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Gender equality in the workforce: Reconciling work, private and family life in Europe

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Justice

Gender equality in the workforce

Reconciling work, private and family life in Europe

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Preface

This report summarises and synthesises the findings of a research project entitled ‘Reconciling work, private and family life: production of statistical reports’, which consisted of six related Short Statistical Reports (SSRs). The SSRs examined the topics of the Barcelona childcare targets (SSR1); labour force participation rates of men, women and parents (SSR2); balancing work and family for single parents (SSR3); gender inequalities in the transition from school to work (SSR4); share of earnings and domestic work within couples (SSR5); and access to family-friendly working schedules (SSR6).

This research was commissioned by the European Commission Directorate General for Justice and Fundamental Rights. It was undertaken by RAND Europe and researchers at the Department of Sociology at the University of Groningen.

RAND Europe is an independent not-for-profit policy research organisation that aims to improve policy and decision-making in the public interest, through research and analysis. RAND Europe’s clients include European governments, institutions, NGOs and firms with a need for rigorous, independent, multidisciplinary analysis. The research group led by Professor Melinda Mills at the Department of Sociology, University of Groningen has a strong record of high quality scientific research in the area of cross-national comparative research, gender equality, work-family reconciliation and advanced statistical analysis with large-scale data.

This report has been peer-reviewed in accordance with RAND’s quality assurance standards.

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Abstract

This study examined the work, family and private life conflicts at different stages in one's life course (from school-to-work transition to parenthood). We investigated the extent to which men and women face these challenges differently and examined their labour force participation, working hours, and contributions to household income and to domestic work. Throughout the report we observed improvements in gender equality over recent decades, but women continue to lag behind on labour force participation and earnings, face slower transition to their first job, while contributing more to domestic tasks even if they are breadwinners. These challenges are particularly pronounced in the presence of children. Mothers have lower employment rates, shorter hours and interrupted their careers more due to childcare, compared to women without children and men (with or without children).

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Summary

This report is a compilation of the core findings from a series of six Short Statistical Reports (SSRs) about reconciliation of work, private and family life. The individual SSRs examined:

- the progress towards attaining the Barcelona childcare targets (SSR1)
- the labour force participation rates of parents: men and women at work(SSR2)
- balancing work and family for single parents (SSR3)
- gender inequalities in the transition from school to work (SSR4)
- share of earnings and domestic work within couples (SSR5)
- family-friendly working schedules (SSR6).

Each of these SSRs provided a statistical portrait of key trends, challenges and the effect of various policy levers using the latest nationally-comparable data from Eurostat, including the European Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) (in particular the 2010 Reconciling Work and Family Ad Hoc Module; 2009 Entry of Young People into the Labour Market Ad Hoc Module), the 2010 Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) and additional European Union Statistics and various macro (country) level indicators.

This report reorganises and synthesises the key findings from each of the individual SSRs. It begins with an analysis of the gender gaps in early career (Chapter 2). We then examine the potential role of parenthood in employment activities in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 delves into household level dynamics and examines the male and female partners' respective earnings contributions, as well as the relation between earnings contributions and time spent on domestic work. In Chapter 5, some possible policy levers that promote gender equality in the work force, namely provision of childcare and flexible working hours, are discussed. Finally, in Chapter 6 we summarise the key findings and discuss policy-relevant recommendations for the EU.

Our analysis highlighted the large gender disparities in the employment situation between parents and non-parents. Mothers in many western European countries continue to have a lower rate of employment, experience underemployment and work fewer hours than women without children and men (with or without children).

More generally, a theme that recurred in the chapters of this report was the persistent inequality among social groups. We demonstrated a social and income gradient:

- in the use of childcare (Chapter 5),

- in labour market participation (Chapter 3), earnings, unemployment and occupational level of single mothers (also Chapter 3),
- for women and those studying particular educational fields on the entry into employment (Chapter 2),
- between couples in the earnings and division of household labour (Chapter 4) and
- in unequal access to family friendly schedules for women, younger workers, the lower educated and those in fixed term contracts.

It was particularly clear that certain groups such as single parents were more vulnerable to the challenge of work-life reconciliation. It is thus essential to consider not only women, men, parents or non-parents as homogeneous groups, but also pay attention to the heterogeneity within these groups. Obstacles to childcare, labour market participation and ultimately work-life reconciliation are inherently linked with socio-economic gradients such as differences in educational level and income. Work-life reconciliation policies targeting vulnerable groups are much needed.

Another key finding was that long-standing social norms play a role in perpetuating gender inequality in employment. Although women across many EU Member States now achieve higher levels of education and labour market participation than in the past, our results also show that the male partner as the sole or main provider remains the dominant household model across Europe. The ‘shift’ from the male-breadwinner/female-carer model towards the dual worker model of the family (Lewis et al. 2008) has therefore not taken place. Furthermore, our analysis of self-reported time use indicated that women spend far greater hours in domestic work than men, even when the woman is the main or sole earner. In the light of these findings, it seems unrealistic to expect a significant increase in female employment rates or hours worked as long as men’s contribution to domestic work continues to be only about half of women’s.

This report identified forerunners or nations that have ‘**best practices**’. In relation to childcare and meeting the Barcelona targets, the forerunners (Denmark, Sweden, Iceland and France) were found to have devoted a substantial part of public expenditure to childcare. Across the EU-27 as a whole, data showed that 25 per cent of women who do not work or work part-time claim that it is due to a lack of availability of childcare services; 53 per cent because childcare is too expensive and only 4 per cent due to childcare being of insufficient quality (from our analysis of LFS 2010 Ad hoc module). There were some variations across countries. In Belgium, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria and Croatia, the lack of childcare services was the most frequently reported reason for not working or working part-time. Concern over the quality of childcare as a reason for not working or working part-time was rare, except in Bulgaria (13 per cent) and Hungary (20 per cent).

Beyond formal constraints such as availability, affordability, and quality of childcare, women and parents may opt not to take their children to formal institutions for cultural reasons. In fact, we found that use of formal childcare for infants under three is not universally accepted across Member States. This explained why some countries persistently fall behind in meeting formal childcare use targets. This finding suggested the opportunity for women to enter the labour force is intricately linked with gender roles and cultural norms about the care of very young children. It highlighted the importance of engaging in a critical reflection of the formulation of policy goals and the means to achieve them.

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Abbreviations

EU	European Union
EU-LFS	European Union Labour Force Survey
EU-SILC	European Union Survey of Income and Living Conditions
SSRs	Short Statistical Reports
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

<i>EU 27 Member States</i>	Austria	AT
	Belgium	BE
	Bulgaria	BG
	Czech Republic	CZ
	Denmark	DK
	Germany	DE
	Estonia	EE
	Ireland	IE
	Greece	EL
	Spain	ES
	France	FR
	Italy	IT
	Cyprus	CY
	Latvia	LV
	Lithuania	LT
	Luxembourg	LU
	Hungary	HU
	Malta	MT
	Netherlands	NL
	Poland	PL
	Portugal	PT
	Romania	RO
	Slovenia	SI
	Slovakia	SK
	Finland	FI
	Sweden	SE
	United Kingdom	UK

<i>New EU Member State</i>	Croatia ¹	HR
<i>Candidate country</i>	Iceland	IS
<i>Third country</i>	Norway	NO

¹ The analysis in this report predates Croatia's accession to the EU.

1. Introduction

Equality between men and women is one of the European Union's fundamental values, dating back to 1957 when the principle of equal pay for equal work became part of the Treaty of Rome (European Commission 2013). The European Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010–2015 cites five priority areas for achieving gender equality: equal economic independence; equal pay for equal work and work of equal value; equality in decision-making; dignity, integrity and an end to gender-based violence; and promoting gender equality beyond the EU. This report focuses on gender equality in the labour market and concentrates on the ability for men and women to reconcile roles and responsibilities in the workforce, in the family and private life.

1.1. Background: Gender equality and work-life reconciliation

The EU has seen some remarkable improvements of the position of women in the workforce in recent decades. The proportion of women between the ages of 25 and 54 in the EU who are in paid employment has continued to increase over the past 15 years before consolidating at just above 70 per cent since 2007 (Eurostat 2013).

The massive entry of women into the labour market across many European countries has brought new challenges for combining paid employment with family responsibilities (Adema and Whiteford 2007). Although the relationship between motherhood and employment inactivity appear to be closely related, this relation is not clear cut. Empirical studies and theory from the literature² acknowledge that labour force participation and employment, on the one hand, and fertility decision-making and childcare on the other, are linked not only at a point in time but have a continuous interplay throughout the life course. Moreover, the relationship between engagement in employment and having children has evolved over time.

A focus on work-life reconciliation necessitates the examination of the ways in which participation in employment and family roles collide and cause tensions and inequality for individuals, couples and families. A range of publications from Eurostat sought to detail the current situation in some of the issues outlined above. A report on 'narrowing the education gap between women and men' (Eurostat 2007a) showed that young women had surpassed men in their age group in terms of formal qualifications. Eurostat data also confirmed the encouraging trends towards increased female employment rates, in the

² For example: Hotz and Miller (1988), Cigno (1991), Francesconi (2002), Apps and Rees (2004), Del Boca and Sauer (2009) and Del Boca et al. (2009).

report ‘People outside the labour force: the downward trend continues’ (Eurostat 2007b). This revealed the share of inactive women of the working age population (15–64 years) had declined from 40.5 per cent to 36.7 per cent between 1999 and 2006. However, women in the labour force were disproportionately concentrated in a minority of economic sectors (Eurostat 2007c), and that the entrepreneurial gap between men and women showed little sign of narrowing (Eurostat 2007d).

