



Does work–life balance still matter?

Interview: MEPs on the European Parliament's recent report

Potential of the Working Time Directive

Employee-friendly working time flexibility

Supporting sustainable work

Closing the gender employment gap

Family-related legislation on leave and care

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This issue of Foundation Focus looks at work–life balance and some of the factors that help or hinder workers in combining working with non-working life. Since average working hours have been decreasing steadily, it asks whether work–life balance still matters. How can the Working Time Directive help, and what role do flexible working time policies have? What specific supports are needed by those with care responsibilities for children or adults? Work–life balance is connected to other aspects of life, including the need for high-quality childcare, addressing the gender employment gap and making provision for older workers who cannot continue in full-time work.

Editorial

It is a fundamental question for every worker – how best to reconcile the demands of the job with other aspects of life. Whether it is called work–life balance, reconciling working and non-working life, or the fit between work and family or social obligations, it involves similar issues.

Four out of five European workers report that they have a good work–life balance. (Of course, these are *workers*, so this figure does not include those who may have had to leave the workforce because of non-work demands.) However, this also means that for one in five workers the fit between work and other obligations is not a good one.

The issues involved in achieving a good work–life balance vary with individual circumstances and with changing demands at work and outside it. Over a working life, children will require more time at certain stages than at others. The need to provide care for parents or elderly relatives tends to arise later in life and to grow.

Regulating working time and enabling a better work–life balance for workers has been a goal of EU policy for many years. It remains high on the agenda, as the latest initiatives by the European Commission and European Parliament show. It has also been the subject of much effort at national level, by governments and social partners.

Improving work–life balance is a worthy policy goal in its own right. However, it is also linked to other top-level goals, including: increasing labour market participation; making work more sustainable; ensuring equal opportunities for women; addressing demographic challenges and the issues that they raise for pension systems.

Sitting as it does at the intersection of working and private life, with strong implications for quality of life, working conditions and labour market participation, the question of work–life balance has been an important subject of research for Eurofound and this issue of Foundation Focus draws on a wide range of recent work. This will continue to be a significant research topic for Eurofound, including in the outputs from the fourth European Quality of Life Survey from late 2017 onwards.

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Working hours are decreasing, so does work–life balance still matter?



It is not headline news – average working hours in Europe and the US have been decreasing since the early 20th century.

Statistics show that people are – on average – working fewer hours, but life is about time and how it is used. People need to be able to take time to live their lives, and to carry out family and caring duties, as well as working. It is a question of balance – a balance that is still not available to too many workers.

Although working hours have been decreasing, some workers, such as self-employed men, still work long hours, and the number of part-time workers has been increasing (33% of women, 10% of men) according to the sixth European Working Conditions Survey 2015 (EWCS). Eurofound's research into the working hours of people in the retail sector shows that short working hours can be associated with unpredictable and split shifts that can have an impact on family life. But it also shows that solutions can be implemented to mitigate the negative impact of these types of working arrangements. This article explores relevant findings of the sixth EWCS and some of the issues arising from them.

Need for flexibility

It is not only the duration of work, but also the organisation of work that matters. Flexibility has been on the increase in recent years, with 21% of workers now regularly working shifts and 30% working on Sundays. The negative side of flexibility is that changes in one's schedule can come with little notice: 12% report that they are told of changes several days before, 5% the same day, and 12% are asked to come in to work 'on demand' (at short notice) at least several times a month. The positive side of flexibility, however, is that it can allow workers to take time off more easily, with 66% (more men than women) able to take time off fairly easily during working hours for personal or family matters.

The organisation of work is also changing: some people work in their free time because they are asked to, some because they feel expected to do so and some because they just want to, while some can work pretty much anywhere, anytime using information and communications technology (ICT). More ICT mobile workers (26%) report poor work–life balance than other workers (18%). Changes in work organisation have now made it possible for some of us to access work 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. This is likely to be of growing concern as Europe looks to become more skilled and more digital.

Flexibility in family life

But life, the other side of the work–life balance, is also changing. Advances in domestic technology mean that less time is needed to cook, wash dishes, maintain the home and carry out other chores. This has helped some – particularly women with young children – to enter or re-enter the labour market, but there are still many household and childcare duties that need to be performed every day, such as bathing young children, helping with homework and asking (even if often in vain) about the day at school.

Despite some progress – a bit more help provided by men – the EWCS shows that women still add to their paid working time by some 22 unpaid hours per week, while men add 10. Individualisation and flexibility are also more prevalent in personal life, meaning that more people may choose to stay single, family composition is more diverse and lifetime relationships may be replaced by successive life partners, leading to more complex patterns of demand for caring.

Need for speed

At the same time, there are demands that we work faster, delivering to tighter and tighter deadlines. Work intensity is high for about one-third of all EU workers, work on demand is a reality for one in

eight, and work at short notice is on the increase. Just-in-time business systems not only aim to reduce stock and make production more flexible, but also to allocate work through an increasing number of communication platforms, with email, messaging and social media apps all calling for instant answers, often impinging on our private lives.

There are many variables and possible combinations of how much time we work (in hours, days, weeks across the year, years across our careers), when we work (traditional and atypical schedules such as Saturdays, Sundays, night work or shift work of all types), the predictability of work (changes in working hours, on-call working) and decision-makers on working hours (companies, employees with certain room for manoeuvre). As we grow older, our needs and the needs of our children or dependants change. Our focus of interest changes; so does our need for work–life balance.

Achieving a balance

It is fortunate (after all these variables) that 81% of workers report a good or very good fit between their work and their family or social commitments. However, in terms of preferences, 30% would like to work fewer hours and 14% would like to work more. Furthermore, qualitative studies show that people tend to adapt their preferences to what is available to them, hence the high degree of reported work–life fit would need to be taken with caution. This would suggest that concerns over work–life balance are likely to increase. The increasing work-related use of mobile technologies outside of working hours is a major concern, but some countries and companies are starting to regulate this. Increased flexibility of both working and non-working time is likely to create more and diverse groups of 'winners and losers'. This highlights how coordination issues become more important to address and regulate to ensure fair and balanced decisions.

Monitoring working time can be complicated for certain occupations and employment situations, and this issue is also expected to grow.

But there are also the traditional, non-technical issues: parents must be able to work and feel assured that their children are well educated and taken care of in schools and crèches. More solutions need to be found so that women in the retail and cleaning industries and all workers with demanding schedules involving shifts, split shifts and unpredictable on-demand hours can go to work while also being able to care for their families, learn new skills, have leisure and perhaps volunteer to help in their communities.

The European Commission has recognised the importance of the challenge, but also acknowledges that it will not be easy to meet. Eurofound's research provides tools to identify and describe the issues in more detail. It contains many examples of good practices and suggests that we should assess these initiatives according to basic principles: are we implementing solutions that are healthy, productive, sustainable, and that contribute to gender and age equality?

The central questions are whether Europe is taking the high road to achieving good work–life balance and is it doing this urgently enough. Time will tell.

Agnès Parent-Thirion

INTERVIEW WITH VILIJÀ BLINKEVIČIŪTĒ (S&D) AND TATJANA ŽDANOKA (GREENS/EFA)

Co-rapporteurs of the recent European Parliament report *Creating labour market conditions favourable for work–life balance*

Can you please summarise the main recommendations in your report?

VB: In our report, the Parliament calls for initiatives to modernise the existing EU legislation, specifically maternity leave and the improvement of parental leave directives. Reconciliation policies must be a mix of different elements and should cover families' needs along the life-cycle.

The Parliament also calls for enhancing the exchange of best practices regarding flexible working time arrangements, and tools to increase labour market participation of workers with dependants. It takes into account the link between negative demographic changes, job insecurity and difficult working conditions, which negatively affect the work–life balance of EU citizens. It is crucial to invest in social services, especially care for children, the elderly and other dependants. I am pleased that the European Parliament has backed the establishment of the Child Guarantee to lift children out of poverty.

TZ: It is important that the Commission bring forward initiatives such as a paternity leave directive with a minimum of a compulsory two-week fully paid leave and a carers' leave directive that supplements the provision of professional care, enables workers to care for dependants, and offers the carer adequate remuneration and social protection. In addition, we call on the Commission and the social partners to extend the minimum duration of parental leave with adequate income replacement and social protection from four to six months, as well as increasing the age of the child for which parental leave can be taken. Parental leave should also be equally shared and a significant part should remain non-transferable.

