



## CAPABLE – Enhancing Capabilities? Rethinking Work-life Policies and their Impact from a New Perspective

### CAPABLE newsletter February 2021

#### Project update

The CAPABLE project has had a quiet few months. Like many of you, we continue to make the best of the current situation, in which we all work primarily from home. As a team, we miss the opportunity to meet up face-to-face. Luckily, our weekly lunches online and other meetings and informal get-togethers still allow us to remain in touch. While working from home, the past six months have been focused on developing the CAPABLE survey, continuing our fieldwork, writing various papers, and co-organizing an event on part-time work (see below).

The CAPABLE survey, that focuses on understanding the role of local relationships, locality, and local policies and services in men and women's capabilities for work-life balance, was intended to go into the field this

January. However, with lockdown measures still in place in all the countries to be included in the survey (the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain and the UK), we are in a holding pattern. We hope to field the survey no later than this coming June. While fielding is delayed, the development of the survey has been an interesting and exciting project, co-led by our new postdoc Karen van Hedel. Karen and I worked together with Dr. Katharina Meitinger, an Assistant Professor involved in CAPABLE, with an expertise in cross-national survey design and testing. We have also worked closely with Professor Barbara Hobson and Dr. Erik Jansen to develop new measures of capabilities. We look forward to working with these data in the coming months and years on the project!

In addition to the survey, fieldwork has continued but in an adapted format. We've hired research assistants in all countries and are now finalizing the document analysis and policy interviews in two cities in each country. Our interns this fall, Oksana Dorofeeva and María Jesús Chaparro have played an indispensable role for the document analysis, which we greatly appreciate! We are also finalizing papers with two previous interns on the project, Bryn



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Hummel and Sylvia Filippi, around childlessness and the accessibility of childcare allowances. We're happy to see such a continuation of learning and connections within the project. These enduring connections have taken on even greater importance given the ongoing nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, as has the topic of work-life balance. Within the CAPABLE project, we continue to adapt as best we can, and look forward to the coming months as we continue to our work on the project. In the meanwhile, if you're interested in hearing more about the project, check out this YouTube video of Mara Yerkes being interviewed for Studium Generale Utrecht University and Tivoli Vredenburg's *Science Sessions*, bringing science to the public during the pandemic: <https://youtu.be/Ls1Vj0Sw0cw>. We hope to see more of you face-to-face soon!

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## New members CAPABLE team

### Karen van Hedel, postdoc researcher



As a postdoctoral researcher in the CAPABLE project I focus on cross-national analyses of work-life balance and (self-reported) health and well-being using cross-

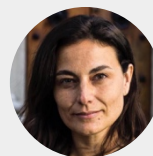
sectional and longitudinal survey data. I obtained my PhD in Public Health from the Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have previously been affiliated with the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research in Germany as a Research Scientist studying work-family factors and health. My research interests include (explaining) socioeconomic inequalities in health, life course approaches to health and health disparities, work-family trajectories, and cross-national differences in health.

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## Research assistants – some familiar and some new faces

The COVID-19 pandemic is preventing field work, and even more so going abroad. Therefore, in Slovenia, Spain and the UK, research assistants have been appointed to help the PhD candidates locally collect research data. Two of them, María Jesús Chaparro and Laura Mrčela, have previously done internships within the CAPABLE project. Ana Jagodic also assisted in preparing the questionnaire for Slovenia earlier in the project. New to the project are Lydia Hiraide and John Wooldridge.

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María Jesús  
Chaparro (Spain)



Laura Mrčela  
(Slovenia)

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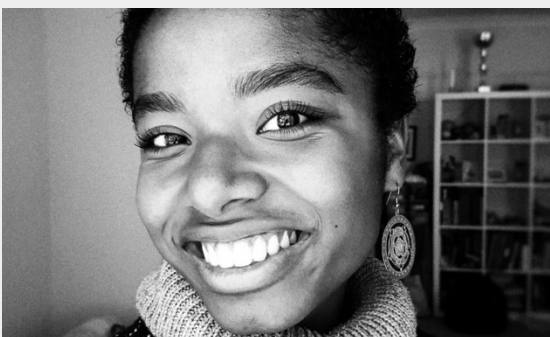
## Ana Jagodic (Slovenia)



I'm a researcher and teaching assistant at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences. I'm a PhD candidate in Sociology, researching multigenerational care work of the middle generation in Slovenian context. I'm involved in the CAPABLE project as a research assistant in collecting data for the Ljubljana and Maribor cases.

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## Lydia Hiraide (London, UK)



I'm currently a PhD student at Goldsmiths, University of London where my thesis focuses on intersectionality in European environmental activism. I hold a BA (Hons) in Politics and International Relations from SOAS, University of London and an MA in Postcolonial Studies from the University of Kent. My research interests include critical theory, social inequalities, the politics of

identity, feminist political ecology, and social movements.

