



Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe

Farewell to the one-and-a-half-earner-model: Objectives and demands of gender equality policy with regard to work-life balance

Work-Life balance policies in Europe: Changing perspectives

Editorial by Lena Reinschmidt and Debora Gärtner

Dear readers,

Caring for children or frail relatives and being employed at the same time – how can this be achieved successfully? The majority of people in Germany and across Europe believe: Both should be possible. However, there is often a substantial gap between wish and reality. Policymakers could and should support people in bridging this gap. The question on how to balance and reconcile family and work duties has thus been discussed intensely for some years now. The debate in Germany was triggered by the desire to boost the birth rate and to increase the participation of women in the labour market at the same time. Recently, the debate in Germany has mainly been coined by the discussion around active fatherhood and the division of employment and care work on a partnership basis.¹ With regards to the demographic developments, the question how to combine informal care for elderly relatives and employment is gaining in importance as well.

Reconciling work and family life has two dimensions: more time for the family and more time for the career. While more time for the family provides (temporary) relief from professional obligations, more time for the career means that certain family tasks, such as housework and childcare, are now and again taken over by third parties. The main instruments that could make this possible are, on the one hand, (paid) leave for the purpose of care and, on the other hand, the provision of high-quality infrastructure, such as comprehensive and widespread childcare. If existing options and offers are well coordinated, they can support families in mastering the balancing act between family obligations and gainful employment.

The European Commission has with its work-life balance package in 2017 tried to give fresh impulses for European standards in reconciliation policies. Besides a set of non-legislative measures aimed, inter alia, at childcare, the package contains a proposal for a directive on reconciling professional and private life for parents and family carers. The Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe took – together with the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth – this policy package as an impulse and opportunity to organise a series of European Expert Meetings. During these two-day events, experts from a number of European countries discussed different aspects of work-life balance policy. The aim is to support the Europe-wide exchange of ideas and good practices.

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Work-Life Balance Package

The so-called work-life balance package of the European Commission consists of a proposal for a directive as well as non-legislative measures. The proposed directive contains legislative measures for leave options, such as parental leave, paternity leave after birth and care leave, as well as flexible work arrangements for employees with care obligations. The Council and Parliament have each agreed on a negotiating position on the basis of the proposed directive. Negotiations between the two bodies within the trilogue-framework started this year in September. Improving the quality, affordability and availability of childcare is also mentioned as a central field of action in the reconciliation package. For more information on the package please click [here](#).

¹ See: Unterhofer, U./Welteke, C./Wrohlich, K. (2017): Elterngeld hat soziale Normen verändert. DIW Wochenbericht Nr. 34/2017 and BMFSFJ – Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (ed.) (2017): Partnerschaftliche Arbeitszeiten aus Kinder- und Elternsicht: 5.

Taking a look back: Series of European Expert Meetings on work-life balance policy

The first two rounds of Expert Meetings focused on the issues of allocating more time for unpaid care work. The **first Expert Meeting** focused on the **participation of fathers in family work**. The main question was how parental leave should be structured in order to promote a partnership-based distribution of care work – and thus indirectly of gainful employment as well. The *documentation* of the event summarises the main findings and discussions. Our *Newsletter 2/2017* also picks up on central questions that occurred during the Expert Meeting discussion. First, how is the participation of fathers in family work affected when they are on parental leave alone – and not at the same time as the mother? And second, what effect does flexible parental leave have on how fathers experience time with their child?

The **second Expert Meeting** focused on **leave options and financial support for family carers**. Which instruments can be used to support family carers in coping with the double burden of employment and care responsibility? This question was at the centre of the exchange. In addition to this, counselling offers for family carers and offers on company level were presented and discussed. According to many participants it is a major challenge to reach family carers with appropriate offers. An overview on the respective examples from different countries as well as further findings from the discussion can be found in the *documentation* of this event. The Observatory's *newsletter 1/2017* offers an additional introduction to this topic.



The topic of the **third Expert Meeting** was: more time for employment by offering **access to high-quality childcare infrastructure**. The international experts discussed different policy approaches and projects that aim to provide access to quality care services, especially for disadvantaged families. Special attention was given to day care offers during nonstandard working hours

and access to tailor-made offers for all children, in particular for children from low-income families, single-parent families and families with a migrant background. Some interesting policy instruments and pilot projects are presented in the *1/2018 edition* of our newsletter. A comprehensive summary of the presentations and discussions within the framework of the Expert Meetings is included in the documentation which we are going to publish on our website soon.

