

OLDER WOMEN WORKERS AND THE EUROPEAN UNION'S EMPLOYMENT GOALS: BRINGING GENDER INTO THE DEBATE

Sally Bould e Sara Falcão Casaca

CEPS/INSTEAD, Luxembourg / University of Delaware, EUA/ISEG-UTL / SOCIUS, Portugal

Abstract

This paper explores the employment figures for older women, aged 55-64 in the EU15. Current policies on «active aging» and the gender neutral approach to pension reform does not take into account the unpaid work of caregiving. Where older women are typically employed during these later years in the Nordic countries, there are a range of supports to assist them with caring for family members. In contexts where the state provision of eldercare facilities is weak and caring activities are mainly performed by women, if the adult daughters are now expected to work, the questions to be raised are: who will care for the very old parents? If women have to step out of the labor market for caring reasons, isn't their future economic situation at risk?

Keywords: Older women's employment, active aging, caregiving, European countries.

Résumé

Les travailleuses âgées et les objectifs d'emploi de l'Union Européenne: introduisant une perspective de genre dans le débat

Cet article examine les statistiques concernant les l'emploi des femmes âgées de 55-64 au sein de l'UE15. Les politiques actuelles en matière de «vieillesse active» et en matière de réformes des retraites sans considération de genre, ne prennent pas en compte le travail non rémunéré de soin des proches parents âgés. Or, si dans les pays nordiques les femmes dans cette tranche d'âge peuvent rester actives sur le marché du travail, c'est aussi parce qu'elles peuvent compter de fait sur une large panoplie de programmes publics d'assistance au domicile pour les personnes âgées. Dans des contextes nationaux où les dispositions mises en place par l'Etat dans le domaine des soins pour les personnes âgées sont moins développées, les activités liées aux soins sont effectuées principalement par les femmes. Dans la mesure où les femmes seront sensées rester actives sur le marché du travail plus longtemps, et notamment dans cette tranche d'âge, deux questions fondamentales se posent. Qui est-ce qui prendra soin des proches parents d'un âge très avancé? Qu'en sera-t-il de la sécurité économique des femmes âgées de 55 à 64 ans quise verront obligées de quitter leurs emplois avant l'âge légale de la retraite?

Mots-clés: l'emploi de femmes âgées, vieillissement actif, soins des personnes d'âge très avance, pays européennes.

Resumo

As trabalhadoras de idade mais avançada e os objetivos da União Europeia: integrando uma perspectiva de género no debate

Este artigo analisa alguns dados sobre o emprego de mulheres com idades compreendidas entre os 55-64 anos no contexto da UE15. As políticas atuais em torno do «envelhecimento ativo» e da idade de reforma não integram uma perspectiva de género, descurando o trabalho não pago e a prestação de cuidados. Nos países nórdicos, o Estado

tende a providenciar um conjunto amplo de serviços de apoio às famílias; no entanto, naqueles contextos onde prevalece a escassez de infraestruturas públicas e de estruturas formais de apoio à população idosa, são fundamentalmente as mulheres com mais de 55 anos que cuidam de familiares idosos/as. A este respeito, são fundamentalmente exploradas duas questões: se é agora esperado o prolongamento do seu ciclo de vida ativa, quem é que assegura a prestação de cuidados familiares? E se a necessidade de cuidar de elementos familiares pressionar essas mulheres no sentido da desvinculação do mercado de trabalho, não estará a sua situação económica presente e futura em risco?

Palavras-chave: emprego feminino em idades avançadas, envelhecimento ativo, prestação de cuidados, países europeus.

Introduction

In the face of significant demographic challenges, the European Union (EU) has approached the issue of aging populations by requesting laws and initiatives aiming to keep men and women working longer. Under this framework, attempts are underway to retain workers in the labor market by increasing the age at which they qualify for a retirement pension. In particular after the Barcelona European Council, held in 2002, in many European countries women's retirement age has been increased more than men's, so now women and men are expected to retire at the same age.¹ Furthermore, as older women's participation in employment is a major economic and social issue in the EU, policies have been designed to increase the labor force supply, enhance economic growth and reduce the costs related to pensions, health care and the social security systems in general (Casaca and Bould, 2012). Increasing employment rates and retaining older workers in the labor market are, therefore, two key targets of the European Employment Strategy (EES). European Union goals for employment for older workers (55-64 years old) were set at 50% by 2010 (with a target of 40% for women) (EUROFOUND, 2009).² This target has been met or exceeded in eight of the fifteen countries of the EU, as indicated in Table 1 below. The main purpose of this article is to explore these differences in employment figures, as well as to understand why working at older ages can present different issues for women that it does for men in the 15 European Union countries.³

¹ The Barcelona European Council (2002) agreed on the target of gradually increasing the average retirement by 5 years until 2010; the average age in the EU was 59.9 years old in 2001 (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cmsData/docs/pressData/en/ec/71025.pdf> access on 15/March/2009).

² According to the goals defined by the Stockholm European Council, in 2001. (http://consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/00100-r1.%20ann-r1.en1.html access on 13/March/2009).

