European Alliance for families
Regional Seminar
Brussels, 25 January 2012

Work-life balance and reform of the welfare state:
Innovative approaches and practices at regional level

Synthesis report
Preface

The issue of “work-life balance and reform of the welfare state” was discussed at a regional seminar, organised by the European Commission and the Lombardy region in the framework of the activities of the European Alliance for Families (www.europa.eu/familyalliance). Hosted by the European Economic and Social Committee in Brussels, the event brought together representatives of EU regions, ministries of EU Member States, NGOs and social partners.

The seminar provided information on reconciliation measures aiming at improving work-life balance. A strong theme running through the workshop concerned relevance and applicability of reconciliation policies in times of crisis.

Building on a recent White Paper issued by the Lombardy Regional Government, the seminar allowed for comparison of different innovative approaches and practices at regional level in Italy, Lindköping (Sweden) and Catalonia (Spain). A lively discussion concluded the meeting.
# Table of Contents

## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Work–family balance in the EU framework</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Concept and Themes</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Recession and Reconciliation. Linda Hantrais, Emeritus Professor, European Social Policy, Department of Politics, History and International Studies, Loughborough University and Visiting Fellow, Centre for International Studies, London School of Economics (UK)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Work-life balance in Europe and the role of care services: Daniel Molinuevo – Research Officer European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound in Dublin)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. REGIONAL EXPERIENCES</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Lombardy 2020 White Paper. Roadmap for reconciliation of family and work life: Giulio Boscagli, Lombardy Regional Minister of Family, Reconciliation and Social Solidarity (Italy)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 The Lindköping experience: Elisabeth Ramberg – Social Welfare Director, Lindköping Municipality (Sweden)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 ‘temps x TEMPS’ PROJECT. Fostering new forms of work time organisation in Catalan businesses: pilot scheme on two industrial estates: Esther Sánchez – Secretary for Labour and Industrial Relations, Catalan Government (Spain)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Stakeholder roundtable</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Paola Panzeri, Policy Officer of the Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Manuela Kron, Corporate Affairs Director at Nestlé Italia</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Claudia Menne, Confederate Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Discussion and conclusions</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Framework and concepts</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Regional experiences</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 Stakeholder views</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 For further consideration</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Introduction

The aims of the regional seminar on ‘Work-Life Balance and the Reform of the Welfare State: Innovative Approaches and Practices at Regional Level’ were to

1. Discuss reconciliation measures as a key factor in the pursuit of a modern welfare system within a wider European social context;
2. Present good practices at regional level with the main focus on the Lombardy 2020 – Roadmap for the reconciliation of family and work\(^1\), recently issued by the Lombardy Regional Government; and to
3. Exchange experiences and knowledge among participants representing regions, national ministries, NGOs and social partners.

The workshop was divided into three sessions. In the morning an overview on reconciliation policies (both at national and European level) was presented with emphasis on the applicability and transferability of these measures in times of recession. This was followed by a presentation on the different aspects of work-life balance and corporate level measures promoting the reconciliation of paid employment and family commitments. During the second session three regional experiences aiming at improving work-family balance, were illustrated. In the afternoon, representatives of different stakeholders were given the opportunity to share their views on how government policies could help families during a period of fiscal consolidation.

This report provides a brief overview of work-family balance within a European policy context. It also summarises the main points from the presentations and highlights some key points from different regional experiences, the stakeholder roundtable and from the ensuing discussion. Then it draws out the main conclusions from the workshop and makes some suggestions for future consideration.

\(^1\) [http://www.cartapariopportunita.it/files/15/Libro%20Bianco.pdf](http://www.cartapariopportunita.it/files/15/Libro%20Bianco.pdf)
2. Work–family balance in the EU framework

Reconciliation has been on the European policy agenda since the 1970s. The issue became of increasing relevance in the context of the concern about the demographic future of the European Union and in the need to reinforce the EU’s collective capacity to manage socio-demographic change.

EU policies aiming at reconciling work and family life have gradually shifted (Eurofound, 2010) from a gender equality perspective towards the need to increase employment rates and stimulate economic growth as a means to achieve better reconciliation of work and family life and; more recently, to promote an increase in birth rates. In particular, over the past decade, these different policies have been redesigned, since they became of equal importance.

According to the European Commission, ‘reconciliation policies are key responses to long-term economic and demographic challenges, and should therefore be reinforced to stimulate growth’.

In its 2006 Communication, the European Commission presented its views on the demographic challenges faced by the EU and offered a strategy for tackling them. The Communication already called for the creation of better conditions for families to deal with the problem of a shrinking labour force by raising employment rates and productivity levels, by relying on immigration and better integration of immigrants, and by meeting the challenge of an ageing society with the supported of sustainable public finances.

One year later, the European Commission adopted a Communication entitled, ‘Promoting solidarity between the generations’. The document highlighted three areas where Member States, social partners and civil society, and the EU could play an important role:

1. Compensation for direct and indirect costs associated with the family (benefits or tax relief for those responsible for children or other dependent persons). However, one has to bear in mind that it falls within the remit of Member States to formulate policies consistent with national public policies.
2. Parent help services in the form of education and care for young children, care and supervision for older children and, increasingly, services for dependent people in an ageing society;
3. Organisation of working and employment conditions (appropriate work schedules and leave) and access to services at local level; usually determined by the respective stakeholders.

---

2 The work–life balance issue has increasingly become part of the rhetoric, replacing the narrow conceptualization of reconciliation of work and family life. It implies a life-cycle approach, taking intergenerational relations into account, thus extending care responsibilities to other members of the family. Moreover it implies a larger set of actions, aimed at supporting parenthood responsibilities (Letablier et al., 2009).
3 The importance of achieving this end is reflected by several key documents, such as The Commission’s ‘Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006–2010’, the European Pact for Gender Equality of 2006, the European Commission’s Strategy for equality between women and men 2010–2015, etc.
5 COM (2006) 571 final
6 COM(2007) 244 final, p.4.
7 Underlined by the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on ‘The role of the social partners in reconciling working, family and private life’ adopted on 11 July 2007 SOC/271- CESE 998/2007
8 For further details on the EAF seminar on the quality of childcare, see: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/emplweb/families/userfiles/file/EAF_Childcare_report_FINAL.pdf
These instruments are combined differently in various countries (Letablier et al, 2009; OCD, 2011):

1. Nordic countries are considered to provide the most comprehensive support for working parents with care responsibilities (raising children under 3). The continuous support combines well-paid maternity/parental leave and relatively high provision of childcare services from age 1. As a result, both female employment and fertility rates are among the highest, while poverty (including child poverty) rates are comparatively low (see Elisabeth Ramberg later in this report.)

2. Anglo-Saxon countries are characterised by short and low paid leave, while financial support is highly targeted on low-income families. Fertility rates are relatively high with high female employment rates, but women with children under 6 frequently work part-time. Poverty rates are relatively high.

3. Southern European countries have long unpaid leave schemes, low cash benefits and less developed childcare services for children under 3. Both fertility and employment rates are low, while poverty rates are quite high.

