

Transitions

INTERVIEW STUDY CONSOLIDATED REPORT

for the EU Framework 5 study
'Gender, Parenthood and the
Changing European
Workplace'

Research Report #8

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Interview Study Consolidated Report

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Transitions is a research project funded within the Key Action Improving the Socio-economic Knowledge Base, of the Fifth Framework Programme of the European Union.

Transitions is a qualitative cross-national research project which aims to examine how young European adults negotiate motherhood and fatherhood and work-family boundaries in the context of labour market and workplace change, different national welfare state regimes and family and employer supports. The project is examining individual and household strategies and their consequences for well-being at the individual, family and organisational levels. This is studied in the context of parallel organisational contexts and macro levels of public support in the 8 participating countries: France, Portugal, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, the UK, Bulgaria and Slovenia.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report covers the interview phase of the *Transitions* study. This was the third phase of the project, which followed the literature review and context mapping phase, and the organisational case studies. This third phase consisted of a series of biographical interviews conducted with parents who were employees of public sector and private sector organisations in seven countries. A social services department was studied in the UK, Norway, Sweden, Portugal and Bulgaria. Case studies in the private sector were studied in financial services in most cases and include the UK, Norway, The Netherlands, Portugal, Bulgaria and Slovenia (see das Dores Guerreiro et al 2004).

A primary objective of the interview study was to gain an understanding of motherhood and fatherhood from a gendered perspective. This involved examining the *transition to parenthood* of both men and women. We approached this by adopting a life course perspective combined with a biographical approach. The latter involves eliciting retrospective accounts from interviewees of the life course decision to have a child and the period following the child's birth (parents with children under twelve years were included).

In this report we have tried to address the research issues identified in the project proposal for this phase of the study.

The objectives of the Interview Study were:

- To further the understanding of motherhood and fatherhood from a gendered life course perspective together with an examination of the transition to parenthood (the latter to be examined retrospectively and for those on parental leave concurrently)
- To examine the gendered experiences of combining waged work and children, and parents' work-family strategies, for example the extent to which employees make the boundaries between work and family life permeable or keep the two spheres separate
- To identify the strategies parents adopt and the resources they draw upon (family, friends, workplace and public policy, especially parental leave) in the context of different organisational contexts and practices, and in relation to employee contractual status (including temporary workers) and different national welfare regimes
- To examine the relationship between different work-family strategies and well-being
- To explore in gendered terms parents' current perspectives with their professed expectations on combining parenthood and waged work

Transitions is an unusual project in that it brings a mixed methods approach that highlights qualitative methods to the study of parents' lives lived in seven different European countries. In this report we have created an analytic framework in which the many layers of context in which interviewees' lives are embedded are made manifest.

Methodology and selection of cases

There are two main aspects to the rationale for our design and methodology. The first aspect is the logic of case study design: to the overall cross-national, comparative design we have applied a *case study logic*. We justify in particular the selection of cases – of countries, organisations and parents – as the study proceeded, both in the fieldwork phase but also in the analysis of the material and the writing of the report. Through this approach we hope that different layers of context are made explicit at every step of the study. We also set out how the overall design addresses issues of representativeness in comparative research. The second aspect of the overall methodology of this phase is the application of a life course perspective to a biographical interview approach. This is discussed at length in Chapter 3, including the creation of life lines for each interviewee. The latter was particularly helpful when examining the interviewees' lives across gender, social class and national context.

Most of the mothers and fathers we interviewed belong to the birth cohorts born between 1965 and 1975 (Chapters 2 and 3). Thus they are the children of the 'baby boomers' born just after the end of World War II, and in most countries for this reason they form a rather large cohort, compared with later birth cohorts. The interviewees were born into societies very different from the ones in which they live their adult lives and their parents lived theirs.

The transition to parenthood in different European regions

The conditions under which the transition to parenthood took place vary. The factors brought to bear in the analysis include the national economic and political contexts, the welfare regimes of the countries concerned, the individual's life course phase, the specific formal and informal resources available to individuals namely education, employment, family relationships and workplace conditions. In some national contexts some conditions are more important than others, for instance in Bulgaria and Portugal the wider family is an important resource for new parents. In Northern Europe the wider family is reported to be less significant, a fact we attribute to a discourse of independence and autonomy in these countries and the existence of a generous welfare state, particularly in the Scandinavian countries.

In this report we analyse the transition to parenthood in the three different regions of Europe: Northern Europe, Southern Europe and South Eastern Europe. We focus on the shape of the life course – its linearity and lack of linearity and discuss this in relation to patterns of transitions and phases in the life course. We also analyse the timing of motherhood and fatherhood in the life course across these contexts, and how the timing of the transition varies between men and women from different social classes across the countries. The timing of parenthood is discussed with reference to other life course phases and transitions such as education, entry into employment and partnering.

We also note considerable class differences across countries in the timing of the transition to parenthood. The lower the level of education the earlier in life the transition is likely to happen. For most well-educated interviewees the transition happened after the completion of education, entry into the labour market and gaining a foothold in the housing market. Young parents from Eastern Europe for instance, even the fairly well-off, have a harder time getting into the housing market than in many other countries. In some cases they have to live with parents or in-laws for a period of time as housing is scarce in some areas and not affordable even for young parents with permanent job contracts. In the UK, especially in London where the social

services study was done, ethnicity and migration are important factors that shape parents' experiences.

The decision to become a parent is related to the type of life parents experience at this transition point. Where for many it appears that the transition happened at a time when it was 'right', when everything was in place for parenthood to happen without there having been a long period of planning ahead, for others the decision was the result of careful planning. The latter is likely to be associated with affluent young families where having children also means changing their life style in important ways. The report emphasises how the transition to parenthood, as indeed other life course transitions, must be analysed and understood in the different layers of context in which individual lives are embedded.

The experience of being a working parent in the present

We selected countries from the three regions of Europe, to compare how particular mothers and fathers experience parenthood. In a discussion of the experiences of being a working mother, we focus on Portugal, Sweden, Bulgaria, and the UK. Here, we selected cases of women with lower education and jobs in the lower echelons of the job hierarchy of their public sector workplaces. The justification is that a focus on the less well-off highlights aspects of context that make parenthood feasible for the majority of parents of each country, not only their more advantaged members. Such parents often draw upon informal sources of support, whereas the better-off can afford to pay their way. An analysis of the experiences of those employed in low-status public sector jobs also provides a baseline for assessing how societies cater for the well-being of those providing important public services.

Our analysis demonstrates how new parents' contentment, or lack of contentment, depends not only upon the resources available to them, but also on the resources available to those with whom they compare themselves. We show how mothers from Portugal and Bulgaria emerge as relatively content compared with their more affluent peers in Sweden and the UK. We also compare the contributions of advantaged father, men who in Northern European societies are expected to pull their weight in childcare and the home. These men (from three contrasting countries - Norway, The Netherlands and Slovenia) are at the other end of the socio-economic spectrum, working in higher status jobs in the private sector. The Slovenian father discussed in-depth emerges as doing the least childcare and is the most content. In a society in which material expectations have been relatively low with the sharp transition from a communist to a market economy, having a job, a car, a wife, children and a house gave this father a feeling of considerable achievement - they were enough. In contrast to the Norwegian father (and the Dutch father both also discussed), gender equality had yet to touch the Slovenian father, while his children's grandparents provided the major childcare support and let him off the hook.

How families adapt to combining work and family is important for their feelings of well-being (see Cernigoj Sadar & Kersnik, forthcoming). However, the options young parents have to choose from where strategies are concerned, are related to the different layers of context within which they live their lives.

Supports and constraints for new parents

We approach the topic of support and constraints by exploring the range of formal and informal resources available to parents and how these intersect. The focus is on highlighting the various aspects of national contexts. Hence the cases in the chapter dealing with this are the particular countries, and analysis centres on constructing typologies. The most significant support for mothers and fathers are childcare support and working hours. The chapter focuses on childcare as a private, a family, or a public concern, and working hours as full-time or part-time. Across Europe most fathers work full-time, so that part-time work, where it exists, is largely perceived as an option for mothers, often with negative implications for women's occupational careers if they do take up part-time working. There is some evidence from our interviews, which echoes conclusions from other studies, that part-time employees feel their commitment to work is questioned. Part-time work can therefore be seen simultaneously as a resource for the families but a career risk for women employees.

In the Netherlands, which has the highest percentage of women in part-time work, the idea of childcare as a public concern is quite foreign. In Sweden the resource of working part-time work is augmented by high quality, affordable public childcare provided in children's own communities, whereas in Portugal both mothers and fathers work full-time and there is little in the way of access to formal and affordable childcare. Support from the wider family becomes crucial for young families in this situation.

Parenthood plays out differently in different contexts. But whatever the context, the gender differences remain.

Implications for policy

By way of conclusion we suggest a few points that, on the basis of our research, are important for policies.

- The transition to parenthood and experiences of and strategies for managing paid work and family need to be analysed and understood in the different layers of context in which individual lives are embedded.
- A focus on multiple layers of context also points to the need for a multi-layered approach to policy-making. Changes in legislation alone are of limited value without shifts in organisational values and practices, family and community practices.
- A frequently recurring theme across the countries is the ways in which gender shapes parenthood and makes motherhood different from fatherhood both in everyday family life and in workplaces. The transition to parenthood appears to be a critical 'tipping point' on the road to gender equality.
- There is a dilemma that policies that meet parents' currently articulated needs – for example part-time work for mothers, also reproduce gender inequalities (unless there is change in workplace values and practices especially the gendered construction of commitment).
- Policies that address gender issues, such as the father's quota in parental leave, may create tensions in families. Such couple tensions may be necessary for progress to occur. On the other hand, help from extended family may act as a solution to such conflicts but absolve fathers from making more significant contributions, thus perpetuating gendered family practices.

- Expectations for managing work-family life may be more easily met in less affluent societies especially where gender equality ideas are not yet widely established. Low expectations may more easily generate well-being, in contrast to the higher expectations of parents living in societies with higher standards of gender equality and greater affluence. But again, raising expectations and unsettling people may be necessary for change.
- Our study points to the importance of identifying the most vulnerable parents. Policies that would help such parents include affordable, good quality housing in big cities for key workers in social care and health services. Locally available, high quality, affordable childcare, together with fully paid parental leave for similar amounts of time across Europe, and the right of parents to be supported when their children are ill are also obvious candidates. Such policies are however ineffective if they are not fully accepted by management and integrated into workplace practices.

It is possible that there has been too much of a focus in research and the public discourse on policy with a consequent neglect of such factors as intergenerational support, precisely because it is not possible to legislate for it. However, alternative strategies are also needed, for example, targeting resources at those with few kin or those located far from their own families, or finding innovative strategies of support.



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1.

Introduction

This report covers the interview phase of the *Transitions* study and draws upon the national reports written by the national teams. It represents a way of linking the micro level of the individual working parent's life to the wider structural and historical context, in particular the macro level of the national context but also the meso level of organisations, kinship networks and local services. The report therefore addresses other phases of the project, in particular the first context mapping phase of the study that sought to outline the demographic characteristics of the countries in which parents live. The third phase of the project – the interview study – followed the organisational case studies conducted in the second phase. This third phase consisted of a series of biographical interviews conducted with parents who were employees of public sector and private sector organisations in seven countries. A social services department was studied in the UK, Norway, Sweden, Portugal and Bulgaria. Case studies in the private sector were studied in financial services in most cases and include the UK, Norway, The Netherlands, Portugal, Bulgaria and Slovenia (see das Dores Guerreiro et al 2004).

A primary objective of the interview study was to gain an understanding of motherhood and fatherhood from a gendered perspective. This involved examining the *transition to parenthood* of both men and women (Chapter 4). We approached this by adopting a life course perspective combined with a biographical approach. The latter involves eliciting retrospective accounts from interviewees of the life course decision to have a child and the period following the child's birth (parents with children under twelve years were included). Interviews with selected interviewees were carried out following a biographical approach. In the methods chapter (Chapter 3) a more detailed account is given of the design and logic of the study.

Another main aim of this phase of the study was to explore the gendered experiences of being a mother and father in the course of their everyday working lives: how parents with young children combine waged work and family in the present, and the current strategies they adopt in order to deal with daily demands (Chapter 5). Questions addressed include: how parents cope with demands of work and family life and the impact these have upon them in terms of feelings and sense of well-being.¹

Closely connected to the former are questions relating to the resources parents draw upon in different national contexts that make working parenthood possible and run smoothly (Chapter 6). Resources receiving particular attention include parental leave schemes, workplace and public policies, access to affordable childcare, support from the wider family and from friends and neighbours in the community in which parents live. All these are discussed with reference to the type of welfare regime that characterises the national context. Given the parameters set by the available resources, the following questions may be posed. Do mothers and fathers face different challenges in combining work and family in the different contexts of their

1. For a further discussion about well-being issues in the project, see the separate report (Cernigoj et al. 2006).

lives? Which strategies do parents adopt? Are the approaches that parents adopt gendered?

These and other questions are considered in the report. Chapter 2 gives a broad overview of some of the relevant historical background for the seven countries in which the organisational case studies and interviews were conducted. This discussion is based on a life course approach in which we draw out the characteristics of the societies into which individual parents were born and where they live their lives. In describing the broader structural and historical context, we are better able to understand parents' trajectories as they develop over time. The countries are located in three different regions in Europe which have developed historically along very different lines: Northern Europe (Norway, Sweden, UK and The Netherlands), Southern Europe (Portugal) and Eastern Europe (Bulgaria and Slovenia). Major change has taken place in these countries in the years between the end of World War II and the Fall of the Iron Curtain: 1945-1990 (approximately). In Northern Europe this period was characterised by a social democratic ideology and a mixed market-state economy, whereas in Eastern Europe (Bulgaria and Slovenia) a communist/socialist ideology prevailed and a market economy only began to be established in the 1990s. In Southern Europe (represented here by Portugal) dictatorship prevailed until 1974, which affected the country's process of modernisation – before 1974 the population was poor and not well educated, since 1974 there has been rapid modernisation and levels of education and affluence have risen fast. In the forthcoming analysis of the material we have employed these different historical contexts as a basis for selecting cases of parents – in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

2.

Cross-national societies: historical and current contexts

The parents interviewed for this study were all born into a Europe that was divided by the Cold War. The lives of individuals are embedded in historical time and current contexts. A life course perspective involves taking both into consideration in order to understand the transitions and trajectories of parents' lives. It alerts us to the opportunity structures provided by national contexts for men and women from different social backgrounds in a particular historical period (Elder 1984; Hareven 1988; Wright Mills 1959). Needless to say in this report we can only give a very brief historical account of developments in the seven countries. We have settled on outlining some key features that characterise the recent history of the societies into which our interviewees were born and lived their formative years. The aim is to *maximise contrasts* in order to comprehend the huge variation between national historical contexts.

First, we draw a broad brush map of the main changes for the countries involved in this study in the latter half of the 20th century *before* the fall of the Iron Curtain. Next we cover the period when parents were born, and give a brief description comparing countries on three key dimensions – economic, political and social.²

Before the fall of the Iron Curtain

The main aim of this brief overview is to highlight some of the broader historical trends that characterised the societies our interviewees were born into. A perspective that seeks to connect 'history and biography' (Wright Mills 1959) also demands that a broader view of history be provided as a backdrop for the interpretation and understanding of the macro and micro 'presents' alike. Table 1 sums up some of the features we discuss in this section and illustrates some key characteristics of the seven countries in the post-war period until the fall of the Iron Curtain.

First, the *economic* dimension before the fall of the Iron Curtain. This includes the division between public and private control over capital and changes in employment by economic sector: primary sector employment includes agriculture and fisheries, secondary sector employment is in manufacturing, and tertiary sector employment is to do with services. During modernisation³ a society moves its economic activity from the primary sector into secondary and tertiary sectors and, increasingly in the 'post industrial' period into what currently is known as 'the information society', with the workforce increasingly employed in occupations demanding a high level of skill and qualifications (Kumar 1995). For most countries in this study a decline in employment occurred in manufacturing and a corresponding increase in jobs in the service sector

2. We base our typology of the historical background on three dimensions in order to provide a framework for understanding and exploring the interview material which is based on a biographical approach. Being familiar with other forms of categorising regimes across Europe, for instance in terms of welfare state regimes (Esping-Andersen 1998 [1990]), we do however find that three dimensions of comparisons give a better background for this particular cross-national analysis.

3. Although theories of modernisation are debated in the social sciences, and in some instances referred to as a process of 'westernisation' i.e. a trajectory of development modelled on western countries' stages of development (Kumar 1995), we find the term useful in the current discussion.

(Table 1).⁴ With some internal differences, the more urbanised societies are north-west European societies - Britain, Norway, The Netherlands and Sweden. These had a higher percentage of their populations living in cities and working in the tertiary sector of the economy. Portugal was the country with the largest percentage living in rural areas, although this is now rapidly changing, and the demographic characteristics of rural areas differed from those of Portugal's major cities. A similar situation was found in Bulgaria and Slovenia.

Big differences existed between the seven countries in terms of the socio-economic characteristics of their populations: ranging from the relatively egalitarian Scandinavian countries with a low level of inequality between social groups, both historically and currently, and the much greater divide between social classes⁵ in Portugal and Britain (Table 1).

Whether capital is privately or publicly controlled also shapes social class locations in a country. A high level of public control of capital was in most cases associated with the existence of a welfare state that provided health care, education and social services. The countries with the most generous welfare states are also those with the most developed schemes for parental leave and child care, and a high percentage of women in the workforce, especially in social and health care professions.

Second, the *political* dimension. Table 1 refers to a simple dichotomy between democratic and non-democratic political systems. The former Eastern bloc countries (Slovenia and Bulgaria)⁶ fall into the category of non-democratic political regimes, as does Portugal which was ruled by dictatorship under Salazar for nearly forty years until the 'Carnation Revolution' of April 1974 (Machado and da Costa 2000). The nature of non-democracy did however vary considerably between Portugal (and indeed also Spain under Franco) and the Eastern European countries. Where the Portuguese regime had a deliberate policy of keeping the population poor and illiterate to thwart popular uprising, the communist bloc countries raised education standards and provided health care.⁷ An understanding of the contexts of political repressiveness is important for comprehending current contexts in the countries in question. It is also important to note that Portugal has had a democratic system since 1974, so none of the cohort of parents interviewed in this study will remember the old regime, while in Eastern Europe, the transition to democracy has been much more recent, and within the memory of the cohort studied. The same could be said for the Northern European societies. They have a history of liberal democracy with elected parliaments but with different types of parliamentary system. Where the UK has traditionally had a two party system, the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands have had multi-party systems.

4. The picture is however complex and varied as manufacturing companies notably from north western European countries currently tend to move their production to low cost countries in other parts of Europe or, more recently, to Asian regions.

5. In this context a broad definition of class is used since the time span we are covering is very long. The point is to give a general overview for comparative purposes rather than creating a detailed empirical picture of each country.

6. Although there were differences between the Bulgarian communist regime, with tight collaboration with Moscow and the socialist regime in Yugoslavia under Tito, the two have more in common on a number of factors than they share with the rest of Europe during the first part of the post-war era.

7. This brief discussion does not include any account of communism as an ideology or practice. Suffice to say that for a number of complex reasons the regimes in Eastern Europe were toppled by both internal and external forces.

Table 1. Key characteristics of countries 1945-1980 (approx)

	Economic	Political	Social
Bulgaria	State control capital No market economy Welfare state Primary and secondary sectors Egalitarian class structure	Non-democratic Communist	High educational level 2 income families Gender equity ideology (in public and work domains)
Netherlands	Market/state capital Large public sector Welfare state Second and tertiary sectors Egalitarian class structure	Democratic Liberal	High educational level Male breadwinner ideology / second earner families
Norway	State/market capital Large public sector Welfare state Primary, secondary and tertiary sectors Egalitarian class structure	Democratic Liberal	Rising educational level Male breadwinner ideology / second earner families
Portugal	Private capital Market Limited welfare state Primary, secondary and emerging tertiary sectors Strong social class divisions	Non-democratic Dictatorship (til 1974), Democratic after 1974.	Low educational level before 1974, rising since. Male breadwinner ideology
Slovenia	State controlled capital No market economy Welfare state Primary and secondary sectors	Non-democratic Socialist	High educational level 2 income families Gender equity ideology (in public and work domains)
Sweden	State/market capital Large public sector Welfare state Secondary and tertiary sectors Egalitarian class structure	Democratic Liberal	High educational level Gender equity ideology
UK	Market/state capital Large publ sector Welfare state Second and tertiary sectors Strong social class divisions	Democratic Liberal	Middle educational level Male breadwinner ideology/second earner families

However, throughout the period covered from World War II until the 1980s, these countries were governed by social democratic governments that implemented Keynesian ideas and established welfare states, albeit of different types. They also created large public sectors and regulated financial capital.

Third, the *social* dimension. This covers a broad set of issues and is related to political and economic dimensions in highly complex ways. The general level of education in the population over the time period in question is, as noted above, associated with the type of political regime and its ideological persuasions. The status and situation for women in society also cuts across the three dimensions we are focussing on here. Communist, socialist, and social democratic ideologies tended to promote liberal gender policies in the spheres of work, education and politics, but the male breadwinner model nevertheless prevailed in the liberal North West European countries until well into the 1970s for some countries, and beyond in other countries.

The lives of our informants' generation must be understood in the context of the great changes that took place in the lives of their parents, especially in the Northern European countries. The parents of our parent generation, born mainly between 1940 and 1955, grew up in an era in which mothers were expected to be housewives. This cohort is also the very same cohort that grew up with the expectation of 'youth' as a separate phase between childhood and adulthood. The parents of our interviewees were the first generation to gain wide access to higher education as this became more obtainable for those from non-privileged backgrounds, although social inequalities in this realm persisted, and still do. They, the parents of our interviewees' generation, belonged to the largest birth cohort in the 20th century in post-war countries, and took part in the youth revolts of Eastern and Western Europe.

The Women's Movement started in Northern European countries in the 1970s. Second wave feminists fought for free abortion,⁸ equal rights to education and work, paid maternity leave, equal pay, and public childcare. Ideas about gender equity that took root during the youth of our informants' parents are still ideals for many today rather than part of established practice.

After the fall of communism

When we characterise these societies according to their present contexts, taking account of their recent post-war history, we see that the seven countries can be divided into three categories as follows:

1. *The West European* political liberal regimes are urbanised societies, with high public sector employment, welfare states, high levels of expenditure on health care and high education level in the population. From the 1970s onwards these countries saw an increase in women's participation in the workforce, and the male breadwinner model was gradually replaced by the dual income family, although among families with young children the norm remains for the father to work full-time and the mother part-time in the UK, The Netherlands, Sweden and Norway.
2. *The Southern European* political regime, Portugal, has changed fast with a rapidly increasing, standard of living, and rising educational levels (especially among women). There is still a high percentage of the population living in rural areas and small towns, although there is recent concern about the "desertification" of the countryside, and social class divisions are relatively

8. This is still a controversial issue and access to abortion is restricted in most countries, most of all in Catholic countries, where it is prohibited unless the mother's health is at severe risk.

large (similar to the UK, both are higher than the other countries in this study). Portugal entered the European Union in the mid-1980's, which aided the modernisation process. The two income family is common and the percentage of women working full time the highest in Europe.

3. *The East-European* countries (Bulgaria and Slovenia) were run by non-democratic political regimes, capital was state-controlled, and were characterised by large public sectors and high education levels among most segments of the population. Egalitarian ideals of social class prevailed. Following the transition to a market economy and a liberal political system, the public sector is decreasing, whilst the health and education systems underwent detrimental changes in the post 1990s. A relatively high percentage of the population live in rural communities.

The interviewees in our study were born in an historical period involving many changes that have affected their life courses in various ways. Most belong to the cohort born between 1965 and 1975. Most were in their teens in the 1980s and were in education during this decade.

Notably for the Portuguese parents, high education is a new experience for many families as most parents and grand parents had little access to higher education,. The modernisation process has been described by Portuguese sociologists as still ongoing with the majority of the population living in the countryside until the 1960s (Machado and da Costa 2000).

Parents from Bulgaria and Slovenia, born on the closed side of 'the iron curtain', had access to higher education, their societies having policies of full employment for both men and women. Until the fall of the Berlin wall and the downfall of the Soviet Union, most had upper secondary or higher education. The 1990s saw a dramatic shift in social, political and economic life in these countries. For Slovenia the shift also involved becoming an independent republic after the collapse of the former Yugoslavia together with subsequent wars and atrocities in the region. Slovenia is now a member of the EU, while Bulgaria has applied to join.

In Northern European societies important changes affecting the interviewees' lives from the 1970s include the deregulation of capital and cuts in public spending affecting the regulation of employment and the provision of welfare. As neo-liberal economic and political ideas have gradually taken hold across all European countries, cost-efficiency and a highest possible profit rate have become the logic by which activities across most spheres of society operate. Where people were earlier thought of as 'citizens with rights' there is currently a focus on 'the customer'.

Another development in Northern Europe is the reduction of employment in the secondary - or manufacturing - sector as companies export manufacturing and service production both to other developed countries and to developing countries such as China and India.

In Northern Europe reduction in public spending has led to a higher rate of outsourcing of jobs from public sector employers to the private market. In the private sector jobs in cleaning, catering and clerical work are outsourced. This change in the composition of the workforce in organisations is new. Another novel trend is towards short-term work contracts becoming a norm rather than an exception. There are variations between the countries on this, as worker protection laws are still strong in the Scandinavian countries for instance, whereas in Britain the Thatcher era introduced a weakening of workers protection that has remained.

A general trend across all countries in the post-war period is the increase in women's labour market participation. This started in Northern European countries in the 1970s⁹, with the male breadwinner family being replaced by the two-income family as the standard among most generations, albeit that most women adjust their employment to working part-time following the birth of children. This trend is only now beginning to be supported by public and employer support in many Northern European countries. By contrast, Eastern European countries under communism provided full employment and public support (public childcare and paid leave) for working parents (mothers). However, while such support remains, the arrival of labour markets has made it risky for parents (mothers) to avail themselves of such support. Moreover, the gender divisions in the private sphere remain persistently traditional across all European countries.

Despite the changes in women's employment, all countries are however characterised by gender segregated labour markets, a point we have discussed more fully elsewhere (see Fagnani et al, 2004), and also by a division of labour in the household where women spend more time than men on domestic tasks. Despite greater affluence in some countries and among some sectors of the population, the current historical period is moreover experienced as involving less security. As the nature of work is changing with increased flexibility preferred by employers and employees alike, the idea of 'jobs for life' that characterised the post-war societies in Europe - east and west alike - is now being replaced with the growth of short-term work contracts and flexible employment patterns. As has been argued elsewhere on the basis of previous comparative research (Brannen et al, 2002), these new trends do not affect people's lives to the same extent or in the same way. In this report we map out how circumstances and contexts vary, and how these variations make for differences in both the patterning and experience of the transition to parenthood as it relates to other life course transitions and phases, across countries, organisational contexts, gender and social class.

9. The women's movement coincided with the increase in women's labour force participation but can not be seen as the reason for the increase. A number of factors pulled together to make the two-income family the new norm.

3.

Design, methods and analysis

This research project has involved three phases in which different data sets were created and analysed. During context mapping and literature review, official statistics and reports from other large-scale data sets were analysed cross-nationally and literature reviews were conducted in each country. The second phase involved organisational case studies in which focus groups were conducted with parents who were employees in the private and public sector organisations, in addition to individual interviews with managers at different levels in the organisations. For the current phase of the study we have carried out biographical interviews with parents who took part in the organisational case study focus groups. We have also completed life lines for each informant, thereby graphically depicting the phases and transition points in the life course. The following is a description of this phase in which we provide an account of the logic behind the methodological choices made and the frame of analysis applied.

The research design: a life course perspective with a biographical approach

A life course perspective means that people's lives are looked at processually in the context of the society they live in (the history-biography connection); the structural characteristics of society at different times in their lives such as the gender and class structure; and also the size of the cohort¹⁰ they belong to (Elder 1980; Riley 1988). Age, cohort and historical period are three key notions in a life course perspective. The significance of the three taken together refers to the timing of events in the personal life seen in relation to: (a) the key events in the life course; (b) the cohort to which the interviewees belong; and (c) the overall conditions in the historical period and how these affect the lives of people in a given place or space. This is the *perspective* that has informed the design of our study as well as the choice of methods we have made.

