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**FROM LIFE PHASES POLICIES TO
LIFE COURSE ONES :
ARE FRENCH FIRMS BRIDGING THE
GAP ?**

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WZB-HBS Life course conference
Berlin, June 14-15, 2007

STRUCTURE OF THE CONTRIBUTION

Introduction

Current situation : a life phases approach either at the statutory level either at firm level

Trends in statutory regulations and firms' practices

Conclusions

Introduction

In France, working time options and/or employment policies are still mainly designed according to a life course divided in three main phases : entry, parental phase and retirement.

These three phases have been subject to deep changes and approaches during the three last decades : differing, flexibilisation increasing precariousness of the phase entry in the labour market ; better consideration for the parental phase (thanks to EU development following the Luxemburg summit, 1997) yet with many side effects ; anticipation of retirement age

Impacts of this kind of phased approach of the life course without any linkages between them are crucial as far as labour market participation, distribution of working hours, income and social protection are concerned (analysed in terms of age, gender, social categories)

New working time options have been regulated through collective agreement or by law that are not yet implemented at the firm level in a life course perspective and are not very well known among employees.

Labour market entry paths



2/3 of hirings are under short term contracts

Transitions between short term contracts and tenure contracts are weak : after one year only 1/3 on short term contracts are on non time limited contracts, 49% after 2 years, and only 54% after 3 years

There is a postponement of the labour market entry of young people

Young people are the most exposed to unemployment (links with precariousness : 18% of employees on short term contracts on year N are unemployed on year N+1 (4% of CDI).

During 1977-2002, employment interruptions have become more frequent for young employees, especially young women. In 2002 a young under 25 years have been in average deprived of work during 12 weeks (less than 3 weeks for the age bracket 45-54)

Generally speaking, professional mobility is weak for all categories but the phenomenon is more accurate for young people

Transitions from unemployment towards employment is weak in France, with more risks for young people : unemployment rate of 15-24 age bracket is 21,4%, one of the highest in EU15 and employment rate only 39,3%, one of the lowest

