The Welfare State and Gender Equality:
Work-family reconciliation policies in Southern Europe

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**Introduction**

The 20th century witnessed two major transformations in western societies: the development of the Welfare State and the Gender Revolution. In what ways do these two processes interact? Is it possible to fully understand one without the other? More specifically, what is the role of the Welfare State in (re-)defining gender roles in the 21st century? It is, in fact, in a context of Welfare State restructuring, on the one hand, and of search of new meanings for the democratic value of Equality, on the other, that the studies on the impact of public policies on gender equality become more prominent. Informed by mainstream welfare policies research and feminist approaches, this paper intends to tackle these debates providing firstly a broad conceptual framework and then highlighting and discussing the preliminary results of the study.

The evolution of the position of women both in the public and in the private sphere has posed a challenge to welfare state institutions that is, in my view, twofold: firstly, the rise in women’s participation in paid work while simultaneously remaining the primary responsible for the family's well-being led to a «care gap». These changes have created new social risks (Taylor-Gooby, 2005) and imposed a new agenda to welfare states that were then urged to recognize and extend women’s social rights as individuals, independently from the male breadwinner. Furthermore, and especially since the nineties, gender equality issues have come to the forefront and the task has moved beyond recognizing women as workers as more recent analyses point to the significance of welfare policies and structures that relieve the care burden on the family and, especially, on women. The gendered division of labor is thus one crucial obstacle to Gender Equality which the Welfare States, during the more recent decades, have been targeting through reconciliation policies, mediators of the work and family spheres.

This paper will focus on three core instruments of reconciliation policy – parental leaves, childcare services and taxation – in Southern Europe (Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Greece) in 2007/8. It intends to isolate the results from the effects of the financial crisis and ends with a broad view of the relation between the Southern European reconciliation cluster and the gender equality outcomes in the labor market and in the family. To this end it uses different OECD and Eurostat databases and the Eurofound European Quality of Life Survey.

In the evaluation of reconciliation policies effects on gender equality, it is important to emphasize the different meanings and theoretical frameworks around this concept, which are
translated in the multi-dimensional nature of gendered outcomes. Therefore, both results in terms of economic achievements (i.e. distribution of material resources) and, more importantly, of individual capabilities to choose between alternative ways of living must be considered. Sen’s capability approach (1980) is thus a fundamental component of our conceptual framework insofar as it doesn’t concern equality as equality of material resources, but rather in what way those resources enable each person to choose the life that he or she can lead. Moreover, it underlines the importance of the context in which economic and social interactions take place, which is especially relevant in the analysis of gender inequalities. Other authors, as Nussbaum (2003) and Robeyns, have proposed a list of capabilities of which everyone should be entitled to, the latter concerning specifically gender inequalities in western societies. Among the selected capabilities are domestic work and non-market care, paid work and time autonomy (Robeyns, 2003), thus emphasizing the relevance of the dynamics around the gender division of labor as key to understanding gender inequality and gender justice.

1. **Background and Theoretical Framework**

   1.1. **The “Worlds” of Welfare Provision**

The most common way to compare welfare states is to build typologies, i.e., to group them in «families» or «ideal types» according to a set of criteria, thus providing a comparative lens and placing the single cases into a comparative perspective. Esping-Andersen’s *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990) is certainly the most influential classification of welfare states and has long provided valuable critical points for discussion. More than an end in itself, his typology departs from a theoretical framework as to the factors influencing the development of welfare states as the nature of class mobilization (the strength of trade unions and left parties, in particular) and the legacies of previous welfare institutions. He classified regime types according to the concepts of decommodification, social stratification and also according to the distribution of welfare functions among the state, the market and the family. To this end, consideration should be given to the extent to which individuals and families can afford an acceptable standard of living independently of market participation (1990: 47), as well as to indicators of how welfare state institutions operate in structuring class and social order (1990: 55).
His outline of conservative, liberal and social-democratic welfare regimes is hence based on an innovative combination of driving forces, institutions and outcomes that lead to «three worlds of welfare capitalism». The Conservative Continental (Germany, France and Austria, among others) regime types were in the vanguard of modern social policy, relying mainly on social insurance schemes with the protection of specific occupational categories and leaving only a marginal role to the market; they were committed to the maintenance of status differentials and the preservation of a traditional family model inherited from the past. The Liberal Anglo-Saxon (USA; UK and Australia, among others) regime types, on the other hand, included countries where residual social benefits (subject to means-testing) were predominant and which encouraged their citizens to seek their welfare in the market. The third type identified by Esping-Andersen was the Social-democratic Nordic (Norway, Sweden and Denmark, among others) which was characterized by extensive universal social rights with the quest for equality and a very limited private (market) provision of welfare.

In spite of the prevalence of Esping-Andersen’s typology in the field of welfare state comparative research, it fails to consider in sufficient detail the impact of welfare policies on caring and family arrangements, ignoring central gender-based institutions and outcomes and has therefore suffered numerous criticisms from feminist researchers.

From a country point of view, there has also been some considerable criticism, especially towards the categorization of Southern European countries as underdeveloped continental regimes. Some authors consider that this classification disregards these countries’ historical development that has shaped their current form and that reflects an essentially different approach to welfare provision both quantitatively and qualitatively. I will return to these arguments in section 2.1.

1.2. Gendering the Welfare State

An important topic in the debate on welfare states is related to the scope of welfare policy, that is, who is affected by welfare policy, and how. Although not always explicitly, it can perpetuate or diminish existing social divisions of class, race and gender, affecting, in particular, men and women in very different ways – an argument that Esping-Andersen acknowledged only in later work (1999). Nevertheless, it was not until the 1970’s that the broad assumption underlying all
welfare models that men specialized in paid work whereas women specialized in caring work (hence, women’s economic dependence on men) was contested.

Since the early 90’s, feminist scholars have highlighted the gendered nature of welfare states focusing two distinct areas of research: the gendered division of labor and the politics of welfare states (including regimes, partisanship, political agency and citizenship.) I will focus on the former and the way it in turn develops around three complementary areas: the role of care, the access of women to paid work and the importance of personal autonomy and defamilialisation.

