Transitions

FINAL REPORT

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for the EU Framework 5 study 'Gender, Parenthood and the Changing European Workplace'

Socio-economic Research

Manchester Metropolitan University

Transitions

Final report

Final Report on the project "Gender, Parenthood and the Changing European Workplace: Young Adults Negotiating the Work-Family Boundary":

Transitions

funded within the Key Action Improving the Socio-Economic Knowledge base of the Fifth Framework Programme of the European Union

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Preface

Transitions was part of the Fifth Framework Programme of the European Commission, under the Key Action Improving Human Research Potential and the Socio-Economic Knowledge Base. The three-year project ran from January 2003 until December 2005.

Abstract

This project extends understanding of the changing contexts in which young parents negotiate the transition to parenthood, based on policy analysis and an international literature review in eight European states and empirical work in seven countries. The overall objective was to examine qualitatively how young European women and men negotiate motherhood and fatherhood and work-family boundaries and how this impacts on their well-being, in the context of different national welfare state regimes, substantial organisational change, and family and employer support. Eleven organisational case studies were conducted in private (mostly finance) and public (social services) sector workplaces, followed by home based biographical interviews with selected parents and some of their partners.

New parents in this study managed work and care in particularly intense, competitive and pressured contexts amid rapid workplace changes and especially the increasingly demanding workloads reported in all the case study organisations. This is compounded by an intensification of parenting as well as of work, as parents in all countries are expected to put growing amounts of effort and time into parenting activities. Nevertheless, the study also highlighted the positive aspects of paid work for many new mothers and fathers who reported their enjoyment of challenging work and contact with colleagues.

National and organisational policies to support employed parents are undermined both by current workplace practices associated with work intensification and, in many contexts, concerns for future job opportunities in rapidly changing job climates. Although the right to ask for flexible working, and longer parental leave entitlements, especially for fathers, are increasingly enshrined in legislation in many countries, parents are often in practice prevented from working flexibly by heavy workloads, or by concerns about their perceived commitment to the job. More important than policies alone, is support from line managers, particularly in the countries with fewer supportive national regulations. However, colleague support also emerged as significant in contemporary workplaces.

National policies and provisions interact with the formal and informal workplace policies, practices and cultures and economic conditions to support and constrain gender expectations and transformations. However, policies for combining paid work and family care are undermined by the persistent assumption made by managers at all levels, by colleagues, and by many of the parents themselves, that these are primarily policies for women. Experiences and well-being of parents of young children depend on multiple levels of context. Good, affordable childcare is regarded as essential, but not in itself sufficient for parental well-being in a context of long working hours and/or unstable employment conditions. Control over work-family boundaries, is also important although parents described a range of preferences and strategies for boundary management. Well-being is also highly related to expectations. Growing expectations of support for parenting, and for gender equity, are associated with transitional tensions if they are not mirrored by institutional changes.

Recommendations from the study include the need for a multi-layered partnership approach to supporting parents in contemporary, changing contexts. This will involve confronting uncomfortable issues about the contradictions between work intensification in the global economic context and the needs of parents and children.

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1. Executive summary

This report extends understanding of the changing contexts in which young parents negotiate the transition to parenthood and work-family strategies, based on policy analysis and an international literature review in eight European states and empirical work in seven countries. The Transitions project took place between 2003 and 2005. The countries involved in the study were Bulgaria, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden and the UK.

Aims and objectives of the Transitions project

The overall scientific objective of the project was: to examine how young European men and women working in public and private sector workplaces negotiate motherhood and fatherhood and work-family boundaries in the context of different national welfare state regimes, family and employer support.

The specific aims of the project were to:

- Map national contexts for understanding the experience of becoming parents and parenthood in the partner countries;

- Develop an understanding of the impact of workplace context and organisational change on young adults who become parents, in the partner countries;

- Examine the transition to parenthood (retrospectively and prospectively) in the partner countries;

- Develop an understanding of how young adults negotiate parenthood and work-family boundaries, in the partner countries;

- Examine positive well-being (including its dimensions and its relationship to different work-family strategies), at individual, family and organisational levels in the partner countries;

- Examine the policy implications of the key foci of the study;

- Disseminate the findings to policy-makers at European, national and local levels, employers, trade unions and other stakeholders and make recommendations.

This project develops and extends previous EU studies by focusing on the ways in which organisations are negotiating the transitions of globalisation and changes in national economies while their employees are negotiating parenthood. The background to the empirical work undertaken in this project has been elaborated by a) a mapping exercise to highlight the national contexts for understanding the experience of parenthood and of becoming a parent in the partner countries and b) by a state of the art literature review on the transition to parenthood, organisational change and well-being. The empirical work included eleven organisational case studies conducted in private (mostly finance) and public (social services) sector workplaces. Methods include focus groups with new parents, interviews with managers of new parents, and a well-being questionnaire. The organisational case studies were followed by biographical interviews with selected parents from these organisations and some of their partners.

Major findings of the Transitions project

The main findings are divided into the three major, interrelated research themes of the project, (1) organisational change and workplace practice, (2) the ways in which young adults negotiate parenthood and work-family boundaries in these changing contexts, and (3) aspects of well-being in diverse contexts.

While this study covers a wide range of issues, the findings highlight in particular the potential contradictions between globalisation and work intensification on the one hand, and the need for time to care for children (and others), in gender equitable ways, on the other hand. One of the overarching conclusions is that experiences of the transition to parenthood, and the well-being of parents of young children depend on many, interrelated, layers of context. This calls for collaborative, joined up policy-making to take account of the challenges presented by transitions taking place in families, workplaces and wider societal contexts.

The conditions under which the transition to parenthood takes place vary. The different welfare state, historical, ideological and economic contexts reflect different dominant models for combining parenthood and employment: an egalitarian model in Norway and Sweden, forms of modified male breadwinner models in the UK and the Netherlands, and different forms of dual earner models in France, Portugal, Slovenia and Bulgaria (Fagnani et al, 2004). Formal and informal resources including education, employment, family supports and workplace conditions also vary. National discourses and debates relating to working and parenting, among policy-makers, employers and the media, are another crucial and dynamic, but often neglected, aspect of context. These tended to shift over the course of the project (Smithson et al, 2005; Lewis and Smithson, in press). Some of these debates, for example, the relative focus on gender equity (fairness) or the business case when discussing employer practices to support parents, reflect the different national contexts. However, some debates and concerns are emerging more widely, for example on demographic issues, levels of stress and sickness, and "work-life balance" or "time squeeze" issues. These generic debates appear to be related to wider European and global trends (see also Wallace et al, 2003; Hantrais et al, 2004), and particularly to the impact of changing workplace conditions and practices.

Organisational change and workplace practice

Parenting decisions and work-family strategies are developed not only in the context of macro social policies and emerging debates but also in the context of the rapid pace of change in contemporary work and workplaces. The different political contexts and, particularly, the reconfiguration of welfare states are shaping different organisational contexts. In particular the dramatically rapid changes taking place in Bulgaria and Slovenia, including liberalisation, new pro-market ideologies favouring employers; rising unemployment and changes in the labour code, together with new regulations that derive from the EU, contribute to the feeling of deep transition, with both positive and negative impacts on workplace policies and practices and on workers' lives. However, all the parents in this study were subject to some degree of workplace change and transition. Within the private sector, organisations fall within a continuum in terms of their support for parents within increasingly competitive contexts. At one extreme, in the relatively newly privatised organisations in Bulgaria and Slovenia, the shift has been from a paternalistic to a task and efficiency orientation, with parents relying on the long standing support from the state for reconciling family and employment, but expecting little from employers beyond compliance with regulation. At the other extreme, in the UK, the Netherlands and Norway, with

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varying levels of state support for parents, workplace efficiency and competitiveness are pursued along with some management recognition of the need to support parents in the increasingly demanding workplace, that is, more of a success-through-people approach, albeit not always consistently applied.

The intensification and extension of work and consequences for parents

Workplace restructuring and reorganisation, including downsizing and other "efficiency" initiatives, that tend to result in an "intensification" of work (see e.g. Burchell, Ladipo et al, 2002; Wallace et al, 2003) are commonly experienced by parents both in the private and public sector organisations in all the countries studied. In the private sector intensification is a by-product of new forms of competition in the global economy, including the transition to a market economy in Slovenia and Bulgaria. An issue for social services workers in many of the case studies is increased pressure of client workload, as a consequence of a low or reduced level of welfare state provision and new public management (Clarke and Newman, 1997), with increased pressure on social services to be efficient.

The experience of intensification of work in all the case study organisations is a particular challenge for new parents, who must manage work and family in a particularly demanding, competitive and pressured context. Experiences of intensification of work contribute to the rise in stress-related illnesses (see e.g. Wichert, 2002) associated with the high levels of sick leave and early or staggered retirement which are on the increase in several of the countries studied (especially Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, the UK and Slovenia) (see e.g. SOU 2002), and may also be one of many factors contributing to low birth rates.

Intensification of work impacts on the implementation and experience of national and workplace policies to support parents. The national contexts – particularly lengths and payments of leaves, childcare options and opportunities to work part-time or flexibly, as well as economic conditions and levels of unemployment, especially in the new and candidate EU member states – make a difference to the ways in which new parents experience both paid work and parenting. However the impacts of different policies (national and organisational) are undermined both by current workplace practices associated with work intensification and, in many contexts, especially in the private sector, by new parents' concerns for future job opportunities in rapidly changing job climates.

Some workplace changes and technological developments can be associated with formal or informal flexibility of working hours. However, while flexible working policies and practices can bring opportunities to integrate paid work and family, particularly if this is associated with greater autonomy, in the context of the intensification of work it can also lead to blurred work-family boundaries or long working hours that intrude on family time or energy (see also Wallace et al, 2003). Flexible ways of working can also generate inequality in workplaces. Employees in direct client contact faced different, less flexible, working conditions than others in many of the case study organisations.

While a decade ago, managers' attitudes to flexible working often prevented employees from requesting or being allowed to work flexibly ((Lewis 2001; Bond, Hyman et al. 2002)), this study demonstrates that parents are now more likely to be prevented from working flexibly by heavy workloads. For example, parents are often reluctant to take family related leaves because work is rarely covered fully while staff are away, and often work is passed to overburdened colleagues, or accumulates to be dealt with on the return to work. This trend thus undermines the right to ask for flexible working which is enshrined in legislation in some countries (see e.g Fagnani and Letablier, 2004).

The intensification of work reported by some parents in all the case studies and long hours culture cited in many contexts, can clearly be problematic for working parents, particularly combined with the intensification of parenting, which we discuss below. However, in some contexts new forms of work can be very satisfying. The pleasure of challenging work and contact with colleagues was mentioned by many of the new parents. This can be associated with positive well-being and "flow" (Haworth and Veal, 2003), although it can also intensify conflict and tension in managing work and family boundaries. This presents challenges for social policy-makers and employers.

Gendered workplace cultures and policy-practice implementation gaps

The effectiveness of national policies in supporting employed parents depends on how these are implemented in the workplace, in the context of ongoing organisational change and wider labour market trends. For example, long parental leaves can create practical difficulties when the pace of workplace change is very rapid, and be perceived as risky in the context of subjective job insecurity. Persisting gendered organisational values and assumptions, such as the widespread assumption that ideal workers do not work part-time, especially in higher status jobs (Lewis, 1997;2001; Rapoport et al, 2001), contribute to an implementation gap between policy (national and workplace) and practice in all the case study organisations, albeit to varying extents. This implementation gap, found in many other studies in a wide range of countries (Gambles et al, 2006) is exacerbated by the intensification of work, which can, for example, make it difficult for parents and their managers to deal with family related leaves. The study highlights the continuing **gendered expectations**, in all the countries (to varying degrees, least in Sweden) that policies for combining paid work and family care are primarily, or only, for women. This assumption is often made by managers at all levels, as well as by many of the parents themselves. This phenomenon mirrors and interacts with the persistence of gender asymmetry in family involvement and the division of domestic labour.

The crucial role of line managers and increasingly colleagues, in supporting parents or as barriers to flexible working practices

Line manager support or lack of it is of crucial significance for working parents' options for negotiating their paid work and family responsibilities. While this is true in all the case studies, it is particularly so in the countries with fewer supportive national regulations, or a shorter history of people taking up family supportive initiatives, and in organisations where there are limited resources to cover absent personnel (for example in sections of the social services organisations in the UK, Bulgaria and Sweden).

However, interviews with managers in the case study organisations highlight some of the dilemmas that they experience. Changing conditions including heavy workloads and targets for managers can reinforce task rather than people-centred management styles. Middle and lower level managers in particular have to negotiate intensified targets, changing working practices and parents' expectations of support. There are also wide differences among managers within the same organisations, particularly between "new style" managers who embrace change and those who cling to old ways of working. In some contexts new style managers are more supportive of parents and of flexible working arrangements, while in others, for example in the Bulgarian and Slovenian private sector organisations, parents find new style managers to be less supportive than the

more paternalistic older style managers. Management support for flexibility is most effective when it is directed at all employees. Some parents felt that it can be divisive if directed only at employees with children, risking the emergence of "backlash" against employed parents. This emerged particularly strongly in the UK context.

The emerging **role of colleagues** as agents of support for or agents of social control of parents is also highlighted, especially in the context of work intensification. With heavy workloads and a decreasing likelihood of official replacement for employees taking leave for family reasons, the support or disapproval of colleagues is increasingly significant. On the positive side, in some contexts parents display considerable solidarity in the context of the intense demands from both paid work and parenting, helping out by covering for each others' absences. However, work intensification combined with "high performance" management techniques (White et al, 2003) such as relatively autonomous teams can also generate feelings of guilt about colleagues who may have to cover for parents who take leave, for example if a child is ill, and can undermine parents' willingness to make use of their entitlements.

Experiences of work in public and private sector workplaces are different, but these distinctions are blurring in contemporary contexts

While many differences remain between working experiences in the public and private sector, some of the distinctions between the two sectors are blurring as the traditionally better (non material) conditions and higher job security in most of the public sector organisations are eroded, and as private organisations (in some countries) become more attuned to flexible working and part-time working practices.

The exclusion of agency or contracted workers

There is a danger that parents who are agency or outsourced workers can be excluded from debates and supports for employed parents. With the increasing tendency of organisations to outsource work, especially the lower skilled jobs such as cleaning or catering, many of the most vulnerable parents are not defined as employees of these large organisations, so are not eligible for organisational entitlements and benefits.

How young adults negotiate parenthood and work-family boundaries in changing contexts

The salience of gender and class

A frequently recurring theme across the countries is the ways in which **gender shapes parenthood** and makes motherhood different from fatherhood both in everyday family life and in workplaces. The transition to parenthood appears to be a critical "tipping point" on the road to gender equity. On becoming parents, decisions have to be made at the household level about how to manage work and family demands. Even in countries with a strong egalitarian ideology, the experiences of motherhood and fatherhood are very gendered, shaped by structural, cultural and practical factors. Socio-economic status is also important, influencing supports and constraints for combining parenthood and employment. The study confirms that gender and class are still major factors that structure and shape experiences of working and parenting across the countries as found by many other studies (e.g Webster, 2001; Perrons, 2004). Although levels of

inequality differ across the countries studied (Fagnani et al, 2004), social inequality is a very persistent aspect of European society, and may be exacerbated by the growing gap between core and peripheral workforces. Structural inequalities persist amongst parents in workforces, affecting their prospects of even taking up policies.

Decisions about and timing of parenthood

Timing of the transition to parenthood needs to be understood in terms of the different layers of context in which individual lives are embedded. Socio-economic status, education, ethnicity and migration, availability of affordable housing and childcare, are all important factors that shape parents' experiences. The lower the level of education, the earlier in life the transition to parenthood is likely to happen in all the countries.

The experience of intensified workloads and demands also appear to impact on decision making on the timing of parenthood and family size. Two full-time jobs are often difficult to sustain, especially jobs with inflexible hours, and this is reflected in the lowest birth rates in countries where there are fewest opportunities for part-time work. In contexts where alternatives to two demanding full-time jobs are available and affordable, parenting and employment may appear more feasible, through the use of part-time work, although this then tends to reinforce gendered strategies for working and caring when children are very young. Thus there are implications of contemporary working practices for fertility rates and/or gender equity in different European contexts.

The intensification of parenting

The intensification of paid work across Europe was a recurrent theme in the project. There is also an intensification of parenting (Brannen and Moss, 1998), which is an important aspect of some societal contexts that influences strategies for working and caring and the need for permeability of work-family boundaries. Young parents, and prospective parents, expressed high expectations of what a "good" parent should do, which typically involved far more care and parental input, as well as more financial resources, than their own parents had been able to provide. Pressure to conform to "intensified" parenting came both from parents' expectations, but also from wider societies, and, in some countries, from national initiatives to encourage more parental involvement of various forms. There is little consideration at policy level as to how this is to be achieved at a time when parents work longer hours or more intensively than previously. This points to the importance of "joined up thinking" at national and European policy levels. The study also highlighted the increasing pressure of material expectations in bringing up a child, which can impact on strategies for working and parenting. In Northern European countries, the pressure was typically to be able to provide a high level of material goods for family and children, while in accession countries and Portugal, there was more pressure to provide the basics of good housing and living standards and, in Portugal, education (Nilsen and Brannen, 2005). But in all these cases parents felt the pressures and compared this to the lower material standards expected in their own childhoods.

Individual and household strategies

A commonly preferred strategy for working and parenting after the transition to parenthood is for households to have one full-time and one less than full-time earner, particularly in the Netherlands and the UK, but also in Norway and Sweden, that is, where part-time work (although differing in nature cross nationally in term of length regulated, protection and associated entitlements), is

widely available and levels of affluence permit this strategy. Across Europe most fathers work full-time, so that part-time work, where it exists, is largely perceived as an option for mothers, often with negative implications for women's occupational careers if they do take up part-time working. There is some evidence from our interviews, which echoes conclusions from other studies (e.g. Wallace et al, 2003, Lewis, Smithson, Cooper and Dyer, 2001), that part-time employees feel their commitment to work is questioned. Part-time work can therefore be regarded simultaneously as a resource for the families but a career risk for women employees. In Portugal, Slovenia and Bulgaria where the option of part-time work is rarely available or affordable, limiting family size is a common strategy for managing income provision and caring.. However, the absence of part-time work opportunities does not necessarily enhance gender equity at work or at home, particularly in Bulgaria and Slovenia, where there are low expectations of gender equity in the family. The workplace model of the ideal (full-time) worker and subsequent undervaluing of part-time workers together with pensions systems and persisting differences in expectation about mothering and fathering underpin the reluctance of most fathers to work less than full-time.

Childcare strategies and possibilities

Options and preferences for childcare were very variable across the countries studied (Fagnani et al, 2004). Some countries have a long history of formal childcare provision, while in others this is relatively new. The study highlighted the increasing expectations not just of availability but also quality of childcare, with discussions about the benefits and costs to children being a salient feature of national debates in the UK, Sweden, Norway and France, while in Portugal, Bulgaria and Slovenia, debates about childcare focused more on schedules and affordability. Affordable childcare can ease the negotiation of work-family strategies. However this study also demonstrates that while high quality, affordable childcare is a crucial basis for negotiating work-family boundaries, it is not sufficient. Attention is also needed to workplace practices that create difficulties for employed parents in many contexts, even when good childcare is available.

Day to day strategies

Parents develop different types of strategies for negotiating work-family boundaries on a daily basis as they move backwards and forwards between their work and family lives (Nippert Eng, 1996; Campbell Clarke, 2001; Reynolds, Callender et al, 2003). Strategies can be conceptualised along a continuum between integration and segmentation, according to the extent of permeability of work-family spatial, temporal and psychological boundaries. There are also differences in the direction of permeability. For example, spillover of family concerns into work time may be acceptable to parents but not vice versa.

High status parents were more likely than those of lower status to have permeable boundaries, particularly from work to home, prior to the transition to parenthood. However, after becoming parents flexibility or permeability of boundaries often became problematic particularly when work intruded into private life. What appears to matter to parents, in most contexts, is not just the level of permeability of work-family boundaries, but whether they are able to adopt their preferred strategies, be they largely separating or integrating, and to have some control and autonomy over their work-family boundaries.

Workplace policies and practices influence the permeability of boundaries. These policies and practices are shaped by national and local regulations, but this study shows that they are also increasingly a matter of daily and informal negotiation with managers in local organisations. Increased flexibility of employees' working

time and place, enhancing potential integration of work and family spheres emerged as a major trend of organisational change in all the countries. However, the process by which this is achieved is ambiguous. Often it involves overcoming a great deal of resistance and requires complex negotiations among employers and employees, leading to *ad hoc* configurations in each organisation. The influence of unions and other collective agents is very different among European countries, but is generally low in these case study organisations, especially for the age group studied, and for work-family topics.

Parents are far from passive in this process. They develop proactive, personal strategies for managing boundaries between their work and family spheres, switching between integration and segregation on their own terms, albeit with greater or lesser difficulty in diverse contexts. Some parents used ICTs to blur the boundaries by, for example, checking email at home, or texting partners during the day, and this study demonstrates that technology can also be used by parents in proactive ways to support complex strategies, combining elements of segregation and integration. Nevertheless intensified workloads can make separation very difficult, especially when work cannot be accomplished during the working day, or when, for example, work related training must be undertaken during non-work time.

Gendered experiences of combining paid work and family life

Experiences of being an employed mother or an employed father continue to be very different. Women continue to do the major share of unpaid work, on average, in all the countries. Further changes in mothers' roles require reciprocal change from fathers, as well as changing organisational expectations (Gambles et al, 2006). As other recent studies confirm the wider perception of a fathers' role, across Europe, still tends to be that of wage earner rather than earner and carer (Hearn et al, 2004).

This study shows that national policies and provisions interact with formal and informal workplace policies, practices and cultures and economic conditions to support and constrain gender expectations and transformations, in complex ways. For example, national policy has long been based on equal opportunities ideology in Sweden and Norway and also under the former communist regimes in Bulgaria and Slovenia, but the outcomes are very different. In the former Eastern bloc countries women have been disproportionately affected by the transition from a socialist to a market-based economy (Metcalfe and Afanassieva, 2005). They are more vulnerable to unemployment under the new regimes, and more likely to bear the consequences for new arrangements for state childcare (Watson, 1997; Domsch et al, 2003). Moreover, the focus is on equality of opportunities for men and women in terms of labour force participation and not gender equity in the home.

Often grandparents or siblings, usually sisters, can step in to help working parents, but although this can help to manage work-family boundaries it tends to absolve men from the need to change and perpetuate gendered responsibilities. Expectations for managing work-family life appear to be more easily met in less affluent societies especially where gender equity ideas are not yet widely discussed. While Swedish and Norwegian couples demonstrated relatively high levels of conflict in negotiating work-family boundaries, Bulgarian parents, despite working long full-time hours, perceive no conflict as they see this as necessary to survival (see also Wallace et al, 2003).

In contrast to the situation in Slovenia and Bulgaria, the egalitarian ideology and related policies in Sweden and Norway address gender relations in both families and workplaces and raise expectations of change, but this can at times create intra-family tensions that are not experienced in countries where there are fewer

aspirations to gender transformation. Moreover, even when supportive social policies are in place, other institutions do not necessarily change at the same pace. **Transitional tensions** can be experienced and exacerbated by lack of commensurate change at the workplace level. It is likely that the intra familial tension or "transitional tension" is a necessary phase of unsettling people for progress to occur towards transformation of the gender order. Policies to support gender equity can help, but are undermined by lack of change at other levels, particularly in the workplace. This again points to the need for social partners to work collaboratively to ensure support for employed parents at multiple levels.

Expectations and Experiences of Parenting

How do young parents' expectations match up with their expectations before starting a family? In a previous study undertaken by some of the *Transitions* team, it was found that young adults' expectations broadly reflected the practical possibilities they saw in their country. Those in Sweden and Norway expected strong support from state for reconciling paid work and family life, and also expected or hoped for an egalitarian division of labour within the home, while those in the UK and Portugal, with far lower levels of state provision, expected little support from employers or state, and women expected less practical support from future partners (Lewis, Smithson et al, 1999). This lower sense of entitlement to formal support was, in this earlier study, accompanied by generally higher expectations of support from family (grandparents and siblings) for childcare in the UK and Portugal (Brannen et al, 2002; Lewis and Smithson, 2001). In the *Transitions* study, some of the expectations in the earlier study have been borne out. New parents in the Nordic countries both expected and received higher levels of support from the state, and generally experienced more egalitarian sharing of parenthood and domestic tasks than elsewhere – strongly supported by leave and policy provisions which explicitly target gender equity and fathers' involvement in parenting, although there remain persisting structural constraints to gender equity that are difficult to change.

It is notable that the expectation of support from grandparents, especially prevalent in Portugal in the earlier study (Lewis et al, 1999; Brannen et al, 2002), is weaker in this study of new parents. While grandparents and other family members were drawn on extensively for support in Portugal and the UK, there were many problems with this. Grandparents were increasingly likely to be in the labour market themselves, or ageing and needing care themselves. Parents were increasingly likely to have moved away from their family of origin and therefore away from possibilities for regular family support. These demographic changes suggest that the reliance on family support for childcare may be increasingly problematic, or unfeasible for growing numbers of parents in the future and underlines the importance of public policies on child care provision.

Well-being in the transition to parenthood

The study sought to identify factors which contribute *positively* to the well-being of these young adults and the factors which have a negative impact. However, this is far from straightforward, particularly because of the effects of diverse aspects of context on expectations and social comparisons, which, in turn, influence parents' well-being experiences. Well-being is complex, multi-layered, context dependent, fluid, dynamic and cannot be separated from expectations and aspirations.

The qualitative, multi-methods approach to well-being across time as well as national borders, used in this study, provides a much more fine grained understanding of parents' experiences than the more usual quantitative

approaches. Our analysis demonstrates that contentment, or lack of contentment among new parents is complex and multi-faceted, often varying throughout the day, and context dependent. Well-being depends not only upon the resources available to parents, but also on the resources available to those with whom they compare themselves. For example, relative satisfaction with employing organisations, even those undergoing rapid changes that could make life more difficult for parents of young children, was often sustained through comparison with other organisations in the same or another sector, which parents believed would be even more difficult places to work in. More generally, parents from Portugal, Slovenia and Bulgaria emerge as relatively content with their lives compared with their more affluent peers in Sweden and the UK, because their expectations of support and resources are lower and thus more easily satisfied.

Higher expectations and sense of entitlement to support can sometimes be important in generating constructive tension and pressure for change. This is illustrated in the example of transitional intra-familial gender tensions discussed above, when expectation of gender equity are high, or in the demands for more support in the workplace, pushing the boundaries of management thinking. In some contexts higher expectations relate to materialistic goals in consumerist societies, which sometimes result in parents working more than they would ideally like to do, creating additional strain. As other research has shown, beyond a certain level, greater material wealth is not necessarily associated with more positive well-being (Layard, 2003).

Organisational well-being and "good practice"

The study examined the notion of organisational well-being, which was found to be problematic. Notions of a caring organisation (Sevenhuijsen, 2003) or "healthy organisation" (Newell, 2002) were evident in some contexts. Both of these concepts assume that the organisation's performance can be enhanced by caring for employees in their wider lives, or a dual agenda of employee well-being and organisational effectiveness (Rapoport et al, 2002). However, many problems remain with this notion. In particular this study shows that pervasive organisational trends such as the intensification of work perpetuate a male model of work and undermine the reconciliation of paid work and parenting. Moreover, there are also often different perspectives among managers and subordinates about whether the organisation can be considered to be "caring". There are also problems about what constitutes an "organisation" as parents' experiences vary across departments or units in all the case studies.

The difficulty in conceptualising well-being at an organisational wide level is reflected in problems in defining good practices, which are also context dependent. Satisfaction with organisational or managerial support for managing work and family boundaries varies not just in terms of the supports available but, again, according to expectations, social comparisons and sense of entitlement. Sense of entitlement to support is influenced by welfare state context and the gender contract on which it is based, as demonstrated in an earlier study of young Europeans' perspectives on work and family (Lewis and Smithson, 2001; Lewis, Smithson and das Dores Guerreiro, 2001). Other factors also come into play however, including economic and labour market context as well as sector; there is generally a higher sense of entitlement to support and for workplaces to be caring organisations in the public than the private sector organisations. Good practices cannot therefore easily be transferred across different contexts. Nevertheless a number of principles were identified that underpin practices that parents experienced as supportive and helpful in different case study organisations. These include: realistic workloads; implementing statutory policies, not in a minimal way but with attention to necessary changes in structures, cultures and practices; management support; consistency and trust; mutual

understanding and flexibility; collaboration and attention to gender equity. Well-being is enhanced if a parent has a choice and some control over temporal and spatial flexibility.

Thus the introduction of "supportive" work-family policies are an not end point of process in consumer-led and gendered society. Rather, policies and practices to support working parents are part of a process of change that involves shifting values and practices. Further support in the changing European workplace is likely to involve empowering parents by raising their expectations of, and sense of entitlement to, support in order to be able to negotiate gender equitable strategies for managing work and family boundaries. To do so, may involve transitional tensions in workplaces as well as in families, but these may be a part of a necessary phase for supporting parents and in the transformation of the gender order in European societies.

Seeds of positive change

There is evidence of some positive changes but these are often accompanied by transitional tensions as commensurate changes in other layers of context take place more slowly. Examples include the growing involvement of fathers in parenting in Norway and Sweden as a consequence of social policies to support fathering. This raises expectations of shared parenting, which can create tensions when some employers continue to expect men not to take family leaves, or if some mothers are reluctant to relinquish their main responsibility for children. Value shifts are therefore needed at workplace and family levels. It is not only social policies that bring about positive changes. Other changes come from the family and workplace levels, For example, there were examples in case studies in the UK, Bulgaria and Slovenia of parents reversing earning and caring roles. This usually came about for practical reasons, but provided opportunities to challenge gender expectations. In every case, however, both parents experienced some gender identity tensions. At the workplace level, organisational change can raise expectations of support for managing work and family boundaries. For example, in the UK private sector organisation a drive for culture change including more flexibility and trust, raised expectations of support among parents, some of whom were able to work very flexibly. Tensions arose in this context because of management inconsistency in applying the new culture, due partly to intensification of work, but also the lack of change in the values and skills of many managers. In other contexts, positive changes emerged from employees themselves. For example, in the Swedish social services solidarity emerged among workers who were parents, which facilitated greater flexibility of working arrangements within teams. Tensions emerged however, because of intense workloads.

Transitions can create tensions at multiple levels; within individuals as they adapt to changing gender practices and expectations at a personal level; within households as parents adapt relationships at an interpersonal level; and within workplaces, or units within workplaces, where the pace of change is too rapid or is uneven. The challenge is to seize opportunities of positive change by looking beyond transitions in one layer of context to support change in other interrelated areas.

Implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for social partners

- **Overall, interrelated implications for policy and practice include:**

Fundamental tensions between contemporary working patterns and the needs of mothers and fathers to be able to care for children.

Parents across Europe are facing growing demands both in the workplace and the home. The study highlights the importance of acknowledging and addressing tensions between contemporary working practices in the context of technological advances, international competition and efficiency drives, as well as growing consumerism, on the one hand, and the needs of individuals and families on the other, as noted by a number of commentators (Bauman, 1998; Sennet, 1998; Gambles, et al 2006).

- **Implementation gaps, organisational change and intensification of work**

Some national social policies can help parents to develop equitable and satisfying strategies for negotiating work and family boundaries. However, there are implementation gaps between policies (government and organisational) and practices, in all the case study organisations. Policies to support working parents are increasingly undermined by changes in the nature and practice of work in the context of global competition in the private sector and efficiency drives in the public sector, which in turn, reinforce gender inequities. Experiences of intensification and also insecurity of work undermine policies to enhance flexibility for parents.

- **A persistent need to address gender issues in organisations, families and wider societies**

The widely reported experiences of intensified workloads are difficult to reconcile with parenting and perpetuate gendered working patterns. The transition to parenthood appears to be a critical "tipping point" on the road to gender equity and therefore a crucial focus for policy-making at different levels to address the well-being of parents. However, while the transition to parenthood affects both mothers and fathers, the different experiences and starting points of mothers and fathers, which also vary across national contexts, still need to be acknowledged.

- **A persistent need to address social inequalities and social exclusion**

Social class as well as gender shapes experiences of working and parenting. The study points to the importance of identifying and supporting the most vulnerable parents. Across Europe low skilled work is increasingly likely to be contracted outside large organisations. Workplace policies and practices experienced as supportive by parents in the case studies are unlikely to benefit the most vulnerable workers. This is particularly relevant to European discussions on agency workers and to the objective of combating social exclusion.

- **The importance of addressing well-being in all its complexity and recognising transitional tensions**

Well-being is complex, multi-layered and context dependent, fluid, dynamic, and related to aspirations, rather than being a fixed state. Raising expectations and aspirations, whether for gender equity, support for reconciling employment and family life, or general levels of affluence can unsettle people. Transitional tensions can be experienced if new aspirations are not supported by changes in values and/or resources at multiple levels of society. But some transitional tension and pressure may be strategic and necessary to start change processes.

