



Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion and Assessment in Social Inclusion

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Germany 2008

Return of women to the labour market

Minutes



On behalf of the
European Commission
DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities



Peer Review: Return of women to the labour market Nuremberg, 17-18 November 2008

The Peer Review was hosted by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) with the support of the Federal Employment Agency (FEA).

Day 1

Welcome address

Raimund Becker (Member of the managing board of the Federal Employment Agency (FEA) Germany) welcomed participants, saying that the FEA was working to help women who wanted to return to the labour market.

The principle of equal opportunities for men and women is inscribed in German law, and the country's changing demography, its ageing population, and falling birthrate mean it is essential to increase women's labour market participation. If not, the country could lose 9 million women, or 20% of its labour force in the next decade.

In order to respond to the needs of women who want to return to work the FEA in cooperation with the BMFSFJ has started a project that offers practical support in the form of counseling, profiling and training, which continues once women are at work.

Many of the women they are dealing with are highly qualified, but are unable to find the type of work they can combine with their family responsibilities. This is then compounded by the lack of support from their families. The FEA is working to fight prejudices about women workers through projects and exhibitions that offer alternative role models.

Eva Maria Welskop-Deffaa (Head of Department for Gender Equality in the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) Germany) praised the FEA as a partner that supports the ministry to anchor the action programme in a sustainable way. Giving men and women equal opportunities in the labour market is a critical aspect of European social and economic policy.

No EU Member State has yet achieved gender equality. Germany has a mixed record. While it has reached high employment levels for women aged 30 to 40, its record on equal pay is poor. Every third woman takes a family-related employment break in Germany, simultaneously 84% of women say they want to be gainfully employed. In March this year the Germany therefore introduced an Action Programme to improve women's opportunities to return to work after a family break, which, among other aspects, concentrated on encouraging spouses to support this process. An important aspect of this programme is that it groups together different policies to ensure that there is a comprehensive approach.

As a study has shown, the integration of women into the labour market has been one of the important causes for the success of the European labour market over recent years. For this reason there is no economic alternative to actual gender equality in the labour market.

Marie-Anne Paraskevas (European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal

Opportunities, European Commission) explained that the Peer Review exercise is regarded as a “success story” within the context of the social Open Method of Coordinations (OMC) and provides an excellent example of mutual learning. Peer Reviews increase understanding and improve the effectiveness of policies as they enable countries to learn from each others’ best practices, and for the host country to get feed back from its peers and thus introduce new elements into its own programmes.

However, the Peer Review system should be used more strategically, said Ms Paraskevas, by increasing the capacity for analysing and disseminating results and increasing stakeholders’ and regional authorities’ input. To this end, a number of suggestions were recently discussed in the Social Protection Committee:

- the host country of a Peer Review should report the relevant results to the Social Protection Committee;
- the results of the Peer Reviews should be included in the annual Joint Report on social protection and social inclusion, when reporting on good practices;
- there should be more media coverage of the Peer Reviews.

The Commission is preparing a new framework for the Peer Review exercise to take these suggestions on board.

Women’s Employment in Germany

Franziska Schreyer and Katrin Drasch (Institute for Employment Research, Federal Employment Agency, Germany) said the level of women’s participation in the labour market had risen from about 45% in 1950 to 67% in 2005, but the *volume* of women’s employment had dropped until 2000, and the volume of work of women only constitutes 73% of those of men in 2004. The discrepancy between the women’s *share* of the job market, as compared to the *volume* of work, enlarges when women get children, and remains stable when women return to work, as most chose to work part-time or in ‘mini’ or marginal jobs.

If one compares the labour force rates of mothers with two or more children in EU countries, Germany comes out at 56% - far below the Danish level of 77% but above the Italian level of 42%, and below the OECD average of 60%. Looking at general trends, the percentage of German working mothers has increased considerably since 1976, but the percentage of those working full-time has decreased from 24% to 18% in 2004, while the level of part-time or marginal employment has increased from 17% to 37%.

There is also an increasing polarisation of employment patterns between women with a university degree, and women without a certificate in Western Germany. In 2004 nearly 50% of the low skilled mothers compared to 23% of the high skilled mothers were inactive on the labour market, and 27% of university-educated women worked full-time, but only 14% of women without a degree were full-time workers. This polarisation has serious implications for poverty and social exclusion of low skilled mothers.

Influence factors on mothers return to the labour market can be found on three levels:

- the societal context, such as the provision of public child care facilities or parental leave, and the regional unemployment rate;
- the working environment, as the public sector or being employed in a small firm increases the

- chances for returning;
- the individual level such as the level of education, the socio-economic status and the number of children a mother has.

Eva Maria Welskop-Deffaa (Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, (BMFSFJ) Germany) described the background to the Action Programme 'Perspektive Wiedereinstieg – vocational reintegration as a perspective'.

In 2006 the German employment rate was 72.8% for men and 62.2% for women. While the country has achieved the European Employment Strategy level of 60%, there is a huge discrepancy between the numbers of working men and women, especially in the age group 50 plus. Re-entry for women aged 40 enables them to work another 27 years until retirement, thus greatly improving their pension levels.

Starting a family drastically changes women's lifestyle, she said, as nearly 70% take family breaks from their professional life only returning to work as their children grow up. As a result women's employment histories are very different from men's who continue to work full-time throughout their lives.

Only 16% of women with children work full-time, compared to 46% of women without children or with older children, whereas 90% of men with children under 18 work full-time compared to 75% without children. Not surprisingly, the greater the number of children a woman has under 18, the less likely she is to work, for only 39.5% of women with four children work, compared to 64.6% with one child. The older the youngest child, the more likely the mother is to work – for example 76.8% of mothers whose youngest child is aged 11 to 17 years are in employment.

Action Programme 'Perspektive Wiedereinstieg – vocational reintegration as a perspective'

In Germany the employment biographies are remarkably different between women and men. This is because within the family there is often still an asymmetrical assignment of roles: the man is the sole breadwinner, while the woman cares for children and older relatives. This results in far fewer women than men in paid work. Germany's social and legal infrastructure is premised on the notion of the "ever-available mother", who puts work second. As a result she is paid an average 23% less than a man and in the long term her pension is much lower.

Previous actions, such as introducing parental allowances, expanding child care, promoting family-friendly working conditions and improving tax rules to offset child care costs, have helped to support young families. But: 72% of women aged between 30 and 49 have already finished a family-related employment break or are still not working (on average: 48 months). The action programme takes this target group into account.

The Programme's short range objectives therefore are:

- to make it easier for women to return to work after a family break;
- to heighten employers' awareness of the benefits of employing motivated, qualified women;
- to encourage men to actively support their wives'/partners' return to work.

In the medium to long-term the programme aims:

- to change prevailing stereotypes;
- to strengthen women's financial and social security;
- to stabilise the family income and reduce the gender pay gap.

