

EDITORIAL

This special issue on 'Motherhood and Work' is dedicated to the research carried out in the framework of a project entitled 'The Rationale of Motherhood Choices: Influence of Employment Conditions and of Public Policies' (MOCHO) that falls under the Key Action 'Improving Human Research Potential and the Socio-economic Knowledge Base' of the Fifth Framework Programme of the European Commission. The project runs for the three years from 1 October 2001 to 1 October 2004.

The project is being carried out by research groups from five countries: Belgium and the Netherlands (the coordinators), Italy, Greece and France. The main question that this project aims to answer is whether and how family-friendly policies, as well as women's conditions on European labour markets, influence and determine women's decision to have children. In this sense, the central research topic is the reverse of what is more commonly studied, the impact of the presence of children on women's labour market participation.

We start from the assumption that young women, and particularly those who are highly educated, want to pursue a professional career and find a full-time job that guarantees them financial independence as well as professional satisfaction and development. Given their professional career they will then decide on whether or not to have children. Therefore, it is important to underline that if the aim is to turn around the decrease in birth rates that has been observed in many European countries, and particularly among the most highly educated women, it is essential to reflect on the relevance and consistency of the existing set of policies aimed at facilitating the reconciliation of professional and family life.

It flows from our basic assumption that birth rates can be stabilised, or even increased, through the provision of high-quality childcare services that are affordable to families with children. In addition, there needs to be an active role for the school system in taking charge of children from the age of 3 onwards.

Policies aimed at encouraging career breaks and part-time employment are ineffective for those young women who are not willing simply to accept the negative effects for their careers of these policies. In this context, in order to prevent a large-scale development of part-time jobs that are

often of low quality and essentially occupied by women, it is indispensable to express the Lisbon and Stockholm targets as full-time equivalent employment rates.

At present, both increasing female labour force participation and ensuring the population's replacement should be priority items on all governments' political agendas. In this context, we would therefore like to express our gratitude both to the European Commission for supporting our research on the mutual interactions between motherhood, employment and public policies as well as to the ETUI for allowing us through this issue of TRANSFER to share our results with a broader public of interested readers.

In an introductory article to this issue Sinead Tiernan from the ETUC summarises existing ETUC policies in the field of motherhood and work.

The general framework of this issue is outlined in the first article by Danièle Meulders and Síle O'Dorchai. This discusses how existing welfare state typologies fit with the reality of mothers and their strategies to overcome the heavy time constraints imposed by their employment and childcare responsibilities. Welfare states across Europe have been designed along the lines of the traditional male breadwinner model. However, changes in society mean that welfare states cannot be assessed without taking into account the way in which welfare states take account of the needs not only of male breadwinners but also of those women who carry the double burden of earning a living and rearing children.

The double burden that women have to bear has a marked impact both in terms of their labour supply and in terms of their fertility choices. If women do choose to try to combine professional and family responsibilities they are likely to experience repercussions of their being mothers within their sphere of work. Wage penalties are an important example. On the other hand, anticipation of such negative repercussions might convince women not to have children or to have them later in their life. The second article by Siv Gustafsson and Eiko Kenjoh presents some new results of research into the employment patterns of women with young children in five countries: Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Great Britain and Japan. Cross-country differences are explained by referring to the set of family policies specific to each country and by emphasising the role trade unions play or can play to enhance a genuine sharing not only of the breadwinning tasks but also of caring responsibilities.

The same sharing dilemma is investigated in the third article by Haris Symeonidou on parenthood and time allocation. This article examines the division of paid and unpaid work between men and women with at least one child under 7 years of age, with a particular emphasis on time allocation. Men continue to be the main breadwinners, while they spend on average about half the time women do on childcare and even less time on household chores. Moreover, a discrepancy is observed between men's positive attitudes towards an equitable division of housework in theory and the non-division of housework in practice, while public policies have little or no effect on this situation.

The effects children have on their parents', and especially their mothers', employment patterns depend on the presence and generosity of public childcare arrangements. The fourth article by

Jérôme De Henau, Danièle Meulders, Síle O'Dorchai and Hélène Périer presents an overall ranking of EU countries based on cross-country comparisons of their childcare systems. Based on criteria such as the level of public funding, the real coverage rate of the childcare system, its cost and the number of carers available to relieve parents' caring tasks, countries were ranked by the degree of family-friendliness and supportiveness of their childcare system for the dual-earner model and for women combining professional responsibilities with their reproductive role.

The effect of parental status on wages is the subject of the fifth article by Cécile Wetzels. The presence of children (and their age and number) affects not only mothers' employment patterns but also their expected wage. This article shows that the ranking of EU countries according to their labour force participation rates does not coincide with the ranking of countries according to gross and net hourly wages for men, women, mothers and fathers. Countries with low female participation rates may face selection into employment effects in women's wages. In the Scandinavian full-time economies, working part-time does not seem to have a negative effect on women's wages but the well-developed tradition of leave-taking in these countries may nevertheless have an impact on wage levels. While British studies have made clear the negative effects of working part-time on British women's wages, no such clear effect has been found in the Dutch part-time economy.

The sixth article by Daniela Del Boca and Silvia Pasqua analyses in detail mothers' labour supply in Italy. Recently, in Italy, new or reformed social and labour market policies have altered childcare costs and availability, the opportunities for part-time jobs and flexibility in working hours have increased, and parental leave has been extended. The analysis examines the impact of these changes on the labour supply of mothers in Italy in comparison with other countries.

In an extended book review and article on motherhood at work Susanne von Auerbach assesses recent publications by Esping-Andersen from a gender perspective. She concludes that Esping-Andersen's minimum conditions for reconciling career and family are in fact insufficient; what are needed are changes on the labour market to make jobs and working hours family friendly.

Taken together, the articles in this issue should form a challenging and useful publication not just for policy-makers and trade unions but also for the large group of women who experience the effects of their combined roles in everyday life. We sincerely hope that this issue of TRANSFER can play multiple roles: we hope it will raise awareness among the broadest public possible, shed new reflections and ideas for future policies both at the government level and within overarching organisations such as trade unions, and, finally, that the issues addressed be recognisable to the group of women concerned with the whole set of factors that derive from combining a healthy professional career with a demanding family life including the care of young children.

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