Gendered costs of austerity: The effects of welfare regime and government policies on employment across the OECD, 2000–13

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Abstract. *This article proposes a thorough analysis of the gendered impact of government policies applied during the Great Recession on unemployment across 28 OECD countries following an empirical estimation using random effects modelling with data from 2000 to 2013 to test the influence of welfare systems. Results point to a significant effect of welfare regime even beyond the crisis, primarily through social expenditure levels and public sector employment dynamics, which mainly affect women. The detailed policy analysis highlights the need to look for alternatives to austerity policies, and the authors conclude with some suggestions in that regard.*

The global financial crisis, which began in the autumn of 2007 and ushered in the wider global economic crisis, has had a profound impact on labour markets across advanced economies, resulting in dramatic increases in unemployment and economic instability in nearly every country. While the negative effects of the crisis on domestic economies have been widespread, distributional outcomes have varied considerably among different labour market groups, particularly between men and women. However, although considerable attention has been paid to the former, less attention has been given to the effects of this downturn on male and female employment. Expanding on our previous work on this subject (Kushi and McManus, 2018), the aim of this article is to further analyse the gendered impact of government policies on labour market outcomes across the member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). We take into account women's position within welfare systems and labour market structures, offering evidence of the influence of welfare systems on those gendered outcomes even beyond times of crisis. We suggest that austerity policies threatened to

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reverse progress made on gender equality in the years running up to the crisis, providing a strong argument for identifying alternative policies in order to improve crisis responses to ensure that all groups in society benefit equally.

The remainder of the article consists of four sections. In the first, we examine several important strands of the literature, including welfare capitalism and feminist political economy, in order to develop a theoretical framework that acknowledges the effects of institutionalized gender differences on employment outcomes. In the second section, we present estimations of a random effects panel model of 28 OECD countries over the course of 14 years, from 2000 to 2013, in order to test the significance of welfare systems on male and female employment rates. These findings help to provide empirical evidence of the significance of these systems on gendered employment outcomes even beyond times of crisis. The third section examines gender outcomes at different phases of the crisis and critically explores how policies adopted by national governments, such as social spending cuts and public sector reforms, affected female and male employment. Most notably, fiscal austerity had disproportionally negative effects on women. In the fourth section, we present our conclusions and identify recommendations for more comprehensive gender assessments of domestic recovery policies.

Literature review: Welfare regimes, social outcomes and gender

The global financial crisis has raised a number of pressing questions regarding the impact of economic downturn on gender equality and female workforce participation across countries. To what extent is female workforce participation vulnerable to recessionary factors? Have the distributional effects of the economic crisis fallen evenly across genders? How have specific government policies affected women's employment and gender equality outcomes? To address these questions, and expanding on our previous work (Kushi and McManus, 2018), we bridge literature on capitalist welfare regimes, feminist political economy and the financial and economic crisis in order to build a theoretical approach that acknowledges the effects of institutionalized gender differences and allows us to understand the full impact of the crisis.

Within comparative politics, there is a well-established literature on the effects of welfare systems on social outcomes (Pierson, 1996 and 2001; Esping-Andersen, 1990 and 1999; Häusermann and Palier, 2008; Thelen, 2012). It is argued that the distinctive historical and institutional characteristics of these systems define the types of policies and levels of social spending adopted by States to influence who has access to social benefits, and to shape government strategies in response to economic challenges (Bonoli and Palier, 2000; Scharpf and Schmidt, 2000; Palier and Thelen, 2010). In addition to providing general social support, many hypothesize that welfare systems influence the role of women in the workforce and society both directly and indirectly (Orloff, 1996 and 2002; Sainsbury, 1996 and 1999; Crompton and Harris, 1997; Lewis, 1992, 1997 and 2002; Gornick, Meyers and Ross, 1998; Esping-Andersen, 1999; O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver, 1999; Misra, 1998; Misra, Budig and Moller, 2007; Huber and Stephens, 2014).

As a provider of social services, such as family benefits, the welfare state may significantly influence female workforce participation and economic independence (Sørensen and McLanahan, 1987; Hobson, 1990; Bianchi, Casper and Peltola, 1999; Mandel and Semyonov, 2006) through parental and family leave, childcare programmes and workforce training (Mandel and Semyonov, 2006). The degree of social support and employment opportunities that women have in society varies according to existing national social protection systems, often corresponding to welfare regimes identified in the classic literature on the welfare state – Liberal, Nordic, Continental, and Southern and Eastern European[1] (Gornick, Meyers and Ross, 1998; Esping-Andersen, 1999; Sainsbury, 1996 and 1999; O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver, 1999; Orloff, 2002; Mandel and Semyonov, 2006). According to Sainsbury's gender-sensitive typology of welfare systems (1996 and 1999), the Continental, Eastern and Southern European regimes are predicated on a male breadwinner model, in which benefits have traditionally extended to women and families through "core" male workers. Liberal welfare states historically operate under the premise of separate gender roles, which assumes that household and caretaking responsibilities largely fall to women (ibid.). Lastly, the structure of incentives and benefits in Nordic welfare systems presumes an equal division of unpaid and paid work between men and women, promoting dual-earner and dual-caretaker households (Sainsbury, 1999). Access to social benefits and levels of support for women, particularly in the aftermath of economic crises is, therefore, largely dependent on the welfare state context.[2]

In the wake of severe economic crises, the institutional effects of different welfare states on gender outcomes are expected to be magnified (Dolls, Fuest and Peichl, 2010a; Cho and Newhouse, 2013; Karamessini and Rubery, 2014). This is due to the fact that social protection measures act as primary buffers between citizens and the effects of economic downturn. These systems of social protection may, however, unevenly distribute benefits and burdens between genders. For example, as women are more likely to be responsible for the care of children and other dependents, they are also likely to be disproportionately affected by cuts to child, housing, old-age and disability benefits, limiting their access to the job market (Bianchi, Casper and Peltola, 1999; Mandel and Semyonov, 2006; Sirimanne, 2009; CSW, 2009; Oxfam International, 2013).

[1] In *Three worlds of welfare capitalism*, Esping-Andersen (1990) uses the categories Liberal, Corporatist-Statist, and Social Democratic to differentiate welfare regime types. We have added additional typologies for Southern and Eastern European welfare systems, which constitute separate, distinct categories (see Kushi and McManus, 2018).

[2] For a more detailed discussion on the effects of welfare regime types on female workforce participation and gender equality in the wake of the global financial crisis see Leschke and Jepsen, 2011; and Périvier, 2014.

As a result, austerity measures aimed at reducing social spending may impose a greater burden on women.

In addition to providing social benefits, which facilitate female workforce participation by reducing barriers to employment, the State also serves as a major employer of women through the public sector, particularly in the female-dominated fields of health care, education and social services protected (Mandel and Semyonov, 2006). Public sector employment not only encourages women's entry into the workforce but helps to establish a labour market in which their rights are protected (ibid.). Gender equality policies, for example, are often first introduced in the public sector (Bettio et al., 2013). Government cuts to public sector jobs and wages are, therefore, likely to have a more negative effect on female employment and economic independence.

The prominence of women within the public sector speaks to larger issues of gender segregation across labour markets, which can result in different distributional effects of economic shocks on male and female workers. Although the degree and form of gender segregation has evolved over time, differences in male and female job allocation, working time and pay remain prominent characteristics of all labour markets (Bettio and Verashchagina, 2009; Rubery and Rafferty, 2013). While gender segregation reduces job competition between men and women in certain sectors, it can have varied consequences for women as female-dominated sectors and occupations are distinctly affected by recessions over time (Bettio, 2002; Rubery and Rafferty, 2013; Périvier, 2018). In other words, gender segregation not only affects the relative job loss of men and women immediately after a downturn but continues to have an influence throughout the recovery phase. This is due to the fact that patterns of recovery may differ across sectors, and government policies may benefit certain fields and occupations more than others. The gendered impact of a crisis is, consequently, hypothesized to vary across countries and over time due to differences in women's positions in the labour market and in the welfare state. The vast majority of policy initiatives during and after the crisis, however, lack a gender-conscious lens (CSW, 2009; Corner, 2009; Villa and Smith, 2010).

It should be noted that relative labour market differences for women refer not only to access to employment in certain sectors or levels of social support and labour market flexibility, but also to varying social norms regarding women's formal employment and household arrangements (Rubery and Rafferty, 2013; Hook, 2006 and 2010). The ability to maintain formal employment, particularly during times of economic hardship, is undermined in societies where women are expected to take on a larger share of domestic household tasks and family support (Benería, 1995; Lim, 2000). Within this context, women may act as a flexible labour market reserve, meeting job demand during times of growth but acting as a buffer to protect the "core" male workforce during times of recession, when they are pressured into leaving formal employment (Rubery and Rafferty, 2013). In sum, we argue that in order to understand the full impact of the Great Recession on both men and women, it is critical to examine the links between gender, social protection systems and labour market structures, and how the global economic crisis and government policy responses to this downturn have affected these relationships.