4. Continental Eastern European countries are situated between the above groups with diverse practices.

The new Europe 2020 Strategy advocates that the employment rate of the population aged between 20-64 should increase to 75% by 2020, partly through the greater involvement of women. Two flagship initiatives of the Europe 2020 Strategy have a direct impact on families. The Agenda for new skills and jobs requires Member States to implement their national pathways for flexicurity to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life. The other flagship initiative is the European Platform against Poverty, which requires Member States to define and implement measures that address the specific circumstances of groups at particular risk, such as lone parents.

As a result of persistently low fertility rates, increasing life expectancy and the retirement of the baby-boom generation, the European Union will face a number of challenges associated with an ageing society. Therefore the Council formulated Conclusions in June 2011 emphasising that ‘meeting the demographic challenge requires determined action to tackle barriers to reconciling work and family life which may prevent European citizens from realising their wishes to have children.’

As Mr Stéphane Buffetaut from the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) stressed in his opening statement, the EESC decided to become a forum, where policies addressing families could be discussed. The Committee adopted a series of explanatory opinions on the issue. In the opinion on ‘The Role of Family Policies in relation to change with a view to sharing best practices among Member States’ the Committee advocated that the EU should ‘enact legislation on balancing work and family life, equality at work between women and men, and child protection and development’, as well as ‘in relation to parental leave and discussion on the length of...

9 The EAF also addressed the topic of time credit schemes and working time flexibility. For further details, see:
http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/emplweb/families/index.cfm?langId=en&id=3&news_id=1162&new s_det=yes


Maternity leave.' (The recent developments in these fields with special attention to the 'Pregnant Workers Directive' (also referred to as 'maternity leave directive, 92/85/EEC)\textsuperscript{14} and the parental leave were addressed during the seminar.)

Maternal and parental leave make a major contribution to work-life balance, they are also a central issue on the European political agenda. Family-related leave schemes are usually divided into 4 categories (Letablier et al., 2009; OECD, 2011):

1. Maternity leave (with compensation generally covering part or all the mother’s regular wage), often for a period of approximately 15 weeks, some of which are taken prior to the birth of the child.
2. Paternity leave, consisting generally of a short period of leave for fathers immediately following the birth of the child.
3. Parental leave\textsuperscript{15}, consisting of a few month of leave for each parent until the child reaches a certain age to care for a young child after maternity leave (either unpaid, flat rate, or contribution-based social insurance benefit as part of the incumbent’s salary)
4. Filial leave/Carer’s leave to care for ill, disabled or impaired family members (child, elderly, adults with disabilities)

Article 33 of the Charter of the European Union\textsuperscript{16} states that in order 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.’ However, negotiations on the draft directive on maternity leave have been blocked for over a year. The latest proposal was submitted by the European Commission in October 2010, recommending the extension of the minimum length of maternity leave from 14 to 18 weeks (paid at 100% or a salary at least equivalent to sickness benefits). The European Parliament in its first-reading position (October 2010) recommended more ambitious provisions: 20 weeks of full paid leave for the mother and 2 weeks of paternity leave. The Council has refused to take a position on the proposal ever since, blocking the negotiations as co-legislator of the directive.

An EU-wide entitlement to parental leave for both parents exists since 1996. The recently revised Directive (2010/18/EU) now provides for four month of leave for each parent until the child reaches a certain age (maximum 8 years). No entitlement to specific paternity leave or carers’ leave existed at EU level. The European Commission held a public consultation of possible measures in the area of carers’ leave in 2011.

In relation to childcare provision, Jane Lewis (2006) found that over the past decade, there has been a trend across the EU towards more investment in childcare capacity (and quality), since many countries have developed childcare programmes in order to meet the Barcelona targets.\textsuperscript{17}


\textsuperscript{15} For further details, please consult: http://ec.europa.eu/governance/impact/planned_ia/docs/2011empl_016_work_family_private_life_en.pdf


\textsuperscript{17} Member States should strive to provide childcare for at least 90% of children between the ages of three and mandatory school age and for at least 33% of children under the age of three by 2010.
3. Concept and Themes

3.1 Recession and Reconciliation. Linda Hantrais, Emeritus Professor, European Social Policy, Department of Politics, History and International Studies, Loughborough University and Visiting Fellow, Centre for International Studies, London School of Economics (UK)

The aims of good practice seminar are to examine how the approaches developed in one member state or one of its regions might be transported to another country or region facing the same issues. Taking account of the policy environment in the exporting and importing countries or regions, participants in good practice seminars attempt to assess why a policy is working in a particular societal environment, why it might or might not work in another, how it might need to be adapted if it is to succeed elsewhere, and how it can help shape future policies and contribute to the process of policy learning and transfer, which is also part of the rationale underpinning the Open Method of Coordination (OMC).

Work–life balance has been on the European policy agenda since the 1970s, and the volume of published and unpublished literature on the topic is phenomenal. The issue has periodically been given a boost every time concerns are raised about the Union’s demographic future in an attempt to reinforce the EU’s collective capacity to manage socio-demographic change, and this would seem to be a strong motivation for the Lombardy initiative.

Over the past 40 years, the issue of work–life balance has given rise to a plethora of policy proposals, which have been used to achieve what are often conflicting and competing objectives (Hantrais, 2004; Hantrais, 2007). The measures proposed have been implemented in very different policy environments, making their impacts and the need for new policy measures difficult to track and assess. In 2006, before the recession moved onto the Union’s agenda, the European Commission was looking for ways of developing new forms of family support at EU level by improving reconciliation between paid work and family life. It was recognised at that time that reconciliation policies based on a holistic, life-long approach to work–life balance could have positive demographic and social outcomes, which is in many ways what the Lombardy project is attempting to do but in more difficult socio-economic conditions. In a good practice seminar, it is therefore interesting to explore how projects such as that outlined in the Lombardy Roadmap might need to be adapted in the current economic recession by asking whether previous reconciliation policies and proposals for policy development are relevant in the context of the prolonged global economic recession that European member states are currently undergoing, and what coping strategies families are developing. In other words: How can and do government policies assist families during periods of austerity?

Justifying EU reconciliation policies

Scrutiny of policies adopted at EU level since the 1970s shows that the management of socio-demographic change is only one among several reasons justifying Community-level intervention to balance paid work and family life. Apart from the explicit objective of raising fertility rates and supporting intergenerational solidarity and social cohesion, arguments that have been used over the years to legitimate EU intervention include: the need to encourage greater female labour market participation on economic and gender equality grounds; the need to ensure the sustainability and quality of social protection systems for economic and social reasons, extending to the
enhancement of economic performance and the creation of more and better jobs; the need to protect women as mothers and to promote personal fulfilment for men and women in public, social, family and private life.

Many, if not all, of these objectives are present in the Lombardy project (see also section 4.1 of this report). It can be argued, and the case would seem to have been borne out by the EU employment strategy and the current economic crisis, that reconciliation measures have generally been actively promoted when women’s labour or reproductive functions are at a premium and not because such measures constitute a fundamental right (Milewski, 2005).

The ‘business case’ for work–life balance is frequently made to encourage companies to recruit and retain more women (and older workers), because it is in their interests to do so: good human resource practices are not motivated by altruism, and workplace legislation is more likely to be respected if it can be demonstrated that it contributes to productivity and efficiency. The same could be said of much of public policy, particularly in a recessionary climate.

