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Flexibility in the organisation of working time: a tool to improve job satisfaction in reconciling work and family life

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Abstract:

Flexibility in the organisation and length of working time, which enables better reconciliation of work, private and family life, can also play an important role in increasing employment rates, particularly among women, who retain the bulk of the responsibility for child and adult care. Using data from the European Labour Force Survey 2010 ad hoc module on reconciliation of work and family life, this study analyses how participation in the labour market is connected with caring and how flexibility of working time, part-time, flexible work organization and working place should be used to balance work and family life.

Data at European level make it possible to compare flexibility of working time and arrangements with the level of employment in Italy and in other European countries.

Finally, employed people's satisfaction in the distribution of time dedicated to work and family is considered in relation with personal and employment's characteristics, in order to identify the typology of workers who are happier with their work and life balance, and to verify the impact of flexibility on job quality.

Keywords: work-life balance, job satisfaction, employment, gender

1. Introduction

Working Time Quality has the greatest effect on Subjective Work-Life Balance, while Intrinsic Job Quality has the greatest effect on Subjective Well-Being. According to Eurofound¹, supposing that “there were a rise of 10 points in Intrinsic Job Quality; this would, other things being equal, raise Subjective Well-Being by 3.5 points”.

In 2010, an ad hoc module on “Reconciliation between work and family life” of the Labour Force Survey has been carried out at European level. The main subjects surveyed in the module were Care responsibilities, Flexibility of working time, Career breaks and parental leave. The first aim of this study is to analyse how participation in the labour market is connected with caring. The second objective is to state how flexibility of working time is used to balance work and family life in the European Union. Having data at European level makes it possible study the relationship between working time flexibility and employment in Italy and in other European countries. Finally, the employees’ satisfaction in the distribution of time dedicated to work and family is considered in relation with personal and employment’s characteristics, in order to identify the typology of workers happier with their work and life balance.

Employment represents a fundamental activity for material sustenance as well as fulfilment of individual aspirations. Employment is one of the main indicators of economic stability, social cohesion and quality of life and has a central role in protecting families from poverty. Tensions between work and family life are at the heart of the employment puzzle when it comes to gender: reconciliation of work and family could increase the employment rate of women, enhancing gender equality and material well being of families.

This is particularly true in Italy, where low women participation to the Labour market is strongly connected to their family role and to care burden, even more than in the rest of the European Union. In Italy, female employment rate is very low, and gender inequality in employment is very high, mostly in household with children.

Given that male employment level is very similar between Italy and the rest of Europe, if Italy wants to reach the Europe 2020 target “75% of the 20-64 year-olds to be employed”, mothers’ employment rate needs to be boosted.

In Italy there are also almost 3 million people who care for children not living in the household –mostly older women – who present a very low level of employment.

Similarly, having to care for very old, sick or disabled people impacts on the participation to the labour market, mostly among women.

A better organisation of welfare, with a stronger involvement of Government, could guarantee a better quality of care services and – at the same time – it could create more jobs, mostly for women, both Italian and foreigner.

The analysis of data of the module shows that a better reconciliation between work and family life would increase the participation of inactive people to the Labour Market:

¹ Eurofond “job quality in Europe

almost 25% of inactive people would be able to work if they could reduce time dedicated to care. Over one million inactive people who have caring responsibilities would work if they could reduce the time devoted to family. The difficulties of reconciling family and work are most evident for parents (52.2% of fathers and 30.3% of mothers), less among those who give support to the elderly and sick (16.4% men and 20.3% among women) and those who look after not cohabiting children, due to the fact that these two groups are composed mostly by older people who have often already left the labour market or, especially in the case of women, have never been active.

There is also the reverse of the medal: low participation to the labour market in our country is accompanied by a high dissatisfaction for the time spent with family among employed people (a third of employees with children is dissatisfied with the time devoted to family).

The analysis of the ad hoc module data allows also to identify the strategies of reconciliation. First of all, part time could be considered the first and most important tool to reconcile work and family life.

As stated by Eurostat, flexibility of the working time represents a key aspect for the topic of reconciliation because it helps to better balance working and family life.

In Italy, almost two employees out of three have fixed daily working times without the possibility to start or end the working day later/earlier autonomously. This possibility instead is allowed to 30% of the employees, as long as a certain number of daily hours is worked. Furthermore, working time banking results very uncommon in Italy. Although women have the major care responsibilities, there are no significant distinctions by gender, and flexible time is more connected to high level jobs and older workers (mostly male) than to caring responsibilities.

On the contrary, in other European countries, flexible working is much more spread. Analysing employment rates and possibility to vary start and/or stop of the working day for family reasons for employees in the European countries, is clear that in countries where flexible working time is widely allowed, the employment rate is significantly higher.

A logistic model has been applied to data for employees, using the variable on satisfaction of working and family balance as dependant variable. In this way, it has been possible to identify which characteristic – personal and job’s – are more important on determining a good balance of work and family time. The results confirm what appears from the descriptive analysis: men are more satisfied than women, older workers more than younger and part-time employees are greatly happier than full time worker with their use of time.

Working time flexibility, instead, is not common enough and is present only in connection with jobs characterised by longer working hours.

2. Data

According to Commission Regulations n. 365/2008 of 23 April 2008 and n. 20/2009 of 13 January 2009, during the 2nd quarter of 2010, five years after the first edition, ISTAT introduced in the questionnaire of the Labour Force Survey the *ad hoc* module on “Reconciliation between work and family life”.

