FEPS

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What impact have post-crisis public policies had on gender equality in EU member states?

Case studies of Poland, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom

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FEPS YOUNG ACADEMICS NETWORK

The Young Academics Network (YAN) was established in March 2009 by the Foundation of European Progressive Studies (FEPS) with the support of the Renner Institut to gather progressive PhD candidates and young PhD researchers, who are ready to use their academic experience in a debate about the Next Europe. The founding group was composed of awardees of the "Call for Paper" entitled "Next Europe, Next Left" – whose articles also help initiating the FEPS Scientific Magazine "Queries". Quickly after, with the help of the FEPS member foundations, the group enlarged – presently incorporating around 30 outstanding and promising young academics.

FEPS YAN meets in the Viennese premises of Renner Institut, which offers great facilities for both reflections on the content and also on the process of building the network as such. Both elements constitute mutually enhancing factors, which due to innovative methods applied make this Network also a very unique project. Additionally, the groups work has been supervised by the Chair of the Next Left Research Programme, Dr. Alfred Gusenbauer – who at multiple occasions joined the sessions of the FEPS YAN, offering his feedback and guidance.

This paper is one of the results of the fourth cycle of FEPS YAN, (the first one ended with three papers in June 2011, the second one led to five papers in spring 2013, while the third one saw the publication of six papers), in which nine key themes were identified and were researched by FEPS YAN working groups. These topics encompass: *"From class struggle to struggling with class*"; "*Are e-learning platforms a promising way forward for social cohesion?*"; "*Monetary v. economic policy: A bug in the Maastricht design?*"; "*Why the Left needs Europolitics*"; "*What impact have post-crisis public policies had on gender equality in EU member states*?"; *"Capital and labour in the post-crisis European context";* "*Promoting labour rights and social protection in post-crisis Europe*"; "*EU asylum and migration policy – Towards an integrative approach to equality*" and "*Renewable democracy: towards full participation through representation deliberation*". Each of the meetings is an opportunity for the FEPS YAN to discuss the current state of their research, presenting their findings and questions both in the plenary, as also in the respective working groups. The added value of their work is the pan-European, innovative, interdisciplinary character – not to mention, that it is by principle that FEPS wishes to offer a prominent place to this generation of academics, seeing in it a potential to construct alternative that can attract young people to progressivism again. Though the process is very advanced already, the FEPS YAN remains a Network – and hence is ready to welcome new participants.

FEPS YAN plays also an important role within FEPS structure as a whole. The FEPS YAN members are asked to join different events (from large Conferences, such as FEPS "Call to Europe" or "Renaissance for Europe" and PES Convention to smaller High Level Seminars and Focus Group Meetings) and encouraged to provide inputs for publications (i.e. for FEPS Magazine "Queries"). Enhanced participation of the FEPS YAN Members in the overall FEPS life and increase of its visibility remains one of the strategic goals of the Network.

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Executive summary

Gender equality is a key tenet of the progressive agenda in Europe. Developing and adopting policies aimed at reducing the gaps between men and women is not just a good in of itself, but also for the future economic and social development of our societies. To this end, our paper explores the gendered consequences of the public policies which have been pursued across EU countries in the years since the economic crisis. The paper takes a comparative approach in which it analyses four case studies: the United Kingdom, Spain, Sweden and Poland. In so doing, the paper first conducts an overview of the common gender dimensions to the policy processes that have been pursued across the EU. Second, from a gender equality standpoint, it examines the extent to which the distinct welfare regimes in each of these cases have followed different trajectories of both the crisis and the post-crisis policy response. Third, it argues that the economic and social policies developed and implemented in at least three of the case studies that we examine in this paper, have resulted in increased levels of gender inequality in some of the analysed areas. This, in turn, is detrimental to efforts to combat the financial and fiscal crisis. Finally, the paper offers recommendations to be adopted at the EU level in order to counterbalance these gendered outcomes.

Key words: gender, crisis, reforms, public policy, equality

Introduction

The financial crisis of 2008, followed by the long-lasting and continuing fiscal crisis, has challenged the budgets of many European governments. Some of which decided to resort to profound budget cuts that covered most areas of public life, including health care, education, social policy and labour. Others, despite quick economic recovery, decided to use the crisis as pretence for the retrenchment of the welfare state. Still others opted for mild cuts in an already relatively gender-friendly environment. At the same time, there are countries that did not go through the post-2008 crisis in a sense that their economies did not slow down more than expected during a regular economic cycle.

Whilst the European Union is perhaps one of the most progressive regimes in the world in terms of gender equality, this is not necessarily reflected in outcomes for women in Europe: gender gaps persist across Europe and have worsened in some countries. A gender equal society is a just society, and as such is a key tenet of the progressive movement. This paper is written at a time when the EU and its member states are faced with a choice between public policies that further entrench inequality between men and women, or enable equality.

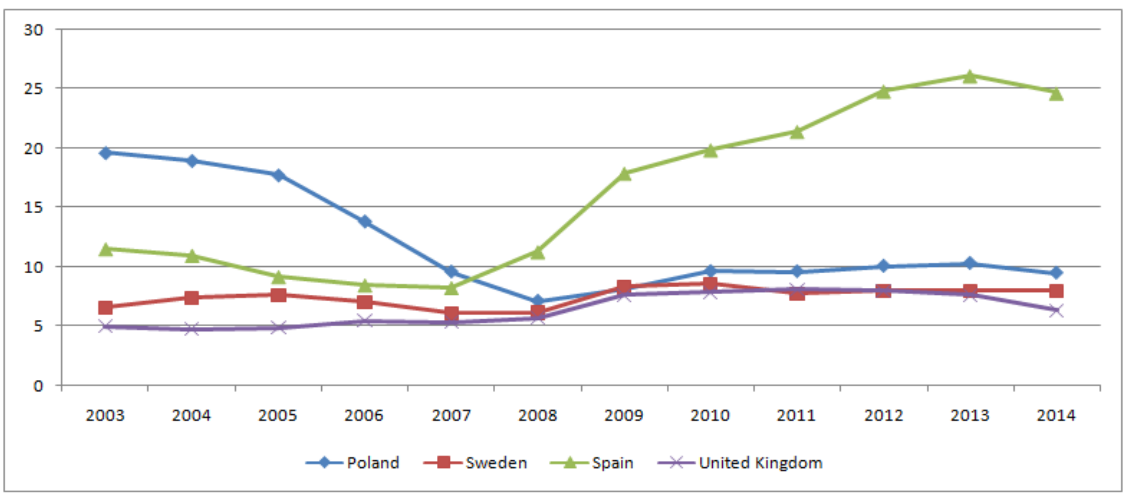
This paper analyses the gendered impact of public policies adopted as a response to the recent global crisis, including welfare, social policy, public sector, and labour market reforms that have been pursued in EU member states since 2008. The analysis is centred on four country case studies: the United Kingdom, Spain, Sweden and Poland. Its goal is to investigate how distinct economies and, more broadly, European welfare systems have been adapted since the crisis, and what role public policies can play in the pursuit for gender equality in Europe.

The countries selected for analysis have had diverse public policy strategies and faced distinct challenges with respect to their economic, social, political and demographic backgrounds. In this we address whether the social and economic consequences of the crisis have had significant impact on the situation of women vis-a-vis men, and whether there exists a significant interplay between welfare regime and public policy outcomes affecting gender equality. Our state-level analyses do not follow the same organising scheme, nor discuss precisely the same areas of reform across all cases. Therefore, individual country chapters discuss the gendered impacts of a wide range of public policies that have been implemented as a response to the crisis. The paper is structured as follows: section one presents arguments behind the choice of cases accompanied by a brief discussion of mainstream welfare regime typologies and their feminist critiques. Subsequently, we present a statistical overview of the impacts of post-crisis public policies on gender equality in the EU member states. The following four sections provide a detailed analysis of our four case studies: the UK, Spain, Sweden and Poland respectively. The final two sections of the paper offer our concluding remarks and a set of recommendations for EU- and national-level policy makers.

