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**Equal economic independence: The contribution of women to
achieving the Europe 2020 targets**

Background note*
'Achieving the Europe 2020 employment target'



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1- Introduction

The year 2010 is a landmark in the evolution of the European Employment Strategy (EES) and also a period of transition as European institutions established the framework for the new “Europe 2020” strategy (EC 2010a; 2010b). By 2010, according to the the Lisbon European Council of 2000, the overall aim of employment and economic policies was to increase the female employment rate to more than 60%, improve the childcare system, reduce gender gaps in employment, unemployment and pay. By 2020, one of the most important aims of the Europe 2020 Strategy is the achievement of 75% overall employment rates for the 20-64 age group. There is no explicit reference to women, but women are recognized to be a crucial resource, and are thus crucial to achieve the 75% target. Although with lights and shadows, progress in women’s employment has already been made, since by 2010 16 out of 27 countries accomplished to the required female employment rate of over 60%. Among Mediterranean countries, Greece, Italy, Spain and Malta are still between 7.2 and 22.3 percentage points below the Lisbon target. On the contrary, the Northern and Baltic countries have all fulfilled the target. Eastern countries, except for Slovenia, are still behind but the gap is lower than the one observed in Mediterranean countries. Among Continental and Anglo-Saxon countries only Belgium, Luxembourg and Ireland have not reached by 2010 the 60% target yet (Eurostat 2009).

2010 is however also a year within an economic crisis which cast a long shadow over employment policy in the Union (EC 2009a; European Parliament 2010a): the severe impacts of the first wave of job losses combined with the effects of budget cut backs mean that progresses made over recent years can be at risk, both in terms of employment rates and conditions and in terms of gender equality. At the same time, such progresses are not neutral or secondary to the achievement of the new social and economic European Union. The achievement of a “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” includes the 75% employment rate target and has to go through the investment in key areas and dimensions, as summarized by the seven flagship initiatives. To meet them, EU action should focus on making European labor market functioning better (reinforcing flexicurity policies, reducing segmentation, increasing internal flexibility within companies), on equipping people with right skills and qualifications, on improving job quality and working conditions, on promoting job creation and demand for labor.

However, if, as declared, the improvement of women’s involvement in the labour market is at the heart of the new Europe 2020 Strategy, the adoption of a fully-integrated gender perspective is necessary, both in the planning and in the monitoring of policies. As many authors argue, such perspective entails a focus not only on quantity and quality of employment, and its gender distribution, but also on quality and quantity of unpaid work, and its distribution, between the market, the state and the family but also, within families, between men and women. The unequal division of family responsibilities is indeed at the roots of the unequal position of women in the labor market. Adopting a fully-integrated gender perspective also means an explicit focus on the cultural, institutional and structural barriers to such unequal position, to women’s lower participation, lower wages, higher concentration in secondary jobs or segments.

2- Current situation of female employment rates

Europe 2020 target

One of the most important aims of the Europe 2020 Strategy is the achievement of 75% overall employment rates for the 20-64 aged. As figure 1 in appendix shows, in 2011 only one country has already reached such threshold, namely Sweden. The other Scandinavian countries are not far from it. Continental, Anglo-Saxon and Baltic countries lie at about ten percentage points below. Eastern countries, except for Slovenia, are still fall short but the gap is lower than the one observed in Mediterranean countries. Italy and Greece, in particular, register the lowest employment rate in Europe, at about 50%, followed only by Malta, at 43%. Here serious efforts to improve women's entry and permanence into paid work, both on the demand side and on the supply side, are necessary if the Europe 2020 target has to be reached, especially among the low educated.

The impact of the economic crisis

Figure 1 in appendix shows that the economic crisis has negatively impacted on the evolution of the employment rates for women: in the context of the economic downturn, the employment rates for women have returned to the 2007 levels. This is, basically, the result of the rise in unemployment rates. Men have been generally more affected by unemployment. However, women's employment rates are still behind and their gap with men remains large in some Eastern and Mediterranean countries. On the contrary, Northern and Baltic countries register high women employment rates, already at the 2020 target level (around 70-75%).