Empirical analysis of welfare system influence on employment outcomes

In the light of these strands of the literature, we apply the method used in Kushi and McManus (2018) for the period 2007–13, expanding the time frame of that analysis to both the pre- and post-crisis periods to examine the relationship between gendered welfare systems and labour market outcomes from 2000 to 2013. In our previous study, we found that the institutional effects of welfare regimes across OECD countries had significantly altered female unemployment outcomes in post-crisis labour markets, with only Nordic regimes providing equal protection for female and male workforce participation. On the basis of this expanded time frame, we again test the hypothesis that certain types of welfare regime are significantly associated with both pre- and post-crisis female unemployment rates. We accordingly expect Continental, Southern and Eastern regimes to prompt disproportionate increases in female unemployment rates.

Given the critical role that social protection systems are hypothesized to have in facilitating or hindering female workforce participation, we predict that welfare regime type will remain the primary explanatory factor for labour market outcomes before, during and after the financial crisis. Consequently, we incorporate additional co-variables into the analysis, as listed in table 1. They account for macroeconomic, EU-level, sector-based and country-specific effects over time. We use random effects panel data[3] and robust standard errors to account for heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation. The model specification permits us to measure individual effects across OECD countries and control for some differences across time and countries. Three main factors contribute to our use of this random effects model. First, our data set includes matched time–year country units, which do not fit standard ordinary least squares (OLS) analysis. Second, many of our independent variables, such as European Union (EU) membership, welfare regime type and electoral system, do not vary over time, therefore eliminating the option of time fixed-effects modelling. Lastly, the combination of time-invariant independent variables and time-dependent ones, which vary across units, eliminates entity and time fixed-effects modelling as an option. Hence, random-effects modelling becomes the optimal choice for our panel data analysis (Stock and Watson, 2011).

It is important, however, to discuss the various limitations of our model and data structures. Our model does not incorporate individual interaction terms for pre- and post-crisis periods, since their inclusion within our data set leads to an extreme degree of multicollinearity within the model, not amenable to mean-centring or other statistical methods. Instead of interaction terms, we

[3] Data sources available from the authors.

Table 1. Description of independent and control variables

Variables	Hypothesis	Source
Welfare regime (Liberal, Nordic, Continental, Southern and Eastern)	Tests the effects of welfare regime types on female, male and total unemployment rates.	Castles and Obinger, 2008; Dolls, Fuest and Peichl, 2010a and 2010b; Esping-Andersen, 1990 and 1999
EU membership	Tests the effects of EU membership on female, male and total unemployment rates.	European Commission
European Monetary Union (EMU) membership	Tests the effects of Eurozone membership on female, male and total unemployment rates.	European Commission
Voter turnout (%)	Tests the hypothesis that higher voter turnout correlates with higher social expenditures (Kenworthy and Pontusson, 2005).	Brady, Huber and Stephens, 2014
Electoral system (majoritarian/ proportional representation/ mixed)	Tests the hypothesis that proportional representation (PR) electoral systems provide better social protection across genders during economic downturns relative to majoritarian ones (Iversen and Soskice, 2006 and 2009).	OECD, 2011b and 2015
PR government composition (right, left, centre)	Tests the hypothesis that governments controlled by left-leaning parties will provide better social protection across genders during economic downturns than centre or right ones (Iversen and Soskice, 2006 and 2009).	World Bank Database of Political Institutions
Labour market protection	Tests the effects of labour market protection policies on female, male and total unemployment rates (OECD, 2015).	OECD
Employment by sector	Tests the effects of different employment sectors on female, male and total unemployment rates (ILO, 2010; Lim, 2000).	ILOSTAT
GDP per capita ($)	Tests the hypothesis that demand for social spending is income elastic ("Wagner's law") (Lamartina and Zaghini, 2011).	OECD
Economic openness	Tests the hypothesis that greater exposure to international markets increases demand for social spending (Cameron, 1978; Garrett, 1998; Rodrik, 1999).	OECD
Women in parliament (%)	Tests the hypothesis that a higher percentage of women in parliament generates more demand for social spending.	World Bank World Development Indicators
Labour market productivity	Tests the effects of labour market productivity rates on female, male and total unemployment rates (OECD, 2015).	OECD

chose to include a post-crisis dummy variable. Consequently, while the model can account for changes and effects during the pre- and post-crisis periods in general, and examine the effects of the financial crisis on unemployment rates, it is unable to compare individual pre-crisis variable effects to post-crisis variable effects. We leave this task to future research.

Findings

Before analysing the findings, it should be noted that the Liberal welfare regime is taken as the baseline category for all other regime variables in this model. In this respect, the analysis confirms that, in comparison to Liberal welfare systems, the Continental, Southern and Eastern regimes prompt significant increases in female unemployment rates among OECD countries from 2000 to 2013 (see table 2). The findings echo similar trends identified in the analysis of post-crisis welfare regime effects conducted in Kushi and McManus (2018), but they extend the gendered effects of the welfare typology beyond acute times of economic crisis. For instance, while holding all other variables constant, the Continental welfare system is associated with an 11 per cent increase in the female unemployment rate, and the Eastern regime type is associated with a similar 11.6 per cent rise (statistically significant at the 1 and 5 per cent levels, respectively). The Southern welfare system presents the most drastic effect, prompting a 16 per cent increase in female unemployment. On the other end of the scale, Nordic welfare systems are not statistically significant for gendered effects in unemployment, signifying that these regimes protect women from both economic crises and regular labour market discrepancies much more completely than their counterparts. While welfare regime type also impacts male unemployment rates, the effect is more muted. Male unemployment increases by 7 per cent under the Continental regime, and by 11 per cent under the Eastern regime (close to its effect on female workers in the latter). The Southern regime prompts a 10 per cent rise in male unemployment rates, which is 6 per cent lower than the female unemployment effects of these systems and points to significant gendered differences.

Welfare regime type stands as the most statistically significant and predictive of all the included co-variables. But, as expected from the literature, strong employment protection policies are also significantly associated with decreases in both female and male unemployment rates. In fact, such policies tend to aid women's employment outcomes more so than men's, making their existence and robustness a vital component of female labour market participation. Moreover, the existence of a larger industrial sector within a country relates to slightly lower female and male unemployment rates, most likely due to more effective governmental buffering and subsidizing of this sector before, during and after the economic crisis. A larger service sector, however, only prompts small decreases in female unemployment, as this is a female-dominated sector but it receives much less governmental stimulus than the industrial sector. These different sectoral characteristics become key to the study of gendered

Table 2. Random effects multiple regression models, 2000–13

Variables	(1) female_unemp	(2) male_unemp	(3) total_unemp
post_crisis	0.370	1.373***	0.878
	(0.493)	(0.511)	(0.503)
gdp_per	–0.000	–0.000***	–0.000**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
econ_open	0.005	0.004	0.004
	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.012)
vturn	0.079	0.284	0.181
	(0.177)	(0.267)	(0.209)
vturnsq[1]	–0.000	–0.002	–0.001
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.001)
eu	–0.299	–1.102	–0.761
	(1.319)	(1.056)	(1.111)
emu	–1.604	–0.828	–1.386
	(1.156)	(1.642)	(1.340)
center	–0.900	–1.152	–1.125
	(0.667)	(0.689)	(0.626)
mixed	2.042	2.466	2.669
	(1.909)	(2.300)	(2.175)
pr	–0.615	1.079	0.483
	(2.160)	(2.349)	(2.263)
left	–0.048	0.193	0.118
	(0.361)	(0.363)	(0.339)
continental	11.122***	7.372**	9.396***
	(3.121)	(3.289)	(3.177)
eastern	11.565**	11.110**	11.676**
	(5.414)	(4.758)	(5.120)
nordic	5.469	2.892	4.077
	(3.119)	(3.422)	(3.301)
southern	15.941***	10.120***	13.066***
	(3.752)	(3.647)	(3.558)
lagwomparl[2]	–0.002	0.009	0.007
	(0.018)	(0.033)	(0.024)
employ_protect	–4.336***	–3.008**	–3.746***
	(1.491)	(1.234)	(1.350)
industry	–1.298***	–0.830***	–1.042***
	(0.371)	(0.298)	(0.326)
service[3]	–0.760***	–0.151	–0.407
	(0.281)	(0.318)	(0.291)
laborproductivity	0.069	0.117	0.094**
	(0.038)	(0.061)	(0.047)
Constant	95.974***	35.158	61.510**
	(30.466)	(33.199)	(31.147)
Observations	369	369	369
Countries	28	28	28
Within R-Sq	0.550	0.600	0.599
Between R-Sq	0.379	0.151	0.231
Overall R-Sq	0.402	0.233	0.287

** and *** indicate significance at the 5 and 1 per cent levels, respectively.

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. [1] Voter turnout was squared in this model, given its quadratic distribution. [2] Women's parliamentary representation was lagged by two years for the full effects of representation in policy. [3] Different combinations of employment sectors were attempted within the model (industry and service; service and agriculture; agriculture and industry), but no significant differences were found.

