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Hélène Périvier

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Recession, austerity and gender: A comparison of eight European labour markets

Hélène PÉRIVIER*

***Abstract.** The collapse in GDP brought about by the global economic crisis in 2008 affected female employment less than male employment, whereas austerity has been particularly harsh on women, a gendered impact described in the literature as “he-cession to sh(e)-austerity”. This article analyses gendered trends in the labour markets of eight European countries, decomposing quarterly changes in labour participation of women and men and in employment by sector. The “he-cession to sh(e)-austerity” scenario is not observed in all countries. Other channels through which austerity policies can jeopardize gender equality and women’s rights are identified with reference to a typology of such policies.*

The global crisis that began in 2007 deeply affected European economies and their labour markets. Employment dropped in all countries and unemployment rates increased dramatically, albeit to a lesser extent in Germany, where employment remained stable (Weinkopf, 2014). The collapse in GDP was followed first by a short relative recovery, and then by a phase of public policies aimed at fiscal consolidation. The crisis had a gendered impact on labour markets during these different phases. Male employment took a serious hit during the recession, whereas austerity is said to have had a stronger impact on female employment. These gendered effects are mainly explained by the degree of sector-related sex segregation of labour markets¹ combined with the sectoral dimension of recession and of fiscal consolidation policies. Men were over-represented in sectors with the highest rates of job destruction (construction and manufacturing) and austerity policies targeted sectors

* Observatoire français des conjonctures économiques (OFCE), Sciences Po; Director, Programme de Recherche et d’Enseignement des Savoirs sur le Genre (PRESAGE); email: helene.perivier@sciencespo.fr.

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¹ In this article, “sex segregation” is understood as horizontal employment segregation and refers to the gendered division of labour in paid employment. It is defined as the under- (over-) representation of women in occupations (occupational segregation) or sectors (sectoral segregation) (Bettio and Verashchagina, 2009).

in which women were over-represented (the public sector, social services, etc.). This process is summed up by Karamessini and Rubery (2014) in the phrase “from he-cession to sh(e)-austerity”.

The aim of this article is to describe the forces underlying the gendered impact of the 2008 recession and subsequent austerity policies. To that end, changes in the labour force and employment of eight European countries – Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom – are analysed using data from the Eurostat Quarterly Labour Force Data series (QLFD) on active population and employment by sector (at the two-digit level defined in the “Statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community”, or NACE). The methodologies developed in the seminal book by Rubery (1988) are applied. The countries reviewed differ in terms of the magnitude of the recession, their macroeconomic situation, and their institutional environments. The analysis provides insight into the gender gaps in participation and employment that occurred during the different phases of the crisis at the macro level. Part-time employment dynamics are taken into account by crossing the sectoral database on employment and the database on average working time per sector available for both sexes at the two-digit level in the QLFD. The analysis does not take account of changes in wages, working conditions or job quality.

The panel of countries comprises various types of welfare state according to the most common typologies (Arts and Gelissen, 2002; Esping-Andersen, 1990) and different types of gender regime (Daly and Lewis, 2000; Lewis, 1992).² The social democratic welfare state is represented by Sweden. Denmark is emblematic of the flexicurity model (Gazier, 2008). The liberal model is represented by the United Kingdom. Germany and France are often presented as corporatist models, although France differs from Germany in terms of gender norms. Italy and Greece are known nowadays as Mediterranean welfare states, with low participation of women in the labour market. Greece, one of the European countries hardest hit in 2007, subsequently suffered an intense public debt crisis and had to implement the most extensive fiscal consolidation ever requested in Europe by the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Spain is a specific case, as female participation has skyrocketed by more than 25 per cent in the last two decades.³ This implies that the Spanish model no longer fits into the classical typologies of European welfare states. There is still a marked sexual division of labour within families, however, and public policies affecting work–life balance and promoting gender equality remain underdeveloped (González Gago and Segales Kirzner, 2014).

² As Arts and Gelissen recognize, the outcomes of comparative research on welfare regimes are still inconclusive and “real welfare states are hardly ever pure types and are usually hybrid cases” (2002, p. 137), hence the need to refer to several typologies.

³ The labour force participation rate of women aged between 15–64 years rose from 42.6 per cent in 1992 to 67.9 per cent in 2012 (Eurostat).

The remainder of the article is organized as follows: the first section describes changes in labour force growth during the crisis and sheds light on the need to assess the interrelations between gender norms, the sexual division of labour and labour supply in order to understand the impact of the crisis on the workforce. The second section examines the different versions of the “he-cession to sh(e)-austerity” scenario in the countries reviewed, underscoring the key role played by sector-related sex segregation of employment. In both cases, we use shift-share analysis to decompose, by gender, workforce dynamics in the light of demographic trends, and changes in employment taking into account sector-related sex segregation. The third section discusses the types of austerity policy implemented in the eight countries and identifies channels other than sector-related sex segregation of employment through which men and women might have been differently affected by austerity and to what extent gender equality is jeopardized.

Labour force, gender and the global crisis

Decomposition of changes in the labour force

During the recession phase of the 2007–08 global crisis, the focus was on men being more affected than women by unemployment and job destruction. Nevertheless, despite the fact that male employment is in general more sensitive to business cycles, women were less sheltered than in past crises (Leschke and Jepsen, 2011). For both men and women, the impact of the crisis was a function of the magnitude of the economic shock, the degrees and forms of labour market flexibility, and the public policies implemented during the recession. Indeed, to limit the impact of the economic downturn on employment, some countries relied on internal flexibility (reducing working time or introducing short-time working schemes, as in Germany), while others mostly relied on external flexibility (such as lay-offs and job destruction, as in Spain) (Cochard, Cornilleau and Heyer, 2010). Stimulus packages (particularly important in the United Kingdom and Spain) were introduced to boost economic activity in targeted sectors (notably the automobile, construction and green industries). Finally, the austerity phase that followed these countercyclical policies was characterized by fiscal consolidation aimed at reducing the public deficit and debt accumulation by different means, notably cuts in public spending and tax increases. These policies clearly hampered the recovery and return to economic growth; improvements in employment for both men and women were consequently limited (iAGS, 2012; 2013).

The gendered impact on the workforce during the different phases of the crisis highlights the structural character of the gender division of labour and the inequalities between men and women in labour markets and more generally in societies (Christensen, 2015). The impact was felt differently in each country for reasons related to the configuration of the labour market, the type of welfare regime and the prevailing gender norms. In general, although the

public and economic policies (either stimulus or austerity) aimed at tackling the crisis were implemented in gender-blind fashion, they were certainly not gender-neutral, because of structural gender inequalities.

At the macro level, changes in the labour force are basically driven by two effects: the demographic effect and the participation effect. The demographic effect is caused by changes in the population as a whole and in its age composition. It may be stronger or weaker depending on demographic trends; for instance, the long-term effects of changes in fertility rates or migration movements (emigration or immigration) can be influenced by the business cycle itself. The participation effect is related to workers' behaviour in the face of labour market conditions. These patterns are different for women and men: the interrelations between gender regimes, gender inequalities, migration and fertility rates explain why female and male labour forces evolve differently during successive phases of a crisis.

In order to shed light on both the demographic and the participation effects from a gender perspective, changes in the labour force have been decomposed by applying a shift-share analysis to different brackets of population age and to men and women separately, during the crisis (2007–2014). This analysis was conducted using Eurostat's European Union Labour Force Surveys.

The methodology is as follows:

$$\text{If } L_{qt} = \sum_i \alpha_{iqt} P_{iqt} \quad (1)$$

where L_{qt} is the labour force in quarter q of year t ; P_{iqt} is the population of age i observed in quarter q of year t ; and α_{iqt} is the participation rate of the population of age i in quarter q of year t . It follows that:

$$\Delta L = L_{qt} - L_{qt-1} = \sum_i \alpha_{iqt-1} (P_{iqt} - P_{iqt-1}) + \sum_i P_{iqt-1} (\alpha_{iqt} - \alpha_{iqt-1}) + \sum_i (P_{iqt} - P_{iqt-1}) (\alpha_{iqt} - \alpha_{iqt-1}) \quad (2)$$

In other words:

demographic effect + participation effect + interaction effect

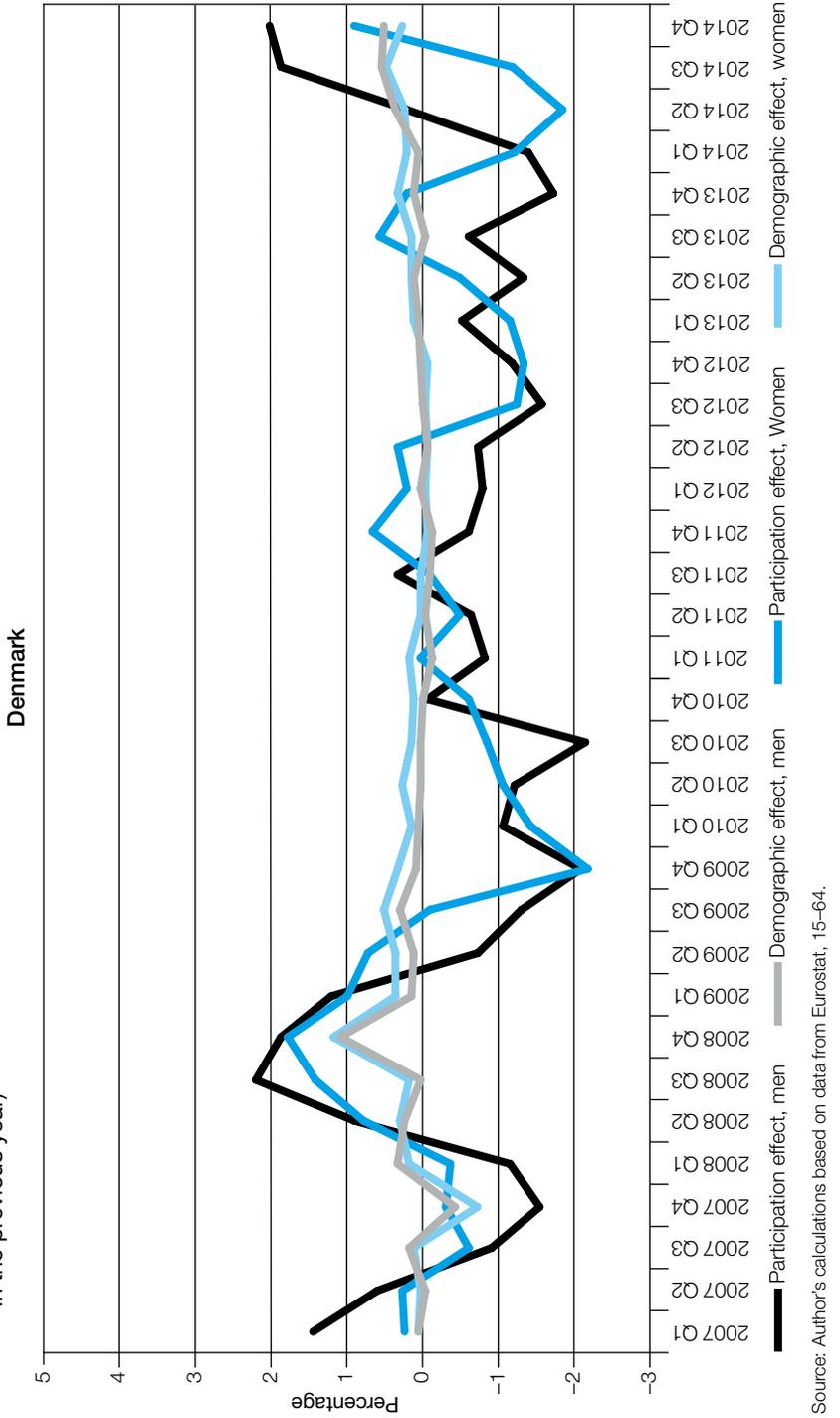
The population is grouped by five-year age brackets, aged from 15 to 64 years.

The shift-share analysis allows to distinguish between three effects:

- The participation effect gives the change in labour force that would have been observed if the total population had not changed compared to the corresponding period of the previous year.
- The demographic effect is interpreted as the change in labour force that would have been observed if the participation rate of each group of age had remained the same.
- The interaction effect measures the interaction between changes in participation rate and demography.

