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Italy and Spain: Still the Case of Familistic Welfare Models?

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Abstract

Italy and Spain are often labeled by the literature on comparative welfare as “familistic” welfare systems. Although it is not possible to find a unified criteria which defines and specifies what is meant by “familism” as a feature of a given welfare state model, generally speaking the term refers to the key role that the family plays in the overarching architecture of the welfare system, acting as the main provider of care and welfare for children and dependent individuals. This article will reflect on these questions by critically revising the framing of Southern European welfare states as “familistic” in the comparative welfare and care regimes literature. We will then look at trends of female labour force participation in Italy and Spain over the last two decades (1990-2010) in terms of the intensity of women’s participation in the labour market and their prevailing pattern of participation for both countries. We will look at activity, employment and unemployment according to age, education level, civil status and number of children; and patterns of participation by looking at permanency in employment and type of contract (part-time/full-time and fixed-term). The idea here is to analyse the extent to which Italy and Spain have (or have not) made the transition from a ‘male breadwinner model’ (where women remain outside paid employment) towards a more diversified pattern of family formation with regards the labour market participation of women. The purpose will also be that of stressing divergences between these two countries in their evolution of their female labour force that may question their assumed similarities.

Keywords

Familistic systems, female employment, Spain, Italy, Southern Europe

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Introduction

Italy and Spain are often labelled by the literature on comparative welfare as ‘familistic’ welfare systems. Although it is not possible to find a unified criteria which defines and specifies what is meant by ‘familism’ as a feature of a given welfare state model, generally speaking the term refers to the key role that the family plays in the overarching architecture of the welfare system, acting as the main provider of care and welfare for children and dependent individuals. What marks the difference between Bismarkian and Mediterranean welfare models is that while in the former there is explicit support, through specific fiscal and social policies to the role of the family as welfare and care provider mainly through the unpaid care work of women, in Mediterranean countries families step in for omission of public intervention. This ‘unsupported familism’ as Saraceno (1994) has called it, implies scarce development of childcare and long-term care services and insufficient measures for the reconciliation of work and family life. Both features impact negatively on the reproductive capacity of Italian and Spanish women and on their labour market participation. Hence, part as a cause and part as a consequence, these countries allegedly score poorly on gender equality indicators both in the public (labour force participation) and in the private (share of unpaid work) realms. The outcome would be the prevalence, in the Southern European countries, of the traditional ‘male breadwinner model’ where women stay outside the labour market doing unpaid care and domestic work. These countries would currently face a limited capacity to articulate transitions towards the “dual earner model” where both adult members of a family are in paid employment. These familistic practices seem to be legitimated by society through the importance given to intergenerational solidarity beyond welfare state responsibilities.

However, there has been a tendency in the comparative literature to accept the continuity of the ‘male breadwinner model’ through the occurrence of familistic practices in Southern Europe without much discussion (Guillén and León 2011) and yet two outstanding questions remain. First, there is the question of whether this pervasiveness of the male breadwinner/female carer model is equally strong in all of the four Southern European countries and significantly different from other non-southern European countries –especially those of a Bismarkian tradition. Secondly, there is the issue of whether there has been path-departure from familistic features in recent episodes of welfare reform in these countries by innovating in some policy fields (such as childcare and work/family balance for instance) or by changing the guiding principles of previous policy domains (social assistance and family policy).

This chapter will reflect on these questions by critically revising the framing of Southern European welfare states as familistic in the comparative welfare and care regimes literature. We will then look at trends of female labour force participation in Italy and Spain over the last two decades (1990-2010) in terms of the intensity of women’s participation in the labour market and their prevailing pattern of participation for both countries. We will look at activity, employment and unemployment according to age, education level, civil status and number of children; and patterns of participation by looking at permanency in employment and type of contract (part-time/full-time and fixed-term). The evolution of the participation of women in the labour market of Italy and Spain will be placed within the wider European context. The idea here is to analyse the extent to which Italy and Spain have (or have not) made the transition from a ‘male breadwinner model’ (where women remain outside paid employment) towards a more diversified pattern of family formation with regards the labour market participation of women. The purpose will also be that of stressing divergences between these two countries in the evolution of their female labour force that may question their assumed similarities.

Understanding familism: Departures from the male breadwinner model

Over a decade ago, feminist scholars vividly criticised mainstream comparative welfare research for remaining oblivious to the way in which women's unpaid care work influenced men's capacity to be in paid employment which in turn affected women's ability to be protected by the welfare state on an autonomous basis. Esping-Andersen's (1990) renowned indicator of de-commodification was pretty much at the heart of these debates, remaining centre stage ever since. What gender scholars were pointing at and what Esping-Andersen so willingly took on board a few years later was that, bluntly put, women's historical absence from the formal economy left them on a pre-commodified status. Several authors (Bussemaker 1994; Lewis 1992; O'Connor 1993; Orloff 1993) attempted to find indicators that would look at women's independence from family obligations. They were also looking at ways in which the worlds of production and reproduction would not be separated from each other but seen as mutually interdependent. Agreeing with Orloff that commodification is potentially emancipatory for women, what was then needed was a "new analytic dimension that taps into the extent to which states promote or discourage women's paid employment and the right to be commodified" (Orloff 1993: 318). Thus, welfare states had to be measured against their capacity to 'free' women from their family dependency by facilitating their entrance into the world of paid employment. 'De-commodification' was then complemented with 'de-familialisation', another, admittedly, cumbersome term. Esping-Andersen recognised the importance of considering 'de-familialisation' along with 'de-commodification' since, despite decades of absence from welfare analysis, the household economy might be the most important social foundation of post-industrial economies (1999: 6). The author operationalised the term by looking at policies that reduce individuals' dependence on the family and maximise individuals' command of economic resources independently of familial relations (Esping-Andersen 1999: 45). From the perspective of welfare regime typologies, the less familistic welfare states are the Nordic ones since social policy is explicitly designed to facilitate women's economic independence by lessening their family burdens. At the other end, the more familistic ones are those of Southern Europe where social policy not only does not help women to be economically independent but it actually relies on them to solve caring obligations and needs.

