

## **Family and Work can be made compatible? The European experience.**

August 2002

Prof.ssa Paola Villa  
Dipartimento di Economia  
Università degli Studi di Trento  
[villa@gelso.unitn.it](mailto:villa@gelso.unitn.it)

*(Very first draft)*

This paper addresses the issues of female employment in the European Union, the implications in the household system and the need for developing /strengthening a co-ordinated and comprehensive equal opportunity employment policy.

Integrating equal opportunities into employment policy is essential for the pursuit of equality (§2) but it has also crucial for boosting the overall employment rate of the EU (§1). Progress towards a higher employment rate requires more than changes within the labour market system (§3 and §4), it requires progress towards equality in the care, welfare and household system (§5).

### **1. WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT RATES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Women's employment rates have risen consistently in all member states in recent decades while those for men have remained stable or declined. Between 1985 and 2000 they rose from 45% of working age population (15-64) to 54%, whereas those for men declined from 75% to 72.5% (see table 1). The gender gap in the employment rate for the European Union shrunk from 30 percentage points in 1985 to 18.5 in 2000.

**Table 1 – Employment rates by gender in the European Union (EU15), 1975-2000**

	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Gender gap</b>
1975*	80,9	44,0	36,8
1985	75,0	45,0	30,0
1991	73,3	50,1	23,2
1992	72,5	49,8	22,7

1993	71,4	49,5	21,9
1994	70,6	49,6	21,0
1995	70,2	49,6	20,6
1996	70,1	50,4	19,7
1997	70,3	50,6	19,7
1998	71,2	51,6	19,6
1999	71,7	52,8	18,9
2000	72,5	54,0	18,5

\* the new German Landers are not included.

Source: Eurostat, European Labour Force Survey (ELFS).

### Modest employment growth in the EU

Until the early seventies the rate of unemployment in the European Union was remarkably low. Subsequently it began to rise as a result of disinflation policies launched in response to the oil crisis. The unemployment rate in the post-oil shock period (1974-96) was systematically above the average rate recorded in the previous period (1960-73). It continued to climb, only dipping during the growth period of the late eighties and that of the late nineties (see table 2).

The unemployment rate gives only a partial idea of the European economic system's inability to create employment. In fact, if we make a direct comparison between the European Union and the US in terms of job creation capacity the differences between the two systems emerge even more dramatically: between 1974 and 1994 the United States created 36 million new jobs, compared with fewer than 6 million in the European Union (EU15). It is within this scenario that the vast literature on Eurosclerosis has developed, calling for policies to enhance labour market flexibility.

The modest employment growth recorded in the European Union since the seventies was mirrored in the low employment rate<sup>1</sup>. In 2000, the level of the employment rate in the EU is low (63%) compared with around 75% in the US, as well as compared with the employment rate recorded in the EU in the '70s (see table 2). If the European Union had today the same employment rate as that recorded in the US, around 30 million more people would have a job which is almost twice the number of the unemployed recorded in the same year.

**Table 2 – Employment and unemployment rates in the European Union. 1975-2000 (EU15)**

	1975	1985	1991	1995	2000
Employment rate (% population 15-64)	64,2	59,8	62,4	60,0	63,3
Unemployment rate (% labour force)	3,7	9,9	8,2	10,7	8,2

Fonte: Eurostat, ELFS

In the second half of the '90s all countries showed an increase in the overall employment rate (compared with the decrease or lack of increase characterising the recession of the early '90s). This was the result of a modest increase in the male employment rate (+2.3 percentage points in 1995-2000) and a large increase in the female one (+4.4). In 2000, 165 million people were in employment in the Union, recording a rise of more than 10 million since 1995. In 2000, the employment rate for the population aged 15-64 stood at 63.3% in the Union. However, the

<sup>1</sup>\* An extensive concept of employment is used in international guidelines on labour statistics. All people with at least an hour's paid work in the reference period are counted as employed.

employment rate remains considerably low. Thus, the question to foster employment is still a crucial issue for the European Union.

The Lisbon European Council of 2000 set as a new strategic goal for the Union in the 2000-2010 decade "to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world". It specifically stated that the overall employment and economic policies should be "to raise the employment rate from an average of 61% today [63.2 in 2000] to as close as possible to 70% by 2010 and to increase the number of women in employment from an average of 51% today [54% in 2000] to more than 60% by 2010." (CEC, 2001: 18).

To understand the implications for women of the pursuing of this strategic goal, it is important to point out that:

- between 1985 and 2000, the European employment rate recorded only a modest increase;
- this increase was almost entirely due to the increase in the female employment rate<sup>2</sup>.

Employment rates for women vary across the Member States to a greater degree than is observed for men. The employment rate for working-age women ranges from about 70% in Denmark and Sweden to 40% in Greece, Spain and Italy. The dispersion in the employment rate for men is much smaller, with the Netherlands and Denmark recording the highest rates (around 80%) and Italy the lowest (68%) (see table 3).

Female employment rates have risen consistently in all countries in recent decades, while those for men have remained stable or declined. Thus, the gender gap in these labour market indicators has shrunk. Although the difference in employment rates between men and women is diminishing throughout the EU (in the long run), it remains large in the vast majority of countries. The gender gap is very narrow in Sweden and Finland (3 and 5.9 percentage points, respectively), while it still very large in the Southern countries (in Italy, Spain and Greece the gender gap is almost 30 percentage points).

**Table 3 – Employment rates by gender in the European Union (EU15), 2000**

	MF	M	F	gender gap
Denmark	76.3	80.8	71.6	9.2
Netherlands	72.9	82.1	63.6	18.5
UK	71.5	78.1	64.8	13.3
Finland	70.8	70.2	64.3	5.9
Sweden	70.8	72.3	69.3	3.0
Portugal	68.3	76.5	60.3	16.2
Austria	68.2	76.9	59.5	17.4
Ireland	65.2	76.2	54.1	22.1
Germany	65.4	72.7	57.9	14.8

<sup>2</sup> Even when expressed as full-time equivalents to control for women's greater involvement in part-time work the female contribution is still systematically greater than that for men.

<b>EU total</b>	<b>63.2</b>	<b>72.5</b>	<b>54.0</b>	<b>18.5</b>
France	62.0	69.1	55.1	14.0
Luxembourg	62.7	75.0	50.1	25.9
Belgium	60.5	69.5	51.5	18.0
Greece	55.7	71.1	41.2	29.9
Spain	54.8	69.7	40.3	29.4
Italy	53.7	67.9	39.6	28.3

