



Work Autonomy,
Flexibility and
Work-Life Balance

Key Results

When flexible working doesn't work

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Motivation... the life of academics




*"I can't remember—do I work at home or
do I live at work?"*

The paradox of autonomy



- *Research shows that flexible working has very little or no impact on reducing worker's work-family conflict, sometimes increasing work-family conflict*
- *WHY?*

The project

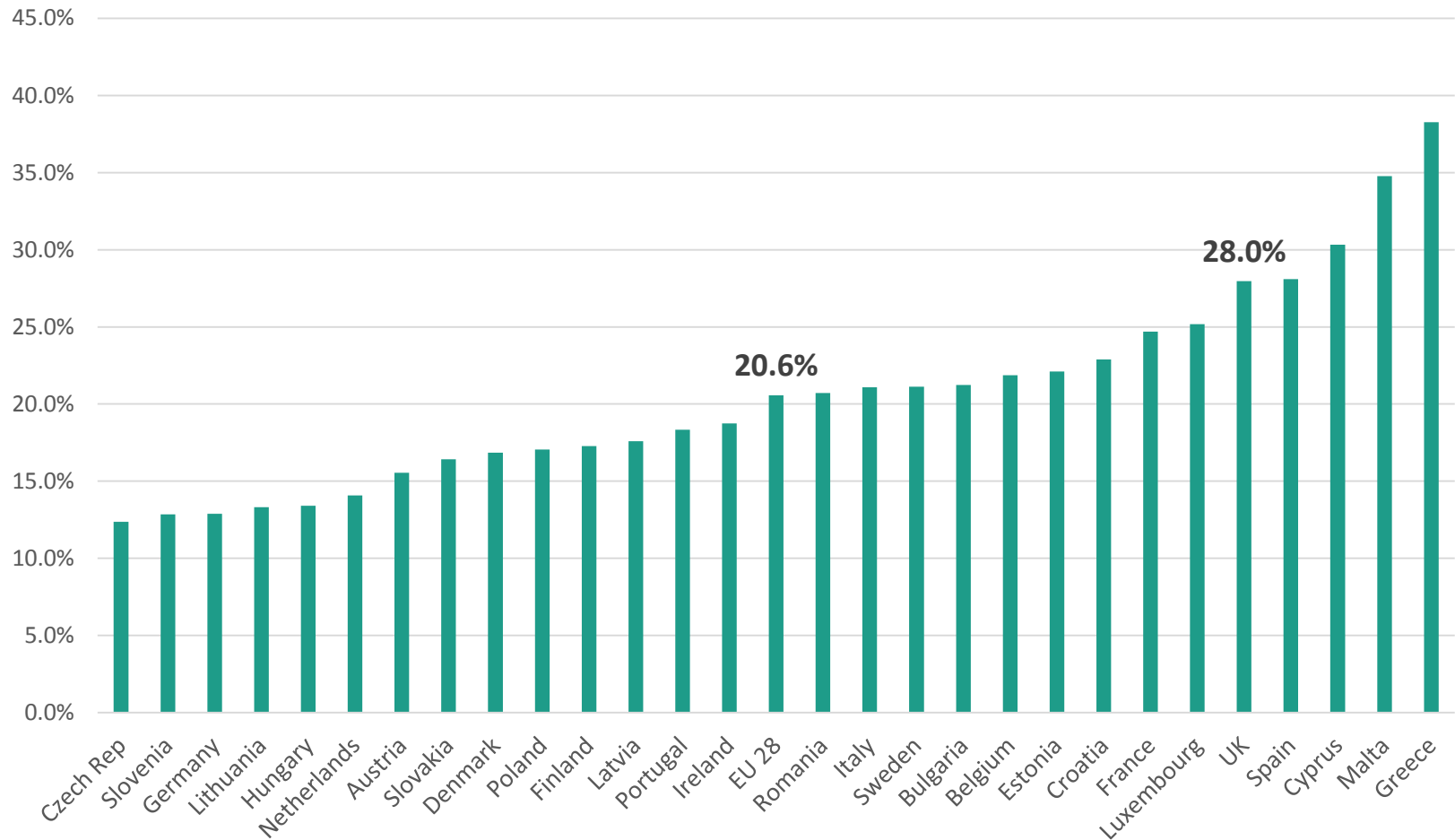
-  Future Research Leader (Dec 2013 –Oct 2017)
- Examines European/UK data to examine why flexible working doesn't work
- Data used: European Social Survey, European Company Survey, European Working Condition Survey, Work Employment Relations Survey, BIS-WorkLife Balance Survey, Understanding Society, G-SOEP
 - Methods used: multilevel analysis, panel analysis, MG SEM

