

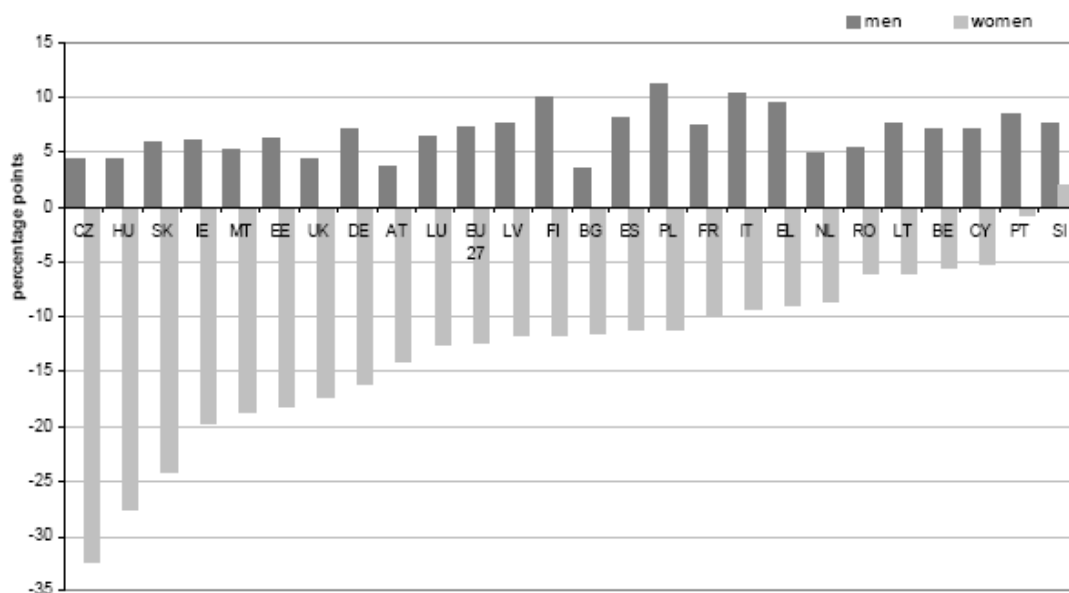
Comments on the German paper 'Women's Return to Work after Family-Related Breaks in Employment'

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I. Comments on Gender Differences in Biographies of Women and Men in Germany

The first part of the paper aims at presenting differences in labour market biographies of women and men, reasons behind them and some effects in terms of wages and income, social security provision, and retirement benefits. It is properly and clearly structured and refers to main important issue. However, in that diagnostic part some information is missing. To illustrate gender differences in the labour market participation and impacts children have on parent's employment some additional labour market indicators would be useful to be provided: employment and unemployment rates by sex, part-time vs. full-time employment, etc. Without comparing data presented in Table 1 with employment patterns of women without children under 18 (and eventually of men) children's impact on employment is difficult to comment. In the appendix of that paper I present some labour market statistics for Poland which illustrate gender differences in that respect. Also the figure below taken from the EC report illustrates effects of parenthood on men's and women's employment in Germany as well as in other EU member states.

Figure 1 Employment impact of parenthood for women and men aged 25-39 in 2007



Source: Eurostat, EU-LFS 2007, Provisional data. SE, DK: no data available.

