

TOWARDS A CARE-LED RECOVERY FOR THE EU?

A Feminist Care Analysis of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans

Laetitia Thissen

FEPS Policy Analyst for Gender Equality

Research question

To what extent have the negative socio-economic impacts of Covid-19 disproportionately incurred by women and underprivileged groups translated into a care-led approach in the NRRPs?

Country case studies:
Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Finland,
Germany, Italy, Latvia and Spain

Outline

Introduction

I. Feminist Care: revisiting the politics of the invisible

II. Care crisis in the EU: contextualising policy responses
(hypotheses, methodology, research material)

III. The EU Recovery Plan: context and development

IV. Analysing care in Europe's recovery: from NextGenEU to the NRRPs

V. Conclusions

Introduction

- largest fiscal stimulus package: NextGenerationEU fund

“help repair the immediate economic and social damage brought about by the coronavirus pandemic”

(European Commission, 2020c)

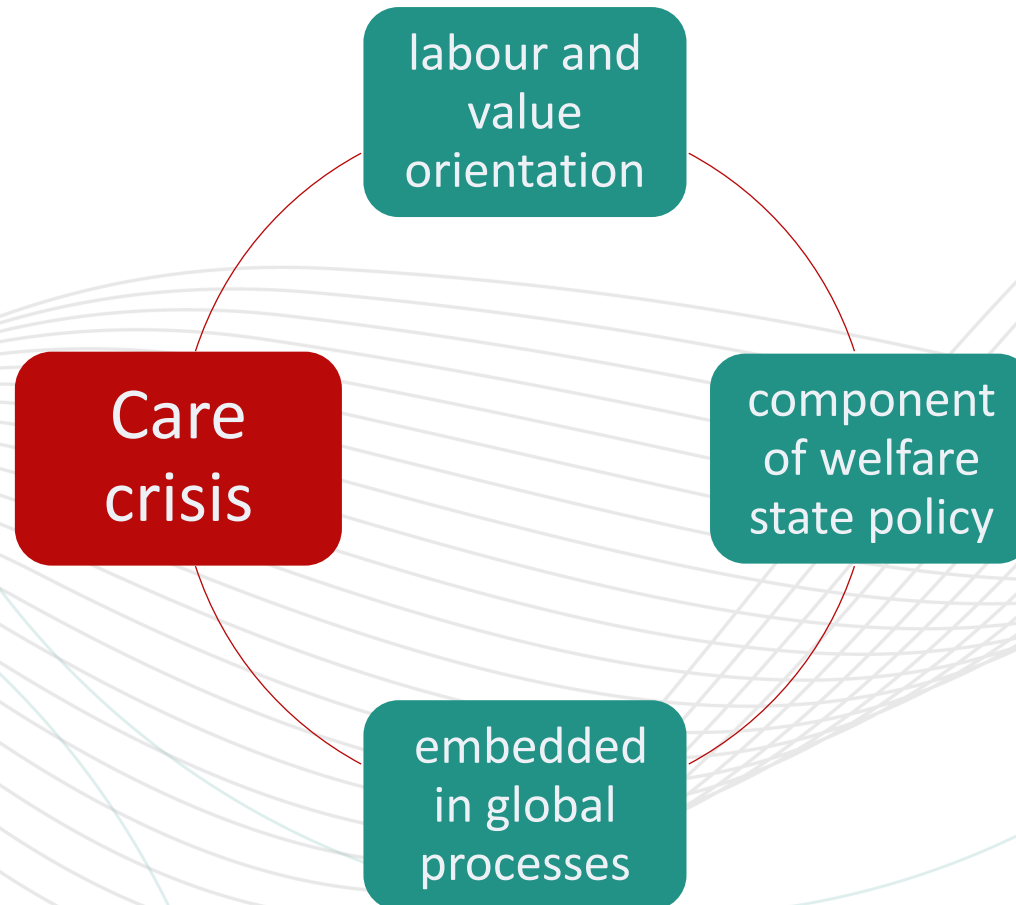
- Covid-19 laid bare importance of **sound care systems & social welfare**
- *“[if] not addressed properly, current deficits in care work and its quality will create a severe and **unsustainable global care crisis** and further increase gender inequalities in the world of work”* (ILO, 2018)

