“The participation of women in the labour market and childcare investment: views from Europe”

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Prepared for the SSP 126th Biannual Conference 25-26 May 2013. Aoyama Gakuin University, Aoyama Campus, Tokyo

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Sumary of presentation:

One of the most important changes that have taken place in European societies since the 1960s and 1970s has been the incorporation of women to paid employment. The industrial economy pretty much built around male workers has given way to a service economy changing jobs and also workers. These changes in employment together with changes in the role of women has brought about a wide number of tensions and conflicts in modern European societies. This presentation will firstly analyse changing dynamics and existing tensions between the participation of women in paid employment and fertility. Secondly, the presentation will analyze developments in childcare provision (Early Childhood Education and Care – ECEC) within the framework of a proposed paradigmatic change of welfare states through 'social investment'. The presentation will give an overview of the current academic and political debate around the pros and cons of expanding service provision for small children (that is, children under compulsory school age). Developments in ECEC at least at the European level have certainly been backed up by a vast amount of research that prove, albeit with different emphasis, positive links between investment in ECEC and (1) female labour force participation, (3) fertility dynamics (3) children's opportunities in life and (4) productivity imperatives in the knowledge-based economy. Despite the fact that causal connections are very difficult to identify (Gerda & Andersson 2008), it truly exists strong empirical evidence on the connections between the labour market participation of women –specially mothers with under school age children- and availability of childcare provision and/or other family-oriented policies (Kamerman & Moss 2009; Boje & Ejnraes 2011). Family policies oriented towards female employment –such as availability of public childcare- have a positive impact on levels of female employment (Gauthier, 2007) and vice-versa. However, there are significant differences between European countries not just in levels of ECEC coverage but on aspects related to the quality of the provision. Furthermore, it is important to look at ECEC development within broader policies for the reconciliation of work and family life, mainly forms of flexible but secured employment and parental leave schemes. The presentation will finally give an overview of the present challenges and dilemmas that European countries face nowadays with expanding ECEC services in the context of strong austerity social and economic programmes that the EU is imposing on member states as a response to the economic crisis.

Departures from the male breadwinner model

Over a decade ago, feminist scholars vividly criticised mainstream comparative welfare research for remaining oblivious to the way in which women's unpaid care work influenced

men's capacity to be in paid employment which in turn affected women's ability to be protected by the welfare state on an autonomous basis. Esping-Andersen's (1990) renowned indicator of de-commodification was pretty much at the heart of these debates, remaining centre stage ever since. What gender scholars were pointing at and what Esping-Andersen so willingly took on board a few years later was that, bluntly put, women's historical absence from the formal economy left them on a pre-commodified status. Several authors (Lewis 1992; Orloff 1993; Bussemaker 1994; O'Connor 1993) attempted to find indicators that would look at women's independence from family obligations. They were also looking at ways in which the worlds of production and reproduction would not be separated from each other but seen as mutually interdependent. Agreeing with Orloff that commodification is potentially emancipatory for women, what was then needed was a "new analytic dimension that taps into the extent to which states promote or discourage women's paid employment and the right to be commodified" (Orloff 1993: 318). Thus, welfare states had to be measured against their capacity to 'free' women from their family dependency by facilitating their entrance into the world of paid employment. Esping Andersen (1999: 45) operationalised the term by looking at policies that reduce individuals' dependence on the family and maximise individuals' command of economic resources independently of familial relations. From the perspective of welfare regime typologies, the less familistic welfare states are the Nordic ones since social policy is explicitly designed to facilitate women's economic independence by lessening their family burdens. At the other end, the more familistic ones are those of Southern Europe where social policy not only does not help women to be economically independent but it actually relies on them to solve caring obligations and needs.

The literature on comparative 'care regimes'[1] has pretty much arrived at similar conclusions. According to this literature, the intersections between paid and unpaid, and between formal and informal care work materialise in a number of ways in different national contexts depending on the interplay between different institutions (welfare state, labour market, the third sector and the family). The 'acceptability' of various forms of care work given cultural and social values and norms (Pfau-Effinger 2005; Crompton et al. 2007; Lister et al. 2007) also plays a major role in shaping these different care models. Furthermore, the literature on social care has rightly pointed out that each arrangement for social care leads to a distinct outcome for gender equality.

