THIRTEEN

Matched on job qualities? Single and coupled parents in European comparison

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Well-functioning matching processes in the labour market are crucial to individual, organisational and societal prosperity. As sole providers, single parents' participation in the labour market is especially critical to their economic and social wellbeing. Single parents are not only consistently overrepresented in poverty across countries (Chzhen & Bradshaw, 2012; Maldonado & Nieuwenhuis, 2015) but also their socioeconomic disadvantages are reflected in generally lower health levels (for example Esser, forthcoming, 2017; Nieuwenhuis et al., Chapter Fourteen in this book; Whitehead et al., 2000). While participation in employment itself is crucial to avoiding poverty and ill health, the *quality* of jobs is increasingly recognised as an important health factor (Drobnič, 2011; László et al., 2010). For single parents, the majority of whom are women, the presence of specific job qualities may also be crucial for both the possibility to participate and the extent of participation in paid work. In a European comparison, more control over one's work schedule was found to significantly relieve women of work–family strain (Lyness et al., 2012). This points to the importance of understanding how single parents' job preferences are matched with job qualities in their current jobs.

Research on job matching has so far focused on objective measures – such as education, skills or qualifications – and has uncovered substantial country differences in matching (Aleksynska & Tritah, 2013; Barone & Ortiz, 2011; Brynin, 2002; Groot & Brink, 2000; Handel, 2003; Tåhlin, 2006), while national studies have found a mismatch on these dimensions associated with lower job satisfaction and wellbeing (Angrave & Charlwood, 2015; Kalleberg, 2008; Loughlin & Murray, 2013). A Swedish study also found that employees in jobs better matching their preferences had better long-term physical health (Aronsson & Blom, 2010). Broader studies of matching on job quality,

however, remain largely uncharted grounds (Esser & Olsen, 2016). To date, the related comparative research has addressed these issues separately, comparing on job preferences (Clark, 2005b; Gallie, 2007c; Gallie et al., 2012; Wielers et al., 2014) or central job qualities, such as job security (Anderson & Pontusson, 2007; Esser & Olsen, 2012; Gallie, 2007a) and work–family balance (Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011; Edlund, 2007). Generally, job preferences are more similar across countries, whereas job qualities differ substantially across countries.

Single parents generally have fewer resources to use as bargaining power; as such, their chances of accessing jobs that have their preferred qualities may be lower, and they may therefore experience a worse match. Yet, their employment and matching opportunities may vary distinctly across countries in relation to how policies and regulations facilitate participation, matching and the availability of quality jobs (for example, Esser & Olsen, 2012). For employees, but arguably even more so for parents, two principal job qualities include job security and jobs that facilitate work–family balance via control over one's schedule and flexible work hours (Clark, 2005a; Edlund, 2007; Kalleberg, 2008). This prompts two questions:

1. To what extent do single parents' jobs offer security and control over their working hours to facilitate work–family balance?
2. How do policies and labour-market regulations affect single parents' matching on these job qualities?

To answer these questions, this study addresses all three conditions of the **triple bind** – inadequate resources, employment and policies – that single parents may face, by taking into account socioeconomic resources and quantity as well as quality of employment and directing attention to the adequacy of policies for single parents' matching, relative to the situation of coupled parents.

The matching process: power resources and institutional buffering

Essentially, job-quality matching captures how an individual's *preferred* job qualities are matched by the (perceived) presence of such qualities in their current job. Sociological and social policy approaches emphasise how institutions represent opportunity structures that may offer quality alternatives in relation to market forces; affect quality of employment; promote matching in the labour market, coordinate wage levels and provide social security through times when unable

(temporarily) to provide for oneself in the labour market (Esping-Andersen, 1989, 1990; Korpi, 2006).

Drawing on the power-resource perspective, the institutional analysis is based on the understanding of how power resources have been invested in central labour-market and welfare-state institutions that serve as essential mediators of opportunities for matching in the labour market (Korpi, 2006). As such, institutions provide employees with varying degrees of independence in the labour market vis-à-vis employers, and in this way influence individuals' life and work prospects. In encompassing welfare states with more extensive social insurances (Korpi, 2006) and more regulated labour markets (for example, Gallie, 2007b), the power balance is shifted further towards the employee. Employers can be expected to compete for employees more often by providing job conditions of higher quality. In contrast, in extensively unregulated labour markets, where social insurances are more residual, employers can be expected to compete for employees (and market advantages) with job *quantity* as opposed to job *quality*, and employees can more often be expected to be liable to take the first available jobs. Although organisational structures (at the firm level) can be expected to play an important mediating role for the development of job qualities, the country-specific institutional context is expected to provide an overarching structure that will guide the development of job qualities in qualitatively different ways across countries (Hall & Soskice, 2001); for example, in the case of organisations' adoption of workplaces' work–family arrangements (Den Dulk et al., 2012).

It is recognised that the idea of single parents being in a *triple bind* aligns well with the power-resource perspective, as all these assets constitute essential power resources with potentially important bearing on single parents' matching on job qualities. From this perspective, a number of institutional factors crucial to matching in the labour market can be identified, based on two mechanisms. First, institutions provide employees with employment and unemployment protection, which essentially may 'buy them time' in the search process. Second, the power relations between employees and employers may also enforce employers to structure employment arrangements more according to workers' job preferences. Five institutions of particular relevance to matching are identified: unemployment protection; active labour-market policies (ALMPs); employment protection legislation (EPL), union strength and family policy.

First, the extent to which individuals are covered by a social security net influences the conditions when searching for a job. Previous research examining the impact of unemployment benefits

on matching outcomes either found little impact on job duration (Belzil, 2001) or positive effects of skilled-based matching processes and occupational mobility (Gangl, 2004). By constituting collective resources, unemployment benefits also provide security to employed individuals by decreasing stress around unemployment (Sjöberg, 2010).

