

Reconciliation of work, family and private life in the European Union

Policy review



This report was prepared for the **European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)** as a part of EIGE's 'Collection of good practices in the area of reconciliation of work, family and private life in EU Member States' study. The study was commissioned by EIGE and carried out by ÖSB Consulting GmbH: Renate Haupfleisch, Katja Korolkova, Monika Natter, Nathalie Wuiame. The work on this publication was coordinated by Maurizio Mosca and Barbara Limanowska from the Gender Mainstreaming Team, EIGE. The report does not necessarily reflect the opinion or position of EIGE, and no responsibility is taken by any persons for the use of the information contained in this publication.

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Country codes

BE	Belgium	NL	Netherlands
BG	Bulgaria	AT	Austria
CZ	Czech Republic	PL	Poland
DK	Denmark	PT	Portugal
DE	Germany	RO	Romania
EE	Estonia	SI	Slovenia
IE	Ireland	SK	Slovakia
EL	Greece	FI	Finland
ES	Spain	SE	Sweden
FR	France	UK	United Kingdom
HR	Croatia	IS	Iceland
IT	Italy	NO	Norway
CY	Cyprus	CH	Switzerland
LV	Latvia	EU-15	15 EU Member States
LT	Lithuania	EU-25	25 EU Member States
LU	Luxembourg	EU-27	27 EU Member States
HU	Hungary	EU-28	28 EU Member States
MT	Malta		

Introduction





Introduction

In December 2013, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) commissioned ÖSB Consulting to carry out a study focusing on policies and the collection of good practices in the field of reconciliation of work, family and private life in EU Member States. The study also included a policy and literature review in the field of reconciliation at EU and Member State level.

This policy review consists of two parts. The first part provides an overview of the main developments on the issue in the European Union (political, social and legislative) including relevant EU legislation and documents. The second part is based on the contributions and information gathered by national experts (a list of the country experts of all 28 Member States is included in this publication).

The involvement of men in care activities, the labour market participation and economic independence of women, the involvement of social partners in reconciliation matters and the impact of the economic crisis and related austerity measures on reconciliation issues are crosscutting themes of the review.

1. European policy review on the reconciliation of work, private and family life





1. European policy review on the reconciliation of work, private and family life

Gender equality is a fundamental principle of the European Union enshrined in the EC Treaty and one of the objectives and tasks of the Community as recognised in Articles 2 and 3(3) of the European Union Treaty and in Article 8 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

Gender equality has contributed a significant share of employment and economic growth over the past 50 years and its potential is not yet fully exploited. New research shows that reducing gender gaps could further boost economic growth: the projected gain from full convergence in participation rates by 2020 is an increase of 12.4 % in GDP per capita by 2030. This would make a big contribution to the EU's economic recovery and be an important asset for the EU in a time of downturn ⁽¹⁾. Investment in gender equality yields the highest returns of all development investments ⁽²⁾.

Under the Europe 2020 strategy, the Commission is enhancing women's labour market participation as a way to reach the targets of lifting 20 million people out of poverty or social exclusion and achieving

a 75 % employment rate. Policies needed include promoting accessible, affordable and high-quality childcare facilities and long-term care, removing fiscal disincentives for second earners, and making work pay for both women and men. These policies have been reflected in the annual growth surveys and country-specific recommendations of recent European semesters ⁽³⁾.

As a fundamental right and a condition of economic growth, reconciliation of work, family and private life is recognised at European level as a key objective of the European Commission's Strategy on Gender Equality 2010–15. To achieve this, men and women have to be able to find an appropriate work, family and private life balance. This means the introduction of family and parental leave schemes, care arrangements for children, the elderly and other dependent persons as well as the development of a working environment structure and organisation, which facilitates the combination of work and family/private responsibilities for women and men. However, sharing childcare responsibilities in particular can be difficult in a culture where men are considered professionally uncommitted if they

⁽¹⁾ European Commission, *Progress report on equality between women and men in 2012*, 2013.

⁽²⁾ OECD, *Closing the gender gap: act now*, 2012.

⁽³⁾ European Commission, 'Mid-term review of the strategy for equality between women and men', 2013.

take advantage of parental leave and mothers are sidetracked from career paths. Additionally, if good-quality, affordable childcare is unavailable, it may simply be impossible for many parents, especially those on low incomes, to work full time and take care of their families ⁽⁴⁾.

Current EU and national policy efforts relate to aspects of leave arrangements, flexibility of working time arrangements and commitments to developing care services.

This paper will present an overview of main relevant statistics, EU policies and actions, and includes a review of the most relevant studies in the field of reconciling work, family and private life.

The issue of reconciling work, family and private life is not new and has been recognised as a priority at EU level for a number of years ⁽⁵⁾. It was first considered as a condition for achieving *de facto* gender equality and is increasingly seen as a key driver for increasing women's participation in the labour market. Key statistics on labour market participation and share of paid and unpaid work will be presented in section 1.1 of this paper.

The European policy and legislative initiatives touching upon the reconciliation of work, private and family life are addressed in three main ways:

- providing various forms of leave for both women and men;
- promoting flexible working arrangements;
- supplying adequate, affordable, high-quality childcare services for children as well as providing care facilities for other dependants.

⁽⁴⁾ OECD, *Closing the gender gap: act now*, 2012.

⁽⁵⁾ See the fourth EU action programme on gender equality and the 1992 resolution of the European Council on childcare arrangements.

The reconciliation of work, private and family life is a fundamental right which is promoted mainly through guaranteed rights to maternity and parental leave and related protection against discrimination. European law provides for minimum standards for maternity and parental leave. Leave entitlements will be addressed in section 1.2.

Working time arrangements comprise both length of working time and flexible working time schedules. The issue of the overall working culture and the division between the public and private spheres have an important gender dimension that is generally underestimated, as we will see in section 1.3. It is at company level that changes in the work culture need to happen. Family-friendly policies by companies signal that a better balance between work, family and private life does not lead to adverse effects at the workplace for employees.

In 2002 in Barcelona, the European Council set different targets for children under 3 years old and for those between 3 years old and the mandatory school age. The current situation in respect of childcare services will be dealt with in section 1.4.

The role of men in gender equality strategies has been looked at in recent European studies and policies. In relation to work, family and private life balance, the support and recognition of men as carers is fundamental to reinforcing gender equality in the labour market and in the family (fairer distribution of household tasks). This issue will be addressed in section 1.5.

Reconciliation measures are at the interaction of welfare systems, policies and organisations' practice. Their cross-influence and complementarity will be the focus of section 1.6.

The final section, section 1.7, will present the main challenges as well as possible ways to address them.



1.1. Participation of men and women in employment

The Lisbon strategy adopted in 2000 and the more recent Europe 2020 strategy both recognise the importance of increasing the participation of women in the labour market, not only in order not to waste talent but also to respond to a changing world and the need for Europe to be a smart, sustainable and inclusive society. In this respect, reconciliation issues become key to the objective of getting more women into the labour market and helping to reach the Europe 2020 target of an overall employment rate of 75 % for women and men.

In 2000, following its commitment set out in the Lisbon strategy, the Council adopted a resolution on the balanced participation of women and men in working life⁽⁶⁾. This resolution recognises the importance of furthering all aspects of equal opportunities, including making it easier to reconcile working and family and private life. The principle of gender equality makes it essential to counter the disadvantages faced by women with regard to access to and participation in the labour market and the disadvantages faced by men with regard to participating in family life. These gender-based disadvantages result from predetermined social models that tend to presuppose that women are chiefly responsible for unpaid work related to looking after a family whereas paid work derived from an economic activity mainly tends to be seen as the responsibility of men⁽⁷⁾.

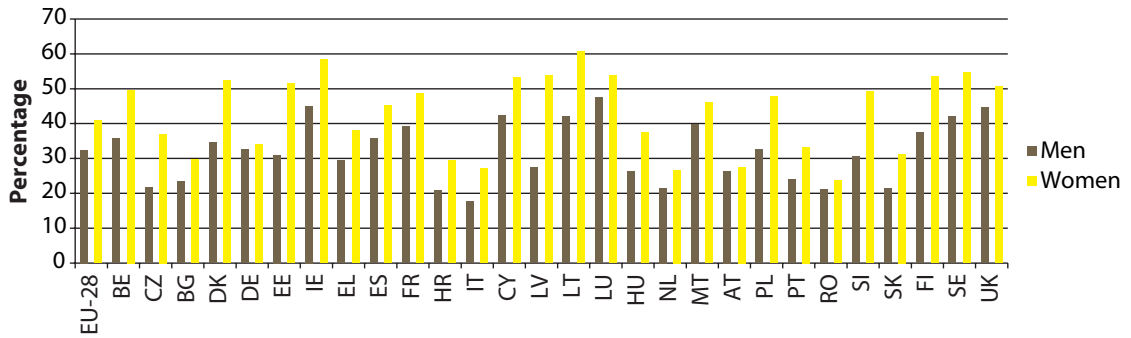
The labour market participation of women has increased over the years and the employment patterns of men and women have become more similar today. Sustainable employment participation is contributing to the goal of strengthening women's lifelong economic independence as stated in the European Commission's strategy 2010–15.

Labour market participation is strongly linked to educational attainment, an issue that is becoming increasingly important with the current economic and financial crisis affecting in particular low-qualified jobs. Greater educational attainment has accounted for about half of the economic growth in OECD countries in the past 50 years — and that owes a lot to bringing more girls to higher levels of education and achieving greater gender equality in the number of years spent in education.

⁽⁶⁾ Resolution of the Council and of the Ministers for Employment and Social Policy, meeting within the Council of 29 June 2000, on the balanced participation of women and men in family and working life, OJ C 218 of 31.7.2000.

⁽⁷⁾ OECD, *Closing the gender gap: act now*, 2012.

Figure 1: Tertiary educational attainment by sex, age group 30–34, 2013



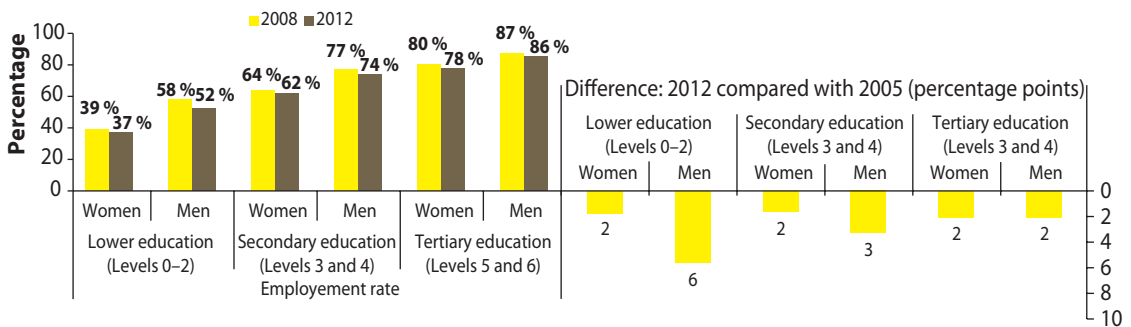
Source: Eurostat, labour force survey (LFS), data retrieved on 10 March 2014.

Today in Europe, as illustrated in Figure 1, girls have higher tertiary education attainments than boys in all Member States. Figure 2 shows that female participation in employment varies greatly among groups with different educational attainment.

In 2012, the EU average employment gender gap was greater than 15 percentage points for those with lower International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels 0–2, decreasing to 12 percentage points for people with secondary education

(ISCED 3 and 4); to just above 7 percentage points for people with tertiary education (ISCED 5 and 6). Between 2008 and 2012 in the EU-28, the employment rates among those with lower education declined from 58 % in 2008, to 52 % in 2012 for men compared with a decline from 39 % in 2008 to 37 % in 2012 for women. In contrast, for tertiary education employment, rates for men over the same time period slightly decreased from 87 % to 86 % and for women from 80 % to 78 %.

Figure 2: Employment rate for women and men in the EU-28 (15–64) by level of education, 2008 and 2012



Source: Eurostat, LFS, extracted from report *Gender equality and economic independence*, EIGE, 2014.



Note: Lower education includes pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education: ISCED levels 0–2; secondary education includes upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education: ISCED levels 3 and 4; tertiary education includes first and second stages of tertiary education: ISCED levels 5 and 6. The employment rate represents employed persons as a percentage of the same group in the total population. The difference is calculated in percentage points of the employment rate in 2012 minus the employment rate in 2008.

However, greater educational equality does not guarantee equality in the workplace. If high childcare costs mean that it is not economically worthwhile for women to work full-time; if workplace culture penalises women for interrupting their careers to have children; and if women continue to bear the burden of unpaid household chores, childcare and looking after ageing parents, it will be difficult for them to realise their full potential in paid work ⁽⁸⁾.

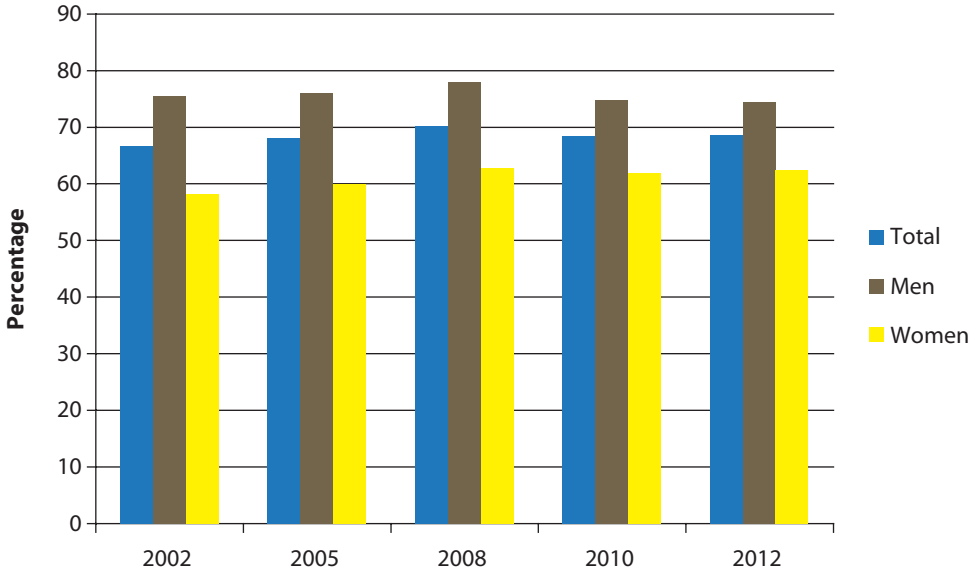
The current gap between male and female employment rates shows clearly the need to foster women's greater involvement if the EU is to meet the Europe 2020 target of a 75 % employment rate.