Although a case study design permeates the study in all its phases, the methodological *approach* for this phase of the study is biographical. A biography can be defined as a *story told in the present about a person's life in the past and his or her expectations for the future*. Three elements are important in a biography: the events in the person's life, the meaning these have for him or her, and the way the story about them is told. All must be interpreted with reference to the different layers of context within which a life unfolds.

A life course perspective using a biographical approach highlights the temporal aspects of both life and narrative. Through the narrative it is possible to identify the way *subjective meaning* is attached to events over the life course. The way meaning is attached to events varies over time, for instance involving the passage of years between interviews conducted with the same person (Nilsen 1996). For this study in most cases only one interview was conducted, although interviewees may alter their time viewpoint during the course of an interview (Brannen et al 2004). Moreover,

10. A cohort is a group of individuals who live through the same historical event at about the same age.

since interviewees also took part in earlier focus groups in the organisational case studies, insights into their views and concerns relate to two points in time.

Traditional interviewing approaches collect some biographical material. This is usually minimal and thus is unlikely to be fully exploited in the analysis. A biographical approach adds new dimensions. It fleshes out the context of people's lives as it has unfolded over time and is a corrective to the 'structural variables' approach. An example from the UK social service study may illustrate this point. The experience of motherhood for a West African migrant working as an unqualified social worker in the UK social services assumes a particular meaning when considered in the light of her *currently* stressful and difficult situation: a very long working day including a two hour tube journey both ways together with an unsupportive relationship and problems with childcare for her young children. Her biographical history and story add a further dimensions to the analysis of her case: the domination of her education and work decisions by her family in Africa, her migration to Britain in her twenties, and a reduction in her standard of living and life chances on arrival, her marriage to a man from her own country who adheres to culturally gender-specific expectations of marriage, motherhood and the domestic division of labour, and her difficulties conceiving. This mother's expectations of support for motherhood continue to be shaped in part by her *past experience* of growing up in West Africa namely the importance there of extended family in caring for children, an experience she replicates periodically – bringing over family members to help her to Britain.

The interview guide

Our experiences with biographical interviewing and other qualitative in-depth interviews suggested a design that took the temporal aspects of narrative into account (Brannen et al 2004; Brannen and Nilsen 2002 a and b; 2005; Nilsen 1992; 1994; 1996; 1999). The interview guide was designed to capture different temporal dimensions but also to tackle these in particular ways. One way to start a biographical interview is to focus on the present at the start of the interview. In the interview guide we suggested this approach to the research teams, starting with an open question that, in most instances, led the informant into a summary narrative of his or her life. From there we adopted a line of questioning that opened up the *present* and enabled a focus on 'current concerns'. From there the interviewer chose which themes in the interview guide to proceed with next, either family or work since these were twin foci of the study.

The present was followed by a focus on the *past*. The section about the past started with a question that asked the informant to think back to when he or she was aged 20. In reminding the interviewee of the actual year, the interviewer jogged the interviewee's memory by bringing back key events on the news in the particular year. This proved a useful strategy in other research for provoking a retrospective account of events in the informant's past life (Nilsen 1996; 1999).

The same specific temporal instruction was given in that the informant was asked to think about his or her *future* ten years from now. We chose this time frame in order to provide a long term view which could help the informant reflect in a broader way about his or her life in general, and with respect to expectations for work and family life in particular.

In the last section of the interview we returned to the present and explored strategies, in particular practices relating to the negotiation of boundaries between work and family life.

The element of time is essential to a biographical approach. In studies where there is only one interview with each informant it is a challenge to capture different aspects of time during the interview, as it is time (sic) consuming to cover the whole life course and to let people talk freely about different phases and transition points. However, the interview guide was designed to grasp different aspects of time, leaving the interviewer the task of covering as much ground as possible during the one encounter.

Selecting cases for biographical interviews

Selecting cases for interviews was a step-wise process that replicated the logic for selecting organisations and countries. An important aim of this study is to look at how factors at different levels – national, workplace, interpersonal and personal – affect the situations of women and men as new parents. In the organisational case study phase, we chose workplaces in private and public sectors. From other research we knew that type of sector affects employees' experiences. In most countries wages are higher in the private than the public sector. More women are employed in public sector occupations and so on. Furthermore we chose to focus on areas of work that could be compared across the countries – social services and finance. Although social services are organised very differently across countries, all countries have such organisations. In some countries elder care is part of social services along with child protection and disability, whereas in others elder care is a separate organisation. It is more difficult to find equally comparable organisations in the private sector. Teams were forced to adopt different solutions with some countries selecting banks, others consultancy companies, others insurance and so on (see das Dores Guerreiro et al 2004 for further details).

In the organisational case study, parents in the birth cohort 1965-75 with a youngest child under twelve years old were asked to take part. Those who took part in the focus groups also filled in questionnaires relating to well-being (see Consolidated Well-being Report) and were asked if they were willing to be interviewed individually during a later phase in the study. In the interview phase we aimed to conduct at least ten interviews with parents from each workplace, and, where possible, to interview their partners also.

Our aim in this phase was to contextualise the individual cases in terms of a link between biographies and the wider contexts of the organisation and the national welfare regimes and contexts in general. Thus we aimed to match cases of working mothers and fathers who had similar aged young children and who were engaged in similar occupations working in similar organisations. An overview of the planned samples is given in Table 2. The selection criteria were based on a logic of comparing across countries and sectors on key dimensions: parental status (mothers and fathers), educational level, type of occupation or occupational status. We also sought to include some lone mothers in each sector (one high status and one low status), but this proved difficult in some cases.¹¹

Status here refers to a person's occupational status and, in the case of high status workers in social services, to their occupation (social worker). It also reflects level of education. Table 2 presents the basic elements of comparison.

11. Initially we also planned to include partners in the interviews. Only in some cases were we successful in this.

Table 2: Selection categories for interviews

Cases for private sector organisation

- 4 high status partnered mothers
- 1 high status lone mother
- 2 low status partnered mothers
- 1 low status single mother
- 2 fathers: one high status and one low status
- 1 agency worker (mother or father)- a cleaner or manual worker if possible

Cases for social services

- 4 high status partnered mothers – social workers
- 1 high status lone mother – social worker
- 2 low status partnered mothers -
- 1 low status lone mother
- 1 high status partnered father – social worker
- 1 low status partnered father
- 1 agency worker - mother and cleaner or manual worker if possible

While the achieved interview samples did not quite match our aims, the fit was good enough. This latter fact is of interest in its own right in terms of making cross-national comparisons. In some contexts there were few lone parents, or lone parents were in new partnerships. Parents in manual low-skilled jobs also proved difficult to find. There are several reasons for this, the most important being the increased outsourcing of low skilled work such as cleaning and clerical work. Where secretaries or cleaners were part of the organisation, they were in many instances found to be too old to be included in the sample, or their children were too old. We also tried to recruit outsourced or contract workers by direct access. However this was difficult and time consuming as we had not initially negotiated access to these organisations and so only in a few countries was this strategy successful (see Table 6 in Appendix).

In qualitative research of the type we have done here, case selection is also a two-way process. The researchers can select criteria but the interviewees have the power to decide to take part in the research or not. So there is a strong element of self-selection. The sample we ended up with is described in Table 1 in the Appendix. In addition to the variability discussed above, it also shows that partner interviews were easier to find in some contexts than others.

Life Lines

The teams filled in a *time line* for each informant in order to depict the shape of the life course, i.e. important phases and events in the life course in chronological sequence. Earlier studies suggest this is helpful in analysis, giving a graphic impression that allows comparison. It is useful in cross-national comparisons showing how institutions create sequencing of the life course notably the length of compulsory education, periods in higher or further education, periods of parental leave, full-time, part-time and temporary employment (Nilsen 1994). The analysis of the life lines proved helpful to identifying patterns of linearity and nonlinearity in education and employment and also in understanding the phasing of the transition to parenthood in interviewees' lives. In cross-national team meetings, life lines were examined collectively and the sector-relevant or country-relevant contextual features that shape patterns among the particular cases were identified.

Methods of analysis

The interviews are analysed both with reference to biographical meanings as well as from a life course perspective. In the latter the life lines provided graphic information for the different types of life courses described in the textual material. To date only preliminary analysis has been carried out, with less attention to detail than the data allow for. The framework developed here aims to provide a general overview of some of the trends reported from the national reports. In analysing the interview material so far, teams were asked to explore three broad topics:

- the transition to parenthood and its scheduling in relation to other life course transitions
- the experience of being a working parent in the present (including well-being) and work-family boundary strategies
- supports and constraints for working parents

As an introduction to each national report, teams outlined the various layers of context that form the overall context in which participants embarked on parenthood including the national economic and policy contexts relating to the labour market, educational systems, statutory parental benefits etc. They have done so by drawing on the Context Mapping Report (Fagnani et al 2004), national data, and the literature reviews conducted by each country team. The organisational context is fleshed out in the case studies of social services and private sector organisations, written up in national reports as well as in the Consolidated Case Study report (das Dores Guerreiro et al 2004). The various layers of context are important for analysis of cases within and across sectors and countries.

Comparative case analysis - case selection and issues of representativeness

Comparative analysis is at the heart of cross-national study. At each stage we have selected comparable and contrasting cases: private and public sector organisations, mothers and fathers, higher and lower occupational positions etc. The case study design is essential to understanding particular institutions and experiences in a rounded way – our project being about the experiences of a new generation of parents working in similar organisations across Europe but located in very different historical contexts, welfare regimes and family life situations.

The life course perspective is useful in making *comparisons* both within countries and cross-nationally. The selection of organisations has already been mentioned above.

In selecting countries we have chosen them according to contrasts in historical and contemporary contexts, in particular different types of welfare state regime including parental leave schemes, employee rights, dominant gender ideologies etc (see Chapter 2). That these factors are not independent of one another and may indeed be closely associated is generally accepted in comparative research on political systems, as social phenomena become diffused across countries in a world of increasing internationalisation, notably within the Nordic countries (Karvonen 1994).

As indicated, interview cases were selected so that they are matched on key factors, namely parenthood (motherhood and fatherhood), age, and occupational status, while allowing contrasts to emerge. In our study an important aspect for national comparison of cases was participants' trajectories into education, work and

parenthood, evident both in the interviews and in the life lines. The timing of events such as parenthood in the life course has a decisive effect on other life course phases and social transitions. In all countries, we find a common pattern of women with higher education having their first child later in the life course compared with earlier cohorts who had children earlier.

Cases were selected *purposively* – not on the basis of the logic of surveys which are typically based on criteria of randomness or statistical representativeness. The analysis and presentation of a case based on biographical methods shows how, in the detail of the case, a trajectory is created, shaped and made sense of by the person. Cases used comparatively can demonstrate typicality. In *replicating* cases – selecting similar cases to see if the same phenomena are found under similar conditions – it is possible to see if a pattern holds across more than one case. However, cases can do more than this; they can have *explanatory* power (Yin 1994; Mitchell 1983). They can also seek to explain patterns and tease out which conditions are more important in producing particular outcomes. The logic of case study does not make claims appealing to statistical representativeness but does so through theoretical argument (ibid.).

Even if explanatory purposes are not pursued and demonstration of particular patterns is preferred, it is still necessary to justify the selection of the particular cases presented. Cases must be 'cases of something'; the researcher must make clear the criteria for the choice of particular cases and how the chosen case relates to the other cases studied (within the organisation or country). Case selection however occurs at several phases in the research: in the design of the study, at the fieldwork stage and in the data analysis at the national and the cross-national levels. However, on all these levels, notions of typicality come up (Shofield 2000). Shofield argues that:

Selection on the basis of typicality provides the potential for a good 'fit' with many other situations. Thick description provides the information necessary to make informed judgements about the degree and extent of that fit in particular cases of interest (p. 78).

The process of selecting interviews for analysis inevitably involves some notion of typicality in the sense that they are selected to illustrate or represent something beyond the individual case. The case study design is also useful in creating 'a contrast of contexts' (Skocpol and Somers 1980 cited in Crompton 2001) cross-nationally: the way in which different national contexts shape parents' life course trajectories, albeit these are likely to be mediated by class and gender, particularly in the case of education and work careers. Thus Ragin (1987) proposes the development of analytic frames that can capture the main points of similarity and difference between cases; the tables of systematic comparison are treated as causal frameworks to explain particular outcomes.

Biographical interviews always capture what is unique for the individual. At one level they can therefore be thought of as representing only themselves. However, as Bertaux (1990) observes:

Whenever [life stories] are used for probing subjectivities, life story interviews prove able to probe deep; perhaps because it is much easier to lie about one's opinions, values and even behaviour than about one's own life. It is this specific quality of life stories, the wealth and complexity of the descriptions they bring forth of personal experiences, that give them value for sociological research and that would make them useful for comparative purposes. But to extract the wealth of sociological meanings latent in life stories is no easy task. Most of them remain implicit in a person's lived

experience; it takes a sociological eye – some lay persons do possess it – to look through a particular experience and understand what is universal in it; to perceive, beyond described actions and interactions, the implicit sets of rules and norms, the underlying situations, processes and contradictions that have both made actions and interactions possible and that have shaped them in specific ways. It takes some training to hear, behind the solo of a human voice, the music of society and culture in the background. This music is all the more audible if, in conducting the interview, in asking the very first question, in choosing, even earlier, the right persons for interviewing, one has worked with sociological issues and riddles in mind (Bertaux 1990, pp. 167-168).

Our interview cases were selected because they were employed in particular organisations. They were selected on the basis of being employed at particular levels in organisations, and because they were in the age range we had targeted and had children within a defined age group that was decided beforehand. All these criteria set the boundaries for what our interviewees are 'cases of'.

In the *analysis phase of the interviews*, case selection is complex and depends upon the issue being examined and upon the level of comparison. When choosing cases to 'represent' at the national level, the transition to parenthood with reference to other life course transitions, the relevance of a life course perspective becomes clear. In most countries the transition to parenthood appears to be associated with other normative transitions such as the couple starting a separate household, the timing of the completion of education, finding settled employment to support a family and so on. As the national interview reports demonstrate, there are variations in this and diversity is associated with gender and social class in systematic ways. Those who spend longer in education are those who have higher status jobs. They are more likely to be of middle class origin than those with less education who have lower status jobs. As more young people stay on in education, so the normative 'right' age to have a child has risen.

Particular examples at a *national* level can illustrate the logic of selection. In the UK social services case study, we contrasted trajectories into parenthood that differed: those where there was a confluence of other transitions around the transition to parenthood (notably the start of a relationship, finding housing and childbirth happening around the same time) and those where the pattern was more staggered and normative (normative in the sense of doing things in a linear way over a longer time period) – a pattern which is increasingly the norm across Europe.

When we turn to another dimension of analysis, the experience of parenthood, a different logic may come into play. Here the analytic dimensions that emerge as critical may vary across sectors and countries or be particular to a particular context. In some contexts, parenthood may be more stressful than others. This may be due to national patterns of support for parents or it may be to do with the nature of a particular sample or with the individual situation. Again, drawing upon the UK social services case study, the local context emerged as very important in shaping the experience of the transition to parenthood for some interviewees. The UK social services study was done in London, the most multicultural and multi-ethnic context studied. By contrast, the Norwegian social services participants were homogenous with regard to ethnicity and background; they had been born in Norway and had lived there all their lives. On the other hand, social services participants from whichever country were similar in working in a context where women predominated.

In writing up the Norwegian interview report, cases were selected on the basis of a life course logic. Interviewees in Norway were all ethnic Norwegians. Life lines demonstrated different trajectories and were categorised according to degree of linearity; i.e. whether phases and transitions in the life course followed 'normative' linear routes. A very important marker in Norwegian life courses is type of upper secondary education. The choices young people make at this stage are decisive for opportunities later in life. University entrance depends upon specialisation and the achievement of grades. Interviewees in the current cohort studied who have only compulsory schooling tend to be employed in low-skilled work that give them little opportunity for upward social mobility in the current labour market. Since participants were selected on the basis of being employed in particular organisations it was difficult to find low-skilled young people if the organisations did not employ people at this level.

Selecting cases for cross-national comparisons in the report

As suggested above, case selection is different in cross-national analysis than within-country analysis. This report is the first step in cross-national comparisons based on the individual interviews. This report aims only to give a *general* overview in relation to the main objectives of the research. As Chapter 2 demonstrates, the first step is to make sense of context and get some overview of national variation. In drawing upon particular cases in the report we make use of cases that the *teams have already selected* for discussion in their national reports to highlight their analysis of the material and/or special features of their respective contexts. Our aim here is to capture some of the key commonalities and contrasts across the countries in the situations of parents of young children.

The Context Mapping Report (Fagnani et al 2004) provides detailed accounts of the situation in each country based on statistics and provided baseline data for cross-national analysis. The aim here is to flesh out some of the contrasts between countries by focussing on individual mothers and fathers and to set their life lines and accounts of their experiences within the layers of context with which their lives are lived. We hope therefore to illustrate how the more general trends mapped in statistics play out in 'real life' and contribute to different experiences of being a working parent in different countries across Europe. The rationale behind the selection of countries that are the focus in each chapter is to draw upon the typologies constructed in Chapter 2 and to ensure that the characteristics of different European contexts are brought to bear upon the analysis of the material. In selecting individual interview cases to illustrate national context, we have followed the logic of contrasting cases: to show both diversity and difference between cases with reference to, where relevant, gender, occupational status, and sector. It needs to be noted that not all countries have done two organisational case studies. The Netherlands carried out a study in the private sector while Sweden concentrated on social services.

Issues in working with a biographical approach from a life course perspective

Not all teams were familiar with the methodology we applied in this phase of the study. However it was a learning process not only for those for whom it was unfamiliar territory but also for those who had used the method previously. When teams had written up their national reports from this phase we asked for feedback on their experiences of the biographical method. Below are listed some of the particular difficulties they reported.

- (a) Difficulty in identifying matched cases across countries and sectors (some cases were missing and were not possible to find in the particular organisations);
- (b) Issues of lack of representativeness of particular cases in terms of national patterns and thus making for difficulties of interpretation in cross-national comparison and cross-national inference;
- (c) Problems in deciding what cases 'represent' or are cases of, a central issue in case study design and inference;
- (d) Managing the depth of individual case analysis while also comparing across cases, a process often experienced as unwieldy especially when more than two countries are involved.

4.

The transition to parenthood

The transition to parenthood must be seen in relation to other life course transitions in peoples' lives. An 'ideal' transition to parenthood would typically include education followed by getting a job and finding a partner and place to live in a separate household. There are similarities and differences in our interviewees' transitions to parenthood depending on which country they live in, but also with respect to social class,¹² organisational affiliation, job level and, with respect to gender, whether they are mothers or fathers.

At the state level, policies for parents are important. Also, the general climate in the labour market is decisive in that long working hours affect parents and children. The following bear directly on the conditions experienced by this generation's transition to parenthood.

- Length of maternity and paternity leave
- Access to affordable (public) childcare
- Access to affordable (public) housing (subsidised rented housing, subsidised mortgages etc.)
- Entitlement to paid leave when children ill
- Working hours

Assessing the availability of parental leave is complex as the different countries have different practices that are embedded in rules and regulations that make it very difficult to make general comparisons. That said however, it is possible to identify some aspects for comparison, for instance, with regard to length of paid leave entitlement for mothers and fathers.

Of the countries in our study, only the Scandinavian countries have much paid leave for fathers to speak of. Norway, Sweden and Bulgaria have the longest paid parental leave. Another dimension that is important to consider is whether the welfare measures targeted at parents are gender neutral or specifically aimed at mothers or fathers respectively.

The Context Mapping Report (Fagnani et al 2004) outlined different policies and conditions at state level in eight countries (including France). Below follows a brief summary (Table 3). The purpose of this overview is to provide some background for understanding the statutory context for the transition to parenthood in the different countries, and to provide grounds for comparison.

Another important element to take into consideration for these young parents is childcare facilities. Since most of our participants – across countries – live in two income families, affordable childcare is crucial for their everyday lives. There are huge

12. Social class is in this context associated with level of education since the cases selected at workplace level, private or public sector organisations, in most instances, are organised in such a way that the higher level occupations are held by those who have higher education.

variations between countries on this, and as the Context Mapping Report makes clear, it is not at all easy to give a clear cut and simple account of the differences.

Table 3: Parental leave schemes in the seven countries

	Maternity leave	Paternity leave	Parental leave	Sick Child leave
Bulgaria	19 weeks 90% pay	none specified	21 months for mother or father min. wage	60 days per year m or f full pay
Netherlands	16 weeks full pay	2 days	13 weeks each parent min. wage	10 days full pay 70% pay
Norway	9 weeks full pay	4 w full pay not transferable	29 w full pay 39 w 80% pay shared 1 year unpaid	10 days per year full pay
Portugal	16 w full pay	5+15 days full pay 10 w of mother's leave can be shared	3 mths unpaid	30 days per year unpaid
Slovenia	15 w full pay	15 days full pay 75 days min. wage	260 days full pay	14 days 80% pay
Sweden	8 w 80% pay	8 w 80% pay+ 10 days	38 w 80% pay shared 12 w. min.wage	60 days per year per child 80% wage
UK	26 weeks (6 full pay)	2 weeks flat rate	13 w unpaid per parent	none specified

The transition to parenthood in context

The average age at birth of first child varies between the seven countries. Figures from 1999 show that Bulgaria has the lowest age at approximately 25 years, whereas Netherlands and Sweden have an average at nearly 30 (Fagnani et al 2004, pp. 113-114). The tendency for European women to become mothers relatively late in the life course compared to a few decades ago must be seen in relation to the extended period of education that has become common in most countries. There are still persistent class divisions with respect to length and level of higher education for different cohorts in the study: middle class young people having more education than young people of working class background. Women with little or no higher education tend to become mothers earlier in the life course. This is a trend across all countries.

In most national reports the life course of parents is analysed in terms of its linearity or non-linearity. Linearity does not refer to any ideal or standard, only to the sequencing of phases in the life course as these are related to age-specific institutions in the society in question, such as the system of education. Most young people from this cohort tend to follow a linear route through upper secondary school and on to higher education, perhaps with a gap year between. The time spent in the system of higher education is notably longer for middle class young than those of working class background with low skilled jobs. A short linear pattern is when secondary or lower level education is followed by employment and parenthood while an extended linear pattern occurs when higher education precedes entry into work followed by parenthood.

The transition to parenthood also typically follows a period of cohabitation or marriage and finding a house or a flat in which to 'settle down' in order to have a family (in some countries renting is still important). The period of youth is shorter for lower educated young people than for higher educated young people in that they take on parenthood and paid employment earlier in life (Nilsen et al 2002). In some cases the lower educated, lower skilled workers feel less secure in their jobs than do those with higher education and more options to choose from. For those with low skilled jobs, wage levels are lower than for those who have higher status jobs, making for more difficulties in finding affordable housing and childcare facilities. In some countries there is a difference between those employed in public sector jobs in social services, and those with equivalent education levels with jobs in the private sector. The latter tend to have higher salaries and more fringe benefits.

An important aspect for the timing and also the experience of the transition to parenthood for working parents is working hours. In some countries, most notably in Britain and Portugal, there is a long hours culture – especially evident among fathers in Britain. Across the seven countries except Portugal and Bulgaria, the part-time rate is very high for women, especially for women with young children.¹³ This is also related to the gender segregation in the labour market, where female dominated areas of employment are lower paid and have fewer career prospects than male dominated areas of work (Solheim and Ellingsæter 2002). Part-time employment was an option that many women, especially those in public sector jobs in some countries, chose when children were young. In particular, this was common practice in the Netherlands but, as their study shows, there were no distinctions between high and low skilled workers in this. In the UK generally, but particularly in the private sector company in our study, the norm was for women to shift to part-time work after the transition to parenthood, although in the case of mothers in managerial or supervisory roles, this frequently resulted in a demotion in our case study, because of persisting assumptions that managing others requires full-time commitment.

Rather than give a 'thin' description of conditions for young parents across the seven countries, we have in this chapter chosen 'thick descriptions' of only four countries. These are selected with reference to the discussion of historical context in Chapter 2 where we highlighted differences and similarities across countries. The layers of context in which individual lives unfold can be better understood within this type of comparative macro-level framework.

The four countries that will be the main focus in the following discussion are Bulgaria, Norway, Britain and Portugal. This selection covers the main dividing lines in European history and contemporary society: the former Eastern bloc is represented by Bulgaria; a Scandinavian universalistic welfare state by Norway; a neo-liberal government by

13. The Netherlands has the highest rate of women in part-time jobs.

the UK; a new Southern European democracy by Portugal (recovering from decades of dictatorship). Discussion of, and comparisons in, the transition to parenthood will follow the framework adopted in the national reports. Thus the timing and scheduling of parenthood in relation to other life course phases and transitions is described first.

Becoming a parent in a post-communist country in transition: Bulgaria

As already noted, there is an overall tendency for young people in Europe to postpone parenthood till later in the life course than was the case for the grandparent generation. There are however differences related to social class, as young people with less education tend to have children earlier in the life course than those who have higher education. The scheduling of parenthood is related to the scheduling of other life course phases and transition, notably higher education and labour market entry. As discussed earlier social class differences are related to the timing of labour market entry: those who have no higher education tend to enter the labour market earlier and also tend to have children earlier in the life course.

Cases from Bulgaria illustrate this point. While the average age at the birth of the first child has risen since the fall of communism¹⁴, young people with higher education tend to postpone parenthood compared to those with manual low paid jobs requiring no higher qualifications. It is not uncommon for Bulgarian young people to live with parents and in-laws after establishing their own families. This is due to the difficult housing situation. Only half of the 23 parents in the Bulgarian study lived in independent households. Obtaining independent housing for young families is 'a family project in which not only the resources of the couple but also the resources of the extended family were mobilised' (Kovacheva & Matev 2005, p. 23).

The Bulgarian study identified three main patterns of the transition to adulthood and to parenthood in their material:

- *Direct transitions* which involve a short, linear route from school to work, then early marriage and children, keeping the same job and expecting the future to be a continuation of the present. This pattern is associated with lower qualifications and lower job levels.
- *Prolonged transitions that involve* many years of higher education followed by a period of temporary work that eventually leads to a permanent work contract, then marriage and children. This pattern is more frequent among the higher educated and higher status employees.
- *De-standardised transitions* is the third variety. These trajectories are characterised by 'starts and stops' where a path chosen and followed has to be left and a new way found. Divorce is one such incidence which disrupts the life course trajectory. This pattern is found among those with no higher education and those on temporary work contracts and contract workers in the public sector.

Rosa represents the first trajectory – a direct linear pattern of transition. Born in 1980 to a working class family, she left school at 18 without university entrance exams and held odd jobs for a year and then became pregnant with her future husband at 19.

14. This is in Bulgarian research explained by the generous policies towards parents during the communist regime. Policies have since then changed so that parents no longer get subsidised housing and paid parental leave is shorter. The labour market has also changed so that secure jobs are fewer and harder to get (Kovacheva & Matev 2005 p. 14).

Within a year she had a husband, a baby and a job in the lower ranks of the social services. The job was necessary in order to receive maternity leave pay and other parental benefits provided by the state. She had a permanent job contract at the time of the interview and had been with the municipal employer for five years by then, three of which had been on maternity leave. Her experience of the transition to parenthood is one of getting help and assistance from her mother and mother-in-law, and support from the wider family. Her main ambition in life was a family of her own. She is happy with the way things have worked out and hopes that the future will follow the current pattern in her life. Her job is not seen in terms of a 'career', but rather a job that earns a living. Rosa is said to be a typical of the old pattern of working class life for women.

In contrast to Rosa is **Nelly**, a 28 year old social worker with higher education and a two year old child. She comes from a working class family but has had a very different outlook on life and a different trajectory from that of Rosa. Her parents lived in a village. At 15 Nelly moved to a bedsit in a city in order to attend upper secondary school and to develop an independent attitude to life. She combined full-time studies with part-time employment to augment the support provided by her parents. The decision to go to university upon finishing her upper secondary education she saw as 'an impulse':

My choice was absolutely random – an impulse. There was no one in 1994 who knew what this specialisation – social pedagogy – was about. Afterwards it turned out that it was something that suited my personality, my understanding of the world, my needs. It was fate I think.

When she got her degree she did not have any clear plans for her career. So she worked as a waitress for a year without a work contract. The explanation for this is to do with lack of contacts to get her a job in the field she was qualified for. The traditional route to the higher echelons of the occupational hierarchy is typically thought to go through a network of family or friends in influential positions. She had no access to such networks. An NGO provided an opening for her and she was able to train as a child protection officer with this organisation which was later taken over by the state and turned into a child protection unit. She was given a permanent work contract with this unit and only then did she marry her long-term cohabitee who is employed in a working class occupation. At 27 she became pregnant.

