



# Capabilities for Combining Employment and Parenting in Vienna

Examining the interdependences of parents' individual decisions and company logics

**Final Version**

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## INTRODUCTION

The overall objective of the present study is to investigate the interdependences of parents' individual decisions and company logics regarding the combination of employment and parenting through the lens of the capability approach. Fundamentally, this means that the study deals with the *capabilities for combining employment and parenting*. Following Amartya Sen's (1993) capability approach, we can define the capabilities for combining employment and parenting as the real freedoms or possibilities for a person to choose among various combination opportunities that she or he has reason to value as well as to achieve these combinations.

Existing quantitative national studies in Austria show that "active" fathers deal with the combination issue in quite different ways than "active" mothers.<sup>1</sup> Thus a further main focus of the present study is on the differences between mothers and fathers in terms of their capabilities for combining employment and parenting.

### ***Some conceptual and theoretical considerations***

One of the key aspects of the capability approach is an emphasis on (social or structural and individual or personal) *conversion factors* enabling women and men to turn formal rights and freedoms into real rights and freedoms, i.e. capabilities. At the same time the capability approach attaches great importance to the *individual's agency freedom*. Still, to quote Giullari and Lewis (2005:89), we can say that this agency freedom or the real freedom of choice requires substantial underpinning (via the conversion factors).

As much as 40 years ago, the early "life course" scholar René Levy (1977) already pointed out that "*the systems of gainful work and the family*" are the two "central institutions of a person's biography". It is the different degrees of participation in these systems that produce gendered life course trajectories. He also showed that these central institutions do not structure a person's life course chronologically or in a certain order but that these institutions are important simultaneous and parallel "social sub-systems". One of the central concerns of feminist scholars in this context (see, for instance: Born/Krüger 2001) has been to show that *these two life course trajectories are interrelated* – resulting in the well-known inequalities: Women (mainly) provide the unpaid care work within the family and thus face much tougher and, compared to men, unequal conditions when participating in the labour market (Born et al. 1996:27). Within the male standard biography, on the other hand, a man's family is at hand to offer support. Thus, the gendered division of labour is a prerequisite for full (i.e. full-time and continuous) labour-market participation. This means that women's working life trajectories are not simply different from men's but complement them: i.e. the work-

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<sup>1</sup> "Active" mothers and fathers are defined as parents who in some way reorganise their working life (especially their working time) in order to actively take care of their child(ren) (i.e. by opting for parental leave or at least part-time work for parents).

centered male life course produces the family-oriented female standard biography and *vice versa*.

Also regarding the capability approach, Giullari and Lewis (2005:93) have explained that the “*capabilities sets of individuals are interdependent* and this interdependence is particularly acute at the *household level*”. This means, for instance, that, on the one hand, the individual real freedom (capability) to engage in paid work can be restricted by care obligations within the family (this is true mostly for women). On the other hand, the individual real freedom (capability) not to engage in (continuous) full-time employment or to provide unpaid care work within the family can be restricted by obligations to provide for the family (this is true mostly for men).

Thus, from a *gender-equality* perspective, *capabilities for combining employment and parenting* refer to the real and equal freedoms for both women and men to choose among various combination opportunities and to achieve valuable outcomes. But, as Lewis and Giullari (2005:91) point out, “structural inequalities between women and men affect women’s and men’s ability to transform resources into valuable functioning”. “For most part, caring remains ‘the proper thing to do’ for women, and their freedom to choose functionings remains restricted compared to that of men” (Giullari/Lewis 2005:94). It should be added here that men’s freedom to choose (e.g. parenting) also remains restricted by the (persistent) “male breadwinner model”. Thus, gender equality and capabilities for combining employment and parenting mean putting the emphasis not only on the individual’s real freedom to choose (agency freedom) but also on the structural inequalities between women and men or the structural conversion factors and thus the gender inequalities in the ability to transform formal rights and resources into valuable functioning.

### **Main objectives and research questions**

The main objectives of the study “Capabilities for combining employment and parenting in Vienna” are:

- examining the connections between *individual decisions (of women and men) and company logics* (company policies and practices as a main framework for individual decisions ),
- describing policies and practices of “combination-friendly” companies<sup>2</sup>, especially the *differences in companies’ attitudes and behaviour towards motherhood and fatherhood*,
- investigating the *re-entry issue*, especially the quality of the re-entry (i.e. change of job or position, payment, upwards or downwards mobility, etc.) and the *opportunities to combine employment and parenting* during the first years after childbirth; the main interest regards the ability to achieve valuable functionings (i.e.

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<sup>2</sup> Capability-friendly companies are companies that offer combination opportunities to all their employees and where the combination of employment and parenting does not impact negatively on employees’ professional pathways.

“successful” re-entry and “good” combination opportunities that do not negatively impact on the earnings or professional pathways of employees);

- investigating the *differences between active mothers and active fathers* in terms of their capabilities for combining employment and parenting,
- shedding light on the *interrelations/interdependencies between female and male* working life trajectories (especially with regard to motherhood and fatherhood).

Thus the main research questions are:

- Which resources and rights are available in Vienna and which individual and social conversion factors *enable or hinder women and men* in achieving their aims and aspirations regarding employment and parenting?
- How do women and men use these resources and rights or how do they convert the resources and rights available to them into capabilities? Why and in how far do *women and men put these resources* (e.g. parental leave, working time arrangements) *to different uses*?
- How do *companies’ attitudes and behaviour influence individual decisions* with regard to motherhood and fatherhood?
- What are the *interdependencies between women and men* (especially at the household level) and what does this mean for the individual capabilities for combining employment and parenting?

### **Methodological approach**

In order to deal with these rather broad aims and research questions, different methodologies are required. The examination and description of resources and rights available at the national, regional and company level in terms of combining employment and parenting is mainly based on the *analyses of literature, documents and policy* with this regard. In addition, for a better understanding of the regional level *expert interviews* were conducted.

The investigation of the structural and societal conversion factors, such as the gendered dimension of the labour market or societal norms and cultural values, which highly determine the gendered use of resources and rights, is based on the analyses of national and regional *labour market and social statistics*.

The analyses and quantitative description of the different use women and men make of the resources and rights offered to them in terms of the combination of employment and parenting is based on the examination of *existing surveys* on the combination issue at the national level.