Policymakers at the EU and Member State level have recognised the trends and associated challenges discussed above. Over the past decades, they have prepared strategies, formulated goals and targets, drafted legislation and started initiatives to achieve them. These include the Barcelona Objectives on access to affordable and high quality child care facilities, the European Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010–2015, and the European Pact for Gender Equality (2010–2020). With the Europe 2020 Strategy, the European Commission (2010a) has set a target of 75 per cent overall employment rates for the working age population between 20 and 64 years of age. In order to achieve this target, it is necessary that female labour force participation and employment continue to rise in the coming years.

1.2. Structure of this report

This report aims to provide a statistical portrait of key trends, and examine the effect of some of the possible policy levers. The results presented in this report are based on analysis of the 2010 EU Statistics on Income and living Conditions (EU-SILC) and the 2010 Labour Force Survey (LFS) including its Reconciling Work and Family Ad Hoc Module and the 2009 Entry of Young People into the Labour Market Ad Hoc Module. We examine the differences between men and women in different Member States and try to explain them. Details of the statistical methods, population covered, data sources and variables used can be found in the individual reports in the Annex.

The following chapters discuss and summarise the various trends and challenges for work-life balance in the EU and the differences between men and women at different stages in life. We begin our analysis by examining the gender gaps that emerge during the transition from school to work among young people (Chapter 2). We then examine the potential role of parenthood in employment activities in Chapter 3. Cognisant that employment rates do not tell the full story, we investigate actual working hours and the reasons for interrupting employment or working part-time. In Chapter 3, we also discuss lone parent households in detail, a household composition that is particularly susceptible to challenges in achieving work-life balance and vulnerable to poverty and inactivity. By adopting a couple-level approach, Chapter 4 goes beyond previous analyses that focus on differences between men versus women. Here we examine the male and female partners’ respective earnings contributions and the relation between earnings contributions and time spent in domestic household work. In Chapter 5, we examine a number of possible policy levers to promote gender equality in the work force. Finally, in Chapter 6 we summarise the key findings of this statistical portrait and draw a number of policy relevant conclusions for the EU, its Member States and policymakers.

2. Gender inequalities in the early career

The questions of why and how gender inequalities emerge and persist throughout the life courses of individuals are central to policy. Although women have made considerable gains in educational attainment, they continue to have unequal labour market outcomes. To examine how gender inequalities already emerge in early educational paths and choices, the types of first jobs and opportunities to combine employment with parenthood can help to understand how gender inequalities emerge. The school-to-work transition is a crucial event in the labour market careers of young people with the transition out of the educational system into the first significant job having lasting effects on the entire life course (Mills and Blossfeld 2005; Müller et al. 2002). In recent years, young people have been challenged by increasing uncertainty and comparatively high unemployment. These labour market trends have been attributed to several structural changes, including globalisation, the rise in international competition, skill-biased technological change and the recent economic crisis (Acemoglu 2002; Barbieri 2009; Mills et al. 2008). Although these factors affect all Europeans, they have been demonstrated to impact young people who are labour market ‘outsiders’ in a deeper manner (Bell and Blanchflower 2011).

The structure of labour supply has changed. Tertiary education in EU Member States has substantially expanded and the educational attainment of recent female graduates is now on a par with or even exceeds that of their male counterparts (OECD 2011a). However, even though women have made considerable gains in education, they continue to have unequal labour market outcomes (Charles and Bradley 2002; Reimer and Steinmetz 2009; Van de Werfhorst 2004). Isolating gender differences in the transition from school to work, and examining why these differences may emerge, has been largely absent until now. In this chapter we examine whether there is a gendered transition from school to work, which can provide evidence to allow EU Member States to learn from the best practices and each other and identifying policies and institutional systems that work best.³

We examined the time or duration that it took from leaving the education system for the last time to the first job held for more than three months. The focus was on young people who left education between 2004 and 2009. Among the predictors taken into account were sex, age, educational level, educational field, vocational education, and co-residing children. Furthermore, we accounted for several time-varying country-level indicators, such as employment protection legislation (as obtained from the OECD database

³ For our empirical analyses, we drew upon the EU Labour Force Survey 2009 ad hoc module 2009 ‘Entry of Young People into the Labour Market’, which focuses on individuals aged 15–34 years living in 27 EU Member States plus Iceland and Norway.

as reported in Venn (2009); Muravyev (2010)), GDP per capita (Eurostat, 2012a) and unemployment rate (Eurostat 2012b).

Our analyses revealed that there is considerable cross-national variation in the speed of entering a first job after leaving formal education across the 29 countries. Youth in Southern and Eastern European countries have a substantially longer period of searching for their first job after leaving education. Countries with the shortest job search periods for youth include the Netherlands, Iceland, Denmark, Norway and the United Kingdom. There are, however, substantial gender differences from leaving school to starting the first job, which we explore in more detail below.

2.1. Substantial gender differences in the transition to first job across Member States

Our findings reveal that there is substantial variation in the speed of entering a first job across countries. In southern and eastern European countries, the speed of transition is substantially slower than the rest of Europe. Men and women have a similar speed of transition to their first job in the first few months after leaving education, but later on women appear to have a significantly slower speed of entry. There are also substantial differences in the speed that men and women enter their first jobs across countries. Men enter their first job more rapidly than women in Italy, Germany, Spain and Portugal. Conversely, women appear to enter earlier than men particularly in Greece, Malta, Finland and Bulgaria (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Gender gap in the school-to-work transition



Source: EU-LFS 2009 AHM (authors' calculations)

Across all countries education has a protective effect on youth, albeit stronger for young men than young women. Graduates with the highest level of education make a considerably faster transition to their first

job, followed by those with medium levels of education and those with lower secondary levels of education making markedly slower transitions. Women who have the highest level of education have a faster transition to first job than those in low or medium levels of education. In comparison to men however, women at all levels of education fare worse than their male counterparts who have comparable education credentials. Although the gender gap closes as the educational level rises from low to high, even when we compare the highest educated group, higher educated men still fare better than higher educated women. One key reason for these gender differences is the different type of educational fields that men and women opt to study. Women are underrepresented in the educational fields that are general,⁴ and the more classically male studies of engineering, manufacturing and construction, or agriculture. Conversely, women are overrepresented in all other types of education, and particularly teaching and education, humanities and arts, social sciences, business and law, sciences, and services.

Youth who study more 'male-typical' fields such as engineering, manufacturing and construction enter their first job significantly faster. However, a central finding is that this is a highly gendered effect that can only be found for men. In fact, when we examine this result in more detail we see that women who study these male-typical fields actually experience the reverse effect (compared to those who study female-typical fields) and have a significantly slower rate of entry into their first job than their male counterparts. Although women appear to be making progress in terms of attaining higher levels of education, they are only making headway when they remain in the more traditional 'female-typical' educational fields of study of education, teaching and healthcare. These are educational degrees that lead to jobs that will eventually afford them more flexibility and better work-life reconciliation. A recent study by Begall and Mills (2013) demonstrated that women in these fields of study and related occupations have more children and have them earlier, suggesting that women are aware that they can more easily combine these occupations with family responsibilities.

Youths with vocational training – especially when it is at least partially workplace-based – make a more rapid transition into starting their first job than those who have no vocational training. This suggests that giving youths a foot in the door and early labour market experience is an important best practice policy. Once again, however, the results are highly gendered. The positive effect of vocational education and training (VET) is largely driven by young males, with women experiencing the reverse effect and making a significantly slower move to their first job. This echoes our previous finding on the negative impact of studying a male-typical field for women. Since VET workplace training is often within these more male-typical studies, we appear to be finding the same effect: women appear to be penalised in the early labour market for choosing male-typical studies.

Although we do not directly model causality, men who have co-resident children make more rapid transitions into their first job, with the reverse effect for women (see details in SSR4). Compared to fathers, mothers are significantly less likely to have made a fast transition to their first job. When we compare women with and without children, we also see that those without children have markedly faster transitions. This strong effect demonstrates that work-life conflict already penetrates the early labour

⁴ 'General' education fields are those with broad programmes which cover a wide range of subjects such as languages and literature, natural sciences or mathematics which are generally in preparation for further studies (Andersson and Olsson 1999).

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market experiences of young women and remains as a core policy concern for integrating young women in the labour market.

3. Combining parenthood and employment

In recent decades the EU has seen some remarkable improvements in gender equality in the workforce. Female employment rates have increased substantially (European Commission, 2010b) but despite these improvements, most Member States struggle to reach the 2020 employment rate target of 75 per cent⁵ for both women and men, and female employment rate remains considerably behind the employment rate of men in most Member States. The 2013 Joint Employment Report by the Council of the European Union (2013: 3) concluded that ‘[n]ot only has gender mainstreaming been historically a part of the European Employment Strategy, but in pursuing the Europe 2020 target of aiming to achieve a 75 per cent employment rate it must be remembered that this was set for men and women, therefore increasing the level of female labour market participation is essential. It will also help the EU manage the exit from this crisis and help promote the contribution of work to the improvement of Europe's social situation’.

Our analyses in this chapter examine female employment issues, with a focus on the challenges relating to combining parenthood and employment. Our results suggest mothers have a much lower employment rates than women without children and those who are in work are more likely to be part-timers. Additionally, their working hours and career tend to more interrupted by parenthood, compare to fathers. Detailed cross-country comparisons relating to these findings are presented next.