In order to monitor progress towards the objectives of the European Employment Strategy and to measure the impact of recent policies on this matter, the AHM 2010, focused on persons who care for children, elderly, ill or disabled people, collected information on the theme of reconciling work and family life. In particular, the first objective of the module was to analyse how far people participate in the labour market as they wish and, if not, whether the reasons are connected with a lack of suitable care services for children and dependant persons. Secondly, it aimed to state the degree of labour flexibility in terms of reconciling work and family demands. Finally, it investigated the frequency of absence from work for family reasons, the career breaks (in particular, the use of parental leaves) and the reorganisation of working hours in order to take care of the youngest children.

Reference period for the AHM was the 2nd quarter of 2010, from April to June. Data collection started the 12th of April 2010 and ended the 25th of July 2010.

The AHM target population was 103,064 persons aged 15-64 years old (62.1% of the total of individuals interviewed in the period).

3. The context: employment and work-family reconciliation in Europe

Employment rate in Italy is 61 per cent among 20-64 years old people, 7 points lower than the European average (68.5 per cent in 2012).

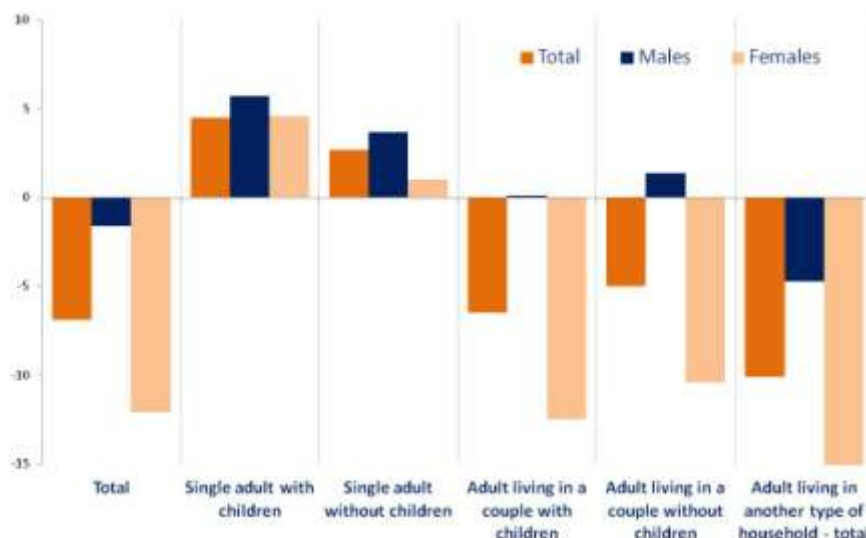
In 2012, Italian employment rate, after a modest increase in 2011, fell by 0.3% over the previous year (69,000 units less) and by 2.2% over 2008 (-506 thousand employed people less), and it is still decreasing (and at a steady pace) in the first half of 2013.

The gap between the employment rate of Italy and the average in the Eu27, already significant before the 2008 recession, grew further in 2012, because employment began to invert the negative trend earlier than in Italy.

The difference between Italy and the European Union average is very high among women (female employment rate is 50.5 in Italy vs 62.4 in the EU27 for people 20-64 years old), while for men, the difference is lower (71.6% vs 74.6%, same age).

Family responsibilities strongly reduce female employment. This phenomenon, that is common in the rest of the European Union, is however particularly strong in Italy. Having children affects the employment rates of women and men differently. The employment rate of women from 25 to 54 years old drops in the UE average of 7 points whereas men's increases by 8 p.p.. In Italy, the employment rate of mothers is 9 p.p. lower than women without children, while for fathers is 10 points higher (figure 1).

Figure 1. Employment rate 25-54 years by household composition (differences EU27 - Italy) – 2012



Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey

In Italy, low women participation to the Labour market is strongly connected to their family role and to care burden: in 2012, the employment rate of women between 25 and 54 years old with children is 55.8 per cent, while is 63.6 among women without children.

Around 30% of working-age women with care responsibilities are either economically inactive or work part-time due to the lack of care services for children and other dependent persons.

Being the male employment level very similar between Italy and the rest of Europe, if Italy wants to reach the Europe 2020 target “75% of the 20-64 year-olds to be employed”, mothers’ employment rate should be enhanced.

A simple correlation coefficient shows a negative relationship (-34 per cent) between the total employment rate and the difference between employment rate of fathers and mothers (25-54 years old).

In Italy, the economic consequences on households of the lack of employment is particularly heavy, because the tax and transfer system plays a lesser role in buffering households against large falls in labour earnings than in other OECD countries, as stated by OECD.

Even if caring for cohabiting children is the commonest form of family’s responsibility, in Italy there are almost 3 million people (15 – 64 years old) who care for children not living in the household. Most of them are women and older people and they present employment levels lower than the rest of the population (41.6% versus 58.4%), although this effect is increased by the presence within the group of older people.

Similarly, having to care for adults or disabled people impacts on employment level and even more for female. ∴, the employment rate of women, between 25 and 44 years, who care for an adult or a senior is about eight percentage points lower than that of the general population.

