

Reconciling work and life

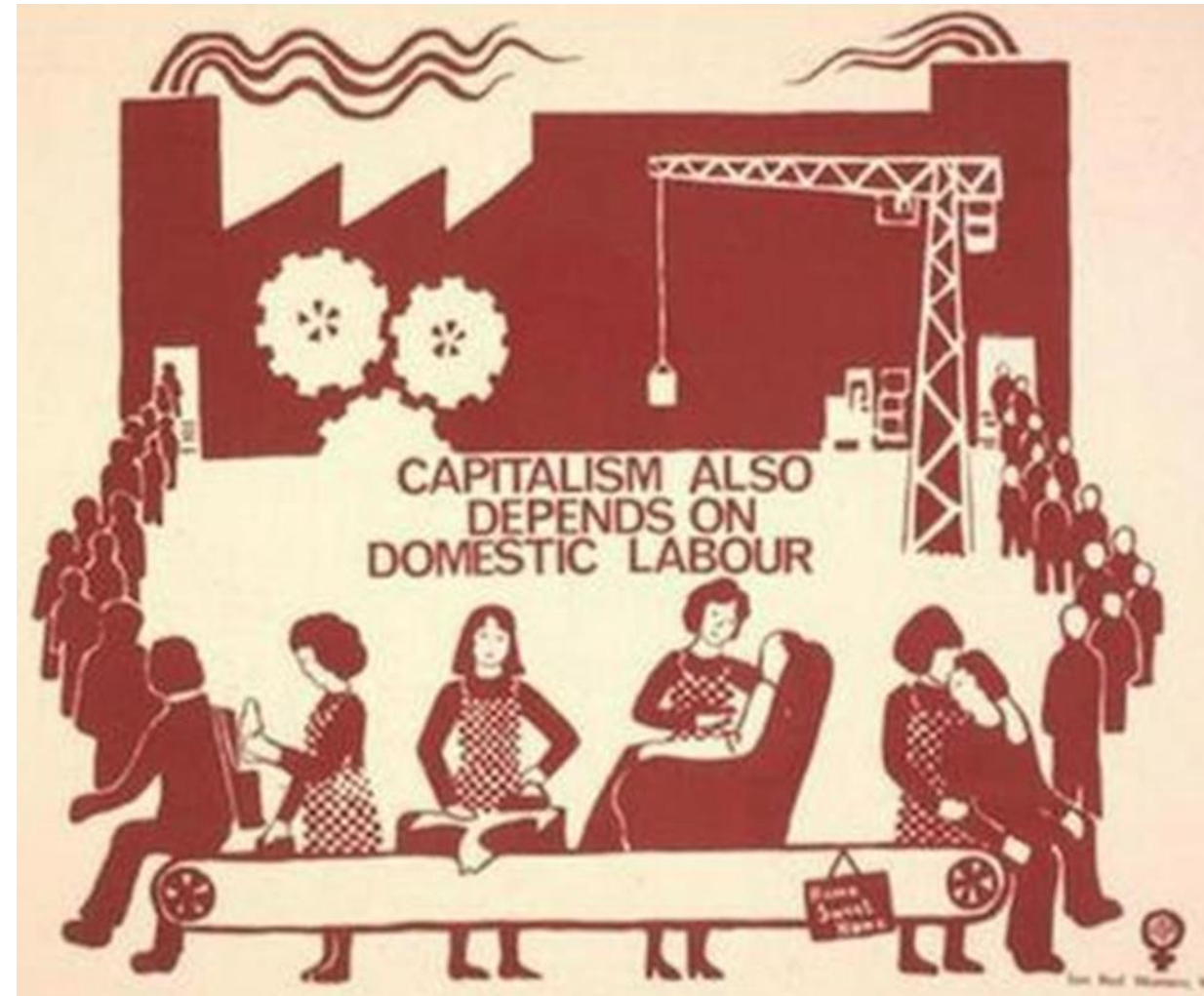
Social partners' role in
the construction and
transformation of
the gendered welfare state

Veronika Lemeire veronika.lemeire@uhasselt.be
Patrizia Zanoni patrizia.zanoni@uhasselt.be

ILERA EUROPEAN CONGRESS 2022,
Barcelona, Session Gender equality – I ,
10 September 2022

