

Future gender relations in global restructuring processes

case study evidence from knowledge-intensive, manufacturing and service occupations

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Abstract

Global restructuring processes have not only strong implications for European working and living realities, but also have specific outcomes with regard to gender relations. The following contribution analyses in which way global restructuring shapes current gender relations in order to identify important trends and developments for future gender (in)equalities at the workplace. On the basis of a large qualitative study on global restructuring and impacts on different occupational groups it argues that occupational belonging in line with skill and qualification levels are crucial factors to assess the further development of gender relations at work. Whereas global restructuring in knowledge-based occupations may provide new opportunities for female employees, current restructuring is going to deteriorate female labour participation in service occupations. In contrast, manufacturing occupations can be characterised by persistent gender relations, which do not change in spite of major restructuring processes at the work place. Taking the institutional perspective into account, it seems to be crucial to integrate the occupational perspective in order to apply adequate policy regulations to prevent the reinforcement of gender related working patterns in the near future.

Keywords: Global restructuring, gender, work organisation, occupational restructuring

JEL codes: B54; E24; F23

Introduction

For the last 20 years restructuring on a global economic level has been a strong development in European societies. Due to technological innovations and political processes new forms of the international division of labour were established which seem have a strong impact on work organisation as well as on working conditions on the local level (Huws, 2006). Whereas the commutability of repetitive and low qualified work of the production sector has already a long European tradition reaching back to the 1960s (Dunford, 2004), the outsourcing and off-shoring of higher-qualified labour

is a recent development. Knowledge-intensive activities as well as service-oriented tasks are prone to undergo fundamental changes due to global restructuring processes (Boes & Schwemmler, 2005; Kämpf, 2008). In most European countries, increased global economic pressure, technological development, and organisational restructuring already have a tremendous impact on employees and workers in low- as well as high-skilled occupations.

Within these global restructuring processes on different occupational and sectoral level, it seems that in fact, working conditions of men and women still show great differences across Europe regarding gender segregation in employment and in unpaid work, i.e. in terms of working time as well as in terms of job satisfaction and work-life balance (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007). Whereas the globalisation discourse in developing countries has already shown that the public view on globalisation processes is incomplete with regard to women's rights (Chow, 2003; Pyle & Ward, 2003), the perspective of global developments on male and female working conditions in the North has widely been gender-neutral (Daly, 2000).

Drawing on the empirical findings from a large European research project²², in the following the gender perspective will be taken into account in order to analyse changes on the local workplace caused by global restructuring²³: Hereby the following questions have been raised: In which way does global restructuring shape current gender relations? What are important developments and trends for future gender relations? In which way are knowledge-intensiveness and occupational belonging related to gender relations? Thereby the article assumes that global restructuring processes reinforce gendered effects at the local workplace level. It will be argued that occupational belonging and knowledge-intensity are crucial to assess the further development of gender relations at work.

The article starts with a theoretical section shedding light on the actual discourse on global restructuring, work and gender. The second section presents empirical findings which were collected in the frame of the WORKS project. In three occupational clusters gender-related developments and trends in current working relations will be shown. For this purpose, the indicators career trajectories, use of skills and qualification, working time, and work-life balance serve to analyse gender-related outcomes. Based on these results, the article concludes with some perspectives on future gender relations across Europe.

²² In 2005, the European Commission funded a ground-breaking research project, called Work Organisation Restructuring in the Knowledge Society (WORKS), to investigate restructuring processes in global value chains and their impact on organisations as well as on individuals. Combining theoretical work and a detailed analysis of a wide range of statistics with in-depth case studies, the team analysed the forces that bring about these changes, including restructuring of global value chains and the policy environment, and produced a series of publications highlighting different aspects of these changes: in work organisation, employer use of technology, skills and knowledge requirements, career trajectories, occupational segregation, and the quality of working life (for further details, see: <http://www.worksproject.be>).

²³

See also Nierling & Krings, 2009, forthcoming; Krings, 2008.

6. Gendered processes in global work restructuring

“In principle globalisation means an encounter of processes leading to increased international interconnectedness” (Blossfeld et al., 2007: 668). Although globalisation already looks back to a long historical development process, since the past 20 years globally-induced processes in terms of economy, information, culture, and politics have enormously gained weight²⁴. However, permanent technological progress, basically of information and communication technologies (ICT), deep political changes i.e. the fall of the Berlin Wall, as well as enabling new markets in Asian countries have strongly reinforced the meaning of globalisation. Blossfeld et al. (2007: 668) define four driving forces of the new quality of globalisation:

1. increased internationalisation of markets and competition between nation states;
2. deregulation, liberalisation, privatisation leading to a high significance of the market economy;
3. ICT enable accelerated interaction and communication between persons, companies and nation states;
4. increasing dependency of (vulnerable) local markets on global market networks.

