

Gender Equality Policies and Practices in Croatia – The Interplay of Transition and Late Europeanization

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Abstract

This article contributes to understanding change in gender regimes in post-communist countries. Using Croatia as a case, it juxtaposes the observed change in key indicators of the position of women in various walks of life with the context of the European gender agenda and the positions of actors involved in the national political arena and policies introduced throughout the transition period.

The article reviews the previous enlargement waves and indicates that the gender agenda was added to the negotiation process rather late – primarily via the EU accession conditionality requirement. Although narrow in scope and often limited in impact to just ‘paper compliance’ with EU legislation, it opened discussions in the gender equality area in post-communist countries and empowered women’s organizations. In all the countries, the implementation of the European agenda was heavily influenced by the power and discourses of the main actors involved.

The article provides a map of social actors involved, together with gender-related policies as they have changed in three distinct periods in Croatia. The final analysis of observed practices and structures indicates very slow change and the crucial impact of structural and institutional developments as well as economic cycles, but little association of observed developments with dominant discourses or policies implemented over the past two decades.

Keywords

Gender equality; Post-communism; Europeanization; Croatia

Introduction

Although several scholars recognized the complexity of post-communist transition right from the outset (Dahrendorf 1990; Offe 1991) and usually framed it as triple transition (political, economic and state/nation building), more nuanced insights into the mechanisms involved emerged throughout the 1990s as the transition unravelled. One of the early but still very relevant contributions (Illner 1996) suggested that the transformation is more complicated, conflictual and prolonged than originally expected; that a new social reality is created which is not a mere transfer of existing models; and that there is a

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great deal of continuity with the past. Illner also emphasized that there is a need to better understand communism itself, which was not only oppressive and economically untenable, but also functional for society to a certain degree, and that the situation varies from one country to another. In addition, at least until recently, the literature on transition has tended to underplay both the role of the state and national questions. Therefore, the notion of 'quadruple' transition (Kuzio 2001) underlines the need to include both the state and other national actors more systematically in analyses. The role of both factors have been particularly relevant in countries that were concurrently involved in a nation-building and state-building process, the condition to be found in a significant number of post-communist countries. This points to the complexity of processes behind policy-making, which has to be respected in analyses.

Moreover, the influences of different external actors have also become more prominent with the onset of transition. Although in some countries there were some previous modes of international collaboration (e.g. through UN conventions), since 1990, post-communist countries started to co-operate more closely with other countries and international/supra-national organizations to find solutions to common problems or to achieve other policy goals (e.g. membership of the EU) (e.g. Deacon 2000; Guillén and Palier 2004; Deacon and Stubbs 2007). The process of Europeanization has also become one of the most important processes that has marked post-communist transformation in Europe. The Europeanization process has covered a wide range of policy areas in post-communist countries, including the gender equality agenda.

The EU gender equality policies have considerably widened in scope since their inception and nowadays they cover a wide range of concepts (e.g. equal opportunities, positive action and gender mainstreaming) and agendas, including areas such as work-family balance, domestic violence, the position of women in decision-making, and so on (Lombardo and Meier 2008). Although covering a wide range of topics and comprising different instruments (Rees 2005), the EU's gender equality agenda has been widely criticized. The main criticism stresses that it is predominantly focused on the public sphere and is increasingly used in an instrumental fashion (especially to contribute to employment-led goals) even though equality in the public sphere heavily depends on equality in the private sphere (e.g. Lewis 2006; Chiva 2009). Consequently, while the equal opportunities perspective indeed becomes included in a broader range of policy areas, it does not lead to changes in gender practices (Lombardo and Meier 2008), leaving structural and cultural obstacles unchallenged.

While this criticism has merit, several papers (e.g. Sloat 2004; Borza 2010; Bútorová 2009) have demonstrated that in the case of post-communist countries, the EU's gender equality agenda has offered an important 'window of opportunity', especially for feminist movements and women's non-governmental organizations. It facilitates awareness raising on gender inequalities as a social problem and places different issues on national gender equality agendas. However, these endeavours had limited success and although post-communist countries transposed the EU *acquis* in this field, a

resistance to the implementation of European gender equality legislation as well as the limited cognitive effect of this process is evident (Gerber 2010, 2011; Ghodsee *et al.* 2010).

Recent studies indicate two important issues that must be considered while studying the effects of Europeanization in the field of gender equality. First, in order to grasp the full picture and especially to understand the gap between legislative compliance and actual practices, the distinction between the transposition of EU rules and their (meaningful) implementation must be unveiled and understood (Gerber 2010). Second, national particularities must be respected and analysis must go beyond singling out Europeanization as a predominant influence, with more weight being put on domestic factors through which the compliance process is mediated. As Hudson and Lowe (2004) point out, merely 'copying' the same policies in different circumstances can lead to different results, which are dependent on previous policies, institutional and structural factors, as well as the normative understanding of policies.

Respecting the complexity behind policy-making, this article contributes to the complex picture of changing gender regimes¹ in post-communist countries with a more detailed focus on Croatia. Drawing on the experiences of the 2004 and 2007 enlargement in the field of gender equality, which are briefly summarized in the first part of the article, the influence of post-communist transformation and, in particular, late Europeanization of the Croatian gender regime is further explored. The analysis goes beyond the scope of the simple transposition of EU rules, as policy changes during various episodes of the transformation period are presented in the light of the power and discourses of the main actors involved in the past 20 years. The next section turns the attention to gender practices by analyzing changes in the position of women with respect to the following dimensions stressed by the EU agenda: labour market participation and care arrangements; occupational attainment and segmentation and the gender wage gap; and political representation. The last part of the article briefly summarizes the analysis and discusses the relevance of the Croatian experience in gender equality to other South East European candidate and prospective candidate countries.

Enlargement and Gender Equality – The Post-communist Experience

Although post-communist countries already started to diverge in the area of women's rights during socialism and although the differences between gender regimes in these countries have only intensified since then (Pascall and Manning 2000), some similarities can be observed. If we summarize their experiences at a very abstract level,² during socialism some of the rights in the public sphere, especially those related to the labour market (e.g. the right to work, equal treatment and equal pay, protective provisions for pregnancy and maternity, working conditions of women) have been state-imposed and benefited gender equality. However, some other issues, especially those seen as part of the private sphere (e.g. domestic violence, the gendered division of labour, LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender] rights), have never

been addressed by policy measures, negatively affecting women's status and the gender equality agenda in general (Havelková 2010). At this point it has to be noted that although the mentioned rights implemented in the period of socialism were state-imposed, at the time they substantially contributed towards achieving greater formal equality between men and women and, consequently, towards the development of women's rights and the improvement of women's status in these countries (e.g. Pascall and Kwak 2005).

