

EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES OF WORK AND FAMILY ISSUES

Suzan Lewis, Ph.D.

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CONTRIBUTING STAFF:

Policy Paper Series Editor Marcie Pitt-Catsouphe

Author Suzan Lewis

Graphic Design Naomi Sheehab, Designkartel

WHO SHOULD READ THIS PAPER:

- Practitioners responsible for planning human resource strategies
- Managers responsible for planning global business strategies
- Work/life managers

WHAT THE PAPER PROVIDES:

- In-depth discussion about the work and family experiences of Europeans
- Analysis of work-family policies and practices as they have developed in different European regions
- A five-step framework which can be used for cross-national examinations of work and family issues

HOW YOU CAN USE THIS PAPER:

- Systematically consider the social, political, and economic factors which have influenced the work and family situations in Europe
- Develop your company's approach to creating a plan for international human resource strategies

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INTRODUCTION

THE RELEVANCE OF GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

It has been widely acknowledged by practitioners and academics alike that corporations on both sides of the Atlantic have been wrenched by massive changes, upheavals and uncertainty. The global economy, which was a mere intellectual curiosity a few decades ago, is now a forceful reality which exerts a powerful influence on corporate strategic directions, business practices, and perspectives about human resource management. Whether companies have their headquarters in Europe or in the United States, there are many striking – and some sobering – similarities in corporate experiences: widespread downsizing, significant organisational restructuring, and the ceaseless drive for increased productivity and quality. In response to the turbulence in the business world, corporations all over the globe want their workforces to be flexible so that they can anticipate and respond to the changing business environment.

As European and American corporations have rushed to meet the emergent challenges associated with global competition, they have had to confront a fundamental workforce concern – employees' need to balance the economic and social priorities of their families. Like many other business issues, responding to employees' work-family experiences has also become a global issue. The development of a global work-family perspective is an important aspect of successfully conducting business in today's world market.

Some of the European responses to work-family issues parallel the experiences in the United States whereas others diverge. The exchange of different national perspectives about work and family issues is essential, but not because it is either feasible or advisable for corporations in one country to try to replicate the policies and programs which have seemed successful in another country. As Desatnik and Bennett (1978) have observed, "Certain management philosophies and techniques have proved successful in the domestic environment: their application in a foreign environment too often leads to frustration, failure and underachievement." Rather, the global perspective of work-family issues helps companies to respond to many of the salient social and economic trends which have accompanied globalisation.

Globalisation has increased companies' needs to understand the social and cultural issues which frame the practical, every-day management of work and family issues in different countries. There are a number of reasons for developing a global perspective of work-family issues:

- Trends such as the growth of multinational corporations, changing immigration patterns, increased international relocation, and the acceleration of subcontracting/outsourcing across national boundaries have made it imperative that business organisations have a greater awareness of and responsiveness to the social, political, and economic circumstances of other countries.

Globalisation has increased companies' needs to understand the social and cultural issues which frame the practical, every-day management of work and family issues in different countries.

- Human resource managers and work-family leaders realise that they need to think globally if they are going to be able to develop and implement strategic approaches which support key business objectives. It is essential that these managers understand how complex social, political and economic factors in different national contexts mirror the expectations, policies and practices of those countries.
- Experiences with globalisation have reminded all of us that we have much to learn from one another. The exchange of ideas about work-family issues in different national contexts is of vital importance. Cross-national analyses not only broaden our visions about “what is possible” but they also help us to develop a deeper comprehension of our own experiences.

Despite the growing links and interdependence between American and European businesses, European work-family issues and strategies have received remarkably little attention in the United States. The time to examine European perspectives about work and family issues is long overdue.

There has been a great deal of attention focused on work-family issues in Europe. In particular, the European Union has demonstrated a substantial interest in promoting work-family balance. Some European companies have expressed an interest in forming a corporate membership group as a way for practitioners to strengthen their policies and programs. A new international journal, *Community, Work and Family*, has recently been founded which will feature work-family articles submitted by researchers and practitioners from all over the world.

The international waters of work and family issues remain essentially uncharted. This paper is an invitation for practitioners and academics to initiate exploratory discussions.¹

PAPER HIGHLIGHTS

This paper discusses some of the circumstances surrounding work and family issues as they are manifested in the European countries that are members of the European Union. Among these countries, there are, of course, many differences in their work-family experiences. These differences reflect specific traditions, political circumstances, and economic situations that are rooted in the countries' unique histories, ideologies, and beliefs about the role of the state in citizens' social and economic lives. However, in spite of their differences, member nations of the European Union have a number of similarities which make it possible to discuss, in a general manner, “European perspectives about work and family issues.”

¹ Editor's note: Although many of the work-family terms used in this paper are familiar to the US reader, a number of words have new connotations. A glossary has been included at the end of this paper to help clarify the definitions and nuances of specific words.

This paper has three primary objectives:

To provide an analytic framework which can be used for cross-national examinations of work-family issues.

This paper is intended to be an introduction to European work and family situations. It is expected that corporate readers may want to extend the analyses of work-family issues to those countries that are most relevant to their own businesses. Furthermore, readers may be interested in considering the work-family situations of countries in other parts of the world. In order to help companies conduct these analyses, this paper provides a model of cross-national analysis that can be used to examine work-family situations in different countries.

Section I, "The Analytic Framework" details the five components of the cross-national examination of work-family experiences:

- Landscaping the Overall Context: Social, Political and Economic Issues
- Overview of the Work-Family Agenda: Key Issues and Policies
- Driving and Restraining Forces: Factors Affecting Progress Toward Family-Friendly Societies
- Best Practices: Examples of Workplace Innovations
- Implications: Future Directions

To highlight some common, fundamental work-family issues as they are experienced by countries which are members of the European Union.

In an effort to emphasize the core issues which are characteristic of the European experience, Section II, "Key European Perspectives about Work and Family Issues" considers those factors which have framed the work-family discourse among the member nations of the European Union. Important issues such as the following are considered:

- the leadership role of the European Commission
- the reconciliation of work and family
- the relationship between work-family issues and gender equity
- the distribution of working time
- the linkages between work-family issues and values about population growth
- the meaning of "family-friendly societies"

To examine some of the salient characteristics of policies established by governments and workplaces in specific European regions and countries.

In order to depict some of the important variations which exist in Europe, additional analysis is presented about four European regions.

For purposes of discussion and analysis, Section III, "Regional Perspectives of Work and Family Issues" provides the reader with an overview of the different European regions and offers some specific information about selected countries within those regions.

I. THE ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

OVERVIEW

By all accounts, work and family experiences are significant and complex issues. In fact, attempts to fully understand work and family issues as they are manifested in even a single country has confounded researchers and practitioners for quite some time. A cross-national examination of these issues can be an almost overwhelmingly complicated task.

The experiences of one company, Levi Strauss and Company, are instructive. This company felt that it was important to examine the socio-political-economic context in Europe before it attempted to establish a work and family programme which had originally been created in its parent company in the United States. Rather than transferring the US model of work and family policies and programmes to European countries, Levi Strauss became engaged in a strategic planning process.

- A survey was conducted to document the position of women in the organisational hierarchy.
- Focus groups were convened to surface and challenge basic assumptions and preconceptions such as, "Women won't travel."
- A task force was created to evaluate the work-family needs of employees and to provide local management teams with the information they needed in order to support the equal opportunities programme (Hogg and Harker, 1992).

The development of effective globalised work-family strategies can be enhanced by examining the different national contexts of work and family issues. Using a systematic approach, companies can identify issues relevant to work and family experiences as they are experienced in different countries.

A framework with five stages will be utilised for this paper.

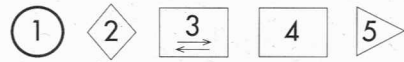
Figure 1: The Analytic Framework



Using this five-stage process, many of the general issues which are characteristic of European countries will be explored. Then, the framework will be used to guide discussions about selected European regions.

This section of the paper explains the importance of each analytic stage and highlights the type of information pertinent to that aspect of the analysis.

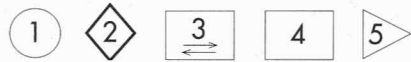
STAGE ONE: LANDSCAPING THE OVERALL CONTEXT



The analysis of work and family experiences in different European nations begins with the identification of the most salient dimensions of the contexts shaping work-family issues. Stage One landscapes the primary social, political, and economic circumstances of peoples' lives. For example, descriptive data about demographic trends contribute to this part of the analysis. An important focus of this stage is the examination of prevalent values which are expressed by cultural and social institutions.

- What historical events continue to affect contemporary work and family experiences?
- Which demographic trends provide insights into people's work and family lives?
- How do values and norms affect perceptions of the status of work-family experiences?
How do they shape a work-family vision?

STAGE TWO: OVERVIEW OF THE WORK-FAMILY AGENDA



Work-family realities can manifest themselves in very different ways. Stage Two of the cross-national analysis focuses on gathering information about specific work-family experiences, responses, and outcomes. The purpose of Stage Two is to highlight the contours of work-family situations in a given country or region.

The identification of key stakeholder groups is a critical task for Stage Two of the cross-national analysis. Gaining insights into the perspectives of stakeholder groups helps to shed light on the evolution of social systems in different countries. Stakeholders may include elected officials, labour groups, corporate representatives, and numerous demographic constituencies.

- Which work-family issues are identified as priorities by families, corporations, unions and/or other interest groups?

The configuration of public and private policies designed to address specific work-family priorities constitute another important aspect of this analytic process. Profiles of these policies contribute to cross-national comparisons.

- What public and private policies have been established which affect the resources and choices made by working families to address their work-family concerns?

The linguistic framing of discussions about work-family issues often suggests which issues are the most important to the peoples of different nations. In the United States, for example, a lot of

attention has been focused on “work-family conflicts” and “work/life balance.” Although the meanings behind these terms are certainly pertinent to the experiences of some European regions, the European discussions often stress different dimensions of work-family issues.

- What are the current, most important work-family debates?

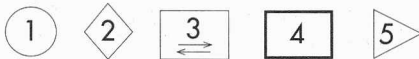
STAGE THREE: DRIVING AND RESTRAINING FORCES



Stage Three of the analysis attempts to uncover factors which have either facilitated or hindered progress toward greater responsiveness to work and family issues. These factors are likely to reflect some of the social, economic, and political situations identified in Stage One. In addition, specific events or decisions made by leaders in the public or business arenas may exert an influence on progress toward family-friendly societies.

- What factors are encouraging the society to become more family-friendly? What factors are holding this progress back?

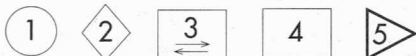
STAGE FOUR: BEST PRACTICES



The concept of “best practices” is, of course, reflective of particular value sets. For this paper, best practices refer to policies and programmes established to support the work-family objectives prevalent in specific regions or countries. For example, best practices in those nations which view work-family issues from a gender equality perspective would include policies and programmes that support progress toward increased equality *between men and women at home and at the workplace*. In contrast, best practices in countries which emphasize more traditional gender and family roles might stress flexible work options to help *women combine work and family roles*.

- Which policies and programmes exemplify best practices in a particular region or country?

STAGE FIVE: IMPLICATIONS



Although the work-family field is just beginning to collect quantifiable data about the outcomes associated with different approaches to work and family issues, the consideration of the consequences – both intended and unintended – is important to the cross-national analysis of work-family experiences.

- What are the consequences of the dominant work-family values in a particular region or country?
- What are the consequences of the public and private policies established (or not established) in a particular region or country?

USING THE FRAMEWORK

The cross-national framework provides the basic tools for examining the work-family situations of different nations and regions. Furthermore, this framework will help corporate readers anticipate the potential outcomes of work-family policies and programmes that might be established for employees in different countries.

FOR THE CORPORATE READER

To what extent do you have ready access to background information about the countries where your company:

- has worksites?
- recruits employees?
- sells products or services?

Do you have a good understanding about the work-family priorities of people in the above countries?

- Are you familiar with the work-family programmes in the above countries which are considered to be exemplary?

II. KEY EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES ABOUT WORK AND FAMILY ISSUES

This section of the paper “maps out” many of the important elements of work and family issues from the perspective of European countries. Using the five-stage analytic framework, our discussion begins with an overview of the socio-political-economic context of today’s Europe. Given the importance of the European Union, some background information about the Union is provided. In Stage Two, key concepts such as “reconciliation” and “family-friendly society” are introduced. Following the examination of driving and restraining forces, highlights of European best practices are provided. This section concludes with summary comments about the implications of today’s work-family situations in Europe.

STAGE ONE: LANDSCAPING THE SOCIO-POLITICAL- ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The European Union: In comparison to the experiences of countries on other continents, Europe’s social, political and economic environments are unique due to the cross-national relationships forged by the European Union (EU or Union).

The European Economic Community, the predecessor to today’s European Union, was originally united in an effort to safeguard peace and promote economic and social progress. The European Community currently comprises fifteen member states:² Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

² Editor’s note: The term ‘state’ and ‘country’ will be used interchangeably throughout this paper to refer to the European countries that comprise the European Union.

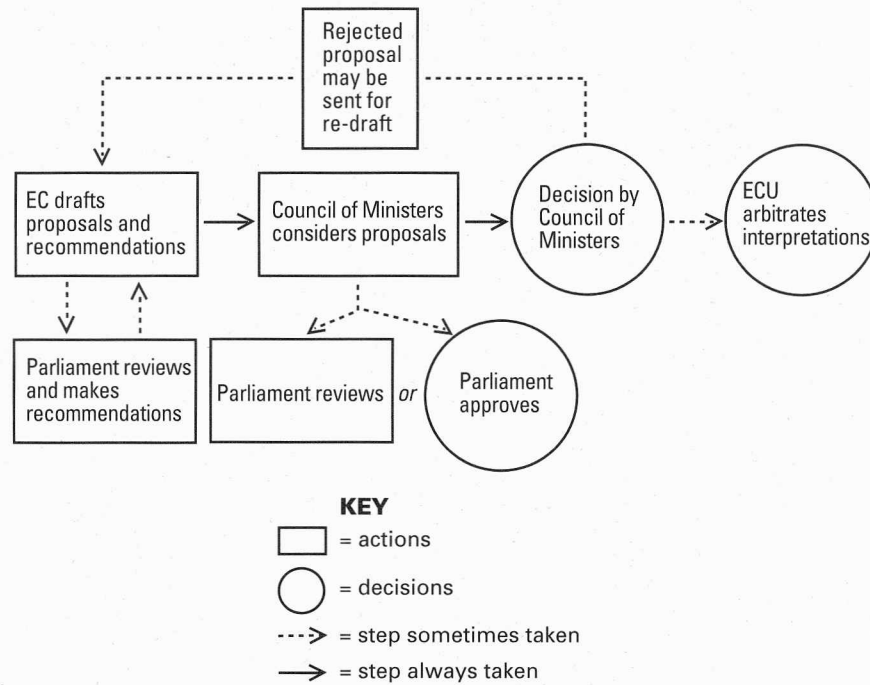


At least in principle, all of the member states are moving toward economic union, with intergovernmental cooperation in other specific areas. In reality, of course, there has been some interstate conflict within the Union about specific social and economic objectives.