- **A focus on "good practices" at the workplace level can overlook the impact of context and the double edged nature of many workplace practices**

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Employer good practices are context dependent. There is a need to look at specific principles and processes of change rather than seeking to transfer generalised good practice. For example, greater flexibility can enable parents to manage multiple roles and enhance well-being in the short-term but can also enable parents to work more, with paid work intruding into family life.

- **The importance of a multi-layered and joined up approach to policy-making and change initiatives**

The focus on multiple layers of context in this study points to the need for a multi-layered approach to policy-making. Although supports and constraints vary in diverse contexts, parents' work-family strategies are still largely negotiated at the household level, and in gendered ways, because of lack of interrelated change at multiple institutions. Changes in legislation alone are of limited value without shifts in organisational values and practices, family and community practices.

- **The need for a focus on long-term outcomes for sustainable societies and workplaces**

Socially sustainable families, workplaces and societies in Europe require long-term thinking as well as interrelated changes at many levels. For example, trends such as the declining birth rate in most partner countries can be related to the strategies that men and women are able to adopt in relation to family formation, in the context of intense workplace demands and uncertainties about jobs.

Recommendations

The findings from this study do not lend themselves to simple policy solutions. Rather they raise some very crucial issues that need careful consideration at many levels in relation to the Lisbon agenda of generating balanced and sustainable growth which benefits all, helping workers to adjust to change and providing new opportunities for prosperity and social equality. Specifically the study highlights the potential contradictions between globalisation and work intensification on the one hand and the need for time to care for children (and others), in gender equitable ways, on the other hand. The task of elaborating new social models and standards in a context of organisational change needs to take place with the full participation of all the social partners. Below, we first consider some important overall recommendations requiring collaboration at many levels and then make specific recommendations for governments and employers.

General recommendations

- **Confront uncomfortable issues about the contradictions between work intensification and the needs of parents and children**

There is a need for focused debate and collaboration between governments, employers, trade unions, NGOs and others, at EU and national levels, asking bigger questions about European goals and values.

- **Take a long-term strategic approach**

The social partners need to take a long-term approach to encourage socially sustainable work (Webster, 2004; Brewster, 2004) to support new parents in their paid work and caring work and support sustainable societies in the future.

- **A multi-layered partnerships approach is needed to support parents at many levels of society, in contemporary, changing contexts**;

The multiple goals of sustainable economic growth which benefits all, sustainable families and social equality, including gender equity, requires partnerships and interrelated change at many levels of context. Neither governments nor employers alone can bring about the necessary changes. Nevertheless, we make some recommendations below about ways in which social policy, and employers and unions can set the necessary conditions for multi-level supports for parents in changing European contexts.

Recommendations for social policy (*to be considered in conjunction with the recommendations for collaboration above*)

- Gender mainstreaming and joined up thinking in policy-making are essential.

- Employment and working time policy need to take account of changing experiences of work, especially intensification of workloads.

- National governments, together with the social partners should develop a national vision and strategy on the importance of good parenthood, on the needs of children, on responsibilities of mothers and fathers, and on the importance of children for long-term national welfare.

- Raise expectations of support for reconciling employment and caring.

- There is a need to promote and develop affordable, high quality, pre-school childcare provision, where this does not yet exist. This is a necessary, albeit not sufficient, condition for supporting working parents.

- National governments should identify the most vulnerable parents. Policies that would help such parents include affordable, good quality housing in big cities for key workers in social care and health services as well as locally available, high quality, affordable childcare.

- Recognise the need to support parents through transitions and associated tensions at diverse levels of context.

Recommendations for organisations: employers, managers and trade unions (*to be considered in conjunction with the recommendations for collaboration above*)

- Employers, managers and unions need to be aware of the contradictions between work intensification and the needs of parents and children. This is not just a "soft issue" – it is crucial to the future of our societies.

- Move beyond implementation gaps to systemic and sustainable workplace change; focus on practices and process.

- Develop active strategies to support fathers as well as mothers in negotiating work and family boundaries.

- Support seeds of positive change where they emerge.

- Take a life course perspective on employees' occupational careers, e.g. consider matching those who work part-time during early parenthood with older workers who may wish to work less than full-time .

- Monitor the effects of workplace changes on parents of young children.

- Support and train managers, supervisors and self managing teams to empower them to support parents.

- Consider the work and family needs of outsourced and other peripheral workers.

- Further EU support is needed for furthering debates and for change initiatives directed at win-win solutions for parents and organisations, and society.

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2. Background and objectives of the project

The Lisbon agenda is built around the need to generate balanced and sustainable growth which benefits all. However, economic developments present some challenges for family life. In the 21st century, young European adults embark on parenthood in the context of falling fertility rates, considerable uncertainty and change, especially in the workplace and family life, and the reduction in welfare expenditure in many countries. This qualitative study explores work-family strategies and subjective well-being during the transition to parenthood (including the years of combining paid work and parenting of young children) in the context of change and transitions at workplace and societal levels, different national welfare state regimes and family and employer supports in two Nordic countries (Norway and Sweden), two Eastern European states (Bulgaria and Slovenia), one Southern European state (Portugal) and three Northern European countries (The Netherlands, the UK and France).

The birth rates of most of the countries in this study fall below replacement level, with the number of children per woman the highest in France and the lowest in Slovenia (Fagnani et al, 2004; Eurostat, 2006). The continuing low birth rates within member and accession states have implications for demographic structure, employment and social protection in the next decades. It is important therefore to understand the changing contexts in which young adults embark upon parenthood and the social policies and other factors that support or constrain the combining of parenthood and employment in rapidly changing workplaces across diverse European contexts.

The study builds on and extends European research on the transition to adulthood (e.g. Kugelberg, 1999; Cordon, 2001; Irwin, 1995; Furlong, and Cartmel, 1997). In particular, an EU co-funded qualitative study which focused on the views of 18-30 year olds on the future reconciliation of work and family life in five European countries (Lewis et al; Brannen et al, 2001) suggested that many young Europeans view their future employment and family trajectories with a considerable sense of uncertainty in the context of changing employment conditions and, in most cases, social provisions. Many talked about putting parenthood on hold because of this uncertainty. However, this varied across national policy contexts and across certain groups within national contexts. As the vast majority of young adults in that study were not, or not yet, parents their discussions of future work and family issues were hypothetical. The *Transitions* study therefore looks at an older age range, who are already parents or about to become parents, in a wider range of European states. The age at which young adults enter parenthood varies within and between countries to some considerable extent, although women's average age at first birth has increased in all European countries (Eurostat, 1999; Lappegård, Trude, 2001; Fagnani et al, 2004). Since there is variation in fertility levels and age of becoming a parent across countries (Bagavos and Martin, 2001), this study focuses on 25-39 year olds – defined for our purposes as "young adults".

Debates on how to support parents of young children in reconciling employment and family life tend to focus on social policy support and workplace "family friendly" policies. However, there is growing evidence that policies implemented at the workplace do not necessarily create the flexibility needed for parenting and that they are not necessarily "women friendly" or gender equitable (Haas and Hwang, 1995; Lewis, 1997; 2001; Brandthe and Kvande, 2002). Moreover, the focus on family friendly policies overlooks the impacts of other organisational policies, practices and trends such as the growing flexibilisation and intensification of work across many European contexts (Birchall 2001; Wallace et al, 2003) and the potential impact of change strategies used to meet the

challenges of global competition in the private sector and of economic cutbacks in the public sector.

Changes in the nature of work and developing technology have rendered the boundaries between paid work and family increasingly permeable (Sullivan and Lewis, 2001; Perrons, Fagan, McDowell, Ray and Ward, 2005). The impact on well-being of parents of young children is unclear. Much of the research on work-family boundaries and well-being has been dominated, to date, by North American work, which has tended to neglect the role of cultural and national context (e.g Campbell Clark, 2000; Cheslie, 2005). It has also tended to treat individuals as passive reactors to experiences of work and family and neglect agency and strategies (Campbell Clark, 2000). The *Transitions* project examines individual and household strategies for managing work-family boundaries within the structural and cultural constraints and supports relating to changing family, workplace and national social contexts, bringing a particular European perspective to the study of work-family boundaries whilst also exploring trans-European variations in contexts.

The study also took account of the contested nature of well-being at the individual level (Haworth; Černigoj Sadar et al, 2005) and aimed to extend preliminary European case study based research by developing the notion of collective well-being as an aspect of organisations (Lansisalmi, Peiro, and Kivimaki, 2000). *Transitions* aimed to focus on collective interpretations of positive well-being and particularly to examine whether "healthy" organisations are those which are able to adapt to global economic challenges whilst taking account of the work-family needs of employees. This is crucial European for debates on social and economic progress.

The **overall objective** was to examine how young European men and women working in public and private sector workplaces negotiate motherhood and fatherhood, and work-family boundaries in the context of different national welfare state regimes, family and employer support.

The specific aims of the project were:

- To map the national contexts for understanding the experience of becoming parents and parenthood among young adults in eight strategically selected countries.

- To understand the impact of organisational context and organisational change on young adults who become parents.

- To examine the transition to parenthood retrospectively and prospectively.

- To understand how young adults negotiate motherhood and fatherhood and work-family boundaries.

- To examine positive well-being – its dimensions and its relationship to different work-family strategies in this life course phase.

- To examine the policy implications of the key foci of the study.

- To disseminate the research findings to governments, employers and other stakeholders and to make recommendations.

The project involved three research phases.

Phase One involved the contextual mapping of the national policy and demographic contexts and a state of the art literature review in which all eight countries participated.

Phase Two consisted of organisational case studies in the public (social services) and in the private (mostly finance) sector. Human Resources and managers at different levels were interviewed in each participating organisation; focus groups of new and prospective parents – aged between 25 and 39 – were conducted in each organisation. In addition, a questionnaire was constructed and used to assess aspects of well-being.

Phase Three consisted of a biographical interview study, conducted with new parents working in the case study organisations studied in Phase Two. In this phase a Well-being work package was also completed, resulting in a report on conceptualising well-being in cross-national qualitative analysis. A good practices report was also completed, drawing on the findings from all three phases of the project.

In this report, we summarise the major reports from each of the work packages and then summarise the major overall findings and their implications. Details of the full reports can be found in the References section, and also on the project website http://www.workliferesearch.org/transitions.

Presentation of the project components

COORDINATION AND REPORTING

WP1, WP8, WP10

Partner Meetings

Reports on phases

RESEARCH PHASE 1 - ESTABLISHING CONTEXT

WP3, WP4

Contextual mapping

Review of state of the art

RESEARCH PHASE 2 - EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

WP5, WP6, WP7

Development of research instruments   **Analysis of well-being**

Organisational Case Studies

RESEARCH PHASE 3 - INTERVIEW STUDIES

WP9

In depth interview study of the negotiation of parenthood

DISSEMINATION

WP2, WP11

Briefing papers, project web site, action oriented workshops

3.   Scientific Description of the Project

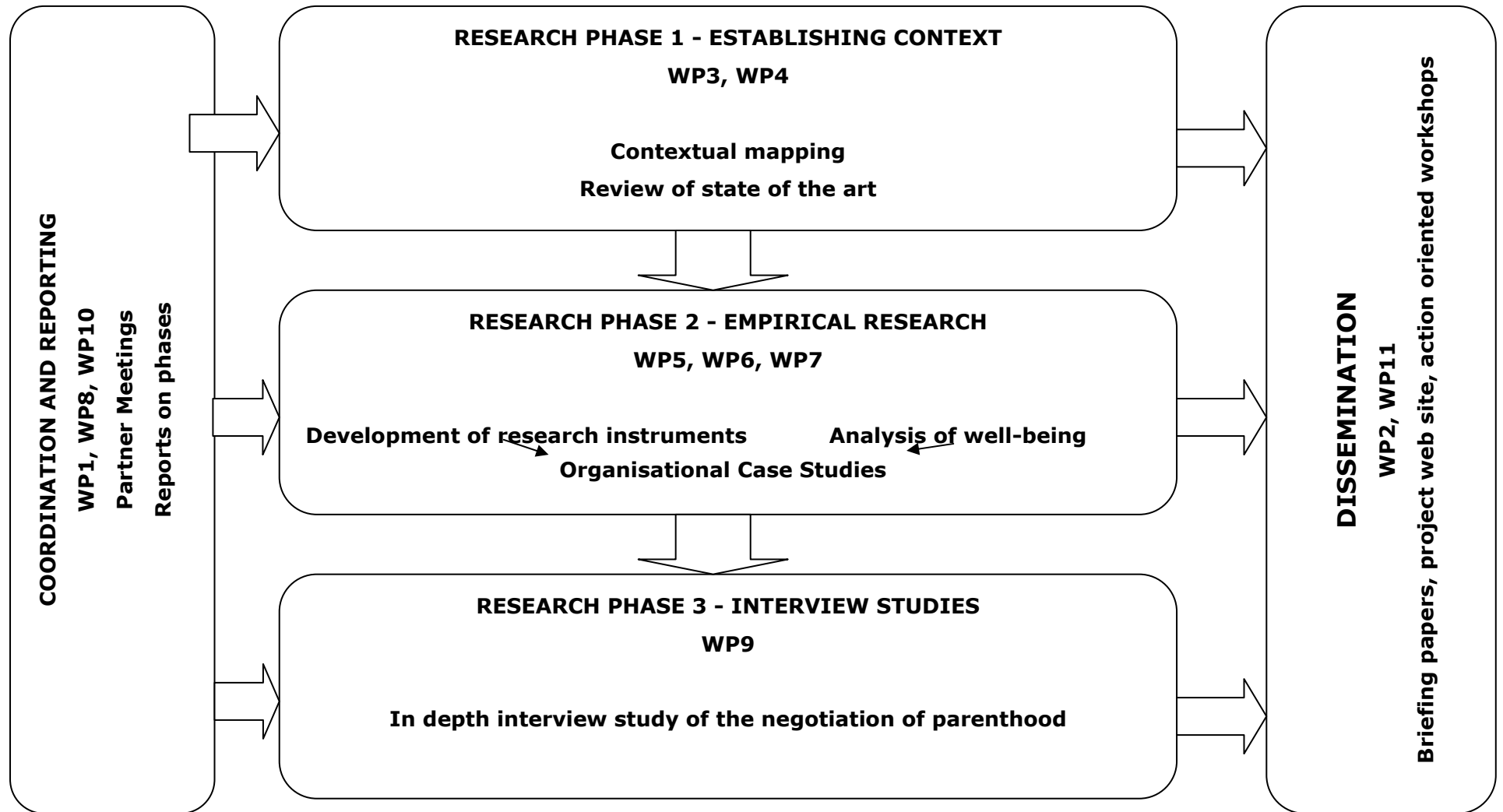The project was divided into three main research phases. The first involved the contextual mapping of the national policy and demographic contexts and a state of the art literature review (Work packages 3 and 4). The second phase consisted of empirical research in which two organisational case studies (one in the public and one in the finance sector) were undertaken in Bulgaria, Portugal, and the UK, one case study in Norway and Slovenia, while partners in the Netherlands and Sweden undertook parallel studies (one case study in each country) which contributed to the overall analysis (Work packages 5-8). The third phase (Work package 9) was comprised of interview studies with young adults aged 25-39 who were parents (including some cases of parents on or about to go on parental leave) and drew its sample from the organisational case studies. The three research phases were accompanied by a parallel dissemination activity (Work package 2).

3.1   Context Mapping

(Work Package 3)

The aim of the context mapping workpackage was to give a broad outline of the principal economic, social and demographic characteristics of the eight countries (Bulgaria, France, the UK, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden) which we have looked at in the course of our research. In our comparative study, we placed our results in the context of their national perspectives, in order both to be able to interpret them correctly and to enable us to draw inferences from the observed differences and similarities between countries. It was not always possible to obtain comparative data for the countries currently not in the EU-15 – Bulgaria, Slovenia and Norway – but relevant data was included where possible. A major project report on Context Mapping was produced (Fagnani et al, 2004).

The initial chapter looks at economic indicators of social inequality. Norway, is, according to these statistics, by far the most wealthy country followed by The Netherlands, Sweden, France and the UK. Bulgaria is at the other end of the scale with a GNP per citizen nearly six times smaller than that of Norway. The Scandinavian countries are also noteworthy in having relatively low indicators of social inequality. The UK and Portugal, on the other hand, by the same measures, show the highest levels of social inequality. Concerning labour costs, Portugal, Slovenia and, in particular, Bulgaria show far lower rates than those which are the norm in the more northern countries. Rates of unemployment are extremely varied from one country to another – the highest rates are found in France and, in particular, in Bulgaria, lowest rates are those found in the Netherlands and in Portugal (using data from 2001). In considering a ranking of countries based on the involvement of women in politics, the Scandinavian countries are leading the way and occupying the first two places.

The second part of the report is devoted to a detailed description of childcare policies in each country and to an analysis of the different public schemes with regard to leave and absence from work following the birth of a child. Sweden, Norway, France and Slovenia demonstrate especially positive responses in terms of the allowances given in this regard. The UK and The Netherlands, on the other hand, are distinguished by less government support in policies that affect pre-school age children, although both governments are addressing this. Alternative systems for childcare are, on the other hand, developed to a much greater degree in France where childcare is heavily subsidised in order to reduce the cost to working parents. One increasing similarity is due, however, in large measure to

European legislation and is the length of leave to which parents of both sexes are entitled after a birth.

The same discrepancies and hierarchy between countries is apparent in the amount of state and social support given to families: the Scandinavian countries and France are particularly generous whilst Portuguese spending is this area is very limited. Whilst The Netherlands maintains an admirable stance with regard to social provision on an individual basis it is much less generous when it comes to families. The structure of payments made to families (in the form of tax, child and housing benefits) is very varied from one country to another and clearly illustrates the political landscape and aspirations of the different governments. In the UK, for example, the needs of low income families are given priority, in France and Sweden it is the more comfortably off who benefit most from government initiatives.

The third chapter of the report looks at the relative statistical data and in particular at birth rates. Irrespective of the statistical indicator used, whether the "total fertility rate" or "completed fertility rate", France and Norway are the countries with the highest birth rates. At the other end of the scale, Bulgaria and Slovenia have recently shown a pronounced slide to low birth rates; fertility rates having collapsed since the 1980s. This is especially true of Bulgaria, where levels of unemployment rose considerably during that decade. In all the countries considered – although in Bulgaria to the least degree – the average age of women at first births has risen. This trend is shown most strongly in The Netherlands and Sweden. On the other hand, the proportion of women aged between 40 and 44 who are giving birth has risen between the years 1998 and 2000 in all countries apart from Slovenia and Bulgaria where the percentage remains low (less than 4% as against 12% in Sweden). It is also noteworthy that an increasing number of women reach the end of their fertility period having had no children. This trend is relatively low in Bulgaria, Portugal and France and is most marked in the Netherlands and the UK.

As demographic and professional attitudes are inextricably linked, the next chapter looks at the characteristics of work (in particular duration of working time for mothers) and its impact on the labour markets for men and women of reproductive age. In the eight countries, the levels of mothers' labour market activity have risen but the number of children, age of the youngest child and levels of education remain significant variables. Norms and conventions in the participation of young women in the labour market also differ greatly. Portugal and Slovenia are notable for the very high numbers of women in full-time paid employment working long hours. In each country, the rates of employment of women between the ages of 25 and 49 has risen in line with investments in education. However, once again, Portugal is noticeably different to the other countries studied: Portuguese women, whatever their level of education, are the most likely group of women to be employed of any group in the study.

Apart from in Portugal and Slovenia, young women with children often work on a part-time basis. In Sweden and in France, women typically work "long part-time hours" compared to the "short part-time hours" of women in the Netherlands or the UK. In terms of the number of hours spent at work, the differences between the sexes are apparent whichever country we considered but it is in the Netherlands and the UK that these differences are most marked.

Furthermore, the fact of having such a majority of mothers working part-time in these two countries (the Netherlands and the UK) means that the model of work sharing between couples with children is most likely to be that of the man working full-time and the woman working part-time; a model usually referred to as the "modified male breadwinner". The other countries show contrasting models in terms of employment of mothers, especially for highly educated women. Even

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amongst well qualified women, having children means that they are much more likely to be working part-time, apart from in Portugal. As a consequence, the preferences of couples with regard to paid work differ from country to country. This raises a number of questions with regard to the widely differing perceptions of the respective responsibilities of each parent in each country. In the Netherlands, couples overwhelmingly "choose" (nearly 70%) the model of men working full-time and women working part-time, whereas in Portugal in nearly 80% of couples both the man and the woman say they want to work full-time even where they have a child.

Taking into account the importance of the level of education as a differentiating factor in the demographic and professional lives of women, the next chapter of the report looks at statistics to point up the rise in the number of women acquiring academic and professional qualifications. Amongst women between the ages of 25 and 34 for example in Portugal, the Scandinavian countries, France and the UK, women now outnumber men in terms of those who continue into higher education. Amongst those of both sexes aged between 15 and 24, the number remaining at school after the end of compulsory schooling has risen markedly. In Portugal the number remains lower, in comparison with the other EU countries and Norway.

The final chapter of the report focuses on the system of dominant values and norms in relation to the respective obligations of parents and the needs of children. Concerning the theoretical preferences for balancing work and home life, a majority of those aged between 25 and 39 and living in France, the UK, Slovenia and Portugal said they would prefer "to have a full-time job and more than one child"; whereas the same aged group living in Sweden and the Netherlands replied "a part-time job and more than one child". However, part-time work has different meanings depending on the social realities and work legislation existing in each country.

Finally, it is evident that a study such as this would make reference to the social and legal realities existing in each country. In conclusion, a table (shown below) was devised to suggest a typology of each country based on the degree of involvement of mothers with young children in a paid working life and to set this indicator against the most significant models of combining paid work and caring for children.

Table 1: Mothers' employment patterns and different ways in which working parents combine a job and a family life

Country	Employment Patterns	Combining Work and Unpaid Work
NORWAY SWEDEN Egalitarian model	Long part-time or full-time jobs. Long paid parental leave (one year in Norway, 480 days in Sweden)	Extensive use of Public schemes supporting Working parents (Subsidised child-care arrangements, paid parental leave, flexible working hours…)
FRANCE Dual-earner model or the "working mother"	Long part-time or full-time jobs. Long parental leave (3 years) for less qualified or low paid	Extensive use of Public schemes supporting Working parents (Subsidised child-care arrangements, paid parental leave, flexible working hours…)
UK NETHERLANDS Modified male breadwinner	Short part-time jobs (as long as children are under school-age)	Reduction of Working time Kin/Voluntary/Market for child-care Family-friendly Flexibility at the Workplace
PORTUGAL Dual-earner model	Full-time jobs Long working hours for both partners	Reduction of the number of children Kin/Market for child-care
SLOVENIA Dual-earner model	Full-time jobs Long working hours for both partners.	Family or informal care for children under 3 years. Use of Public schemes supporting Working parents (Subsidised child-care arrangements) and Reduction of the number of children
BULGARIA Dual-earner model	Full-time jobs for both partners	Reduction of the number of children Long (2-3 years) parental leave for mothers

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3.2   National Debates on the reconciliation of family and employment

(Part of workpackage 3)

Part of the Context Mapping workpackage was to map the national debates on reconciling work and family. The Context Mapping report (Fagnani et al, 2004) aimed to provide a broad outline of the principle economic, social and demographic characteristics of the eight participating countries. To supplement this data with the national "climates" on paid work and family life, the National Debates report (Smithson and Lewis, 2005) provides an overview of national debates on work and family, based on national researchers analysis of discourses within the media, government, employers and trade unions, in the eight participating countries, during the period of the Transitions research project (2003-5). We were interested in what is on the political and social agenda in each country, what is driving change in policies and practices, and what are the public and media reactions to these debates – for example about fertility concerns, disability, parental leaves, funding for childcare, and changing gender role expectations.

We collected initial data on national debates relevant to work and family in spring 2003, at the beginning of the 3-year project. It was apparent that the debates were changing rapidly in each country, and so we repeated the exercise in spring 2005, towards the end of the project to provide a picture of the ways in which national debates were changing and developing across this time frame. In the first stage of the exercise, in 2003, native work-life experts in each country located what they considered to be the relevant national debates on working, parenting and care at this time. They were prompted by a common framework of general questions, derived from relevant literature and personal experience and expertise within the team. The national chapters are structured according to this framework. The national authors also added data on other debates which they viewed as significant in their context. Topics which were not originally considered but which emerged in some countries during the first stage of the research included "Superwoman syndrome" (mentioned in the UK and Norway) and concern about sickness absence rates (mentioned in the Swedish, Norwegian and the Netherlands first reports). The second stage considered in more depth how these new debates were related to work and family in national discourses.

In the second stage of the exercise, in 2005, the same authors repeated the exercise, but extra questions were added to include the additional debates that had emerged in stage one. The authors again also added new debates which they perceived as emerging in their national context at this time. In addition, the authors reflected on how the national debates have been changing over the two year period.

This method arguably has the limitations of privileging the perceptions and perspectives of the authors – their understanding of the debates in the media, the government, academic and policy circles. On the other hand, the process whereby native work-life experts, with in-depth knowledge of the issues, and many years experience of studying the issues in this field, pick out what they considered to be the relevant national debates can also be considered a strength of this method.

A summary of the main national debates on reconciling paid work and parenting in each country in 2003 and 2005 can be seen in Tables 2a and 2b.

Table 2a: Summary of national debates 2003

	Work-family terminology used	Business case arguments	Fertility debates	Trade Union Debates
UK	Work-life balance Flexible working	High profile	Few in recent years but suddenly increasing	They do deal with these issues but not got a very high profile
FR	Conciliation of work and family	High profile	Interest in fertility	
PORT	Work-family conciliation	Not much. Gender equality debate	Not really	Work organisation and schedules, flexibility
NL	Work-family reconciliation; work-life balance; family-friendly policies; flexible working patterns	Social equality debates. Also sickness absence as a business and work-family issues; satisfied employees as an important argument for employers to offer family-friendly policies	Not really debates on fertility initiated by the government. However, articles in papers and research projects on rising age of mothers giving birth to first child. Some worries about increasing childlessness.	Collective agreements include measures on childcare, leave arrangements and childcare. Trade unions often take the initiative
SW	Reconciling work and family Work-family balance	Not really Gender equity debate. Sickness absence increasingly an issue	Recent decline in fertility sparking debates. Links found in Sweden between this and labour market and welfare regulations.	Debates about wage levels and work conditions more than family-work issues
NOR	Family friendly Work-life balance	No, gender and social equality and children's needs Sickness absence becoming an issue	Not really	Yes. Focus on "inclusive labour market," gender equality and measures for a better work-family balance including reduced working hours
BULG	Reconciliation of family and work/ employment	Arguments mainly on society in transition. Employment regulations, flexibility and security	Yes, falling population an issue, fuelling much discussion. High emigration an issue.	Preserving employment in companies being privatised. Security for adult workers.
SLOV	Reconciliation of work and family life	Gender equity	Yes, population replacement an issue	Overtime and long hours including effects on family life

Table 2a contd: Summary of national debates 2003

	Conditions for having children	Employers debates	Media debates	Main social policy discussions
UK	Higher educated more securely employed women have fewer children	Flexible working hours regulation	Much discussion of work-life issues. Working mothers. Fathers also discussed.	Flexible working legislations, working hours
FR	Despite relatively high fertility rates, family associations would like to provide French families with the opportunities to have more children if they want to	Regulation of the 35 hour week	Benefits and drawbacks of 35 hour week and effects on work-life balance	Fighting unemployment Increase in flexible work schedules
POR	Concerns about poverty for larger families	Labour law, working conditions, flexibility	Gender equality in the workplace	Poor and single parents' benefits Children's rights
NL	Higher educated women have fewer children. Rising proportion of people without children.	More flexible labour relations; people need to work longer hours, employers say	'Pros and cons' of childcare; rush hour family; caring fathers, more balance in life	Increase of elderly people and pension costs; how to keep older people in labour force; the life course perspective; the future of welfare states
SW	Higher educated more securely employed women have more.	Not really, sickness absence, early retirement are issues	Frequent discussion of work-life issues and gender	
NOR		Not really as it's regulated by the state.	Welfare policies, benefits for single parents. 'Compulsory' daddy leave.	Gender and social equality. Children's needs
BULG	Higher educated more securely employed women have fewer. Concerns about Roma having more children.	More freedom to hire and fire workers. Workforce reduction.	Rarely on work-life issues. Women and their "natural functions" e.g. childcare. Unequal representation of women in politics	Women's education, employment, and poverty. Reducing unemployment and poverty. Low levels of pensions.
SLOV		Flexible working practices, discrimination (gender)	The role of women. Gender equity. Fertility replacement	Employers' obligations. Workplace discrimination

Table 2b: Summary of national debates 2005

	Work-family terminology used	Business case arguments	Fertility debates	Trade Union Debates
UK	Work-life balance; hardworking families	High profile and influential	New in last couple of years. Increasing in frequency.	Long working hours issues. Some recent interest in working parent issues.
FR	Articulation travail/famille, conciliation de la vie professionnelle et de la vie familiale; Equilibre vie privée/vie professionnelle	Some big companies deal with the issue of access of women to higher responsibilities. Women underrepresented on advisory boards of the 500 largest companies	Not really because the demographic situation is relatively good compared to other EU member countries	Gender discrimination on the labour market; Gender wage gap Over-representation of women among working poor
SW	Gender equality, reconciliation work-family, the best interest of the child	Not found	Not at present	About sick leave
POR	Work-family conciliation Work-family articulation/combination	Not much. Gender equality debate	Yes, recently increased	Work organisation/schedules flexibility. Training; Flexibility recently introduced in New Labour Law brought the discussion of W-F balance; Trade unionist women raise issue of equal pay
NL	Work-family reconciliation Work-life balance Family-friendly policies Flexible working patterns	Yes, work-family issues are (sometimes) framed as a business case. Sickness related absence as a business case in relation to work-family issues; Satisfied employees as an important argument for employers to offer family-friendly policies	The limited number of debates that did occur were initiated by the government. However, there were articles in papers and research projects on the rising age of mothers giving birth to first child. Some worries about increasing childlessness No targeted policies to facilitate having children at an earlier age	Collective agreements between employers and unions include measures on childcare and leave arrangements Trade unions often take the initiative The necessity of childcare as a basic provision for all parents, recently stipulated by the largest union
SLOV	Reconciliation of work and family life Balancing work and family Integration of work and family	Gender equity	Yes, population replacement an issue Labour force shortage	Decline of industries (textile, leather) New Social Agreement*
NOR	Work and family Parents' and children's needs	Not high profile Reducing sick-leave Increasing effectivity	Recently emerging. Remarks on relatively high fertility in Norway in the European context Increasing focus on "dangers" of delaying first birth	Against temporary contracts and weakening welfare state regulation Changes in the pension system
BULG	Reconciliation of work and family	Not high profile, less on transition than in 2003, more on European legislation, flexibility of work, anti-discrimination	Falling birth rate still an issue, less talk about emigration	Still preserving employment in companies being privatised, against more flexibility in employment contracts

Table 2b contd: Summary of national debates 2005

	Conditions for having children	Employers debates	Media debates	Main social policy discussions
UK	Concerns about women "choosing" to postpone parenthood until mid 30's.	State the importance of regulations being "voluntary" and "market driven"	Overworked mothers. Long working hours. Pressure on "hard working families"	Affordable childcare. Long working hours. Social inclusion?
FR	Affordable housing, family-friendly working schedules, access to a stable job Unemployment is an obstacle to childbearing	Employers would like a less 'rigid" labour legislation Claim changes in the labour code Impact of the 35-hour laws on the economic situation	'Glass ceiling' phenomenon Wage gaps between men and women Social inequalities and gender (women over-represented among working poor and more often unemployed than men)	Economic and social impact of the 35-hour laws; the effects of unemployment (has reached a record high of 10%) on families; soaring house prices: effects on young parents; gay parents and the right for gay couples to adopt a child
SW	Parental insurance pressure on fathers, gender equality		Extensive about gender equality	Parental leave insurance, sick leave, violence against women, lesbians as parents
POR	To have a stable job	Labour law, working conditions, flexibility The silent (small group) debate: the big extent of maternity leave Women's performance as professionals	Mostly on gender equity	Poor and single parents' benefits. Children's rights. Unemployment; Childcare solutions
NL	Higher educated women have fewer children; higher educated women postponing parenthood or choosing not to have children; having children or not is seen as a private matter; no direct interference of the state.	More flexible labour relations: people need to work longer hours, employers say; Employers have no objections to part-time work in general but, they are not in favour of part-time work in managerial positions	'Pros and cons' of childcare Rush hour family Caring fathers More balance in life	Increase of elderly people and rising pension costs; how to keep older people in the labour force; life course perspective; future of the welfare state; cutbacks in Disability Law and Unemployment Law; lack of economic growth
SLO	Resolved housing problem, permanent work contracts	Organisational change; human resource management; more flexible work arrangements	Role of women, gender equity; fertility replacement, discriminated groups, social policy reforms	Change of social policy acts to increase economic effectiveness and the quality of life; relationship between generations, equal opportunity issues
NOR	Postponement of first birth Focus on education and secure work before having a child	Not high profile; Reducing sick leave Related to following EU regulations about max. working hours	Time-squeeze; Low representation of women in top management; Gender equality; Time-use patterns; Increasing divorces and break-ups	Supply of public day-care; Further investment to increase day-care places for children below the age of 3; Changes in parental leave regulations (increasing the fathers' quota)
BUL	Poverty and financial insecurity of families; Debates of 2003 continue: higher educated more securely employed women have fewer; Roma having more children.	Employers would like less 'rigid' labour legislation (more freedom to hire and fire), suggestions (not accepted) to make the parental leave shorter (than two years) but better paid (than the minimum salary).	Poverty and social integration (of people with disabilities, the Roma), unemployment, gender discrimination – cases of sexual harassment.	Changing regulations for health insurance – limited access to health care; pension reform concerning mainly older workers, lifting the 'ceiling' (upper limit) for pensions, changes in parental leave.

