

Work family integration and flexibility in Europe

Time to work – time to be in the family

The amount of time that people spend at work differs considerably across Europe (see Figure 1). In Eastern Europe both men and women spend longer time at work and few people work part-time. The longest hours were worked in Eastern and Central Europe where there is a tradition of full time work, but in addition the decline in wages and economic conditions. People in Romania (the poorest country) worked the longest hours with men working an average of 48 hours and women working 44 hours. This was followed by Hungary with men working 47 hours and women working 45 hours on average. The lowest number of working hours were in the Netherlands, where men work on average 40 hours and women 26 hours.

However, 28% of the whole sample of workers would like to reduce their working hours and the main reason is in order to spend more time at home. Surprisingly, it was men rather than women who were more interested in reducing their working hours, especially educated men and especially in Western European countries. This is illustrated in Figure 2, which shows that of those wanting to reduce their working hours, 40% wanted to spend more time with their family.

For women in Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK, part time work was the way in which they managed to integrate care of families with work in the labour market. Part time work has no tradition in Eastern and

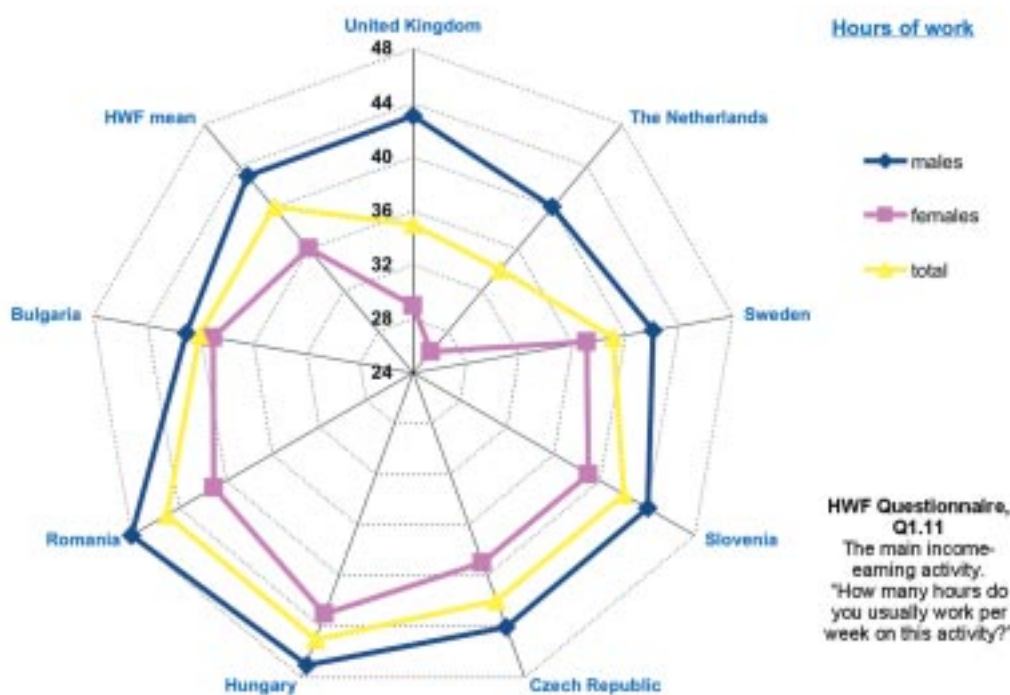
About the HWF project

- ▶ The project started in March 2000 and completed in April 2003.
- ▶ The study involved carrying out a survey in the UK, Sweden, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria.
- ▶ The HWF survey is based on a representative sample of individuals aged between 18 and 65 (N=10123).
- ▶ The aim of the project was to look at flexibility policies in each country and the types of flexibility that actually occurred there.
- ▶ Another task was to study family roles, the gender division of labour and work-family conflict in households in order to understand how far flexibility could help or hinder the integration of home and work.

