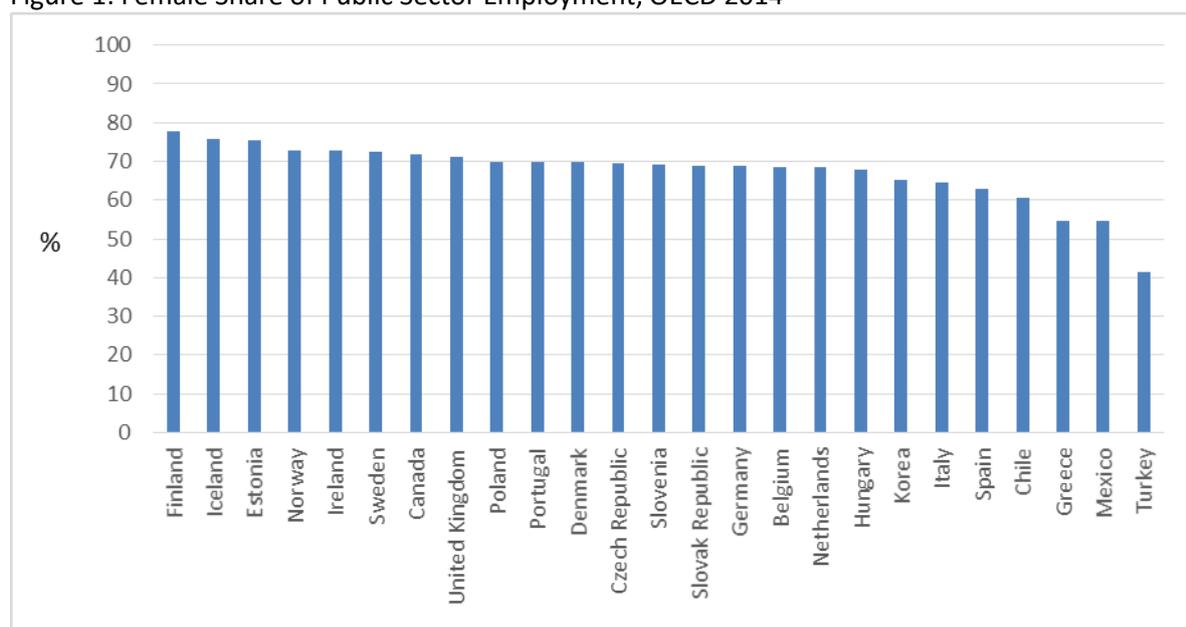


# Why the public sector matters for gender equality

Jill Rubery and Hugo Figueiredo

Women dominate public sector employment and public sector employment relations. Their share varies across countries but figure 1 shows that the female share ranges between 60% and 78% for 22 out of 25 OECD countries and only falls below half in Turkey. Women now outnumber men among trade union members in some countries and where that is the case, for example in the UK, it is largely down to the public sector.

Figure 1: Female Share of Public Sector Employment, OECD 2014



Source: OECD Annual Labour Force Statistics (stats.oecd.org, own calculations). Public sector employment refers to total employment in Public administration, Defence and Compulsory social security (ISIC Rev 4. O), Education (P) and Human health and social work activities (Q)

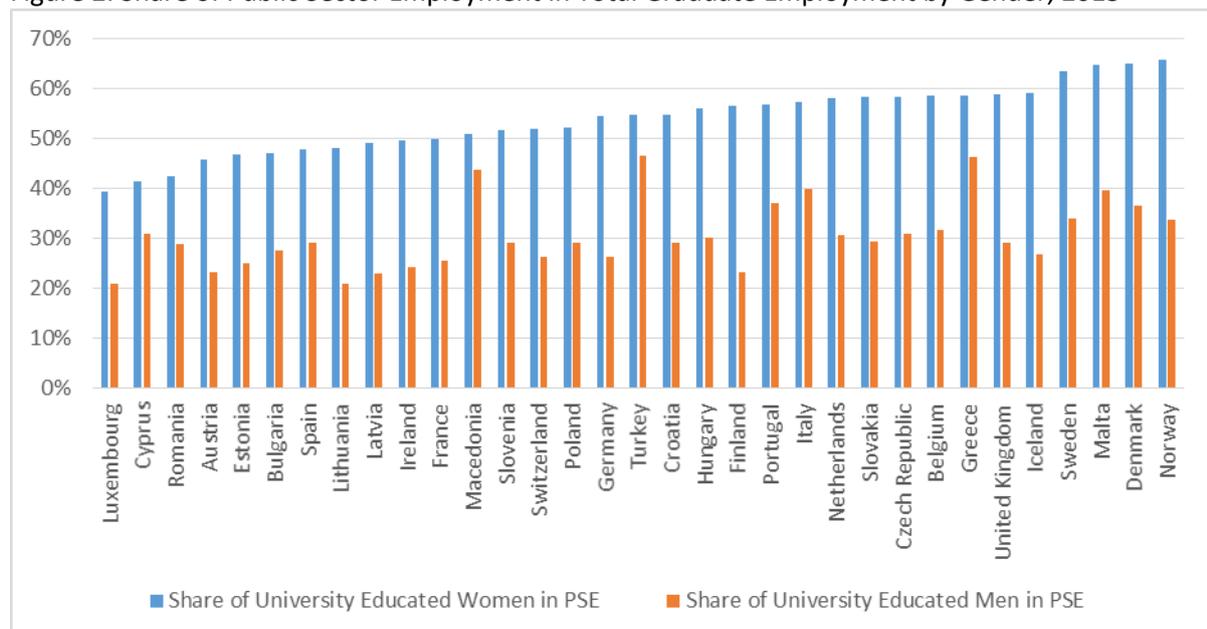
Public sector employment relations are thus primarily about women and women's employment but you would be hard pressed to glean this from any perusal of the literature on public sector industrial relations. I found it hard to track down references to women- even as the group most affected- by New Public Management (NPM) with the main exception a special issue in Gender, Work and Organisation (Conley et al. 2011). There has certainly been limited consideration of the possibility that feminisation of public services employment may have encouraged the emergence of NPM if women are considered perhaps easier targets for policies that aim to reduce autonomy and subject workers to more control over both work effort and labour costs. NPM could also be seen as a means of reducing what in some countries may be considered to be unnecessarily high wages, possibly reflective of a more male-dominated past. And there are still other types public services sectors with both a long history of both low pay and feminisation, primarily found in Eastern European countries, which also receive little attention.

Nor is there much interest in how NPM is actually implemented from a gender perspective; this can work in many different ways but for certain the ways will be gendered. For example, outsourcing may be skewed towards either male- or female-dominated job areas, or both, but the reasoning and expectations of the process will depend upon the gendered internal and external labour market conditions. Where the public sector pays women well above the external private sector rate,

outsourcing of women's job types may be encouraged. However, if men have succeeded in raising their pay within the public sector more than women, for example through favourable bonus schemes, they might be the more vulnerable to outsourcing. Again it depends on how organised the private sector is and what the alternative rates of pay might be (e.g. for example in Germany legal binding extended collective bargaining agreements were introduced for waste collection and commercial cleaning to reduce incentives to public sector outsourcing but the wage gap between the two sectors was also narrowed by the introduction of a new lower pay rate for public sector workers which mainly affected women (Grimshaw et al. 2015)). What is certain is that there will be gender differences both in the internal public sector pay level and in the implied external pay premiums which are likely to shape outsourcing policy.