I felt that I am ready, that if it comes I will cope with it, but it wasn't specially planned, it was not an aim...I always thought life was a very big responsibility. I was prepared to take care of myself, to earn enough money for myself. But taking care of a child was something I always thought was even more difficult and demanding, even more responsibility.

Nelly demonstrates a career-oriented attitude to her work, and does not see herself as a full-time mother. She went back to work when her daughter was four months old, full-time. The crèches in Bulgaria do not accept children under eight months so childcare became an issue for Nelly. In the end she had to take what is described as the typical Bulgarian childcare decision involving her mother. The baby stayed with the grandparents until she was old enough to go to a nursery. Her husband was away a lot and Nelly's work was very demanding with long hours. She experienced this phase as very busy and tiring. Her husband changed his work schedule to be able to take more part in the everyday care of their child and the situation became better for the whole family.

Nelly's transition to parenthood, and her life course trajectory in general, is regarded as following a new pattern in Bulgarian society. She is married to a man with lower

qualifications and career prospects than her own, a pattern that was previously very unusual but has now become more common. Among social workers she belongs to a new group of employees who see their jobs in terms of careers with promotion opportunities and self-development potential.

The de-standardised trajectory in a Bulgarian context is represented by a 29 year old working class man **Miro**, who is a driver in social services. He is a father of two. An early school leaver at 16 who started working for his grandparents' small business, he held a number of temporary jobs after his military service. Only when his girlfriend became pregnant and they married did he apply for a job with a permanent contract and has been with social services for two years. His wife comes from a middle class background and holds a university degree. She has never been in waged work and is currently studying part-time for a law degree. In order to qualify for maternity leave benefits, a complicated procedure involving a fake work contract for the required amount of time was secured. This was during a time when the social security system and health insurance were being reformed in Bulgaria.

At the time of the interview they lived in one room in her parents' house due to complex circumstances regarding the upkeep of a flat they had been given by the husband's parents. His earnings were not enough to provide for the family, so both pairs of grandparents now provide different types of support for the young family: financial, childminding, housing etc. Miro's transition pattern is gendered in that he is the main breadwinner, yet cannot really provide for the family without the grandparent support. As the national report says, his route to parenthood is straightforward but not accompanied by success in achieving other life course transitions such as setting up an independent household and earning enough to support the family.

All the Bulgarian examples illustrate parents' high dependence on the extended family. Embedded in complex webs of relationships that provide support of various types, these young parents' stories demonstrate how the different layers of context are important for understanding the biographical accounts about this phase in their lives. The shift from state-owned capital and generous state support to privatisation and cuts in state services have underlined the importance of the wider family network for the current generation of young parents.

Becoming a parent in an egalitarian welfare state: Norway

A different national context illustrates other varieties of trajectories in the transition to parenthood. The Scandinavian countries still have welfare states and comparatively generous benefits for young parents in terms of parental leave. The average age at birth of first child is just below 30 in Norway and Sweden, with considerable social class differences. As in Bulgaria, those of working class background and occupations have children earlier in life than those who have higher education and high status occupations. Although both countries score high on the GEM and GDI indexes¹⁵, Norway has one of the most gender segregated labour markets in Europe (Ellingsæter & Solheim 2002). Women on average do more housework than their male partners, and the part-time employment rate is high. The cohorts the Norwegian interviewees

15. GDI (Gender Development Index) and the GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure) are both used by the UN as indicators of gender equity in societies. Whereas the first measures gender differences on much the same data as the HDI (Human Development Index) life expectancy, education level etc, the GEM is calculated by measuring the percentage of women in parliament, in leadership and managerial positions (www.un.org).

belong to are highly educated. Approximately 80 per cent completed upper secondary school and a high percentage went on to higher education (Fagnani et al 2004).

Norwegian life courses are for the cohorts in question highly associated with type of upper secondary education and whether or not university entrance qualifications were obtained at the age of 19. In the Norwegian cases a distinction was made between linear trajectories and non-linear ones, with semi-linear constituting a third type. These types must be understood in their historical context. An 'atypical' pattern for today's women might be 'typical' for the housewife generation forty years ago since the majority of women in this generation left school after compulsory education at 15, had a job for a few years before they got married and were supported by their husbands. One of the interviewees discussed below has a life line like this and is very atypical of the cohort she belongs to. However, the life lines are also interpreted with social class and gender in mind.

The linear life lines are the ones where the informant moves from one life course phase to the next without any breaks or set backs between. The transition from upper secondary to higher education, and then from studies to waged work and on to cohabitation/marriage to childbirth is thought of as a linear pattern. However, a trajectory that does not involve higher education may also be linear if it involves a move from education to continuous employment. Gendered aspects of linearity can also involve periods of non-employment and/or reduced working hours for mothers in relation to childbirth. This does not however necessarily make for a non-linear trajectory, only a female form of linearity which, because of its gaps, sets it apart from a male linear model. Non-linear patterns, on the other hand, are associated with atypical timings of transitions in the life course compared to the trajectories of peers. Having a child early in life is a form of non-linearity, but can however have different impact on subsequent development depending on the circumstances, as examples below demonstrate. Non-linearity can also be associated with the timing of education in the life course. Quite a few of the social workers have gone to college relatively late in life after having held other jobs. This is a form of non-linearity where early choices in the life course are not seen as 'irreversible' - they can be remedied without high costs. Irreversible choices are understood as, for instance, dropping out of school without exams and qualifications that enables one to get into higher education or to get a job to support oneself. One such case is discussed below.

Gro is a rather extreme example of an extended linear trajectory in a Norwegian context. She is a 36 year old engineer working for a private sector company, comes from a middle class background and is married to her long term cohabitee and has a 1 year old child. Her route through the system of education is linear but extended. After upper secondary she went straight to university to do a master degree in engineering. The year she graduated she met her partner and started working for a multinational. She managed to get a permanent work contract and has been in the same job since. Gro is atypical in that she graduated from a male-dominated course and is employed in a male-dominated profession. Her wage level is very high, and she enjoys a life style that is dependent upon high earnings. She is very committed to her work and took only eight months leave out of the ten months with full pay she was entitled to. Her partner took extended parental leave, four months in contrast to the one month daddy leave to which he was entitled in his own right. Her trajectory takes the form of an extended linear pattern that reflects much more the life lines of *men* in the multinational than those of her female colleagues regardless of job level. When talking about the decision to have a child she says,

When you get to my age you have to make a choice. Will we ever? And then I thought 'of course I still have many years' but then again.. you have

to start thinking about it by the age of 35. It was unthinkable that I would never ever want one, had I been 25 I would probably have postponed it. It was actually my husband who brought it up and asked if we'd give it a think. And when I'd thought about it for a couple of months... we decided.

Her husband is a very committed father and Gro presents herself as a 'feminist' who demands equal sharing of childcare and domestic work. They are both in highly paid jobs on permanent work contracts, and in spite of it being unusual at her husband's workplace to take extended leave, he nevertheless was supported by his colleagues and managers in his decision.

Gro is an example of an unusually smooth transition to parenthood, where everything was 'in place' before the child was born: a caring and committed partner, higher education completed, a well-paid, high status occupation and a home of their own. Her life course pattern, although far from typical in any sense, is more frequently found among women from upper middle class backgrounds. Her choice of education and occupation has led her into a competitive male-dominated work environment and a job she clearly enjoys very much.

A contrasting case to that of Gro is **Jorunn**. She is 33 years old and works for a cleaning agency and is currently a contract worker at the same multinational. She comes from a working class background and has no upper secondary education. She left school at 16 and met her future partner, got pregnant and had her first child at 17. Her partner provided for them for eight years while she was a housewife. Their second child was born when she was 22. When she was 25 her partner became ill and had to reduce his working hours. She started working for the agency part-time since the family needed the income to get by. When her husband's condition got worse and he had to go on disability benefit, she started working full-time as a cleaner. By then she was a contract worker at the multinational and has been there ever since. By the time she had her third child she had been in employment for long enough to claim maternity leave. She took a whole year off and went back to full-time work in the same job.

The timing of Jorunn's transition to parenthood makes for a non-linear life course. It is more common for working class women to have their first child earlier than those of middle class background. However, the fact that Jorunn does not have upper secondary education of any type, neither academic nor vocational, sets her apart. Her level of skills gives her few options occupation-wise in a country where the level of education for her cohort is very high. Most of her contemporaries have at least 12 years of schooling. The trajectory is characterised by her having made some choices early in life which could be seen as irreversible. Should she feel a need to change her job she would have very few options to choose from indeed. Going back to school to take upper secondary level qualifications is not an option either. The family needs the money she earns as her husband is on a benefit scheme that gives a very low income. They live near her family who provide some childcare and other practical tasks.

The transition to parenthood, whatever the social and other circumstances, is made smooth for the Norwegian parents by the welfare state. However this said, social background, workplace factors and level of occupation play an important role. Family income is decisive for this life course phase. As in the other countries the timing of parenthood in the life course relative to other transitions is important. Having a child at an early age is unusual for this generation as a whole, and for this reason alone early parenthood involves being out of synch with peers. This can lead to social isolation (Granlund et al 2005; Sumer et al 2005).

The picture is not clear cut however, as the total sum of resources available to parents must be brought into consideration. A case that illustrates this point is **Ingunn**, a 34 year old engineer from the multinational. She comes from an upper middle class family and followed a linear path through the system of education, with a gap year between upper secondary and university studies. She met her partner and future husband at university. They had their first child when she was 24 and was just finishing her Bachelor degree. After a year's leave she returned to her studies and did a Master's in engineering. Although the timing of childbirth is very early compared to her peers, she did not suffer any setbacks education or career wise because of this as she had a very supportive husband and a family who could also provide support. When she finished her degree she got a job at the multinational and has been with the company ever since. She started off full-time and had her second child two years after she got a permanent work contract. A year's maternity leave was followed by working 80 per cent time for a year before going back to full-time employment for two years. She was on maternity leave for the third child at the time of the interview.

Ingunn expressed some thoughts about the timing of childbirths in her life course. Many of her friends and colleagues are having a first child when she is on her third. However, she also sees advantages with having a child while studying.

I had my first child while at university and the second one right after I started working. When I compare... when you are student you haven't had any considerable income to speak of, so that side of it didn't feel like a problem. I felt I was very flexible being a student, I was a university student and it's probably different if you're at a college. For me it was an ideal situation and it gave me additional motivation to get my degree fast and study efficiently.

Although the timing of Ingunn's transition was 'off course' compared to her peers, her circumstances were very different from those of Jorunn who did not have upper secondary school. Ingunn was committed to her studies and felt the child gave her extra motivation for graduating and getting a good job. Her supportive partner was also a student at the time, and parents and in-laws helped. In most university cities in Norway there is special housing for students who have children while at university. The study loan scheme has since the early 1990s provided maternity leave benefit for student mothers in the form of a study loan being transformed to a grant if the requisite conditions are met. So for young people in Ingunn's situation the early timing of childbirth in the life course did not really hamper their career development if all the other transitions, notably those that are related to education have followed a 'normative' route.

A case of a semi-linear male pattern is the case of **Arild** who works in social services. At the time of the interview he was 34 years old. He comes from a working class family, is married and has three children. He works in the social services in a clerical position. He did not succeed in getting good enough grades at upper secondary level to give him many choices at higher education level. He went on to do military service for a year, took a year's course in clerical subjects and had various temporary jobs in the municipal sector until he got a permanent work contract in the social services ten years before the time of the interview. He has always worked full-time. His first child was born in 1994 and he took a month's leave, which he also did when the second and third were born.

The trajectory of Arild is linear in the sense that he has been in continuous employment. However, his life line also bears the marks of social class. A marker of social class is his choice of upper secondary specialisation. Many young people in his

age group choose the combination of theoretical and vocational subjects that Arild chose. More working class than upper middle class young people are likely to choose this specialisation at upper secondary, impeding career opportunities later in life. The occupation he currently has as a clerical worker in the social services does not provide much opportunity to make career moves that will bring a higher salary or higher status. Should he wish for such career opportunities he would have to enter higher education which he says is unlikely since the family is dependent upon two incomes. Throughout the interview he expressed concern that his type of job might become outsourced in the future and he therefore felt some insecurity with regard to his position in the labour market.

Arild's transition to parenthood occurred when he was 25 years old and in permanent employment in the job he currently holds. At the time of the interview he had three children. Asked about the decision to have the first child he replied it had been an agreement between him and his then cohabitee after a year's relationship. She wanted children and asked if he would go along with it, to which he agreed. He had a month's paternity leave for each child and has the following reflections on this period:

How did you experience being on parental leave?

I thought that it is all right to know what you ladies talk about when you reflect on being at home with children. They also keep saying that one will become very much attached to the kids... sure there is a reality in that as well. But what I noticed is that it is actually a hell of a hustle and bustle at home, and that was OK.

Arild and his family live in the suburbs so he commutes on a daily basis. The housing in the area was affordable and with three children they needed the space a house provided. Since his partner only works half time his income makes him the main breadwinner, which is still the traditional Norwegian pattern. His parents are old and frail and are unable to provide support for childminding or financial support. He works in a female-dominated environment in the social services and experiences a lot of understanding from colleagues and managers for his situation as a busy breadwinning father of three in a low income occupation.

The fact that Arild works in a female field of occupation (social work) in a female dominated job (clerical) sets him apart. On the other hand he is a traditional male breadwinner with a partner in part-time work. At the same time he is a committed, responsible father who pays a lot of attention to his children's needs. Everyday life is very busy with three children and since his wife works evenings he is the one who usually drives the children to their various leisure activities.

These four cases from the Norwegian context demonstrate how circumstances related to life course transitions in general and in context, are important for understanding the various experiences surrounding the transition to parenthood. Compared to Bulgaria, there is much less said in the interviews about support from the wider family circle. In fact this tends to be a 'silent discourse' in most Norwegian interviews with young people. In contrast to Bulgaria, which has had severe cuts in its welfare state provisions, Norwegian parents are still entitled to support from the state which is decisive for the living standard and welfare of many young families. The silence about family support in the Norwegian context could be related to where it is considered 'legitimate' to get support from; there is a sense of entitlement to support from the welfare state and employers, whereas support from family may not be regarded in the same way. This fact may relate to the strong ideal of being independent and autonomous for young people in general (Brannen and Nilsen 2002; Nilsen et al.

2002), and perhaps for young parents in particular (Lewis and Smithson, 2002; Lewis et al 2002).

Norway has not had any shifts in policies and politics on the scale that Bulgaria has witnessed. The situation for the young generation of parents is different from that of the preceding generation. But this is no more than that which is considered due to 'normal historical development'. The situation for the current generation of parents in Bulgaria is that they were born into a society that structurally provided for a set of expectations that turned out to be redundant in the context of major social and economic change following the fall of communism. Within a short period of time, an entirely new opportunity structure emerged that was foreign to the grandparent generation. On the other hand, it is ironic that access to such new opportunities depends upon the provision of support by the older generation (grandparents).

Becoming a parent in a class-divided and multi-cultural Western society: the UK

The UK has not experienced changes of the magnitude of Bulgaria. Nor historically has it had the same level of welfare state provision as the Scandinavian countries. The long era of neo-liberal conservative government represented a break with the pattern of governments after World War II. While the British welfare state did much to change the class composition of Britain, neo-liberalism of the 1990s has polarised divisions between rich and poor. The UK, along with Portugal, is one of the most class-divided societies in the study. The existence of private schools and private health care alongside fairly well-funded public systems of education and health makes the UK a contrast to the Scandinavian countries on key areas of policy.

In demographic terms, the average age at birth of first child in Britain is 26 but with variations across social classes as in other countries. Britain is to a much greater extent than the other countries in the study, a multicultural and multi-ethnic society. Two studies were done in the UK, one in a private sector company in the North of England and the other in a London department of social services. The multi-ethnic composition is evident in the social services workforce in London. In the British context social workers have rather lower status than in Scandinavia (see Brannen & Brockmann 2005). In many countries, social services as an increasingly important instrument of welfare represents an opportunity for female employment and offers significant opportunities for training and upward occupational mobility. In many instances the life courses of those who enter social services are less 'linear' than for those in private sector organisations. Social service workers, at all levels, have often worked in other types of work before they started training/education in social work.

In most northern Western European countries young couples usually set up independent households before they have children. In many countries buying a home is an important step to parenthood. This is difficult for parents as housing prices have increased very steeply over the past decades. Public or subsidised housing has declined in all countries, in particular in the UK. The steep housing prices in London have led local authorities to set up schemes to help 'key workers' to buy homes in order to fill vacancies in fields of work such as social services.

Cases that illustrate aspects of the transition to parenthood in this context are two mothers, one working in a private sector company and another in social services.

Diane is a 36 year old manager in Peak, a private sector company. Her life line is linear in that phases and transitions follow in a 'normative' sequence. Diane comes from a white, middle class background. She went to university after upper secondary

schooling and gained a degree in business studies. After having been a trainee in the company she was given a permanent work contract and is currently a manager. She met her husband, who works in finance, when they were both 22 when she first started working in the company. They cohabited and bought a house together and married when they were both 29.¹⁶ They had their first child at 34.

At the time of the interview she was pregnant with the second child. The family lives in a large house in an affluent suburb. The timing of childbirths was carefully planned. In Diane's case the timing of motherhood was affected by considerations other than the 'standard' ones of living with a partner in a separate household, having a degree and a house. Well paid jobs, a house of their own, a lifestyle that included much travel abroad and other leisure activities were key considerations in the planning of parenthood. The general impression in Diane's case is one of a highly structured life course with a carefully planned transition to parenthood.

Diane had always thought she would have children. At 20 she thought she would have them earlier than in her mid thirties:

I think when you're 20 you think 30 is ancient don't you? I don't think you realise how quickly those ten years just disappear into nothingness, but our big thing is we used to spend a lot on travel, we used to go away for weekends an awful lot, lots of European cities.

Diane and her husband's backgrounds and positions in occupational hierarchies made their transition to parenthood easy. They have flexible working hours and their high salary levels make any form of childcare affordable. They have few problems with combining work and children.

Diane's case is not a typical one for the circumstances surrounding young people's transition to parenthood in general. It does however represent some aspects of this transition for the more privileged of our participants, particularly in North-Western European countries. The cohort she belongs to has in other studies been named 'the young adults' (Brannen and Nilsen 2002; Nilsen et al 2002). This characteristic refers to a group of young people for whom *life style* is important since they have the spending power to consume beyond the 'consumption for basic needs' (Jones and Wallace 1992; Brannen and Nilsen 2002). For 'the young adults', the timing of the transitions to parenthood will not only be related to education, job and housing issues. For those who can afford an affluent lifestyle, choosing parenthood in many cases means that key features of lifestyle have to be achieved. The transition is therefore not only one of deciding with reference to combining *work and family* and with basic material needs in mind. Equally important considerations are *leisure* activities.

Another case of transition from the UK highlights a different set of topics. Living in a separate household is in most instances regarded as a necessary prerequisite for making the transition to parenthood. The housing costs in London are particularly high. Some of the social workers in the UK study who had migrated to Britain from Asian and African countries started their families while living with parents, in-laws or other relatives (Brannen & Brockmann 2005).

Uche is a 37 year old unqualified social worker of African origin. She came to Britain in her early twenties and is married to a man from her birth country. They have two children aged 3 and 4. She has a degree from a University in Africa but not in social work. She came to Britain to visit relatives and see more of the world and stayed on

16. Housing prices in that region of the UK were affordable at the time, and according to the national report it was quite common for young people in their twenties to buy a house. A period specific aspect of this is also the encouragement of home ownership during the Thatcher era and the selling off of council housing.

when she got a job as a clerical worker in the public sector. At 30 she changed jobs to become a social work assistant which she was happy with since she had always liked to work with people. She is now acting as a social worker (there being a major shortage of qualified social workers in London) and has yet to find time to study for the social work qualification.

The children were born after she found a job in social services. The couple would have liked to have children earlier but she did not get pregnant until she was 33. Uche took 4 months maternity leave at each birth and returned to work full time. Her husband is also a social worker, with a degree. She supported them both while he was at college. Her transition to parenthood was experienced as stressful because of the strained economic situation of the family. They lived in council housing when they first got married. Before the birth of her first child her employer provided a small subsidy towards their deposit for buying a house. This happened under a scheme from the public sector to support key workers whose pay is not high enough to meet the costs of living in London. Many employees of this particular social services live far from their workplace since it is situated in an expensive part of London. For Uche it means commuting across town on a daily basis – a journey that may take up to four hours in all. The two small children need childcare which Uche found difficult to obtain. Being used to an extended family network in her own family of origin, Uche found it difficult to leave her children in the care of strangers. After a number of attempts to find a suitable arrangement, an elderly aunt living the other side of London moved in with them on a temporary basis to help with childcare. This is not an ideal situation in Uche's view because of the aunt's age and because it is not a stable arrangement. Uche's life is busy and stressful.

'Most of the times I don't get time to relax. Straight into the kitchen, see what is there, how tidy the place is, see whether I can put anything away. Then it's the wash. The laundry basket is ever flowing over because they have the one they wear to school, then they come back, they change, another set, and then their pyjamas. So we always have the laundry basket, so that straight the washing machine is my priority. Then get something to eat. Then if I finish, if I'm lucky, I make it to the kitchen (laughter) to unload. If not I just drop off there, sleep until like 1 or 2am, then I wake up, unload, put that to dry then go back ... go upstairs. That is my routine at the moment (laughter)'

Uche's life course is not linear. It does not bear the mark of planning so evident in Diane's. Uche moved away from the country where she was born and settled in work that did not demand a degree, although she holds one from a non-UK university. The timing of childbirth was involuntarily postponed; she planned to have her children earlier than actually happened. The family income does not permit the kinds of expenses that could make life as a working parent easier, for instance housing near the workplace and more stable childcare arrangements.

Comparing Uche and Diane, both had their children following marriage, a life course phase when the time was 'right'. However the contrasts are striking. Firstly Diane comes from a white ethnic British middle class family whose education led her straight into a job where she currently holds a managerial position. She lives in a part of England where the housing prices are not as steep as in London, but also has an income which is far higher than Uche's. Secondly Diane's husband also earns more than Uche's husband. They both enjoy their work very much and have employers who are supportive of their situations as mothers. What constitutes the main contrast between them and what makes Uche's situation immensely more stressful than Diane's is mostly the time consuming commuting that Uche does every day across

London. This again is related to income since the housing prices in the area where Uche works is are out of reach for the family's income. The dissatisfaction Uche feels with her current childcare arrangement is another source of stress. Unlike Diane, whose upbringing in a family where the extended network of kin is not reported to be significant for childcare Uche is worried about her children being looked after by 'strangers'. Uche feels very strongly that children should be looked after and taken care of by kin. Lacking an extended family network in London - most of her family live in Africa - she feels very much alone. Her husband also has long working hours and commutes, though not so far. The support she gets from him on an everyday basis is very limited. She bears the main responsibility for the children; he 'helps out' now and again.

These two cases bring out aspects of social class very clearly. The timing of childbirth in Diane's case was related to lifestyle choices, whereas in Uche's case difficulties with conceiving were the main reason for postponing childbirth. When Uche decided to try and become a mother, it was at a time in her life when finances were still difficult. Her decision was therefore taken *in spite of* the material limitations in their lives. For Uche the decision cannot be conceptualised as a lifestyle choice, rather more of a life course decision. Diane's decision to become pregnant was, in contrast, taken under conditions of material affluence and a lifestyle where children would mean changing the established pattern of leisure activities. Her decision to have a child can therefore be seen more in terms of 'choices'.

The transition to parenthood in a Southern European state: Portugal

The Portuguese Report (das Dores Guerreira et al 2005) sums up the main characteristics of the contemporary situation in Portugal as with a transition from dictatorship to a weak welfare state (30 years ago now, so before the lifetimes of most of the participants in this study), a weak economy and still low levels of qualifications.¹⁷ The level of poverty remains high, with 20% of the population living below the poverty line. The percentage of women in the workforce has increased manifold over the past three decades with full-time work the norm. The childcare services have also greatly improved over the past decade, with many more crèches and childminders for young children.

The Portuguese team conducted organisational case studies in both private and public sectors. Conditions for employees vary between the sectors; the public sector conforms to worker protection regulations, including measures for the benefit of working parents, to a greater extent than companies in the private sector. As in some other countries, few employees in the private sector firm in the Portuguese study were members of trade unions.

The average age of employees in the private sector company was somewhat lower than in the social services. The Portuguese National Report demonstrates the same differences between the life courses of higher and lower educated interviewees in terms of timing of childbirth in relation to other life course transitions as do the other countries. The system of education in this country is different from, for instance, the Scandinavian or the Dutch system in that there is no study loan scheme. This in itself makes for a highly class segregated access to higher education. As we have addressed elsewhere (Nilsen et al 2002) the opportunity structure for Portuguese young people, compared to Scandinavian youth, depends to a much higher extent on parental income and social class. Most young people live with their parents until they enter paid

17. Despite the massive increase in the level of qualifications of the population in the last 30 years many young people leave school after 10 years (das Dores Guerreiro et al 2005).

employment and often until marriage. For those who go to university their parents provide for them while studying but some have part-time jobs to obtain spending money. The few from working class backgrounds who enter higher education often take evening classes and have a full-time job in addition to their studies.

Young parents from middle class families with higher education tend to have more extended linear trajectories than those of working class background. The timing of childbirth is also later in the life course of young people of middle class backgrounds.

Alexandra is a 32 year old mother of two with a degree in business studies. She comes from a middle class background and her trajectory through the system of education is extended linear; upper secondary schooling was followed by university studies and short-term employment for half a year until she got a permanent work contract with the private sector company. Like most Portuguese young people from middle class backgrounds she lived with her parents until she got married, which she did when they were both 25. Her husband has been her long-term, and only, boyfriend. Their first child was born a year after the wedding. The pregnancy was not planned but she is happy with this since she says she would not have liked to have a child late in life. Her second child was at the time of the interview 22 months old. About the timing of marriage she says:

We had both worked for two years already and we had some money, it wasn't that much but it was enough. We had actually bought a house and were making repairs there so the decision to get married was very natural.

When she first got pregnant she was concerned about her career as the work pattern in the finance company is 'seasonal' involving the yearly auditing of company accounts. She was worried that the timing of childbirth would coincide with the most hectic period in the company's year, and was happy that this did not happen.

Alexandra had a lot of help and support from her parents when the first child was born as her mother looked after him during the day. Alexandra's and her husband's income were high enough to have paid help in the house. Her husband does not however take much part in either childminding or housework.

Alexandra's life course is similar to most young people of middle class background in her birth cohort. Living with her parents until marriage and a move on marriage into a separate household with her husband is the norm in Portugal. The average age at birth of first child is also lower than in the Northern European countries. The Portuguese report states that different types of 'linearity' are involved in middle class and working class lives. Where the linearity in middle class lives includes a period of upper secondary and higher education followed by employment, marriage and children, in working class lives it involves leaving school early and finding waged work as soon as possible, getting married and having a child. Linearity here refers to an unbroken line of activity where the working class model follows a different pattern from that of the middle classes.

Dália, a 38 year old mother of two illustrates a short, linear working class trajectory. She left school at 13 having completed what was compulsory schooling at the time. After having had a series of non-skilled, short-term jobs (cleaning, factory work etc.) from the time she left school, she is now a care worker with the social services looking after elderly clients. She got married at 28 and has two children aged 8 and 2. Her husband was at the time of the interview unemployed. About the transition to parenthood Dália says about the second child:

After my son I thought no more but he started telling us he wanted a sister. We thought about it and there he got his sister! It's difficult but now we feel really happy with our little one!

Dália's life line is in the strict sense linear, however, the series of jobs she has had have all been on short term contracts; only when she joined the social services did she get a permanent work contract. The life course was however marked by insecurity related to employment and income. She went back to full-time employment after the statutory maternity leave for both children. She receives a lot of support and help from her parents, who live with them, when Dália is working and they have done most of the childcare for both children. Dália and her mother work shifts; Dália works in the morning and her mother looks after the children and then goes to work in the evenings when Dália returns from her job. Her husband does not take much part in looking after the children or the housework, even though he is unemployed, something Dália complains about. The system of networks around Dália seems to be built on women across generations helping and supporting each other in a complex everyday situation.

