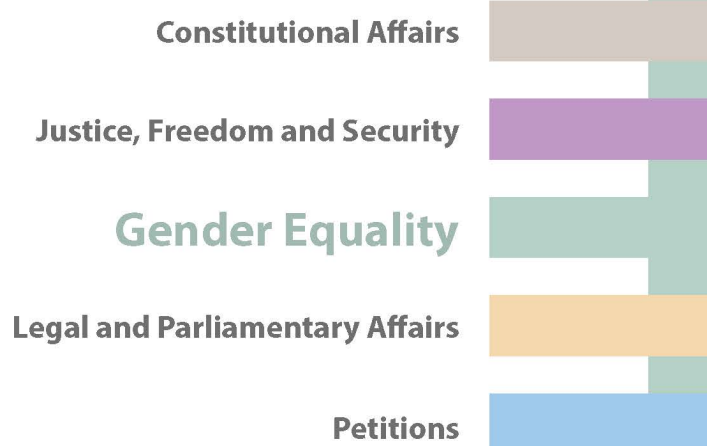


DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES

POLICY DEPARTMENT **C**
CITIZENS' RIGHTS AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS



Demography and family policies from a gender perspective

STUDY FOR THE FEMM COMMITTEE



DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES

**POLICY DEPARTMENT C: CITIZENS' RIGHTS AND
CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS**

WOMEN'S RIGHTS & GENDER EQUALITY

Demography and family policies from a gender perspective

STUDY

Abstract

The European Union is in the midst of three crises: the economic, the demographic and the refugee. This study evaluates policies aiming at increasing fertility through work-life balance, reveals their interrelation with family policies and economic priorities and suggests ways of addressing challenges on all three fronts with the view to minimise their gendered outcomes.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
Eurofound	European Foundation of Living and Working Conditions
FEMM	Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDT	Second Demographic Transition
TFR	Total Fertility Rate
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
WLB	Work-Life Balance
WLE	Working Life Expectancy

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MAP 1

Annual EU Population Change

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Even though the world's population has been rising constantly and the demographic change has been faster and more universal than ever before in human history, Europe's population has been ageing.

All EU Member States exhibit increasing life expectancy and decreasing fertility rates, while the problem of sustaining the working age population and by consequence economic growth becomes more prominent. Pension systems have fewer workers-contributors and expenses for medical care and elderly care also increase and cannot be sustained.

New family arrangements, delayed union formation (marriage or cohabitation) between members of different or the same sex, postponement of childbearing, rising divorce rates and higher numbers of children born out of wedlock, as well as ideas and attitudes of European citizens have also been undergoing transformation. Traditional family is no longer the dominant form.

Women's labour market participation has been increasing, while gender roles in the domestic sphere have been changing. This transformation has given rise to new ideas about parenthood, with a growing number of men wanting to be more involved in the care of children or elderly relatives and share the burden of work in the private sphere more equally.

All the above developments are threatened by the economic crisis in the European Union. Strategies to tackle the demographic problem have included solutions to increase fertility, reduce pension costs, extend workforce participation to older ages and integrate immigrants. Key concepts in the struggle to tackle the demographic challenges are 'active ageing', which prolongs people's economic activity past retirement age, and measures trying to improve work-life conflict, mostly known as 'work-life balance' policies.

Work-life balance is a controversial term which has been seen as non-inclusive of certain social groups and family arrangements because of its focus on dual-career families. Increasing people's control over their life through the introduction of flexible work arrangements, leaves and policies which would allow a more equal distribution of paid and unpaid work in the domestic sphere would be a positive development. Nevertheless, context matters. At the level of Member States such policies are translated by each government differently and cultural factors, together with political ideology and government priorities. The role of gender regimes and types of welfare states are crucial factors.

Behind the debate around balance, autonomy, reconciliation, choice or control lies the desire of economic activation of people which will increase the workforce and improve the sustainability of the welfare state and invest in children, the next generations of workers.

This study looks into the relationship between demography and family policies from a gender point of view and analyses the ways state policies influence the sphere of intimacy, reflecting economic priorities and shaping attitudes and family arrangements.

It highlights the need for further research into the outcomes of policies related with demography and family from a gender perspective. Immigration and ageism are key factors. It concludes that successful implementation of policies requires looking at the broader policy picture and the constellation of policies which may work in synergy or against each other. It proves that the most successful policies in this area are those which view individuals both as earners and carers. They seem to have the highest potential for changing roles and shaping attitudes favouring gender equality and work-life balance.

INTRODUCTION

The world's population in 2011 reached 7 billion individuals and the death rate since the 18th century has been declining in Europe, USA and Canada. This demographic change has been faster and more universal than ever before in human history following different patterns in different parts of the world and it is estimated to reach 10.1 billion at the end of the 21st century¹.

As EU countries exhibit an increasing life expectancy and a decreasing fertility rate, the problem of sustaining the working age population and by consequence economic growth becomes more prominent². Pension systems have fewer workers-contributors, while expenses for medical care and elderly care also increase and cannot be sustained.

In the 1980s the political debate revolved around falling fertility rates, population ageing due to higher life expectancy, and the economic repercussions of the demographic time bomb became dominant in Europe. This was reflected in Article 7 of the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights on respect for personal and family life³ and the subsequent research into 'reconciliation of work and family', mainly consisting of child care and leave policies⁴.

Family in its traditional form has been constantly changing in the last decades. New family arrangements, delayed union formation (marriage or cohabitation) between members of different or the same sex, postponement of childbearing, rising divorce rates and higher numbers of children born out of wedlock, as well as ideas and attitudes of European citizens have also been undergoing transformation. These changes in the structure of family as an institution constitute key features of what is known as **the second demographic transition (SDT)**⁵.

In parallel, female labour market participation has been increasing, and gender division of domestic labour and care has become less unequal. This transformation of roles has led to new ideas about parenthood, with a growing number of men wanting to be more involved in the care of children or elderly relatives. Some call this the **gender revolution, during** which they argue consisted of the first half, during which women's participation in the labour market women's participation in the labour market increased substantially, and the current second half during which men have become more active in the private sphere and more involved in childcare⁶. There is growing evidence of the latter, but it has to be treated with caution, as these are still early days. Nevertheless, it may bring about structural changes and lead the new family arrangements with a more equal division of labour.

All the above developments against the backdrop of the long-lasting fiscal crisis in the European Union are interlinked with economic policies which have always constituted the

¹ Ezeh, A.C., Bongaarts, J. and Mberu, B. (2012). Global population trends and policy options. *The Lancet* 380:142-148. P. 142.

² Testa, M. (2014). The contribution of migration to the demography of Europe between 1991 and 2011 – An overview. Desk Research Paper n.18. Milan: ISMU Foundation.

³ Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union 2000/C 364/01).

⁴ Lombardo, E. and Meier, P. (2007). Gender mainstreaming in the EU. *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13(2):151-166.

⁵ Laesthaeghe, R. (2010). The unfolding story of the second demographic transition. *Population and Development Review* 36: 211-251.

⁶ Goldscheider, F., Bernhardt, E. and Lappegård, T. (2015). The Gender Revolution: A framework for understanding changing family and demographic behaviour. *Population and Development Review* 41(2):207-239.

Union's main priority and which have been altering the meaning of well-intentioned notions such as 'gender equality' and 'work-life balance', as they become subordinate to economic priorities. Strategies to tackle the demographic problem have included solutions to increase fertility, reduce pension costs, extend workforce participation to older ages, and integrate immigrants into society⁷.

This study aims to reveal the links between demography and family policies from a gender point of view and analyse the ways state policies influence the sphere of intimacy, reflecting economic priorities and shaping attitudes and family arrangements.

The first part presents the current demographic landscape, as well as various state responses and possible strategies and measures to improve the situation, which will be critically assessed. The second part focuses on the ways specific policies, both on the EU and the Member State level, specially designed to address the demographic concerns via the adoption of work-life-balance measures, may produce gendered and unintended outcomes. It provides an overview of family policies aimed at increasing fertility in different Member States, analyses their rationale and evaluates them as to their effectiveness and interconnectedness with other welfare and economic policies through the lens of gender. Finally, in light of the above, policy recommendations and effective best practices may provide useful insights and criteria for refining future implementation and policy-design on the EU and Member State levels.

⁷ McLean, S.B. (2014). We are family? Governance and the prospects for instability in Europe. *European Journal of Futures Research* 2(59).

1. DEMOGRAPHIC DYNAMICS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION: DECLINING POPULATION, CHANGING FAMILY AND IMMIGRATION

KEY FINDING

- The demographic situation in Europe has been deteriorating due to the long-lasting recession with much more pronounced effects on the crisis-stricken Member States of the South and the East which are also the entry points to the EU and receive high number of immigrants and refugees.
- Demographic and family policies have always been linked with economic policies and have been subordinate to the EU economic priorities.
- A holistic way of policy-design could lead to successful implementation of family policies and improve simultaneously both demography and work-life balance, through the enhancement of equal distribution of work and care and provision of care services for children and the elderly.

1.1. Ageing Population

The population of Western Europe is among the oldest in the world, as a result of higher life expectancy, lower fertility and improved health. Despite the overall rapid population growth, the population of Europe has been declining as does the birth-rate, which is below replacement (with the exception of France). Moreover, the number of marriages and divorces has been increasing and childbirths are delayed, whereas new forms of family arrangements have been emerging in the midst of economic recession (see Map 1).

These trends result in ageing population which puts strain on health and pension systems, as the number of EU citizens over 65 is estimated to rise from 17% in 2010 to 30% in 2060⁸. Population ageing and welfare state policies have been closely associated since the beginning of welfare states, as public pensions have traditionally constituted the largest item of social expenditure⁹.

In 2014, there were 28 people of pensionable age for every 100 of working age in the EU-28, about 7 more compared to twenty years earlier; the number of those under 15 years was 23.7%¹⁰. In 15 years' time, the population over 64 is projected to be 31% larger than today, while that under 15 years will be 4% smaller; with the workforce participation rate stable, there will be an increase in the total age dependency ratio, which will put pressure on fiscal policy and social services¹¹. Old age poverty is also on the increase and it particularly affects women, whose presence in the labour market is usually shorter and fragmented, their pensions lower and their life expectancy higher.

⁸ Ezech A.C., Bongaarts J., and Mberu B. (2012).