Introduction

- idea of care *rediscovered* in policy making
- nascent rhetoric for a “**caring society**” in politics: from clapping to action?
- care inequalities a major impediment to gender inequality (Folbre, 2008)



I. Feminist Understanding of Care?



I. Feminist Care: revisiting the politics of the invisible

Covid-19 and care: new crisis, same symptoms

- 2008 financial crisis vs. C-19 crisis
- gendered nature of EU response
(O'Dwyer, 2022)
- **gender-blindness of the NGEU fund**
(Klatzer & Rinaldi, 2020; Barry & Jennings, 2021)
- proactive role of **feminist stakeholders & EP** (Elomäki & Kantola, 2022).



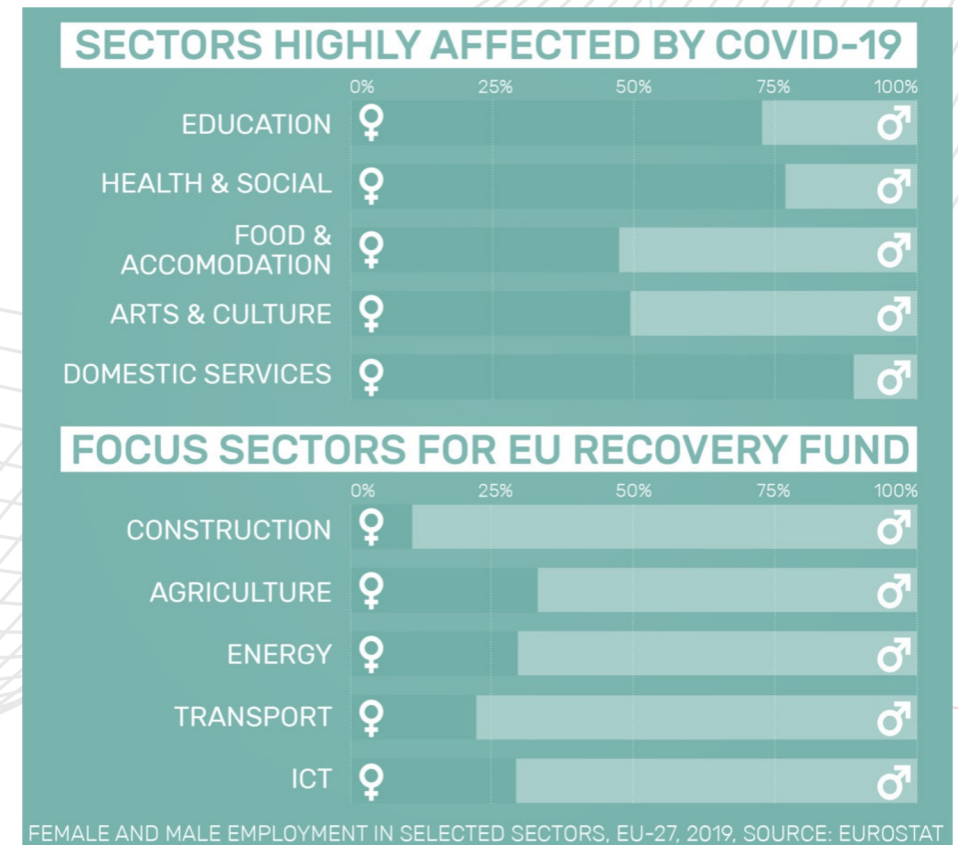
I. Feminist Care: revisiting the politics of the invisible

- a **care-led recovery** (De Henau & Himmelweit, 2021) :
social transformation (> return to “normal”) (Branicki, 2020)
- investments in high-quality public services :
 - recovery must build on **social** (not just physical) **infrastructures**
 - a care-led (construction-led) recovery has much more to offer (**job creation / gender inequality reduction**)
 - sectors in urgent need of reform: LTC = low priority



