

Socio-Economic Challenges to Work-Life Balance at Times of Crisis: Lessons from Europe

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The Logic of Austerity

- Language of exceptionalism
- Employment rights, welfare rights etc. secondary to “higher” economic and political imperatives

Invisibility of gender in mainstream accounts of crisis & austerity

- Focus of current debates:
 - Short & long term impact on financial markets
 - Economic governance/ECB & national central banks
 - Austerity & the rise of Euroscepticism/populist parties
- Gender analyses of crisis and austerity remain ghettoized
 - Work-Life Balance increasingly sidelined

Feminist critiques of the austerity & crisis have produced a detailed assessment of the gendered nature of economic governance

Some of the key findings relate to:

- Representation
- Male biased neo-liberal economic structures
- Unequal divisions of labour
- Policy myopia and gender blindness

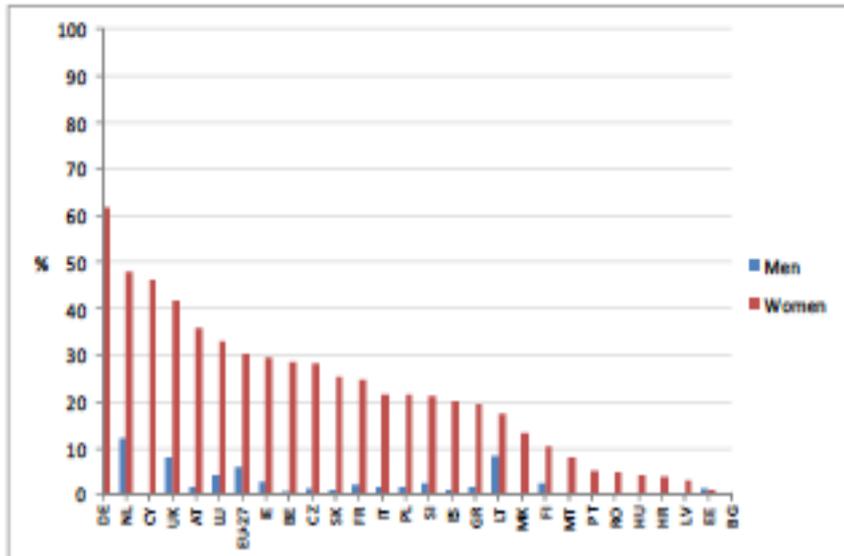
“The recent economic crisis has no precedent in our generation. The steady gains in economic growth and job creation witnessed over the last decade have been wiped out – our GDP fell by 4% in 2009, our industrial production dropped back to the levels of the 1990s and 23 million people - or 10% of our active population - are now unemployed. The crisis has been a huge shock for millions of citizens and it has exposed some fundamental weaknesses of our Economy” (European Commission, Europe 2020)

The Adult Worker Model

Daly (2011)

- Individualisation of social policy
- Commodification of care
- Continued familism
- Dual earner & gender specialised models