³ The EU composition at the time (Stockholm and Barcelona Councils): Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Such uniform European Union (EU) employment directives and social policies defined under the Stockholm and Barcelona European Councils (2001 and 2002) were to be implemented in each of 15 EU countries. The national contexts, however, are quite diverse. They vary not only in cultural expectations about older women's employment, women's retirement and gender roles in paid and unpaid family work, but also in political history, demographic, economic, employment conditions, and in the provision of social services (childcare and eldercare facilities, for instance). In this regard, each country has developed with its own history of social policy and welfare regime (e.g. Kröger, 2001, 2003; Orloff, 2002).

The article reviews the different family care policies with regard to their potential impact on the employment behavior of older women. It discusses some issues of concern, in particular some of the risks imposed on older women by non-gender sensitive policies and the ongoing welfare reforms. In fact women, aged 55-64, do most of the unpaid work caring for family members, especially elderly relatives; this work is usually «off the books» (Picchio, 2010). In contexts where the state provision of care facilities is weak and where traditional gender ideologies assign these tasks to women, older women's employment may be limited by family caregiving duties. In a situation of increasing demand for welfare restructuring and pressure to cut public expenditure, such concerns might be relevant for many women in Europe. These questions need to be raised because women's current and future economic situation, as well as their living conditions may be at greater risk. Moreover, if women are now expected to work but no formal arrangements are provided to support care and eldercare in particular, aging European societies might face a considerable crisis of care.

Increasing employment at older ages: the need for a gender perspective

In many countries women's retirement age has been increased more than men's so now women and men are expected to retire at the same age (Eurostat, 2008). Therefore, the new policies of later retirement and the employment targets for older age groups require a greater change in the behavior of women than men. They often apply to countries where retirement policies allowed women, if they worked at all, to retire earlier than men. The European framework appears to be mainly driven by instrumental and financial purposes in order to reduce the state pension expenditure (Taylor 2006), neglecting the gendered effects of this kind of active aging policies (Casaca and Bould, 2012). Older women as caregivers are often invisible, and care work is socially perceived as «devalued labor» (Calasanti, 2003; Durán, 2007). A different perspective has been offered by some scholars who call for a more comprehensive approach to work, encompassing both paid and unpaid activities as well as a more equal sharing of unpaid activities between men and women (e.g. Silva, 1999; Perista, 2002; Durán, 2007; Bould and Gavray, 2009).

While the demographic changes and the urgent need of reforms to alleviate the financial pressure upon the social security systems are the driven forces of the current European policies (Taylor, 2006), other important dimensions have been disregarded, such as the urgent need of formal care provision (Casaca and Bould, 2012). This is particularly critical as far as the elderly are concerned, as in the context of longer life expectancy and population aging many very old people will need care in Europe (Bettio and Plantenga, 2004). Informal care provision for the very old is usually provided by older women in the family, adult daughters and daughters-in-law with some variation of spousal care by husbands for their wives (Ray, 2000; Calasanti, 2003). For that reason, their retention in the labor market raises new challenges and concerns in terms of employment opportunities and care provision.

The emphasis is on increasing life expectancy while ignoring the fact that healthy life expectancy has not increased as fast. A healthy life expectancy of more than 63 years for men and women is found only in Belgium, Ireland, Luxembourg, United Kingdom and Sweden.⁴ What is also striking about the aging of the population is the diversity in health and ability at the older ages of 55-64. This means that many individuals age well, while many others suffer from two or more chronic diseases by age 55; women are significantly more likely to be disabled than men at these ages (Wray and Baum, 2001; Bould, 2010). A gender neutral political framework ignores the health problems that those aged 55-64 face in the labor force, especially women. Many «women's jobs» require a high level of physical ability or manual dexterity, e.g domestic service, child care, and inputting and retrieving data from computers.

Contemporary societies and labor markets are centered on the apotheosis of the market, consumption and on the commodification of personal attributes (such as youth) (Taylor, 2001, cited in Collin, 2005: 10). For some authors, age and gender are seen as a «double jeopardy», due to the interplay between two subordinate positions – that of being a woman plus that of being old. It is a combination of *sexism* and *agism* (Krekula, 2007: 161). Colin Duncan and Wendy Loretto (2004) suggest that the jeopardy is not just additive but also interactive. For women agism and sexism interact to produce something that is more than just sex discrimination added to age discrimination. The situation of older women also varies culturally, historically and even within each society (Vincent, 2000; Arber, Davidson and Ginn, 2003; Venn, Davidson and Arber, 2011).

Even though women's employment patterns result from a complex of forces (Orloff, 2002), the welfare state policies have had an important influence upon women's situation in society, either encouraging or discouraging their participation in the labor market (Lewis, 1992; Daly and Lewis, 2000, Orloff, 2002). Some

⁴ However, in relation to this indicator (healthy life years at birth), caution is required in reading the data, due to the non-uniform criteria of gathering data across the different countries (EUROSTAT, 2011: 38).

welfare states attempt to provide the necessary conditions for *defamilialization* (McLaughlin and Glendinning 1994, cited in Mahon, 1998: 158), by providing extensive public care services. Jane Lewis (1992) states that when non-paid work dimensions are added to paid work ones, it is then possible to identify some variations of welfare regimes: those which are based on a *strong male breadwinner model* (where Mediterranean countries are included), those which may be classified as a *modified male breadwinner model*, and finally those where a *weak male breadwinner model* prevails (a model found in the Nordic countries). Birgit Pfau-Effinger (1999) has also incorporated the importance of gender ideologies; each welfare regime reflects its national the ideologies about women's and men's roles in society and in families. The ideologies around this division of labor also shape the way public policies are defined and social facilities are implemented (e.g. Lewis, 1992; Drew, 1998; Mahon, 1998; Daly and Lewis, 2000; Orloff, 2002; Addis, 2006; Crompton, 2006).