Second, ALMPs aiming to (re)training and (re)educate may facilitate matching in relation to how continuous training serves as a buffer when unemployed individuals may be retrained. For example, Chung and van Oorschot (2011) found that both passive and ALMPs were more important for perceived employment security as compared to EPL. Also, opportunities for continuous training upgrade skills, which influences opportunities for better-matched employment.

Third, the EPL goes to the core of mobility and rigidity of labour markets by quantifying how easy or difficult it is for employers to hire and fire workers. Stricter EPL has been shown to prevent job losses in the initial stages of the economic crisis (Heyesm & Lewis, 2014). In addition, countries that maintained relatively strong employment protection experienced fewer labour-market disruptions (Heyes, 2011). On the other hand, stricter EPL may hinder hiring, which may have distinct effects for different groups of workers. Negative lock-in effects can be anticipated, especially through times of high or increasing unemployment, if employees tend to stay longer in relatively secure, but in other dimensions less-preferred, jobs (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999). In sum, stricter EPL protects employees and provides them with power vis-à-vis their employers, which may facilitate matching on preferred job qualities – at least for employees in permanent (and preferred) positions.[2]

Fourth, unions may influence matching by providing workers with power relative to the employers. Comparative research has shown how organised labour partly explains cross-national differences in job qualities, including job security (Esser & Olsen, 2012; Holman, 2013). Union density is expected to be of direct importance for the employee in negotiating job quality in the current job, but also an indirectly important influence on matching by increasing the availability of high-quality jobs related to their core concerns, such as income, training, flexible working time and job security.

Fifth, family policies aiming to promote more equal sharing of paid and unpaid work are expected to facilitate better matching – not only immediately following childbirth but also generally in the labour market – by means of incorporating more equal and flexible work conditions into the labour market. As a proxy for such family policies, we draw on a measure of the generosity of parental-leave benefits promoting dual-earner/dual-carer families (Korpi et al., 2013).

Lastly, the state of the economy is also expected to influence both the matching process and the availability of preferable jobs. During times of high unemployment it is generally more difficult to switch jobs, and people are more likely to stay in their jobs (Pichler & Wallace, 2009). When employers typically have more workers to recruit from, the bargaining power of workers decreases with higher unemployment (Greenan et al., 2014). Thus, probability of matching is expected to be inversely related to the level of unemployment.

Country-level characteristics

The five institutional dimensions categorised are shown in Table 13.1. Countries are grouped geographically, which to some extent mirrors welfare and employment regime types. Data in Table 13.1 refer to averages for 2004 and 2010.[3]

The Nordic countries combine higher measures in all dimensions, with the exception of intermediate strictness of EPL. In Western European countries, the levels of unemployment-benefit duration and employment protection are almost as high as in the Nordic countries, combined with lower measures in the remaining dimensions. The Anglo-Saxon countries, as typical cases of residual welfare states and unregulated market economies, display the lowest measures across all institutional dimensions. The trademark of Southern Europe is strict employment protection, while unemployment-benefit duration is intermediate and measures on ALMP spending and family policy are low. Eastern European countries combine intermediate (EPL and family policy) and low (unemployment-benefit duration, union density and ALMP spending) institutional scores. Notably, there is nontrivial variation in all country clusters on all institutional dimensions. This is yet another important reason for taking an institutional approach and using continuous measures of specific institutional dimensions – as compared to taking a regime approach relying on grouping country clusters, which may conceal important institutional differences.

Individual characteristics

Generally, individuals' power resources differ significantly in relation to socioeconomic characteristics. Groups with fewer resources are typically more vulnerable to worse matching in the competition for quality jobs. Also, jobs requiring less education and fewer occupational skills are more often of lower quality in terms of autonomy and job security (Esser & Olsen, 2012). Opportunities to find jobs matching

Table 13.1: Country characteristics, averages for 2004 and 2010

	Unemployment rate (%)	Unemployment-benefit duration (weeks)	EPL reg. (index)	Union density (%)	ALMP (expenditure/ GDP /unemployed)	Dual-earner/dual-carer family policy (proxy, 0–100)
Denmark	6.0	80.0	2.5	72.0	7.9	48.6
Finland	8.5	38.5	2.0	72.0	3.4	56.0
Norway	4.0	40.0	2.4	55.0	5.7	82.8
Sweden	7.7	23.1	2.6	78.0	2.1	78.8
Average Nordic countries	6.5	45.4	2.4	69.3	4.8	66.5
Belgium	8.3	100.0	2.9	53.0	1.3	20.1
Switzerland	4.3	30.8	2.2	20.0	2.7	24.3
Germany	8.4	20.0	3.0	22.0	0.2	43.8
Netherlands	4.7	15.5	2.9	22.0	1.8	24.7
Average Western EU	6.4	41.5	2.7	29.3	1.5	28.2
Ireland	8.7	18.5	1.9	38.0	4.1	20.8
United Kingdom	6.2	10.0	1.7	30.0	0.0	24.2
Average Anglo-Saxon countries	7.5	14.3	1.8	34.0	2.1	22.5
Greece	10.7	20.0	2.9	19.0	0.3	13.7
Spain	14.4	31.1	2.8	16.0	0.2	30.8
Portugal	9.3	30.0	3.8	16.0	1.0	42.7
Average Southern EU	11.5	26.9	3.2	17.0	0.5	29.0
Czech Republic	7.6	10.0	2.9	22.0	0.4	32.5
Poland	13.7	10.0	2.4	19.0	0.2	37.1
Slovenia	6.5	10.0	2.9	38.0	4.0	92.6
Slovakia	15.3	10.0	2.7	24.0	0.4	29.8
Average Eastern EU	10.7	10.0	2.7	25.8	1.3	48.0
Total	8.1	29.0	2.6	35.6	2.1	41.2

Notes: Unemployment rates are averages for 2004, 2005, 2009 and 2010 (EUROSTAT, 2016). EPL for regular employment contracts include individual and collective dismissals, and ALMP data exclude public employment services (OECD, 2016). Unemployment-benefit duration and family policy data are averages for 2005 and 2010 (SPIN, 2016). Data on union density is from Visser (2015).

employee preferences are expected to be more constrained with lower education and social class.