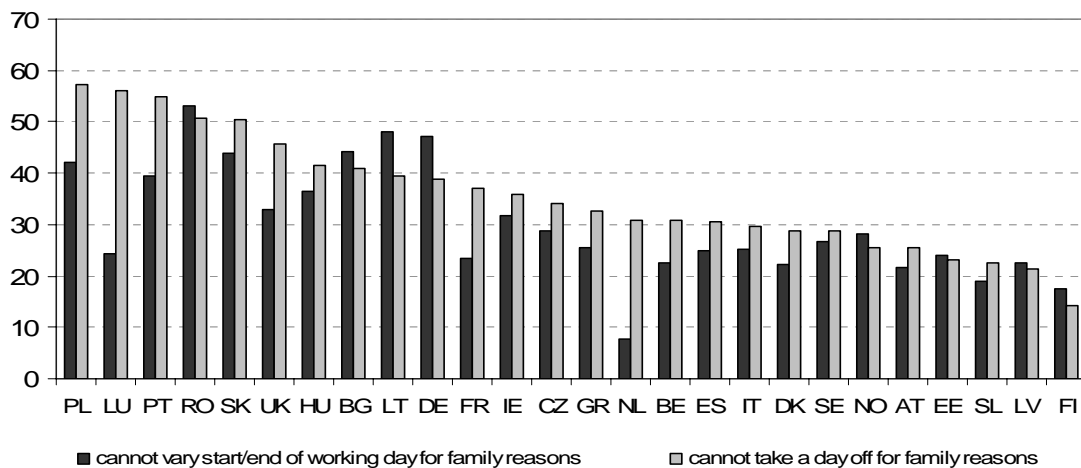
The indicator is calculated as the average employment rate for persons with at least one child under 12 minus the average employment rate of persons without any children under 12.

Source: Commission Staff Working Document, COM(2008)598, Implementation of the Barcelona objectives concerning childcare facilities for pre-school-age children, Brussels, SEC(2008) 2524, p.7.

Moreover, more information on old-age pension scheme is lacking, for instance what general entitlements are granted to account for childrearing years by mothers, when they have been introduced, statutory age of retirement by sex.

Perception of gender roles is one of the main driving factors behind gender inequalities within a household and in employment, responsible also for considering often reconciliation between work and family in terms of a women's issue instead of a parents' issue. Important reconciliation measures like regulations on maternity and parental leaves, their up take by parents, and flexible work arrangements are missed in the diagnosis. For instance, data coming for the Eurostat module on reconciliation of work and family life in the EU-25 in 2005 on the LFS sample show that working arrangements in Germany are rather inflexible (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Flexibility of working hours measured by percentage of those who cannot vary the start/end of working day or to take a day off for family reasons



Source: Matysiak, A. 2008. On interdependencies between fertility and women's labour supply. PhD thesis. Warsaw: Warsaw School of Economics.

The still relatively strong perception of men as main economic providers and women in their dual roles of as primary care givers and secondary economic providers results in gendered take up of parental leave despite gender neutral regulations, existing in majority of European countries. For instance, in Poland fathers have been entitled to the leave since 1996. Despite that in 2005 only 50% of mothers and merely 2.6% of fathers entitled to the leave made use of it ¹. Flexibility of parental leave, individualisation of rights, level of compensation are important for increasing father's take up of leave. That development is relevant not only to counteract that asymmetrical burden of job breaks for child care reasons. It may also contribute to needed change in employers' attitudes toward men and women care responsibilities. These aspects have not been fully taken into account when the new regulation on parental allowance in Germany has been presented (page 7 of the paper).

¹ The data comes from a representative survey "Reconciliation of family and work" carried out in 2005 on the LFS sample. The survey was conducted under the recommendation of Eurostat. Results of the survey have been presented by Kotowska and Baranowska, 2006; Matysiak, 2007a, 2007b.

In the diagnostic part of the paper also information on care services in Germany is missed. The withdrawal of mothers caring for small children (as seen from the Table 1) may result not only from shortages in care services but also from social disapproval of care not provided by mothers. It is a case of Poland. Shortages in care provision² are accompanied by a relatively strong confidence that the best for small children is to be cared by mothers, which however is declining over time (see Figure 2 and 3 in Appendix).

II. Comments on Vocational Reintegration as a Perspective Action Programme in Germany

In general, labour market biographies of women and men differ mainly due to different impacts of family on labour market behaviour by gender. Therefore, women's returns to work after family related breaks need to be considered from the perspective of reconciling work and family, being a core component of the work-life balance approach. And moreover, one should avoid to look at reconciliation in terms of a women's issue instead of both men's and women's issue. It means that job breaks (e.g. leaves) or working-time reduction due to family reasons cannot be perceived as dedicated entirely to women. Hence, along with measures aimed at encouraging women to work returns also measures which facilitate men's participation in care provision cannot be ignored. In other words, the issue is not only in making it possible for women to re-enter the labour market but also in changing strongly gendered use of different reconciliation measures, perceived often by both employees and employers as related to women. However, the latter requires changes in gender roles assignments which in fact influence not only people's perceptions but also increasing use of gender neutral measures by men and service infrastructure to be adapting to needs of the dual earner family.