**Tracking policy development and outcomes**

As outlined in the introduction to this report, the measures pursued over the years at EU level in an effort to achieve these objectives cover: more accessible, affordable and better care provision; different forms of leave; more flexible work organisation; social infrastructures to support households and families; fiscal and financial instruments; and the monitoring of national legal systems.

Because, according to the subsidiarity principle, EU legislation, including the OMC, leaves governments to decide how to implement the measures prescribed or achieve the targets set, marked variations can be found, both between and within societies, in the ways in which government, market, families or NGOs (civil society) plan and deliver services; whether it be in terms of the purpose of the provision, funding arrangements, or cost to providers and users, organisation (opening times), quantity and quality of services, status of care work, the balance between formal and informal provision, public expectations and the level of satisfaction (Hantrais, 2004). For this reason, it is difficult to track and compare outcomes and determine which policies are suitable for transfer.

Although it is almost impossible to establish direct links between specific policy measures and outcomes, except in certain narrowly-defined circumstances (changes in legislation and divorce rates), as far as the EU-wide context is concerned, there is some evidence to suggest that female labour market participation has substantially increased in the past 40 years. More women with children have entered and remained in paid employment, particularly lone-mothers who were encouraged to move off benefits into employment, often into the large numbers of jobs created as paid care workers for children and older people in the formal sector (European Commission, Demographic and Employment Reports, 2008, 2010). This undoubtedly bolstered employment figures. However, with a few exceptions (Nordic states), most of these service sector jobs have been low paid, and they have involved short, often unsocial, hours. They have mainly been taken up by women, increasingly by migrant workers, confirming the perception that they are low-status jobs.

In most EU member states, opportunities for women and men have become more equal in education. The gender-employment and pay gaps have narrowed. The quantity and quality of childcare and other public services have improved. Working arrangements have become more flexible. More older people have been remaining
longer in employment, at least in most Western European member states (European Commission, Demographic Reports, 2008, 2010).

The question that can be asked is to what extent this progression is affected by recession. The available evidence shows that, during previous periods of recession in the 1970s and 1990s, as more workers became unemployed, particularly younger people and migrant workers, household income fell, and families struggled to make ends meet, younger people found it more difficult to enter the labour market, tended to spend longer in education and training, and to continue living with their parents until they could become economically independent.

Already in the 1990s, family indebtedness had become a major problem, and increasing numbers of home owners with large mortgages suffered from negative equity. Birth rates fell, particularly first births, not only in less well-educated families and among migrant workers, where the risk of unemployment was greatest, but also among better educated women for whom childbearing could be seen as a risky strategy. During previous recessions, the decline in birth rates was, however, temporary (postponement, 'tempo effect') (Lutz, 2000). Welfare systems were under threat as governments sought to reduce public spending and diversify the provision of services by involving the private sector and NGOs.

Although it may be too early to say, the indications are that the current recession could last much longer and its impact could be more far-reaching than that of previous recessions, with the result, for example, that the postponement of child birth ('tempo’ effect) could become permanent.

Observable impacts of the current recession on policy are already that welfare systems have come under much greater threat as governments seek to cut back dramatically on public expenditure.

A survey in 2010 among the members of the European Network of Experts on Family Policies established that, from the onset of the recession in the third quarter of 2008, all member states were implementing structural changes in their family policy mix, in some cases family support measures are being reduced.

Data collected by the Social Protection Committee in 2011 showed that some member states which had initially increased support for families were reducing it in an effort to control the public deficit, by introducing greater targeting of benefits on low income families or lowering rates. Financial pressures to offload care work from the public to the private or voluntary sectors, which can be seen as one of the solutions to the problem of how to reduce public spending on welfare even before countries entered the recession in 2008, have led to the closure of some of the public provision of care services and to intensification of the mixed economy of care.

Whereas, initially, women were less affected by redundancies, as the cuts have been extended to the public sector, women are also losing their jobs, and more women of childbearing age are being affected. Whereas governments had been introducing incentives to encourage more older workers to remain longer in the labour market prior to 2008, the trend is being reversed as companies shed staff or go into liquidation, just as more older workers are reaching retirement age.

These policy shifts are increasing the burden on family members, and particularly low-income families at the same time as welfare benefits are being reduced, and the number of jobless households has increased, thereby expanding the risk of poverty for children, particularly in large families.
Family reconciliation strategies

As argued elsewhere (Hantrais, 2004) decisions about when to have children and how many, and whether or not women with young children enter or remain in employment are dependent on a whole range of personal and societal factors. In reaching decisions about child bearing, and not all births are carefully planned, couples consider family living arrangements, the stability of their relationship, the availability of affordable housing, the geographical proximity of relatives, access to labour markets and job security, pay and opportunities for career development, flexible working arrangements, social and personal time organisation, perceptions of the material, social and psychological benefits and costs, especially for women, of having children, individual lifestyle preferences, attitudes and value systems.

Qualitative studies\(^{18}\) of the impact of the recession on families suggest that their coping strategies are also dependent on a whole range of personal and societal factors of which family-oriented policies are only one dimension. They suggest that families, particularly low-income families with three or more children, generally react to cuts in benefits and services by reviewing household spending, and their priorities, focusing on food and housing, and cutting back on ‘luxuries’. Greater reliance may be placed on both self-help and support from family members, involving greater sharing of household resources by moving in with their parents, or downsizing and moving nearer to them (see also Paola Panzeri in this report).

The same studies show that younger people are remaining even longer in the family home or returning to it when they are unemployed or a partnership breaks down in countries where this was a less common practice. Younger people are also remaining longer in education and training when they can afford to do so and when no jobs are available.

Unemployment may motivate family members to reconstruct relationships, for example when a male partner loses his job in a previously dual-earner household, he may become a house husband as a practical necessity. However, there are indications that household vulnerability is increased by economic uncertainty resulting in tensions and arguments within families caused by financial concerns and difficulties in planning ahead and the undermining of role expectations (men as breadwinners). Insecurity may result in lifestyle changes and alterations in future plans, for example not deciding to reschedule family building, particularly in families that were already living on low incomes.

Relevance of reconciliation policies

The available studies suggest that in times of recession and particularly when the prospects are that the situation could get worse before it gets better, decisions about whether mothers enter paid work and remain in employment would seem to depend primarily on economic and job security, which is a precondition for embarking on family life.

The amount and quality of public care facilities and other forms of support for children and older people are secondary factors influencing the strategies adopted by couples for combining paid work and family life, rather than decisions about whether or not women with caring responsibilities should enter and remain in paid work. In other words, ‘family-friendly’ policies may be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for reconciling family life with employment.

\(^{18}\) For example those reported in the UK, in Journal of the Academy of Social Sciences, Special Issue: ‘Lived experience through economic downturn in Britain’, vol 5, no 2, June 2010.
In the absence of a magic bullet or one-size fits all solutions, this would seem to suggest that the main focus of government policy when public finances are in free fall should be support for job creation and training and giving guidance to families on how to cope.

