

## **WORKPACKAGE 5**

# **QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS WITH HOUSEHOLDS ABOUT WORK AND CARE**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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The empirical research of Workpackage 5 is conducted under the project WORKCARE (CIT5-028361) funded under the Sixth Framework Programme of the European Commission, with the aim of describing how couple and single parent families try to combine work, care and personal activities both in daily routines and in a life course perspective in 7 European countries: Italy, United Kingdom, Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Poland and Portugal.

The overall aim of this paper is to outline the methodology of Workpackage 5, based mainly on qualitative interviews, in order to allow any possible connection and triangulation with the other, quantitative or policy analysis workpackages from now on. Therefore, outcomes deriving from the - still underway - in-depth investigation in work-family balance among respondents to our interviews, are here intended mainly as rough examples of method choices, of research design or sample adjustments, not yet as a part of an interpretive framework which will emerge only at the end of the computer-assisted analysis phase.

The paper consists of 4 chapters and it starts with a brief recall of sociological contributions to the debate about work-life balance in Europe, in order to identify some emerging and, from our point of view, open and unresolved topics;

their connection with the interviewing techniques we adopted, the longitudinal and narrative perspective implicit within the study of couples' work life-balance.

We then pass on to examine the qualitative and narrative methodology adopted, the method followed to select and approach respondents, and finally the main tools for collecting data. It follows a more precise description of both the methodology we used in interviewing household couples and the process we followed in adjusting our purposive sample, our cross-countries comparison scheme and others research tools.

The general methodological assumptions and the tools of the research we have defined and then adopted (but in particular the interview guide) are the outcome of an intensive collaboration among research units and are aimed at making the narrative interviews most 'rich in stories' and their contribution as revealing as possible of the real challenges parenting couples have to face when balancing work and caring activities.

Finally we report on several preliminary trends emerging from a good number of the interviews conducted in the seven countries (not yet the entire sample), only in order to illustrate possible outcomes of our methodological decisions.

## 2. THE DEBATE ON WORK LIFE BALANCE AND SOME UNRESOLVED QUESTIONS IT POSES.

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Our qualitative research on parenting couples which have to balance work and family duties falls in the middle of a period of deep changes in work organization, but also socio- cultural transformations.

The organization and composition of paid work and the structure of families have changed dramatically in recent decades and so too has the context within which individuals and families organize their lives. In labour market, the service sector has grown everywhere, even if at different speed in different countries, paid work has become less male dominated than before (Rubery et al, 1998; 1999; Daly, 2000a), if to a varying extent in different European countries. Certainly not all of them became 24 hours societies (Presser, 2003), but the change in the nature of work is to be seen everywhere.

At the same time, processes of family formation, partners' new styles of life as well as cultural orientations towards the idea of being together, having children, parenting and coping both with individual biography and family life-cycle are getting more and more self-conscious, which in turn implies that social researchers may more easily collect 'storied' accounts of the choices and negotiations of the couples (or ex couples). This allows us to observe a growing heterogeneity in family models, work-life balances, family divisions of work and daily functioning.

A pivotal and indubitable change has to do with the growing number of women who desire to work for a gainful occupation, irrespective of whether they succeed or not in different national labour markets. The significance of the male breadwinner-female caregiver model, dominant in the 'mid-century compromise' (Crouch, 1999; Blossfeld and Drobnic, 2001), has declined everywhere in Europe,

even if at a different pace in Northern, Continental or Southern Europe. The dual earner or 'adult worker' (Lewis and Giullari, 2005) family model is still very unevenly spread in Europe (Franco and Winqvist, 2002) but, even more important, it is experienced in very different ways. These changes also reflect the interrelations between the shifting economy and the policy endowment of states.

Our qualitative research included very different national contexts: Denmark, United Kingdom, Austria, Italy, Portugal, Hungary and Poland. These countries fit quite well to the models the sociological debate has elaborated about the European gender regimes and work-care typologies, even if the construction of these typologies sometimes involves different dimensions. What is more, most of the sociological contributions to the definition of work and care arrangement templates are not able to really include the complex relationship between paid work, unpaid work and care (Lewis, 2002; Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999; Bettio and Plantenga, 2004; Naldini, 2006).

Anyway, selected countries and selected types of couples in each country may quite well represent a rough ordering of these different work-care arrangement models. If we adopt the approach of Gornick and Meyer (2003) and take it seriously - assigning a key role to the institutional policies developed by different European Welfare States - Denmark may stand for the Scandinavian case, representing the social democratic welfare state regime, even though it deviates from the classical Swedish model (Ellingsæter, 1998). The United Kingdom embodies the market oriented Anglo-Saxon model, standing as the liberal

welfare state regime. Austria stands for the continental model, a conservative welfare state regime. Italy and Portugal - with their deep regional diversities, but also their different women's participation rates to the labour market - stand for the familistic model, in a Mediterranean welfare state regime (Ferrera, 2005; Trifiletti, 1999; Naldini, 2006). Finally, Poland and Hungary represent the new members coming from the former state socialist regime. Nevertheless, of course, this modelling was not meant to be absolute, since diversity usually spans across countries areas, social and economical classes as well as cultural orientations.

Pfau-Effinger (1998; 2001; 2005) argues that negotiations in the households and the decisions concerning work are not only an outcome of socio-economic and institutional factors, but are highly dependent on norms, values and practices in the societies. She proposes the term 'gender order' or 'gender arrangement' to describe the complex interaction between cultural and institutional conditions in determining the different work-care models in Europe (Pfau-Effinger, 2004; Haas et al, 2006). It is especially in this respect that we have selected couples also along a cleavage between the two/three prevalent family organization models of work and care. In fact, we tried to select very assorted parenting couples in each of the participating country: dual earners couples, one and a half earner, male breadwinner couples and even single parent households. Above and beyond the mentioned types, it is oftentimes life-cycle adjustments, which usually account for a changing work-family pattern in time, as an effect of both partners' (more frequently the mother's) varying work involvement and career progression. Countries selected in our qualitative research do represent considerable variation in many of the crucial dimensions of our research question: the level of industrialization and tertiarization and the standard of living; the degree to which the husband can earn a

breadwinner family wage; the package of public policies that support maternal employment; the variation in women's full-time and part-time employment rates; and the degree of decommmodification and defamilialization granted by the welfare state.

Nonetheless, at the same time, the classic (Esping-Andersen, 1990; 1999) or modified (Abrahmson, 1999; Ferrera, 2006; Naldini, 2003) welfare regime typologies do not precisely overlap nor are really able to explain the more complex gender ordering (Duncan and Pfau-Effinger, 2000; Pfau Effinger, 2001; 2004; 2005) or the caring regimes that some scholars began to propose for European countries (Anttonen and Sipilä, 1996; Anttonen et al, 2003; Daly and Lewis, 2000; Leitner, 2003; Bettio and Plantenga, 2004; Bettio et al, 2006). In fact, historical path dependency and cultural factors are important intervening variables causing fuzzy sets and complex configurations (Ragin, 2000).

It seems very difficult to obtain the explanation of persistent differences in work-life balance only by adding up (or subtracting) labour market opportunities, policy offers and more or less traditional cultural habits. Something important still escapes these macro analyses. Real and day-to-day reconciliations between work and family life also depend on variable articulated interconnections between types of jobs, kinship care networks, partners' arrangements and schedules. Yet, they depend much more on level of aspirations, on subjective and social constructions of meaning concerning the viable work and care balance in a normal life.

On the other hand, the growing need to recast welfare regimes and societies is obvious and self-evident everywhere, but the main proposals at hand, especially those formulated in terms of a social investment approach, in order to take the right account of family choices and behaviours in the welfare diamond (Esping-Andersen, 2005; Del Boca, 2002)

risk sounding like social engineering. We have to take into account personal reasons to work part- or full-time in diverse periods of life and after important turning point choices, which are not the result of a simple cross tabulation between market opportunities and leave generosity and/or its social legitimation. Therefore, some questions remain unresolved and open to empirical investigation, even if the theoretical frame is actually well defined.

- People in families and families as a whole tend to act strategically in work-life balance.
- They may experience conflicts but most of time, they also show pacified attitudes of full acceptance.
- Families measure their unsatisfied needs with respect to what their welfare system could easily cover, no matter which level of quality and generosity it provides. Therefore there is much more similarity

much less dissatisfaction than expected when policies-in practice are considered bottom-up. Welfare regimes are only a frame within which people make their choices (or non-decisions) depending on complex opportunities and on national cultures of care.

- Employment structures and national working-time regimes are much stricter; therefore, informal solidarity in the workplace and outside becomes more and more an important resource in the balance.
- In fact, nowhere is a work-life balance only based on services: the mix between formal and informal care is always needed and becomes more and more necessary with the growth of work-flexibility.

### 3. THE CONTRIBUTION OF QUALITATIVE AND NARRATIVE APPROACHES.

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We should start by pointing out that work and family research does not always take into account the way people actually live their lives. Mothers and fathers are continuously balancing work and care needs, they are constantly performing identity-oriented activity. As they move through life, they must construct and reconstruct their self-perception in response to an ever-changing articulation of personal, family and work demands. By biographical work we mean here the symbolic process by which individuals achieve this balance by reflexively structuring their experiences and activities. It enables them to orient themselves in practice, while dealing with changing situations as they go through life.

Our task as researchers is simply to try to describe faithfully and respectfully the 'finite province of meaning' into which they introduced us. Therefore, in the framework of the 'Workcare' project, the qualitative workpackage aims at eliciting thick descriptions of personal and family experiences of work and life and their interconnections. This relates the present situation of single individuals coping with work and life balance to a perspective that covers their entire lives and involves all the meanings that respondents refer to their life course's turning points (Chase, 1995). This perspective appears located midway between social structure and the individual as social actor. The construction of meanings by respondents' accounting can offer to researchers useful insights on the micro-mechanisms which in turn may support connections between structural social variables and life courses' turning points. The narrative approach derives such insights from the direct discourses, which naturally emerge during the interviewer-respondent relation as evidence of such interconnection. The key

feature of the narrative approach is then to put in place a process of construction of a view of reality that is carried out jointly by the researcher and the respondent. That is why we agreed with partner teams to make use of a great deal of probing and elicitation techniques (Whyte, 1982; Blanchet, 1997; Johnson and Weller, 2002; Fontana and Frey, 1998): in a sense, this kind of interview offering 'a good listener' works well because in some way it interrupts the daily rule of turn-taking (McCracken, 1988). Even though most people live most of their lives in families, mainstream social research works under the illusion that humans are isolated individuals anchored only within large aggregate groups (Miller, 2000; Mason, 2004).

On the contrary, interviewing couples is a useful way to catch these complex interconnections, and the use of a narrative approach can grant a complete and realistic portrayal of both everyday life and long-term process of reconciling work, care and personal activities. On the other hand, this cognitive interest may hinder an excess of identification: we agree with Silverman (2006) that a true qualitative open-ended interview should avoid the shortcomings both of positivist *and* of emotionalist positions (Oakley, 1981; Finch, 1984; Ribbens, 1989). Therefore, we stressed in the first meeting among national teams the good quality of our long (McCracken, 1988) and active (Holstein and Gubrium, 1988; 1997; 2001) interviews<sup>1</sup>. It has to be

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<sup>1</sup> We even proposed to our national partners to share a sort of a scale of indicators of autonomous reactions and of assuming responsibility, on the part of the interviewees, graded as follows, from a minimum to a maximum (in order to have in common a tool controlling for respondent's activity):

- 'exit', to escape from a question, caused by the uneasiness of a question seen as irrelevant to what

underlined that we decided not adopt the quantitative methodologists' use to codify the mythical limit of duration of interviews around an hour: the more an interview is based on a mechanism of 'extraction of information', on the rigid question/answer reiteration, the more it has to respect a duration limit. It is not by chance that CATI interviews have to be even shorter. However, when an interview is based on a more equalitarian reciprocal communication mood; if the respondent is invited and aided to a narrative accomplishment of performative nature (Kohler Riessman, 1993; Mason, 2004); if his/her space of activity is granted and respected; the more it approximates the normal social interaction between ordinary persons (Rapley, 2007), the more we can glimpse important nexuses. This does not allude to a sort of separated authenticity of the respondent as emotionalists believe or, even less, to a sort of false conscience we can unmask, as positivists often suggest.

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is being discussed, not only as the effect of an interviewer's error (the respondent also resists reformulations or probes);

- ability to softly deal with questions with already pre-structured alternatives, illustrating well the reasons for the choices made;
- directly opposing a probe the interviewer formulated in order to resume the interviewees taking turns out of the question-answer sequence in order to add or specify something (even when the interviewer, satisfied with the response already given, has 'closed' a subject);
- the formulation of 'instructions' for the interviewer, useful for his/her future life (Schwartz e Jacobs 1987, 283);
- the real, non-ritualistic adding of a subject regarding the interview, supplied in answer to the final question 'is there anything you would like to add?' (intended as indication of having reached a sort of implausibility of keeping us on the threshold as regards key aspects constituting the self);
- the formulation of a reflective account of how the interview as a whole went, in the context of a request for an addition; the free choice of an episode of the past illustrating some point the respondent is dealing with;
- the free choice of an episode of the past illustrating some point the respondent has touched in a former phase (Trifiletti, 2004).

Yet, it finds that active subjects can very well describe the world in which their actions are embedded; they do make use of a way of making sense of their world that is the culturally available way of putting their experience in words. Therefore, a sincerely constructivist attitude is not only descriptive but catches

«...how the situated production of talk... what is been... said relates to the experiences and lives being studied... without losing sight of... the circumstances that condition the meaning-making process» (Holstein and Gubrium 1997, 127).

Summing up, it seems important to be aware of a constructionist methodology corresponding to the substantive constructionist nature of the topics to be explored. Our main problem is not so much to avoid selectivity and bias - something we have of course to take care of, in selecting our subjects even if in non-representative samples (Henry, 1990) - but, rather, to grant enough space to the really relevant problems of our respondents to emerge. Even more, a constructionist approach is required because the 'Workcare' project aims at overcoming the 'old-type' logics of comparison based on description of national cases by national experts (Øyen, 1990; Hantrais and Mangen, 1996; Mangen, 1999). This requires a truly reflexive methodology (Kvale, 1989). Such a constructionist-reflexive approach is the more suited to introduce the truly inductive phase of data analysis (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Dey, 1993; Demazière and Dubar, 1997). Yet, a constructionist approach is even more necessary as concerns the research design and the comparative task itself. In fact, in many qualitative mixed-methods projects it has proven very important to share a learning or 'tuning up' phase among partners belonging to different national research cultures (Kröger, 2001; Trifiletti, 2004; Cameron, 2003). Moreover, in a truly qualitative research design, reformulation of the sample or refocusing of the research questions themselves should be always possible.



## **4. RATIONALES OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN, SELECTION OF CASES, SAMPLE CONSTRUCTION AND MAIN RESEARCH TOOLS.**

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### **4.1. RATIONALES OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN**

The main rationale for the qualitative package has been to conduct in-depth interviews about strategies for work and care in a group of representative countries: Italy, Denmark, United Kingdom, Austria, Hungary, Portugal and Poland. These rich, open-ended and context-bound interviews were expected to offer wide and articulated materials in order to glimpse how macro-level changes are affecting the micro-organization of the family and daily life, with particular reference to working and parenting patterns and the gender division of work. Our belief is that only locally, temporarily and situationally-bound narratives can illustrate the wide spectrum of pluralized life courses, their intertwining in families, the individualized approaches to labour markets, their trade-offs and the real concrete effects of policies in the everyday life of families.

