

Wide Switzerland Conference "Feminist Perspectives on Responses to the Crises in Ecology and (Care) Economy"

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**"Gender Impacts of the Crises in Spain"**

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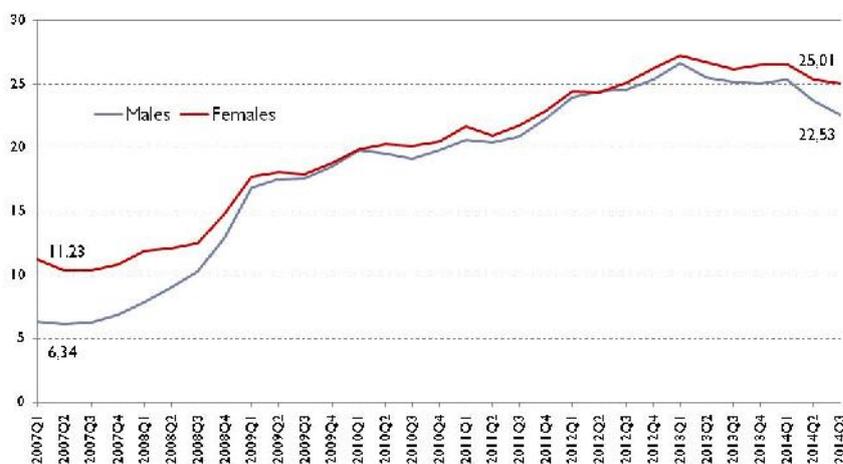
Big steps towards gender equality happened in Spain from the 90s to 2008. However, since the crisis started in 2007-08, it seems that gender equity is not any longer a debated issue. In fact, articles and news in mass media have highlighted that this is simply a male recession or he-cession, only because many jobs have been destroyed in male-dominated sectors. It is true that high gender segregation of the Spanish labour market (and western economies in general) led to a closing of the gender gap in unemployment rates due to a massive destruction of male jobs at an early stage of the crisis, as the sectors mostly hit at the beginning were male-dominated sectors. In Spain 1.4 million jobs have been lost in construction and 800 thousand in the industrial sector since 2007. Therefore, for many mass media and public opinion gender equality was being achieved, just because the gender gap in unemployment rates was closing down.

These misguided interpretations of gender equality have contributed to consider this recession as a male recession and to lessen the interest in analyzing the gender impacts of the crisis, forgetting that economic crises and recessions have always differentiated effects on women and men because women occupy an unequal and unbalanced position in the labour market, the economy, time and work distribution and access to power and decision-making. If we apply a gender analysis to the impacts of the crisis and fiscal consolidation policies in Spain, we are able to distinguish differentiated outcomes for women and men.

At the beginning of the crisis, some stimuli measures were implemented. Not only the measures were not enough but they also lacked any gender analysis. Main measures were: (i) 8,000 million euro that went to municipalities under Plan E to finance mainly construction works -it is estimated that 426,195 persons were employed, though we do not even have this data available by gender-; (ii) subsidies to male dominated industries (car manufacturing). In fact, from mid-2009 to mid-2011 when the crisis spread to the entire Spanish economy, male and female unemployment rates started to go up at similar rates.

And since the third quarter of 2011, when the effects of austerity policies and structural reforms started to be noticed, the rise in unemployment accelerated with female unemployment rates have grown much faster. In fact, the gender gap in unemployment has again increased from a positive gender gap of 0.07 in the second quarter of 2012 to 2.48 in the third quarter of 2014, with a male unemployment rate of 22.5 and a female rate of 25 in 2014Q3 (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Unemployment rates by gender in Spain 2008Q1-2014Q3**



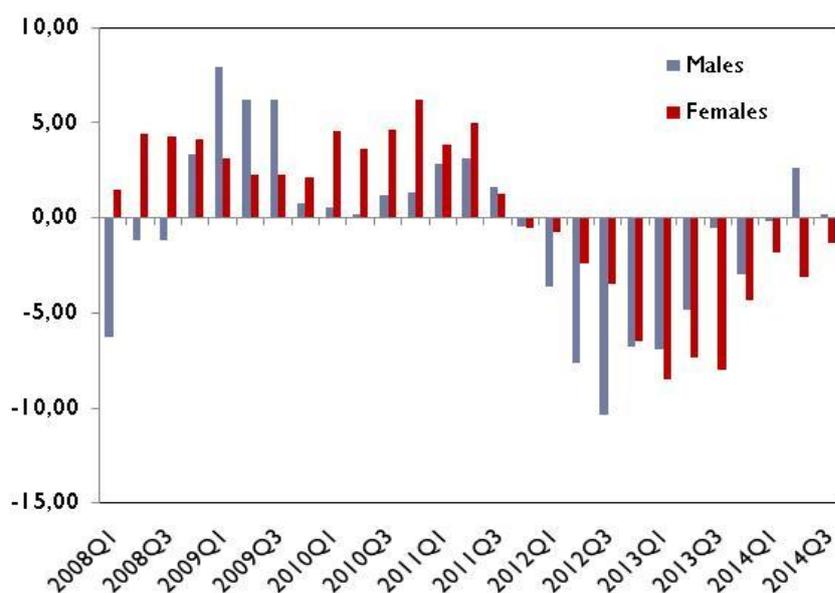
Source: Own elaborations based on data from Labour Force Survey.

