



# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



## WORKCARESYNERGIES

### Flexibility in work and care (WP3)

Political Implications of WORKCARESYNERGIES, an EU-funded support action to disseminate the research findings of previous EU Framework Programme projects in the field of work and care. The following seven EU countries are covered: Austria, UK, Denmark, Hungary, Poland, Italy and Portugal.

November 2011

## INTRODUCTION

### Creating local awareness of EU research findings on work-care tensions

The aim of our research is to support the current Danish policy debate concerning how to establish more gender equality related to participation in both paid work and caring activities. Through disseminating country comparisons and best practice examples we want to initiate a national discussion about how to promote diversity and flexibility in work-care relations, and by this discussion developing the current family and labour market policy

Based on selected findings from previous EU research projects, for example Household, Work and Flexibility (2000-2003), WorkCare (2006-2009) Cinefogo (2005-2009), as well as actual Danish and Nordic statistics we want to discuss how the Danish family policy model has been challenged by the financial crisis and how we can develop the conditions for greater gender equality related to participation in caring activities.

We have organised 8 national information and discussion events at which the need for flexibility and diversity in work and care relations have been debated.

At these meeting we presented the research findings from followed by a discussion on the present development in the Danish social and family policies. These meetings clearly documented that the local actors were worried about present developments in welfare policy measures and were interested in learning how the Danish model of work and care deviates from other European models. Both the

information provided about the different European models for social and family policy measure and the discussions helped the Danish local actors

- To learn about best practices in European countries concerning family policies and policies that promote flexibility,
- To create awareness of the strength and weakness of Danish national policies on work and care relations,
- To develop sustainable policies facilitating work and care relation in Danish families

### Discuss findings and local relevance with local actors

The overall strategy for the Danish Team is divided into three phases. During the first phase local dissemination events were organised involving practitioners, academia and students. Research findings were disseminated and discussed in relation to the ongoing debate on work-care relations. The second phase included contact to policy makers, politicians, NGOs and trade union representatives. The target audience were small groups of informed policy makers and the themes were more specific than in phase one. The policy briefings were not just one-way communication. Discussions and mutual exchange of knowledge were the core purpose of these events. During this phase, statistical documentation and oral presentations were created and tested. The research findings were transformed into materials posted on the project's homepage [www.workcaresynergies.eu](http://www.workcaresynergies.eu).

The third phase ran during most of 2011. During this period the focus was twofold. First to transform the research findings into materials and presentations aimed at practitioners and the public. Second to reach larger target audiences through debate meetings and media using the network created during steps one and two. We held a meeting in collaboration with an EU public educational organisation Democracy in Europe (DEO). At the meeting the audience was social workers, EU journalists, and NGO representatives. Furthermore, we organized an international conference on work-care relations together with representatives from both academic organisations and creative networks in the field. The conference was held at Roskilde University and it was divided into two parts. Part one was aimed at a broader audience and part two at a target group of academic researchers concerned with family and care issues.

## KEY OBSERVATIONS

### The Danish model of Family policy

European countries are facing a number of challenges including demographic changes due to an aging population and low birth rates. This has created a growing interest in developing policies to ensure both high employment rates for men and women and

simultaneously to encourage family formation and child-birth. The results from our research might offer some tentative answers to a number of the important questions on work-care relations, gender equality in the family, and the type of family policies to pursue concerning maternal employment.

The Danish model of family policy is in the European context characterized as an extensive family policy model combining comprehensive high quality childcare and well paid parental and maternity leave. This model is often considered as best practice example in Europe along with Sweden, France and Belgium.

### Characteristics of different European work-care regimes

Work-care Regime	Spending on Family Policy	Key Features <sup>2</sup>
<b>Extensive Family Policy</b>	Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, France	High level of childcare 0 -3 years, with generous payment of parental leave. High proportion women working part-time
<b>Short leave, Part –time</b>	UK , Netherlands	Short period of poorly paid parental leave, Medium provision of public childcare for 0 – 3 year and high proportion of mothers working part-time.
<b>Long Leave, Part-time</b>	Germany, Austria, Luxembourg	Long period of relatively well paid parental leave followed by mothers who do return to the labour market working part-time.
<b>Family Care</b>	Estonia, Slovenia, Spain, Latvia, Greece, Italy, Portugal	Period of parental leave varies but badly paid. Mothers generally withdraw from the labour market and do not return when their children are getting older.
<b>Extended Parental Leave<sup>1</sup></b>	Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Finland	Very long period of parental leave with women returning to full-time employment when they have exhausted their entitlement to leave.