We also call upon the Commission and the Member States to introduce targets on care for the elderly, persons with disabilities and other dependants, with monitoring tools that should measure quality, accessibility and affordability.

In July, the Commission launched a second-stage consultation to see if the social partners were willing to enter into negotiations with regard to legal instruments on maternity, paternity, parental, and carer's leave, or flexible working arrangements. However, they concluded that they were not in a position to be able to negotiate. What do you think of this outcome?

TZ: I believe that step-by-step negotiations will move things forward and an agreement will be reached in the near future. I am ready to use all available tools to boost this process as these are issues of high importance.

VB: We were looking forward to better results from these negotiations, but unfortunately the social partners failed to reach an agreement on legislative action. It is very important that the Commission takes responsibility, fulfils its commitments and takes decisive steps to further advance this issue, which is affecting millions of citizens of the European Union.

Although work–life balance is an EU policy priority, there are considerable variations in the nature and extent of supports that national governments offer. As MEPs from Lithuania and Latvia, respectively, can you briefly describe the situation in your own countries? Are good practices transferable to other Member States?

TZ: According to Latvian legislation, maternity leave is from 112 to 140 days and paternity leave is 10 days; benefits are based on 80% of the recipient's pay during the previous 12 months. Parental leave can be up to 18 months and is paid until the child reaches the age of one, based on 60% of the recipient's average pay during the last 12 months; or until the child reaches the age of one and a half at 43.75%. So this is an example of good practice in Latvia.



Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (MEP S&D)



Tatjana Ždanoka (MEP Greens/EFA)

However, the problem with parental leave is that there is no free choice about the duration. Due to a lack of crèches, parents have no option than to take parental leave straight after maternity leave has ended and to use all 18 months to take care of the child until the age of one and a half to two years and then go into day care.

VB: Work-life balance is a policy priority and should be improved since we face unprecedented demographic challenges. With regard to family-related leave, and after examining the situation in all Member States, Lithuania has one of the best systems in the EU. For example, maternity leave is 126 days and fully paid. Fathers can also enjoy fully paid paternity leave for one month until the child is three years old. Parents have a choice to take parental leave for one year, fully paid, or two years paid 70% and 40% of their salary for the first year and second year, respectively. However, more parents would like to go back to work when the child is one year old, but often one parent is forced to take the full period of parental leave of two years because of a lack of kindergartens and insufficient childcare facilities.

In addition to maternity, paternity and parental leave, Parliament considered a law which would enable working grandparents to take leave of 14 days with 80% of salary to take care of sick grandchildren if they are under 14 years old. This is a very good initiative and could be a good example for other Member States.

Work-life balance will be the subject of the international women's inter-parliamentary meeting at the Parliament in 2017. What will be your recommendations?

VB: I am deeply concerned that current measures in some Member States are not always improving, sometimes worsening the situation, causing negative effects on the well-being of people as well as on their employment and productivity. There is a need for strong action at both European and national levels for legislative measures, including on different types of leave, combined with non-legislative measures, such as awareness and information campaigns, controlling mechanisms and monitoring.

Social partners (particularly, at national level) should debate working time, emphasising the need for work-life balance. Employers at company level should also offer more flexible time arrangements for working parents and strive to create a family-friendly atmosphere in the workplace.

We should also highlight the negative effects for women, still the main users of family-related leave, on their position in the labour market. If women continue to be the main or the only users of family-related leave, we will never improve their employability, ensure equal pay or career development. At the same time, men are not supported or motivated to take up time to spend with and care for their family. This must be changed as soon as possible.

TZ: In my opinion, we have to set common goals at EU level. We know there is a large diversity between different EU countries in traditions, cultural and social sphere, etc. But there is also a lot of commonality, including problems, which have to be clearly formulated to find a common solution.

A fresh start for improving work-life balance

As announced at the publication of its roadmap *New start to address the challenges of work-life balance faced by working families* in summer 2015, the Commission launched a public consultation in November 2015 on how to improve work-life balance for parents and caregivers and reduce obstacles to their participation in the labour market. In parallel, the Commission launched a first-phase consultation with the EU social partners on the topic.

Following the EU social partners' responses, in July 2016, the Commission identified in a second-stage consultation possible avenues for EU legislative action on which it would like to seek the views of the social partners. The Commission also wanted to see if the social partners were willing to enter negotiations with a view to concluding an agreement with regard to any of these legal instruments: maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, carer's leave and flexible working arrangements.

The European Parliament's response to the Commission's roadmap was the report *Creating labour market conditions favourable for work-life balance*, adopted in plenary on 13 September 2016.

Since this interview, the European Commission presented its work programme 2017 on 25 October. Among 21 key initiatives, the work-life balance package was noted under the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Realising the potential of the Working Time Directive



A greater involvement of the social partners in defining standards for working time could boost the capacity of the Working Time Directive to contribute to a better work–life balance.

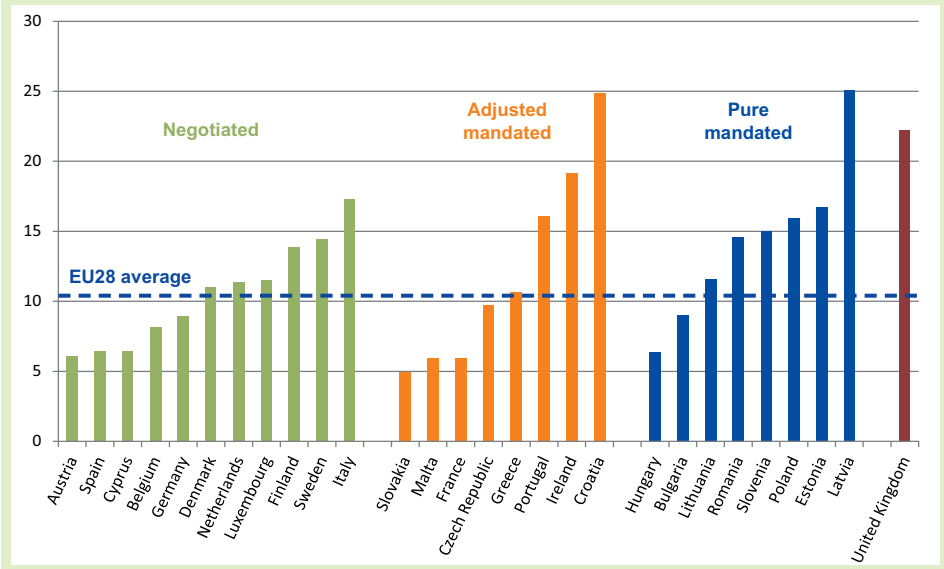
On the basis of the research currently available, it is possible to assert – with little doubt – that the most important factors influencing work–life balance are well known and defined. To put it simply, long working hours and non-standard work schedules, such as night work and shift work, tend to affect work–life balance negatively, while autonomy and control over working hours have a positive impact. In this context, can Directive 2003/88/EC, the European Working Time Directive, contribute to a better work–life balance?

The Working Time Directive was not designed with work–life balance in mind. However, by laying down minimum safety and health requirements for the organisation of working time, it has ended up contributing towards better work–life balance. One of its main requirements is that Member States must ensure that for all workers weekly working hours do not exceed – on average – 48 hours (including overtime).

It also establishes that workers should have a minimum daily rest period of 11 consecutive hours in every 24-hour period. In addition, the directive defines a number of extra protection measures regarding night work and shift work, including limitations on night work, free health assessment of night workers, and assurance of protection for the safety and health of night and shift workers. Overall, the directive contributes, at least theoretically, to an improved work–life balance. But how does this work in practice?

The results of the sixth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), carried out in 2015, provide some guidance in answering that question.