Key research questions – such as the interrelation between female and male working life trajectories or the actual quality of re-entry – necessitate the use of *qualitative methodologies* of empirical social research. The qualitative fieldwork was thus carried out at two levels: first, at the level of *company case studies* and second, at the level of *individual case studies*. All in all, eight company case studies (based on semi-structured

interviews with managers/HR managers and works council members as well as with one “active” mother and one “active” father per company) and seven individual case studies (based on in-depth interviews with “active” mothers or “active” fathers) were carried out.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Due to the interest of and additional funding provided by the City of Vienna, the number of company case studies was raised from five to eight case studies. In addition, seven individual case studies were carried out.

## 1. **RESOURCES AND RIGHTS FOR COMBINING EMPLOYMENT AND PARENTING IN VIENNA**

Employees in Vienna have access to a number of rights and resources to combine employment and parenting – there are various specific measures and regulations in place for them. These resources and rights can broadly be divided into time options and financial transfers on the one hand and services and benefits in kind on the other hand. These can either be implemented at national level, such as e.g. legal provisions, or at regional level, where benefits in kind play a particularly important role. The company level in turn is particularly important when it comes to the concrete functioning and achievement of combining employment and parenting.

Policies for combining employment and parenting can roughly be divided into two major categories: policies encouraging parents to combine work and childcare obligations simultaneously; and sequential combination policies, i.e. resources and measures allowing parents to at least combine parenting and employment one after the other. Traditionally, sequential combination policies have been favoured in Austria. This has led to particular weight being given to financial benefits and other resources allowing women to take career breaks. In 2008, direct transfers (e.g. childcare benefit (*Kinderbetreuungsgeld*) and family allowance (*Familienbeihilfe*) and tax rebates for families made up about 83% of all family policy expenditure (about 3% of GDP) while only 12% were spent on benefits in kind (such as childcare facilities) (Festl et al. 2009).

### 1.1. ***Time options and financial resources for combining employment and parenting***

Paid *maternity leave* and provisions banning women from working before and after the birth of their child primarily serve to protect the (expectant) mother's health. Originally only available to mothers employed in a standard employment relationship, eligibility to maternity allowance has been extended in recent years to also cover quasi-self-employed and marginally employed women. Self-employed mothers(-to-be) are also eligible to either a financial benefit or funding for a stand-in to replace them at work. Despite repeated demands by women's organisations, similar resources allowing fathers to take care of their new born children or to provide support to the new mothers during this important early phase are still lacking.

To allow parents to opt for, at least, a sequential combination of employment and parenting, opportunities to take career breaks protected by labour law and social-security law are necessary. The long-term effects of *parental leave* on women's life course, however, very much depend on the specific way in which it is structured – especially in terms of its maximum length and protection against redundancy. So far this has had little effect on fathers' readiness to temporarily drop out of the labour market to look after their children (Mairhuber 2000: 200ff). Following the birth of a child and

maternity leave, Austrian mothers or fathers can take parental leave for a maximum of two years. Until 2002 salaried workers received a so called parental leave benefit for the duration of this period. In 2002, labour-law provisions for parental leave were completely decoupled from eligibility to the newly created childcare benefit (*Kinderbetreuungsgeld*). Childcare benefit (of €436.-/month) can be claimed as an (almost) universal family benefit until the child's third birthday, regardless of whether a mother or father is on parental leave or not. Parts of the total sum of childcare benefit (a minimum of six months) must be claimed by the child's other parent. In addition, claimants of childcare benefit can earn an income of up to a certain earnings threshold. On the one hand, decoupling parental leave and the financial benefit has resulted in more fathers claiming childcare benefit (the fathers' share in Vienna is currently at 9%). On the other hand, among women, the extension of the period during which parents can claim the benefit has led women to, on average, drop out of the labour-market for longer periods and to change jobs more frequently. It has also led to rising re-entry problems (Riesenfelder et al. 2006:87f.).

In order to reduce the length of (women's) career breaks and the associated labour-market disadvantages, childcare benefit provisions underwent a reform in 2008, towards offering "higher benefits for shorter periods". Existing provisions were added to by two further variants (20+4 months/€624.- and 15+3 months/€800.-). To provide an incentive to fathers and mothers in higher income brackets, in 2010 two more schemes were introduced: a benefit to the amount of €1,000.-/month for an even shorter period (12+2 months) and an income-related childcare benefit (80% of the previous monthly income, up to a maximum of €2,000.-/month) for the same period (12+2 months).

While the concrete organisation of parental leave is important for a sequential combination of employment and parenting, opportunities for a temporary reduction of working hours are a key prerequisite for parents to simultaneously combine work and childcare obligations. In 2004, the ***right for parents to part-time work*** was implemented in Austria. Thus, up to their child's seventh birthday Austrian parents have the explicit right to temporarily reduce working hours and increase them again after the end of this period or to move their working hours to more suitable times. These provisions, though, are only available in companies employing at least 20 staff and only to parents who have been working for their present employer for three years or more. In companies employing fewer staff or if parents have not been with their company long enough, employer and employee can negotiate a voluntary agreement for part-time work for parents.

An additional instrument facilitating the simultaneous combination of employment and parenting, especially for low-income parents of young children who are looking for a job or participating in training courses, is the ***childcare allowance*** (*Kinderbetreuungsbeihilfe*) granted by the Austrian Public Employment Service.

Other chief rights and resources allowing parents to simultaneously combine employment and childcare obligations include opportunities to paid leave during periods when a child is sick. Austrian mothers and fathers have had the right to so-called ***nursing leave*** (*Pflegefreistellung*) since 1999. These provisions allow parents to take a



maximum of two weeks of paid leave per year to look after their sick children (up to the age of eleven).

Austrian *enterprises* only rarely offer additional financial resources to families. So-called “family friendly” measures primarily refer to *working-time arrangements*, which are frequently granted informally – especially in smaller companies. Qualitative surveys (BMWA 2008:14ff.) and studies of good-practice examples (Magistrat der Stadt Wien, MA 57 – Frauenabteilung 2009) provide an overview of the individual measures and regulations currently on offer in Austrian enterprises: flexible working-time arrangements and/or flexitime, the blocking of working hours (e.g. for part-time workers), long-term working time accounts (benefiting the employee), holiday arrangements taking school holidays and closing periods of childcare facilities into account, unpaid leave or sabbaticals, extended parental or nursing leave (paid or unpaid), working time reductions (including the right to return to full-time employment).