Concepts used

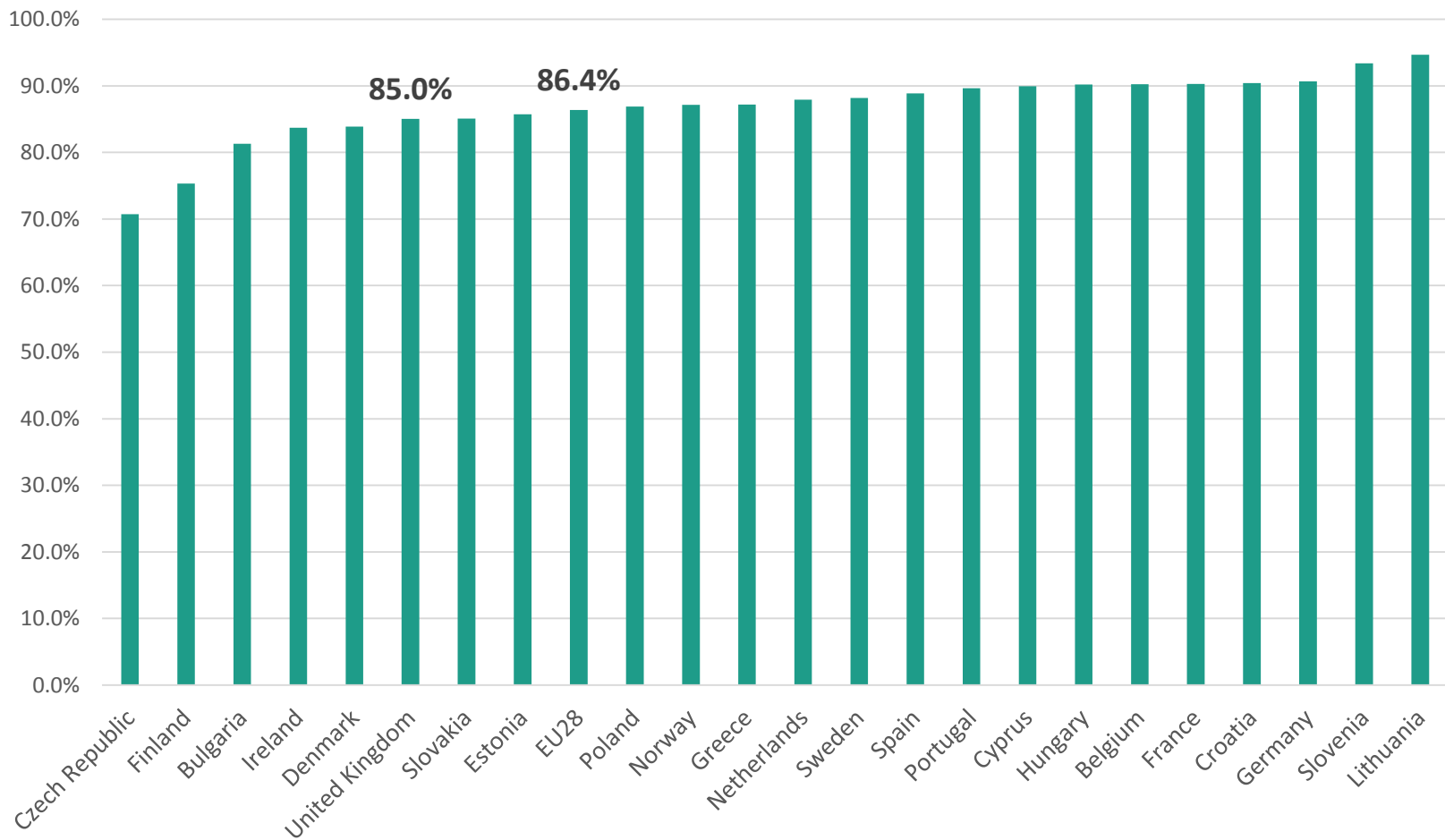
- **Flexible working** = flexible schedules (flexitime+ working-time autonomy) + teleworking
 - **Flexitime** = having flexibility in starting ending times
 - **Working time autonomy**= having more/full control over your schedules
 - **Teleworking** = working outside the office, from home
- **Work-family conflict**= the conflict workers feel due to the demands coming from work and family
- We only focus on those **employed/dependent employment**, and will give emphasis on the **UK case**

Across Europe workers are
struggling to balance work with
family life...
& majority of workers find work-life
balance one of the most important
aspects of a job

Proportion of individuals who feel that they are too tired after work to do some of the household jobs which need to be done (always or most of the time) across 28 EU countries (Source: EWCS 2015)

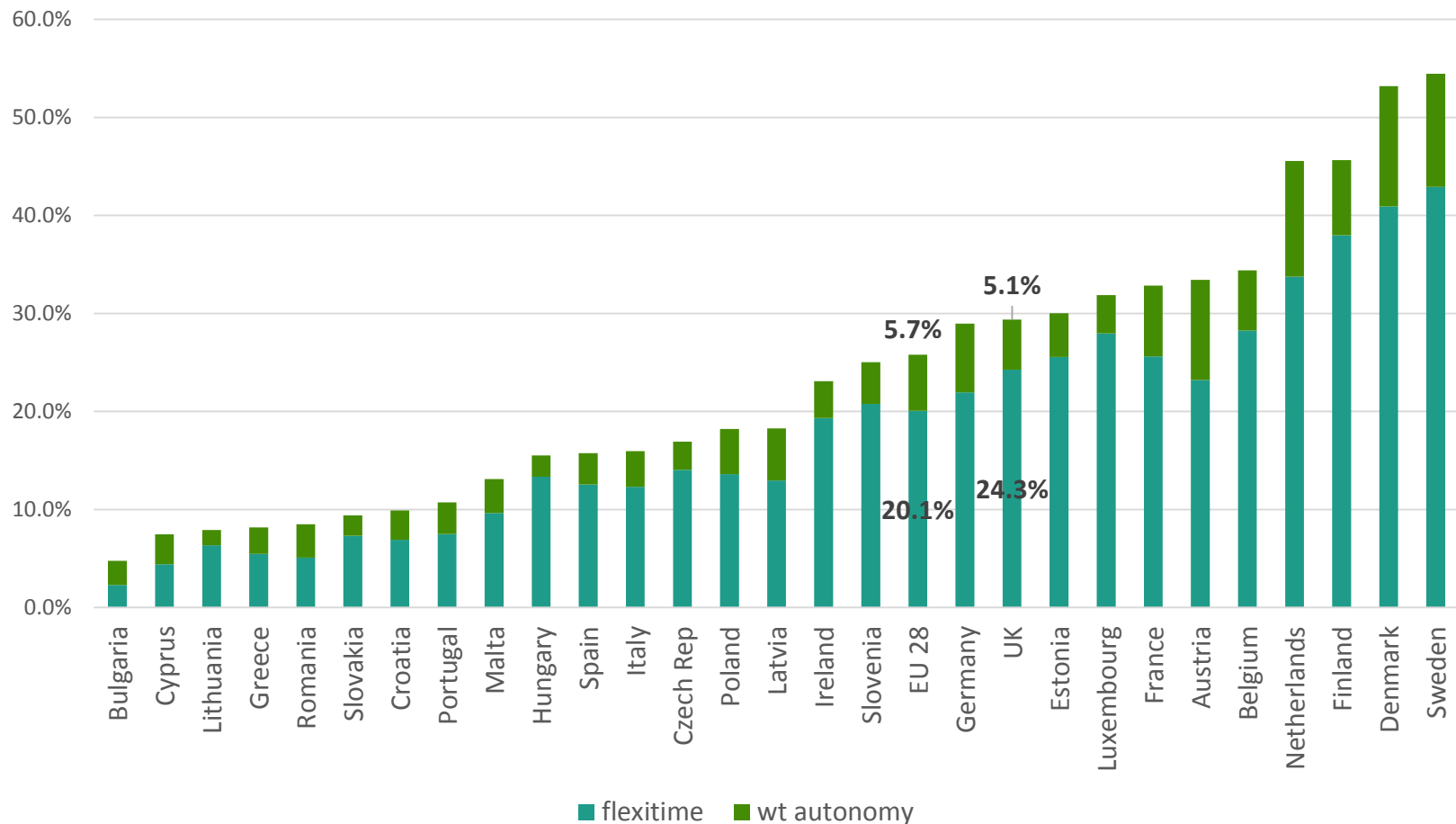


Proportion of individuals who states that the ability to combine work/family is important/very important when choosing a job across 23 European countries in 2010 (Source: ESS2010)