Figure 1: Percentage of employees working usual weekly hours of 48 hours or more, by working time setting regime



Note: The regimes for setting working time are defined in Eurofound (2016a); the United Kingdom is classified as having a 'unilateral' regime. Source: EWCS, 2015

Working over 48 hours a week

According to data from the EWCS, some 11% of employees in the EU28 reported working long hours (more than 48 hours per week) in their main paid job. The proportions, however, vary greatly between Member States (Figure 1). When the regimes for setting working time are taken into consideration (as defined in Eurofound, 2016a), it seems quite evident that countries with a negotiated regime tend to have lower proportions of employees reporting working beyond the directive's 48-hour maximum. (In negotiated regimes, standards are mainly set by collective bargaining agreements, usually at sectoral level and can be complemented by company-level bargaining on working time organisation.)

On the other hand, in most countries with regimes in which social partners have a weaker role in defining working time standards (unilateral, pure mandated or adjusted mandated regimes), above-average proportions of employees work 48

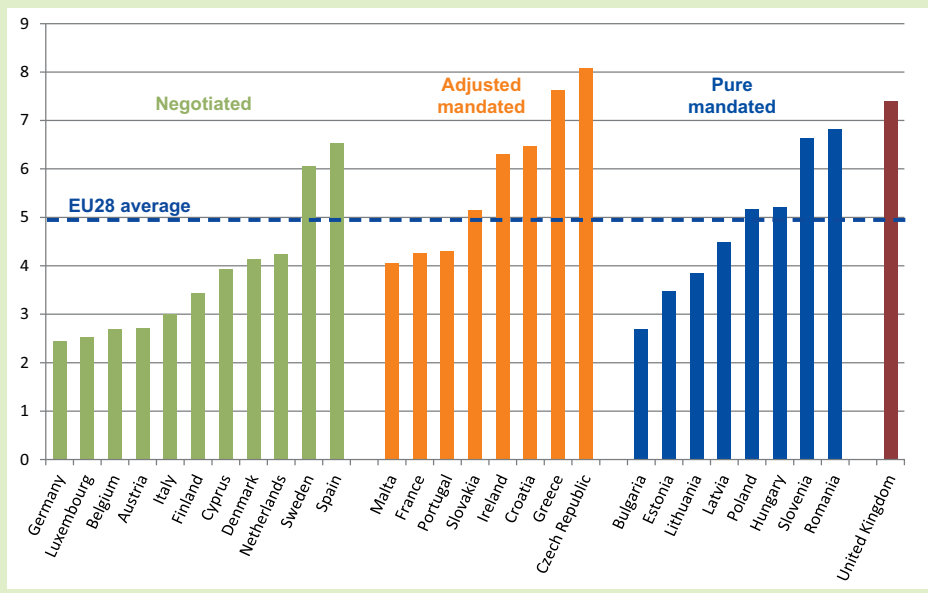
hours or more. This means that despite the fact that the Member States have – in line with the Working Time Directive – adopted legislation implementing the right to limit working hours, the data indicate that those rights are not in place for all employees. (Note: the directive exempts self-employed workers because they are supposed to have autonomy over their hours.)

Data from the EWCS also show that, in 2015, about 16% of male and 6% of female employees in the EU did not have a rest period at least once in the month prior to the survey of 11 hours between two working days, as the directive prescribes. And about half of these employees also worked more than 48 hours per week.

Role of regime

When working long hours and having fewer than 11 hours of rest between two days of work are combined, the working time regime again seems to play a role. The proportions of employees experiencing this combination tend to be

Figure 2: Percentage of employees working usual weekly hours of 48 hours or more and not having 11 hours' rest between two days of work, by working time setting regime



Notes: The proportions refer to cases in which individuals reported that at least once in the month prior to the survey they had fewer than 11 hours' rest between two working days. The regimes for setting working time are defined in Eurofound (2016a); the United Kingdom is classified as having a 'unilateral' working time setting regime. Source: EWCS, 2015

lower in those countries with a negotiated regime for setting working time (Figure 2). This confirms that, overall, the protection provided by the Working Time Directive benefits a greater proportion of employees in countries where the social partners have more say, hence contributing to a better work-life balance.

Discretion over working hours

Research shows that increased autonomy for workers and control over their working hours and schedules also lead to a better

work-life balance. Nonetheless, according to the EWCS, in 2015 some 55% of male and 58% of female employees in the EU still had their hours set by the organisation they work for, with no possibility for change. In other words, they have little or no autonomy or control over their working hours. As with the other aspects just discussed, the extent of individuals' autonomy over working hours varies across countries. And it seems to be associated with the type of regime for setting working time: higher proportions of employees report some degree of autonomy over their working hours in

those countries with negotiated regimes (Figure 3).

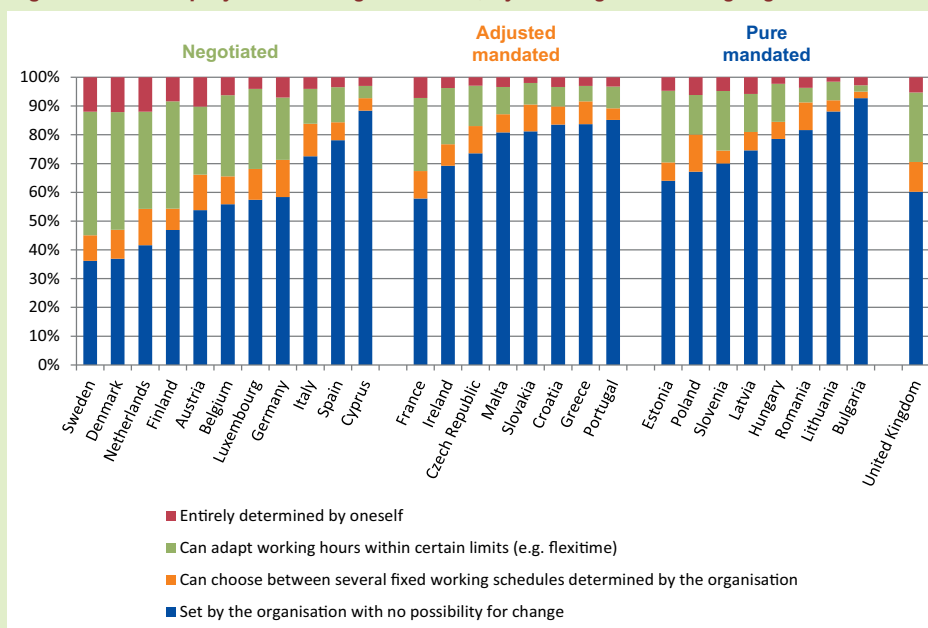
Conclusion

While not designed for the purpose, the Working Time Directive, in principle, could contribute positively to work-life balance when it sets maximum weekly working hours, limits the number of hours of night work, and provides night and shift workers with additional protection.

Moreover, the data show that workers' rights to those limits are more protected in those Member States with negotiated regimes for setting working time (though that protection does not seem to be extended to all employees). In those regimes, collective bargaining plays a relatively important role in determining working time standards. This implies that the key to realising the potential of the directive to contribute to a better work-life balance may lie in collective bargaining and a stronger involvement of the social partners in defining standards for working time, including its duration and organisation.

Jorge Cabrera

Figure 3: How employees' working time is set, by working time setting regime



Notes: The regimes for setting working time are defined in Eurofound (2016a); the United Kingdom is classified as having a 'unilateral' working time setting regime. Source: EWCS, 2015

Employee-friendly working time flexibility: Prevalence and policies



Working time flexibility is used in a number of European countries to help workers achieve a better work–life balance.

Companies mainly offer working time flexibility to allow workers to take care of their children, but it can also help improve overall company performance. The amount of flexibility available depends on national regulations on working time, production processes, companies' own practices and national work cultures, which influence the uptake of flexibility.

The EU provides a basic legal framework for the length of working time in its Working Time Directive (2003/88/EC). Under the terms of the directive, collective bargaining can build on this framework to vary the length of working time and negotiate its organisation at sectoral and company levels. This approach makes sense, since the flexible organisation of working time has to take into account a company's economic activity.

Duration of weekly working time has slowly declined over the last few decades in Europe. However, flexibility is now

driving major changes in laws and agreements on working time. Working time flexibility can be employer-friendly or employee-friendly to different degrees. Uncertain economic times have led to employers' needing more flexibility to adjust production times to business cycle fluctuations. On the other hand, employees are increasingly demanding greater flexibility to suit their lifestyles and fulfil their responsibilities outside work. This article focuses on employee-friendly flexibility.