⁹ Walker, A. and Maltby, T. (2012). Active ageing: A strategic policy solution to demographic ageing in the European Union. *International Journal of Social Welfare* 21(s1):117-130.

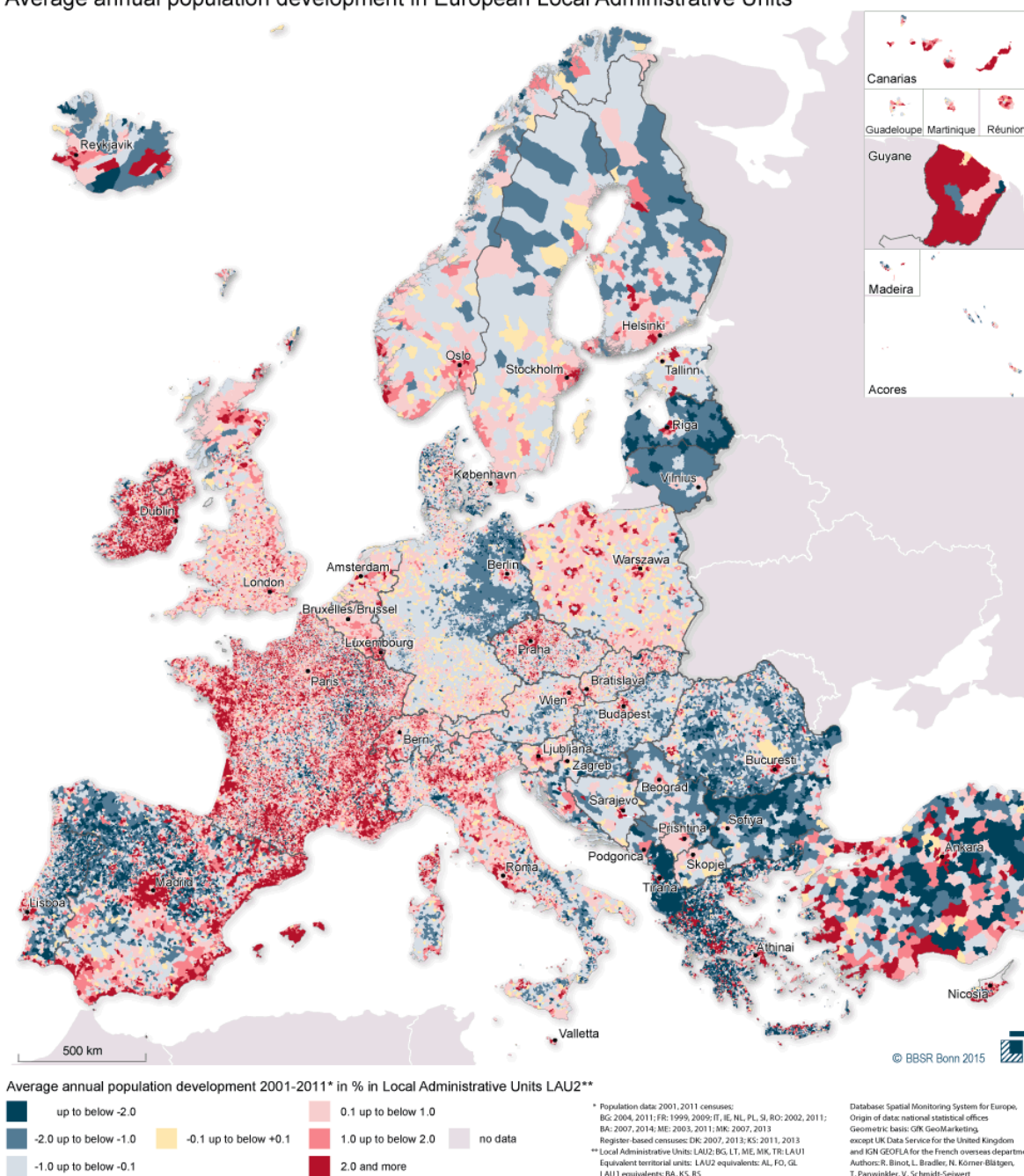
¹⁰ Eurostat (2014). The EU in the world – population, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/The_EU_in_the_world_-_population

¹¹ McLean, S.B. (2014).

1.2. Falling fertility

Map 1 Annual EU Population Change

Average annual population development in European Local Administrative Units



Source: BBSR Bonn

<http://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/EN/SpatialDevelopment/SpatialDevelopmentEurope/AnalysesSpatialDevelopment/Projects/PopulationDevelopment/PopulationDevelopment.html>

Fertility is a very important factor in demographic processes; one of the most common ways of measuring is by using **Total Fertility Rate (TFR)**, namely the mean number of children born alive to a woman during her lifetime, if she were to pass through her childbearing years

conforming to the age-specific rates of a given year¹². In 2009 in EU-27 the number of children born was 5.4 million, whereas the equivalent in 1964 was 7.7 million¹³. The population of the European Union is expected to rise from 501 million in 2010, peak at 526 million in 2040 and decline to 517 million in 2060¹⁴. The two components of fertility are: **tempo** (the timing of the childbirth) and **quantum** (the total number of children including childlessness)¹⁵. Determinants of fertility at the micro-level include education, gender division of labour, income, family composition, transmission of values and preference. Meso-level factors which impact on fertility are social capital and social networks which have been under-researched and there is scarcity of quantitative comparative data. Finally, at the macro level economic, family and employment policies, cultural and attitude changes, reproductive technologies and institutional settings, all have impact on fertility.

One of the most common arguments used by demographers has been that recessions affect fertility and people revise their fertility plans¹⁶ because of the resulting economic uncertainty. Recent work by Goldstein et al¹⁷ has shown that the current crisis has hit Europe at a time that the childbearing age had been constantly rising and some countries were exhibiting signs of increasing fertility. It seems that the recession has reversed that fertility trend in certain Member States such as Greece (in which until 2009 fertility was increasing), Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Croatia. The gap between desired and achieved fertility has been growing¹⁸. By contrast, in other countries such causality cannot be established; for instance, in Portugal and Italy, which were also struck by the crisis, the effect on fertility was less marked. Conversely in some Nordic countries that have been much less affected, fertility has been declining. Possible explanations are to be sought in the broader socio-cultural environment, such as the influence of the Catholic church as well as in the domain of family policy.

The different reactions may be linked with the introduction of family-friendly policies in countries such as Portugal before 2007, which mitigated the effect of the recession¹⁹, or a policy turn toward more traditional family values and similar attitudes of the younger cohorts in some Member States. For instance, the Hungarian government's expressed commitment to the institution of family as 'the union between a man and a woman' and with strong conservative and Christian undertones, led to various traditional family-strengthening policies and made the link between demography and family policy prominent in the debate in Hungary but also during the Hungarian Presidency at the EU level²⁰.

Gender roles have been slowly changing and it would be of interest to see whether men's greater involvement in the private sphere would impact on fertility, as there is evidence that

¹² Eurostat (2011a). Demography Report 2010: Older, more numerous and diverse Europeans. Luxembourg: European Commission.

¹³ Eurostat (2011a): p.28.

¹⁴ Eurostat (2011b). The greying of the babyboomers: A century-long view of ageing in European Populations. Statistics in Focus. Eurostat.: Statistical Office of the European Union, 23/2011.

¹⁵ Balbo, N., Billari, F. C. and Mills, M. (2013). Fertility in advanced societies: A review of research. *European Journal of Population* 29:1-38. DOI 10.1007/s10680-012-9277-y.

¹⁶ Hofmann, B. and Hochmeyer, K. (2012). Perceived economic uncertainty and fertility. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 75:503-521.

¹⁷ Goldstein, J.R., Kreyenfeld, M., Jasilioniene, A. and Karaman Örsal, D. (2013). Fertility reactions to the 'Great Recession' in Europe: Recent evidence from order-specific data. *Demographic Research* 29(4):85-104. DOI:10.4054/SemRes.2013.29.4

¹⁸ Balbo, N., Billari, F. C. and Mills, M. (2013).

¹⁹ Thévenon, O. (2011). Family policies in OECD countries. A comparative analysis. *Population and Development Review* 37 (1):57-87. DOI: 10.1111/j.1728-44572011.00390.x

²⁰ Fülöp A. (2013) The question of demography as an approach to the family's budget: Plans, results, challenges and struggles of the Hungarian government. Paper presented at the conference "Jeden swiat, wiele kultur". 7-8 November. Bydgoszcz.

child care time for women is much harder to reduce than housework time²¹. What is indisputable is that availability of day care centres (state-owned or affordable private ones) can only strengthen the desire to have children and the same applies to more equal sharing of domestic work²².

Research on cross-country variations in fertility responses to the economic crisis has shown that there is a clear link between unemployment and first birth rates, with stronger impact on younger age cohorts, given the increasing youth unemployment. The second birth rates are more irregular and the third birth rates even more irregular than the second. Therefore, there is an important relationship between unemployment and fertility with major effects in Southern, Central and Eastern European countries²³. Disentangling the different contributing factors, though, is a much more complex task and requires further research.

Even though demographers have been debating the above issues since the 1970s, attributing the problem to individualism and consumerism, the general feeling up to the end of the 1980s had been that the problem would take care of itself²⁴. Policy-makers in many advanced economies were reluctant to intervene for various reasons. It would have been contradictory on the one hand to encourage childbearing in their own countries and on the other to promote family planning in developing countries. In relation to gender, such intervention would be reinforcing gender stereotypes and women's reproductive role and attempt to limit their control over their body, whereas their position in the family would remain disadvantaged, as they would be under the double pressure to 'produce' in the labour market and to 'reproduce' in the private sphere. All these would be at the antipodes of the substantive volume of gender equality policies in the EU. It has been argued that EU policies have always been dominated by economic priorities, which drive gender equality policies away from their original targets, and conditioned by the market²⁵. In the case of policies aiming at the organisation of intimacy, for instance, there was the pressure of feminist movements to promote a more equal gender distribution of unpaid work in the private sphere. This led to 'reconciliation of work and family', a concept with a feminist potential which was diminished through the change of its meaning when it became part of the European Employment Strategy and in this way acquired a market-oriented character; it was, as Stratigaki puts it, co-opted and, as such, weakened in terms of its power to transform gender roles in the family²⁶. Gender equality is also seen by feminist scholars as an 'apparatus of power to govern fertility'²⁷ which raises the question of the degree to which it is socio-political.