This gender blindness also applies to current austerity policies: I was surprised and I have to say unconvinced to read in one recent article that the gender effects of public sector austerity were well known, more so than the wage bargaining effects, yet only my own book chapter (Rubery 2013) on the topic was cited, a paper written despite not because of available analyses of the gender impacts of public sector austerity (Bach and Bordagna 2013). Apart from doubting its widespread impact, it also has not had my intended desired effect; instead of inspiring more gender sensitive interrogations of public sector employment it seems to be providing a rationale for limiting further investigation. The need for more gender awareness is indicated by a recent analysis of varieties of service systems (Ansell and Gingrich 2013) designed to compensate for the almost sole focus on manufacturing in the varieties of capitalism literature. Here the argument is made that in countries without wage compression there will be a tendency for few graduates with high potential productivity to enter the public sector due to high gains to be made in the private sector. The fact that a high share of women enter the public sector in most OECD countries (see figure 2 where the share equals or exceeds half of all women with tertiary qualifications in 23 out of 33 countries). This suggests that reason for entering the public sector are not solely related to monetary factors or indeed underlying talent but may also have a gender dimension but this is not remarked upon or even thought about. So the blindness does not only affect the ILERA community but that does not lessen the problem.

Figure 2. Share of Public Sector Employment in Total Graduate Employment by Gender, 2015



Source: EULFS (own calculations). Data refers to employees only and those aged 15-64. Public sector employment is defined as NACEs Public administration, defence and compulsory social security, education, human health and social work activities.

To address why the public sector matters for gender equality we first establish some of the reasons for the centrality of the public sector for progressive gender equality objectives before in the final part turning to recent trends and policies to see what these may add up to as potential threats to future progress or even protecting the status quo. We posit five reasons why the public sector matters: as source of employment growth and integration, as a means for delivering a new social reproductive bargain that does not reinforce and exploit women's role in domestic labour, as a source of decent work for women, as a promoter of gender equality at the workplace and as source or space for alternative value systems that could support nurturing, care and community activities alongside but not under the control of or evaluated according to market principles.

### **Why the public sector matters for gender equality**

#### **1. The public sector and women's integration into wage work**

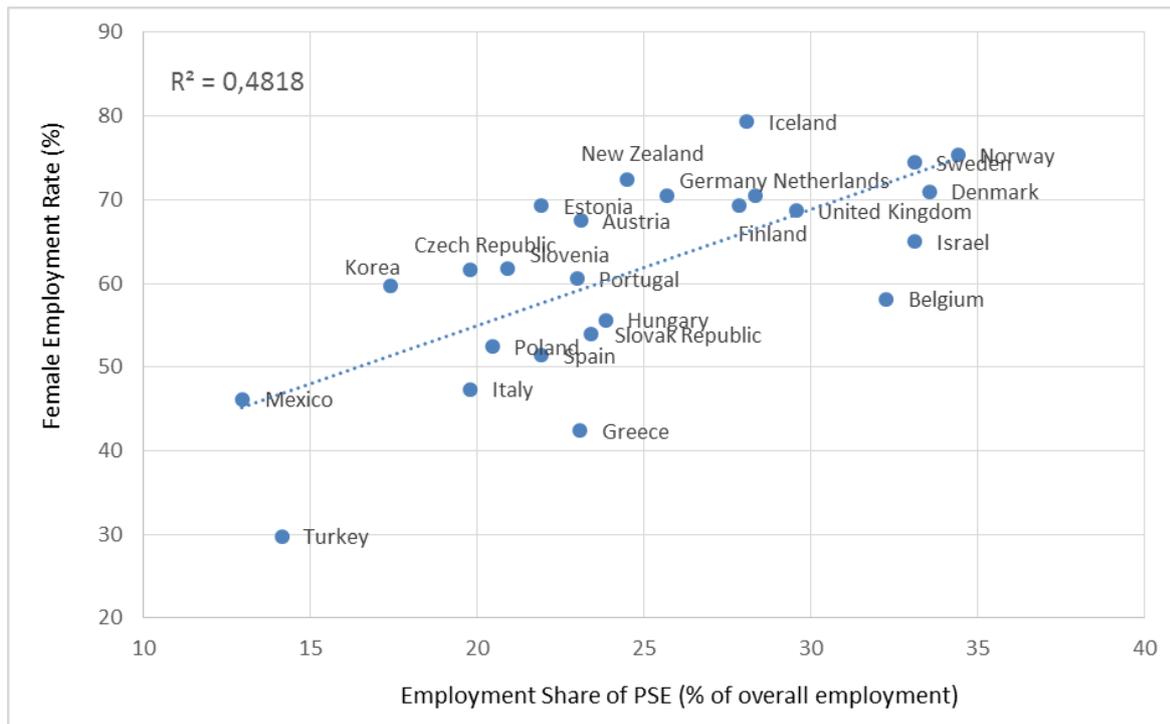
The role of the public sector as a key factor in explaining very divergent employment rates among OECD countries in the post war decades was clearly identified in Esping-Andersen's (1990) analysis of the historical development of varieties of welfare and employment systems. However, since this period women's employment has increased in most countries and some countries expected to generate few employment opportunities for women, such as Germany, now have relatively high female employment rates. Even some Southern European countries characterised by the Mediterranean family model of welfare have experienced high rates of female employment growth in the immediate decade before the financial crisis, for example Spain. A key issue is therefore whether the public sector still matters for generating a high female employment rate.

It is certainly the case that public services, defined here as public administration, education and health and social work, account for a much higher share of women's than of men's employment at the EU28 level- 40% to 15% (2015 data) and that public services accounted for 44% of all women's' job growth for the EU15 between 1995 and 2007, the pre crisis peak, compared to just 13% for men. The following figures (3 and 4) suggest that the size of the public services in total employment also matters at the European member state level as its correlation with women's employment rate is still considerably high ( $r=0.69$ ,  $R^2=0.48$ ), even if the correlation is lower than in the past<sup>1</sup> (Anghel et al.2011; Whitehouse 1992) and in comparison there is little correlation ( $r=0.23$ ;  $R^2=0.05$ ) with men's employment rate.

Figure 3. Public Sector Employment Share of Total Employment and Female Employment Rates, 2014

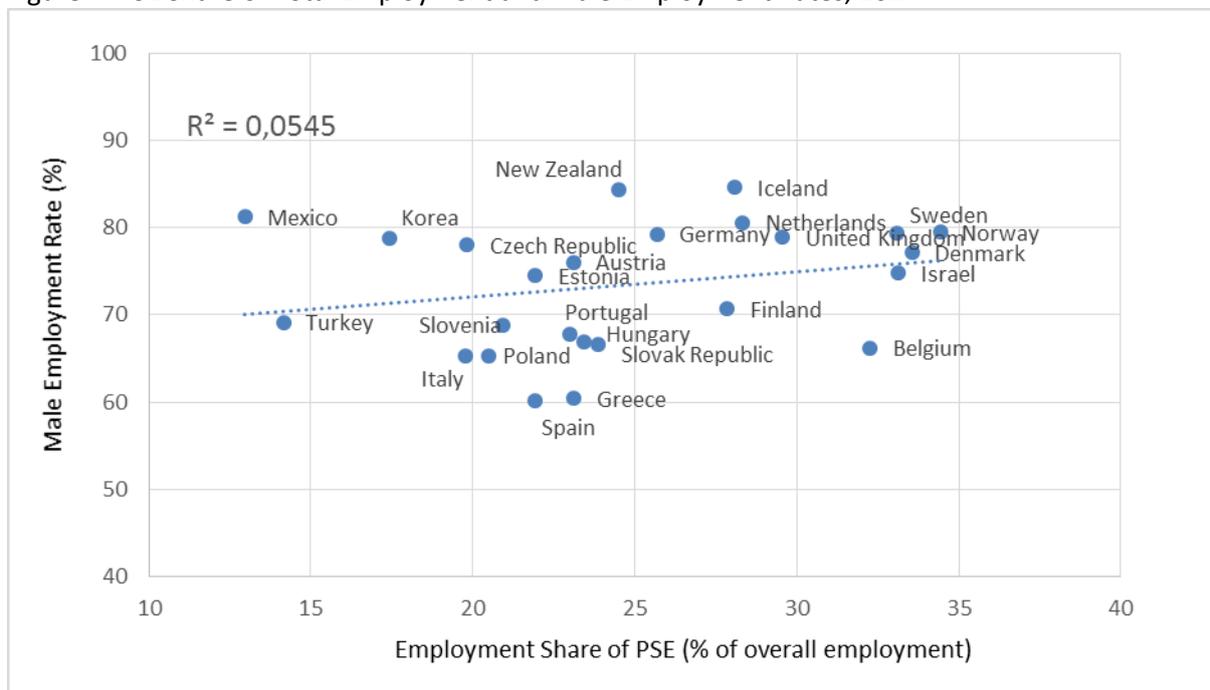
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<sup>1</sup> Anghel et al.'s (2011) data indicate a declining correlation between the female labour force participation rate with this time the female share of public services employment from 0.88 in 1995 to 0.50 in 2009