4. Working time flexibility and other tools to reconcile work and family life in Europe

The analysis of data of the module shows that a better reconciliation between work and family life would increase the participation of inactive people to the Labour Market: almost 25% of inactive people would be able to work if they could reduce time dedicated to care. Over one million inactive people who have caring responsibilities would work if they could reduce the time devoted to family. The difficulties of reconciling family and work are most evident for parents (52.2% of fathers and 30.3% of mothers), less among those who give support to the elderly and sick (16.4% men and 20.3% among women) and those who look after not cohabiting children, due to the fact that these two groups are composed mostly by older people who have often already left the labour market or, especially in the case of women, have never been active.

Table 1. Inactive caregiver (15-64) who wish to work by gender and territory – 2010
(percentage of 100 inactive caregiver)

| Inactive caregiver who wish to work | TOTAL | -children in the same household | - other children | -adults (old, disable) |
|--|--------------|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Total | 24,0 | 32,8 | 12,9 | 19,4 |
| North | 14,4 | 22,4 | 7,1 | 13,1 |
| Centre | 18,8 | 27,2 | 12,0 | 14,4 |
| South+Islands | 33,4 | 39,8 | 20,1 | 28,0 |
| Uomini | 26,9 | 52,2 | 12,7 | 16,4 |
| North | 10,7 | 30,2 | 5,0 | 7,7 |
| Centre | 15,4 | 20,7 | 15,6 | 14,4 |
| South+Islands | 44,4 | 60,9 | 21,4 | 29,9 |
| Donne | 23,4 | 30,3 | 13,0 | 20,3 |
| North | 15,3 | 21,8 | 7,9 | 15,1 |
| Centre | 19,5 | 27,6 | 10,6 | 14,3 |
| South+Islands | 31,0 | 35,9 | 19,7 | 27,6 |

In Italy, there would be around 400 thousand people not working (mostly women) that would participate to the labour market if there were more and better care services for children. Moreover, there would be almost 200,000 (of which 160,000 women) people in Italy who would work if care services for adults were available.

There is also the reverse of the medal: low participation to the Labour market in our country is accompanied by a high dissatisfaction for the time spent with family among employed people (a third of employees with children is dissatisfied with the time devoted to family).

There are many different types of flexible working schemes and arrangements on offer to workers to help them to reconcile work and private and family life. These cover issues such as flexibility in the organisation of working time (including working atypical hours) and flexibility in the length of working time.

The analysis of the ad hoc module data allows also to identify the strategies of reconciliation. First of all, part time could be considered the first and most important tool to reconcile work and family life and more than a third of employed women with caring responsibilities have a part-time job..

Part time and flexibility of working hours have been valid tools to reconcile work and family, and have support employment in Europe.

4.1. Part time

One of the most used tool to reconcile work and family life is part time work. In 2011 the EU-27, almost a third (32%) of employed women aged 25 to 54 with a child less than 6 years have worked part-time, while for employed women with three or more children, where the youngest is up to 6 years, half (50%) work part time (table 2). For employed men, the rates are significantly lower (5% and 7% respectively).

Among employees without children, 22% of women and 7% of men work part time in 2011.

Highest quote of part-time workers are observed in the Netherlands (81% for those with a child under the age of 6 and 92% for those with three or more children), Austria (60% and 69%), Germany (56% and 77%) and the UK (48% and 67%).

It is worth noticing that a high proportion of part time workers is often accompanied – in the European Union countries – with a high level of the employment rate (ISTAT, 2011). Netherland, Germany, Sweden and UK show both high proportion of employed people and part time employee, while in Italy, Malta, Hungary these quote are both lower than the EU average.

While helping reconciling work and life balance, part time implies also a wage reduction that, in particular in households with children, could create economic problems. In Italy, there are 1 million 424 thousand women employed part time who have children younger than 15 years old or who take care of other children, elderly or other dependent adults. The 14,4% of these women report that they are not being able to work full time because of the lack of care services in term of cost, time, proximity to the area of residence and presence of specialized personnel. The 11% of these women refers only to

services for the care of children, 1.5% of services for the care of the elderly, sick or disabled adult and 1, 9% of cases of both kind of services.

Table 2. Part-time employment by number of children – Year 2011

| | No children | | One child | | Three or more children | |
|----------------|-------------|-------|-----------|-------|------------------------|-------|
| | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men |
| EU27 | 21.7 | 7.0 | 32.2 | 4.5 | 49.6 | 7.0 |
| Belgium | 33.4 | 8.4 | 35.3 | 6.2 | 56.5 | 6.4 |
| Bulgaria | (1.4) | (1.7) | : | : | : | : |
| Czech Republic | 4.2 | 1.7 | 11.2 | : | (13.7) | (2.0) |
| Denmark | 27.4 | 10.8 | 24.0 | 5.3 | 38.3 | : |
| Germany | 31.2 | 8.5 | 56.2 | 5.4 | 77.3 | 8.5 |
| Estonia | 12.1 | 5.2 | (16.6) | : | (25.7) | : |
| Ireland | 16.1 | 10.8 | 26.2 | 7.9 | 48.3 | 7.7 |
| Greece | 8.4 | 4.4 | 10.2 | 3.1 | 13.7 | (2.7) |
| Spain | 17.7 | 7.4 | 25.5 | 4.9 | 40.7 | 5.5 |
| France | 20.5 | 6.2 | 24.5 | 4.8 | 52.4 | (5.3) |
| Italy | 23.2 | 6.0 | 33.1 | 3.5 | 45.8 | 3.5 |
| Cyprus | 9.5 | 7.4 | (7.4) | : | (15.5) | : |
| Latvia | 8.6 | 7.5 | 12.3 | : | : | : |
| Lithuania | 8.2 | 7.1 | : | : | : | : |
| Luxemburg | 19.9 | 3.2 | 28.0 | : | 50.9 | : |
| Hungary | 6.0 | 4.2 | 10.0 | (2.2) | 26.3 | (5.2) |
| Malta | 11.9 | 3.0 | 27.6 | : | : | : |
| Netherlands | 55.7 | 16.5 | 80.7 | 13.4 | 92.0 | 14.4 |
| Austria | 30.1 | 7.5 | 60.0 | 5.7 | 68.6 | (6.1) |
| Poland | 7.0 | 4.2 | 8.8 | (1.9) | 16.2 | (2.9) |
| Portugal | 11.6 | 6.7 | 8.5 | 3.0 | 16.1 | : |
| Romania | 7.0 | 7.7 | 5.8 | 4.8 | 19.5 | 16.0 |
| Slovenia | 6.9 | 5.4 | (7.5) | : | (19.8) | : |
| Slovakia | 4.7 | 2.5 | (5.6) | : | : | (5.5) |
| Finland | 10.4 | 6.5 | 17.3 | (3.6) | 21.5 | : |
| Sweden | 26.1 | 8.5 | 31.8 | 8.3 | 49.6 | 8.0 |
| United Kingdom | 22.4 | 6.3 | 48.4 | 5.1 | 66.6 | 12.2 |

Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey

4.2. Work from home

Working from home (so-called teleworking) is widely used in Europe by those who need to reconcile work and child care.

Teleworking offers benefits for both workers and for employers. This working organisation allows a better balance between work and family life and gives companies a chance to reduce costs and absenteeism. The possibility of granting teleworking varies greatly between different professions, based on the possibility of bringing work home.

In the European Union, the use of teleworking among workers has increased slowly, from 11 per cent in 2002 to 13 per cent in 2011. Italy is placed very far from the European average and major European countries in the use of work from home, that

concerns only 4 per cent of employees (Table 3). In addition, the quote of employees working from home is decreased by two percentage points since 2002.

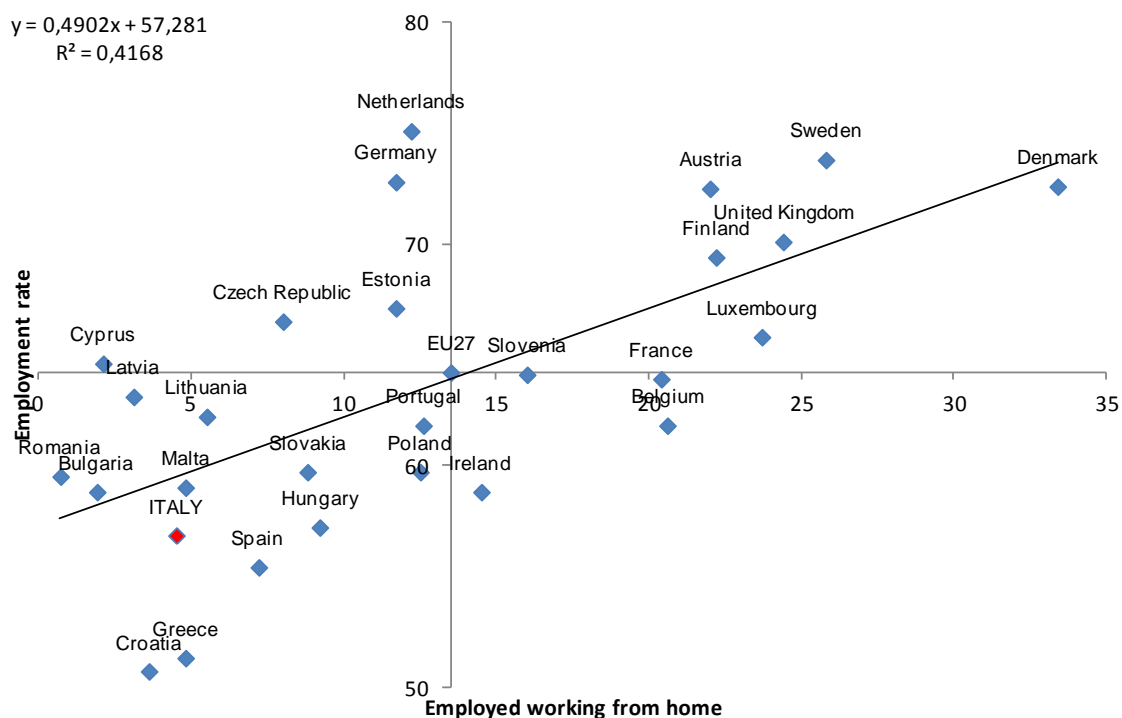
Table 3. Employees (15-64) who work from home by number of children - Year 2012

