

# “AN EBBING TIDE LOWERS ALL BOATS”

## HOW THE GREAT RECESSION OF 2008 HAS AFFECTED MEN AND WOMEN IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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In this paper we explore the impact of the economic recession of 2008 on gender inequality in the labor force in Central and Eastern European countries. We argue that job and occupational segregation protected women's employment more than men's in the CEE region as well, but unlike in more developed capitalist economies, women's level of labor force participation declined and their rates of poverty increased during the crisis years. We also explore gender differences in opinions on the impact of the recession on people's job satisfaction. For our analysis we use published data from EUROSTAT and our own calculations from EU SILC and ESS 2010.

*Keywords:* Economic crisis, CEE countries, Gender, Employment, Poverty.

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The Great Recession of 2008 was the second major economic downturn which has devastated the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in the past quarter of a century. The first one after the fall of the communist regimes forced economic insecurity on a sizeable portion of the population. The second has exposed even more vulnerabilities, more cutbacks in social spending, a rise in joblessness and substantial deprivation. But the harsh consequences of the two crises have not been distributed equally: class and race inequalities have increased in each post-state socialist society, especially immediately after 1990 and then again since the beginning of the Great Recession.

In this paper we examine the differential impact of the economic crisis on the working lives of men and women in the post-socialist “periphery” of the European Union. Feminist observers had expected gender inequalities to rise sharply after 1990. Indeed, women’s employment chances did deteriorate, while their risk of joblessness and poverty did multiply. However, there is little documented evidence available for a systematic increase in overall gender inequalities in the labor markets of post-socialist societies. Did this change after the Great Recession of 2008? Did the economic crisis have specifically gendered consequences in Central and Eastern Europe? Researchers have found a leveling down process when examining the European Union overall: while the position of women has remained more or less stable, men have lost jobs at a higher rate, so the gender gap has narrowed (Bettio *et al.*, 2012). After a careful examination of the data we argue that a different picture emerges in CEE countries: here women also lost ground economically, if not to the same extent as men. This means that while the gender gap narrowed in Central and Eastern Europe as well, the difference between the employment and poverty rates of women in core and peripheral societies increased. The crisis has thus led to a diversification in women’s life experiences. There has been a divergence between the more and less developed parts of the continent – at least among women. This is indeed a form of inequality, namely inequality among women, even if this is less than inequality between women and men.

In addition, we test the hypotheses developed to explain the impact of economic crises on gender relations and we find support for the existence of a “silver lining” in job segregation: i.e. the fact that job segregation may provide protection for women in economic downturn. We find this to be valid in CEE countries, perhaps even more so than elsewhere. But other factors are also at play. Job segregation itself does not fully explain the variation across countries in how women have been affected. Other factors such as welfare measures, parental leave practices as well as the structure of the labor market are also important. This assumption fully coincides with Rubery’s and Rafferty’s recent statement that “... the gendered impact of a recession will not be the same across time and space as differences can be expected in women’s relative position in the labor market or welfare system linked to varying

degrees of attachment to employment and varying social norms and household arrangements.” (Rubery and Rafferty, 2013:2). Finally, we explore the gendered differences in people’s experience of the crisis and show that men have tended to suffer cutbacks and vulnerabilities more than women in both parts of the continent.

In the next section of this chapter we consider the reasons why CEE countries may exhibit different trends in gender inequality, compared to more developed regions of the European Union. Then we proceed to put forward our argument in three sections, addressing: i) the gender differences in job losses and destitution in the CEE, as compared to “Western” Europe<sup>1</sup>; ii) the impact of job segregation as well as other possible factors which may explain variations within CEE; and iii) gender and regional differences in people’s experience of the crisis. We conclude with a discussion of our findings and some suggestions for further analysis.

## 1. Why the CEE countries?

The countries of Central and Eastern Europe exhibit patterns which are different in a number of ways to those observed in historically capitalist societies. These include: i) women’s participation in paid work, ii) in mainstream ideological commitments to gender equality, and iii) the practices and consequences of mothering on women’s participation in public life. There are at least two broad reasons for these differences. On the one hand, the legacy of state socialism is still an important factor shaping certain social processes in these countries, gender relations being an important example. This legacy is not uniform: state socialist societies were quite different even before 1990. However, they did share a commitment to women’s emancipation in a rather narrow sense and started promoting this idea well before women started to enter the labor market in developed capitalist countries. The main pillar of the emancipation campaign was women’s full employment, a response to the permanent and urgent demand for cheap labor

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1. We use the term “Western” Europe, and the “West” with a capital “W”, or in quotation marks to indicate that we do not simply mean a geographical location but rather a concept, i.e. the “core” or more developed countries within the European Union. This also suggests that we are aware of the value connotations associated with the concept of the “West” and invoked in both parts of the continent when discussing geopolitical divides. For further explanations see Melegh, 2006.

in the socialist economy. In the 1960s, however, a pattern of lengthy parental leave was introduced, which is still part of legislation in many CEE countries. Full-time employment and long parental leaves made the work-life balance feasible and the social norm for most women across the region. This history is thus meaningful for at least the current generation of women.

Secondly, the post-socialist region has been partially integrated into the European Union but even countries, which are members of the EU, operate on the peripheries of the European geopolitical space. This peripheral status has a direct impact on all areas of life including the economy, the labor market, the structure of social inequalities, etc. It has important consequences for gender relations too, as studies on migration, on women's work in multinational factories, and on welfare state retrenchment have demonstrated. These two factors – the history of state socialism and life in the peripheries of an economic system – shape the experience of everyday life for the populations of these countries and impacts gender relations in meaningful ways. Below we review the legacy of state socialism briefly, and later show how the peripheral position of the CEE countries is being reinforced through subtly-changing gender inequalities brought on by the economic crisis of 2008.

## 2. State socialism and its collapse

As early as the 1940s, state socialist policy-makers introduced a vast array of social policies which were supposed to bring gender equality and women's emancipation to CEE countries in the not-so-distant future. These policies encouraged and occasionally forced women to enter the labor market and participate in public life (Haney 2002; Kligman 1992; Weiner 2007). Indeed, by the early 1980s, most women expected to spend their lives in paid work, working full time, throughout their adult lives, perhaps interspersed with short breaks for raising children. Inequalities in and outside the labor market remained, but women's full time participation in wage-labor increased until 1989. Their contributions to family budgets soon became significant, and by the 1980s their chances of making it at least into middle level managerial positions exceeded that of women living in comparable non-

socialist countries. Mainstream official gender ideology promoted the importance of women's contributions to economic growth and political life, while simultaneously also constructing women as mothers and carers of children and the elderly (Fodor 2002). Lengthy parental leaves were introduced in the late 1960s in most of the CEE countries, and women indeed withdrew from the labor force for long periods after childbirth. This, however, was less "costly" in a state socialist economy which was characterized by a shortage of labor rather than unemployment. Even if returning after 5 years on parental leave, women with small children could easily find work before 1989.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall much of this has changed. From the point of view of the research here, a steep decline in employment levels is the most important issue (Einhorn 1993, Funk and Mueller 1993, Gal and Kligman 2000). Figure 1 below demonstrates these trends in eight post-socialist societies: a sharp drop in employment between 1990 and the mid-1990s was followed by varying degrees of growth in most countries.<sup>2</sup> The figure below also reveals profound differences among countries. Hungary performed worst with a vast drop in employment and very little improvement since, while the decline was smaller and gains came faster, for example, in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, or Slovenia.

