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### The impact of austerity on gender equality in the labour market and alternative policy strategies

Francesca Sanders

Harriet Taylor Mill-Institut für Ökonomie und Geschlechterforschung  
Discussion Paper 32, 02/2017

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Discussion Papers des Harriet Taylor Mill-Instituts für Ökonomie und  
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Die Herausgeberinnen

# **The impact of austerity on gender equality in the labour market and alternative policy strategies**

**Francesca Sanders**

**Author**

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**Abstract**

Austerity policies introduced to deal with the euro crisis have led to negative impacts on social welfare, including gender equality. People of different genders exhibit differences in social and economic behaviour, including in the spheres of paid and non-paid work. Because women are more likely to undertake care activities in all forms, the recent cuts to provision of health care, childcare and aged care, as well as wage freezes and staffing cuts in the public sector have been particularly detrimental for women. While these policies appear to be gender neutral, they may have inadvertently stalled many of the gains that were made in gender equality prior to the crisis.

This paper examines the impact so far of fiscal consolidation policies on certain indicators of gender equality in the labour force in Europe. It considers not only policy settings but also broader macroeconomic and institutional settings, as well as prevailing trends in labour force indicators and ideology. There will be a specific focus on two countries substantially affected by austerity: Ireland and Spain. A second research question will also be addressed, considering strategies and policy approaches that might promote gender equality.

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## **1. Introduction**

In the European Union, many consider excessive government spending and high debt-to-GDP ratios to have led to widespread instability and ultimately the euro crisis that officially began in 2010. Fiscal consolidation, known as austerity, has been promoted as the way to achieve debt sustainability. This perception is a prevailing view among many policymakers, and many countries around the world have for many years implemented cuts to their government budgets.

As has become clear, the negative effect of austerity on growth means that for many countries, debt-to-GDP ratios have, in fact, risen. Austerity measures have additionally had significant negative impacts on social welfare, including gender equality.

People of different genders<sup>1</sup> can be affected by the same economic policy in different ways. This is due to differences in social and economic behaviour. This paper focuses on gendered division of labour in particular, both paid and unpaid. Social norms mean that women are responsible for a greater proportion of care work, particularly childcare and elderly care. This means that they have greater pressure on their time, if they perform the care work themselves, or that they rely heavily on public services to provide this care. In addition, women experience occupational and sectoral segregation in employment that leads them to be more likely to be employed in the public sector than in any other sector.

These differences mean that the recent cuts to provision of health care, childcare and aged care, as well as wage freezes and staffing cuts in the public sector have been particularly detrimental for women. While these policies appear to be gender neutral, they may have inadvertently stalled many of the gains that were made in gender equality prior to the crisis.

These detrimental social outcomes are not inevitable. There are ways of designing fiscal policy that avoid, as much as possible, these negative outcomes. Gender mainstreaming is a strategy whereby gender impacts of policies are considered in the process of the policy development. Further, carefully directed social spending has the potential to promote gender equality in the labour force. Several ideas have been put forth recently that focus on social or public investment for inclusive and sustainable prosperity. This would include investment in education, social services and policies that increase the demand for and supply of female labour.

The impact of austerity policies on women is an issue that has received increasing attention in recent years, along with broader issues of women's empowerment and gender equality. This is an issue of broader social significance, as well as of personal importance to this author.

The research question this paper will address will be: what has the impact been so far of fiscal consolidation policies on gender equality in the labour force in Europe? There will be a specific focus on two countries hard hit by austerity: Ireland and Spain. A second research question will also be addressed, considering strategies and policy approaches that might promote gender equality.

A framework will be established in which to consider austerity and its effects. While policy decisions are significant, broader macroeconomic and institutional settings

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<sup>1</sup> A note on the use of the term "gender": For the purposes of this paper this refers to men and women, due to the way data is disaggregated and the way that the relevant economic and social theory is largely framed. The author wishes to acknowledge that there are more than two genders and that policies may affect the economic behaviour of other genders in ways not addressed here.

are also highly relevant, as are prevailing trends in labour force indicators and ideology.

The paper is organised as follows: Section 2 will outline the relevant theoretical concepts; Section 3 will describe the methodology for answering the first research question as well as a hypothesis; Section 4 will look at recent trends in austerity and gender equality; Section 5 will provide detailed case studies of the experience of Ireland and Spain with austerity and gender equality in the labour force; Section 6 will look at strategies that could promote gender equality and address the second research question; Section 7 will conclude.

As time progresses and the impacts of the crisis and austerity continue to unfold, more information and data become available. Thus this paper contributes to the ongoing discussion with an up-to-date examination of the most recent information, focusing on two countries in particular.

Many people and organisations have worked hard to make concrete progress towards equality of opportunity and of compensation for women in the labour force. Austerity threatens to undermine this progress and even reverse the gains that have been made. By highlighting the damaging effects that austerity policies and poorly conceived fiscal policy have had and can have on women in the labour force, I hope to contribute to a world that takes one step closer to achieving gender equality.

## **2. Theoretical concepts**

### **2.1 Social norms and sectoral segregation**

This subsection will focus on two specific areas of gender difference in behaviour and the relevance to fiscal policy. The first area is that women take greater responsibility for unpaid care work than men, which makes them bigger consumers of public goods, such as health care, education and childcare services. The second is that due to differences in paid work, women are more likely to be employed in the public sector than they are in any other sector of the economy.

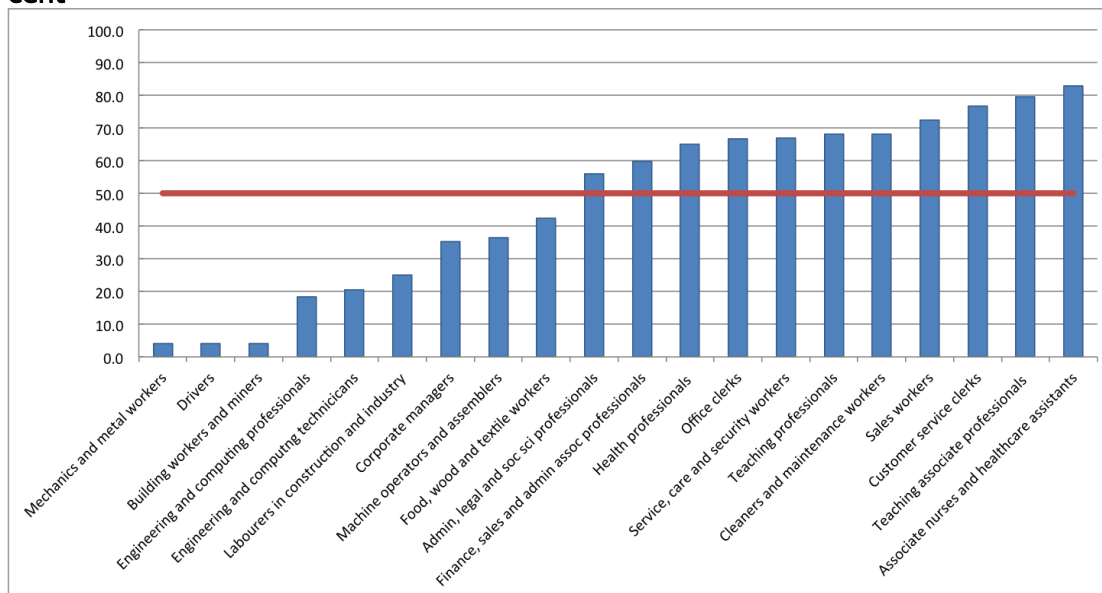
Francavilla et al. (2013: 57) found that women in 13 EU countries were consistently found to perform more domestic and childcare work than men. A larger study of time-use surveys in 26 OECD countries and three emerging market economies found a similar trend: in all countries women were found to do more unpaid work activities than men. This includes cooking, cleaning and caring for family members and is regardless of whether they also do market work (Miranda 2011). If women do not perform this work themselves, they are, by nature of this gendered division of labour, likely to be responsible for arranging the work to be performed in the market, for example, by engaging a house cleaner or enrolling children in childcare.

These trends in unpaid care work and consumption of public care services means that when funding to public services like child or elderly care is lacking, these shortfalls are often made up for by women (Rubery 2014). Issues of intersectionality—overlapping and interdependent characteristics of discrimination or disadvantage—are salient here, where in some countries, for example in the Mediterranean region in particular, it is likely that women in formal but low-paid work or migrant women in the informal sector compensate for a large portion of the reduced provision of public care services (Simonazzi 2009).

Social norms and gendered division of labour also lead to gendered vertical and horizontal segregation in the labour market. Vertical segregation refers to the fact that women are much more likely than men to be employed in unskilled or lower paid positions such as domestic cleaners, low-grade manufacturing or desk clerks,

and the reverse is true in positions of senior officials and managers (UNCTAD 2012: 68). Horizontal segregation, describing sectoral and occupational segregation, refers to the different types of jobs that women are likely to undertake. As indicated in Figure 1, below, Burchell et al. (2013: 52) found that in 2010 in the EU-26 countries, women dominated occupations such as nursing and health care, teaching, and cleaning. All occupations above the 50 per cent horizontal line are those dominated by women.

**Figure 1: Female employees in top 20 occupations in 2010, EU-26 average, per cent**



Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey (2010) quoted in Burchell et al 2013: 50, Figure 15

Bettio and Verashchagina (2009) give several reasons why gender segregation is an issue that should be addressed. They argue that women's skills may not be visible in the labour market because female-dominated occupations are often undifferentiated in terms of pay and grading; that pay and grading structures are often based on 'male' skills and so 'women's' skills may be less valued; that pay is often lower in female-dominated occupations and that women may face obstacles to gaining access to higher job levels which accompanies higher pay and non-pay rewards (ibid.: 46).

The types of jobs dominated by women, for example health care and education, fall under the sphere of the public sector in the majority of countries. Further, the public sector in many countries offers greater job security and better working conditions than the private sector, and has often implemented policies that have enabled progress toward greater gender equality. For these reasons the public sector is a source of employment for highly skilled women and has played a significant role in making gains towards equality of conditions and wages (Rubery 2014). All this means that policies affecting the public sector, including cuts to public sector jobs and changes to working conditions in the public sector will likely have a large impact on women.

The European Women's Lobby (2012) estimates total employment in the public sector in Europe is 69.2 per cent women. The figures are even higher in health and social work, where 78.4 per cent of workers are women, and in education, where women are 71.5 per cent of workers (ibid.: 4).

Reductions in public sector jobs have been a central part of austerity in many countries. For example, in Greece, public sector employment was reduced by 25 per cent, and in Britain 20 per cent of public sector jobs were cut. The effect on

women has been very pronounced in Spain, Portugal and Greece, where job cuts were concentrated in education, health and social work, those sectors that are highly female-dominated (ibid.).

## **2.2 Institutional arrangements**

The trends seen in gender separation of work—paid and unpaid—discussed above have been well-established as factors that contribute to labour market participation decisions and other characteristics of the labour market. To get a full understanding of the impacts of policies, it is important to also consider the institutional context in which these trends occur. Different institutional settings are shown to produce different outcomes in gendered behaviour generally and in the labour market specifically.

