

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

February 2013

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this phase of the project was to analyse 11 local welfare systems, including factors such as the local welfare mix, the local governance and partnership structure, and the quality of welfare services, which may promote or inhibit women's labour force participation. Three service sectors - childcare, care for older people and lifelong learning - were in particular analysed. Special attention was paid to voluntary organisations. An analysis of the role of the Red Cross in our 11 cities has been made.

Two types of welfare provision have been singled out as of major importance for female employment: care (both for children and older people) and human capital investments (vocational training and lifelong learning). The coverage and quality of services, the welfare mix (public, private and in between), partnerships, and governance structures most favourable for the employment of women and social cohesion were identified based on a comparison of eleven cities in eleven European countries.

The analysis of childcare systems in 11 European cities shows the importance to study not only national childcare systems but also local variation within the national frameworks. Many cities have created their own childcare policies, which are often more generous than the national policy, and the use of formal services is at a higher level locally than at the national level. The most evident examples of progressive local policy-making identified in this project are the two Southern European cities, Bologna in Italy and Terrassa in Spain. This research shows also that it is necessary to take different age groups of children into account when childcare systems are analysed. There are major differences in the formal service provisions and in the use of them between different age groups of children in all cities, except in Aalborg (Denmark) where affordable, good quality public services are available and widely used also for the youngest age group. There is a major gap in most cities in public or publicly subsidized affordable services

especially for children aged 1-2 years. The main problem in the care services for older children is limited time replacement, as the opening hours of the services do not meet the needs of mothers/parents working full-time. There are also gaps in services in atypical hours.

With regard to elder care, it was found that (1) local welfare systems with a high level of generosity towards public or publicly paid formal care for senior citizens are usually also generous in relation to support for family care; (2) the degree of generosity of local welfare systems differs according to the type of welfare regime of the national welfare state to which the city belongs, according to Esping-Andersen's classical welfare state typology (1990, 2001); (3) in the majority of cities, the extent of the actual care-provision widely corresponds with the degree of generosity of care policies. However, the findings also show that it is not possible to treat the care structures and care provisions as a direct outcome of care policies; i.e. policies do not automatically trigger practices. This is because older people in need of care, their families, and those employed in care work all act within the broader framework of complex and often contradictory cultural, institutional, social and economic contexts of their specific local 'care arrangements'. The same challenge resulted in different solutions with different effects for *formal* female employment in different local contexts.

Comparison of the employment oriented lifelong learning systems in the 11 European cities shows the complexity of these systems. Educational policies are mainly formulated at the national level and local authorities alone have very little possibilities to formulate educational policies and provision for the local needs even if some of the cities have taken an active role in networking with different actors for better coordination of this field. Instead, there are other important actors in this field at the national, regional and local levels e.g. regional authorities, labour unions, employers and their organisations, educational institutions and/or employment authorities.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

The project analysed the political autonomy of local political actors vis-à-vis national and EU policy making, including culture as an important explanatory variable. Culture is included in two dimensions: first, women's disposition to participate in the labour market is seen as culturally embedded, while cultural ideals and values play an important role in how policies are perceived and rendered practically useful by women (thus, for instance, definitions of 'the good mother' vary socially and geographically: some mothers would prefer not to use day-care facilities but instead take care of their children themselves). Second, local cultural values and belief systems condition creativity among political actors and stakeholders, and thus impact on the formation of local policies, diverting, for example, local childcare provision away from national or international intentions.

The study of childcare systems in the 11 European cities showed significant local variation within the national frameworks. Several cities, particularly in Southern Europe, have created their own childcare policies, which are more progressive than national policies. The results of this research also showed major differences in the use of formal service provisions between different age groups of children. Aalborg (Denmark) was the only exception from this rule as there affordable, good quality public services were widely available and used also among under-3-year-old children. There is a major gap in most cities in affordable childcare services especially for children aged 1-2 years. A major problem in the services for older children is limited opening hours that do not meet the needs of mothers/parents working full-time. There are also gaps in services that are available in atypical hours.