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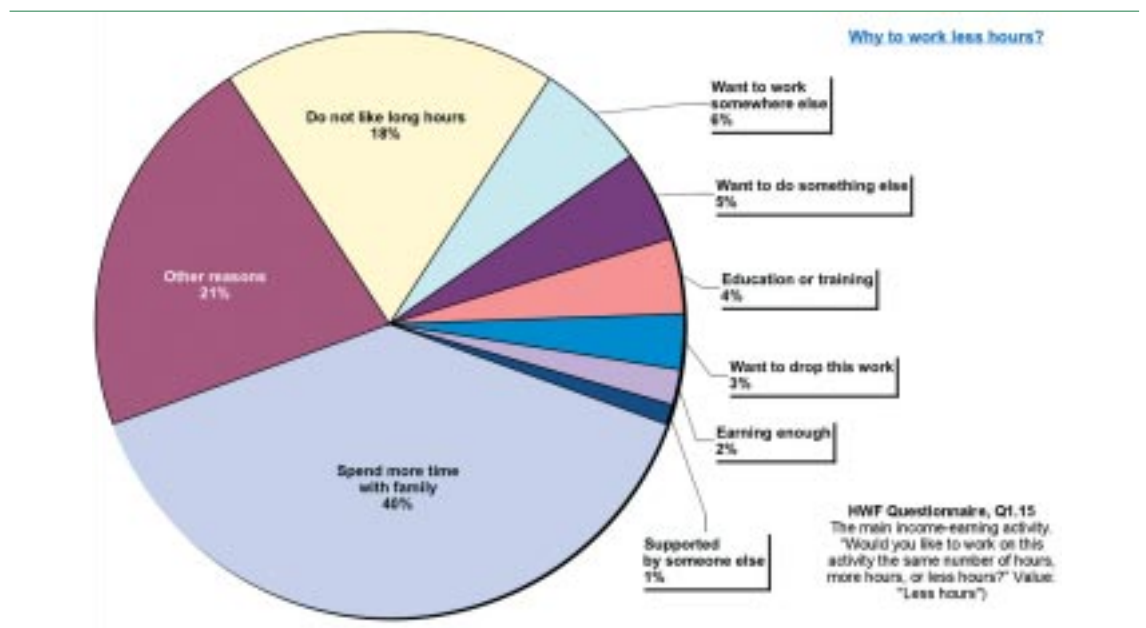


Figure 1 :: Hours of work on the main activity, mean values per gender, per country (radar chart).



“In Eastern Europe both men and women spend longer time at work and few people work part-time. The longest hours were worked in CEE countries where there is a tradition of full time work, but in addition the decline in wages and economic conditions.”

Figure 2 :: Reasons for wanting less hours on the main activity.



Source: HWF Survey 2001 - Unified international data collection

Central Europe, where wages are too low to make this an option for most people and where part time work is undertaken it is as likely to be done by men as by women. In the UK and in the Netherlands, families have to make private arrangements for child care. In Sweden and Slovenia there were generous, subsidised childcare facilities for working mothers, enabling many women to work full time. In the Czech Republic and in Hungary, a very extended paid child care leave (three years and four years respectively) has been introduced enabling mothers to stay at home whilst

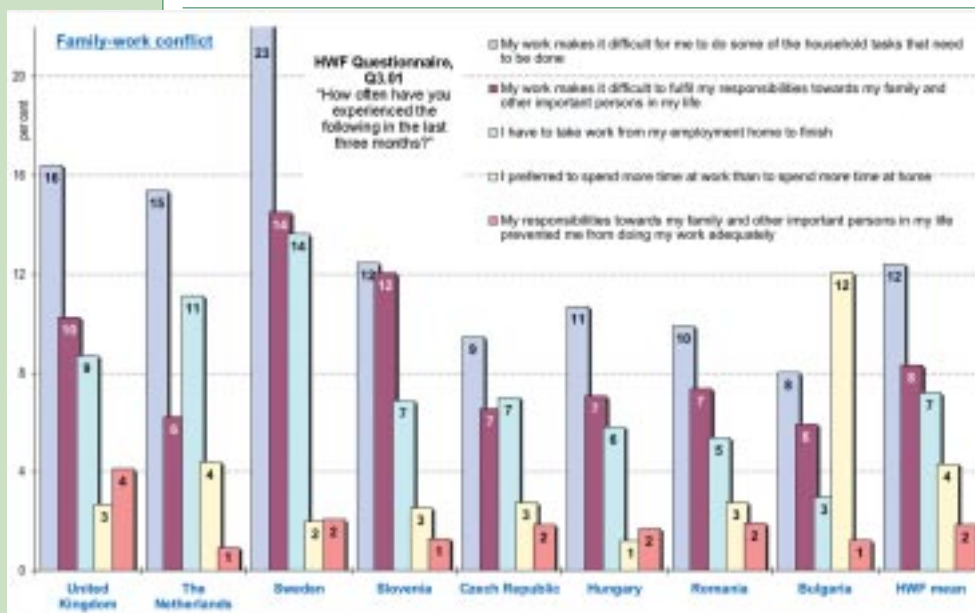
public child care facilities are extensively available from municipalities and are used by mothers until the children go to school. In Romania and Bulgaria, the public child care facilities which existed under socialism, have largely disappeared and not many people can afford the private child care facilities. In these countries it is more often the extended family which has taken over the role of child care. With these differences in mind, we looked at the extent of work-family conflict in different countries and this is expressed in Figure 3.

Family-work conflict

In Figure 3 it is evident that it is people in the Western areas of Europe who are most likely to experience work-family conflict. People in Sweden were especi-

ally likely to say that their work makes it difficult to the household tasks, that work makes it difficult to fulfil the responsibilities towards families and significant others and that they have to take work home to finish it. Whilst work is quite likely to interfere with family, it

Figure 3 :: Problems with combining work and domestic obligations (options *always* and *often*).