It can be said that to some extent EU-level directives and guidelines unify national approaches to division of care, employment opportunities and conditions for men and women. For example, the European Council and the EU recognise and promote the value of affordable childcare in supporting labour force participation (European Commission 1992). The Lisbon Strategy covering the years 2000 to 2010 formally enshrined gender equality as a goal for the EU, making an explicit target of 60 per cent average female labour force participation (Lisbon European Council 2000).

Despite agreement at this level regarding the importance of social inclusion and gender equality, in practice the situation varies across the continent. The different institutional arrangements and levels of gender equality can be broadly divided into four main groups. Although the literature does not have a firm consensus over the precise grouping or naming of country groups, there is broad agreement over certain characteristics. The discussion here is based on the work of Plantenga and Remery (2013a). There are also several overlaps with Esping-Anderson's (1990) three worlds approach as well as with Braunstein's (2015) model.

The clearest distinction can be drawn between the limited formal welfare arrangements and low female participation rates of Mediterranean countries, with heavy reliance on informal care arrangements, and the strong public provision of care, well developed leave arrangements and high female labour force participation rates of Northern Europe and Slovenia. In the latter group of countries, which includes Scandinavia, France and Belgium, childcare is considered a 'social right', and social policies aim at universal coverage of formal childcare (Plantenga and Remery 2013a: 101).

Two further groups of countries can be distinguished based on institutional arrangements and gender equality indicators. Those of central and eastern Europe, including Cyprus, Poland, the Czech republic and Malta, have high female participation rates but limited childcare services resulting in women taking long periods of leave from work (ibid.).

The final group of countries includes the UK, Ireland, the Netherlands and arguably Germany, which exhibit underdeveloped but increasing coverage of child care and high female participation rates, with limited reconciliation policies made up for by flexibility in the labour market (ibid.).

Table 1, below, outlines these configurations of flexibility in relation to gender equality by Plantenga and Remery (2013a) with additions taken from Mutari and Figart (2001). 'Working time regime' follows the description used by Mutari and Figart (2001). 'Gender equity' captures gender pay gap and women's labour force participation. 'Flexibility' covers factors like length of working time, organisation of working time, and work location. These elements are related to but not exactly the same as work-life reconciliation.

**Table 1: European countries divided according to gendered division of working time, gender equity and flexibility for women in the workforce**

Working time regime	Gender equity	Flexibility	Other notes	Countries
Male breadwinner	Low	Low	Low FLFP	Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal
Liberal flexibilisation	Low	High	Self-regulated, rely on overtime and part-time work	UK, Ireland, Austria, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands
Solidaristic gender equity	High	Low	Made great progress to equity by changing social norms	Denmark, France, Belgium, Finland, Sweden
High road flexibilisation	High	High		None yet

Source: Author's distillation based on Plantega and Remery (2013a) and Mutari and Figart (2001)

Table 2, below, further divides a set of European countries into the availability of childcare facilities due to the importance childcare has for labour force decisions.

**Table 2: Reconciliation and work: countries divided according to childcare availability**

Childcare	Country
Short supply but improving	UK, Netherlands, Germany
Low starting point but slowly increasing	Luxembourg, Portugal, Italy, Spain, Austria, Greece
Very limited	Cyprus, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Malta

Source: Based on Plantega and Remery (2013b)

These differences in institutional arrangements and policy environments provide the context for looking at the effect of austerity, because different starting environments will respond differently to shocks.

The two countries chosen for the case studies, Ireland and Spain, have different institutional settings and have gender equality embedded to different extents. Ireland is a country with limited childcare and other reconciliation policies but labour market flexibility that enables high female participation. Spain has a strong tradition of men as breadwinners and relies heavily on informal childcare, but huge improvements have been made in recent years in female labour force participation and the provision of support for women in the workforce.

The hypothesis in Section 3.2 below will consider these pre-existing institutional settings in the context of the shock of austerity, and will make some predictions as to how labour market indicators will be affected in the two countries, before examining the data to see what actually occurred.

## 2.3 Factors affecting labour market indicators

This study will consider the five standard indicators of gender differentials in the labour market used by the ILO (2012) to examine trends in employment of women:

1. unemployment rate;
2. employment rate;

3. sectoral and occupational segregation;
4. labour force participation rate; and
5. vulnerability.

These five indicators cover standard labour market indicators, and also indicate some behavioural and demographic change (in the case of labour force participation) as well as qualitative change in the measure of vulnerability. In addition to these indicators this study will also consider indicators for:

6. gender pay gap.

This subsection will outline what factors are shown to have an impact on the above labour market indicators. In this way, the likely effect of austerity policies, including cuts to public jobs, wages, spending on public services and changes to public sector working conditions, on women in the workforce and gender equality will be explored. It will also be a starting point for determining what kind of data to collect and what additional intervening factors need to be considered.

#### *Unemployment and employment rates*

Unemployment rates show the number of unemployed women out of the total women in the labour force and the employment rates show the number of women that have jobs out of the total women participating the labour force (in the case of the female unemployment and employment rates). Due to the proportion of women that make up the public sector, as well as the contribution to women's employment that the public sector makes, it is expected that cuts to public sector employment figures, a significant element of austerity measures, will be reflected in the unemployment and employment rates for women.

It is possible that, due to ease of mobility, if women are able to pick up employment outside the public sector in the event they lose their job, these rates may not change. However, due to the reduction in jobs caused by other factors in the crisis and because men are also losing their jobs and seeking new ones this is unlikely.

#### *Sectoral and occupational segregation*

As described in Section 2.1, horizontal, or sectoral and occupational segregation broadly means that women are more likely to be employed in certain types of jobs, namely education, care and service-related jobs. Women are thus more likely to be employed in the public sector than any other sector and also often make up the majority of employees in that sector.

Research has found that the causes of vertical and horizontal segregation can be broadly grouped in four areas: choices in field of study, hours of work related to the unequal burden of care, stereotypes, and other organisation and procedural biases, for example in pay setting (Bettio and Verashchagina 2009: 90). Thus, changes to segregation will likely occur slowly over time, and are closely linked with ideologies. There is also a link between increasing rates of female employment and decreasing segregation. This is seen in an initial short-term increase due to the ease with which women join female-dominated occupations, and then are more likely to branch out (ibid.: 35). Other trends that are demonstrated to reduce segregation are an increase in levels of education and training among women, enabling greater occupational mobility (see e.g. Hong Li et al. 1996).

Dex (1987) and Dex, Ward and Joshi (2006) found that a large proportion of women experience downward occupational mobility in the United Kingdom following childbirth. The level of occupational mobility following childbirth varied depending

on type of job held before ceasing work, the length of time spent out of the workforce and whether the return to work was part-time or full-time (ibid.: 7f). Another study by Dex and Bukodi (2013) found that occupational mobility was negatively affected in economically depressed conditions, particularly so for people in lower level jobs, of which women make up a majority in many countries. They also found that women experience lower job mobility than men in weak labour markets.

The gender composition of public and non-public sector industries may change if job mobility is possible and the skill requirements of public sector and private sector jobs are similar.

### *Labour force participation*

Many studies have analysed the factors that influence labour force participation rates for women. These factors can be broadly grouped in labour market policies and institutional characteristics, which can have varying affects in different welfare regimes (Thévenon 2013).

In recent decades in Europe and other OECD countries, female labour force participation (henceforth FLFP) rates have increased significantly. Regarding institutional characteristics, an increase in the educational attainment of women in recent decades has been cited to contribute a great deal to promoting FLFP. This is estimated to contribute as much as 40 per cent of changes in the FLFP in Ireland, for example (Russell et al. 2009: 35). A second factor is the growth of the public service in different countries, which often has stronger wages and better conditions, employment protection and less discrimination and so supports FLFP. A further factor is the growth in availability of part-time work which has helped women re-enter the workforce following having children. The rise in part-time work may be a double-edged sword, however, because while in the short-term labour force participation is enabled, these types of jobs are often associated with lower wages, lower pensions and fewer career advancement opportunities (Thévenon 2013: 11).

Labour market policies affecting FLFP include parental leave, provision of childcare and financial support in the form of tax design. Parental leave is designed to strengthen attachment to the labour force, and so while availability can improve FLFP, longer durations of leave can have a negative impact on participation decisions (ibid.: 12). Provision of childcare for young children has consistently been cited as a major contributing factor (see for example, Henau, Meulder and O'Dorchai 2010; Del Boca, Pasqua and Pronzato 2009; Jaumotte 2003). Thévenon (2013: 27) cites this as having an "unambiguous positive correlation". Importantly, greater spending doesn't necessarily improve labour market participation, but rather greater coverage has the strongest effect. Tax design also contributes to participation decisions as women are often 'second earners' in a household, and higher effective tax rates reduce their labour market participation (ibid.).

Bloom et al. (2007) investigated the effect that fertility has on labour force participation. The estimated effect of each additional child on a woman between the ages of 25 and 39 was a 10 to 15 percentage point decrease in labour force participation. Reduced fertility is estimated to have been a significant contributor to the rise in FLFP in Spain, for example (Balleer, Gómez-Salvador and Turunen 2009: 20).

### *Vulnerability*

The ILO uses the term 'vulnerability' as one of its indicators for gender equality in the workforce (ILO 2012: 22). This measure specifically covers the proportion of workers in a country that are contributing (unpaid) family workers and own account

workers, and so are neither waged nor salaried (ibid.). This is a measure more appropriate for developing countries, where this type of worker can make up a large proportion, or even a majority, of the workforce. In developed countries, including the European Union, this specific type of 'vulnerable' worker makes up only 11 per cent of male workers and 8.4 per cent of female workers (ibid.: 23).

For the purpose of this study, an adjusted description of vulnerability will be considered, focusing on quality and security of work. To measure this for the two case studies, data for temporary and permanent contracts will be considered, as well as a qualitative discussion of working conditions and any other relevant change that has been observed since the beginning of the implementation of austerity measures.

### *Gender pay gap*

The final labour market indicator to be considered for the case studies is the gender pay gap. The European Commission officially uses the unadjusted gender pay gap, that is, the difference in average earnings between men and women, without controlling for any other differences in working behaviour or other characteristics (Eurostat 2010: 1). It does this for ease of cross-country comparisons and because there is yet to be an agreed-upon way of adjusting the measure, or controlling for other characteristics. The measure uses gross hourly earnings in order to compare part-time workers with full-time workers.

