

1 .Introduction

The European debate on poverty at the end of the twentieth century was characterized by two main tendencies. On the one hand, it was marked by a shift in focus in analysis from "traditional poverty", which was passed on from one generation to another and was linked to economic factors, to "the new urban forms of poverty consisting of a concatenation of negative events (loss of job, income, housing, family breakdown, separations and divorce) which led to an incapacity to run one's own life and be "good consumers"; on the other hand, it was marked by the difficulty, in terms of measurement, of repeating the success recorded in the political and academic debate by categories of analysis such as social exclusion and multidimensional poverty.

We can begin by examining the first aspect. Economic inequality is increasing throughout Europe. As Peter Townsend and David Gordon have recently observed, "the speed of social polarization seems to have been faster in the last two decades of the 20th century than at any other time in recorded history, because wages and the labour market were deregulated, progressive taxation reduced, means testing of benefits extended, social insurance weakened, and publicly owned industries and services substantially privatized" (2000, 9). Indeed according to the latest available data (2001) the top income quintile (the 20 % of the population with the highest income) in the "old" 15 EU Member States has an overall discretionary income 4.4 times less that of the lowest income quintile (the 20% with the lowest income) (Eurostat 2004b). The first five places of the list of countries are occupied by Portugal (6.5), Greece (5.7), Spain (5.5) and Italy (4.8), countries which are traditionally included within the Southern European or Mediterranean area. Italy is immediately preceded by the United Kingdom (4.9) where, from the end of the seventies to the mid nineties, growth in real income was more than 60%, for the richest tenth while it was only 10% for the poorest tenth (before housing costs) (Townsend and Gordon 2000, 4). In the rest of Europe, the 20% of the wealthiest inhabitants had discretionary incomes that ranged from three (Denmark) to four (France) times higher than the 20% of the poorest.

It is interesting to observe that, compared to two decades ago, inequalities and social polarization are nowadays rarely the focus of social policy or the sociological literature. It is paradoxical that, precisely at a time when inequality and social polarization are growing, there has been a tendency to shift attention away from distributive dimensions, towards relational dimensions, there is no longer such concern with collective dimensions related to the break-up of the community and, instead, the emphasis is on individual or family dimensions. The literature on new urban poverty usually refers to people who enter the poverty bracket due to misfortune. Their social background may be highly differentiated and the fact that they belong to a lower class or to a disadvantaged sub-population may not even be considered a relevant factor. For example, an alcoholic college graduate with no fixed abode is seen as typical of the "new poor", opposed to an unemployed young person with a poor educational background. This does not mean that the

majority of scholars who study poverty share this view¹, but it does reflect the prevailing intellectual climate².

Obviously, forms of poverty in Europe that centered on processes of individual distress or institutional discrimination are deemed to have no sociological relevance. On the contrary, there have always been cases where individuals, due to various life events, have encountered greater difficulties in providing for themselves (lone mothers, for example, have traditionally been regarded as a separate category in studies on poverty). But when it comes to the basic issue – i.e. who are the poor, why are they in this condition and where do they live? – simply resorting to individual trajectories does not carry a sufficient explanatory weight to displace structural forms of determination, and certainly cannot provide an accurate identification of typologies and processes. This is especially the case when the focus is on a certain stage in a given demographic process, i.e. at the stage where a significant life event has already occurred, and actually conceals significant parts of the overall story.

It is not so much the focus on individualization *per se* which gives rise to theoretical problems, but rather the exclusive focus on individualized explanation. Indeed, the capability approach – which has a wide following in Europe – does take into consideration individual differences, both by translating income into an effective capacity of “being and doing” and by establishing the type of lifestyle that people would like to have; however, it attributes central importance to the capacity of welfare systems, and more generally the social context, to compensate for individual deficits in the conversion of resources into “functioning” (Sen 1985; 1999). Even Robert Castel (1995, 2000), in his analysis of “*disaffiliation*” (i.e. the rupture of the bond with society) makes a distinction between poverty as a residue, (i.e. those eternally excluded from any social formation), and those who suffer from destitution and social isolation due to destabilization of both work and social supports and subsequently as an outcome of structural processes. Both authors, although from very different perspectives, have focused attention on the erosion of the material conditions of existence among significant sectors of the population and their collocation within the structure of inequality: in other words, they examine the mass nature of the sense of precariousness and social insecurity and its connection with “the structure of the wage society, its crisis or its disintegration since the mid-1970s” (Castel 2000: 533). The shift has proved less successful at a practical level, although there have been interesting developments.