Source: HWF Survey 2001 - Unified international data collection

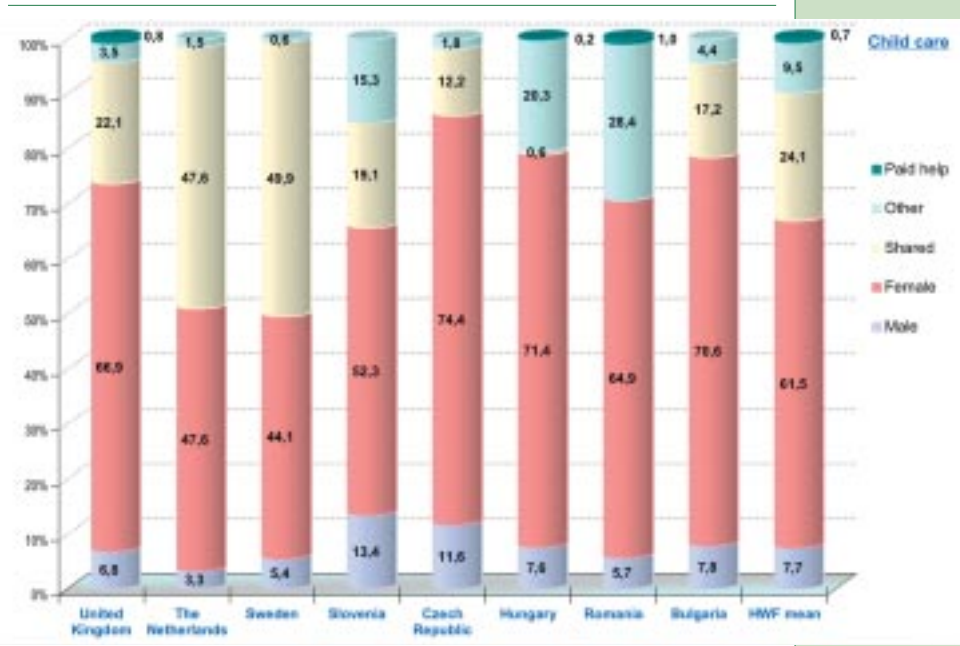
was seldom the other way round – family did not on the whole interfere with work. Also in Slovenia where support for working families is generous, there was more conflict between work and family. In the other countries of Eastern and Central Europe, there was less family-work conflict even though people generally worked longer hours. Only in Bulgaria were people more likely to want to spend more time at work than in the family and there it was because of the general impoverishment of the population.

Care of children

Figure 4 :: Taking daily care of the child/children

The way in which care is actually carried out reflects the culture of care in different communities and the division of labour between the sexes. In Figure 4 we can see how the care of children is organised in different countries (the question was worded: who is mainly responsible for this task). Women are much more likely than men to undertake child care in all countries, but there were strong variations nevertheless. In the Czech Republic and Slovenia more than on in ten men helped with daily child care. In the Netherlands and Sweden there is a strong sharing ideology so that nearly half of couples claimed to share childcare. This was also the case with 22% of couples in the UK and 19% of couples in Slovenia. However, almost nobody shared child care in Hungary or Romania. "Other arrangements" would include extended family and we can see that this was especially common in Romania, but also in Hungary and to a lesser extent in Slovenia. Paid help from outside was rather negligible in all countries.

Whilst there was a much more even division of labour between men and women in North Western EU countries, it was in these countries where the subjective work-family conflict was felt to be most acute. In



Source: HWF Survey 2001 - Unified international data collection

countries of ECE where there was a highly unequal division of labour and with a tradition of women working full time as well as men, there was less role conflict. Men especially would like to reduce their hours in order to spend more time with their families and this was particularly the case for better educated men. Most men worked more than 40 hours per week, so there could be a good argument for reducing hours in order to enhance family life.

Policy implications

Family-work conflict

Family work balance depends upon the perceptions of stress as well as the actual situation. Our results showed that many people would like to work less hours in order to spend more time with their families.

Supporting the labour force participation of women

It is evident that in most countries there is a very uneven division of labour between men and women in the home and that in some countries, sharing is considered normal (The Netherlands, Sweden, Slovenia and the UK) whilst such egalitarian ideologies were

Avoiding a care deficit

In countries where there is little or inadequate public care provision, families must resort to private resources. Some families are fortunate enough to have kin living in the house or not far away who are prepared to take over this role (this is the case in several of our Eastern and Central European countries where having several generations living in one household is not un-

Fathers in particular would like to spend more time with families, so increasing the flexibility options for men in this respect might be a way forward.

less common elsewhere. In order to raise the labour force participation of women (in line with the Lisbon targets) there should be either more affordable child care facilities or more encouragement for men to share domestic work.

common and there are strong traditions of inter-generational solidarity). However, others may not have this additional resource and may not be able to afford private care. For these families there is a danger of a "care deficit" where children are not adequately supervised or are not supervised at all.

"The way in which the child care is actually carried out reflects the culture of care in different communities and the division of labour between the sexes."



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Editor: Claire Wallace, 2003. pp 250.
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