Reconciling work and care in European cities: how do local childcare policies matter?
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3.1. Introduction
European societies are facing some common changes in family and household structures affecting the articulation of work and care: a higher proportion of mothers with young children in the labour market; a growing share of single-parent households due to divorce and the diversification of living arrangements; ageing which generates new trends of intergenerational relations; overall a higher proportion of one-person households; and new migration flows involving families with children.

These phenomena are not evenly distributed but affected by territorial and urban diversity. Some cities present specific recent local urban trends, such as an unequal recovery of the birth rate (which varies according to the urban areas and social groups), inclusion/exclusion processes for couples with children from city centres to peripheral areas, or a variable impact of the current economic crisis on male and female employment. These processes are leading to the reconfiguration of work and childcare in the cities. Whereas social opportunities have improved, so too have social vulnerabilities, especially for single mothers or families with more and younger children.

The relations between families, the market and the state have been analysed at national level, within conceptual frameworks of welfare regimes, gender and care regimes, with empirical clustering and typological analysis of countries, from which specific types of work and family social arrangements have been identified (Bettio and Plantenga, 2004; Pfau-Effinger et al., 2009). But to what extent do local welfare policies - in particular, family and childcare policies - matter in terms of tackling these problems?

In this chapter, local childcare policies are analysed taking into account their interplay with national care policy models or regimes. Various local solutions are studied, as well as the tensions within the childcare provision system, which stem from the need to reconcile a growing demand for formal childcare, with specific work and childcare needs for vulnerable groups in a context of significant local shortages of places for young children.

The comparison of local childcare policies in different European cities assesses to what extent local governance systems are autonomous and innovative in implementing childcare strategies in conjunction with national regulations and funding. Based on literature review on work-family policy models, we relate our selected cities and countries to different typologies, and compare the distance of city positions from the national reconciliation patterns in the field of childcare (cities that go beyond national averages, that are below, or on average positions). Cities can also be differentiated according to whether they adopt integrated and regulated approaches to meet the increasing variety of childcare needs and services, or whether they
rely on parental care and more selective and segmented childcare according to different types of families.

3.2. Recent demographic trends affecting work and family articulation in European cities and societies

Major changes have affected both families and labour markets in European societies in the last decades. Post-industrial and knowledge-based economies have prompted a higher degree of individualisation and a profound change in life experiences over the life course. As a result, relationships have been changing between individuals in families, the labour market and the state (and within the state between national, regional and local levels). Public policies in most European countries have been oriented to support a more individually based articulation of paid work and unpaid care work, between households and workplaces, and individual work-life balances better adapted to present family and employment patterns. In the European Union and EU member states’ policy agendas of the 1990’s, this issue is referred to as reconciliation of work and family life (or informal family-based care work), emphasizing the resolution aspect of a conflict, generated by the change of family models and values in relation to the organization of work and employment careers defined in relation to male adults without caring responsibilities.

From a demographic and family perspective, the process conceptualized as a second transition, involves:

- a decrease in fertility below the replacement rate (EU-27 average is around 1.6 children on average per woman in 2009, ranging between 1.36 in Germany and 2 in France amongst our selected countries);
- ageing (with EU-27 average old-age dependency ration around 26, ranging between 19 in Poland and 31 in Germany),
- the de-institutionalisation of marriage with a rise in unmarried cohabitation, births out of the wedlock (around one-third on average in the OECD, ranging from 17% in Switzerland to near 55% in Sweden in 2009), divorce and partnership dissolution, periods of single parenthood (14% of minors live in a one-parent household in the EU, Eurostat 2011) and family re-composition (estimated for around 9% of young adolescents on average at the OECD, 2006).

However this is not a linear nor uni-dimensional process, and some countries are experiencing a reinforcement of traditional family patterns and new family solidarities, particularly when children are young, after facing crisis and deep social economic transformations. Still, even though three out of four children live with married parents in the EU (Eurostat, 2011), there is an increasing fluidity and diversification of family forms with an expanding variety of new living arrangements contributing to the separation of marriage and parenthood (Flaquer, 2007). New trends of motherhood, fatherhood and parenthood develop in the context of late modernity and welfare state policies (Escobedo, 2013). Social policies are increasingly addressed to support a broader diversity of household and family configurations, particularly childcare and childraising in the framework of dual-earner or universal adult worker and care-

On average in most western countries, the mean personal ideal family size for both men and women is around 2.25 children, slightly above the population replacement rate level of 2.1 children per woman, which is above the actual fertility rate (1.6 in the EU-27). This fertility gap around 0.6 on average indicates the existence of barriers in family formation and reflects the increasing costs of raising children (OECD, 2012; Eurobarometer data). Between 1980 and 2010 the relationship between female employment and fertility evolved from a clear negative correlation, explained in terms of increasing costs of opportunity of raising children for employed mothers, towards present situation where countries with higher rates of female employment also have relatively high fertility rates. Thévenon (2011) summarizes the success of policies to reconcile work and family life by the fact that for more than fifteen years in Europe, the countries with the highest fertility and lowest poverty rates have been those with higher rates of female employment. For this reason work and family reconciliation policies oriented to de-commodify child-raising are becoming prominent in political agendas. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) policies have a national component (general regulation and funding, family cash benefits and working time arrangements as parental leave) but in the field of early education and childcare services the local level has also a very important role, even the capacity in some cases of supplementing national cash provisions in order to meet childcare demands.

Within the framework of welfare and care regimes analysis, the local level is therefore relevant: both because family trends take place in territorial diverse contexts, and general trends of family change are accentuated or modulated in different urban contexts, but also because social care services, particularly childcare and out-of-school care, which are crucial for the reconciliation of work and family and to support maternal employment trajectories, are mainly managed and developed at the local level (EU Family Platform, 2010 and 2011).

Within each national context and trends, often cities present a significant variation and particular demographic and family profiles which differ to the national averages. This is the case of cities attracting university students (as Nijmegen, Malmo, Lille or Münster), or where families with children have migrated to metropolitan areas reinforcing ageing in central cities. Furthermore particular groups of migrants have unevenly settled in the territory (as the district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg in Berlin, or Amsterdam), which generates differential social needs and demands.

**Local policies and national care regimes**

A common trend in our selected cities is a favorable articulation of national and local care policies, adopted in each local context, which become a relevant factor both to attract or retain families with small children and to publicly manage and prevent situations of social vulnerability affecting families with children.