Differences across Member States

According to the EU Labour Force Survey ad-hoc module on reconciliation between work and family life (2010), flexible arrangements for working time differ significantly between countries on a number of issues. These include:

- flexitime;
- time banking;
- flexibility within the day while keeping a fixed number of hours (the schedule being determined entirely by the employee);

- extent of employee's control over a flexible schedule.

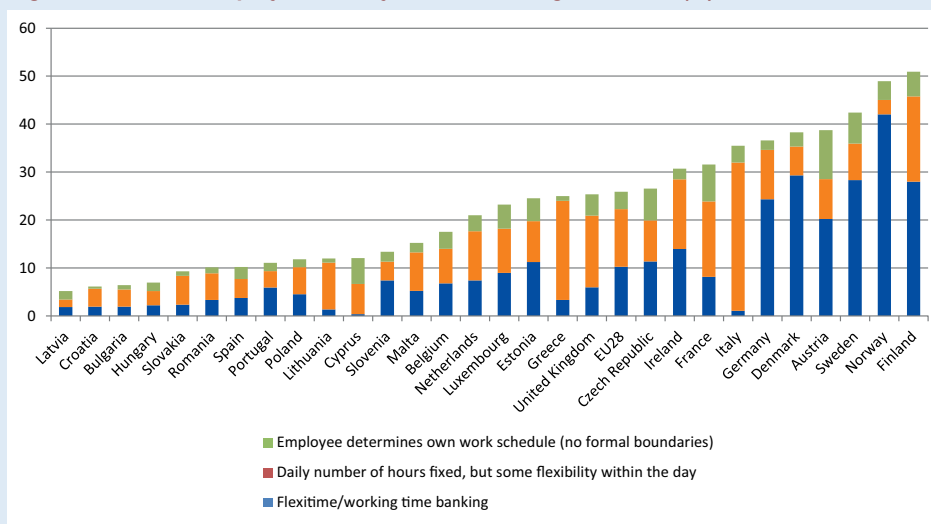
As Figure 4 shows, Austria, Germany and the Nordic countries are amongst those where flexible working arrangements are more prevalent than the EU average. Workers in central and eastern European countries are least likely to have these flexible arrangements.

Eurofound's sixth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), using slightly different categories, found that between 2010 and 2015 there was an increase in the proportion of workers with some form of flexible working time and a decline in the extent to which companies set schedules with no possibility for change (Figure 5). This reflects the overall trend of growing flexibility of working time. However, the data also show divergent trends. In some countries, the proportion of workers with flexible arrangements has decreased (Bulgaria, Lithuania and Slovakia). Generally, in these countries, working time legislation continues to be rather rigid, with recent developments in working time involving mainly part-time work.

In contrast, the proportion of workers taking up flexible arrangements has increased most in western Europe (Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Spain and the United Kingdom). This is a consequence both of a growth in dual-earner households (and their concomitant need for work–life balance) and of companies' needs for flexible production. Moreover, it is likely that recent legislative changes or company practices have had an impact in terms of the more flexible schedules in these countries.

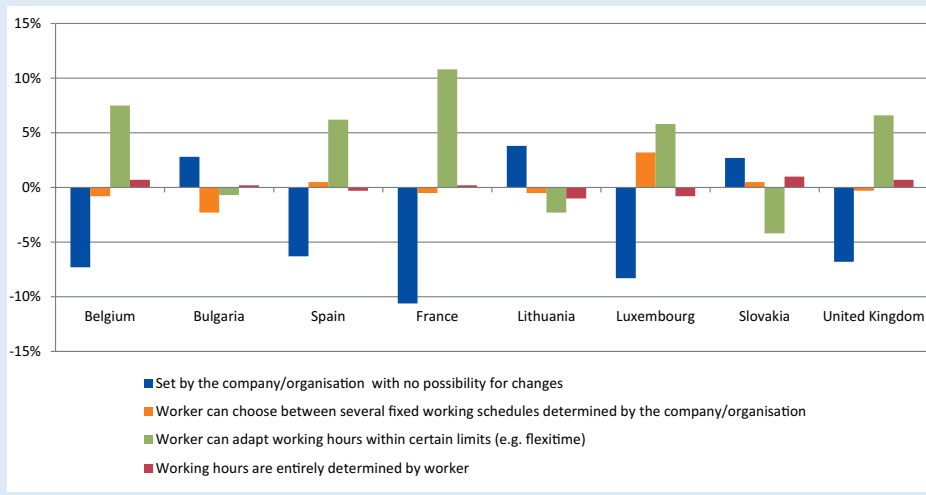
In the United Kingdom, the right to request flexible working came into operation in June 2014. The employer retains the right to refuse the request for a number of business reasons. When the measure was put in place, it was not clear if it was going to lead to an increase in

Figure 4: Extent of employee-friendly flexible working time, 2010 (%)



Source: EU Labour Force Survey 2010 ad-hoc module on reconciliation between work and family life

Figure 5: Employee working time arrangements in selected EU countries – developments 2010–2015



Source: EWCS 2010 and 2015

workers' working flexible hours. Findings suggest that this legislative change has had some impact: for instance, an increase of seven percentage points in the proportion of workers who can adapt their working hours within certain limits (flexitime) was recorded between 2014 and 2015.

Greater flexibility at company level

In France, working time flexibility is being promoted at company level through social dialogue, not through new legislation. Several big French companies have introduced new flexible agreements on working time. Société Générale has recognised the right to 'switch-off': in order to limit intrusion into employees' own time, the bank has defined periods when electronic devices (phones, tablets) can be switched off and no company emails can be sent. Other examples include LCL bank, and Cap Gemini group, which has established better working time for parents after collective bargaining.

Laws on working time flexibility, affecting parents in particular, were changed in Spain in 2012. Major changes included the use of collective or individual agreements to reduce working time and the opportunity for parents to adapt their working day. Spanish oil and gas company Repsol, in an effort to improve employees' work-life balance, introduced measures to increase flexibility, including telework, flexitime and the ability to bank time.

Although the aim of these measures is to protect workers' work-life balance, the growing flexibility of working time does not always have positive consequences for workers. A 2013 Eurofound report on the organisation of working time, using data from the 2010 EWCS, showed that highly variable working hours are associated with greater difficulty in balancing work with other aspects of life and reported negative impacts of work on health. However, it seems that workers who have control over their working hours (employee-friendly flexibility) are less

likely to report a poor work-life balance. The same report shows examples of how social dialogue can address changes in the organisation of working time, taking into account the company's production system and the employees' well-being at the same time.

In conclusion, there is a trend in Europe towards more employee-friendly flexible working time arrangements driven by social, cultural and labour market changes. However, when flexibility means working longer, working very irregular schedules, or having work interfere with family life it can have negative effects for workers.

Social dialogue and collective bargaining on company-level agreements on working time flexibility have been shown to have positive consequences for both companies and workers. However, policymakers in Europe should be aware of differences among workers, depending on the country they live in, the sector they work in, their status and their occupation. For example, in the financial sector and in managerial and professional occupations, flexible schedules are more prevalent than in elementary occupations. Moreover, in the context of an EU policy agenda promoting work-life balance, there are certain countries where the opportunities for flexible schedules are limited in comparison with the EU average.

To improve work-life balance, it is important, firstly, that the effects of flexible working time are monitored to prevent possible negative consequences. Secondly, the options for adapting working time to family or other personal needs should be developed in a way all workers can avail of them, regardless of occupation, sector, status or country. As already stated, social dialogue can play an important role in this under the terms of the Working Time Directive.

Oscar Vargas

Balance is key for sustainable work throughout the life course

Work-life balance, and with it gender equality, is central to ensuring that work be sustainable for all.

The extent to which Europeans engage in paid work depends greatly on how successfully they can reconcile the demands of work with those of their personal lives – in particular, their care responsibilities. This issue is one of the key aspects in ensuring that work remains sustainable throughout the life course for both men and women.

No one-size-fits-all solution exists, however: people's needs change over the life course, different solutions being appropriate for different phases in life. For instance, caring for children of different ages, for disabled relatives, for elderly parents or a partner with health issues are likely to require different solutions.