The original aim of the research design was to understand, first, what people mean by work and care, how they define their level of aspirations for every task, how they construct their unique world of meanings, how they manage working and mothering or fathering in their households and what room is left for agency in this management. As it is usual when working with biographical materials and life stories (Bertaux, 1981; Bruner, 1987; Denzin, 1989), the expected results have to do both with social structures and with individual agency, both with cultural influences and with daily family, couple and relatives' interactions. However, local knowledge and local practices catch the only layer where both levels are constantly intermingled and ordered in a coherent construction of meaning.

Moreover, the involved levels are always more than two when family negotiations are at stake and qualitative methods are particularly amenable to the study of interaction between family life considered as a whole and series of alternatives in the work realm (Miller, 2000). Qualitative methods are suited to understanding the meanings, interpretations, and subjective experiences of family members in a common horizon of meaning: this because qualitative methods' real object is rather the process by which families create, sustain and discuss their own realities.

### **4.2. THE ORIGINALLY PLANNED SELECTION OF CASES**

The seven research teams agreed that at least 15 interviews in each country would be carried out, transcribed verbatim and integrally translated<sup>2</sup>. Several countries in fact conducted more than 15 and were therefore able to choose among them afterwards in a more targeted way, whereas only few countries have strictly respected this number of cases besides the three pilots<sup>3</sup>. This allowed us to shift - at least in part - from a pre-defined sample to a more gradual definition of the sample structure (Flick, 1998); this, in a sense, approximates theoretical sampling considering and adapting to material

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<sup>2</sup> In approximating the intense interview style we decided to adopt.

<sup>3</sup> In fact, only Hungary performed so strictly and so early the task, that nothing could be any more adjusted. Austria and Portugal, with the same number of interviews, being late in data collection, were able to adjust much more their samples to meanwhile emerged relevance, even if for a limited number of interviews. All other countries could dispose of a larger sample and could have more choices in composing the final sample.

already emerged from the first interviews analysed, even if not so radically as having 'data collection controlled by emerging theory' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). We do not mean here having really adopted the circular process of grounded theory, but only not having discarded some possible improvements, even if not realizing them in a uniform way all over countries.

In principle, households have been selected to cover couple and non couple families, different educational levels (as a proxy for social class) and different ages of children. The sampling frame for each country has taken into account different household types: dual-earner couples, male breadwinner couples - mainly one and a half earner families. In addition, in order to define a sort of limit to possible variations, as a sort of 'deviant', or, better, 'critical' case (Flyvbjerg, 2007; Quinn Patton, 2002<sup>3</sup>) of difficult and extremely demanding work-life balance, we decided to include one-parent households: whenever possible both female and male single parents.

We obtained interviews using direct acquaintances first and then mainly went through a snowball sampling process. Only a minority of single parent interviews have been obtained with the help of social workers aid. In fact, the mainstream typology is articulated with more types: 'dual earner-dual carer', 'dual earner-woman sole or main carer', 'one and a half earner-woman sole or main carer', 'dual half earner/dual half carer', 'dual half earner/woman sole or main carer', 'male breadwinner/woman sole or main carer' (Crompton, 1999; Keuzenkamp et al, 2000; Lewis, 2001). However, obviously before interviewing, we could not fully ascertain each partner's involvement in the carer role. Therefore, for each country, we decided to stick to the simple subdivision based on dual-earners, one and a half earner couples, male breadwinners as well as single parent families. In fact, in the process of analysis, the emerging typology of gender contracts proved more complex

and articulated than the preliminary subdivision. Besides, we also introduced an intervening variable 'work/rich work/poor families', which seemingly involves many other dimensions.

Single parent households, from this point of view, are a key addition in analysing the new risks of contemporary work-life balance, because of the growing number of one-parent families both in the countries where they have been long common and in the ones where the phenomenon is almost anew. Moreover, this polarization does not change their being a surely extreme case of difficult, sometimes heroic reconciliation.

It is also crucial to recognize that the dimension of work-life balance cannot be solely aligned with the distinction among welfare regimes or along the differences in gender order. Daly (2000a), for example, specified further principles completing the typologies regarding work-life balance and gender division of labour: the extent to which the breadwinner model is characteristic of the couple relationship, the types of citizenship specifying the resource-based relations between men and women and the level of familialisation/defamilialisation of the care responsibilities (cf. Saraceno, 2004).

Pascall and Lewis (2004) mapped the European welfare systems and their labour market and social policies in relation to gender equality across a variety of key dimensions characterising the gender order. These dimensions are paid work, care work, income, time use and voice; all of them usually surface in our interviews.

In addition, the concept of familialisation/de-familialisation has been also introduced as the extent to which individual adults can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living independently of family relationships, either through paid work or through social security provisions (Orloff, 1993; Lister, 1997). The context of de-familialisation is crucial to understand the welfare of individuals and families, and to determine

the extent to which social provisions through welfare programmes may have altered the balance of power between men and women and between dependent and non-dependent members of families. Pre-selection of the household cases could not cover these latter dimensions either, which may intervene to specify the nature and degree of work-life balance and gender (in)-equity. In spite of this choice, during the interpretation of interviews' narratives, we have been soundly keen of the dimensions of welfare and de-familialisation.

Independently of other social traits, age - to be more exact, membership in a specific age cohort - can be considered as a structural variable, such as class, gender or ethnicity. We decided to select household cases where partners were born in the period between 1958 and 1986 and were still in their parenting phase with at least one child aged between 5 and 12 years old. The cohort membership derives from the choice to interview parents having a solid experience in caring for children and working, who, on the other hand, have overcome the infancy and pre-school phases so that their parent's life histories would have certainly covered different subsequent phases of the work/child caring experience.

We considered the educational attainment of each partner as a crucial variable to look at. In each country, we interviewed families from upper, medium and lower educational levels. As for other relevant dimensions already quoted, social class could not be so precisely defined in a preliminary way, but the educational level has worked as a good proxy for it. We did not follow, in fact, a precise and scientific definition of class hierarchy, but we did pay attention to collect narratives from families representing the widest variation we were able to catch in each society: our main interest was in analysing work-life balance outcomes, linked to different groups of women and men, positioned differently in economic terms.

We relied at the beginning on a three level rough stratification criterion, which each national team had to define more precisely, in terms of what in their country could be recognized as a low-medium-high standard level, avoiding any reference to more precise income criteria. Anyway, we had subsequently to ask our partners to put the lowest level much lower than they did, due to the deep difference that really low educated respondents had exhibited in Italy. These interviews with lower income/low educated couples were much more difficult to obtain in every country and we could theoretically adjust our final sample, trying to ensure their representation, where the choice among many interviews was open (UK, Poland, Italy) or where the 15 sample had not yet been completed (Portugal, Austria), but unfortunately not everywhere<sup>4</sup>.

Some national research teams (Poland, Portugal) have also selected cases by a distinction between households from urban and rural or semi-rural areas. The reason was that such a difference was considered relevant in the national context, having significant effects on the extent to which commuting facilities and other service availability may exert an influence on times and spaces involved in daily reconciliation of work and care practices. Yet, research teams did not follow a predefined composition of the national sample in this respect: the common aim was to obtain the most heterogeneous group of households possible on the basis of context-bound dimensions of variation.

To give an example, the Italian sample is rather divided between big cities and middle-sized ones, because this has a bigger impact on daily quality of life of families, whereas the 'largely urbanized' country territories of little communities would not have been so different in our case. On the other hand, a real rural

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<sup>4</sup> We tried to compensate this lack, accepting a smaller sample in countries like Hungary where the 15 interviews chosen would have overrepresented high educated people in the sample.

condition would have been limited to exceptional situations in the mountains or isolated areas.

Therefore, data in the following tables and charts cannot be considered to be representative in the sense of an usual social survey, based on quota sampling. We chose to collect them according to the principles of a non-probability purposive sample. In particular, we are perfectly aware that they cannot be considered representative of the single society from which the samples have been drawn, since the national subsamples do not really constitute cases (Ragin and Becker, 1992). Rather, we are aiming at a different kind of generalizability, the one about the nature of a social process (Gobo, 2007). Our goal is, in fact, to collect information that will be illustrative of those social processes that have affected work-life balance arrangements. As we go on to show, there are biases in favour of some kind of social features rather than others.

The whole group of our household cases, if surely not statistically representative, constitutes at least a quite respectable sample. The outcome of the different criteria applied in selecting household cases is that research teams have conducted 196 interviews in 120 households (48 dual-earners couples, 38 one and a half or male breadwinner couples and 34 single parent households) in Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal and United Kingdom. Each research team shared the same kind of methodological tools, even in a space of high flexibility due to national diversities.

The cross-national comparison will be based on the analysis of at least 15 interviews translated in English for each country, approximating the following subdivision:

- 4 dual-earner households (8 interviews)
- 3 one-and-a half earner or male breadwinner (or modified) households (6 interviews)

- 1 single parent household (1 interview)

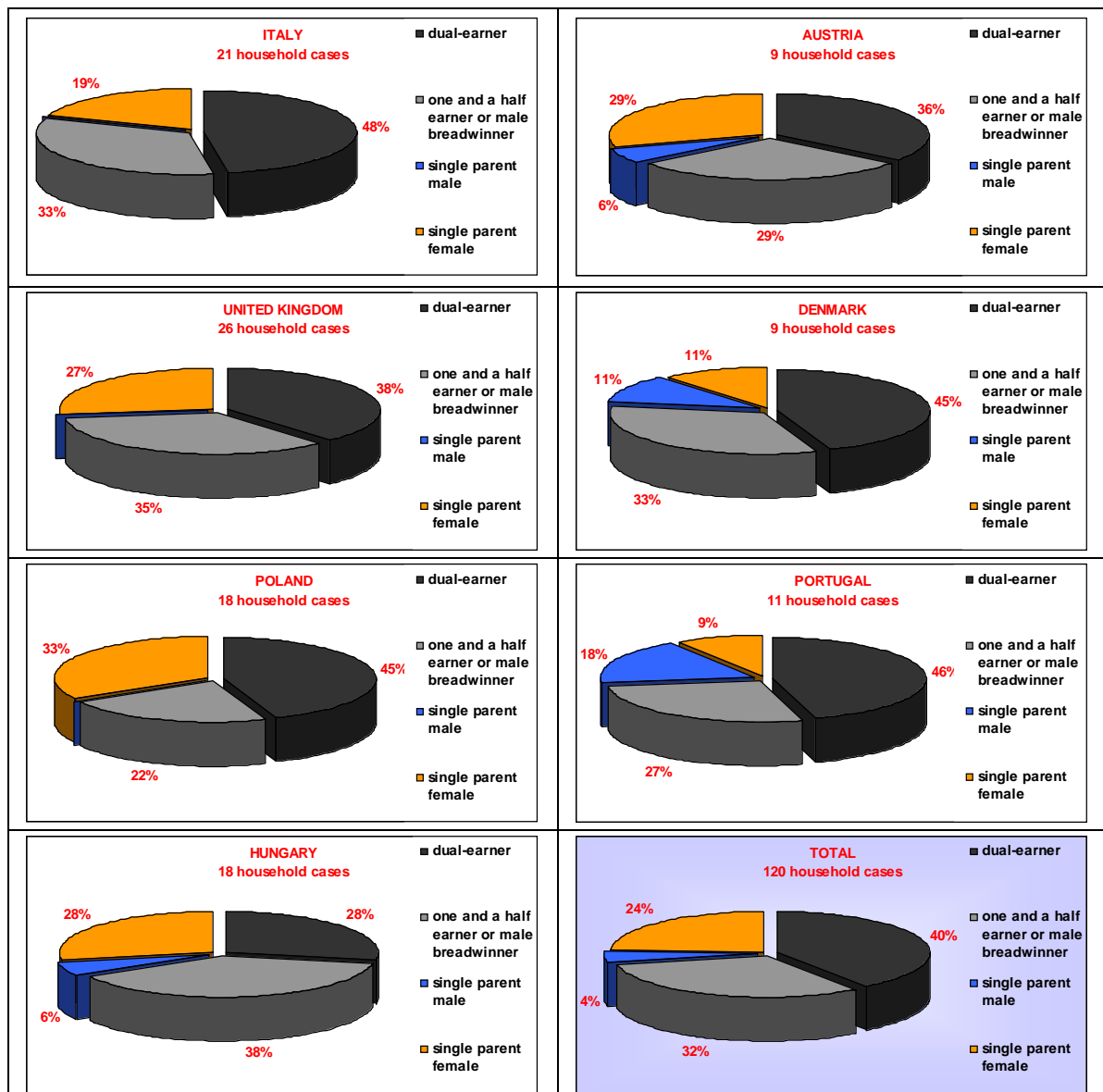
The selective sampling method we adopted is based upon deliberately choosing partners who typify couples and households according to the diverse types of family gender organization, income and educational groupings, cohort membership and location. In some cases, research teams adapted the standard criteria to national household characteristics. Research teams interviewed more respondents than the requested 15, even if they made transcriptions of the extra-set interviews only in their national language. The total group of households cases transcribed in national languages<sup>5</sup> counts 48 dual-earner households, 38 one and a half-earner households and 34 single parent households (29 female single parent and 5 male single parent households).

With respect to the expected distribution, there was an overrepresentation of single parent households. We tried anyway to include 8 or more cases for each country following as much as possible the above criteria of 4 dual-earner, 3 one and a half-earner and 1 single parent household. In the case of Hungary, we included more than 8 cases since there is just one partner interview for each dual-earner or one and a half-earner couple and therefore including an household means to include just one instead of two interviews. While the information in the following tables concerning our cases' features should not be considered as 'hard' data on social structure, significant features observed in the tables will correspond to significant phenomena that actually occur in the wider society. Going back to the overall sample of interviews conducted in each country, we note that Italy, Denmark and Portugal have a higher quota of dual earner cases, while Hungary and Austria have a lower quota.

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<sup>5</sup> Some partners, however, directly transcribed in English from the original registration, which implies a slightly different quality of materials.

**Chart 1.1. Overall set of interviews: distribution of household types by gender contracts in each country (interviews transcribed in the national language).**



Italy and United Kingdom do not have male single parent households, while each country team has selected more female than male single parent households, except Portugal team, which has done the opposite.

This kind of imbalance is related to national tendencies: in Portugal, dual-earners represent the dominant template, while in Austria and Hungary, where finding one and a half-earner couples is more difficult, male breadwinner households are more diffused and we opted for including this traditional model alongside one and a half-earner families.

On the other hand working part-time is much more seldom in Italy, so that the bias

is acceptable (the real bias is, rather, the under-representation of male breadwinner households in this country). There is an overrepresentation concerning single parents - especially female single parent households - both in the totality of selected cases and in cases from Hungary, Poland and Austria.

In Italy female part-time work is not very widespread and male part-time work is irrelevant. We could have directed our

interest toward male breadwinner households. Nonetheless, even if this latter template has a strong appeal - i.e. Italian female employment rate is one of the lowest among EU countries - we preferred to have a significant number of dual-earner cases since situations where both partners are working full-time are complicated through a scarcity of prime age childcare agencies. Furthermore, in Italy there are many mothers working 30-32 hours per week among dual-earners couples and also among our selected set of interviews.

There is an overrepresentation of single parents in the sample - especially female single parent households - both in the totality of selected cases and in cases from Hungary, Poland and Austria.