### Advantages of the Danish model

The Danish model of family policy has some obvious advantages:

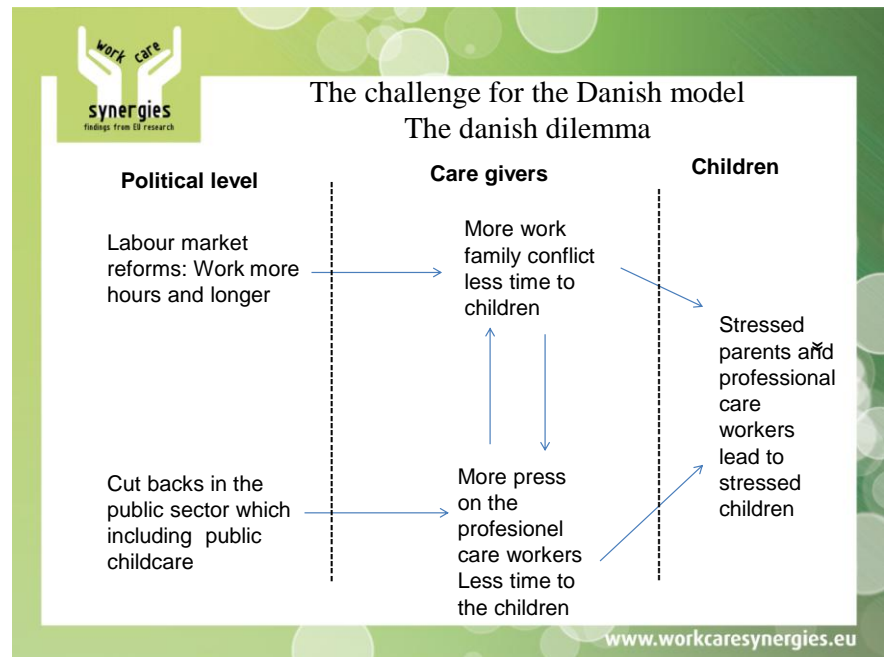
- It enables women to return to work after a one year's leave with few negative career consequences
- The comprehensive childcare service in Denmark prevents mothers from taking up involuntarily part-time work in order to reconcile work and family. Most part-time work among mothers in Denmark is voluntary and for shorter periods characterized by a heavy care-load
- It reduces the gender-gap in men's and women's income over the life course
- High quality of day-care facilities with highly educated and professional care workers seem to give children equal life

- chances and strengthen societal cohesion
  - It enables Danish women to be able to more easily combine motherhood and a continuous labour market career compared to most other European countries
  - It has positive effects on the fertility rate which in Denmark is higher than in most other European countries
  - It increases parents' options of combining work and care responsibilities and makes the work-family relations less constrained than we find in other European countries
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### Challenge for the Danish model

However, the sustainability of the Danish model is threatened. The flexibility and generosity in the Danish welfare model is declining due to lower income compensation in periods outside employment, longer working hours for both women and men, and cuts in educated personal in the public institutions providing care services for children. In our discussion with political parties, trade unions and researchers these concerns about the sustainability of the Danish model were often mentioned and much debated. In these discussions we have been able to register some important recent trends in Danish society

- There is a growing political demand for an increase in the labour supply either by an increase in the weekly working hours or by a prolongation of the time for retirement – both demands are raised due to the ageing societies and the risk of labour shortage in the future,
- The local authorities have been forced to make severe budget cuts on different types of services provided for children and other dependent citizens as a result of the financial crisis, and finally
- There has been registered a reduced flexibility in both work – care relations and generally in labour market relations due to the growing unemployment and as a consequence of reduced generosity in social benefits and social service provision.



The above-mentioned tendencies will challenge the welfare and family policy in several respects.

An increase in the weekly working time for employees or a postponement of the retirement age will put more pressure on working parents, especially the mothers' ability to manage work and family responsibilities and it will increase the demand for affordable childcare facilities.

The cuts on childcare service provision will reduce the quality of the services in terms of staff-child ratio and opening hours. This will again make it more difficult for the families to reconcile family and working life. The cutbacks on childcare service will also deteriorate the professional care workers' working conditions and reduce the time they can spend with the children.