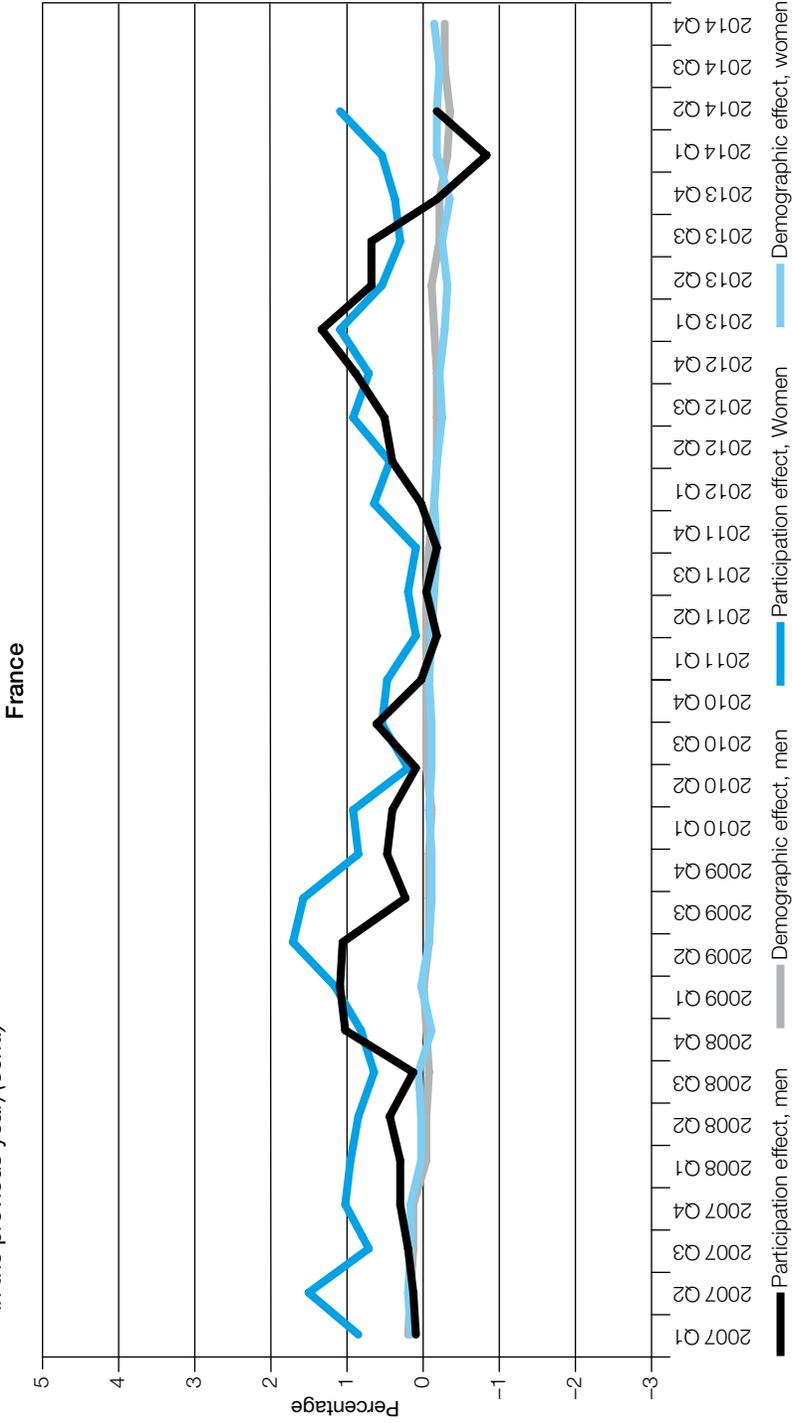
The decomposition was performed for men and women from the first quarter of 2007 (Q1 2007) to the last quarter of 2014 (Q4 2014). The demographic and participation effects are presented in a series of graphs (figure 1) as percentages of the workforce compared to the corresponding quarter of the previous year for each country. The interaction effect is considered to be residual and is not shown.

Figure 1. Decomposition of changes in the labour force, by sex (percentage change compared to the corresponding period in the previous year)



Source: Author's calculations based on data from Eurostat, 15-64.

Figure 1. Decomposition of changes in the labour force, by sex (percentage change compared to the corresponding period in the previous year) (cont.)



Source: Author's calculations based on data from Eurostat, 15-64.

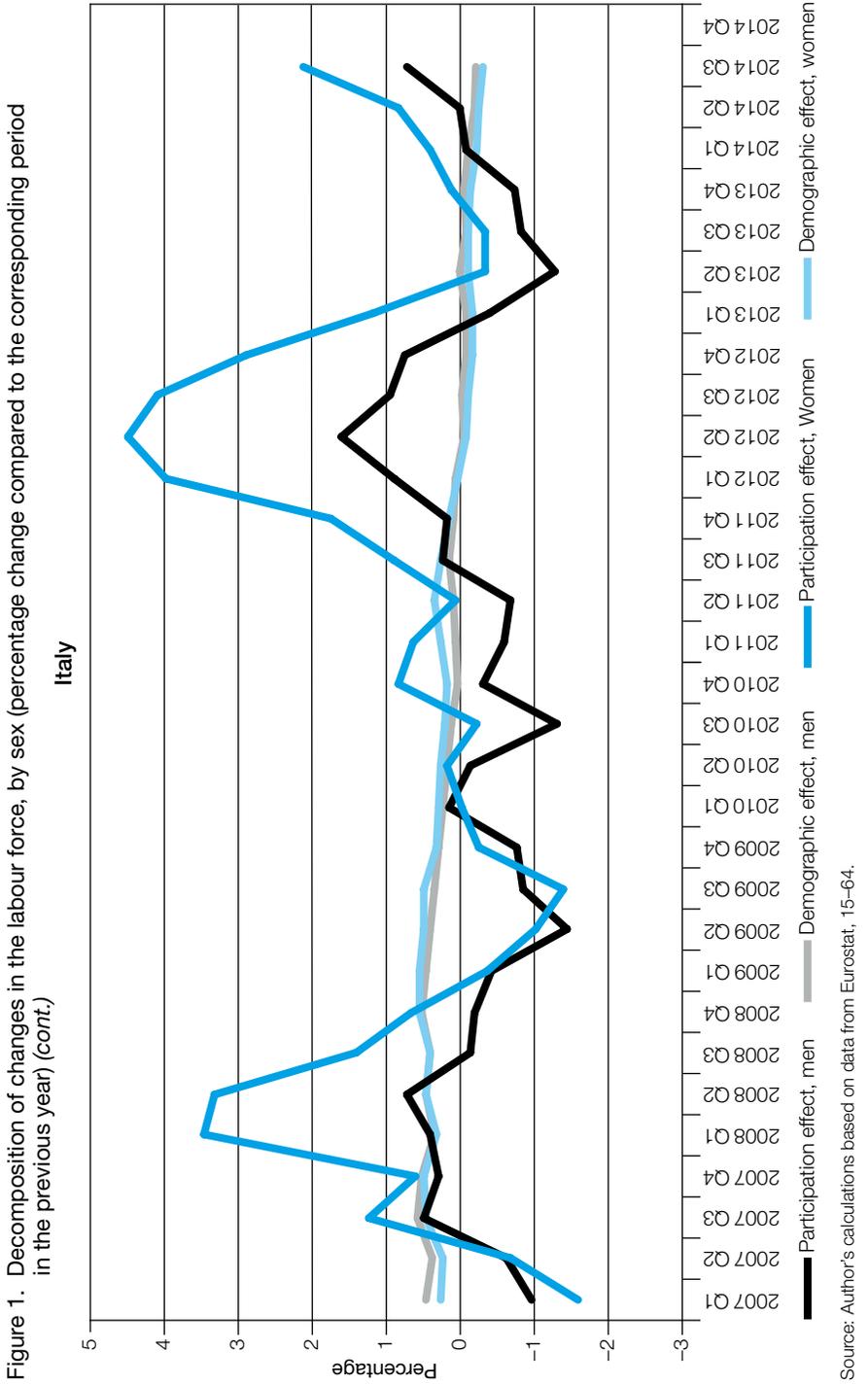
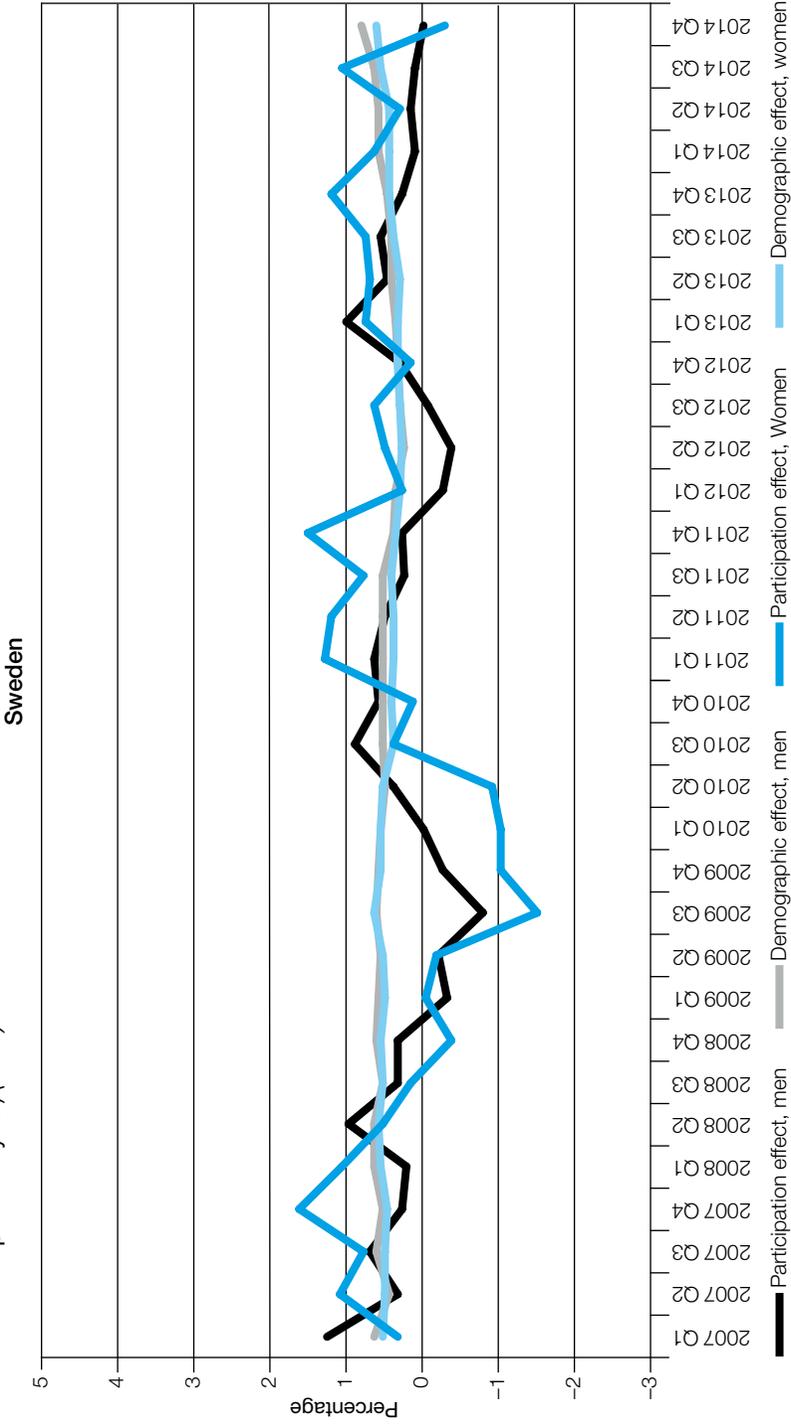


Figure 1. Decomposition of changes in the labour force, by sex (percentage change compared to the corresponding period in the previous year) (cont.)



Source: Author's calculations based on data from Eurostat, 15-64.