| | Total | No children | 1 child | 2 children | 3 children or more |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------------|---------|------------|--------------------|
| Denmark | 33,4 | 28,5 | 34,5 | 41,2 | 41,6 |
| Sweden | 25,8 | 22,3 | 27,4 | 33,1 | 33,1 |
| United Kingdom | 24,4 | 23,1 | 23,1 | 29,3 | 25,9 |
| Luxembourg | 23,7 | 24,3 | 20,5 | 24,2 | 26,6 |
| Finland | 22,2 | 20,2 | 24,6 | 27,7 | 29,5 |
| Austria | 22,0 | 20,5 | 21,4 | 24,8 | 31,5 |
| Belgium | 20,6 | 19,0 | 18,7 | 23,8 | 26,6 |
| France | 20,4 | 18,3 | 18,7 | 24,4 | 26,9 |
| Slovenia | 16,0 | 14,2 | 15,5 | 18,4 | 22,2 |
| Ireland | 14,5 | 13,8 | 12,6 | 15,1 | 19,3 |
| European Union (27 countries) | 13,5 | 12,8 | 12,0 | 15,6 | 18,7 |
| Portugal | 12,6 | 11,6 | 11,6 | 15,5 | 20,0 |
| Poland | 12,5 | 12,5 | 11,6 | 13,2 | 14,1 |
| Netherlands | 12,2 | 11,8 | 11,0 | 13,3 | 14,3 |
| Euro area (17 countries) | 12,1 | 11,3 | 11,0 | 14,1 | 18,3 |
| Germania | 11,7 | 11,1 | 11,2 | 13,8 | 16,8 |
| Estonia | 11,7 | 10,9 | 11,9 | 12,6 | 15,0 |
| Hungary | 9,2 | 9,0 | 9,2 | 9,3 | 10,8 |
| Slovakia | 8,8 | 9,0 | 8,5 | 9,0 | 8,0 |
| Czech Republic | 8,0 | 8,2 | 7,2 | 7,8 | 9,9 |
| Spain | 7,2 | 6,8 | 6,7 | 8,3 | 10,3 |
| Lithuania | 5,5 | 5,6 | 4,9 | 5,3 | 10,3 |
| Greece | 4,8 | 4,9 | 5,0 | 4,3 | 4,7 |
| Malta | 4,8 | 3,9 | 5,2 | 6,0 | 7,5 |
| ITALIA | 4,5 | 4,4 | 4,2 | 4,8 | 4,5 |
| Latvia | 3,1 | 3,1 | 2,9 | 3,1 | : |
| Cyprus | 2,1 | 2,3 | 2,0 | 2,0 | 1,5 |
| Bulgaria | 1,9 | 1,9 | 1,7 | 2,5 | : |
| Romania | 0,7 | 0,6 | 0,8 | 0,7 | : |

Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey

Analysing together the employment rate and the share of employed people working from home in Europe, it appears that countries with higher percentage of people who can work from home present also a higher level of employment. The simple regression coefficient between the two variables is positive, with a R^2 equal to 41%.

Figure 2. Employment rate and percentage of employed people (15-64) who work from home - 2012



Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey

4.3. Flexible working time

As stated by Eurostat, flexibility of working time represents a key aspect for the topic of reconciliation because it allows balancing better the time of working with the time dedicated to assistance. The following analysis regards flexibility of working hours and the possibility of being absent from work daily for family reasons.

Flexible working time are possible for women and men as well. It doesn't seem related to care. Is slightly less used in the South of Italy. It regarded mostly older worker and high level occupation.

Different forms of flexible working hours may depend on the national law and policy applied by the employer.

Countries where flexible working time is more used among employees show also higher average employment rates. Analysing employment rates and possibility to vary start and/or stop of the working day for family reasons for employees in the European countries, is clear that in counties where flexible working time is widely allowed, the employment rate is significantly higher.

Table 4. Employees (15-64) by working time flexibility - Year 2010

| | Flexible working hours | | Possibility to vary entry/exit time (a) | | Possibility to take a day off for family reason | |
|---------------|------------------------|-------------|---|-------------|---|-------------|
| | Employees | -carer | Employees | -carer | Employees | -carer |
| Total | | | | | | |
| Total | 35,0 | 37,0 | 77,5 | 78,3 | 65,6 | 66,7 |
| North | 36,1 | 38,5 | 79,7 | 80,3 | 66,2 | 67,1 |
| Centre | 37,2 | 39,7 | 77,7 | 79,0 | 64,9 | 66,1 |
| South+Islands | 31,0 | 32,1 | 73,0 | 73,9 | 65,0 | 66,5 |
| Women | | | | | | |
| Total | 34,7 | 37,3 | 77,7 | 78,4 | 66,9 | 68,0 |
| North | 35,1 | 37,8 | 79,7 | 80,2 | 67,3 | 68,1 |
| Centre | 38,2 | 40,4 | 78,0 | 78,4 | 67,6 | 68,1 |
| South+Islands | 30,1 | 32,5 | 72,7 | 73,6 | 65,3 | 67,4 |
| Men | | | | | | |
| Total | 35,2 | 36,7 | 77,3 | 78,2 | 64,5 | 65,7 |
| North | 36,9 | 38,9 | 79,7 | 80,4 | 65,2 | 66,1 |
| Centre | 36,6 | 39,0 | 77,6 | 79,6 | 62,7 | 64,1 |
| South+Islands | 31,5 | 31,9 | 73,2 | 74,0 | 64,6 | 65,9 |

