



## Flexicurity policies: are they viable for managing work and care?

The EU sees flexicurity as being a policy with the potential to balance the demands of the labour market for flexible labour and of the individual for security of income and work. The countries that are most often cited as successful examples of flexicurity policies are Denmark and the Netherlands. In this analysis the different kinds of flexicurity policies are critically examined, especially with respect to how they treat gender issues.

### Types of flexibility

There are a number of different kinds of flexibility including:

- *External numerical flexibility* concerned with the ease of hiring and firing employees
- *Internal numerical flexibility* concerned with manipulating working hours, overtime, part-time and flexi-time work
- *Functional flexibility* concerned with manoeuvrability between jobs within the workplace and flexible organisation at the level of the firm
- *Wage flexibility* concerned with performance related pay

### Types of job security

There are a number of different kinds of security including:

- *Job security* concerned with the certainty of retaining a job with a particular employer
- *Employment security* concerned with remaining in employment (perhaps with a different employer)
- *Income security* concerned with receiving social security benefits in such a way as to cushion the movement between jobs
- *Combination security* or the certainty of being able to combine paid and unpaid work

A number of issues arise with managing these different kinds of flexibility and security. In general there is a virtuous circle which promotes both flexibility and security, but there is also a vicious circle which promotes flexibility without security. The flexicurity policy in general is concerned more with economic and employment goals than with improving the job satisfaction of the employees. Flexicurity policies are therefore more focused upon the demand side of the labour market than on the supply side. They also tend to be gender-blind: men and women are treated as individual adult workers rather than gendered employees.

### Comparing Denmark and the Netherlands

Both Denmark and the Netherlands provide flexibility and security, but in different ways. In Denmark there is an emphasis on flexibility of employment, continuity of income between jobs and the provision of parental and care leave with very substantial child care support. In the Netherlands there is more of an emphasis upon internal numerical flexibility through the provision of part-time jobs and by ensuring the security of part-time work via the offer of pro-rata benefits. The outcomes in both countries are different for women than for men. In both countries the job quality of women is lower than for men, and the part-time work opportunities offered are also mainly for women (in the Netherlands this enables them to combine work and care). The career opportunities across the life course for women are worse if they take part-time jobs and their economic security is lower.

### Policy Implications

A main conclusion of this paper is that policy developments need to take an explicitly gendered perspective; flexicurity has different implications for men and women. Flexibility tends to apply disproportionately to women and the security to men. Policy makers therefore need to address how security for women can be improved and need to look at the supply side of the labour market as well as the demand side.

### What kind of work-family balance package is necessary?

There is no one, 'magic bullet' that will secure real choice between paid and unpaid work. Parental leave needs to be structured such that men as well as women are inclined to take it. Child care services must be available, accessible, affordable and of high quality if they are to further the real choices that women can make without disadvantaging young children. Informal care is also important in most countries, particularly that provided by grandparents. If a longer (paid) working life is to become a reality, this will affect the availability of grandmothers to provide unpaid care. Policymaking on the 'care' side of the equation must be accompanied by policies to promote the equality of women in the labour market; in most countries part-time work has serious consequences for women's career and pensions.

Professor Jane Lewis, London School of Economics, UK  
j.lewis@lse.ac.uk

### About Workcare

Workcare is a research project drawing upon the collaboration of 10 different institutional partners (University of Aberdeen, University of Roskilde, Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna, Economics University Vienna, University of Sussex, London School of Economics, DISPO University of Florence, ISCTE Lisbon, TARKI Hungary, University of Warsaw) and 16 persons.

### Research Team

**Professor Claire Wallace,**

University of Aberdeen, Scotland, UK  
(Project Co-ordinator)  
claire.wallace@abdn.ac.uk,

**Professor Pamela Abbott,**

University of Aberdeen, Scotland, UK  
p.abbott@abdn.ac.uk

**Professor Renata Siemienska,**

University of Warsaw  
siemiens@post.pl

**Dr. Barbara Haas,**

Economics University, Vienna  
barbara.haas@wu-wien.ac.at

**Professor Thomas P. Boje,**

Roskilde University, Denmark  
boje@ruc.dk

**Dr. Anders Ejrnæs,**

Roskilde University, Denmark  
ejrnaes@ruc.dk

**Professor Jackie O'Reilly,**

University of Brighton, UK  
J.O'Reilly@brighton.ac.uk

**Professor John MacInnes,**

University of Edinburgh, UK john.macinnes@ed.ac.uk

**Professor Jane Lewis,**

London School of Economics, UK  
j.lewis@lse.ac.uk

**Professor Endre Sik,**

TARKI Joint Research Centre, Hungary  
sik@tarki.hu

**Dr. Andras Gabos,**

Tarki Joint Research Centre, Hungary gabos@tarki.hu

**Professor Analia Torres,**

ISCTE Portugal  
analia.torres@iscte.pt

**Associate Professor Rossana Trifilleti,**

University of Florence, Italy  
rtrifil@tin.it

**Dr. Luca Salmieri,**

University of Florence, Italy luca.salmieri@uniroma1.it

**Dr. Liliana Mateeva,**

Institute for Advanced Studies,  
Vienna, Austria  
Mateeva@ihs.ac.at

**Dr. Michaela Gstrein,**

Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna, Austria  
Gstrein@ihs.ac.at

It runs for three years from October 2006 to September 2009.