There are noticeable differences between Eastern Europe and Western Europe: terminologies, e.g. Bulgaria – no talk of division of labour in household; Norway – tensions in organisations, career problems for men taking paternity leaves, which is surprising from the standpoint of Esping-Anderson's typology.

Changes in terminology are noticeable in this period (2003-2005). Slowly, issues of well-being, quality of life, health and lifestyle choices are being debated in relation to working regulations, flexible working changes, intensification of work, and the impact on fertility rates, and on parenthood. Notions about "the end of work" or a "leisure society" are significantly absent. Childhood and the needs of the child and young people – often defined in terms of creating the new generation and the knowledge society – are an important focus in some countries, notably the Nordic countries and the Netherlands. In Portugal and the UK the needs of the child for a strong nuclear family remain largely linked to right wing debates. In some countries, especially Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands, there is a growing awareness of the role of fathers in parenting, with fathers feeling increasingly included in debates about work-family. Where there is a longer tradition of including fathers in parenting debates, discussion focuses on about relatively slow pace of change in behaviour and the slow increase in fathers' leave-taking patterns. Elsewhere, fathers receive less attention and in the case of Bulgaria, continue to be ignored in these debates.

This period appears to be marked by an increase in concerns about fertility levels, ageing population, and discussions which link this to working hours regulations across Europe, and to work-family options for women, and, occasionally, for men. There is also a related increase in awareness of problems manifested in growing sick leave rates, especially stress related leave, often linked to the intensified nature of work, and the intensified nature of everyday life, as well as increased expectations of parenting involvement in many countries. There appears to be a steady increase in discussion of the effects of globalisation and competition resulting in increases in social inequalities. Only in the UK is the focus primarily on the business case for flexible working and work-life balance, reflecting the liberal labour market approach in the UK, which has links to the US model. Most of the countries focus on the social case for work-family reconciliation. On the other hand, crises in the European Union suggest that policies that make EU countries more competitive (and reduce unemployment) are likely to be to the fore in the future. Moreover such policy is likely to be at the expense of social protection.

3.3   Consolidated Literature Review
(Work Package 4)

This literature review (den Dulk et al, 2003) focused on the transition to parenthood; i.e. the way new parents negotiate their work-family boundaries and the strategies they apply. The main objective was a review of recent European literature (since 1998) on organisational, gender and well-being issues in relation to the transition to parenthood and the negotiations of work-family boundaries. The review includes the eight European countries of the *Transitions* project: the United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and Bulgaria. It consists of eight national reviews and an introductory chapter considering comparative European studies. The countries included in the project represent a cross-section of policy regimes within Europe. The review is structured around four themes: young adults and parenthood; parenting strategies and work-family boundaries; workplaces and organisational change; and well-being. Each national review addresses the four themes, and for each theme the main theoretical perspectives, main methodology used, main empirical findings and important gaps in research are discussed.

The postponement of parenthood and decreasing fertility rates has given rise to a large body of research on the decision-making of young people regarding having children and the timing of family formation. Most existing research regarding young adults and the transition to parenthood uses quantitative methodology. Qualitative research is needed to enrich and complement existing survey data; in particular to open the black box of decision-making of couples on having children and the way they organise their work and family life. There is also a need for longitudinal designs following couples over time and to consider differences between young people, such as those due to class and ethnic background.

Much of the previous research on the combination of paid work and family life focuses on women's experiences. However, there is a growing body of research focusing on the role of fathers. In addition, research more often uses a multi-actor design in which data on both partners, and increasingly, children, are collected. Contemporary research shows that despite the increasing labour market participation of women, the unequal division of domestic work and care for children remains a persistent phenomenon. In particular, after the transition to parenthood, research consistently shows that gender roles become much more traditional.

There is little research on the impact of labour market demands, organisational change, and new workplace practices on parenting strategies and work-family boundaries. For example, few studies address the question of how atypical work schedules, the development of dynamic organisations with flat and changeable structures, and working from home affect parenting strategies for combining work and family life. This domain of organisational research has frequently been separated from research on gender issues, women's work, work-life issues and equal opportunity questions. New research that brings these two domains together is extremely relevant.

The concept of well-being is addressed from a wide variety of perspectives: sociological, psychological and economical. The focus varies from research on living conditions or poverty to studies on stress, job insecurity or happiness. Most of the studies reviewed are of a quantitative nature. There are two distinct conceptions of well-being. It is studied as an objective and as a subjective concept. Objective well-being is usually measured in terms of health conditions, while subjective well-being is measured by asking respondents to reflect on their feelings. In several countries well-being is not a direct object of research. In Bulgaria, Slovenia, France and Portugal, research is more concentrated on living conditions and the quality of life. In Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands, well-being is addressed directly, however there is not much research in relation to parenthood. In the UK, well-being is studied the most explicitly. Organisational health and positive well-being are hardly addressed in most countries; however in the UK research on these topics is starting to appear. Research on the positive effects of work, family life, and the combination of the two is relatively scarce.

3.4 Methodology report

This research project has involved three phases in which different data sets were created and analysed. In order to explore the wider research questions we started out with a multi-method strategy for collecting and analysing this highly varied data. Seven main sources of data were drawn upon in the study:

- Official statistics (national and cross-national levels)
- Documentation from organisations
- Manager interviews
- Focus groups
- Well-being questionnaires
- Biographical interviews
- Life lines

During context mapping and literature review, official statistics and reports from other large scale data sets were analysed cross-nationally and literature reviews were conducted in each country. The second phase involved organisational case studies in which focus groups were conducted with parents who were employees in the private and public sector organisations, in addition to individual interviews with managers at different levels in the organisations. All participants completed a short well-being questionnaire at this stage. In the third phase of the study we carried out biographical interviews with parents who took part in the organisational case study focus groups. We also completed life lines for each informant, thereby graphically depicting the phases and transition points in the life course.

The design and the methods are closely connected to the type of research questions we started out from. The fact that we were doing cross-national comparative research invited a complex design in order to capture the different layers of context people's lives are embedded in. Thus three dimensions have been important for the methodological design of this cross-national study: *A case study logic; a life course perspective and a biographical approach.*

Case study logic

An important aim of this study has been to look at how factors at different levels – national, workplace, interpersonal and personal – affect the situations of women and men as new parents. In the organisational case study phase, we chose workplaces in private and public sectors. From other research we knew that type of sector affects employees' experiences. In most countries wages are higher in the private than in the public sector. More women are employed in public sector occupations and so on. Furthermore we chose to focus on areas of work that could be compared across the countries – social services and finance (see das Dores Guerreiro et al, 2004 for further details).

In the organisational case study, parents in the birth cohort 1965-75 with a youngest child under twelve years old were asked to take part. Those who took part in the focus groups also filled in questionnaires relating to well-being (see Çernigoj Sadar et al, 2005) and were asked if they were willing to be interviewed individually during a later phase in the study. In the interview phase we aimed to conduct at least ten interviews with parents from each workplace and, where possible, also to interview their partners.

Our aim in this phase was to contextualise the individual cases in terms of a link between biographies and the wider contexts of the organisation and the national welfare regimes and contexts in general.

Transitions

Cases used comparatively can demonstrate typicality. In *replicating* cases – selecting similar cases to see if the same phenomena are found under similar conditions – it is possible to see if a pattern holds across more than one case. However cases can do more than this; they can have *explanatory* power (Yin, 1994; Mitchell, 1983). They can also seek to explain patterns and tease out which conditions are more important in producing particular outcomes. The logic of case study does not make claims appealing to statistical representativeness but rather does so through theoretical argument (ibid).
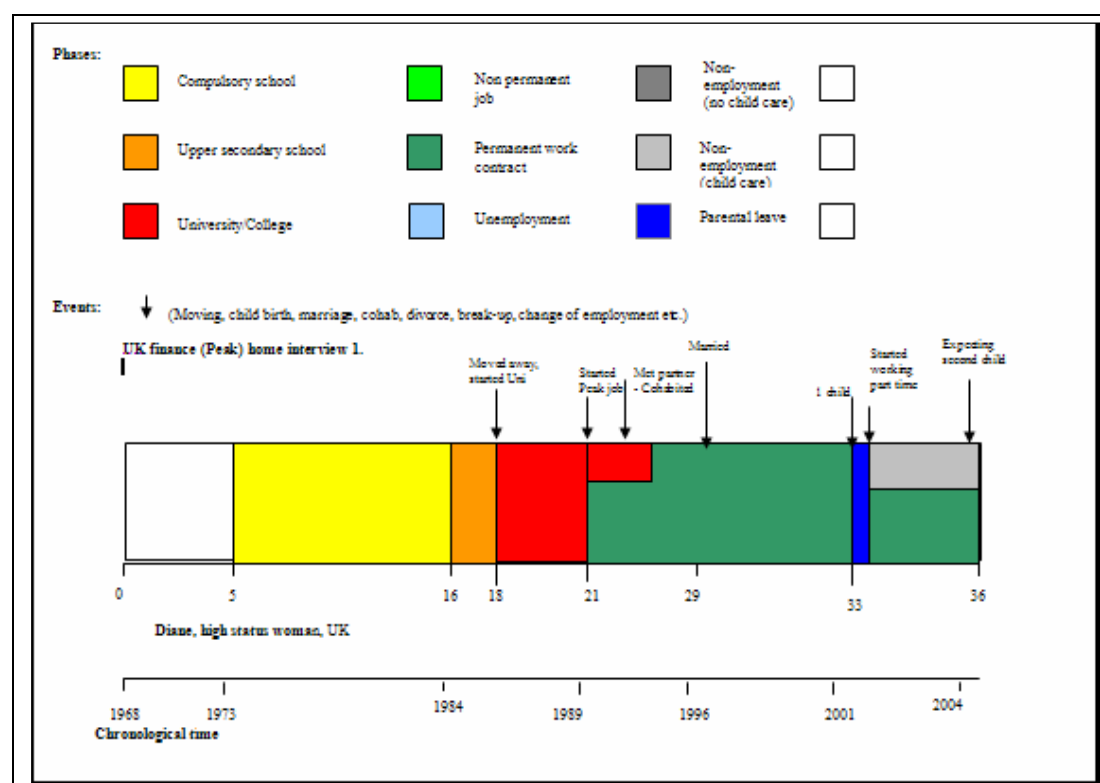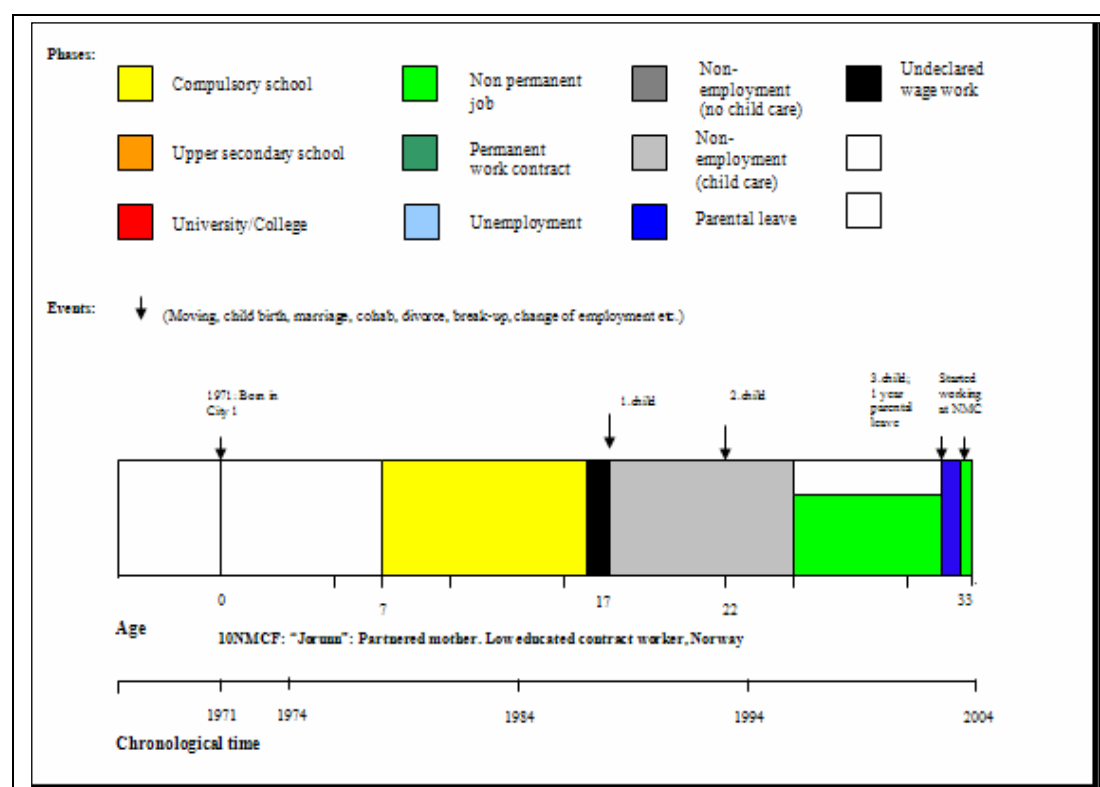
Even if explanatory purposes are not pursued and demonstration of particular patterns is preferred, it is still necessary to justify the selection of the particular cases presented. Cases must be "cases of something"; the researcher must make clear the criteria for the choice of particular cases and how the chosen case relates to the other cases studied (within the organisation or country). Case selection however occurs at several phases in the research: in the design of the study, at the fieldwork stage and in the data analysis at the national and the cross-national levels. Our interview cases were selected because they were employed in particular organisations, at particular levels in organisations, in the age range we had targeted and had children within a defined age group. All these criteria set the boundaries for what our interviewees are "cases of".

A life course perspective and life lines as illustrations

A life course perspective means focussing on the sequence and timing of events and transition phases in a person's life. This perspective also involves taking into consideration general traits of society and the cohort an interviewee belongs to, as synchronised or non-synchronised transitions are important for understanding the overall development in life. A life course perspective is therefore highly sensitive to the many and complex layers of contexts individual lives unfold within. As such it is thus well suited for cross-national studies.

The timing of the transition to parenthood is an example of the importance of this as it has to be compared to the average age for this transition in the cohort and the social context the interviewee belongs to. Life lines were useful for describing graphically the sequences of events, transition points and phases in the lives of the interviewees. Examples of contrasting life lines; a British and a Norwegian mother, may illustrate these points:[1]

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1. In Section 3.6, describing the interview study, more life lines demonstrate different aspects from those raised here.

Phases:

- ▮ (yellow) Compulsory school
- ▮ (orange) Upper secondary school
- ▮ (red) University/College
- ▮ (green) Non permanent job
- ▮ (dark green) Permanent work contract
- ▮ (light blue) Unemployment
- ▮ (dark grey) Non-employment (no child care)
- ▮ (light grey) Non-employment (child care)
- ▮ (black) Undeclared wage work
- ▮ (blue) Parental leave

Events: ↓ (Moving, child birth, marriage, cohab, divorce, break-up, change of employment etc.)

1971: Born in City 1

1. child

2. child

3. child; 1 year parental leave

Started working at NMC

Age: 0 — 7 — 17 — 22 — 33

10NMCF: "Jorunn": Partnered mother. Low educated contract worker, Norway

Chronological time: 1971 1974   1984   1994   2004

Phases:

- ▮ (yellow) Compulsory school
- ▮ (orange) Upper secondary school
- ▮ (red) University/College
- ▮ (green) Non permanent job
- ▮ (dark green) Permanent work contract
- ▮ (light blue) Unemployment
- ▮ (dark grey) Non-employment (no child care)
- ▮ (light grey) Non-employment (child care)
- ▮ (blue) Parental leave

Events: ↓ (Moving, child birth, marriage, cohab, divorce, break-up, change of employment etc.)

UK finance (Peak) home interview 1.

Moved away; started Uni

Started Peak job

Met partner - Cohabited

Married

1 child

Started working part time

Expecting second child

0 — 5 — 16 — 18 — 21 — 29 — 33 — 36

Diane, high status woman, UK

Chronological time: 1968 1973   1984   1989   1996   2001   2004

The Norwegian mother, Jorunn, has no education beyond compulsory schooling and the transition to motherhood occurred very early in life compared to her

peers. Jorunn's lack of higher education gives her few options to choose from in the labour market in a context where most of her contemporaries have at least finished upper secondary education. At the time of the interview she was employed in a cleaning agency and worked in the private sector company. Diane's transition to motherhood happened much later in her life but was more in sync with her peers of the same social and educational background in British society. She has higher education and a high occupational position in the private sector company where she is employed. When her first child was born she was well established in a career with a high income and married to a partner with equal qualifications and occupational position.

The teams agreed on a standard for what dimensions life lines should portray in order for comparisons to be made "at a glance". During the writing of the national reports for the interview stage of the study, life lines were used by all teams to portray the cases selected for in-depth focus, especially with regard to the transition to parenthood.

A biographical approach

A biography may be defined as an autobiographical story (narrative) told in the present about a person's experiences of events in the past and her or his expectations for the future. The interviews were done from this approach, being sensitive to time and timing, and inviting people to talk about how they had experienced important events in their lives, highlighting the transition to parenthood. Where a life course perspective focuses on the sequences of *factual* events and phases, a biographical approach concentrates on individuals' *interpretations* of events and transitions in their lives. The two combined have therefore offered many-layered insights into the complexities of the research questions this study set out to explore.

The value of such interviews is captured in this quote: *It is this specific quality of life stories, the wealth and complexity of the descriptions they bring forth of personal experiences, that give them value for sociological research and that would make them useful for comparative purposes.* (Bertaux 1990, pp. 167-168). The quote continues to draw a parallel with this type of study and a complex piece of music, *behind the solo of a human voice* [one can hear]*, the music of society and culture in the background* (ibid).

Logic of analysis

Comparative analysis is at the heart of cross-national studies. At each stage we selected comparable and contrasting cases: private and public sector organisations, mothers and fathers, higher and lower occupational positions etc. The case study design is essential to understanding particular institutions and experiences in context and in time – our project being about the experiences of a new generation of parents working in similar organisations across Europe but located in very different historical contexts, welfare regimes and family life situations.

This overarching logic of analysis is a guiding principle for conducting comparative studies. When choosing cases to "represent' at the national level, the transition to parenthood with reference to other life course transitions, the relevance of a life course perspective becomes clear. In most countries the transition to parenthood appears to be associated with other normative transitions such as the couple starting a separate household, the timing of the completion of education, finding settled employment to support a family and so on. In some contexts, parenthood may be more stressful than others, due to national patterns of support for

parents, or associated with a particular organisation or workplace, or it may be to do with the nature of a particular sample or with the individual situation.

Types of data produced

In addition to making use of secondary sources such as official statistics and documents, we produced data from focus groups, questionnaires to focus group participants, manager interviews (key informant interviews), biographical interviews and life lines.

Focus groups were useful in the organisational case study phase because our main objective was to get an overview of how employees at the same workplace talked about the issues that concerned our study. Rather than having each individual mother or father as the centre of attention, this phase sought to examine and explore how parenthood and the situation for working parents was talked about in a collective setting. Focus groups are particularly useful at the initial stage of a research project, especially when the overall aim of the study is exploratory (Smithson and Brannen, 2002). Questions of sampling in this stage are related to the case study logic, the sample is the number of parents at a certain workplace who fall into the age category of our study. The sample of parents is thus strategic and stratified, not random.

Questionnaires designed to measure individual well-being were completed by all participants in the organisational case studies, which were analysed, together with the well-being components of the focus group and interview data, in the Well-being Report (Çernigoj Sadar et al, 2005).

Individual interviews of two main kinds were conducted in this study. The manager interviews were conducted to elicit information about the organisations primarily. However, in such interviews there is always a certain amount of personal information coming out. In some cases where managers were also parents themselves, dynamics at a workplace that affected working parents in particular were more readily talked about.

The biographical interviews were conducted from the viewpoint of getting first hand personal experiences from the transition to parenthood and from being a parent in the context of interviewees' personal lives as a whole.

Life lines are graphs that illustrate the sequence of events, phases and transitions in a person's life over time.

Cross-national use of methods: opportunities and challenges

However well a study is designed and however rigorous the sampling of cases in the different phases, there are always constraining factors that come into play during the phase of collecting and producing empirical evidence. In cross-national research this is especially relevant as national variations that could not have been foreseen at the planning stage make themselves felt. The initial plan was for all countries to choose the same types of organisations as cases. (see das Dores Guerreiro et al, 2004, for details).

Issues of access to organisations

Gaining access to organisations was a multi-phased process (see Brannen, 2004 for details). Some of the challenges included:

- Working through the different levels of management for permission for the case studies to take place in the organisation;

- Finding managers who knew who were parents with the project characteristics;

- Finding fewer parents with young children in some contexts than others (some contexts were very small, for example, in local social services units);

- Lack of access to or availability of organisational databases with information about parents;

- A bias among managers favouring mothers and ignoring fathers;

- Work pressures and lack of time within organisations for focus groups – collectively or individually experienced;

- Difficulty in checking criteria of focus group participants in advance of their set-up;

- Having to do focus groups across a wide range of geographical and organisational locations – in one setting (Bulgaria) the groups were organised off site and after working hours;

- Difficulty in getting access to focus group participants; in one country and in one sector a small financial incentive was offered.

Whereas access to private sector companies involved more diverse experiences between countries, the problems of research access to social services have some commonalities across countries. These were in part a consequence of bureaucracy since social services is administered by the state or is part of local government. Social services also deliver services at the local level to clients many of them in need; they therefore need to be organised in small units which are administered by managers in other locations. For this reason above, the local managers there are several tiers of managers who integrate local services into districts, regions and, in some cases, nationally. Hence, gaining initial permission was a complex procedure involving negotiating permission first at higher levels of management. At these higher levels there was little information about the parental status of employees. However, once consent had been given to approach managers at the local level – the point of delivery of social services, researchers found it easier to find out from managers which employees had children.

Composition of focus groups

In most countries the focus group participants belonged to the ethnic majority in the country. Hence there were few people from ethnic minorities except in London which is the most multi-ethnic of the cities where studies took place. It did also prove difficult to get an even gender balance even in companies where men were a majority of employees. This was due to a complex set of reasons; managers associated parenthood with mothers and therefore did not try to recruit as many fathers. Another reason might be that fathers themselves did not volunteer to take part in the study.

The biographical interviews

Case selection

Our aim in this phase was to contextualise the individual cases in terms of a link between biographies and the wider contexts of the organisation and the national welfare regimes and contexts in general. Thus we aimed to match cases of working mothers and fathers who had similar aged young children and who were engaged in similar occupations working in similar organisations. An overview of

the planned samples is given in Table 3. The selection criteria were based on a logic of comparing across countries and sectors on key dimensions: parental status (mothers and fathers), educational level, type of occupation or occupational status. We also sought to include some lone mothers in each sector (one high status and one low status), but this proved difficult in some cases.[2]

Table 3: Selection categories for interviews

Cases for private sector organisation

4 high status partnered mothers

1 high status lone mother

2 low status partnered mothers

1 low status single mother

2 fathers: one high status and one low status

1 agency worker (mother or father) - a cleaner or manual worker if possible.

Cases for social services

4 high status partnered mothers – social workers

1 high status lone mother – social worker

2 low status partnered mothers

1 low status lone mother

1 high status partnered father – social worker

1 low status partnered father

1 agency worker - mother and cleaner or manual worker if possible

Status here refers to a person's occupational status and in the case of high status workers in social services, to their occupation (social worker). It also reflects level of education.

While the achieved interview samples did not quite match our aims, the fit was good enough. This latter fact is of interest in its own right in terms of making cross-national comparisons. In some contexts there were few lone parents, or lone parents were in new partnerships. Parents in manual, low skilled jobs also proved difficult to find. There are several reasons for this, the most important being the increased outsourcing of low skilled work such as cleaning and clerical work. Where secretaries or cleaners were part of the organisation, they were in many instances found to be too old to be included in the sample, or their children were too old. We also tried to recruit outsourced or contract workers by direct access. However this was difficult and time consuming as we had not initially negotiated access to these organisations and so only in a few countries was this strategy successful.

Comparative qualitative analysis

This was the greatest challenge for the project, especially for those teams who were less familiar with case study methods or biographical interviews. To anticipate the difficulties we ensured time for discussion about the interview guides at various project meetings. Test biographical interviews between team

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2. Initially we also planned to include partners in the interviews. Only in some cases were we successful in this.

members were conducted at one meeting; this proved very valuable and team members found the method interesting and the exercise a learning experience. Analysing the data for the national reports from a life course perspective was also more difficult for some teams than for others. Again, issues relating to this were raised at project meetings. Summaries of the individual interviews translated into English were exchanged between cross national teams with each team asking for specific elucidation of taken for granted contextual and cultural issues unclear in the summary interviews. Later drafts of national reports were exchanged between cross national teams and discussed in groups.

With hindsight, the study would have benefited from more time devoted to the discussion of concepts and cultural terminologies concerning the central foci of the project, in particular concerning issues of well-being. More time for methodological development could in future be given in the form of teaching workshops early on in the project, especially focussing on data collection methods and qualitative data analysis methods with which some teams were less familiar. However, it is also the case that analysis frameworks were developed for common use, based on specific questions posed in the interview schedules. Some teams sought to replicate similar analyses done by other teams in the course of analysing this national case study data.

Language is of particular importance in cross-national comparative analysis. Few projects have enough funding to make translation of all interviews feasible, so also for this study. Teams were asked to provide summaries of each interview in English. The depth and length of these summaries vary greatly between countries, again relating to fluency in written English but also raising questions about the depth and quality of the data. For the first comparative analysis carried out for the Consolidated Interview Report, the authors were reliant upon the analysis provided in the national interview reports. The original analysis and data were not available in the form required.

In comparative qualitative analysis, this is not satisfactory. However there are ways round this as our efforts have shown. The report authors fed back their analysis of particular cases to the relevant cross national team for confirmation of their interpretations and for further contextual data and subjective interpretations from the perspective of the case study informant. However, access to interviews in full is much the better way to facilitate comprehensive cross-national comparative analysis.

The dissemination strategy adopted for further publications from this study includes plans for collaboration across countries whose data are being analysed (see Section 5 for dissemination details).

Life lines

The teams agreed on a standard for what dimensions life lines should portray in order for comparisons to be made "at a glance". The idea of lines was new to most team members, one team had used them in an earlier research project. The value of these became evident to team members when used as an exercise tool during a project meeting. This session demonstrated how life lines need to be understood and interpreted with knowledge of the context the life unfolds within, and as such also demonstrated the necessity of knowledge about the different layers of context for making sense of the lines and the interviews combined. During the writing of the national reports for the interview stage of the study, life lines were used by all teams to portray the cases selected for in depth focus, especially with regard to the transition to parenthood. However for future project more work needs to go into providing a similar comparative framework.

Methods: concluding comments

The reporting of the case study methodology was very variable in terms of detail and illustrative examples. There are a number of reasons for this but three main issues are highlighted. The first is different traditions of qualitative research and analysis and the implications of this for the capacity and workload of teams (some had two case studies), together with the fact of English being the main working medium with team members having variable fluency in English (spoken and written).

Comparative qualitative analysis is hindered by the following conditions, some of which applied in parts of this project so that solutions adopted can also become part of the problem:

- Different traditions and experiences of working with qualitative material.

- Raw data are not fully translated into common languages that can be accessed by all teams.

- Where translated, data are subject to translation and interpretation by others (not always the researchers who conducted original interviews but the authors responsible for writing the national report).

- Recontextualisation of the original qualitative material so that the data are turned into translated summaries of the original interviews; this can lead to distortions in the analysis at cross-national as well as national levels.

- Recontextualisation of the data as overall summary analyses accessed only through the national country reports.

Cross-national organisational case studies are difficult to do. In particular problems of *access* can be notoriously difficult. Three factors in particular were significant in this project. One was the complexity and hierarchical nature of organisations in terms of personnel but also their complexity in physical or geographical location. In some cases, this made for lengthy and complex negotiations with gatekeepers before access was provided to the particular groups to whom we sought access. This issue was prominent in public sector social services bureaucracies where personnel was often located in small centres within the community in contrast to the large office locations in private sector companies. Social services are delivered at the local level, while in some countries they are administered at national level and in others at a more local level. Social services have to be accountable because they are publicly funded.

Another issue relates to the *degree of threat* which researching within organisation presents to management. This issue was more often problematic in the private sector finance organisations (e.g. Bulgaria with recent privatisation) Where the topic of the research – family friendly work practices – fitted with the express goals of the organisation, albeit often only at the level of organisational rhetoric, this greatly facilitated the negotiation of access (e.g. Norwegian multinational). Thus the threat of outside surveillance of the organisation's internal secrets was rendered non-threatening if potential benefits to the organisation, for example feed back which would enhance management's practices (UK finance) or the reflected glory of being associated with a project funded by the EU (Portugal) or being connected to the local university (Sweden).

Although the project might be more threatening to some types of organisation than others – private sector as compared with social services – this was not all bad news however. Once permission was given in the private sector then access was secured more speedily and with less red tape.

The route of access that we chose, that is via the employers, determined the fact that we *only in very few cases gained access to contract and agency workers.*

Thus in organisations where cleaning, food preparation and other manual jobs are outsourced, this meant that we gained a view of the organisation which was unrepresentative of all groups of parents working there. Not gaining access to agency workers may also affect the gender mix of the sample and the representation of minority ethnic groups. Similarly, the route taken via management ensured that pathways to trade unions were not opened for us, even though in some contexts, especially in the public sector, they are very significant actors.

Our research design demanded a multi-faceted approach both in terms of perspective and methods. It is rare for a cross-national project of this scale to do this. We have found this design very helpful for exploring the issues we set out to study. Focus groups helped us elicit accounts from people which serve not only as reflections of the public discourses which prevail in different contexts. It also provided opportunities for observing group dynamics and the kinds of relations people forge; those from similar and different backgrounds and with similar and different characteristics. Such an opportunity for direct observation is a valuable additional source of data in a cross national study. The biographical interviews and life lines were very useful for capturing the many layered contexts people's lives evolve in. Where the focus groups were primarily concerned with organisational and national issues, the individual interviews added to our insights of these very same contexts over time, and how individual life courses are shaped and interpreted by many different factors. Transition periods such as parenthood are particularly important to understand against the back cloth of not only individual choice, but also with reference to the forces that form the opportunity structures individual choices are taken within.

All in all the data from our project adds important insights to already existing empirical evidence relating to the problem areas we have focussed on.

Some recommendations for working cross nationally on comparative qualitative analysis

The main recommendation is that goals for comparative qualitative research should be modest with time set aside at the start of the project for conceptual and methodological development

- Smaller teams work better.

- Teams with experience of working together beforehand work better (as in this project).

- Time must be built early into the timetable of the project for the team to get to know and to get on with one another.

- Time and effort must be put into working up a good cross-cultural question that all teams can subscribe to and that makes empirical sense in the different contexts; in this study the concept of organisational and individual well-being were contested concepts.

- Time for discussion and explication of concepts should be built into the start of the project.

- "Capacious concepts" need to be found that fit into and work across different contexts since these are likely to work best in comparative qualitative analysis.

- Teams may need additional training in methods; the creation of a role of project methodologist – involving a mix of research and teaching – can help as in this study.

- The value of being highly explicit about research questions, informant questions, frameworks of analysis needs to be recognised and properly resourced.
- Facilitating methods for the optimal description of data/material is a central resource concern.

A further set of recommendations relates to *comparative organisational case studies:*

- Countries and cases that are selected in the research design and in specific analyses must be selected as cases of "something".
- Team members should visit the contexts of the study – the particular organisations under investigation for example.
- The possible value of a longitudinal approach (revisiting organisations) should be taken into account: snapshot studies of organisations and individual lives may confound problems of comparative understanding and interpretation.
- Finding strategies for condensing data/showing main features of cases, as in the case of the study life lines and the organisational charts.