To the extent that women are weakly attached to the labour market (for example, by part-time work) or prone to lower-quality jobs in the gendered service and care sectors, mothers can be expected to be worse matched than fathers. However, to the extent that part-time work facilitates a work–family balance based on more traditional gender roles and women's work preferences, this could neutralise

gendered differences. Ethnic minorities have been found to be more susceptible to skill mismatches in the labour market, although work experience narrows the gap relative to natives (Aleksynska & Tritah, 2013). Employees with temporary employment contracts are more likely to experience greater insecurity, and conceivably lower job quality, related to temporary work status; hence, they are expected to be worse matched. Lastly, relating to the research on matching of educational level, it seems most likely to expect worse matching on job qualities among the overqualified; for various reasons, these employees are in jobs that require fewer skills than their skill level, and as such are susceptible to lower-quality jobs. It seems less obvious, given the expectation of better matching with increasing *level* of education, how being matched on education independently would be associated with matching on job qualities, which hence remains an empirical question.

As single parents tend to have fewer resources, this decreases their relative bargaining capacity in the competition for quality jobs. At the same time, they can be expected to have somewhat higher valuations of time-flexible and secure jobs, which could imply a higher degree of mismatch for this group at the country level.

Data, variables and method

The comparative survey data on job preferences and qualities are from the European Social Survey (ESS). Subsamples for analyses include employed parents aged 18 to 59 with dependent children below 18 years of age living in the household. The cross-sectional data are from two rounds, including the same 17 countries in 2004 (ESS2) and 2010 (ESS5); in total, 10,851 parents.[4] Of these, 9.4% are single parents, of whom the large majority (82%) are mothers. A single parent is defined as a one-parent household with at least one child under age 18 living in the household. Single parents are compared to parents in couples, who are either married or live as married.

Measures of matching

The two matching variables are derived as the correspondence between measures of job preferences and job qualities. Questions about job preferences were phrased as a statement: 'For you personally, how important do you think each of the following would be if you were choosing a job?: (1) A secure job; (2) A job which allowed you to combine work and family responsibilities'. Answers on a scale of 1–5 reflect the degree of (dis)agreement ('strongly disagree'; 'disagree';

'neither agree nor disagree'; 'agree'; 'strongly agree'). The corresponding questions about job qualities were also phrased as statements: '(1) My job is secure; (2) I can decide the time I start and finish work', with answers on a 1–4 scale ('not at all true'; 'a little true'; 'quite true'; 'very true'). Responses were dichotomised. 'Agreement' or 'strong agreement' indicate higher valuation of these job preferences, and answers 'quite true' and 'very true' indicate presence of the specific job quality.

A **positive match** was coded for parents answering 'agree'/'strongly agree' on job preferences *and* 'quite true'/'very true' on job quality. In contrast, a **negative match** was coded with similar agreement on preferences *but* answering 'not true'/'a little true'. A third matching outcome, labelled **indifferent**, was coded for individuals who do not value the specific job quality (regardless of the job qualities in their current jobs).

The upper panel in Table 13.2 shows how parents on average are matched on job security and work–family balance. First, it can be noted that the proportions of 'indifferent' parents on both quality dimensions are quite small; on average, 10%. Results relating to the limited subsample of single fathers, however, need to be regarded as tentative. Neither do averages of positively and negatively matched differ greatly across parental groups. On average, three out of five parents in couples are positively matched on job security – a few percentage points fewer among single parents. The matching is lower in relation to work–family balance – on average two out of five parents, with women at a slight disadvantage whether single or in a couple.

Individual-level variables

Single parents are compared to parents in couples, either married or living as married. **Age** is indicated by age groups: 18–24, 25–34, 35–44 and 45–59 years. **Education** is indicated at three levels: below upper secondary, upper secondary completed (including a vocational degree) and (any level of) tertiary education (recoded from ESS harmonised ISCED codes). The measure of educational match was calculated from two indicators in the ESS data, as the difference between the number of required full-time years in education for the job and the respondents' pursued number of years. A discrepancy of more than two years indicates over- or under-education; less discrepancy indicates a match (cf. Kalleberg, 2008). **Social class** is represented by five occupational categories according to the Erikson–Goldthorpe–Portocarero class schema: unskilled, skilled and routine nonmanual workers, as well as the lower and upper service classes

Table 13.2: Individual characteristics of employed parents 18–59 years, across 17 European countries, percentages (if not otherwise noted), averages for 2004 and 2010