The project will last three years. Information can be found on the website:

<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/socsci/research/nec/workcare/>

*The WORKCARE project is supported by the Sixth Framework Programme of the European Commission.*



**Professor Claire Wallace**

School of Social Sciences  
University of Aberdeen  
AB24 3QY

Tel: ++44 1224 273250

Fax: ++44 1224 273442

Email: [claire.wallace@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:claire.wallace@abdn.ac.uk)

# Mother's labour market transitions in Europe

One of the challenges that face workers in Europe is how best to reconcile a career in paid employment with the relatively large amounts of unpaid work that has to be done in caring for children, especially when they are below school age. Social policy in individual member states addresses this in diverse ways, such as provision for maternal and paternal leave, child benefits, rights to work for less than full time hours and public or subsidized childcare provision.

Much research has shown that family formation, or the arrival of young children, alters parents' demand for paid work, while the 'capabilities' approach put forward by Sen suggests that it makes sense to relate the labour market behaviour of parents (or those who wish to become parents) to the constraints and needs imposed by parenting responsibilities. It is well established that family formation both imposes extra caring work burdens on families and the need for extra income. While in the past this sometimes led to various forms of 'male breadwinner' system in which fathers concentrated on paid work while mothers took most responsibility for parenting, such systems have been broken down by increasing gender

equality in the public sphere of economic and politics and the more private sphere of personal relations, and by the feminisation of employment and Europe's commitment to expanding female employment.

Many social surveys have traced this change. For example, as recently as the early 1980s Eurobarometer surveys recorded majorities of men and women in all member states (with the sole exception of Denmark) agreeing with the proposition that men, as breadwinners, ought to have priority in employment in times of high unemployment. Now, however, we find not only almost universal commitment to gender equality in employment, but also to the idea that men and women ought to share caring work equally between them. Table 1, based on survey results from the fifteen member states of the Union in 2003 shows not only that the great majority of men and women think that childcare should be shared equally, but also that this is the case for those (over half in most European countries) who believe that it is still more 'natural' for mothers to look after children.

Table 1: Views on gender and childcare

	<i>"Men and women should divide all childcare tasks between them as equally as possible"</i>	<i>"It is more natural for mothers than for fathers to take care of children"</i>
<b>Agree</b>	81.1%	88.9%
<b>Disagree /Don't know</b>	18.9%	11.1%
<b>Total (n = 16566)</b>	100.0%	100.0%

Source Eurobarometer 59.0

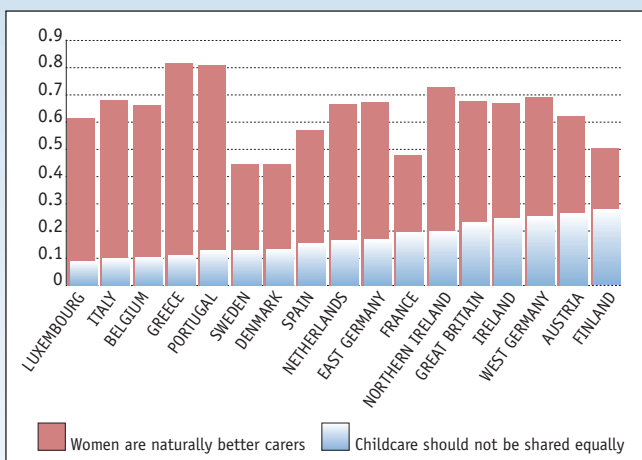


Figure 1 Proportion of people who think that it is 'natural' for women to do childcare, and proportion of these who think that childcare should not be equally shared. Europe 2003

Figure 1 shows how these views are distributed across different member states. The pink bars correspond to the proportion of people in each country who think that it is natural for women to care for children, while the blue bars

show the proportion of such people who disagree with sharing childcare tasks equally. Of course we also know that there may be significant differences between what people say should happen, and what people actually do. Other constraints they face may lead them to diverge from their ideals. We know that it is still far more common for women rather than men to take time out of the labour force, or to reduce their hours of work to care for young children, and there are few households where all unpaid work is divided up equally. However we know from both research on the European Community Household Panel (Nazio and MacInnes 2007) and from the results of European Harmonised Time Use Surveys, that the total burden of work (paid and unpaid) tends to be fairly equal amongst those couples with the greatest work burdens: that is couples with young (pre-school age) children.