Employment patterns and family policy: variation across the EU

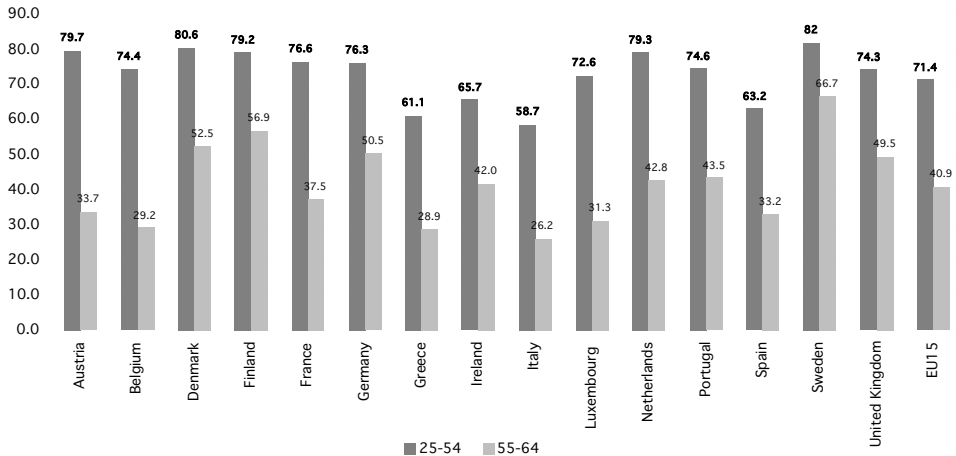
The Nordic cluster

A key factor in this variation is whether or not men's and women's gender roles reflect a strong division of labor with men's role primarily in paid work and women's role primarily in unpaid work. In addition there is the role of the state responsibility for care, in this situation, the care of elderly persons. Gerdt Sundström *et al* (2008) group countries by their family care policies. One cluster includes the Nordic countries: Denmark, Sweden and Finland. In this group, there is an explicit family policy with the state having the final responsibility for the provision of care; long-standing gender equality policies have also supported women's employment and dual-earner families (e.g. Orloff, 2002; Crompton, 2006). As Figure 1 shows, not only is women's employment rate at 80% in the prime ages but also older women, aged 55-64, have a high employment rate. According to Pfau-Effinger (1999), the dominant gender model is based on the idea of a full-time integration of men and women into the workforce. In Sweden high rates of employment for older men and women have been observed for the past three decades (Lowenstein, Katz and Gur-Yaish, 2008). In Denmark these high rates for women are more recent, and Finland has experienced an extremely rapid increase in the rate of participation of older men and women since 1994.⁵

In general, the state provides formal care, such as child care to support young women's employment, but also facilities and services for elderly persons in need of care (Lowenstein, Katz and Gur-Yaish, 2008; see also Kröger, 2001).

⁵ EUROSTAT, *LSF database*; access on 26/January/2012.

Figure 1
Employment rates for women in 2010, by age groups and by countries (EU15)



Source: EUROSTAT, *LSF database*; access on 26/January/2012
http://epp.EUROSTAT.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/statistics/search_database

Results from the Survey of Health and Aging in Europe (SHARE) indicate that persons 65 and over in Sweden generally use formal care although it may be combined with family care (Suanet, 2011). This welfare provisioning may be one of the forces laying behind the relatively high employment rate of women aged 55-64; public support provided enables older women to continue working (Sundström *et al.*, 2008: 244). In the SHARE survey women over 50 in Sweden and in Denmark who provide care and help are the most likely to be employed; the employment rate in Sweden is 30% and in Denmark 25% (Finland is not in the SHARE survey). Part-time work in the Nordic countries is most likely to be due to «family and personal responsibilities»⁶ and less than 20% of part-time work is involuntary.⁷ In the Nordic group both men and women have some protection from risks resulting from working at older ages in the current «*turbulent* labor market» (Taylor 2006); therefore, even part-time work can provide adequate wages and security (Orloff, 2002).

Finland, similarly, has had a long tradition of structural supports for women's life-time employment and the employment rates for older men and women have been quite similar. For both men and women there have been dramatic increases since 1994⁸ from about one-third to 56% in 2010 (See Table 1). To

⁶ EUROSTAT, *LSF database*; access on 26/January/2012.

⁷ EUROSTAT, *LSF database*; access on 26/January/2012.

⁸ EUROSTAT, *LSF database*; access on 26/January/2012.

support later retirement the government put in place explicit policies of pension incentives encouraging working into older ages, but studies found that one reason for women not taking on this opportunity for continuing to work was the «need to help others» (Kauppinen, 2010: 167). In order to accommodate this care activity the new program allows older workers to reduce their working hours to part-time and make up for some of the lost wages by qualifying for a part-time pension. A survey found that 38% of part-time pensioners, especially women, «were involved in care activities related to their family members or relatives, most typically a spouse, aging parent(s) or grandchild or grandchildren» (Kauppinen, 2010: 168).