Nevertheless, concerns about the cost and lack of sustainability of pension systems, child and elderly care led to a recent emphasis on 'work-family reconciliation' in order to deal with the 'demographic time bomb'. Therefore, the underlying rationale of gender equality policies is to enable women through work-life-balance measures to produce in the labour market and

²¹ Goldscheider, F., Bernhardt, E. and Lappegård, T. (2015).

²² Rindfuss, R.R., Guilkey, D., Morgan, P., Kravdal, Ø, and Benjamin-Guzzo, K. (2007) Childcare availability and first-birth timing in Norway. *Demography* 44(2):345-372.

²³ Goldstein, J.R., Kreyenfeld, M., Jasilioniene, A. and Karaman Örsal, D. (2013). Fertility reactions to the 'Great Recession' in Europe: Recent evidence from order-specific data. *Demographic Research* 29/4:85-104. DOI:10.4054/SemRes.2013.29.4

²⁴ Derega V. (2013). The impact of public policies on the trends of family and fertility in the European Union. *Public Policy and Economic Development* Issue 4:34-40.

²⁵ Verloo, M., Maratou-Alipranti, L., Tertinegg, K., and van Beveren, J. (2005). Framing the organisation of intimacy as a policy problem across Europe. *The Greek Review of Social Research*. 117(B): 119-147.

²⁶ Stratigaki, M. (2004). The Co-optation of gender concepts in EU policies: The case of reconciliation of work and family. *Social Politics* 11(1): 3-56.

²⁷ Repo, J. (2012). The governance of fertility through gender equality in the EU and Japan. *Asia Europe Journal* 10(2):199-214.

to reproduce the workforce of the future²⁸. This is on the EU policy agenda to which Member States respond differently²⁹: either through accentuating traditional family arrangements and values, confirming women as primary carers, or by embracing work-life balance policies and measures whose ideological hues depend on the political constellation and the socio-economic and cultural environment in the particular Member States. Some advance gender equality and others tend to reinforce the traditional heterosexual family and gender roles. The number of governments which consider their population growth rate as too low and want to stimulate it has risen considerably and this shift is expressed in documents referring to the centrality of Family and family-friendliness³⁰.

1.3. Context matters

Pronatalist policies' outcomes also vary depending on the context. Recent research³¹ in 24 countries has shown that the more progressive and supportive a national context is towards gender equality, the more equal the division of unpaid labour and the more stable unions become, which may lead to stronger families and hence to increase in fertility rates.

Moreover, immigration which is one of the tools to improve the above situation, is a thorny issue in the EU at the moment, given the refugee crisis. Some countries are only open to selected highly-skilled migrant workers, which fuels the debate on 'brain drain'³². Nevertheless, very recent evidence from Germany shows how immigration and work-life balance policies can work in synergy to increase fertility. The birth rate in Germany last year was 1.5 for the first time after three decades, with women of non-German nationality reaching levels of 1.8 or 1.9, as opposed to German nationals whose birth rate was 1.43³³. This development can be attributed to both immigration and the introduction of family-friendly policies, such as the great emphasis on child care provision for pre-school children and the sharp increase of nursery places.

As people's economic behaviour changes at different stages of the life-course, changes in the population structure has obvious economic effects for productivity and growth. Having said that, policies (family, health, labour and so on) are needed to complement a demographic dividend that might be present if most of the population are of working age³⁴.

Demographic shifts have implications also for ethnic, class and social conflict in general. In addition, the rise of populist parties, which feed on the EU demographic crisis, can push for restrictions in free trade and movement³⁵. A recent article³⁶ describes the current situation in the EU through the lens of 'consociational democracy', which analyses the ways in which European elites governed through power-sharing and consensus-building, so as to provide political stability and overcome divisions in the EU. In the beginning of the 21st century, while political stability has been established, the promise of prosperity has failed in the light of the

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Duncan, S. (2002). Policy discourses on 'reconciling work and life' in the EU. *Social Policy and Society* 1(4): 305-314.

³⁰ Council of Europe (2010). Investing in Family Cohesion as a Development Factor in Times of Crisis. Report. Parliamentary Assembly. Council of Europe. 19 January 2010.

³¹ Kil, T. and Neels, K. (2014). Gender inequality in the division of housework over the lifecourse: A European comparative perspective. Paper presented at the meetings of the European Population Association, Budapest, June.

³² Ezeh A.C., Bongaarts J., Mberu B. (2012).

³³ Oltermann, P. (2016). Fertility rate in Germany rises to 33-year high. *The Guardian*, 16 October 2016.

³⁴ Testa, M. (2014).

³⁵ McLean, S.B. (2014).

³⁶ Ibid.

financial crisis. There is evidence of current mistrust toward EU institutions, e.g. a 2015 Eurobarometer study, in which only 40% of Europeans tend to trust the EU, while in 19 out of 28 member states more than 50% of citizens believe that their voices are not heard (unsurprisingly perhaps, Greece has a very low percentage of 20% and Cyprus the lowest with 19%)³⁷.

Current divisions in the EU are along the lines of gender, race/ethnicity, class, age, religion, and are exacerbated by the demographic crisis, education shortfalls, unemployment, the migration crisis, the rise of populism and the extreme Right³⁸.

1.4. Migrants and demography

Migration flows can be part of a solution to the growing demographic problem. Indeed, migration has already helped the demographics of several EU countries in the last two decades. Comparative research has shown that the five countries that have benefited the most are Spain, Italy, France, Germany and the UK, who received about 90% of the additional workforce of people aged 15-64³⁹.

The contribution of migrants to the EU working age population more than doubled in the period 2001-2011 (about 13 million people aged 15-64) compared to the period 1991-2001 (5.6 million people); in addition, the former workforce was overall younger⁴⁰.

While at the end of the last century the positive contribution of migration to the EU mainly referred to the EU-15, it appears that at the beginning of the 21st century additional member states, such as Poland, have also benefited⁴¹.

Currently there is a growing interest in studying immigrant families and the relevant dynamics, including those of partnership and childbearing. The issue of integration of immigrants and the ways in which such integration plays a role in addressing the EU demographic problem calls for further research. Studies have shown a correlation between inter-ethnic marriage and economic assimilation. However, there are hidden dynamics in such marriages, not least increased risks of separation compared to intra-ethnic marriages. Moreover, such risks appear higher the more pronounced cultural dissimilarity between the partners becomes⁴².

Research into immigrant fertility seeks to understand fertility patterns after immigration and also the ways in which immigration impacts on them. A central issue is the extent to which immigrant fertility behaviour is influenced by the environment that the immigrant experienced in their childhood (the socialisation hypothesis) and, by contrast, the degree to which such behaviour is shaped by the immigrant's current context (the adaptation hypothesis). The latter points clearly to the economic opportunities, facilities, services and constraints facing the immigrants in their destination countries. In most cases there is an

³⁷ Eurobarometer (2015). Public Opinion in the European Union – First results. Standard Eurobarometer 83, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb83/eb83_first_en.pdf.

³⁸ McLean, S.B. (2014).

³⁹ Testa, M. (2014).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Kulu, H. and Gonzalez-Ferrer, A. (2014). Family dynamics among immigrants and their descendants in Europe: current research and opportunities. *European Journal of Population* 30: 411-435.

interplay between drivers from both the origin and the destination countries shaping the fertility behaviour of migrants⁴³.

When it comes to the descendants of immigrants, they seem to be more influenced by the country of destination as regards their fertility behaviour, though whether they grow up within a family of immigrants also plays a role; often an interplay between the culture and norms (but also opportunities and services provided) of the destination country and those of the 'subculture' of the immigrant community interact in more complex ways⁴⁴.

To the extent that immigrant integration can redress the demographic challenge facing the EU, policies for integration/adaptation should take account of the opportunities that need to be provided to the immigrants. Family/fertility patterns of immigrant and ethnic minority families are an indicator of their wider social, economic and cultural integration⁴⁵.

There is a clear need to study family changes of immigrants over their life courses to provide a holistic picture of their family life; research family trajectories among the descendants of immigrants; examine alternative family arrangements (e.g. cohabitation), which can indicate the degree of integration of immigrants; promote comparative research on family trajectories among immigrants across groups and countries; enhance our understanding through qualitative longitudinal research to understand family dynamics and their reasons⁴⁶.

Finally, a better understanding of work-life challenges for transnational families is required, especially in the transition from the country of origin to the destination country; there may be different needs which policies aimed at the autochthonous population do not capture.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Kulu, H. and Gonzalez-Ferrer, A. (2014).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

2. SOCIAL OR GENDER POLICIES IN MEMBER STATES AIMING AT ADDRESSING DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES

KEY FINDINGS

- Work-life balance policies without parallel provision of services not only are less effective but may also undermine what gender equality policies have achieved.
- Workplace flexibility has to be accompanied by regulation of working hours, so that they do not lead to intensification and spillover. Protection of rights and benefits of those in flexible employment must be safeguarded.
- Given the controversy around the concept 'work-life balance', further research is required to highlight the needs of those social groups that have been left out. This would ensure greater inclusiveness and emphasis on the improvement of the situation of the most vulnerable.
- Policies focusing on individuals as earners and carers, such as those of the Nordic countries, have the most egalitarian outcomes in terms of work-life balance.

2.1. Policies aiming at boosting fertility and labour market participation

A holistic approach to employment needs to be adopted that includes raising educational standards, reducing early school leaving, addressing discrimination at work (including gender occupational segregation and the gender pay gap), providing opportunities for work-life balance (childcare facilities, flexible employment arrangements, extended and flexible parental leave packages). The influence of gender equality policies which provide opportunities to women in education and the labour market in a setting which does not allow them to reconcile work and family is weakened and women will not have the number of children they once intended to have.

As women's participation in the labour market has been rising in the recent decades, higher fertility rates are associated with national policies enabling both parents to combine work and family, i.e. enhancing work-life balance. These include the provision of childcare facilities and flexible work arrangements, e.g. in Sweden or France⁴⁷ but also transformation of gender roles and a more egalitarian sharing of care duties. Further research is required on men's fertility and the fertility plans of couples, rather than those of individuals, since the decision of having children is usually a joint one⁴⁸.

