

Is there a feminist perspective on the European Employment
Strategy and Guidelines?

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FIRST DRAFT - all comments welcome

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A feminist perspective on the EES and EGs?

- EARLY FEMINIST CRITIQUES OF THE EU
- POLICY AREA: THE EES, OMC AND EGs

HIGH EMPLOYMENT RATES

**EMPLOYMENT FRAGMENTATION &
MAXIMISATION**

SOUTHERN LOSERS, NORTHERN WINNERS

CHANGING THE ESM?

THE EGGE'S CRITIQUE

EU'S CURRENT PLANS FOR EES

- EMPLOYMENT INDICATORS FOR WOMEN
- FEMINIST FRAMEWORKS

LIBERAL EQUALITY

THE RIGHT TO CARE

PREFERENCE THEORY

Is there a feminist perspective on the European Employment Strategy and Guidelines?

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As the call for this panel pointed out, feminists were not slow in coming forward with critiques of the European Community, its priorities, its limitations and its lack of attention to, and understanding of, gender issues. Perhaps the best known critiques in the 1980-s were those of Catherine Hoskyns, Sonia Mazey^{Joye Oulshovin}, amongst others, followed by Amy Elman from 1990.

Inherent to this was the issue of what had the EU done that could be identified as 'for' women, given that this was itself a contested assumption, and the lack of agreed criteria about what progress or advancement for women or their 'interests' would mean, when translated into benchmarks against which an institution or a country's performance could be measured and declared to be performing satisfactorily or not. Nevertheless, the feminist community knew what they were getting at and broadly recognised the EC failings as found. There could be little to counter the main thrust of the critique that EC institutions were overly concerned with rights at work and the 'male' world of employment, being unable to tackle fundamental feminist issues such as abortion (Ostner & Lewis 1995).

If there was any challenge to the 1980s feminist critique, it was mainly on procedural rather than fundamental grounds. It tended to suggest that some of the censure of the then EC was merely misplaced in so far as it was directed at institutions that were not remotely designed to deliver the kinds of outputs that feminists were criticising them for failing to produce. My own work took this line, suggesting that there was a danger of 'barking up the wrong tree', and that

the critique of the EU was probably misplaced. But since, unlike dogs, we were not really interested in whether there was a cat up in the branches, I believe the Spanish version is more apt "Don't ask an elm tree to bear pears". This led me to a measured defence of the EC, or at least of the Commission, on the grounds that there was some evidence that the great EC elm was, in its own inimitable way, striving to produce pears for women after all. Not only had some foundational laws of the EC (laid down inadvertently, as Hoskyns revealed when she found that the men who approved Art 119 had had no inkling of what it might engender), laws that had been used to further gender equality in unexpected ways. The Commission in particular, I argued, had milked its prerogatives for all they were worth to take sex equality to fields beyond employment.

More recently, there is more of a consensus in so far as, in Guerina's view, 'most feminist literature has argued that there are some inherent limitations in striving to achieve equality in a legal system that was developed predominantly to maximize the economic gains of the member-states'. Instead it is now widely accepted, she argues, that there are achievements in the field of employment legislation pertaining to the official labour market.

For the purposes of this panel, devoted as it is to developing feminist perspectives to *other* realms of EU activity, the paper recognises that there is a heritage to work with. On the one hand, the legacy of the fact that both the forefathers, the architects and the builders of the of European edifice were gender-blind and lacked a remotely realistic social vision in their grand project. When Jean Monnet said 'we are uniting a people, not forming coalitions of states' (cited in Duchéne 1994:363) he was evidently not thinking of women as ~~part of the people~~ ^{part of the people} separate from men. On the other, an already established history of struggle and the knowledge that feminists' constructive engagement with EU institutionality had nonetheless been able to bear fruit, sometimes quite a lot of it, at others frustratingly little. So despite initial sceptical analysis, feminist claims on the EU appears to bear out Mazey and Richardson's contention that 'interest groups will seek to exploit opportunity structures or venues as a means of maximising their capacity to shape public policy to their own (Mazey and Richardson 2001:220).

