




WP 4 (Austrian WU team): Quality of Work and Life, Work-Life Balance across the Life Course

Events realised by the Austrian WU team:

In 2010 and 2011, the Austrian team at the University of Economics and Business Vienna (WU) realised a number of events on the topic „Quality of Life and Work“: In total, nine local public events and five specific seminars for students at the WU were held. The events included presentations of selected results from EU research projects on the topic in question and their subsequent discussion in a local context. Moreover, two short films produced in the course of the project were shown and their contents discussed at the beginning of the lectures and discussion rounds. The first film presents the visions of 10 year-olds regarding their future Work-Life Balance, while the second film depicts the current situation of caring and working relatives in Austria, illustrated with example cases. Both can be viewed on the project webpage.

List of events:

	2010-09-27	Vienna	(WU) Work-Life Balance
	2011-01-19	Vienna	Work-Life Balance: Chances and risks under new working conditions
	2011-03-30	Vienna	(WU) Presentation at the OeNB brunch
	2011-05-04	Vienna	Work-Life Balance: Chances and risks under new working conditions
	2011-05-12	Vienna	Work-Life Balance: Chances and risks under new working conditions
	2011-06-28	Vienna	(WU) Press Conference: Paid work and care in Austria as compared to Europe
	2011-06-28	Wien	(WU) Caring Relatives – Current scientific findings from Austria and the EU
	2011-09-12	Wien	Working is much easier than living (Oe1 radio feature)
	2011-09-19	Vienna	(WU) Focus group on policy recommendations
	2011-10-10	Innsbruck	(WU) How to do it all! Conflicting priorities of job, household and family duties
	2011-10-11	Feldkirch	(WU) Attitudes towards the equal division of labour in couples from a comparative perspective across countries (workshop)

	2011-10-31	Vienna	How to disseminate EU funded projects and policy briefs? Main findings from research on Work-Life Balance in parts of Europe
	2011-11-16	Vienna	(WU) Attitudes towards the equal division of labour in couples from a comparative perspective across countries (workshop)
	2011-12-07	Vienna	Work-Life Balance: Chances and risks under new working conditions

Links:

General information on the project, the specific topics for each country, all events and their contents may be found on the project webpage of WORKCARESYNERGIES (www.workcaresynergies.eu).

Specific information on the events organised by the Institute for Sociology and Social Research (WU team), especially regarding work packages, films, PowerPoint presentations and summaries, may be found on the AT WU team country webpage (<http://workcaresynergies.eu/work-life-balance/>).

Participants:

The participants at the local information and discussion events in Austria included experts from associations and NGOs, representatives of companies in the service industries (from the areas of childcare, elderly care and assistance) and advisory centres, as well as local politicians, representatives of communities, the social partners (Austrian Chamber of Labour (AK), Federal Chamber of Economy Austria (WKOe), Austrian Federation of Trade Unions (OeGB), Federation of Austrian Industries (IV)), local mediators, scientists from the area of business, economics and social sciences, and especially also students and other interested parties.

Contents of the events:

While in the first event, the topic of Work-Life Balance was treated from the perspective of childcare, the second event focused on the perspective of caring relatives regarding the issue of elderly care and assistance.

Apart from organising events in the capital, it was a target to introduce these issues in a rural context as well. Therefore, two events were held in the Western region of Austria towards the end of the project. In the federal capital Innsbruck and in Feldkirch, events could be realised in the local Chambers of Labour, owing to close collaboration with the Interfaculty

Platform for Gender Research, the women's department of the federal government, the Chamber of Labour (AK) and the Austrian Federation of Trade Unions (OeGB). Furthermore, the second film explored the care situation in the rural areas of Austria, featuring example cases from Graz (federal capital of Styria) and Burgenland (in the East of Austria).

The project and its central research findings were published and disseminated in a press conference, several press releases, radio interviews and radio features on the topic of Work-Life Balance. Following this, articles could also be placed in Austrian print media with considerable coverage (newspapers and magazines).