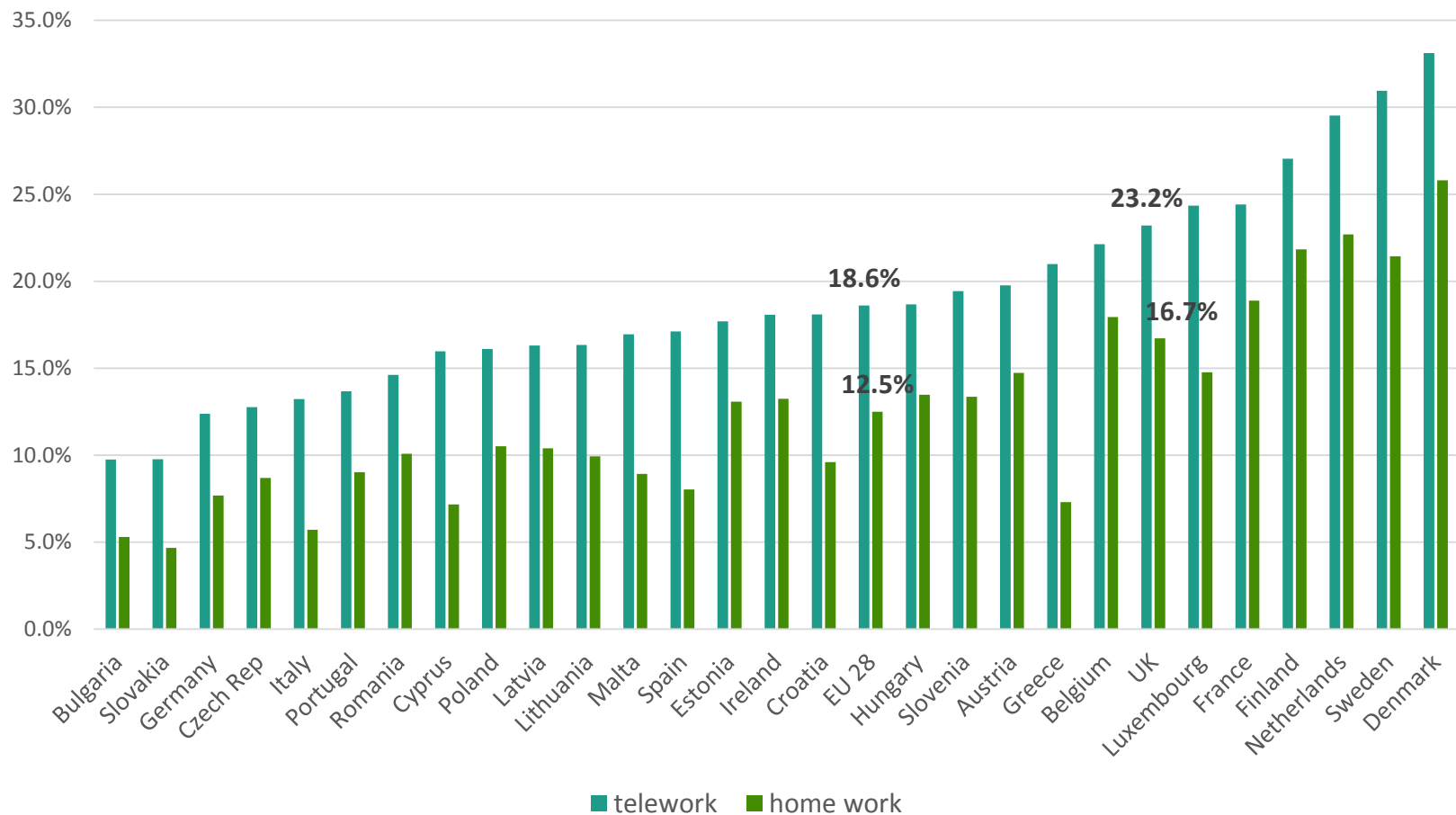


Large and growing number of
workers now work flexibly

The proportion of workers across 28 European countries with access to flexible schedules in 2015 (source: EWCS, author's calculations)



The proportion of workers across European countries that regularly teleworked in the past 12 months in 2015 (source: EWCS, author's calculations)



Does flexible working reduce work-family conflict?

Flexible working and work-family conflict

- Looking at UK data for 2011 (WERS) **flexitime reduced work-family conflict** of workers, but not as much as expected while ***teleworking increased it***
- At the European average (EWCS 2015) flexitime and working time autonomy did not have a significant impact on work-family conflict and telework increased feelings of work-family conflict
- (Having controlled for a range of other factors)



Those who telework are
1.5 times more likely
than those who do not to feel
that their jobs prevented them
spending time with their family