During the early transformation period, a gender equality agenda was not among the priority policy areas in post-communist countries. A wide range of political and socio-economic consequences of transition and limited (re)distributive capacities of the state (Deacon 2000; Guillén and Palier 2004; Stubbs and Zrinščak 2009a), put the primary focus on political and economic reforms, which also favoured the role of international financial organizations (like the World Bank [WB] and the International Monetary Fund [IMF]) both in economic and social policy (primarily in the pension and healthcare fields). In a newly set liberal market discourse, the legitimization of gender issues becomes problematic, aggravated by a negative image of the socialist past and an antifeminist discourse (Jalušič and Antić 2001), and in some countries (e.g. Poland) an imposed national ideology that becomes closely connected with the idea of re-traditionalization (Gerber 2010).

In these circumstances, although criticized for the belated addition of gender issues to the negotiations agenda and the prioritizing of socio-economic reforms that lacked a gender perspective (Choluj and Neusuess 2004), the EU becomes one of the important initiators of discussions in the gender equality area in post-communist countries, as well as a dominant legitimizing force of changes, especially for women's organizations, whose activities accelerated reforms in this field (Borza 2010; Bútorová 2009).

Although the initiation of legislative and institutional changes in the field of gender equality in most post-communist countries can be primarily ascribed to the EU accession conditionality, and the EU was used as a justification to put some other 'non-binding' issues on national agendas (e.g. domestic violence, LGBT rights), recent studies indicate that the transformative power of the EU's gender equality framework in these countries turned out to be quite limited (e.g. Bútorová 2009; Gerber 2011). First, there was initial resistance to harmonization with European gender equality legislation present in some countries.³ Second, a gap between the legislative 'paper compliance' and observed practice is more than evident (Ghodsee *et al.* 2010). As Gerber (2010: 30) noticed, 'there is little evidence that implementation has been complete or successful anywhere within the EU . . . while meaningful implementation has proven particularly challenging among the Eastern European candidate states'. Unsurprisingly, in post-communist countries as well as in many other European countries, the labour market continues to be segregated, income inequalities are prevalent, women still bear the main burden of care work, and they are still severely under-represented in decision-making bodies (Pascall and Kwak 2010).

In the literature there are two groups of explanations noted for resistance to the implementation of the EU's gender equality agenda. One set of reasons is inherent to the European policy field itself. First, gender equality issues were not high on the public agenda during the negotiation process and, frequently,

compliance with EU legislation was just ‘mechanical’, while some countries entered the EU without entirely fulfilling conditions in this area⁴ (e.g. Hašková and Křížková 2008; Havelková 2010). Second, the EU’s gender equality agenda is too narrow to bring about comprehensive changes at the level of gender practices. With the gender equality agenda predominantly focused on economic integration, some issues have been dealt with sporadically (e.g. human trafficking, political representation), and the EU in any case does not have a mandate to intervene in the private sphere or the family, which is the source of real inequalities (Chiva 2009; Gerber 2011). Third, while the EU ‘forced’ countries to introduce legislative and institutional changes, there has been a limited effect at the cognitive level (Bútorová 2009; Gerber 2010).⁵

Another related but more commonly utilized set of explanations are those stressing interaction with domestic factors (e.g. Borza 2010; Ghodsee *et al.* 2010; Gerber 2011). The implementation of the gender equality agenda is strongly mediated through a set of discourses specific to each country and shaped by domestic circumstances. For example, strong neo-liberal and conservative actors make transposition and implementation of the gender equality agenda quite difficult (Havelková 2010; Weiner 2010; Gerber 2010, 2011). The existing literature on the consequences of the EU enlargement in the field of gender equality points to a number of domestic factors that have contributed to the resistance or success of post-communist countries to implement the EU’s gender equality agenda in a meaningful way. The most common factors through which Europeanization in the field of gender equality has been mediated are:

1. state-building, which has been closely related to national ideology where one of the components is also an idealized vision of masculinity/femininity and which undermines the development of the gender equality agenda (Gerber 2010, 2011);
2. the socialist legacy where its negative perception undermines the gender equality agenda⁶ (Hašková and Křížková 2008; Gerber 2010; Dobrotić 2012);
3. political parties’ ideology where left-oriented political parties have been proven to be more supportive of the reforms in this field, while right-oriented and conservative parties (although not exclusively) tended to favour familistic policies (Avdeyeva 2009; Gerber 2011; Dobrotić 2012);
4. the role of a dominant church in policy-making where strong conservative religious actors and related movements justify discriminatory practices against women (Gerber 2010; Razavi and Jenichen 2010);
5. the strength of the women’s movements, i.e. their capacity to influence policy-making (Bútorová 2009; Avdeyeva 2010; Gerber 2010, 2011);
6. policy learning, i.e. transferring policies from neighbourhood countries (e.g. Estonia and Lithuania from Nordic countries) (Avdeyeva 2009; Karu and Pall 2009).

It is important to note that the factors listed above never operate alone and that different post-communist countries had different configurations of actors, which kept shifting over time.

To sum up, based on this literature review on the experience of post-communist countries that have already joined the EU, there are three crucial factors that could be singled out. First, the EU is a rather weak actor in promoting gender equality practices. Second, ambiguities arise in the way the gender agenda in the EU is constructed (prioritizing socio-economic reforms, employment-centred policies, etc.). Third, the complex nature of adoption and implementation of the EU's gender equality agenda, itself strongly mediated through the interplay between different historical, socio-economic, political and cultural circumstances of post-communist transformation, is specific for each country and period. We now turn to the example of Croatia.