The gender gap between employment levels gradually shrank as female employment participation increased from 58 % in 2002 to 63 % in 2008. The gap also shrank as a direct consequence of the financial and economic crisis which affected particularly the male-dominated sectors of the labour market. Over the past 10 years, the employment gap has diminished by almost a third ⁽⁹⁾.

⁽⁸⁾ OECD, *Closing the gender gap: act now*, 2012.

⁽⁹⁾ European Commission, *Boosting equality between women and men in the EU, key actions and figures*, 2014.

Figure 3: Employment rate by sex, 2002–12

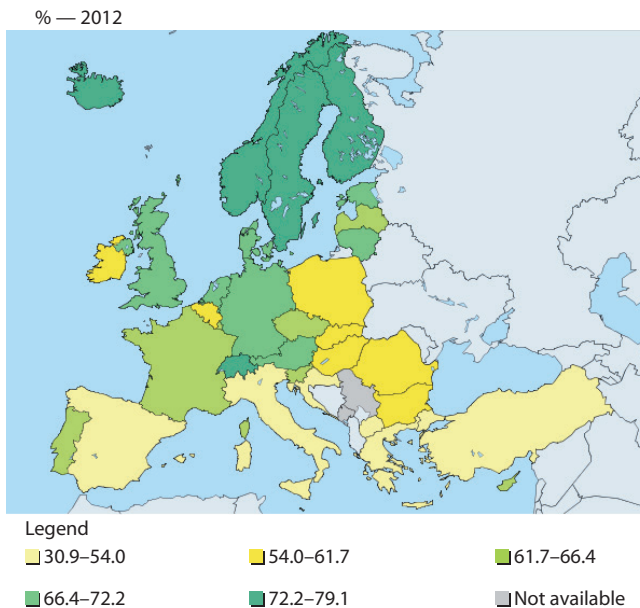


Source: Eurostat, LFS, data extracted 10 March 2014.

Currently, women’s employment rate in the EU stands at 63 % — that of men at 75 %. The female employment rate is lower than 60 % in Ireland, Greece, Spain, Italy, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania and Slovakia,

while it is above 70 % in Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland and Sweden. Only Sweden has already met the Europe 2020 target.

Figure 4: Employment rate of women, age group 20–64



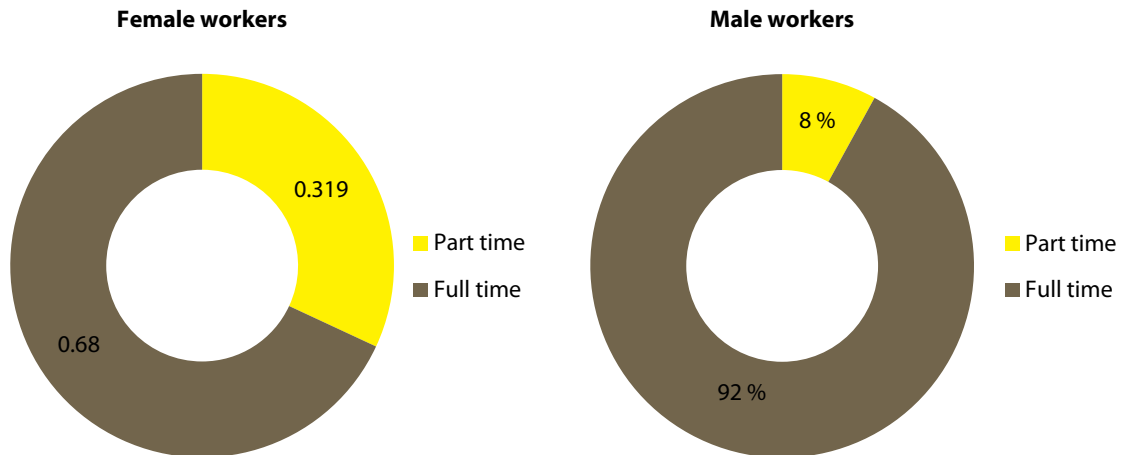
Source: Eurostat, LFS, data extracted 10 March 2014.



A major reason for women's low employment rates is the challenge of reconciling work, family and private life. More women have entered the workforce in recent years, but they are more likely to work part time and in sectors such as health, welfare, education and

in administrative jobs which have a high percentage of women as employees. Such gender differences and choices correspond to social expectations and the fact that women still bear the burden of unpaid tasks such as childcare and housework.

Figure 5: Part-time employment rate by sex in 2012.

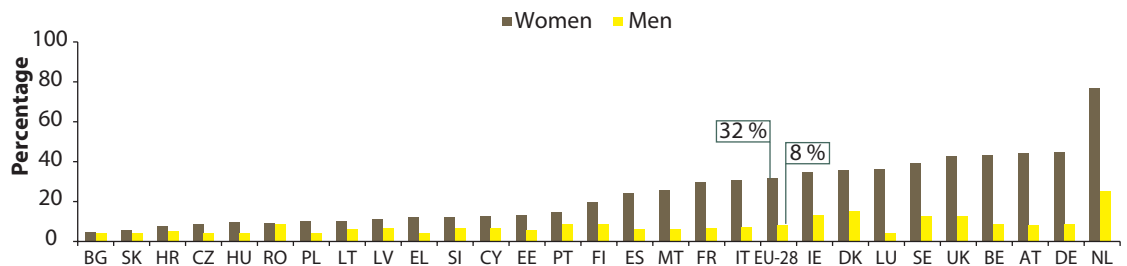


Source: Eurostat, *Women and employment in 2012*, March 2014.

Almost one third of employed women work part time, compared to a mere 8 % of men working part time. However, there are important differences between Member States: while part-time employment is not common among women in eastern Europe, more than one in three women employed in west-

ern Europe works part time: a higher proportion of women working in part-time jobs can be found in the Netherlands (77 %), Germany (45 %), Austria and Belgium (44 %). In 2012, the proportion of men in the labour market on a part-time basis was highest in the Netherlands (25 %) and Denmark (15 %).

Figure 6: Part-time employment as a percentage of the total employment in the EU-28 by sex and Member State, 15–64, 2012



Source: Eurostat, LFS, extracted from report *Gender equality and economic independence*, EIGE, 2014.

Note: The full-time/part-time distinction in the main job is made on the basis of a spontaneous answer given by the respondent in all countries (except for the Netherlands).

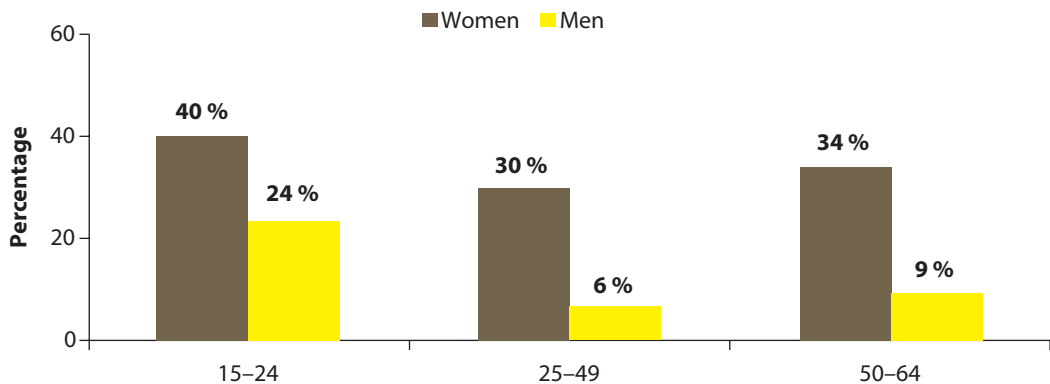
Part-time work has increased slightly for both women and men from 2008 to 2012 (for women from 31 % in 2008 to 32 % in 2012 and for men from 7 % in 2008 to 8 % in 2012), possibly due to shorter hours of work adopted to minimise employment cuts during the economic crisis (ILO, 2013). For women the most notable increases were recorded in Estonia and Latvia (4 percentage points, from 9 % to 13 % in Estonia, from 7 % to 11 % in Latvia). For men, rates nearly doubled in a number of Member States over the time period (Ireland, Greece, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovakia).

What is commonly defined as part time can vary substantially in terms of working hours. Working hours vary considerably, from very few to nearly a full-time job, with an average of 20 hours in the EU. Working time less than 10 hours a week has been

classified as ‘micro-jobs’. In 2012 part-time work of less than 10 hours per week was widespread among women in Denmark (22 %) and Portugal (23 %); but also among men in Austria (20 %), Germany (23 %), Portugal (24 %), the Netherlands (29 %) and Denmark (33 %). In Portugal, more than half of women part-time workers (54 %) were in marginal part-time employment. This also concerned more than half of men in part-time employment in the United Kingdom (51 %), Portugal and Germany (56 %) and Denmark (66 %).

Part-time work is unevenly distributed over the life course of individuals. It tends to be more concentrated at the beginning and at the end of people’s working lives, especially in the case of men, while it is more evenly distributed and remains relatively high for women.

Figure 7: Part-time employment as a percentage of total employment in the EU-28, by sex and age groups, 2012



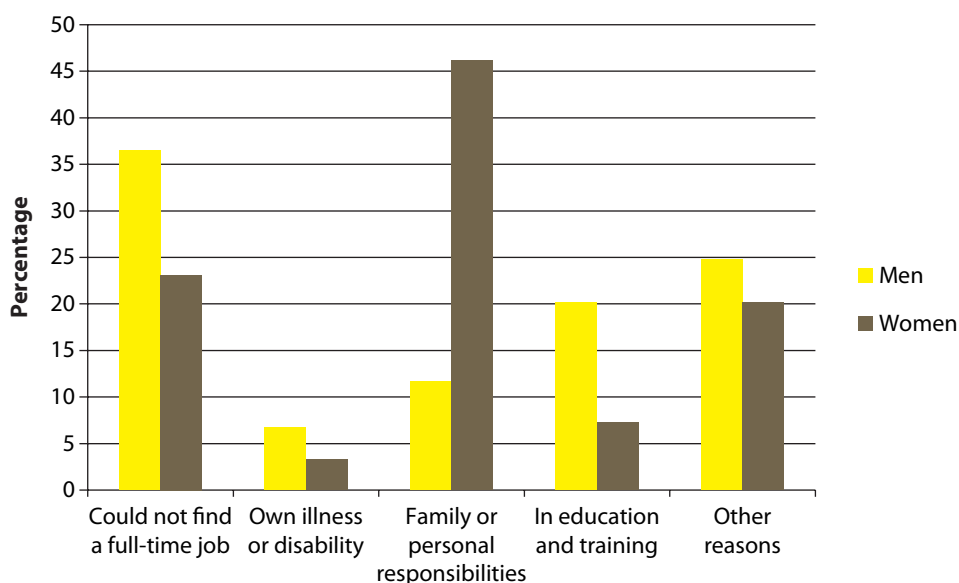
Source: Eurostat, LFS, extracted from report *Gender equality and economic independence*, EIGE, 2014.

Note: The full-time/part-time distinction in the main job is made on the basis of a spontaneous answer given by the respondent in all countries (except for the Netherlands).



Reasons to engage in part-time paid work differ between women and men. While women work part time for family or personal reasons, men take part-time jobs because they cannot find a full-time job (see Figure 8 below).

Figure 8: Main reasons for working part time, by sex (persons aged 15–64), EU-27, 2011



Source: Eurostat, European social statistics, *Pocketbook*, 2013 edition.

However, even though men devote more time to paid work, women work, in total, 60 hours a week, 10 hours more than men, spending on average 25 hours on caring activities compared with 9 hours spent by men ⁽¹⁰⁾.

The differences in terms of number of hours worked can be summarised in one telling figure: if employment is measured in full-time equivalents, only 54 % of the female workforce is employed in the EU as compared to 62 % in terms of the employment rate's usual measure ⁽¹¹⁾.

Tensions between work and family life are at the heart of the employment puzzle when it comes to gender. Families with young children need affordable childcare if parents are to work. If childcare eats up one wage so that there is little or no financial gain in going out to work, parents (most often mothers) are less likely to seek a job. But how people manage life at home also plays a big part in the equation. Many systems still implicitly regard childrearing as a mother's responsibility: everywhere, women are doing more unpaid work than men, regardless of whether they have full-time jobs or not.

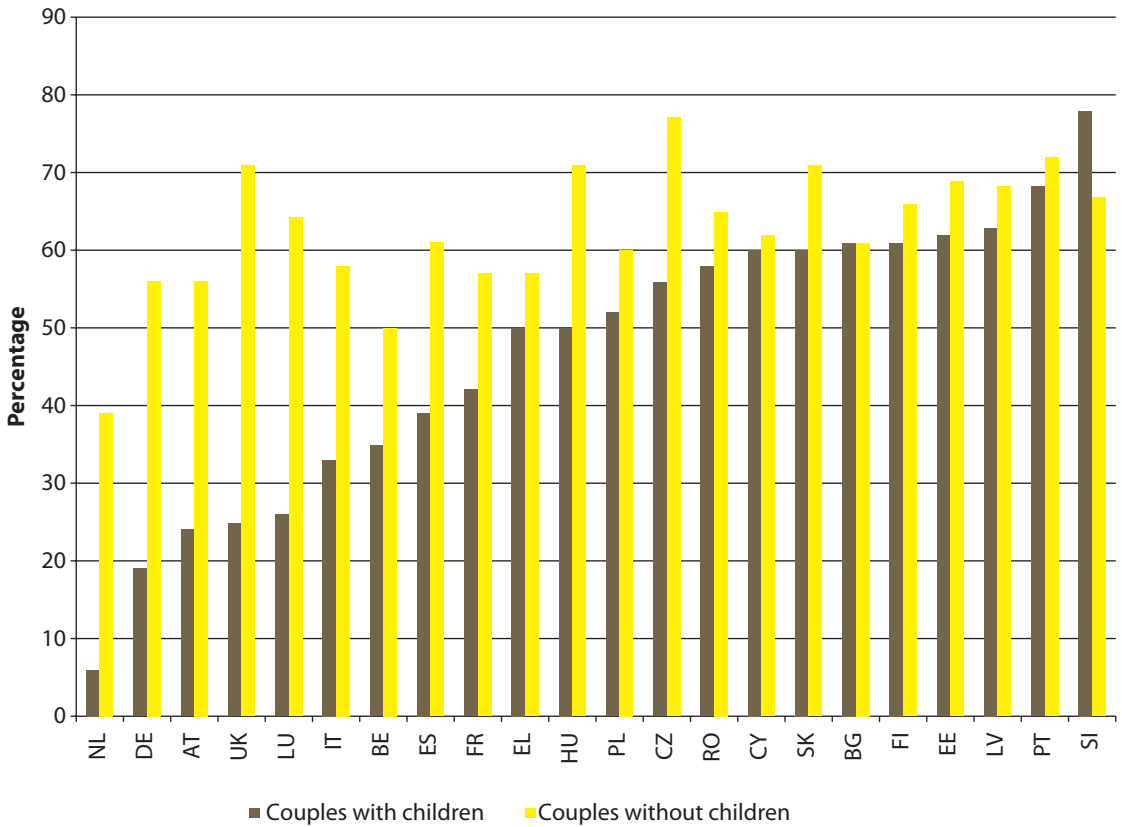
⁽¹⁰⁾ European Commission, *Boosting equality between women and men in the EU, key actions and figures*, 2014.