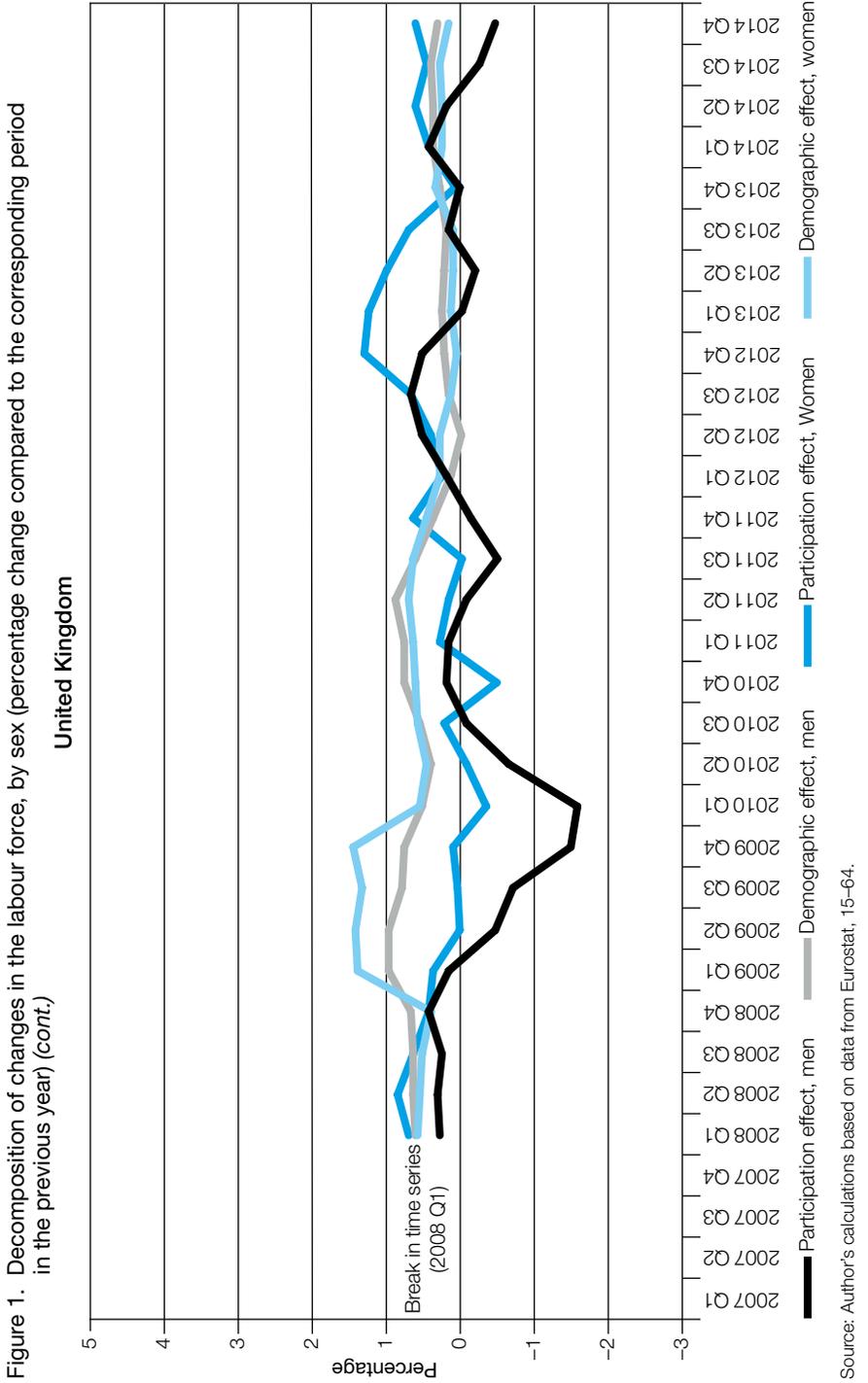
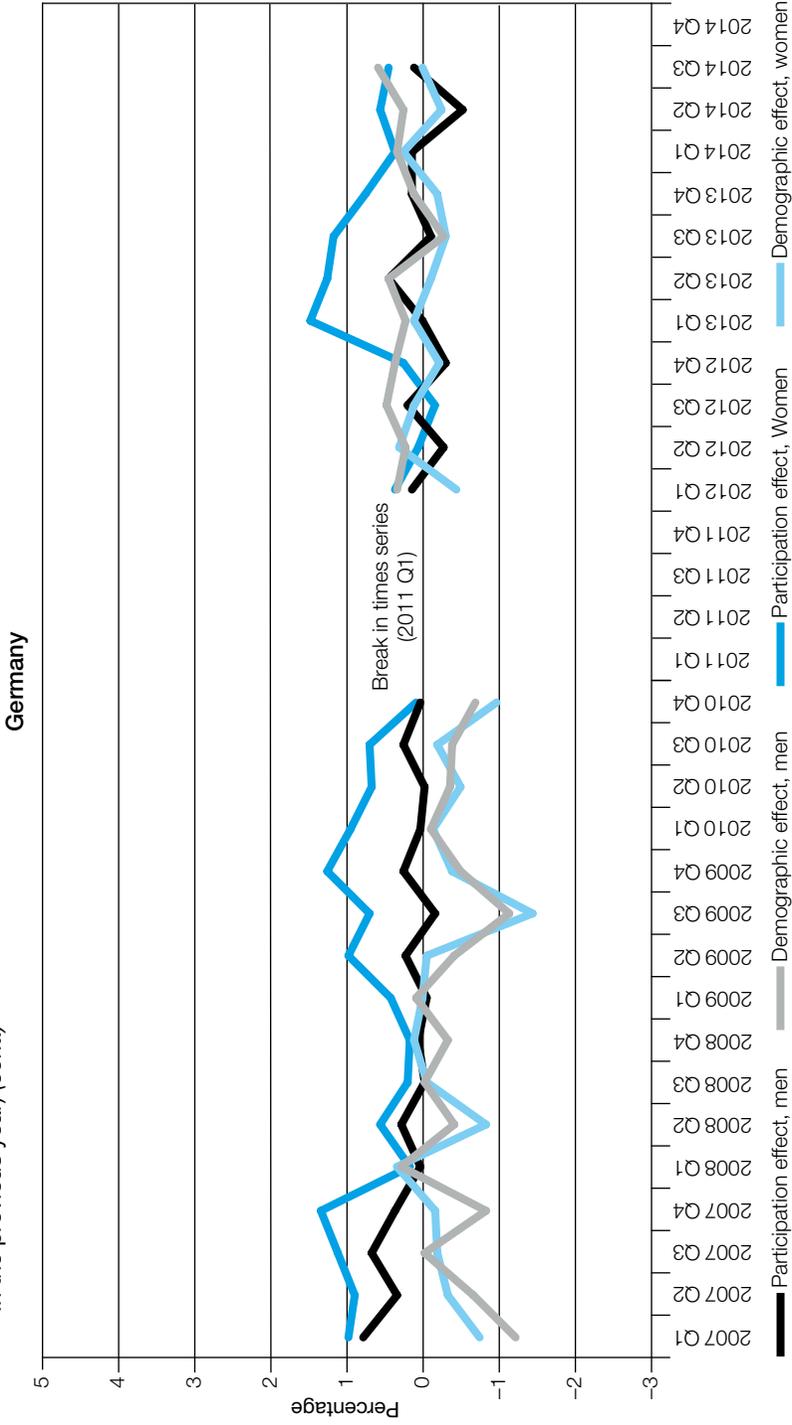
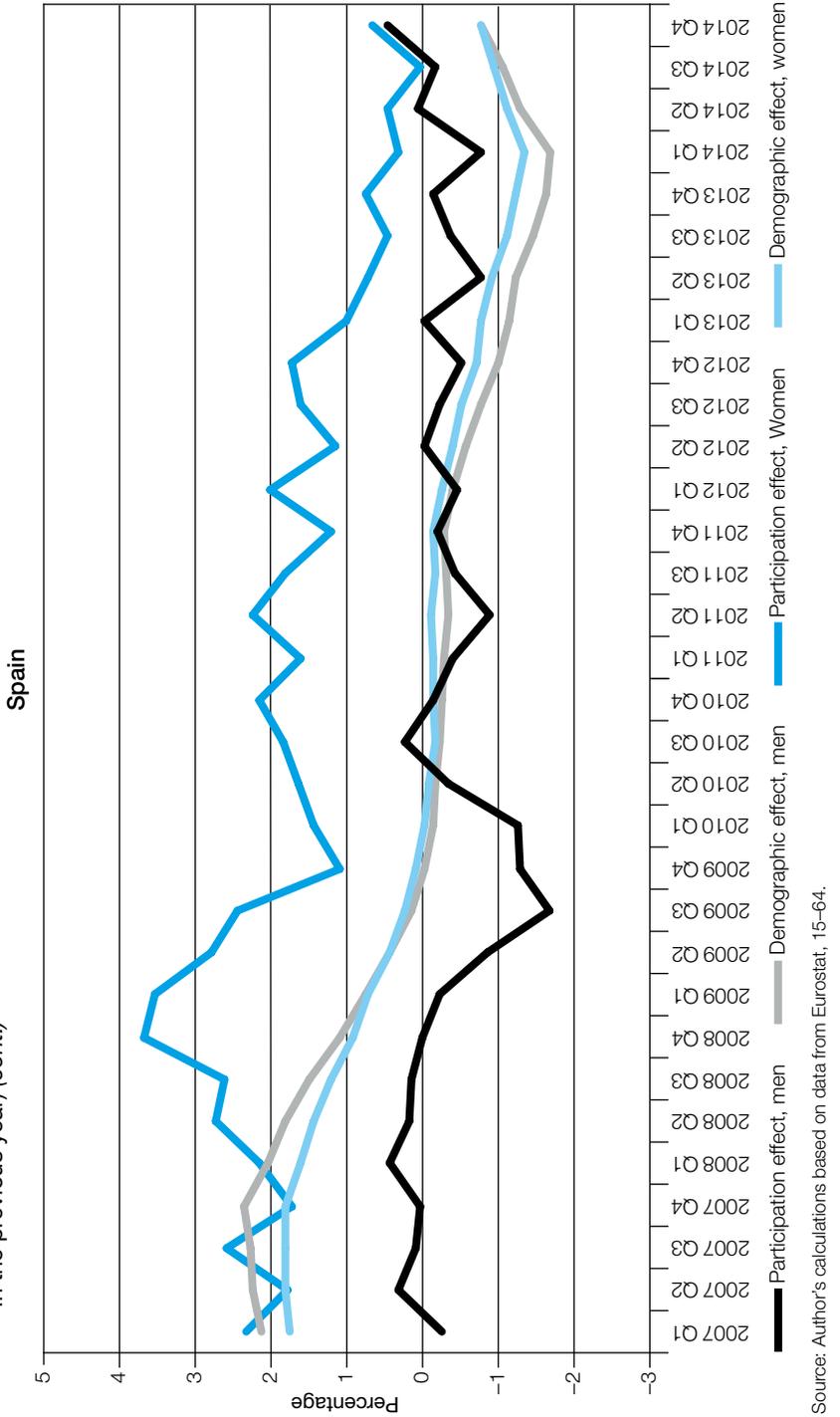


Figure 1. Decomposition of changes in the labour force, by sex (percentage change compared to the corresponding period in the previous year) (cont.)



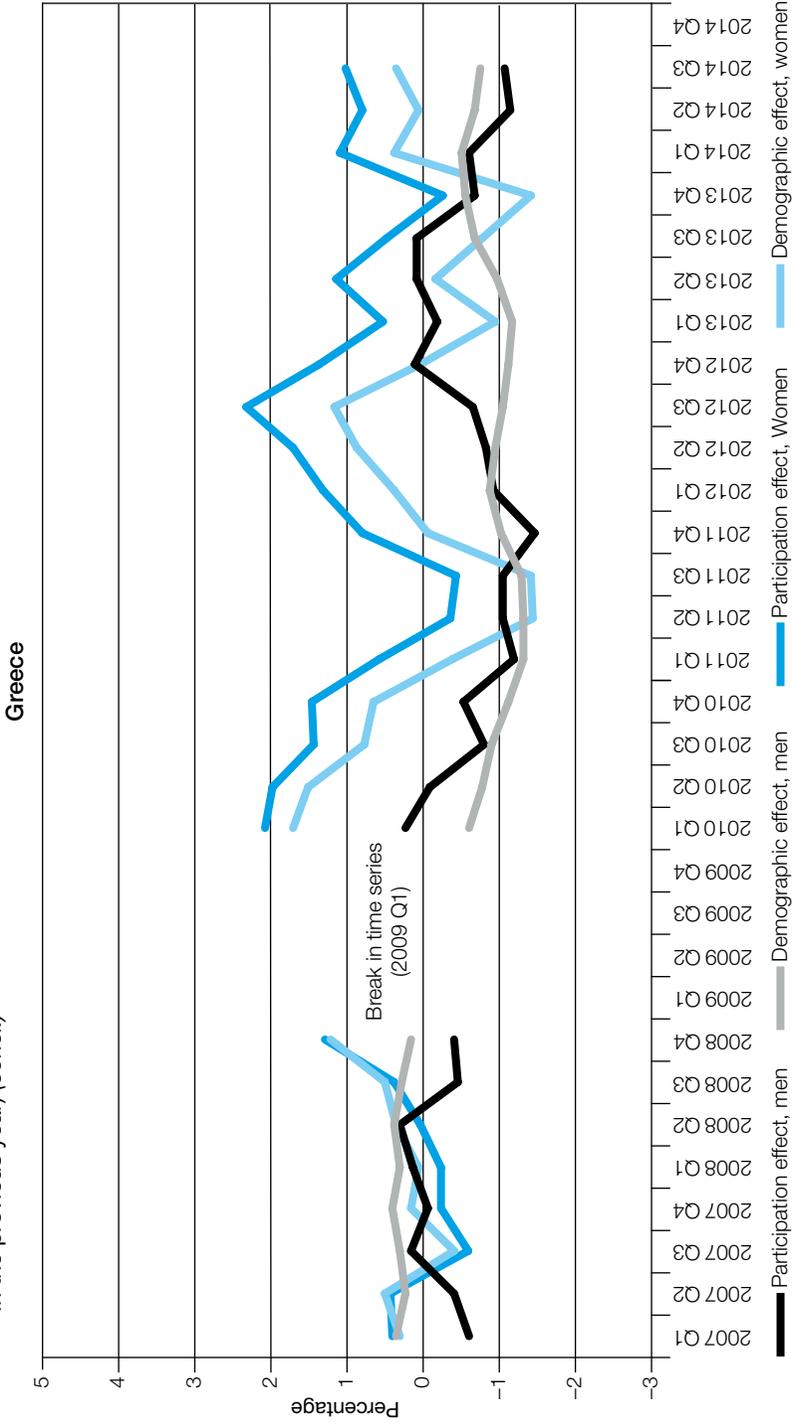
Source: Author's calculations based on data from Eurostat, 15-64.

Figure 1. Decomposition of changes in the labour force, by sex (percentage change compared to the corresponding period in the previous year) (cont.)



Source: Author's calculations based on data from Eurostat, 15-64.

Figure 1. Decomposition of changes in the labour force, by sex (percentage change compared to the corresponding period in the previous year) (concl.)



Source: Author's calculations based on data from Eurostat, 15-64.

