prevalent in low- and middle-developed countries, where 70% of the world's population live, but is less significant in the most developed countries.

Additionally, the team found that while most of the SHDI inequality in low-developed countries could be attributed to disparities in education, within more highly developed countries inequality was

more likely to come from differences in income.

Indicators of well-being – health and education

Using census microdata samples and household surveys from around the world, EQUALIZE looked at educational variability and the gender gap in education over time, documenting trends across the world from 1950 to 2010 (with projections until 2040).

Findings included the fact that up until the turn of the millennium, education attainment variability among men was typically higher

than among women. After 2000, distributions display the same degree of dispersion. "Currently, most global education variability in high- and middle-income countries is attributable to women tending to be more highly educated than men," explains Permanyer.

Regarding health, EQUALIZE completed studies comparing inequalities in life expectancy and length of life across countries and socio-economic groups since the 1950s. Results indicated that health differences across groups tend to increase over time, with lower socio-economic status groups experiencing higher uncertainty about the age at which they are likely to die (particularly among men).

Towards sustainable growth

EQUALIZE benefitted from an increased availability of subnational data around the world. Drawing on many data sources, such as household surveys, enabled the project to take an internationally comparative perspective.

"The Europe 2020 strategy aimed for sustainable growth across states. By looking at differences in socio-economic development within countries as well as between them, our findings can help design more territorially cohesive policies," says Permanyer.

"Additionally, understanding micro-level demographic dynamics, such as the influence of lone parenthood on income inequality, can help reduce these inequalities."

One idea currently under development is to capture global sex-specific indicators of socio-economic development, such as education, health and standard of living, at the subnational level to investigate socio-economic differences in unprecedented detail.



By looking at differences in socio-economic development within countries as well as between them, our findings can help design more territorially cohesive policies.

PROJECT

**EQUALIZE – Equalizing or disequalizing?
Opposing socio-demographic determinants of
the spatial distribution of welfare**

HOSTED BY

Centre for Demographic Studies in Spain

FUNDED UNDER

H2020-ERC

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/637768

PROJECT WEBSITE

bit.ly/34Z1Atl

The invisible women of international migration

EUBorderCare investigated the healthcare of migrants, especially women, coming into the EU. The researchers' findings help plug the gaps in available data that can lead to assumptions and misconceptions.

When exploring a subject as politically sensitive as migrant health needs, researchers often lack available data. Additionally, responses across the EU to health needs differ, reflecting the variety of healthcare systems and political traditions. Each country also has distinct public narratives and perceptions about both migration and their healthcare systems, sometimes at odds with reality.

The ERC-funded project, EUBorderCare (Intimate Encounters in EU Borderlands: Migrant Maternity, Sovereignty and the Politics of Care on Europe's Peripheries), focused attention on migrant health in borderlands (i.e. peripheries) as sites of magnified national tensions and cultural traditions.



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“Frontline borderland healthcare workers protect core European values of citizen health and mobility,” says principal investigator Vanessa Grotti from the University of Bologna. “We need to ensure a continued and clear distinction between health rights and migration governance.”

EUBorderCare highlighted a lack of awareness about gendered migratory experiences and the necessity to provide gender-specific responses at all stages of migrant reception.

The under-investigated experiences of women

“Despite being a growing phenomenon, our field research confirmed that female migration, pregnant crossings in particular, have been under-studied,” adds Grotti. “Our findings show that more needs to be done to organise care for migrant women recognising basic needs, such as sanitation, housing and healthcare.”

Comparing experience of three migration routes, the eastern Mediterranean (into Greece), the central Mediterranean (into Italy) and the western Mediterranean (into Spain), the team found clear migration patterns related to nationalities, age groups, personal and family circumstances and reproductive health concerns for each route.



Our findings show that more needs to be done to organise care for migrant women recognising basic needs, such as sanitation, housing and healthcare.

For example, pregnant refugees fleeing war arriving in Greece suffered from malnutrition and stress after protracted stays in camps. Pregnant patients rescued in Italy had often been separated from loved ones due to slavery and trafficking and had suffered assault and exploitation.

