

#### 4.1. Overview

This section deals with the issue of work/life balance and to what degree it is integrated in the social dialogue process, as well as in business practice in the banking sector, focussing on the 7 countries participating in the project: Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Spain and Portugal.

The first part of the section briefly examines the economic and social conditions that led to the emergence of policies aiming to reconcile work with caring responsibilities, in the most advanced sectors and countries of the E.U. These include: demographic changes, the increasing participation of women in the labour market, changes in traditional roles between men and women, the redistribution and re-arrangement of working time, etc. Then it describes the wide array of statutory and non-statutory regulations regarding the protection of motherhood, family support and work/life balance, encountered throughout the E.U. In view of identifying best practice across national boundaries, a number of corporate initiatives are presented to illustrate how some forward looking firms and organisations across Europe are dealing with the double burden of their employees (especially female employees) and the conflicting demands they are faced with, by offering a variety of flexible working options, childcare assistance and leave schemes. Special mention is made of existing family-friendly policies in the 7 countries participating in the current project. The implications of family-friendly policies are then examined, both for employers and employees, followed by a tentative and provisional assessment of these policies.

The second part of this section focuses on the national experience of Greece, where the work/life balance issues is not as relevant as in other European countries. The general context of policies to reconcile work and family responsibilities is briefly examined: the institutional framework, the social infrastructure in place, the traditional roles prevailing in Greek society, business culture and work organisation. Then the report investigates the set of policies offered to bank employees, indicating an emphasis on family and childcare support schemes and the absence of flexible hours and of flexible working arrangements. This trend is line with practices prevailing in the vast majority of Greek companies and organisations and poses the question of why there is reluctance, not only on the employers' but also on the employee side, to pursue family-friendly policies and a greater work/life balance in the Greek business context.

The third part of the section suggests a number of initiatives that need to be taken at company, but union level as well, in order to enhance the reconciliation of work and family, in a viable and mutually beneficial way for all the parties involved. Initiatives that cannot be limited to the mere improvement of existing family-friendly policies, but should seek more drastic changes in work organisation and the prevailing business culture.

Finally, the last part of this section briefly examines the impact of future developments anticipated in the banking sector (i.e. the spread of new ITC technologies, the emergence of new forms of banking like home-banking and the call-centres, the pursuit of mergers and acquisitions, etc.), on working practices, employment conditions, and hence work/life balance issues.

## 4.2. Reconciliation of Work and Family: the state-of-the art in the EU

The need to reconcile working with non-working life (family and domestic responsibilities) has been gaining importance over the past 20 years, as a result of increasing female employment rates all across Europe and drastic changes in family patterns, changes that have given rise to a growing number of nuclear or single-parent families. Being able to juggle the conflicting demands of a paid job or even more so a career, with changing private needs and non-work-related duties, often requires a titanic effort on behalf of individuals. This endless strive for time control has been left, in most cases, at the sole responsibility of workers concerned, though it is increasingly becoming a priority area for policy action, at the macro as well as the micro-levels.

### 4.2.1. The Demise of the “Male Bread-Winner” Model and the Changes in Traditional Roles

Despite the increasing participation of women in paid employment (63% female labour force participation in the EU), role distribution between the partners remains largely traditional, with men less inclined than women to assume their share of family and household responsibilities, especially in the Southern European countries. This trend is exemplified in the low percentage of men across the EU making use of their right to take *parental or childcare leave*: just 2% of parental leave is taken by men. [1] Even in Denmark, which has the highest proportion of female labour force participation in the EU (76%), men are reluctant to make use of their entitlement to parental leave: only 4% of Danish men actually utilise their right, while women make full use of their possibility to take parental leave, after maternity leave, and are absent from the labour market, on average, for a total period of 44.8 weeks, as opposed to men who are away for only 2.2 weeks. Not surprisingly, only 8% of people on childcare leave were men in Denmark in 2000. Similarly in Sweden, which has been the pioneer in promoting parental leave schemes significantly earlier than most European countries, fathers use only 13% of the total hours provided for parental leave. [2]

The main reasons for the low up-take of parental leave by fathers are a mixture of financial considerations and deeply-rooted attitudes, as illustrated below:

- (a) the considerable loss of income suffered, as in many countries parental leave is low paid or not paid at all, and subject to a number of conditions. Owing to lower female earnings, the family's total income loss is smaller when the mother, rather than the father, takes parental leave (opportunity cost);
- (b) traditional attitudes about who is more appropriate as a carer and who holds the primary responsibility in childcare duties;
- (c) the low status of care work; and
- (d) the condescending attitude of management and colleagues towards men who take time off to care for their children, while the same is not true for women employees making use of their entitlements (the concept of “hegemonic masculinity”).

This reluctance on behalf of male partners to participate more actively in family responsibilities indicates a growing imbalance in the distribution of the double workload between women and men, and this despite a widespread progressive “rhetoric” and attitude towards role models, and a favourable cultural context. [3]

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[1] The parental leave directive introduced in 1996 –following common agreement between the social partners- provides for a minimum of 3 months leave following the birth of a child in addition to maternity leave. The entitlement is applicable to either the mother or the father.

[2] In Southern-European countries the percentage is even lower: for example in Spain, only 1% of parents on childcare leave are men.

[3] According to a European Foundation survey across the EU, only 12% of men spend more than an hour daily on housework as opposed to 63% of women (European Foundation, 2002).

### 4.2.2. Working Time Solidarity and Working Time Flexibility: Towards a Redistribution and Deregulation of Working Hours

Another important dimension in enhancing a work/life balance, apart from the role of

stereotypes in the division of paid and unpaid work between women and men, is the issue of working time, and how it is organised and distributed.

In a context of persisting high unemployment levels and “jobless growth”, a number of unions have been urging –since the mid-80s- for a redistribution of working hours between those already in employment (often with a lot of overtime work) and the unemployed. Several patterns of **working time redistribution** have been adopted across Europe over the past 15-20 years. The more widespread patterns include:

- The reduction of the working week (usually to 35 hours a week) with no loss in pay. The most prominent example is France, where the introduction of the 35-hour week applies across the board, since 2001. The reduced working week is a reality, however, in a growing number of sectors and individual companies and organisations in many European countries (mostly in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, etc.).
- Job rotation schemes (mostly Denmark), whereby an unemployed person replaces an employee on paid leave (for training or other purposes), for a period of 6-12 months.
- Redistribution of working time –through financial incentives- between full time male workers and women part-timers (the Netherlands), or, otherwise, between “working hours rich” and “working hours poor”.

