

Women's Return to Work after Family-Related Breaks in Employment

I. Current Status: Biographies of Women and Men

1. Introduction

The aim of German gender equality policy is to afford women and men equal opportunities in all areas of life. To achieve this, policy measures must take the differing biographies of women and men into account. In Germany in particular, women's lifestyles change far more dramatically than men's when they start a family. Section 1 of this paper shows how this has a huge impact on equality between women and men in the professional life. Section 2 uses the situation illustrated in Section 1 to explain the goals of the *Perspective Wiedereinstieg* (Vocational Reintegration as a Perspective) programme. Section 3 sets out the key findings, on which the programme is based. The final section, Section 4, describes the programme in detail and sets out the measures it contains.

2. Differing employment biographies of women and men

How starting a family affects women and men is most visible in their differing employment biographies. Greater access to education has boosted the number of women in work. In 2006, 62.2 percent of women in Germany were employed (putting Germany in tenth place among the 27 EU Member States). While this is still some 10 percentage points below the figure for men in employment (72.8 percent), it already exceeds the EU's employment strategy objective of having 60 percent of women in work by 2010.

In the working world, there is still a huge discrepancy between women and men as regards the numbers in work and the volume of work they do. In recent years, the gap between men's and women's average working hours has widened yet again.¹ This means that the larger number of women in work does not reflect comparable growth in women being able to secure their livelihoods through the jobs they hold.

This has one main cause: while in the case of childless couples it is normal for both partners to go to work, once they have their first child women usually stop working if only for a temporary period. For one in three mothers, starting a family means a long-term break from employment. More than 60 percent of women born between 1957 and 1961 have experienced phases in which they interrupted their careers to look after the home and family. In 2005, Germany ranked only 19 out of 27 in an EU comparison of the number of women aged between 25 and 49 who go to work and who have children under 12.

¹ Klammer, Ute: Eigenständige und abgeleitete Existenzsicherung von Frauen in Deutschland – empirische Befunde. in: Dokumentation der Tagung „Eigenverantwortung, private und öffentliche Solidarität – Rollenleitbilder im Familien- und Sozialrecht im europäischen Vergleich“; Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (BMFSFJ); (Eds.), p. 134, 2008.

Table 1²

Employment Rate of Mothers ¹⁾ According to the Age of Their Youngest Child in 2005 (in %)						
Age of Youngest Child (in years)	Western Germany			Eastern Germany		
	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time
0 – 2	31	10	21	41	23	19
3 – 5	56	12	42	67	38	28
6 – 9	65	15	50	69	41	28
10 – 14	71	21	50	73	51	22
15 – 17	74	30	44	79	58	21

1) Actual time worked at least one hour per week
 Source: sozialpolitik-aktuell.de; WSI-FDR 2005: 175 according to statistics published by the Federal Statistical Office (StBA)

When they return to work (if they return at all), it is usually to a part time job, full time work is the exception rather than the rule. Even today, working mothers find the best way of combining paid employment with unpaid work (caring for the family) is to decide more or less voluntarily to take a part-time job. Where they have little opportunity to delegate any of the work involved in looking after the home and family, and where equality between women and men in performing such work is not recognised or practiced, they often have little choice but to work part-time or give up work altogether.³ This situation is illustrated in the following examples:

- The rise in the number of women who go to work is largely due to the increase in the availability of part-time work and low-paid jobs. In Germany, some 48 percent of working women work reduced hours in what are known as *mini-jobs* or are hired as freelancers to work on specific projects on an intermittent basis. Only four percent of working men are employed in this way.⁴
- More than half the women who work part-time do so for personal or family-related reasons.
- The number of men in part-time work stands at 7.4 percent and they make up 16.1 percent of all part-time workers. At 83.9 percent, women represent the largest part-time workforce (Federal Statistical Office, Microcensus 2005).

Women who return to work on reduced hours after having a child usually opt when submitting a joint tax return with their husband for their income to be taxed in Steuerklasse V (tax bracket V), which is the best choice as regards its effect on the couple's joint tax burden but makes the wife's after-tax income appear lower than it actually is. The fact that the higher marginal tax rate makes their income seem lower is largely due to the child-care costs being deducted from the woman's income, the woman being classed as the so-called 'secondary' earner.

² Klammer, Ute: loc.cit., p. 5

³ Hohnerlein, Eva Maria: „Rollenleitbilder und Sozialleistungen im Spiegel europäischer Entwicklungen – Probleme der eigenständigen Existenzsicherung von Frauen aus vergleichender Sicht“, in: Dokumentation der Tagung „Eigenverantwortung, private und öffentliche Solidarität – Rollenleitbilder im Familien- und Sozialrecht im europäischen Vergleich“; Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (Eds.), p. 65, 2008.

⁴ Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (Eds.): Beruflicher Wiedereinstieg nach der Familiengründung. Bedürfnisse, Erfahrungen, Barrieren, Berlin 2008, p.9.