1. Case Study Rationale

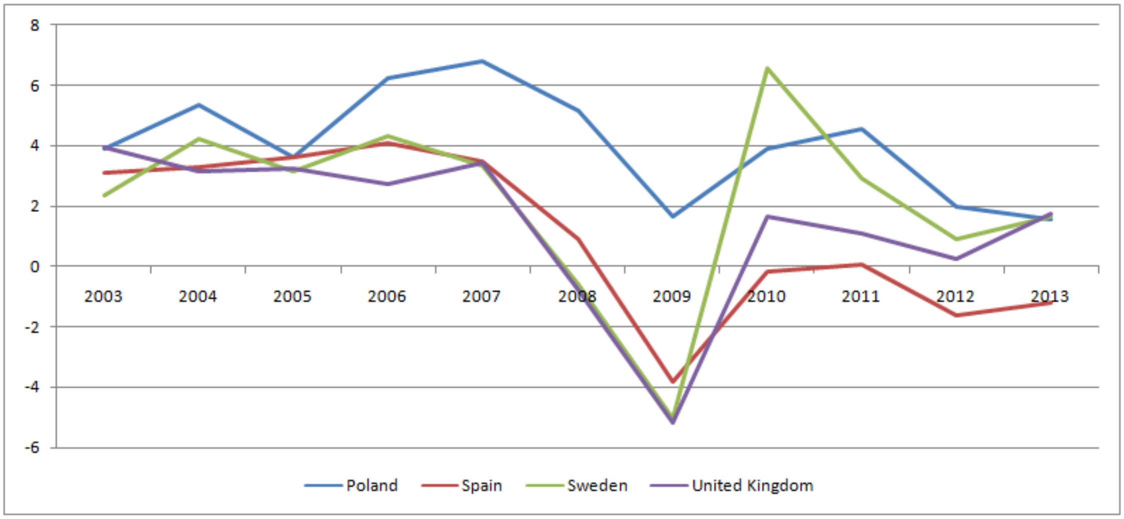
The four countries chosen for a comparative analysis reflect four different trajectories of both the crisis and post-crisis public policy responses. The chosen countries have shown very different levels of vulnerability to the financial crisis. Spain has emerged as the single hardest-hit country among the four. Sweden and the United Kingdom have shown some mild-to-medium signs of the crisis. Poland has fared economically better after the crisis than before it in terms of unemployment, (Figure 1) and only slightly worse in terms of economic growth (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Pre-crisis and post-crisis levels of unemployment in Poland, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom (2003-2014)



Source: figure prepared using data from IMF World Economic Outlook Database (2014)

Figure 2. Pre- and post-crisis levels of economic growth in Poland, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom (2003-2014), percentages.



Source: figure prepared using data from IMF World Economic Outlook Database (2014)

Equally important to this analysis – and further justifies the selection of cases – is that the four EU member states represent distinct welfare regimes. Since the publication of Esping-Andersen's seminal *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990), there have been attempts to extend his original triumvirate of 'liberal-conservative-social democratic' regimes. These extensions have been aimed at addressing some significant differences between the countries clustered within a single regime type (most notably 'conservative/continental') and to 'universalize' the typology by enabling the incorporation of countries that were not originally considered (most notably the emerging democracies of the post-Soviet bloc).

With respect to the former attempt, Ferrara (1996) argued that there exists a 'Southern model' of welfare in Europe, encompassing Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece, while Gal (2010) proposed to also include Cyprus, Israel, Malta and Turkey in a broader 'Mediterranean regime'. Regarding the post-communist Central and Eastern European countries, Fenger (2007) designed a six-item typology which involved 'Former-USSR type' and 'Post-Communist European type' of welfare state.

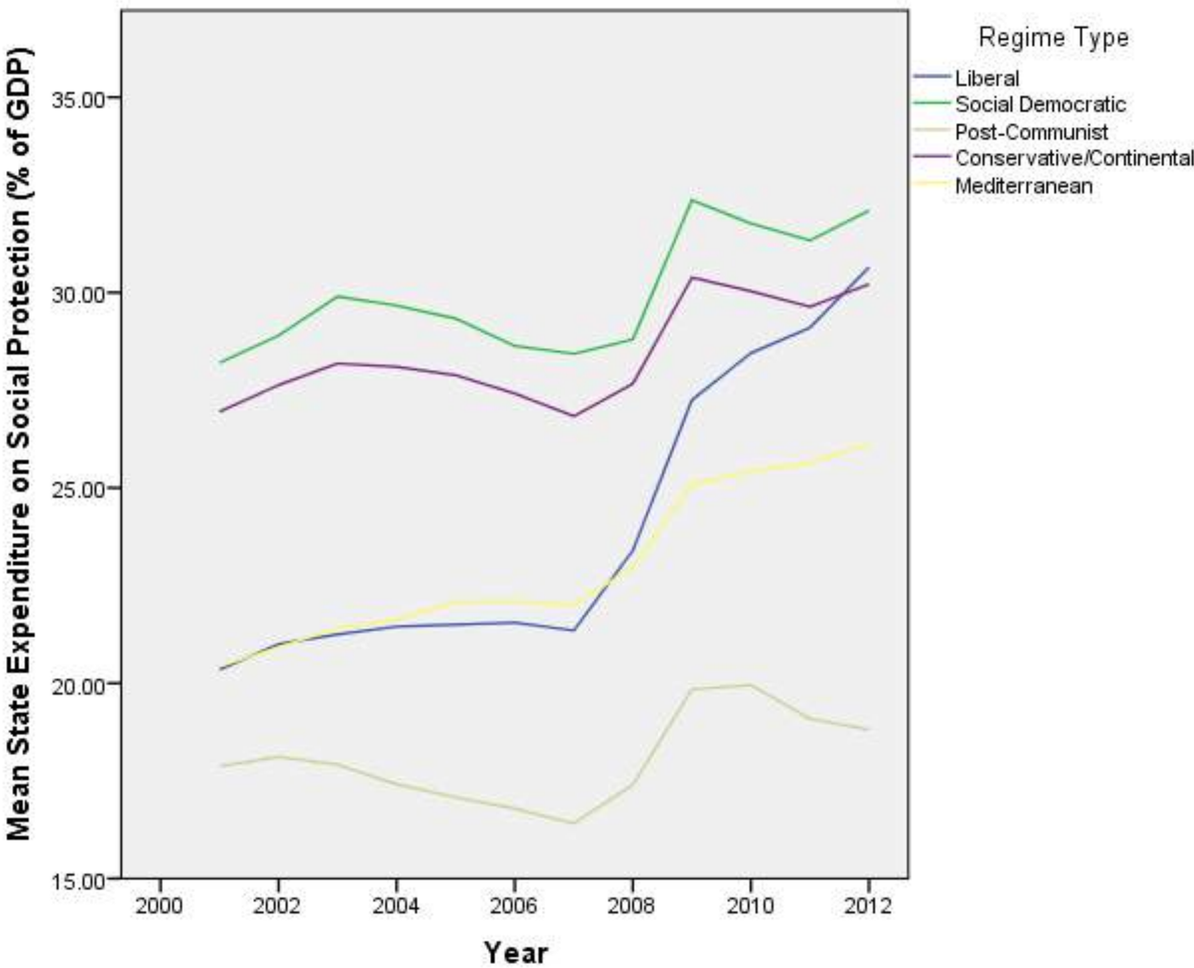
These ‘standard’ typologies have also been criticised from many gendered perspectives (see Arts and Gelissen 2002 for an overview, also Lewis 1992, Sainsbury 1996). Firstly, for not accounting for the male bias inherent in the analyses that do not consider the public-private divide as the research lacks appropriate recognition of the role the family plays in the provision of care and welfare. Secondly, these typologies do not address the degree to which women are excluded or included in the labour market, as emphasised by the perspective of social and economic citizenship. Bearing this in mind, it has to be stressed that no comprehensive “gendered welfare regime typology”, encompassing at least 5 major groups of countries analysed in this paper, has so far been developed. Therefore, our analysis builds on the heritage of mainstream ‘welfare regime studies’ but is enriched by critical developments in the study of gender and the welfare state.

2. Overview of the impacts of post-crisis public policies on gender equality in the EU member states

This section aims to situate the four chosen case studies in the context of the EU as a whole, through an overview of the impacts of post-crisis welfare reforms on gender equality in the EU member states. The overview will demonstrate the effect of the financial crisis in various welfare regimes, and the impact of changes in public policy on gender equality within these states. In this analysis, the member states are divided into the five welfare regime categories previously identified: liberal, social democratic, post-communist, conservative/continental, and Mediterranean (see Appendix 1 for details of the classification). Whilst the detailed case studies will provide evidence of the varied effects of post-crisis public policies, this overview will give a broad view of the effects of welfare reform across the 28 EU member states within these public policy regime categories.

As demonstrated in Figure 3, there is a remarkable difference in the state expenditure on social protection in each of these types of welfare regime. This spending includes: social benefits (including transfers in cash or kind), administration costs, and miscellaneous costs (Eurostat 2015a). As anticipated, the social democratic welfare regimes spend the most on social protection (as a percentage of GDP), whilst the post-communist regimes spend substantially less than the rest of their European counterparts. The peaks in expenditure on social protection as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) between 2008 and 2011 are largely due to the corresponding dips in GDP for each of these welfare regime types during this period (see Appendix 2). A reduction in GDP during this time leads to an increase in social protection expenditure as a percentage of GDP. Figure 3 demonstrates the variation that exists within the EU on social protection spending, for each of the five welfare regime categories.

Figure 3. Mean State Expenditure on Social Protection as % of GDP (2001-2012)



Source: figure prepared using data of Eurostat (2015e). Countries are grouped into regimes according to the table in Appendix 1.