Parental phase

Maternity leaves : 16 weeks, preservation of income

Paternity leaves : 14 days (3+11), preservation of income

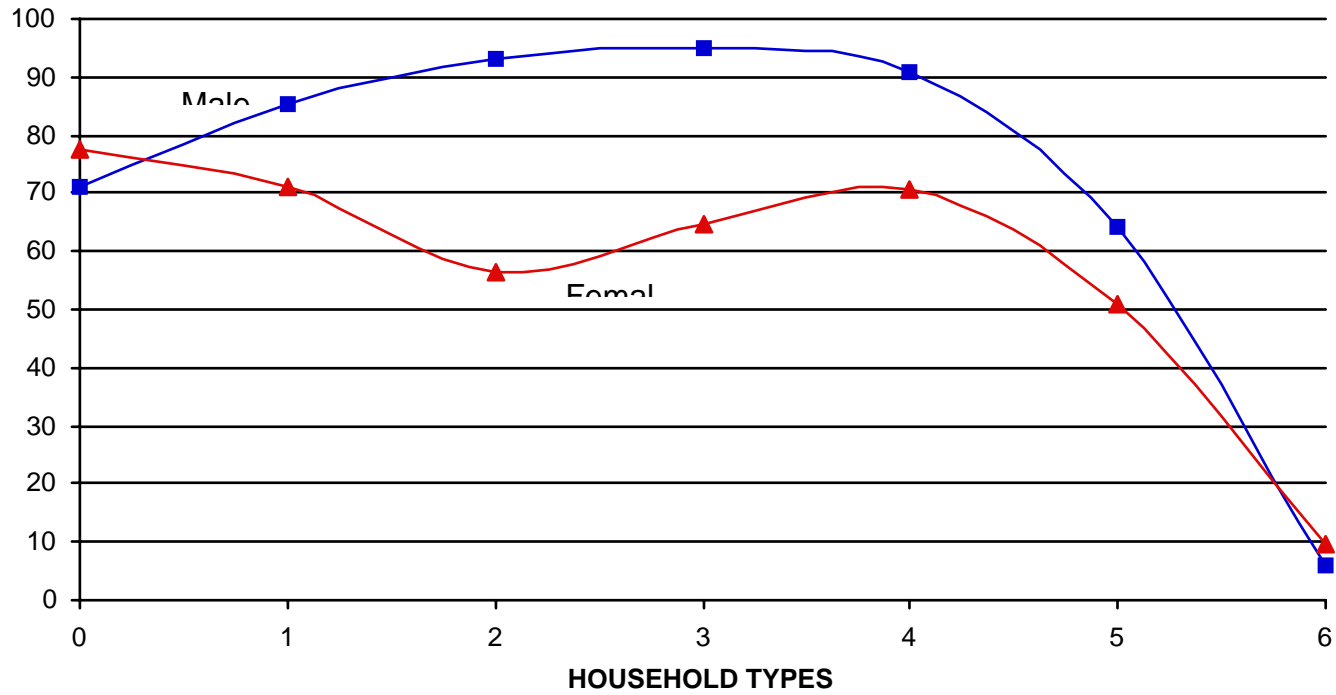
Parental leaves : two regimes

- lump sum which is weak (about 530€), but long leave (until 3 years, with possibility to take it on part time) (open from the 1st child)

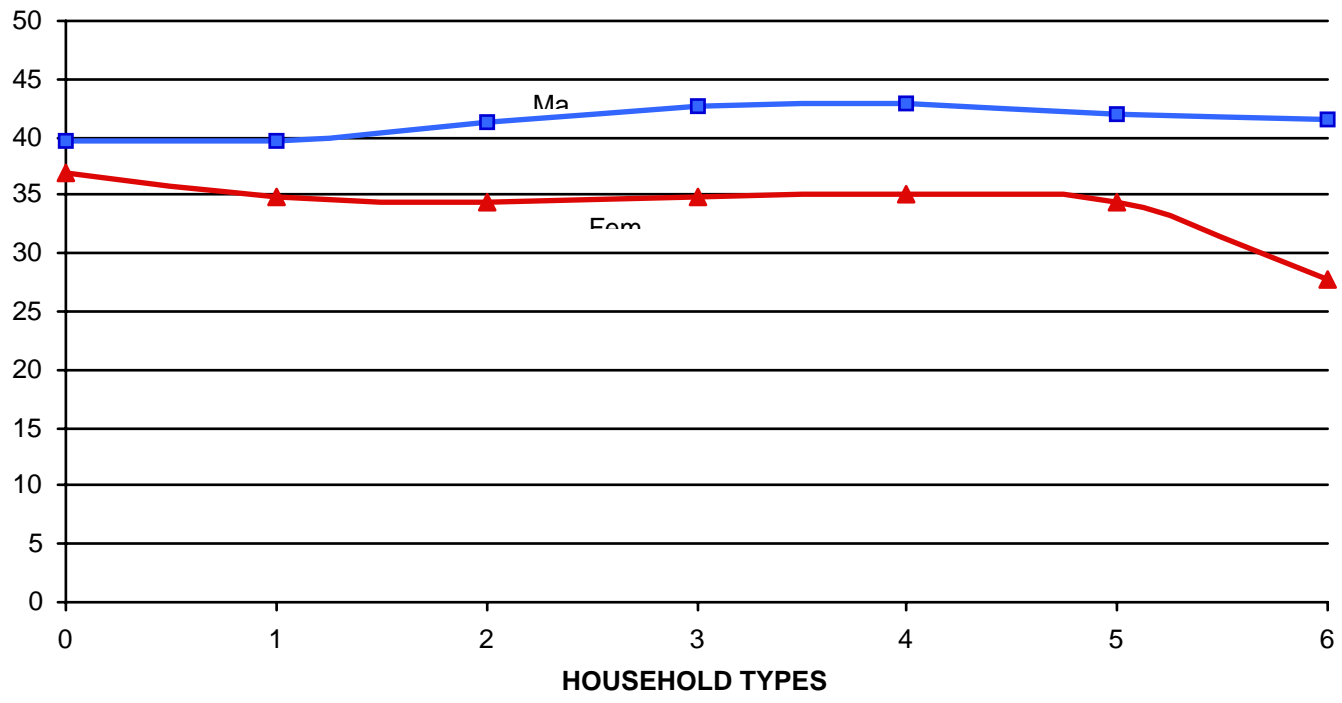
- highest lump sum (750€) if the leave is limited to 1 year, but no possibility to take it on part time basis (open from the 3rd child in the household)