3.1. Mothers are underrepresented in the workforce

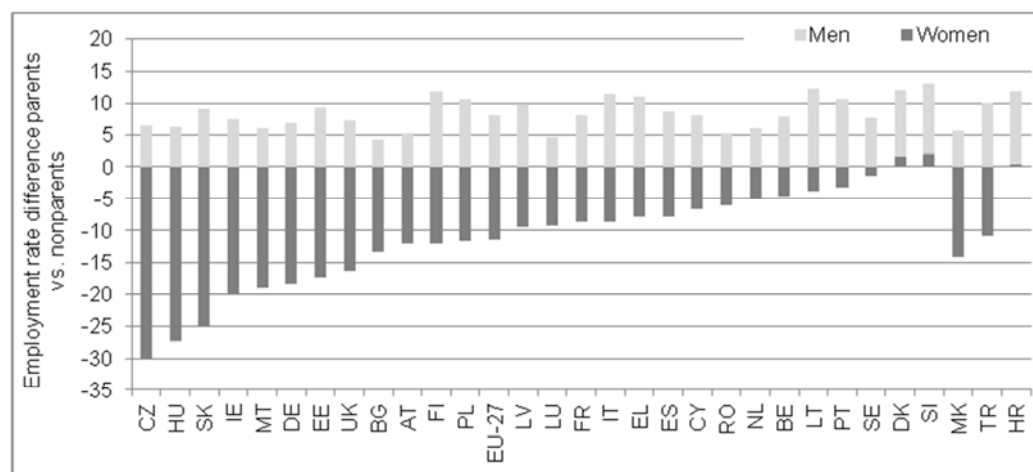
Figure 2 illustrates the difference between employment rate for women and men aged 25-49 years *with at least one child below the age of 12* minus the employment rate of *persons without any children under the age of 12* in 30 countries (EU27 plus the new Member State, Croatia and candidate countries Turkey and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). It illustrates a clear positive association between parenthood and employment for men, i.e. in all countries men who are parents are more likely to be in employment than those who are not. The association between parenthood and employment for women is primarily negative. Mothers have a higher employment rate than women without children in only 3 countries (Denmark, Croatia and Slovenia). In the Czech Republic and Hungary, for instance, the employment rate

⁵ ‘The employment rate of the population aged 20–64 should increase from the current 69% to at least 75%, including through the greater involvement of women, older workers and the better integration of migrants in the work force.’ in European Commission (2010a).

for women with children below the age of twelve is more than 29.9 and 27.4 percentage points lower than their counterparts without children, respectively. For EU27 as a whole, the is 11 percentage points.

Additionally, we observe more than a 10 percentage point difference in employment rates between fathers and male non-parents in Finland, Poland, Italy, Greece, Lithuania, Slovenia and Croatia. One possible explanation could be that men in those countries undertake substantial efforts to gain employment to support the household when approaching fatherhood status (Astone et al. 2010). Other research has shown that fathers are often more protected by employers, particularly in societies where they are seen as the main breadwinner. The causal relation may also be in the opposite direction: a secure employment situation may also be an important condition for men before embarking on parenthood. Furthermore, men with certain characteristics may be less prone to have a job and a family (e.g. low educated men have higher risk of unemployment and lower likelihood of founding a family).

Figure 2: Difference between employment rate with and without children under 12, men and women aged 25 to 49, 2010



Source: LFS main dataset (2010)

3.2. Women and particularly mothers have more part-time jobs

Our analysis further shows that across Europe the proportion of part-time workers among non-parents is much higher for women than for men, and this proportion tends to be even larger among mothers: 20.5 per cent of women (between 20 and 49 years of age) without children were working part-time in the EU as a whole in 2010 compared to 36.4 per cent of all mothers. This is in contrast to only 9 per cent of men without children and 4 per cent of fathers who had a part-time job. In the Netherlands, almost all employed mothers work part-time, and a majority of mothers work part-time in Austria, Germany and the UK. It is noteworthy that in the Netherlands part-time jobs are widely available, partly because employers are legally obliged to offer part-time contracts at the employee's request. Working part-time can be a solution for reducing work-life conflict. It should be noted, however, that due to part-time work, about 25 per cent of working Dutch women earn less than what would be considered the minimum income for being financially independent (Bosch et al., 2009).

Furthermore, our analysis suggests that in about half of the Member States, motherhood is clearly associated with a decrease in the likelihood of working 40 or more hours a week; whereas it is positively associated with working between 20 and 39 hours a week, or fewer than 19 hours a week. The shift from full-time work (40h+) to short part-time work (fewer than 19h)⁶ is particularly strong in Austria, Cyprus, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands and the UK. In France, mothers appear to reduce their worked hours to a lesser extent, which could be explained by the relatively good availability of childcare. At the other end of the spectrum, Slovenia, Croatia, Lithuania, Romania, Latvia, Portugal, and Denmark stand out as countries where mothers are more likely to work more than 40 hours a week than non-mothers (with between a 5 and 25 percentage points increase). The results for these countries are counter-intuitive and merit further research.

For men, two main patterns emerge across Europe. In northwestern European countries including the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Austria, and the UK, fewer men work 40+ hours when they are parents (with more than 10 percentage point difference between parent and non-parent). In contrast, in the Baltic and Eastern European countries, there is greater tendency among fathers to work more than 40 hours per week (compared to men without children). A combination of cultural parameters and economic context could be contributing to shaping those patterns.

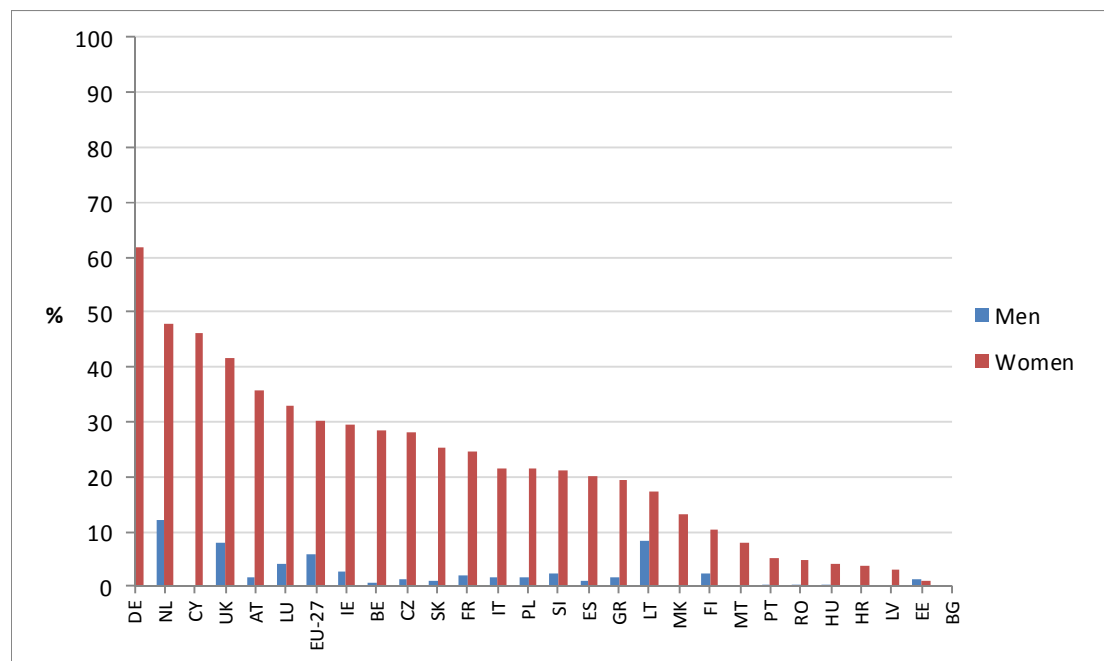
3.3. Women's work is more interrupted by parenthood than men's

When asked 'Did you reduce working hours to take care of the youngest child in the household for at least one month (excluding maternity leave)?', more women than men responded yes to the question in all EU Member States. In particular, in Germany, the Netherlands, Cyprus, UK, Austria and Luxembourg over 30 per cent of women answered yes (see Figure 4).

With regard to parental leave, our own analysis shows that only 1 per cent of fathers have taken parental leave, versus 24 per cent for mothers. Furthermore, more than 40 per cent of mothers in the EU reported that they stopped working to take care of their youngest child for at least one month longer than their maternity leave. In contrast, only 2 per cent of fathers declare they did so. Considering that longer work interruptions can potentially lead to lower probabilities to return to work, and lower wages once back at work, the disparities between fathers and mothers with regard to work interruption is likely to exacerbate gender inequalities at work.

⁶ The situation of those who engage in longer part-time work (20+ hours) are discussed in SSR2.

Figure 3: Percentage of men and women who have reduced their working hours to take care of the youngest child in the household (up to 8 years old), individuals aged 20 to 49



Source: IFS 2010 Ad hoc module

Note: This figure is based on individuals answering the following question: 'Did you reduce working hours to take care of the youngest child in the household for at least one month (excluding maternity leave)?'.

3.4. Single mothers more likely to be unemployed or in low-skilled jobs

Single parents,⁷ who generally do not have a partner to share responsibilities in employment and child care, are particularly vulnerable to the challenges of work family life reconciliation. Whereas a two-parent household parents has options, such as staggering work hours to address shorter childcare or school hours than workday hours, single parents face a greater need to work shorter and/or flexible hours in order to accommodate their children's hours, sick days, school breaks and holidays.