3.2 Work-life balance in Europe and the role of care services: Daniel Molinuevo – Research Officer European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound in Dublin)

The lack of reconciliation measures has several negative consequences such as the financial disadvantage linked to the involuntary reduction in working hours; the limited access to training and skills development; more stress on the job, sickness and absenteeism and less overall opportunities for career development and promotion.

The evolution of household characteristics is one of the main drivers shaping the work-life balance. The fifth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS)\(^\text{19}\) concluded that there has been a shift from the previously predominant male breadwinner model (which in 2010 accounted for 11.2% of the households participating in the survey) to the modified breadwinner model\(^\text{20}\) (35.9%) and the dual-earner model (17.2%). Research shows that in all EU-27 countries (except Malta and the Netherlands) both partners work, the proportion varies from around 35% in Ireland to 70% in the Czech Republic and Slovakia) of the households. The sharp rise in the number of households where both partners have to reconcile family care and paid employment has placed the issue of work–life balance higher on the EU policy agenda.

The European Working Conditions Survey also identified the main factors influencing work-life balance, as follows:

1. **Working hours**: in 2010, some 80% of the respondents were satisfied with their work-life balance. Working age men (between age 30-49) were most likely to experience problems with their work-life balance. The volume and allocation of working hours might explain these somewhat surprising results, since women tend to have more predictable work schedules than men or less working hours. Yet, they continue to be more involved in domestic and caring activities.

2. **Family situation**: the presence of children in the household has a considerable influence on work-life balance with consequences for working hours and household characteristics (for further details, see the chart below).

3. **Age**: nearly a quarter (23%) of men aged between 35 and 49 reported problems with work-life balance.

4. **Autonomy**: workers who can determine their own working hours or they are entitled for flexitime, leave periods for private reasons on short notice or fixed schedules are more satisfied.

5. **Regularity**, as regular and predictable working hour schemes have a positive effect on work-life balance. The less regular the working time scheme is, the more problems the workers face. 13% of workers with regular working time schemes experience problems in reconciling work and family life compared to 28% with no regularity. There is a gender dimension to regularity, since women (68%) more often have fixed office hours (starting and finishing time, either for full-time and part-time workers) than men (58%, mainly full time)

---

\(^\text{19}\) The 2010 survey gathers the views of 44000 workers from 34 European countries; covering various issues such as working time, work organisation and work-life balance. For further details, see: http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/ewcs/2010/index.htm

\(^\text{20}\) In this model the man is the main breadwinner and women have a job (part-time, occasional, seasonal) contributing in part to the household income.
Problems with work-life balance are more prevalent for workers with alternating or rotating shifts (30%) compared to those with permanent schedules (26%).

Source: Eurofound, 2012

The second European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) from 2007 includes questions on the impact of family and care commitments of workers on employment in order to assess the impact of private life on work. While almost half (48%) of the workers in the EU 27 reported that their work had negative impacts on their family life (they were too tired to fulfil family commitments several times a month); only 8% of workers found it difficult to concentrate at work several times a week because of their family commitments. In terms of geographical allocation, these problems are more prevalent in Southern and Eastern Europe, while Belgium, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands are on the other end of the scale.

As for the gender dimension of the issue, 22% of men and 21% of women reported that they are too tired several times a week to do household jobs. 11% of men and 10% of women find it difficult several times a week to fulfil family responsibilities and 3 per cent of men and 4 per cent of women report that they have difficulties in concentrating on work because of family responsibilities.

Eurofound also researched company initiatives aiming at helping workers with care responsibilities for disabled children or adults. This project looked at 50 case studies from 11 Member States. Three types of solutions were identified in terms of flexibility and flexicurity:

1. Measures to promote combining full-time work and care responsibilities
2. Measures that entail downshifting to part time employment in some form
3. Leave opportunities to provide care (for further details, see below)

22 http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1002.htm The latest EQLS is to be finalised before the end of the year with more detailed data on childcare services.
23 http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef11471.htm
### Flexibility / Flexicurity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective / Outcome</th>
<th>Practical measures</th>
<th>Minimising financial or other downsides</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Support full-time working for carers** | - Flexibility in working hours  
- Teleworking  
- Accessibility at work  
- Short- and emergency care leave | - Payment during leave  
- Other measures to minimise financial or other downsides of flexibility (e.g. for career) |
| **Enable part-time working (downshifting) and caring** | - Part-time work  
- Term-time working or equivalent | - Measures to minimise income loss associated with hours reduction  
- Measures to minimise other downsides of part-time working (e.g. for career) |
| **Enable / complete lengthy time off for carers** | - Longer carer leave  
- Possibility to accumulate (additional) leave  
- Maintaining continuity whilst on leave  
- Early retirement | - Paid leave and/or ‘topping up’ social benefit payments whilst on leave  
- Helping employees to save/self-provide income for leave periods  
- Measures to minimise other downsides of leave (e.g. for career) |

Source: Eurofound, 2012

Apart from measures helping to adjust to caring activities, companies can also provide direct support for employees, clustered as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Care-related supports</th>
<th>Other measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - Information  
- Referral; care brokerage  
- Counselling  
- Carer networks / support groups  
- Practical daily life supports (e.g. home delivery of groceries etc.)  
- Use of phone / other technology  
- Direct care provision  
- Support for care costs | - Addressing carers’ health and well-being in occupational health services  
- Carer surveys/audits  
- Awareness-raising, promotion of positive attitudes amongst managers, co-workers etc.  
- Lobbying/liaison with external stakeholders (e.g. other employers, care services) |

Source: Eurofound, 2012

A research project is currently undertaken on parenting support and education[^24]. The project identified the main areas for intervention together with mainstream and special services aimed at tackling the problems.

4. REGIONAL EXPERIENCES

4.1. Lombardy 2020 White Paper. Roadmap for reconciliation of family and work life: Giulio Boscagli, Lombardy Regional Minister of Family, Reconciliation and Social Solidarity (Italy)

Brief demographic overview of Italy
As the 2010 Demography Report of the European Commission concludes, Italy currently has the highest old-age dependency ratio in the European Union (30.8%). With a low fertility rate at 1.42 children per woman (2009) and high life expectancy, the old age dependency ratio could rise to almost two-thirds (2 persons aged over 65 for every 3 working age persons).

There is still a significant scope for an increase in the labour force participation of women, since Italy has the second lowest female employment rate in the EU. Only 46.4% of women were employed in 2010, compared to an EU average of 58.6% (Eurostat, 2012). Higher labour market participation would also help in reducing the levels of poverty for households with children, which is amongst the highest in the EU; since families bear the bulk of the cost of raising children. Reducing public debt would enhance Italy’s ability to meet future social protection needs (European Commission - Eurostat, 2011).

Reconciliation in Lombardy

Lombardy is one of the most developed and industrialised regions in Europe, with an economy dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Economic indicators (as GDP and employment rates) are above the national and EU average. Also female employment is above the national level (55.8% compared to 46.4%). Nevertheless, there is a clear demand for effective reconciliation measures (women find both becoming a mother and participation in the labour market crucial). However, there is still a trade-off between a paid career and family life. 20% of employed women withdraw from the job market during their first year of maternity and 30.5% of working women work part-time (Regione Lombardia, 2011).

