

Online Roundtable

The ELHN Working Groups and the future of labour history

15 June 2021

Feminist Labour History Working Group

Coordinators:

Eloisa Betti, Leda Papastefanaki, Susan Zimmermann

Presentation: Leda Papastefanaki

[here with minor formal past-presentation updates]



The WG “Feminist Labour History” was created in 2013 in Amsterdam, at the foundational meeting of the ELHN. (Coordinators: Silke Neunsinger, Susan Zimmermann, Leda Papastefanaki. Eloisa Betti joined us a coordinator in 2016, while Silke stepped down as coordinator in 2019).

Today, the WG has more than 40 members with a lively interest in gender and feminist labour history.

Scope

The Working Group discusses and promotes research related to a broad range of themes and concepts in feminist labour history including but not limited to the following:

- the intersection of class, race, gender, global inequality, etc. in all thematic areas of labour history
- the global gendered division of labour
- the historical engendering of various types and forms of labour
- the historical evolvement of the relationship between paid and unpaid or subsistence-oriented work
- commodification and decommodification of domestic and care work
- the role gender has played in shaping labour law and practice of regulating labour and the impact of labour law and labour practices on gender and gender relations
- trade unions and gender locally, nationally and internationally

1st ELHN conference (Turin, 2015)

There was an open call for papers. Women's and gender labour history had a tremendous visibility at the Conference. Around one third of the overall sessions of the Conference addressed explicitly gender-related topics.

5 sessions were organized by our WG:

- “Gender, Labour and Modern History. What's new on Europe” (coordinators: Cristina Borderias and Manuela Martini)
- “Wage Equality, Pay Equity and Equal Pay” (coordinators: Cristina Borderias and Silke Neunsinger)
- jointly organized with the WG “Long-term History of Remuneration”
- “Women and Trade Unions in Europe” (coordinators: Silke Neunsinger and Susan Zimmermann)
- “Women Work in Rural Areas: a long-term perspective (XII-XXI Centuries)” (coordinator: Giulio Ongaro) - jointly organized with the Italian Association (SISLav – Labour and Rural Workers Group)
- “Women and Gender Relations in the Labour Force: the case of mining, 1500-2000s” (coordinators: Rossana Barragán and Leda Papastefanaki)

Past Activities of the Working Group

Already from the sessions and the debates during the 1st ELHN Conference in Turin, have emerged further opportunities of international cooperation and networking.

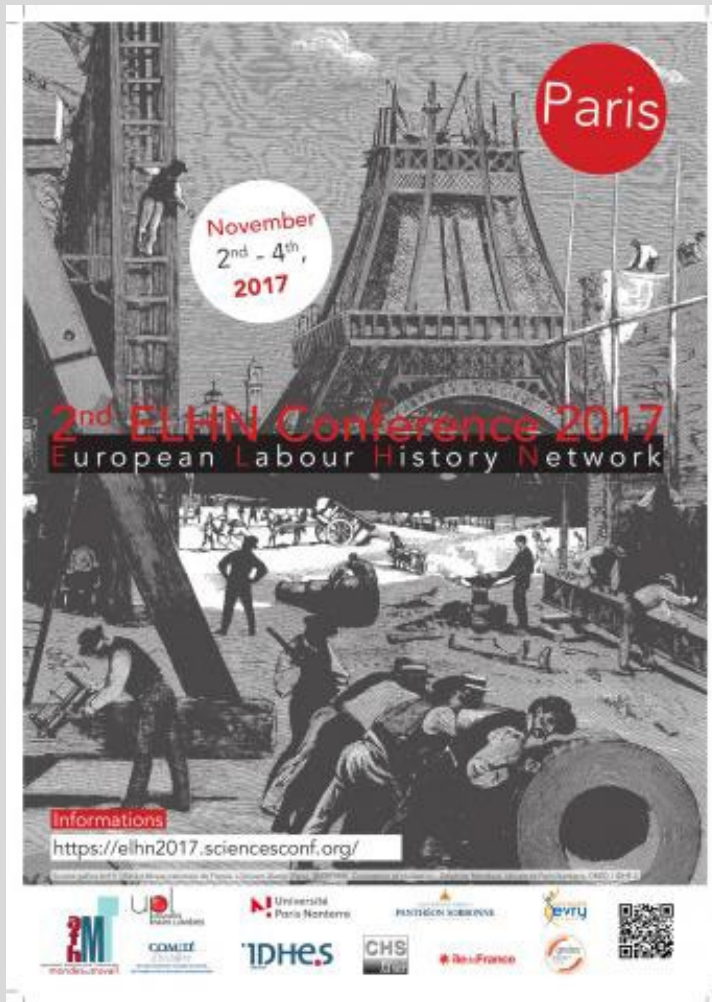


2nd ELHN conference (Paris, 2017)

The WG organized six sessions and a working group meeting.