Many of the characteristics and features of women in the labour force discussed in this sub-section contribute to the existence of the unadjusted pay gap. Eurostat (2010: 3), for example, cites differences in education and occupational choices, breaks in career due to child rearing, and decisions by women to take on part-time work to support work-life balance. Interestingly, they find that a high FLFP rate is associated with a high pay gap, due to the large proportion of women working part-time. A low FLFP rate is associated with a low pay gap due to self-selection: in countries where not many women work, it tends to be the highly-skilled who choose work because they know they are able to earn a high wage (ibid.: 4). Corsi (2014b: 13) adds the introduction of a minimum wage as a factor that, due to raising the wage floor, would reduce the size of any pay gap. A European Commission (2013) report found that additional factors contributing to gender pay gaps are a lack of transparency in pay systems, a lack of clarity around legal obligations regarding equal pay for equal work, and other procedural obstacles that mean workers are not fully informed or able to claim equal pay.

The gender pay gap likely reinforces the gender norms that contribute to differences in time spent on unpaid care. As long as women earn less than men, it follows that unpaid care responsibilities will fall more often to women than to men (Onaran 2015: 13).

Due to the link between the size of public sector and the size of the gender wage gap, Rubery (2014) asserts that the stronger the public sector in a given economy, the smaller the gender pay gap tends to be. She argues that countries that have implemented cuts to public sector jobs and wages early in the euro crisis have already seen reversals in the steps they made to close the pay gap in preceding decades. Corsi (2014b) supports this finding, noting that sectors that are strongly unionised, of which the public sector is one, tend to have lower wage gaps too.

To correct for these observable differences in economic behaviour and personal characteristics that might explain differences in hourly wages, estimates for adjusted wage gaps are made. The 'adjustment' is the various factors that are taken into account. If any wage difference remains after correcting for these variables, it is likely to distil the discrimination, or pure gender-based pay



discrepancy. Adjusted wage gaps are less-widely used due to the lack of agreement around specific methodology.

Ponthieux and Meurs (2005: 20) controlled for several variables in estimating an adjusted wage gap, and found that the wage premium associated with employment in the public sector was significant to the size of the gender pay gap. The consequence is that the downsizing of the public service likely has the impact of increasing the size of the adjusted gender pay gap.

## **2.4 Social investment as an alternative to austerity**

Social investment is a model of providing social protection and welfare that has become widespread in Europe in recent decades, and has specifically been promoted as a strategy that would promote gender equality in the current context of recovery from the crisis. This sub-section will provide a theoretical background to the concept, outlining why it is considered a superior model for social welfare provision, as well as what the concerns and criticisms of the model are.

There is no universally agreed upon definition of social investment (considered one of its weaknesses as a policy prescription), but there are several hallmarks of the model. The key difference between it and other models of social protection is the focus on 'active' prevention rather than 'passive' protection. A key element of such a system is that by strengthening and expanding the provision of education, beginning at early childhood, and continuing through higher education and training, an individual has the best chance of being connected to the workforce and remaining so for the entirety of their working life. In this way they are better skilled and able to contribute to economic growth and will avoid relying on the state in later life to support them. It is a model described as requiring upfront investment and having long-term return (Hermerijck and Vandenbroucke 2012).

In addition to the focus on strengthening human capital, social investment policies support greater labour market participation for vulnerable groups (ibid.: 205). Benefits of the social investment model include that education opportunities are provided to all people, regardless of an individual's socio-economic background or gender (Bothfeld and Betzelt 2013: 20). It is also considered to be less costly in the long term than other 'passive' protection strategies, due to increased tax revenue and reduced future welfare payments that come from greater and more quality employment (Simonazzi 2015: 5; Famira-Mühlberger 2015: 30).

There are several areas of criticism, too. The first is that the model presupposes that all people can, want to, and should be in productive work, ignoring those who are unable to work, due to a physical or mental impairment, those who choose to or must care for a child or elderly relative, and those who for some other reason are unable to or choose not to work. A second criticism is related to the responsibility placed on the individual to ensure they find work or attend training and schooling, which has the potential to reinforce existing social inequalities (Cantillon and Van Lancker 2013: 557f). The third criticism is that provision of childcare and education tends to benefit those already engaged in some work and can have difficulty in reaching the most disadvantaged or disconnected groups. This can mean an inadvertent redistribution effect away from the most vulnerable, when cash transfers are replaced with investment in childcare (ibid.: 560; Cantillon 2011: 16).

Social investment and the promotion of labour market participation have been incorporated into EU policy guidelines since the adoption of the Lisbon strategy in 2000. Since the onset of the global financial crisis and the Eurozone crisis and the failure of neoliberalism and austerity in addressing social issues, its concepts have been revisited as an alternative to the current recovery strategy (Hermerijck and Vandenbroucke 2012).

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Drawing a link between policy and outcome

This paper will look at a few general trends in austerity and gender equality, and then focus on the experience of two countries: Ireland and Spain. These countries were both hit hard by austerity, introduced as a path towards achieving debt sustainability.

The case studies in Section 5 will begin by outlining the policies that have been implemented in the two countries, looking specifically at the areas of public expenditure for the provision of public goods in the areas of care—for children, people with disabilities, and the elderly; and with regard to public sector employment—including changes to staffing levels, wages, and employment conditions. The public sector as defined by the ILO is based on state-ownership, but excludes state-owned enterprises. It thus covers the sectors of public administration, education, health care, and social services (Hammouya 2010: 4).

The second part of each case study will consider movements in related indicators to determine if there has been a change following the implementation of policy. Table 3, below, provides the policies and indicators to be looked at.

**Table 3: Policies and associated indicators to be examined in case studies**

<b>Austerity policy to look at</b>	<b>Indicator to consider</b>
Cuts to public sector jobs	Female unemployment rate
	Female employment rate
	Sectoral and occupation segregation
Cuts to expenditures on public services e.g. child care, aged care	Labour force participation
More temporary positions and fewer full time positions: changing composition of public sector jobs, e.g. part-time and short term contract work	'Vulnerability': non-standard work (temporary, part-time, self-employed)
Wage cuts and wage freezes in public sector	Gender wage gap: adjusted and unadjusted

Where possible, data before austerity policies were implemented will be compared with the most recent available data, or changes over time will be examined. Charts are displayed in a similar scale for the same indicator across each country to allow for visual comparison.

As discussed in Section 2.3 above, there are many intervening factors that have an impact on changes to labour market indicators. As much as possible, these will be also considered, to try to draw a complete picture of the impact of austerity. It will be important to consider how much of a change can be attributed directly to the cuts to public spending and changes in conditions, and what impact other intervening factors may have had.

While considering contributing factors, and the data available, it will be important to additionally note the timing of the policy changes and the relevant corresponding data, as some policies occurred quite early in the crisis and others later; and the

nature of the reforms, whether they are quantitative (and easier to establish causality) or qualitative (where more judgement will be required).

### **3.2 Hypothesis**

The differences in behaviour, institutional arrangements and policy environments outlined in Sections 2.1 and 2.2 provide the context for looking at the effect of austerity. That is, labour markets with different starting environments will respond differently to shocks. The elements discussed above can be combined to create a framework to hypothesise what changes might occur in the specific countries of interest here, Ireland and Spain.

For example, it could be expected that countries with undeveloped reconciliation policies and weak welfare states would exhibit a strong reaction to cuts in funding for public services and cuts to jobs, as the situation is reasonably precarious to begin with. However, it may also be the case that due to weak public provision of childcare where families primarily rely on informal care arrangements, people may be well insulated from shocks to funding, as they don't rely on public services as much.

These countries can be contrasted with those with well-developed reconciliation policies and strong, universal welfare. In these countries austerity may have limited impact on women's labour force participation decisions and the wages they receive.

Due to the ongoing nature of the crisis and austerity policies, as well as the difference between first round effects of the crisis and the second round impacts caused by the implementation of austerity, predictions and assessments must be made cautiously.

#### *Unemployment and employment rates*

At the beginning of the crisis, sectoral segregation meant that men's employment was hit much harder than women's—because of job losses in construction and manufacturing sectors in all European countries. Financial sector jobs, another male-dominated area, were also hit hard in several countries (Karamessini and Rubery 2014a: 21). Following these initial job losses, the introduction of austerity has caused a second round of damage, this time to jobs where women dominate.

The combination of these first round and second round effects are thus expected to cause an increase to unemployment rates in Ireland and Spain, evenly for women as for men, although with different timing.

Between 1994 and 2007, across Europe female employment rates were rising. This was significant in Ireland and Spain as both countries started the period with relatively low female employment (Karamessini and Rubery 2014a: 18). Austerity policies in the two countries have led to significant cuts to public service worker numbers, where women make up a majority.

It would therefore be expected that Spain and Ireland have experienced declines in employment rates for women, caused by the loss of jobs in the public sector. This decline would have started later than for men, who were hit by cuts to jobs in male-dominated sectors of manufacturing and industry.

#### *Sectoral and occupational segregation*

Using the standardised or Karmel and MacLachlan index of occupational and sectoral segregation, Ireland and Spain are found to have had similar levels of occupational segregation in 2007, prior to onset of the crisis and austerity. Ireland's

score was 27.9 and Spain's 27.4, around the middle of the EU-27 countries (Bettio and Verashchagina 2009: 33). This measure can be interpreted as the change required to achieve even distribution of genders across occupations, where 0 indicates complete equality and 50 indicates an equal male and female labour force that are working in completely gender-segregated occupations or sectors. Both countries were found to have a relatively large increase in occupational and sectoral segregation between 1997 and 2007. This may be due to the surge in female labour force participation prior the crisis, which, as explained in Section 2.3, may settle down as time goes on and as women seek other jobs in other sectors, expanding into those previously male-dominated. This may have been exacerbated over the course of the crisis as jobs were cut from the female-dominated public sector, and supported by the increasing levels of education attainment for women. Spain in particular, experienced a strong increase in skills-attainment for women in the lead up to the crisis.

### *Labour force participation*

The sizeable cuts to jobs in the public sector and childcare provision in both Ireland and Spain make it likely that the female participation rate in both these countries will have declined since the onset of austerity.

However, there are some factors pushing in the opposite direction. Part-time work, previously hardly available in Spain, became much more widespread leading up to the crisis, boosting women's labour force participation. Additionally, social policy and childcare provision was expanded to support women entering the workforce, partially in response to urging by the EU of all member states (Karamessini and Rubery 2014a: 18). Thus, coming from a low base, Spain's FLFP had increased strongly up to the beginning of the crisis.

Echevarría and Larrañga (2004) estimate that FLFP in Spain is strongly responsive to male unemployment, and so in times of crisis has a tendency to increase.

Although cuts to childcare and other reconciliation policies occurred in Spain, these had not long been introduced and were not strongly established at the time the crisis hit. So, given the prevailing trend and strength of other contributing factors, it would be possible that FLFP in Spain would continue to rise, overcoming the negative influence that cuts in childcare and other reconciliation policies may have.

In Ireland too, leading up to the crisis, female labour force participation was on the rise, supported at least partly by a significant improvement to childcare coverage and support for working mothers (Barry and Conroy 2014).

### *Vulnerability*

Women were particularly concentrated in temporary and informal work in Spain prior to the crisis, with one-third of female employees employed in temporary employment in 2007 (OECD, quoted in Karamessini and Rubery 2014a: 20). Part-time work was less available prior to the crisis but became increasingly available as full-time, permanent jobs were cut. Judging from these two measures, it would seem likely that with cuts to public sector jobs and wages, vulnerability has increased in women's work in Spain.