Fathers' ability to continue working is, by way of contrast, rarely affected by the fact that they have children. On the contrary: once they start a family, if their wife or partner stays at home to look after the child, the father often works longer hours to cope with the increased financial responsibility. Thus, around 75 percent of men who have no children under 18 living at home go to work full-time. This compares with almost 90 percent of men with dependent children who live with them.⁵

3. Reasons behind the differing employment biographies

a) Asymmetrical assignment of roles within the family

One of the main reasons that women take time out from work has to do, directly or indirectly, with the asymmetrical assignment of roles within the family. Most unpaid work involved in caring for the family is done by women (regardless of their employment status); nonetheless they are assuming increasingly more responsibility for the family's financial security.

Table 2⁶

Division of Labour between Couples with Children Western Germany and Eastern Germany 1991/92 and 2001/02								
	Western Germany				Eastern Germany			
	1991/92		2001/02		1991/92		2001/02	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
	Couples with a Child/Children under 15							
Unpaid work (hours/minutes)	07:17	03:06	06:31	03:08	05:39	03:14	05:07	03:20
Paid work (hours/minutes)	01:18	05:43	01:35	05:14	04:08	06:26	03:27	05:07
Ratio of women's unpaid work to paid work	5.6	0.5	4.1	0.6	1.4	0.5	1.5	0.7
Ratio of women's unpaid work to men's unpaid work	2.3		2.1		1.8		1.5	

Source: WSI-FDR 2005, Table 4.12, Data taken from time budget surveys in 1991/1992 and 2001/2002 conducted by the Federal Statistical Office (StBA).

While in 2001/2002 women in western Germany spent 2.1 times as much time performing unpaid work as men, the ratio in eastern German states was 1 to 1.54. This unequal representation of women and men in unpaid and paid employment is of a similar magnitude in other countries in Europe.

An unequal distribution of household and childcare responsibilities within the home has given women a weaker position in the labour market and thus perpetuates the inequalities between women and men in the professional life.

⁵ BFMFSFJ (Eds.) loc.cit., p.10.

⁶ Klammer, Ute: loc.cit., p. 5.

b) Social and legal role assignments

When it comes to responsibility for paid employment and work performed in the home, the historically shaped structure of gender-related role assignment is especially evident in western Germany: while throughout the country, the fact that women go to work is broadly accepted, women still have difficulty in balancing family with work. This trend is fostered by the (still) poor availability of state-run all-day childcare services and the fact that society still relies heavily on women assuming responsibility for caring for the family, especially where young children are involved. By the same token, men are largely seen even today as the traditional breadwinner in the family. Traditional role assignments are thus a strong but invisible guiding influence in the lives of women and men and restrict both in their freedom of choice.

However, legal norms can also significantly influence role assignments by prevailing social sub-systems and often in conflicting ways. In some cases, explicit expectations – such as those set out in Article 3 (2) of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany (Grundgesetz) – can run contrary to implicit guiding principles that can only be reconstructed by analysing the interrelationship between sub-sections of the law: that of the male, breadwinner husband in ongoing employment and the role model of the ‘non-working mother with a child under three’, for example.

In German family law, the gender hierarchy model of marriage depicted in the German Civil Code (Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch, or BGB) of 1900 has evolved into formal, gender-neutral models in which the state, since the enactment of the Marriage Law Reform Act in 1977, leaves the decisions regarding role assignment and household management to the individuals involved (see also paragraph 1356 BGB) and explicitly requires men (and women) to consider family needs when mapping out their working lives. There are, however, a multitude of rules and regulations in family, social, labour and taxation law which prejudice equal division of labour and assignment of roles.⁷

4. Effects of differing employment biographies

a) Employment phase

Role assignments do not only affect women and men, they also influence the behaviour of employers whose attitudes vary depending on whether they are dealing with a female or male employee: they see female employees as being burdened by family commitments and male employees as being supported by their families. These gender-related attitudes are not the result of gender-specific performance or abilities. Rather, they stem from perceived gender differences regarding availability for work. When dealing with employees, employers often implicitly and as a matter of course assume a locally situated, traditional immediate family and extended family structure.

⁷ Scheiwe, Kirsten: „Auf den Spuren der Rollenleitbilder im deutschen Familien- und Sozialrecht – über Normen, die egalitäre Rollenteilung immer noch benachteiligen“; in: Dokumentation der Tagung „Eigenverantwortung, private und öffentliche Solidarität – Rollenleitbilder im Familien- und Sozialrecht im europäischen Vergleich“; Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (Eds.) p.55, 2008

However, restructuring measures in the labour market increasingly place the traditional breadwinner and additional-small-income-model in question because in both economic and structural terms, unemployment brings the risk of the family being reliant on a single income. Job opportunities have shifted positively from the male to the female segment of the labour market.