R4D
Research for Digitalisation,
Diversity and Democracy

►► **UHASSELT**



Overview

1. Theoretical framework:

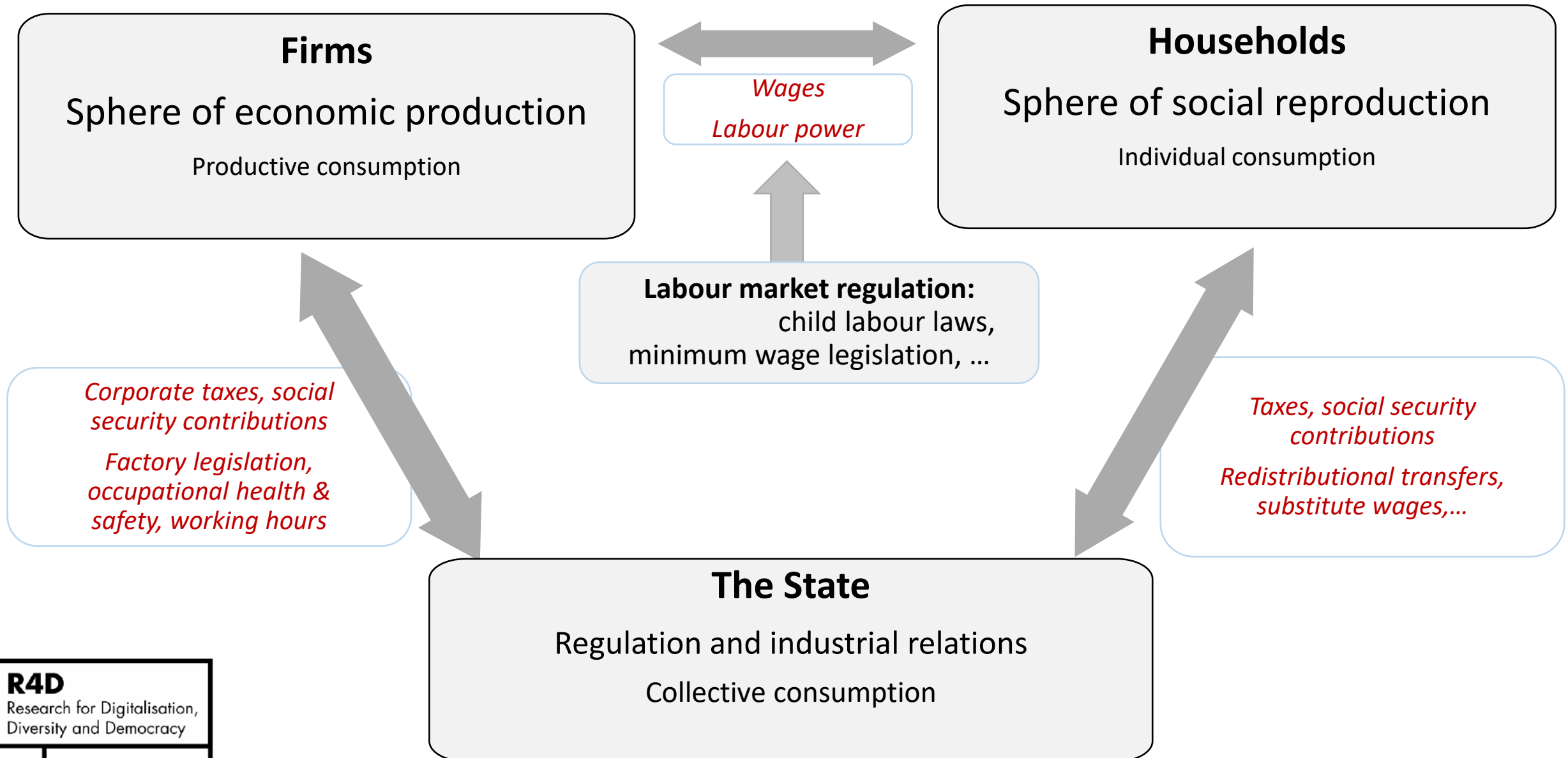
- Interrelation social reproduction, economic production and the State
- The role of social partners and social dialogue in the regulation of social reproduction