⁽¹¹⁾ European Commission, *Progress on equality between women and men in 2012, a Europe 2020 initiative*, 2013.

There is clearly higher participation in the labour market of couples without children than persons with children with the exception of Slovenia. This difference is less marked in new Member States and

to a lesser extent in southern countries than in 'older' Member States. In the Netherlands and in Belgium, dual full-time earner couples do not represent the majority.

Figure 9: Dual full-time-earner couples as percentage of all couples (persons aged 25–49 living in households as couples) with and without children in the household, by country, 2006



Source Eurostat, LFS, in *Reconciliation between work, private and family life in the European Union*, 2009; data not available for all countries.



The fifth European working conditions survey ⁽¹²⁾ reports that in each life phase, employed women still spend on average more hours on non-paid domestic or care activities than employed men. The smallest gender gap is found in the northern cluster and the largest in the continental and southern cluster. While the gender gap is lowest at the two ends of the life cycle, it increases dramatically during the parenting phase, with employed women spending twice as many hours on care and household activities compared with employed men.

When entering the parenting phase, employed women reduce their paid work by 4 hours a week but increase their unpaid work by 25 hours, while men's unpaid work increases by 12 hours.

The northern country cluster exhibits the lowest gender gap in time allocation, even when controlling for compositional and structural effects. This result can be ascribed to active mainstreaming policies that promote gender equality, and to measures intended to help parents achieve a balance between paid work and family life. These measures include the provision of high-quality public childcare and elderly care facilities, and the option of flexible and reversible working time over the course of life ⁽¹³⁾.

There has been a levelling down of gender gaps in employment, unemployment, wages and poverty during the crisis. However, this does not reflect progress in gender equality, as it is based on lower rates of employment, higher rates of unemployment and reduced earnings for both men and women ⁽¹⁴⁾. The European Commission's expert report on the impact of the crisis on gender equality policies and the situation of men and women draws important conclusions in terms of labour market participation.

⁽¹²⁾ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Working time and work-life balance in a life course perspective, Executive Summary*, 2013.

⁽¹³⁾ See footnote 12, p. 19.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Bettio and al., 'The impact of the economic crisis on the situation of women and men and on gender equality policies', *Synthesis report*, European Commission, 2013.

It concludes that the labour market behaviour of women during the crisis has been similar to that of men. The traditional view that women behave as employment buffers, called in when demand expands but pushed back when it contracts, has been definitely refuted by the experience of this crisis. The contemporary 'buffers' are young men and women on temporary employment contracts and migrant workers. During the downturn the share of dual breadwinner couples fell while that of female breadwinner couples rose by almost 10 %. Further, there is evidence of an increase in 'involuntary' part-time work for both women and men (the absolute increase in the number of involuntary part-time workers was larger among women, although in percentage terms the surge was stronger among men). A final conclusion of this report is that, while there is evidence of contained but uneven retrenchment in welfare provisions in the first years of the crisis, there is a threat that fiscal consolidation may ultimately reduce both the welfare provisions being made and the related employment with associated gender equality impacts ⁽¹⁵⁾.

1.2. Leave arrangements

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union explicitly recognises the right to reconcile family and professional life as a fundamental right of the European Union. It also explicitly guarantees a right to maternity (paid) and parental leave.

The Charter stipulates in Article 33(2):

'To reconcile family and professional life, everyone shall have the right to protection from dismissal for a reason connected with maternity and the right to paid maternity leave and to parental leave following the birth or adoption of a child.'

⁽¹⁵⁾ See footnote 14, p. 19.

Several Community law instruments and specific provisions grant important rights such as different forms of leave, entitlements during leave, protection against dismissal in relation to pregnancy, paternity and parental leave.

The main directives adopted up to now as regards leave and protection in relation to pregnancy and maternity are the pregnancy directive (92/85/EEC) and the parental leave directive (96/34/EC as amended by Directive 2010/18/EU) ⁽¹⁶⁾.

There are two main measures that allow fathers to be involved in the care of their children: paternity leave and parental leave. Paternity leave is generally a short period expressly granted to fathers around the birth of a child. Parental leave is a longer period of leave made available to both parents. In addition to this, fathers are increasingly using the right to breastfeeding breaks (e.g. in Spain). This right can be considered to be a form of parental leave. The introduction of a right to paternity leave is part of the proposed revised directive on maternity currently blocked before the Council.

The parental leave directive is an expression of the key role European social partners are playing in this issue. This role is further enhanced by Recast Directive 2006/54/EC which stipulates in Article 21(2) that:

‘Where consistent with national traditions and practice, Member States shall encourage the social partners, without prejudice to their autonomy, to promote equality between men and women, and flexible working arrangements, with the aim of facilitating the reconciliation of work and private life.’

While most countries now offer maternity and parental leave, there is far more diversity in the details, especially for parental leave. The European directive provides for 4 months’ parental leave for all workers, with 1 month not being transferable between the parents. It also gives parents returning to work after parental leave the opportunity to request a change to their working hours, and gives greater protection against dismissal or unfavourable treatment as a result of taking parental leave.

Parental leave is provided in all Member States. However, this right is implemented in different ways. At one end of the spectrum there are the Scandinavian countries which have enacted a form of mild coercion (father’s quota). In Sweden for example, 2 months of the parental leave regarding each child are reserved for the father and are thus non-transferable. In other cases, for example the United Kingdom, there is no parental leave as such. However, the very extensive period of ‘maternity leave’ is transferable to the father ⁽¹⁷⁾.

Major dimensions of diversity include length of leave, payment (whether paid or unpaid and, if paid, at what level), flexibility in use (especially whether the leave can be taken on a part-time basis, and in several blocks of time) and whether leave is a family or individual entitlement (that is whether the leave is an entitlement of the family to be divided between the parents as they choose, an individual and non-transferable entitlement for each parent, or a mixture of the two approaches) ⁽¹⁸⁾.

In practice, therefore, countries with an entitlement to parental leave can differ enormously in the details and therefore the effects of that leave policy. In an attempt to bring some systematisation to the

⁽¹⁶⁾ Council Directive 2010/18/EU of 8 March 2010 implementing the revised framework agreement on parental leave concluded by Businesseurope, CEEP and ETUC and repealing Directive 96/54/EC, OJ L 68/13 of 18.3.2010.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Masselot, A., Caracciolo di Torella, E. and Burri, S., *Fighting discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy, maternity and parenthood, The application of EU and national law in practice in 33 European countries*, European Commission.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Kamerman, S. and Moss, P., Eds., *The politics of parental leave policies: children, parenting, gender and the labour market*, Policy Press, 2009.



great differences between individual national parental policies, Wall ⁽¹⁹⁾ has suggested six main leave policy models in Europe, defined in terms of the length of leave they grant and the values and goals they assume and support ⁽²⁰⁾:

- the 1-year-leave gender-equality-oriented model (for example Iceland, Slovenia and Sweden);
- the parental choice-orientation model (for example Finland and France);
- the long-leave mother, home-centred model (for example Hungary and the Czech Republic);
- the short-leave part-time-employed mother model (for example the Netherlands);
- the short-leave male-breadwinner model (for example Spain);
- the early-return-to-full-time model (for example Portugal).

Paternity leave and leave for sick children are also available: the latter is more widespread than the former, and both are less widespread than parental leave.

As already mentioned, no minimum standards have yet been established at EU level for paternity leave. Although there are differences, paternity leave overall is very minimal. It usually lasts between 2 days (e.g. the Netherlands) and 14 days (e.g. Poland) with some exceptions where the period of entitlement is longer (18 weeks in Finland and 1 month in Lithuania) in connection with/around the time of the birth. The aim of the paternity leave differs among the Member States: in Finland it is mainly used by fathers to get to know the baby and help the mother, rather than as a way for fathers to care for the child. In Romania, the emphasis is more on

the welfare of the child and leave is conditional on the father completing a course in infant care. In Slovakia, it is linked to health and safety concerns: an employer is obliged to grant time off for the time necessary to transport the mother to a medical facility and back ⁽²¹⁾.

The schemes which stimulate the best take-up by fathers are those with a quota of leave reserved for the father, a high earnings replacement rate and flexibility in when and how the leave may be taken. The length of the leave is also important in providing the conditions for nurturing a more gender-equitable sharing of domestic work after the leave period ends ⁽²²⁾. Involvement in the daily upbringing of the child also helps fathers to create and strengthen their bond with the child and therefore they will be more likely to be involved in childcare at a later stage ⁽²³⁾.

This diversity underlines an important point: international organisations have an increasing influence on social policy formulation. The EU has set important minimum standards in maternity and parental leave through legislation (directives) that apply to all its Member States ⁽²⁴⁾.

Besides leave provisions related to childcare, other forms of leave are necessary in relation to care responsibilities. Demographic changes mean that more women (and men) are confronted with care responsibilities for (older) relatives. The detailed

⁽¹⁹⁾ Wall, K., 'Leave policy models and the articulation of work and family in Europe: a comparative perspective' summarised in International review of leave policies and related research 2007, Employment relations research series No 80, UK Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, 2007.

⁽²⁰⁾ Kamerman, S. and Moss, P., Eds., *The politics of parental leave policies: Children, parenting, gender and the labour market*, Policy Press, 2009.

⁽²¹⁾ Masselot, A., Caracciolo di Torella, E. and Burri, S., *Fighting discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy, maternity and parenthood, The application of EU and national law in practice in 33 European countries*, European Commission, 2013.

⁽²²⁾ Fagan, C., *Analysis note: Men and gender equality — tackling gender-segregated family roles and social care jobs*, European Commission, 2010.

⁽²³⁾ Masselot, A., Caracciolo di Torella, E. and Burri, S., *Fighting discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy, maternity and parenthood, The application of EU and national law in practice in 33 European countries*, European Commission, 2013.

⁽²⁴⁾ Kamerman, S. and Moss, P., Eds., *The politics of parental leave policies: Children, parenting, gender and the labour market*, Policy Press, 2009.

review of leave and other time-related provisions shows that, in some countries, provisions are simply underdeveloped. In (some) other countries, however, the problem is not so much a lack of provisions but rather poor design and poor coordination with the other long-term care services in place ⁽²⁵⁾. In particular, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Norway, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia offer only short-duration leave ranging from 6 to 30 days per year, while the majority of the remaining countries features both short and medium-to-long duration leaves. Short leave is often paid (but not everywhere, e.g. not in Cyprus or Croatia), and it is not made conditional on the employer's consent. The prevalent motivation is care-giving to family members, and only in about one third of cases are provisions explicitly or de facto targeted at older people, e.g. in Greece, Austria and Romania. One or more medium- and long-duration leave schemes are reported for 15 countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Romania, Spain and Sweden. In the majority of cases the maximum duration does not exceed 1 year.

The experience of countries that have implemented or attempted to implement leave schemes specifically targeted at long-term care — Austria in particular — indicates that there may still be insufficient knowledge about the optimal design of long-term care leave. Since the time horizon in long-term care is less certain, and the evolution of needs over time less predictable, parental or childcare schemes do not offer valid templates. Also, other working time arrangements may efficiently meet the needs of caregivers in employment. In particular, flexible working hours are popular among European caregivers, men or women, as they often suffice to satisfy care demands when disability is light, while effectively serving to complement formal care when disability is severe. Finland, Latvia, Norway,

Romania, Slovenia and the United Kingdom currently operate flexible hours programmes for the purposes of long-term care ⁽²⁶⁾.

1.3. Working culture, time arrangements and initiatives by companies

Different types of working time arrangements

As mentioned earlier, reconciliation can be promoted by leave entitlement but also through working time arrangements. The European social partners (Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE) — now referred to as *Businesseurope*, European Centre of Employers and Enterprises providing Public Services (CEEP), European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)) are also vigilant on this issue. For example, in Directive 97/81/EC of 15 December 1997, which implemented the framework agreement on part-time work concluded on 6 June 1997 by the European social partners, the social partners stress the importance of measures to facilitate access to part-time work in order to ease the reconciliation of professional and family life. EU legislation on part-time working outlaws unjustified discrimination in employment conditions, between part-time and full-time workers.

Clause 5 of the framework agreement concerns opportunities for part-time work and section 3 stipulates that:

'As far as possible, employers should give consideration to:

- (a) requests by workers to transfer from full-time to part-time work that becomes available in the establishment;
- (b) requests by workers to transfer from part-time to full-time work or to increase their working time should the opportunity arise;

⁽²⁵⁾ Bettio and al., 'The impact of the economic crisis on the situation of women and men and on gender equality policies', *Synthesis report*, European Commission, 2013.

⁽²⁶⁾ See footnote 25, p. 22.



- (c) the provision of timely information on the availability of part time and full time positions in the establishment in order to facilitate transfers from full time to part time or vice versa;
- (d) measures to facilitate access to part-time work at all levels of the enterprise, including skilled and managerial positions, and where appropriate, to facilitate access by part-time workers to vocational training to enhance career opportunities and occupational mobility;
- (e) the provision of appropriate information to existing bodies representing workers about part-time working in the enterprise.⁽²⁷⁾

Also, the integrated guidelines for growth and jobs for the period 2005–08, which was the principal policy instrument for developing and implementing the Lisbon strategy, recognised in Guideline 21 the importance of increasing flexibility of working time.

In their review of flexible working time arrangements and gender equality in 30 European countries, Plantenga and Remery differentiate between flexibility in the length of working time — i.e. part-time work, long hours and overtime — and the flexible organisation of working time — such as flexible working time organisation, homeworking and work at atypical hours ⁽²⁷⁾.

