

# Work life trends in Europe

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- WLB is experienced when demands from domain of paid work are compatible with demands from other domains (eg. family or leisure time) (Pichler, 2009)
- Juggling five aspects of our lives at any one point in time: work, family, friends, health and spirit (or self) (Byrne, 2005)
- Harmonizing work family and personal life – both relieving conflict and seeking enrichment between the domains (Poelmans, 2008)

- Organizational flexibility, rather than simply where, when and how employees may work
  - Employment practices (non-standard forms of employment)
  - Organizational structure – the division of work, distribution of skills and authority, nature of technology, character of communication
  - Culture - a climate of opposition and resistance or consent and commitment

Ramsdal and Skorstad, 2009

- Positives
  - Varied and challenging work
  - Empowerment
  - Improved employability
  - Changing organizational structures, dependent on skills of employees
- Negatives
  - Greater intensification of work
  - Less individual control
  - More precarious working conditions

The degree of state support reflects welfare-regime types (Esping-Andersen, 1999)

- the social-democratic welfare state regime
- the liberal regime
- the Mediterranean regime
- the conservative regime
- the post-communist regime

Summary from *den Dulk, Peters, Poutsma & Ligthart, 2010*

- De-familialization – the degree to which welfare state or market provisions ease the burden of families' caring responsibilities
- Defamilialized welfare state regime
  - Active public policy allowing full participation of men and women in labour market
- Familialistic welfare state regime
  - caring responsibilities primarily seen as responsibility of private households

## The social-democratic welfare state regime:

- Examples are Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark
- Equality among citizens and full employment for men and women is promoted
- Universal services – including substantial public childcare system and broad range of leave arrangements
- Promotion of gender equality through introduction of paternity leave and specific “daddy” quotas within parental leave system

## The liberal regime

- eg. UK and Ireland
- National regulations are limited and development of work family arrangements left to market forces
- Diversity in employer involvement – which may offer competitive advantage re: recruitment and retention

## The Mediterranean and the conservative regimes

- Eg. Spain, Greece, Portugal and Germany, Austria and the Netherlands
- Emphasize role of family and traditional gender roles
- Extended family primarily responsible for combination of work and family life
- Labour market participation of women tends to be low or reduced by wide use of part time employment

## The post-communist regime

- Many Central and Eastern European countries have seen varying levels of decline in childcare services and wage compensation for leave arrangements
- Eg. Slovenia, Estonia still have high state support for leave arrangements
- Bulgaria, Czech Republic – state support diminished to far greater extent

- Practices include flexitime, remote working, leaves of absence, child care services, extra parental leave
- Low performers
  - Organizations in Italy, Portugal, Belgium
- Medium performers
  - Organizations in Germany, Finland, Greece, Austria, France
- High performers
  - Organizations in Denmark, Ireland, UK, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden

## Data from European Social Survey

- Higher professionals report highest levels of work life conflict – they have more stressful jobs
- Work hours (no. worked and working unsocial hours) have a greater impact on work life conflict for women than for men
- Having children, especially young children, increases work life conflict, and reduces gap between high and lower professionals
- Prof'al women in Ireland and UK have high work life conflict compared to other working women.
- In the Netherlands and Sweden, smaller difference between prof'al and non-prof'al women

- Countries with most generous family friendly policies have highest employment rates for women and men
- National productivity levels - top three: Norway, Denmark, Sweden, which have the most generous family leave policies
- Productivity per hour: US rates are lower than Netherlands, France, Luxembourg, Norway, Ireland and Belgium – all countries that guarantee more time off than the US for family related reasons

Widener, 2007

- Regular cross-training and job rotation
- Giving worker teams more autonomy and responsibility for their own work
- Measuring productivity by performance rather than by work hours
- Regularly phasing in new people into long-term projects
- Developing alternative career paths for specialists and managers
- Allowing careerists with small children to take “responsibility breaks” while still working
- Allowing more flexibility in terms of where work is performed (home, for example)
- Facilitating part-time work and job sharing, including management positions

- Four basic elements of a work life programme
  - Policies – formally designed and formally communicated rules
  - Practices – **use** of policies, or non policy-driven habits and practices prevalent in the organization. Can be either constructive and supportive or can exacerbate work life conflict
  - Culture – the importance of a changing cultural mindset: implicit assumptions, social norms and expectations
  - Enablers – strategy and resources, leadership, communication and accountability

Poelmans, Patel and Beham, 2008

**The family-responsible company development model**  
– complementing the evolutionary process of culture change

*Stages 1 and 2:*

- **Systematic contamination** – no attention to or acknowledgement of issues of work life harmony
- **Implementation of policies and commitment at senior levels** – existence of few formal policies but limited take-up. Often a perception gap between what was intended by an organization and what an employee perceives as the result. May be support at the highest levels, but discretionary at middle management

## The family-responsible company development model

### *Stages 3 and 4:*

- **Broader buy-in, healthier practices, and a supportive culture** – recognition that work life harmony of employees affects the bottom line through improved productivity and employee satisfaction
- **Managing with conviction for sustained improvement** – successful implementation of a suite of consistent policies and practices. Work family balance is integrated into the mission of the organization, and evidence of support is visible in day to day business

Poelmans, Patel and Beham, 2008