The literature on comparative 'care regimes'¹ has pretty much arrived at similar conclusions. According to this literature, the intersections between paid and unpaid, and between formal and informal care work materialise in a number of ways in different national contexts depending on the interplay between different institutions (welfare state, labour market, the third sector and the family). The 'acceptability' of various forms of care work given cultural and social values and norms (Crompton et al. 2007; Lister et al. 2007; Pfau-Effinger 2005) also plays a major role in shaping these different care models. Furthermore, the literature on social care has rightly pointed out that each arrangement for social care leads to a distinct outcome for gender equality. In these care regime classifications, 'familism' is again a feature that justifies the grouping of Southern European countries within a cluster or model of welfare and care that is different from the three main traditions of welfare. Anttonen & Sipilä's (1996) models of care, for instance, classified countries according to whether care was provided formally by the welfare state or the market, or informally by the family. At the two extremes of this continuum were the Nordic countries, dominated by public social care provision, and the Southern European countries, where the

¹ 'Care regimes' are patterns of care organisation in different societies (Pfau-Effinger and Geissler 2005). More specifically, and based on developments in the comparative welfare-state and industrial-relations literature (Esping-Andersen 1990; Crouch 1993; O'Reilly 2006), a care regime is defined as the specific set of institutions and of policies affecting these institutions that shape how care is delivered, influencing both the working conditions of carers and the quality of the care provided.

family is identified as the main institution providing (unpaid) care. Equally, both Pfau-Effinger's (2005) and Bettio & Plantenga's (2004) analyses of care arrangements in Europe also situate Southern European countries as the more familistic in the sense of delegating the bulk of care to the private (unpaid) domain of the family. May we also add that when the concept of 'familism' is used in the comparative literature to label care regimes in Southern Europe, one tends to read between the lines the assumption of a shortcoming of these countries' welfare development. Among other features such as clientelism, insider-outsider dynamics, etc., familism puts these countries in a disadvantaged position in comparison with other European welfare states in relation to enabling a departure from the traditional male breadwinner model. However, two issues might have been under-specified in the academic literature: 1. The extent to which European countries have gone through a linear transformation from the male breadwinner family model towards the more individualistic adult worker model; and 2. The treatment of Southern European welfare states as familistic in a pretty much static way, underestimating thus the capacity of these systems to undertake processes of change and also their capacity to diverge between each other in these said processes of change. Regarding the first point, Daly (2011:17) argues that:

"(...) The adult worker model has started to be quite widely used as a fully-fledged model or characterization of real life. This is unwise. To the extent that it depicts an empirical trend towards individualization, the adult worker model is but a partial characterization of what is happening (...)"

As Daly points out, one cannot question the fact that everywhere in Europe the entrance of women into the labour market is being promoted by work/family balance mechanisms, including employment flexibility and greater availability of childcare services. As Orloff (2005) has also argued, governments in developed democracies cannot any longer afford to be the advocates of women's role as housekeeper but need to be actively engaged in promoting employment for all, women included. One of the pillars of post-war welfare states, the strict gender division of labour between the public sphere of work and the private sphere of the family has cracked into little pieces. The 'job for life' has been replaced by a more fragmented and diverse pattern of employment and, equally relevant, the traditional image of the protective family has blurred both as a symbol of identity and as an effective institution of welfare provision. In today's welfare states, policies for the reconciliation of work and family life and flexibility in employment are instrumentally driven towards female employment growth.

Nevertheless, and as Daly notes, these measures do not mark an unequivocal trend towards individualization but rather a recast of the concept of family in terms of roles, functions, and relations *vis-à-vis* other institutions (Daly and Scheiwe 2010 in Daly 2011: 18). In this respect, the assumption that familistic policies hinder progress towards the adult worker model and greater gender equality can be called into question. In fact, the concept of familism and the degree to which it leads to gender inequality can indeed be interpreted in conflicting ways. Leitner (2003) for instance, uses parental leave as an indicator of 'familism' since this is a policy which supports the caring function of the family with respect to childcare. Paid parental leave allows parents to be absent from the labour market for a period of time in order to take care of young children. As the author puts it: "the existence (respectively: the absence) of regulations for paid parental leave will be taken as an indicator for the dimension of strong (respectively: weak) familialisation" (2003: 360). There is no simple answer to the question of whether parental leave is an indicator of familism and whether this does or does not promote gender equality. Some 'familistic' instruments, such as some formulations of parental leave might be promoting gender equality, some others might not. As Pfau-Effinger (2005) argues, the argument that the degree of formalisation of informal care is determined by the degree to which welfare states support gender equality and the integration of women in the labour market does not take into account the fact that informal care has itself been modernised and that the promotion of informal family care (parental leave

would be promoting this) does not necessarily contradict ideas about gender equality. Comparative research on long-term care has also shown that partly as a cost-containment strategy and partly following citizens' demands, the trend towards home-based services for the elderly is a common feature in all of Europe, even in countries with a high degree of institutionalization of long-term care services (Ranci and Pavolini 2008). Therefore, the concept of familism goes beyond an 'underground' strategy of some 'weak' welfare states which delegate all responsibility for and care of the family to become a wider and more complex element of interaction between the family, the state and the market. The definition of 'familism' gets further complicated by the ongoing process of commodification of previously unpaid private care work.

