

EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



WORKCARESNERGIES Work-Care Tensions (WP1)

Political Implications of WORKCARESNERGIES, 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.

November 2011

INTRODUCTION

Creating local awareness for EU research findings on work-care tensions

There are many interesting findings in the field of work and care not yet well known at local level. In addition, research often offers country comparisons and best practice examples that might help local actors in their decision taking and promotion of policy measures.

Discuss findings and local relevance with local actors

Based on selected findings of various EU research projects – i.e. Household, Work and Flexibility (2000-2003), WorkCare (2006-2009), Multilinks (2008-2011), Mocho (2001-2004), IFAC (2006-2008), the Meta-Analysis of Gender and Science Research (2008-2011) and the Family Platform, (2010-2011), as well as actual Austrian statistical data we discussed various social frameworks, changing family structures, (new) expectations of work and cultures of care to be observed in different EU countries.

We held sixteen local information and discussion events where we showed how EU families divide work, household and care responsibilities and how they find solutions for work-care tensions within the context of their traditions, norms and social systems.

The vivid discussions that usually followed our presentation of research findings, facts and film viewings in our local dissemination events quickly showed that local actors were quite interested to learn about EU research results, especially if these helped them to better evaluate local decisions, proved their point or supported local implementation issues. In this context, the preparation and transformation of academic findings into material for "everyday use" by local non-researchers also played an important role. The outcome of the local discussion rounds is described below.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

Work-care tensions result from many factors

The attainment or lack of reconciliation of work and family life is not only determined by its most obvious cornerstones: job flexibility and the sharing of household and care responsibilities within the family.

Reconciliation is possible if supported

A large variety of other factors have strong influence on the actual work-care situation, by **limiting or increasing parent's decision and action spaces**. Such factors are prevailing traditional ("men goes out to work, women looks after household and children") or new role models, local and societal attitudes, social networks and structures, availability of external childcare facilities, after school services and learning support, but also the parent's level of education and life style, job offers and working times.

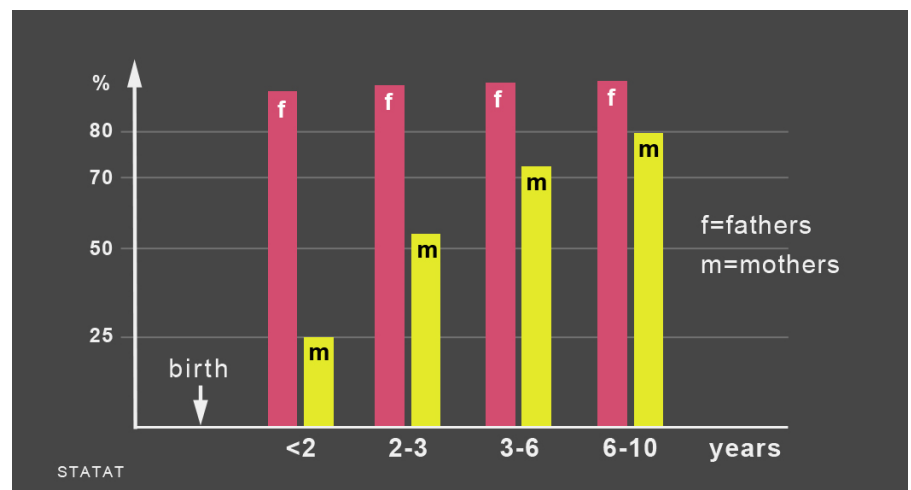
How men and women see it differently

Not unexpectedly, the views of those affected differ significantly. Men often have clearly other (more traditional) perceptions of the situation than women; quite frequently, fathers feel less concerned or do not see a problem at all. Location and level of parental education, but also the existence of family-supportive measures (by companies, local communities, counties or the state) increase or decrease the chances of reconciliation for fathers and mothers.

In general, **young men and women** seem to follow new, modern role models, women have changed their labour market behaviour and mothers and fathers seem to have new expectations concerning job and family. Yet, in every-day life, it is still mothers that bear the main responsibility to combine work and family duties.

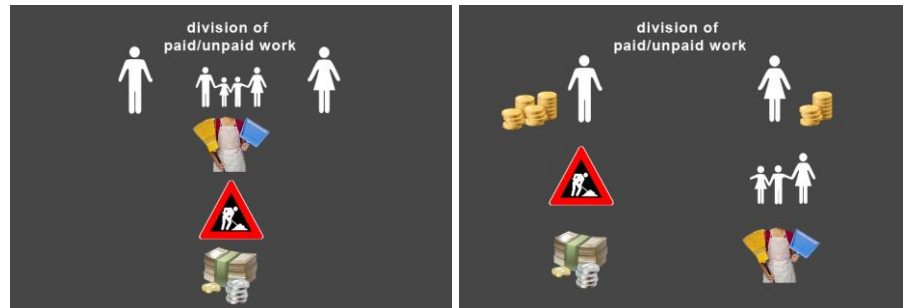
The Austrian example

In Austria, the situation in 2009 was the following: Although women have rapidly gained ground in education and employment, parenting for mothers still means a reduction of working hours. Fathers, however, continue to work in most cases full time. On the other hand, more and more mothers are soon back in business. Every fourth mother with children under 2 and every second mother with children between 2 and 3 years are economically active. Mothers of children of kindergarten age work to more than 70% and mothers of children of primary school age even close to 80%.