The last set of recommendations relates specifically to the very difficult task of *comparative cross national analysis and writing:*

- Modest amounts of comparative qualitative data analysis should be attempted in the first instance.
- The latter involves recognising that comparative cross-national work is a dialogue between teams.
- It centrally involves the interpretation data/ material in context – spelling out NOT ironing out meanings.
- Interpreting data in relation to layers of context.
- Drawing upon contextual material where silences occur in the data.
- Explaining inter-country differences may be a step too far.
- Taking account of different traditions and types of research(er) goals (including for publication) depending, for example, upon research careers and a university system's organisational goals.
- Recognising that most productive writing often occurs after the project has ended.
- Deciding who the 'reader' is even more difficult in cross-national than national research.
- Issues of ownership, authorship, archiving, English language domination (see section on reflections on team working for more on this).

3.5   The organisational case studies

Recent decades have been marked by what social scientists term "globalisation" or the rise of "the information society". These changes raise new challenges for organisations: new paradigms of work, new modes of management, innovative technologies and products, the increasing development of a global market (both of goods and labour force) and changing attitudes towards organisational cultures and practices. Today organisations are complex nodes of networks which incorporate both traditional and innovative trends. They are not totally new entities, but they all face the challenge of adapting to or anticipating changing contexts.

Simultaneously, the different welfare regimes in Europe are also changing in diverse ways in different countries. This profoundly influences work organisations and labour policies, and conversely, changes in this field have been drivers for change in welfare regimes: recalibration and costs containment. This goes along with significant changes in national social services structures, another major issue for understanding the contemporary European workplace.

The *Transitions* organisational case studies were planned to understand how these major organisational and societal changes impact on the transition to parenthood. To study this, eleven case studies in both public and private organisations were developed in seven of these countries.

Objectives of the organisational case studies:

- To understand the workplace contexts in which employees (aged 25-39) negotiate the transition to parenthood and develop work-family boundary strategies in different sectors and countries;

- To examine elements of workplace change and transition, and the ways in which changes are reflected in workplace policies and practices affecting parents, in public and private/transitional sector organisations in seven countries including EU and accession states;

- To examine structural and cultural aspects of organisational change and practice from the perspectives of both managers and groups of employees who are parents of young children;

- To examine and compare experiences of organisational supportiveness for parenthood and experiences of positive well-being at individual and organisational levels in the different contexts;

- To relate parents' experiences of their employing organisations to national policy context.

The case studies' design

The cases focus predominantly on two types of workplace: private sector finance organisations and public sector social services. Some countries did case studies in both sectors, some in one sector only. In Norway the private sector company is in the oil industry – a major sector of the Norwegian economy. We sought parents of a similar age (25-40), with children aged under 11 years, and working in higher and lower status occupations to participate in focus groups in the organisations. Since the design was cross-national we expected some cross national differences in parents' experiences related to the type of welfare state regime. Thus, in selecting the seven countries, we had a mix of neo-liberal welfare regimes (UK and Netherlands), social democratic welfare regimes (Sweden and Norway), a Southern European welfare regime (Portugal) and two East European countries. Methods used included focus groups with parents,

interviews with managers, document analysis and short well-being questionnaires.

Results from case studies

1.   Changing contexts

- In the context of economic, technological and social changes at the global level and changes in welfare state regimes at national levels, European workplaces in both the private and public sectors are facing new challenges and are also undergoing massive changes.

- Global competition and the opening of new markets in the private sector, new public management trends in the public sector and the transition to a market economy in Slovenia and Bulgaria are all associated with workplace efficiency drives that involve reducing the size of the workforce and expecting surviving employees to work harder. Employees in all of the case study organisations report the widespread experience of intensification of work. This is a particular challenge for young parents, who must manage work and family in a particularly intense and competitive context. While a minority of employees experience this intensification as challenging in a positive way, the majority appear to experience this as negative but nevertheless inevitable.

- The growth of flexibility, in its many forms, is double edged. It brings both insecurity and opportunities for parents. Contractual flexibility evident in the private sector and also a trend towards individualisation of contracts in many public sector organisations brings job insecurity. In Slovenia and Bulgaria this is a relatively new experience to which parents must adapt. Flexibility of working hours can bring opportunities to integrate paid work and family, particularly if this is associated with greater autonomy, but in the context of the intensification of work it can also lead to long working hours that intrude on family time or energy. Trade unions in some countries can play a role in resisting the more negative aspects of flexibility.

- New technologies bring important changes to daily work organisation although their impact is often double edged – they can facilitate flexibility but speed up intensification. New technologies feed into the knowledge society. The spread of knowledge is being incorporated into the employers' role, as organisations increasingly promote training, albeit in a range of different ways.

- The different political contexts, particularly the reconfiguration of welfare states are shaping different organisational contexts. In particular the dramatically rapid changes taking place in Bulgaria and Slovenia, including liberalisation, new pro-market ideologies favouring employers, rising unemployment and changes in the labour code together with new regulations that derive from the EU, contribute to the feeling of deep transition, with both positive and negative impacts on workplace policies and practices and on workers' lives.

- In this context new discussions on gender and work-family reconciliation are developing, framed by a wider discussion on caring organisations in some organisations and/or by business concerns. Nevertheless, the male model of ideal workers who do not need time or energy for family work remains dominant.

2.   On Work

One of the main tasks in this project was to examine changes in workplace policies and practices in European organisations, from the perspectives of both managers and groups of employees who are parents of young children. Major findings include:

- There is a significant implementation gap between formal policies and current practices. Managers play a decisive role in the implementation of policy. Colleagues can also act as agents of social control, especially in the context of tight staffing and intense workloads where parents' flexible working or leave-taking leave can exacerbate colleagues' overload.

- Workplace policies and practices are shaped by national and local regulations, but they are increasingly a matter of daily and informal negotiation with managers in local organisations. The influence of unions and other collective agents is very different among European countries, but appears to be higher in the public sector.

- Employees' statutory entitlements are implemented in very distinct forms according to (a) the nature and location of the work, (b) professional status, (c) type of contracts and (d) access to information.

- Most managers still believe that caring about employees' family commitments, and meeting organisational needs are mutually exclusive rather than mutually reinforcing. Managers' priorities appear to be highly conditioned by national and organisational contexts as well as their values and experiences. Gender of managers is sometimes but not always a decisive factor in how supportive they are to the needs of new parents. Parental status of managers is often more important than gender.

- "Family friendly" or flexible working policies and entitlements are still largely perceived as benefits for women workers. Consequently both men and women feel a growing sense of inequality. Employed mothers feel that this interpretation may prejudice their careers, while caring fathers feel that they have fewer opportunities than mothers to care of their children. The focus generally remains on policies at the margins rather than systemic changes which might challenge male models of work, and women are particularly disadvantaged by this.

- Increased flexibility of employees' working time and place emerged as a major trend of organisational change in all the countries. However, the process by which this is achieved is ambiguous. Often it involves overcoming a great deal of resistance and requires complex negotiations among employers and employees, leading to *ad hoc* configurations in each organisation.

- Although there are well-defined leave entitlements for parents, in practice, leaves are usually taken by employees through "mixed arrangements", that is a set of formal and informal procedures. Often these prioritise organisational needs, but sometimes they also extend employees' opportunities.

- Training courses are also considered a core practice of organisational change and modernisation. However, time pressure and economic constraints make their implementation difficult. Consequently they often end up taking place outside the employees' weekly schedule, which increases the experience of intensification of work and is particularly difficult for young parents. Public sector organisations are more likely to provide time for training and development during working hours.

3.   Comparison of public and private sector organisations

Case studies in different organisations allowed not only a comparison among different countries but also between those in the private (mostly finance) sector and public (social services) sector. This study has shown that:

- Very significant differences between policies, cultures and practices of private and public sectors are still evident across the seven countries, although these distinctions vary from one country to another and both sectors are experiencing profound changes, blurring some traditional contrasts between them.

- "Ethics of care" and "ethics of business" were found in all organisations, but the former tends to be dominant in social services and the latter in finance.

- Public and private organisations appear to have a different approach to "family friendly" policies: the former strictly following legislation and sometimes developing its own policies, the second using a more flexible approach. Both have advantages and disadvantages.

- Insecurity is a major concern among younger employees in both sectors, but its meaning varies. The private sector is characterised by "daily insecurity", with good conditions but fear of job loss, and the public sector by "future insecurity" with less favourable conditions, ambiguity regarding the future, but more effective support for the reconciliation of work and family.

4.   On organisational well-being

This study focuses on factors contributing to positive well-being rather than just the absence of negative well-being. We explore a collective notion of "organisational well-being" or "healthy" organisations, from the perspectives of employees who are parents and their managers.

- Healthy organisations tend to be defined in the literature as those which can meet the needs of employees as well as organisational goals. The view that workplace effectiveness can be enhanced by looking after the workforce is made explicit in organisational discourses in a minority of the cases studies but the view is not always shared by managers and there is often a gap between theory and day to day practice.

- A number of problems and issues emerged in conceptualising organisational well-being. In particular it is difficult to determine what meeting employers' and employees' needs means when the perspectives of managers and subordinates often diverge on this. Evaluations of the organisation in terms of meeting needs are also influenced by national context, cultural expectations, social comparison and a sense of entitlement to support.

- A distinction can be made between a fragmented notion of organisational well-being that takes account only of individuals' experiences in the workplace, and a more holistic approach which addresses employees' needs within and beyond the workplace.

- While in some contexts there is a discourse of a "caring organisation" – i.e. organisations that can enhance performance by caring for employees' family and individual needs – this is a problematic concept. Pervasive current organisational trends such as the intensification of work undermine the equitable reconciliation of work and parenting and perpetuate

traditional gendered divisions of labour to some extent in all the organisations.

- The conceptualisation of organisational well-being, and its relationship to individual and family well-being, is an ongoing part of the *Transitions* project. The Good Practice report and the forthcoming Well-being Report (to be published in 2005) continue to develop this concept.

Implications for Phase Three from the first two phases of the project

The issues raised in Phases One and Two were addressed in more detail by the in-depth interviews in Phase Three of the research. Building on the findings of the case studies, the interview data highlighted the employment, family and welfare policies and workplace policies and practices that can, separately or in combination, empower parents to negotiate work-family strategies and positive well-being in the new workplace in different national policy contexts.

As well as the initial themes which guided the first two phases of the project (young adults and parenthood; parenting strategies and work-family boundaries; workplaces and organisational change; and well-being), themes which emerged from the first two phases of the project which were developed in Phase Three include:

- Intensification of work and its impact in all the countries, both in the public and private sectors, on individual employees' experiences, parenting decisions, and well-being.

- Job insecurity and effects on transition to parenthood for men and women, for both high and low skilled workers.

- Links between organisational and individual well-being.

- Gendered negotiation and understanding of integration of paid work and family needs.

- Furthering understanding of the range of factors and resources influencing young adults' decisions about becoming parents, thus informing policy relating to declining fertility rates.

3.6   The Consolidated Interview Study Report

In the third phase of the study a series of biographical interviews conducted with parents who were employees of public sector and private sector organisations in seven countries. A social services department was studied in the UK, Norway, Sweden, Portugal and Bulgaria. Case studies in the private sector were studied in financial services in most cases and include the UK, Norway, The Netherlands, Portugal, Bulgaria and Slovenia (see das Dores Guerreiro et al, 2004).

A primary objective of the interview study was to gain an understanding of motherhood and fatherhood from a gendered perspective. This involved examining the *transition to parenthood* of both men and women. We approached this by adopting a life course perspective combined with a biographical approach. The latter involves eliciting retrospective accounts from interviewees of the life course decision to have a child and the period following the child's birth (parents with children under twelve years were included). Some participants were expecting a baby at the time of the focus group and were now parents so there was also a small prospective element to the study.

Objectives of the Interview Study:

- To further the understanding of motherhood and fatherhood from a gendered life course perspective together with an examination of the transition to parenthood (the latter to be examined retrospectively and for those on parental leave concurrently).

- To examine the gendered experiences of combining waged work and children, and parents' work-family strategies, for example, the extent to which employees make the boundaries between work and family life permeable or keep the two spheres separate.

- To identify the strategies parents adopt and the resources they draw upon (family, friends, workplace and public policy, especially parental leave) in the context of different organisational contexts and practices, and in relation to employee contractual status (including temporary workers) and different national welfare regimes .

- To examine the relationship between different work-family strategies and well-being.

- To explore in gendered terms parents' current perspectives with their professed expectations on combining parenthood and waged work.

Transitions is an unusual project in that it brings a mixed methods approach that highlights qualitative methods to the study of parents' lives lived in seven different European countries. In the report we created an analytic framework in which the many layers of context in which interviewees' lives are embedded are made manifest.

Selection of cases[3]

Two main aspects form the rationale for our design and methodology. The first aspect is the logic of case study design: to the overall cross-national, comparative design we have applied a *case study logic*. We justified in particular the selection of cases – of countries, organisations and parents – as the study proceeded, both in the fieldwork phase but also in the analysis of the material and the writing of

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3. For further details about questions relating to methods, see the methods section in this report.

the report. Through this approach we aimed to make different layers of context explicit at every step of the study. We also set out how the overall design addresses issues of representativeness in comparative research. The second aspect of the overall methodology of this phase is the application of a life course perspective to a biographical interview approach. The latter was particularly helpful when examining the interviewees' lives across gender, social class and national context.

Most of the mothers and fathers we interviewed belong to the birth cohorts born between 1965 and 1975. Thus they are the children of the "baby boomers" born just after the end of World War II, and in most countries for this reason they form a rather large cohort, compared with later birth cohorts. The interviewees were born into societies very different from the ones in which they live their adult lives and their parents lived theirs.

In the case selection for this phase we found it important to make the historical contexts of countries explicit in order to make sense of the transition to parenthood in a more comprehensive way. The seven countries were categories into three main typologies:

1. *The West European* political liberal regimes are urbanised societies, with high public sector employment, welfare states, high levels of expenditure on health care and high education level in the population. From the 1970s on, these countries saw an increase in women's participation on the workforce, and the male breadwinner model was gradually replaced by the dual income family, although among families with young children, the norm remains for the father to work full-time and the mother part-time in the UK, The Netherlands, Sweden and Norway.

2. *The Southern European* political regime, Portugal, has changed fast with a rapidly increasing, standard of living, and rising educational levels (especially among women). There is still a high percentage of the population living in rural areas and small towns, although there is recent concern about the "desertification" of the countryside, and social class divisions are relatively large (similar to the UK, both are higher than the other countries in this study). Portugal entered the European Union in the mid-1980's, which aided the modernisation process. The two income family is common and the percentage of women working full time the highest in Europe.

3. *The East-European* countries (Bulgaria and Slovenia) were run by non-democratic political regimes, capital was state controlled, large public sectors and high education levels among most segments of the population. Egalitarian ideals of social class. Following the transition to a market economy and a liberal political system the public sector is decreasing, the health and education systems underwent detrimental changes in the post 1990s. A relatively high percentage of the population living in rural communities.

The transition patterns demonstrated in the life lines can be understood against the back drop of individual choices but equally important is an understanding of this in relation to the national opportunity structures provided by the dimensions we have focussed on in the three typologies.

The transition to parenthood in different European regions

The conditions under which the transition to parenthood took place vary. The factors brought to bear in the analysis include the national economic and political contexts, the welfare regimes of the countries concerned, the individual's life

course phase, the specific formal and informal resources available to individuals, namely education, employment, family relationships and workplace conditions. In some national contexts some conditions are more important than others, for instance in Bulgaria and Portugal the wider family is an important resource for new parents. In Northern Europe the wider family is reported to be less significant, a fact we attribute to a discourse of independence and autonomy in these countries and the existence of a generous welfare state, particularly in the Scandinavian countries.
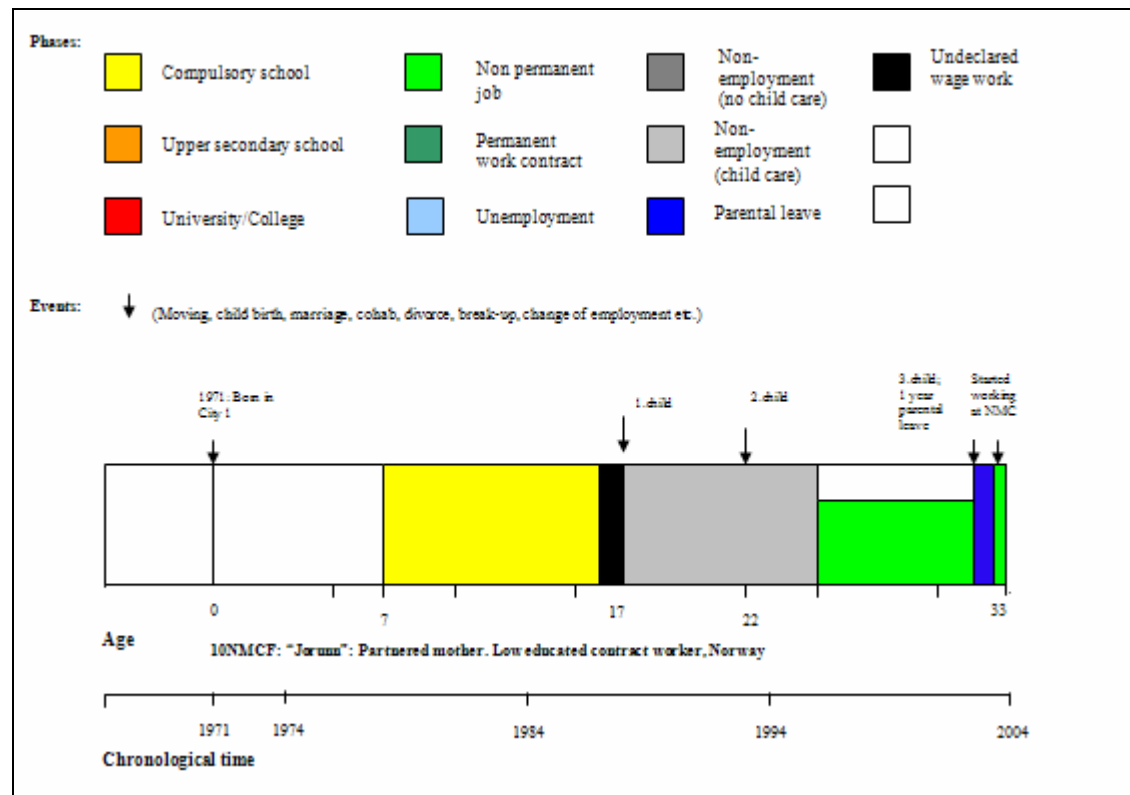
In this report we focus on the shape of the life course – its linearity and lack of linearity and discuss this in relation to patterns of transitions and phases in the life course. We also analyse the timing of motherhood and fatherhood in the life course across these contexts, and how the timing of the transition varies between men and women from different social classes across the countries. The timing of parenthood is discussed with reference to other life course phases and transitions such as education, entry into employment and partnering.
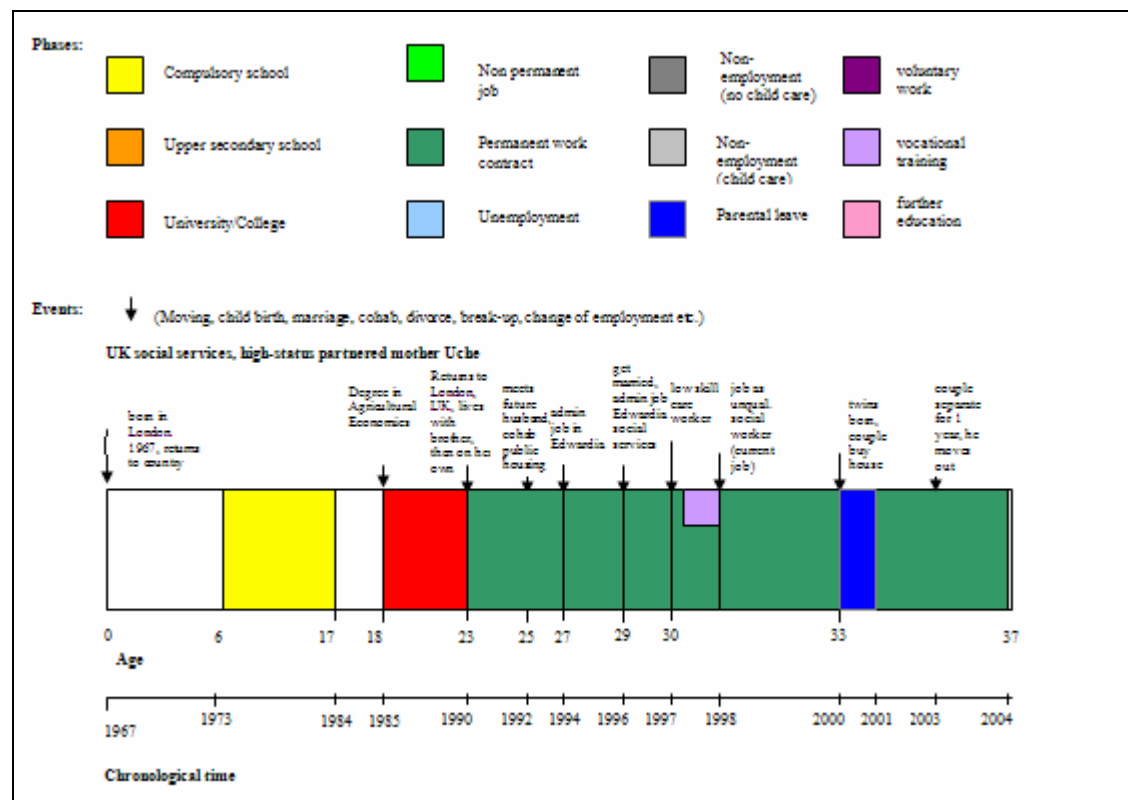
We also note considerable class differences across countries in the timing of the transition to parenthood. The lower the level of education the earlier in life the transition is likely to happen. For most well-educated interviewees the transition happened after the completion of education, entry into the labour market and gaining a foothold in the housing market. Young parents from Eastern Europe for instance, even the fairly well-off, have a harder time getting into the housing market than in many other countries. In some cases they have to live with parents or in-laws for a period of time as housing is scarce in some areas and not affordable even for young parents with permanent job contracts. In the UK, especially in London where the social services study was done, ethnicity and migration are important factors that shape parents' experiences. Examples of life lines may illustrate this point:
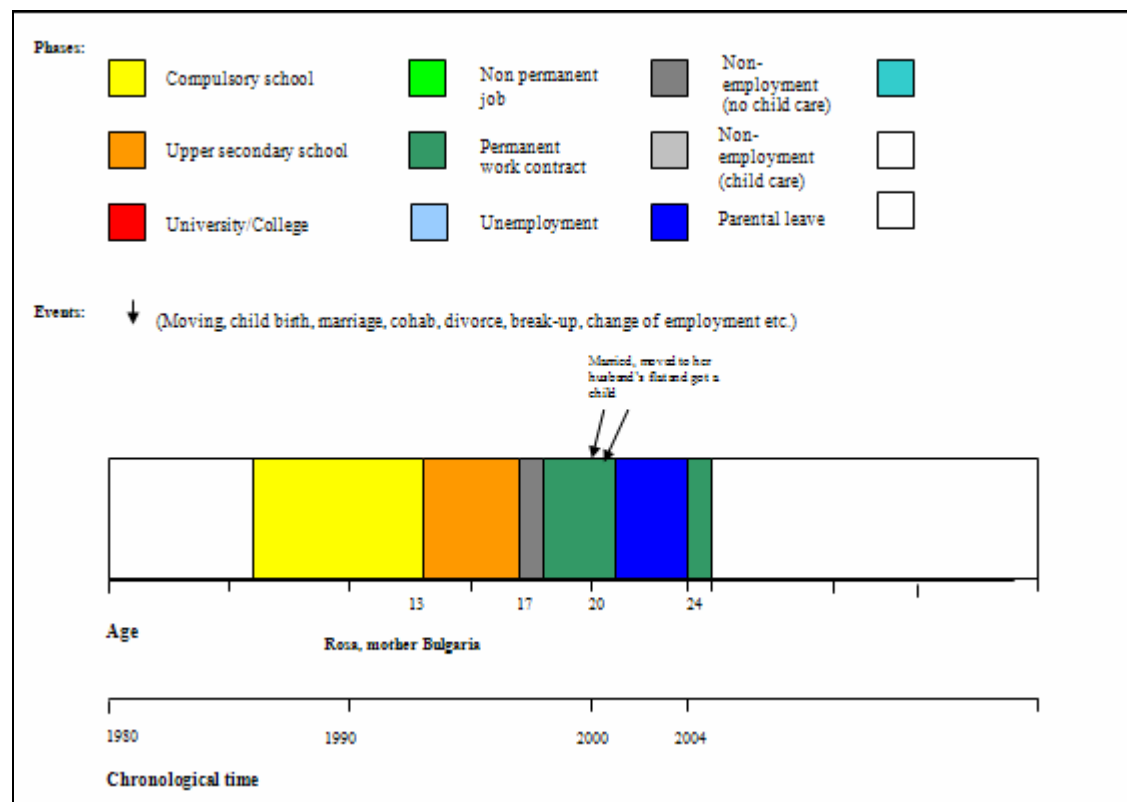
Rosa is a Bulgarian mother of working class origin who at the time of the interview worked in the lower ranks of the social services. She has little in the way of formal education and married and had her first child early in life. At the time of the transition to parenthood she had a permanent work contract and had been with her employer for long enough to qualify for the lengthy period of maternity leave provided by the Bulgarian welfare state. Both her and her husband's family supported the young couple after the birth of their first child. Such support is often necessary for working mothers in the Bulgarian context in order to make the everyday time puzzle fall into place. Rosa's transition to parenthood demonstrates a linearity which seems typical of the old working class pattern in the country (Kovacheva et al, 2005).

Another example of the transition to motherhood early in life is the Norwegian mother Jorunn. She is a cleaner employed by an agency who worked with the Norwegian multinational at the time of the interview. She had her first child at 17 which for her cohort in the national context is unusual. However, the timing of the transition to parenthood varies with social class and is earlier in life for working class women than for those of middle class origin. Jorunn has no upper secondary education which is very unusual for her cohort as more than 80% of young people in her age group had such education. At the time of becoming a mother she and her husband received support from both sets of parents. Jorunn also had a long period of non-employment as well as a lengthy period of part-time employment. Only after her husband got ill and received disability pension did she extend her working hours to full-time. At the birth of their third child she went on maternity leave, something which she had not be eligible to on the two previous births as she was not in permanent employment then.

Phases:

- Compulsory school
- Upper secondary school
- University/College
- Non permanent job
- Permanent work contract
- Unemployment
- Non-employment (no child care)
- Non-employment (child care)
- Parental leave
- voluntary work
- vocational training
- further education

Events: ↓   (Moving, child birth, marriage, cohab, divorce, break-up, change of employment etc.)

UK social services, high-status partnered mother Uche

born in London 1967, returns to country

Degree in Agricultural Economics

Returns to London, UK, lives with brother, then on her own

meets future husband, cohab, public housing

admin job in Edwardia

get married, admin job in Edwardia social services

low skill care social worker

job as unqual. social worker (current job)

twins born, couple buy house

couple separate for 1 year, he moves out

Age: 0   6   17 18   23   25 27   29 30   33   37

Chronological time: 1967   1973   1984 1985   1990   1992 1994 1996 1997   1998   2000 2001 2003   2004

Uche is an African born immigrant[4] to London who is a social worker. Uche had her children late in life. Her transition to parenthood was delayed in relation to her peers. She has a higher education and obtained work beyond her qualifications in the UK. She did further education in order to get the type of work she wanted in the social services and has a permanent work contract. Housing prices in London are steep, Uche and her family therefore live in an area where housing is affordable and hence she has a lengthy travel distance between home and work. A tiring two hour journey makes life more difficult for the family than it would have been had they been able to afford housing nearer her workplace.

The three life lines chosen to illustrate some points relating to the transition to parenthood are all from mothers of working class background. The interview report provides a more detailed and rich description as it contrasts gender and social class across the countries. The timing and transition patterns for the middle classes are in most countries characterised by a lengthy period in higher education and childbirth in their late twenties or early thirties. Since these groups in most cases have higher income jobs, the transition period is seemingly smoother as they in most cases have more resources at hand than do those with lower income.

The decision to become a parent is thus related to the type of life parents experience at this transition point. Where for many it appears that the transition happened at a time when it was 'right', when everything was in place for parenthood to happen without there having been a long period of planning ahead, for others the decision was the result of careful planning. The latter is likely to be

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4. London was the only placed studied where ethnic minorities formed part of the sample. This is due to both sectors of employment selected, but also to the fact that London is the only multiethnic big city in the study.

Transitions

associated with affluent young families where having children also means changing their life style in important ways. The report emphasises how the transition to parenthood, as indeed other life course transitions, must be analysed and understood in the different layers of context in which individual lives are embedded.

The experience of being a working parent in the present

We selected countries from the three regions of Europe, to compare how particular mothers and fathers experience parenthood. In a discussion of the experiences of being a working mother, we focus on Portugal, Sweden, Bulgaria, and the UK. Here, we selected cases of women with lower education and jobs in the lower echelons of the job hierarchy of their public sector workplaces. The justification is that a focus on the less well-off highlights aspects of context that make parenthood feasible for the majority of parents of each country, not only their more advantaged members. Such parents often draw upon informal sources of support, whereas the better-off can afford to pay their way. An analysis of the experiences of those employed in low-status public sector jobs also provides a base line for assessing how societies cater for the well-being of those providing important public services.

Our analysis demonstrates how new parents' contentment, or lack of contentment, depends not only upon the resources available to them, but also on the resources available to those with whom they compare themselves. We show how mothers from Portugal and Bulgaria emerge as relatively content compared with their more fortunate peers in Sweden and the UK. We also compare the contributions of advantaged fathers men who in Northern European societies are expected to pull their weight in childcare and the home. These men (from three contrasting countries – Norway, The Netherlands and Slovenia – are at the other end of the socio-economic spectrum, working in higher status jobs in the private sector. The Slovenian father discussed in-depth emerges as doing the least childcare and is the most content. In a society in which material expectations have been relatively low with the sharp transition from a communist to a market economy, having a job, a car, a wife, children and a house gave this father a feeling of considerable achievement – they were enough. In contrast to the Norwegian father (and the Dutch father both also discussed), gender equality had yet to touch the Slovenian father, while his children's grandparents provided the major childcare support and let him off the hook.

How families adapt to combining work and family is important for their feelings of well-being (see Çernigoj Sadar and Kersnik, 2005). However, the options young parents have to choose from where strategies are concerned, are related to the different layers of context within which they live their lives.

Supports and constraints for new parents

We approach the topic of support and constraints by exploring the range of formal and informal resources available to parents and how these intersect. The focus is on highlighting the various aspects of national contexts. Hence we look at particular countries, and analysis centres on constructing typologies. The most significant support for mothers and fathers are childcare support and working hours. We distinguish between countries where childcare is viewed as a private, a family, or a public concern, and working hours are typically full-time or part-time. Across Europe most fathers work full-time, so that part-time work, where it exists, is largely perceived as an option for mothers, often with negative implications for women's occupational careers if they do take up part-time working. There is some evidence from our interviews, which echoes conclusions from other studies, that part-time employees feel their commitment to work is

questioned. Part-time work can therefore be seen simultaneously as a resource for the families but a career risk for women employees.

In the Netherlands, which has the highest percentage of women in part-time work, the idea of childcare as a public concern is quite foreign. In Sweden the resource of working part-time work is augmented by high quality, affordable public childcare provided in children's own communities, whereas in Portugal both mothers and fathers work full-time and there is little in the way of access to formal and affordable childcare. Support from the wider family becomes crucial for young families in this situation. The table below provides a typological overview of the situation concerning support and constraints across the countries in the study.

Parenthood plays out differently in different contexts. But whatever the context, the gender differences remain.

Table 3: Support for young parents according to evidence from National Reports

	State	**Workplace**	**Partner**	**Wider family**	**Community/ friends**	**Access childcare**
Sweden	High level support. Childcare a *public issue.*	Colleagues support. Many mothers part-time	Ideals of gender equal. Mothers more dom work. Fathers some childcare.	Some practical support for *leisure time.*	Some babysitting.	Publicly funded and subsidised. widespread access.
Norway	High level support. Childcare a *private and public issue.*	Colleagues, some manager support. Many mothers part-time.	Ideals of gender equality Mothers do more dom work. Fathers do some childcare.	Some practical support *leisure time.*	Not mentioned.	Publicly funded. Expensive. Shortage
Portugal	Low level support. Childcare a *family issue.*	Public sector 'continuous working hrs' mothers. Full-time norm for all.	Traditional gender ideology. Mothers responsible dom arena.	Practical *everyday support together with* formal and informal childcare.	Some exchange and paid childcare.	Some publicly funded. Severe shortage.
The UK	Some support. Childcare *private matter.*	Depends on job level and manager. Some mothers part-time.	Gendered. Mothers main responsible dom arena. Fathers some practical support.	Some practical support *addition* to formal childcare.	Not mentioned	Some publicly funded. Severe shortage. Expensive.
Netherlands	Some support. Childcare seen as a *private matter.*	Flexible employment. Mothers high part-time rate (short and long part-time).	Gendered. Mothers main responsible dom arena. Fathers some practical support.	Some practical *leisure time* support.	Not mentioned.	Privately funded and recent pub/private partnerships in poor areas. Shortage. Expensive unless on low income.
Slovenia	Declining support. Childcare *public and family issue.*	Intensification of work, inflexible. Full-time norm for all.	Traditional gender ideology. Mothers responsible dom arena.	Practical *everyday support addition to* public childcare. Financial support.	Children play neighbourhood.	Publicly funded. Subsidised. Good access. Short opening hrs.
Bulgaria	High level support. Childcare *public and family issue.*	Intensification of work, inflexible. Full-time norm for all.	Traditional gender ideology. Mothers responsible dom arena.	Practical *everyday support in addition to* public childcare. Financial support.	Not mentioned.	Publicly funded. Subsidised. Good access.