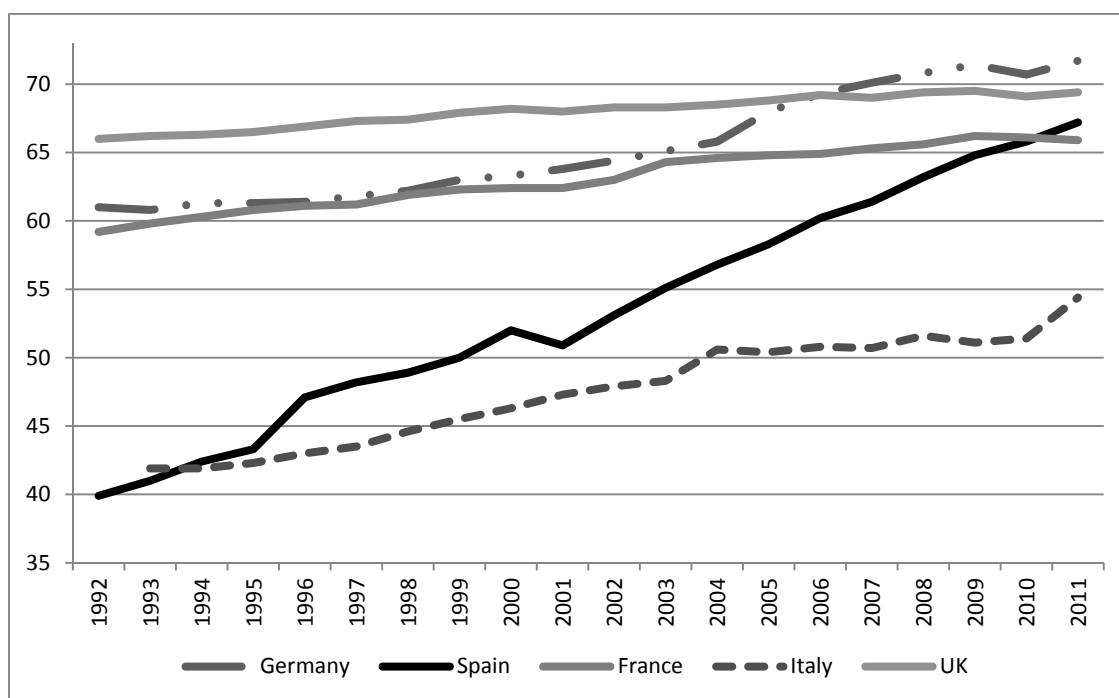
Diverging and converging trends in female labour force participation in Italy and Spain

In recent decades, the diversification of employment forms has been a leading mechanism in transforming national labour markets and social structures in all Western Europe. From a comparative perspective, the spread of flexible and unstable forms of work driven by the growing demand for flexibility and the pressures of international competition, show significant differences among countries according to labour market structures and employment regulation systems (OECD 2002, EC 2006). Italy and Spain are two national cases particularly interesting in that concern, as they experienced very strong changes in the last twenty years having at the same time very different labour market regulation systems (Fellini and Migliavacca 2010; Migliavacca 2008, 2010). The increasing diffusion of flexible labour contracts, which represents one of the major changes that have taken place in the recent decades, has been critical for those welfare systems soundly built on salary-employment and thus largely based on employment-related social benefits, like Italy and Spain.

The growth of the female activity rate represents, together with the growing spread of flexible employment contracts, one of the most relevant changes in the labour market in the last twenty years in the main European countries (Reyneri 2005). In Spain in particular this trend has been phenomenal. Patterns of female participation in the labour market are interesting to understand the specificity of Southern European countries. At the same time, however, the evolution of female labour force participation over the last two decades in these two countries also indicates very significant divergences between them. To put it simply, and as will be shown in this section, Spain has been departing from "southern" levels of women in paid employment and approaching "northern" ones mainly due to general employment growth in the country for the period mid-90s - mid-2000s and a remarkable increase in women's education level, especially for the younger cohorts. Data however shows that the current economic crisis has had a much more devastating effect on female employment in Spain than in Italy. The "substitution effect" of weak employment –mainly short-term employment- by unemployment puts a question mark over the depth of the shift towards dual-earner family types in the Spanish case. Moreover, the lack of effective work/family balance mechanisms and availability of childcare and long-term care services implies that marital status and number of children have strong explanatory capacity for women's access and permanence in paid employment.

In Spain and Italy in the early 1990s, the female activity rate was about 20 percentage points lower compared to main European countries (Fig 1).

Figure 1. Female activity rate (15-64)



