

# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



## IMPACT OF LOCAL WELFARE SYSTEMS ON FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL COHESION

On how local welfare provision affects the labour market participation of women, and how female employment affects social cohesion

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### INTRODUCTION

The overall policy aim of this policy brief based on the research findings for WP6, Women's Decision Making, is to develop recommendations for governments and other relevant actors to improve the employment prospects of women. Using focus groups WP6 explored (1) the decision making of *working mothers* with pre-school children and the role of local childcare in facilitating their labour force participation; and (2) the *responsiveness of working women* to the care needs of a dependent elderly relative and its implications for their labour force participation.

#### 1 Working mothers with pre-school children

Set in the context of the Lisbon strategy, the aim of this research package was to collect data on mothers' access to and take up of childcare services at a local level which enable or constrain them in reconciling their work and family lives. The final focus group question also asked mothers to make policy recommendations that would assist them as working mothers.

#### 2 Women with dependent elderly relatives

The focus groups with women with dependent elderly relatives explored their responsiveness to elder care needs. They provided an insight into local elder care policies and their experiences in getting access to services for their elderly relatives. Women were also asked to make policy recommendations in relation to elder care.

## 1 Working Mothers with pre-school children: Context

The EU council set an objective in 2002 that childcare should be provided for 90% of children between age 3 and mandatory school age. The EU noted the persistent employment gap in 2012 between mothers with children under 12 (aged 25- 49) and women without children (see European Commission 2013: 30). This employment gap is not surprising as children need care, but more interestingly is that the gap varies between countries. The highest gaps are in Czech Republic, and Hungary (-29 and -28), followed by (-19) for Ireland; Germany (-18) and Estonia (-17), and (-16) for UK. Finland has a gap (-12), while France, Italy and Spain had a lower gap of approximately (-8). These differences are to an extent related to the uneven provision of childcare services for children in these countries. In this work package we found that mothers located in cities in the above countries with high employment gaps were dissatisfied with local childcare provision.

Almost all of the mothers in the focus groups were highly motivated to work. Many were proud to be *working mothers* who were able to reconcile the challenges of work and family lives. Mothers' decision making and reconciliation strategies were influenced by the local availability of pre-school services and their access to the same. Mothers in the focus groups had a very positive orientation towards the provision of high quality childcare for their children.

### Key findings from focus groups with mothers with pre-school children

#### (i) Uneven access to adequate affordable childcare for pre-school children aged 3 and over

The WP6 focus group reports revealed that many working mothers were unable to access adequate affordable formal childcare in Leeds (UK) and Dublin (Ireland), Brno (Czech Republic) and Szekesfehervar (Hungary). Mothers in Hamburg (Germany), Nantes (France), Bologna (Italy) and Terrassa, (Spain) and Brno (Estonia), Aalborg and Jyvaskyla all enjoyed better access to childcare.

The EU (2002) objective has been important in stimulating the provision of free pre-school childcare for children aged 3 and over in Dublin and Leeds for 15 hours a week since 2010. This provision had a positive effect of maternal employment in cases where mothers were able to take their *free* childcare hours in a block of time to overlap with their working times or to supplement it by paying for additional childcare hours.

However, mothers in cities who can access childcare from 9.00 to 5.00 are in a better position to enter the labour market than mothers whose children are provided with 15 hours childcare per week. So a lack of access to affordable full time or part time childcare explains the lower labour force participation rate of mothers with pre-school children in these cities.

#### (ii) The *care gap* between paid maternity/parental leave and access to public affordable childcare

Mothers in most cities complained about the 'care gap' between the end of paid maternity leave and the age at which a child was eligible for a municipal crèche place. Increasingly mothers would like to return to work after maternity leave for financial or work related reasons. Lower income earning mothers were especially disadvantaged during this interim period as they could not afford to *pay* for any kind of childcare. So they relied on grandparents and relatives to provide childcare (Leeds and Dublin). Focus group accounts revealed great determination and resilience among mothers who constantly have to find 'informal' childcare to cover the hours they want to work and who have to refuse some work because they don't have enough informal childcare and can't afford to pay private childcare.

Aalborg is the only FLOWS city located in a country without an employment gap and it may offer a 'best practice' model for the achievement of the Lisbon strategy. In Aalborg childcare is provided to infants if required at 6 months of age, which coincides with the end of mothers' statutory six months paid maternity leave. Mothers are not offered paid parental leave there.

### **(iii) No childcare provision for mothers who work atypical hours**

Mothers in several focus groups, Aalborg, Terrassa, Leeds, Nantes, Brno, Szekesfehervar criticised crèche child care time schedules which are typically 8/9am until 5.00pm. These opening hours do not accommodate the needs of mothers who work irregular hours, over the weekends or during the 'holiday' season. So certain groups of working mothers cannot avail of any public childcare while they work.