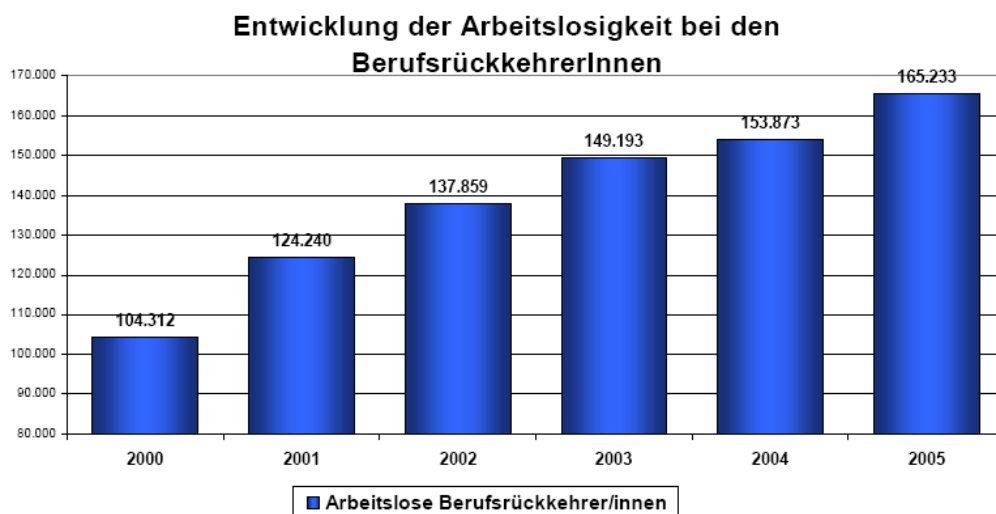
Also, partnerships have become less reliable and stable, which jeopardises financial provision for the female spouse or partner who do not work on a full-time basis. Like non-marital partnerships, marriage has evolved into a form of relationship that does not necessarily follow traditional gender roles. Perceptions of equal participation and responsibility between parents must repeatedly be renegotiated to accommodate current circumstances and thus shape the behaviour of adults and their contribution to family life. Child poverty is a phenomenon of single-income families and is on the rise due, among other things, to the high divorce rates and low levels of employment among low-skilled fathers and mothers.

Independent social security provision for women has long been a central issue in gender equality policy and must be taken further in the interests of family and social solidarity. While around one third of adult women now live from the income they earn in gainful employment, in 2003 4 in 10 women in western Germany were dependent on their relatives, but in eastern Germany it was only 2 in 10.⁸ In the group of non-employed females, it is evident that (at least empirically speaking) the traditional breadwinner model still plays an important role.

Using the example of unemployment benefit, it appears that many welfare benefits in Germany are implicitly shaped by the notion of the constantly employed male breadwinning husband and the wife, who has a small additional income, if she earns at all. From a gender equality policy standpoint in particular, the way unemployment benefit is calculated is problematic: the contributions paid *into* the unemployment insurance fund are deducted as a percentage of gross income. Unemployment *benefit* is based on a lower net income, meaning that relative to the contributions they pay, when they sign on as unemployed women receive a disproportionately lower amount of benefit than men.

Independent financial security for women is one of the aims of German gender equality policy and is closely linked to improving women's status in the professional life. Their integration into the labour market is a vital prerequisite for meeting this goal. Despite social trends and the progress made to date, returning to work after raising a family is not always immediately possible and can often be fraught with difficulty. This is illustrated by the figures on unemployment among people trying to return to work (mostly women):

⁸ Klammer, Ute: loc.cit., p. 1f.



Title: Development of Unemployment from women and men trying to return to work after raising a family

Below the diagram: Unemployed women and men wanting to return to work after raising a family

In August 2007 Germany's employment agencies reported 136,000 women who were trying to return to work after raising a family. They make up 7.9 percent of all unemployed women. Only 1,700 men were reported as trying to return to work for the same reason; this represents 0.1 percent of all unemployed men. Returning to work after looking after the family is thus largely a women's issue.

b) Retirement phase

Even in retirement, women's financial security is jeopardised by long family-related interruptions in their employment record. While most women have accrued pension entitlements or will accrue these, this is not enough to provide information as to the amount of entitlements they have accrued, the pension they will receive and how far it will go to making them financially secure. With an average monthly pension of €501 in 2006, women in western Germany received around half the pension paid to men; women in eastern Germany received €637 per month, about two-thirds of the average for men.⁹ In other words, secondary (widow's/dependent's) pensions for women still play an important role because only through cumulation of their own pension and their widow's/dependent's pension can women achieve a level of financial security comparable to that of men.

Germany's pension scheme bases its calculations on the length of employment and the amount of income earned that is subject to mandatory social security contributions. This means that only about five percent of women achieve the status of *Eckrentner* (someone who has earned the average full-time income and has worked for 45 years); the additional entitlements awarded to women in Germany, e.g. for childrearing years, could, however, be seen as generous in international comparison.

⁹ Klammer, Ute: loc.cit., p.11

On the whole, it must be remembered that gaps in financial security arise when people “do not meet the explicit or implicit ideals of social and labour law, particularly that of the constantly employed man with a full-time job and the woman in a secure and lasting marriage” – either because they are unable to or choose not to.¹⁰

c) **Ongoing inequality in pay / Segregation in the labour market**

It is not only financial security during and after the employment phase that is threatened by long breaks away from work. In Germany, such breaks are a key factor when it comes to segregation in the labour market and ongoing inequality in pay: the prevailing assumptions regarding gender-typical family phases can already be seen in the wages and salaries being offered to job candidates. When returning to work after a period of childrearing, women in particular rarely return to the same rung of the career ladder. Knowing they have family commitments, employers are reluctant to trust what are often better paid positions to the women who previously held them.