However, three peculiarities over the period of economic crisis are worth noting. First, in 6 out of 27 countries (Denmark, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary, Netherlands and Austria) female employment rates have increased (between 2008Q1 and 2011Q1). Second, on average European gender differences have reduced (from 7.6 to 6.3 percentage points) mainly due to a worsening of men's position higher than the one of women. Third, the evolution of the employment rates varies greatly across group of age: middle-aged women (and men) have grown their participation into the labor market, while the young and the elderly have reduced. As outlined in various studies (e.g. Gary 2009), young people, in particular, seem to bear the costs of the crisis.

Temporary employment

As well known, when women work, they tend to be concentrated in certain sectors and occupations, and in certain labour markets such as the "precarious" or "part-time" ones. In 2010 the share of employees with temporary work contracts averaged 14.0% in the EU, most of them in Poland (27.3%) and Spain (24.9%), whereas it was below 5% in Romania (1.1%), Lithuania (2.4%), Estonia (3.7%) and Bulgaria (4.5%). Yet, almost everywhere women are more vulnerable to work instability than men: 14.6% of women and 13.4% of men in EU-27 were employees with fixed-term contracts in 2010. However, also this proportion varies markedly across European countries. Among Mediterranean countries, a higher percentage of fixed-term jobs for both women and men is recorded in Spain, where it amounted in 2010 to 26% of all female employees and 24% of male ones, and in Portugal. Also in Poland, among Eastern countries, the proportion is very high (around 27% for both women and men). At the other extreme, about 6% of male and female employees were on fixed-term contracts in the UK, in Baltic countries, in many Eastern Europe countries (Eurostat 2011).

Part-time employment

Compared to men, women are also more involved in part-time jobs. In 2010 the share of part-time among working women was higher than that among men in all countries, but especially in Continental and Northern countries and in the Anglo-Saxon countries. The highest share of part-time work among women was recorded by the Netherlands (76%); in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Austria, United Kingdom, Sweden and Norway it was about 40%. Instead, shares of part-time jobs are low in many Eastern and Baltic countries, both for women and men. Overall, part-time employment maintained its upward trend in 2010. Part-time employment as a percentage of total employment reached 18.5% in the EU, up by 0.4 p.p. from 2009. Among EU countries it was highest in the Netherlands (48.3%) and lowest in Bulgaria (2.2%) and Slovakia (3.8%) (Eurostat 2011).

The involvement in part-time work is heavily influenced by the number and the age of children: female part-time workers with children aged 6 or below are about 40% of the total female workers. In comparison, this figure falls to 5% in case of males. The different levels and types of women's involvement in paid work are indeed strongly connected to the issue of the gender allocation of family obligations and responsibilities. Unlike that of men, the labour-market participation of women is markedly "elastic" to family circumstances and events.

Women might adjust their labour supply in different ways: they might withdraw from the labour market, they might move to part-time jobs, they might be able to find a new temporary contract if it ends around motherhood, or they might be more often than men hired by employers on a temporary basis under the assumption that they will invest less in career for family reasons. Such adjustments are not neutral for women's current and subsequent careers, wages, and living conditions. In particular part-time employment, if, on the one hand, it allows reconciliation and thus often a continuous attachment to paid work, on the other hand it might confine women into secondary positions within the labour market and within the households, thus reinforcing gender inequalities. This is especially true in those contexts where part-time is the only available public resource to reconciliation, and where part-time has been constructed as a secondary and female labour market, with low wages, low protections, low human capital investments, high risks of entrapment.

3- Causal factors at the micro level

Education

Everywhere education is a strong discriminator of women's labour supply and types of family/work combination. It entails higher human capital, thus higher earnings potentials and better chances in the labour market. It also entails less traditional gender attitudes, stronger "tastes" for work careers. However, as many comparative cross-countries studies have shown, the effect of education differs across countries, being institutionally and culturally embedded. Such gap, and its variation across countries, is connected to the different behavior that highly and poorly educated women have not

only in the propensity of entering paid work, but also of remaining attached to it around marriage and motherhood.

