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TOWARDS AN EQUAL DIVISION OF PAID AND UNPAID WORK: THE CASE OF THE NETHERLANDS

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Summary

Both the Netherlands and other European countries are involved in the transition from a breadwinner society towards a more individual-oriented society. What is unique in the Dutch case is the strong emphasis on the equal sharing of time, between paid and unpaid work as well as between women and men. Despite the preferences among citizens for a more equal sharing of paid and unpaid work, in practice it appears that general participation in paid labour is being achieved more rapidly than general participation in unpaid labour. The article looks at the obstacles and sticking points which stand in the way of the process of redistribution and investigates how this process can be accelerated. It includes an empirical analysis on survey data for the Netherlands with respect to both actual and preferred working hours for married and cohabitating men and women. The authors conclude that a consistent government policy is lacking. As a consequence neither individuals nor organizations get signals that might contribute to those steps in the area of part-time work, child-care provision and leave facilities that would bring about a redistribution of paid and unpaid work between women and men.

Résumé

Tant les Pays-Bas que les autres pays européens sont impliqués dans une transition d'une société basée sur le rôle du père de famille (breadwinner) vers une société plus orientée sur l'individu. Ce qui est unique dans le cas

hollandais est la forte insistance sur un partage égal du temps, entre le travail payé et non de même qu'entre hommes et femmes. Malgré les préférences parmi les citoyens pour un partage plus égal du travail payé et non, il apparaît en pratique que la participation dans le domaine du travail rémunéré a été atteinte plus rapidement que la participation au travail non rémunéré. Cet article examine les obstacles et les blocages qui existent dans ce processus de redistribution. Il étudie la manière dont ce processus pourrait être accéléré. Notre analyse empirique se base sur les données d'une enquête aux Pays-Bas concernant le temps de travail presté et souhaité des hommes et des femmes mariés ou cohabitants. Les auteurs concluent à l'absence d'une politique gouvernementale cohérente. En conséquence de quoi, ni les individus ni les organisations ne reçoivent des indications appropriées qui pourraient contribuer à progresser dans les domaines du travail à temps partiel, des dispositions pour la garde des enfants et des possibilités d'interruption de carrière; mesures qui entraîneraient une redistribution du travail payé et non entre hommes et femmes.

Introduction

The slow decline of the breadwinner model has put the organization of work and care firmly on the Dutch policy agenda. In former days, the strong breadwinner model (Lewis, 1992) created a social economic environment in which care could be carried out privately within the informal economy – that is, by women in the families. At the same time, the breadwinner could work full time and uninterrupted due to the externalization of care.

In modern society, policy has changed in the sense that the individual rather than the family is the point of departure, and labour market participation of both men and women is advocated. This shift implies a different organization of work and care and, as a consequence, of the relationship between the formal and informal economy.

This transition from a breadwinner society towards a more individual-oriented society is not unique to the Netherlands. In other countries, too, breadwinner arrangements have lost importance due to the changing roles of men and women. What is unique in the Dutch case, however, is the strong emphasis on the equal sharing of time, between paid and unpaid work as well as between women and men. In most other countries, rising rates of female participation in the labour market have tended to go hand in hand with the externalization and commercialization of care. Because of a strong attachment to private and informal care, this is considered less appropriate in the Netherlands and adjustments in the organization of labour are sought that will facilitate and make accessible the combination of work and care in every citizen's life. In fact, a recent memorandum by the Dutch government underlines the importance of a policy aimed at achieving a situation in which every adult individual, irrespective of his or her living circumstances, can provide for their own maintenance and can care for themselves (SZW, 1997). Inherent in this goal is the assumption that there will be both general participation in paid labour and equally general participation in unpaid labour. Yet, despite the preferences for a more equal sharing of paid and unpaid work, in practice it appears that general participation in paid labour is being achieved rather more rapidly than general participation in unpaid labour. In other words, women's labour market participation has certainly increased, but there has been no corresponding increase in men's care participation.