Although the nation state becomes weaker in favour of global markets, working structure seems still very much embedded into national-institutional settings. Nevertheless, globalisation causes important changes on the individual level for both, men and women: an increased dependency on the employer together with an enfeebled (welfare) state lead to a high level of subjective insecurity e.g. regarding biographical planning or job security etc.

With regard to globalisation effects on gender a feminist perspective was already established in the 1970s strongly criticising the exclusion of countries from the Southern hemisphere and the domination of countries from the Northern hemisphere (see Anderson, 2006, Mies, 2001, Pyle & Ward, 2003, v. Werlhof, Bennholdt-Thomson & Faraclas, 2003). Although living and working realities of women in the North are fundamentally different due to industrial development and national wealth, also here, gendered effects of globalisation can be detected. In the North, the division of labour between the sexes already changed, but still there is a gendered division of labour regarding care and household work, great differences in the extent and quality of female participation in the labour market, i.e. atypical forms of work, part-time work, and a varying degree of institutional support for female participation in the labour market across countries (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and

Working Conditions, 2007, Forsberg, 1998, Gönas & Karlsson, 2006, Haas & Hwang, 2000).

A prominent thesis in gender research refers to the fact that new forms of work organisation are beneficial for female labour participation. "In this optimistic view, the new forms of work organisation may mark a departure from rigid hierarchies because they value flexibility and at the same time no longer demand a lifelong commitment. Women can shape their working time and their careers to suit their own individual needs, including the demands of childcare" (Dahlmann, Huws & Stratigaki, 2008: 26). However, empirical studies show that up to now, organisational restructuring and individualisation of career paths have not offered better opportunities for female employees in any case²⁵. Rather, organisational restructuring caused a double sided outcome, providing both opportunities and constrains for women: New opportunities are the increase of female labour participation, flexible working time, importance of soft skills, and entrance of men in female dominated areas.

New risks are provided by new forms of gendered working structure, long hours culture, discrimination, rather downgrading of male work than upgrading of female work (Hebson & Grugulis, 2004 in Dahlmann et al., 2008: 27). On a global level, possible outcomes of global restructuring also show an ambivalent picture: "globalisation creates employment opportunities and increases female labour force participation, wage benefits, economic independence and more life-options, although these advantages are still limited and unequal" (Chow, 2003: 453). At the same time it gives way for reproduced patterns of gender segregation, be it on a horizontal or vertical level, or regarding contractual, temporal or spatial segregation (Flecker, Holtgrewe, Schönauer & Gavroglou, 2008: 77).

Furthermore, differences between women become crucial, as possible risks are more likely to affect women in low-skilled areas (Blossfeld et al., 2007: 678), whereas women in higher positions have to face more complex, differentiated and to some extent "hidden" consequences of global restructuring, widely on the individual level (Krings, 2008).

The following presentation of the empirical findings of the WORKS-project strengthens the idea that effects of global restructuring do not lead to a uniform trend. Rather, in terms of gender relations, globalisation effects have to be analysed into the direction of opportunities as well as constrains by taking differences between women into account. In this contribution, assuming the thesis global restructuring processes reinforce gendered effects at the local workplace level, current working and living realities are analysed along different occupational groups across Europe. Hence, skill-intensity, educational level as well as institutional background play a decisive role in assessing gender-related working conditions.

²⁵ Especially in high-skilled occupations, a range of new career options were opened up for women. However, in realising the occupational options women were asked to follow male working biographies instead of following female ways of working and living (Krings, 2007).

Mapping global working conditions: empirical approach

The empirical findings are presented on the basis of the qualitative research of the WORKS project²⁶. In different occupational groups in-depth case studies were conducted to analyse the individual perspective of globalisation in relevant sectors and according occupations²⁷. The sectors were chosen in order to map global restructuring in industries which faced it in different times. The four sectors chosen were clothing, food, IT, and the public sector. Whereas the clothing sector faced major restructuring processes as early as the 1970s (Dunford, 2004), the food industry started its Europe-wide restructuring in the 1990s after the single market was established in the European Union (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2004). In the IT sector, internationalisation strategies started during the industry's boom years in the late 1990s, and resulted in global offshoring processes of IT services (Boes & Schwemmler, 2005; Kämpf, 2008). Currently, in all countries included in the sample, the public sector is undergoing massive restructuring processes towards privatisation which is causing deregulation of previously well-regulated working conditions (Dunkel & Schönauer, 2007).