In the EU, the proportion of single parent households is increasing (Andersson, 2002; UNICEF 2007). The majority of single parents are female. Across Europe, 16 per cent of children come from single-mother homes (from 5.3 per cent in Greece to 28.1 per cent in the UK) and 2.1 per cent from single-father homes (from in 0.7 per cent Cyprus to 15.1 per cent Belgium). Considering this fact, the rest of this section will focus on single mothers.

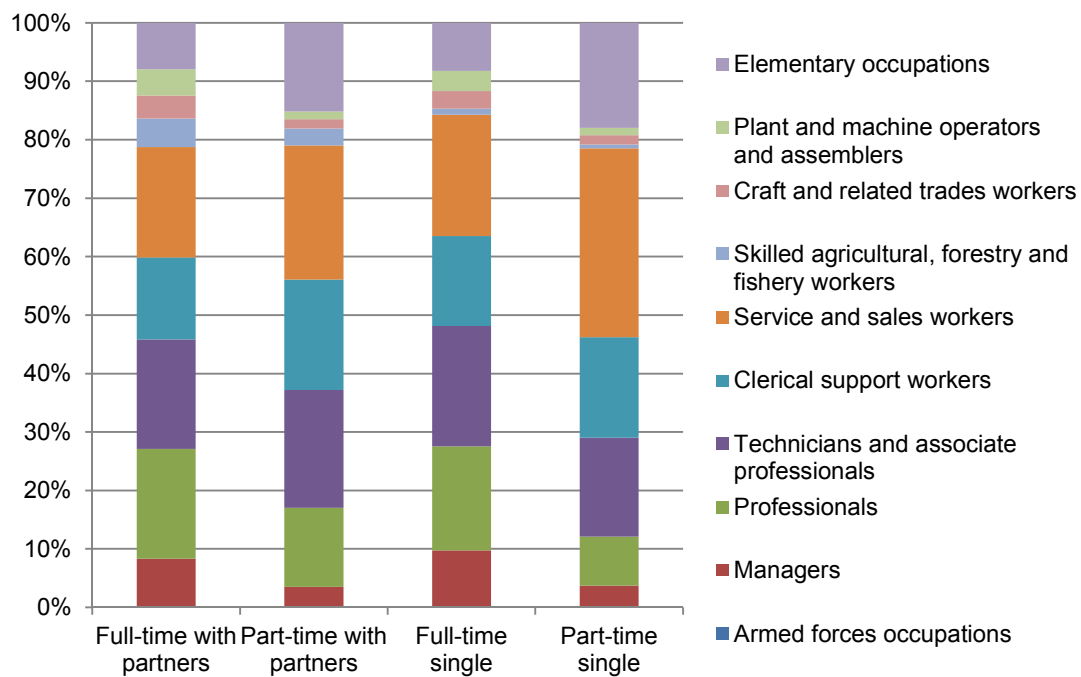
⁷ An adult is identified as a 'single parent' if he/she lives with at least one child but not with another adult. The data do not allow us to go into detailed issues such as the sharing of custody.

Across the EU, among those women in the labour force,⁸ about 10 per cent of partnered mothers are unemployed and seek employment, compared to about 15 per cent of single mothers. This may explain, at least partly, an increasing socioeconomic gap. Mothers with partners are able to share care responsibility as well as contribute to the household income whereas single parents are less able to provide even a single source of income. Single parents are considered to be a major risk group for a variety of factors and particularly given that across Western industrialised countries single mother households have a much higher poverty rate than two parent households (van Stolk et al. 2011; European Commission 2007; McLanahan 2004). Previous studies (Plantenga and Remery 2010) suggest the only countries where single mothers are more likely to work full-time than mothers with partners are those with flexible work policies. Young single mothers (15–29 years of age) tend to be far more likely to work part-time than young single women without children (with the exception of the Netherlands and Luxembourg). Our analysis examines the implications of single mothers' overrepresentation in part-time work, by examining the occupations that single mothers are engaged in and compares that to partnered mothers in employment (Figure 4). Part-time mothers, partnered as well as single, are much less likely to be in managerial and professional occupations, and are much more likely to be in elementary occupations or to be service or sales workers compared to full-time working mothers.

Furthermore, our analysis indicates that hardly any of the mothers (with or without partner) working in part-time jobs report that they are voluntarily give up full-time work to seek further education. This suggests that these are individuals unlikely to gain competitive and marketable skills through continued education. This pattern may contribute to fewer labour force opportunities in the immediate term as well as the long term.

⁸ As SSR3 was intended to focus on single parents and employment, descriptives include only those in the labour market.

Figure 4: Occupation type for mothers by partner and employment status in 24 selected countries in the EU



Source: EU SILC 2010

4. Earnings contributions and sharing domestic work within couples

The previous chapter showed that despite improvements, there is still a long way to go until we can speak of gender equality in the EU workforce. But what about within households? What can the dynamics within couples tell us about whether gender equality in Europe is improving or worsening?

Since 2000, several governments have introduced policies aimed at facilitating a dual-earner model, notably Germany and the UK (Lewis et al. 2008). Another potential factor contributing to a shift⁹ towards a more equal earnings distribution within households has been the recent economic crisis. Recent studies suggest that the increased unemployment rates or risk of unemployment for the male-breadwinner may have led to a more substantial relative position of women's earnings (Bettio et al. 2012). However, longstanding differences in the comprehensiveness of work-family reconciliation infrastructure across countries (Esping-Andersen 1990 and 1999; Hantrais 2004), and in cultural attitudes towards gender roles in the market and domestic work spheres may inhibit significant changes.

In this chapter we examine whether a trend can be observed in recent years in the EU towards a more gender-equal model, in which the dominance of the male-breadwinner model is waning in comparison to the dual-earner model. Specifically, we discuss changes in the earnings structure of prime working-age couples¹⁰ and differences between Member States. Finally, we investigate the extent to which more equal earnings relate to more equal domestic work contributions.

⁹ Such a shift may be structural or temporary (i.e. changes that could be reversed in future as the economic crisis ends). In this paper we do not attempt to tackle the question of whether the change is structural or not, as we are only presenting descriptive statistics. Instead, we focus on whether a shift can be observed.

¹⁰ The analysis in this paper focuses on prime working-age couples defined by the woman's age in the range 20–49, and with at least one earner in the couple. Such household includes households with children, and households with other adults, but excludes multi-adult households in which none of the adults are couples. Same sex couples are also excluded as they do not support an analysis of gender differences. We selected prime working-age couples based on the woman's age, since the husband/partner is more often older than his female partner and selecting based on the woman's age then avoids the potential elimination of a significant number of younger couples, who may be much more likely to face challenges in work-family reconciliation than older couples.

4.1. Persistent majority of male sole- or main-earners households

Based on Raley et al. (2006), we look at five types of couples, which are distinguished by the partners' contribution to household earnings. In this typology, the main provider is determined by the individual who is responsible for 60 per cent or more of the couple's earnings. Table 1 presents the distribution of couples according to this typology for 27 Member States plus Iceland and Norway.

Households in which the male partner is the main provider (i.e., dual-earner households in which the woman contributes less than 40 per cent of the couples' earnings) form the largest group, comprising 37 per cent of all households in 2010. This is followed by households with relatively equal male and female contributions (29 per cent). Male sole provider households make up 21 per cent of the households, whereas female main provider households (i.e., households in which the female earner contributes to over 60 per cent of the couple's earnings) make up only 9 per cent. The smallest group is female sole provider households of only 5 per cent.

Table 1: Distribution of couples by earnings structure, for EU27 plus Iceland and Norway

	Weighted share
Male sole provider	21%
Male main provider (Female <40%)	37%
Relatively equal	29%
Female main provider (Female >=60%)	9%
Female sole provider	5%

Source: EU-SILC 2010, authors' own calculations

Note: Survey sample weights for each country were applied to take into account unequal sampling probabilities.

More details about the variation by country are shown in Figure 5. Figure 5a illustrates results for the first two categories (male sole provider and male main provider households), while Figure 5b illustrates the results for the remaining three categories (relatively equal partners, female main provider, and female sole provider households).