Historically, the tendency has been to reduce working time and to regulate the length of the working week. Since the 1980s, most industrialised societies have experienced a trend towards the diversification, decentralisation and individualisation of working time patterns, driven both by companies' need for greater adaptability in order to meet market constraints and by large changes in the gender division of labour. Various forms of working time arrangements have become more widespread, in par-

ticular part-time work. However, as statistics show (see section 1.1), it is largely women who have been involved in such arrangements ⁽²⁸⁾. The more recent emphasis is on more flexible and individualised working hours and a regulatory framework more focused on allowing tailor-made solutions within the boundaries of a commonly agreed framework. Overall, the length of a country's weekly working time is negatively correlated with female employment rates. With the exception of a few countries, the higher the labour force participation of women, the shorter the average weekly working time. Importantly, it should be noted that the distribution of working time is greater among women than men, as women's working time is strongly influenced by their life stage ⁽²⁹⁾.

As noted by Fagan ⁽³⁰⁾, differences in the **length of working time** between the European Union Member States are still very large. While individualised working hours appear widespread in the northern and western EU Member States, the traditional 40-hour working week is still largely intact in the new Member States. Working overtime and long hours is more common in the prime age group and older group and part-time work is the main form of flexibility among female employees. Although having children is an important reason to work part time, part-time rates in the prime age group are not consistently the highest. It should be noted that in most countries part-time work is associated with low-paid sectors and fewer opportunities.

From a gender perspective, the increased flexibility in working hours should be rated positively inasmuch as more individualised working hours can help employees to reconcile their work obligations with their personal lives.

⁽²⁷⁾ Plantenga, J. and Remery, C., *Review of flexible working time arrangements and gender equality in 30 European countries*, European Commission, 2009.

⁽²⁸⁾ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Working time and work–life balance in a life course perspective, Executive Summary*, 2013.

⁽²⁹⁾ See footnote 28, p. 23.

⁽³⁰⁾ Fagan, C., *Analysis note: Men and gender equality — tackling gender-segregated family roles and social care jobs*, European Commission, 2010.

Flexible working time organisation is less documented than length of working time as it mainly happens at firm level. However, large differences can also be seen in Europe, with at least 60 % of men and women having access to flexible working time schedules in Sweden and Denmark contrasting with low flexibility scores in the southern and new Member States.

From a gender perspective, flexible working time schedules should be carefully designed in order to take the preference of the employees into account. In addition, the organisational culture has a large impact on the actual use of these schedules. As long as flexibility is still considered a female way of organising working time, flexible working time schedules are more likely to confirm gender differences than to change them. Plantenga and Remery propose a classification of countries according to a spectrum of indicators for gender equality (gender gap in employment, in pay, and working time dissimilarity index) and working time arrangements (shape of working time distribution of all employees, percentage of employees working at home and percentage of employees making use of working time schedules) ⁽³¹⁾.

Working time/flexibility policies

Several countries have working time flexibility on their agenda. However, specific topics vary as does the focus on gender equality. Flexibility can be an instrument to increase the participation rate both in persons and hours, and in this respect the fact that part-time work does not refer exclusively to women is a positive trend (e.g. it can be a policy instrument within the context of active ageing) as are measures to avoid involuntary part-time work. Time banking and annualised hours are also connected with the debate on lowering the prevalence of overtime in some countries. Also within the context of the eco-

nomical and financial crisis, flexibility is seen as an instrument to allow employers to adjust to changing economic circumstances. However, the gender dimension does not figure predominantly in these current debates.

The impact of the crisis should not be underestimated in its gender aspects as is currently the case. In countries with a high unemployment rate, it might be very difficult to re-enter the labour market after having given up a job in relation to care responsibilities. On the other hand, a high employment rate might improve the willingness of employers in some sectors to provide more flexible work arrangements in order to retain skilled workers (mainly women) with family responsibilities in the workforce ⁽³²⁾. Available leave facilities — even if they are gender neutral — are in most countries taken more often by women than men. Possible negative financial implications or worse working conditions related to some forms of leave therefore affect women more often than men. This can explain why men — fathers — are more interested in adjusting how they organise their working hours across the day and week rather than reducing them ⁽³³⁾.

For the countries of central and eastern Europe the transition process has often led to the reduction or even the abolition of existing institutional support, with, for example, less extended paid leave facilities and the collapse of various kinds of services, such as childcare facilities. This has influenced the employment patterns of both men and women. The poor financing of public services, in particular education and healthcare, furthermore confront employees and families with greater burdens ⁽³⁴⁾.

⁽³¹⁾ Plantenga, J. and Remery, C., *Review of flexible working time arrangements and gender equality in 30 European countries*, European Commission, 2009.

⁽³²⁾ Burri, S. et al., *Legal approach to some aspects of the reconciliation of work, private and family life in 30 European countries*, European Commission, 2008.

⁽³³⁾ Fagan, C., *Analysis note: Men and gender equality — tackling gender-segregated family roles and social care jobs*, European Commission, 2010.

⁽³⁴⁾ Burri, S. et al., *Legal approach to some aspects of the reconciliation of work, private and family life in 30 European countries*, European Commission, 2008.



The life courses of both men and women are changing, in particular due to the increasing labour market participation of women, but in many countries an overall policy on the reconciliation of work, family and private life still has to be developed. In many countries, state policies addressing reconciliation issues are poorly developed. Legislation on working time is often not 'reconciliation sensitive', but can have a large impact on individual working-time schedules. Rights to long-term flexible time models such as working time accounts, life cycle regulations or sabbaticals are lacking. Measures encouraging men to engage in care activities are scarce. Only a few countries have elaborated legal provisions on time-credit schemes. Such schemes mostly offer the possibility to accumulate days compensating for overtime, rest days, days granted due to a collective reduction of working time, etc. in view of a career break ⁽³⁵⁾.

Teleworking and part-time or temporary work may sound attractive in the short term as ways of juggling work and family commitments, but the choice can be costly in the long term — in terms not just of salary, but of pensions and job security ⁽³⁶⁾.

Recent data on working time show that time and reconciliation do matter for men in terms of work and life expectations (see section 1.6 below). The overall trend is a decline in working time for both men and women ⁽³⁷⁾.

Initiatives by companies: the business case

The number of skilled workers is falling and the situation is further compounded by demographic changes and represents an important challenge for

Europe as a whole. In the years to come even young parents and people caring for needy dependants must be able to participate as much as possible in the workforce so as not to let any potential workers go to waste. Many companies already report difficulties in recruiting or retaining qualified staff. Policies which aim to reconcile work, family and private life more effectively have become more attractive ⁽³⁸⁾.

A survey was conducted in 2009 via the European Business Test Panel (EBTP) and targeted the business community. They were consulted on their attitudes towards the reconciliation of work and family life and family-friendly measures in companies. The consultation was intended to inform policymakers in the Member States about the employers' outlook on family and reconciliation issues.

Given the nature of the survey (a small and self-recruited sample with an unbalanced distribution across the Member States), the results need to be interpreted with great caution. However, some general remarks can be made. The reconciliation of work and family life remains a challenge for many Europeans. Seen from the employers' perspective, the situation is most difficult in small companies, where a family-related absence of just one employee might have an important impact on the entire enterprise. Creating good conditions for employees who want to reconcile their work and family life is, according to many entrepreneurs, an efficient way of retaining staff. However, it should be stressed that keeping the existing workforce is believed to be important for the company's operation only as concerns skilled employees. In addition, for many respondents, family-friendliness seems to be mostly an image issue. Last but not least, with the exception of an extension of school and child-care hours, no great changes in the area of reconcili-

⁽³⁵⁾ See footnote 34, page 24.

⁽³⁶⁾ OECD, *Closing the gender gap: act now*, 2012.

⁽³⁷⁾ Gärtner, M., Puchert, R. and Scambor, E., *The role of men in gender equality — European strategies and insights*, European Commission, 2012.

⁽³⁸⁾ Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend — BMSFJ (German Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women's and Youth), European Company Survey on Reconciliation of Work and Family Life, 2010.

ation and family-related policies are expected or desired by a majority of employers' respondents. The existing arrangements (e.g. maternity and parental leave) are considered as satisfactory ⁽³⁹⁾.

However, changing the **working culture in enterprises** is taking time. Due to the gender-based division of labour and the separation between the public and the private sphere, the notion of a 'job' already contains gender meanings. The traditional model of the ideal worker can thus be understood as a male 'ideal type', independent of care and domestic work ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

As Plantenga and Remery emphasise, it is on the organisational level (plant — enterprise) that the details of reconciliation of work and family life are worked out. As such, the organisational level is an important element of the overall care regime, with a distinct effect on patterns of labour market participation and fertility ⁽⁴¹⁾.

The organisation has to be seen as an interface of work, care and gender (in)equality, which has to be linked to the role of men in order to foster gender equality. In current research on men and work, the focus has shifted from dominant roles of men in management to potential role models such as involved father part-timers and men in feminised occupations ⁽⁴²⁾.

Family-friendly workplace practices can make it easier to combine work and home life, but only if both men and women take advantage of them. Yet do employers make it easier for men and women

to share domestic and family responsibilities outside the workplace? Are men who take their parental leave in full, for example, seen as uncommitted to their careers and passed over for promotion? Change is not always easy, and it takes time for fundamental attitudes to shift in response to changing realities. Yet today's economies need all available talent to ensure a sustainable and prosperous future, while the right balance must be struck between responsibilities at home and at work to deliver better lives for all ⁽⁴³⁾.

Do organisations want men to care? Gender is now seen as a legitimate organisational issue, but only as far as women are concerned. Traditional provider roles of men have not been questioned on the organisational level, which results in the persistence of traditional work distribution models between men and women. Moreover, men in care-giving roles, in particular, may find their careers impeded. This contributes to a cultural system that confirms gender-traditional identities and couple arrangements, while inequalities at the workplace are constantly reproduced ⁽⁴⁴⁾.

1.4. Care services

1.4.1. Childcare services

The ability of Member States to significantly increase the employment rate and decrease gender gaps depends, among other things, on the availability of childcare services. Recognising this crucial role, the European Council in Barcelona set what is known as the 'Barcelona target': 'Member States should strive (...) to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90 % of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33 % of children under 3 years of age.'

⁽³⁹⁾ European Business Test Panel, *The importance of family-friendliness for business development*, 2009.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Gärtner, M., Puchert, R. and Scambor, E., *The role of men in gender equality — European strategies and insights*, European Commission, 2012.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Plantenga J. and Remery, C., *Reconciliation of work and private life: A comparative review of 30 countries*, European Commission, 2005.

⁽⁴²⁾ Gärtner, M., Puchert, R. and Scambor E., *The role of men in gender equality — European strategies and insights*, European Commission, 2012.

⁽⁴³⁾ OECD, *Closing the gender gap: act now*, 2012.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Gärtner, M., Puchert, R. and Scambor E., *The role of men in gender equality — European strategies and insights*, European Commission, 2012.



Employment Guideline 18 relating to a new life-cycle approach to work provided for better reconciliation of work and private life and the provision of accessible and affordable childcare facilities and care for dependants.

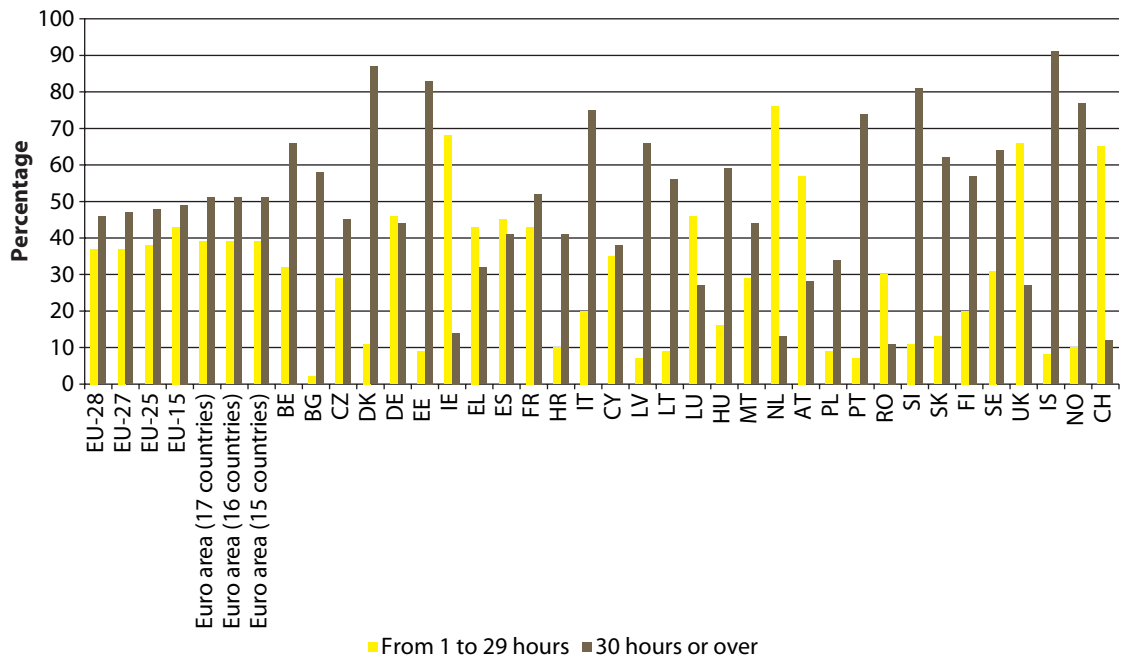
EU reports highlight that in almost all countries the lack of high quality and affordable services, in particular institutional care facilities for children, and care structures for severely disabled persons and the elderly, is a major impediment to reconciliation. Structures and services are very insufficient

and expensive, especially for employees with lower incomes.

Despite the commitment of Member States in the European pact, only 10 Member States had reached the Barcelona targets for children up to 3 years of age by 2010. The majority of Member States have yet to make substantial efforts to meet the target. As shown in Figure 10a, this is particularly the case for the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia, whose coverage rate is less than 5 %.

