



Sustainable work over the life course

Supporting longer working lives

Combining care and work over the life course

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The upsides of autonomy

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Supporting working carers

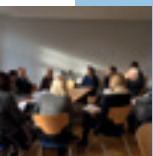
Sustainable work

Toward better and longer working lives





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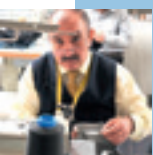


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The ageing of European society is leading to a situation where, at current employment levels, supporting the retired population will become increasingly unaffordable. The proposed solution can be summed up simply: bring more of the working age population into work and extend everyone's working life. Achieving these objectives presents a significant challenge, however. People stay out of the workforce or leave it for many reasons, and the nature of work itself is often the core of the problem: it does not adapt to the different needs of different people; it does not adjust in step with the ageing of workers; it does not motivate them to stay on. Work may even damage the health of workers, forcing them out of the workforce. This issue of Foundation Focus looks at the different aspects of both life and work that influence a worker's ability and availability to work over the course of their lives.

Editorial

The goal of increased labour force participation has been enshrined in the Europe 2020 strategy for some years now. The objective of actively moving people – men and women, older and younger people – into work is a driving force in the policy agenda of the European Union. The reasons for this are many and complex. The demographic shift has seen the balance tilt towards an ageing population across the 28 Member States. Those who work are set to be outnumbered by those who do not, with the corresponding implications for pensions, taxation systems and society at large.

At the same time, people are living longer and better, and older workers are increasingly wishing to continue working, with retirement ages pushing upwards in many countries. Childcare and elder care services are slowly becoming more responsive to the needs of the would-be (often female) worker, enabling them to consider longer working careers that respond to the different phases of their lives. And work itself is in many cases being adapted and improved to provide better conditions and structures for workers over the long term.

So how to ensure that the context is created to facilitate people and encourage them into work while also ensuring that workers are supported and protected in their working environments on an ongoing basis, so that longer working lives can be achieved? That is essentially the concept of sustainable work over the life course – a concept that is not only a response to the changing demographic trends and economic demands, but also of more general value to society, workers and companies. Poor job quality has poor health and well-being outcomes, which have negative implications for society as whole. The reverse is also true.

In this context, combining policies and practices that increase participation in work with better job quality across the board is clearly a win-win that Europe can ill afford to pass up.

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Sustainable work over the life course



One of the main challenges of work in the future is how to ensure that workers are able to work over the course of their lives. European countries are undergoing a demographic shift that could create an imbalance between the active versus inactive populations. At current employment levels, the result will be a rapid increase in the proportion of retirees relative to workers and a consequent need to either reduce social spending or expand taxation significantly. To avoid either of these alternatives, the Europe 2020 strategy calls for increasing the labour force participation rates of all.

Making work sustainable over the life course, however, is a valuable goal in itself. It involves improving the conditions of work over the life course and reorganising social and employment policies to facilitate a better work–life balance, hence adapting work to the worker in a dynamic way.

Holistic approach

Lengthening the duration of working life has become a policy priority in many countries. Policy reforms have focused on increasing the retirement age as well as strengthening the preconditions for access to pensions. However, policy should not focus only on the end of the career: it is important to adopt a holistic approach in trying to understand the different elements that contribute to making work sustainable over the life course for all. The aim is to ensure that people are able and willing to work until their future retirement age.

Postponing retirement for all, however, does give rise to considerations of social justice. Different groups of workers experience different working conditions, which leads to occupational health

inequalities. People in strenuous jobs either retire early because they can no longer do the job, meaning their pension benefits will be lower, or continue to work in poor health and may die earlier.

Enabling participation

What do we mean when we speak of sustainable work over the life course? There are two dimensions:

- how to ensure that more people can participate in the labour market;
- how to ensure that workers can continue to work in the labour market until a later age.

The first dimension, enabling more people to engage in paid work, focuses on those groups of workers who, for some reason, are not working but who could if the personal circumstances preventing them from doing so could be resolved. This involves considering the different abilities of people to engage in the labour market and catering for specific needs with regard to health, time and care responsibilities, skills, difficulties in finding a job, and so on. It should be stressed that not all those who are not working are unwilling to work; many simply might be unable to find a job or unable to reconcile work with their personal circumstances. Women, older workers, migrants and low-skilled workers, as well as people with health problems or disabilities, are less active in the labour market. Policies and practices geared at adapting work to the specific needs of these groups could enhance participation rates.

Supporting parents and carers

A good example is providing for the care needs of those with children and

other dependent relatives. A good care infrastructure and government policies that allow parents and carers to combine work with their private life (for example, by sanctioning reductions of working hours and better leave entitlements) will increase the likelihood of those people being able to enter or remain in the labour market. Working time arrangements in companies are important too: having a predictable work schedule or flexitime, as well as being able to take leave at short notice – for instance, to care for a sick child. In addition, care responsibilities might change over the life course and therefore enabling transitions – for example, from full time to part time and vice versa – is another means of supporting workers in the workplace.

Overcoming the barriers posed by health issues, which might or might not be related to work and which might be permanent or temporary, must be a central focus in the movement towards sustainable work for all. Policies to encourage and help employers to engage workers with health problems alongside workplace arrangements, such as special working time arrangements or the physical reorganisation of the workplace, might allow workers with specific needs to engage or continue to be engaged in work.

Skills are also a critical consideration. There are two aspects to this: the transition between education and work, and the updating of skills throughout the life course. The educational system and lifelong learning are central here. Learning throughout the life course can take place both within and outside the job. At work, skills can be updated through training, but also through the way work is organised, having the time to reflect on how to work better, and in working with and learning from others. Outside the job, training initiated by the worker,



working conditions), collective agreements as well as workplace practices in the company that create the context in which workers work throughout their life course. How this context is constructed will either enable individuals to participate and continue to participate in the labour market in a sustainable way, or will diminish their chances to do so.

Greet Vermeylen

in the context of mid-career reviews or active labour market policies during spells of unemployment or inactivity, are important.

Job quality

While the first dimension of sustainable work looks at how to ensure that more people can participate in the labour market, the second dimension – how to ensure that workers can continue to work in the labour market until a later age – deals with job quality and the work environment. Job quality is crucial because the combination of the different aspects of working conditions has an impact on health, skills and ultimately a person's ability to work until retirement age. The effects of poor working conditions might be temporary or might leave a permanent scar. Throughout the life course there might be changes in working conditions following the job trajectory, be it in one job or a succession of jobs (possibly combined with spells of non-activity or unemployment).

Job quality indices developed by Eurofound (see the report *Trends in job quality in Europe*) provide a framework for understanding the aspects of the job that are associated with health and well-being outcomes. Four dimensions are identified:

- earnings;
- prospects, referring to job trajectories and job security;
- intrinsic job quality, referring to the physical and social environment (including support from co-workers and superiors), skills and autonomy, and work intensity;

- working time quality.