This article looks at the obstacles and sticking points which stand in the way of or slow

down the process of redistribution and investigates how this process can be accelerated. The first section examines the actual division of paid labour in the Netherlands by investigating the specific working-time regime. The second section looks at the preferences of married and cohabiting men and women with respect to paid work, both as regards their own working hours and when considering the total amount of paid work to be performed by the household as a whole. The next section moves on to examine sticking-points, obstacles and policy developments. Finally, there follows a short summary of the main results.

Working-time regimes and equal opportunities

The actual patterns of working times are shaped by individual preferences, cultural norms and socio-economic circumstances. Traditionally, the male breadwinner preferred full-time and uninterrupted working hours in the interest of his family. This working-time pattern is no longer adequate, however, given the rise of women's labour supply and dual earner families. Women in particular try to escape the all-or-nothing option on the labour market and experiment with more differentiated working-time patterns. These may also be favoured by the employers. The times of generic arrangements – such as working from nine to five – seem to be over and there is a general desire for tailor-made solutions for each company. This process of supply and demand, however, is not relegated to a vacuum; matching preferences occurs against a backdrop of cultural standards and legislative and regulatory measures which make specific options more or less attractive. In this way, the institutional structure can have a standardizing effect and exert influence on specific working-time patterns of men and women.

In a recent article, Rubery et al. (1998) use the concept of 'working-time regime' to refer to

this explicit and implicit standardization. In their view, gender divisions relating to working time arise primarily from the unequal division of unpaid work, but the extent and form that these gender divisions take in the labour market are moderated or mediated by national working-time regimes, defined to include the set of legal, voluntary and customary regulations which influence working-time practice (Rubery et al., 1998: 72). Working-time regimes can promote or diminish gender equality by limiting or extending full-time working hours, promoting or discouraging part-time work and by influencing the terms and conditions under which overtime, unsocial hours or atypical work contracts are undertaken. More specifically, Rubery et al. (1998: 79–80) identify seven characteristics of working-time regimes which can be considered relatively favourable for gender equality. These characteristics are:

- relatively short full-time hours
- a small gender gap in average full-time hours
- low shares of both men and women on very long hours
- opportunities for women to work long part-time/short full-time hours

- low shares of women on short-hours jobs
- low rate of unsocial-hours working for both men and women
- a relatively equal use of men and women on unsocial-hours work and no particular tendency to use female part-time work to cover unsocial hours.

These characteristics are based on the twin principles of a better balance between time allocation between men and women and a better balance in the allocation of time between paid and unpaid work. Although a straightforward comparison between countries on these dimensions is difficult, due to lack of data and the fact that the interpretation of data is not always self-evident, Table 1 gives some information in this respect for five countries, generally assumed to represent different welfare state regimes in Europe (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Sainsbury, 1996). For purposes of comparison, the EU-15 average is also included.

When analysing the data of Table 1, it should be noted that the outcomes are influenced by gender as well as by the working-time regime. Gender has an independent effect, shaping the overall working-time

Table 1 Working-time regimes and gender (in)equality, 1996

	<i>Nether-lands</i>	<i>United Kingdom</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>Sweden</i>	<i>EU-15</i>
Average full-time hours (employees)	39.4	43.9	40.0	38.6	40.0	40.4
Full-time hours (women) as a percentage of full-time hours (men)	98.7	88.8	97.3	91.5	99.5	94.4
Share of employees on long working hours (46 hours and more)	1.7	31.8	7.2	9.5	3.0	11.7
Share of female employees on long part-time jobs (25 hours and more)	17.9	10.6	8.7	3.8	24.8	9.4
Share of female employees on short part-time jobs (10 hours or less)	18.8	10.8	6.6	1.0	4.1	5.9
Persons in employment, usually work at night (%)	2.1	6.3	6.8	4.9	6.7	5.4
Share of women	30.4	35.1	27.7	22.3	40.3	28.9
Persons in employment, usually work in the evening (%)	15.8	16.7	17.7	12.9	20.7	13.6
Share of women	41.7	41.6	37.2	28.0	50.5	37.6
Usual hours per week (women) as a percentage of usual hours per week (men)	66.1	69.1	80.1	87.0	84.5	80.4

Source: Eurostat (1997).