The recent development of reconciliation strategy in the Lombardy Region is part of the current welfare reform in Italy. In order to succeed, welfare policies have to be person-centred, based on the needs of families and people. The policies also need to enhance the link-ups between different actors and territorial needs in order to see how they can share in the resources they already have. The priority of the Lombardy region is to bring the welfare system closer to people’s needs: through personalised assistance and by applying the principle of subsidiarity.

The issues of work-life balance and reconciliation require complex and comprehensive policy solutions. It is crucial to meet the needs of individuals and families throughout their life-cycle in terms of social participation, work and care. The balance of these elements is not only determined by individual choices, but also depends on a variety of opportunities, resources and policy options provided by different social actors. It is a cross-cutting issue that brings together different policy fields as financial instruments, service provision, housing, health, territory and also social cohesion. At the same time it also has an impact on different actors involved: citizens, family associations, non profit organizations, local institutions, and social partners.

The approach of the Lombardy Region is characterised by relational vision, based on direct reciprocity and cross-linking between actors. The Lombardy Region also seeks to establish a more generalised view, which considers the social capital of families,
enterprises and the community as a starting point. This effort is even more remarkable since these actors traditionally belong to different spheres i.e. the worlds of care and business.

The consultation process of the Roadmap was designed to guarantee the participation of different stakeholders who are also involved in the implementation of the solutions proposed. To this end several complementary initiatives were launched. With the establishment of the Strategic Committee on Women, Family, Work (Comitato Strategico di Conciliazione Donna, Famiglia, Lavoro) and with the publication of the Green Paper on Reconciliation of family and work life\(^\text{25}\), the Lombardy Region directly involved the main stakeholders in the ‘reconciliation issue’ by asking them to conduct an in-depth analysis and to share responsibility for developing a new reconciliation policy strategy. A debate on innovative measures was launched in order to set up a collective strategy for social investment incorporating the ideas of citizens, families, enterprises, social partners and representatives of the of the non profit organizations.

The consultation process on the proposals of the Green Paper was carried out between November 2010 and January 2011, through online questionnaires. It led to the following priorities:

1. Labour organisation and development of enterprise welfare programmes;
2. Improving accessibility and availability of services; and
3. Time policies at city and territorial level.

There was a broad consensus on the need to promote Corporate Family Responsibility in order to overcome the burdens of national labour law. The current work organisation model can also be modified with the application of technological innovations. Moreover, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have to organise themselves into networks in order to be able to benefit from services that they could not provide alone (economies of scale). Therefore territorial agreements became a fundamental factor for success in the field of reconciliation.

Reconciliation is linked to relevant challenges, such as low birth rates, low levels of female employment, and tensions in families caused by unsatisfactory work-life balance. Therefore reconciliation serves as a privileged experimentation platform of the new welfare system in Lombardy.

The consultation and definition process also aimed at broadening the scope of the initiatives in order to develop a coherent strategy with mid-term attainable goals. As a result, the Roadmap includes three main strategic areas:

1. **Family mainstreaming**: the integration of policies along the reconciliation ‘value chain’ (enterprise, labour, family and urban development), while incorporating the issue of work-life balance into all regional policies;
2. **The joint design and co-production of services** between private and public actors on a relational basis that stimulates organisational capacity and allows for better management of resources; with an aim to involve citizens and the representatives of the non profit organizations as they possess the necessary resources and know-how;
3. **Territorial and sustainability networks**: serve as a basis for the new welfare model; an organisational model including local and public bodies, these

\(^{25}\text{The Green Paper aimed at raising awareness and formulating strategic priorities and policy options, based on the principles of: family mainstreaming, integration, coproduction and sustainability. At the same time the document aimed at pushing the boundaries of the current public discourse on these issues by launching a public consultation. Further details at: http://www.conciliazione.regione.lombardia.it}\)
networks are expected to enhance social cohesion and adaptability process in a sustainable manner.

The Roadmap aims at implementing multi-level and multi-actor governance. It further establishes the strategy for three years (2011-2013) and proposes concrete actions in two macro areas:

1. In terms of 'work / job': it seeks to develop new organisational strategies promoting work-life balance; with an aim to disseminate these measures among SMEs, public administration and other relevant areas. Social partners are expected play a key role in collective bargaining at local level.

2. As for 'family and territory': it aims at providing access to services, by simplifying procedures with the use of more IT-based elements; as well as promoting flexibility to facilitate access to services. This cross-cutting approach might also have an impact on housing policies by creating a greater supply of social housing, which might be beneficial for both the business sphere and the healthcare sector. Other measures include the reorganisation of the opening hours of shops, health services, transport, calendars and school hours.

Further measures are targeted at families and people with disabilities. The approval of the Regional Action Plan for policies for people with disabilities is expected to improve accessibility to the highly fragmented services. Yet, a new type of measure addressing home care is currently being tested. Direct care interventions proved to be efficient because they strengthen the freedom of choice of citizens with respect to individual projects, built under the terms of need rather than the characteristics of the disease.

Another innovative and successful measure to support families in providing care is the Nasko Fund. In collaboration with the widespread Family bureaus and regional pro-life Help Centres, this scheme supports women in distress on their way to motherhood through personalised projects.

During the first year of implementation (2011) 27 million EUR was invested, which brought about good results at the local level, with the Territorial Networks for Conciliation, in terms of corporate welfare and firms. Corporate Welfare programs included a series of measures targeted at small enterprises and self-employed. The Lombardy Region has also provided 5 million EUR for experimental projects where companies were asked to co-finance at least 20% of the total cost of their programmes. In 2011, 33 2-year projects have been launched. The aim was to help over 6300 self-employed people to become more flexible. As the families of workers were also targeted; there is a link between this project and the territorial networks. Further actions included: 1. trials of second-level contractual agreements, 2. testing of new forms of flexible working hours, 3. promotion of technologies to manage family duties online, and 4. social and educational interventions.

The issue of evaluation is being addressed bearing in mind the complexity of the issue itself. The Regional Government aims to have an evaluation network which reflects the participatory approach of the project but which can also ensure its sustainability. The development of useful indicators is a prerequisite for a focused work.

There are some future challenges ahead. Bearing in mind that the current welfare model is in transition and that it might imply changes in social networks and the provision of services; a guideline on social planning at local level was approved in December 2011. The role of the territories therefore is expected to become increasingly important.
Finally, it is essential to accompany legislative choices with financial initiatives in order to make them fully sustainable. Currently, the Lombardy Region is working on the introduction of the ‘family factor’; a tool that aims at redefining the distribution of the costs of the access to services in family care. This will also be aligned to a new ‘pro-family’ fiscal policy, which recognizes the commitment and value of families by including further and more rational deductions.