Sessions:

- “Gender, labour and state intervention”
- “Women in industry and male work spaces”
- “Female labour and economic development: Ester Boserup’s contribution”
- “Women’s work effects on politics and home”
- “Women workers’ agency”
- Meet the authors: “Women’s ILO. Transnational Networks, Global Labour Standards and Gender Equity, 1919 to Present” (Brill 2017)



Past activities of the Working Group

Around forty scholars were involved in our sub-programme in Paris conference (2017) and many more attended the WG meeting.

The discussion about the future of the Feminist Labour History WG was particularly interesting.



Photo: Leda Papastefanaki, 2017

Conference “New perspectives in feminist labour history: work and activism”
(Bologna, 17-18 January 2019)

*The conference took place at the **University of Bologna**, and was co-organized by the “Feminist Labour History” WG and the **Società Italiana di Storia del Lavoro** (Italian Society of Labour History, SISLav, **Group “Genere & Lavoro”**).*

Around forty scholars participated. We organized six sessions, and there were two keynote speeches (given by Eileen Boris and Susan Zimmermann).

The conference was closed with an open meeting of the WG.





Past activities of the Working Group

Conference “New
perspectives in
feminist labour
history: work and
activism”
(University of
Bologna, 17-18.1.
2019)



Photos: Leda
Papastefanaki

3rd ELHN conference (Amsterdam, 2019)

The “Feminist Labour History” WG organized jointly with the WG “Free/Unfree Labour” a plenary Roundtable:

- “Rethinking the triangle: the relationship between free, unfree and reproductive/subsistence labour”

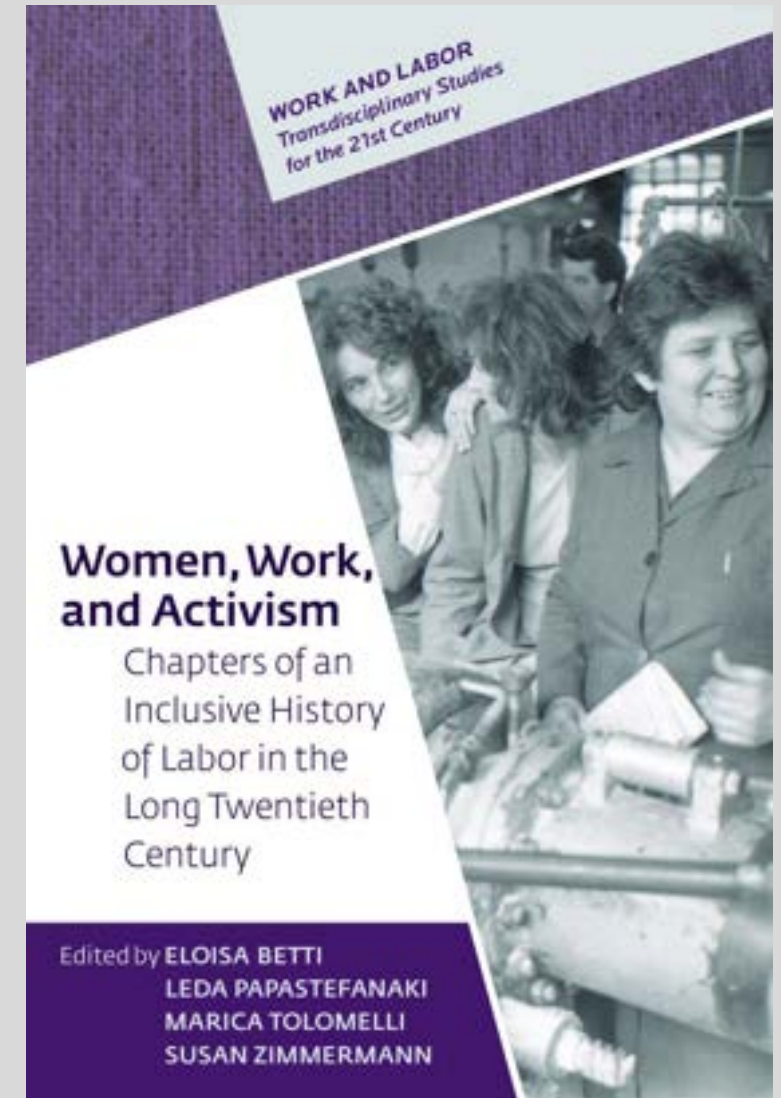
Two panels were been organized jointly with the “Family Economy Labour”:

- “Family labour in the long period. Gender roles, agency and boundaries”
- “Women in trade unions: obstacles, agency, resistance and personal constraints”

Preparation of a peer-reviewed edited volume

Women, Work, and Activism. Contributions to an Inclusive History of Labor in the Long Twentieth Century [provisional title], edited by Eloisa Betti, Leda Papastefanaki, Marica Tolomelli & Susan Zimmermann (CEU Press, forthcoming June 2022).

