

EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



WORKCARE SYNERGIES

Mapping work-care orientations for gender equality in private and public contexts. (WP8)

Political Implications of WORKCARE SYNERGIES, 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.

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INTRODUCTION

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

Based on selected findings of various EU research projects – i.e. Household, Work and Flexibility (2000-2003), WorkCare (2006-2009), as well in recent European statistical fertility data

The local dissemination events created vibrant discussions that followed the presentations of research findings, and film viewings in local dissemination events showed that local actors were interested the theme and research results, especially if these helped them to better evaluate local decisions, or supported local implementation issues. In this context, the preparation and transformation of academic findings into material for "everyday use" by local non-researchers played an important role.

Discuss findings and local relevance with local actors

The dissemination events had the same structure of contents (except for the first event: presentation of the WORKCARE SYNERGIES project). These were sessions each one focussed with a specific group of actors. In all these dissemination events the contents were organized in five sets of data and topics of discussion:

1. Family and childcare support policies: (a) major European trends; (b) care policies, children development and parents; (c) absence of policies: women's consequences; (d) caring in Europe: informal and women centred.
2. Quality of life in Europe between work and care: (a) workplace and the family important for high quality of life; (b) the importance of the institutional context for quality of life.

3. Fertility and employment: (a) Policies do have effects; (b) Part-time jobs don't solve the fertility problem; (c) High fertility and mother's employment.
4. Gender equality and labour market: (a) Labour market and workplaces were highly gendered.
5. Employment and flexibility: (a) flexibility and quality of employment; (b) different kinds of flexibility; (c) regulation of flexibility.

The outcome of the local discussions is described below.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

Family and childcare support policies

European trends

The dual earner family is increasingly seen as the norm in European countries. This causes some stress for families in managing work and care

In countries where there is little childcare provision this causes great strain to families because they have to make a range of arrangements for childcare whilst parents are at work that can be quite precarious.

This means that women have to shoulder a double responsibility for employment and domestic care

Fathers are increasingly involved in child-rearing but women still do most of the domestic work

Good child care provision enables continuity of employment since those countries with the greatest degree of public childcare support are the ones which also have the greatest continuity of employment for men and women over time. By contrast, in those countries with extended childcare leave it is often difficult for women to re-enter the workforce after having children.

Care policies, children development and parents

Parents are greatly concerned about the cognitive and educational development of children. There is a shortage in many European countries of good quality affordable child care especially for children under three years. Pre-school and school provision for children over three years is often for short hours and does not meet the needs of parents when both are in paid employment.

Absence of policies: women's consequences

In the absence of affordable childcare it is generally women who take time out of the labour market to care and take on part time, insecure employment to enable caring commitments to be fulfilled.

This is a result of a number of factors including: ideologies of care, normative expectations, the attitudes of employers and the gender pay gap.

This has life time consequences for women's economic security and opportunities to have a career.

Caring in Europe: informal and women centred

The state with caring in Europe can be characterized in the following way: low levels of formal care for all dependents are prevalent across the EU, informal care is the predominant form of care, better care is available for children, less developed are services for older persons, there are negative financial and emotional strains on carers.

Across Europe kin and friends provide important support and grandparents provide an important resource in emergencies.

In those countries without a good provision of affordable childcare there is a higher reliance on kin. Families without kin to support them face especial difficulties.

Kin are an important resource for enabling parents to make choices, the unavailability of kin makes it more difficult for parents to combine paid employment with care.

Fertility and employment

Policies do have effects.

Higher fertility rates in some countries are often associated with good childcare provision which enable women to fully participate in the labour market as well as raising children

The participation of women in the labour market is not a constrain to a higher fertility rate, on the contrary, it is a factor that seems to enhance it.

Though policies, and their combination, differ in different countries they may have the same impact in raising fertility rates. Positive correlation between mothers work and fertility rate in Europe.

Part-time jobs don't solve the fertility problem

Part-time jobs aren't a solution for mothers. In countries with an important number of mothers in part time jobs the most common situation is the withdraw from the labour market (UK, Netherlands, Switzerland).

High fertility and mothers employment

In countries with long term high fertility rates (Nordic) – mothers young children (until three) work full-time. After the leave of one year they get back to work.

Fertility decisions and trends have to be explained by the interaction of different social dimensions. Each country with a specific combination of factors.

But where the philosophy seems to be a combination between the right for mothers and fathers to have a job and quality childcare facilities look the more balanced and preferred solutions.

Quality of life in Europe between work and care

Workplace and the family important for high quality of life

Next to job autonomy and social relations at work, work-life balance support proved to be highly relevant for the quality of life.

Long working hours, work pressure and job insecurity, on the other hand, negatively influence overall life satisfaction as well as having care responsibilities for relatives outside the household.

Country differences indicate that in a country with more profound social policies and regulations regarding quality of work and life, workers appear to be more satisfied.

The importance of the institutional context for quality of life

The quality of family life is strongly related to the quality of the family policies and their flexibility.

The greater security of employment, the greater gender equality in both paid and unpaid work, the more extensive state support for family care as typical for the social-democratic welfare states serve to provide a better institutional context for the quality of life than the high material well being but lower protection and lower equality in the corporatist and the liberal regimes.

The countries in the sub-protective and postsocialist regimes tend to combine low living standards with low flexibility of work and low or declining state support.