III. The EU Recovery Plan: context and development

- 27 May 2020: **NextGenerationEU**
“should be a dedicated instrument designed to tackle the adverse effects and consequences of the COVID-19 crisis in the Union.”
- Yet, initial version of proposal for RRF regulation was **equality blind**
- 21 July 2021: **horizontal objective** in final RRF regulation [article 18(4)(o)]
 → **missed opportunity**

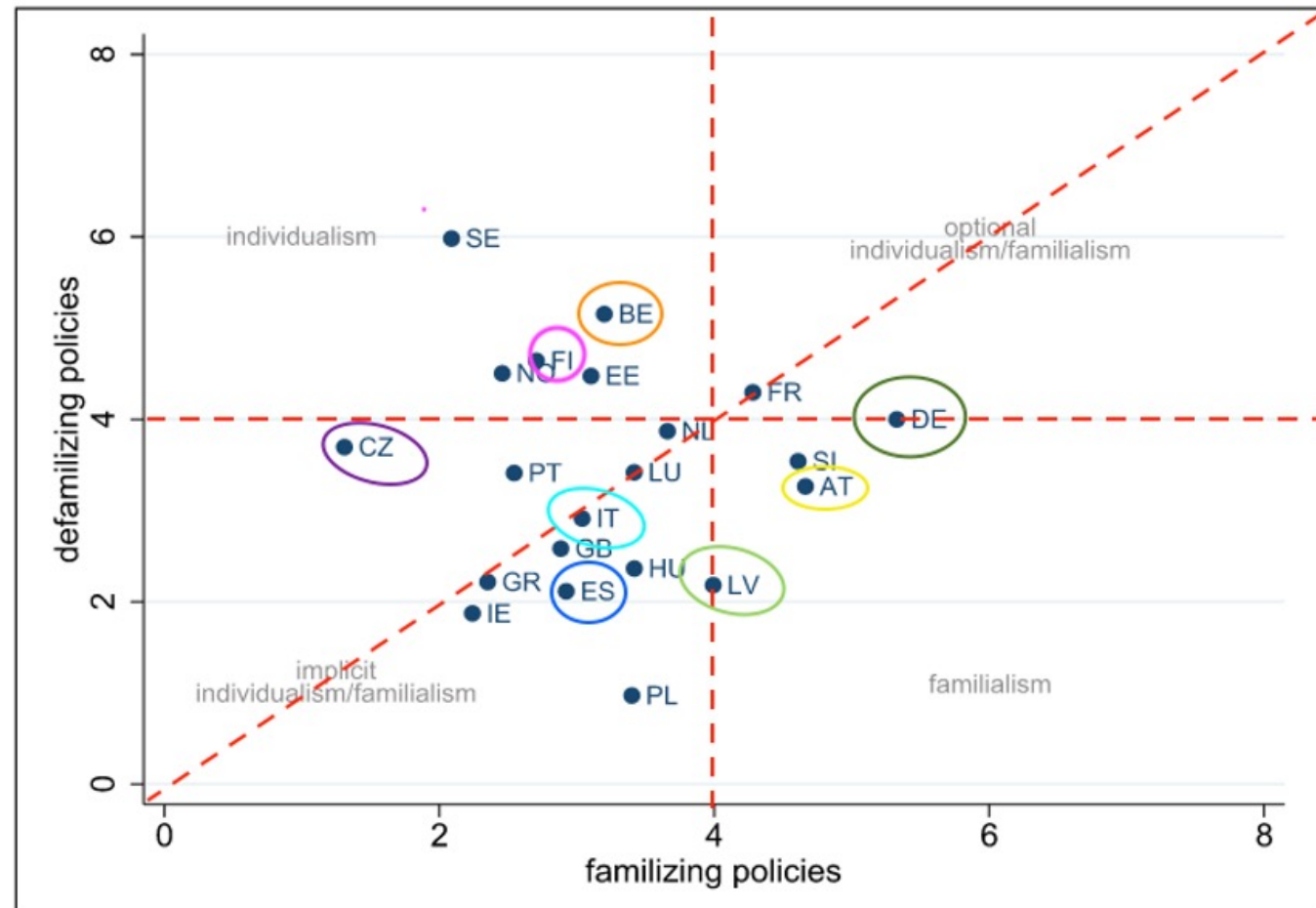


IV. Analysing care in Europe's recovery: from NextGenEU to the NRRPs

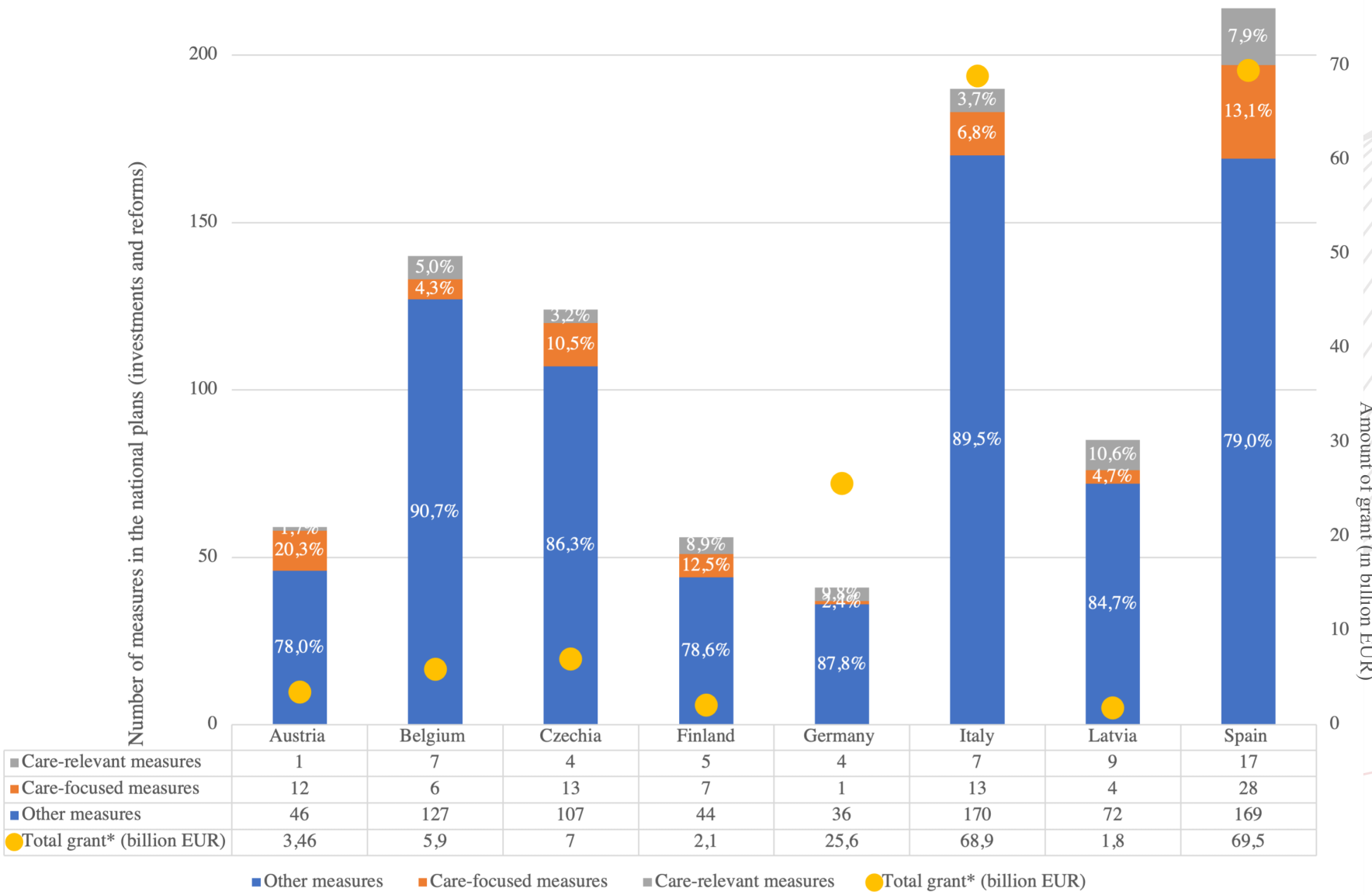


Care crisis in the EU: contextualising policy responses

*Familisation and defamilisation across countries.
(Lohman & Zagel, 2016,
own annotations in colours)*