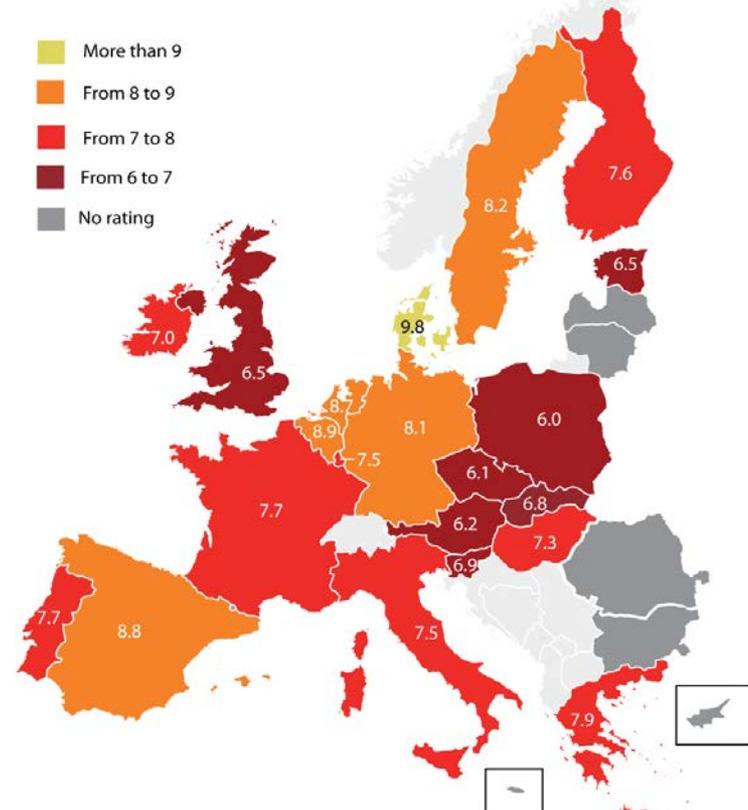
Figure 3: Percentage of men and women who have reduced their working hours to take care of the youngest child in the household (up to 8 years old), individuals aged 20 to 49



Source: LFS 2010 Ad hoc module

Giullari & Lewis

- EU policy linking social and economic policy
- OMC
- Activation



Focus on working mothers

- Economic dimension
 - Cost of non-equality
 - Provision of childcare, family-friendly policies etc
- Social dimension
 - Impact of working mothers on the well being of children, the family etc.

Persistence of gender ideologies



Key question that underpins public debate:

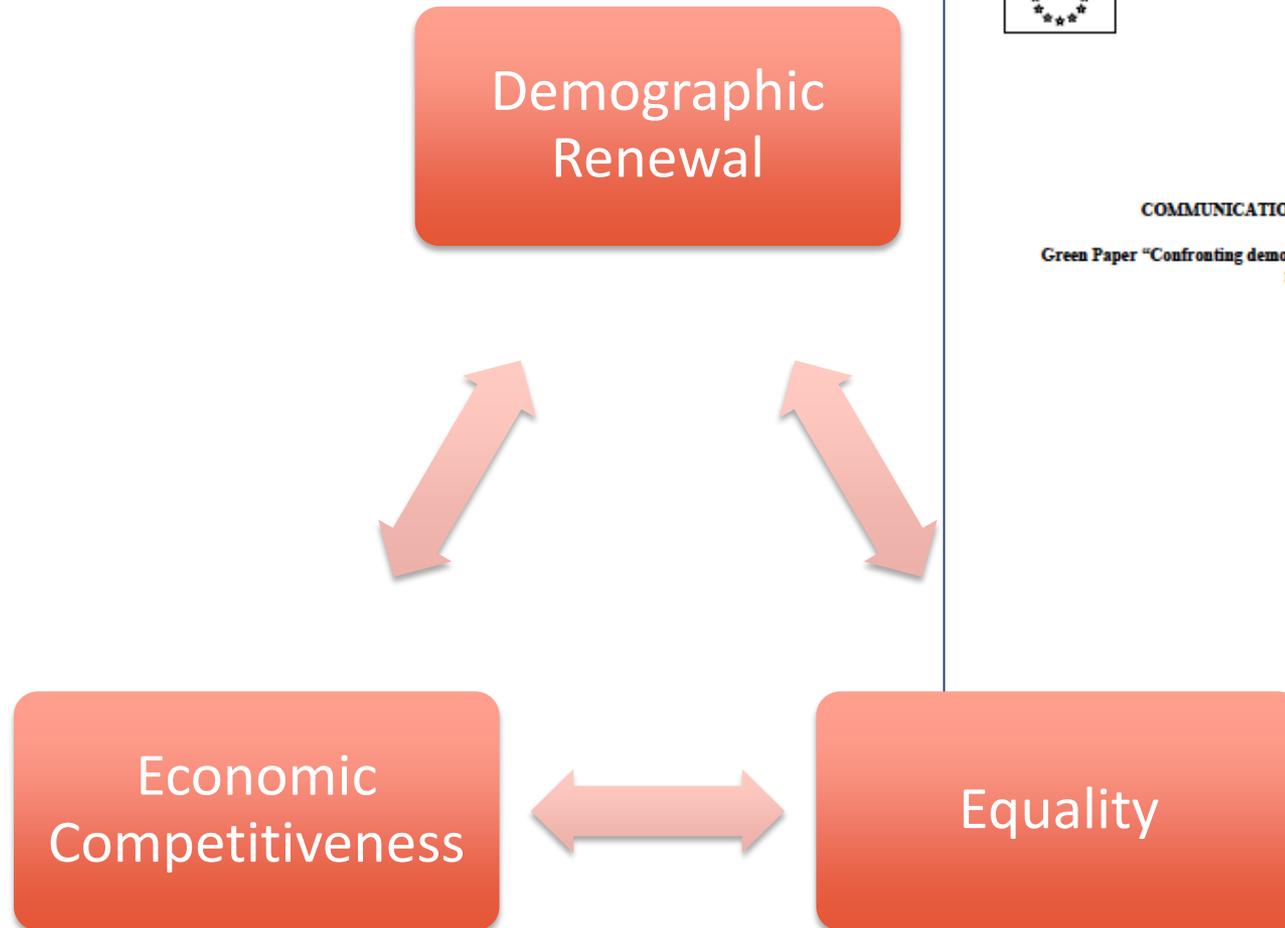
Can women have it all (in the context of austerity)?