This brings us to the second of the trend mentioned at the beginning of this paper, namely the “poverty” of the system of measurement of “incapability” or “disaffiliation” but also of social exclusion – a term introduced in France in the mid-seventies and today widely used, though often inappropriately, as synonym of extreme poverty³. The available data sets are still insufficient. The European Council held in Laeken in December 2001 adopted an initial set of 18 statistical indicators to cover the important elements which were identified as factors leading to social exclusion. Ten of them relate to monetary poverty and inequality while eight concern other aspects

¹ For example, two Italian scholars, Nicola Negri and Chiara Saraceno perceive in all this “a re-definition of the main emphasis of political concern, from the lack of resources to the risk of social disintegration, from the need to provide resources to the need to contain conflicts and deviant forms of behavior, from the investigation into the causes underlying the persistence of poverty in affluent societies to the investigation into the risks of welfare and the misdoings of welfare beneficiaries, from attention focused on the causes of unemployment to the reasons why the unemployed and welfare beneficiaries remain as such” (2000: 185-186).

² The role of the concept of “new urban poverty” in Europe could be compared to that of the concept of the “underclass” in the USA. Few academics use the term in the same way as mainstream observers or journalists. Nevertheless the “blame the victims” view, which related the phenomenon of poverty to deviance instead of labor market dynamics or cranky social security rights, is prevailing.

³ The concept was coined to explain the problems which arose due to the inadequate coverage of social insurance and at the time included mainly single mothers, and young unemployed people. It was extended in the 1980s to reflect the increasing concern with long-term adult unemployment, precariousness and lack of skills, and the problems of integrating immigrants

of social exclusion, such as health and education⁴. Ongoing efforts are being made to refine and extend this list of indicators (for example to cover non-monetary poverty, poverty at work, the situation of children, regional breakdown, homelessness and other issues). However, for the time being, the following comment by David Gordon seems an accurate reflection of the current situation. “Although poverty has been clearly defined in Europe as an unacceptably low standard of living caused by low income, the measurement of poverty within Europe has almost exclusively concentrated on measuring only low income” (2002, 64).

2. The risk and persistence of poverty in the 15 EU countries

The data available for poverty in Europe comes mainly from the European Community Statistical Office (Eurostat) studies which are based either on the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) survey⁵ or harmonized national household budget surveys. The low income thresholds, used as proxies for poverty, do differ, but most commonly 50 % or 60 % of the national median income is used for European comparison. The focus is therefore on the relative rather than absolute poverty. Thresholds are expressed in terms of equivalent income, taking into account household size and composition.

In some cases the estimate produced by Eurostat – which are the result of an attempt to harmonize the various sources – differ significantly from those provided by individual official statistics or national governments and are frequently contested. This discrepancy is actually due to the criteria utilized, which can result in considerable modifications in the estimate of poverty⁶. For example, in the Italian case, the Italian statistical institute Istat uses expenditure rather than income levels, the mean rather than the median value and a different scale of equivalence.

Table 1 shows a recent comparative analysis by Eurostat (2004b). The data show that in 2001 - in the 15 EU states taken as a whole, an average of 15% of people were living in households at risk of poverty (i.e. with an equivalent disposable income below 60% of the national median of the country in which they live). This figure masks considerable variation between Member States – with the share of population at risk ranging from 9% in Sweden to 21% in Ireland and 20% in Greece and Portugal. The share of the population living on a low income at a certain point gives us only limited information about the experience of poverty.

⁴ The indicators are intended to help monitor progress towards the common objectives of social inclusion which were agreed at the Nice European Council in December 2000 where Member States reconfirmed and implemented their March 2000 decision in Lisbon that the fight against poverty and social exclusion (target: the eradication of poverty by 2010) would be best achieved by an open method of coordination. Key elements of this approach include the definition of commonly-agreed objectives, the development of national action plans to meet these objectives and the periodic reporting and monitoring of progress actually made (European Commission 2003, 65). The report on indicators for social inclusion prepared by the Social Protection Committee and endorsed in Laeken can be found on the web-site of the Directorate General *Employment and Social Affairs* of the European Commission (www.europa.eu.int)

⁵ The research has been carried out annually since 1994 in Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Holland, Portugal, the United Kingdom and Spain. Austria joined the project in 1995, Finland in 1996 and Sweden in 1997.