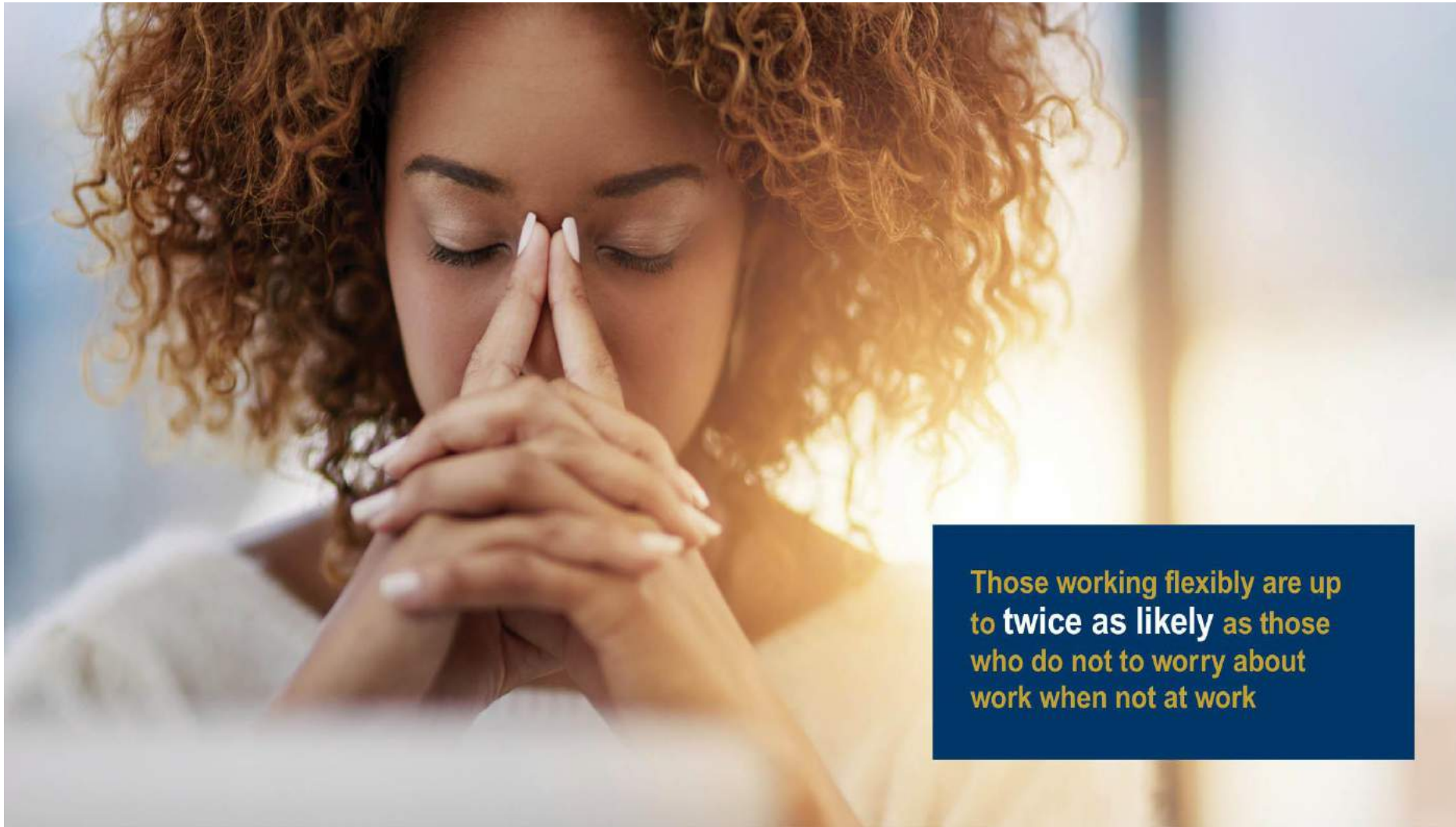
Why is flexible working not as effective as we expect it to?

Three reasons why...

- Flexible working blurs boundaries between work and family life
- Flexible working makes you work longer!
 - Flexible working is not always used for family-friendly purposes
 - Flexibility is a gift.... stigma is prevalent
- Flexible working allows people to work longer!

Blurring of boundaries





Those working flexibly are up to **twice as likely** as those who do not to worry about work when not at work

Flexible working makes you work longer

Slacking off?



Slacking off!



Heteronomy

Autonomy

OVERTIME

Having more autonomy over your
working hours **makes you work**
more overtime

Evidence

- German longitudinal data flexitime leads to approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ hours and working time autonomy 1.5 hours more overtime per week
- UK longitudinal data: flexitime no effect, but time autonomy increases **unpaid** overtime by $\frac{1}{2}$ hours a week.... (men & professionals more)
- Evidence of teleworking leading to overtime in US (~1hour) and Germany (0.8 hours)
- *This is not comparing across groups but within workers having controlled for a number of factors!*

Good news managers!



Encroaching on other spheres of life...

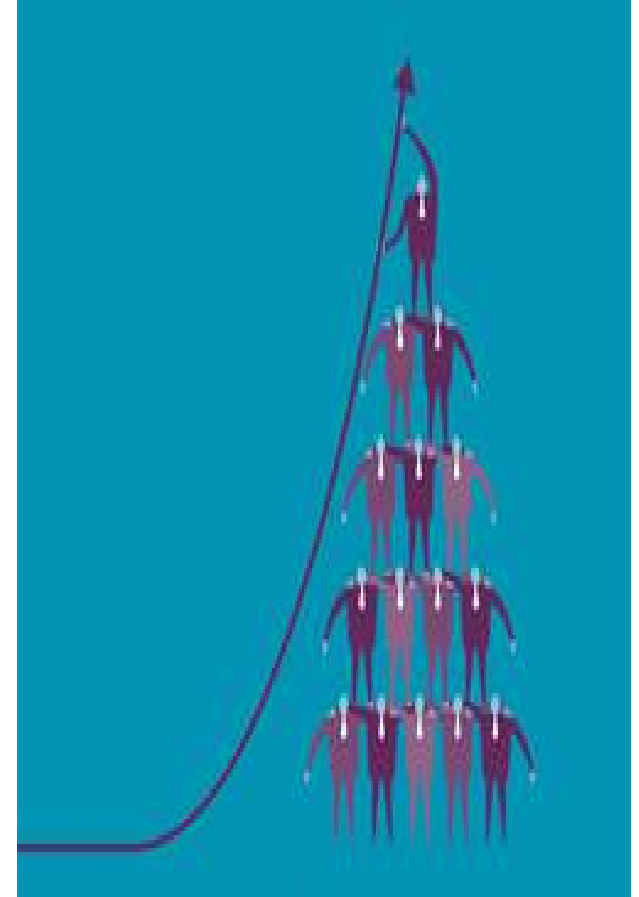


Flexible working is a high
performance strategy (as well)

Who has access to flexible working?

