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Gender and labour in times of austerity: Ireland, Italy and Portugal in comparative perspective

Tindara ADDABBO,* Amélia BASTOS,** Sara Falcão CASACA,***
Nata DUVVURY**** and Áine NÍ LÉIME*****

Abstract. *Using Eurostat data for 2007, 2010 and 2012, the authors examine the effects of the 2008 crisis on the situation of male and female workers in Italy, Ireland and Portugal, with particular attention to changing labour market dynamics, (intra-household) employment patterns, and incomes. The gender gaps in employment, unemployment and precarious employment are narrowing, but this trend cannot be interpreted as progress toward gender equality: it is driven by men's increasingly vulnerable position resulting from the generalized deterioration of labour market conditions, including the growth of precarious and/or low-paid employment, unemployment and poverty to the detriment of household living standards.*

The global financial meltdown of 2008 and the subsequent wave of reforms affected most countries across the globe. In Ireland, Italy and Portugal, however, their impact was exacerbated by sovereign debt crises and consequent fiscal consolidation programmes. As a result, all three countries experienced severe economic recession and labour market contraction. Ireland and

* Associate Professor, Marco Biagi Department of Economics, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, email: tindara.addabbo@unimore.it. ** Assistant Professor, Department of Mathematics, School of Economics and Management, and researcher at the Centre for Applied Mathematics and Economics *(CEMAPRE)*, University of Lisbon, email: abastos@iseg.ulisboa.pt. *** Assistant Professor, Department of Social Sciences, School of Economics and Management, and researcher at the Research Centre in Economic and Organizational Sociology/ Research in Social Sciences and Management (SOCIUS-CSG), University of Lisbon, email: sarafc@iseg.ulisboa.pt (corresponding author). **** Senior Lecturer, Global Women's Studies, School of Political Science and Sociology, National University of Ireland, and member of the Gender and Public Policy Cluster, Whitaker Institute of Business, Social Sciences and Public Policy, Galway, email: nata.duvvury@nuigalway.ie. ***** Research Fellow, Irish Centre for Social Gerontology, and member of the Gender and Public Policy Cluster, Whitaker Institute of Business, Social Sciences and Public Policy, Galway, email: aine.nileime@nuigalway.ie. The authors wish to acknowledge the support of the Portuguese National Funding Agency for Science, Research and Technology (FCT), under Project PEst-OE/SADG/UI0428/2013, for their work on Portugal.

Portugal were the first to initiate reforms and implement austerity budgets to meet the bailout conditions set by the so-called Troika, i.e. the European Commission (EC), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Central Bank (ECB).

Based on the rich body of literature that suggests structural and economic reforms often have gendered effects (see Rubery, 1988; Elson, 1995; Daly, 2011), the main purpose of this article is to conduct a comparative gender-sensitive analysis of the impact of austerity packages on recent labour market dynamics in Ireland, Italy and Portugal. These three countries were indeed characterized by different "gender regimes" before the crisis, making the analysis of its consequences particularly interesting from a gender perspective (Anxo et al., 2007; Erhel and Guergoat-Larivière, 2013; Karamessini and Rubery, 2014). In Ireland, the dominant structure of growth was heavily biased towards construction, international financial services, and exports. The country faced a banking crisis, a fiscal crisis, an economic crisis, a "reputational crisis", and a social crisis. The government guarantee of banking debt in September 2008 quickly transformed the banking crisis into a sovereign debt crisis which affected the entire economy and its fiscal stability (Whelen, 2013). This, in turn, had a disastrous effect on Ireland's ability to borrow in the markets, and by late November 2010, the Government signed on to an EC–IMF–ECB bailout. A key condition of the bailout was compliance with the European Union (EU) policy guideline of a fiscal deficit no larger than 3 per cent of GDP by 2015.

Italy has also been severely hit by the crisis. Here, fiscal austerity policies were undertaken in 2009 and stepped up in 2011, together with structural reforms of the goods, services and labour markets, with a view to increasing their efficiency and competitiveness, reducing administrative costs and corruption, and incentivizing investment (Istat, 2014). According to OECD estimates, these market reforms were to have a positive effect on GDP growth – in ten years' time. The Italian tax system featured complex and uncertain regulations and a higher tax rate than the European average, which were said to have had a negative effect on employment and on the consumption and investment behaviour of firms and households. More crucially, Italy is characterized by a higher incidence of single-earner households compared to the EU average, which heightens the risk of poverty when the typically male breadwinner loses his job (Verashchagina and Capparucci, 2014). Moreover, as with other Mediterranean countries, Italy's welfare model seems to be increasingly diverging from the "European social model" and, being based on family support, possibly exacerbating inequalities and segmentation because of the growing economic precariousness of households (Simonazzi, 2014 and 2015).

As for Portugal, the global financial collapse exposed its sovereign debt crisis and gave rise to three "Growth Programmes" in 2010 and two subsequent packages, aimed at containing the deficit and the public debt. A political crisis erupted in March 2011, when the Parliament failed to approve the fourth Stability and Growth Programme, prompting the Government to recognize the need for external financial support. In May, a three-year bailout programme was therefore agreed with the Troika. Here again, a key condition of the bail-out was compliance with the EU policy guideline. In view of the size of Portugal's deficit, the EC extended the deadline by one year and set the target of a fiscal deficit no larger than 2.5 per cent of GDP by 2015. As a result, the policy agenda has been largely dominated by the current fiscal consolidation plan, austerity measures, labour market reforms (towards less labour protection), and the country's critical economic and employment situation (Casaca, 2013; Ferreira, 2014).

Considering the similarities between the three countries' main political concerns and institutional reforms since 2008, the first part of this article uses Eurostat labour force survey data to examine how the economic recession and austerity reforms have affected their labour markets in terms of employment, part-time work, (long-term) unemployment, and temporary contracts among men and women. The second part of the article explores a different Eurostat database – European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) – in order to consider the impact of the main changes in the three labour markets on household employment patterns, income poverty and social exclusion. The data we examine are primarily for 2007 (before the outbreak of the crisis), 2010 (at the height of the crisis) and 2012. The final section offers some concluding remarks and suggestions for further research.

Employment effects of economic recession and austerity reforms

Employment rates

The promotion of women's economic independence has long been identified as pivotal for advancing gender equality in Europe. Accordingly, the EU's main economic and social policy instruments have stressed the need to bring more women into the labour market and to increase their participation in economic activity, along with broader policy aims such as increasing the proportion of the population in employment, enhancing economic growth and contributing to the sustainability of social security systems (Crompton, 2006; Villa, 2007; Rubery, 2011; Bould and Casaca, 2012). In 2000, the European Employment Strategy (EES) agreed by the EU15 set the target of achieving an overall employment rate of 70 per cent and a female employment rate of 60 per cent by 2010. Table 1 shows how Ireland, Italy and Portugal performed in this regard between 2000 and 2012.