As figure 2 in appendix shows, on average in Europe the impact of motherhood is especially strong among low-skilled women with one or more children aged less than 6, whose employment rates are below than 40% (less than half of men's figures). Particularly, Hungary (16.3%), Slovakia (20.8%) and Czech Republic (20.9%) show very low employment rates for this group of women. The improvement of skills and qualifications, also in those fields traditionally male-dominated or economically more dynamics, is decisive in order to facilitate the incorporation of women into the labor market.

Marriage and motherhood

As said, women's labour-market choices are strongly influenced by the family life course and the family's circumstances. Changes in marital status, in the number and age of children, and in the situation of the partner, change the demand for time and financial resources. In nearly all countries employment rates are lower in case of women living in couple households (especially with children). Employment rate gender gap rise to 21.3 percentage points in this group, though in some countries reach almost 35 points¹. Moreover, employment rates of men increase when they live in couple, while those of women decrease. On the contrary, those women aged 25-54 living in single households (without children) show employment rates as high as those of men (81% and 79% respectively). In all countries, except four (Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia and Romania), women with one child have employment rates lower than those of women without children. The gap is particularly wide in Eastern countries, whereas it is particularly narrow in Northern countries, in most of continental Europe and in Bulgaria, Romania and Portugal (Eurostat 2009).

We would drop thisFor example, drawing on ECHP, Del Boca and Pasqua (2005) find that, with the exception of the Netherlands, Belgium and Ireland, the probability of women leaving the labour market after the first childbirth is higher than the probability of transition from a full-time to a part-time job. Overall, the countries where women mostly adjust their participation around first childbirth are the Netherlands, followed by the UK, Germany, Ireland, and Belgium. Types of adjustment differ among these countries. In the Netherlands, and to a lesser extent in Belgium and Ireland, transitions from full-time to part-time prevail, whereas in the UK drop-out from the labour market is higher. In Germany, each type of movement affects around 20% of women. The countries with the smallest overall adjustments are the Mediterranean and Scandinavian ones. Yet, while in the first group of countries continuity seems mainly to regard the highly educated, in Scandinavian countries it is the norm for both high and low educated women. As argued by various authors (Crompton 2006; Stier and Lewin-Epstein 2001), differences by education or class in women's employment patterns around motherhood are stronger where policies in support of child costs and care are weaker.

4. The situation of vulnerable women

¹ That is the case of Greece and Italy. On the contrary, gender differences are only 5-8 percentage points in Slovenia, Lithuania and Latvia.

Most member states have reached or have neared Lisbon targets in terms of female employment and are on the way to reach the 2020 targets of 75%. However, these targets are still far from being reached for specific group of women, such as young women, lone mothers, older women, and migrant women. Their greater difficulties in entering and remaining in the (formal) labour market expose them to the risk of poverty and social exclusion.

The Young

Young people are typically characterised by a higher unemployment rate and a weaker inclusion in the labour market. The reasons are several: because young people typically have the least work experience, and the least amount of company training invested in them, which expose them to vulnerability in economic downturns; because, whatever the state of the economy, young people simply have less experience in looking for work; because they are charged by weaker financial and family obligations and hence can wait longer for a job (Gary 2009)

Labour inclusion is harder for young women than for young men. Youth unemployment stood at 21.1 % in the EU in 2010, a figure heavily affected by the current crisis, still up from 20.1 % in 2009, and more than twice the prime-age adult unemployment rate (8.3%). In many Member States youth unemployment remains a severe problem, with rates over 30 % in Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia, and over 40% in Spain. The unemployment rate of young women is dramatically higher than that of young men in several Member States (Czech Republic, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal) with a difference of almost 15 percentage points in Greece.

The reason why young women are more vulnerable than young men is that, if on the one side young women are more educated than young men in most European countries, on the other side qualification segregation still make women more likely to be skilled in subjects whose occupational prospects are usually worse. Moreover, due to the expectation of career breaks and/or care leaves following childbirth, young women may be hired more reluctantly by employers, especially in more traditional gender contexts. In addition to policies preventing the gendered nature of educational and professional segregation, or giving employment subsidies and start up incentives, crucial are thus policies promoting awareness of gender stereotypes, and supporting a more equal distribution of family responsibilities between male and female workers (Corsi et al 2010).