Workers in jobs that score low on all dimensions are at increased risk of ill-health. The overall impact of poor quality of work on its sustainability over the life course needs to be examined further. (Serge Volkoff, in an interview in this issue, discusses this topic further.)

Benefits to workers and employers

The sustainability of work is important not only for increasing participation rates but for the benefit of society, workers and companies. It is not only about participation but also about how we participate. The feeling of doing meaningful work and having direct involvement in the improvement of products and processes will not only be good for health and the sustainability of work for workers but also for innovation and productivity. Much of the knowledge that companies possess resides with their workers, and therefore giving them opportunities to make such a contribution – and the space and time to do so – has positive effects for all. Having autonomy and being able to participate in the organisation are important factors in achieving such a work environment; on the other hand, intense working conditions, such as having to work at high speed or to tight deadlines, have a negative effect.

All actors can play a role in creating the environment for sustainable work over the life course. It is the combination of policies (employment, social protection and social infrastructure), legislation (directed at health and safety, working time, leave and minimum standards for

Exploring the concept of sustainable work

Sustainable work was the topic of the 2014 Foundation Seminar Series (FSS), Eurofound's annual discussion forum organised over two sessions during the year, in spring and autumn. The FSS brings together representatives of unions, employer organisations and governments from across Member States to exchange knowledge, experiences and practices on a specific topic. Invited experts in the subject area also participate, bringing the latest evidence and thinking to stimulate the discussion.

At this year's FSS, participants presented and discussed policies and practices at national, sectoral and company level in their countries that aim to increase sustainable work over the life course. However, the aim was to put the main focus on the company level as this is where policies are implemented and specific practices applied.

In the second session, in November, participants looked at the actions that can be and have been taken at national level and examined examples in the workplace. The seminar covered subjects including differences between workers at different ages, the conditions in which workers work and how they are engaged in the workplace.

Approaches to age management

From the contributions of participants, it was clear that governments and social partners recognise the need to plan for the rising age dependency ratio. As the current policy emphasis across countries seems to be on keeping older workers in work, one policy approach is to undertake pension reform to discourage early exits from work. However, it is recognised that this is not sufficient. The other main approach is through age management in the workplace, focusing on increasing the employability of older workers, mainly

through provision of training, lifelong learning and maintaining workers' health.

The participants presented some of the approaches being adopted in their countries. Finland is one of the countries to the fore in rolling out age management policy at workplace level. As part of a framework agreement, the social partners have developed an age plan model, covering all sectors, to guide organisations on how best to manage longer working lives. Organisations are obliged to develop an individualised age plan for all employees, not just for older workers. The model is comprehensive, covering career planning, skills and competence development, occupational health and working time arrangements, but also encompassing the subjective experience of work by considering topics such as the meaningfulness of work, work environment and social support.

Towards a better quality of work

The concept of making work sustainable for all workers is slow to be adopted in workplaces. Nevertheless, a number of case studies presented at the FSS reflected initiatives designed to drive improvements in working conditions. One case study delineated a plan, called 'Quality of life in the workplace', aimed at developing constructive dialogue in the workplace. Developed by the CFDT union in France, the scheme gives workers greater say in dealing with the problems that arise and in working out solutions. The project, which is currently being trialled in Renault, also aims to prove that employee well-being contributes to company performance.

Another project examined was the NUST network of companies in Barcelona, which is an initiative started by the city council to support companies and workers in balancing work schedules to benefit both sides of the employment relationship. The network comprises more

than 90 companies, which have pledged to help their employees achieve a better work-life balance.

A recurrent point during the FSS was the need for an individualised approach to sustainable work. As emphasised by Serge Volkoff, who is interviewed in this issue of Focus, ageing is highly variable – everyone ages differently – and so individual circumstances must be taken into account. He described examples of how older workers in demanding jobs – hospital nurses working on night shifts and riggers constructing event structures – adopt work strategies to organise their tasks in such a way as to enable them to continue in the job.

Learning from experience

Other experts highlighted the effects of working conditions on workers. For example, a Finnish study on the impact of a merger of several municipalities on managers found that not only good, but – surprisingly – also some bad experiences of the merger resulted in positive outcomes. The managers who had undergone bad experiences initially reported frustration, absence of learning and even growing cynicism; but interviewed two years later, some reported that they had developed new competences out of adversity – they became better leaders, strengthened professionally and personally and became more flexible in their thinking. Support from colleagues and focusing on successes were important in helping these workers get through. These findings may provide pointers on how difficult experiences at work can be turned into learning experiences and on the conditions in which this can happen.

The input of participants to the 2014 FSS reflected the heterogeneity of the concept of sustainable work and will contribute to Eurofound's research in progress on the subject.



Supporting longer working lives

Longer working lives are feasible only if workers have the capacity – and the motivation – to remain in employment until a later age. To help workers retain this capacity, we need to understand better the long-term effects – both positive and negative – of working conditions on working lives, as well as examining critically whether we are today putting at risk a worker's capacity to work tomorrow.

Making the most of an ageing workforce

The ability of older workers to continue to work depends very much on the working conditions they encounter and how their work is organised. According to the literature, for work to be sustainable for older workers, it must avoid or limit physical risks, demanding working time schedules and tight deadlines. Making work sustainable also demands approaches that promote social support (both informal and formal), manage change in an age-sensitive way, and take the experience of individuals into account.

Of course, ageing can be associated with some decline; however, in a supportive workplace, adaptive strategies can be put into place to compensate for this. In particular, work organisation can support a range of abilities and workers can apply their experience to change the way they carry out tasks so that this reflects their capabilities. This decision-making latitude (marked as 'Activity' in the diagram opposite) can be a key mediator in the relationship between work and age.

Creating workplaces that support sustainable work may require changes in



work organisation and human resource policies, such as developing a supportive culture and a trusting environment in which workers have a sense of control over their work. Processes may need to be redesigned so that the intensity of the work is limited. If these changes are to have the greatest benefit, they should be introduced with the participation of management and the workforce, and companies need to demonstrate that the experience of older workers is valued as a productive part of their operation, if their example is to be followed elsewhere.

Analysis of data from Eurofound's fifth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) indicates that older workers are becoming more exposed to arduous working conditions; in addition, it seems that some of the mechanisms that once protected older workers are being eroded. For example, it was often the case in blue-collar work teams that workers would switch to less demanding tasks as they got older, leaving the lifting and carrying of heavy loads to younger team members. However, this option to change tasks is becoming less feasible, because of changes in work organisation and because of the ageing of the workforce as a whole.

Untangling work and health

The relationship between work and health is complicated: each affects the other, and individuals differ greatly. The limitations caused by poor health can restrict a person's ability to hold certain jobs (for example, occupations that are very demanding physically or mentally) or their ability to meet certain work requirements (shift work, for instance). These limitations may require that their job or work station

be adapted; in some cases, this is difficult and costly to negotiate and organise. Poor health may also mean that a worker may wish to retire early; conversely, if their health is good, they may wish to work longer. And in the most extreme cases, exposure to particularly adverse working conditions can lead to illness or even premature death.

