

Closing the Gender Pay Gap in public services: union action

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Central European Labour Studies Institute (CELSI)

**Centre for Research on Employment and Work (CREW), University of
Greenwich**

European Public Services Union (EPSU)



**Closing the gender pay gap
in public services in the
context of austerity
(VP/2018/004/0076)**

EU Social Dialogue

European Public Services Union
(EPSU)

Central European Labour Studies
Institute (CELSI)

The Association for International
and Comparative Studies in
Labour and Industrial Relations
(ADAPT)

Centre for Research on
Employment and Work (CREW),
University of Greenwich.

The project – stemming from stagnation of GPG in public services

To provide insights into the public services GPG in the context of austerity across the EU.

Identify the extent to which the GPG is driven by cuts in public sector spending and whether, why and how budget cuts disproportionately impact upon women's pay.

Actions taken by trade unions to address the GPG.

Factors underlining the GPG

- Sectoral segregation – the concentration of women in public services;
- Occupational segregation – the congregation of women in particular jobs;
- The undervaluation of work involving care;
- Vertical segregation – the under-representation of women in senior positions;
- A ‘motherhood’ penalty;
- Working time – the disproportionate representation of women in part-time work, distribution of overtime and incentive-based pay;
- The unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities.

Method

21 case studies across the EU where trade unions have addressed the gender pay gap.

Based upon documentary evidence and interviews, guides, with trade union officers responsible for the organisation, organisational union representatives and where possible, representatives of management.

Analysis of EU statistics

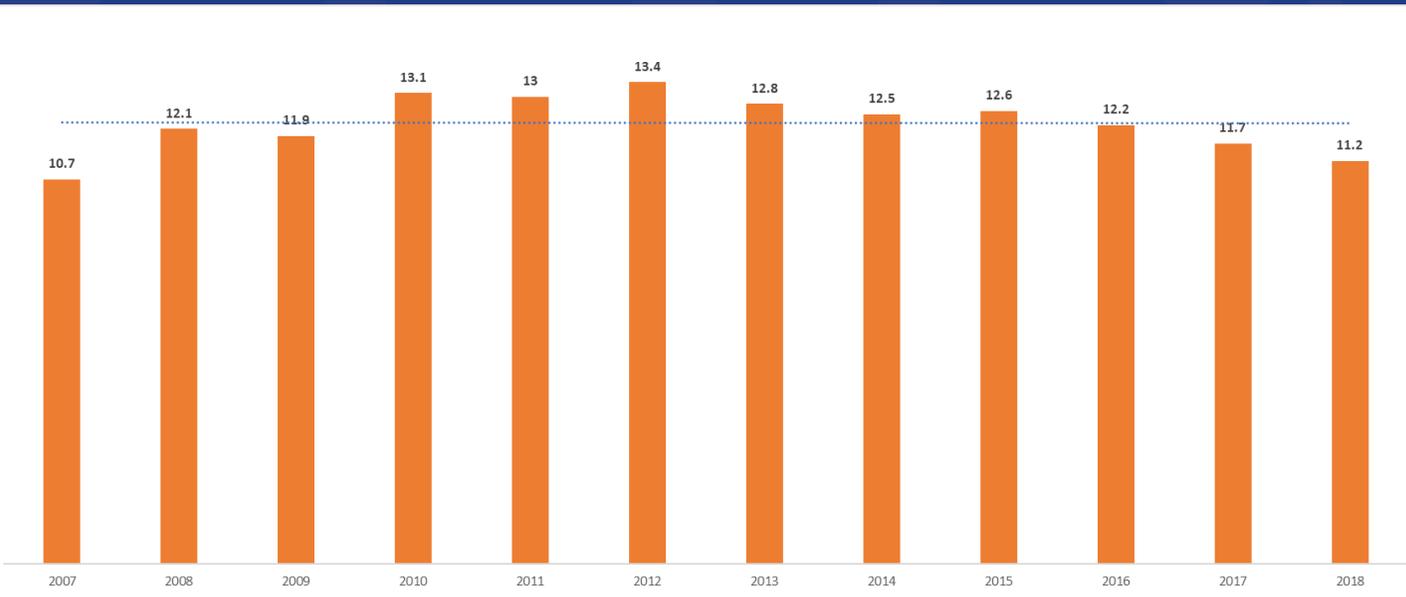
Two propositions with regard to the impact of the financial crisis on the GPG

1. The predominance of women in the public sector and cuts to the public sector have severely affected the prospects for gender equality in Europe (Rubery, 2015) with the EU reporting stagnation of the GPG, including in the public sector.
2. A narrowing of the GPG because of the levelling down of men's earnings. Where the gap decreased, there is likely to be an association with reductions in pay (bonuses, overtime pay) for men rather than a positive development for women (Smith and Villa (2015)).