The Elderly

Women's disadvantage in the labour market is still relevant when they approach retirement and their children get older. Gender differences in adulthood are the results of the professional qualification inherited from youth and the career breaks caused by family responsibilities, as well as other structural inequalities such as the pay gap, discrimination and women's predominance in precarious employment conditions. In seniority, gender differences are mainly the results of the labour market disadvantage that women has accumulated in their earlier stages of life course, which often flows into in-work poverty, early retirement and inactivity. This disadvantage is linked to women's lower career and earning profile, and to skill obsolescence due to their previous or current labour market interruptions or reductions (Crepaldi *et. al.* 2010).

The issues of lack of training opportunities and of skill obsolescence are particularly relevant for older women, due to their more frequent spells of career breaks caused by family related responsibilities and by the lower level of educational attainment compared with men of the same age. In 2010, in the European Union 43 % of women between 55 and 64 years old were low

qualified (i.e., their highest educational attainment was lower secondary education or lower), compared with 33 % of men in the same age. This difference is consistent in most European countries, with the exception of Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Ireland and Latvia.

In all countries, except Estonia, Latvia and Finland (where the gender difference is modest), older women's employment rates are much lower compared with those of men of the same age, with a labour market disadvantage of 17.9 percentage points in the EU in 2010. The difference is greatest in Malta, Greece, Cyprus and Slovakia, where it reaches over 30 percentage points, and it is above the EU-27 average also in Spain, Ireland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Italy, Poland, Austria and the Netherlands (in diminishing order). It is lowest in the Nordic countries and in France.

Although retirement is the main reason for older men to be outside the labour market in almost all countries (the exceptions being Finland, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden where illness and disability account for a higher share), the picture is more mixed for older women. In several countries (Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta and Spain), personal or family responsibilities are a more important reason for the non-participation of older women than retirement. This highlights the importance of the availability of flexible working arrangements and care facilities for the elderly, which can enable not only adult women with children but also older women with ill relatives to achieve a better balance between private responsibilities and work. Important are also actions to address regulations on retirement and health issues, such as health and safety at work.

Lone mothers

As many studies argue, mothers' earnings are extremely important as 'divorce insurance'. The post-divorce poverty risk for women and children depends largely on their previous economic dependence on husbands (Sorensen 1994). The longer the time spent by mothers outside the labour market or in 'weak' sectors, the more difficult it is for them to enter it or to find better jobs. Indeed, low labour-market attachment and commitment cause human capital depreciation. Hence, mothers who after divorce wish or need to work or improve their position are constrained by their past investment in marriage. Moreover, becoming the only adult in the family, their chances in the labour market are constrained by their present need to balance work and caring responsibilities (Solera 2001).

Lone mothers' employment rates differ greatly across countries. Different indeed are models of gender division within marriage and different the policies in support of reconciliation and female employment. Even with controls for age, education and marital status, in all countries mothers are less likely to be employed full-time (Misra et al 2007). Yet, on average, single mothers are more often employed than married women.

Although in most countries lone mothers' employment is not lower than that of married mothers, their poverty risk is higher. The impact of motherhood on poverty is highest in Anglo-saxon countries, with single mothers particularly hard hit (in the United States, for example, motherhood increases the odds of impoverishment by 111 per cent for single women and 39 per cent for married women). Motherhood does not have a statistically significant impact on poverty in Germany and Luxembourg, while in the Netherlands motherhood decreases the odds of poverty by 9 per cent for married women, much more for single women. In Sweden, Belgium and France, motherhood and single motherhood does not produce higher risk of poverty (Misra et al 2007).