In some cases, the ill-effects of work on health are immediate (for example, a slip leading to an injury); in others, the effects are deferred (exposure to work-related stress leading to increased rates of depression and cardiovascular disease). In turn, these effects – in the form of ill-health or impairment – can result in a limitation in activity. Of course, other factors enter the equation: healthy or unhealthy lifestyle, the prior level of health and hence ability to recover, and the quality of healthcare received.

At European level, the general policy focus is on the long-term effects of exposure to unfavourable working conditions – witness the increasing attention paid over the last 20 years to work-related stress and associated health problems such as cardiovascular disease and mental illness. One example of this focus is the Healthy Workplaces Manage Stress campaigns run by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA); another is the European Commission's Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014–2020. The Framework identifies work-related health problems as a common challenge across the Union, and calls for further policy action directed at the 'improvement of the prevention of work-related diseases by tackling existing, new and emerging risks'.

Skills renewal key to longer careers

Adapting working conditions to support individuals' health and minimise risk is a key element of making work sustainable over the life course; also crucial is creating working conditions that support workers in developing their skills and competences as they grow older. Failure on the part of management to provide adequate training and learning opportunities over the life course can leave workers without the skills required to perform their current job effectively or to take on other roles.

Generally, there is a substantial shortfall in the amount of training received: one worker in 10 says they have not been granted access to the training they requested. Significant disparities exist between groups in their access to lifelong learning: these have increased in some cases, as the results of the successive waves of the EWCS make clear. Workers aged 50 years and over receive less training from their employers than do younger workers, and they less often learn new things in the course of their work. Meanwhile, for workers of all ages, those who are most skilled get the most training.

Another element of skills development is the form of work organisation and the possibility it offers for learning. Analysis of the EWCS indicates that, in 2010, fewer workers experienced the features of work organisation associated with learning organisations than was the case

10 years previously. Again compared with the situation 10 years previously, slightly more workers experienced work organisation features with a strong learning component that are also associated with more strenuous working conditions and a very high level of work intensity.

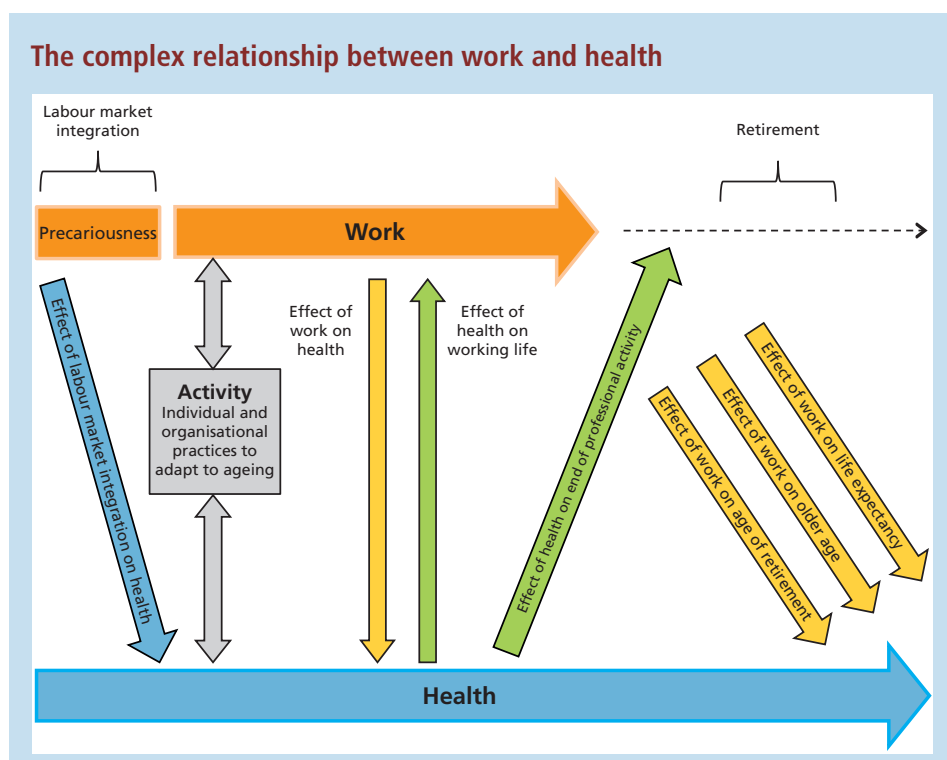
Shaping tomorrow's labour market today

Working conditions, as indicated earlier, are not the only factor determining the sustainability of work. Also playing a role are the ability to combine work with non-work activities, the type of employment, the occupations the worker has held, the direction of their career and many other factors. However, exposure over time to particular combinations of working conditions will greatly shape how sustainable a job is for the person performing it.

To prepare for tomorrow's labour market participation and ensure that people will be able and willing to work longer requires paying attention to today's working conditions and work organisation. And the benefits are not limited to the long term: developing forms of work organisation and human resource management that promote sustainability and allow workers with different capacities to work to the best of their ability can result in a general improvement in working conditions.

The research and debate required to shed light on how best to facilitate people in shaping their own working lives will work best when it is inclusive. Workers and their representatives, companies, and governments all have a role to play in helping Europe understand the issues at stake and identifying priorities for action.

Agnès Parent-Thirion



Source: Adapted from A.-F. Molinié, C. Gaudart and V. Pueyo (2012), *La vie professionnelle: Âge, expérience et santé à l'épreuve des conditions de travail*, Octares.

Combining care and work over the life course



Being available for employment requires that the demands of work are reconciled with those of one's private life – in particular, the needs of children or dependent adult relatives. And these needs shift over the course of a working life. If we want to ensure that men and women can participate in working life until a later age, and still meet their domestic responsibilities, we need to rethink how time is allotted to both work and care throughout the career.

Balancing time: a battle of the sexes?

Women's employment rates have risen over recent decades. However, it still is the case that, by and large, in households where both the man and woman work outside the home, responsibility for balancing the demands of work and personal time rests disproportionately upon the woman. The segregation of the sexes when it comes to allocation of time is striking.

Women are far more likely than men to work shorter hours: they constitute three-quarters of part-time workers. Of the women in the workforce, 38% work part time, compared with 13% of men. When men work part time, it is usually at the beginning or the end of their careers. Women, on the other hand, tend to work part time throughout their career and further limit their working hours while they are raising children. There are huge differences between countries in the EU in this regard: the Netherlands, for example, has a high rate of part-time work (the majority of part-timers being women) while there are limited levels of part-time work in eastern European countries.