Croatian Gender Equality Policies

Although the Croatian 'transition' experience was similar to that of other post-communist countries, three important contextual features specific to Croatia must be singled out at a more general level: the war, the state-building process and late Europeanization (Stubbs and Zrinščak 2007, 2009a). The 1990–95 period was marked by the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the building of an independent Croatian state, and the 1991–95 war, which encompassed much of Croatian territory and resulted in significant human and economic losses (Puljiz 2001). Only at the beginning of the 2000s did the democratization process accelerate and the EU became an important actor in line with EU membership as a prime political goal. That contributed to the complexity of transition and influenced how gender issues were constructed, negotiated and understood by different actors and in different periods, elaborated in more detail below.

The absence of a gender equality agenda in the 1990s

Similar to other post-communist countries, the socialist period in Croatia also favoured the economic independence of women, primarily by granting them employment in the public sector and with that connected employment rights, but without addressing the position of women in the private sphere. That resulted in a comparatively high participation of women in the labour market, but also in their double burden, as the traditional division of care work was preserved (Puljiz and Zrinščak 2002). In addition, the issues of horizontal and vertical segregation in the labour market never gained traction. Looking from a comparative perspective, for that time progressive and rather liberal legislation in the field of reproductive rights and family relations was introduced (e.g. free choice on fertility, right to divorce, rights of cohabiting couples and children born out of wedlock) (Puljiz and Zrinščak 2002), and although the socialist period did not promote a wide range of political rights and autonomous civil movements, women were represented in the political sphere (Šinko 2007).

The 1990s were marked by a transition from socialism to a market economy and democracy, accompanied by a fall in gross domestic product (GDP), rising unemployment and inequalities, the widespread use of earlier retire-

ment, and reduced social spending (Puljiz 2001). Those were not inherently detrimental to gender equality, particularly as mostly 'male' industry jobs vanished through the 1990s, but limited services and restricted resources constrained possibilities for women, pushing them out of both the labour market and the policy agenda (Kerovec 2003). These processes were additionally reinforced in war circumstances, as it was mostly men who participated in the war efforts, 'built the state' and had access to considerable veteran support policies/benefits (Stubbs and Zrinščak 2009a). Moreover, the war and nation/state-building processes brought very slow democratization, visible in authoritarian tendencies and particularly imposing limitations on the independent civil society scene (Bežovan and Zrinščak 2007). Human rights and feminist civil society organizations were targets of the most negative attitudes and consequently not able to contribute considerably to the reforms or to put 'their issues' on the public agenda (Kesić 2007).

Hence, one strong conservative, right-oriented political party (the Croatian Democratic Union, HDZ) dominated the policy scene, initiating and maintaining national ideology and a pro-natalist discourse, assigning women's reproductive function as their primary role.⁷ Under these circumstances the Catholic Church as the dominant religion in Croatia and church-related organizations became publicly visible and influential actors. Being the main actor which supported and legitimized both the new social order and an independent Croatian state, the Church nevertheless did not have the power to significantly influence the public agenda (Zrinščak 2007). The EU was almost completely absent during 1990s, while the IMF and the WB were involved in defining 'gender-blind' economic and social policy, notably pension and healthcare reforms (Stubbs and Zrinščak 2007).

A depicted combination of political and economic circumstances promoted a traditional and 'romantic' vision of gender distribution, praising 'ideal' notions of masculinity/femininity, and gender equality was not perceived as a public issue. Consequently, policy measures were announced, such as a paid profession of mother/caregiver for mothers with four or more children, including health and pension rights, although most of them were not implemented mainly due to funding problems (Puljiz and Zrinščak 2002). However, in line with dominant political ideas, and at the same time because of the pressure to reduce public costs advocated by the WB, some measures were adopted during the 1990s, such as a reduction of maternity allowances⁸ and an introduction of three years of paid maternity leave for multiple births, the third and any subsequent child, etc. Although under the Beijing Platform for Action the government introduced the first institution in the field of gender equality in 1996 (the Committee for Equality Affairs) and created the first national gender equality policy (without consultations with other actors), this was mere 'symbolism' in order to fulfil international obligations (Kesić 2007).

Hence, in the 1990s there was an explicit discursive turn toward re-traditionalization promoted by strong political actors, but constrained due to a lack of resources. However, the absence of a gender equality agenda from the public discourse and practical policy level from the time of the communist regime continued.

New opportunities for a gender equality agenda (2000–03)

This period is characterized by a 'political turn', symbolized in the first change of government after 1990. That brought a left-centre coalition to power and EU membership as a primary political goal. Yet, the political/democratic turn should not be understood as a radical break with the past (Stubbs and Zrinščak 2012). During this period, the EU became important, but just one among other actors/processes. In the Croatian case the Europeanization process means a long negotiation process⁹ and even considerable resistance to some aspects of EU involvement, backed by significant Euro-pessimism. This does not speak against the importance of the EU influence in the field of gender but gives it a 'proper' weight.

When it comes to the gender equality agenda this period was politically quite active. On the one hand, a left-oriented coalition was more inclined to this agenda, while on the other hand, the political goal of EU membership opened an additional window of opportunity for women's organizations, some scholars and part of the media to put new issues on the public agenda. Hence, they started to co-operate more actively with the government and were involved in the preparation of a national gender equality policy and legislation (Gender Equality Act adopted in 2003), where they ensued from EU legislation as well as from the practices of other countries (e.g. Norway, Slovenia) (Kesić 2007). Furthermore, a more comprehensive institutional setting for gender equality started to emerge (the Parliamentary Committee for Gender Equality was established in 2000, the Gender Equality Ombudsman/woman in 2003, the Governmental Office for Gender Equality in 2004).

In this period, the harmonization of labour-market-related legislation also started (e.g. prohibition of discrimination/sexual harassment, etc.) and, breaking with previous practices, some attention was directed towards domestic violence (the Law on the Protection from Domestic Violence was passed in 2003) and the LGBT population (the Same-Sex Civil Unions Act was passed in 2003, though granting very limited rights). Some additional measures were passed, but they said more about 'policy confusion' than a clear gender agenda. For example, there was an attempt to foster fathers' involvement in childcare by granting two additional months of maternity leave to those families where fathers exercised at least three months of maternity leave (paid at a low level), which did not contribute to fathers' involvement in early childcare. Simultaneously, state budget deficits and the IMF demands to reduce social spending led to reductions in some parental rights in 2001, receiving very negative public attention.