Source: Authors' calculations based on panel data (see table 1).

labour markets, especially given that the sectors experienced the economic crisis from very different vantage points, defining the two main phases of the crisis. Lastly, the post-crisis variable reveals a small, direct relationship to men's unemployment rates. This finding may point both to women's pre-existing labour market vulnerability and to the greater impact of the economic crisis on male-dominated industries. Ultimately, while the more explicit effects of the crisis revealed themselves most strongly within male-dominated industries, prompting political action, its more subtle effects on female labour market participation remained almost invisible to policy-makers.

Interpretation of findings

The empirical findings above confirm the effects of welfare regime type on male and female labour market outcomes during and beyond times of economic crisis (see Lewis, 1992, 1997 and 2002; Sainsbury, 1996 and 1999). These regimes are vital institutional variables for explaining social, gendered patterns within advanced welfare states – an area of research that remains under-explored. As comparative welfare literature predicts, only the Liberal and Nordic regimes appear to have provided equal unemployment protection for both men and women from 2000 to 2013. However, each system relied on drastically different mechanisms. Generous social protection measures, universal employment targets and a focus on social cohesion and egalitarian norms characterized Nordic mechanisms. Liberal mechanisms were characterized by high labour market flexibility, which allowed both men and women to access employment more easily than in welfare systems with greater benefits for core, regular workers.

In contrast, Continental, and Southern and Eastern European welfare regimes failed to protect both men and women during the time frame of this study, with women experiencing a far greater unemployment effect than men. Aside from offering much less social protection for women, such regimes also limited women's labour market availability. Women, as labour market outsiders, do not have access to the same labour market opportunities, employment protection and social benefits as core male workers. This effect is magnified within the smaller, less generous Southern and Eastern European welfare systems, which share similarities with Continental systems but lack the resources to fund generous social spending. This dearth of social protection and labour market access under Southern and Eastern European regimes generates disparities between core male workers and non-traditional workers, such as youth and low-skilled labourers. As a result, these structural set-ups also limit male labour market prospects.

Having established the important effects that welfare systems and labour market structures have on male and female employment outcomes, in the next section we examine how the Great Recession affected different sectors over time and how government policies to address the crisis have exacerbated gender differences.

Impact of governmental policies on employment throughout the Great Recession

For the purposes of our policy analysis, we identify two distinct phases of the crisis, producing highly gendered outcomes. The first phase, from 2007 to 2009, was marked by a rapid decline in gross domestic product (GDP) and significant loss of employment, with sharper declines seen in certain sectors. During this phase, national governments throughout the OECD countries introduced stimulus packages aimed at boosting economic activity, especially in hard-hit industries, such as construction and manufacturing, increasing employment and buffering citizens against the effects of economic downturn. The second phase of the crisis, which began in early 2010, was characterized by the adoption of austerity measures as government concerns over debt and deficit levels increased. This period of fiscal consolidation saw significant cuts to public expenditure, including considerable reductions in funding for welfare programmes and the public sector.

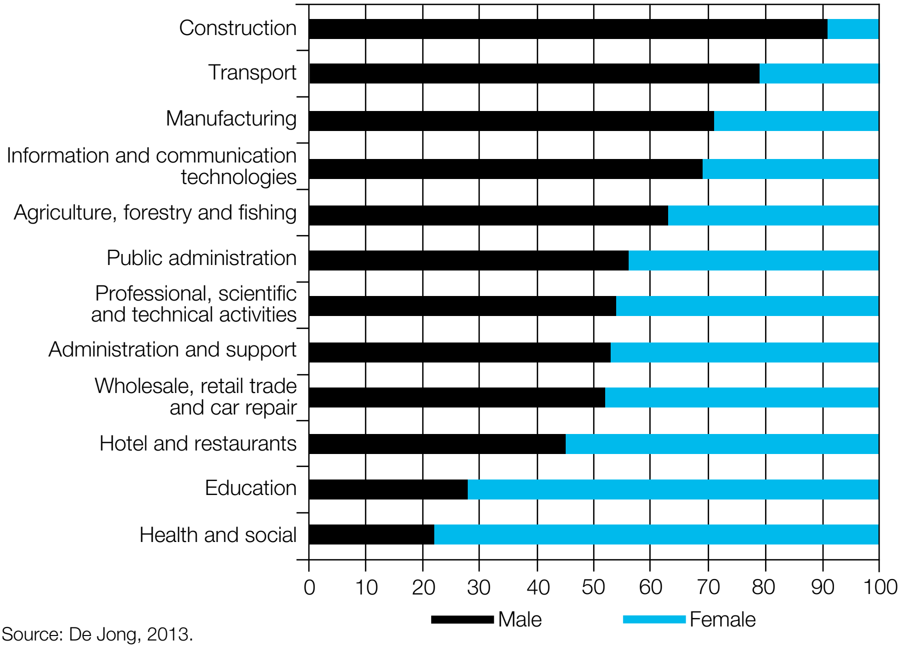
Phase I of the crisis: Stimulus policies for hard-hit, male-dominated sectors

Initially, the heaviest job losses across OECD countries affected male-dominated sectors, particularly manufacturing and construction (De Jong, 2013; OECD, 2013).[4] In the United States, for example, nearly 80 per cent of the 5.1 million workers that lost their jobs within the first few months of 2009 were men. Male unemployment rose to 8.8 per cent while female unemployment remained at 7 per cent (Amann, 2009). From the second quarter of 2007 to the fourth quarter of 2009, the average unemployment rate for men across the OECD rose by 3.5 percentage points. By comparison, female unemployment rose by 2 percentage points over the same period (OECD, 2013). Differences in female and male unemployment rates are largely attributed to gender segregation of different sectors within national economies (see Périvier, 2018). As shown in figure 1, while men are over-represented in construction and manufacturing industries, women constitute the majority of the workforce in sectors such as health care and education. Construction and manufacturing are industries that are far more sensitive to economic cycles and market fluctuations, resulting in a higher number of lay-offs during recessions. This was particularly true in the most recent global economic crisis, which began with a housing market collapse in the United States, leading to a sharp decline in construction and a decreased global demand for manufactured goods.

By 2008, governments throughout the OECD countries had begun to introduce stimulus measures aimed at strengthening purchasing power, boosting

[4] For an overview of the main factors that predict employment outcomes during the financial crisis across groups, including the effects of employment sector, see Cho and Newhouse (2013). The study finds no negative gendered effect during the recession, but it does not account for gendered differences in welfare systems, larger sample sizes and other relevant variables.

Figure 1. Male and female employment by sector (EU–27, 2011) (percentage)



Source: De Jong, 2013.

consumer demand and protecting workers and firms from the recession (European Commission, 2008). In the light of the initial footprint of the crisis, male-dominated industries were the sectors to benefit the most from such measures (ILO, 2010; Oxfam International and European Women's Lobby, 2010).[5] Furthermore, owing to higher rates of unemployment in the immediate wake of the crisis, male workers were also the beneficiaries of many unemployment and labour market policies designed to protect those affected by lay-offs.[6] For example, the work-sharing schemes, which were introduced by the German Government to allow full-time workers to maintain employment, largely benefited male workers (Annesley and Scheele, 2011; Périvier, 2014). Out of 1.4 million workers registered under work-sharing schemes in June 2009, 78 per cent were men while only 22 per cent were women (German Federal Employment Agency, 2009). This trend can also be found in other countries such as Slovakia, Ireland and the United Kingdom (Glassner and Galgóczi, 2009; Villa and Smith, 2010).[7]

[5] For an example, see Weisman (2014) and Snavely (2014), on the Automotive Industry Financing Program adopted by the United States Government in 2009.

[6] See "Table LMF2.5: time use for work, care and other day-to-day activities", in OECD Family Database (2011). Available at: www.oecd.org/social/family/database [accessed 3 Oct. 2018].

[7] ibid.

Surprisingly, it appears that during the crisis, gender considerations were largely neglected when drafting stimulus packages. According to a report by an EU Expert Group on Gender and Employment, no significant gender impact assessment was carried out in relation to the stimulus packages implemented by Member States (Villa and Smith, 2010; Leschke and Jepsen, 2012). As a result, these policies had the unintended effect of providing greater benefits for male-dominated industries and male workers, while providing less compensation for female workers.

It is worth noting that, although the gender gap decreased during the first phase of the crisis, this outcome reflected worsening employment and wage conditions for men, rather than an improvement of women's labour market situation (European Women's Lobby, 2012). As we will see, overall, women's labour market situation became more precarious as crisis conditions worsened and government policy responses shifted from stimulus to austerity.

Phase II of the crisis: Austerity policies

Motivated by collective fears of debt, weakened financial capacity and lack of economic growth, by 2010, governments across OECD countries made dramatic moves to end existing stimulus policies in favour of increased taxes, structural reforms and heavily decreased social spending and benefits (Leschke and Jepsen, 2012).[8] This turn towards austerity, which was particularly pronounced in the EU, marks the start of the second phase of the crisis.