However, if we look at the amount of time that women and men spend on unpaid work – care and household activities, for

instance – the picture is very different: women work more hours than men, regardless of whether their paid work is part time or full time. The figure below shows the average amount of time that employed men and women spend on unpaid work over a typical life course. When they become part of a couple, unpaid working time increases for women and decreases for men. During the parenting phase, it increases for both men and women; however, women spend twice as many hours per week on domestic activities as men. When they become parents, women reduce their paid work by four hours per week, but increase their unpaid work by 25 hours. Men, meanwhile, increase their unpaid work by 12 hours. Furthermore, the time men spend in paid work is less affected by the stage of life they are at, although it tends to increase during parenthood.

The decision by men to engage in care work is often dependent on circumstances – if their working time is organised to allow for it (for example, if they work atypical hours), they tend to take on more.

Role of national policy

For workers with dependants, being available for work requires synchronising their private life and employment: working time must be organised to fit with school time and opening hours of shops and services, for example. The organisation of private life is also embedded in a national system, which to a greater or lesser extent enables the reconciliation of work and home life. Social protection and legislation, for instance, provide for and support maternity leave and

Hours per week spent on unpaid work by employed men and women



Source: Eurofound (2013), Working time and work-life balance in a life course perspective, Dublin.



parental leave, part-time work and childcare benefits. Social infrastructure is important, too: the accessibility of formal care services for children and adult dependants, whether publicly or privately organised, can also play a role in determining a person's availability for work.

Whether men and women can and will avail of provisions made by the state is determined by a number of factors. Societal norms, and traditional gender roles in particular, strongly influence decisions by both sexes on how to divide their time between domestic and economic spheres. In addition, national systems are very differently organised, and this influences the take-up of some entitlements. To take parental leave as an example, the first question is one of eligibility. The EU directive on parental leave entitles all workers to parental leave on the birth or adoption of a child, but employers may require a certain length of service from employees before they become eligible. Then there is the duration of the leave, for which there are large differences between countries and sectors. The directive sets a minimum of four months' leave, but there are countries and sectors in which it is more generous. Next is the question of how the entitlement is paid for: is it unpaid, paid at a fixed rate or paid as a percentage of one's salary? Lastly, while both father and mother have the same entitlement, in many countries they can transfer it to the other partner; quite often the decision is made on the basis of financial considerations. In some countries,

however, a specific period is reserved for the father.

Employers making a difference

Company arrangements can make a big difference in helping employees reconcile work and private life. Ideally, employers should cater for employees' changing working time needs over the life course through measures that facilitate transitions between working-time options and arrangements.

Better work-life balance is reported by workers who work fewer hours, who do not work unsocial hours (such as night time), and who have predictable working hours. In addition, workers who have been granted some control over the hours they work are more successful in managing their time. Flexitime arrangements, for instance, enable a person to vary their starting and finishing times according to their needs; also beneficial is the freedom to take emergency leave at short notice – for instance, to pick up a sick child from school or go to the doctor.

Recognising time needs

If society is to make work sustainable for both men and women over the life course, it is of utmost importance that both are able to combine working life and private life, taking into account specific time needs that vary throughout their lives as responsibilities for dependants grow and

wane. Equally, achieving this can bring tremendous benefits to society. Not least, there is a social justice element related to this issue: women's careers are on average eight years shorter than men's, often related to the amount of time they give to work in the private sphere. (This raises the question to what extent paid work and unpaid work should be reflected in the calculation of pension benefits.)

No one-size-fits-all solution exists: addressing this issue calls for the participation of a wide range of actors. Countries, companies and social partners can all play a role. Working time arrangements, embedded in workplace practices and collective agreements, along with social systems, legislation and infrastructure will be instrumental in making it possible for both men and women to participate fully in the labour market for as long as is feasible. Separately, work is required on the social attitudes and ideas of traditional gender roles, which affect the choices people make about working and domestic responsibilities. It is clear that everyone stands to benefit from a labour market and social system that enables people to choose to work – individuals, families, employers and society.

Greet Vermeylen

INTERVIEW WITH SERGE VOLKOFF

'Work has to be bio-compatible ... ergo-compatible ... and socio-compatible'

Serge Volkoff, of the Centre d'études de l'emploi in France, is a statistician and ergonomist who specialises in studying the relationship between age, work and health.

Can we think about prolonging working life without looking at working conditions?

Often in policy debates about the postponement of retirement age or about the work of older workers, this is in fact not discussed at all. And a good number of workers do leave work prematurely. The reason for this could be related to their health situation, the arduousness of work – 'pénibilité' we say in French – related, for instance, to physically and psychologically demanding working conditions, but also because it is not, or no longer, possible for them to imagine themselves having a professional future that makes sense for them.

What would make work sustainable? And what would have the opposite effect?

The regeneration of human and social resources is a very important element. This idea stems from work carried out by a group of researchers under the leadership of Peter Docherty in 2002, working on what they termed 'sustainable work systems'. The authors juxtaposed sustainable work systems with intensive work systems. They pointed to an increase in the latter, with long-term damaging effects for both the well-being of workers and for the quality of products and services. They proposed an alternative approach based on the idea of regeneration of resources.

In my work, I was often confronted with similar findings: intensification of work and of forms of work, as well as the growing complexity of the work, had damaging effects on sustainability of work. Furthermore, there are challenges arising from both technological and organisational changes at work, as

well as in terms of the work trajectories of workers, with regard to, for example, work strategies and ways of evaluating professional performance.

What is needed for work to be sustainable?

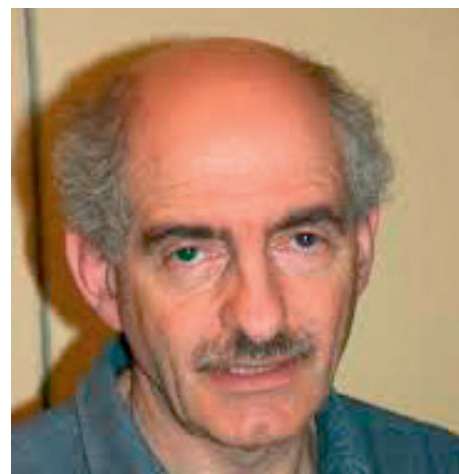
In the course of a seminar organised by the French Centre d'Études d'Emploi in 2008, we developed three criteria which need to be considered for work to be sustainable: work has to be 'bio-compatible', that is, adapted to the functional capacities of the human body and how it changes throughout the life course; it has to be 'ergo-compatible', meaning it has to allow for the development of efficient strategies to deal with work; and it has to be 'socio-compatible', facilitating the reconciliation of working life with private and family life.

How does sustainability of work relate to ageing?

There are different strands in the literature. One takes a 'functionalist' approach, focusing mostly on the changes in the physical and cognitive functions of the body, some of which may decline with age. Another is the 'developmental' approach, which focuses on the impact of the work trajectory on those functions in their multiple dimensions: physical, cognitive, social and psychosocial. The latter approach would, therefore, focus more on differences according to real situations; so while it would indeed point to declining functions, it would also insist on differences between individuals and on the effect of the environment, and in particular the work environment. The work environment can accelerate or slow down these declines, accentuate or moderate them. Some of these might only show up in extreme situations.

How can workers cope with declining functions that are part of ageing?