The EU conditionality as a main driver of reforms since 2004

The period from 2004 onwards is marked by the return to power of the right-wing coalition, and the pro-natalist discourse started to be pronounced anew. However, as the right-wing coalition continued with the EU agenda (Croatia got EU candidate status in 2004 and negotiations started in late 2005), the EU became a dominant driver of reforms. Still, the 2004–07 period mostly witnessed the 'silence' of a gender equality agenda, mainly due to

vague EU authority in this field. Indeed, gender issues were mainly absent from the public agenda, except domestic violence and human trafficking which, backed by support from the government and active advocacy of women's organizations, received considerable public attention.

It was only since 2008, as EU negotiations entered their final phase, that substantive compliance-related changes were introduced in policy and normative areas. In 2008, a new, fully harmonized, Gender Equality Act was adopted (introducing 40 per cent gender quotas in government and politics to be reached within three election cycles) as well as a very comprehensive Anti-discrimination Act, which received some public attention and even resistance from the Catholic Church and church-related organizations. Still, the law was adopted due to the overarching EU argument (the claim that the law must be passed in order to 'buy' EU membership) and support from a considerable part of civil society. Furthermore, in order to harmonize with EU legislation, individual entitlement to parental leave was introduced. However, as parental leave is fully transferable and paid at a very low level, again that did not bring about changes in fathering practices.

The economic crisis hit Croatia slightly later (as there was still some growth in 2008), but was deep and protracted, as the GDP change had not yet (up to 2012) turned positive on an annual basis. It hit the private sector the hardest, particularly manufacturing and construction (Franičević 2011), but an ongoing drive towards austerity is likely to reduce opportunities for female participation in the labour market, as well as the provision of family and gender-related services.

From Policies to Practices?

Operational framework and expectations

The EU Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010–2015 stresses four important areas of equality: equal economic independence, equal pay for equal work and work of equal value, equality in decision-making, and dignity, integrity and an end to gender-based violence (European Commission 2010). Heavily relying on that framework, the Croatian Parliament passed its fourth National Policy for Gender Equality 2011–15 (GRC 2011) particularly stressing equal opportunities in the labour market (particularly by reducing women's unemployment and eliminating all forms of discrimination, stimulating women's entrepreneurship and work-family balance) and gender equality in decision-making.

Indeed, the EU conditionality brought 'new' issues to the gender equality agenda in the last decade. Yet, many problems remained unaddressed (e.g. gender pay gap, sectoral segregation in the labour market, early childcare education and care) and there was no vision of necessary reforms (e.g. work-family balance, active fathering). At the policy level, newly introduced legislation did not bring much change that could disrupt prevailing gender practices. Furthermore, there is little public awareness of the existence of anti-discrimination legislation (Kamenov and Galić 2011) as well as a lack of case-law (GEO 2011). Lastly, established gender equality 'machinery' did not

turn into an active advocate of 'gender-sensitive' social policy reforms that could significantly challenge existing gender practices, especially in the private sphere. For this reason we cannot expect radical changes in observed gender practices throughout the transitional period. In particular, no substantial changes are to be expected regarding labour market participation, the position of women, and prevailing care arrangements. Those 'decisions' are mainly left to economic circumstances and the impact of other structural changes (e.g. educational trends). The same applied to political representation, as quotas were enacted with gradual implementation. It is still hard to expect significant changes in women's position in politics.

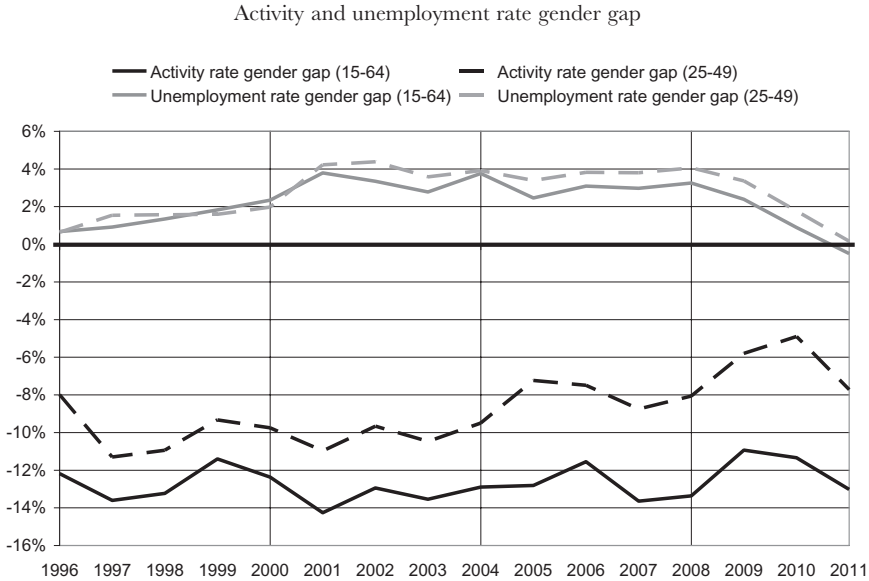
In order to examine those issues, we analyze patterns of labour market participation and care arrangements; occupational attainment, segmentation, and the income gender gap; and the participation of women in political power. The developments in participation in political power are portrayed through administrative data, and for labour market developments in the 1996–2011 period we use Labour Force Survey (LFS) data, supplemented by prior research in the field. Periods of analyses follow the periodization of the previous section.

Labour market participation and care arrangements

Equality in labour market participation is a key indicator of economic independence. While the labour market participation rate for prime working-age women (25–49) declined from 79 per cent in 1996 to 77 per cent in 2001, and then hovered steadily at the rather low level of 79–80 per cent between 2004 and 2011, it is the gender gap in activity and unemployment, shown in figure 1, that is most indicative of gender inequalities. The gap in the activity rate for the population aged 15–64 remained stable throughout the period, oscillating between 12 and 14 percentage points, but for the population aged 25–49 the gender activity gap has declined notably since 2003, down to 5 per cent in 2010. In addition, the male advantage in the economic activity rate declined in both observed recession periods (1998–99, 2009–10), only to intensify again at later stages of the crisis (2000–01, 2011). The unemployment rate gap was actually most intensive during the years of economic growth, particularly among the core working age workforce in the mid-2000s, but relative female disadvantage has steadily declined since the crisis emerged and had all but disappeared by 2011.