Source: OECD Annual Labour Force Statistics (stats.oecd.org, own calculations). Public sector employment refers to total employment in Public administration, Defence and Compulsory social security (ISIC Rev 4. O), Education (P) and Human health and social work activities (Q)

Figure 4. PSE Share of Total Employment and Male Employment Rates, 2014



Source: OECD Annual Labour Force Statistics (own calculations; data extracted from stats.oecd.org). Public sector employment refers to total employment in Public administration, Defence and Compulsory social security (ISIC Rev 4. O), Education (P) and Human health and social work activities (Q)

The reason for the correlation with female employment rates appears to be, according to the work of Mandel and others (for example Mandel and Shalev 2009), that a large public sector (or public services – depending on available data) together with the availability of public services is important

in generating employment opportunities for the lower or medium level educated (as well as offering services to facilitate their employment). In practice the employment rates of higher educated women are relatively similar across OECD/EU countries. Although the large public sector has been generally regarded as positive for women's integration, there has been a wide ranging debate on potential negative impacts (Mandel and Shalev 2009), arguably fuelled by evidence- also disputed (See Korpi et al.'s (2013) critique of Mandel's work) - that the large public sector in Sweden leads both to a high level of gender segregation and to restricting women's opportunities in the upper part of the private sector employment distribution. The mechanisms for the latter are unclear but can include both the public sector acting as too strong a draw on talented women because of the family friendly policies and employers in the private sector being reluctant to employ women in high level jobs due to the strong mandatory supports available for working mothers.

Trends in the role of the public sector post the financial crisis have become more mixed, for although they provided some protection for both women's and men's employment in the immediate financial crisis, under austerity job growth has slowed or even reversed. Overall in the EU28 between 2008-2015 men registered a modest overall increase in a context of an aggregate steep decline in employment while women's gain was larger and also exceeded overall net job growth.

## 2. Public sector and the 'new social reproduction bargain'

Public services are not only important for generating employment demand for women workers but also in facilitating women's access to employment in general. Ruth Pearson (2014) has set out a range of scenarios that could accompany women's increased integration into wage work, developed in the context of developing countries but also applicable with some adaptation to developed countries. The first is that men might share equally in domestic labour. Although this is more possible in developed countries than developing countries due to men's very long hours of work and the extensive domestic labour demands in the latter societies, there is no evidence of a strong trend in this direction in developed countries. The more likely scenarios without state intervention are that women work a double shift or use their wages to purchase alternatives to domestic labour or a combination of the two. Neither, in Pearson's view, is compatible with gender equality and the only progressive scenario is when there is an active state to absorb at least part of the costs or provide directly some substitute services for social reproduction. These would need to be paid for out of general taxation but this avoids pressure on women at the time of high care responsibilities to take on a double shift or to stay out of the labour market due to the high costs of substitute services (or alternatively to exploit other women by seeking to employ those available at cheap cost, for example migrants to provide the services). Thus the public sector is important to secure decent employment conditions for those providing service through wage labour. Prior to the crisis there was evidence of moves towards more public services in the area of childcare and eldercare across many EU member states – that is of the emergence of a new social reproductive bargain- although in some countries this was accompanied by tendencies towards outsourcing again to reduce the cost of female labour providing the services.

## 3. The public sector and decent work for women

Public sector employment is expected to provide an exemplar of the standard employment relationship (see table 1). The SER is expected to provide for predictable and regular employment (permanent contracts, regular or predictable working hours), offer transparent practices (published wage structures and criteria or methods for determining recruitment, promotion, dealing with grievances) and contribute to the costs of social reproduction (through paid holidays, pensions where good pensions are not mandatory, sick pay and the like) (Bosch 2004). The importance of these conditions will vary across countries, reflecting in part the conditions of employment outside the public sector. Where the private sector is relatively unregulated, the public sector may provide

more of a beacon of good practice, of particular importance to women who may be less able to secure good conditions in the private sector through individual bargaining. However, the disparity between private and public sector conditions may also be a factor driving policies to downgrade conditions in the public sector.

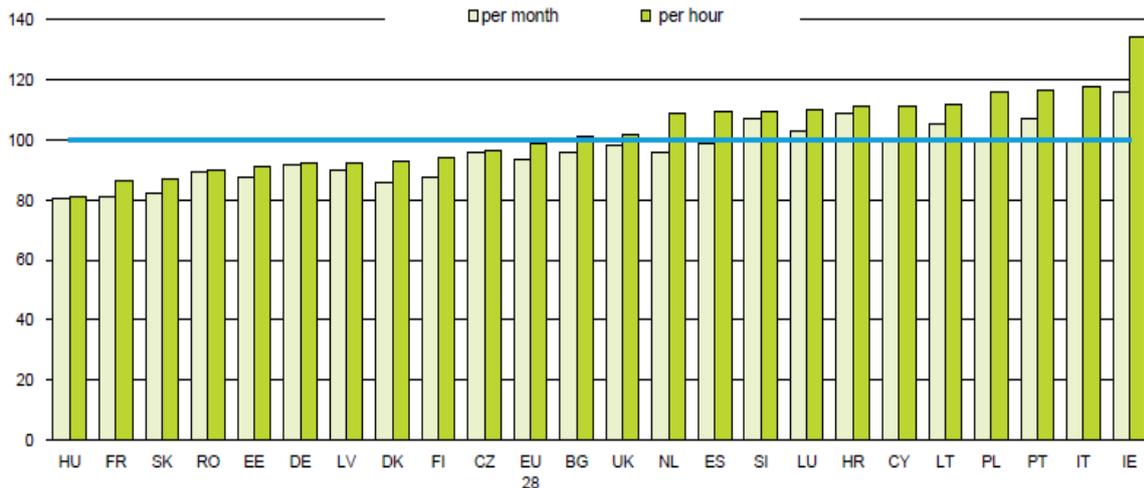
*Table 1. Dimensions to decommodification associated with a standard employment relationship*

Dimensions to decommodification	Expectations of employer under SER
<b>Guaranteed wage income</b>	Guaranteed hours and hourly rate
<b>Adequate pay and maintenance of real pay</b>	Historically associated with family wage model. Pay increases in line with cost of living.
<b>Stability of employment and fair treatment</b>	Open ended contract, expectation of stable employment, compensation for redundancy and fair/non arbitrary discipline and dismissal procedures
<b>Income during non work periods</b>	Holiday pay, pay for unplanned variations in demand (employer responsibility) Sick pay, lay off pay, parental leave, pensions (responsibility varies but employer often contributes)
<b>Division of work and non work times</b>	Employer sets regular, continuous work periods with limited unpaid break; also limits use of on call requirements in days off/ unsocial hours
<b>Skill upgrading/ maintenance of employability</b>	Employer provides training to ensure skills and knowledge updated- funded by employer unless individual gains major labour market advantage
<b>Adjustments to needs of individual</b>	Some adjustment to illness/incapacity, pregnancy but also to care responsibilities
<b>Opportunities for voice/ to avoid forced exit</b>	Workplace representation mechanisms
<b>Access to social security</b>	Regular employment and pay as basis for membership of social protection schemes

There are, however, two major problems in portraying the public sector as offering decent work conditions: first the standard employment conditions may act to exclude or limit opportunities for women (see next section for how the public sector may or may not be trying to change their practices to promote gender equality) and second, the actual practices and employment conditions differ dramatically between countries, reflecting both historical conditions and also the specific role of the public sector as the target for public finance objectives. Here we focus primarily on the differences among countries in their social choices with respect to pay in the public sector- returning to the issue of public finances in our discussion of austerity .