The Action Programme is based on the premise that returning to work is a *process*, not a simple step. According to 80% of women surveyed, family support is the main component that helps them to continue once they are back at work. However, more than 50% complain they do not receive this support. Another barrier women 'returnees' face is that employers are not always prepared to offer the job flexibility they need. Seventy percent of women complain of the difficulty in reconciling family life and work, and 33% consider quitting their jobs because of - amongst others - the lack of family support and societal infrastructure.

Eva Maria Welskop-Deffaa described the four main elements of the Action Programme:

- ***European Social Fund (ESF)-based Programme:*** This has a budget of €30 million, including €14 million from the ESF between 2009 and 2011. A high-profile jury will select the ten best projects to carry out some. The objective of the programme is to create regional networks, to set up contacts with the target groups and to boost connections with employment agencies, advisory services, and enterprises. The programme will use measures such as coaching, further education and training, job-sharing, etc. A major focus is set on the integration of the partners of the women who wish to return to a job. The programme is a cooperative venture between the BMFSFJ and the FEA.
- ***Online portal.*** This is being launched in January 2009 to run for a three-year period. The portal will assist women who want to return to the labour market. Women 'surfers' access a 'map' of advisory services and portraits of women who successfully returned to work, news, etc. It is aimed at both men and women. The portal is based on a cooperation agreement between the BMFSFJ and the FEA.
- ***Local level projects.*** These integrate women's concerns into local events such as 'information days'. The information days are local events which target women from all cultures and age groups, the aim being to inform and empower them in issues such as health, careers and work-life balance.
The new funding period of the ESF-programme "Local Social Capital (LOS)" will include the promotion of women returning to work after a family-related break. In addition, the existing programmes run by the Federal Ministry – i.e. initiatives for families and multi-generation homes – will be incorporated into the action programme.
- ***Work with private companies.*** This work consists of visiting companies to heighten their awareness about women returnees, and show-casing those which have successfully implemented measures for women wanting to return to work. Attempts will be made to persuade business associations to produce a joint statement of commitment.

Eva Maria Welskop-Deffaa said the aim of all these projects is to give employees the choice of staying in the labour market or interrupting their jobs and then returning to work without it reducing their long-term employment options. They are also designed to help women and companies achieve more flexible work/life models.

Discussion

Agata D'Addato (EUROCHILD) stressed that a woman's role in caring for elderly relatives should be taken into account.

Katrin Drasch (Institute for Employment Research, FEA, Germany) said that low-skilled mothers were less active in returning to work both because of cultural attitudes about women's role in the home, and because their pay was so low, so it was often financially better to remain at home.

Eva Maria Welskop-Deffaa (BMFSFJ, Germany) said that in Germany the employment gap between low-skilled men and women was not nearly as high as that between highly-skilled men and women, and that employers said that they did not offer management training to women as they expected them to take family breaks. She said that the added-value of this Programme is that it helps filling the gaps in existing provision, by forming networks and bringing together local programmes – the level at which action is most effective.

Responding to a question about the focus of the Action Programme, Ms Welskop-Deffaa said it was specifically targeted at married women with children, as studies showed that a very high percentage of women in this group - 85% - did not return to work. Interestingly, migrant women are one of the main categories of women who return to the labour market after childbirth. There are large numbers of migrant women from the former USSR, who work in mini-jobs; and many Turkish women, who take full-time work wherever possible.

The Dutch experience in view of the German approach

Charles de Vries (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Netherlands) began on a practical note, describing the challenges he and his wife have as they both work and at times also call on childcare from their parents.

He said that Dutch women's participation in the labour market stands at 68%, placing it sixth in Europe. However, in terms of the hours worked - just 25 hours a week, it is one of the lowest in Europe.

To remedy this the government has recently introduced the Taskforce Part-time Plus to stimulate women to work more hours a week. Within the labour market there are 'mother contracts' or 'school-time contracts' for working women, but he felt this might encourage employers to stigmatise women, as they fear that if they employ a woman, she will expect a 'mother contract'. A more successful solution might be this Taskforce 'Part-time Plus' to change cultural habits, or a '2 x 4' model, in which women (and men) can work a 32- or 36-hour week in four days.

Mr de Vries found many similarities between the Dutch and German experiences, and said that Dutch officials of the Ministry of Youth and Family had visited Germany to learn from their experience of Family friendly Employers. In the Netherlands 200,000 women are registered for social security or seeking work, although there are far more women who are not seeking work because when the economy was booming women left the labour market, as their husbands could earn enough to support the family. However, many women say they would like to work part-time.

There is a shortage of low- to middle-skilled professionals in health care and education – areas where women traditionally work. To encourage them back and fill the shortage in these sectors,

the Dutch government introduced measures to train low-skilled women for middle-skilled level posts.

As already mentioned the government has recently changed its policies with the Taskforce Part-time Plus to stimulate women work longer hours and is holding conferences for 'Family friendly employers' to change attitudes. However, its efforts are complicated by the fact that three Ministries deal with work and family issues. The Family Affairs Ministry wants to encourage employers to be more family-friendly, but leaves it up to parents to choose whether to work; the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment wants to increase participation levels of all categories of workers, while the Emancipation Directorate of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is promoting four-day weeks for men to take a more active role in childcare and thus to give women more space to develop themselves.

The government believes that increasing women's working hours by just five hours a week would provide the extra labour needed to solve the country's labour shortage. The 'Part-time Plus' approach (mentioned above) is also being used to change women's attitudes, as currently only 45% of young women aged 22 to 30 expect to work full-time, while all young men of this age expect to work full-time.

Other measures include promoting collective agreements between employers and unions on flexible working hours, and e-work, based on output, rather than on the time spent in the office. However this depends on flexibility on both sides, he said, as employees are allowed to work at home to carry out childcare, provided they take work calls or answer e-mails out of 'working time'.

He summed up the key issues:

- What 'mummy track' do we want? Part-time work for both or each partner, or 4/5 working for both sexes?
- Is part-time work essential for women's labour participation – or just the first step?
- How can we mobilise women to work more hours and men to work less?
- How can we persuade men to take a greater role in caring?
- Is it essential for women to work more hours?

The Danish experience in view of the German approach

Agnete Andersen (Danish Ministry of Employment), said women in Denmark are seen as a resource, and constitute 47.8% of the entire workforce. However, their participation rate of 73.7% is still lower than men's' at 79.8%.

The participation rate of women until 30 is 59%, as women are still pursuing further education. The participation rate of older women is 80%, as on average they retire aged 61.

All women return to the labour market after having children, and their unemployment rate stands at just 1.7%, compared to men's of 1.6%. Women's fertility rate is increasing too, now standing at 1.9%, just below the 2.1% the population needs to replicate itself. An important element is that all children over six months are guaranteed a place in a day care institution.

Parental leaves schemes are essential, said Ms Andersen, but employees must be allowed to decide when to take leave, and companies must agree not to dismiss women during maternity leave. In Denmark women are entitled to 18 weeks maternity leave and men to two weeks

paternity leave. Both parents are entitled to 32 weeks parental leave each.