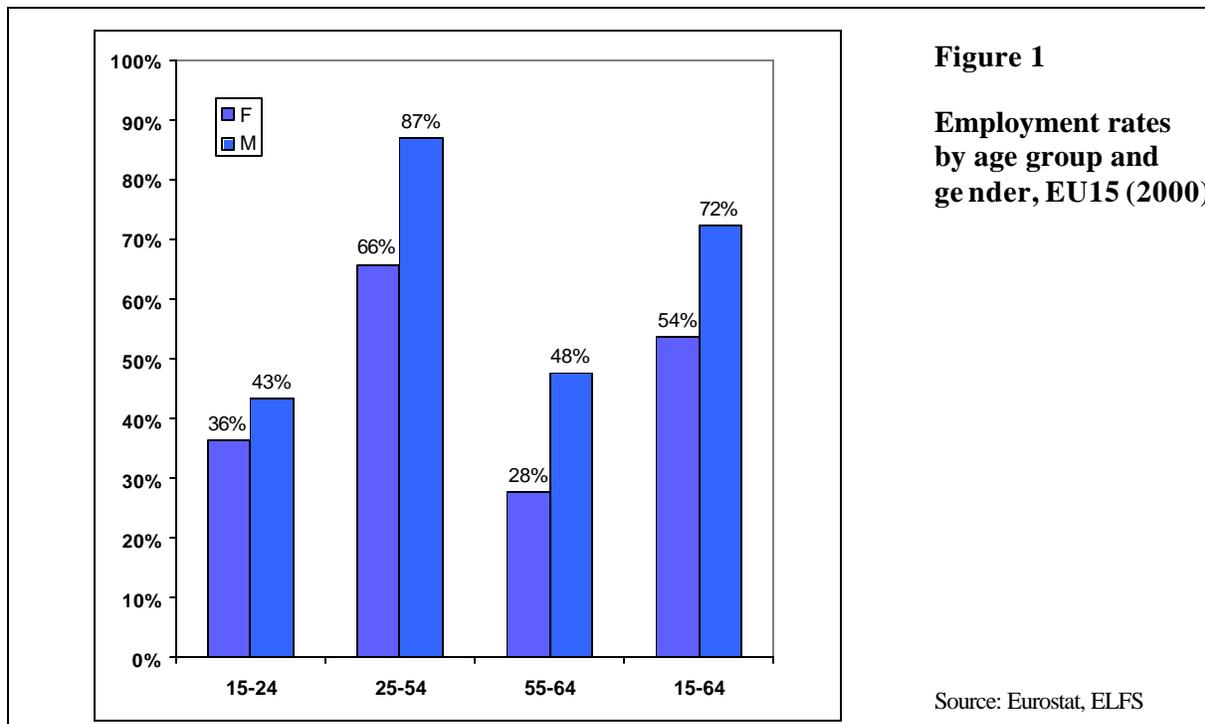
Source: Eurostat, ELFS

Data in table 3 are ranked by the overall employment rate (column 1). The countries with the highest employment rate are those recording the highest percentage of women in employment. This has an important implication: in order to increase the overall employment rate it is necessary to foster female employment.

**Age.** The combination of increasing education and changing attitudes means that employment rates of women are converging on those of men. The difference in employment rates for men and women is much smaller in the younger generations.

Employment rates hit the highest point for both sexes in the core working ages (25-54) (see Figure 1). Within this broad age group, the long term increase in women's labour market involvement in recent decades has been concentrated in the age group 25-39 (25-49 in those countries experiencing earlier this trend). This implies that the increase in female employment rates recorded over the last decades has concerned women with family responsibilities (that is, raising small children), having to combined paid work in the labour market with care work at home. On this important point I will come back later.

It is important to stress that in virtually all countries, the employment rates for young females are closer to those of young men than their elders. So, as better-educated, younger generations of women keep joining the labour market, female participation will keep increasing.



**Education.** Attainment levels of the population have improved significantly over the last thirty years, particularly among females. The improvement in the educational level has been one of the major achievements of the last decades. Younger generations are much better qualified than older generations. This improvement in educational attainment across cohorts is particularly significant for women.

The following are the main characteristics of this evolution (related to educational attainment), found across all Member States:

- female education levels have improved remarkably over the last decades;
- the gender gaps in educational attainment (for the younger generations) have disappeared in almost all Member States;
- by the mid-'90s, women outnumbered men at both the upper secondary (103 women/100 men for EU15) and higher education level (104 women/100 men); and the trend is still on the increase: in 1997 there were 107 women per 100 men in tertiary education in the Union as a whole (see table 4);
- women's employment rate increase significantly with their qualification levels (see table 5); this implies not only a convergence towards the male employment rate at higher educational levels (see the gender gaps by educational attainment) but also a significant reduction in inter-country variation in women's employment rates (see figure 2B);
- women with a low educational attainment record a very low employment rate (see figure 2A). This is due not only to a factor of age (the average age of women with low qualification levels is higher than the average), but also to the fact that they face higher difficulties in entering employment (and/or re-entering after temporary interruptions in active life);

- among women with low qualifications, employment rates show significant differences across countries (as shown in figure 2B);
- highly educated women maintain a more continuous employment profile during their working lives; moreover, they are employed in full-time jobs at a larger extent (with respect to women with lower educational attainment).

**Table 4 – Female participation in tertiary education per 100 males. EU15**

	EU15	B	DK	D	EL	E	F	IRL	I	NL	A	P	FIN	S	UK
<b>1981/82</b>	80	76	98	72	74	83	105	67	77	70	76	102	89	108	59
<b>1997</b>	107	102	120	84	92	112	122	107	117	93	95	134	112	126	107

Source: Eurostat, in: Commission Européenne (2001), "La situation social dans l'Union européenne 2001", p. 118.

**Table 5 - Employment rate by educational attainment level and gender in the EU15 (2000)**

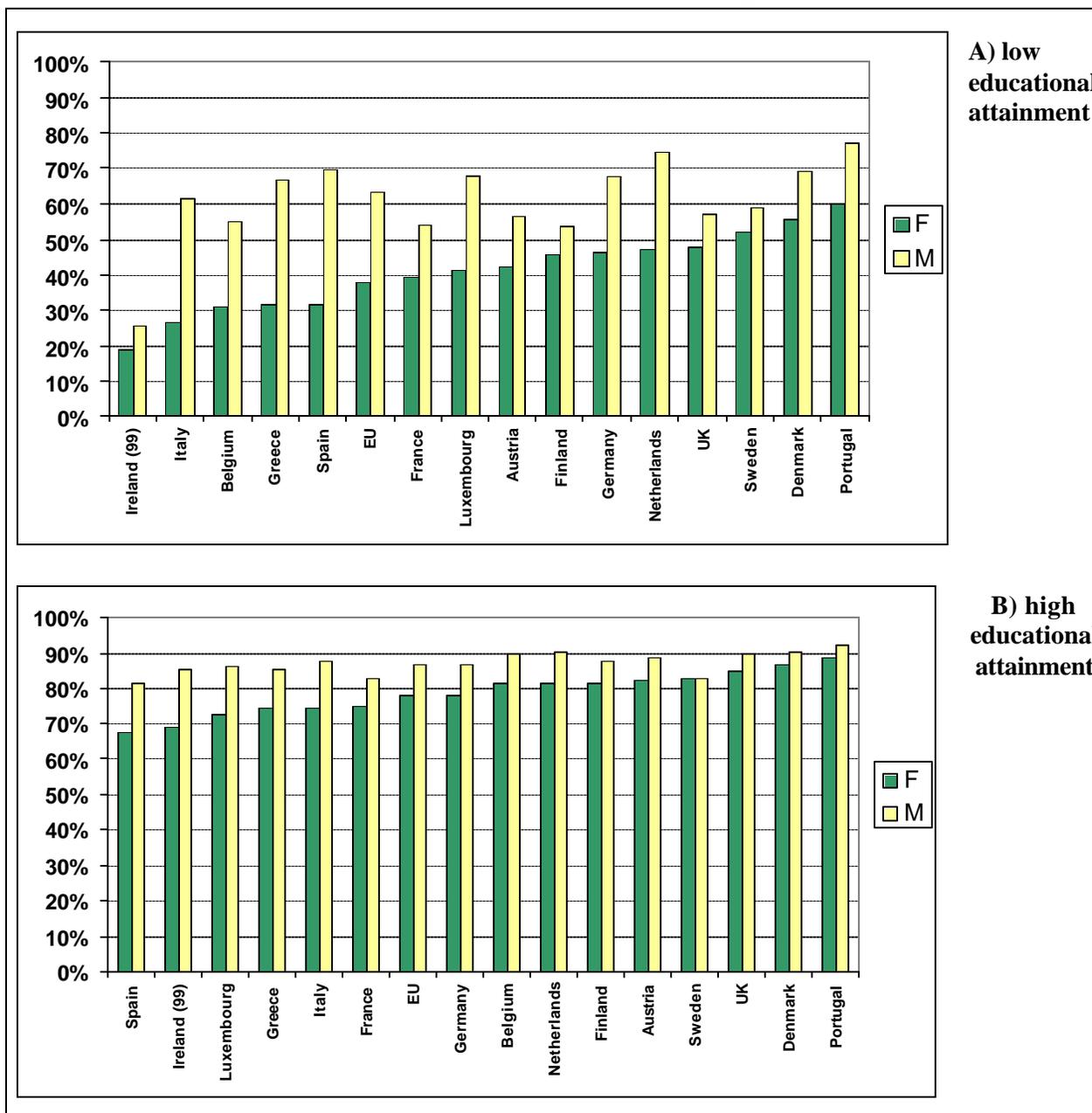
	Educational attainment level			total
	Low	medium	high	
F	37.9	62.2	77.9	55.5
M	63.4	76.6	86.3	73.8
<i>Gender gap</i>	25.4	14.4	8.5	18.4