The concept of care and the role of the family (especially women) in providing welfare are central to most feminist research. In fact, most western welfare states still depend greatly on this labor of caring performed by women which, due to its informal an unpaid nature, impacts both on female employment patterns and on power and dependence relations on the male-breadwinner within the family. For this reason, it is essential to clearly define what is meant by “caring”. As the feminists have put it, care is necessary work. Reverting to Glucksmann’s (1995) “total social organization of labor”, caring work can be defined as comprising both the economic and non-economic activities needed to meet the needs of dependent children and adults (including caring for the sick, child-minding and doing housework). With an emphasis on the interconnectedness of different spheres, institutions and activities, the feminist approach to care is thus essentially relational. As Sevenhuijsen (2002: 138) has argued, «Care should not be conceptualized as a safety net in times of misfortune and transition but rather as an ongoing social process that demands our attention daily and thus should figure prominently in any scenario for future social policy». The gendered division of care work is therefore crucial to understanding the gendered nature of welfare state change. Even though men can care as much and as well as women, caring work has been identified for centuries as an essentially feminine attribute, resulting in an extremely unbalanced division of care work inside and outside the family. The issue of unpaid care work has therefore become a fundamental pillar of the debates on gender and the welfare state.

Lewis (1992) has provided a valuable alternative typology for highlighting how welfare systems shape gendered work patterns, using the strength of the «male-breadwinner model» as a proxy measure. It identifies a strong male breadwinner model (examples being the UK and Germany), a weak male breadwinner model (as Sweden) and a modified male breadwinner
model (as France), which leads to country clusters essentially different from the ones depicted in Esping-Andersen’s work. This analysis highlighted that the German and British regimes, for example, were based on a traditional gender division of labor (man-breadwinner vs. woman home-maker) which was not revealed by the concept of decommodification.

This work was followed by propositions of welfare state reform from other feminist social theorists, like Nancy Fraser (1994), who advocated that the breadwinner model needed to be overcome in order to achieve gender equality. As she argues, neither full employment for both men and women (universal breadwinner model) nor economic reward for domestic carers (caregiver parity) would result in gender equality. While the former forces women into the male mould, the latter would tend to consolidate the gender division of labor. Her proposal is that men become «more like women», combining care work with paid employment, a reality that would only be possible once a major shift in gender roles takes place in the family sphere.

As we have seen, the concept of decommodification (that happens when social benefits are provided as a right, independently from market participation) is especially problematic in the context of gender relations due to the distinct male and female labor patterns (paid and unpaid). Women need, in fact, first and foremost to be commodified, that is, to secure a position in the paid labor force, which will potentially lead to economic independence and leverage within the patriarchal family. Therefore, the decommodification dimension, according to Orloff (1993: 317-8) needs to be «supplemented with a new analytical dimension that taps into the extent to which states promote or discourage women’s paid employment (...) and guarantee services that enable women to balance home and work responsibilities. » In addition to this, she developed a second additional analytical dimension to properly assess the welfare state’s impact on gender relations, which is the «capacity to form and maintain an autonomous household» (1993: 319). This dimension is directly related with Lister’s concept of defamilialisation, and reflects «the extent of women’s freedom from compulsion to enter or stay in marriages in order to obtain economic support» (1993: 323).

It was, in fact, Esping-Andersen’s categorization of welfare regimes what led to a deep and prolific debate involving feminist and mainstream scholars of the welfare state. As a result, many gendered insights have been incorporated into the mainstream arguments, including the ones related to the traditional division of work between men and women. As a consequence of this array of criticism, women’s economic behavior (including their contribution to welfare
provision by the unpaid caring work in the family) has become central to the analysis of welfare states.

In conclusion, the work of feminist scholars aims to go beyond the effects of different welfare regimes on class relations, the main purpose of mainstream welfare state literature. Instead, they focus on the welfare regime’s potential to reproduce or transform gender relations through the redistribution of paid and unpaid labor inside and outside the household. Answering the question introduced by Hernes (1987) «Can welfare states be women-friendly?», they will insofar as they promote the democratization of gender relations both in the public and in the private spheres.

1.3. Reconciliation Policies

One of the positive outcomes of the debate between mainstream and feminist social policy has been the emphasis on the role of the state in helping parents reconcile their work and family responsibilities.

During the 1980’s, many feminist writers were suspicious and even hostile of the role of the state in relation to women, arguing it perpetuated patriarchy and reinforced the male breadwinner model. It would therefore be through the civil society, and not state institutions, that women would achieve emancipation. These arguments were challenged particularly by Scandinavian feminist authors (Hernes, 1987), who pictured the state as potentially “women-friendly” and as a central player in the reduction of gender inequalities. This notion of state was based on a view of «feminism from above in the form of gender equality and social policies» (Hernes, 1987: 162). Despite criticisms of the Scandinavian proposal of the women-friendly state, there has been a growing feminist engagement with the state during the last decades. As O’Connor, Orloff and Shaver (1999: 11) put it, the state has not lost its centrality and has played an integral role in restructuring state social provision, gendered interests and men’s and women’s activities through the 90’s. Furthermore, the interest in studying state feminism - «policies and agencies specifically charged with promoting women’s rights and status» (Mazur, 2002: 1) - has sharply increased in recent years, reclaiming the state as a fundamental political player in feminist theories and practices. Mazur argues that, in the last decades, Western democracies have developed a set of responses to the demands for expanded rights, including those arising from
second-wave feminist movements, «implementing an enormous array of feminist policies» suggesting that these states might actually «be taking on a new feminist function» (2002: 3).