On average in 2006, after childbirth women received maternity benefits for 37.2 weeks, while men received 3.8 weeks, and paternity leave constituted 8% of their entire leave. In some cases during this leave women and men receive their full salary from their employer, in which case the employer is compensated by the state.

However, two related problems remain: the gender pay gap, which has not changed in the last ten years, and the gender-segregated labour market. The labour market is particularly segregated in the public sector, where 78% of staff is female, and while there are measures to change this, it is difficult to persuade women to move from one sector to another. At the same time, as men are now taking on some of the low-skilled, low paid jobs like nurses, teachers or care assistants, pay rates in these sectors are increasing.

The high level of male and female labour participation rates has been spurred on by the country's need for labour, and most families' need for two incomes. The country has a flexible labour market, and employers offer flexible working, so workers can decide how many hours/days a week to work. In addition 'flexicurity' on the labour market makes it easier for employers to dispense with unnecessary personnel in times of economic downturn, while workers know that they will be given social benefits when they are out of work.

Ms Andersen mentioned that the government wanted to make changes to the proposed updating of the EU Maternity Directive which it felt was too rigid, as both parents should be able to take advantage of parental leave schemes, and it should not just be aimed at women.

Discussion

Brigitte Weinandy (Ministry of Family Affairs and Integration – National Service for Social Action, Luxembourg) said more could be achieved if attention was not only focussed on the issue of women's difficulties when returning to the labour market after family related employment breaks but also on the issue of men taking responsibility for childcare. Where is the strong message that men also must assume care responsibilities? Given that gender stereotypes are still operating, she was concerned whether policies that insist on parents' free choice regarding these responsibilities (as for instance in Luxembourg) are not sufficient. She approved of the Netherlands '2 x 4' approach, but felt most countries might not want to address the challenge inherent to it.

Kay Bourcarde (Network Expert) was also impressed with the Dutch '4 x 2' approach, and wondered how many parents used this, and how employers felt about it.

Marie-Anne Paraskevas (European Commission) believed that the recent proposal for extending periods of maternity leave would be detrimental to women's employment, in view of the fact that the longer women are absent from the labour market, the more difficult it is for them to return.

Instead it would be preferable to opt for more flexible working arrangements, as this would also provide an incentive for fathers to be more involved in childcare.

Eva Maria Welskop-Deffaa (Germany) said the German system of parental allowances enables

people to work part-time. Many fathers take parental leave on a part-time basis, and work part-time, but this means they forfeit part of this allowance.

Charles de Vries (Netherlands) said that 50% of fathers in the public sector but only 10% in the private sector take advantage of paid parental leave. The government is exploring the possibility of integrating measures for paid leave for fathers after childbirth and paid leave to care for sick relatives. This is likely to increase the costs of employing men, thus balancing the costs of employing men with employing women (and creating a level playing field between women and men) who take more parental leave.

He explained that while childcare is not fully publically financed, there are some fiscal stimulants for it, and this administration is contributing €2.6 billion extra during this administrative period with fiscal stimulants (of childcare costs) for parents. Despite this there are still staff shortages in this sector, so parents have long waits for a full-time childcare place.

As many participants were interested in knowing more about the Dutch '2 x 4' approach used in both the public and private sectors, Mr de Vries said that in the Netherlands public sector employees work 36 hours, and this has resulted in many of the Ministries being 'feminised', and 50% of the male public employees take parental leave.

More flexible working patterns have also been successfully adopted in the Dutch private sector, where it has resulted in lower levels of sick leave. However, it is usually only the most highly-educated men who adopt more flexible working, possibly because they are married to high-earning women so can afford a drop in income.

Irena Kotowska (Institute of Statistics and Demography, Warsaw School of Economics, Poland) believed that increasing women's participation must be part of the redistribution of work and care in society.

Elizabeth Villagómez (Thematic Expert, Almenara, Estudios Económicos y Sociales, Spain) believed that cultural attitudes on gender equality play an important role. While the Spanish gender equality law introduced paternity leave, entrenched stereotypes about male roles are preventing this being fully taken up.

Agnete Andersen (Denmark) said that the state sector allows flexible working, and so there are more female workers and the salaries are lower. In the private sector, where people are more career-minded, flexible working is more difficult, particularly in the financial sector where there is a need to change employer's expectations about the effects of men and women returning from maternity or paternal leave and help them accept more flexible work patterns.

Alexia Panayiotou (University of Cyprus) said the presentations have shown the need to change cultural mores about women, and that while education is important, financial incentives could be more productive in the short-term.

According to **Martina von Bassewitz** (BMFSFJ, Germany) German cultural attitudes result in segregated jobs, as in some sectors women can take a 15-month break, and many chose careers such as education where they can work more flexibly. Not all German families need two incomes, so many women stay at home, but some who want to return to work after five years feel their skills are out-dated.

Agnete Andersen (Denmark) said collective bargaining was important for improving conditions in female-dominated sectors, as having children weakens a women's labour-market position. In Denmark there are good maternal-leave schemes at full pay, so in order to spread the costs across sectors and remove the negative impact on women's pay. All employers pay into a common scheme so those in male-dominated sectors support female-dominated sectors.

Denmark's gender pay act compels large companies to set up cooperative committees to discuss pay differentials, yet studies show that women still pay a "maternity punishment", forfeiting 5% of their salary to have children – while men with children earn 5% more than men without.

Charles de Vries (Netherlands) said that flexible working was not only reserved for executive-level jobs, as 'self-rostering' was possible in low-skilled work. Sixty-eight percent of Dutch women only work 25 hours a week, as they chose jobs where they can mix care and work. He said he believed strongly that the solution was for structural change, and for women to move away from the 'mummy track' and "dead-end jobs" which give them no intellectual stimulation.

He noted that employers are usually 50-year old white men, with conservative views, but when they reach grandparenthood they want a "second-hand parenthood", as they missed out on being parents themselves.

Eva Maria Welskop-Deffaa (Germany) responded that a "life-cycle approach" to gender and equality policies in the labour market was needed. She was concerned that many women shoulder the "double-burden" of work and domestic care, so burn out by the age of 50. Gender equality should allow people to work part-time with no stigma attached.

Céline Simonin (Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union - COFACE) welcomed the four-day working, one-day-caring week, model for mothers, saying fathers should use this as well, combining flexibility and good childcare.

Charles de Vries (Netherlands) mentioned that the Dutch Minister of Emancipation would be awarding a 'fathers' role-model prize' on 21 June (Fathers' Day), for men who are successful role models and for the company which has done most to help men combine family and work roles.

Tiziana Lang (Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policy, Italy) felt that one had to use the media to change the stereotype that women's role is just to care for children. Italy is working with other EU countries to produce videos to be shown in schools to counteract these stereotypes.

Eva Maria Welskop-Deffaa (Germany) followed on from this to say that the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* had recently introduced a magazine for new fathers, trying to change gender stereotypes. It had included an interview with German soccer player Lukas Podolski, in which he described looking after his children as more fulfilling than goal-scoring.