An alternative way to approach economic independence is to explore whether the share of women defining themselves as housewives, or those living independently in their own household, has changed. On both accounts a considerable and steady transformation can be identified over the past 15 years. The share of prime working age women who identified themselves as housewives declined in almost linear fashion from 18 per cent in 1996 to about 11 per cent in 2011, whereas the share of the same age group not living with a partner increased from 22 per cent in 2002 to 28 per cent in 2011. Both developments can be partially explained by delayed transition into marriage (as the mean age of entry into the first marriage for women increased from 24

Figure 1



Source: Labour Force Survey.

Note: Absolute differences in unemployment and activity rates are shown. Positive gap indicates higher rate amongst women.

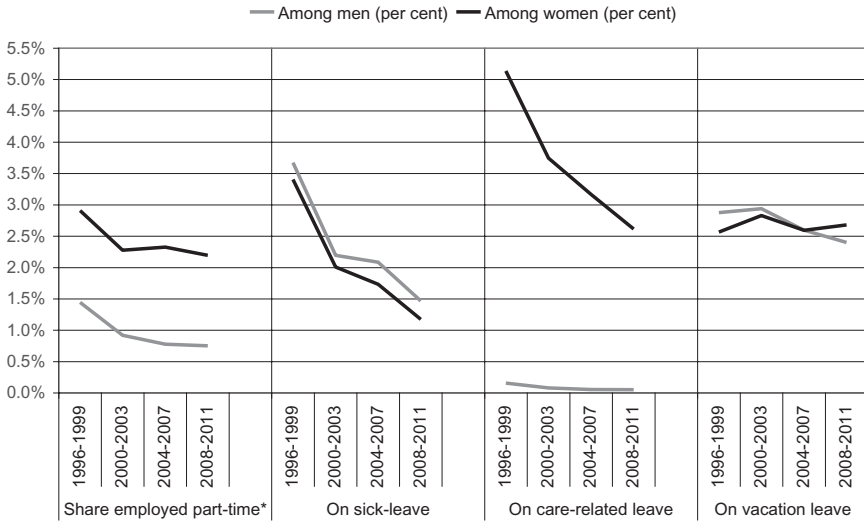
in 1992 to 27 in 2009 [CBS 2012]), but this nevertheless stands for a significant change in structure of household arrangements and gender roles in Croatia.

The share of employees working part-time in Croatia is miniscule and decreasing, but still more prevalent among women (see figure 2; similar gender differences can be found among the self-employed, among whom 26 per cent of men and 45 per cent of women worked less than full-time). Apart from that, women employees on average report 3–4 per cent shorter working hours than men. The gap narrowed in the past 15 years, with the mean decreasing from 43.0 to 41.1 hours for men and from 41.1 to 40.4 hours for women between the 1996–98 and 2008–11 period.

Concerning the population taking leave (figure 2), gender differences are modest and shifting in favour of women when it comes to sickness and vacation leave. The greatest gender differences can be observed in care-related leave arrangements, which are almost non-existent among men, with no sign of improvement throughout the observed period.¹⁰ Taking a closer look at take-up of maternity/parental leave among employed parents (figure 3), a persistent increase in the use of leave among mothers of nursery age children (aged one to two) can be observed in the 2004–07 period, but still less than 20 per cent of mothers are to be found taking prolonged leave. Among parents of pre-nursery age children (younger than one year), the share of mothers who remain on leave until the first birthday substantially increased

Figure 2

Working time and leaves



Source: Labour Force Survey.

Note: * = employees only.

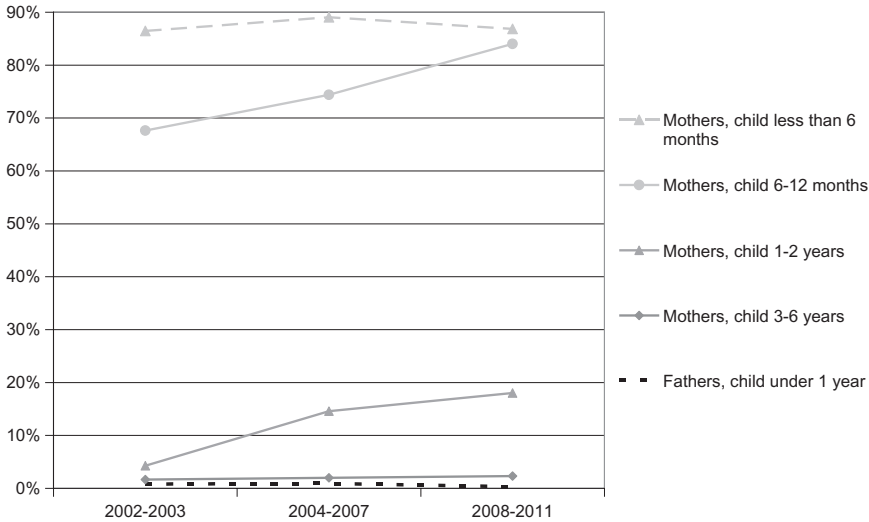
and converged with the prevalence of maternity leave during the first six months of parenthood. However, fathers' use of leave is very low, regardless of the child's age, the observed rate being statistically undistinguishable from zero.

Considering the national policy targets with respect to labour market participation, discrimination and work-family balance, it is important to broaden the inquiry from maternity/parental leave to the employment patterns of mothers. Regardless of the observation period, childless women and women with primary school-age children have the highest employment rate, indicating that career breaks are temporary in most cases (figure 4). However, mothers of pre-school-age children had about 4–5 percentage points lower employment rate than mothers of primary school-age children. The gap is most dramatic among mothers of nursery-age children, their employment rate being 14 percentage points lower than among mothers of primary school children in 2002–03, but slightly narrowing in more recent years to 7–9 percentage points. The employment rate for mothers of children under one year of age improved somewhat, but it must be noted that as their children reach nursery age (and paid parental leave expires), the employment rate of mothers takes a plunge.

A trend of workforce segregation towards a 'feminized' public sector and 'masculine' private employment seems clear in the past 15 years. In the late 1990s, about 40 per cent of both the male and female workforce was employed in the public sector. Yet, in the late 2000s, the share was down to about a

Figure 3

Take-up of maternity/parental leave by age of the youngest child



Source: Labour Force Survey.