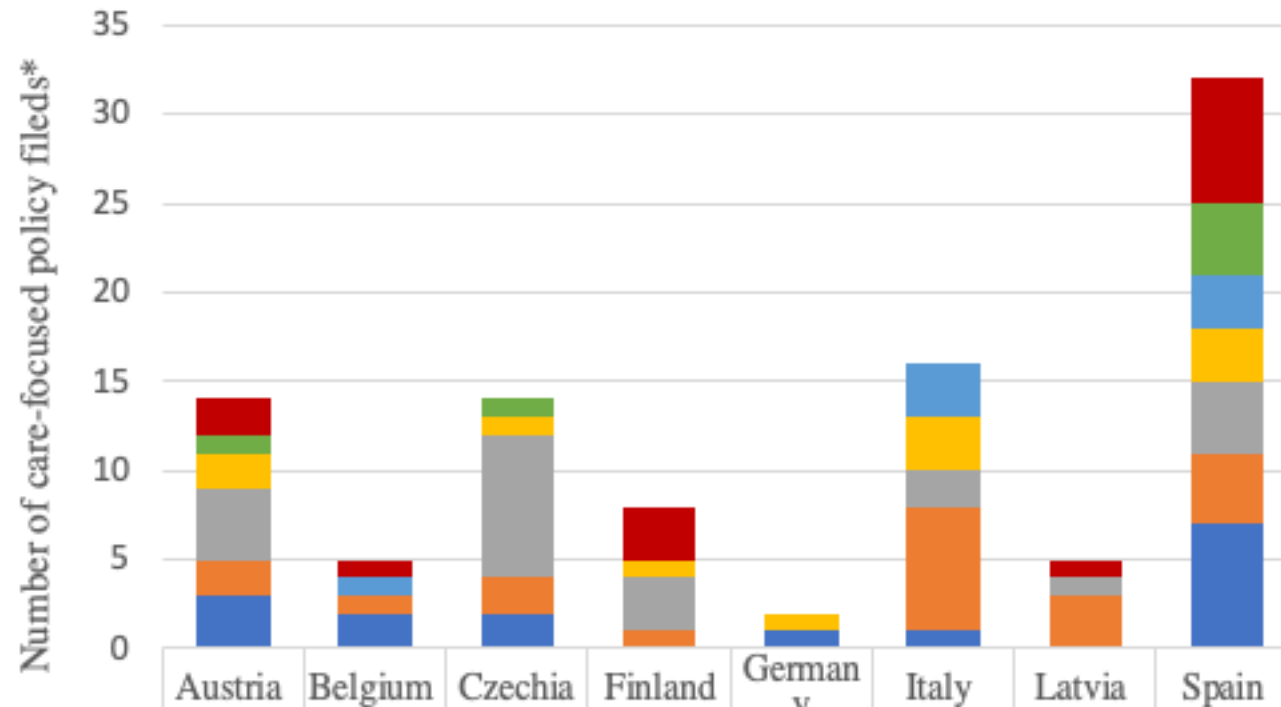


The place of care in the NRRPs in relation to the overall share of planned measures and to the total grant per country