The extent of financial cuts differed across countries. For instance, the Baltic States, Hungary, Ireland, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom aimed to cut public expenditure by 12–40 per cent of GDP between 2010 and 2014 (with spending cuts of 12 and 40 per cent in the United Kingdom and Ireland, respectively) (Leschke, Theodoropoulou and Watt, 2012). In contrast, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany and Sweden limited spending cuts to less than 10 per cent of GDP (Leschke and Jepsen, 2012).

These austerity policies also involved a shift in gender labour market outcomes. Indeed, whereas labour market segregation in the early years of the crisis effectively sheltered women's employment and wages, long-term economic decline and fiscal consolidation, particularly cuts to public sector employment and social spending, exposed women to greater labour market instability (Oxfam International and European Women's Lobby, 2010; Bettio et al., 2013). According to a report by the European Women's Lobby (2012), as the crisis wore on, female workforce integration ceased and progress toward reaching the EU female employment rate target of 60 per cent by 2010 and the general employment target of 75 per cent by 2020[9] was reversed in 22 EU Member States. This reversal was particularly noticeable in Greece, Spain, Ro-

[8] For a typology of austerity policies in the EU, see Périvier (2018), p. 32.

[9] The goal of achieving a 60 per cent female employment rate across Europe by 2010 was outlined in the Lisbon Strategy. The revised goal of reaching 75 per cent employment in Europe by 2020, among others through female participation, was outlined in the Europe 2020 Strategy.

mania, Slovakia, Ireland, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Slovenia, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, where by 2011 the employment rate for women was near, or had fallen below, 2005 levels.

As in the case of stimulus measures, gender impact assessments were absent from the austerity packages of nearly all EU countries, with the exception of the United Kingdom (Leschke and Jepsen, 2012; Fagan, 2008). According to a 2012 report by the European Commission, since the start of the recession, gender impact assessments had only been included in about one tenth of crisis management policy initiatives as part of national reform programmes (Bettio et al., 2013).

The disproportionally negative effect of these austerity policies on women can be analysed from the point of view of the channels through which the effects came about. In the next subsections, we look at sectoral segregation and pre-existing labour market vulnerability, social spending cuts, gendered division of labour, and public sector lay-offs as the main vectors of the effects of austerity policies on women's labour market indicators.

Sectoral segregation and pre-existing vulnerabilities

Throughout the crisis, governments prioritized subsidies and stimulus packages to the automotive and the construction industry over sectors such as textiles, retail and services. In Slovakia, for instance, more than 90 per cent of employees in the textile and similar industries are older, less educated women. Textile companies in Slovakia suffered as much as other manufacturing firms from the economic downturn, but they did not benefit from government stimulus plans (Oxfam International and European Women's Lobby, 2010). Similar patterns of sectoral segregation appear across the whole of the EU, where 80 per cent of construction workers are men, while 78 per cent of health-care and social services workers, and over 60 per cent of teachers in primary and secondary education, are women (ibid.). Consequently, by 2009, female unemployment rates across many EU countries began to increase more than male rates (Cho and Newhouse, 2013).

It should also be noted that such labour market segregation meant that, when the crisis hit, women's workforce positions were already more vulnerable than those of men. Women generally work fewer hours, receive lower pay in lower productivity sectors and are less represented in occupations with high social benefits and unemployment insurance in the private sector (see Bosch, 2009). These trends are reflected in women's higher rates of part-time, temporary, low-skilled work and their prevalence in non-regular work (Leschke and Jepsen, 2012). Such female-dominated jobs are among the first to be negatively affected in terms of regularity and benefits during times of crisis (Corner, 2009; Rubery and Rafferty, 2013).

Employers also tend to lay off women first when jobs are scarce due to the dominant male breadwinner bias, which continues to shape markets across OECD countries. Men retain their jobs because institutions perceive them as the primary, legitimate providers for their families, while women are merely seen as secondary providers in formal markets (CSW, 2009; Leschke and Jepsen, 2012).[10] In 2005, almost 40 per cent of an interviewed global sample agreed that, when jobs are scarce, men have more right to a job; a view that was only magnified during the economic crisis (Seguino, 2009).[11] In fact, the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s confirmed this phenomenon, with women laid off at seven times the rate of men in the Republic of Korea (Lee and Cho, 2005). Nevertheless, official unemployment statistics are likely to miss this phenomenon because, even if underemployed, women still measure as employed in labour force surveys. Most importantly, many unemployed or underemployed women will withdraw from the labour force due to cultural norms. This, too, inherently results in the underestimation of the labour market effects of the crisis on women (Seguino, 2009; Rubery and Rafferty, 2013).

As discussed above, the impact of the global economic crisis on women remained largely invisible. In fact, some sources claim that the labour market behaviour of women over the period of the crisis has been similar to that of men, with men claiming to have been more affected by the crisis, including complaints of greater job insecurity, pay cuts and being forced to accept less interesting work (Bettio et al., 2013). These conclusions, however, disregard the already precarious nature of women's labour market position, their concentration in atypical, harder-to-measure sectors, their unpaid labour burdens and other indirect sources of prejudice.

Social spending cuts and gendered division of labour

It is vital to remember that any cuts to social welfare programmes and services, including family, child, health-care and old-age benefits, predominantly harm women. During difficult times, societies depend on women to care for the sick, elderly, young and extended family, even when they already engage in paid work (Sirimanne, 2009; CSW, 2009). Women rely on government-provided social services to lessen the disproportionate burdens placed on them in areas such as household labour and care-giving roles. In other words, many women require robust social services in order to enter and participate in paid, regular employment.

Men, on the other hand, already receive greater social benefits due to their more regular, full-time work patterns, and are, on average, much less affected by the penalties associated with pregnancy, childcare and domestic duties (Sainsbury, 1996; O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver, 1999). Thus, any decrease in social spending is a much graver threat to female workforce participation, especially as regards the ability to perform regular, full-time work (Lee and Cho, 2005; Lim, 2000). An economic crisis can impose much heavier unpaid labour burdens and costs on a household, the brunt of which is almost exclu-

[10] For raw survey data on this phenomenon, see European Social Survey (ESS), Rounds 4 and 5. Available at: https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/data/.

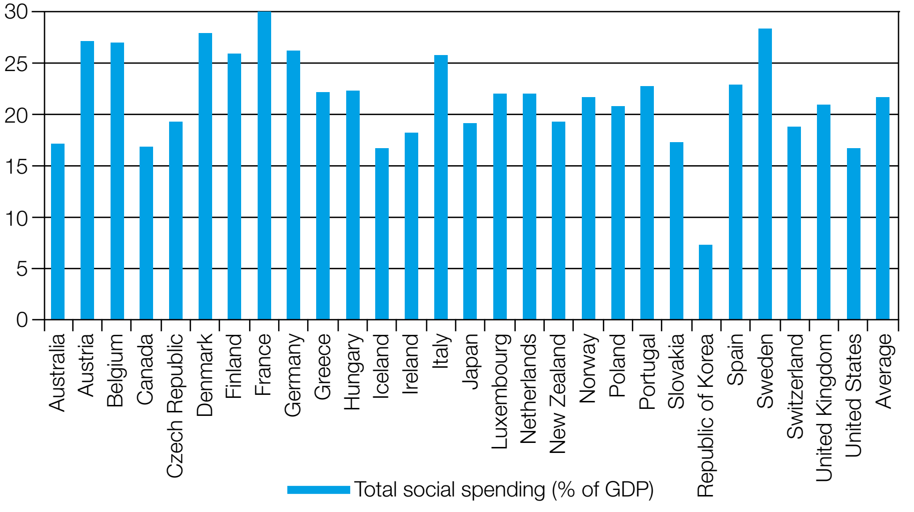
[11] See Kushi and McManus (2018) for a detailed theoretical and empirical breakdown of these percentages as applied to OECD countries and welfare regimes during the economic crisis.

sively borne by women across countries and years. As governmental safety nets falter and employment prospects sour, the family unit acts as a source of social protection through the provision of free care and support – putting greater pressure on women to lessen their formal labour market contributions to take on unpaid labour at home (Karamessini, 2007; Mandel and Semyonov, 2006; Palme et al., 2009). Accordingly, governmental social support becomes even more imperative for female employment outcomes during an economic crisis (Benería, 1995; Lim, 2000; Floro and Dymski, 2000).

Unfortunately, by 2014, in the aftermath of the global economic crisis, 131 countries had contracted their public expenditures and, of these countries, 91 were in the developing world. The majority of these cuts affected areas deemed vital to female labour market participation (Ortiz, 2014). As figure 2 illustrates, there is wide variation across OECD countries as regards their allocation of social spending as a percentage of GDP, with EU countries such as Denmark, France and Sweden providing much more support than Australia, Canada, the Republic of Korea and the United States, for example. Even in more generous EU countries, austerity measures to reduce budget deficits were rolled out by means of deep spending cuts. In the United Kingdom, for instance, the ratio of spending cuts to tax increases was roughly 85:15 – for every £100 of deficit reduced, £85 came from spending cuts, and £15 from increased taxes (Oxfam International, 2013).