Yet this paper proposes that the ongoing critique of the EU can be taken forward and evolve in complexity by introducing further differentiations. Two new, interlinked differentiations can be made, firstly, between EU institutions, such as Commission and Council and between legislation and strategy. While the EU's gendered achievements in the field of employment legislation expanding the legal acquis have been recognized, the issue of gender in wider socio-economic strategies governed by intergovernmental bargains, such as the case of the European Employment Strategy, has as yet received little attention from researchers working from within a feminist perspective - apart from the scholars on gender and the labour market who have been involved with the Commission, such as the EGGE team and its EU country specialists, coordinated by UMIST. Is it safe to assume the supra-national and the intergovernmental levels need a different toolkit of analysis? Perhaps by turning the spotlight on an intergovernmental bargain such as the European Employment Strategy, we can see how far the recognised 'emancipatory value' (Guerina 2002 :50) of the EU project remains confined to the sphere of rights and regulation and fails to filter down to wider practical policymaking field , despite the best efforts of the Commission in adopting gender mainstreaming techniques.

The European Employment Strategy

The idea of member states' co-ordination of employment policies was launched at the Essen European Council of 1994, but took shape later at the Extraordinary European Council Meeting on Employment held in Luxembourg on 20 and 21 November 1997 (the Luxembourg jobs summit), 'the first really high level meeting had been devoted *exclusively* to employment' at which the then President of the European Parliament (José María Gil-Robles Gil-Delgado), presented the European Parliament's Resolution on an employment initiative. (European Council 1997). Luxembourg meeting launched the implementation of the new open method of co-ordination embedded in art. 128, and the Council endorsed the first set of the Commission's *Employment Guidelines*. *The Open method* of coordination was a new mechanism for the employment field, but actually replicated the type of coordination that had taken place over economic policies' (European Council, 1997). Fundamentally, MS resolved to converge their policies on employment 'while respecting the differences between their situations'¹.

New Art. 128 of treaty of Amsterdam instituted a framework for developing national employment policies on the basis of shared European priorities and interests. The specific mechanism appears in the Treaty of Amsterdam of that year as the Open Method of Coordination. Briefly, the Commission develops the European Strategy for Employment, and once approved it adds Employment Guidelines to indicate how the strategy is to be implemented by the MS. After adopting the strategy and the guidelines, the MS agreed to follow a procedure of stages for implementation, ~~consisting of 4~~. They drawing up their National Action Plan, submit it the Commission and then report annually on their progress, which is monitored by the Commission, who produces a report which is circulated and discussed in a peer review. Member states are assessed in such a way that those who ignore the guidelines or fail to make progress are reported, -

¹ The new mechanism of coordination was to be supported by a financial initiative directed mainly at small and medium enterprises that create sustainable employment.

observers have likened this to the technique of naming and shaming. Finally, the lessons feed into the production of a Joint Employment Report from the Commission and the Council, with a view to set the next annual guidelines.

Rather than discuss the politics of employment coordination, the paper chooses to discuss the targets laid down in the Strategy, particularly the most focused of them, which is that *all member-states are formally committed to the endeavour of making the whole of their population of working age (16 and 65 years of age) enter gainful employment*. By 'whole', they currently mean 60% to 65% in 2005 and 70% by 2010². I argued in a paper last year that the Strategy showed no evidence that any serious consideration had been given to the social consequences of such an employment target, for in fact the EES provoked a rather sudden European commitment to what can be called an 'all-working society' (Threlfall 2002). It is, arguably, a strongly prescriptive goal - amounting to the adoption of a new social model - adopted without negotiation or consensus over its long-term implications and with no apparent regard for the sizeable socio-economic transition that some member states would have to make in order to meet it. The Southern European member states, arguably, would have to forsake their current social model for a different, northern European one, in a transition that would be strongly gendered, for, on closer analysis, we find it to be dependant for its success almost exclusively on the responses and behaviour of women.

This interpretation of the potential impact of the EES rests on the EU's clear choice of the "employment rate" as the main indicator around which all MS are to galvanise their efforts, and on my interpretation of the effect of this indicator in the context of current labour force patterns.

The 'employment rate' as an indicator

Firstly the EES has chosen not to focus on the unemployment rate. Rather than convergence around the old goal of reducing unemployment by meeting the

² The Luxembourg Presidency of 1997 concluded: *'The objective of these measures, which are to form part of the overall strategy for employment, is to arrive at a significant increase in the employment rate in Europe on a lasting basis'* (European Council, 1997).

demands for employment and the skills offered by frustrated jobseekers, governments are now agreed that the priority is simply to have a larger labour force as a proportion of the working age population - more people in jobs. This is not the same thing.