(a) excluding employees with flexi time

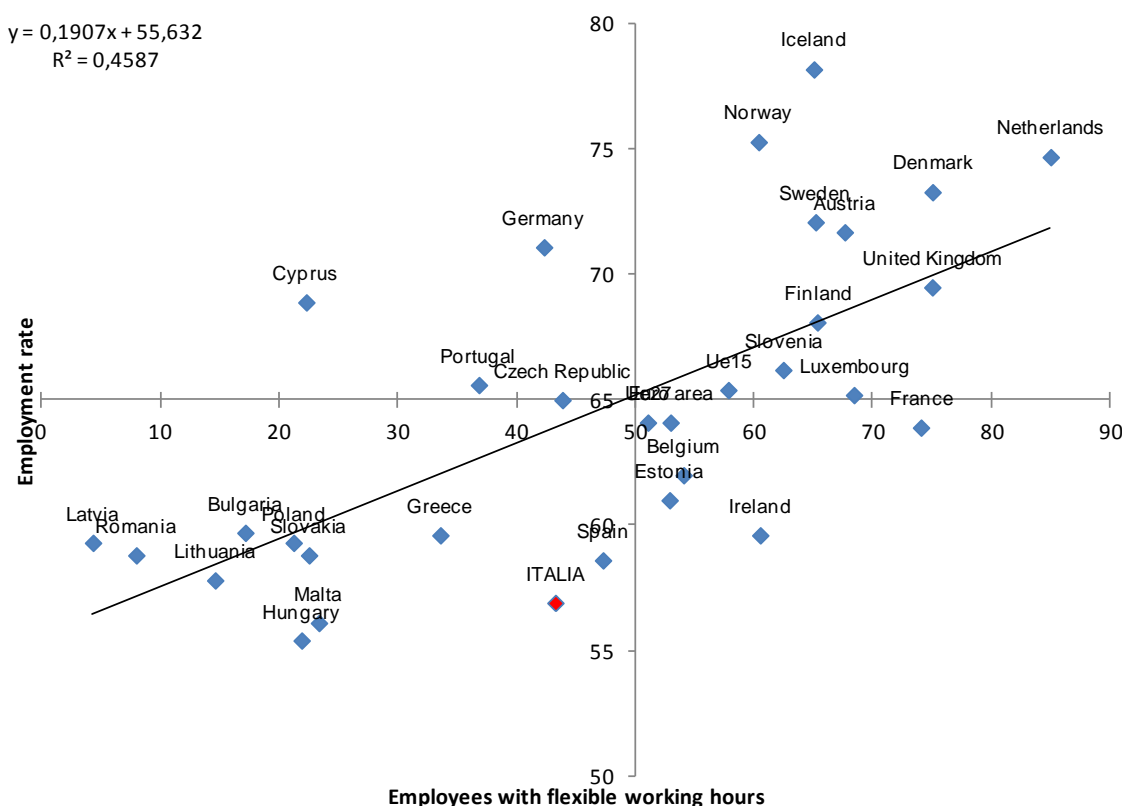
In 2010, in the UE average, 26% of employees aged between 15 and 64 has flexible working hours. The highest shares for both women and men were recorded in Finland (53% of women full-time employees and 59% of males), Sweden (49% and 47%), Denmark (both 44%), Germany (39% and 41%) and Austria (36% and 39%).

In Italy, almost two employees out of three (64.5%) have a fixed daily working times without the possibility to start or end the working day later/earlier autonomously. This possibility instead was allowed to 30.4% of the employees, respecting a fixed daily number of hours. Furthermore, working time banking results very uncommon in Italy since it was indicated only by 1.1% of the interviewees.

It is interesting to note that although women have the major care responsibilities, there are no significant distinctions by gender. In other words, women must reconcile work and family duties despite not having more flexibility of working times, compared to men.

As seen for “work from home”, working time flexibility appears to be more spread in those countries where the employment rate is higher, such as Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and United Kingdom.

Figure 3. Employment rate and percentage of employees with flexible working times (15-64) - 2010



Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey

Another way to meet family responsibilities is to allow the possibility to vary start and/or end of a working day or to take whole days off - usually or exceptionally- for family reasons. Overall, there is a discreet level of flexibility; in both cases, to ask for a permit or to be absent from work in order to cope with family commitments is “generally possible” for respectively 40.6% and 33.7% of the respondents while it is “rarely possible” or “not possible” for the remaining part of the target population. No gender differentiation emerged.

In Italy, almost two employees out of three have fixed daily working times without the possibility to start or end the working day later/earlier autonomously. This possibility instead is allowed to 30% of the employees, as long as a certain number of daily hours is worked. Furthermore, working time banking results very uncommon in Italy. Although women have the major care responsibilities, there are no significant distinctions by gender, and flexible time is more connected to high level jobs and older workers (mostly male) than to caring responsibilities.

Working time flexibility, instead, is not common enough and is present only in connection with jobs characterised by longer working hours.

On the contrary, in other European countries, flexible working is much more spread.

4.4 Career breaks and reductions in usual working hours

In Italy, according to the legislative decree n. 151/2001 the maximum duration of parental leave (or optional maternity/paternity leave) for employees is 6 months for the mother and 6 months for the father (rising to 7 if the latter uses at least 3 months). It may be taken until the eighth year of age either for natural children, adopted children or foster children. In case of self-employed mother (but only for few categories), it may be taken until the first year of age for three months while self-employed fathers are not entitled to parental leave.

Parental leave is generally compensated at 30% of full pay until the child's third year of age: higher percentages may exist under various national collective employment contracts. At the end of the period parents have the right to return to the same job or an equivalent one.

Use of full-time parental leave to care for children continues to be very low in Italy. Only the 11% of the employed people have taken it for at least one month, compared to the 20% of EU average.

The economic crisis has not certainly encouraged the increase of this measure which, as above specified, implies a substantial reduction of the income. The proportion of people who took parental leave decreased- compared with 2005 - from 17.5% in Italy and from 22.9 in the European Union.