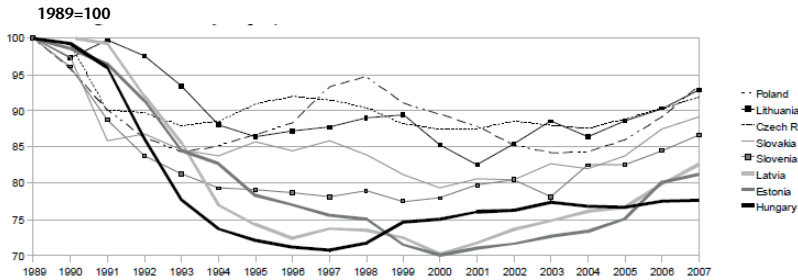
Scharle has pointed out three basic reasons for the low employment level of both men and women after 1990, in all post-socialist countries: "the compressed wage structure of the pre-transition era, the transitional shock, and the policy response to the shock" (Scharle, 2012: 180). She has also emphasised that the rapid privatization process in Estonia, Hungary and Latvia contributed to the huge and permanent loss in employment (see Figure 1 above). The process of privatization and thus the shift to a market principle was slower or timed differently in the other countries, which

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2. All through the paper we explore employment rather than unemployment rates. We made this choice as most statistics are based on self-classification and we expect women to classify themselves as "homemakers" rather than "unemployed" when this choice is possible, while men will most likely opt to do the opposite. Therefore, unemployment rates themselves reflect a gendered understanding of social expectations, which we avoid when we study employment rates only. Moreover, instead of unemployment, inactivity has always been a serious and widespread phenomenon in most post socialist countries. This has several reasons, from the high female enrollment rate in higher education to the trap of lengthy parental leave schemes, as discussed below.

may explain some of the differences in the rate of job loss. The three countries noted above could not recover before the 2008 crisis started. According to Scharle, the low employment level was maintained by the high percentage of unskilled people in all post-socialist countries.

Figure 1. Level of employment in accession countries



Sources: for 1989-1995: ILO (2011) ; for 1996-2007: Eurostat on-line database (LFS employment, population aged 15-64 ; Scharle, 2012: 184.

One of the consequences of the disappearance of jobs was the emergence of extreme destitution and deprivation. Statistics on poverty and social inequality are hard to find and notoriously unreliable for the state socialist period. However, all observers agree that the rate of poverty increased, with certain groups being particularly affected: especially those who belong to underprivileged ethnic minorities, who have low levels of education, and/or who live in rural regions (Emigh and Szelenyi, 2001). The threat of permanent hopeless poverty has had consequences not only for people's own health and life chances but also for society, the social fabric, solidarity at large.

Researchers generally assumed that women would be disproportionately disadvantaged by the economic crisis that followed the collapse of the state socialist economic and social systems (Einhorn, 1993; Funk and Mueller, 1993). Feminist authors identified a "back-to-the-kitchen" type of revival of domesticity, growing discrimination against women, a decline in the provision of social services, including childcare facilities, and an increase in the time employers expected workers to spend on the job. On the basis of these, many scholars expected an overwhelming increase

in labor market gender inequality: women were seen as the ultimate losers of the transforming economies.

Yet overall, women did not seem to have lost more ground in the paid labor force than men. For example, Fodor (1997) found that in at least some of the Central European countries gender was not a significant predictor of unemployment, net of other factors. She argued that skills which had been more typical of women protected them in these countries, including: language skills, high school education as opposed to specialized vocational training, as well as experience in service sectors jobs which had been devalued, poorly paid and thus feminized under socialism. But these skills subsequently became more useful in a service-oriented, globalizing economy. Glass (2008) reproduced these results using somewhat different indicators, and argued that not gender alone but parental status became a major disadvantage in the labor market especially for women. Lippe and Fodor (1998) reviewing a broader range of labor market indicators – such as the wage gap, job segregation, and access to authority – showed little increase in gender inequality in Central and Eastern Europe.

The labor market situation of women no doubt worsened after 1989 (Matland and Montgomery, 2003; Pascall and Kwak, 2005; Weiner, 2007). Many women were forced to leave the labor force, although, unlike men, instead of being unemployed they often went on parental leave or into early retirement at least in the countries where this option was available.<sup>3</sup> Examining this period, researchers noted the paradoxical situation where fewer and fewer children were born (in Hungary, for example) yet more and more women stayed on child-related leave, as new types of entitlements were also introduced (Frey, 1997). The rate of poverty among women and especially single mothers and female single pensioners increased. The real value of a number of social welfare payments decreased while most CEE countries experienced some forms of “re-familization” of care, exactly at the same time when the opposite tendency was taking hold in the “West” (Saxonberg-Sirovatka, 2006). Time budget surveys underline the existence of high levels of inequalities in the domestic division of labor (Bukodi; 2005,

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3. Even in the early years following change of the system the official retirement age threshold was quite low in many post-socialist countries: 55 years for women and 60 years for men.

Falussy, 2002). The already-existing trend that women with small children withdrew from the labor force for lengthy periods of time in some CEE countries, such as Hungary, Poland, Slovakia or the Czech Republic intensified and was also supported by the emergence of rather conservative gender role attitudes (Křížková *et al.*, 2010). Some authors also called attention to the backlash due to what was seen as an “unholy alliance” between women and the state (Gal and Kligman, 2000), referring to the argument that the socialist state provided more undeserved blanket support for women than for men. Yet, while women suffered great losses during the transition from state socialism, so did men and gender inequality may not have increased systematically or to the extent expected.

This should not have come as a surprise. Historical research had long pointed out that the deeply entrenched practice and ideology of job segregation may protect women from becoming the “reserve army of labor” in certain types of economic crises, for example, in the Great Depression (Milkman, 1976; Rubery, 1988). This was so, because women occupied positions in segments of the economy, such as the service sector, which were less effected by the crisis. Also, they tended to do jobs, for example in accounting, human resource management, secretarial help, teaching, etc., which were indispensable even for crisis-effected industries. This may not be the case in every economic crisis as contexts vary: for example, when women’s employment is concentrated in export-oriented production and when the crisis affects investment in this area, women are the first to lose their jobs (Seguino, 2000; Razavi, Pearson and Danloy, 2004). In addition, crises often mean austerity measures and a change in the care economy, which may impact a family’s survival strategy and could mean a heavier domestic work load for women (EWL, 2012).