Alexandra's first child was not planned and she was relieved because the birth did not coincide with a hectic period at work. For Dália this did not pose a problem since her work is not of a 'career' type. She is satisfied with her situation however, and considers herself lucky to have a permanent work contract in a job she finds rewarding on many levels. For Alexandra, the job is also important because she thinks of it as a career. Being absent from work during a period when her skills were most needed could hinder her future career. The trajectories of these two women illustrate different types of linearity - the former more extended than the latter - that are strongly associated with social class.

Examples of non-linear trajectories in many instances involve social mobility, as in the case of **Gaspar**. He is a 38 year old highly educated social worker who comes from a working class background. He works in social services. A school leaver at 16, he held several unskilled jobs for many years. At 18 he started upper secondary education as evening classes and at 25 he started his university studies, still working full-time and doing evening classes. This pattern of education is becoming more frequent among people of working class background. There is no study loan scheme in Portugal, and those who come from family backgrounds where parents cannot support them through university have no other option but to work their way through education. However, he lived in his parents' house until he met his cohabitee six years ago and bought a house with her. At the time of interview they had an infant child. About the timing of parenthood, Gaspar said:

We were both on temporary work contracts, in what concerns professional situation...I also thought about age, and we both had a natural desire... we postponed it a little, but then we decided it wasn't necessary to wait for the ideal conditions, maybe they'd never come, so we decided to have a child.

Gaspar became a father late in life in Portuguese terms. He had five days of leave when his child was born and went back full-time to his job. His child is very young and he says he has not really got quite used to being a father but notices the difference it makes to everyday life. His partner took most of the responsibilities in the home after the child was born although he says he tries his best to be of help. His mother has provided some support and assistance (das Dores Guerreiro et al 2005, p. 74). However Gaspar's partner's parents live far from where the couple live so it is difficult for them to be of much help.

The situation for the Portuguese women's transition to parenthood, however different their circumstances, was eased by the support provided by their mothers and female relatives. In Portugal, as in most other countries, practical support with care work is generally a female issue. Family support in the general sense, is however wide-ranging in that it is made up of several elements with financial support important. Whether resource provision is direct or indirect is beyond the level of detail our study can explore. The main point here is that there is evidence of intergenerational support of a type that involves largely female kin networks. Moreover, this type of support network is evident across social classes.

The case of Gaspar is illustrative for several reasons. Firstly, because he is a man of working class background who has followed the only option open for young people of this background to gain higher education. Secondly, because of combining full-time work with evening studies to gain a degree and thus achieve a better paid job with a higher status - in short social mobility. His case is also illustrative in that as a father he is not entitled to much in the way of paid leave. The gender role structure in Portugal is more traditional than is the case in for instance the two Scandinavian countries. While the transition to parenthood is gendered in all countries, the case of Gaspar illustrates some aspects that are particular to the Portuguese case.

Comparing transitions to parenthood

Interviews across the countries demonstrate how level of education and income are important both for the timing of the transition to parenthood and for subsequent experiences of parenthood. The higher the level of education the later in the life course the transition to parenthood tends to occur. Where there are instances of early transition to motherhood and higher education, as in the case of Norwegian Ingunn, resources provided by middle class parents, a supportive partner and a study loan scheme (that substitutes for the paid maternity leave for those in employment) become important for laying down the conditions of parenthood. A similar case from Bulgaria, Nelly, illustrates some important differences in family support that are related to the wider context. Although Nelly already had a university degree when her first child was born, the situation she found herself in became very stressful with her husband away a lot and much pressure at work. The option she chose in those circumstances is referred to as a 'typical Bulgarian' decision; she left the child with her parents during the weekdays. This situation occurred because she went back to work when her child was only four months old since crèches do not accept children of less than eight months.

What our interviews suggest is that the transition to parenthood in the cohorts and workplaces we have studied are for many a planned event. It is also an event that is planned with reference to other life course transitions, mainly relating to education and employment. Where this transition is the result of careful planning, there are differences in the data associated with several layers in the context. In the case of the Portuguese accountant, Alexandra, the timing of childbirth in relation to work was important in that her job involves different levels of intensity over the year, some periods being more stressful than others. She was concerned that taking maternity leave during the busiest time of year would have been frowned upon. The overall timing of the transition did in this case follow a standard pattern for Portuguese young people of middle class background. Another aspect of timing is related to those areas of life that are considered a priority when thinking of having a child. In the UK case of Diane, a middle class manager in a finance company, the considerations she and her husband took into account were as much related to lifestyle and leisure activities as

with other fundamental concerns of housing and adequate income. Consumption was important to Diane and her husband suggesting differences between more privileged parents and those who are less privileged. In addition it seems that those who say most explicitly that the timing of parenthood was carefully planned are those with higher education and high income jobs.

Between the countries in the study there are differences with regard to the involvement of the extended family in the transition to parenthood. In Southern and Eastern Europe, family seem to play a bigger role in young couples' lives than in countries in Northern Europe. Only a few in the UK, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands mention family as key sources of support at this transition, for childcare in particular. This is not to say that families are not important in these countries, as noted in the case of Norwegian Jorunn who sees moving nearer his parents as helpful in managing their busy lives. Uche in London involved an elderly aunt to look after her children because she did not want her to be looked after by 'strangers'. She missed the family network she was brought up with in Africa and on whom she would have depended upon had she not migrated.

By contrast, welfare state provisions play an important role in the lives of young people from the Scandinavian countries. The strong discourse of 'autonomy and independence' is evident among young people in these countries, sustaining a belief in their own solutions and underplaying notions of dependency upon others. In Bulgaria not only childcare is provided by family networks, in many instances grandparents also provide housing and other forms of support. This is not surprising since Bulgaria is the country in the study that has most recently undergone profound changes of its economy and social life. When the public sector and hence the health system and welfare state provisions become severely weakened as is the case in Bulgaria, family support becomes all the more important. In Portugal parents tend to come live with young couples for a period of time to provide help and support in the phase where assistance and childcare is needed by the new parents.

Parenthood is a gender-neutral term. Gender being asymmetrical, there is little reason to doubt that motherhood and fatherhood are two different experiences. As we will discuss in the next chapter, our data demonstrate that fathers in most instances are the main breadwinners, regardless of social class and education level. In the very few instances we find of mothers being main providers, these are often women in low skilled work with partners who are ill or for other reasons unable to work to earn an income (though we have few cases of this). In cases where women with university degrees are main or only breadwinners, their partners are often supported by them during their studies.

5.

Being a working parent in the present

The well-being of working parents is generated by different mechanisms in different domains. At home, it is the peace, patience and mutual understanding and support that bring about joy and a sense of fulfillment. In some cases the feeling of guilt for not having enough time for child and partner gives rise to discontent and unhappiness. At work, it is the challenges of change, innovation and high responsibility that create a feeling of well-being for career oriented (high status workers)... For other (lower status workers) the limited autonomy, the insufficient resources, the imprudent regulations generate a feeling of helplessness and alienation.

Much of this description of the daily life of parents could have been written by any of the teams in the different countries and could refer to either public or private sector employees. In fact it is written by the team in Bulgaria, the poorest country in our study and one which is still suffering from the reversals and changes that took place from the early 1990s – the fall of the Communist bloc, the arrival of private markets and the setting up of a limited welfare state. A clue to its authorship lies in the strong words that end the quotation – '(parents') feeling of helplessness and alienation'. For while occupational status and class position have negative effects on the experiences of those lower down the socio-economic structure compared with those in more advantaged locations, the experience of limited autonomy and helplessness is likely to be relative across different countries and contexts. Yet, as we shall see, this is only part of the story and does not apply in all cases, especially among parents whose lives are progressing well compared with their peers.

There are several ways in which current experiences of being a mother and a father were explored in the interviews. The conceptual themes of the study on this issue covered the following:

- How parents organized their daily lives including how, at the couple level, a parent organized their working day including work time, home time, childcare and their contribution to childcare and domestic (household) work;
- How they negotiated work-family boundaries: their preferences and strategies for connecting or keeping separate work and family life;
- Their feelings of well-being related to daily life and its various social domains but also feelings about being a parent, worker and partner;
- The kinds of support available to parents and the extent to which they availed themselves of such support (to be discussed also in the following chapter).

As we have suggested, variation within each set of cases (within a country and within a sector) is likely to be considerable even where individuals share the same gender, occupational location and parental status, and have access to the same institutional frameworks and services, at organizational and national levels. The uniqueness of each case and their variability are the rationales for using a biographical case study approach. However, we do not propose here to synthesize or summarize the findings across all the countries or both sectors. In this short report we can only embark on a

limited amount of comparative case analysis. Rather in this chapter we shall present some cases according to the typology of countries discussed in Chapter 2 in order to explore the possible importance of type of society/ welfare regime for the *experience of parenthood identifying the particular resources individual parents who work in the same kind of organization and in the same type of jobs draw upon*. We will briefly outline the experiences of these parents in relation to the themes set out above.

First, we compare some cases of mothers, focusing on those with least resources in the respective societies and those who work in the lower echelons of the public sector. An analysis of the experiences of those employed in low status public sector jobs provides a baseline for assessing how European parents manage parenthood. In focusing on the less advantaged it will provide an *a fortiori* test for assessing the conditions and experience of parenting in different contexts. We have selected mothers with young children who work as care workers in social services in Portugal, Bulgaria, Sweden and the UK, countries which represent the full spectrum of political contexts and welfare regimes in Europe. Second, in order to extend the range of our analysis to fathers, we will compare some cases of high status fathers again across a spectrum of countries, this time from Norway, Slovenia and The Netherlands.

Being a mother: low status care workers across Europe

In Table 4 below we set out in brief the main biographical 'facts' of four mothers together with their current situations with respect to occupation, working hours, presence of parents nearby, childcare, housing, travel to work time, partners' work and help with childcare and domestic work. As we have discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, interviewees are all from the cohort born between 1965 and 1980 and the mothers selected for the following discussion are working class by current occupation and in most cases by background. In Chapter 4, we showed how the transition to adulthood of many low status workers is less direct and protracted than among high status workers since they move from early school-leaving or the completion of upper secondary level education straight into the labour market. Three of these women began their work careers in care work classed in all countries as low to medium skilled work. Their partners are in similar level occupations. They vary however in the age at which they became mothers, their housing histories, their travel to work conditions, their kin networks and access to public affordable childcare and so on. We discuss each case in turn, comparing and contrasting cases in a cumulative way, on their particular current experiences of and conditions for being a mother.

Dália, a case also described in Chapter 4, lives in Portugal and works as a care worker in social services located in an old part of Lisbon. Against the wishes of her parents, Dália left school at 13, early compared with her sister but not by standards of her social class and gender in Portugal at that time. After working in a number of manual jobs, she found employment in the centre, doing all sorts of tasks (feeding and other personal care). She lived with her parents until she got married at the age of 28. Despite having some health problems around the first birth (aged 30), she had a second child mainly, she says, for her son's sake. The birth of her second was more difficult but her manager was supportive. Dália only took 4 months parental leave, and says that her employer allows her to take the occasional day off for children's illnesses. She also mentioned her entitlement to be exempt from working nights until her children are 13.

Table 4 Biographical facts and current circumstances of mothers

Portugal Dália, Care worker	Sweden Susanne, Care worker	Bulgaria Rosa, Care worker	UK Carol, Care worker
Born 1966, now aged 38	Born 1976, now aged 28	Born 1980, now aged 25	Born 1974, now 30
Left school aged 13, did a number of manual jobs before becoming a care worker in Social Services.	Left school at 18 at end of upper secondary; carer in day centre for mentally handicapped	Left local high school at 18; stayed at home helping her mother; found job in social assistance after child born aged 20; carer (delivers food to people on social assistance)	Left school at 16; brief office job before works in old people's home; briefly unemployed before moving into care work with disabled people
Works full-time	Works part-time (80%)	Works full-time	Works full-time
1 hour travel to work per day	3 hours travel to work per day	Works locally	Travels by various means - 1 hour per day
Married aged 28	Married aged 23	Married aged 19 due to pregnancy	Lives with partner from aged 20; separates at 29; now living with new partner (6m.)
1 st child aged 30, 2 nd child at 36 (now 2 years old)	1 st child aged 26 (now 2 years old)	1 st child aged 20 (now 4 years old)	1 st child aged 28 (now 2 years)
Moves from parents' house to marital home	Lived independently before partnering and parenthood	Moved from parents' home into husband's parents' home and then into own marital home	Lived independently as couple before parenthood
Parents live in same city; now live part-time in their house	Parents not nearby	Parents nearby	Only father lives nearby
Mother does childcare in child's home	Local public day care	Local public day care	Private nursery near workplace
Husband is at home Last job as skilled worker	Husband a full-time pedagogue/ musician, works as a pedagogue with youth	Husband is full-time, a driver in local firm	Partner (not father of child) employed as fulltime care worker
Partner does little childcare domestic work	Partner shares domestic work and childcare equally	Partner reported supportive - does specialized tasks	Partner does little childcare or domestic work

As shown in Chapter 4, a key to Dália's experience of her life is the support she receives from her parents, her mother in particular. Dália's husband has been unemployed for more than a year. On a working day Dália leaves the house at 6.30 a.m. and drives to work for approximately half an hour, dropping off her father en route at his workplace. Her 8 year old son goes to school on his own - as she said he wants to manage by himself - while her mother looks after the younger child until Dália returns from work at 3 p.m., whereupon her mother goes to her own workplace. Because of her mother's availability, Dália is able to work at weekends and does not have to plan her holidays. Despite being unemployed her husband does no housework or childcare except to "*stay with the baby for an hour or two, now that she is a bit grown up*". Dália does not appear to be critical of this: "*domestic work is for the women of the house*". Her lack of criticism may be because she expects him to spend his time looking for another job or that he is working in the grey economy while drawing unemployment benefit. Her very brief comments suggest that she was reluctant to talk about it.

Although Dália says her work is hard, she enjoys her job and is able to concentrate without worrying about her children. Her free time is taken up with taking her son to his activities, a further justification for working and for running a car as well as for her own commuting needs. Portuguese women invest strongly in motherhood, even more when their jobs are not intrinsically rewarding and they use their income to provide for their children's needs and wishes. Dália is happy that she returns home mid-afternoon allowing her time to be with her children. Her main discourse is about balancing time for motherhood and time for work. This leaves little time for herself. Yet Dália comes across as relatively content with her lot, accepting the limitations and reporting no difficulties in separating her work and her family life: '*I usually say that when I arrive at the office door, my family problems stay out and when I leave and pass the door again, my work problems stay here.*' This is made possible by considerable childcare support from her parents (who live with them when she is working) and also material help as both are working while Dália's husband is unemployed.

Susanne lives in Sweden and works as a care worker in a centre for the mentally handicapped, work that she enjoys greatly. She left school later than Dália (typically most Swedes complete upper secondary level education) and did not go on to further education. Aged 20, she wanted to get married (not so typical in Sweden) and to have children. The couple depends upon public childcare for their son who started day care when he was 1.5 years old at the end of Susanne's long period of paid parental leave

Susanne and her husband shared parental leave. They took sixteen months' leave between them to be at home as long as possible: *We were very poor during that time but it was worth it. That's why I could stay home for 9 months and my husband 7 months.* This way of extending the parental leave is very common among our interviewees who see themselves as "good parents" by postponing their children's start in day care.

Unlike Dália, they are fortunate in having high quality, affordable public childcare that is locally available. But unlike Dália, they have no parents living close by to fall back on in case of emergencies, as when their child is ill and unable to go to day care. Susanne and her husband live far from the city where Susanne works. Having recently moved to their new house, they have few friends in the neighbourhood to help with babysitting although they belong to a local church.

Under Swedish law Susanne was able to reduce her hours on her return to work; she works four days a week having a day off in the middle of the week. This gives Susanne a much needed break from commuting in the middle of the working week. Each

working day Susanne has to leave home very early to get to her workplace where she starts at 8 a.m. She depends upon her husband to take and collect their son from day care. Officially there is no flexi-time in her centre and as her work involves contact with clients she cannot work from home. However she is able to take time off if she makes it up later and writes this down in a book. She has been fortunate in negotiating with her manager to leave work 15 minutes earlier each day and to arrive 30 minutes later than her colleagues *without* a reduction in her wages. This enables her to catch trains without having to wait for long periods. Without this benefit Susanne's commuting time would be four hours a day instead of three. Despite the long commute, Susanne feels very committed to her colleagues and clients. Unlike many parents but like Dália, perhaps because of the nature of her frontline care work with clients (that takes place in a centre), Susanne feels able to leave her work behind her when she goes home.

Unlike Dália's husband, Susanne's husband takes full responsibility for their son when he is in charge – taking and collecting him from day care. They share the household work between them fairly, with Susanne conscious of how rare this is even among Swedish couples.

Susanne enjoys motherhood and believes that motherhood helps her to empathize with her clients at work: *"Yes ... you turn into another person when you become a mother, it is inevitable. You feel more mature, and it spills over at work and even at home."* Like Dália, she puts her child first. The best time of the day is when they are sitting together on the couch watching children's TV. She also thinks that becoming a mother has improved her relation with her partner. On the other hand, small children are tiring: *"Happiness is – when your toddler sleeps through the night"*. But because of her long travelling time Susanne feels she lacks sufficient time to spend with their son and regrets putting him into day care at one and a half years old, something she had to do because of their need for two salaries: *'I didn't put him into day care because he needed it. It was more we who had to work.'*

Rosa, discussed in Chapter 4, lives in Bulgaria. She works in social services. Rosa had a great deal of help from her parents and parents-in-law after their baby was born and the couple lived with her in-laws to start with. The baby was fretful and Rosa felt very inexperienced. Rosa saw it as 'normal' for her to take the long leave while her husband devoted himself to earning the family income. Her husband and mother-in-law convinced her that returning full-time to her old job in social assistance at the end of maternity leave (there are no part-time options and parents cannot afford to take them up even if they were available) was the best strategy as it offered both security and very reasonable working hours. Such public sector employment was also seen as less risky enabling mothers to take up the very substantial sick leave offered under Bulgarian law when children are ill.

Rosa was additionally supported in being able to send her daughter aged three to the local public kindergarten. *'I am very relaxed that she is in the kindergarten while I am here.'* When her daughter is ill (as she is quite frequently) Rosa is able to stay off work without problems. After a week away from work Rosa says she can depend upon her mother-in-law to look after her daughter for the following week if this is necessary.

In many ways Rosa's case combines the good fortunes of both Dália in terms of kin support and of Susanne in terms of public (state) support. Like Dália, Rosa has considerable support from kin but in Rosa's case from her husband's mother as well as from her own mother. Her ties with kin are strong, as is the case for many Bulgarians of this generation who have lived with their parents until marriage (and sometimes after marriage) and who often depend upon help from kin to purchase housing –

housing loans being very risky especially following the vagaries of the Bulgarian financial sector in the late 1990s. Like Susanne, Rosa can also depend upon affordable local day care provision provided by the state for children aged 3 to 7 years, even though it is rigid and inflexible in terms of hours and days. She was also supported by two years paid parental leave after the birth (135 days at 90% of salary and the remaining two years at a flat rate).

Unlike Susanne's job, Rosa's job is more precarious, albeit public sector employment is less precarious than private sector employment in Bulgaria. In the context of considerable change and instability in recent years in Bulgaria, Rosa feels 'lucky' to have a job. She also feels fortunate, compared to many people she knows, in having a healthy child, a supportive partner, generous parents on both sides as well as a secure job in the state sector.

The fact that the situation of Rosa and her family is on an 'even keel' means that Rosa emerges as currently relatively content with being a mother. Her husband is described as helpful, driving Rosa and their daughter to work and childcare in the mornings and evenings. Rosa is, however, the parent who takes the sick leaves when the child is ill. Her workplace does not object when she takes leave.

In general Rosa finds the workplace a conducive environment in which family issues can be readily discussed. She says that work does not impinge on her home life. She also does not expect to be promoted (even if such opportunities exist, which seems unlikely in such low skilled work). Such low expectations are likely to contribute to her considerable sense of well-being as it may also do in the case of the other low status workers (although this possibility is not referred to specifically in the respective reports). Moreover having little expectation of promotion is likely in the case of low status workers like Rosa to encourage rather than discourage them from taking up the expensive parental and sick leave currently available in Bulgaria. Being in the public sector also reduces the fear of job loss. In this context work can be enjoyed less for the nature of the work (evaluated as low status) and more for its rewards in terms of sociability. As Rosa notes: *'Look at us here. We are all young mothers working here. I look forward to come here in the morning and enjoy laughing and talking with them.'*

Carol lives in London. She works in a centre run by social services for adults with learning disabilities. Carol grew up outside London and followed her mother into care work, first working alongside her in an old people's care home during the school holidays: *'I've worked since I was 14. Cos we never had much money as a family, so we always tried to work.'* Carol left school at 16 with minimal qualifications. She met her child's father at the age of 20 and they went to London in search of better job prospects. But Carol soon returned to care work although she also has had a couple of spells of unemployment and short term contracts, suggesting that such work is not as secure as it might appear even in a British context (where there is considerable demand for care workers).

Carol had no plans to become a mother, a point that is significant for the way she now feels about motherhood: *'I just always assumed that we would always live together and get married and not have children and have a nice car each and a nice house (...) and holidays.'* After the birth she took the available paid maternity leave of six months and was pleased to return to her full-time job as she did not bond well with the baby and felt lonely and isolated on maternity leave. Her partner was not supportive and within months their relationship broke down. Carol found working full-time very hard going and managed to negotiate slightly shorter hours so that she could collect her child earlier from the childminder. However her manager soon pressed her to return to full-time hours by which time Carol was separated and having to manage on only her

own income and so could not afford to work part-time. Without a partner, part-time work was not a possibility, especially in the context of a large mortgage. Carol and her partner had taken out a loan based upon their joint earnings just before the birth of their child. In fact Carol could not afford to pay the mortgage and they sold the house very quickly. Carol moved into a smaller flat of extremely poor quality (*'I have no heating and I have windows that are falling out'*), in what she describes as a 'rough area' of London. She has applied for public housing, but has been told that she is a low priority. She feels that she would be better off living as a single mother on benefits, but her work is important to her.

Carol enjoys her work but describes the workplace in terms of low morale and work overload. There is high staff turnover and the centre frequently has recourse to agency staff. Carol has been there, however for 8 years, and in that time she has gained some qualifications (equivalent to upper secondary level schooling) and has taken a specialist course. This suggests some considerable commitment on her part to social services and to her care work occupation. However the working hours are not flexible, a pattern common among front line social service workers. If she needs to take time off for her son, she has to take annual leave and feels discriminated against compared with managers: 'managers have children and they never explain themselves when they're off ... they are just off and it's fine'. If she takes time off she also feels guilty about the extra burden on her colleagues.

Even though Carol has a new partner, she does not appear to find family life easier. Her account of her working day describes starting the day feeling stressed, having to rush the child and often 'fighting' with him in order to get him ready for nursery. At work, she enjoys her job but often feels under pressure and so often works through her lunch break. At the end of the day she is reliant on a colleague giving her a lift to the nursery and then has either to take the child and buggy on the bus or walk for half an hour - a long time in bad weather. In the evenings she feels she copes best if she sticks to rigid routines with her child while finding this stressful at the same time. She does not seek support from her partner and as he is not the child's father, she considers it inappropriate for him to be very involved. While accepting her partner's feeling about not being the child's father, she seems resentful of the fact that he does not pull his weight in other ways, for example he does not pay half the bills. In practice Carol feels she is a lone mother and, while accepting that responsibility, finds she cannot enjoy and relax into motherhood as she feels she should.

While enjoying her work, Carol also finds it very stressful and feels she cannot easily cut off from work when she gets home. This is exacerbated by the fact she often has to do preparatory work at home. She often takes out her frustration and anger on her partner and son, having outbursts of temper and periods of irritability. The fact that the couple work in the same workplace is unlikely to help the situation.

In most domains Carol's feelings about and experience of motherhood compare poorly with the experiences of Dália, Susanne and Rosa. In part this is because she did not want a child to start with and found it difficult when the baby arrived. It is also to do with the break up with her partner. Lone motherhood is difficult in most contexts but more so in some than others. Moreover even a new partner does not alleviate Carol's situation. Carol's situation is tougher in other ways also. In terms of availability of kin support, unlike Rosa and Dália but like Susanne, Carol lacked close kin living in London except for her father. Her father who lives nearby provides some support with childcare. Her husband's kin were no longer available after the couple split up. Unlike Rosa's parents, Carol's parents are unable to support her with housing in the context of her marriage break up.

Carol's access to childcare is also more problematic than it is for the other three mothers. In part this is because Carol is living in a very large capital city but it is also because the UK has no history of public childcare for young children. Unlike Rosa and Susanne but like Dália, Carol could not rely on locally provided public childcare that she could readily afford. Carol had some initial difficulties with the childminder who was reported to have ignored Carol's timetables for her child. Carol then moved the child to a private nursery near her workplace when the childminder put up her fees.

Carol's housing situation is also particularly difficult, reflecting the 'London factor'. With no partner to share the mortgage, very high housing costs in London (especially in her part of London) and little public housing available, Carol's situation is worse than the other three mothers discussed, but comparable with those parents in Bulgaria and Portugal who lack the help of their families. As Rosa notes, such people typically migrate from Bulgaria.

While it seems that Carol lacks a number of sources of support she also makes life difficult for herself in being very rigid about her son's routines and in being obsessive about doing housework, both practices which likely to discourage the involvement of her new partner (and other people). The fact that she puts so much into her work compared with family life and life outside work is a strength but also a weakness, given her workplace is marked by high turnover and low morale. Work makes Carol feel a bit better about herself and her life but also makes her feel bad especially in the context of the rest of Carol's currently difficult life and her feelings.

Comparing mothers

To sum up, Dália, Susanne and Rosa are largely content with their lot as mothers. Of the three, Dália has least reason to be content given her husband's unemployment and his failure to pull his weight with housework and childcare. But Dália is happy because of her parents' presence in the house, in particular her mother's help with caring for the 2 year old while she is at work. On a daily basis Dália can run a car taking herself and her father to work while they live in an area where it is possible for the 8 year old to take himself to school. Susanne's life is logistically more complicated than Dália's in that the couple lives far from her workplace in a rural location, thus she is required Susanne to make a long commute by train. Also on the negative side, the couple has no family living nearby or friends (yet) in the neighbourhood. Yet Susanne is more or less happy because she is able to have a day off in the middle of the week. They also have a new house and there is locally available high quality public childcare. Still she feels she lacks time with their son. On the other hand, this negative feeling is offset by the fact that her partner is very involved in the child's care and shares the household work equally.

Similarly Rosa (from Bulgaria) seems happy, perhaps a little more so than Dália in the Portuguese context. Even so, both have experienced material hardship. Rosa is acutely aware in the Bulgarian context of the difficulties of many people she knows in her community. By contrast with their lives, Rosa counts herself fortunate, at present at least, perhaps because of her low expectations. Indeed life was difficult for Rosa when she became pregnant. She was not married and had no job but was fortunate in being found a job through informal sources. Moreover, even though she was in the job for only a short time, the Bulgarian law entitled her to take 3 years parental leave (2 years paid). Moreover, like Dália, she has considerable material help from parents (her own and her husband's). Furthermore, the state also provides, as it does for Susanne in Sweden, affordable public childcare that is available in her neighbourhood. In terms of their partners' help with childcare and domestic work, the picture is more

variable. Only Susanne's husband pulls his full weight (reflecting the public discourse of gender equality in Sweden) but the situation for Dália and Rosa is mitigated by plenty of help from kin.

All three mothers working in social services report few problems at work or with taking time off if they need to for their children (although all three have other back up support). Only Susanne is able to work part-time. But she is probably the only one who can afford to. All three feel able to leave their work behind them when they go home. Perhaps this reflects the type and level of their (low status) jobs and a limited investment in work.

Carol, who lives in London, is the exception. As a working lone mother she is not well supported in terms of pay or support from the child's father, her current partner or from kin. Carol did not strongly invest in motherhood to start with and she has not enjoyed being at home (on maternity leave), while she depends on her work for her self esteem. Carol contrasts markedly with these three mothers in terms of her feelings about motherhood now, and also the conditions for motherhood.

Five conditions emerge in these stories as important in enabling mothers to feel secure and content. They are: (a) a satisfactory housing situation; (b) a stable and relatively supportive relationship with the child's father (at least emotionally if not one involving an equitable sharing of responsibilities); (c) local, affordable institutional childcare; (d) substantial support from locally available extended family (parents); (e) workplace support. Some of these conditions are shaped by policies and conditions at both national and local levels, notably housing and childcare. Others are indirectly shaped by the societal context. Sweden is the only country among these four where gender equality among parents is part of the public discourse. Intergenerational kin support cannot be legislated for but is a key part of each societal context. It emerges as a key factor which serves to buttress deficiencies in the other three conditions: housing difficulties, errant or absent husbands, and lack of public or institutional childcare. As we have seen, in some contexts intergenerational kin support becomes more critical than in others.