The data suggest that the weakening of the male breadwinner model and the growth of the dual earner model have been occurring at a different pace in each country. In 2000, the female employment rates in both Ireland and Italy were below the EU15 average. In Italy, less than 40 per cent of women aged 15–64 years were formally participating in the labour force. Portugal, by contrast, had already attained the EU target for female employment by 2000, with 60.5 per cent, and this rate remained fairly stable until 2010. Thus, although

Table 1. Male and female employment rates (population aged 15–64) and gender employment gaps, 2000, 2007, 2010 and 2012

	2000			2007			2010			2012		
	M	W	Gap (M–W)	M	W	Gap (M–W)	M	W	Gap (M–W)	M	W	Gap (M–W)
EU27	70.7	53.6	**17.1**	72.5	58.2	**14.3**	70.0	58.2	**11.8**	69.8	58.6	**11.2**
EU15	72.5	53.9	**18.6**	74.2	59.5	**14.7**	71.3	59.4	**11.9**	70.6	59.8	**10.8**
Ireland	75.7	53.2	**22.5**	77.5	60.6	**16.9**	63.5	55.8	**7.7**	62.7	55.1	**7.6**
Italy	67.6	39.3	**28.3**	70.7	46.6	**24.1**	67.7	46.1	**21.6**	66.5	47.1	**19.4**
Portugal	76.2	60.5	**15.7**	73.8	61.9	**11.9**	70.1	61.1	**9.0**	64.9	58.7	**6.2**

M = Men; W = Women.
Source: Eurostat (Labour Force Survey).

Ireland and, particularly, Italy were still below the target in 2010, with 55.8 and 46.1 per cent, respectively, the gender employment gap narrowed sharply in all three countries over that decade. This is especially true of Ireland, where the gap shrank from 22.5 to 7.6 percentage points between 2000 and 2012.

The diversity of gender regimes is related to the history of women's integration into paid employment (Karamessini and Rubery, 2014). There are indeed historical and socio-economic factors underpinning Portugal's relatively high levels of female labour force participation and their further increase since the 1960s. First of all, women's participation was motivated by the shortage of male workers due to the massive recruitment of men for the country's colonial wars and emigration. Another factor was the need to contribute to family incomes, as wages were particularly low under the right-wing authoritarian regime that held power for almost 50 years until the democratic revolution of 1974. Thereafter, the persistence of low wages was compounded by other factors including the development of the public administration sector, women's rising formal educational attainment, and a family socialization process based on the dual breadwinner model (see, for example, Chagas Lopes and Perista, 1995; Cardoso Torres et al., 2005; Casaca and Damião, 2011).

In the case of Ireland, the low levels of female participation are partly the result of a cultural norm that defines the home as the central place for women and which is explicitly enshrined in the Constitution (Mahon, 1998). This also contributed to shaping social and labour market policies, such as the "marriage bar", which restricted married women's employment in many occupations until 1973. Then, limited economic opportunities throughout the 1980s and early 1990s led to extensive emigration for employment. The dual breadwinner model emerged only recently in Ireland, with the economic boom of the late 1990s, leading to a sharp increase in women's labour force participation between 2000 and 2007, when the rate peaked at 60.6 per cent.

Italy still featured a wide gender employment gap in 2012 (19.4 percentage points). Its relatively low levels of female labour force participation may be explained by the comparatively weak development of the service sector, the relative under-supply of public child care services, and a welfare state centred on the family and women as the main providers of (unpaid) domestic and care work (Casaca and Damião, 2011; Addabbo, 2013; Bianco, Lotti and Zizza, 2013; Verashchagina and Capparucci, 2014). During the recent crisis, women aged over 50 years accounted for much of the (modest) growth in female employment, while male employment decreased markedly in the 35–49 age group (Istat, 2015). On average, there has also been an increase in the number of households with children where only the mother works (idem, 2013), though mothers now tend to drop out of the labour market at a higher rate and sooner after childbirth than before the crisis (idem, 2014).

In 2010, under the Europe 2020 Strategy, the Member States of the EU27 agreed on a new employment target to be reached by 2020: an overall employment rate of 75 per cent for the 20–64 age group (no particular reference was made to women). The financial crisis, the economic recession and the rise in unemployment explain the changes observed over the past few years, but the trends have been uneven across the three countries examined here. While Italy displays a continuous increase in female employment rates (in contrast to the decline in male employment rates), Ireland has experienced a slight decline among both men and women, and Portugal has been facing an alarming decline in both male and female employment rates (Casaca, 2012).

The effects of parenthood on employment

According to the literature, Ireland, Italy and Portugal are classified in different gender regime clusters (Anxo et al., 2007). Portugal is closer to the "Nordic universal breadwinner model", with women and men working on a full-time and continuous basis throughout their life-cycle; Ireland displays the features of the "maternal part-time work model", as mothers tend to work part time even when their children are older; and Italy is included in the "Mediterranean exit or full-time work model", as female employment rates tend to be low but, once in the labour market, women work on a full-time basis (Karamessini and Rubery, 2014). Our analysis confirms that there are indeed different employment trends across the three countries – between women and men, and between those without and with children – that reflect their gender regimes and economic conditions (Anxo et al., 2007; Erhel and Guergoat-Larivière, 2013; Karamessini and Rubery, 2014).

There is clear evidence of lower labour force participation among women with children in Ireland and Italy, but much less so for Portugal (see Appendix table A1). In 2007, there was a considerable gap (24.9 percentage points) in Ireland's employment rates between women without children (84.4 per cent) and women with children (59.5 per cent), reflecting the combination of high employment during the "Celtic Tiger" period with relatively low availability of family friendly policies (Ní Léime, Duvvury and Callan, 2015). In Italy, there was a smaller gap (14.4 percentage points) between mothers and childless women, though their employment rates were much lower than in Ireland (at 54.1 and 68.5 per cent, respectively), reflecting a gender regime based on "familialism". Portugal stands out as having a high employment rate among women with children (75.1 per cent) and a very narrow gap between the rates for women with children and those without (1.2 percentage points), reflecting the country's strong tradition of continuous female employment and the availability of policies that support working mothers (Casaca and Damião, 2011).

By 2012, the gap in Ireland had narrowed to 21 percentage points, as a result of a significant drop in employment among women without children and a more moderate decline among those with children; in Italy, the gap had narrowed to 10.7 percentage points; and in Portugal employment was higher among women with children than among those without – possibly a consequence of the dramatic increase in youth unemployment, particularly among young females (Casaca, 2012).

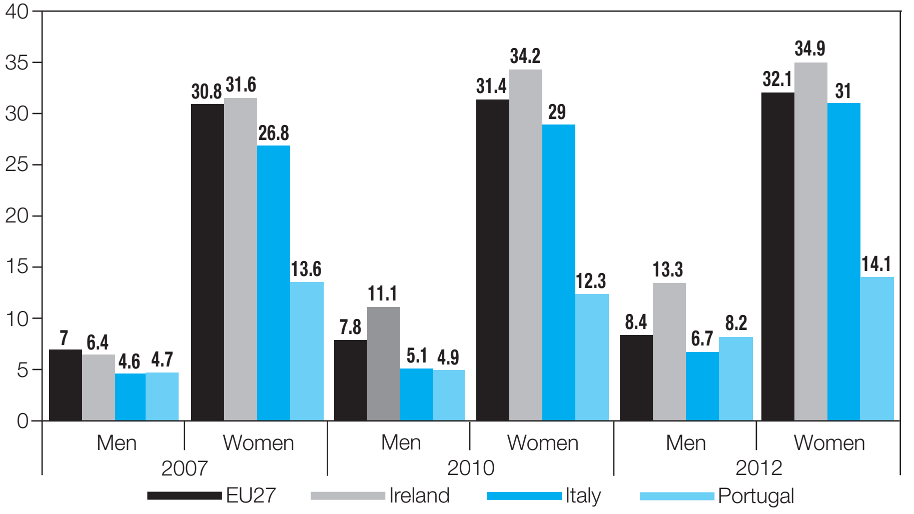
By contrast, all three countries display a higher rate of employment among men with children than among those without children, i.e. the traditional male breadwinner model. In 2007, in Ireland, the employment rate was 92 per cent for men with children and 85.7 per cent for those without, leaving a gap of 6.3 percentage points, while in Italy, the gap was 11.2 percentage points, and in Portugal, 10.4 percentage points. This reflects the high levels of male employment during Ireland's Celtic Tiger period, though these subsequently dropped dramatically, especially among young men: by 2012, the gap between men with children and those without had widened to 8.2 percentage points. In Italy, the gap had by then increased to 12.5, and in Portugal, to 14 percentage points.