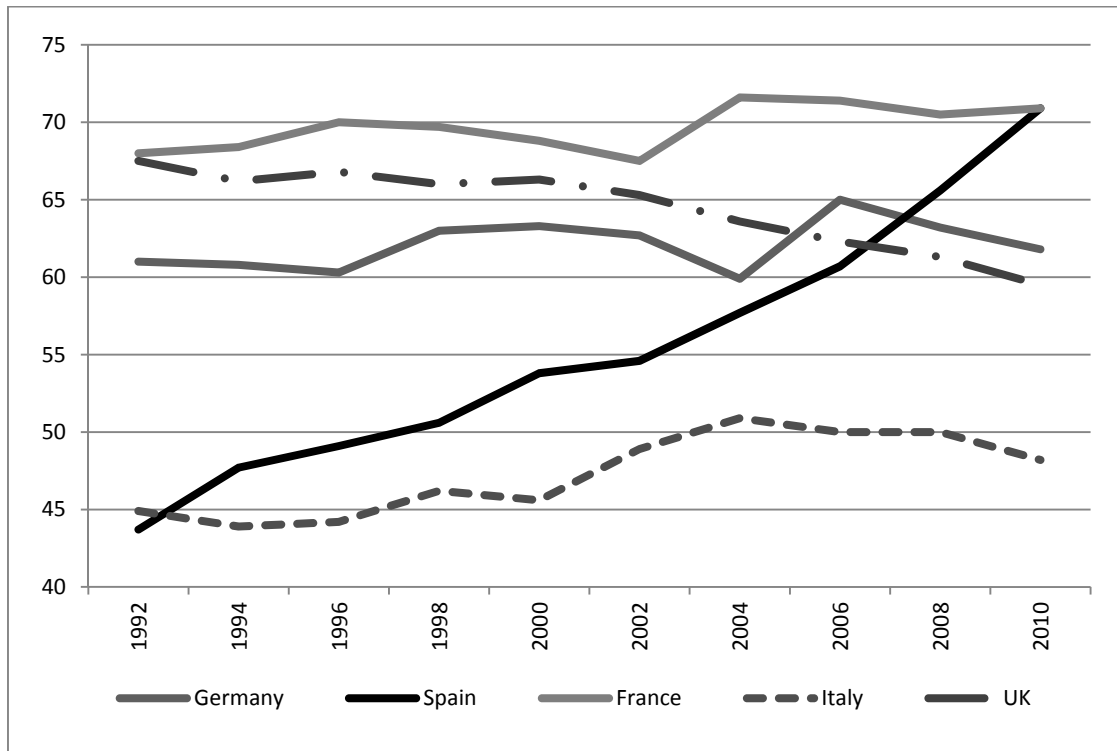
Source: Eurostat 2010 LFS

However, as Figure 1 indicates, although stemming from similar levels at the beginning of the 90s, the evolution of female activity in the labour market in Spain from the mid-90s onwards has been much stronger (20 percentage point increase) than in Italy (only 10 percentage points). This has meant that while Spain has reached levels of female participation that are similar to other European countries, the Italian level of female participation is still remarkably under the European average. The increase in women's activity in Spain is strongly explained by a sharp increase in women's education level, especially among the younger cohorts over recent decades. Over a period of two decades (1987-2007), Spanish levels of female illiteracy dropped from 8% in 1987 (plus another 16% with an incomplete primary education) to 3% in 2007, while the percentage of women aged 16 and older with tertiary education increased from 6% to 16% (Salido 2011: 190). As has been explained in the literature, in the context of low levels of state support to families with children, education levels become a salient explanatory variable for female participation in paid employment (De Henau et al. 2006; Salido 2011). Nevertheless, data concerning the female participation rate by education level show that, among Spanish women in the last twenty years, a strong growth was registered also for the lowest educated, while this did not happen in Italy (Fig 2). This trend is partly explained by the growth of labour opportunities in the Spanish labour market during the period of economic expansion, even for low skilled jobs with non-permanent contracts.

As far as female employment rates are concerned, statistical data show a strong positive trend both for Spain and Italy although much stronger for the former until the end of the economic expansion in 2008. Regarding Spain, the period from the mid-1990s until the end of 2008 saw a sharp increase in total employment rates (the employment rate increased from 46% to 64% between 2004 and 2008), in Italy the increase was lower (from 51% in 1994 to 59% in 2008). In both countries much of the employment growth that occurred during this period consisted of female employment, which contributed towards narrowing the gap in relation to EU average figures. The gender gap narrowed considerably between the

younger generations. As Figure 3 shows female employment for the 25-49 cohort was in Spain clearly below Italian levels until the early 2000s when Spanish ones surpassed those of Italy.

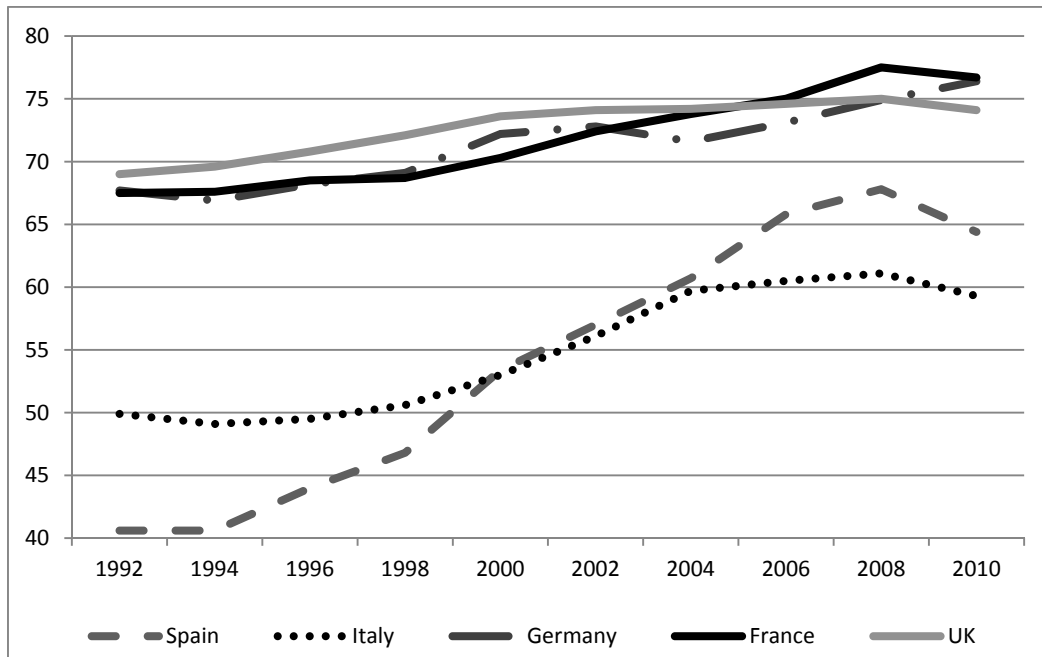
Figure 2. Female activity rates (25-49) by highest level of education attained (ISCED 0-2)



