

# How Belgium is defeating the gender pay gap

Britain's neighbour has made substantial progress on its gender pay gap in recent years. But how?

**Jon Stone** Brussels | @joncstone | Thursday 5 April 2018 16:02 |



INDEPENDENT

The work isn't over in Belgium either, where women are still under-represented in management and tend strongly towards part-time work. But the lesson from Brussels is probably that if you want to close the gender pay gap, join a trade union.

# Evolution of gender pay gap based on gross hourly wages of full time and part time workers in industry (1960-2014) - Belgium

**Grafiek 13: Loonkloof op basis van de bruto-uurlonen van voltijdse en deeltijdse werknemers in de industrie (1960-2014)**



Bronnen: ADS, Enquête naar de Structuur en de Verdeling van de Lonen (vanaf 1999)  
en de Zesmaandelijksse enquête naar de lonen en de wedden

# Gender equality bargaining under European economic integration:

How European macro-economic policy shapes  
Belgian social partners' (in)action for gender equality

Veronika Lemeire

[veronika.lemeire@uhasselt.be](mailto:veronika.lemeire@uhasselt.be)

Patrizia Zanoni

[patrizia.zanoni@uhasselt.be](mailto:patrizia.zanoni@uhasselt.be)

**SEIN**

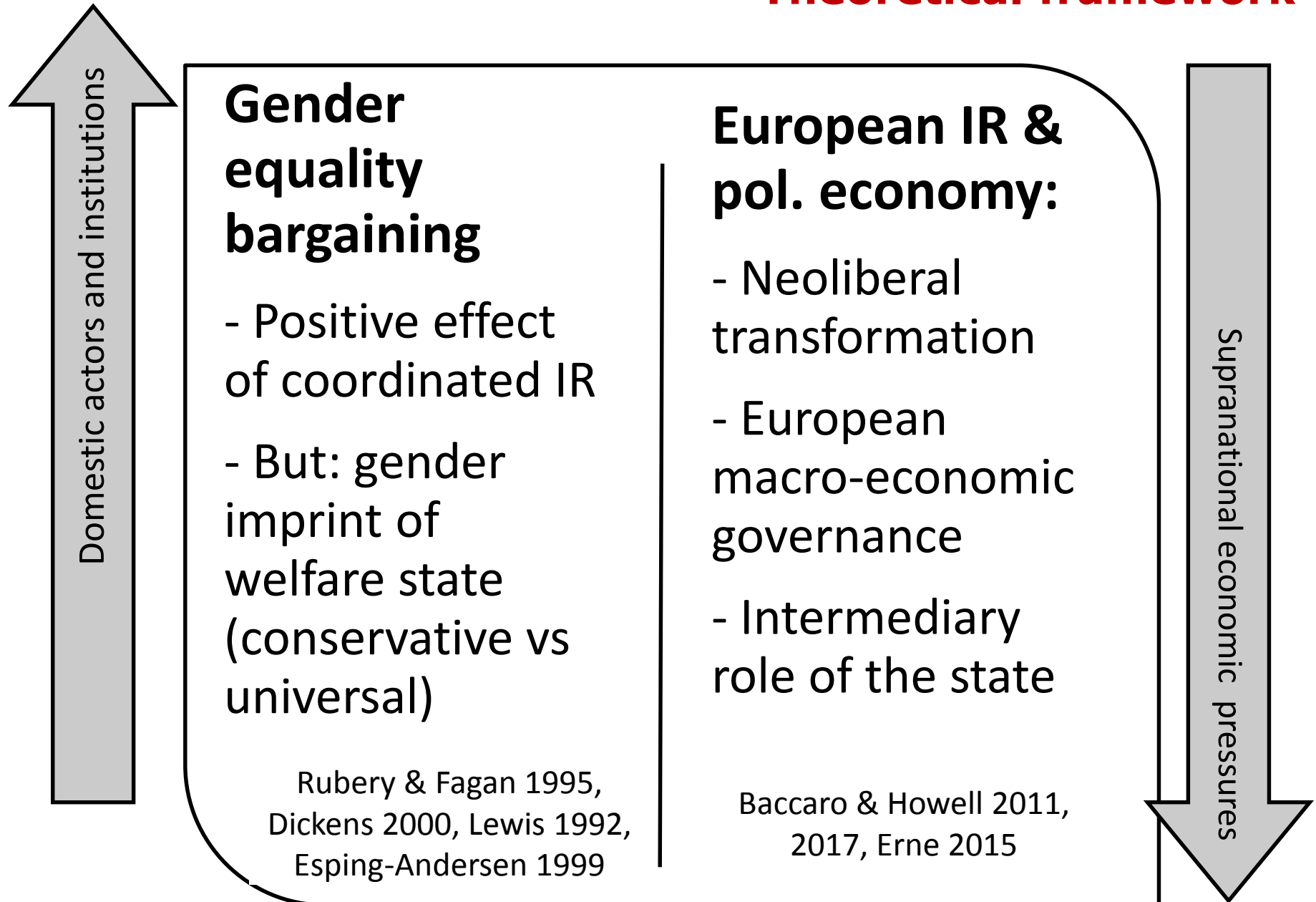
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Track 1: Social Europe: Equality and Poverty  
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# Theoretical framework