In summary, after the recession, the with/without children employment gaps narrowed among women in both Ireland and Italy and were actually reversed in Portugal. However, this resulted from an overall drop in female employment, not increased participation by women with children. Among men, the gaps widened, reflecting dramatic decreases in employment in all three countries, particularly among young men. Overall, there is some evidence of convergence in terms of the male and female gaps between those with children and those without as a result of declining employment opportunities for most groups, rather than increased employment opportunities for women with children.

The growth of part-time employment

In line with EU trends, figure 1 shows that the incidence of part-time employment increased in all three countries over the period under analysis, for both women and men. As in most other developed countries, however, part-time work in Ireland, Italy and Portugal is much more prevalent among women than among men. Despite some cross-country variation, this clearly demonstrates that gender is a cross-cutting issue: gender roles shape the employment behaviour of both men and women in all three societies. The incidence of part-time work is strikingly low in Portugal, though it has increased, especially among men, since the economic and financial crisis, in line with the rapid deterioration

Figure 1. Part-time employment as a percentage of total employment (workers aged 15–64 years), 2007, 2010 and 2012



Source: Eurostat (Labour Force Survey).

of labour market conditions. Low wages, combined with economic necessity, the late development of the service sector and traditional (labour-intensive) models of production may account for the country's low rates of part-time employment (ibid.). In Ireland, the rate is consistently above the EU27 average: over one-third of employed women work on a part-time basis. Since 2007, the part-time rate has been increasing in Italy too, resulting in the widest gender gap – a difference of 24.3 percentage points – between the proportions of women and men in part-time employment. This type of employment, however, may conflict with the aims of gender equality. It may jeopardize not only women's career prospects and economic independence, both present and future, by increasing the gender pay gap and pension gap, but also the modernization of gender relations by reinforcing the role of women as the main care providers and men as the primary breadwinners (ibid.; Crompton, 2006; Rubery, 2011). Moreover, it should be stressed that the economic crisis has significantly increased the share of involuntary part-time work in the southern European countries (Addabbo, 2013; Gerecke, 2013; Istat, 2015).

Unemployment and precarious work

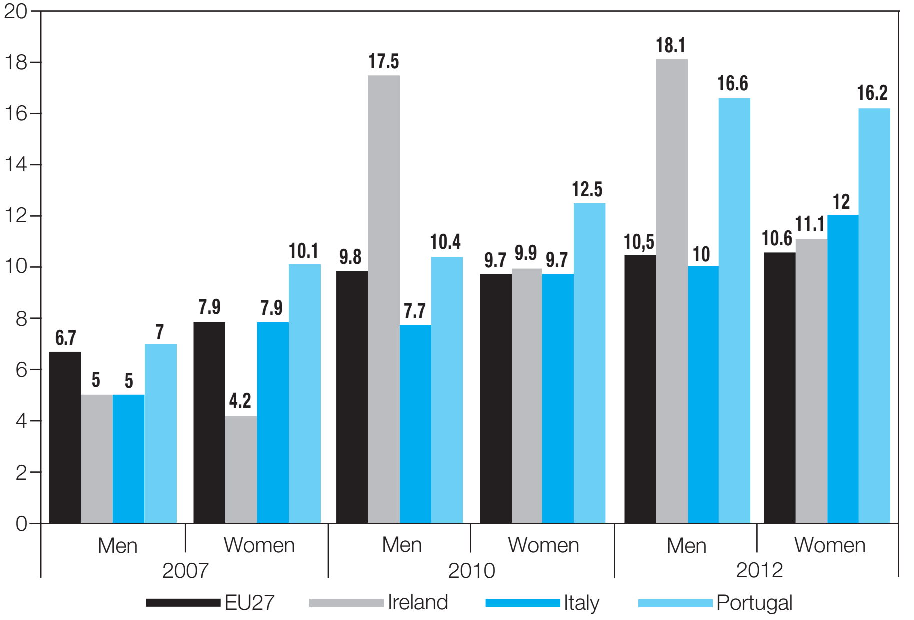
Prior to the crisis, the unemployment rate was generally higher among women than among men across the EU27, including in Portugal and Italy. Ireland was an exception, with male unemployment slightly higher than female unemployment in 2007 (5 vs 4.2 per cent). This may be partly due to the fact that the downturn in the country's male-dominated construction industry had begun by the middle of 2006 (Duvvury, 2010). However, in the first years of the economic crisis, the pattern of generally higher female unemployment reversed quickly, leading commentators to characterize the financial crisis as a "mancession" (Sierminska and Takhtamanova, 2011). Average male unemployment in the EU27 rose from 6.7 per cent in 2007 to 9.8 per cent in 2010, and to 10.5 per cent in 2012; over the same period, average female unemployment rose from 7.9 to 10.6 per cent. Among Irish men, unemployment more than tripled, from 5 to 18.1 per cent, between 2007 and 2012. The initial sharp increase in male unemployment is hardly surprising since men often dominate industries that are more vulnerable to cyclical shocks, such as construction, shipping and manufacturing (Rubery, 1988). However, as the crisis unfolded and reforms in public administration were fully implemented in occupations where women are overrepresented (e.g. health and education), the impact on female unemployment could be expected to be stronger than that on male unemployment (Casaca, 2012 and 2013).

Indeed, as the crisis deepened and austerity (or fiscal consolidation) became the policy response across Europe, unemployment continued to increase for both women and men (see figure 2). However, men were nearly three times more affected if one considers only absolute changes between 2007 and 2012 (Sierminska and Takhtamanova, 2011; Bettio et al., 2012). In terms of the gender gap, Italy continued to have higher unemployment rates for women, whereas in Ireland (particularly) and Portugal (slightly) the gender gap was reversed by 2012. Occupational segregation by sex would seem to account for this reversal, as the first industries to be severely hit by the financial and economic crisis were male-dominated – construction, manufacturing, automotive repair and maintenance (Casaca, 2012 and 2013).

An important measure of unemployment is the proportion of long-term unemployed (see figure 3).[1] Across Europe, women experienced a higher incidence of long-term unemployment, by nearly 2 percentage points in 2012. In Italy, for example, long-term unemployment among women increased by 9.4 percentage points compared to 5.4 percentage points for men. While no comparable data are available for Ireland, its proportion of long-term unemployment was very high in 2012, affecting nearly three out of five unemployed men and women. The experience of long-term unemployment is also influenced by age: Eurostat data suggest that young males in Portugal were more likely to experience long-term unemployment than their female counterparts, though the opposite was true for those in the 25–49 and 50–64 age groups. Italy exhibits a similar pattern, albeit on a lesser scale (European Commission, 2012a). A key feature of long-term unemployment is its relationship to low educational attainment and skill levels. Though all educational attainment categories have been affected by the crisis in this regard, low educational attainment still translates into the highest rates of long-term unemployment, as is the case in Portugal (ibid.).

