



Exploring the impact of local welfare systems on female labour force participation and social cohesion in Leeds

INTRODUCTION

Research Objectives

The overall aims of the FLOWS project are to analyse:

- (1) How local welfare systems support women to either remain in, enter or re-enter the labour market; and
- (2) The extent to which (and under which conditions) integrating women into the labour market affects their status in society, allowing them to become “full citizens”, or results in women (or certain groups or women) remaining marginalised or excluded from society.

Methodology

The research is taking place in eleven European cities: Aalborg, Denmark; Bologna, Italy; Brno, Czech Republic; Dublin, Ireland; Hamburg, Germany; Jyväskylä, Finland; **Leeds, UK**; Nantes, France; Székesfehérvár, Hungary; Tartu, Estonia and Terrassa, Spain. A multi-method approach is being used, including literature reviews, analysis of policy documents, local area case studies, interviews with key-informants about local policy processes and a survey of 800 women in each city. The survey in Leeds was completed in November – December 2012 and the results of this will be available in Spring 2013.

UK Case Study City : Leeds

The initial research on the UK Case Study City for the FLOWS project is Leeds. Recent (to 2011) and historical labour market statistics have been used, with local and national policy documents, to explore women’s employment in Leeds, examining: how their employment is structured and the way labour market opportunities are configured within the city; and how women’s labour force participation is supported by an infrastructure of support. The support investigated includes welfare arrangements, employment law and policy and local systems of (i) childcare, (ii) care for older and disabled people (and their unpaid family carers) and (iii) vocational education / lifelong learning. The first publication from the FLOWS project using data specifically concerning Leeds was published in the journal *Local Economy* in December 2012¹.

Initial key messages for policy-makers, businesses, trade unions and civil society actors across Europe

Policy makers and employers have several challenges to meet in order to assist some women with caring responsibilities into employment. Some early conclusions and recommendations based on evidence from all FLOWS cities are:

- Policy documents need to be written with gender-specific data and indicators.
- Consideration should be given to the creation of legislation as a policy response to motivate employers to create conditions which would support employees, women in particular, who have family responsibilities.
- Debate is needed on the merit of joining up policies and practice. Key actors in policy making and governance, service providers, employers and civil society actors need to create and conceptualise links between employment, welfare and education policies that would open up more opportunities for women with care responsibilities to be well integrated in the labour market.
- In designing and delivering courses, Life Long Learning (LLL) providers need to take into account the different needs of women with caring responsibilities, as these have implications for their labour market integration and their training participation.
- LLL providers should direct resources to adult education and training in occupational fields where women are under-represented, and where there are plenty of employment opportunities.
- To involve more women in economic sectors where employment opportunities are broader, targeted policy measures will need to be applied.
- Childcare services need to be provided for children of all ages with guaranteed access to childcare, thus supporting women’s entry / return to employment.
- All children should be eligible for publicly provided day care regardless of their parents’ situation (such as working irregular hours or not being able to pay full fee for childcare, etc).

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KEY OBSERVATIONS : LEEDS

Leeds and its labour market

Having grown throughout the 1990s and for most of the 2000s, the Leeds economy was in a strong position by 2008, having become, after London, the UK's second largest city for finance and business services. Employment in the financial and banking services industries grew by over 10% between 1998 and 2008. However, the city's reliance on financial and public sector jobs became apparent when the financial crisis took effect in 2008-11. In total, jobs in Leeds fell by 7% during this time (a net loss of 29,600 jobs, many in the finance and education sectors), with the decline in jobs in Leeds much sharper than at regional and national (GB) levels.

Within the city of Leeds, some of the most affluent localities in the country, as well as some of the most deprived localities in the country are found. As in many other English localities, the city's 'average' labour market figures obscure much city-level variation. This variation has implications for the local welfare system and the types of support needed in different parts of the city to support women's participation in the labour market.