Vulnerable work was less common in Ireland prior to the crisis, with only 9.5 per cent of women working in temporary employment in 2007, but 34.9 per cent of women working part-time (OECD, quoted in *ibid.*: 20).

In both countries leading up the crisis, the public sector played a key role in providing secure work with sound working conditions for women. The loss of jobs,

the removal of an equality institution in Spain, and the weakening of conditions would likely have resulted in increased vulnerability in both countries, with a greater effect in Spain, where women's work was more precarious to begin with.

### *Gender pay gap*

The public sectors in each of these countries were important for providing high paid work for women, particularly for highly-educated women. Due to the factors discussed in Section 2.3, the job cuts and cuts to wages in the public sector would be expected to raise the overall gender pay gap in both these countries.

In the case studies in Section 5, below, these hypothetical connections will be tested for the countries of Ireland and Spain to see how gender equality was impacted following the implementation of austerity. The following section will first provide a discussion of recent trends across the EU regarding austerity and gender equality indicators.

## **4. Recent trends and policies in the European Union**

### **4.1 Austerity to address government debt levels**

The prevalence of austerity in Europe is well known. From as early as 2010, following a brief period of fiscal expansion, official organisations and some country governments have been advocating for fiscal consolidation and austerity as a means of dealing with the fallout of the global financial crisis and the euro crisis. In the European Union, excessive government spending was considered to have led to widespread instability in the first place, with austerity advocated for as a way of achieving debt sustainability and restoring investors' confidence. This perception remains among many policymakers, and many countries around the world have in recent years been implementing cuts to government budgets. (UNCTAD 2010:17; UNCTAD 2011: 22)

Austerity refers to fiscal policies aimed at reducing net government spending. It typically involves fiscal consolidation, reduction in government expenditure, cuts in unemployment benefits and family allowances, as well as decreases in health spending and public investment (Hermann 2013: 5). Moreover, wage freezes in the public sector and significant cuts to public service jobs have been a hallmark of the recent austerity policies. These kinds of policies are advocated for through EU-specific targets and recommendations for particular countries, which are not legally binding, or through legally binding 'conditionality' imposed on countries who required fiscal assistance by the 'Troika', made up of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the IMF (Dodig and Herr 2015: 7f).

Fiscal consolidation in OECD countries between 2009 and 2011 was widespread, with 27 out of 35 countries implementing some form of austerity in this period (OECD Fiscal Consolidation Survey 2012). It was also deep: in Greece and Ireland, for example, where austerity has been particularly severe, reduction in government spending amounted to around 18 per cent of GDP by 2012 (European Women's Lobby 2012: 3). Most OECD countries have chosen to achieve fiscal consolidation goals through reduced fiscal spending, rather than through revenue increases.

Contrary to expectation, public debt-to-GDP ratios have increased in the face of austerity. Countries that implemented austerity have also experienced sharp contractions in GDP (Dodig and Herr 2015: 8f). Gechert and Rannenberg (2015) estimate that austerity implemented in Greece since 2010 has been almost entirely responsible for its decline in GDP. In addition to these effects, damage to social welfare and equality in many spheres has been a hallmark of austerity.

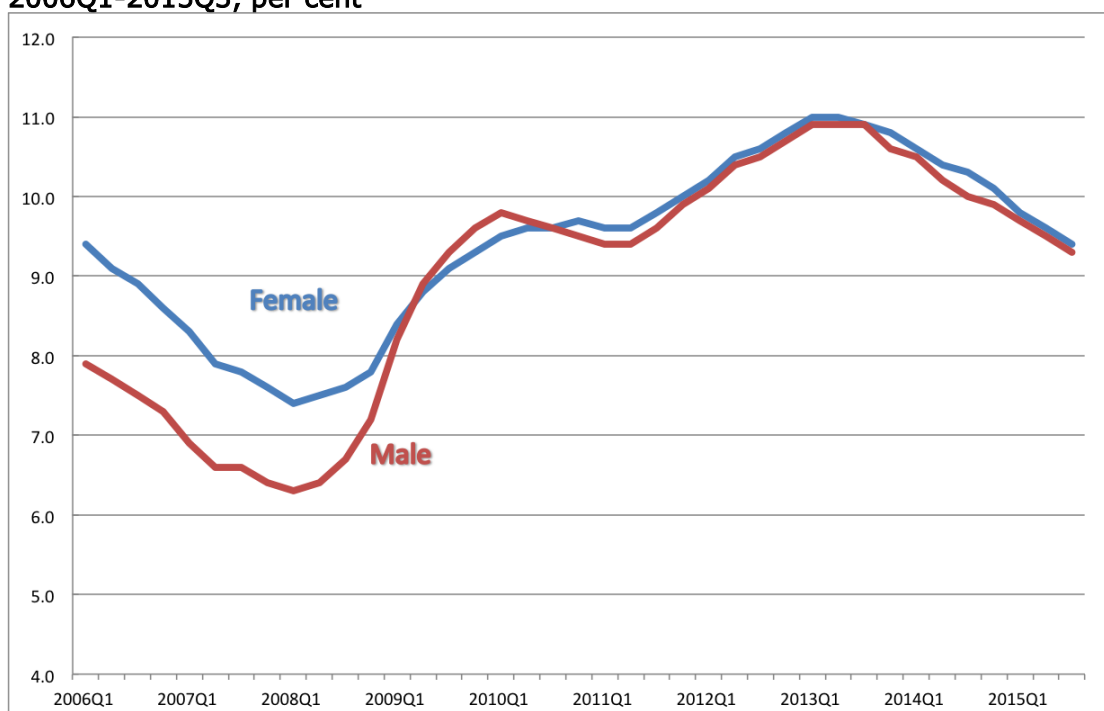
The following sub-section will look at recent trends in gender equality in the labour force.

## 4.2 Recent trends in the labour force

At first glance it seems that in recent years gender gaps in some areas have narrowed. However, gender gaps in employment, for example, narrowed between 2006 and 2013, not due to an increase in women's employment but rather a drop in the male employment rate of about 2.5 percentage points (Corsi 2014a: 6). In fact in 12 EU member states, female employment rates are currently below or at the level they were in 2005 (European Women's Lobby 2012: 5).

Similarly, the gap in unemployment rates between men and women fell close to zero in 2013. This was caused by the unemployment rate for men increasing, with a significant contribution from unemployed low-skilled men in 2008 (Corsi 2014a: 7). Figure 2, below, shows the unemployment rates from before the crisis until the third quarter of 2015. The rising of men's unemployment and the closing of the gender gap can be clearly seen. Drops in men's employment and unemployment rates are largely attributed to gendered sectoral segregation and the initial losses in employment to male-dominated sectors (industry and manufacturing).

**Figure 2: Unemployment rate disaggregate by gender, EU-28 average, 2006Q1-2015Q3, per cent**



Note: figures are seasonally adjusted

Source: Eurostat (2015)

These trends highlight the need to be wary of how 'equality' is measured and what exactly our goals are. Only considering the distance between men's and women's positions shows an improvement in equality, which hides the underlying movements. This means that rather than discussing equality, some measure of standard acceptable work conditions may be more appropriate.

Although the initial damage to men's employment at the beginning of the crisis narrowed gender gaps, it is argued that the negative impact on women caused by subsequent austerity policies will likely reverse this trend. Section 5 will examine specific austerity policies and the connection with movements in labour force indicators for women in Ireland and Spain.

## 5. Case studies: austerity in Ireland and Spain and the impact

### 5.1 Ireland

#### 5.1.1 Experience with austerity

Following strong growth in GDP and employment between 1994 and 2007, The Republic of Ireland was hit by a recession that began in August 2008 (Barry 2014: 83). Ireland's 2010 real GDP was 11 per cent below its 2007 level. Ireland suffered because of the depth of its interconnectedness with struggling trading partners, and because the collapse of the domestic property market and construction industry brought on a banking crisis it was unprepared for (Irish Government 2010: 14).

Aiming to restore public finances, Ireland began implementing austerity measures in 2008, the first of European countries to do so. It was the second country after Greece to enter a financial program with the Troika, the IMF, ECB and the European Commission, which required policies designed to restore fiscal sustainability, to correct excessive deficit and to strengthen and overhaul its banking sector (European Commission 2015a). Most of the savings came from "the major drivers of spending including public service pay and pensions, social welfare, public services including student supports, free or subsidised medical care and treatment and public investment" (Irish Government 2010: 11). Further, free provision of public services was considered no longer sustainable, reflecting an ideological change in the face of budgetary pressure.

In 2013, the public sector in Ireland employed 24.7 per cent of all workers (ILO 2013), a sizeable contribution to employment in the economy. It also highlights the impact that policy changes in the public sector have on the working population as a whole.

Table 4, below, summarises the cuts to public sector pay, staffing level, pensions and social welfare expenditure cuts that were made between 2009 and 2014. Ireland announced an end to austerity with the release of the 2015 Budget at the end of 2014 (Wall Street Journal 2014).

**Table 4: Timing and details of cuts to public sector pay, staffing, social welfare and public services in Ireland, 2009 to 2014**

Timing	Cuts to	Amount and other details
2009-2010	Public sector pay	
	Public sector staffing	12,000 staff since end-2008; exceeded 2009 target
2011-2014 (Front-loaded)	Public sector pay	€1.2 billion total (combined with pensions, is an average 14% decrease); reduce new entrants' pay by 10 per cent
	Public sector staffing	12,750 staff; bring back to 2005 levels, total reduction of 8 per cent
	Public sector pensions	Reduction of 4-7.5 per cent; "reform" for new entrants increased pension age
	Social welfare	€2.8 billion; Labour activation, control measures to limit access
	Public services	"Make more efficient"

Source: Author's distillation based on Irish Government (2010); Barry and Conroy (2014); Barry (2014), Rubery (2014); Karamessini (2014)

Changes to working conditions and services also occurred, for example, teachers became required to work longer hours for unchanged pay (Rubery 2014). Ireland

also saw a reduction in child benefits and cuts to carers' allowances (Karamessini 2014).

In Ireland, many institutions advocating for equal opportunities had their funding reduced or entirely cut off, including the Equality Authority, the Human Rights Commission, the Combat Poverty Agency, the Women's Health Council and the Crisis Pregnancy Agency (Barry and Conroy 2014).

Ireland had met the Lisbon targets for labour force participation for men and women by 2007; and had adopted gender mainstreaming under the 2000 to 2006 Irish Development Plan (Barry 2014). Unfortunately, the crisis and subsequent austerity looks to have brought an end to many of these achievements.