One of the policy sectors identified as feminist is devoted to reconciliation policies (RP’s), which is particularly interesting given that work-family reconciliation policies rarely, if ever, have gender equality as their primary goal. Instead, they often aim at increasing women’s labor supply, fertility and child well-being. According to Esping-Andersen’s recent work (2009), higher maternal employment is associated with lower levels of child poverty and higher levels of financial sustainability of ageing populations. For this reason, and given its potential to overlap with other policy sectors (as family policy or employment policies), it is firstly necessary to conceptualize RP’s as feminist, that is, policies that have the specific intent of promoting women’s rights and equality between the sexes. To that end, I adopt Mazur’s approach that presents RP’s as «any policy that seeks to promote women’s economic independence within the purview of the predominant division of labor between work and family. The policy may work within the established gender division or seek to change it. » (2009: 104) Furthermore, they should primarily aim at mediating the work-family relationship.

Within the feminist view, we can identify three different approaches to RP’s, that might aim at maintaining or transforming the gender order and which can even coexist in the same country (Mazur, 2002, adapted from Heitlinger 1993). The first one includes policies that assume that women should stay at home and be responsible for the “labor of caring”, thus maintaining the traditional gender roles and the traditional division of labor. Women’s economic independence would be achieved by means of social security benefits and the “housewife salary”. This approach is supported mainly by the Marxist and Socialist feminists that identify the unpaid nature of house work performed by women as the pillar of gender inequalities. According to the second model of RP’s, the traditional gender roles might be slightly challenged in the sense that it considers that in spite of traditional division of labor and the feminine “double burden”, women should not be penalized when entering the labor market. Hence, state policies should protect them from this risk. The last and most radical approach aims at redefining the traditional gender roles so that men and women share care work (see Fraser). The state should thus promote men’s participation in parenting and doing general housework.

The most pervasive reconciliation instruments are social security benefits and allowances, childcare services; parental leave and taxation reform. This paper will focus on the latter three
policy instruments which have been widely referred in social policy literature as potential promoters of gender equality. The social security benefit system (pensions, health benefits and family allowances) will not be part of the analysis at this point due to the complexity of the social security reforms in general, which makes it very challenging to identify specifically feminist reforms.

1.3.1 Parental Leave Policies

Acting on the nexus of labor market and family, parental leave designs can have a profound impact on gender equality both in the labor market and in the home, as they help parents return to their workplace after the period of job-protected leave and they allow both parents (in dual-earner families), not just mothers, to stay at home to care for their young children. There is a growing interest in leave designs in comparative social policy literature, as they have an extremely sensitive nature concerning gender equality. In fact, they can either reinforce or transform the traditional gender roles of worker/carer, according to their specific stipulations. The impact of leave policies is therefore ambiguous (Ray, 2010).

On the one hand, the absence of paid leave schemes potentially leads to women abandoning the labor market, due both to traditional social expectations about care work and to their economic disadvantage regarding their lower salaries. However, the mere existence of parental leave schemes does not necessarily lead to gender equality (Moss and Deven, 1999: 14). While paid leave schemes of short duration allow mothers to return to work instead of quitting the labor market, thus helping ensure job continuity for new mothers, compulsory paid leaves of longer duration available only to mothers can erode women’s human capital and reduce opportunities for promotion. (Ray, 2010; EIGE, 2011) According to Gornick and Meyers (2003), generous family leave provisions taken up predominantly by mothers can weaken women’s labor market attachment and increase gender inequalities in paid and unpaid work. The authors argue that «government policies are needed that both enable and encourage fathers to share in family leave benefits» (2003: 133). Accordingly, if the leave available to the father can be transferred to the mother or does not have a high income replacement rate, it is unlikely that fathers will be successfully engaged in care giving. Since fathers’ take-up of parental leave lags

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1 Gustafsson, 1992; Stotsky 1997; Gornick et al, 1998; Bettio and Verashchagina, 2009; Plantenga, 2009; Ray et al, 2010; Villota, 2011 (among others).
behind that of mothers, the net effect of parental leave schemes on gender equality is unclear (Ray, 2010). In countries with paid paternity leave, fathers tend to take it, but paternity leaves are usually too short (from a few days to a few weeks) to make a real difference to the gender division of care in the home.

There is substantial variation across EU countries in terms of parental leave duration, coverage, flexibility in use and even source of financing, being the responsibility of the member countries to define whether and how much of the parental leave is to be paid. Nevertheless, there is a common EU framework concerning this reconciliation instrument: the maternity leave directive (Council Directive 92/85/CEE) establishes the minimum of 14 weeks of paid statutory maternity leave for all female workers while the 1996 Parental Leave directive (Council Directive 96/34/EC of 3) requires the member states to have statutory provisions guaranteeing parental leave of at least three months per parent.

1.3.2. Childcare services

The availability of affordable, accessible and high-quality childcare facilities can promote gender equality by making it easier for women with younger children to participate in employment while reducing the hours the burden of care work. (Gornick and Meyers, 2003: 197) Unlike parental leave policies, affordable and accessible childcare services tend to have an unambiguously positive impact on mothers’ attachment to the labor force. This, alongside the promotion of the healthy development of children, is the main objective behind public intervention in the field of childcare.

The financial costs of childcare are an especially important variable, as women from lower income families will be more likely to abandon their jobs when facing higher childcare costs or, in turn, resort to informal care. In other words, access to publicly funded childcare is found to have a positive effect on mothers’ propensity to work (Baker et al, 2008; Uunk et al, 2005). According to Leira (1992), the public provision of childcare services «highlight a dominant shifting in parenthood thinking, namely the translation of parental responsibility for children’s care into social rights of mothers and fathers».

There is considerable variation in the way childcare provision is financed: direct provision of public child care; cost sharing with parents through co-payments; and alternative arrangements such as subsidies and tax credits.
At the EU level, the importance of childcare services provision as an instrument of work and family reconciliation is also recognized. In 1992 the European Council recommended initiatives «to enable women and men to reconcile their occupational, family and upbringing responsibilities arising from the care of children» (Recommendation 92/241/EEC of 31 March 1992 on ‘Childcare’). Furthermore, the Barcelona Council in 2002 set explicit targets for the provision of childcare places to reach 90% of children between age 3 and mandatory school age and 33% of children under the age of 3 by 2010 in order to remove barriers to women’s participation and achieve full employment. These targets were later restated in the 2008-2010 employment policy guidelines (Council Decision 2008/618/EC). Even though the Barcelona targets narrow their focus on formal childcare and don’t directly envisage an equal participation of men and women in employment and care provision, they are nonetheless an important monitoring instrument of the provision of childcare services in each member state.