Both one and a half earner and male breadwinner couples constitute a unique category in our model just because of the fact that in many of these latter cases, the wife may have shifted her position from part-time to being on leave, unemployed or on inactive status. Since our approach tries to reconstruct the successive phases of the couple's life cycle, we have not differentiated the male breadwinner template from one and a half earner model beforehand. Rather, we have tried to catch the distinction from a subjective point of view, through the changes that emerged in the analysis of narratives of the partners' work and family stories. Besides the distribution of this kind of gender contract types among selected household cases, we also tried to compose a general sample as much balanced as possible according to income levels and educational backgrounds of the couples taking part in the research.

We did not establish tight indicators in assessing the couple income level. Apart from the indication of the monthly net income, each research unit gave a general estimation based on local subjective criteria in order to assess the effective economic situation of each couple. Our intention was to remit the income level estimation to each research team according

to the cost of living and national's income averages in each country. Couples with both members having low incomes or with one partner having a low and the other a medium income represent more than 40% of the overall sample. Couples having medium or high/low income - one partner with high and the other with low income - reach roughly 30%. Households where both partners have high incomes or one has medium and the other has a high income represent around 23% of the sample.

There is a slight bias of high-income household cases among United Kingdom and Portuguese respondents, while medium-income households are underrepresented among selected couples from Poland. Low-income cases are higher among the Italian and Polish selected cases. Among our 120 households, 6 have not reported their income level: it is a tiny quota if we think that monthly total income is usually considered a very private matter. This is probably a sign of interviewer-respondent trust developed during the process of intense collaboration in the interview.

Class stratification among selected couples is also linked to their educational level. The selection of couples followed also the criteria of education level attained by partners. In this respect, to decide

**Table 1.1. Overall household cases according to income, educational level, children and use of childcare arrangements of each household couple.**

Country	Dual-earner	One-and-a half earner or male breadwinner	Single parent		Total
			Female	Male	
TOTAL	48	38	29	5	120
<i>Income</i>					
Both high	9	1	5	1	16
High- medium	6	3	0	0	9
Both medium	12	8	9	1	30
High- low	1	9	0	0	10
Medium-low	10	8	3	0	21
Both low	7	8	12	1	28
Not available	3	1	0	2	6
<i>Education</i>					
Both high	18	11	11	3	43
High- medium	15	5	1	1	22
Both medium	8	12	7	0	27
High- low	2	2	0	0	4
Medium-low	3	2	4	1	10
Both low	2	6	6	0	14
<i>Children</i>					
One	21	7	21	2	51
Two	20	21	6	3	50
More than two	7	10	2	0	19
<i>Use of</i>					
Babysitting	18	13	7	2	40
Parents help	25	20	13	3	61
Daycare (age 0-2)	15	8	7	2	32
Childcare (age 3-5/6)	41	38	29	3	111
Mother leave	35	32	19	2	88
Father leave	12	12	3	2	29

(Cases based on interviews transcribed in the national language. Education is computed thanks to ISCED 97 codes: primary education roughly corresponds to codes 1 and 2; secondary to code 3 and tertiary to codes 4, 5 and 6.

whether the level is high, medium or low has been an easier task for researchers, since they had to collect formal indications - tertiary, secondary or primary degrees - whilst where income was considered high, and medium or low was a result of a subjective estimation.

The sample of total cases has an overwhelming majority of partners with tertiary education (65 on 120 cases) and that is due to a relatively young age

(cohort position) of the selected cases. Almost one quarter of the sample is composed of household cases where respondents have medium educational achievement (both partners with secondary education or one partner with tertiary and the other one with primary). Only 24 cases out of 120, concern households where either partners have a primary education or combine a secondary with a primary education. Compared with the general

sample of selected cases, low education cases are underrepresented in samples from Portugal, Austria and Hungary; medium education cases are underrepresented in samples from Portugal, Italy and United Kingdom.

Households with one or two children represent more than 80% of all selected cases. Household with more than two

children are mainly concentrated among one and a half earner couples, while there is no such case among male single parent households.

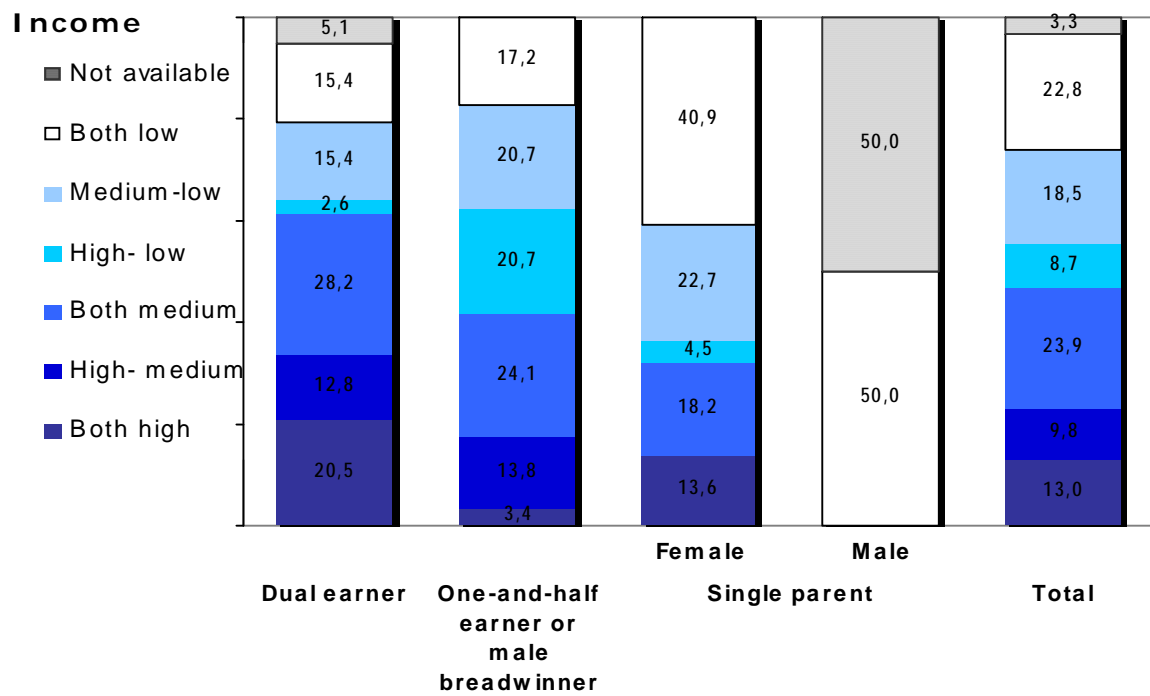
**Table 1.2. Percentage of cases according to income, educational level, children and use of childcare arrangements of each household couple.**

Country	Dual-earner	One-and-a half earner or male breadwinner	Single parent		Total
			Female	Male	
TOTAL	40,0	31,7	24,2	4,2	100,0
<i>Income</i>					
Both high	18,8	2,6	17,2	20,0	13,3
High- medium	12,5	7,9	0,0	0,0	7,5
Both medium	25,0	21,1	31,0	20,0	25,0
High- low	2,1	23,7	0,0	0,0	8,3
Medium-low	20,8	21,1	10,3	0,0	17,5
Both low	14,6	21,1	41,4	20,0	23,3
Not available	6,3	2,6	0,0	40,0	5,0
<i>Education</i>					
Both high	37,5	28,9	37,9	60,0	35,8
High- medium	31,3	13,2	3,4	20,0	18,3
Both medium	16,7	31,6	24,1	0,0	22,5
High- low	4,2	5,3	0,0	0,0	3,3
Medium-low	6,3	5,3	13,8	20,0	8,3
Both low	4,2	15,8	20,7	0,0	11,7
<i>Children</i>					
One	43,8	18,4	72,4	40,0	42,5
Two	41,7	55,3	20,7	60,0	41,7
More than two	14,6	26,3	6,9		15,8
<i>Use of</i>					
Babysitting	37,5	34,2	24,1	40,0	33,3
Parents help	52,1	52,6	44,8	60,0	50,8
Daycare (age 0-2)	31,3	21,1	24,1	40,0	26,7
Childcare (age 3-5/6)	85,4	100,0	100,0	60,0	92,5
Mother leave	72,9	84,2	65,5	40,0	73,3
Father leave	25,0	31,6	10,3	40,0	24,2

(Cases based on interviews transcribed in the national language).

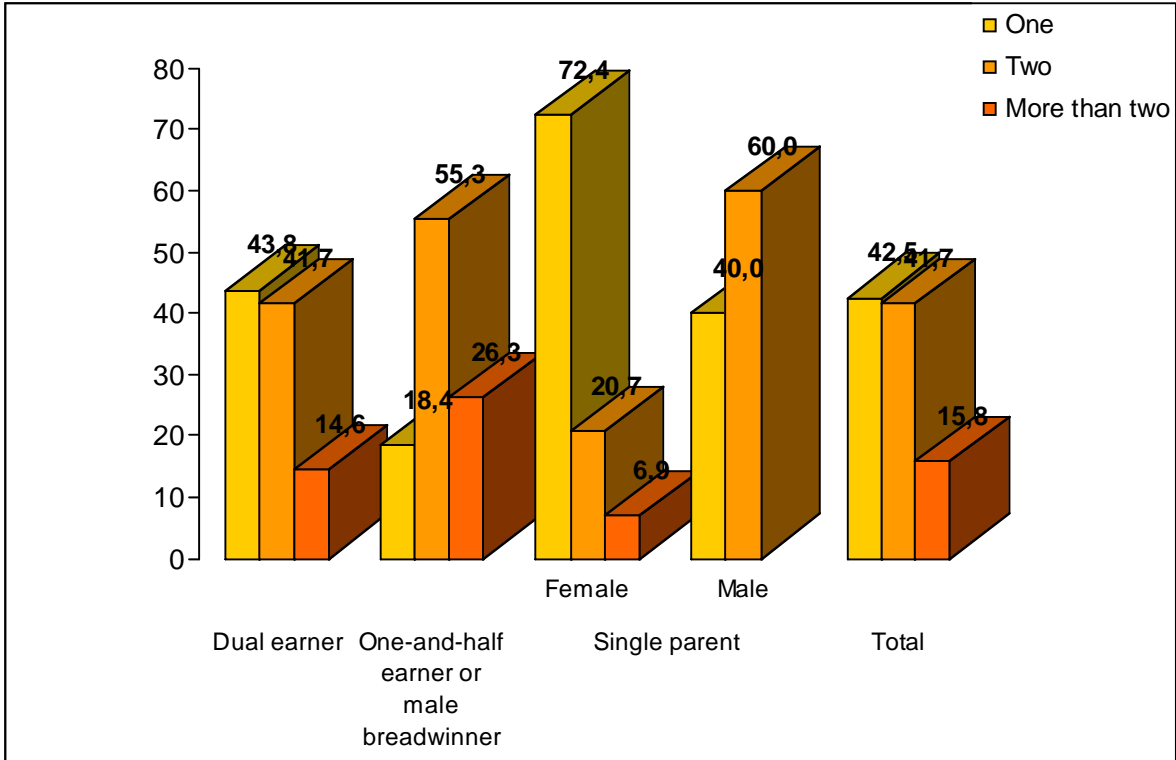


**Chart 1.2. Percentage of household cases according to income level and type of household.**



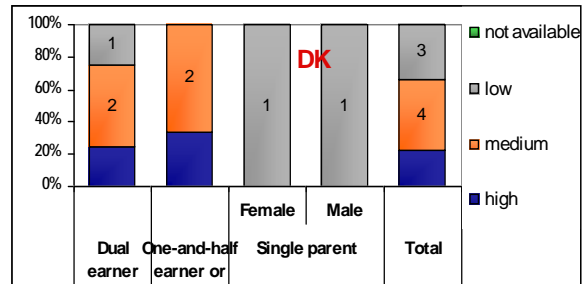
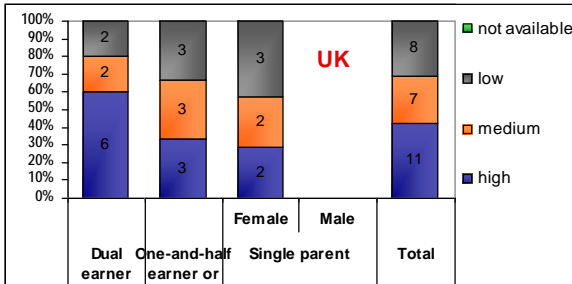
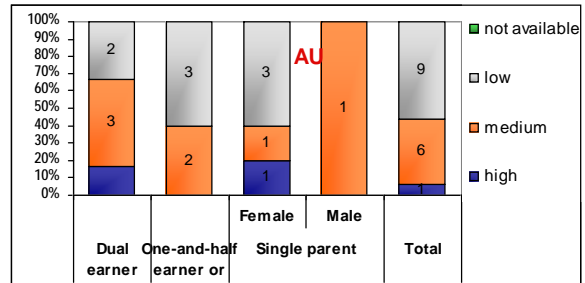
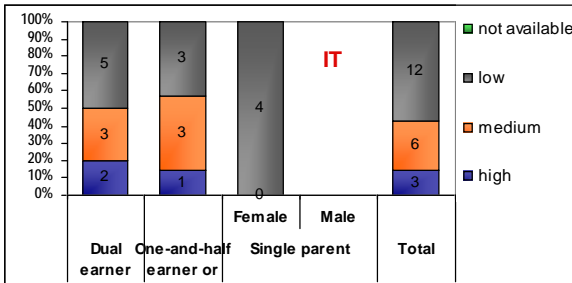
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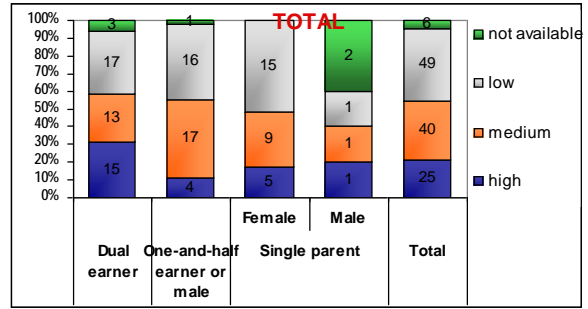
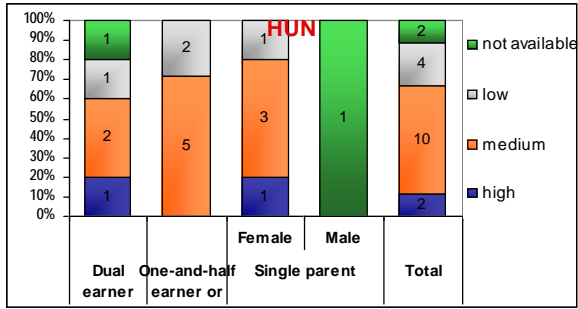
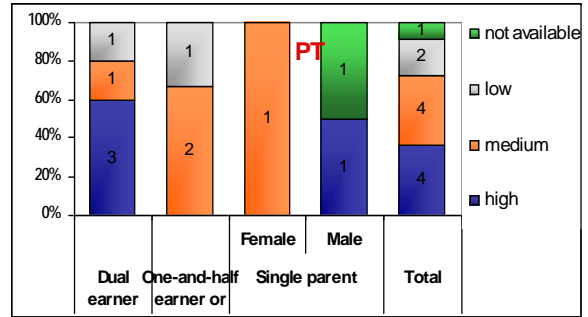
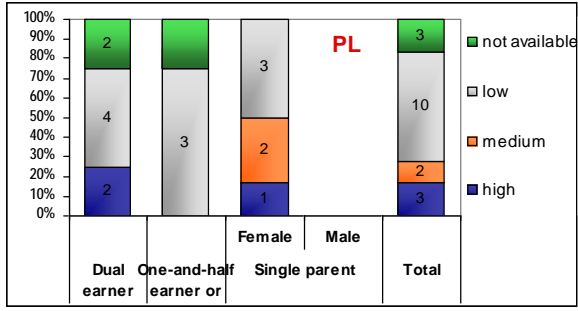
**Chart 1.3. Percentage of household cases according to the number of children in the household.**



(Cases based on interviews transcribed in the national language).