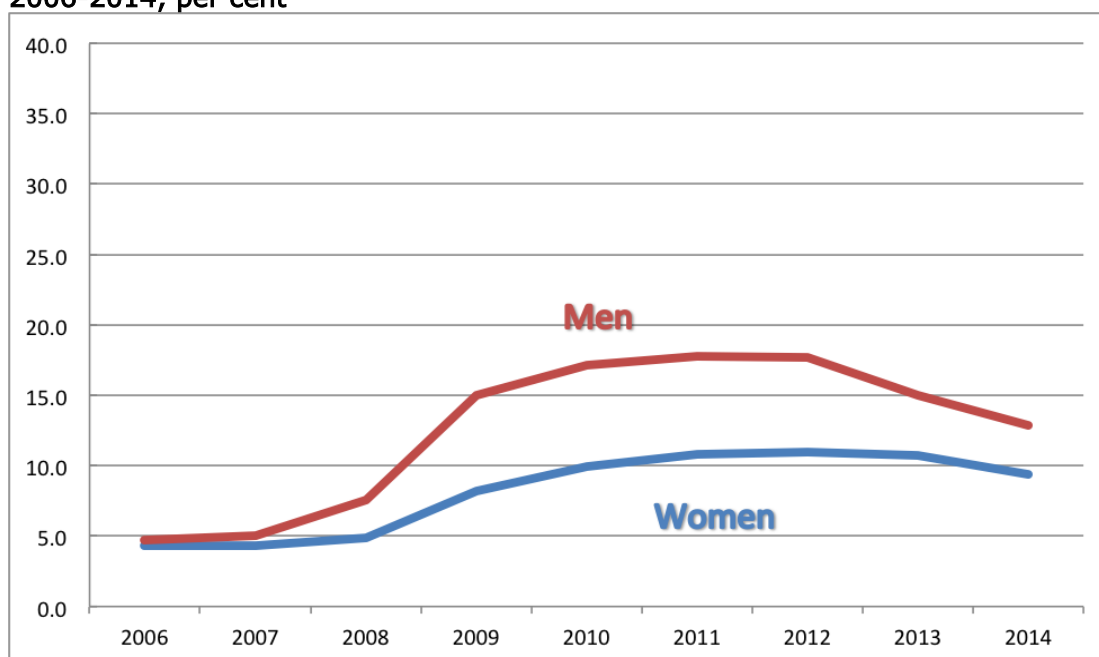
The following sub-section will investigate what changes have been observed for women in the Irish labour force following the implementation of these policies.

### **5.1.2 Movements in labour market indicators**

#### *Unemployment and employment rates*

Figures 3 and 4, below, illustrate unemployment and employment rates for men and women in Ireland since before the crisis and austerity began, until now.

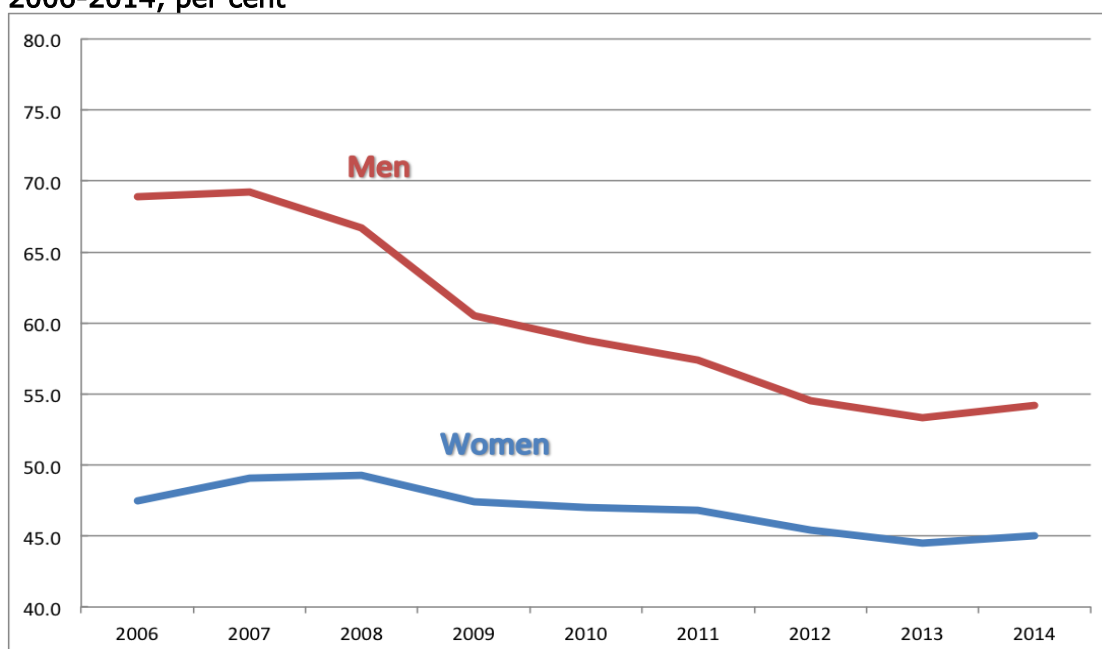
**Figure 3: Unemployment in Ireland, 15-64 year olds, disaggregated by gender, 2006-2014, per cent**



Notes: Not seasonally adjusted  
Source: Eurostat (2015)



**Figure 4: Employment in Ireland, 15-64 year olds, disaggregated by gender, 2006-2014, per cent**



Source: Eurostat (2015)

As expected, unemployment has risen and employment dropped. Like in many European countries, the first round effects of the crisis hit men's unemployment while the second round of austerity measures looks to have now hit women. The timing of the increase in unemployment for women and the decline in employment seen in the above charts coincides with the introduction of cuts of public sector jobs. The commensurate decrease in employment reflects the little-changed female labour force participation shown in Figure 5, below. The much larger decrease in employment for men over unemployment reflects the number of disillusioned men who have left the workforce.

As in many countries, the public sector in Ireland is particularly appealing for female workers due to its advantages in conditions and leave arrangements over other sectors. For example, in Ireland, the public sector offers much longer paid maternity and parental leave than the private sector does (Rubery 2014).

#### *Women in the public sector in Ireland*

In Ireland, the health sector is the top sector women are employed in, employing over one-fifth of all women employed in 2010 (Irish Government 2010: 64). Between 2008 and 2014 approximately 11,000 people lost their jobs in the health sector, which is also the biggest sector in the public service in Ireland and where the greatest number of jobs were lost over that period (ibid.). Comparing job losses with the gender profile of occupations for 2012 (Table 7) in Ireland, the likelihood of a disproportionate impact on women becomes apparent.

#### *Gender segregation: horizontal and vertical*

##### *Horizontal segregation*

The two tables below compare the top sectors for women's and men's employment in Ireland between 2005 and 2012, covering the period before the start of austerity measures and after the implementation of many of the cuts to jobs and changes to conditions in the public sector. Caution is required when reading these tables as data standards changed in 2011, which means that the ISCO-88 classification was

replaced with the ISCO-08. These classification systems are similar but not identical, so exact comparisons across years cannot be made.

**Table 5: Top sectors for employment of women and men in Ireland and EU-25 average, 2005, per cent**

Per cent of women employed in	Ireland	EU25	Per cent of men employed in	Ireland	EU 25
Health care and social work	18.9	17.2	Construction	20.7	13.0
Retail trade	13.5	12.5	Agriculture	10.9	5.2
Education	10.7	11.4	Retail trade	5.7	6.3
Public admin	6.0	7.3	Public admin	4.4	7.2
Business	7.4	7.3	Business	5.3	6.1
Accumulated concentration	56.5	55.7	Accumulated concentration	45.1	37.7

Source: Barry and Sherlock (2008: 6)

**Table 6: Top sectors for employment of women and men in Ireland and EU-27 average, 2012, per cent**

Per cent of women employed in	Ireland	EU-27	Per cent of men employed in	Ireland	EU-27
Health care and social work	22.8	18.2	Manufacturing	15.0	20.4
Wholesale and retail	15.4	15.1	Wholesale & Retail	14.3	13.1
Education	12.5	11.7	Construction	9.9	12.1
Manufacturing	7.6	10.2	Transportation and storage	7.4	7.3
Accommodation and food services	7.4	5.4	Agriculture, forestry and fishing	6.4	5.4
Accumulated concentration	65.7	60.6	Accumulated concentration	53.0	58.3

Source: Eurostat (2012)

There are many similarities in the sectors that employed the largest proportion of men and women in 2005 and 2012. Notably, construction went from being the largest employer of men in Ireland in 2005 to being the third largest, with a drop from 20.7 per cent of male workers to 9.9 per cent in 2012. The top employers of women are largely unchanged; however, the concentration of women in the top five sectors appears to have increased since 2005. This may be due to the broader increase in female employment, which, as discussed above, may result in more women in female-dominated occupations in the short term. It may also reflect limited mobility between sectors in Ireland. It is interesting that in health care, dominance of female employment has increased despite the large number of jobs that were cut from that sector. Both of these changes may also be due to changes in classification.

### *Vertical segregation*

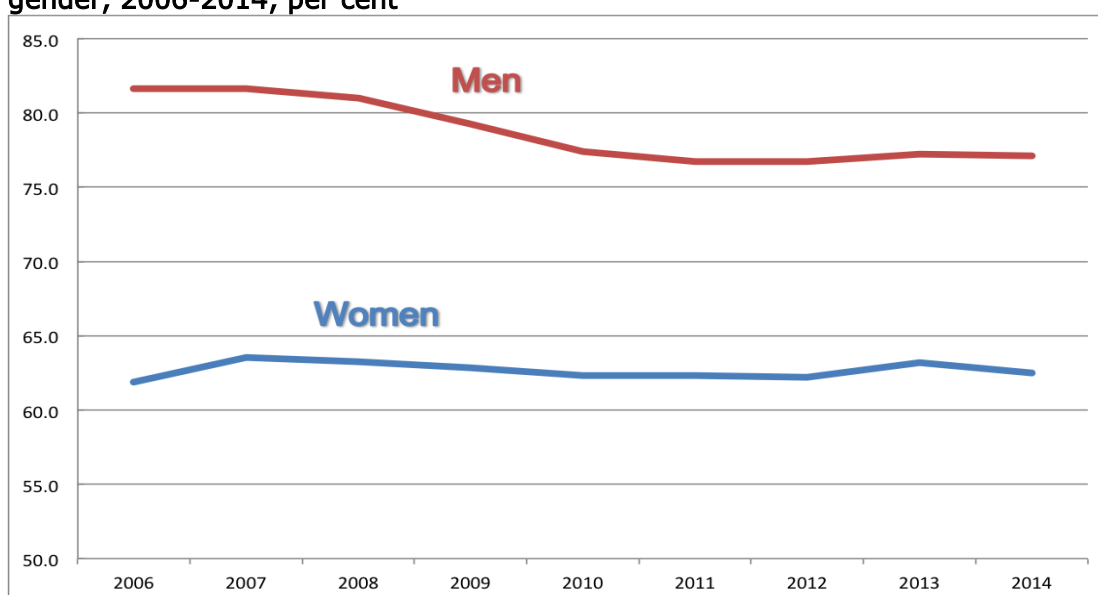
Vertical segregation in Ireland may have made progress in recent years. The proportion of women that are on corporate boards increased from seven to nine per cent between 2010 and 2012, and in management positions increased from 19 to 22 per cent (EC DG Justice, Gender and Science 2012). It is positive that these proportions increased despite recent turbulence in the labour market. However, these figures remain well below even the EU-27 average, which are themselves far below an even 50 per cent rate (ibid.).