The 'employment rate' is *not* the complementary part of the unemployment rate that makes up 100% of the labour force (as if a 10% unemployment rate went together with a 90% employment rate). The 'employment rate' in this EU usage is the % of the working age population who have a job of some kind, in other words the denominator, or base, is the population instead of the labour force. It is unhelpful that the Commission now officially uses the same term, though it used to call this employment rate over population a 'ratio' to distinguish it, and still does when talking about youth unemployment.

Prima facie, moving away from the unemployment rate as an indicator can be seen as a step forward because the unemployment rate is a proportion of the whole labour force which already includes the unemployed (who are always calculated as part of the labour force). At first glance using the 'employment rate', with the population as the base/denominator instead, can appear to be an improvement. It is also more holistic as a statistic because it includes a wider category of people - the whole working age population- rather than only those working or trying to find work among them. ³

The problem lies with the interaction of the statistic and real movements in the behaviour of labour. For a country's employment rate/ratio to rise, as is considered desirable in the EES, one of two things must happen and for the country in question, and it is preferable for them to occur simultaneously: the number of those already active in the labour force who have been frustrated in their job search (the unemployed) can have fallen because they have found the

³ This can be considered more reliable because population figures are derived from 'hard' census data (a census includes absolutely everybody - at least that is its main aim) rather than on the 'soft' data of self-reported labour force participation derived from a mere sample of people surveyed) - in other words with a rate/ratio only one side of the equation is self-reported rather than both (see Threlfall 2000).

kinds of jobs they want or can do; or, numbers of hitherto 'inactive' people will have joined the labour force and found some form of employment.

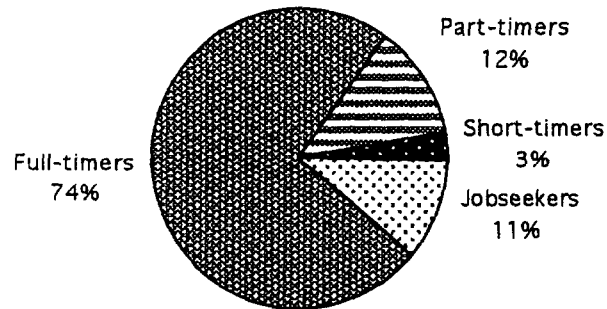
What is not always obvious from the use of the employment rate/ratio indicator is that it can go up even when the pool of unemployed does not go down. This is possible with the use of new entrants onto the labour market and the creation of part-time jobs. This swells the size of the employed labour force, while the unemployed already in the labour market who are seeking full-time jobs or the same kind of job they did before, to apply their existing skills, remain unemployed. If the *employed* labour force including all PT and casual work is enlarged, then the unemployed group within it becomes a smaller proportion of it, even if not a single unemployed person has found a job.

My argument is that a country's performance in the European league tables of employment rate and the targets that are pored over by peers and scrutinised by the Commission can depend entirely on whether it has the kind of labour market and labour laws that facilitate part time work and make all short hours work visible and counted - instead of depending on full-time job creation and the reduction of the actual pool of unemployed. That this might happen was almost admitted right at the start. The Extraordinary European Council of 1997 in its Conclusions stated that economic growth alone 'will not enable us to make up for the job losses suffered in the early 1990s or to achieve the rate of employment growth needed to get most of the unemployed into work...' (European Council 1997). Instead of calling a spade a spade and endorsing employment fragmentation, it called for 'Structural reform'.

I have been particularly critical of the fact that winning at these kinds of stakes can also depend on the type of PT work that is generated. PT is not a homogeneous block: PT employees are distributed across at least four main groups of hours (1-10, 11-20, 21-30 and over 31, but still defined as PT) that vary from country to country. Research indicates that there is quite a significant proportion of people who are in really 'minor employment' doing mini-jobs of just a few hours a week, which fall into the 1-10 group. Such work is frequently not registered and so forms part of a black economy, but in some countries

Labour Force Surveys are able to pick up on people doing few hours of work (possibly because it's legal or because employment laws make it easy for employers to put such few hours employees on their records). As such short-hours work is now quite common (for instance among students in the UK), such countries find that the number of employed in their Labour Force Survey is swelled by several percentage points. Conveniently, this automatically reduces the proportion of the unemployed in the labour force, as the following chart helps to illustrate:

Chart 1. The EU labour force as a spectrum of working times from jobseeking to full-time employment



Source: M.Threlfall, elaboration on basis of Eurostat ELFS Results 1997.