The occupational case studies focussed on employees with a wide variety of working profiles from different occupational groups in these sectors. In the WORKS project changes in work in the knowledge-based society are central. Therefore a key criterion was to choose occupational groups which were affected by changes in knowledge requirements in order to analyse the effects of global restructuring on different occupations with regard to their knowledge intensity. The sample thus ranged from highly skilled, knowledge-intensive occupations (designers in the clothing sector and IT professionals) to semi-skilled tasks (front-office employees in the public sector) and low-skilled employees (production workers in the clothing and food sector). The case studies were distributed over the 14 countries in order to obtain a representative sample of different levels of knowledge intensity of the occupations within countries in

26 The project design encompasses several research approaches: theories and concepts, quantitative and qualitative research, policy recommendations. The results presented here refer to the qualitative project pillar, which consists of organisational and occupational case studies. Whereas the organisational case studies provide insights about organisational changes, the occupational case studies, whose results are used here, focus on changes on the individual level of employees and workers (see Flecker, Holtgrewe, Schönauer, Dunkel & Meil, 2008 on the general outcomes of the organisational case studies and Valenduc, Vendramin, Krings & Nierling, 2008 on occupational case studies).

27 Individual work biographies were analysed in companies of various size over a wide range of sectors (clothing, food, IT, and the public sector). The occupational groups which were analysed were: Designers in the clothing industry; researchers in ICT; skilled and semi-skilled production workers in the food and clothing sector; production workers in software development; front-office employees in customer services; IT professionals in IT service providers. In the further analysis, the three occupational groups of the IT sector are summarised to one occupation, IT professionals.

different parts of Europe (Northern, Central, Eastern and Southern Europe)²⁸ (see annex).

One prerequisite for the case studies was that all companies researched had undergone restructuring processes at a global level during the past five years. The category "gender" was "mainstreamed" into the overall research design and was analysed intensively in each of the research topics. Interpretation focused on changes in the individual work biography caused by global restructuring processes. In order to structure the international research, common interview guidelines were designed which were adapted and translated by the research partners. This approach aimed to cover a range of certain topics in all interviews, but at the same time to keep a narrative dimension in the interviews. The interview findings were summarised by the partners in case study reports which were structured around the five central research topics mentioned above. The overall findings of each of the occupational groups were compared cross-nationally and discussed within the WORKS consortium (cf. in detail Valenduc et al., 2008).

Opportunities and constrains in gender relations: global trends in different occupations

The particular view on global restructuring and gender relations is often neglected in academic debate on globalisation processes. Though using the category gender allows a deeper look into the consequences of multi-faceted change processes at the local workplace. The following results will show in which ways global restructuring may offer challenging options or may increase inequalities with regard to future gender relations. The results are based on living and working experiences in three occupational clusters, offering a wide spectrum of current experiences of change.

It includes, first, high skilled, knowledge-based occupations: fashion and technical designers in the clothing industry as well as IT professionals. These occupational groups have several aspects in common with regard to creativity and work performance.

Second, it explores manufacturing workers: low skilled workers in food and clothing production. They can be characterised by a low level of knowledge intensity and a high standardisation of working processes.

²⁸ In total, 27 occupational case studies in 14 European countries with 222 individual interviews were carried out. Each case study consisted of 8-12 semi-structured biographical interviews with employees of the occupations being researched.¹ The interviews lasted between 60 and 120 minutes, were conducted during working hours with the consent of the company management. The interviews were centred around the following research topics: work biography, changes in occupational identities, skills and qualification, quality of work and work-life balance. The sample covered the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, The Netherlands and the UK.

Third, it researches service occupations: front office employees in the public sector. This group is very heterogeneous and includes a wide range of knowledge intensity facing a broad spectrum of change processes. In the following, the topics skills and qualification as well as working time and work-life balance will be used to map and to predict change processes in gender relations.

The most important impact of restructuring seems a growing intensification of work (Flecker, Holtgrewe, Schönauer, Dunkel et al., 2008; Valenduc et al., 2008). Common trends of globalisation which are in force for all occupational clusters are accelerating business processes together with an increasing responsiveness of production to the market. Tighter deadlines, an increasing work load, different forms of flexibility lead to an intensification of work in all occupations. Whether the intensification of work is caused by new production modes (new technologies) in the production sector or whether it is caused by tighter deadlines and a high degree of self organisation of work in high-qualified occupations, differences between the branches seem to underline the overall trend towards more intensive work profiles in most countries. Hence, the consequences of these trends differ enormously according to individual career prospects, institutional settings as well as specific working conditions.