There is a process of accumulated resource-building arising from experience. What we see is that workers can learn



from doing their work, both about the tasks required and about their own way of dealing with the work, finding better ways of doing it and coping with the tasks allocated to them. In this way, they can understand what is painful for them, what causes tiredness, what they find easy or difficult, and reflect on how to work better with others. This can enable workers to develop coping strategies which lead to more efficient working. Depending on the impact of such elements as working conditions, working hours, training, collective resources, work trajectories, social representation, the effect of ageing on workers is more or less pronounced and experience is more or less valued.

So this leads to two questions: do the demands related to work allow workers to compensate for those functions that usually decline with age? And can work experience and the knowledge gained from the work trajectory enable workers to become more efficient and lead to good results without physical and psychosocial exhaustion? Through surveys, including the European Working Conditions Survey, and other research, we find huge differences between different groups of workers. We also find that a lot of workers are still exposed to high physical demands, night work and shift work. While older workers used to be protected to some extent from these demands, this is no longer the case. We see that both individual and collective self-preservation mechanisms play an important role, but these are largely dependent on the environment and the work organisation.

What concepts could help us to understand sustainable work?

We need to understand that the relationship between work, health and experience is constantly changing and evolving. This would allow us to enrich the notion of sustainability.

First of all, sustainable work is work that is exempt from hazards that are likely to

cause long-lasting and often irreparable damage. Furthermore, we need to take into account the fact that there might be a cumulative effect of multiple exposures to certain physical and psychosocial risks, particularly when they are combined with work intensity.

Secondly, sustainable work has to take into account the large diversity of workers. Individuals should not be exempt from work because they have certain health problems, muscular problems, accidents, mental health problems, or because of family needs or because they are ageing.

Thirdly, sustainable work is linked very closely with worker discretion – having some autonomy with regard to time, some room to manoeuvre in how work is carried out and having the possibility to cooperate with others. Work organisation plays a predominant role here, but so do work systems. Efficient strategies to deal with work demands can be compromised by practices which prevent learning and sharing of knowledge or know-how, or by job precariousness – which is not only an issue for young workers but could also be experienced by older workers.

Where do skills come in?

When we talk about sustainable work, we often refer to two elements – health and skills – which are commonly placed in opposition to each other. In fact, they are very closely linked. A professional failure is a health risk factor, and this is not only the case with a person losing their job or having difficulties in finding a job. It's also the feeling that you're not on top of the job and you do not have the necessary skills to do the job over a long time. This can have a negative effect on the worker in the long run. In the opposite case, knowledge and work experience that is accumulated and developed in a coherent way by an individual can allow the worker to be able to change jobs at an appropriate moment and under the right conditions.

In addition, health problems – whether they are related to work or not – can weaken the worker's position in a production system and their ability to build up different skills: this can make it less likely that they will build up professional experience. Work organisation is therefore a very important element which fixes the parameters in which we build up sustainability of work over the life course. The company plays an important role within a national context, in which the framework for sustainable work over the life course through economic and social policies is constructed.

The upsides of autonomy

There is a considerable body of evidence to suggest that employees are more likely to thrive at work when they have more autonomy and influence. Involvement in decision-making is inherently satisfying and is a source of recognition and status in societies with egalitarian norms. It has been claimed that when employees have a say over their tasks, work pressure has less negative consequences for their well-being. In addition, having autonomy at work can increase an employee's sense of responsibility for the outcomes of their work. This suggests that autonomy in the workplace is a significant factor in promoting the sustainability of work for individual workers.

Eurofound's most recent findings on this topic, from the third European Company Survey (ECS), add further weight to the evidence of a link between employee autonomy and employee well-being. The survey was conducted in 2013 in 32 countries (the 28 EU Member States, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Montenegro and Turkey), and over 30,000 managers and employee representatives were interviewed.

Employee well-being

Employee well-being was measured using an index based on managers' rating of the general work environment and whether organisations have problems with high levels of sick leave, low employee motivation and difficulty retaining employees. This index was scored from 1 to 100.

To identify which establishments grant more autonomy to their employees, the establishments were classified based on two criteria: 1) who makes decisions on the planning and execution of daily tasks (managers, employees or both);



and 2) whether members of teams decide among themselves who will perform tasks. Establishments were divided into two types: top-down and joint. In top-down establishments, managers or supervisors decide and plan work allocation, while in joint establishments, decision-making tends to be delegated either partly or fully to employees.

Analysing the relationship between these two variables showed that workers in joint establishments score slightly better on the well-being index: on average they score 75, compared to an average score of 73 in top-down establishments.

Work organisation

Workers' well-being is influenced by other factors in the workplace apart from autonomy, of course. To examine the issue further, Eurofound researchers looked into the combined effect of autonomy and a number of aspects of work on workers' well-being. It turned out that well-being is influenced most by autonomy in combination with internal structuring of the organisation and knowledge management practices.

Internal structuring refers to the way organisations structure their activities across departments and the extent to which teamwork operates. Knowledge management is how organisations use organisational information for the organisation's benefit. It includes quality control of production processes, use of information systems, monitoring of external technological developments and sharing good working practices between employees.

Establishments were divided into two groups based on these two criteria: highly structured and moderately structured. In highly structured organisations, teamwork is prevalent, tasks are explicitly divided between departments, and knowledge



management deliberately implemented; in moderately structured establishments, these characteristics were developed to a much lesser extent.

Worker well-being was found to be greatest in joint establishments that are also highly structured: employees of such establishments have an average score of 77 points on the well-being index. In contrast, employees of top-down, moderately structured establishments score 72 points on average on the index.

Other research

The finding that greater autonomy is related to greater well-being is consistent with findings from the earlier European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) conducted by Eurofound in 2010. Here, autonomy is defined as the ability to change or choose the order of tasks, the speed or rate of work, and the method of work. Well-being is measured using the WHO-5 Well-being Index, which assesses well-being based on people's answers to five statements about their mood over two previous weeks and scores them from 1 to 5. Analysis of EWCS data finds that people with autonomy in their workplace have a higher ranking (4.37) than people without autonomy (4.27).

Health outcomes

Autonomy appears to be a particularly important factor in coping with high intensity work. The EWCS data show that

employees who have highly demanding jobs but limited autonomy in those jobs report relatively worse health outcomes. On the other hand, employees with highly intensive jobs report considerably better health outcomes when they have more autonomy.

In addition, employees with a higher level of autonomy are more likely to report that they will be able to do their jobs at the age of 60. This finding is of particular relevance to the subject of sustainable work, suggesting that having power in decision-making is a factor enabling workers to remain in the workforce into older age.

Company performance

Building more autonomy into workplaces does not necessarily occur at a cost to the 'well-being' of the business. In fact, the evidence suggests that it pays off in terms of an establishment's financial performance. Based on the ECS survey data, an index of financial performance was constructed summarising establishments' financial situation, labour productivity and the amount of goods and services produced (scale of 1 to 100). Joint establishments scored 63 on the index, while top-down establishments scored 59 on average.