2. Case study of Belgian social dialogue

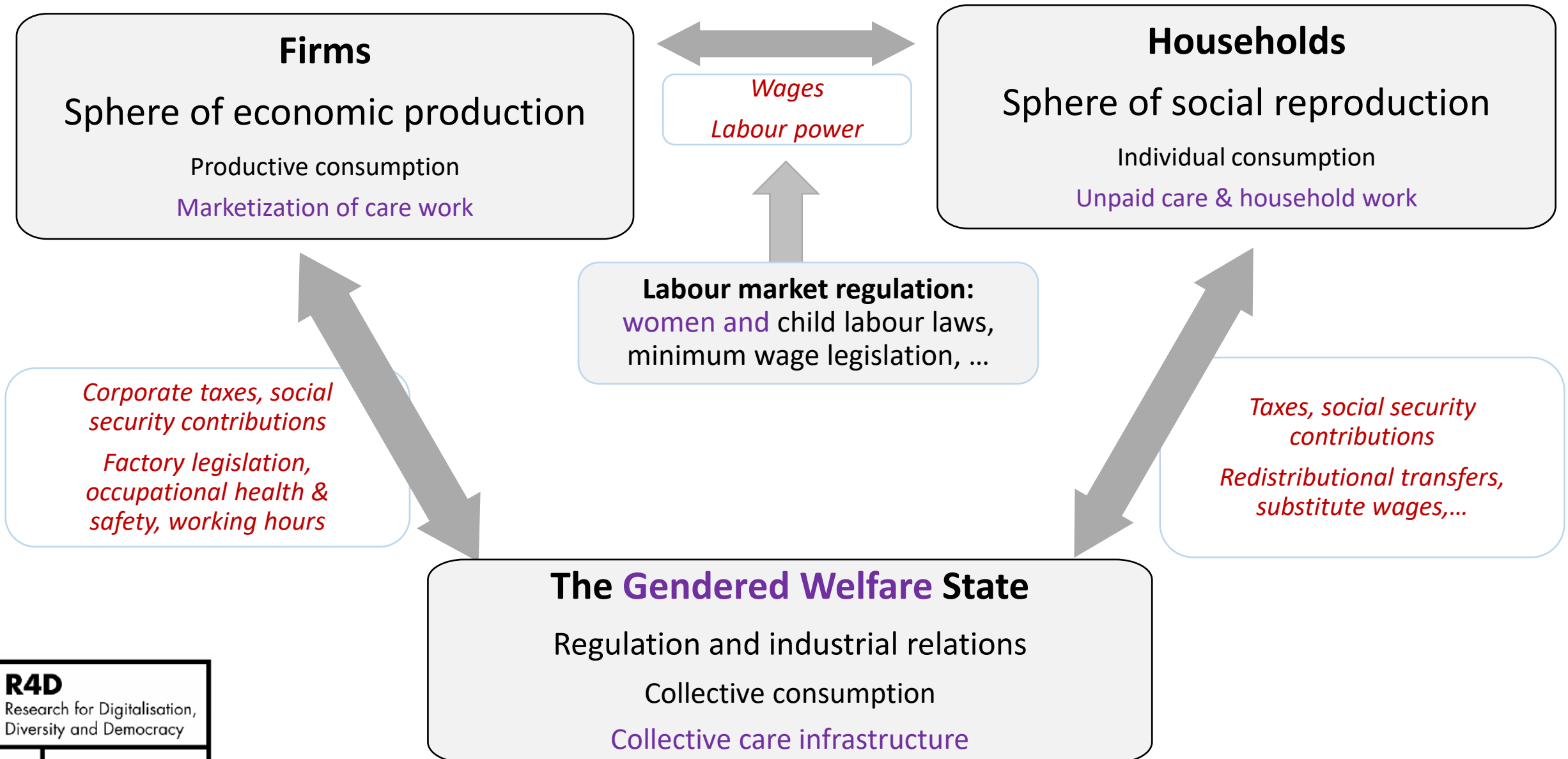
- National Labour Council – opinions from 1953 to date
- Data and methodology
- Preliminary Results