Gender equality and labour market

Labour market and workplaces were highly gendered.

While women gain in career opportunities they experience more time pressures and the need to find the right balance between work and family life. At the same time there is an enduring gender asymmetry in family care involvement, even in the more egalitarian Nordic countries.

In many cases the dominant organisational discourse is that men and women are treated equally and fairly. This assumes that everyday practices are gender neutral. Yet vertical and horizontal segregation is common. This is often justified on the grounds of gender stereotypes and also reflects gendered patterns beyond the workplace such that women often continue to take the major responsibility for domestic and care work. Yet assumptions about gender are rarely made explicit and discussed or challenged.

There is growing evidence that working practices based on gendered assumptions undermine not only gender equity but also workplace effectiveness.

Persistence of gender pay gap across Europe (particular acute in Portugal).

Persistence of gender glass ceiling across European countries.

Employment and flexibility

Flexibility and quality of employment

There is a growing diversification of the legal conditions of employment contracts, their duration and the amount and schedules of working hours.

Flexibilisation is 'double edged' as it has the potential to harmonise work and family life and lead to higher quality of life, and to induce more overtime, a disturbed work-life balance and less quality of life.

Flexible work brings more opportunities for achieving a work/life balance but may also be a trap of insecure jobs without career prospects.

In the current situation of diversified labour markets, not only the quantity but also the quality of employment has to become a central issue for the European welfare states.

Different kinds of flexibility.

We should be beware of using too narrow a definition of flexibility (for example: deregulation or counting the numbers of part time, self-employed and temporary workers) and rather see flexibility in broader terms to include a variety of working arrangements both inside full time or secure jobs as well as outside of them.

The regulation of flexibility

Flexibility should be regulated. The de-regulation of labour market protection can lead to an increase in bad forms of flexibility.

Flexible employment contracts are easily associated with job instability, often resulting in lack of protection for workers in terms of sick leave, unemployment and family care, among others.

Guaranteeing that flexibility in work is accompanied by social protection for workers and reinforcing control of employers' abuse of flexibility are two focuses of intervention recognised as essential in promoting quality of work.

Flexicurity policies often provide flexibility and security for men but only flexibility for women. This has a negative impact on women's access to employment, opportunities for support in re-entry to the labour market and economic and employment security across the life course.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY-MAKERS

European and national level

Social policy towards children is a collective responsibility. Children should be seen as the responsibility of the society as a whole rather than just the private responsibility of families.

Raising well socialised and adequately cared for children is in everyone's interests in terms of ensuring that there are future workers able to take up positions in the knowledge society, creating healthy, contributing citizens, supporting the long-term future of the welfare state and avoiding crime.

Comprehensive childcare is preferable to other policy solutions for raising children (such as extended child rearing leave) because they enable women to return to full labour market activity with minimum disruption and is not necessarily more expensive than paying women to stay at home.

Given the importance of cognitive and educational development in an increasingly complex and competitive society, quality, professionalised childcare that can provide educational development tailored to the needs of children of different age groups is preferable to other kinds of care.

Well-paid flexible parental leave including 'daddy' leave should be available to enable parents to combine their caring responsibilities with paid employment.

Substitute Care – child minders, nurseries, pre-school classes, school, after school and out of school provision should be affordable, professional, of high quality, adequate to meet the demand from all parents who want to access the services and the opening hours should be compatible with full-time employment and employment demands.

Governments need to invest in supporting families to enable them to combine their responsibilities for care and ensure that men and women are able to exercise their rights to employment.

Gender equality in the workplace and labour market must be progressed and in particular attention paid to measures to reduce the gender-pay gap.

Employers must be encouraged to introduce family friendly policies and men and women feel supported in taking their entitlement.

Regulation of flexibility so that it takes place within the scope of the official economy and complies with employment regulations.

Regulation of flexibility in such a way that it is not driven into the black economy.

Flexicurity is seen as a key aspect of European policy, but these policies must ensure flexibility and security for men and women, not flexibility and security for men and a flexibility without security for women.

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.

The **Portuguese Team** “translated” and transferred (i.e. collect, summarize, make understandable and accessible) findings relevant for the local policy debate and addressed local NGOs, policy makers, trade unions, employer representatives, regional organizations and services, companies as well as other local actors and interested parties.

In **Portugal**, we held a total of seven local dissemination events in 2010 and 2011 where we presented selected research findings from EU Framework Programme projects related to work-care orientations for gender equality in private and public contexts and initiated their discussion in a local context.

We settled specific local dissemination platforms such as a website, a facebook page, a blog. Additionally we produced three short videos with research findings in work-care orientations for gender equality in private and public contexts. The videos (and all materials produced by the Portuguese team) are available for download both at local website and in project homepage. The videos were shown and discussed in various events.

Local Team Objectives

What? The Portuguese team (CIES-ISCTE) discussed findings from existing research projects within the EU Framework Programs and initiated their discussion in a local context. Main topics were:

1. Workcare orientations and childcare services;
2. Workcare orientations and gender equality on the labour market.

Why? To support the current local policy debate on how to shape the work care orientations for gender equality in private and public contexts. Two main policy issues will be addressed:

1. Support of childcare services
2. Promotion of gender equality on labour market and their social acceptance.

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

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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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