3.7 Good practices
(Part of Work package 6)

A central feature of the organisational case studies (Work package 6) was to locate examples of good practices at workplace levels to be disseminated via the websites and in national and international dissemination strategies. This was carried out at the time of conducting the organisational case studies, and a draft good practice report drawn up, based on seven national good practice reports. It was felt that this report would strongly benefit from including data from the interview studies, which gave a more in-depth picture of new parents' experiences of good and bad practice. For this reason there was further analysis of good practice during the interview study, and a final Good Practice report (Purcell et al, 2005) was drawn up, which explored employer "good practices" from the perspectives of new parents working in private and public sector organisations in seven European countries, based on the data from the case and interview studies.

Whilst we are critical of the concept of good practice – that there is one way of doing things that can be transferred to other organisations regardless of context – we are interested in what can be learnt from a cross-national comparison of what parents say they find helpful for reconciling employment and family life. Our findings confirm that, whilst there is no one set of good practices that works in all contexts, it is possible to pinpoint some basic principles of good practices that apply more broadly. The context-specificity of what counts as good practice is illustrated by the varying experiences of employer "good practices" across national, workplace and family contexts. In particular, national policy on leaves and rights to flexible working has a important impact on what is perceived as good practice in the workplace setting; in some national contexts there is less reliance on organisational policy. However, since statutory regulations rely on implementation at the workplace level, organisational practices are important in all contexts in determining how employed parents negotiate the paid work-family interface.

Good working arrangements for parents are important for individual, organisational and societal well-being

Finding ways of reconciling paid work and family life is a key challenge for European countries. The aim of this report was to examine the experience of parents within organisations, and their perceptions of "good practice" in a general European-wide context of deregularisation of some aspects of the labour-capital relation, and a corresponding intensification of work experienced by most of the parents in our study (das Dores Guerreiro et al, 2004). However, the promotion of organisational "good practice" is *not* presented in the Good Practice Report as the key to overcoming the complex problems facing employed parents as they try to negotiate paid work and family. One major reason for this is that "good practices" are not enforceable. Workplace practice is dependent on organisational culture, which in turn is influenced by the business and operational imperatives of private and public organisations within national and international contexts.

That these imperatives are very often at the expense of socially sustainable working practices – since they focus on productivity and profitability, considered crucial in a period of intense international competition (Dores Guerreiro et al, 2004; Nilsen and Brannen, 2005) – is demonstrated by the Report. A focus on productivity and profitability tends to be narrow and short-term in the context of rapidly changing market conditions – longer term considerations which take into account wider, societal issues that go beyond the logic of organisational imperatives are likely to be overlooked. The ability of parents in the workforce to

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ensure a healthy family environment – desirable on a variety of levels; individual, family, organisational and societal – is one such issue which is likely to be excluded from organisational agendas.

Appeals to "mutual advantage" which emphasise positive outcomes for both business and employees can, to some extent, play a role in encouraging businesses to be more "socially responsible" and to adopt workplace practices which engender "healthy organisations". Workplace practices to reconcile parenthood and paid work can benefit organisations in term of retention, productivity and commitment, and can be simultaneously beneficial for society in the long-term because of their impact on gender equality, and individual and family well-being. However, whilst some far-sighted organisations may recognise these mutual benefits, many more are unlikely to alter their organisational practices without external regulation.

There is a risk therefore that the promotion of good practice, since it is an individualised solution, is an inadequate response to the challenges facing European organisations and wider societies. Whilst government policy has a major role to play in facilitating the work-family interface, the Good Practice Report illustrates the need for statutory policies designed to reconcile paid work and family life to be accompanied by cultural shifts at the organisational level.

It is also important not to view individualised solutions as a panacea that can offer real choice to employed parents. The choices made by the parents in our study, as well as the desired solutions they expressed for their specific situations, are considerably constrained by their socio-economic status within different national welfare state frameworks. Choice is often used as a rhetorical device to encourage the acceptance of procedures that are in practice double-edged. In the UK public sector organisation, the choice to work more flexibly was an important factor in gaining employees' acceptance of the outsourcing of an elderly persons' home. However, whilst this may have seemed attractive at the time, particularly for those with young children, employees lost out in terms of a re-negotiated and less favourable pension scheme.

Finally, good practices are context-specific. The context within which parents negotiate the reconciliation of paid work and family is multivarious: national context, socio-economic status, access to various resources and support networks, position within the organisation. All these factors play a role in how workplace practices are experienced and how relevant "family-friendly" practices are. Gender, and cultural attitudes to gendered parenting roles within different European countries, greatly influence perceptions of good practice and the sense of entitlement to different types of practices related to paid work and family.

A major focus of the Good Practice Report, therefore, is on principles of good practice, rather than good practice *per se*. Drawing on our organisational case study and interview data, the Report highlights some broad principles that set the framework within which employees and their representatives can negotiate in their workplace organisations:

- Implementation of statutory entitlements – with attention to culture and practice change

- Management support

- Trust and mutual understanding

- Management consistency

- Colleague support

- Realistic workloads

- Collaborative agreements and communication policy

- Gender equity

These principles may appear to be obvious, however our data illustrates that there are many shortcomings in European organisations with regards to facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life.

Whilst stressing the limitations of the concept of "good practice", we have been able to pinpoint some key workplace practices which parents in our study point to as helpful:

- Reduced contracted hours

- Compressed hours

- Flexible working with autonomy

- Working from home

- Arrangements for dealing with family emergencies

However, it is important to recognise that these practices work in specific contexts and are therefore not a blueprint for enhancing paid-work and family reconciliation.

Overworked and stressed parents are bad for families, society and organisations

"Sometimes I'm so tired that I don't have much patience for my children. In the tough periods we work long hours and we even work Saturdays. It is so absorbent that we sometimes can't think about anything except work matters."

Portuguese father (manager), private sector

Happy parents can be good for workplaces

"If you take the employers point of view, if you only hire people without children, because they are more effective, you'll miss a lot of the workforce. So the employers should give flexible arrangements. Because it has a lot to do with well-being, if you like being at work you'll do a better job. If you feel guilty because you're not at the nursery, I think that can make you work less effectively."

Norwegian mother, private sector

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3.8   Well-being
(Work package 7)

One of the primary and central aims of the project was to explore the notion of well-being, both individual and at an organisational level, and to relate this to the transition to parenthood, to the experience of organisational change, and to the management of work-family boundaries. The well-being workpackage was carried out throughout the project, with specific well-being components in all the major research work packages. Analysis of individual and organisational well-being was made in separate chapters of the literature review, the organisational case studies, and the interview study. This was drawn together in the final Report on Well-Being (Çernigoj Sadar et al, 2005).

In the well-being workpackage we explored the notion of well-being in relation to the transition to working parenthood for new mothers and fathers employed in private and public sector organisations within seven European states: Bulgaria, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK. The different social policy, historical, ideological and economic contexts in these countries constitute a range of different situations in which working parents combine employment and family life. (See table 1, Section 3.1, Çernigoj Sadar et al, 2005)

The state of the art literature review for this project (See Section 3.2, ibid) demonstrates that current research on well-being is approached from very different perspectives, through a host of different concepts, sometimes overlapping and sometimes quite distinct. The focus varies from research on living conditions, poverty and social exclusion/inclusion to studies on stress, quality of life, and a variety of feelings or emotions, such as happiness, joy and flow. The term well-being is often used interchangeably with the term quality of life.

The concept of well-being is used increasingly frequently in some countries (especially the UK and other English speaking countries). It is emerging in research and national debates in the Netherlands and Sweden, but is rarely or never used in other countries (Bulgaria, Slovenia or France). The term is difficult to translate in a simple way in Norway.

Well-being in relation to work, or work-family issues, is usually conceptualised at an individual level. Much less attention has been paid to the notion of well-being at more collective levels, such as the level of the organisation. This project aimed to extend the notion of well-being, and especially positive well-being, to organisational contexts, focusing on collective interpretations of well-being.

The development of a framework for studying the concept of well-being, both individual and collective, in diverse contexts, is thus particularly challenging.

A Framework for exploring well being of parents of young children and organisational well being, in the context of changing workplaces

Conceptual foundations

In conceptualising well-being in this project several dominant approaches were considered, drawing on the literature and research traditions in several countries and disciplines. The approaches which most explicitly informed the project's conceptualisation of well-being, at the individual/group and organisational levels, include:

at the individual/group level:

> ➢ Positive Psychology, including sources of positive well-being, in addition to causes of stress.

> ➢ Scandinavian sociology, including Allardt's model of Having, Loving, Being.

at the organisational level:

> ➢ Ethics of care, including co-operative relationships, shared responsibilities and obligations.

> ➢ Organisational culture, including support, mutual trust, group morale, and shared values.

> ➢ Concepts of healthy organisations and organisational well-being, including individual well-being within organisations and socially sustainable work.

Overall approach

In the project, well-being in the transition to parenthood is explored in the context of:

- national social and economic policy

- organisational change at the workplace level

- individual and family resources and supports

This framework for the study permits the exploration of inter-relationships between the different levels of context on well-being.

The study also explores multiple, and sometimes conflicting, perspectives on well-being at the organisational and family levels; including those of:

- employers/managers

- employees/parents

- parents/spouses

Well-being is explored first in relation to organisational context and change and then developments in individual well-being during the transition to parenthood are explored within a socio-historical and biographical framework.

Multiple methods

In order to examine the impact of organisational context and change on well-being eleven organisational case studies were developed in public and private sector organisations in seven countries. The specific, multiple methods employed to explore well-being in the case studies included: questionnaires, document analysis and manager interviews (to explore organisational context), and focus groups with parents. Biographical interviews were carried out at a later stage with selected focus groups participants, and where possible their partners, to locate the well-being of employed parents of young children within a life course perspective within the diverse contexts.

Key Findings and Conclusions

Questionnaire results: some preliminary findings

The results of the **questionnaire** which assessed well-being in work, family, and life in general indicate that the **most significant sources of individual well-being are in family life** for the respondents at this phase in the life course in all the countries studied in this project. Being a mother or a father contributed most

to the positive experiences of well-being. However, this can be undermined by material circumstances.

Work is also an important source of well-being, and is particularly so in the Scandinavian countries, which might relate to supportive social policy and its implementation in workplaces. Parents report feeling least positive about their experiences of work in Bulgaria (where public policy is supportive for parents, but is not always implemented at workplace level or is undermined by job insecurity) and also in the Netherlands, where the family appears to be a much stronger source of well-being.

There was greater variation between the countries regarding general well-being compared to well-being at work and family well-being. This appears to relate partly to economic and material conditions.

The qualitative stages of the research helped to flesh out and understand some of the questionnaire findings and provide a more in-depth, nuanced insight in the experiences of working parents in different national and workplace contexts.

The Organisational case studies: issues in conceptualising organisational well-being

The study showed that it is important to conceptualise organisational well-being in context specific ways. What makes a "healthy" organisation in one sector or one country may be very different in another context. The particular form of organisational change taking place and the ways in which this is managed, influences **needs** and **expectations** and hence **feelings about the organisation**. However, there is a question of whose perspective to take on needs as the perspectives of managers and subordinates often diverge. Participants' evaluations of the organisation in meeting their needs are influenced by their values, subjective and cultural expectations, and sense of entitlement to organisational support. Expectations and evaluations of well-being in an organisation are also affected by processes of social comparisons. Parents compare their situations with social referents within and beyond their organisation. Different employees have different needs. In particular, parents often need very different organisational supports than non-parents. Needs can also change over time.

The conceptualisation of organisational well-being remains problematic, not least because of the difficulties in disentangling the notion of organisational as distinct from, and at times opposed to, individual well-being, as well as distinct from national, social, political and economic context. There are also issues about defining organisational well-being since well-being tends to be associated with departments or units more than the "organisation". It may be more useful to conceptualise well-being in organisations, which permits multiple perspectives at different organisational levels.

Common factors contributing to well-being in organisations

Notwithstanding these critiques, it is possible to identify some common factors described by parents in the study as contributing to well-being in organisations (as opposed to the more problematic concept of organisational well-being) in both private and public sectors. These include: permanent or relatively secure work contracts and flexible working time and leave policies that are well implemented and respected. In describing organisational cultures various discourses emerged. However the common base is that management support and understanding and colleague support and solidarity are considered crucial for well-being. Good salaries and challenging work are mainly mentioned as important factors

influencing well-being in the private sector. In the public sector the prevailing factors are trust, autonomy, cooperativeness and the absence of after hours work. Caring organisations tend to be conceptualised differently in the public and private sectors. The ethic of care is more likely to be regarded as conflicting with the ethic of business in the private sector, although this is also emerging in the public sector with modernisation.

Barriers to well-being in organisations

In general more factors limiting well-being are mentioned in private sector compared to public sector organisations. Most often mentioned are: increase of temporary work contracts, organisational climate that prioritises efficiency, competitiveness and task orientation over people, and poor or inefficient communications. However, those in private sector employment are usually better paid than their public sector counterparts, which can positively affect aspects of well-being in terms of housing choices, childcare and transport options.

There are some common barriers to positive well-being mentioned in both sectors. These are: the changing nature of work in terms of intensification, overload and changing work demands, growing actual and/or expected job insecurity, inflexible working practices and managerial discretion/insensitivity, all of which undermine the social sustainability of work. Even if an ethic of care, gender equity or a dual agenda rhetoric of effectiveness though supporting employees is incorporated into organisational practice, many problems still remain. Pervasive current organisational trends, such as the intensification of work, perpetuate a male model of work, and undermine the equitable reconciliation of paid work and parenting.

Well-being, time and the life-course

A biographical interview guide was developed for exploring well-being in relation to various dimensions of parents' lives, taking a temporal aspect of narrative into account. The interviews demonstrated that well-being is not a static state, but a multi-faceted process situated in time and dependent upon the different layers of context in which life is embedded. The biographical interviews demonstrate the importance of exploring well-being across everyday and life-course time and within many layers of context. Context influences perceptions, which influences expectations, which in turn influence judgement/appraisal and feelings of well-being that can fluctuate even over a typical day. It is also clear from the interviews that positive and negative well-being are not mutually exclusive. The interviews illustrate ways in which work-family boundary strategies and options for young parents are related to the different layers of context within which they live their lives and that well-being for new parents remains a gendered experience, albeit operating in complex and diverse ways across contexts.

In addition, both context and life-course phase are significant in relation to perspectives of having, loving and being as aspects of well being. For example, many mothers are happy to have and love and leave personal 'being' until a later life phase, or achieve 'being' through loving (parenthood) or through having meaningful but not necessarily well remunerated work. However, economic context matters although parents in less affluent contexts find different ways of coping, have lower expectations and do not necessarily have a poor sense of well being. Other values also matter. For example, some mothers were prepared to spend more time in paid work than they considered ideal from a family perspective, in order to provide more material benefits for their children.

Well-being and work-family relations

Work-family relations were explored in relation to opportunities for flexibility in managing work-family boundaries provided by organisations, and later in relation to the individual and household strategies parents use to combine work and family life. Part-time work and flexible working schedules/hours options were most often offered in Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands and partly also in the UK. These options are quite new in Portugal, Slovenia and Bulgaria. In particular, options for part-time work were more often constrained by parents' financial situation and rigid management in the latter countries, compared to organisations in Scandinavia and Netherlands. However, the impact of opportunities for part-time or flexible work can be double edged. They can contribute to positive well-being in the short term, helping parents, to manage work-family boundaries at the individual and household level. However part-time work tends to limit career opportunities in all the countries studied. Moreover, part-time work in the context of efficiency drives result in colleagues having to take on extra work. This can result in lowered morale and/or feelings of guilt among part-time workers. Flexible working can increase the permeability of work-family boundaries, but in the context of intensified workloads can result in work intruding on family time and lead to overwork. The impact of policies on parents' experiences of well being are therefore complex.

In the biographical interviews strategies were discussed for managing the following boundaries:

a)   emotional, i.e., cognitive and emotional;

b)   spatial and

c)   temporal.

In coping with transitions from work to family and vice versa parents use various individual strategies taking into account public policy and organisational options. The setting of boundaries is the process of learning influenced by the stage of life cycle, gender and life priorities – needs change at different times in life and with new family responsibilities. The work-family strategies that parents described varied from complete segregation to integration. High status parents were more likely than those of lower status to have permeable boundaries, particularly from work to home, prior to the transition to parenthood. However, after becoming parents flexibility or permeability of boundaries often became problematic particularly when work intruded into private lives, as mentioned by some participants in Norway and high status mothers in Bulgaria, Slovenia and UK who were bringing work and work worries home. The permeability of work-family boundaries is more problematic for mothers than for fathers in our study, as, generally, the mothers not only carried out only more of the informal family work but were also, typically but not always, more emotionally engaged. In this study, fathers were more likely to separate the world of paid work and family life, but those who were very involved in childcare reported similar issues to mothers. Neither integration nor segregation work-family strategies were found to automatically lead to greater or lower levels of reported well-being in a simple way. More important for well-being appeared to be whether a parent has a choice and some control over temporal and spatial flexibility. Being able to successfully achieve the preferred strategy tended to be associated with more positive well being.

Well-being and policy-making

Policies addressing diverse objectives, for example, gender equality and the reconciliation of employment and family life, health, fertility issues and

citizenship, as well as socially sustainable work and corporate social responsibility, ultimately address well-being, implicitly or explicitly. Could a more explicit focus on well-being in policy-making contribute to these objectives and if so, how? In this respect this study raises as many questions as it answers. We have argued that well-being is complex, multi-faceted, fluctuating over time and influenced by the many layers of context in which individual's lives are embedded. There can therefore be no simple answers to questions about how policy can enhance well being for working parents. There are no quick fixes. However, there are a number of issues arising from this study that are relevant for policy makers to consider.

1. At the most basic level of being able to work and care, or "have " and "love" in Allardt's model, some policies and supports are crucial for the well-being of most working parents, for example some form of childcare. Our study points to the importance of identifying the most vulnerable parents, who are most likely to need support in achieving positive well-being. Policies that would help such parents include not only childcare but also, for example, affordable, good quality housing in big cities, especially for key workers in social care and health services. The availability of high quality, affordable childcare, together with fully paid parental leave for similar amounts of time across Europe, and the right of parents to be supported when their children are ill, are crucial, although such policies are ineffective if they are not fully accepted by management and integrated into workplace practices. Gaps between policy (national and/or workplace) and practice were evident in all the case study organisations. Parents' experiences of well-being in organisations depends on fundamental requirements in terms of not just policies, but also culture and practice and especially the day to day support of line managers.

2. Beyond meeting basic needs, a focus on multiple layers of context as well as dimensions of time point to the need for a multi-layered approach to policy-making to enhance well-being. Different layers of context are important for enhancing parents' well-being. For example, we have seen that changes in legislation alone are of limited value for enhancing well-being of new parents without shifts in organisational, family and community values and practices. Policy making to address well-being would therefore need to be integrated and collaborative at many levels. For example, different areas of public policy such as educational, health, work and employment, and fiscal policies need to be integrated and to be supported on different societal levels.

3. A frequently recurring theme across the countries is the ways in which gender shapes experiences of parenthood and well being, albeit in complex ways and makes motherhood different from fatherhood both in everyday family life and in workplaces. The transition to parenthood appears to be a critical "tipping point" on the road to gender equality and therefore a crucial focus for policy-making at different levels to address the well-being of parents. However, while the transition to parenthood affects both mothers and fathers, the different experiences and starting points of mothers and fathers, which also vary across national contexts, still needs to be acknowledged.

4. There are significant questions to be considered about whose well-being is to be addressed, at what point of time and in what context. A life course approach involves focusing on the potential long-term as well as short-term impact of policies and practices on well-being in given contexts. For example, there is a dilemma that policies that meet parents' currently articulated needs – for example part-time work for mothers, can enhance mothers well-being in the short term but also reproduce gender inequalities and potentially undermine well-being in the long term, unless change occurs in workplace values and practices

such as the gendered construction of organisational commitment in terms of full-time work. This again points to the need for interrelated changes at many levels.

5. Policies that aim to bring about fundamental social changes towards what is considered to be a common good, may also affect well-being negatively for some people in the short-term, albeit aiming for long-term positive consequences. For example, our study demonstrates that policies that address gender issues, such as the father's quota in parental leave in Norway and Sweden, may create short term tensions in some families, but such couple tensions may be necessary for progress to occur and in the interest of long-term well being in families and societies. Similarly this study shows that rather low expectations of organisational support for managing work and family life may be more easily met in less affluent societies, especially where gender equality ideology is not yet widely established. On the other hand, the resistance to organisational change to enhance parents' well-being in less affluent societies could be greater. Low expectations may more easily generate well-being, in contrast to the higher expectations of support among parents living in societies with higher standards of gender equality and greater affluence. But again, raising expectations and unsettling people may be necessary for change, with the potential to contribute to enhanced well-being – in terms of longer terms opportunities for positive experiences in work and family, and for having, loving and being.

6. The dynamics of change have to take into account the contextual and historical context. The experience of drastic change in the accession countries in this study (Bulgaria and Slovenia) demonstrated that a too-fast rate of change, even when this is intended to be positive social change, can create resistance and seriously delay the positive effects.

Overall this project indicates that rapidly changing conditions in European workplaces in the global market require the ongoing evaluation of the impact of a range of policies and practices on the well-being of individual parents and their employing organisations, taking both short term and long term perspectives, and taking into account of the roles of the most relevant actors: state, employers, trade unions and workers.

3.9 Reflections on working as a cross-national team

In this chapter we explore and reflect on issues in working as a cross national team, including what we have learnt, what worked well, and what we might do differently if starting again or in future projects.

3.9.1 The Nature of the Team

3.9.1.1 Diversity and size of the team

The Transitions team was large (around 30 people at some of the full meetings and on the email distribution list). It was also diverse. Members come from ten countries and a range of disciplines and research fields and of course are native speakers of different languages. In the team that includes both partners and contracted researchers there is also a great diversity of age, experience and occupational status. Not only are members experts on their own national contexts but they also bring different perspectives, expectations and approaches; as sociologists, psychologists and demographers. They have diverse expertise in the study of organisations, families and social policy, different types of methodological expertise, and approach our topic through different generational and life course lenses, all of which enriched the research process.

We benefited in many ways from this diversity. The co-ordination of different work packages by different national partners, who then organised and led work package related sessions during the project meetings, exposed the group to different ways of working, which was productive. Sharing responsibilities and involving all the teams in this way also helped to engage all the team.

We also benefited from diverse and challenging perspectives. Working in a large, diverse team reflects the nature of EU research designs, with the advantage that it harnessed different perspectives and skills, encouraged challenges to taken for granted assumptions about research approaches and findings and enhanced creativity. While size and diversity do not lend themselves to easily achieved consensus, lively, critical discussions albeit sometimes heated can be useful and constructive. Dissent can have positive spin offs. However, diversity, reflected in different styles of communication and of argumentation as well as different research traditions, theoretical perspectives and interests also presents major challenges within the framework of a tight timetable and clearly defined research goals and deliverables.

Although we benefited from much diversity, it is also important to note some limits to the diversity in the group. There was a gender imbalance - many more women than men, but this is not unusual in research that includes a focus on family life. Although team members were at different life course phases, the dominant ethos of the group was white, heterosexual, predominantly female and middle class. This may be a significant limitation when studying the full range of family lives. Moreover, despite the multi disciplinary nature of the team, other perspectives may have been useful, particularly that of an economist. Two of the teams had non-national researchers on the team, which was felt to be a positive advantage in analysis of the national data.

3.9.1.2 History of relationships within the team

Most of the partners had previously had substantial experience of working in cross national teams although in most cases these were smaller. Five partners, including the project coordinator, together with the project manager had worked together on a previous EU funded project. Most national partners had worked with at least one other partner in some capacity. This enabled us to build on

relationships and understandings and to learn from earlier experiences: in particular about how to work together, what to expect to achieve inside and outside meetings, how best to structure meetings to enable maximum interaction and shared learning, and how to share out roles and responsibilities. On the other hand, the fact that a core group had a prior existence meant that new members had to be incorporated and made to feel part of the group and not marginalised, something that was not always easily achieved. The perception of a "core group" led to differential power relations that were confounded by structural differences of seniority, and in some cases English language fluency, which also had to be addressed carefully.

There were occasional problems meeting the team's stated commitment to work in non-hierarchical ways, and especially to encourage the careers of the younger or less established researchers, for example in relation to authoring. In practice, it was sometimes hard to reconcile egalitarian ideals with actual working habits patterns, especially with the pressures of working in small intense teams and when working within institutions with clearly defined power differentials.

Such challenges were met by constant awareness of the issues, but sometimes created dilemmas. For example the need to share the chairing of meetings and to include team building activities could conflict with the need to work efficiently to meet the demanding timetable and specific goals of the project. In any future projects we would seek to build in more time for teambuilding, articulating and discussing sources of difference, framing diversity explicitly as a strength of cross-national research.

3.9.1.3 Experiences of the research group mirroring aspects of the research topic and findings

Experiences of members of the group mirrored aspects of the research topic and findings in a number of ways. Several of the younger researchers were already parents of young children and some experienced the transition to parenthood (albeit not as first time parents) within the duration of the project. The different entitlements to and use of parental leaves by team members in different countries illustrated the parameters within which mothers and fathers can negotiate work-family boundaries in different contexts. In some cases this generated surprise or concern among other team members. For example a partner from a country with more generous parental leave arrangements expressed concern that a mother in another country returned to the project "so soon" after having a baby, while the mother/team member herself was happy with the arrangements. This illustrates the impact of different expectations, also evident in our data. When one team member took parental leave this also provided the national partner (her line manager) with further insights into the issues faced by managers in the transition to parenthood – for example, in this case, the difficulty of negotiating with the employer to provide a temporary replacement. Some of the national partners also experienced the transition to grandparenthood during the project, which provided yet a different perspective on and insights into the experiences and dilemmas of new mothers and fathers negotiating work-family boundaries.

All the team members experienced intense workloads, (discussed in more detail below) and most of the younger researchers also experienced job insecurity towards the end of the project, mirroring our findings about the experiences of new parents in diverse workplace and national contexts. This highlights for us just how endemic issues of work intensification and uncertainty are, in academia as elsewhere.

All these issues from our personal and professional lives were discussed among member of the team, although due to time constraints this was largely outside of formal meetings and interaction. However, our experiences will inevitably have impacted upon or interpretation of our data, and in some cases our fieldwork (for example a pregnant researcher conducting a focus group with mothers-to-be inevitably established a particular rapport). In retrospect it would have been useful to build in time for more formal refection on these processes and explicit discussion in relation to our findings.

3.9.2 Process and Ways of Working

3.9.2.1 Working with diversity

A *sine qua none* for working in cross-national teams is the need to be sensitive to cultures, norms and expectations – one's own as well as those of others. For example, some teams were more comfortable with group work or with a non directive leadership style while others were less so. Adjustments and compromises have to be made when developing ways of working in cross national teams. However it is not always possible to anticipate the necessary adjustments when planning a research project and the timetable of the project may not allow the necessary changes.

Where there are acknowledged and relevant cultural differences, which might influence interpretation of data or issues focused upon, (for example the different approaches to difference and diversity in France and other countries) it can be productive to address these, although again there may be time constraints. However, to attempt to explain differences within the team in terms of national differences is to fall into the trap of focussing only upon the 'national' aspects of comparative research. Differences within teams arise for a multitude of reasons relating to individual personalities, interests, expertise and understandings, which may or may not reflect national contexts. Sensitivity to needs, styles and preferences in team dynamics is important.

The understanding of diverse contexts is crucial to EU projects. Explaining aspects of our own national contexts to others helped us to better understand some of the taken for granted aspects of our everyday lives. Some national partners felt that they faced difficult dilemmas about whether to meet deadlines, or to give partners as much information as possible about their national contexts and findings, particularly if English was not their native language. However, all feel that this was a useful experience, enhancing skills in understanding and communicating the familiar to those from other contexts.

In bringing together different traditions and expectations within a comparative research project that included researchers from eight countries, other inequalities existed that surfaced from time to time. For example there were differences in financial resources available to each country team (countries in the project ranged from those at the top of the European index of economic prosperity to those at the bottom), an inevitable consequence of the rules of EU funding. In addition researchers were differentially supported by their own institutions in the different countries. While being open about this was important from the outset, it was only possible in a very limited way to address such inequities, Ways of compensating for such inequities have to be addressed in the project planning stage.

3.9.2.2 Working as a virtual team – the place of email and internet communication in a cross-national team

International project meetings were held twice a year - six in total for the life of the three year project. These rotated around the countries, hosted by different national partners, which was very useful in enabling the team to experience aspects of the different national contexts. Team members were also able to organise additional meetings during academic conferences, which were crucial for sustaining ongoing discussions. Face to face contact was nevertheless limited and the role of email and telephone communication was clearly vital to the project.

An email distribution list was set up and this was used for group communication, but personal emails between team members were also essential. Team members who were not always confident of airing their views in a large group (due to English language fluency or status) often made contributed their opinions by email. Also, a process of reflection after the tightly packed team meetings, often informally conducted via phone and email led to a reconsideration of some of the decisions and modifications to plans and the associated documentation.   A discussion forum was also set up at the beginning of the project, in the hope of facilitating group communication. However, there were difficulties of access and only half the project team logged on. Partly this was due to time pressures, but also in some cases due to lack of expertise and support in internet technologies. Other group members found this additional discussion forum to be unnecessary because they felt that email contact was widely and effectively used, and was sufficient. The discussion forum was in fact abandoned early on and the email distribution list became the primary online discussion medium. There was some variation in the team as to how enthusiastic members were about relying on internet communication for ongoing collaborative work such as co-authoring reports and articles. Some of the team found this a very natural way of collaborating, while others felt that there was no substitute for face-to-face interaction.

3.9.2.3 Sharing expertise

In cross-national teams it is rare to be able to match the expertise of researchers in relation to method, discipline and fields of interest. One of the research approaches used in the project was relatively new to some team members, while others were very experienced in this approach. Clarification of expected outcomes is vital in this context, although there can be tension between the need to structure outputs and to avoid stifling creativity.   Although it was valuable to have the opportunity to learn new skills from experienced researchers, there was a danger that this could polarize the group into those who had more or less "knowledge" or skills at different points in the research process. We addressed this by various means of sharing skills, as discussed in Section 3.5 (Methods), including building practice activities into team meetings.

After the field work was completed, funding was obtained from the ESRC in the UK to carry out training workshops on comparative qualitative methods involving experts, doctoral students and other researchers with less experience with these approaches. These were very useful and those of us who attended realised that as these are relatively new approaches, there is much for us all to learn from each other. In retrospect given that we planned to use innovative methods, new to some team members, but a learning experience for all the team, it would have been helpful both for skill development and for relationships in the group, to begin the project with such a workshop, involving experts other then those in the team.

3.9.2.4 Research capacity building: younger researchers

One session at one meeting was allocated for the young researchers on the project to meet together, without national partners, to discuss what they hoped to get out of the project and how partners could help them to achieve their goals. The project manager encouraged the young researchers to continue these discussions by email. Overall the young researchers reported a very positive experience of working with researchers with more experience. However, they sometimes found large meetings somewhat intimidating and were more at ease contributing in smaller groups activities that were organised at each meeting, or with small teams in cross national visits Young researchers were keen to carry out research visits in different countries and some were able to do this. These visits were important for providing opportunities for researchers to make a more substantial contribution to the project, extending their experiences and building confidence and research skills and capacity. The visits were also much appreciated by the host partners who had further opportunities to learn about the different national contexts and to discuss cross national data and ideas. We would consider building such visits into further research proposals in order to build research capacity and enhance the contribution of the entire team.

Inevitably, researchers employed on the project have short term contracts for the duration of the project and this does pose problems, reflecting some of the issues of job insecurity found in our research. It can make be difficult for those with uncertain future contracts to contribute to meetings, for example when future plans and publications are being discussed. Contract researchers even those who stay to the end of the project have to move on before much of the writing and analysis are complete and before other forms of dissemination take place. Ground rules about authorship have been formulated, including that we believe it is good practice to involve junior researchers where possible, but these do not address the fact that not all those involved will be able to find unpaid time to complete the work.