In terms of financial resources, next to childcare benefit, *family allowance* (*Familienbeihilfe*) plays a key role in Austria. In general, all Austrian parents are eligible to family allowance until a child’s 18<sup>th</sup> birthday or until the child has completed his or her education or vocational training. The amount of family allowance depends on the number and ages of a family’s children and currently ranges from approx. € 105.- to €202.- a month per child. Additional financial resources include *tax credits for children* (*Kinderabsetzbetrag*) of approx. €58.-/month and *tax credits for single earner families and single parents* (*AlleinerzieherInnen- bzw. AlleinverdienerInnenabsetzbetrag*; €364, month) as well as – as of the 2009 tax reform – *tax allowances for children* (*Kinderfreibetrag*; €132 or €220/month) and *childcare costs* (of up to €2,300.-/year). As tax credits for single earners are based on the entire family’s income, this scheme indirectly encourages women not to work. This is also true for the *Vienna family supplement* (*Wiener Familienzuschuss*): A financial resource for low-income families with small children, it solidifies the gendered division of labour. And while tax allowances for childcare costs do help parents to simultaneously combine employment and parenting, they are usually not available to low-income parents (including parents working part-time) and unemployed mothers and fathers.

Another – indirect and rather long-term – financial resource or compensation for childcare obligations worth mentioning are the *childcare periods taken into account within the Austrian pensions insurance scheme* (*Kindererziehungszeiten*), as they represent a form of compensation for and recognition of periods of childcare without encouraging women to drop out of the labour market. What is special about these periods is that they are added cumulatively to any gainful employment which may have been pursued during the first years of the child’s life. Thus, these childcare periods (of up to a maximum for four years/child) will eventually add to the amount of a mother’s (or father’s) pension, independent of breaks in gainful employment. This measure thus does not favour any particular type of family arrangement or division of labour.

## 1.2. Available services and benefits in kind for combining employment and parenting

*Childcare services* are a key prerequisite for parents to simultaneously combine employment and parenting. Despite substantial improvements in recent years, childcare provisions in Austria still face major problems in terms of quality and supply, and the differences between Austria's federal states are huge. Vienna is at the forefront innovation in this respect. Due to a massive expansion of the system, especially in recent years, in 2009/2010 enrolment rates in Vienna were at more than 87% among 3-to-5-year-olds and close to 27% for children below the age of 3 (Magistrat der Stadt Wien, MA 5 – Finanzwesen 2010:28). In terms of daily and annual opening hours, childcare services in Vienna also best meet the demands of parents in full-time employment. The relatively high cost of institutional childcare is another important factor. Since autumn 2009, childcare (half-day or all-day) for all Viennese children up to age 6 has been free of charge. The abolishment of parents' fees for institutional childcare is one of the farthest-reaching combination-policy reforms in Austria during the past decades.

However, free access to childcare does not solve all combination issues. A sick child still represents a major challenge for working parents. In Vienna a number of *institutions* are in place to offer relatively cheap *childcare for sick children at home* (such as *Sozial Global's* service, "*Kinderbetreuung Daheim*"). In addition, qualified nursing services are available for chronically or severely ill children (such as "*MOKI – Mobile Kinderkrankenpflege*"). The hourly rates for these services can be steep but are – in certain conditions – paid for by the health insurance scheme or "Fonds Soziales Wien".

Company-level childcare services hardly play any role at all in Austria. But some companies offer *services or benefits in kind* to facilitate the combination of work and parenting. While no current surveys of services and benefits at company level are available, recent qualitative studies and surveys of good-practice examples can be used to provide an overview of individual measures currently on offer in Austrian enterprises: Thus, children are allowed to accompany their parents to work on days without school, or the company organises (and finances) family-related services. In addition, some companies provide (or were planning to provide) the following measures: joint planning of parental leave and re-entry, continued company contact and/or further training for parents on parental leave, access to company-level information and participation in company events, marginal employment or work as holiday replacement for parents on parental leave; support of parental leave for fathers and/or part-time work for fathers and options for telework (BMW 2008:22ff).

As so far in Austria the emphasis has been on a sequential combination of employment and parenting, *active labour-market measures* accompanying and aiding parents to successfully return to the labour market after a period of family-related absence are very important. In this context, the Austrian Public Employment Service (AMS) and, in Vienna, Wiener ArbeitnehmerInnenförderungsfonds (WAFF) offer a series of measures.

While AMS services primarily focus on unemployed women and female jobseekers wanting to return to the labour market, WAFF primarily provides support to mothers and fathers already in employment. In addition to specific information events and leaflets, AMS Vienna also offers a special programme for female returnees which includes a system of basic qualification modules. WAFF's NOVA programme, on the other hand is particularly notable for its preventative character: It not only targets parents returning to the labour market as well as working mothers and fathers but also offers a service helping parents to carefully plan labour-market absences and re-entry. Since 2006, "KarencKarriereKompetenzZentrum" launched by abz\*austria, a non-profit women's organisation, also provides preventative measures not only for women but also, and explicitly, for men planning to go on parental leave or part-time work for parents. These services are not only aimed at employees but also at the companies themselves. Their basic concept is to actively plan and organise the "phase surrounding a child's birth", on the part of both the employee and the employer. For small and medium-sized companies, part-funding of these services is currently (2008-2010) available from the City of Vienna's Women's Department.

## 2. STRUCTURAL CONVERSION FACTORS FOR COMBINING EMPLOYMENT AND PARENTING

Gendered functioning and achievements based on the conversion factors for combining employment and parenting very much depend on the overall structures (e.g. standard working time) in place as well as on the gendered dimensions of the labour market and the resulting gender-specific risks and opportunities. In addition, the prevalent societal and cultural norms and values regarding the gendered division of labour (especially in terms of childcare) also play an important role.