Source: Eurostat, ELFS

Rising female education levels and increasing female labour force participation are strong general trends. But important differences exist across EU Member States in the female employment rates. While in Northern Member States (Finland, Sweden, Denmark) female employment rates are already very close to male ones, disparities remain most notably in Southern countries (Greece, Spain and Italy), Luxemburg and Ireland.

It is worth noticing (see Figure 2, A and B) that while the employment rate of women with high education levels is high and rather similar across countries (ranging between 70 and 85%), that of women with low education levels is strongly differentiated. On the one hand, over 50% of these women are employed in Portugal, Denmark and Sweden; while less than 30% are employed in Ireland and Italy.

**Figure 2 – Employment rate by gender and by educational attainment in EU countries. 2000**



**2. WOMEN STILL AT A DISADVANTAGE IN THE LABOUR MARKET**

Despite progress in recent years, women still have particular problems in gaining access to the employment market, in career advancement, in earnings and in reconciling professional and family life.

**Unemployment.** Although the net additional jobs created over the past decades have virtually all gone to women, this job growth has failed to keep pace with the increasing number of women

willing to work. As a result, unemployment among women is much higher than for men in most EU Member States.

**Table 6 – Unemployment rates by gender in the European Union (EU15), 1995 and 2000**

	M	F	absolute gap
<b>Unemployment rate (% labour force)</b>			
1995	9.4	12.5	3.1
2000	7.0	9.7	2.7
<b>Youth unemployment rate (% labour force 15-24)</b>			
1995	20.1	23.1	3.0
2000	14.9	17.6	2.7
<b>Long term unemployment rate (% labour force)</b>			
1995	4.5	6.2	1.7
2000	3.0	4.4	1.4
<b>Youth unemployment ratio (% population aged 15-24)</b>			
1995	10.1	10.2	0.1
2000	7.7	7.9	0.2

Source: Eurostat, ELFS

In the Union as a whole, active women are more likely than men to be unemployed (9.7% and 7%, respectively); they tend to have longer unemployment spells, therefore long-term unemployment is slightly higher for women with respect to men (4.4% and 3%, respectively). Moreover, young females (17.6%) are more likely than young males (14.9%) to be unemployed.

In the recent years, unemployment has been falling throughout the Union. The decrease has been general and more pronounced for women. The gender gaps in the unemployment rate, in the youth unemployment rate as well as in the long term unemployment rate have shrunk, but they remain positive, showing the greater difficulties women face in entering employment.

**Part-time.** In the Union as a whole, 33.4% of women in employment are working part-time, against only 6.2% of men (in 2000). There are *two basic features* common to the pattern of part-time work across the EU:

- since the early '80s there has been a general expansion in the rate of part-time work in almost every EU country;
- the rate of part-time employment is much higher for women than men in every country (see the values for the ratio between the two shares of part-time work,  $F_{pt}/M_{pt}$ , in table 7).

Trends in women's employment have been intertwined with the growth and spread of part-time work, but part-time trends and rates vary markedly from one country to another. Thus, the above mentioned common features coexist with *national differences* in the level and trends in part-time work:

- in 2000, rates of part-time work for employed women in the EU range from over 70% in the Netherlands, down to less than 10% in Spain, Greece and Italy;
- trends in the expansion of part-time work also vary considerably across countries. This was the case in the '80s and early '90s (Smith, Fagan, Rubery 1998: 36). But it still is the case in the '90s. Just to give some examples: the Netherlands, recording already in 1991 the highest female part-time rate (60.9%) recorded almost 10 percentage points increase by 2000; Italy, Spain and Finland, characterised by very low rates in 1991, recorded only small increases (between 3 and 5 percentage points); finally, Sweden and Denmark, having about 40% of women employed in part-time jobs at the beginning of the '90s, recorded a significant contraction (-6.8 and -3.7, respectively).

**Table 7 – Female part-time employment (% of total employment). EU15**

	EU15	B	DK	D	EL	E	F	IRL	I	NL	A	P	FIN	S	UK
<b>F<sub>pt</sub> in 2000</b>	33.3	40.5	34.1	37.9	7.4	16.9	31.0	30.1	16.5	70.5	32.2	16.3	17.0	36.0	44.6
<b>Abs.change 1991-2000</b>	+4.3	+9.5	-3.7	+7.7	0	+5.7	+6.1	12.5	+4.7	+9.6	+5.7	+3.3	3.4	-6.8	+1.1
<b>M<sub>pt</sub> in 2000</b>	6.2	5.8	10.2	5.0	2.4	2.8	5.4	6.9	3.7	19.2	4.1	6.2	8.0	10.7	9.1
<b>Ratio F<sub>pt</sub>/M<sub>pt</sub></b>	5.4	7.0	3.3	7.6	3.1	6.0	5.7	4.4	4.5	3.7	7.9	2.6	2.1	3.4	4.9

Source: Eurostat, LFES

**Atypical forms of employment.** Higher shares of women are systematically found non just in part-time work but in general in all atypical forms of work (temporary employment, family workers, home working, informal work). Even though not all atypical forms of work have to be considered as 'poor quality jobs', it is certainly true that on average atypical forms of employment are characterised by lower earnings, higher instability, lower employment rights, less on-the-job training, fewer possibilities for career advancement, etc.

**Earnings.** The harmonised data for monitoring the gender pay gap in the European Union present some limitations (that do not allow a short presentation). Nevertheless, the available data show that women earn considerably less than men on average, although the extent of the pay gap varies markedly between countries as well as between manual and non-manual employees. In general, it is true that:

- the concentration of women in low paying sectors of employment is relatively high;
- the concentration of women in low paid jobs is, again, higher (compared to men);
- in general, the risk of poverty (to fall in a low income household) is higher for women (compared to men).

### 3. FERTILITY AND FEMALE PARTICIPATION

The question of the relationship between fertility and female participation is not an easy one to be tackled in a few paragraphs. In fact a large number of issues are involved:

- fertility rates (number of children per woman and age at childbirth),
- household structures (diffusion of the dual-earner family, single parents, etc.),
- spreading of part-time work arrangements for mothers,
- female employment patterns (intermittent or continuous),
- provision of care services for working mothers,
- the organisation, quality and cost of these services (they can be provided freely by the family network, they can be purchased in the market, or they are supplied by the public sector/local governments).

To start with, I will show some evidence on the impact of children on the employment rates of women (Figure 3 and table 8). Then I will consider how far the inclusion of educational attainment modifies the picture. Finally, I will turn to the role of part-time work.

**Children.** Figure 3 shows the employment rates of women with and without small dependent children (aged 0-6 years) for 12 European countries.