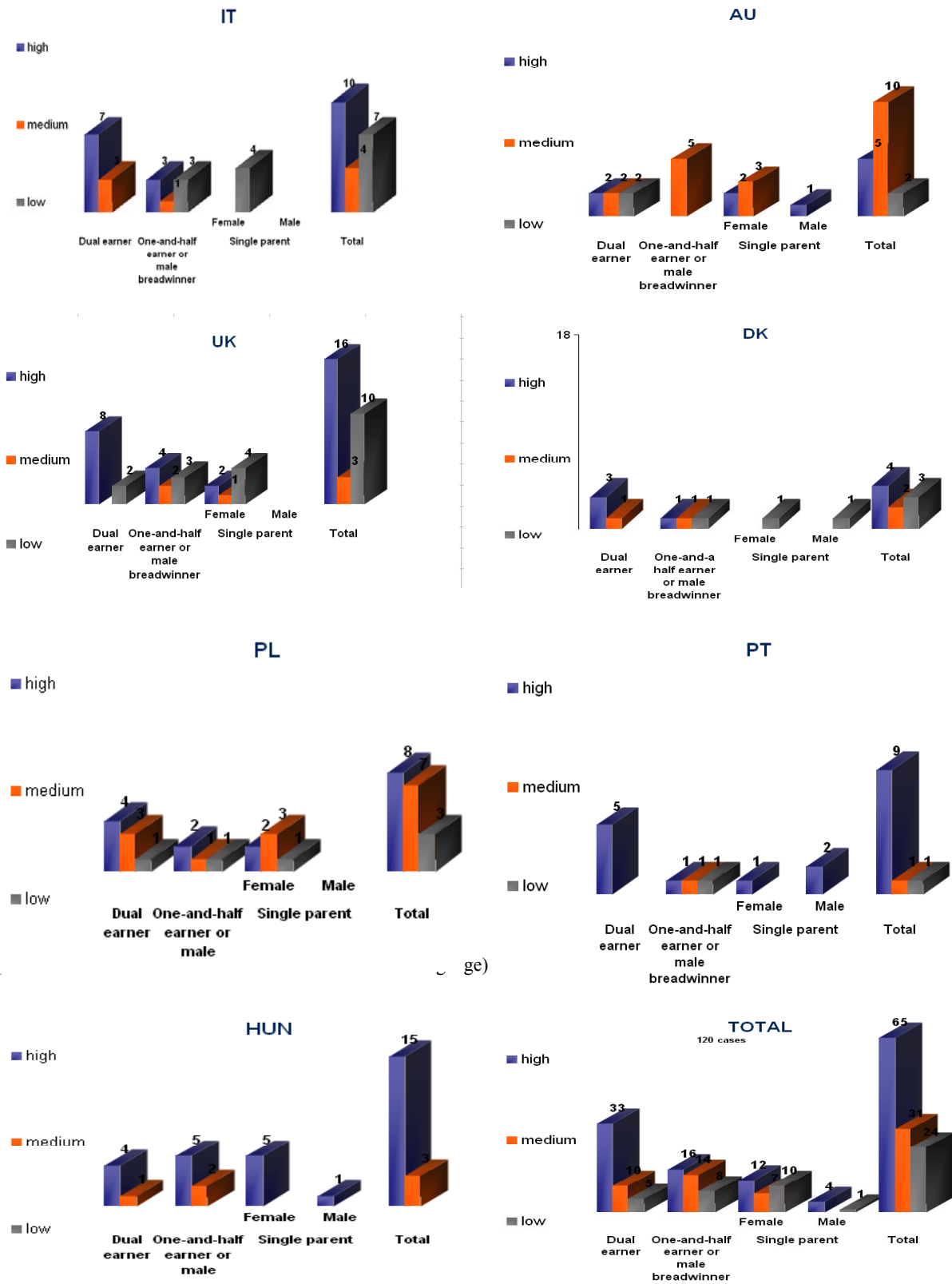
**Chart 1.4. Percentage of household cases according to income and type of household in the 7 countries' samples.**





(Cases based on interviews transcribed in the national language).

**Chart 1.5 Percentage of household cases according to educational level and type of household in the 7 countries' samples.**



### 4.3. THE FINAL SAMPLE OF CASES TO WHICH THE COMPUTER-ASSISTED ANALYSIS WAS APPLIED

As already mentioned, thanks to the larger numbers in some national samples or to the different speed of data collection, we tried to approximate some features of a purposive and maximum variation sample (Gobo, 2007; Quinn Patton, 2002<sup>3</sup>). We allowed, for instance, the largest possible

number of low educated respondents in the countries where this was possible because of a margin of choice available or where some interviews were still to be collected.

This seemed of paramount importance because we had noticed in these kind of couples a very different way of passively accepting instead of governing the work-life balance and a very different style of parenting.

**Table 1.3. Overall respondents and household cases selected for the computer-assisted analysis.**

Country	Dual earner	One-and-a half earner or male breadwinner	Single parent		Total respondents	Total households
			Female	Male		
Austria	4	3	1	1	16	9
Poland	5	3	1	0	17	9
Portugal	5	2	1	1	16	9
Italy	4	3	2	0	16	9
Hungary	4	4	2	1	13	11
Denmark	4	3	1	1	16	9
United Kingdom	4	4	1	0	17	9
Total	30	22	9	4	111	65

**Chart 1.6. Overall household cases selected for the computer-assisted analysis. Income levels according to type of households.**

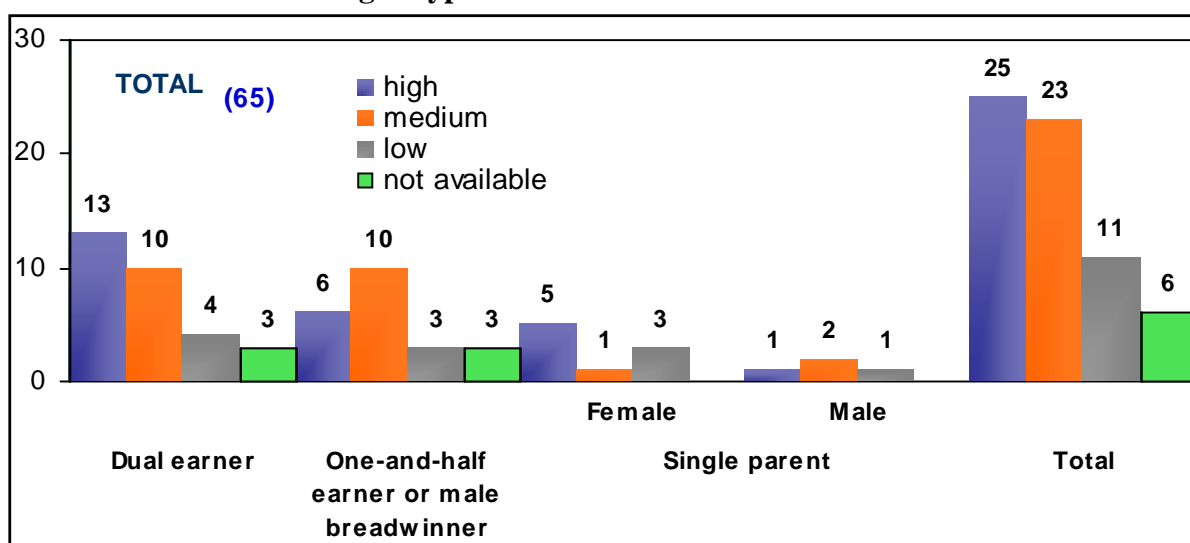
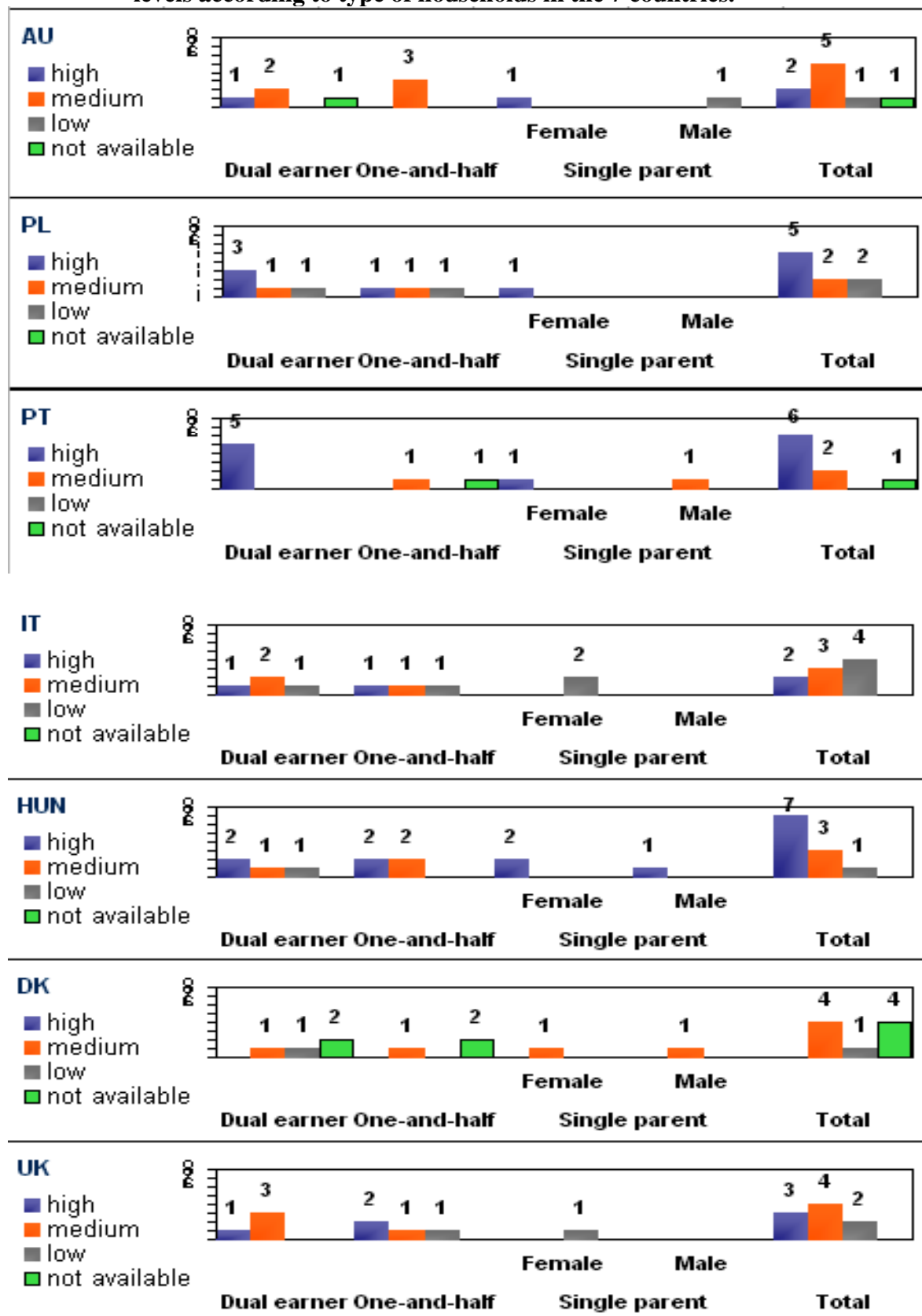


Chart 1.7. Overall household cases selected for the computer-assisted analysis. Income levels according to type of households in the 7 countries.



Most national cases were in fact in some sense mixed. The only country, which still has a strong bias towards high-educated respondents was Hungary. Therefore we decided to reduce a bit its weight in the final sample (of translated transcripts to be coded), a decision which may be justified also in terms of a smaller population compared to other countries.

The remaining Hungarian interviews which are not part of the final sample to be processed by N.vivo, will be part of another set in N.vivo collecting for different analytic purposes all the single parents interviewed; the same will be realized for other single parent interviews in other countries (UK, Austria, Italy, Poland). The proof that educational levels are a reliable enough proxy for social class may be seen in chart 1.7., where the final sample to be processed by N.Vivo are much more equilibrated than some national samples, even if a bias towards medium-high levels is still to be seen.

#### **4.4. METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES AND INTERVIEW TOOLS**

Research teams used a uniform set of tools for conducting and analysing interviews.

- Interview guide
- Helping network leaflet
- Checklist of objective data
- Synopses of each case

##### **The Interview guide**

The interview guide has been defined thanks to discussions and debates

occurred along a process where all teams were participating by choosing the main themes and subjects to be dealt with. Starting from the first pilot interviews, each country team tried to homogenize the type of interview situation to be aimed at, and at the same time adopting a non-directive interview guide.

From our first pilot experiments and going on towards real interviews, we noticed a growing level of homogeneity in the approach followed during the interviews (contents, probing, follow-up questions, emerging narratives, feedbacks). Nonetheless, the cultural differences among countries still play an important role in determining the type of interviewer-respondent dialogue: Danish interviews are for instance more concise, but less content full. Polish interviews may have longer diviations, dealing with subjects outside our central interest, but, on the other hand, open a real perspective on the everyday life of men and women coping with work-care balance and conflict. Yet, Italian interviews show sensible differences between men and women's loquacity and involvement.

Respondent's experiences about work and family life stand as the most revealing expression for our analyses. Furthermore, when it is part of a confrontation with the social context and with other respondent situations, interview accounts reveal similarities and differences useful to recognize the influence of macro variables such as gender, class, education, occupational status, work content and timetable, welfare provisions, etc..

We should never forget that interviewer and respondent co-construct an account of the past 'from the present' (Kohli, 1978; Fischer, 1987). Respondents felt free to open flashbacks at any moment

and we agreed to follow his/her relevance system in this too, when and where they spontaneously made a link to other biographical strands, we had to follow them.

On the other hand, we decided to prefer finely crafted questions against a mere list of themes and key words. This has clearly nothing to do with the total liberty and ease of the interviewer in not using any of the pre-formulated questions, having in many senses to 'work' with them, continuously adapting them to the effective interaction (Rapley, 2007) and being entirely free to word them in the most appropriate conversational style (Quinn Patton, 2002<sup>3</sup>). Nor it has especially to do with the problem of being sure of having dealt with a good number of foreseen themes. Actually, once we defined an interview guide as a simple support to interviewers in following the narrative performance of the respondent, we used it like an InterView (Kvale 1996) guide, in a flexible way so that it could be adapted to respondent and to each different language. Hence, in a number of cases it has been possible to formulate the same question in a different way.

Of course, the choice of research subjects, pre-existing concepts and the current issues of academic debate have moulded even our non-directive set of interview prompts. However, these suggestions have been transferred into the interview guide according to a very discursive and ordinary use of language, detached from the academic vocabulary and influenced by the possibility of changing the wording of the question-sentence simultaneously into the contextual style of the developing interview.