In addition, when a different data set is considered and data is extended to 2013, a significant drop in women in senior and middle management in 2010 can be seen, which is concerning (OECD 2013).

### *Labour force participation*

Figure 5, below, shows labour force participation rates for men and women since 2006. Consistent with trends in other countries, men's labour force participation has declined since the onset of the crisis, likely due to disillusionment. Women's labour force participation, while rising prior to the crisis, has remained broadly flat since then, and is now around the same level as before austerity measures were imposed, contrary to initial expectations outlined in the hypothesis above. This suggests that the interaction of other factors have prevented a significant decline in female labour force participation.

**Figure 5: Ireland labour force participation rate, 15-64 year olds, disaggregated by gender, 2006-2014, per cent**



Source: OECD (2014)

The possible factors that might have prevented a drop in FLFP are the availability of part-time work, the provision of childcare, and the education levels of women. These will be examined in turn.

Part-time workers in Ireland, both men and women, increased in 2008 and have remained at a higher level since that time. This may support increased FLFP, although it may also include some involuntary unemployed (Eurostat 2014).

Childcare coverage, the proportion of children in an age bracket being cared for in formal childcare, has been volatile in recent years, with drops in 2009 and 2011 of childcare take up for children under 3 years old (Mills et al. 2014: 3; Eurostat 2013). Nonetheless, rate of coverage rate in 2013 was above the 2008 rate, which would support increased labour force participation for women as well.

The rate of women with upper-secondary and post-secondary education has, along with the EU average, been steadily increasing, with a surge since 2012 in Ireland. This would also contribute to greater FLFP.

### *Vulnerability*

The austerity measures implemented by the Irish government included changes in working conditions and a reduction in permanent and full-time work in the public sector. Reductions in sick leave and annual leave also came into effect, and staff redeployment occurred to increase efficiency of service delivery (Farrelly 2013).

In addition to the increase in part-time work illustrated in Figure 13, above, Table 7, below, shows the increase in self-employed and workers on temporary contracts that has occurred in Ireland since the introduction of austerity. These increases were already occurring before the changes to public sector work came into effect, suggesting that other forces in addition to austerity may have been responsible.

**Table 7: Self-employed and temporary workers in Ireland, disaggregated by gender, 2006-2014, per cent of all employed people**

Year	Self-employed female	Self-employed male	Temporary workers female	Temporary workers male
2006	0.02	0.12	6.9	5.1
2007	0.03	0.13	10.0	7.1
2008	0.03	0.13	9.9	7.2
2009	0.03	0.13	9.8	7.7
2010	0.03	0.12	10.2	8.9
2011	0.03	0.12	10.6	9.8
2012	0.03	0.11	10.4	9.9
2013	0.03	0.12	9.8	10.1
2014	0.03	0.12	9.4	9.2

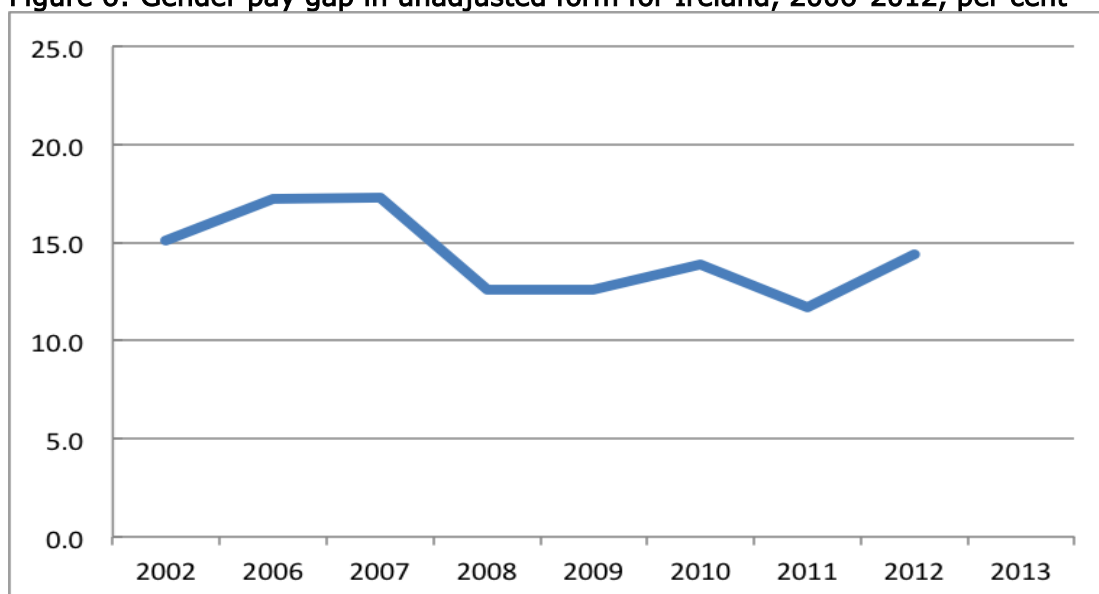
Source: Eurostat (2014), author's calculations

### *Gender pay gap*

#### *Unadjusted gender pay gap*

The final indicator to be examined is the gender pay gap, or the difference in average hourly earnings between men and women. The size of the public service in Ireland, the proportion of women employed there and the number and size of cuts to public service wages could be expected to have an impact on the difference in earnings between men and women. This looks to have been the case in recent years where, as can be seen in Figure 6, while the gap decreased prior to the crisis, the years of austerity look to have stalled progress. More recent data would flesh out the story here.

**Figure 6: Gender pay gap in unadjusted form for Ireland, 2006-2012, per cent**



Note: 2013 data not available, shown for scale comparison with Spain chart

Source: Eurostat (2012)

### *Adjusted gender pay gap*

The Economic and Social Research Institute (2009) in Ireland estimated Ireland's adjusted pay gap to be 8 per cent, which means that about half the pay gap in Ireland cannot be explained by observable variables such as hours worked, education level and experience. This remaining gap may instead be due to some form of gender discrimination.

With the end to austerity as of Ireland's Budget 2015, and Ireland returning to positive growth, continued examination of developments in the labour market for women will be valuable to gain a complete understanding of the effects of crisis and austerity.

## **5.2 Spain**

### **5.2.1 Experience with austerity**

Spain also started experiencing negative growth in 2008. It experimented with a small bout of fiscal expansion in 2009, but austerity policies have been implemented since the official beginning of the euro area crisis in 2010, and were strengthened following the agreement of an eighteen-month financial assistance program with the European Commission and the European Central Bank in June 2012. The conditionality focused on the banking sector. Conditions included assessment and restructuring of banks, the resolution of banks that were not viable, and a strengthening of regulation, supervision, governance, and consumer protection. (European Commission 2015b)

Heavy cuts to public sector wages, public sector jobs, welfare and public services followed. This continued for several years, but the Spanish government intends to end austerity with the implementation of the 2016 Budget (Financial Times 2015).

In October 2013, Nils Muižnieks, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, commented on the negative impact that cuts in social, health and educational budgets had had. Among other issues, the report outlined growth of child poverty in Spain and a deterioration in living conditions for persons with disabilities (Muižnieks 2013: 5f). In addition to these issues, concerns have also

been raised regarding the huge number of families evicted from their homes (Ruiz Garcia 2014: 3).

The cuts to public sector jobs and wages and public provision of services like childcare have had detrimental effects on women and their position in the workforce too. Ruiz Garcia (2014) argues that the austerity policies implemented in Spain have unfortunately had the result of a return to Franco-era traditional roles of women staying at home and having limited involvement in the workforce.

Specific policies and the timing of their implementation are outlined in Table 8, below.

**Table 8: Timing and details of cuts to public sector pay, staffing, social welfare and public services in Spain, 2009-2014**

Timing	Cuts to	Amount and other details
2010	Public sector wages	5 per cent cut
	Pensions	Freeze
	Ministry of Equality, gender equality services	Services entirely lost funding in Galicia, Murcia and Madrid
2011	Health care	
	Public sector wages	Freeze
2012	Subsidies for professional caregivers and nursing homes	Freeze
	Public sector jobs	9 per cent cut to numbers
	Wage decreases in health care and child care	
	Conditions for pregnant women	Reduced rights to breastfeed, less protection for employed pregnant women
	Social transfers	Reduction of those eligible for benefits from 160,000 people (90 per cent women) in 2011 to 24,000 in 2012; social protection for non-professional carers removed
	Subsidies for professional caregivers and nursing homes	Freeze
2013	Public sector contracts	62% of new contracts are part-time work, 74% of these women
	Public sector jobs	Reduction in numbers
	Public sector conditions	Increase in working hours, reduction in personal leave

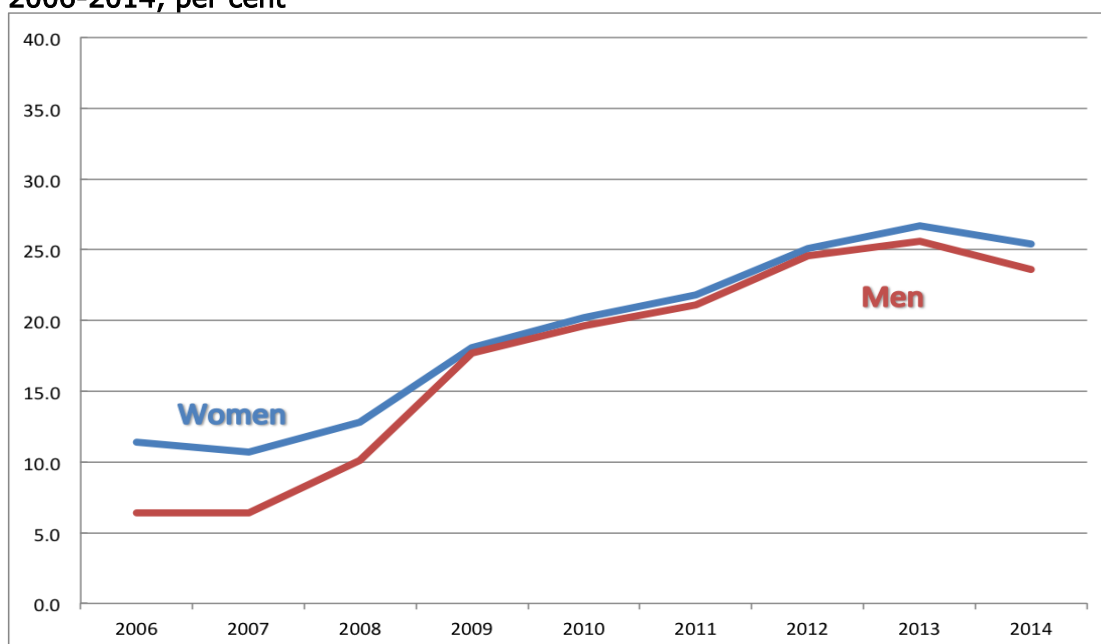
Source: Author's distillation based on European Commission (2015b); Financial Times (2015); Ruiz Garcia (2014); Rubery (2014)

### **5.2.2 Specific policies and their effects on gender equality**

#### *Unemployment and employment rates*

Figures 7 and 8, below, illustrate unemployment and employment rates for men and women, and their movement since before the crisis and austerity began.