The Union is managed by a number of institutions, including:

- the European Commission (EC), which is the executive structure of the EU and acts as the guardian of the treaties on which the Union is based. The EC drafts proposals and presents them to the Council of Ministers, but does not make final decisions. In addition, it has the power to ensure that European Community law is implemented.
- the Council of Ministers, which is the primary law making body. It represents the member states and makes decisions about the proposals submitted by the Commission. Recommendations/approval of the Parliament may be sought.
- the EU Parliament, which is directly elected by citizens of member states and examines Commission policy proposals. The Parliament can advocate for change through its review of proposals.
- the European Court of Justice (ECJ), which is final arbiter in the matter of European Commission law.

Figure 2: Decision Making Path in the European Union



In order to understand the context of work-family issues in Europe, it is essential to recognise that Europeans view economic and social progress as being inextricably linked.

Although the EU was initially developed on the basis of economic agreements, it has increasingly paid attention to the nature of the societies which are being affected by the significant economic and social changes that have occurred in Europe.

All of the EU member states are affected by EU legislation and policies which relate to employment, health and safety.³ It is important to understand that some work and family policies, such as specifications about work hours, have been introduced as employment directives whereas others, such as leaves, are considered to be social provisions. Although the Union has no powers to directly legislate in the family sphere, it can influence work and family experiences through its employment legislation (directives). For example, it has established directives concerning labour laws and working conditions, maternity leave provisions, and the rights of part-time workers.

Despite movement toward Europeanisation, there are important national differences in their approaches to work and family issues. As will be discussed throughout this paper, issues such as the reconciliation of work and family, family well-being, gender equity, and social-economic interests may be viewed in particular ways by different countries. In addition, there are important national differences in perspectives about what different stakeholder groups, including the government, can (and should) contribute to work-family balance.

³ Editor's note: When signing the Maastricht Treaty which established the EU, the UK negotiated an opt-out of the Social Chapter; therefore, it does not have to comply with the directives developed from the Social Chapter. However, the UK does have to comply with the other directives. Other member nations must comply with all of the directives.

Linking Social, Political and Economic Experiences: Within the European Union, *work and family issues are framed as socio-political as well as economic issues*. This distinction is an important difference from the work-family debate in the United States where these issues are usually seen as a combination of business matters and private, family concerns. In order to understand the context of work-family issues in Europe, it is essential to recognise that Europeans view economic and social progress as being inextricably linked. It follows, therefore, that one of the EC's concerns is to monitor the impact of economic trends on families. The following statement of the EC underscores the significance of this perspective:

“Competitiveness and solidarity have both to be taken into account in building a successful Europe for the future ... The development of social policy cannot be based on the idea that social progress must go into retreat in order for economic competitiveness to recover...”

(European Commission, 1993: 7)

This policy orientation contrasts with the dominant United States perspective which tends to construe social and economic policies separately.

Economic Factors: Many of the same economic factors underpinning the need to address work-family issues in the United States are also affecting work and family experiences in Europe. The demands of global product markets and the heightened global competition has augmented the emphasis on the flexibility of work processes and employment practices. Pressure for the *expansion of flexible work schedules* has also been increased as a result of the globalisation of the labour market.

Within Europe, job insecurity is increasing in all sectors of the economy and unemployment is a problem in many regions. For example, although the output per person increased in Germany for four consecutive years (1992-1995), the employment rates fell. There is, of course, significant variation in unemployment among the various EU countries. The 1995 unemployment rate in Luxembourg was a low of 3 1/2% whereas in Andalucia in Southern Spain it was 35%. Analysts have suggested that, in general, the fall in men's labour force participation rates contributed to the recent small gains in the employment rates. It is important to note that both the rates of labour force participation and rates of employment have risen for women in the majority of EU countries (European Commission, 1996).

In some ways, high rates of unemployment have helped to “set the stage” for family-friendly policies. Work sharing schemes have been introduced, particularly by companies in Germany and France, in an effort to ensure economic support for a greater number of families. These work sharing arrangements have also made it possible for increasing release time which employees can use for family interactions. Indeed, Phyllis Raabe has argued that any company which does not at least explore the possibilities of work sharing before downsizing cannot be regarded as family-friendly – in the broadest sense – whatever its family benefits for the surviving workers (Raabe, 1996).

Work sharing schemes have been introduced, particularly by companies in Germany and France, in an effort to ensure economic support for a greater number of families.

Employment Patterns & Social Trends: A number of social trends in Europe have reinforced the significance of work-family issues.

- Women have become more economically independent from men. To a great extent, this is reflective of the increase in *women's labour market participation*. The changing patterns of women's workforce affiliation are particularly noteworthy among the mothers of young children. As in the United States, the large-scale entry of women in the labour force has increased the support for attention to work-family issues.⁴ The rates of labour force participation of women and men with children ten years and younger are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Employment Status of Women and Men with Children Aged 0-10 years:*
Selected EU Countries
% of mothers and fathers in the labour force

| Country | Mothers | | | | Fathers | | | |
|----------|---------|-------|--------------|-----------------------|---------|--------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| | TOTAL | FT/PT | Unemp. | Economically Inactive | TOTAL | FT/PT | Unemp. | Economically Inactive |
| Austria | 64 | 40/24 | not reported | not reported | 97 | not reported | not reported | not reported |
| Belgium | 62 | 38/24 | 9 | 29 | 92 | 92/1 | 5 | 2 |
| Denmark | 74 | 49/25 | 10 | 15 | 88 | 86/2 | 6 | 6 |
| Finland | 65 | 57/8 | 12 | 23 | 80 | 77/3 | 15 | 6 |
| France | 59 | 40/19 | 11 | 30 | 90 | 88/2 | 8 | 3 |
| Germany | 51 | 26/25 | 8 | 41 | 92 | 91/1 | 5 | 3 |
| Greece | 44 | 40/3 | 7 | 49 | 95 | 93/1 | 3 | 2 |
| Ireland | 35 | 24/10 | 8 | 57 | 81 | 78/2 | 13 | 7 |
| Italy | 43 | 37/6 | 6 | 51 | 93 | 91/1 | 4 | 3 |
| Luxem. | 42 | 29/13 | 3 | 54 | 93 | 93/- | 3 | 3 |
| Nether. | 46 | 6/41 | 5 | 49 | 92 | 85/7 | 3 | 5 |
| Portugal | 70 | 63/7 | 5 | 25 | 95 | 93/1 | 3 | 3 |
| Spain | 35 | 29/6 | 14 | 52 | 85 | 84/1 | 12 | 3 |
| Sweden | 75 | 35/40 | 7 | 19 | 85 | 82/3 | 8 | 7 |
| UK | 53 | 18/35 | 6 | 41 | 84 | 82/2 | 11 | 5 |

* Statistics for Sweden are for parents with children under 7 years.

Source: European Commission Network on Childcare, 1996, pp. 137-39.

⁴ Editor's note: In the US, the 1995 labor force participation rate for women with children under the age of 6 years was 53.0% among single women, 63.5% among married women and 66.3% among "other" women. Since 1981, there has been a steady rise in the labor force affiliation among mothers with children under the age of 6 years (regardless of marital status) which increased from 48.9% in 1981 to 58.0% in 1992 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1994. March Current Population Survey. Unpublished data. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor; Women's Bureau, 1994. *1993 Handbook on Women Workers: Trends & Issues*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor).

- **Birth rates** are falling throughout most of Europe. Birth rates have been particularly troublesome to decision makers in Spain and Italy where these rates have been among the lowest in Europe. In 1993, the fertility rate was 1.22 in Italy and 1.26 in Spain compared to the aggregated rate for all EU countries of 1.46 (European Commission Network on Childcare, 1996).⁵ This trend has created considerable concern that the replacement of the population might not be sufficient to ensure future economic viability. Low birth rates have diminished the likelihood that the working adult population will be large enough to support the social and economic security of the growing elderly population. In France, historical anxieties about maintaining an army comparable to neighbouring states have contributed to pro-natalist policies which attempt to promote the maintenance of the country's population size.
- Increasingly, European employees are questioning the need to work long hours. In fact, employees are expressing interest in *reducing the length of their work week* and increasing the flexibility of their schedules as ways to increase the time which families can spend together. Table 2 contains information about the average work week in EU countries.⁶

TABLE 2

Length of the Average Work Week: Selected Countries
hours per week in 1994

| | Males | | | Females | | |
|-----------------|-------|------|------|---------|------|------|
| | F/T | P/T | All | F/T | P/T | All |
| Belgium | 38.8 | 21.1 | 38.3 | 36.9 | 20.9 | 31.9 |
| Denmark | 39.8 | 14.2 | 37.1 | 38.0 | 21.1 | 32.0 |
| France | 40.6 | 22.5 | 39.8 | 38.8 | 22.4 | 34.2 |
| Germany | 39.9 | 18.9 | 39.3 | 39.2 | 20.2 | 33.0 |
| Greece | 41.6 | 25.6 | 41.0 | 39.0 | 21.5 | 38.0 |
| Irish Republic | 41.6 | 21.2 | 40.6 | 37.8 | 18.0 | 33.9 |
| Italy | 39.7 | 30.1 | 39.5 | 36.3 | 23.0 | 34.7 |
| Luxembourg | 40.6 | 26.7 | 40.5 | 37.9 | 19.7 | 34.3 |
| The Netherlands | 39.6 | 18.6 | 36.3 | 39.1 | 17.9 | 25.2 |
| Portugal | 42.7 | 26.3 | 42.4 | 39.3 | 20.2 | 37.9 |
| Spain | 41.0 | 19.6 | 40.6 | 39.5 | 17.5 | 36.3 |
| UK | 45.4 | 16.0 | 43.5 | 40.4 | 17.9 | 30.6 |
| EU: Average | 41.1 | 19.5 | 40.2 | 38.9 | 17.9 | 25.2 |

Source: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1996.

⁵ Editor's note: The fertility rate is calculated as the live births per 1,000 women.

⁶ Editor's note: In the US, the average length of the work week for all full-time workers regardless of gender was 43.3 hours in 1995 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Reports #630).

The combination of European political, social and economic factors have created an environment where work and family issues have become increasingly important during the past decade.

STAGE TWO: THE EUROPEAN WORK-FAMILY AGENDA

Framing the Work-Family Discussion: The European terminology used to discuss work and family experiences tends to be somewhat different than that used in the United States. The European Commission typically discusses work-family issues in terms of the reconciliation of paid work and family life. Some critics have suggested that reconciliation implies the need to restore a harmonious relationship between work and family which once existed and is now lost (by implication, as a result of women's employment outside of the home). The European Commission is clear, however, that the term reconciliation does not imply restoration but rather an attempt to harmonise different activities and interests so that they can be conducted with minimum stress and disadvantage (Moss, 1996). This perspective of reconciliation acknowledges the potential for conflict between work systems and family systems. It also alludes to the importance of seeking accommodation between the needs and interests of families, employers, employees and other stakeholders.

ABOUT RECONCILIATION

The Recommendation on Childcare, which was adopted by the Council of Ministers in 1992, indicates that reconciliation:

- is an important issue for men as well as women
- is a responsibility to be shared among a wide range of groups including governments at all levels, social partners, private organisations, and individuals
- can best be supported through a variety of complementary strategies such as services; leaves; workplace supports; and increased participation of men in the care and upbringing of children.

(The European Commission Network on Childcare, 1996)

The term reconciliation has gradually gained currency in public sector discussions of member countries; however, it is not as yet widely used by companies across Europe. At the workplace, *work-family* has become accepted, especially when gender equity is the priority concern. The term "work/life" has only recently been introduced into discourse. The notion of *family-friendly* policies and practices is current in some countries, but is not easily translatable into all European languages and is not used by every member state.

The deeper meanings attached to the work-family language vary cross-nationally. For example,

- In some countries, family-oriented employer policies may be designed to support the traditional, single breadwinner family model or some variant of this family structure whereas the

family-oriented policies developed in other countries provide supports for reconciling a range of work and family lifestyles.

- The goals of gender equality are interpreted by some as providing opportunities for women to assume work roles. Others have viewed gender equality as an opportunity to reconceptualise work and family roles so that men and women can meaningfully participate in both work and family experiences.

The work-family language which has developed in Europe reflects different ideologies and value systems. It is very important to pay attention to these differences because they often are clues to the various shades of meanings behind the work-family debates.

Priority Concerns: Much like the early years of work-family in the United States, debate about work and family issues within Europe has tended to focus on *childcare* issues to a greater extent than other work-family concerns. However, the aging of the population which is occurring across Europe has increased awareness of the challenges facing working families as they try to combine their employment and *eldercare* responsibilities.

The EU is very much concerned with *gender inequality*. Many European social policies for the reconciliation of work and family have been established so that women who need to or want to work are also able to bear children. It is widely perceived that public policies in Sweden and Denmark, for example, have ensured that women are not forced to choose between having a career or children. Policies established to support gender equality attempt to:

- 1) ensure that women are not disadvantaged in the workplace by the assumption of caretaking responsibilities, and
- 2) promote greater gender equality within families.

In contrast, United States policy pertinent to gender equity has been focused on workplace concerns such as job discrimination, career advancement and the glass ceiling, and wage equity. The EC endeavors to avoid an exclusive focus on women, and there has been much debate around the fatherhood role.

The EU has emphasized the importance of mainstreaming gender equality issues by considering the implications which all social and economic policies have for gender equality. This standard is considered to be essential to remove systemic inequalities. Some countries, notably Sweden, are already some way along the road to mainstreaming these issues. Others are just beginning to realise the potential implications of having every government department consider the impact of policies on gender equality.

The eradication or minimisation of *unemployment* and the associated social exclusion of families outside the labour force are also major concerns of the EU and the national governments of member states. A number of European states have taken steps to restrict overtime as a means of creating jobs and distributing work more fairly. This type of employment strategy has the poten-

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tial to expand the availability of *alternative work arrangements* which can be perceived as family-friendly. There are, however, drawbacks to overtime restriction. Many employers have traditionally used overtime to minimise redundancies in their workforces and enhance the elasticity of a stable workforce. These objectives are achieved by offering overtime to workers during the heavy production periods and then cutting back on overtime during slack periods rather than hiring and laying off personnel in response to the variations in economic circumstances. If employers cannot use overtime, they may be forced to create a pool of redundant workers, possibly through short term contracts. Employers express concern that this could foster a situation where they would lose skilled employees who may be needed during periods of economic recovery. Some European states have established policies to help employers maintain flexible employment relationships with their workers while also reducing costs.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Government and the Workplace: Supports provided by governments and employers in EU countries create the work and family infrastructure. Of course, the levels of commitment to work and family policies vary, depending on the specific issue and the particular country.