Family re-traditionalization with childbirth

Why? Family life, especially **once children have arrived**, seems to be governed by traditional rules and expectations, with gendered income situations furthering such behaviour (“man earns more, woman stays at home”). The equal sharing of tasks observed in young couples/partnerships (left) quickly disappears and traditional role models (right) resurface.



It has also been shown that parents' (original) **agreements** on how to handle their work-care situation – who works or cares to what extent – as well as mother's and father's attitudes and expectations about their partner's involvement change over time and need repeated family discussion and adjustment.

Male identity vs. sharing family responsibilities

While (most) men see their **identity** dominantly determined by their jobs, relation to colleagues and status within their firm, they assume that women are interested in family life first, with job and career coming second only. For them, the sharing and division of domestic tasks between partners is therefore often a(n unwanted) re-definition of their social identity and responsibilities – to be avoided if possible.

With changing role models and higher female expectations about male involvement in household and caring tasks, (many) men show a marked **fear** of professional/male recognition failure due to such involvement. On the other hand, they see women as reluctant to give up their dominant position within families.

Nevertheless, balancing work and family tasks has also become an **issue for (younger) men**, who often struggle to find their “new” place within the family but also in working life and especially in front of their (male) colleagues.

The **public promotion** of new male (and female) role models can support such new-orientation (e.g. in TV-spots, public campaigns, movies) but may also hinder family-friendly orientations: What role models do media actually communicate? How do successful men and women look like? How do they combine work and family life, especially with children (if any)?

On the other hand, men do not have the same undisturbed life-long working careers as before. Will they (fathers, grandfathers, sons) be able to **use breaks in a family-relevant way**? Which policies could support such family-supportive behaviour?

Provide family support in multiple and flexible ways

Legal regulations and both state and local help are important elements of family support. In many cases, they are the basis for work-family **reconciliation**, reduce poverty and ensure social participation and security (especially for children and women).

Since families nowadays exist in many and changing forms and varieties, such support has to be provided in multiple and flexible ways, so that families can profit (most) from selecting arrangements best fitted to them and their **choice** of life style.

Yet, it is also important to **inform** families – especially women - about the (often negative long term) effects of choices they take for the benefit for their children and family. They should realize that long parental leave (as e.g. still common in Austria) and later (precarious or) part time employment has negative impact on their future income, career opportunities and old age security.

How to combine different worlds?

It soon becomes obvious that the worlds of work and family life seem to function according to very different rules and regulations – which make a satisfying reconciliation of both worlds rather **difficult**.

In general, parents are expected to show **increasing flexibility** and dedication in both fields: For **work**, this is expressed in the common occurrence of long working days, regular overtime, high expectations of labour mobility, permanent availability, frequent changes of job (within and between companies), long commuting times, erratic working hours, etc. **Family life** (but also leisure time), on the other hand, are characterized by high expectations of “fun”, the need to fulfil important children’s needs and wishes (to compensate for rather long daily absences), yet small core families and working parents, limited opening hours and closing days of childcare facilities, long school holidays, ... and (not least) the currently common and strong propensity to consume which seems to have become an important driving force in everybody’s life.

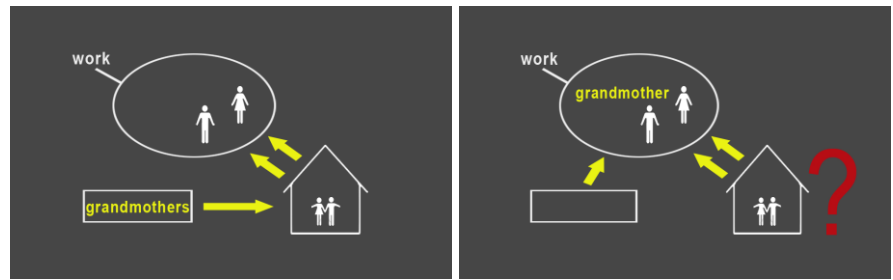
Reconciliation if all work together

Reconciliation of work and family yet seems to be **possible** if all involved parties contribute: the state by financial and care support as well as the public communication of modern role models; employers with family-friendly work time arrangements, qualified part time and parental leave offers for both men and women; (child)care facilities by offering work-related opening hours and flexible uptake of care; local key players and mediators by supporting modern role models and new (non traditional) initiatives; and families themselves - through social networks and intergenerational support within the family itself.