But job segregation did, to some extent, protect women’s labor market position after the fall of state socialism. In 1990, although manufacturing jobs contracted this was accompanied by a veritable boom in the service industries, for example in banking, finance, hotels and tourism, etc. People with skills associated with these occupations (language skills, administrative experience, “people skills”, etc.) were in demand, while those with more technically oriented knowledge lost their attractiveness to employers.



Women were more likely than men to have gained these skills under state socialism. In addition, women had accumulated work experience in the public sector (for example, in education, health care or public administration), which gave them more protection than private enterprises. As discussed by Rubery, although a relatively higher proportion of professional positions had been available to women in health care and education in the Central and Eastern European countries than in the Western world, these jobs had also been particularly badly paid there. This means that women in public service occupations in general received very low pay in the “Eastern bloc” (Rubery, 2013). Obviously, the segmented labor market both protected and limited women in their careers and the metaphors of the “glass wall” and the “glass ceiling” have been applicable in the CEE context as well (Nagy, 2012). It should also be noted that certain groups of women, such as mothers with small children, ethnic minorities or older women did find themselves at a particular disadvantage in the 1990s, once the protection offered by socialist states was removed and discrimination became widespread (Glass, 2008).

### 3. The crisis of 2008

The first economic crisis in 1990 in the region had severe consequences for both men and women, but as most of the CEE countries started to recover from the shock of the collapse of state socialism, a new recession hit their labor markets. In the remaining part of this section we examine the impact of this second crisis while bearing in mind comparisons to the previous one.

Researchers have proposed three major hypotheses about women’s relative (dis)advantage in times of economic downturn (Milkman, 1976; Rubery, 1988; EP, 2011). Some scholars expect women to be especially badly affected: women are assumed to be the first to be dismissed and the last to be rehired in case of a shortage of employment, as women’s labor market position is very vulnerable. The phenomenon is often labeled as the “buffer” hypothesis (Rubery, 1988), or the marginality effect (EP, 2011), or women are even positioned as a “reserve army of labor” (Milkman 1976). Women are viewed as marginal in the labor market, less senior than men in most cases, their income is not considered vital

for the family budget and thus they are seen as expendable, a true “reserve army of labor”. Alternatively, other commentators suggest that women may not be especially vulnerable in times of economic crisis as they are protected by the existence of job segregation (segmentation hypothesis). This is the “silver lining” of job segregation, which nevertheless is the main reason behind the wage / pension gaps and much gender inequality observed otherwise. Yet if women occupy positions which are less severely affected in a shrinking labor market, they will do better than men and employers will keep employing women rather than switching to hiring men, especially when women are cheaper, and seen as more docile employees. This is called the “substitution hypothesis” (Rubery, 1988), or the strength-in-weakness effect (EP, 2011). Below we examine the data on CEE countries in the light of these three approaches.

Indeed, the first reports on the economic crisis of 2008 (the largest since the Great Depression of 1929) support the applicability of the segmentation hypothesis, at least within the European Union and for the USA.<sup>4</sup> Bettio *et al.* (2012) note that gender inequality in the EU has declined after 2008 (see also UN Women, 2013). They add, however, that “[t]here has been a leveling down of gender gaps in employment, unemployment, wages and poverty over the crisis. This however does not reflect progress in gender equality as it is based on lower rates of employment, higher rates of unemployment and reduced earnings for both men and women.” (Bettio *et al.*, 2012: 8). The explanation for this may again be found in job segregation: in countries where segregation is stronger, women’s disadvantage compared to men is smaller. Does this apply for CEE countries too and if so, is there any variation among them? Below we use data from EUROSTAT as well as EU SILC 2008 and 2010, and the European Social Survey 2010 to describe the gender impact of the economic crisis on employment, poverty and its perception in CEE countries.

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4. The designation of the present crisis as “mancession” was widely used in the US in 2009. See Baxter, 2009; Wall, 2009; *The Economist*, 2009. It described the situation that the recession first affected the male labor force.

#### 4. Leveling down or the stranding of all boats?

European Union statistical data show that East European men have been the main losers of the 2008 crisis: major job losses occurred in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, where men's employment rate dropped from around 75% to 64% (EC, 2012). In other CEE countries too, women were less likely to lose their employment than men (see the tables in the Appendix.) In this sense their experience of the economic crisis is not altogether different from women in more developed countries: gender inequality declined because men lost out more than women. But, unlike in most other EU countries, women in peripheral parts of the continent suffered greatly from the recession. Women's joblessness, poverty and material deprivation rates increased in all of the ten post-socialist EU member states.

Figure 2a above displays employment rates for women before and during the crisis years in core EU countries, in CEE countries and in the other peripheral countries of the EU (Spain, Ireland, Greece, Cyprus and Portugal).<sup>5</sup> In core countries, women's employment rate barely declined: it stood at 66.1% in 2007 and grew to 67.7% by 2012, never dropping below the 2007 level. This contrasts to men's job losses, but that was not specifically marked either. Men's employment rate (see Figure 2b) was 79.6% in 2007, but only 78% in 2012, with a 77.8% low in 2011.

The story is quite different in other regions of the EU. Women's employment rate declined steadily until 2010-11 and started to pick up a bit afterwards, but has not reached its pre-crisis levels by 2012. In 2008, women's average employment rate was about 64% in Central and Eastern Europe, which dropped to 61% by 2011.

Men's job losses were more severe: employment rates declined from over 76% in 2008 to 70% by 2010, with an increase starting in 2011, especially in the Baltic countries. No doubt, men suffered more job loss than women everywhere, but the contrast between women's experiences in "core" and "peripheral" countries is also pronounced. This is so especially if we examine the case of the "Southern" periphery of the EU separately. There the impact of the

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5. In terms of women's employment patterns and the huge employment losses, Ireland belongs more to the group of the "Southern" periphery than the core countries.

crisis has been especially heavily felt by both women and men: women’s employment rate had declined by almost 5 percentage points by 2012, while men’s dropped from over 80% to 69%: i.e., an 11 percentage point decrease.