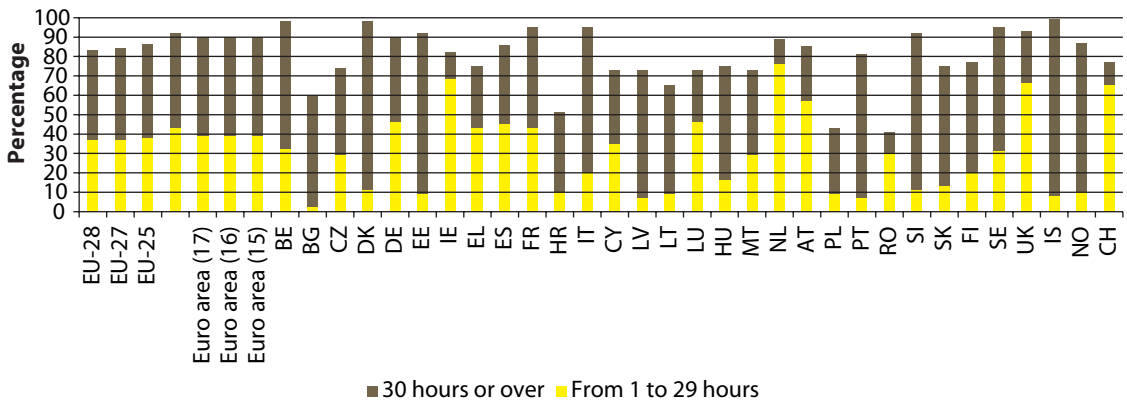
Figure 10: Formal childcare by age group and duration — percentage over the population of each age group — by weekly time spent in care.

10a: Children less than 3 years



Source: Eurostat, EU-Silc, last update 26.6.13, data extracted on 12.3.14.

10b: Children from 3 years of age to mandatory school age



Source: Eurostat, EU-Silc, last update 26.6.13, data extracted on 12.3.14.

Across Europe, 83 % of children from 3 years old to mandatory school age are in formal care facilities. For this category, nine Member States reached the target of 90 % coverage in 2011 (see Figure 10b).

More worryingly, the coverage rate has significantly decreased between 2010 and 2011 in several countries. It is also important to note that for some countries, even if the targets are met, the use of formal childcare is mainly part time so does not cover a full week of work. The Netherlands, Ireland and the United Kingdom are examples where part-time childcare places may be for less than 20 hours ⁽⁴⁵⁾.

Formal childcare services can only help parents enter and stay in employment if they are affordable. However, the price of these services is considered an obstacle for 53 % of mothers who do not work or work part-time on account of childcare responsibilities ⁽⁴⁶⁾. This is particularly the case in Ireland, the Netherlands, Romania and the United Kingdom, where the price is an obstacle for more than 70 % of mothers who do not work or work part time on account of childcare. The net cost of

childcare services may in fact represent more than 41 % of net income in a household in the United Kingdom or Ireland ⁽⁴⁷⁾.

While the arguments in favour of childcare services are well known and most European countries have taken initiatives to increase the availability of (high-quality) childcare services, many Member States are far from reaching the Barcelona childcare targets. Barriers seem to be financial as well as ideological.

From a **policy perspective**, the provision of childcare services raises several issues. In recent decades, childcare services have become a matter of serious public concern. Affordable and good-quality childcare services are seen as a way to improve the reconciliation of work and family life and foster labour market participation and gender equality. Childcare facilities may also provide an important answer to declining fertility rates, by lowering the cost of childbearing in terms of labour market and career opportunities. Finally, there is a growing tendency to see childcare services from a social pedagogical perspective ⁽⁴⁸⁾. In this perspective the main poli-

⁽⁴⁵⁾ European Commission, *Progress on equality between women and men in 2012, A Europe 2020 Initiative*, 2013.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ See footnote 45, p. 28.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ OECD, *Doing better for families*, 2011.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Plantenga, J. and Remery, C., *Review of flexible working time arrangements and gender equality in 30 European countries*, European Commission, 2009.



cy rationale is no longer the reconciliation of work and care, but rather the contribution of childcare services to child development and socioeconomic integration.

An important question is that of the underlying motives for investing in childcare services, which may differ from ensuring future labour supply to promoting child development. A predominance of labour market concerns, for example, may lead to a rather strict policy with regard to availability, compared to a policy that emphasises the important role of childcare arrangements in terms of social inclusion. Another important issue is the policy mix between financial allowances, time facilities and services, given the particular policy ambitions. The decision on this issue may depend on fundamental debates about the most desirable organisation of society or on rather practical considerations about what is financially feasible. In addition, the policy might be inspired by the conviction that parents should be allowed to choose between different options, given the fact that different parents will have different preferences ⁽⁴⁹⁾.

Until now, policy concern has tended to focus on young children and especially those below compulsory school age (cf. Barcelona targets).

The role of **out-of-school services** for school-going children has received relatively less attention. Implicitly it is presumed that the educational system takes over part of the care responsibility as school-going children spend a considerable part of the day at school. However, in most countries school hours are part time and generally not compatible with a full-time working week. In addition, school holidays tend to be longer than holidays for employees, as a result of which working parents face problems not only during the week, but also over the year ⁽⁵⁰⁾.

Affordable and good-quality out-of-school services could help parents to find a better match between their working hours and the school hours of their children, and hence support their (full-time) labour market participation. As in the case of childcare services, in addition to increasing the participation rate, investing in childcare services is also presented within the context of social inclusion. Investing in good-quality out-of-school services means that these services may serve a child development purpose. In addition to offering a safe place where children can relax, out-of-school services may contribute to further social and educational development. As such, out-of-school services might be particularly beneficial for children with learning difficulties and/or children from disadvantaged households.

However, it appears that the variation in services is rather large, partly as a result of the diversity in educational systems. The level of provision of out-of-school services in quite a number of European countries is rather limited; large groups of children have no or only very limited access to such services. In addition, the quality of services is often not regulated. As such the provision of out-of-school services remains an important policy priority at both EU and national levels ⁽⁵¹⁾.

1.4.2. Care for the elderly

The current policy debate on reconciliation of work, family and private life is dominated by childcare issues. It is true to say that the conflict between work and care responsibilities for the elderly is not of the same scale and impact on the labour market participation of women. However, considering the ongoing postponement of the retirement age and the increased life expectancy, the tension between work and long-term care will be more and more exacerbated in the future.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ See footnote 48, p. 28.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ Plantenga, J. and Remery, C., *Childcare services for school age children — a comparative review of 33 countries*, European Commission, 2013.

⁽⁵¹⁾ See footnote 50, p. 29.

The European Commission's experts note that typically, informal caregivers in employment can take short-duration leave in order to deal with health-related emergencies or unexpected care needs. In addition to leave schemes, some countries, but only a few, offer caregivers the option of reducing working time while needs persist, or guarantee the right to switch to flexible working time. The majority of countries, but not all of them, also offer long-duration leave, but the conditions are more restrictive. Short-duration leave is generally granted as a right and is paid, provided that health or care needs are certified. Longer leave is often unpaid and not infrequently conditional on approval by the employer, especially in the private sector⁽⁵²⁾.

As in the provision of childcare, women are largely over-represented among caregivers for the elderly, whether paid or unpaid. The availability, affordability and quality of provision affect women and men in their role of caregivers and influence their participation in the labour market. However, persistent over-representation of women among informal caregivers compounds the extreme feminisation of care workers and other professionals in the care sector. Whilst the pronounced feminisation of long-term care work opens up employment opportunities for women in a rapidly expanding sector, it raises important concerns about gender equity in the labour market, as well as within households⁽⁵³⁾.

Informal caregivers, i.e. family and friends, remain the most important group of providers. An encouraging finding of Bettio's report is that men take part in informal long-term care much more than in informal childcare and their contribution may be on the rise. The main reason for this is that, in practically all countries, spouses and partners are the main caregivers for co-residing older people, and men very often assume care responsibility for their spouse or partner. In fact, spouses/partners are

equally likely to care for each other, independently of sex, in half of the countries for which detailed information is available (Belgium, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria and Poland). And men's participation is explicitly reported to be increasing in some countries (e.g. the United Kingdom)⁽⁵⁴⁾.

With regard to **policies**, according to some national experts⁽⁵⁵⁾ (e.g. from Austria, Greece, France, Iceland and Latvia), long-term care has not been as high on the political agenda of Member States as childcare was until the financial crisis set in. A lack of clear targets like those set for childcare in the Lisbon strategy may have lessened the pressure to address the issue publicly. However, there are signs that the topic is gaining prominence in the public arena, notably in the United Kingdom.

Also, the Women's Committee of the European Parliament has recently called on Member States to invest in affordable, high-quality facilities for the care of children, the sick, the disabled, the elderly and other dependent persons, making sure that they have flexible opening times compatible with full-time working days and are accessible so that as many people as possible can combine professional with family and private life⁽⁵⁶⁾.

Perhaps the most serious challenge that lies ahead for the majority of the EU countries is the effect of the current crisis on future provisions. It would, however, be a great missed opportunity for the economy, and not only for gender equality, if the prevalent response to the financial crisis were confined to rationalising provisions and putting pressure on the family to insource rather than outsource care. Rather, the challenge lies in reversing this perspective

⁽⁵²⁾ Bettio, F. and Verashchagina, A., *Long-term care for the elderly. Provisions and providers in 33 countries*, European Commission, 2010.

⁽⁵³⁾ See footnote 52, p. 30.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ See footnote 52, p. 30.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ See footnote 52, p. 30.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Zuber Inés Cristina, rapporteur, Report on equality between women and men in the European Union — 2012, European Parliament (2013/2156(INI)) adopted in the FEMM Committee on 23.1.2014 — the report was rejected at the EP plenary session during the meeting on 11.3.2014. See: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=PV&reference=20140311&secondRef=IT-EM-009-23&language=EN&ring=A7-2014-0073>



and turning a rapidly expanding sector like long-term care into an employment growth engine. At the same time, employment expansion could also be used to turn this employment segment into a port of entry for men into the larger care sector⁽⁵⁷⁾.

1.5. Men and gender equality

Recently, gender inequalities in Europe have been looked at through a focus on men. This is an important way to advance effective gender equality.

With regard to reconciliation, the social relations of work represent some of the most fundamental aspects of gender relations as well as some of the most important elements in the construction of men's identity and men's relation to women and children. Paid work has figured and continues to figure as a central source of men's identity, status and power. Yet many studies on work, organisations and management have long assumed their subject to be gender neutral⁽⁵⁸⁾.

As Fagan notes⁽⁵⁹⁾, it is essential that men are involved in making the social changes needed to achieve gender equality. This involves tackling gender segregation at home as well as at the workplace. As already illustrated in numerous studies, while men work longer employment hours, women have longer working weeks when paid and unpaid work is summed up. Reconciliation policies are paying more attention than before to the question of men's involvement in providing care (see section 1.1).

Increasingly, the answer to the question 'do men care?' is 'yes', as measured by men's share of care activities at home. Indeed, there is an increasing desire to contribute to family life and childcare that goes beyond a theoretical level. Research shows a gradual, yet historically remarkable, change in men's participation in large parts of Europe — a growing participation in caring for children at home, and in many fields of domestic work⁽⁶⁰⁾.

Between 2005 and 2010, men's proportion of unpaid work at home continued to grow (see Figure 11). In 2010, men's share of weekly unpaid working time varied from 15.5 % in Greece to more than double this figure, reaching 40.3 % in Sweden and 40.2 % in Denmark.

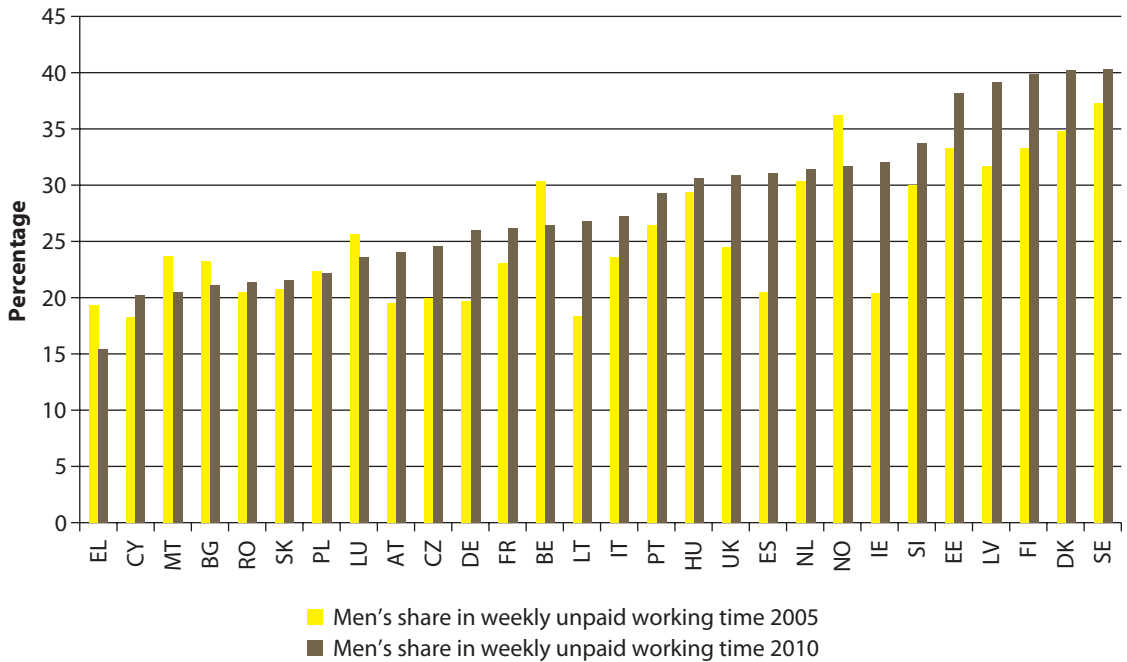
⁽⁵⁷⁾ Bettio, F. and Verashchagina, A., *Long-term care for the elderly. Provisions and providers in 33 countries*, European Commission, 2010.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ Gärtner, M., Puchert, R. and Scambor, E., *The role of men in gender equality — European strategies and insights*, European Commission, 2012.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ Fagan, C., *Analysis note: Men and gender equality — tackling gender-segregated family roles and social care jobs*, European Commission, 2010.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Gärtner, M., Puchert, R. and Scambor, E., *The role of men in gender equality — European strategies and insights*, European Commission, 2012.

Figure 11: Men’s share in weekly unpaid working time, by country, in percentage, 2005 and 2010



Source: European working conditions survey (EWCS), taken from report *The role of men in gender equality*, Figure 4.1, p. 81 ⁽⁶¹⁾.