That reconciliation perspective imposes also integration of labour market policy with family policy and gender equality policy³. That implication is reflected in the German family policy: "Germany's current family policy, which is closely linked to its gender equality policy, rests on three pillars: more time, a supportive infrastructure and income. This mirrors the paradigm shift in that it focuses on matching family-related employment breaks taken by women with those of men and on improving opportunities for fathers and mothers to achieve a better work-life balance" (the Host country paper, p.7). Also, the *Wiedereinstieg* Programme can be considered as reflected such an integrated approach since accounts for three aspects: increasing women's labour force participation taking into account family responsibilities of workers and changes in gender roles towards gender equality.

In the context of facilitating women's returns to the labour market after breaks related to family responsibilities two issues need to be distinguished: how to influence job breaks take-up by persons who are at the early stages of their family life course (primarily persons below 40 years of age) and how to integrate in the labour market women who have already experienced long period without job and currently their reduced family responsibilities make it possible to (re-)enter em-

² These shortages are illustrated by the number of places in crèches per 1000 of children under 3 to be the lowest in the UE-25 (24 in 2007) and the number of places in kindergartens and pre-school establishments also low by the EU standards (619 per 1000 of children at age 3-6 in 2007).

³ See for instance Esping-Andersen, 2005; Neyen, 2006; Kotowska, 2007; Kotowska and Matysiak, 2008.

ployment. The former is strictly related to more gender balanced of job breaks, flexible use of parental leaves, and shortening duration of breaks i.e. refers to persons in employment. The latter concerns in principle women aged 40/45 and more. A considerable part of that population spent more time outside the labour market than in employment. Here, key issues are their workability, employers' attitudes towards them and reconceptualisation of gender roles, to be even more challenging than among younger persons. And these women are declared as a focus group of the *Wiedereinstieg* Action Programme (the Host country paper, p.9).

The paper addresses directly policy measures relevant for the first group of population. Developments in child care infrastructure (crèches, kindergartens, care services at primary schools) in terms of their availability, accessibility and quality are of primary importance for work-life balance at the early stages of family life course. Similarly, the parental allowance implemented in January 2007, improved tax rules (when?) are dedicated to that target group. However, more flexible working time arrangements seem to be missed when considering measures supportive for persons at first stages of family life course.

Policy towards labour market integration of women aged 45 and more is presented within the frame of the *Wiedereinstieg* Action Programme, which refers directly to main findings of the project 'Returning to Work After Starting a Family: Needs, Experiences, Obstacles'. They accentuate that returning by women to work needs to be considered as a process instead of one step, requires family member's support i.e. reconceptualisation of gender roles within family, and demands also for changes in work place i.e. changes in employer's attitudes toward female workers what means reconceptualisation of gender roles at work place and work arrangements supportive for better work-life balance.

Implementation of that challenging Action Programme involves many actors of different levels (the chart on page 12). From the description given it is not clear how the programme will be managed and monitored. What measures will be designed? Labour market integration of women aged 45 and more means shortening of family care resources. Under advanced population ageing it needs to be combined with better provision of housekeeping and care services, including institutional care.

III. Could Poland Benefit from the Policy Initiative taken up in Germany?

Undoubtedly, the broad perspective employed when discussing on women's integration in the labour market is to be recommended. Especially, demands for reconceptualisation of gender role within family and at work place should be acknowledged. It is also necessary to distinguish between two groups of women – those at first stages of their family life course and those being at later stages as it has been done in the German approach

Improvements in child care infrastructure, more flexible and individualised leaves, better compensation of parental leave, income tax changes to diminish direct costs of children – all these measures are highly recommended. However, their implementation needs financial resources to be allocated in social investments. Nevertheless, recent changes in maternity and parental leave and regulations related to work returns after parental leave, submitted to the government as amend-

ments to the Labour Code and the Act on Family Benefits, increase flexibility in their take up and are expected to encourage fathers to use them more.