Assumptions that are starting to emerge from public discourse

- Women are (and should be) the primary carers
- Participation in the labour market is something new and thus secondary



Challenges for Europe → Reconciling competing agendas



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 16.3.2005
COM(2005) 94 final

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION

Green Paper "Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations"

A key player in the development of women's employment rights

HOWEVER, neo-liberal focus of the European equality agenda has failed to challenge dominant power structures

MOREOVER, economic rationalities used to “justify” or “promote” women's employment rights not applicable at times of crisis/austerity

Focus of dominant discourse on equality:

- The cost of NON-EQUALITY
- Arguments framed within the neo-liberal paradigm

Key issue in the context of austerity:

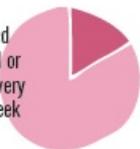
- Is this discourse/narrative still viable when European leaders are faced with “higher” economic and political priorities?

EUROPEAN RECONCILIATION PACKAGE

2014: YEAR OF RECONCILING WORK AND FAMILY LIFE IN EUROPE

RECONCILING FOR CARERS

13% of Europeans aged 50-64 care for a disabled or elderly family member every day or several times a week



RECOMMENDATION

The European Commission should initiate a Recommendation on the recognition of family and informal carers and for the adoption of provisions recognizing their legal status in Member States.

80% of care work in Europe is provided by informal carers.



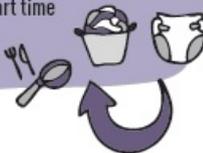
WOMEN AT WORK

Average gender pay gap in the EU **16%**

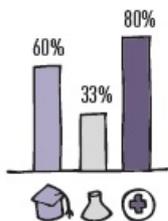
Average gender pension gap in the EU **39%**



The unequal share of unpaid work in the family has a direct impact on gender segregation, because women still adjust their working arrangements considering their caring responsibilities. They are more likely to take leaves, work part time or withdraw from the labour market.

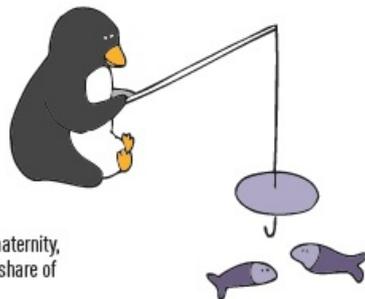


Nearly 60% of EU university graduates are women, but they account for less than 33% of scientists and engineers across Europe, yet represent nearly 80% of the total workforce in the health, education and welfare sectors.