3.9.2.5 Workloads, timetabling and the intensification of work

The time tabling of different tasks and work packages was very explicit and an advantage in that all members knew what was expected of them and when they had to deliver by. On the other hand there was little latitude allowed for slippages in the timetable. Moreover, as well as the formidable pressures of the project timetable, partners in particular had other work pressures related to their own institutional contexts. There were times when partners were too busy to contribute fully to every stage of the project. This was caused by the tenured academic partners not being permitted to buy out time from their institutions to work on the project, but being expected to, and wishing to, make a very substantial contribution to the project on top of their already heavy workloads. Inevitably this contributed to intensified workloads for contract researchers. This reflects the trend towards the intensification of work found in the study and is an important factor affecting the experience of working as a cross national team.

The large amount of email communication, while helping the group to keep in touch, as discussed above, also added additional pressure, contributing to the intensification of the teams' workloads. The need to read material from all the national teams further contributed to overload, while it is perhaps a symptom of overwork that not all national teams managed to circulate all their work, making cross national comparison more difficult. As a solution to the latter problem a CD of all the Transitions national and national reports and material is being developed and circulated to all team members.

The intensity of demands of the project and especially the number of national and international reports to be written made it difficult to find time for substantial cross national analysis, much of which will take place after the completion of the project- when most team members have moved on to new jobs or projects. This is a considerable loss. It takes time to digest and reflect on the findings and their cross national significance and implications. We feel that a lesson for future projects would be to be less ambitious in terms of multiple deliverables throughout the project and to schedule in a number of analysis workshops and or more visits and exchanges between national partners and researchers, to facilitate the cross national analysis.

3.9.2.6 Invisible work

A great deal of work was carried out behind the scenes of the formal research process. Much invisible work was at the interpersonal level, undertaken to encourage group cohesion. Also crucial was the behind the scenes work done to ensure the quality of the research outcomes. This included editing the writing of on native English speakers. While there was no expectation that all non native English speakers should achieve a high standard of written English, the extra workload imposed on native speakers needs to be acknowledged and allowed for. This should be addressed in future projects and written into the timetable of producing consolidated reports.

Other invisible work includes the need to work closely across national teams in consolidating national reports. We have learnt about the need for sensitivity in writing about the different countries in the project reports, to avoid presenting findings in a way that could be construed as oversimplified or even patronising.

With so many reports and deliverables some national partners felt that their national reports remained insufficiently visible, with the focus on consolidated reports. National report writing also involved considerable invisible work in terms of translating and editing. Similarly, some of the workers on the project felt that their work on the national reports remained invisible.

Many funded projects implicitly rely on the assumption that all team members have time after project to write up academic and other dissemination, which assumes invisible work in that it either assumes that tenured academics have time built into their schedules for this, and/or assumes that non-tenured academics do not need publications. Both assumptions were not true for all the cross-national team, and this was particularly noteworthy in a large cross-national team where members had access to very unequal resources in the different national contexts and university systems. This is particularly pertinent to a study of work-life and well-being, as the project work, including the proposal writing and the final dissemination, is often achieved by invisible and unpaid work, contributing to and perpetuating the work overload and long hours experienced by academics in many of the countries participating in this project.

The loss of contract research staff at the end of the project, before most of the books and academic articles are written is a loss for both the partners and the researchers themselves as they need publications to develop their academic careers. It would have been useful to build in a dissemination period after the final field work and analysis. In this project there was a great deal of field work and the cross national analysis will all take place after the completion of the project. The analysis of and reflection on complex cross national research takes considerable time and the process would benefit from the involvement of all key workers. The coordinating institution for this project, Manchester Metropolitan University has provided an example of good practice by finding the project manager between externally funded projects.

There is a widespread view among the team that future projects would benefit from a recognition of the amount of invisible work involved in good cross national research. This would involve a greater focus on inputs and process and more realistic outputs in terms of deliverables. Deliverables in the form of publishable papers and/or books, rather than reports that are later restructured to be disseminated in these outlets might be more efficient.

3.9.3 Some Conclusions and Recommendations

Working in a large, cross national, multidisciplinary team has been both challenging and hugely rewarding and we believe that this is reflected in the quality and quantity of the deliverables. It has also been a valuable learning experience on the basis of which we make the following recommendations:

- It takes time, and what is currently invisible work, to build successful cross national and interdisciplinary teams. For optimum research outcomes this should be acknowledged and built into the planning stages of projects.

- An explicit focus on group dynamics would be useful to surface and discuss sources of difference in the working group, framing them explicitly as positive strengths.

- It is important to encourage and provide many opportunities for interaction among diverse team members.

- If methods are to be employed which are new to some team members it would be useful to begin the project with a methods training workshop, involving experts other then those in the team.

- Cross national research visits for both national partners and younger researchers contribute to team cohesiveness and cross national understanding as well as giving young researchers a voice and developing research capacity. It would be useful to build these into funding proposals.

- Many of the issues explored in our research are also reflected in the personal and professional experiences of team members. Formal reflection on these processes and explicit discussion in relation to our findings can be relevant and useful in the research process.

- In particular, issues of work intensification and time pressures, and job insecurity, emerging in our data, were salient factors in the experience of working as a cross-national research team, in a context of increasing time and performance pressures in universities in many of the countries. This should inform project planning.

- Projects would benefit from recognition of the amount of invisible work involved in good cross-national research. This would involve a greater focus on inputs and processes and more realistic outputs in terms of deliverables.

- Deliverables in the form of publishable papers and/or books, rather than reports that are later restructured to be disseminated in these outlets would be more efficient.

4. Conclusions and policy implications

4.1 Major findings of the Transitions project

The *Transitions* project explored work-family strategies and subjective well-being of young adults during the transition to parenthood (including the years of combining paid work and parenting of young children) in the context of change and transitions at workplace and societal levels, in diverse national policy contexts in two Nordic countries (Norway and Sweden), two accessions states (Bulgaria and Slovenia), one Southern European (Portugal) and two Northern European states (UK, Netherlands, France). The research was based on case studies of public and private sector organisations in seven countries (all the above, with the exception of France) investigating the key characteristics and main changes which shape the experiences of young adults who become parents in the context of globalisation, technological developments, increased economic competition in the private sector and the demand for greater efficiency in the public sector in many countries. Most large cross-national studies on family and employment are based on large scale quantitative data sets (den Dulk et al, 2003; Wallace et al, 2003). This project built on the knowledge gained from these studies by using innovative qualitative methods to focus on the expectations, strategies and experiences of parents, both within organisational contexts, and in their home contexts.

In this section, we summarise the main findings of the project and consider some of their implications. The findings are divided into the three major, interrelated research themes of the project, beginning with organisational change and workplace practice, moving on to explore the ways in which young adults negotiate parenthood and work-family boundaries in these changing contexts, and then consider aspects of well-being in diverse contexts. Implications for policy and practice are then discussed, and some recommendations are made for social partners – governments, employers and trade unions – to contribute to the EU agenda of helping people to seize the opportunities and overcome the difficulties created by international competition, technological advances and changing population patterns while supporting family life and equality of opportunities and protecting the most vulnerable in society. The section concludes with a discussion of some implications for further research.

While the findings from this study cover a wide range of issues, it highlights in particular the potential contradictions between globalisation and work intensification on the one hand, and the need for time to care for children (and others), in gender equitable ways, on the other hand. One of the overarching conclusions is that experiences and well-being in the transition to parenthood, and especially for parents of young children negotiating boundaries between paid work and family, depend on many, interrelated, layers of context. This calls for collaborative, joined up policy-making to take account of the challenges presented by transitions taking place in families, workplaces and wider societal contexts.

4.1.1. Differences in national context

The conditions under which the transition to parenthood takes place vary. The different welfare state, historical, ideological and economic contexts reflect different dominant models for combining parenthood and employment: an egalitarian model in Norway and Sweden, forms of modified male breadwinner models in the UK and the Netherlands, and different forms of dual earner models in France, Portugal, Slovenia and Bulgaria (Fagnani et al, 2004). Formal and informal resources including education, employment, family supports and

workplace conditions also vary. Differences between national contexts play an important role in explaining differences in attitudes and practices in the transitions to parenthood, although there has been some convergence in recent years. This makes cross-national comparison interesting but also inherently difficult, especially when comparing, for example, countries as diverse as Norway and Bulgaria.

National discourses and debates relating to working and parenting, among policy-makers, employers and the media, are another crucial and dynamic, but often neglected, aspect of context. These tended to shift over the course of the project (Smithson et al, 2005; Lewis and Smithson, in press). Some of these debates reflect the different national contexts, for example, the relative focus on gender equity or the business case when discussing employer practices to support parents. However, some debates and concerns are emerging more widely, for example on demographic issues (low birth rates or age at first birth) (MOCHO, 2002) levels of stress and sickness, and "work-life balance" or "time squeeze" issues. These generic debates appear to be related to wider European and global trends (see also Wallace et al, 2003; Hantrais et al, 2004), and particularly the impact of changing workplace conditions and practices.

4.1.2 Organisational change and workplace practice

Parenting decisions and work-family strategies are developed not only in the context of macro social policies and emerging debates but also in the context of the rapid pace of change in contemporary work and workplaces. The different political contexts and, particularly, the reconfiguration of welfare states (Esping-Anderson, 1996) are shaping different organisational contexts. In particular the dramatically rapid changes taking place in Bulgaria and Slovenia, including liberalisation, new pro-market ideologies favouring employers; rising unemployment and changes in the labour code, together with new regulations that derive from the EU, contribute to the feeling of deep transition, with both positive and negative impacts on workplace policies and practices and on workers' lives. However, all the parents in this study were subject to some degree of workplace change and transition. Within the private sector, organisations fall within a continuum in terms of their support for parents within increasingly competitive contexts. At one extreme, in the relatively newly privatised organisations in Bulgaria and Slovenia, the shift has been from a paternalistic to a task and efficiency orientation, with parents relying on the long standing support from the state for reconciling family and employment, but expecting little from employers beyond compliance with regulation. At the other extreme, in the UK, the Netherlands and Norway, with varying levels of state support for parents, workplace efficiency and competitiveness are pursued along with some management recognition of the need to support parents in the increasingly demanding workplace, i.e., more of a success-through-people approach, albeit often inconstantly applied. The public sector organisations are more likely to characterise themselves as caring organisations and generally are more supportive of parents than the private sector, although this varies in extent and nature within and between organisations, and is changing in practice with efficiency drives and new public management. Moreover, policy and practice to support parents, whether at state or workplace levels, are undermined in all the case study organisations by trends such as the intensification of work and, in some cases, poor management support.

The intensification and extension of work and their consequences

Workplace restructuring and reorganisation, including downsizing and other "efficiency" initiatives, that tend to result in an intensification of work (see e.g. Burchell, Ladipo et al. 2002; Fagan and Burchall, 2004; Green, and McIntosh, S., 2001; La Valle, Arthur et al, 2002; White et al, 2003), are commonly experienced both by parents in the private and public sector organisations in all the countries studied (see also Wallace et al, 2003). In the private sector intensification is a by-product of new forms of competition in the global economy, including the transition to a market economy in Slovenia and Bulgaria. An issue for social services workers in many of the case studies is increased pressure of client workload, as a consequence of a low or reduced level of welfare state provision and new public management (Clarke and Newman, 1997; Erik-Lane, 2000; McLaughlin, Osborne and Ferlie, 2002), with increased pressure on social services to be efficient.

The experience of intensification of work in all the case study organisations is a particular challenge for new parents, who must manage work and family in a particularly intense, competitive and pressured context. Experiences of intensification of work contribute to the rise in stress-related illnesses (see e.g. Wichert, 2002) associated with the high levels of sick leave and early or staggered retirement which are on the increase in several of the countries studied, especially Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, the UK and Slovenia) (see e.g. SOU 2002,) and may also be one of many factors contributing to low birth rates. In some of the case study organisations, for example, the Portuguese private sector company, there were many complaints about health problems among parents, but they avoided sick leaves because this was frowned upon – which has long-term implications for levels of well-being.

Intensification of work impacts on the implementation and experience of national and workplace policies to support parents. The national contexts – particularly lengths and payments of leaves, childcare options and opportunities to work part-time or flexibly, as well as economic conditions and levels of unemployment, especially in the new and candidate EU member states – make a difference to the ways in which new parents experience both paid work and parenting. However the impacts of different policies (both national and organisational) are undermined both by current workplace practices associated with work intensification and, in many contexts, especially in the private sector, by new parents' concerns for future job opportunities in rapidly changing job climates.

Some workplace changes and technological developments can be associated with formal or informal flexibility of working hours. However, while flexible working policies and practices can bring opportunities to integrate paid work and family, particularly if this is associated with greater autonomy, in the context of the intensification of work it can also lead to blurred work-family boundaries or long working hours that intrude on family time or energy (Wallace et al, 2003). Flexible ways of working can also generate inequality in workplaces. Employees in direct client contact faced different, less flexible, working conditions than others in many of the case study organisations.

 While a decade ago, managers' attitudes to flexible working often prevented employees from requesting or being allowed to work flexibly (Lewis, 2001; Bond, Hyman et al, 2002; Yeandle, Wigfield et al, 2002), this study demonstrates that parents are now more likely to be prevented from working flexibly by heavy workloads. For example parents are often reluctant to take family related leaves because work is rarely covered fully while staff are away, and often work is passed to overburdened colleagues, or accumulates to be dealt with on the return to work. This trend thus undermines the right to ask for flexible working which is

enshrined in legislation in many of the countries (see e.g. Fagnani and Letablier, 2004).

Despite the problems of the intensification of work for parents in this life course phase, there is some evidence that it can also be a positive force in some contexts; the study highlighted the positive aspects of paid work for many new mothers and fathers who reported their enjoyment of challenging work and contact with colleagues. It can be associated with positive well-being and "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Haworth and Veal, 2003) although this can also intensify conflict and tension in managing work and family boundaries. The potential positive aspects of challenging workloads may suggest that long working hours could be more stressful than pace of work or intensification. Actual working hours are very important for parents of young children because of the need to fit in with childcare schedules and to spend time with children. Often however it is difficult to disentangle working hours and workloads. For example, the excessive long hours reported by many of the Bulgarian participants were due to intense workloads which could not be accomplished in standard hours.

The intensification of work reported by some parents in all the case studies and long hours culture cited in many contexts, can clearly be problematic for working parents, particularly combined with the intensification of parenting, which we discuss below. However, in some contexts, new forms of work can be very satisfying. This presents challenges for social policy-makers and employers to maximise satisfaction and minimise pressure for parents.

Gendered workplace cultures and policy-practice implementation gaps

National public policies need to be backed up by workplace practice. The effectiveness of national policies in supporting employed parents depends on how these are implemented in the workplace, in the context of ongoing organisational change and wider labour market trends. For example, long parental leaves can create practical difficulties when the pace of workplace change is very rapid, and can be perceived as risky in the context of subjective job insecurity. Persisting gendered organisational values and assumptions, such as the widespread assumption that ideal workers do not work part-time, especially in higher status jobs (Lewis, 1997; 2001; Rapoport et al, 2001), contribute to an implementation gap between policy (national and workplace) and practice in all the case study organisations, albeit to varying extents. This, implementation gap, found in other studies in a wide range of countries (e.g. Gambles et al, 2006) is exacerbated by the intensification of work, which can, for example, make it difficult for parents and their managers to deal with family related leaves.

The study highlights the continuing gendered expectation, in all the countries (to varying degrees) that policies for combining paid work and family care are primarily, or only, for women. This assumption is often made by managers at all levels, as well as by many of the parents themselves. This phenomenon mirrors and interacts with the persistence of gender asymmetry in family involvement and the division of domestic labour.

The crucial role of line managers and increasingly colleagues, in supporting parents or as barriers to flexible working practices

Line manager support or lack of it is of crucial significance for working parents' options for negotiating both their paid work and their family responsibilities. While this is true in all the case studies, it is particularly so in the countries with fewer supportive national regulations, or a shorter history of people taking up family supportive initiatives, and in organisations where there are limited resources to

cover absent personnel (for example in sections of the social services organisations in the UK and Bulgaria).

However, interviews with managers in the case study organisations highlight some of the dilemmas that they experience. Changing conditions including heavy workloads and targets for managers can reinforce task rather than people centred management styles in many contexts. Middle and lower level managers in particular have to negotiate intensified targets, changing working practices and parents' expectations of support. There are also wide differences among managers within the same organisations, particularly between "new style" managers who embrace change and those who cling to old ways of working. In some contexts new style managers are more supportive of parents and of flexible working arrangements, while in others, for example in the Bulgarian and Slovenian private sector organisations, parents find new style managers to be less supportive than the more paternalistic older style managers. Management support for flexibility is most effective when it is directed at all employees. Some parents felt that it can be divisive if directed only at employees with children, risking the emergence of "backlash" against employed parents (Young, 1999). This emerged particularly strongly in the UK private sector context.

The emerging role of colleagues as agents of support for or agents of social control of parents is also highlighted. This is especially significant in the context of work intensification and some cases, (for example, the Swedish social services), management strategies of delegating responsibility for managing team members' work and family boundaries to work groups (Bäck-Wicklund and Plantin, forthcoming) With heavy workloads and a decreasing likelihood of official replacement for employees taking leave for family reasons, the support of or disapproval of colleagues is increasingly significant. On the positive side, in some contexts parents display considerable solidarity in the context of the intense demands from both paid work and parenting, helping each other out by covering for each others' absences. However work intensification combined with "high performance" management techniques (White, Hill, McGovern, Mills, and Smeaton, (2003), which can include relatively autonomous teams can also generate feelings of guilt about colleagues who may have to cover for parents who take leave, for example, if a child is ill, and can undermine parents' willingness to make use of their entitlements.

Trade unions were seldom mentioned as being important in this respect, perhaps an indication of the growing individualisation in the organisational and national contexts studied.

Experiences of work in public and private sector workplaces are different, but these distinctions are blurring in contemporary contexts

While many differences remain between working experiences in the public and private sector, some of the distinctions between the two sectors are blurring as the traditionally better (non material) conditions and higher job security in most of the public sector organisations are eroded, and as private organisations (in some countries) become more attuned to flexible working and part-time working practices. For example parents in the Norwegian social services organisation felt that the growing focus on cost efficiency eroded some of the specific experiences of difference between working in the public and private sector.

The exclusion of agency or contracted workers

There is a danger that parents who are agency or outsourced workers can be excluded from debates and supports for employed parents. It was difficult or

impossible to interview agency or outsourced workers in all of our case studies because they were not direct employees and therefore not within the jurisdiction of our main organisational contacts/gatekeepers. Although it is possible that parents in this position maybe be supported via agencies, in our study, as in the organisations, the needs and expectations of these key workers are marginalised to the point of invisibility. With the increasing tendency of organisations to outsource work, especially the lower skilled jobs such as cleaning or catering, some of the most vulnerable parents are not defined as employees of these large organisations, so are not eligible for organisational entitlements and benefits.

4.1.3 How young adults negotiate (the transition to) parenthood and work-family boundaries within many layers of context

The salience of gender and class

A frequently recurring theme across the countries is the ways in which gender shapes parenthood and makes motherhood different from fatherhood both in everyday family life and in workplaces. The transition to parenthood appears to be a critical "tipping point" on the road to gender equity. On becoming parents, decisions have to be made at the household level about how to manage work and family demands. Even in countries with a strong ideological commitment to equality of opportunities and gender equity the experiences of motherhood and fatherhood are very gendered, shaped by structural, cultural and practical factors.

Socio-economic status is also important, influencing supports and constraints for combining parenthood and employment. The study confirms that gender and class are still major factors that structure and shape experiences of working and parenting, across the countries as found by many other studies, (see for example Webster, 2001; Perrons, 2004). Social inequality is a very persistent aspect of our model society, and although levels of social inequality differ across the countries studied (Faganani et al, 2004) , inequalities may be exacerbated by the growing gap between core and peripheral workforces. Structural inequalities affect parents' prospects of even taking up policies. It is not simply an issue of taking up "choices". Structural inequalities within national contexts are also mirrored by cross-national differences in levels of affluence and hence unequal structural constraints. Some of the "choices" available in more affluent countries, such as part-time work are simply not on the radar for parents in other contexts.

Decisions about, and timing, of parenthood

Timing of the transition to parenthoods needs to be understood in terms of the different layers of context in which individual lives are embedded. Socio-economic status, education, ethnicity and migration, availability of affordable housing and childcare, are all important factors that shape parents' experiences. The lower the level of education, the earlier in life the transition to parenthood is likely to happen in all the countries, though this is less pronounced in Sweden. For most well-educated interviewees, the transition happened after the completion of education, entry into the labour market and gaining a foothold in the housing market. Housing is a particular issue in Slovenia and Bulgaria, but also, for example, in the UK for young adults living and/or working in regions with high housing costs.

The experience of intensified workloads and demands also appear to impact on decision-making on the timing of parenthood and family size. Two full-time and demanding jobs are often difficult to sustain, especially jobs with inflexible hours

and this is reflected in the lowest birth rates in countries where there are fewest opportunities for part-time work. In contexts where alternatives to two (intensive) full-time jobs are available and affordable, parenting and employment may appear more feasible, through the use of part-time work, although this then tends to reinforce gendered strategies for working and caring when children are very young. Thus there are implications of contemporary working practices for fertility rates and/or gender equity in different European contexts.

Work-family boundaries and strategies

Young adults negotiate parenthood drawing on resources at the individual, household, wider family and community levels, in the context of national social and labour market policies and workplace supports and constraints. Two major types of strategies were explored. One relates to strategies for allocating parenting work and income provision within households. These strategies have been examined in many other projects, mainly in surveys of household patterns (Keuzenkamp & Hooghiemstra, 2000; Kovacheva 2002; Fagnani and Letablier, 2003; Fine-Davis and al, 2004), and in some single country studies focusing more qualitatively on strategy (e.g. Lewis, Kagan and Heaton, 2001; Kugelberg 2000; Sumer, 2002). The other approach relates to strategies for negotiating work-family boundaries, including degrees of segregation and integration of work and family domains (Brannen, Lewis et al, 2001; Reynolds, Callender et al, 2003). Less is known about these strategies for dealing with contemporary, potentially permeable, work-family boundaries, and especially in a cross European context.

The intensification of parenting

The intensification of paid work across Europe was a recurrent theme in the project. There is also an intensification of parenting (Brannen and Moss, 1998), which is an important aspect of some societal contexts that influences strategies for working and caring and the need for permeability of work-family boundaries. Young parents, and prospective parents, expressed high expectations of what a "good" parent should do, which typically involved far more care and parental input, as well as more financial resources, than their own parents had been able to provide. Pressure to conform to "intensified" parenting came both from parents' expectations, but also from wider societies, and, in some countries, from national initiatives. For example, in Sweden there is a strong focus on "the new fatherhood" to motivate fathers to be more involved in the children's everyday life, from infancy to school. There remains a big gap, however, between what men are entitled to from parental insurance and what they actually make use of, partly due to lack of change in some organisations (Haas, Allard and Hwang, 2002). The recent riots in the suburbs in France have generated much policy debate about responsibilities of the parents and the UK government currently has a drive to encourage parents to be more involved with, and responsible for, their children, in terms of closely supervising their behaviour, school attendance and homework. There is little consideration at policy level as to how this is to be achieved at a time when parents work longer hours or more intensively than previously. This points to the importance of "joined up thinking" at national and European policy levels, taking account of employment and workplace trends as well as parenting needs and responsibilities, as we discuss later.

Our study also highlighted the increasing pressure of material expectations in bringing up a child, which can impact on strategies for working and parenting. In Northern European countries, the pressure was typically to be able to provide a high level of material goods for family and children, while in accession countries and Portugal there was more pressure to provide the basics of good housing and living standards (Nilsen and Brannen, 2005), including, in Portugal, access to

education. But in all these cases parents felt the pressures and compared this to the lower material standards expected in their own childhoods.

Individual and household strategies

A commonly preferred strategy for working and parenting after the transition to parenthood is for households to have one full-time and one less than full-time earner, particularly in the Netherlands and the UK, but also in Norway and Sweden, that is, where part-time work (although differing in nature cross-nationally in term of length regulated, protection and associated entitlements), is widely available and levels of affluence permit this strategy. Across Europe most fathers work full-time, so that part-time work, where it exists, is largely perceived as an option for mothers, often with negative implications for women's occupational careers if they do take up part-time working. There is some evidence from our interviews, which echoes conclusions from other studies (Wallace et al; 2003 Lewis, Smithson, Cooper and Dyer, 2001; Guerreiro, Abranches and Pereira, 2003), that part-time employees feel their commitment to work is questioned. Part-time work can therefore be seen simultaneously as a resource for the families but a career risk for women employees. Nevertheless part-time work means different things across different occupations and countries. In the Netherlands a decision for both parents to work four days a week, permitted within parental leave entitlements in the public sector is a potentially egalitarian solution most likely to be available to highly educated parents. In the UK private sector company, part-time work was acceptable for low status mothers but not among managers or supervisors, many of whom accepted demotions in order to be able to reduce working hours. In Portugal, Slovenia and Bulgaria where the option of part-time work is rarely available or affordable, limiting family size is a common strategy for managing income provision and caring, (although clearly this is only one of many factors contributing to the low birth rates).

Although the availability of part-time work or reduced hours work and the feasibility of families living on less than two full-time incomes can perpetuate gendered family strategies, the absence of part-time work opportunities does not necessarily enhance gender equity at work or at home, particularly in Bulgaria and Slovenia, where there are low expectations of gender equity in the family. The problems are not with part-time work per se, but again relate to lack of interrelated changes in other contexts. In particular the workplace model of the ideal (full-time) worker and subsequent undervaluing of part-time workers together with persisting differences in expectation about mothering and fathering and pensions systems based on full-time jobs across the life course, underpin the reluctance of most fathers to work less than full-time and marginalise and disadvantage those, mainly women, who do so during this phase of intensive work and family demands.

Childcare strategies and possibilities

Options and preferences for childcare were very variable across the countries studied (Deven and Moss, 2002; Pfau-Effinger, 2004). Some countries (Bulgaria, Sweden, Slovenia) have a long history of formal childcare provision, while in other countries this is relatively new. Our study highlighted the increasing expectations of not just availability of childcare but also concern about the quality of the childcare, with discussions about the benefits and costs to children being a salient feature of national debates especially in the UK, Sweden, Norway and France. In Portugal where there is less sense of entitlement or lower aspirations for childcare, it is discussed mainly in terms of number of places, prices and schedules.

Affordable childcare can ease the negotiation of work-family strategies. However this study also demonstrates that having good childcare strategies and provision, is not sufficient to support working parents if other conditions are not met. For example, in Bulgaria, there is a long history of formal childcare provision, with which parents in the case study organisations were largely very satisfied, yet in the context of the long working hours and perceived job insecurity, parents were reluctant to have more children, so fertility rates are very low. Other studies have similarly demonstrated that it is not an absence of family policy which explains the postponement of family formation in the Southern and Eastern European countries, but rather perceptions of a low standard of living, perceived problems in getting stable employment, decent housing, and healthcare costs (Hantrais et al, 2004).

Thus while high quality, affordable childcare is a crucial basis for negotiating work-family boundaries, it is not sufficient. Attention is also needed to workplace and wider social practices and provisions that create difficulties for employed parents in many contexts, even when good childcare is available.

Day to day strategies

Parents develop different types of strategies for negotiating work-family boundaries on a daily basis as they move backwards and forwards between their work and family lives (Nippert Eng, 1996; Cambell Clarke, 2001; Reynolds, Callender et al, 2003). Strategies can be conceptualised along a continuum between integration and segmentation, according to the extent of permeability of work-family spatial, temporal and psychological boundaries. There are also differences in the direction of permeability. For example, spillover of family times or concerns into work time may be acceptable to parents but not vice versa.

High status parents were more likely than those of lower status to have permeable boundaries, particularly from work to home, prior to the transition to parenthood. However, after becoming parents, flexibility or permeability of boundaries often became problematic particularly when work intruded into private life. This was especially evident among high status parents in Norway, Bulgaria, Slovenia and the UK who often brought work and work worries home. This was usually more of a problem for mothers than fathers, but those fathers who were very involved in caring for children also found this difficult and wished for more segregated work and family boundaries. What appears to matter to parents, in most contexts, is not just the level of permeability of work-family boundaries, but whether they are able to adopt their preferred strategies, be they largely separating or integrating, and to have some control and autonomy over their work-family boundaries. However, there are country differences in expectations, and those with lower expectations (for example, in Bulgaria) tend to accept less autonomy in this respect (Kovacheva, 2005).

Workplace policies and practices influence the permeability of boundaries. These policies and practices are shaped by national and local regulations, but this study shows that they are also increasingly a matter of daily and informal negotiation with managers in local organisations. Increased flexibility of employees' working time and place, enhancing potential integration of work and family spheres emerged as a major trend of organisational change in all the countries. However, the process by which this is achieved is ambiguous. Often it involves overcoming a great deal of resistance and requires complex negotiations among employers and employees, leading to ad hoc configurations in each organisation. The influence of unions and other collective agents is very different among European countries, but is generally rather low in these case studies organisations, especially for the age group studied and in relation to work-family topics.

Parents are far from passive in this process. They also develop proactive, personal strategies for managing boundaries between their work and family spheres, switching between integration and segregation on their own terms, albeit with greater or lesser difficulty in diverse contexts. They do this, particularly, by making use of information and communications technology (ICTs). For example parents in the UK private sector organisation talked about endeavouring to keep work and family spatially and temporally separate, but used email or mobile phones to communicate with partners or with family members or others caring for their children, during the working day. Their psychological/cognitive boundaries were thus blurred, despite an expressed ideal of more separation than integration. Similarly some, mostly high status parents, in Norway for example, talked about deliberately turning off their company mobile phone or not checking email out of work time, to preserve boundaries. Others used ICTs to blur the boundaries by, for example, checking email at home. Much research has noted that ICT can blur work-family boundaries, (Sullivan and Lewis, 2001; Perrons 2003; Guerreiro, Lourenço and Rodrigues 2000) but this study demonstrates that technology can also be used by parents in proactive ways to support complex strategies. Combining elements of segregation and integration. Nevertheless intensified workloads can make separation very difficult, especially when work cannot be accomplished during the working day, or when, for example, work related training must be undertaken during non-work time.

The role of fathers and continuing gendering of parenthood

Experiences of being an employed mother or an employed father continue to be very different. Although there are some differences in the division of domestic labour across the countries, women continue to do the major share of unpaid work, on average, in all the countries. Further changes in mothers' roles require reciprocal change from fathers, as well as changing organisational expectations (Rapoport et al, 2002). As other recent studies confirm the wider perception of a fathers' role, across Europe, still tends to be that of wage earner rather than earner and carer (Hearn et al, 2004).

This study shows that national policies and provisions interact with the formal and informal workplace policies, practices and cultures and economic conditions to support and constrain gender expectations and transformations in complex ways. For example, national policy has long been based on equal opportunities ideology in Sweden and Norway (Haas, Hwang and Russell, 2000; Hantrais et al, 2004) and also under the former communist regimes in Bulgaria and Slovenia, but the outcomes are very different. In the former Eastern bloc countries women have been disproportionately affected by the transition from a socialist to a market-based economy (Metcalfe and Afanassieva, 2005). They are more vulnerable to unemployment under the new regimes, and more likely to bear the consequences for new arrangements for state childcare (Watson, 1997; Domsch et al, 2003). Moreover, the focus is on equality of opportunities for men and women in terms labour force participation and not gender equity in the home. Women are still widely perceived as responsible for childcare and domestic work. There is little discourse or national debate about the division of labour in the household in Bulgaria or Slovenia (see also Wallace et al, 2003). Meanwhile, in the Netherlands, there is a gap between societal expectations of gender equity and family policy which does not reflect this (Strand and Nordnmark, 2003; Wallace et al, 2003).

Often grandparents or siblings, usually sisters, can step in to help working parents, but although this can help to manage work-family boundaries it tends to absolve men from the need to change and perpetuate gendered responsibilities. Few mothers in Bulgaria, for example, expressed dissatisfaction with the family contributions of their partners and thus there is little incentive for fathers to

change their behaviour. Expectations for managing work-family life appear to be more easily met in less affluent societies especially where gender equity ideas are not yet widely discussed. While Swedish and Norwegian couples demonstrated relatively high levels of conflict in negotiating work-family boundaries, Bulgarian parents, despite working long full-time hours, perceive no conflict as this see this as necessary to survival, (Wallace et al, 2003). Thus, low expectations may more easily generate well-being in contrast to the higher expectations of parents living in societies with higher aspirations of gender equity and greater affluence.

The egalitarian ideology and related policies in Sweden and Norway address gender relations in both families and workplaces and raise expectations of change, but this can at times create intra-family tensions that are not experienced in countries where there are fewer aspirations to gender transformation. Moreover, even when supportive social policies are in place other institutions do not necessarily change at the same pace. Transitional tensions can be experienced and exacerbated by lack of commensurate change at the workplace level. The persistence of a traditional ideal of full-time and uninterrupted work, intensified in the context of global economic trends, can mean that fathers who take advantage of entitlements such as the fathers parental leave quota are undervalued in the workplace and their careers can be limited, just as those of many mothers who work part-time. Debates in Norway about tensions in organisations and career problems for men taking paternity leaves challenge stereotypes of the Scandinavian social democratic model inherent in welfare state typologies and again point to the impact of many layers of context on parents' experiences. Our study did show some fathers taking on major caring roles, such as a lone father taking lower paid work which fitted around childcare (in the UK), but these examples are still the exception, rather than a widely-supported norm.