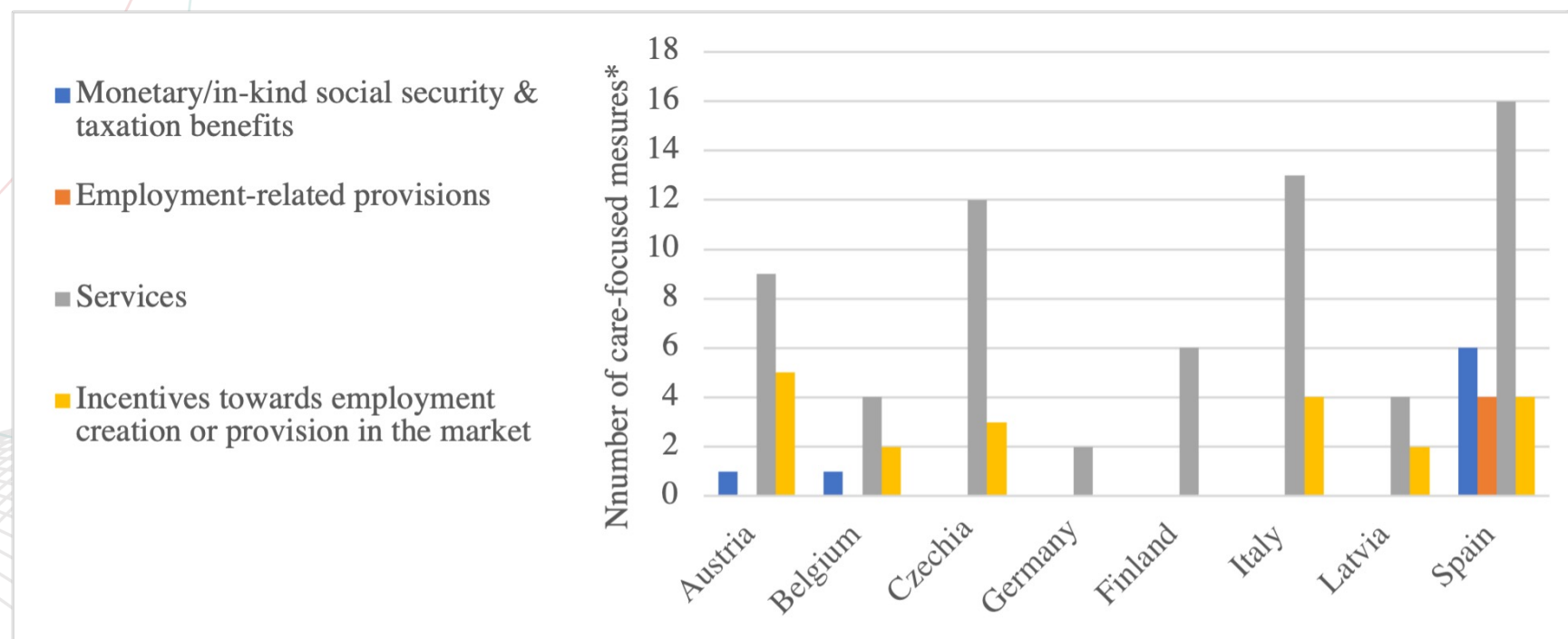
	2019/2020 CSRs RELATED TO CARE	ADDRESSED IN THE NRRPs	Additional measures
AT	sustainability of pension systems	YES, with a gender-sensitive dimension	YES
	sustainability of health systems	YES, with a gender-sensitive dimension	
	long-term care (fiscal sustainability)	YES	
	support full-time employment among women	YES	
	inclusiveness: education including "people with a migrant background"	YES	
BE	sustainability of pension systems	YES, with a gender-sensitive dimension	YES
	sustainability of health systems	YES	
	long-term care (fiscal sustainability)	YES, with a gender dimension (for Walloon region)	
CZ	(health)care workers and the integration of care	YES	YES
	sustainability of their health systems	YES	
FI	shortages of health workers to strengthen the resilience of the health system and improve access to social and health services	YES	No
	support employment and bolster active labour market policies	YES	
	equal access to social and healthcare services.	YES	
	incentives to accept work and enhance skills and active inclusion	YES	
DE	sustainability of their pension systems	NO	YES
	sustainability of their health systems	YES	
	inclusiveness: education, vulnerable groups	YES	
IT	female labour market participation, stressing the need to access both quality childcare and long-term care	YES	YES
	sustainability of their health systems	YES	
	Ensure that active labour market and social policies are effectively integrated and reach out notably to young people and vulnerable groups	YES	
	Step up efforts to tackle undeclared work	YES	
	Improve educational outcomes, also through adequate and targeted investment, and foster upskilling, including by strengthening digital skills. / School dropout	YES	
	Address social exclusion notably by improving the adequacy of minimum income benefits, minimum old-age pensions.	NO (pension) but YES minimum income	
LV	sustainability of health systems	YES	YES
	support for people with disabilities	YES	
	sustainability of pension systems	YES, with a gender-sensitive dimension	
ES	sustainability of their health systems	YES, with a gender-sensitive dimension	YES
	improvement of support for families	YES, with a gender-sensitive dimension	
	Reduce early school leaving and improve educational outcomes, taking into account regional disparities	YES	
	Ensure that employment and social services have the capacity to provide effective support.	YES	
	Foster transitions towards open-ended contracts, including by simplifying the system of hiring incentives.	YES	

