

Title: The impact of Crisis on Gender Inequality: The Greek Case

Dr Joanna TSIGANOU

Director of Research

Institute of Social Research – EKKE

Initial Address

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Economic restructuring has led to the redefining of certain aspects of inequality in contemporary societies which are deeply gendered. In the case of Greece, as well as in the case of other countries under economic crisis and austerity, gender inequality persists, while new forms of discrimination emerge. My presentation draws on the critical analysis of quantitative and qualitative research data on the most important aspects of gender inequality. In this context the impact of austerity measures on the implementation of EC gender mainstreaming and equality policies shall be examined. The personnal ‘cost’ on women’s lives is also considered together with the strategies they have developed to ammeliorate its effect.

My presentation is a result of a team work. It is a summary of results produced by EKKE’s Laboratory of Gender Research since its establishment. The evidence supporting the arguments to be presented here, has been provided through the analyses of both: large national, european and international data sets properly processed as well as qualitative investigations. The work done by European Commission networks on gender research has been also taken into condideration.

Having said that, I have to thank my colleagues at EKKE, especially Maria Thanopoulou since data presented here reflect our common research experience as experts at the European Commision network on Gender Equality with the acronym EGGSI for the years 2010 and 2011, and Dionysis Balourdos for his help in large data sets processing to produce meaningful results.

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My presentation will proceed in two parts. In the first part calculating ‘risk’ is the basic idea. The language of numbers, unquestionably important, exhibits only a portion of the truth. Therefore, in the second part, which I have called ‘the risk of calculating’, the non material aspects of the crisis for gender equality will be discussed.

Before entering to the discussion two further points need clarification.

Firstly, equality between women and men is a fundamental value of the European Union and is vital to its economic and social growth. In the objectives set by the EU in the Europe 2020 growth strategy, gender equality has a pivotal role in the political and academic debate in Europe.

Secondly, the definition of gender equality adopted in this presentation reflects the pragmatic and operational definition provided by the European Institute for Gender Equality, in that it can encompass several different perspectives: ‘equal share of assets and equal dignity and integrity between women and men’.

SLIDE - PART ONE: Calculating risk

The current crisis is still unfording so that the analyses of this presentation should be seen as remaining a work in progress.

Upon examination of the repercussions of the current crisis on the labour market position and the social situation of women and men in Europe in general and in Greece in particular, there are three sides to the story to tell:

The first refers to the downward levelling of gender gaps in employment, wages, working conditions, and poverty. 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. Men are loosing more since they were earning more before the crisis. The gendered segregation in the labour market has an additional impact. In short is a loose – loose situation for both men and women.

The second side of the story refers to increasing similarities in labour market behaviour between men and women. The traditional view that women behave as employment buffers, called in when demand expands, has been definitely refuted by the experience of this crisis. The contemporary ‘buffers’ are young men and women on temporary employment contracts and migrant workers providing the necessary labour surplus. This similarity of behaviour starts with the changed income role of women. Dual earner couples lost ground in the downturn almost exclusively to the advantage of female breadwinner couples that increased their share to almost 10%. The worsening of employment conditions, affected women and men differently rather than ‘more’ or ‘less’. Undoubtedly, however, there are repercussions from the crisis that specifically concern women as in the case of pregnant women’s rights to maternity leave and benefits which have been curtailed.

The third main side of the story is that in countries that underwent the most significant fiscal consolidation, Greece Ireland and Spain among them, long-term wage and monetary benefits cuts, had a disproportionate impact on women. Thus, fiscal consolidation poses a risk for gender equality.

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Despite the more than 50 years of gender equality policy at EU level, a closer examination of the data available reveals that gender gaps are prevalent across the EU.

As shown by the average score, (in green) the EU remains far from reaching its gender equality aim. The range across Member States, shows the broad scale of variation throughout the EU in the level of gender equality. Nearly half of the Member States (13) are below the score of 50 (Greece among them in red).

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More particularly, in the domain of work, the EU has achieved a score that is only slightly above two thirds of the way towards gender equality. Women remain less likely to participate in the labour market, in terms of working hours and duration of working life which may put them at a higher risk of economic dependence. Gender segregation of labour markets is an issue that can exacerbate gender inequalities in earnings, impacts on career advancement, quality of work and economic independence. And, although economic independence is seen as a prerequisite for European citizens, both women and men, to exercise control and make genuine choices in their lives, women remain in more precarious situations in terms of access to financial resources. Throughout the EU, women earn less and receive less income than men, with progress in closing the gender gap painstakingly slow. The average EU income, in purchasing power standards represents a 20 % difference.