Figure 5 shows the variations in the so-called public sector premium between the private and public sectors across Europe based on the labour cost survey data and thus not differentiated by gender . This confirms other studies using SILC data (for review see Rubery 2013, Grimshaw et al. 2012) that demonstrate the presence of highly variable premiums but by in this case aggregating across men and women it is also made clear that much of the public sector in Europe operates on lower average wages than the private sector ( 10 member state have public sector costs below the private sector average, two roughly equal to the private sector and 11 have somewhat higher costs) - largely due to employment of women and the discount implied by the gender pay gap. Even when the labour cost is higher than average this is no less than one would expect given a much higher concentration of higher qualified workers in the public sector. The main caveats to the argument that the public sector tends to under rather than overpay is that considering the wage alone does not capture all the benefits of public sector working, particularly the job guarantees and the often better pension arrangements.

Figure 5: Public sector wages as percentage of private sector wages



Source: Müller and Schulten (2015) based on Eurostat Labour Force Survey 2012. Note: Private Sector: NACE Code B-N (Business economy). Public Sector: NACE Code O-S (Public administration and defence; compulsory social security; education; human health and social work activities; arts, entertainment and recreation, other services).

Source: ETUI 2015 (figure 3.2)

Further detailed gender disaggregated data on public/private pay differences (table 2), however, do reveal the most consistent positive premiums are for lower skilled women relative to the private sector – that is the benchmark used to infer a privileged status for public sector workers is for the core disadvantaged adult group that is low skilled women in the private sector. Moreover it must be remembered that when it is often stated that women receive a premium for public sector work and men do not that the women are still actually lower paid than the men: the reference points are the different and discriminatory pay gap rates by gender in the private sector.

Table 2 Public and private sector pay for men and women relative to average male earnings in the private sector

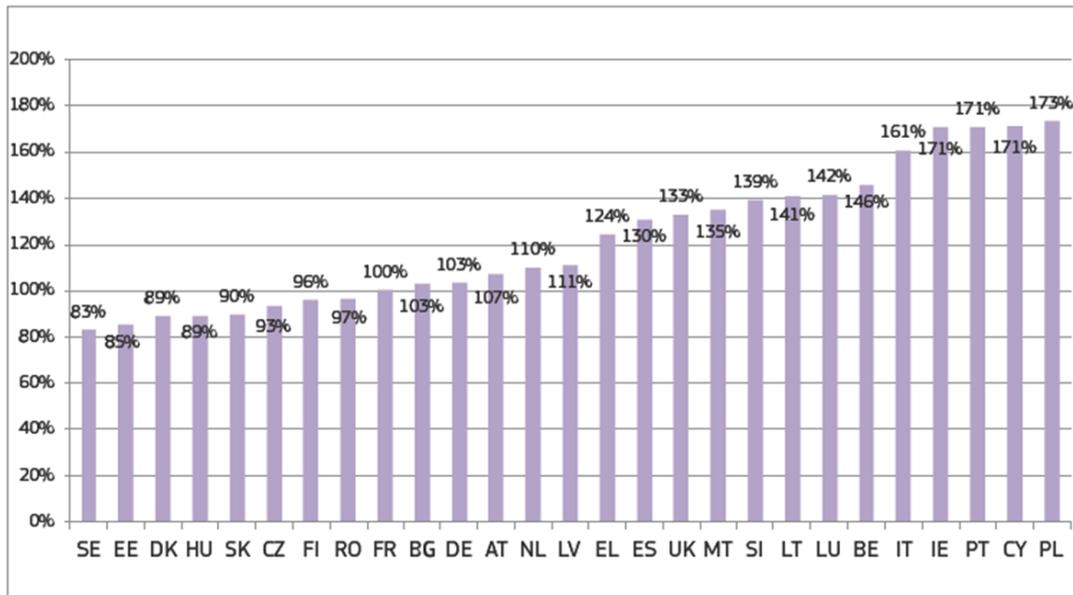
		Public/private	As a % of male private sector full-time	
			Public	Private
France	Female full-time	1.13	0.98	0.87
	Female part-time	1.22	0.97	0.80
	Male full-time	1.10	1.10	1.00
Germany	Female full-time	1.01	0.80	0.79
	Female part-time	1.08	0.73	0.68
	Male full-time	0.95	0.95	1.00
UK	Female full-time	1.25	0.99	0.80
	Female part-time	1.44	0.82	0.57

	Male full-time	1.15	1.15	1.00
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Source: Grimshaw et al. 2012: Table 3.2

Figures 6 and 7 provide data on some key public sector professions. These reveal the consequences of monopsonistic employers in the public sector, that is that the actual pay received by public sector professionals is a matter of social choice and varies considerably between countries. These variations may reflect differences in social norms with respect both to women's work and public service employment. If we look first at pay for female teaching professionals (the majority of teachers in the EU) we find that their average pay varies from 83% of overall male average in Sweden to 173% in Poland, a range much too large to be explained by variations in job requirements. The eight countries paying on average less than the overall male average wage include Scandinavian and Eastern European countries: this fits with the legacies of these countries in the sense that the well-known compressed wage structures in the Scandinavian countries have helped to raise pay at the bottom for women but have resulted in low pay at the other end of the public sector for the more professional and highly qualified staff. In Eastern European countries public services such as teaching were both highly feminised and low paid under the previous socialist regimes, a legacy that in many Eastern European countries persists today in both respects. This does not explain the very high pay found in Poland however. Certainly it is not an issue of low feminisation as nearly four fifths of teaching professionals are women. This example perhaps also underlines the scope for political and social choices.

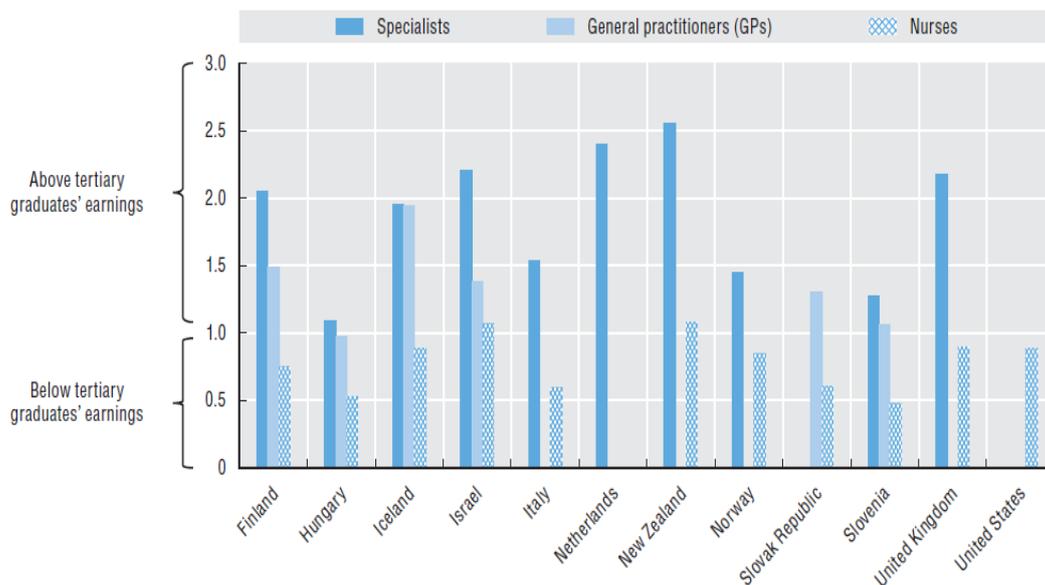
**Figure 6. Ratio teaching professionals female pay to average male pay, by country – EU-27, 2010**



Source: Burchell et al. 2014:102

Figure 7.