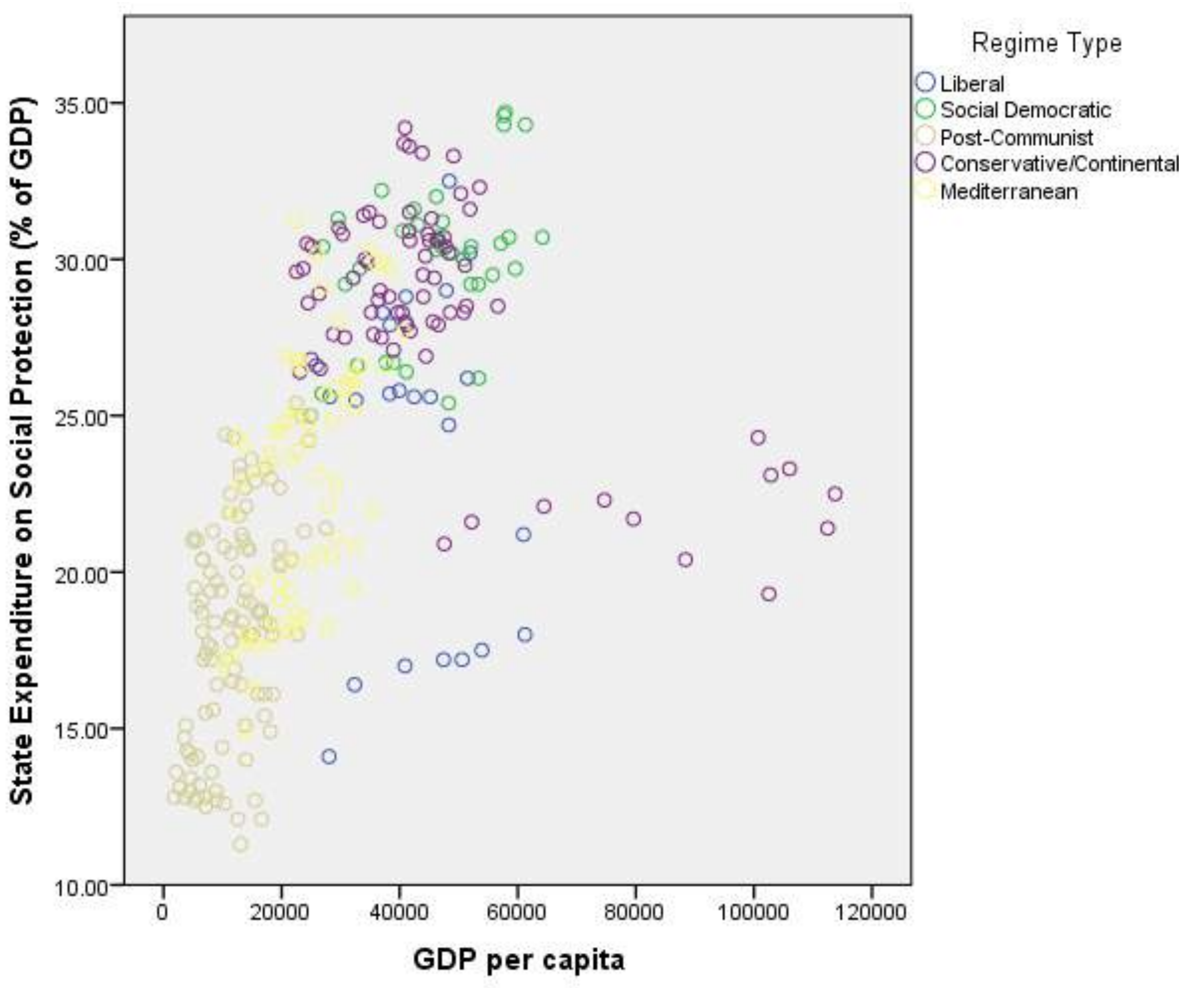
Moreover, Figure 4 demonstrates that, when the element of time is removed, GDP per capita has a strong correlation with state expenditure on social protection[1] (Eurostat 2015b). It is also the case that social democratic regimes with relatively high GDP spend a greater percentage of GDP on social protection, whereas post-communist welfare regimes with low GDP per capita spend less on social protection. It is possible that reductions in GDP per capita, as a result of the economic crisis will have a

[1] The outliers shown here, with GDP per capita values above $70,000 are all data points for Luxembourg which has a small population and large GDP.

[2] At the time of publication the Conservative Party have secured a majority government. The roll out of the welfare

negative effect on state expenditure on social protection. This paper seeks to investigate whether the effects of public policy reforms, as a result of the post-2008 financial crisis, are different for male and female European citizens.

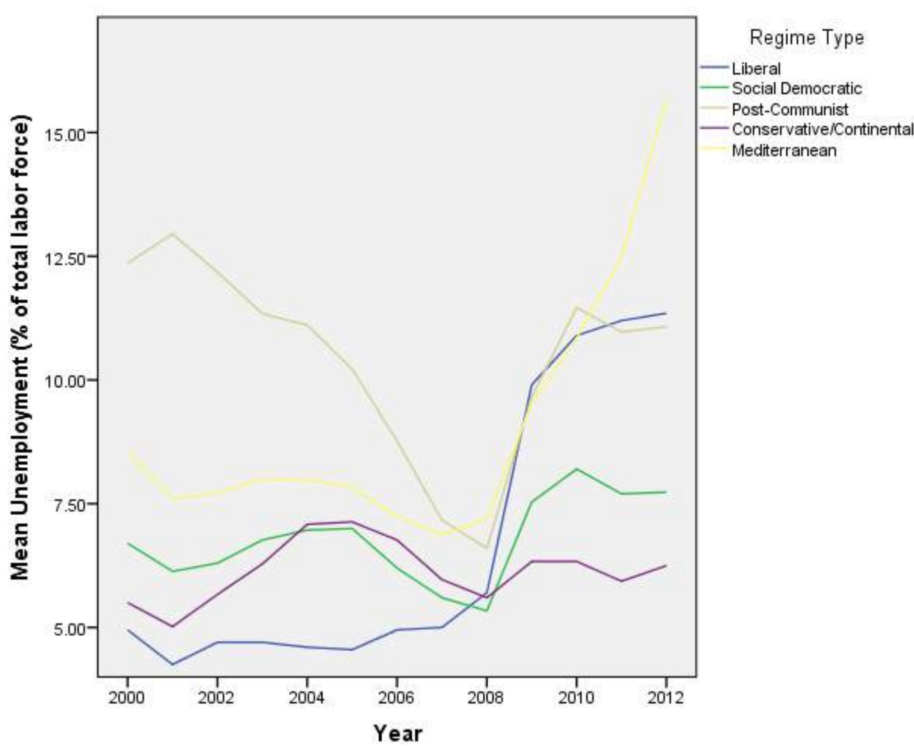
Figure 4. State expenditure on social protection as a % of GDP against GDP per capita



Source: figure prepared with data of World Bank (2015). Countries are grouped into regimes according to the table in Appendix 1.

In order to examine the differential effects of public policies on men and women this analysis will now turn to several outcomes of the financial crisis, grouping the EU member states based on the five welfare regime categories. The first of these outcomes are the unemployment rates within each of these five groups of countries. Figure 5 represents the mean unemployment, as a percentage of the labour force, for each welfare regime categorisations over time (World Bank 2015a). Each category of welfare regime exhibits a reduction in unemployment during the 'boom' period of 2006-2007. However, unemployment increases dramatically in the aftermath of the 2008 recession. As expected, there is a strong relationship between economic downturn and an increase in unemployment levels.

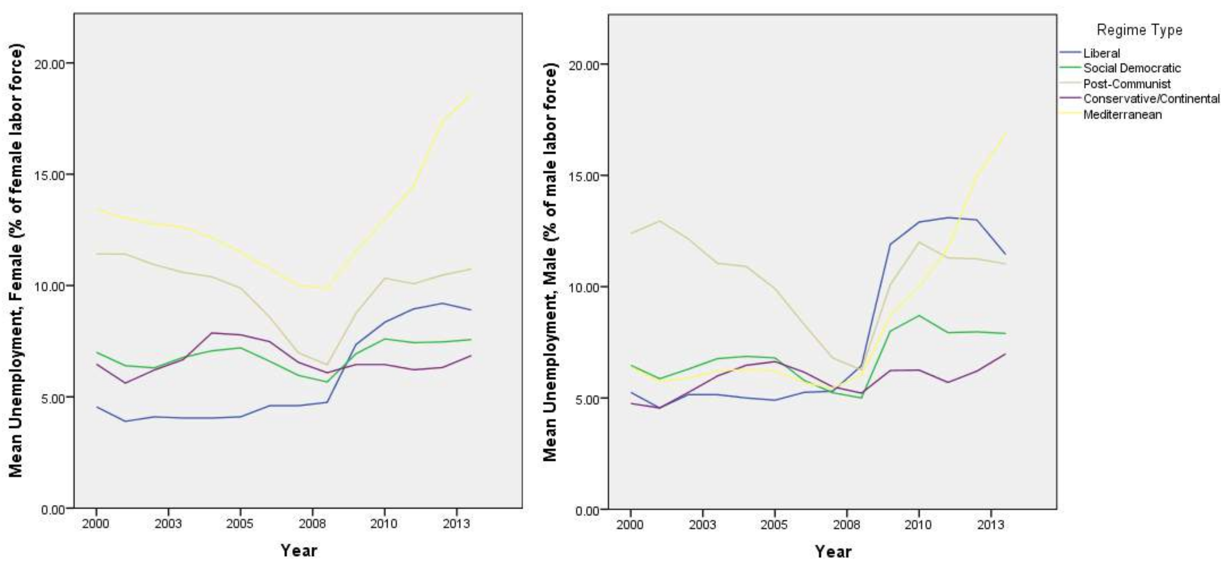
Figure 5. Mean unemployment as % of total labour force by regime type (2000-2012)



Source: figure prepared using data of World Bank (2015). Countries are grouped as shown in the table in Appendix 1.