In a comparative analysis of emergency and maternity services in Greece, Italy and Spain, the team explored precarious

working conditions such as underfunding, understaffing, temporary contracts and stretched services. The research documents how antenatal and perinatal health had to be entirely redesigned and adapted to emergency contexts, with little European or international support.

Examples included clinics and A&E departments changing opening hours to meet emergency needs, such as boat rescues. This results in long shifts, the employment of interpreters and the creation of medical files for pregnant patients without medical records.

In Greece, state hospitals collaborated with medical NGOs and volunteers to provide care continuity, while in Overseas France and Italy, hospital staff coordinated with the care sector, often relying on professional networks.

“These resilient, local structures are indispensable, yet unsustainable without systemic support. After all, they cannot be easily replaced as they know the territory better than anyone,” Grotti notes.

Following the coronavirus outbreak, which significantly reconfigured the ways in which healthcare is delivered in hospitals and smaller health clinics, the team decided to assess the impact that the COVID-19 emergency has had on the organisation and delivery of maternity care services. “Hopefully this will lead to the drafting of a set of policy recommendations specific to health equity in obstetric care in EU borderlands,” explains Grotti.

Unique borderlands

EUBorderCare was grounded in long-term immersive field research in care settings (e.g. refugee camps, medical NGO premises, maternity wards), both temporary and permanent, in French Guiana and Mayotte (Overseas France), the North Aegean and Attica (Greece), Sicily (Italy), and Ceuta and Melilla (Spain).

These regions were chosen because they experienced significant migration flows. They also have experienced underinvestment, yet have universal healthcare systems with special humanitarian provision for urgent free care regardless of legal status. Being on Europe’s external borders, they were the first countries of reception and the asylum process.

PROJECT

EUBorderCare – Intimate Encounters in EU Borderlands: Migrant Maternity, Sovereignty and the Politics of Care on Europe’s Peripheries

HOSTED BY

University of Bologna in Italy

FUNDED UNDER

H2020-ERC

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/638259

PROJECT WEBSITE

eubordercare.eu



Shining a new light on modern Chinese families and gender roles

Family and gender are often intrinsically linked to each other. Whilst the relations between the two have been heavily studied in Western societies, one ERC-funded researcher is currently undertaking the first comprehensive study of family practices in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. The work is leading to fascinating insights on gender, conjugal relations and intergenerational dynamics.



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Confucian ideology was the guiding principle of Chinese family relations for over 2000 years. But in the early 20th century this came under scrutiny as protocols of hierarchical family relations were considered to be holding society back. There followed a series of political and social campaigns to reform the structure of family life in China.

The Intimacy (Doing Intimacy: A Multi-sited Ethnography of Modern Chinese Family Life) project, led by Jieyu Liu, deputy director of the SOAS China Institute at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London approaches the subject of modern Chinese family life from a new and unconventional angle. Intimacy considered the family as a process of practices and experiences,

moving away from a rigid analysis of family structures to the quality of relationships. Lui focused on what she calls: 'doing intimacy'.

"In short, this project takes a closer, fresher, critical look at Chinese family dynamics as they are lived," Liu says. "And by doing so, it documented significant generational shifts in various aspects of Chinese family life covering child-parent relations, dating and courtship, gender relations, sexual relations, and ageing and later life."

Delving deeper into 'doing intimacy'

To shift the focus to the practices of intimacy, emotions and agency, Intimacy examined three generations of women's experiences with their natal family, i.e. the family they were born into.



The traditional Chinese patrilocal family model has been reformatted for the present modern era – whilst in the past newly-weds lived at first with the husband's parents, they are now more likely to live alone. But it remains the societal norm and expectation that the husband will be responsible for purchasing the marital home.

As Lui explains, married daughters often have intimate relationships with their parents, despite patrilineal and patrilocal cultural traditions. The former sees the organisation of family relationships by lines of descent from male ancestors: the latter, the settling of the family close to the husband's relations or under their roof.

"Women have taken an active role in strengthening natal ties, which has gradually led to the

modification of the cultural preference for sons, and patrilocal practice. Indeed, this may eventually challenge the patrilineal culture within Chinese society."