As regards to women at later stages of life course the issue refers not to their returns to the labour market but to counteract their early exits from the labour market. Employment rates of women aged 40-49 are relatively high, the decline takes place for women aged 50-59, before the statutory age of retirement (figure 2 in the Appendix). Similarly, employment rates for men aged 50-54 decline visibly (their age of retirement is 65). Therefore, in Poland a focus is on persons aged 50 and more, in general. To keep these people in the labour market the special programme has been formulated "Generations' Solidarity - Activities to increase labour force participation of persons aged 50+" and approved by the government on 17 October 2008. Despite differences in the age of groups focused on and reasons for their low labour force participation workability of these persons, their adaptation to work requirements, and changes in employer's attitudes toward 'older' workers remain the key issues to be tackled in.

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(projekt z 9 października 2008 r.) www.mps.gov.pl/bip/index.php

Appendix

| Labour market indicators | Age | Men | Women | Total | Difference between men and women |
|--|-------|------|-------|-------|----------------------------------|
| Labour Force (% of Population aged 15-64) | 15-24 | 37.5 | 30.7 | 34.2 | 6.8 |
| | 25-34 | 92.8 | 77.0 | 85.0 | 15.8 |
| | 35-44 | 92.1 | 81.9 | 87.0 | 10.2 |
| | 45-54 | 80.2 | 68.7 | 74.3 | 11.5 |
| | 55-64 | 42.6 | 20.3 | 30.7 | 22.3 |
| | Total | 70.1 | 56.8 | 63.4 | 13.3 |
| Employment (% of Population aged 15-64) | 15-24 | 26.9 | 21.0 | 24.0 | 5.9 |
| | 25-34 | 81.3 | 65.6 | 73.5 | 15.7 |
| | 35-44 | 83.2 | 71.2 | 77.2 | 12.0 |
| | 45-54 | 71.1 | 60.3 | 65.6 | 10.8 |
| | 55-64 | 38.4 | 19.0 | 28.1 | 19.4 |
| | Total | 60.9 | 48.2 | 54.5 | 12.7 |
| Part-time employment (% of employment) | 15-24 | 9.5 | 17.9 | 13.2 | -8.4 |
| | 25-54 | 2.9 | 7.3 | 5.0 | -4.4 |
| | 55-64 | 11.5 | 25.2 | 16.3 | -13.7 |
| | Total | 4.7 | 9.5 | 6.9 | -4.8 |
| Temporary employment (% of employment) | 15-24 | 65.4 | 69.7 | 67.3 | -4.3 |
| | 25-49 | 25.3 | 22.7 | 24.1 | 2.6 |
| | 50-64 | 18.6 | 13.9 | 16.5 | 4.7 |
| | Total | 28.5 | 26.0 | 27.3 | 2.5 |
| Unemployment (% of Labour Force aged 15-64) | 15-24 | 28.3 | 31.6 | 29.8 | -3.3 |
| | 25-34 | 12.4 | 14.9 | 13.5 | -2,5 |
| | 35-44 | 9.7 | 13.1 | 11.3 | -3,4 |
| | 45-54 | 11.3 | 12.1 | 11.7 | -0,8 |
| | 55-64 | 9.8 | 6.2 | 8.5 | 3,6 |
| | Total | 13.1 | 15.1 | 14.0 | -2,0 |
| Long-term unemployment (% of Unemployed) | Total | 49.0 | 52.0 | 50.4 | -3.0 |