According to a report published by the European Commission in July 2007, family-related employment breaks and the associated role assignments have resulted in a gender pay gap in Germany of 22 percent. This exceeds the EU average of 15 percent.

II. *Perspective Wiedereinstieg* (Vocational Reintegration as a Perspective) Action Programme: Goals and Objectives

Gainful employment has become an integral part of women’s identity, role models and lifestyles. No less than 84 percent of women want to work, not least after a family-related employment break.

While Germany has been keen to promote its policy goals and objectives for women’s employment and especially women’s financial security, it also calls for people to be afforded the freedom to choose the lifestyles that suit them best.

Despite the political and personal goal of women’s employment, working women who have children face a range of difficulties when negotiating their everyday lives. The traditional role assignments touched upon in Section 1 can be seen in many areas of society: social infrastructures like **day-care centres** and **primary schools** work on the notion of the ever-available mother. This is evident in the institutions themselves, e.g. their opening times, and in the mind sets of the staff who work in them. One example involves the difficulty faced by working mothers when arranging appointments to speak to their children’s carers and teachers. Most appointments are offered during the morning or afternoon, and certainly not after five o’clock. Such routine and ritual sends a clear message to working mothers: that they should give utmost priority to their roles as mothers, place their jobs on the back burner and bow to the inflexibility of other areas of the working world.

¹⁰ Klammer, Ute: loc.cit., p.25

Germany is, however, in a state of transition. The results of a Federal Statistical Office survey – *Familienland Deutschland* (Family-Friendly Germany) – show that for most people, finding a good balance between work and family is of key importance. With both partners working in over half the couples whose youngest child is under 15,¹¹ the need for family-friendly working conditions and adequate time to spend with the family would appear particularly pressing.

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 parental allowance introduced on 1 January 2007 is designed to give parents, especially young parents, more targeted assistance and foster families' long-term financial security. It prevents the huge loss of earnings (of one parent's income) that used to occur when a mother or father took time out to look after their new baby. Parental allowance is paid out for up to 12 months and amounts to 67 percent of the income (up to a maximum €1,800) foregone by the parent who takes parental leave after the birth of a child. Two additional partner months are available if the other partner chooses to take time out to look after the child. Parental leave can be divided between the two parents as they see fit: they can each take up to seven months although the full number of months can only be taken if both father and mother have each taken at least two months' parental leave. According to the latest statistics, almost 20 percent of fathers now take parental leave. Since the introduction of parental allowance almost two years ago, the number of young fathers who choose to take time off work to be with their children has risen more than five-fold.

Taxation rules regarding offsetting of childcare costs have also been improved. Parents can now set off two-thirds of the childcare costs they incur from birth right up to the age of 14 (up to a maximum €4,000 per year and per child). This relieves the financial burden on families and helps them achieve better work-life balance.

Thanks to pressure exerted by the German government, the infrastructure for external childcare services has been improved. The Federal and *Länder* (state) governments and local administrations have agreed to make some 750,000 places available for the under-threes by 2013. This will allow an average 35 percent of children in this age group to be cared for either in crèches or by private childminders.

The company-based *Erfolgsfaktor Familie* (Success Factor Family) programme provides vital stimulus for family-friendly working conditions. The nation-wide programme has attracted upwards of 1,700 companies in all Federal States in total and more than 500 local, family-focused initiatives.

This policy approach primarily targets young women and men who are about to start or have just started a family. But from a gender equality policy standpoint, another priority is to respond to the fact that in Germany, many women in the 40+ age group who took a break from work five, seven or even ten years ago are now thinking of returning to work.

¹¹ Federal Statistical Office Press Release No. 264 of 22.07.2008

This situation will not disappear. There will always be mothers and fathers who want to take either a **long break from or significantly reduce the amount of time they work** to spend time with their families, especially if they have more than two children. This will continue to be the case despite the improved opportunities for external childcare and increasingly better balance between work and family. Plus, there remains a broad consensus that when in doubt, the family takes priority.

In an Infratest survey of young women aged between 25 and 40, it was revealed that a majority of 60 percent still think that looking after their children is more important than their own careers.

Policymakers must provide for these women by supplementing current family policy measures now and in the future. The decision to take a long break from work should not lead women down a blind alley:

- With the growing need for skilled employees, employers in particular should wake up to the fact that almost **90 percent of 45 year-old mothers** have finished raising their families and can concentrate on getting back to work.
- Some 78 percent of women who take time out to look after their children are under 40, almost 26 percent are under 30 and 11 percent are older than 45. If they manage to find a job, they still have between **20 and 27 years to work before reaching pensionable age**.
- Two-thirds of women who return to work after raising children are **well educated and trained**. Seven percent have a university degree.
- By returning to work, women improve **their own financial security and status within the social security system**, they boost their pension entitlements, reduce the risk of poverty in old age and stabilise the **family income**.
- Promoting women's return to work fosters their equal participation in the employment market and reduces gender-specific pay differences in the longer term.