The official use of the 'employment rate' (ratio over population) as a target to which all member states should converge therefore gives certain types of labour market and inherent advantage, while granting the rest a political incentive to follow this model of fragmenting employment and increasing the size of their labour force with new entrants - who are in practise women or young people who constitute convenient reserve armies of labour for those who want to go down this route. Consideration should be given to whether this is a desirable route leading to a healthy social model, or not.

Women's unemployment

A particular gender issue to be taken into account in relation to the EU's shift away from casting the spotlight on unemployment rates is that women's rates have long tended to be higher than men's in most EU member-states (except Sweden and the UK) and continued to be so in 2000 (Commission 2001: 25, table 29). In some countries such as Spain, Greece and Italy, ~~it is~~ the rise in female *participation rates* has been mirrored by a rise in female unemployment; whereas in others, such as Finland and France, where women have long tended to work full-time, the female unemployment rate may represent loss of a job. Whether women have recently joined the labour market and been frustrated in their job-search or have been working full-time and are seeking more of the same, the point is that the issue of high female unemployment is arguably being sidelined by the EU's emphasis on employment rates/ratios. The latest Commission Employment package states in the paragraph on Equal Opportunities: *"the objective of full employment cannot be furthered without raising women's labour market participation rates"*. In the 'old' meaning of full employment as <5% unemployment rates, the statement is incorrect - all that is needed is the creation of jobs for those women who are already participating in the labour market but have not found employment. A country can have low unemployment rates at the same time as low female participation rates, the Netherlands being a case in point (Threlfall 2000:37). In fact, the EES, rather than asking member-states to find jobs for the unemployed women (who mostly seek full-time work given the restriction on jobseekers for PT work being included among the unemployed), are, instead, encouraging ~~them~~^{MS} to allow for the creation of 'secondary' jobs that might attract more women, young people or students into the labour force.

Thus the EES's real goal appears to be an accelerated expansion of a secondary labour force. The linchpin of the strategy becomes even clearer when one considers whether it is intended that enough full-time jobs will be created to absorb the existing demand. It is unlikely. After all, government-backed early retirement packages in the 1980s and early 1990s were devised to remove pressure on the demand for full-time jobs and also abolished numerous posts,

creating 'inactivity'. It is only at the peak of the best expansionary period of recent times 1999-2001 that the number of full-time jobs has overtaken PT job creation in the EU (Commission 2001:16, table 5)⁴. All in all, the goal of raising employment rates/ratios contains an unannounced agenda regarding working time. Even during a period of expansion and growth such as the late 1990s, the proportion of part-time employment does not fall, but continues to rise slightly (European Commission, 2001: 116, table 4).

Very straightforwardly, the UK Chancellor Gordon Brown and cabinet member David Blunkett proclaimed that 'The *modern* definition of full employment' is 'employment opportunity for all' [emphasis added]. We should all create an *all-working society*. At European level this implies a dramatic shift away from the post-war, or even the 20th century, model of work and division of labour between the genders. Some might consider that it was high time, or argue that it the shift started a long time ago and the new model was already well-established. Yet, arguably, the implications of such a shift, now that it is backed by governments brandishing a set of prescriptive policies rather than being simply a spontaneous social trend, have not been explored in any depth.

The EES after five years

Let us now contrast the launch of the Strategy with recent official assessments of it. More than 10 million new jobs were created since 1997 (6 million of which were taken up by women) and 4 million less unemployed, while the active population continued to grow by 5 million people, mainly women. While not claiming that this is due to the EES rather than the econ climate in general, the report of the Commission does claim that there has been a clear convergence of policies after policy changes (Commission 2002, Executive Summary :2)

In Greece for example, 'Labour legislation was modernised in 1998 with the introduction of part-time work and parental leave'. In Spain, 'Labour market reforms were accelerated through the introduction of new contracts

⁴ Furthermore it is worth noting that such full-time job creation coincided with a rise in temporary contracts for both men and women – to 12.5% and 14.5% respectively (European Commission 2001:17) – suggesting that even new FT jobs may increasingly be of the short-term kind.

("permanent employment-development" contract and part-time contract). Italy has seen the 'Introduction of part time legislation and 'Regulation on parental leave. Portugal also reports the 'Introduction of legislation for part time work' for 1999 The Netherlands reports continued high participation in part-time work, existing since early 90s, and that their equal opportunities policy has been strengthened through the 65% target for female employment"⁵

(Commission 2002, Annex 2). The overtly positive treatment given to the PT employment issue is evidence that creation of PT work was indeed at the heart of the EES, especially for women. And it affects SE to a greater extent, since they report efforts to move towards the northern European model. Yet there is no comment on the implications for this.