Care policy models or care regimes have been conceptualised and identified taking into account public provisions for children and the elderly in the form of care services, paid leave arrangements and public financial provisions to support care and carers, and on the other hand
indicators on the extension and intensity of informal care (Bettio and Plantenga, 2004). Data analysis in fourteen countries results in the following clusters or types of care regimes (ibid. pp.99-102):

- countries delegating the management of care to families and kinship networks, with relatively high female inactivity due to low public commitment to provide care services or transfers (Italy and Spain are in this group)
- countries with high informal care, based on very high rates of female part-time and the location of expensive service provision in the private sector (e.g. UK and The Netherlands)
- countries with a publicly facilitated private care model, based on partly compensated parental leave, family allowances and transfers that support largely private and informal care following a principle of subsidiarity (e.g. Germany)
- countries with strong formal care strategies but less developed paid time-off strategies (e.g. France)
- countries with moderate to high levels of all formal care resources, offering universal coverage (e.g. Sweden).

A bit different but complementary typology of childcare models can be identified and conceptualized when focusing on families with children under three years old, on the connection between paid parental leave and childcare services, in the context of national predominant patterns of parental/maternal employment (Wall & Escobedo, 2012). Adapting this typology to the WILCO country selection\(^1\), we can produce the following picture as a comparative contextual basis to locate our cities comparison and a local typological analysis:

1. A one-year-leave gender equality oriented model with universal childcare entitlements, where national regulations provide approximately one year of well-paid leave, with a relatively high participation of fathers in leave arrangements, and a strong complementarity between the 1-year leave and publicly funded day care services, starting afterwards well adapted to parents’ working hours, with high coverage rates for children under 3 (often based on a subjective entitlement to childcare). The dominant household pattern is the full-time dual-earner couples, however with a growing share of long female part-time.

   Within this model one important role of municipalities is to manage the universal entitlements to childcare and public support to families with small children, to meet diverse and special needs, with a wide array of instruments, including additional cash transfers or the articulation of providers and local actors. Sweden and Swedish cities fit to this model: Stockholm and Umea.

2. A parental-choice-oriented policy model, that allows parents to choose to some extent between nurseries and caring for children up to 3 years old at home. This compromise is built around publicly funded expansion of childcare, complementarily to long low-paid child-care leave arrangements associated to flat rate benefits which are

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\(^1\) We add Croatia and Switzerland besides other 22 European countries integrated in the analysis, and we use for that the same data sources from Moss, 2012 and the OECD Family Database (see Tables and Charts in statistical annex with national comparative indicators)
independent of the previous employment situation. Services are both available and affordable at the end of the well paid leave, so parents then can choose between services or a longer childcare allowance. Services provision is fairly good and opening hours adapt to parent’s work schedules. Gender equality is on the policy agenda (by means of explicit father’s quotas or paternity leaves), but with a lower emphasis, as far as low paid childcare leaves generate significant gender and social biases (most users are low-paid women). There is not a unique dominant household pattern: a majority of dual-earner couples, however with medium female part-time, and an important share of male-breadwinning in households with under 3’s.

Within this model a role of municipalities is to manage choice and diversity. France and the French cities would fit this model: Nantes and Lille.

3. A maternal care-centered policy model where the availability of a long-flat rate paid leave is seen as an alternative to service provision in particular for children below age 3. Childcare coverage rates are far below the European average for pre-school children. Even though female employment is high, the dominant household pattern when children are very young is male breadwinner. On the other hand as low flat rate benefits do not always provide a real option for many working mothers and households (affecting both high qualified mothers or low-income households) informal arrangements involving kinship play a relevant role, as far as part-time arrangements.

Within this model, municipalities can foster the development and modernization of childcare as far as the model does not fit EU policy recommendations, or as social resource for vulnerable families. Poland fit this model: Varsow with a higher service coverage rates than the country average and Plock lower-average.

Some countries having previously this model are evolving towards the one-year leave gender equality oriented model which is presently acting as a European benchmark: transforming the leave system in the direction of a well-paid year of leave and enacting policies both to increase the provision of childcare and father’s involvement. Since 2007 Germany took this direction, with municipalities being important agents in promoting childcare service development (both Munster and Kreuzberg-Berlín illustrate well this situation).

Croatia combines a one-year well paid leave system (with some gender equality elements but in practice mostly a maternal use) with a low service provision, which appear as a principal challenge to be addressed by municipalities.

4. A short-leave ‘part-time mother’ policy model complemented by an increasing availability of part-time day care market oriented services. From a previous history of underdeveloped state provision of leave and services, a new emphasis on the need to increase female employment participation in order to bring low income families out of poverty has led, over the last decades, to an increased availability of part-time day care services, with short opening hours in line with mother’s part-time work. Female and maternal employment rates are high and the one-and-a-half earner is the dominant pattern in households with young children.
UK, The Netherlands and Switzerland fit this model, where the role of municipalities is to promote and regulate the private provision of childcare, which in some aspects as in the UK have a very centralized regulation.²

5. A short-leave model based on extended family care in Mediterranean countries, and a relatively high appreciation of childcare and early education. Maternal employment is dominant in households with young children and not much affected by the age of children, while part-time work is below European averages, even though progressively increasing in these countries. An significant proportion of married women (mostly low educated) still follow the traditional male breadwinner pattern. Italy has since 2002 a paid parental leave at 30% of previous earnings (up to 10 months per family, 6 months of leave per parent) to take care of children under 3’s, and some Spanish regions (starting with Navarre in 2000) have introduced flat rate parental leave benefits or additional part-time or full-time leave entitlements. Informal childcare arrangements, particularly within family networks, are relatively important in these countries where childcare and school hours do not always fit working parental schedules. This is particularly the case for lone mothers, who in both countries, have the highest employment rates of the WILCO countries (see Table 4 in annex) and around 20 percentage points above partnered mothers within the respective countries.

Both countries have strong regional and local disparities in childcare and early education provision, thus the regional and local level are important actors. All our selected cities in both countries (Pamplona, Barcelona³, Milano and Brescia) are above national averages, and relevant actors in sustaining the differential effort to keep a relatively higher provision of services, than average.

3.3 To what extent the city level matters on work and family reconciliation issues?

Considering structural socio-demographic characteristics (fertility rates, labor market trends, gender inequalities…) as well as unequal and limited competences of local authorities on family policies matters, the local care trajectories at the city level are embedded within national care regimes as demonstrated in the previous part. In others words, cities variations from national situations are significant but not enough divergent for modeling alternative and coherent regimes at the local level.