Having the two respondents of the couple interviewed at the same time was

the other crucial choice we decided to adopt. There is, in fact a danger to change the nature of the in-depth active (face-to-face) interview if the other respondent was allowed to interfere. Therefore, interviewing two partners separately, by two interviewers, but at the same time, in two separate rooms, granted for each member of the couple a narrative flow where the interviewer-respondent's relation is not altered by a third presence and can freely proceed as a very personal and subjective construction of her/his world of meanings.

This kind of approach is not a mere preference: after some pilots conducted in co-presence, we definitely avoided interviewing two partners at once. A large number of interviews have thus been conducted with one partner while the other one was interviewed at the same time, but by a second interviewer and in a different household room<sup>6</sup>. This approach proved to have several qualities.

- 1) Following this choice, both narratives - the wife's and the husband's one - represent a personal, individual and very specific account of the gains and costs of any particular aspects deriving from the daily reconciliation of family and work realms.
- 2) Husband and wife feel free from any indirect influence from the presence of the other partner, not only in the sense of having to negotiate their narratives, but also in more subtle ways. (It is not so

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<sup>6</sup> Having sometimes - as an exception due to partners' work requirements - the two interviews in different places or even after a couple of days did not involve serious damages of the interaction.



much a problem of detecting contradictions as, rather to allow each partner constructing his/her specific form of coherence).

- 3) They do not have to take into consideration the other partner's presence during their reasoning around the two sides of work and life arrangement - the female one and the male one - and may tell unshared or never fully explicit feelings.

Being at home has made respondents more at ease with intimate and personal matters. At the same time, this has induced interviewers to produce a serious effort to talk about workplace issues, which were obviously felt as more distant in time and space from the interview context. In fact, we noticed that if an interview was conducted in the family household, then family issues became the central subject. Vice versa, interviews conducted at workplace or in office rooms at university had the counter effect of putting the work centre stage. Anyway, family households, rather than workplaces or university rooms, made respondents feel more comfortable, even if children sometimes interfered (but this has been generally a minor problem). Many interviews have been conducted in a positive atmosphere.

Interviewers showed interest and respect for participants as individuals, and tried to show understanding and closeness to their point of view, but, above all, a willingness to sit quietly and listen. Interviewers have always tried to use an informal approach so that respondents could feel they were telling the past, the present and the future of their work-life equilibrium in a free and friendly situation. This has helped to

give the idea that our research was not a quick, depersonalizing, statistical survey.

Once identified a participant willing to be interviewed, we agreed a sort of 'informal biographical pact' before beginning the interview (Bichi, 2002). Beforehand we agreed explicitly on the clear ground rules for the interview itself and gave all possible clarification about the uses of information arising from it. Participants who were going to be interviewed had a clear idea as to the amount of time they would be devoting to the interviews and about the uses to which their materials would have been put in the subsequent analysis and publication. We never omitted to confirm that the respondent's identity had to remain confidential and that we would make use of pseudonyms. Furthermore, at the onset of the interview we explained the goals and purposes of the research as comprehensively as possible. In our case, the very usual explanation about the research aims was deliberately long and detailed, framing a conversational situation in which the interviewer promised to speak and explain diffusely when requested and begun to introduce some possible interview topics. In fact, this premise has been often adapted to the personal characteristics of the respondent and never skipped.

The duration of interviews was on average 1 and half hours ranging from the minimum of 1 hour to a maximum of 2 and half hours in length. As a result of our methodological choice, such a long duration was possible when respondent started enjoying and getting involved in the process of acting out part of their private life. The respondent, in such a case, is not someone just replying to fixed questions; rather he or she is someone who tells a series of stories

regarding his/her work, family and personal biography, having a sort of interest in their general coherence (Holstein and Gubrium, 1988; 1997).

The interviewer is just a helper, someone intervening as little as possible, when the narrative flow needs to be reactivated or to be connected with what was already told. In principle, questions and suggestions do not have a predefined sequence; they rather have to fit with the emerging narrative plot.

When adopting a non-directive conduct of the interview, the starting point - 'consigne de départ' - becomes, if possible, even more important in "proposing the plot" of the subsequent conversation (Bertaux, 1980; Bichi, 2002). It is usually advisable to begin collecting biographical materials (life-story, rather than life-history materials in our case) with a sort of very open-ended, projective tool signifying in a direct way to the respondent his/her full responsibility for the overall quality of the performance and the real tuning up of the interview to the research aims. This is clearly connected to a constant manifestation of the researcher's authentic interest in a complex and unique point of view (in the whole life of the respondent) for which the respondent itself is celebrated throughout the interaction as the sole responsible unique judge of what is relevant and necessary to tell about. This underlines our clear preference for the active interview among all subtypes of in-depth interviews (Holstein and Gubrium 1995<sup>2</sup>, 1997).

Anyway, in this case, and having to do with 'different national cultures of interviewing' we postponed our real projective tool after a few initial questions beginning with a more cautious request to the respondent of

introducing his/her own family. A way of opening up the interview by something a-problematic and really not conditioning: it was clear that the household components to be mentioned and the idea of family of the respondent should in no case be framed or suggested by the interviewer, not only in order to leave maximum space to cultural diversities. In this way the personal image of the respondent is left as entirely free, in a wide space of agency. The opening question points out this.

In general, we let our respondents insert their flashback where they felt it more relevant, from the very beginning. They usually began when dealing with the story we elicited about work life balance of the couple (question b.1.). It was designed so that they could move up and down in time and space all the time, except for two more precise but open-ended questions we expressly inserted early in the interview guide (b.2. '*When thinking about having a child, did you ever feel anxious about balancing work and care responsibilities?*' and b.3. '*Who helped you during the first months of childrearing?*'). These two questions at the very start had exactly the symbolic function of signalling that it was possible to freely shift at any time between present and past, instead of being referred to a precise time structure. Another 6 questions were recommended in a certain position in the interview guide in order to keep a sort of very soft ordering: all the other ones could be posed at any time in the interview, provided that they did not interrupt the 'natural' flow of the conversation and especially not a story being told. This way, even if our interviews are surely not so rigorously non interventionist, in their first part as a truly biographical-narrative interview (Schütze, 1992), so

that they cannot really be sequentialized (Denzin, 1970; Plummer, 1991; Rosenwald and Ochberg, 1992; Rosenthal, 2007), some freedom in the going back and forth in life periods was anyway granted to our respondents. Every interview we conducted is inevitably structured to some extent by a time progression, in large part proposed by the respondent. Telling about one's diverse passages through work and care combinations means telling about the constraints and opportunities that were available in the past and how one dealt with these - circumventing obstacles or being thwarted by them, taking advantage of, or missing opportunities, re-reading *ex-post* all this in a unique strategy (Wallace, 2002; Tobio and Trifiletti, 2003).

The subjects covered by the interview guide were developed in a very flexible progression. Rather than having a succession of theoretical interests, the aim was to dispose subjects along areas that could be helpful for the interviewer stimulation of a narrative of personal experience. The latter ranged from parenting to gainful employment; from being a partner in a couple to network's relations with welfare services or family resources; from alternating parent leaves and the use of babysitters to being active through a reciprocal network of social help; from giving priority to job and career requirements to spending time and energies in educating the children. The interview guide thus contains a flexible set of subjects the respondent is stimulated to cover freely during the narrative. Rather than being limited to the slice of individual's situation located at present, the focus of interest is upon people's complete lives or, at the very least, upon a significant portion of people's lives ranging from

the moments preceding the formation of the couple up to now and the plans and worries about the family future.

Furthermore, the list of subjects in the interview guide works a sort of tool the interviewers use to look at during interview to be sure not to skip or miss some important themes to deal with.

The Austrian research team developed a helpful guiding map, an aide-mémoire to support visually the interviewer's ability to cope with different subjects, which usually are key focuses of the respondent's work-life balance history. It helps in following the respondent narrative without producing too many interruptions so that interviewer is sure, at the same time, to cover the main arguments or may suggest which additional inputs have to be introduced at the end of the interview (see chart 1.8.). Most of the subjects have usually been covered simply adopting the relevance system the respondent feels and develops. Sequential phases exist just in order to be able to care for the flow in the worst hypothesis of a non responsive respondent (Adler and Adler, 2002) but, of course most of the questions/themes had to be adjusted to the specific person the respondent gradually revealed and put on stage.

An area, named 'the story' deals with the reconstruction of work and family history, especially from the first childbirth up to now. When talking about their 'story', respondents tell about the ways they have been managing to adapt themselves to the varying needs of work and care realms or the ways they have succeeded in combining their choices in one realm with the needs coming from the other.

The '[description of present work-care organization](#)' is an area where interviewer has to ask for inducing

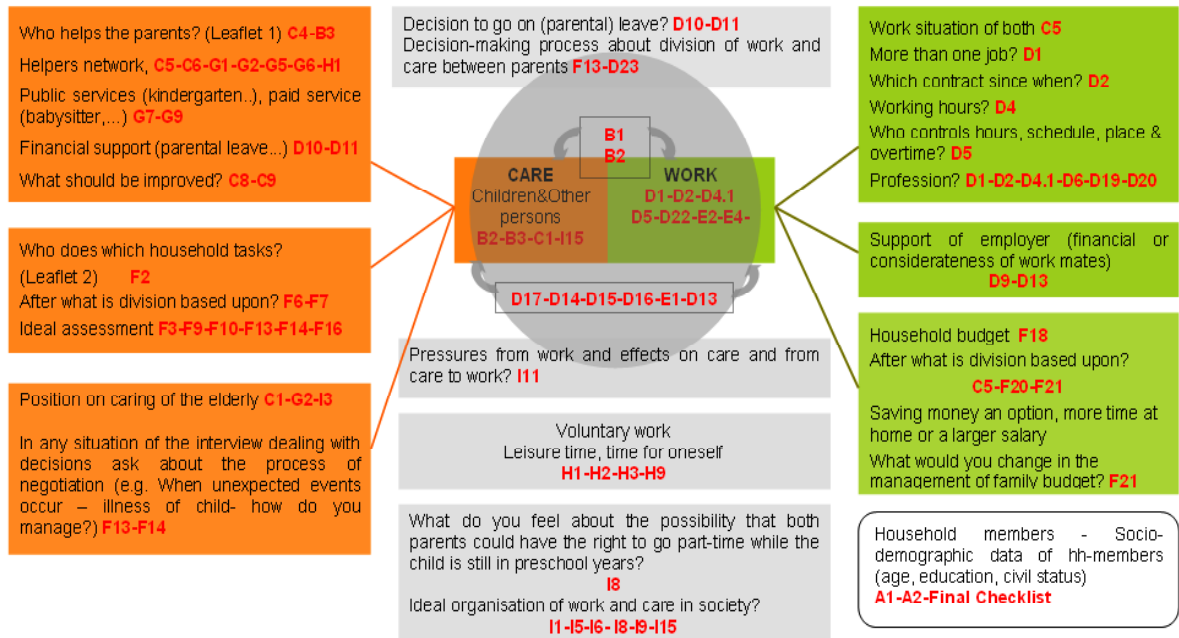
narratives about several types of combinations. Here interaction is about the ways children or other relatives are cared for, about the services for families, market and public structures the respondent use to refer to (see below Helping network leaflet). Questions and following narratives shape the story of how helping networks may take part in performing caring tasks; how daily caring activities and arrangements interweave together; how a typical day in a normal week is organized between work and family times.

## Chart 1.8. Aide-mémoire for the interview

### Guide of principal topics.

Organisation of work and care (of children and other persons). Four levels are important:

1. Narration about the organisation of work and care since the birth of the first child
2. Assessment of the ideal organisation of work and care
3. Factors preventing someone from the ideal organisation of work and care
4. Practical features of network



The interviewer task is to introduce issues on whether the daily work and care organisation represents the ideal set or rather there are gaps and unsatisfactory arrangements the respondents would like to change. The capability approach has surfaced, since narratives include the description of whether, when and how respondents feel able to make changes and organise things in the way they want. We get conscious of the varying situations, which parents have to cope with day by day, since work, school and leisure activities or childcare centres, helping grandparents, and babysitters may have varying schedules and timetables. Therefore, respondents also used to describe chaotic and messy days.

A revealing subject deals with gainful employment. Respondents describe their working activities. Reports not only cover what the actors' job means, but also what it consists of. We called this subject 'family-friendly

work?', because the implicit expectation is to collect narratives about how feasible is the equilibrium of the respondent's professional activities with family and care requirements. The interview guide contains also several inputs directed to obtain specific accounts of the working day activities: interviewer can relate with respondent's representation of the type of job the latter performs. Respondents' descriptions usually deal with the hours worked per day and per week, with the flexibility or rigidity of timetables, with work contents and organisation, with relations with co-workers' at workplace and with employers' attitude towards parenthood. Respondents also spontaneously depict more often than not the way they have been managing work requirements during the most intense period of parenting, when children were more time demanding.

We included matters covering choices and practices of parental leaves. Respondents usually show a deep sensitivity to the subject, by talking about the eventual consequences of family constraints on career and workplace, about the likeliness of managing family tasks from the workplace, about unexpected work obligations pressuring up on respondent's family time, about the possibilities or restrictions that drive people taking work home (or even taking 'home' to work with them). In addition, the narrative focus here relies on the meanings and importance parents attach to their job: to gather this relevance and to link it to other aspects of family-life such as full mothering attitude or for example very caring fathering, narratives usually concentrate on the crucial dimensions of work-life balance.

The dimension of man and woman professional careers alongside with their life-cycle courses stands as a focal aspect that respondents may describe during their reporting. The subject 'Work history of the man and the woman' cover descriptions of work progressions, with choices, opportunities, failures, unemployment periods, crucial decisions about studies and career, often having the family history in the background of the picture. Descriptions of the present job are important at least as much as career and mobility in the labour market. The interview guide provides indications that allow listening to narratives enlightening about 'household and children'. Opening questions unlock the space to a voyage into the domestic and private sphere of life where respondents normally ground the sense of being part of a family. Detailed accounts of the parents' habits in doing household tasks, in caring for children in the ordinary weeks as well as when the latter are sick, in taking and

fetching them at school and in the other parenting activities are at fore when interview goes to be focused on domestic and family life.

Interviewers try to inspire partners in recounting whether they have fair division of family tasks and in giving descriptions about the contents of disagreements and quarrels that may arise in a normal couple relationship. Models of education, family free and leisure times, couples free time activities are also part of the subject. Here parents also produce detailed and rich narratives concerning regular daily fixed couple and family meetings such as having breakfast, lunch or dinner together.

The management of the household budget was another central issue allowing partners to discuss the ways gender stands in the allocation of money. This kind of issue, we presume, had a reinforcing impact on the type of gender contract in the couple. Furthermore, respondents can also reveal the household's economic well being. In the topic subject of 'Helpers network' the respondent normally deals with frameworks and dynamics characterizing the family relationships with institutional support and paid services, but also with informal helpers such as others parents, grandparents, relative, friend or neighbours. Interviews also contain people feelings and emotions regarding social quality. The intention was to encourage people to give extensive room to individual and familial accounts about what social quality should mean in the every day life, indicating gaps resulting from the ideal-actual confrontation, but also tangible and intangible social assets people do not want to lose.