Furthermore, only a few countries reported any measures that could be considered to address the work-life balance problem. Austria reports an improvement in childcare facilities and Portugal launched a programme called "Crèche 2000" part of a National Childcare Strategy to help individuals balance work and family life. Belgium also highlights as a key response to EES that greater emphasis was given to quality of employment, equal pay and reconciliation of family and working life (Commission 2002 as above) .

Overall a reading of the short section on equal opportunities shows that little progress has been made. Increased employment is underscored as progress, and the small reduction on the pay gap is noted. But the centrality of childcare and family friendly hours remains un-addressed . For instance, the equal opportunities section ends with "Childcare provision, which involves the direct responsibility of public authorities emerges as a priority area for direct government action, and new targets⁶ were set by the Barcelona Summit for 2010". This constitutes an admission that progress on this front was limited. The best one can say is that the problem is therefore singled out for further

⁵ In the Netherlands PT work is already high proportion of female employment, yet they report the adoption of a high target for female employment as if it was of absolutely no consequence whether the great majority of women only did PT work.

⁶ Improvement of the provision of childcare by 2010 to at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age, and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age.

improvement. But the report itself shows how partial and piecemeal a vision of gender equity this employment strategy provides. Despite the fact that the use of an employment rate over *population* indirectly acknowledges that women are half the universe, there is no holistic view, for instance, linking employment to PT work, to pay, to care responsibilities, to childcare provision, to hours of work, or certainly not to anything as holistic as the reform of school hours.

Instead the report blithely asserts that 'priorities set by the Employment Guidelines remain broadly valid for the future' (Csson 2002: section 3) And furthermore, it confirms the attachment to employment maximisation without reflecting an understanding of what it means :

'Raising employment rates to reach the Lisbon and Stockholm targets is a central objective of the Lisbon strategy. Increasingly this will become a condition - not only for reducing unemployment - but also for economic growth and for ensuring the sustainability of our social model' (Csson 2002: section 3.1.)

The recent Barcelona European Council called for a reinforced Employment Strategy and provided directions for the future of the EES. The Joint Report⁷ - again on increasing labour force participation - prepared for the Barcelona European Council estimated the necessary increases in employment between 2002 and 2010 at 15,4 million, of which 9,6m. would be taken by women and 7,4m. by older workers.

The All-Working Society model, without being acknowledged has now been raised as a flag of achievement. Not only is the idea that more of us should take employment now seen to be a condition for reducing unemployment with no recognition that the latter can be effected by the sleight of hand of creating more mini-jobs for students as bar staff or women as office cleaners - possibly because this is considered to be *the way forward*. But the employment maximisation model is suddenly transformed into a condition that underpins

⁷ Increasing labour force participation and promoting active ageing" Council doc. N° 6707 of 8 March 2002, adopted on the basis of COM(2002) 9 final of 24.01.2002

Europe's social model - a social model into which the Commission does not integrate a work-life balance. Thus is the European social model being reframed by the EES rather than a social model dictating the strategy for the future. Far from being sustained, the status quo is being undermined: the traditional male breadwinner model is seen as unsustainable, but the new work-life balance model is not espoused instead.

The references to the ESM seem to be made as a feelgood button that can be pressed in support of many things. For instance, it is stated that 'inclusive labour markets and productivity should be seen as a way to exploit the potential of the European social model as a productive factor, building on the synergies between more and better jobs' (Commission 2002, section 3.1). Should it be thus exploited? Instead of modernising the social model to include gender equity, it is transformed into 'a productive factor' subsumed into the needs of business. Is this progress?

Though this is the sum of what can be found in the main report, it is significant that a separate report was published in mid-2002, an impact evaluation of the EES on equal opportunities that is based on all the national reports as well as on the comments of the EGGE group (the European Group on Gender and Employment) led by Jill Rubery (EMCO/29/060602/EN_REV 1).