Also, typical characteristics from national regimes are identified within the descriptions of WILCO cities. The role of extended families remains crucial for a large part of inhabitants in Polish cities. In a context of resurgence of the male-breadwinner model, particularly in households with young children, family and mothers continue to be the dominant “carer”

² Except for Bern, with a childcare coverage far above national average, it is difficult to evaluate the other cities for lack of comparable data.
³ The municipal data for Barcelona correspond only to registered early education while the harmonised indicator for Spain we use is from EU SILC database, which also includes nurseries which operated outside educational regulation.
partly due to a structural deficit number of formal care solutions even in large city like Warsaw (table X). Part-time employment as the norm in the labour market for women is mentioned as a key component of work and care conciliation for mothers in the Dutch, Swiss, English cities (Amsterdam, Nijmegen, Bern, Geneva, Birmingham and Medway) in conformity with countries situations. Higher fertility rate are located without surprise in Birmingham, Nantes, Lille, Medway and Stockholm in the line of the national figures and European ranking (table 3.1).

Besides sharing “work and care patterns” with national positions, talking about local care regimes is more than questionable because, in almost all of the cases studied, municipalities have very little control over the frame, the conditions, the length and the amount of parental leaves, family tax credits and childcare allowances. With few exceptions, the fundamental factors influencing work and care arrangements remain under the responsibilities of central or Federal governments. Of course, the municipalities and the regions have more or less leeway in the implementation of family policies. Local authorities sometimes adopt additional programs or funds dedicated to families with special needs or for a better reconciliation between work and care. Innovative or supplementary, these local welfare measures could not be considered as a global alternative or substitute to national legal framework and public investments in care (infra)structures.

However, several specific metropolitan or city socio-demographic trends deserve emphasis. From Wilco cities reports, we can point out several features that specify reconciliation work and family issues in urban areas:

- An unequal but urban recovery of birth rate which increases the potential number of early young children to take care in the cities in comparison to the last decade;
- Urban city centres inhabited by a growing number of single-person households which become the most important group in many cities studied whereas family households with children meet increasing difficulties to live in city centers. A more or less important migration process of couples with children out of the city centres.
- The complex diversity of household configurations issued of divorce or separation after cohabitation, create new residential, mobility, and services demands and challenges at the local level, where housing has been identified in most of our cities as a challenge (see chapter 4). In urban contexts, the demand of social housing and of housing in general is fed by family rupture and re-composition.
- Large urban areas are likely to provide more job opportunities for women of childbearing age.
- Finally, formal childcare solutions either in terms of number places or in diversification of provision are generally more generous in large cities.

**An unequal but urban recovery of the birth rate**

After a long period of fertility decline, western European cities have been seeing unequal but positive growth in the number of births since the end of the 2000s. Figures collected in the Table 3.1 confirm this relative growth of fertility rate during the 2000’s. In almost all cities
studied, the levels of the fertility are higher than it was at the turn of the last century. In many cases, the average numbers of children per women in age of childbearing in urban areas go beyond national situations. The increasing number of very young children creates new challenges and childcare issues to be dealt with in near future at the city level.

Table 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cities fertility rate*</th>
<th>National fertility rate (2009)***</th>
<th>Local trend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lille (Nord)</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nantes (Loire-Atlantique)</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medway</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malmö</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockholm**</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amsterdam (North Holland)**</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UE-27</strong>*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fertility rates above the national averages & under the UE average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>Fertility Rate</th>
<th>Local trend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brescia</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamplona (Navarre)</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fertility rates under the national averages & under the UE average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>Fertility Rate</th>
<th>Local trend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bern (Canton)</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pločki</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warsaw</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barcelona</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


** Eurostat: Fertility rate by NUTS 2 regions - Number of live births per woman

*** Eurostat : Total fertility rate, 2009, Number of children per woman

The slight improvement of demographic indicators seems to be more visible at the cities level, it remains in coherence with the European ranking of Member-States. As expected, cities in France (Nantes, Lille), Sweden (Stockholm and Medway) and UK (Birmingham and Medway) continue to recorded the higher fertility rates with around 2.0 live births per woman whereas inhabitants of Italian, Polish, German and Spanish cities have generally fewer children.

This reverse demographic change applies to different degrees according to the cities. The prospect of a new “baby boom” remains the exception (Stockholm). A positive natural increase has been registered in large (Amsterdam) as well as medium-size European cities (Bern, Medway, Malmo, Pamplona). Birth rate is contributing modestly but positively to urban population growth alongside factors such as immigration and attractiveness. Even in
cities with a low fertility rate (Barcelona, Brescia, Milan, Warsaw, Munster), recent and moderate recovery of the birth rate has been highlighted in city reports over the last few years. This recovery is not only due to recent immigration flows and a higher fertility rate among foreign families, as noted in several cities (Birmingham, Bern, Milan, Barcelona). Where ethnic statistics are available, a positive birth rate among indigenous populations is also significant. One of the explanations often mentioned is the tendency to postpone giving birth until after the age of 30 and the increasing number of women of childbearing age. This trend potentially means more children to take care of in a context of women’s increasing participation in the labour market, continuing inequalities between fathers and mothers in terms of childcare responsibilities, changes in family structures as well as an insufficient number and affordability of childcare facilities.

**Urban city centres inhabited by a growing number of single-adult households**

The second remarkable and convergent European urban transformation is the growing proportion of single-person households in urban cities centres, where the proportion of families and couples with children has declined. This is not only a feature of student cities but a global urban trend affecting European cities. Whereas about third of households in European Union are single person living without children, this has affected more than half of the population in Metropolis such as Barcelona, Stockholm, Amsterdam, Berlin or Lille. Conversely, the number of large families decline in the WILCO cities. The household with only one child tend to become the dominant model in cities with low fertility rate and represent the majority of families in core city of Berlin, Brescia, Geneva, Plock, Zagreb or Warsaw.

The reduction of the average household size has an urban counterpart: a more or less important migration process of couples with children out of the city centre. This trend has to be related to the global rise of housing property prices and rent in the city centres during the last decades or to access to better quality housing. It is becoming more and more difficult for middle-class couples with more than one child to access and pay for a family apartment. Urban polarisation is more than ever a question of level of household income but also of family size. On the other hand, immigrant families find more cheap housing opportunities in cities, while some city reports point also to new trends of young autochthonous couples choosing to stay in the city for longer (Amsterdam).

More than a number of children, primary family formation as well as family rupture, or successive household/family re-compositions, create residential movements (from centre to peripheries, or vice-versa, or between different municipalities), with two particular transitions: the first residential decision when having children, the parental residential strategy after divorce both in countries with a norm on maternal custody or on joint custody, either on shared or non-shared residence. Statistical household categories are challenged by forms of joint custody and « shared residence » in countries (Sweden) where this arrangement is becoming the norm.
The family intra-metropolitan migration process points to the hypothesis of a growing divergence between work and childcare places, with new constraints for parents trying to balance work and family, especially mothers.