The gender differences in unemployment rates over time are revealed in Figure 6 (World Bank 2015b, c). This trend is particularly interesting in the case of the Mediterranean welfare regimes, which have the highest levels of post-crisis unemployment for both men and women. Whilst the pattern of unemployment over time is similar for both men and women in these countries, the rates of unemployment female unemployment are higher at all point of time between 2000 and 2014. This may be observed due to the effects of financial pressures on the household. As household financial pressures increase, and welfare reforms take effect, the role of the man in work may be prioritised (European Parliament 2013:15). This is especially the case where childcare costs are increased, or subsidies removed: in periods of financial hardship, the traditional role of woman-as-carer affects conceptions of the necessity of their role as breadwinner. Whereas, there are relatively more men than women in unemployment across this time period in the post-communist welfare regimes. The social democratic welfare regimes exhibit the smallest gender differentiation in unemployment (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010).

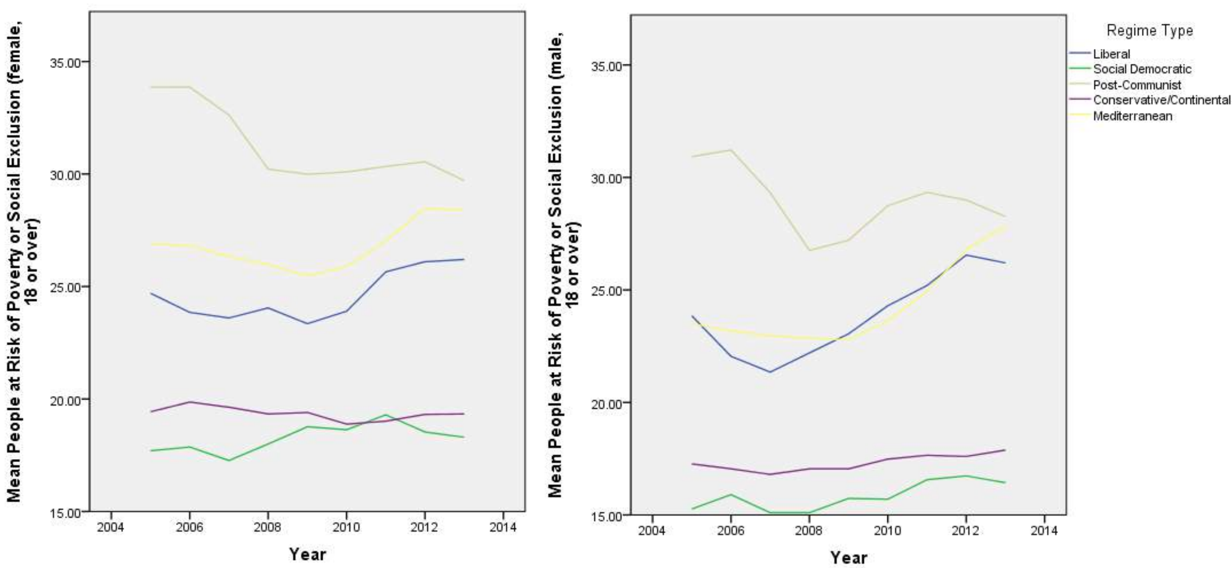
Figure 6. Mean unemployment of men and women by regime type (2000-2013)



Source: figure prepared with data of World Bank (2015). Countries are grouped into regimes according to the table in Appendix 1.

Secondly, this overview turns to another indicator of post-crisis welfare regimes: the risk of poverty or social exclusion (Eurostat 2015c, d). From Figure 5 it is clearly identified that women are more likely to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion in all 5 of the welfare regime types across the EU. This is also the case across the whole time period of 2005-2013. The patterns of note to this investigation, however, lie in the variation between the types of welfare regimes. The social democratic welfare regimes demonstrate the lowest levels of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, yet the values for women remain substantially higher. The conservative/continental regimes show the least post-crisis change in the risk of social exclusion for both men and women, whilst the Mediterranean regimes show the greatest change post-crisis. The post-communist classification actually made post-crisis improvements for men and women.

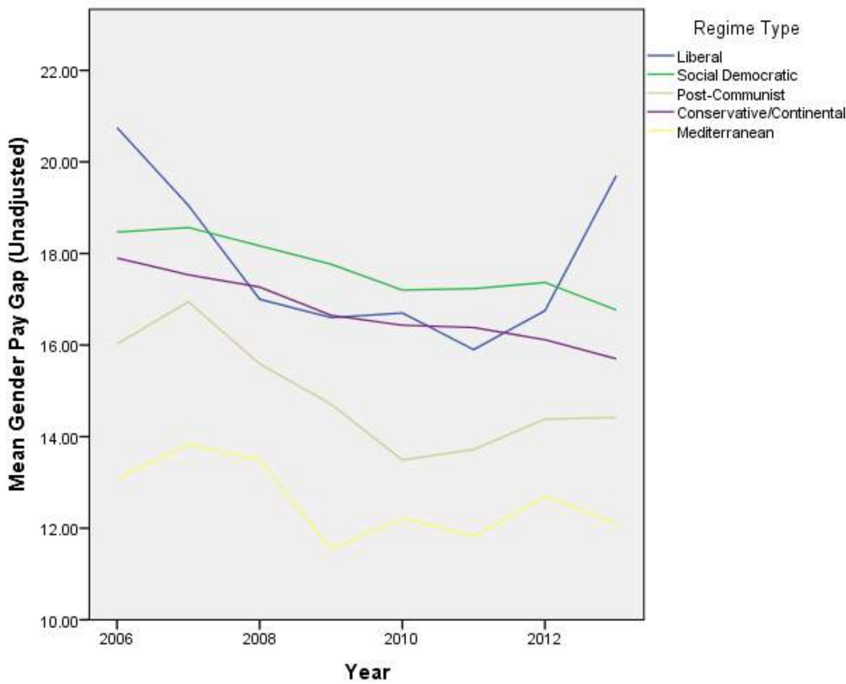
Figure 7. People at risk of poverty or social exclusion, by gender



Source: figure prepared using data of Eurostat (2015). Countries are grouped into regimes according to the table in Appendix 1.

The final attribute related to the effect of welfare reforms on gender equality in the EU member states is the gender pay gap in each country (Eurostat 2015e). Figure 8 demonstrates the variation in the gender pay gap, as categorised by the welfare regime typologies, where a larger value for the pay gap represents greater disparity in pay between men and women. The remarkable trend identified in this figure is the dramatic increase in pay inequality within the liberal welfare regimes (the UK and Ireland) between 2011 and 2013, even if this trend reversed by the end of 2014. This graph demonstrates that the liberal welfare regimes have a significant problem with post-crisis pay inequality. Furthermore, the post-communist regimes have experienced a significant decline in the gender pay gap. This progressivity is reflected in each of the regime types, except the liberal welfare states.

Figure 8. Unadjusted gender pay gap by welfare regime (2006-2012)



Source: figure prepared using data of Eurostat (2015). Countries are grouped into regimes according to the table in Appendix 1.

The overview has demonstrated the utility of the categorisations employed in this paper in the examination of the effects of the economic crisis on gender equality in the EU member states. This analysis has further identified the EU-wide effects of the financial crisis on welfare regimes, and the potential gendered implications of welfare reforms. The clear relationship between GDP and social spending exemplifies the effect of the financial crisis on public policy budgets, which has affected all EU citizens. However, public policy reforms have had different effects on unemployment, poverty and remuneration for men and women. The crisis has had the most substantial effect on women, who struggle with a remuneration gap and an increased risk of poverty and social exclusion. The detailed case studies will now explore the effects of post-crisis welfare reforms on gender equality.

3. Case Study I: United Kingdom

This case study examines the exacerbation of gender inequality through austerity-driven cuts to the public sector and welfare spending introduced by the 2010 to 2015 Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government (herein referred to as the coalition government)[2]. Whilst the Big Society[3] agenda all but disappeared from the government's rhetoric, the ideological and gender-blind drive to slash public spending through cuts to the public sector – where the majority of women are employed – and social security – which makes up a fifth of women's income, twice as much as men's – is very much alive and well.

Over the last three decades, there has been a shift away from the male breadwinner model upon which the British welfare state was founded (MacLeavy, 2011). Changes to the family structure and a shift towards a post-industrial economy have encouraged larger numbers of women in formal labour market. Subsequently, there has been an expansion of social insurance and protection – such as the inclusion of statutory maternity and child care benefit payments. However, whilst expansion of the welfare state has facilitated greater entry into the labour market for women, barriers to their employment and equal pay persist. A striking illustration of this trend is research that shows over half of women in employment are in temporary jobs or on zero hour contracts in the UK (TUC, 2015).

Whilst the male breadwinner model has somewhat rescinded over-time, male full-time employment supported by a secondary – predominately female – wage has become the norm. It is against this backdrop that the coalition government has instigated the greatest retrenchment of the British welfare state in living memory through the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and successive budgets. This poses a risk of further engraining gender inequality in the UK.