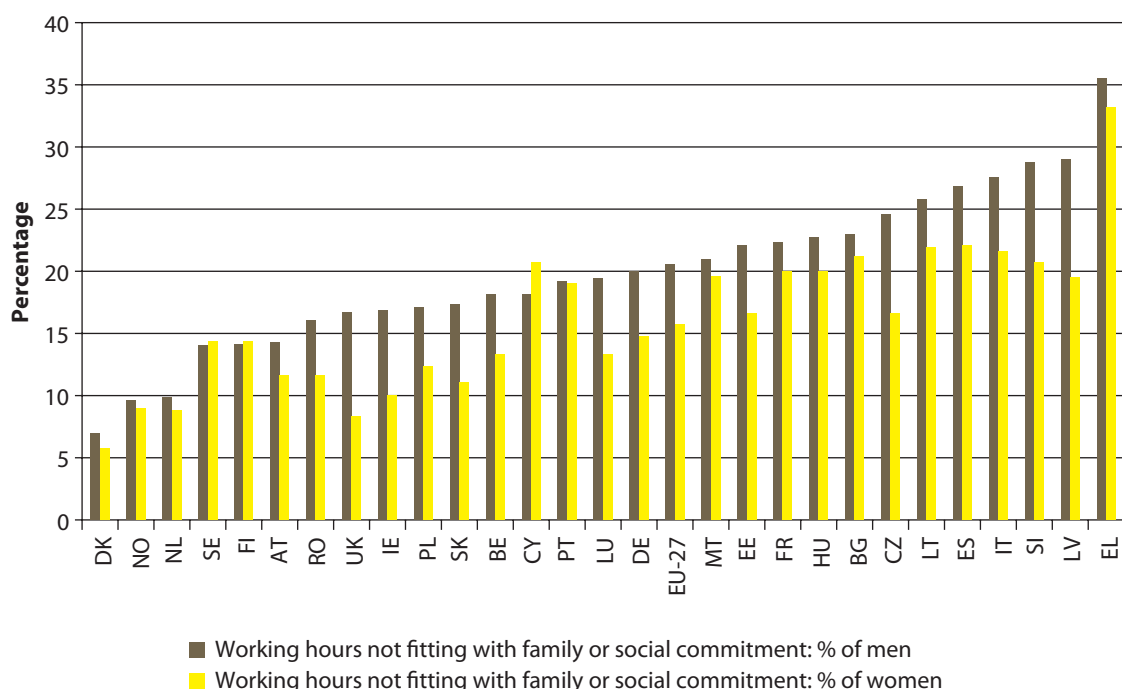
The length of working time and satisfaction at work are linked. Men are working longer hours and are less satisfied than women. All countries where more

than 25 % of men say that working time does not fit family or social commitments are also in the lower section of work satisfaction.

⁽⁶¹⁾ EWCS 2005 and EWCS 2010; EWCS 2005: combination of different variables: ef4.1c, ef4.1d; explanations: average weekly unpaid working time: unpaid work is calculated for 7 days a week and includes hours of caring for and educating own children (included are persons with children aged less than 18 living in the same household) as well as hours for household/cooking tasks; EWCS 2010: combination of different variables: ef3c, ef3d; explanations: average weekly unpaid working time: unpaid work is calculated for 7 days a week and includes hours of caring and educating for own children (included are persons with children aged less than 18 living in the same household) as well as hours for household/cooking tasks; EWCS includes only persons in employment/self-employment; own calculations.



Figure 12: Working hours not fitting with family or social commitments by sex, in percentage, 2010



Source: EU report on men and gender equality, p. 71, extracted from EWCS 2010.

Beside the involvement of men in unpaid family tasks, the role of men as professional carers is important as a way to change the hegemonic masculine working culture and to have role models of men as carers.

Regarding men in **care work and professions**, gender-based employment segregation is a resilient feature of European labour markets. Men have made less movement (than women in men's occupations) into female-dominated job areas. Barriers are exposure to gender stereotyping, cultural norms about what 'proper' men do to provide for their families and discriminatory assumptions about men's nurturing and emotional skills⁽⁶²⁾. A major deterrent is stereotypical assumptions that jobs

dominated by women are of bad quality and not suitable for men. In order to increase the number of men in such sectors and to tackle gender stereotypes, Norway has introduced quotas to recruit men into early childcare with some success.

A particular concern is the under-representation of men in care work, including nursing, elderly care, and early childhood and primary school teaching. Between 2000 and 2009, the countries with the highest rates of male care workers experienced a decrease of men's involvement in professional care work⁽⁶³⁾. Supporting and promoting caring masculinities, not only through family policies such as active fatherhood but also through employment policies such as those for professional carers may

⁽⁶²⁾ Fagan, C., *Analysis note: Men and gender equality — tackling gender-segregated family roles and social care jobs*, European Commission, 2010.

⁽⁶³⁾ Gärtner, M., Puchert, R. and Scambor, E., *The role of men in gender equality — European strategies and insights*, European Commission, 2012.

open the door to a transformative impact on the norms and practices of traditional masculinities. This might have positive consequences for men as well as for the existing gender order and the gender equality project ⁽⁶⁴⁾.

1.6. Interactions between welfare systems, policies and organisational practices

The previous sections show the importance of welfare provisions, policies and rights granted, and companies'/organisations' practices. Culture, norms and standards will influence companies' practices and policies as well as the assessment of what constitutes good practice.

The concept of care is a point of intersection of a systemic reality that involves individual companies (workplaces) and society (welfare system, policies, culture). It also questions the relations between state, family, market, financing and childcare systems for working parents and work–life balancing policies ⁽⁶⁵⁾.

Reforms and structural regulations clearly have an impact on family choices. Some types of reforms have a larger positive effect than others in terms of increasing men's share of care. Studies show that collective regulations that clearly involve fathers have more impact than individual or diffuse arrangements. At the same time, the actual effect of a reform depends on wider social and cultural factors. Very similar reforms may yet have quite different outcomes due to these wider contextual differences ⁽⁶⁶⁾.

Some Member States have a social structure that supports men's larger involvement in care. Others

do not. According to current analysis this structural variation (e.g. existence and length of paternity leave/father's quota) is more important than family tradition, culture or religion in today's European family life ⁽⁶⁷⁾.

The development of leave, in particular parental leave, can be seen as part of the redesign of the welfare state that has emphasised its role in encouraging and supporting the employment of men and women, although society remains ambivalent regarding the employment of women, in particular mothers of very young children, especially infants less than 1 year old. The relationship between employment, care and gender is still contentious and goes to the heart of beliefs about childhood and parenthood, and men's and women's roles. In a strategic framework — i.e. the Europe 2020 strategy — in which employment is seen as good and important — economically, morally and socially — leave policies are part of the battery of policy measures needed to ensure continuity of employment, or, to use the European Union's term, to reconcile employment and family responsibilities ⁽⁶⁸⁾.

A study investigated the variations in adoption of workplace work–family arrangements and whether this variation can be explained either by differences in welfare state contexts or by organisation-related factors. It found that when the development of work–family arrangements is mainly left to the market, employers often do not counterbalance the absence of public provisions. The findings support the argument that regulatory measures, such as EU initiatives, help to create a normative climate that gives rise to new social expectations and 'a sense of entitlement' regarding work–family support. Furthermore, in an institutional context in which work–family support is considered important, employers

⁽⁶⁴⁾ See footnote 63, p. 33.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ See footnote 63, p. 33.

⁽⁶⁶⁾ See footnote 63, p. 33.

⁽⁶⁷⁾ See footnote 63, p. 33.

⁽⁶⁸⁾ Kameron, S. and Moss, P. (eds.), *The politics of parental leave policies: Children, parenting, gender and the labour market*, Policy Press, 2009.



may look for ways to show their sensitivity to the issue in a way that benefits the organisation ⁽⁶⁹⁾.

Looking at the employee side, qualitative analysis of fertility decision-making in different political economies in Europe suggests that gender roles with references to women's paid employment, men's involvement in family work, and childcare systems are key factors in the decision couples make to have a child.

However, Neyer strongly argues against the suggestion that governments should push for gender equality more aggressively in order to raise fertility. She presents a threefold 'no' to this proposal: no to the goal, the method and the means. Her paper takes issue with the goal of raising fertility, arguing that claims that fertility must be increased are based on myths. It rejects a more aggressive pursuit of gender equality for demographic purposes, maintaining that this method preserves inequality. It warns against using gender equality for fertility purposes, stating that this narrows the realm of gender equality ⁽⁷⁰⁾.

1.7. Main challenges and ways forward

The issue of reconciliation is at the core of the relationship between employment, care and gender. It touches the heart of beliefs about childhood and parenthood and men's and women's roles.

Arguments in favour of reconciliation used at European level clearly refer to:

- increasing the employment participation of women and reaching the overall target of 75 % employment rate for men and women;
- deriving from this, the necessity for men to share care and household responsibilities and tasks more equally;
- the opportunity to rethink the flexibility of working time arrangements needed to increase the competitiveness of companies in Europe;
- demographic arguments and the need to encourage Europeans to have children;
- and last but not least, the main condition for a more gender-equal society and specifically for increasing women's economic independence.

Reconciliation is therefore a way to offset the disadvantage faced by women with regard to access to and participation in the labour market and the disadvantage faced by men with regard to participating in family life. However, this demands changes in pre-determined social models in policy (family and labour), in the family and at the workplace.

As this paper demonstrates, the image of women as being responsible for unpaid work related to caring for the family, while paid work derived from an economic activity is seen as mainly the responsibility of men, is still vivid. However, reality is evolving and gives a clear indication that this model is losing ground.

- Men are more satisfied with working time arrangements that fit with family responsibilities, confirming that men do care; men are increasingly caring for their children and also for their relatives.
- Women's share as breadwinners is increasing and they are no longer the employment buffers in economic crisis and recession periods.
- The gap between employment levels has shrunk and working patterns of men and women have become more similar. For example, part-time jobs are also used to manage active ageing.

⁽⁶⁹⁾ Den Dulk, L., Peters, P. and Poutsma, E., 'Variations in adoption of workplace work-family arrangements in Europe: the influence of welfare-state regime and organisational characteristics' in *International Journal of Resource Management*, 2012.

⁽⁷⁰⁾ Neyer, G., 'Should governments in Europe be more aggressive in pushing for gender equality to raise fertility? The second 'NO'', in *Demographic research*, 2010, Volume 24, Article 10, pp. 225–250.

Yet, work remains to be done. Cultural changes are needed but are slow. Research shows that gender is now seen as a legitimate organisational issue but only as far as women are concerned. Traditional roles are reproduced at organisational level and men in care-giving roles suffer from sanctions.

To retain workers, some companies are adapting their workplace policies to support men and women in order not to waste talent and to retain qualified staff. However, this is only true for skilled workers and is still considered as an issue of 'image' by companies.

International organisations have an increasing influence on social policy formulation, as is demonstrated by EU legislation setting minimum standards for maternity and parental leave, which are available in all countries even if there is great diversity in modalities in terms of length, payment, flexibility in use and whether leave is a family or individual entitlement.

The provision of accessible and affordable care services is still a major challenge. The majority of Member States have yet to make substantial efforts to meet the Barcelona targets and to make care services available full time and in particular for employees with lower incomes. More worryingly the coverage rate has significantly decreased between 2010 and 2011 in several countries.

The focus on leave arrangements should be extended to other forms of working time arrangements. A reduction of working time is less popular amongst men than increased flexibility of working time across the day and week. Legislation on working time is often not 'reconciliation sensitive' but can have a large impact on individual working time schedules. Long-term flexible models such as working time accounts, life cycle regulations or sabbaticals are lacking. Provisions on time credit are also scarce.

When the development of work-family arrangements is mainly left to the market, employers often do not counterbalance the absence of public provisions. Regulatory measures, such as EU initiatives, help to create a normative climate that gives rise to new social expectations and a 'sense of entitlement' regarding work and family support.

It is essential that men are involved in making social changes needed to achieve gender equality. Men's involvement in care is needed. It is time to use employment policies to increase the percentage of men who work as professional carers and to use family policies to promote fatherhood and caring roles.

Collective regulations that clearly involve fathers have more impact than individual or diffuse arrangements. According to current studies, social structures supporting men's larger involvement in care are more important than family traditional and cultural aspects in today's European family life.

The schemes which stimulate the best take-up by fathers are those with a quota of leave reserved for the father, a high earnings replacement rate and flexibility in when and how the leave may be taken.

Perhaps one of the most complicated challenges arises from the fact that the policy objectives on participation, gender equality, fertility and social integration are not always easily compatible. Child development concerns, for example, or the ambition to reduce child poverty may translate into a policy targeted at increasing childcare services, but may just as easily translate into a policy favouring extended leave and/or increasing childcare allowances. However, long parental leave or favourable financial incentives may not promote labour supply and may result in large differences in male and female working time patterns. Another complicated matter is the issue of parental choice. Parents may differ in their preferences with regard to work and



family outcomes and most public policies tend to enhance parental choice. The result may be a complicated mixture of time facilities, financial allowances and services that may not necessarily be very coherent and/or may not be very favourable from a gender equality point of view ⁽⁷¹⁾.

In a time of economic crisis, it is essential to consider reconciliation from a gender perspective and to place it at the core of reforms. If the crisis is used to reduce welfare provision and affordable services and to extend working time leading to a polarisation in the working hours of men and women, the various goals associated with reconciliation policies will not be achieved.

⁽⁷¹⁾ Plantenga, J. and Remery, C., *Review of flexible working time arrangements and gender equality in 30 European countries*, European Commission, 2009.

2. The impact of the economic crisis on reconciliation of work, private and family life





2. The impact of the economic crisis on reconciliation of work, private and family life

In the course of this study a questionnaire was distributed to all national experts (one expert per Member State). The ÖSB team provided the experts with detailed guidelines and a template for their inputs in order to ensure the quality and comparability of the information received. On this basis, each expert elaborated a detailed country policy review on national policies and programming documents and the main tendencies and challenges in their countries.

Furthermore, the national experts were asked to identify what — in their assessment — was the impact of the economic crisis on reconciliation of work, family and private life. Their answers are summarised in the following two sub-sections.

2.1. Impacts of the crisis on national/regional policies

Only a few experts said either that:

- the crisis did not have significant impact on reconciliation issues (Denmark, Malta, Sweden, and Croatia as well as Hungary where the impact of the crisis is negligible as the work–life balance did not gain an important place on the public

agenda before the crisis and the countries barely had any reconciliation policies before 2008); or that

- so far there is no evidence of the impact (Luxembourg, Finland where the results of an ongoing study on the impact of the crisis will be available only in 2015); or that
- paradoxically, one of the effects of the financial and economic crisis was closing gender gaps in activity, employment and unemployment rates but it was achieved by worsening the situation of men instead of significantly improving the situation of women who already prior to the crisis had experienced worse living conditions compared to men (Slovakia).

For the majority of the countries the economic crisis is creating new challenges with regard to the reconciliation of work, private and family life.