All European states have *national health services*; therefore, the need for health insurance and dependent health care is not as significant a concern as it is in the United States. The availability of publicly sponsored health care enables employers to concentrate on the provision of other types of benefits and services that support families.

Childcare is often addressed at the workplace, especially in countries where the state provision of services is more limited. Workplace-based childcare and *childcare allowances* are more common in countries such as the UK, the Netherlands, and Portugal where public provision is minimal. In these contexts, companies are more likely to look to the US for ideas about corporate-sponsored policies and programmes. Among those states which have established more comprehensive, higher quality, publicly funded childcare services, the workplace programmes are typically designed to supplement rather than replace existing options.

It must be remembered that in Europe national governments are often primary employers. In several countries, such as the Netherlands, UK, Ireland, Germany and Portugal, governments often provide childcare to public sector employees (Brewster and Hegewisch, 1994).

Across Europe, the public provision of health care and *statutory maternity/parental leave rights* helps to ensure some basic benefits for all families. In addition, many countries support childcare and other family-oriented benefits. However, given the current difficult economic climate, even the strongest welfare states are increasingly looking to workplaces as well as governments to adopt more family-friendly policies and practices. As a consequence, greater numbers of leading-edge employers have started to offer supplementary benefits so that they can become employers of choice. Employer-supported benefits are beginning to make important contributions to European nations becoming more family-friendly.

Beyond Corporate Policies and Programmes: In contrast to American discussions about work and family issues which tend to concentrate on programmatic and policy-oriented strategies, the work-family debate in Europe has been expanded to include the various environments where families live and work. As a consequence, Europeans tend to talk about their visions of family-friendly policies, family-friendly workplaces and family-friendly societies.

DIMENSIONS OF FAMILY-FRIENDLINESS

- Family-friendly policies refer to formal social policies or employer policies which aim to help people manage their work and family demands. These formal policies may be either blocked or supported by informal practices. It is important to note that family-friendly policies and workplaces can be defined from either the perspective of the employer or the employee.
- Family-friendly workplaces refer to those worksites where there are formal policies and informal practices that support the reconciliation of work and family. In Europe, discussions tend to refer to organisations or workplaces rather than corporations. This focus makes it possible for discussions to be relevant to both public and private sector employers. In fact, it is often the public sector employers who have assumed leadership in terms of work-family policies. The inclusive nature of the European discussions about work-family issues invites a number of stakeholders to participate in the debate.
- Family-friendly societies may be defined as those societies which assign equal importance to economic and social progress. The European Commission has suggested that the criteria for a “family-friendly society” would include the extent to which all policies and practices established by social institutions, including economic policies, are evaluated according to the impact which they have on families. A “family-friendly society” would, for example, strive to encourage time for family interactions and would work to reduce family poverty by minimising unemployment and unstable work arrangements. In theory, a “family-friendly society” would be responsive to the needs of all family members, although to date there has been more focus on childcare than on eldercare or the care of other family members.

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Stakeholders as Social Partners: The social partners who are seen as having a vested interest in the reconciliation of work-family concerns include:

- all levels of *policy-makers* (e.g., European, national, and local);
- *employers*;
- trade *unions* and other representatives of employees;
- *interest groups* and advocacy groups; and
- *individuals* (including *employees* and the members of their families).

The European Commission has intentionally framed its discussions about work and family issues so that all social partners are encouraged to become involved. The goal of the social partnership approach is to move these issues from being principally the private concerns of families to being

a shared priority among a number of different stakeholders. This approach has been developed to relieve individuals (particularly women) of sole responsibility for mediating their work and family systems. In addition, by involving multiple stakeholders in the discussion about reconciliation, the responsibilities for responding to work and family issues are not assigned exclusively to one party (e.g., employers or governments). A fundamental assumption of the social partners perspective is that appropriate solutions which meet a range of needs are more likely to be developed and implemented if multiple stakeholders are involved. With the reconciliation of work and family being firmly on the agenda of the European Union, the European Commission has assumed a significant leadership role and has encouraged member states to make changes that would promote family-friendly societies.

The social partners have been given real power to influence European regulations through the Social Protocol annexed to the Treaty of European Union (1992), better known as the Social Chapter.⁷ This Chapter provides for social dialogue about the development of social policy through formalised contacts between management and labour. The first agreement to be reached through this process is the Directive on Parental Leave. The partners involved in the development of the Directive were the European Trade Unions Confederation (ETUC); the Union of Industrial and Employer's Confederations of Europe (UNICE); and the European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation (CEEP). This Directive requires that all member states (except the UK) provide an entitlement of a minimum of three months unpaid leave for all working parents. As depicted in Table 3, policies established by many of the member states already go well beyond this provision.

⁷ Editor's note: As mentioned previously, the UK, alone, has opted out of this agreement.

TABLE 3: PARENTAL LEAVE IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

| Country | Length of Leave | Service Requirement | Pay | Limits |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|
| Austria | 24 months | None | Flat rate payment | Up to 4th birthday |
| Belgium | Not statutory but universal system of 6-12 months career breaks | 12 months (does not apply in companies with fewer than 25 employees) | Flat rate payment | Up to a total of 36 months throughout career |
| Denmark | 10 weeks (plus 6 month extended leave) | None (3 months for extended leave) | Flat rate payment | Must follow maternity leave (up to 9th birthday for extended leave) |
| Finland | Until child is 36 months | None | First six months linked to earnings; then flat rate | Up to 3rd birthday |
| France | Until child is 36 months | 12 months (does not apply in companies with fewer than 100 employees) | Flat rate but only for second and subsequent children | Up to 3rd birthday |
| Germany | Until child is 36 months | 4 weeks | Flat rate for 24 months; then means tested | Up to 3rd birthday |
| Greece | 3 months per year | 12 months (does not apply in companies with fewer than 100 employees) | No benefit | Until child is 2 1/2 |
| Ireland | No statutory provision for parental leave | | | |
| Italy | 6 months | None | No benefit | From 4th to 10th month after birth |
| Luxembourg | No statutory provision for parental leave | | | |
| The Netherlands | 6 months | 12 months | No benefit | Up to 4th birthday but only on a part-time basis |
| Portugal | 6 - 24 months | 6 months | No benefit | Follows maternity leave |
| Spain | Until child is 36 | None | No benefit | Up to 3rd birthday |
| Sweden | 120 days per family per child | None | 80 - 90% of earnings | Up to 8th birthday |
| United Kingdom | No statutory provision for parental leave | | | |
| EU | 3 months | Up to 12 months (to be decided by member states) | Left to member states | Can be up to 8th birthday |

Sources: "Opt-Out Means UK Parents Lose Out", January, 1996; European Commission, 1995; and European Commission Network on Childcare, 1996

The development of the Directive on Parental Leave is an illustration of the progress that can be made by involving different stakeholder groups. The social partners affiliated with the European Union recently embarked on a similar process that is exploring the protection of atypical workers (e.g., part-time workers).

At the national level, equal opportunity organisations which are usually established by governments to oversee progress towards gender equality may also strive to keep reconciliation on the social agenda. For example, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) in the United Kingdom was responsible for taking a key case to the House of Lords regarding the rights of part-time workers. Similarly, the Instituto de Mujer in Spain has worked towards the removal of discrimination and the improvement of working conditions for women.

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There is a great deal of variation in the extent to which trade unions and other types of industrial relations groups are involved with work-family issues. In the past, European trade unions have demonstrated minimal interest in issues related to childcare and other dependent care concerns. Furthermore, they have tended to oppose atypical employment patterns because these alternatives are perceived as threats to full-time work. For many years, part-time workers were largely excluded from collective bargaining systems, a condition that contributed to part-time workers having a peripheral and unprotected status.

More recently, unions have begun to demonstrate an interest in work-family issues. There are some indications that unions have recognised that so-called atypical working patterns are here to stay. Unions have acknowledged that it is difficult to even define what constitutes a typical work pattern. Furthermore, unions in those countries where there is limited public support for childcare have been more active in discussions about the importance of childcare services for working families. In contrast, in some countries where unions continue to be male dominated, (e.g., Spain), there is little indication of union interest in issues related to the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities.

A number of interest groups are supporting changes toward more family-friendly societies. For example, COFACE (the Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Community) is a non-governmental organisation which speaks up for families and advocates for European policies to consider family well-being. This organisation also encourages the exchange of ideas and mutual aid between family organisations across Europe. Family organisations are particularly influential in France and Portugal.

As in the United States, employers are seen as important stakeholders and are recognised as having a pivotal role in being able to establish employment practices that might enable employees to balance their work and family lives. However, in Europe employers are regarded as only one of several partnership strands. For example, in Germany the state pays short term allowances to offset the loss of work which results from economic downturns. In 1993 approximately 700,000 workers received short term allowance which avoided more than 200,000 redundancies and the associated social security costs. Generous short term regulations in Belgium have also facilitated

employer experimentation with new models of work time arrangements (European Commission DGV. Directorate General for Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Affairs, January, 1995). These are examples of workplace/government partnerships that contribute to both organisational and family well-being.

STAGE THREE: DRIVING AND RESTRAINING FORCES

A number of situations in Europe have served to either facilitate or restrain progress toward family-friendly societies. There are two important points to remember with respect to driving and restraining forces:

- Factors which serve as “driving forces” in one country may act as “restraining forces” in others.
- Some of the factors which have influenced the support for family-friendly societies may reflect social support for issues other than work-family priorities. For example, although the tremendous growth in part-time work in the UK has reflected the preferences of women with children to work less than full-time schedules, other factors – such as the national insurance contributions scheme which makes it cheaper for employers to hire a larger number of individuals who work for a fewer number of hours than to hire fewer full-time workers – have had a more substantial effect on the availability of part-time positions (Hewitt, 1996).

Leadership of the European Union: The European Union has had a powerful influence on the status of work-family issues in member countries and has promoted change using a variety of strategies such as directives, recommendations, and forums for discussion.

The European Court of Justice (ECJ) plays a significant role in interpreting and upholding employment equality for men and women. For example, in 1990 the ECJ defined pensions as “pay” which must meet the standards of the European equal pay rules. As a consequence, employers were required to eliminate discrimination in pension plans. The ECJ also has jurisdiction over directives for atypical workers. In two Dutch cases, the Court ruled that part-time workers must have the right to join occupational pension schemes.

At the prompting of the European Commission, the Council of Ministers adopted a recommendation for childcare in 1992. This recommendation encouraged initiatives that would help men and women reconcile their occupational, family and childrearing responsibilities. The goals of the recommendation were:

- to enhance the responsiveness of workplaces to the needs of workers and their children;
- to increase the participation of men in the upbringing of children; and
- to facilitate the meaningful participation of women in the labour market (Moss, 1996).

The Council of Ministers developed a systemic approach to reconciliation and recommended that changes be made to the workplace environment as well as the structure and organisation of work. This recommendation required that member states consider working parents' needs for childcare services. All member states were required to report on their progress in these areas.

The European Union has also exerted influence on work and family progress as a result of the exchange among member states of their experiences, by sharing ideas about innovative practices, and by encouraging dialogue about issues related to reconciliation. The European Commission has established a number of networks for this purpose.

The European Commission has stimulated discussions about reconciliation. For example, all member states have participated in debates about issues associated with equal opportunities, including the southern Mediterranean states which only recently began to focus on these issues. Other discussions have considered the possibility of introducing service vouchers which family members could use to hire people to take care of some household responsibilities (e.g., cleaners, gardeners, ironing services). It is anticipated that the use of vouchers would also stimulate employment, which is a concern across Europe (Lebrun, 1995). If enacted, the use of vouchers would allow for the consumption of specified services to be subsidised, either by governments or by private companies. The goal of a voucher system is to reduce the cost of domestic and other services, thereby stimulating the employment of service providers. According to opponents, the voucher system would lead to legalising the black market of untaxed domestic work. Proponents argue that the careful implementation of vouchers would meet the needs of the overworked and the unemployed, improve the employment conditions of domestics and neighbourhood workers, and increase the visibility of their work experiences.

There is considerable variation in the extent to which individual countries have followed the EU's leadership regarding the reconciliation of work and family issues, reflecting the degree of consensus or conflict within the states around these issues. Consensus is highest in the Nordic countries but there is often conflict among political practices or among interest groups in other EU member states. It is important to note that some national governments and/or political parties within specific countries have resisted changes in social policy that might promote progress toward family-friendly societies. For example, the UK Conservative government continues to vigorously resist pressure to introduce statutory parental leave. This party argues that regulations of this type would reduce the competitiveness of businesses, ultimately putting employees' jobs at risk. Similarly, in other European states right wing political parties advocate for policies which encourage mothers to remain at home full-time and consistently attempt to put "traditional family values" on the political agenda.

In general, the debates about work-family reconciliation which have occurred among member states of the European Union and the passage of European directives have resulted in many progressive changes.

Social Values, Social Trends: Emergent lifestyles and perspectives about work and family have affected the movement toward family-friendly societies in Europe. Five issues have exerted particular influence:

- concerns about the proportion of *work time and family time*;
- changing *business needs*;
- recent experiences with *efforts to promote work and family policies* and practices;
- changes in *technology*; and
- *organizational culture*.

Time- As indicated in Table 2, full-time work weeks are considerably shorter in Europe than in the United States. There appears to be a growing reluctance among Europeans to work long or unsociable hours. A representative survey of employees in the European Community found that even if higher pay were offered, only one-fifth were willing to work on Sundays (21%) or nights (22%) (Baldwin and Morsink, 1991).

This European propensity to set limits on work time raises questions about whether European industry can be competitive under these circumstances. German experiments with shortened work hours have demonstrated that they need not reduce productivity. Rather, there are indications that shortened hours can increase efficiency (Raabe, 1996). Research findings suggest that in manufacturing industries, innovative shift systems and reductions in overtime can de-couple working hours and operating hours. Thus, an increase in operating hours in Europe often leads to greater recruitment rather than to an increase in working time for existing employees, as tends to happen in the United States (European Commission DGV. Directorate General for Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Affaires, January, 1995).⁸

Economic and Business Factors- Economic circumstances and business management philosophy have contributed to changes in work patterns. In the late 1980s, companies confronted several important workforce challenges such as the decline in the number of school leavers and an imminent *skills shortage* among workforce entrants. At that time, it was widely argued that companies would need to establish family-friendly policies if they wanted to recruit and retain a sustainable workforce, which would include increasing proportions of women with young children. Companies' needs to meet their changing workforce priorities helped to make the "*business case*" for work and family policies which, in turn, drove changes at the workplace.