regime and the gender differences within it (Rubery et al., 1998: 89). The high percentage of women working part time in the Netherlands, for example, is related to the particular history of women's employment in the Netherlands. Until about 1960, married women in paid employment were extremely rare. Even though there have been many changes in the subsequent decades, a large majority of women are still rather attached to the Dutch tradition of caring for their children personally. Therefore, a full outsourcing of care is not considered desirable, leaving a part-time job as the most realistic proposition (Knijn, 1998; Plantenga, 1996). At the same time, there is also an independent effect of the working-time regime, as the popularity of part-time work can also be attributed to government policy in this respect. For example, the hour threshold has been removed in the minimum wage regulation. The same applies for social security hour thresholds which have been almost totally abolished. As a result, the individual costs of a part-time job are not disproportionately high and part-time employees are not marginalized by definition.

On the basis of Table 1, it seems fair to say that the Dutch working-time regime is not unfavourable for gender equality. On the positive side, there are the relatively short full-time hours, the absence of a gender gap in full-time hours, the low share of employees on long working hours, the relatively high percentage of women working long part-time hours, and the low percentage on night work. On the negative side, there is only the high share on marginal part-time jobs. Indeed, Rubery et al. (1998: 90) conclude that the Netherlands together with Belgium offer the most gender-friendly working-time regime (Sweden is not included in their sample), whereas the UK is the least friendly, due to long full-time hours and high unsocial hours for both men and women.

However, a gender-friendly working-time regime, does not imply gender-equal working times. This is most clearly indicated by adding an eighth characteristic to the list of Rubery et

al., namely the gender gap in the average hours usually worked per week. On this dimension, the Netherlands appear at the bottom of the list with women working only 66 percent of the usual hours per week of men, whereas the EU average is 80 percent. This low Dutch score is directly related to the popularity of part-time jobs: in 1996, 68.3 percent of the women worked part time compared to only 31.5 percent in the European Union as a whole. Seen from this perspective, it could be argued that the combined effect of both gender and the working-time regime has been to create a new, fairly dominant model in the Netherlands. The once strict division of labour between breadwinner and care-provider has been transformed in the space of a few decades into a one-and-a-half-earner model, with women emphatically in the role of secondary earner.

A final assessment of the Dutch working-time regime from an equal opportunities point of view is sensitive and rather controversial as the gender-friendly elements of this model seem to compete with the clear signs of gender inequality. Proponents point to the fact that this model still provides some space for qualities, activities and responsibilities historically associated with women's lives and facilitates the combination of work and care in an acceptable manner. In their view, part-time work is not an employment strategy available for women only. Given the strong attachment to private and informal care, the part-time model offers the opportunity for both men and women to achieve a more equitable distribution of paid and unpaid work. Opponents point to the risks and indicate that this part-time model goes hand in hand with an enduring inequality in the labour market, in terms of income, responsibility and power. Their basic problem is that part-time work is touted as a general strategy to combine work and care, but in reality it is primarily women who are being addressed here (see, for a discussion; Plantenga, 1996).

The differences are more or less bridged by an alternative model, advocated in recent years

by the Dutch Equal Opportunities Council. The proposed alternative could be called a 'twice-three-quarter model', a model whose characteristic element is the lack of any form of specialization. Both men and women are supposed to participate in the labour market for approximately four days a week and to share the responsibility for unpaid work (Emanicipatieraad, 1996). It aims to reach this redivision of paid and unpaid work by changes in the fiscal and social security system, by extending public care provisions and by introducing a standard 'full' working week of 32 instead of the present 38 hours by the year 2010. It is this equitable division of paid and unpaid work which forms the unique (but also vulnerable) aspect of the twice-three-quarter model. Not only are adjustments in the organization of labour required; it also implies a shift in perspective: it is no longer about women and their entry in public life, but also and particularly about men and their entry in private life. Up until now, experiences with a more equal sharing of unpaid work have been disappointing. True, the idea that existing or traditional gender divisions are unfair is widespread: attitudes are now more inclined towards egalitarianism and sharing (Hooghiemstra and Niphuis-Nell, 1993: 190). In actual practice, however, the increased interchangeability of genders in the labour market has not given rise to a more cooperative pattern of behaviour on the part of men in household activities (Van der Lippe, 1997). Yet there are indications that in the Netherlands men would like to get away from the traditional full-time and uninterrupted working-time pattern and that the current large gender difference in working hours does not match preferences. In the next section, we present the results of an analysis of desired working hours.