Moreover, much more research into new family forms is needed. Given the geographic specificity of research on fertility which involves European scholars focusing mainly on Europe and North America, it would be constructive and beneficial, if geographical barriers were crossed and systems of common methods of data collection were developed and agreed

⁴⁷ McLean, S.B. (2014).

⁴⁸ Balbo, N., Billari, F. C. and Mills, M. (2013).

through collaboration⁴⁹. There is lack of international data on institutions which would enable very useful comparisons of the ways they interact in diverse welfare states settings and institutions which would reveal restrictions posed on the micro-level by macro-level policies, for instance how family policies affect a couple's work-life balance⁵⁰.

2.2. Active ageing

Life expectancy in Europe has been rising and governments have been concerned with the sustainability of the pay-as-you-go character of pension systems and ways of facing the substantial financial burden of ageing population. A way to deal with this trend is through increasing retirement age and prolonging economic activity past retirement age. A good indicator to assess the situation is **working life expectancy (WLE)**⁵¹ which is the number of years a person is expected to be economically active and includes times spent in employment and in unemployment⁵². Using this indicator to check for gender differences in WLE at age 50, Leichlinger and Weber have found that there are great differences across countries and between men and women as to how the remaining years are used between activity and inactivity. There are positive correlations with life expectancy and healthy life expectancy. Retirement policies vary across countries; some allow full retirement while others permit gradual retirement through part-time work. This leads to a difference up to ten remaining healthy years with women having lower WLE although they have higher healthy life expectancy than men⁵³.

Retirement was viewed until recently as people's complete disengagement from the labour market at an arbitrary age and the beginning of the last stage of their life in which they would be just pension recipients. Old age had overall negative connotations of passivity and exclusion from political and social life, as people were getting older.

Demographic and financial pressures brought about a shift in the perception of the elderly, as more healthy, active people and the term '**active ageing**' appeared, which is understood in different ways⁵⁴; one approach is the economic one which means prolonging working life by some years and another the gerontological paradigm of successful ageing which links activity and health. Ageism is the most common form of discrimination as different studies show⁵⁵ and has been aggravated by the economic recession. Aiming at its reduction is essential for active ageing policies to be effective⁵⁶.

Ageism is also a major impediment to the implementation of the EU commitment to equality in employment (EC Directive 2000/78/EC) and to active ageing policies whose goal was to

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Kalwij, A. (2010). The impact of family policy expenditure on fertility in western Europe. *Demography* 47(2):503-519.

⁵¹ Also known as labour force expectancy, active life expectancy, labour market life expectancy, work-life expectancy, duration of active life or average length of working life.

⁵² Leichlinger, E. and Weber, D. (2016). Trends in working life expectancy in Europe. *Journal of Ageing and Health* 28(7) 1194-1213.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Walker, A. and Maltby, T. (2012).

⁵⁵ Abrams, D., Russell, P. S., Vanclair, C.-M., and Swift, H. (2011). *Ageism in Europe: Findings from the European Social Survey*. London: Age UK.; Naegle, G., & Walker, A. (2006). *A guide to good practice in age Management*. Dublin: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

⁵⁶ Walker, A. and Maltby, T. (2012).

raise awareness of the value of older workforce and provide training to older workers on an equal basis⁵⁷.

Active ageing is about including older people and creating opportunities for them to participate as active citizens, which could also mean voluntary work in the community or help with care in the domestic sphere and not necessarily labour market activity. On the other hand, employment conditions often cause ill health and may affect the ability to work. Active ageing also comprises the aspect of autonomous living in dignity for as long as possible.

None the less, in spite of the compulsory character of the EC Directive 200/78/EC, there is still vagueness as to its content and the lack of sanctions contributes to its lack of effectiveness, which means that older people miss on opportunities which could improve their lives⁵⁸. There is a clear need for a comprehensive strategy between the state and the citizens, in which the former will provide opportunities in a co-ordinated way in the domains of health, labour market, social protection, housing, transport, learning which will empower older people to remain active, offer services and take care of their life and health. Walker and Maltby⁵⁹ highlight some risks, namely potential emphasis by policy-makers on a particular type of ageing which would stress the physical aspect rather than mental capacity and the productivist aspect. In this way they would lead to the exclusion of certain more vulnerable groups, which may be either the 'old old' or the more physically frail.

Another policy challenge is provision of care for the elderly which, given the less availability of children and changes in family structure and attitudes to care and family values, will in the near future have to be provided by the state. Currently this is not the case in some Member States, especially in the South. Three demographic factors can offset these developments: Rising life expectancy, immigration and population momentum (boost in growth generated by young population structure). These factors explain why many countries below replacement rate do not have also negative growth.

2.3. Immigration policy

Exogenous immigration could provide the supplementary working age population that the EU so urgently needs. By contrast, internal EU mobility, however, when the more skilled workers leave a country to move to richer countries, can increase the gap between EU Member states (e.g. the immigrants from Southern Europe to Germany)⁶⁰.

Since 1989, more than 12 million applicants for asylum have arrived in developed countries (with peaks in the 1990s after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the war in ex-Yugoslavia, and after 2010 with the Arab spring and war in Syria)⁶¹. Distribution of claims has been uneven, with per capita rates higher in Malta and Sweden, but also Luxemburg, Cyprus, Austria, Belgium. Asylum policy harmonisation and the Dublin Regulation have not been adequate and have exacerbated the unequal distribution of immigrants in EU countries⁶².

⁵⁷ European Commission (EC). (2001). *Guidelines for member states' employment policies for the year 2002*. Brussels: European Commission.

⁵⁸ Walker, A. and Maltby, T. (2012).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ McLean, S.B. (2014).

⁶¹ Hatton, T. (2015). Setting policy on asylum: has the EU got it right? IZA World of Labour 124. doi: 10.15185/izawol.124.

⁶² Ibid.

Refugees could be seen as a public good, which should be evenly distributed among EU Member States, as part of a EU wide policy (including a semi-developed Common European Asylum System) which would be more likely to be supported by the EU citizens⁶³.

The difficult relationship between immigration and the welfare state has been prominent in both scholarly and political debates. Friedman's argument that 'you cannot have free immigration and a welfare state' has been quoted extensively in the relevant literature⁶⁴. Populist politicians present the welfare state as a pull factor for immigration and migrant workers as people who leave their countries to draw benefits in other welfare states. Research findings are mixed. The friction between migration and the welfare state is known as the **migration-welfare state paradox** to describe that under austerity negative views are strengthened and the immigrants are seen as a threat to the natives' jobs, the national and local culture, or welfare resources⁶⁵. Conflating the notions of 'refugee' with 'illegal immigrant' and 'welfare scrounger' clearly cannot but create negative public sentiment⁶⁶.

Although such divisive arguments, used extensively by xenophobic politicians seem to reflect the attitudes of some in the native population, research on the views of labour migrants from various countries and different levels of education and skills in the Netherlands (11.6% of its workforce are immigrants) shows that those coming from poorer countries and with lower education focus on work rather than on welfare benefits⁶⁷. They are in search of a work contract and when asked about welfare rights, they supported the view that those had to be 'earned' through work and contributions gradually, what is known in the literature as **citizenship ladder** or **differentiated citizenship**. By contrast, it is the European educated migrants with higher education who are after the security offered by the welfare state and feel entitled to its benefits. This difference in their attitudes strengthens the view that attitudes are shaped by the institutional setting of the country of origin. Turkish and Indian respondents did not have the sense of entitlement and were of the opinion that citizenship had to be earned through work, with the exception of education for their children. Their views change after living in the receiving country for a long time and get accustomed to the culture.

A key issue is how attractive the EU is as a destination for immigrant workers in terms of the legal schemes available in the Member States⁶⁸.

Family reunification as a right is guaranteed by various legal sources in the EU. The adoption of Council Directive 2003/86/EC, which grants family members the right to work, set the conditions for the right to family reunification to be exercised by third-country nationals residing in a Member State. However, it limits the rights to the children and spouse, generally speaking, though giving to the Member States the opportunity to extend these rights to more family members. Article 8 of the ECHR and Article 7 of the EU Charter, on the other hand, guarantees the right to family life⁶⁹.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ From Milton Friedman's lecture 'What is America' in 1978, quoted in Kremer, M. (2016). Earned Citizenship: Labour migrants' views on the welfare state. *Journal of Social Policy* 45(3): 395-415 (395).

⁶⁵ McLean, S.B. (2014).

⁶⁶ Hatton, T. (2015)..

⁶⁷ Kremer, M. (2016). Earned Citizenship: Labour migrants' views on the welfare state. *Journal of Social Policy* 45(3): 395-415.

⁶⁸ Eisele, K. and Heinemann, c. (2013). The EU as a family-friendly destination? Family reunification rights for Indian nationals in the EU and access of family members to the labour market. CARIM India Thematic Report RR2013/1. Florence: European University Institute.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Research has shown that emphasis primarily on the economy in a fragmented, rather than an all-encompassing way undermines the successful implementation of policies, which could improve simultaneously both demography and work-life balance, through the enhancement of equal distribution of work and care and provision of care services for children and the elderly.

2.4. Family and employment policies aiming at work-life balance

In 2005 the European Commission published the Green Paper Confronting Demographic Change⁷⁰, which alerted policy-makers to the problem of population ageing. Increase in employment was one of the recommendations in the paper, in particular female employment, something which has been set as a goal in the 2000 Lisbon strategy.

Since 2007 many countries in the EU have been suffering a fiscal crisis, unemployment and have been subjected to heavy austerity measures. Employment has been transformed and is defined by less work, reduced working time, rising job insecurity, less employment choices and decreasing wages and benefits.

The transformation of the labour market, the current recession and the phenomenal rise in unemployment, precarious employment, part-time work and poverty have brought about changes and led to increasing flexibility at the workplace. As a result of all these, there is repercussion on the private life of women and men in Europe with the former overrepresented in the most vulnerable types of employment. In parallel, traditional family is no longer the norm as new family forms emerge or become more common. All these have been well-documented by many European studies⁷¹ and it is imperative that they also be reflected in European family and employment policies⁷².