## 26.2 Ratio of salaried doctors' and nurses' compensation to the earnings of tertiary-educated workers (2008)



Source: OECD Health Data 2010 for the compensation of salaried doctors (e.g. specialists, general practitioners) and nurses; OECD (2010), Education at a Glance 2010: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris for the earnings of tertiary-educated workers.

Source: OECD 2011

A similar pattern is indicated by data on doctors and nurses pay with the lowest pay for both groups in Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia with Norway also registering relatively low pay. Finland however does not fit in this case the Nordic pattern of compressed pay as it records relatively high pay for doctors despite this being a highly feminised profession, as in the Eastern European countries. Again the key point is the wide variations making public sector pay determination a key area for public policy choice and increasingly a key issue for gender pay equality.

### 4. Public sector and equal opportunity/ employee-friendly working time

The adoption of many principles of the SER in the public sector is not necessarily a good indicator of gender equality as the SER is well known for embedding characteristics supportive of the male breadwinner model of employment and family life, with its stress on full-time continuous employment and patriarchal systems of recruitment and promotion. Where women have been recruited – often into specific roles- they may have been given special privileges such as early retirement (e.g. Greece) which in many respects maintains the division and specificity of female employment. This characterisation may still apply to some public services but in many countries it is the public sector that has spearheaded implementation of more gender equality and family friendly policies and where these are mandatory across all sectors it is often the public sector that implements them more forcefully and with additional elements to reinforce effectiveness. This is not to suggest that the public sector does not still have gender equality challenges but it is arguable that without the public sector as an exemplar, few private sector companies would have developed equal opportunity policies. Many countries have implemented specific laws and/or responsibilities for promoting gender equality in the public sector (e.g. Spain, Germany, UK, France). This does not apply in all public sectors as in some gender equality appears not to be on the policy horizon but this would also apply to the private sectors.

Table 3 provides some key examples of either specific laws or responsibilities for public sector employers to implement together with some cases where general policies are more fully implemented in the public sector. One element of equal opportunity policy is to facilitate some reconciliation between work life and family life. Opportunities for work life balance are often cited as a factor in gender segregation and this could be expected to apply to the public sector. However the differences in family friendly work options within the public sector are as great or even greater as between the public and private sectors: for example teaching may be expected to offer reconciliation with school hours for children but nursing requires often long shifts and very unsocial hours.

Table 3. The public sector as promoter of gender equality

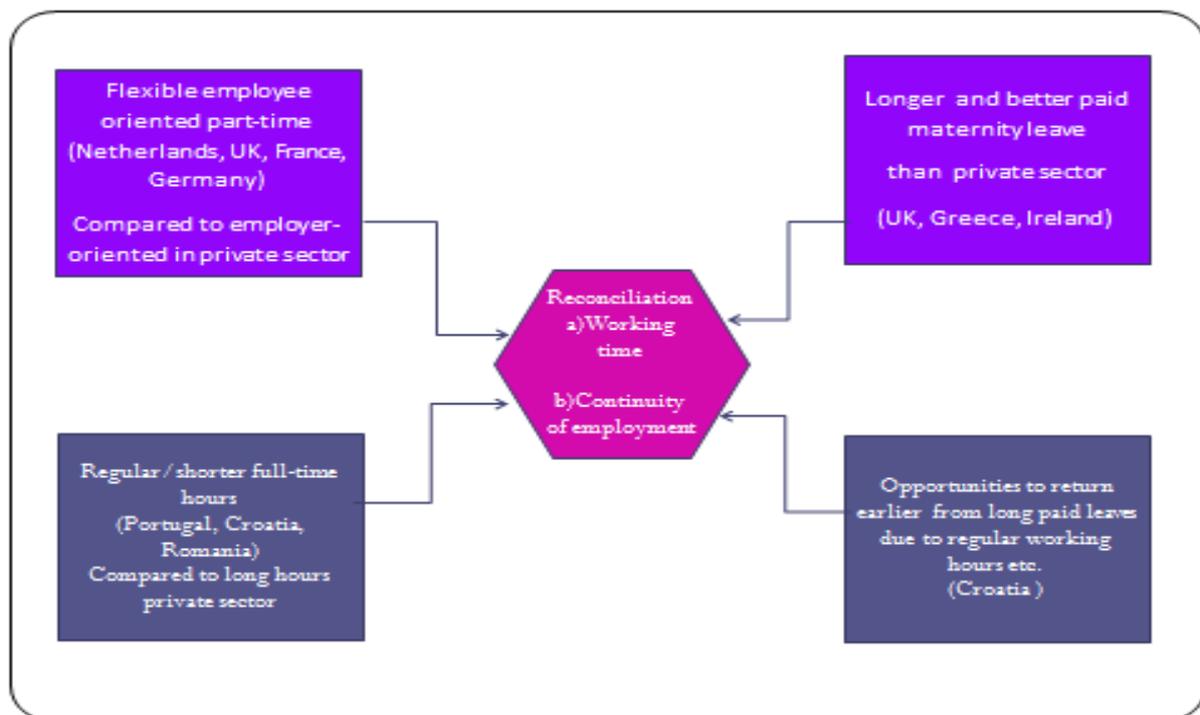
Country	Gender equality in the public sector
<b>Germany</b>	Federal Equality Act : preferential consideration of underrepresented sex ; flexible work and career breaks; equal opportunity plan; equal opportunity reps; regular reporting.
<b>UK</b>	2007 duty to promote gender equality -eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimization; advance equality of opportunity; foster good inter-group relations and publish information/ ensure pay system promotes gender pay equality.
<b>France</b>	From 2001 -gender parity in recruitment committees: in central government female share increased from 36.1% to 47.6% 2006-elsewhere more limited. 2008 charter to promote equality in the public sector- some ministries adopted “action-plans” with quantitative targets.
<b>Sweden</b>	All organizations must have a gender equality plan (gender pay monitoring) and take measures if there are differences. Implementation is widespread but stronger in public sector
<b>Netherlands</b>	The 2001 Work and Care Act requires employers to facilitate the combination of work and care but scope for variation and public sector takes the lead.
<b>Spain</b>	The 2007 Gender Equality Act required the promotion of equality in the public sector with respect to employment and training, gender balance in recruitment committees, gender equality monitoring etc.

Source: Rubery (2013)

Nor does work life balance policy necessarily mean the offer of part-time work as the use of part-time is primarily determined by national norms. However, where part-time is available it is more often based on employee than employer flexibility needs. Figure 8 indicates the divergent paths to

work life balance offered by the public sector across countries: where part-time work is a normal form of work, the public sector may offer opportunities to work part-time after returning from leave but where it is more normal to work full-time the public sector may offer more regular and predictable hours than in the private sector- even if full-time- and opportunities to reduce their working day using rights to breastfeeding breaks. Differences between countries also apply to maternity leave; when statutory rights are for short and/or low paid leave, the public sector may offer longer and/or higher pay ( particularly important for take up of fathers' leave and for establishing rights to being an equal breadwinner within the family for women). Where statutory leave is long , better working hours may enable an earlier return to work. Table 4 provides examples of specific public sector work life balance policies. In the UK and Ireland the public sector provides better than statutory leave and even in Sweden the public sector removes the threshold on paid leave payments, assisting take up by fathers and reinforcing women's breadwinner position in families. Greece, Spain, France, Germany and the Netherlands – along with Portugal and Hungary provide various working time options. Portugal and Hungary provide specific examples of allowing shorter working days when children are young but within the norm of full-time working. No specific policies are found in Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Croatia (and only limited policies in Estonia) . This is in line with a general finding that equality of opportunity is not on the agenda of public sectors in Eastern Europe.