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Further, women are at a disadvantage in terms of their economic situation. As a result of receiving lower disposable income, women on average are more likely than men to be at risk of poverty. Data for the last ten years and more

particularly from 2008 onwards suggest that in almost all countries and years, women exhibit a higher at-risk-of-poverty rate than men. Higher increases were experienced in the countries severely hit by the crisis as Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Italy, but also countries newcomers in the EU like Bulgaria and Roumania (in dark red in the map).

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Women suffer from a higher at risk of poverty rate before social transfers, to a degree that is considerably higher than the gender gap after social transfers (about 5% as opposed to 2%). As pictured, Greece represents the most vulnerable case.

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Yet, Greece represents the most vulnerable case among the EU in the at risk of poverty rate by sex since in both cases of the female and male populations lies at the bottom of the pyramid.

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Data also indicate a jump at the risk of poverty rate by sex in Greece during the crisis which is higher for women than men. The female rate overrides the national medium as well.

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Followingly, considering Social Exclusion Issues before and after the advent of the crisis data suggest that women suffer from greater material deprivation in almost all years and all countries. The index of material deprivation, as it is well known, is defined as the enforced inability to pay for a number of items considered necessary to a decent and adequate life. The crisis has slowed down the progress towards the reduction of material deprivation. Also, it has slightly reduced the gender gap,

though worsening men's position rather than improving women's. Variations are on average small for the first years of the crisis, but to some extent they hide substantial heterogeneity between countries. As indicated at the map (in red colours) the material deprivation index shows that in Greece men and women were both severely affected through the current crisis.

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I would like to draw your attention to this particular figure. As my colleague Dionysis Malourdos has remarked, this figure is extremely important to be ignored since it exhibits the acuteness and severity of material deprivation for the general Greek population, men and women alike, and despite gender gaps leveling processes. What is more important is that the worsening of the situation from 2010 onwards has created a spearheaded poverty and deprivation jump which, if not alleviated by the anti-poverty policy actions, may at any time trigger off similar to nuclear devices explosions in the societal level.

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Yet, in comparison to the situation abroad, Greece holds one of the lowest positions in the pyramid lader of female material deprivation far behind the EU medium score which is also true for all countries in debt crisis.

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These results for countries under debt crisis may be partly attributed to fiscal consolidation measures. As shown despite progress in fiscal consolidation, (expected) debt to GDP ratios are considerably higher in 2013 than in 2007 throughout the EU, with the single exception of Sweden. The increase is especially great in Ireland, Greece, Portugal, and Spain, where large falls in GDP are an important part of the story behind soaring debt ratios.

On the other hand survey data on the perceptions of the people about poverty rate in their country have shown that Greece represents the strongest case of people believing that poverty has strongly increased in their country.

Yet, there is an emerging divide between countries where fiscal consolidation has been severe and protracted – Greece, Ireland and Spain - and those where the scope for consolidation was comparatively smaller – the Netherlands and Finland – or the problem was radically addressed early on in the crisis – Latvia. In the first group of countries the impact is severe for both men and women and may well be rolling back progress in gender equality.

Tracing further the material deprivation interrelations with the indices composing the risk of poverty or social exclusion, it may be noted that although the advent of crisis may have reduced the pace of reduction in the number of people (men and women alike) at risk of poverty or social exclusion, it did so for the female population more slowly.

SLIDE for MEN

SLIDE for Women

Indeed, between 2009 and 2010, the impact of the crisis on the share of population severely materially deprived and/or living in a household with zero or very low work intensity was relatively small at the EU-27 level but the female bigger vulnerability was even then obvious.

Entering now to the discussion of the educational and skills domain, gender segregation in educational fields remains high. Despite the changes in the educational attainments of women and men, segregation patterns remain deeply entrenched throughout Member States, with women over-represented in feminised

sectors such as education, health and welfare, humanities and arts. Gender segregation in education translates into further inequalities in the labour market and contributes to differences in the economic independence of women and men. Multivariate analyses have showed the strong level of association that exists between educational attainments and labour market segregation.

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Another important domain to measure gender inequality and how it is impacted by the current crisis is that of time which attempts to capture the gendered nature of the allocation of time spent between economic, care and social activities. It is an important domain from a gender perspective, given the imperative to ensure a better integration of work and family life for women and men.

This particular domain reveals wide gender differences in time spent in care activities in the EU. Throughout all Member States, it is women who are disproportionately involved in caring activities, with extremely wide gender gaps between the time spent on caring and educating children and grandchildren. (As many as 41 % of women spent, 1 hour or more on the care and education of children and/or grandchildren per day, compared with 25 % of men). Women are, throughout all Member States, also disproportionately responsible for cooking and housework. The 77 % of women compared to only 24 % of men, on average in the EU in 2010, were involved in cooking and housework every day for an hour or more. This translates into an average score of 45.5 out of 100, well below halfway towards gender equality. The Member States fare differently, from just 20.0 in Greece to 80.4 in Denmark. At the same time men are more likely than women, to participate in sporting, cultural or leisure activities on a regular basis. In 2010, on average in the EU, only 9 % of women were involved in sporting, cultural or leisure activities at least every other day compared with 12 % of men.