To summarize, from 2010 to 2014, Ireland cut total public spending by 40 per cent of GDP; the Baltic States by 20 per cent; Spain by 12 per cent; and the United Kingdom by 11.5 per cent. This meant a systematic loss of public sector jobs and public services throughout Europe. Moreover, European gov-

Figure 2. Average total social spending in 28 OECD countries, 2000–13



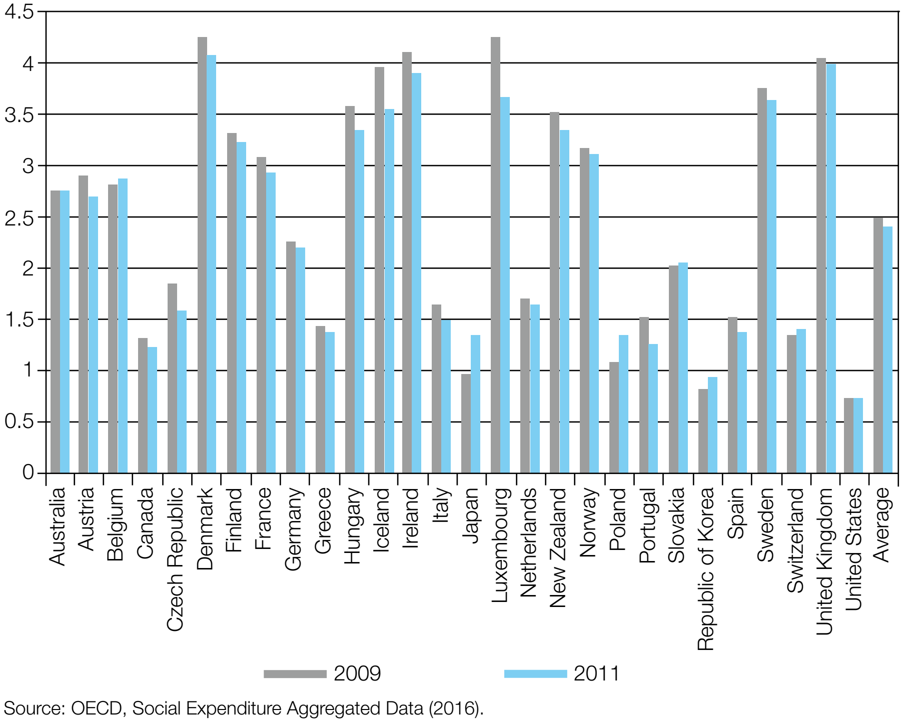
Source: OECD, Social Expenditure Aggregated Data (2016).

ernments drastically cut social security budgets, with Greece, Latvia, Portugal and Romania introducing decreases of over 5 per cent in their 2011 budgets (Oxfam International, 2013). As women are more likely to provide care for children and other dependants, they disproportionately suffer from cuts to child, health, housing and other types of welfare benefits, reducing their availability for the labour market.

As figures 3–5 illustrate, the economic crisis prompted cuts in areas of social spending that are most relevant to female workforce participation, including family benefits, and health and incapacity insurance. Between 2009 and 2011, these areas of public expenditure decreased as a percentage of GDP across the majority of OECD countries – with Iceland, Ireland and Luxembourg undertaking the most drastic cuts in family and health-care spending, while a few countries, including Japan, the Republic of Korea and Switzerland, maintained or increased social spending in at least two of these areas. Interestingly, in terms of incapacity spending, the Scandinavian countries of Norway and Sweden implemented the deepest cuts over the period of this study.

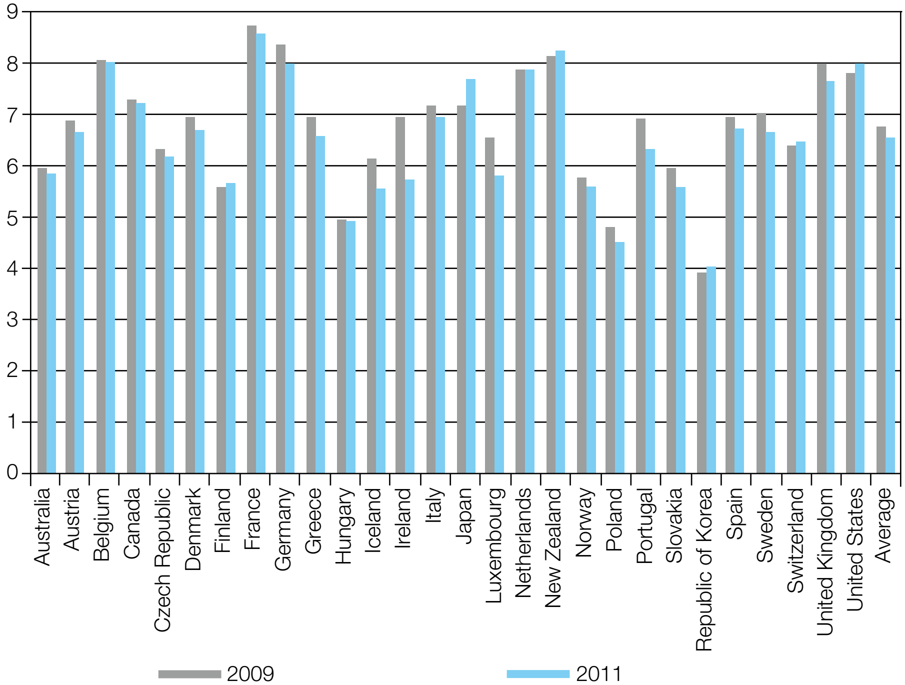
A reduction in such targeted public expenditure prompted an increase in unpaid labour burdens for women, as communities and families turned to them, instead of the dwindling public services, for a range of care-giving and health-care activities. In fact, all OECD countries, from the most gender-

Figure 3. Family spending in 28 OECD countries, 2009 and 2011 (percentage of GDP)



Source: OECD, Social Expenditure Aggregated Data (2016).

Figure 4. Health spending in 28 OECD countries, 2009 and 2011 (percentage of GDP)

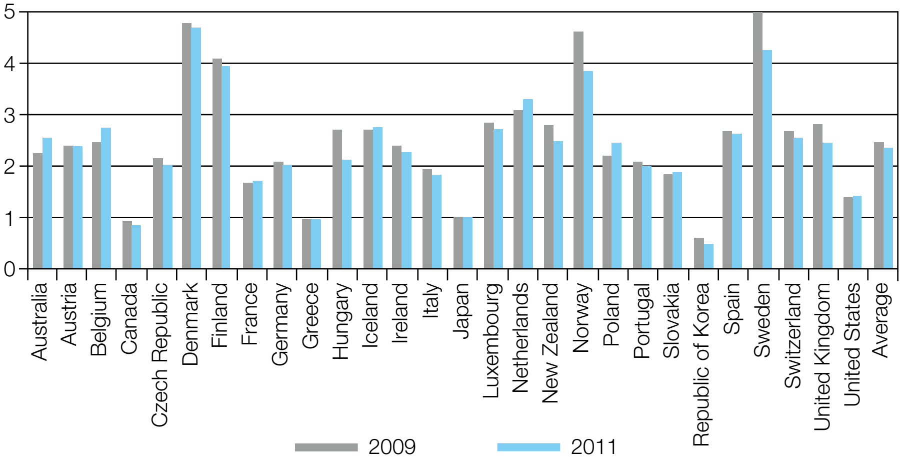


Source: OECD, Social Expenditure Aggregated Data (2016).

sensitive and inclusive to the most traditional, exhibit a much higher unpaid labour burden on women (Hook, 2006 and 2010). Southern and Eastern European States show the most gendered burdens, with extreme discrepancies between female and male unpaid labour hours. More specifically across the OECD countries, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden show the smallest differences, while Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Portugal have the highest levels of gender segregation in unpaid labour (see also OECD, 2011a; Eurofound, 2012).