Table 1
Employment rates for men and women (55-64 years old), in the EU-15 (2010)

	Men	Women
Germany	65.0	50.5
Austria	51.6	33.7
Belgium	45.6	29.2
Denmark	62.7	52.5
Spain	54.7	33.2
Finland	55.6	56.9
France	42.1	37.5
Greece	56.5	28.9
Ireland	58.1	42.0
Italy	47.6	26.2
Luxemburg	47.7	31.3
Netherlands	64.5	42.8
Portugal	55.7	43.5
United Kingdom	65.0	49.5
Sweden	74.2	66.7
EU 15	56.2	40.9

EUROSTAT (2011: 3)

Southern Europe: The Mediterranean cluster

The second cluster integrates the so-called Mediterranean countries: Italy, Greece and Spain. In the first two countries, older women’s employment rate (55-64 years old) is below one third (in Spain is 33.2%) and prime-age women’s employment rate below 65% (See Figure 1, above). These countries have a strong breadwinner model and a *familialistic* approach, along with the prevalence of deep-seated traditional gender ideologies (e.g. Pfau-Effinger, 1999; Trifiletti,

1999; Addabbo, 2006; Addis, 2006; Crompton, 2006). Large differences, at least 20 percentage points, between older women's and older men's rates of employment can be found in this group (and almost 30 percentage points in Italy) (Table 1, above). Historically these countries have also provided earlier retirement for women in contrast to men (Eurostat, 2008).

The limited employment of older women is linked to the cultural expectation that these women are responsible for care of family members. Over 85% of the population surveyed in Italy and Greece sees the family as the principal provider of care for elderly family members and the family has had a legal obligation to care (Sundström *et al.*, 2008: 238; 250). Elder care in these countries is often provided in three generation households (Albertini and Kohli, 2012). Formal home help usage is less than 1% among persons 65 and over in Greece and Italy and only 4% in Spain (Sundström *et al.*, 2008: 254; see also Bettio and Plantenga, 2004; Casaca and Damião, 2011).

The contrast between the Nordic and the Mediterranean cluster is also evident in gender attitudes towards care work. Even though the asymmetrical division of unpaid work is also found in the Nordic group (Björnberg and Dahlgren, 2003), there is a stronger egalitarian belief system and the expectation for men to be more involved in care activities (e.g. Bettio and Plantenga, 2004; Aboim, 2007). In Sweden there are almost equal numbers of elderly husbands caring for elderly wives as there are wives caring for husbands (Socialstyrelsen, 2006, as cited in Sundström *et al.*, 2008: 245). In Spain husbands «less often care for their wives, even in spouse-only households» (IMERSO, 2005, cited in Sundström *et al.*, 2008: 245). A patriarchal culture still prevails in Southern Europe, where caregiving is more strictly a women's obligation especially for older generations). Even in the case of elderly married couples it is often the daughter who provides more care than the husband; women are still seen as the primarily caregivers for their elderly relatives, parents or even parents-in-law, grandchildren or other relatives in need (e.g. Portugal, 1995; Trifiletti, 1999; Torres *et al.*, 2004; Addis, 2006).

There is an important exception to the universally very low employment rates of older women in the Mediterranean countries. Older women with high education at the tertiary level (ISCED 5-6) are much more likely to be employed. In 2010 the employment rate in Greece for older educated women is 45.4%, greater than for educated women in Belgium (43%); in Italy the employment rate (58.1%) is higher than in France (49%); and in Spain the rate is 61.1% as high as in the UK (61.3%).⁹ Furthermore in the Mediterranean countries older women's employment is predominantly full-time in contrast to a majority part-time in the UK and the Netherlands. Perhaps this is because educated working women in the Mediterranean countries have expectations of a longer career path and may be able to hire domestic help (Trifiletti, 1999; Bettio and Plantenga, 2004).

⁹ EUROSTAT, *LSF database*; access on 26/January/2012.

Southern Europe: the singular case of Portugal

While Portugal has often been classified together with the Mediterranean countries, Portuguese women have had a long tradition of employment, especially in the primary ages 25-54 (e.g. Ferreira, 1999; Guerreiro and Romão, 1995; Wall *et al.*, 2001; Torres, *et al.*, 2004; Casaca, 2010; Casaca and Damião, 2011). Women in this age have an employment rate of about 75% in 2010, well above the countries included in the Mediterranean Cluster and above the average in the EU-15 (Figure 1). This has been considered a very interesting case study, as Portugal shares many characteristics with the Mediterranean countries in terms of welfare state provisions, gender ideologies and family characteristics, but clearly the cultural expectation in Portugal is for prime age women to work (e.g. Torres, *et al.*, 2004; Casaca, 2010; Casaca and Damião, 2011). This is quite remarkable because – as the Figure 1 shows – Portugal is closer to the Nordic cluster than to Greece, Italy and Spain in employment rates of prime age women. Furthermore, over 80% of Portuguese women workers participate on a full-time basis in the labor market (Casaca, 2010).