For the comparative analyses of the policies of local welfare systems towards long-term care for senior citizens our main questions included: (1) How far do the 11 European cities differ in relation to the degree of generosity towards long-term care for older people? (2) How much does the generosity of care policies of the local welfare system differ from the type of welfare regime of the national welfare state? (3) What is the relationship between care policies of the local welfare regime and the care structures? The findings show: (1) Local welfare systems with a high level of

generosity towards public or publicly paid formal care for senior citizens usually also are generous in relation to support for family care. (2) The degree of generosity of local welfare systems is related to the type of welfare regime of the national welfare state. In case of low generosity on the national level the generosity is not compensated for on the local level, not even in cities with a high degree of autonomy in care policies. (3) In the majority of cities, the quality of the actual care provision widely corresponds with the generosity of the care policies. However, in some cities, not all older people turn to public or publicly paid formal care.

Comparison of the employment oriented lifelong learning systems in the 11 European cities shows the complexity of these systems. Educational policies are mainly formulated at the national level and local authorities alone have very little possibilities to formulate educational policies and provision for the local needs even if some of the cities have taken an active role in networking with different actors for better coordination of this field. Instead, there are other important actors in this field at the national, regional and local levels e.g. regional authorities, labour unions, employers and their organisations, educational institutions and employment authorities.

Lifelong learning systems in all cities and countries are divided into sub-systems for different target groups and different groups of women have dissimilar opportunities to access training and education. Their labour market status is crucial in this respect. First, there is the education system for those adults who are employed and have previous vocational or academic education. For them, educational options are rather good. Second, there is specific training for unemployed people, often understood as a part of activation measures. Third, there are special programmes and projects for the most marginalized or disadvantaged groups of people, which are often organized with funding coming fully or partly from the European Social Fund. Women are not considered as a specific target group, because in general, they are active in participating in education and training and the educational level of women in the cities studied is rather high. Women outside the labour force (e.g. full-time carers of children or old people) have the most limited options for education and training. The educational systems recognise very weakly the care responsibilities of women, especially care responsibilities other than childcare.

It became clear in all the local city reports prepared by the FLOWS project partners that the three fields of the local welfare systems are not horizontally integrated nor considered primarily from the perspective of women's labour market integration or their informal care responsibilities. From the three sectors of the local welfare systems, childcare is the one where in many cities there is most positive local deviation from the national average in service provision, while care systems for older people seem to follow national policies more firmly with rather little local variation from the national system. Employment oriented lifelong learning systems are the most centralised but also very fragmented systems compared with the care service systems and local authorities have only a minor role in providing education and training and in formulating policies in this field.

It is important to consider that welfare policies and actual local service provisions do not determine women's labour market behaviour, since women act in a complex framework of cultural, institutional, social and economic factors. The local welfare system is only one, even if it is an important variable in supporting or limiting women's labour market integration.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It has been shown that a high generosity at national level in terms of rights related to care and resources spent on care guarantees sustainable care systems at the local level in contemporary greying societies. Decentralisation paired with low generosity at national level, on the contrary, overcharges the local level and thereby conflicts with sustainable care systems at local level.

- Overall, rights to leave schemes (job protection), generous income substitutes and care services provide women with options to decide whether they take care of children and

older family members temporarily themselves or use care services and participate in paid employment. Such rights thus support gender equality significantly.