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[2] At the time of publication the Conservative Party have secured a majority government. The roll out of the welfare reforms will continue as the government promise to reduce the working-age benefit bill by £12 billion.

[3] The senior party in the coalition government – the Conservatives – ran their 2010 election campaign on the idea of a 'Broken Britain'. They argued that the state had become too big and that public spending was out of control. Their ideologically-driven solution was to shrink the welfare state and replace it with the Big Society – ie. leave public services to the voluntary and informal care sectors.

Dismantling the Welfare State through 'Reform'

The Welfare Reform Act (2012) is the centrepiece of the overhaul of the social security system. The changes have been driven by four stated policy objectives: reducing the working-age welfare bill; simplifying the benefits system; protecting vulnerable people; and creating a system that incentivises work (DWP 2015).

These austerity-driven cuts to the welfare state have had wide ranging and damaging effects on people reliant on social security benefits[4]. Once fully implemented the reforms will remove £19 billion per year from the British economy, equating to an average of £470 per person every year (Beatty & Fothergill 2013). It is estimated that around 74% of the cuts to welfare will be taken from women's incomes (Fawcett Society, 2012).

Of the changes to the benefit system, this section will focus on Universal Credit, Child Benefits and Housing Benefits[5]. These changes are among the most significant in terms of their impact on women's income, access to work, and protection from (both physical and psychological) domestic violence[6]. An early analysis is provided below.

Universal Credit

In terms of gender equality, the most problematic reform to the benefits system is Universal Credit (UC). This flagship programme will amalgamate the means tested benefits in the UK into one single payment.

[4] A forthcoming report from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations has found that the most vulnerable people in society including people with mental health problems, the homeless, young people and newly approved refugees have been among the hardest hit by the reforms.

[5] Tax credits are state benefits that provide extra money to workers on low incomes and people responsible for children. There are two types of tax credits: child tax credits and working tax credits.

[6] Since this report was written there have been a number of reports on the additional pressures placed on women as a direct result of the welfare cuts. See for example, the Women's Budget Group - http://wbg.org.uk/economic-social-policy/other-social-security-2/, and the Fawcett Society who have produced a report on their inquiry into Women and Job Seeker's Allowance - http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Wheres-the-Benefit-An-Independent-Inquiry-into-Women-and-JSA.pdf

Whilst there has been limited investigation of its impact within the time frame of this research[7], we can offer an early analysis here.

The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) arguing that UC provides "an opportunity to promote equality with respect to employment and narrow the employment gap" between men and women. However, government and independent impact analyses demonstrate that the financial incentive for second earners to leave employment will increase under this new system (See DWP, 2011 and IFS, 2011).

As women is typically most likely to bear the brunt of informal care work in the household and is more likely to leave employment than her male partner. Therefore, UC seems best understood as a return to the male breadwinner model that the UK has, albeit not entirely successfully, moved away from (Fawcett, 2011). Despite the contribution this will make to financial inequality in households reliant on UC, the DWP argues 'that any such risk of decreased work incentives for women in couples is justified' (DWP 2011 p. 19).

Secondly, by paying the benefit on a monthly basis UC risks eroding low-income families' ability to budget effectively. DWP claim that paying the benefit on monthly basis 'mimics' the way that wages are paid. However, low-income earners are typically used to be paid fortnightly by their employers. There are concerns about the impact this dramatic change in income patterns will have on families on a tight budget. In particular, women are likely to bear the brunt of the impact given that in situations where money runs low in a household, women go without. In essence they become the "shock absorbers" of poverty (Fawcett, 2011).

The third, and perhaps the most concerning aspect of UC is that couple households will be required to make a joint submission for the benefit and only one person in the couple will receive the payment. Charities supporting victims of domestic violence have argued that this have affected many women's access to an individual income for children and for themselves as there is no guarantee that the income

[7] In February 2013 the UK's Major Projects Authority (MPA) review conducted a 13-week "reset" between February and May 2013. In the MPA's annual survey published in May 2014 Universal Credit continued to be listed as "reset" which means that the scale of the required changes set out rendered it a new project.

will be split fairly between both partners. In terms of financial independence and stable relationships, the approach that the coalition government is adopting ignores the power inequalities and intra-household distribution of power.

Child benefit

Prior to the welfare cuts, child benefit in the UK was a universal benefit paid to the main carer - predominantly the mother. The coalition has frozen the rate of child benefit resulting in a 10% cut in real terms by 2O14. For a family with one child this translates to a £180 reduction in income. Given that women sacrifice lifetime earnings to become primary caregivers when they have children, this benefit freeze has only increased this financial loss. Whilst the family as a whole will feel the reverberations, research shows that mothers in low income families will often forgo food, clothes and warmth in favour of their children and partners. Whilst the government argues that this reduction in income will somehow encourage more women to move into paid employment despite the fact that they have not made any move to break down existing structural barriers to secure employment for women, they have also reduced the level of childcare subsidisation from the state. Prior to the introduction of Universal Credit, the benefits and tax credits system covered 96% of childcare costs for many low-income working families (around 100,000 families). Under Universal Credit, this support will go down to 70% due to cuts in Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefits (Children's Society, 2012). This additional support will be lost. All those entitled will receive 70% of their childcare costs. This will leave some of the lowest income working families having to pay up to seven and a half times as much towards their childcare costs from their own pocket than they do under the current system.

As such, it remains financially unviable for mothers to enter the formal labour market and make up the shortfall in income created by the cut to child benefits. The Child Poverty Action Group has also identified the detrimental impact this cut will have on children: *"It's the extras like school trips which will have to go, extra-curricular activities that require payment. Very concerned that although these are considered luxuries, it is the basics that will suffer too. We are in debt now so it will only get worse" (*CPAG, 2012).

Housing benefit

When Housing costs are properly accounted for, poor people are worse off than they were in 2010 in absolute terms (Belfield et. al 2015). Whilst homeowners have benefited from a 20% reduction in housing costs, renters in the private sector are spending 28% of their income, a 2% increase between 2007/08 and 2012/13. Women make up 50% of recipients of housing benefit, the majority of which are single mothers. Due to the arbitrarily cap in housing benefit payments, 67,000 households will lose an average of £83 a week (DWP 2012). The NGO, Shelter, analysed official rent data and found that median rents in 55% of English local authorities are already unaffordable (Shelter, 2011). The cap therefore further prices single mothers out of their local area, a group for whom local social networks are particularly vital.

4. Case Study II: Spain

This case study will explore the austerity measures introduced by the Spanish government, since the election of Mariano Rajoy in November 2011, in response to the financial crisis and their impact on gender equality.

Prior to the November 2011 election in Spain, Zapatero's socialist government mainstreamed gender into the national and regional-level policies at the national and regional level (Alonso 2013). This was done through a number of measures including, but not limited to:

- the Equality Policies General Secretariat in 2004;
- the Equality Law 3/2007;
- the establishment of a higher rank Ministry of Equality in 2008 (Bustelo and Lombardo 2012);
- laws against gender violence (Law 1/2004);
- the Public care and Dependency Law (Law 39/2006);
- and gender equality in employment and other areas (Law 3/2007).

This trajectory changed in November 2011, with the election of the conservative Popular Party. In the name of "rationalisation", the new government introduced significant funding cuts across the public sector. This has had a particularly detrimental impact on women who are more likely to work in the public sector and are more reliant on welfare provision.

Cuts to health

In 2012 the government reduced benefits for carers looking after dependent relatives by 14-15% by removing support for non-professional carers and by limiting benefits for those that are considered severely disabled. As women are more likely to care for dependent relatives, this move has financially penalised women. To demonstrate, in 2011, 160,000 people were registered as non-professional caregivers in the social security system: more than 90% of them were women and a majority of them over the age of 45. After the 2012 reform, only 24,000 of them are still registered (Requena, 2012).

Health services have also born significant cuts. Since September 2012, the Spanish health-care system no longer provides universal medical coverage (Ruiz, 2014) which has, for example, resulted in preventive mammograms no longer being covered by health plans. The removal of universal medical coverage disproportionately impacts women and this will be further exacerbated by the current conservative government push to privatise the health-care system in its entirety.

Labour Market Reform

Current labour market reform is a major backwards step in effective social public policies from a gender perspective. The high unemployment rates and precarious jobs, most of them unstable and seasonal (building, agriculture, services), are sending Spanish women back home.