There are a number of further projects, for example a film package aimed at secondary-school students which presents men and women in non-stereotypical roles. On international women's day (March 8) this year, the Bavarian state government released a cinema advert about equal pay.

NGO Statements

EUROCHILD

Agata D'Addato (EUROCHILD) said that couples now have fewer children than they would like, so policies should be introduced that enable them to have more children if they wish. Women still pay a huge economic and social penalty for having children, as they often return to the work on a part-time or temporary basis, have lower incomes, and forfeit social security and pension benefits, while still shouldering most of the burden of domestic and family responsibilities.

There should be more investment in improving the *quality* of childhood, with child well-being as a high priority. State policies should offer support to parents in raising children, particularly helping those who lack financial resources.

Looking at the German programme, Ms D'Addato felt it provided useful suggestions for combating gender stereotypes, encouraging men to take on a more equal share of family and childcare responsibilities, building cooperation between different agencies and regional and local authorities. It was also a model for countries with a low employment rate for women over 40. However, any programme has to be geared to a specific national cultural environment with its own perception of women's role outside the home.

The priority is to promote a child's best interests, and EUROCHILD believes that children are best cared for in a family where parents are active and confident. It is important to boost the mother's self-esteem and satisfaction, partly by encouraging her to re-enter the world of work, although this should not be pursued at all costs.

Early years' provision should not only be geared to parents' needs, she insisted, but should offer high quality, accessible, affordable childcare, particularly for children who need special support, for example those from ethnic minorities.

EUROCHILD believes a holistic approach to childcare is essential, as it promotes social inclusion, particularly those furthest from the labour market.

The key issues for debate are:

- to invest in childcare to improve children's development and education;
- to get more men into the childcare professions, and break down gender stereotypes;
- to help women gain access to the labour market;
- to ensure that the most vulnerable groups are included;
- to promote decent work for all.

Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE)

Céline Simonin (COFACE) praised the German approach of linking local and national services, and of raising employers' awareness in companies to adapt flexible employment practices. At the same time, she felt that childcare provision should be flexible enough to offer places for children on a temporary basis – for example mothers who are seeking work.

Ms Simonin stressed the importance of using ICT, as distance learning and online services can be very helpful for women who want to return to work, although there must be measures to

ensure that all women know how to use, and have access to, ICT.

All these programmes should allow 'space' for men to participate and receive the support they need when themselves are returning to work after a family-related career break. She did not foresee any difficulties in transferring the German approach to other countries, although the main difficulty might be funding.

Ms Simonin raised the following points for consideration:

- the importance of the child's well-being, and ensuring this is not overshadowed by the need to fulfil the Lisbon objectives of growth and jobs, which insist on women's full employment;
- offering support to those who care for elderly relatives, with the need for filial leave and flexible working, and preventing those who care for elderly relatives from being stigmatised;
- the need to achieve a work-life balance, and fight social exclusion;
- the importance of decent work, and social security rights during parental leave;
- the need to improve part-time workers' rights;
- the need to ensure quality services for all families.

Given the close links between helping women return to work and encouraging social inclusion, she said that all EU Member States should adopt policies to achieve the life-work balance, and policies to integrate women in the labour market should be included in the national inclusion strategy.

Association of the German Female Entrepreneurs (VDU)

Haidrun Weitler (VDU) said the VDU was originally formed in 1934 to promote the interests of female entrepreneurs and equal opportunities. Currently German entrepreneurs have a turnover of €15 billion and employ 20,000 people.

She believed the Action Programme was an "important cornerstone" to support women re-entering the labour market, and a step forward for equal opportunities. At present Germany faces particular obstacles: insufficient childcare for young parents, and the traditional German idea that childcare is best carried out by the mother, so working mothers are "uncaring".

Women, particularly those with qualifications, who have moved out of the labour market, find it difficult to re-enter as their qualifications and knowledge are no longer up-to-date, so need help in updating these. At the same time employers should realise that these women are highly motivated, and raising a family has taught them to manage stress and develop a high level of competence.

She was anxious to persuade companies to give female returnees the opportunity, and for them to move away from only focusing on those with clear career paths. Often those with breaks in their CVs, have more to offer than those with conventional CVs.

Site Visits

There were two site visits: to PS Akademie – a training centre focusing on giving women computer and other skills to return to the world of work, and the Nuremberg Employment Agency to see an exhibition on 'Changes stereotypes of workers'. These were then discussed at a feed-

back meeting.

Commenting on the visit to PS Akademie, **Elizabeth Villagómez** (Thematic Expert) stressed the importance of the Akademie for including those – such as single mothers – who were in danger of being socially excluded if they did not have a job.

She also noted that Petra Semmert, the head of the Akademie, described people who had been out of work for 12 years “as if they had come from Mars”, as they were so out of touch with the current job market. The German government should consider lengthening the time span of their retraining programmes to give people time to learn about the new employment scene.

Eva Maria Welskop-Deffaa (Germany) praised the Akademie's approach of offering a very attractive learning environment to add to the self-confidence and self-esteem needed to get a job. – “If I train here, I can make it anywhere”.

Marie-Anne Paraskevas (European Commission) who attended the Employment Agency, stressed the importance of offering quality and well-paid jobs and reminded that part-time work is not always the preferred choice of women. With regard to the ‘Barcelona Targets on childcare’, she stressed the need for establishing qualitative targets as well given that so far only the quantitative aspects have been covered. She also reminded participants that, women in particular are now facing the additional task of caring for elderly relatives and this should be also taken into consideration when designing measures aimed at reconciling personal and professional life.

Tiziana Lang (Italy) agreed that one needed to take the care of the elderly into account. Many women now fall into the ‘sandwich generation’ between their children leaving home at 18, and caring for their elderly relatives.

Nigel Meager (Facilitator) wanted to know more about the different situations in West and East Germany/Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR), as he believed it had achieved greater gender equality in the labour market, and wondered whether this had influenced West Germany. He noted that the short length of the German school day added to the difficulties of caring for school-aged children for working parents.

Eva Maria Welskop-Deffaa (Germany) said the DDR had employed more women in higher positions and there had been a narrower gender pay gap. Since unification many young women have migrated to former West Germany as there is more potential for employment.

Childcare in the DDR, which had sometimes been organised by companies, had been a top priority, as women were needed in the labour force. In former West Germany there had been very little provision until children reached the age of three, as the prevailing view was that children should stay at home with their mothers.

Now mini-jobs are increasing all over Germany, particularly for women, and it is not clear whether this is because they prefer these or because this is the only option. The Action Programme tries to encourage women to return to a job, which is covered by social security benefits.

Dagmar Hebmüller (Unit of Gender Equality in the labour market, FEA, Germany) believed that daughters tended to adopt their mothers' attitudes, and as in the DDR women went back to work after childbirth, their daughters expected to as well.

Katrin Drasch (Germany) confirms Mr. Hebmüllers statement and said that the higher unemployment rate in the East, may eventually hinder women from entering the labour market although the attitudes towards mothers' employment have not changed. Also structural factors such as the provision of childcare facilities play a role.