Changing perspectives: Rethinking work-life balance policies policy from a gender equality perspective

In the upcoming (and final) Expert Meeting in this event series, we want to change the perspective and letting you, dear readers, join us in this endeavour. The European Commission considers its work-life balance package to be a set of measures that is to support gender equality. The question of how paid work and care work can be re-distributed between men and women will therefore be the focus of this newsletter as well as of the final Expert Meeting.

In Germany², state regulations, institutions, morals and values have for a long time been based on the model of a male breadwinner. In this model, the breadwinner provides financial security for the family with his employment, while the housewife takes over the private care work. As Prof. Dr. Meier-Gräwe points out in her article, the predominant model has in recent decades slowly changed into a one-and-a-half-earner model in which women work part-time and at the same time still take over family care work, while men continue to earn the majority of the family's income and have hardly any time to take over family tasks. As both of these models put severe restraints on the self-fulfilment of many people, the expertise for the Second Gender Equality Report of the German Federal Government proposes the introduction of a new model: the earner-carer-model. This model



2 This was the situation in West-Germany. In East-Germany an adult-worker-model was predominant. Here the women provided the private care work in addition to their full time employment.

aims for a “gender equal organisation of paid work and (unpaid) care work that provides everyone irrespective of gender with the ability to combine employment and care work in equal measures during the life course.”³

Taking a look ahead: Aims and requirements of work-life balance policies from a gender equality perspective

There is one predominant, implicit assumption within the debate about improved reconciliation of work and family life: fostering work-life balance also fosters gender equality. However, this assumption has to be questioned in its generalisation. For instance, long-term unpaid leave options offer more time for the family. However, due to existing differences in salaries as well as societal norms and values, it is mainly women who make use of such instruments. The effects are long career breaks, low career development opportunities as well as wage and pension gaps. Therefore, it all depends on the concrete policy design of such instruments. They determine how work-life balance policy affects the organisation of paid work and care work as well as gender equality.

In the final round of our event series we thus want to discuss which aims and requisites work-life balance policy should have from a gender equality perspective. The Expert Commission for the Second Gender Equality Report of the German Federal Government has drafted the earner-carer-model (see above).⁴ Prof. Dr. Meier-Gräwe was a member of the Expert Commission and explains in her contribution how the model works, and which challenges arise for work-life balance policy from a gender equality perspective. In the second contribution, we move on to have a look at another European country. We interviewed Mrs. De Lathouwer from the Flemish Government about the voucher scheme for household related services. The vouchers are a Belgian policy instrument which supports the reconciliation of work and family life. It is at the same time very interesting from a gender equality perspective. Households can purchase subsidised vouchers that can be redeemed for household-related services – for instance shopping, cleaning or ironing – at certified service companies. On the one hand, this voucher system eases the burden of care work for the households. On the other hand, it is also intended to tackle the informal market and create jobs that are subject to compulsory social insurance. On page 8, the Spanish Institute for Women and Equal Opportunities – an important stakeholder in gender equality policy in Spain – will present itself.

The team of the Observatory wishes you an exciting read.

Challenges for work-life balance policies from a gender equality perspective: How can a farewell to the one-and-a-half-earner-model be achieved on basis of partnerships?

Contribution by Prof. Dr. Uta Meier-Gräwe, Member of the Expert Commission for the Second Gender Equality Report of the German Federal Government

The findings of the Second Gender Equality Report of the German Federal Government are clear: The goal of gender equality in Germany has still not been reached. This can be seen in the labour market, in the underrepresentation of women in science, business and policymaking, in the allocation of unpaid care work but also in the field of old age provisions. The First Gender Equality Report (2011) had already carried out a comprehensive analysis, calling for consistent policy concepts for more gender equality and recommended various implementation steps. The Expert Commission for the drafting of the Second Gender Equality Report has picked up on these considerations, expanded them conceptually and deducted a vast range of concrete policy recommendations. This analysis does not only focus on the Gender Pay Gap or the Gender Pension Gap. Rather, a new indicator – the Gender Care Gap – has been calculated on the basis of representative data taken from the Time Usage survey of the Federal Statistical Office. The Gender Care Gap stands



3 German Federal Government (2017): *Second Gender Equality Report of the German Federal Government*. BT-Drucksache 18/2840: 24.