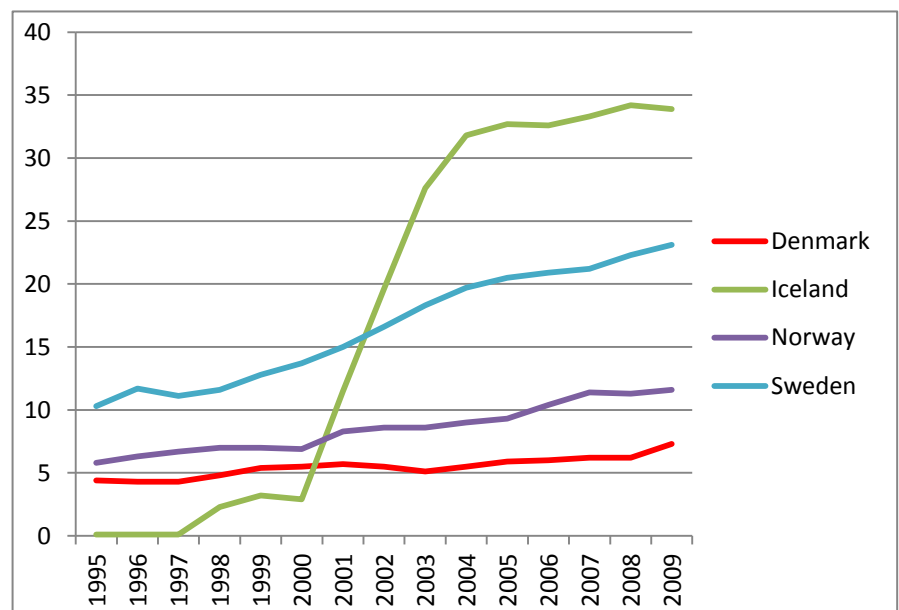
The budget cuts will have negative consequences for gender equality. They will increase the burden of care obligations placed on women in the family and reduce the status of professional care workers in the public sphere – which will also primarily concern women. In this respect women are hurt twice by the financial crisis – both in relation to the workload in the family and the working conditions in the labour market.

This development might in the end imply that children feel a twofold stress-strain. In the family the children will experience stressful parents who struggle with growing demands from the labour market while the children in the daycare situation will be confronted with stressful care workers due to deteriorated working conditions and less time for children. Especially for the most vulnerable children, a declining quality of childcare service will have severe negative impact on their future life possibilities.

### Leave reserved to the father

Another crucial discussion in the Danish debate concerns how to develop more equal conditions fathers' and mothers' participation in caring activities for their children. Despite the fact that Denmark has one of the highest rates of labour market participation among women, women are still the main providers of care work within the family. Numerous findings from European research show that in general family policy has a significant impact on women's involvement in paid work and caring activities but do not radically change fathers' involvement in paid work nor care, unless there is a specific legislation to support fathers' involvement. It is remarkable that Denmark is the only Nordic country that does not have a period of the total parental leave reserved for the father. This has clearly implications for fathers' take up of parental leave, which as shown in the figure. Among the Nordic countries the fathers' proportion of the total parental leave is lower in Denmark than in any of the other Scandinavian countries.

#### Percentage of the total period of parental leave taken by the father



Source: The Nordic council

If we compare the proportion of the total parental leave taken up by the fathers we find very different patterns in the Nordic countries. Danish men only take 7% of the whole leave and this proportion has been more or less stable over time during the last 15 years.

In 2001 a leave scheme was introduced in Iceland which reserved 3 months out of the total 9 months leave period to the father. This led to a dramatic increase in the leave take up among Icelandic fathers and today they take 33% of the total leave period. This indicates that a change in the leave legislation might create rapid change in fathers' care pattern. In Denmark the newly elected government is considering a proposal of reserving a 3 months period of the total parental leave for father which might significantly improve the fathers' involvement in caring obligations in most families with small children.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY-MAKERS

### European and national level

#### Labour market

- Better possibility regulating working hours over the life course – e.g. the possibility to shift between part-time work and full-time work in periods with heavy caring obligations
- Male dominated private companies must be encouraged by financial incentives to introduce family-friendly policies and men and women ought to be supported in sharing the entitlement for parental leave more equally

#### Leave policy

- More flexible parental leave, part-time leave, more options for postponing the take up of leave until children have reached the age of 8 (to take leave when the children change from crèche to pre-school, school etc)
- More days left for caring the children when they are sick
- A extended period of leave reserved specifically for the fathers

#### Childcare provision

- Extension of opening hours and elimination of closing days on normal weekdays - which again demand provision of more educated staff.
- Improved staff/child ratios in day care centers, especially when there are a high proportion of children from ethnic minorities.
- Closer cooperation between professional childcare workers, parents and other family members in providing the care service.