The redistribution of working hours goes hand-in-hand with the increased **flexibilisation of working time**. Although fixed, regular hours are still the most widespread pattern of working time organisation, increasingly irregularity of working hours is steadily becoming “standard” and typical in many firms and organisations. According to recent a report on the quality of work by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 37% of employees in the E.U. do not work the same number of days each week and 24% have different working weeks within a month (European Foundation, 2002). Moreover, the range of potential forms of time management is wide and constantly expanding. [see Box 2 below] Apart from flexibility of working hours, other aspects of time organisation that also need to be taken into consideration are the duration of the working day/week, the predictability of working hours (in a context of growing de-standardisation of working patterns), and the overall organisation of social (or urban) times.

As changes in working time have been calling into question the prevailing social organisation of time, a number of local authority organisations across Europe have developed a new approach to the politics of time in the cities (working time and non-working time), in view of synchronising social times with individual needs and facilitating access of the citizens to municipal and other services. Examples of “Time in the city projects” can be encountered in Italy (tempi della citta), [1] Germany, France (“Bureaux de Temps”), the Netherlands (“time offices”), and the U.K. In these novel experiments, time negotiation is relocated from its traditional setting, the company, to the local level, using both the ‘bottom-up’ as well as the ‘top-down approach’.

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[1] Experiences of urban times policies that started in the early 1990s, now cover more than 80 Italian cities (see Boulin, 1997).

#### **4.2.3. Statutory Entitlements and Non-Statutory Provisions**

The role of the national or supra-national institutional framework is to lay down the necessary regulatory conditions and set the minimum standards regarding the terms and conditions of employment and various individual rights, that may then be supplemented and improved in the collective labour agreements. It also has a wider educative role, often showing the way ahead and exerting a significant social and political influence, as in the promotion of equal opportunities, of anti-discrimination policies, etc.

The statutory regulations, providing support for the reconciliation of work and family life, have been steadily expanding and improving in all EU countries over the past few years, reflecting the progress recorded in this area. The most widespread provisions, encountered in all or most of the EU countries, include the following:

- **Maternity leave:** the duration of this leave –that gives right of return to a position

following the birth of a child- varies from one country to the other, but in most countries it usually lasts 16-18 weeks. The same is true for the level and duration of pay. In some countries, maternity leave (which follows the childbirth leave) can be shared between mothers and fathers, or fathers may have the exclusive right to use part of the leave.

- Parental or childcare leave: one of the most advanced schemes of childcare leave can be found in Denmark. This leave, which currently extends to 52 weeks and is compensated with a sum equivalent to 60% of the unemployment benefit, is available to either of the parents, until their child reaches the age of 8. At present, the various leave schemes available are under consideration, in view of re-distributing 54 weeks of parental leave between the two parents (who will be able to postpone part of the leave period until their child is 9) and ensure full benefits for the 52 weeks. This will entail extra costs for the employers, especially in some sectors like the finance sector, that will have to offer full pay for an extra 20 weeks, as is stipulated in the sectoral collective agreement.
- Adoptive leave: same requirements and entitlements as for natural children.
- "Force majeure": leave for unforeseen events.
- Sabbatical/training or education leave (partly or fully recompensed).
- Subsidised childcare for pre-school children: this may take various forms, from the more traditional (availability of a free or affordable care place, financed by central or local government, or exceptionally by a private company or an organisation, at the crèche or nursery school for the children of working parents), to more innovative ones, like the cash subsidy to parents who look after their children at home (Norway), or the individual voucher designed to allow parents to choose the type of childcare facility they prefer (Hamburg), and the 'childcare benefit' that will replace the parental-leave benefit, that depends on employment, and will enable parents to freely choose among different care services (Austria). In the majority of EU countries, public childcare institutions do not offer enough places to respond to caring needs and parents have to resort to expensive private childcare facilities, or to relatives (usually grandparents).

Other innovative government measures include:

- The "Family Competencies" project (Austria) launched in 2000, offers women with children the possibility to prepare for a return to work, through family counselling centres.
- Working time initiatives: employees are entitled to increase or reduce their individual working time and income respectively, according to their needs (the Netherlands, since July 2000). According to the law, as much as 50% of the total workforce at a workplace, can request to work on a part-time schedule. In Italy, the option to telework for 2-3 days a week has been introduced in the public sector, on an experimental basis.

### **Social Partners' Initiatives**

In addition to institutional measures, a number of initiatives have been taken jointly by the social partners' organisations, at the industry-wide, national or supra-national level, in view of directly or indirectly facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life.

- A "Programme for Prosperity and Fairness" has been agreed in Ireland.
- Establishment of a 22-member joint committee "Employers for Work-Life Balance" in the UK (2000), in view of promoting flexible working practices.
- Awareness rising campaigns have taken place in several countries.
- Individualised working time accounts exist in a number of countries, as a result of collective agreements (Denmark, Germany,...).

At the E.U. level, the social partners' inter-professional organisations (UNICE, CEEP and CES) have, so far, reached a common framework-agreement (leading to the issue of E.U. directives) on health and safety at work for pregnant and breast-feeding women (1992), on parental leave (1995), on part-time work (1997) and on fixed-term work contracts (1999), whilst the sectoral social dialogue committees have reached an agreement on working time reduction in the agriculture sector (1997) and in the rail and maritime transport sectors (1998).

#### **4.2.4 Corporate Initiatives: Family-Friendly Policies in the Banking Sector and Elsewhere**

The emergence of work-life balance issues in a growing number of companies and organisations is related to two major management concerns:

- (a) tightening labour markets and skill shortages, owing to the ageing of the workforce;
- (b) the importance of human resources as a key competitive element. Increasingly, valued employees demand greater time sovereignty, extra non-work time rather than a pay increase, and more flexible working patterns in order to accommodate their complex and changing needs, namely personal and family considerations. [1] A recent survey of 2 000 managers in the U.K. found that one third of them would change their jobs if they felt they could improve their work-life balance. [2]

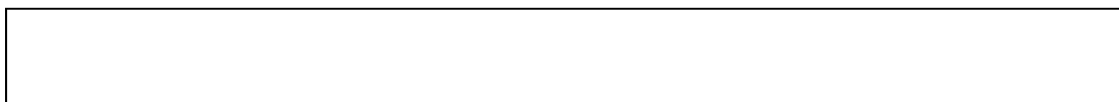
In addition, several employers are eager to improve their company profile, as well as their organisation performance. A well-developed strategy for work/life balance is associated with a number of *advantages* for businesses:

- ✓ Retention of valued and highly skilled employees. The hidden cost of talent drains can be considerable. It has been estimated that the cost of recruiting a new employee (advertising, selection, interview) and the loss of investment in training by far outweighs the cost of introducing family friendly policies;
- ✓ Effective recruitment tool, in view of attracting new, top class employees. In many companies, the availability of family friendly policies increasingly constitutes an essential part of the job offer;
- ✓ Higher staff morale, better workplace atmosphere;
- ✓ Substantially reduced absenteeism (in the U.K. at least 50 work hours are lost every year by employees with family commitments);
- ✓ Higher productivity of the workforce;
- ✓ Improved customer service;
- ✓ Enhanced reputation of the company;
- ✓ Employees become more committed to their work and the company;
- ✓ Diversification and full participation of the workforce.