Although the recession and subsequent emphasis on downsizing detracted from this argument in favour of family-friendly policies and programmes, employers recognised that family-friendly workplaces could minimise stress among the reduced core workforce, thereby enhancing their productivity. *Stress reduction* has become a primary economic rationale for maintaining and expanding family-friendly workplace policies.

There appears to be a growing reluctance among Europeans to work long or unsociable hours.

⁷ This tendency to increase the working time of employees already hired is also observed in the United Kingdom.

In 1995, the European Commission Work Family Network *awarded social innovation prizes* to corporations. Almost all of the recipients have established flexible alternatives of work scheduling, much of which has been introduced as a result of participative forms of decision making. When accepting these prizes, many of the corporate representatives made comments which acknowledged wisdom which is widely touted but often forgotten: satisfied and involved workforces will be more productive.

Some employers and managers in Europe have resisted proposed family-friendly strategies because they fear that such changes might undermine management authority and introduce new management challenges. For example, concerns have been expressed about the outcomes that result from long periods of worker absence associated with leaves (c.f., Lewis and Taylor, 1996).

Positive Experiences with Leaves- Europe's long-standing history with maternity leave policies has had an impact on employer attitudes toward the provision of family-friendly policies and programmes. European organisations have had many years of experience managing maternity leaves, and in some countries other leaves such as paternity leaves, parental leaves, and leave to care for sick family members. Surveys have found that while employers often anticipate difficulties related to administering leaves, those who have managed leaves usually report fewer problems. This suggests that the anticipated problems are more severe than those actually experienced (McCrae, 1991).

Technology- The impact of technology is a truly global phenomenon and has had the effect of driving work-family change in Europe as it has elsewhere in the world. Computer and telecommunications technologies have contributed to the growth of teleworking (also called telecommuting) which is particularly accelerated in the UK and the Netherlands.

At the level of the European Commission, there has been some concern expressed about the working conditions of teleworkers, home workers and other isolated workers who are rarely unionized or represented. In addition, there has been some discussion about the probability of work more easily intruding in the home, possibly having deleterious consequences for families and especially for children.

Organisational Culture- The debates about the need for changes in organisational culture have been increasing in Europe, but in practice, change tends to be slow. In the UK as well as other regions, workplace policies regarding work and family issues generally coexist with cultures that are *unfriendly* to families (such as expectations for long work hours).

The treatment of work-family as a women's issue has marginalised its importance in some countries, holding back the possibility for more fundamental changes. There is evidence that support for the establishment of family-friendly policies at some workplaces has been withheld because of the reluctance of fellow employees who may not directly benefit from such programmes. This phenomenon is illustrated by the responses of the BMW workers in Germany who resisted the introduction of family-friendly initiatives on the grounds that, "We should be making cars, not babies." (Harker, 1996)

Surveys suggest that while employers often anticipate difficulties related to administering leaves, those who have managed leaves usually report fewer problems.

STAGE FOUR: EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES

The European approach to the reconciliation of work and family issues, which emphasizes the importance of the participation of all key stakeholder groups, makes it necessary to consider the responses of workplaces in relation to the types of family-responsive public supports which have been established. It is necessary to view the concept of “best practices” as a relative construct, reflecting the socio-political-economic contexts of particular countries. In addition, Europeans see the concept of best practices as being relevant to all workplaces – public sector organisations as well as for-profit firms of all sizes.

The European Commission has promoted the visibility of noteworthy workplace practices with the initiation of the European Social Innovation competition in 1995. Prizes were awarded to workplaces which demonstrated *flexibility in their policies and programmes designed to reconcile work and family life*.

Three award categories were established:

- flexibility in multinational firms
- flexibility in small and medium enterprises
- flexibility in public sector organisations.

Workplaces were invited to describe and document the innovative measures they had taken to help employees reconcile work and family life. The awards were made by a panel of judges representing key stakeholder groups including:

- The European Commission
- The European Social Dialogue (a forum for employers and trade union organisations, UNICE, and ETUC)
- COFACE
- The Families and Work Network (a panel established by the Commission which includes members of all EU member states).

The European Social Innovation prizes have the potential to stimulate employer commitment to work and family.⁹

STAGE FIVE: IMPLICATIONS

The availability of extensive baseline supports for families, such as health care, unemployment insurance, and family allowances, establishes a different *balance between public and private benefits* in European nations. Companies can decide to enhance statutory benefits thereby strengthening childcare options, leave entitlements, or medical insurance.

Europeans see the concept of best practices as being relevant to all workplaces – public sector organisations as well as for-profit firms of all sizes.

⁹ In the US, the recognition of corporate work-family efforts by periodicals such as *Business Week* has had a similar effect.

There are indications that the EU's linking of social and economic policies may help to keep reconciliation as a prominent item on the public agenda.

The opportunities for employer leadership might seem higher among those countries where the level of public support is lower in comparison to states with extensive family supports, such as countries in the Nordic region. However, a survey of European companies regarding human resource policies found no relationship between the extent of workplace policies and the levels of statutory benefits in different countries (Brewster & Hegwisch, 1994). In fact, it seems that cultures of interest in the reconciliation of work and family tend to develop within certain countries. In response, high levels of statutory benefits are established by the public sector and employers are more sensitive and responsive to the needs of working parents, resulting in the establishment of family-friendly workplaces.

The movement toward family-friendly societies seems to have taken hold in Europe. The EC has launched a 4th Medium Term Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women for four years (1996-2000). This programme of action and research focuses on the mainstreaming of gender considerations, which includes the reconciliation of work and family issues.

There is considerable interest in and speculation about the possible outcomes that will emerge as a result of the current approaches for reconciling work and family experiences. There are indications that the EU's *linking of social and economic policies* may help to keep reconciliation as a prominent item on the public agenda. In turn, this public attention might encourage employers to begin to consistently examine the impact of their policies and practices on the work and family experiences of their employees. Support for this type of employer focus, long advocated by researchers in the United States, is urging the workplace to examine organisational practices "through a work-family lens" (Fletcher and Rapoport, 1996; Gonyea and Googins, 1996). This approach to work and family issues has contributed to the documentation of linkages between reconciliation strategies and business productivity and effectiveness (Fletcher and Rapoport, 1996). On the other hand, some have argued that framing work-family as a central business issue before fundamental work-family support structures have been established could detract from important discussions about family priorities.

Advocates of "Europeanisation" have promoted increased economic, social and political integration and harmony among the member states of the European Union. Although important progress has been made, there has also been some resistance to Europeanisation which is perceived as moving too fast or which appears to be going too far. In the UK, for example, political debates have raged and the media has focused considerable attention on the tension between the pro-Europeans who would like to see greater involvement in Europe and the Euro-skeptics who fear the consequences of submerging national interests within a wider Europe.

Clearly, the future of work and family in Europe is uncertain. For example, there are frequent public debates about whether today's socio-political-economic circumstances make it the right time to attempt to mainstream these issues. If work and family leaders are reluctant to push this agenda, many are concerned that a loss of focus will result and momentum will be lost.

FOR THE CORPORATE READER

- What are the links between economic development and social progress in those countries of interest to your company?
- Mainstreaming considers the implications which all social and economic policies have for a selected issue, such as gender equality. How might corporations mainstream work-family issues?
- Who are the social partners for your company's priority work-family issues? Does your company promote active collaboration with these partners?

III. REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES ABOUT WORK AND FAMILY ISSUES

INTRODUCTION TO THE REGIONAL POINT OF VIEW

Work-family reconciliation has a high profile in European Union countries, although there are important variations in the priorities and strategies among members. Many of the patterns and trends which distinguish some member nations from others emerge within geographic regions that tend to share important cultural perspectives and social traditions. Although distinctive national characteristics remain, regional analyses help to sharpen our focus on some of the most fundamental variations in European work and family experiences.¹⁰ The regional perspective helps to clarify the context for work and family issues in different European states. Using the regional analysis, it becomes easier to contextualise work and family circumstances in specific countries.

This section of the report uses the five-step analytic framework discussed in the first section of the paper to highlight the reconciliation of work and family as it has developed in EU member countries affiliated with four European regions:

- The Nordic Countries - Sweden, Denmark and Finland
- The United Kingdom - England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- Northern Europe - Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands
- Southern Europe - Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain

Key issues in each of these four principal regions are discussed, followed by more in-depth examinations of a specific country in each region.

While the limited scope of this paper precludes the possibility of including a comprehensive analysis of each country, it is anticipated that the regional information will be useful to human resource managers of multinational companies conducting business in these areas.

It is important to stress that this paper focuses only on those countries that are members of the European Union. At this time, countries in Eastern and Central Europe (formerly communist states with the exception of East Germany prior to unification) have not yet become members, although many of these nations are attempting to do so once they have fulfilled the economic requirements for membership. The futures of these potential members are of particular interest to work and family analysts because the work-family trajectory for these states is currently very different from the paths taken by countries in Western Europe. For this reason, they may present some interesting, alternative response models with respect to work and family issues.

⁷ Editor's note: US readers may have a limited familiarity with the regional perspective of Europe. It may be helpful to consider similar comparisons among different sections of the United States. For example, in comparing employment patterns it might be useful to contrast emerging trends in New England and the Southwest, even though the individual states in those regions might deviate somewhat from the regional patterns.

THE NORDIC COUNTRIES



Three of the four Nordic countries are members of the European Union: Sweden, Denmark and Finland. After a referendum, Norway voted not to join the EU. The Nordic countries all have developed advanced welfare states. In this region, reconciliation of work and family and gender equality are high priorities on the political agenda.

Examples from Sweden will be used to illustrate some of the salient dimensions of work and family issues in the Nordic regions.

Stage One: Landscaping the Nordic Context

Social-Political Priorities: In the Nordic countries, there is a relatively high level of consensus among the social partners regarding two important issues: family priorities and gender equality. Furthermore, there is widespread support for the government to provide leadership and take an active role in addressing these issues.

Family well-being in general and the *well-being of children* in particular are important political priorities in the Nordic states. In contrast to the US and the UK where there is strong cultural emphasis on individualism and private responsibilities for family well-being, the quality of family life is considered to be a public responsibility in Nordic countries. These countries have explicit family policies which focus on the needs of children and other dependent family members requiring care. For example, the Swedish policy states, "Children are entitled to good contact with both parents, while parents have a right to personal development and an independent livelihood. Parents and children should have enough time to spend with each other, at the same time enjoying a reasonable economic standard." (Swedish Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1995)

**Public policies
strive to enable
women to
participate fully in
the labour market
and to encourage
egalitarian
parenting.**

Gender equality – in the workplace and in the home – is a major goal of the Swedish government. There have been efforts to increase the participation of women in decision making bodies as one way to facilitate progress toward gender equality. During recent years, women's representation in parliament and other government bodies has increased substantially. Public policies strive to enable women to participate fully in the labour market and to encourage egalitarian parenting. The consideration of gender equality has been mainstreamed into all policy making. Current political discussions have focused on persuading more men to take parental leaves and become more involved in parenting. With the increase in public debates about gender roles, men in the Nordic countries are now expressing a desire to have more discussions about the role of fathers.

Public Supports: The social welfare system and social policies such as *parental leave entitlements and universal access to publicly-provided childcare* have been designed to proactively provide all men and women with opportunities to contribute to their families and participate in the labour force. The Parental Insurance provision for parental leave was introduced in 1974 and has been gradually expanded over the years.

In the Nordic states, central government funding is distributed to local authorities to fund welfare services. Publicly subsidised, high quality childcare services are widely available. Local governments are responsible for the provision of pre-school childcare and out-of-school services such as after school care and provisions for vacation care. All parents who are employed or who are studying are entitled to a place in a publicly funded childcare service, beginning when their children are one year of age. Most children under the age of one are cared for by a parent on parental leave.

Budgetary difficulties encountered by some local authorities have led to some cuts in the welfare system and changes in specific practices such as the increase of parental fees for childcare. However, despite the economic and fiscal challenges currently faced by the Nordic countries, at the present time the government remains committed to the universal welfare system.

Employment Trends: There has been a long tradition of maternal employment in the Nordic countries. Public policies facilitate and encourage the participation of mothers in the labour force. Social policy reflects and supports the fact that the *dual earner family* is the norm. In these countries, the presence of two incomes in the household is considered beneficial to children's welfare. Relative to other European states, women's labour force participation is high, albeit lower than men's. In 1993, 75% of Swedish mothers of young children were employed, 35% on a part-time basis and 40% full-time.¹¹ This compares with 85% of fathers of young children in employment, 82% of whom work full-time.

¹¹ Part-time refers to "reduced hours." Parents of children under the age of 8 are entitled to reduced working hours with full employment protection.

Globalised labour force concerns which have affected workers in many countries have also become evident in the Nordic states. *Unemployment* is currently higher than it has been in the past. The unemployment rates have been different for women and men, with a higher proportion of men being unemployed. In spite of the emphasis on gender equality, there is a pay differential between men and women, primarily because these two groups continue to work in different occupations. However, the difference in compensation between men and women is lower than elsewhere. In 1995, the average earnings of Swedish women who were employed full-time was 80% of men's income (Swedish Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1995).¹²

Stage Two: Overview of the Nordic Work-Family Agenda

Framing the Work-Family Debate: The Nordic countries have framed work and family issues according to reconciliation, family support, and gender equality. The term "family-friendly" has not yet been applied to either public sector policies or workplace programmes and practices (Kugelberg, 1996).

The concept of *reconciliation* as defined in the Nordic countries reflects a child-centered vision of families. In these countries, there are two basic priorities for the reconciliation of work and family: families need to have time to spend together and to have the means for securing resources for an adequate economic standard.

The *focus on children* is evident in virtually all aspects of everyday life. For instance, trains provide well equipped play areas for children. In this context of a child-centered perspective of reconciliation, childcare is viewed as essential, not only to enable parents to be employed but also to provide opportunities (created cooperatively with parents) for children to learn and develop.

Gender Equality at Home and at Work: In Sweden, the government has assumed a long-standing position in support of *gender equality*. A comprehensive set of strategies has been designed which encompass economic, social, and family policies. The government has tackled issues such as sex segregation of the labour market and the domestic division of labour, both regarded as important barriers to equality.