Figure 2a. Women’s employment rates from 2007 to 2012 in three groups of countries

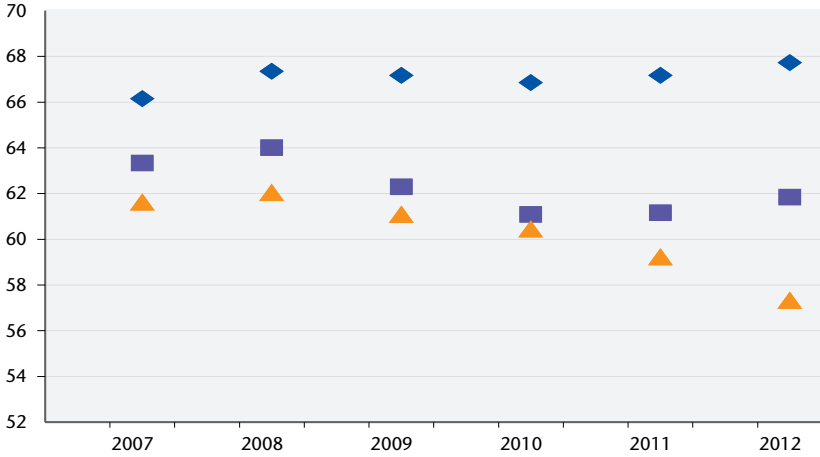
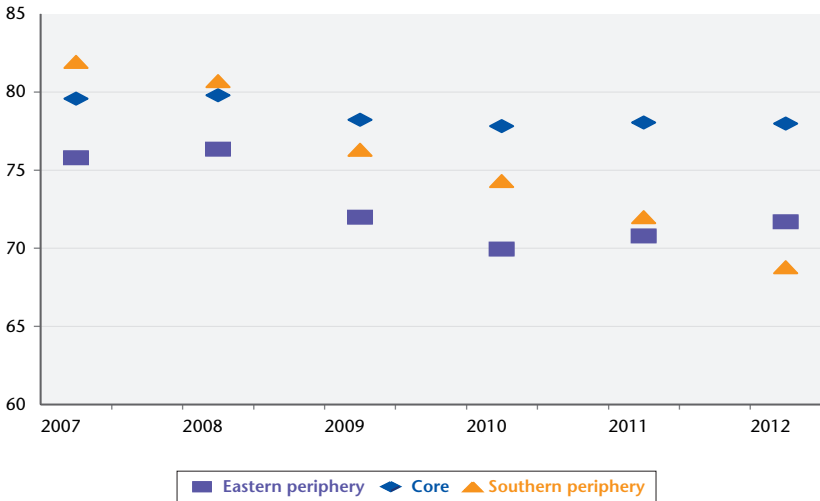


Figure 2b. Men’s employment rates from 2007 to 2012 in three groups of countries



Source: EUROSTAT.

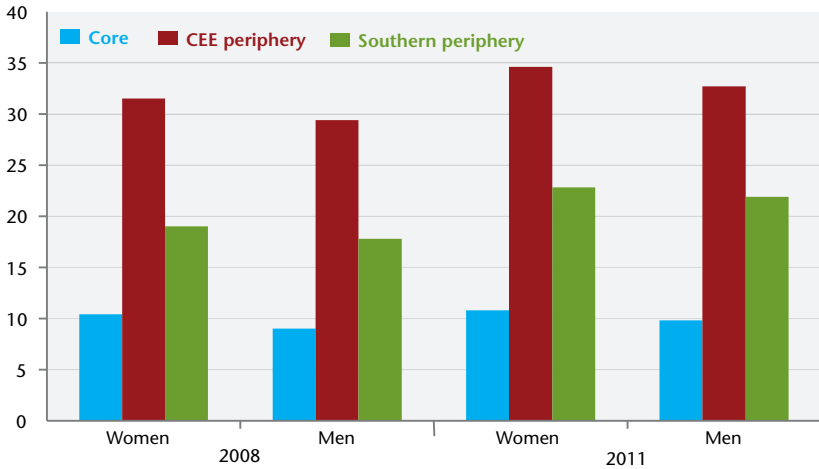
Both women and men in CEE countries suffered job loss, although men have borne more of the burden of the crisis than men in the core countries. In addition, the peripheral regions experienced more hardship than core countries, even though employment rates were already lower in the former, in 2007. Women's disadvantage in CEE countries declined somewhat compared to men, but the gap between their life chances and those of their counterparts in "Western" Europe grew wider. This is probably the most important point here: inequalities among women in core and peripheral countries are on the rise. This may have long term consequences for migration patterns, as women in poorer countries migrate to do care work in more developed regions – a phenomenon which can only exist if inequalities are large enough (Milkman, Reese and Roth, 1998; Bettio *et al.*, 2012). Indeed, recent Eurostat data on migration supports this claim.<sup>6</sup> A growing number of migrants left CEE countries for the Western part of Europe – out-migration is the lowest in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Hungary. However, both the target countries and the gender ratios were different across nations. For example, as is well known about 1.8 million Polish people migrated to European countries, particularly to the UK shortly after the EU accession. Although the process has slowed down, it is significant even today. Women and men from Romania and Bulgaria targeted mainly Germany and Spain to work in agriculture, whereas mainly women are welcome to work in household and in care work in Italy. The Baltic States made use of their closeness to the Nordic countries. Overall there has been a slight female surplus leaving for Western countries (though in the case of Norway, which is not an EU member, more men than women left the CEE countries). In sum, migration serves as a buffer in the depressed labor markets of CEE countries, but there is no evidence that this affected women or men more, as there is demand for low-skilled workers of both genders in West Europe.

Similar patterns may be observed when we look at rates of poverty and especially material deprivation (see Figure 3).

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6. We are grateful for Attila Melegh, who provided the Eurostat flow and stock migration data.

Figure 3. Rates of material deprivation: differences across regions and genders



Source: Eurostat, online, accessed March 1, 2013.

People who are classified as materially deprived live in extreme poverty and lack access to basic goods and resources. Overall, this type of poverty is significantly lower in “Western” Europe than in CEE countries or in the “Southern periphery”, and this gap has increased further during the recent crisis. In 2007 a little less than 10% of people in core countries lived in material deprivation according to EU surveys, as did 32% in CEE countries and about 20% in the “South”. But while in core countries neither women nor men were much more likely to end up in extreme poverty after the crisis, in Central and Eastern Europe both men and women have faced a higher chance of experiencing severe deprivation. Women’s rate of material deprivation grew from 32% to 34.5% in CEE countries and from 20% to 22.8% in the South. Thus while in the “West” researchers characterize the experience of the crisis as one of “leveling down”: i.e. gender gaps have diminished due to a weakening of men’s position while women’s social status stagnated, in the CEE countries both men and women suffered (and keep suffering) losses, even if men do so slightly more than women. This is not simply a leveling down, where one person’s position sinks to that of a lower group, it is a situation when everyone is experiencing a harder time and the gap between the different parts of the conti-

ment, especially between the job market opportunities of women in core and peripheral countries has widened. In CEE countries, financial cuts in the public sector have affected women's economic situation especially. As Rubery has put it: "This has led to a large rise in low paid public sector workers – for example in Hungary and Romania – many of whom are women. In the Baltic States the high share of performance pay facilitated widespread reductions in nominal pay that significantly reduced the pay premium in Latvia and Lithuania." (Rubery, 2013: 34).