In Denmark, France and Italy (figure 1), demographic changes had little impact on labour force dynamics, which are explained mainly by changes in behaviour regarding labour market participation. In Sweden and the United Kingdom, the demographic effect was positive, meaning that population dynamics reinforced the workforce (figure 1). In Germany, the demographic effect was slightly negative at the beginning of the period studied (figure 1). This could be related to Germany's low fertility rate, a decades-long trend that might affect the labour force. In Spain, the demographic effect was positive for both men and women up to the end of 2009 (figure 1), boosting the workforce. This trend is explained by the flow of migrant workers to Spain during the 2000s: between 2000 and 2007, Spain's immigrant population rose from 4 per cent to 11 per cent of the total population, with most of the increase consisting of Europeans, Latin Americans and Africans.⁴ Since 2010, the demographic effect has been negative for both sexes, but especially for men under 35. This is due to the emigration of male workers, mainly male immigrants who came to Spain during the economic boom and then left. Indeed, as Spain's economic outlook worsened, the unemployment rate of non-Spanish workers rose dramatically, up to 40 per cent. The outflows reached "the highest level of emigration in Spanish history" (Izquierdo, Jimeno and Lacuesta, 2015, p. 12). These trends were less noticeable for women, and men were more likely to migrate regardless of their nationality. Greece has also experienced a negative demographic effect since the end of 2009, probably for similar reasons: unemployed workers may have progressively left the country.

Participation effect and labour supply of men and women

Changes in the workforce attributable to the participation effect differ between men and women (figure 1). The neoclassical paradigm provides a theoretical framework for analysing these gender differences in terms of labour supply. Two different effects are distinguished: the discouraged worker effect and the added worker effect. These effects might be intensified during a recession depending on how the labour supply is influenced by labour market conditions and how individual labour supply decisions are influenced by the situation of other members of the household and/or labour market conditions.

The discouraged worker effect arises when jobseekers become discouraged because they have little prospect of finding suitable work and consequently withdraw from the labour market or are not included in statistics related exclusively to the job-seeking activities of unemployed persons. It leads to a contraction of the workforce as measured by international statistical standards. The sex segregation of employment (whether by occupation or sector) and the potential dualization of the labour market imply that men and women face different labour market situations in terms of level of unemployment and type of job they can access. The sectoral dimension of the recession

⁴ The flow of immigrants had no impact on native employment, but it did induce a reallocation of native workers from manual to more interactive occupations (De la Rica and Polonyankina, 2013).

therefore strengthens the potential discouraged worker effect for men during this phase. In Spain and Greece (and to a lesser extent in the United Kingdom, Denmark and Italy), the participation effect for men was clearly negative (figure 1). This is consistent with the fact that job destruction concerned for the most part male workers. In the United Kingdom (figure 1), the positive demographic effect partially compensated for the negative participation effect for men, whereas in Greece (figure 1), the negative demographic effect reinforced the negative participation effect observed for men, so that the male labour force contracted, offsetting the rise in the male unemployment rate (Karamessini and Koutentakis, 2014). In Italy (figure 1), the discouraged worker effect seems to have been in the same range for both men and women in 2009, a trend explained by the increase in unemployment during this period for both sexes. After 2010, however, the participation effect for women increased, indicating the emergence of a potential opposite effect attributable to intrafamily decisions.

The added worker effect is based on the hypothesis that couples “share risk”: if the primary earner becomes unemployed, the secondary earner may seek an additional job to compensate for the loss of income. This causes the labour force to expand, but can potentially increase unemployment if the demand is not dynamic enough. It can appear at the extensive margin if it implies a transition from inactivity to participation in the labour market, or at the intensive margin if it implies an increase in working time (from part-time to full-time employment). The added worker effect obviously has a gendered dimension, since it relies on the sexual division of labour within couples and on the fact that women may still be considered secondary earners in some countries. The change in arrangement it involves may be transitory or may have long-term implications for the couple’s division of labour and household tasks. The literature on that effect is unclear. Some previous studies have found significant but small responses in female labour supply when the spouse is unemployed (Mincer, 1962; Lundberg, 1985), while others have found no evidence at all (Heckman and Macurdy, 1980). A severe recession that is especially harsh for male employment, as was the case in 2008, might nevertheless reinforce the added worker effect.

The type of gender regime, and consequently the level of female participation in the labour market before the crisis, play a key role in this regard. As suggested by Smith and Villa (2013), the impact of business cycles from the gender perspective must be analysed in the light of long-term trends, such as gender regime, family model and institutional environment, all of which change over time. Since the launch of the European employment strategy in 1997, female labour force participation has risen and in most countries women can no longer be considered secondary earners, at least in terms of labour market participation. Despite the fact that women are still more likely than men to be in part-time employment in Sweden, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Denmark, the added worker effect is expected to be small or at the intensive margin in these countries. The high level of social protection implies the

existence of unemployment insurance and limits the potential added worker effect. Furthermore, in the United Kingdom, the means-tested feature of unemployment insurance is expected to discourage married women from entering the labour market if their partner becomes unemployed (Bredtmann, Otten and Rulff, 2017); the magnitude of the recession has nonetheless limited this specific effect, as people became particularly cautious about their jobs (Bryan and Longhi, 2013; 2015). What is more, Gush, Scott and Laurie (2015) use a qualitative approach to show that additional spousal labour is only one of the alternatives open to couples facing serious financial hardship. The results of the shift-share decomposition provide no sign of a strong positive participation effect for women in these countries (figure 1).

Southern countries where the participation of women remained low might have experienced a stronger added worker effect during the recession. The results of the shift-share decomposition indicate a positive participation effect in Greece, Italy and Spain (figure 1). In Spain, this must be interpreted in line with the long-term trend towards female participation, which has destabilized the male breadwinner model. During the crisis, poorly educated women showed signs of household compensating strategies, a development that can be interpreted as an added worker effect (Addabbo, Rodríguez-Modroño and Gálvez-Muñoz, 2013; González Gago and Segales Kirzner, 2014). In Italy, female participation rates are structurally low, but regional differences exist because the gender regime has not evolved homogeneously throughout the country: the female employment rate is above the European average in the north, but far below it in the south (Verashchagina and Capparucci, 2014). The increase in female participation observed in the decomposition is partly due to a dramatic rise in employment in the sector referred to as household activities as employers, which almost doubled during the period under review (from 370,000 jobs in Q1 2008 to 704,000 in Q1 2013, of which around 90 per cent were female workers). This increase can be explained, at least in part, by the progressive implementation of the laws enacted in 2008 to regularize illegal workers, specifically in the Italian care sector⁵ and benefitting mainly women. It did not correspond to effective growth in either employment or female participation, as it resulted from the inclusion in the statistics of regularized illegal jobs. Nevertheless, part of the increase in female participation during the crisis is due to the added worker effect, according to the literature (Bredtmann, Otten and Rulff, 2017; Verashchagina and Capparucci, 2014). For Greece, figure 1 indicates a similar trend: inactive women joined the labour market, which can be interpreted as a supply-side response, or added worker effect. In both countries, the increase in female participation raised the female unemployment rate because of the sharp deterioration in the labour market (Karamessini and Koutentakis, 2017; Bredtmann, Otten and Rulff, 2014; Verashchagina and Capparucci, 2014; Giannakopoulos, 2015).

⁵ See, for example, Law 2009/102, Art. 1-Ter, <http://www.parlamento.it/parlam/leggi/091021.htm> [accessed 2 February 2018].

For countries in which the added worker effect is observed, the question of its persistence is crucial. If the labour supply of married women is permanently modified by the so-called “he-cession”, then one can expect to observe a transition from the male breadwinner model to a less unequal model. However, the quantitative approach using the added worker effect integrates gender as an “ad hoc” variable. The labour supply of both men and women is embedded in the economic and social regime: the fact that married women might increase their participation in the labour market when their partners lose their jobs does not guarantee that, conversely, the partners are going to increase their participation in domestic and family work. The “substitutability” of female and male labour when it comes to paid work is not necessarily compensated by substitutability in unpaid work. In Italy, for instance, the trend towards greater female labour participation was not associated with a transformation in the role of men inside the household; rather, it was sustained by an inflow of migrant women performing domestic and care labour, thereby enabling educated women to work (Verashchagina and Capparucci, 2014). Similarly, during the decade preceding the recession, the dramatic increase in Spanish women’s employment was not associated with greater participation by men in childcare and housework (González Gago and Segales Kirzner, 2014). As suggested by Rubery (2014), path dependency has to be taken into account, as changes in family organization and social norms related to the gender division of labour are not readily reversible.

Sectoral analysis of employment trends

The different positions of men and women in the job structure (at either the sectoral or the occupational level) and the pattern of gender segregation (in terms of degree and/or nature of the segregation) provide insights into why recession and austerity may have different effects on female and male employment (Rubery, 2014). Sex segregation of labour markets, combined with sectoral recession and sector-oriented austerity policies, is the main explanation for the gendered impact of the crisis summed up in the phrase “he-cession to sh(e)-austerity”. This section investigates to what extent sector-related sex segregation explains the gendered dimension of the crisis in the countries under review.

Segregated labour markets and sectoral dimension of the crisis

Two types of segregation might explain the gendered impact of the crisis on employment. Sector-related sex segregation implies that women are over-represented in certain sectors of the economy (education, social services, etc.) and under-represented in others (manufacturing, construction, etc.). If the recession has a sectoral dimension, then its effects on female and male employment will differ. Occupational sex segregation implies that women are over-represented in certain occupations (child-minders, cleaners, etc.) and under-represented in others (electricians, train drivers, etc.).

Both types of sex segregation are a common feature of European labour markets. Women represent around 80 per cent of workers in the health and social services sector, compared to only 10 per cent or less in the construction sector. The commodification or externalization through public services (depending on the country) of some family tasks has boosted female participation in the labour market, but it has also led to an increase in sector-related sex segregation, as workers in the care sector are mainly women. For instance, female employment growth in Spain during the decade preceding the recession occurred in already feminized sectors, and the index of dissimilarity rose as female employment increased (González Gago and Segales Kirzner, 2014). In the countries under review, female-dominated occupations include “shop salespersons and demonstrators”, “domestic and related helpers, cleaners and laundresses”, and “other office clerks”. In contrast, the male-dominated occupations include “motor vehicle drivers”, “building frame and related trades workers”, and “machinery mechanics and fitters” (Bettio and Verashchagina, 2009, p. 31).

As the recession had a clear sectoral dimension, sector-related sex segregation might have protected women during that phase of the crisis. Sectors in which women were over-represented – for example, education and human health and social services – were spared during the collapse in economic activity; whereas sectors in which men were over-represented – for instance, construction and manufacturing – were deeply affected. Moreover, sectors like “construction” are more likely to hire temporary workers, a strong and quick means of adjusting employment to the business cycle. Between Q1 2008 and Q1 2010 in Spain, the “manufacturing” and “construction” sectors, in which women represented less than or around one-third of workers, suffered the destruction of 709,000 and 1 million jobs, respectively. In “education” and “human health and social work activities”, on the other hand, sectors in which women represented, respectively, 60 per cent and 82 per cent of workers, 54,000 and 133,000 jobs were created during the same period.

In France and Italy, specific policies aimed at restructuring the civil service have prompted a fall in public sector employment.⁶ In Sweden, the “human health and social work activities” sector also lost many jobs during the same period.⁷ Conversely, the UK public sector continued to grow during the recession, adding 324,000 jobs in “education” and 248,000 jobs in “human health and social work activities” (see also Rubery and Rafferty, 2014; Périquier, 2014).

In general, male-dominated sectors were more affected during the recession than female-dominated sectors; the opposite should occur during

⁶ In France, the education sector lost 44,000 jobs as a consequence of the reduction in non-teaching workers in education resulting from specific policies aimed at containing the number of civil servants. In Italy, the education sector also lost 129,000 jobs, owing to specific measures aimed at reforming the educational system and cuts in public education spending – the *Riforma Gelmini* (2008–09) – (see Decree 81/2009, at http://hubmiur.pubblica.istruzione.it/alfresco/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/25ba2ec2-bf2b-4713-9800-dd20cf3d6346/dpr81_2009.pdf, and Law 169/2008, at <http://www.edscuola.it/archivio/norme/leggi/dl28808.pdf> [both accessed 25 January 2018]).

⁷ In all, 37,000 jobs were lost, representing around 2 per cent of the jobs destroyed in all NACE activities.

periods of austerity. Austerity policies are sector-oriented and aimed at reducing the public sector and public spending in general. The trend should be towards “sh(e)-austerity”, which is the mirror effect of “he-cession”. This is why the central role of sector-related sex segregation has to be analysed. Indeed, the variation in employment by gender and by industry does not serve to identify the “pure” effect of job segregation as the main driver of the gendered impact of the crisis. Between 2008 and 2014, the share of women in each sector might have changed, masking the specific gendered effects of employment changes during the crisis. For instance, in sectors in which women were under-represented, job destruction might have been concentrated on female occupations, and the share of women in those sectors might have fallen as a consequence. Female workers might have been less protected by sector-related sex segregation than they apparently seem to have been.

The shift-share analysis of the variation in employment by sector and by sex provides a measure of the role played by sex segregation in the dynamics of women’s employment. This methodology consists in calculating a counterfactual of the changes in female employment. What would the trend have been if the share of women in each sector had been stable during the whole period? In order to take into account changes in working time during the period under review, the average weekly working time by sector is used to adjust the measurement of employment. In female employment dynamics, two different effects are distinguished. One is caused by the change in employment within each sector, and the other by the changing proportion of women in each sector. The variation in employment is as follows:

If F_{iqt} is female employment in sector i in quarter q of year t ,

$$F_{iqt} = JF_{iqt} * HF_{iqt} \quad (3)$$

where JF_{iqt} is the number of jobs occupied by women in sector i in quarter q of year t , and HF_{iqt} is the number of hours worked weekly by women in sector i in quarter q of year t .