Source: Eurostat 2010 LFS

The female employment rate (aged 15-64) grew more strongly in Spain (from 32% in 1992 to 52% in 2010) than in Italy (from 35% in 1992 to 46% in 2010) and in that concern, as for participation rates, differences by level of education are quite interesting. While in Italy the employment rate of low educated women (ISCED 0-2) is mainly constant during this period, in Spain it grows by 12 percentage points (EUROSTAT 2010 LFS). Considering the low starting levels of the Italian and the Spanish female employment rates, the trends registered in these two countries are similar for women with medium and high levels of education. As far as low educated women are concerned, the entry to the labour market seems more difficult in Italy than in Spain. As a matter of fact, Spanish data show a good trend starting at the middle of the 90s, highlighting that the good performance of Spanish economic growth has brought with it more low-qualified jobs than qualified ones. At the same time, the Italian data, after a good growth in the female employment rate for the central cohort (25-49), highlight a delay that put in evidence the difficulties of Italian women to enter the national labour market. At this point, further research will be needed in order to highlight gender differences in employment conditions both in Italy and Spain (differences between men and women in earnings, occupational categories, part-time versus full-time, etc.), when female activity rates in these two countries continue their convergence process in relation to other European countries.

Figure 3. Female employment rate (25-49)

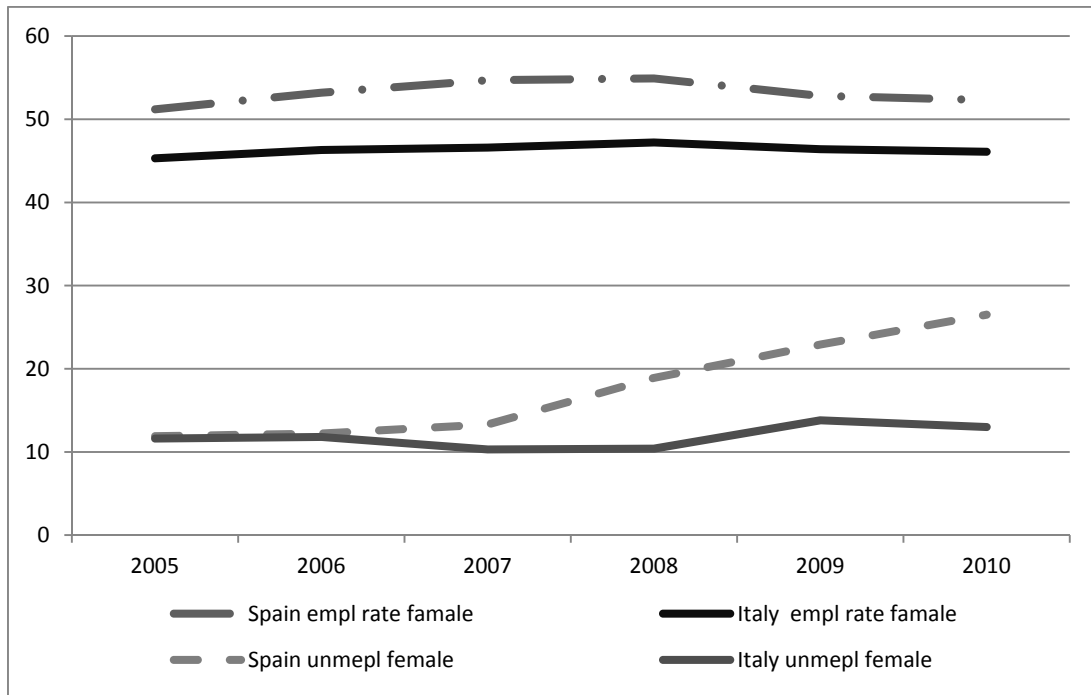


Source: Eurostat LFS 2010

This convergence between levels of employment and education among younger cohorts of women during the 1990s and first half of the 2000s, much more spectacular in the Spanish case, has been interpreted as a movement away from the male breadwinner model towards the adult worker model. Furthermore, together with a change in the intensity of women's participation in the Spanish labour market there has also been a change in the pattern of participation, with more women, especially the younger cohorts staying in employment for longer and with shorter breaks (Salido 2011). However, as we have noted, although data confirms Spanish levels of female employment similar to other European countries, from 2008 onwards there is a clear step backward with regards female employment illustrated by a sharp increase in unemployment.