### **(iv) Class and access to private childcare**

Only mothers or couples who earn high incomes can afford to pay private childcare. This lack of public childcare provision obstructs the return to work of lower income earning mothers. Low income earning mothers in many cities had to weigh up the costs of childcare versus potential income earned, when making decisions about working extra hours.

### **(v) Other criticisms of childcare provision**

There were several other proposals made by mothers in different cities – greater information on childcare services; the regulation of childcare costs; improved quality of childcare provision; and less bureaucracy in accessing care which related to local issues ( see Mahon 2013).

### **(vi) Reconciling working hours and motherhood**

In all focus groups mothers raised issues related to working conditions and times which obstructed their reconciliation practices. In many cities where full time work was the norm, mothers would have liked the opportunity to return to work part time while their children were very young. Some mothers in Jyväskylä would prefer to work part time, whereas they are currently only offered a choice between full time parental leave and full time work. The demand for part time work was also made by mothers in Hamburg, Aalborg, Brno and Szekesfehervar. Mothers in Bologna and Terrassa proposed a six hour working day. Mothers in higher educated groups spoke about the intensity of their work and being expected to be available at all times (Hamburg). They wanted more flexible working hours, to work fewer days per week or be able to work fewer hours or days as a temporary arrangement while their children were very young.

## **2 Women with dependent elderly relatives and their responsiveness to their care needs**

### **Elder care: context**

Worldwide people are living longer and policy discussion has focused on how care of the elderly can be funded and who should provide eldercare. Currently the OECD estimates that over 80% of eldercare is provided outside of formal care i.e. by families or more specifically by women. As women increasingly participate in the labour market there is a fear that they will no longer be able to provide such care. In the context of FLOWS, eldercare needs were anticipated as having a negative effect on women's labour force participation while eldercare services facilitated their reconciliation of work and family lives. Earlier research had found that the public provision of services for the elderly was relatively high in Nordic and continental countries but less developed in South European countries where intergenerational elder care prevailed. Earlier research distinguished between practical help which many were able and willing to give and personal care which some thought was best provided by professional carers.

WP6 investigated working women's responses to the care needs of an elderly relative in eleven cities. The focus group participants included some women who had become carers and helpers so their discussion revealed local access to eldercare services and the impact of the needs of their elderly relatives on their working lives. The groups were also able to identify local gaps in service provision and propose new eldercare policies.

### **Key Findings of focus groups with women with an elderly relative with care needs**

#### **Women's attitudes towards work**

Women in these focus groups were older and had been continuously in the labour market. They were very attached to their work. Some of them were able to combine work with elder care and found paid work a welcome relief from elder care work which they found demanding and tiring.

### **The impact of eldercare on their future labour force participation**

In six of the eleven cities (Aalborg, Jyvaskyla, Hamburg, Nantes, Dublin and Leeds) women were not prepared to work part-time or to stop work to care for their elderly relatives. However in cities with low levels of public eldercare - Mediterranean cities such as Terrassa, Bologna and Post-socialist cities Szekesfehervar, Brno and Tartu women said that they were quite likely to have to change to part-time work to care for their elderly.

### **Variation in orientations towards nursing home care for the elderly**

Many of the focus group participants spoke of the need to respect their elderly dependents requests to stay in their own homes. In Aalborg focus group participants saw the state as having a primary responsibility for eldercare services. In that city elderly people had a right to get appropriate formal care along a continuum of need: in one's own home', in sheltered housing and in nursing home care. Focus groups participants in Hamburg also accepted the role of supported housing and nursing home for their elderly. Jyvaskyla too, while prioritising home care and providing home services, offered supported housing and residential care based on the assessed needs of their elderly.

In contrast residential nursing home care was not widely supported by the elderly or by some focus group participants in other cities. In Nantes participants said residential nursing home care 'was a form of bereavement' while in Brno some women said "it seems immoral for you to put them in a nursing home, even more so if they don't want to go there".

Intergenerational care was the norm in Bologna and in Nantes though women in both cities employed local care workers to help them to look after their elderly in their own homes. However, family intergenerational care without any state support put a heavy burden of care on carers. Many suffered negative mental and physical effects on their health as a result. The move to a nursing home came as a welcome relief to some of those carers. However access to publicly funded nursing home care was restricted in Liberal, and Mediterranean and Post Socialist cities, while the private nursing home market simultaneously increased.

### **From help to care**

In several of the focus groups participants who had experience of elder care gave realistic accounts of their elderly relative's transition from independent living to physical dependency and/or dementia. Different kinds of elder care needs evoked different responses. Women in all the focus groups were willing to provide help with financial matters, taking a parent to the doctor's surgery for a check up, or looking after their gardens or homes as required. They also provided company and companionship. Some were reluctant to provide personal care preferring to leave this to professional caregivers. Many of the working women in the focus group had to purchase personal care services privately as there were few state supported personal care services available. In many cities migrant workers were employed as personal care assistants.