4 For more information on the Second Gender Equality Report of the German Federal Government, see: <https://www.gleichstellungsbericht.de/de/topic/10.english.html>.

at 52.4 percent, which means women perform 52.4 percent more unpaid care work than men, every day. For couples with children, the Gender Care Gap is even at 83.3 percent. This figure comprises socially necessary care work for children or for frail relatives, voluntary work and household work. This time allocated to household, family and voluntary work – but also the fact that women have on average lower hourly wages and incomes than men – lead to Pay and Care Gaps. This indicates a lack of equal capabilities.

Thinking together paid work and (unpaid) care work

It is well known that people's personal circumstances change throughout their lives. Consistent gender equality policy therefore has the aim to support women and men in their respective life phases and situations, particularly in transition phases. After all, research has repeatedly shown that transitions in the life course and the associated decisions prove to be "status passages" with considerable, often unforeseen effects on the capabilities for women and men in their further course of life. The transition from partnership to parenthood (e.g. the birth or the reception of a child, for example through adoption or care obligations) has a particularly striking relevance for gender equality. Many disadvantages that parents face in their professional development over their life course are connected with the fact that they have to laboriously balance the manifold requirements of parenthood, gainful employment, care and also self-care during important phases of their lives. In these phases of life, decisions are made that are determined not only by personal preferences and the resources available, but also by a vast range of other framework conditions. These currently lead to evident risks in the further life course – in the form of diminished opportunities for careers, reduced incomes and low pensions for those who assume the main responsibility for care work. Still, it is mostly women that are affected by these disadvantages. However, for men, too, gender-stereotyped patterns of division of labour certainly restrict their capabilities of self-realisation as well.

The expertise of the Second Gender Equality Report underlines that paid work **and** care work have to be rethought and brought together. Therefore, the social organization of employment and of care work is taken into account – with regard to both, private and unpaid care work as well as paid care work. One core question is thus: How can care work be organised in a gender-equal manner? The term "care work" includes all activities in care, attention and support for oneself and for others. Even though each and every society and every economy depend on these vital activities and tasks, they have historically been devalued and made invisible. To this day, property- and person-related care work is not regarded as a part of the economy, and certainly not consistently integrated into the national budgetary accounts.⁵

A future-oriented gender policy must convincingly answer the question of how to organise care work in the future and how to ensure that people are prepared to take on generative care work for children and for members of society in need of support. The willingness to do so is a quintessential prerequisite for an economically and socially intact society. With regards to life courses, it is therefore a question of dissolving the traditionally gender-segregated paths of life and of readjusting all life-course-related institutions, so that the combination of employment, educational and care work as basic patterns of a person's biography – regardless of gender – can be lived in various "mixes" and with flexible transitions.

Different guiding principles and their effects on equal capabilities

State regulations, politics, law and social norms usually follow – implicitly or explicitly – certain ideas of gender as well as concepts of patterns of division of labour. In Germany, state regulations, institutions and cultural orientation have for a long time been based on the so called male-bread-winner. According to this concept, care work is mostly privately organised, i. e. within couple or family relationships: a sole 'breadwinner' earns the money to support the family and lives with a 'housewife', who provides private care work. However, with the rising level of education of women, this model has in recent decades rather changed in the direction of one-and-a-half-earner-model. From a gender equality



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⁵ In the best of cases, there are separate calculations on satellite systems and budgetary effects.

policy point of view, this only constitutes a variation of the breadwinner-model, though. The mostly male family breadwinners thus have almost no time for their family, and the usually female supplementary earners, on the other hand, have to reconcile the double load of part-time employment and family care work. Furthermore, such supplementary part-time employment also makes it harder to secure one's livelihood and to build a career. The "adult-worker-model", in turn, provides for full-time (gainful) employment for all persons, without taking into account that people also want to care for their own children or relatives in need of care to a certain extent, or would like to do some of the housework themselves.

Both models thus limit the capabilities of many people.

