



European women and the crisis

Whilst contracting output in male-dominated sectors prompted some analysts to talk of a "[he-cession](#)", others argue that the effects on women remain to be revealed as the crisis unfolds further.

A male-dominated recession?

Labour markets across the European Union (EU) have been severely impacted by the crisis, resulting in a record high average [unemployment](#) rate of 10.7% at the end of 2012. The [contraction](#) principally hit sectors that employ men, such as construction (90.8% men, based on [Eurostat data](#)), transport (78.1%) and manufacturing (70.4%). On average, male unemployment rose by 3.8 percentage points from 2007 to 2012, compared to a 2.6 increase for women. At the same time as women started to close the labour market [participation gap](#) with men, [gaps](#) in pay also narrowed. However, the average gender pay gap for women remains high, at 16.5% in 2010, and both discriminatory practices and traditional gendered roles persist.

The female face of the crisis

Although women are catching up on labour markets, their position remains [vulnerable](#). Newly occupied posts are typically more prone to [lay-offs](#) and women change jobs more regularly, are more often employed on a [part-time basis](#) (nearly one third of women employed in the EU) and are over-represented in unpaid work. This combination of factors lowers women's social protection, a matter all the more serious since women generally hold fewer [financial assets](#), such as houses, whilst being more frequently responsible for single-parent households. In addition to this, women would be more vulnerable to the implications of [governmental austerity measures](#) on female-dominated employment sectors such as healthcare and welfare (78.3% women) and education (71.7%); moreover they are also the main beneficiaries of the services these sectors provide. Budgetary cuts will increase [unpaid work](#) in the private sphere and a drop in childcare subsidies could, for example,

decrease women's participation on the labour market and eventually lead to increasing drop-out rates for girls who need to compensate for loss of family-income.

Policy recommendations

Both the [Council](#) and the [European Commission](#) (EC) have acknowledged the deteriorating effects of the crisis on women. Nonetheless, stakeholders doubt that the EU's response to the crisis to date, has been "[gender mainstreamed](#)". This practice attempts to guarantee measures undertaken would have (had) equal effects, and stakeholders see it as a main policy recommendation to support equality throughout the crisis, amongst others:

- Implementing gender mainstreaming through gendered impact assessments and monitoring of [EU strategies](#), gender [budgeting](#) and an upfront integration of gender equality in anti-crisis policy-making.
- Addressing [sectoral segregation](#) of labour markets, to stimulate women's participation in male-dominated sectors.
- Enhancing the presence of women in both political and [corporate](#) decision-making.
- Boosting [entrepreneurship](#) amongst women, as female entrepreneurs are more sparse but no less successful than men.

European Parliament

The EP first drew attention to the effects of the crisis on EU women in a resolution on the [gender aspects of the economic downturn and financial crisis](#). More recently, on 19 February, the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) adopted a draft report on [the impact of the economic crisis on gender equality and women's rights](#). Rapporteur Elisabeth Morin-Chartier (EPP, France) believes the long-term impact of the crisis on women is underestimated, and [calls](#) for a limitation of budgetary cuts which could increase the feminisation of poverty, and for the development of gender-based indicators.

For further information see the recent Library Briefing on "[European women and the crisis](#)".