Different Member states have diverse gender regimes, namely 'interconnected systems, through which paid work is lined with unpaid work, state services and benefits are delivered to individual or to households, costs are allocated, and time is shared between men and women in households, as well as between households and employment'⁷³ in particular welfare cultures. In addition, female participation in paid employment is related to a diversity of attitudes and norms across Europe as to gender roles and perceptions of motherhood which consequently inform family practices, as well as decisions about employment and work at home, including care work⁷⁴. The European Union's commitment to the promotion of equal employment opportunities, as reflected in the EU 2020 Strategy, aims to reduce unemployment and poverty through job creation and inclusion which would facilitate work-life balance.

⁷⁰ European Commission (2005) Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations. Green Paper. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

⁷¹ Eurofound (see References section for full references) 2012a;2012b;2013a.2013b;2015a;2015b;2015c;2015d;2015e;2015f;2015g;2015h;2016; Eurostat (2015). Quality of life in Europe: facts and views - leisure and social relations, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Quality_of_life_in_Europe_-_facts_and_views_-_leisure_and_social_relations.

⁷² Crompton, R. and Lyonette, C. (2005). The new gender essentialism – Domestic and family 'choices' and their relation to attitudes. *British Journal of Sociology* 56: 601-620.

⁷³ Deven, F. and Moss, P. (2002). Leave arrangements for parents: overview and future outlook. *Community, Work and Family* 5(3): 237-255.

⁷⁴ Jappens, M. and Van Bavel, J. (2012). Regional family norms and child care by grandparents in Europe. *Demographic Research* 27(4):85-120. 10.4054/DemRes.2012.27.4.

The lack of balance between work and lifestyle, or so-called **work-life conflict** has been connected with lower quality of life and lack of satisfaction for individuals, as well as lower performance at work due to insufficient time and the generation of stress in the process of trying to meet one's obligations. It also affects relationships between couples and between parents and children⁷⁵. Moreover, work-life conflict issues play a crucial role in childbearing decisions. In the EU, the desired average number of children has remained the same, i.e. two or more children per woman; this is the case even in low-fertility EU countries, which indicates that the achieved fertility increasingly deviates from the desired one⁷⁶.

Work-life balance (WLB) refers to the balanced assignment of priorities between individual activities that come under the term **work** (including employment and career prospects) and **life**, encompassing all aspects of life outside work (broadly leisure, physical and spiritual personal development and family obligations and tasks)⁷⁷. There is a grey area in this dichotomy, namely time which cannot be considered either work or leisure, such as time required for commuting to the workplace⁷⁸. This assignment involves 'time-management, inter-role conflict (role overload and interference) and care arrangements of dependants'⁷⁹. More analytically, work-life balance for each individual is determined by the interaction between gender and household characteristics (age, gender care responsibilities, partner's situation), workplace characteristics/conditions and welfare and working time policies⁸⁰. Other terms in the literature and policy texts are 'work-family reconciliation', 'work-life interface' etc.

The term 'work-life balance' presents certain problems because of the normative concern whether it is possible to balance employment and family responsibilities and the gendered nature of care that it is often associated with⁸¹. It has also been attacked for being non-inclusive of certain social groups and inequitable⁸². Furthermore, it is linked with the emerging agenda of welfare states' need to meet new social risks, such as reconciling paid employment and unpaid care for children, the elderly and the disabled. It also involves a personal, though society-induced, element of motivation and performance, which has to be balanced with family responsibility⁸³.

Critics argue that 'work-life balance' is strongly associated with middle-class dual earner heterosexual couples with dependent children, usually in white-collar jobs. What is known as '**dual career**' or '**work-rich, time-poor**' households. The very notion became prominent in the debate surrounding gender equality and increasing female labour market activity and the problems of combining work and care (also predominantly and traditionally female). As a response to this, research has focused on the private sphere and the roles performed by the genders at work and in the family and hence groups such as single fathers in part-time work, parents living in poverty, homosexual parents or post-divorce parents; similarly, when it comes to professional life, very few studies focus on the most vulnerable groups and their

⁷⁵ Fernandez-Crehuet, J-M. Gimenez-Nadal, J-I. and Reyes-Recio, L-E. (2015). The National work-life balance index: the European case. *Social Indices Research* 128:341-359.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Wheatley, D. (2012). Work-life balance, travel-to-work and the dual-career household. *Personnel Review* 41(6):813-831.

⁷⁹ Gregory, A. and Milner, S. (2009). Work-life balance: a matter of choice? *Gender, Work and Organization* 16(1): 1-13.

⁸⁰ Gregory, A. Milner, S. and Windebank, J. (2013). Work-life balance in times of economic crisis and austerity. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 33(9-10): 528-541.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Gatrell, C.J., Burnett, S.B. Cooper, C.L and Sparrow, P. (2013). Work-life balance and parenthood: A comparative review of definitions, equity and enrichment. *International Journal of Management Reviews* 13: 300-316.

⁸³ Khallash, S. and Kruse, M. (2012). The future of work and work life balance 2025. *Futures* 44:678-686.

needs in terms of needs and work-life conflict⁸⁴. Finally, 'Work-life balance' does not depict the enriching side of parenthood as an experience and leaves out a great number of care workers who facilitate middle-class people's work-life balance, having themselves a situation of total imbalance themselves as they often have to leave their own children behind⁸⁵. Work-life balance also produces gendered outcomes, as a lot of the work involves care and homemaking, which are part of daily life, particularly of women, and are unpaid and outside market employment relations.

In this complicated landscape of policies and regulations, people have to combine paid work and personal life, contribute to production, reproduction and care, all three central in policy-making. Care encompasses both child and elderly care and spans the private and the public spheres, as some welfare states (such as the Nordic ones) provide public care services.

Family policies are crucial vehicles for addressing work-life balance issues and vary across the EU, which results in different policy outcomes and different implications for gender equality.

A recent study has provided a comparative measure of work-life balance in the EU by constructing an index. Using this index, it was found that Central and Northern European countries (such as Denmark, Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands) present a higher score on work-life balance than those of Southern (Greece, Spain, Portugal, Bulgaria) countries. This National **WLB index** is a specific tool for analysing the nature of the opportunities that individuals have to balance their work and life spheres. It is made up of five dimensions, namely time/schedule, work, family, health and policy⁸⁶. Working time forms part of the index, as it is an important aspect, however, its regularity and structure (e.g. shifts, day/night, weekends) is also taken into consideration. The percentage of individuals working part-time is also accounted for.

The index shows that Denmark and Sweden are in the top positions according to the five dimensions, while Slovakia and Greece occupy the bottom places; interestingly, variations in the five dimensions are observed, e.g. the Netherlands are in the third position overall, but only in the 21st position on the policy dimension⁸⁷.

'Work-life balance', controversial as it may be and due to lack of a better alternative, will be used in this text because it does not presuppose a family in its nuclear form, it is dominant in a massive volume of literature and research in this field which this study is linked with.

Given the high number of studies and reports produced by European and international research bodies and institutions, which investigate different dimensions of the work-life debate, there is no point in using the limited space of this study to relist policies at Member State level. Therefore, this section's purpose is to distil and present the main arguments around the dominant themes in the work-life balance debate focusing on linking ideas in ways that demonstrate the interrelation of demographic, family, employment and broader economic policies. Sporadic references to successful practices in different countries will be

⁸⁴ Skinner, N. and Chapman, J. (2013). Work-life balance and family-friendly policies. *Evidence Base Issue 4* <journal anzso.g.edu.au> ISSN 1838-9422.

⁸⁵ Ehrenreich, B. and Hochschild, A. (2003). *Global Women: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. London. Granta; European Parliament (2016a) Differences in Men's and Women's Work, Care and Leisure Time. A Study for Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policies Department C: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, Gender Equality, European Parliament, Brussels.

⁸⁶ Fernandez-Crehuet, J-M. Gimenez-Nadal, J-I. and Reyes-Recio, L-E. (2015). The National work-life balance index: the European case. *Social Indices Research* 128:341-359.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

made for illustration purposes with the hope that this text will contribute to the evaluation and design of policies adopting a more holistic view of the situation.

2.4.1. Leaves

All forms of leaves, mainly maternity, paternity, parental and carers' leaves, are central instruments to address work-life-conflict challenges. They vary according to duration of employment-protected statutory leave, average payment during the leave, and the arrangements through which the leave is divided between men and women in child-bearing families⁸⁸.

The Pregnant Workers' Directive (92/85/EEC) sets out the basic rights for all women in the EU before and after pregnancy. Maternity leave is paid at least at the level of sick pay for a period of at least 14 weeks with a maximum of 52 and varies greatly as to its length and level of pay across Member States, half of which have above 18 weeks. It offers protection against dismissal for the entire length of pregnancy and leave. In 2010 Directive 2010/41/EU granted a maternity allowance of at least 14 weeks for female self-employed workers or female spouses of self-employed workers⁸⁹.

The Parental Leave Directive (2010/18/EU) provides workers with the right to be with their natural or adopted children for a period of at least four months and until their child reaches a certain age, which varies across Member States but cannot exceed the age of 8 years. It can be taken in several blocks and shared between parents also on a part-time basis. At least a month cannot be transferred and is lost, if not taken by each parent. Setting the level of pay and conditions and rules is left with the Member States⁹⁰. This fact causes a highly varied picture across the Union, as the length of parental leave can be anything between 17 and 156 weeks.

No similar Directive on paternity leave or carers' leave exists on a European level. Paternity leave is an individual, non-transferable right of fathers which can be taken around the time of childbirth and ranges from 1 day to 90 days. Some Member States do not have it at all, whereas those that do provide a level of compensation ranging from 70 to 100 per cent of respective salary⁹¹.

Carers' leave has been introduced in a number of countries for workers to be able to take care of ill, disabled, elderly or frail dependants. It comprises leave to care for sick or disabled children, leave of up to 7 days for urgent family reasons (*force majeure*), leave to care exclusively for terminally ill relatives and leave to care for dependent relatives (including children of usually 18 years of age)⁹².

Despite these developments gender inequalities between women and men in the domains of paid work, care and leisure persist⁹³ and women remain overrepresented among carers, although progress has been made in terms of the role of men when it comes to care.

⁸⁸ For a thorough and exhaustive account of maternity, paternity and parental leaves across the EU, see European Parliament (2015). Maternity, paternity and parental leave: data related to duration and compensation rates. Document prepared for the FEMM Committee, Brussels: European Parliament.