Unpaid work at home – a question of equality

The sixth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) finds that women continue to do the bulk of unpaid work in the home. In households without children, women spend 36 hours per week in paid work and 12 in unpaid work. In contrast, men spend on average 40 hours per week in paid work and 5 in unpaid work. When children arrive in the household, women generally reduce their paid working hours, but their unpaid working hours increase dramatically: in households where the youngest child is aged under seven, women spend 32 hours per week in paid work, but 39 hours in unpaid work. Upon the arrival of children, men increase their unpaid working hours, but not to the same extent as women: where the youngest child is under seven, men spend 41 hours in paid work and 15 in unpaid work. As children get older, the total number of unpaid hours falls, but the difference between men and women remains.

Aspects of work that support work-life balance

The EWCS found that just over 80% of workers felt they had a good balance between their work commitments and commitments outside of work. This, however, means that one worker in five experiences problems in this respect. More men report problems with their work-life balance than women: 20% as against 16%. This might be related to choices men and women make, whereby women tend to take jobs with time schedules that can be more readily reconciled with their personal lives.

Formal working time arrangements and options play a key role in determining work-life balance. The EWCS finds that work-life balance is associated negatively with long working hours and with irregular and asocial working hours (working at nights and weekends). And those who work in their free time to meet work demands, something particularly facilitated now by information and communication technology, have a poorer work-life balance.

In contrast, a better work-life balance is associated with shorter working hours, having some say over one's working time and being able to take time off at short notice (this is especially important). Allowing workers to take time off at short notice to take care of personal issues, such as taking an hour to bring a child to the dentist, is not necessarily costly for employers; however, the EWCS finds that it is one of the strongest positive factors in work-life balance.

Temporary reduction of working time can also be helpful, but this is not always associated with positive outcomes from a gender equality point of view, if it is women who are taking part-time jobs. Part-time workers, for instance, have fewer career prospects and more job insecurity than their full-time counterparts. Nor is part-time working even the preferred option for many part-



time workers themselves: 37% would like to increase their working hours if they could, compared with 7% of full-time workers.

(Maternity, paternity, parental and carers leave are also of critical importance in helping parents balance work and non-working life. These are discussed in detail in another article in this issue.)

Supporting informal carers

Many workers have to give up work in order to take care of dependent relatives (other than small children). Around 80% of care in the EU is delivered by informal carers.

In most countries, support for carer's leave is much less well organised than child-related care. Short-term leave, usually linked to sickness of a relative, is relatively well supported: between 6 and 30 days per year are made available – and often paid. However, longer-term leave, more in line with what is needed for the ongoing care of elderly or disabled relatives is much less prevalent, and often unpaid.

In Spain, carer's leave of up to two years is provided; however, it is unpaid. In Sweden, 60 days per year are available, paid at a similar rate to sick leave. In the case of a sick child, 120 days can be used. In other countries – Germany, the Netherlands and the UK – working hours can be reduced. Given the background of working lives getting longer, support for care could be embedded more systematically to allow a worker to take care of elderly parents or an older partner. And non-governmental organisations and the European Parliament have called for a 'Carer's directive', which would include giving care credits to workers. Finally, good-quality, affordable, flexible infrastructure – crèches, afterschool care, residential or semi-residential care, home-care support – can facilitate workers with care responsibilities.

In order to enhance workers' ability to reconcile work and personal life and perform work that is sustainable, what is required is a wide range of working time arrangements, leave arrangements and other supports. Ensuring that both men and women can continue to participate in work depends on actions by policymakers at all levels, by employers, and by workers and their representatives.

Greet Vermeylen

Closing the gender employment gap: An economic and social objective



Ensuring equal opportunities in employment participation is a key issue in facing the challenges posed by demographic change, achieving inclusive and sustainable growth, and meeting the Europe 2020 employment targets.

The reality is that employment opportunities are still far from being equal for everybody and that half of the population still seems to be held back. Although there have been considerable improvements in the position of women in the labour market in recent decades, employment and participation rates for women still remain systematically lower than those for men.

While the more recent evolution of the labour market since 2008 shows a convergence between female and male employment rates, this has been driven mainly by a fall in the male employment rate and the decline of previously male-

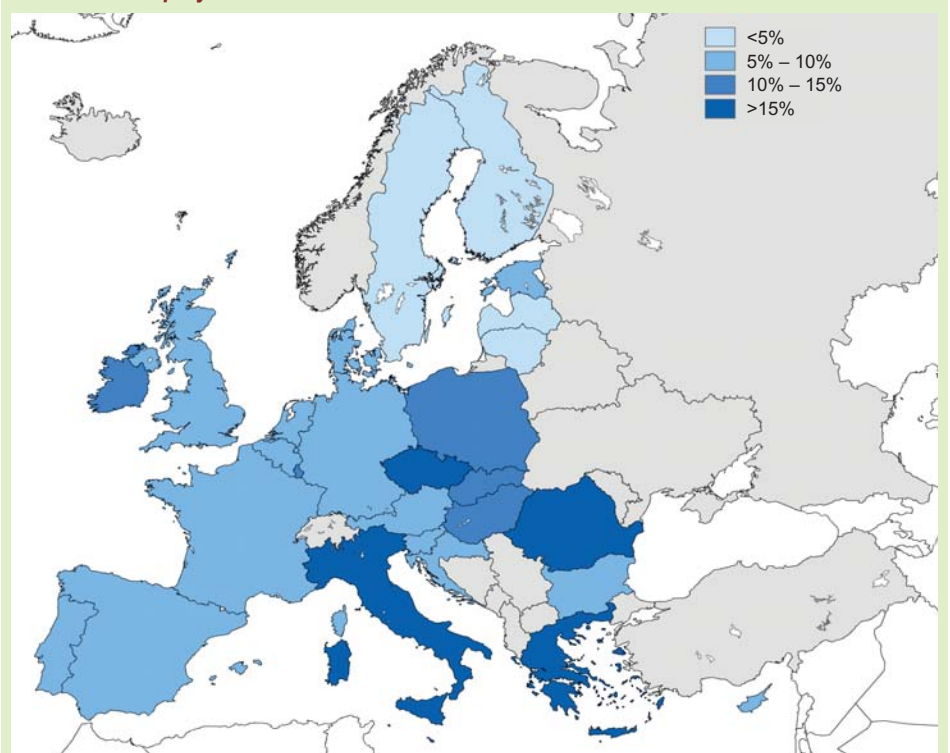
dominated industries such as construction and manufacturing.

According to the latest Eurostat data, in 2015 the gender employment gap in Europe was 10.4 percentage points, with 60.4% of women aged 15–64 in employment as against 70.8% of men. There is considerable variation between EU Member States, as shown in Figure 6. Hidden behind the overall 10% differential is the reality of 17 million women who are unable to participate in the labour market, who would like to have a job but cannot do so due to family and other responsibilities, or who cannot secure a job under suitable and fair conditions and treatment.

Economic and social costs

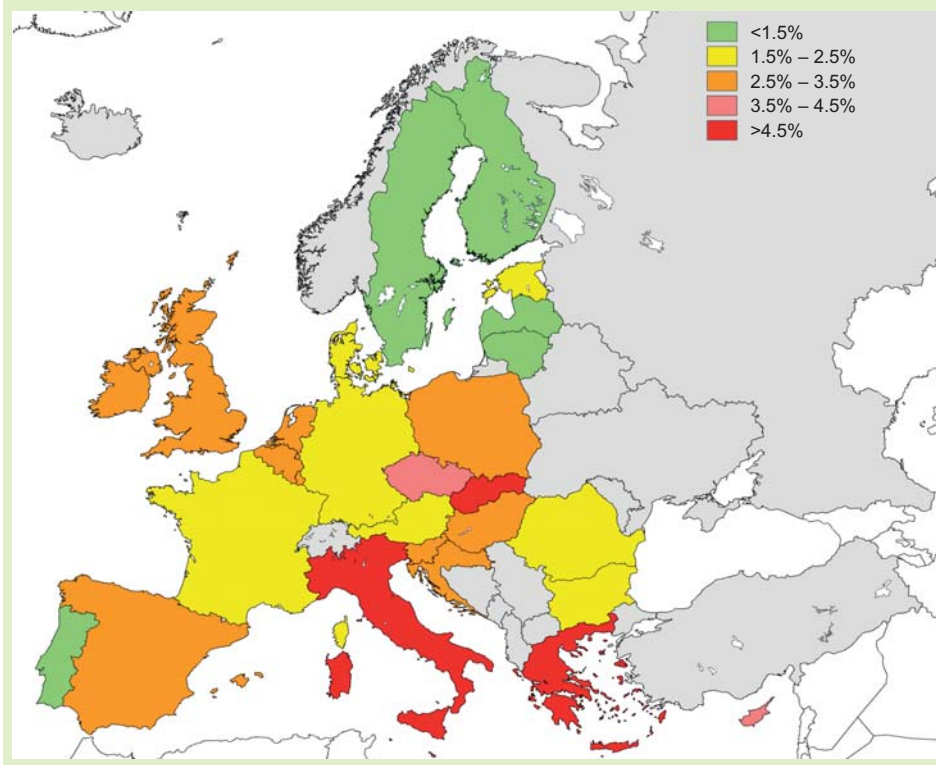
There are clear ethical and political implications resulting from this inequity, which means that closing the gender employment gap should be an urgent