Additionally, the research team at the WU had the aim of not limiting the communication of the results to experts on the topics from the areas of economy, politics and society, but of also including the students at the Vienna University of Economics and Business in the dissemination of the results, introducing them to the contents of the project and its issues and main findings. This seems all the more justified considering that this target group includes future decision makers in the areas of economy and society. Therefore, students of Business Administration, Economics, Socio-Economics, Business Law and Information Systems were sensitised to the major challenges employees and employers face in this issue. The students showed great interest in the topics and contributed substantially to a successful discussion with their own opinions and questions.

Finally, a selected number of participants at the local events in Vienna (on the topic of Work-Life Balance and caring relatives) were invited to participate in a focus group, with the aim of discussing recommendations and requests to policy makers. The strategy of joining a small group of experts on childcare and elderly care from the areas of economy, politics and society and allowing space for discussion proved extremely successful. The entire discussion (about 2 hours) was recorded on audio and may be used, for example, as a basis for further (scientific) publications after the end of the project.

Specific topics of the events:

The contents of the events focused on the following areas: (a) Work-Life Balance from a childrens' perspective, as also presented in the film, (b) attitudes and demands of women and men regarding the reconcilability of job and family life in Austria, as compared to other European countries, and (c) findings from various EU studies on working conditions and their effect on the Work-Life Balance of different groups of people.

The second public local event was dedicated to the topic of (d) adult or elderly care and assistance. In order to discuss the difficulties of reconciling employment and care, a

particular focus was placed on the concrete case of people in a situation of working and caring. As in the first event, the international context and differences between countries formed the starting point of the discussion, moving on to the specific situation in Austria. Selected results from the following EU research projects were presented:

1. WORKCARE (2006-2009), a project on the topic of „changing relationships between work, childcare and welfare in Europe“. http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/232_en.html; <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/socsci/research/nec/workcare/>
2. HWF – Households, Work and Flexibility (2000-2003), see: www.hwf.at; http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/057_en.html
3. EQUALSOC - Economic Change, Quality of Life and Social Cohesion (2005-2010): a Network of Excellence funded by the European Union’s Sixth Framework Programme, see: www.equalsoc.org
4. WORKS (2005-2009), an "integrated project" on the changes of work in a knowledge-based society, see: <http://www.worksproject.be/>
5. MULTILINKS (2008-2010) investigated how changing social contexts, from macro-societal to micro-interpersonal, affect social integration, well-being and intergenerational solidarity across different European nations. See: <http://www.multilinks-project.eu/>
6. EUROFAMCARE (2003-2005) examined the situation of family carers of elderly people across Europe in relation to the existence, familiarity, availability, use and acceptance of supporting services. See: <http://www.uke.de/extern/eurofamcare-de/>

The following **main points of discussion** on the topics of employment and childcare or elderly care, respectively, frequently came up in the events and should therefore be considered of high relevance to future political decisions and actions of enterprises and individuals:

- Financial and transfer benefits in Austria as compared to other countries.
- The quality of childcare and elderly care and assistance: private versus professional forms, or mixed forms.

- Trust in the quality of professional supply and its influence on individual decisions.
- What do people want? Diverging expectations towards a „successful“ Work-Life Balance require measures which increasingly render free decisions possible. Gaps between expectations and reality: tendencies towards modernisation and an egalitarian legal status might clash with the concrete realisation of égalité and equality between the sexes.
- What may be understood by a „just“ division of labour? Controversial positions regarding norms and values.
- Lacking recognition of care on part of society, which is reflected, for example, in the payment for professional care, perpetuating gender-specific attributions.
- Lack of data, particularly in the area of elderly care and assistance.
- Knowledge about the attitudes of caring relatives and the possibilities and requests for external support.
- Raising public awareness and changing the comparably traditional attitudes towards caring responsibilities.
- Care as a specific form of work (caring for, and the work itself), rendering visible the boundaries of professionalization.
- Opinions and critical positions on how meaningful EU country comparisons really are.
- Consistently positive statements on the efforts for opening a public discussion of scientific results and enriching them with practical experiences and reports.