None of the four mothers' situations meets all these conditions. With the exception of Carol, the other three mothers report little difficulty in the workplace in terms of supporting their care responsibilities. In terms of the other four conditions, Dália lacks a supportive partner and local affordable childcare but is compensated by having plenty of kin support. Susanne lacks kin support but is compensated by having the other conditions. Rosa's situation meets all the conditions. By contrast, Carol experiences an unsupportive workplace environment, lives in unsatisfactory housing, is separated from the child's father and has a less than supportive current partner, has little affordable local childcare available to her, and lacks a local supportive kin network. Not surprisingly, she is far from content.

Being a father: high status private sector workers across Europe

The decision to focus on high status (rather than low status) fathers in this chapter is partly a consequence of the fact that we only included two fathers per sector and hence the range is more limited. From the few in our sample, we did include low status fathers in Chapter 3. Historically we may expect to find a less differentiated picture of fatherhood compared with motherhood (Brannen et al 2004). *Fatherhood* is defined in institutional terms in most countries. *Fathering* as an activity may be defined in terms of engagement in substantial caring responsibilities (Brannen and Nilsen forthcoming). However this is still relatively rare in most countries although it is an official discourse in Scandinavian countries (see the Swedish Report, Bäck-Wicklund

& Plantin 2005). Fathers in all European countries, even if they are no longer sole breadwinners still expect to be full-time workers. Only in Scandinavian countries is there a statutory expectation that fathers should be involved with their children at an early age. Norwegian fathers, for example, are entitled to one month of the paid parental leave (intended for either or both parents), leave that is lost if they do not take it up. In other countries, leave reserved for fathers is minimal, taken around the time of the birth when the mother is incapacitated (paternity leave) and is usually unpaid (see Fagnani et al 2004).

We examine three cases of fathers from Norway, Slovenia and The Netherlands. These men are working in relatively well paid, high status occupations in the private sector. The three countries they live in have very different policy, political and welfare contexts, enabling us to see whether these make a difference to the experience of being a father in particular cases.

Bengt is Norwegian. He is clearly a committed father but comes across as feeling rather overloaded. He and his partner are 31 years old. The couple has cohabited for 6 years and have a 2 year old son. They both have university degrees. Bengt works full-time for a large multinational as a contracts consultant, while his partner is an administrator, also in the private sector. Bengt is unusual in having used nearly half the parental leave taken by the parents; he took 5 months while his partner took 7 months. In fact Bengt belongs to the 13 per cent of Norwegian fathers who took longer than the one month quota. Both returned to work full-time after parental leave. However, unlike his partner, Bengt felt punished for taking such long leave: his employer saw his leave-taking as evidence that Bengt did not take his job sufficiently seriously. Bengt thinks that he has not been given the salary increase due to him and feels he has been passed over for promotion to other jobs available internally within the company. If the couple has another child (a statistical likelihood), Bengt says that he will be more careful next time and will only take one month's parental leave; he will make sure that the boss agrees first that taking leave will not affect his career. We did only find one such case in our sample, so based on our study we cannot say whether this is a trend or not. However, from other research (Lewis & Cooper 2005; Brandth & Kvande 2001, 2002), it is clear that fathers who take out more than the paternity leave they are entitled to can meet difficulties in their workplaces.

Bengt's early involvement in his son's care is reflected in his use of the flexible working times available to him in his company. Bengt uses the opportunity to get to work early, sometimes around 7 a.m. His partner has fixed hours and starts later at 8 a.m. and takes their child to day care. Bengt leaves work between 2.30 and 4.00 in order to pick up his son from the local public day care they use for their son. They have dinner around 4 p.m. He says his partner cooks mostly but Bengt reports tidying up and doing the dishes. If the weather is okay he goes outside to work in the garden with his son. Bengt often puts his son to bed at the child's request. This happens around 8 p.m. and couple goes to bed around 10 p.m.

Bengt sees his life as stressful mainly because, in addition to his job and his intensive involvement with his son, he is also committed to finishing the decoration of their new house and is also studying. Significantly, in answer to a question about the best times of day, Bengt mentions having lunch at work and seeing his son when he comes home. He feels he does more than his partner at home. He also complains that he takes too much responsibility for his son and works all the time, blaming the long parental leave for making his son follow him around. He enjoys being with his son, but thinks his partner should do more. Life for Bengt is experienced as being all work:

Because as I see it I work from when I get up until I go to bed. At work, the garden, the house and all. In addition my son, he is following me. But she, she sits down and watches television, sleeps on the sofa and. I feel she has turned the traditional gender pattern upside-down...'

On the other hand, it is Bengt who likes the kitchen to be tidy: *'I do not like if I find crumbs after the last person there. I am a meticulous perfectionist at that field, while she isn't'.*

Interestingly, despite the availability of public, affordable childcare in the neighbourhood, Bengt wants to move closer to his parents who live in a small city in the South West of Norway in order to get more help with their child. Bengt misses going out in the evening to enjoy himself. They have not felt able to ask the neighbours to babysit since their neighbours have their own families nearby and do not need them to return the favour.

In short, Bengt's experience of fatherhood is ambivalent. He enjoys the safety and predictability of life with his partner and child, but at the same time feels restless and afraid of leading a boring life. He feels he only has time for work and family life. Although he enjoys being with his son he thinks his partner should do more. On the positive side, he was able to take lengthy parental leave and has flexible working hours, while on the negative side, he feels his career and salary were affected by taking long leave and he has other commitments (studying and doing up the house). Rather than blaming the time squeeze he is under, he tends to blame his partner and sees the solution to the need for more support in terms of moving nearer to his own family of origin.

Janez is Slovenian. He comes across as not very involved in fathering but is more or less content. He is a middle to high status worker, married with two children aged 6 and 11, and in his mid-thirties. Having finished secondary school where he specialised in computer sciences and completed military service, he found work at 21 as a computer programmer in the private sector. He says he always expected to get married and have a family. After marriage, the couple moved to their own house and had a child, a natural and self-evident next step in life from Janez' point of view. By the time he was 25, he 'had it all' (his own expression): a job, a car, a wife, children, and a house. Since then he sees his life as going along very much in the same vein. Janez works full-time while his wife also works full-time - in the public sector. Janez describes keeping his work and family life quite separate, something he prefers to do.

Janez's wife, with help from her parents, is the main carer. Janez is not a very active father even though he thinks that family roles are in general becoming more equal. Fathers are no longer in his view merely authority figures. However Janez does not describe fatherhood in emotional terms, referring to the role as 'challenging'. However Janez thinks that, as children grow older, parents have to become more engaged especially in the child's school activities. He justifies his lower level of involvement compared with that of his wife in terms of children being 'more attached to their mother'. While he thinks men should make an effort to be involved, mothers are still seen as more important in the satisfaction of children's needs - 'it is a fact' - and he thinks that fathers accept this and 'take the easiest way'.

Well it is a fact, no matter how much you are trying, the children are still more attached to the mother, at least as far as their needs are concerned. (A child) will never say: daddy give me something to eat... well you may jump in but... really you could only sit there and vegetate if you would want to... if you don't want to be active... you have to make an effort but it is a truth that the majority of us are made to take the easiest way.

Fathers like Janez are reported in the Slovenian Interview Report as accepting a gendered division of family work. This is explained not only in terms of fathers' lack of willingness to be involved, but also in terms of the high standards women set for household tasks and the strong emotional ties between mother and child that makes fathers' involvement difficult. More important than fathers in Slovenian family life is intergenerational help. As in Janez's family, grandparents come to the rescue of their adult children solving financial and housing problems, and provide childcare for their grandchildren and collect them from kindergarten.

In short, Janez does not feel overburdened by fatherhood. He is relaxed about playing a secondary, somewhat passive role currently and expresses few negative feelings in his interview. He sets a very clear boundary between working and family life. When troubles appear regarding his work, he takes time for himself and keeps them away from his family. Thus he sees home as a haven and protects his family and himself from the burdens of outside problems, in particular trying to talk as little as possible about his work. He feels lucky to have intergenerational help.

Chris lives in The Netherlands. He is an involved father though not as involved as his partner. He was born in 1971 in the north of Holland. The couple come from solid middle class backgrounds. He is a high status employee working in finance, just like his father had done before him even though he views it as 'and accident'. His wife, born in 1970, studied law just like her own father. At the time of the interview they had recently had their first child who was only 7 months old.

Chris works full-time - 36 hours a week. However, his company offers a number of different kinds of flexible working arrangements. Chris only does a 4 day week involving long days of 9 hours each. His wife is similarly a high status employee working in an IT company as a product manager. She is now back at work (having taken four months paid leave) and plans to move to another job as she feels insecure mainly due to a reorganisation while she was on leave. She too works 4 days a week but only slightly fewer hours than Chris. Chris looks after the child 1 day a week and his wife one day. The child is taken by Chris' wife to a private crèche near her (not Chris') work 2 days a week. Chris' mother has the child one day a week. The couple is happy with this arrangement; their son being in the crèche only 2 days a week is seen as '*busy enough for him*'.

Chris and his partner lived together for 9 years before they got married and had a child - Chris was aged 33 at the time of the birth. At the time they started living together Chris was still studying business administration at university. Chris says he would have liked to become a photographer, '*but I thought it a too insecure future, and now it's too late*'. At the end of the 1980s - a time of high unemployment, Chris had to decide which career to go for. Chris wanted job security and so he chose to study business administration which he thought could provide this. When Chris became a father he had already worked for seven years in his current company. In the same year that the baby was born, they moved to the outskirts of Utrecht to a child friendly neighbourhood. At the time of the interview Chris' main current concern was the renovation of their house. To move out of the centre of Utrecht where they had previously lived was an important condition they considered for having a child. Their house in central Utrecht was '*just no place for kids*' even though Chris and his wife really loved it. '*It was awfully nice; we lived in Utrecht centre on a canal, really downtown*'.

Although moving out of Utrecht was a pre-condition for having a child, they postponed the birth as long as possible. Perhaps this was because they were enjoying the freedom of just being a couple and being able to spend their high income or perhaps

this was because they were content with their old home. In any event, most other conditions for having a child had been already met (completion of education and gaining well paid secure jobs). However Chris still feels that he was pushed into fatherhood by his wife who felt that her 'biological clock' was ticking and could not wait any longer to get pregnant.

When the baby was born, Chris had only 2 days paternity leave. Chris says that now he has no time to stay late at the office. Note this is not reported as an intention but is merely expected – presumably by his wife:

No, I just don't have time for that. Look, before we worked later and came home later...I absolutely do not do this anymore, not intentionally, sometimes it is even very difficult to put down the work, just because you know there is a lot burning at your desk.

Yet Chris provided a very relaxed description of his working day. He still works long hours (because of his four day week). On one day a week he is responsible for looking after the child. On the week days when he is working, he appears to get off childcare lightly reporting that his partner has fed and bathed their son already when he gets home. His evenings are relaxed while for his wife they are 'somewhat busier' (she reports in her interview getting everything ready for the next day). Chris: '*I usually slouch around and watch telly*'. He does however play with his son '*laugh and romp a bit*'. But he notes he is with his son all day on a Wednesday. Unlike his wife he never worries about their son when he is at work.

Chris enjoys parenthood and expresses no worries, the reason for this becoming apparent as he talks, namely his *low* expectations for enjoying being a father of a young baby:

*It is inconceivably nice. Even now. Eh? ...I cannot do much with him (7 months old). He does not understand anything yet. He is terrifically dependent on me and of course there is not much in return. We cannot play football yet. But it is nice already now! **I had not expected that.***

Chris says that household chores are divided equally and he does not want hired domestic help, something his wife would like as it would give her more time. Chris and his partner had not discussed the division of labour in respect of their son's care but assumed they would both continue working after the birth. Chris never envisaged doing a great deal of childcare even though he enjoys it. His wife does most of the caring when she is around – she gets home first - and Chris is happy with this:

... in my view there should not be room for two captains on one ship, constantly quarrelling what is better and what should be done in what order; I just follow her in that, so to say. I do a lot myself, but she does evidently more. Partly because she is more likely to worry, to concern, to realise when he wants something, I just walk in the way or I put him in his play pen.

Chris has chosen his compressed working week since the birth though the justification he gives for this is a bit ambiguous in the way he plays down the benefits in terms of childcare: '*I chose Wednesday, jolly good: two days on, one day off, two days on and then the weekend. This is really inconceivable luxury, and you are just one day with the little one.*' By contrast his wife found it difficult to return to work having been out of the workplace for so long and her manager and colleagues were not helpful. She still has a full-time 40 hours contract, but works 32 hours as she is taking one day of parental leave per week. Usually one set of grandparents steps in if the child is ill. Chris is moreover busy with the renovation of the house leaving him little time for

himself, a fact he currently accepts though he regrets loss of time to be with friends. The couple have little time with each other. In short, with the arrival of a first baby, Chris sees the current lack of time as a transient situation that is complicated by moving into a new house that he is doing up. However in his description of his working day he comes across as relaxed and content, perhaps not surprisingly in the context of having more than sufficient income but also continuing to bring in a full-time salary and only working four days a week.

Comparing fathers

These three fathers experience fatherhood very differently. Bengt (from Norway) is the least content at present. It seems that parental leave targeted at men does not necessarily enhance well-being while organisations retain gendered notions of commitment and gender roles in the family are in flux. Janez (from Slovenia) is the most content. Chris from The Netherlands is somewhere in the middle. These men work in similar jobs but live in very different societies. Their experiences and practices of fatherhood and fathering reflect those contexts.

Bengt, the Norwegian father, reflects the Norwegian context that promotes a gender equal ideology. His marriage is the most equalitarian in terms of sharing childcare and housework albeit he is least content. He is unusual in Norway as well as among all the fathers in the study in that he took a more or less equal share of parental leave. However he felt penalized by his private sector employer for doing so. Interestingly he also complains about his wife not pulling her weight with the child and at home. However his solution is to turn to his own kin for help with the time squeeze that he feels he is experiencing, a rather traditional solution in a modern equalitarian Scandinavian welfare state.

Chris, the Dutch father, is somewhat pressed for time because of overload at home but, unlike Bengt, Chris has been able to accommodate his work so that he is still bringing in a full-time salary but working a compressed (4 day) week. Such working practices are fairly common in The Netherlands even in the private sector and are found not only among parents with young children. In a society in which the domestic division of labour is still fairly traditional, Chris does not feel obliged to share the childcare and domestic work on an equal basis with his wife, although he is clearly expected to help. However he has additional pressures in that, like Bengt, Chris is doing up their new house (Janez was also doing this while Bengt was also studying). On the other hand, unlike Bengt, he is less involved with his son. Significantly Chris mentions his wife wanting to buy in domestic services to solve the work overload situation, a solution clearly not seen as so acceptable in a Norwegian context. Indeed it is Chris's wife who appears to be more hard pressed than Chris, both at work and at home, while in Bengt's household, at least according to Bengt, he is one who bears most of the brunt of the time squeeze.

Janez is the most relaxed father. In a society in which material expectations have been relatively low with the sharp transition from a socialist to a market economy, having a job, a car, a wife, children and a house (Janez' priorities) gives a feeling of considerable achievement. For Janez they were enough. Gender equality, while being on the horizon, had not yet affected him and he seemed relieved. He expected his role as a father would become more important when children were progressing in their education but not yet. Grandparents currently seem more important than fathers in Slovenia in terms of everyday care and back up support. On the other hand Chris and his wife also had some childcare help from kin while Bengt saw the solution to the time squeeze in these terms.

Conclusion

Workplaces are important in making everyday life run smoothly for parents with young children, especially for mothers. However as, or more, important are a number of other conditions: the presence of a supportive partner, the availability of intergenerational family help, decent housing, statutory paid leave, and affordable local childcare. Mothers and fathers experience contentment in the presence of some or all these positive conditions. However social comparison is also important. Those who see themselves most favourably compare themselves against a negative norm. Rosa who lives in Bulgaria counted herself fortunate compared with many of her peers experiencing hardship. Carol living in London lacked all the conditions but clearly expected her lot to be better living as she did in a more affluent society.

Fathers have lower expectations of parenthood than mothers, with the father least content doing the most childcare and household work. The most content father did the least.

Intergenerational help emerged as important in most cases and contexts but especially for parents in East Europe and Portugal, interacting with and complementing other forms of support. Such help constitutes a form of informal insurance and protection from new risks of social exclusion (Kohli 2004). It can surpass and substitute for lack of support from fathers, as in the case of Dália and Janez. However intergenerational support while less available in other countries and contexts may also be seen as important by parents.

6.

Support and constraints for young parents

Introduction

We have already discussed aspects of the topic for this chapter. Here we will pull together earlier material to give a more systematic overview and provide some cross-national comparison of types and sources of constraint and support for parents. The analysis is not at the individual level; we do not focus on how young parents *experience* support since this has been covered already. In this chapter we conceptualise differences across countries with reference to the *structural characteristics* that provide support or constraints - the resources that can be drawn on to make working parenthood possible. Thus we analyse what the national contexts are 'cases of' where support for working parents is concerned.

In order to get a more systematic picture of the situation as it is portrayed in the national reports we have categorised types and sources of support¹⁸ in the following way.

Types of support include:

- *practical*
- *emotional*
- *regulations*

Sources of support can be either formal or informal.¹⁹

Table 5 Sources of support

Formal	Informal
The state	Partner
Workplace	Wider family
Formal childcare facilities	Friends, colleagues, and neighbours

Formal support from the *state* in the form of regulations and laws is greater in the Scandinavian countries than elsewhere. Employers in these countries and in Bulgaria are bound by regulations laid down by the state to implement lengthy paid parental leave and, in countries such as Norway, to provide flexible working hours during the period of breastfeeding. Employers on their own play a minor role. In the other countries such as the UK the state is less generous and seeks to persuade employers

18. In this discussion we will not refer to financial questions such as employment contracts, financial support across generations etc. These are clearly important and can be seen in terms of 'support', but fall outside the framework we have constructed for this chapter.

19. See table 7 in Appendix for summary of types and levels of support by country.

to act in a family friendly way to employees (for example, by promoting a "business case" in the UK). The rights for employees under labour law are in general stronger in the Scandinavian countries. In the former Eastern bloc countries the right to lengthy paid parental leave²⁰ is still in place and hence more generous than in many Western European countries, while access to subsidised housing has radically diminished

In most countries, the Scandinavian countries included, managers play an important role in the everyday life of parents (see das Dores Guerreiro et al 2004). Suffice it to say here that a parent friendly manager is very important for parents with young children and can be a source of both *practical* and *emotional* support in certain situations, or can undermine regulations in others. Another important aspect is the relationship between colleagues in the workplace. Where people work in teams, such as in the Swedish social services, colleagues can become important for organising the working day in a flexible way.

Childcare facilities have been singled out as a separate source of support for several reasons, not least because affordable childcare is one of the most important resources for working parents. Their sheer existence is important in its own right. Such *practical* help offers parents the opportunity to work but also is *emotionally* reassuring in providing for children to be looked after in a safe place.

Among informal sources of support, the partner is very important in most instances both for *emotional* and *practical* support. However, on the practical side different gender role ideologies across the countries affect the division of labour in the household between fathers and mothers. A gender equal ideology is more often reported by Norwegian and Swedish parents, although the evidence is that women still do more of the domestic work and childcare than men do. Compared to other countries however, Scandinavian women are more 'equal' to their partners than anywhere else in the world.

When both partners work, and where little formal support is available, for instance formal childcare, other informal sources such as the wider family, particularly grandparents, become important. While family support is reported more *typically* in the reports from Slovenia, Bulgaria and Portugal, it is in some instances a resource for working class parents in Northern European countries. In the North European countries there is however a strong discourse of autonomy and independence, ideals that suggest young people should be in charge of their own lives.

In order to give some depth to differences between countries on these dimensions, we have chosen to provide some thick description of selected countries – Slovenia, The Netherlands, Sweden and Portugal following the logic of the North/ South/ East divisions of European history (Chapter 2). We focus on some of the main formal sources of support and constraint for working parents: affordable childcare and working hours and see these in relation to informal support networks.

Cross-national comparisons: working hours and childcare

Most National Reports mention working hours as either a support or a constraint. When a workplace allows flexible working hours this is often seen as a huge advantage by parents. In the overall majority of cases mothers but not fathers of young children reduce their working hours when this option is available. However, not all have the

20. From the different phases of our study we have seen that there is often an implantation gap between policy and practice. For instance for women who choose to work part-time or fathers who ask for a longer period of paternity leave, their commitment to work is called into question.

opportunity or the means to do so and then other resources must be drawn upon in order to make working parenthood possible.

Part-time work - childcare a 'private matter': The Netherlands

All the countries in the study except Portugal, Slovenia and Bulgaria, have high rates of part-time working especially among mothers of young children, The Netherlands has the highest rate with 70% of women working part-time.²¹ Here the average age at birth of the first child is relatively high at 29.3 years, with highly educated middle class women tending to be older at the transition to parenthood (as in other countries) compared with women from working class families with less education. The Dutch case is also special in that there is a rather traditional division of labour between men and women and, as the Dutch National Report notes, the idea of institutional childcare facilities has yet to be fully integrated into the Dutch system and mindset. Parenthood and childcare have been historically regarded as a private matter in this country. Only in the last decade has childcare facilities entered the public discourse as a public concern in both countries. The high part-time rate among working mothers must be seen in the light of the ideological notion that children are best cared for by their mothers at home. Even in couples where the mother earns a higher income than the father, in most cases the mother reduces her working hours to care for the child. The Dutch National report mentions one such case, Nadine, who works in the private sector.

Against the economic rationality of the human capital theory, it is not unusual that women decide to reduce their working times, even when the level of income of the female partner is - or could be, when working full-time - higher than that of the male partner. Nadine is an example of this decision. It is interesting to see how she explicitly explains her decision, by referring to the fear of her partner to lose career perspectives when working part-time and her own wish to spend more time with her child. This specific situation of Nadine indicates in a broader sense, that the norm of motherhood is still rather strongly embedded in Dutch culture. This norm implies that at least part of the daily care for children needs to be provided by the parents themselves, preferably by the mother. (Dutch National Report, Veldhoen-van Blitterswijk et al 2005, p. 46)

Employees (mainly mothers) are entitled to reduced working hours and this is mentioned as one of the most important sources of supports for parents in the Netherlands. However, as other reports demonstrate, part-time work can also be regarded as a constraint, a constraint against positive career development for women.²² In the Dutch case part-time work is viewed favourably by interviewees. Part-time work is not presented as a gendered measure and it is not a right for mothers in particular. By law²³ Dutch employers are obliged to treat employees equally regardless of working time. In a context of a traditional division of labour between

21. In statistics from 1998 men with children under 16 have 100% employment rate (Context Mapping Report p. 143).

22. The Norwegian Case Study report discusses this in some detail based on the focus groups. And similar viewpoints were expressed in the individual interviews. In both private and public sector organisations women expressed concern that part-time jobs could make them seem less committed to work than employees in full time jobs, and hence they were afraid to lose out on promotion opportunities and salary rises.

23. Which is also EU law.

men and women in the household, however, the majority of those who work part-time are mothers.²⁴ (The effect on Dutch women's careers is not discussed in the report.)

Partner support is likely to be shaped by mothers working part-time since part-time working gives mothers more time to spend with children and to take care of domestic tasks. The men in such households are the main breadwinners (where they work full-time). Part-time working mothers are a source of both practical emotional support for full-time working fathers, while full-time working husbands provide financial support and reassurance for mothers, but at the expense of mothers' work careers.

The situation of one Dutch couple can illustrate this point. Gerben and Nienke are a full-time working father and part-time working mother. As the Dutch report notes:

Gerben has a full-time job. He tries to fulfil his professional duties in four days per week. It often happens, however, that Gerben feels he has to go to his work, on his day off. Nienke says: 'That is a nuisance; then I have to organise ad hoc day-care and I don't like that'. Apparently it is Nienke who has to organise day-care, when Gerben is not able to stay at home on his official day off, in spite of the fact that it is Nienke's working day as well. When Gerben - as the main breadwinner - is called to his work, Nienke defines it as her responsibility to organise the conditions for Gerben to go to his work. This is an interesting example of gendered responsibilities, adopted by both partners in a sort of taken for granted way of doing. (National Report, Veldhoen-van Blitterswijk et al 2005 p. 47)

The gendered division of labour in the home and the gender segregation in the labour market - implying that women in most couples earn less than men - mean that most responsibility for weaving the strands of work and family together fall on women, thus perpetuating the gender earnings gaps.

Part-time work and childcare a 'public issue': Sweden

The right to work part time is also an issue in the Scandinavian context. Many mothers in the Swedish social services reduced their working hours when they had children. However, when a distinction between long and short part-time hours is made, it is clear that mothers with higher education tend to reduce their working time to long part-time hours (four days a week) compared with those who have lower education. The average age for the birth of a first child in Sweden is around 29 years, similar to The Netherlands, again with considerable differences depending on level of education and social class.

Sweden has by far the best publicly funded childcare programmes of the countries in this study, and 80% of 1-5 year olds are in pre-school. In recent years the focus has been on keeping public childcare affordable, and a maximum price has been set. This is considered one of the main sources of support for parents (National Report, Bäck Wicklund & Plantin 2005, p.10). Swedish childcare, in contrast to childcare in The Netherlands, is a public issue, and has been so for many years. Moreover, where the Dutch authorities have chosen a 'private-public' partnership in the funding of childcare institutions, involving employers in their efforts to provide for their particular employees, Sweden has continued to see this as a provision of the welfare state.

24. We only have a private sector Dutch case, but in the public sector there is a slight trend for the more highly educated men to share parental leave with their partners, i.e. both working less than full-time in the early years. (Gambles, Lewis and Rapoport (in press).

The Swedish National Report says that Swedish parents do not look to their employers for support. In the social services where the Swedish case study was conducted, colleagues proved important. This was because these workers are organised in teams. In order to enable flexibility during the working day, such as staying home with a sick child or taking children to the doctor, colleagues negotiate the time with one another, thus making being a working parent easier. This informal support provides flexible working hours but also contributes to goodwill and high morale at work. There is nevertheless a downside to this given that in the context of intensified working conditions, parents are often reluctant to stay away from work as they know that their already overburdened colleagues will have to take over their work. So this system would work better if there was some slack in the teams.

Parents who had not lived in the same place all their lives did not have family around. This situation is common for many who have moved to the city for work reasons. For those who do have extended family nearby, the most frequent type of support they provide is babysitting to make leisure time possible for the couple.

In spite of having a high score on the GEM-index, Swedish parents do not experience gender equity at home. As the Swedish National Report states, it is accepted that mothers do the bulk of domestic work and childcare, and have to negotiate with fathers if they want to share the tasks. The division of labour in the household frequently becomes an issue of conflict between partners, as the case of Patricia illustrates. Patricia picks up the children from the nursery. This affects her work since she is the only one in her team with young children. She reports having had many heated discussions with her partner on this. When children are ill she is usually the one who has to take time off. Asked if her partner could not do more she says:

Of course he could. I mean if I can stay home, he can do the same. But he is a better negotiator than me and he always makes it sound like his work is more important than mine and that he HAS to do certain things at work. And in the end he earns a lot more than me and that's also something that matters...

This quote illustrates a frequently recurring theme across the countries: how gender shapes parenthood and makes motherhood different from fatherhood both in everyday family life *and* in workplace.

Full-time working hours – childcare a public issue: Slovenia

Slovenia like Bulgaria has moved from being a socialist/communist society – respectively – to a market economy, resulting in a decline in public services. Full employment and public childcare facilities were taken for granted in the former Yugoslavia of which Slovenia was a part. After the transition to a market economy the situation for working parents became more stressful, with parents having to rely more and more on family networks for support.

The part-time employment rate in Slovenia is low (see Fagnani et al 2004) and most mothers work full-time. There is however a legacy from the old regime, namely affordable public childcare. All the parents in the Slovenian case study make use of it. Since the opening hours of day care centres in many cases do not coincide with the parents' working hours, additional support has to be found. As the National Slovenian Report states, most of the interviewees would not be able to balance work and family were it not for additional support from family, especially mothers and mothers in law (Cernigoj Sadar & Kersnik 2005, p. 55). In one case (Nina) both her mother and her

mother-in-law help out by picking up the children from the nursery and by sometimes cooking the evening meal for the family.