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But most importantly, in the domain of power, the gender imbalance in decision-making remains an important challenge at EU level and for all Member States. Women are greatly under-represented in top positions of decision-making. Despite the fact that women make up nearly half of the workforce and account for more than half of tertiary-level graduates, the proportion of women involved in top-level decision-making, remains very low. This discrepancy shows a waste of highly qualified and skilled human resources.

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In political decision-making, the representation of women is very low, despite the strong policy focus in this area at EU level and in wider international frameworks (Beijing Platform for Action, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women). The lowest gender equality score can be found in economic decision-making. The dearth of representation of women in the economic sphere is even more pronounced than in political decision-making. Women are greatly under-represented among board members of the largest quoted companies (12 % on average in the EU in 2010) and among members of central banks (18 % on average in the EU in 2010) in the vast majority of Member States.

On the domain of health, since Prof. Yfantopoulos will devote specific attention, suffice is to say that in terms of gender equality data suggest that under the current crisis ‘women get sicker and men die younger’.

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As shown, finally, by the compound calculations of the Gender Equality Index scores for EU – 27 and of certain individual countries poor performances (Greece among them) there is still enough room for implementing gender

equality policies. In fact austerity measures have pushed away gender mainstreaming policies. They should be brought back into focus if unequal gender relations are to be eradicated.

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As mentioned earlier the language of numbers reveals only a portion of the truth. For the economy of the discussion, I shall try to sum up the non material aspects of gender inequalities and the non-material ‘cost’ of the current crisis for women’s lives.

Despite the scarce qualitative evidence on the human bontage, burdens, misery and unhappiness, that is, the non-material ‘cost’ brought about on women’s lives by the current economic crisis, the existing narrations reveal the depth of the changes, turn-overs and turn downs on women’s every-day lives and future prospects and expectations.

The language of the living experience of the crisis enriches our understanding of an ever-increasing depth of gender equality. The consequences of the crisis in the lives of the Greek women hit at the heart of women’s emancipation. They have helped to changing the social roles of both sexes in the case the woman becomes the only bread-winner of the household. The crisis has also accelerated exploitation and violence against women since the scarcity of employment and, in turn, of the economic resources, has blocked the road to personal autonomy and emancipation.

Yet, the vulnerable female population has encountered new social categories, previously met at the ‘haves’ and not the ‘have nots’ of the Greek social formation. The ladder of stratification and mobility have both been shattered. The new vulnerable social categories include women proprietors who cannot preserve their property due to heavy taxation, women pensioners who cannot afford health expences, migrant women who cannot support their families with their lower earnings any longer. The uncertainty of income coupled with fears for survival have increased the anxiety felt by large categories of the Greek female population. As a result material deprivation is

coupled by an non measurable ‘cost’ in the satisfaction from life and personnal happiness with severe implications for the individual physical and mental health.

Concluding the present discussion,

it should be noted that the Europe 2020 strategy is a holistic and integrated work plan aiming at inclusive growth. In pursuing this aim, European countries should show a considerable awareness of the conceptual limits of considering poverty exclusively as lack of adequate income, as well as of the limits in policy-making that a strategy based only on income support schemes would imply. The European countries should adopt a vast array of policies aimed at overcoming European men’s and women’s deprivation in several dimensions: education, housing, health and care. As it emerges, in times of financial and economic crisis and the subsequent decisions to pursue austerity measures, a general trend though valid only in broad lines and not consistently followed by all European countries in all the mentioned dimensions – should be to preserve the provision of services relatively more than the disbursement of cash benefits.

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Being here, in the place of the Greek Acropolis, we should keep in mind that the issue of gender equality, dates back to the Greek antiquity. Aristofanes Lysistrata personifies this struggle quite eloquently.

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The Greek ‘Princesses’ with their different garments, represent apart from their class position women’s contribution to the economy and the society.

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Women's profiling nowadays shows the aspects of this struggle for equality.

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But most importantly, certain aspects of this struggle are hidden behind the curtain of non-reported and non-recorded violence against women which should receive the most urgent attention. The gender-based violence remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations of our time, undermining women's dignity and integrity, as well as imposing serious harm on individuals, families, communities and societies. It is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men, which poses a major obstacle to the achievement of equality between women and men. In the EU, 9 out of 10 victims of intimate partner violence are women. Even if the data are scarce, it is estimated that up to one quarter of all women in the EU have suffered physical violence at least once during their adult lives.

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Thank you all for your attention.