The emphasis of recent discussions about gender equality has been on *egalitarian parenting*. In Sweden, for example, the notion of "father-friendly policies and workplaces" has recently emerged. This term refers to the extent to which fathers are encouraged to use their statutory parental leave rights (Haas and Hwang, 1995). Although this language is not widely used, it does reflect the underlying values of work-family debates in Sweden. The government of Sweden has expressed concern about the role of men in Swedish families, and has focused particular attention on the lower rates of parental leave utilisation among men. In 1983 the government appointed a "Working Party on the Role of Men." This was replaced in 1992 by

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¹² Editors' note: This compares to about 75.5% in the United States, where the median weekly wages earned by working women (over the age of 24 years) in the U.S. was \$406 compared to \$538 for men (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1995. Unpublished data. Washington, D.C.: Department of Labor)

**Daddy
Go Home.**

another government-appointed working group, "Fathers, Children and Working Life." This new group, which was asked to examine men's use of parental leave benefits, had the responsibility of identifying obstacles that discourage men from taking leaves of absence. Parental leave policies were recently modified to allow fathers a one-month leave at 90% pay, a provision that cannot be transferred to the mother.

Social Partners: The clarification of social partners is evolving in the Nordic countries.

Governments, which have provided the traditional leadership for reconciliation and gender equality, are currently attempting not only to support parents but also to encourage other social partners to provide support. Debate about the role of *employers* as social partners with shared responsibilities for social welfare is a relatively recent phenomenon.¹³ Traditionally, employers have not been expected to provide direct services and benefits to their employees (such as health care, childcare, etc.). At the present, workplaces are being encouraged to assume social responsibility by becoming more family-friendly. The Swedish government has supported organisational changes through a campaign encouraging men to curtail long hours of work and to take advantage of parental leave options. For instance, notices which state "Daddy go home," have been displayed at the workplace.

Similar to the United States, there is often a wide range of workplace responsiveness to work-family concerns. In part, this reflects the fact that workplace policies are often negotiated in collective agreements or determined by participative decision making.

Stage Three: Driving and Restraining Forces in Nordic Countries

Three sets of factors have facilitated Sweden's progress towards being a "family-friendly" society:

- The success of government efforts to introduce proactive measures for reconciliation and gender equality reflects the high degree of *citizen consensus* about the importance of these issues and the need for specific government supports.
- Many initiatives to address work-family issues were introduced prior to the economic downturns of the late 1980s. As a consequence, a number of policies were established and infrastructures were created during a period of *economic growth*.
- *Cultural values* support many aspects of work-family issues. For example, parents have high expectations for the quality of their childcare services. Furthermore, there is a norm for close cooperation between childcare providers and parents which has strengthened parental commitment to quality.

The challenges associated with achieving gender equality have slowed some of the hopes for progress toward reconciliation objectives in the Nordic countries. Although the efforts of the governments of Sweden and other Nordic countries to lower the gender gap in earnings have

¹³ Editor's note: In contrast, in the U.S. much of the leadership for work-family issues has emerged in the corporate arena.

met with some success, interventions designed to reduce gender segregation at the workplace have had only limited success. Some men have continued to find it difficult to take leave, particularly those who have supervisory positions or those who are employed in male-dominated occupations (Haas and Hwang, 1995). Despite the fact that public policies stress that reconciliation is an issue for both parents, some employers continue to view it as a women's issue.

Stage Four: An Example of Best Practices in Nordic Countries

Although Sweden was not yet a member of the EU when the European Commission Social Innovation Prizes were awarded in 1995, two special prizes were awarded to Swedish companies and two to Danish organisations. One of the Swedish winners was an insurance company, Folksam.

Despite the fact that public policies stress that reconciliation is an issue for both parents, some employers continue to view it as a women's issue.

| FOLKSAM |
|--|
| <p>Workforce</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3,700 workers • 53.4% women <p>Innovations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 37.5 hour work week • Parents (mothers and fathers) offered 1.5 months extra salary when they take parental leave of more than three months following the birth/adoption of a child. • Full-time employees are entitled to shorten their work time to 75% until their children are 12 years old. • Educational and competence development activities are offered addressing topics such as "Women and Leadership," "Professional Development," and "Coming Years." The company offers training for women to help them cope with having careers and families. • The company has created an equal opportunity policy based on Sweden's Equal Opportunity Act. The goals of this policy are clarified in the company's Equal Opportunity Plan which is monitored by Folksam's executive group. Folksam's managers are responsible for integrating equal opportunity concepts in day-to-day activities, with the support of an equal opportunity manager. All groups of employees include both men and women who share power, influence and responsibility. <p>Observations</p> <p>Folksam has demonstrated a serious commitment to gender equality and has mainstreamed gender issues by integrating the concept of equal opportunity into business practices and activities.</p> <p>Folksam has managed to maintain job security, avoiding work force redundancies. Rather than laying workers off, the company has pursued strategies such as arranging retirement contracts and retraining staff for future vacancies.</p> |

Stage Five: Implications for Work and Family in Nordic Countries

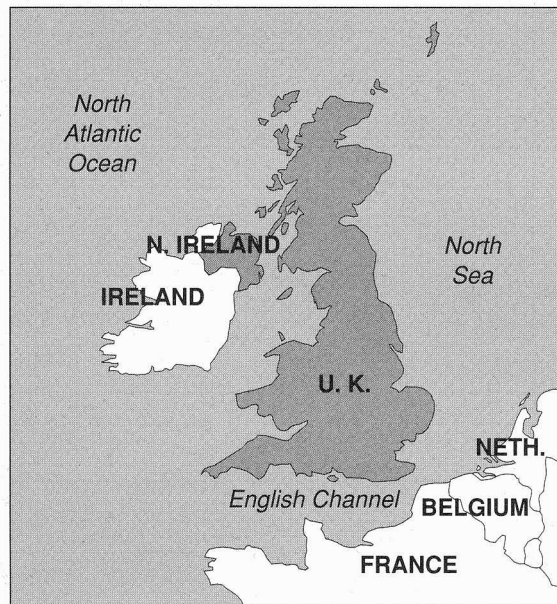
The Nordic approach to work and family supports has a foundation of a comprehensive system of childcare, family benefits, and leave entitlements. The extensive set of public policies and supports has created a situation where there is less need for employers to provide benefits such as childcare. As a consequence, workplaces have the potential to consider other types of responses to the family priorities of their employees.

Birth rates remain relatively high in the Nordic countries and women report that they are able to reconcile work and family with moderate ease. For example, the fertility rate in Sweden is 1.99 in comparison to the average EU rate of 1.46. Although there are indications that it has been more difficult for men to modify their work behaviors, work attitudes, and the structure of their approaches to work in response to family responsibilities, this appears to be slowly changing. For example, in the early 1980s, 22% of Swedish men utilised parental leave. By the 1990s, this utilisation rate had increased to 39%. Although men are increasingly involved in family life, gender differences in the allocation of domestic tasks tend to persist.

It has been widely acknowledged that the *highly developed welfare states* and extensive policies for work-family reconciliation have been supported by relatively high taxation. There is some uncertainty about the extent to which the current levels of support will continue given the trends toward reduced government supports throughout Europe. Shortages of funds experienced by some local authorities may lead to unevenness in the quality and availability of childcare across different regions. In spite of the possibilities of reductions in the welfare states, there is a great deal of optimism that the focus on children's welfare will continue (Kugelberg, 1996). If governments begin to reduce their high levels of involvement in reconciliation initiatives, there may be more pressure put on employers to assume increasing responsibilities for work-family issues, particularly for the provision of childcare.

THE UNITED KINGDOM

The United Kingdom includes England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. As part of the UK, all of these countries are members of the European Union.



Stage One: Landscaping the UK Context

The Role of the State: In comparison to other European regions, the socio-political-economic ideologies which frame work-family issues in the United Kingdom are most similar to those in the United States. While the well-being of children and families in the UK is regarded principally as *a private rather than a public responsibility*, the government has established some policies that affect families. For example, efforts are made to ensure that fathers make financial contributions towards the support of families from previous relationships. Overall, however, there is a prevailing sentiment that it is preferable to avoid government “interference” in the daily lives of family members. In this context, policies designed to encourage greater participation of women in the labour force would not be widely supported.

The ideological emphasis on individual responsibility and the strong support for reducing public spending has increased pressure for limiting potential governmental roles relative to the reconciliation of work and family life. In general, it is felt that the provision of childcare and other supports for working parents should be left to market forces.

The preference for a more *limited government role* with family life is echoed in the UK's preference for minimal interference with businesses. The UK has mounted vigorous opposition to EC directives on regulations such as parental leave and rights for part-time workers. In addition, the UK has negotiated an “opt-out” of agreement on EC social policy. The opponents to the EC directives have argued that decisions about these issues should be left to the discretion of employers who best understand their own business needs.

Policy Orientation: Social policy in the UK is based on the ideal of the traditional single breadwinner, two-parent family. For example, there is a policy which encourages the elderly and sick to live independently in their own homes, where care can be provided in the community. In practice, this policy relies heavily on informal, family support and increases the pressure on those family members who attempt to combine employment responsibilities with this community approach to care.

Economic Policies and Employment Patterns: Since 1979, the Conservative governments have pursued a policy of labour market deregulation. This has had the unintended consequence of encouraging the *growth of part-time and temporary work*.

In spite of the British social policy orientation towards traditional family structures, there has been substantial growth in female labour force participation in recent decades, although a significant proportion of the jobs are part-time positions.¹⁴

Unemployment and *job insecurity* are high in the UK as elsewhere in Europe, with male unemployment being higher than female unemployment. According to the Office for National Statistics, in 1996 the unemployment rate among men was 1,631,000 out of the 15,651,000 in the labour force (10.4%) compared to 519,000 of 12,407,000 among women (4.2%).

The government has resisted the implementation of a national minimum wage, arguing that this would further increase unemployment. However, the Labour party is committed to implementing a minimum wage, although the actual rate remains a contentious issue. Meanwhile, equal pay legislation offers some protection to the lowest paid workers who are typically women. This is especially true for those who are employed in part-time or temporary positions in order to reconcile their job responsibilities with their family obligations.

Deregulation of the labour market has stimulated the growth of a large, peripheral part-time and temporary workforce. A landmark legal case taken to the House of Lords with the support of the Equal Opportunities Commission has led to a change in the law regarding the rights of part-time workers. The House of Lords ruled that a requirement for a 16-hour work week in order to qualify for unfair dismissal and redundancy pay after two years of service constituted indirect discrimination. Consequently, since 1995 employees working less than 16 hours a week are afforded the same protections against unfair dismissal and redundancy as their full-time counterparts.

Stage Two: Overview of the UK Work-Family Agenda

Framing the Work-Family Debate: Discussions in the UK about the reconciliation of work and family experiences have recently focused on progress which can be made towards "family friendliness." Although this term has typically referred to the existence of workplace policies

¹⁴ Editor's Note: A recent report of the Office for National Statistics has indicated that the average hourly earnings of British women was the equivalent of \$10.90 in comparison to the \$12.50 earned by men (*Boston Globe*, "British women get jobs faster." 3/6/97, p. A-4).

which enable mothers to combine their work and family responsibilities, attention has increasingly been drawn to the existence of options for other types of family care. Although the concept of family-friendliness is commonly used in public policy discussions and media coverage, many workplaces continue to consider their work-family policies as either “equal opportunity policies” or as policies for “employees with family commitments.”

Social Partners: A number of different groups have entered the work-family debate including workplace organisations (usually represented by personnel/human resource management or equal opportunity departments), advocacy groups, and unions. One group, the Employers for Childcare, is comprised of leading edge employers who are advocating for greater government support for improved childcare.

The role of the state in work-family concerns has been a key issue on the work-family agenda in the UK. Recently, the concept of family-friendliness has been expanded to refer to the wider social context. For example, groups such as the Committee of the UN International Year of the Family, Employers for Childcare, and an “All Parliamentary Group on the Family” have all recommended the development of public policies which are more family-friendly.

The Trades Union Council (TUC) has supported a number of work-family initiatives. It has published an information pack on carers’ rights and is currently campaigning for family leaves. The TUC argues that there should ideally be statutory rights for paternity leave, parental and adoption leave, and leave for family reasons. In the meantime, the TUC has published a guide on family leave urging all unions to press for leave rights in negotiations. This guide includes guidelines to be used in negotiations.

Leaves: Paid maternity leave has been available to certain women since 1975, and since 1994 has been available to all women regardless of their length of service with an employer. However, there are *no statutory parental leave rights beyond the provision for paid maternity leave.*

Some companies offer family leave or options for career breaks which employees can use to care for their elderly relatives. In the absence of statutory parental leaves or career breaks, some employers allow employees to leave their positions for up to five years in order to fulfill their responsibilities for childcare or other types of dependent care. These leaves are usually available only to highly trained or experienced staff. Employees who take leaves for family care usually do not receive any pay during the leave period but typically do have a right to return to work. Due to economic changes, there are indications that even this modest provision may change. For example, Midland Bank, one of the pioneers of leaves, recently modified its career break scheme because the economic climate had made it difficult for the company to guarantee jobs after a five year period for career breakers (or for continuing workers). The Bank has now stated that it will make every effort to offer suitable jobs to career breakers upon the receipt of a three-month written notice of intent to return to work. However, there is no longer a guarantee of re-employment.

Recently, the concept of family-friendliness has been expanded to refer to the wider social context.

Most employees maintain some professional contact during their leaves and may participate in training to ensure that they keep up-to-date with developments in their field. Although in principal – and by law – leaves and career breaks are available to eligible men and women, they are taken almost exclusively by women.

Childcare: There are *minimal publicly funded childcare* services in the UK and those which do exist are not targeted at the children of working parents. The children of employed parents are cared for either by relatives, by childminders (who must be registered and approved), or by private, non-subsidised services.

... parents are
expected to
accept the
responsibilities for
childcare.

**TABLE 4: CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENTS
USED BY BRITISH WORKING MOTHERS IN 1994**

% of Children By Age of Youngest Child*

| | All Children | Children Under 5 Years | Children Ages 5 - 12 Years |
|----------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Relatives (including partner) | 62 | 69 | 57 |
| Childminders | 15 | 25 | 7 |
| Neighbour/Friend | 13 | 3 | 23 |
| Day Nursery | 6 | 14 | — |
| Workplace Nursery | 2 | 2 | 1 |

* Respondents were asked to mention all the arrangements they used. As a consequence, the percentages add up to more than 100% of the population of the youngest child.

Source: *Work and Family: Ideas and Options for Childcare. A Consultation Paper*, 1996.

- A recent consultative document on work and family published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), *Work and Family: Ideas and Options for ChildCare, A Consultation Paper*, acknowledged that an increasing number of mothers of young children are employed and that there is a good business case for encouraging the creation of a system of affordable and accessible quality childcare. However, this report reiterated the government position that mothers should be able to choose to be employed or to stay at home. Furthermore, this report clarified that if mothers make the decision to work, parents are expected to accept the responsibilities for childcare. The DfEE document applauded the growth in the range of private childcare options.
- The government recently announced an initiative to provide preschool for all four year olds. Vouchers will be provided to families to purchase approved private childcare services.
- The government has also supported the development of services for school aged children. Public funding has been allocated for the start-up costs of after school programmes which has contributed to an increase in the number of these services.