⁶ Atkinson, for example, has estimate that by varying the unit of analysis (individuals or families), the position index (mean or median), the scale of equivalence and considering or not the cost of housing, the extent of poverty in the United Kingdom in 1985 oscillated between 4.1% and 13.6%. By also taking into account the threshold value (40, 50 and 60%) poverty varied between 1.7 and 25% (1998:25)

Table 1 – At risk-of-poverty rate by age in the EU 15 Member States (% - 2001)

	eu15s	be	dk	de	gr	es	fr	ie	it	lu	nl	at	pt	fi	Se	uk
Total	15	13	10	11	20	19	15	21	19	12	11	12	20	11	9	17
0-15	19	12	7	14	18	26	18	26	25	18	16	13	27	6	7	24
16-24	19	12	21	16	19	20	21	12	25	20	22	11	18	23	18	20
25-49	12	10	7	9	14	15	12	17	18	11	10	8	15	7	7	12
50-64	12	12	5	10	21	17	13	16	16	9	7	9	16	9	5	11
65+	19	26	24	12	33	22	19	44	17	7	4	24	30	23	16	24

Source: Eurostat, *Poverty and Social Exclusion in the EU*, Statistics in Focus - Population and Social Conditions, n.16, 2004, p.9

s: European population weighted average

Abbreviations:

eu15s: European Union of Fifteen; be: Belgium; dk: Denmark; de: Germany; gr: Greece; es: Spain; fr: France; ie: Ireland; it: Italy; lu: Luxembourg; nl: Netherlands; at: Austria; pt: Portugal; fi: Finland; se: Sweden; uk: United Kingdom.

Drawing once again on published Eurostat data, table 2 examines those who fell below the poverty line in the current year and in at least two of the preceding three years. In 2001, 9% of the European population risk experiencing persistent poverty. The rate of the persistent risk of poverty varies from 5% in the Netherlands to 15% in Portugal. Italy, Greece and Spain also have high rates (more than 10%).

A more explicit measure of how far the income of people at risk of poverty lies below the threshold consists of the “at-risk poverty gap”. Expressed as a percentage of the threshold, at an EU level, the gap in 2001 was 22% (in other words, half of those at risk of poverty had an income below 78% of the threshold, which means less than 47% of the median income). The gap was largest in Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal (as well as in Ireland) and smallest in Denmark and Belgium (see table 2).

Table 2 – Persistent at risk-of-poverty rate (60% threshold) and relative risk-of-poverty gap by gender (% - 2001)

		eu15s	be	dk	de	gr	es	fr	ie	it	lu	nl	at	pt	fi	se	uk
Persistent at risk-of-poverty by gender	Total	9	7	6	6	14	10	9	13	13	9	5	7	15	6	:	10
	M	9	6	:	6	13	10	8	12	12	9	6	5	14	4	:	9
	F	10	8	:	7	15	11	9	15	13	8	5	9	15	8	:	11
Relative risk-of-poverty gap by gender	Total	22	15	13	19	28	24	19	24	28	17	20	19	22	17	17	23
	M	22	15	:	21	27	24	18	27	28	18	21	20	22	18	:	22
	F	22	15	:	18	29	24	19	23	28	17	19	18	24	17	:	23

Source: Eurostat, *Poverty and Social Exclusion in the EU*, Statistics in Focus - Population and Social Conditions, n.16, 2004, p.10

s: european population weighted average

: data not available

Table 3 – At risk-of-poverty rate before and after social transfers by gender in the EU 15 Member States (% - 2001)

		eu15															
		s	be	dk	de	gr	es	fr	ie	it	lu	nl	at	pt	fi	se	uk
Before all transfers	Total	39	38	36	39	39	37	40	36	42	40	36	38	37	30	34	40
	M	36	34	:	34	36	34	38	35	39	38	33	34	36	27	:	37
	F	42	42	:	43	41	39	42	37	44	42	39	42	37	34	:	44
After pensions	Total	24	23	29	21	23	23	24	30	22	23	21	22	24	19	17	29
	M	22	21	:	20	21	22	23	29	21	24	21	19	25	17	:	26
	F	25	25	:	23	24	25	24	32	23	23	21	25	24	20	:	32
After all transfers	Total	15	13	10	11	20	19	15	21	19	12	11	12	20	11	9	17
	M	14	12	:	10	19	17	15	20	19	12	12	9	20	9	:	15
	F	17	15	:	12	22	20	16	23	20	13	11	14	20	14	:	19