Impact of these measures (particularly the first one) : decreased activity rate for mothers of two children (70% in 1995, 55% in 2005), decreased income, career and social protection perspectives for those who up take these schemes

EMPLOYMENT RATES, FRANCE 200



WEEKLY WORKING TIME, EMPLOYEES, FRANCE 20

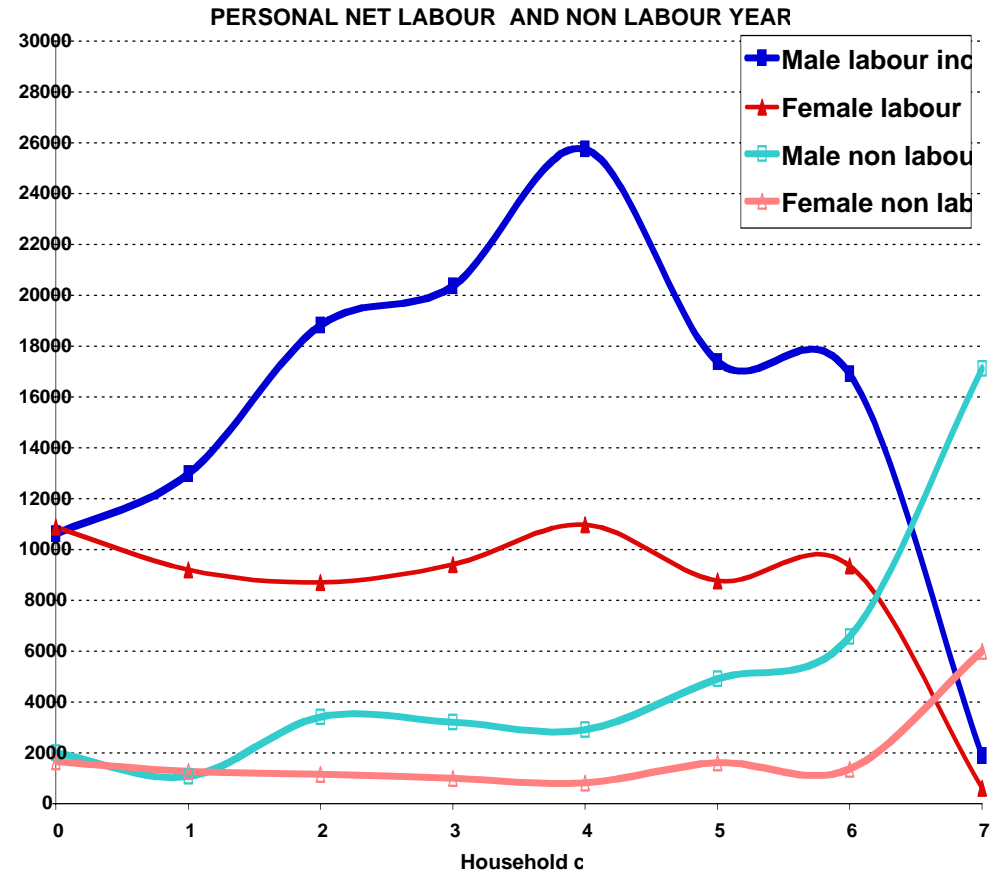


France

Modèle 'MALE BREADWINNER' modifié.

Profils des revenus du travail et transferts

- Higher gender gap in earnings profile.
- The dip in employment rate and working hours, and therefore the reduction in labour income is not compensated by transfers like in Sweden.
- Derived rights, limited individualisation, intra household income transfer



Training leaves



Vocational training is diminishing in France since 1971 and is stabilised at a very marginal rate (1,48% of GDP in 2002 like in 1998) and firms' participation in training efforts is also decreasing together with the access rate of employees (35,3% in 2003).