RECOMMENDATION

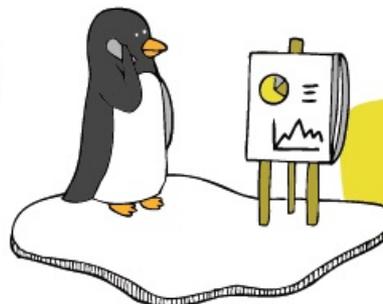
The EU should adopt a coherent legislative package including maternity, paternity, parental and carers' leaves, to promote a more equal share of care responsibilities between women and men.



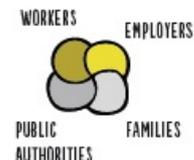
RECONCILING AT THE WORKPLACE

Less than half of the European workforce has flexibility in working hours (Eurofound EQLS 2012)

43%



In order to create a reconciliation friendly environment, all stakeholders must be involved in shaping legislative and practical initiatives.

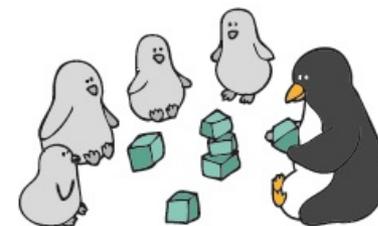


RECOMMENDATION

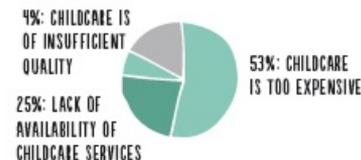
Reconciliation policies are not a "one-solution-fits-all" type of policies and companies should elaborate and introduce adapted instruments to fulfil the specific needs of the workers and of the company, according to its size and sector.

CHILDCARE, EDUCATION AND PARENTING

Almost **60%** of parents identifies availability (waiting lists, lack of services) as a difficulty concerning the usage of childcare in the EU27.



Across the EU, women reported that they do not work or work part-time because...



RECOMMENDATION

In addition to guaranteeing a legal right to a childcare place for all children after the end of the Leave period, there is the need for a childcare policy that supports the diversity of types of provision and is flexible enough to be able to reflect the real lives of the families who rely on these services locally.

Policy Initiative	Targets	Implementation Measures
Lisbon Agenda (2000)	60% Female Employment by 2010	
Barcelona Targets (2002)	90% of 3 year olds+ in formal childcare 33% of under 3s in formal childcare	
European Roadmap (2005-2010)	Reaching the Lisbon targets	Flexible working; better care policies; RBWFL
Framework Strategy (2010-2015)	Economic Independence	Assess gaps in family related leave & childcare
European Pact for Gender Equality (2011-2020)	Promote better work-life balance	Increase availability & quality of childcare. Meet Barcelona targets
Europe 2020	75% Female Employment by 2020	
New Start (2015)	Increase women' participation	Replace 2008 proposal for a revised Pregnant Worker Directive

Economic imperatives given higher priority

- Fawcett case against the UK government 2010
- ILO study (2010) Public Sector Adjustment in Europe
 - disproportionate impact on women employed in the public sector
- The impact of the cuts
 - Female unemployment
 - Public sector cuts have disproportional effect on women → increase pay disparities because Public Sector has highest level of pay parity.
 - Cuts in childcare services

Austerity and Euro crisis are crystallising the distinction between high and low politics

- Equality firmly placed at the lower end of the spectrum
- Undermine both Lisbon Agenda and Barcelona Targets

Working mothers emerging as acceptable *collateral damage*

- Supported by dominant gender ideologies and discourses about mothering.
- European governments may well decide to abandon austerity, but the impact on gender equality will outlast the crisis.