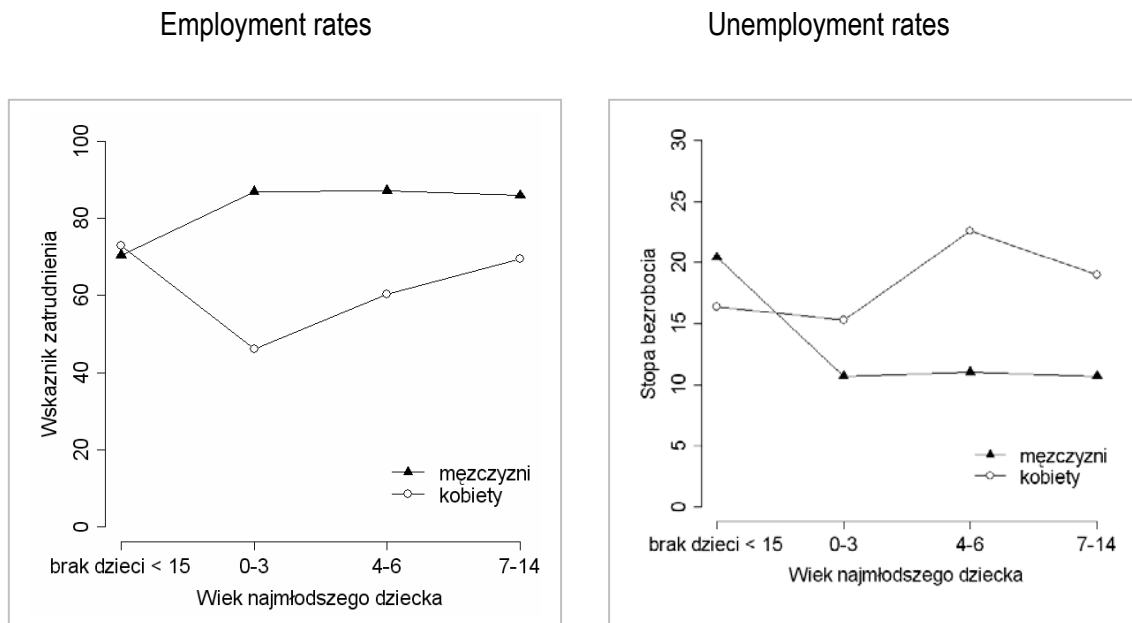
Source: Matysiak, A. 2008. On interdependencies between fertility and women's labour supply. PhD thesis. Warsaw: Warsaw School of Economics. LFS data from OECD Database on Labour Force Statistics. data on temporary employment - Eurostat New Cronos Database; data retrieved on 3rd January 2008.

Figure 1 Employment rates by age and sex, LFS II quarter 2007



Source: the LFS data, Central Statistical Office

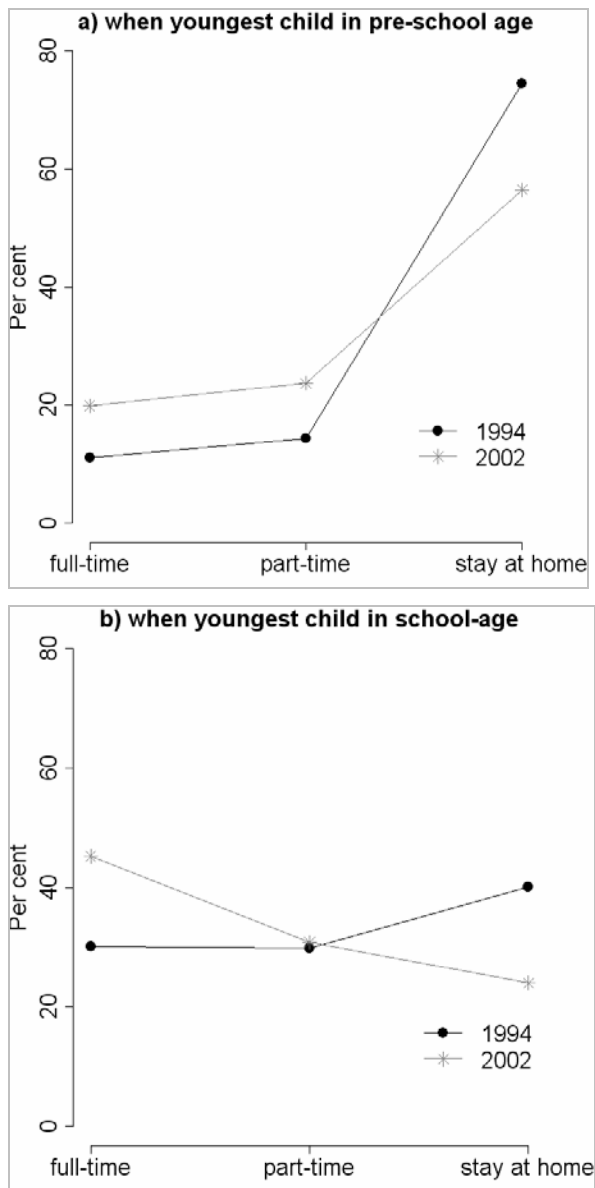
Figure 2 Employment and unemployment rates of persons aged 25-44 by sex and age of the youngest child, Poland, LFS II quarter 2005