On the one hand, '*non-mothers*' (here defined as women not having small children) record very similar employment rates, between 70 and 80%, with the exception of southern countries (Greece, Spain and Italy), recording much lower rates (around 54%).

On the other hand, '*mothers*' (women having at least one small child) record a much wider dispersion in the employment rates (ranging from over 72% in Portugal to 42% in Spain), suggesting for significant national differences in the way in which women cope with motherhood.

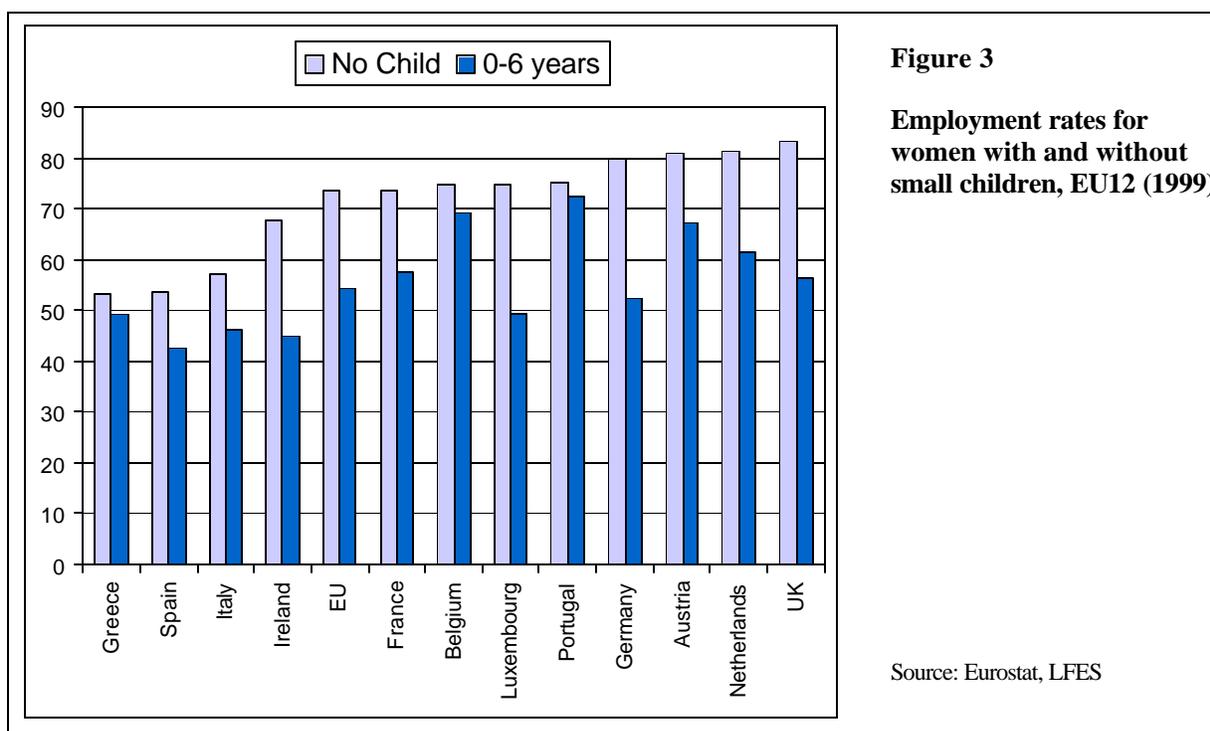
To better portray these national differences, let us look at the impact of children on female employment rate country by country (that is, consider the difference recorded in female employment rates by their maternal status). As expected, motherhood is associated with a reduction in the employment rate, but the dimension of this contraction is rather different:

- motherhood is associated with a marked reduction in employment in the majority of countries (Germany, Luxemburg, the UK, the Netherlands, ...);
- in Portugal and Belgium – characterised by an employment rate of '*non-mothers*' above the average – the impact of children is small;
- but also in the Southern countries (Greece, Spain and Italy) – characterised, on the contrary, by very low employment rates for '*non-mothers*' – the impact of children is rather small.

These data suggest three different employment patterns. The standard pattern is for women with small children to leave active life for some time for raising small children, and re-entering later (discontinuous employment pattern). The second pattern applies to those women who manage to

have a continuous employment profile during their working life, not leaving active life at childbirth. The third pattern applies to women quitting active life when family responsibilities make it difficult to be employed. In all countries the three patterns coexists, but they differ significantly in weight.

Over time, female employment appears to be less and less dependent on the number of (small) children. Differences still exists across countries, but the general tendency is towards the continuous employment pattern. This shift is strictly related to rising female education levels.



**Table 8 - Employment rates of women by number of children, EU12 (2000)**

	Number of Children (< 14)			
	0	1	2	=>3
Employment rate	74.47	64.44	58.02	42.95
<i>impact of children</i>		-10.03	-16.45	-31.52

Source: Eurostat, LFES

**Educational attainment.** Let us now consider how far the inclusion of educational attainment modifies the picture. In previous section we saw that women’s level of qualification is strongly associated with their employment rate. I also stated that highly educated women maintain a more continuous employment profile during their working life. This pattern applies to all women, but it is particularly accentuated for mothers with dependent children. In fact. The impact of children on

female employment decreases significantly as education increases (as shown in table 9). To put it in another way, we can say that educational attainment has a stronger impact on the employment rate of mothers (with respect to non-mothers).

**Table 9 - Employment rates of women by educational attainment and presence of small children, EU12 (2000)**

	No small children	At least one child aged 0-6	Impact of children
low	54.87	36.40	-18.47
medium	76.59	59.97	-16.62
high	86.58	76.79	-9.79
<i>impact of education</i>	<i>31.7</i>	<i>40.4</i>	

Source:ELFS 2000 (own calculations) - Household Data (private households), 1999-2000

This relationship between educational attainment and the involvement of mothers in active life has been explained as follows:

“Qualification enhance job prospects, earning potential and employment aspirations, as well as access to many of the more rewarding areas of employment. It is also associated with the expression of more egalitarian sex role attitudes and a rejection of the traditional breadwinner model, and a modest modification of the division of domestic work in the home.

Inter country variation in women’s employment rates declined at higher educational level, regardless of maternal status. However, the convergence is weaker for mothers ... This shows that qualifications have a strong and positive effect on female employment rates but they only partly offset the influence of country -specific employment patterns for mothers” (Rubery, Fagan 1998: 44)

Thus, it is argued that also at higher educational level there are significant national differences in the way in which women cope with motherhood.

**Part-time work.** It is often argued (by politicians, newspapers, some scholars) that the policy tool to be employed in order to foster female employment, is part-time work. The assumption behind this position is that women are second income earners within a ‘male breadwinner’ model of family life, in which women combine employment with their primary responsibility for unpaid domestic labour in the household. In more recent years, part-time work has been suggested as a policy tool for reducing mass unemployment across Europe and increasing the overall employment rate.

It has been shown that there are significant national differences in both the level and trends in part-time work across Europe. It has also been argued that:

“This differential expansion in the level of part-time work for women has no simple relation with the integration of women into the labour market, for high levels of part-time work are neither necessary nor sufficient to ensure high levels of female employment among women with family responsibilities” (Smith, Fagan, Rubery 1998: 36).

Figure 4 shows the overall employment rate for women by full and part-time status. The data show that there is not a clear relationship between the share of part-time work and female employment:

- Portugal and Finland have a low share of women in part-time work, but rather high overall employment rates;
- Denmark and Sweden, the two countries with the highest total employment rate, not only are not among those with the highest share of part-time work, but they have been recently reducing it.