In Western Europe it used to be the case that most women withdrew from the labour market on the birth of their first child and if they returned at all, were likely to do so only once their youngest child was at school, and often returned to part-time work and were likely to experience downward occupational mobility. In Eastern Europe women were more likely to work continuously on a full-time basis. However in many countries it was possible to take long maternity leaves

(up to two or three years in duration for each child) so that women's continuous full time 'employment' could sometimes mean that women were nevertheless at home for very long periods of time when children were young. Over the last three decades, the 'feminisation' of employment in Western European countries has been associated with the mothers taking shorter periods away from the labour market (or none at all) and suffering less downward occupational mobility on returning to employment after having children. Meanwhile, following the liberalisation of Eastern European economies after 1989, very long maternity leaves are becoming less common, and the incidence of part time work is increasing.

However while labour market surveys give us detailed information about women's behaviour, they do not tell us what women themselves think of the relationship between employment and parenting, and what kind of labour market transition they would ideally prefer. This is where the *Family and Gender Roles* surveys of the International Social Survey Programme are very useful, for as well as asking women brief details of their work history, the surveys ask women what kind of employment they think women should have at each of four life course stages:

- Once they are married but before there are children
- When the youngest child is pre-school age
- Once the youngest child has gone to school
- Once the youngest child has left school

This allows us to compare women's actual experience with what they believe 'should' happen, and thus make some general comparisons between behaviour and preferences.

Types of labour market transition	
Never work	Never does paid work
Withdrawal	Stops paid work when children arrive and does not return
PT reduction	Changes to part-time work when children arrive and stays part-time
NW transit	Stops paid work when children arrive, resumes when they go to school
PT transit	Changes full to part-time when children arrive, resumes when they go to school
Continuous	Does not change employment status when children arrive
FT Continuous	Works full-time throughout

We can examine trends over time by comparing the transitions of older and younger women, and the information collected in two different waves of the survey, in 1994 and 2002. This confirms that in Western Europe women are taking less time out of the labour market to care for children, and more likely to take on full-time work. In Eastern Europe the reverse is the case: continuous full time work is becoming less common and transitions involving part time work more common.

The 'fit' between women's preferences and their actual work histories varies widely across member states, as do the reasons for the lack of fit. Table 2 compares the employment history and preferences of adult women aged 25-49 for the life course stage when pre-school age children are present in the household for countries in East and West Europe. Just over half the women in West Europe had the work status they preferred at this life course stage compared to about two

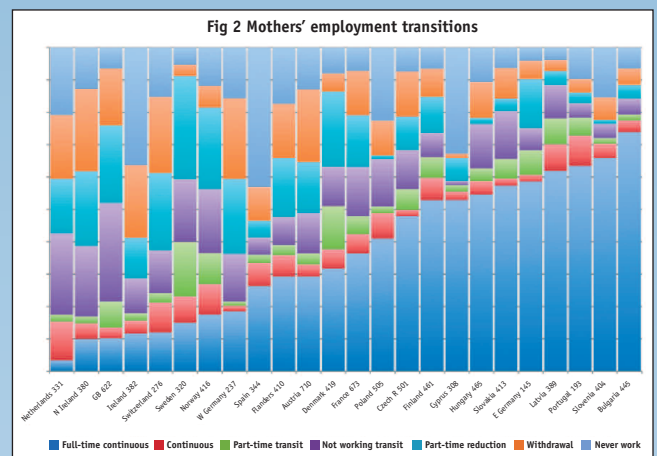


Figure 2 shows us the pattern of labour market transitions experienced by women in Europe. These data refer to adult women up to age 59, so they give us a picture of what has been taking place over the last thirty years or so. The contrast between East and West Europe stands out clearly.

fifths in East Europe. While one quarter of women in West Europe were working full time or at home when they would have preferred to be working part time, this was true of over one third of women in East Europe. In addition about one women in six in East Europe would have preferred to be at home instead of working part-time.

Table 3 Europe 2002: Women's work preferences and histories compared

Work Preferences				
Work History	Work full-time	Work part-time	Stay at home	Total
<b>West Europe</b>				
Work full-time	6.1	13.1	4.2	23.4
Work part-time	2.4	26.5	8.2	37.1
Stay at home	1.4	13.3	24.8	39.5
Total	9.9	52.8	37.2	100.0
<b>East Europe</b>				
Work full-time	12.6	26.2	16.0	54.8
Work part-time	.9	8.4	2.7	12.0
Stay at home	3.6	11.0	18.6	33.3
Total	17.1	45.6	37.3	100.0

### Conclusions

The single most important conclusion to emerge from this research is the importance to many women of part-time work as a means for reconciling employment and childcare. Part-time work offers women the chance to stay in the labour market but also have time for looking after children. This suggests that policies that allow workers to switch between full and part-time statuses, or reduce hours of work temporarily have a role to play in increasing employment rates, facilitating work-life balance and encouraging gender equality. There is also a role for policies that ensure that part-time workers enjoy similar rights and promotion prospects to peers working full-time.

John MacInnes



### Reference

T. Nazio & J. MacInnes 2007  
*'Time Stress, Well-being and the Double Burden.'*

In *Family Formation and Family Dilemmas in Contemporary Europe* Gøsta Esping-Andersen (Ed), pp.155-183. Bilbao: Fundación BBVA.