Figure 8: Type of work life balance policy varies between countries



Source: Rubery (2013)

Table 4: Work life balance policies in the public sector

Work life balance policies in the public sector	
<b>Germany</b>	Right to work part-time for family reasons and to return to full-time work.

<b>Estonia</b>	Some provisions for parental leave and some protections during pregnancy
<b>Ireland</b>	More supplementary payments for maternity leave, more opportunities to take unpaid leave
<b>Greece</b>	Longer paid childcare leave after maternity leave and longer unpaid working time reductions as alternative to leave
<b>Spain</b>	Wider range of additional rights to leave, flexible working , shorter hours
<b>France</b>	Right to work 50% to 90% time -50 % paid at 60%- right to return to full-time work. Plus extra care days
<b>Latvia</b>	No differences known
<b>Lithuania</b>	No differences known
<b>Hungary</b>	Longer period when can work two hours less per day until the child is two
<b>Netherlands</b>	Work and Care act 2001 implemented universally in public sector
<b>Portugal</b>	More rights to reduce working time when child is young
<b>Romania</b>	No specific policies
<b>Sweden</b>	Top ups to parental leave pay influences fathers' take-up of parental leave.
<b>United Kingdom</b>	More additional maternity leave pay, more job sharing and flexitime and more requests flexible working granted.- more high paid part-timers in public sector
<b>Croatia</b>	No specific policies but women return sooner from parental leave

Source: Rubery 2013

##### 5. Public sector and alternative value systems

The public sector is not just a site of employment but also a space for the realisation of values other than those dictated by the market. NPM and other reforms of public services have changed the terms of debate on the public sector, with its focus on choice between the market and the public sphere based on efficiency criteria. This puts the public sector back into the male-dominated public realm (Stivers 2002) and obscures the importance of the public sphere as an alternative to domestic work and the private sphere. Public services are well recognised for providing a form of redistribution to lower income classes (even when middle income classes make most use of them) but the redistributive effects from men to women are less often articulated and considered.

The importance of the public sphere for citizens has been strongly articulated by Wickham (2004) as a defining difference between European social models and the United States:

*Interwoven with the acceptance of the state is the acceptance of a public sphere - of an area of society which belongs to all citizens as of right. Here in the public sphere things are done not for profit, but for the general good (op.cit:10).*

While citizens of both genders benefit from the public realm there may still be differences in equality between men and women as citizens and the extent to which alternatives to domestic labour are identified as being for the general good rather than as unnecessary expenditures on tasks that can and should be done by women. It could be considered that the value attached to public sector activities and public sector workers is a touchstone for the value society places on ensuring social reproduction and the contribution made to those activities by women. Moreover the provision of services by directly employed public sector workers further protects the space for non

market values, for valuing and delivering services for reasons other than contribution to productivity or profitability.

This is not to argue that women have a monopoly of non market values but responsibility for social reproduction may increase concern for non market objectives. Furthermore the reason that women choose public sector work may not be because of work life balance options or because they lack talents or opportunities to enter dynamic private services (Ansel and Gingrich 2014) but may lie in work orientations that are not solely focused on market -recognised rewards (DeHart-Davis et al. 2006) ( again this in part not due to essentialist gender differences but maybe because women are less socially constrained into becoming breadwinners).

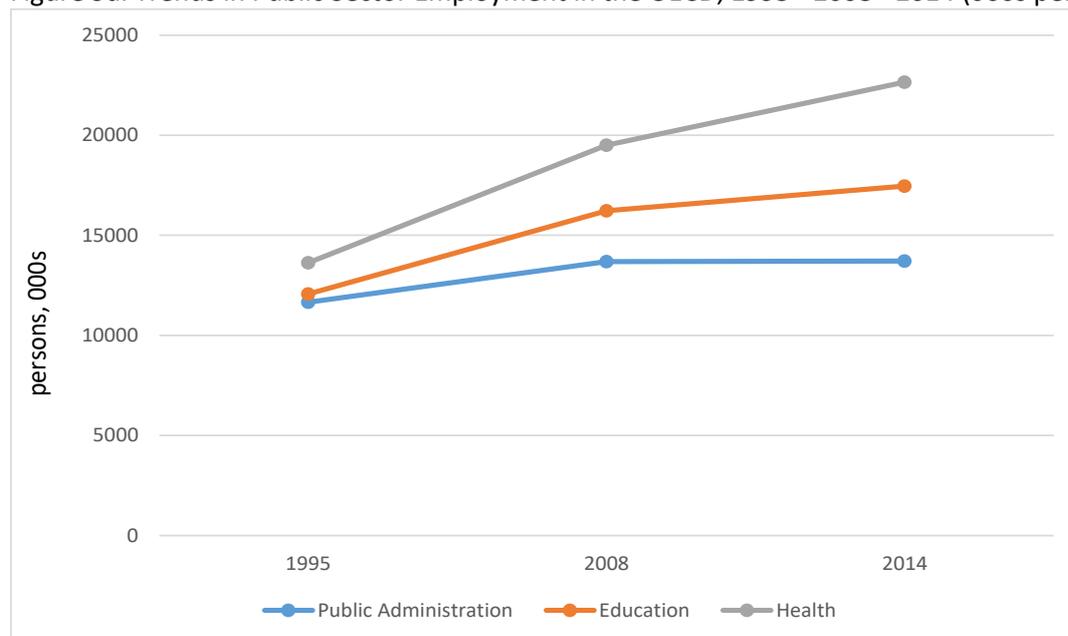
### **Austerity, the public sector and the threat to gender equality.**

Our account of the importance of the public sector for gender equality is not supposed to present an idealised world in which public sector employment offers a form of gender equality paradise. Reforms over several decades have been introducing more market values and challenging the ability of the public sector to offer decent work even if at the same time reforming practices towards more equality and work life balance objectives. Furthermore there are wide variations across countries in the quality of employment conditions for women and in the attention to gender equality objectives in workplace practices. Yet the picture we have drawn also suggests that preserving and indeed strengthening the public sector is vital if there is to be any chance of achieving the oft-cited grand objectives by national and EU politicians of creating a more gender equal world or closing the gender pay ( while at the same time displaying their ignorance of what that might entail by, in almost the same breath, calling for cuts to minimum wages or freezes to public sector pay). In this second part we therefore identify the threats and challenges to gender equality that arise out of policies towards the public sector, particularly in the era of austerity, set against the five positive gender equality reasons for a public sector.