Women's labour force participation in Leeds

The financial crisis of 2008 had a significant effect on both the labour force participation (LFP) rate and the employment rate of women in Leeds. (LFP is defined as all working age people in, or actively looking for, paid work.) By 2007 women's LFP rate in the city had reached 73%, and was the closest it had ever been to the LFP rate of men in the city (almost 83% in the same year). By 2011, however, female LFP in Leeds had fallen back to 68%, and the gender gap in LFP was once again widening, as male LFP remaining fairly stable (81% in 2011). Before the financial crisis, women's employment rate in Leeds was also relatively high and on an upward trend. However, after 2008, the unemployment rate for women started to rise, reaching at its peak, in 2010, 9.1%. The fall in female unemployment which followed in 2011 (down to 5.6%, the lowest rate since 2008) is likely to reflect both changes in employment and the withdrawal of some women from the labour force. The national austerity measures which were introduced after the financial crisis began to affect those employed in the public sector in 2010. The occupational distribution of women's jobs in Leeds changed substantially between 1998 and 2008, resulting in a larger proportion of women in the city being employed in the public sector. This left women especially vulnerable to cuts in this sector. From 2010 to 2011, while the number of men employed in the 'public administration, education and health' sector remained stable at 19%, the number of women employed in this sector fell from 47% to 43%.

Access to childcare to support women's employment in Leeds

In some areas of Leeds a variety of childcare options are available allowing women in these areas to select childcare which best suits their needs. Most full-time childcare is offered by private sector providers, which expect to be able to make a profit, however. This creates a situation in which some areas of Leeds have inadequate provision as demand for chargeable childcare is insufficient to incentivise providers to supply it. This applies particularly for those looking for childcare for sessions outside 8am - 6pm or to meet the needs of shift workers. How far all women in Leeds have their childcare needs met, enabling them to participate in the labour market, is not known. Even with the available financial support, some parents find it difficult to pay childcare fees. Others cannot access childcare which is conveniently located. Much unmeasured, informal childcare, provided by relatives and friends, almost certainly plugs the gaps in the childcare system, hiding the extent to which childcare provision currently fails to meet the needs of all women in Leeds who wish to work.

Access to support for women who are unpaid carers and who wish to work in Leeds

The support which exists to help women with caring responsibilities to enter or remain in the labour market in Leeds is quite limited. Flexibility in employment relies heavily on individual employers, and local authority funded services are based on a rather strict assessment of needs. Because Carer's Assessments are sometimes wrongly perceived by carers as an assessment of their ability to care some people choose not to be assessed and consequently are unable to access services to which they may be entitled. Overall, support to help carers of working age combine work and care in Leeds meets national and legal requirements, and is underpinned by comparatively good voluntary sector services, but nevertheless remains very limited.

Access to education and training to support women to enter the labour market in Leeds

There are opportunities for women to access various types of education and training across the city, but for those women who are out of work the emphasis is on ensuring they access *some* training to enable them to qualify for a job; and for education provided by the state it is only possible to access a certain range of courses. Free choice in education or training relies on an ability to pay, favouring women on good wages (who are likely to be better educated) or with families able to support them. National and local policy emphasis is on making sure everyone has access to the same basic level of education, which may assist women who are unemployed or educationally disadvantaged to gain employment, but is unlikely to increase female labour force participation in the longer term.

Integration of services to support women to enter or remain in the labour market in Leeds

In England, labour market policy currently has no explicit gender focus and in Leeds very little support has the specific aim of improving women's position in the labour market. There is little evidence that childcare, support for carers and vocational training opportunities are integrated, either in policy or in service delivery, at a local level. Consequently much of the organisational strain of co-ordinating suitable support is borne by individuals, a task which can be time-consuming and stressful especially if care is needed simultaneously by children and older or disabled relatives. Women in Leeds are more likely than men to be the main providers of such care, so it is women and female employment which are negatively affected when integrated support is weak.