Since in the first economic crisis in the early 1990s the most important losers were women with children, who were the most likely to lose paid employment. We examined how this group fared in the second economic downturn in the region. Researchers have found that in CEE countries with generous parental leave policies, women withdraw from the labor market for lengthy periods and have difficulty returning. In these countries, motherhood especially of young children has had a high impact on female employment (EC, 2012). Interestingly, however, in 2008 women with children did not do worse than those without, either in the CEE countries or in "Western" Europe. Using the 2008 and 2010 waves of the EU SILC database, we calculated self-declared employment rates for these two groups of women and found that the same patterns hold in both groups: women with children were not particularly disadvantaged in this case either in the "East" or the "West".<sup>7</sup> This is notable, as it is sharply different from what we found in the 1990 crisis. On average, fewer mothers of small children are in the labor market in CEE countries than in "Western" Europe, although those who are tend to work full time. This pattern forces women in CEE countries to choose either between a life oriented more towards mothering, or to following the full-time (male) worker model, as moving between the two is difficult and costly. This is certainly one of the reasons for labor market gender inequality in CEE countries, but we observed no change in this pattern. This may be because women with young children had already been excluded and discouraged from the labor market well before the present crisis. The employment of

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7. In this case respondents were asked to classify themselves as to what their economic status is (variable PL030, EU SILC 2010).

these women had already reached its lowest point earlier, due to the lack of opportunity for returning to employment, insufficient childcare facilities, a dysfunctional parental leave system, etc.

## 5. Variations in the degree and distribution of job losses across CEE countries

While the overall pattern is no doubt interesting, a more nuanced picture emerges from an examination of the differences across countries in employment losses. In this section we will focus more on the CEE region, and look at country-specific variations and their causes. Figure 4 describes the difference between the peak employment rate (in most cases in 2008) and the lowest rate (usually 2010) in each CEE country, separately for women and men. The average difference in the employment rate between the peak and the trough year is 3.6 percentage points for women and 7.3 percentage points for men. As noted above, men in the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) suffered the most from job loss within the EU. In Estonia and Latvia, men's employment rates were 13-15 percentage points lower in the depth of the crisis, compared to more prosperous times just two years earlier. Bulgaria is close to the Baltic group with a roughly 10 percentage point loss for men, while there is practically no change in men's employment level in the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary. Women's rates roughly follow men's: women in the Baltic States, where they experienced the most loss, followed by Bulgaria, then Slovakia and Slovenia. It should be noted that Romania is the only country according to Eurostat data where women's job losses were greater than men's.

Recovery has started after the trough years in most CEE countries. Figure 5 describes gains in the employment rate for men and women, compared to the lowest employment levels. On average, men's employment rate has climbed by 2.3 percentage points, and women's by 1.25 percentage points. This means that by 2012, the gender gap was still narrower than it was in 2008, but somewhat larger than in the trough year in between. This is so because men's employment losses were worse and while these are improving more rapidly than women's, by 2012 the difference had not reached its pre-recession level.



Figure 4. The difference between the highest and lowest employment rates between 2008 and 2012, aged 15-64

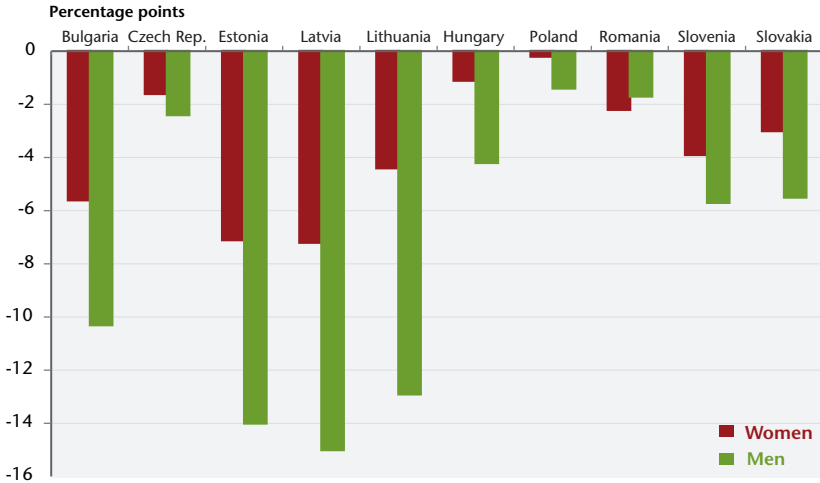
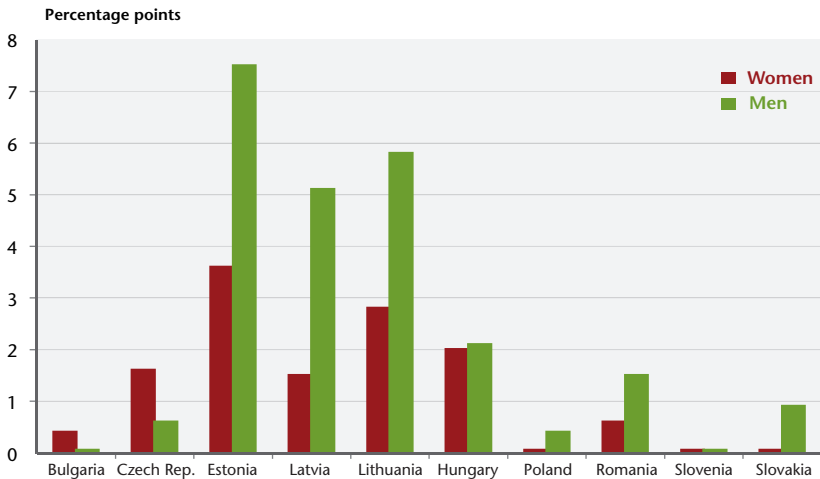


Figure 5. Recovery and improvement in employment rates between the trough year and 2012, for women and men



Source: EUROSTAT, accessed April 29, 2013.

It should be noted that in the Baltic countries, men’s employment gains have been significantly higher than women’s: men seem to be in a better position to recover from the crisis. This is in fact true for most of the countries, except the Czech Republic, where women have recovered faster. In Bulgaria, where job losses were significant, almost no improvement has started yet.