It is precisely this group of women that the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs wants to reach with its *Perspektive Wiedereinstieg* (Vocational Reintegration as a Perspective) programme.

The programme is designed to promote initiatives and measures which:

- Make it easier for women to return to work after a family-related employment break.
- Heighten employers' awareness to the fact that by employing such women, they gain experienced employees (both in terms of work and life) who are willing and able to work, are available for work for another twenty years or more because they have finished raising their families, and have the skills and qualifications needed to secure a company's future.
- Encourage men to actively support their wives and partners in their efforts to return to work.

The programme also aims to change prevailing role models by placing the spotlight on the stereotypical responsibilities that occur within the family. The aim is to counter a retraditionalisation of the division of labour during the course of the marriage or partnership. By focusing on women's and men's biographies, equality becomes an organisational challenge and the need for flexible transitions between the various stages of life is emphasised. Individual decisions as to how a family should live are expressly respected.

The aim is to design a policy which – for socially and politically recognised reasons – gives employable adults the choice of taking up employment or taking a break from it at various stages of their (long) working lives without ending up down a blind alley work-wise. A mix of childrearing leave, childcare institutions and altered working hours together with measures to assist integration into the employment market are thus vital, both in terms of managing the additional care needs in an ageing society and in achieving gender equality. Flexible models must be liveable and the structures must be created to allow seamless transitions. The *Perspektive Wiedereinstieg* (Vocational Reintegration as a Perspective) programme aims to make this happen.

In this way, labour, family and gender equality policy provide instruments with which to tackle the many challenges (e.g. an ageing society and dwindling birth rates) faced by westernised welfare states like Germany.

III. Focus of the Action Programme

The *Perspektive Wiedereinstieg* (Vocational Reintegration as a Perspective) programme focuses on three key findings which largely rest on the results of a Sinus milieu study on *Beruflicher Wiedereinstieg nach der Familiengründung. Bedürfnisse, Erfahrungen, Barrieren* (Returning to Work After Starting a Family: Needs, Experiences, Obstacles).

Sinus milieu studies group people together according to their outlook on life and their lifestyles. They bring both people and the interrelationships that exist within their lives to forefront and thus provide more detailed information. The Sinus studies use qualitative and quantitative research methods to ensure the research question is looked at in its entirety and given adequate coverage.¹²

1. Returning to work: A process rather than one step

Returning to work after a family-related employment break is not an event but a process that is driven by many variables, primarily by the length of the break, personal and social circumstances, the woman's level of education and training, place of residence and the reason for wanting to go back to work. The process is by no means finished when work resumes. Once back at work, women find the task of balancing family and work becomes a juggling act. Having a family and holding down a job are equally difficult in their own right: both require a high degree of attention, flexibility and organisation. This is why many women give up their jobs within one to three years of going back to work.¹³

¹² For further information on the methodology and research design see: BMFSFJ (Eds.): loc.cit., p.60 f.

¹³ BMFSFJ (Eds.): loc.cit.; p.13

2. Women's return to work is reliant on support from their spouses/partners and other family members

For women, the issue of returning to work is highly reliant on the question of whether they can balance work with family life. This gives rise to the question of gender equality in many marriages and partnerships in that the organisational difficulties involved are usually faced by the women. A successful return to work calls for rearrangement of existing structures and a new approach to organisation within the family. Hence, a woman's spouse or partner plays a key role in her re-entry into the working world.

The main finding of the Sinus study is, however, that men (with the exception of just a few) are not prepared to reduce their full-time working status and work reduced hours even if their wife or partner wants to work other than in a mini-job and take a position that requires her to work 20 hours or more a week.¹⁴

On the other hand, only a minority of men today (less than a third) see themselves as the sole breadwinner in the family. A majority of almost three-quarters refuse to be seen in such narrow terms.¹⁵ It is not surprising, therefore, that men with modern values and role models want to support their wives and partners in returning to work. In many cases, however, there is a difference between what they intend to do in theory and what they actually do in practice. The reasons are as follows:

- The existing pay differentials force many families to opt for the traditional breadwinner model to ensure the family's financial security.¹⁶
- Many men who work full-time believe that reducing their working hours will be disadvantageous to their careers. They say that colleagues and supervisors still think it odd if a man wants to look after his children or make it easier for his wife to return to work.
- At the same time, family-unfriendly conditions in the workplace make it difficult to balance work commitments with those of the family. While in more and more companies, upper management profess to operate a family-friendly policy, the degree of family-friendliness they actually practice is not simply about putting the technical infrastructure in place but about the underlying principles adopted in the company's corporate culture.
- Some men demonstrate an intuitive, latent attitude: they see women's return to work as a matter of professional organisation. They fail to see why they should reduce their own working hours at a time of life when their children are gradually becoming independent. It seems paradoxical. Most men work on the preconceived idea that working reduced hours is an option prior to their child's birth, but not once the child is two or more years old.¹⁷

¹⁴ BMFSFJ (Eds.): loc.cit., p.19.