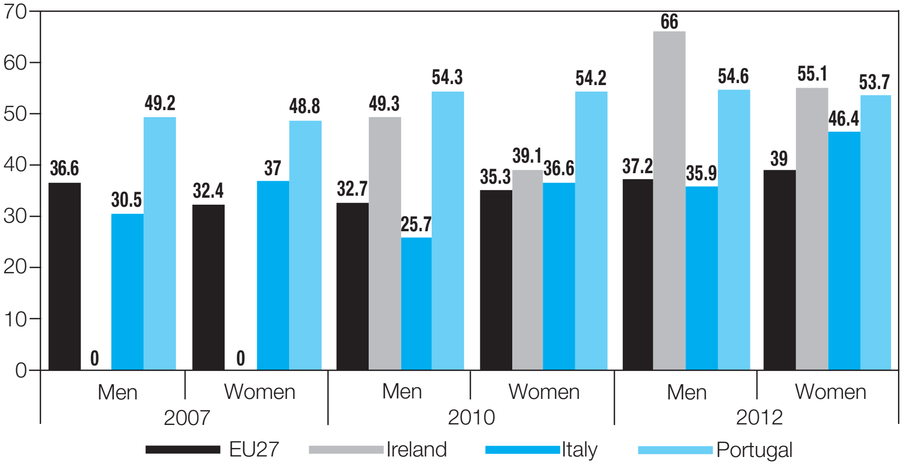
[1] The definition we use is that provided by Eurostat, i.e. the share of persons unemployed for 12 months or more in the total number of labour force participants.

Figure 2. Male/female unemployment rates (percentage of workers aged 15–64 years), 2007, 2010 and 2012



Source: Eurostat (Labour Force Survey).

Figure 3. Percentage of long-term unemployed in total male/female unemployment (workers aged 15–64 years), 2007, 2010 and 2012



Notes: No data available on Ireland for 2007. For Portugal, the data for 2012 were provided by the National Institute of Statistics (INE).

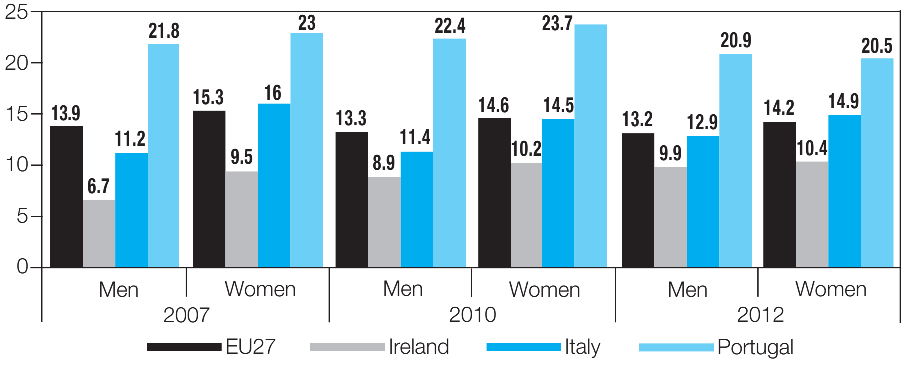
Source: Eurostat (Labour Force Survey).

The above overview of unemployment and long-term unemployment trends needs to be qualified with some caveats. Research has indeed demonstrated that unemployed women tend not to be counted in unemployment statistics as they often withdraw from the labour market into unpaid or informal work. Thus, the impact of changing economic conditions – both for women and men – is not fully captured by employment and unemployment data. The statistics thus disguise feminized patterns of behaviour shaped by national labour market rules and norms and the constrained labour supply choices that women often face (Maier, 2011).

Another dimension of vulnerability in the labour market is temporary employment. At the start of the crisis, women averaged a slightly higher proportion of temporary employment than men across the EU27 (15.3 vs 13.9 per cent). Women's greater vulnerability to precarious employment has long been a common pattern in Europe and in the OECD countries generally (Rubery, 1988 and 2011). The gender gap in this respect has been evident in all three countries (except for Portugal in 2012) and is particularly wide in Italy (see figure 4). Over the crisis period, the share of temporary employment increased among both women and men in Ireland and Italy, but it declined in Portugal, and the gender gap in temporary employment narrowed across all three countries – as a result of the severe (and rapid) deterioration of men's labour market prospects since 2007.

However, the broad finding of narrowing gender gaps in terms of employment, unemployment and temporary employment cannot be interpreted as a movement towards gender equality or as a significant change in gender relations. Rather, this trend seems to suggest that men have moved closer to women's labour market vulnerability. This is indeed a common pattern resulting from the deep economic crisis, fiscal consolidation, bailout conditionalities and the severe austerity programmes imposed by the Troika, which have exacerbated the degradation of labour market conditions in all three countries. Moreover, austerity measures have included considerable changes in labour legislation, towards greater flexibilization. This has been particularly striking not only in Portugal and Italy – commonly seen as countries with higher levels of formal labour regulation – but also in Ireland, which is usually deemed to have a more liberal labour market (OECD, 2012). In Portugal, for instance, such deregulation was a condition for external financial assistance and has significantly reduced labour protection since 2011 by simplifying individual and collective dismissal procedures and cutting redundancy payments. Such policies have led to widespread job losses even in those industries that were previously taken to be more "secure" and protective of workers. Collective agreements were suspended in Portugal, whereas Ireland flexibilized wage determination so as to make it easier for companies to opt out of higher-level collective agreements (ibid., p. 29). This may explain the greater vulnerability of men, who were traditionally employed in more protected private industries, but also the risk of further deterioration in labour conditions for women due to public administration reforms. Indeed, all three countries have drastically

Figure 4. Percentage of temporary employment in total male/female employment (workers aged 15–64 years), 2007, 2010 and 2012



Source: Eurostat (Labour Force Survey).

reduced their numbers of public employees, cut their salaries and frozen recruitment and career progression opportunities in the public sector. This has affected female workers disproportionately since they dominate public-sector employment. Moreover, severe cuts in public expenditure on educational and childcare services may also aggravate the terms on which women participate in the labour force, given the prevalence of a familialist ideology. This holds true of all three countries, albeit in different ways. In Portugal, the austerity reforms amount to a policy backlash against the dual-earner model, given the considerable public investment made in childcare services before 2010. In Ireland, the reforms have suspended EU pressures for the implementation of a policy framework more supportive of women's employment (Barry and Conroy, 2014; Ferreira, 2014). And in Italy, where welfare cuts have been deeper, the cutbacks have limited the expansion of childcare services, which are provided very unevenly across regions, leading to further constraints on mothers' labour supply with a negative impact on women's employment in all sectors (Addabbo, 2013; Verashchagina and Capparucci, 2014). We now need to discuss the implications of these developments in terms of household employment patterns, poverty and social exclusion.