How to replace reduced support from grandmothers?

In this context it is important to realize that **higher female employment results in less grandmothers being available** for family support. Thus, the provision of (more) external services (e.g. childcare, after school care, old age care) becomes a necessary precondition for reconciliation. It also seems important to re-discuss changing expectations and situations within the household and throughout various family phases: A (more) equal sharing of work, household and care responsibilities will allowing for (better) social

inclusion and social security of both men and women, fathers and mothers.



Why gender wage gaps reproduce traditional role models

Income disparities (gender wage gaps) tend to perpetuate traditional role models: When children are born, partners usually revert to the male breadwinner and female caretaker model – because the **father's income is usually higher**, and mothers are commonly thought of as natural carers.

This allocation of **paid and unpaid work** continues (to a certain extent) throughout most females' lives - with all its often negative impact on women's careers, incomes and social security, especially in old age.

Attention should also be drawn to the fact that behavioural patterns observed within families are subject to **intergenerational transfer**, influencing future parents' expectations of how to construct and later manage their own work and family life. Thus, the road towards gender equality lies not only in the labour market or in social policies, but also in relations within the household.

Unattainable reconciliation (or the expectation of such) results in **declining fertility rates** - less children planned and even less realized. This should raise a discussion about the value of children and families in society, as well as a reconsideration of associated (often unfriendly) public attitudes.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY-MAKERS

European and national level

- With new family compositions and labour market conditions, reconciliation of family and work requires **flexibility** on all sides, employers, employees, state, local communities and families. If all work together, a WIN-WIN situation can be realized.
- Both, men and women need support to attain reconciliation. With the ageing of the population, such reconciliation comprises not only support in **childcare but also in elder care**.
- A high female activity rate has positive effects for a country's economy, especially when labour is scarce. **Reconciliation for men and women** can be supported by qualified part-time, flexible employment as well as time-wise compromises (e.g. flexi-time, time banks). Such arrangements also profit employers in terms of well motivated, dedicated, flexible, long-term staff.
- Yet, with **women mostly balancing work and family**/household needs, it is them that currently need support most, such as flexible work and leave arrangements, external childcare options and wage compensation. Yet, in the **long run**, governments should work towards and promote more equal sharing of work, household and childcare tasks between the partners – the only way to ensure equal social inclusion, participation and (old age) security for both, men and women, mothers and fathers.
- If (working) **grandmothers** cannot support families anymore, more (affordable) infrastructure is needed.
- **Reduce income disparities** (gender wage gaps) between men and women to avoid the reproduction of traditional role models.
- **The concept of flexicurity** has become a key aspect of modern European policy. Yet, one has to ensure flexibility and security for **men and women** - not flexibility and security for men but flexibility without security for women.
- Although young people in general express a wish to found families and have children, a change of heart seems observable once they grow older: Is the (planned) **childlessness** of young couples/partners what they see as their optimal family situation?
- It is important not to underestimate the **impact of modern media** on the younger generation: How do their role models (e.g. on TV, YouTube or in commercials) influence their real life decisions?
- The implementation of new initiatives (e.g. father's leave) must be carefully **monitored**. Sometime concepts do not fit local business needs or are socially not (yet) acceptable. Media work and the use of local key players may facilitate the process.

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. collect, summarize, make 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 **Austria**, we held a total of fifteen local dissemination events in 2010 and 2011 where we presented selected research findings from EU Framework Programme projects related to **work-care tensions** and initiated their discussion in a local context.

We also produced three documentary **films** on work-care tensions in Austria that were shown and discussed in various events and uploaded to our project homepage.

Local Team Objectives

What? The Austrian IHS team discussed findings from existing research projects within the EU Framework Programs and initiated their discussion in a local context. Main topics were:

Topic 1: Breadwinner to Dual Earner
Topic 2: Childcare and Parental Leave

Why? To support the current local policy debate on

1. Higher labour market participation of women with children vs. the strong Austrian tradition of caring for children at home
 2. How to handle/balance childcare and work/professional career with children of different ages?
 3. Extensive female parental leave vs. life course concepts of work (and social security)
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Purpose of Events

To inform about and discuss findings with local community, with the aim to feed back policy recommendations to the EC.

PROJECT IDENTITY

Project	WORKCARESYNERGIES – Dissemination of Synthesized Framework Programme Research Findings
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Funding Scheme	Seventh Framework Programme Theme 8, Socio-economic sciences and humanities (SSH), 8.1 Measures to support dissemination of research results
Budget	EUR 600.000
Website	www.workcaresynergies.eu
For more information	Local events and materials, underlying FP research projects, short films, policy briefs, etc. can be found on the website , detailed information on “work-care tensions” in: http://workcaresynergies.eu/work-care-tensions/
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