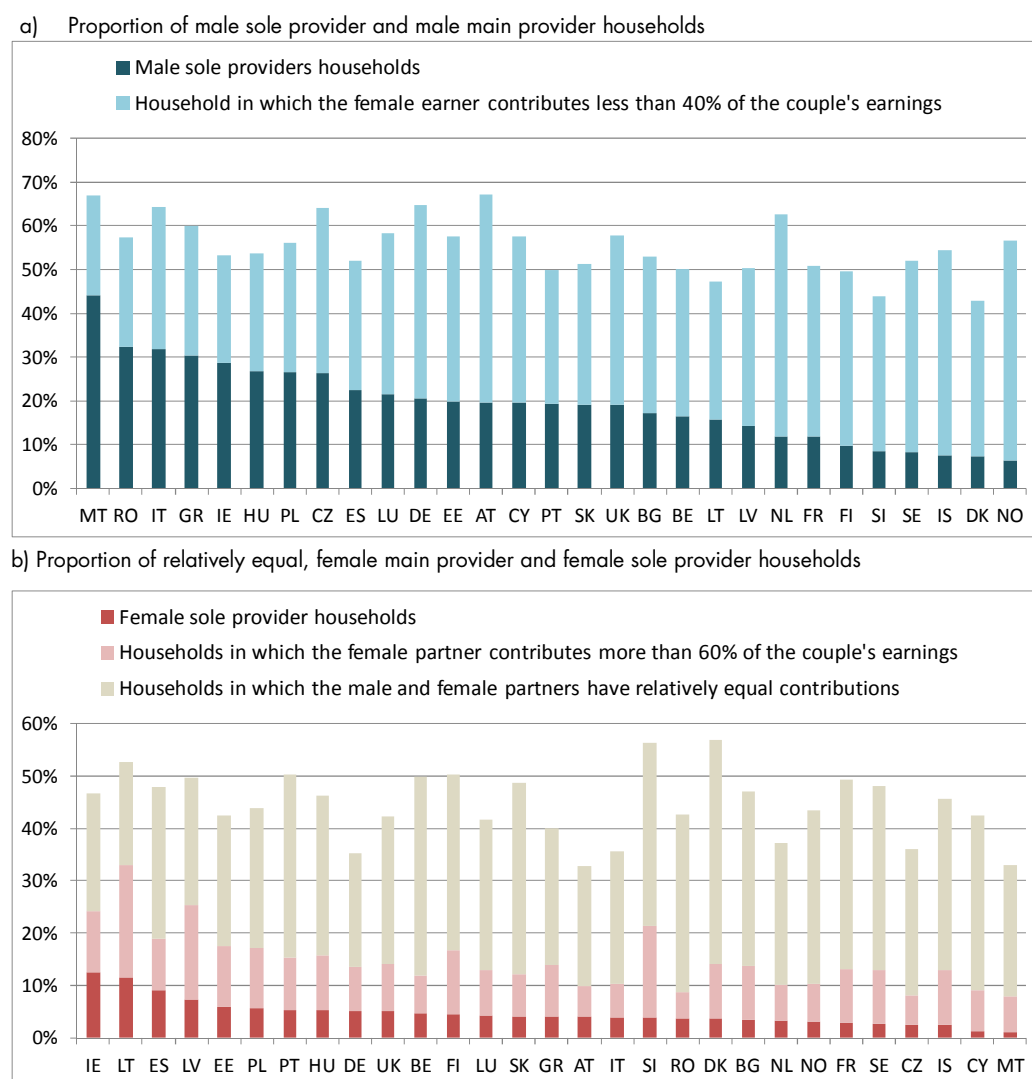
Malta has the highest share of male sole provider households (44 per cent), followed by Romania, Italy and Greece where the share of male sole provider households is over 30 per cent; and in Ireland, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic where the share is over 25 per cent. While having the highest share female sole provider households, Ireland also has one of the highest shares of male sole provider households (the fifth highest out of 29 countries). The situation for Spain is similar. It has a high share of female sole provider households (the third highest), as well as a high share of male sole providers (the ninth highest).

In contrast, the share of male sole provider is low (under 10 per cent) in the Nordic countries (Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden and Finland) and Slovenia.

Combining the male sole provider and male main provider categories, Malta along with Austria, are the prominent male-breadwinner countries: each with two thirds of couples having either a male sole provider or male main provider. Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic, and the Netherlands also all have above 60 per cent of males as the sole or main provider. The Netherlands has an especially large share of male main

provider couples (51 per cent), even though only 12 per cent of couples comprise of male sole providers. Slovenia and Denmark still stand out as the countries with most income equality within couples, when both the male sole and main provider categories are considered. These countries also have relatively high shares of female partners contributing substantially to the couple's earnings, although the share of female sole providers remains low. The shares of female sole providers are the highest in Ireland and Lithuania (12 per cent). The other four Nordic countries all have relatively large fractions (more than 40 per cent) of male main provider couples, with Norway at 50 per cent and Iceland at 47 per cent especially high in this unequal earnings category. These countries therefore do not stand out as having gender-equal earnings structures when considering both the percentage of male sole and main providers.

Figure 5: Household earnings structure by country, 2010



Source: EU-SILC 2010, authors' own calculations

4.2. Recent decrease in the proportion of men as the sole income provider

Europeans are living in turbulent times. Most Member States have experienced the consequences of the financial crisis since the summer of 2008. Employment rates have dropped, unemployment levels have

soared and income inequality is on the rise in Europe (Sarfati 2010). The previous section discussed the household earning structures for Member States in 2010. When considering the changes in earnings structure between 2007 and 2010, most changes are within the range 1–4 per cent with only a few exceptions of a relatively larger change (see Table 2).

Out of the 28 countries,¹¹ the share of male sole provider households has dropped or remained constant in 25 countries. The opposite trend could only be observed in Hungary, Ireland and Iceland, where the share of male sole providers increased slightly. The biggest drop in male sole provider households occurred in France (7 per cent), where the drop translated to an increase in the share of households in three other categories except for the female sole provider category. Similar transitions were observed for Austria. In many other cases (Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, Iceland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Portugal), the share of male sole providers dropped, together with the share of households with the female partner contributing less than 40 per cent, whereas the share of households with a relatively equal male/female contribution expanded. However, these countries are similar to France in that there is little movement in the share of female sole provider households. In most cases (14 out of 28 countries), the share of relatively equal partners increased the most.

Ireland, Lithuania and Latvia underwent a different transition. Decreases in the share of the first two (or three) categories gave way for the share of the final two categories (i.e., female main providers and female sole providers) to rise.

Overall, these results seem to suggest that we can observe an increase – albeit modest – in the relative economic power of women within households in the majority of Member States.

Table 2: Households earnings structure, change in percentage point between 2007 and 2010

	male sole provider	female <40%	relatively equal	female >=60%	female sole provider
AT	-5%	5%	1%	-1%	0%
BE	0%	-3%	3%	-1%	1%
BG	-3%	2%	2%	2%	-3%
CY	-1%	-5%	4%	2%	0%
CZ	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%
DE	0%	0%	1%	-1%	1%
DK	-1%	-4%	3%	2%	0%
EE	-1%	-6%	2%	4%	1%
ES	-4%	-5%	2%	3%	4%
FI	0%	-1%	-1%	1%	1%

¹¹ EU-27 minus Malta, for which no data was available, plus Norway and Iceland.

	male sole provider	female <40%	relatively equal	female >=60%	female sole provider
FR	-7%	3%	3%	3%	-1%
GR	-6%	-1%	4%	3%	1%
HU	3%	-2%	1%	-2%	0%
IE	3%	-14%	1%	2%	8%
IS	1%	-8%	3%	2%	1%
IT	-3%	-1%	2%	1%	1%
LT	0%	-7%	-9%	10%	7%
LU	-5%	-4%	6%	2%	1%
LV	-1%	-3%	-6%	6%	4%
NL	-4%	-1%	3%	2%	0%
NO	-2%	-1%	3%	0%	1%
PL	-2%	1%	3%	0%	-2%
PT	-1%	-6%	4%	2%	1%
RO	0%	-1%	3%	-1%	-1%
SE	0%	0%	0%	2%	-2%
SI	-1%	4%	-3%	1%	-1%
SK	0%	-3%	0%	2%	1%
UK	0%	-4%	2%	2%	0%

Source: EU-SILC 2007 and 2010, authors' own calculations

4.3. Women do majority of domestic work regardless of earning contributions

As discussed in the previous section, women's relative economic power within households has increased in recent years. Does this mean that their share of domestic work in households has therefore reduced?

Table 3 shows male and female partners' self-reported time spent on domestic work by household earnings structure for the 11 countries for which data is available.^{12,13} Domestic work in this context

¹² This analysis is based on (self-reported) time use data from EU-SILC's 2010 special module on 'intra-household sharing of resources'. The time spent on domestic work question is an option question in the 2010 Special Module of EU-SILC. It is only available for 11 Member States: BE, BG, DE, GR, IE, IT, LU, MT, PT, RO and SK.

¹³ In EU-SILC, the reference period for respondents' self-reported time spent is the same as the survey period (i.e. 2010), while the reference period for income is typically the calendar year previous to the survey year (i.e. 2009). Thus, there is a slight mismatch in the reference period of the income data and time use data. Ideally, income data from 2011 EU-SILC should be used. However, it was not available at the start of this study.

includes housework, child care, and care for other dependents. We can make two main observations from this table. First, when the female partner is the main provider, she still spends considerably more time on domestic work than her partner does. Second, the time women spend on domestic work is more sensitive to the earnings structure than that of men. In other words, women in male-sole-provider households spent almost 18 more hours per week in domestic work than women in female-sole-provider households (43.2 versus 25.4 hours per week), but men in female-sole-provider households only spent about six hours more than men in male sole provider households (17.5 versus 11.7 hours per week). Both of these points suggest that traditional gender roles still have a strong influence on domestic work in the household, regardless of changes in the earnings contribution to the household.

Table 3: Self-reported time spent on domestic work by household earnings structure, 11 European countries

	self-reported time spent on domestic work (average hours per week)		number of couples in the sample
	men	Women	
Male sole provider	11.7	43.2	4934
Male main provider (female <40%)	12.1	32.1	6608
Relatively equal	10.9	22.6	5556
Female main provider (female >=60%)	12.6	20.9	1537
Female sole provider	17.5	25.4	926

Source: EU-SILC 2010, authors' own calculations

Although there are certain caveats to self-reported time-use data (Sullivan and Gershuny 2003), these findings suggested that even if there are improvements in the gender equality in the work force and in the distribution of household earnings between men and women, domestic work still largely remains the responsibility of women. In the light of these results, it seems unrealistic to expect a significant increase in female employment rates or hours worked in employment as long as men's contribution to domestic work continues to be only about half of women's contribution.