Household employment patterns, poverty and social exclusion

Household employment and income pooling patterns

Microdata provided by EU-SILC suggest that the financial, economic and labour market crises have also had an important impact on household employment and income. In particular, Bettio et al. (2012, p. 78) report a significant decline in the number of dual-earner couples: in 2007 dual-earner couples constituted 74.1 per cent of all surveyed couples in the EU25, with male breadwinner and female breadwinner couples accounting for 21 and 4.9 per cent of the total, respectively. By 2009, the proportion of dual-earner couples had dropped by 5.1 percentage points, with much of the change reflected in an increase in the proportion of female breadwinner couples (+4.7 points). In Italy and Portugal, the increase in the share of female breadwinner couples was higher than the EU average, at 6.64 points and 6.72 points, respectively. Interestingly, Italy experienced a decline not only in the proportion of dual-earner couples (–4.97) but also in that of male breadwinner couples (–1.67). In other words, the rise in unemployment that severely hit men during the first phase of the crisis seems to have produced new household configurations, associated with the growing proportion of women becoming the main breadwinners (and also jobless households). Given the prevailing gender wage gap, however, this trend is likely to translate into a higher risk of poverty for female breadwinner households, although women's access to paid employment acts as a buffer against the risk of poverty consequent upon job loss among men.

While the impact of the Great Recession on poverty and material deprivation will be discussed more fully below, it is important to start by examining the extent to which available measures of income poverty may be biased by the assumption of income pooling. Indeed, according to the classical views on poverty, the household is a "black box", within which incoming resources are pooled and equally allocated and shared among household members (Pahl, 1983). But this assumption does not allow for an accurate estimation of the gender poverty gap. Within the current framework of poverty analysis, a household statistically classified as non-poor may include poor individual members, who are often women and children (Daly, 1992; Findlay and Wright, 1996; Bastos et al., 2009).

Accordingly, we use the ad hoc module of the EU-SILC 2010 on income pooling and resource sharing to reconstruct the intra-household allocation of resources in the three countries considered here. In order to observe patterns of intra-household inequality, Eurostat follows Pahl (1983) in defining three types of resource pooling, namely: full pooling, partial pooling and "no pooling".[2] Except in the case of full pooling, differences in individual incomes and in sharing may result in intra-household inequalities that adversely affect those who are lower-income earners or not wage earners at all.

Preliminary results from the survey show that responses vary widely depending on whether one uses household-level information or individual-level information (Eurostat, 2013). In Italy, for example, the share of households

[2] "Full pooling" is understood to refer to a situation in which all the incomes of all the household's members are pooled and used by any member for common or personal expenditures – i.e. all have full access to the pooled income whatever the individual contribution to the pool might be. Under the partial pooling regime, household members contribute a share of their personal income to the pool and keep the rest (which they do not necessarily use for themselves). A given household member then has access only to a share of the others' incomes, a priori only for common (or dedicated) expenses. "No pooling" means that no income is pooled at all, and that no household member has access to the income of another – suggesting that the household members have to organize for common expenses (Eurostat, 2013, p. 13).

Table 2. Distribution of households by income pooling regime (percentages)

	Household level			Individual responses			
	Full pooling	Partial pooling	No pooling	Full pooling	Partial pooling	No pooling	Not consistent
Ireland	63.5	11.5	25	41	23.2	2	33.8
Italy	78.3	12.8	8.9	44	25.6	3.6	25.9
Portugal	72.3	22.6	5.1	52.2	11.6	9.1	27.1

Source: Eurostat (2013), tables 1 and 4.

that reported full pooling ranged from 78 per cent based on household-level responses to 44 per cent based on individual responses. Similar discrepancies are observable in the cases of Ireland and Portugal (see table 2). However, cultural differences compounded by uncertain data quality and comparability make comparison difficult across countries. This also raises doubts about the consistency of responses on the prevailing model of income disposal. While full pooling is the most common pattern of household resource allocation in all three countries, the standard hypothesis of a generalized pattern of full pooling across all household seems to be rejected by the data.[3]

To sum up, table 2 suggests the existence of intra-household inequalities, as people who are lower-income earners or who are not earners at all (typically women and children) may be deprived of intra-household resources. In order to account for the problem of sex-differentiated access to resources, Bettio et al. (2012) use an indicator constructed at the individual level, namely, the dependency rate. This captures the proportion of people with an individual disposable income (after social transfers) below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold of 60 per cent of national median individual disposable income after social transfers. The dependency rates for the three countries examined here show a gender gap to the advantage of men that was similar in 2005 and 2009. Gradín, del Rio and Cantó (2010) also show that poverty in the EU is not gender neutral, because of the inequalities that adversely affect women in terms of education, employment and wages. To overcome this problem, Bárcena-Martín and Moro-Egido (2013) consider only single-adult households in their research on the impact of micro- and macro-level factors on gendered poverty outcomes. Our findings thus also highlight the need for in-depth qualitative studies on the potential implications of men's and women's changing employment patterns for gender relations within the home.

Poverty and social exclusion

As stated in the EES in 2000, raising employment and promoting social inclusiveness have long been key goals of EU policy. The goal of transforming the EU into a smart, inclusive and sustainable society was reaffirmed under

[3] See Eurostat (2013) for preliminary results and sensitivity analysis on the EU-SILC 2010 ad hoc module on income pooling and sharing of resources.

the Europe 2020 Strategy. In addition to raising the employment rate to 75 per cent for men and women, this laid down a further commitment to lifting 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion by 2020.

The recent economic crisis and current austerity reforms in Italy, Ireland and Portugal have been affecting these countries' rates of poverty and social exclusion. Neither of these is gender-neutral, as the causes and experiences of living in poverty and/or being socially excluded are distinctively gendered (Bastos et al., 2009) – and all three countries are variously affected by gender inequalities in regard to employment. Against this background, we now examine the gender implications of recent labour market dynamics for poverty and social exclusion.

According to the Eurostat definitions we use, the "at-risk-of-poverty rate", capturing income poverty, is the share of people whose "equivalized disposable income" is below 60 per cent of the national median equivalized disposable income after social transfers.[4] In 2010, Eurostat introduced the concept of people "at risk of poverty or social exclusion", incorporating definitions of income poverty ("at risk of poverty"), severe material deprivation, and very low work intensity.[5] Despite the importance of this compound definition, we undertake a separate analysis of each of these indicators as they are not gender neutral, hence also the importance of establishing the extent to which work intensity is associated with poverty. It should be noted, however, that the concept of work intensity does not distinguish full-time from part-time employment. This constitutes a limitation because the nature of an individual's labour force participation has important consequences for his/her resources and, therefore, for his/her experience of poverty and social exclusion (Ward and Ozdemir, 2013).

Except for Ireland in 2011, the at-risk-of-poverty rates are higher for women than for men across all three countries (and the EU27). Over the years, Italy and Portugal consistently display rates above the EU average, and

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[4] Equivalized disposable income is the total income of a household, after tax and other deductions, that is available for spending or saving, divided by the number of household members converted into "equalized adults" on the basis of the so-called modified OECD equivalence scale, which attributes the weight 1 to the first adult in the household, 0.5 to each subsequent member aged 14 or over, and 0.3 to household members aged under 14 (see http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php).