1.3.3. Taxation and benefit systems

Taxation and tax benefits systems have been neglected in most discussions on welfare states, although a number of scholars, both mainstream and feminist, have emphasized their importance as an instrument of both redistribution (Castles and Mitchell, 1993) and promotion of specific family models and relationships within the family (Land, 1983; Bergmann, 1986). In fact, taxation systems can have a decisive impact on gender equality since they influence women’s economic independence and, consequently, power relations in the family as well as the gender division of labor. As Sainsbury argues, «the tax system is a crucial nexus of the state, the family, and the market. Through tax regulations the state can privilege certain types of families and provide incentives to enter or leave the labor market» (1999: 185). Likewise, at the beginning of the eighties, the European Commission recommended the reform of tax systems as a means of achieving the equal treatment of men and women in the job market.

In spite of social attitudes changing in favor of women’s participation in paid work, many tax and benefit systems retain past social norms, namely from the period when male-breadwinner families were the norm. As Stotsky and McCaffery rightly emphasize, «Tax systems reflect a tapestry of decisions, made over many years, influenced by social attitudes about the respective roles of women and

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3 See also Daly, 2001 and Gustafsson, 1992.
men» (Stotsky, 1997: 30) and «...such systems in turn exercise coercive force, tending to entrench patterns of social life, in an endless feedback loop...» (McCaffery, 2008: 2).

As a consequence, both explicit and implicit gender biases are still found in tax and benefit regulations that have different consequences for men and women, because of their prevailing social and economic behavior. While explicit gender bias is more obvious, consisting of specific legal provisions treating women and men differently, implicit forms of bias are more difficult to identify because it is strongly related to one’s value judgment on the desirable social and economic behavior of women and men. (Stotsky, 1997) As women and men show distinct patterns of consumption and investment, implicit forms of discrimination can be identified in almost any fiscal norm. However, this paper will narrow the analysis to those forms which potentially most influence women’s economic independence, namely the secondary-earner bias and the unpaid work bias.

Secondary earner bias - or the higher taxation of lower earners -, has especially negative consequences for women’s employment patterns. (Gustafsson, 1992) Since women in couples contribute less to household income than their partners and have a more intermittent paid work profile, they are more likely to be secondary earners. Notwithstanding the evolution of the equality in earnings between women and men, there is still a majority of male sole-earners or main-earners.5

This discrimination of the secondary earner is most likely to be found in joint (i.e. family-based rather than individual) taxation systems. The filing unit is important insofar as it represents the option of how to tax the earnings of two adults living as a couple and, therefore, how to treat each income available in the household: in individual taxation, marriage is ignored and the individual earnings are taxed as such; in joint taxation spouses are treated as a unit, facing both the primary and the secondary earner the same tax rate; finally, in an optional filing system, couples may choose to file their taxes together or apart. As most countries’ tax systems have some degree of progressivity (i.e. one pays higher tax rates as the income increases), secondary earners pay a higher level of tax than they would pay as single earners at the same earnings level, simply as a result of joint income tax filing (Bettio, McCaffery, Stotsky). Despite strategies to reduce the disadvantages of joint taxation (as, for instance, the system of income-

5 See Tsang, Rendall, Rohr and Hoorens, 2014.
splitting), the secondary-earner bias cannot be canceled out in progressive tax systems with joint assessment of tax liability (Bettio, 2009: 49).

According to Villota (2011), «The principle of tax equity in the family unit implies that a certain income should be subject to the same tax quota, regardless of the family member who obtains the earnings, (...) otherwise, there will be discrimination against one or some of its members» (2011: 150). It is therefore not surprising that this negative treatment of women’s earnings influence their decisions to enter or abandon the labor market and, consequently, the distribution of paid and unpaid work in the family (McCaffery, 2008).

However, the effects of tax systems are also closely related to another RP instrument, namely childcare and its cost. In fact, the tax treatment of childcare costs can be an important source of unpaid work bias insofar as for couples with children, work may not actually pay enough (or at all) once childcare fees are taken into account. As OECD reports show (2004; 2011), childcare fees vary a lot between countries and they can represent a strong disincentive to work for second earners whenever parents don’t have access to informal care solutions. Tax incentives for children (either in the form of fees reductions, cash benefits or tax concessions) thus play a crucial role in determining whether women join the labor market or specialize in family related work at home.

It is yet important to emphasize the importance of the policy design or, as McCaffery puts is, the «child versus child-care credits» question. While the former is designed to benefit the presence of children, the latter targets specifically the working mothers, who need to resort to formal childcare. In this sense, different fiscal mechanisms can potentially promote either parental home care or formal childcare, i.e. «tax matters» (McCaffery, 2008: 34).

1.4. Reconciliation models

Although equality issues had been a topic of concern for EU member states since the 1970’s, it wasn’t until the 1990’s that measures of reconciliation of paid work and family life were actually developed (Hantrais, 2000). EU provisions have been particularly insistent on the development of parental leave schemes and childcare services (as mentioned on previous

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6 See also Scheiwe, 2011, «Income Redistribution through child benefits and child-related tax deductions: a gender-neutral approach». 

sections), but that has not led to an adoption of identical RP’s by all member states. They represent, nevertheless, minimum standards to which member states must comply, irrespective of their national priorities.

We can divide European countries into five basic models of reconciliation policies in relation to their political and socio-economic backgrounds, as depicted on Table 1. (adapted from Lohkamp-Himmighofen and Dienel, 2000) Both the egalitarian and the liberal labor market models correspond to Esping-Andersen's welfare regimes, whereas the demographic, the three-phase and the family based models correspond to his broad categorization of the continental regime.