5. Policy levers: missed targets and mismatched needs

The previous chapters analysed the various challenges associated with reconciling work, family and private life at different stages in the life course (such as school-to-work transition and family formation) and for different groups (such as single parents). We investigated the extent to which men and women are facing these challenges differently and examined their employment activity, working hours, contributions to household income and to domestic work. Throughout the preceding chapters we have observed improvements in gender equality over recent decades, but we conclude that women continue to lag behind on all of the employment and earning indicators, face slower transition to their first job, while contributing disproportionately to domestic tasks, even if they are breadwinners. These challenges are particularly pronounced in the presence of children. Mothers have lower employment rates, shorter hours and more interrupted careers due to childcare (compared to their male counterparts). Combining a career and the role as mother appears to be especially hard for single mothers.

European policymakers have long acknowledged these challenges. At the EU level, various strategies have been adopted, goals and targets formulated and legislation drafted to improve the compatibility of work and family life. A number of policy interventions have been found to increase female employment activity, reduce career interruptions due to motherhood, encourage the return to employment after motherhood, improve the gender balance in family care and domestic work and facilitate the transition between education and first employment. In the following sections we first discuss two policy levers in detail: providing access to affordable childcare facilities and offering flexible working hours. We examine the extent to which these services and conditions are developed in Member States and investigate potential avenues for improvements. We focus on the role of governments, although it should be recognised that there is also a role for private companies and social partners in both of these areas (to help provide affordable childcare facilities and, even more so, flexible working hours).

Before going on to our discussion below, we should note that other policy instruments can also play a role in mitigating work-life reconciliation and reducing gender inequalities. Examples include the number of weeks of maternity/paternity leave/parental leave; and the cash benefits paid during maternity/paternity leave. However, the resources available for this study allow us to investigate two of the key levers (providing access to affordable childcare facilities and offering flexible working hours) in detail.

5.1. Access to childcare

Formal childcare facilities for young children from birth to mandatory school age have been found to be a major policy driver for allowing men and women to reconcile their work, family, and private lives.

Greater gender equality with regards to employment and hours worked could thus be potentially established via better access to childcare. Additionally, parental employment, and particularly maternal employment, has been shown to be the main safeguard against child poverty (Lichter and Eggebeen 1994).

In March 2002, the Barcelona European Council acknowledged the importance of childcare in terms of growth and equal opportunities, setting the following goals for Member States to remove disincentives to female labour force participation (the 'Barcelona targets'):

- Provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90 per cent of children between three years old and the mandatory school age.
- Provide childcare by 2010 to at least 33 per cent of children under three years of age.

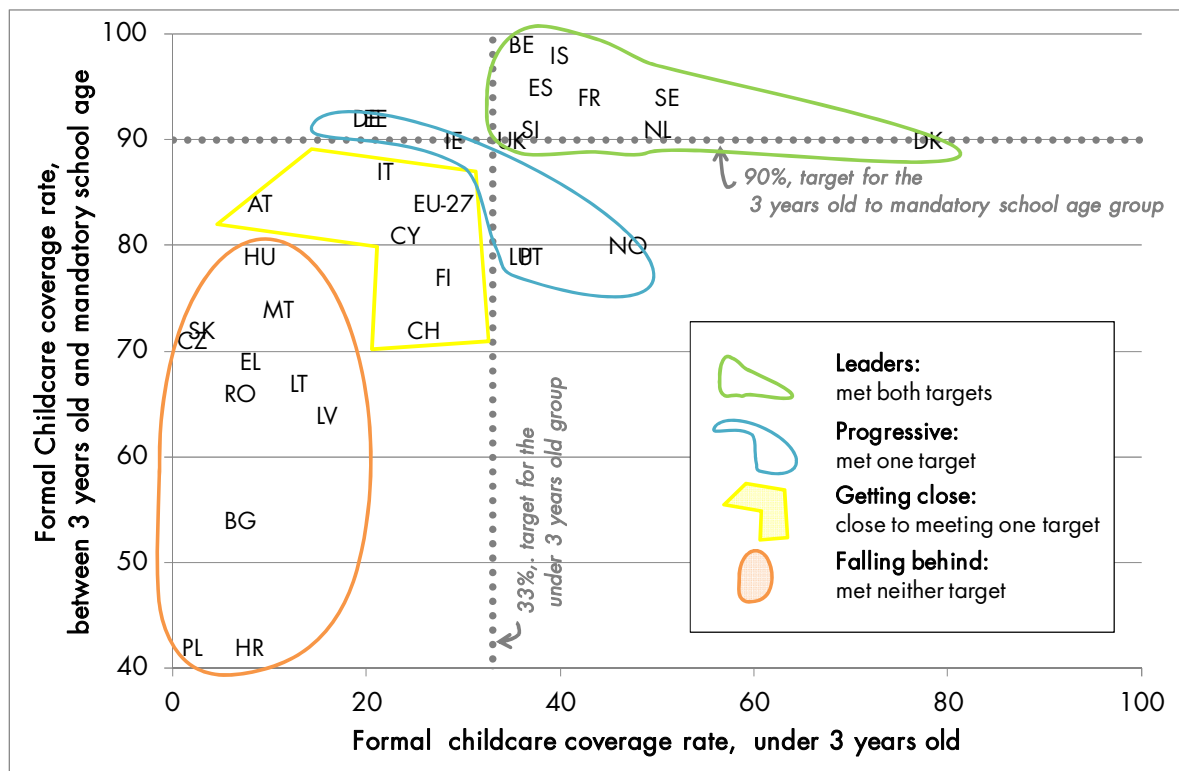
The commitment to improve childcare provision was also reflected in the European Commission's Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006–2010 and in its Strategy for equality between women and men 2010 to 2015. In March 2006, the European Council further reiterated its commitment to attain the Barcelona targets in the European Pact for Gender Equality which was renewed in 2010 for the period 2011 to 2020.

Our assessment of the progress showed that, by 2010, eight Member States, namely Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom have met the Barcelona targets for both age groups (see

Figure 6). A further five Member States (Estonia, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg and Portugal) had met the target for one age group. Four Member States were close to meeting one or both targets, namely Austria, Cyprus, Finland, and Italy. The remaining Member States were not close to achieving any of the targets.

In the majority of the countries, there has been small progress between 2006 and 2010 (from 26 to 29 per cent for the less than three years old group and from 84 to 85 per cent for the three years to mandatory school age group, for the EU-27).

Figure 6: A typology of the progression towards the Barcelona targets



Source: LFS 2010

Although the comparatively large number of successful Member States creates a positive impression of childcare provision in the European Union, further analyses revealed a number of points that highlight the need for additional policy efforts. Firstly, when comparing the 2010 figures to those from 2006,¹⁴ it became clear that there had been only limited progress in recent years. Most of the countries performing well in 2010 already did so in 2006. Secondly, when targets appear to have been met, in many instances, childcare arrangements are provided for less than 30 hours a week. Limited hours undermine the ultimate goal of the Barcelona targets, which is to assist parents and especially women to acquire and sustain employment. Thirdly, although the employment rate of women has grown over the past decade in the EU-27, motherhood remains negatively correlated with employment across most EU Member States, suggesting that the underlying goal of the Barcelona targets to increase the employment participation of parents remains unmet in many countries. For the EU-27 as a whole, the difference between the employment rate for women with and without children under twelve is greater than ten percentage points.

Further analyses revealed a number of crucial points for consideration. Across the EU-27, the majority of mothers with young children who are not working at all, or only part-time for reasons linked to childcare, do so largely because childcare is too expensive or not available for them. Quality concerns of the services provided were reported by only a minority. Furthermore, we were able to detect a 'social gradient' in formal childcare take-up, i.e. in most Member States, low-income households are substantially less likely

¹⁴ A mid-term assessment was conducted by the Commission.

to use formal childcare than high-income households. This is problematic since earlier research has shown that children from lower socio-economic strata would benefit most from formal childcare, and employment of both parents would better protect these children from risk of poverty.

To facilitate future attainment of the Barcelona targets, it would be essential to examine the forerunners (such as Denmark, Sweden and France) to determine the best practices that can be learned from these nations. Special attention needs to be paid to whether the same principles can be applied in other national contexts. It would likewise be essential to look at those that clearly fall behind to identify what can be achieved in the short term in these countries.

Furthermore, it appears that the use of formal childcare for ages three to mandatory school age is widely accepted and almost universal in Europe, whereas use of formal care for infants under three varies widely across Member States. It remains essential to continue to acknowledge the different levels of acceptability and types of care that are required for children under the age of three and those from three years old to mandatory school age. Considering the general acceptance of use of formal childcare in the older age groups, future policy directives should specifically focus on stepping up enrolment in formal childcare for children aged three and under. Another related aspect to consider is that the mandatory school age varies widely across Europe, ranging from between the ages of four and seven, which also needs to be taken into account in future initiatives. The Barcelona targets were fixed in relative terms in order to allow each country to focus on and develop their own strategies, with the perception that once children were in school, many childcare issues would be solved. It is important to note, however, that in many countries, even entry into mandatory school covers fewer than 30 hours a week and in some countries involves children coming home for lunch or afternoons. This can be a further impediment for parents and mothers to engage in full-time employment even when the children are in school if informal or formal care out of school hours is not available.

Although the distinction between individuals with and without children or between men and women remains useful, it is essential to acknowledge in future policy directives that women and parents are not homogeneous groups. The obstacles in access to childcare and the labour market are inherently linked with socio-economic gradients such as differences in educational level and across income groups. Some countries, such as Sweden and Denmark, have been more successful in ensuring equal access to childcare across all income levels. A related point to consider is the eligibility criteria for childcare, where priority of access may be given to employed parents over those who are inactive or not employed, which reinforces inequalities. The decision for parents to work or not is driven by the calculation of financial trade-offs between whether it would be more advantageous to be employed and pay for childcare or stay at home. This is particularly the case for those groups that have been shown to be more responsive to financial incentives such as single parents or second earners (often women) with young children. A suggestion would therefore be to provide more focused financial incentives¹⁵ or targets to certain groups that are more likely to respond to these incentives to work. The next section explores in more detail the barriers to the use of formal childcare, namely cultural norms and affordability.