These are the countries which adopt what has been defined a "choice" or "earner-carer" strategy regarding work-family reconciliation policies, as opposed to the "primary caregiver" or the "primary

earner” strategy. In “the choice strategy” policies provide substantial support for women’s full-time employment, such as high-quality childcare, while also providing aid for women’s caregiving, for example, through generous parental leave and caregiver allowances, and support for part-time employment. In “the earner-carer strategy” both women and men should balance carework and employment. Both men and women are encouraged to take parental leave, and high-quality childcare outside of the home is available. In addition, income transfers help families to balance care and employment. As argued by Gornick and Meyers (2003), the “dual-earner dual-carer” model is compatible with various ideological concerns: it is gender egalitarian both in the labour market and in the household; it values and rewards care work (although not only female care); and it emphasizes child well-being; it also addresses within-women inequalities. The “dual-earner dual-carer” model is also associated with the best records in terms of micro and macro outcomes: fertility and employment rates are high; poverty is low; parents spend more time with their children; mothers and fathers divide paid and unpaid work more equally; and children’s well-being is better (low poverty, low mortality, moderate school achievement scores, low TV consumption, and low levels of teenage pregnancy).

Migrant women

Belonging to an ethnic or national minority highly influences the incorporation of men and women to the labor market. As figure 3 in appendix shows, this is marked by two features. First, differences in terms of employment rates between foreigners and not foreigners are more intense among women than men. Second, the gender gap is more intense among foreign people and especially among the youngest. Irrespective to the group of age, in 2011 gender gaps among foreign people are highest in Slovenia (43.1 percentage points), Greece (26.8) and Italy (26.6). On the contrary, they are lowest in Spain (4.9 percentage points), Estonia (8.7) and Denmark (9.5).

Overall, migrant women encounter multiple vulnerability in the labour market. They are generally low educated. They come from different cultural backgrounds, which affect also their way of understanding and moving within different types of labour markets and organisational contexts. They confront themselves with a labour market that is segregated by both gender and ethnicity. The result is that immigrant women do cluster in certain sectors (like immigrant men tend to do), but the number of sectors in which they cluster is less than what we find amongst immigrant men. More precisely, they concentrate in the (semi-)private sphere of domestic work, or work within family enterprises. Thus, they are mostly relegated to the realm of invisible, informal and unregulated work, where they normally receive low wages, where there is not control over the quality and qualification of their jobs, and where they can claim fewer rights. In many countries such relegation makes also difficult for them to get access to a regularised stay. As a whole, immigrant women become more vulnerable. (Schrover and Janes Yeo 2010)

5- Casual factors at the macro level

The role of labor market policies

As mentioned in the introduction, EU has proposed seven flagship initiatives in order to achieve a new model of economic growth (smart, sustainable and inclusive). Such growth contains, among

others, the target of 75% of employment rate for women and men. To meet this challenge, EU action focuses on four key priorities: a better functioning of labour markets; more skilled workforce; better job quality and working conditions; stronger policies to promote job creation and demand for labour. Reduction of labour market segmentation and adoption of successful flexicurity models (Denmark, Netherlands) appear to be fundamental issues, especially in those countries where vulnerable groups have many obstacles to access to social protection (those with temporary contracts, part-time jobs, etc.). Improving skills through education, training and lifelong learning, addressed particularly to vulnerable groups, is also crucial.

If such model of economic growth wants to be inclusive also of women and on a more equal basis with men, a gender mainstreaming approach has to be adopted. As Corsi et al underline (2010), the active labour market policies which might improve employment stability and the career prospect of women are several: among others, desegregation of professional qualifications (promoting young women into non traditional subjects and jobs), skill-training programmes and job-search assistance, direct job creation, start-up incentives, employee-friendly flexibility measures, employment subsidies and service vouchers. However, in quite a number of countries, policies in this area have not been developed with any explicit gender perspective or reference to gender equality and mainstreaming. Conversely, a gender mainstreaming perspective in the domain of reconciliation is to a certain extent established, insofar as most European countries recognise the impact of care responsibilities on women's employment. Yet countries differ in their policy responses and in their implicit or explicit focus on gender equality. Some countries encourage the supply of public care services, others of private, others improve the opportunities to work part-time. Some still consider reconciliation as a woman's affair, whereas others recognise the role of men in care and family responsibilities.

