

Research team

Work, family policies and the transition to adulthood

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WP02
Reconciling Work and
Family Life

Research task coordinator

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Research questions

- How is the balance of work and family represented in EU policies and in National Reform Plans?
- What are new social risks for young adults given the *flexibilisation* of the labour market, the *fragmentation* of family life and the *marketization* of services?
- Are demographic tendencies in EU member states diverging or converging, in particular concerning the transition to adulthood?
- Are school-work transitions in EU member states diverging or converging, and how do European young adults enter the labour market?
- Is there evidence of adjustment of social policy to increasing reality of flexible jobs for young adults, and what are income consequences?
- Is an optimal mix of childcare facilities and time policy to facilitate the work-family life possible and in development?

Constructing a common research framework

Does European integration influence national social policies via OMC? **This project focuses on the relationship between work and family life, in particular for young adults in EU and EU member states social policy.**

Recent literature has shown that EU policies aim at a combination of three hard to combine goals: increasing employment rates, reconciling work and family life, and a flexible and mobile labour force. However, hardly any attention is oriented to the implications for young people who are passing the thresholds to adulthood; leaving parental home, entering the labour market, and starting a family. Does the flexible labour market offer constraints or challenges, is leaving the parental home at the age of 30 a cultural or a social-economic phenomenon, and is fragmentation of family life a matter of choice or is it conditioned by social policies? Our project is aimed explicitly at exploring and specifying what are the policy mechanisms through which the work-life balances of young adults are facilitated or hampered.

Main research findings

The main finding is that **European social policy indeed aims to reconcile striking policy aims, by setting targets, supporting reforms and exploring deficiencies. In principle, national welfare states have to develop and implement the policy instruments and do so according to their political problem analysis, resources and institutional frameworks.** The eight countries in our analysis on the one hand have gone through some, either legal or policy, changes and indeed the reform processes are often inspired by Europe. Nevertheless, European aims are translated and mediated differently in each country according to the domestic 'intergenerational and gender contract' as reflected in the institutional and historical context.

- A big challenge for the EU is to reconcile policy objectives with regard to participation, gender equity, and fertility.
- In particular the eastern and southern countries are so far unable to cope with the New Social Risks for young adults
- The effects of EES - labour mobility, a flexible labour market, self-employment and temporary work - for starting an autonomous household, family life, fertility are highly underestimated by the EU
- Changes in fertility and partnership behaviour in Europe show common trends and persistent diversity in their pace: (postponement, retreat of marriage, the rise of cohabitation and diversity of consensual unions, declining stability of marital unions)
- What really matters is the context for managing different risks and incompatibilities between family life and work, especially at early phases of both careers.
- Changes in cross-country correlation between women's employment and fertility signal the context dependence of tensions experienced by families
- 'Youth on the Move' symbolizes and reinforces the neglect of family life by its explicit assumption that people in the age category 25 – 34 do not have children yet.
- The long duration of adolescence is not only a cultural phenomenon; it is reified and even constructed by social policy both at the EU-level and in member states
- It is not clear yet if the precarious position of young adults is only a temporary intergenerational struggle or that today's young adults as a cohort will overcome their troubles. Much will depend on EU's and member states' social policy

Publication outputs

Work, family Policies and Transitions to Adulthood in Europe. Edited by Trudie Knijn
Palgrave Macmillan, 2012 (Forthcoming, Work and welfare in Europe series)

"The relationship between Family and Work: Tensions, Paradigms and Directives" by Trudie Knijn and Arnoud Smit

"Work family reconciliation. In search of reliable statistics and meaningful indicators" by Janneke Plantenga and Chantal Remery

"Reconciliation of work and care in Poland – the imposed home-care model?" by Irena Kotowska

"Facilitating family life in times of re-commodification" by Trudie Knijn and Barbara Butta

"Facilitating family life. The provision of child care services in the EU" by Janneke Plantenga and Chantal Remery

"De-constructing the Familist Welfare State in Spain. Towards Reconciliation Through Europe?" by Sergio González Begega, Ana M. Guillén Rodríguez and Nuria Moreno-Manzanaro García

"Investing, Facilitating or Individualizing the Reconciliation of Work and Family Life: Three paradigms and Ambivalent Policies". Trudie Knijn and Arnoud Smit, 2009. *Social Politics*, (16) 4, 484-518

"The role and effectiveness of time policies for reconciliation of care responsibilities" 2008. Colette Fagan and P. Walthery in OECD (ed) *Modernising Social Policy for the New Life Course*. Paris: OECD

"The provision of childcare services. A comparative review of thirty European countries" Janneke Plantenga and Chantal Remery. 2008. EU Expert Group on Gender and Employment (EGGE).