Source: Eurostat, *Poverty and Social Exclusion in the EU*, Statistics in Focus - Population and Social Conditions, n.16, 2004, p.10

s: european population weighted average

: data not available

Table 3 compares rates for all women and men as they would fare if families only received income from the market, with poverty rates after the state has paid cash transfers (i.e. old-age pensions and pensions for surviving dependents, unemployment benefits, invalidity payments, family allowances)⁷. There is little cross-national variation if we look at the poverty rates that would prevail if only market income were available. The country ranking that emerges from these measures of poverty is quite distinct; if families received only market income, Italy and the UK would have the highest poverty rates of all countries. Once state transfers have been taken into account, the poverty rates vary from a low of 9 % in Sweden to a high of 21 % in Ireland. European countries differ in terms of the diffusion and intensity of poverty, but also in terms of the capacity of social transfers to reduce the risk of poverty. The level of protection provided by the welfare system is very different in Northern and Southern Europe. The literature makes frequent reference to a “Latin rim” (Leibfried 1993) or to a “rudimentary assistance regime” (Gough 1997). Indeed, the Southern European welfare state has privileged the redistribution of income over goods and services. Moreover, most benefits are not only fragmented and categorized, but are also meager and do not enable individuals and families to escape poverty completely (Saraceno 2002)⁸. Many families consider welfare payments less as an entitlement than as a sort of “windfall”, to be added to the ‘regular’ income obtained from petty jobs in the informal economy, transfers from kin or other benefits. However, more recent studies criticize the view that the welfare state in Southern Europe has been rudimentary or underdeveloped and, instead, argue for the existence of a specifically Mediterranean model of social protection, with a particular mix of strong family support, a low level of state transfers (but not of pensions) and market dependency. This model worked fairly well in the post-war period in ensuring social cohesion (Mingione 2001, Morlicchio, Pugliese and Spinelli 2002, Kazepov ed. 2002) even though it has not been able to reduce the level of poverty to the same extent as in the social-democratic Northern European welfare states.

⁷ The indicator of “poverty risk before social transfer” does not enable us to look at the redistributive effects of tax credits and tax allowances or social transfer in kind

⁸ In many Southern European countries, in the wake of Northern European countries, which have had such a protection system since the 1970s or early 1980s, systems of minimum income provision for the poor have been introduced. However, these rights vary considerably between various countries (they still do not exist in Italy and Greece) and regions (as in Spain where the system is still regulated at a regional level) (see Saraceno 2002)

Indeed, as table 5 shows, the drop in the at-risk-of poverty rate calculated before and after social transfers is lowest in Ireland (from 36% to 21%), Portugal (from 37% to 20%), Spain (from 37% to 19%), Greece (from 39% to 20%) and Italy (from 42% to 19%). It is highest in Luxembourg and Germany and to a lesser extent in Denmark and Austria, suggesting a high redistributive impact of social transfers or a high level of social expenditure in these countries.

The way in which poverty is being reduced is also important and the second column of the table shows the percentage of reduction in poverty caused by state pensions. In Spain, 87% of the reduction in poverty is a result of pension provision, in Greece 84%, in Italy 80%, in Portugal 76%. In the remaining countries, there is evidence of a much greater mix, with around half of the reduction in poverty resulting from pensions (the mean for the 15 EU states is 62%), while in Ireland about two-thirds of poverty reduction is brought about by state transfers other than pensions. Nevertheless, as far as the Italian case is concerned, it should be observed that “the fraction of individuals on low incomes who receive a pension (both directly and in the context of the nuclear family unit) is lower in Italy even than in other countries of southern Europe (Spain, Portugal and Greece)” (Boeri and Perotti 2002, 17). Moreover, the same authors show how pensions has the biggest redistributive effect on wealthier families, who are in the highest quintile of the distribution of income, but affects poorer families to a lesser extent.

3. The overburdening of the Mediterranean family

Although Italy is an extreme case, the redistributive role of the family has been particularly important in all Mediterranean countries⁹. Redistribution within the family was made possible by the concentration of unemployment among young people and by the fact that they remain in the family of origin for longer periods. As Gallie (1999) has shown, in 1996, while more than half of the unemployed in Denmark and the Netherlands and about a third of the unemployed in Western Germany, Finland, Sweden and Belgium lived alone, the figure for Spain, Greece, Portugal and Italy was less than 10%. Denmark and Italy represent the two ends of the spectrum in this respect. In Denmark, 52% of the unemployed live independently and only 2% live at home whereas in Italy the situation is the exact opposite, with 2% living alone and 56% living in the family home (40% of the Danish unemployed live with a partner and 6% with other adults, while in Italy these percentages are 28% and 14%).

This family model gives adult women a central role in the family. The lack of social services for children and the elderly, the protracted permanence of young people in the family, the persistence of traditional models underpinning the division of domestic tasks, and the high standards of care displayed in looking after the home, affects the time women have to spend on running the family, thus making domestic work time-consuming. This makes the work harder than is necessary and is a burden that women tend to shoulder alone.