The role of social policies and gender equality in unpaid work

As argued by various scholars (Crompton 2006; Lewis, 2006; Pascall and Lewis 2004), within Europe the tendency has been towards the promotion of "the adult worker family model", a model that emphasises labour market activation policies, including reconciliation policies in support of staying in work, but that pays insufficient attention to the issue of care, to its distribution not only between market, state and family but also between men and women, to the universal income protected right for time for care. Indeed not all care can be commodified; so that scant attention to how care is valued and shared, at the macro and micro levels, risks reinforcing gender inequalities or producing new ones. In line with Bettio and Plantenga (2004), Lewis proposes a variety of policies in order to enable both men and women to choose to engage in paid or unpaid work (Lewis, 2006). These policies also imply a logical shift: if one follows Sen (1992, 1999) in adopting a multidimensional concept of welfare, not only money and economic life, but also time, care and political, social and family life, become important functionings. Defining the goal of the welfare state in terms of well-being, rather than only work and wages, means that policies should not focus only on the work/welfare relationship and on the "commodification" of women (and men); they should also address the distribution of time and the "de-commodification" of men (and women) (Lewis, 2002).

Women's levels and types of labour market participation over the life course, in particular the incidence and duration of interruptions around motherhood, the re-entry behaviour after leaves, and their consequences on subsequent women's participation and wages, differ importantly across countries. As many authors argue (Bettio and Plantenga 2004; Lewis 2006; Gornick and Meyers

2003) and as mentioned at the end of section two, crucial in shaping such cross-country differences is the package of reconciliation policies offered and their orientation, that is, the extent to which they “defamilialize” caring responsibilities and child costs, the extent to which they do so by investing more in services than in cash transfers, and by encouraging also men to do domestic and care work. In order to secure, men and women, a genuine choice to engage in paid and/or unpaid work the model should shift towards “a dual earner-dual carer society”, which is compatible with various ideological concerns and it is associated with the best records in terms of many micro and macro outcomes: Moreover, the policy model should provide different kind of support: in terms of time (working time and time to care); money (cash to buy care, cash for carers); services (for children and frail older people). Important is then how the three pillars of income, service and time are individually designed (eligibility criteria, duration, costs and level of income support, availability and quality etc), if they are all in place, and how they are combined. Overall, what really matters are not single policies but packages of policies. The high attachment of Scandinavian women to the labour market is the joint outcome of a good public childcare system and job-protected, well-paid and flexible parental leaves, in combination with paternity leaves and with universal cash benefits. In addition, low wage inequalities and “employee-friendly” flexibility restricted to normal weekly working hours facilitate the conciliation of parenthood and employment. It is also the outcome of a greater gender equality within the family.

6- Conclusions: policy challenges in a gender perspective

If we compare the situation of older generations with young generations, there is no doubt that women have improved their position in the labour market. In many countries, they have very high levels of labour market participation, they work in primary segments and positions, they have good earnings and continuous careers also when getting married and becoming mothers. Yet, gender inequalities still persist. Compared to men, they participate less, they tend more to adjust their participation over family formation, they are more concentrated in part-time or temporary employment, they are more sensitive to economic downturns, and more exposed to the risk of poverty or labour market exclusion in different phases and circumstances (when young, when elderly, when lone mothers, when migrant). Also within-women inequalities persist, with education and motherhood marking the line.

Although these “facts” are common all over Europe, their intensity vary importantly across countries. The structural, institutional and cultural context indeed shapes women and men choices and risks in the labour market, their supply, the position they get, their career continuity, how they combine work with family responsibilities, how they divide such responsibilities. As argued in section five, in addition to demand opportunities and constraint, crucial are active labour market policies and social policies, especially those in the field of care and reconciliation. On the basis of the analysis of women’s employment offered in this paper, and having in mind the European agenda for a greater involvement of women in the labour market, within what has been called a “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”, we shall suggest, to conclude, some gender-sensitive focal points to which policies should address their attention. Namely: to support a “dual earner-dual carer” model; to develop life course policies, to promote desegregation.

