

Women's Return to Work after Family-Related Breaks in Employment

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The situation of female employment in the Netherlands

'Good practices' in the Netherlands

A popular 'good practice' which in this context is always mentioned in The Netherlands is the project 'mother contracts'. It was a project in academic hospitals which were having shortages of specialist nurses. These nurses resigned their jobs after having a child. They were asked to re-turn when only asked to work during school hours (between 08.30 and 15.00).

I am not convinced if this is such a 'good practice'. Neither from an emancipation point of view, nor from a labour participation one, because it stigmatizes women/nurses (nurses are mostly women) and it created a lot of disturbance between other employees, especially those who work 'normal' shifts. It also keeps women in their role as mother and doesn't change cultural patterns.

Similarities/differences between Dutch 'good practices' and the experience of Germany, potential for transferability

There are more similarities than differences.

In 2000 and 2001 specific sectors (health care and education) in the Dutch economy were confronted with shortages of professionals. Because these were relative feminine sectors, employment projects for women were focused on the healthcare and educational sectors.

In 2007 a report was published that almost 200.000 not working women not-registered as work searching would be willing to (re)enter the labour market under certain conditions. These women mostly didn't have recent working experience and were relatively distant from the labour market. The policy focused from employment projects towards empowerment of women.

Last year this administration diversified different groups of women and concentrated on women who were already working. The labour participation in the Netherlands of women measured in persons is one of the highest in Europe, but it is one of the lowest when measured in working hours.

The difference between Germany and The Netherlands is this new focus of policy. The Netherlands shifted its focus towards a call for action for working more hours a week. This administration has installed the Taskforce Part-time Plus. The aim of this taskforce is to chance the culture

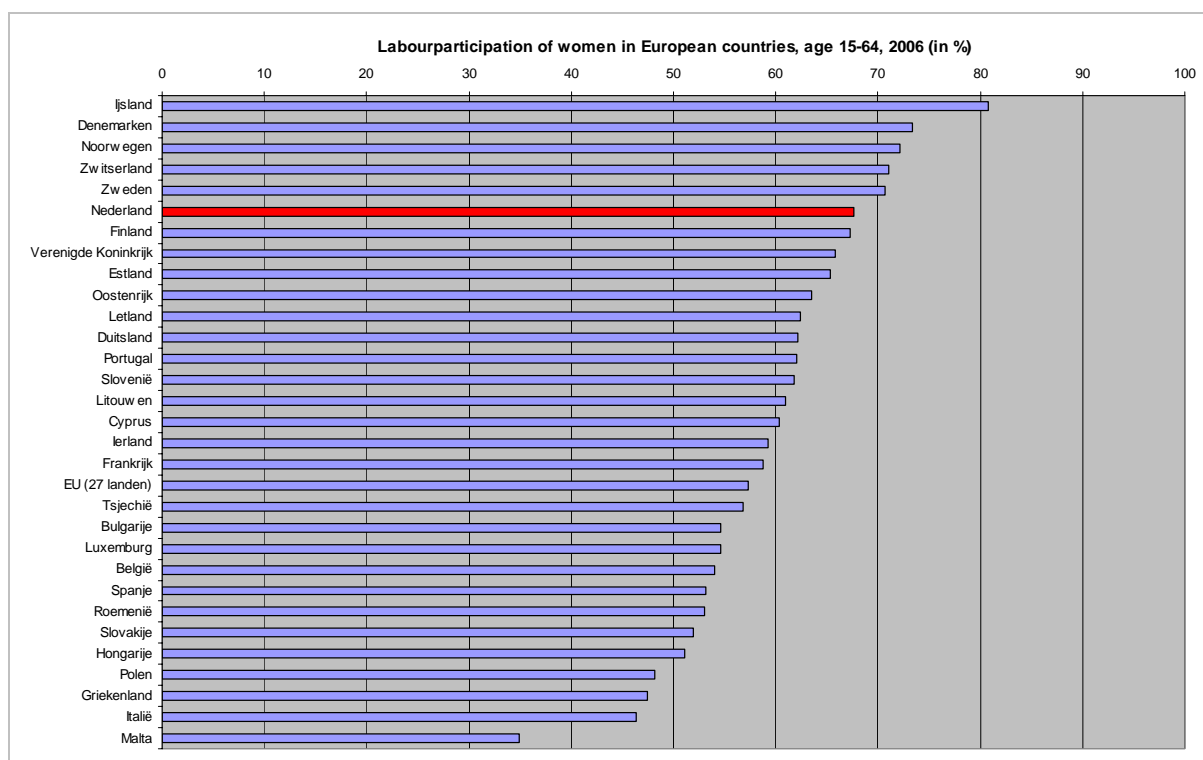
of the so called mummy track. In The Netherlands women stay working after having a child, but these are often small jobs which often result in dead end jobs.