The volume includes selected papers presented at the conferences in Turin (2015), in Paris (2017), and Bologna (2019). Participation of 20 researchers (mainly from Europe, also from Australia and USA).



Other publications

Other publications (articles, chapters) by scholars participating in the WG have been published in the period 2016-2021, after being presented in the sessions co-organised by our WG (e. g. in *International Review of Social History*, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, *Genesis: rivista di Società Italiana delle Storiche*, ed. Volumes...).



How the Working Group has worked

- All the activities of the WG (mainly the sessions and the meetings in the conferences, the publications, the volume) are aimed at creating and expanding existing more or less formal and informal contacts and networks of researchers with an interest in gendered labour history in Europe and around the world.
- While being a WG within the European Labour History Network, the Working Group has included in a permanent manner scholars from all over the world, including from the USA, India and Australia, by adopting a truly global approach. Researchers ...
- As far as European labour history is concerned, the Working Group has included scholars and excellent work in feminist labour history from countries otherwise less represented in the English language landscape of labour history, e.g. Portugal, Greece, Romania, Serbia and Hungary...

How the Working Group has worked

Communication /Dissemination

- **Mailing list** including the members of the WG
- Periodical **Newsletter** of the “Feminist Labour History” WG, sharing also information about local/national/regional events. The Newsletter is a good tool for sharing information regarding calls for papers, job advertisements, ongoing projects and activities as well as opportunity of cooperation in the field of women’s labour history (4 Newsletters since 2016 and a Report for the Bologna Conference).
- **Webpage** of the WG within EHLN website in Social History Portal <https://socialhistoryportal.org/elhn/wg-feminist>
- **Facebook** page



What has made the Working Group work ...

Statements collected from the Working Group coordinators:

- “From the side of coordinators, a kind of, yes, wavering individual, yet taken together still constant collective responsibility ...”
- “The **keen interest, intense response, input etc. from so many scholars** fully active in their field in many countries and capturing the opportunities provided by the existence of an international network.”
- “The sense **of trust and collaboration within and between all parties**, people in the WG.”
- “Our contribution, we hope, to the generation of such sense of trust and collaboration via the emphasis on **open conversation**, the message that we are not doing this business out of any kind of narrow self-interest but because of **our interest in helping the field to develop** (in a sense of “help many flowers blossom”), and the ever-conveyed message that the **WG, while being more than the sum of its parts, still is, can and should only be what all the parts bring into it, not only the coordinators alone.**”
- “The coordinators have pursued an **inclusive and cross-generational approach**, favouring the **participation of young scholars** in the WG. I think this is very important, because in our group younger scholars had a chance to get in contact with and receive support from senior members.”
- “The practical collaboration of different generations of scholars from very diverse European regions.”

Ongoing challenges

- As WG we were confronted with a number of more or less ‘technical’ challenges (including the creation of basic WG-infrastructure, down to the level of who updates and curates the mailing list, who prepares the Newsletter, and so on ...)
- We don’t have any funds (for technical or secretary assistance), for all of us the work for the Working Group is purely voluntary, and sometimes in conflict with our otherwise big work loads: “We are not heroes of any kind... Often in an ad-hoc but still concentrated last minute manner we somehow still did manage to manage the WG.” For example, we got our CfPs in shape, and always after good discussion, in the very last moment only
- Sometimes the fragmentation of the “to does” within the WG into many different tasks and responsibilities created discontinuities in the communication ...

Plans of the Working Group [as of June 2021]

- Participation in the **4th ELHN conference in Vienna** (30 August-1 September 2021) with 3 sessions (on “Women as workers, peasants and property owners in 19th century rural Europe”, “Women workers as writers and witnesses: voices from 20th century-Europe and North America”, and “Rural women workers in 20th century peripheries: economic roles and forms of agency”) and a WG meeting. These sessions have been proposed according to the suggestions of the last WG meeting in Amsterdam 2019.
- Closer (and better) co-operation with other WGs in the ELHN. We have already collaborated with the **WGs “Free/Unfree Labour”, “Long-term History of Remuneration” and “Family Economy Labour”** and we wish to expand our collaborations. **Collaborations need better preparation/organization in advance and better stressing the links between the WGs.**
- **Co-operation with national/regional and local networks for shared events.** We have already collaborated with 2 groups of the **Italian Society of Labour History (SisLav)**, the Group “Labour and Rural Workers” in the Turin conference and the Group “Genere & Lavoro” in the Bologna conference.

To conclude

- The WG “Feminist Labour History” is always open to new members and is happy to welcome people that have not been part of the discussions and activities so far. Do contact us via the email addresses provided at the webpage of the WG within the EHLN website in Social History Portal <https://socialhistoryportal.org/elhn/wg-feminist>
- We would like to express our gratitude for the generous secretarial work and the technical assistance for the ELHN and thus our Working Group by the IISH in the Netherlands and the Amsab-ISG, Institute of Social History in Belgium.