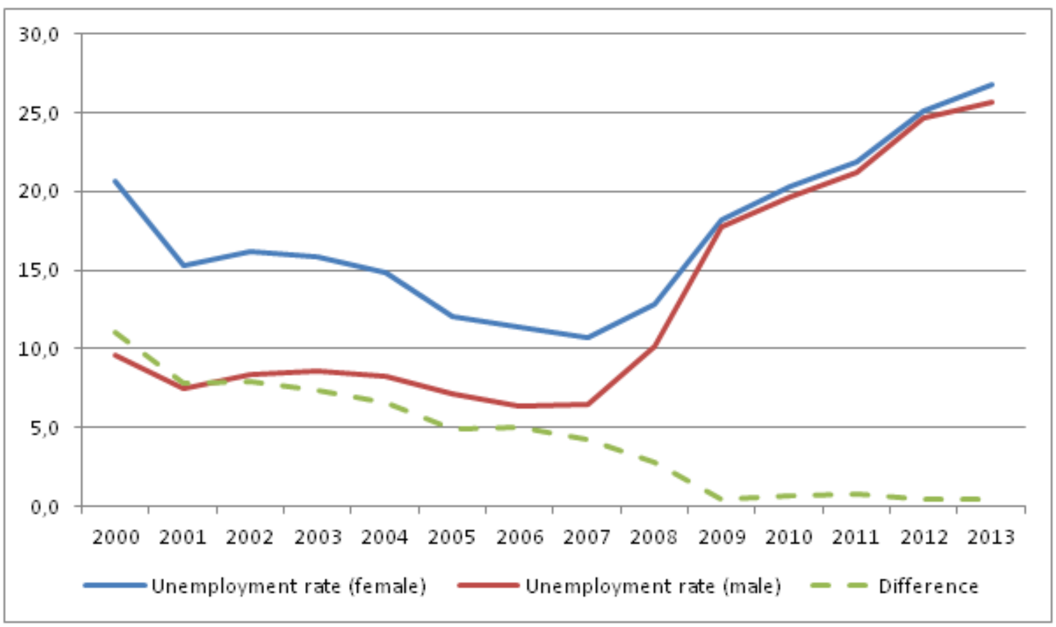
Although the collapse of the construction sector in the first five years of the financial crisis has affected traditionally masculine jobs the most (Gónzalez 2011), from 2010 onwards public sector adjustments negatively affected temporary employees, most commonly women. For the first time in 30 years, the female participation rate has decreased and the precarization of jobs is increasing. In 2014, the unemployment rate reached 26% (women 27.2%, men 25.5% and youth 54.6% EUROSTAT June 2014). There are 1,832,000 households where every family member is unemployed with 1,049,300 destroyed jobs (PSOE, 2014).

With the 2012 labour market reform, employers are given the opportunity to propose more "flexible" employment conditions without any collective agreements, increasing the precariousness of part-time contracts which are more prolific among women, and limiting worker's rights to care for the children or dependent relatives (Cavaghan, 2013).

The narrowing differences in women's and men's employment rates and patterns signify the deteriorating employment situation of both women and men (European Women's Lobby 2012). Furthermore, the precarious job situation is creating not only a gender gap but also an age gap. Figure 9 shows the problematic equalising effect of the crisis. Since 2008, the unemployment situation of both men and women has been systematically worsening, but the job losses have been much more rapid for men than for women leading to historically low gender gap in unemployment but at the cost of worse situation for both genders.

The government's education budget was cut by 31% in 2013 (PSOE, 2013). The impact of this cutback was especially hard on women with the closing of rural schools, the elimination of subsidies for meals and cuts to school transportation (Marea Lila, 2012). The results are predictable, women are suffering an "*enforced familialism*" leaving women's empowerment compromised.

Figure 9 Unemployment rates of men and women in Spain in percentage points (2000-2013).



Source: OECD (2015)

Dismantling opportunities and institutions

In January 2011, the socialist government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero approved a proposal to extend the paternity leave from two to four weeks (Bustelo 2009). Nevertheless, this equality measure was postponed in the name of austerity policies due to the arrival of the conservative power in parliament (Peterson 20119). The Spanish welfare state is based on a traditional division of gender roles which has increased the unequal system of parental leave regulations. Maternity leave grants mothers up to six mandatory and not transferable weeks, while fathers are entitled only to two weeks. This situation reaffirms the “female caregiver model” and “male breadwinner model” of social policies. The result is quite simple, it makes it almost impossible for Spanish women to be freed from the work of care (Ciccia and Verloo 2012).

Further restructuring justified with the austerity narrative was the decision of Rajoy's new elected government to relegate the historic Women's Institute (established by a socialist government in 1983) to an office at the new Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality. This new institutional structure replaces the State Secretariat for Equality for broad competencies Secretariat of Social Services and Equality fighting against all six grounds of discrimination that EU directives prescribed (sex, ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, age, and disability). These institutional changes represent a counter-trend in the Spanish path to the consolidation of women´s policy institutions (Lombardo 2013).

The Spanish response to the crisis following the neoliberal receipts supported by the Troika, have subordinated gender equality to “more urgent” economic priorities in line with the neoliberal agenda (Lombardo, 2013). In Spain, the consequences of EU and national austerity measures, fiscal consolidation packages and reforms for women are endangering previous progress towards gender equality by undermining vital employment and social welfare protections and de-prioritising gender equality (Karamessini, Rubery 2013). These consequences are more evident due the ineffective implementation of gender mainstreaming impact analyses in the Spanish reforms including employment, care and gender violence policies. These post-crisis changes in public policy have produced instability, lack of social cohesion and a return of women to traditional female positions (Allwood, Guerrina, and MacRae 2013).

5. Case Study III: Sweden

During the post-2008 crisis, unemployment in Sweden rose from 6% to 8% between 2007 and 2010 and the economy went into recession, contracting by 5% of GDP in 2009 (Starke et al 2011). However, the overall impact of the recent financial crisis has been weak compared to other EU member states. Swedish recovery was quick and successful: the economy re-entered the growth path already in 2010 (with 6% GDP rise in 2010).

When analysing the recent crisis and its impact on the Swedish welfare state, it is essential to take into consideration the previous global crisis of the early 1990s. It was in its aftermath when Sweden embarked on a wide-scale public finance reform which eventually helped the country to defend itself from more harmful consequences of the post-2008 downturn (Clasen 2010). But the reforms of the 1990s retrenched the Swedish welfare state, traditionally known for its generosity and universality. There were cuts to unemployment benefits, sick-leave benefits as well as parental leaves and other family policy measures which had disproportionate impact on the situation of women (Duvander 2012).

The influence of the recent global economic crisis on gender equality in Sweden has been limited when macro-level social indicators are concerned. For instance, Sweden represents the sole case of the lowered dependency rate for women between 2007 and 2009 (Bettio et al 2012). At the same time, despite the overall decreasing trend at EU level, Swedish women experienced 2.4 percentage point increase in income poverty between 2007 and 2011, while the same indicator for Swedish men decreased by 0.2. p.p. Similarly, in 2007, 10.6% of Swedish women were at risk of poverty and the number reached 14.3% in 2011 (the rise for men was only 0.9 p.p.). The picture becomes more complex when we consider unemployment rates between 2008 and 2012 which grew by 2 p.p. for men and remained relatively unchanged for women (EC 2012). The latter finding refutes the common perception of women as main “employment buffers” in times of economic slowdown and labour market disturbances, at least in the case of Sweden.

Family policy reforms and its impact on the situation of women in Sweden

Family policy is crucial in analysing the realization of gender equality principle in any society. Public policy aiming to support family has always been more concerned with mothers than fathers, while family policies in general tend to discriminate women more often than men due to the persistence of gender divisions of labour and the ascription of care roles predominantly to women.

Sweden has been traditionally recognized as the leading promoter of dual-earner model with extensive measures supporting defamilialization of care responsibilities. Since the 1970s, Sweden has invested heavily in public childcare and other measures devoted to the promotion of equality in the labour market, such as generous parental leave with significant number of weeks reserved for fathers. Although the official agenda has not changed significantly during the crisis, the former conservative-liberal government led by Fredrik Reinfeldt has been accused of diminishing the importance of gender equality principle in family policy (Larsson et al 2012).There has been more emphasis on 'family choice' in the provision of care services and less on the importance of supporting mothers into work. The most important reform introduced home care allowance that favours parents who prefer to look after children at home instead of utilising public childcare. There is significant body of evidence suggesting that financial incentives for parents staying at home to perform care duties tend to cement gender divisions of labour in paid and unpaid work (Ferrarini and Duvander 2009). Moreover, similar measures affect women disproportionately along the lines of class and ethnicity since women from immigrant backgrounds and those with lower educational attainment are more likely to be excluded from the labour market in result. Not only did the government allow for more 'choice' in childcare, but it did also in the area of elderly care where the principle of 're-familialization of care' has gained prominence.

The reforms of the Swedish conservative-liberal government during the crisis indicate some important, and sometimes overlooked, aspects of gender politics. While there may be no coherent evidence of a macro-scale quantitative worsening of the situation of women vis-à-vis men during the crisis, we can nevertheless identify some incremental changes leading to the curtailment of state responsibilities at the expense of individuals, and in this case, predominantly women. There is much to support the argument that the twin processes of privatization and re-familialization of welfare provision disproportionately affect women. Therefore, more research should be devoted to exploring the consequences of austerity measures and welfare recalibration on the situation women in the post-crisis context.

The male bias in financial packages to counteract the effects of crisis in Sweden

The Swedish government – like all EU member states – responded to the early economic downturn of 2008-2010 with economic stimulus packages to boost the growth of the economy. This has been within a larger frame of the European Economic Recovery Plan that aimed to stimulate demand, lessen the human cost of the economic downturn, and keep the European economy competitive (EC 2008).