The data reproduced in figure 4 do not distinguish between mothers and non-mothers. Nevertheless (as it will be argued below), even when considering the employment rate for mothers by full and part-time status, the picture that emerges is rather differentiated by country.

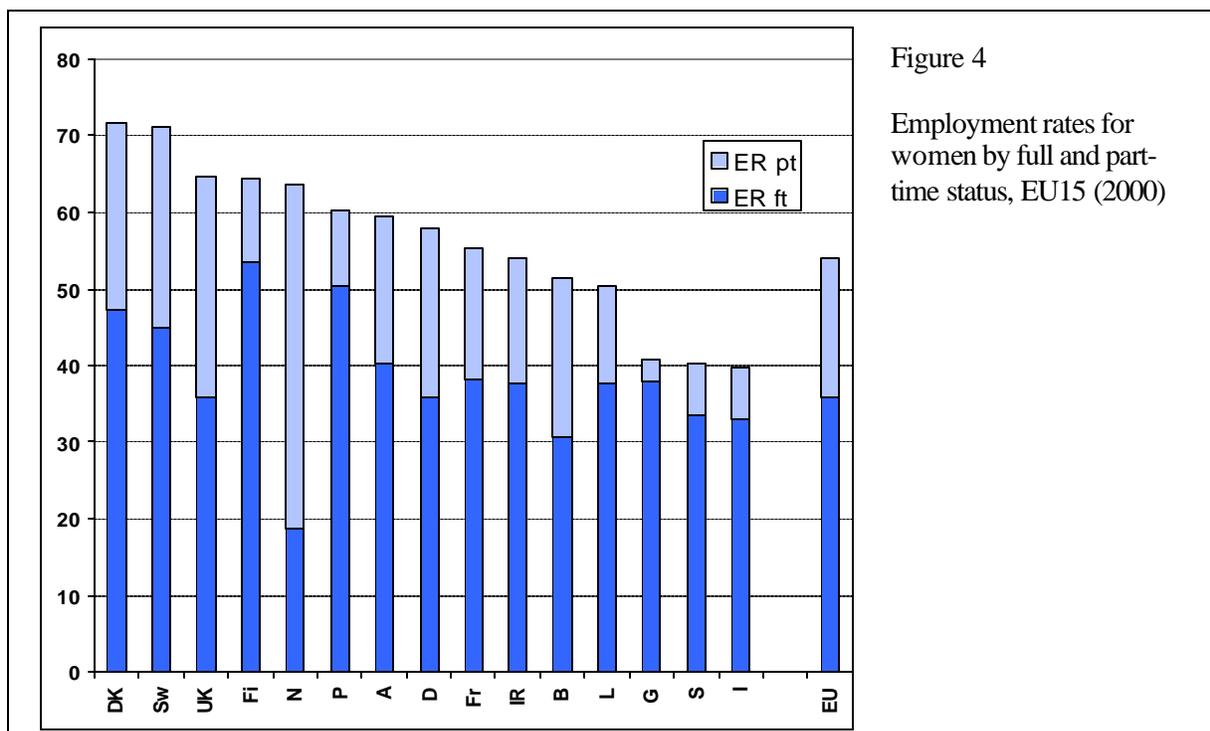


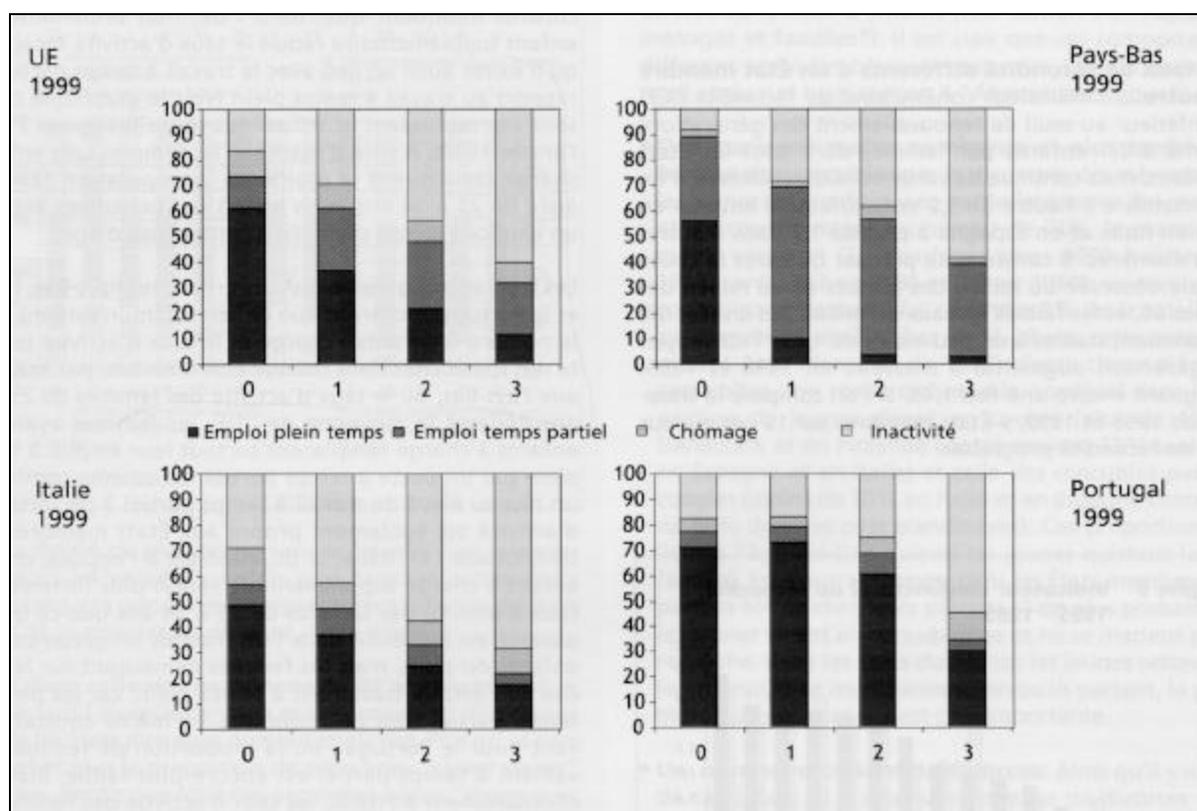
Figure 4  
 Employment rates for women by full and part-time status, EU15 (2000)

In analysing women’s employment rates in the European Union in the second half of the ‘90s, Rubery and Fagan showed clearly that it would be misleading to consider the spreading of part-time work as the major determinant of female employment rate in general, and of mothers in particular:

“Despite the long-term rise in women’s labour market involvement, women’s employment rates remain lower than men’s, particularly once they enter the core working years, and it is at this point in the life course that the national differences in women’s full-time and part-time employment rates begin to open up. These national differences emerge primarily in association with the onset of motherhood. ... (Rubery and Fagan, 1998, p. 40)

The evidence on full and part-time employment rates of mothers and non-mothers, shows clearly the relevance of these national specific patterns. In order to clarify this point figure 5 considers the employment rate of women aged 24-34 by number of children (presence of dependent children aged 0-9) and by employment status (inactive, unemployed, in part-time employment and in full-time employment). The data are produced for the EU15 and the Netherlands, Portugal and Italy - three countries characterised by very different employment patterns.

**Figure 5 - Employment rates for women (aged 25-34) by number of dependent children (aged 0-9). The EU15, the Netherlands, Portugal and Italy, 1999**



Source: Eurostat, ELFS (in: La situation sociale dans l'Union européenne. 2001, p. 28)

The comparison between these three countries illustrates that the common link between motherhood and female employment rate shows in each country some specificities.