### 2.1. Gendered dimensions of the labour market

Over the past decades the *female activity rate* in Austria has seen a continuous rise, which has led to a considerable reduction of the gender employment gap. In Vienna, the activity rate of both women (66.7%) and men (78.3%) was below the Austrian average in 2008 but at 11.6% so was the gender employment gap (Statistik Austria 2009b:257). Nevertheless, children still have a major impact on women's labour-market participation: Female employment declines with the number of children; among men, the number of children has hardly any influence on the employment rate (Statistik Austria 2009a:162f.). In addition, female activity clearly correlates with the children's age: The younger the children, the lower the activity rate among mothers (Statistik Austria 2009a:165). Among single parents, who very much depend on an income from employment, the number or age of the children has a far less pronounced effect.

In terms of employment women thus gained considerable ground in recent years. International data show, however, that they have also been more severely affected by *unemployment*, at least up to 2009, when the economic downturn reached the country. Based on international surveys (2008), unemployment in Vienna was well above the national average, but slightly lower for women (6.5%) than for men (6.9%) (BALI, database inquiry of 28/10/2010).

While in terms of statutory daily, weekly and annual working hours Austria ranks within the European average, the average actual weekly *standard working time* is above the EU average. In addition, Austrian workers work more overtime than their European peers. In Vienna the average standard working week of full-time employees was slightly below the national average but in 2008 still amounted to 42.4 hours for women and 44.7 hours for men (Statistik Austria 2009:283f.). Combining gainful employment and unpaid family work thus generally is very difficult for women and men in full-time employment.

In addition to the long weekly working hours Austria, is characterised by an above-average (by international standards) increase of *part-time work* – above all among women and mothers. While in Vienna the gender gap in this respect is slightly below the national average, the part-time rate (including marginal employment) still amounted

to 35.2% for women and a comparably high 12.3% for men (Statistik Austria 2009b:283f). Similar to women's activity rate in general, female part-time work is very much dependent on the number and age of the children. This means that only a small share of mothers of young children in Austria are active in the labour market and, of these, most work part-time (Statistik Austria 2009:164f.). The data clearly reflect traditional gendered division of labour in Austrian families with children below the age of three: In 37% of the families the man is the single earner, in another 30% the mother is on parental leave, and in another 20% of families the man works full-time while the woman works part-time (Statistik Austria 2009:167).

Part-time work does not only entail a lower income and lower benefits but in an economic and social-security system based on full-time employment it also has additional disadvantages (such as job instability) which women are often forced to accept due to a lack of alternatives or the prevalent traditional gender roles.

The labour-law reforms of 2008 introduced further leeway for flexible working hours in Austria and thus the *de facto* gap between short-hours part-time work for women and long full-time working weeks for men. Thus, weekly and daily working hours can now be extended to a maximum of 60 and 12 hours, making it even harder – or even impossible – for women with childcare obligations to accept full-time work. At the same time, men with full-time jobs are likely to find even less time to fairly share unpaid family care and household work with their wives or partners.

Despite – or perhaps because of – the rising female activity rate and structural changes towards a service economy, the *Austrian labour market* is still very much *gender segregated*. Women and men not only work in different sectors but also in different occupations (*horizontal segregation*). Women are also underrepresented in higher levels of all organisational hierarchies and occupations (*vertical segregation*). All available studies on gender segregation in Austria stress that occupational segregation persists or is showing but minor signs of relief (etwa: Friedl/Kreimer 2005). For Vienna the data shows an even higher concentration of women in typically female sectors, especially in the service sector. In terms of vertical segregation, the situation is slightly better for Viennese women than on the national average (Magistrat der Stadt Wien, MA 57 – Frauenabteilung 2005:43ff.).

Neither have there been any improvements in terms of the *gender pay gap*. Quite on the contrary: Since the 1990s, pay differentials have even been on the rise again. This development is primarily due to the increase in female part-time. In full-time equivalents, pay differentials between women and men have seen a slight decline over the past two decades but are still considerable by international standards. Women are already at a disadvantage at the start of their career; over the course of their working life family-related labour-market absences and reductions in working hours serve to further widen the pay gap (Gregoritsch et al. 2009). In Vienna the gender pay gap is below the Austrian average. Thus the average annual net income of women was “only” 25.2%

below that of men, compared to 35.4% at the national level (Magistrat der Stadt Wien, MA 5 – Finanzwesen 2009: 176).

## 2.2. Societal and cultural norms and values

The findings of various empirical studies show that while attitudes regarding the gendered division of labour and childcare obligations have changed in Austria over the past fifteen years (Tazi-Preve 2004:124), Austrians remain rather conservative regarding the question of *working mothers*. In 2001 about 41% of Austrian women and men still strictly opposed working mothers of pre-school children. And while 80% were not against mothers of school-age children taking up employment in general, most favoured part-time work as the best solution (Gisser 2003: 29ff.).

The successful combination of employment and parenting also largely depends on the age of children from which *childcare outside the family* is accepted as suitable. Here too, Austrians prove to be rather traditional: Three quarters of Austrians can only image institutional childcare for children aged 3 or older. In Vienna, by contrast, 45% endorse childcare also for children below the age of 3 (Kapella/Rille-Pfeiffer 2007:48).

Interestingly, a majority of Austrians believe that *mothers and fathers* have the same competences to look after (young) children. This can be seen from the very high acceptance rate of parental leave for fathers (70%) (Gisser 2003:39) even if this has no impact on the number of fathers actually making use of the scheme. However, for a large part of Austrians the mother still is the ideal carer – especially during the first 1.5 years of a child's life (Kapella/Rille-Pfeiffer 2007:45).

*Unpaid household work*, which especially in families with children makes up a considerable part of daily and weekly working hours and thus restricts labour-market availability, is still largely done by women. According to the current Time Use Survey 2008/09, two thirds of unpaid work is still carried out by women, the lion's share of which is housework and only a smaller part childcare duties. In urban areas traditional arrangements for the division of labour are slightly less pronounced than in rural regions (Statistik Austria 2009:34ff.).

In terms of childcare, the current Time Use Survey of 2008/09 shows that the positive trend towards a *grater participation of fathers* in childcare obligations continues but also that there is little change in terms of the areas fathers are active in. Thus, fathers still primarily engage in playing with their children. Care and supervising duties (such as feeding, washing, dressing, homework) are still primarily women's work (Statistik Austria 2009:67ff.).