[1] 'Care regimes' are patterns of care organisation in different societies (Pfau-Effinger & Geissler 2005). More specifically, and based on developments in the comparative welfare-state and industrial-relations literature (Esping-Andersen 1990; Crouch 1993; O'Reilly 2006), a care regime is defined as the specific set of institutions and of policies affecting these institutions that shape how care is delivered, influencing both the working conditions of carers and the quality of the care provided.

The departure of the male breadwinner model might have been under-specified in the academic literature in a number of ways. Daly (2011:17) argues that:

"(…)The adult worker model has started to be quite widely used as a fully-fledged model or characterization of real life. This is unwise. To the extent that it depicts an empirical trend towards individualization, the adult worker model is but a partial characterization of what is happening (…)" .

As Daly points out, one cannot question the fact that everywhere in Europe the entrance of women into the labour market is being promoted by work/family balance mechanisms, including employment flexibility and greater availability of childcare services. As Orloff (2005) has also argued, governments in developed democracies cannot any longer afford to be the advocates of women's role as housekeeper but need to be actively engaged in promoting employment for all, women included. One of the pillars of post-war welfare states, the strict gender division of labour between the public sphere of work and the private sphere of the family has cracked into little pieces. The 'job for life' has been replaced by a more fragmented and diverse pattern of employment and, equally relevant, the traditional image of the protective family has blurred both as a symbol of identity and as an effective institution of welfare provision. In today's welfare states, policies for the reconciliation of work and family life and flexibility in employment are instrumentally driven towards female employment growth.

Nevertheless, and as Daly notes, these measures do not mark an unequivocal trend towards individualization but rather a recast of the concept of the family in terms of roles, functions, and relations vis-à-vis other institutions (Daly & Scheiwe 2010 in Daly 2011: 18).

Promoting female employment as a precondition for childbearing: Is it good to invest in the employability of women?

In OECD countries the macro cross-country correlation between total fertility rate (TFR) and the female labour force participation (FLP) turned from a negative value before the 80s to a positive value afterwards. Generally speaking, the countries that now show the lowest levels of fertility are those with relatively low levels of female participation in the labour market and vice-versa (Engelhardt and Prskawetz 2004, Ahn and Mira 2002). Thus, the increase in women's labour force participation has been accompanied by a steady decline in fertility although there are significant reversals at both the macro and micro levels. Understandably, the trend is the opposite if we look at female unemployment: the cross-country correlation shifts from positive to negative. If we look at European countries higher fertility is associated with higher female participation in the labour market in Northern European countries while lower

fertility is in southern Europe associated with low female participation. Besides female employment and unemployment the form of employment also matters greatly. Part-time jobs are generally expected to have a positive effect on fertility by allowing an easier conciliation of work and family responsibilities. In Europe, countries differ greatly regarding part time employment. An important difference is the 'quality' of part time employment. Research shows that part-time jobs have a positive effet on fertility only in those countries where they are voluntarily chosen and socially accepted (Ariza, De la Rica and Ugidos, 2005). Public sector jobs also seem to be more 'family friendly' that jobs in the private sector mainly because flexible and secure options are available mainly right after maternity leave. Moreover, fertility is usually higher in countries with larger public sectors (Bernhardt, 1993), and women employed in the public sector tend to have higher fertility rates than their counterparts in the private sector (Adsera, 2011). Better working conditions in the public sector compared to the private sector also facilitate fathers' take-up of parental leave (Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2011).

In short, empirical research shows that women's labour force participation does not necessarily lead to low fertility but it can actually be the opposite. The relationship between employment and fertility is shaped by institutional arrangements, employment and social policies, gender relations and the domestic division of work between men and women. The way in which countries promote the employability of women in a way that it might not clash with their role as mothers is a good telling indicator of the adaptability of these countries to the changing opportunity costs of having children.