The earner-carer-model



The Expert Commission therefore proposes a new variant, using the term "earner-carer-model". Many young men and women today expect not only to be able to take on an equal role in professional life, but also that their profession does not completely dominate their private lives. Women want to develop professionally and be able to work in all sectors

and at all levels. Men, in turn, want to be able to perform care work without having to be faced with preconceptions and stereotypes. Both, women and men, do not want to become trapped in economic dead-ends. The earner-carer-model must be practicable independent of gender. To ensure this, consistent framework conditions have to be established which enable people to participate in paid work on equal terms without having to forego care work in order to do so. The earner-carer-model also means: The demonstrably existing problems of the division of gainful employment and care work are not a private matter that individuals "somehow" have to deal with. Rather, framework conditions have to be established that make living according to an earner-carer-model without becoming overstretched possible. The policy recommendations in the expertise of the Second Gender Equality Report aim for such a goal.



The voucher scheme for household related services in Flanders

Interview with Lieve De Lathouwer, PhD, Department of Work and Social Economy, Flemish Government

Mrs. De Lathouwer, in Belgium households can purchase subsidised vouchers for household related services. Can you explain the context of the service vouchers to our readers?

Throughout their (working) life, most people face more than once the challenge to combine employment and care/household responsibilities, especially because two partners working has become the living standard in Belgium. The service voucher scheme is a Belgian policy measure aiming at local job creation and allowing families to buy household related services for a reasonable price. The service voucher is the instrument to organize and finance the scheme. It was introduced by law and has been operational at a federal level since 1 January 2004. Since July 2014 the regions have been responsible for the scheme. Since 1 January 2015 the management has been taken up by the Department of Work and Social Economy of the Flemish government (previously the federal unemployment insurance scheme (RVA)).

How does the system of service vouchers in Flanders work?



In a nutshell, people can buy subsidized vouchers which they can use to purchase household related services. Five actors are involved in the scheme. Three actors, the users, the service sector companies and the domestic workers, play a key role. The two remaining actors are the regional governments and Sodexo. The latter is a private contractor issuing the vouchers and coordinating the administrative process. The regional government subsidizes the vouchers.

The **first actor** are the users. They have to register with Sodexo and can purchase 400 service vouchers per year at a cost of nine euro per voucher. One voucher corresponds to one hour of household related service. 100 additional vouchers can be purchased at a cost of ten euro per voucher. Single parents and people with disabilities can buy 2000 service vouchers per year. Users receive a tax deduction of 30 percent for the first 156 vouchers in the Flemish region (lower in the Walloon and Brussels region resp. ten percent and 15 percent). Covered activities inside the user's house are cleaning the house (windows included), doing the laundry and ironing as well as cooking. Activities outside the user's house include grocery-buying service, common transport for less mobile people and ironing in laundries.

The **second actor** are the service sector companies, which employ the domestic workers and serve as an intermediary between the workers and the users. All kind of companies can be accredited to operate as a service voucher company (commercial companies including temporary work agencies; non-profit and social profit enterprises, municipalities and local welfare offices). For each service voucher used in 2017, the service sector company receives 22.69 euro. This means that in Flanders the voucher is subsidized for 72 percent: the government pays 16.39 euro (including the tax deduction), while the user pays 6.30 euro. In addition to the subsidies, service sector companies can – just like any other company – claim other wage subsidies e.g. for employing disadvantaged groups.

The **third actor** are the workers. The employees have a service vouchers employment contract with the service sector companies, not with the individual users of the scheme. Wage conditions are laid down in sectoral collective bargaining agreements (social partners). There are no specific entry conditions for the workers. They can be unemployed, inactive, retired or have another job. A high percentage is entering the scheme from inactivity (34%) and from another job (39%). These figures are much higher than the figure



for people entering from unemployment or other social benefits (23%). Therefore the scheme is activating inactive persons in the first place, particular from foreign origin.

Why was the voucher system introduced? What are its main goals?

The objectives of the scheme are threefold: a) supporting the reconciliation of work and care so the users are available for the labour market; b) creating (decent) jobs for low skilled persons who have difficulties to find a job on the regular labour market and c) combatting the informal/black market of care activities, thus providing extra income for the government.

The introduction of the scheme has to be understood within the broader background of Belgium economic and social employment policies. A challenge to any social employment policy is to simultaneously expand low-skilled employment, to avoid increasing income inequality and to keep the state budgets balanced (Cantillon, 2016). Since there is no political consensus in Belgium that the answer to this trilemma is reducing the relatively high gross minimum wages or creating more flexible jobs, the alternative are highly subsidized jobs. The service voucher scheme has established a new (heavily) subsidized domestic service market.