Hence, a growing number of forward-looking firms have been introducing (since the late 1980's-early 1990's) a set of policies, aiming at enabling their employees to combine work with their family life, caring responsibilities and personal life. These policies have become known as "family-friendly policies", and they consist mainly of new, flexible working arrangements, reduced working hours, various types of leave (paid and unpaid), subsidised childcare, etc.

### **A typology of family-friendly policies across Europe**

- Flexible working patterns: these include a wide array of flexible working practices, that deviate from the "norm" of full time 8-hours work 5-days a week until retirement, at the employers' premises [see Box 2].
- Extended leave arrangements: additional parental leave (in addition to the statutory entitlement, partly paid), incentives to fathers to make use of the parental or childcare leave, career breaks, domestic leave.
- Child-care and dependent care support: childcare vouchers, cash payments, childcare allowance.
- Adoptive leave.
- Workplace crèche facilities or close to the company: subsidised or free-of-charge.
- Summer camps.
- Employee assistance, health and well-being support.
- On-site referral and information service to provide consultation, information and assistance on childcare; parental seminars.



### Box 2: Flexible working patterns: definitions

- flexi-time, variable hours working arrangements: employees can vary their starting and finishing times each day at work
- individualised time accounts (often linked to self-rostering and staff organised shift patterns): employees can match their individual preferences for working time with business needs and colleagues' considerations
- annualised working hours: working time is organised on an annual rather than weekly or monthly basis, in view of taking into account seasonal variations
- time off in lieu: employees can take time off as a compensation for extra hours worked
- reduced working hours: part-time work, job sharing upon request (2 employees share the workload and duties of one full time job), the 35-hour week, the 6+6 working time model (Finland), etc.
- phased return to work after maternity: gradual re-insertion to work
- compressed working week: employees can work their total weekly working hours over a shorter number of days (i.e. 4-day week)
- term-time working: an employee has the possibility to take unpaid leave of absence during school holidays
- teleworking/e-working: employees have the possibility of working at home on a regular basis or occasionally, using the new technologies
- mobile working/telecommuting: flexi-place work, off-site
- job rotation or job replacement: an employee on leave of absence is temporarily replaced by an unemployed worker
- part-time retirement schemes: employees approaching retirement can take half of their pension and continue to work as part-timers.

### Work-Life Balance Initiatives in the Banking Sector

Owing to the fact that the banking sector is heavily feminised –with women consisting 60% of the workforce in the finance sector- the banks have been among the first to consider family-friendly or work-life balance initiatives, in view of retaining valuable female employees, after the birth of a child. Overtime, these policies were extended to cover other needs as well, apart from strictly speaking childcare and became available also to male employees. Some examples follow: [2]

**Lloyds TSB Bank** (UK) has introduced the “Work Options” scheme, covering some 2,000 employees (out of a total of 78,000). Under this scheme, employees can apply for a flexible work option, such as part-time work, job sharing, career break, term time work, and homeworking. Management will consider any option, for whatever reason, as long as it does not impact adversely upon the business. Men are also encouraged to take part in this scheme: so far, 20% of applications have been from men, and 23% from managers. The implementation of this programme resulted into reduced absenteeism, more motivated employees and higher productivity,

**HSBC Bank** (UK) has introduced the “Childcare Programme”, providing extensive and quality nursery facilities for bank employees since 1989. There are currently over 100 nursery partnerships, mostly joint ventures with either the public or private sector. The bank buys a guaranteed number of places in a nursery for a period of 2-3 years, which are allocated to employees. As a result of this scheme, the retention figure of maternity leavers had risen from 30% to 85% in 13 years. The management of the bank has calculated that the cost of replacing a maternity leaver amounts to a year’s salary. Other options offered to the bank’s 47 000 employees, of which 63% are women, include: part-time working, flexible working, job sharing, paid family leave and priority returners scheme. The bank also offers access to a confidential advice, research and referral helpline, “Lifeworks”, which assists employees to manage more effectively the often conflicting demands of work and home responsibilities.

**Co-operative Bank** (U.K.) has introduced a pilot project in its debt collections department to explore how teleworking could benefit both employers and employees, the latter

consisting of departmental staff and specialists in IT and human resources. In 1996, the bank union BIFU signed a model agreement on teleworking and homeworking, which resulted into (a) the retention of highly skilled staff, (b) more productive and efficient workers, and (c) considerably cost-savings owing to the fact of setting up home work stations, rather than buying expensive extra office space.

**Credito Predial Portugues** (Portugal), winner of the 2000 "Equality is Quality" award. *Portugal is one of the few countries where the right to reconcile work with family life is recognised by the Constitution.*

### **The state-of-the art in the 7 project countries [4]**

Provisions included in the banking collective agreements in the 7 countries studied in this project vary enormously, ranging from a high degree of flexible options offered to employees, to a minimum set of statutory entitlements.

**Italy:** Italian law and the banking sector collective agreement have amongst the most forward-looking statutory arrangements regarding the reconciliation of work and family:

- Maternity leave: 5 months fully paid
- Parental leave: 6 months or 10 months if both parents make use of the entitlement, until the child reaches the age of 8
- Family or personal leave: 1 year (unpaid)
- Paid leave for a short period of time
- Flexi-time, variation of weekly working hours, compressed working week, 6 hours X 6 days a week, following an agreement with the bank
- Working time reduction: part-time upon request
- Crèche facilities, workplace crèche or close to the bank
- Tax reduction (43 euro per month) for every child
- Re-insertion courses for returners from parental leave
- Teleworking, distant-learning: at an experimental stage
- Other: financial support for families with disabled children, for medical reasons, for unforeseen events, subsidies for summer vacations for children

**Spain:** the National Contract for the banking sector provides the following:

- Maternity leave: 16 weeks fully paid for the first child, and an additional 2 weeks for the second child and after. The father can also use 10 out of the 16 weeks, simultaneously with the mother. Employees can also work part-time and take up to 10 weeks of maternity leave at the same time, provided the company agrees. The same arrangements apply in case of an adoption
- Nursing /childcare leave: 1 hour daily, to be taken by either the mother or the father
- Leave of absence: 3 years maximum for childcare, one year for relative-care (unpaid)
- Working time reduction: parents are entitled to a working time reduction (1/3 or 1/2 of normal working hours) to look after a child (until the age of 6), a disabled person or relative (of first or second degree)
- Family or personal leave: 15 days for marriage, up to 15 days for emergencies, 4 days for personal reasons.