The burden of domestic work seems to have had a strong effect on participation in the labor market, especially for those with low levels of education. A comparative study shows that, in all European countries, education encourages participation in the labor market, taking into account motherhood and age. However, in Italy and Greece, the impact is significantly higher (Bettio and Villa 1999: 161-2). It should also be noted, that the lower activity levels of poorly educated women is not attributable, in this case, to the effects of the so-called “poverty trap”. Indeed following Esping-Andersen (1990), we could argue that the tax system of Southern European countries does not penalize the employment of housewives. In these countries, given the limited rights to, and low

⁹ The literature on the distinctive characteristics of the Southern European family is extensive (see Mingione 1991; Saraceno 1998; Naldini 2002). Factors with a specific bearing on the poverty of such families include the network of relationships, the strength of solidarity among the members of the networks and between generations, and the higher institutionalization of lifestyles as illustrated by low divorce rates, low levels of cohabitation and the low number of children born outside marriage.

replacement rates of, child benefits or unemployment subsidies, the loss of income due to the spouse workings is quite insignificant (while it is very high, for example, in the UK, Finland and Belgium). The low level of participation in the labor force is related more to the burden of childcare and caring for elderly relatives which, in Southern Europe, continue to be borne mainly by women, as well as the scarcity of occupational opportunities in economies with structurally high levels of unemployment, which deprives such families of much needed extra income.

For all these reasons, the overburdening of southern families has nothing to do with the so-called “familism” the family ethos, which according to Banfield (1958) consists in the incapacity of the family to go beyond its own immediate interests for the benefits of the development of the local community. It is also different from the productive role that the family plays in the so-called “Third Italy” (the central zone of North-East Italy where a consistent development is based on the micro business) which is the result of particular historical, political and local dynamics that have not been reproduced elsewhere, even in other regions of Italy (see Hadjimichalis and Papamichos 1991). Other factors, such as the importance of the agricultural sector, are more helpful in explaining the persisting central role of the family. In a country like Italy, for example, which even in the 1950s still had a much larger agricultural than industrial workforce (nine million in agriculture compared to three million in industry), it would not be surprising to find a persistent central role for the family, a factor which applies even more strongly to other Southern European countries. Until just a few decades ago, poverty in all of these countries mainly equated to rural misery. The late shift towards an industrial economy entailed an intense process of de-ruralization, urbanization and modernization, this caused a sharp decline in rural employment, while simultaneously it led to urban unemployment and gave rise to urban occupational sectors characterized by low salaries and high levels of insecurity. As Pugliese argued with regard to Italy, ‘while the rural class of self-employed workers and their dependents might have benefited in the last decade from a flow of social security income that kept them substantially sheltered from poverty and misery [...] we can not say the same for the urban population. It is here that we record the main conditions of distress that are not compensated, unless exceptionally acute, by welfare provisions’ (Pugliese 2002: 144-5). The capacity of Mediterranean families and the poorly educated housewife to cope with the daily struggle for survival with limited resources has been severely tested in the last decade. Indeed, the generally smaller average size of families combined with the increase in the adult male population¹⁰, have led to a greater number of families with unemployed members and no member receiving a pension. Eurostat data do not always make it possible to compare the socio-demographic characteristics of poverty in individual countries since the sub-samples of poor families in national samples are too restricted. Nevertheless, on the basis of this source and various national surveys, significant differences emerge between the profiles of poverty in Southern and Northern Europe. In the first case, poverty principally affects families with dependent children where both parents are present who lack either the demographic or personal characteristics that would lead to them being included in the trajectory of social exclusion. This seems to be most likely in northern European countries where, in a richer and more favorable context with regard to the labor market, the more subjective and individual variables have a greater importance. Indeed, poverty mainly affects single parents (generally women) whose presence in the poor population is more than three times that of the population as a whole, and people who live alone (mainly young people and the elderly). This difference in roles clearly emerges in table 6: in Portugal, one large family in two is poor (in Spain and Italy, the figure is one in three) while in Holland and Finland, one young person in two is poor (in other words, with an individual income below the average standard in the country).

¹⁰ In Italy, one unemployed person in three is currently over 35 years old while the figure at the beginning of the nineties was one in five.