¹⁵ In fact, in some countries there are **disincentives** to work for certain groups (mostly resulting from joint taxation and/or tax deduction for economically dependent spouse).

Cultural barriers

The Barcelona targets were agreed upon, with the caveat that the demand for childcare facilities and national patterns of provision have to be taken into account. There is, in fact, a strong normative and cultural value attached to the care of children by mothers in many European countries. Our analysis showed that only 50 per cent of adults approve that a woman with a child under three years of age should have a full-time job in more than half of the countries. The low levels of approval in countries such as Austria and Germany provide a further indication as to why policies that encourage use of formal care may have been ineffective or even non-existent (LFS 2010 Ad hoc module). In these countries, the negative perception of childcare may operate not only as a barrier to the wider use of childcare, but lack of momentum to create policies. Cultural norms about parenthood, values regarding the institutionalised care of children, and preferences of parents, as well as concerns about preparing children for school and the risk of poverty, need to be taken into account in future policymaking endeavours. Beyond formal constraints such as availability, affordability, and quality of childcare, women and parents may opt not to take their children to formal institutions for cultural reasons. It may be that, in countries with relatively prevalent conservative family values, facilitating women to participate in the labour market may be more related to informal childcare via grandparents than mandates for formal childcare (see discussion in Box 1).

It is not always the case that cultural norms act as the barrier. In fact, our analysis indicates the full-time employment of young mothers is generally approved in nations such as Poland, Cyprus and Slovenia. In these countries, there appears to be a gap particularly in the availability and affordability of childcare, which needs to be addressed for women to realise their labour market intentions.

Affordability

Childcare arrangements can only assist parents to enter or sustain employment participation if they are considered to be affordable and of sufficient quality. Across the EU-27 as a whole, data showed that 25 per cent of women who do not work or work part-time claim that this is due to a lack of availability of childcare services; 53 per cent because childcare is too expensive and only 4 per cent due to childcare being of insufficient quality (from our analysis of LFS 2010 Ad hoc module). There is some variation across countries: In some countries, namely Belgium, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria and Croatia, the lack of childcare services is the most frequently reported reason for not working or working part-time. Concern over the quality of childcare as a reason for not working or working part-time is rare, except in Bulgaria (13 per cent) and Hungary (20 per cent).

In many Member States, households in the richest income group have the highest childcare usage, with the notable exceptions of Denmark, which ensures a high childcare usage amount the poorest, Sweden where usage is universally high among all socio-economic groups, and Germany which has a fairly equal but low usage among all income groups.

We found that total public spending on childcare and early-education services as a percentage of the national GDP is particularly high in countries where the correlation between parenthood and employment is low, such as Denmark and Sweden. The relationship between public investment in formal childcare and usage is not straightforward since some countries, notably the United Kingdom, have relatively low returns for their investments (OECD Family database 2009).

Box 1: Role of informal care

When looking at childcare by grandparents and others for more than thirty hours per week, informal care does not operate as a sufficient alternative to formal childcare. Only in Romania and Greece are more than 10 per cent of children under three cared for by grandparents. When looking at the Mediterranean countries, where welfare state provisions are often lower than in other countries and need to be supplemented with relatively large support from kin networks, it is surprising that prevalence rates of childcare by grandparents and other kin is not more prominent relative to other Member States. Portugal, Greece and Italy all have prevalence rates over 20 per cent for childcare by grandparents for less than thirty hours per week, but they still are markedly lower than for instance in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

Child-minders also play a less significant role in the childcare of under-three year olds. Only in Romania they play a prominent role; in the Netherlands, Portugal and Iceland a minority of children (slightly above 10 per cent) are being cared for by child-minders. In all remaining countries, child-minders do not play a significant role in childcare of under-three year olds.

Source: EU-SILC 2010, authors' own calculations

5.2. Flexible working hours

Another potentially important lever to foster the reconciliation of work, family, and private life is working time flexibility. This refers to arrangements such as variable working hours, working time banking, or compressed work weeks.¹⁶ The significance of working time flexibility for work–life reconciliation is based on the assumption that giving workers greater autonomy and more control over their working times should empower them to better balance their work and non-work demands. This could then in turn lead to less work-family conflict, greater female labour force participation, higher fertility¹⁷ and greater gender equality on the labour market. In addition, working time flexibility increases employee discretion, which is an important feature of quality of work (Drobnič et al. 2013). Against the backdrop of an aging population in Europe, improving working time flexibility has also been recommended as a coping strategy, to allow a better distribution of work over the life course and accommodate caring for older family members.

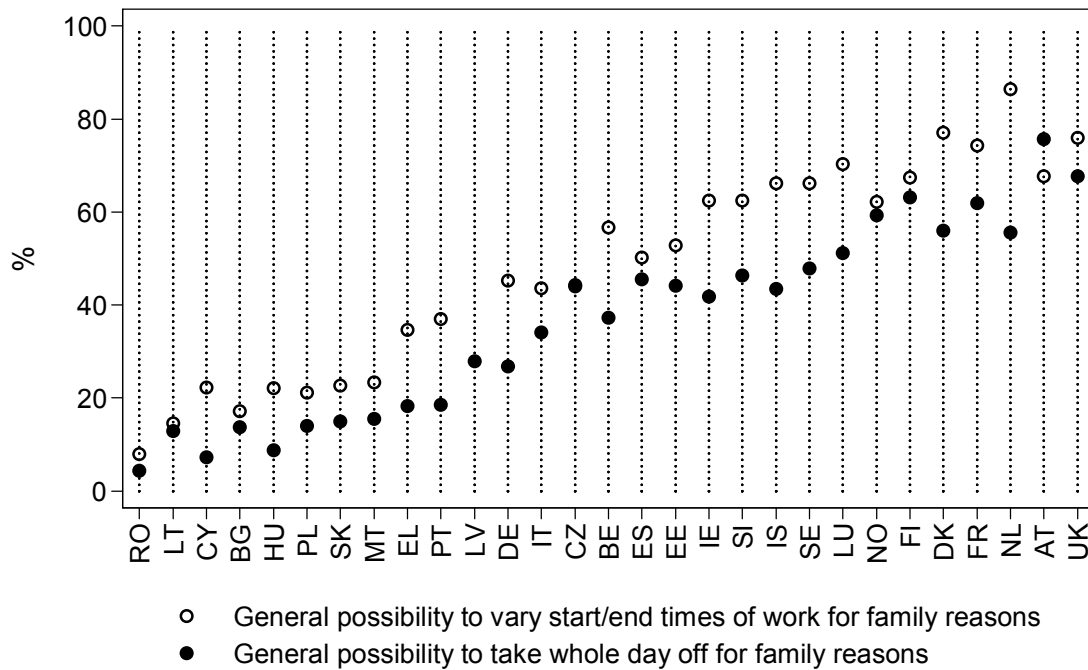
Previous research has been able to show that flexible working arrangements can indeed be helpful to improve work-life reconciliation, even though findings are sometimes mixed and effects are often small in magnitude (Allen et al. 2013). Studies have suggested that flexible work arrangements are associated with less work-family conflict, greater well-being of workers, less burnout, and better health behaviours (e.g. sufficient sleep, more exercise, going to the doctor when sick) (Halpern 2005; Moen et al. 2011).

¹⁶ Phenomena such as overtime work or part-time work are also sometimes considered to be flexible work scheduling, but we would like explicitly to exclude these here.

¹⁷ Realised fertility becoming closer to desired fertility.

Furthermore, some positive outcomes have also been reported for organisations, such as less sickness absence, greater commitment to the employer, less turnover, and reduced costs due to fewer missed deadlines (Lyness et al. 2012). However, it needs to be acknowledged that some research has suggested that making use of flexible work arrangements might be linked to disadvantages in other domains, such as slower career progress.

One way to better understand the effects of flexible work scheduling is to look at who actually has access to it. Making use of the 2010 Ad Hoc module of the European Labour Force Survey, we shed light on this issue. We focused on two indicators tapping the availability of informal work schedule flexibility for workers, which would allow accommodating for family demands. Firstly, we looked at the perceived possibility of varying the start and/or end of the working day (by at least one hour) for family reasons and secondly, at the perceived possibility of organising working time in order to take whole days off for family reasons (without using holidays). Figure 7 shows the cross-national variation in these two indicators for EU-27 and the two non-Member States Norway and Iceland.

Figure 7: Family-related work schedule flexibility across countries

Source: EU-LFS 2010 AHM (weighted, authors' calculations)

Figure 7 reveals remarkable variation in work schedule flexibility across countries. While less than ten per cent of workers in Romania report being able to make use of the two options in question, in countries like the Netherlands, Austria, and the UK, this share exceeds sixty per cent of the workforce. The top of the list is dominated by EU-15 Member States, only in rather few eastern European Member States, such as Slovenia or Estonia, are the possibilities for flexible work scheduling common. The countries in which the possibilities are less prevalent are mostly eastern European Member States. In Romania, Lithuania and Bulgaria, the share of workers who report so is less than 20 per cent. Some southern European countries such as Cyprus or Malta are also located towards the bottom of this scale.