In addition to the National Contract, a lot of company agreements provide better terms and conditions to their employees, in view of helping them to achieve a work/life balance: for example financial assistance for children who attend compulsory education, sabbatical, etc. [for more details, visit the union web site: <http://www.comfia.net/acuerdo/index.htm#empresa>]

**Netherlands:** the Dutch banking sector employees enjoy a large range of flexible options, regarding their working patterns, their leave schemes, and their organisation of time. Moreover, the statutory working week in the banking sector is 36 hours.

- Maternity leave: 16 weeks fully paid
- Childcare leave: 6 months maximum, of which a period of unpaid leave
- Parental leave: 13 times the agreed average weekly working hours, to be taken until the child reaches the age of 8, either in a continuous period of 13 weeks, or in a

period of 26 weeks, whereby the employee has to work part-time (50% of the total hours). The bank compensates 50% of the parental leave, up to a maximum of four times the average working week

- Care leave: in the event of a seriously ill child, parent or partner, employees are entitled to a maximum of 13 weeks full time or 26 weeks part-time leave. The bank compensates a maximum of four weeks leave
- Sabbatical: employees can save days leave and use them for a period ranging between 8 weeks and 6 months
- Special leave: 3 days for marriage, 1-5 days for bereavement, 1-2 days for special wedding anniversary, and 1 day emergency leave
- Childcare arrangements vary per bank; childcare costs are covered by collective agreement
- Voluntary part-time work is possible, at the employees' request, which is binding for the employer
- Individualised working hours: employees can choose the structure of their working week, as long as it does not interfere with business interests (options available include half a day off once a week, a full day off once a fortnight, a 4-day week of 9 hours daily, or a variation of the above options)
- Employees can request a change in working hours up to three times a year
- Flexi-time: regular working hours can be worked between 7 a.m. and 9 p.m.
- Employees can work longer hours to save up a period of time for pre-pension, or for a higher pension allowance
- Teleworking: at an experimental stage
- Early retirement: employees may request to retire at 62 years of age, or after 65, if they wish.
- For further details on the Dutch banking sector, visit the website:  
[www.bondgenoten.fnv.nl](http://www.bondgenoten.fnv.nl)

**Cyprus:** like in Greece, the family friendly policies that are in place in the banking sector in Cyprus, are exclusively focused on the protection of the family and offer no flexible working time patterns to employees.

- maternity leave: 16 weeks fully paid
- breast-feeding leave: 1 hour working time reduction for breast-feeding mothers for a 6-month period
- parental leave: 3 months un-paid leave for either parent (in compliance with the European *acquis social*) until the child reaches the age of 7
- family/personal leave: 1 day in exceptional circumstances, 2 days for marriage
- summer camps for the children of the employees
- leisure activities for employees and their families (excursions, dancing, theatre plays, private holiday resort)
- entertainment centres for the exclusive use of banking employees.

**Greece:** see below, section 4.2.6.

[For a comparative overview of family-friendly policies, see also Diagram 1 in the Appendix].

### **Pre-requisites for successful family-friendly policies**

The success of the above policies largely depends on the degree of commitment of management to family-friendly policies and on how well the latter are integrated into the broader business and human resources strategy, and are being regularly monitored and assessed. The *pre-requisites* for successful family-friendly policies can, hence, be summed up as follows:

- (a) family-friendly policies need to reflect the reality of the workplace, ensure the efficient operation of the company/organisation, and, mostly, be economically feasible and mutually beneficial;
- (b) they need to be flexible, in order to take into account the changing needs of both the organisation and the workforce;
- (c) there should exist a clear process for applying for a flexible working arrangement or a leave, without a negative impact on the career of employees;
- (d) they can thrive only if there is a genuine change of mentality of senior managers and shop-floor managers, who should value their employees for their overall performance



- and contribution, rather than their working pattern or the number of hours spent at work (this suggests that the long hours culture needs to be abandoned). Moreover, managers should not perceive the introduction of similar policies as a threat to their power and their prerogative, but as a tool for enhanced performance;
- (e) family-friendly policies need to be based on a partnership approach shared by management, union representatives and employees alike, in view of meeting the needs and concerns of both sides;
  - (f) finally, the success of these policies also depends on their regular communication across the board, their monitoring and evaluation.

[1] These include, apart from childcare increasingly also elderly-care, owing to the rapid ageing of the population

[2] see Department of Trade and Industry, Work Life Balance – The business case

[3] Information was collected from the following website: [www.EmployersforWork-LifeBalance.org.uk/](http://www.EmployersforWork-LifeBalance.org.uk/)

[4] Portugal and Malta are not included in this section of the report, as the information requested from the banking unions was not received on time.

**Table 1: Main forms of flexibility in the banking sector of the project countries**

Country	Part-time	Flexi-time	Individualised working time	Time-off-in lieu	Career breaks
Cyprus	X	X	X	X	X
Greece	✓	X	X	X	X
Italy	✓	✓	✓	X	✓
Malta					
Netherlands	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spain	✓	X	X	X	*
Portugal	✓	X		X	

\* in individual banks, not at the national banking sector level

#### **4.2.5. Implications of Family-Friendly Policies**

Although the introduction of family friendly policies has obvious benefits for the reconciliation of work and family for employees that take advantage of the schemes offered, the implications for employees are not necessarily neutral or problem free.

The most common **disadvantages** of these policies are associated with poorer career prospects, decreased participation in vocational training programmes, reduced pension and social security rights and lower wages. It is mostly women who suffer the adverse impact of these policies, as they are often forced out of the labour market for shorter or longer periods, in order to look after their children, thus making an unstable labour force and jeopardising their career prospects. The fear of marginalisation deters a lot of women –especially those at the lower end of the hierarchy- from making use or requesting a flexible working arrangement, that would suit their family needs at some stage of their working lives (e.g. part-time work, leave of absence). Overall, work/life balance can be very difficult for low wage-workers with little or no bargaining power, whilst it is more widespread in prosperous and well organised workplaces.

On the company side, the most significant implication is the extra cost incurred to implement, manage and monitor the family friendly policies. Cost is the barrier most frequently cited by companies, deterring the introduction of family-friendly policies, especially childcare provision. [1] Other shortcomings include the difficulty to dismiss employees if their childcare leave has not been fully exhausted, and the unilateral legislative initiatives often imposed on companies, regardless of their concerns. Overall, managers are often hesitant to introduce greater flexibility at the workplace, fearing that it would conflict with the achievement of business goals.