The scheme is widely accepted: 77 percent of the (Belgian) population know it (Haigner and others, 2009) and it has proved to be highly popular with a broad coverage of users and employees. In 2016 668,066 Flemish families have purchased 81.8 million service vouchers (24 percent of all Flemish private households) with 1,473 service voucher companies. 88,334 workers have found a job within the service voucher scheme, for an average of 2.4 hours a week per family (workers might have several families to work for). The economic crisis did not halt the expansion of the scheme. The gross cost is 1,296.5 billion euro (177.3 million euro for the fiscal advantage). Studies in the past found an earn back effect of up till 40 percent of the gross costs for the Belgium government (figures 2012, Idea Consult).

How do the service vouchers effect the users and the workers?

With regard to the users, it is clear that the scheme is supplying and encouraging cheap personal domestic services at a price level allowing many households to afford them. The main group of users (43%) are couples with children, 26 percent are couples without children; six percent are one parent families and a very high percentage (21 %) are single households. A point of critic is that the vouchers are mainly used by middle-class families, thus benefiting the better-off households (Marx & Vandelannoote, 2014). Because of outsourcing domestic work at a low cost, active persons (51 percent of the users are females) can participate on the labour market at the same time. However, we do not know if they are able to raise their working hours because of outsourcing household activities. We also do not know how the scheme has affected the gender balance within the household. The high proportion of (older) single households using the vouchers suggest that the scheme is not only an interesting offer for users in the 'busy life phase', but is also of importance for older persons. The scheme can help them to remain living autonomously at home.

Of the workers, 98 percent are female, 93 percent are working part time and 42 percent have a foreign origin. The average gross hourly wage was 11.06 euro in 2013. It is important to note that this is significantly higher than the legal minimum wage of workers in Belgium (Idea Consult, 2014). However, because of part time jobs, wages are rather to complement household income. The majority of the workers are living within a couple (53 percent are part of a couple with children and 21 percent are without children). Nevertheless single parents are overrepresented among the service voucher workers (15 percent to only eight percent among all workers). In many respects the working conditions of domestic services workers have improved markedly compared to their working conditions before the implementation of the scheme. Before, the majority of domestic workers was active in an informal/black circuit without access to social security benefits and was thus vulnerable to demands of individual employers. There exists



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some evidence for an increase in the employment rate for low skilled women, but it still remains unclear how many new 'net' jobs the scheme creates. Furthermore, we do not have figures of the possible death weight effects and displacement effects. It is also still an open question whether the scheme is more cost-effective than other active labour market policies. Currently, a survey is carried out and the results will tell us more on this objective. Also on the objective of combating undeclared work we do not have reliable evidence. One would expect that the competitive price of the voucher (6.30 euro/hour) would induce a significant shift from undeclared to declared work. Surveys show that only eight percent of the actual users tell us that they had previously used the informal/black market. For older age groups this percentage must be much higher, but there are no survey results on this. Existing studies do not allow us to make correct assumptions about what the informal/black market of domestic work would look like in the absence of the scheme.

To conclude: the Flemish (Belgian) service voucher scheme is an innovative instrument to exploit the employment potential of the personal and household services and the improvement of the work-life balance.

The Spanish Institute of Women and for Equal Opportunities

The Spanish Institute of Women and for Equal Opportunities (IWEQ), an autonomous body under the State Secretariat for Equality⁶, works to support the progress of women in all areas of society since 1983. It is specifically entrusted to foster gender equality and the equal participation of women and men in political, cultural, economic and social life, as well as to promote active policies to enhance women's employability, female employment and self-employment, the application of gender mainstreaming in all policies and practices, and to prevent and eliminate all kinds of discrimination. Among other specific functions carried out by the IWEQ are to foster effective equality between women and men in the work place and in business, tackle the gender pay gap, support women's professional promotion and their access to top executive positions both in the public and the private sector, recognise business excellence in gender equality matters, as well as the promotion of measures to facilitate work-life balance and a better sharing of household and care responsibilities between women and men. The IWEQ is also the National Equality Body under the Gender Equal Treatment Directives (the 2010/41 on self-employed persons, the 2006/54 Recast directive, and the 2004/113 Goods and services directive). For more information, have a look at the [website of the institute](#).

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- 6 *The State Secretariat for Equality is attached to the Ministry of the Presidency, Parliamentary Relations and Equality.*

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Benjamin Landes (Director)
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D-60439 Frankfurt am Main
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*Person responsible according to the German press law:
Benjamin Landes
E-mail: info@iss-ffm.de*

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