Summary of the results of the local discussions

The main points of discussion listed above showed that childcare and elderly care overlap in many aspects. The following section differentiates the key results on the specific requirements of care according to the respective target group (children or adults care recipients):

Childcare and employment:

The aspects mapped by the project coordinators (of the IHS team – see their respective summary of local discussions) partly coincide with the following points of discussion. The emphasis placed by the WU team expands the results of the IHS team by two more aspects: First, we asked the next generation about their ideas regarding their future Work-Life Balance and their expectations towards work and life in general. Second, the discussion also touched upon new challenges and requirements in the current world of work and their general consequences for the possibilities available to parents and other working people with caring responsibilities.

Children rely on their parents or other people caring for them in terms of time and content. They need security, clear (time) structures and binding agreements. However, parents often cannot live up to these expectations in times of rapidly changing demands in their jobs. Therefore, also employers and companies are called to show flexibility and consideration for this situation. Because parents are existentially dependent on the job market, they might react by adjusting their private issues to fit the demands of their workplace and not the other way round. Research results and everyday experiences of the participants in the discussion corroborate the theory that women tend to be flexible for their families and children, whereas men show more flexibility regarding their jobs.

Altered time demands towards employees often impact on the „dissolving boundaries of employment and private lives“. Individuals therefore need to set their own limits in an independent and clear way. Especially highly qualified people are prone to experiencing this lack of externally set time limits and increasing self-control in the form of enhanced self-responsibility and feelings of guilt incidental to this situation. The self-responsibility and self-control that may be witnessed here are part of a process full of contradictions. On the one hand, people identify much more with their work, targets and results, which may foster intrinsic motivation and self-realisation. On the other hand, the negative consequences of missed targets and failures also include a perceived personal culpability, in turn leading to strains and stress (e.g. fear of failure). Perception of time, time management and time conflicts are on the rise and create the challenge of balancing employment and private life. This particularly concerns employees with caring responsibilities, especially at a certain stage of life (the so-called *rush hour of life*), in which job market integration and career development are crucial to personal development and the accumulation of insurance time for social security, as well as for personality development, identity and social integration.

Only if the discretionary competence does not remain within the responsibility of employers only, they are in a position to exploit their flexibility for the benefit of a better Work-Life Balance. They need to decide themselves completely, or at least to some part, when (they are able) to complete tasks and reach certain goals. What is of crucial importance here is the regulation of working hours and discretionary competence.

Children who grow up in egalitarian households where both parents share the responsibility of managing the household, childcare and employment to equal parts experience the division of labour in a positive way. It would be interesting here to conduct a comprehensive survey on the perceptions children have of different lifestyles and their long-term consequences.

Collective times such as school days, opening hours of institutions and holidays rarely concord with each other. The duration of school holidays exceeds the amount of holidays both parents may take by far, rendering individual strategies necessary. On one side, people recur more or less perforce to the support of their social networks, the grandparents or relatives, acquaintances and neighbours. On the other side, it is very common for parents to take turns caring. They frequently take their holidays separately, which reduces the amount of family time spent together.

Demands to childcare and education vary greatly according to the respective stages. For example, there may be a lack of places – or at least, of approved high quality places - in childcare for toddlers, while coverage for the period from kindergarten until the start of school improves (also because holiday times are much better covered). During the school period, bottlenecks may appear in different respects: children often need learning assistance, and provision of lunches or afternoon care are not the least all-encompassing and responding to the quality demands and requirements of parents and children.

Controversies of the discussion concern the implications of changing priorities in family and social policies: What would a shift from financial benefits (e.g. childcare allowance, attendance allowance) to more non-pecuniary benefits entail? Could we afford both on a high level? In general, expansion of infrastructure was welcomed, as supply also creates demand and may change people's attitudes on the long run.

Elderly care and employment:

Claims to non-pecuniary benefits are frequently considered important, as compared to the comparably well-developed transfer payments (e.g. on the basis of attendance allowance). The question of in how far and if caring relatives – mostly women – should be guaranteed

better financial security and receive compensation for a loss of earnings due to caring activities remained controversial. The proponents of financial benefits for private care argue that they acknowledge and value the work in a stronger way and provide long-term financial hedge and social protection for the carers. Opponents see the problem of direct payment for private care largely in the fact that mainly women provide these financially not lucrative services. These payments could reinforce gendered responsibilities for unpaid household work; consequentially, differences in payment on the formal job market would also change more slowly.