Respondents may add descriptions on their 'ideal work-care organization' where they discussed and commented ideas about the public intervention in

family issues, gender equity and work life balance. Narratives that husbands and wives produced dealing with the opportunities and constraints they normally face in the field of public social services contribute to enrich the complexity referred to the reciprocal influence of macro and micro structures of the social actions. 'Life outside family and work: leisure time' is a subject through which respondents were invited to describe all the activities and habits that do not directly concern family and work life. We included this subject since we assume that many descriptions of the capabilities and opportunities to improve the social quality of the European citizens can be investigated only when understanding the realms of labour market, social security, access to healthcare and other social services, public welfare structures as well as structures for sport activities and other various individual interests.

Summing up, the method we have chosen is fundamentally based upon the ongoing development of the respondent's viewpoint during the telling of his/her life story focused on work-life balance subjects. Understanding the individual's unique and changing perspective, as it is mediated by context, is the focus prevailing on merely questions of fact (even if, of course, objective data were also collected). That is the reason why we opted for an interview guide that is really non directive in the plot sequences. The idea was to have an interview context where the two together - the interviewer and the respondent - are collaborators, composing and constructing a story the teller can be pleased with. As collaborator in an open-ended process, the interviewer is never really in control of the story and of the narratives actually told (Atkinson, 1998). Certainly, as we have seen with

the guiding map, interviewers have tried to check that the narratives were going to cover all the main subjects the research deals with. Nonetheless, it was a latent control, formally hidden during the narrative process and coming out just when the story needed to recommence after a pause or the end of a subject. From time to time, of course, we could tactfully also probe more deeply or even express distance from some of the respondent's opinions or assertions, but the goals of these challenges to the respondents' stance were not, however, to push them toward an ideal narrative flow, but rather to clarify anomalies or to advance the interview.

Anyway, we normally tend to explore how macro-levels changes affect the micro-level organization of daily life, with particular reference to working patterns and gender and family realms. Nevertheless, we rarely recognise that parenting couples have a very complex way to evaluate the provisions of a welfare system. If it is not rare to listen to their quick and simplified assessment of welfare services, their complicated daily reconciliation and long-term work-life equilibrium make welfare resources a fragmented puzzle of situations rather than a whole unambiguous available body of services. In a phase when EU social policy is expanding into new areas, extending its efforts by developing a number of policies concerned with reconciling paid work and family life - an area previously considered outside of its remit - the picture from couples' interviews speaks for volatile and continuously reshaping demands for specific and locally situated offers. In real life narratives, men and women use to report the varying needs in child care, flexible working schedules, services and structures for elderly relatives as

well as changing needs in commuting, shopping or leisure times.

At first glance, information from interviews may add too many layers of complexity to a schematic general picture of what people desire as ideal work-life arrangements, because of such an intricate series of connections among work, family, personal and social realms. But it has the advantage to make the research enter into the more precise definitions of what work, family, personal and social realms really means for respondents. When respondents look back at their stories of work and life balance or reflect on their future work-care arrangements, they usually adopt a basic framework into which they freely insert their memories and expectations - entering the labour market, starting a couple relationship, accepting motherhood and fatherhood, building their home organization and domestic settlement, obtaining job advancements, career progressions, career breaks or better adaptation to workplace requirements and so forth.

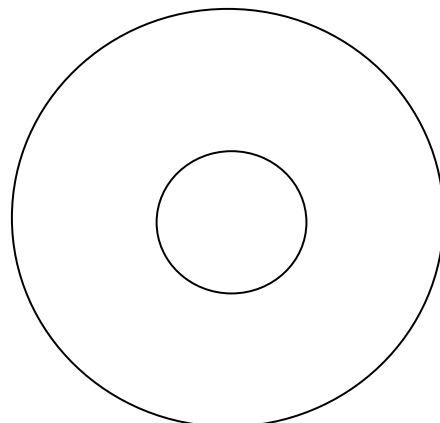
However, not only do people have several possibilities to go back to their childhood and youngest periods in case they feel the need to recount about diverse backgrounds of their origins (education, social and cultural capital, models of education or whatsoever); in addition they can choose their own personal meanings of how the family future is viewed according to the present. Present activities concerning work and care arrangement, job prospects, gender division of family tasks can be seen as formed as much by the anticipation of the future as it is by the experience of the past. When respondents were giving long discursive accounts, we were willing to listen to the whole narrative even if they seemed to be drifting off the subject of the interview. The risk is always present that if one stops a story

because one thinks it is irrelevant, one will cut off not just that one, but a whole series of subsequent offers of information which will be relevant. The aim of this method is to elicit and maintain a narrative by the respondent. Narrative of experiences gives the chance to glimpse some of the motives and interpretations guiding the actions of the respondent.

### **Helping network leaflet.**

The respondent's personal reconstruction of his/her social networks deriving from work, family, kin, friends and neighbours contexts is a key subject in a research covering work and care conciliation at present and over the life-course. In order to facilitate this kind of description, researchers used a 'Helping network leaflet' during the interview. It is a moment of the interview stimulating the respondent autonomous reconstruction of the social network involved in the family daily arrangement of caring activities. Interviewers submit a leaflet with growing circles starting from a centre (the core members' engagement) and going outward. The inner circle symbolizes people (or services) helping on a daily or almost daily basis and the outer one people (or services) who can be mobilized more seldom. Out of this latter ideally are located people who only very seldom appear to help.

### **Chart 1.9. The circles of the helping network.**







Anyway, what is interesting is that each respondent has a personal and specific way to dispose his/her next-of-relation in the social space, connecting meanings about availability and reliability to them: a sort of plot with reference to which s/he will tell and discuss about work-care arrangements with the researcher. Furthermore, the network circles also facilitate consolidation and inspire the narrative of correlated social meanings in the forthcoming parts of the interview. We can say it is a system of interactions, which gradually and spontaneously grows during the interviews and which allows the respondent to compose his or her system of relationships without feeling pressed to give an immediate and too schematic framework. Therefore, this tool reveals being a sort of interactional regulator, more than a mere tool to draw just a map: interviewer and respondent share afterwards a simple mental image, may refer to it, to add details or complications or may 'finish the picture' as the interview goes on.

### **Checklist of objective data**

We have deliberately avoided short objective questions at the beginning of the interview (education, age and so on), since they tend to 'freeze' interaction. We preferred to recover any unsaid information of this kind at the end of the interview, in a specific checklist where to collect all the relevant objective data.

We intended the use of checklist in order to separate the collection of

objective data from the narrative parts of the interview based on a continuous and uninterrupted flow from respondents, but we also meant it as a sort of hidden control question. It is only a very quick check of things already known, but while interviewer fills in what has already surfaced it is possible to ask more details and also to introduce the direct question about income. During the process of selecting household cases, research teams controlled that these latter were fitting to the expected general criteria of type of household income and educational level.

Anyway, once the interviewed was at the ending point, interviewers had the opportunity to get more objective data, both to check the criteria on the basis of which cases fill one category or another and to collect other, now more neutral type of information: these latter will be treated as quantitative attributes of cases. Besides the figures concerning income and education levels of each partner, the checklist questions allow to collect or confirm data dealing with respondent's and partner's age, respondent's profession and occupational status, professional careers and other sources of income, numbers and kinship relation of other household members 'living under the same roof' and further information about people cared for. This kind of objective data do not any more alter the narrative approach developed during the interviews and are indeed very helpful during the subsequent coding and analysing processes because of the socio-economic framework they reports.

**Table 1.4. The predefined questions from the checklist (see also appendix).**

**Final checklist**

Now just let me check if I have missed something about you or your partner.....

Respondent's year of birth...|||

Total number of members in the household, including the respondent...|||

**Members of the respondent's household. Write the relationship to respondent: partner, son, daughter, grandparent, sister... etc**

Member	Gender	Age	Level of education (*)
1 Partner			
2 Child, step/foster child			
3 Child, step/foster child			
4 Child, step/foster child			
5 Child, step/foster child			
6 Parent, step-parent, parent in law			
7 Parent, step-parent, parent in law			
8 Parent, step-parent, parent in law			
9 Parent, step-parent, parent in law			
10 Brother, sister or partner's brother, sister			
11 Brother, sister or partner's brother, sister			
12 Other relative.....			
13 Other relative.....			
14 Non-relative.....			
15 Non-relative.....			

(\*) Primary, secondary, tertiary education

**Respondent's profession at the moment (verbatim description)..... Which of the following applies to the respondent?**

<input type="checkbox"/> Employed full time	<input type="checkbox"/> Employed part time	<input type="checkbox"/> Government training scheme	<input type="checkbox"/> Sick or disabled
<input type="checkbox"/> Employed on fixed contract	<input type="checkbox"/> In employment but temporarily laid off	<input type="checkbox"/> Unpaid worker in family business	<input type="checkbox"/> In education or training
<input type="checkbox"/> Self-employed	<input type="checkbox"/> Casual worker (working from on a day to day arrangement)	<input type="checkbox"/> Retired from paid work	<input type="checkbox"/> Housekeeper
			<input type="checkbox"/> Unemployed

**Duration of the contract (present main job) in months...|||**  undefined. **Respondent work progression:** Write down the progression from now back to the beginnings

	Duration (months)	Type of contract and schedule	Cause of ending
1			
2			
3			
4			

**Level of education**

Primary (up to 8 years education)\* |  Secondary (between 8 and 13/14 years) \*\* |  Tertiary (more than 13/14 years)\*\*\*

\* Roughly corresponding to ISCED97 codes 1 and 2; \*\* Roughly corresponding to ISCED97 code 2; \*\*\* Roughly corresponding to ISCED97 codes 4, 5 and 6

Monthly net family income (How much can you count safely on each month?)	Euro
Earnings main job respondent	
Earnings secondary jobs respondent	
Earnings main job partner	
Earnings secondary jobs partner	
Earnings main job other (specify).....	
Earnings secondary jobs other (specify).....	
Family benefits	
Other benefits allocated (specify).....	
Maintenance allowance	
Pensions (specify).....	
Estate incomes	
Financial aid from relatives	
Expenses	
Mortgage	
Rent	
<b>Total Family Income after tax:</b>	

**People receiving care (at the moment):**

Kin or relation with the respondent	Age	Gender	In the same household	Caregivers
		<input type="checkbox"/> male <input type="checkbox"/> female	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	
		<input type="checkbox"/> male <input type="checkbox"/> female	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	
		<input type="checkbox"/> male <input type="checkbox"/> female	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	
		<input type="checkbox"/> male <input type="checkbox"/> female	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	
		<input type="checkbox"/> male <input type="checkbox"/> female	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	

**Synopses of single cases**

Before and during the coding and analysing of interviews transcripts, research teams had to control and to follow each family case in order to make recognitions and in-depth confrontations of all the research queries. It is a hard task to do it, if cases identification relies merely on the names or nicknames correlated to each interview or only to some fundamental characteristic, as several partner did. It is time consuming to search for objective information along the transcript and one risks losing the whole impression of a unique case, so to say, its Gestalt. Furthermore, each household case, except single parents, correspond to 2 interviews transcripts,

making the whole recognition even harder. In order to solve this problem, research teams agreed to use a synopsis of the household.

Synopsis is a brief summary bringing to the fore the main information concerning one household case and composed throughout the strategic intervention of the interviewer. He or she provides to register few quick notes about the main aspects of the interviews, derived from both objective data taken from the checklist and direct observation. The synopsis is a framework where interviewer may save few preliminary evaluations about the household situation and systematically collect all the objective data. Therefore, each household case corresponds to one synopsis (we did not make a synopsis

with information related to just one parent, unless it was a single parent household).

We firstly report the way we found access to the couple. Then it is important to stress whether respondents have been interviewed at the same time but in two different contexts or in two different moments. There also are objective figures concerning the educational levels of both partners: not only have we reported if it is primary, secondary or tertiary; we also report the type of education and the cultural background. Furthermore, we identify the people living together under the same roof and the kin relations among them.

An indication of the weekly working hours is reported together with the assessment about full or part time schedule. The average amount of the weekly working hours is registered to understand work engagements. Whenever possible we add information about timetables, shifts and overtime too. Information about income and house property is useful to have a more precise outlook about their economic well-being. However, not only objective attributes are collected: at the end, in few words, the synopsis tries to summarise of the points or morals of the household story the respondents told and of the points of the arguments they made. The synopsis works as a general picture of the case and it may be progressively and continuously revised according to further reconsideration of the interviewees' accounts. When starting to code an interview transcription, previous information collected via interview and checklist may be reconsidered in order to improve the general overview of the case. It is also working as an immediate way to locate the type of case when one needs to make general consideration about the distribution of same variables in the general sample.

A special section is dedicated to the list of people (and their ages) respondents have indicated as main caretakers in the form of a short description of the overall care arrangement. This information can quickly drive the researcher to identify the caring needs to be observed more precisely during the coding of the interview transcript. The same can be said for the descriptions provided in the section named 'main actors of the care arrangement' where there is, however, a more detailed description about the care arrangements the interviewer has summarised after the interview.

We also report - usually just few minutes after the interview - a general assessment of the household work-life balance main pivots. Both the household structure - extended, nuclear, door to door 'almost extended', multiple, reconstituted family etc. - and the distinction between dual earner and one-and-half/male-breadwinner family follow as another indicator of the main criteria to be followed. Finally, the researcher has the possibility to give the earliest evaluation of the main features of the interviewed couple: the extent to which they can rely to an extended helping network, the extent to which they have a constrained daily reconciliation of work and family activities, the extent to which the gender division of labour seems to be traditional or liberal.

The use of a synopsis allowed us to have a preliminary outlook about childcare solutions, work and caring reconciliation. Research teams analysed the use of childcare arrangements within the selected cases, assessing whether couples and single parents have ever made use of babysitters, parent help, day-care centres services for children less than 2 years old, day-care centres services for children aged 3 years and older, in

general of mother and father parental leaves. We stress that this recognition of childcare arrangements is a mere schematic overview, which cannot reveal the complex development of childcare arrangements along the life story of each couple. On the contrary, it is just the narrative emerging from each interview, which can offer the real insight about childcare arrangements in its complicated and continuous re-shaping. However, babysitter solution appears to be used especially among the high-income households in Denmark and the United Kingdom. Help from parents is

reported to be used especially among Hungarian cases. While childcare structures dedicated to children older than 3 years seems to be an arrangement almost all households refer to, infant and nursery child care centres services for young children are used only in the case of the Danish, UK and Austrian sample. Maternal leave is widespread everywhere, but especially highly among the UK, Austrian and Hungarian household cases. These latter have long maternity leaves.