In its role as employer, the government has developed family-friendly policies in the Civil Service. By acting as a role model in the establishment of these policies, it has hoped that private industries will follow.

There is an emphasis in the UK on the development of services, such as childcare, in the private sector. However, access to all forms of childcare in the UK remains limited in comparison to countries with state-supported childcare (Brannen et al., 1994). The government has recommended that employers implement family-friendly policies (c.f., *Work and Family: Ideas and Options for Childcare. A Consultation Paper*, 1996). In the absence of extensive public sector supports, some workplaces have instituted childcare assistance to enable parents, especially women, to work. Other companies have established positions such as childcare coordinators, provided subsidies to help offset the cost of childcare expenses, or offered information and referral services to employees. For example, the Midland Bank identified the limited availability of childcare to be a major block to women returning to work after maternity. In order to respond to this problem, as of 1996 the Bank had established 115 nurseries around the country. Both full-time and part-time employees are able to use the childcare programme which is monitored for compliance with quality standards. The company also offers 70 holiday play schemes which are available for school-aged children.

Eldercare: A few workplaces have attempted to address the need for eldercare. The more well established eldercare programmes have been sponsored by paternalistic companies as an extension of their schemes to care for their own retirees. For instance, Pilkington Glass is a multinational company with headquarters in the north of England. This company has an extensive eldercare programme which includes respite care, home visitors, meals on wheels and other welfare services for the firm's retirees as well as for the elderly relatives of current employees. This eldercare initiative is operated by a charitable trust established by the company founders.

Job Sharing: During recent years, there has been some growth in job sharing in the UK. Job sharing has been identified as one way to expand the access which employees have to part-time work hours. Traditionally, part-time jobs have been restricted to certain occupations and to entry level positions. In contrast, job sharing is an option that is more widely available. While there is no statutory right to either part-time work or job sharing, under British discrimination law an employer's refusal to allow a woman to return from maternity leave to a part-time schedule can constitute *indirect discrimination*.¹⁵ This type of indirect discrimination has been successfully argued in court by a number of women (Lewis, J., 1996).

Stage Three: Driving and Restraining Forces in the UK

There are a number of factors which have supported progress toward family-friendly policies and programmes in the UK. The priorities and decisions of the European Union have promoted

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woman to return
from maternity
leave to a part-time
schedule can
constitute indirect
discrimination.*

¹⁵ The indirect discrimination is associated with less favourable treatment of women because fewer women than men can comply with a requirement for full-time work.

changes in the UK, although at times these changes have occurred despite opposition from the national government. For example, improvements in maternity rights have been implemented to comply with European law, although the government continues to oppose directives on parental leave.

**... the UK cites
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policies such as
parental leave.**

The *reliance on market forces* has both driven and restrained progress toward achieving work-family goals. The government's preference to have the issues of reconciliation addressed in the market has resulted in a limited scope of public policies and services in the UK, at least in comparison to many other EU countries. The reluctance of the UK to encourage women's labour force participation has impacted its stance towards reconciliation. While most countries emphasize the economic importance of establishing policies to support women's participation in the workforce, the UK cites the need to be competitive as a reason for not implementing policies such as parental leave. They support this perspective by pointing to examples of German companies which have opened factories in Britain to avoid high domestic employment costs.

Interestingly, the stance of the UK government with respect to work-family policies may have not only encouraged corporations to provide more family supports for their employees, but also to put pressure on the government to change the existing level of public provisions. For example:

- The Employers for Childcare, which includes companies such as British Airways, Shell, and the BBC, have joined together to campaign for greater government contributions to quality childcare.
- A recent publication supported by both the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and the Trades Union Council (TUC) stated that it should not be the role of employers to provide all the childcare needed for the well-being of the new generations, and argued for more government involvement.

A number of other organisations are campaigning for better childcare and other work-family policies. These include:

- New Ways to Work, which promotes alternative working patterns, has recently publicised examples of British men who work part-time in order to spend more time with their young families (Walton and Collins, 1995).
- Parents at Work, a support and campaign group, presents annual awards to the most family-friendly employers, the childcarer of the year, the working mother of the year, and the working father of the year.¹⁶ It can be argued that such prizes encourage companies to superficially focus on the number of formal policies rather than on the work and family experiences of employees who do (or do not) use them. Parents at Work has begun to address this issue by focusing attention on issues such as face-time and expectations at the workplace for long working hours, attempting to raise awareness about the long work hours culture. In 1995, this organisation ran a very high profile campaign highlighting the fact

¹⁶ Parents at Work was originally called the Working Mothers Association but has changed its name to better reflect the nature of the issues with which it is concerned.

that men in the UK work the longest hours in Europe, an average of 45.4 hours each week. The media coverage drew attention to the impact of long work hours on families and on the workplace, including the negative effects on productivity.

Workplace culture is one factor which has hindered progress. Similar to the US, it is not uncommon in the UK for innovative schemes, such as part-time work or reduced hours, to coexist with a culture which devalues anything less than full-time work. For example, one firm of accountants established a reduced hours programme which enabled employees with family commitments to work four days a week or five shorter days while maintaining pro rata benefits and, in the case of managers, a company car. While this option helped the company to retain highly qualified women, many of the individuals who used this option and some of their managers reported that they would not be promoted because the use of this benefit (reduced hours) demonstrated less commitment to their work and resulted in decreased productivity. It is rarely recognised that the women who use this provision may work more efficiently, and in fact, may be just as productive as they were when they were working full-time (Lewis and Taylor, 1996).

Stage Four: An Example of Best Practices in the UK

The UK organisation Parents at Work awards prizes to family-friendly companies on the basis of their stated policies, methods of communicating these policies, and strategies for promoting policies.¹⁷ One of the 1996 winners was Lilly Industries, a pharmaceutical company.¹⁸ The package of policies developed at Lilly illustrates the importance of workplace supports, including flexible work and leave options, in the absence of statutory entitlements.

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¹⁷ There were no UK companies among the EC Social Innovation prize winners.

¹⁸ Unlike most of the other winners, Lilly offers no childcare assistance. For example, Price Waterhouse in the UK has an on-line childcare database accessible from each work station and offers a booklet, "Planning Our Childcare," which contains guidance on planning for childcare selection, childcare options, choosing childcare, and crisis management. In 1996, this company introduced childcare vouchers which are based on a proportion of the salary at the time the mother returns to work. These vouchers are provided for a period of 12 months.

LILLY INDUSTRIES

Workforce

- 1,750 full time employees
- 1,200 men
- 550 women
- 40 part-time employees (all female)

Innovations

Lilly offers a programme of leaves which includes:

- Paid paternity leave, maximum of 3 days
- Career breaks which offer unpaid leave for study, childcare or eldercare. Employees with at least 5 years of service are eligible.
- Sabbaticals for an agreed-upon period of paid absence (minimum: 1 month - maximum: 1 year). Employees may request sabbaticals for study, childcare, or eldercare.

Information about Lilly's Worklife Programme is shared with employees in a manual, newsletters, and posters. The programme includes:

- Part-time work options (minimum: 13 hours per week - maximum: 20 hours per week)
- Reduced hours (fewer than full-time but more than 20 hours per week)
- Job Share
- Term-time working (contract work; may or may not be contingent)
- Phased return to work after maternity leave/illness
- V-time offering employees the option of reduced working hours for an agreed-upon period at reduced salary. This option is chosen by the employee because she/he wants it and not for company reasons.
- Staggered hours with flexible starting and finishing times (but not reduced hours)
- Official homeworking where the employees' main place of work is at home.

A shared work station is available to these employees at a Lilly location.

Observations

Lilly reports that its Worklife Programme has resulted in benefits to the company such as increased staff retention and increased productivity. Flexible working has also reduced overhead and running costs and extended business hours. Lilly is unusual in using the terminology work/life and may well be heralding a new trend. It explicitly recognises that employees without children may also require flexibility. The phased return to work after maternity leave is favoured by many UK employees.

Stage Five: Implications for Work and Family in the UK

The increased interest in and active support for reconciliation has resulted in some progress toward a family-friendly society in the UK. For example, a growing number of companies are developing family-friendly policies; however, childcare supports and leaves are not available to all employees. A wide variety of alternative *employment options* have emerged in the UK including part-time work (ranging from a few hours a week to a few hours less than the norm for a particular job), numerous shift patterns, regular night work, and weekend work. However, unlike most EU countries, there are no restrictions on employers' use of part-time and temporary work. A number of factors have precipitated the expansion of these options including: deregulation, growth of the service sector, development of childcare policies, rise in the rate of women's employment, and changes in attitudes towards the care of dependents. This range of options offers choices to families about how they might combine work and family responsibilities.

It has been noted that the marginalisation of family-friendly policies has had the unintended consequence of perpetuating the division of labour by gender in the home, thereby making it more advantageous for male partners to be at the workplace. Policies which offer women options for modifying their work schedules are often at the expense of career advancement. In addition, men may feel that since it is relatively easy for their partners to take leaves for children, it is not necessary for them to advocate for or to use these rights themselves (Newell, 1993). The ideal of the work-primary employee (i.e., one partner who primarily works and provides financial resources and the other who primarily takes care of home responsibilities and works a reduced schedule, if at all) persists in the UK, as in the US, despite the fact that many work-family initiatives such as part-time work are framed as equal opportunity policies.

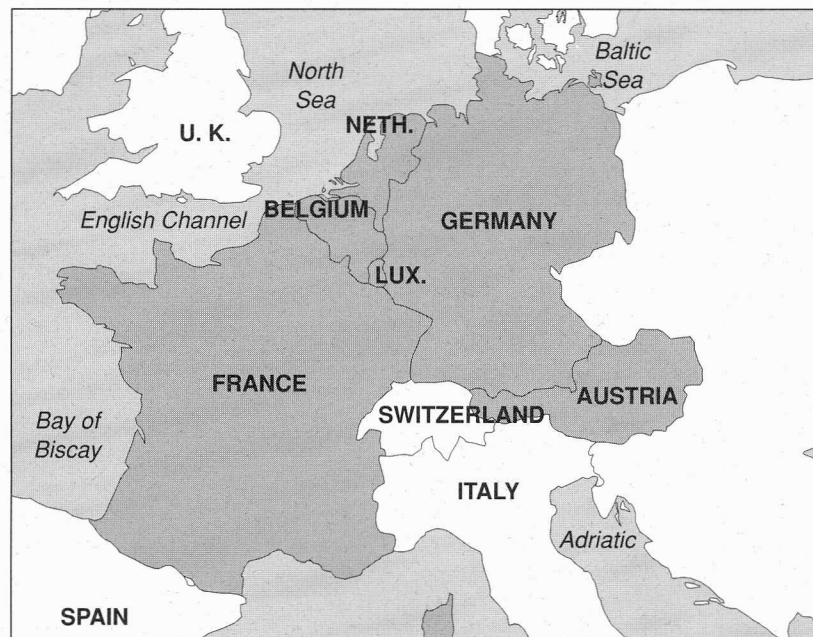
Corporations can contribute towards the establishment of a more family-friendly society either by campaigning for work-family issues, or, as is the case in the US, by providing financial resources for these services. There is a growing awareness in the UK that it is important to consider ways of moving beyond the benefits approach to changing organisational culture (Cooper and Lewis, 1995). Currently, however, this emphasis on culture change often remains at the level of rhetoric more than action. While some companies have made progress in this area, there are still many companies where it is not acceptable to talk about work-family policies because these issues are regarded as having no place in business.

It is not clear whether the UK will strengthen or loosen links with the EU. Euro-skeptics resent what they see as attempts to impose regulations such as parental leave or limits on working time. On the other hand, the Labour Party emphasizes the importance of creating a socially inclusive society built on active citizenship which requires a partnership between employers and employees – the stakeholder society (Hutton, 1996). The Labour Party has indicated that it would agree to the European Social Chapter which would augment progress toward a family-friendly society.

... the Labour Party emphasizes the importance of creating a socially inclusive society built on active citizenship which requires a partnership between employers and employees – the stakeholder society (Hutton, 1996).

NORTHERN EUROPE

There are considerable social, political, and economic differences among the Northern European states which include Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, all of which are EU members.



Different traditions and ideologies have contributed to a variety of work-family circumstances among these countries. For example, the former West Germany (but *not* East Germany) and the Netherlands have traditions of women in the home, while France has a long history of maternal employment. There are also differences in terms of ideologies concerning families and the role of the state relative to family issues. The French government has assumed more responsibility for families whereas the Dutch government has been more reluctant to “interfere” with family life and has limited its role (similar to the governments in the UK and the US). However, reconciliation has become a more prominent issue throughout this region, including the Netherlands.

Despite the wide variation in work-family circumstances in Northern Europe, commonalities such as concerns about unemployment and a fair distribution of work exist so that an analysis of work and family issues in this region is worthwhile.

For discussion purposes, France will be primarily used to illustrate the work and family issues as experienced by Northern European countries.

Stage One: Landscaping the Context in Northern Europe

Ideological Perspectives: Work and family discussions in France are rooted in two pronounced value orientations: pro-natalism and the child-centered perspective of family priorities. In addition, work and family priorities are framed by concerns about unemployment and gender equity.

France has traditionally had a pronounced *pro-family ideological* perspective and is strongly *pro-natalist*. The French government has expressed concern for maintaining a steady birth rate and places the well-being of families high on its agenda. A particular emphasis is placed on the experiences of children.

Patterns in Employment: The reduction of *unemployment* in France is a priority and has influenced work and family policies. France has a high unemployment rate and there has been a steady increase in the number of temporary positions, offering insecure work to job seekers. In Southern France, the unemployment rate has soared to over 15%. The unemployment situation has resulted, in part, from the considerable amount of downsizing and reorganisation which has occurred. The state has attempted to cushion this with the establishment of early retirement provisions.

Part-time work is regulated in France, with part-timers having access to training and other benefits much like full-time employees.

Gender Equity: There is a long history of maternal employment in France. Its social policy, which reflects a recognition of the family model where the working mother is part of a two-earner family, endeavours to make it easier for families to raise their children (Fagnani, 1995). Nevertheless, the rate of female labour force participation is lower than in the Nordic countries. Furthermore, there is considerable gender disparity in the labour force participation rates among French parents. In 1993, 59% of mothers with children under the age of ten years were employed (40% of whom worked full-time and 19% part-time) in comparison to the 90% of fathers.