The significance is that, soon after the launch of the EES, the EU-funded European Expert Group on Gender and Employment (EGGE) called attention to the lack of gender impact assessment (GIA) as part of the toolkit for deploying employment strategies⁸. If carried out at an early stage, it can prevent any potential negative impact by pinpointing how policies should be adapted or reoriented. 'Without any GIA it is strictly speaking not possible to claim that policies are promoting gender equality' (EGGE 2001). The EGGE believe that '*Policies that prioritise employment over improving access to education and training may not close the equality deficit*' (Rubery & Fagan 2000:10). In other words, the way that the EES resorts to the simple expedient of creating low-skill

⁸ A GIA is an instrument for 'identifying whether a policy under scrutiny has positive or negative outcomes in terms of promoting gender equality' (Rubery & Fagan 2000:7).

and mostly PT jobs will merely bring in its trail further low wages and poor or non-existent career prospects for women. Not surprisingly, Rubery & Fagan (2001 p.12) concluded their EU-wide assessment by warning that '*Attention needs to be paid to improving the quality of women's jobs, not just to raising the short term employment rate*'. It is probable that the policy actors involved in drawing up the EES never considered the potential impact effect of their gendered policies, and that the generally negative GIA made on each national Action Plan by the EGGE international team has struck a note-with the Commission. For the new Impact Evaluation document is a serious gender analysis that highlights how far the member-states still have to go.

A key criticism that can be made of it is that it does not consider sufficiently gender-sensitive indicators. For instance the question of whether part-time is automatically a positive indicator is not addressed, nor is the purely statistical effect of employment fragmentation into mini-jobs on raising or lowering unemployment rates. Confirming this, the Employment Committee of the Commission endorsed a series of Indicators for Monitoring the Employment Guidelines 2002 (europea.eu.int/comm/EMCO....). It continues to use the employment rate over population and the unemployment rates, but the FT/PT question is only addressed by the Employment rate FT equivalents (effective for comparing the actual volume of employment generated, but no the headcount or number of persons included in the employed labour force by PT and mini-jobs. Above all it does not make any attempt to produce a truly meaningful gender indicators.

POLICY-RELEVANT INDICATORS FOR WOMEN

(Chart 2.)

See Table Indicators for women p.10a.

- Labour force participation rates/ratios/pop?
- Full-time employment / population
- Part-time employment / population
- Unemployment ratio / population

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**Indicators for women: labour force participation rates,
full-time and part-time employment ratios, unemployment
ratios. EU Rank Order, prime-age women 1996-7.**

A. Participat rates age 25-49 High>low			B. FT employt. ratio age 25-49 High>low		C. PT employt.ratio age 25-49 High>low		D. Unempl. ratio age 25-49 Low>high				
rank	%		rank	%	rank	%	rank	%			
1	86.2	Sweden	1	65.2	Portugal	1	44.7	Netherla nds	1	3.7	Austria
2	84.0	Finland	2	64.9	Finland	2	30.5	UK	2	4.1	UK
3	83.8	Denmk	3	55.6	Denmk	3	29.4	Sweden	3	5.0	Neths
4	78.9	France	4	50.0	Austria	4	24.2	Germ/y	4	5.8	Denmk
5	78.0	Portugal	5	49.3	France	5	22.8	Austria	5	5.7	Portugal
6	76.5	Austria	6	49.1	Greece	6	22.5	Denmark	6	6.1	Ireland
7}	75.3	}UK	7	46.7	Sweden	7	20.7	Belgium	7	6.9	Germ.
8}	75.2	}Germ.	8	45.0	Germ/y	8	19.9	France	8	7.4	Sweden
							19.7	EU			
9	73.5	Belgium	9	44.6	Belgium	9	12.0	Ireland	9	7.7	Greece
	71.7	EU		43.7	EU						
10	70.8	Neths	10	43.4	Italy	10	8.6	Finland	10	7.9	Italy
11	60.9	Ireland	11	42.7	Ireland	11	7.2	Spain	11	8.1	Belgium
										8.1	EU
12	60.3	Greece	12	40.7	UK	12	7.0	Portugal	12	10.4	Finland
13	61.0	Spain	13	37.5	Spain	13	6.7	Italy	13	10.7	France
14	58.1	Italy	14	20.9	Neths	14	3.5	Greece	14	16.3	Spain

Source: Own calculations based on Eurostat, LFS Results 1996, 1997, tables 003, 008, 010, 048.
Luxembourg: OOEPC, 1997, 1998.

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON THE POLITICS OF WORK IN THE EU

A feminist perspective on the little-heralded yet, I believe, rather remarkable new development in which 15 states have jointly decided that all women should find employment without any form of consultation with women's organisations, is obviously a required response that would be politically helpful. What kind of employment policies and patterns of employment are most clearly in the long-term interests of women, and which best meet their current needs?