### 3. GENDERED USE OF RIGHTS AND RESOURCES

Existing quantitative surveys on parental leave and childcare benefit as well as part-time work for parents and childcare arrangements offer valuable insights into the gendered use of the various rights and resources available for combining employment and parenting in Austria and, more specifically, in Vienna

#### 3.1. Parental leave and childcare benefit

To the great disadvantage of parents, the surveys show that Austrian men and women know very little about the discrepancy between the maximum lengths of parental leave and the various variants for drawing childcare benefit (Riesenfelder et al. 2006a:3f.). Problems regarding protection against dismissal and upon re-entry are thus inevitable. In terms of the key question of planning career breaks, it may be said that more men (64%) than women (55%) discuss their plans with their employer before taking parental leave. With men, these discussions more frequently revolve around concrete re-entry arrangements, with women the focus is more often on working-time arrangements (Riesenfelder et al. 2006: 58f.).

Since the introduction of childcare benefit in 2002, the number of fathers drawing the benefit has risen steadily. Until September 2010, the share of *fathers claiming childcare benefit* rose to 4.6% in Austria and to almost 9% in Vienna. Due to the decoupling of eligibility to the benefit and parental leave provisions this does not automatically mean that more fathers are actually taking time off work to look after their children. Fathers most frequently draw childcare benefit from the 31st to the 36th month of their child's life and during the child's second year. In terms of the *different variants of childcare benefit arrangements* the data shows that in Vienna only 58% of parents choose the option offering the longest duration (30+6 months), compared to a substantial 27% opting for the second-longest variant (until the end of protection against dismissal). So far, only 5.6% have opted for the income-related option. The share of fathers differs little between variants, at approx. 9%. Interestingly, the share of fathers is below average (5%) for the income-dependent arrangement, both in Vienna and at the national level. As to their share in the various variants, fathers clearly seem to favour the 15+3-month option (fathers' share: 13%) ([www.bmwfj.gv.at](http://www.bmwfj.gv.at), download October 2010). Mothers and fathers *sharing parental leave* are still few and far between. The main reasons for not sharing parental leave with their partners reported by Viennese women in 2006 was financial losses; objections by the employer or partner only played a minor role (Braun et al. 2006:4).

Even though almost all Viennese parents on parental leave consider *further training during parental leave* important, a majority reported not having participated in further training. In 2007 about a third of respondents reported taking part in in-company training while on parental leave, by 2010 this share had dropped to 22%. In general, it can be said that the shorter the period of parental leave and the higher the level of

formal qualification, the more likely are mothers or fathers on parental leave to participate in company-level training (Braun et al. 2006:25ff; Brauen et al. 2010:28f.).

The extension of the period for drawing childcare benefit in 2002 also resulted in *changes in the quality of re-entry*. According of a 2004/5 study, the new provisions led to longer labour-market absences, more frequent job changes and increased re-entry problems (e.g. professional downward mobility or a change into atypical employment) among women. Even though only 8.5% of women on parental leave had problems regarding protection against dismissal, almost another third reported having terminated their employment contract themselves. Men, by contrast, are shown to remain anchored in the labour market and to even achieve higher job stability afterwards. Only 5.9% of fathers on parental leave had problems regarding protection against dismissal. The most popular strategy they reported to avoid such problems (more than a third) was to return to their jobs within 24 months (Riesenfelder et al. 2006: 71ff.). Surveys of Viennese mothers and fathers on parental leave confirm the assumption that re-entry into the same job is all the easier the shorter the period of parental leave. The level of qualification also impacts positively on job security (Braun et al. 2007:15f; Braun 2010:17ff.). In terms of income development, the data shows that women – in contrast to men – generally expect income losses after returning to work following parental leave and actually tend to earn less after re-entry (Riesenfelder et al. 2006:54ff.). In addition, just above a quarter of women and even a third of men failed to achieve their preferred working time arrangements, with women tending to want shorter working hours and men longer hours than they were granted (Riesenfelder 2006:62f.). In 2006, almost all Viennese parents on parental leave considered having a say in working time arrangements very important for the combination issue but less than half believed they would have the opportunity to do so. About 90% put their hopes on part-time work as a means to facilitate the combination of employment and parenting (Braun et al. 2006:17f.).

For female claimants of childcare benefit in Vienna institutional childcare services are most important to *allow them to combine employment and parenting*. For men, their wives and partners play the key role even though childcare services are also considered important. Concessions on the part of the employer are essential for women but, interestingly, less so for men. The role of support provided by grandparents is below the Austrian national average, among both women and men in Vienna (Riesenfelder et al. 2006:212).

### 3.2. *Part-time work for parents – the employees' and the employers' perspective*

Similar to childcare benefit provisions, a 2007 survey showed Viennese parents to be inadequately informed about the regulations regarding part-time work for parents (Dörfler/Wernhart 2007:10ff.). And while most companies know about parents' legal right to part-time work, only few know about the possibility to voluntarily arrange part-time work for parents between the employee and employer. In general, companies



regard part-time work for parents as positive. It is considered a measure to facilitate combining employment and parenting as well as to further the commitment of qualified staff to the company. The majority of companies, though, also believe that the scheme generates additional administrative and financial cost for the employer (Dörfler et al. 2009:118ff.).

Especially for small *companies*, a *key problem regarding part-time work for parents* is finding qualified replacement staff. Other problems reported include the incompatibility of parents' desired working hours (usually mornings) with the companies' business processes or differences between the opening hours of childcare facilities and parents' working hours as well as the provisions offering parents protection against dismissal (Dörfler et al. 2009:125ff.).

Due to the legal requirements, at the time of the survey (2007) 70% of men but only 54% of women were eligible to claim part-time work for parents. By contrast, of the 6% of parents *making use of their right to part-time work only 14% were men*. Mothers not only choose part-time work for parents for longer periods they also work shorter hours. Similar to the situation with childcare benefit, fathers opt for part-time work for parents more often during their child's second year (Dörfler et al. 2009:165ff.). Findings also show that part-time work for parents is much more prevalent in companies where parents have a legal right to do so than in companies where part-time work for parents is based on an agreement between employer and employee. In addition, part-time work for parents is most often used by persons with higher levels of formal qualification, higher incomes and more highly qualified jobs (Dörfler/Wernhart 2007:28f.).