It is likely that the intra-familial tension or "transitional tension" is a necessary phase of unsettling people for progress to occur towards transformation of the gender order. Policies to support gender equity can help, but are undermined by lack of change at other levels, particularly in the workplace. This again points to the need for social partners to work collaboratively to ensure support for employed parents at multiple levels, discussed in more detail later.

Expectations and experiences of parenting

How do young parents' expectations match up with their expectations before starting a family? In a previous study undertaken by some members of the *Transitions* research team, it was found that young adults' expectations varied between the countries and broadly reflected the practical possibilities they saw in their country. Those in Sweden and Norway expected strong support from state for reconciling paid work and family life, and also expected or hoped for an egalitarian division of labour within the home, while those in the UK and Portugal, with far lower levels of state provision, expected little support from employers or state, and women expected less practical support from future partners (Lewis, Smithson et al, 1999; Brannen, Lewis et al, 2001). This lower sense of entitlement to formal support was, in this earlier study, accompanied by generally higher expectations of support from family (grandparents and siblings) for childcare in the UK and Portugal (Brannen et al, 2002; Lewis and Smithson, 2001).

In the *Transitions* study, some of the expectations in the earlier study have been borne out. New parents in the Nordic countries both expected and received higher levels of support from the state, and generally experienced more egalitarian sharing of parenthood and domestic tasks than elsewhere – strongly supported by leave and policy provisions which explicitly target gender equity and fathers'

involvement in parenting, although there remain persisting structural constraints to gender equity that are difficult to change, particularly from the workplace.

It is notable that the expectation of support from grandparents, especially prevalent in Portugal in the earlier study (Brannen et al, 2002), is weaker in this study of new parents. While grandparents and other family members were drawn on extensively for support in Portugal and the UK, there were many problems with this. Grandparents were increasingly likely to be in the labour market themselves, or ageing and needing care themselves. Young parents were increasingly likely to have moved away from their family of origin and therefore away from possibilities for regular family support. These demographic changes suggest that the reliance on family support for childcare may be increasingly problematic, or unfeasible for growing numbers of parents in the future and underlines the importance of public policies on child care provision.

4.1.4 Well-being in the transition to parenthood

The study sought to identify factors which contribute positively to the well-being of these young adults and the factors which have a negative impact. However, this is far from straightforward, particularly because of the effects of diverse aspects of context on expectations and social comparisons, which, in turn, influence parents' well-being experiences. Well-being is complex, multi-layered, context dependent, fluid, dynamic and cannot be separated from expectations and aspirations.

The qualitative, multi-methods approach to well-being across time as well as national borders used in this study provides a much more fine grained understanding of parents' experiences than the more usual quantitative approaches. Our analysis demonstrates that contentment, or lack of contentment among new parents is complex and multi-faceted, often varying throughout the day, and context dependent. Well-being depends not only upon the resources available to parents, but also on the resources available to those with whom they compare themselves. For example, relative satisfaction with employing organisations, even those undergoing rapid changes that could make life more difficult for parents of young children, was often sustained through comparison with other organisations in the same or another sector, which parents believed would be even more difficult places to work in. More generally, parents from Portugal, Slovenia and Bulgaria emerge as relatively content with their lives compared with their more affluent peers in Sweden and the UK, because their expectations of support and resources are lower and thus more easily satisfied.

Higher expectations and sense of entitlement to support can sometimes be important in generating constructive tension and pressure for change as in the example of transitional intra-familial gender tensions discussed above, when expectations of gender equity are high, or the readiness to demand more support in the workplace, thus pushing the boundaries of management thinking. In some contexts higher expectations relate to materialistic goals in consumerist societies, which sometimes result in parents working more than they would ideally like to do, creating additional strain. As other research has shown, beyond a certain level, greater material wealth is not necessarily associated with more positive well-being (Layard, 2003). While materialistic goals are a feature of some families in the more affluent societies, even in Bulgaria some parents accepted difficult workplace contexts because, again using social comparison, they aspired to the greater affluence of western European societies.

Organisational well-being and "good practice"

The study examined the notion of organisational well-being, which was found to be problematic. The notion of a caring organisation (Sevenhuijsen, 2003) or "healthy organisation" (Newell, 2002) was evident in some contexts. Both of these concepts assume that the organisation's performance can be enhanced by caring for employees in their wider lives, or by a dual agenda of employee well-being and organisational effectiveness (Rapoport et al, 2002). However, many problems remain with this notion. In particular our study shows that pervasive organisational trends such as the intensification of work perpetuate a male model of work and undermine the equitable reconciliation of paid work and parenting. Moreover, there are also often different perspectives among managers and subordinates about whether the organisation can be considered to be caring. There are also problems about what constitutes an "organisation" as parents' experiences vary across departments or units in all the case studies.

The difficulty in conceptualising well-being at an organisational wide level is reflected in issues in defining good practices, which are also context dependent. Satisfaction with organisational or managerial support for managing work and family boundaries varies not just in terms of the supports available but again according to expectations, social comparisons and sense of entitlement. Sense of entitlement to support is influenced by welfare state context and the gender contract on which it is based, as demonstrated in an earlier study of young Europeans' perspectives on work and family (Lewis and Smithson, 2001; Lewis, Smithson and das Dores Guerreiro, 2001). Other factors also come into play however, including economic and labour market context as well as sector – there is generally a higher sense of entitlement to support and for workplaces to be caring organisations in the public than in the private sector organisations – although there are often inherent tensions for social workers about whether the organisations should be caring primarily for the employees or the clients. Thus the supports that are expected, and the subsequent contentment and satisfaction with the workplace context, varies from country to country and across organisational sectors.

Good practices cannot therefore easily be transferred across different contexts. Nevertheless a number of principles were identified that underpin practices that parents experiences as supportive and helpful in different case study organisations. These include: implementing statutory policies, not in a minimal way but with attention to necessary changes in structures, cultures and practices. There is a problem in that high levels of state support can result in parenthood being viewed as a state rather than a workplace responsibility as in Bulgaria and Slovenia. In the Swedish social services, despite acceptance of state initiatives, there was no clear strategy among managers for encouraging fathers to take parental leave. There is a need for explicit management attention to implementing state policies. Other crucial principles include management support; consistency and trust; mutual understanding and flexibility; realistic workloads; collaboration and attention to gender equity. Well-being is enhanced if a parent has a choice and some control over temporal and spatial flexibility.

Thus the introduction of "supportive" work-family policies are not end point of process in consumer-led and gendered society. Rather, policies and practices to support working parents are part of a process of change that involves shifting values and practices at multiple levels of context. Further support in the ever changing European workplace is likely to involve empowering parents by raising their expectations of, and sense of entitlement to, support in order to be able to negotiate gender equitable strategies for managing work and family boundaries. To do so may involve transitional tensions in workplaces as well as in families, but these may be a part of a necessary phase for supporting parents and in the transformation of the gender order in European societies.

Seeds of positive change

There is evidence of some positive changes at different levels which have the potential to enhance gender equity and contribute towards meeting the Lisbon agenda of helping people to seize the opportunities and overcome the difficulties created by international competition, technological advances and changing population patterns, while supporting family life and equality of opportunities and protecting the most vulnerable in society. However these changes are often accompanied by transitional tensions as commensurate changes in other layers of context take place more slowly. Examples include the growing involvement of fathers in parenting in Norway and Sweden as a consequence of social policies to support fathering. This raises expectations of shared parenting, which can create tensions when some employers continue to expect men not to take family leaves, or if some mothers are reluctant to relinquish their main responsibility for children. Value shifts are therefore needed at workplace and family levels. It is not only social policies that bring about positive changes. Other changes come from the workplace and family levels. For example, there were examples in case studies in the UK, Bulgaria and Slovenia of parents reversing earning and caring roles. This usually came about for practical reasons, for example after a father lost his job, but provided opportunities to challenge gender expectations. In every case, however, both parents experienced some gender tensions; fathers because they were not providing for the family, mothers because they were not spending sufficient time with their children. Parents need support in adapting their expectation to atypical arrangements such as these. At the workplace level, organisational change can raise expectations of support for managing work and family boundaries. For example, in the UK private sector organisation, a drive for culture change including more flexibility and trust, in the wider context of a government work-life balance campaign and widespread media debates on this issues, raised expectations of support among parents, some of whom were able to work very flexibly. Tensions arose in this context because of management inconsistency in applying the new culture, due partly to intensification of work, but also the lack of change in the values and skills of many managers. In other contexts, positive changes emerged from employees themselves. For example, in the Swedish social services, solidarity emerged among workers who were parents, which facilitated greater flexibility of working arrangements within teams. Tensions emerged, however, because of intense workloads. For example a social worker was allowed to work part-time, but her work was distributed among colleagues. This can challenge colleague solidarity.

Transitions can create tensions at multiple levels, within individuals adapting to changing gender practices and expectations at a personal level, in households between parents adapting relationships at an interpersonal level, and within workplaces, or units within workplaces where the pace of change is too rapid or is uneven. The challenge is to seize opportunities of positive change by looking beyond transitions in one layer of context to support change in other interrelated areas.

4.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SOCIAL PARTNERS

In this section we first outline some major interrelated implications of the findings for policymaking and practice in general, and then make some recommendations.

4.2.1 Overall, interrelated implications for policy and practice include:

- **Fundamental tensions between contemporary working patterns and the needs of mothers and fathers to be able to care for children.**

Parents across Europe are facing growing demands both in the workplace and the home. The study highlights the importance of acknowledging and addressing tensions between contemporary working practices in the context of technological advances, international competition, and efficiency drives, as well as growing consumerism, on the one hand, and the needs of individuals and families on the other, as noted by a number of commentators (Bauman, 1998; Sennet,1998; Gambles, Lewis and Rapoport, 2006).

- **Implementation gaps, organisational change and intensification of work**

Some national social policies can help parents to develop equitable and satisfying strategies for negotiating work and family boundaries. However, there are implementation gaps between policies (government and organisational) and practices, in all the case study organisations. Policies to support working parents are increasingly undermined by changes in the nature and practice of work in the context of global competition in the private sector and efficiency drives in the public sector, which in turn, reinforce gender inequities. Experiences of intensification and also insecurity of work undermine policies to enhance flexibility for parents, who are increasingly likely to be prevented from working in ways that help them to manage the boundaries between work and home due to heavy workloads. For example, work is rarely covered fully while staff are on leave, and often work is passed to overburdened colleagues, or accumulates to be dealt with on the return to work, creating more pressures.

- **A persistent need to address gender issues in organisations, families and wider societies**

The widely reported experiences of intensified workloads are difficult to reconcile with parenting and perpetuate gendered working patterns. The transition to parenthood appears to be a critical "tipping point" on the road to gender equity and therefore a crucial focus for policy-making at different levels that address the well-being of parents. However, while the transition to parenthood affects both mothers and fathers, the different experiences and starting points of mothers and fathers, which also vary across-national contexts, still need to be acknowledged. The persistent view in all the countries, albeit to varying extents, that mothers are primarily responsible for young children, is reflected in low expectations of support for fathers to be able to work flexibly or reduced hours or to take parental leaves, in most organisations.

- **A persistent need to address social inequalities and social exclusion**

Social class, as well as gender, shapes experiences of working and parenting. The study points to the importance of identifying and supporting the most vulnerable parents. Across Europe, low skilled work is increasingly likely to be contracted outside large organisations. It is clear that workplace policies and practices experienced as supportive by parents in the case studies are unlikely to benefit the most vulnerable workers. This is particularly relevant to European discussions on agency workers and to the objective of combating social exclusion.

- **The importance of addressing well-being in all its complexity and recognising transitional tensions**

Well-being is complex, multi layered and context dependent, fluid, dynamic. and related to aspirations. Raising expectations and aspirations, whether for gender equity, support for reconciling employment and family life, or general levels of affluence can unsettle people. Transitional tensions can be experienced if new aspirations are not supported by changes in values and/or resources at multiple levels of society. But some transitional tension and pressure may be strategic and necessary to start change processes, with the potential to contribute to enhanced long-term well-being for parents and the institutions in which they are embedded.

- **A focus on "good practices" at the workplace level can overlook the impact of context and the double edged nature of many workplace practices**

Employer good practices are context dependent. There is a need to look at specific principles and processes of change rather than seeking to transfer generalised good practice. Many apparent good practices are double edged, in that they can have negative, as well as positive, impacts. For example greater flexibility can enable parents to manage multiple roles and enhance well-being in the short-term but can also mean that parents work more, with paid work intruding into family life. Moreover, a focus on good practices can obscure the more basic dilemmas that are faced by parents and managers/employers in diverse contexts.

- **The importance of a multi-layered and joined up approach to policy-making and change initiatives**

The focus on multiple layers of context in this study points to the need for a multi-layered approach to policy-making. Although supports and constraints vary in diverse contexts, parents' work-family strategies are still largely negotiated at the household level, and in gendered ways because of lack of interrelated change at multiple institutions. Different layers of context are important for enhancing parents' well-being, so linkages between different policy areas need to be taken into account to support parents in reconciling paid work and family responsibilities. Changes in legislation alone are of limited value without shifts in organisational values and practices, family and community practices. Transition and change in different forms can create tensions at multiple levels: individual, household or workplace and these can be positive or negative in their long-term impact. Seeds of positive change in one layer of context – for example changes in fathers' family involvement or colleague solidarity in supporting parents – can be supported by attention to associated changes at other levels, or can create new tensions if multi-layer changes do not happen.

- **The need for a focus on long-term outcomes for sustainable societies and workplaces**

Socially sustainable families, workplaces and societies in Europe require long-term thinking as well as interrelated changes at many levels. For example, policies that meet parents' currently articulated needs – such as part-time work – are clearly important for parents' strategies for negotiating work and family boundaries, especially in the context of intensified workloads, but given that it is overwhelmingly mothers who adopt this strategy, it will inevitably reproduce gender inequities in the longer term in the absence of changes in workplace values and practices especially the gendered construction of commitment. What is needed in the short-term to support women in their current dilemmas must be distinguished from what might be more transformative in the long-term (Molyneux, 1984; Orloff, 1996).

Policies that aim to bring about fundamental social changes towards what is considered to be a common good, such as those giving fathers more rights and obligations in family life, can also affect well-being negatively for some people in the short-term, again in the context of slower rates of change in a range of social institutions. practices that may bring short-term benefits at the cost of long-term social consequences (Sennett, 1998) also merit consideration. For example, trends such as the declining birth rate in most partner countries, can be related to the strategies that men and women are able to adopt in relation to family formation, in the context of intense workplace demands and uncertainties about jobs.

4.2.2 Recommendations

The findings from this study do not lend themselves to simple policy solutions. Rather, they raise some very crucial issues that need careful consideration at many levels in relation to the Lisbon agenda of generating balanced and sustainable growth which benefits all, helping workers to adjust to change and providing new opportunities for prosperity and social equality. Specifically the study highlights the potential contradictions between globalisation and work intensification on the one hand, and the need for time to care for children (and others), in gender equitable ways, on the other hand. The task of elaborating new social models and standards in a context of organisational change needs to take place with the full participation of all the social partners. Below, we first consider some important overall recommendations requiring collaboration at many levels, stemming from the *Transitions* study, before making specific recommendations for governments and employers.

4.2.2.1 Overall recommendations for collaboration and dialogue by all the social partners

- **Confront uncomfortable issues about the contradictions between work intensification and the needs of parents and children**

All the social partners should confront the potential contradictions between globalisation and work intensification on the one hand, and the need for time and energy to care for children (and others), in gender equitable ways, on the other. There is a need for focused debate and collaboration between governments, employers, trade unions, NGOs and others, at EU and national levels, asking bigger questions about European goals and values. For example, what will be the long-term impacts of contemporary working hours and practices on parents, on children's health and well-being, on fertility rates and sick leave rates, and other social indicators? What is the optimum level of economic growth, taking these costs into consideration? Evidence suggests that well-being does not necessarily

rise with levels of affluence, beyond a certain threshold (Layard, 2003). Debates will need to be informed by multiple perspectives on the intensification of work; social as well as economic/global competition concerns.

- **Take a long-term strategic approach**

The social partners need to take a long-term approach to encourage socially sustainable work (Webster, 2004; Brewster, 2004) and support new parents in their paid work and caring work. Sometimes long- and short-term consequences of policies and practices conflict. For example part-time work for one parent – almost always the mother – can be a satisfying work-family strategy in the short-term, but without wider changes at different levels to encourage and enable father to also take up this option, it can perpetuate gender inequities in the long-term. Raising expectations can generate tensions in the short-term if commensurate shifts do not take place in other contexts, but is a prerequisite for long-term change. Organisational restructuring that involves intensification of work may increase competitiveness in the short-term, but be associated with high sickness and absenteeism rates in the long-term.

- **A multi-layered partnerships approach is needed to support parents in contemporary, changing contexts**

This project demonstrates that well-being in the transition to parenthood depends on the many layers of context in which parents' lives are embedded. National policy matters (Gornick and Meyers, 2003; OECD, 2001), but is not sufficient. Day to day implementation occurs in workplaces (OECD, 2001), and at the family level. There is a need for social partners in multiple contexts to work together to support parents in negotiating work and family boundaries, and to support the seeds of positive change that are emerging in households and workplaces in some contexts. Statutory policies on combining employment and family are necessary but are limited without commensurate changes in values and practices in workplaces and households. For example policies and other national initiatives to enhance father involvement in families must be considered alongside innovative strategies for encouraging changes to workplace practices and values and especially assumptions about ideal workers, so that fathers (and, of course, mothers) are really able to take advantage of their entitlements without being stigmatised or disadvantaged. Protection of part-time workers is important but will not be sufficient to change fathers' behaviour without attention to assumptions played out in both workplaces and households.

We have argued that the multiple goals of sustainable economic growth which benefits all, sustainable families and social equality, including gender equity, requires partnerships and interrelated change at many levels of context. Neither governments nor employers alone can bring about the necessary changes. Nevertheless, we make some recommendations below about ways in which social policy, and employers and unions can set the necessary conditions for multi-level supports for parents in changing European contexts.

4.2.2.2 Recommendations for social policy

(To be considered in conjunction with the recommendations for collaboration above)

- **Gender mainstreaming and joined up thinking in policy-making**

National governments should develop an integrated vision of possible effects of diverse social policies, and the implications for gender equity. Mainstreaming gender all too often means that gender differences have disappeared from national policy agendas and that gender inequities are no longer defined as problematic. There are many examples of uncoordinated policies making life more difficult for parents. For example, in Dutch social policy the Ministry of Health stresses the importance of informal care (for and from family members) to reduce the costs of formal care, while the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment stresses the necessity of more working women in the Netherlands and women working longer hours per week, instead of having small part-time jobs. In the context of women still being the main informal carers, such a policy further complicates women's lives. Similarly, policies to encourage greater parental involvement in schools and homework (in the UK) take no account of the intensification of work, and need to be considered in conjunction with policies on working time, on equal opportunities and on pensions, recognising the impact on pensions, of alternative ways of working across the life course.

Gender mainstreaming in social policies means that all significant policy measures should be monitored on their possible different effects on women and on men. Gender mainstreaming only makes sense when (some) policy-makers are experts in gender issues. This expertise should be carefully kept and maintained in ministries and other places where policy plans are prepared and formulated.

- **Employment and working time policy needs to take account of changing experiences of work, especially intensification of workloads**

The EU and national governments should pay attention to the intensification of work and particularly workload management for parents including those who work flexible or reduced hours. Experience of intensification of workloads across Europe can, for the more fortunate employees, enhance feelings challenge and satisfaction, but it can and usually does make parenting young children particularly difficult and reproduces gender inequities. Discussions are necessary among the social partners about how to reflect workloads and pace of work as well as working hours in policy-making. This might include, for example, consideration of regulation on the ratio of workload to numbers of staff, stronger requirements for formal cover for parents on leave, or possible developments of working time regulation to take account of workload.

- **The need for a national vision on the importance of good parenthood, on the needs of children, on responsibilities of mothers and fathers, and on the importance of children for long-term national welfare**

The participation of women in the labour force is an economic and social necessity in all European countries. At the same time European societies need children for national welfare in the long-term. Parents need support, not blame or stigmatisation. So national government (with the other social partners) need to ensure adequate conditions for parenting and labour force participation. We have discussed the intensification of parenting and demands on parents. Good parenting is not just a responsibility for the parents themselves. All nation states

of the EU have the responsibility to create good conditions to raise children. National governments should develop an integrated vision on education, on the well-being of children, on the conditions for good parenthood, on the role (and the need to extend the role) of fathers and create the conditions for achieving these visions. Debates about "good" parenting and especially the "good mother" are highly emotionally charged in many of the countries, whilst debates about lone parents and gay or lesbian parents tend to be either stereotyped or ignored in national debates about parenting and working. National government strategies should be non-judgemental and focus should be on providing the best possible conditions for parents to work and care.

- **Raise expectations of support for reconciling employment and caring**

Such national visions, that both recognise the importance of reproducing national societies and the participation of mothers and fathers in the labour markets as national and not just individual responsibilities, and that set the conditions for this, would empower parents and raise their sense of entitlement to support to be able to be good parents as well as good workers. Currently sense of entitlement to support from workplaces is often limited for mothers, and usually low for fathers. An important aspect of national government strategy towards empowering families in this way is to include initiatives for raising expectations of gender equity at home and at work. Again this must be in conjunction with employers and require changes at workplace levels. Campaigns which draw on wider European experiences can raise awareness and expectations of what might be possible. For example, when promoting the role of fathers, it is useful to diffuse awareness of ways in which this has worked in other national, organisational or household contexts.

It could be argued that the link between low expectations of father involvement in families and well-being found in some national contexts in this study raises an ethical dilemma. Should policy aim to raise expectations, especially if it is not easy to change situations and would fuel short-term tensions? Equally however, there are ethical issues in not raising expectations. Problems that are not articulated may nevertheless be experienced. Moreover, the transitional tension that can be a by-product of raised expectations can be minimised by the social partners working together to address the need for commensurate change to take place at multiple levels of society – to ensure good implementation of policies and practices, rather than sustaining low expectations.

- **Childcare**

Childcare is not a sufficient condition for supporting working parents, but is nevertheless a necessary condition. So there is a need to promote (EU) and create or develop (national governments) affordable, high quality, pre-school childcare provision, where this does not yet exist. Similarly there is a need to promote (EU) and implement or develop(national governments) before and after school facilities, with extra curricular activities, including facilities for homework, sport facilities and the provision of good quality, healthy, hot meals.

- **Target and support the most vulnerable parents**

The study points to the importance of identifying the most vulnerable parents. National government policies that would help such parents include affordable, good quality housing in big cities for key workers in social care and health services as well as locally available, high quality, affordable childcare. Fully paid parental leave for similar amounts of time across Europe, and the right of parents

to be supported when their children are ill, are obvious candidates. Again, however, such policies are ineffective if they are not fully accepted by management and integrated into workplace practices so that parents are able to make use of their entitlements. Innovative approaches and/or regulations are needed to support the growing number of workers outsourced from large organisations. The needs of these parents are likely to be invisible in workplaces as they are this study. It is vital for policy (both national, and at union level) to strengthen the workplace rights of agency workers and of temporary workers, who are often excluded from formal and organisational policies.

- **Recognise the need to support parents through transitions and associated tensions at diverse levels of context**

Transitional tensions in workplaces point to a need for support in handling deep individual and interpersonal changes, for example, in the workplace: supervisors' anxiety, reluctance or lack of skill in empowering parents to manage their work and family boundaries; or in the home: men's and women's ambivalence about changing aspects of their behaviours that are central to gender identity. While interrelated changes at many levels will help to minimise pressures, some level of tension may be inevitable and productive. Government at national and local levels should consider how to support parents in managing tensions at individual and household levels, for example, through funding training and support organisations and professionals. The work of such professionals could include raising consciousness about and helping parents to think through, the impact of many layers of context on their values and dilemmas.

4.2.2.3 Recommendations for employers, managers and trade unions

(To be considered in conjunction with the recommendations for collaboration among the social partners discussed above)

- **Be aware of the contradictions between work intensification and the needs of parents and children**

Board level discussions are needed on the long-term implications of these contradictions which should be addressed as relevant strategic questions. Taking a long term, strategic approach to this issue implies that "healthy" or caring organisations will be those which view the needs of parents (and societies) and organisational effectiveness in the long-term as potentially complementary rather than in conflict, although in some cases it may involve strategic decision-makers reframing some organisational goals. Recognise that an organisation is likely to be efficient and productive if the workforce is successfully able to negotiate their work with their family commitments. Managers should work with unions and employees at all levels to develop a strategy to meet the needs of parents and the long-term needs of the organisation. Modernity of organisations should be associated with social responsibility and awareness of the needs of parents (and other carers) to have time and energy for their life beyond work. This long-term strategy will require changes in organisations, more flexibility, more trust in the commitment of employees, and better and more efficient organisation of work.

- **Beyond implementation gaps to systemic and sustainable workplace change; focus on practices and process**

The widespread implementation gap between policy and practice, found in this and many other studies, across-national and workplace sector contexts, shows that the focus for workplace change to support parents and organisational

objectives should be on implementation and changing working practices rather than policy initiatives alone. This will involve challenging deeply held assumptions about gender and about the nature of work and working practices. This includes, for example, assumptions that ideal workers need to work full-time across the life course to demonstrate commitment. The related overvaluing of male styles of working also need to be questioned and the effectiveness of diverse ways of working recognised (Rapoport et al, 2002). This will involve attending to the process of change to develop initiatives for systemic change, i.e. changes to structures, cultures and working practices (Lewis and Cooper, 2005; Rapoport et al, 2002). Human Resources departments alone cannot accomplish this. Successful change of this nature involves collaboration at all levels within organisations. Recognise that this takes time and is a long-term strategy.

This study shows that good practices for meeting the needs of parents and their employing organisations tend to be context dependent and not easily transferred across contexts. It is nevertheless important for HR and line managers to recognise the principles underpinning what parents regard as supportive practices in a range of contexts: realistic workloads, the implementation of statutory entitlements, with attention to culture and practice change, line management support and consistency, trust and mutual understanding, and collaboration with workers in policy development and design of working practices.

- **Develop active strategies to support fathers as well as mothers in negotiating work and family boundaries**

Gendered assumptions in the workplace about ideal workers and about mothers' and fathers' needs and responsibilities are major barriers to changes in fathers' behaviours and to gender equity at work and home. These assumptions are exacerbated in the context of the widespread intensification and perceived reduction of security of work. Statutory provisions to support fathers are necessary but not sufficient. Management and unions need to work together to develop active strategies to make men's family responsibilities more visible and legitimate and to reflect changes taking place at other societal levels (in some countries more than others). This will involve examining and challenge assumptions that committed workers do not work part-time or take up parental leaves. It will also be important to identify working practices that will facilitate occasional absences from work if a child is ill or during parent leaves. Appropriate practices will be context dependent but might include, for example, multi-skilling or adequately resourced autonomous, self-managing teams.

- **Support seeds of positive change**

It is important for managers to recognise positive working practices where they emerge, and to nurture them. For example, spontaneous solidarity between parents and between parents and other employees, helping out, can enhance flexibility. However, inadequate resources leading to intensification of work can stifle such seeds of positive change. Unions can play an important role in encouraging and protecting emergent practices that can, if adequately resourced and supported benefit both parents and the effectiveness of their employing organisations.

- **Consider the work and family needs of outsourced and other peripheral workers**

Employers have a role to play in combating social exclusion by considering the work and family needs of peripheral workers in partnership with unions, employment agencies and other stakeholders. Some of these employees are

recent immigrants whose knowledge of what rights they do have is likely to be partial. In such cases, the implementation gap is likely to be more striking than our study has found for core workers. ETUC, with the support of the European Commission should develop ways of reaching these employees and giving them a voice to air their grievances at local, national and European level.

- **Take a life course perspective on employees' occupational careers**

Strategic decision-makers and line managers should take a life course perspective on occupational careers and time at work. In view of the mounting concerns about ageing populations and pensions issues across much of Europe, many employees in the age range covered in this study are likely to need to work longer than previous generations over the life course. Moreover, periods of intensive work demands may be sustainable, even satisfying and challenging in the short term, in certain life course phases or in certain family contexts.

Consider the implications of a life course approach to working lives. For example, consider matching those who work part-time during early parenthood with older workers who may wish to work beyond current retirement ages, but also less than full-time.

- **Monitor the effects of workplace changes on parents of young children**

Unions and management should implement a system for monitoring the effects of workplace changes on employees who are mothers and fathers of young children, as part of gender mainstreaming initiatives.

Consider the potential paradoxes of the double-edged nature of many flexible and innovative working practices and consider ways of encouraging positive outcomes and minimising potential negative outcomes, such as work intruding unreasonably into family time. These double-edged effects are often the consequence of intense workloads. There is a pressing need for attention to workload management for parents, including those who work flexible or reduced hours.

- **Support and train managers, supervisors and self-managing teams to empower them to support parents**

The influence of managers and colleagues on work-family practices and well-being is important in all counties. There is a corresponding need for management training and support. This should include training managers and supervisors in workload management for themselves and for those whom they manage. Training and support in collaborative partnership approaches to developing working practices that meet the needs of employees and the organisation are also needed. Support and adequate resources are also needed for self-managing teams to manage flexibility in equitable and effective ways. Self-managing teams have the potential to enhance flexibility and autonomy for parents, but it is not sufficient for managers to simply delegate responsibility to teams without support and training.

- **Unions should address the issue of the contradictions between work intensification and the needs of parents and children as a core issue**

Workplace representation is an important factor in the realisation of statutory rights. A decline in workplace representation is undesirable from the standpoint of European social dialogue. Unions should address their numerical decline and the decline of their influence amongst employees in European organisations. Given

the increasing importance of "work-life balance" for employees, initiatives around this issue could enhance union influence. National union initiatives can play an important role in providing information to employees and in providing both arguments for systemic change and examples of such change. Unions are key at the local level. They can play an important role in initiating and negotiating working practices which can produce positive outcomes for both employees and the wider community. An example of this is the "Time of Our Lives" work-life balance project in Bristol, UK. Local government unions worked together with local government to achieve better services for the community whilst at the same time improving the "work-life balance" of employees. The role of the unions was key in identifying better ways of organising work and time and achieving a "win-win" outcome for employees, managers and the community. (See http://www.tuc.org.uk/changingtimes/casestudies_bristol.htm).
Ongoing collaboration with employees, organised via the local unions, underpinned the success of this project.

Some European countries face more difficult challenges than others, due to an historical lack of gender mainstreaming and/or more (perceived) pressing needs being pushed to the top of the agenda, such as wages and job retention, alongside hostility to flexible working practices, due to negative experiences. ETUC should work closely with national unions to look at ways of weaving work-family reconciliation into the already existing concerns of workers in these countries.

- **Further EU support is needed to move forward the debate on fundamental tensions highlighted in this report and to support change initiatives directed at win-win solutions for parents and organisations**

The TUC Bristol project discussed above was one of many supported by the EU. More initiatives of this kind, in collaboration with employee organisations, could provide the opportunity to open up debate and active collaboration between social partners to find solutions to the challenges highlighted by this study. The EU should also facilitate discussions on fundamental tensions between contemporary working patterns and the needs of mothers and fathers to be able to care for children, by for example: showing examples of positive change that take account of parents', children's and societies' needs; facilitating internationally comparative research; organising meetings; and by continuously stressing that the reconciliation of work and parenting is part of modern organisational strategies.

4.3 Implications for future research

Research bringing together issues about the transition to parenthood and organisational change and well-being is rare. Most cross-national studies of these topics are quantitative in nature. The *Transitions* research extends the knowledge built up by these other studies and has developed a new, qualitative methodological approach to studying layers of context. As Europe expands, an understanding of the impact of diverse contexts at many layers is crucial. This will involve not just comparing experiences in different countries but in specific different contexts. There are a number of ways on which this research should be developed, and implications of the findings for further research.

Transitions

Diverse parents and social inclusion in the new European Workplace

The organisational case study approach used in this study was important for enabling the *Transitions* team to explore the impact of specific workplace context and enabled us to pinpoint specific factors contributing to or undermining well-being within multiple layers of context, in the light of contextually mediated expectation of support. However, this method involved negotiating access to research participants through organisational gatekeepers and although participants were diverse in some respects (for example all case studies included single parents) there is a need for more research on how diverse employees navigate the transition to parenthood in the context of the rapid pace of organisational changes. For example, the case studies included few disabled parents. One exception was a mother in the UK finance company who was able to negotiate a great deal of support while she underwent a series of hip operations before becoming a parent. She was, however, a high status and highly valued employee. Identifying supports and constraints experienced by disabled parents, and the strategies that employers and others can adopt to enable them to fulfil their parenting and employment obligations will be important for the EU goal of encouraging active inclusion of disabled people in European society and the economy through independent living and for mainstreaming disability as well as gender in the European employment strategy. While the biographical approach used in the *Transitions* research would be useful for addressing key questions about how to encourage the inclusion of disabled parents in changing workplaces, a more targeted approach to the recruitment of research participants would be necessary.