Construction of care across policy fields in the NRRPs



	Austria	Belgium	Czechia	Finland	Germany	Italy	Latvia	Spain
■ Social policy and welfare	2	1	0	3	0	0	1	7
■ Working conditions and training	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	4
■ Employment	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	3
■ Education (school 6 to 18y)	2	0	1	1	1	3	0	3
■ Healthcare	4	0	8	3	0	2	1	4
■ LTC, desinstitutionalisation, adult care	2	1	2	1	0	7	3	4
■ Childcare (0 to 6y)	3	2	2	0	1	1	0	7

Distribution of care-focused policy tools in the NNRPs



V. Conclusions

- recovery presented a unique momentum to **ignite a transition towards a fairer, more socially sustainable and caring Europe**
- more than a return to normal but asks for transformative answers rooted in a **care-led recovery**
- care as a key component for a genuinely more resilient Europe
- **care regimes constitute an important variable in understanding the different paths for care policy development as part of the post crisis reconstruction**



@banksy/Instagram/PA

V. Conclusions

1. All NRRPs address care, although with substantial variations and to a significantly lower extent overall compared to other, unrelated measures

2. The scope of care measures in the NRRPs mirrors pre-existing care regimes

3. Similar prognosis (*what is the solution?*) but different diagnosis (*what is the problem?*)

4. Efforts moving towards a more comprehensive understanding of care but not all aspects treated equally

Limited incentives for MS to foster a care transition

Extent to which NRRPs tackle care inequalities laid largely in MS' hands.

Defamilising policy model → **moderate incidence of care measures** (FI, BE).

Implicit individualism/familialism models → **highest level of occurrence** (ES, IT, CZ).

Familising policy models → incidence of care-focused measures **either much lower** (DE, LV) or **much higher** (AT).

Prognosis: general convergence towards similar solutions (institutionalisation of childcare & deinstitutionalisation of LTC).

Diagnosis:
care = **cost/burden** (BE, CZ, IT, LV)
Care = **valuable for itself** (ES, FI)
Care = **both** (AT)
Care = **marginal issue** (DE)

Broadly shared tendency to adopt a **life-cycle perspective**.

Most NRRPs fail to acknowledge the **inherently intersectional and cross-border dimension** of care, although with some notable exceptions (ES, FI).

Ways forward...