Parents, and in particular *mothers, very much appreciate* part-time work for parents because it allows them to combine taking care of their children with an earlier re-entry or continuing to work for the same company. For fathers, re-entry issues do not play any role. Findings also show that it can sometimes be difficult to enforce their right to part-time work for parents and that making use of one's right can entail *disadvantages*, e.g. in terms of career advancement, being moved to inferior position or a deterioration in the working climate. Women (70%) are much more often affected by such negative consequences than men (50%). For men, *reasons for not making use of their right to part-time work for parents* primarily include "career disadvantages" and "major loss of income". Women, by contrast, make use of the scheme irregardless of problems, career disadvantages or income loss. If women do not succeed in arranging part-time work, they are often forced to postpone re-entry or even change jobs. Men, by contrast, forgo part-time work if they face disadvantages and leave childcare obligation to their wives, partners or others (Dörfler/Wernhart, 2007:43ff).

### 3.3. Working time and childcare obligations/services

In 2005 parents in both Austria and Vienna were *generally satisfied* with the organisation of time arrangements regarding employment and parenting. Nevertheless,

about 27% of Viennese women and 17% of Viennese men would like to see improvements (Statistik Austria 2006:65ff.).

In 2005 Viennese children aged below fifteen were enrolled in childcare facilities *during their parents' regular working hours* much more frequently than in Austria on the whole, with working mothers making use of institutional childcare particularly often. Nevertheless, still more than half of Viennese children were looked after by a working parent's female partner, about a third by the working parent's male partner. In urban areas such as Vienna, relatives and friends play a minor role in taking on childcare duties (Statistik Austria 2006: 77ff.). If these forms of childcare are not available, opportunities for flexible time arrangements are important. Thus, in 2005 about two thirds of Viennese parents took a day per week off or reduced working hours, a smaller share even had special working time agreements, with all three options used by slightly more women than men. Moving the start or end of the working day *for family reasons* or taking a day off (without taking nursing leave or a holiday) seems to be more difficult in Vienna than at the national level. Still, in 2005 more than half of Viennese parents did so (Statistik Austria 2006: 95f.). Absences from work due to *family emergencies* are more common in Vienna than in Austria on the whole: Thus, 24% of Viennese women and 19% of Viennese men took at least a day off for this reason, with 9% of women and 5.5% of men taking nursing leave to deal with the emergency. In general – and in contrast to the opportunities for flexible working time arrangements for family reasons – use of nursing leave rises with the size of the company (Statistik Austria 2006:31ff).

## 4. CASE-STUDY FINDINGS

### 4.1. *The qualitative survey – the methodology*

Key research questions – such as the interdependencies of women’s and men’s individual decisions and the company and household level, or the question as to the actual quality of the re-entry – made it necessary to base the research on *qualitative methods of empirical social sciences*. The qualitative fieldwork was thus carried out at two levels: at the level of *company case studies*, eight of which were carried out, and by means of *seven individual case studies*.

*Company case studies*: In each of the studied companies semi-structured interviews based on a common guideline were conducted with an HR manager and a works council member (if available) as well as both an active mother and an active father (if available) working for the company. As the research interest primarily focussed on “good” practice examples of combining employment and parenting and on “successful” re-entry, the emphasis was on “combination friendly” companies. The eight enterprises under investigation thus included the following sectors: manufacture of pharmaceutical products, libraries, retail, publishing, pharmacies, adult education, kindergarten and pre-school education, and research.

Among *micro enterprises* it often difficult to find “positive” cases that employ both an active mother and an active father. As Vienna’s economy is characterised by a large share of enterprises like this, the survey wanted to include a special emphasis on micro companies. Here, in terms of methodology, *individual case studies* investigating single persons in his or her working environment were used, including the gathering of company-level information from the employee’s perspective. Like in the company case studies, the active mothers and fathers interviewed should ideally have achieved a “successful” re-entry or be a positive example of recent (past 5 years) combination issues.

### 4.2. *Company practices – company logics*

A key aim of the research was to plumb the situation in companies in terms of parental leave, re-entry and the combination of employment and parenting, with central questions including company cultures and attitudes towards parental leave and re-entry as well as actual resources and measures in place to help achieve valuable outcomes.

#### 4.2.1. *Parental leave and re-entry*

In the enterprises investigated, *company culture regarding parental leave, labour-market re-entry and part-time work for parents* can be seen as predominantly positive,

also as far as fathers are concerned. Companies with a positive attitude towards these issues have a common characteristic: *Furthering employees' commitment to the company* constitutes a core element of these companies' HR management. A high level of qualification turned out to be a further advantage for the employee in this respect. Next to providing an incentive to employees to stay with the company, other individual factors can also play a role. This may have historical reasons, such as a traditionally large share of female workers, or be due to the implementation of diversity-management strategies, with positive effects on company practices in terms of parental leave and re-entry. As the findings clearly show, a positive attitude towards parental leave and re-entry is an essential prerequisite for the implementation of concrete resources and support measures to facilitate a smooth exit and re-entry of employees on parental leave.

As far as *rights and resources* are concerned, it is remarkable that *institutionalised rights and resources* are few and far between. This is presumably due to the dominance of small and medium sized enterprises within the sample. One exception is a large former public-sector organisation outsourced several years ago, which has kept a public sector outlook on equality policy. In the other enterprises, company practices that are themselves strongly shaped by company culture are – even if not codified – of major importance.

A widespread set of measures is the *active maintenance of contact and information exchange* between the company and employees on parental leave. This allows employees to keep up with job- and company-relevant news and developments and facilitates re-entry. Invitations to company events, access to company-related information (operating hours, etc.) and regular visits to the company are resources on offer in a majority of the companies studied.

An important question for a successful re-entry is whether a company offers employees the opportunity to arrange re-entry conditions. The issue of *re-entry agreements* clearly shows that in this context smaller companies have an advantage over larger ones: As examples show, smaller companies can utilise personal interaction to shorten negotiations and thus are quicker in finding needs-based solutions. In addition, the conditions of re-entry are directly negotiated with the management, adding to the agreements' reliability. In the larger enterprises – of about 50 employees or more – of our sample such re-entry agreements were rare and only concluded with fathers planning to take parental leave.

In the context of parental leave and re-entry, two individual case studies of our sample have a special position as they focus on a self-employed woman and a mother in precarious employment. Both women continued working even during the protective period before and after their children's birth because their jobs' requirements and economic consideration did not leave them any choice. Their stories show that *self-employed or quasi self-employed women* have huge problems complying with the legal provisions banning (expectant) mothers to work before and after the birth of their child as they interfere with the realities of their jobs.