	Parents in couples	Fathers in couples	Mothers in couples	**Single parents**	Single mother	Single father
Matched on job security	**61**	62	60	**56**	56	56
Negative match	**31**	29	32	**35**	36	29
Indifferent	**9**	9	8	**9**	8	15
Matched on work–family balance	**43**	47	39	**39**	38	43
Negative match	**47**	41	54	**52**	54	39
Indifferent	**10**	12	7	**10**	8	18
Parental status (% of total parents)	**90.5**	40.8	49.8	**9.4**	7.8	1.7
Mothers	**45.0**			**81.6**		
Age (mean)	**39.9**	40.5	39.0	**40.4**	40.1	41.5
No. of children in household (mean)	**1.71**	1.73	1.68	**1.49**	1.48	1.53
Education						
Primary	**18**	19	17	**23**	23	20
Secondary	**48**	50	47	**47**	47	46
Tertiary	**33**	31	36	**30**	29	33
Social class						
Unskilled	**21**	24	18	**23**	22	26
Skilled	**14**	21	6	**9**	8	15
Routine nonmanual	**22**	11	36	**32**	35	16
Service class II	**25**	22	28	**26**	26	25
Service class I	**18**	22	12	**11**	9	18
Work hours/week, full time (≥30 hrs)	**86**	96	74	**79**	76	94
Long part time (20–29 hrs)	**9**	2	16	**12**	14	3
Short part time (1–19 hrs)	**5**	2	9	**9**	10	2
Permanent employment contract	**79**	78	79	**75**	76	73
Matched on education						
Undereducated (>2 years)	**16**	19	12	**14**	13	15
Matched (within 2 years)	**58**	58	59	**59**	59	61
Overeducated (>2 years)	**26**	24	30	**28**	28	24
N (total n=10,851)	**9,834**	5,409	4,425	**1,017**	822	195

Source: ESS2 and ESS5, weighted data

(Ganzeboom, 2015). **Full-time work** is contrasted against long and short part-time work (>30, 20–29 and <19 hours per week). **Ethnic minority** reflects the respondent's subjective perception of belonging to this category. **Employment contract** contrasts workers with no or a limited contract against those permanently employed. Lastly, indicators for jobs by **industrial sector** are included.[5]

The lower panel in Table 13.2 shows how parents differ on individual background characteristics. The averages across countries generally show that employed single parents are quite similar to coupled parents on most background characteristics, although we know from comparative research that these averages conceal substantial cross-national variation (cf. Esser, forthcoming; Nieuwenhuis et al., Chapter Fourteen in this book). The mean age of parents is 40 years; most parents (one in two) have upper-secondary education, while one in five has lower education and one in three higher (tertiary) education. The majority (three in five) are matched on education, although this also implies large shares of overeducated parents (24–28%) and a smaller proportion of undereducated parents (12–19%). Similar majorities (around 75%) are permanently employed. Notable differences relate to how labour markets are gendered across all countries. In this way, mothers – whether single or in a couple – are overrepresented in routine nonmanual work but underrepresented in skilled manual work and in the upper service classes. Mothers also more often work part time.

Method

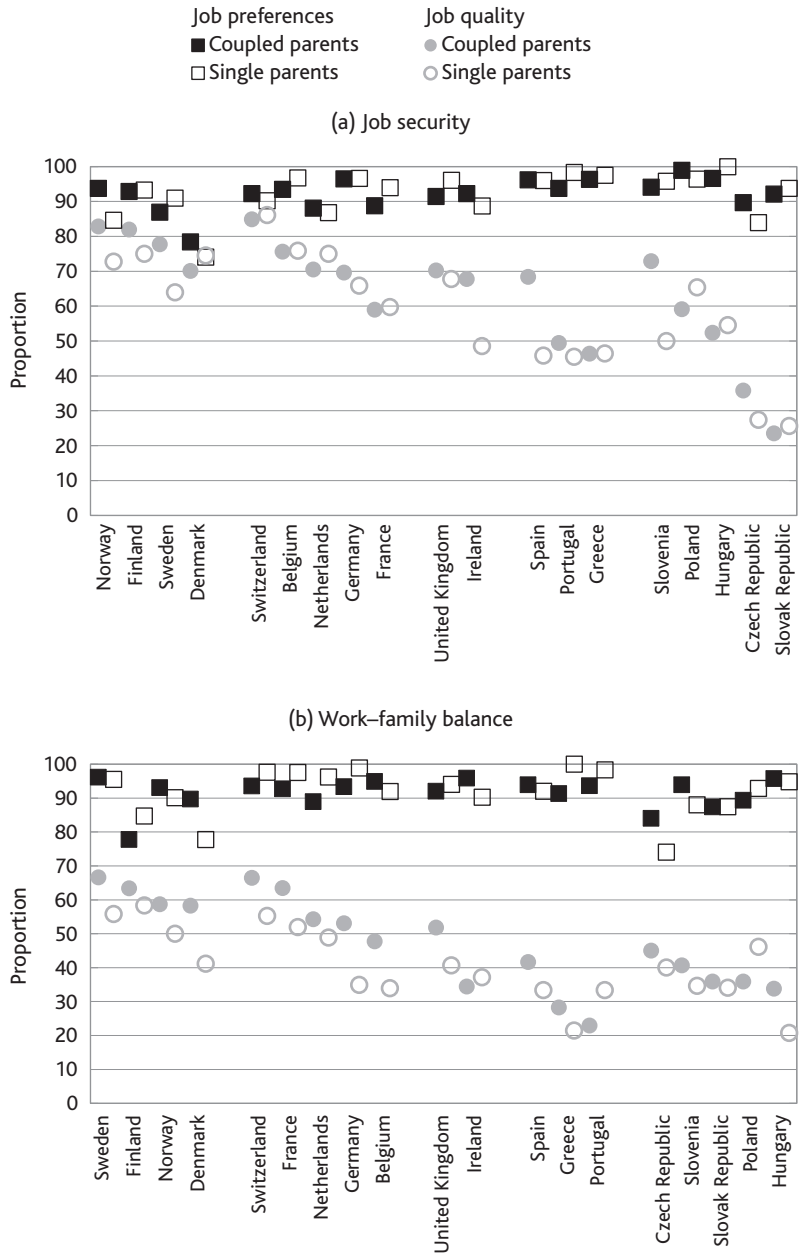
For all descriptive results, the proportions of positively matched parents are given as percentages of all matching outcomes; that is, the positively and negatively matched, as well the parents categorised as indifferent. In multivariate analyses, the individual survey data are combined with institutional and structural indicators in linear probability regressions that estimate the probabilities of being positively matched as compared to being negatively matched. For clarity, parents categorised as indifferent were excluded from analyses. For ease of interpretation and comparison across policy areas, country measures were transformed into their z-scores (centred and standardised). Estimates were multiplied by 100 to show the percentage-point change in probability of being positively matched as compared to being negatively matched, with one standard deviation change in each respective institutional measure.