## Case study: National intersectoral collective agreements (1960-2019)

Economic level	Stakeholders	Institutions, bodies	Results	Women
The economy as a whole (synonyms: national or intersectoral or multi-industry)	Employer confederations (FEB, UCM, UNIZO, BF), trade union confederations (FGTB, CSC, CGSLB) and government	Group of ten	Multi-industry agreements (since 1961)	27%
		National Labour Council	Collective labour agreements (since 1968)	33%
		Central Economic Council	Opinions	27%
Sector (synonyms: industry or industrial sector)	Groups of affiliated trade unions and employer organisations	Joint Committees	Sectoral collective labour agreements	
		Special Consultative Committees	Opinions	
Company	Trade union delegates and officials	Works Councils	Company level collective labour agreements	
		Committees for Safety, Health and Well-Being in the Workplace	Opinions	

**Source:** Cassiers & Denayer (2010)

Analysis of national agreements

+ negotiation process and context

Gender outcomes of national IR

European gender & macro-economic  
policy

Interaction of state and social  
partners

Impact of European integration on  
gender outcomes of IR

### **1957-1979: Equalising women workers' rights**

- Equal pay & treatment, maternity regulation, childcare infrastructure, minimum wage
- Prevent unfair intra-EU competition
- Period of labour shortage (&labour migration “stop”)
- Result: partial equalization, indirect discrimination

## **1980-1992: Non-standard work and dualisation**

- Flexibilisation, part-time regulation, positive actions
- Economic recession, European monetary integration
- State interference in IR
- Dualisation of women workers



## 1993-2009: Gender equality during competitive corporatism

- WLB and gender-neutral pay classifications
- European macro-economic convergence criteria
- State imposed wage moderation (wage norm), budget and tax reforms
- Revision of pay classifications restricted by (indicative) wage norm, minimum wage

### **2010–2019: Austerity and gender window-dressing**

- Reform of WLB under austerity
- Law to combat gender pay gap (2012): revision of sectoral classifications
- EC's CSR to Belgian govt: reform wage setting and indexation system
- Wage freeze (2013-2014), strict maximum wage increase (2015-2020)
- Pay equality subordinate to wage competitiveness

06.03.2013

## ***Loongelijkheid M/V en loonbevriezing gaan niet samen***

Met een ludieke actie hebben we de ministers erop gewezen dat ze beloofden de loonkloof M/V te dichten, maar nu wel de lonen hebben bevroren



La FGTB se demande comment le Gouvernement peut respecter ses engagements en matière de réduction de l'écart salarial femmes-hommes tout en décrétant un gel des salaires !?

La décision de geler les salaires est, en plus, inconciliable avec la nouvelle loi du 22 avril 2012 sur la suppression de l'écart salarial (elle implique la révision des classifications de fonctions et donc des discriminations dont sont victimes les femmes).

## Discussion

1. Positive impact of European gender equality policy
2. Process of national intersectoral agreements crucial
3. Macro-economic policy interferes with gender policy
4. Role of the state
5. European macro-economic policy pushes towards neoliberalisation of national IR and welfare institutions

**Suggestions?**

**... Thank you for listening**

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# Sources

- <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/gender-pay-gap-belgium-how-fight-business-work-women-income-men-a8290321.html>