(European data on flexitime/telework)

- High occupational groups and skilled workers, companies with high skilled workers more likely to use it
- Flexible working used along side arrangements that may increase work intensity of workers – e.g. performance related pay



Autonomy paradox

- Enabled intensification
 - Freedom to work as long as you want (especially in competitive environment)
 - Silicon valley
- Enforced intensification
 - increasing workload without the restriction of time borders

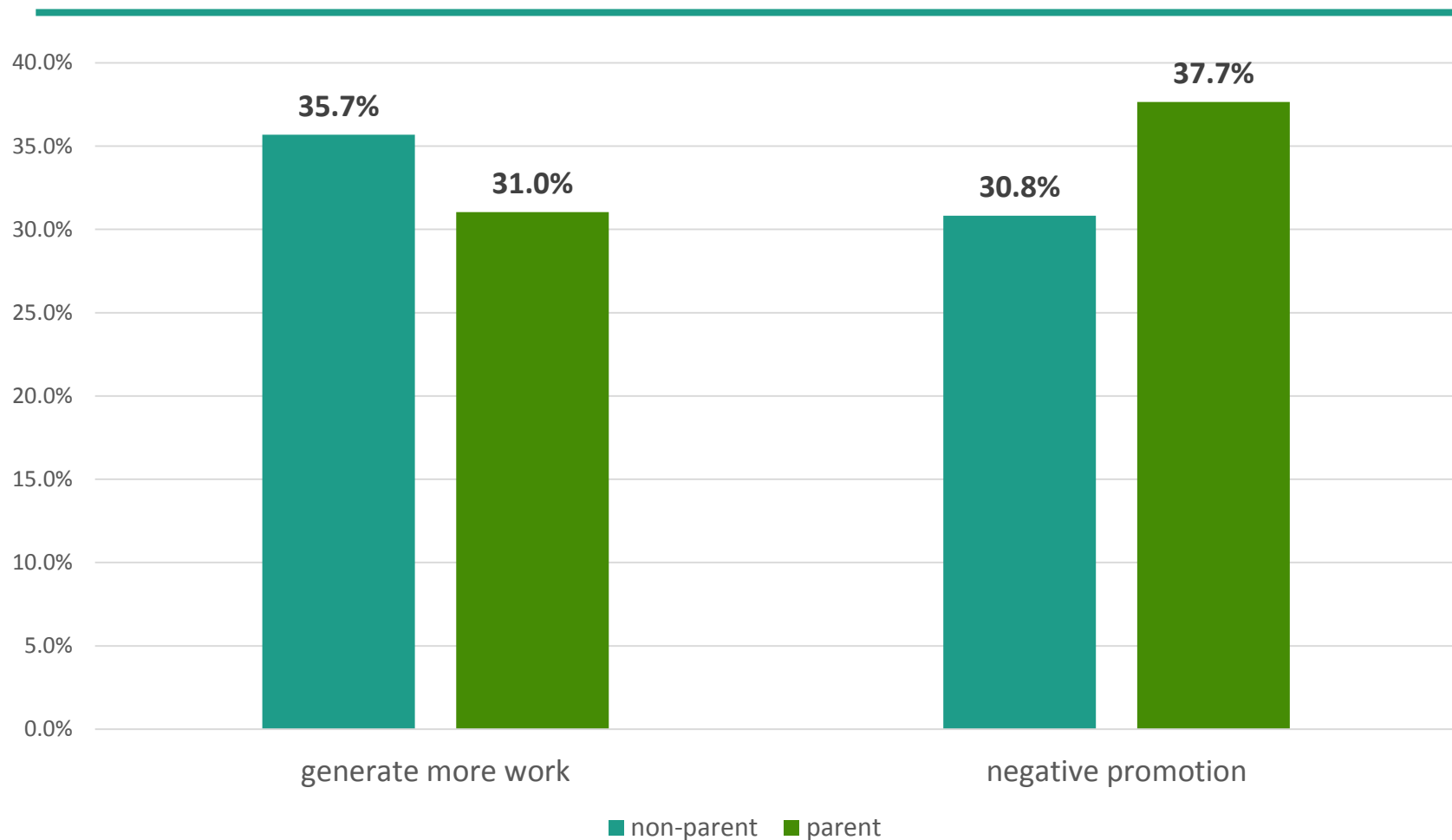


Gift exchange... compensate for
the flexibility stigma?

Gift exchange theory and flexibility



Proportion of individuals with flexibility stigma (BIS WLB 2011)





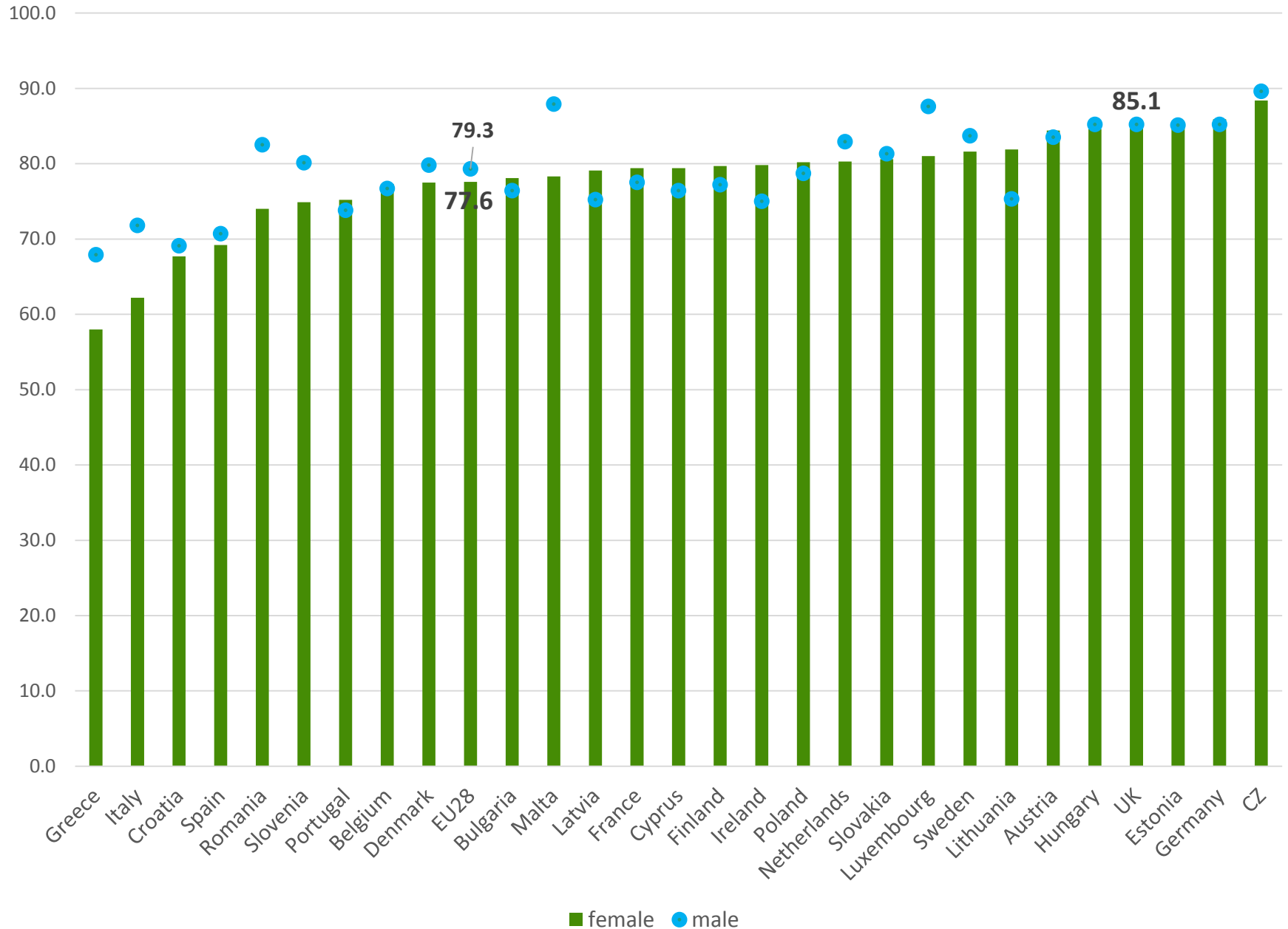
Men/fathers are more likely to hold feelings of flexibility stigma and fear its repercussions more than women/mothers do