⁸⁹ European Commission (2016). Second stage consultation of the Social Partners at European level under Article 154 TFEU on possible action addressing the challenges of work-life balance faced by working parents and caregivers. C (2016) 2472 final.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² European Commission (2016).

⁹³ European Parliament (2016a) Differences in men's and women's work, care and leisure time. A Study for Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policies Department C: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, Gender Equality, European Parliament, Brussels.

Overall, the EU childhood policy consists of the legal right to maternity and parental leave, public support for working parents and for early education for all children. Directives on the regulation of working time and parenthood have started to incorporate the concept of the worker-parent into employment law. However, implementation of EU equality directives is uneven and conditioned on national differences in legal arrangements, political will and different ways of transposing EU law, while care subsidisation rests with the authority of the Member States.

2.4.2. Fathers' involvement in care

The changes that the traditional family has been undergoing has led to changes in the traditional gender roles. Fathers are becoming more willing to care for their children and to be more emotionally present.

However, organisational psychology literature has been rather slow in exposing these changes and practices at the workplace remain geared towards a family in which the father is the main earner and the mother the main carer. Consequently, men who choose to care may be seen as less 'masculine' by their colleagues, while they are deprived of their right to spend time with their families. More research is certainly needed to highlight the differences between parents' desires and attitudes to parenthood and social/workplace expectations of them⁹⁴ and demonstrate the changes which would counteract the deeply-rooted assumptions of masculinities at work.

This argument is strengthened by evidence from the Member States that have been promoting gender equality which clearly shows that unless policies, such as parental leave, include a '**take it or leave it**' part reserved for fathers, flexibility as to the remaining time and a high wage-replacement rate, men's uptake will remain low. This has both an economic and a cultural basis. Single parents should be allowed to use the entire leave available to couples.

The Nordic countries score very highly. The percentage of fathers taking leave is around 90 per cent in Iceland and Sweden and 70 per cent in Norway. Findings from Norway suggests that parental leave is the most influential policy instrument for parents to decide to have children, whereas policies which encourage equal share of parenting responsibilities are effective in the decision of couples to have a second child⁹⁵.

Nevertheless, studies have documented a clear trend towards greater involvement of fathers in childcare in the last fifteen years⁹⁶. This entails both a change of attitudes and a trend facilitated by parental leave policies. The 2010-15 Coalition government in the UK, for instance, attempted to stimulate fathers' involvement by enabling fathers and mothers to share some of the 52-week maternity leave. However, these measures cannot be enough unless they simulate the non-transferable **daddy quota** of the Nordic countries and are accompanied by a generous replacement pay⁹⁷.

The gender role transformative character when it comes to division of labour in the domestic sphere is very much related with availability of publicly provided care services.

⁹⁴ Gatrell, C.J., Burnett, S.B. Cooper, C.L and Sparrow, P. (2013).

⁹⁵ Buber-Ennser, I. (2015).

⁹⁶ Nandini, M. and Jurado, T. (2013).

⁹⁷ Gregory, A. Milner, S. and Windebank, J. (2013).

2.4.3. Access to child care services

Supply and access to formal child care (or the lack of it) is a structural problem, linked with child care practices in the family. These practices are informed by a number of factors, including broader social and cultural ones, and vary across Europe, though the variation is not simply a difference between the **individualistic** North and the **familialistic** South. For example, research has shown that in Italy, Greece, parts of Spain, Austria and Hungary, the probability that mothers rely mainly on grandparent-provided child care is the highest, while in countries like France, Sweden, and Denmark it is lowest. Such differentiations can be statistically attributed mainly to country-level, but also to intra-national differences⁹⁸ in terms of culture.

Family as an institution may be very strong in the Southern and in some Central European Member States but it the availability of high-quality state-run child care facilities is crucial for women's labour market participation but also for shaping attitudes to care. The Nordic countries' example speaks volumes for the empowering effect quality childcare facilities have in women's employment.

The effects of the recession in some countries deserve particular attention, since they affect women and poorer households disproportionately hard. Budget cuts in Greece, for instance, are detrimental to care services and benefits for children and the elderly, which depend increasingly on the family and in particular on women. In times of austerity it becomes paramount to relieve families in a less privileged socio-economic position from the responsibility and cost of child care and public provision of pre-school child care services would ensure a more equal start in life and education.

2.4.4. Work flexibility

'Flexibility' is a very popular, albeit problematic term, which can be seen both as positive and as negative in terms of work-life balance. Its attraction can be explained by the fact that employers and employees respectively tend to focus on the aspect which is beneficial to them. The term denotes practices such as reduced hours, remote working, compressed hours among others.

Employees see it as a way of having control over their lives, of saving time and money by not commuting to work and of spending more time at home. Often they are not aware of the spillover effect tele-working may have on their personal/family life and leisure and a way to deal with time pressure and emotional stress, the two most common themes in work-life conflict⁹⁹. Organisations on the other hand, see it as a way of extending working hours and of making the flexible employee 'available' and at times obliged to choose and prioritise between work and personal life. An argument which is often seen in the literature is that work-life balance policies are mainly employer- and business-needs-driven and must be assessed with caution. Therefore, work-life friendly policies which at first sight appear equally beneficial to both parties may not really be that. For example, the 2003 regulations in the UK which give parents of young children to ask their employers to have flexible arrangements is at first sight a mutually beneficial solution but not really, as it can be rejected by employers on the grounds of 'business needs' ¹⁰⁰.

⁹⁸ Jappens, M. and Van Bavel, J. (2012).

⁹⁹ Skinner, N. and Chapman, J. (2013).

¹⁰⁰ Wheatley, D. (2012).

Flexibility is correlated with productivity. According to a German study¹⁰¹ employees with greater flexibility and control over their time are more productive (estimated gain 0.1% per hour per employee) as proof of appreciation of their organisation's willingness to facilitate their work/life arrangements, while evidence from Finland¹⁰² (research involving 25,000 public sector employees) shows that low time control leads to increase in the number of days of medically-certified sick leave. Other benefits for employers include higher retention rates and lower turnover intentions¹⁰³. Further benefits for employers would include savings in accommodation and equipment through 'hot-desking' for instance.

Another form of employees' control over their working hours is 'self-rostering', especially in categories such as that of health professionals who have to work in shifts. Research shows that in order for self-rostering to be efficient, it has to be done in small groups which guarantees good communication¹⁰⁴. As women are overrepresented among health professionals, having more control over their time and the ability to plan would indeed improve their well-being.

Working long hours has been proved to be positively associated with work-life conflict and men's work and strengthening of women's role as main carers. Working time and its regulation is an important aspect of WLB. Social partners have a significant role in setting working time standards, through collective agreements covering the national, sectoral and firm level¹⁰⁵.

The increasing presence of irregularity in working-hours (e.g. night shifts, nonstandard hours) is often facilitated by informal provision of child care, notably by grandparents. Other factors causing work-life conflict are overtime and commuting to work which affect women more, given that they are mostly those responsible for the school run. Not having to go to work saves time and money, especially if employees live away from the workplace. Transport policies can also have positive impact on the life of employees and so can policies relating with provision of parking spaces, as it has been demonstrated that the school run causes delay to working parents in charge of school runs who need to use cars in order to get to work miss the beginning of business meetings or arrive late due to shortage of parking spaces around their workplace. Consequently, practices which alleviate the burden of having to find a parking space. Such a practice is the 'lottery of parking spaces' initiated by the HRM County of Nottingham in the UK¹⁰⁶.

As the literature related with work-life balance tends to focus on families with young children who struggle to combine work and care, another dimension worth-mentioning refers to the variety of needs across the lifecycle. Different stages in a person's life have different needs in terms of combining work and life. Younger people, working very long hours, experience time poverty and have little time to dedicate to relationships with friends and partners. This impacts on their delay in family-formation¹⁰⁷. Similarly, people entering retirement may prefer to have more control over their time and prefer to prolong their working lives, opting

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Hegewisch, A. (2009). Flexible working policies. A comparative review. Equality and Human Rights Commission Research Report Series. Manchester.

¹⁰² Ala-Mursula, L., Vahtera, J., Kuvonen, A., Väänänen, A., Linna, A., Pentti, J. and Kivimäki, M. (2006). Long hours of paid and domestic work and subsequent sickness absence: does control over daily working hours matter? *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 63(9):608-616.

¹⁰³ Skinner, N. and Chapman, J. (2013).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Eurofound (2016). Sixth European Working Conditions Survey. Working time developments in the 21st century: work duration and its regulation in the EU. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

¹⁰⁶ Wheatley, D. (2012).

¹⁰⁷ Skinner, N. and Chapman, J. (2013).

for part-time work in the last years of their working life. Given the ageing of population such attitudes are encouraged by governments as active-ageing.

2.4.5. The use of technology

The use of technology is clearly linked with productivity, which in itself is important for work-life balance. Higher productivity generally goes together with more free time for lifestyle activities. Differences in the EU in productivity and working hours generate differences in the way people reconcile their professional and personal life. Data from the OECD has shown that Spanish and Greek workers both work 10%-40% longer hours and are less productive than those in Germany and the Netherlands¹⁰⁸.

Technology also makes the geographical location of work less relevant. Employees have more opportunities to work from home, while being in contact with their firm and this decentralisation is also economical for firms. This development has potentially huge significance for work-life balance, as it saves commuting time and provides more flexibility to combine work with home-making and care obligations¹⁰⁹. Its downside is the constantly 'switched on' culture which has a serious spillover effect, as the spheres of work and intimacy are not separated. Consequences include increased level of stress and tension in the relationship with the nearest and dearest.

2.4.6. Workplace culture

Five key dimensions to workplace culture have been identified, when viewed from the work-life balance perspective: manager support, organisational time expectations, career consequences, gendered perceptions of policy use and colleagues' support¹¹⁰. Without the synergy of those factors and in a less supportive environment, policies' effectiveness is starkly compromised. Empirical research shows that women's underrepresentation in higher echelons in the labour market can also be partly attributed to discrimination and lack of equal opportunities within the workplace. Despite gender equality and equality of opportunity policies the gender pay gap persists. Organisational culture is, therefore, very important. Would the situation improve, if women were better represented in managerial positions?

Research findings from the US¹¹¹ and Norway¹¹² show that overall higher representation of women in top positions advances the career of other women and promote female representation among the higher ranks, a pattern known as 'women helping women'. Discrimination against women is thus reduced and their pay rises.