And if E_{iqt} is total employment in sector i in quarter q of year t ,

$$E_{iqt} = J_{iqt} * H_{iqt} \quad (4)$$

where J_{iqt} is the number of jobs in sector i in quarter q of year t , and H_{iqt} is the number of hours worked weekly in sector i in quarter q of year t .

Finally, if α_{iqt} is the share of women in sector i in quarter q of year t taking into account the average working time by sector

$$F_{qt} = \sum_i \alpha_{iqt} E_{iqt} \quad (5)$$

Then:

$$\Delta F = F_{qt} - F_{qt-1} = \sum_i \alpha_{iqt-1} (E_{iqt} - E_{iqt-1}) + \sum_i E_{iqt-1} (\alpha_{iqt} - \alpha_{iqt-1}) + \sum_i (E_{iqt} - E_{iqt-1}) (\alpha_{iqt} - \alpha_{iqt-1}) \quad (6)$$

That is, employment effect + share effect + interaction effect

The effects are presented as a percentage of female employment in $t-1$: $= F_{qt-1}$.

The sectoral analysis is constrained by the data available, as there is a break in the statistical series between Q4 2007 and Q1 2008.⁸ The shift-share analysis covers Q1 2008 to Q1 2014 and allows us to distinguish three effects:

- The employment effect indicates what the female employment trend would have been if the share of women in each industry had remained the same as during the corresponding period of the previous year.
- The share effect indicates how the variation in the share of women in each industry evolved during the period.
- The interaction effect measures the interaction between changes in employment per sector and the changes in share of women.

A share effect close to zero can be interpreted as indicating that sector-related sex segregation explains much of the gendered impact of the crisis on employment. When it differs from zero (negatively or positively) two main interpretations are possible. First, the NACE two-digit numerical codes might not be precise enough to measure the impact of segregation.⁹ Sex segregation can be stronger at subsector than at sector level. In that case, a negative share effect might be interpreted as indicating that subsectors dominated by women were more severely affected than those dominated by men. Second, a negative share effect can be interpreted as a decrease in the share of women either because more women were laid off than men holding similar jobs in the same sector, or because job creation benefited men disproportionately. In addition to sector-related sex segregation, occupational sex segregation can also play a role in the gendered impact of the crisis:¹⁰ within a sector, the positions dominated by women might have been more prone to destruction than those dominated by men, resulting in a decrease in the share of women.¹¹

Thanks to the decomposition, the impact of the different phases of the crisis can be evaluated not only in absolute terms (number of jobs destroyed for each sex), but also in relative terms (number of jobs lost with regard to changes in the share of women within sectors).

“He-cession and sh(e)-austerity”? Mixed patterns across countries

Spain is a typical case of the “he-cession to sh(e)-austerity” scenario. Sector-related sex segregation explains the gendered trends of employment throughout the period under review (see also Peña-Boquete, 2014). The share effect

⁸ Eurostat quarterly sectoral data are not seasonally adjusted, so the percentage change compared to the corresponding period of the previous year is used here.

⁹ For instance, subsectors in the “public administration and defence; compulsory social security” division might be highly segregated with regard to gender.

¹⁰ We have applied the same decomposition methodology to occupational sex segregation, but because of many breaks in the time series for the countries under review, the interpretation is not robust.

¹¹ The database on occupational status is available from Eurostat, but numerous series breaks make it impossible to apply the shift-share methodology.

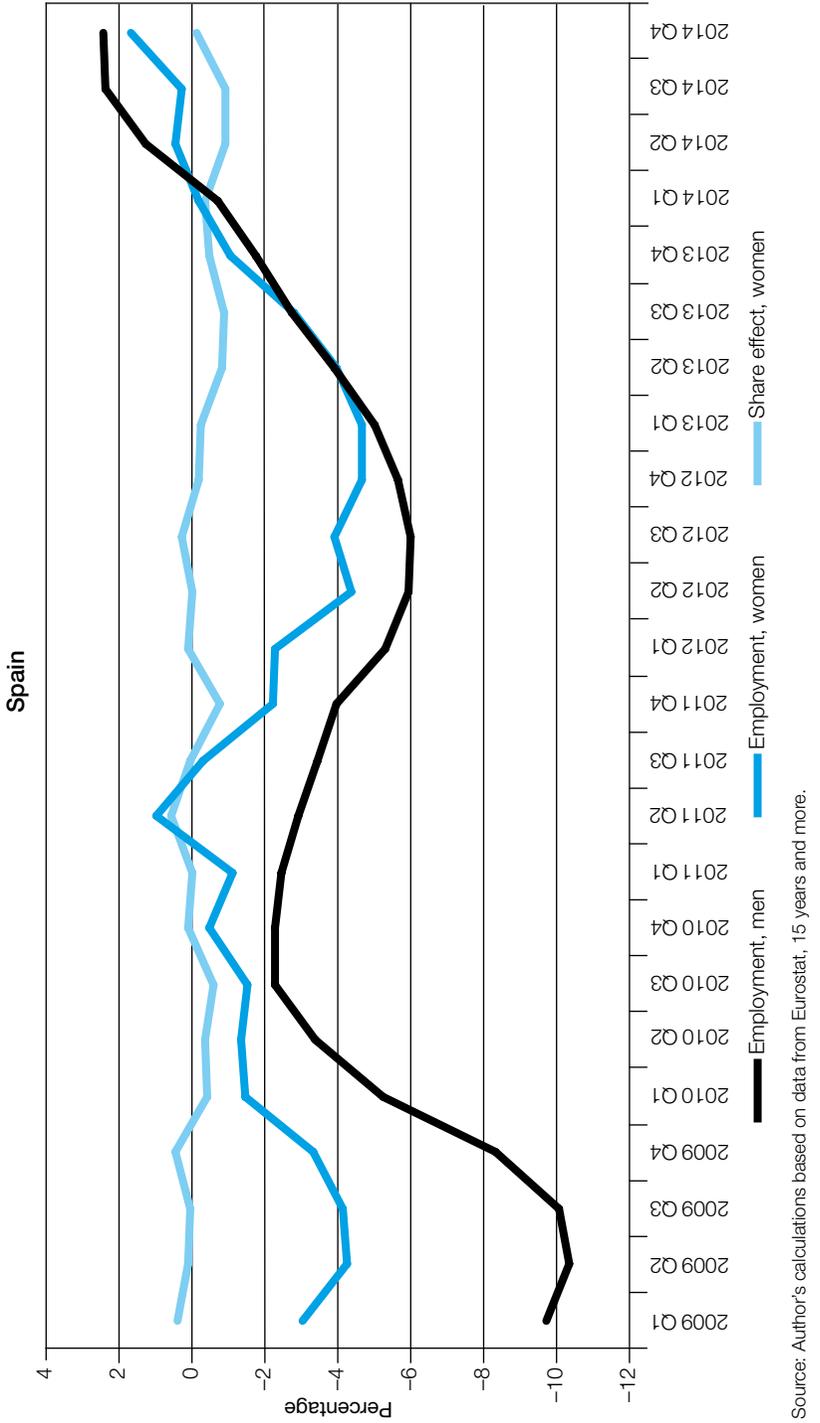
was close to zero during the actual recession, meaning that the share of women remained stable (figure 2). Spanish women were less affected by the crisis than men in terms of job destruction, even when the average working time per sector is taken into account. This is chiefly because they were over-represented in sectors less severely hit by the recession. Women did experience employment losses during this phase, but at a slower pace than men. Male employment plunged 24 per cent between Q1 2008 and Q1 2013, whereas female employment fell by 10 per cent. The collapse in male employment is equivalent to the destruction of 2,870,000 jobs. Half of this drop occurred in “construction” and one quarter in “manufacturing”. However, the relative resistance of female employment went hand in hand with an increase in precariousness, low income and bad jobs for women, in a context of low income and economic pressure (González Gago and Segales Kirzner, 2014). At the end of 2012, a negative share effect appeared, meaning that changes in female employment were less favourable than they should have been had women’s share within sectors remained stable (figure 2). Figure 2 further indicates that, since 2014, male employment has recovered slightly more than female employment. Spain is experiencing the “sh(e)-austerity” part of the typical scenario.

The Greek case is more complex and could be more properly characterized as a “race-to-the-bottom sh(e)-austerity” scenario. During the recession, employment collapsed for both sexes (figure 2).¹² In absolute terms, the collapse was more complete for men than for women. Job losses were concentrated in “manufacturing” for both men and women (27 per cent of male and 20 per cent of female job losses), but men faced a particularly steep drop in employment (37 per cent) in “construction”. The gender gap is mainly explained by sector-related sex segregation. The Economic Adjustment Programme 2010–2014, adopted in May 2010, was the first of successive austerity plans (Karamessini, 2014). In the first quarter of 2011, female employment started falling at a quicker rate than it should have if the share of women within sectors had been stable. Therefore, in relative terms, female employment was more affected by the austerity measures than male employment.

The situations in the United Kingdom and Denmark point to a slight but clear “sh(e)-cession”. In both countries, the share effect was negative from Q1 2009 to Q3 2011: women should have benefited from more favourable employment dynamics than they actually did. In Denmark, female employment should have decreased more slowly than it did (figure 2). In the United Kingdom, women should have experienced a positive trend in employment; in view of the shifts in their share within sectors, however, female employment actually decreased (figure 2). In both countries, women experienced more job losses than they should have between Q1 2009 and Q1 2011, given the sex composition of the following sectors: “manufacturing”, “construction” and “wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles”. In the United Kingdom,

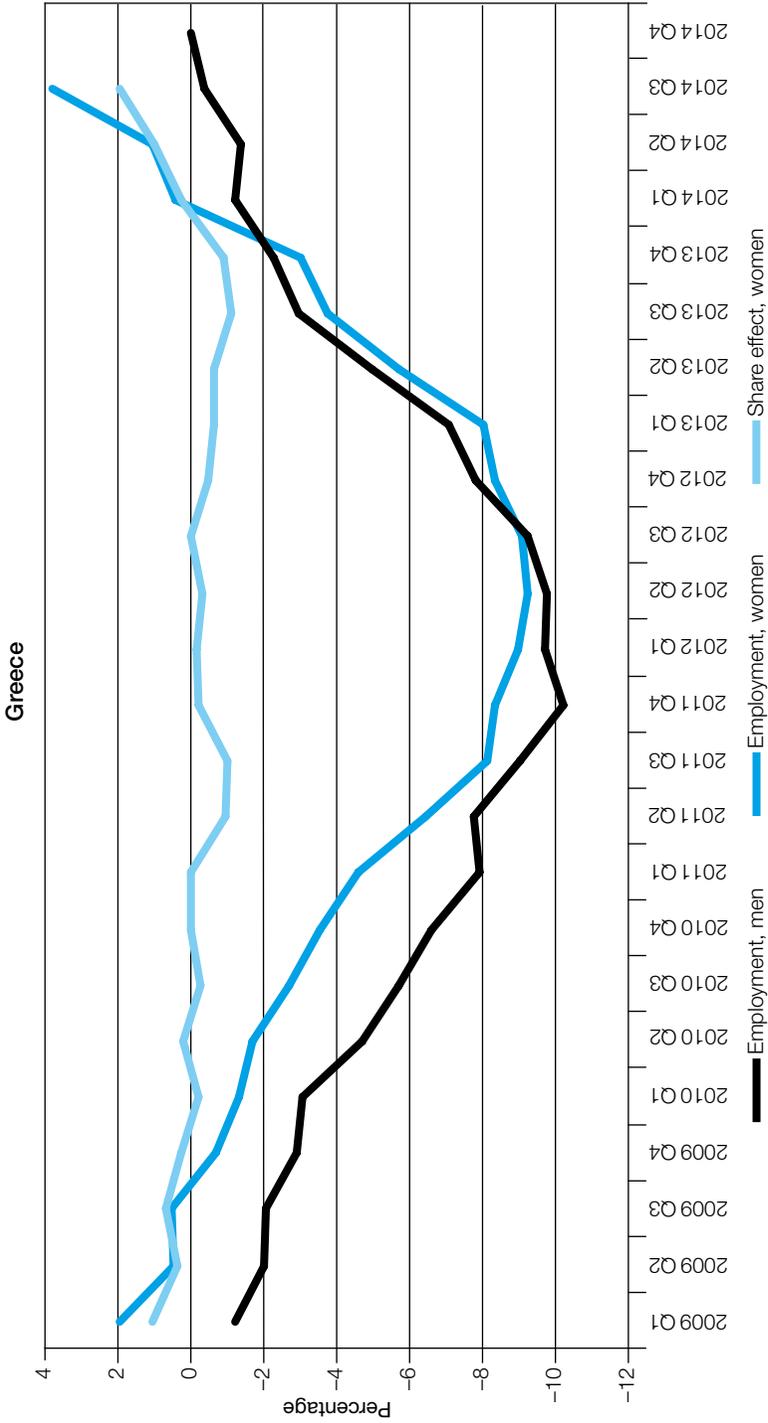
¹² Between Q1 2008 and Q1 2013, male employment plummeted 22 per cent, female employment 17 per cent.