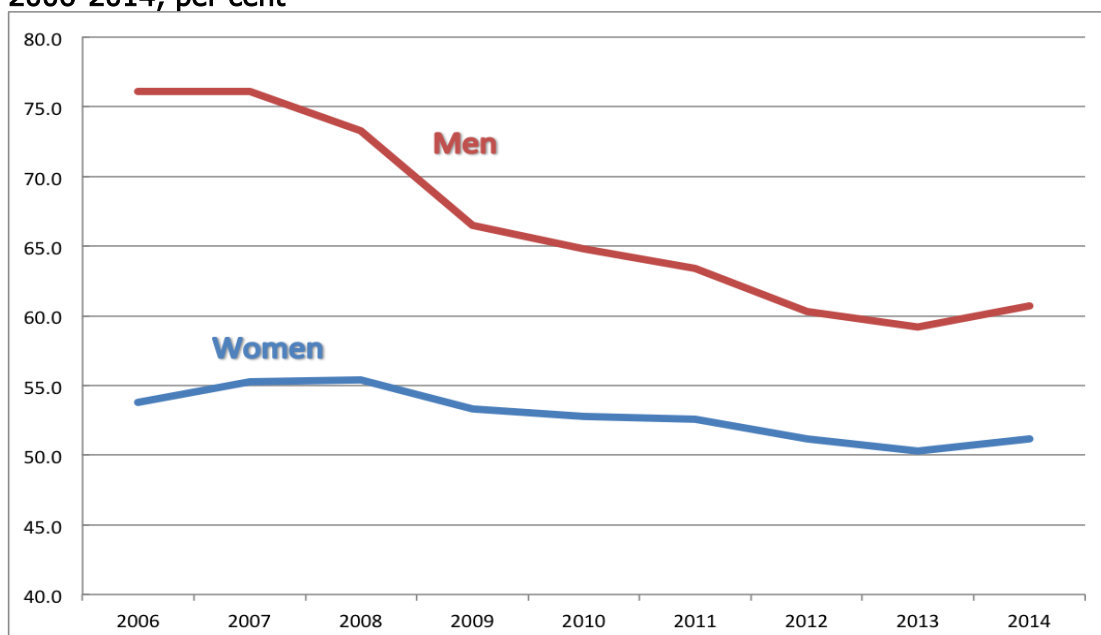
**Figure 7: Unemployment in Spain, 15-64 year olds, disaggregated by gender, 2006-2014, per cent**



Note: Not seasonally adjusted

Source: Eurostat (2014)

**Figure 8: Employment in Spain, 15-64 year olds, disaggregated by gender, 2006-2014, per cent**



Source: Eurostat (2014)

As in Ireland, the first round effect of the crisis was detrimental to men in Spain as the construction industry was badly hit. The steep increase in unemployment and increase in employment to 2009 illustrates this. Women look to have suffered a large increase in unemployment while employment was largely protected. This reflects a sizeable increase in labour force participation, shown below in Figure 9. This follows a common trend in the face of a crisis where additional women join the labour force but are unable to find work, exacerbated by the cuts to jobs in the public sector.

### *Women in the public sector in Spain*

The public sector in Spain makes an important contribution to employment generally and for women in particular. In 2013 in Spain, 17.1 per cent of workers were employed in the public sector and over 20 per cent of women employed in Spain annually are employed in the public sector (ILO 2013). The public sector has played an important role in women's employment and gender equality in Spain, where it had a specific policy of promoting gender equality (Rubery 2014). Rubery (2014) estimates that there was a great deal of advantage in working in the public sector due to better pay, leave, and other conditions that were more accommodating than in the private sector.

### *Gender segregation: horizontal and vertical*

#### *Horizontal segregation*

Table 9 illustrates the top sectors for employment of women and men employed in Spain in 2010, alongside the same information for the average of EU-27 countries. A comparison of occupations across years is not possible due to data difficulties.

There is little overlap in Spain between the top sectors of employment between women and men. This more intense gender segregation is a key feature of the Spanish experience of the crisis and austerity where women's employment was largely protected from the effects of the crisis because jobs were initially lost by primarily male-dominated industries. Austerity policies had an impact on female-dominated industries, but to a lesser extent.

Gonzales Cago and Capparucci (2014) argue that while women's employment was largely protected, what did occur was an increase in precariousness and poor-quality jobs in female employment.

**Table 9: Top sectors for employment of women and men in Spain and EU-27 countries average in 2010, per cent**

Per cent of women employed in	Spain	EU-27	Per cent of men employed in	Spain	EU-27
Wholesale and retail	17.6	15.3	Manufacturing	17.3	20.5
Health care and social work	12.9	17.8	Construction	14.8	12.9
Education	9.5	11.7	Wholesale and retail	14.3	13.1
Accommodation and food services	9.1	5.3	Public administration	7.9	7.2
Activities of households as employers	8.3	2.4	Transportation and storage	7.2	7.3
Accumulated concentration	57.5	52.4	Accumulated concentration	61.6	61.0

Source: Eurostat, quoted in European Commission (2012: 8)

#### *Vertical segregation*

The proportion of women in senior and middle management in Spain has increased between 2006 and 2013, with a noticeable surge between 2009 and 2010. While the rate remains low compared with a 50 per cent rate, the steady increase appears to have not been put off neither by the crisis nor by the austerity response (OED 2013).

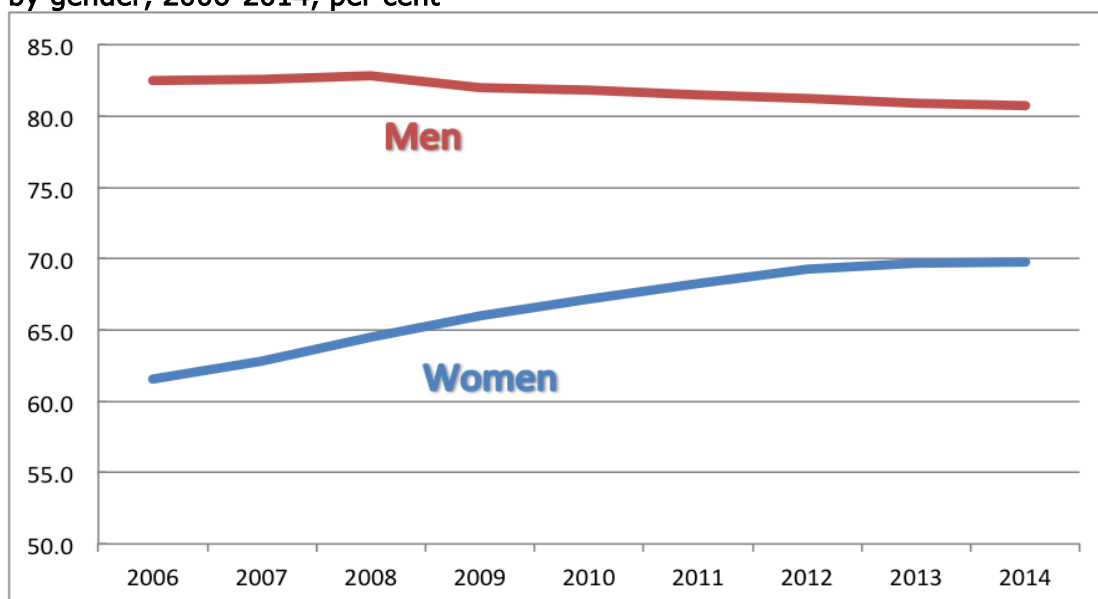


### *Labour force participation*

Figure 9 shows the labour force participation rates for men and women. Men have demonstrated some element of disillusionment leading to an exiting of the workforce, which follows the trend for Ireland. Labour force participation for women has steadily increased, which was not expected.

There are several factors that may explain this result. These are the availability of part-time work, the provision of childcare, and the education levels of women. The high rate of unemployment among men in Spain likely has also contributed to the rise of FLFP, where women are seeking work to support their families.

**Figure 9: Labour force participation rate in Spain, 15-64 year olds, disaggregated by gender, 2006-2014, per cent**



Source: OECD (2014)

The prevalence of part-time work in women was relatively high in Spain prior to the crisis, covering more than 20 per cent of female workers in 2007. The rates have steadily increased over the course of the crisis and since the introduction of austerity measures (Eurostat 2014).

The rate of coverage of childcare for children under the age of three increased between 2009 and 2011. In 2012 and 2013, a decreasing proportion of children were covered by childcare, and the FLFP rate looks to have increased despite these cuts (Eurostat 2013).

An important factor for women in Spain has been the increased rate of education and skill attainment that has been occurring since the end of Franco's reign. While starting from a level below the broader EU average, the rate of women with secondary and post-secondary education has been growing steadily. This, combined with a broader ideological shift that began to take place in Spain leading up to the crisis, also contributed to continued momentum in steadily increasing female labour force participation.

### *Vulnerability*

Table 10 shows the trend in proportion of women and men who are self-employed and employed under temporary contracts. Unlike in Ireland, there has been little to no change in the rate of workers who are self-employed, and the rate of workers

not employed in a permanent job has actually decreased substantially since before the crisis. This suggests that the changes to employment have occurred elsewhere.

Gonzales Cago and Capparucci (2014) argue there has been an increase in precariousness of work for women in Spain, which includes involuntary part-time work and low-paid work. Other changes occurred to working conditions in the public sector, such as teachers being required to work longer hours for unchanged pay (Rubery 2014).

