

**Gender, parenthood and
the changing European workplace:
Young adults negotiating
the work-family boundary
Acronym: Transitions**

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Further details of the project can be found on

WWW.WORKLIFERESEARCH.ORG/TRANSITIONS

Transitions

Transitions partners

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Objectives

- To examine how young European men and women negotiate motherhood and fatherhood and work-family boundaries
 - in public and private sector workplaces undergoing substantial changes
 - in the context of different national welfare state regimes, family and employer support.

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Context: mothers' employment and parents' work-family patterns

- *Norway, Sweden*-egalitarian model, long parental leave and long part time or full time jobs, extensive use of public schemes
- *UK, Netherlands*. Modified male breadwinner model. Short part time jobs when children are young, kin/voluntary or market childcare, workplace flexibility

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Mothers' employment and parents' work-family patterns

- *Portugal* Dual earner model. Full time work and long hours for both partners. Reduction of number of children, kin/market childcare
- *France* Dual earner or “working mother” model. Long part time or full time jobs. Long parental leave for less qualified or well paid. Extensive use of public schemes and supports

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Mothers' employment and parents' work-family patterns

- *Slovenia* Dual earner model. Full time work and long hours for both partners. Family or informal care for under 3s and public schemes for working parents. Reduction of number of children
- *Bulgaria*. Dual earner model. Full time jobs for both parents. Reduction of number of children. Long parental leave for mothers/grandmothers

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National debates and discourses

- Work-family reconciliation, work-life balance
- Working hours (e.g. UK, long hours; France, 35 hour work week; Norway, time squeeze)
- Gender equity (especially Scandinavia)
- Birth rates
- Childcare issues: availability and quality
- Unemployment and poverty (esp post communist states)
- Sickness levels, early retirement
- Pensions

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Organizational case studies

- Public sector- social services
- Private sector- finance
- Document analysis
- Focus groups with parents of young children
- Interviews with managers
- Well-being survey
- Follow up biographic interviews

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Contexts for organizational changes

- Drive for more efficiency to compete in the global workplace
- Commercialisation of public services - new public management
- Specific transitions- e.g. mergers and acquisitions
- Transition to a market economy in the former communist countries

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Organisational change to support parents - driving factors

- Private sector in UK and some other countries most influenced by a “business case”. Rhetoric of success through people
- Slovenia and Bulgaria, legacy of more paternalistic approaches-more focus on economic drivers now
- Norway and Sweden- equality agenda
- Often there is support for employees in crises, but less support for day to day flexibility needs (especially in private sector and especially Slovenia, Bulgaria)

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Changing Workplaces

- Widespread experience of intensification of work
- The growth of flexibility, in its many forms, is double edged.
- New technologies facilitate flexibility but speed up intensification.
- The male model of ideal workers who do not need time or energy for family work remains dominant.

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Changing Workplaces contd.

- Widespread implementation gap between policies (state or workplace) and practice
- Crucial role of managers
- Most managers believe family commitments and organisational needs are mutually exclusive
- Role of teams- colleagues in intensified work contexts
- Daily informal negotiations more significant than policies

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Intensification of work

- Intensification of work is often greater barrier to flexibility than managers
- Work is rarely covered fully while staff are on leave, and often work is passed to overburdened colleagues, or accumulates to be dealt with on the return to work
- Policy needs to consider workload as well as working time

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Implementation gap: state and workplace policies undermined by:

- Unemployment (Slovenia, Bulgaria)
- Intensification of work (everywhere)
- Pressures from managers and colleagues
- Lack of understanding of policies and diverse interpretations

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Seeds of positive change

- Growing involvement of fathers in parenting, especially in Sweden and Norway (encouraged by policy)
- Some role reversals in each country
- Some organisational policies and practices raising expectations of support for working and parenting
- Can create transitional tensions as change takes place more slowly at other levels

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