In the Netherlands, where the employment rate of women aged 25-34 is higher than in the Union as a whole, women with children substitute almost entirely their full time employment with part-time jobs (if they were not already employed in a part-time position). Among non-mothers the share of part-time work is already very large to start with (about 37% of total employment in this age group, in 1999). Part-time work increases very significantly for mothers of one child or more. A similar

pattern is found in the UK, in Germany and Austria. In these countries, mothers of young children are employed primarily in part-time jobs, even though the shift towards part-time work for mothers is less pronounced than in the Netherlands.

In Italy, the picture is almost opposite: the overall employment rate is low (compared with the EU average) for both non-mothers and mothers. Moreover, unlike the pattern shown for the EU average, the impact of each additional child on the full time employment rate is relatively small. As a result, in Italy mothers of small children (aged 0-9) record full-time employment rates slightly higher with respect to the EU average. The share of part-timers is slightly higher among mothers with one child with respect to non-mothers, but it decrease among mothers with more than one child. A similar pattern is found in Greece and Spain. One possible interpretation of this pattern is that in these countries entry into employment is difficult for women (unemployment for young women is rather high), once they enter employment they keep their job. At motherhood, either they exit active life, or they continue to be employed in full-time jobs. In the case of Italy, the crucial issue is the lack of employment opportunities for women in general (mothers and non-mothers), more than the distribution of employment between full and part-time jobs.

In Portugal, the share of women in part-time work is very low. However, in opposition to Italy, the female employment rates are very high for both non-mothers and mothers of 1 or 2 children. It is only with the coming of the third child that the employment rate for mothers falls significantly (but still higher than that recorded for the EU average). Portugal is not an isolated case. A very similar pattern is found in Finland.

To sum up, the evidence produced in this section support the idea that there are significant national differences in the way in which women cope with motherhood. The next questions to be considered concern the relationship between female employment and fertility. In other words, how far the increasing involvement of women in active life has an impact on their fertility rate? Moreover, how far the greater commitment of women to paid work has been accompanied by a reduction in their involvement in unpaid work at home? Finally, demographic changes are they going to affect the supply and demand for care work and social services in the near future?

#### **4. TRENDS AND IMPLICATIONS OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE, THE CHANGING FAMILY STRUCTURE AND THE CHANGING PARTICIPATION PATTERNS IN THE LABOUR MARKET**

The relationship between the female employment rate and the fertility rate is certainly a difficult one to disentangle. The evidence available is not easy to be interpreted. In fact, the relationship between these two variables has been referred to as the *'participation-fertility puzzle'* (Bettio, Villa 1998).

On the one hand, all European countries show decreasing trends in fertility and increasing ones in participation rates in the long run. In fact, the total fertility rate (TFR = children per woman) has been decreasing over the last three decades and it has now reached very low rates in all European countries (well below the replacement rate, that is 2.1). In 1999, the average fertility rate in the EU15 was as low as 1.45 children per woman, among the lowest in the world (see table 10).

On the other hand, the countries with the highest female participation rates are those with the highest fertility rates (Ireland being the only exception); somehow surprisingly, the Mediterranean countries – those characterised by the lowest female participation rates – are those with the lowest fertility rates.

**Table 10 – Trends in fertility rates in Europe**

**A) Total fertility rate in the European Union (EU15)**

	1960	1980	1995	1999
<b>EU15</b>	2.59	1.82	1.42	1.45

**B) Total fertility rate and female participation rates in EU countries**

		<b>TFR (1960)</b>	<b>TFR (1999)</b>	<b>Participation rate in 1999 (F)</b>
<i>B</i>	Belgium	2.56	1.54	56.3
<i>DK</i>	Denmark	2.54	1.74	76.1
<i>D</i>	Germany	2.37	1.37	62.9
<i>EL</i>	Greece	2.28	1.30	49.7
<i>E</i>	Spain	2.86	1.19	48.9
<i>F</i>	France	2.73	1.77	63.2
<i>I</i>	Italy	2.41	1.21	45.5
<i>IRL</i>	Ireland	3.76	1.89	55.0
<i>L</i>	Luxembourg	2.28	1.73	50.3
<i>NL</i>	Netherlands	3.12	1.64	65.9
<i>A</i>	Austria	2.69	1.30	61.8
<i>P</i>	Portugal	3.10	1.48	62.8
<i>FIN</i>	Finland	2.72	1.74	71.2
<i>S</i>	Sweden	2.20	1.50	74.7
<i>UK</i>	UK	2.72	1.70	67.6
	<b>EU 15</b>	<b>2.59</b>	<b>1.45</b>	<b>59.3</b>

Participation rate = % population aged 15-64.

Source: Eurostat, ELFS and Demographic Statistics.

Among other factors, the increasing burden on women, having to combine paid work with family responsibilities, has played a major role in lowering fertility. In this process, too, national differences are important. Those countries which have been able to develop the supply of social services (all personal services, in particular childcare services) and to move towards a more equal sharing of

family responsibilities (between men and women) have not only successfully expanded female employment, but they also managed to halt the declining trend in fertility. However, the question of the so called 'double burden' for women – having to combine paid work with family responsibilities is far from being successfully solved.

Experts agree that the greater commitment of women to paid work has not been accompanied by any significant redistribution of household labour, with women performing more than 80% household tasks in all but the Nordic countries. The disparities in terms of gender equality and sharing of tasks between men and women in the household are shown in table 11 and in table 12.

In the European Union as a whole (in 1996), 31% of women (aged over 16) with respect to 16% of men were daily taking care of their children. The corresponding figures for caring other people (sick, disables, frail elderly) were 8% for women and 4% for men. This implies that about 70% of all informal daily care activities (unpaid) were provided by women.

**Table 11 – Share of the population (aged over 16) spending unpaid time looking after children and other persons\*, 1996 (%)**

	Looking after children		Looking after other persons	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
EU 15	16	31	4	8
Belgium	19	38	4	8
Denmark	23	28	4	7
Germany	16	28	4	7
Greece	12	36	1	5
Spain	11	27	2	8
France	12	23	3	5
Ireland	17	40	3	7
Italy	15	37	4	9
Luxembourg	20	33	4	7
Netherlands	31	41	5	8
Austria	14	33	2	7
Portugal	5	25	1	6
Finland	19	27	5	7
Sweden	:	:	:	:
United Kingdom	21	37	6	10

\* people needing care (sick, disabled, or frail elderly).

Source: Eurostat, Panel communautaire des ménages (PCM) in: Commission Européenne (2001), "La situation social dans l'Union européenne 2001", Annexe II, p. 117.

Looking at the unpaid time (hours per week) spent looking after children and other persons it is possible to see significant differences across countries. In Northern countries (in particular, Denmark and Sweden) there is an equal division of responsibilities between men and women; while in both Central and Southern Europe there still a long way to go (see table 12, last column).

**Table 12 - Gender gap in unpaid time spent looking after children and other persons, 1995 (hours per week)**

	Men	Women	Gender Ratio
EU 15	3.0*	12.6*	0.2383*
Belgium	3.1	9.1	0.3407
Denmark	4.8	8.8	0.5455
Germany	4.3	14.3	0.3007
Greece	2.1	13.8	0.1522
Spain	3.9	14.7	0.2653
France	2.0	7.5	0.2667
Ireland	4.1	16.1	0.2547
Italy	3.7	14.8	0.2500
Luxembourg	3.3	11.6	0.2845
Netherlands	6.2	19.3	0.3212
Austria	2.7	15.4	0.1753
Portugal	1.0	6.8	0.1471
Finland	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Sweden	8.5**	19.3**	0.4408**
United Kingdom	5.4	14.9	0.3624
Iceland	6***	19***	0.3158***

Source: Eurostat, European Community Household Panel, Wave 2, 1995, unpublished data (EGGE Network).