**Table 1.9. Example of a synopsis (see also appendix).**

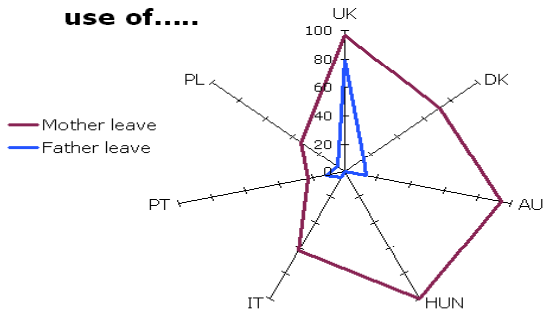
<b>Case selected</b>	Through social network	
<b>Place of the interview</b>	Florence (Italy). Respondent's house	
<b>Respondent</b>	Partners interviewed at the same time in two separate rooms	
	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
<b>Marital status</b>	Married since	
<b>Length of the interview</b>	1 hour and 44 minutes	2 hours and 13 minutes
<b>Age of the couple</b>	40	46
<b>Educational level</b>	Secondary	Secondary
<b>Profession of the couple</b>	Permanent full-time employed as post office vice-director	Permanent full-time employed as forester
<b>People living together</b>	1. She	2. He
	3. Daughter (5 years old)	
<b>Weekly working hours</b>	Officially she should work 36 hours a week (5 days on 7, week-end excluded). But since starting and finishing time is flexible, she has arranged to take and fetch the daughter at school everyday.	42 hours a week. He has a monthly fixed amount of working hours. Therefore each day he can vary according to his or workplaces needs. He usually follows a 8.00-16.30/17.00 timetable
<b>Wages of the couple/monthly</b>	1.900 euro	1.400 euro
<b>Other income/month</b>		
<b>Total income</b>	3.300 euro	
<b>Housing</b>	Property of the couple (no mortgage)	
	<b>People cared for</b>	
<b>Gender</b>	Age	Situation (school, etc.)
Girl	5	Public pre-school (from 8.30 to 16.30)
<b>Main actors of the care arrangement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She; He; Her parents (living in the same building); Other mothers</li> </ul> <p>They are fully helped by her parents who live next door and are crucial in caring for the daughter. In case Matilde can not take or fetch her daughter at school, she may ask her mother, or husband to do that or even a sister of her. In case of extreme needs, other mothers of children attending the same class may do the job. Next year the daughter will start the primary school, but with changing timetables (from 8.00 to 12.30 and to 14.30 in certain days, instead of 16.30 as now). This forthcoming change will stress the family arrangements since Matilde's mother is available to care for, but not to fetch the child at hour changing from day to day. Moreover the school bus does not cover the area where they live. She hopes to manage with the parents' of other schoolmates help.</p>	
<b>General assessment</b>	<p>Gianluca and Matilde live with their 5 years old daughter in a residential area of Florence. He is a permanent full-time forester, commuting each workday for 40 minutes by car to the wooded areas surrounding the city hills and she works as vice-director in a local post-office which she reaches by bicycle. A well balanced working timetable of both partners, with a friendly flexibility, the potential helps coming from her grandparents living next-door, the daughter attending a full-time pre-school (and a forthcoming primary school with a prolonged timetable), the use of a paid domestic helper, all those factors, contribute to an equilibrated and balanced work-care system where the only asymmetrical arrangement concerns the gender gap among husband and wife involvement: since the latter, as usual, sounds more active in managing and organizing family times.</p>	
<b>Type of family</b>	<p><b>"Almost extended" family, i.e. nuclear family living in the same building of her parents. Dual earner and woman main carer.</b></p> <p>Although Gianluca is a very loving father spending some hours a day with her daughter, he is not enough involved in domestic chores, as Matilde reports. Matilde may start working in the morning at varying hours and may as well end at unscheduled time. Anyway the weekly amount of worked hours is not such high as to prevent her from fetching her daughter at the public pre-school and from carrying out all the domestic tasks she regrets to do as main carer. It's a classical middle class family (they soon completed the mortgage-refunding programme to gain the full property of the house).</p>	
<b>Footnotes of the interviewer</b>	<p>In a sense the mother is more breadwinner than her husband, she earns more, has directive tasks, is proud of having obtained productivity prizes and tells clearly that her husband's work climate is very different.</p>	

Paternal leave has been reported to be massively used among household cases from the United Kingdom sample. Looking at household types, use of babysitters is more diffuse among dual earner couples - as expected - since there is

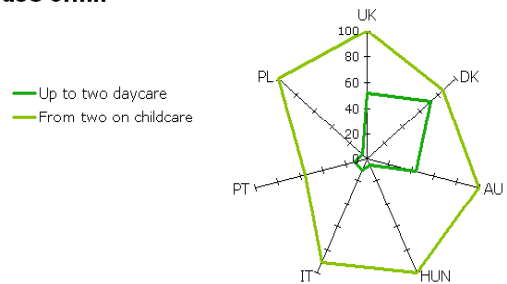
a dual income in the family budget, while maternal leave is used less among female single parent household because of the difficulties in obtaining it without experiencing significant reductions in the monthly salary.

**Chart 1.11. Use of childcare arrangement according to the country's sample and to type of household. (Interviews transcribed in the national language).**

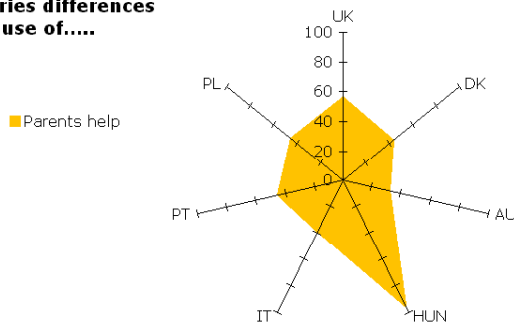
**countries differences use of.....**



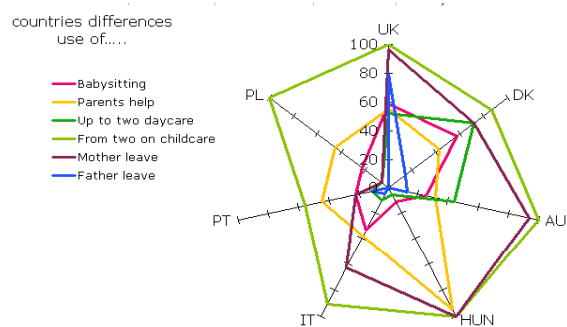
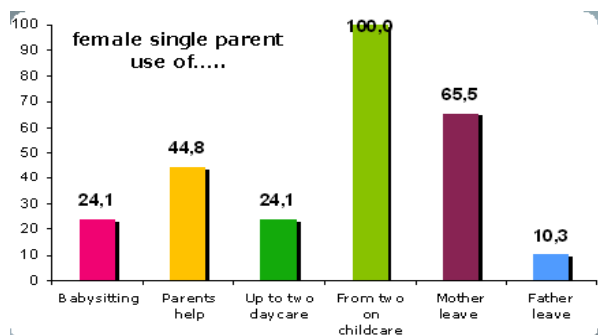
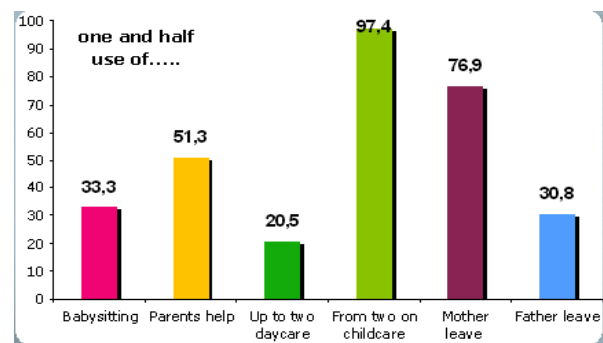
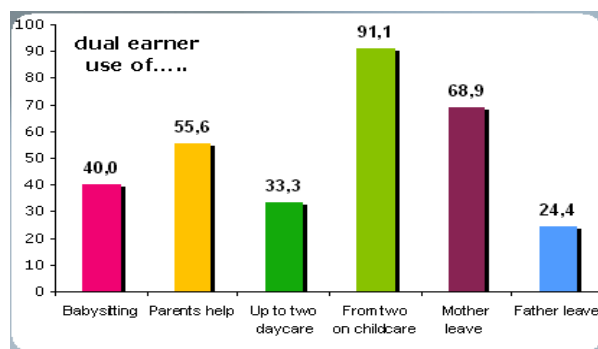
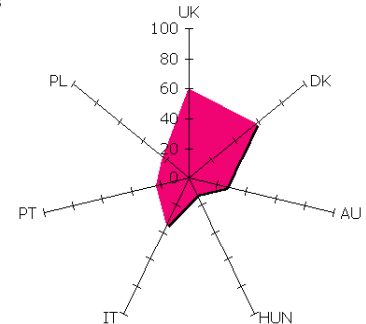
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**countries differences use of.....**



**countries differences use of.....**



#### **4.5. A BETTER DEFINITION OF SOME FEATURES OF NATIONAL CONTEXTS**

When conducting qualitative interviews in seven European countries, according to a narrative and open approach based on collecting personal biographies from husbands and wives with parenting functions and belonging to diverse social classes, regional areas and cultural attitudes, the immediate temptation is to adopt the typical cross-national comparative approach, which means to try to configure a sample of cases exactly reproducing the independent variables from the macro set of available data.

In our qualitative research, we did not follow this orientation: cases are not numerous enough to be representative. The degree of representativeness, as already underlined, does not allow us to consider 15/16 interviews as a national case. Anyway, countries differences stand as the context characterization surrounding the qualitative findings we pull out from our interviews. Therefore, the context framework is something to take into account in order to know where and how the couples' experiences are located and it is helpful to be aware of some 'local' peculiarity of the national samples. Being blind and neutral toward national economical well-being, welfare state provisions, labour market functioning, specific patterns of family formations, as well as cultural values and orientations, which nationally more or less influence individual actions, would be an unrealistic mistake.

##### **Portuguese interviews.**

Many people are doing seasonal work in the tourist industry so there is a very different pattern of work in winter and in summer. Migrant workers are not employed for child care but people are

'contaminated' by modern lifestyles of the tourists. The sample has very few male breadwinners or modified breadwinners.

Interviews have been conducted mainly in Algarve also to present a sharp difference between urban and rural areas of the country, being conscious that rural areas do not mean exactly the same social diversity we used to refer to 10 years ago. Some key interesting reflections about gender differences emerged: caring tasks are assumed to be mainly a woman's job even among higher educated couples. It is very important to recognize the socializing factors coming from the grandparents' generation. We underline the particularity of the Portuguese labour market where women have always been working seasonally, informally and in statistically unofficial positions.

For several decades, Portuguese women's work and care in rural areas were really intermingled, while nowadays the pre-school childcare centres and childminders, neighbours informal paid solutions are very widespread. Men and women in dual full-time jobs seldom hire migrant women for caring activities. Portuguese workers still compete for these kinds of jobs so that there has not been such an important migration flow for caring jobs as in other Mediterranean countries.

##### **Polish interviews.**

In the case of Polish interviews, it was very difficult to find people in low educational positions, especially because many of the contacted partners did not want to be interviewed. Having children in post-Socialist countries is becoming a way to prove that a couple is affluent. So having 3 children is linked to highest income couples. When there is a baby sitter solution, it seems as if this probably indicates previous conflicts between parents about how to manage work and care.

Babysitting is a very costly solution of the elite to be considered together with the inadequacy of parental leave. We think that where the babysitter solution is a sort of acquired kit to solve the problem, a male breadwinning orientation probably survives. In the countryside areas, the social network is poorer, but we do not have to assume that couples belong to a rural way of life. They rather have an urban style of life, they rely on non-agricultural source of income, but they have to commute daily and their work-care choices depend very much on transport and communication available.

### **British interviews.**

The entire UK sample comes from Aberdeen (except one interview conducted in Lancaster) but from different class neighbourhoods. Interviews have been conducted mainly at respondents' home and only in some cases at school. Among single parents only females were found. Interviews concern men working above all for the oil industry whereby men are often absent for longer periods, leading to strong male breadwinner families.

The oil industry creates a cultural legitimacy for male breadwinner families. The importance of the oil industry in labour market is to be perceived in the fact that many respondents have rotating jobs with two weeks shifts. This is a very important aspect: special conditions of the labour market should be considered when studying work life balance.

### **Danish interviews.**

The Danish sample is composed by 16 persons in 9 couple/single parent households. A typical pattern is that father works long hours in the private sector and mother works shorter and more flexible hours in the public sector. There is no public debate about the division of labour in the way that there is in Sweden. The division of family labour is not yet

equalitarian and there is much less debate about it than in other Scandinavian countries: it seems that family policy is separated from quality of life policies. There is no debate about sharing parental leave either. Child care activity is seen as a woman's duty. Couples are very dependent upon public childcare structures and they seem to appreciate and to ask for the high quality of public childcare centres. Couples are also very concerned about the education of children, rather than other aspects of well-being.

The middle class are very concerned that public childcare is of high quality. But there are strong individualist tendencies. In principle, the family has to manage its own affairs. Often wives work in the public sector and husbands in the private one, but they very seldom share parental leave. Since also middle-higher classes make use of full-time public day-care structures, other caring solutions such as babysitting, au-pair arrangements, even if quite common, seem to have the function of freeing the time parents devote to leisure and personal relationships.

### **Italian interviews.**

The Italian sample is composed by 21 household cases: 10 dual-earners, 6 one and a half couples, 1 classic male breadwinner case and 4 female single parents. Since in each household case both partners have been interviewed, the total number of interviews is 38. Single parents are all lower class people, which introduce a bias that will be re-balanced by higher class and nested families. Grandparents are very important for childcare and pedagogical assistance: those couples that cannot rely on grandparents seems to suffer from a difficult work and care conciliation.

Male breadwinners are also mostly disadvantaged families. Those with better educational level are usually dual-earners. Having children is a phase of family impoverishment. Delay in having children



means that many people have to care for their own parents as well. One of the most evident outcomes is that both in couples showing a harmonized work-childcare organization and in more hectic families the spatial and temporal mismatches between workplaces, homes, school and nurseries and the associated tensions between the time schedules of these activities represent a constant puzzle to be solved.

#### **4.6. THE CODING PROCESS.**

The coding process till now is only in the first phase of extensive 'open' coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), or, in the original terminology of Galser, of first-order 'substantive' coding before gradually shifting to the more interpretive 'theoretical' coding (Glaser, 1978). Anyway, since the transition from one phase to the following one is of course, gradual, a first definition of the coding tree has emerged after the analysis of a number of Italian interviews (in original language) and 3 interviews for each other country (only some Austrian in original language, all the other in translation).

This allowed us to begin a constant collaboration between the Italian and the

United Kingdom teams, which make use of the same coding tree to add interviews: these latter have been subdivided between the two teams across each country and, whenever possible, across different statuses and educational qualifications of the respondents. At regular intervals, both teams merged the coding works of each other. This kind of process requires a reconsideration of the added nodes each team formulates as 'free nodes'. Most of the 'free nodes' subsequently find a place in the structured tree when we merge or require its reformulation or adjustment, also in the sense that a node- category may reveal itself to be more complex than it originally appeared and needs to be broken down in two or more.

Extensive coding works with about 500/600 nodes, all grounded in texts of our transcriptions. They will be reduced in the subsequent phase of axial coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The common mechanism is, of course, analytic induction but the two different teams may have different sensitivity and we try to keep the merging occasions at regular timings in order to get gradually tuned up.

## 5. LISTENING TO COMPLEXITY: SOME PRELIMINARY OUTCOMES AND EMERGING MEANINGS OF BALANCING WORK AND LIFE.

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In order to construct their biography focussed on the work and care activities and their interrelations, individuals must take account of their history and its working in the present to an anticipated future. The 'account taking' includes an estimation of preceding social structures, their future evolution and the person's own placement in them. This 'embeddedness' in time and structure is necessary for an individual's own sense of autobiography, and above all for his/her reconstruction of work career, family arrangement, partner co-decisions, caring needs from and solutions for others family members. The adoption of a narrative perspective implies transcending barriers of self/society and past/present/future. This transcendent nature deriving from analysing personal narratives opens new prospects for a significant advance in recognizing the real mechanisms at play in men and women daily process of combining work and care duties.