Strong agreement was found regarding the necessity of expanding the supply of professional support for caring relatives. More support is needed in the form of ambulant care, visiting services, consultation, care leave models and possibilities for carers to go on holiday or take time off. However, it was put into question if the disposition to stronger public support in Austria is already comprehensively embedded in society. In the countryside, for example, the predominant opinion regarding tasks the family should assume sees the relatives in charge of care for the parents. It is a very common strategy to manage the pressure by society individually. Especially in the rural areas, accepting external help is often considered disgraceful. The experts and some of the people concerned in the discussion round, however, are largely convinced that relatives are in need of professional support for care, assistance to psychological self-help and relief of the strains on health that this physically and emotionally demanding task entails. Public awareness for this issue should be strengthened.

Politics is therefore called to launch offensive awareness-raising campaigns: Even though care frequently happens within the family, that is, in private, it does not mean that it represents an issue which is to be solved privately. The state and the economy are also responsible for the well-being of all parties involved, both the care recipients and the people who work and care. Public responsibility for care should increase much more than is currently the case. Political decisions regarding the “care crisis” can draw on a large number of current developments in economy and society to support their arguments: Employees face increased mobility demands, and demands for continuous (full-time) employment biographies are being made to both women and men, requiring them to remain in employment longer than ever before. What is therefore necessary is a distribution of the charges in order to diminish the load individuals have to bear and to create room for alternative forms of emotional and psychological support. Offers for professional help could dramatically increase the freedom of choice for relatives regarding their involvement in care and could thus contribute to diminishing the pressure on all parties involved.

Final conclusions of the discussions:

- Increasing the integration of women into the job market offers many chances. However, if this process is not accompanied by adjustments in other areas (e.g. regarding a reduction of inequality regarding payment and careers, equalising gender roles, new concepts for the division of labour, measures and consideration for the situation on part of the employers, increased participation of fathers, father's leave), it also entails certain risks. This particularly concerns the obvious potential for greater pressure on women in different stages of their lives.
- Reconciling work and family life has always been a “female topic” in Austria. Women also accounted for the majority of the audience at the events – with the exception of the seminars held for students. However, the people present at the discussions unanimously concluded that work, family and care concern both sexes to equal shares and that both women and men should feel responsible and should also jointly assume this responsibility.
- Specific models for certain stages of life offer promising alternatives to the comparably traditional division of labour between the sexes that can be witnessed in practice. Innovative approaches are required and need to be put into practice - both on the part of science, in collaboration with experts contributing their know-how, as well as on the part of the economy and politics (e.g. legal claims to a reduction of working hours in certain stages of life, with a guaranteed possibility of returning to full-time employment).
- The public and scientific discussions on Work-Life Balance primarily focus on the perspective of parents. In companies (audit work and family life in Austria) and in politics, measures catering to childcare predominate, even though caring and working relatives face similar questions concerning reconcilability. It is interesting to note that employees with caring responsibilities are not unreliable per se – on the contrary: a Viennese study reveals that they are highly motivated and extremely reliable. Employment is not considered so much a burden but rather as enriching their lives and general duties considerably. Therefore, there is a particular practical benefit for companies and employers in realising the specific potentials of their employees and supporting them by discussing relevant issues and jointly finding strategies to solve them.

- Recognition and the formation of identity are still largely determined by the integration into the job market. Therefore, it is crucial to render paid and unpaid activities reconcilable and to reorganise the structures in the context of future challenges for an active welfare policy.
- Knowledge about the benefits available and support measures is unevenly distributed across the population. People with a higher status in society and a higher level of education easily find access to information about legal and institutional issues. Furthermore, their financial resources tend to be larger, which increases their options. Politics is called to facilitate the equilibrium between generations according to social class and migration background.
- Local agents show considerable interest in working with scientific research results as they have the potential of backing political demands on the part of representatives of NGOs, NPOs and other organisations and associations. National and regional politics as well as the management of companies could also gain in acceptance and foundation by referring to the results of scientific studies. Relating to this, the experts unanimously found fault with the current lack of data and knowledge in the area of elderly care and assistance – the topic of the future – in order to offer an adequate basis of decision-making to politics.