4.2 The Lindköping experience: Elisabeth Ramberg – Social Welfare Director, Lindköping Municipality (Sweden)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brief demographic overview of Sweden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden’s fertility rate at 1.94 (2009) is relatively high compared to the EU average of 1.6 and it is expected to remain high. Life expectancy is also relatively high, which combined with significant immigration is expected to result in further population growth by near 8% in 2050. At the same time, Sweden has one of the highest employment rates in the European Union; 70.3% for women and 75.1% for men in 2010 (Eurostat, 2012). The employment gap between men and women is relatively small. A large proportion of women work part-time: 40.4%, compared to the EU average of 31.9% (Eurostat, 2012). However, due to the crisis, many migrants in Sweden recently found themselves unemployed. Therefore access of minorities and third-country nationals to the labour market and education system should be improved. The public debt is below the EU-average; also the expected ageing-related increase in public social protection expenditure is moderate (European Commission - Eurostat, 2011).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Nordic countries, policies shaping work-life balance belong to the competence of the national and local level. Regarding the state level, welfare issues are of vital importance in Sweden; with an aim to promote economic and social security for citizens. The Swedish family policy promotes the dual-earner model, while ensuring the same rights and obligations for both women and men regarding family and work. The policy mix also includes:

1. Generous spending on family benefits (related to previous income);
2. Relatively long and gender-balanced parental leave (with 60 days of non-transferable leave dedicated to the father);
3. Flexible working hours for parents with young children;
4. Affordable (tax-funded) and high-quality childcare services;
5. Families are also entitled to a special price deduction for household services (RUT).

Apart from helping families in bearing the costs of children, policies also seek to enhance work-life balance. For example, a high proportion of women use flexible working arrangements, which are available at most workplaces. Furthermore, parents with children under 12 are automatically entitled to reduced working hours. The fact that the highest female and maternal employment rates in the EU are combined with high fertility rates is a clear indicator that Swedish parents are successful in balancing work and family responsibilities.

The municipality of Lindköping has competences in promoting work-life balance for its 38000 inhabitants in different aspects, mainly by:

1. Helping them to find work;
2. Providing family support and possibilities for parental education;
3. Enhancing gender equality;
4. Providing day-care centres and school transportation, as well as a school system with high standards for children, youth and adults.

Policy making at municipal level is traditionally consensus and efficiency oriented, taking different opinions on board. Different types of networks also play a crucial role in the process.

1. Business networking was identified as one of the key factors for the successful implementation of measures at municipality level. A strong cooperation has been developed between municipality and companies over time. A customer panel including businessmen, politicians and civil servants enhances the creation of a strong business climate. These relations contribute to the mutual understanding of competences at municipal level, creating favourable conditions for development and growth.

2. Networks of associations also contribute to finding the right balance between work and family commitments. The different kinds of associations are important for families offering possibilities for sport, church and other leisure activities as well as informal education. As a result, parents became more involved in their children’s activities (so-called ‘curling parents’) than they were in the 1970s, before the establishment of the current system.

However some challenges remain. It is still different to coordinate the pieces of the puzzle of life, such as stress at the workplace or decisions affecting family formation. These problems are more common for vulnerable groups, such as lone-parent or immigrant families. Inclusion and youth centres cooperate with youth organisations in order to prevent and combat problematic issues related to immigrants. Programmes are being launched to create better conditions for inclusion.
4.3 ‘temps x TEMPS’ PROJECT. Fostering new forms of work time organisation in Catalan businesses: pilot scheme on two industrial estates: Esther Sánchez – Secretary for Labour and Industrial Relations, Catalan Government (Spain)

Brief demographic overview of Spain
According to the 2010 Demography Report of the Commission (European Commission - Eurostat, 2011) the Spanish fertility rate at 1.4 (2009) lies below the EU average. Moreover, Spanish women tend to have their first child relatively late in life. The projections assume that fertility will recover slightly and that life expectancies will evolve in line with the EU average. Over recent years, Spain has attracted large number of immigrants; however, as a result of the crisis, unemployment among youth and immigrants has risen considerably.

Reconciliation
Families are facing many difficulties when balancing their paid work and family commitments. Due to the relatively low levels of public financial support, they must bear a large part of the costs of raising their children. In 2010, 64.7% of men and 52.3% of women were in employment. Take-up of flexible forms of employment is relatively low: only 23.2% of women and 5.4% of men work part-time compared to the EU averages of 31.9% and 8.7% (Eurostat, 2012). A report published by DBM Spain in 2011 found that some 46% of Spanish employees who voluntarily leave their occupations mainly do so due to their difficulties in balancing work and family life. Recently, Spanish companies realised that they need to introduce measures to improve work-life balance of their workers, particularly women (Durán-Isusi, 2011).

The ‘temps X TEMPS’ (Time by time) project was launched by the Government of Catalonia (Ministry of Enterprise and Labour) to demonstrate the competitive advantage of companies applying new forms of working time flexibility. To this end, between 2008 and 2011, a series of measures aiming at improving work-life balance were implemented in two estates of the Barcelona industrial belt. More specific objectives include:

1. To map the real needs of participating companies;
2. To provide information and raise awareness (among companies, social partners and employees);
3. To set up skills managements teams involving the representatives of workers in order to implement the measures in a way that suits all parties;
4. To offer advice and technical support to participating companies; and
5. To offer specific measures adapted to each companies.

Drawing on the recommendations of the Fórum del Temps (Time Management Forum) held in 2007 with a view to reopening the social debate on time management, actions for the project were grouped into four areas as follows: 1.Awareness raising; 2.Business practice; 3.Training; and 4.Studies and methodological resources.

26 For further details, see: http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/2011/04/ES11040111.htm
27 The Fórum brought together more than 100 experts with different backgrounds (business, scholars, social partners, and governments), ensuring the diversity of opinions, which contributed to the development of a comprehensive approach of the subject.
The pilot scheme began in 2008 with the participation of 33 companies of different size and economic activities, employing a total of 4307 workers (56% female and 44% male). The project was divided into three stages: 1. Diagnosis, 2. Implementation and 3. Assessment.

The first phase (‘Diagnosis’) was conducted in 2008 and provided information on the ‘state of play’ of reconciliation measures already implemented by the companies and on the needs and expectations of companies (through a qualitative analysis of data). The profile, needs and expectations of workers in terms of reconciliation, and business indicators (e.g. absenteeism, staff turnover, etc.) were measured using qualitative methods. During the 12-month of the ‘Implementation’ phase in 2009, a set of actions were tested, including: individualised diagnosis and work plan developed for companies; support during implementation; training provided for the management and staff; networking; best practice sessions; home assistance services and a medical helpline for workers. Results of the scheme were evaluated in the beginning of 2010. The assessment of personal interviews, surveys and business indicators confirmed that the implemented measures had an overall positive effect on participating companies and their workers. 88% of companies reported that they have achieved more efficiency in time management. Better time management based on flexible working hours then led to an increase in productivity for 81% of companies. New forms of work time organisation, based on flexible working hours, were proved successful in reducing absenteeism for 85% of the companies. Flexible working hours provide a margin to cover personal requirements and complete the tasks more efficiently, therefore workers are less prone to stress in 73% of the companies. 84% of the companies managed to improve their working environment with the new forms of work time organisation that also helped to attract and retain workers for 65% of the companies.

