# Work life trends in Europe

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Work life policy, practice and potential

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- WLB is experienced when demands from domain of paid work are compatible with demands  from other domains (eg. family or leisure time) (Pichler, 2009)

○ Juggling five aspects or our lives at any one point in time: work, family, friends, health and spirit (or self)

- Organizational flexibility, rather than simply where, when and how employees may work
  - Employment practices (non-standard forms of employment)
  - Organizational structure – the division of work, distribution of skills and authority, nature of technology, character of communication
  - Culture - a climate of opposition and resistance or consent and commitment

Ramsdal and Skorstad, 2009

The degree of state support reflects welfare-regime types (Esping-Andersen, 1999)

- the social-democratic welfare state regime
- the liberal regime
- the Mediterranean regime
- the conservative regime
- the post-communist regime

Summary from *den Dulk, Peters, Poutsma & Ligthart, 2010*

- De-familialization – the degree to which welfare state or market provisions ease the burden of families' caring responsibilities

- Defamilialized welfare state regime
  - Active public policy allowing full participation of men and women in labour market

- Familialistic welfare state regime
  - caring responsibilities primarily seen as responsibility of private households

## The liberal regime

- eg. UK and Ireland
- National regulations are limited and development of work family arrangements left to market forces
- Diversity in employer involvement – which may offer competitive advantage re: recruitment and retention

## The post-communist regime

- Many Central and Eastern European countries have seen varying levels of decline in childcare services and wage compensation for leave arrangements

- Eg. Slovenia, Estonia still have high state support for leave arrangements

- Bulgaria, Czech Republic – state support diminished to far greater extent

- Practices include flexitime, remote working, leaves of absence, child care services, extra parental leave
- Low performers
  – Organizations in Italy, Portugal, Belgium
- Medium performers
  – Organizations in Germany, Finland, Greece, Austria, France
- High performers
  – Organizations in Denmark, Ireland, UK, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden

Straub, 2007

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**Data from European Social Survey**

- Higher professionals report highest levels of work life conflict – they have more stressful jobs

- Work hours (no. worked and working unsocial hours) have a greater impact on work life conflict for women than for men

- Having children, especially young children, increases work life conflict, and reduces gap between high and lower professionals

- Prof'al women in Ireland and UK have high work life conflict compared to other working women.

- In the Netherlands and Sweden, smaller difference between prof'al and non-prof'al women

McGinnity & Calvert, 2009

# Scandinavian trends

- Regular cross-training and job rotation
- Giving worker teams more autonomy and responsibility for their own work
- Measuring productivity by performance rather than by work hours
- Regularly phasing in new people into long-term projects
- Developing alternative career paths for specialists and managers
- Allowing careerists with small children to take "responsibility breaks" while still working
- Allowing more flexibility in terms of where work is performed (home, for example)
- Facilitating part-time work and job sharing, including management positions

Widener, 2007/8

- Four basic elements of a work life programme
    - Policies – formally designed and formally communicated rules
    - Practices – *use* of policies, or non policy-driven habits and practices prevalent in the organization. Can be either constructive and supportive or can exacerbate work life conflict
    - Culture – the importance of a changing cultural mindset: implicit assumptions, social norms and expectations
    - Enablers – strategy and resources, leadership, communication and accountability

Poelmans, Patel and Beham, 2008

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The family-responsible company development model – complementing the evolutionary process of culture change

*Stages 1 and 2:*

- Systematic contamination – no attention to or acknowledgement of issues of work life harmony

- Implementation of policies and commitment at senior levels – existence of few formal policies but limited take-up.  Often a perception gap between what was intended by an organization and what an employee perceives as the result.  May be support at the highest levels, but discretionary at middle management

Poelmans, Patel and Beham, 2008

The family-responsible company development model

*Stages 3 and 4:*

- Broader buy-in, healthier practices, and a supportive culture – recognition that work life harmony of employees affects the bottom line through improved productivity and employee satisfaction

- Managing with conviction for sustained improvement – successful implementation of a suite of consistent policies and practices.  Work family balance is integrated into the mission of the organization, and evidence of support is visible in day to day business

Poelmans, Patel and Beham, 2008