Shifting gender relations in modern Chinese societies

On the surface, modern Chinese societies seem to have developed many of the same gender roles and activities as seen in Western societies. For example, many young Chinese experience dating culture and nuclear households that are similar in the West. "However, my research indicates that the

interdependence between conjugal family and wider kin persists and such ties are strengthening in the face of economic and welfare uncertainties," Liu adds.

There has also been a shift towards more affective and communicative conjugal relationships amongst younger generation Chinese couples. "This shift goes hand-in-hand with the older cultural ideal of the bridegroom bringing significant material goods to the marriage," Liu continues.

"The traditional Chinese patrilocal family model has been reformatted for the present modern era – whilst in the past newly-weds lived at first with the husband's parents, they are now more likely to live alone. But it remains the societal norm and expectation that the husband will be responsible for purchasing the marital home."

An upcoming regional analysis

From January 2021, Liu will begin one of the key final stages of the project – an analysis of the regional differences between the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Two research monographs are also in the works.

And the wider legacy of the project? "Because matters relating to emotions, sex and intimacy are such private parts of human lives, there is a notable absence of studies of this kind. The findings of this project will be of great value to global family studies," Liu concludes.

PROJECT

Intimacy – Doing Intimacy: A Multi-sited Ethnography of Modern Chinese Family Life

HOSTED BY

School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London in the United Kingdom

FUNDED UNDER

H2020-ERC

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/640488

PROJECT WEBSITE

intimacy.soas.ac.uk



Examining gender through the historical experiences of disabled soldiers and their carers

After the First World War, Britain was faced with reintegrating millions of soldiers, many of them carrying horrific physical and mental disabilities. One project has been examining the experiences of disabled returnee soldiers and their carers, providing intriguing insights into how gender roles and societal norms were altered in the years immediately following the end of the war... and beyond.





The gendered nature of war service also shaped the way in which care was provided. For example, nursing work during the war influenced the caring priorities of the women who ran religious charities which provided care for the disabled after the war.

Millions of soldiers lost their lives during the First World War and we remember the fallen every year on 11 November. However, the fates of all the surviving soldiers who returned home, as well as the people who cared for them, are arguably less etched into today's public consciousness. The responsibility for the physical care of veterans, for example, often fell on female relatives.

The ERC-funded project MenWomenCare (Men, Women and Care: The gendering

of formal and informal care-giving in interwar Britain) has been studying these returnees and has discovered that their experiences were not as grim as one could imagine. "One of the key findings of the project is the extent to which men, even those suffering from serious, long-term and/or highly visible disabilities, were able to reintegrate into the post-war society and economy," begins Jessica Meyer, the project's principle investigator and associate professor in modern British history at the University of Leeds. "They were able to successfully negotiate their post-war lives as disabled ex-servicemen with the care and support of family members, community advocates and the State."

These findings have been made possible due to the core aim of the project, namely to create a database of the more than 20 000 personal pension files relating to British ex-servicemen of the First World War, which then allowed for the detailed analysis of the files to examine the care provided to them as they readjusted back into society.

Examining gender through the experience of the war disabled

"For men, disabilities posed serious challenges to their ability to act in what could be described as 'appropriately masculine' ways, as domestic providers and as good husbands and fathers," Meyer says. "These anxieties shaped many of their interactions with the Ministry of Pensions, which was keen to ensure that disabled ex-servicemen achieved as much economic independence as possible."

However, this could cause conflict, due to certain family members being constructed by the Ministry as being 'nameless dependents' rather than care providers with their own unique social and emotional needs. "This is best exemplified by the regular note on pension applications to 'verify wife', showing that the wife was seen by the Ministry as a nameless object, to be allocated an allowance only if the marriage was properly verified," explains Meyer.

Gender is also significant in relation to the division of labour, where male relatives of disabled ex-servicemen often acted as advocates to the Ministry and provided financial support if needed. Meanwhile,

female relatives provided medical care and domestic labour. "The gendered nature of war service also shaped the way in which care was provided," Meyer adds. "For example, nursing work during the war influenced the caring priorities of the women who ran religious charities which provided care for the disabled after the war."