Figure 2. Sectoral decomposition of changes in female and male employment, taking into account working time (Percentage change compared to the corresponding period in the previous year)



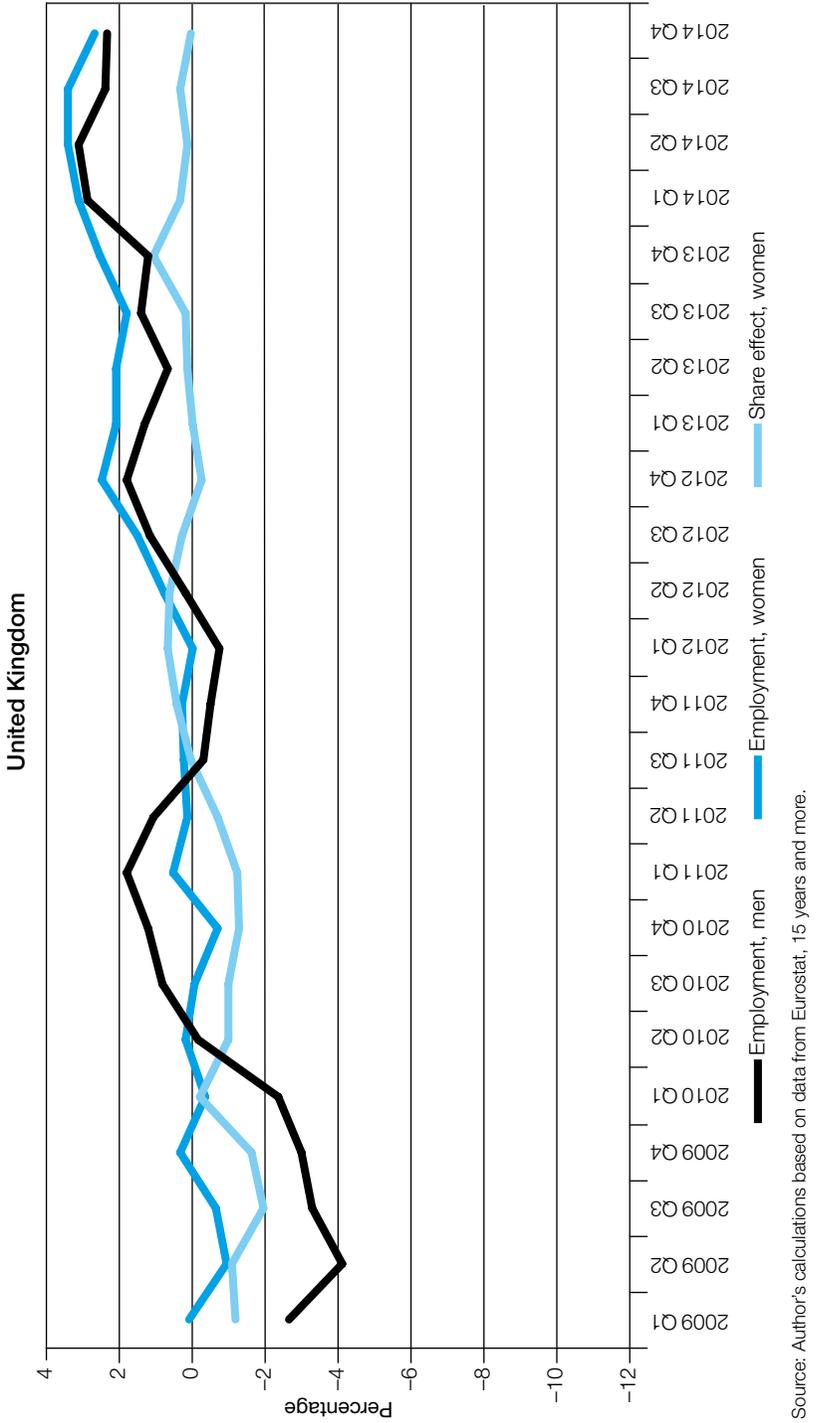
Source: Author's calculations based on data from Eurostat, 15 years and more.

Figure 2. Sectoral decomposition of changes in female and male employment, taking into account working time (Percentage change compared to the corresponding period in the previous year) (cont.)



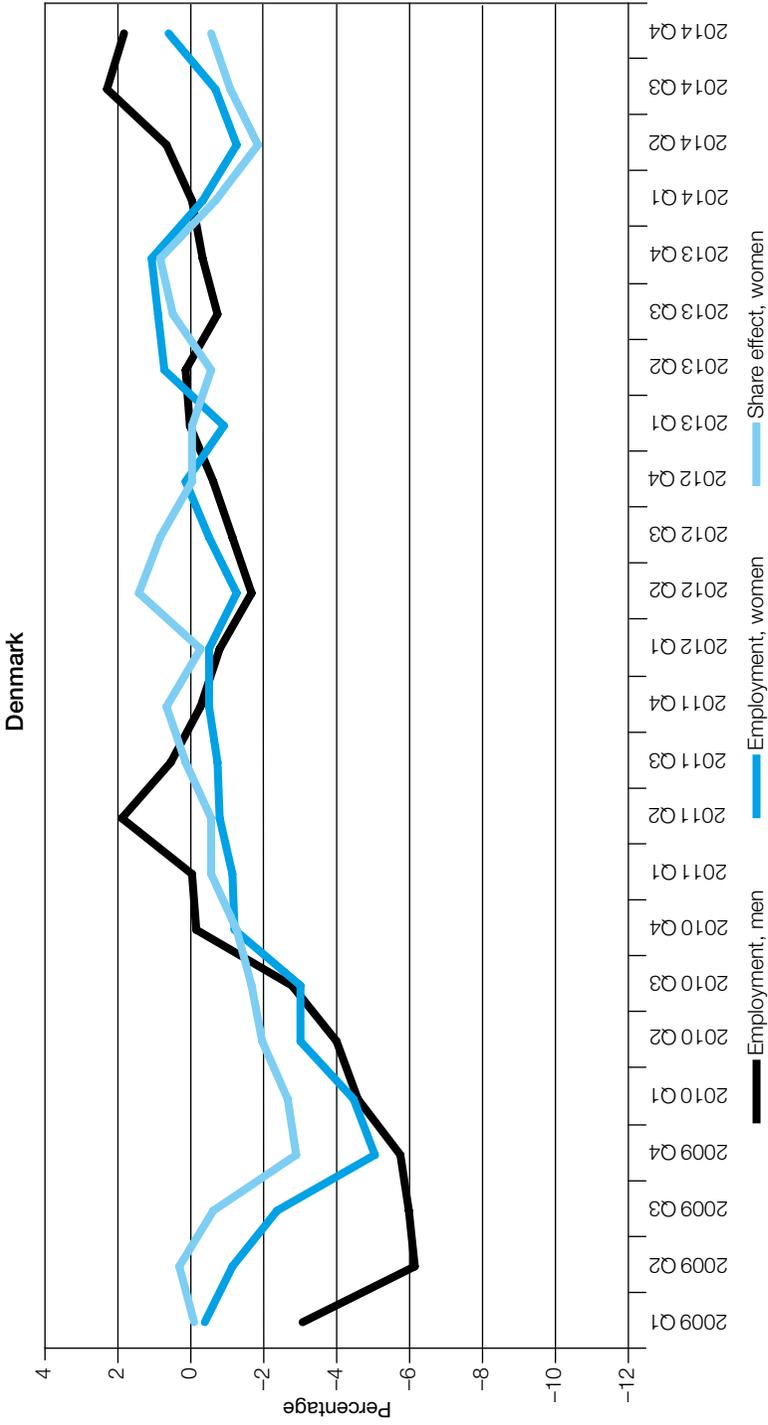
Source: Author's calculations based on data from Eurostat, 15 years and more.

Figure 2. Sectoral decomposition of changes in female and male employment, taking into account working time (Percentage change compared to the corresponding period in the previous year) (cont.)



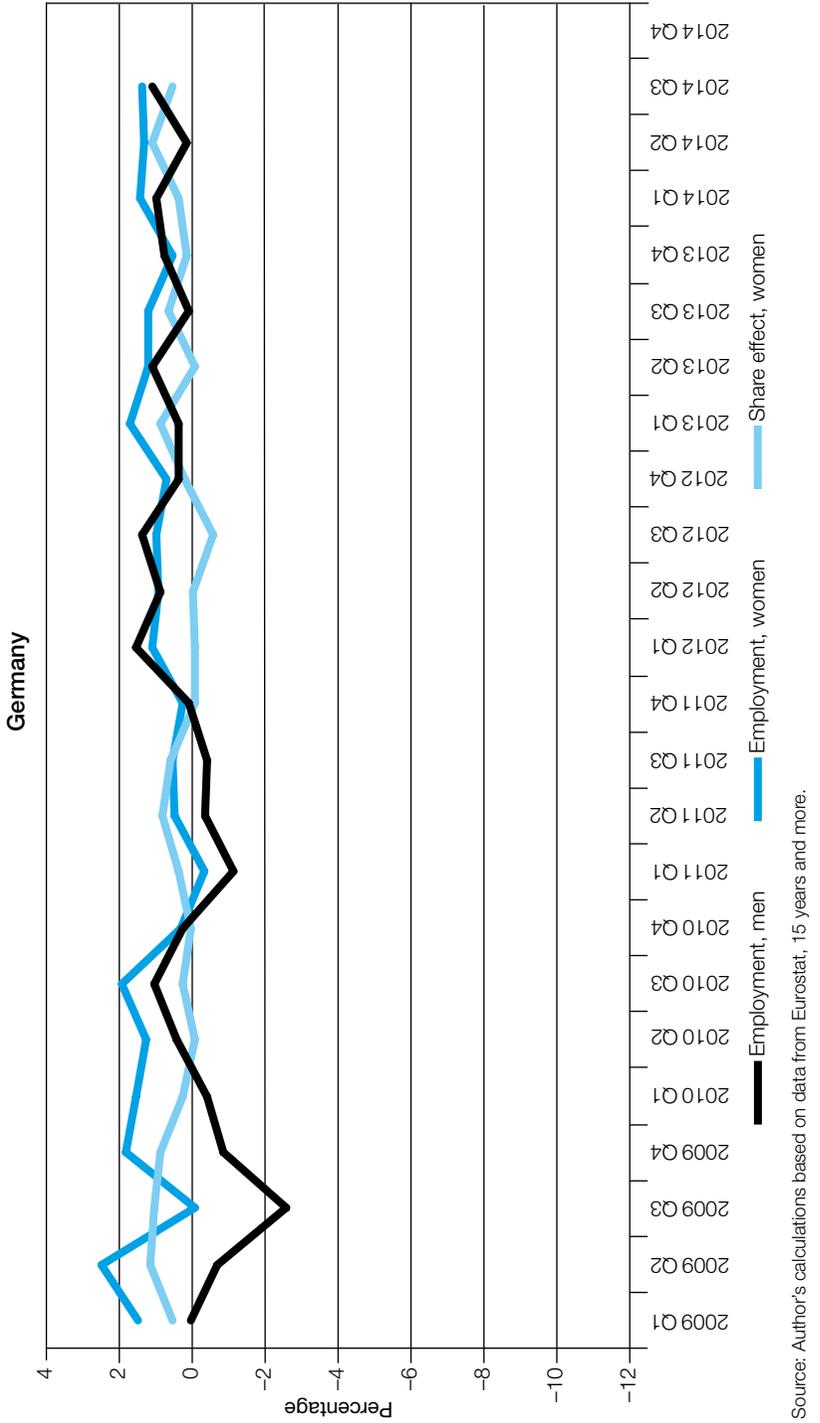
Source: Author's calculations based on data from Eurostat, 15 years and more.

Figure 2. Sectoral decomposition of changes in female and male employment, taking into account working time (Percentage change compared to the corresponding period in the previous year) (cont.)