**Further training** during periods of parental leave is not on offer in any of the companies studied. Larger companies, though, frequently offer training for returnees during the re-entry period, especially if a mother or father has been away from the job for an extended period of time. For parents returning to work, the key issue regarding training and further education is whether the company also provides sufficient time resources.

Concrete **measures encouraging fathers to take parental leave** are not in place in any of the companies investigated. As mentioned above, the positive attitude many companies have towards parental leave also extends to fathers. But even in companies with an explicitly positive attitude towards parental leave for mothers and fathers, the use of parental leave is unevenly distributed. This clearly shows that parents' decisions regarding a division of parental leave is not only due to the specific framework in place in the parents' place of work but must be seen as an interplay of the parents' individual situation, company conditions and economic and societal structures. The latter include, e.g. pay differentials as well as gendered attributions – e.g. of specific competences to mothers.

As far as **parental leave for fathers** is concerned, one phenomenon was found in all companies studied: Women generally take longer periods of parental leave than men, followed by longer periods of part-time work/part-time work for parents. Men much more frequently return to working full-time after returning from parental leave. In terms of parental leave and re-entry conditions, the case studies found that men are more likely to arrange individual agreements and to negotiate more favourable agreements than their female co-workers. They thus receive “special treatment” compared to women on parental leave. This is not least due to the fact that even when parents share parental leave women still take on the lion's share of the obligations in combining employment and parenting.

Some of the women in our sample made use of the opportunity to **keep working during parental leave up to the level of the earnings threshold**. For the most part, such arrangements were made on the women's request. One woman, for instance, explained she had financial reasons to continue working and said she “wanted to stay on the ball and not be away from the company for too long”. Some women, however, reported that company requirements had influenced their decision to keep on working while on parental leave.

After their return from parental leave, a majority of women opted for part-time work for parents or regular part-time work. This is also true for companies exempted from legal requirements to offer part-time work for parents due to their size.

In general, in a vast majority of companies, returnees opting for part-time work (for parents) can **return to the same position and to the same or equivalent job** they had before parental leave. In some cases women were asked to accept a different if comparable job within the company. This is all the more likely the longer a parent has been on parental leave (also see Braun 2010). The fact that many women can return to

their previous jobs but work part-time also means that in these companies part-time work is also possible for executive or management positions.

A company's concrete *work organisation and working-time culture* also plays an influential role in whether a parent's (part-time) re-entry is successful or not. If company culture is based on full-time employment (including overtime) and the idea of a "constantly available employee without care obligations", part-time re-entry often entails career disadvantages or even a move down the career ladder. If legal provisions did not to give parents the right to part-time work, these companies would not offer part-time arrangements at all.

Compared to their income before parental leave, the *income level* of all returnees *declined* to the level of the *part-time work arrangements*. All of them – including the men on parental leave – returned to the same level of the salary structure they had occupied before parental leave. Performance-based payment systems and bonus schemes, however, tend to put returnees at a disadvantage as bonuses and premiums are usually only due from a certain amount of working hours.

#### 4.2.2. *Company resources in support of combining employment and parenting*

*Flexible working time arrangements* are a key prerequisite to facilitate the combination of employment and parenting. There is no doubt that flexible working hours, such as flexitime systems and (temporary) part-time work, can help parents to juggle job and family obligations. Our findings show that flexible working time arrangements are particularly valuable in supporting parents if the flexibility is based on the needs of employees, i.e. if it gives working parents the required leeway to, e.g. adapt working hours to the opening hours of childcare facilities. A high level of flexibility required from parents to suit company or job requirements rather than individual needs, however, hampers a successful combination.

In combination debates, *working from home or (temporary) telework* is generally regarded as a measure supporting working parents in combining work and family obligations. Working from home allows parents both to save valuable time otherwise spent on the journey to and from work and to easily deal with childcare problems. However, the companies in our sample do not really offer "home office" days or telework to parents as an instrument to facilitate combining employment and parenting. For one thing, this is due to the type of service work provided by the companies and thus the jobs of employees. For another, in two cases, working from home is a privilege reserved for management. At the same time, the case studies show that in companies with a certain working-time culture – all-inclusive contracts and frequent overtime – working from home rather serves company interests towards ever greater working-time flexibility than supporting the combination of work and parenting.

Concrete *childcare measures at the company-level* are only in place in one of the studies enterprises. The company concerned has entered an agreement with a nearby childcare facility granting privileged access to children of employees. In the companies



of our sample it is not habitual for children to accompany their parents to work but it is allowed in some of the companies to fill childcare gaps and used by employees in emergencies.

In terms of *holiday planning*, all companies try to take the needs of parents of school-age children into account. The holiday requirements of these parents during school holidays are given priority. In six of the eight companies investigated *nursing leave* is only available up to the level stipulated by law. Parents who have used up all the days due them for nursing leave are required to call in their partners, the child's grandparents or other relatives to look after the sick child. Parents taking nursing leave at short notice, however, do not cause problems in any of the companies, neither with bosses nor colleagues. On the contrary: Many of our interview partners stressed that co-workers were very understanding.

#### **4.2.3. Selected company case-study examples**

Describing three selected company case studies in more detail allows us to illustrate more complex company processes and their interplay as well as their impact on the combination issue. Case study 1 and Case study 2 depict companies offering favourable re-entry and combination conditions. Case study 3, by contrast, highlights factors that can contribute to hampering a successful re-entry and combination of employment and parenting.

In Case study 1, a small-sized company employing a staff of fourteen, sectoral factors combine with company strategies to find individual and informal needs-based solutions to form a working environment that facilitates the successful combination of employment and parenting. The sector this company is active in is highly regulated and characterised by above-average income levels and job security. The sector's share of part-time workers is well above average too.