The result is a very low mobility rate particularly for unskilled workers who are less involved in training courses than qualified workers and for small firms' employees (an unskilled employee has 30 times less chances to be trained than a PMS working in an over 2 000 employees' firm)

Exit from the labour market



A dramatic use of pre retirement schemes during 20 years : in 2001, 550 000 persons where on pre retirement

Retired average age is 58,5 years in France

Result is a very low employment rate of the population over 55 years old : 43,8% - 50-64 - in 2005 (total OECD was 62,3%) ; 10,7% for the 60-64 ; 47,9% for the 55-59

Despite of a huge reduction in the access to public pre retirement schemes (128 100 where on pre retirement in 2005) firms continue to expulse their older workers. As a result there is a increasing number of unemployed aged people (583 000 at the end of 2005, 70% of them are exempt of job research)

In 2005, 6 out 10 of the 50-64 where in activity, but only 55% had a job.

To sum up the current situation



Firms use the public schemes aiming young and aged employees : after having used massively public early retirement schemes they have some difficulties to restrain themselves to continue to favour early retirement of their employees (particularly high qualified). This is contradictory to the trend to extend the working lives (increasing number of quarters needed for having a right to full pension)

Firms respect the right to parental leave but barely improve the income conditions which could be a way to counterweight the gender bias of such schemes

Firms do not tend to improve the training statutory framework and tend to discriminate its use between social categories(skilled vs unskilled, young vs aged ; men vs women)

Overall assessment : discontinuities in life courses; gender and social categories discriminations

Difficulties for firms to maintain internal labour markets. Professional mobility and secured life courses occurred in crisis situation : social plan (tripartite negotiations at the local level, social pacts and social compromises)

However, we may notice a trend towards regulation of life course working time options

Trends towards life course policies



Working time accounts (CET : statutory regulation from 1994) :

- boosted by the 35h working week (a way to smooth the WTR effects)

- progressively becoming a trade off between time and money (possibilities to transform time in money : possible maxi amount : 62 136€)

- low take up rate and low use by firms

Life long learning schemes (DIF : right to individual training) :

- 20h a year during 6 years (120h)

- too recent to draw lessons

Debate about unions proposals :

- professional social security (CGT)

- secured professional courses (CFDT)

Which means to equip men instead of jobs

Use and take up rate/wishes



No survey on use by firms and take up rates (lack of surveys)

Working time issues are “tabou” since 2002 :no evaluation of the different schemes

Firms are reluctant to use these schemes

Employees are more open, particularly young employees (national survey 2005, chronopost) :

- 92% of the under 30 years of age express a desire to modulate the place of work in their life course
- 71% (79% for women) intend to use parental leave
- 57 % intend to use life training leaves (high education levels are more eager to use these leaves)
- 41% (58% of women, 25% of men) intend to shift from full time to part time for a limited period
- 32% intend to use the working time account leaves, but a quarter of them does not know this scheme
- 24% intend to use sabbatical or unpaid leaves

Conclusions



The bridge does not exist for the moment : no linkages between the different schemes which remained mostly life phases designed

The current orientation towards “working more in order to earn more” is a disincentive to a life course perspective (short term, income oriented and adverse to lengthened professional life policy :long working hours have controversial effects to the lengthening of professional lives - exhausted employees, working conditions)

Implementing a life course policy supposes a radical change in working time policy :

- take gender and social categories bias in account**
- take life expectancy and health questions in account**
- propose policies and schemes that might counter fight the**

individualisation process : universal rights suppose inter temporal and inter personal distribution of time and income (mutualisation of working time accounts at the industry or larger (national, EU) levels

Questions to be discussed :

-How to avoid path dependency (the question of the continuation of the employment relationship during the leave or the downshifting period and the question of the social protection entitlements) ?

-How to avoid the low take up rates of men (parental leaves, transitory reduction in working time etc.) ?

-Should we introduce a distinction between WTO subject to universal rights and others that refer more accurately with the personal life and development of the individual (inter temporal distribution of time over the life course)