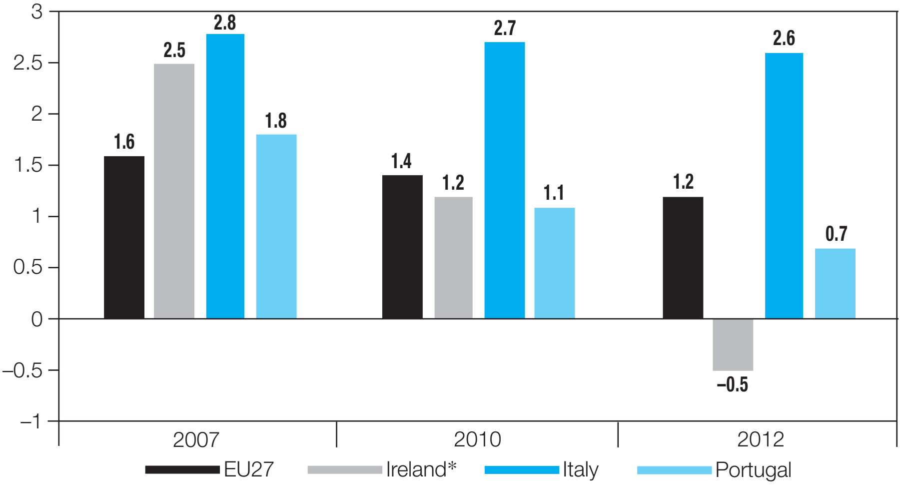
[5] Specifically, an individual is deemed to be "at risk of poverty or social exclusion" if he or she belongs to at least one of the following three categories: (i) being at risk of poverty, (ii) being severely materially deprived, or (iii) living in a household with very low work intensity. People in the first of these categories are those whose equivalized disposable income (after social transfers) is below 60 per cent of the national median equivalized disposable income after social transfers. The second category includes people who cannot afford at least four of the following nine items: to pay their rent, mortgage or utility bills; to keep their home adequately warm; to face unexpected expenses; to eat meat or proteins regularly; to go on holiday; a television set; a washing machine; a car; a telephone. For the third category, an individual is deemed to live in a household with low work intensity if the members of the household aged 18–59 years worked less than 20 per cent of their potential working time in the income reference year. Work intensity evaluates the number of months during which individuals were employed in the income reference year. It varies between 0 (never employed) and 1 (always employed).

Italian women face the highest risk of poverty – a condition that affects approximately one in five of them (see Appendix table A2). Italy also appears to display the largest gender poverty gap to the disadvantage of women, and Ireland, the smallest. As shown in figure 5, the gap in Italy was 2.8 percentage points in 2007 and, though it narrowed slightly during the crisis, it was still wider than the EU average in 2012 (and the widest among the three countries studied here). In Portugal, however, the gap has been narrowing over the crisis period, which may be explained by men's greater vulnerability to unemployment during the initial phase of the crisis. Ireland follows a similar trend, with the 2011 reversal of the gender gap reflecting the cuts to unemployment benefits, which men were more likely to be receiving.

By computing the at-risk-of-poverty rates on income before transfers and comparing them with the rates after social transfers (Appendix tables A2 and A3), we confirm the important role of social transfers in protecting people from poverty during the crisis (see also Bettio et al., 2012). This is particularly evident in Ireland. Here, although the difference between the at-risk-of-poverty rates before and after social transfers tends to be greater for women, the crisis sharply widened the gap between the two states among men as well (see figure 6). This evidence also is probably related to their higher vulnerability to job loss coupled with the increase in the proportion of them receiving unemployment benefits.

The at-risk-of-poverty rates by employment status and work intensity suggest a rising trend in poverty among the employed, especially those

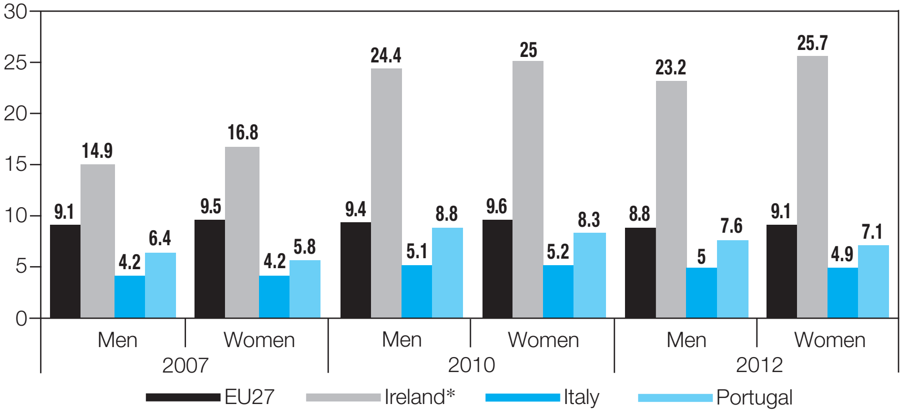
Figure 5. Gender gap in at-risk-of-poverty rates after social transfers (percentage points), 2007, 2010 and 2012



Notes: The gender gap is the difference between the at-risk-of-poverty rate after social transfers for women and the at-risk-of-poverty rate after social transfers for men. * For Ireland, there are no data available for 2012; data for 2011 are used instead.

Source: Authors' calculations based on EU-SILC data.

Figure 6. At-risk-of-poverty rate differentials before/after social transfers, 2007, 2010 and 2012 (percentage point gaps)



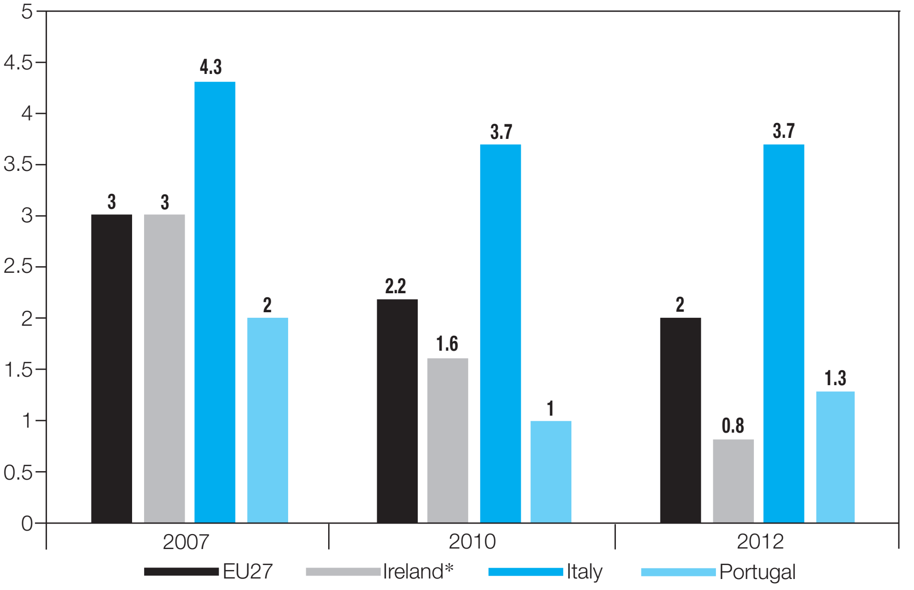
Notes: The gap is the difference between the at-risk-of-poverty rate before social transfer minus the at-risk-of-poverty rate after social transfers. * For Ireland, there are no data available for 2012; data for 2011 are used instead.