2. The impact of the economic crisis on reconciliation of work, private and family life

The crisis has distracted policy focus away from reconciliation

- Work–private life balance is no longer high on the policy agenda and in public discussion.
- Policy disinterest in this issue.
- Negative impact on the willingness to introduce or continue human resource policies that had been designed to improve the work–life balance.

Countries: Ireland, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Lithuania. Hungary

Spain emphasises that the reconciliation and co-responsibility issues have lost relevance at policy level and have to be subordinated to the goal of economic recovery and job creation ⁽⁷²⁾.

In **Croatia** work–family policies and related problems were basically absent from the public agenda and there have been no public discussions in this area since the beginning of the crisis. While the work–life balance did not gain an important place on the public agenda before the crisis, it seems that it is even harder for this policy area to secure a political priority in the situation of growing unemployment, increased job insecurity and scarce jobs.

Ireland reports that as a consequence of the crisis the National Framework Committee for Work–Life Balance ceased to function and stopped its funding schemes for employers and for social partner organisations in 2010. The budget of the Equality Authority was cut by 43 % in 2009. The budget of

the National Women’s Council of Ireland was cut by 35 % in 2012.

In **Cyprus** certain plans have been postponed. An extensive study (2009) and proposal were under way in the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance to examine ways to strengthen reconciliation policies through rendering paid parental leave more flexible. The crisis means that such a proposal is unlikely to be promoted in the short and medium term.

In **Italy** the economic crisis has had a negative impact on the willingness to introduce or continue human resource policies that were designed to improve the work–life balance.

It is rather exceptional that despite the context of an economic and financial crisis and the severe austerity measures in place, the work–life balance is seen as an important political priority, as — is proclaimed in **Portugal**, or as in **the Netherlands**, where the government commits to creating conditions in which the positive trend in the participation of women in the labour market will not be hampered by the economic crisis. To this end, in 2013, the government increased its tax refund again for working men and women. One of the conditions is that women are mainly able to work in part-time jobs in which they can easily combine work, private and family life.

⁽⁷²⁾ Subcommission of the Equality Commission of the Spanish Parliament (2013): Informe de la Subcomisión para el estudio de la Racionalización de Horarios, la Conciliación de la Vida Personal, Familiar y Laboral y la Corresponsabilidad.
<http://ep00.epimg.net/descargables/2013/09/26/ed87c0772aeb2b9406fa383995b93026.pdf>



The withdrawal of investment from the area of reconciliation, and extensive budgetary cuts includes:

- reduced funding of pre-school childcare centres and schools leading to their closing or curtailment;
- financial cuts in governmental healthcare which have a negative impact on long-term care;
- financial cuts resulting in shrinking or curtailment of institutions promoting gender and reconciliation issues.

Countries: Czech Republic, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Malta, Netherlands, United Kingdom

In the **United Kingdom** the 'emergency' budget of 2010 introduced deep cuts to benefits and ministerial budgets, public sector pay freezes and some tax increases. There have been extensive cuts to early-years education and childcare services since 2010, which have had a particularly detrimental impact on low-income families.

In **Spain** cuts in the budget of the Ministry of Education for 2012 have reduced the funding of pre-school childcare centres. Also at regional level there have been cuts in this field as well as in the flat rate payments that some regions paid to people who took unpaid parental leave.

In **Estonia** the government programme 'Kindergartens Available to Each and Every Child!' to finance the provision of more childcare places was significantly cut due to the crisis.

In the **Czech Republic** the former right wing government fully cancelled the provision of state nurseries and did not support kindergartens.

In the **Netherlands** partial financial cuts to the budget for childcare in 2012 did have negative consequences on the participation of women on the labour market.

Negative changes in parental leave policies include:

- reduction of parental leave allowance or parental benefit or relevant wage compensation;
- postponement of already planned leave increases;
- introduction of threshold for social insurance benefits such as the unemployment, sickness, maternity, paternity and parental benefits.

Countries: Germany, Estonia, Spain, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovenia, United Kingdom

In **Spain** a foreseen improvement for 2011 of the paternity leave from 2 to 4 weeks has been systematically postponed.

In **Estonia** there was a temporary abolishment of the payment for paternity leave (from 2009 until 2013 when it again started being fully compensated).

In **Germany** a pronounced negative effect of the crisis concerns the parental leave allowance (the replacement ratio was lowered from 67 % to 65 %; furthermore the recipients of unemployment assistance no longer benefit from parental leave allowance).

2. The impact of the economic crisis on reconciliation of work, private and family life

In **Slovenia** as part of the austerity measures, since June 2012 and until the year that will follow the year in which the economic growth will exceed 2.5 % of GDP, parental leave and paternity leave wage compensations have been decreased to 90 % of the basis if that basis is EUR 763.06 or over. The ceiling has also been lowered from 2.5 times to 2 times the average wage.

Also in **Portugal** as a result of austerity measures, there has been less funding for public services and social benefits including family allowances and parental leave. Such reforms have also impacted on conditions for eligibility, which have become even more restricted. As a consequence, the number of recipients of family allowances declined sharply in 2011 and 2012. In 2012, the government changed the calculation formula for determining the amount of parental leave; as a consequence the payment is lower, as only 12 months of previous earnings are taken into account, whereas the payment was previously calculated on the basis of 14 months.

Lithuania reports that there were a number of cuts on parental leave benefits during the economic crisis. Until 2009, the length of parental leave was 24 months, but since 2010 the reductions started being introduced, as well as a ceiling for payment (in 2012). According to recently introduced amendments to the Sickness and Maternity Social Insurance Act, benefits are also reduced if parents receive income which is not insured and free from social security contributions.

In **Latvia** budgetary cuts in 2009 and, in particular, in 2010 have affected those benefits where the amounts depended on the paid social insurance contributions. As concerns the period from 1 January 2010 till 1 January 2012 the budget incorporates several restrictions of social insurance benefits. It established a threshold for unemployment, sickness, maternity, paternity and parental benefits. Over the 2005 to 2012 period as a whole, the combined

effects of pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis policy was a significant reduction in net benefits for all family types and at all earnings levels. Low-earning families with children saw the greatest reduction in net benefits.

Countries like **Denmark** where parental leave policies (length of leave, level of benefits, etc.) have not been a target for potential savings despite the economic crisis are an exception.

Negative impact on social partnership model, negotiations and agreements. Decrease in employer's interest in and commitment to work-life balance arrangements.

Countries: Ireland, Spain

Ireland emphasises that the social partnership model ceased to function once the crisis hit. An important arena within which to negotiate new developments and sustain existing commitments in support of reconciliation is no longer available. Employer association interest in the issue has waned as has, to a lesser extent, trade union willingness to raise this issue. The public service agreement between the government and public sector trade unions marked a low point in relation to commitment to reconciliation in that the government put forward a position that was hostile to reconciliation and trade unions were unable or unwilling to resist it.

In **Spain** the reform performed during 2012 has reinforced the power of employers to distribute irregular workloads over time (from 5 % to 10 % of the annual amount of working hours) and to force geographical mobility in given circumstances, as well as the possibility that companies do not implement signed collective agreements.



2.2. Consequences for families: negative impact on the quality of family time and ‘work–life balance’

In general terms, the economic crisis has negatively impacted on families in many different ways, e.g. due to the alarming rise in unemployment, job insecurity, wage cuts and the reduction in family incomes, which have contributed to a significant degradation of living standards and conditions in many households. The crisis has had more significant effects on male employment. Thus, more women have become the main provider of income for the family, which focuses their attention mainly on work and less on family.

Non-use or assertion of their rights by parents (related to the fear of unemployment and losing one’s job): reduced leave use (including fathers’ leave).

Countries: Denmark, Germany, Greece, Portugal, Slovenia

In recent years **Denmark** has witnessed a general decline in the leave take-up among Danish fathers. A fear of signalling lack of commitment/fear of being fired may prevent fathers from taking leave and in particular for fathers working in the private sector.

In **Slovenia** parents tend to minimise days of leave to care for their sick children (or do not take it at all) in order not to risk their employment.

In **Greece** labour relations have become more flexible and informal. All these developments have had a negative impact on workers’ rights and particularly the rights of parents. In particular, leave use has been negatively affected with parents (mainly mothers) not using all their rights and thus mak-

ing reconciliation more difficult to handle. There is a tendency on the part of mothers to solve their problems privately with their employers by accepting, in effect, the violation of their rights for fear of losing their jobs. Even those that complain to the Ombudsman’s Office are hesitant to proceed to further action and sometimes they withdraw the complaint.

In **Portugal** the reduction of public spending on parental leave recorded in 2012 also raises questions on whether workers, in the current context of mass unemployment and job insecurity, feel reluctant in claiming and using their rights, including in terms of work–family reconciliation.

Families are confronted with significant reduction in net benefits related to parenthood (especially low-earning families who suffer the most).

Countries: Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovenia, United Kingdom

See examples provided in an earlier section 2.1.

Families are confronted with the shortfall of places in childcare facilities as well as with less affordable childcare.

Countries: Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, France, Croatia, Italy, Slovenia, United Kingdom

In the **United Kingdom** there have been extensive cuts to early-years education and childcare services since 2010, which have had a particularly detrimental impact on low-income families. About one in seven Sure Start centres ⁽⁷³⁾ have closed since

⁽⁷³⁾ Sure Start centres provide early learning and full daycare for pre-school children across England.

2. The impact of the economic crisis on reconciliation of work, private and family life

2010, while many others have been forced to offer a reduced service due to cuts in funding. Moreover, about a fifth of the 500-plus nursery schools in England have closed over the past decade and there have been cuts to childcare tax credits for low-income families ⁽⁷⁴⁾.

In **France** the shortfall of places in formal childcare provision (between 300 000 and 500 000 according to different calculations) — and their cost for low-income parents — has been identified as one of the main obstacles as far as the access to employment and the entry into the labour market for women is concerned.

The closing down of childcare facilities is also reported by **Greece**. But thanks to the ESF funding, however, an increasing number of mothers were subsidised and secured a free childcare place for their pre-school children under the programme ‘Reconciliation between work and family life’ and the number of its beneficiaries increased significantly in the last 5 years. Another effect of the economic crisis on childcare is that the demand has reduced since a lot of parents are now unemployed.

In **Slovenia** the interventions on the expenditure side of the state budget include a permanent decrease in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programmes subsidy from June 2012. It means that the services became less affordable for parents.

In **the Czech Republic** because of the closing of state nurseries and kindergartens the only possible option for mothers of children under 3–4 years of age who cannot afford private childcare is to stay on parental leave (until the child is 3) and then accept a fixed-term contract with bad working conditions or become unemployed. The Czech Republic is still the country with the highest impact of parenthood on employment of mothers among EU-28 countries.

⁽⁷⁴⁾ Walker, P. (2014): Early years education cuts irresponsible, experts warn, *The Guardian*: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/feb/21/early-years-education-cuts-nurseries-experts-warn>

In **Croatia** childcare became too expensive, especially for parents who lost their jobs, and they started to withdraw their children from childcare.

Families are confronted with sharpened inequalities in access to the labour market and job insecurity.

Countries: Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Slovakia

The quality of operating childcare facilities in **Greece** has been affected due to the lack of resources; the number of children per staff member is often increased beyond what the legislation allows.

The Swedish government is concerned about the growing number of children in groups and classes in pre-schools and schools that may affect the educational quality and the psychosocial environment for the children. The cuts in school budgets have affected the teachers and led to extensive layoffs and redundancies, larger classes and less special education. Budget cutbacks also lead to poorer quality of care for the elderly.

In **Portugal** the issue of lacking childcare services is tackled not through investments in the new facilities but through the changes in the regulatory framework in order to increase the number of children allowed in each classroom. This change may have critical implications for the quality of the childcare provided.

Families are confronted with more discriminatory practices/approaches implemented by employers.

Countries: Greece, Poland, Slovakia, United Kingdom



In **Austria** prior to as well as since the crisis, women's employment is often part time and has been becoming increasingly precarious. This affects the reconciliation of employment and family in the sense of less security with regard to employment and income and fewer resources for paying for childcare. On a more general level, **labour market difficulties may enhance a more conservative reconciliation model**, as in times of scarce labour it may, on a general societal level, become regarded as more legitimate for mothers to stay at home with their children.

In **Italy** the economic crisis aggravated the inequalities in the labour market which concerns to a greater extent the quality of female employment.

In **the Netherlands** since 2012 the participation of single women in the labour market has decreased and this continued in the first quarter of 2013. Employment participation is negatively influenced by the economic crisis. Moreover, policy effects such as financial cuts in the budget for childcare did have negative consequences on the participation of women on the labour market.

In **Greece** there was an increase in the level of undeclared work which, according to the Labour Inspectorate, was more than 36 % in 2012 compared to 25 % in 2010.

In **Slovakia**, according to the report on gender equality for 2012, women gave up their participation in the labour market more often than men. This implies that unequal distribution of housework increased.

In **Portugal** recent studies show that there is a correlation between employment status and poor work–life 'fit', meaning that job insecurity (objective or/and perceived) also increases the perception of work–family conflicts.

Families are confronted with more discriminatory practices/approaches implemented by employers.

Countries: Greece, Poland, Slovakia, United Kingdom

In **Poland** the difficult labour market conditions shift the balance of power towards employers, who do not see the need to create better employment conditions, and away from employees, who lack bargaining power and are obliged to accept inferior working arrangements. The economic crisis makes employees feel insecure in the labour market and accept exploitative working conditions.

In **Greece** since 2008, there has been a constant and dramatic increase in complaints concerning unfair dismissals due to pregnancy or maternity leave. With regard to rotation work, involuntary changes of contract has increased by 13 times between 2010 and 2012. The Citizens' Ombudsman (cycle of gender equality), in a special report published in 2012 with the title *Abusive unilateral imposition of rotation work on employees returning from maternity leave*, refers to the practice of increasing numbers of employers to convert the work contract of such mothers (and only them) from full-time to rotating work, with the subsequent reduction of their wages. In 2011, discrimination related to pregnancy and childcare leave was recorded as the most prominent form of discrimination (about 42.46 % and 21.79 %, respectively, of total complaints concerning discrimination).

In the **United Kingdom** according to the 2011 workplace employment relations survey, the proportion of workplaces making some use of 'non-standard working hours arrangements' also increased following the recession. For example, the proportion of workplaces with at least some shift workers rose from 24 % in 2004 to 32 % in 2011; the percentage of workplaces with some employees on annual-hours contracts rose from 4 % in 2004 to 7 % in 2011, and

those with some employees on zero-hours contracts with no guaranteed working hours rose from 4 % to 8 %. Long or unsocial hours, as well as increased job insecurity impacts on the quality of family time and ‘work–life balance’. Many ‘dual earner’ households raising children have therefore experienced a ‘time squeeze’ when trying to balance work and family responsibilities.