Actual and preferred working hours

The data on working hours are from the labour supply survey that was carried out in

1994 on behalf of the OSA (Organization for Strategic Labour Market Research) in the Netherlands. For 1118 households with a male and a female partner, some married, some not, the database contains sufficient statistics for both partners' actual and preferred working hours to be able to answer the research questions that are central to the present article. In 448 of the 1118 households covered by the nationwide survey, both partners were engaged in paid work. The database used for the analysis presented here relates to men and women ranging in age from 18 to 65 and includes, besides people in paid employment, respondents who gave their main activity as housework, plus a number of jobseekers, physically/mentally challenged people and early retirees.

In the context of the questions put to the respondents, all respondents were asked the following question about the amount of work they would like to do: 'Imagine you were allowed to decide for yourself how many hours you worked every week. How many hours would you like to work in your present/future job, if you were able to determine it yourself AND if you were to earn on average the same amount PER HOUR?' To make this perfectly clear, the interviewer then added: 'If you choose to work fewer hours, this means that you would have less NET income; if you worked more hours you would have more NET income. You must assume that other members of the family would not be working any longer or shorter than at present.' The wording chosen, together with the explanatory remark, ensured that the respondents really were aware of the fact that less work implied less income, and hence that we achieved the clearest possible picture of the 'trade-off' between time and income.

Respondents were then asked a question relating to the amount of time the household as a whole should spend on paid work, including the way this should be distributed between the partners. The question was as follows: 'Suppose you were allowed to decide for yourself how many hours your partner and you

Table 2 Actual and preferred hours of paid work for households, 1994

Hour class	Number of households	Actual hours of paid work			Male dictator point			Female dictator point		
		Average number of hours	Share female partner	Share male partner	Average number of hours	Share female partner	Share male partner	Average number of hours	Share female partner	Share male partner
0	181	0.00	–	–	11.05	0.46	0.54	11.23	0.47	0.53
0–8	5	5.60	1.00	0.00	20.20	0.57	0.43	21.00	0.65	0.35
8–16	7	11.71	0.86	0.14	31.43	0.52	0.48	35.00	0.71	0.29
16–24	14	21.43	0.93	0.07	40.00	0.55	0.45	35.57	0.53	0.47
24–32	25	29.48	0.65	0.35	43.64	0.46	0.54	42.60	0.54	0.46
32–40	215	38.81	0.04	0.96	40.81	0.27	0.73	43.48	0.30	0.70
40–48	182	44.04	0.05	0.95	44.73	0.28	0.72	45.55	0.32	0.68
48–56	122	52.25	0.13	0.87	48.12	0.28	0.72	48.36	0.30	0.70
56–64	118	60.52	0.29	0.71	54.35	0.35	0.65	56.59	0.39	0.61
64–72	80	68.19	0.35	0.65	56.85	0.39	0.61	59.38	0.44	0.56
72–80	84	76.55	0.43	0.57	64.96	0.43	0.57	66.00	0.45	0.55
80–	85	88.75	0.44	0.56	64.99	0.43	0.57	66.48	0.45	0.55
Total	1118	45.13	0.27	0.73	43.56	0.36	0.64	44.82	0.39	0.61

Source: OSA Arbeidsaanbod panel, 1994

worked every week. How many hours would you like your partner to work and how many hours would you like to work yourself?' Here, too, the explanatory remark about net income was added. The answer men gave to this question provided the so-called male 'dictator point'; the answer given by the women the female 'dictator point' (Grift, 1998; Ott, 1992). These two 'dictator points' are effectively the basis for the intrahousehold negotiations which are commonly supposed to take place at the kitchen table.