On the other hand, changes in the family structure, female labour participation and the transformation in the demographic structure affect the relationship between family and employment. Female employment varies with childbirth as a function of the number of children (Ranci and Pavolini 2010, Ranci and Migliavacca 2011, Naldini 2006, Del Boca 2002). The employment rate for women aged 25 to 49 decreases as the number of children increases, while for men in this age group the pattern is almost the opposite (Saraceno & Naldini 2011). As Table 1 shows the difference Zero-Three+ (last column Table 1) is large for Germany and the United Kingdom. The only remarkable difference, as shown in Fig. 6, is when we compare female participation (25-49) of single women without children and women in couples with children. While Italy and Spain have similar levels of participation in the case of single women without children as Germany, France and the UK, the distance between these countries and Italy and Spain increases for the case of women in couples with children.

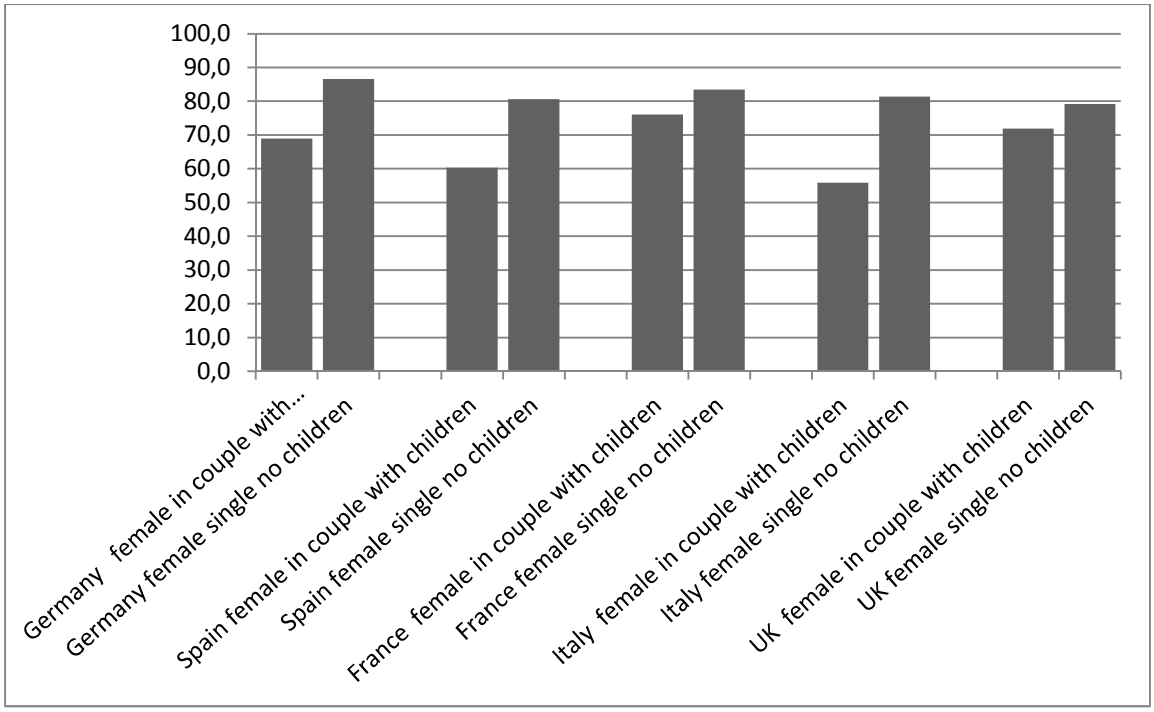
Table 1 Female employment and maternity in the European Union* by the number of children aged under 12 (2008): women aged 25–49