**Single-parent households as a vulnerable group in the cities**

The global decline in the average size of families in European city centres is combined with a high geographical concentration of single-parents families. More than the others kind of households with children, lone parents live mainly in large cities. This over-representation of lone parenthood in urban areas is a shared characteristic of the WILCO cities studied. In Berlin, Amsterdam, Stockholm, Nantes, Birmingham, more than one in four families are single and one in five in Munster, Barcelona, Lille, Warsaw (table 5). With the exception of Italian cases, the proportion of sole parent families among the households with children is both significantly above national and European averages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cities with high concentration of lone parents</th>
<th>% of lone parent in all families</th>
<th>National figures 2007**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>35.8 (2009)</td>
<td>Germany 15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
<td>27 (2008)</td>
<td>Netherlands 11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>27 (2008)</td>
<td>Sweden 17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham</td>
<td>23 (2011)</td>
<td>UK 21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munster</td>
<td>22.2 (2009)</td>
<td>Germany 15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barcelona</td>
<td>20.32 (2001)</td>
<td>Spain 7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plock</td>
<td>20 (2002)</td>
<td>Poland 11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milano</td>
<td>11.7 (2007)</td>
<td>Italy 10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brescia</td>
<td>9.7 (2009)</td>
<td>Italy 10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UE-25</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* WILCO reports, WP3.  

The concentration of single-parent families in European urban districts does not lead to a proportional increasing in number everywhere. Two groups of European cities can be distinguished: cities (Barcelona, Birmingham, Bern, Brescia, Stockholm, Warsaw) where the population of single parents continues to increase in number and in proportion to the whole population, in contrast to cities (Munster, Milan, Amsterdam, etc.) characterised by a stable proportion of single parents during the 2000’s.

However, the notion of single parents as a statistical category is sometimes questioned. The Stockholm case study observes the complexity of “the notion of ‘single parents’ when a growing number of parents have a kind of shared single parenthood, both in terms of bringing up and supporting the child/children.” The growing importance of joint custody agreements
and practices between separated parents is difficult to assess on the basis of city reports and local available data but it is reported as an emerging trend associated to new interplays and challenges at local level. However, frequent statistical evidence is that single parents generally equate to single mothers, even if the number of single fathers has increased slightly in some cities (Nantes). Moreover, qualitative interviews (see chapter 7) remind us to what extent single mothers often face a lack or an absence of support from the fathers rather than strong commitment to sharing parental and childcare tasks. In another context, the Warsaw City Report underlines that “single mothers and single fathers, more often than other families with children…functioned in two- and multi-family households” (Siemienska and al., p.40-41). In Spain (Barcelona, Pamplona), this trend is also present, mainly amongst nationals, as a growing number of situations of lone parenthood amongst immigrant women do not find the same kinship support. It draws our attention to the fact that the single mother status is not always equivalent to a one-person household and to the unequal mobilization of family networks.

Although the single parents group is not socially homogenous, it remains socially more vulnerable (for detailed description see chapter 6). Social vulnerability can be identified through a set of trends and indicators. Firstly, the proportion of single mothers working in part-time or temporary jobs or who are unemployed is often higher than in other population groups. With the exception of a minority of well-educated single mothers in certain metropolitan areas or neighbourhoods (for example, in Berlin), precarious working conditions are the consequences of a combination of a lack of vocational skills and job experience, discrimination in access to the labour market and inappropriate childcare facilities. Single mothers tend to be active, and in specific local urban areas, “single mothers have a higher activity rate than the mothers who live with their partner” (Naegeli, Cattacin, p.22). Secondly, living in a single parent household increases the risk of child poverty. Lower income due to part-time work or precarious jobs is the counterpart of very constrained working and childcare arrangements. Without an additional wage in the family, social and family allowances are crucial income supports for single parents. They are often overrepresented locally among the beneficiaries of minimum income support (Nijmegen, Amsterdam) and of municipal social aids. Suppression or reduction of any specific national welfare fund for single parents, such as the Alimony Fund in Poland between 2004 and 2008 (Siemienska and al., p.6), have strong local impacts on their daily living conditions. Thirdly, several city reports highlight the obstacles met by single mothers in obtaining access to decent housing. Provision of affordable housing is one of the most urgent problems for single mothers (Ewert and Evers, 2012, p.70). Affordable housing arrangements in the inner city has become more and more difficult in some cities, and in some cases has pushed single parents into peripheral districts (Boadu, and al., 2012, p.29). Compared to two-parent families, single-parent families often live in social housing districts (Nijmegen, Nantes and Lille) and the poorest neighbourhoods. In some metropolitan areas, single mothers constitute the largest group of homeless families (Nordfeld & Larsson, 2012, p.14).

It is important to point out that single mother’ positions depend on local family arrangement norms and labour market patterns. The role of the family in childcare arrangements is more or less crucial according to the availability and affordability of childcare institutions, which
depends on family models for absorbing or internalising social risks in the local welfare system. In Poland, extended family arrangements have become determinant in a context of very weak childcare infrastructure. Belonging or not to a “two-person or multi-family households” makes a difference (Siemienska and al., op.cit). Levels of integration and discrimination of women in the labour market is another key point. In local urban contexts, where breaking off careers (Bern) or working part-time are considered as the norm for mothers of young children in the local welfare system, opportunities to work for single parents are constrained on two levels, by employer discrimination and by unavailable full-time care provision for young children.

The relative high concentration of one of the most vulnerable family type in urban districts raises the question of the city level of responsibility for tackling to lone parent’s work and care conciliation issues. As presented in the next section, Childcare provision is a privilege care policy fields where local authorities can act on reconciliation issues within the constraints of more or less complex system of local governance. After looking at the specific barriers to work-family reconciliation related to the characteristics of local childcare systems (part 3.5), we explore some kind of local initiatives, implemented or supported by local authorities, which try to provide a more integrated approach for work and care arrangements of vulnerable families.

3.4 – Providing and improving childcare facilities: a strategic role for the cities

As already underlined, the role of cities is much more important for providing and improving childcare facilities in comparison with family benefits or parental leaves which are generally centrally defined and controlled. In most contexts, childcare services are the component of welfare where cities can do more, as opposed to other policy fields. That is why childcare policies are a key element for measuring the degree of autonomy of urban local care system.

This autonomy could be appreciated through the concrete contributions of the local authorities to the extension of formal care solutions or the control of the diversification processes of providers and services.

Extension of formal care solutions: a mix of national impulsion and local regulation

Many European cities have taken initiatives to increase the availability of childcare services in the 2000s. Substantial efforts in terms of number of services and places created have been made in most of the WILCO cities studied (see table 6). Among significant examples: Barcelona has increased the number of childcare places by 5287 since 2002; in Munster the coverage rate for children under three years increased about one fifth between 2009 and 2010; 43.3% of all children between aged 0 to 3 years old living in Nijmegen attend an official childcare service compared with 29.1% in 2004; Nantes’ hosting childcare capacity has doubled in the last twenty years.