Table 2 shows that both men and women in households which now do 40 hours or less of paid work have a preference for more (sometimes considerably more) hours of paid work for the household as a whole, with little difference between men and women as regards the total number of hours they feel the household should work. Households which are now in the 40–8 hours a week class would prefer to keep the total number of hours of paid work for the household more or less as it is. Both men and women in the higher-hour classes would prefer to see a reduction (sometimes a considerable reduction) in the number of hours worked by the household, with partners

who together work around 60 hours a week (7.5 days) wishing to reduce the total working week by 5 hours (over half a day), while households with almost two full-time workers (over 72 hours a week) would like to go back to a joint working week of 65 hours (i.e. a total of 8 working days).

When it comes to the preferred distribution of the hours worked by the partners there is little difference between men and women. On average, preferences result in men doing approximately 63 percent of the paid work and women 37 percent. The preference for a more balanced division of paid labour exists among both men and women from households in the hour classes up to 32 and among men and women from households in the hour classes between 56 and 80. Indeed, in the highest-hour classes, the preferred distribution coincides with the actual figures. In the hour classes between 32 and 56 hours the opposite is the case: whereas both men and women in these classes have a preference for a working week of around 40 to 48 hours – 30 percent of which would be done by the female partner and 70 percent by the male partner – the actual distribution is such that women take

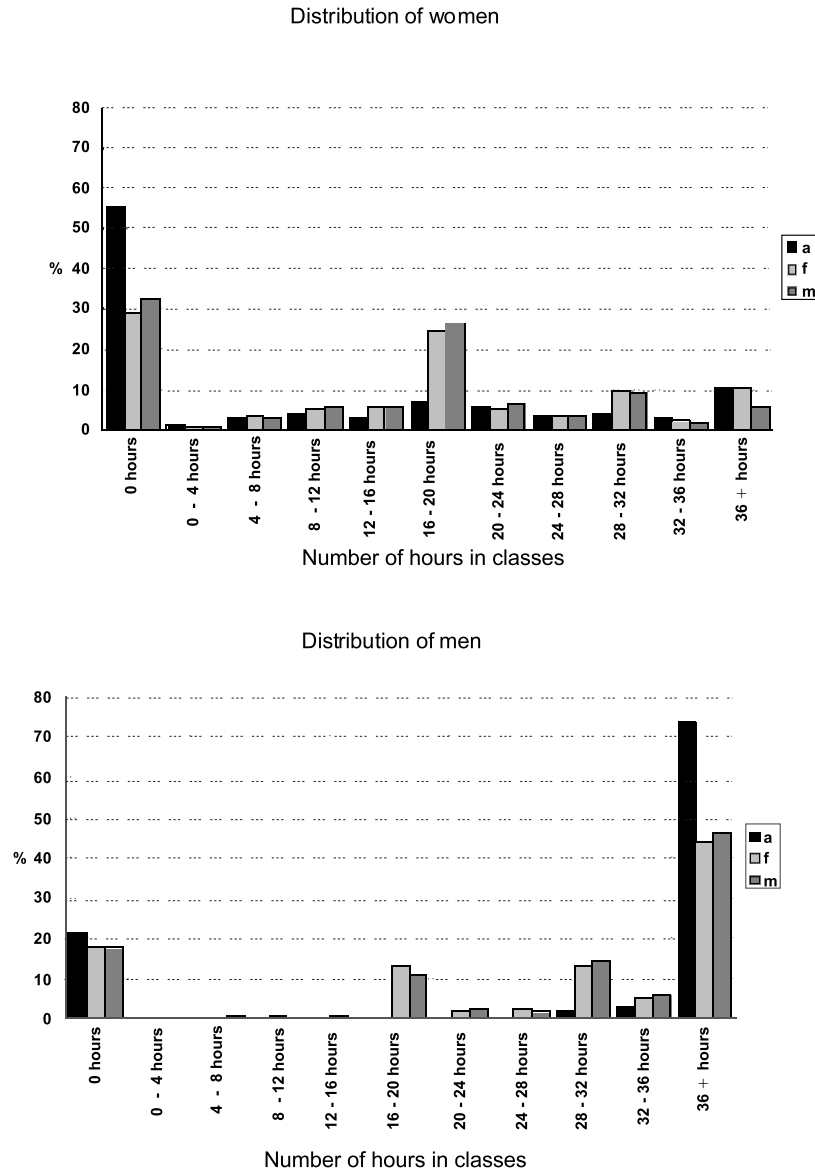


Figure 1 Distribution of women and men by hours of paid work (actual and preferred), 1994