[1] Other barriers mentioned are the lack of demand (especially in male dominated sectors) and the lack of space.

#### 4.2.6. Assessment of Family Friendly Policies

So far, the experience of introducing family friendly policies in a number of European countries and workplaces, has been definitely positive, and has proved beneficial for both the employers and the employees concerned. The overall impact, however, will continue to be limited, as long as these initiatives remain at the discretion of some forward looking firms and they are not integrated in the wider strategic business planning, but also in the core of the collective bargaining agenda. A partnership approach is the best way to address employers' concerns and strike a balance between business goals and individual needs.

One of the major obstacles to the widespread diffusion and the success of work/life initiatives is the prevalence of the rigid working time organisation paradigm at the workplace. The individual performance evaluation system, the career advancement system, the pay systems, are all founded on the full time- uninterrupted until retirement- work model. This outdated model is unable to accommodate any longer the huge diversity of the changing and conflicting needs of the contemporary European workforce, consisting of a constantly rising number of educated, skilled and aspiring women, but also of men with changing priorities.

Moreover, companies and organisations are often inclined to adjust the working time, flexible working patterns and work/life initiatives exclusively on business considerations, disregarding their employees' need for greater autonomy over their working time patterns. The key to this quest for autonomy is the individualised management of working time during the life-course of an individual.

The provision of family-friendly arrangements by employers is also seriously hampered by prevailing working practices and overall organisational culture. The most prominent obstacle seems to be the prevailing long-hours culture and the pressure exerted on employees to work way beyond the 8-hour norm. In a recent survey carried out in the U.K., 64% of managers interviewed said that long hours was part of their organisation culture. [1]

The decision on whether or not to offer family-friendly working arrangements to employees usually relies on the initiative of managers, as unions, in most countries and sectors, rarely put formal pressure on a company –reflected in a collective agreement- regarding the introduction of such policies.

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[1] See "Quality of Working Life" report by The Institute of Management and UMIST.

### 4.3. The (Non) Issue of Family-Friendly Policies in Greece

#### 4.3.1. The Institutional Framework

The current institutional framework in Greece affecting the reconciliation of family and work continues to place great emphasis on the protection of the family and offers very few options—despite some piecemeal and belated legislative improvements—regarding flexible working time patterns, which remain at the employers’ prerogative. Equal opportunities legislation is also quite forward-looking, yet unable to change the attitudes of employers.

**Diagram 1**  
**Various forms of paid and unpaid leave for parents**  
**Greece, 2002**

PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES	PRIVATE SECTOR EMPLOYEES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>maternity leave with full pay: 5 months in total, 2 before birth and 3 after birth (law 2683/99)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>maternity leave with full pay: 17 weeks, of which 8 weeks before birth and 9 weeks after birth (NGCLA 2000-2001)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>child-rearing leave: 2 hours reduction in daily working hours of a mother until the child is 2 years old, and 1 hour reduction until the child is 4; alternatively, the mother can make use of a 9-month long paid leave after the end of the maternity leave (law 2683/99)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“breast-feeding” leave: 1 hour reduction in daily working hours for mothers until the child is 2 years old, or 2 hours reduction until the child is one. The father can also make use of the leave, instead of the mother</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>unpaid parental leave: up to 24 months of leave for each parent, until the child reaches 6 years, either continuously or in discontinued periods (law 2683/99)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>unpaid parental leave: 3 ½ months for each parent, until their child reaches the age of 3 ½; the leave can be taken uninterruptedly or can be broken up into different periods</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>unpaid leave to look after a sick child or other dependent relative: 6 days a year for 1 child, 8 days a year for 2 children, 12 days a year for 3 children, etc.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>paid leave to monitor children’s progress at school: 4 days per year</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>one hour reduction of daily working hours for mothers with a disabled child</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>protection of pregnancy: employers cannot lay-off a woman during her pregnancy and 12 months after the birth of her child; similarly, employers cannot refuse recruitment to a woman because of her pregnancy</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>father’s leave: 2 days paid leave upon birth of a child</li> </ul>

#### 4.3.2. The Social Organisation of Time

The lack of compatibility between social/city times and working hours schedules is striking in Greece. The social organisation of times in Greece remains adjusted to the traditional ‘male breadwinner’ model and the extended family support network, neither of which are relevant any longer, as women are increasingly participating in paid work (whether formal or informal), [1] and the nuclear family has gradually replaced the formerly predominant form of the extended family.

Not only school hours (see 4.2.3.), but a wide range of public services (hospitals, social

security funds, posts and telecommunication offices, central and local administration services, tax authorities, etc.), banks, and other social facilities operate exclusively in the mornings, thus denying access (at least legitimate) to the majority of employees, who have to work rigid and often long hours daily. [2] Some fragmentary initiatives to address this flagrant dissonance between working schedules and social or urban times (e.g. the establishment of "Citizens' Advice Bureaux" with extended operation hours, the possibility to order certain certificates by telephone, the extension of reception hours in a small number of crèches in the afternoon, etc.) cannot change the overall grim picture.

[1] There are over 500,000 women estimated to be working in temporary jobs, in family-run business and in undeclared employment (Soumeli, 2002).

[2] Greece, has the second longest duration of the working week in the E.U., after the U.K. (on average 41 hours a week, i.e. 2 hours above the E.U. average), owing to the widespread recourse to overtime work and the low incidence (3.8% of total employment) of part-time work. [EUROSTAT, L.F.S., 2000 – see Annex]

#### 4.3.3. Childcare and Elderly-Care Facilities: the Social Infrastructure and the Role of the Family

The provision of quality and affordable childcare in Greece has substantially improved over the past years, and is expected to further expand, largely thanks to funding from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Community Support Frameworks. It remains, however, unable to meet increasing demand from a steadily growing female workforce.

There exist several types of public, subsidised or private childcare facilities. [see Diagram 2] State-funded nurseries have gradually come under the competence of the local governments and entail a monthly charge, depending on the parents' income. Subsidised childcare is available for only a small proportion of employees, whilst workplace nurseries are virtually non-existent, despite the obligation of companies with over 300 employees to set up crèche facilities for their staff. [1] Thus, the majority of employees have recourse either to costly private care facilities (nurseries, crèches, and, increasingly, home-helpers or nannies), or to informal networks.

**Diagram 2**  
**Childcare infrastructure (0-6 years)**  
**Greece, 2002**

	<b>Structures</b>	<b>Number of children covered</b>
Kindergarten, crèches (local government)	1386	57 820
Kindergarten, crèches, Creative Activity Centres for Children	184	6700
C.A.C. for Disabled Children	3	92
Workers' Welfare Foundation	22	1266
Church of Greece +	16	635
Private crèches & nurseries	1450 ^	68 875
<b>Total</b>	<b>3061</b>	<b>135 388</b>

+ excluding the provinces of Crete and Peloponnese, that do not belong to the Church of Greece

^ according to a 2001 survey carried out by the Panhellenic Association of Private Nursery Schools Owners.

