The results of 140 experiments in flexible work arrangements are feeding into the life-work policies of companies, organisations and government. Two new rounds of experiments have now been launched in the Netherlands. A third round is under construction.

More and more women are combining work with family commitments, and fathers are taking a greater share of childcare responsibilities. Furthermore, the number of one-parent families and non-traditional family entities continue to grow.

Despite these trends, the social infrastructure and working conditions have been slow to adjust. The flexibility of employers, delivery of services, opening times, and organisation of space are still inadequate for the needs of parents and carers.

Innovative solutions
The ‘Daily Routine Incentive Scheme’ was set up in 1999 to challenge welfare organisations, businesses and local authorities to work in partnerships and come up with solutions to reconcile work and family life. During the next four years, 140 local experiments were financed, producing concepts, models and instruments that can be applied to organisations or in local, regional or national government policy.

Experiments ranged from providing leisure activities for children out of school hours to introducing flexi-time or part-time work in industry. The results have been very promising. For example, a hospital recruited more women for their operating teams by introducing an innovative contract that allows them to fit their work around their parenting responsibilities. By doing so, the number of operations carried out increased by 341 over five months, reducing the patient waiting list.

The Incentive Scheme ended in May 2003, and a follow-up scheme began in December 2001 funded through ESF. Some 27 experiments have been completed, a further 66 have recently been approved and around 60 are expected to start in October 2004.

Multiplying effect
“We take our role in implementation and mainstreaming of project results very seriously,” says Jannie Roemeling, leader of the project team in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. “We analyse the results, translate them into policy information, and disseminate this to ministries, social partners at national and local level, companies, schools, municipalities and so on.”

The team is also leading a European project ‘Daily Routine arrangements, from local practice to national policy’ involving partners from France, Finland, Italy, and the Netherlands.