In a process of «unfinished modernisation» Fernando Machado and António Costa (1998) say that Portugal exhibits characteristics of a «dual country» in many dimensions. In this context, the position of the state has been ambivalent in terms of gender relations: despite the progressive legislation on gender equality and (paid)work-family reconciliation in Portugal, the provision of formal care services has been rather weak. Some progress has been made over the last years primarily in terms of childcare facilities; eldercare services still remain largely underdeveloped (Casaca and Bould, 2012). This is still a country in which the dual earner model coexists with a strong asymmetry in terms of the burden of unpaid and caring work –activities that still remain on women's shoulders (Perista, 2002; Torres *et al.*, 2004). In the older ages, women provide essential care for aging parents (and parents-in-law) as well as adult children or grandchildren (Portugal, 1995; Casaca and Bould, 2012), therefore attending to caregiving on «two fronts» (Kröger, *et al.*, 2003).

During the 1980s and the next decade, the state assumed that encouraging early retirement could act as a solution for the unemployment among the young workforce. However, following the European Directives¹⁰, early retirement has been discouraged and even penalized. Since the law reform (Law n.º 4/2007), the calculation of pensions is not based on the best 10 years of remuneration of the last 15 years, but on the whole working-life. This change particularly impacts on women because their work-life remuneration is usually less than the men's, thereby creating a greater risk of poverty for women in old ages (see also Perista, coord, 2012). The low wages and poor pensions provide a context in which to

¹⁰ The targets agreed in the Stockholm and in the Barcelona European Councils, in 2001 and 2002.

understand the reasons why Portugal has the highest employment rate for women aged 65-74 in the EU15 – 17.6% (the average for the EU15 is 5%, in 2010).¹¹

The UK and Northern continental Europe

Despite the diversity, the other European countries (EU15) tend to have a mixture of family and state responsibility for the provision of elderly care and care in general. It is not our purpose to analyze this diverse group in detail, but to highlight some important features and trends. Patterns of employment for older women in 2010 vary from a low of 29.2% in Belgium to a high of 49.5% in the UK (See Figure 1, above). While there are a great many possible causes for this behavior in each country, the liberal welfare state of the UK (also Ireland) can be distinguished from the continental welfare states (Esping-Anderson, 1990). In Britain, the liberal tradition is to provide services only for the elderly who are poor. The family, with its access to the market, is responsible for the care of the majority of elderly and persons in need (Thane, 2010), also in line with the prevalence of a male breadwinner model (Lewis, 1992; Orloff, 2002). The liberal welfare state is characterized by a greater degree of inequality than the continental welfare states and also a large inequality of income among state pension recipients. Now there is a non-contributory pension to help persons over 80 with low incomes mostly poor women.¹²

For the continental welfare states, the Netherlands stands out because of the rapid increase in the rate of employment among older workers, both men and women, since 1994.¹³ About 43% of older Dutch women (55-64 years old) are employed (Figure 1, above), more than doubling the low rate of 17% for older women in 1994. While the family is seen as the “natural” provider for children, the state is considered to be an important care provider for the elderly (Bettio and Plantenga, 2004: 101; see also Sundström *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, older Dutch women can obtain help in the home from the state for their elderly parents (Suanet *et al.*, 2011). All of the welfare states of continental Europe, however, have provided benefits for older workers who are out of work and/or with a work disability and too young for full pension benefits. This system can provide support for older women with work histories who cannot find work. The impact of raising the retirement age in these countries will vary depending on the extent to which these benefits will be sustained.

¹¹ EUROSTAT, *LSF database*; access on 26/January/2012.

¹² Source: www.direct.gov.uk (Pension and retirement planning, The over 80 pension).

¹³ EUROSTAT, *LSF database*; access on 27/January/2012.

Part-time work among the strategies for combining work and care

As far as older women are concerned, part-time employment is particularly high in the Netherlands and in many other EU countries (except for the Mediterranean ones and Finland, where the percentage is less than 30%) (Table 2, below). Often this work-time regime has been considered as a solution for combining work and care (Fagan, O'Reilly and Rubery, 2000; Bettio and Plantenga, 2004), although other factors may support that «option». ¹⁴ For those who are working part-time, however the most important question is whether or not the part-time regime is voluntary. The Netherlands is a newcomer to this group and the rapid growth in women's employment discussed above is in voluntary part-time not full-time work; about 82% of older women (55-64 years old) work part time.

Table 2
Part-time employment among older workers (55-64 years old), as a % of men and women's employment (2010)

	Men	Women
	55-64	
Germany	9.9	50.0
Austria	12.5	48.7
Belgium	17.2	52.9
Denmark	12.1	40.0
Spain	3.9	21.7
Finland	15.0	23.1
France	11.3	33.5
Greece	3.3	11.5
Ireland	13.4	47.4
Italy	6.4	20.8
Luxemburg	a)	40.2
Netherlands	29.0 c)	81.8 c)
Portugal	11.2	25.7
United Kingdom	16.3	51.3
Sweden	15.7	41.4
EU 15	11.6	41.3

Source: EUROSTAT, *LSF database*; access on 26/January/2012
http://epp.EUROSTAT.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/statistics/search_database
 Notes: a) not available; c) break in series

¹⁴ EUROSTAT, *LSF database*; access on 27/January/2012.