Results

Job preferences, job quality and matching across Europe

Figure 13.1 shows job preferences and job qualities for parents across 17 European countries relating to job security and work–family balance. The vast majority of all parents across Europe prefer

Figure 13.1: Job preferences and job qualities of coupled and single parents in 19 European countries (averages of 2004 and 2010)



Notes: Countries on x-axis are sorted by geographical groups and within groups by job quality of coupled parents.

Source: ESS2 and ESS5, own calculations

secure jobs as well as jobs conducive to work–family balance (square markers), whereas job qualities (round markers) vary substantially across countries. Generally, in most countries more than 90% of all parents express these job preferences. A few countries stand out: in Denmark and the Czech Republic, slightly fewer parents express these valuations (around 80%).

Turning to job quality, rather similar patterns appear in relation to both job security and jobs offering control over work hours, with larger shares of quality jobs in Northern and Western European countries as compared to Southern and Eastern Europe. The two Anglo-Saxon countries take an intermediate position, with somewhat higher shares of secure jobs as compared to jobs facilitating work–family balance, although markedly fewer single parents in Ireland experience secure jobs (49%). In terms of jobs facilitating work–family balance, Anglo-Saxon countries rather group with Southern and Eastern European countries, British coupled parents exempted.

In terms of job security, Figure 13.1 shows how secure jobs are especially prevalent in the Nordic countries and Switzerland, while scarcer across Southern and Eastern Europe, and especially scarce in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (24–35%). Exceptions include relatively large shares of Polish parents enjoying secure jobs (63% on average), as well as coupled parents in Spain (68%) and Slovenia (73%). In several countries, single parents' job security does not differ from the security experienced by coupled parents – but in Sweden; Ireland; Spain; Slovenia, Hungary and to some extent Norway, single parents are at a clear disadvantage.

Turning to the proportions of parents in jobs that offer control over work hours to facilitate work–family balance, it can first be noted how there are fewer quality jobs across all countries as compared to the proportions of secure jobs. Also, single parents are more generally at a disadvantage in Nordic and Western European countries, as well as in the UK. Differences by family type in Southern and Eastern European countries are small, but then again, the majority of all parents in these countries are mismatched in this dimension.

From these results, it seems reasonable to expect that matching of job preferences with job qualities will relate considerably to the availability of quality jobs. Figure 13.2 shows the proportions of positively matched employees. On average, matching on security is more common as compared to matching on work–family balance (confirming differences noted in Table 13.2 and comparison in Figure 13.1). There is a substantial amount of cross-national variation, by and large reflecting the pattern of job qualities across countries.

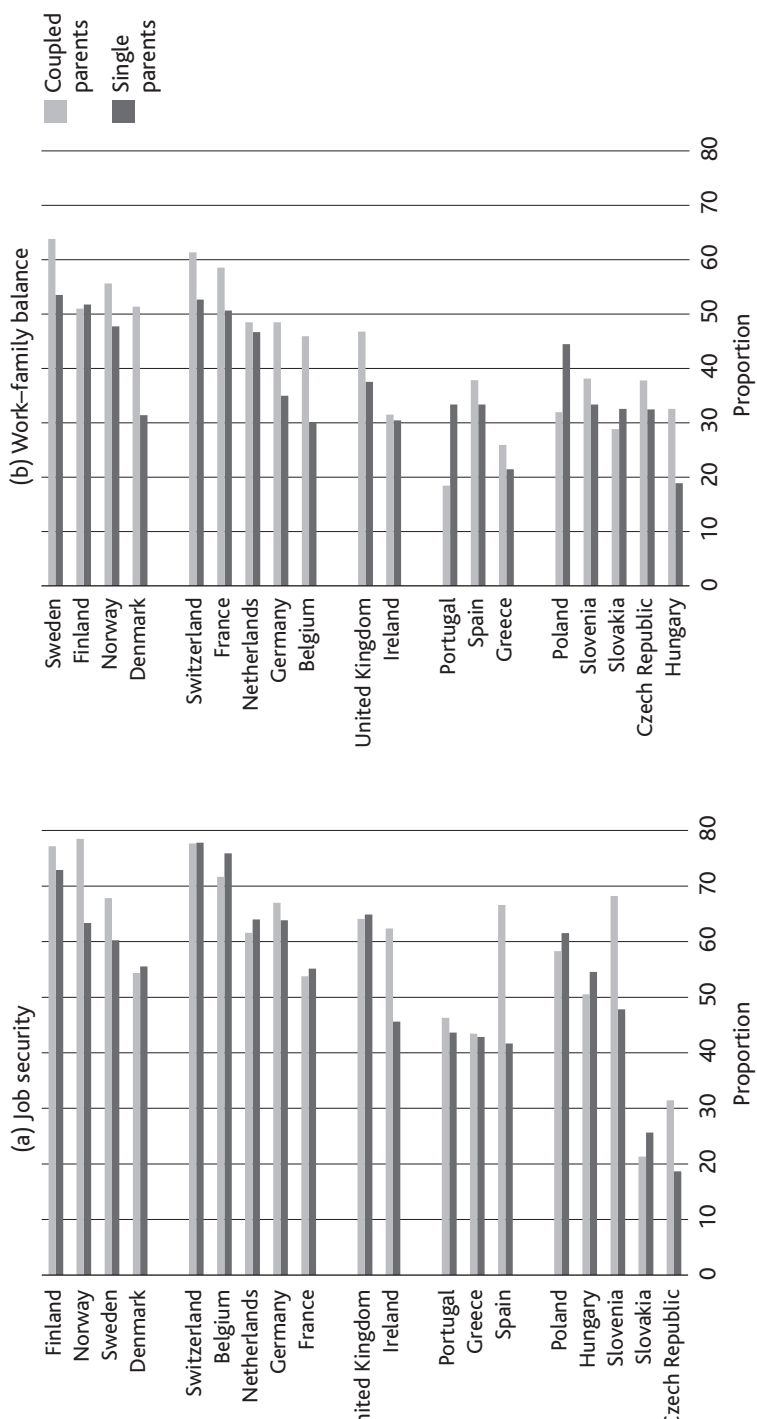


Figure 13.2: Proportion coupled and single parents positively matched on job security and work–family balance in 19 European countries (averages of 2004 and 2010)