Whilst definitely having an emphasis on British social history, Meyer points out that the project's research on domesticity is also relevant beyond the shores of the British Isles, particularly with regards to our understanding of imperial history. Specifically, she points to the effects of war disability on family breakdown in the context of imperial migration from Britain to its colonies.

Translating into modern experience

The work undertaken in the MenWomenCare project has also been applied by Meyer and her team to the experiences of both contemporary British servicemen and disabled people. "We found that the attitudes, language and priorities of the Ministry of Pensions' medical assessment boards in the post-war period bear direct comparison with the modern agencies currently contracted by the British Government to assess those claiming independence allowances and other benefits," says Meyer.

In fact, Meyer and one of her colleagues, Elis Boyle, submitted written evidence to the United Kingdom's Women and Equalities Committee, drawing on their research to argue for ways that families could better be supported as a way of addressing the contemporary crisis in male mental health.

Whilst MenWomenCare officially closed at the end of August 2020, Meyer's medium-term aim is to use her findings from the project to write a monograph on the social and cultural history of war disability in Britain. "Whilst gender relations will feature, the book will also look at life cycle and cultural representations of war disability," she concludes.

PROJECT

**MenWomenCare – Men, Women and Care:
The gendering of formal and informal
care-giving in interwar Britain**

HOSTED BY

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PROJECT WEBSITE

menwomenandcare.leeds.ac.uk

The reality behind a stalled gender equality revolution

The NEWFAMSTRAT project has left no stone unturned in its quest to identify the remaining obstacles to gender equality.

In the 1960s, European and North American women's demands for liberation and emancipation was one of the defining social movements of the age. They wanted equal rights to employment. They asked for their children's fathers to do their fair share in unpaid family work.

Most of their revendications have since been met with progressive measures such as equal education opportunities, paid maternity leave, parental leave targeting fathers and narrowing gaps in wages and domestic assignments. Yet, researchers continue to claim that the gender revolution is incomplete, or even stalled. So, what happened? Well, no one knows exactly.

NEWFAMSTRAT (The New Shape of Family-Related Gender Stratification) was launched to find out. "We have been analysing national data using advanced statistical techniques, as well as collecting primary experimental data. We interrogate the predictive power of economic theories, and then develop new testable theories that better map modern gender relations," says Lynn Prince Cooke, professor of social policy at the University of Bath and principal investigator of ERC-supported NEWFAMSTRAT.

The project, which runs until the end of 2021, looks at the very structure of gender inequalities at the individual, couple, organisational and societal levels. As gender relations are not



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the same for all women and men at each level, it also compares skill and wage differences in terms of inputs and outcomes.

Multilayered research

Cooke and her team picked three countries for their research: Finland, Germany and the United Kingdom, complemented by analyses of Canadian, American and other country data. The three countries were essentially selected because of their contrasting policy support for tackling gender divisions as well as the quality of the national data they had available.

“Just like its Nordic neighbours, Finland was amongst the first countries to support dual-earning and -caring. It has universal well-paid leave for both parents, and it guarantees access to publicly funded full-time childcare for children under 3 years old. Germany, on the other hand, historically typified a strong male breadwinner / female carer model.

“Change occurred during the 2000s with the expansion of public childcare and revised parental leave to encourage employment among medium-skilled women. Finally, the United Kingdom is the policy laggard, with policies consistently ranked the least generous in Europe,” Cooke explains.

NEWFAMSTRAT explores gender inequalities by means of four subprojects. The first studies individual statistics on inequalities. The second assesses circumstances predicting egalitarian divisions in couples, while the third performs a comparative field experiment of potential hiring discrimination. The fourth subproject completes the picture by linking employee-employer data to assess how workplaces contribute to family-related inequalities.

“Perhaps our most important findings thus far come from analyses of organisational processes. For example, when analysing Canadian-linked employee-employer data, we found that not only the magnitude, but also the organisational source of fathers’ higher wages varies by skill level. Over half of low-skilled fathers’ wages can be explained by the fact that they are likely to work in higher-wage firms before the birth of their first child,” Cooke adds.