#### 1) The public sector as a source of women's employment integration.

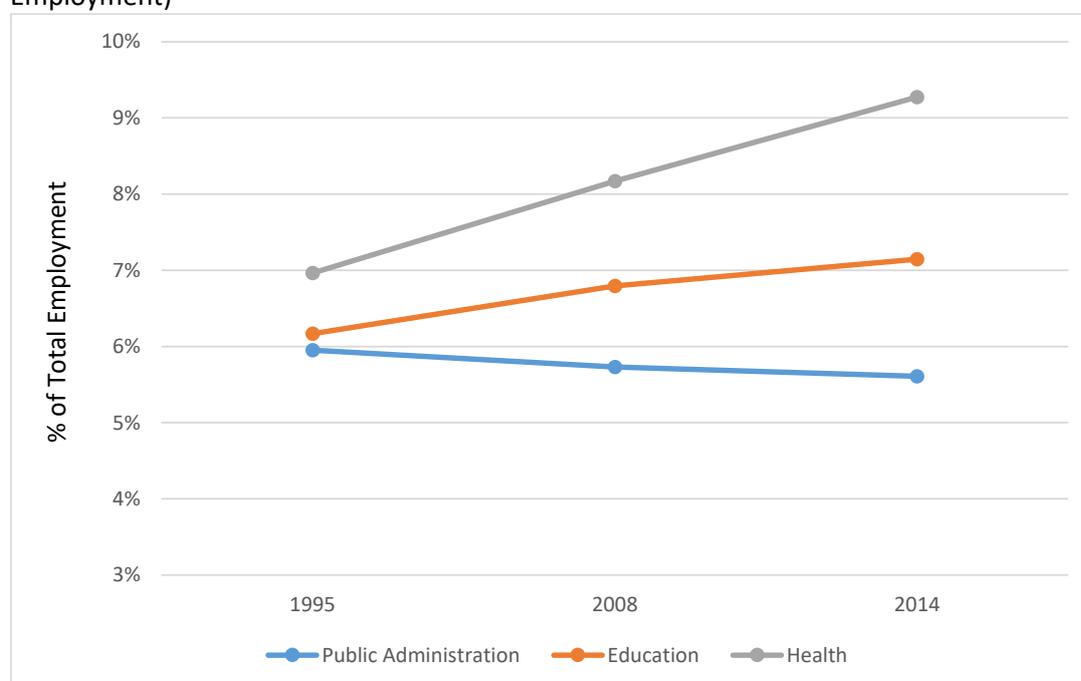
Austerity is in principle threatening women's Integration into wage work through reducing the traditionally protective role of the public sector during recessions and downturns (Rubery 1988). Figure 9a shows that over the period 1995 to 2008 there were very steep increases in public service employment in OECD countries for which we have long term data. These increases were particularly steep in health but also sizeable in education, but modest in public administration. Since the crisis there has been a downward shift in the rate of increase for health and education( though still positive overall) but employment in public administration has declined. Figure 9b shows that due to the downturn in employment outside public services the share of public services in total employment has continued to rise just as steeply since the crisis in education and health but the downturn in public administration is more evident. Due to the ageing population and the demand for higher skills a secular increase in both education and health is to be expected and although the expansion continued post crisis, in many cases this is still insufficient to meet rising needs. Indeed austerity is undermining chances of less developed member states catching up with the member states with more developed public services. The very different ratios of nurses to population shown in figure 10 indicate the continuing expectations in many countries for personal nursing care to be carried out by the family without reference to the trend towards dual career families.

Figure 9a. Trends in Public Sector Employment in the OECD, 1995 - 2008 - 2014 (000s persons)



Source: OECD Annual Labour Force Statistics (own calculations; data extracted from stats.oecd.org). Public sector employment refers to total employment in Public administration, Defence and Compulsory social security (ISIC O), Education (P) and Human health and social work activities (Q)). Only countries with valid data for all years considered were included. The OECD aggregate therefore refers to Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Spain and the United Kingdom. Data for 1995 refers to ISIC rev3. Data for 2008 refers to ISIC rev 3 for Canada, Germany, Ireland, Israel, New Zealand and the Slovak Republic. Data for 2014 refers to ISIC rev 3 for Canada and Ireland. All remaining data refers to ISIC rev. 4.

Figure 9b. Trends in Public Sector Employment in the OECD, 1995 - 2008 - 2014 (% of Total Employment)

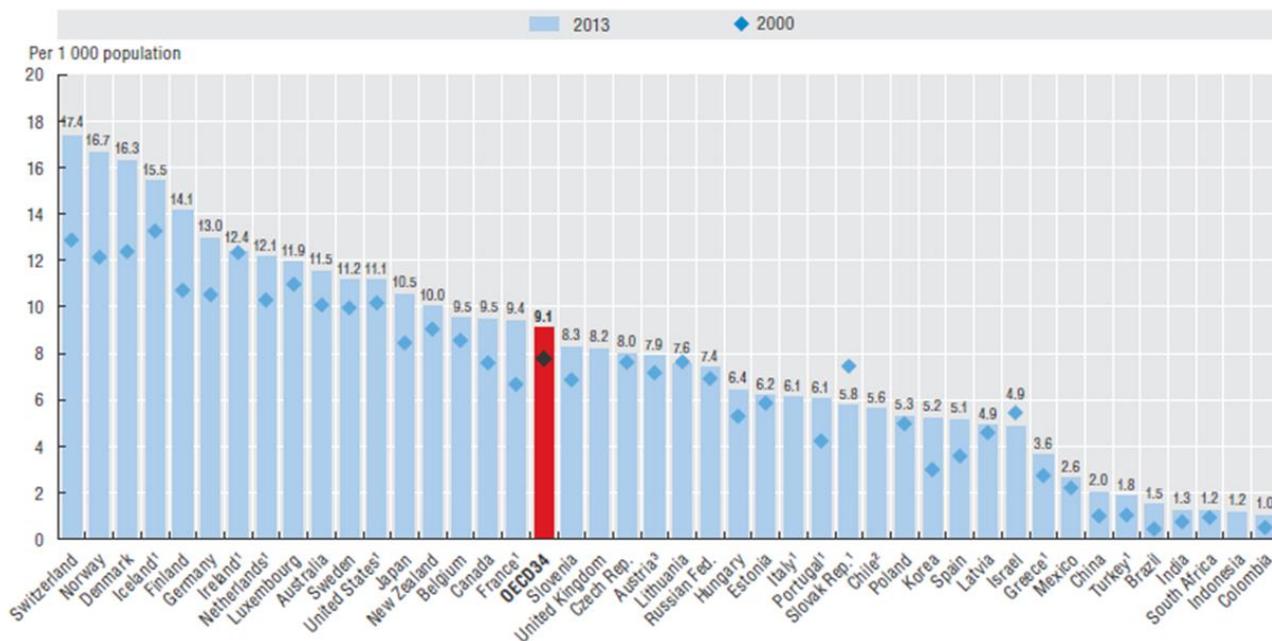


Source: OECD Annual Labour Force Statistics (own calculations; data extracted from stats.oecd.org). Public sector employment refers to total employment in Public administration, Defence and Compulsory social security (ISIC O), Education (P) and Human health and social work activities (Q)). Only countries with valid data for all years considered were included. The OECD aggregate therefore refers to Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Spain and the United Kingdom. Data for 1995 refers to ISIC rev3. Data for 2008 refers to ISIC rev 3 for Canada, Germany, Ireland, Israel, New Zealand and the Slovak Republic. Data for 2014 refers to ISIC rev 3 for Canada and Ireland. All remaining data refers to ISIC rev. 4.

Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Spain and the United Kingdom. Data for 1995 refers to ISIC rev3. Data for 2008 refers to ISIC rev 3 for Canada, Germany, Ireland, Israel, New Zealand and the Slovak Republic. Data for 2014 refers to ISIC rev 3 for Canada and Ireland. All remaining data refers to ISIC rev. 4.

Figure 10

### Practising nurses per 1 000 population, 2000 and 2013 (or nearest year)



1. Data include not only nurses providing direct care to patients, but also those working in the health sector as managers, educators, researchers, etc.  
 2. Data in Chile refer to all nurses who are licensed to practice (less than one-third are professional nurses with a university degree).  
 3. Austria reports only nurses employed in hospital.  
 Source: OECD Health Statistics 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/health-data-en>.

Source: OECD 2015

### 2) Public services and a new social reproductive bargain?

Before the financial crisis there was evidence of some trends towards a new social reproductive bargain in Europe: many countries were expanding their care infrastructure and some were even becoming belatedly to the view that care was not solely a responsibility of women in the household. For example, the 2007 equality law in Spain for the first time established that elderly people living with their children had rights of access to state services and also planned to expand childcare and elder care services- but then the crisis came along. In general Troika countries have experienced reduced commitments to the new social reproductive bargain especially in the southern European member states (with the exception of Portugal where plans for more care facilities still went ahead (Rubery 2013)). Even in the UK there has been some reversal of policies to halt childcare support schemes but new proposals are not fully costed and rely on private sector suppliers, who have limited choices other than to pay very low wages. Other countries such as Germany and Poland have instigated new policies to expand childcare infrastructure but this indicates both the current deficits in provisions and the continuing need for the public sector to adapt to changing citizen needs and demands. Despite some positive trends, the overall risks are that women may face even more of a double shift coupled with increased problems of juggling informal childcare arrangements (particularly if they are seeking to add more hours). Furthermore, where problems arise, there is the risk of a large care deficit emerging where young and old and the sick do not receive the care they

need. This is a major problem in the US and increasingly in some EU countries such as Greece and in the Eastern European countries who are losing high shares of qualified health workers, both nurses and doctors.