Note: Employed parents only.

quarter of men and a third of women (figure 5). While this development is mostly due to the privatization of state-owned firms, even within the 'core' public sector (education, health, public administration), the share of female employees in the public sector increased from 58 per cent in 1997–98 to 68 per cent circa 2010.

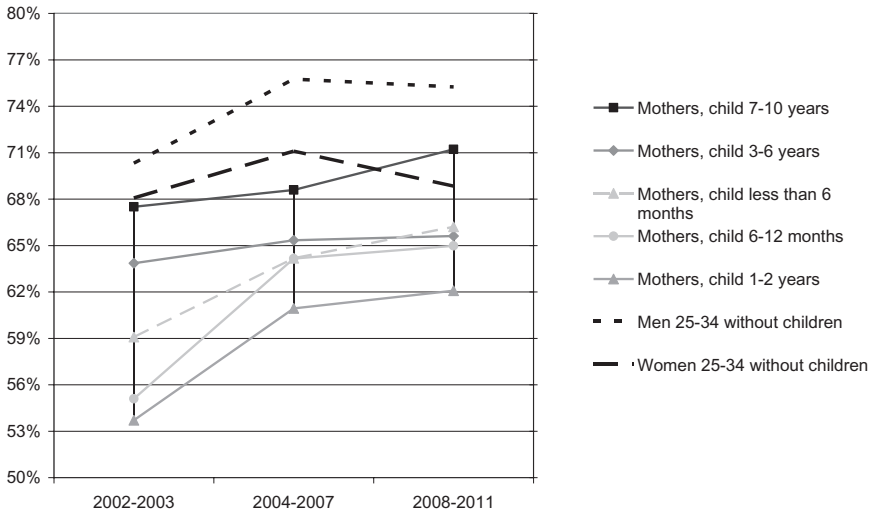
Occupational attainment and segmentation, and gender wage gap

Turning to occupational attainment, there is an evident and persistent increase in the odds of female employees working in managerial occupations, while the share of women in professional occupations was growing much faster than among their male peers (figure 6). Such a trend is clearly visible in the administrative records of employment (CBS 2012) for prestigious professions such as medical doctors, academic staff or judges. However, with respect to being employed in a supervisory position, and especially being an employer, the gender gap is substantial and persistently disfavours women throughout the period, even with slight tendencies towards widening.

While the gender aspect of sectoral and occupational segregation in Croatia is well documented (Matković 2008), the change in the feminization of any given occupational group is far from overwhelming, with an increase being persistent only among professionals (cf. figure 6) and a further decline in craft occupations (from 16 to 8 per cent). Most industrial sectors are far more

Figure 4

Employment rate for mothers with children by age of youngest child



Source: Labour Force Survey.

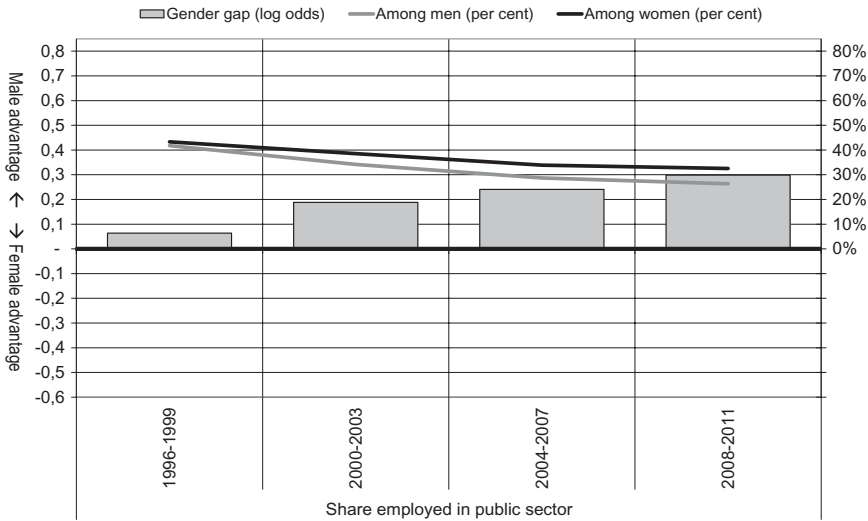
Note: Childless men and women aged 25–34 added as a reference group.

balanced in gender composition than occupational groups, with only manufacturing, construction and transport being substantially male-dominated, while high feminization is evident in the financial sector, health and education. A decrease in feminization in the 1996–2007 period was evident in manufacturing, construction, retail and the financial service sector, with some growth in business services, public administration and defence, and other services. However, the picture portrayed here is one of stability rather than change.

Although the observed gender wage gap is not overwhelming and declined from 10.5 per cent in 2004 to 9.8 per cent in 2010 (CBS 2012), a counterfactual analysis based on LFS data (Nestić 2007, 2010) showed that by taking into account personal characteristics of employed women (like a more favourable education structure) the counterfactual wage gap turns out to be substantially higher in both the public and private sector for mothers and childless women, and the differences actually increased between 1998 and 2008 (from 20 to 22 per cent). In addition, consistent with our findings here, Nestić found little evidence of a glass ceiling, with the gap in the higher strata of income distribution being rather small, but there is some support for the ‘sticky floor’ effect, as the wage penalty is substantially stronger among women in the lower half of the income distribution, particularly in the public sector.

Figure 5

Workplace characteristics



Source: Labour Force Survey.