Eva Maria Welskop-Deffaa (Germany) said that over the last five years the German regions had embarked on an intensive childcare programme, and this will last until 2013. It is funded by €4 billion from the federal budget, topped up with regional funds. One could say that "a childcare revolution is taking place".

Day 2

Presentation of the Discussion paper

Thematic Expert **Elizabeth Villagómez** (Almenara, Estudios Económicos y Sociales, Spain) praised the German Programme for bringing in stakeholders' views to draw up its programme, as this provides a more nuanced picture of the situation.

Turning to the employment rates for men and women in EU-27, she said that while countries like Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands easily surpassed the Lisbon targets for both men (70%) and women (60%), countries like Germany only just met the target for women, while others, such as Italy and Malta, fell well below.

However, when one looked at the levels of employment for women with lower levels of education (ISCED levels 0-2), only two countries: Denmark and Portugal approached the 60% target for women's employment, while Germany only reached 40%.

Germany is only slightly below the Lisbon 60% target for men and women in the 40-59 age groups, and this reflects their recent efforts to help older workers update their skills and education, although more needs to be done.

In terms of the female employment rates for different age groups in Europe, Denmark performs best in all categories, followed by the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK, with Germany placed eighth, mainly because its average has been brought down by the low percentage of working women under 30. Malta performs worst, because of the very small number of women over 40 at work.

Looking at EU surveys of how men and women spend their time, the biggest discrepancy is in employment: here women spend 176 minutes a day, while men spend almost double at 308 minutes each day. The reverse is true for domestic work, where women spend 278 minutes each day, and men only 116 minutes (more than double).

These differences are mirrored in Germany: women spend 158 minutes and men 275 at work and women 260 and men 131 minutes on domestic work - women spend more time on domestic work than in employment. In addition, the figures show that women appear to have chosen jobs where the travel to work is shorter than men's, presumably so they can spend less time away from home.

Elizabeth Villagómez described how time-related issues are important in reconciling work and family life, particularly for women. Policies need to focus on this, as the conflict between women's work and family life often arises because public services, shops or leisure services are not open during women's out-of-work hours. There have been initiatives to cope with this, and in Italy some cities have arranged to open services so women can make use of them when they leave work.

Turning to the policy impacts of helping women to reconcile work and family life, **Elizabeth Villagómez** said the Danish experience shows that gender equality and higher female employment can result in higher fertility rates. A low fertility rate is an obstacle for sustained economic growth and the only other plausible source of labour would be to encourage greater immigration, which has other consequences.

If citizens are to be persuaded to have more children then both the economic and societal structure will have to be changed so that tax-benefit systems and care services do not discriminate against working women. Employers must also be persuaded to accept more flexible working, and they will then benefit from employing highly-educated, motivated women.

Discussion

Charles de Vries (Netherlands) warned that many economists are sceptical about linking future labour shortages with the necessity of higher fertility rates, but **Irena Kotowska** (Poland) said high fertility rates can coexist with high employment, provided changes are made to the institutional infrastructure and that gender roles are modified. **Marie-Anne Paraskevas** (European Commission) pointed out that it has been often mentioned that immigration could improve a country's birth rate – yet there is now evidence that immigration is not a long-term answer to increasing the working population, because immigrants adopt their host countries' fertility patterns.

Eva Maria Welskop-Deffaa (Germany) commented on the time-use survey saying that in Germany well-educated women and women with a high income often continue to undertake more of the domestic tasks, spending an inordinate amount of time on washing, ironing and cleaning to prove "they are still real women". A recent German study of women in managerial positions shows that the more hours a woman spends on household tasks, the less likely she is to be promoted, regardless of how long she spends at work.

Agnete Andersen (Denmark) said that as the Peer Review is concerned with social inclusion, the emphasis should be on the enlarging the labour market to fight social exclusion. In Denmark, the government priority is to increase the numbers of women in work to finance the welfare system.

Tiziana Lang (Italy) said that the Italian fertility rate of 1.3 is the lowest in Europe, whereas in the 50s and 60s, Italy had the highest rate. People's incomes are so low that they cannot afford to have more than one child.

Elizabeth Villagómez (Thematic Expert) said encouraging women to return to the labour market was an important way to fight social exclusion, as those women are out of the workforce for many years are in danger of becoming socially marginalised.

Statements by peer countries

Cyprus

Alexia Panayiotou (University of Cyprus) said Cyprus had a high level (4.4%) of economic development. Unemployment is low at just 3.9%, and the employment rate of 71% exceeds the Lisbon target of 70%, and the EU average of 65.4%. Women's employment of 62.4% has met the Lisbon target, but failed the national target of 63%.

However the pay gap is large (25%, the largest in the EU), and only 14% of women hold managerial positions. Job segregation is also very high, with men and women sticking to different employment sectors. In families with a young child, the mother works an average two hours less, while the father works an average hour more. Men with children under six work 43 hours a week, while a woman with a child under six works 37 hours.

Cyprus is still very traditional, seeing women as responsible for the children and the home, so many working women face the 'double shift'. This may help to explain the pay gap of 22.8% (2008 projected estimate), as many women chose lower-paid, less demanding jobs so they can care for the children. One striking aspect is the 32% difference between the employment rates of men and women aged 55-64, which could be that women of that age group typically look after their grandchildren while their sons and daughters go to work.

The government has committed itself to providing childcare facilities for 90% of children aged three to five years by 2010, although it seems unlikely to reach this target. New care services are being developed through projects run by partnerships of NGOs and the local authorities, co-financed by the ESF and EU Structural Funds.

At present few children of the under 3 age group are in childcare, and it is very common for grandparents or other elderly relatives, unregistered childminders, or (for some better off families) immigrant workers to look after the children.

Turning to the similarities with Germany, **Ms Panayiotou** said both countries had a large gender pay gap; shared the dominant model of the male-breadwinner family, women were concentrated in "pink collar occupations" and there was considerable job segregation. In both countries the 'glass ceiling' hinders promotion and the 'sticky floor' prevents women leaving the bottom ranks. The main difference is that fewer women work part-time in Cyprus, as they cannot afford to, and there is no infrastructure to support part-time work.

The country has introduced a pilot project on flexible working, but as this is a new phenomenon employers are mistrustful of allowing their workers to carry out Internet- or home-working. The government is also introducing training programmes to get women back to work, but at present most of these tend to focus on gender-segregated skills, such as secretarial work.

Childcare is a continuing issue, as in many extended families it is assumed that the older female relatives will undertake the task, particularly as they tend to have lower-skills and reached lower education levels, as in the past women were not educated past secondary level.

She believed that the German programme could be used in Cyprus in the following ways:

- adopt the emphasis on returning to work as a *process* needing long-term support, while accepting this would require a radical re-ordering of the existing family and societal

- structures;
- the 'Online Portal' could be adapted and used: there is now Internet access in public employment offices in Cyprus, but the digital divide remains. The government could provide Internet training for women, or hire people to help with the Internet in employment offices;
- provide more childcare to allow women to attend training courses;
- introduce 'information fairs', and information days, etc. to encourage women to set up as entrepreneurs;
- encourage local businesses to work with the authorities to set up awareness programmes.