The concept of work-life balance was introduced partly in response to the long-hours culture and the ways in which paid work could and perhaps should be combined with other aspects of life including caring and leisure as well as studying. It was designed to reflect the diverse interests of workers and thereby be more inclusive than family-friendly; it also has more normative connotations by covering the idea of harmony between paid work and these other life dimensions. Indeed the terms family-friendly and work-life balance are often used interchangeably in the UK and the US, while in continental Europe and among EU policies the terms family-friendly and reconciliation of work and family life are currently more prevalent (Duncan, 2006).

One of the most debating issues is to consider whether current policies are driven as much by desire to expand the employment rate and enhance economic growth in the quest for a competitive knowledge as by desire for gender equity. In considering what the outcomes are for different groups of women and men positioned differently in economic terms and in work-life balance opportunities, narratives from interviews show how life-cycle changes may position one individual in varying places and constrained sets, according to a specific period of his/her life. Being pregnant, waiting the first child, experimenting the first unprotected unemployment period, taking a long and generously compensated parental leave, making economic sacrifices in order to enter a new more comfortable house, etc constitute crucial turning points for the work-life articulation.

At the beginning, as many couples' stories show, work and life conflicts are weak and partners just care about living together in an easy individual arrangement. Sacrifices come one by one but before having children, each partner feels he/she can go on with the perfect selfish life.

As a student I was rather having a good time than worrying about life choices. Besides, I regret that now, because it's very unwise, and if I were to start all over again, I would do it differently now. But one of the side-effects of enjoying myself was that I played an instrument, a bass guitar and other instruments, too. Kasia studied in Gdańsk at the time. She was doing her first year, I think, and it was my 4th. And Kasia needed a bass guitar player, and I played the bass, and that's it. And later, well, you know. We played together for a while, then it turned into something else very quickly

and that's it. For about six months, it was like she studied in Gdańsk, and I was in Warsaw. She visited me and I visited her. And then Kasia moved to my place, to Warsaw, because I was closer to graduation, so Kasia concluded it would be easier for her to change university than for me. And so we lived together, and we were poor, because I was a student at the time, I lived in the Riviera building, because my father worked in Warsaw a little and they rented a company apartment for him there, so I lived sort of with my father, which was very bad, but that's how it was, so we just lived like this. Then we rented our own apartment.

**WC\_PL\_15\_DE\_He**

The extent to which work and care may conflict, being combined, harmonized or balanced between wives and husbands, market and public welfare solutions, parents' or other informal supports is something we can not assess in a rigid and static evaluation of the present arrangement in each households. In this respect, interviews conducted using a narrative approach have enlightened the complicated and intricate interactions among different phases of life cycle and partners' biography. In addition, children different life-phases too, matter a lot.

My daughter went to a kindergarten when she was 4, we didn't want to let her go earlier, when she was 3, our younger daughter was born, and we didn't want her to feel rejected. So, she went to the kindergarten, when she was 4, but I guess she wouldn't have gone earlier, when she was 4, it was difficult for her to get used to it, she was crying, she was depressed, sad. Now it's great, now she's crying, when she's to stay home.

**WC\_PL\_08\_OH\_She**

Work-care arrangements are continuously changing according to varying needs, which depend on career prospects, home locations, fluctuating helping networks, social services availability, entitlements and costs, etcetera. People can readjust

solutions that were previously considered optimal or can legitimate arrangements that sounded defective at the beginnings.

Even the perception of time is diverse, according to the differences in the sequence of turning points identified. One year of maternity leave may be perceived as a too long absence from workplace as well as a too short period of mother-child closure. Furthermore, societal expectations about the proper behaviour for a given stage of life, do institutionalize the life course - both ordering and regulating individual action. The life course is then a 'institution' in the sense of a set of regulations of a specific dimension of life, namely, its temporal extension (Kohli, 1978). General mores or culturally prevailing views- as well as deviances from these latter - may act as opportunities and constraints about what is normal behaviour for someone of a certain age or they can be formalized into age-based statuses. Italian respondents, for instance, mainly reported to have experimented a 'limbo stage' between full-time education and full-time work consisting of sporadic menial labour interspersed with episodes of youth training and spells of unemployment. Nonetheless, the meanings they attached to this prolonged stage varies significantly among different life stories even if it seems to become a structural phase for most respondents.

The content of a story regarding all the main issues of conciliating work and care activities is dependent upon how respondent see his/her life at that particular moment and how he/she choose to depict that life view to the person carrying the interview. Often, when dealing with work-life conflicts, one can point out that the structure in which respondent has placed the account conforms to the stereotype of conflict/activity resolution.

We started the business up together during our parental leave. There seemed to be less risk attached to it because it all started during parental leave. But it turned out that unless you are a real workaholic you would

not be able to support a family based on this type of business. So, after parental leave I decided to apply for a position at a Secondary school and once Cornelia turned two years I started my job.

**WC\_AU\_02\_DE\_She**

We have been analysing interviews contents by paying attention to the diverse modes of narrative each interview transcript inevitably contains. We have descriptions, where the respondent's intention is clarification or to report factual information. The decisive feature distinguishing them from narrative is that descriptions present static structures that we can code as attributes or objective references.

Yes, my highest qualification is from a secondary technical and vocational college. I completed a degree from a secondary technical and vocational college and Regina received her A-levels from a public secondary school.

**WC\_AU\_06\_OH\_He**

There are, instead narratives, where the respondent adopts a story-telling mode - sequences of actual occurrences that are related to one another through a series of temporal casual links - in order to place an event or a particular strategy or arrangement into a structure which is intended to convey a thematic point to the listener.

At that time, I studied to become a bailiff. That was a part of my job, too. But it didn't worry me at all. The public sector is very understanding when it comes to having a family. I didn't have any specific career goals. I'm not that type of person, at all. There wasn't the same rule regarding leave for both of the children. With Frederik, the eldest, I was on leave for six months only. It was hard taking him to the day nursery only after six months. He was very little back then. When he turned 1 ½ year they implemented new rules where you were paid some special benefits if you wanted to take care of your children at home for a while

(børnepasningsorlov). I took a year of that with Frederik then. Then I got pregnant with Andreas straight after. I wasn't that popular at work, then [laughing], but of course, they were okay with that. With Andreas I was on leave for 1 ½ year...

**WC\_DK\_07\_OH\_She**

Finally, there is argumentation that where the respondent's intention is to assert one particular viewpoint or interpretation when several alternative views are possible or where he/she anticipates scepticism or rejection by the listener.

I find it somewhat funny that people make profits from rent. That somebody can profit from rents at all, well I find that really strange that you have to spend that much money on housing. So, find that something that's absolutely peculiar. Like then, like the story of the inter-war period, I mean they were, they were, they were revolutionary. Precisely, and then nobody dares to speak up, I mean. No, so like, so, I find that, I'd find it approach-worthy I honestly have to say. Because of housing, of the fact that people have to live somewhere, that shouldn't earn profits. I don't consider that all right, ok.

**WC\_AU\_04\_DE\_She**

Much of the recent debate about the reasons for differences in women's employment patterns - and particularly between those mothers who pursue full-time gainful employment and those who move into part-time employment or quit their jobs - has been framed in relation to Catherine Hakim's 'preference theory' (Hakim, 1991; 1998; 2000).

Simon Duncan (2006) argues that preference theory connects to the individualization thesis, for both maintain that people are now the reflexive authors of their own biography, rather than following structurally determined pathways.

When dealing with respondents' narratives, are there work-life balance conflicts or positive arrangements? It depends a lot on the individual capabilities

to manage work and family: the more they cope with difficult work-family challenges, the more they seem to report a strong commitment about these achievements.

There is a strong tension between the subjective viewpoint of an actor and his/her perception of an overarching social structure. The first general impression about the preliminary analysis performed until now is that active respondents - that is, respondents to whom we took enough care to grant an agency space - tell stories of actively managing their lives and choices much more than stories of overburdening and stress, as it is more common in literature about dual-earner families.

Moreover, they seldom describe conflicts or spill-over from one world to the other (something we expected). Rather, important commitments are expressed to both realms, as if they were embedded in a unique, rich layer of meanings. A sort of self-confirmation between the two was a condition of good or even sustainable life (based on self-esteem, assurance, control...) as of a good quality of life. That sounds like a confirmation for having chosen a narrative approach when conducting interviews, since the subjective explanation of how work and care are combined together relies on the individual willingness to give a positive account of his/her capabilities. It also gives theoretical strength to the thesis that we cannot rely on a single objective reality as if it were factual and existing at a level of abstraction. Reality, especially when entering the complex relation between the actor and the social structures, appears to be fuzzy and in constant flux. Therefore, what we are trying to develop during the process of coding and analysing interview transcripts is to take care of the multidimensional links that each piece of interview has with the whole narrative. It is a bi-directional path: from the specific narrative under the coding process to the

entire narrative we collected and from this latter back again to the meanings of the coded piece of interview, in best cases a hermeneutic circle.

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## APPENDIX

**Table 1.4. The predefined questions from the checklist.**

### Final checklist

Now just let me check if I have missed something about you or your partner.....

Respondent's year of birth...|||

Total number of members in the household, including the respondent...|||

Members of the respondent's household. Write the relationship to respondent: partner, son, daughter, grandparent, sister...etc

Member	Gender	Age	Level of education (*)
1 Partner			
2 Child, step/foster child			
3 Child, step/foster child			
4 Child, step/foster child			
5 Child, step/foster child			
6 Parent, step-parent, parent in law			
7 Parent, step-parent, parent in law			
8 Parent, step-parent, parent in law			
9 Parent, step-parent, parent in law			
10 Brother, sister or partner's brother, sister			
11 Brother, sister or partner's brother, sister			
12 Other relative.....			
13 Other relative.....			
14 Non-relative.....			
15 Non-relative.....			

(\*) Primary, secondary, tertiary education

Respondent's profession at the moment (verbatim description)..... Which of the following applies to the respondent?

<input type="checkbox"/> Employed full time	<input type="checkbox"/> Employed part time	<input type="checkbox"/> Government training scheme	<input type="checkbox"/> Sick or disabled
<input type="checkbox"/> Employed on fixed contract	<input type="checkbox"/> In employment but temporarily laid off	<input type="checkbox"/> Unpaid worker in family business	<input type="checkbox"/> In education or training
<input type="checkbox"/> Self employed	<input type="checkbox"/> Casual worker (working from on a day to day arrangement)	<input type="checkbox"/> Retired from paid work	<input type="checkbox"/> Housekeeper
			<input type="checkbox"/> Unemployed

Duration of the contract (present main job) in months...|||  undefined. Respondent work progression: Write down the progression from now back to the beginnings

	Duration (months)	Type of contract and schedule	Cause of ending
1			
2			
3			
4			

### Level of education

Primary (up to 8 years education)\*  Secondary (between 8 and 13/14 years)\*\*  Tertiary (more than 13/14 years)\*\*\*

\* Roughly corresponding to ISCED97 codes 1 and 2; \*\* Roughly corresponding to ISCED97 code 3; \*\*\* Roughly corresponding to ISCED97 codes 4, 5 and 6

Monthly net family income (=How much can you count safely on each month?)	Euro
Earnings main job respondent	
Earnings secondary jobs respondent	
Earnings main job partner	
Earnings secondary jobs partner	
Earnings main job other (specify).....	
Earnings secondary jobs other (specify).....	
Family benefits	
Other benefits allocated (specify).....	
Maintenance allowance	
Pensions (specify).....	
Estate incomes	
Financial aid from relatives	
Expenses	
Mortgage	
Rent	
<b>Total Family Income after tax:</b>	

### People receiving care (at the moment):

Kin or relation with the respondent	Age	Gender	In the same household	Caregivers
		<input type="checkbox"/> male <input type="checkbox"/> female	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	
		<input type="checkbox"/> male <input type="checkbox"/> female	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	
		<input type="checkbox"/> male <input type="checkbox"/> female	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	
		<input type="checkbox"/> male <input type="checkbox"/> female	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	
		<input type="checkbox"/> male <input type="checkbox"/> female	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	

Table 1.9. Example of a synopsis.

Case selected	Through social network	
Place of the interview	Florence (Italy). Respondent's house	
Respondent	Partners interviewed at the same time in two separate rooms.	
	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
Marital status	Married since	
Length of the interview	1 hour and 44 minutes	2 hours and 13 minutes
Age of the couple	40	46
Educational level	Secondary	Secondary
Profession of the couple	Permanent full-time employed as post office vice-director	Permanent full-time employed as forester
People living together	1. She	2. He
	3. Daughter (5 years old)	
Weekly working hours	Officially she should work 36 hours a week (5 days on 7, week-end excluded). But since starting and finishing time is flexible, she has arranged to take and fetch the daughter at school everyday.	42 hours a week. He has a monthly fixed amount of working hours. Therefore each day he can vary according to his or workplaces needs. He usually follows a 8.00-16.30/17.00 timetable
Wages of the couple/monthly	1.900 euro	1.400 euro
Other income/month		
Total income	3.300 euro	
Housing	Property of the couple (no mortgage)	
	<b>People cared for</b>	
Gender	Age	Situation (school, etc.)
Girl	• 5 •	Public pre-school (from 8.30 to 16.30)
Main actors of the care arrangement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She; He; Her parents (living in the same building); Other mothers</li> </ul> <p>They are fully helped by her parents who live next door and are crucial in caring for the daughter. In case Matilde can not take or fetch her daughter at school, she may ask her mother, or husband to do that or even a sister of her. In case of extreme needs, others mothers of children attending the same class may do the job. Next year the daughter will start the primary school, but with changing timetables (from 8.00 to 12.30 and to 14.30 in certain days, instead of 16.30 as now). This forthcoming change will stress the family arrangements since Matilde's mother is available to care for, but not to fetch the child at hour changing from day to day. Moreover the school bus does not cover the area where they live. She hopes to manage with the parents' of other schoolmates help.</p>	
General assessment	<p>Gianluca and Matilde live with their 5 years old daughter in a residential area of Florence. He is a permanent full-time forester, commuting each workday for 40 minutes by car to the wooden areas surrounding the city hills and she works as vice-director in a local post-office which she reaches by bicycle. A well balanced working timetable of both partners, with a friendly flexibility, the potential helps coming from her grandparents living next-door, the daughter attending a full-time pre-school (and a forthcoming primary school with a prolonged timetable), the use of a paid domestic helper, all those factors, contribute to an equilibrated and balanced work-care system where the only asymmetrical arrangement concerns the gender gap among husband and wife involvement: since the latter, as usual, sounds more active in managing and organizing family times.</p>	
Type of family	<p><b>"Almost extended" family, i.e. nuclear family living in the same building of her parents. Dual earner and woman main carer.</b></p> <p>Although Gianluca is a very loving father spending some hours a day with her daughter, he is not enough involved in domestic chores, as Matilde reports. Matilde may start working in the morning at varying hours and may as well end at unscheduled time. Anyway the weekly amount of worked hours is not such high as to prevent her from fetching her daughter at the public pre-school and from carrying out all the domestic tasks she regrets to do as main carer. It's a classical middle class family (they soon completed the mortgage-refunding programme to gain the full property of the house).</p>	
Footnotes of the interviewer	<p>In a sense the mother is more breadwinner than her husband, she earns more, has directive tasks, is proud of having obtained productivity primes and tells clearly that her husband's work climate is very different.</p>	