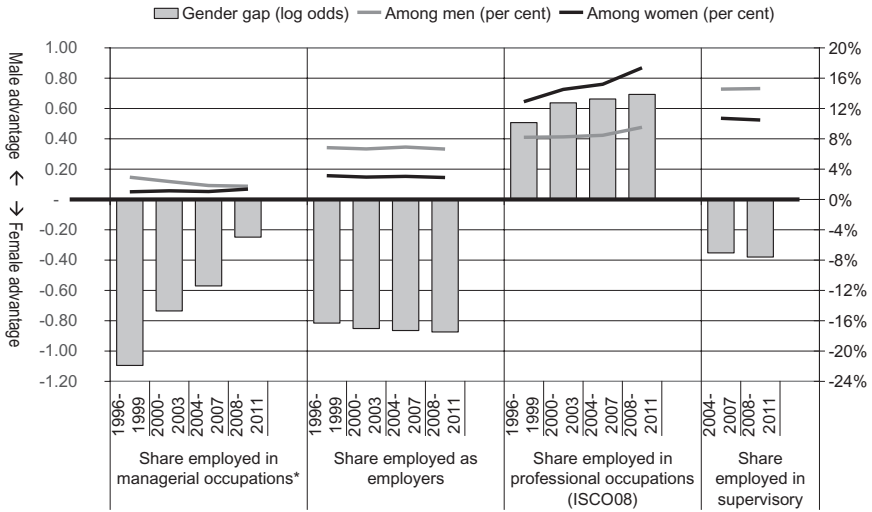
Political representation

In the political sphere there seems to be a substantial pendulum effect, as a rather stagnant share of women in Parliament during the last decade of socialism (17 per cent in 1978, 13 in 1982, 16 in 1986) (RBS 1974–89) declined to 4–7 per cent in three elections during the 1990s – a clear reflection of the re-traditionalization of this period portrayed in the previous section. While the share of women in the national Parliament increased to 22 per cent in the 2000 elections and remained close to that level (18–21 per cent) through the following three elections (figure 7), this process lagged in local government, as county and city councils reached a 20 per cent threshold only around 2009, while women’s participation in municipal councils did not yet reach the level observed during the last decade of socialism (16–17 per cent in the 1978–86 elections).

The top tier of the executive branch followed the same pattern, as there were few female ministers or ambassadors during the 1990s, and even during the initial years of the centre-left coalition government 2000–02 (figure 8). Although the share of female ministers declined in 2008 and 2009 (partially because one of them became Prime Minister), the share of functionaries and ambassadors is steadily growing, albeit still far from the stipulated 40 per cent parity threshold.

Figure 6

Job status



Source: Labour Force Survey.

Note: * = employees only.

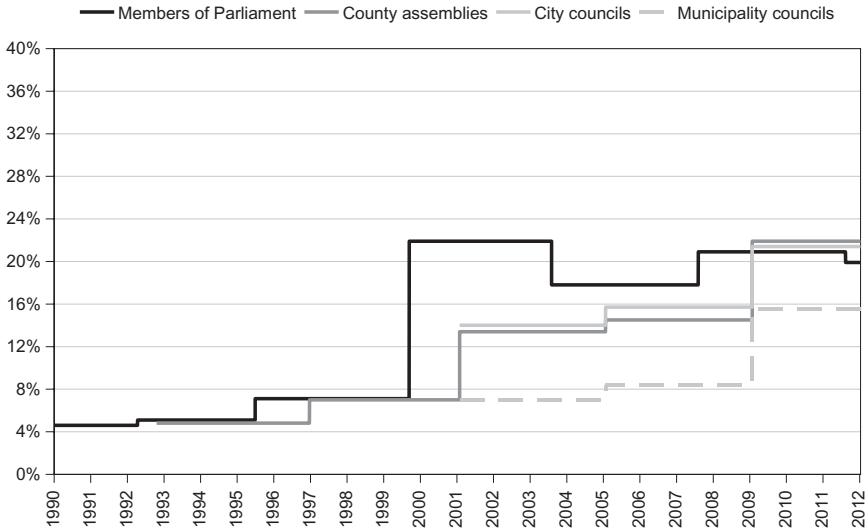
Conclusion

The development of the Croatian gender equality agenda shares some similarities with other post-communist countries that have already joined the EU. We find three facts highly important. First, the EU was just one of the actors in developing and understanding gender issues in post-communism. The main role of the EU is in facilitating and supporting domestic actors (mainly women's organizations and/or experts) to put some issues on the public agenda. This contributed to a change of discourse, but only in a limited way and only in some areas. Second, the domestic arena is of crucial importance. Without a deep understanding of actors and discourses it is not possible to understand social dynamics in a particular country. That is why we underlined the gender policy implications emerging from specific features of Croatian transition, like war, state and nation building and late Europeanization. Third, focusing only on the policy level diverts attention from practice and structure, that is, from the real position of women in society. Actually, apart from parental leave uptake among mothers, the policy and practice levels seem to be highly unrelated. The question is why and what are the implications?

Our analysis of gender practices in Croatia shows the importance of legacy and the transition period. Labour market participation of women and men is historically shaped and influenced by transition circumstances. For example,

Figure 7

Gender participation in legislative positions

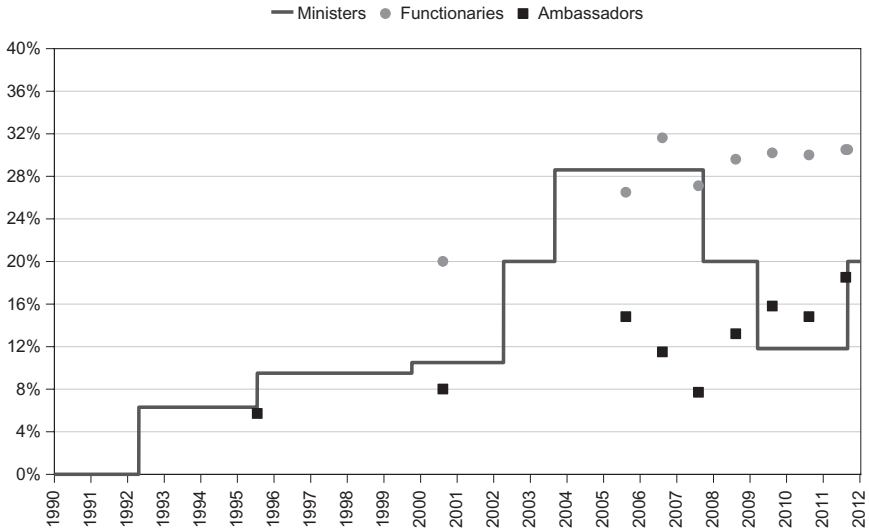


Source: CBS 2012.

due to the massive practice of early disability retirement of war veterans, the activity rate of men is quite low and consequently the gender gap with respect to economic activity is not so pronounced. The institutional role is not to be ignored either, as the gender gap is higher for the 15–64 population than for the 25–49 population, indicating weaker labour market participation of younger (due to education) and older women (due to the possibility of early retirement). In addition, men seem to benefit more during a period of economic growth, while women are more sheltered during a crisis. Unsurprisingly, the dominant women’s role in care work continued. The parental leave participation slightly increased, in line with the expansion of provisions in the early 2000s, but only among mothers. However, the employment rate gap for mothers of pre-school age children declined in recent years, possibly due to an increase in early childhood education and care coverage, and anti-discrimination provisions. However, the employment gap is still substantial compared with school-age mothers and childless women. Regarding occupational segmentation, considerable changes have unravelled over the past 15 years. On the one hand, the gender segmentation between the public and private sector has intensified, while the share of women among employers or in supervisory positions has not increased. On the other hand, the share of women has steadily increased in professional and managerial occupations (including several of the most prestigious occupations), in line with substantial changes in the educational structure. Political power is an exceptionally inter-

Figure 8

Gender participation at the executive level



Source: CBS 2012.

esting story. While women's share in Parliament increased in the second decade of the transition period, it is just slightly higher than during the socialist period and is reaching parity level very slowly.