#### **Source: Ministry of Employment & Social Security, National Action Plan for Employment, 2002**

Despite the continuous improvement in childcare facilities, it is estimated that over 170 000 children of working women -especially under the age of 3- are not covered by the existing crèches and nursery schools (Symeonidou et al., 2001). Working mothers to a large degree still have recourse to family networks, mostly grandparents, to meet their childcare needs. [see Diagram 3].

**Diagram 3**  
**Childcare options when both partners are working**  
**Greece, 1998**

<b>Children age</b>	<b>0-3</b>	<b>3-5</b>	<b>6-15</b>
state nursery schools	1.0%	14.8%	0.6%
private nursery schools	8.2%	24.9%	1.3%

nanny at home	13.8%	3.2%	3.0%
Grandparents	46.4%	28.6%	24.1%
at home with mother	21.4%	18.5%	20.1%
at home with father	2.6%	3.2%	3.2%
at home alone	-	1.1%	34.6%
Other	6.5%	5.8%	13.0%

Source: Symeonidou, Mitsopoulos & Vezyrgianni, 2001

The incompatibility between school hours and normal working hours [2] has deterred a large number of women from entering the labour market or returning to work when their children reach schooling age (6 for primary school, and 4 for infant school). Moreover, a significant proportion of schools in the large urban areas still operate on a double shift, owing to lack of space, with pupils alternating morning and afternoon shifts every week. Recently, the situation has improved, as a growing number of state primary schools and infant schools have introduced extended operation hours (7-8 a.m. and 1.30 to 4 p.m.).

**Diagram 4**  
**After-school care facilities**  
**Greece, 2002**

	<b>Existing</b>	<b>To operate shortly</b>
Extended timetable of state infant schools (4-6 years)	1331	125
Extended timetable of state primary schools	2522	500
All-day primary schools	28	100

**Source: Ministry of Education**

Elderly-care facilities still lag behind in Greece, despite the rapid ageing of the population, the growing participation of women in employment, and the diminishing importance of family networks, that have traditionally acted as a substitute to inadequate social welfare institutions. At present, only 0.5% of the elderly population is covered by some sort of elderly-care unit, as opposed to 2% in Italy, 2.8% in Spain, 5% in Portugal, and 7.2 % in Finland (see KETHI, 2001).

**Diagram 5**  
**Elderly-care infrastructure**  
**Greece, 2002**

	<b>Existing structures</b>	<b>New structures</b>
Social Care Units («Help at Home»)	<b>184</b>	<b>381</b>
Day-care Centres for the Elderly	-	<b>79</b>
Open-care Centres for the Elderly *	<b>530</b>	-

**\* for older people able to look after themselves**

**Source: Ministry of Health & Welfare**

Overall, the level of the childcare and elderly care infrastructure still acts as a barrier, though to a lesser degree than in the past, to women's participation in paid employment, but also to their career advancement. However, other factors play an equally important role: the social security system, which does not take into account the changing patterns of labour force participation over the course of a lifetime, and the rigid working patterns that offer very few options to employees, also prevent women from enjoying equal opportunities at work. Combining work and family responsibilities under these circumstances is hard to achieve; as a

result, women are forced out of the labour market or are trapped into unrewarding and less demanding jobs. At best, they are faced with strenuous situations, feelings of guilt and frustration for not being committed mothers, partners and /or employees. The persistence of the 'male bread-winner' model and of traditional roles within the family, perpetuate the subordinate position of women in the society.

**[1]** This legislative provision is rarely applied, owing to resistance on behalf of employers, who request financial incentives from the state in order to set up a crèche.

**[2]** Primary schools finish between 12.30 and 13.30, whilst kindergartens normally operate only between 9-12. Public sector employees usually work between 07.00 or 07.30 and 14.30 or 15.00 hours. Private sector employees usually work between 08.00 and 16.00 hours, but many have irregular or prolonged working time schedules.

#### 4.3.4 Traditional Attitudes Towards Role Distribution Within the Family and at Work

Traditional attitudes in Greece, especially regarding gender roles, seem to resist sweeping changes in legislation, the economy, and the family structure. Recent empirical evidence suggests that the division of household tasks between the partners largely reproduces the long-standing division of roles between the sexes (see Symeonidou et al., 2001):

- men still feel uneasy about sharing housework: the weak participation of men in family and household responsibilities is reflected in the very few hours they spend on housework, less than 9 hours a week, as opposed to 34 hours a week spent by women;
- women spend double time than men on childcare, 15 and 8 hours a week respectively;
- women spend only 20 hours a week on paid work, as opposed to men, who spend 50 hours a week; similarly, women *with children*, devote much less time to work than men with a similar family situation: on average, 13-14 hours and 39 hours a week respectively;
- women often have to substitute the weak welfare structures in supporting dependent family members;
- women are overburdened with their multiple roles and receive little help from their male partners, even when the latter have a positive attitude (in theory at least) towards the division of household tasks.

Traditional attitudes also prevail outside the household, at the workplace and in society at large, thus perpetuating gender-based discrimination and creating a restrictive socio-economic context for the reconciliation of work and family life.

#### 4.3.5 Business Culture, Organisation of Work and Working Time: the Case of the Banking Sector

In Greece, there is a striking lack of demand or interest on behalf of unions, but also of employees, for family-friendly policies. This is true not only for male-dominated sectors, as one would expect, but for all sectors, banking included. As no empirical findings exist, one can speculate that the reasons for this could be:

- (a) the survival of informal support networks, that cover childcare needs to a large extent still today (see above)
- (b) the perceived hesitance of employers to grant greater flexibility over working hours, or to incur the cost of childcare provision, leaves of absence, etc.
- (c) the under-representation of women in union structures, at all levels of negotiation (confederal, industry-wide, company level), that could put forward similar demands: in banking, the percentage of women participating in the General Council of OTOE is only 9% (7 women out of 75 members in total), whilst at the top leadership (Executive Secretariat) there is only one women in 15 members **[1]**
- (d) the significantly low share of women in the higher ranks of the hierarchy: in banking, only 3-9% of the directors' or sub-directors' posts are covered by women
- (e) the ignorance of prevailing family-friendly policies in other European countries, due to a lack of information and benchmarking techniques

- (f) the fear of losing income if taking a prolonged leave of absence or working reduced hours, or jeopardising one's career prospects if not always available to work long hours
- (g) the extended use of overtime work in the private sector and the frequent violation of regular working hours allows little room for work/life balance requests
- (h) a lack of a determination to redistribute working time between "insiders" and "outsiders", or to trade off extra time for less money. This is especially true for women who are paid lower salaries than men.