In spring 2011, still under the socialist government Spain was forced by the troika (European Commission, ECB and IMF) into austerity measures. Austerity policies that have been implemented in Spain -and in other countries (Ortiz & Cummins, 2012)-, mainly since the conservative government won the elections in the winter of 2011, are:

1. Prioritizing fiscal balances over employment
2. Cuts in public services and employment
3. Elimination or reduction of subsidies
4. Wage cuts, including the salaries of education, health and other public sector workers
5. Increasing consumption taxes, such as value added taxes (VATs), on basic products that are disproportionately consumed by poor households
6. Pension and healthcare reform
7. Rationalizing and further targeting of safety nets
8. Labour reforms: less bargaining power of workers, collective agreements and trade unions, collective dismissals
9. Local administration reform

The current austerity agenda and programme of deep spending cuts has left women facing a 'triple jeopardy' of cuts to jobs, benefits and vital services: women make up 55% of the public sector workforce, so cuts to this sector are hitting them harder (Figure 2); caps and cuts to benefits and tax credits such as housing benefit and carers allowance hitting women disproportionately hard; and, rolling back public services also affects women disproportionately as they the main complementary carers and natural substitutes for formal care.

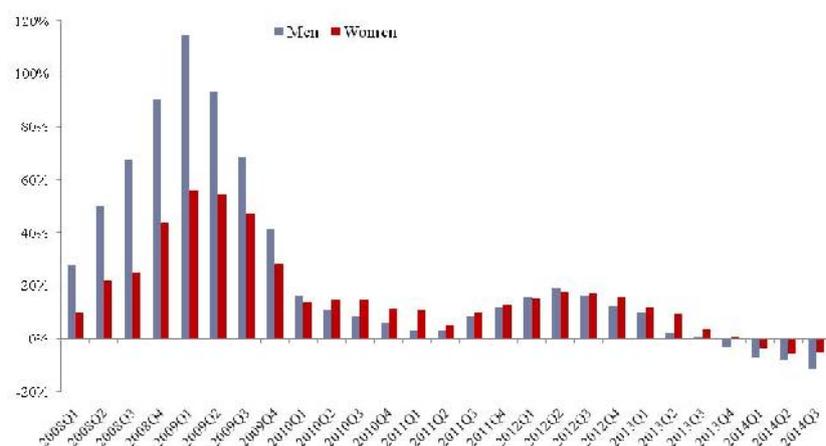
**Figure 2. Interannual variation in public employment by gender in Spain, 2008 Q1-2014 Q3**



Source: Own elaborations based on data from Labour Force Survey.

Thus, female employment tend to recover later from economic crises due to (i) these more negative effects of austerity policies on female-dominated sectors, such as social services, education or health (ii) the "gender-blind" expansionary policies, and (iii) a still higher "social tolerance" to female unemployment. Since its maximum level in the first quarter of 2013, unemployment has decreased in 564,900 males and only 285,700 females (Figure 3). One of the most negative impacts on women's employment has been caused by the huge drop in public employment from 2011 exceeding the fall in employment in the private sector, as three out of four public jobs destroyed were occupied by women.