Compensation?

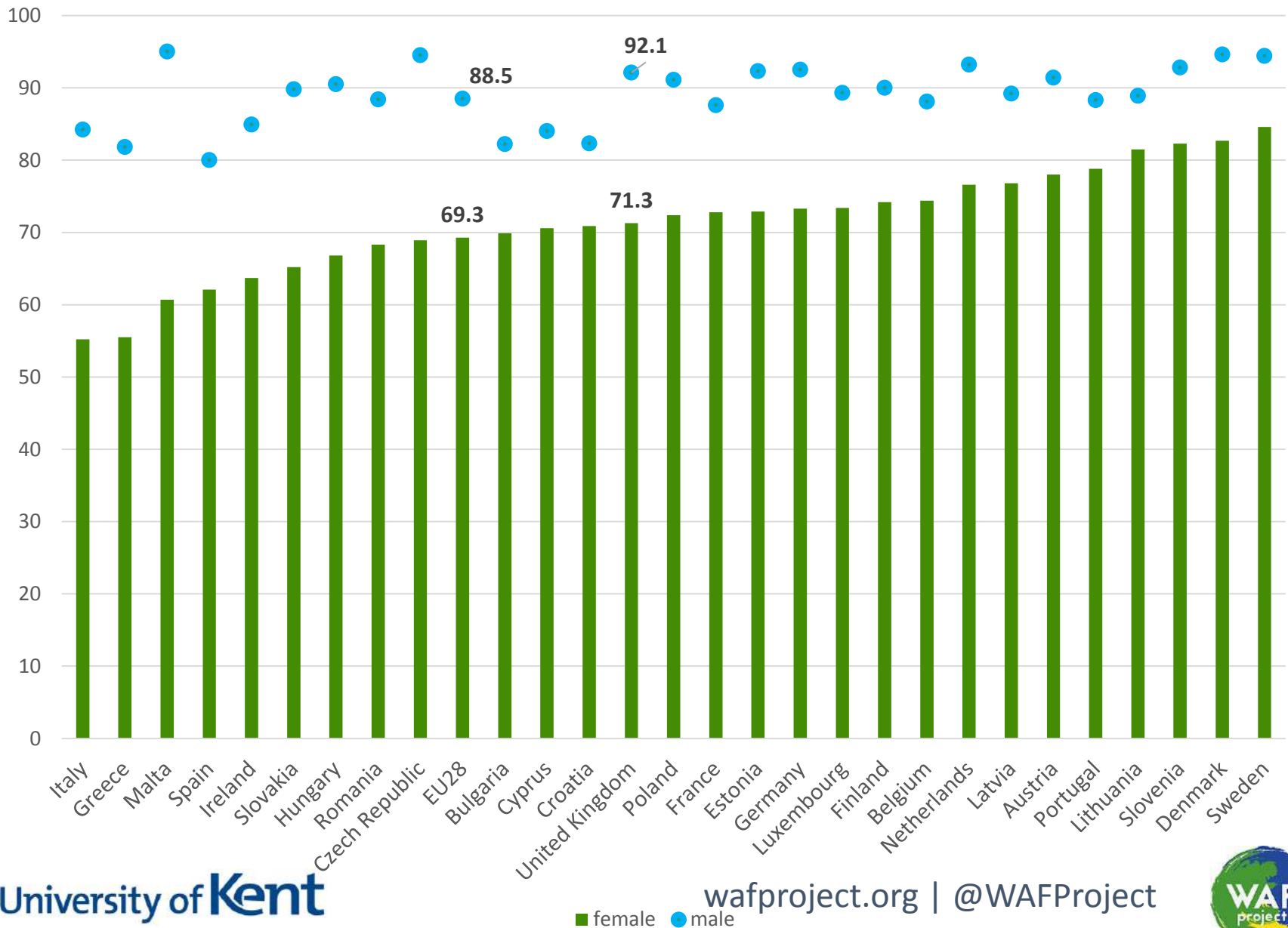
- Workers may work harder to compensate for the stigma attached to flexible working, and the potential career consequences

Flexible working can increase work capacity of workers/mothers in times of high family demand