	Female rate 2008	Zero children	One child	Two children	Three + children	Dif. Zero–One	Dif. Zero–Two	Dif. Zero–Three+
European Union	73.1	78.6	72.0	69.1	54.5	–6.6	–9.5	–24.1
Germany	76.4	83.7	77.2	72.4	53.0	–6.5	–11.3	–30.7
Ireland	78.4	81.5	68.2	61.5	49.1	–13.3	–20.0	–32.4
Greece	76.8	70.0	62.5	59.7	54.4	–7.5	–10.3	–15.6
Spain	**70.1**	**73.2**	**64.2**	**60.2**	**48.9**	**–9.0**	**–13.0**	**–24.3**
France	64.0	80.4	78.6	77.8	59.0	–1.8	–2.6	–21.4
Italy	**67.8**	**67.3**	**59.5**	**53.4**	**40.3**	**–7.8**	**–13.9**	**–27.0**
Luxembourg	77.6	83.7	74.4	70.8	52.6	–9.3	–12.9	–31.1
Netherlands	61.1	86.6	79.8	81.4	71.3	–6.8	–5.2	–15.3
Austria	71.4	85.2	82.1	77.3	60.0	–3.1	–7.9	–25.2
Portugal	81.8	78.2	77.5	75.5	66.6	–0.7	–2.7	–11.6
Finland	79.5	84.0	77.0	83.0	67.4	–7.0	–1.0	–16.6
The UK	77.5	84.0	75.1	71.8	48.6	–8.9	–12.2	–35.4

Note: * No data available for Sweden and Denmark.

Source: Salido 2011: 197.

Fig 6: Female Employment rate aged 25-49 by children and household type 2010



Source: Eurostat LFS 2010

Developing care policies and the 'social investment' paradigm: Is it good to invest in childcare?

Developments in ECEC at least at the European level have certainly been backed up by a vast amount of research that prove, albeit with different emphasis, positive links between investment in ECEC and (1) female labour force participation, (3) fertility dynamics (3) children's opportunities in life and (4) productivity imperatives in the knowledge-based economy. Despite the fact that causal connections are very difficult to identify (Gerda & Andersson 2008), it truly exists strong empirical evidence on the connections between the labour market participation of women –specially mothers with under school age children- and availability of childcare provision and/or other family-oriented policies (Kamerman & Moss 2009; Boje & Ejnraes 2011). Family policies oriented towards female employment –such as availability of public childcare- have a positive impact on levels of female employment (Gauthier, 2007) and vice-

versa. In a recent research (Drobnic & León 2013) on worklife balance dilemmas in Germany and Spain we found that for both countries having children are still an important obstacle in female employment. Women who anticipate high work-life conflict are less likely to be employed in the first place or the 'resolve' the conflict by not having children. Our study also showed that constraints and opportunities in the labour market as well as policy measures exert an impact on selection into employment. Availability of childcare provision, or work-family balance policies more generally, also affects fertility dynamics. In this respect, research shows that different childcare arrangements affect couple's decisions to have children (Schober 2012; Budig et al 2012). In most countries the lack of sufficient institutional support for working mothers explained to a large extent the low fertility levels seen in many European countries during the previous decade (Brewster and Rindfuss 2000). In their cross-national study using household level data Hobson and Ólah (2006) found that fertility decisions (i.e. the likelihood of having first child) were affected by configurations in welfare states for reconciling employment and caring for children. 'Birthstriking' effects were identified in countries with weak reconciliation policies for working mothers. In sum, the fact that governments need to support, through specific policy packages the participation of women in the labour market, is, as Daly (2011) points out, hard to question. Everywhere in Europe the participation of women in the labour market is being promoted by work/family balance mechanisms, including employment flexibility and greater availability of childcare services. As Orloff (2005) has also argued, governments in developed democracies cannot any longer afford to be the advocates of women's role as housekeeper but need to be actively engaged in promoting employment for all, women included.

