

Title: Flexible working arrangements for work-life balance in familialist countries: Tensions between national and organisational-level policies

Abstract: There have been significant work-life policy changes in familialistic countries (i.e. whereby families are implicitly or explicitly responsible for care) in recent decades (Saraceno, 2016). Despite these changes, care responsibilities often remain within the family due to the lack of explicit state or market alternatives (Leitner, 2003). In such country contexts, where there is no “way out of care”, flexible work arrangements (FWAs) could have the potential to help family members reconcile paid work and care (Fahlén, 2013); especially when implemented along employment security measures (Van Eyck, 2003). Yet recent evidence suggests flexible work in familialistic countries often takes the form of non-standard work (e.g. temporary employment). Such forms of ‘employer-friendly’ flexibilization are related to an increase in employment precarity and the intensification of gender inequality, not improvements in work-life reconciliation (Maestripieri & León, 2019). Less evidence is available about other forms of flexibilization, such as tele-work, flexitime and working time autonomy. The limited evidence available suggests FWAs are less likely to be available in national policy frameworks and/or vary across organizations, reducing the potential of FWAs to be a resource for families. This paper addresses this gap by investigating the potential of FWAs to help family members reconcile paid work and care in two familialistic work-life countries, Spain and Italy, using Sen’s capability approach (CA) (1990). Combining national level policy data with Eurofound survey data on European companies, it focuses on possible tensions between the availability, accessibility (regulation) and design (degree of control and autonomy) of flexible work arrangements at the national and organisational level, and the consequences of such tensions for parents’ ability to reconcile paid work and care. The CA framework allows for a focus on processes rather than on outcomes. It provides a lens to evaluate the policies’ potential to provide workers with “real opportunities” (capabilities) to arrange their personal, family and professional life in a way they have reason to value.

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