There is strong commitment from the part of the Catalan government to promote changes in terms of working time arrangements and human resources management. Nevertheless, future challenges remain:

1. To maintain the achievements of the programme, a monitoring system with a set of structured monitoring indicators highlighting the benefits of the measures should be consolidated. This might also help in raising awareness among companies that new forms of time management are consistent with their interests.
2. To adapt measures to the changing circumstances of companies e.g. with high levels of unemployment during the economic crisis.
3. To develop incentives for companies to implement reconciliation measures.
4. To foster internal and external communication on the impacts and applicability of reconciliation measures also in order to overcome the internal reticence towards reconciliation in Catalonia.
5. To enhance policy transfer and the exchange of best practices throughout Catalonia. (The achievements and results of the temps x TEMPS were recently validated and consolidated with a subsequent project involving 60 companies. The aim was to identify good practices suitable for policy transfer).

28 Distribution of companies by the number of workers: small enterprises with less than 50 workers – 15%; medium-sized companies with 30-300 employees – 35%. Yet, half of the participating firms were large companies with more than 300 employees. Distribution of companies by activities: textiles and leather goods, chemicals, handling, consultancy, labour risk prevention, economic development, logistics and other services and industries.
5. Stakeholder roundtable

The afternoon roundtable, chaired by Linda Hantrais, provided an opportunity for stakeholders to express their views on how government policies can help families during the current recession and period of fiscal consolidation.

5.1 Paola Panzeri, Policy Officer of the Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE) addressed the theme from a different angle. She presented strategies that families have developed to cope with the challenges of the crisis, based on first-hand experiences from COFACE’s member organisations.

Recently, the recession has started to affect families directly. Even though families are not hit in the same way - some families are more at risk of poverty - perceptions have all changed negatively. Growing anxiety and instability are the two main consequences of the recession along with a negative effect on family formation. Families are changing their behaviour and various exit strategies have emerged that influence life in many aspects:

1. **Energy consumption and housing**: in Belgium (Flanders), approximately 14000 families limited their energy consumption in 2010.
2. **The spread of alternative solutions** was observed: in Italy and Greece families started to use other forms of heating as they could not manage to pay their service charges.
3. **More people are applying for loans** (therefore becoming over-indebted) to maintain their previous financial situation in times of difficulties.
4. **Anecdotic evidence shows** that in Spain the number of divorces decreased, in order to avoid having to pay for its costly process and consequences.
5. **Indebtedness due to unpaid mortgage bills** is rising.
6. **There is a considerable change in terms of expenditure on food**: people are starting to buy discount products or fewer branded items (in the UK spending on food was reduced by 30%).
7. **Reduction of spending on health**: e.g. in Belgium people are cutting back spending on health insurance.
8. **Family, charitable and civil society organisations** are under considerable pressure: in Greece many people turn to them for support.
9. **Child poverty** is increasingly becoming a real concern across all European countries (including Germany, Finland and Greece).

COFACE advocates a ‘clear and direct link between difficulties in combining family, private and professional life, and poverty and social exclusion’. Since reconciliation is the key to preventing poverty and social exclusion, reconciliation policies need to be backed up by financial resources, accessible quality services and time provisions. Reconciliation should also be better mainstreamed across all relevant policies (employment, care policies, disability, education, childcare, elder care etc.)

5.2 Manuela Kron, Corporate Affairs Director at Nestlé Italia described the corporate-level measures promoting work-life balance and gender balance in her multinational company.

---

29 COFACE has 53 members in 21 Member States.
'The first key challenge in designing and implementing these incentives was to change the attitude of the management towards the organisation of work.’ She stressed that it required a new mindset whereby performance of the employee is seen as essential to increase productivity (instead of long office hours). The second step was to develop adequate family-friendly solutions that meet the needs of workers, which were also incorporated into collective agreements. Among others, Nestlé Italia launched several projects, aimed at improving the performance of employees by facilitating reconciliation of work and family life (e.g. by offering teleworking to staff with time consuming family commitments).

As a food company employing seasonal workers also, Nestlé needed to cope with the seasonal fluctuations of the workload. As a solution, a regular monthly stipend is paid for seasonal workers throughout the year, irrespective of the number of hours they are required to work at different times of the year. This way ‘their financial security is ensured, and they are able to plan ahead with their family responsibilities’. The arrangement allows for monthly and yearly flexibility and was regarded positively by the other speakers. However some concerns were raised about the amount of work that has to be provided during the peak seasons.

The above-mentioned practice has been also transferred to other Italian Nestlé plants. As for the possibility of international transfer of policies, Manuela Kron noted that Nestlé is a multinational company, characterised by cultural differences; so ‘the company practice has to be adjusted to different local needs and national legislations through a complex operation.’ Plans for the future include finding solutions for families providing care for their elderly members.

5.3 Claudia Menne, Confederal Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) called for reconciliation to be kept high on the European agenda. Since ‘budget cuts and rigid rules for public budgets envisaged for the coming decades’[^31] jeopardize the assistance provided for families at national and local levels.

As dual-earner couples are becoming increasingly common across the EU, companies have a crucial role to play in reconciliation. Support for parenthood is also a corporate issue, not only in terms of costs of children but also in terms of time and flexible working arrangements. The role of social partners in this context is to ensure the flexicurity dimension of company-level agreements, as families, especially with small children ‘require flexibility on a daily basis.’ At the same time, parents also require security in their professional life. In order to create such a favourable environment, the ETUC has re-launched the negotiations on the so-called ‘working-time directive’ (2003/88/EC)[^32]; and will submit proposals on how to achieve a secure framework for daily/weekly flexibility.

There are different proposals on the table concerning two other directives addressing the allocation of time for family responsibilities. The recently revised ‘parental leave directive’ (2010/18/EU)[^33] now provides for four month of leave for each parent until the child reaches a certain age (maximum 8 years). The deadline for transposition

[^31]: The ETUC adopted a Declaration on the “Treaty on stability, coordination and governance in the economic and monetary union” on 25 January 2012 (http://www.etuc.org/a/9591) that will be followed by text proposals to develop a secure framework for flexible working arrangements.


expired in March 2012 for most of the Member States. The ‘maternity leave directive’ (92/85/EEC)\(^{34}\) is however currently blocked at the Council since 2010.

Two other issues were raised for further consideration:

1. The proposal for a directive concerning ‘carer’s leave’ (or ‘filial leave’) that can be defined as a short period of leave to take care of sick or disabled family members. This type of leave allows family carers\(^{35}\) to stay in employment when taking leave to care for dependant family members. The proposal was strongly supported by COFACE.

2. The negotiations on a new form of ‘paternity leave’\(^{36}\) are blocked at EU-level. However some companies have achieved tangible results in this field. Nestlé Italia was among the pioneers to provide 3-5 days of leave for new fathers. The initially low levels of take-up increased after its use was made mandatory.


\(^{35}\) For further details, see: http://www.coface-eu.org/en/Policies/Disability-Dependency/Family-Carers/

6. Discussion and conclusions

There was a rich and lively discussion and many participants gave feedback, presented other good practices and raised new issues for further consideration.