Table 4 – At risk-of-poverty rate by household type in the EU 15 Member States (% - 2001)

	eu															
	15s	be	dk	de	gr	es	fr	ie	it	lu	nl	at	pt	fi	se	uk
Total	15	13	10	11	20	19	15	21	19	12	11	12	20	11	9	17
		21			37			21	19							
1 person hh <30yrs	32	u	:	42	u	27	31	u	u	11	49	17	1u	52	:	37
1 person hh 30-64	15	13	:	13	15	18	11	37	16	10	6	12	28	20	:	18
1 person hh 65+	29	27	28	19	38	43	27	79	29	7	3	35	46	45	27	35
2 adults no children (at least one 65+)	16	26	20	7	36	24	16	37	14	8	5	18	32	8	6	17
2 adults no children (both < 65)	10	8	4	8	17	14	11	14	12	6	4	10	13	5	4	9
Other hh no children	9	8	:	5	18	8	12	8	15	5	9	7	10	10	:	5
								42		35						
Single parent (at least 1 child)	35	25	12	36	37	42	35	u	23	u	45	23	39	11	13	50
2 adults 1 dep. Child	10	7	3	9	8	18	10	17	13	13	10	7	9	5	5	8
2 adults 2 dep. children	13	11	3	7	14	23	12	17	21	15	9	7	15	5	4	12
2 adults 3+ dep. children	27	7	13	21	26	34	24	37	37	23	17	23	49	5	8	30
Other hh with dep. children	16	15	3	11	23	18	14	10	24	26	18	9	23	7	6	13

Source: Eurostat, *Poverty and Social Exclusion in the EU*, Statistics in Focus - Population and Social Conditions, n.16, 2004, p.10

s: european population weighted average

u: small sample size or many missing information

: data not available

The process of “*familisation*” of poverty (Mingione et al. 2002: 52) does not mean that the small or one-parent family is absent in Southern Europe. Although statistically different from this ‘typically Northern’ phenomenon, the number of single mothers and youngsters at risk of poverty is increasing (Spanò 2002, Bimbi 2000) and, given the limited rights to even a low substitution income, the threat to survival is for them probably more serious in Southern than in Northern European countries. (Saraceno ed. 2002a).

4 .The links between poverty and unemployment

A theme that still needs further examination concerns the links between poverty and the labor market and between poverty and unemployment. Indeed, there is no doubt about the existence of such links, although their exact nature is less clear. In this regard, an example from Italy may prove instructive. At the beginning of the nineteen fifties, half the population of the Mezzogiorno lived in poverty (defined by consumption indicators as the lack of shoes, food and inadequate housing), although in Lucania, one of the poorest regions, it emerged that the unemployed numbered only a few hundred; this apparent anomaly was due to the fact that the criteria employed in the definition and measurement of unemployment did not take into account the case of sub-employment and the hardship experienced by agricultural laborers and peasants (Pugliese 2002). This implies that the characteristics of unemployment in various contexts and different historical epochs can obscure the links between unemployment and poverty. The lesson that we can draw from this episode of social history is that the characteristics of unemployment or precarious employment can obscure the links with poverty which cannot always be clearly distinguished. Table 5 enables us to examine the role played by the variables of the labor market in different countries in more detail. The rate of those at risk of poverty among the unemployed is especially high: 38% at the EU level in 2001. This percentage masks considerable variations between member states, varying from 19% in Sweden to 54% and 51% in Ireland and Italy respectively where one unemployed person out of two is poor. Italy also has the highest long-term unemployment rate (over 24 months) in 2001 (the rate varying from 0,6% in Luxembourg and in the Netherlands to 5,8% in Italy) and the highest long-term

unemployment share (of total unemployment) which ranges from 20% in Denmark to 62% in Italy. (European Commission 2003: 73)

The high rate of poverty among the unemployed in Southern European countries is particularly interesting, since a large proportion of them are young people who live with their families and not heads of families. However, living with one's parents does not necessarily imply receiving much support from them, particularly if one's has to deal with unemployment for long periods. A study by Bison and Esping-Andersen (2000) shows that in the Southern European countries, families with young, long-term unemployed members manage to compensate for the "welfare gap", by coping with the overload of domestic work and the scarcity of welfare services, but are not able to compensate for the "income gap". In other words, families are not in a position to provide effective support in terms of income because of the scarcity of component wages and the often precarious employment situation of the head of the family.