Matching in Nordic and Western Europe is more prevalent – on average, 67% and 50% are matched on job security and family balance respectively – while less common in Southern and Eastern Europe, where the corresponding averages are 45% and 31%. The two Anglo-Saxon countries again take intermediate positions. While matching on security here is more similar to the matching in Northern and Western Europe (except for lower levels of matching of Irish single parents), matching on work–family balance is more similar to the lower levels of matching in Southern and Eastern Europe. A few countries stand out from this general pattern. On job security matching, (all) Polish parents are relatively better off, reflecting the higher availability of secure jobs. Also, Spanish and Slovenian couples are more extensively matched on job security.

Differences between single and coupled parents' matching are larger in relation to matching on work–family balance. In terms of job security, single parents are substantially disadvantaged in Norway, Ireland, Spain and Slovenia. In the extreme case of Czech Republic, more than 80% of single parents are mismatched. With regard to matching on work–family balance, single parents are at a substantial disadvantage in several Northern and Western European countries, and in some of these countries (Denmark, Germany, Belgium, the UK and Ireland) matching is on par with the lower levels of matching in Southern and Eastern Europe (around 30%). In relation to matching on work–family balance, Hungary is the extreme example, with more than 80% of single parents mismatched. Notably, single parents are at a matching advantage in two countries – Portugal and Poland – although matching is generally limited in these countries. In sum, matching differs greatly across European countries, and in terms of mismatch, it is obvious how quite substantial shares of European parents are missing out on central quality dimensions in their work.

Multivariate results

The upper panel of Table 13.3 show estimates for matching probabilities by family type, where all parents are included in the same model while controlling for all other individual characteristics (estimates not shown). Mothers in couples are worse matched as compared to fathers in couples in both dimensions. Also, single parents do worse on job security matching as compared to coupled fathers, but do not differ from coupled mothers in this respect. In contrast, single parents' matching on work–family balance is more similar to coupled fathers' matching, and is significantly better as compared to coupled mothers'

matching on work–family (alternative reference category was tested in separate model; estimates not shown).

In the lower panel of Table 13.3, the estimates of individual factors are shown in separate models for each family type. Overall, individual factors matter in rather expected ways, with some notable exceptions. First, the gender of single parents is not a significant factor: single fathers' and single mothers' matching do not differ significantly. The estimates indicate that single mothers are at some disadvantage, but the small sample sizes and small share of single fathers limit statistical power, possibly explaining why the estimates are not significant.

The effects of the most influential factors are relatively similar across family types. Better matching on both job security and work–family balance is related to higher socioeconomic status, especially to the two service classes, although this is not the case for single parents' matching on job security. The effects of higher education are less consistent across family types. While important for single parents' matching, higher education does not imply better matching for coupled mothers, and matters more selectively for coupled fathers' matching. Being in temporary employment (without a permanent employment contract) is related to worse matching for all parents; except in one case – mothers in couples – the negative estimate is not significant.

Age-related effects are few and mixed. Somewhat unexpectedly, the youngest single parents (aged 25–34) are better matched on job security as compared to older single parents. More in line with expectations, older mothers in couples are better matched on work–family balance. Matching is not extensively related to weekly work hours, especially not to part-time work with short hours. Single parents with longer part-time work may be somewhat better matched on job security, although the estimate just fails to reach statistical significance, possibly suggesting a trade-off in favour of security over full-time work. Conversely, fathers in long part-time work are worse matched on work–family balance. Unexpectedly, ethnicity is overall of little relevance to matching, with one exception: fathers in couples who perceive themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority are worse matched on job security. Lastly, being matched on education appears generally unrelated to matching on job qualities, suggesting no apparent trade-offs between different types of matching. In addition, only one case is in line with the expectation of worse matching with overeducation: overeducated single parents are significantly worse matched on job security.

Table 13.4 shows how country-level characteristics are associated with matching. The upper panel shows estimates when one country factor is added to each model, which also includes the full set of

Table 13.3: Linear probability models for positive matching on job security and work–family balance, individual-level predictors, linear probability regressions, 17 countries, reference categories within parenthesis