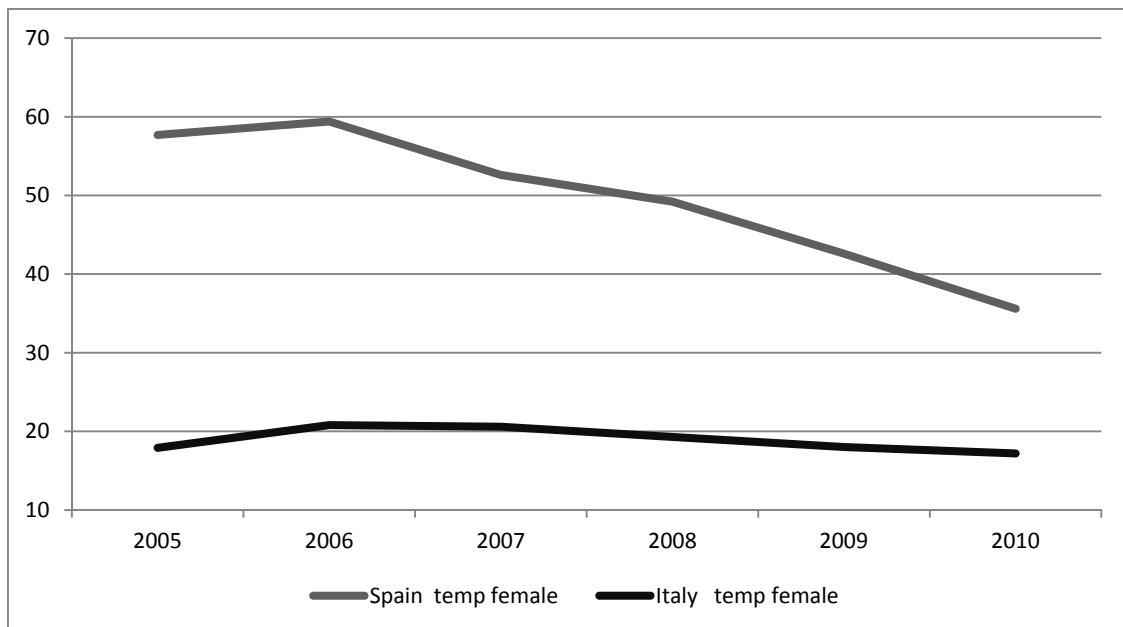
These data on unemployment indicate that the depth of the shift towards an adult worker model has been hindered by a number of factors. First, the increase in the quantity of jobs during the 1990s and early 2000s was achieved largely at the expense of their quality. Very high percentages of non-permanent jobs, together with very low levels of secure part-time employment (Ibáñez 2011), limited the genuine opportunities of working women to access the labour market. The very high proportion of temporal employment affects Spanish women much more than Italian women: in 2010, 25% of Spanish employees had a fixed-term contract, against a level of 14% for the EU15 average and 13% for Italy. This data has undergone few changes over the past twenty years. In particular, in recent years, some short-term contracts have quickly turned into unemployment as soon as the economy entered into a recession period, especially in Spain. This "substitution effect" is more noticeable in Spain than in Italy even when comparing total rates, due to a much stronger impact of the crisis in levels of unemployment in Spain than in Italy.

Figure 4. Unemployment and employment rates: Italy and Spain (female 15-64)



Source: Eurostat LFS 2010

Figure 5. Temporary employees as a percentage of the total number of employees: Italy and Spain (female 15-64)



Source: Eurostat LFS 2010

As regards part-time employment, while in Spain the percentage of women employed with a part-time contract has not increased very significantly (from 12% to 23% over the last two decades), in Italy the share of women employed part-time was very low in comparison with the European average but has

increased by 20 percentage points in the last twenty years (from 9.4% to 29%), mainly in the Northern regions, where the female employment rate is higher (Reyneri 2011). As the large majority of part-time jobs in Italy, to date, have been mainly permanent, the condition of Italian women seems better than that of Spanish women, at least from the point of view of employment stability.

We now turn our attention towards the impact of children on women's participation in the labour market. Data show that, generally speaking, having children remarkably diminishes the chances of women entering or staying in the labour market. Given the characteristics of the Italian and Spanish welfare systems and labour markets, we would expect the impact of children on women's labour market participation to be stronger, however, and as we will see below, the comparison with other European countries does not show significant specificities for these two cases.

Changes in the family structure, female labour participation and the transformation in the demographic structure affect the relationship between family and employment. Female employment varies with childbirth as a function of the number of children (Del Boca 2002; Naldini 2006; Ranci and Pavolini 2010, Ranci and Migliavacca 2011). The employment rate for women aged 25 to 49 decreases as the number of children increases, while for men in this age group the pattern is almost the opposite (Saraceno & Naldini 2011). As Table 1 shows, the female employment rate for 2008 decreases in Spain by about 9 percentage point when the woman has one child (and about 24.3 percentage points when there are three or more children) and in Italy the figure is similar (7.8 points lower for one child and 27 percentage points for three or more children). However, the comparison with other European countries

Table 1. Female employment and maternity in the European Union* by the number of children aged under 12 (2008): Women aged 25–49

	Female rate 2008	Zero children	One child	Two children	Three + children	Dif. Zero–One	Dif. Zero–Two	Dif. Zero–Three +
European Union	73.1	78.6	72.0	69.1	54.5	–6.6	–9.5	–24.1
Germany	76.4	83.7	77.2	72.4	53.0	–6.5	–11.3	–30.7
Ireland	78.4	81.5	68.2	61.5	49.1	–13.3	–20.0	–32.4
Greece	76.8	70.0	62.5	59.7	54.4	–7.5	–10.3	–15.6
Spain	70.1	73.2	64.2	60.2	48.9	–9.0	–13.0	–24.3
France	64.0	80.4	78.6	77.8	59.0	–1.8	–2.6	–21.4
Italy	67.8	67.3	59.5	53.4	40.3	–7.8	–13.9	–27.0
Luxembourg	77.6	83.7	74.4	70.8	52.6	–9.3	–12.9	–31.1
Netherlands	61.1	86.6	79.8	81.4	71.3	–6.8	–5.2	–15.3
Austria	71.4	85.2	82.1	77.3	60.0	–3.1	–7.9	–25.2
Portugal	81.8	78.2	77.5	75.5	66.6	–0.7	–2.7	–11.6
Finland	79.5	84.0	77.0	83.0	67.4	–7.0	–1.0	–16.6
The UK	77.5	84.0	75.1	71.8	48.6	–8.9	–12.2	–35.4