**Table 10: Self-employed and temporary workers in Spain disaggregated by gender, 2006-2014, per cent of all employed people**

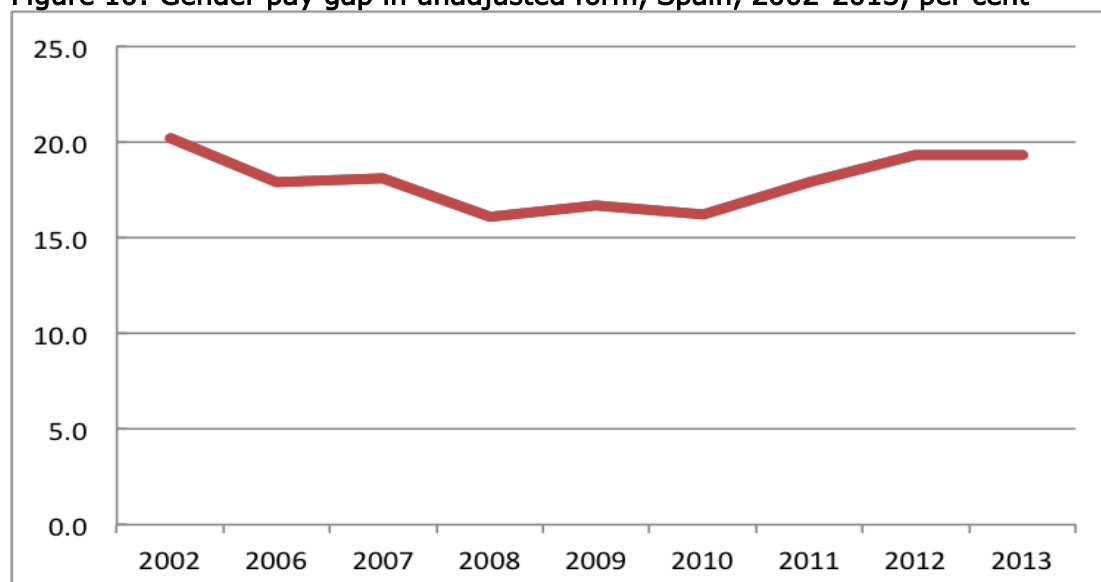
Year	Self-employed female	Self-employed male	Temporary workers female	Temporary workers male
2006	0.05	0.19	36.6	32.0
2007	0.05	0.19	32.9	30.6
2008	0.05	0.20	31.2	27.5
2009	0.05	0.19	27.2	23.6
2010	0.05	0.19	26.1	23.6
2011	0.05	0.19	26.5	24.0
2012	0.05	0.20	25.0	22.1
2013	0.05	0.21	24.2	22.2
2014	0.05	0.21	24.6	23.6

Source: Eurostat (2014), author's calculations

### *Gender pay gap*

#### *Unadjusted pay gap*

**Figure 10: Gender pay gap in unadjusted form, Spain, 2002-2013, per cent**



Source: Eurostat (2013)

The unadjusted pay gap in Spain looks to have followed a similar path to the employment of women in the public sector. It declined until 2010, which coincides with the peak in public sector employment, and rose afterward as public sector employment was cut. This would follow Rubery's (2014) claim regarding the significance of the contribution to women's equality that the public sector makes in

Spain. The large and increasing proportion of women working in part-time work in Spain would be another possible factor to explain the existence of the pay gap.

### *Adjusted pay gap*

De Cabo Serrano and Garzón (2007) estimated the adjusted wage gap for Spain for the whole period 1995 and 2002 to be 15 per cent. This points to the fact that a large proportion of the pay gap in Spain may not be explained by observable factors and characteristics, and thus could be attributed to some kind of discrimination.

As of 2016, Spain has also returned to positive growth. With the end to austerity planned to occur in 2016, the developments in the labour force that occur from now on will be of great interest.

## **6. Alternative strategies**

The damage to the employment environment for men and women is not an inevitable outcome of necessary policy. Further, if we consider gender equality to be a worthy goal, there are strategies that may help achieve this.

### **6.1 Gender budgeting and gender mainstreaming**

Regardless of whether fiscal consolidation must occur, it is possible to address gender equality by considering the gendered outcomes of policies through gender-responsive budgeting and gender mainstreaming.

Gender mainstreaming intends to integrate gender outcomes into policy development as a standard. The EU adopted gender mainstreaming in its strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015. It focuses on six areas in particular, two of which are specifically related to the labour force: equal economic independence, equal pay for equal work and work of equal value, equality in decision-making, dignity, integrity and ending gender-based violence, gender equality in external action policy, and horizontal issues. (Beveridge et al. 2014: 17)

Gender budgeting takes gender mainstreaming at its base and applies the principles to the formation of government budgets. The intention is for budget measures to be developed with the consequences for gender equality in mind (Elson 2003: 3).

### **6.2 Social investment**

A nuanced approach to policy that incorporates gender mainstreaming is targeted government spending programs (fiscal spending and investment) that would provide sufficient social services and increased demand for female employment. Social investment is one such strategy that focuses on labour activation policies.

Social infrastructure refers most commonly to publicly provided care services such as childcare, elderly care and care for people with disabilities, the work that women are most likely to do. As discussed in Section 2.3 above, the public provision of these services is strongly associated with the increased labour force participation of women. Social investment thus encompasses directed spending on improved social infrastructure, as well as other types of reconciliation and work activation policies that enable and encourage participation in work. These include, for example, enhanced parental leave facilities, and training and education programs.

While quantitatively social investment has not been associated with a change in public expenditures, it is described as qualitatively changing in response to shifting

demographics and the emergence of 'new social risks' (Jenson and Saint-Martin 2006: 430).

The Gendered Investment Plan outlined by Hansen and Andersen (2014) focuses on investing in childcare to support increases in FLFP, and investment in broader areas to boost employment, particularly areas that would increase demand for female labour. They propose levying taxes across the euro area evenly, but targeting investment in southern European countries, where women's employment is most behind men's (ibid.: 8).

### **6.3 Combined approaches: a pink new deal and a purple economy**

Two comprehensive proposals are discussed here that are designed to tackle not only spending on programs that assist women in the workforce but also address ideologies and broader systemic issues.

#### *A pink new deal*

Corsi (2014a) proposes a 'pink new deal', in reference to Roosevelt's actions in 1929 to lift the US out of recession. In addition to investment in social infrastructure that generates jobs and encourages qualified female employment, tax and benefit measures to enhance female labour market participation, it ultimately calls into question our current care regime and gendered division of labour.

The recommendations target individual government and European-level action and comprehensively address all aspects of gender equality (ibid.: 20f). The recommendations are that:

1. Individual countries use fiscal policy to enhance female labour force participation, addressing the factors discussed in Section 2.3, above;
2. European Parliament becomes involved with removing labour market distortions and creating an environment that increases demand for female labour;
3. European Commission supports the increased awareness of legal rights to equality and encourages national bodies to increase awareness of equality issues; and
4. gender equality indicators be reformed so as not to show an improvement in the face of deteriorating conditions for men, as is the case now.

#### *Purple economy*

In reference to the concept of the 'green economy', İkkaracan (2015) outlines the pillars that would establish a 'purple economy'. The purple economy is one that addresses unpaid care work and the cost to society of caring labour, while eliminating gender and class inequalities. The four pillars are:

1. Social care infrastructure for children, elderly, and people with disabilities;
2. labour market regulation focusing on reconciliation policies;
3. policies focusing on the particular needs of rural communities; and
4. reorientation of macroeconomic policy allowing for sustainable and equitable growth.

## **6.4 Discussion: to what extent are these proposals a solution?**

### *Political feasibility*

Decisions regarding economic and social policy are highly ideological. The strategies discussed above would require a shift from the current ideological paradigm concerning women in the workforce. Before considering whether the strategies might promote gender equality, it is worth examining the likelihood of achieving a change in policy approach.

Karamessini and Rubery (2014b) point out that the austerity policies that have been implemented across Europe and around the world recently are indicative of a broader paradigm shift that occurred in the 1980s towards neoliberalism. This shift has generally meant fewer employment benefits and a smaller social safety net for both men and women. It also has tended towards a lower status of the government and public sector, which exacerbates the already low value placed on much care work. Despite the evidence to support the role of education and childcare in enabling participation in the workforce, these areas have proven the easiest to cut back in times of crisis.

It is heartening that while the nature of women's work has changed, and limited gains have been made toward employment equality, women are not retreating from the labour market entirely, and further, women's earnings are being increasingly valued in the household (ibid.: 44). Simonazzi (2015: 4) also notes evidence of changes in ideology that are conducive to social investment policies and women's integration in employment. This means that even within the neoliberal political economy the world currently is in, the goal of gender equality may still be achievable.

### *Effectiveness*

This author considers that the comprehensive approaches to gender inequality as outlined in the purple economy and the pink new deal address the interconnected elements of gender equality in the labour force. However, their effectiveness strongly hinges on the ability to convince decision makers that change is needed.

The EU's gender mainstreaming approach is sound, addressing multiple important areas. Equality is a consistent aim: in pay, pensions, leisure time, economic independence, migration, decision-making and safety from violence. However, at EU and individual country level, authorities often endorse gender equality in principle but less so in practice. Gender mainstreaming is already a central tenet of the European Union and yet was easily abandoned in the face of the crisis. Gender budgeting has been performed in many countries across the world, but until the issues are taken up seriously, the recommendations are easily ignored.

The biggest hurdle to be overcome with regard to equality of opportunity for women in the labour market is an ideological shift, which, as discussed above may be difficult to achieve. More extensive legislative change and visible EU-level information campaigns may demonstrate how important such a shift is and may be the catalyst for active change. Using more appropriate measures of gender equality is also needed to achieve transparency and understanding of the current situation.

Studies must continue, to gather concrete evidence of the personal impact of economic policy. To achieve this there needs to be better and more comprehensive data available for more countries, particularly data that is gender disaggregated.

## **7. Conclusions**

Through differing economic behaviour, including care roles and sectoral segregation in employment, this paper has outlined how fiscal policy can have different effects on men and women. It has explored the outcomes of austerity on women in the workforce and the possible explanations for these channels.

As the data above showed, the impact of austerity on gender equality in the labour force has been mixed, and is also complicated by many intervening factors that shape the opportunities women have in employment. A number of expectations laid out in the hypothesis proved not to bear fruit, which also highlights the complexity of drawing links between policy and outcomes.

Especially problematic results include the increasing gender pay gaps in both countries; the declining coverage of childcare in Spain in the last couple of years; the huge number of job losses and the employment conditions that have worsened in the public sectors of both countries. What was revealed is that many of the damaging outcomes in the labour force are qualitative, occurring in areas like work conditions and institutional support.

As at the beginning of 2016, Ireland and Spain have the Eurozone's strongest growing economies at 4 and 3.1 per cent GDP growth respectively, causing many to celebrate the success of austerity (see for example Bloomberg 2015). If one considers re-access to financial markets and positive GDP growth to be successful, then this could be true. However, as made clear by the data presented above, this is not the whole story. Importantly, it doesn't have to be the end of the story.

If we accept gender equality as a worthy goal, the current situation needs to be addressed before it becomes the new normal. What is required is a shift in ideology and policy approach. It is important to ensure that should a crisis occur again, it is dealt with differently. While there are some suggestions for policy strategies that support gender equality, it remains unclear how easily it will be to shift towards an ideology that supports equality.

It will be valuable to continue this type of analysis as time goes on, as improvements in data disaggregation and collection are made, and to communicate this information to decision-making bodies.

It is heartening that throughout the course of the crisis and austerity, women's labour force participation continued largely undisturbed in Ireland, and even grew in Spain. Political change seems not impossible too, with parties like Podemos in Spain receiving the third-largest number of votes in the December 2015 election (New York Times 2015). Despite the setbacks women have faced in recent years, the goal of gender equality may still be achievable.

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