A study which looked at data from 30 European countries over a period of fifteen years (1995-2010) testing whether female leadership is associated with less discrimination (as perceived by the respondents), more equal opportunities and better work-life balance¹¹³ has reached some interesting conclusions: Female presence in managerial and supervisory roles is negatively associated with perceived gender discrimination and work intensity and positively

¹⁰⁸ Fernandez-Crehuet, J-M. Gimenez-Nadal, J-I. and Reyes-Recio, L-E. (2015).

¹⁰⁹ Khallash, S. and Kruse, M. (2012).

¹¹⁰ McDonald, P., Pini, B. and Bradley, L. (2007). Freedom or fallout in local government? How work-life culture impacts employees using flexible work practices. *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 18(4): 602-622.

¹¹¹ Matsa D.A. and Miller A.R. (2013). A female style in corporate leadership? Evidence from quotas. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 5(3): 136-169.

¹¹² Kunze, A. and Miller, A.R. (2014). Women helping women? Evidence from private sector data on workplace hierarchies. NBER Working Paper (WP No 20761).

¹¹³ Lucifora, C. and Vigani, D. (2016). What if your boss is a woman? Work organization, work-life balance and gender discrimination at the workplace. Discussion Paper No 9737. IZA. Bonn.

associated with time flexibility, supportive work environment and better work-life balance for both sexes. Nevertheless, women tend to reach top positions in female-dominated occupations or lower-paid ones, while male employees in these occupations sometimes report being discriminated against. By contrast, women in top positions in male-dominated, work-intensive environment behave similarly as their male counterparts since they are selected through highly competitive processes in which female employees are penalised not only because they do not reach the top echelons but also because the pay structure is such that favours through bonuses and promotion opportunities people who work very long hours. Therefore, promoting work-life balance practices at the workplace clearly helps the reduction of pay gap and gender inequalities. These micro-level results could inform macro-level policies which would help women's advancement to top positions.

The dominant model of heterosexual traditional family and the association of work-life balance with this family type may contribute to the inability of male employers to comprehend the need for introducing such policies in the workplace and the fact that organisational psychology is rather 'insular' in its approach to the topic¹¹⁴ does not help fathers or same-sex couples.

2.5. Cultural and ideological factors influencing public policies and attitudes

Culture and ideology influence significantly people's attitudes. Less emphasis has been put on these dimensions in the debate on work-life balance. Whilst the state is still recognised as the provider of work-life balance opportunities, at the national level there is considerable variation of policy according to a given welfare regime¹¹⁵.

From the 1990s till 2008 WLB policies have been an integral part of employment and social policy in the EU and at the national level. Such policies promoted a shift from a traditional male breadwinner and female carer model to an adult worker model. The rationale behind work-life balance has been predominantly to address falling fertility rates and the related demographic problem of the ageing population. Other agenda issues include reducing child poverty and the need to manage an increasingly diverse workforce¹¹⁶.

Across Europe there is considerable variation of family practices, including arrangements for provision of child care, which are not only shaped by individual preferences, but also by economic and demographic characteristics, public and social policies and services and also broader cultural environments¹¹⁷.

Racial/ethnic origin is key in understanding what culturally imposed obligations non-paid work may comprise, especially in the case of women and regarding care. Unless research highlights the heterogeneity of unpaid work, policies will be failing certain social groups and ignore cultural diversity and diversity of needs.

The Nordic countries which constitute the most successful examples of advancing women's equal opportunities in employment and have achieved better work-life balance have often been criticised of rendering their public sectors into 'female ghettos', using this as an

¹¹⁴ Gatrell, C.J., Burnett, S.B. Cooper, C.L and Sparrow, P. (2013).

¹¹⁵ Gregory, A. Milner, S. and Windebank, J. (2013).

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Jappens, M. and Van Bavel, J. (2012).

argument against gender equality policies. This implies that public sectors of those countries are seen as lower quality jobs when the reverse is the case but also ignore that the public sector as employer can provide women with more security and job protection and compensate for their career interruption¹¹⁸.

Greater gender equality within the family is certainly positively associated with increase in fertility. Nevertheless, research has shown that it is not the actual degree of equality that matters as much as how people perceive their roles and their degree of satisfaction with the existing division¹¹⁹.

Theoretical debate without equality policies in place does not bring about changes in stereotypes. Whereas encouragement and support by the state will help people decide to try and be exposed to new experiences. Ideologies behind family policies deserve particular attention as they reveal economic pressures, political and social tensions which are often revealed through the model of family they promote over others.

A recent article comparing the situation of unpaid care work in Italy and Spain suggested that in Italy, where women's employment is lower, the general attitude is that work for mothers is detrimental to child development. In Spain, but contrast, the new ideal of "fatherhood", involves assigning care for the child not only to the mother, but also to the father who is seen as having a separate relationship with the child. Over 80% of Spaniards agree with the capacity of fathers to look after children and most Spaniards do not agree that mothers' work is harmful for the children¹²⁰.

Variation in attitudes is also recorded with regard to the deployment of informal child care arrangements in the family. A recent study has highlighted the variations in the use of grandparental child care in Europe in accordance with both the existence of formal child care and cultural factors in different regions. More specifically, the study found that cultural factors did play a role in the decision to assign child care to grandparents; moreover, the cultural determinants were not emanating from women's attitudes towards family and gender roles, but rather from the prevalent norms and practices of the region, with more conservative regions more inclined towards using grandparents as the main source of child care¹²¹.

2.6. Work-life balance and the economic crisis

The effect of the crisis on public policy related to work-life interface has been detrimental; public sector employment, traditionally associated with better work-life reconciliation has significantly declined in many Member States; welfare benefits supporting parents have been reduced; extension of care arrangements planned in many countries have been postponed¹²².

Austerity programmes, prevalent predominantly in Southern Europe, have imposed significant cuts in the domains of benefits and services for children, the elderly and the

¹¹⁸ Korpi, W. Ferrarini, T. and Englund, S. (2013). Women's opportunities under different family policy constellations: Gender, class and inequality tradeoffs in Western countries re-examined. *Social Politics* 20(1): 1-40.

¹¹⁹ Buber-Ennser, I. (2015). Aspects of gender mainstreaming of family and work in Austria. Vienna Institute of Demography (VID) Working Papers, No. 1/2015.

¹²⁰ Nandini, M. and Jurado, T. (2013). Family and welfare state reorientation in Spain and inertia in Italy from a European perspective. *Population Review* 52(1): 43-61.

¹²¹ Jappens, M. and Van Bavel, J. (2012).

¹²² Gregory, A. Milner, S. and Windebank, J. (2013).

handicapped. In Greece, only 10% of children 0 to 2 years and only 61% of children 3 to 6 years are covered, with more care burden borne by the family, notably women¹²³.

Furthermore, the economic crisis has presented new challenges for work-life balance. A 2012 European Quality of Life Survey¹²⁴ records increasing concern among workers that they might lose their job, (particularly in Greece, Cyprus and Latvia) and this perception of job insecurity can have clear negative effects on people's wellbeing. Furthermore, the crisis has led to increases in low-paid part-time jobs and has often created situations in which more than one part-time jobs are undertaken by an individual with obvious negative effects on work and family life¹²⁵. Work intensification and job insecurity seem to be on the rise.

In Spain, one of the country mostly affected by austerity, recent research has shown the impact of the current recession on all four aspects of self-reported work-life balance, i.e. perceived level of work flexibility, autonomy, stress and monotony¹²⁶.

In Greece, the general unemployment level is very high (30.6% for women and 23.5% for men). In addition, a large number of women in atypical employment in the informal sector are not covered by the statistics¹²⁷. However, there are some positive signs, namely policies favouring work-life balance and policies by corporations to increase female participation in top positions. Guidelines by the Council of Corporate Governance put a commitment to large companies to promote gender equality and transparent pay. In addition, companies, members of the Greek Network for Social Responsibility apply work-family-reconciliation facilitating practices, such as part-time work (39%), flexible working hours (59%), tele-work (33%), compressed week (10%) career breaks (26%), while 21% of firms have their own child care facilities or offer child care allowances¹²⁸.

Taken the above into consideration, the big question that the crisis poses, is whether certain progressive moves towards gender equality in sharing unpaid care work will face a backlash. This is the fear expressed, for instance, in the case of Spain, which before the crisis had experienced a qualitative transformation of the traditional family model based on family support and care towards a dual earner family model (e.g. through providing and subsidising childcare services)¹²⁹.

At the aggregate EU level, it seems that the overall picture is that of more generous parental leave than other regions and this is largely due to the active role of EU and Nordic inter-governmental bodies¹³⁰.

2.7. Work-life balance, gender equality and demography

Arguing that gender equality can increase fertility rather than decreasing it appears as a paradox at first sight, as greater gender equality in the workplace and less in the family has the opposite effect. Women become more productive in the public sphere at the expense of

¹²³ Papalexandris, N. (2016). Coping with gender issues in times of crisis: the case of Greece. An Enterprise Odyssey. International Conference Proceedings: 210-218. Zagreb: University of Zagreb, Faculty of Economics and Business.

¹²⁴ Eurofound (2012c). Third European quality of life survey. Quality of life in Europe: impacts of the crisis. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

¹²⁵ Fernandez-Crehuet, J-M. Gimenez-Nadal, J-I. and Reyes-Recio, L-E. (2015).

¹²⁶ Gregory, A. Milner, S. and Windebank, J. (2013).

¹²⁷ Papalexandris, N. (2016).

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Nandini, M. and Jurado, T. (2013).

¹³⁰ Gregory, A. Milner, S. and Windebank, J. (2013).

reproduction. It is this fine balance that demographers have been trying to achieve which will lead to an optimal fertility rate for safeguarding economic growth and stability, 'a matter of optimisation rather than maximisation of gender equality'¹³¹. Increased gender equality and increased fertility would be feasible through the transformation of traditional gender roles in terms of work and care and amore equal distribution.