Table 1 – Reconciliation Policies Models

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<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Policies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Egalitarian</strong> (Nordic countries)</td>
<td>Equal parenthood and dual-earner family; individual rights and duties for men and women.</td>
<td>Independent entitlement to paternity leave, generous childcare arrangements, individual taxation.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Demographic</strong> (France, Belgium)</td>
<td>Importance of women’s contribution to the economy (full-time workers) and demographic balance.</td>
<td>Limited parental leave schemes alongside publicly funded childcare.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Liberal labor market</strong> (Ireland, UK)</td>
<td>Reconciliation seen as a private (family) concern; women as part-time workers.</td>
<td>Mainly negotiated between workers and employers; market childcare provision.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Three-phase</strong> (Austria, Germany, Netherland)</td>
<td>Prevalence of male-breadwinner model; female pattern: full employment / withdrawal / gradual return or part-time.</td>
<td>Long parental leave schemes; poor provision of childcare services and non-individualized taxation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family based</strong> (Mediterranean countries)</td>
<td>Prevalence of male-breadwinner model; extended family responsible for care with no support from state.</td>
<td>Poor public childcare facilities; relatively generous maternity leave.</td>
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*Source: own elaboration, adapted from Lohkamp-Himmighofen and Dienel, 2000.*
In the Nordic countries a concept of reconciliation - inspired by the “women-friendly” welfare state ideology - had emerged long before it moved on to the EU agenda. This model supports women’s employment through the provision of public sector jobs (mainly in the health, education and social work sectors) as well as of extensive care services and of generous leaves benefits. Despite negative consequences, namely the high level of labor market segregation, the impact on gender equality seems to be the highest within Europe. In contrast, in the liberal model, the state does not rate high in the provision of either care services or job-protected leaves, leaving to the parents themselves the responsibility of finding adequate arrangements to combine work and family life. Therefore, traditional gender roles tend to prevail pushing women to part-time jobs alongside the market provision of care services. In continental Europe the RP’s models are, as already stated, extremely diverse: while in countries like France and Belgium the states have developed “women-friendly” policies that enable women to be both workers and mothers, in Austria, Germany or the Netherlands, RP’s dispositions favor women’s role as carers once they become mothers. In fact, the labor market demographic model of RP’s is recognized by its long tradition of publicly funded childcare and short leave schemes, encouraging a rapid return to employment. On the other hand, the three-phase model reflects a chronological pattern of work and family life, according to which women are firstly involved in full-time employment, abandoning their job once they have children and, finally gradually returning to work, often in a part-time basis. This model presents a set of work disincentives to mothers as, for example, non-individualized taxation systems, long, paid parental leave schemes and poor provision of childcare facilities. Whereas in France formal childcare is seen as important to the development and socialization of children, in countries like Germany and Austria family policies are dominated by the idea that young children are better taken care of by their mothers. Finally, in the family based RP’s model, typical of Mediterranean countries, caring work is mainly provided by the family with limited or no support from the state. In the cases where mothers are involved in full-time employment, as in Portugal, informal arrangements (neighbors or extended family) are made in order to combine work and family life. In the last decade, however, some “women-friendly” measures have been included, especially in the field of parental leave – whereas maternity leave is quite generous in Mediterranean countries, it is particularly important to emphasize the introduction of paternity leave provisions which gradually promote the role of fathers in care provision.
2. Case Studies: context and preliminary results

2.1. Social Protection in Southern Europe: main characteristics

As has been mentioned in section 1.1, Esping-Andersen’s categorization of the Southern European welfare regime has been widely criticized in the sense that these countries be represented by an autonomous regime type, according to their shared patterns of demographical movements, institutional and political resources particularities, socio-economic backgrounds as well as public policy and value systems. (Ferrera, 1996; Garcia and Karakatsanis, 2006) Some authors (Castles, 1994; van Kersbergen, 1995) also emphasize the religious factor and the consequent role of “national” churches in social protection. While evolution of Southern European states during the recent decades can be explained by the combination of socio-economic development, democratization and Europeanization, traditional practices from predemocratic periods and corporatist legacies still contribute to the fragmented and poorly developed character of social welfare in Southern Europe. (Garcia, 2006)

In his proposal of the «southern European model of welfare», Ferrera (1996) argues that the countries in Southern Europe (Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece) are sufficiently distinctive to constitute an autonomous category of welfare state. Accordingly, the following similarities in social protection models can be observed: fragmentation and polarization of the system, that is, a gap between the majority of poorly protected and a minority of highly protected; labor market segmentation – insiders vs. outsiders; clientelistic practices in public administration; family as a safety net, which compensates for shortages of public social provision and an universalistic National Health System mainly used by the less privileged while the richer turn to the private sector.

In the view of Moreno (2006), «Familialistic interpenetration is to be regarded as the crucial element characterizing welfare arrangements and outcomes in Southern Europe». This means that the family plays a central role in providing for the well-being of its members, being this responsibility mainly (if not always) attributed to women. The term “Mediterranean superwomen” was coined by the author to describe the situation where women had to simultaneously perform paid professional
activities (though limited) and the unpaid tasks in the household. The case of Portugal is, in this respect, particularly distinctive in that it has a very high female employment rate, which underlines the role of the “Mediterranean superwomen”. The provision of free household and personal services by these superwomen for the last decades, have been described as both the cause and the consequence of the insufficient policies developed by the Southern European welfare states. Flaquer (2000) goes further and describes the «deficit in Southern welfare systems not so much as the result of a low decommodification level but of a low defamiliarization level», based on a traditional division of labor. Recently, there seems to be a trend of liberalization, that is, of externalization of care services, with the families resorting to low-cost workers (usually female) often found in the “underground” economy.

In general, recent works account for a transition toward a new gender order in Southern Europe, characterized by the weakening of men’s role as breadwinners and the improvement of women’s educational level as well as of their labor market attachment alongside patterns of gradual individualization of social rights (González, 2009). As a result, family will be less capable of acting as a “shock absorber” and the main provider of care and thus the ability of the state to guarantee these social services will be decisive. (Moreno, Flaquer)

2.2. RP’s in Southern Europe: preliminary results

This section examines the RP’s according to their ability to commodify and defamilialize women as well as to promote a more equitable sharing of unpaid work. Even though our main focus is on Southern Europe, other countries are included for comparison purposes.