There has been less consensus about women's roles in France than in the Nordic countries. In France, concerns about gender equity have centered on making progress toward the goal of *enabling women to reconcile employment with raising children*. Although all family-friendly social measures such as leaves are legally available for both men and women, the political debates in France have not focused on gender equality in the same ways as they have in some other countries such as Sweden and Denmark. In comparison to countries in the Nordic region, there have been fewer explicit attempts to enhance the involvement of men in family life as a key strategy for enhancing gender equality. The work and family discussions in France have reflected implicit assumptions that mothers perform the bulk of childrearing in addition to their employment roles (Fagnani, 1995). In fact, as in some other countries there is some public sentiment encouraging women to stay at home and care for their children.

Stage Two: Overview of the Work-Family Agenda in Northern Europe

Terms of Discussion: In comparison to other EU countries which have begun to frame work and family issues in terms of either "work and family" or "family-friendly," the work and family discourse in France is placed in the context of broad discussions about the role of the state in these issues and the relationships among the social partners, including unions. Work and family discussions have tended to direct attention to the development of workplace policies for "harmonising" work and family (Hogg and Harker, 1992).

In comparison to countries in the Nordic region, there have been fewer explicit attempts to enhance the involvement of men in family life as a key strategy for enhancing gender equality.

Due to the high level of public sector support for childcare in France, companies that want to help employees reconcile work and family may choose to fill in the gaps of existing provisions and offer additional choices to working parents such as competitively priced childcare options.

Public Policies: The French government has been proactive in addressing the reconciliation of work and family issues. There is a particularly elaborate and well-funded set of programmes to ensure the well-being of children which include *accessible quality childcare services and financial measures for families with children*.

Childcare, which aims to promote child development, is specifically targeted for the children of working parents. In recognition of the fact that childcare is an essential support enabling parents to work, there is tax relief for childcare costs. Parents who employ a carer in their home for children under the age of six years can also claim an allowance to cover the employer's (e.g., the parent's) and the employee's social security contributions.

There is a comprehensive system of parental leaves in France. The Parental Education Benefit (APE) complements the parental leave entitlements. The APE is a non-taxable, fixed sum benefit which can be paid to either parent after the birth of their second child, until the youngest child reaches the age of three, as long as the parent meets certain conditions. The APE can be shared between the two parents. Clearly, this benefit addresses two important issues: reconciliation and unemployment.¹⁹

Private Sector Policies and Practices: In comparison to some of the other EU countries, there has been less discussion in France about workplace policies and practices, although some employers are addressing reconciliation issues. Due to the high level of public sector support for childcare in France, companies that want to help employees reconcile work and family may choose to fill in the gaps of existing provisions and offer additional choices to working parents such as competitively priced childcare options. In addition, career breaks have been established by some organisations. These are typically structured as sabbaticals that can be taken either for childcare, study, or other reasons (Brewster and Hegewisch, 1994).

There are a number of leading edge private sector employers with workplace-based childcare in France. For example, Roussel Uclaf, a chemical company, first opened its creche in 1948 to attract women during an era of postwar skills shortages. This childcare support was intended to offer a choice to parents as an alternative to the publicly provided childcare which was already being developed. The creche is heavily subsidised by the company, with parents paying according to income but less than they would elsewhere. The company has also established a childminding network where they recruit the childminders but the parents pay them directly. Similar to other French parents, employees are then entitled to receive financial assistance from the state for these childcare expenses. Roussel Uclaf has also established a holiday scheme for children up to the age of sixteen, with the company paying 70% of the costs of the programme (Hogg and Harker, 1992).

¹⁹ Previous employment status is considered as part of the eligibility. In addition, the parent who receives the benefit must be currently unemployed or only working part-time when the benefit is received.

Stage Three: Driving and Restraining Forces in Northern Europe

A range of factors has affected the responses to work and family situations in France. For example, the country's desire to maintain the birth rate has been a strong facilitator of work-family policies in France. In addition, the employment situation and the country's orientation to social partners have also affected work and family issues.

Social Partners Orientation: Unions are considered important social partners in work and family debates and have played a significant role in negotiating with management on a range of issues. Most collective agreements in France have limited annual overtime, and the use of time-off rather than overtime pay has been encouraged.

Arrangements for work sharing and a reduction in the number of work hours have been negotiated in a number of voluntary collective or company agreements. These agreements have been used to *avoid redundancies* in France and Germany, which may have spin-offs for work and family by limiting working hours. For example, in Germany, Volkswagen avoided about 30,000 redundancies by reducing working hours from 36 to 28.8 hours and using a system of differentiated income losses to adjust pay levels.²⁰ This reduction of working hours resulted in savings in potential redundancy payments, no loss in productivity, and secured the cooperation of the workforce for its rationalisation programme. In 1993, similar agreements with respect to a reduction in working hours were made in 44 firms in France (European Commission DGV, Directorate General for Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Affaires, January, 1995).

Some collective agreements have addressed issues of reconciliation directly, usually focused on the priorities of women and children. These agreements have included the conditions of term time working. For example, the insurance group AXA signed an agreement providing for yearly formulas enabling employees to match their working time to the school year. Employees who use this option work full-time during the school term and take extra vacation (in addition to the usual 25 day summer vacation) during school vacations (Wedderburn, 1996).

The Parental Education Benefit (APE) is an example of a policy which was established as a result of a compromise among various interest groups that have different perspectives about the roles of women and goals of gender equity. This benefit was supported by different social partners, some who wanted to support mothers in the home and others who were concerned about gender equality (Fagnani, 1995).

Patterns of Employment: The current economic climate, rising unemployment, and concerns about job insecurity have made it difficult for parents to take advantage of generous statutory parental leave rights. Few women (and even fewer men) feel that they can take leaves which would interrupt their working lives and might risk their families' income.

Unions are considered important social partners in work and family debates and have played a significant role in negotiating with management on a range of issues.

²⁰ Workers were ensured a certain minimum level of income security based on family needs (Ehrler, 1996).

There is some speculation that the rise of unemployment among women and the increase in the proportion of part-time and temporary positions could ultimately decrease the demand for childcare which might, in turn, reduce public sector support for these programmes.

Stage Four: An Example of Best Practices in Northern Europe

In 1991 the French government established prizes for the most innovative companies in helping employees to harmonise work and family. The St. Camille Hospital was one of the recipients.

The work schedules of this hospital, which include night shifts as well as work on Sundays and public holidays, pose unique work and family challenges to the organisation.

ST. CAMILLE HOSPITAL

Workforce

- 700 employees
- 80% women

Innovations

- Contract drafted with the Health and Social Affaires Directorate which was designed to improve working conditions.
- Work and family life questionnaire distributed to staff. Results indicated that employees were experiencing problems with reconciliation.
- In response to survey findings, a local service association was created in 1992. This association, the Equilibre Vie-Travail or the E.V.T. ("Work-Life Balance"), was organised to help relieve staff members of home chores. Staff can join the association and access four types of modestly priced types of services: ironing, sewing, pre-cooked meals, and housework. With the help of the National Employment Agency, 10 people who had been unemployed on a long-term basis were recruited to work for the service association. The E.V.T. is controlled by staff members who ensure that the services provided are of good quality.
- Homework assistance for staff member's children (scheduled to be reexamined).
- Child-minding scheme (to be explored with outside partners).
- Assistance with gardening and odd jobs.

Observations

The programmes developed by St. Camille Hospital illustrate how national priorities can influence the ways in which workplaces think about work-family innovations. The work-family programme at St. Camille responds to the inter-linked priorities of work-family issues, goals for reconciliation, and concerns about unemployment. The importance of providing family supports is exemplified by the hospital's innovative scheme for helping employees' children with homework.

Childcare services are not a major concern for these employees due to the high quality of publicly provided childcare.

Stage Five: Implications for Work and Family in Northern Europe

Many consider France to be a family-friendly society because its social policies emphasize the importance of the well-being of children and families. From a work and family perspective, gender equity is considered to be a lesser priority.

There are linkages between France's response to unemployment and the country's work-family priorities. Measures taken to address unemployment, such as the reduction of working hours, are recognised as potentially having positive consequences for work and family experiences. The reverse is also true; for example, utilisation of the APE is conditional on one parent being unemployed or working part-time. This requirement can create job openings for other labour market participants, thereby reducing unemployment (Fagnani, 1995). The approach to the S.V.E. adopted by the staff members of St. Camille Hospital described above is another illustration of strategies which *simultaneously address both unemployment and work-family concerns*.

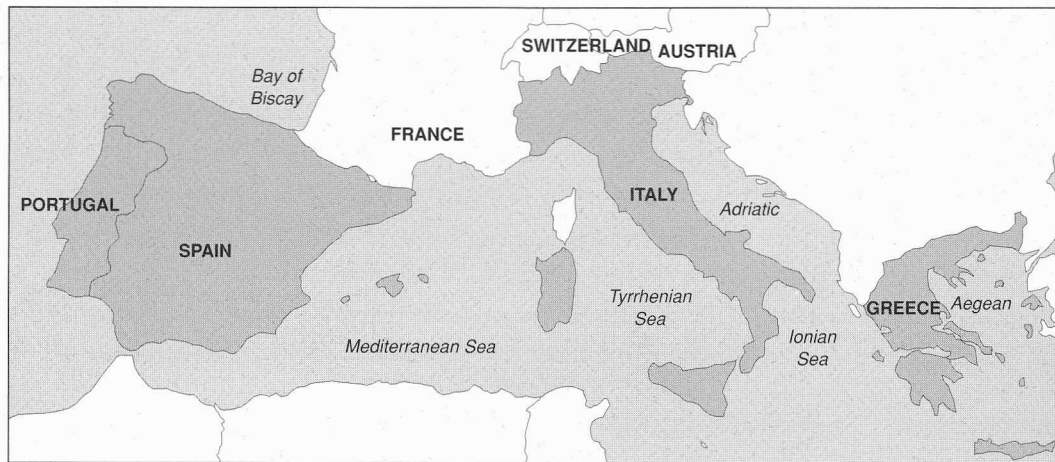
It has been argued that some French policies have had the unintended consequence of decreasing support for women attempting to reconcile work and family. For example, some have observed that employers are increasingly reluctant to employ women of childbearing age because of the generous parental leave provisions to which they are entitled (Fagnani, 1995). Thus, policies designed to make it easier for women to combine work and family could disadvantage women in the labour market. Moreover, there may be a gap between the *availability* of supports afforded by formal social policies and daily life circumstances which enable families to actually *use* them. For example, French policies for parental leave appear generous and supportive but in practice only a limited portion of working families may actually use them, especially given the current economic climate and concerns about job insecurity.

Over a longer period of time, the development of social policies such as APE which encourage women to care for children at home are likely to impact women's career development. It is not clear how this orientation to work and family will blend with the EU policy of mainstreaming gender considerations in all areas of public policy making. It may evolve that companies will design enhanced career break systems that will:

- enable employees to keep in touch with the organisation;
- ensure that skills are maintained; and
- facilitate employees' return to work.

SOUTHERN EUROPE

The Southern European region includes four states, all EU members: Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain.



In general, these countries have begun to address work and family issues more recently than countries in the Northern Europe region. However, the states in the Southern region are increasingly working to develop supports for reconciliation.

The experiences of Spain will be used to depict some of the work and family circumstances which exist in the Southern Europe region.

Stage One: Landscaping the Context in Southern Europe

Socio-Economic-Political Factors: In examining work and family issues in Spain, one needs to consider the rapid changes which have occurred during the past two decades. Since the death of Franco, Spain has moved from a dictatorship to a democracy and has experienced rapid industrialisation. However, these upheavals occurred within the context of enduring traditional social structures, the ongoing influence of the church, and the continuation of other traditional sources of power (Cousins, 1994). It is important to recognise that these dramatic changes in economic and political systems happened within a very brief period of time in Spain whereas similar transformations occurred over many decades in most other European countries.

The historic upheavals in Spain's economic and political systems have had far reaching implications for different aspects of work and family issues. For instance, under Franco women were required to forego employment after they were married. It was less than twenty years ago, in 1978, that the law requiring married women to obtain their husbands' consent before taking up employment was revoked (Cousins, 1994).

Traditional Family Structures: Despite a strong women's movement, families in Spain continue to be patriarchal and hierarchical, structured around the male breadwinner (Cousins, 1994). There is widespread belief that a woman's central role is to be the major homemaker and carer

within the family. Nevertheless, there has been a rapid increase in the number of women in the labour market, although this trend happened more recently than in most other European countries. In 1988, only 28% of mothers with children under the age of ten were employed. By 1993, this had risen to 35% (29% full time and 6% part time). Part-time work which might be more of an option for some women remains difficult to find in Spain.

Given the problems involved in reconciling work and family responsibilities, Spanish women have opted for *smaller families*. Spain now has the second lowest birth rate in Europe (with Italy as the lowest).

In Spain, there is a strong ideological preference for home-based care for small children. Most Spanish women still leave the labour market during their childrearing years.

Gender Equality: Currently, there are considerable efforts in Spain to develop measures that will enhance gender equality, including policies for the reconciliation of work and family. Spanish political leaders have indicated a commitment to:

- enhance preschool childcare services;
- establish new labour laws, particularly parental leave entitlements; and
- use awareness campaigns and other actions designed to promote more equal sharing of family responsibilities between men and women.

The Instituto de la Mujer, which is responsible for the country's equal opportunity policies, was established in 1983 by the Spanish government to enhance the role of women. This body has campaigned for a better distribution of parental and domestic responsibilities between men and women.

The Economy and Employment: Spain is rapidly constructing a modern, competitive economy. However, this economy currently consists of two employment sector tiers. The formal sector, or the first tier, is highly regulated and offers protections to employees. The informal sector, or the second tier, consists of temporary jobs with few benefits and protections. The unemployment rates in Spain are particularly high, especially for women. For the first half of 1996, the unemployment rates remained over 22%.

Economic difficulties experienced after the 1993 recession have led to cutbacks in public expenditures for a range of social programmes.

Stage Two: Overview of the Work-Family Agenda in Southern Europe

Work and Family Concepts: Discussions about organisational contributions to reconciliation are relatively recent in the Southern European countries. In comparison to the Northern European states, the Southern European countries use the term "family-friendly policy" less often.

***The work-family
debate tends to be
framed as a
women's issue.***

The work-family debate tends to be framed as a women's issue. However, the influence of the European Union has affected these discussions and more attention has been focused on providing equal opportunities for men and women, especially around work and family experiences.

Public Childcare Supports: Since the end of the Franco era, the Spanish government's social reforms have been concentrated on *the economic protection of families* with children and those with responsibilities for the elderly or infirmed. Emphasis has been placed on the protection of male wages and promotion of women's re-entry into the labour market after their children have entered school (rather than encouraging women to simultaneously assume work and family roles).

**Workers with
family
responsibilities
are offered the
first choice of
vacation dates.**

The level of public childcare provision is lower than in much of Northern Europe. There is no tradition of nursery education for three year olds in Spain; however, the government has indicated that it is a priority to establish a sufficient number of nurseries for parents who wish to access these services. Although parents pay for childcare expenses, tax relief is available to low income families for childcare expenses related to children under the age of three.