Karel Fric

Working with chronic disease

Chronic diseases account for 70%–80% of all health costs in the EU and are one of the top five health concerns of the World Health Organization. They are diverse in nature and definitions vary, but the term generally refers to non-communicable diseases, of long duration and typically slow progression. Employees with a chronic illness often have difficulty either staying in work or returning to work after a long period of absence. In order to achieve the employment rate targets set in the Europe 2020 strategy, however, it is important for this group to remain in the labour market, or to be reintegrated if they have left it. Workplace realities will clearly have to be adjusted to accommodate the needs of workers with reduced health capacity.

Eurofound research on employment opportunities for people with chronic diseases, carried out over the past year, shows that these diseases increase with age, affect more women than men, and are more common among those with lower levels of educational attainment. In 2012, according to Eurostat EU-SILC data, 31.5% of the EU27 population reported having a longstanding illness or health problem. The incidence varies greatly across countries: for example, 47% of Finns report having a longstanding condition, compared to less than 20% of people in Bulgaria and Romania.

Chronic disease and work

In general, chronic diseases are linked to ageing, lifestyle and genetic predisposition. They may or may not be caused, or made worse, by work, but they often limit people's ability to engage in work. In an employment context, the concept is very much related to the notion of 'disability'.



Musculoskeletal disorders are the main chronic health problems among the employed population, followed by mental health disorders and cardiovascular conditions. Empirical evidence shows a direct relationship between certain chronic diseases and some occupations and economic sectors – for instance, chronic skin conditions among hairdressers arising from exposure to hair-care products and respiratory diseases (such as chronic silicosis) and chronic dermatitis among blue-collar workers in the natural stone industry.

A majority of working age people with a chronic disease are inactive and outside the labour market, being in receipt of disability benefit or having retired early. They also experience long-term unemployment more often than those with no health impairment. The absence of this group from the labour market has significant consequences at macroeconomic level: it reduces productive capacity, and this, together with healthcare costs, can have a serious impact on a country's economy. At microeconomic level, chronic diseases have an adverse impact on the enterprises that employ the individuals affected, through loss of productivity and increased workloads for colleagues.

Employer concerns

The reasons for lower participation in the labour market, based on Eurofound's national research findings, include the belief among employers that people with longstanding health problems are less productive and impose additional costs on the enterprise. They are also concerned about the financial responsibilities that long-term sick leave may place upon their company, either in terms of paid wages during an absence or legal obligations facilitating a return to work, such as workplace adaption

requirements. Nevertheless, a proportion of enterprises surveyed had consciously hired 'fragile workers', stating that this is an explicit part of their business strategy.

Chronically ill workers often experience discrimination as a consequence of their disease. According to some national surveys, the numbers of workers with a long-term disease claiming to have experienced discrimination in the workplace is almost double that of workers without any disease. They also report receiving less support from managers and colleagues.

Support for workers

To what extent are employers trying to adapt workplaces to the specific needs of this group? Research from various European countries reports a diversity of measures that companies have pursued in recent years. Some focus on working time, such as offering reductions in working hours and flexible working time options or telework. Other measures deal with the content of the jobs, such as adapting tasks, changing the quantity of work and modifying work equipment. Some employers prefer to provide the worker with a new post and related training rather than making changes to the original workplace and career position. These measures, however, are not the rule, and some studies show a significant gap between the number of workers with a chronic disease who have asked for changes to their work and the number who have obtained them.

At national policy level, the focus of the initiatives developed by public authorities and social partners is disability and, in many cases, policies addressed to those with disabilities are the only measures affecting the employment situation of people with chronic diseases (who may or may not be specifically mentioned in these policies).

Legal requirements

All EU Member States have labour laws that promote equal treatment and prevent discrimination towards people with disabilities or health problems. These include quota systems for the recruitment of people with disabilities and legal provisions requiring employers to adapt working conditions or workplaces and to ensure equality in terms of career progression and training opportunities. Public initiatives include financial compensation covering the costs of workplace adaptation, training and prevention programmes, and financial incentives for companies to hire people with a reduced ability to work. There are also examples of regulated flexible working time arrangements to help employees cope with diseases and attend treatment.

Existing legislation on the issue typically refers to the provision of financial compensation and benefits rather than to the actual integration of workers with health conditions into the workforce. It is important, nevertheless, that the regulations enable workers with chronic diseases to adapt their working time and workloads without diminishing their entitlement to benefits and to continue working in a way that takes their disabilities into account.

It is clear that the medical, economic and social burden of chronic diseases in the EU is an issue that has to be addressed. Adapting working conditions to the needs of people with chronic diseases represents a way of helping those concerned to manage their lives rather than being pushed into inactivity.

Access to healthcare in an economic downturn

Health is a major factor in determining people's ability to work. Along with prevention of illness, timely access to good-quality healthcare can help to make work sustainable over the life course. However, across Europe, people are encountering reduced access to healthcare, due to public spending cuts in response to the economic crisis – cuts that show no likelihood of being reversed in the present ongoing economic slowdown. Policymakers should give some thought to the impact this will have on the health of a workforce from which more work is expected.

Budgetary constraints

Limited budgets and difficulties in accessing healthcare services are not new: they cannot be attributed entirely to cutbacks arising from the crisis and are unlikely to ever disappear altogether. Recent budgetary constraint is just one of several influences (and not always the dominant one) driving change in these very complex systems. Nevertheless, it is clear that the crisis has reduced access to healthcare for many, impacting on both the supply and demand for certain healthcare services.

Diminished supply

Since 2007, almost all EU Member States have cut public expenditure on healthcare, leading inevitably to some level of curtailment in service provision. Services that are perceived as being easier to cut have faced the most cuts, as shown by examples from across the EU.

Support services for groups in vulnerable situations, such as health mediators for



migrants in Portugal and social workers employed by community healthcare centres in Slovenia – both of which help people who have difficulties finding their way through the healthcare system – have been cut, further increasing the disadvantage of these population groups. Mental healthcare budgets have been reduced in the Netherlands, Slovenia and Sweden. Funding pressure has accelerated the long-term restructuring of the hospital sector in several countries, leading to the closure of smaller public hospitals, mostly in rural areas. For example, in Romania, 67 public hospitals in rural areas (about 15% of the country's public hospitals) were closed in April 2011.

Provision of healthcare has also been compromised by increased migration of staff and restrictions on hiring new staff. This has led to scaled-down provision and increased waiting times. In Spain, for example, waiting times have started to increase from a low in 2010, especially after January 2012 when vacancies were restricted by law to a 10% replacement rate. In particular, smaller healthcare service providers in rural areas in several of the Member States that have joined the EU since 2004 are experiencing difficulties in hiring certain staff such as nurses and anaesthetists.