As emphasised by the Slovakian expert the research provides some evidence (for [the whole EU](#)) that during the crisis employers were predominately interested in the situation of women as regards young children when hiring them.

Families are confronted with the worsening of working conditions especially for some groups of population.

Countries: Czech Republic, Greece, Spain, Poland, United Kingdom

In response to the economic crisis the labour code in [Poland](#) was made more flexible so that (a) employers, after consultations with employee representatives, can extend their accounting period to a maximum of 12 months; (b) regulations pertain to variable start/end of working time, for example staggered/sliding (*ruchomy*) and to interrupted (*przerwy*) working time. According to the research data a great proportion of employees are required to work overtime or weekends, which counters their desire for more balance between employment and private life (in 2008 there were as many as 82 % of

employees who worked overtime, and nearly a million worked more than 12 hours per day).

In [Spain](#) the reforms of the labour market accomplished during the crisis period have not included major improvements in the field of reconciliation. The trade union critics consider even that these reforms have eroded the right to conciliation established by the gender equality law of 2007. To support this criticism, they state that the reform performed during 2012 has reinforced the power of employers to distribute irregular workloads over time (from 5 % to 10 % of the annual amount of working hours) and to force geographical mobility in given circumstances, as well as the possibility that companies do not implement signed collective agreements.

In [the United Kingdom](#) the reconciliation of work and family has also been affected by changes to employment hours and practices during the economic crisis. In addition to widespread job losses, there has also been an increase in job insecurity, reduced mobility, pay cuts, growth in involuntary part-time jobs, in temporary work and informal work. There has also been some decline in average working hours (reduced paid overtime, short-time working schemes) as well as increases in unpaid overtime and in work intensity.

In [Greece](#) in comparison to 2011, 43.3 % more full-time contracts were converted into other forms of flexible employment in 2012.

3. Challenges and gaps in reconciliation of work, private and family life and possible ways to address them





3. Challenges and gaps in reconciliation of work, private and family life and possible ways to address them

The national experts involved in this study were asked to identify what — in their assessment — were the most prevailing challenges and gaps when it comes to reconciliation of work, private and family life in their country and how these challenges/gaps could be addressed. Their answers are summarised in the following two sub-sections.

3.1. Challenges and gaps

A challenge reported by almost all experts relates to the **fight against gender stereotypes**. This is linked to traditional attitudes that suggest that it is the primary responsibility of women to care for children and/or other dependants. The male breadwinner/female housekeeper models still seems to be the prevalent model in most European countries, which is supported either explicitly or implicitly (for instance through tax and social insurance regulations).

European **labour markets** furthermore seem to be faced with **high gender segregation** and other work-related gender inequalities. In their assess-

ment most experts referred to the existing gender pay gap and pronounced disadvantages when it comes to recruitment. There is also a gender division of paid and unpaid labour predominant, with women working significantly more hours than men if unpaid (household) work is taken into account. In numerous countries the regulations in place favour a sequential rather than simultaneous combination of employment and care obligations, particularly for women. The results are often long care-related leave periods and related employment breaks. If the mother returns to work, the care leave is often followed by part-time work for many years with strong implications for career opportunities, lower incomes, a gender pension gap, etc. (e.g. Ireland, France, Austria, United Kingdom).

This part-time work is not always entered into voluntarily and is often closely linked to the **availability, affordability and quality of (child)care facilities**. A majority of experts reported a lack of childcare facilities and after-school care in their countries. Existing facilities often do not have opening times that support full-time working, they are expensive

(e.g. Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Portugal, Slovakia and United Kingdom) and sometimes of low quality (e.g. Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Portugal, United Kingdom) which is also linked to a low status of the (child)care profession. However, there can be pronounced regional differences even within countries.

A big challenge seems to be how to **address and involve men in care and other unpaid work** where effective and proactive strategies seem to be missing. This also concerns strategies to increase the take-up rate of men when it comes to (child)care leave, which is very low in numerous countries. Cultural factors often play a role in this but it also relates to inflexible leave schemes or low replacement rates of benefits.

On a **policy level**, there is also often **lack of awareness** of the importance and (social as well as economic) benefits of supporting an adequate work-life balance. Some experts (e.g. Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta) reported that reconciliation measures have only very **low priority** in their countries' policy debate and practice and in general the focus seems to be even less when it comes to care for adult dependants compared to childcare. In other countries, there is awareness but a lack of consistency of measures or a comprehensive policy. An important factor when it comes to policy formulation and implementation seems to be the economic crisis (for more details see chapter 1.2) when the lack of financial means results in a low political prioritisation of the issue (when other issues are 'more urgent'). Furthermore, in the context of massive unemployment and job insecurity, workers may feel reluctant to make use of their already existing rights. So sometimes there seems to be a gap between legal provisions/rights and the actual practice.

A further challenge is the **involvement of stakeholders**. Social partners might not place reconciliation measures high on their agenda and sometimes particularly trade unions even

seem to be rather suspicious of certain measures (such as flexible working time arrangements) (e.g. Cyprus, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta). An **increasing involvement of employers in changing the prevalent working culture is noted**. While in some countries low flexible working arrangements and/or part-time work possibilities are available (e.g. Czech Republic, Estonia, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland), other countries have a working culture characterised by long working hours (particularly at management level) and the notion that leadership cannot be executed part time (e.g. Germany, Spain, Portugal, United Kingdom). Furthermore, there often seems to be a lack of interest and commitment by employers when it comes to supporting a better work-life balance, particularly in times of economic crisis.

3.2. Ways to address the challenges

Strategies and initiatives suggested by the experts to address the challenges listed above included the following areas.

Fighting against gender stereotypes

- **Awareness-raising** was the issue most frequently raised when it comes to fighting gender stereotypes. The 'universal caregiver' model (where both sexes participate equally in care and breadwinning) should be discussed in public and media discourse (using traditional channels such as radio, television, newspapers and poster campaigns but also new information tools such as social media). Stereotypes, e.g. in advertisement, should be avoided.
- Stereotypes need to be addressed in **education** right from the start in order to challenge traditional roles attributed to women and men. Young girls and boys should be encouraged to choose 'non-traditional' education pathways.
- On a **company level**, family-friendly policies need to be questioned critically with regard to addressing only women, with the risk of perpet-



uating traditional gender role ascriptions, and then limiting women's career opportunities.

- In countries where the **tax system** is still linked to the concept of marriage and therefore traditionally favours an asymmetric distribution of roles, it should be reformed in line with individual taxation.

Combatting gender segregation in the labour market

- The high share of women not being in employment or working part time in many countries could be addressed by an increase in all-day schools and attractive **after-school care facilities** for school children.
- Young girls and boys should be encouraged to make **non-traditional work choices** through training, coaching, using role models, etc. Furthermore, a **gender mix** should be aimed for in every profession and function, including boards of directors and executive committees of companies, organisations and associations.
- The gender pay gap and other work-related inequalities could be addressed by **strong policies encouraging and/or committing companies** and especially public employers to take measures (e.g. through the introduction of quotas, linking public procurement to equality activities or creating incentives and/or sanctions for companies based on their gender equality efforts or outcomes).
- The social partners (particularly trade unions) are recommended to develop a strategy to promote the **growth of wages** specifically for jobs traditionally associated with women. Improvements in wage incomes can also be an effective tool for relieving the pressure on men to be the breadwinners.

Promoting the availability, affordability and quality of (child)care facilities and services

- A substantial **increase in the number of care facilities** and (child)care places and the extension of their opening hours were considered key by many experts when it comes to reconciliation matters, particularly for women. This concerns not only formal childcare but also other forms of care such as childminding. Particular attention should, in this context, furthermore be paid to introducing or increasing all-day schools.
- In the provision of childcare services not only the needs of working parents should be taken into account but also those of **unemployed or inactive parents**. This would enable them to search for work or go to job interviews.
- While some experts suggested direct financial incentives for families in order to **make (child) care more affordable**, others recommended that the support should rather be indirect by investments in institutional childcare and infrastructure rather than having a strong focus on direct payments to parents. Also childcare tax credits were recommended. Particularly state-financed pre-school care and out-of-school care services should be expanded. Some experts suggested an entitlement to childcare (particularly early childcare) and the provision of free childcare services.
- As regards childcare and pre-school education, there is a need to view these in a **coherent** manner in terms of **quality standards** and pedagogic approaches and — where this is not the case — they should come under one administrative system.
- **Employers and local authorities** could provide more **support to help employees** find affordable and quality childcare for young children, for example, through employer-supported packages that increase employees' choices such as childcare vouchers and/or workplace crèches.

Involving men in care and other unpaid work

The recommendations provided by the experts in relation to involving men in care and other unpaid work mainly address two issues: awareness-raising and reform of the leave system.

- **Awareness-raising:** Several experts suggest that awareness-raising activities for the promotion of men's role in the family should be initiated. These might include more systematic training and sensitisation of personnel responsible for human resources, sensitisation of employees themselves particularly those in managerial positions in employers' and employees' unions and federations as well as enterprises. The awareness-raising initiatives should address traditional stereotypes regarding gender roles amongst pre-school/school children and students, the implementation of adult education programmes for the improvement of caring skills amongst prospective or new fathers, implementation of national media campaigns, etc. A further recommendation was to collaborate with employers' organisations in male-dominated sectors to raise awareness of reconciliation matters.
- **Reform of the leave system:** It was frequently suggested that making adjustments to the parental leave scheme may encourage fathers to take up parental leave. Recommendations included the introduction of (well-paid) paternity and/or parental leave in countries where this is not yet the case, to make the leave system more flexible in order to increase the possibilities for combining work and care and to enhance job security for parents (including men) in order to guarantee a return to the same or equivalent job. Many recommendations addressed the issue of introducing some sort of quota system to divide care responsibilities between the parents. In this context, the introduction of a 'fathers' quota', that is a certain non-transferable period of leave earmarked specifically for fathers, was (as is already the case for instance, in

Sweden) frequently mentioned. This would also provide a strong signal that participation of men in childcare is regarded as standard and required.

Further recommendations

- **Parental leave and childcare allowance schemes** need to be more strongly **evaluated and researched**, e.g. with regard to the low use by men and the preference for longer models taken by women in some countries.
- **Organisations** should introduce specific **encouragement for men to make use of leave** and family-related working time adjustments, which would reform organisational culture and norms so that care is seen as a gender-neutral joint rather than a female-only responsibility. Financial compensation of employers to support parental leave could be introduced.

Increasing awareness and implementation of reconciliation matters at policy level

- Recommendations by the experts repeatedly addressed the importance of **political commitment** (up to the highest policy level) and the presence of adequate and **well-established institutional mechanisms** for gender equality with well-trained staff. Gender focal points at decision-making level could ensure that reconciliation policies are being suggested, designed, and implemented.
- Where necessary, **legislation** should be **strengthened** and existing legislation more effectively enforced and controlled. In this context also the introduction or stronger enforcement of sanctions should be considered.
- In many countries **more information on the facts and benefits** of reconciliation practices is needed. This includes statistics on the implementation and impact of reconciliation policies (disaggregated by sex), monitoring of the implementation of legislation, impact assessment of legislation, etc. Some experts pointed to the



urgent need for research funding in order to thoroughly assess measures related to reconciliation, to identify trends in practices at work, within the family and in leisure/private time, to note possible changes in the perceptions of boys and girls and young men and women regarding their roles at work and private life, to identify the factors that hinder or help gender equality at work and private life and other related issues.

Increasing the involvement of stakeholders

A particular focus in this respect was put by the experts on a stronger involvement of social partners (especially trade unions) and companies. Furthermore, the development of partnership networks within communities (including public bodies and the non-governmental sector) was suggested.

- **Social partners** are challenged when it comes to critically assessing their own activities for gender biases. In many countries work–life balance was assessed as needing higher priority among social partners. There should be a national consensus among the social partners. In order to equip them with the necessary means for championing work–life balance issues, it was suggested to provide social partners with training and tools or even to create a fund which would finance projects carried out by the social partners. A further focus was placed on collective agreements. Experts recommended making achievements in favour of gender equality compulsory in collective agreements (positive actions) as they can be precursors in developing new innovative practices in the field of gender equality in the workplace. As a consequence, gender issues should be part of all social partner negotiations.
- There is a need to **discuss reconciliation in different life stages**, for example when children are young, when parents grow old and when grandchildren are born. In these discussions, also

labour market representatives and individual employer organisations are needed.

- **Employers** should be **motivated to invest in family-friendly practices** at the workplace. This could take the form of financial initiatives or support in the form of advice and training, which is of particular importance to small and medium-sized enterprises, especially those that do not hold a human resources expertise. Equally important, however, is to more effectively communicate the case for work–life balance in terms of its impact on equality, on employee satisfaction, on business performance and on labour market participation by women. All stakeholders need to be convinced of its positive potential in both difficult and more favourable economic times. Indeed, particularly in times of economic crisis when financial means are scarce, visibility of the matter could be given (relatively inexpensive) by the establishment or promotion of awards, labels, indexation, etc. for outstanding performance in relation to providing work–life balance.

Changing the prevalent working culture

Long working hours, often associated with commitment to the company and a necessity (not only but especially) for managers as well as a lack of flexible working time arrangements are common in many countries. Recommendations by experts for changing this prevalent working culture focus particularly on flexible working time arrangements and changing internal cultures and practices within organisations.

- In most countries, the experts noted the need for improvement (or indeed introduction) of flexible working time (and place) arrangements. This requires adjustments to both employers' and employees' needs. It was stressed as important, however, that this **flexibilisation of work** (time, place, medium) is preceded by negotiations with employees and is not unilater-

ally imposed by employers. Equally important is that boundaries between the professional and private sphere are preserved, so as not to replace the culture of being present with a culture of permanent availability. This can only be achieved through social dialogue. Furthermore, workplace cultures are sometimes particularly hostile to men taking up flexible working arrangements, so actions are needed to change this culture to one that is more supportive of men and women taking up these arrangements.

- Support for employees with eldercare responsibilities should also be increased through options to work flexibly, take leave and by providing clear information about available financial support for accessing eldercare services where appropriate.
- On the company level, family-friendly and equal-opportunity-friendly corporate cultures should be established, with senior managers setting examples by assuming care tasks. Moreover, concepts should be developed for a human resource management that addresses requirements in different phases of life and which, for example, takes care tasks into consideration when it comes to further career development. In order to improve company practices, coherent support needs to be provided at policy level, in close cooperation with the social partners and experts on the subject of work–life balance and gender equality.

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