Notes

a = actual number of hours worked

f = number of hours worked if the woman was to determine both her own working week and that of her partner

m = number of hours worked if the man was to determine both his own working week and that of his partner

Source: OSA Arbeidsaanbod panel, 1994.

either no share at all or only a very limited proportion of the actual hours worked. In terms of distribution this is where wishes and facts lie furthest apart.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of women and men, respectively, over the various hour classes on the basis of: the actual number of hours worked (a); the preferred number of working hours if the woman was to determine both her own working week and that of her partner (f); the preferred number of working hours if the man was to determine both his own working week and that of his partner (m). These distributions offer an insight into both the length of the desired working weeks and the differences between the preferences of men and women.

Figure 1 shows that in the case of women the distribution over the hour classes for actual hours worked (a) differs considerably from the distribution of the hours worked by women if women (f) and men (m) were to be allowed to determine the working hours of both partners. There is little difference between these last two distributions. Full-time jobs for women would be preferred by less than 10 percent of both men and women. At the same time, around 30 percent of both women and men wish to keep the woman out of paid work entirely. A job of 16–20 hours is considered optimal for around a quarter of all women and men. In the case of men, Figure 1 shows yet again how dominant the full-time working week (36 hours or more) is for men: almost 75 percent of men are found in this category. If men or women were able to redefine the household's working week, only 45 percent of all women and men would have the male partner still working 36–40 hours a week. Some 15 per cent would prefer a working week of 28–32 hours, whereas around 10 per cent would go for a working week of 16–20 hours. Once again there is a close correspondence between men's and women's views on what ought to happen.

The redistribution of paid and unpaid work: obstacles and policy measures

Given the fact that the present major difference in working hours between men and women does not meet the requirements of either, an important question seems to concern what prevents men and women from dividing working times more equitably and how this process of redistribution could be accelerated.

No doubt, there are various reasons for the discrepancy between preferred and actual working times. In the organization of paid work, for example, a full-time job is still the norm and a part-time job constitutes a deviation from that norm. The consequences of the existence of that norm are manifold. It translates into the fact that in most cases doing a job properly is equated to doing a (more than) full-time job. Working part time is often regarded as displaying a lack of commitment and consequently has a detrimental effect on the career of the person concerned. The fact that full-time work constitutes the norm also means that employers do not see it as their primary responsibility to implement 'work-family' policies (i.e. to create facilities which will make it possible for their employees to combine paid and unpaid work). For many employers, care remains comparable to football, fishing and gardening, in the sense that these are activities in the private sphere which should remain outside the workplace portals (Bosker, 1997). True, under the influence of the shifting social norms, employers have of their own accord taken steps to facilitate the combination of paid work and caring. Even so, in many cases it is principally the pressure of the market in the form of an imminent or actual shortage of qualified employees that forces employers to implement some form of work-family policy. For example, it is mainly organizations with predominantly women's occupations that have day-care facilities (Remery, 1998). Other facilities aimed at promoting the combination of paid work and care

also appear to be linked chiefly to the presence of women in the workplace. This link not only perpetuates the segregation of men's and women's occupations, it also appears to offer little guarantee of continuity for the provisions and facilities concerned. Evaluations of affirmative action reveal that measures taken in this context tend to take root more effectively if they have been introduced not for reasons of corporate economy but on the basis of considerations of justice or a recognition of the fact that organizations also have a social responsibility (see, for example, Van Amstel et al., 1994).

Still, the obstacles in the way of a more balanced distribution of paid and unpaid work are not only to be found at the company level. The discrepancy between actual and preferred working hours also has its origin in government policy, as the government for a long time actively supported the breadwinner model. As a result there are still lingering breadwinner perks in the system of social security and the fiscal regime. At the same time the Dutch government pursued an extremely reserved policy with respect to child-care facilities.