This suggests that the crisis is far from over in CEE countries. While the gender gap may have narrowed, men seem to recover faster and gain some of their jobs back. The gap between core and peripheral countries in terms of employment rates (or in the level of poverty and extreme poverty) has widened.

What might explain the cross-country variation in women's ability to retain employment in times of economic crisis? We turn to an examination of this question in the next section.

## 6. Explaining cross-country differences

There are a number of reasons why women may do worse in some countries than in others. Bettio *et al.* (2012) have found that the job segregation argument (described above) is applicable to the recent Great Recession as well. Specifically, they show that there is a positive correlation between the level of job segregation and the gender gap in employment losses: gender differences were larger (i.e., women fared better relative to men) in countries where occupational and sectoral segregation were more pronounced. Bettio *et al.* (2012) calculated a correlation coefficient of 0.50 for the relationship between sectoral segregation and the gender gap in employment loss for 2009. We made the same calculations for the CEE countries alone. Table 1 below summarizes the strength of the relationship between occupational/sectoral segregation, and gender differences in employment rate changes.

**Table 1. Correlation coefficients between different types of segregation and the male-female employment gap in two periods in CEE countries**

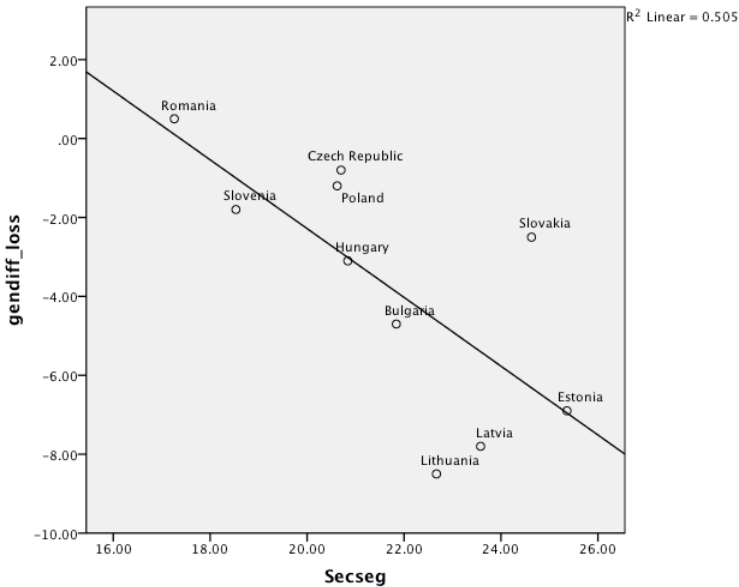
	Peak to trough period	Trough to 2012 period
Occupational segregation and employment gap	0.60	0.40
Sectoral segregation and the employment gap	0.71	0.67

Source: Fazekas and Scharle, 2012.

The correlation between sectoral segregation and the employment loss gap is 0.71 in CEE countries, much higher than what Bettio *et al.* found for the whole of the EU (0.5). This means that the relationship between sectoral segregation and men's employment disadvantage is higher in CEE than in Western European countries. The same is true for occupational segregation where

Bettio's coefficient of 0.40 contrasts to ours of 0.60. We also calculated correlation coefficients for the relationship between sectoral segregation and gender difference in employment rate recovery (thus for the years between the trough and 2012), and found that these are somewhat weaker relationships than those in the earlier period, in the CEE countries as well.

**Figure 6. Scatter plot showing the relationship between sectoral segregation and the gender gap in job loss (peak to trough period)**



Source: Bettio *et al.* 2012.

Figure 6 describes the strong relationship between the level of sectoral segregation and the gender gap in job losses. The vertical axis describes the gender gap in job losses – the percentage point difference between men's job losses and women's. The horizontal axis is a segregation index calculated for EU countries from Bettio *et al.* (2012). We note a strong correlation between the two variables: at higher rates of segregation, men's job losses are higher relative to those of women. But this figure also indicates that a linear regression line (or correlation coefficient) does not tell the whole story. Indeed, we observe a group that is quite different from the rest, namely the small Baltic States.

In Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, high levels of sectoral segregation go hand in hand with major job losses for all: relatively less for women, and a huge drop for men (EC, 2012: 31). These countries suffered the greatest decline in GDP during the crisis years among CEEs: more than twice as much as observed in Romania, the Czech Republic or Hungary, which were also deeply affected (IMF website).<sup>8</sup> Much of the decline was due to a sudden halt in foreign direct investment. This was experienced in other countries as well, but had a more dramatic impact in states which had relied heavily on foreign investment for their economic growth. In 2007, foreign direct investment stock amounted to over 70% of the GDP of Estonia. The flow of foreign capital into the country dropped to about half, from over 13% to about 7% of the GDP by 2009, dropping to less than 2% in 2011.<sup>9</sup> This occurred as GDP itself was in sharp decline. Foreign investment in Estonia created jobs for both men and women, albeit in different sectors. The sectors which contracted most sharply were manufacturing and construction, typically male-dominated fields, and this may explain some of the disadvantages men suffered after 2007. Similarly, as FDI investments bottomed out by 2009, Latvia and Lithuania (as well as Bulgaria, which is also heavily dependent on foreign capital) experienced severe labor market contractions, especially in sectors dominated by men. By 2012, however, the male employment rate had increased sharply in the three Baltic countries (but not in Bulgaria). Analysts celebrate the Baltic region's flexibility and "unique adjustment" in reacting to the financial shock (Purfield-Rosenberg, 2010), and emphasize that foreign investors, particularly parent banks, did not withdraw from these countries. This protected some female-dominated jobs during the crisis, and also helped the recovery. At the other end of the spectrum, women's advantage compared to men was much smaller in Romania or Slovenia. These countries have the least segregated labor markets, which did not protect women in times of an economic downturn, as evidenced by this data.

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8. A summary of the Baltic States' financial crises can be found on the IMF-blog: <http://blog-imfdirect.imf.org/2011/01/07/toughing-it-out-how-the-baltics-defied-predictions/>.

9. Eurostat, <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgmrefreshTableAction.do?tab=table&plugin=1&code=tec00046&language=en>, accessed April 2, 2013.

Segregation does not explain the whole story, however, and here we can only put forward to an exception to demonstrate this point. Slovakia is an interesting contrast to the Baltic States: its level of sectoral segregation is similarly high, yet women's advantage in the crisis was much smaller in this country, comparable to that of other CEE nations. Slovakia was also heavily impacted by the contraction of FDI investment flows, which dropped to zero by 2009 (from over 8% of GDP in 2006), but a different structure of investments may explain why women here were less protected. This suggests that sectoral segregation will have different consequences depending on the existing structure of the economy, which may be quite different.