Source: Authors' calculations based on EU-SILC data.

characterized by low work intensity – the category in which women predominate (Appendix tables A4 and A5). This trend points to the growth of working poverty in the three countries considered, reflecting the marked deterioration in wages and labour market conditions during the crisis and the implementation of very severe austerity measures.

The analysis of the "at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion" indicator is in line with the income poverty results (Appendix table A6). As expected, however, the gender gaps shown in figure 7 are wider than the corresponding gaps in income poverty because they include material deprivation and work intensity – i.e. labour market attachment – areas where women are especially vulnerable (European Commission, 2012b). Noteworthy in this regard is the relative position of Italy: its wider average gender gap to the disadvantage of women can be related to the higher likelihood they face of being in lower paid and more precarious employment or in inactivity. Moreover, they are also more likely than men to face material deprivation for lack of income support on account of their typically more discontinuous employment histories, their higher likelihood of experiencing long-term unemployment and the characteristics of the Italian system of unemployment insurance, which penalizes those who were formerly inactive or who were in precarious employment. The deterioration of the relative position of men in Ireland in 2011 should also be noted. Again, it reflects their higher vulnerability to unemployment, along with the changing composition of part-time employment, as men increasingly took up "vulnerable employment" (Duvvury and Finn, 2014). In Portugal, the gender gap narrowed in the first years of the crisis, in line with the EU 27 trend. More recently, however, it has again widened slightly, perhaps as a consequence of

Figure 7. Gender gap in at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rates, 2007, 2010 and 2012 (percentage points)



Notes: The gender gap is the difference between the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate for women and at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate for men, according to the definition given in footnote 5. * For Ireland, there are no data available for 2012; data for 2011 are used instead.

Source: Authors' calculations based on EU-SILC data.

the lagged deterioration of women's labour market position. As mentioned above, occupational segregation by sex had the effect of "sheltering" women's jobs during the first phase of the crisis (see Casaca, 2012 and 2013). In Italy, the gender gap in income poverty narrowed between 2007 and 2012, both for the employed and for the unemployed, but in Ireland, it widened for both; and in Portugal, the gap narrowed for the unemployed but widened for the employed. Generally speaking, however, the relative situation of women worsened (see Appendix table A4). Indeed, as from 2010 in particular, the extensive cuts made in public expenditure, especially in family-related benefits, have not been gender-neutral because women are the main recipients (Bettio et al., 2012).

The effect of fiscal consolidation on welfare provisions has thus been especially acute in the three countries analysed here (Bettio and Verashchagina, 2014). One of their common policy responses to the crisis has been to reduce public expenditure on health care, education and, particularly, social protection. This policy has had far-reaching consequences for poverty and social exclusion, especially for families with children, whose living conditions have deteriorated significantly. Government funding of social policy programmes, including social welfare and childcare, has been reduced, and direct payments to single parents and people with disabilities have been cut (Walsh, Carney and Ní Léime, 2015). It has been argued that the focus on reducing public expenditure may disproportionately affect women in the long run since they are the most vulnerable to cutbacks in services and to measures affecting public sector workers (Rubery and Rafferty, 2013). Changes in unemployment insurance systems, either limiting the duration of benefits or restricting eligibility, have also had a tremendous impact on standards of living in the context of growing unemployment and long-term-unemployment. Precarious workers and those with more intermittent employment trajectories – women and youth being over-represented in these groups – are now more exposed to the risk of not being covered by the welfare system.[6]

Concluding remarks

In the pre-crisis period, under the EES, EU countries were trending towards convergence in terms of women's labour force participation and narrowing the gender employment gap (Karamessini and Rubery, 2014). Taking a gender-sensitive perspective, this article has used Eurostat data for 2007, 2010 and 2012 to analyse the effects of the 2008 financial and economic crisis and consequent austerity policies on labour market dynamics (employment, part-time work, unemployment, long-term unemployment, temporary contracts), households, income poverty and social exclusion in Ireland, Italy and Portugal.

Although the promotion of women's economic independence has been seen as crucial to the advancement of gender equality and to economic growth in Europe, the three countries have performed quite differently in this regard. Indeed, the weakening of the male breadwinner model and the growth of the dual earner model have been occurring at very different paces in each country. The gender employment gap has narrowed sharply, particularly in Ireland, though it is still fairly wide in Italy. However, both men and women in these three countries now have a longer way to go to reach the Europe 2020 target of 75 per cent employment than was the case at the outbreak of the crisis, before the introduction of severe austerity reforms. Morever, cuts in public expenditure on schooling and childcare facilities have further constrained mothers' labour supply, thereby exacerbating the negative impact on women's employment and discouraging them from taking up full-time employment. This obviously highlights the need for further research in this area. The interaction between cutbacks in public spending and the increasing retirement age in the three countries (also lowering grandmothers' childcare supply) should also be analysed since primary carers (typically women) could experience a significant increase in the amount of unpaid work they do, compounded by lower access to public services and a further decline in their employment.

Diversity was also found in relation to working time regimes. Around one-third of Irish and Italian women are now working on a part-time basis –

[6] Although Italy's wage supplementation fund was expanded at the beginning of the labour market crisis to encompass employees who were not previously eligible (e.g. those employed in small firms) and recent reforms have tried to increase the coverage of unemployment benefits, the country's social protection system remains incomplete (OECD, 2015).

a trend that does not challenge the traditional male breadwinner model, but seems to point to a modified version of it, and one that compromises gender equality both in the current labour market situation (fewer career prospects, widening gender pay gaps) and in the future, with a widening of the gender pensions gap and greater vulnerability to income poverty and social exclusion (Rubery, 1988 and 2011; Crompton, 2006; Bettio et al., 2012; Casaca, 2012). Over the period 2007–12, the gender gap in temporary employment narrowed across all three countries because of the severe (and rapid) deterioration of men's labour market conditions since 2008. Looking at the overall figures on unemployment and precarious (temporary) employment, we find the situation in Portugal to be particularly critical.

In terms of the gender gap in unemployment, Italy continues to have higher unemployment rates among women, whereas in Portugal the gender gap has been reversed, with men experiencing higher unemployment by 2012. Occupational segregation by sex would seem to account for this outcome, as the first industries to be severely hit by the economic crisis were male-dominated – i.e. construction, manufacturing, automotive repair and maintenance. This also occurred in many other European countries during the first phase of the crisis, immediately after 2007, in a process that led commentators to characterize the financial crisis as being primarily a "mancession" (Sierminska and Takhtamanova, 2011). The traditional view that women act as a "buffer segment" in the labour market, being called in when demand expands and dispensed with when it contracts, has already been challenged in the context of previous crises (Bruegel, 1979). But considering the data on the current crisis, that view seems to be completely refuted (Bettio et al., 2012). However, as the crisis unfolds and public administration reforms are fully implemented – in occupations where women are overrepresented (e.g. health care, education) – the impact on female employment can be expected to be far more detrimental (Casaca, 2012 and 2013). Meanwhile, across all three countries, the most general finding is convergence in terms of the narrowing gender gaps in employment and unemployment, and part-time and temporary work, which cannot be interpreted as a movement towards gender equality or a significant change in gender relations. Rather, this trend suggests that men have moved closer to women's vulnerable position in the labour market, in a process that is accelerating the generalization of degraded labour market conditions (i.e. low-quality jobs, part-time work, insecure temporary contracts, low wages, and unemployment) and vulnerability to income poverty and social exclusion. In Portugal and Ireland, this is a common pattern resulting from the deep economic crisis, fiscal consolidation plans, severe austerity programmes, including labour market and welfare reforms, and bailout conditionalities. In fact, we note significant policy convergence across all three countries with respect to both labour market deregulation and weakening social protection. In the context of growing unemployment and long-term unemployment, the reduction of social spending in general and of unemployment benefits in particular has contributed to a dramatic deterioration of living conditions, and left many individuals without any social protection. Also, the adoption by all three countries of austerity policies narrowly focused on reducing public debt appears to have adversely affected progress towards gender equality.