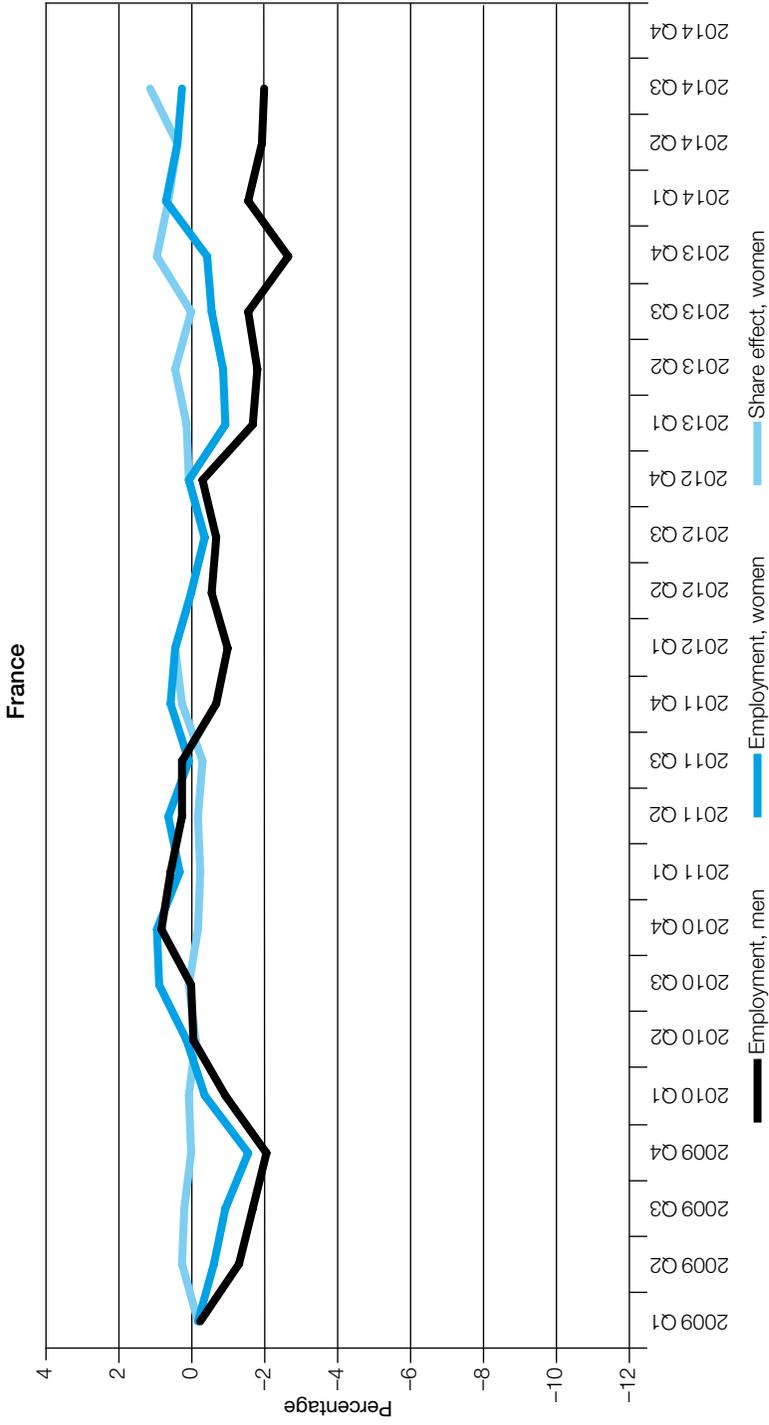
Source: Author's calculations based on data from Eurostat, 15 years and more.

Figure 2. Sectoral decomposition of changes in female and male employment, taking into account working time (Percentage change compared to the corresponding period in the previous year) (cont.)



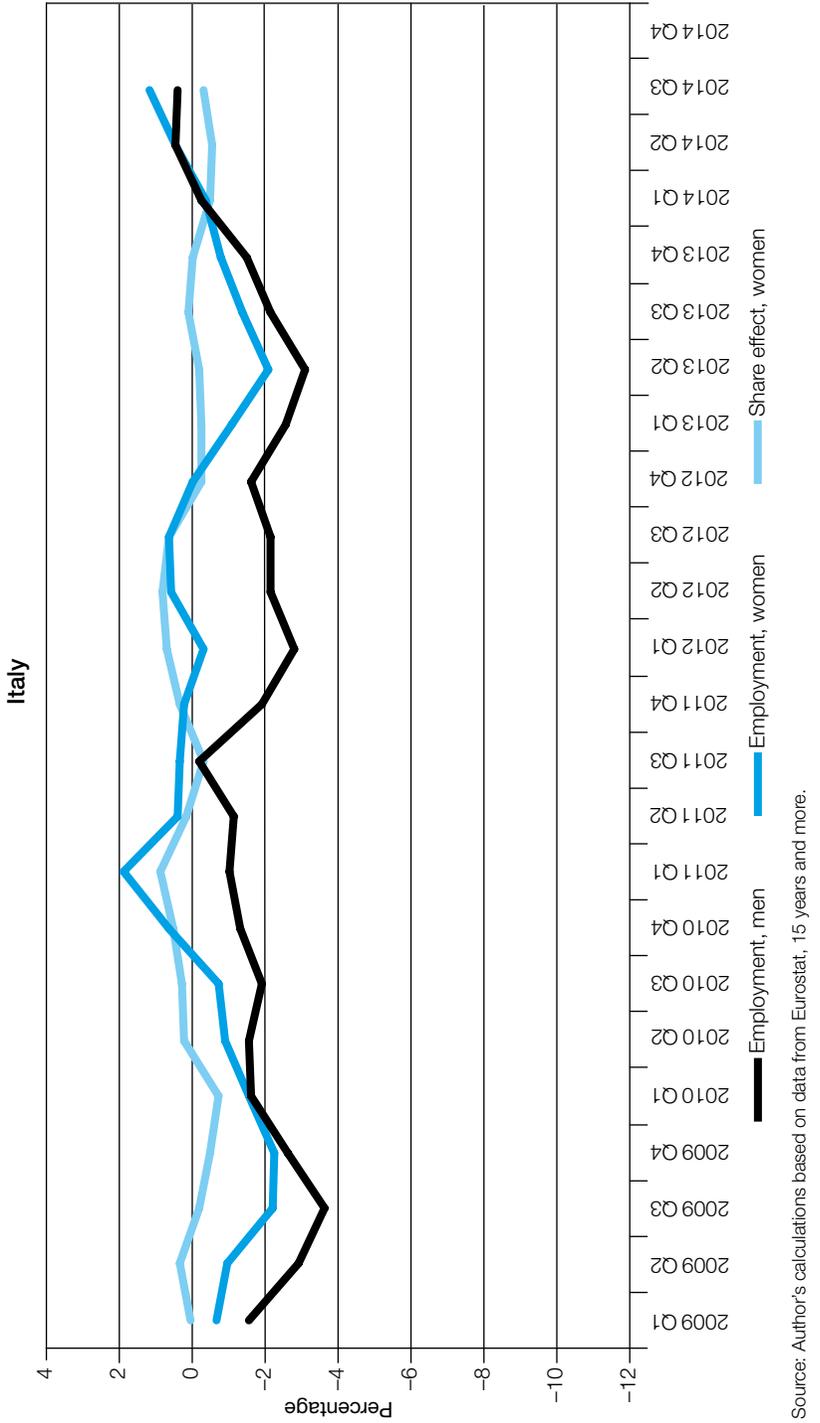
Source: Author's calculations based on data from Eurostat, 15 years and more.

Figure 2. Sectoral decomposition of changes in female and male employment, taking into account working time (Percentage change compared to the corresponding period in the previous year) (cont.)



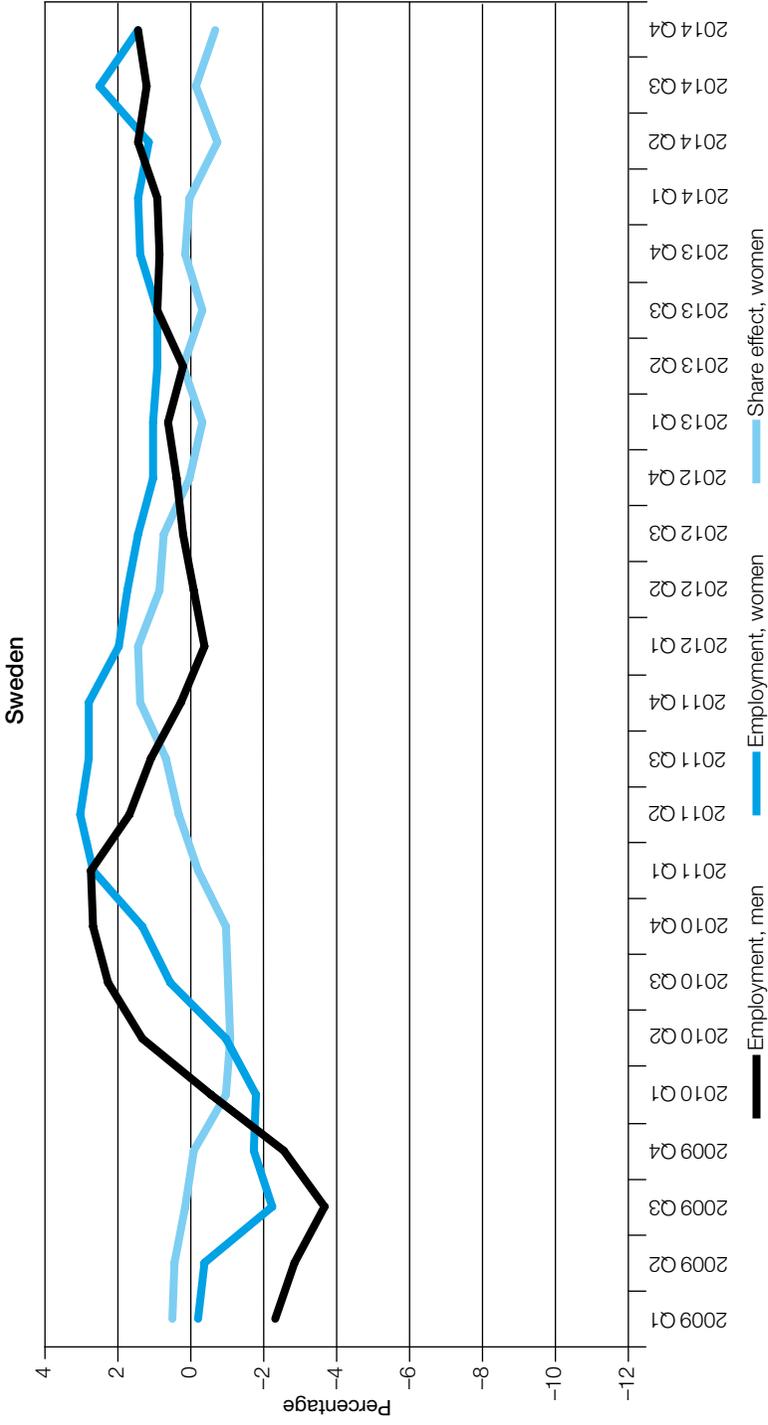
Source: Author's calculations based on data from Eurostat, 15 years and more.

Figure 2. Sectoral decomposition of changes in female and male employment, taking into account working time (Percentage change compared to the corresponding period in the previous year) (cont.)



Source: Author's calculations based on data from Eurostat, 15 years and more.

Figure 2. Sectoral decomposition of changes in female and male employment, taking into account working time (Percentage change compared to the corresponding period in the previous year) (concl.)

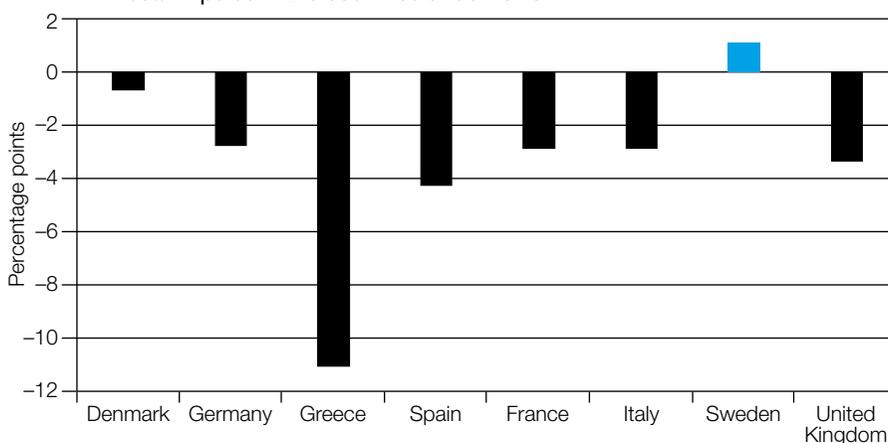


Source: Author's calculations based on data from Eurostat, 15 years and more.

226,000 jobs were cut in the “wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles” sector, with 75 per cent of the cuts falling on women. Also in the United Kingdom, the creation of jobs in “education” benefited women less than it should have, whereas in Denmark, 80 per cent of jobs created in “education” concerned women (instead of 60 per cent if their share in “education” had remained stable). In absolute terms, women were less affected by the recession than men in terms of employment trends, but in relative terms they were more affected. Starting from Q3 2011, the share effect had little or no impact in the United Kingdom, whereas in Denmark it was positive but small.

In Germany, France, Italy and Sweden (figure 2), the scenario is not clear and changes in employment are less pronounced. Sweden is an interesting case. In 2010, the share effect was negative and female employment was more strongly affected than it should have been. Indeed, the measures taken by the Swedish Government at the end of 2008 and during the first half of 2009 included a plan to invest extensively in the country’s road and rail networks (Anxo, 2011). The Swedish stimulus packages were thus of greater benefit to men than to women. At the municipal and county levels (where responsibility lays for social services, education and health), public employment declined owing to severe budget cuts, even though Sweden’s national government made additional allocations to local authorities (Anxo, 2011; Nyberg, 2014). Conversely, after Q1 2011, the share effect was positive. Women benefited relatively more from the fact that Sweden did not implement austerity policies. Indeed, Sweden is the only one of the eight countries under review that did not choose the path of austerity, as between 2010 and 2013 the fiscal impulse was positive (see figure 3).

Figure 3. The scope of austerity policies in Europe between 2010 and 2013 – Fiscal impulse in the countries under review



Source: Ameco database.

Notes: Variation between 2010 and 2013 of the structural balance of general government (as a per cent of potential GDP) in percentage points. In Greece, the structural part of the public deficit amounted to -9 per cent of potential GDP in 2010; it was positive in 2014, at around 2 per cent. The effort to reduce the structural part of the public deficit was thus around 11 percentage points.