Figure 6: The gender employment gap in the EU: Percentage difference between male and female employment rates in 2015



Source: Eurostat

Figure 7: Cost of the gender employment gap as share of GDP, EU Member States, 2013



Source: Eurofound

economic and social objective. At the individual level, participation in the labour market enables men and women to achieve economic independence and to exercise control over their lives. At the societal level, the cost of the gender employment gap is enormous.

Eurofound's latest report on the subject, *The gender employment gap: Challenges and solutions*, estimates that, taking into account forgone earnings, missed welfare contributions and additional public finance costs, the total yearly cost of the lower female employment rate was €370 billion in 2013. This corresponds to 2.8% of the EU's GDP. Moreover, the cost of a woman's exclusion from employment throughout her working life is estimated at between €1.2 million and €2 million, depending on her educational level.

(Unpaid work performed at home by women not active in the labour market contributes substantially to the economy. The report states that estimating the monetary value of this labour was beyond the scope of the study.)

The cost at Member State level, as shown in Figure 7, varies from the most equal countries, where it corresponds to less than 1.5% of national GDP, to the worst-performing countries, where the yearly cost is higher than 5% of GDP. In absolute terms, the highest loss due to the gender employment gap is in Italy, at €88 billion.

Moreover, participation in the labour market not only has economic implications, but it also has important social effects. It not only improves a person's perceptions of their quality of life, but improves the overall quality of society. Women in employment are more empowered and evaluate their lives more positively than those outside the labour market. Therefore, paid employment not only ensures economic independence that acts as a shield against poverty and deprivation, but also contributes significantly to better inclusion of individuals in society.

Ensuring freedom of choice

The dramatic numbers (above) clearly show that the persistence of unequal employment opportunities between men and women in Europe should be addressed as a high priority, since improvements could lead both to a fairer society and to substantial macroeconomic gains.

Despite various initiatives by the European Commission to foster the labour market participation of women, it is unfortunate that the EU will not meet its target on female participation (in the short term). A renewed and additional effort is urgently needed at EU and Member State levels, because if progress were to continue at its current rate, it would take several decades to achieve EU targets and to close the gender employment gap in many Member States.

Closing the gender employment gap is an extremely complex issue. Lessons learned from Member States that have been successful in reducing the gap reveal that effective policy initiatives aimed at increasing women's integration or reintegration to the workplace need to go beyond traditional labour market policies. They must include integrated measures related to adult care and childcare support, paid parental and adult-care leave, and flexible working arrangements. While integrated policies are essential in order to achieve significant results more quickly, many Member States urgently need a cultural shift to tackle the persistence of gender stereotypes and to foster a shared and more equal division of family responsibility.

Ultimately, the decision to participate in the labour market or not has to be made by women on the basis of their individual preferences. However, providing equal opportunities to ensure that this choice is freely taken should be the common objective of every EU government, in line with European values.

Massimiliano Mascherini and
Martina Bisello

Family-related legislation, policies and company-level measures on leave and care provision



The conflicting demands of work and non-working life are particularly acute for parents, a fact that has been recognised in EU and national law to protect mothers and, to some extent, fathers.

Since 1992, the protection of pregnant workers, workers who have recently given birth or are breast-feeding has been part of EU legislation (Directive 92/85/EEC) in the area of health and safety. In the new century, the European Commission reviewed this directive and proposed amendments (such as the extension of the minimum amount of weeks of leave to 18 and the review of dismissal protection). The European Parliament proposed to improve some of these even further, including extending the minimum number of weeks to 20, 16 to be fully paid.

Following resistance from the EU Member States, in 2008 a draft of the new Maternity Leave Directive (COM(2008)0637) became stuck in the legislative process. After deadlock in the debate, the Commission finally decided in 2015 to withdraw its proposal. Instead, the Commission presented a roadmap for a 'new start for working parents', thereby shifting the paradigm towards a broader and more family-oriented policy approach.

Types of family leave

Eurofound research has shown that the scope of the national terms related to the different kinds of family leave is extensive. While some Member States distinguish explicitly between pregnancy leave and maternity leave (exclusively for mothers) and later on between maternity leave and parental leave (which can be shared between both parents), others use one overall term and regulation for leave that can be used by both parents (albeit with certain periods reserved for either one). In addition, several Member States also have paternity leave exclusively for the father.

Nearly all Member States comply with the directive's provision of at least two weeks' mandatory maternity leave before and/or after childbirth. Most Member States exceed this, although there is no mandatory period provided for in Estonia or Lithuania, while the longest compulsory leave – in that the woman is not allowed to work – is over 20 weeks in Italy. The majority of Member States have opted for a compulsory maternity leave period of 8–16 weeks, and around half of the Member States have made the entitlement to pay (or maternity allowance) conditional upon previous employment (or the payment of social security contributions).

Leave from work related to the birth of a child still tends to be strongly associated with mothers, while less attention is paid to fathers' needs. Nevertheless, the fact that in 2015 only three EU Member States provided unpaid parental leave and no paternity leave at all, illustrates, to a certain extent, that a father's involvement in early childhood care is seen as important in most EU Member States.

Thanks to the Parental Leave Directive (2010/18/EU), all Member States have parental leave systems to which fathers are entitled. Paternity and parental leave systems in Europe vary greatly in terms of duration and the amount of compensation involved, as well as the system for paying beneficiaries. They also differ in terms of entitlement and how leave can be shared between both parents.

The uptake rate of paternity and parental leave by fathers has increased in recent years. Nevertheless, the figure is still relatively low, with only a small number of fathers using their entitlements to paternity and parental leave. Eurofound research has shown that factors influencing fathers' uptake rate of parental leave include the level of compensation, the flexibility of the leave system, the availability of information, the availability and flexibility of childcare

facilities, and the extent to which workers fear isolation from the labour market when taking leave.

Recent changes

Eurofound research from 2015 to the second half of 2016 shows a high level of legislative activity around family leave or support of working families within many Member States. This activity is mainly aimed at improving the conditions for (working) families and supporting shared responsibilities between partners.

In Portugal, pregnancy-related discrimination was recently addressed by Law 133/2015, which defines rules to combat illegal dismissals of pregnant, postnatal and breastfeeding women. Companies convicted for such illegal dismissal will not be entitled to benefit from grants or public subsidies for two years. Romania also transposed EU legislation to protect pregnant workers, and Malta extended its maternity leave to 18 weeks, changing elements of its financing. This sparked debates about the extent to which male-dominated sectors should contribute.

A large number of countries recently introduced, or extended entitlement to, paternity leave, or are promoting the uptake of paternity leave. This includes increasing the period of paternity leave entitlement, as in the Netherlands, Portugal and Slovenia, and the introduction of paid paternity leave after or around childbirth, as in the Czech Republic and Ireland (including a period when the mother returns to work).

In other countries, new rules regarding parental leave schemes or parental rights are being made. Some are broader in scope, such as the German Act on the better reconciliation of family, care and work, which allows parents to reduce working hours and obtain some state-support in lieu of lost salary. In Portugal, a new law (Law 120/2015) reinforces parental rights in several ways; for

instance, by granting workers with children up to three years of age the right to choose telework, and by ensuring that when they avail of reduced or flexible working hours, they cannot be penalised in performance evaluation and career advancement. In Spain, a court ruled in favour of a worker who wanted to modify his arrival time at work in order to take his child to nursery school.