This sharply contrasts with high-skilled fathers who earn more regardless of the firm wage structure. Besides, high-skilled fathers gain from moving jobs after the first birth, whereas low-skilled ones lose their wage premium when doing so.

Likewise, the team found that organisational policies affect the magnitude of group differences. Collective bargaining agreements unsurprisingly reduce skill differences in fathers’ net wages, while formal human resource departments increase skill differences. Actual compensation programmes such as merit-based or incentive pay, however, have no impact.

Another major finding relates to analyses of Finnish and German employer-employee data. “These highlight that relative group advantage or disadvantage is also contingent on organisational social relations. For example, low-skilled Finnish fathers receive larger wage premiums when employed in firms with more fathers. This is another example of how lower-skilled groups benefit from collective action. German mothers are also more likely to receive employer training when supervised by a father than when supervised by either a woman or a childless man,” Cooke notes.

With statistical analyses, data gathering and organisational analyses still well under way, the project team certainly have more findings up their sleeves. The project is much more than an intellectual exercise. It is set to lift the veil on dominant policy myths while suggesting more effective new policies and amendments to existing ones.



We have been analysing national data using advanced statistical techniques, as well as collecting primary experimental data. We interrogate the predictive power of economic theories, and then develop new testable theories that better map modern gender relations.

PROJECT

NEWFAMSTRAT – The New Shape of Family-Related Gender Stratification

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newfamstrat.com



LGBTI+ asylum claimants call for a fairer system

In 2020, sexual orientation and gender identity are still a mere afterthought in the asylum granting process. The SOGICA project has been documenting the consequences of this lack of understanding and provides recommendations for future British, German, Italian and European policy.

Asylum claims by people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and of other sexualities, sexes and gender diversities (LGBTI+) are increasing. Individuals often face discrimination and can be victims of persecution in their countries of birth, which makes it necessary for them to seek asylum in less hostile countries.

Although the number of people in the LGBTI+ community fleeing persecution is rising there is a relative lack of academic studies and NGO reports focusing on this very specific type of asylum claim. According to Nuno Ferreira, co-director of the

Sussex Centre for Human Rights Research, this is mostly because researchers and policymakers have so far failed to realise that sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) asylum claims are actually widespread.

“Until recently, SOGI asylum claimants have been rather invisible within the larger refugee population. Meanwhile, political and media priorities have generally lain elsewhere. Experts were most concerned with racist, xenophobic, homophobic and transphobic social trends,” he explains.



By interviewing almost 500 people, including policymakers, lawyers, NGO activists and asylum claimants, the ERC-supported project SOGICA (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Claims of Asylum: A European human rights challenge) has managed to paint a detailed picture of the problem as well as draft recommendations for future policies.

"We offer a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of SOGI asylum claims. We base it on a comparative, interdisciplinary and empirical approach. First, we used case studies in Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, along with the EU and the Council of Europe. We approached these from the double perspective of law and sociology and completed them with interviews and surveys. We are particularly proud to have reached out to over 200 SOGI asylum claimants and refugees," Ferreira adds.

Towards better policies

Project findings reflect the range of issues faced by SOGI asylum claimants. At the European level, Ferreira and his team notably found that the EU Common European Asylum System (CEAS) is not responsive enough to the needs and rights of SOGI minorities. Meanwhile, the European Court of Human Rights does not deal with applications from SOGI asylum claimants in a way that truly honours the European Convention on Human Rights.

"It's not much better at domestic level," Ferreira says. "Asylum authorities often deal with SOGI claims in inappropriate and unlawful ways. They deprive claimants of quality legal advice and

interpretation services and rely on stereotypes. They tend to adopt intrusive and demeaning lines of questioning and use an unreasonably high standard of proof."

Legal processes aside, project findings indicate that SOGI claimants and refugees are often exposed to violence and discrimination with regards to accommodation, access to healthcare, the labour market and educational provision. Whilst NGOs are trying their best to fill the gap, they often lack resources.

But not all is dark and gloomy. Some positive practices have emerged, including SOGI-friendly interpretations of key notions of the refugee definition or procedural arrangements, which Ferreira says are worth replicating across Europe.