¹⁵ Volz, Rainer: „Zwischen ‚Alleinernährer‘ und ‚aktivem Vater‘: Wandlungen und Widersprüche männlicher Rollenbilder in Deutschland am Beispiel der Vaterrolle“ in: Dokumentation der Tagung „Eigenverantwortung, private und öffentliche Solidarität – Rollenleitbilder im Familien- und Sozialrecht im europäischen Vergleich“; Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (Eds.), Berlin 2008, p. 164.

¹⁶ Volz, Rainer: loc.cit., p.164.

¹⁷ BMFSFJ (Eds.): loc.cit., p.19.

3. Expectations: Employer versus employee

Along with people's individual expectations, support within the family and social environment, conditions in the workplace, local infrastructure and prevailing trends in economic and social policy all influence the process of women's re-entry into the working world.

This is why having managed to return to work after a family-related break, a large number of women give up their jobs before very long because their employer's expectations do not match their own. It essentially comes down to a clash of cultures: the woman has her family to think about and the employer must focus on business needs. Calls for mobility and flexibility to be a given on the one side clash with the desire for part-time work or the opportunity to work from home on the other. The issues of working hours and working location can soon become insurmountable hurdles that hinder a woman's attempts to return to work.

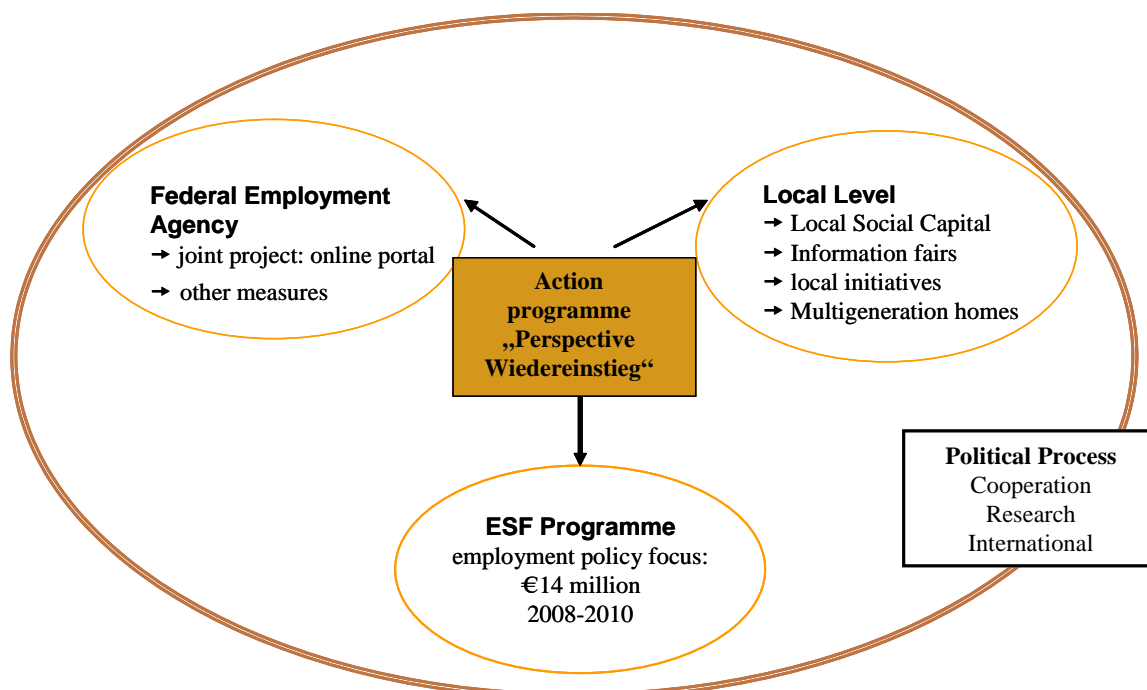
Women who have not worked for a number of years can also find that expertise and technical developments in the workplace have advanced so far in the meantime that they find themselves at a competitive disadvantage. They either have to catch up in a very short space of time or seek a completely different type of employment. Further education and training are thus vital to women's successful return to work.

On the whole, the findings outlined above affect all the milieu groups identified in the Sinus study, albeit to differing degrees. The subject of reintegration into the labour market is not purely a women's issue. The transition phase it involves affects the whole family and the process impacts on men's roles as husbands, partners and fathers.

IV. Contents of the *Perspektive Wiedereinstieg* Programme (Vocational Reintegration as a Perspective)

1. The three pillars of the programme

The three main pillars of the *Perspektive Wiedereinstieg* (Vocational Reintegration as a Perspective) programme are shown in the following chart¹⁸ and described in detail below:



a) ESF Programme: *Perspektive Wiedereinstieg* (Vocational Reintegration as a Perspective)

With the ESF-funded *Perspektive Wiedereinstieg* (Vocational Reintegration as a Perspective) programme, strategies will be developed which take account of personal circumstances in order to find ways of integrating women into the employment market after a family-related break from work. A multi-locational model is planned in conjunction with the Federal Employment Agency, with whom the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior, Citizens, Women and Youth has concluded a cooperation agreement. Using the findings of the Sinus studies for guidance, the project management agencies will provide ongoing support both for women wishing to return to work and for their families for the entire duration of the reintegration process (see Section III: Focus of the Programme).