### **Information on and eligibility for services for the elderly**

When the needs of their elderly increased many sought access to information on local services and wanted to find out about entitlements to elder care services. Many focus group participants in several cities found it hard to access and understand eldercare social and health services. In some cities eligibility for a service was determined on the basis of those with 'greatest need' (Leeds and Dublin). As the eldercare services were limited, there was often a long waiting list and by the time a dependent relative qualified for a public service, the carer was already experiencing burn-out.

As can be seen from the findings, childcare provision remains inadequate and presents an obstacle to the achievement of the Lisbon employment targets. The focus group participants made many relevant policy recommendations. The majority related to childcare provision but they also proposed that women be given the opportunity to work part time while their children were very young.

Eldercare policy is not very developed so the range of policy recommendations is much wider covering both residential and community based elder care.

### **(1) Recommendations for policy makers on childcare provision**

- Synchronise the end of paid maternity or parental leave with the introduction of eligibility for a state sponsored childcare place (as in Aalborg)
- Increase the number of hours of childcare for children aged 3 and over to facilitate working mothers
- Increase childcare provision for children under 3 in all cities
- Provide affordable childcare for lower income earning working mothers in all cities
- Introduce special 'child sick leave' for parents to use when their children are too ill to attend a crèche
- Extend crèche opening hours to accommodate the needs of workers with atypical working hours including evening and week-end work
- Provide after school childcare for school aged children
- Increase the number of workplace crèches
- Increase the opportunities for part time work for mothers of young children in all cities to help them to reconcile work and family lives
- Promote more actively the roles of fathers in childcare

### **(2) Recommendations relating to the development of elder care services**

- Provide information on local eldercare services
- Provide criteria for access to eldercare services
- Improve co-ordination of local elder care services
- Introduce a case management approach and care plans for those in their seventies so that their health and care needs can be monitored
- Develop local partnerships between health professionals, social services and the family carers
- Increase financial support for home based elder care services

- Provide state funded home care to help family carers to remain in employment
- Provide affordable extra-familial support for the elderly in their homes at an earlier stage to reduce family care burden
- Provide more affordable residential nursing home care
- Provide professional training for all care workers
- Regulate the employment of home carers
- Increase the number of day care centres and medical facilities for the elderly including those with neurological diseases
- Improve the design of residential nursing homes, adding communal spaces that would facilitate social interaction between family and residents
- Improve the quality of care in residential homes
- Provide more stimulation and activities for residents in nursing homes
- Provide flexibility in working hours for women with elder care responsibilities
- Provide 'elder care' leave days for those with caring responsibilities

## RESEARCH PARAMETERS

### Objectives of the research

The overall aim of the FLOWS project is to analyse (1) how local welfare systems in interaction with other factors support female labour market participation and (2) the extent to which female labour market integration has contributed to strengthening social cohesion (and under which conditions).

The present Policy Brief focuses on one of the objectives of the project, which is to improve our understanding of the local welfare systems and their effects on female labour force participation. The overall aim is to analyse how local welfare provision affects the labour market participation of women, and how female employment in turn affects the life-courses of women and men, structures of inequality, social cohesion and hence the sustainability of the European social model.

Specifically, the policy objectives of this research for WP6 Women's Decision Making was to get an insight into reasons for women's employment and into the role of local childcare and eldercare services on their employment decisions. It also included a remit to develop recommendations that would improve the employment prospects of women.

### Scientific approach / methodology

The starting point of this WP6 was to provide a literature review on childcare and eldercare to inform the focus group interviews schedules that were to be used in all cities (See D6.3 for details). On the basis of these reviews two separate focus group schedules were designed: one for mothers with pre-school children and one for women with a dependent elderly relative with care needs.

Each national team was asked to conduct two sets of focus groups in each city. The first set of two focus groups was conducted with mothers who had pre-school children; one focus group was composed of mothers with lower educational levels (ISCED 1-3) while the second was with mothers (ISCED (4-8)). The interview schedule covered the following for areas; the meaning of work, childcare arrangements; facilitators and barriers to their working lives and policy changes that would facilitate their working lives. Reports on each these focus groups were written up and are included in D6.3.

The second sets of focus groups were conducted with working women who had a dependent relative with care needs. One focus group was composed on women with educational level (ISCED 1-3) while the second was with higher educational level (ISCED 4-8). The interview schedule covered the following four areas: the meaning of work; their responsiveness to the dependent elder relatives' care needs, reconciling employment and elder care and the development of elder care policies that would improve the lives of working women with dependent elder relatives. Reports on each of these focus groups were written up by each city team and are included in D6.3.

All the research findings presented here are drawn from both these National City reports and form the integrated final report D6.5. The final section of each focus group was used to inform the recommendations presented in this policy brief.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

<b>PROJECT NAME</b>	Impact of local welfare systems on female labour force participation (FLOWS).
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<b>FURTHER READING</b>	Mahon, E. (Ed.) (2013) A Comparative analysis of female decision making (D6.3) Mahon, E. (2014) Integrated Final Report on Female Decision Making (D6.5).