New opportunities? – Knowledge-based occupations

Both occupational groups, designers and IT professionals are representatives of creative modern workers in knowledge-intensive sectors, which have been discussed much in academic literature since 1990 (Baukrowitz et al., 2006; Manske, 2003; Pfeiffer, 2004; Schmiede, 1996). In terms of global restructuring the clothing and IT sector, and thus their employees, have been affected differently. Whereas the clothing sector is particularly susceptible to global acceleration processes and has a long history in being responsive to highly dynamic market demands (Nierling & Bechmann, 2007), the IT sector has only faced large-scale internationalisation processes in recent years. Nevertheless, today international production structures are very common, including offshoring as well as changing working conditions at the workplace level (Boes, 2005; Kämpf, 2008).

Skills and qualification

International business processes have provided new access possibilities in the IT sector, especially for female employees. Whereas the percentage of female employees is low in sectors with strong technological bias (Winker, 2002), the internationalisation of IT companies, international markets and cooperation, changed the profile of IT professionals. The skill portfolio has been opened up towards soft skills, i.e. project management skills, customer-oriented communication skills, language skills and social interactive skills, which promotes women to move in the occupations, as is described

in one of the IT case studies:

both the increasing importance of general skills in sales and marketing and the location of IT research in the contextualised areas of computer science such as geoinformatics, human computer interaction etc. opens the field up for people holding degrees in geography, psychology, linguistics etc. who are more likely to be women (Holtgrewe, 2007: 17).

Furthermore, these new skill demands established new career paths and occupational opportunities. The 'traditional' technical career path has been complemented by a 'managerial' career path, which seems to be more favourable for women. Although the percentage of women in the field of IT is still low, in recent years the proportion has risen significantly. The empirical findings provided that the IT sector offers challenging career pattern for both sexes, in terms of further qualification, international work experience, high wage levels, etc²⁹ (Krings & Nierling, 2007; Valenduc, 2007).

Also in design, the working profile skill portfolio has undergone significant changes integrating technical, managerial as well as administrative tasks. Aspects such as technical knowledge, and coordination with other departments like sales or production have become more important and take up an increasing portion of the work content. Although, the designers are still very much dedicated to their occupation.

The creative aspects of the work such as developing one's own ideas and new concepts, and shaping and inventing new models very much express the subjectivity and individual dedication of the designers. Therefore, the occupation generally has high relevance for the employees, providing self-fulfilment, identity and an artistic expression of talent. This high commitment to work still seems to buffer the new demands that arise from global restructuring processes, which are widely integrated into perception of the occupation (Nierling, Krings & Bechmann, 2007). However, this new development is sometimes "perceived as threats to creativity: less time to create and innovate, more constraints from market feedback" (Valenduc & Muchnik, 2007: 47).

This new development strongly emphasises the managerial aspects of the occupation - whether this development makes the occupation more attractive for male employees or changes attitudes towards the occupation among women has to be elaborated long term.

²⁹ From a more pessimistic perspective the study of Peterson on gendered work ideals in Swedish IT firms implies that male hegemony does not change with women entering the organisation via 'sideways'. Her analysis shows "that women have been allowed to enter the prestigious IT sector in specific, technical fields that have less status and are associated with female characteristics [...]. When entering the business in these fields, women did not threaten or challenge male dominance but risked being the ones primarily affected by redundancies" (Peterson, 2007: 346).

Working time and work-life balance

Although new opportunities for women were opened up i.e. in the field of IT, global restructuring has gendered effects on working conditions. Up to now, male and female employees in IT enjoy highly satisfying working conditions in terms of quality of work, job autonomy, job security. Nevertheless, globally induced acceleration processes have an important impact on local working conditions. At first sight the IT sector does not support gender inequality in terms of entry, formal qualification or career prospects. Though, the orientation towards markets increased the speed of daily working routines. As a trend, working tasks are more demanding nowadays while having to be fulfilled in shorter time frames. Tighter schedules and deadlines, frequent business travels, unusual working times due to global-wide synchronisation of working time become common. Furthermore, working time is organised along international demands, i.e. the need to communicate at night or at the weekends with partners abroad, so that overtime and unusual working hours seem to become essential. At second sight, the prevalent working praxis reveals male working patterns which determine work clearly as centre in life, so that women as well have to organise their way of living very much along given working demands (see also Krings, 2007).

The dominance of male working patterns also applies for female designers³⁰. In this occupation, work has become even more intensified by global dynamics. The high market pressure in the sector has led to significant acceleration processes, i.e. the number of collections per year doubled in recent years. These acceleration processes affect designers directly at the workplace as they have to deal with tighter deadlines, a higher work load, compensate flexibly for high peaks, and fulfil a multitude of tasks while being under constant market control. Female designers who opted for their profession have made a clear decision to follow a traditional male biographical pattern, because the temporal demands of the occupation are extremely high.