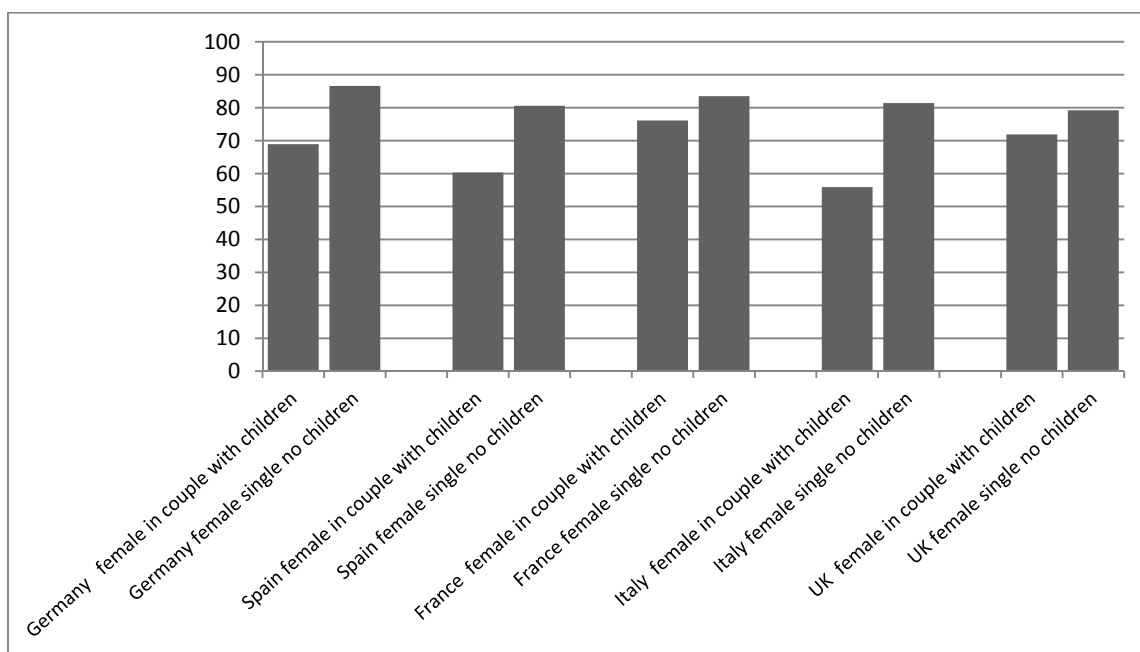
Note: *No data available for Sweden and Denmark.

Source: Salido 2011: 197.

does not show relevant specificities for the Spanish and the Italian cases. The difference Zero-Three+ (last column Table 1) is even larger for Germany and the United Kingdom. The only remarkable difference, as shown in Fig. 6, is when we compare female participation (25-49) of single women without children and women in couples with children. While Italy and Spain have similar levels of

participation in the case of single women without children as Germany, France and the UK, the distance between these countries and Italy and Spain increases for the case of women in couples with children.

Figure 6. Female employment rate aged 25-49 by children and household type 2010



Source: Eurostat LFS 2010

Further reflections: Familism in the organisation of welfare policies and everyday life

As all welfare states with Bismarkian roots are clearly geared towards social insurance, familism was firmly entrenched in the development of Italy and Spain's welfare states. For quite some time the ideal of the traditional male breadwinner family model has functioned as an indispensable complement to forms of social provision. Besides, the socio-cultural proximity of the countries of the south has also implied that familism acquired an imprint in everyday life that would be 'unique' in the European context. To a considerable extent, familism has in these two countries been ideologically defined and encouraged by the doctrines of Catholicism. Ever since Ferrera (1996) formulated the main traits of the Southern Model, i.e. low participation of women in the labour market, low levels of spending on families, weak social service provision, etc., the model has been put to test in comparative research with varying degrees of scrutiny and scientific accuracy. It has been argued in this chapter that: 1. The model might have been underspecified; and 2. Path departure over the last two decades calls for a timely revision of the model in general, and the principle of familism in particular.

Data on the participation of women in the labour market indicates that Spain has been departing from "southern" levels of women in paid employment and approaching "northern" levels mainly due to the general employment growth in the country for the period mid-90s - mid-2000s and a remarkable increase in women's education level, especially for the younger cohorts. Data however shows that the current economic crisis has had a much more devastating effect on female employment in Spain than in Italy. The "substitution effect" of weak employment –mainly short-term employment- by unemployment from 2008 onwards puts a question mark over the depth of the shift towards dual-earner family types in the Spanish case.

For both countries, the fact of having children strongly predicts a decline in female labour-force participation. However, this effect does not seem to be significantly different from other European countries such as Germany and the United Kingdom. It has been argued that to the extent that Italy and Spain continue to converge with other EU countries in female activity levels, the distance between these two countries and the rest of the EU, as well as the proximity between these two countries and other Southern European countries, might become less significant than the differences in employment conditions. In this respect, further research that compares levels of gender segregation across European labour markets will be needed.

Although beyond the goals of this chapter, the degree to which familism is still captured via the welfare state should also be considered. In this respect, path departure from familistic assumptions in the Spanish case has been quite spectacular. Since the beginning of democracy in Spain all governments, social-democrat and conservatives alike, have placed sizeable efforts in modifying the framing of familism in normative assumptions and policy discourses. By only looking at the input aspects of policymaking, the ideal of the male breadwinner model is long gone as an undesirable Francoist memory that nobody seems to be interested in regaining. The introduction of anti-discrimination and gender equality legislation together with deep processes of institutional adaptation has forced the prescription of patriarchal assumptions regarding the subordinate role of women. This institutional and policy change might have been less pronounced in the Italian case (Naldini and Jurado 2013).

In both countries, the education of children under compulsory age has improved and expanded remarkably. Contrasted with childcare provision targets in other EU countries, there is good availability of education services for children from 3 years old until mandatory education, complying with EU benchmarks regarding pre-school education. Territorial fragmentation in the Italian case is responsible for the existing structural imbalance in the allocation of public resources. The regional differences between the more urban, economically developed north and the rural, agricultural south still persist.

