

Title: Flexible working policies and work-life balance capabilities: a comparison between Slovenia and Sweden.

Author: Samuel Briones, PhD Candidate Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, Utrecht University.

Abstract:

Flexible working arrangements (FWAs) have been described as paradoxical. While intended to enable family-friendly workplaces and opportunities for work-life balance, they can result in the reinforcement of gendered roles at the workplace and the home, cognitive work-to-home spill-over and an increase in unpaid overtime. Despite attention for this paradoxical aspect of FWAs, we know little about the potential of national-level flexible work regulations to shape these outcomes. The limited evidence on this topic is made more difficult given differing conceptualizations of FWAs in cross-national research (Chung and van der Lippe, 2018). This paper aims to improve our understanding of the paradoxical outcomes produced by FWAs by systematically conceptualizing and assessing cross-national variation in the regulation of FWAs in Slovenia and Sweden. Both countries share a de-familialized care regime but differ in income level, working-time regimes and gender role attitudes (Grönlund and Javornik, 2014). Data from expert questionnaires and policy documents will be analysed in the light of contextual differences to identify policy implications for work-life balance. The paper focuses on three salient aspects of FWAs: availability, accessibility and employment protection provided in national-level regulations. Building on Yerkes and Javornik (2019) and drawing on Sen's Capability Approach, the focus on these three key regulatory aspects of flexible work will allow for a nuanced, cross-country analysis of how the design of flexible working rights shapes workers' real opportunities to achieve work-life balance. Such policy analysis allows us to identify potential mechanisms contributing to the paradoxical outcomes associated with flexible working arrangements.

Keywords: flexible working, policy design, worklife balance capabilities, Slovenia, Sweden