On the employers' side, there exist several **barriers** to the introduction and wider diffusion of work/life balance initiatives:

1. cost considerations, that are exacerbated by the small size of the vast majority of business
2. business culture and managers' attitudes towards initiatives that come into sharp contrast with the traditional pattern of organising work: middle-managers fear losing control over the workforce if a flexible approach is adopted in addressing work-family issues
3. the Taylorist system of work organisation (dedicated skills)
4. the absence of retention policies for highly qualified female employees, which is also linked to the fact that there is a lack of explicit demand for greater work/life balance.

In banking, in particular, one could also add the small average size of outlets and the fact that female employees –who represent 38% of the total- are mostly concentrated at the lower levels of the hierarchy. The establishment of sectoral and enterprise equal opportunities committees during the 1990s, in view of improving women's position in banking and eliminating discriminations, does not seem to have given a significant boost to work/family balance issues.

As a result, working time flexibility in Greece (which in any case is restricted) has not been used, so far, as a tool to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life, but rather as a way to reduce labour costs (cf. part-time work, annualisation of working hours, etc.).

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**[1]** Women's representation is slightly better at the level of primary unions, where about 15-17% of women are in leadership positions.

#### 4.3.6 Best Practices Regarding Work/Life Balance in the Greek Banking Sector

The union federation of banking employees is considered as one of the most powerful and influential unions in the Greek collective bargaining system. As a result, the banking sector in Greece, besides higher than average wages, provides a wide spectrum of "fringe benefits" to its employees, including: good quality medical care, low interest rates for housing loans, employee assistance, training opportunities, cultural and sports activities, etc.

In the area of family-friendly policies, provisions focus mainly on the protection of motherhood, on childcare and on reduced working hours for mothers of young children [see Box 3 ]. These provisions are the outcome of concerted efforts of the union movement (especially during the period 1981-1994) to improve the individual employment rights, enhance the protection of motherhood, enshrine the right of fatherhood, and facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life. There are no flexible working arrangements in place, however, such as flexi-time, time-off-in lieu, individualised working time accounts, voluntary reduced hours, possibility to work at home occasionally, career breaks, etc., that would facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life, when the leave schemes are over.

Unions are against the flexibility of working hours (including part-time) and thus are

**Box 3**  
**Regulations aiming at a work/life balance**  
**Greek banking sector**



- childbirth assistance: 1084 euro
- maternity leave: 18 weeks
- family allowance
- breast-feeding and childcare leave: reduced working hours for women until their child reaches 4 years of age (2 hours a day until the child is 2, and 1 hour a day when the child is between 2-4); alternatively, childcare leave can also be taken by fathers
- parental leave for both parents: up to 24 months of unpaid leave of absence, until the child reaches school age, to be taken by either parents. Medical care is not suspended, during the period of absence, as long as the employee is not covered by the spouse
- leave to monitor children's school progress: 6 days (paid)
- subsidised childcare facilities: 160 euro monthly allowance to cover for kindergarten or nursery school expenses, or a guaranteed free place at the Banks' own nursery school
- summer camps for the children of employees: 574 euro for each child or free access to camp sites owned by banks
- early- retirement schemes for mothers of children under-age (after 17 years of service)
- special leave: for marriage, bereavement, emergency, etc.

hesitant to request and negotiate the introduction of flexible practices, fearing that this would lead to flexibility being imposed on the employers' terms and not as a mutually beneficial arrangement, thus adversely affecting female employees, deteriorating rather than improving their position and increasing job insecurity.

Practices encountered in the banking sector, need to be placed into the wider business context prevailing in Greece. Most large companies and organisations go beyond the statutory entitlements and provide some kind of additional family support schemes (e.g. free private insurance policies, medical care, counselling, childcare and elderly-care, children's education assistance, professional orientation, etc.), but very few have a good record of promoting work-life issues in a consistent manner. [1][1] Thus, provisions for employees working in the banking sector in Greece can be considered as exceptional and well above average, though they may seem inadequate compared to practices prevailing in other countries.

Overall, the effective reconciliation of work and family life in Greece, is hindered by several factors, that combine to create an environment not conducive to a work/life balance. These factors include:

- (a) certain legislative provisions, such as the fact that parental leave is unpaid and deprived of social security cover, but also by the restrictive framework on working time flexibility and changing patterns of participation in the labour market;
- (b) the structure of the business sector, with an overwhelming majority of micro-businesses, that are reluctant or unable to provide genuine flexible options to their workforce;
- (c) the persistence of an anachronistic system of work organisation;
- (d) the prevalence of traditional attitudes towards role distribution, especially within the family;
- (e) the lack of mainstreaming of work/life issues, both in collective bargaining, as well as in business culture and in society at large;
- (f) low wages, combined with high consumer aspirations, that trap employees (especially male) into overtime work, a second or even a third job, in order to make ends meet, thus cancelling out the potential benefits of any work/life policies.

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[1][1] The only company known to offer the possibility to spouses to co-ordinate their working schedules between

|| them is the large dairy products firm FAGE S.A. See Tsoumani, 2002.



Companies and organisations eager to improve work/life balance at the workplace and thus reap all the benefits of a satisfied, committed and more efficient workforce, need to concentrate their efforts on two main directions: (a) improving and enriching existing family-friendly policies, and (b) proceeding to more drastic changes in work organisation and business culture, that would favour the creation of a genuine, mutually beneficial flexible working environment.

Business initiatives need, however, to be supported and stimulated by government policies that will promote “positive” flexibility, mitigate the adverse implications of flexibility for workers with limited bargaining power, provide a supportive institutional framework (regarding leave schemes and protected exits from the labour market, in particular), and ensure a greater time sovereignty for individuals. The state cannot opt out of its responsibilities towards the citizens and relegate the burden of finding solutions to complicated problems to companies and their workforce alone.

#### **Improving family-friendly policies**

- improvement of the social infrastructure (childcare, elderly-care) and drastic re-organisation of social times (time schedules of schools, public services, health services, shops, etc.)
- reform of the social security system in view of removing the existing disincentives for employees to switch between different employment systems during the course of their working life (from part-time to full time and vice-versa, sabbaticals, career breaks, etc.)
- encourage fathers to make use of parental leave, through increased wage compensation, longer duration and exclusive use by the father (individualisation of parental rights). [1] Larger uptake of parental leave by fathers also requires the break-down of cultural barriers that identify the use of the entitlement as a lack of commitment to the company or the organisation
- improved leave schemes for both parents
- greater understanding of the double burden of female employees, reflected in more flexible working options, that take account of both business and employees’ needs (“two-way” flexibility). To this end, the introduction of individualised working time accounts (where possible) would greatly facilitate the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities
- companies and organisations need to integrate family-friendly policies into their wider management plans and view them as a long-term investment in human resources
- wider diffusion of services provided by the companies to their employees, such as childcare, laundry, etc.
- dissemination of good practices, exchange of experience and communication of policy developments.