## PROJECT SETUP

### Project Objectives

**WORKCARESYNERGIES** was an EU-funded support action with the aim of disseminating research findings of previous EU Framework Programme projects in the field of work and care in the following seven EU countries: Austria, UK, Denmark, Hungary, Poland, Italy and Portugal.

It “translated” (i.e. collects, summarizes, makes understandable and accessible) findings relevant for the local policy debate and addressed local NGOs, policy makers, trade unions, labour representatives, regional organizations and services, companies as well as other local actors and interested parties.

In Denmark, we held a total of eight dissemination events in 2010 and 2011 where we presented selected research findings from EU Framework Programme projects related to Citizenship, flexibility and diversity in work-care relations and initiated discussion in a local context.

### Local Team Objectives

## Citizenship, flexibility and diversity in work-care relations, WP3

WP 3 “Flexibility in Work and Care”: The Danish team supports the national debate on the need of diversity and flexibility of work-care policies and gender equal conditions for participating in paid work, caring activities and unpaid work in politics and organizations. The discussion concerned primarily gendered citizenship and work-care relations and diversity and flexibility in family policy.

*Where?* The Danish team organised local dissemination activities in *Denmark*.

Location for Dissemination is Copenhagen and Roskilde.

*Main sub-themes:*

- (1) Gendered Citizenship and Work-Care relations;
- (2) Diversity and flexibility in family policy.

*Why?* The aim has been to support the current national policy debate on the need of diversity and flexibility of work-care policies and gender equal on the conditions for participating in both paid work in the labour market, caring activities in the household, and in different forms of unpaid work in politics and organisations. Denmark has been outspoken in the flexicurity debate and has a labour market characterised by decentralised decision making. The overall question for the dissemination can be summed as following: What implications do these characteristics of the Danish society have for gender equality in citizenship, diversity and social protection?

*Whom to reach?* Through local events in Copenhagen and Roskilde: NGOs, policy makers (middle/higher level), trade unions and think tanks. Through policy briefs: NGOs and policy makers in Denmark. Through the press: general public (e.g. newspapers, TV and radio).

*What.* We will disseminate research findings from the following projects:

- (1) WORKCARE (2006-2009), a project on the social quality and changing relationships between work, care and welfare in Europe.
- (2) HWF (2000-2003), a project on households, work and flexibility.
- (3) CINEFOGO (2005-2009), a project on civil society and new forms of Governance in Europe.
- (4) RECOWWE (2006-2011), a project on reconciling work and welfare in Europe.
- (5) BETWIXT (1998-2001), a project on integration and inclusion in the form of a comparative study in local dynamics of precarity and resistance to exclusion in urban contexts.

The Danish team will “translate” (i.e. collect, summarize, make understandable and accessible) findings from existing research projects within the EU Framework Programmes and initiate their discussion in a local context.

### **Purpose of Events**

To inform about and discuss findings with local community, with the aim of giving feedbacks on policy recommendations to the EC.

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## PROJECT IDENTITY

<b>Project</b>	<b>WORKCARESYNERGIES</b> – Dissemination of Synthesized Framework Programme Research Findings
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<b>Duration</b>	January 2010 – December 2011
<b>Funding Scheme</b>	Seventh Framework Programme Theme 8, Socio-economic sciences and humanities (SSH), 8.1 Measures to support dissemination of research results
<b>Budget</b>	EUR 600.000
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.workcaresynergies.eu">www.workcaresynergies.eu</a>
<b>For more information</b>	Local events and materials, underlying FP research projects, policy briefs, etc. can be found on the <b>website</b> , <b>Detailed information on</b> 'Citizenship, flexibility and diversity in work-care relations' in: <a href="http://workcaresynergies.eu/flexibility-in-work-and-care/">http://workcaresynergies.eu/flexibility-in-work-and-care/</a>
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