Statistical Findings

The average unadjusted GPG in the public sector across the EU-28 between 2007 and 2018 increased during recession and has only just started to recover although the overall average obscures variation between countries - austerity measures have differed in their ferocity between EU states and have had differential outcomes.

Two measures of austerity impact the GPG. Increases in unemployment across economies and lower government expenditure on public sector pay both increase the GPG. The latter suggests that public sector pay policies under austerity have impacted negatively on the GPG.



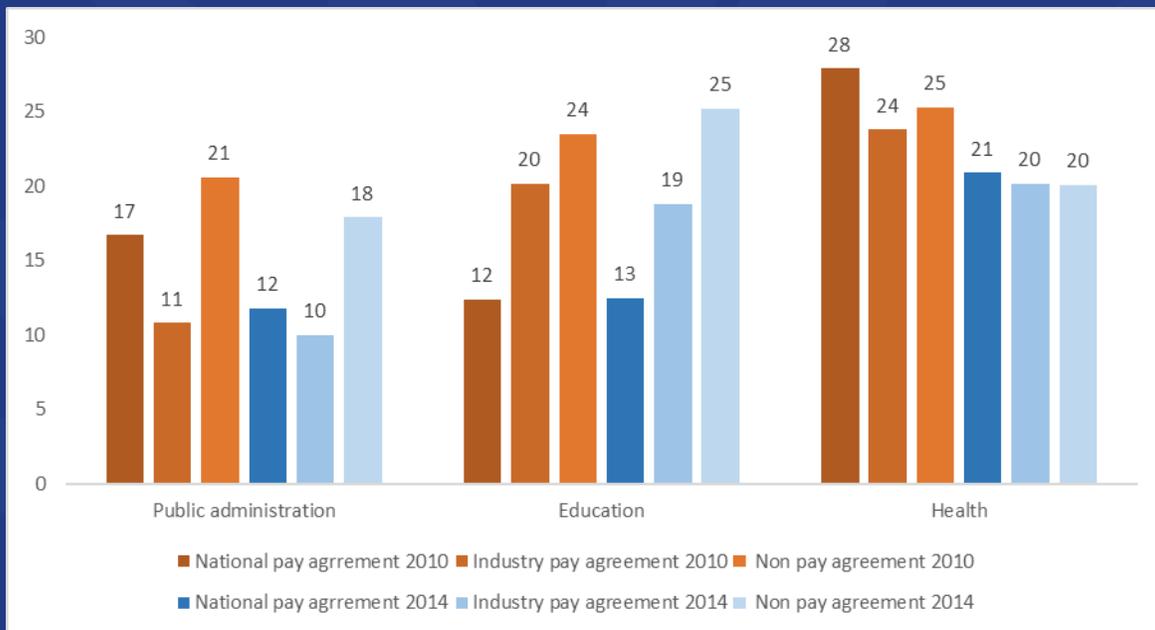
Statistical Findings

The GPG is wider for those earning most and narrower at the bottom of pay distributions - austerity can cause convergence between men and women's pay at the lower end? Trade union attempts to protect the lowest paid against pay cuts or freezes and/or an outcome of statutory minimum pay policies?

Narrowing in the difference between the hours worked by men and women in public services between 2008 and 2018. A number of EU countries have seen a decline in the proportion of full-time men in the public sector. This is the case in Italy where there has also been a reduction in the GPG.

Statistical Findings

The positive effect of collective agreements on the GPG was confirmed in public administration and education where the average GPG was lower in organisations with national or industry level pay agreements in comparison to those with no agreement. However, in health and social work, the relationship is not as straightforward, and the collective agreement does not necessarily translate into a lower GPG (possibly because privatisation has removed workers from collective bargaining).



Key Findings – case studies

- Austerity measures have undermined collective bargaining across Europe, including the suspension or contraction of collective bargaining, agreements and negotiations that may address gender inequality (Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland). In many cases trade unions have focussed on mitigating the adverse effects of austerity measures for all workers in terms of job losses;
- Differential pay for new entrants plus recruitment and pay freezes stall progress on closing the GPG. Wage systems based on seniority, pay freezes can trap younger women at the bottom of pay grades;
- Targeted pay increases to the lowest paid, with repercussions for the GPG ('bunching' of pay points at the lower end of the pay scale).

Key Findings

- Industrial action by women particularly health and social care, to defend their jobs, pay and conditions. Such action is not posed in terms of the GPG, but the recognition and societal value of women's work;
- Reform of collective bargaining structures that reinforce gender segregation - separate agreements;
- The flaws of Gender Pay Gap reporting - trade unions have produced critiques of the current reporting guidelines.

The application of EU and domestic Equal Pay legislation

Despite some important trade union initiatives to counteract low pay in occupations in which women predominate, there is limited knowledge and use of EU or Member State equal pay legislation or EU initiatives intended to promote it. This means that it is not being fully utilised as a vital tool to help close the GPG, whether in collective bargaining, legal action or the design of gender-neutral job evaluation schemes.



Thank you