In this regard, it is worth noting that the number of employed people exposed to the risk of poverty (the working poor) also increased during the period under analysis, particularly affecting those in low-intensity employment (mainly women). Our analysis confirms the importance of social transfers in protecting workers and households from the risk of poverty (see also Bettio et al., 2012). The difference between the at-risk-of-poverty rates before and after social transfers tends to be wider for women, although the crisis has sharply increased the gap for men too. This finding is probably related to men's higher vulnerability to job loss and to their increased reliance on unemployment benefits (particularly in Ireland). In the current context of austerity and extensive cuts in social provisions, this raises some key concerns, as vulnerability to income poverty may increase in the near future for both men and women, but especially for women as the main recipients of social benefits. In terms of the risk of social exclusion, the gender gap is wider than it is for income poverty (particularly in Italy) because this indicator includes material deprivation as well as labour market vulnerability, areas where women are especially exposed. There is indeed evidence from the three countries to suggest that gender-sensitive social policies are needed to ensure the protection of the most vulnerable groups from the consequences of the crisis.

Current labour market conditions also seem to be shaping new household configurations that are increasingly featuring women as the main breadwinners. Given the persistent wage gap to the disadvantage of women, this shift also could well heighten the risk of poverty for female breadwinner households. Moreover, changes in household employment patterns may also have important implications for men's and women's relations within the home. In particular, since "full pooling" of resources is not found to be the generalized pattern across households in the three countries considered, differences in individual incomes and in income sharing regimes may generate intra-household inequalities, which may negatively affect those who are lower-income earners or not wage earners at all (typically women and children).

In the current context of crisis and austerity, our research has thus identified some relevant gender specificities, which could make an important contribution to mainstreaming gender in labour and social policies. Gendered changes in household employment patterns and the hypothesis of intra-household inequalities suggest that further research is needed to find out whether gender identities and roles are being renegotiated between couples. This would also require analysis of the impact of current changes on the negotiation and distribution of paid and unpaid work, decision-making processes and power relations. All of these factors call for in-depth qualitative studies aimed at examining the potential implications of current labour market and household changes for gender relations within the home.

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Appendix

Table A1. Employment rates among men and women without and with children, 2007, 2010 and 2012 (percentages)

	2007			
	Without children		With children	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Ireland	85.7	84.4	92.0	59.5
Italy	82.7	68.5	93.9	54.1
Portugal	82.4	76.3	92.8	75.1
	2010			
	Without children		With children	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Ireland	72.1	80.5	79.1	56.5
Italy	78.0	66.3	90.6	53.5
Portugal	77.7	77.1	90.1	72.2
	2012			
	Without children		With children	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Ireland	70.6	79.5	78.8	58.5
Italy	76.1	66.1	88.6	55.4
Portugal	71.8	72.0	85.8	73.5

Source: Eurostat (Labour Force Survey 2007, 2010, 2012).

Table A2. Male/female at-risk-of-poverty rates after social transfers, 2007, 2010 and 2012 (percentages)

	2007		2010		2012	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
EU27	15.7	17.3	15.7	17.1	16.3	17.5[e]
Ireland*	16.0	18.5	14.6	15.8	(15.4)	(14.9)
Italy	18.4	21.2	16.8	19.5	18.1	20.7
Portugal	17.2	19.0	17.3	18.4	17.5	18.2

[e] estimated. * For Ireland, there are no data available for 2012; the numbers in parentheses refer to 2011.
Source: EU-SILC.

Table A3. Male/female at-risk-of-poverty rates before social transfers (pensions excluded from social transfers), 2007, 2010 and 2012 (percentages)

	2007		2010		2012	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
EU27	24.8	26.8	25.1	26.7	25.1	26.6
Ireland*	30.9	35.3	39.0	40.8	(38.6)	(40.6)
Italy	22.6	25.4	21.9	24.7	23.1	25.6
Portugal	23.6	24.8	26.1	26.7	25.1	25.3

* For Ireland, there are no data available for 2012; the numbers in parentheses refer to 2011.
Source: EU-SILC.

Table A4. Male/female at-risk-of-poverty rates by most frequent activity status, 2007 and 2012 (percentages of employed/unemployed/retired persons)

	2007						2012					
	Employed		Unemployed		Retired		Employed		Unemployed		Retired	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
EU27	9.0	7.6	47.9	39.8^{e}	13.5	11.8	9.7^{e}	8.6^{e}	49.9^{e}	43.9^{e}	10.8^{e}	11.7^{e}
Ireland*	5.5	5.6	43.8	44.2	36.0	28.6	(6.2)	(4.3)	(31.3)	(34)	(15.4)	(5.0^{u})
Italy	11.8	6.9	49.4	39.7	10.7	8.6	12.2	9.4	48	40.4	9.1	8.3
Portugal	9.9	8.7	36.9	27.7	19.4	15.6	11.2	8.5	38.6	38.3	13.5	11.3

Notes: M = Men; W = Women; ^{e} estimated; ^{u} low reliability. * For Ireland, there are no data available for 2012; the numbers in parentheses refer to 2011. Data on other inactive persons are not included.
Source: EU-SILC.

Table A5. Male/female at-risk-of-poverty rates by work intensity (high, medium and low), 2007 and 2012 (percentages)

	2007						2012					
	High		Medium		Low		High		Medium		Low	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
EU27	8.5	8.8	18.2	18.6	34.4	35.5	9.2^{e}	10.4^{e}	22.6^{e}	22.7^{e}	41.8^{e}	42.6^{e}
Ireland*	4.1	5.4	8.6	9.2	27.8	23.0	(4.1)	(2.9)	(9.7)	(10.2)	(16.6)	(13.5)
Italy	7.8	8.6	24.0	24.1	36.5	37.2	8.3	10.1	25.9	27.5	45.6	48.2
Portugal	9.8	10.1	25.1	23.5	39.7	44.1	11.5	10.7	30.9	29.9	43.8	43.4

Notes: M = Men; W = Women; ^{e} estimated; Low intensity:]0.2–0.45[, Medium intensity [0.45–0.55] and High intensity]0.55–0.85]; * For Ireland, there are no data available for 2012; the numbers in parentheses refer to 2011.
Source: EU-SILC.

Table A6. Male/female at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rates, 2007, 2010 and 2012 (percentages)

	2007		2010		2012	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
EU27	22.9	25.9	22.5	24.7	23.7	25.7^{e}
Ireland	21.6	24.6	26.5	28.1	—	—
Italy	23.8	28.1	22.6	26.3	28	31.7
Portugal	24	26.0	24.8	25.8	24.6	25.9

^{e} estimated.
Source: EU-SILC.