		Job security			Work–family balance (match with flexible work hours)		
Family type (father in couple)	Mother in couple	–6.9**			–5.4**		
	Single parent	–8.8***			–2.0		
N (all parents combined)		8,119			8,088		
		Father in couple	**Mother in couple**	**Single parent**	**Father in couple**	**Mother in couple**	**Single parent**
Gender, woman				–6.1			–2.7
Age	18–24	6.2	6.3	23.5*	5.0	–5.5	–11.8
	(25–34)						
	35–44	–3.0	–2.1	–6.1	–0.3	5.6**	5.9
	45–59	–2.1	–0.9	–6.9	–2.8	6.7**	7.3
Education (primary/lower secondary)	Upper secondary	–3.2	–2.4	3.2	8.5*	8.1	4.5
	Tertiary	5.1	4.3	13.6 *	20.9***	6.7	12.2*
EGP class (unskilled)	Skilled	7.7*	0.7	2.7	2.5	–3.0	–9.4
	Routine nonmanual	4.6	8.0*	4.9	9.2**	4.9	6.8
	Service II	6.6*	10.8*	5.1	25.6***	12.8**	15.6**
	Service I	8.8*	11.7*	6.5	36.3***	35.1***	33.3***
Weekly work hours (full time >30 hrs/week)	Long part time 20–29 hrs/week	–6.1	4.3	9.2	–16.9**	–1.4	–9.4
	Short part time (0–19 hrs/week)	5.6	6.8	7.5	–2.8	1.7	–9.9
Employment contract (unlimited contract)	No/limited contract	–18.2***	–24.2***	–27.2***	–6.4*	–3.4	–9.1*
Ethnic minority (not minority)		–7.9	–4.2	9.5	–6.6	–1.0	2.0
Education match (matched)	Undereducated	4.1	2.1	–1.7	0.1	2.5	3.3
	Overeducated	–2.7	–2.0	–9.2*	–2.9	–2.9	–1.3
N		3,911	3,312	896	3,811	3,381	896

Notes: *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001. Each model also controls for industrial sector (not shown, available upon request).

Source: ESS2 and ESS5, own calculations

individual characteristics. First, unemployment is clearly negatively associated with matching for all parents, with only coupled fathers' matching on job security exempted. In relation to the financial crisis, matching in the early postcrisis year of 2010 is not generally worse, with one exception: for mothers in couples, matching on work–family balance decreased from 2004 to 2010. Effects of institutional variables are more mixed. First, an overview tells us that all institutions, except EPL, are positively associated with matching. Institutions matter more consistently for (all) parents' matching on job security, but more selectively for matching on work–family balance. For single parents, only family policies are significantly beneficial to matching on work–family balance. And only for single parents are the otherwise positive effects of unemployment-benefit duration negatively related to their matching on this dimension, although the effect is small.

Second, consistently conducive to matching in both dimensions (and with rather substantial effects) are the presence of strong unions, higher spending on ALMPs and family policies aiming to promote more equal sharing of paid and unpaid work. Greater bargaining power of employed parents in the labour market translates into better matching for nearly all. The exception is single parents' matching on work–family balance. Somewhat surprisingly, extensive dual-earner/dual-carer family policies are not significantly beneficial to coupled mothers' matching on work–family balance. It is plausible that this finding is related to (country-specific) selection effects, where coupled mothers more often than single parents have the option to opt out of jobs with too-poor qualities – an option not necessarily available for single parents.

Third, unemployment benefits matter less consistently. While longer benefit duration is beneficial to matching on job security for all parents (especially single parents), it is unrelated to coupled parents' matching on work–family balance. In relation to the debate on unintended consequences of long duration of unemployment benefits, the overall absence of negative effects does suggest few generally adverse effects of these benefits on matching. To the contrary, stricter EPL appears to more generally decrease the probability of matching of coupled parents, while the negative effects on single parents' matching are not significant.

In the lower panel of Table 13.4, three country-level characteristics are included in each model. The effects of institutional indicators are shown in the table when the models also include measures of unemployment and postcrisis year dummy (estimates not shown). Results are mixed but several positive effects of institutions do indeed

Table 13.4: Linear probability models for positive matching on job security and work–family balance, country-level predictors (*z*-scores), 17 countries

	Match job security			Match work–family balance		
	Parental couples		*Single parents*	*Parental couples*		*Single parents*
	Fathers	*Mothers*		*Fathers*	*Mothers*	
1 macro variable in each model						
Structural variables						
Unemployment rate	–5.4	–8.7*	–10.1*	–6.5**	–5.7**	–4.3*
Postcrisis year (ESS5)	3.7	–1.5	–1.2	–1.4	–4.1**	1.3
Institutional variables						
Unemployment-benefit duration	4.7^	4.2^	6.5*	1.6	1.7	–1.6^
EPL, regular contracts	–5.9*	–6.8**	–2.4	–4.7	–3.8^	–2.1
Union density	6.7*	7.5*	6.0*	6.1*	6.6**	2.8
Active labour market programme effort	7.1*	5.8*	7.2*	4.8*	2.6^	1.8
Family policy, dual-earner/dual-carer	6.3*	5.8*	4.5*	4.9*	3.4	4.3*
1 institutional macro variable (shown), controlling for postcrisis year and unemployment in each model (not shown)						
Unemployment-benefit duration	4.2^	3.1	5.8*	0.9	1.1	–2.0*
EPL, regular contracts	–5.0*	–5.9**	–1.2	–3.5	–3.4	–1.4
Union density	5.8*	5.3*	4.5	4.6*	5.0*	2.3
Active labour market programme effort	5.9^	1.9	4.0	2.1	–0.4	0.1
Family policy, dual-earner/dual-carer	5.2*	3.4	2.2	3.6	2.3	3.3*
N individuals	3,911	3,312	896	3,811	3,381	896

Notes: ^p<0.10, *p<0.05, **p<0.01. Each model includes full set of individual-level variables (see Table 13.3).

Source: ESS2 and ESS5, own calculations

remain, including when unemployment and time period are controlled for – especially in relation to matching on job security. In this case, institutions seem especially beneficial to the matching of fathers in couples, who benefit in every case (except in relation to EPL). While family policies are still beneficial to single parents' matching on work–family balance, and their matching on job security is positively associated to the length of unemployment benefits, the positive effects of unions pertain only to coupled parents' matching. The effects of ALMP are only sustained in one model: fathers' matching on job security. The overall absence of institutional effects on matching on work–family balance is perhaps more surprising. Except for positive effects of strong unions, it is only the effect of more extensive dual-earner/dual-carer family policies on single parents' matching that sustains its significant positive association. In sum, certain institutional dimensions do buffer against the negative effects of unemployment on matching, especially job security matching, while the negative effects of stricter EPL prevail.