Therefore, the analysis suggests very slow change and the crucial impact of structural (in first line education) and institutional (e.g. early childhood education and care facilities) developments, as well as of economic performance. Hence, we do not expect much change in the (near) future in gender practices. There are many indications that an economic crisis affects the gender equality agenda negatively (Walby 2012), and the depth of the Croatian economic crisis does not leave much space for optimism in this respect. Moreover, despite structural changes and increasing women's independence that should generate pressures 'from below', the issues related to labour market participation of women, particularly care arrangements and the gender pay gap, are almost non-existent in public discourse. Also, currently there are no influential actors that can make a difference in public discourse in that respect.

There are two implications of our analysis that should be further elaborated. First, briefly presented 'post-communist' gender equality literature emphasizes a failure of implementing the EU agenda (so-called compliance gap) and domestic resistance to implementing and discussing gender equality. Although recent literature put more weight on domestic factors, it still seems that the EU agenda is pictured in an unambiguous way. We do not question the fact that on an ideological level equality is the EU's fundamental value

promoted by a range of measures, but the EU's equality agenda manifests itself both at the normative and the practical level, and there is substantive variation among EU countries. Hence, (non-) transformation in gender regimes is not only a question of transition complexity, but also of the EU complexity itself, which is faced with very contradictory tendencies. As underlined by Radaelli (2004: 6), Europeanization is 'an explanandum, not an explanans', and if that is so, then at least a partial shift in studying gender is needed.

Second, all that has implications for other South East Europe (SEE) countries. There was an argument that the study of Croatian social policy development could serve as a 'bridge' to SEE countries in terms of theory and research (Stubbs and Zrinščak 2009a: 131–2). A deep complexity of transition, state and nation building, and very late Europeanization are factors that are very relevant to SEE countries (Deacon and Stubbs 2007; Stubbs and Zrinščak 2009b). The region is still characterized by high political instability, also meaning a high uncertainty about future political developments. This includes uncertainties about EU membership prospects, and thus the role of the EU in social development. Social policy-making is highly complex and influenced by state fragmentations and state-building, as well as the fact that welfare is conditioned by a constant re-definition of citizenship. Despite the crucial role of political/state, the states' capacities are very weak. Besides, the region could be pictured as a 'crowded playground' (Arandarenko and Golicin 2007: 182) in terms of a wide range of (primarily international) actors, each of them following their own agenda and being engaged in short-term projects without making any sustainable impact. Regarding the economy and the labour market, SEE countries vary, but are affected by low economic performance, a widespread grey economy, a very low activity and employment level, high unemployment, and above all a very low female employment rate. That will all contribute to an even more complex and uncertain transposition of the gender equality agenda and its implementation in these countries. The question is whether the EU could be seen as a 'window of opportunity' as in the case of Croatia and other post-communist countries that joined the EU. Presently, there are no positive signs, bearing in mind particularly slow and uncertain Europeanization and a weak civil society in these countries.

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Notes

1. A gender regime refers to the key policy logics of a welfare state related to gender, as Pascall and Kwak (2010: 118–19) argue, 'as systems of gender equality or inequality through which paid work is connected to unpaid, state services and benefits are delivered to individuals or households, costs are allocated, and time is shared between men and women in households as well as between households and employment'.

2. It must be noted that all the processes, which are very briefly summarized in this section, have been of different intensity and significance in a particular country although some similarities can be restated, as Pascall and Manning (2000: 262) point out, 'summarizing these does some violence to the project of acknowledging the diversity of the new regimes and of women's experience in them'.
3. The dominant argument was that equality is guaranteed by the constitution and there is no need for additional legislation (Dobrotić 2012).
4. Although compliance with EU legislation in the field of gender equality and antidiscrimination was one of the preconditions to enter the EU, it was not insisted upon. For example the Czech Republic entered the EU without harmonizing all directives in that field (Havelková 2010). Chiva (2009) also stressed that the final monitoring report in 2003 identified gaps (e.g. equality bodies were not established, the *acquis* was incompletely transposed).
5. Existing literature points to a lack of EU mandate when it comes to changing beliefs. For example Gerber (2010: 36) states, 'As the case of gender equality implementation in Poland demonstrates, it is possible to build institutions at the national level to satisfy the letter of the law without fully committing to either the full implementation necessary to effect change or to the normative mission that motivates the formation of such institutions in the first place'.
6. Gerber (2011: 493) stressed that the EU's gender equality agenda has faced resistance in Poland as several of the central norms underlying it are identical to the socialist gender policy and hence it got labelled by policy-makers as similar or identical to the 'social engineering of the previous regime'.
7. It is important to note that due to war circumstances, these discourses were closely connected to ethnicized nationalism where women were seen as a 'symbol of the nation' who should contribute to the nation's survival through their reproductive behaviour (see Topić 2009).
8. First a ceiling was introduced and afterwards an earnings-related allowance was replaced by a low flat rate during the second six months of leave.
9. It started with the signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement between Croatia and the EU in 2001 and will symbolically end only in July 2013 with full Croatian membership of the EU.
10. The marked decline in employed women on care-related leave stems from two compositional effects. First, a declining share of employed women of child-bearing age, as the demographic bulge of baby boomers aged and older workers remained in employment as retirement age increased by five years between 1999 and 2008. Second, there were substantially more children born annually in the post-war mini-boom 1995–99 (45,000–49,000), than in the 2001–07 period (40,000–42,000).

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