2.2.1 Parental Leave Policies

Before examining the distribution of maternity, paternity and parental leaves, it is necessary to briefly define them as there is considerable variation in the distinction of different types of leave between countries. The maternity leave is generally available to mothers only and it is intended to protect the health of the mother and the newborn child. Similarly, the paternity leave is available only to fathers, enabling them to spend more time with his partner and the newborn child. The parental leave is usually available both to mothers and fathers, after the end of maternity leave and it can take the form of either an individual right (each parent has an individual entitlement to a specific amount of leave) or a family right (enables parents to share
the period of leave as they choose). This section will use internationally comparable data from the OECD Family Database from 2008 as well as detailed information from Moss and Corintus, 2008. In order to deal with the complexity and diversity of parental leave policies in the different countries, the OECD uses the Full-Rate Equivalent (FRE) as a measure of both duration and generosity of leave. It is calculated as the wage replacement rate multiplied by the duration of leave in weeks and represents the proportion of the duration of paid leave if it were paid at 100% of last earnings.

Source: OECD, 2011, *Doing better for families.*

Chart 1 reports the total length of maternity leave (both paid and unpaid entitled weeks) as well as its FRE in the selected countries. In the majority of OECD countries, as of 2008, the period of maternity leave ranged from 15 to 20 weeks, as are the cases of Germany (14), France (16), Spain (16), Portugal (17), Denmark (18), and Italy (20). By contrast, the longest period of maternity leave was available in the United Kingdom (52) followed by Greece (43), while Sweden offered one of the shortest periods of leave available exclusively to mothers (9). As for the generosity of the leave, Greece was the country where mothers can make use of the longest period of leave paid at FRE (25 weeks) whereas in the rest of the selected countries the maternity leave at FRE was, on average, 15 weeks. The Nordic countries were, in this category, the least generous.

Chart 1: Maternity leave in weeks and at FRE, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total length of maternity leave</th>
<th>Full-rate equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD, 2011, *Doing better for families.*
Parental leave entitlements have been often introduced as supplementary rights for mothers only and later extended to fathers in most countries. Chart 2 represents the number of weeks mothers can take after maternity leave (both paid and unpaid) and its FRE, while the period of parental leave reserved to fathers will be addressed in Chart 3. The figures show that there is considerable variation in the duration of parental leave across countries and that the rate of income replacement is proportionally much lower than in maternity leave. Mothers could therefore make use of prolonged periods of leave in Germany (148), France (146) and Spain (144) but the gap between paid and unpaid leave is considerably large in these countries. In fact, if we account only for the leave at FRE, both Sweden (31) and Denmark (23) offered similar benefits to Germany (41) and France (28), while in Spain, Greece, the UK and Portugal parental leave was, in 2008, unpaid. The maximum amount of leave available to mothers (adding maternity and parental leaves), if paid at 100% of last earnings, as indicated in Table 2, was highest in Germany and France while in Portugal, Spain and the UK, the values were considerably lower.
Table 2 – Total weeks of leave available to mothers, at FRE, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Weeks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD, 2011, *Doing better for families.*

There is considerable variation in the generosity and in the duration of leave schemes across the selected countries, however, there it is clear that maternity leaves are longer and more generous compared to the period reserved to fathers. Chart 3 represents the overall period of father specific leave, including both paternity and parental leave. Sweden (8 FRE) and
Germany (11.6 FRE) had the most generous entitlements for fathers while in Southern Europe they were very limited, especially in Greece (2 days). However, the ranking for Germany is based on the assumption that the father takes four months of parental leave which, in reality, is not likely to be used. In Portugal and Spain fathers could make use of about 3 fully paid weeks of leave. The level of income replacement is especially important in this case given that fathers often have higher wages than their female partners and, therefore the loss of income is smallest when the mother takes leave.

As already mentioned, parental leave design is a very complex task but it is still one of the few policy tools that governments can use to directly influence behavior among parents and promote a more gender-equitable division of paid and unpaid work. Concerning leave entitlements available to mothers, prolonged paid arrangements are likely to lead to a weaker labor market attachment and, therefore, have a negative effect on female employment. In fact «the ambiguous influence of leave mandates suggests that weeks of leave have a positive effect on female labor supply up to a limit above which the marginal effect of further leave extension becomes negative» (Jaumotte, 2003) In relation to fathers, some policy options should be pursued to encourage them to spend more time with their children as, for instance, individual entitlements, with long duration and high payment rates. In this sense, Greece can be considered the least gender-egalitarian of the selected countries with (almost) no leave reserved for fathers and a relatively long leave available for mothers (25 FRE), thus reinforcing the traditional division of work.

Portugal and Spain, the other two Southern European countries, are relatively better placed, with longer paid paternity leaves (thus enabling a more equitable sharing of care work after the birth of a child), and shorter leaves available for mothers (potentially promoting a rapid return to paid employment). From the selected countries, only in Sweden is the paternity leave longer (8 weeks). Despite the fact that in Southern Europe the maternity leaves are clearly longer than the ones reserved for fathers, they aren’t as high as the German, which potentially disincentives a rapid reintegration of the mothers in the labor market. The Nordic countries (here represented by Sweden) appear to be the most egalitarian with generous paternity leaves (8 weeks at FRE), although these are still largely outstripped by the mothers entitlement (38 weeks at FRE).

\footnote{The case of Italy seems to be similar, but at this point we have no data concerning leave reserved for fathers in 2008.}
2.2.2. Childcare services for pre-school children

The provision of formal childcare tends to have a very positive impact in gender equality both in the labor market and in the home because in their absence it is mothers, and not fathers, who become detached from the labor market. (Gornick and Meyers, 2003, 197) This section compares the provision of childcare places in Southern Europe and other three reference countries, using data from the EU-SILC.

