

# Demographic Insights



## WOMEN & WORK

Career, children and combining the two is a big enough problem for most women. Yet for demographers it is no more than the tip of the iceberg: In the ageing and shrinking European population of the near future, women will have to further shore up the declining workforce, look after their children, and also increasingly care for elderly family members. Recent research takes a closer look at these challenges and how to tackle them. Find some of it here and more on our website: [www.population-europe.eu](http://www.population-europe.eu).

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## What working mums really need Five questions for demographer Anna Matysiak

**What are the main differences today between women and men in relation to work?**

First of all, women experience many more career breaks, which are very often related to childbearing. For some women it is difficult to come back to work afterwards and then they experience further career breaks due to inactivity or unemployment. Whereas for men we observe that once they have children they become more motivated to work and those who did not work before may even enter the labour market. And there are big differences in working hours: Women reduce their working hours when they have children, while men tend either to work as much as before or even more.

**What consequences does this have?**

If women withdraw from the labour market for some time, they of course earn lower wages, are less likely to be promoted, and their position in the labour market is lower. Women in Europe now generally want to work. So they tend to establish their position in the labour market first, before they form a family, so later on it should be easier for them to come back. However, when women find it to hard to combine childrearing and work, they tend to postpone having children.

**How do European countries differ in this respect?**

Women reduce their labour market activities to the least extent in the Nordic countries. The situation is quite difficult in Southern Europe and also in Germany and Austria where attitudes towards working mothers are more traditional, the childcare situation is worse and there are few incentives for men to take parental leave. But one must mention that the discussion about this has started and we can already see some changes.

In Eastern Europe the interesting thing is that despite many institutional and cultural barriers for working mothers, women are very motivated to participate in the labour market and in fact they quite widely participate.

**What are the reasons for these country differences: economics, culture or politics?**

All of them matter: Politics matter, culture matters, and also the structure of the labour market, like the viability of part-time jobs or certain regulations that make it easier or more difficult to become employed. And of course all of these factors are interrelated, so some policies that work in one country might not work in another because of the different cultural background.

**In a perfect world, what would be the ideal setting for working mothers?**

Policies that make it possible to combine work and children, but also leave room for individual choices. You would have the possibility of parental leave, but there would also be good childcare available and working hours would be very flexible. Of course that is not easy for employers, therefore some incentives for them would help. And it would be important to receive some training during parental leave, to help maintain contact with the employer and prepare for a successful return.



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**74 %** of all Swedish fathers eligible for parental leave actually made use of it in 2010. This is one result of a study by Ann-Zofie Duvander and Mats Johansson from Stockholm University. The researchers explored the effects of reforms promoting fathers' parental leave use in Sweden. Their results suggest that the effect of the special "father month" – introduced in Sweden as early as 1995 and extended to two month in 2002 – made a big difference. Before the reforms, only 43% of fathers used any paternal leave. However, when looking at the totality of leave days used, the fathers' share is still only about 23%. [Read full article](#)

## Having it all or having enough?

Reconciling work and family is a daily challenge for most Europeans. A recent study explores the connections between wellbeing, paid work and household duties, and compares the impact that different family policies have on this triangle. Using data from the European Social Survey (ESS) 2004/2005, Katarina Boye looks at the situation of families with at least one underaged child in 18 countries.

Based on their family-policy-approaches, the countries are categorized into four groups: a) the dual-earner model that supports paid work for men and women and treats reproductive work as a state responsibility; b) the traditional model, where reproductive work is treated as a family responsibility and female labour force participation is not especially encouraged; c) the market-orientated model, where the state does not take any responsibilities for reproductive work. It either has to be provided by the family or bought through commercial providers. Paid work for women is encouraged as a necessary source of family income; d) the contradictory model, where women are encouraged to participate in the labour force, but at the same time are treated as mainly responsible for housework (see also Table 1, first column).

Family-Policy Model Countries	Wellbeing Index		Paid Work, hours / week		Housework, hours / week		Work-Family Conflict	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Dual-Earner Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden	16.1	16.6	33.8	42.3	12.8	7.0	7.5	7.4
Traditional Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands	15.7	16.1	24.6	42.0	16.8	5.4	7.3	7.5
Market-Oriented Ireland, Switzerland, UK	13.7	15.2	19.0	44.8	20.6	6.0	6.4	8.0
Contradictory Czech. Rep., Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia	15.1	16.1	31.3	46.5	19.6	7.8	7.7	7.7

Source European Social Survey (ESS) 2005/2006; authors' computations

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**Table 1.** Mean values for wellbeing, hours of paid work and housework, and level of work-family conflict in all country-groups

Looking at the level of wellbeing, Boye points out that women express significantly lower wellbeing than men across all family-policy models.

Only the countries in the dual-earner group provide an exception: Here women and men report almost equal levels of wellbeing, 16,1 and 16,5 (on an index between 0 and 25).

However, the basic positive correlation between paid work and wellbeing is significantly threatened by work-family conflicts. The more hours people work, the more likely these problems become, almost irrespective of the dominant family policy model. On an index between 0 (lowest level) and 20 (highest level of conflict), the mean values of all four policy-model groups lay between 6.4 and 8, both for women and men (see table 1, last column). [Read Pop Digest](#)

## Caring for one's dears

Caring for one's spouse who suffers from long-term impairments, looking after one's grandchildren or giving a hand to an elderly neighbour – care provided outside of formal care institutions comes in many different guises. Based on data from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) 2006, a recent study by Athina Vlachantoni explores questions about mid and late life carers.

According to the results of the study, in the UK about 9 percent of men and 15 percent of women aged 50 years or over actively provided informal care to someone in 2006. Mostly, carers belonged to the "younger old" aged 50 to 64 years. (The probability of caring for someone decreases with age from 12 percent of those from 50 to 59 years of age to less than 5 percent among those aged 80 years and over.) Caring can be quite a different experience for men and women: Many women look after their parents and parents-in-law, children, grandchildren, friends or neighbours. Men – if they provide informal care – tend to do so for their spouses.

Almost two-thirds of mid and late life carers are still in the active labour market phase of their lives. However, among 50-64 year-old caregivers only 50 percent are employed or self-employed, whereas this is the case for 64 percent of their cohorts not engaged in informal care. Moreover, the more hours a carer invests, the less likely it is that he or she is active in the labour market. [Read Pop Digest](#)

## Events & Publications

"Gender, Policies and Population" is the theme given special attention to at the European Population Conference (EPC) 2012. The conference takes place in Stockholm from the 13th to the 16th of June. [Read more](#)

"The International Handbook of Gender and Poverty: Concepts, Research, Policy", edited by Sylvia Chant, comprehensively covers the key themes that are vital to understanding poverty as a gendered process. It is written by leading scholars and policy advisors and combines theoretical insights with policy lessons. [Read abstract](#)