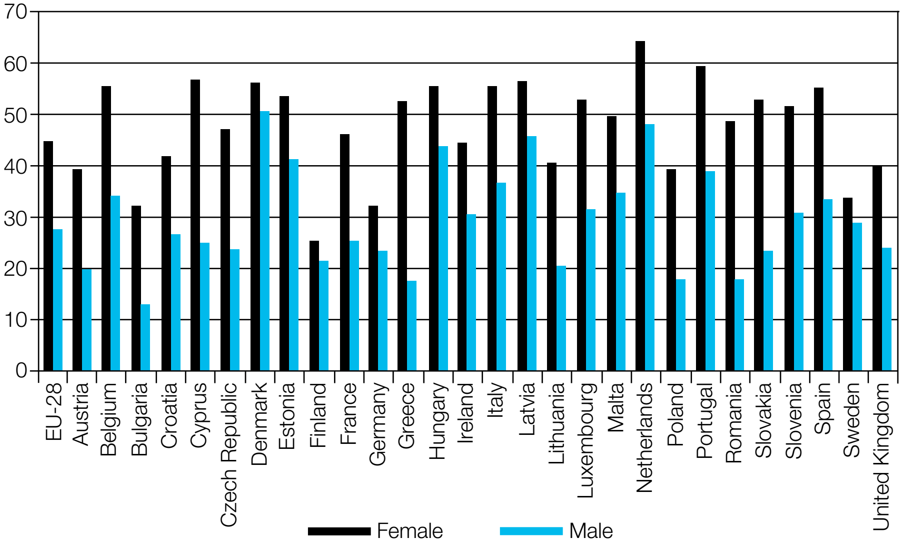
As figure 6 indicates, in 2012, EU countries recorded drastic gender segregation in the percentage of time spent on childcare activities – accounting for the majority of the unpaid labour burden. Aggregated EU rates show an almost 20 per cent activity gap between men and women in childcare activities. Scandinavian countries such as Denmark, Finland and Sweden record the narrowest gap, while Southern and Eastern European countries present with staggering gaps. In Greece, for instance, the gender gap is over 35 per cent, while in Cyprus, Romania and Slovakia it stands at over 30 per cent, hitting similarly high rates in many other countries. It is important to recognize, however, that each country presents with unique total rates of childcare activities,

Figure 5. Incapacity allowances spending in 28 OECD countries, 2009 and 2011 (percentage of GDP)



Source: OECD, Social Expenditure Aggregated Data (2016).

Figure 6. Time dedicated to childcare (percentage) by gender, EU-28, 2012

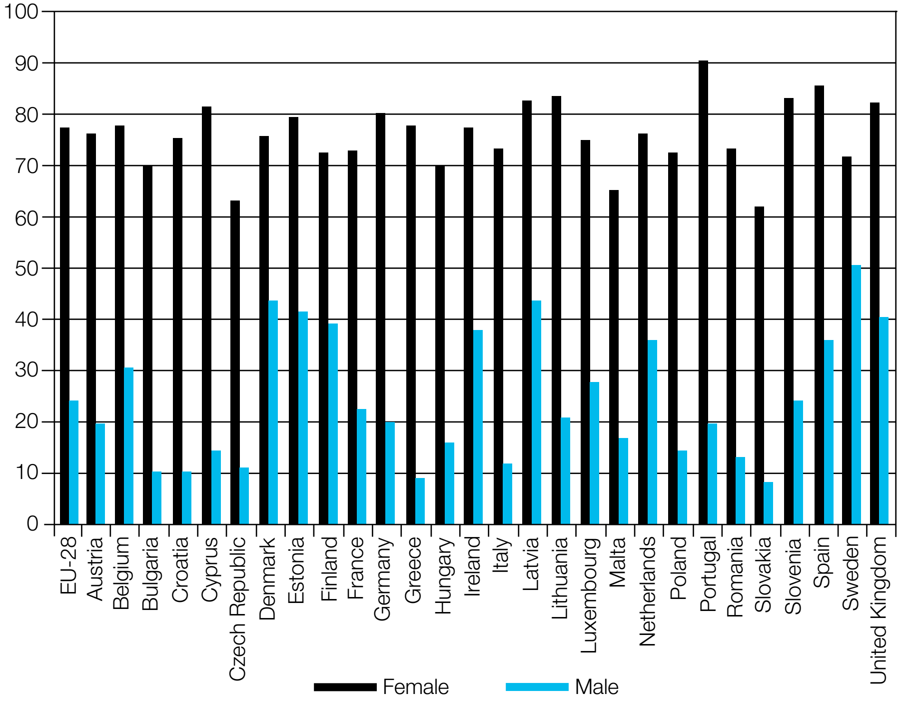


Source: European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index (2012).

and these discrepancies exist due to differing state support structures and welfare regimes (Kushi and McManus, 2018).

Figure 7 presents a much bleaker overview of the unpaid labour gap as related to general domestic household tasks. In this case, the most progressive Nordic regimes appear not to differ as drastically as might be supposed to their

Figure 7. Time spent in domestic household tasks (percentage) by gender, EU-28, 2012



Source: European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index (2012).

Southern and Eastern European counterparts. The aggregated European average for domestic household tasks shows a gender gap of over 50 per cent – with a 70 per cent gap in Portugal, 65 per cent in Croatia, Cyprus and Greece, and 60 per cent in Bulgaria, Germany, Italy and Lithuania. Sweden, Denmark and Finland have the smallest gender gaps, at 20, 30 and 30 per cent, respectively.

These major gendered discrepancies in unpaid labour posed serious challenges for women's integration in formal labour markets, especially as regards regular, full-time work. As support services and public expenditures decreased in response to austerity measures taken during the economic crisis, women's unpaid labour burdens increased much more than those of men. For instance, across all advanced welfare states, the recession threatened the provision of maternity protection and leave, alongside child benefits. In the United Kingdom, there was immediate pressure from businesses not to implement previously agreed improvements to maternity leave, arguing that they could not afford such a luxury at the time (Oxfam International and European Women's Lobby, 2010). In Ireland, the 2010 budget introduced cuts to child benefits, which is the only state benefit that offsets childcare costs and burdens. A similar view was expressed that such luxuries ought to be the first to go in harsh economic times. Yet such cuts in social spending directly hindered female workforce participation. A survey conducted by the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) (2009) highlighted the vital importance that parents place on child benefits and other direct payments. A total of 45 per cent of respondents said that it would be a "financial disaster" for their families if the State were to cut child benefits, while two-thirds said that child benefits were a "critical part" of family income.

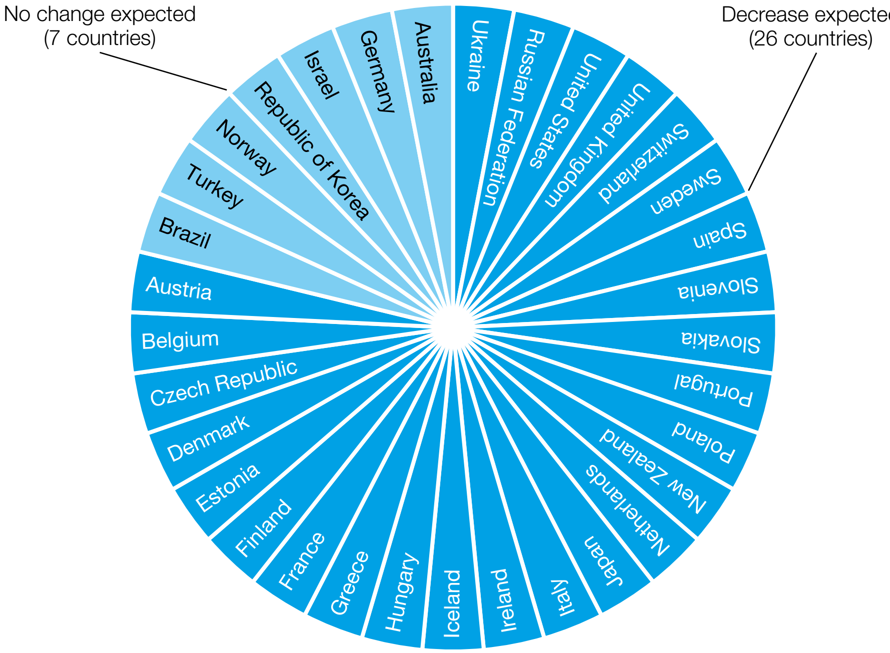
In sum, women did not share the same benefits as male workers from the initial stimulus packages given to the hardest hit industries and did not receive state aid when demand for female-dominated industries and services was weakened by slow economic recovery. Women suffered the most when austerity measures were introduced in the second phase of the crisis, resulting in cuts to vital social benefits, thereby increasing women's already disproportionate unpaid labour burdens and decreasing their availability for employment. To make matters worse, the austerity measures also crippled one of the biggest employers of women: the public sector.

Public sector lay-offs

As national governments came under pressure to reduce debt and deficit levels so as to repair budgets, restore market confidence and promote economic growth, public sector jobs and wages became primary targets alongside social spending cuts (European Women's Lobby, 2012; Glassner, 2010; Glassner and Keune, 2012). According to Ortiz (2014, p. 8), wage cuts and salary freezes for public sector workers were introduced in 98 countries, including teachers and health-care staff. By 2010, over three-quarters of OECD countries had identified plans to reduce the public sector, while none had planned to increase public employment or wages (see figure 8). By 2013, 20 countries across the EU had announced public sector wage cuts and 15 had introduced planned staff reductions (Bettio et al., 2013). These wage cuts varied considerably – from a two-year wage freeze in the United Kingdom to a 10 per cent wage reduction in the Czech Republic, and a nearly 14 per cent cut in Ireland (see table 3). Public sector employment was reduced significantly in a number of countries. For example, by 2017, the United Kingdom planned to eliminate general government employment by 710,000 (see table 4). Other countries, including France, Greece, Portugal and Spain, also introduced policies to limit the replacement of vacant positions. Overall, as the economic crisis continued and national sovereign debt concerns became more prevalent, the public sector faced growing retrenchment.