### 3) The public sector and decent work

The ability of the public sector to deliver decent work for women has been put in jeopardy by the cuts to public sector pay and worsening of employment conditions irrespective of the adequacy of the conditions before the cuts were imposed. Thus Eastern European countries with a history of very low pay have still in the crisis been cutting wages by large amounts and have suffered the consequence of losing qualified staff to other EU countries (as fiscal rectitude takes precedence over delivering services). Cuts to pay (see table 5) and pensions have occurred alongside other measures which have increased work intensity- including redundancies, hiring freezes, reduced hours or non payment for overtime. Standard hours have been increased overall in some countries but in other cases the rise has been targeted on particular occupations such as teaching.

Table 5: Wage cuts and wage freezes in the public sector in EU27 2008-13.

Category of measures	Troika/IMF countries	Other countries
General wage freeze	Greece, Spain, Ireland, Italy, Cyprus, Hungary, Portugal, Romania	Czech republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, UK, Netherlands
Pay cuts up to 10%	Spain, Ireland, Italy, Portugal	Czech republic, Estonia, Slovenia, Slovakia
Pay cuts between 15% and 30%	Greece, Latvia, Hungary, Romania	Lithuania
Abolition of bonuses and special benefits	Greece, Spain, Hungary, Portugal, Romania	Denmark, Estonia

Source: ETUI 2014: figure 5.2

These changes have come on top of longer term trends towards new public management systems in some EU countries that are aimed at developing a performance culture in the public sector and to limit autonomy and increase work intensity. These policies can be considered to be contributing to a downgrading of the status of public sector work and reinforcing the low value attached to women's work. In addition the crisis has seen a further push towards outsourcing: this may apply to men's as well as women's jobs but for example in the UK it is women's jobs in social care that have ended up not only being very low paid (often under the national minimum wage due to unpaid travel time) but also organised on a zero hours contract basis.

### 4) The public sector and gender equality policy

Austerity policies are challenging the public sector's lead role in gender equality in a number of ways. First the increase in outsourcing is reducing the extent of the workforce covered by public sector policies as the share of private sector delivery of services increases. Second the sometimes formal increase in working hours coupled with the major increase in work intensity associated with hiring cuts are increasing stress and actual working time, making it more difficult to combine work and family life with many public sector jobs including teaching. The recent trends are often just adding to the intensity of this direction of travel (Conley et al. 2011b). However unions in Portugal have succeeded in reversing a five hours imposed increase in hours.

Overall the widespread failure to address the gender equality implications of public sector cuts also puts into perspective commitments to gender equality within the public sector and within workplaces in general. In the UK commitments to gender pay audits within large private as well as public sector organisations have been introduced under pledges to eliminate the gender pay gap at the same time as announcing a 1% per annum cap on public sector pay increases for four years to reinforce the downgrading associated with three years of freezes and two of capped 1% increases in the previous parliament.

#### 5) The public sector and alternative non market value systems

Far from the public sector being treated as a protected non market sphere which delivers services that are emblematic of a society's core values, the spread of austerity thinking and policy in countries such as the UK is reducing the public sector to simply a residual. Whatever is deemed collectable in taxes determines the amount a society can pay for public services and in allocating that lump of tax revenue there is a clear trade-off presented, as Osborne, the UK's finance minister, made clear in his 2015 budget, between the volume of services and jobs and the costs of labour. This argument was made despite Osborne promoting the budget under the banner 'Britain deserves a pay rise', to be achieved through an extra hike in the minimum wage. Public sector workers were not deemed deserving and again expected to sacrifice pay for jobs.

Nor is this trading pay for job security expected to lead to problems in motivation for service delivery. As has been constantly reiterated in the UK's most high profile dispute over the past year over pay and working time for junior doctors, most of whom are women, the reason why the government expected this group to take a 30 per cent pay cut and work more weekends was that the only way to achieve higher staffing at weekends which the government had decided was a priority for better patient care ( a priority which is also disputed) was through pay cuts. No consideration was given to the impact on motivation of both the planned increase in unsocial hours or the lower pay cuts but by reducing the public sector to a residual, the government risked calling into question the alternative values and commitments to patient care on which the system is founded and relies. One wonders if the government had expected to have an easy fight due in part to the increased share of women among the workforce. Not only did that not happen- 98% voted for strike action- but the gender implications of the proposed changes formed a major plank in the resistance and even more importantly perhaps, the dispute became as much concerned with a struggle to retain the alternative non market values embedded in the NHS as with the specifics of the pay and working time changes.

#### **Conclusions**

What does this review of the gender implications of public sector retrenchment suggest both for policy and for research?

For research the general implication is that public sector reforms need to be considered through a gender lens, both to understand how gender influences the mode of reform and the outcome and to understand the implications for issue of equality. This means, for example, examining how decisions are made with respect to outsourcing or insourcing of services and whether these are linked to different ways in which groups, occupations and genders are valued in the internal and external labour markets. It also means interrogation of reforms, whether to methods of pay determination, payment systems, contractual arrangements and working hours for any gender impacts and whether gender may have been implicated in the reform decisions- for example with respect to cuts

of hours or in new pay arrangements involving lower rates of internal pay. Gender may also be informing debates on what services to cut or to expand and these are worthy of further inquiry, including for example the influence of the gender composition of decision makers.

When it comes to research on how to defend employment conditions in the public sector, it is important to recognise the specific roles played by the public sector in promoting gender equality. This may mean consideration of extending not just pay arrangements but also codes of practice through the supply chain or using public sector good practice to try to extend requirements on all employers to promote gender equality. Finally but of no less importance, to understand the capacity of collective action to defend the public sector it is essential to consider how far gender interests are represented within public sector trade unions and collective bargaining institutions. Without effective representation, it is necessary to consider the implications for successful defence of public services and public sector direct employment, given the importance of women as both workers and users of services. This might also require consideration of how far unions have recognised and articulated feminist concerns to raise the value of social reproduction activities in society as part of wider employment relations campaigns on the public sector or to defend the principle of the public realm and public employment.

With respect to the implications for policy the first must be to persuade policymakers that both gender equality objectives but also actual changes in behaviour and attitudes among men and women mean that they cannot simply assume that there will be replacement for public services by unpaid female domestic labour. As such cuts to services are likely to result in care deficits for those in need, not only in extra labour for women. Another imperative is to undertake gender equality impact assessments of public sector reforms. These will need to be subject to open public scrutiny as it was only due to the exposure of the prejudiced views contained in the UK's equality impact assessment of the proposed new contract for junior doctors that gender equality issues became a major part of the subsequent bargaining over improving the contract offer. Equality impact assessment thus also needs to be done by people with awareness of gender issues and this means also recognising that gender inequalities are embedded in wider 'market'. This means that rather than the opportunities to pay lower wages being a rationale, for example, for outsourcing of public services, the higher pay in the public sector should instead be identified as a contribution to the public sector's gender equality duty. Likewise policymakers need to recognise the role of social choice in determining pay for public dominated occupations and professions. This means that commitment to gender equality requires those social choices not be discriminatory, which also in a period of austerity means treating public sector pay as not solely an issue of meeting fiscal deficits. Finally as both men and women who work in the public sector have been found to have strong public service work orientations (though this may vary by country), policymakers needs to consider how to sustain and build on this goodwill rather than undermine it. As the majority of those working in service and care work are women this must mean taking gender equality issues seriously.

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