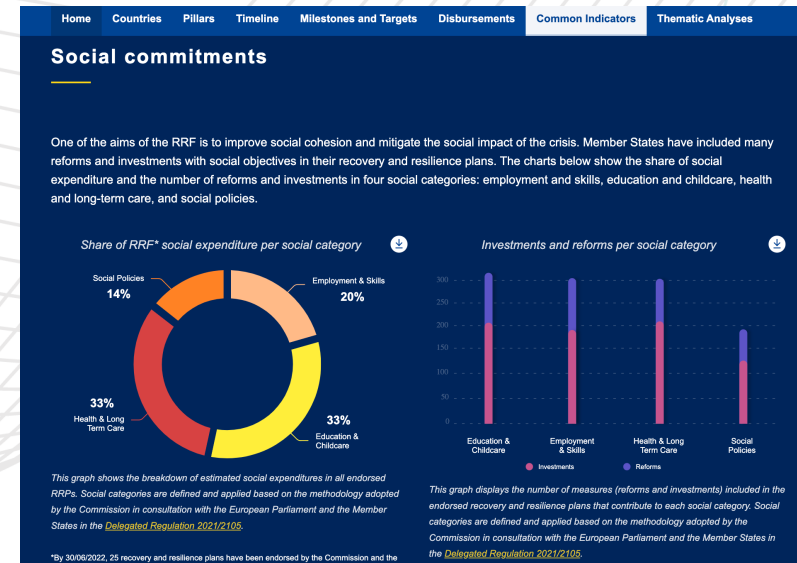
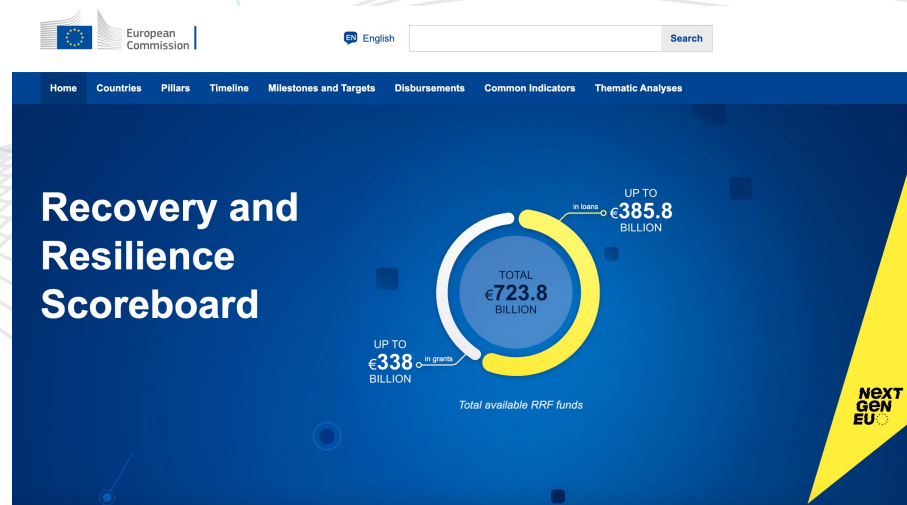
1. The EU needs to take **bold leadership** in the realm of care policy
 - centrality of care
 - inherently cross-border nature



Ways forward...

2. Recovery monitoring : implementation of care measures

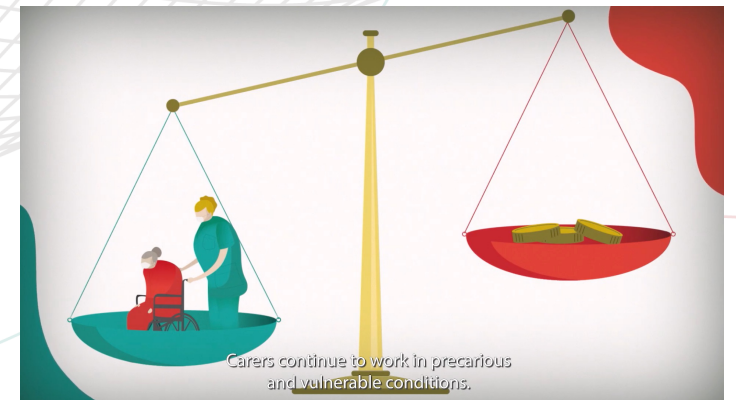
- RRF scoreboard / common indicators
- review report to EP/Council



Ways forward...

3. Upscaling care in the framework of the mid-term revision of the MFF

...a socially sustainable recovery will remain incomplete without a transformative care transition putting into action the idea of a “caring society as a blueprint for ensuring our Union emerges from the current crisis stronger, more united and with greater solidarity” (European Council, 2020).



Thank you

Laeticia Thissen

FEPS Policy Analyst for Gender Equality