In a second step, we analysed which social groups across countries report the availability of work schedule flexibility. In order to be a successful lever for work-family reconciliation, work schedule flexibility would have to be available to those most likely to be pressed by family demands, namely the young, women, and those with young children. However, theories of the labour market predict that employers are more likely to grant greater working time discretion to those in senior positions and professional occupations and those with longer tenure, greater skills and greater commitment. Therefore, one could expect a mismatch between the need for work-life reconciliation¹⁸ and the availability of flexible working times.

This mismatch was confirmed in our empirical analyses of the EU-LFS microdata. Firstly, women reported substantially less access to family-related work schedule flexibility. Secondly, young children in

¹⁸ Flexible working times may also be needed for reasons other than reconciliation, but those other reasons are not the focus of this research.

the household had hardly any effect on the availability of family-related work schedule flexibility. Those with children were just as likely to perceive work schedule flexibility to be available for them as those without children in their household. Thirdly, our empirical analyses showed evidence for a social gradient in the perceived availability of work schedule flexibility. Compared to workers with permanent contracts, those with fixed-term contracts are substantially less likely to report perceiving access to flexible work schedules for family reasons. Workers with supervisory status also more often state that they can access flexible work scheduling than non-supervisors. Also, there is some evidence that higher-educated workers find it easier to vary the start/end of the working day for family purposes. These findings suggest that already disadvantaged parts of the workforce have troubles enjoying any advantages conveyed by flexible work scheduling.

Based on this empirical analysis, we recommend that policies that incentivise employers to offer flexible working hours based on employees' work-life reconciliation needs may be a promising strategy to help alleviate work-life conflicts for men and women in the EU and to achieve better gender equality in the labour market.

6. Conclusion and discussion

This report summarised the core findings from a series of Short Statistical Reports (SSRs), which focused on various aspects of work-life reconciliation. Core topics examined which countries met the Barcelona childcare targets (SSR1), the labour force participation rates of men, women and parents (SSR2), balancing work and family for single parents (SSR3), gender inequalities in the transition from school to work (SSR4), share of earnings and domestic work within couples (SSR5), and family-friendly working schedules (SSR6).

The ability for European men and women to **reconcile work, private and family life** was an overarching topic of exploration in all studies. Recent European mandates (notably the Barcelona targets) had the ambition to increase women and mother's employment, have more children enrolled in childcare and reduce inequalities between social groups (e.g., single parents, men and women). At the core of these issues is the dilemma of how to ensure that an increase in female employment is compatible with family responsibilities. These goals also correspond to a shift in policy from the male-breadwinner/female-carer model towards an adult worker model of the family.

Another central theme across all studies was the role of **gender inequality**. This report highlighted large differences between the EU Member States, often related to underlying institutional and culture differences which in turn perpetuate or reduce gender inequality.

Gender inequality occurs when there is incoherence between the levels of gender equity within different social institutions (Esping-Andersen 1996). When women are offered what appear at face value to be similar educational and employment opportunities to men, but these opportunities are then severely restricted by having children, they may react by remaining out of the labour force, working reduced hours or having less and later children. Throughout the reports we were able to demonstrate how core institutional factors that differ between the Member States either enable or exacerbate work-life reconciliation, which include, for instance, educational systems and employment systems (e.g., availability of part-time work, family friendly schedule flexibility). Policies designed to permit the combination of paid and unpaid work in the form of childcare, care leaves and reduced or flexible working hours remain different across the Member States. The level of social transfers and their availability to different socioeconomic groups is another factor in aiding families to reconcile work and caring responsibilities, but likewise widely diverges.

Gender inequality is not only embodied in national-level institutional policies, but there is also **household-level gender inequality**. Although women across many EU Member States now achieve higher levels of education and labour market participation, our findings also demonstrate those women's roles and the unequal division of household labour persists even in light of women's gains in household

earnings. This ‘stalled revolution’ (Hochschild 1989) at the household level appears to be a crucial factor inhibiting gender equality and meeting the Barcelona and other employment-related targets. National-level policies, such as a higher prevalence of part-time work among women and long parental leaves of women have been consistently shown to increase sex specialisation in household labour (e.g., Hook 2010). Our results also show that the male as the sole provider (21 per cent) and main provider (37 per cent) remain as the dominant household model across Europe compared to those where the earners are relatively equal (29 per cent) or the female is the main (9 per cent) or sole (5 per cent) provider. The ‘shift’ from the male-breadwinner/female-carer model towards the dual worker model of the family (Lewis et al. 2008) has therefore generally not taken place. The household earner models diverge widely across countries, with the Nordic countries (Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden and Finland) less likely to have sole providers. In other countries the classic male-breadwinner model was maintained (Austria, Malta, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic).

An additional finding that spanned the reports was the **persistent inequality** not only between countries, but also among social groups. We demonstrated a social and income gradient in the use of childcare (Chapter 5), labour market participation (Chapter 3), earnings, unemployment and occupational level of single mothers (also Chapter 3), for women and those studying particular educational fields on the entry into employment (Chapter 2), between couples in the earnings and division of household labour (Chapter 4) and in unequal access to family friendly schedules for women, younger workers, the lower educated and those in fixed-term contracts. It was particularly clear that certain groups such as single parents were more vulnerable to the challenge of work-life reconciliation. In a study of the transition from school to work, we also revealed substantial gender differences in educational field of study and transition to first job, which have long-term labour market effects on women’s careers. It remains essential to focus on these more vulnerable groups that are consistent across countries, but in larger numbers and more susceptible in others.

A consistent and large disparity that likewise emerged was the **difference in employment of parents versus non-parents**. Despite many policy efforts, mothers in many western European countries in particular continue to have a lower rate of employment, experience underemployment and work fewer hours than women without children and men (whether they have children or not). It is striking that there is little variation between employment levels and part- versus full-time work for men across most EU Member States. Considerable variation exists for women between different countries and even more for mothers. In countries such as the Netherlands (87 per cent), Austria (60 per cent), Germany (66 per cent) and the UK (54 per cent), the vast majority of mothers (between 20 and 49 years of age) with children in the same household work part-time as opposed to full-time. Whereas in central and eastern European countries, such as Bulgaria (2 per cent), Poland (9 per cent) and Romania (9 per cent), and southern European countries, such as Portugal (9 per cent), rates of part-time work are very low, with very little difference in the labour market participation of mothers versus non-mothers. Higher levels of employment for women in these countries is thus not merely a function of gender equality, but a financial necessity for women to work full-time and in some cases a unique history of women’s full employment from the legacy of socialism. Conversely, the gender inequality in part- versus full-time employment for women and particularly mothers is higher in some of the western European countries.

The studies were also able to identify certain forerunners or nations that have ‘**best practices**’ in certain respects that we can learn from for posing future policy mandates. In relation to childcare and meeting the Barcelona targets, for example, it would be essential to focus on whether the forerunners (Denmark, Sweden, Iceland and France) have core principles (such as devoting a substantial part of public expenditure to childcare) that could be transferable to other national contexts. It was also clear in Chapter 2 that youths who studied a vocational topic or certain educational fields had a smoother early labour market transition. Conversely, it is essential to understand the challenges of countries that persistently fall behind in meeting policy targets. In particular, care for children under the age of three or division of household labour are complex topics interrelated not only with the opportunity for women to enter employment, but cultural norms about the care of very young children and gender roles. It remains essential to engage in a critical reflection of the original formulation of policy goals and the means to achieve them.

Although we were able to isolate many core findings and reflect on future recommendations within the individual chapters, there remain some **strengths and limitations** of the statistical data underlying our studies. An advantage of these reports was that we were able to use the most up to date comparative European datasets, collected by Eurostat. Specifically, the focus was on the European Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS), including the 2010 Reconciling Work and Family LFS Ad Hoc Module and the 2009 Entry of Young People into the Labour Market Ad Hoc Module and the use of the Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) and additional European Union Statistics and various macro (country) level indicators. The availability of this type of nationally comparative data across Europe is essential for European policy and understanding key similarities and differences and best practices across Europe. Cross-nationally comparative harmonised high-quality data is essential to draw any serious empirically-based policy recommendations. The fact that virtually all countries could be included into these analyses in most cases allowed us to empirically compare countries, but also the impact of additional macro- or country-level indicators such as the unemployment rate or employment protection legislation.

Although the availability of this cross-nationally comparative data is clearly a strength of this study, one key limitation of the results presented throughout is that data is sometimes unreliable due to small sample sizes (e.g., such as EU-SILC data) or only available for certain countries. In order to fully address many of the key questions related to work-life reconciliation, in the future it would be essential to collect larger sample sizes in each country, which would result in more reliable results. For instance, small cell sizes meant that we were unable to examine groups such as single fathers or detailed income categories. In other cases, data, such as the examination of time spent on domestic work or the presence of children in the household, were only available for certain countries. In other instances we were sometimes unable to adequately capture key questions that we wanted to answer, such as those related to childcare, labour market flexibility, the domestic division of labour or work-life reconciliation. For example, it may be that children are in the care of both formal and informal caregivers, and that in fact there may be large variation in the mix of formal and informal childcare in across countries but such variation is not empirically represented with the existing data. A recommendation would be to collect more focused data, with sufficient sample sizes, that capture informal childcare and the combination of different types of care. These data would help researchers to gain further understanding of the barriers to formal childcare, especially with regard to unmet demand. Additionally, more detailed time use about domestic work

would be useful in advancing the understanding about household level dynamics. In particular, data that distinguish between childcare versus (non-caring) household chores would be valuable, as recent studies in the US indicated that over the past decades men have more engaged in childrearing tasks, but not much more in general household tasks (e.g Parker and Wang, 2013).

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