Specific improvements

In other countries, the new regulations have focused on more specific aspects of family leave. Luxembourg, for example, has looked to make parental leave more flexible and increased allowances. France, Poland and the United Kingdom have focused on adapting schemes to encourage both parents to take parental leave; as of April 2015, four million additional parents in the United Kingdom have got access to unpaid parental leave. Romania has legislated towards more generous allowances by removing caps for higher earners, and a new regulation for parents returning from maternity/paternity leave now entitles them to professional reintegration programmes.

Some countries have also aimed to extend policies that promote work–life balance for families to workers outside the ‘standard’ forms of dependent employment. This is the case in Spain,

where a new law aims to facilitate work–life balance for the self-employed, and in case of parental leave, introduces the possibility of hiring a replacement employee to carry out the job, with all social security contributions subsidised. In Poland, people working on the basis of civil law contracts (as well as the unemployed, farmers and students) are now entitled to a new family allowance.

A number of countries have made existing measures more inclusive to also include ‘non-traditional’ families, such as Austria and Ireland, where same-sex couples were granted access to the parental leave schemes, or Romania, where new provisions on parental leave now also refer to adopted children. In France and Italy, new legislation has opened the possibility for workers to transfer some of their unused time off to colleagues who may be experiencing difficulties in reconciling work and family responsibilities.

While the issue is mainly dealt with by legislation, there are also some recent examples stemming from social dialogue. In Germany, the federal family minister and social partners signed a memorandum on family-friendly working time, stating that they will do their best to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life.

In Belgium, Collective Agreement 64 on parental leave has extended the right to parental leave from three to four months, has increased the maximum age of the child from four to eight years old and has given the employee the right to demand an adapted working schedule. The agreement is adapted to the European regulation.

At the end of 2015, Bulgarian families protested outside the National Assembly, seeking an increase in maternity and child benefits. However, the tripartite council did not support their demands for relinking maternity and child benefits to minimum wages.

Overall, the high level of legislative activity relating to family leave shows that this remains a significant issue in relation to balancing work and family life. The pattern of examples also shows that, in line with the EU-level debate, there appears to be a shift from specific policies aimed at mothers or fathers in isolation, to a more holistic focus on families.

Christine Aumayr-Pintar



Reconciling work and care duties for adult relatives



Workers with care responsibilities for adults are a vulnerable and growing group, requiring support from policymakers and social partners.

Reconciliation of work and family life has long been focused on work–life balance for parents, and especially on early childhood. Most policies developed in recent years have focused on work and childcare arrangements for couples with small children. However, demographic changes now demand more attention on the care of dependent adults.

The population of working age (15–64) in the EU has started to decrease, while the population aged over 65 is projected to increase from 87 million in 2010 to 152 million in 2060. One of the impacts of this demographic change will be that the number of people in need of care will almost double over that same period, from around 8 million now to over 15 million in 2060.

As the population ages and people work longer, increasing numbers of workers may have to care for an adult relative, partner, parent or sibling. This means that in the next 20 to 30 years, the generation now in their 30s may have to take on care duties for parents and older relatives (who are part of the most numerous generation, the ‘baby boomers’) and also for their partners, and sometimes for their own children at the same time. Therefore, labour market shortages will have to be met with more flexible working arrangements for working carers, especially for older workers, to keep as many people in employment as possible, both young and old, in years to come.

New policies and practices

The issue of combining work and family care can be addressed from many angles: employment policy; social protection; equal opportunity; or a health and care point of view. The reconciliation issue is positioned somewhere at the intersection of all these domains, and of their different perspectives.

The ageing of the workforce calls for a new range of policies and practices to reconcile work with care. These need to take a life-course perspective, embracing family commitments to children, as well as to older dependants. There is also an important role to be played by the social partners. Some agreements have been reached at company level in a number of Member States, but sectoral or national agreements are still rare.

There is empirical evidence from research that care duty is often taken on by those family members with the lowest opportunity costs, in other words, those who do not have to give up other valuable activities. Traditionally, more women have taken responsibility for care. But with falling family size and increasing female employment rates, more men will have to take on at least informal care duties, as no one else will be available.

Analysis of the available evidence indicates that the prevalence of caring among the workforce rises with age, with the greatest among workers aged 50–64, especially among women: almost one in five people aged 50–64 has care duties at home.

Mixing forms of care

Formal and informal family care can be substitutes for one another, but they can also complement each other. Formal care is costly for the economy and public finances, but informal family care also comes with a price: many individuals are forced to give up work if they cannot find the necessary support from their employers and colleagues and/or from other providers, such as public or private care services. Those individuals who cannot combine work with care duties will not contribute to the economy, pay taxes or make social contributions and will often have to rely on public support when they are old themselves because of a lack of pension entitlements.

The optimal solution for policymakers seems to be to provide a mix of formal and informal care. Possible solutions for working carers could be economic support (involving cash allowances for care

provided or using social protection entitlements) in combination with care leave entitlements.

An alternative is to offer protection for working carers in legislation or collective agreements to help reconcile informal care duties with formal employment. Employers will need to consider innovative measures to accommodate and retain staff while maintaining their productivity. Such measures include: temporary withdrawal from work in order to concentrate on caring; downshifting (hours reduction); and support to combine full-time working and caring.

Vulnerable groups

The working carer issue has, in places, begun to feature quite strongly in the context of national and sectoral social dialogue. In a few countries, mainly in western Europe, collective agreements play an important role by providing further instruments for the reconciliation of work and care or by being used to implement national guidelines.

The issue has also received growing attention from the trade union movement in countries such as Austria, Germany and the Netherlands. This includes efforts to raise awareness and support action at the lower levels of the union movement (works councils) and research on the working carer issue among the membership (for example, in the Netherlands), as well as more general promotional efforts.

The situation is becoming more pressing, and public authorities and the social partners need to increase efforts to help the vulnerable group of working carers. Trying to balance work and family care can lead to considerable distress. But the worst outcome is when carers have to give up employment and see their financial resources dwindle, losing out on their pension entitlements and being forced into poverty.

Jean-Marie Jungblut

Improving quality and accessibility of childcare

The debate at EU level about early childhood education and care (ECEC) has shifted its emphasis over the last decade from the availability of services to the importance of their quality.

This shift reflects the experience of many service users who are sometimes deterred from using available services because of poor quality. According to the 2012 European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS), poor quality made access difficult for 27% of service users.

This emphasis on quality is reflected in the development of an ECEC quality framework in 2014 by the European Commission, together with the national ministries responsible for ECEC. The framework includes:

- access;
- workforce;
- the curriculum;
- evaluation and monitoring;
- governance and funding.

Prioritising areas for investment and improvement is complex. The 2016 wave of the EQLS will provide some indications of satisfaction levels among service users. The survey includes questions about the quality of childcare facilities, the expertise and professionalism of staff, and the personal attention that their child was given. It also includes questions about the affordability of services and whether people are treated equally. This will make it possible to compare the prevalence of such issues across countries.

Whilst cost is the most frequent barrier to access for all families, even if services are affordable, children with physical or mental disabilities or who come from an ethnic minority or a disadvantaged background often experience additional barriers. Eurofound has compiled examples of additional resources that have been proven to make ECEC more inclusive, such as education plans, funding schemes and teacher training.

Eurofound research has also identified what forms of training are more beneficial for staff, gathering and appraising the

information available. This research shows that training is more effective when it is integrated in the practice of ECEC centres. For training lasting less than six months, a video feedback component has a positive impact on the competencies of practitioners in caregiving and language stimulation, and on the language acquisition and cognitive development of children. For longer forms of training, pedagogical support to staff provided by specialised coaches or pedagogical counsellors in reflection groups has a positive impact on children's cognitive and social outcomes.

Childcare is one of the areas that will be covered in the European Pillar of Social Rights. It is important that in its approach, the pillar continues to highlight the importance of quality, adequate training and the inclusivity of services.

Daniel Molinuevo



Working time arrangements for older workers: Partial retirement



Older workers are often interested in reducing their working hours, while taking into account their financial needs.