In knowledge-based occupations gender relationships are therefore defined according to the biographical stage reached of female employees. At the beginning of the career, in both fields a broad variety of challenging working possibilities and career developments are offered. However, gender differences become crucial at the stage of family planning. Gender roles in society persist, so that women are still the main responsible for family life. Because working time requirements are very demanding in both sectors, part-time work models to combine work and life are rarely used. They seem inappropriate for a male structured work environment of the IT sector as well as the tight work organisation in design and are deemed to have negative impacts on career progress. As a consequence, family building still leads to occupational disadvantages for female employees.

In work environments with prevalent male working culture like IT or design, women very often have to face the choice for or against a family vs. career. Although working conditions in the IT sector would allow a combination of work and family life, women are often forced to create individual of combination (Krings and Nierling, 2007).

30 A high proportion of the designers are women with a strong identification with the occupation.

However, in design, it seems to be impossible for women to combine the demands of work and family life:

All designers I met were between 25 and 35 years old and very few had children, I would say that within the 10 to 15 with whom I had tighter relations, only one had a baby (...). Indeed, it's not easy to get a job as a designer. Everybody wants to keep his job and unfortunately it's not convenient to have a baby at this moment. In any case, I wouldn't even think about it now because of that (French designer in Valenduc and Muchnik, 2007: 42).

By contrast, the situation for male designers is not similarly polarised; in a traditional way it is mainly their wives who organise family life (Valenduc and Muchnik, 2007).

The current developments described above reflect the main tendencies in gender-related working conditions in the IT sector as well as in design. Nevertheless, cultural and national differences have a great impact on the praxis of gender-related working patterns. This is particularly visible in the reconciliation of family and career where crucial gender differences occur. The cultural embedding of family life in institutional settings allows strongly adapted, family-friendly working models, leading i.e. to a "baby boom" in the Norwegian case (Krings and Nierling, 2007: 64). In contrast, supporting institutional or organisational models for work-life balance are much weaker in other parts of Europe. Especially in the Eastern European countries, the opposite development can currently be observed. After social transformation the field of IT is at a developmental stage demanding high commitment and temporal flexibility from mostly male employees, making it difficult to integrate family needs in such a working environment (cf. Makó, Illéssy & Csizmadia, 2007). Furthermore, recent findings show an increased polarisation of male and female work in the new member States (European Foundation, 2007). Although the gender equality of former socialist regimes is still higher than in the old member states, "a widening gap in working hours may reduce women's longer-term ability to compete with men in the labour market" (European Foundation, 2007: 57). This development confirms that gender relations at work are very much shaped by the distribution of working time, which is still highly influenced by persisting gender roles in terms of care responsibilities. In Southern Europe, reconciling work and family life relies mainly on the family network, which is still strong in these countries. However, these supportive family networks are now increasingly disappearing. Because of the lack of institutional and organisational support, the reconciliation of work and life is becoming very complex and difficult for women who have to organise their own ways of dealing with both family planning and career development.

New opportunities?

To sum up, the main trends provide that changes in the skill portfolio also change the further integration of women in the occupation. It seems that in the occupational group IT professionals access possibilities for female employees will be further provided and stabilised in the next years. For the occupational group designers, up to

now, the predictability whether the gender composition of the occupation will change due to the loss of creative tasks is far less distinctive. In terms of working time and work-life balance in both occupational groups it seems that trends remain strongly gendered. It does not seem that male structured working patterns will change in the future. Therefore institutional or organisational support for working time regimes remains an important issue regarding women's equal participation in the labour market.

More constrains? – Service occupations

Restructuring in service occupations of the public sector presents a heterogeneous spectrum of organisational change. Not only are the occupational profiles very diverse, also restructuring follows different strategies (privatisation, outsourcing, re-organisation, etc.) generating new temporal, contractual and organisational demands. Thus, fundamental changes occur due to re-organisation from 'public' to 'private' work organisation, but the effects are heterogeneous across countries and organisations. Deregulation affects fields like wage levels, work intensity, job security, working time, increased standardisation (Dunkel & Schönauer, 2007; Muchnik & Valenduc, 2007). As a trend, time pressure, work load, job insecurity, as well as constraining working time flexibility increase. Generally, the service sector has a high female proportion, thus female employees are very likely to be affected by these changes ³¹.

Skills and qualification

As described above, service occupations present a heterogeneous occupational group. Muchnik & Valenduc distinguish between (1) the degree of interactivity in the service relationship between employee and customer (2) the degree of personalisation of services (standardised vs. customised activities) (3) time dimension of service relationship (one-time vs. long term customer relationship) to characterise different working tasks and demands in customer services (Muchnik & Valenduc, 2007: 142). Also here, changes in skills and qualification occur in the course of restructuring, but the direction of skill changes is diametric. Upskilling and downskilling processes occur at the same time, depending on organisational decisions. In the case of downskilling workers perform high standardised activities with low knowledge intensity and little customer interaction. In the case of upskilling, work activities are enriched by the need for technical, administrative, communication and social skills.