The low number of male interviewees who took full-time parental leave does not enable a statistically significant further in-depth analysis.

Focusing on female respondents, with regards to the length of the parental leaves, in most cases it is less than 3 months, while for less than one third of mothers taking parental leave it lasted for more than 6 months.

The use of parental leave is more widespread among women with a higher education level: almost half of employed mothers with secondary or tertiary level of education took a parental leave, while only a third among mothers with primary education.

It is important also to understand the main reasons for not having taken full-time parental leave. A third of respondents asserted that they were not yet entitled to take such leave (*“had no legal right”*, 27% of mothers and 20% of fathers). Secondly, a relevant quote affirmed that *“partner or other relatives are/were anyway at home/around”*: among fathers those who indicated this answer were 26% whereas were 17% among mothers. The gender role pattern, which assigns the role of caregiver to the female figure, seems to be still widespread in Italy.

Finally, 5% of respondents declared explicitly that they *“did not know about parental leave right”* while *“financial reasons (no remuneration or too low)”* regarded 4% of fathers and 8% of mothers.

Table 5. Principal indicators of parental leave and reduced working time in relation to care in Europe (25-49 years) –2010 and 2005 (in percentage of employed people of the same age)

| | Persons who took parental leave to care for their youngest child aged less than eight – (%) | | Persons who reduced their working time to care for their youngest child aged less than eight -2010 (%) |
|-------------------------------|---|------|--|
| | 2010 | 2005 | |
| European Union (27) | 19,9 | 22,9 | 18,2 |
| European Union (15 countries) | 17,4 | 21,0 | 18,9 |
| Euro area (17 countries) | 16,4 | 19,4 | 18,6 |
| Belgium | 11,6 | 18,4 | 19,0 |
| Bulgaria | 10,6 | 11,8 | 18,8 |
| Czech Republic | 41,8 | 41,5 | 3,3 |
| Denmark | 11,7 | 4,1 | 16,4 |
| Germany | 33,9 | 30,7 | 8,1 |
| Estonia | 52,9 | 53,4 | 34,5 |
| Ireland | 3,9 | 10,8 | 7,9 |
| Greece | 4,2 | 11,0 | 15,6 |
| Spain | 4,4 | 8,4 | 11,5 |
| France | 13,3 | 17,6 | 11,3 |
| Italy | 11,0 | 17,5 | 17,1 |
| Cyprus | 0,0 | 5,2 | 11,3 |
| Latvia | 46,4 | 9,0 | 21,4 |
| Lithuania | 28,6 | 30,2 | 9,0 |
| Luxembourg | 23,7 | 34,1 | 17,9 |
| Hungary | 45,3 | 39,6 | 25,5 |
| Malta | 6,1 | 23,3 | 4,6 |
| Netherlands | 10,2 | 19,5 | 9,9 |
| Austria | 36,7 | 45,3 | 31,1 |
| Poland | 20,0 | 25,2 | 21,3 |
| Portugal | 14,0 | 9,7 | 12,8 |
| Romania | 28,4 | 32,5 | 8,8 |
| Slovenia | 47,7 | 0,7 | 4,5 |
| Slovakia | 43,0 | 43,8 | 19,4 |
| Finland | 53,2 | 35,3 | 14,8 |
| Sweden | 61,6 | 61,7 | 11,4 |
| United Kingdom | 18,7 | 26,1 | 41,1 |

Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey

5. Satisfaction with working/ life balance

In Italy, a low participation to the labour market is accompanied by a high level of dissatisfaction of the time spent with family: a third of employees with children is not satisfied with the time devoted to family. Nearly 3 million and a half of employees with children or other caring responsibilities (35.8% of the total) would change the balance between paid work and care work. Only the 6.7% wish to dedicate more time to work

outside the home while the 29.1% would like to spend more time with their children and / or others in need of assistance (Table 6).

Table 6. Employed people (15-64 years old) who regularly take care of cohabiting children younger than 15, other children of the same age and / or adults (elderly, sick, disabled) and wish to change the balance between time for work and family by gender. second quarter of 2010 (% employees with the same characteristics)

| WANT TO CHANGE THE BALANCE BETWEEN TIME FOR WORK AND TIME FOR CARE | Men | | | | Women | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|---|-----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|---|
| | People who care for someone | -cohabiting children | -Other children | -Adults (elderly, sick and disabled people) | People who care for someone | -cohabiting children | -Other children | -Adults (elderly, sick and disabled people) |
| YES | 33.7 | 33.9 | 36.4 | 36.0 | 38.8 | 40.8 | 31.8 | 37.8 |
| - More work and less care | 5.8 | 5.3 | 8.6 | 9.3 | 8.0 | 7.5 | 10.4 | 9.0 |
| - Less work and more care | 27.8 | 28.6 | 27.8 | 26.7 | 30.8 | 33.3 | 21.4 | 28.8 |
| NO | 66.3 | 66.1 | 63.6 | 64.0 | 61.2 | 59.2 | 68.2 | 62.2 |

Source: Istat, Labour Force Survey

The higher quote of employed people who wish to change their work/family pattern are mothers: a third of women with children would like to spend more time with their family and work less hours.

The happiest with the time spent at work are women caring for other children (e.g. grandmothers), but they are a few, and mostly older women.

Men are generally more satisfied than women with the distribution of their time but still almost a third of fathers is unsatisfied of the time spent with his children.