They may wish to reduce their hours because of health reasons, to take care of partners or relatives with health problems or disabilities, or to spend more time with their grandchildren. They may also simply prefer to work less. Partial retirement schemes can facilitate such working time reductions. These are schemes where workers can reduce their working hours while being partly compensated for the loss of wages.

Partial retirement can enable and motivate people to continue working longer, thus providing a response to both the pressing need for sustainable and adequate pensions and an increase in quality of life. However, partial retirement schemes are only effective if well designed and implemented.

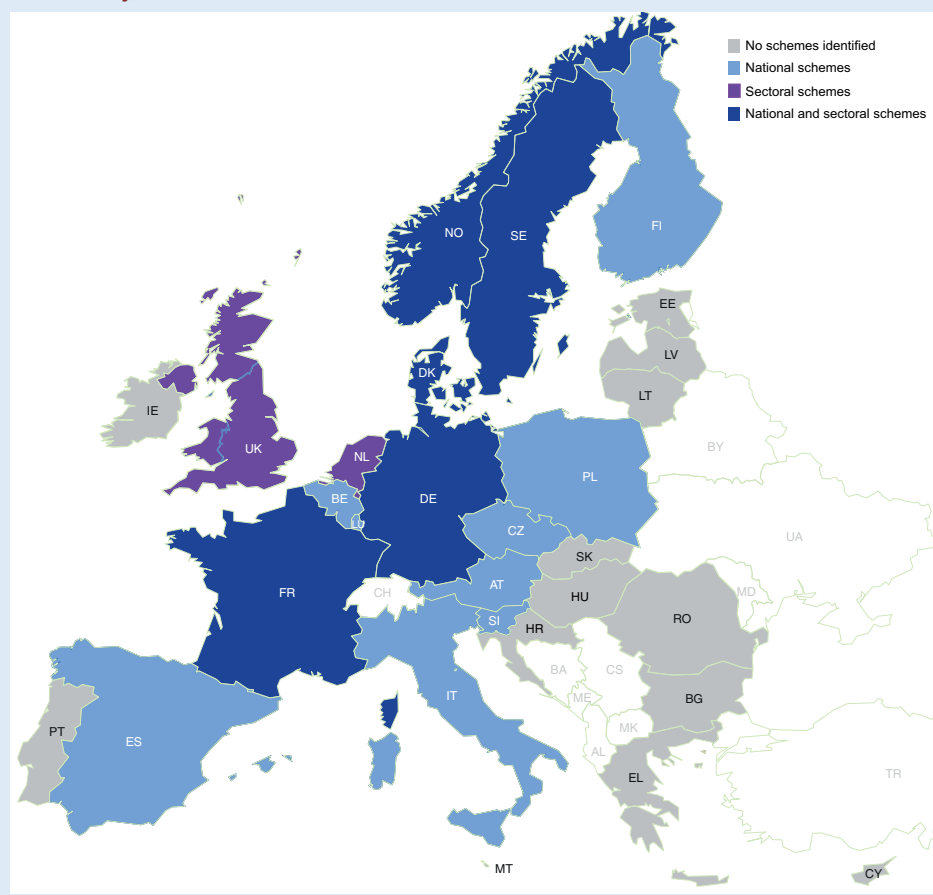
According to the sixth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), 27% of workers in the EU reported that they would be unable to work until the age of 60. Eurostat data show that a quarter of economically inactive pensioners between 50 and 69 years old had stopped working due to health problems, disability or care responsibilities. We can expect this to become even more common with current increases in pension ages and the discouragement of early retirement.

How can these workers be enabled to work longer? A Swedish survey revealed a reduction of working hours to be the most important enabler: 60% of workers aged 50–64 who reported being unable to work until the retirement age said this would enable them to do so.

Motivating people

Almost half (45%) of workers aged 50 or over would prefer to work fewer hours, taking into account their financial needs. For many others, such reductions would be preferable but may not be feasible as they cannot afford a reduction in income.

Figure 8: National and sectoral partial retirement schemes in EU Member States and Norway, 2016



Source: Eurofound (2016c), *Extending working lives through flexible retirement schemes: Partial retirement*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Working time reductions can motivate people to work longer, even after the state pension age. A 2011 Eurobarometer survey showed that almost two-thirds (65%) of people in the EU find it more appealing to ‘combine a part-time job and partial pension’ than to fully retire.

Norway was the first country in Europe with a national partial retirement scheme. Currently, over half of the Member States have national or sector-level schemes (Figure 1). They vary greatly in terms and conditions, funding and take-up.

Experiences with partial retirement

Results from a survey of partial retirees in Finland best illustrate the experience of various schemes (Table 1). Almost half of

partial retirees (49%) would have continued working full time had the partial retirement scheme not been available. Partial retirement has thus shortened their working lives. However, there are people for whom partial retirement has prolonged their working lives (11%), in particular workers with poor health (28%).

Partial retirement schemes that aim to extend working lives should not be too attractive for people who would otherwise continue working full time – the latter should be encouraged and supported. However, they should enable people to reduce their hours if they have a strong need or desire to do so, and be more attractive than full early retirement schemes, should they exist. Furthermore, to increase the positive impact partial

Table 1: What partial retirees would have done had partial retirement not been available in the Finnish national scheme, by health status, 2007 (%)

	Continue working full-time	Continue working full-time for a while	Apply for retirement straight away	Don't know
Good health	65	19	5	11
Moderate health	35	33	14	17
Bad health	11	45	28	16
All	49	26	11	14

Source: Adjusted from Takala, 2007, in Eurofound (2016c), Extending working lives through flexible retirement schemes: Partial retirement, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

retirement has for at least some people, continued partial retirement after the statutory pension age should be facilitated.

Partial retirement is easier to implement in countries and sectors where it is more common to work part time. However, it has particular potential in contexts where part-time work is currently uncommon and has proven effective in increasing opportunities to work part time.

Some schemes have been used involuntarily, partly to make older workers redundant. However, they have also prevented full-time redundancies and kept people partially attached to the labour market, increasing the chances of future full-time employment.

Fairness

Publicly subsidised partial retirement schemes have, in some cases, been taken up mainly by workers from higher socioeconomic groups and have not been accessible to workers who already work part time or who have moved from inactivity or unemployment into a part-time job. This raises concerns of fairness and parity. Examples of this can be found in Austria and Finland.

Schemes where the partial pension is funded by people's own future pension entitlement has prevented subsidising higher socioeconomic groups and making partial retirement overly attractive, but it has also limited feasibility of partial retirement for lower socioeconomic groups.

The earliest examples of national partial retirement schemes (Finland, Norway and Sweden) all moved to 'decoupled' systems where people can withdraw a partial pension and combine it with any amount of work. A risk is that people will 'eat up' their pension and spend old age living in poverty. Norway addressed this by requiring a minimum pension

accumulation to be in place for a worker to be entitled to partial pension. This has made partial retirement inaccessible for people with small pension pots (many of them female).

Low take-up is sometimes explained by lack of awareness. For example, in France only 18% of new retirees knew about the scheme in 2012–2013, according to the Pensions Guidance Council. Low take-up has also occurred when schemes were only accessible after the pension age (Czech Republic), in particular when it is more attractive to combine full pensions with income from work than to partially postpone pensions and combine a partial pension with income from work.

(Generally, partial pensions are better for the sustainability of pension systems, as pension withdrawal is partially postponed.)

Often, partial retirement may serve to gradually 'phase out' work, but this is not always the case. Older workers may want only to reduce their working hours for a limited period, for example to take care of a partner with health problems. Hence 'partial' should not mean 'phased' retirement. It is important to facilitate reversals if the policy goal is to extend working lives.

Even if partial retirement does not extend working lives for individual workers, it can be part of a package negotiated when early retirement options are cut. Then, partial retirement will clearly prolong working lives compared to the previous situation of full early retirement.

Article based on Eurofound's report Extending working lives through flexible retirement schemes: Partial retirement, published in September 2016.

Hans Dubois



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Eurofound (2016c), *Extending working lives through flexible retirement schemes: Partial retirement*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

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Key resources

European Working Conditions Survey reports and data visualisation.
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-working-conditions-surveys>

Eurofound's European Observatory of Working Life (EurWORK).
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork>

www.eurofound.europa.eu

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