The project management agencies act as a 'bridge' between the Federal Employment Agency, the women wanting to return to work, their spouses or partners, their families, prospective employers, further education and training institutes, and other organisations. The aim is to test alternative approaches which fill the gaps in the existing offers. The plan

¹⁸ Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (Eds.): Aktionsprogramm Perspektive Wiedereinstieg. p. 6, Berlin 2008.

is to increase the number of (long-term) placements in secure employment relationships and form a closer link between the Federal Employment Agency and relevant actors.

Estimates show that the current ESF budget of €14 million will provide funding for between six and ten programme locations. Thus, the programme is designed to test new ideas (quality not quantity) rather than aiming for country-wide coverage. Through careful selection of the locations and evaluation of the results, products can be developed for incorporation into the package of services provided by the Federal Employment Agency to provide a kick-off incentive (where appropriate, including in areas funded by the German states (*Länder*) and local authorities). Analysis and comparison of the alternative approaches adopted in the various locations will help identify practicable (sustainable) models and strategies.

The funding period starts in March 2009 and will end in 2011. The term of application ended on October 31. 124 institutions and private organisations have filed an application. In mid-January a prominently assigned Jury, inter alia federal minister Dr. Ursula von der Leyen and chairman of the federal employment agency Dr. Frank-Jürgen Weise, will term the project management agencies.

b) Online portal Perspective Wiedereinstieg

The research carried out prior to launching the *Perspektive Wiedereinstieg* programme showed that while the Federal and *Länder* (state) governments and local authorities fund a range of very different agencies, programmes and measures that also target women who want to return to work, such promotion is not always readily visible. This makes it difficult for women when looking for advice on a certain issue, for specific types of support or trying to find a job in their immediate vicinity. The advisory services take very different forms and the fact that they also target this particular group often goes unrecognised.

These findings led to the idea of using an online portal to advertise the existence of this varied yet confusing advisory environment, make it transparent and easier to understand. The website thus consolidates existing regional and publicly funded services. The 'returning to work' website assists women who want to return to work after a long family-related break from employment and who would like advice and information on where to start. It acts as a guide and helps women negotiate the wealth of information and advisory services on offer. The project is carried out in conjunction with the Federal Employment Agency.

The launch of the project is foreseen in January 2009. The website will be funded for three years.

c) Local level

From December 2008 the new funding period for the ESF-programme Local Social Capital (LOS) will include promotion of women returning to work after a family-related employment break. One of the aims of the programme is to improve the employment prospects for women who are having difficulty returning to the labour market and to assist their integration into society and the working world. The programme is implemented and managed on a

decentral basis by local coordination offices belonging to the local authorities and which are chosen by means of a strategy competition. The selected local authorities work together with local actors to develop local action plans and establish support committees in which members of the target groups are represented. The committees use the local action plans to decide how to allocate ESF-provided funding and award micro-grants of up to €10,000 to small, local initiatives and organisations.

The micro projects eligible for LOS funding involve a range of measures which target women who wish to return to work. Measures of this type can include career orientation and advice, flexible training projects specially designed to meet women's needs (perhaps being held at pre-agreed times), integrated childcare provision, ongoing advisory and support services, profiling and coaching, courses on how to apply for jobs, further education and training (e.g. in media use), and assistance in business start-ups and succession to encourage self-employment.

The *Infobörsen für Frauen* (Information Fairs for Women) held in numerous places throughout the country and which have been funded by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth since 2007 are an important instrument for the political information brokering. Information fairs for women are local events which target women from all cultures and age groups, the aim being to inform and empower them in issues such as health, careers, old age provision and work-life balance.

Over 60 percent of these fairs focus on **employment and opportunities**. At about 20 percent of them, visitors receive information on **returning to work** after a family-related employment break and are pointed to appropriate advisory services.

As part of the *Perspektive Wiedereinstieg* programme, dedicated information days (*Infotag Wiedereinstieg*) are held on the subject of returning to work after raising a family. They highlight the importance and complexity of this subject. Individual preconditions, the support of the family, framework of the companies, the infrastructure and political developments in society and economy influence the process of the vocational reintegration. Against this background 95% of women and 90% of men ask the policy for support the vocational reintegration.

The information days will link local resources and competencies to facilitate the framework for the vocational reintegration. An additional 17 events have been held in 2008, another 60 information days will take place in 2009.

The existing programmes run by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth – *Lokale Bündnisse für Familie* (Local Initiatives for Families) and *Mehrgenerationenhäuser* (Multigeneration Homes) will also be incorporated into the *Perspektive Wiedereinstieg* programme. The organisations responsible for the two sub-programmes have been informed about the research results and about the action programme itself. They have been asked to take account of these findings in their work and to support the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth in implementing the action programme at local level. This constitutes another step in linking the two initiatives with the main programme to help women return to work.