The EES position can be characterised as falsely progressive, a faux-modern cry: 'Women can no longer stay home, that's old hat, now the liberating thing to do is work!' But the EU must have realised that employment/job creation trends indicate that European economies will never create full-time employment for women. This as a political issue with social consequences, namely that the demand arising from an increasing number of women who expect to earn their own living autonomously - and a full living at that - cannot be met foreseeably, across Europe. Unable, perhaps, of facing up to this, the falsely modern position* glosses over the contradiction and suggests that all could be like the Netherlands, UK and Denmark - at least these look good on paper. Old-fashioned gender systems like those of Germany and Belgium who appear to have clung to the male breadwinner model are sidelined, while the perennial laggards of the South are challenged to change.

It could be said that the liberal feminist position would go along with the EES's underlying outcomes of ^{a larger} ~~more~~ secondary labour for women with the caveat that it allows women working time flexibility and that, as long as the PT work is of a certain quality, or at least paid above the minimum wage if it is unskilled and casual, and pro-rata if it is open-ended and white collar or professional. This is also a position that fits UK women where female unemployment/dissatisfied jobseekers has long been low, both FT and PT due to the abundance of PT work with short hours. Paradoxically the UK is the liberal model: long-standing lack of public childcare services has historically reduced married mothers' expectations of earning a full living, so they have created their own work-life balance by

combining care work with PT employment, thus saving the state the costs of childcare and winning the EU employment rate stakes.

The liberal feminist perspective is critical of the meanness of the model rather than of the model itself - of its lack of attention to childcare services to ease the model along, of the dangers of job segregation and pay disparities, but the Swedish and Dutch versions of it are largely deemed acceptable.

A critical variant is that deriving from social policy work on de-commodification and particularly Orloff's re-rendering of Esping Anderson regarding women's right to be commodified – to be allowed to achieve financial autonomy through the market, which I would equate with the French model – high levels of FT work – liberal equality – combined with high levels of state support for parents. If priority is accorded to the ability of women to access financial autonomy, then female employment fragmentation must be considered a hindrance to it and a false solution to the question of gender equity. Nonetheless if women are to earn their own living, then PT ^{wife} could be seen, especially if only engaged in during periods of bringing up younger children, as a stepping stone in an overall movement of women towards the ultimate goal of autonomy, with freedom of access to the market, combined with removal of barriers to it, being a prime consideration. This is also the position held by women's policy advocates in both the Spanish trade union confederations, who are highly critical of the PT work option in so far as it does not support the demand for open access to 'men's jobs', and in fact undermines it, from their point of view.

A more substantial critique of the kind of issues implicit in the EES, yet ignored, is the Right to Care perspective. To be fair, the EGGE believes in *the right to care* and warn in their gender impact assessment summary report that 'promoting employment may compromise women's right to care' (Rubery & Fagan 2000: 12). Policies would therefore need to actively protect this right, a point that raises many controversial questions, with echoes of the Wages for Housework campaigns of a sector of the early feminist movement. It is truly ironic that *after decades in which women had to fight for the right to work, employment is now being prescribed for them as a duty against which they now have to reassert a right to choose care work*. Social policy analysts have argued that the concept of unpaid caring work, or social care, needs to be

placed at the centre of any analysis of the welfare state (Daly and Lewis 2000)
 - and by extension the employment models that it is based on.

Lewis's insights into the operation of ^{the} gendered system in welfare in four European countries, with her by now familiar concepts and terms. Based on the division of paid and unpaid labour, she identified a typology of strong, modified and weak male-breadwinner states. As Williams (2001:138) reminds us, Lewis also pointed out that the impulse behind the weakening of the male breadwinner model was not exclusively the search for gender-equality, because 'labour market shortages and pronatalism are also significant'. The latter insight is particularly significant for the current European context, where structural unemployment has co-existed with persistent claims of labour shortages and a strong pull for immigrants to take up, even create, low paid jobs. It was also in part a concern with falling populations that encouraged policymakers and the Commission to campaign for a reconciliation (their term) of work and family life [MT 2000]. Daly and Lewis point to the crisis of care affecting all European societies. On the one hand, demographic changes (especially the ^eaging of the population and financial pressures) are increasing the demand for care, whilst on the other, women's greater participation in paid work and changing norms of family responsibilities have decreased the supply of caring work. Arguably, these particular points, if applied to the analysis of the EES would serve to highlight its incoherence, rather than its harmfulness.