OX – age of the youngest child

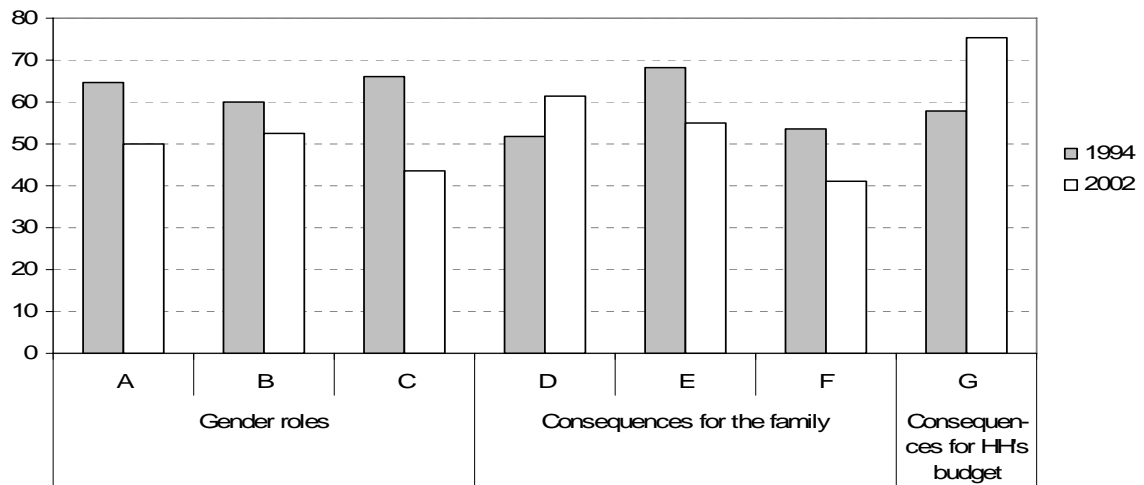
Source: Kotowska, I.E., Matysiak, A. 2008. Integration of labour market policy and family policy, mimeo, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Warsaw, 2008 (in Polish).

Figure 3 Should mothers work full-time, part-time or stay at home? Response distributions by children's age in Poland in 1994 and 2002



Source: Matysiak, A. 2008. On interdependencies between fertility and women's labour supply. PhD thesis. Warsaw: Warsaw School of Economics; authors' calculations on ISSP 1994 and ISSP 2002

Figure 4 Gender-role ideology, consequences of women's work on family well-being, and the economic consequences of women's work in Poland in 1994 and 2002, % of those who agree or strongly agree



- A- Work is good, but what most women really want is a home and children
- B- Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay
- C- A man's job is to earn money, a woman's job is to look after the home and the family
- D- A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work
- E- A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works
- F- All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job
- G- Both the man and woman should contribute to the household income

Source: Matysiak, A. 2008. On interdependencies between fertility and women's labour supply. PhD thesis. Warsaw: Warsaw School of Economics; authors' calculations on ISSP 1994 and ISSP 2002.