An obstacle in the fiscal regime, for example, is the transferable tax-free allowance, justified by the principle of tax-bearing capacity. Based on this principle the total basic deduction per household is independent of the number of wages coming into that household. A disadvantage of this system is that labour market participation by the dependent partner is discouraged, as a high marginal tariff may apply for a secondary earner, especially at low hours of work (Vlasblom, 1998: 47). Developments in the area of social security are rather mixed. On the one hand, the 1980s have been characterized by the EU's Third Directive on Equal Treatment in statutory social security, resulting in a far-reaching individualization of employee and national insurances. On the other hand, cutbacks in social security in the 1990s have further limited access to these insurances through which a growing group of people are becoming dependent on non-indi-

vidualized welfare. In addition, breadwinner facilities are lingering in a number of income-dependent regulations, including individual rent subsidy, student loans, home ownership premiums and parental contributions for children's day care. These benefit regulations are especially discouraging to women seeking (more) paid work when they come together in one household, as is the case in low-income groups. The net contribution of a woman's extra earnings to the household will usually be limited and, in the worst case, even be negative as a result of reduced entitlement to income-dependent benefits. All in all, the financial support for a traditional breadwinner family is extensive. A conservative estimate of the actual value of all breadwinner perks in Dutch society in 1996 amounts to NLG19bn comparable to 3 percent of the gross domestic product (Bekkering and Jansweijer, 1998).

These figures stand in glaring contrast with the government budget for child-care facilities. From 1990 through 1993 over NLG865m was made available within the framework of the Child-care Stimulation Measure (Directie Jeugdbeleid VWS, 1995: 3). The subsidy measure was extended for a number of years and was terminated on 1 January 1996 when policy responsibility for child care was transferred to local authorities. Central government's role is now restricted to the annual transfer of a specific amount to the Local Authority Fund. How these monies are spent is not fixed. In 1996, government (both central and local) contributed around 33 percent of total child-care costs, amounting to around NLG350m, or 0.05 percent of GDP (Van Tongeren, 1998). Given the rather limited budget, the share of children making use of institutionalized child care is still relatively low. In 1994, only 10.4 percent of children in the new-born to four-year-old age group used child care. At less than 1 percent, the level of extra school care – from 4 to 13 years old – is especially low.

Yet, at the same time, government policy is not only oriented to and based on the traditional breadwinner model. There is also a

process of evolution which, although it is far from being complete, contributes in a positive sense to the effort to arrive at a redistribution of paid and unpaid work. An important field has been policies towards part-time work. As mentioned before, government has taken various measures to stimulate the popularity of part-time work, including the reinforcement of the position of part-time employment. The so-called 'one-third criterion' was removed from the minimum wage and the legal minimum holiday allowance on 1 January 1993. This means the legal minimum wage is applicable to all employees from 15 to 64 years old, regardless of weekly working hours. In the same spirit is the Act prohibiting unequal treatment by working hours, which came into force on 1 November 1996. This Act gives part-timers an explicit right to equal treatment in areas negotiated by the social partners, such as (above minimum) wages, holiday pay and entitlements, overtime payments, bonuses and training. Promoting part-time work was also the primary goal of a bill initiated by the Green Left, which proposed a legal entitlement to part-time work. The core concept behind the bill was that every employee who had worked for longer than one year with a specific employer would be entitled to reduce working hours by a maximum of 20 percent. Ultimately, this proved a bridge too far. The proposal was accepted by the Second Chamber of Parliament, but failed to make it through the First Chamber in December 1997 because Christian-Democrat senators voted it down for a combination of practical, principled and party-political reasons.

Maybe even more important than the policy towards part-time work has been the renewed interest in shortening the full-time working week. Since the mid-1990s, discussion on working hours has again entered the negotiations on collective labour agreements (CLAs). As a result, the 36-hour working week has been introduced in a large number of sectors, including local authorities, banks and some sections of industry. In total, an average

working week of 36 hours applied from 1 January 1998 to around 100 CLAs covering 2.8m employees, which is about 40 percent of the total workforce. A new element in these negotiations is the way the reduction of working hours is linked to the introduction of flexible and individualized working times. A number of CLAs, for example, contain agreements on compressed working weeks in which employees work four days per week in a rotating schedule.