More research is needed about women's attitudes to returning to work in Cyprus, together with qualitative studies on the difficulties women face in reconciling their role of wife and mother with going out to work.

Finally, there is the problem of the young grandmothers – aged 50 to 55, who take early retirement in order to look after their grandchildren. Most women in this age group cite family reasons for giving up work.

Italy

Tiziana Lang (Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policy, Italy) introduced the Italian situation, saying the country has one of Europe's lowest female employment rates at 47%.

However, the situation varies across the country as northern Italy has nearly achieved the Lisbon employment targets, and been dubbed "the Island of happiness", as many women work and opening times for shops, schools and care services have been adjusted to help them reconcile work and family life.

However in the south nearly 60% of women are inactive, and while many women would like to work, the only jobs available are 'precarious', or on a string of fixed-term contracts. One reason why women have children so late (over 29 years) is that they are waiting until they have a secure job that will give them financial security. Throughout the country part-time work is prevalent, with 27.2% of women and 4% of men working part-time, and there is a considerable gender differential in part-time earnings.

The 2000 Parental Leave Act was aimed both at parents and those who need to care for elderly relatives to help them achieve a better work/life balance. It includes financial incentives for employers to reorganise working time for employees, such as tele-working and the creation of home-based work for employees who have to travel long distances to work – for example a shoemaking project, which allows people either to work at home or in the factory.

According to the law, men are allowed two weeks' paternity leave and both parents can take up to six weeks' parental leave. Figures from the National Institution for Social Security which pays the parental leave allowance, show that in 2003 96.8% of working mothers took parental leave, and 21% of men, although 44% of all parental leave was taken by fathers with children of two to three years.

The reason for this is that Italians retain the stereotyped role for parents – women spend 5.20 hours a day on household tasks and childcare, while men only 1.35 hours. In 2004 64.5% of women were working, but this reduced to 35.6% after the birth of their first child, and many did

not re-enter the labour market. Measures must be introduced to prevent pregnancy and maternity being a financial 'cost' for employers.

Anastasia Guiffrida (Labour Market Team, Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policy, Italy) said that policy implementation was decentralised so female employment was very different between northern and southern Italy. Some areas had high levels of public childcare, while others did not, and in south there are more problems with the public employment services.

The new government has begun to open the debate on the new social model, including the social partners such as NGOs and trade unions. One priority is to create unemployment benefits for those in precarious employment.

Discussion

Asked for more details of fertility levels, **Tiziana Lang** (Italy) said that this also varied between the north and south, but where there are more services for working parents, fertility levels are higher.

Carole Blond-Hanten (CEPS-INSTEAD, Luxemburg) felt women should not bear all the brunt of changing stereotypes, as men must play their part.

On fertility issues, **Elizabeth Villagómez** (Thematic Expert) said the OECD study showed that the more unequal a society is in terms of men and women's roles and the more people believe that women should care for the children, the lower the fertility rate. **Eva Maria Welskop-Deffaa** (Germany) added that German women would like to have more children, but did not, partly because of the lack of state support, and partly because of their partners' reluctance. To overcome these barriers the state is introducing more childcare and a parental allowance, and she wondered whether a parental allowance or 'partner money' might persuade more men to see the positive aspects of having a larger family.

Malta

Antonella Ellul (Department of Research and Development, Employment and Training Corporation Head Office, Malta) explained that Malta is a young nation which obtained its independence only in 1964. Moreover in Malta the Church has a very strong influence on people's way of thinking and culture in general. As a result gender equality legislation was only introduced in 1989, and the belief continues that the man's role is as the breadwinner, while women must care for the children. However, ideas are changing as the country becomes more secular.

The above scenario could partly explain why in Malta there is a very low level of female participation in the labour market. The female employment rate stands at 38.5%, and is slowly rising, although many work part-time. About 66% are inactive, while the percentage of employed women who are 35 years and over drops to 19% from 34%.

The government is using fiscal means to encourage more women to work, letting couples decide whether to submit a joint or two single tax declarations, and will be introducing new measures such as giving all working women a one year tax rebate for every child born after 2007. Parents also receive a small (means- tested) annual family allowance of €250 per child.

State childcare is virtually non-existent and private care very expensive, so this year the state opened three childcare centers with two more scheduled for next year, and has introduced an annual €1000 childcare rebate.

Women are entitled to 14 weeks' paid maternity leave, and parents working in the private sector can take three months' (unpaid) parental leave, and in the public sector one year's (unpaid) leave. This option may not be widely taken up because of the loss of income.

Parents working in the public sector can also take a career break, or work reduced hours, and this has led to more job segregation, as women choose to work in the public sector because of the possibility of taking a career break. As a result this has become a 'feminised' sector, where the pay is lower than the 'masculine' private sector, where most men work, which offers no such breaks and the pay is higher.

In terms of national insurance contributions, the employer and employee pay equal amounts. Until recently parents who took family breaks were not eligible for national insurance credits, they built up fewer pension contributions, which acted as a disincentive to take a career break, as parents did not want to prejudice their final pension level. However, government introduced national insurance credits of up to two years per child to counteract this situation.

Looking at the transferability of the German policies, **Antonella Ellul** said that most were useful, but the situation was very different, given the number of inactive women in Malta. In addition, as most Maltese women only reach primary education level, the Maltese government needs to offer multiple training packages to provide the skilled workforce Maltese employers require.

Given the lack of financial incentives most women would prefer to work full-time rather than reduced hours, or part-time; full-time working conditions are also much better than those for part-time work. Paid parental leave would also act as an incentive for women to take a career break, and return to work afterwards.

Antonella Ellul thought a 'one-stop-shop' to help lowly-paid, poorly educated women would be a positive means of overcoming poverty. This centre could offer training, counseling on social problems, a social security department to help with bureaucratic problems, a job centre and childcare. Such a one-stop shop is offered in Malta through the *Kumpless Access* in Vittoriosa.

However, she foresaw that the recession would affect such policies, although she thought it might be possible to apply to the European Social Fund for funds to set up training opportunities.

Luxembourg

Carole Blond-Hanten (CEPS-INSTEAD, Luxembourg) emphasized that the employment rate of women in Luxembourg had grown slowly but constantly, from 41% in 1988 to 56% in 2006, but was still below both the European average and the Lisbon target of 60%.

One significant characteristic of the Luxembourgish labour market is the high rate of cross-border workers. In 2007, there were 320.000 workers in Luxembourg, 139.000 (43,3%) were cross-border workers: 50,3% live in France, 25,9% in Belgium and 23,9% in Germany. The important part of the female cross-border workers, who make up a larger percentage than native

Luxemburgish female workers, are responsible for the positive evolution of the female employment rate.