"All these findings and our key proposals for the overall improvement of asylum systems in Europe are discussed in detail in our forthcoming book, which analyses our results in the context of Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom. The book will come out later in 2020, in electronic and open access format," Ferreira notes.

Besides this book, the team has published close to 50 articles and a database of over 1 000 case-law documents, policy papers and other elements related to SOGI asylum. The project has produced 30 national policy recommendations and 32 for the EU, which Ferreira hopes will be considered in the new EU LGBTI+ Equality Strategy.

"At the end of the day, we envision an asylum system which – by acting upon our recommendations – ensures that all actors involved have sufficient training on SOGI matters and contribute to a culture of empathy towards SOGI minorities. The starting point for decision-making should be the claimant's self-identification," he concludes.



Asylum authorities often deal with SOGI claims in inappropriate and unlawful ways. They deprive claimants of quality legal advice and interpretation services and rely on stereotypes.

PROJECT

SOGICA – Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Claims of Asylum: A European human rights challenge

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PROJECT WEBSITE

sogica.org/en



A new look into prehistoric motherhood

What was motherhood like during the Bronze and Iron Ages? The VAMOS project aims to find out with innovative archaeological analysis methods. In doing so, it manages to challenge misconceptions about ‘natural’ childbearing.

There are many things about motherhood that we have come to consider as set in stone since the dawn of time. But the truth is, these are just assumptions. As a mother of two young boys, Katharina Rebay-Salisbury, an archaeologist specialised in the European Bronze and Iron Ages working at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, knows it all too well.

“There is a considerable amount of political debate in Europe on how to best support working mothers in their careers while providing optimal substitute care for babies and small children. In such debates, naïve narratives of ‘prehistoric’ and ‘natural’

childrearing are frequently misused as political arguments. You’ll hear either that mothers should never be separated from their babies, or that child-rearing used to be communal,” she explains.

Whilst the three millennia preceding the rise of Rome are generally considered as one of the foundations upon which our societies are built, the truth is that we don’t know much about what it meant to be a mother back then.

Was social status already impacting the number of surviving children? When did women first become mothers and how many



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Burial of a 12-14 year-old girl from Franzhausen

children did they have on average? If these questions pique your interest, there is little chance you'll find an answer in history books or in archaeological studies.

"We need to provide evidence-based answers to all these questions," adds Rebay-Salisbury, who is also the principal investigator of the project VAMOS (The value of mothers to society: responses to motherhood and child rearing practices in prehistoric Europe), funded by a grant from the ERC. "To get there, we tried to find out whether becoming a mother was in any way archeologically traceable, either through female skeletons or through societal responses, and indeed it is."

Together with her team and with the help of a wide network of researchers across Europe, Rebay-Salisbury used state-of-the-art analytical methods for the project. The range of methods is impressive. For example, the team applied organic residue analysis to prehistoric baby bottles found in children's graves.

These efforts resulted in the first-ever evidence of the use of ruminant animal milk as a substitute for breast milk. They analysed peptides in children's teeth enamel to determine the sex of buried babies and children and could thereby determine whether there was a societal preference between boys and girls.

In another instance, the team applied mitochondrial DNA analysis to test whether mothers and children buried together were biologically related, and it turned out that not all of them were. They also applied strontium isotope analysis to see if women changed their residence upon marriage. "So far, most evidence points to patrilocal residence patterns, with women starting to live with the family of the husband," Rebay-Salisbury observes.

Reading through female skeletons

From a methodological point of view, VAMOS provides evidence that pregnancies and childbirth events can leave traces in the female skeleton. The interpretation of pelvic features was much more complicated than initially thought, but the team eventually succeeded.



We have contributed to introducing the topic of motherhood as a research field in archaeology and we have advanced the methodology of tracing childbirth in the female skeleton.

"Part of my team kept recording changes in the pelvis in archaeological collections, but we also recorded the same changes in historical anatomical collections for which the number of births per woman is known. Now, we're investigating pelvic changes on CT scans of modern women's pelvises to model and explain underlying factors. I never envisioned this approach at the start of the project, but it is key to our research. We can now correlate factors such as age, body weight and number of children with the expression of specific pelvic features. This

enables us to go back and interpret the human remains from archaeological contexts in a new light," she says.