\* Weighted average on the basis of the population aged 15 and over, of all EU-member states, except Austria, Finland and Sweden.

\*\* Estimate based on Nyberg, A. (1997); data are for 1990/91, and refer to time spent on care for small children and others, in hours per week.

\*\*\* Estimate based on Ólafsson (1990); data refer to normal unpaid time at home

The evidence here presented helps to provide a plausible explanation of the *participation-fertility puzzle*. The reconciliation of family responsibilities and paid-work is better realised in those countries where:

- informal care activities (towards children and other persons needing family care) are better distributed between men and women within the family;
- public structures providing personal social services (care services for children, disabled, elderly people in need of care) are more developed;
- legislation is favourable to family in general (through parental leave legislation, income taxation favouring families with children, etc.) and to women in particular (through maternity leave legislation);
- flexible work arrangements (family friendly arrangements, including 'voluntary' part-time work for mothers) are available at the work place.

Within the European Union, the countries facing more difficulties in meeting these goals are those experiencing the lower fertility rates. As already pointed out, they are also those where the integration of women in the labour market has made less progress.

In the near future the problems associated with the double burden for women (having to combine paid work with family responsibilities) are due to increase. Three general processes have to be considered:

1. the progressive ageing of the EU population;
2. the changing household and family patterns, resulting in more households but smaller;
3. the rising female education levels and increasing female labour participation.

<b>DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS AND CHANGING FAMILY STRUCTURE IN THE EU</b>
<p><b>The EU population is ageing.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fertility levels remain very low. With an average of 1.45 child/woman in 1999, the fertility rate in the EU is (together with that of Japan) the lowest in the world, but with differences between Northern and Southern countries. Nowadays the lowest fertility rates are found in the Mediterranean countries (1.2 child/woman in Spain and Italy).</li> <li>- Life expectancy is expected to continue to rise. In 1999 it stands at 81 for women and 75 for men; Eurostat estimates that it might increase to 84 for women and 78 for men by the year 2020.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The EU working age population is ageing and it will be decreasing in size.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The working age population is ageing.</li> <li>- The size of the working age population will be decreasing (therefore the 'dependency ratio' [non working age population aged / population 15-64] will increase).</li> <li>- Given the demographic trends, women will be practically the only source of labour supply growth.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Households are becoming smaller.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The proportion of households composed of two (or more) adults with children is gradually declining (from 52% in 1988 to 46% in 2000).</li> <li>- The number of people living alone is increasing.</li> <li>- The share of single parent households has increased significantly.</li> </ul>

On the one hand, the demand for social services is likely to increase:

- the trend towards population ageing contributes to the growth of demand for social services;
- the trend towards smaller and less stable families implies that the new household structures will be more dependent on the *external* social support.

On the other hand, the supply of informal care (by family members) is likely to decrease as more women will enter active life. Given the demographic trends, women will be over the next decade the major source of labour supply growth. The prospects of a further increase in female participation (in most European countries) raises once more the question of reconciliation of family life and work.

## **5. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND EMPLOYMENT**

Existing discrimination in the labour market and some of the more recent trends, like the expansion of part-time jobs (mainly taken up by women) and in general the expansion of atypical employment, confirm a continuing division of roles by gender, leaving women with most of the workload as care-givers. However, the increasing future care demands and the increasing desire of women to integrate more widely in the labour market may raise tensions between family tasks and work. This imbalance can only be addressed with greater equality between sexes (with further progress in sharing family tasks between men and women) and making employment and family life more compatible for both men and women.

Since 1993 gender issues (from inequality in employment to reconciliation issues) have been progressively incorporated in the European employment policies. Three main areas for intervention have been singled out to tackle the issue of the integration of women in the labour market:

- the promotion of *equal opportunities in employment* women continue to be over-represented in the more vulnerable and lower paid career patterns (part-time, temporary, atypical jobs); entry into employment is more difficult; unemployment spells are longer;
- the encouragement of *reconciliation* policies: the reconciliation of family life and work is crucial non only for the wellbeing of family life but also for society at large (given the demographic trends).
- the backing up of gender *mainstreaming*.

Mainstreaming gender equality in policy programmes is defined as follows:

“... not restricting efforts to promote equality to the implementation of specific measures to help women, but mobilising all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality”  
(COM 96/67)

This definition implies that in order to achieve equal opportunities in practice, a dual and complementary approach is needed. This dual approach has to be implemented by the pursuing of two complementary goals:

- the continuation - and, when feasible, strengthening - of the specific positive measures which are currently being applied;
- the systematic application of gender impact analysis and its continuous monitoring and evaluation in all national and community policies and activities.

While a lot of progress has been made with respect to the first goal (the strengthening of specific measures to favour female employment), the judgement is far from positive with respect to the second goal.

The meaning of gender impact analysis is straightforward: before decisions are taken by governments and other policy actors, with respect to policies and programmes, an analysis should be made of the effects on women and men respectively (COM 98/122: 5). In particular, gender

impact assessment should be used extensively to establish whether a policy proposal is likely to affect either sex adversely, and how, conversely, a given policy could impact positively on the overall objective of equality between women and men:

*"The assessment could show that specific measures will be needed to address existing inequalities, or that the policy proposal needs to be amended or changed in order to accommodate the equality dimension."* (COM 98/122: 12).

The fact that the meaning of gender impact assessment is obvious does not imply that its fulfilment is smooth and easy. In fact, the assessment from a gender perspective on the national action plans for employment (Bettio, Bimonte, Tiezzi 1998; Rubery et al., 2001), has shown the lack of a thorough gender impact analysis in most of EU countries.

Among the many *pre-conditions* that need to be fulfilled if mainstreaming had to be actually implemented<sup>3</sup>, I would like to stress the crucial role of the full involvement of women in political and public life. Women have to be directly and actively involved in the decision making process, at all levels. The way in which this can take place might differ from country to country; certainly, an expansion in the number of women directly involved in the political and public life (women elected in Parliament and in local governments, women-ministers, women in top-positions of trade union organisations and employers' associations, and so on) should favour the emergence of the political will for gender mainstreaming. This remark by the Council of Europe illustrates very well the point:

*"It is obvious that it will be difficult to obtain the political will for gender mainstreaming if women are not fully involved in political and public life and in decision-making in general. Therefore, it is important that women enter political and public life in much greater numbers. It is especially important that women enter decision-making processes, to ensure that the various values, interests and life experiences of women are taken into account when decisions are made ... Besides, experience shows that in countries where a greater number of women participate in decision-making, changes are more considerable and take place at a quicker rate."* (Council of Europe, 1998, p. 23)

Far too often, policies with strong direct implications on women (in the labour market and in the household) are taken ignoring gender impact analysis, as if policies were gender neutral. This is the result of the fact that frequently decision makers are almost exclusively men, by and large not interested in gender mainstreaming. More precisely, the general attitude is that only some very specific questions, dealing directly with women (such as maternity provisions, parental leave, part-time work, equal opportunities laws), are considered "women's questions"; in those cases, some women will be involved directly in the decision process. For all other issues - dealing with employment, training, pay, taxation regime, retirement schemes, and so on - there is no perception that they might carry some gender implications, therefore the standard decision process (by and large involving exclusively men) will apply.

---

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion on the necessary prerequisites or facilitating conditions for gender mainstreaming see Council of Europe (1998, pp. 21-23).