- Supporting reconciliation towards a “dual earner-dual carer” model

Within European academic and political debate, supporting reconciliation is considered a priority and it is advocated not only from an equal opportunity perspective. The difficulty to reconcile work and family life indeed entails high individual and social costs. At the individual level, it means lower fertility or lower household incomes and higher risks of poverty. It also means, for women, depreciation of human capital investments, loss of economic independence and medical costs related to childbirths postponed beyond the optimal biological age. At the societal level, it implies a waste of human capital and, above all, a threat to welfare state and economic sustainability. Policies can do a lot in supporting reconciliation between work and family life but the way they do it is not gender neutral. As widely acknowledged, gender inequalities in the labour market are strongly intertwined and linked to gender inequalities in the distribution of domestic and care responsibilities. Policies aimed at reducing gender inequalities need, thus, not only to promote a greater involvement of women in paid work but also a greater involvement of men in un paid work. Reconciliation has to be defined as also a men's issue.

- The need for life course policies

Needs, preferences and risks change over the life course. A woman, as a man, might invest in a specific qualification track, find a job within it, desire or need to improve her skills searching for extra education or training. She might work in a weak sector, with low income and low protection, become unemployed, or she might take time off for taking care of a child or an ill parent. Policies, thus, need to adopt a life course perspective, recognising women's and men's heterogeneous experiences and needs in their different domains of life, their evolutions over time and their complex interdependencies. In particular, in front of the transformations of the labour market demand and regulation, of the family and demography, and in line with both the "Agenda for new skills and jobs" and "European platform against poverty" flagship initiatives, crucial are lifelong training policies. These can provide people with "insurance" against the risk of employment precariousness, of human capital depreciation in the event of career interruptions (for care responsibilities, for long-term unemployment), of difficult labour market re-entries or improvements as response, for example, of a divorce or an extra childbirth. Lifelong training policies can also contribute to reduction of education-based inequalities, offering to low educated men and women more instruments to compete and success in the labour market. Since gender differences are larger among the low-skilled, appropriate life course policies can also help in reducing gender inequalities.

- Supporting desegregation

Appropriate life course policies can also contribute to reduce gender segregation, to the extent they promote young women's presence in non traditional subjects and professions, and adult women's entry into top positions. It is largely recognised that the root causes of the gender labour market segregation, including the pay gap extend well beyond the equal pay for equal work goal, having to do with educational segregation, job segregation, gender stereotypes, distribution of domestic and care responsibilities, and transition from education to work, to name a few.

The European Commission's strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015 identifies some concrete actions to reduce gender inequalities in the labour market: improving the transparency of pay; encouraging women to enter non-traditional professions, for example in "green" and innovative sectors, which are also less vulnerable to economic downturns; promoting the adoption of quota systems to increase women's presence in senior positions; identifying and opposing biases in job evaluation procedures, pay systems, career advancements; favouring

reconciliation, also towards the top (when the care for an elderly conflict with work); societal initiatives to raise awareness of gender inequalities in the labour market and in the family.

All actions seem important and need to be planned in a “package logic”, since, as said, what really matters are not single policies but packages of policies: the synergy of labour market policies with social policies, and of various measures within them.