Therefore, from a subjective point of view, women – and mothers most of all – show worst problems of reconciliations than men.

Two-thirds of men and 61.2% of females, however, do not want to change the space dedicated a to these two dimensions of everyday life, with the largest share among fathers (66.1%) .

In the South the percentage of employed people who do not want to change the time spent for work and family is highest (70% among men and 63.2% among women), and is also very high the share of people that would like to work more (6.9% for men and 10% for women).

The professional status has a significant influence over the happiness with the balance between work and other responsibilities: while for women the right balance is achieved more often by self-employed women, for men it is more common for the employees.

The quote of those who would change the organization of their life, wishing to increase the time devoted to the family (42.9% of men and 43.7% of women) is very high among managers, entrepreneurs and freelancers. Workers, however, more often than the other employed people would like to work more, even if still with marginal percentage (7.8% among men and 14% among women).

Almost the 40 per cent of *full time* employed women would like to give more time to care, while having a job *part time* seems to allow a better allocation of time: 69.2% of part-time workers does not want to change the organization of their day, compared with 57% of those who work full-time.

Part time, therefore, could be considered the first and most important tool to reconcile work and family life.

6. The empirical model and results

We have seen that flexibility of working time is an important tool to help the reconciliation of work and life balance and therefore a tool to enhance employment.

Using Italian Labour Force Data, it is possible to verify which characteristic – personal and job’s – are more important on determining a good satisfaction in the distribution of time devoted to care or work, that is to say, employed people satisfaction in reconciling work and family life.

Therefore, a logistic model has been applied to data to the sub-population of employed people who have caring responsibilities.

A variable on satisfaction of working and family balance (calculated for the task) has been used as dependant variable.

On top of structural variables (gender, age, area of residence), kind of care (children living in the household, children living elsewhere, adults), characteristics of job (self-employed/employees, part time/full time, working time, ect) have been considered as independent variable of the model.

The results show that the probability that the employed person is satisfied with his/her working time balance is higher for men than women, for older workers more than younger and in the South of Italy.

In relation with job characteristics, part-time employees are much more satisfied than full time workers with their use of time, employees with no working hours limit are less satisfied than employees with fixed working time or banking hours.

As seen above, employees with total freedom in choosing their working time are – in Italy – mostly long hours workers, with high-profile jobs, such as managers, directors, high level professionals. All these categories declare themselves less satisfied of their work-life balance than employees with less time-demanding profession.

Table 7. Logit model Estimations

| Variables | Point estimate | Wald | Confidence limits (95%) |
|---------------|----------------|-------|-------------------------|
| SESSO 1 vs 2 | 1.391 | 1.302 | 1.487 |
| cletad 3 vs 5 | 1.265 | 1.160 | 1.378 |
| cletad 4 vs 5 | 1.024 | 0.960 | 1.092 |
| rip3 1 vs 3 | 0.911 | 0.853 | 0.973 |
| rip3 2 vs 3 | 0.784 | 0.720 | 0.853 |
| piepar 1 vs 2 | 0.677 | 0.623 | 0.736 |
| dipaut 1 vs 3 | 1.051 | 0.824 | 1.340 |
| dipaut 2 vs 3 | 0.860 | 0.674 | 1.097 |
| cura 0 vs 3 | 0.058 | 0.051 | 0.067 |
| cura 1 vs 3 | 0.052 | 0.048 | 0.057 |
| flex 1 vs 4 | 1.630 | 1.130 | 2.351 |
| flex 2 vs 4 | 1.864 | 1.576 | 2.205 |
| profe 1 vs 5 | 0.814 | 0.722 | 0.917 |
| profe 2 vs 5 | 0.868 | 0.776 | 0.970 |
| profe 3 vs 5 | 0.888 | 0.797 | 0.989 |
| profe 4 vs 5 | 1.043 | 0.924 | 1.178 |
| cat3 1 vs 3 | 1.119 | 0.961 | 1.303 |
| cat3 2 vs 3 | 1.016 | 0.940 | 1.098 |

7. Conclusions and policy remarks

The labor market in Italy is quite stiff: flexible ways of working are not widespread, The data, however, show that flexible working hours and arrangements, more suitable for employed people with caring responsibilities, allows a greater willingness to participate to the labour market, in particular for women.

Part time and flexibility of working hours have been valid tools to reconcile work and family, and have support employment in Europe.

To this we must add also an improvement in quality of life of employed in part-time and flexible working hours, especially in the satisfaction of the reconciliation of work and family.

As for the relationship between welfare and employment, it has been repeatedly shown that the increase in the supply of care services and education (both in terms of years, and hours) favours both the demand and the supply of labour, especially female.

It would be appropriate to work in both directions, giving parents the opportunity to stay close to their children, especially in the first few years of their life, and at the same time developing and structuring care services, including through the establishment of agencies "placement" that certify the quality and promote the encounter between supply and demand for care work.

At European level, working time flexibility helps reconciliation and is more used in those Countries where employment is higher.

In Italy, instead, where working time flexibility and other forms of working schedules and working arrangements are less used, flexible time is only possible for high level professions - mostly adult men – and their use is not aimed to reconciliation but related to profession and/or economic sector.

Make easier to use working time flexibility, part time and work from home would at the same time make reconciliation easier and employed people happier, helping to increase female labour force participation.

Given the importance of the topic for the progress of Italian and European labour market, it would be very useful to have data on working hours schedules and flexible hours every year, and not only every five or more years.

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