Publicly funded services for children under the age of six years (the compulsory school age) are currently being developed. These services are regarded as early childhood education and are designed as part of the education system.

There are minimal after school care provisions for Spanish children. However, some private centres for enrichment teaching (e.g., languages, computer skills) have been established and some local authority centres offer after school play and recreation activities.

Leaves: Recent labour laws have provided entitlements and various forms of parental leaves in the Southern European countries. In Spain, maternity leave, paternity leave, and leave for family reasons offer the employees pay at their full earnings. Parental leave, which is available for up to three years and can be shared by both parents, is unpaid. In comparison to the UK and the United States, Spanish parents have more leave entitlements.

Employment Policies: There is a tradition in Spain of workplace regulation which favours the family. For example, women are entitled to an interruption of the working day in order to breastfeed an infant of less than nine months of age. Workers with family responsibilities are offered the first choice of vacation dates.

In order to distribute work more fairly, there is *an upper limit on the number of paid overtime hours* (European Commission DGV. Directorate General for Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Affairs, January, 1995). This policy could help employees to have more time with their families, although the traditional family roles mitigate against a greater participation in family activities by male employees.

Since the death of Franco, employers have pressed for reforms in industrial relations and labour laws to enable them to hire and fire freely and to utilise forms of part-time work and temporary contracts. There was much opposition from the unions but in the context of high unemploy-

ment, this position has been accepted on the basis that “any” jobs – even precarious jobs with minimal protection – are better than no jobs (Cousins, 1994).

With the support of employers, the Spanish government has sought legislative strategies that make it easier for workplaces to offer new flexible forms of employment. It is important to note, however, that this has *not* generally been promoted as a strategy for reconciliation or gender equality. Rather, these options offer greater flexibility for the workplace. Spain, along with the other Southern Mediterranean states, has developed temporary work to a greater extent than part-time work.

Employment, including part-time and temporary employment, remains highly regulated and protected. The costs of dismissal are fairly high for employers.

Workplace Policies: Workplace responses to work and family priorities vary but, in general, are not widely developed in the Southern European countries. In Portugal, for example, the lack of publicly funded childcare has resulted in a relatively high level of employer provided childcare. However, the limited level of public support for childcare in Spain has not been associated with increased workplace-based supports because there is less labour force pressure on employers to hire women with young children.

Stage Three: Driving and Restraining Forces in Southern Europe

The state of the economy has exerted a significant influence on the work and family debate in Spain. The recession has resulted in cutbacks in public expenditures which, in turn, have held back the development of childcare and other services planned by the government as strategies specifically designed to enhance the reconciliation of work and family.

Unions, a key social partner in work and family, tend to be male dominated (except for those unions representing workers in female dominated occupations). Hence, in comparison to unions in other EU regions, the unions in Spain have expressed limited concerns about childcare and other work-family issues.

Three important factors have continued to support progress in the work and family arena in Spain:

- the low birth rate which has made it easier for women to manage their work and family responsibilities;
- the women’s movement which has advocated for progress as part of the commitment to gender equality; and
- campaigns initiated by the Instituto de la Mujer which give institutional legitimacy to work and family discussions.

Stage 4: An Example of Best Practices in Southern Europe

There were no Spanish companies among the European Social Innovation winners. However, one company in Southern Europe was recognized: DuPont de Nemours Italiana (DPI). DuPont de Nemours Italiana in Italy is a research and technology-based chemical and energy company which serves worldwide markets.

DUPONT DE NEMOURS ITALIANA

Workforce

- 512 employees
- 377 men
- 135 women

Innovations

- Flex-time has been available to employees since 1982. While the core time is 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., flex-time hours begin between 8:00 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. and end between 4:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. This programme is organised with a monthly compensation of a maximum of 8 hours without time limit. The employees, not the company, manage their working hours.
- Part-time work options, which were established in 1986, are available to employees at all career levels. Part-time work schedules are not common in Italy. The company has reported that 16 employees (15 women and 1 man) work on a part-time basis so that they can reconcile their work responsibilities with childcare and/or eldercare.
- Teleworking has been an option for employees since 1991. Currently, 250 employees (primarily performing sales and technical tasks) are involved with teleworking arrangements. A majority of the teleworking employees (150) are linked to the DuPont International Network by computer, and use portable phones.
- The company is working to sign agreements with local creches to help women in the sales department.

Observations

In 1993, Du Pont Italiana conducted an internal survey which found that there was an imbalance between the number of jobs being held by males and females. In order to improve this situation, DPI leadership established a goal of tripling the rate of women in managerial and professional positions by the year 2000, and launched a programme to strengthen gender equality.

Early in 1994, all managers and employees were enrolled in seminars and exercises designed to explore the relationships among men and women in both working and social environments. The DPI Equal Opportunity Programme was submitted for review by the Italian Ministry of Labour. It was very positively received due to its innovative approach and the participation of the entire workforce.

The policies established at DPI have stressed the importance of developing flexible work options which are not widely available in Southern Mediterranean countries.

Stage Five: Implications for Work and Family in Southern Europe

Perspectives about work and family issues reflect the fundamental economic circumstances in the Southern European region. Families often need multiple jobs for subsistence, and many of these jobs, including second jobs for men, are found in the informal economy.

Women continue to be disproportionately affected by work and family issues. The fact that women assume most of the domestic responsibilities and have very limited access to part-time work has excluded many women from participating in the labour market. Home-working is reportedly widespread. A combination of work and family factors has perpetuated *inequalities in the labour market for women*. The only employment options available to many women are marginal, insecure, temporary work in the informal economy.

The focus on gender equality and reconciliation is a relatively new phenomenon in Southern Europe. There are indications, however, that new values which support the reconciliation of work and family are beginning to be assimilated by trade unions, employers, and employees. Inevitably, this process will take some time (European Commission Network on Childcare, 1996). Already, much progress has been made in some areas such as parental leave entitlements.

Spain has developed rapidly since the Franco era. If economic conditions improve, it is possible that the political support for gender equality and work and family will facilitate continued progress. However, the strong traditions of the woman's family role may conflict with these developments.

Companies may assume a critical role in the work and family debate by considering ways to increase opportunities for female employees which will not only offer benefits to working women but will also help the workplace to gain a competitive advantage by developing the full potential of their female employees.

There are indications, however, that new values which support the reconciliation of work and family are beginning to be assimilated by trade unions, employers, and employees.

FOR THE CORPORATE READER

- Does your company make a direct link between gender equality and work-family issues?
- Have work and family policies or programmes been identified as a way to minimise the negative impacts of downsizing and displaced workers?
- What are the facilitators and barriers for reducing the number of hours which the average employee works?

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Work-family issues remain pressing concerns across Europe. Research conducted in countries with very different socio-political-economic contexts, such as the UK and Denmark, has identified work-family conflict as a major source of stress for individuals (Lewis and Cooper, 1987; 1988; Holt and Thaulow, 1992).

Despite the variation in the work and family situations among the EU countries, there is some commonality of experiences which differentiate their priorities and responses from the United States.

... economic factors may also prevent men and women from taking advantage of generous parental leave arrangements.

- Work and family issues tend to be regarded as socio-political as well as economic concerns.
- It is widely expected that all social partners – including workplaces, governments, and trade unions – should be involved in addressing work and family issues. Work and family priorities are not regarded as being primarily a corporate concern.

There is a need for multi-national companies to address the work and family experiences of their employees. In order for workplace-based responses to be effective, it will be important for organisations to consider the social, cultural, and policy contexts of different countries. These factors exert a significant influence on the practical supports for and barriers to managing work and family demands. For example, shorter hours could help employees reconcile work and family responsibilities. However, in countries where a traditional model of family and gender roles prevail, it is possible that men might use the extra time to take second jobs and the work and family demands on women would remain high. In some countries, the dual-earner family is the norm and fathers are publicly encouraged to increase their involvement in families. At the workplace, however, organisational cultures continue to constrain men from making changes in their work arrangements in order to accommodate family priorities. Furthermore, economic factors may also prevent men and women from taking advantage of generous parental leave arrangements.

In order for companies with headquarters in the United States to successfully extend their work and family programmes to locations in other countries, it will be necessary for these organisations to assess the work-family needs and preferences of their specific workforces. This includes a consideration of the national context within which the companies are operating. In many cases, it will be necessary for workplaces to adapt their work-family policies, programmes, and practices so that they fit the European context. For example, attempts by IBM to transfer their work/life programmes to the UK required some negotiation around the language used to describe the initiatives. In the UK, using the words “workplace balance and flexibility” were more acceptable than “work/life.”

This paper has emphasized the importance of understanding the social, political, economic, and cultural contexts of work and family issues in various European regions and countries. The five-step model has been offered as a framework for understanding different national perspectives about work and family issues. This analytic process is not just a tool for examining new situations; it can also be used to help practitioners reflect on their own practices.

Learning about work and family experiences in different national and regional contexts can offer new perspectives on these issues, enriching our understanding of public and private responses to these important aspects of our daily lives.

GLOSSARY

atypical workers - employees who work adjusted or flexible schedules such as part-time employees and job sharers.

campaign groups - interest or advocacy groups engaged in the public discourse of socio-political issues such as work and family.

career breakers - individuals who take leaves of absence for reasons such as dependent care or the pursuit of education.

career primary - individuals who express a strong orientation to their occupational responsibilities in comparison, for example, to their family responsibilities.

carers - individuals who provide services to dependents (e.g., children, elders, disabled individuals).

Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Community (COFACE) - a non-governmental organisation which ensures that public policies consider their implications on European families.

Council of Ministers - the main legislative arm of the European Commission, with the last word on adopting EC law. This body convenes Council meetings with the appropriate Ministers from each of the member states (depending on the topic of discussion).

creche - care centers for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

European Commission (EC) - the guardian of treaties on which the European Union is based. The Commission has the power to initiate and implement legislation.

European Commission Families and Work Network - a panel of experts appointed by the EC to promote family friendly societies. This network has now been replaced with the Network on Families, Work and Intergenerational Solidarity.

economically inactive - an adult who is not in the labour force nor actively seeking employment.

Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) - the UK administrative body established to promote equality, such as gender equality. Other member countries have similar bodies (with different names).

European Court of Justice (ECJ) - the body which ensures that European law is observed.

European directives - EU policies regarding employment, health and safety which require compliance from all member states.

European Economic Community (EEC) - the predecessor to the Economic Union, often referred to as the Common Market, originally united to safeguard peace and promote economic and social progress throughout Europe.

European Social Dialogue - a forum for employer groups and trade union organisations (i.e., UNICE, EEC, and ETUC).

European Social Innovation Competition - a contest initiated by the European Commission which awarded prizes to workplaces that demonstrate flexibility in policies and programmes designed to reconcile work and family life.

European Trade Unions Confederation (ETUC) - a group comprised of different trade unions.

European Union (EU) - a cross-national member group which works toward economic union, with intergovernmental cooperation in other specific areas. Member states include: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

Europeanisation - the promotion of policies and practices that support progress toward EU goals.

Euro-sceptics - individuals and groups who raise concerns about the movement toward Europeanisation.

family-friendly policies - formal public policies or workplace policies which attempt to help workers manage their work and family demands.

family-friendly societies - societies which attempt to promote the reconciliation of work and family and which assign equal importance to economic and social progress.

family-friendly workplaces - worksites which have formal policies and informal practices designed to support the reconciliation of work and family.

father-friendly policies/workplaces - workplaces which encourage fathers to increase their involvement in family caretaking by using benefits such as statutory parental leave.

House of Lords - the upper legislative body in England.

informal economy - jobs paid by cash and not reported to the authorities (i.e., not taxed).

Instituto de Mujer - Spanish body that works toward the removal of discrimination and the improvement of working conditions for women; Spanish equivalent of the EOC.

mainstreaming - consideration of the implications which all social and economic policies have for issues, such as gender equality.

National Health Services - publicly sponsored health care benefits and services.

New Ways to Work - a private organisation which promotes alternative working patterns.

Nordic Countries - Sweden, Denmark and Finland (and Norway, although not a member of the EU).

Northern Europe - Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands.

out-of-school services - programmes provided outside of school, such as after-school care and vacation provisions.

overworked - individuals who devote significant numbers of hours to their paid employment, either as a result of working many hours in a single job or holding more than one job.

parental insurance scheme - parental leave policies in Sweden which include financial supports to parents.

Parents at Work - a campaign group which advocates for strategies that can support the reconciliation of work and family.

EU Parliament - the EU legislative body, with representatives directly elected by the member nations.

pro-natalist - an orientation to maintaining or increasing the national birth rate.

reconciliation - the attempt to harmonise work and family activities and interests, promoting an atmosphere of minimal stress and disadvantage.

redundancies - layoffs.

scheme - programme.

school leavers - young adults who have recently graduated and have entered the labour force.

service vouchers - an initiative suggested by the European Commission to provide assistance for workers' household responsibilities and simultaneously stimulate employment of service providers.

Social Chapter - the Social Protocol annexed to the Treaty of European Union (1992), establishing the policy framework for social issues. The UK opted out of this when they signed the original treaty.

social partners - the stakeholders who recognize the reconciliation of work and family as a priority, including: all levels of government, employers, trade unions, and individuals.

Southern Europe - Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

term time working - contract arrangements for work. It may or may not be contingent, since it includes regular, permanent part-time work.

Trade Union Council - organisation of trade unions in the UK.

United Kingdom - Great Britain, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

unsociable hours - work hours outside of the typical Monday - Friday work week including weekends, evenings, and holidays.

V-Time - voluntary reduced hours.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Suzan Lewis is currently a Reader in Psychology at Manchester Metropolitan University and co-director of the Elizabeth Gaskell Centre for Interpersonal and Organisational Development, which undertakes research, training and consultancy in public and private sector organisations. She received her Ph.D. in organisational psychology from the School of Management, UMIST in the UK. Her major research interests are in the areas of work, family, community and organisational change.

She has published widely on these topics in professional and academic journals and books. She is co-author of *Career Couples* (1989) and *Managing the New Workforce, The Challenge of Dual Income Families* (1994), co-editor of *Dual Earner Families, International Perspectives* (1992), and co-editor, with Jeremy Lewis, of *The Work Family Challenge, Rethinking Employment* (1996). She is also the co-editor of *Community, Work and Family*, a new international journal for academics and professionals in the field.

She is currently co-ordinating a transnational study of young workers' present and future orientations to work and family in five European countries, funded by Directorate General Five of the European Commission under its 4th Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men.

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The Center for Work & Family
Boston College
Carroll School of Management
140 Commonwealth Avenue
Chestnut Hill, MA 02167

ph: (617) 552-2844
FAX: (617) 552-2859