- Based on this analysis, special attention should be paid to the situation of mothers with young children at the time when maternity or family leave ends. At this point, affordable, flexible and good quality childcare services should be available so that the mothers who want to return to employment are able to do so and are not forced to leave their job.
- There is a major gap in most cities in the availability of affordable public or publicly subsidised services especially for children aged 1-2 years. Special attention should thus be paid to service provision for this age group of children.
- Childcare services in most cities are not flexible enough for mothers who want to (re)enter the labour market or participate in education and training. It is difficult especially to accept sudden job offers or a job requiring atypical working hours. In order to make this possible, opening hours of childcare services need to be lengthened and their waiting lists need to be cut.
- The commonly adopted early-education approach of early education and childcare has its positive sides (good availability and affordability of childcare services), but it also brings problems that need to be dealt with. As these services usually follow daily and weekly school hours and the annual school-term, they do not provide coverage that makes (full-day) paid work of both parents possible. A specific problem is the lack of provision during long school holidays. The same difficulties are faced by families with young school children.
- Mothers outside the labour force (or other full-time carers) were found to have currently very limited training options and often they need to pay their training fully or partly themselves. In order to make it possible for this group of women to re-enter the labour market, it is vital to offer them suitable and affordable education and training opportunities that update and upgrade their skills and qualifications.
- Care for older people and the situation of women as informal carers of older people have received much less attention from local policy makers than childcare. This need to be changed in the future, due to population ageing, a key question is how to support women and men to combine paid employment and caring for their older family members.
- Benefits for people who care for older family members by themselves are much too low to be a real income substitute in most of the cities. Using low benefits as policy instrument to push people into the labour market, however, does not take into account the availability of good quality care services.
- The costs for residential care are very high in many of the cities studied. Therefore, this option is only affordable for a small part of the population.
- Taking leave to care for an older family member should be a social right, including the guarantee to return to the former job afterwards, in all the cities. Flexible leaves make it easier for women to provide care while remaining in the labour market.
- In many of the cities studied, it is not possible to work flexible hours. This is important for people who want to combine employment with their family care tasks, for example if they want to work and care on a part-time basis.
- The findings show that the generosity of local policies towards long-term care for senior citizens highly correlates with the generosity on national level. Even economically prospering cities like Bologna do not add substantial local resources to the national ones for extra-familial care. Politicians on national level should be aware that the effects of highly fragmented care policies on social cohesion need consideration on national level.
- Care for older people is carried out mostly by women and a good part of them are in working age. In order to enhance female employment and user choice cash for care schemes seem to be the most effective. Cash for care schemes, however, also can enhance familial care.

The three fields of the local welfare systems - childcare, care for older people and lifelong learning services - are neither horizontally integrated nor considered primarily from the perspective of women's labour market integration or their informal care responsibilities. In order to use the service systems as an effective tool to improve women's labour market integration, more attention needs to be paid to their better integration.

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 objectives of this research were:

- To distinguish the components and the functions of local welfare systems that are connected to provisions of childcare, care for older people, vocational training and lifelong learning,
- To elaborate how those local policies that are connected to the employment of women are orchestrated in the 11 European cities,
- To discern successful and less successful policies and organisational models of welfare services,
- To explore whether the different welfare provisions are horizontally integrated.

Scientific approach / methodology

A multi-method approach was applied, including a literature review, analysis of policy documents and local area case studies and interviews with key informants about local policy processes in 11 European cities: Aalborg (DK), Bologna (IT), Brno (CZ), Dublin (IR), Hamburg (DE), Jyväskylä (FI), Leeds (UK), Nantes (FR), Szekesfehervar (HU), Tartu (EE) and Terrassa (SP).

In this study, all partners collected documentary and statistical data and conducted (at least 2-4) expert interviews in relation to the main features of the local welfare system (childcare, care for older people, lifelong learning) in the 11 European cities of the study.

The collected data included national data from statistical offices about the cities in the countries and data from the municipalities, as well as research publications from national ministries or local governments. Interviews with local experts (e.g. municipal managers, NGOs) further deepened the findings from other data, e.g. on the changes and trends in local service provision, local debates and local innovations. As we compared the local welfare systems not only between the 11 European cities but also in relation to the national welfare system in each country, both local and national data were gathered. All these data from different sources were gathered and analysed according to the same procedure, used in each country and city, in order to maximise the comparability of the findings from different cities. The data were analysed first by local research teams and reported in local reports. The data and the local reports of all partners were further analysed by the leaders of this study (WP3 of the FLOWS project) and reported in the final WP

report. In addition, the Danish Red Cross prepared a report about the activities of the Red Cross among older people in the 11 cities.

PROJECT IDENTITY

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FUNDING SCHEME	FP7 Framework Programme for Research of the European Union - Collaborative Project - SSH-2010-2.
DURATION	January 2011 – April 2014 (40 months).
BUDGET	EU contribution : 2 697 421 €.
WEBSITE	www.flows-eu.eu
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FURTHER READING	Kuronen, M. and Schwindt, N. (eds) (2011) WP 3: The Local Welfare System - Literature Review, October 2011. Kuronen, M., Kröger, T., Pfau-Effinger, B., Frericks, P., Och, R. and Schwindt, N. (2012) Integrative report on local welfare systems supporting female employment, June 2012. Helqvist, I. (2012) Integrative report on local welfare systems supporting female employment – Report on elderly care from DRC, June 2012.