As in all other countries, the largest discrepancy between male and female workers arises when women have children and increases with the number of children. The employment rates of men and women without children are 71% and 57% respectively, but by the time families have four children, the father's employment rate rises to 100%, whereas the mother's drops down to 35%.

Looking at the measures for parental leave, **Ms Blond-Hanten** stressed the importance of the 1999 law that led to the establishment of the National Action Plan (NAP). This law allows both parents to take a paid break in employment for six months full-time, or 12 months part-time, with their job reentrance guaranteed at the end of the leave. Furthermore, it allows each parent to take two annual days' leave to look after their sick children. The 2006 law introduced minor modifications making non-paid parental leave for three to six months available.

Between 2002 and 2007, eight of every ten days of parental leave was taken up by female workers, with the man rarely being the first parent to take the leave – expecting his wife to volunteer first. In fact, very rarely, women take the second parental leave, full-time or part-time, and even more rarely, men take the first one. Despite of this, parental leave has slightly changed men's attitudes towards childcare, so that it could be an instrument for gender equality.

In terms of how women perceive their careers: before having children 67% indicated that they would take a parental leave, but after having children, 47% said they would return to work on a full-time basis, 49% would return at reduced hours and 4% would interrupt their career.

Carole Blond-Hanten further highlighted that Luxembourg provides childcare for school-aged children in the form of 'relay houses' which are open before and after school schedules. A legal framework for parental assistance was created in 2007 that puts forward a complementary child care structure to the relay-houses. In addition, from March 1st 2009, a system of child care checks will be introduced offering families three free hours in private or communal child nurseries, relay houses, residential schools. During school holiday activities, 20 additional hours will then only cost 3 Euros per hour. This amount will be reduced in accordance to the living conditions of the household.

Referring to the gender pay gap in Luxembourg, there is a gap of 13% between the two gross salaries. The main factors that influence the wage level are professional specifications, initial and continuous training and breaks in employment. But, in the private and professional sphere, stereotypes still continue to operate. She said she was convinced that one has to work on this topic, from childhood on, if one wants to progress in the field of gender equality.

Assessing the elements of the German programme that are likely to be useful in Luxembourg, **Carole Blond-Hanten** mentioned the existing non-profit organisations and especially the local gender equality services (depending on the local authority) that have already set up programmes to help women return to the labour market after a parental break. There are many similarities between the job description of the person in charge of the gender equality in the employment agency in Germany and that of the persons in charge of the gender equality services in the local governments in Luxembourg. **Carole Blond-Hanten** was impressed with the German programme's attempt to network all the different services together at the local level, so that people could learn from good practice, while keeping the local character. In Luxembourg, the advantage of the German programme would be that all the gender equality services would work

on the same concept of the women's return to employment, give the same advisory to the women, improve the networking between the gender equality services, keep the local character, have a greater impact because of the dissemination of the information and finally influence national policies.

Carole Blond-Hanten also agreed with the holistic approach of the German programme, which she felt should concentrate on changing gender roles and stereotypes.

Brigitte Weinandy (Ministry of Family Affairs and Integration – National Service for Social Action, Luxembourg) added that the Luxembourgish government had earmarked childcare as a priority in its National Action Plan for social inclusion. Next year it will introduce a voucher system for households with children aged 0-12, enabling them to 'buy' hours in private or communal childcare facilities. Given that this care element is free, it is particularly targeted at families at poverty risk, thus helping to prevent their children being 'ghettoised'.

Turning to the German project, she said that Luxembourg's older workers employment rate (male and female) being particularly low (32%) the government has made it a priority to re-integrate them by offering for instance incentives to companies to employ them. Also, men and women over 30 are offered a tailor-made integration plan within six months of signing on for work.

For Luxembourg which has many single initiatives, the main message from the German experience is that the focus should not be on creating new services, but on building more coherence between what is offered and publicizing this fully. Networking should not be difficult in a small country like Luxembourg, she finished.

Poland

Irena Kotowska (Head of the Centre for Demography, Institute of Statistics and Demography, Warsaw School of Economics, Poland) said in Poland, a country which was part of the Soviet bloc, employment is only 48.2% for women and 60.9 for men, leaving a gender gap of 12.7%. At the same time it has one of the lowest fertility rates in Europe: just below 1.3.

Structural changes are needed to increase women's employment in the labour market and in the organisation of work and institutional care. This will help women reconcile work and family life, while fuller employment for women should boost the fertility rate as well.

Existing cultural norms have been a barrier to women's employment because women were seen both as an equal economic provider for the family with the father, and as the primary carer in the home, carrying the well-known 'double burden'. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the opening up of the former Soviet bloc countries in the 90s, there was a radical reassessment of a woman's role in the family, which actually had the reverse effect of making it more difficult for women to reconcile both roles.

Despite the difficulties associated with moving to a market economy the gap between men and women's employment in the 25 to 40 age group has declined significantly. This is mainly thanks to the increase of women in higher education, as numbers doubled between 1994 and 2007.

However the government has difficulties in keeping women over 40 in the labour market as many were educated under the old system so their skills are outdated, and given their age, employers

do not want to invest in upgrading their skills.

While the statutory retirement age is 60 for women and 65 for men, the effective retirement age is 56 and 58 respectively, giving Poland the dubious prize of having the lowest employment of people over 55 in the EU. To overcome this, the government has introduced a programme '50 and more' to invest in training older workers and to encourage employers to make their workplace more 'older-worker friendly'.

However, women have difficulties in reconciling work and family life, as Poland has the worst EU record for flexible working hours, i.e. varying the beginning of end of the working day for family reasons or allowing employees to take days off for family reasons,

Again childcare is the primary reason for differing employment rates between men and women, as women's employment *drops* considerable after the birth of the first child, whereas men's employment rate *increases*. When women want to re-enter the labour market as their children grow up, many find they are unable to do so, and this is reflected in the increase in women's unemployment rates.

Turning to parental leave - this has been available for both men and women since 1996, said **Irena Kotowska**, but during 2005, only 2.5% of men took leave, while almost 50% of women did. As parental leave is compensated at a flat rate, it is more advantageous for lower-paid women to take advantage of this, rather than well-paid men – and figures show the higher the education level, the lower the proportion of those taking parental leave.

When women are asked why they do not take more parental leave, they cite both the low level of the allowance paid, and the negative effect on their career. However men did not believe this could negatively affect their career choices, which shows entrenched attitudes.

Irena Kotowska then turned to what she described as "the myth of institutional childcare in Poland before 1989". In fact as so many women worked under the previous system, only 60 places were available per 1000 children.

Women remain the main carers, with 54% calling on support from family members and only 21% use public care centres. A recent government proposal has increased maternity leave, but this simply reinforces social expectations that it is a woman's role to care for the children.

Policy initiatives to increase women's participation include offering more flexibility in maternity and parental leave and increasing financial compensation for those who take it, together with higher state contributions to the old-age pension scheme. There have also been moves to provide social funds for companies to set up kindergartens and nurseries.

A general social change is needed, as both women and men should change their life/work balance, and there has been discussion in the mass media about offering more parental leave for fathers.