As for the case of care for the elderly, long-term care in Italy is characterized by high institutional fragmentation, as sources of funding, governance, and management responsibilities are spread over local and regional authorities, with different modalities in relation to the institutional models of each region. At the same time it is also characterized by a wide variability among regions and areas in both funding levels and structure of services supply (Gabriele, Tediosi and Tanda 2010). Italian long-term care is also characterized by a wide variability among regions and areas in both funding levels and structure of services supply. In Northern Italy the culture of public service in long-term care is rather widespread, also due to the high female participation in the labour market. These regions have been making an effort to improve their long-term care system, thanks also to their more developed management capabilities and their larger economic resources. In Southern Italy, on the other hand, the care burden rests mostly on families, with poor public support. As for Spain, the 2006 law on long-term care (*Ley de Dependencia*) was introduced to mitigate the historical absence of institutional support for individuals in need of long-term care. This recent political initiative to create a comprehensive long-term care system had the merit of putting an end to a history of neglect regarding the care for and rights of those who could not live an independent life. Previous (implicit) familistic practices meant that families, and especially women inside families, were the ones fully responsible for the welfare and wellbeing of those considered as 'dependents'. Before this new law, citizenship rights of carers and of those in need of care were conspicuous by their absence. However, first evaluations since the law was put into practice highlight a number of issues that might potentially hinder its capacity for success (León 2011). Furthermore, the

current harsh economic crisis has accentuated to unpredictable levels those same problems, and it is unclear to what extent the new system for long-term care will continue in the near future.

This deficit in service provision still forces Spanish and Italian families to step in. However, the opposite is also true: the socio-demographic composition of the population, and especially the living arrangements of Spanish and Italian families cushion the effect of an ageing population making the social risks associated with this phenomena less of a problem when compared with other European countries. The Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe-SHARE provides interesting data on the social and family context of the over 65 population in the 11 participating countries.² As explained by Kohli and others in their SHARE's analysis there is a North-South gradient when it comes to family structures with the Mediterranean countries showing the strongest intergenerational ties. This is exemplified for instance in percentages of co-residence between the elderly and their own children and other members of the family. Spain together with Greece and Portugal are the European countries where the percentage of people over 65 living in single-headed households is smaller (under 20% in 2001). This is in sharp contrast with countries such as Denmark where the percentage was up to almost 50%. The percentage of over 65s that live with their children is also higher in Spain (17%), Ireland (15%), Greece (15%), Italy (14%), and Portugal (12%) than countries such as Germany (1%), Denmark (0.3%), France (5%) or the UK (6%). The fact that children in Spain emancipate later than in the rest of Europe partly explains the high percentage of over 65s living with their children. But data also show that the percentage of people over 75 who live with one or more children is also higher (especially in the case of male elderly) in Spain and Italy, together with other countries of Southern Europe, than in the rest of Europe which indicates that many elderly people move in with their children when they reach a certain age or when they are confronted with solitude. The frequency of contact between elderly parents and their children is also closer in Spain and Italy than in the Continental and North European countries. Frequency of contact is also evidenced by the frequency with which grandparents look after their grandchildren. Spain, Italy and Greece are the countries participating in SHARE where there is a higher percentage of grandparents who look after their grandchildren on a daily basis. This prompts Albertini and others (Albertini, Kohli and Vogel 2007: 326) to suggest that "co-residence is *the* Southern European way of transferring resources from parents to children and vice versa". These indications of intergenerational relations means that, at least until now, the capacity for family support in critical moments (whether this is childcare or care for the elderly) diminishes the need for state intervention.

Notwithstanding the above, the need to intervene in the policy area of care (both for small children and the elderly) is triggered by a number of socio-demographic (on the side of both demand and supply) factors. First, compared with the majority of European countries Spain and Italy's ageing processes started relatively late and yet, by the beginning of the year 2000 the prospects of an ageing population were among the worst in Europe given high life expectancy and low fertility. Therefore, future projections at the beginning of the decade pointed towards a huge increase in the demand for long-term care services. Secondly, the massive incorporation of women into the labour market –especially among the youngest cohorts- since the mid 1990s, and changes in expectations and perceptions of traditional gender roles translated into a predictable decline in the volume of traditional caregivers affecting thus supply; the mass incorporation of women into the labour market together with the new expectations of younger cohorts of women increase the necessity of more and stronger measures, both in the field of employment relations and in social policies, of work/life balance mechanisms. In this respect, the most recent European Value Survey shows a remarkable increase for both countries, especially for the 25-49

² Germany, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, France, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland.

group in more egalitarian attitudes regarding domestic and caring duties between men and women (see Naldini & Jurado in this volume). Thirdly, and closely connected with the other two, since the end of the 1990s there has been a rapid process of commodification of care work, although still within the limits of the household.³ This process has been triggered by the first massive inflows of international economic migration. As argued elsewhere (León 2007: 332), individual strategies for social care have to a certain extent shifted from informal unpaid family support to a vague area of paid work circumscribed between the informal sector of the black economy and the formal but ‘weak’ service sector economy. Following common trends in other European countries, this new form of commodification of care work has been crucially facilitated by mass migration since the end of the 1990s. In fact, the incidence of migrant carers in the domestic sector has rapidly become a key element in the configuration of care systems in Southern Europe (Bettio et al. 2006; Bettio and Solinas 2009; Simonazzi 2009) although, as argued by Sarasa and Billingsley (2008) this ‘private solution’ to confront the problem of care supply given insufficient public provision generates important inequalities across social strata.

³ The volume of household employment in Spain is remarkably high when compared with that in other European countries. According to the Spanish Labour Force Survey (INE 2006), 600,000 people declared themselves in 2006 to be employed in the domestic sector, although the figure for those who are actually registered with Social Security (through the Special Regime of Household Employees) is less than half that number. Over 90% of those employed in the Special Regime of Household Employees are women and 61% non-nationals. Of these foreign workers the large majority (87%) are non-EU citizens, mainly from Latin American countries (Ministry of Labour and Immigration 2009).

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