In the Mediterranean countries and Portugal, older women typically work on a full-time basis (only 25.7% are part-time workers). For those who are working part-time in these southern countries the main reason is because the woman cannot find full-time work; – 40% of the Italian older women, 40% of the Spanish, 21% of the Portuguese and 18.5% of the Greek women report involuntary part time work¹⁵ (Casaca and Bould, 2012). In the Nordic countries, however, older women are more likely to report voluntarily choosing part time work due to family and personal responsibilities.¹⁶ The EU policy to promote part time work as a solution to work and family issues for women may encourage exploitation of older women in marginal low wage work where part time work has no protection. Except for the Nordic countries and the Netherlands, part-time jobs are mainly characterized by low status, poor pay and precarious futures (Bettio and Plantenga, 2004). As it is a gendered work-time regime, it reinforces women's position of economic subordination as well as the ideology of female domesticity (Casaca, 2010). Accepting part-time work as a solution for women does not call into question the men's role in paid and unpaid work (Fagan, O'Reilly and Rubery, 2000).

Conclusion

Older women's participation in employment is a major economic and social issue; the goals of EU policies are not only to reduce costs related to pensions, health care and the social security systems in general, but also to increase the labor force supply and to enhance economic growth. The first concern with this approach is that policies to retain older workers in employment tend to be gender-blind, inasmuch as they ignore that older men and women do not have the same opportunities and resources to organize their lives and participate in the labor market. In examining current employment rates of older workers there is more of a variation among the countries for women than for men. In the Nordic cluster the state takes responsibility for the provision of in-home care as well as institutional care and the goal of a longer working life for men and women has already been reached. Conversely, in Italy, Greece and Spain, as well as in some continental countries, that is not the case; the participation of older women (55-64 years old) is below (sometimes, well below) the European target of 40%. Moreover, in the Mediterranean cluster and Portugal women have the primary responsibility for the care provision for elderly and other family members in need. Consequently, working longer raises new challenges and concerns in terms of employment opportunities and care provision.

The second concern is that the current reforms have a greater impact on women than on men in most countries, thus imposing a greater risk for women's

¹⁵ EUROSTAT, *LSF database*; access on 26/January/2012.

¹⁶ EUROSTAT, *LSF database*.

present and future economic situation. Now men and women qualify for a retirement pension at the same age as, from a political point of view, gender roles in employment and caring were identical. As long as the issue is one of providing care, especially to elderly persons in need, a gender neutral analysis is not appropriate. What would be a sustainable political framework of care at the European level? For now EU policies may limit women's access to full retirement benefits during their caregiving years as well as reduce their pensions as a result of their «early» retirement. Such a situation would deny many of them the opportunity of an adequate retirement pension and of decent living conditions in their later years.

The third concern is that in the current financial crisis states are not likely to be spending more on providing care. Even the Nordic cluster is not immune to financial cuts (Alderman, 2010). Southern European countries, especially Spain and Portugal have been developing a basic care network for children (Kröger, 2001) but the provision of in-home care as well as institutional care for the elderly is very limited (Sundström *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore these are the countries which are now in the grip of severe financial austerity pressures (Daley, 2010). While current programs are being limited, the possibility for new ones is remote. Current difficulties, however, should not limit the search for a new social model in order to provide age and gender friendly working environments for older women and men, with decent work available for all. Such a model must also account for the growing need for care, in particular among the very old. The burden of austerity programs should not be allowed to fall so heavily on older women and on those in need of care.

References

- Aboim, Sofia (2007), «Clivagens e continuidades de género face aos valores da vida familiar em Portugal e noutros países europeus», in Karin Wall and Lígia Amâncio, (orgs.), *Família e Género em Portugal e na Europa*, Lisboa, ICS/Atitudes Sociais dos Portugueses, pp. 35-91.
- Addabbo, Tamara (2006), «Unpaid work by gender in Italy», in Antonella Picchio (ed.), *Unpaid Work and the Economy, A Gender Analysis of the Standard of Living*, London, Routledge, pp. 29-58.
- Addis, Elisabetta (2006), «Unpaid and paid caring work in the reform of welfare states», in Antonella Picchio (ed.), *Unpaid Work and the Economy, A Gender Analysis of the Standard of Living*, London, Routledge, pp. 189-223.
- Albertini, Marco and Kohli, Martin (2012), «The generational contract in the family», *European Sociological Review*, July 6, 0: jcs061v1-jcs061 (published on-line).
- Alderman, Liz (2010), «Turning of the tide», *New York Times*, (August 17) p.B1.
- Arber, Sara, Davidson, Kate, Ginn, Jay (2003), *Gender and Ageing – Changing Roles and Relationships*, Maidenhead, UK, Open University Press/McGraw Hill.
- Bettio, Francesca and Plantenga, Janneke (2004), «Comparing care regimes in Europe», *Feminist Economics*, 10(1), pp. 85-113.
- Björnerberg, Ulla and Dahlgren, Lillemor (2003), «Labour Supply – the case of Sweden»,

