



UNIVERSITY  
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# WORKCARE

No:9

Social quality and changing relationships between work, family and welfare in Europe



## Relevance to Society and European Public Policy

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### Research Context

The Workcare project, a cross-European study funded by the European Union, has furnished important new findings which provide pointers for developing public policy in the European Union. The recommendations made by the expert project team provide the basis for evidence-informed public policy to improve the lives of Europeans and enable the realisation of key policy objectives. These findings develop from ideas set out in the Lisbon Strategy and later reinforced in the Renewed Social Agenda adopted by the European Commission in July 2009. The Renewed Social Agenda is based upon three goals: creating work opportunities, providing access to employment and demonstrating solidarity. It explicitly highlights the importance of reconciling private and professional life by improving parental leave arrangements, introducing new forms of leave and strengthening protection for pregnant women.

EU policy is concerned to encourage as many people as possible, women as well as men, to be active in the workforce. There is also a commitment to promote equality of opportunity for men and women and an over-arching goal is to promote a high quality of life for the whole population. Concerns about European demographic trends such as an aging population and low fertility rates have led to concerns about whether it is possible to both maintain high rates of employment for women as well as men and to encourage family building. This raises questions about how these policy objectives can be achieved when some of them seem to be in conflict with others.

This leads us to ask: how do we enable families with young children to combine work and care, to take benefit from equality of opportunity for mothers and fathers and at the same time to enjoy a high quality of life? This project, carried out by an expert team of social scientists from seven European countries, was designed to explore how families with young children could best be supported by public policies to do this.

### Project Objectives:

- To describe and explain a Europe-wide patterning of welfare, work and care using a variety of methods and sources.
- To develop and apply a social quality perspective, enabling a synthesis of macro and micro levels of analysis.
- To understand the nature and impact of European level policies for work and care.
- To explain the transitions between work and care on a comparative basis.
- To understand how households make decisions about work and care
- To determine how employment and social policies have impacted upon the organisation of work and care.

### Scientific Approach

The research was carried out between 2005 and 2009 through:

- Analysis of cross-European data sets to provide the “big picture” of European patterns of work and care
- Analysis of childcare, flexibility and workplace policies at both national and European level
- In-depth interviews with a cross-section of countries having contrasting traditions of work and care: Denmark, the UK, Poland, Hungary, Austria, Portugal and Italy

### Key Findings

#### Major trends

- The dual earner family is increasingly seen as the norm in European countries, even in those ones where a “family model” previously prevailed. This causes some stress for families in managing work and care
- In countries where there is little childcare provision this causes great strain to families because they have to make a range of arrangements for childcare whilst parents are at work that can be quite precarious.
- This means that women have to shoulder a double responsibility for employment and domestic care
- Fathers are increasingly involved in child-rearing but women still do most of the domestic work
- Higher fertility rates in some countries are often associated with good childcare provision which enable women to fully participate in the labour market as well as raising children
- Good child care provision enables continuity of employment since those countries with the greatest

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

- The extent to which people could control their work and care arrangements differs by social class. Better educated parents have a wider range of choices about how they organise work and care than working class ones. This is related to a greater financial resources as well as the opportunity to negotiate flexible working times with employers. Working class and poorer households are less likely to enjoy these advantages.
- There are five main strategies for managing work and care:
  - shift working**, whereby parents take it in turn to stay at home by arranging alternate working times. This was common in countries with little child care provision such as the UK, Austria, Poland and Italy
  - flexible working** whereby one or both parents found flexible working times or even went self-employed to accommodate this. The most common strategy, found in all countries
  - Reliance on formal care** . This was where the formal child care arrangements fitted with parent's working times. This was more available to those in countries with extensive child care arrangements and to middle class families who could afford to pay for care.
  - Informal care networks** whereby parents drew upon the support of family (especially grandparents) or wider informal ties. Common in Southern and Eastern Europe where families were sometimes co-resident with other kin
  - Self reliance** whereby children were old enough to look after themselves or after each other (only possible when children are old enough).

#### For Mothers:

- Mothers still do most childcare and domestic work even if working full time
- Mothers tend to sacrifice their careers for their families
- Employers and other work colleagues are often more sympathetic to women taking maternity and childcare leave than to male employees.

#### For Fathers:

- Fathers complain about not having enough time to spend with children
- Fathers are increasingly actively involved in childcare BUT
- Employers are reluctant to recognise their needs as fathers
- Fathers have the longest hours of work at precisely the period of the life when they have small children (for financial reasons)
- Daddy leave schemes are introduced in most countries BUT
- There is not much uptake because this would reflect badly on their careers
- They would suffer financial losses by taking up paternity leave, which is not generally compensated equivalent to their normal salary.
- Gender stereotyping by employers and work colleagues means that men's caring roles are not reinforced.