As a general trend, the empirical results show that "the function becomes completely customer-oriented [...] while the identity of this occupational group was not, until now, created by any particular training or profession" (Muchnik & Valenduc, 2007: 159). In the course of this orientation towards customer service, technical skills and formal

³¹ An exception from this is the case on German railways. German railways have traditionally a high share of male employees due to the technical expertise of the working field. Although the percentage of men is still higher due to restructuring the share of women increased.

qualification loose in importance. Rather informal skills are needed in customer services, which are often constructed as female attributes, such as communication skills, empathy, coping with stress, "looking after customers and being caring towards customers" (Dahlmann & with assistance from Alison Gosper and John Kirk, 2007: 20). Thus, changes in skills and qualification seem to ground female employees even more in this occupational group.

Working time and work-life balance

Also the development in working time and work life balance is strongly characterised by the heterogeneity of the sample. In general, the phase of transition leads to an area of tension in the public sector. Whereas the restructuring process already caused a range of changes in work organisation, i.e. intensified work relations because of performance control as well as changes in working time due to the orientation towards customer needs (unusual working hours, weekend work, overtime), in comparison to the private sector, working conditions remain highly regulated. Often, main changes in working conditions could be avoided by outsourcing demands to private companies. The Austrian case implies:

If the city administration had kept telephone service in-house, an extension of working hours for customer service employees at service centres might have been the consequence (Schönauer, 2007: 8).

This strategy sheltered employees in customer service for the moment from more fundamental changes. But the trend for extended service times as well as the praxis for outsourcing to private companies will – in the long run – lead to worsened working conditions in the public sector as well as to increased job insecurity.

Work security as well as predictability in working time formed in former times an important criterion to work in the public sector. This becomes true especially for women, because working conditions were very convenient for "working mothers" ³² (Muchnik & Valenduc, 2007: 158). Thus, the female identity of women in the public sector follows a traditional division of labour at the household level, as the UK case implies:

The reason for wanting to work in the public sector definitely ties in with them being mothers with children, looking for flexibility in their work but also a sense of security which they believed their employer could give them. (...) Interestingly, all the women interviewed were married, with a husband taking on the main 'breadwinner' role. What they ask from their employment is that it should enable them to give priority to their traditional gender role and not create undue conflicts in their lives (Dahlmann, 2007: 11).

In general, female employees take on the main carer role. In order to combine work and family needs they individually depend on working time arrangements. The

³² It refers here to i.e. family leave, children-compatible working time, special financial provisions

changes in working time differ across the cases and ranges from a more flexible organisation to a more rigid organisation in shift systems³³. However, both types of changes in working time arrangements deeply affect the work-family reconciliation. Each of the changes caused resistance by the affected employees who had already organised work and family life according to the prevalent work routines. After restructuring they were asked to reorganise well-practised daily routines in order to cope with new time demands which required individual efforts on the female side.

More constrains?

In the case of service occupation one can observe a sector 'at the crossroads'. Working conditions are still highly regulated in comparison to the private sector, but employees have to face reorganisation on a high level. The traditional attitude towards childcare adds to the fact that the protected work environment was especially convenient for female employees with family duties. Up to now, the change has not damaged this picture:

"The number of temporary jobs or free-lance contracts is increasing. In spite of this evolution, working in the public sector is still perceived as a mean to gain more security in employment, especially for women with children" (Muchnik & Valenduc, 2007: 159).

However, in the future, changes in terms of job security and enlarged and more flexible working hours will surely deteriorate working conditions and possibilities to create a satisfying combination of work and family needs in the future ³⁴.

The 'feminisation' of the occupation due to the orientation along customer skills comprises the danger of downgrading the occupation and hence, worsening working conditions. Hereby, the Austrian case could serve as pioneer for further development regarding deteriorated working conditions: The outsourcing of jobs to the private sector established a gender bias for call centre agents. New jobs which were created are far less qualified and qualifying, low paid and accomplished mainly by women (Muchnik & Valenduc, 2007).

Business as usual? – Manufacturing occupations

Production work has a long tradition in national contexts. During the past centuries work organisation in production work changed fundamentally. It became not only automatised to a high extent, leading to a high level of standardisation. Moreover in

³³ Furthermore, the existence of family-friendly settings depends on the bargaining power of the employees (see Dahlmann & with assistance from Alison Gosper and John Kirk, 2007)

³⁴ This development can already be observed in the outsourced call centre work in Austria, where outsourced call centre agents have in contrast to service centre employees discontinuous work biographies (Muchnik & Valenduc, 2007: 147).

recent years, global restructuring led to a significant decline of production work in Europe as companies outsourced and offshored working activities on a large scale (Birindelli et al., 2007). The clothing sector has a long tradition in outsourcing due to the low level of automation in clothing production, leading to a shift of pressure to subcontractors down the value chain and high flexibility demands (Dunford, 2004; Flecker & Holtgrewe, 2007). On the contrary, food production allows a high level of automation and globalisation is mainly counteracted by increased standardisation and flexibility in working time (Meil & Schönauer, 2007). In both industries, a loss of union power forced the workers to face more directly the forces of globalisation.