- Research Report*. [online] available at: <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/research/nordic/swedenlabo.pdf> [access on 20/January/2012].
- Bould, Sally (2010), «Hidden gender inequalities in health care for older adults: equal treatment does not mean equal results», in Jennie J. Kronenfeld (ed.), *Research in the Sociology of Health Care*, 28, pp. 231-246.
- Bould, Sally and Gavray, Claire (2009), «Women's work: the measurement and the meaning», *Ex aequo*, 18, pp. 57-83.
- Calasanti, Tony M. (2003), «Masculinities and care work in old age», in Sara Arber, Kate Davidson, Jay Ginn (eds.) *Gender and Ageing – Changing Roles and Relationship*, Maidenhead, UK, Open University Press/McGraw Hill.
- Casaca, Sara Falcão (2010), «A igualdade de género e a precarização do emprego», in Virgínia Ferreira (ed.), *A Igualdade de Mulheres e Homens no Trabalho e no Emprego em Portugal – Políticas e Circunstâncias*, Lisboa, CITE, pp. 261-289.
- Casaca, Sara Falcão and Damião, Sónia (2011), «Gender (in)equality in the labour market and the southern European welfare states», in Elisabetta Addis, Paloma Villota, Florence Degavre, John Eriksen (orgs.), *Gender and Well-Being: The Role of Institutions from Past to Present*, London, Ashgate, pp. 184-199.
- Casaca, Sara Falcão and Bould, Sally (2012), «Género, idade e mercado de trabalho», in Sara Falcão Casaca (ed.), *Mudanças laborais e Relações de Género – Novos Vetores de Desigualdade*, Coimbra, Fundação Económicas/Almedina, pp. 87-132.
- Collin, Aurélie (2005), «Age discrimination and social partners: a comparative study of France and the United Kingdom», *Warwick Papers in Industrial Relations*, nº 75.
- Crompton, Rosemary (2006), *Employment and the Family: The Reconfiguration of Work and Family Life in Contemporary Societies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Daley, Suzanne (2010), «Safety net frays in Spain, as elsewhere in Europe», *New York Times*, (June 28) p. A4.
- Daly, Mary and Lewis, Jane (2000), «The concept of social care and the analysis of contemporary welfare states», *The British Journal of Sociology*, 51(2), pp. 281-298.
- Drew, Eileen (1998), «Re-conceptualising families» and «Changing family forms and the allocation of caring», in Eileen Drew, Ruth Emerek, Evelyn Mahon (eds.), *Women, Work and the Family in Europe*, London, Routledge, pp. 11-26; pp. 27-35.
- Duncan, Colin and Loretto, Wendy (2004), «Never the right age? Gender and age-based discrimination in employment», *Gender, Work and Organization*, 11(1), pp. 95-115.
- Durán, María Ángeles (2007), *El Valor del Tiempo*, Madrid, Espasa Calpe.
- Esping-Andersen, Gøsta (1990), *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- EUROFOUND (2009), *Drawing on experience – Older women workers in Europe*, Dublin.
- EUROSTAT (2008), *The Life of Women and Men in Europe – A Statistical Portrait*, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Union.
- EUROSTAT (2011), *Demography Report – Older, More Numerous and Diverse Europeans*, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union.
- Fagan, Colette, O'Reilly, Jacqueline, Rubery, Jill (2000), «Part-time work: Challenging the 'breadwinner' gender contract», in Jane Jenson, Jacqueline Laufer, Margaret Maruani (eds.), *The Gendering of Inequalities: Women, Men and Work*. Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Limited, pp. 174-186.
- Ferreira, Virgínia (1999), «Os paradoxos da situação das mulheres em Portugal», *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 52/53, pp. 199-227.
- Guerreiro, Maria das Dores and Romão, Isabel (1995), «Famille et travail au Portugal. La coexistence de différentes dynamiques sociales», in Tineke Willemsen, Gerard Frink-