Groups new to need

Demand-side impacts of the crisis have also reduced access. Disposable income has fallen in many households because of decreased income and increased living costs. In some countries, households consequently have more difficulty in making copayments (partial payments of the cost of services used) or paying for insurance, especially those who are out of reach of support measures. In countries



where copayments are absent, low or poorly enforced, reduced disposable income may still decrease access when transport costs or under-the-table payments are required to access good-quality healthcare.

Access to healthcare may be complicated for those who are 'new to need'. Some people lack information about the support available and have difficulty finding their way to it. Others have financial difficulties (such as debt problems) that reduce their income, but the system has not adjusted to recognise this and so they are denied free access. There is also a group of people who reside in a 'twilight zone': earning too much to be entitled to copayment exemptions and insurance subsidies but earning too little to enjoy easy access to healthcare.

Rising demand

Meanwhile, demand for healthcare is on the rise. Increased job loss and insecurity, workload and stress at work (including for healthcare workers themselves), debt problems, and housing loss or insecurity have led to increases in the need for access to mental healthcare services. In some countries – for example, Cyprus, Greece and Spain – public services have seen increased demand from people who would previously have used private services but can no longer afford them or have lost the private insurance that came with their jobs, because of benefit reductions or job loss.

The dynamics of the impact of the crisis on demand for healthcare are complex. On the positive side, there is evidence of healthier lifestyles and fewer accidents. In some cases, people have moved from public to private (rather than the other way around) because of decreased cost differences (higher copayments for public services and lower prices for private

services) and a longstanding trend towards private services, for example in Bulgaria, Romania and Sweden.

Mitigating measures

Across Europe, governments have taken steps to maintain access during the crisis. Some have supported increased take-up of exemptions to copayments or have added exemptions. They have also worked to decrease reliance on expensive forms of care, such as inpatient care and emergency care, and to develop more cost-effective outpatient care. Priority has been given to the most urgent health conditions and services, such as replacing a small hospital in a remote area with an emergency service unit.

Healthcare services have also reacted to the situation. In the face of reduced budgets, they have sought to maintain access by economising on utilities and food. They have also innovated in ways of providing services. To address the increased demand for mental healthcare, for example, group sessions have been offered in place of the axed individual ones. ICT has also been used to provide self-help, information and distant diagnoses of images sent by local GPs in remote areas to specialists in hospitals. Providers have also been lenient in enforcing copayments for people in vulnerable situations.

Balancing act

While these mitigating measures have provided relief in difficult times, they cannot be maintained in the long term. For example, if prioritisation and economising extends beyond a certain threshold, this is likely to lead to decreased access and quality. Reductions in inpatient care have not always been accompanied by investment in outpatient

care as a substitute. Furthermore, while leniency by service providers on payment can be crucial for people in vulnerable situations, it risks being applied inconsistently – moreover, the scope for leniency has diminished with reduced budgets.

Simple cost-cutting solutions may incur higher costs in the longer term. There is, for instance, evidence of increased reliance on emergency care for non-emergency needs because of the lower cost barriers to access. There have also been reports (in Bulgaria, Ireland and Slovenia) of increased reliance on inpatient care because the temporary contracts of home-care workers were relatively easy to cut, because relatives could not afford to have the patient at home, or because early discharges risk decreased public funding to hospitals.

Overall, the mitigating measures have been taken in a context of huge financial pressure and in some cases they balance or outweigh the risks. While the financial constraints will never disappear altogether, when the pressure subsides, the measures will need to be reassessed.

Hans Dubois

Supporting working carers

Addressing the childcare needs of working parents has taken centre stage in the discussion around resolving the work–life balance conflict. At some remove from the spotlight is the care of older or disabled relatives and dependants. However, providing informal home care places a substantial demand on sections of the working population and affects whether and to what extent these individuals can reconcile their work and care duties. For this reason, the support of working carers should play a prominent role in the debate around extending working life and the sustainability of work.

According to a 2011 Eurobarometer survey, 16% of the working age population in Europe are carers: most of this group (13%) provide part-time care, but 3% do so on a full-time basis. Demand for care will indisputably increase in the future due to demographic ageing: it is expected that the number of people in need of long-term care in the European Union will almost double by 2060: from around 11 million at present to over 20 million.

Profile of working carers

The likelihood of becoming a family carer increases with age, with the highest probability among workers aged between 50 and 64 years of age: almost one out of five people in this age group has care responsibilities at home. Working women are more likely to be carers than working men. Some types of carers are less likely to be in employment than others – these include those who are caring for a parent and those spending 20 hours or more a week on care duties. Among the most burdened are ‘sandwich carers’: people



who have to care simultaneously for their children and for an older relative. Most of these workers find it impossible to manage both work and care duties and are often forced to leave the labour market.

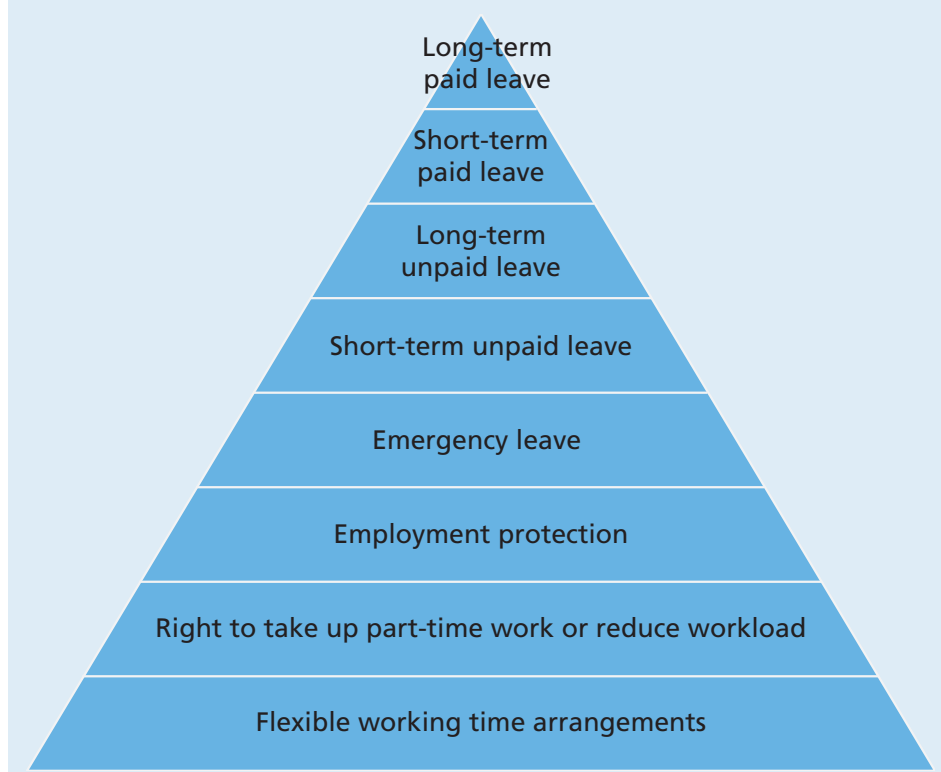
It is important to highlight the disproportionate presence of older women among carers, as it is precisely this demographic group that is underrepresented in the workforce at present. To achieve a higher level of participation of older women in employment, there needs to be a specific policy targeted towards working carers, which would support a better balance

between work and family life. This would require the involvement of governments and national and local authorities, as well as social partners, employers and the EU institutions.