As Chart 4 shows, cross-national variation in enrolment rates of children aged under three is much larger than for pre-school children. In 2008, Spain was the only country in Southern Europe to achieve the Barcelona target for the youngest children (40%) with the other three lagging well behind, especially Greece (10%). Italy (25%) and Portugal (27%) were somewhat closer to the 33% enrolment target. These low participation rates of very young children in formal childcare should be a matter of concern insofar as these countries offered relatively

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8 Formal childcare arrangements include: Education at pre-school or equivalent; Education at compulsory education; Child care at center-based services outside school hours; Child care at day-care center organized/controlled by a by public or private structure. The data from EU_SILC/EUROSTAT does not include care by professional childminders. (Eurostat, 2013, «Childcare arrangements metadata»)
short paid parental leaves, leading parents to resort to informal care arrangements or, in the absence of such, to abandon paid work. In contrast, Sweden had the highest enrolment rate for the youngest children, exceeding the Barcelona targets.

As regards the target for children between the age of 3 and mandatory school age, both Italy (90%) and Spain (92%) had at least 90% of children in this age group using formal childcare services, running close to Sweden (91%). In contrast, Portugal and Greece presented a participation rate of only 75% and 65%, respectively. Considering the two age groups, Portugal and Greece were the two countries in Southern Europe which, in 2008, had not achieved either of the Barcelona targets regarding the provision of formal childcare, being the situation especially serious in Greece.

Even though the Barcelona targets focus primarily the formal types of childcare, there is no doubt that informal types of childcare, being by childminders or friends and relatives, still play a crucial role in many countries, especially in Southern Europe. It should be taken into account however that this category can overlap with the results of formal care because parents might use a combination of both types of care to cover a full working day. Charts 5 and 6 represent the share of young children (by age group) that are being cared for informally in part-time (from 1 to 29 hours a week) and in full-time (over 30 hours a week) and show a very significant variation across the selected countries.
Chart 5: % of children under 3 years old in informal childcare by numbers of hours a week, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>1 to 29 hours</th>
<th>over 30 hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurostat / EU-SILC (data extracted on 02/09/2013)

Chart 6: % of children from 3-6 years old in informal childcare by numbers of hours a week, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>1 to 29 hours</th>
<th>over 30 hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurostat / EU-SILC (data extracted on 02/09/2013)
While in almost all countries very young children are preferably in part-time informal care, in Portugal and Greece around half the children under 3 are being cared for informally mainly on a full-time basis. Regarding the older age group (Chart 6), full-time informal care occurs more rarely, except in Portugal and Greece, where around 20% of the pre-school children remain in informal care more than 30 hours a week. Conversely, in the other selected countries, informal care is regarded as a complement to formal arrangements (UK, Italy, Germany and Spain) or even residual, as in the Nordic countries.

Still, these figures do not allow us to understand whether parents use informal arrangements because they prefer them or because formal childcare isn’t available or affordable. In this sense, apart from policy issues, the role of cultural norms cannot be ignored and in most countries attitudes vary according to the age of the child (childcare services are seen as more suitable for older children) (Plantenga, 2009). In fact, the demand for childcare services is influenced by a series of factors and cannot be inferred merely by the high or low usage of these facilities. The participation rate of parents (especially mothers), the level of unemployment, the length of parental leave, school opening hours and the availability of informal arrangements must be taken also into account.

According to Plantenga (2009), in Southern Europe the availability of places in formal childcare, although improving in the last decade, is still not enough to cover demand, especially for the youngest children (0-2 years old), with the exception from Greece, where there is a limited demand for these services. While in Portugal the main obstacle to the expansion of childcare seems to be financial containment, in Italy traditional cultural norms play a more relevant role as well as the prevalence of financial transfers over the provision of care services.
The affordability of formal childcare is particularly important for low-income families, helping parents (especially mothers) to participate in paid work. In fact, children from low-income families are less likely to participate in formal childcare arrangements than their better-off peers. (OECD, 2011: 144) Given the absence of comparable data concerning the provision of private and public childcare services, the level of public expenditure on childcare is therefore of significant importance. Overall, public investment in formal childcare generates high participation rates in childcare; this is especially clear in the contrasting cases of Greece and Sweden. While the former invested only 0.1% of GDP on childcare services in 2008, presenting low rates of childcare enrolment, the latter represented the opposite tendency, investing 1.3% of GDP on formal childcare, which contributed to very high participation rates. The cases of Portugal, Spain and Italy fall somewhere in the middle, being however important to emphasize that while Italy invests more than Portugal and Spain it is not reflected on higher rates of childcare enrolment, especially on what concerns the 0-3 age group.

2.2.3. Taxation and benefit systems

The cost of childcare can be, as already mentioned, quite substantial and therefore a strong disincentive to work, hindering women’s financial independence in the family. In this sense, it is essential to take into account any tax concessions and benefit amounts that can be
subtracted from the gross fee charged by the childcare provider, leading to the net cost to the parents. This section uses the OECD data on childcare costs, which reflect this reality.

According to Chart 8, in the three Southern European countries, net childcare costs were, as of 2008, under 10% of the national average wage, some of the lowest levels across OECD countries. In the case of Greece, dual-earner couples spent 5% of average wage on childcare and only 3% of their family income. These values are even lower than the ones registered in Sweden (7% AW, 5% FI), where childcare is provided directly by the state, funded primarily by taxation. Indeed, it is important to highlight the fact that, in countries with very low participation rates in formal childcare, as is the case of Greece, low availability of childcare services is a greater problem than its affordability. Therefore, while the costs of childcare may not be high in Southern Europe, the supply of these services is very limited, limiting the probability of maternal employment.

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9 data currently not available for Italy.
According to Plantenga (2009), in Southern Europe, as in most European countries, the cost of childcare services is income-related and therefore low-income families may attend childcare for free (Italy). However, the costs vary across regions and municipalities and the maximum fees are close to what is charged by private childcare facilities, which is, in general, considered very expensive.