Issues and remarks

Marie-Anne Paraskevas (European Commission) said the German programme provides a good model of governance, as it operates at both regional and local level – the latter being the most

appropriate level on which to fight social exclusion and also involves a variety of stakeholders.

She summed up the lessons from the German Programme as follows:

The 'life cycle' approach adopted by the Programme is very important as it shows that the return to the labour market is a process that needs practical support from all members of the family.

Employers play an important role in this process, and it is useful to cite the examples of Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives by companies – for example Volkswagen automobile company uses a system of time credits, so employees can gain credits from working additional hours, which they cash in when they need to have time for personal reasons, so they do not lose pay for taking time off. Employers should also provide training for women who return to the labour market which is appropriate for the job they are assigned to carry out.

It is crucial to concentrate on the father's role in encouraging the mother to return to the labour market. Pushing for more flexible working arrangements, such as the Dutch example of the four-day week, will encourage men to take up caring responsibilities.

Women returning to the labour market have different profiles, so each needs a tailor-made solution.

Cater for the specific needs of the most vulnerable among women who return: lone parents and those who care for the elderly and disabled.

The Barcelona Childcare Targets, specify that by 2010 EU Member States should try to provide childcare for at least 90% of all children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age, and at least 33% of all children under 3 years of age. However this ignores the need to care for school-aged children, and the 'Relay Centers' in Luxembourg provide a good example of what could be offered.

Childcare should also be provided for women seeking work or following a vocational course.

Tax benefits – here it is useful to learn the lessons from gender equality programmes about adopting a more flexible approach and 'individualising' social security rights.

Finally, the German Programme has a strong social inclusion dimension – it helps reduce child poverty and encourages the active inclusion of women in the labour market and in society. Many children grow up in a jobless household where no parent works, and these families have a 25% to 30% chance of ending up in poverty. Giving women the chance to enter/return to the labour can help alleviate this risk. Likewise, many households are confronted with 'in-work' poverty, and encouraging women to work full-time could help alleviate this situation.

Relevance and key learning elements for peer countries and stakeholder representation

Elizabeth Villagómez (Thematic Expert) outlined key lessons and transferability issues:

- 1) The need for consistency between the tax benefits system, services and other relevant gender equality measures – i.e. women's economic independence and greater participation by men in care work.

- 2) The need to identify the main quantitative (actual figures) and qualitative (anecdotal evidence from people themselves) challenges to increasing the employment rates for women.
- 3) The need to see what other characteristics are not being addressed by employment policy instruments, such as civil status, age, race, ethnic background, disability, etc.
- 4) Adjust policies to recognise the strong link between flexible labour market models and reconciling work and personal life. Europe is far behind the US in its use of tele-working and ICT, and there should also be more flexibility built into employees' contracts.
- 5) Other policies need to be linked and a more holistic view taken towards employment policies, such as adapting the accessibility and time of services, like transport, shopping, family care, etc. to working women's needs. The German Programme should examine how employment policies link with other policies.
- 6) Studies need to be carried out on improving coordination and cooperation between regional and local authorities and incorporating this into strategies to increase women's employment rates.
- 7) Analyse the quantitative and qualitative indicators being used to evaluate policies, to monitor whether the programmes are having the desired effects.
- 8) There are two approaches to helping women to return to the labour force – non-paternalistic or proactive, and the proactive approach is better for women's emancipation.
- 9) Avoid the double victimisation of women, or of creating a 'benefits trap', whereby women cannot return to work as they lose their financial benefits.

Discussion

Agata D'Addato (EUROCHILD) welcomed Luxembourg's efforts to ensure that care services reach out to the most vulnerable groups, saying that universal care was the best approach, with additional care for those more in need. She felt that out of school care for school children was not widely addressed, leaving a gap between research and policies.

Agnete Andersen (Denmark) stressed that women are 'actors' who decide on their work patterns, and take decisions about their own lives, not 'victims' to be protected. This belies a whole difference of attitude as in Denmark women do not 'return' to work, as they never left it and full employment for women is the norm as the country needs the labour supply.

The goal is not to 'remove women' from poverty, but to retain the supply of labour, as high employment funds the tax and benefit system which is a prerequisite for the country's welfare system. Retaining women in the labour market is seen from the perspective of employment, not of social inclusion.

Brigitte Weinandy (Luxembourg) commented that while labour supply is important, so is social inclusion. In most countries special integration measures are needed to support women returning to the labour market. She disagreed that providing special programmes to do this treated women as 'victims', particularly as the German project was very anxious to avoid this. She felt that employers had to be aware of the positive aspects of employing women over 40.

Céline Simonin (COFACE) believed that both approaches were needed – to overcome men's attitudes about women having primary responsibility for children and to gain employers' agreement to accept more flexible modes of working. She welcomed the European Commission's emphasis on social inclusion, and felt that EU Member States needed to develop an inclusive labour market and an inclusive approach for 'returnees'.

Kay Bourcarde (Network Expert) emphasised the financial difficulties faced by women with lower qualifications who are (usually also) the low earners, as replacing a standard child benefit with a parental allowance may help better-off families, but disbenefits those with lower incomes.

He also pointed out that women with lower qualifications often do not know how to use, or have access to the Internet, so should be offered computer-skills programmes.

Charles de Vries (Netherlands) said more information is needed about the tax policies in each EU country, in order to compare data and to quantify their effects on women's labour participation.

Tiziana Lang (Italy) said that some Italian projects to help women return to work are financed by the state, and this requires an agreement at company level between trade union representatives and management, to ensure that they reflect employees' needs.

Closing remarks

Eva Maria Welskop-Deffaa (Germany) outlined what the German Programme organisers had gained from the meeting:

- 1) It had confirmed their approach of including men, so that women do not have to carry their 'double burden', and here the Dutch model of 4 x 2 provided a concrete example.
- 2) The discussion revealed that, by using a flexible life cycle approach, gender equality and family policies tend to be far more effective than policies to rigidly extend existing regulations (e.g. lengthening maternity leave).
- 3) As a result of the discussion the focus of the Programme has to be extended. As well as being used to support the re-entry of women into the labour market, but it could also be a good tool to fight poverty, particularly as in 20% of multi-person households, women are the main breadwinners. Ensuring women return to the labour force and take up full-time work will help families avoid the poverty trap.
- 4) Re-entry into the job market should be into socially-secure jobs.
- 5) It had confirmed their comprehensive approach
 - of embedding the programme in the entire German family and gender equality policies (e.g. parental allowance, expansion of child care) and
 - of creating a network, including many stakeholders, such as entrepreneurs, NGOs and other authorities at all regional levels.

- 6) In addition to care for pre-school age children, it is important to offer out-of-school care for school-aged children.

She ended with a forecast for 2009: Next year's International Labour Conference will focus on the ILO Campaign for Gender Equality at Work, and the German authorities will contribute to this by emphasising the importance of taking a lifelong approach, and ensuring a good work/family balance so that women do not have to bear the double burden of work and childcare.