It is obvious that not every men is necessarily unaware of gender issues and gender impact analysis; but if a critical mass is required for promoting a strong political will to mainstreaming and if most advocates of balanced gender relations are women, it is crucial that more women enter decision-making processes, particularly in political life. In fact:

*"... politicians are the main actors to initiate mainstreaming. ... it becomes clear that political will and a serious political commitment are a crucial prerequisite for mainstreaming. Even if gender mainstreaming involves many actors and politicians are not necessarily those with the most gender expertise, the main responsibility for making gender mainstreaming possible rests on their shoulders." (Council of Europe, 1998, p. 33)*

However, it is not infrequent the case that all participants in a complex decision process are men, with no awareness of gender problems, therefore no political will to mainstreaming. This is certainly the case of those countries, like Italy, where the number of women involved in political and public life continues to be rather small.

At the EU level, women's representation in the European Parliament has increased steadily with each election since 1984 and now reaches 30%. In national Parliaments as well as in national governments the percentages are lower, on average (23 and 25%, respectively). It is interesting to notice that this is not the case in all countries. In fact, in the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden), the Netherlands and Germany, the female share in all political bodies is high and well above EU average. There is a second group of countries (Austria, Ireland, France, Luxemburg and Spain,) were women continue to be under-represented in national Parliaments (and to a less extent in national governments) but record a relatively good representation in the European Parliament. Finally, there is a third group of countries (Italy and Greece, followed by Portugal, the UK, and Belgium) where women are largely under-represented in all political bodies.

**Table x – Women in decision making. Spring 2001**

	Percentage of seats occupied by women		
	In the European Parliament	in national Parliaments	In the national governments
Denmark	38	38	43
Netherlands	32	35	36
UK	24	18	33
Finland	44	37	39
Sweden	50	44	50
Portugal	20	20	10
Austria	38	28	31
Ireland	33	13	22
Germany	36	32	39
<b>EU total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>25</b>
France	40	10	29
Luxembourg	33	17	29
Belgium	28	23	22
Greece	16	9	13

Spain	34	28	18
Italy	10	11	14

Source: European Database – Women in decision making (in CEC, "The social situation in the European Union 2002". In Brief, 2002: 25)

## APPENDIX

The development of a framework for employment policy was initiated in 1993, with the publication of the *White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness, Employment* (CEC 1994). This led to a switch in focus from the unemployment rate to the employment rate as the main target of employment policy. This shift in European employment policy (from a focus on unemployment rates to employment rates) was a welcome one because it allowed a better monitoring of women's labour market position.

KEY STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EUROPEAN EMPLOYMENT POLICY		Remarks (from a gender perspective)
1993-94	<p><i>White Paper</i> on "Growth, Competitiveness, Employment":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- commitment to employment as a major European priority;</li> <li>- development of an EU employment policy.</li> </ul> <p>This document led to the reorientation from the unemployment rate to the employment rate as the main target of the employment policy.</p>	The shift in analytical focus from activity and unemployment rates to employment rates (if supported by adequate indicators) allows better <u>monitoring women's labour market position</u> .
December 1994	<p><i>Essen Summit</i> (Council of Ministers meeting). It established two main priorities for the EU:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the fight against unemployment,</li> <li>- progress towards equal opportunities for women and men.</li> </ul>	
1995 and 1996	Submission of <i>Multi-annual plans</i> (MAPs)	
June 1997	<p>The <i>Amsterdam Treaty</i></p> <p>"... the Community shall support and complement the activities of the Member States in ... equality between men and women with regard to labour market opportunities and treatment at work"</p>	
1998-2001	<p>Submission of <i>National Action Plans</i> (NAPs)</p> <p>The European Council in Luxembourg (20-21 November 1997) identified four pillars on the basis of which NAPs (National Action Plan) had to be formulated:</p> <p>Pillar I – Employability Pillar II – Entrepreneurship Pillar III – Adaptability Pillar V – Equal opportunities</p>	
	<p>The 2000 Employment Guidelines:</p> <p>"Member States will attempt to reduce the gap in unemployment rates between women and men by actively supporting the increased employment of women and will take action to bring about a balanced representation of women and men in all sectors and occupations." (Guideline n. 19)</p> <p>In order to strengthen equal opportunities Member States and</p>	

	social partners will "design, implement and promote family-friendly policies. Including accessible and high quality care services for children and other dependants, as well as parental and other leave schemes." (Guideline n. 20)	
--	--	--

## REFERENCES

### a) official documents

- Commission of the European Communities (CEC). (1994), White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness, Employment. Luxemburg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities
- Commission of the European Communities (CEC). (2001), Employment in Europe 2001. Recent Trends and Prospects. Luxemburg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities
- COM 96/67 – Commission of the European Communities (1996), "Incorporating equal opportunities for women and men into all Community policies and activities", final of 21 February 1996
- COM 98/122 – Commission of the European Communities (1998), "Incorporating equal opportunities for women and men into all Community policies and activities", final of 4 March 1998.
- COM 98/574 – Commission of the European Communities (1998), "Proposal for Guidelines for Member States Employment Policies 1999", Final.
- Doc. EQOP 02-97rev, DG V/D/5 30 – Strategy Paper, "Mainstreaming of a Gender and Equal Opportunities Perspective into all Community Policies. A strategy for the follow-up to the Commission Communication (COM (96)67): 'Incorporating equal opportunities', 30 January 1997
- Doc. EQOP 42-97en, DG V/D/5 – "A guide to gender impact assessment", 8 October 1997

### b) other references

- Bettio F., Bimonte S., Tiezzi S. (1998), "The 1998 National Action Plans for Employment: Assessment from a Gender Perspective", Report for the "Gender and Employment Network of Experts", Equal Opportunities Unit, DGV, E.C., Bruxelles
- Bettio F., Villa P. (1998), A Mediterranean perspective on the breakdown of the relationship between participation and fertility, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Vol. 22, no. 2 (137-171).
- Council of Europe (1998), "Gender Mainstreaming. Conceptual framework, methodology and presentation of good practice", Final Report of Activities of the Group of Specialists on Mainstreaming, April, Strasbourg (EG-S-MS (98) 2)
- Humphries, Jane and Rubery, Jill (eds.) (1995), "*The Economics of Equal Opportunities*", ...
- Rubery Jill (et al.) (1999), Gender mainstreaming in European Employment Policy, Manchester School of Management UMIST, A report by the E.C.s group of experts on Gender and Employment
- Rubery, Jill, Fagan Colette (1998), *Equal Opportunities and Employment in the European Union*, published by: Federal Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs, and Federal Minister of Women's Affairs and Consumer Protection, Drucker ei Gerstmayer, Vienna
- Rubery, Jill, Mark Smith and Colette Fagan (1999), "*Women's Employment in Europe. Trends and Prospects*", Routledge, London
- Rubery, Jill, Mark Smith, Colette Fagan and Damian Grimshaw (1998), "*Women and European Employment*", Routledge, London
- Smith, Mark, Colette Fagan and Jill Rubery (1998), Where and why is part-time work growing in Europe?, in O'Reilly J, Fagan C. (eds) (1998), *Part-time prospects: an international comparison of part-time work in Europe, North America and the Pacific Rim*, Routledge, London and New York, NY, pp. 35-56

### c) EGGE - Expert Group on Gender and Employment

The European Commission's expert group on gender and employment is set up under the European Commission's fourth action programmes on equal opportunities for women and men in the European Union to provide expert advice, research and policy evaluation to assist the Commission's Equal Opportunities Unit located in DG Employment.

The group consists of independent academic experts with long standing experience of working in the field of equal opportunities and employment. There is one expert appointed per member state. The experts are appointed by the Commission, not by member state governments. The coordination of the group is carried out at the European Work and Employment Research Centre at Manchester School of Management, UMIST, under the direction of the coordinator, Professor Jill Rubery.

Publications produced by the EGGE Network are downloadable from: <http://www.umist.ac.uk/management/ewerc/>