As a result, many WILCO cities have surpassed the objective of providing child care for 33% of all children under three years of age. This European indicator of reference was set by the European council during the Barcelona Summit in 2002 as a common perspective objective for member-States to reach in 2010. Even in countries (Italy, Germany, Poland) which had
been ranked under the European threshold in the use of formal childcare arrangements (Plantenga, Remery, 2009). Metropolitan cities such as Warsaw, Milan or Berlin fare much better than the national figures. In medium cities like Brescia and Munster, the rate of coverage (respectively 25.9% and 31.3%) has improved significantly during the 2000s and is now approaching the Barcelona target.

Differences of coverage between age groups are also significant in terms of reconciliation in cities providing quasi-universal full-time pre-school education for young children between 3 to 6 years old. These quasi-public pre-school systems can be more or less centrally managed and funded, as in French cities (Nantes, Lille) where écoles maternelles depend on the Ministry of Education, or be the result of regional and municipal decentralized governance, as in Barcelona, Pamplona, Brescia or Milan. Some cities (Birmingham, Amsterdam, Nijmegen) have ensured almost all children between 4 to 5 years old have access to formal childcare facilities, but only part-time, as a result of which working parents still need additional and informal childcare arrangements. Although largely above the national situation of countries in welfare transition, the use of formal childcare facilities in Warsaw, Plock and Zagreb remains far from the Barcelona target especially for the 0 to 3 age group.

Figures gathered together in WILCO should be interpreted carefully. Firstly because the childcare coverage rate is not locally calculated on the same basis depending whether are or not considered the age groups of children (from 0-2-years-olds to 0-4-years old), the diversity of formal childcare arrangements or on the access to full time or part-time places. For instance, 25% of children between 1-4 years old could be placed full-time in the day care centres of Amsterdam in 2009 (WP3 report, p.. This rate, which doesn’t included places in toddler playrooms, is higher if we consider that parents usually resort to a day care centre 2 or 3 days a week rather than fulltime.

Table 3.3 - Coverage rate in European Cities

| Cities reaching the Barcelona targets (33% of children under 3 and 90% for children aged 3 to 6) |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Stockholm                                       | 83% of children aged 0-5 in 2010                |
|                                                 | Stable rate of coverage in the 2000s. Modest    |
|                                                 | growth of non-municipal services for meeting    |
|                                                 | growth of demand of childcare (WP3, p13).       |
| Pamplona                                        | 57% of the children aged 0 to 3 in 2010         |
|                                                 | Almost 100% of the children aged 3 to 6.        |
| Nantes                                          | About 50% of children aged 0 to 3 in 2009       |
|                                                 | Almost 100% of the children aged 3 to 6.        |
| Nijmegen                                        | 43.3% of all children aged 0 to 3 in 2010 went  |
|                                                 | in formal childcare facilities (including toddler playrooms) |
|                                                 | Increase of children aged 0 to 3 in formal      |
|                                                 | childcare facilities: from 29.1% in 2004 to     |
|                                                 | 43.3% in 2010 (WP3 report, p.19).              |
| Barcelona                                       | 38% of children aged 0 to 3 in 2011             |
|                                                 | “The number of places has increased             |
### Cities approaching the Barcelona targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Percentage of Children</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lille</td>
<td>37% of children aged 0-3 (including childminders)</td>
<td>160 places created between 2008 and 2011. 140 new places are planned for 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milano</td>
<td>33.2% in 2009</td>
<td>“The (coverage) rate for children under three years increased from 2009 to 2010 at about one fifth” (WP3, Münster, p.29)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Munster     | 31.3% of children aged 0 to 3 | \( \frac{1}{5} \) \times \frac{2500}{500} = 2500 \text{ children} \]

### Cities approaching the Barcelona targets on a part-time basis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Percentage of Children</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham</td>
<td>32% of 0 to 2 years old</td>
<td>Coverage rate has increased from 21% in 2005 to 25% in 2009.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
<td>25% of children aged 0 to 4 listed in day care centers in 2009 (toddler play rooms not included)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bern</td>
<td>38% of children in pre-school age are in day care nurseries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Cities far from the Barcelona targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Percentage of Children</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Varezdin</td>
<td>70% of children in pre-school age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zagreb</td>
<td>68% of the 3-4 years old in 2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warsaw</td>
<td>71 children in nurseries per 1000 children aged 0-3 in 2009 941 children in pre-school per 1000 children aged 3-6 in 2009</td>
<td>“In the Metropolitan area the number of (municipal) kindergartens grew from 774 to 894” (….) “The number of private Kindergartens has been growing quickly”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plock</td>
<td>1.3 % of children aged 0 to 2 in kindergartens (2009) 69.7% of children aged 3 to 5 in kindergartens (2009)</td>
<td>In the case of children aged 3-5, the share of all children at kindergartens was increasing between 2005-2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beyond the level of coverage, the dynamics of creation of childcare places and services within the European urban areas need to be interpreted. Understanding the city contribution to the expansion formal childcare facilities need to be viewed in relation within national the multi-governance patterns. From this viewpoint, four configurations could be identified:
- Countries which have a long tradition of national childcare policies such as Sweden or France which means existing national objectives, public programs and funding, standards in terms of quality (example ratio children/staff, diploma) as well as regulation of fees. The local improvement of quantitative provision has to be considered in the continuity and within a national framework. This doesn’t mean a lack of “room to manoeuvre” for the cities, which play a crucial role in running, co-funding, locating and diversifying local childcare facilities.

- Countries (Germany, United-Kingdom, Netherlands) which have introduced substantial national reforms in terms of funding and regulation of childcare facilities during the last decade. In those cases, creation of new childcare places at the municipal level has been boosted in response to strong national incitation.

- Countries like Italy, Spain or Switzerland where the implementation of childcare services depends mainly on the local and regional authorities. Despite debates and attempts at reforms by the central governments in the 2000s, regions and cities remains the key actors of funding and regulation of childcare facilities explaining the huge regional variations in efforts for a better quantitative and quality supply.

- Countries in a transitional welfare situation (Poland, Croatia) where cities have played a crucial role in the face of disengagement or absence of State investments in childcare policies. Polish cities illustrate distinct urban dynamics in a national context of global low level childcare provision for the 0-3 age group.

What can we conclude? Firstly, with the exception of Sweden, the role of the cities is fundamental for providing and improving childcare facilities in comparison to others social policy fields much more centrally controlled like compulsory education or family benefits allocation. Secondly, the implementation of national legal framework and investment for childcare accelerate substantially the efforts of local governments. Thirdly, significant improvements in childcare supply have locally been possible in the 2000s when the lack of supports from central government has been compensated by strong regional and cities commitments in the field.