This analysis clarifies the role of sector-related sex segregation in the gendered impact of the recession and, to some extent, of the austerity policies adopted. As far as austerity is concerned, the methodology used does not capture the whole impact that these policies might have on gender equality. First, it does not integrate the effect of austerity on wages, quality of employment and working conditions. Second, the effect on employment might take longer than the period studied. Lastly, some of these policies have affected gender equality, and female employment, through indirect channels. The third section explores this last point.

Austerity policies and gender equality

“Sh(e)-austerity” has been analysed through the direct effect of austerity policies on female employment attributable to sector-related sex segregation: public spending cuts lead employment to contract in sectors where women are over-represented. Austerity policies can affect gender equality and/or women’s situations through all kinds of channels. They can affect female employment indirectly (cuts in public services or social reforms might make it even more difficult to achieve work–life balance or degrade working conditions), or their effects may be delayed and are therefore not yet clearly visible in the data. This section analyses the different types of austerity policy in order to shed light on their potential or effective impact on gender equality.

Overview of different austerity policies

Fiscal consolidation programmes are macroeconomic policies that provide restricted room for manoeuvre and can generate a regressive framework for gender equality. The economic downturn widened output gaps and increased public deficits and public debt. This was the consequence of both automatic stabilizers, as the recession pushed down tax revenues and pushed up social and public spending, and the fiscal policies implemented in 2008 and 2009 to dampen the economic consequences of the crisis. The short-term priority was to limit the rise in unemployment and boost economic growth. The implementation of expansionary fiscal policies at first managed to contain the economic consequences of the financial crisis.¹³ However, fearing a surge in interest rates and constrained by its Stability and Growth Pact, the European Commission and European Union Member States prioritized the long-term issue of public debt sustainability over recovery (iAGS, 2012). In most European countries, the main concern became fiscal consolidation. Therefore, and in spite of the fragile economic situation, most countries started to tighten their fiscal policies in 2010 or 2011 (iAGS, 2012; 2013). It is these consolidation programmes that are referred to by the umbrella term “austerity policies”. Austerity policies can be defined as discretionary measures whose objective is fiscal consolidation and that affect the

¹³ Among the countries reviewed, the United Kingdom and Sweden, which are not members of the eurozone, also may have benefited from a depreciation in their effective exchange rates.

structure of the welfare state in terms of social security, public administration, the public sector, public services, the taxation system, labour market institutions, and so on. Their magnitude and their nature can be compared across countries.

The austerity policies applied were more far-reaching in countries receiving external assistance from international institutions (International Monetary Fund, World Bank, European Central Bank) and/or facing a public debt funding crisis in the market (Spain and Greece). As we can see in figure 3, with the exception of Sweden, all eight countries under review implemented austerity policies, as reflected by negative fiscal impulse.

The nature of austerity policies can be analysed according to the relative proportions of spending cuts and tax rises. In most countries, austerity packages lean towards spending cuts rather than tax rises (Theodoropoulou and Watt, 2011). The United Kingdom is a specific case, as the British Government has scheduled tax reductions which will be offset by extremely deep spending cuts. One such reduction implies a tax rebate for married couples.¹⁴ This is clearly a step back from the individual taxation implemented in the 1990s. Even if the impact on female participation is expected to be small, this reduction promotes the male breadwinner model and does not support the gender-equal family model. Finally, in terms of spending cuts, different types of policies are observed in the countries reviewed. Austerity policies may also include structural reform, which implies the deregulation of labour markets.

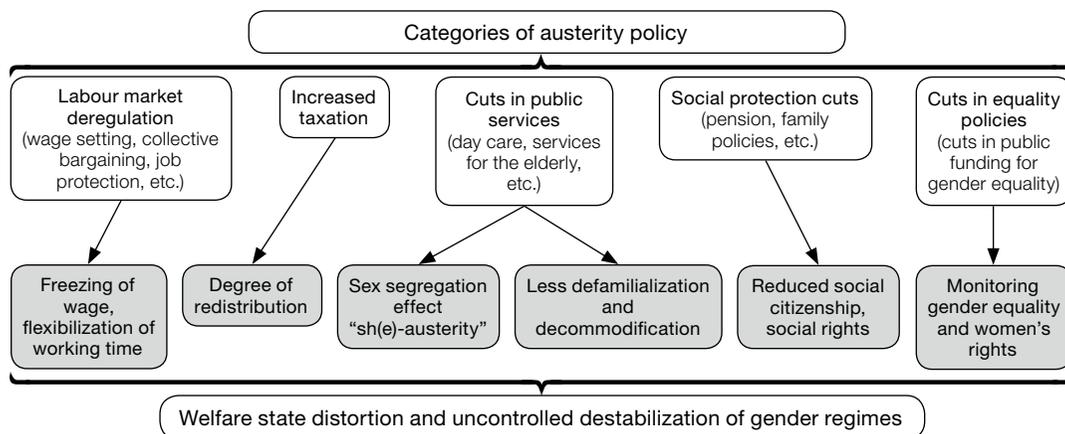
Austerity policies, like stimulus packages, are not gender-neutral. Depending on the sexual division of labour, labour market sex segregation and gender inequalities prevailing in each society, their consequences on the economic and social situation of individuals will differ for women and men. As we saw earlier, recession can have a long-term impact on the gender regime, by changing the economic conditions for the sexual division of labour within families via the added worker effect. At the same time, however, the persistence of that effect, which weakens the male breadwinner model, especially in countries where it continues to prevail (as is the case in Italy, Greece and Spain), depends on the policies implemented to support female employment. Austerity policies may put an end to the dynamics generated by the added worker effect. They also set the conditions under which women participate in the labour market.

Gender equality and women's rights

The aim of this section is not to draw an exhaustive map of austerity policies in the countries reviewed, but rather to analyse the direct/indirect and long-term effects such policies have on gender equality and the situation of women.

¹⁴ The annual cost to the British public purse is expected to be around GBP 500 million for 2015–2016 and GBP 780 million for 2018–2019. More than 4 million married couples will benefit from this change, but at the individual level, the overall winners are men (84 per cent of the recipients of the transfer), at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/293790/TIIN_2518_transferable_tax_allowance_for_married_couples_and_civil_partners.pdf; see also <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/6869> [both accessed 2 February 2018].

Figure 4. Typology of austerity policies in the EU



Policies were classified into five categories: increased taxation; cuts in public services; labour market deregulation; social protection cuts; and cuts in policies directly targeting gender equality (see figure 4). The analysis focuses on spending cuts and labour market deregulation, and highlights the different channels through which gender equality and the situation of women have been or will be affected in the future. The categories are illustrated by specific examples.¹⁵

The first channel is employment losses and relates to the “sh(e)-austerity” scenario analysed in the previous section: as the sectors most affected by austerity are dominated by female workers, cuts in public spending should mechanically lead to job destruction for women and a subsequent rise in female unemployment. In the long term, a persistently high level of unemployment might see women’s participation fall through the discouraged worker effect.

The second channel relates to work–life balance, which is affected by the combined effect of cuts in public services and labour market deregulation.

- Cuts in public and social sectors, with public sector job cuts and wage freezes, are common features of austerity policies (Theodoropoulou and Watt, 2011; Leschke and Jepsen, 2011; Smith, 2009; Karamessini, 2014). The social and public sectors play a central role with respect to this issue (in terms of childcare, social services, elderly care, etc.). The degrees of defamilialization and decommodification of welfare states are affected. As women are the main users of these services (owing to the sexual division of labour within families), they struggle to participate in the labour market or are affected in their daily lives by tougher constraints on work–life balance. This could reinforce the potential discouraged worker effect.

¹⁵ Part of this survey was realized using the European Commission LABREF database, which contains detailed data on the range of labour market policies implemented by each Member State every year.

- Austerity policies also aim to increase labour market flexibility through deregulation. In Greece, regulations limiting the opening hours of shops were abolished in 2012. In the same vein, in Spain, working conditions were modified in 2012 and 2013, notably to allow firms to make substantial changes to individual or collective contracts and to give them greater leeway to distribute working hours irregularly over the year.¹⁶ The latter can affect women more specifically, because women are over-represented in the sectors that are potentially most sensitive to such changes in labour regulations (retail and services¹⁷), and because the deconstruction of working time makes it more difficult to achieve a work–life balance, and hence more complex to synchronize women’s social time.

The third channel involves the alteration of social citizenship (i.e. social rights).

- The retrenchment of the Corporatist/Bismarkian pillar of welfare states, through a contraction of social rights, can affect women more deeply than men, because of the gender gap in careers and wages. Therefore, the withdrawal of specific compensations for these inequalities, within a general context of deteriorating work–life balance, will worsen conditions for the most underprivileged women. In this respect, pension reform has a particularly harsh impact on women. In Greece, the reform has considerably strengthened the link between contributions and benefits.¹⁸ A statutory retirement age of 65 has been established for both men and women. The retirement age-limit differentials between men and women retirees have been abolished. In Italy, pension system reform also implies a higher retirement age for both sexes. Beside this direct effect, as women will have to work longer before they can retire, younger women with children will be less able to rely on grandmothers for childcare. In countries where intrafamily support remains the dominant model and the cost of childcare is high, this will limit mothers’ participation in the labour market (Verashchagina and Capparucci, 2014).
- Reduced family support can also affect gender equality by reinforcing the weight of the sexual division of labour on women’s lives. In the United Kingdom, childcare subsidies were reduced and the “birth grant” eliminated in 2011. Germany introduced a new home-care allowance in 2015, a child-rearing benefit for parents not using public childcare. France reformed its system of universal family allowances (*allocations familiales*) in 2015, introducing means testing. The 2014 French reform of parental leave was presented as a way to promote gender equality; it imposes shared leave, whereby one year (of three) is taken by the “other parent” (that is to say, the father). At the same time, the lump-sum allowance was reduced (to

¹⁶ LABREF database, European Commission.

¹⁷ On average, two in three retail employees in the European Union are women.

¹⁸ The reform consists of a contributory pension on top of a non-contributory pension. The years of work that are required for a full pension have increased to 40.

one-third of the minimum wage). This new scheme remains financially unattractive for fathers; it is likely to have a low male take-up rate, thereby reducing the public cost of parental leave as a whole. Not only does the reform not create any credible incentive for men to be more involved in family work, it worsens the situation of mothers of young children because it reduces their share of parental leave – which is unlikely to be compensated by an increase in childcare. In Spain, the Government decided in 2013 to delay implementation of the extension of paternity leave. None of these policies promote the equal division of labour within families; they will all, in fact, make it increasingly difficult for women with children to participate in the labour market in good conditions.

Last but not least, gender equality and women's rights are directly jeopardized when support for equality bodies is reduced. In Spain, the Equality Ministry established in 2008 was abolished and some gender equality monitoring bodies shut down. In the United Kingdom, the budget of the Equality and Human Rights Commission was cut in 2011 and 2012 (see Karamessini and Rubery, 2014). These measures limit the possibilities to monitor gender equality.

Taken together, these policies lead to an “uncontrolled” modification of welfare states and gender regimes, in that they lower the degree of defamilialization and of decommodification of welfare states. The balance between retrenchment and recalibration of welfare states in the aftermath of the crisis is still unclear and varies across countries, but coverage is weaker, at least in southern countries, which have adopted more stringent austerity policies (León, Pavolini and Guillén, 2015). The focus on the fiscal consolidation target precludes long-term structural changes and jeopardizes the consistency of public policies. The public policies adopted during the crisis have relegated gender equality to the back burner, or even consigned it to oblivion (Smith and Villa, 2013). As a result, austerity policies can be described as institutionalized misrecognition in the theoretical frame of Fraser's principles of justice (Pauli, 2014).

Conclusions

This paper adds a new perspective to the growing volume of literature analysing the gender impact of business cycles. The “he-cession to sh(e)-austerity” scenario, which is based on sector-related sex segregation, provides a useful grid for analysing the current crisis, but it has to be nuanced: as far as changes in employment are concerned, some countries experienced both “he-” and “she-cession” and in others no clear “sh(e)-austerity” has been observed so far. Spain is a typical case of the “he-cession to sh(e)-austerity” scenario, with sector-related sex segregation explaining gendered trends in employment throughout the crisis. Denmark and the United Kingdom do not fit this pattern, however, as women were affected by a faint but clear “sh(e)-cession”, they should have benefited from a more favourable employment dynamic than

they actually did during the recession. Greece experienced “race-to-the-bottom sh(e)-austerity”, as employment collapsed dramatically for both sexes.

In the countries hit hardest by the recession (Spain and Greece), male workers were discouraged from participating in the labour market (discouraged worker effect), whereas women increased their participation, in order to compensate for the loss of household revenue (added worker effect). This boost in female participation in southern countries led to an increase in female unemployment. The destabilization of the male breadwinner model might have long-term implications on gender regimes in Europe, depending on the public policies implemented. The austerity context has prevented the design of policies that consistently take into account the change in the sexual division of labour brought about by the crisis: cuts in public spending and social services have hampered mothers’ participation in the labour market, and male unemployment seems to have no significant effect on the distribution of unpaid work within families. Labour market deregulation and the elimination of bodies in charge of implementing and monitoring gender equality policies have bleakened the prospects for women’s rights and their living conditions. Not only do austerity policies have a direct potential impact on female employment, their indirect and/or long-term effects might exacerbate gender inequalities. Some of the effects of austerity policies on gender equality are not measurable or quantifiable, but nevertheless need to be addressed. They should be explored and researched more deeply. The general framework of austerity precludes the (re)invention of a new social and economic model based on and effectively promoting gender equality.

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