In spite of widespread public childcare in Slovenia, there is a strong tradition of family networks to be relied upon if needed. In these networks, as discussed in Chapter 5 women give practical assistance on an everyday basis.

The gender division of labour in the household follows the same standard pattern in Slovenia as elsewhere. However increased availability of family help serves to let fathers off the hook, as was seen in Chapter 5 in the case of Janez. The unusual case of Marija is also illustrative in serving to underline what is seen as the desirable norm, at least from a male point of view. Marija is a financial analyst with a degree whose partner is a student. Currently Marija is the breadwinner while her partner stays at home with their young daughter. They share the housework between them, and Marija seems satisfied with the situation. However her partner, who was also interviewed, says that if he was working he would work full-time and she would probably either take time off work or work reduced hours if possible, thus indicating the norm. (Černigoj Sadar & Kersnik 2005, p. 54).

Full-time working hours – childcare a family issue: Portugal

Among the countries in this study, only the UK surpasses Portugal in terms of long working hours. However, where British mothers typically work part time when they have young children,²⁵ both Portuguese mothers and fathers work full-time. There is no tradition of part-time work in Portugal apart from some recent flexible working hours schemes related to family friendly policies in the public sector.²⁶ The Portuguese National Report (das Dores Guerrereiro et al 2005) says the private sector has no specific policies for parents. In two-income families, the juggling of long working hours, no match between nursery opening hours and working hours, and a short maternity leave is in most cases solved with a combination of formal and informal care, such as help from kin. Only in cases where parents and parents-in-law live far away from young families, or if parents are ill or too old and frail to be of much help, are they not relied upon for support in combination with other sources of assistance (das Dores Guerreiro et al 2005).

Family support for childcare comes in different varieties. In Alexandra's case for instance (see Chapter 3) the in-laws moved in with the family to look after the children, and the mother-in-law did all the domestic work, the cooking included. In Dália's case (Chapter 5) Dália's parents lived with the family when Dália was working in order to help with childcare. Sergio, a father in a higher status position in the private company is the only one whose wife stays at home to look after the children. They also have paid help in the house, and it is stated that his father sometimes helps with childminding.

Support from partners is shaped by gendered practices in Portugal along the same lines as in the other countries. However only in one case, in the private sector company, does a mother report that she and her partner share the housework. Where mothers have access to wider family, in most cases their mothers or grandmothers, the fathers' lack of help in the house is less of a constraint. In one of the few cases of paid help in the house, the case of Alexandra, little practical support is provided by her partner. She nevertheless manages to get some time by herself when the maid arrives

25. The part-time rate for women in Britain is the same as for Norway, approximately 42%.

26. The so called 'continuous working day' which means a six hours working day (das Dores Guerreiro et al 2005)

in the afternoon (das Dores Guerrereiro et al 2005, p. 31). It could be argued that support from wider kin, or paid help absolves fathers from sharing family work. It avoids conflict and makes life possible, but perpetuates gender inequities.

The overall impression from the Portuguese case studies is that the wider family is more involved – making the everyday lives of working parents run smoothly. The main difference between Portugal and the Eastern European countries (Bulgaria and Slovenia) who also report considerable help from kin is their greater public childcare provision compared to Portugal and the long parental leave in Bulgaria.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter we have discussed the main sources of support for working parents. We have demonstrated how different regimes of working hours and different forms of formal and informal childcare create complex webs of support for parents of young children across the seven countries. The cross-national variation in type of support is related to current and historical regimes of welfare in each country. These regimes are strongly gendered. They encompass state provision and regulation (working hours, parental leave and public childcare); informal care from family networks; gender practices as they shape the contributions of both mothers and fathers in the household and in childcare.

As indicated by the national trend evidence and national and local studies, mothers are the ones who reduce their working hours when children are born and afterwards take up part-time work when it is available.²⁷ Where mothers work full-time, as in some countries like Portugal, mothers assume they should take on more of the childcare and domestic work than fathers. However they are sustained by the help of their mothers or mothers-in-law. In contrast, in Scandinavian countries where there are explicit expectations from women that fathers share domestic work and childcare, practical help must be negotiated and can lead to tension in the couple.

Support from the wider family in everyday life is more common in Bulgaria, Portugal and Slovenia than in the other countries. In the other four countries, family support was more important for looking after children when parents engaged in leisure activities. We have noted however that that family may be more involved in young parents' lives in the Northern countries than we have demonstrated here, as there is a stronger discourse of autonomy and independence in Northern European countries. This may affect the way parents talk about the receipt of intergenerational support.

27. For women whose jobs are 'careers', part-time may mean losing out on promotion opportunities. Reduced working hours as a gendered adaptation pattern may be good for the family as whole during the time when children are young, but may be a mixed blessing for gender equity on the labour market.

7.

Concluding remarks

In this report we have tried to address the research issues identified in the project proposal for this phase of the study. These include: the transition to parenthood, being a working parent in the present, and the types of support parents have access to, given the particular welfare regime, workplace policies and wider family networks. Throughout the report we consider the gendered nature of parenthood and how it plays out differently in the various national contexts across Europe.

Transitions is an unusual project in that it brings a qualitative approach to the study of parents' lives lived in seven different European countries. Studies based on comparative qualitative data are difficult to accomplish. Such research is more commonly written up as national reports, separate and unconnected in any but superficial ways. Thus we have chosen a somewhat different route. Instead we have created an analytic framework in which the many layers of context in which interviewees' lives are embedded are made manifest.

In Chapter 3 we outlined two aspects concerning the rationale for our design and methodology. The first aspect is the logic of case study design: to the overall cross-national, comparative design we have applied a *case study logic*. We justify in particular the selection of cases – of countries, organisations and parents as the study proceeded – both in the fieldwork phase but also in the analysis of the material and the writing of the report. Through this approach, we hope that different layers of context are made explicit at every step of the study. We also set out how the overall design addresses issues of representativeness in comparative research. The second aspect of the overall methodology of this phase is the application of a life course perspective to a biographical interview approach. This is discussed at length in Chapter 3 including the creation of life lines for each interviewee. The latter was particularly helpful when examining the interviewees' lives across gender, social class and national context.

We show that most of the mothers and fathers we have interviewed belong to the birth cohorts born between 1965 and 1975 (Chapter 2 and 3). Thus they are the children of the 'baby boomers' born just after the end of World War II, and in most countries for this reason they form a rather large cohort compared with later birth cohorts. The interviewees were born into societies very different from the ones in which they live their adult lives and their parents lived theirs.

In Chapter 4 we analyse the transition to parenthood in the three different regions of Europe. We focus on the shape of the life course – its linearity and lack of linearity and discuss this in relation to patterns of transitions and phases in the life course. We also analyse the timing of motherhood and fatherhood in the life course across these contexts, and how the timing of the transition varies between men and women from different social classes across the countries. The timing of parenthood is discussed with reference to other life course phases and transitions such as education, entry into employment and partnering.

We also note considerable class differences across countries in the timing of the transition to parenthood. The lower the level of education the earlier in life the transition is likely to happen. For most well-educated interviewees the transition happened after the completion of education, entry into the labour market and gaining a foothold in the housing market. Young parents from Eastern Europe for instance, even the fairly well-off, have a harder time getting into the housing market than in many other countries. In some cases they have to live with parents or in-laws for a period of time since housing is scarce in some areas and not affordable even for young parents with permanent job contracts. In the UK, especially in London where the social services study was done, ethnic differences were also important.

Chapter 4 also discusses how the decision to become a parent is related to the type of life parents experience at this transition point. Where for many it appears that the transition happened at a time when it was 'right', when everything was in place for this to happen without there having been a long period of planning ahead, for others the decision was the result of careful planning. The latter is likely to be associated with affluent young families where having children also means changing their lifestyle in important ways. The chapter emphasises how the transition to parenthood, as indeed other life course transitions, must be analysed and understood in the different layers of context in which individual lives are embedded.

The conditions under which the transition to parenthood took place vary. The factors that we brought to bear in the analysis include the national economic and political contexts, the welfare regimes of the countries concerned, the individual's life course phase, the particular formal and informal resources available to individuals namely education, employment, family relationships and workplace conditions. In some national contexts some conditions are more important than others, such as for instance in Bulgaria and Portugal where the wider family is an important resource for new parents. In Northern Europe the wider family is reported to be less significant, a fact we attribute to a discourse of independence and autonomy in these countries and the existence of a generous welfare state, particularly in the Scandinavian countries.

In Chapter 5 we move to the experience of being a working parent in the present. Again we follow the logic laid out in Chapter 2 and select countries based on the three regions of Europe. In this chapter we focus on Portugal, Sweden, Bulgaria, and the UK in a discussion of the experiences of being a working mother. We selected cases of women with lower education and jobs in the lower echelons of the job hierarchy of their public sector workplaces. The justification is that by focussing on the less well-off we are able to highlight aspects of context that would seem less significant were we to focus on the better-off. An analysis of the experiences of those employed in low status public sector jobs also provides a baseline for assessing how less well-off European parents manage parenthood. Such parents often draw upon informal sources of support, whereas the better-off can afford to pay their way.

In Chapter 5 we show how particular mothers and fathers experience parenthood. Their contentment or lack of it depends upon the resources available to them but also on those with whom they compare themselves. We show how mothers from Portugal and Bulgaria emerge as relatively content compared with their more fortunate peers in Sweden and the UK. In this chapter we also compare the contributions of advantaged fathers, men who in Northern European societies are expected to pull their weight in childcare and the home. These men (from three contrasting countries – Norway, The Netherlands and Slovenia) are at the other end of the socio-economic spectrum working in higher status jobs in the private sector. The Slovenian father emerges as doing the least childcare and is the most content. In a society in which material expectations have been relatively low with the sharp transition from a communist to a

market economy, having a job, a car, a wife, children and a house gave this father a feeling of considerable achievement - they were enough. In contrast to the Norwegian father and the Dutch father, gender equality had yet to touch this Slovenian father, while his children's grandparents provided the major childcare support, thus letting him off the hook.

How families adapt to combining work and family is important for their feelings of well-being (see Cernigoj Sadar & Kersnik, forthcoming). However, the options young parents have to choose from where strategies are concerned, are, as Chapter 5 demonstrates, related to the different layers of context they live their lives within.

In Chapter 6 we approach the topic of support and constraints by exploring the range of formal and informal resources available to parents and how these intersect. The focus is on highlighting the various aspects of national contexts. Hence the cases in this chapter are the particular countries. The most significant support for mothers and fathers are childcare support and working hours. Across Europe most fathers work full-time, so that part-time work, where it exists, is largely an option for mothers. In Sweden the resource of working part-time work is augmented by high quality, affordable public childcare provided in children's own communities, whereas in Portugal both mothers and fathers work full-time and there is little in the way of access to formal and affordable childcare. Support from the wider family becomes crucial for young families in this situation.

Parenthood plays out differently in different contexts. But whatever the context, the gender differences remain.

By way of conclusion we suggest a few points that on the basis of our research are important for policies.

1. The transition to parenthood and experiences of and strategies for managing paid work and family must be analysed and understood in the different layers of context in which individual lives are embedded. This also points to the need for a multi-layered approach to policy-making. Changes in legislation alone are of limited value without shifts in organisational values and practices and in family practices.
2. A frequently recurring theme across the countries is the ways in which gender shapes parenthood and makes motherhood different from fatherhood both in everyday family life and in workplaces. The transition to parenthood appears to be a critical 'tipping point' on the road to gender equality.
3. There is a dilemma that policies that meet parents' currently articulated needs - for example part-time work for mothers - also reproduce gender inequalities (unless there is change in workplace values and practices especially the gendered construction of commitment).
4. Policies that address gender issues, such as the fathers' quota in parental leave, may create tensions in families (the case of a higher status Norwegian father, Bengt, in Norway). Such couple tensions may be necessary for progress to occur. On the other hand, help from extended family may act as a solution to such conflicts but, at the same time, absolve fathers from changing, thus perpetuating gendered family practices.
5. Expectations for managing work-family life may be more easily met in less affluent societies especially where gender equality ideas are not yet widely established. Low expectations may more easily generate well-being (the Bulgarian case of Rosa, a care worker), in contrast to the higher expectations of parents living in societies with higher standards of gender equality and

greater affluence. But again, raising expectations and unsettling people may be necessary for change.

6. Our study points to the importance of identifying the most vulnerable parents (e.g. the care worker, Carol, in the UK). Policies that would help such parents include affordable, good quality housing in big cities for key workers in the social and health services. Locally available, high quality, affordable childcare, together with fully paid parental leave for similar amounts of time across Europe, and the right of parents to be supported when their children are ill are also obvious candidates. Such policies are however ineffective if they are not fully accepted by management and integrated into workplace practices.

It is possible that research has focused too much on policy and neglected the importance of factors such as intergenerational support, precisely because it is not possible to legislate for it. However, alternative strategies may be possible, for example, targeting resources at those with few kin or those located far from their own families, or finding innovative strategies of support.

APPENDIX

Table 6: Characteristics of the Interviewees

	Mother/ Father	Age	Marital Status	Age of Children	Qualification	Job-Level
BULGARIA						
<i>Private Sector</i>	Mother	31	Partnered	7	University	High
	Mother	34	Partnered	6, 10	University	High
	Mother	27	Partnered	3	University	High
	Mother	36	Partnered	7	University	High
	Mother	29	Partnered	2	Secondary	Low
	Mother	31	Partnered	2	Secondary	Low
	Mother	34	Single	6, 12	University	High
	Mother	38	Single	6, 12	Secondary	Low
	Father	37	Partnered	9	University	High
	Father	30	Partnered	6	Secondary	Low
	Mother	34	Single	5, 11	Secondary	Low (agency)
<i>Public Sector</i>	Mother	28	Partnered	2	University	High
	Mother	32	Partnered	3	University	High
	Mother	37	Partnered	3, 7	University	High
	Mother	34	Partnered	6	University	High
	Mother	32	Partnered	4	Secondary	Low
	Mother	25	Partnered	4	Secondary	Low
	Mother	30	Single	4	University	High
	Mother	27	Single	6	University	Low
	Father	30	Partnered	1	University	High
	Father	28	Partnered	6 mts, 2	Secondary	Low
	Mother	28	Partnered	3, 5	Secondary	Low (agency)
	Mother	28	Partnered	7, 10	Secondary	Low (agency)
THE NETHERLANDS						
<i>Private Sector</i>	Father	33	Partnered	2 mts	University	High
	Father	34	Partnered	1	Upper secondary	Medium
	Mother	36	Partnered	1 mt, 2	Postgraduate	High
	Mother	44	Partnered	3, 4	University	High
	Mother	33	Partnered	4 mts, 2	Univeristy	High
	Mother	35	Partnered	2, 4	University	High
	Mother	27	Partnered	1	Upper secondary +	Medium
	Mother	40	Partnered	2, 4	Courses, no degree	Low- Medium
	Mother	32	Single	2, 10, 12	Secondary	Low
	Mother	33	Partnered	2, preg.	Secondary	Low

	Mother/ Father	Age	Marital Status	Age of Children	Qualification	Job-Level
NORWAY						
<i>Public Sector</i>	Father	34	Partnered.	4, 8, 10	Upper secondary	Medium- Low
	Mother	34	Partnered	2, pregnant	University college (3 yrs)	High
	Father	42	Partnered	7, 12	Upper secondary	Medium- Low
	Mother	31	Single	9 mts, 12	Upper secondary	Low
	Mother	37	Partnered	6, 6, 11	Upper secondary	Medium
	Mother	40	Partnered	4, 7	University college	High
	Mother	30	Partnered	3, 4	University college	High
	Mother	29	Partnered	4, pregnant	University college	High
	Father	36	Partnered	4, 7	University college	High
	Mother	40	Partnered	4	Upper secondary	Medium (agency)
	Mother	41	Partnered	5, 8, 15	University college	High
<i>Private Sector</i>	Mother	41	Divorced	6	Upper secondary	Medium
	Father	31	Partnered	3	University	High
	Father	35	Partnered	2, 5	University college	High
	Father	41	Partnered	6 mts, 4	University	High
	Mother	30	Partnered	3	University master	Medium
	Mother	37	Divorced	8, 10	Upper secondary	Medium
	Mother	36	Partnered	1	University Master	High
	Mother	35	Partnered	2	Univ. Master	Medium
	Mother	34	Partnered	2 mts, 6, 10	Univ. Master	High
	Mother	33	Partnered	2, 11, 16	Compulsory	Low (agency)

	Mother/ Father	Age	Marital Status	Age Children	of Qualification	Job-Level
PORTUGAL						
<i>Public Sector</i>	Mother	36	Partnered	3	University	High
	Mother	31	Partnered	1	University	High
	Mother	38	Partnered	8	University	High
	Mother	36	Partnered	4, 7	University	High
	Mother	31	Divorced	5	University	High
	Mother	38	Partnered	2, 8	Less than compulsory	Low
	Mother	24	Single	4	Less than compulsory	Low
	Father	38	Partnered	1	University	High
	Father	32	Divorced	8	Less than compulsory	Low
<i>Private Sector</i>						
<i>Private Sector</i>	Mother	26	Partnered	1	University	High
	Mother	30	Partnered	4 mts, 3	University	High
	Mother	32	Partnered	8 mts	University	High
	Mother	31	Partnered	2	Compulsory	Low
	Mother	30	Partnered	2, 5	University	Low
	Mother	26	Divorced Lone parent	6	Upper secondary	Low
	Father	34	Partnered	1, 2, 5	University	High
	Father	38	Partnered	5	Upper secondary	Low
SLOVENIA						
<i>Private Sector</i>	Mother	35	Partnered	2, 5	University Masters	High
	Mother	33	Partnered	2	Degree	High
	Mother	35	Partnered	3, 4	Secondary	Low
	Mother	40	Partnered	3		High
	Father	35	Partnered	6, 11	Secondary	Middle
	Mother	38	Partnered	7	High school (2 yrs.) studying	High
	Mother	35	Partnered	4, 8	Secondary studying	Middle-low
	Father	42	Partnered	2	Secondary	Middle-low
	Mother	35	Partnered	3, 5	Secondary	Low
	Mother	40	Single	7	University	High

	Mother/ Father	Age	Marital Status	Age of Children	Qualification	Job-Level
SWEDEN						
<i>Public Sector</i>	Father	34	Partnered	6 mts, 4	Univeristy	High
	Mother	33	Partnered	5, 9	Upper secondary	Low
	Mother	31	Partnered	4 mts, 4	Upper secondary	Middle
	Father	27	Partnered	1	Upper secondary	Low
	Mother	28	Partnered	2	Upper secondary	Low
	Mother	36	Partnered	1	University	High
	Mother	34	Single	4, 10	University	High
	Mother	34	Partnered	3, 6	University	High
	Mother	33	Partnered	4	University	High
	Mother	34	Partnered	2, 4	University	High
THE UK						
<i>Private Sector</i>	Mother	36	Partnered	3, pregnant	University	High
	Mother	30	Partnered	9 mts	University	High
	Mother	25	Partnered	6 mts, 2	Compulsory	Low
	Mother	33	Partnered	2	University	High
	Father	38	Partnered	6	Compulsory	Low- middle
	Father	34	Partnered	4, 6	University postgraduate	High
	Mother	34	Partnered	5 mts, 2	Compulsory	Low
	Mother	34	Partnered	2, 7	Compulsory	Low
	Father	37	Single parent	7, 10, 13	Compulsory	Low
<i>Public Sector</i>	Mother	39	Lone parent	4	University	High
	Mother	38	Partnered	4, 12	University	High
	Mother	44	Partnered	2, 4	University	High
	Mother	37	Partnered	4, 4	Degree	Middle
	Mother	39	Partnered	8, 11	University	High
	Father	36	Partnered	1	University	High
	Mother	37	Partnered	6	Upper secondary	Low
	Mother	30	Partnered	2	Compulsory	Low
	Father	30	Lone parent	7	Compulsory	Low
	Mother	33	Partnered	11	Compulsory	Low

Table 7: Support for young parents according to evidence from National reports

	State	Workplace	Partner	Wider family	Community/friends	Access childcare
Sweden	High level support. Childcare a <i>public issue</i> .	Colleagues support Many mothers part-time	Ideals of gender equal. Mothers more dom work. Fathers some childcare	Some practical support for <i>leisure time</i>	Some babysitting	Publicly funded and subsidised. widespread access
Norway	High level support Childcare a <i>private and public issue</i> .	Colleagues, some manager support. Many mothers part-time	Ideals of gender equality Mothers do more dom work. Fathers do some childcare	Some practical support <i>leisure time</i>	Not mentioned	Publicly funded. Expensive. Shortage
Portugal	Low level support. Childcare a <i>family issue</i> .	Public sector 'continuous working hrs' mothers. Full-time norm for all	Traditional gender ideology. Mothers responsible dom arena	Practical <i>everyday support together</i> with formal and informal childcare.	Some exchange and paid childcare	Some publicly funded. Severe shortage.
The UK	Some support. Childcare <i>private matter</i> .	Depends on job level and manager. Some mothers part-time	Gendered. Mothers main responsible dom arena. Fathers some practical support	Some practical support <i>addition</i> to formal childcare	Not mentioned	Some publicly funded. Severe shortage. Expensive
Netherlands	Some support. Childcare predominately a <i>private matter</i> .	Flexible employment. Mothers high part-time rate (short and long pt)	Gendered. Mothers main responsible dom arena. Fathers some practical support	Some practical <i>leisure time</i> support	Not mentioned	Privately funded and recent public/private partnerships in poor areas. Shortage. Expensive unless on low income
Slovenia	Declining support. Childcare <i>public and family issue</i>	Intensification of work, inflexible. Full-time norm for all	Traditional gender ideology. Mothers responsible dom arena	Practical <i>everyday support addition</i> to public childcare. Financial support	Children play neighbourhood	Publicly funded. Subsidised. Good access. Short opening hrs
Bulgaria	High level support. Childcare <i>public and family issue</i>	Intensification of work, inflexible. Full-time norm for all	Traditional gender ideology. Mothers responsible dom arena.	Practical <i>everyday support in addition</i> to public childcare. Financial support	Not mentioned	Publicly funded. Subsidised. Good access.

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Life lines for cases used in the consolidated report:

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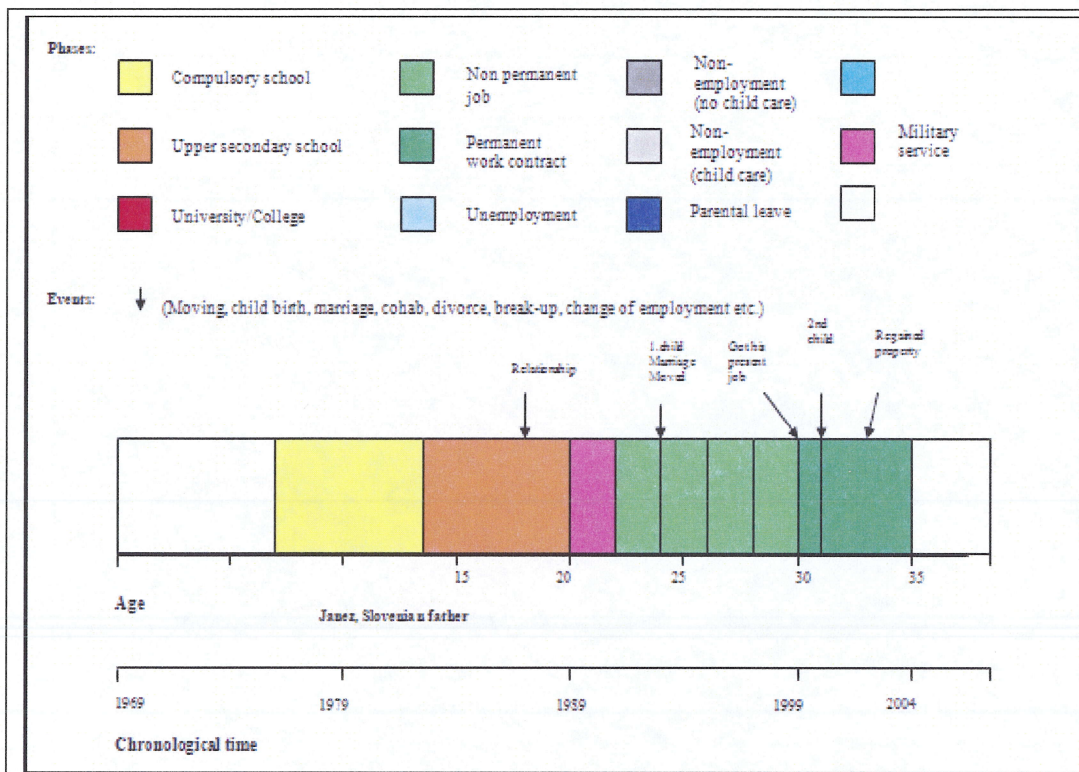
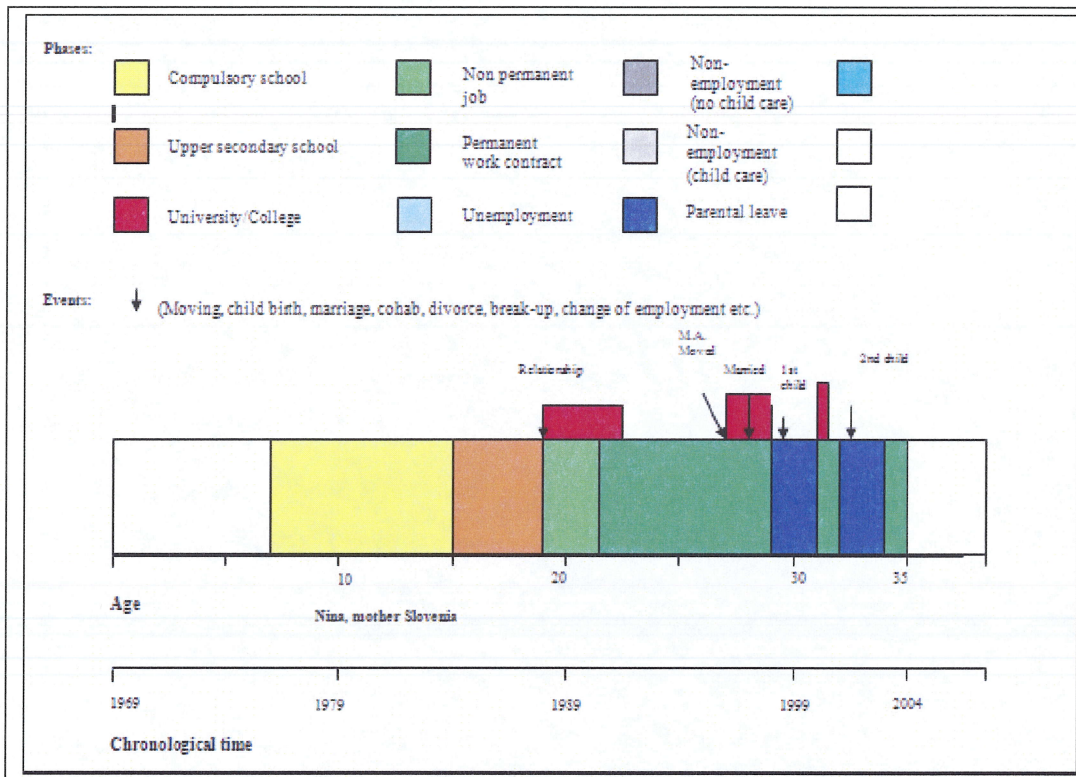
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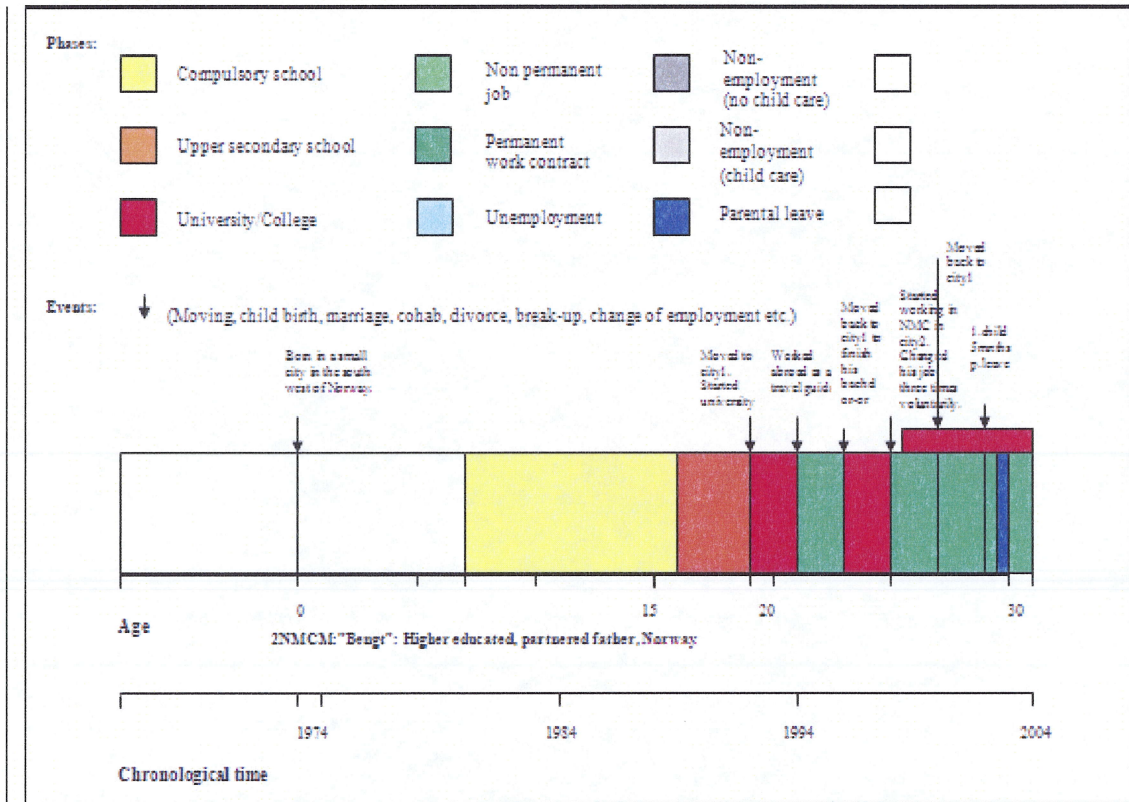
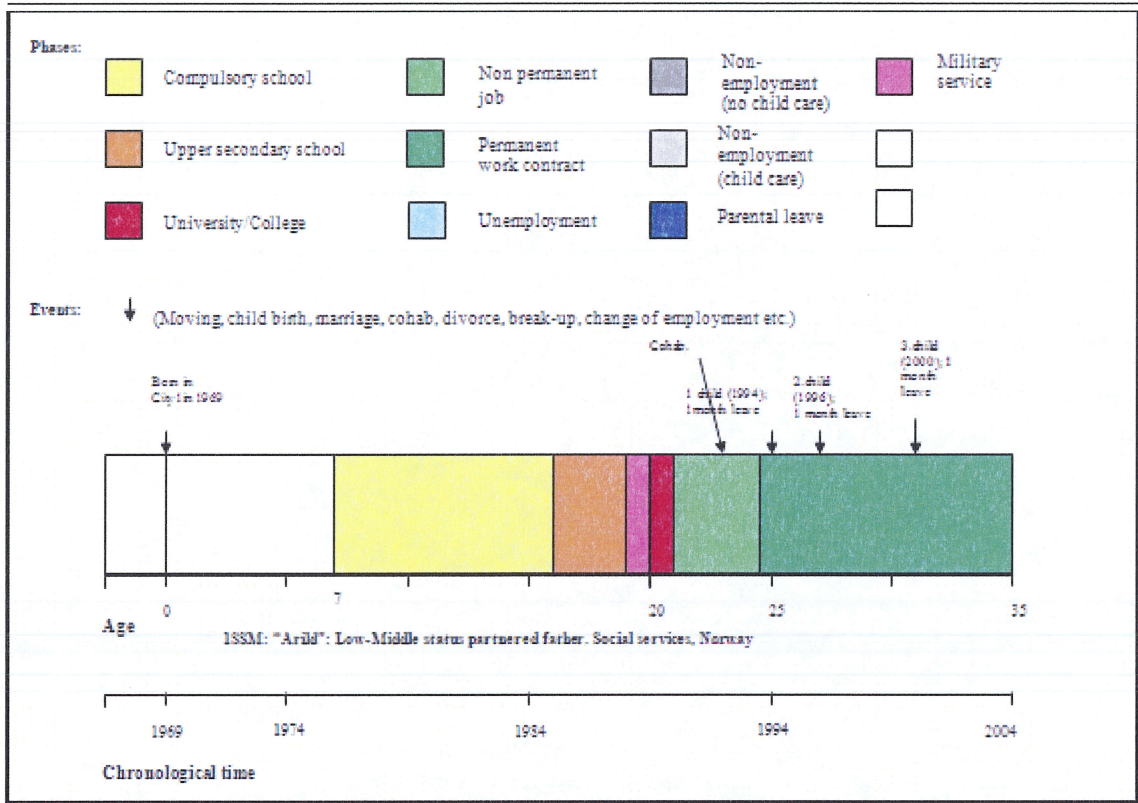
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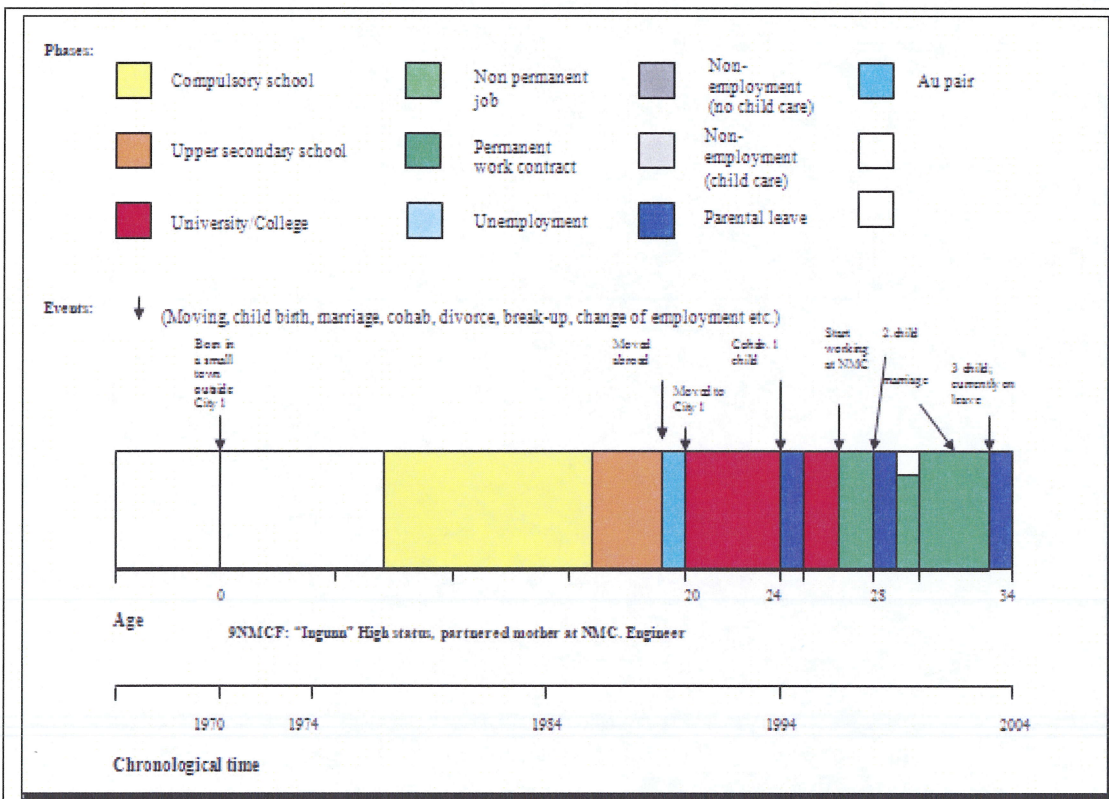
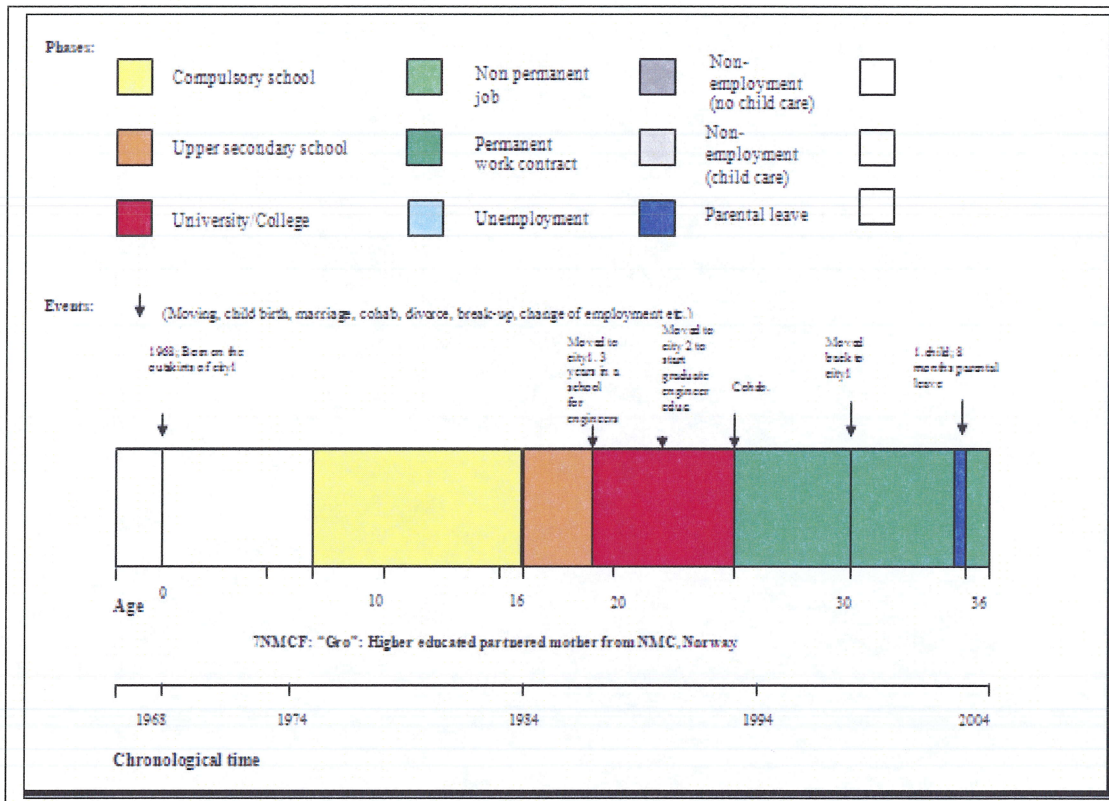
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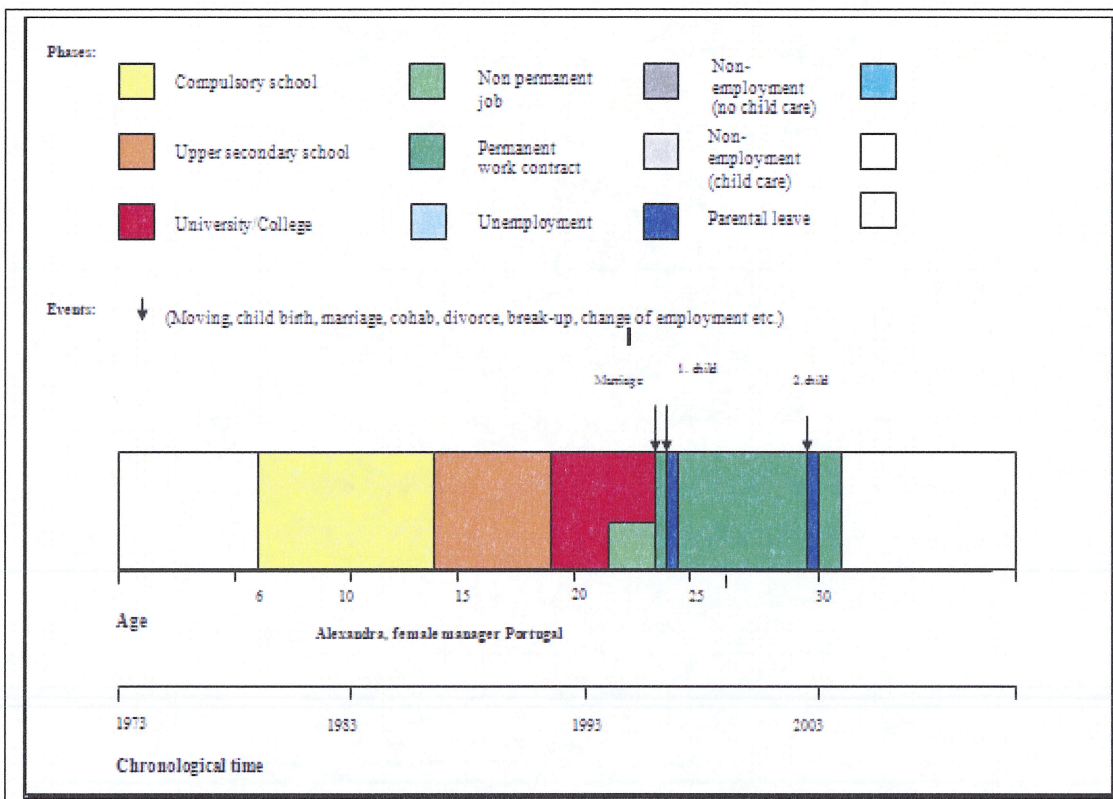
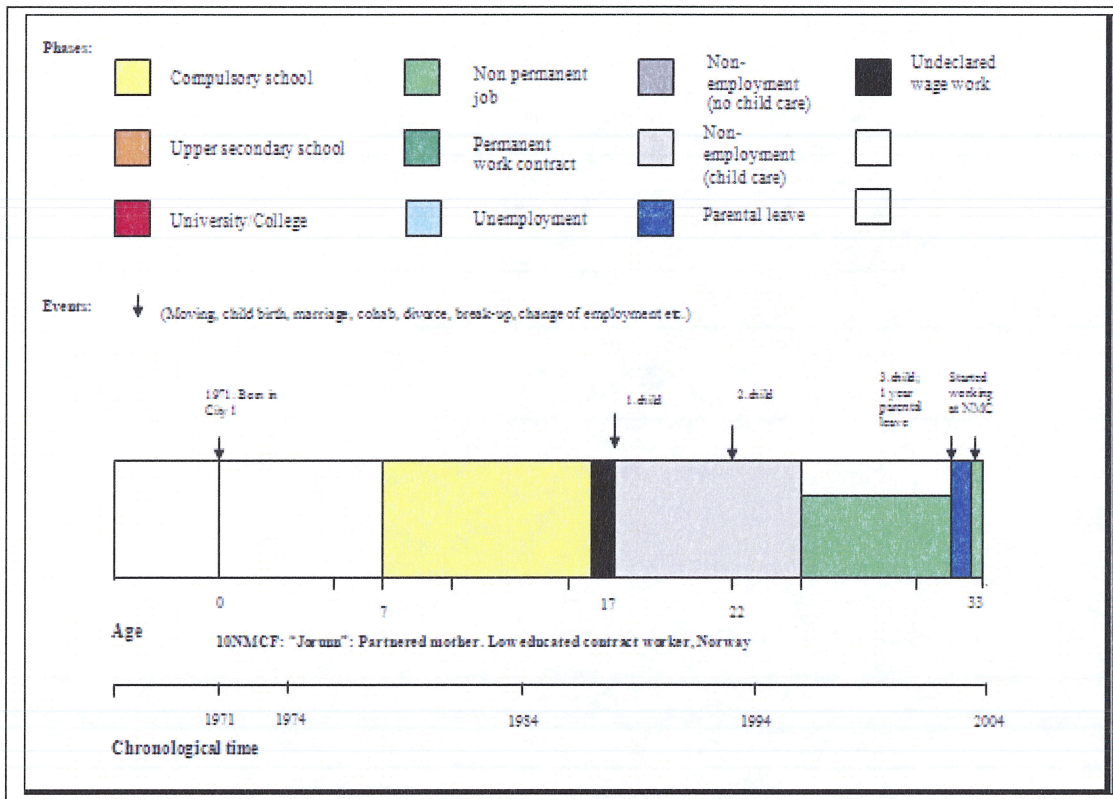
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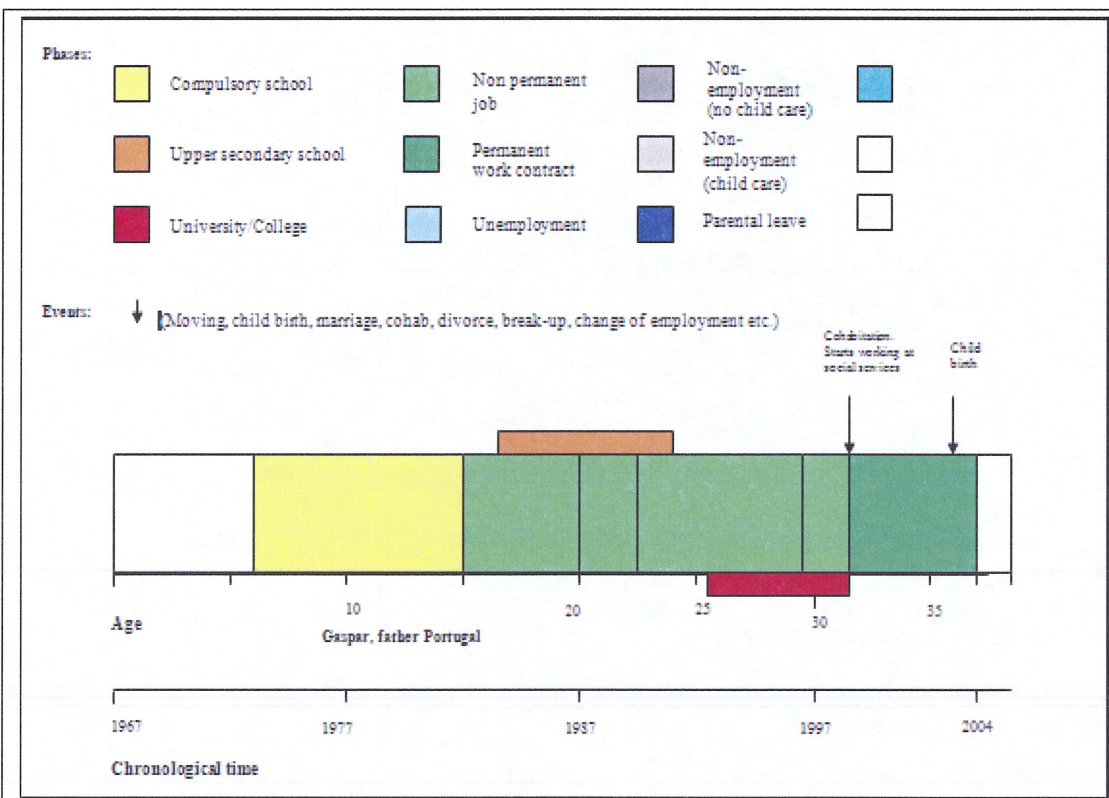
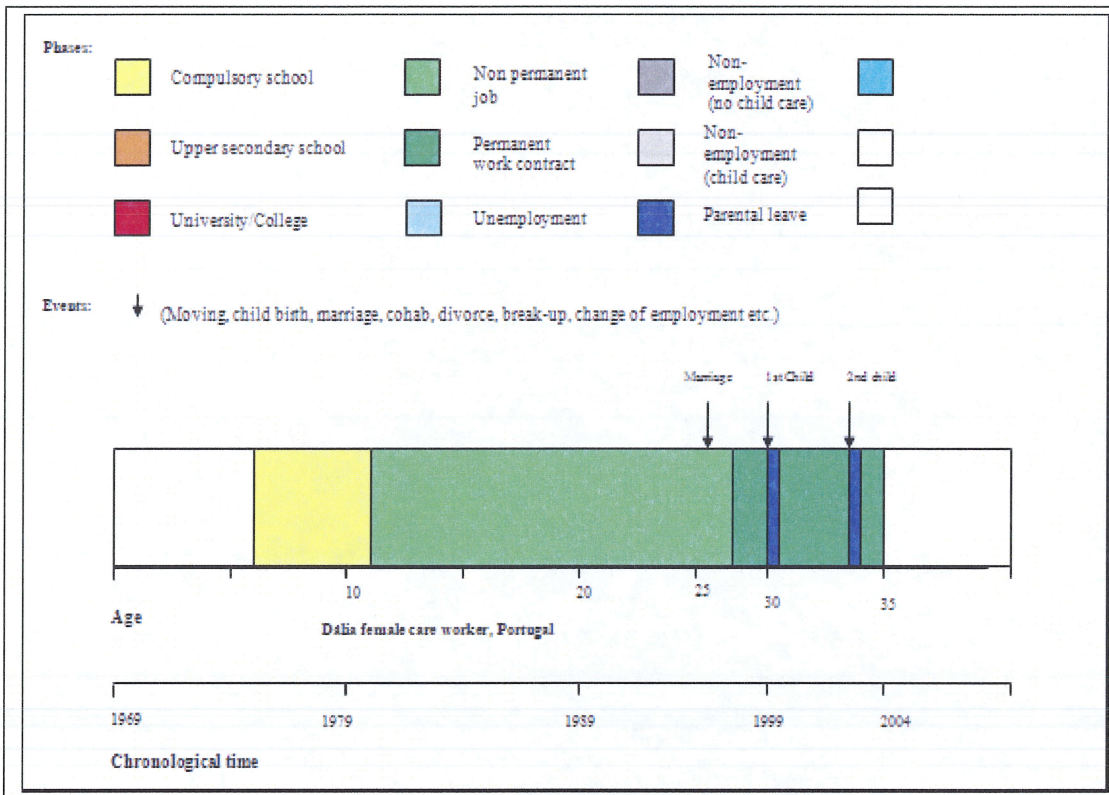
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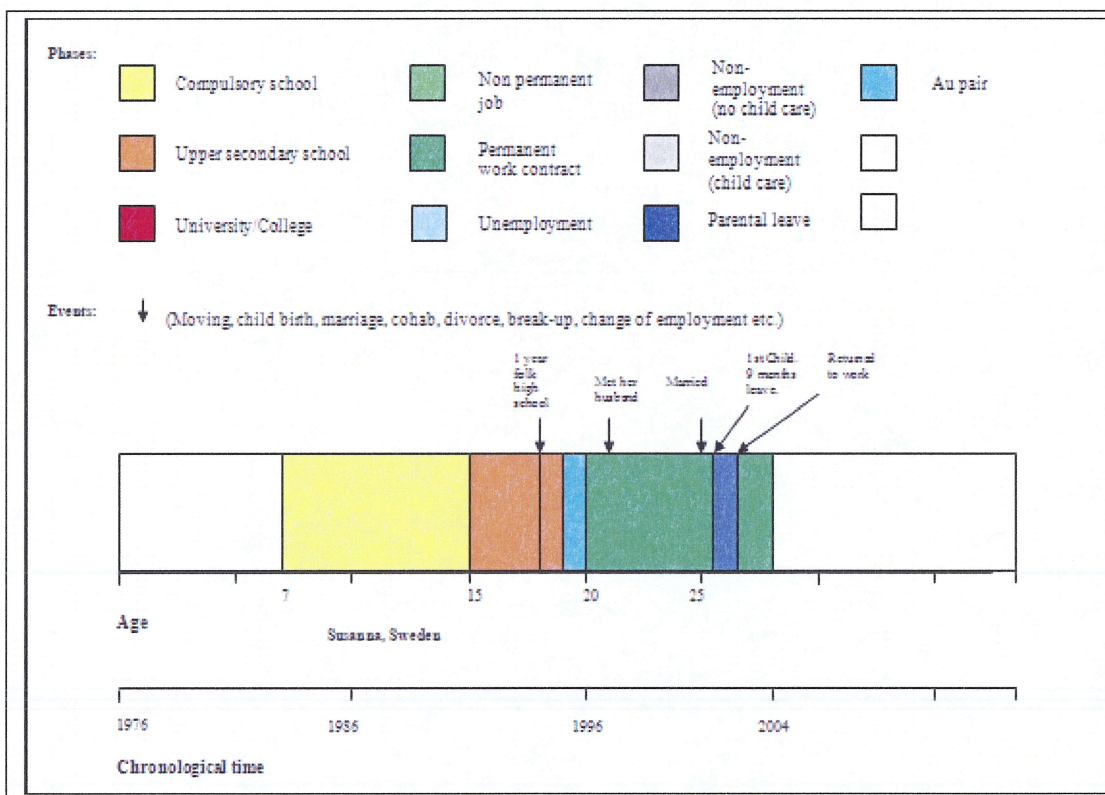
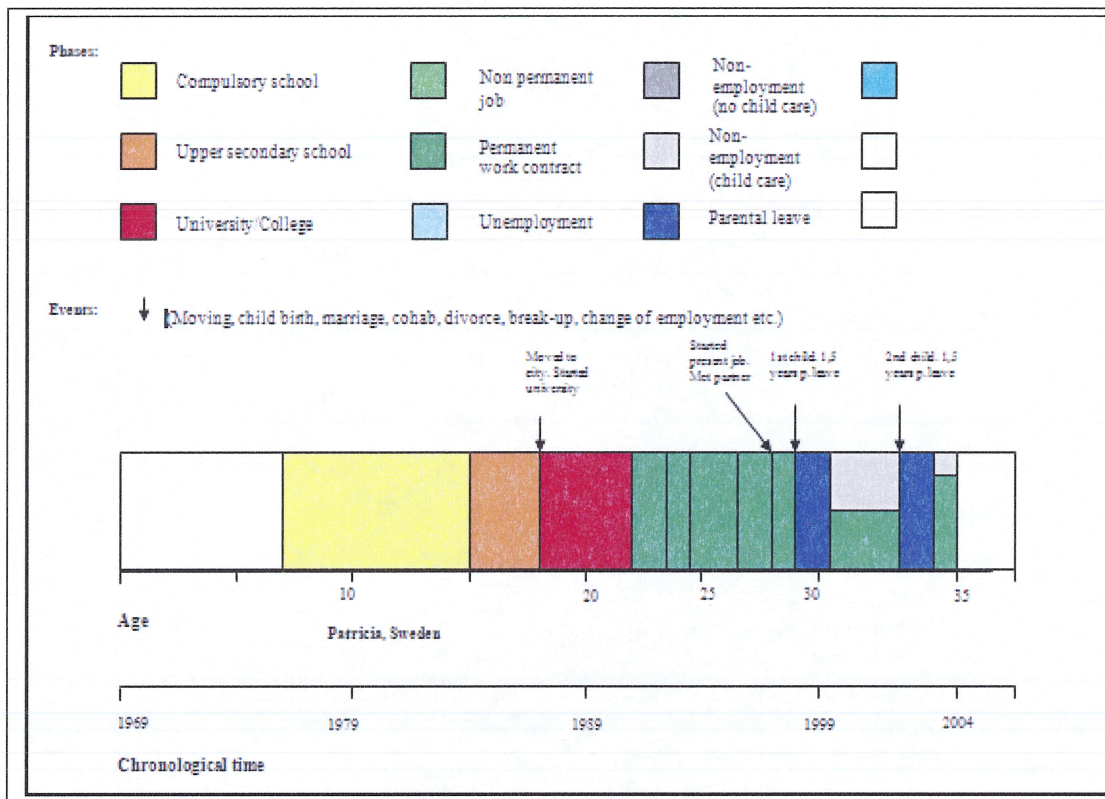