A major implication of fiscal consolidation efforts, which reduce public sector jobs and wages, is that these policies may generate greater gender inequalities (Bettio et al., 2013; European Women's Lobby, 2012; EPSU, 2013). While the size and composition of the public sector varies across countries, cuts to public employment and wages represent a considerable burden on women, who are far more likely to be employed in the public sector, particularly in the areas of health and education (Mandel and Semyonov, 2006; Ortiz, 2014;

Figure 8. Plans to decrease public employment in OECD member and candidate countries, 2010*



* Anticipated changes in employment levels in more than 50 per cent of public agencies and ministries as of 2010.
Source: OECD, 2011b.

OECD, 2015). In the United Kingdom, for example, between 710,000 and 1.1 million public sector jobs were projected to be cut over the period from 2010 to 2018 (OECD, 2011c and 2012; Oxfam International and European Women's Lobby, 2010). It was estimated that twice as many women as men would lose their jobs, given that female workers comprise 64 per cent of public sector employment in the United Kingdom (ibid.). This is true elsewhere, given that women are more likely to bear the burden of public sector cuts across countries.

As shown in figure 9, women comprised a larger share of public sector employment in most advanced economies in 2009 and 2013. On average, throughout the OECD countries, women accounted for 58 per cent of the public sector workforce, compared to the whole economy, where female workers comprised only 45.3 per cent of total employment (OECD, 2015). According to available data for 2013, women represented around two-thirds of public sector workers in OECD countries including the United Kingdom, Estonia, Norway, Denmark and Slovenia, and an incredible 72 per cent of public sector employees in Sweden. In fact, only in a small number of countries did men outnumber women in the public sector, as in the case of Greece. However, while women may have made up a smaller share of public sector employment in those

Table 3. Public sector wage reduction targets of selected OECD countries, 2009–14

Country	Wage reductions
Belgium	0.7 per cent savings on personnel expenditures.
Czech Republic	10 per cent wage cut in the public sector (excluding teachers).
Estonia	9 per cent savings on personnel expenditures.
France	Freezing public sector wages.
Greece	Allowances cut by 20 per cent in 2010. Abolishing the 13th and 14th month bonuses for monthly earnings above €3,000 (= 14 per cent). Rationalization of special wage regimes (police, military personnel, firemen, diplomats, etc.).
Hungary	Freezing public sector wages.
Ireland	13.5 per cent public sector wage cut in 2009–10. More cuts expected in 2011–14.
Poland	Freezing public sector wages.
Portugal	5 per cent wage cut in the public sector. 0.11 per cent to 0.84 per cent of GDP wage cut by 2013. Wage freeze in 2012–13.
Slovakia	10 per cent wage cut in central government.
Slovenia	14 per cent wage and public intermediate consumption cut.
Spain	5 per cent wage cut in 2010, frozen in 2011.
United Kingdom	Two-year wage freeze.

Source: OECD, 2011c and 2012.

Table 4. Public sector staff reduction targets in selected OECD countries, 2010–17

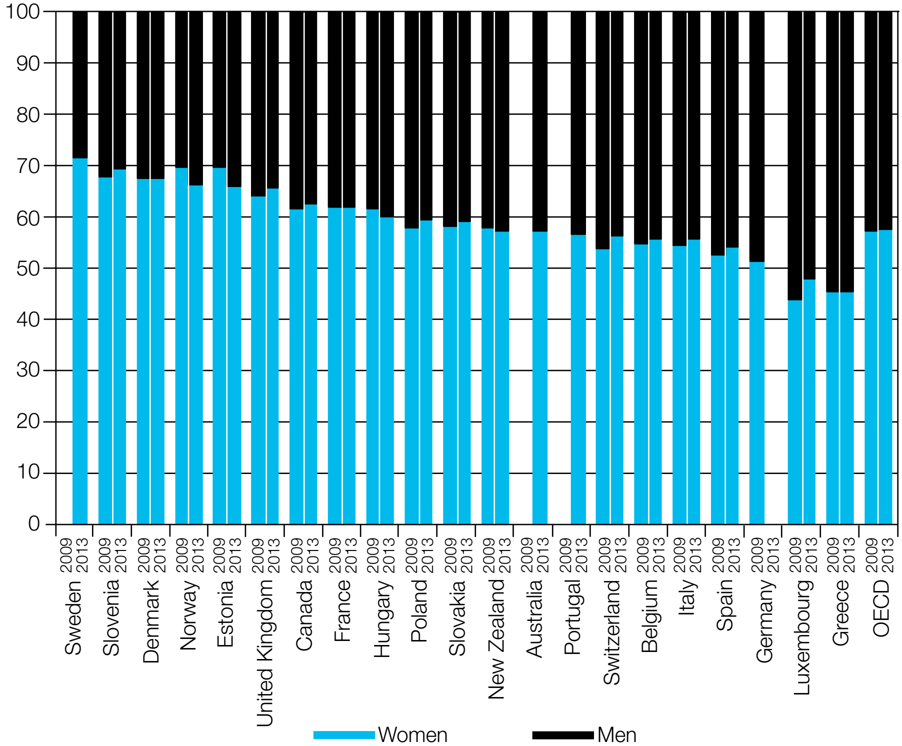
Country	Staff reductions
Austria	3,000 federal officials by 2014. Recruitment reduction.
France	150,000 public sector jobs by 2013 by non-replacement of one out of two retiring civil servants.
Germany	10,000 federal public sector jobs permanently abolished by 2014.
Greece	20 per cent of retiring employees replaced, fewer public short-term contract employees.
Ireland	24,750 public sector jobs by 2014. €1.2 billion to be cut from the public service wage bill in 2011–14.
Portugal	Recruitment freeze of civil servants (no replacements).
Slovenia	1 per cent of public sector employees from 2010 to 2011.
Spain	10 per cent replacement rate for public sector staff in 2011–13 (7 per cent staff reduction by 2013).
United Kingdom	General government employment to fall by 710,000 by 2016–17.

Source: OECD, 2011c and 2012.

countries, this often reflects lower levels of overall female participation in the labour force. For instance, while women only comprised around 46 per cent of public sector employment in Greece, they were also under-represented in the overall economy, accounting for only 40 per cent of total employment.[12] Furthermore, while the average unemployment rate for men in Greece be-

[12] See "Female share of public and total employment", OECD Employment Data (2016). Available at: https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?QueryId=78408 [accessed 11 Oct. 2018].

Figure 9. Share of public sector employment filled by women and men in selected OECD countries, 2009 and 2013



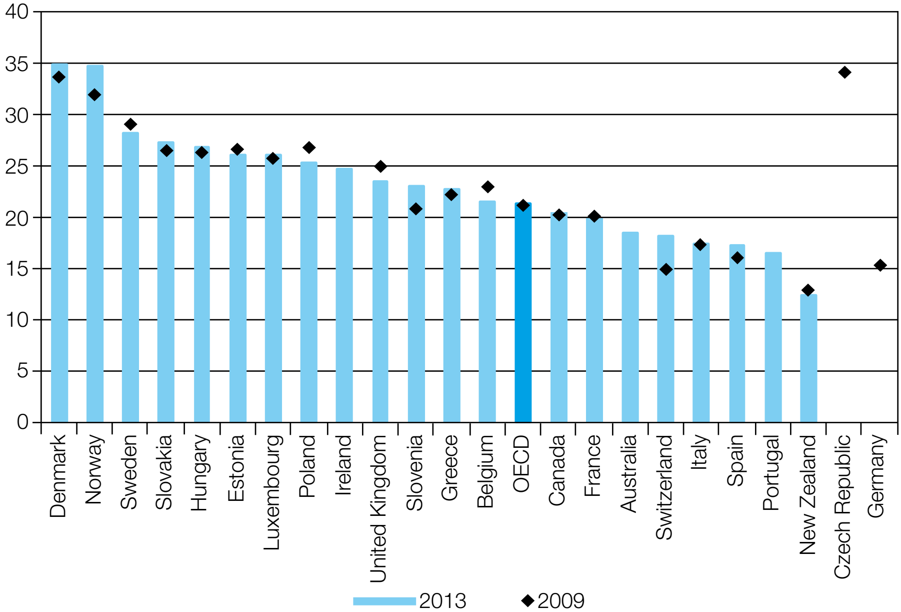
Source: ILO, ILOSTAT database. Data for Italy are from the National Statistical Institute and the Ministry of Finance. Data for Portugal are from the Ministry of Finance. Data for Austria, Czech Republic, Finland, Ireland, Iceland, the Netherlands and the United States are not available. Data for Australia, Germany, Portugal and Sweden are not included in the OECD average due to missing time series. Data for New Zealand are expressed in full-time equivalents (FTEs). Australia, Greece, Hungary and Slovenia: 2012 instead of 2013. Denmark, Luxembourg and New Zealand: 2011 instead of 2013. Switzerland: 2008 instead of 2009.

tween 2007 and 2013 was 12.7 per cent, it was significantly higher for women at 19.3 per cent.[13]

Although the size of the public sector varies from country to country, on average it represents over 20 per cent of total employment across OECD countries and is particularly high in Nordic countries and in Eastern European States (see figure 10). Women account for the largest share of public employment. Austerity measures aiming to downsize the public sector and reduce its wages are, therefore, likely to generate greater income inequality and labour market instability for women. The timing of public sector cuts was also in line with more widespread efforts to reduce government spending through social welfare cutbacks. Effectively, this means that at the same time as women faced

[13] See "LFS by sex and age – indicators", OECD Labour Statistics (2016). Available at: https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=LFS_SEXAGE_I_R [accessed 10 Oct. 2018].