Table 5 – At risk-of-poverty rate by most frequent activity in the EU 15 Member States (% - 2001)

	eu15s	be	dk	de	gr	es	fr	ie	it	lu	nl	at	pt	Fi	se	uk	
Employed	6	3	1	4	5	7	6	6	7	8	:	3	7	4	4	5	
Self-employed	16	10	15	5	25	20	25	16	18	2	:	24	28	17	24	14	
Unemployed	38	32	23	34	39	37	30	54	51	48	u	23	23	38	21	19	49
Retired	17	21	23	13	32	18	17	39	13	8	3	16	25	20	16	24	
Inactive/other	25	21	22	18	23	24	26	33	28	16	12	22	28	22	22	30	

Source: Eurostat, *Poverty and Social Exclusion in the EU*, Statistics in Focus - Population and Social Conditions, n.16, 2004, p.9

s: european population weighted average

u: small sample size or many missing information

: data not available

At this point, there is another significant aspect which requires highlighting, linking the issue of poverty to the quality of employment, represented by the data concerning employed persons. Table 5 shows that, at a European level, poverty among the employed is 6% while this value rises to 7% in Italy and Spain. This is an extremely important statistic since it indicates the existence of a percentage of working poor that cannot be ignored. Moreover, as Chiara Saraceno has observed, "the growing number of non-standard labor contracts which, particularly in Southern Europe, are mainly concentrated among adult women and the young of both genders, is creating a subgroup of workers who, by definition, are less protected by social security measures. This is a particular risk in those countries in Continental and Southern Europe where social security is highly categorical and linked to the worker's status and seniority" (2003, 236).

However, it should be noted that in Southern Europe few workers found employment in the traditional Fordist sectors, which offered a high protection for insiders i.e. the 'internal labor market workers', usually adult males. Moreover, the fordist branch plant economy, which created a degree of manufacturing employment in the *Mezzogiorno* of Italy, has suffered badly from global restructuring which has led to the closure of many local manufacturers.

Furthermore, it should also be emphasized that in Southern European countries, the main problem is not represented by low salaries or unemployed heads of family but rather by the high number of working poor who belong to families in which there is at least one person employed, even on a full-time basis. Indeed, the model of solidarity involving relatives and family members which, as we have seen characterizes Southern European countries and assigns the well-being of children and elderly parents to the care of mothers/daughters, implies "on average a number of adults per family superior to the European average, but a number of employed people per family which is inferior" (Negri and Saraceno 2002, 182).

This causes an imbalance between the number of those receiving an income and the number of family consumers which, as we have already seen, is only partly compensated for by an increasingly restricted and overburdened network of relatives and irregular work. The involvement of a high number of adults in precarious occupations, rather than representing a resource that can stem the risks of survival, reflects the great effort required by these families to produce an effectively low income and maintain some kind of equilibrium despite the precariousness of their economic situation. This sub-equilibrium, though it may enable families to survive, is clearly inadequate to enable them to escape from the poverty trap.

5 .The educational disadvantages

As we have seen, the social and material difficulties of poor people differ for each country, depending on the nature and evolution of the labor market, and on the system of social protection that exists in relation to that market. However, there are also key differences in relation to other aspects of the social structure that have an impact on poor people, such as the practice of social reproduction, its prevailing gender relations, the role of the family and, perhaps most importantly, the educational system.

The schooling and employment problems of youngsters in Southern Europe have become increasingly acute. School drop-outs, low educational levels, etc, should not necessarily be attributed to the dysfunction of the educational system, but to a spiral of declining motivation fed by decreasing job opportunities, increasing educational failure, peer behavior among drop-outs etc. Within a climate of continuing brain drain of skilled persons to the North of Europe, and a poor work experience caused by the lack of employment opportunities, these developments cause the average skill level of the Southern labor-force to be dragged further downwards. Of course, this phenomenon is comparable to the qualification and employment problems experienced by migrant youngsters in Northern European cities. Nevertheless, the phenomenon is typically southern in that it affects large sectors of the working population, irrespective of race.

Another important factor concerns the relationship between the educational system and the family. The negative attitudes of pupils and parents caused by peer behavior among young school drop-outs and the lack of interest in attending secondary school are reinforced by the lack of work experience and the demoralization of school teachers. Moreover, there is a scarcity of additional resources and services (such as full time school-wide or personal tutoring) that could overcome initial social disadvantages and stimulate social integration. As a consequence, children are more likely to fail and abandon school to gain work experience. Consequently, Southern Europe countries have particularly high levels of young drop-outs, most of whom leave school several years before reaching the legal minimum age. As Klasen (2001) shows, more than 10% of the Southern European population (11% in Greece and in Portugal and 17% in Spain) find themselves in these conditions as opposed to just 3% in Sweden. Moreover, the proportion of the Southern European population who do not attend school at the age of 17 is very high: 44% in Greece, 27% in Portugal and 25% in Spain. Klasen explains that "...educational systems that fail a proportion of its students not only lead to social exclusion through denying them this basic right of citizenship in sufficient quality, but also through fostering social exclusion as adults" (2001: 435).