The 2009 recovery plan of the Swedish government provided for more than 70 billion Swedish Crowns (equivalent of more than 6 billion Euro) on investments in road infrastructure, constructing industry, vehicle industry, creation of new jobs, vocational training, and support to municipalities (see Table below, adapted from Nyberg 2009).

Measure	Allocated spending (in EUR)
Male-dominated measures	
Special measures in the vehicle industry	2,55 bn
Guarantees during the construction period of buildings	1,82 bn
Tax deductions for repairs and rebuilding in private homes	0,32 bn
Maintenance of road and railroads	0,09 bn
Total	*4,75 bn*
Mixed measures	
"New-start jobs"	80 mln
Vocational training (mainly men) and adult education (mainly women)	45 mln

Total	*0,12 bn*
Female-dominated measures	
Support to the municipalities	*1,55 bn*

Source: Nyberg 2009

As the figures show, the financial stimulus package was unevenly divided between female- and male-dominated sectors, distinguished by Nyberg on the basis of numbers of employed men and women in those sectors of the Swedish economy. The government's economic recovery plan mainly focused on subsidies for 'heavy' industries, and only a small portion of public funding was directed to more gender-neutral areas of the labour market. The local government sector – where 4 in 5 employees are women – received some 30% of the sum spent on the vehicle and construction industries.

Therefore, an important conclusion is that although the immediate economic effects of the crisis in Sweden did not hit women much harder than men, the ensuing policy response to the crisis was patterned along gender lines, and might have had negative effect on the principle of equality between men and women which is, ostensibly, one of the core principles of the social democratic welfare state that Sweden has been promoting for decades (EP 2015a).

The Löfven government and the revival of feminist public policy in Sweden

The parliamentary elections in September 2014 brought about a change to the government with social democratic party returning to power and replacing the centre-right coalition after an 8-year rule. Stefan Löfven, the new prime minister who conducts a minority coalition government composed of Social Democrats (*Socialdemokraterna*) and the Greens (*Miljöpartiet*), proclaimed his cabinet to be a 'feminist government', and declared that efforts to improve gender equality will be among its top priorities[8]. Löfven announced also that Sweden will be committed to lead the EU agenda on gender equality. In the area of social policy, the new government makes an attempt to further de-familialize childcare by

[8] The Löfven Cabinet comprises 12 men (including Löfven himself) and 12 women (among the latter are: Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Minister of Foreign Affairs).

extending the non-transferable part of the parental leave from two to three months as of January 2016. As part of another important reform, also to be introduced in 2016, government is allocating resources specifically to evaluate and develop work with gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting. The Löfven government is also committed to combating gender pay gap and in doing so is planning to reintroduce annual pay surveys.

The Swedish case is thus a real-life example that there exist tangible differences between social democratic and conservative policies in the area of gender politics in the context of a mature, social-democratic welfare state, characterized by a well-embedded political consensus on the overarching principle of gender equality. Whereas Reinfeldt's conservative government officially upheld values of gender equality, the policy outcomes were inconsistent and lacked genuine tools to counteract economic processes that disadvantaged women in the aftermath of crisis. In this sense, Löfven's red-green coalition brings hope for, in substance, more comprehensive and, at the same time, progressive approach to gender politics. If successful, this reorientation should set an example at the EU-level as well.

6. Case Study IV: Poland

An analysis of Poland's welfare and its gender consequences should occur against a broader framework of rolling back the welfare state since 1989. Before its systemic transition, Poland was noted for high participation of women in the workforce while Poland's largest employer, state-owned enterprises, organized benefits and, to limited extent, also childcare. Upon exiting communism, Poland went through a series of neoliberal reforms that focused on fighting inflation, liberalizing prices, privatizing enterprises, opening borders to trade and reducing public debt by austerity measures. By rolling back the welfare state, especially the care infrastructure, many post-communist societies, including Poland 'retraditionalised' its societies but not in a Fordist/Beckerian-family fashion of a male-breadwinner and female homemaker but rather in a model of female double burden amidst high unemployment of both sexes .

At the same time, the weight of the country's economic activity refocused from big state enterprises to their small and medium private counterparts, while unemployment went from what was technically considered as zero to 12 percent in less than two years and then kept rising throughout the 1990s (see Figure 10). At the same time, the 1997 Constitution of the Republic of Poland, written under a leftist government, proclaimed social market economy as the basis of the economic system and put "the principle of subsidiarity" to Constitution's Preamble and principle of social justice to its Second Article. This mixed heritage of communism, neoliberal economic reforms and constitutionally declared social market economy accounts for part of the difficulty in classifying Poland to one of Esping-Andersen's welfare regimes.

Still, regardless of these diverse influences, gender inequality in Poland has remained a substantial predicament. As the European Parliament (2013:74) recently noted "the key challenge for gender equality in Poland is historic underinvestment in care services such as child and elder care as women are the main providers of care". In 2013, there were places in organized childcare for less than 5% of children under the age of three, 80% of municipalities lacked *any* form of organised childcare for children at this age, while majority of existing institutions (54%) were private (Central Statistical Office, 2015).

This state of affairs is likely to render labour activation policies inefficient for women for whom entering the labour market might be conditional upon the provision of childcare.

Poland during the 2008 economic crisis

Poland did not experience the 2008 crisis in a sense that the country did not record a fall of Gross Domestic Product in any single year following the 2008 crash. In this way, when compared to Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom, Poland makes for a unique case of a country where the economy actually has shown some improvements after the crisis when compared to its pre-crisis levels. For one thing, in 2009, Poland was the only country in the European Union that recorded economic growth (1.6%). For another, unemployment rate, a key economic challenge of capitalist Poland, has substantially lowered. The post-crisis (2009-2014) unemployment rates averaged at 9.5% which made for a significant improvement when compared to its pre-crisis (2003-2008) levels that averaged at 14.5% (Figure 10).

Moreover, when the gender aspect is included, it can be noted that the difference in unemployment rates between men and women fell to less than one percent in 2008-2009 (Figure 10). It must be observed, however, that by no means can this dynamic be treated as a universal scenario. Interestingly, it contrasts sharply with the Spanish case where it was the crisis and huge unemployment that brought down the gendered unemployment-difference to historically low levels.

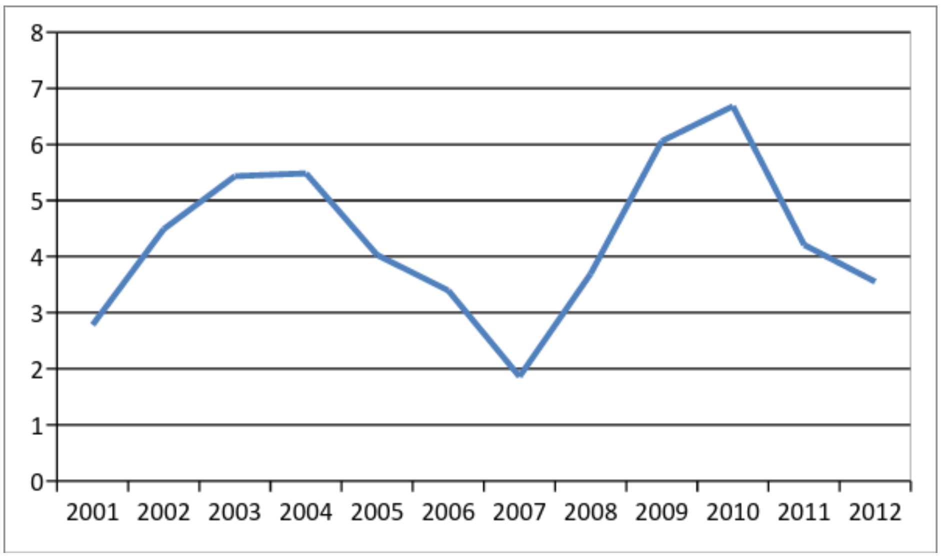
Figure 10 Unemployment rates of men and women in Poland in percentage points (2000-2013).

Source: OECD (2015)

Economic or demographic crisis?

Poland cannot be said to implement post-crisis belt-tightening *sensu stricto*. Actually, as Figure 11 shows, the immediate follow-up of the crisis saw increase in the budget deficit that kept rising until 2010 accruing to higher public debt.

Figure 11. Poland's budget deficit as a percentage of GDP (2000-2012).