When asked about the work that remains to be done, Rebay-Salisbury can't help but contemplate the immensity of the task at hand. "In a way, the project will never be finished. We have contributed to introducing the topic of motherhood as a research field in archaeology and we have advanced the methodology of tracing childbirth in the female skeleton. Patterns are likely to emerge from broader comparison across time and space, and we still have to write up a number of case studies for which we have gathered the data," she concludes.

PROJECT

VAMOS – The value of mothers to society: responses to motherhood and child rearing practices in prehistoric Europe

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The rise and rise of women editors from 1700 onward

Women were denied the right to vote until the early 20th century. They had limited access to financial rights and almost none to formal education. Yet, a few of them managed to make their voice heard through the press. The WeChangEd project is investigating their contribution to sociocultural change.



London, 1852: The first issue of the 'Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine' is published by Samuel Beeton. Articles cover fiction and middle-class domestic life and offer practical ideas on household management. A first step towards feminism is taken, addressing women as a valuable readership and consumers in their own right.

Little did people know then that Beeton's wife, Isabella Beeton, was in fact responsible for a large share of the magazine's content. She was a pioneer in the editing business and a member of a pan-European network of women editors who had been writing and creating from the shadows since the 1700s.

Through the project WeChangEd (Agents of Change: Women Editors and Socio-Cultural Transformation in Europe (1710-1920)), Marianne Van Remoortel, associate professor at Ghent University's Department of Literary Studies, wanted to put the spotlight on women like Beeton.

"Female authorship is a relatively rare phenomenon and may even seem unworthy of detailed studies. On the contrary, we argue that women's editorship does matter from the perspective of women's history," she explains. That's precisely why she decided to demonstrate the existence of these women's networks and put the spotlight on their most influential members.

A database of over 1 700 editors

"One of the main outputs of our project is a database of women editors and their periodicals, to which members of my team contributed. We have now gathered data about more than 1 700 female editors and the periodicals they edited in 26 European languages," Van Remoortel says.

There lies one of the project's most important contributions. Instead of focusing on specific national traditions and periods, WeChangEd is a large-scale, cross-language study of periodical press. And this wasn't an easy task, as Van Remoortel notes.

"An important challenge for us was to include data on editors and periodicals published in languages that we did not cover as a team. Even with six researchers, there were still numerous European languages we did not have access to. By organising an international conference on European women editors in May 2019, we were able to bring together a wealth of additional expertise on, for instance, Eastern European women editors," explains Van Remoortel.

A year before its completion, the project has already led to four successfully completed doctoral projects and a host of scholarly

articles. It has also produced a new data model for periodical studies that can be used even for projects focusing on other topics.

"Our model reflects a number of curatorial choices – only periodicals, edited by women, in Europe, between 1710 and 1920. But it also goes beyond these choices. For instance, we argue that the digital turn in periodical studies needs to be geared towards building sustainable, structured and open data models for periodical research," she outlines.

"We therefore built our data model in accordance with Linked Open Data principles. It fosters collaboration among periodical researchers beyond language boundaries."

WeChangEd's data is publicly available through Wikidata and a web application called Science Stories. The stories aggregate their data directly from Wikidata, which means they can be continuously expanded by Wikidata users.

Overall, Van Remoortel hopes that WeChangEd's research and the way it made its data available will eventually inspire similar research on women's editorship, and on the periodical press in general. But no matter what the future holds, the project certainly pioneered a new research field through its focus on women whose histories, perspectives and experiences are still too often regarded as secondary to men's.



We have now gathered data about more than 1 700 female editors and the periodicals they edited in 26 European languages.

PROJECT

WeChangEd – Agents of Change: Women Editors and Socio-Cultural Transformation in Europe (1710-1920)

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RESULTS PACK ON CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE

This Results Pack features some innovative EU-funded social sciences projects that are helping us to better understand the major political issues of the day and provide solid recommendations on how policymakers, citizens and other organisations can better respond to the challenges facing European democracy.



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