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## John Wooldridge (Leeds, UK)



I'm a PhD student at the University of Leeds undertaking a comparative case study project about drug treatment in prison. Prior to this, I completed a MSc Social Policy (Research) at the London School of Economics. I'm interested in policy areas around poverty, inequality and social disadvantage. Alongside working as a research assistant on the CAPABLE project and collecting data around the Leeds case, I work part-time as a research consultant.

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## Past internships

The CAPABLE project greatly benefits from the work of research interns. Two of them give an insight in what they did during their internships:



## Oksana Dorofeeva

During my internship I conducted a document analysis of the local policies in Leeds in London within the UK case study within the project. In the situation where inequalities in work and life outside work persist in Europe despite recent policy advancements, local policies are of interest to researchers because they can be a valuable resource for tackling these inequalities. However, it is not a given, and many factors, including features of policy design and structural factors like gender affect the real opportunities that local policies can provide.

The analysis provided a snapshot of the relevant policies in Leeds and London. Because of the complex, two-tier governance of London it was decided to investigate two local authorities (boroughs) to observe possibilities of within-city variation that can lead to inequalities. The report developed during my internship will assist with future fieldwork in Leeds and London as a source of information on the policies and the saliency of different policy design aspects (availability, accessibility, affordability, flexibility, and quality). In addition, we will put it on the website to be a potential resource for UK policy makers or other academics.

also improve my ability to analyze public policies. The project allowed me to do field work, to further develop my methodological techniques, and to delve deeper into the theoretical approach that the CAPABLE project adopts. The capabilities approach has given me a better understanding of the complex reality of combining work and family life. Finally, CAPABLE offered me the opportunity to share experiences with staff and students, who have welcomed me and from whom I have learned a great deal. Like Oksana, I have also helped prepare a report on the Spanish case, which will soon be available on the website.

## International stakeholder event 'Part-time Work: What's at Stake?'

On 12 February a stakeholder meeting about part-time work took place organized by Mara Yerkes, Janna Besamusca, the Gender and Diversity Hub, and the CAPABLE project: 'Part-time Work: What's at Stake?' With more than 40 participants from all over Europe it was a success!

The aim of the event was to bring together key national and international researchers and stakeholders with an interest in part-time work, inequality, and/or the wellbeing of part-time workers, to discuss current pressing issues from academic and societal perspectives, as well as identify avenues for future research and stakeholder engagement in the research process.

The event took place fully online, with an interactive program allowing for active participation from all attendees. To kick-off the



## María Jesús Chaparro

My time in the CAPABLE project, first as an intern and now as a research assistant, has been a tremendously nourishing experience. I have been able to learn more about the social reality of Barcelona and Pamplona, and



event, key perspectives from European stakeholders tackling urgent issues in part-time work were offered, including speakers from the European Commission, the European Trade Union Confederation, the non-profit sector and academia. Following, attendees participated in one of five interactive breakout sessions, mapping the experiences, representations and consequences of part-time employment for different groups of workers. These included female part-time workers, workers combining part-time work with care responsibilities, shift workers, precarious workers, and part-time workers aspiring to or in leadership positions. Each breakout session developed an outline of key issues facing their group of workers and steps needed to address the issues in practice and/or gaps in our scientific knowledge. In the coming weeks, these outlines will be integrated into a policy brief, to be disseminated broadly.

For the program and video registration see the website of the CAPABLE project: <https://worklifecapabilities.com/news>.



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## Writing retreat CAPABLE team

Last December, the CAPABLE team held a writing retreat. The initial plan was to actually retreat to a comfortable accommodation in the woods to focus on writing and spend some social time together. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 we had to stay at home and meet online. Nevertheless, we had two useful and inspiring days across two weeks. Led by Mara Yerkes, we did some writing exercises, reflected on the writing process and reviewed each other's work. Below, two team members share their experiences. To conclude the writing retreat as well as the year, all fourteen team members gathered online for Christmas drinks.



“When working from home, especially during an unprecedented health crisis, you can become easily distracted or have a difficult time respecting your self-imposed blocks of working time. CAPABLE's writing retreat helped me remember the value of dedicating *exclusively* to a task for short periods of time. If you set a small goal for yourself and you really dedicate to it (turning off your email, not looking at your cell phone), you will be impressed how much faster you get to explain that idea, the one that could not find a way out of your head!”

– Carla Brega



“Early December we had a writing retreat with the CAPABLE team, digitally this time due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As a recent addition to the team, the writing retreat was a great way for me to get to know everyone better and to really see the interdisciplinarity of our team, as well as all the amazing work that has been done already.”

– Karen van Hedel