Research has also shown positive links between investment in ECEC and equal opportunities among children of different socio-economic backgrounds. Sara McLanahan (2004) for instance claims that to the extent that the second demographic transition is widening social class disparities in children's resources, investing in ECEC can compensate from the loss of parental resources of the more disadvantaged children. In a similar line, Esping-Andersen has done extensive research on the effects of ECEC on child outcomes. In a period where inequalities are widening, he argues, investing in early years education appears as the best way for "minimizing, across the board, the impact of (non-biological) inequalities on children´s opportunities" (Esping-Andersen 2009: 144). Thus, research based on longitudinal analysis shows that availability of childcare provision can potentially minimize the effects of family background variables, such as low income, lone motherhood or poor parental learning culture on children´s cognitive development and educational achievement.

Furthermore, the links between productivity and childcare provision have been clearly expressed by the European Strategy for Cooperation in Education and Training –ET 2011 (CORE 2011). It is revelatory here how PISA reports on school children performance have become a main tool to assess both ECEC and compulsory education arrangements of different countries and the prospects of their economies. In this way, the interactions between care, education and productivity shape the debate on care for the young ones. This goes also in line with the capabilities approach. Taking Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum's conceptual framework, several scholars have reflected on the way in which the welfare state might or might not enhance human capacities. Access to good quality education and availability of policies to ease the work-family conflict, for instance can be seen as capabilities to achieve agency (Hobson 2011ref.)

Supported by proof of these four elements both international and national agents have framed the need to invest in ECEC services within the 'social investment paradigm' (Morel, Palier, and Palme 2012). 'Social investment' could become a new paradigm for social policy and welfare research in the coming future, much as Keynesianism was for the postwar years and neoliberalism over the past three decades. The social investment viewpoint presents social policies' enrichment of human capital as a cornerstone for a tentative new paradigm. Investment in issues such as education suited to the different life stages, improved combinations of active/protective labour market policies and social cohesion become key productive forces in present societies. The greates challenge for social investment is that most examples of policy innovation driven by the social investment logic are concentrated on the Nordic countries and the Netherlands, under conditions that are difficult to transfer to other political, social and economic contexts in Europe.

In any case, discourse of social investment is being used to good effect to promote a children's agenda that goes beyond mothers' employability to emphasize children's wellbeing and equal opportunities. OECD's Starting Strong reports have, for over a decade now, focused on the importance of ECEC based on the above mentioned empirical evidence. ECEC considered as part of the social investment paradigm to the extent that it contributes towards the cognitive development of children and enables the participation of women in the labour market by providing services that help reconcile family responsibilities with paid work. ECEC is also a source of employment. Moreover, both the European Commission and the Council have clearly shifted from emphasizing the need to invest in childcare only as a measure towards facilitating the employability of women (clearly visible in the 2000 Lisbon Strategy and the 2020 Strategy) to a more recent concern (especially since 2011) for the wellbeing of children. In this more recent perspective, investment in childcare is put forward as the best way to guarantee equal

opportunities in children, especially for the most disadvantaged ones. Quality childcare is considered to be a preventive strategy for the acquisition of goals later in life.

But despite common set of benchmarks at EU and OECD levels, convergence proves to be difficult. Different countries have followed different agendas and the policy direction of these changes is far than easy to ascertain. In previous periods of welfare change the idea of 'path dependency' seemed to have great explanatory capacity in the sense of orienting welfare systems towards pre-existing models. Over the last years welfare state's capacity to break from pre-conceived moulds has increased. As Morgan (2012) argues, the so-called 'social investment triad', that is, activation of women's employment; promotion of gender equality; and fostering child development through good quality care, is rarely seen in policy practice. As the author argues, most countries focus on only one of the three dimensions, while very few countries, what she calls 'the social investment pioneers' namely France, Norway and Sweden' emphasize all three.