Conclusion

For single parents as sole providers, it is well known that employment is crucial for economic and social wellbeing. This chapter extends the traditional focus beyond job quantity to an assessment of job quality, and more precisely how well parents' preferences for key job qualities are matched in their current jobs. Contrasting single parents with coupled parents across Europe, the aims of this chapter were twofold: first, to describe job preferences, corresponding job qualities and their matching on two central job quality dimensions (job security and work–family balance); and second, through multivariate analyses, to assess key institutions' potential to facilitate matching through times marked by high unemployment. From a power-resource perspective, institutions that shift the power balance more towards the employee are expected to have larger potential to facilitate matching: both directly in the matching process, and indirectly by pressuring employers to provide more quality jobs in competition for employees. The power-resource perspective also allows addressing the triple bind that single parents disproportionally face – limited resources, employment and policies – as these factors are taken into account in the multivariate models.

Three main results are reported. First, valuations of job security and work–family balance are shared in similar ways by nearly all parents across Europe, with only a few exceptions. In contrast, job

qualities vary extensively across countries. In this way, matching on job qualities is largely a story about the availability of quality jobs, and how institutions in important ways may influence matching indirectly by affecting the availability of quality jobs.

Second, several individual factors are important for matching. While coupled fathers generally experience better matching, single parents are in fact better matched on work–family balance as compared to mothers in couples. This points to how the additional bargaining resources that coupled mothers potentially access through their partner do not necessarily translate into better matching. This result may also reflect the larger proportions of (employed) single parents in the Nordic countries, where quality jobs are relatively more frequent.

Third, several institutions were conducive to job-quality matching. Overall, matching is more extensive in countries with stronger unions, longer duration of unemployment benefits and more extensive ALMP and parental-leave benefit, whereas matching proved to be negatively associated with stricter EPL, which is especially prevalent in Southern Europe. However, institutions matter differently by parental status. Nearly all institutional dimensions in the first step of analysis were conducive to coupled parents' matching, as well as single parents' matching on job security. Single parents' matching on work–family balance was only supported by family policies promoting equal sharing of paid and unpaid work. However, when the consistent negative impact on matching of countries' unemployment rates was accounted for, institutions mattered more selectively. Most commonly, institutions were generally beneficial to coupled fathers' matching on job security, while stronger unions were favourable to all coupled parents' matching. For single parents, only highly specific institutional effects were retained: longer unemployment-benefit duration was beneficial to matching on job security, whereas dual-earner/dual-carer family policies increased matching on work–family balance.

Taken together, these results suggest that single parents – who generally have less bargaining power, and for this reason are in greater need of supportive institutional structures conducive to quality employment – are in fact at an institutional disadvantage as compared to parental couples, especially coupled fathers. Although some of the beneficial effects of institutions on matching did not hold up against the negative impact of unemployment, it seems reasonable to acknowledge how institutions may still convey important positive effects on matching in their capacity to also lower unemployment.

These findings can also fruitfully be related to the social-investment perspective on policy making, which in its narrower understanding emphasises the importance of more specific policy measures to address the consequences of 'new social risks' such as single parenthood, as compared to previously stressed 'old social risks' such as sickness and unemployment. The results here indicate that policies relating to both the old risks (unemployment benefits) and the new risks (family policies) are of relevance to single parents' matching on job qualities.

The analyses in this chapter are not without limitations. First, employed parents – especially employed single parents – form a selective group in systematic ways across countries. To the extent that the limited availability of quality jobs undermines single parents' participation in the labour market, the notable country differences are, in effect, underestimated. In this way, the beneficial effects of institutions on single parents' matching may also be somewhat underestimated, although the cross-national pattern would arguably not be altered much. There are also statistical limitations related to the small number of countries compared, limiting the simultaneous evaluation of institutional dimensions. Also, statistical power is decidedly lower for evaluation of macro-level effects based on the single-parent subsample, which yet again implies underestimation of institutions' significance for single parents' matching. It can also be argued that institutions need to be measured in different ways for higher relevance to each parental group. This would certainly be a fruitful step for future research.

To increase not only employment but also – among all parents – universally preferred quality employment, the findings presented here indicate how several policies and regulations play important (although selective) roles, wherein single parents tend to be at a disadvantage. Institutions seem to fall short of providing quality employment for those in most need of support. Important policy implications to counteract such inequalities in the labour market is to not only improve the matching process itself but also aim for strong policies and regulations that substantively increase the number of quality jobs available for matching, which appears to substantially determine successful matching on job qualities for all parents. In this view, policies aiming only to stimulate employment as a strategy to improve wellbeing may fail if the resulting employment is of (too) poor quality.

Notes

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[2] Presented results only show estimates related to EPL of regular employment, which in some countries differ greatly from legislation on temporary work. Generally, legislation on temporary work mattered less for matching, but was notably also found conducive to matching in several models.

[3] Overall, institutional measures do not change in fundamental ways in this limited time. Unemployment-benefit duration and EPL are quite stable over time. Union density is decreasing in all countries except Greece and Portugal. ALMP and family policies in the 'more ambitious' countries tend to be either stagnant or decreasing, although family policies encouraging dual-earner/dual-carer families increased greatly in Germany, and substantially also in Portugal. Slighter increases are seen in the two Anglo-Saxon countries, albeit starting from low levels.

[4] For more information on the ESS data, see www.europeansocialsurvey.org.

[5] Eleven categories include: agriculture, forest, mining, construction; manufacturing; transportation, post and telecommunication; wholesale and retail trade; finance, insurance, real estate business, R&D, programming, computers; business and repair, personal services (hotels), entertainment; medical services, including hospitals; educational services; social (childcare) and other professional services; public administration; public utilities (including sewage). Estimates available upon request.

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