## 7. Gender differences in the perceptions of the impact of the crisis

Previous analysis has pointed out men's subjective vulnerability in times of crises. "Men do report themselves as more affected by the crisis with more frequent complaints of heightened job insecurity, cuts in pay and having to accept less interesting work" (Bettio *et al.*, 2012 based on ESS 2010). This paper also presents the perceived differences not only between men and women, but also between the two parts of the European continent. We expect men in "Western" countries to complain more intensively about "softer issues", such as less interesting work. In contrast, we expect men in "Eastern" countries, where the decrease of employment started from a lower level, to stress "harder issues", such as reductions in pay and less job security.

Based on previous results, we expect men to express deeper dissatisfaction for at least two reasons. On the one hand, their employment figures decreased more considerably, which is an objective explanation for the more intensive complaints. On the other, we assume that according to the prevailing gender order, men are expected to be more attached to paid work even today than women. Thus work-related losses might cause higher rates in perceptions in general. This expectation may go back to the old sex-segregated models, which treat men's and women's commitment to employment differently, with a bias towards men. As Feldberg and Glenn emphasised in their classical work "[w]hile

analyses of men's relationship to employment concentrate on job-related features, most analyses of women's relationship to employment (which are rare by comparison) virtually ignore type of job and working conditions. When it is studied at all, women's relationship to employment is treated as derivative of personal characteristics and relationships to family situations." (Feldberg-Glenn, 1976: 526). Despite the time which has passed since this publication, sociological investigations repeatedly show evidence of these traditional and stereotypical gender expectations. (A good overview about the mechanisms is given by Ridgeway and Connell, 2004). This is particularly challenging in the CEE countries, where re-familization took place in the post-socialist era, as noted above. Thus, we presume that men in CEE countries will perceive the highest loss concerning paid employment.

The European Social Survey (ESS) 2010 contained four basic questions for measuring the perceptions of the economic crisis. The questions referred to the previous three years, thus the respondents were asked to compare the years before (2007) and after the crisis (2010). The questions were formulated in the following way: "Please tell me whether or not each of the following has happened to you in the last three years: I have had to do less interesting work? I have had to take a reduction in pay? I have had to work shorter hours? I have had less security in my job?"

**Table 2. Perceptions of the crisis**

Percentage of those having...

	"East"			"West"		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Less interesting work	33.7	27.8	30.7	30.8	25.1	28.1
Reduction in pay	26.1	22.6	24.3	23.4	19.8	21.7
Shorter hours	16.3	13.7	15.0	13.5	14.3	13.9
Less security	27.3	23.5	25.4	23.9	21.8	22.2

Source: ESS, 2010.

The most frequent problem interviewees noted was "less interesting work" (29% of all respondents mentioned this, see Table 2), followed by "less security" (24%), "reduction in pay" (23%), and finally "shorter working hours" (14%). Men in the "East" and "West" shared the fact that they more frequently reported a deterioration in their work-related status than women did.

The difference was about six percentage points between women and men: see, for example, the tables below on less interesting work.) Contrary to our expectations, slightly more Eastern than Western men (and women) complained of less interesting work. Every third man in the CEE countries noted that he had a less interesting job in the years of crisis.

The same tendency is observed in all the other cases: complaints about shorter working hours, reduction in pay and job security were more often emphasized by “Eastern” than “Western” men, and more often by men than women in general. Looked at from another angle, women complained less about bearing the employment-related burdens of the crisis.

The fact of (involuntary) shortened working hours was the softest issue among the above listed items, and here we can see that women in the core countries were relatively more often affected by this measure (Table 2, row 3). We also have to note that it was the least frequent complaint. We should not forget either that the CEE countries have hardly any part-time or flextime options in their employment systems. All this comparative data underlines the previous thesis regarding the economic and social losses of the crisis. Both the “objective” statistics and the “subjective” perceptions the same phenomena: first, men faced more serious labor market losses than women did in the period 2007-2010, and second, women in “Eastern” countries have been more vulnerable to the last crisis than their “Western” peers.

## 8. Conclusion

In the preceding analysis we have argued that comparing Central and East European countries to developed core industries is particularly useful to identify the gendered effects of the last economic crisis. As a starting point, we stated that many CEE countries still had not recovered from the transformation shock of the 1990s, when the present crisis started. We showed that although a levelling down process was clear in Eastern Europe as well, men’s worsening social and economic situation was paralleled by women’s deteriorating position. We thus conclude that the crisis has led to a situation in which “an ebbing tide strands all boats”.

We pointed to the increasing inequality between women in core and peripheral societies, and the somewhat decreasing inequality between East European women and East European men, in terms of employment, poverty and material deprivation, though at a lower level than previously existed. This shift was reflected in the perceived effects of the present crisis, too. Whereas “Western” women were hit more intensely by the austerity measures, and were not affected immediately by the first wave of the economic crisis, women on peripheries underwent a permanent employment crisis until 2011 (CEE countries), or even longer (“Southern” periphery). It is a special situation, which has not been elaborated in detail by previous analyses.

We have argued that the “silver lining” of job segregation has protected women in economic downturns in CEE countries, as it has in “Western” countries, and perhaps even more so. Still, job segregation does not explain all the variation among CEE countries: the Baltic States, which have a rather small population and strong gender segregation, have been particularly open to both economic boom and recession. Here, men have suffered huge losses, so it was a real “mancession”, but the recovery was faster for them, too. Slovakia, with a similarly high level of gender segregation, has had a different pattern, and less protection for women. Thus, the structure of economies and the functioning of welfare states might also explain the differences in national outcomes.

Further investigations are needed, however, to explore the effect of austerity measures on gender relations in the labor markets of core and (semi-)peripheral countries.