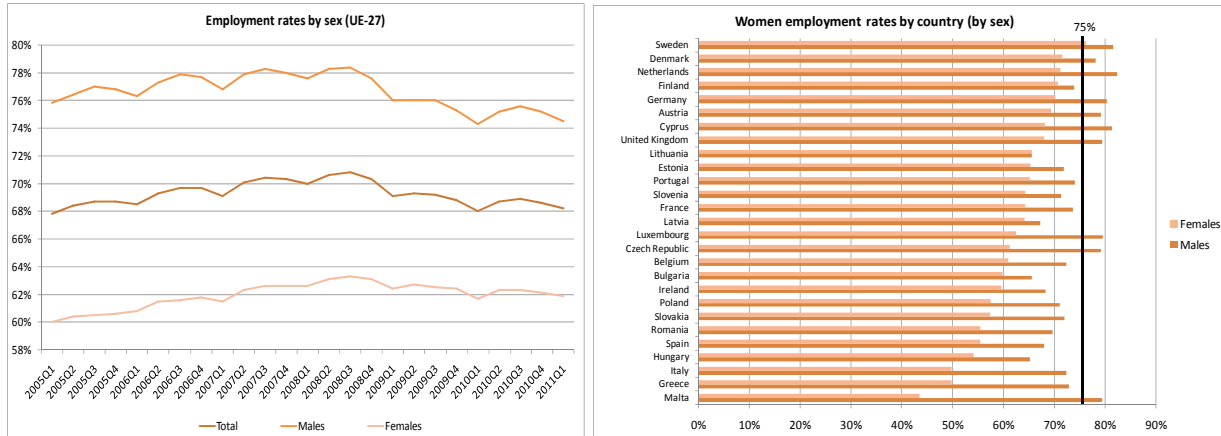
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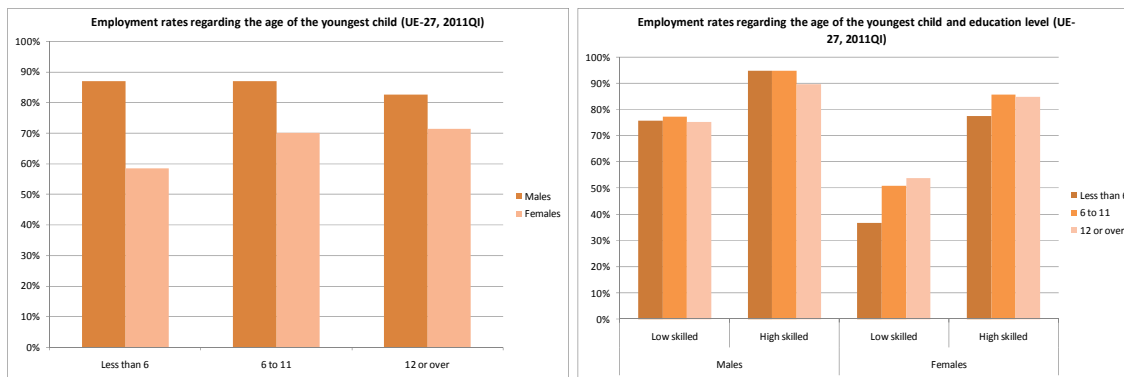
Appendix

Figure 1. Women and men employment rates (Age 20-64): UE-27 (2005-2011) and by country (2011Q1)



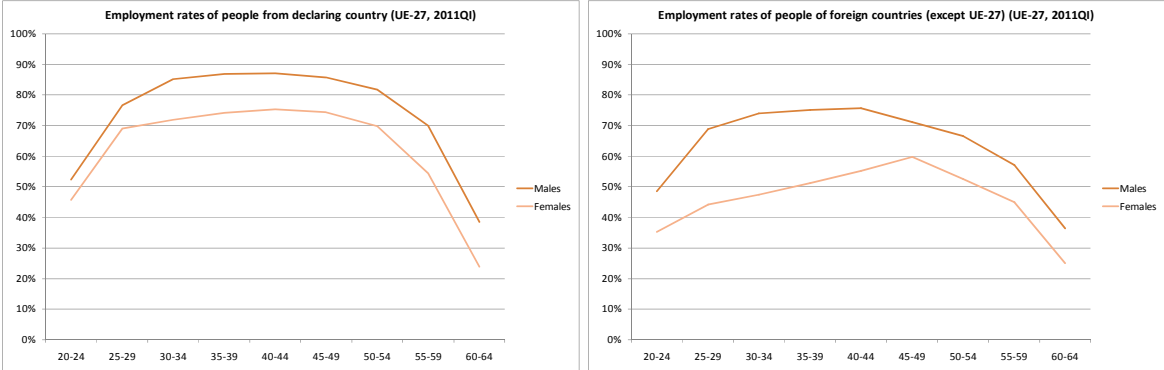
Source: Eurostat (2011).

Figure 2. Women and men employment rates by age of youngest children and education (2011Q1)



Source: Eurostat (2011).

Figure 3. Women and men employment rates by foreigner status, group of age and education (2011Q1)



Source: Eurostat (2011).