**Figure 3. Interannual variation in unemployed population by gender in Spain, 2008Q1-2014Q3.**

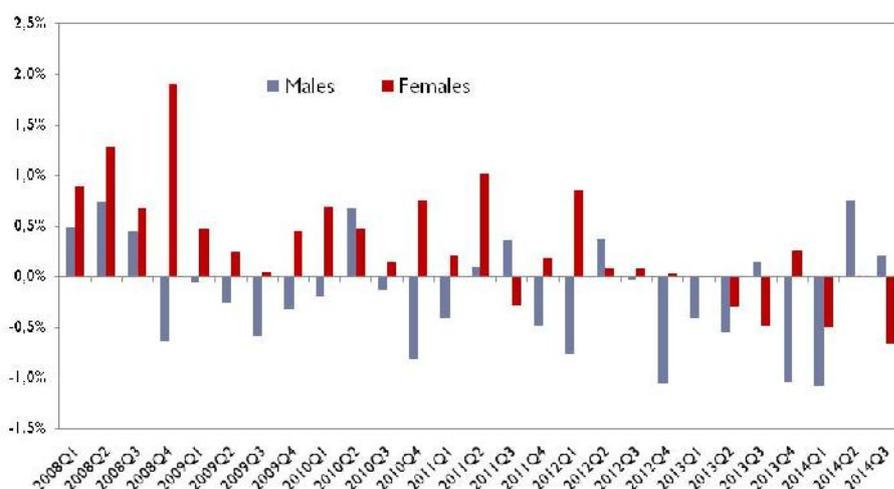


Source: Own elaborations based on data from Labour Force Survey.

Also, women's opportunities to find a job are often reduced after a crisis since economic crises usually increase the needs for a family provision of goods and services as they are not any longer provided by the State due to public budget cuts or because they cannot be purchased in the market due to the deterioration of households' incomes. This intensification of unpaid domestic and care work falls on women because of the still uneven distribution of care responsibilities between men and women, reducing women's opportunities to go out from unemployment. Employment population in Spain has started to increase since the second quarter of 2013, but more for men than for women, as it happened in other countries (such as USA or the UK) that had previously left behind the recession. The number of employed people in Spain has increased by 440,300 men in the last two quarters of 2013, while only by 113,100 women.

Therefore, we may be going back to a labour market that pushes out women, or at least some groups of women, when there are labour shortages. If we analyze by gender the evolution of Spanish labour supply, we find a completely different behaviour for men and women. While male inactivity has been falling since the beginning of the crisis due to a discouraged worker effect caused by the high and increasing unemployment, female labour participation went up till the end of 2012. This added worker effect for women affected mainly over 50 years-old married women whose husbands had become unemployed. However, in 2013 we started to see a turning point, with more women than men going from activity to inactivity. In 2014, 69.4 thousand women left the workforce while 117 thousand men entered the labour force (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Variation last quarter in active population by gender in Spain, 2008Q1-2014Q3.**



Source: Own elaborations based on data from Labour Force Survey.

Finally, women tend to go out from a crisis with more precarious contracts. Although labour reforms and public budget cuts under this recession are leading us to a radical change in the social model and in the job market, with increased precariousness for both women and men, the over-representation of women in short-term contracts and part-time jobs with low pay and poor conditions place them in a position of even greater disadvantage. Part-time jobs have increased from 10.9% in 2007 to 14.9% in 2014. In Spain, 70 percent are involuntary part-timers, thus we can consider it underemployment. Though part-time contracts for men are increasing very quickly, 72 per cent of part-timers are women. So, in this new model of "flexi-insecurity" for everybody, women may be trapped in the growing categories of underemployed, working poor or at-risk-of-poverty.

These distinct features by gender do not only show that men and women are suffering the effects of this recession in different ways, they also remind us that progress towards gender equality is not an unstoppable force and we can see steps back in gender equality. In fact, the Ministry for Equality was suppressed, the Spanish budget for gender equality has dropped by 2.4 times (Table 1), and the Institute for Women has become the Institute for Equality in general.

**Table 1. Budget for gender equality policies in Spain (2008-2014)**

	<b>Budget (thousands euro)</b>	<b>Annual Variation (%)</b>
2008	43,240	2.3
2009	37,697	-12.82
2010	33,597	-10.88
2011	31,160	-7.25
2012	24,970	-19.86
2013	18,952	-24.10
2014	19,073	+0.64

Source: Own elaborations based on data from Ministry of Finance and Public Administration.

Therefore, progress in gender equality experienced for the last decades in Spain has been seriously paralyzed and female labour participation is taking place under unsustainable conditions, since it is very easy during such a long recessionary period to reformulate the rules-of-the-game and gender norms, creating a new sexual division of labour, even more segregated and unequal than before. In a context characterized by the promotion of individual responsibility, the re-privatization of care and a feminized "precariat", gender stereotypes are being reinforced and we are heading to a new "old" gender order in which women will be sent totally or partially back home under a gender re-segregation of employment.

But we have alternatives to neo-liberal responses to the crises. Fighting inequalities, including gender inequality, should be central to economic and social policies. If we want to avoid a huge setback in women's position in the labour market, in the family and society, it is essential to take into account that economic crises and policies implemented have unequal effects on women and men. We must stop deflationary policies and credit squeeze and propose a new order and international regulation of financial markets, introduction of global taxes to finance global public goods, the cancellation of the debt, fair trade, and the implementation of limits to free trade and capital flows.