Skills and qualification

In production work working patterns have undergone tremendous changes during recent years. Nevertheless, a strong sex segregation regarding deployment of skills as well as allocation of working tasks remains. As a case study from the Danish food industry shows, even major changes in a strong male working field, which fundamentally affected the former occupational identity, did not change current gender relations at the work place. In production, male dominated structures and prevalent gender stereotypes do not seem to change despite major upheavals in work organisation (cf. also to Gorm Hansen, 2007; Sayce, Ackers & Greene, 2007). Rather, women are chosen for standardised and repetitive tasks while being excluded from technically advanced tasks. This leads to further segregation of male and female working profiles (Nierling & Krings, 2007), which becomes in particular visible in directly comparable indicators like i.e. wage level. In a Portuguese case in the clothing sector, women do not get special payments due to gendered division of tasks:

the work categories men belong to (machine specialist; stamp specialist; store workers) have subsidies of risk that women categories don't have (seamstress, embroiderers) (Silva, A. V., 2007, 10).

It seems that the phenomenon 'feminisation of work' which is already well described in academic literature (cf. i.e. Becker-Schmidt, 2007) still catches the most important developments in production work.

Working time and work-life balance

Female labour participation in the production sector has a long tradition, as a second income always has been essential in working class due to economic reasons. Nevertheless, the division of labour at the households remains very traditional. Therefore, female production workers are especially affected by one-sided flexible production pattern and intensified working conditions implying long and irregular working hours often including night shifts as well as overtime. On the level of the household, new temporal restrictions in the sphere of work increase difficulties in work-family reconciliation. As the workers have to adapt widely to company demands, they have to follow working hours which are organised around rigid shifts, including atypical working hours without temporal flexibility on the worker's side. In terms of

work-life balance, very often, working schedules do not match opening hours of public service institutions or childcare facilities causing trouble to combine work and family requirements. An Italian experience states:

Women who have to take their children to kindergarten have quite a lot of problems; when they have morning shifts and must clock in at six they cannot take their children because nobody looks after them at kindergarten or school... (Italian production worker in Pedaci, 2007: 10).

Very often, the bridge between work and family demands has to be organised on an individual basis by using family support or social networks. Although daily practices of work family combination are very much influenced by cultural and national settings, it becomes obvious that in none of the countries organisational frameworks offer essential support for the creation of a work family combination. However, across Europe, the strong family background in Southern Europe as well as the dependency on institutional or company support characterise different national regimes (Nierling & Krings, 2007).

Business as usual?

Above all, according to the empirical findings, job insecurity can be regarded as the most important effect of global restructuring for both female and male production workers³⁵. As relocation activities have become very common in production, insecurity about job future has increased. Due to their low-qualified job profile, production workers do not have many alternatives to their current job and feel therefore very much dependent on strategic decisions of the company.

In terms of work organisation it seems that first the present strong sex segregation in spite of major restructuring processes determines very much further gender-biased allocation of working tasks and use of skills. Second, the results imply that the low level of temporal autonomy on the worker's side does not have the potential to change current gender relations in work and private spheres. Thus, it seems that disadvantages for women in terms of progression, wage, qualification, working time, and work-life balance seem to persist in the future.

35 However, often at a societal level, the job insecurity is gendered as it is considered mainly as a male problem, although it is equally serious for women and men in individual terms (Charles & James, 2003).

Global trends and implications in gender relations

"In the dual process of destruction and creation of skills and jobs that accompanies restructuring, there are both winners and losers and, whilst some positions become more precarious or disappear altogether, others are created with attractive prospects" (Dahlmann et al., 2008: 83). Looking back to the main trends which were identified for different occupational groups the article provides that skill and knowledge intensity seems to be crucial to assess the future of gender relations in European countries.

In *knowledge-based occupations* intensified working conditions are compensated by an increase of the individual commitment to work. In terms of gender relations this type of individual adaptation towards work provides new possibilities and new gender orders in these occupations. Probably, these new gender orders may lead to more emancipated female work biographies in the future.

Service occupations are currently very much 'under restructuring'. Changes in skill demands as well as outsourcing and standardisation processes are very likely to further affect former well regulated working routines. In terms of future perspectives it remains open, whether service occupations remain a favoured occupational field for 'working mothers'.