#### **Drastic changes in work organisation**

- change of attitudes of managers and colleagues towards work/life balance issues and a long-term approach to this issue; employees should be valued for their performance and not their working pattern
- the long-hours culture, especially powerful in the banking sector, needs to be reconsidered, as it directly stands on the way of implementing family-friendly policies. Managers should become aware that their employees have also other considerations outside work
- workplace requirements are usually structured in such a way as to ignore life outside work, whilst maternity and family responsibilities are seen as a burden by management. As a result, work is “colonising” the private lives of employees. Greater control over working time by the employees would help them accommodate conflicting requirements, without compromising either their work or their family commitments
- the advancement of women in the professional hierarchy is likely to give a considerable impetus to family friendly policies at the workplace. At present, at the EU level, only 19% of employees have a woman as head of their department, the proportion being significantly lower in the Southern European countries [2]
- the upgrading of women’s skills through training will improve their occupational mobility and increase their opportunities to move up the hierarchy. Yet, as promotion also usually entails longer working hours, women might be tempted to turn down progression opportunities, unless the hours and organisation of work are reconsidered
- the diffusion of new technologies in banking presents new threats for women (job losses,

routine tasks, precarious employment, wage discrimination, increased supervision and control, health hazards, etc.), but it also opens up new possibilities (teleworking, teleconferences) that could improve work/life balance.

In addition to company and government initiatives, *trade unions* are called upon to play a crucial role in promoting greater work/life balance, in particular in a context of a growing diversification of workers' interests. Workplace unions need to become more involved and pursue work/life policies more intensively, and endorse them through formal agreements. So far, in most cases, union initiatives have been focussing on the reduction of working time with no loss in pay, rather than on greater flexibility over working hours. As bargaining around time is gradually replacing bargaining around pay issues, time being in itself a precious commodity, priority should also be given on the issues of greater working time flexibility (voluntary reduction of the working week, individualised time accounts, policies of 'chosen' time, organisation of total working hours over the course of the life cycle, etc.), as well as on the organisation and re-assessment of social times (improved synchronisation of working and non-working time schedules).

However, as women's time is –owing to their double workload- more complex than men's time, and given the diverging preferences of men and women over their working patterns, [3] greater female participation in union structures is essential in mainstreaming work/family life issues in the collective bargaining agenda. [4] Yet, the difficulty to attract more women into union membership, let alone into leadership positions, as well as the deep-seated cautiousness of female workers towards male-dominated union structures, perpetuate the vicious circle of low female participation and weak union representation of women's issues. [5]

The ambitious goal set at the Lisbon EU summit to increase the female activity rate from 53% today to 60% by the year 2010, can only be attained if women are offered the possibility to enter and remain in the labour market without major trade-offs with their other commitments and the private sphere of life, and if men are encouraged to play their multiple roles, without jeopardising their career prospects and their work profile.

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[1] Legislation stipulating the exclusive use of part of the parental leave by fathers is already in place in Sweden, Denmark and Italy.

[2] According to a recent report published by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, the percentage of employees with a female "boss" is 20% in the Netherlands, 18% in Portugal, 17% in Italy, 13% in Spain, and only 8% in Greece.

[3] A recent report found that men prefer flexi-time, annualised working hours, and a compressed working week, while women opt for evenly reduced working hours, and individualised time accounts (see Pillinger, 2002). Other studies have highlighted the fact that men would prefer to work fewer hours (ideally 37 hours a week), whilst a significant number of women part-timers would prefer to work longer hours (see Fagan, 2001, Bielenski et al., to be published, Lilja and Hamalainen, 2001).

[4] Union density is higher in banking than in other sectors, yet women are still significantly under-represented.

[5] According to UNI-Europa, women's participation in the different branches of the organisation is below 30%.

#### 4.5. Concluding Remarks

The future outlook regarding the promotion of a work/life balance in the banking sector across Europe does not allow for an optimistic attitude, in view of new trends developing.

A) The rapid expansion of mergers and acquisitions, outsourcing, home-banking, and of new technologies threaten the position of women more drastically as compared to men, since the former are more likely to be employed in low-skill, routine tasks that are being outsourced by banks. [1]

B) The deregulation and individualisation of employment contracts undermines the capacity of the workforce to organise collectively and forces an increasing number of workers outside the scope of collective labour agreements. Temporary workers are increasingly replacing employees with a stable employment relationship with their employer, at the lower end of the hierarchy.

C) The precariousness of employment: increasingly, bank employees all over Europe are faced with the dilemma of accepting a derogation of their terms and conditions (i.e. involuntary overtime and shift work, interrupted working schedule, etc.), or losing their job.

D) Growing competition from a newly emerged phenomenon in the banking sector, the “non-banks”, that rely on low-qualified personnel with communication and marketing skills (mostly working in the call-centres), rather than traditional banking skills. This trend is still marginal in continental Europe, but is rapidly expanding in the U.K. [2] and is expected to bring about profound changes in the structure of the banking system within the following years. Competition is also growing from retail shops, super-markets, insurance companies, car dealers, etc. providing financial services at low cost. The profile of employees working in this new type of banks –that often operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week- is highly flexible (part-timers, temporary agency workers, casual workers, etc.) and with limited career prospects, thus hardly lending themselves to a long-term investment on behalf of management in work/life balance initiatives encountered in traditional “high street” banks. [3]

The social dialogue process in the European banking sector - faced with serious challenges ahead- is seeking the answers to increasingly complex situations, in a context of deregulation, growing uncertainty about the future of employment, and individualisation of bargaining procedures. Regarding the crucial issue of achieving a work/life balance, the possibility to choose between hours and patterns of work that fit in with their other commitments is gaining great importance for increasing segments of the workforce. A drastically new approach, thus, needs to be taken by unions, employers and governments alike to the need of a heterogeneous workforce for greater control over the use and organisation of time (working as well as non-working), as well as for the accommodation of conflicting interests between the private and the public spheres.

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[1] According to research findings presented at the 5th Panhellenic Assembly of Women, October 2000.

[2] “Non-banks” represent 10% of the total number of banks in the U.K.

[3] According to the findings of a survey carried out in the U.K. on call centre female workers, the majority complained about lack of understanding and respect for their personal needs, involuntary overtime work at short notice, and unilateral flexibility being imposed upon them by management. See Henderson, 2000.