**A Persistent shortage of places**

Despite substantial efforts by local governments in the 2000s to improve the number of childcare services and facilities in the majority of the European cities studied, the shortage of places remains to varying degrees a considerable obstacle for families with dependent young children. A higher level of coverage may not always indicate that parents’ demand for childcare is better met, particularly in an urban environment. Except maybe in Stockholm, with a comfortable and stable percentage of 83% children aged 1-5 listed as receiving childcare (Nordfeldt, Sköndal, 2012, p.13). In this context, the increase in places during the 2000s could be interpreted as an indicator of growing demand.

Assessing childcare demand is not an easy task. A traditional indicator usually mentioned as expression of local childcare needs is the persistence of long waiting lists (Berlin, Bern, Milan, Nantes, Lille, Warsaw…). Examples of waiting times for parents reported give some dramatic examples of the mismatch between supply and demand: 18 months for admittance of
children in day care centres in some areas of Bern, children on the waiting list representing 13.6% of the available places of municipality of Milan; 16.5% in Lille with only half of them finally admitted in crèches; 3500 children living in Warsaw were waiting to get registered in a nursery in 2009. But to be reliable indicator of demand waiting list suppose a cross-assessment of the different kind of providers which can be difficult in case of fragmented local supply between public and private actors, individual and collective services. Another indirect indicator of the excess of demand is the number of children per classes. In cities suffering of a structural deficit of childcare infrastructures like Warsaw and Plock, higher density of children per kindergartens is observed (Siemieniska and al., p.46)

However, signs of stagnation or even reduction in childcare demand are noticeable in some urban contexts. Barcelona is an interesting example, where the lower demand for places in recent years is attributed to the consequences of the current crisis (Montagut, 2012, p.18). Growing adult unemployment leads parents to take care of children by themselves and loss of income makes childcare costs unaffordable for some families.

**Geographical disparities in the distribution of provision**

Considering children between 0 to 3 years old group, most of the WILCO cities studied (Birmingham, Barcelona, Brescia, Milan, Nantes, Zagreb, Warsaw…) have generally a better coverage rate than at the regional and the national levels.

While the inequalities between urban and rural areas are a shared common trend, some specific regional disparities deserves to be emphasized in some countries. Despite substantial expansion of childcare places in Germany during the 2000s, the historical difference between East Germany’s länder and West Germany’s länder are still remarkable (Ewert and Evers, 2012, p.25). In East Germany, “two third of the under 3’s are being cared for at least 7 hours per day (in day-care centers) in comparison to only one third of their western contemporaries” (Ibid,p.25). Another classic example is Italy where urban areas in the North frequently provide an acceptable level of coverage while provision in southern areas is far from reaching the Barcelona target.

Beyond national patterns, different local factors explaining local and regional uneven distribution of childcare provision give ideas about the driving forces of local childcare systems. Firstly a higher demand for care solutions of parents living in urban areas put pressure on the local supply side. Despite a significant and diverse number of childcare providers in the large cities, the availability of childcare places is not sufficient to meet the growing demand. This is particularly reflected for instance in Netherlands with longer waiting lists in the West of the country where the four big cities are located (Brandsen and Broesmal, 2012, pp.24-25).

A second factor is the role and the financial capacities of local authorities in the funding of childcare facilities in relation to the existence or not of national contribution. In countries, where funding competencies is highly decentralized, the size of public investments and spending can cause huge variations from a region or municipality to another. Italy and Spain are significant examples where differences in take-up rate and level of fees for municipal day-
care from one region to another reflect regional differences in terms of level of funding and allocation rules. But even when a national childcare policy exists, as in France, with a dedicated budget allocated locally by the Family Office on the basis of national regulations, the obligation of municipalities to co-fund the crèches has introduced disparities between cities.

The expansion and strategies of location of private childcare provision which tend to set up preferably in wealthier urban areas and neighborhoods with high concentration of better-off households is another factor explaining geographical disparities.

**Diversification of services and care arrangements**

Another indication of the relative autonomy of local childcare arrangements in cities is the diversification of providers (municipal, for-profit and non-for profit) as well as services (collective crèche, day-care centers, Kindergartens, nurseries, pre-school, play groups and toddlers playrooms, childminders and day care mothers, etc.). High variations in urban situations make clustering complicated considering that local diversification processes cannot be totally disconnected to national patterns.

Taking into account these considerations, different configurations of mixed-childcare provision can be identified:

- **Predominance of public municipal supply** with an increasing role of non-municipal structures. Stockholm is the typical Swedish case in which childcare sector has been opened in the last twenty years to private providers within a national framework defining similar standards of funding, affordability and quality than the public sector.

- **Importance of childminder provision combined with high level of municipal crèches and significant number of third sector providers.** This supply configuration is specific to French cities, Nantes and Lille in the WILCO project. The prominence of childminders is more the result of national childcare over which municipalities have limited influence. But municipal childcare priorities explain the high proportion of places in public crèches as well as local historical supports to non-for profit childcare services.

- **Relative balance between municipal and non-municipal childcare services** in a context of growing part of private and for-profit providers in the last period. Differentiation between cities could be identified according to the persistence of a positive dynamic of municipal sector (Barcelona, Brescia, Zagreb) or its relative stagnation (Plock) as well as the introduction of outsourcing mechanisms (Milano, Nijmegen).

- **Predominance of third sector actors and, to a lesser extent, private providers in local childcare arrangements.** Welfare associations and parents’ initiatives are still key players in the provision of childcare services in cities like Münster in accordance with the Federal subsidiarity principle that gives priority to local welfare providers in Germany. Differences with others cities (Bern) depend on the emergence or not of for-profit providers in the local public-private partnership.

- **Preeminence of private, voluntary and independent sector on public provision** like in Birmingham. In this configuration, local government is playing a minor role as
provider of childcare services compared to the local implementation of for-profit organizations which directly compete and weaken the traditional place of non-profit organizations.

Case studies confirm the trend which is leading to the diversification of childcare services and providers. These variety local early childcare arrangements configurations contrast with a relative movement towards standardization of preschool system for the 3 to 6 year age group in some countries (France, Spain, Italy). With the exception of the Swedish cases, the perspective of universal public childcare service based on a right to a full time place, free or affordable fee and similar national quality requirements is neither on the national or local political agendas.

Among the most significant and recent processes of diversification, several city reports describe a significant development of private and commercial kindergartens and childcare services (Birmingham, Berlin, Warsaw, Zagreb, Milan, Brescia, Bern) as a result of the structural gap between demand and supply (Barcelona, Pamplona) but also of certain outsourcing processes within public provision (Milan) or of a market-driven approach (Nijmegen, Amsterdam).