The EU is a very diverse landscape when it comes to all sorts of policies and responses to common economic and demographic 'threats'. Ageing population by itself would not be a problem, if it did not happen in a climate of global competition and economic pressures. It is in relation to falling economic competitiveness in the EU that demographic concerns arose in the mid-1990s, as reflected in the White Paper on 'European Social Policy'¹³² that clearly revealed the tension between economic and social priorities. The emphasis was on a dynamic, risk-taking and adaptable working population which was seen as the Union's key resource towards an efficient economy. Women's contribution to the revitalisation of the economy was key in the Commission's view and to that end gender equality and gender mainstreaming became prominent in the European debate. Women suddenly were seen as an underutilised economic resource and had to be encouraged to participate in the economy through policies that would alleviate their care burden and abolish impediments to their full economic participation¹³³.

Gender equality and work-life balance policies have been viewed as a 'tool' for improving the economic and demographic situation simultaneously. This triptych of demography, work-life balance and gender equality policies is resonant in very recent documents such as the Draft Report earlier this year which clearly states that 'the EU is facing unprecedented demographic challenges...and is concerned that austerity measures have had a negative impact on the sustainability of public finances needed for work-life balance and services that foster demographic renewal'¹³⁴.

Having said that, are public policies in a position to decrease gender inequalities for all women or just for some more privileged categories? Gender cannot be seen in isolation but in combination with class and race/ethnicity and their intersections for valid conclusions to be drawn. Political ideologies and public/private sector cleavages ought to be taken into consideration. Policies must take into account all forms of inequality, not just material but also inequality in terms of limited capabilities and place emphasis on women's labour market participation as a major indicator¹³⁵.

Research into the gender/class interplay from an intersectional lens in eighteen OECD countries has shown that women with tertiary education do very well in terms of employment opportunities in all countries and choose to work, irrespective of family policies¹³⁶. It is to the situation of women with medium-low level of education that family policies really make a difference. In Scandinavia for instance where policies favour a type of earner/carer family, it is much easier for those women to be in employment than it is in countries with either traditional family models (Austria, Germany, Italy, France), or market-oriented ones (UK,

¹³¹ Repo, J. (2012).

¹³² Commission of the European Communities (1994). European social policy: a way forward for the Union. COM{94} 333 final.

¹³³ Repo, J. (2012).

¹³⁴ European Parliament (2016b). Draft Report on creating labour market conditions favourable for work-life balance (2016/2017 INI). Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality.

¹³⁵ Korpi, W., Ferrarini, T., and Englund, S. (2013).

¹³⁶ Ibid.

USA and Ireland). The picture changes significantly when the representation of women in the highest paid positions and top echelons of the hierarchy is examined; no significant variation between countries exists and where market-oriented countries score the highest. Nordic women are catching up with their UK and US counterparts.

A recent article explores the impact of flexible employment on wellbeing. It is argued that irregularity of working conditions is more significant in upsetting work-life balance for men than for women¹³⁷. Moreover, it is claimed that flexibility of working time may work well in some institutional contexts, notably liberal economies, but, in the absence of supportive legislation, it cannot challenge embedded cultures of care, which are clearly gendered¹³⁸.

¹³⁷ Hofäcker, D. and König, S. (2013). Flexibility and work-life conflict in times of crisis: a gender perspective. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 33(9/10): 613–635.

¹³⁸ Riva, E. (2013). Workplace work-family interventions: Italy in times of welfare state retrenchment and recession. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 33 (9/10):565-578.

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND POLICY POINTERS

The demographic situation in Europe has been deteriorating in a climate of globalisation and almost a decade of economic recession with much more pronounced effects on the crisis-stricken Member States of the South and the East which in addition happen to be the entry points to the EU and receive disproportionately high numbers of immigrants and refugees.

Against this backdrop, demographic policies unless complemented by other policy interventions (including employment, family, human resource, integration of migrants among others¹³⁹), will not only have minor effects but may also jeopardise the improvements of the recent years in terms of gender equality, timid as the latter may be. Arguments about changing gender attitudes based on comparative research allow for a glimpse of hope that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

The EU legislation and gender equality framework offer policy-makers the necessary ammunition to improve the situation. Investment in human capital, including early childhood education, formal education, lifelong learning and vocational training have been part of the Europe 2020 and the Social Investment Package; however, political measures to address the crisis have targeted austerity measures, as opposed to investment for growth¹⁴⁰.

The Barcelona targets of child care for pre-school children have not yet been met even by half of the Member States¹⁴¹. This calls for a directive on child care facilities which will speed up the process.

Fertility is linked with economic factors and security but also with the division of labour within the family. State policies can facilitate individuals and couples achieve their intentional fertility through decommodifying policies.

Thinking of men and women as both workers and carers will improve gender equality both at home and at work. Policies need to be seen as part of the broader economic and social landscape. Family policies should be seen in interrelation with other areas of the welfare state, as positive changes in one domain may impact negatively on others. Social cohesion and regulation in the area of employment are also crucial. Intersectional approaches encompassing divisions across gender, class, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability are required to carefully assess the impact of policies and for policy design.

Work-life conflict and its gendered effects can be addressed with a number of policy instruments. There is a growing need for policies to also reflect changes in attitudes to parenthood and work-life balance, which also needs to reflect the continuously shifting social circumstances. To achieve this, further research is required which would investigate the so far neglected areas and social groups and the links with poverty and exclusion.

Creating good quality jobs with reasonable working hours not only contributes to a better reconciliation of professional and personal commitments but also contributes to productivity which are sustainable.

Leaves are powerful instruments of great importance in reducing work-life conflict. **Maternity leave**, although important for the first months after childbirth to allow for

¹³⁹ Testa, M. (2014).

¹⁴⁰ McLean, S.B. (2014).

¹⁴¹ European Parliament (2016b).

breastfeeding and mothers' recovery can be detrimental to women's careers when it is too long, but also enhances their roles as main carers. **Paternity leave** has to be introduced in all Member States to allow fathers to enjoy the arrival of their children and must have a decent length and pay level. The most egalitarian form of leave, however, is **parental leave** which ought to be promoted for gender equality purposes and for enabling parents to share work and care equally and view parenthood as an enriching experience. Finally, **carers' leave** has to be introduced in all Member States, as the people of Europe, with or without children, must have the right to care for their nearest and dearest. This leave exists in some countries in a variety of forms.

The existence and need to reduce the gender care gap has been recognised officially on the EU level¹⁴². A carers' leave directive is a way to introduce greater uniformity and better monitoring of the situation across the EU. For all types of leave to be taken up by men and to be really effective, factors such as a high replacement rate, no negative repercussion on career and work environment, flexibility in the timing would allow people in all living arrangements decide on their productive and reproductive aspects of their life.

A very important point is that unless leave-related policies are accompanied by the parallel formal provision of services, their effectiveness will be limited. Studies have pointed out the importance of reducing the gender wage gap, or providing free childcare and elderly care services. Research into the needs of informal carers and the impact of care on their health and wellbeing is highly significant. Services alleviate the care burden of carers.

Policies encouraging earner/carer family arrangements, as the case of Scandinavian countries demonstrates, have improved work-life balance for all women, in particular those with primary or secondary education who are the most vulnerable in the labour market. Public provision of services aiming at work-life balance (pre-school child care, day centres, elderly care) also creates tension between the weaker social groups who are seen as benefitting more than the worse off¹⁴³. This gives rise to political debates which attack the Nordic welfare model.

Even though up to the 1970s class and gender inequalities were decreasing in parallel, this is no longer the case¹⁴⁴. Class inequality has been rising, whereas gender inequality has been decreasing. Adopting policies which view individuals both as earners and carers would improve equality on both fronts.

Preferences for flexible work arrangements are indicative of work-life conflict. Part-time work may be a way to allow for more time spent at home, provided that it is not at the expense of career opportunities and job security. As more men get involved in care (child or elderly), the strong association of part-time work with women's work will change.

Increasingly, work-life balance and its gendered effects is seen more as an institutional and societal, rather than an individual problem. Compensating women for having necessary career breaks by promoting and remunerating them adequately through taxation of highly paid workers, (typically men) can be a way forward¹⁴⁵.

¹⁴² COM (2016)

¹⁴³ Korpi, W. Ferrarini, T. and Englund, S. (2013).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Khallash, S. and Kruse, M. (2012).

The concept of 'institutional competitiveness', which implies strong economic and political institutions which both benefit the economy but also protect citizens/employees, has been offered as a key to the successful Nordic model. **Flexicurity**, a combination of flexibility for employers and firms with security for the employees and workers is an example of institutional competitiveness¹⁴⁶. According to estimates, the Scandinavian model will expect taxes to rise by 9 percentage points between 2011 and 2040, bringing the tax to the level of 68%. This level of taxation will test the social cohesion and solidarity principles underpinning this model and its long-term sustainability. Predictions anticipate rather a reduction in social service provided together with measures to improve efficiency¹⁴⁷.

If, as Oliver Blanchard has put it¹⁴⁸, Europe has invested wealth in guaranteeing more leisure time for the European citizens. One of the challenges ahead will be how to maintain these benefits (a hard-earned right for many), while addressing the fiscal and debt problems, the increasing demands for a green economy, as well as the growing demographic problem. The Scandinavian model, characterised by high productivity and competitiveness, accompanied by low working hours might be a model to aspire to¹⁴⁹.

Research has shown that drawing attention to all policy aspects in a holistic way rather than focusing on separate dimensions, mainly on the economic aspects, would lead to a more successful implementation of policies and address both the demographic and burning socio-economic issues. Fighting all sorts of discrimination (gender discrimination, ageism, social exclusion and xenophobia), by providing services, accommodating immigrants and refugees, promoting equal distribution of work and care will improve people's wellbeing and possibly restore their sense of security and trust. Most importantly, going beyond the traditional family to design policies which would also include often ignored living arrangements.

There are limits to the degree the legislator and policy-maker can intervene in the private realm. People must be enabled to make autonomous decisions about all aspects of their lives through policies that promote gender equality and respect diversity.

On the level of semantics, the order of words in 'work-life balance' signifies prioritising the economic. An ageing and less popular Europe in the midst of recession, demographic and refugee crises is called to prove to its people that it puts the accent on 'life'.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Blanchard, O.(2003). European growth over the coming decade. <http://economics.mit.edu/files/751> accessed 20 November 2016.

¹⁴⁹ Khallash, S. and Kruse, M. (2012).

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<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/printpdf/publications/resume/2015/working-conditions/first-findings-sixth-european-working-conditions-survey-resume>
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