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## Appendix

**Table 1. Employment rates (women and men aged 20-64)  
in EU member states – 2005 and 2010**

	Women		Men		Gender gap	
	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010
<b>EU-27</b>	60	62.1	76	75.1	-16	-13
<b>Belgium</b>	58.6	61.6	74.3	73.5	-15.7	-11.9
<b>Bulgaria</b>	57.1	61.7	66.8	69.1	-9.7	-7.4
<b>Czech Republic</b>	61.3	60.9	80.1	79.6	-18.8	-18.7
<b>Denmark</b>	73.7	73.1	82.3	79	-8.6	-5.9
<b>Germany</b>	63.1	69.6	75.6	80.1	-12.5	-10.5
<b>Estonia</b>	69	65.7	75.4	67.7	-6.4	-2
<b>Ireland</b>	62.4	60.4	82.8	69.4	-20.4	-9
<b>Greece</b>	49.6	51.7	79.8	76.2	-30.2	-24.5
<b>Spain</b>	54.4	55.8	79.9	69.1	-25.5	-13.3
<b>France</b>	63.7	64.7	75.3	73.7	-11.6	-9
<b>Italy</b>	48.4	49.5	74.8	72.8	-26.4	-23.3
<b>Cyprus</b>	63.8	68.5	85.5	82.5	-21.7	-14
<b>Latvia</b>	65.7	64.9	75.4	65.1	-9.7	-0.2
<b>Lithuania</b>	66.6	65.1	74.9	63.6	-8.3	1.5
<b>Luxembourg</b>	58.4	62	79.4	79.2	-21	-17.2
<b>Hungary</b>	55.6	55	69.2	66	-13.6	-11
<b>Malta</b>	35.1	41.6	80.6	77.8	-45.5	-36.2
<b>Netherlands</b>	67.6	70.8	82.4	82.8	-14.8	-12
<b>Austria</b>	64.9	69.6	78.5	80.2	-13.6	-10.6
<b>Poland</b>	51.7	57.7	65.1	71.6	-13.4	-13.9
<b>Portugal</b>	66	65.6	78.7	75.4	-12.7	-9.8
<b>Romania</b>	56.9	55.9	70.4	70.8	-13.5	-14.9
<b>Slovenia</b>	66.2	66.5	75.8	74	-9.6	-7.5
<b>Slovakia</b>	56.7	57.4	72.5	71.9	-15.8	-14.5
<b>Finland</b>	70.8	71.5	75.1	74.5	-4.3	-3
<b>Sweden</b>	75.5	75.7	80.7	81.7	-5.2	-6
<b>United Kingdom</b>	68.5	67.9	82	79.3	-13.5	-11.4

Source: EC, 2012: 31.

**Table 2. Share of part-time workers in total employment  
(persons aged 15 and over) in EU member states – 2005 and 2010**

	Women		Men	
	2005	2010	2005	2010
EU-27	30.9	31.9	7.4	8.7
<b>Belgium</b>	40.5	42.3	7.6	9.0
<b>Czech Republic</b>	8.6	9.9	2.1	2.9
<b>Denmark</b>	33.0	39.0	12.7	15.2
<b>Germany</b>	43.8	45.5	7.8	9.7
<b>Estonia</b>	10.6	14.5	4.9	7.1
<b>Ireland</b>	31.8	34.7	6.4	11.8
<b>Greece</b>	9.3	10.4	2.3	3.7
<b>Spain</b>	24.2	23.2	4.5	5.4
<b>France</b>	30.3	30.1	5.8	6.7
<b>Italy</b>	25.6	29.0	4.6	5.5
<b>Cyprus</b>	14.0	12.7	5.0	6.5
<b>Latvia</b>	10.4	11.4	6.3	7.8
<b>Lithuania</b>	9.1	9.3	5.1	6.7
<b>Luxembourg</b>	38.2	36.0	2.5	4.0
<b>Hungary</b>	5.8	8.0	2.7	3.9
<b>Malta</b>	21.1	25.0	4.5	6.0
<b>Netherlands</b>	75.1	76.5	22.6	25.4
<b>Austria</b>	39.3	43.8	6.1	9.0
<b>Poland</b>	14.3	11.5	8.0	5.7
<b>Portugal</b>	16.2	15.5	7.0	8.2
<b>Romania</b>	10.5	11.4	10.0	10.6
<b>Slovenia</b>	11.1	14.7	7.2	8.6
<b>Slovakia</b>	4.1	5.4	1.3	2.8
<b>Finland</b>	18.6	19.6	9.2	10.0
<b>Sweden</b>	39.6	40.4	11.5	14.0
<b>United Kingdom</b>	42.6	43.3	10.4	12.6

Source: EC, 2012: 35.

**Table 3. Employment rates of men and women aged 25-49, depending on whether they have children (under 12) – 2010**

	Women			Men		
	Without children	With children	Gap	Without children	With children	Gap
EU-27	76.8	64.7	-12.1	81.0	89.7	8.7
Belgium	78.5	72.4	-6.1	83.0	91.4	8.4
Bulgaria	77.5	64.8	-12.6	76.7	83.0	6.3
Czech Republic	86.0	54.4	-31.6	88.6	95.5	6.9
Germany	83.8	64.5	-19.3	85.0	91.7	6.7
Estonia	81.9	62.6	-19.2	73.5	82.4	8.9
Ireland	76.0	57.2	-18.8	71.2	80.0	8.8
Greece	66.1	58.2	-7.8	82.1	93.0	11.0
Spain	68.1	60.1	-8.0	71.9	81.5	9.5
France	81.3	72.3	-9.0	83.7	91.7	8.0
Italy	62.7	54.7	-8.0	78.7	90.8	12.1
Cyprus	81.7	73.1	-8.6	85.2	93.9	8.7
Latvia	77.9	69.6	-8.4	69.6	81.0	11.3
Lithuania	78.2	74.9	-3.2	67.1	80.2	13.1
Luxembourg	78.8	69.4	-9.4	90.6	95.6	5.0
Hungary	78.2	49.3	-28.8	77.1	84.5	7.5
Malta	59.4	42.6	-16.7	86.4	94.9	8.5
Netherlands	82.8	78.2	-4.6	88.2	94.1	5.9
Austria	85.5	72.8	-12.7	87.6	92.7	5.1
Poland	78.6	66.8	-11.8	79.5	91.8	12.3
Portugal	76.5	74.6	-1.9	79.8	91.2	11.5
Romania	70.8	66.3	-4.5	80.0	86.5	6.5
Slovenia	83.0	84.9	1.9	81.9	94.1	12.2
Slovakia	80.4	53.7	-26.7	78.4	89.4	11.0
Finland	84.1	71.4	-12.7	80.6	92.4	11.8
United Kingdom	81.9	65.6	-16.3	83.0	90.5	7.5

Source: EC, 2012: 37.

**Table 4. Gender segregation in occupations and in economic sectors in EU member states – 2010**

	Gender segregation in occupations	Gender segregation in economic sectors
Belgium	25.4	19.5
Bulgaria	29.0	21.2
Czech Republic	28.3	20.9
Denmark	25.8	19.6
Germany	26.0	19.3
Estonia	30.7	25.7
Ireland	26.3	21.4
Greece	21.8	16.0
Spain	26.7	20.6
France	26.0	19.1
Italy	24.7	19.7
Cyprus	28.8	19.9
Latvia	28.2	24.5
Lithuania	28.8	21.9
Luxembourg	23.4	16.0
Hungary	27.8	20.9
Malta	23.7	16.0
Netherlands	25.0	19.4
Austria	25.9	19.3
Poland	26.1	20.6
Portugal	26.5	21.4
Romania	22.5	17.1
Slovenia	25.8	19.0
Slovakia	31.1	25.2
Finland	28.6	23.7
Sweden	26.1	21.6
United Kingdom	24.3	19.4

Source: EC, 2012: 38.