6.1 Framework and concepts

It was generally acknowledged that, in countries where governments have long supported childcare provision and parenting, female employment rates and fertility rates are higher today than in countries with insufficient policy support to parenthood. The argument was raised by Stéphane Buffetaut, from the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), who also highlighted in his opening remarks that policies have to be adapted to different stages in family life. Participants agreed that policies based on a holistic, life-cycle approach to work-life balance are likely to have more positive demographic outcomes.

Although developments, such as the narrowing of the gender gap and the equality of opportunities were regarded as positive trends, concerns were raised in terms of the gender equality paradox (or glass ceiling effect) of reconciliation policies. Evidence shows that gender differences prevail in the labour market and also in terms of the allocation of paid and unpaid work. The role of men and fathers is crucial to overcome these difficulties. However, in times of recession, the reversal of gains and the changes in the reconstruction of family relationships (with the increasing importance of ‘house husbands’) might lead to questioning of male and female values. By contrast, the most recent research project by Eurofound on parental support concluded that, there is a risk that support measures might replicate the traditional male breadwinner model. However, at the workshop little attention was paid to the gender division of family-related tasks.

6.2 Regional experiences

The seminar compared innovative approaches in Italy, Sweden and Spain. These approaches depend to a large extent on the administrative division, norms and values of the regions. Although the three experiences differed considerably in terms of their visions, measures, context and levels of intervention, they all aimed at improving the work-life balance of their citizens. While the Lombardy region seeks to implement a work-life balance strategy based on multi-level and multi-actor governance, the Catalan Government promoted the implementation of innovative human resource policies at corporate level. The Swedish experience was regarded as a ‘benchmark’, because the comprehensive reconciliation policies result in both high levels of employment and fertility. Despite these marked variations, all the projects illustrated the importance of local networks in the provision of services.

The crisis, as a result, is leading to foster innovative, creative, practical and pragmatic bottom-up solutions. A shared priority is the promotion of reconciliation opportunities in relation to the care needs of family members, elderly, disabled persons. Recently, regional and company-level support is provided to families (with disabled members) to ease their burden of caring responsibilities. Participants also argued for the official recognition of the efforts of family carers (in terms of leave entitlements and pensions).

The multi-actor consultation of the Roadmap (the so-called ‘dialogue for development’) was well received. However, it was argued that a major change in Italian corporate culture is still needed. To this end new values have to be created. A work-life balance award was developed to appreciate the efforts of family-friendly
companies. The value of these awards is strictly non-economic, since it does not provide any financial incentives, but recognition and publicity for the winners.

Participants also shared further practices. In the Veneto region, a family-audit project is being implemented. The programme maps the different fields of activities, working hours, contents and procedures, work environment, communication and information policies, management competence, development of staff skills, and benefits and services supporting the family. In recognition, a certification label is awarded to enterprises carrying out family-friendly measures. Apart from the creation of new values and awareness raising; training and methodological resources provided for companies might help to implement cultural changes. Evidence-based social policies (tested through small-scale experimentations) might reduce the length and the costs of such a process.

In reaction to the Catalan experience, it was noted that external incentives (support or recognition received from national/regional governments) are needed to create a favourable environment for organisational changes in companies. However, companies also have to implement bottom-up strategies; otherwise they become dependent on assistance, which might hamper change. A working group consisting of employers and employees must develop comprehensive strategies both to sustain the current results and to allow for further development. The follow-up process has a crucial role in creating long-lasting, continuous effect for projects. The commitment of the private sector was seen as another key factor for success.

One participant quoted a parallel experience with programmes supported by the European Social Fund in Finland in the 1990s with the aim of creating continuity for projects. Working groups were formulated with the participation of employers and employees to define and develop different interventions adapted to different family phases. As both the investigation and the evaluation took a long time, she was somewhat surprised by the results of the ‘temps x Temps’ project (for the results see page 21).

With regard to immigrants: in Spain it was important to promote a regional agreement with social partners to provide a general framework on time organisation targeted at immigrants, related to personal factors, such as religion (with no direct links to reconciliation.) In relation to the glass ceiling phenomenon, promotion possibilities are enshrined in the internal regulation of the position, set by collective labour agreements.

Whilst the aims and the focus of the Lindköping practice were regarded positively, it appeared that some issues concerning immigrants and other vulnerable groups still remain to be solved. It was agreed that the question of eligibility of immigrants for certain measures (leave schemes) has to be endorsed by the municipality. Despite the high female employment rate, there is also still room for further development in the gender equality area. Even in Sweden women rarely occupy top management positions in the private sector.

6.3 Stakeholder views

A number of comments addressed the human resources practice of Nestlé Italia. In terms of the transfer and the applicability of measures, it was said that there were no rigid frameworks; the company only aims to achieve a vision, which then can easily be transferred to different enterprises. As a result, flexibility measures may prove to be efficient for SMEs as well. However some participants were sceptical about the attitude of management towards reconciliation measures. It was noted that workers play an
important role in the planning of practices. The initiatives are bottom-up and the management also tries to map the needs of employees with quantitative measures. Nestlé Italia is also involved in multi-actor networks with local authorities and workers (e.g. providing childcare services in the factory near Perugia).

It was also agreed that family organisations play different important roles in multi-actor networks, such as awareness raising, representation, coordination, and networking. They also play a key role in identifying needs and seeking solutions. These networks often support family solidarity, complementing state and national solidarity, which is crucial in times of crisis.

Career prospects for both women and men are based on flexibility and spatial mobility, which often makes it more difficult for both sexes to reconcile their conflicting career interests. Challenges are not necessarily related to age but to the current way of living. There are professions that require constant mobility allowing for only limited spatial stability. This type of precariousness is becoming increasingly common.

The design and implementation of leave policies at EU level has been a difficult process over decades. Social partners play a key role in the process; therefore the level of commitment of their members is crucial to succeed. During the negotiations, there was an enormous support for more leave schemes. Members have always been interested in more paid leave schemes and protection from dismissal, which can be difficult to combine with national labour laws. The most problematic issue was related to the debate on the definition of families.

There was much support for the proposal concerning the ‘Pregnant Worker Directive’ (currently regulated by Directive 92/85/EEC37) presented by the Commission in 2008; since the issue is related to health and safety. However, when it comes to Paternity leave there is more resistance, partly due to cultural differences. This type of leave was not demanded by working men. ‘It was first introduced in the Nordic countries, through fiscal encouragement, for business reasons’ – as one of the participants noted. This proves that potentially beneficial measures are not necessarily demand led. Yet, it raises the initial question of the seminar: How to identify effective policy responses at European level in times of austerity?

6.4 For further consideration

The economic crisis has put social protection systems under strong strains across Europe. On the one hand, this has exacerbated the need for fiscal discipline and sustainability. On the other hand, it has considerably increased the need and the demand for social interventions. Taking the current socio-demographic trends into account, the need for innovative, effective and cost-efficient policy measures and practices has become much more urgent. It is therefore not surprising that innovation is at the core of the Europe 2020 Strategy. The European Platform against poverty and social exclusion advocates in particular more evidence-based social innovation, especially through social experimentation i.e. testing a new policy intervention on a small sample to evaluate its efficacy before scaling it up (European Commission, 2011). In this way cost-effective practices can be transferred to different regions or countries so as to shape their future policy developments.

REFERENCES