In addition, a pragmatic right to care perspective would see the German Erziehungsgeld and the British right to sixteen years of income support for single-parents, and the German state's agreement to keep up national insurance contribution of carers temporarily out of the labour market, such as on parental leave, as positive steps along the road to recognition ^{of} caring as a right, and would critique the strategy's silence on such matters. Some feminist approaches on difference can also arguably be brought into this critique, including the lawyers who emphasise procedural vs. substantive equality (eg. Shaw 1998) who would decry the EES's inability to address the latter. Certain French feminists view that there is a key need for a new social contract for gender that incorporates a constitutional recognition of difference, based on a recognition of

care as inherent to that difference (Irigaray 1989, Velu 2000). Again, from such a perspective the EES is a dangerous 'forward flight' into uncharted territory in a context where women's difference has not been acknowledged, which, interestingly, would lead us back to the critique of the narrowness of the EU's remit on gender equality.

One of the caveats regarding the right to care perspective that should be entered here, is that its implementation also simultaneously buttresses women carers' opportunities to leave the labour market. This is one of the reasons it is not welcomed by the liberal egalitarian and the 'access first' approaches found in Spain.

Preference theory is a further perspective to consider. Catherine Hakim's work also offers a useful theory for analysing European trends, though it is based mainly on research in the UK and the US and elsewhere outside the EU. If one takes her 1996 contentions regarding the increasing polarisation of female employment, these suggest that the emphasis on facilitating a right to access to the labour market and to autonomy -sketched out above- ~~is~~ would not be shared, by Anglo-Saxon women (at least) for the heterogeneity of women is the source of polarisation in women's labour market behaviour (Hakim 1996:202). Elaborating on this, Hakim also contends that women are heterogeneous in their preferences and priorities regarding the conflict between family life and employment. In the new scenario of modern societies, they have a choice, and this generates heterogeneous behaviour in their employment patterns (2000:4). She identifies three fundamental lifestyle preferences - home-centred, adaptive, and work-centred. At the same time, Hakim argues that a major historical change in the labour market is the creation of jobs for secondary earners, people who do not want to give priority to paid work at the expense of other life interests (2000:7), a socio-economic trend that supports female employment heterogeneity.

The theory of women's preferences leads to an interpretation of the way the European Union is going on the employment front. It is urging its members to accelerate their move into that stage of modernity in which secondary jobs are created so as to give women choice. Even more than seeing the call to employment as an injunction on women to seek employment, it can instead be seen as an opportunity to 'liberate' those who have been at home but would now like to have a job, perhaps because their care work has become less onerous. There is an emphasis ^{in Hakim's work} here on choice, and the research

focus gives space and visibility to the varieties of women's preferences instead of aggregated concepts of 'average woman' as the representative of all womankind. Yet in Hakim's view that very choice is what lies at the base of women's conflicting interests, due to their greater heterogeneity of preferences regarding how to conduct their lives. This suggests therefore that a pan-European employment strategy will not provoke a united feminist response or a united feminist view about more preferable strategy.

So, is the EES simply the modern way? One of the difficulties of assessing it lies in its incoherence, in the sense of its non-holistic formulation. The EU is blind to the effects of the EES on unpaid private care, ^{to} its implicit reduction, as if it might be gradually replaced by paid versions of the same, and states would be freed from addressing the issue. This is not convincing, *prima facie*, in so far as there ~~are~~ ^{is} no economic research that is widely known to predict that all care work will simply end up by being converted to market work and paid for privately by the individuals who make use of it. That leaves room to argue that the right to care will never fully take place in the private sphere of a household, and should not entail a compulsion to become financially dependent on a spouse. So the incoherence of the EES as a social strategy is that it can only with difficulty address public and social spending issues in the social policy arena that would allow it a more holistic approach encompassing a vision of how to deal with the question of unpaid care.

To conclude briefly, this preliminary assessment of the implications of a major policy choice made by the EU ⁱⁿ ~~by~~ devising the European Employment Strategy, and the pathway that the EU has designed for itself, elicits ^a number of responses that have been further elaborated by drawing on a variety of feminist frameworks and perspectives. In the initial considerations that this first version of the paper has entered into, none have been found to be fully satisfactory. This is at first sight at least, due to the way ~~the~~ feminist perspectives are themselves 'partially-sighted' and do not encompass all the complex issues. In addition to discussing frameworks for interpretation, there is also the question of whether a political response addressed ^{to} ~~at~~ the EU is needed from a feminist

perspective, in order to create awareness of the implications, such as those outlined above. For the intriguing part of this story is how little insight the politicians and policymakers seem to have into their own strategy.

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