Municipal day-care centres have continued to progress, but at a lower rate. Their weight in the local provision is still central for defining the local norm in terms of quality and affordability of childcare services. Third sector organisations, which in many cities have been the historical private childcare providers, are challenged by the rise of commercial supply. Here the priorities and regulation of local authorities are essential. Introduction of competition rules through vouchers or public tenders could destabilise not-for profit organisations. Other cities (Lille, Nantes, Munster) focus on maintaining and strengthen a privilege local partnership between local authorities and welfare associations or parental initiatives.

3.5 – Availability and affordability of childcare for single parents in an urban context of lack of places, diversification of provision and geographical disparities

To what extent are the shortage of places, diversification of provision and geographical disparities favorable for the work-family reconciliation of single parents? Lack of childcare places for early children as well as affordable facilities for lone mothers prevent them from seeking work, getting a job or starting to train. The global shortage of places tends to put locally social groups and family sizes in competition for access to a scarce common good.

In this shared urban context, access criteria and their local interpretations in the local childcare system are a decisive factor in tackling social vulnerability. In many cases studies, single parents as well as other types of families (low-income, child with specific needs) have priority access to municipal childcare facilities (for example, in Barcelona, Milan, Brescia and Nantes). However, this does not guarantee getting a place because of possible conflicting priorities in the interpretation of different criteria.

In a context of long waiting lists, local kindergartens could tighten up practices of allocating places (Kreuzberg- Berlin) encouraging indirectly parents to compete by providing additional
information on their profiles and socio-economic statuses. Such selective procedures seem to disadvantage lone mothers with low level of education and income (Ewert and Evers, 2012, p.19). In other cities (Birmingham, Lille, Milan), municipal and childcare services tend to give priority to the children of two parents working rather than to children of an unemployed or inactive single parent. In this case, the criterion of reconciliation for a family with dual earners families can have local preference over prevention of child vulnerability or specific support to single parents. This preference for working parents could also be integrated in quasi-market tool like a voucher. In Bern, the amount of the childcare voucher depends on the income but also workload of parents. It is not possible to get a voucher for a full time place if your work part-time (Naegeli, Cattacin, 2012, p.24). Offering places for children whose parents are unemployed or on parental leave even on a part-time basis is quite rare and appears conceivable in contexts where demands are already satisfied for children whose parents are working or studying (Nordfeld & Larsson, 2012, p.23).

**Impacts of diversification of childcare facilities**

Unintended competition for childcare facilities and benefits seems to be locally more or less intense according to the dominance of public supply and the degree of fragmentation of childcare local supplies. Beyond the shortage of places, the impacts of diversification processes of childcare supply in European cities have to be taken into consideration. To what extent does a mixed economy of childcare services improve access to formal care solutions for single parents? Analysis of the WILCO case studies does not give a simple answer. Diversification, especially if it is not regulated, can turn out to be problematic in some cases. It can also be a synonym of the fragmentation of the supply and of the social polarization of childcare services in the cities. It leads to more complications for parents who have a limited perspective of the local offer and continue to choose their childcare mode by default. Due to the absence of regulations concerning supply and of the accompanying of parents’ demand, diversification can also turn out to be a generator of inequalities from the point of view of access to appropriate and affordable childcare services.

Recent evolutions within the mix of childcare facilities in European cities lead us to investigate the potential effects of the development of private and commercial provision, which raises the question of affordability for low income families in general and single parents in particular. While a strict comparison of the costs paid by parents is not possible from the information provided by WILCO city reports, qualitative information enables us to identify the main issues.

Access to private, for-profit, individual childcare services is often a barrier for single parents. In Nantes, Lille and Birmingham, families with low incomes do not have enough resources to pay for a childminder, which remains an important childcare solution locally. Reduction of fees, vouchers and tax credits for single parents do not always compensate for the increase in fees planned by private providers (Birmingham, Amsterdam) or the deteriorating economic situation of low-income families in a crisis context (Barcelona). In the Netherlands context, “since private full-time childcare services are very expensive, many single parents have no choice but to work part-time.” (Brandsen, Broesma, 2012, p.28). The issue of affordability of
private services for many single parents is partly related to the existence of the regulation of places and fees by national and local institutions. In cities (Barcelona, Bern, Pamplona, Milan, Warsaw…) where some private providers are neither subsidized nor authorised, admissions fees are rarely income-related and can be subject to major increases. As a consequence, families have to pay full costs and many single parents do not even apply to expansive services. A possible means of local regulation is compensation by specific, ad-hoc monetary support from local social services to single parents for covering part of the cost improving access to private childcare facilities. There are also examples of progressive inclusions of some private childcare providers within municipal regulations and funding (Milan, Bern, Nijmegen). Subsidies to private providers or outsourcing public provision based formal agreement require in counterpart to the reservation of places for children on the municipal waiting list or to the application to similar eligible criteria than municipal childcare services including priority access for single parents. We should bear in mind that in Sweden and France the admission fees applied by private childcare services should respect a national scale that is related to family income.

**Urban polarization of childcare facilities**

Geographical polarization of childcare provision can also be an obstacle to better local articulation of work and family. The family place of residence is frequently an admission criterion for children in day-care centres. This means that households can only apply for crèches or nurseries in the area where they are living. Proximity between home and formal childcare service is an important condition in the final care arrangements of parents. This raises some important questions regarding the location of services. As a matter of fact, the geographical spread of public collective crèches within the city becomes crucial. For instance, if all services are concentrated in the central and more affluent areas, households living in the outskirts are clearly disadvantaged. Evidences from WILCO studies seem to point in this direction.

We have underlined the difficulties in urban metropolitan areas caused by long distances between the workplace and the home, with increasing time spent on public transportation. This problem is more serious for single mothers in cities with unequal coverage levels according to area or district. The absence of social infrastructures in new neighbourhoods (Warsaw) and the prohibition on redistributing places among districts or municipalities in the same metropolitan area (Ewert and Evers, WP3, p.18) make access to childcare opportunities more dependent on where they live.