- ing, RiaVogels (eds.), *Work and Family in Europe: The Role of Policies*, Tilburg, TUP, pp. 151-165.
- Krekula, Clary (2007), «The intersection of work and gender: Reworking gender theory and social gerontology», *Current Sociology*, 55(2), pp. 155-171.
- Kröger, Teppo (ed.) et al. (2001), *Comparative Research on Social Care – The State of the Art*, SOCCARE Project Report 1, European Commission.
- Kröger, Teppo (ed.) et al. (2003), *Families, Work and Social Care in Europe – A qualitative study of care arrangements in Finland, France, Italy, Portugal and the UK*, SOCCARE Project Report 6, European Commission.
- Lewis, Jane (1992), «Gender and the development of welfare regimes», *Journal of European Policy*, 2(3), pp. 159-173.
- Lowenstein, Ariela, Katz, Ruth, Gur-Yaish, Nurit (2008), «Cross-National variations in elder care», in Maximiliane E. Szinovacz and Adam Davey, *Caregiving Contexts*, New York, Springer, pp. 93-112.
- Kauppinen, Kaisa (2010), «Who cares when grandmother gets sick?», in Tindara Addabbo, Maire-Pierre Arrizabalaga, Christina Borderias, Alastair Owens (eds.), *Home, Work, and Family: Gender and Well-being in Modern Europe*, Farnheim/Burlington, Ashgate Publishing, pp. 163-175.
- Machado, Fernando L. and Costa, António Firmino (1998), «Processos de uma modernidade inacabada. Mudanças estruturais e mobilidade social», in José Manuel Viegas and António Firmino da Costa (eds.), *Portugal, Que Modernidade?*, Oeiras, Celta Editora, pp. 17-44.
- Mahon, Evelyn (1998), «Changing gender roles, state, work and family lives», in Eileen Drew, Ruth Emerek, Evelyn Mahon (eds.), *Women, Work and the Family in Europe*, London, Routledge, pp. 153-158.
- Orloff, Ann (2002), *Women's Employment and Welfare Regimes – Globalization, export proentation and social policy in Europe and North America*, Geneva, Social Policy and Development Programme, Paper Number 12, United Nations.
- Perista, Heloísa (2002), «Género e Trabalho não pago: os tempos das mulheres e os tempos dos homens», *Análise Social*, 163, pp. 447-474.
- Perista, Heloísa (coord) and Perista, Pedro (2012), *Género e Envelhecimento, Planear o Futuro Começa Agora – Estudo de Diagnóstico*, Lisboa, CIG/PCM.
- Pfau-Effinger, Birgit (1999), «The Modernization of family and motherhood in western Europe», in Rosemary Crompton (ed.), *Restructuring Gender Relations and Employment – The Decline of the Male Breadwinner*. Oxford, University Press, pp. 60-79.
- Picchio, Antonella (2010), «Vulnerable bodies, total work and caring relationships», in Tindara Addabbo, Maire-Pierre Arrizabalaga, Christina Borderias, Alastair Owens (eds.), *Home, Work, and Family: Gender and Well-being in Modern Europe*, Farnheim/Burlington, Ashgate Publishing, pp. 59-74
- Portugal, Sílvia (1995), «As mãos que embalam o berço. Um estudo sobre redes informais de apoio à maternidade», *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 42, pp. 155-178.
- Ray, Mo (2000), «Older women, long-term marriage and care», in Miriam Bernard, Judith Phillips, Linda Machin, Val Harding Davis (eds.), *Women Ageing*, London, Routledge, pp. 148-167.
- Silva, Manuela (1999), *A Igualdade de Género, Caminhos para uma Sociedade Inclusiva*, Lisboa, CIDM, Cadernos Condição Feminina, 53.
- Suanet, Bianca, Van Groenou, Marjolein B., Van Tilburg, Theo (2011), «Informal and formal home-care use among older adults in Europe», *Aging and Society*, pp. 1-25.
- Sundström, Gerdt, Malmberg, Bo, Sancho Castiello, Mayte, del Barrio, Élena, Castejon,

- Penélope, Tortosa, Maria Ángeles, Johansson, Lennarth (2008), «Family care for elders in Europe», in Maximiliane E. Szinovacz and Adam Davey (eds.). *Caregiving Contexts*, New York, Springer, pp. 235-267.
- Taylor, Philip (2006), *Employment Initiatives for an Ageing Workforce in the EU-15*, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg.
- Thane, Pat (2010), «Intergenerational support in families in modern Britain», in Tindara Addabbo, Maire-Pierre Arrizabalaga, Christina Borderias, Alastair Owens (eds.), *Home, Work, and Family: Gender and Well-being in Modern Europe*, Farnheim/Burlington, Ashgate Publishing, pp. 109-121.
- Torres, Anália (ed.), Silva, Francisco, Monteiro, Teresa, Cabrita, Miguel (2004), *Homens e Mulheres, Entre Família e Trabalho*, DEEP/CITE, Estudos 1.
- Trifiletti, Rossana (1999), «Southern European welfare regimes and the worsening position of women», *Journal of European Social Policy*, 9, pp. 49-64.
- Venn, Susan, Davidson, Kate, Arber, Sara (2011), «Gender and Aging», in Richard A Settersten Jr. and Jacqueline Angel (eds.), *Handbook of the Sociology of Aging*, New York, Springer Science, pp. 71-82.
- Vincent, John A. (2000), «Age and old age», in Geoff Payne (ed.), *Social Divisions*, London, Macmillan, pp. 133-151.
- Wall, Karin, Aboim, Sofia, Cunha, Vanessa, Vasconcelos, Pedro (2001), «Families and informal support networks in Portugal: the reproduction of inequality», *Journal of European Social Policy*, 11(3), pp. 213-233.
- Wray Linda A. and Blaum, Caroline S. (2001), «Explaining the role of sex on disability», *The Gerontologist*, 41 (4), pp. 499-581.

Sally Bould PhD. Senior Research Fellow, Centre for the Study of Poverty, Population and Socio-Economic Policy (CEPS), Esch, Luxembourg; Professor of Sociology emerita University of Delaware, Newark DE USA; Fellow, the Gerontology Institute of the University of Massachusetts, Boston (salbould@udel.edu).

Sara Falcão Casaca, PhD. Assistant Professor in the Unit of Sociology at ISEG (School of Economics and Management, Technical University of Lisbon) and a researcher at SOCIUS – Research Centre in Economic and Organisational Sociology (sarafc@doc.iseg.utl.pt)

Artigo recebido em 16 de março de 2012 e aceite para publicação em 25 de setembro de 2012.