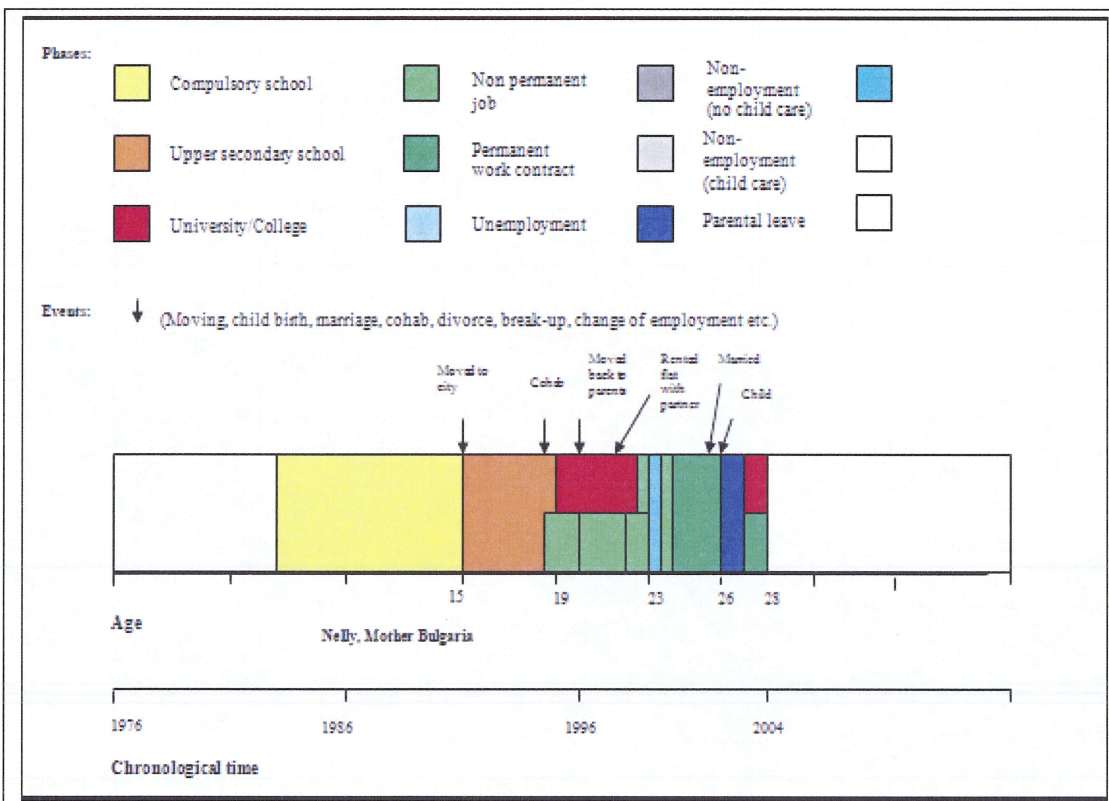
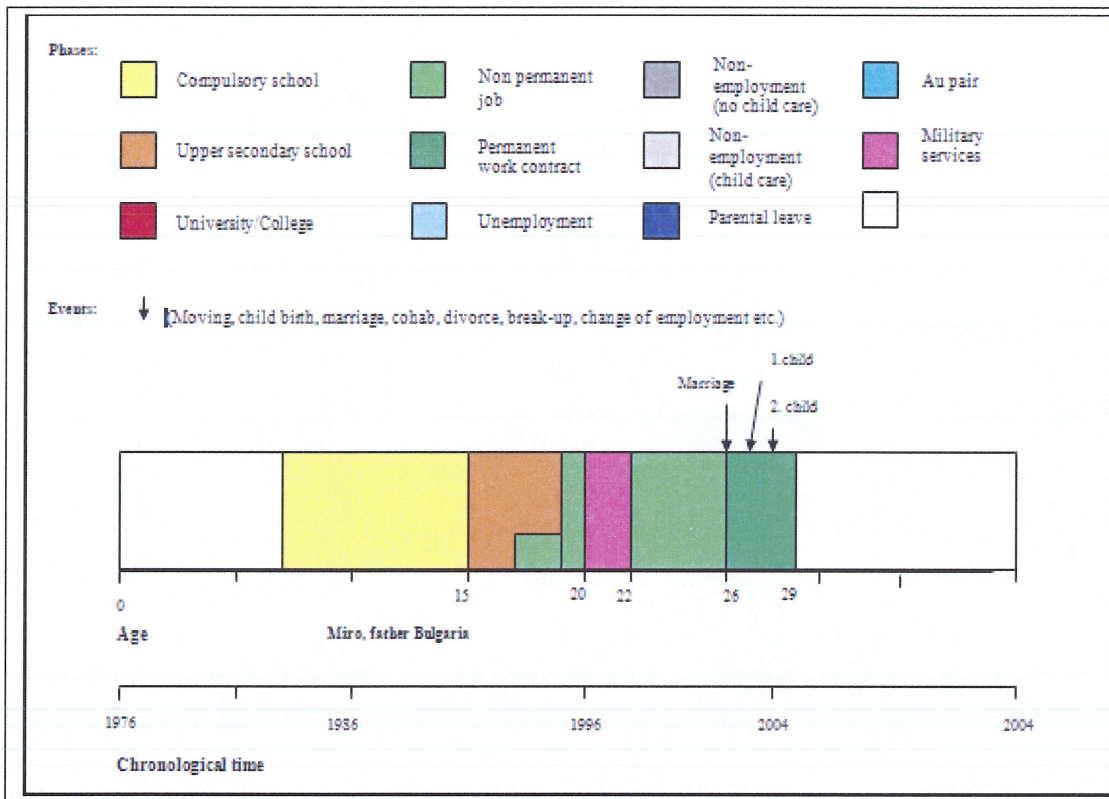


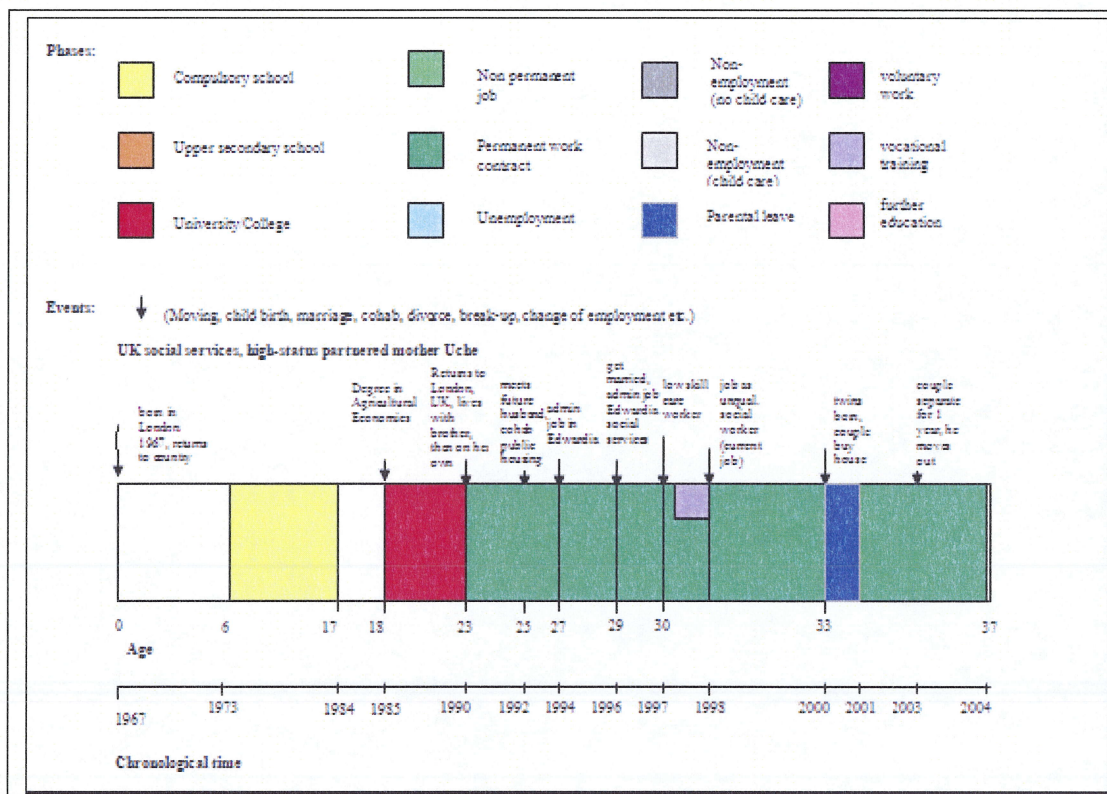
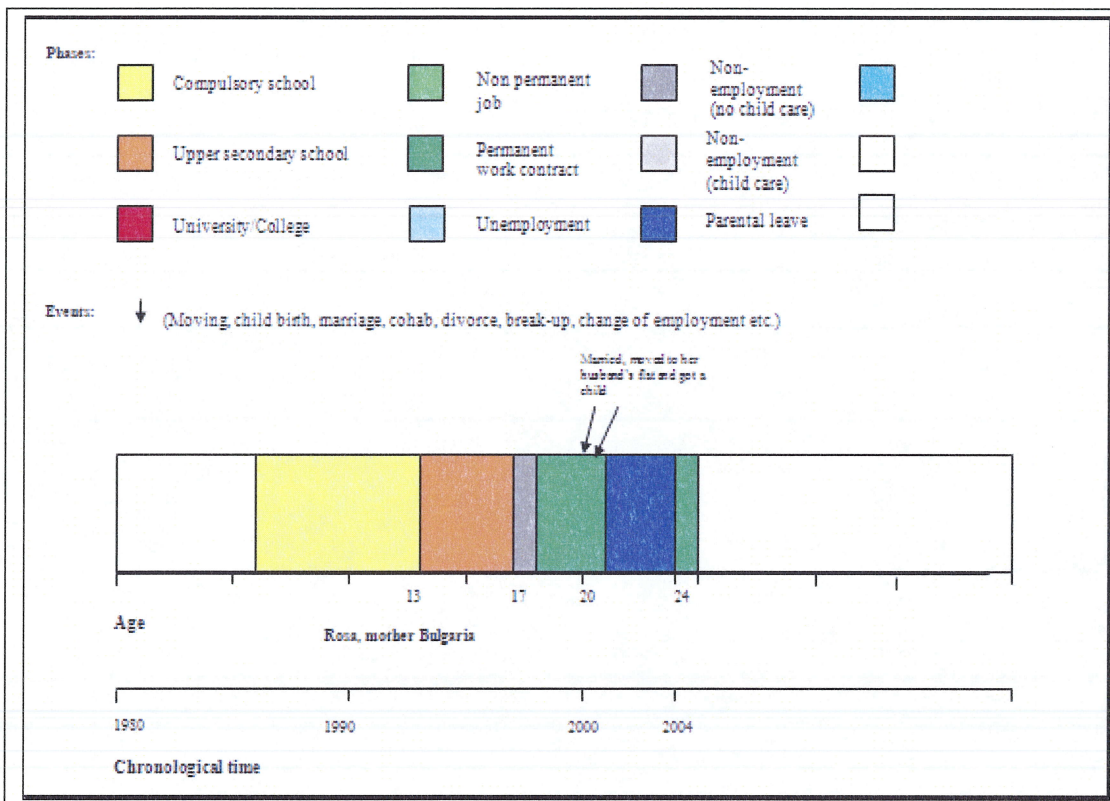


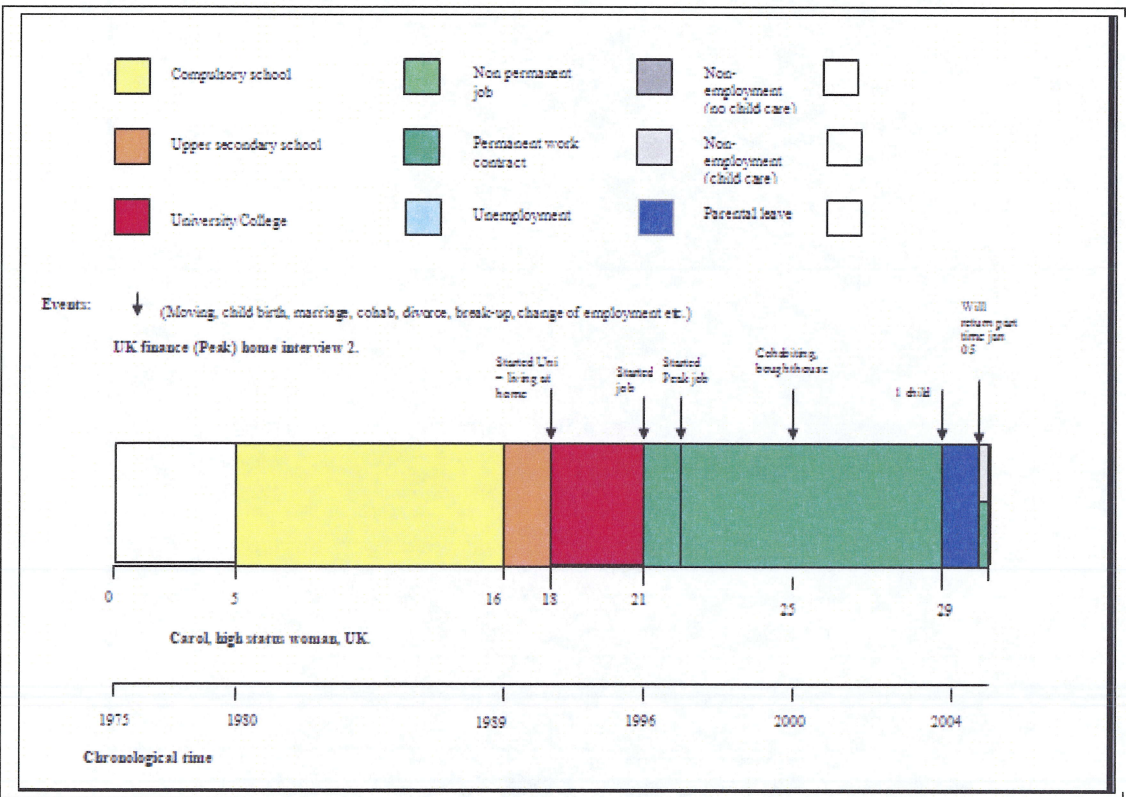
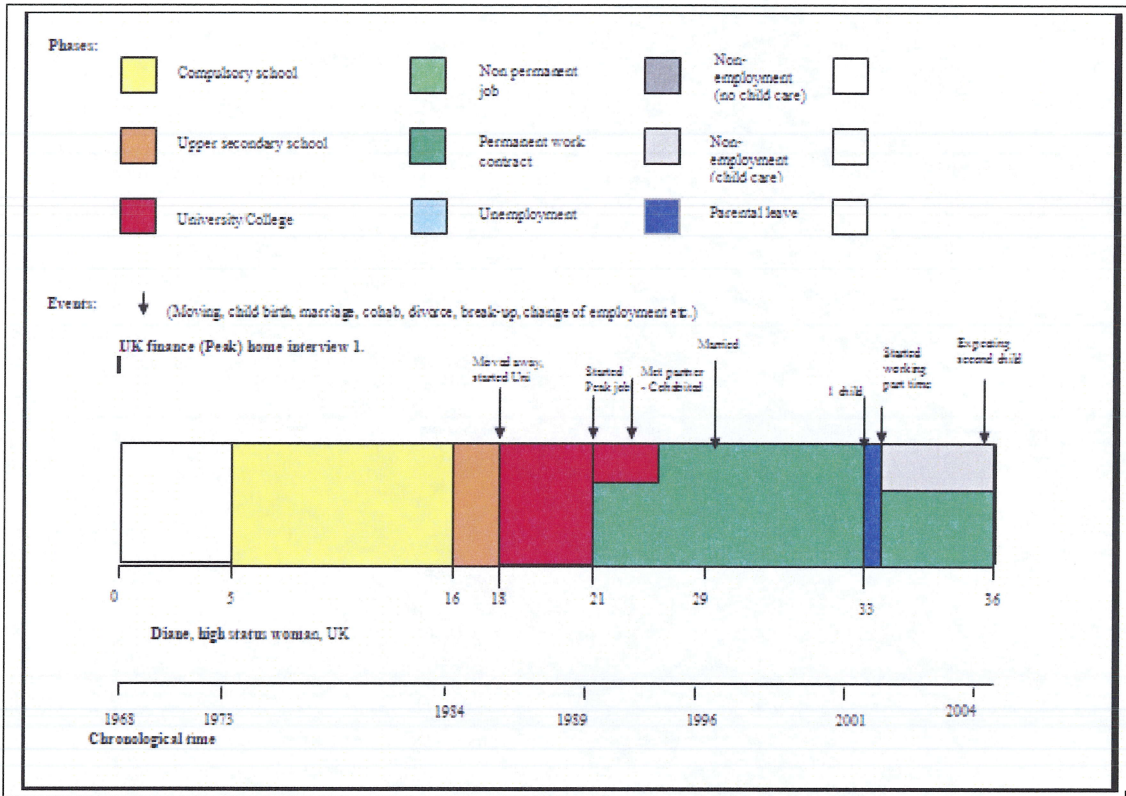


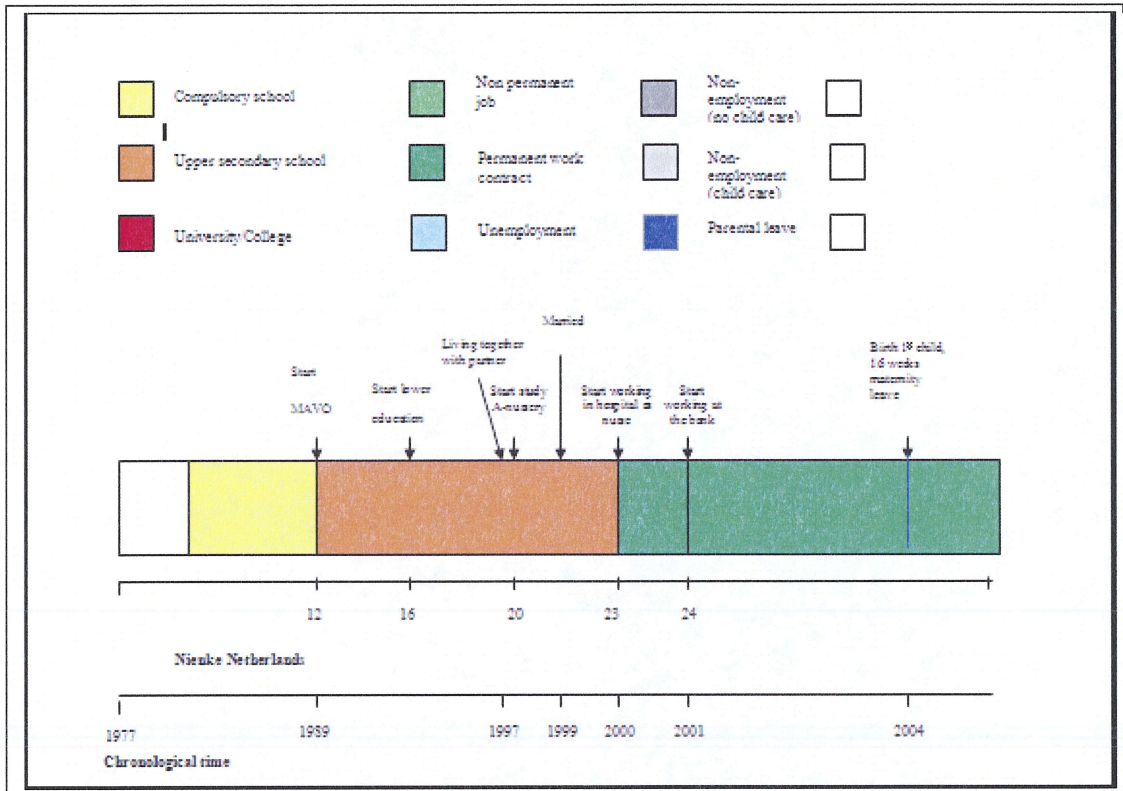
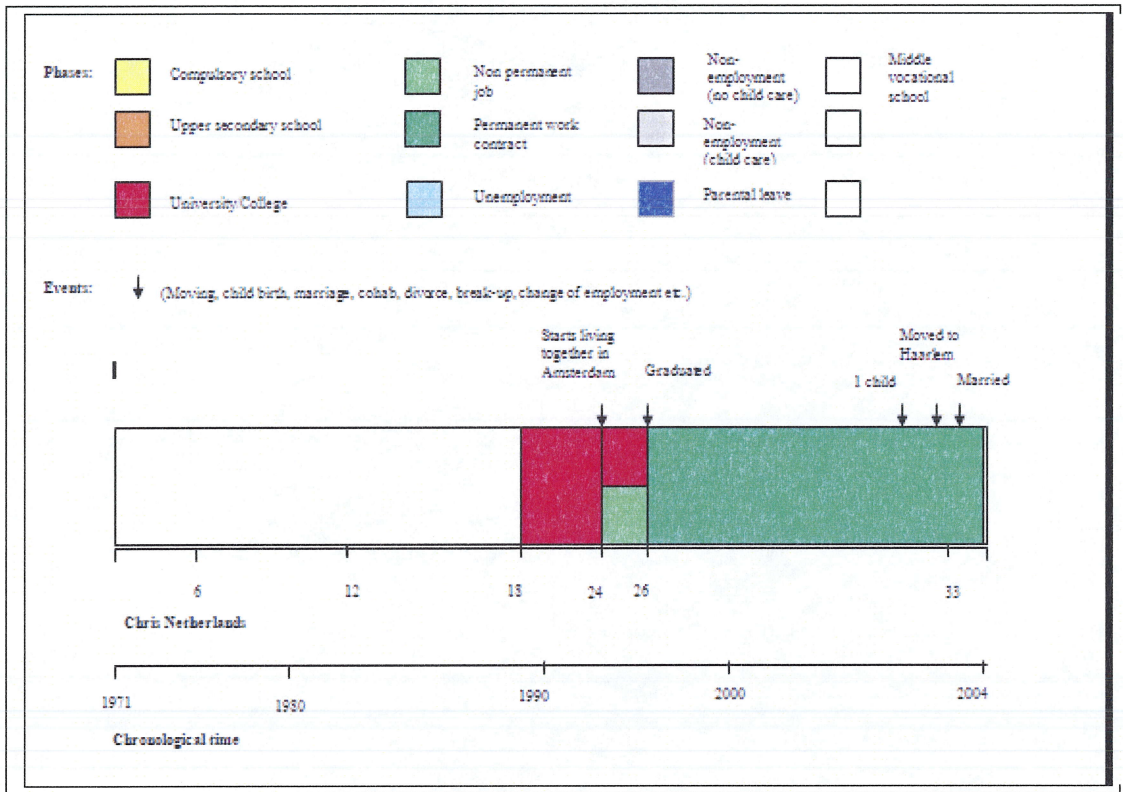


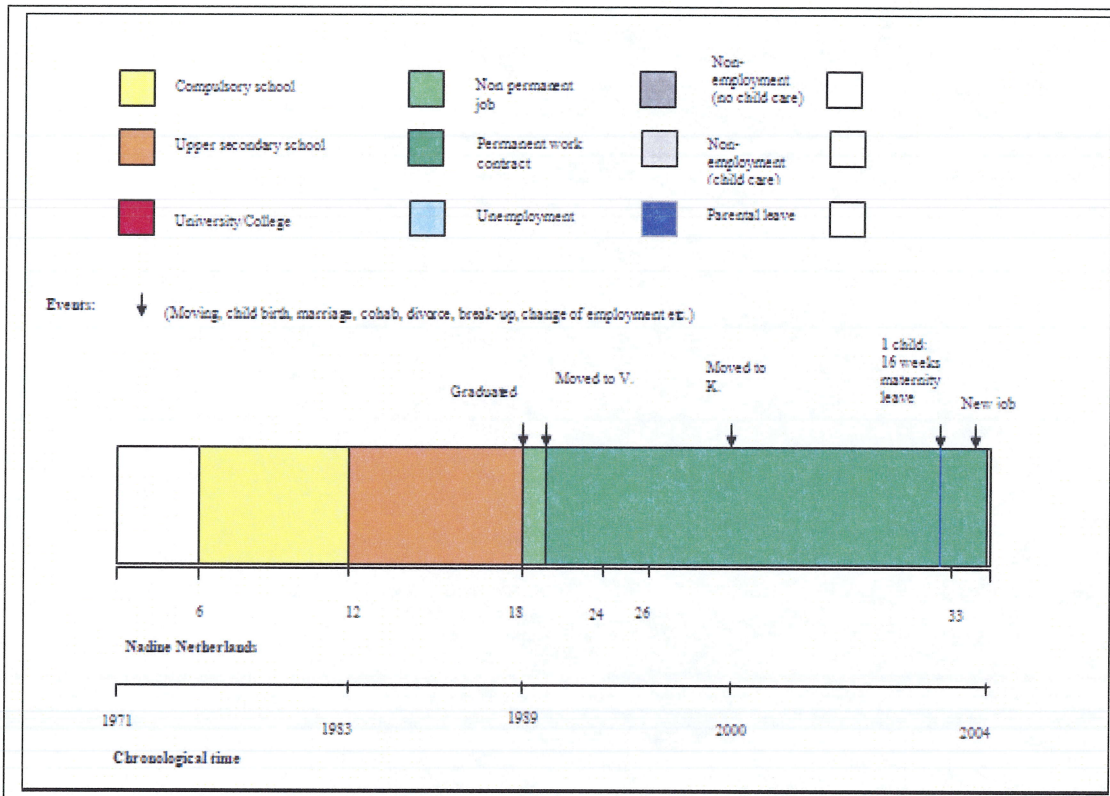




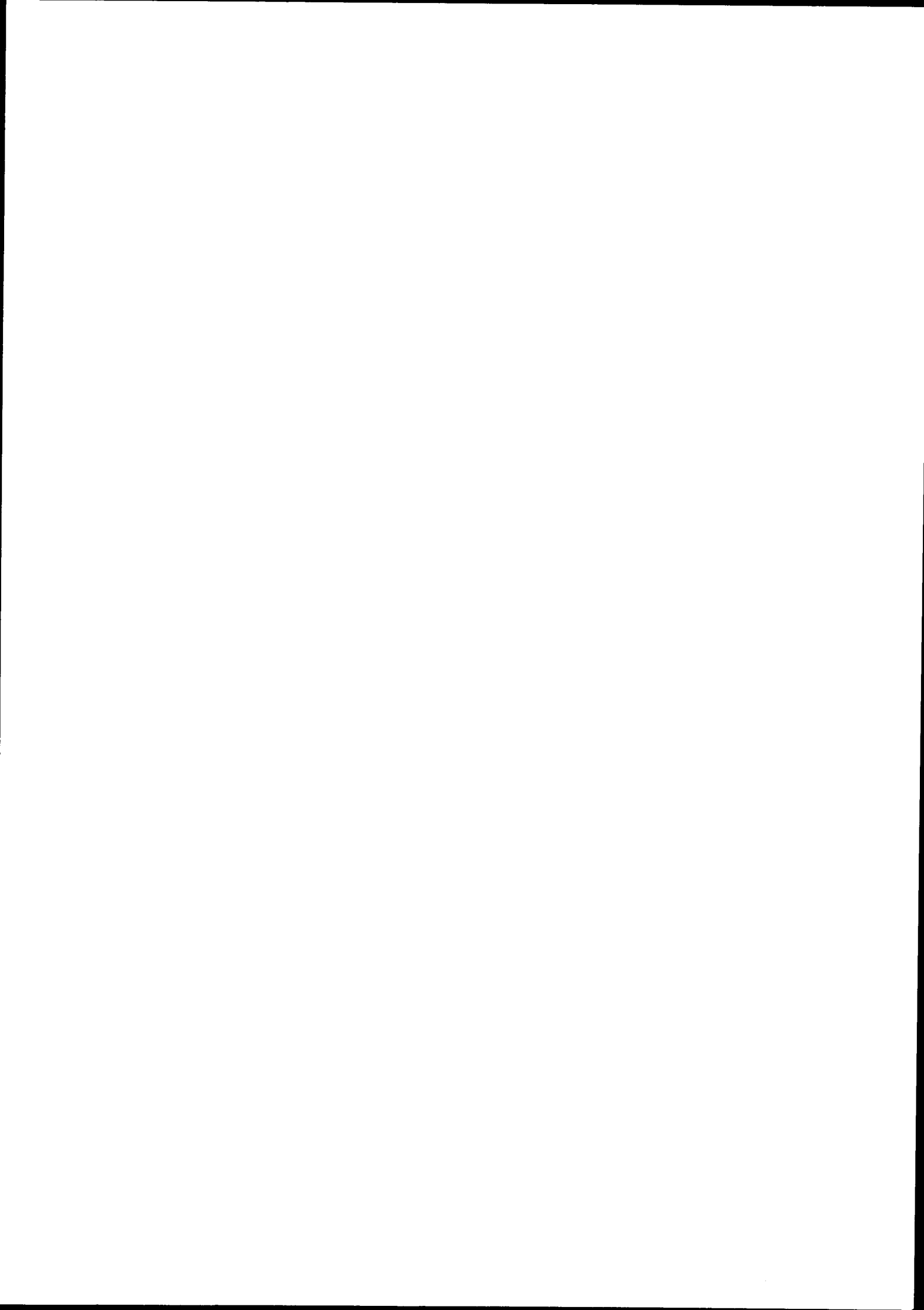












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