**Time Schedule barriers**

Finally, another common obstacle to accessing childcare services encountered especially by single parents in cities is the inappropriate opening hours of childcare provision. In the context of an increase in precarious employment on the local labour market, more and more of the jobs available to low-skilled workers have atypical hours and require very flexible childcare arrangements (Ewert and Evers, 2012, p.17; Costa and Sabatinelli, 2012, p.17).
Therefore working single parents are often excluded from applying for jobs demanding availability in the early morning or evening or at the weekend (Brookes and al., p.13). In this respect, the lack of appropriate childcare opening hours is sometimes presented by local employment offices as one of the main obstacles to integrating single mothers into the labour market. It is interesting to note that independent and private childcare services do not always provide more flexible solutions. In Nantes, the demand of single parents with atypical working hours is highly concentrated on municipal day care services because both childminders and not-for profit organisations tend to select parents with full-time jobs (Fraisse and Bia Zafinikamia, 2012, p.16). Looking for working hours compatible with the opening hours of childcare services constitutes a particular challenge in cities dominated by part-time places (Bern, Nijmegen, Amsterdam). Working part-time often becomes the only option for single parents, which also means a lower income, except when municipalities facilitate the public regulation of more diverse childcare services arrangements.

Despite significant efforts of local governments to increase the number and the diversity of childcare facilities in the cities, families still meet difficulties to elaborate adequate care solutions. Even, lone parents who have generally a priority of access at least in municipal day care often present vulnerable work-family reconciliation pathways in the face of mix and complex systems of childcare provision. In this context, some WILCO cities try to implement services or to support initiatives offering a more integrated approach of work and care issues for families including single parents.

3.6. Local initiatives for improving work and care conciliation for vulnerable families

Urban areas also constitute some experimenting field for the implementation of additional local welfare programs or news kinds of services at the city level. Beyond the commitment and investment for an extension of formal childcare solutions, the support or control of diversification of providers, local authorities often implement local services and partnerships with local stakeholders for improving work and care arrangements in the city. Evidences from WILCO reports enabled to identify different kind of local initiatives for tackling care and conciliation needs for vulnerable families with dependent children, often targeted on lone mothers. More or less traditional or innovative, these examples illustrate the ability to act for the cities in complement or compensation to national welfare benefits and traditional childcare facilities.

Monetary supports integrated in traditional social assistances

Delivering temporary cash supports to the families in need combined with social assistance to maternity or parenthood and priority of access to public childcare services is the traditional way for municipalities to supplement at the city level national family policies. Generally organized on a category based for a limited period of time, sometimes considered as too passive and discretionary, this kind of measures continue to play a major role in a context of the current crisis. Social services in cities like Brescia and Milan (Costa, Sabatinelli, p.18, p.21) have to face to increasing demands from a number of families with dependent children facing precarious and poverty situations. Distribution of social vouchers sometimes combined
with the implementation of Food Bank by third sector organization (Brescia) is example of local response for tacking monetary needs. In Nijmegen and Amsterdam, municipalities have decided to give to single-parents extra-benefit in complement to the minimum income and in accordance with criteria established at the national level (Brandsen et al., p.40). These extra benefits combine with others social assistance schemes dedicated to lone parents are part of the municipal anti-poverty policy.

Multi-activities centre for a better orientation and adaption of care solutions to families

In order to reduce the fragmentation of the local care system, some cities set up multi-functional offices or centres for improving information, advise and access to families to an adequate care arrangements as well as for facilitating coordination between services and childcare providers.

Thus, there are over 70 Children’s Centres in Birmingham providing multi-agency services to meet need of young children and their families including lone parents. This provide not only early education with full day care facilities but also family supports, health services, base for childminders, hub platform between parents and local childcare providers, link with job center and training providers (Brookes & al. p.14). In another context, the City of Nantes has opened four Childhood Coordination Centres in deprived neighbourhood in charge of informing and supporting families in their search for all kind of early childhood services (municipal, associative, childminders) and of coordinating the decision making process for the allocation of places. Targeted mainly on young families and lone mothers, Family office in Munster offers also a package of information on all day care facilities and available places, family supports, leisure and extra-school activities, job orientation and advice...

Building-bridge between employment office and childcare services

In several WILCO cities, diverse type of cooperation and partnerships between employment office and local childcare services have been initiated in order to facilitate the reintegration of single parents into the labour market. The idea that access to employment is a crucial protection against poverty and social exclusion for single parents and that the lack of adapted childcare solutions is a serious barrier to their professional integration seems to be shared by a growing number of city policy makers. A better integration of employment issues of single parents by social assistance to families and childcare services could take in practice varied directions. The creation of flexible and emergency services dedicated to single parents who get temporary jobs or attend vocational training is a response given in cities like Nantes or Lille. Bridge-building between local childcare and employment services’ professionals is another way experimented for reducing the number of workless lone parents. This could practically means the regular attendance within the local Family office of a consultant from the job center for counseling mothers who want to return to work after parental leave (Munster). In a more systematic way in Birmingham, all unemployed lone parents have an annual review meeting, focused entirely on gaining employment, takes place with a lone parent adviser in Job Center.

Initiatives from organised mother’s or single parent’s networks
Finally, it is worth mentioning initiatives self-organised by mother’s organisations or network of singles parents. MaMa Foundation is an innovative example in Warsaw which combine advocacy campaign’s for the acknowledgement of mothers rights both within the family and employers as well as services like workshops for women-refugees, mothers time bank encouraging to share the time and exchange support e.g. in childcare. Quite unusual is the presence in the cities of active network single parent’s families like in Munster. It provides not only individual advice and counseling to single parents but tries to act as an interest group at the municipal level (Boadu, and al., 2012, p.21). A last interesting example is the network of neighborhood women’s initiatives in Nantes Metropole. These 6 local initiatives deliver different kind of services: childcare, support to parenthood, catering and restaurant, sewing, community laundry, family cycle rent. Besides the package of job, training, leisure and care opportunities for mothers, the networking between of members from different neighborhood and social categories contributes to social mix between native and migrant women as well as families and lone mothers.

Conclusion

If Wilco cities characteristics remain embedded in national childcare trajectories, they concentrate specific demographics and socio-economic trends that accentuate work and care reconciliation issues but also potential arrangements for families especially single parents who are overrepreented in urban districts. In comparison with leaves and family allowances policies, childcare facilities is a complex but privilege policy field of local governments for improving work-life balance of parents.

The review of the WILCO project city reports indicates that local childcare policies are relevant to facilitate the reconciliation of work and care in families with small children, and particularly important to counteract the higher social risks of social vulnerable groups as lone mothers. Childcare policies facilitate social cohesion in two directions: to prevent processes of social exclusion but also to attract and retain families with young children in order to balance the age structure composition of cities which is also a component of social cohesion. Particularly in present contexts of economics crisis for some countries the possibility to preserve family networks or cooperation amongst divorced partners is crucial. Local initiatives and regulation implemented or supported by local governments try to articulate a large pack of services, benefits or public/private facilities (ranging from access to nurseries to family counselling, parental leave supplements or social assistance schemes) make really a difference for families amongst local European contexts.

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4 « Les lieux de proximité »


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