

Social policies, cultural values and work-life balance in crisis times and beyond

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Objectives of the call

In the recent years, many industrialised countries formulated their gender equality policies, aiming at reconciling employment and private duties of parents and carers by accentuating accessible and affordable care services to reduce “disincentives for women to work more” (EC 2017). Apart from personal attitudes, women still have fewer opportunities for labour market participation in many countries. The reconciliation of work and private life/parenting is hence signalled out as challenge at all stages of agency. This challenge has reached its peak during the current Covid-19 crisis, which changed work-life balance tremendously, especially for women.

While most research focuses on monolateral effects by analysing the top-down impact of policies on care provisions and individual orientations regarding female labour force participation across countries (Sainsbury 1994, Korpi 2000, Grunow et al. 2018), the bottom-up voicing of individual ideals and values in work-life balance (WLB) policies remains largely unexplored. This *bottom-up approach* displays not only how people *access* policy benefits, but also by how they *claim and express their demands*. Current research hardly accounts for how social policy offers are accessed and used depending on individuals' background. This is particularly true for natives and migrants, who often differ in their cultural values (Gewinner 2019, 2020). Little is known to what extent internalised cultural notions and ideas of reconciliation of work and family are persisting in disadvantaged, as compared to privileged, individuals, and prone to state and corporate family and labour policies. This is crucial, since the range of influence of state and corporate WLB policies can address people differently (Sainsbury 1999), especially during crises.

Migrant family formation and subsequent reconciliation of work and parenting might be characterised by different culturally anchored traditions and values regarding the (in)compatibility of family, children and work. Particularly individuals in highly skilled professions show large gaps between desired and actual numbers of children. They more often than less educated persons invest in human capital and increase their career chances by staying longer in the educational system. At the same time, academic job profiles are more diffuse, whereas the link between training and future jobs is much weaker than in apprenticeship systems and vocational training. Within the context of migration further issues such as the transferability of skills, precarious employment conditions and uncertain career prospects for

certain time periods over the life course aggravate the compatibility of work and family life. Additionally, structural constraints collide with societal expectations and age norms for having children. This may lead especially highly skilled individuals to delay or renounce the idea of having children, with migrants being disproportionately affected.

The role of cultural values as a human agency motivation and decision making basis in work-life balance has hardly been explored so far. As a third aspect, the societal and political context in which family formation and parenting takes place is crucial. While some societies demonstrate family-friendly institutional conditions that support reconciliation of work and family, others have not yet tackled this apparent problem. These conditions might be challenged or established for the first time in periods of crisis, as the current Covid-19 confinement in 2020.

To conceptualise the bottom-up approach and provide views on work-life balance from diverse cultural contexts, both during crisis times and beyond, we seek for contributions that address, but are not limited to, the following themes:

(1) Do state and corporate regulations target the needs of migrants and natives, pertaining to work-life balance, equally?

Potential topics of interest are voices of certain groups, anchored in social policies or corporate regulations; inclusivity of social policies; consistency or incongruity of state and corporate regulations of individual work-life balance, or comparisons between sectors/companies/countries.

(2) Are there any culturally rooted differences in social norms and values of reconciliation of paid work and parenting in single societies?

Questions here relate to cross-cultural similarities of differences between migrant groups and natives with regard to family formation and work-life balance; cultural understandings of work-life balance; gender role models of work-life balance and patterns of bottom-up voicing of claims and access to social benefits associated with work-life balance and reconciliation of work and parenting.

(3) To what extent did state and corporate regulations facilitate or aggravate the work-life balance of different social groups during the Covid-19 lockdown?

Issues here might address telework; coping strategies with digital work and work-life balance; challenged or newly established gender role models or modes of work-life balance with regard to parenting in crisis times, etc.

We welcome your contributions consisting of 400-500 words and a short bio, to wlb.workshop@uni.lu until 30th September 2020. Initially conceptualised as a face-to-face meeting, this workshop will take place online via platform Zoom on December 10, 2020. We will get in touch with you on 15th October 2020 at the latest. We are currently searching for opportunities to publish a special issue based on the results of the workshop.