2. Frame of the Action Programme

a) Research

Sinus Sociovision, the Social Science Research Centre Berlin (WZB) and the Federal Statistical Office collect data and facts. The Sinus studies on *Beruflicher Wiedereinstieg nach der Familiengründung. Bedürfnisse, Erfahrungen, Barrieren* (Vocational Reintegration as a Perspective: Needs, Experiences, Obstacles) and *Wege zur Gleichstellung heute und morgen* (Paths to Gender Equality, Today and Tomorrow) looked at the attitudes, behavioural patterns and problems connected with gender equality in general and with the subject of women's return to work in particular. The results have since been published (see Section III). A further study on *Perspektive Wiedereinsteig: Ziele, Motive und Erfahrungen von Frauen vor, während und nach dem beruflichen Wiedereinstieg* (Vocational Reintegration as a Perspective: Women's Aims, Incentives and Experiences Prior, During and After Returning to Work) is planned for publication in September 2008.

The WZB study on *Berufsrückkehrinnen: Die Potentiale nicht erwerbstätiger Frauen für den Arbeitsmarkt* (Women Returning to Work: Non-Employed Women's Potential in the Labour Market) is designed to identify the potential of non-employed women and assess the opportunities available for their reintegration into the working world. The interim findings of the study should be available in September 2008.

b) International exchange

At European level, achieving equal opportunities for men and women, particularly in the working life, has been a focal point of EU economic and social policy from the outset. Equality between men and women is an explicitly worded objective in a range of key policy areas relevant to people's financial security – the EU's employment strategy, pensions reform policy and anti-poverty strategy, for example. At the EU Peer Review Conference in November 2008, a glance beyond the national horizon will highlight experience gained in other European countries, be it the negative effects of the resistance and obstacles faced or the positive impact of the adopted supportive measures.

The European comparison serves not only to identify potential best-practice models; as ever it assists choice of location and information gathering, gives a better understanding of the needs involved, aids analysis of the issues in question and helps in finding appropriate solutions.

c) Public relations work

The information and proposal strategy used in the *Perspektive Wiedereinstieg* action programme is currently being finalised and the necessary measures developed. The strategy will comprise a range of different campaigns tailored to the target groups covered by the programme (businesses,



industry associations and other organisations, the general public and people directly affected by the problems of returning to work after a family-related employment break).

Inter alia it is foreseen to visit German entrepreneurs in 2009 to heighten the employer's awareness for the target group and to present best-practise-examples of enterprises that already have dealt with the subject. This shall cause sustainability and model effects for other enterprises as well. Additionally it is planned that different associations of enterprises conclude a joint statements of commitment to this subject in 2009.

A specially designed logo adorns all components of the programme.

V. Questions in the context of the Peer Review

The Peer Review also takes place to discuss the following questions with the member states:

Life Cycle Approach

- According to the life cycle approach how does working life of women look like in the member states? Does the fact of a long family-related break from employment also exist in the member states?
- Is there a correlation between the number of children and the length of the interrupted career? Is there a correlation between the educational level of women and the length of family-related employment breaks? Does a discussion about 'the rush hour of life' exist? What is the employment rate of women in the age of 45 and above? Which role does part-time work play in a life cycle oriented policy?
- Is the life cycle approach taken into account within the member states?
- How are transitions supported in the different life phases of a woman?

Responsibilities

- Is the politics interested on the group of women returning to work resp. the group of older women? Does the need for action exist at all? Is this issue a topic for the future (keyword: Flexicurity)?
- If yes, where does the responsibility for this topic in the member states lie?
- Which roles do networks, associations and advice centres play? Do there exist any?
- To what extent are companies / employers embedded into that topic or at least beware of it?
- Does experience with coaching of mentoring for women returning to work exist?

Integration of women into labour market within the member states

- Do incentive systems for the employment of women exist? How do they look like?
- Is there a support of integration of older women into employment (45+) organized within the member states?
- Do 'return-to-work-projects' for older women or especially for women returning to work exist?
- If yes, which experiences did you do with those? How do they look like?

Sinus studies

- Do similar studies exist in the member states? If yes, which results containing the topic are known?
- Are the results of our Sinus studies familiar/interesting/transferable (key terms: returning to work as a process; the importance of the family/spouse; balancing the expectations of the employer and the women returning to work)?
- Which kind of images of mothers and fathers are predominant? Do tendencies for retraditionalisation exist after starting a family in the member states as well?

Inequality in pay

- How does the integration of good educated resp. high educated women into employment (employment gap) look like in the member states? How does the pay gap look like in the member states? Do you assume that there is a correlation between both data?
- How can a labour participation of good educated women be supported that their career and income chances won't fall behind of those of men? Do you consider a shorter period of the interrupted career for less than three years (also for mothers of several children) indispensable necessary? Or, is it possible and important for the improvement of the income chances to support the potentials of the returnees independent of the length of the interrupted career?

Flexicurity approach

- Is the Flexicurity approach taken into account in the policies within the member states? Are gender aspects considered within this approach?

VI. List of Literature

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