#### For Children:

- Children are central to the lives of families
- Families of all social classes and all countries are deeply concerned about the educational and cognitive development of children.
- For this reason they are concerned about the quality of the care their children receive and value it when this is professionalised. Professional care should take into account the changing needs of children as they grow older.
- This involves participation by both parents in child-rearing

#### For Childcare:

- The most comprehensive and successful childcare policies were found in those countries where children were regarded as the responsibility of **society as a whole** rather than only a private matter for families.
- Even in societies where childcare policies are extensive, parents have to use a range of back up arrangements
- Flexible child care arrangements are the key to enabling parents to work
- In all countries extended family are important, but especially in countries where there is little public childcare provision.
- Other social networks such as friends and neighbours are also important, especially for single parents who need to draw upon a wide-ranging support group

#### For Work Policies:

- Dual earner families managed best where there were flexible hours of work or where they could negotiate time with their employers
- Some parents deliberately chose self-employed or non-standard jobs for this reason
- Middle class families were more easily able to negotiate working times than working class ones. Middle class parents were more easily able to work from home for example.
- Sympathetic employers allowed time for those with children, but they were more sympathetic to requests from women than from men.

#### For social policies:

- Flexicurity policies often provide flexibility and security for men but only flexibility for women. This has a negative impact on women's access to employment, opportunities for support in re-entry to the labour market and economic and employment security across the life course.
- Across Europe kin and friends provide important support and grandparents provide an important resource in emergencies, although in those countries without a good provision of affordable childcare there is a higher reliance on kin. Families without kin to support them face especial difficulties. Kin are an important resource for enabling parents to make choices, the unavailability of kin makes it more difficult for parents to combine paid employment with care.
- All parents are greatly concerned about the cognitive and educational development of children. There is a shortage in many European countries of good quality affordable child care especially for children under three years. Pre-school and school provision for children over three years is often for short hours and does not meet the needs of parents when both are in paid employment.

In the absence of affordable childcare it is generally women who take time out of the labour market to care and take on part time, insecure employment to enable caring commitments to be fulfilled. This is a result of a number of factors including ideologies of care, normative expectations, the attitudes of employers and the gender pay gap. This has life time consequences for women's economic security and opportunities to have a career. In some countries this is encouraged through social policies

- There is a common European view as to what provides for a high quality of life – a view which is shared by

men and women and across the life course. Europeans want a decent standard of living, an orderly society, to be socially integrated and to be empowered to take control over their own lives. This provides an important backdrop against which to develop public policies designed to support families.

- It is possible to identify five workcare regimes in terms of the ways they support (or not) parents combining paid employment with their caring responsibilities. These different regimes have very different consequences for how parents organise work and care and especially impact on women. They are shown below:

Work-care Regime	Spending on Childcare	Key Features <sup>2</sup>
Extensive Family Policy	Sweden (3.1%) <sup>3</sup> , Denmark (3.9%), Belgium (2%), France (2.5%)	High level childcare 0 -3 years, with generous payment of parental leave. High proportion women working part-time.
Short leave, Part -time	UK (1.7%) <sup>4</sup> , Netherlands (1.2%)	Short period of poorly paid parental leave, low provision of public childcare for 0 – 3 year olds and high proportion of mothers working part-time.
Long Leave Part-time	Germany (2.9%), Austria (3.0%), Luxembourg (3.9%)	Long period of relatively well –paid parental leave followed by mothers who do return to the labour market working part-time.
Family Care	Estonia (1.7), Slovenia (2.0), Spain (0.7%), Latvia (1.2%), Greece (1.7%), Italy (1.2%), Portugal (1.3%) <sup>5</sup>	Period parental leave varies but badly paid . Mothers generally withdraw from the labour market and do not return when their children are older.
Extended Parental Leave <sup>1</sup>	Hungary (2.5%), Poland (0.9%), Czech Republic (1.6%), Lithuania (1.1%), Finland (2.9%) <sup>6</sup>	Long period of parental leave with women returning to full-time employment when they have exhausted their entitlement to leave.

1 Bulgaria also has this regime but was not included in the Workcare analysis.

2 Part-time work is working less than 30 hours a week. In the Scandinavian countries, including Finland, part-time is generally relatively secure long-part-time whereas in the UK, Netherlands, Germany and Austria many women work in short-part -time jobs which with the exception of those in the Netherlands are often marginal and insecure.

3 Figure in brackets % GDP spent on Family policy. All figures are from Eurostat 2006

4 Since 2007 the UK introduced long maternal leave and invested in childcare provision

5 In Portugal in fact most mothers go back to work full time (in contrast to other Southern European countries)

6 Finland deviates somewhat as there is a greater provision of public care for 0-3 year olds and more women working part-time.