Last but not least, the results from the *manufacturing occupations* imply that several impacts of global restructuring are experienced "down the value chain". It seems that ongoing global restructuring processes will deteriorate future work organisation in terms of job insecurity and one-sided temporal flexibility. With regard to gender, it seems that the main effects of global restructuring are buffered by individual action of female production workers.

Especially in terms of work-family reconciliation, the results show that family and private spheres remain crucial to assess gender relations at the work place (Krings, Nierling, Pedaci & Piersanti, 2008). In all occupational clusters, women still hold the main responsibilities for the household. Whereas changes in skills and qualification can offer new chances for female employees in knowledge-based occupations in terms of individual freedom, positive outcomes for women in semi- and low-skilled are limited due to stable gender contracts.

When assessing the impact of globalisation in gender relations the institutional perspective has a high importance. National and cultural settings play a crucial role in shaping gender related work relations. Furthermore they are central to buffer inequalities in gender relations and become in particular important for weak actors. These actors have to be defined along the categories of gender (men vs. women), skills and qualification level (low- vs. semi- vs. high-skilled occupations) as well as institutional setting (Eastern vs. Southern vs. Northern vs. Continental Europe). Accordingly policies on a European level which can be applied to reach gender equality have to be well selected in order to come up against gender inequality in different occupational clusters.

In *knowledge-based occupations* liberal principles of 'equal treatment' and 'equal opportunities' should be reinforced in order to meet the consequences of competition between individual employees to gain scarce job chances. However, applying generalised EU equal opportunity policies becomes especially difficult in these occupational fields, because, very often high competition and individualised contracts hinders collective action. Furthermore, work is very much organised along a "corporate global male way of life" (Dahlmann et al., 2008: 85) neglecting the spheres of family and community in order to follow individual work biographies. As this represents implicit patterns which underlie current working culture it is very challenging to develop policies which can encourage 'female sides' of working life. In a way, more specific policies regarding further training and skills development may be supportive to prepare and enable employees for the broad and widened skill portfolio due to global restructuring (Dahlmann et al., 2008: 83ff.).

Due to restructuring, *service occupations* are affected by the erosion of former highly protective work regulations covered by collective agreements, which targeted at improving work-life balance by introducing i.e. parental leave options or establishing equal treatment for employees working part-time. Further policy initiatives should definitely continue to improve work-life balance in service occupations in the public sector. In order to encourage gender relations, these policies should be in charge for both, female and male employees. Although in terms of family responsibility especially male employees should be supported to make use of these possibilities (Dahlmann et al., 2008: 85ff.). Reflecting the degradation of customer service skills and qualification in the course of global restructuring, also here, specific training policies could be supportive for further qualification level and beneficial working conditions in the public sector.

Regarding *manufacturing occupations* segregation lines along gender are most distinctive. In order to preserve weak actors at the end of the value chain from performing in even more precarious, insecure and unprotected work relations it seems to be less successful to strengthen individual emancipation or collective agreements the level of organisations or sectors level. Rather, policies which serve on a governmental level seem to be adequate to cope with global forces in production work. These policies would encompass i.e. statutory minimum standards regarding wage, working conditions, and health and safety standards; public education against discrimination at the work place. Furthermore, the provision of public childcare facilities which reflect rigid shifts and new flexibility demands in working time would be supportive especially for female workers to cope with the private burden of work-family reconciliation (Dahlmann et al., 2008: 87ff.). This caring infrastructure could also open new paths towards a more equal share of care work between men and women.

All in all, it seems that global restructuring causes important changes in work organisation which has deep effects on gender relations. On a European level, it is important to be aware of these changes and to develop institutional responses in order to establish a set of adequate policies to upgrade gender equality or at least to keep it on a stable level. Nevertheless, it has to be stressed that restructuring does not represent the only driving force in changing gender relations. Rather, the impact of

global restructuring on gender has to be seen in relation with national and cultural settings, policy regulations, skill-intensity, and individual capacities, and biographical stage, etc. which altogether will determine female and male labour participation in globalised economies.

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Annex:

Distribution of occupational case studies across countries (number of case studies)

	Austria	Belgium	Bulgaria	Denmark	France	Germany	Greece	Hungary	Italy	Norway	Portugal	Sweden	The Netherlands	UK	In total
High skilled occupations															
Designers in clothing					1	1					1				3
IT-professionals	1	1	1		1	2		1		1		1	1	1	11
Semi-skilled occupations															
Front office employees in customer services in the public sector	1	1				1		1	1			1		1	7
Low-skilled occupations															
Production workers in food or clothing		1		1			1		1	1	1				6