Figure 10. Public sector employment as a percentage of total employment in selected OECD countries, 2009 and 2013



Source: ILO, ILOSTAT database. Data for Italy are from the National Statistical Institute and the Ministry of Finance. Data for Portugal are from the Ministry of Finance. Data for the Republic of Korea were provided by the national authorities. Data for Austria, Finland, Iceland, Israel, the Netherlands and the United States are not available. Data for Australia, the Czech Republic, Germany, the Republic of Korea, Ireland and Portugal are not included in the OECD average due to missing time series. Data for Czech Republic and New Zealand are expressed in full-time equivalents (FTEs). Australia, Greece, Hungary and Slovenia: 2012 instead of 2013. Denmark, Luxembourg and New Zealand: 2011 instead of 2013. Switzerland: 2008 instead of 2009.

the prospects of lower wages and lay-offs, essential protection measures, such as unemployment benefits, active labour market policies, childcare services, health care and family support diminished. This represented an additional burden on women as social policies, including parental and family leave, childcare programmes and workforce training often reduce the costs for women to participate in the labour market and allow for greater economic independence (Sørensen and McLanahan, 1987; Hobson, 1990; Bianchi, Casper and Peltola, 1999; Mandel and Semyonov, 2006).

In addition to the importance that the public sector holds as a source of employment for female workers, it is often the originator and promoter of gender equality policies. According to Bettio et al. (2013, p. 121), "Gender equality policies often start in the public sector and are always implemented much more strictly in the public sphere due to visibility, employment stability, the strength of the unions and – very often in the past – soft budget constraints". This indicates that public sector cuts may not only affect the wages and employment status of women but could potentially limit the introduction of more comprehensive gender equality measures. In a joint employment report issued at the start of the crisis, the European Commission (2010, p. 9) acknowledged the negative impact that the crisis was starting to have on gender equality policies, indicating that since the start of the Great Recession, "some measures for gender equality have been delayed or cancelled and no new measure[s] have been taken except support to new jobs in the care sector". While some countries, such as Slovenia and Sweden, were able to increase funding after the crisis began, fiscal consolidation efforts in many other States have had a negative impact on gender equality infrastructures. Public budget cuts, for example, have resulted in a reduction of resources dedicated to gender equality measures in Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Ireland, Latvia, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom (Bettio et al., 2013). A report by the European Women's Lobby (2012) indicates that gender equality institutions in Europe have been weakened by austerity measures, which threaten to undermine the progress that women have made in the labour market. As a result, although the specific impact of public spending cuts on gender equality will vary between countries, it is possible that gender inequality may increase as an unintended consequence of austerity measures. This will occur particularly as a result of cuts to the public sector and social welfare programmes, which disproportionately affect women. However, given that female-dominated industries and female workers were less visibly affected by the recession, governments and decision-makers have largely ignored women's unique concerns and positions within post-crisis labour markets.

Conclusions and policy implications

While the current political science literature offers a range of analysis on general post-crisis labour market effects, studies on the disaggregated effects of the crisis on gender remain rare. Our research examines the little studied relationship between economic crisis, social protection systems, labour market structures and gender across advanced capitalist countries. Our findings point to significant gender-based discrepancies within OECD labour markets, largely founded upon different welfare systems with varying degrees of social spending and public sector investments.

Our research illustrates women's particular vulnerability to the effects of economic crisis and labour market shifts. This pattern has already been documented in relation to the crisis in Asia and the Pacific in the late 1990s, and it remains consistent in the contemporary era (Lim, 2000; Corner, 2009; Karamessini and Rubery, 2014; Périvier, 2018). These gendered vulnerabilities originate from women's already precarious employment status in society, including their concentration in non-regular work and less subsidized sectors, such as service and trade. Moreover, women must contend with a highly disproportionate unpaid labour burden arising from traditional cultural norms regarding women's role in society, which is magnified during times of economic hardship (Sainsbury, 1996; Hook, 2006 and 2010). Lastly, as our random effects model reveals, many welfare regimes across OECD countries offer male workers much greater social protection and labour market access than their female counterparts.

The primary mechanisms of these gendered regime outcomes relate to government social expenditure allocations and public sector employment dynamics (Sirimanne, 2009). As the financial crisis hit advanced welfare state economies, government policies initially buffered and bolstered the hardest-hit manufacturing and construction industries, dominated by regular, full-time male workers. As the crisis progressed to more female-dominated sectors, such as services, trade and public employment, OECD countries began the implementation of harsh austerity measures. Thus, female-dominated industries were not protected from the economic crisis and social safety nets for female workers were diminished. Additionally, decreases in state-sponsored benefits, including social spending on family, health-care, disability and housing policies, disproportionately impacted female labour market participation. Women predominantly rely on these benefits to offset unpaid labour costs and family responsibilities, and they comprise a much larger proportion of public sector workers. Consequently, the composition and timing of government policies failed to account for gender bias, thereby placing a greater burden on female workers.

The findings of this research provide further evidence of the negative, highly gendered effects of rapid and deep austerity measures across advanced economies. The austerity programmes implemented across Europe and other Western countries – founded upon regressive taxes and drastic spending cuts, particularly to public services, such as education, health care, family benefits and social security – have eroded the policy mechanisms that are meant to mitigate social inequalities and promote economic growth (Oxfam International, 2013; European Women's Lobby, 2012). These programmes have left the most vulnerable members of society to fend for themselves, often taking on the costs of past economic mistakes, to the benefit of insider groups.

As we have shown, in the vast majority of countries, gender mainstreaming was absent in the implementation of crisis policy design. Given the damage that austerity has caused, it becomes imperative to identify alternative policies in order to improve crisis responses and ensure that all groups in society benefit equally from state policy-making. All policies must first undergo gender impact assessments so as to identify the unique impact of economic crisis on both men and women, and on both male- and female-dominated sectors and services (CSW, 2009). The first step toward this endeavour is to define and collect sex-disaggregated data – measures that better capture women's roles and contributions, including unpaid activities, which can be used to design gender-sensitive fiscal stimulus packages for those who are most affected.

Once gender analysis has established the particular effects and concerns of the crisis on the different groups of workers, gender budgeting should be adopted. It should become standard procedure in assessing dynamics of public spending within economic recovery plans (Oxfam International and European Women's Lobby, 2010; Oxfam International, 2013).

Serious gendered gaps exist in fiscal policy-making. In response to economic crises, most government funds are directed toward infrastructure and public works, which predominantly employ men, because they are the best means of quickly reaching a large, wide range of unemployed workers. But since they largely involve the construction industry, very few women benefit from such initiatives (ILO, 2010). Even investments within the formal sector marginalize women's needs, as they are vastly employed in non-regular work. It would thus be beneficial for governments to expand social services so that women may also begin to involve themselves in such full-time, regular sectors. Another method would be to establish sectoral targets for women, especially within areas such as construction and manufacturing, where they are under-represented.

A critical policy recommendation is to promote a greater role for women in the policy-making process, allowing women to advocate for their own economic empowerment and well-being. Women must be better informed and involved in economic decision-making and budgetary allocations. Their voices and their particular needs must be heard during the early stages of a crisis to enable prompt advocacy within policy-making processes. This should include greater visibility of women of all backgrounds so that the impact of the economic downturn and policy responses can be evaluated across social and economic groups of women.

Lastly, beyond their gendered outcomes, welfare regimes – with their structures of social spending and public sectors – influence other marginalized groups across OECD countries. Future research should delve into such dynamics, ranging from youth unemployment to migrant labour markets and ethnic and racial minority unemployment outcomes. Moreover, when more disaggregated data become available, the analysis should integrate variables of economic class, age, race and ethnicity, alongside gender. Austerity norms and measures have greatly harmed women's employment prospects over the years, and they may have similarly impacted other labour outsiders. Fiscal austerity, however, remains the preferred means of post-crisis policy-making, and national governments will continue to implement such measures with little hesitation until the effects of austerity are systematically studied across all social demographics and integrated into policy assessments.

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