Case study 2 shows how company culture (i.e. transparency, communication and participation on the part of employees), company structure (flatter hierarchies and careers based on individual achievement) and, not least, a company's economic position (growth of the enterprise) can combine to benefit the combination of employment and parenting. Another advantage this company may offer is its (limited) size even if this was not mentioned explicitly: Negotiation processes are conducted directly with the management itself. The case study also highlights the fact that a company's influence regarding parental leave for mothers and fathers is limited. In other words: The decision about how parental leave is distributed between mother and father not only depends on the specific company situation but must be largely seen as the interplay of a couple's individual situation and social and economic structures. Pay differentials between sectors (horizontal segregation) and differences in position within the company (vertical segregation, impacting on income) between women and men have a huge impact on individual parents' organisation of parental leave.

In contrast to the other two case studies, Case study 3, a subsidiary of a multinational company, highlights company-level influences that hamper a successful combination of employment and parenting. In this company these include a headcounts model in place, combined with detailed specifications on how many staff (“heads”) a department may employ, accompanied by a work organisation and working-time culture very much based on full-time employment, all-inclusive contracts and overtime. A second key factor is the lack of collective agreement provisions or schemes organising re-entry after parental leave. But the case study also illustrates the positive impact of the introduction the right to part-time work for parents, which only made part-time work possible for parents in this company returning to work after parental leave. At the same time it shows that changes at the level of work organisation and company culture are needed to allow parents to take parental leave and return to work without facing career disadvantages.

### 4.3. *The household level – attitudes, value system and resources*

This concerns the *influence* of both *economic conditions at the household level* and the *attitudes and value systems of the parents* (e.g. in terms of the gendered division of labour) on the concrete organisation of career and parenthood. In addition, it highlights the impact of institutional childcare (e.g. opening hours and closure days, e.g. during school holidays) and social and family networks on the options available to working parents to combine employment and parenting.

#### 4.3.1. *Conditions, attitudes and value systems influencing parental-leave decisions*

In line with the results of similar studies (Bucheber-Ferstl/Rille-Pfeiffer 2008, Haas et al. 2009), the employees in our sample who opted to take parental leave were predominantly women, who thus took on childcare obligations to a greater extent than their husbands or partners. We arrived at these results even though we explicitly sought out both companies offering parental leave to fathers and for fathers on parental leave.

In terms of the *concrete organisation of parental leave, two major factors* turned out to be influential: On the one hand, next to the company and job situation, it is *economic factors* such as gender-specific pay differentials as well as the *regional availability of childcare for small children* that determine parents’ concrete parental-leave arrangements. On the other hand, the influence of parents’ attitudes and value systems is another key factor. This concerns, for one thing, *gendered attributions to mothers*, i.e. the mother taking parental leave is considered “natural”, regardless of the parents’ income situation. For another, *parents’ conceptions regarding the best type of childcare – for their child’s development* – has an influence on their decision about who takes parental leave. In this context, we found that the less the child’s well-being is associated with a certain person, the more freedom parents have in terms of what form of childcare to choose for their child.



In all, the findings clearly show that there is a clear *need for improvement concerning information* regarding the various options of organising parental leave – including the different options available for claiming childcare benefit and extra earnings thresholds – and/or part-time work for parents – especially in terms of the legal framework. An important measure in this context would be to offer detailed information material at the regional level. Works councils too can play a key role in improving the situation and acting as hubs of information.

#### 4.3.2. *Combination issues and gender arrangements – same old story or new developments?*

Another important factor in deciding whether combining employment with care obligation for (small) children is possible for both parents is the parents' *conceptions and values regarding the gendered division of labour within the household*. An analysis of the arrangements in place in our interview partners' households clearly showed that a majority of parents still live in *structurally specialised household arrangements* (Grottian et al. 2003), in which gainful employment and childcare are based on a division of labour, i.e. with one partner responsible for earning the family' keep, the other in charge of childcare. There are, however, differentiations within this group in terms of the degree to which the roles of breadwinner and family worker are distributed. In structurally specialised family arrangements, the traditional male breadwinner model has become rare. As the examples show, change and pluralisation is altering these structurally specialised arrangements. *Structurally egalitarian models*, on the other hand, in which both partners set similar priorities (i.e. a focus on work and/or childcare), represent a minority in our sample. Here, it is particularly women who seem to be the driving force behind a continuation of the egalitarian model after the birth of a child.

#### 4.3.3. *Institutional childcare, family, friends and paid childcare*

Most important for the use of institutional childcare is, above all, *regional supply*. The situation in Vienna thus is reflected in the answers supplied by our interview partners. While parents report few problems in finding childcare for children aged 3 to 5, this seems to be much harder for children below the age of three. Finding institutional childcare for children of working mothers and fathers is problematic again when it comes to finding after-school afternoon care for school-age children up to the age of 14. The parents in our sample, thus, identify a lack of all-day schools and adequate afternoon care facilities near their children's schools.

A majority of the parents interviewed for our study are very satisfied with the *opening hours of childcare facilities*. Childcare services in Vienna offer the longest opening hours in Austria. Problems only arise once the children reach school age. In the context of opening hours, it is interesting to note that quite a few parents are anxious not to be the last to pick up their children from childcare. Thus, not only the opening hours are a

criterion but also the usual attendance hours of the other children and the associated socio-cultural norms regarding parenting reflected in individual attitudes.

Sine autumn 2009, attendance of public childcare facilities (half-day or all-day) for Viennese children up to age 6 is *free of charge*. All working parents regard this as a *positive* development. Still, the interviewees find the steep cost of childcare in the afternoons and during school holidays a problematic financial burden. In this context, we also find a clear differentiation between parents' choice of school, very much depending on the family's income situation. Higher-income parents frequently opt for sometimes rather expensive – up to 400,00 €/month – private primary schools offering afternoon care while low-income parents choose public primary schools and rely on family support for afternoon care.

The results, however, also highlight that fact that despite a rather favourable regional supply of childcare – compared to other Austrian federal states – *support from family and friends* is *hugely important* for parents to combine employment and parenting. Predominantly, it is the grandparents who actively provide childcare support. If grandparents or other relatives are not available because they do, for instance, not live in Vienna or themselves engage in gainful employment, the interviewees resort to friends and acquaintances for support. A second option, wherever this financially viable, is making use of paid childminders.

The study also shows that parents also make use of the support provided by family, friends or paid childcare in order to address their own work-life balance and spend time on their own interests, with their partners or just to have some time to themselves. This means that in some cases this form of informal *support* allows parents to *integrate* other *subjectively important spheres into their lives* besides work and parenthood.

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