Pyramid of supports

While state provision of care services is one dimension in the support of working carers, the policy mix has to extend further to encompass employment-related strategies to reconcile work and care. At present, some countries have put in place a combination of policies, while others have just a single support mechanism. In

Figure 1: Pyramid of reconciliation measures



some countries, the ability to juggle work and care is entirely dependent on the goodwill of employers.

The different measures introduced in Member States for the benefit of working carers is shown in Figure 1 (borrowing from Maslow's hierarchy of needs). The lowest levels of the pyramid represent measures that are most pertinent for the reconciliation of work and care – those addressing working time arrangements. They include flexible starting and finishing times, being able to work less on some days and more on others, and reductions in workload or responsibilities, such as management tasks, for a period.

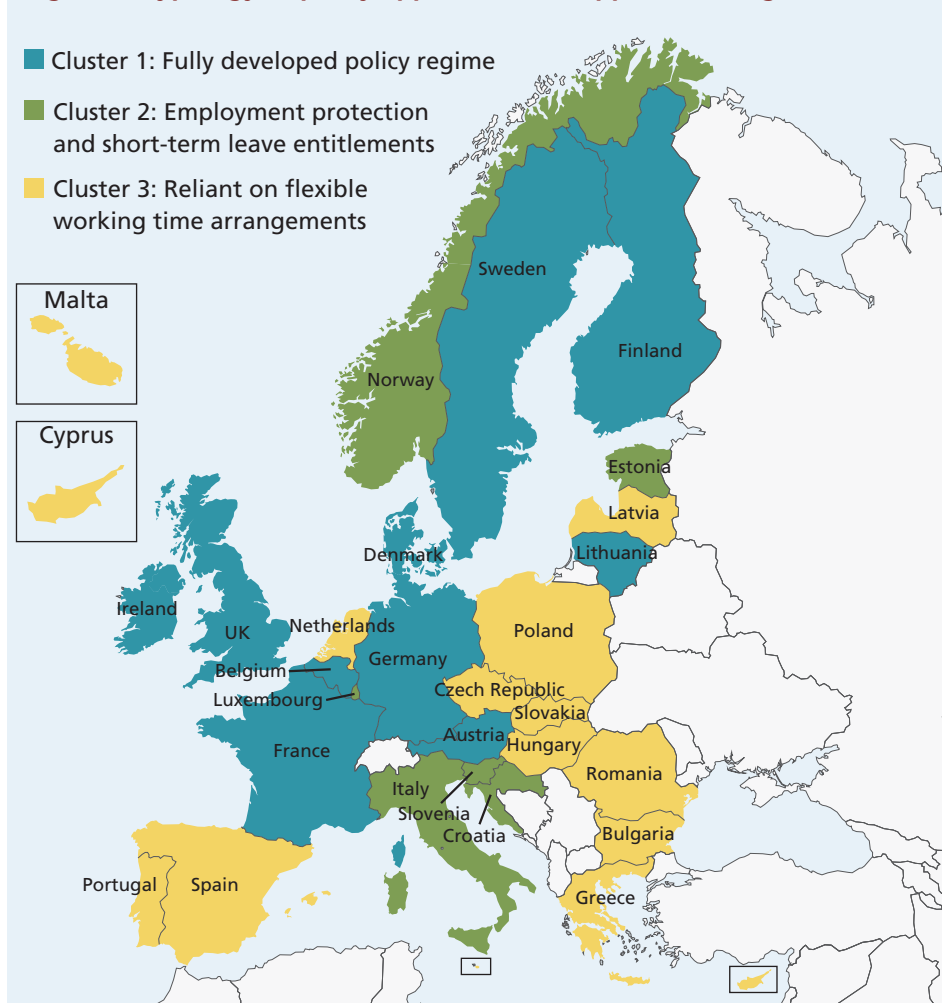
Next in the hierarchy are protection mechanisms aimed at providing employment security, such as a guarantee that workers can return to the same job if they take leave. These are an essential part of the policy mix, as entitlements for working carers are worthless if employers can get around more basic entitlements by laying off workers who have to care for relatives. There is evidence from several countries that workers do not tell their employers or even colleagues that they have to care for someone, for fear of putting their job at risk. In many of the former Eastern Bloc countries, employment protection was and still is the main support plank for workers with care duties.

Leave entitlements

On a higher level again are leave entitlements: emergency or force majeure leave for up to one week, unpaid short-term leave (usually up to 6 months) and unpaid long-term leave (one year or more). The most sophisticated entitlements are short- and long-term leave with income replacement. This income is usually not covered by the employer but by insurance, local authorities or government. In the Nordic countries, carers commonly have the right to return to their job after sabbatical care leave and for the duration of their leave are employed by the local council. Even though the payment is rarely a full wage, it is much more generous than in most countries. The UK has a similar entitlement but a raft of conditions (including means testing, reduction of working hours and assessment of the level of care needs) generally discourage take-up.

Priorities vary, of course, according to individual cases. If taking unpaid leave for a lone mother looking after her disabled father means making an already poor income situation worse, there is no argument in favour of the

Figure 2: Typology of policy approaches to support working carers



legal entitlement if it does not come with income replacement.

Support measures across Member States

Eurofound has classified Member States according to the mix of support measures they have in place, resulting in three clusters (see Figure 2).

In the first cluster are countries that have a fully developed carer support regime for the reconciliation of work and family life. These countries have extensive leave entitlements for working carers, especially emergency leave and short-term and long-term leave, both of which come with income replacement. In addition, most of these countries have a good level of working time flexibility and, in some cases, employment protection for carers.

The second cluster is characterised by an emphasis on short-term leave entitlements, with or without income replacement, and employment protection for working carers. These countries have limited working time flexibility and emergency leave entitlements.

The third cluster groups countries that rely by and large on flexible working time arrangements. None of these countries has

a long-term leave entitlement, and other entitlements, if they exist, are fairly limited. Employment protection for working carers is also underdeveloped in these countries. For example, Slovakia offers a good level of working time flexibility, part-time working and even teleworking, but no other measures. The same holds true for Poland. Only the Czech Republic offers other entitlements but on a limited basis: just one day of emergency leave and one day of short-term leave. In these countries, the reality is that most carers give up work and become full-time carers, as balancing their work with caring responsibilities is not really possible.

The presence of the Netherlands in this group is anomalous and does not accurately reflect the level of support available in this country: while employment-related policies are few, there are many initiatives among social partners and at company level. In addition, the state in both the Netherlands and Luxembourg provides a wide range of formal care institutions, so comprehensive employment-related policies are less critical.

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