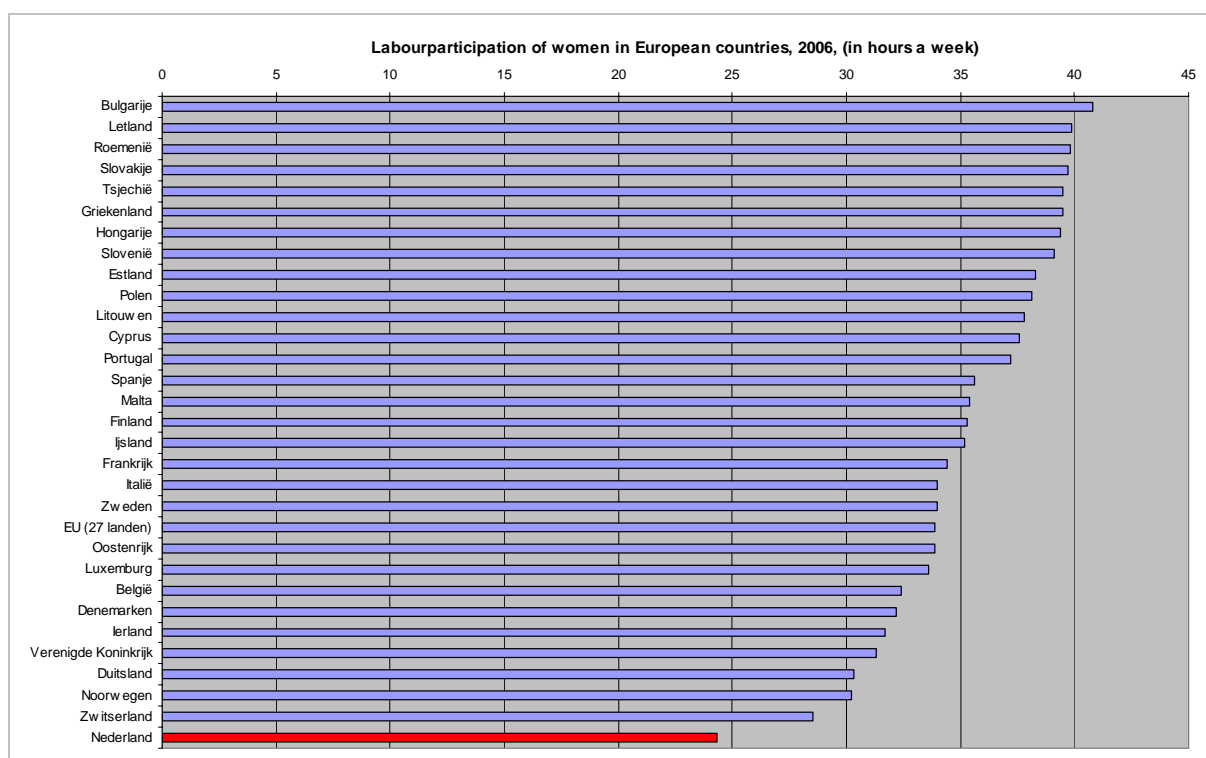
The other side is the role of men. Our minister (Emancipation) is convinced that women can and will only work more hours if men are prepared to care more. In the Netherlands an average full-time working week is 36 hours a week. Most people who work fulltime work 8 hours a day, 5 days a week and therefore 'save' 4 hours a week as compensation, which they can use as extra holiday hours. A fulltime working week can also be shaped in 9 working hours a day in 4 days a week. People can use that day for leisure, caring or study.

If parents would work 4 days a week each, they can choose themselves if they work 32 hours a week or 36 hours a week (4x8 or 4x9). Each of them will thus be able to care one day for their children and accordingly 3 days remain to make use of childcare. Given that childcare is guaranteed, most important is that women feel reassured that she can orient herself in a profession. The role of men is therefore crucial.

Essential issues that are being debated in the Netherlands in relation to return of women to the labour market

- More working hours of women (Taskforce ParttimePlus): underneath figures show the difference in the Netherlands between labour participation in persons and labour participation in hours.
- The role of men, which is crucial (2 times 4 model).





Ways to measure success of good practices in this field in the Netherlands.

The most accurate variables are participation in persons and participation in hours.

Statistics about preferences by women (and men) of hours worked, hours spent on leisure, study, care, etc.

Key issues and main questions for debate at the review meeting.

Which mummy-track do we want?

Is part-time work a necessary bridge towards working (almost) fulltime (Netherlands vs. other EC countries)?

How to mobilize women to work more hours?

How to mobilize men to work four days?

How to mobilize men to care more?

Is more caring by men essential (and sufficient) for women to work more hours?