Although access to childcare facilities for young children makes it easier for parents to reconcile work and family life, the net gain from employment, also depends on the governing tax and benefit rules. Villota (2005) evaluated different taxation regimes in 15 European countries according to the person liable to pay tax (an individual person or a family unit), thus establishing a distinction between the individual tax payment system and the family/joint tax system¹⁰, which considers the income of all persons in the family as a whole. Her analysis illustrates the tax penalization of the secondary earner in the family unit when paying income tax – the secondary earner bias. To that end, a discrimination index was developed that measures the relative discrimination as regards the income obtained by the second earner.

**Table 3: Values of Fiscal Discrimination Index**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Index</th>
<th>Forms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>0,23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>0,07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>0,49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>0,56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>0,74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Forms**  
- Individual  
- Joint (Splitting)  
- Individual or Splitting  
- Individual or Accrued

Source: own elaboration, based on Villota (2005).

¹⁰ Variants of joint taxation: accrued; splitting, familial quotient.
According to Table 3, as of 2008, most of the countries studied had separate income taxation of spouses. The exceptions were Portugal, which maintained an obligatory joint taxation system and Germany and Spain, which allowed tax payers to choose between individual or joint tax returns. In the selected countries, a higher discrimination rate is most likely to be found where joint taxation systems are available, as in Portugal, Germany or Spain, whereas in the Nordic countries (here represented by Sweden) and in the UK the discrimination rate is practically absent. In the Southern European context, Portugal and Spain present the highest discrimination rates, even with the option for individual taxation in Spain.

2.3. Gender equality outcomes in Southern Europe – preliminary results

Gender equality in the labor market and in the family are two closely related dimensions, which should be evaluated in tandem when planning public policies. Indeed, the integration in the labor market holds two main consequences for women: higher levels of financial independence and personal autonomy and, on the other hand, the so called «double burden», or the accumulation of paid working hours with family responsibilities, namely domestic and care work. In this section, we will briefly analyze the relationship between the studied indicators and measures of gender equality in the labor market and in the family.

Charts 9 and 10 represent both the extension of female employment and its intensity. Southern European countries had, in 2007, the lowest female employment rates, with Greece at the bottom (49%).
Portugal was, in fact, the great exception to this pattern, presenting higher female employment rates (62%), closer to the Nordic pattern (70%). Concerning the maternal employment rate, it is important to highlight what seems to be a Southern European trait, namely, the employment rate of mothers being slightly higher than of women with no children. Again, this feature is especially important in the Portuguese case where almost 10% more mothers than women with no children are employed. In contrast, both in Germany (-16%), the UK (-14%) and in Finland (-8%), female employment rates decrease significantly once women have children.
As Chart 10 indicates, low rates of part-time employment are also characteristic of Southern Europe. While Italy (27%) and Spain (23%) are closer to the EU average (31%), Portugal (14%) and Greece (10%) lag well behind. This is in stark contrast with the other reference countries which present part-time employment rates of around 42%. These figures allow us to conclude that while in Italy, Spain and Greece relatively less women participate in the labor market, they do so in a more intensive manner, i.e., full-time. On the other hand, Portugal represents a clear exception to the Southern European female employment pattern insofar as it has significantly higher female and especially maternal employment rates. However, it also differs from the other selected countries due to its high maternal employment rates combined with low part-time employment rates.

The figures in Chart 11 represent the number of hours in a week that men and women dedicated to unpaid work (both domestic and care work), as of 2007. These data are drawn from the European Quality of Life Survey (Eurofound, 2007) and relate only to men and women workers, which clearly illustrates the «double burden» on women.
Notwithstanding the gradual inclusion of men in domestic and care work in the last decades, there is still a clear asymmetry concerning the division of unpaid work. In the EU-27, the average gap between men and women is of 20 hours a week. In Southern Europe, while Greece (22) and Spain (21) were closer to Germany (25) and the UK (23), in Portugal (17) and Italy (15) the gap between men and women was more similar to the Nordic countries (12), which presented the most balanced division of unpaid work in the family, due to a significantly higher participation of men in domestic and care work. In sum, working women carried a heavier burden of unpaid work in Greece (43) and Spain (46) than in Portugal (40) and Italy (37). However, the male unpaid work pattern was very similar in the four countries, below EU-27 average, what seems to indicate that traditional gender roles still prevail in the family sphere.
3. Discussion and final remarks

Based on the preliminary data presented, the Southern European RP’s cluster seems to be broadly in accordance to the Mediterranean RP’s model presented in Table 1, but there are still significant distinctions to be made. On the one hand, they present a relatively high fiscal discrimination level, revealing a marked gender-bias in the taxation of personal income. The availability of formal childcare services (especially for the youngest) is low and despite the net childcare costs being also low, it is generally not translated in high enrolment rates in formal childcare. Parental leave policies in both Italy and Greece are likely to reinforce traditional gender roles insofar as they attribute prolonged leave periods to the mothers with virtually no leave entitlements reserved for the fathers. On the other hand, in Portugal and Spain, parental leave entitlements are more balanced, allowing for a more equitable sharing of unpaid work. It is still important to emphasize that, in general, the leave period reserved for fathers is too short to have a clear positive impact in the division of unpaid work. These general characteristics of reconciliation policies in Southern European countries seem to contribute both to low rates of female participation in the labor market (with the marked exception of Portugal) and to low levels of male participation in unpaid work. However, it is also clear that reconciliation policies work as a whole, meaning that the partial reform of parental leave policies, childcare services or tax and benefit systems would not be sufficient to conduce to higher levels of gender equality in the labor market and, especially, in the family. The real challenge appears to be finding the optimal reconciliation policies mix, according to national circumstances and taking into account the desired organization of society, namely towards gender equality.

Although this paper used a variety of comparable indicators, there is still the need for more types of harmonized data sources, namely in the field of gender equality in the family. There also appears to be a notable lack of comparable data on childcare quality as well as on the availability and affordability of childcare places.

As a result of this paper, further research is currently under development aiming for a longitudinal analysis of reconciliation policies in Southern European countries since the ‘80s and their potential effects on the levels of gender equality in the labor market and in the family.
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**Primary Data Sources:**