Expanding the contexts examined

The biographical approach needs to be applied to other national and workplace contexts, including SMEs, where many parents are employed across Europe and also for furthering understandings of the specific issues experienced by those combining self-employment and parenthood in diverse European contexts.

Transitions across the life course

The transition to parenthood is a crucial tipping point for gender equity across Europe. It is also important to look at other crucial transition points in the life course and implications for gender and class equality, social inclusion and exclusion, building on the long tradition of literature on critical transitions (e.g. Rapoport, 1963; Adler, 1975; Lewis and Cooper, 1988). What is the influence of intensification across the life course? For example, what is impact of having a second or even third child, and (how) could parents reconcile contemporary forms of work with larger families? With an ageing European population and in the contexts of current debates and policy agendas across Europe relating to retirement and pensions, we also need to know more about the transition to retirement. If, as this study suggests, intensified workplace demands perpetuate women's lower participation in the labour market than men's in many contexts, what will be the impact on gender and material and psychological well-being in retirement? How will current working practices and trends influence the age of retirement and the nature of the transition? Comparative, cross-national research on these questions have important policy implications. The life course methodology used in this study, ideally combined with prospective designs catching people at different transition points, would help to address some of these questions . The richness of data from our life course approach would help to understand different meanings of time, work, family and leisure, and the impact

of different work-family strategies adopted in earlier phases on the transitions to retirement, and, particularly, how this is influenced by layers of context.

The transition to parenthood and work-family strategies among workers excluded from contemporary organisations

Research also needs to examine parents' opportunities for negotiating work-family boundaries in the context of organisational/non-organisational boundaries. A common feature of contemporary organisation is that boundaries between those who are inside the organisation and those who are at the periphery are often unclear. The difficulties in accessing low skilled workers to participate in this study highlight the need to ensure that research does not omit the experiences of workers who are not part of the core organisation, including, for example, temporary agency workers, self-employed contractors and others working within large organisations. Temporary agency work is increasing rapidly in almost all European countries, as part of the general movement towards increased flexibility in employment. A common feature of agency work is a three-way triangular, employment relationship, between a user, the employee and the agency, which can complicate issues of support for parents who are agency workers. Moreover, a significant proportion of agency workers are immigrants, many of who come from cultures which are highly gendered. More needs to be known about how parents can be supported in what is often a context of low pay, few rights and enforced flexibility. The organisational case study and life course approach used in *Transitions* could be adapted to address this question by broadening the concept of the organisation and specifically examining employment agencies as crucial organisational players. Given the role of immigrants and mobility and the European priority of protecting agency workers, this research is needed at the European and not just national levels.

Well-being

Most research examining the relationship between work and family experiences and strategies and well-being relies on questionnaire measures of subjective well-being, conceptualised in rather static ways. This study points to the need for a fuller understanding of well-being, as a dynamic and fluid process, sensitive to expectations and context. Further research is needed to explore the relationships between well-being, in all its complexity and sense of entitlement to support for reconciling employment and family obligations as it relates to both social policy and working practices. In particular, there is a need for further examination and understanding of what we have identified as a process of transitional conflict, in families and workplaces, which was beyond the scope of the present project.

Developing methods

The project has developed innovative research strategies and methodologies for further use in this area. (Brannen and Pattman, 2005, Lewis, Guerreiro and Brannen, 2006; Smithson, 2006). There is considerable scope for expanding this methodological approach and developing comparative theoretical concepts and perspectives. The assessment of well-being, in particular and especially at the collective level, is very problematic. It is difficult to assess well-being at a collective level without recourse to other, equally problematic, terms such as stress, climate/culture. This study highlights some of the inherent difficulties of doing justice to the multi-faceted nature of well-being. However, this difficulty should not be a reason for recourse to more simplistic and one-dimensional approaches. Currently much research on well-being is based on methods which

do not fully acknowledge these difficulties and may produce oversimplified findings.

There may be a role for wider European networks to explore the meanings of well-being, especially insofar as it informs policy.

Action research

The Lisbon agenda is built around the need to generate balanced and sustainable growth which benefits all. As social and economic change is likely to continue to be rapid in most countries, there is a need to monitor changing perspectives on efficiency/performance and individual/family and organisational well-being. However, the findings from this study suggest that the European social agenda will require mutually reinforcing changes at multiple levels. Social policy can contribute to necessary social change, but changes are also needed in structures, cultures and practices at workplace levels as well as in values and practices within households. Collaborative and participatory action research is needed to move these agendas forward. For example, collaborative interactive action research has been used to bring about systemic changes in workplaces to support a dual agenda of gender equity and organisational effectiveness in the USA (Rapoport et al, 2001). Research applying this approach to European organisations, combined with the European model of social dialogue could be used to develop processes of change that could then be diffused across diverse European workplace contexts.

Transitions

Transitions

5. Dissemination and/or exploitation of results

5.1 Dissemination Strategy

The dissemination strategy was an inherent part of our research project which aimed at enhancing the academic and social understanding of how young adults manage to balance work and family while planning to become parents and when they have young children. Disseminating results from the project has also a more practical objective: to contribute to the spread of more 'family-friendly' workplace cultures thus improving conditions for the positive wellbeing of employed young parents.

The dissemination of the project objectives, intermediary and final results was organised to cover the whole of the project's duration (2003-2005) and beyond on three levels:

- **International** Europe and the global world;
- **National** – in each country;
- **Local** – in the communities where our case studies are conducted.

The strategy had three broad target groups:

- **Policy-makers** – those involved in social and family policy, labour market regulation, non-discrimination and gender equality policies;
- **Civil society** – employers' associations, trade unions, youth NGOs, women's and parents' organisations, the general public;
- **Academic community** – researchers, lecturers, students and experts.

The following channels for dissemination to our target audiences were used:

- Written **articles** in academic journals, policy journals, trade journals, employers' journals, practitioners' newsletters,
- **Papers** presented at a variety of international conferences, seminars and workshops,
- **Media** coverage through widely read newspapers, as well as major TV and radio stations and the Internet.

5.2 Direct actions for making the project known

Website

The Transitions website, www.workliferesearch.org/transitions, was established early on in the project and has proved to be an important medium for disseminating Transitions research and findings to a larger audience. Over the course of the project, Transitions Research Reports, either full reports or Executive Summaries have been made available on the website. Summaries of reports in the national languages of the countries participating in the project are also available on the website. A variety of stakeholders, including researchers from government, industry and academia and postgraduate students have contacted us via the website requesting more information and copies of reports.

5.2.2 Transitions Newsletters

Two project newsletters have been produced. Both newsletters highlighted the aims and objectives of Transitions and Issue 1 (2004) presented findings from Phase 1 and 2 of the project, whilst Issue 2 (2005) presented findings from Phase 3. Both publicised the website for further information.

5.2.3 Transitions Leaflet

In the first year of the project we produced a project leaflet with a description of project aims and the methodology employed. This leaflet was used for gaining access to organisations for carrying out field work and has been disseminated at national and international conferences and seminars.

5.2.4 European Research Community

A description of the Transitions project and information regarding project were presented at the Transitions Symposium at the Community, Work and Family Conference in Manchester, and the Gender, Work and Organisation Conference in Keele. Information about the project aims, methods and preliminary findings was included in the European Commission's **Newsletter on EU Research in Social Sciences and Humanities**, Issue 3, 2005.

5.3. Transitions Research Reports

A number of research reports arising from Transitions project have been published and disseminated to a variety of stakeholders. Much of this dissemination has taken place at conferences and seminars, however, as mentioned above, the website has also been an important complementary medium for the dissemination of this project output.

5.4 Wider dissemination

Members of the Transitions team have presented the project methods and findings at a wide variety of conferences, high profile seminars, and workshops in many countries. See Appendix for details.

In addition to these seminars, the ERSC National Centre for Research Methods in the UK funded two workshops on Transitions Methodology:

- **ESRC National Center for Research Methods Workshop on comparative and cross-national research using biographical methods,** organised by Julia Brannen and Ann Nilsen Institute of Education, University of London, November 2005; Presentation on comparative research using a life-course approach, by Ann Nilsen

- **ESRC National Center for Research Methods Workshop on comparative organisational case studies,** Manchester Metropolitan University, February 2006 (forthcoming), organised by Suzan Lewis and Julia Brannen, with presentations by Maria das Dores Guerreiro and Janet Smithson

Transitions research generated and has continued to generate a number journal articles and book chapters:

Further, practical dissemination took the form of:

- Workshops

Transitions

- Popular articles

- Interviews

- Lectures, seminars and discussions organised by Transitions team members

In addition, Transitions team members provided feedback reports and sessions for the organisations and interviewees who provided the data for the case and interview studies:

Team members also disseminated Transitions material via teaching, including Lectures, workshops and discussions

There were, and will continue to be, a variety of presentations targeted at policy-makers and employers, which included:

- Presentation of Transitions Project to a policy seminar on Youth Policy, organised by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Bulgaria, by Anatas Matev and Siyka Kovacheva, March 2003

- Presentation to a government organisation, Management-Development Trajet Women, by Anneke van Doorne-Huiskes, Netherlands, September 2003

- Seminar on Family, What Future? Organised by Vila Fanca de Zira Municipality, Have the young people to choose between career or children? Changing working contexts around Europe, presented by Pedro Abrantes, Portugal, October, 2004

- Presentation of Transitions Project to policy-makers, and government ministers, employers and trade unions at a Summit on "Gender and Productivity" at 11 Downing Street, organised by the Equal Opportunities Commission, by Suzan Lewis, London, October 2004

- Presentation of Transitions Project, by Suzan Lewis, at the Policy Institute, London, UK, February 2005

- How women combine paid work and family life in Europe. Post-graduate course on Career management, by Nevenka Černigoj Sadar, at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences

- Strategies to handle clashes between work and family life, at the Swedish Parliament, by Lars Plantin, Stockholm, April 2005

- Work-family initiatives in the wider context, Keynote talk to employers, by Suzan Lewis, at the Inaugural Conference of the International Center of Work and Family, Barcelona, July 2005

- Presentation of Final Report to UK employers and HR professionals at CBI (Confederation of British Industry), by Suzan Lewis, July 2006

Team members also participated in Interviews, newspaper articles and radio discussions, including:

- Participation in Swedish radio programme, *The Family*, by Lars Plantin, January 2004

- Radio interview for the Swedish radio programme, *Parenthood,* by Lars Plantin, November 2005

- Full page article in Manchester Evening News on working parents in Europe, including Transitions research by Suzan Lewis, April 2005,

- Various newspaper articles citing Suzan Lewis' work on Transitions:
    - August 2005, Scottish Daily Record
    - August 2005, Birmingham Post
    - August 2005, Nottingham Recorder
    - August 2005, Derby Express

The Transitions team has a number of papers submitted to academic journals. In addition there is a proposal for a book based on the organisational case studies, to be published in Portugal (in English), another proposal to be submitted to Wiley, UK publishers. The intensive work of analysis of the rich qualitative data from the fieldwork is still going on from different perspectives and the team will continue to disseminate to a range of stakeholders after the completion of the study and final report. A number of activities and publications are already planned, including a Transitions Symposium at the 1st Biennial International Women's Studies Conference, Izmir, Turkey, June 2006.

6. Acknowledgements and References

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7. ANNEXES

Annex 1: Publications from the project so far

1.   Transitions Research Reports

Fagnani, J., Houriet-Ségard G. and Bédouin, S. (2004), Transitions Research Report #1: Context Mapping for the EU Framework 5 funded study "Gender, parenthood and the changing European workplace". ISBN 1-900139-36-7. Printed by the Manchester Metropolitan University: Research Institute for Health and Social Change.

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Das Dores Guerreiro, M., Abrantes, P. and Pereira, I. (2004), Transitions Research Report #3: Case studies Report for the EU Framework 5 funded study "Gender, parenthood and the changing European workplace". ISBN 1-900139- 46-4. Printed by the Manchester Metropolitan University: Research Institute for Health and Social Change.

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Lewis, S. and Smithson, J. (2006) Transitions Research Report #11: Final Report on the Transitions Project. Report for the EU Framework 5 funded study "Gender, parenthood and the changing European workplace". ISBN 1-900139-04-9 Printed by the Manchester Metropolitan University: Research Institute for Health and Social Change.

2. Dissemination at academic conferences, seminars and workshops

ERSC conference: Employment and the family, London, UK, April 2004:

• **The Workplace as an arena for negotiating the work-family boundary,** presented by Margareta Bäck-Wiklund and Lars Plantin, University of Göteborg.

• **Work, Family and Transitions to Parenthood: A Research Agenda for the Coming Years,** presented by Julia Brannen, TCRU

SISWO-dagen, Amsterdam, Netherlands, April 2004

• **Managers en werk/privé beleid in de financiële sector: de rol van organisatiecultuur [Managers and work/life policies in the financial sector: The role of organisational culture],** paper by Laura den Dulk and J. de Ruijter, University of Utrecht.

Fifth Portuguese Sociological Organisation Congress, Braga, Portugal, May 2004:

• **Work/family-relations in changing organisational contexts,** presented by Maria das Dores Guerreiro, Pedro Abrantes and Inês Pereira, ISCTE

International Conference on Work-Life Balance across the Lifecourse, Edinburgh, UK, June/July 2004:

• **Reconciling work and parenthood in the new European workplace: the role of colleagues**, paper presented by Bram Peper, University of Rotterdam, Suzan Lewis, MMU and Laura den Dulk, University of Utrecht

International Conference on Human Resource Management in a Knowledge-Based Economy, Llubljana, Slovenia, June 2004:

• **Parents' Experiences in the Workplace,** presented by Nevenka Černigoj Sadar, University of Llubljana and Polono Kersnik, University of Llubljana

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International Conference on "Economic Culture of Balkan Societies in the Contemporary World', Sofia, Bulgaria, July 2004:

- **Changing Cultures in Changing Workplaces, UK and Bulgaria compared**, presented by Siyka Kovacheva, Paissii Hilendarski State University, Suzan Lewis, MMU and Nely Demireva, Paissii Hilendarski State University

Second European Conference on Positive Psychology, Verbania Pallanza, Italy, July 2004:

- **Well-being in young European adults negotiating the work-family boundary**, presented by John Haworth, MMU

International Society of Work and Organizational Values Conference, New Orleans, USA, August 2004:

- **Workplace change and organisational wellbeing: the perspectives of employed parents and their managers in diverse European contexts**, presented by Suzan Lewis, MMU et al

Work/Family Conference organised by the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKE), Helsinki, Finland, November 2004:

- **Work, Family and Managerial Attitudes and Practices in the European Workplace,** presented by Laura den Dulk, Utrecht University

Conference at Escola Superior de Educação de Portalegre, Portugal, January 2005:

- **Young people in transitions**, presented by Maria das Dores Guerreiro, ISCTE

Community, Work and Family Conference, Manchester, UK, March 2005:

- **Gender and work-family boundaries in private and public sector organisations**, presented by Ann Nilsen, University of Bergen

- **Changing work-life expectations and organisational cultures in European workplaces,** paper by Siyka Kovacheva, Paissii Hilendarski State University, Suzan Lewis, MMU, Nely Demiriva, Paissii Hilendarski State University

- **The family as a risk-calculated project – young Swedes negotiate the family-work boundary,** paper by Margareta Bäck-Wiklund and Lars Plantin, University of Göteborg

- **Different ways in which working parents combine work and family life: an eight-country comparison**, paper presented by Jeanne Fagnani, CNRS

- **Negotiating Work-Family Boundaries among new parents in the UK and Norway**, presented by Sevil Sumer, University of Bergen

- **Parenthood in Context: a Case Analysis Approach,** paper by Ann Nilsen, Julia Brannan, Sevil Sumer, Micheala Brockmann, and Lise Granlund

- **Parents in private and public organisations,** presented **by** Nevenka Černigoj Sadar and Polona Kersnik

Society of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, Los Angeles, USA, April 2005:

- **Work and family in Europe,** Symposium on International Policy and Practice, presented by Suzan Lewis, MMU

- **Job insecurity and work-family boundaries in changing European organisations,** presented by Suzan Lewis, MMU

Transitions Symposium, Gender, Work and Organisation Conference, Keele, UK, June 2005:

- **Strategies of Portuguese families to balance work and private life**, presented by Inês Pereira, ISCTE

- **Work, Family and Managerial attitudes and practices in the European workplace: comparing Dutch and British financial sectors,** presented by Bram Peper, University of Rotterdam

- **Gender, parenthood and the changing European workplace, the Transitions project,** presented by Janet Smithson, MMU

- **Sense of Entitlement to Support for Work and Family: a case study of parents in UK and Bulgarian organisations,** Suzan Lewis, Janet Smithson, Siyka Kovacheva, presented by Suzan Lewis

Inaugural Conference of the International Center of Work and Family, Barcelona, Spain, July 2005:

- **Work-life initiatives and organisational change: a transformational approach?**, presented by Suzan Lewis, MMU

- **The effects of job insecurity on new parents' decisions about paid and family work,** presented by Janet Smithson, MMU

Philosophy of Management Conference, Oxford, UK, July 2005

- **The relevance of moral management,** presented by Jana Nadoh

7th European Sociological Association Conference, Torun, Poland, September 2005:

- **Parenthood in contrasting contexts: Sweden and Portugal compared,** presentation of paper by Margareta Bäck-Wiklund, Goteborg University, Maria das Dores Guerreiro, ISCSTE, Inês Pereira, ISCTE, Lars Plantin, Goteborg University and Pedro Abrantes, ISCTE

- **The effects of job insecurity on new parents' decisions about paid and family work,** paper by Janet Smithson, Suzan Lewis and Christina Purcell, MMU, Nevenka Černigoj Sadar, University of Ljubljana, Maria das Dores Guerreiro and Ines Pereira, CIES-ISCTE, presented by Janet Smithson

Conference on "Dear Child. On men, children and gender equality in Sweden", Fudan University, Shanghai, China November 2005:

- **Men's parenthood and the importance of a family-friendly worklife,** presented by Lars Plantin, University of Göteborg

Conference on Open Futures, Lancaster University, UK, November 2005:

- **From work-life balance to socially sustainable work,** presented by Suzan Lewis, MMU. Conference on Critical Perspectives on work-life balance at the University of Nijmegen, Netherlands, March 2006:

- **Paper on Transitions,** to be presented at a workshop by Janet Smithson, MMU and Suzan Lewis, MMU

Sloan Conference on Work and Family, University of Chicago, USA, May 2006 (forthcoming):

- **Keynote talk on Transitions,** to be presented by Suzan Lewis, MMU

Presentations at high profile seminars and workshops

Annual Seminar "Europe's Coming Generations: Demographic Trends and Social Change", organised by the European Observatory on the Social Situation, Demography and the Family, Brussels, Belgium, September 2004:

- **Youth transitions and family support in a transforming social context: reflections from the new member states,** presented by Siyka Kovacheva, Paissii Hilendarski State University

Meeting of Slovenian Sociological Association, Faculty of Social Sciences, Ljubljana, September 2004

- **Spol, starševstvo in spreminjajoča se delovna mesta v Evropi (Gender Parenthood and changing European workplace),** Presentation of the project, by N. Černigoj Sadar

ISS Seminar on Family Policies, Lisbon, Portugal, December, 2004:

- **Family, Work and Life Quality,** presented by Maria das Dores Guerreiro, ISCTE

Department of Social Policy, University of Oxford, UK, February 2005:

- **Seminar on Transitions Project**, presented by Suzan Lewis, MMU

Seminar, organised by the Centre of Organisational and Human Resource Research – Faculty of Social Sciences, Portorož, Slovenija, February 2005

- **Na poti k organizacijskemu blagostanju (On the way to organisational well-being),** by N. Černigoj Sadar, P. Kersnik, J. Nadoh

Department of Social Work, University of Chicago, USA, April 2005:

- **Seminar on Transitions Project,** presented by Suzan Lewis, MMU

Research Seminar on Family and Working Life at the Danish Social Research Institutute, Köpenhamn, April, 2005:

- **Workplace as an Arena for Negotiating the Work-Family Boundary, paper by** Margareta Bäck-Wiklund, Goteborg University and Lars Plantin, Goteborg University

- *Methods training workshops based on Transitions methodology*

In addition to these seminars, the ERSC National Centre for Research Methods funded two workshops on Transitions Methodology:

- **ESRC National Center for Research Methods Workshop on comparative and cross-national research using biographical methods,** organised by Ann Nilsen and Julia Brannen, Institute of Education, University of London, November 2005; Presentation on comparative research using a life-course approach, by Ann Nilsen

- **ESRC National Center for Research Methods Workshop on comparative organisational case studies,** Manchester Metropolitan University, February 2006 (forthcoming), organised by Suzan Lewis and Julia Brannen, with presentations by Maria Das Dores Guerreiro and Janet Smithson

3.   Scientific articles and book chapters by Transitions team members

Bäck-Wiklund, M. & Plantin, L. (2006), The Workplace as an Arena for Negotiating the Work-Family Boundary. A Case-study of two Swedish social service agencies in Crompton, R., Lyonette, C. and Lewis, S. (eds), Women, men, work and family in Europe. London:Palgrave MacMillan.

Brannen, J. and Pattman R., (2005), Work-family matters in the workplace: the use of focus groups in a study of a UK social services department, Qualitative research 5 (4) 523-542

Černigoj Sadar, N. & Kersnik, P. (2004) Parents' Experiences in the Workplace, Svetlik, I. & Nadoh, J. (eds.), Conference proceedings, Ljubljana: Faculty of Social Sciences, ISBN 961-235-162-7.

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Černigoj Sadar, N. and M. Ignjatović (2005), Praksa kadrovanja in fleksibilne oblike dela (Staffing practices and flexible working practices), M. Ignjatović (Ed.) Upravljanje človeških virov 2004 (Human resource management 2004). Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, Bilten Centra za proučevanje organizacij in človeških virov. Posebna številka.

Doorne-Huiskes, A. van, Peper, B., Dulk, L. den (2005), Chapter: Flexible work and organisational change from a European perspective: challenges for future research, Flexible Working and

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Peper, B., Doorne-Huiskes, A., Dulk, L. den, (2005), Flexible Working and Organisational Change. The Integration of Work and Personal Life. Cheltenham: Edgar Elgar.

Purcell, C., Lewis, S., and Smithson, J., (forthcoming), Chapter on Good Practice, R Burke and C. Cooper (eds) Building more effective organizations. Cambridge University Press

Smithson, J. (2006) Using focus groups to study work and family, M.Pitt-Catsouphes, E. Kossek, and S. Sweet (Eds.). The Work-Family Handbook: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives and Approaches, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers

Vladimirov, P. (2004), Usklajevanje plačanega dela in družinskega življenja: stališča o spolnih vlogah in delitev dela v družini (Balancing paid work and family life: attitudes about gender roles and division of work within family) Masters thesis, Ljubljana: Faculty of Social Sciences. Mentor: N. Černigoj Sadar

4   Practical dissemination and exploitation of results

- Presentation on Transitions research findings to the "Dutch bank" by Bram Peper and Laura den Dulk, November 2004

- Lewis, S. and Smithson, J., Feedback Report to Finance Sector Organisation in the UK, September 2005.

- Veldhoen-van Blitterswijk, M. van, Dulk, L. den, Doorne-Huiskes, A. van and Peper, B., Onderzoek naar werkende ouders, November 2005

- Presentation of Transitions Project and "Best Practice", by Margareta Bäck-Wicklund, organised by the Committee for Equality, in the organisation where the case studies were conducted.

- Demireva, N., Are Working Parents a Paradox or how do parents working in the private finance sector combine work and family life?, July 2005 issue of Plovdiv University's monthly newsletter

- Presentation of Transitions Project at the Department of Sociology, University of Mulga, Turkey, by Sevil Sumer, December 2003

- Series of lectures and seminars on work-family balance, organised by M. Back-Wicklund and L. Plantin, at the University of Malmo, Sweden, Spring 2004

- Undergraduate Course on the Scandinavian Welfare Model and Gender Relations, by Sevil Sumer, at the Department of Sociology, University of Bergen, Norway Spring 2004

- Series of lectures and seminars on "Family policies and support for working parents", by Siyka Kovacheva at the University of Plovdiv, Bulgaria, Autumn 2004

- Seminar on "Becoming a working parent in post-communist Bulgaria" by by Siyka Kovacheva at the Thomas Coran Research Unit, University of London, UK, December, 2004

- Transitions Project presentation by M. Back-Wicklund at Malmö University, Sweden, December 2004

- Laura den Dulk, Arbeid en zorg arrangementen in Europa: rol van werkgevers en de nationale overheden, (Work-family arrangements in Europe: the role of employers and national governments). Guest lecture for the course:. Guest lecture for the course: Arbeid, Organisatie en Emancipatie (Work, organisations and equal opportunities) of Dr. B. Peper and prof. dr. K. Tijdens, Erasmus University, Rotterdam, Faculty of Social Sciences, Februay 2005

- Laura den Dulk, Arbeid en zorgarrangementen in organisaties, (Work-family arrangements in organisations) Guest lecture for the course: Arbeid en Organisatie (Labour and Organisations) of Dr. S. Groeneveld,. Sociaal-Culturele Wetenschappen (Ba3), Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, March 2005

- Research seminar on "Combining work and family life", by Lars Planting at the University of Göteborg, March 2005

- Laura den Dulk, Explaining managerial attitudes towards the use of work-life policies in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, Presentation at the colloquium of the social-cultural sciences department, Chairman: Prof. dr. J. De Bruijn, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, April 2005

- Lecture on Work/Life (Masterclass), by Anneke van Doorne-Huiskes, University of Utrecht, December 2005

- Lecture on Gendered Issues, Work-Life Balance and Modernisation of work, by Anneke van Doorne-Huiskes

- Lectures on flexible working and organisational change, Manchester Metropolitan University, by Suzan Lewis

- Conference call with Kathy Lynch from the Boston College Centre for Work and Family on research in Europe, including Transitions, Laura den Dulk, November 2005, from Boston College, director corporate roundtable and I talked about research in Europe and also about Transitions

- Public lecture, Young parents in changing organisations – a comparison between the social services in 7 countries, by Margareta Bäck-Wicklund, at Göteborg, November 2005

- Presentation on comparative/cross-national research, by Julia Brannen, ESRC, University of Bristol, November 2005

- Seminar on the occasion of the retirement of Anneka van Doorne-Huiske, Universtiy of Utrect , March 2006 (forthcoming)

Presentations targeted at policy-makers and employers

- Presentation of Transitions Project to a policy seminar on Youth Policy, organised by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Bulgaria, by Anatas Matev and Siyka Kovacheva, March 2003

- Presentation to a government organisation, Management-Development Trajet Women, by Anneke van Doorne-Huiskes, Netherlands, September 2003

- Seminar on Family, What Future? Organised by Vila Fanca de Zira Municipality, Have the young people to choose between career or children? Changing working contexts around Europe, presented by Pedro Abrantes, Portugal, October, 2004

- Presentation of Transitions Project to policy-makers, and government ministers, employers and trade unions at a Summit on "Gender and Productivity" at 11 Downing Street, organised by the Equal Opportunities Commission, by Suzan Lewis, London, October 2004

- Presentation of Transitions Project, by Suzan Lewis, at the Policy Institute, London, UK, February 2005

- How women combine paid work and family life in Europe. Post-graduate course on Career management, by Nevenka Černigoj Sadar, at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences

- Strategies to handle clashes between work and family life, at the Swedish Parliament, by Lars Plantin, Stockholm, April 2005

- Work-family initiatives in the wider context, Keynote talk to employers, by Suzan Lewis, at the Inaugural Conference of the International Center of Work and Family, Barcelona, July 2005

Interviews, newspaper articles and radio discussions

1. Participation in Swedish radio programme, *The Family*, by Lars Plantin, January 2004

2. Radio interview for the Swedish radio programme, *Parenthood,* by Lars Plantin, November 2005

3. Full page article in Manchester Evening News on working parents in Europe, including Transitions research by Suzan Lewis, April 2005,

4. Various newspaper articles citing Suzan Lewis' work on Transitions:

- August 2005, Scottish Daily Record

- August 2005, Birmingham Post

- August 2005, Nottingham Recorder

- August 2005, Derby Express

5. Further opportunities for dissemination

The Transitions Project and research reports were disseminated widely at conferences on related themes:

- Conference on Working Time and Social Security in a Life-Long Perspective, Berlin, Germany, attended by Anneke van Doorne-Huiskes, October 2004

- International seminar on 'Leave Policies and Research: Issues of Diversity', organised by the Centre for Population and Family Studies and Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of education, University of London, Brussels, attended by Jeanne Fagnani, October 2004

- Conference on Changing patterns of interdependence and solidarity in family relations, Utrecht University, attended by Laura den Dulk, October 2004

- Mixed Final Conference, Amsterdam, attended by Suzan Lewis, Anneke van Doorne-Huiskes, Laura den Dulk and Bram Peper, November 2004

- ETUC-TUC Conference "Challenging Times", London, UK, attended by Christina Purcell, November 2005

The Transitions team has a number of papers submitted to academic journals. In addition there is a proposal for a book based on the organisational case studies, to be published in Portugal (in English), another proposal to be submitted to Wiley, UK publishers. The intensive work of analysis of the rich qualitative data from the fieldwork is still going on from different perspectives and the team will continue to disseminate to a range of stakeholders after the completion of the study and final report.

Annex II Project deliverables

All the project deliverables have been delivered. See table for details.

Table 4

		Deliverable no and title	**Delivery date**	**Draft or final version**	**Dissemination level**	**Delivered**
D1		Report on Dissemination activities and how to implement strategy. (WP2)	M3 Apr 03	Draft	CO	Apr 03
D2		Project website (WP2)	M5 May 03	Final	PU	M3
D3		Report: International framework of contexts for negotiating parenthood and work-family boundaries among young parents(WP3)	M6 July 03	Draft	RE	M9 Oct 03
D4		Briefing paper: summary of report (D3) available in languages of consortium and on project website. (WP3)	M6 July 03	Final	PU	Nov 03
D5		National summaries of literature review (eight summary reports)(WP4)	M7 Aug 03	Draft	CO	Aug 03
D6		Consolidated report on literature review: "Organisational, gender and well-being issues in the transition to parenthood and in the negotiation of work-family boundaries". (WP4)	M8 Sep 03	Final	RE	Jan 04
D7		Briefing paper: summary of consolidated report (D6) available in languages of consortium and on project website. (WP4)	M8 Sep 03	Final	PU	Jan 04
D8		Common interview schedules, focus group guides and well-being measures. (WP5)	M6 July 03	Final	CO	July 03

D9	Conceptual and methodological discussion: national reports on results of piloting research instruments (WP5)	M11 Dec 03	Draft	CO	March 04
D10	National organisational case study reports (WP6)	M13 Feb 04	Draft	CO	April 04
D11	Consolidated report based on deliverable D10. (WP6)	M15 Apr 04	Final	CO	Nov 04
D12	Briefing paper: summary of consolidated report (D11) available in languages of consortium and on project website. (WP6)	M15 Apr 04	Final	PU	Nov 04
D13	Good practice at workplace levels – report to be made available through website and national and international dissemination. (WP6)	M15 Apr 04	Final	PU	Initial version delivered April 04. Final version Dec 05
D14	Innovative qualitative frameworks for assessing positive well-being. (WP7)	M14 Mar 04	Draft	CO	Mar 04
D15	National reports on positive well-being and contextual factors.(WP7)	M31 Aug 05	Draft	RE	Aug 05
D16	Consolidated report on national reports (D15). (WP7)	M32 Sep 05	Final	RE	Dec 05
D17	Briefing paper: summary of consolidated report (D16) available in languages of consortium and on project website. (WP7)	M33 Oct 05	Final	PU	Dec 05
D18	Report on Phases 1 and 2 of project (WP8)	M20 Sep 04	Final	RE	Jan 05
D19	Briefing paper: summary of report (D18) available in languages of consortium and on project website. (WP8)	M20 Sep 04	Final	PU	Jan 05
D20	National case study reports on Phase 3 (WP9)	M30 July 05	Draft	CO	Sep 05

D21	Consolidated report on Phase 3: "Negotiating parenthood"(WP9)	M31 Aug 05	Final	RE	Nov 05
D22	Briefing paper: summary of report (D21) available in languages of consortium and on project website. (WP9)	M31 Aug 05	Final	PU	Nov 05
D23	Final report (WP10)	M33 Oct 05	Final	PU	Feb 05
D24	Briefing paper: summary of report (D23) available in languages of consortium and on project website (WP10)	M33 Oct 05	Final	PU	Feb 05
D25	Periodic and annual management reports to be delivered to the Commission (WP1)	M11, M23 Dec 03 Dec 04	Final	CO	Feb 04 Feb 05
D26	Final management report to be delivered to the Commission. (WP1)	M35 Dec 05	Final	CO	Feb 06