european council for an energy efficient economy

Developing sufficiency approaches in androcentrically organised societies

The need for a sufficiency strategy is increasingly recognized at the international political level as the pressure to act grows especially as traditional approaches focusing on efficiency and consistency alone have proven inadequate. Sufficiency aims to reduce energy demand and emissions within planetary boundaries while enhancing societal well-being. However, without an intersectional gender-responsive alignment, sufficiency policies risk exacerbating social inequalities. They must account for diverse socio-economic contexts, not least to avoid resistance, which could strengthen populist narratives and hinder collective transformation.

A critical issue is the androcentric bias in policy and economic design: the prioritization of the productive economy (market-based, monetized activities) over the basic economy: the largely invisible and unpaid care economy, i.e. caregiving, household work, and emotional labor. Sufficiency measures often increase the burden on the care economy through low-tech or labor-intensive solutions (e.g., foregoing high-energy appliances like clothes dryers). Women, who disproportionately perform care work, are particularly affected, as illustrated by data showing that 75% of women in shared households manage laundry. In this example, gender aspects are approximated by assigning them according to sex as the lack of available gender-related data makes it difficult to quantify gender inequalities, increasing the risk of them being rendered invisible in androcentrically organised societies. Without addressing the aforementioned inequalities and rebalancing priorities, sufficiency policies unintentionally reinforce gender imbalances.

Using the International Energy Agency's 10-Point Plan to cut oil consumption including sufficiency-oriented measures as a case study, this research applies a Gender Impact Assessment to identify gaps and biases. Overall, the 10-Point Plan reaches the level of "gender-negative", particularly as the care economy is consistently ignored and considered to be leisure time with a lower priority than the productive economy regarding access to limited resources. Furthermore, it lacks any transformative perspective towards sustainability, but reproduces car dependency.

Combined with multivariate analyses of survey data from four European countries, this research highlights how micro-level behaviors interact with structural conditions. Findings stress the need for transformative policies that empower households, especially caregivers, by providing resources and infrastructure to enable sustainable lifestyles without overburdening individuals or exacerbating inequalities.