Both a general shortening of the working week and introduction of more flexible working hours can contribute to the redistribution of paid and unpaid work, provided that the introduction of flexible working hours is coupled with due attention to a number of conditions which will protect the employee against excessively large fluctuations in working hours and allow him adequate room to plan his paid work and caring tasks. At the same time it is absolutely clear that this is not enough. The basic problem seems to be that government has no consistent picture regarding the 'optimal' time-expenditure pattern of individuals and households. Caught somehow in the middle-ground between trying to protect existing facilities and developing new initiatives, actual policy is inconsistent and contradictory. As indicated above, in some policy areas (for example, fiscal and social legislation) the traditional breadwinner family is still taken as a point of departure. As a result, the traditional division of paid and unpaid labour is supported by a number of policy measures. At the same time, in other policy areas (for example, employment and working times) the explicit aim is to increase women's labour-market behaviour and to facilitate the combination of paid and unpaid work. Given the fact that a general and comprehensive policy is lacking, the individual employee has to solve any problems regarding the combination of work and care more or less on a private basis, that is by adjusting individual working hours. However, the adjustments in working hours usually apply only to female workers; men still follow the traditional

breadwinner model of full-time labour market participation.

The coherence of policy could be considerably enhanced if the same picture of how an individual or household should ideally behave existed throughout government policy. This is not to say that the government should prescribe in detail actual working-time behaviour. It does mean, however, that the picture of the most desirable division of paid and unpaid labour should translate into all actual policy areas. Implicitly, such pictures already exist in a number of areas: certain behaviour is rewarded (for example, the traditional breadwinner division between labour and care), other behaviour is 'punished'. This financial incentive structure is grafted to and signifies a confirmation of specific 'male' and 'female' attitudes towards labour and care. It is precisely this interaction between financial and cultural standards which ensures that the full-time working day continues firmly anchored, especially among men, in the reality of everyday life. Instead, the funds that now 'disappear' into breadwinner facilities could be used to finance a further individualization of the fiscal and social security system and to increase child-care facilities. The result might not be an equal division of paid and unpaid work; it might, however, be a reduction of the gap between actual and preferred working hours.

Conclusion

The restructuring of the welfare state and the slow diversification of the breadwinner model raises important questions about the organization of paid and unpaid work. Traditionally, there is a strong emphasis on labour market participation and on the changing role of women. The fixation on paid work, however, seems to overlook relationships between the informal and formal economy and result in the danger of losing sight of the fact that a specific organization of the formal economy always

implies an equally specific organization of the informal economy. In other words: an increase in the amount of time spent in the market without any corresponding change in the organization of unpaid work will not only slow down any progress made towards gender equality, but will also have detrimental effects on the quality of our lives.

In this article we have described the search for a more equal distribution of paid and unpaid work in the Netherlands. Both men and women perceive a need for a redistribution of paid work, even if this has implications for income levels. Such a redistribution of paid work would at the same time leave room for a redistribution of unpaid work between men and women. The concept of full employment thus takes on some rather different meanings from that to which we are accustomed. Given the preferences of employees, it is clear that full employment does not necessarily have to mean that the entire working population is employed for 40 hours a week. At the same time, a proper job is more and more defined as a job which leaves the employee with enough time to perform unpaid work as well.

Despite the preferences for a redistribution, many people are still failing to put their preferences into practice. Both obstacles in the market-place and in government policy may be regarded as restrictions here. In the market-place, the organization of labour is still based on the implicit norm of the full-time breadwinner, who has nothing else on his mind than his role as employee. Government policy is obstructive mainly because of the difficulties of restructuring a society whose organization was based on a strictly segregated use of time, into the exact opposite. Because a consistent policy is lacking, government gives neither individuals nor organizations the signal that might contribute to those steps in the area of part-time work, child-care provision and leave facilities which would bring about a redistribution of paid and unpaid work between men and women. This becomes even more pressing in view of lower birth rates and a greying population. The pressure which this places on

women's time allocation – women are usually perceived as the providers of any kind of (blanket) care – obviously has consequences for the time which can be expended on paid work and care for children. Only a structurally cohesive policy, based on the interaction between paid and unpaid work, can accommodate all the complex atunement problems concerning the equal division of paid and unpaid work.

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