Another element shaping institutional change in European countries which might be seen as conflicting with the universalisation trend is that of externalization. In the case of infants, externalisation has pretty much been framed within the concept of 'defamilialisation' of childcare in the sense that states are assuming more responsibility towards the care and educational needs of younger children and the elder albeit with very different forms of public/private provision. However, and as argued somewhere else (León and Migliavacca 2012) the understanding of the defamilialisation trend can be quite contentious. As Daly notes, the current events do not mark an unequivocal trend towards individualization but rather a recast of the concept of family in terms of roles, functions, and relations vis-à-vis other institutions (Daly & Scheiwe 2010 in Daly 2011: 18). In this respect, the assumption that familistic policies hinder progress towards the adult worker model and greater gender equality can be called into question. The concept of de-familization' has to be deconstructed analytically in order to account for its highly ambivalent effects on the choices and economic self-reliance of women (Leitner & Lessenich 2007: 245). In fact, the concept of familism and the degree to which it leads to gender inequality can indeed be interpreted in conflicting ways. Leitner (2003) for instance, uses parental leave as an indicator of 'familism' since this is a policy which supports the caring function of the family with respect to childcare. Paid parental leave allows parents to be absent from the labour market for a period of time in order to take care of young children. As the author puts it: "the existence (respectively: the absence) of regulations for paid parental leave will be taken as an indicator for the dimension of strong (respectively: weak) familialisation" (2003: 360). There is no simple answer to the question of whether parental leave is an indicator of familism and whether this does or does not promote gender equality. Some 'familistic' instruments, such as some formulations of parental leave might be promoting

gender equality, some others might not. As Pfau-Effinger (2005) argues, the argument that the degree of formalisation of informal care is determined by the degree to which welfare states support gender equality and the integration of women in the labour market does not take into account the fact that informal care has itself been modernised and that the promotion of informal family care (parental leave would be promoting this) does not necessarily contradict ideas about gender equality. The concept of familism goes beyond an 'underground' strategy of some 'weak' welfare states which delegate all responsibility for and care of the family to become a wider and more complex element of interaction between the family, the state and the market. The definition of 'familism' gets further complicated by the ongoing process of commodification of previously unpaid private care work.

The impact of the economic crisis 2008+

Expansion of these policy factors has, as explained above, coincided in most countries with a restrictive financial environment. In some countries, most notably Southern Europe, the growth of the childcare sector has taken the route of non-family paid carers which alerts against sources of informality and precariousness, a threat that is very explicit in the conditions of care migrant workers. In other countries, such as Germany and the UK, childcare provision has expanded even in a finally restrictive scenario as a form of welfare recalibration (cuts in 'old' policy domains are compensated by the development of 'new' policy domains) fuelled by the social investment logic as mentioned above. In the case of LTC, the compromise between universalism and free choice principles has shown to be inadequate to deal with the new financial and demographic pressures emerging in the 'austerity age'. The effects of the economic crisis on ECEC developments can be summarised in the following points below:

a) There is an emerging trade off between quantity and quality. There is a visible tension between extension of public intervention versus the commodification of care. In many countries, the extension of public care programmes based on universalistic principles has come with the introduction of market competition in the care delivery system, on the basis of the idea that pluralism of supply increases efficiency and effectiveness.
b) Professionalization/formalisation vs. informalization or 'refamilization' of care. The expansion of ECEC has come together with an emphasis on professional standards and extension of professional care. Developments in ECEC programmes have been subject to the establishment of professional standards of the workforce specially for the 0 to 3 group. At the same time, in many countries cash-for-care programs and parental leave packages have been introduced to sustain informal care, either explicitly (in Austria) or implicitly (Italy, Germany), contributing to the extension of semi-formal care supply. The main direction was towards professionalization, or public recognition of informal

care. The most recent years have been characterised by a turn towards more informalization and re-familization of care. The introduction of cash programs based on free choice principles has actually shifted part of the care responsibility to informal caregiving.

c) Flexibility vs. standardization of care services. Two processes have taken place in the organisation of care work. Despite common set of benchmarks at EU level regarding coverage rates of schooling of infants, standardisation is difficult precisely because of different values and ideas regarding what is best for children. Thus, flexibility (i.e. combining expansion of childcare services with alternative arrangements where parents can chose from).

The main consequence of such trends has been a quite general situation of worsening the working conditions of care workers, and the deterioration of the quality of care services with some exeptions. If on the one hand the reforms introduced in many countries have increased the volume of care services and the amount of care workers, on the other it is true that legitimacy, autonomy and salary of care workers have been drastically reduced.

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