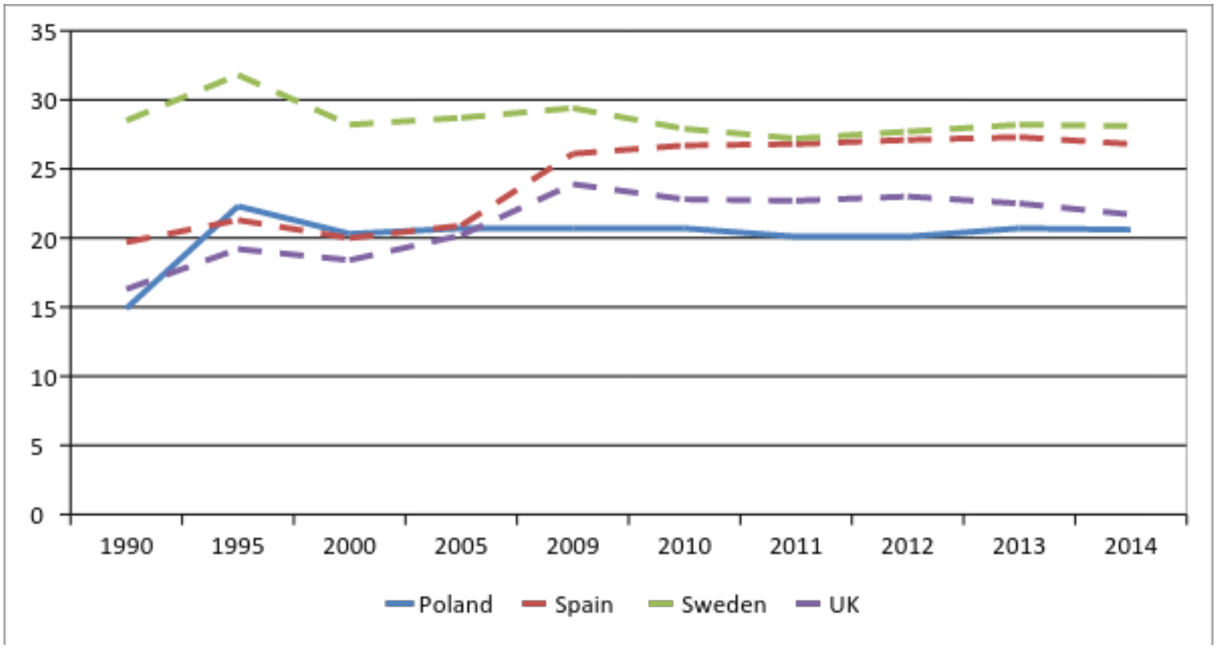
Source: OECD (2015)

Also, as Figure 11 shows, overall social spending remained largely unchanged throughout the 2000s: at around 20% of GDP. However, what is characteristic of Poland's social expenditure, which includes both public services as well as welfare benefits, is that almost half (46%) of it are pensions. At the same time, family related spending rose only slightly from 1.1 to 1.3% of GDP and is expected to rise further following the 2013 reforms that doubled the period of maternity leave from six to twelve months. However, even if most of that rise in spending will reach women that will not necessarily be conducive to greater gender equality, especially when the supported interventions are likely to keep women out of the labour market. In this way, prolonging the period of maternity leave without offering any childcare alternatives might further complicate balancing motherhood with career in Poland.

The first saving measures appeared in 2011 and were linked to the reform of the pension system. Effective from the 1st of January 2013, the key change was the increase of the statutory retirement age and its equalization for men and women at 67 years (to be implemented gradually until 2040). The change, necessitated by Poland's growing dependency ratio, i.e. proportion of working to non-working population, will likely narrow down the gender gap in the height of the pensions. At the same time, women's retirement age shows higher effective raise and a longer perspective of handing the double burden of family and professional chores.

The case study of Poland shows how difficult it might be to assign causes of particular interventions to macro events. Arguably, it could have been demographic situation that has had stronger explanatory power in accounting for most of those changes than economic crisis in Poland, a country struggling with one of the world's lowest fertility rates – currently at 1.3 children per woman. For instance, what might look as an austerity measure and what was interpreted by the European Parliament (2013) as economic-crisis related public sector employment cuts, might actually show stronger links to changing demographic make-up of the Polish society when analysed in detail. In this particular case, a massive fall of fertility from 701,000 births in 1980 to only 370,000 in 2013 (Central Statistical Office, 2015) translated to a sharp decline of student enrolment and influenced teacher dismissals in most affected areas.

Figure 12. Public social expenditures as a percentage of GDP (1990-2014).



Source: OECD (2015)

Conclusions

In this paper we have explored the gendered consequences of the post-crisis public policies pursued by four case study countries: the United Kingdom, Spain, Sweden and Poland. We show that explicit austerity measures in the first two countries representing, respectively, the liberal and Mediterranean regimes, have quantifiably resulted in increased levels of gender inequality, particularly related to the cuts in benefits that represent even two times higher proportion of women's income than that of men. Still, for Sweden and Poland - representing the social democratic and post-communist regimes correspondingly - the picture is more complex. Whilst in Sweden there may be no explicit evidence of a macro-scale quantitative worsening of the situation of women vis-à-vis men during the crisis, the ensuing policy response to the crisis was patterned along gender lines to the detriment of women. In the post-communist regime of Poland, it is difficult to identify which particular interventions were related to the economic crisis and which to other macro events, such as the extraordinarily rapid aging of population.

Still, effects of public policies on gender equality do not stem exclusively from the substance of the policy but also from the structure of the addressed population. These dynamics is particularly visible in the United Kingdom that not only saw £19 billion per annum removed in cuts from the British economy but also did so in the society that has 28% of children raised by single mothers - four times more than Spain - making for the second highest proportion across the European Union (OECD, 2014). This characteristic is important for all welfare cuts in the UK but particularly for those of housing benefit as the majority of its female recipients are single mothers.

In Sweden, the worsening of the situation of women should be attributed to the ideological orientation of the former conservative government (privatisation of care, marketization of services, lowering of taxes) rather the crisis climate and ensuing policy response. On the other hand, the relative immunity to sharp decreases in welfare spending in general is due to the well-embedded social-democratic character of the Swedish welfare state. These interesting parallels between the social-democratic Sweden and Mediterranean Spain might mean that across different welfare states we may observe some more universal trends or, alternatively, that the welfare regime identification might not be as justified as it was a quarter century ago when Esping-Andersen published his famous classification.

However, some gender effects have challenged some traditional discourses, such as that about women as employment buffers - the last to hire and the first to dismiss. Paradoxically, it was contradictory forces that reduced Poland's and Spain's gender unemployment gap to the lowest levels in decades. For the former, it was the narrowing of gender gap against the falling unemployment of both sexes. For the latter, it was rather 'equality in misery' type of process: bringing the country's gender unemployment gap to historically low levels amidst the rampant unemployment surpassing 25% for both men and women, probably a result labour market horizontal segregation.

This conclusion stays in line with more general findings for the developed countries: by the end of 2012 unemployment rates in the OECD were at 8% for both men and women (OECD, 2013). However, as the case study of Spain has shown - the new division lines on the labour market might embrace a stronger dimension of age or type of employment contract (short term versus long term). For instance, Spanish youth unemployment being more than twice as high as women's unemployment testifies to these dimensions gaining more explanatory power and should be analysed in conjunction with gender.

Policy Recommendations

1) We call upon every social democratic party to conduct a qualitative and quantitative gender impact assessment of every budget, whether they are in government or opposition.

Our paper shows that inequality between men and women has grown as a direct result of austerity policies. We have demonstrated that women are hardest hit by cuts to state benefits (in the UK, a fifth of women's incomes come from benefits, twice as much as men), and public sector cuts are one of the first austerity measures to be introduced and women across the EU are more likely to work in this field. These effects have led to the entrenchment of the male breadwinner model.

In order to demonstrate such impacts of government policies in each member state, social democratic parties should conduct a gender impact assessment of every budget, whether they are in government or opposition.

2) It is necessary to ensure women's rights at work and in the labour market. For so doing, austerity **policies should be limited and social expenditure should be channelled to prioritize quality services over cash benefits**. These quality services should ensure that the care burden borne by women is eased, by privileging free child-care and elderly care so that women can access the labour market.

3) The European Commission is called upon to **introduce strong legislative measures in its forthcoming Roadmap "New start to address the challenges of work-life balance faced by working families".** The Roadmap is an opportunity to make a breakthrough in EU policy on work-life reconciliation but to achieve that, it will need a strong gender equitable approach that takes into account the fallacies of current (soft) EU legislation in the areas of labour market equality and family policy. In particular, robust policy tools supporting de-genderization and de-familialization of care need to be provided as the gender division of care and domestic work - augmented by the crisis - is a major obstacle to women's full labour market participation.

4) To improve gender equality in the labour market The EU should oblige the Member States to **adopt national systems of parental leaves that are equal in length for both parents, non-transferable and fully paid**. This new EU-level legislation should replace the existing system that is based on two disconnected directives on maternity and parental leaves.

5) We encourage progressive European political foundations and national think tanks to **specifically address gender in all of their outputs** by drawing attention to gender issues in reports and recommendations. As demonstrated by this paper, mainstreaming gender issues into every report and policy briefing can be very fruitful in addressing the issues that pertain to *every* European citizen, rather than primarily addressing male concerns.

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Appendix 1 - Table of Country Classifications

1- Liberal	Ireland
	United Kingdom
2- Social Democratic	Denmark
	Finland
	Sweden
3- Post-Communist	Bulgaria
	Croatia
	Czech Republic
	Estonia
	Hungary
	Latvia
	Lithuania
	Poland
	Romania
	Slovakia
	Slovenia
4- Conservative/Continental	Austria

	Belgium
	France
	Germany
	Netherlands
	Luxembourg
5 - Mediterranean	Malta
	Italy
	Portugal
	Spain
	Cyprus
	Greece

Appendix 2 - Mean GDP per Capita by Welfare Regime (2000-2012)

MEAN GDP PER CAPITA BY WELFARE REGIME (2000-2012)