This socio-cultural reproduction of under-educated young people, exposed to the same life-style and consumption pressure as their peers in other industrialized countries, leads to severe tensions between means and aspirations (Spanò 2001). In some cases and contexts, young school drop-outs end up becoming involved in illegal activities., such as drug dealing and theft. If we consider some relevant data regarding Naples, the Italian Ministry of Justice reports that two thirds of young people condemned by the juvenile courts of Naples are of Italian nationality and come from families in which one or more family members (generally the father or the brother) already have a criminal record. Of these, 58% young offenders have not completed compulsory education and 66%

come from families with five or more members which, as we have seen in Europe, is a factor associated with the highest risk of poverty (Ministry of Justice 2001).

The nexus between poor educational achievement, exclusion from the labor market and poverty is particularly relevant to the situation of women in Southern Europe. Despite increasing female participation in the labor market, there is evidence of much greater polarization between those with high and those with low levels of education, compared to Northern Europe¹¹. This gap in participation rates is over 30% in Italy and in Spain, while the figure is much lower in Northern European countries. The gap in participation is even bigger (48% in Italy and 39% in Spain) if, in addition to the educational levels, we consider the presence of pre-school children (see Cantillon et al. 2001).

6 . Concluding remarks: are there two different models of poverty in Europe?

In this paper we have examined the diversity in national poverty patterns in Europe and the distinguishing features of the Mediterranean model of poverty. The data show that, in Southern Europe, poverty mainly affects “ordinary” families: it is the poverty of precarious and underpaid workers who have little or no protection from any system of welfare. The exclusion of young people from the labor market, which begins with their educational difficulties, their being part of underprivileged families and initial experiences of failure, are very similar in terms of consequences to those experienced by youngsters in Northern European (and American) cities. Nevertheless, they do not experience the same degree of social isolation, even though they may find themselves within segregated networks made up of other unemployed persons. The risk of abandonment and social isolation seems to be much higher in Northern European countries (this is also partly true of the North of Italy and certain regions of Spain) where, in a much more favorable economic context and in particular a more favorable labor market, subjective and individual variables have a much greater importance in explaining the level of poverty.

The difference between Southern European countries and the more economically successful countries of Northern and Central Europe is not so much due - as it was in the recent past - to the rural or urban character of the phenomenon, but more to the lesser degree of social isolation and stigma attached to being poor experienced by poor families in Southern Europe.

Our analysis suggests that the fact that Southern European countries have traditionally been affected by endemic and often acute material poverty, and by the precariousness of the labor market, may mean that it would be inopportune to refer exclusively to phenomena and processes that often underlie models developed by sociologists to study “new urban poverty” in other social contexts. Indeed, urban poverty is quite different within these countries, both in its causes and its consequences. Problems of development and economic growth continue to play a crucial and more fundamental role. This issue will become even more significant with the entry of the New member states (Eurostat 2004a).

At the same time, we need to be very cautious about considering poverty and precariousness in Southern Europe as an expression of a family-oriented or special “model of survival”, based on a combination of resources of a purely re-distributive nature, such as the recycling of second-hand or stolen goods, welfare transfers and the support guaranteed by kinship networks¹². Such a picture

¹¹ A question that cannot be addressed here is whether in the Southern European countries a proportion of the poorly educated women are employed in the informal economy.

¹² It is also important to remember that not only do networks of solidarity develop among and within poor families, but also competitive and even constrictive networks can develop. The problem lies in identifying and verifying which conditions favor the development of one type or the other.

often provides a misleading description of events – or, if preferred, of impoverishment trajectories – and contains many anachronistic aspects; these do not help us to understand how social exclusion develops, the extent to which it is an individual or area-based problem, or the importance of large-scale changes in the labor market and the economic and urban structure of the metropolitan areas. With regard to this last point, we may conclude by mentioning the fact that in Southern European countries, as opposed to those in the North, the absence of social isolation and the persistent central role of the families contributes to attenuating “concentration effects” (Wilson 1987, 1996) caused by living in areas of high unemployment and poverty which have been observed in other contexts. Another important factor in preventing the formation of “ghetto-like” concentrations in Southern Europe is the relatively recent character of immigration and its fragmented nature (involving a wide range of nationalities). However the relative absence of forms of spatial concentration of poverty at the city level does not imply the absence of forms of spatial concentration at a broader level. To cite the example of Italy, a third of Italian families live in regions of Southern Italy but there is a concentration of well over half of Italy’s poor families in these regions, constituting a structural polarization of the country. Not so marked, but just as significant, such differences exist between the regions of Spain (CES 2001: 13).

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