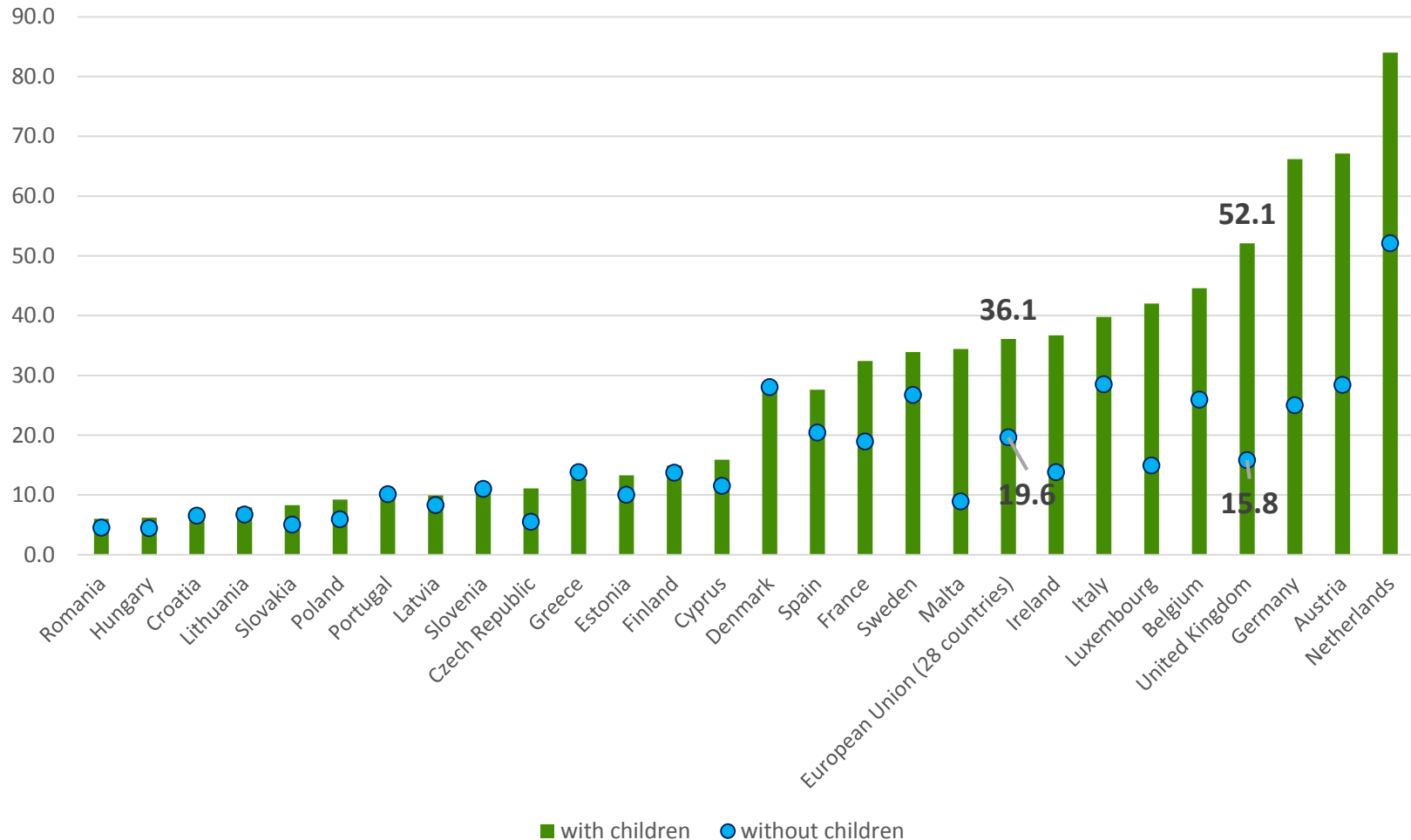
Employment rate of men women without children (25-49) EULFS2015