In terms of our research findings the extensive family policy regime comes closest to one which is likely to meet European policy objectives and the aspiration parents have for combining paid employment and caring. In this respect an important finding is that the extensive family policy model is not invariably the most expensive option, the long leave, part- time and extended parental leave models are comparable in costs. The 'cheap' alternatives are when there is a very low level of public support for families. The highest level of public investment in supporting families is in Denmark (3.9% GDP) and the lowest level in Spain (0.7% GDP). However, the levels of investment are much the same in Sweden (3.1% GDP) which provides high levels of support for families to work and care and Austria (3%) which encourages fathers to have paid employment and mothers to become full-time careers. The costs of the extended family leave model are not much below the costs of the extensive family care model (in effect long leave for mothers).

### Policy Recommendations

- Children should be seen as the responsibility of the society as a whole rather than just the private responsibility of families. Raising well socialised and adequately cared for children is in everyone's interests in terms of ensuring that there are future workers able to take up positions in the knowledge society, creating healthy, contributing citizens, supporting the long-term future of the welfare state and avoiding crime. Social policy towards children is a collective responsibility.
- Comprehensive childcare is preferable to other policy solutions for raising children (such as extended child rearing leave) because they enable women to return to full labour market activity with minimum disruption and is not necessarily more expensive than paying women to stay at home.
- Given the importance of cognitive and educational development in an increasingly complex and competitive

society, quality, professionalised childcare that can provide educational development tailored to the needs of children of different age groups is preferable to other kinds of care.

- Policies need to take account of a gender perspective perhaps through a gender impact analysis of all new policies and recommendations. In particular policies should consider supply side as well as demand side of employment policies. Unless policies take account of the gendering of supply side factors policies may have unintended or unanticipated consequences. Examples of this are flexicurity policies which do not result in security for women and entitlement to paternity leave which is not taken up.
- Men and women are independent citizens but policies must recognize that mothers and fathers have joint responsibilities for the family and develop negotiated strategies to enable them to carry out these responsibilities and therefore see the household as a unit. Parents should be empowered in developing joint strategies and as individuals in taking control over their lives and making informed choices.
- Labour market policies are needed to ensure that both men and women can access flexible employment and that they know their rights in negotiating this. Employers and Trade Unions need to ensure that people are informed of their rights in this respect. At the moment these rights might exist but people either do not know about them or are unable to access them.
- Governments need to invest in supporting families to enable them to combine their responsibilities for care and ensure that men and women are able to exercise their rights to secure and flexible employment. In this way EU policy objectives will be achieved, including high levels of employment, social inclusion of men and women and the avoidance of precariousness, equality of opportunity for men and women, and increased fertility rates. A gender lens must be used in evaluating all policy proposals and all subject to a gender impact analysis.
- Flexicurity is seen as a key aspect of European policy,

but these policies must ensure flexibility and security for men and women, not flexibility and security for men and a flexibility without security for women.

- Gender equality in the workplace and labour market must be progressed and in particular attention paid to measures to reduce the gender-pay gap
- Employers must be encouraged to introduce family friendly policies and men and women feel supported in taking their entitlement.
- Policies must be informed by a life course perspective, for example the consequences for career, entitlement to social security benefits and so on for women and men of taking periods outside the labour market to care.
- Policies must recognise that reliance on informal care is precarious and may cause difficulties for parents and employers. An unintended consequence of encouraging older women to enter the labour market is likely to be a reduction in the availability of grandmothers to provide care, something they do in all countries at least in emergencies.
- Well-paid adequate maternity and maternity leave are essential to support families. Men must be encouraged and supported in taking paternity leave which should be 'lost' if it is not taken by the man. In Sweden this has been introduced
- Well-paid flexible parental leave including 'daddy' leave should be available to enable parents to combine their caring responsibilities with paid employment.
- Substitute Care – child minders, nurseries, pre-school classes, school, after school and out of school provision should be affordable, professional, of high quality, adequate to meet the demand from all parents who want to access the services and the opening hours should be compatible with full-time employment.
- Support should be provided to support informal carers meeting the needs, including the cognitive development needs of the child(ren) they care for.
- Nursery and other care providers need to be flexible enough to take account of employment demands for men and women, perhaps by providing additional hours before or after the main opening times.

## Title of project: Workcare: Social quality and Changing Relationships between Work, Care and Welfare in Europe

### Consortium

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 University of Glasgow Caledonian, UK  
 Institute for Advanced Studies, Austria  
 The University of Economics, Austria  
 ISCTE Portugal  
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#### Website:

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

Copies of our policy briefings and working papers can be found on the website.