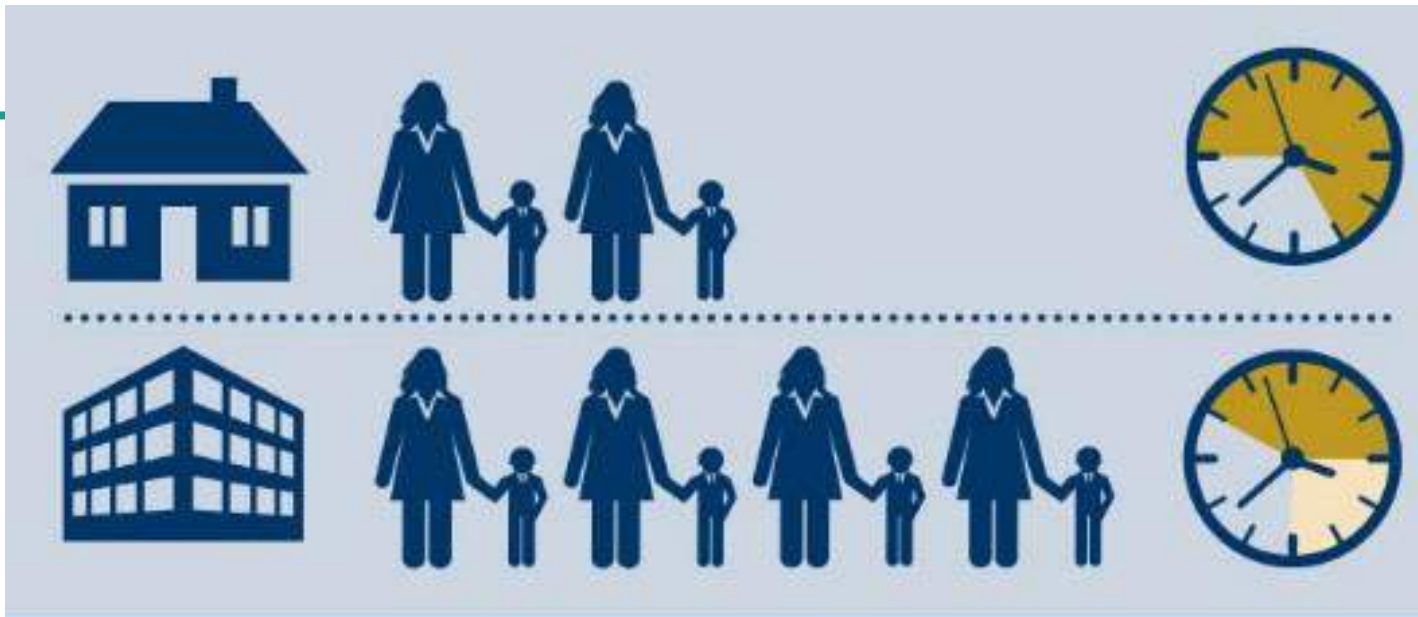


Employment rate of mothers/fathers (25-49) source: EULFS2015



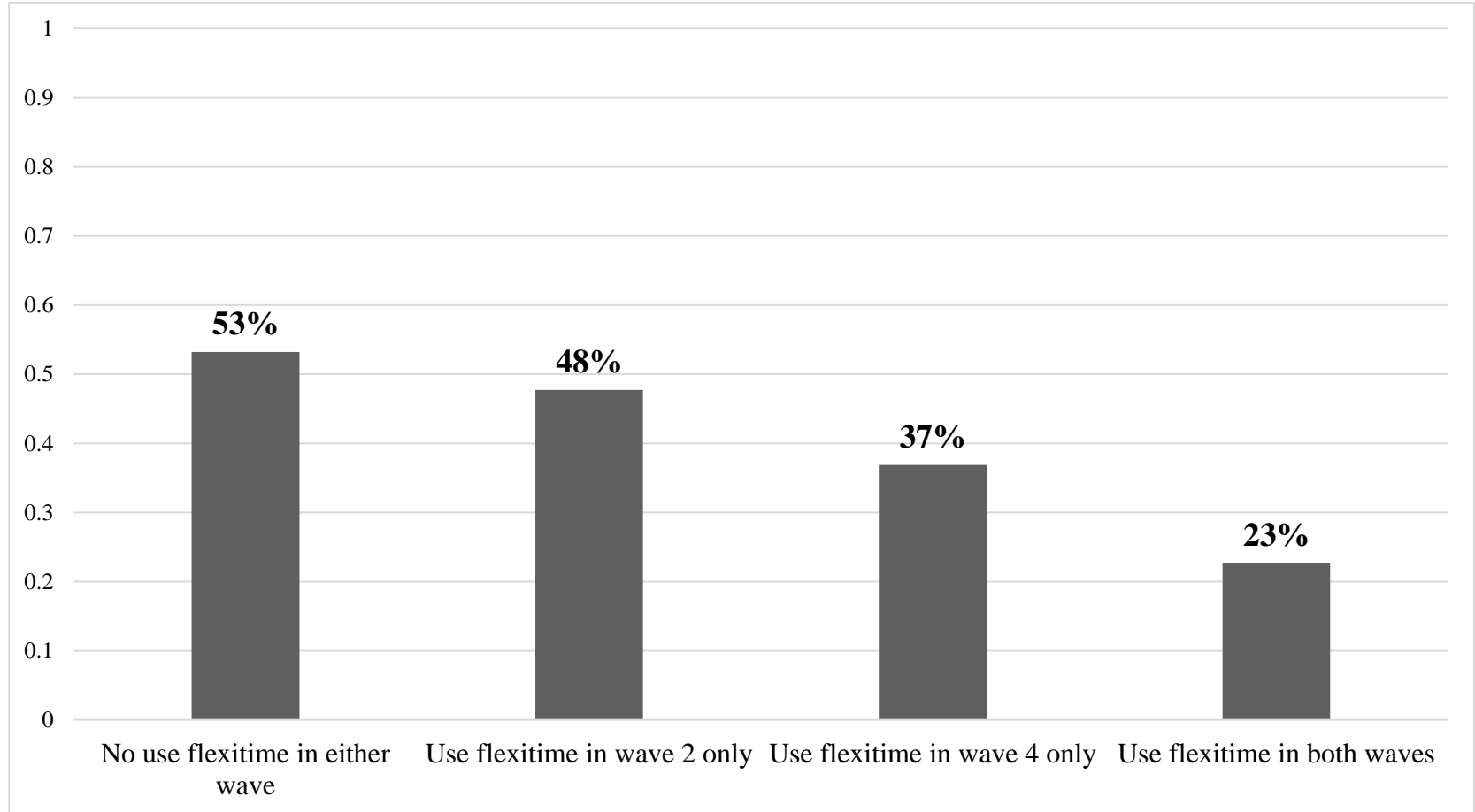
Proportion of women 24-49 in part-time employment in 2015 (with/without children)





Women who use flexitime were only half as likely as those who do not to reduce their working hours after childbirth

Likelihood of mothers reducing the working hours (4h>) after childbirth (Understanding society)



Higher conflict, but also higher work-life balance satisfaction



Yet access limited

- Gender, parental status care demand makes very little difference in access/ having controlled for a number of factors
- Female dominated jobs/sectors worst in access to flexitime/working time autonomy
- Flexibility stigma reduces the likelihood of taking it up even when available!! (0.6-0.7 odds)

Flexible working means different things for men and women



Traditionalisation of gender roles?

- Men work longer overtime when using flexible working & gain income premiums → for career enhancing purposes
- Women/mothers even when increasing overtime as much more likely to be seen to use it for family purposes
- Women have to use it for family friendly purposes
- Flexible working can lead to a more traditional division of gender roles? **Men for careers and women for family demands**

Conclusions & Policy recommendations

Trust in flexible workers

- Flexible workers do NOT slack off when working flexibly
- They actually work harder when they gain freedom!
- Regardless the stigma towards those who work flexibly still very prevalent

Gender gap

- Flexible working can enhance women's work capacities during the peak family demands periods
- Ensuring access to flexible working has major implications for maintaining human capital, enhancing gender equality (tackling the gender wage gap)
- But women still face obstacles in access

Enhancing Access

Make flexible working
the norm- from the
beginning of a job



Tackle the work culture

- Role modelling - Starting from senior management
- Include work-life balance as a main part of discussions between managers and workers – we are carers as well as workers!
- Work-life balance reporting/certification (Athena Swan)- criteria for government tenders...
- Stronger legislative right to flexible working (reduce tribunal fees)

Gender roles and flexible working

- Flexible working can increase gendered division of work
- Encourage men's flexible working for Family friendly purposes
- Campaigns to tackle gendered view of the use of flexible working



Rethinking labour laws

- Tackling and monitoring work demands when time/place boundaries are missing
- White paper/Review on the future of work
- A more comprehensive view on the labour market with increase in work intensity, labour market insecurity, and other types of flexibility – e.g. gig economy, can be examined in a holistic manner



Flexible working is not a panacea, we need to examine it in the context of the existing work cultures/systems to ensure flexible working can lead to a better work-life balance for all

Thank you!

For comments & questions
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