3. Discussion

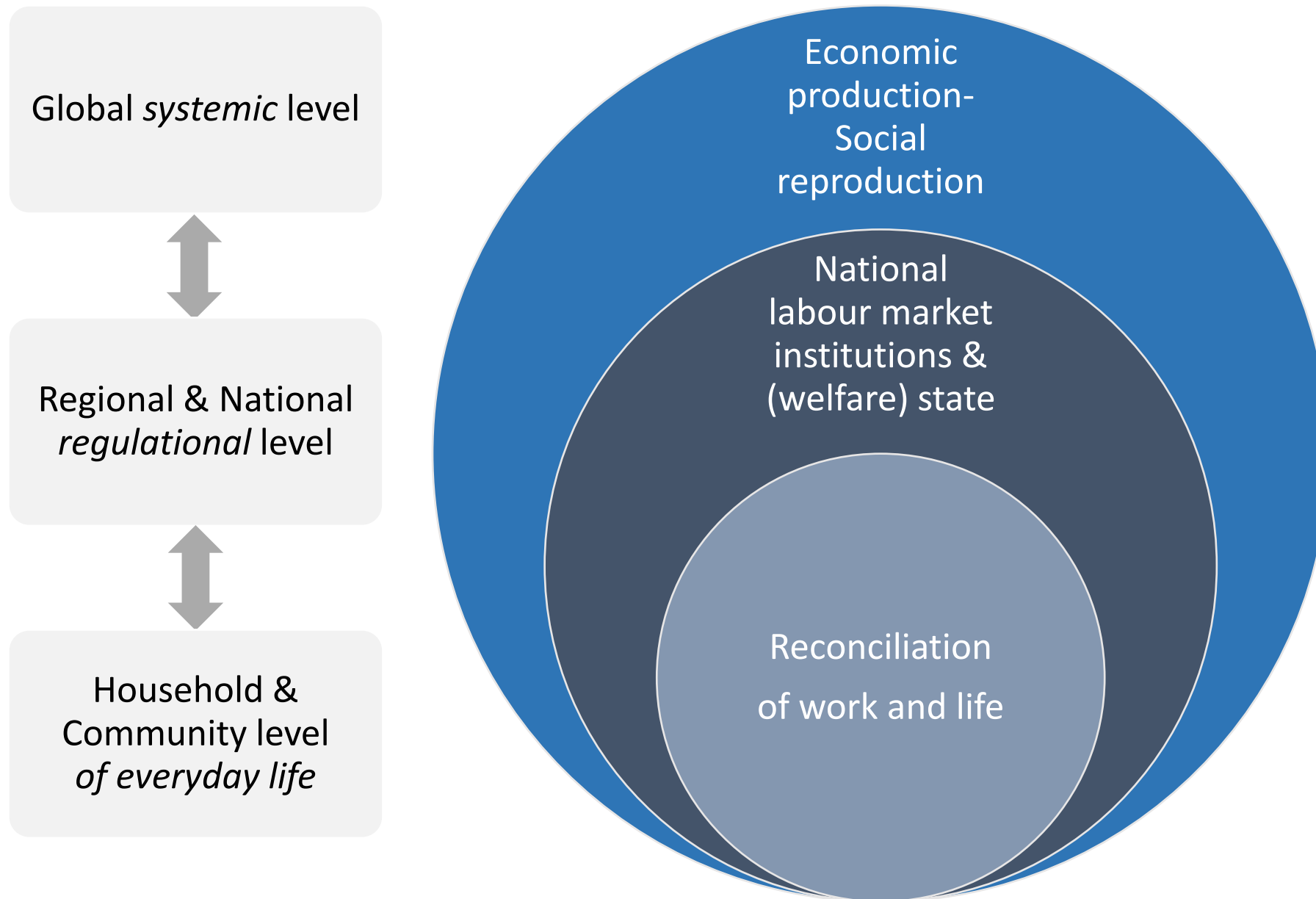
Institutional Framework of Capitalist Reproduction



Gendered Institutional Framework of Capitalist Reproduction



Work-life reconciliation, welfare state & social reproduction



Work-life reconciliation, welfare state & social reproduction



Research gap:

Role of **social partners & social dialogue institutions** in the gendered welfare state

The negotiation of **social reproduction needs** by social partners

➔ Case study of Belgian social dialogue institutions at national, intersectoral level

Time frame: 1953-present

Research gap:

Role of **social partners & social dialogue institutions** in the gendered welfare state

The negotiation of **social reproduction needs** by social partners

➔ Case study of Belgian social dialogue institutions at national, intersectoral level

Time frame: 1953-present

Research questions:

- *How have social partners reconciled the tensions between production and reproduction needs in social dialogue institutions?*
- *What is the impact on work & life reconciliation of (women) workers?*

Federal government

Minister of Work and Employment

Minister of Social Affairs

Parliament

Employers' associations

FEB-VBO,
agriculture, SME,
social profit, self-
employed

National social dialogue institutions

National Labour Council

Central Economic Council

Social security boards

C.Women's Labour-E.O.

(private sector)

Trade unions

FGTB-ABVV
CSC-ACV
CGSLB-ACLVB

National Labour Council



Bipartite composition:

- **Employers' representatives:**
federation of enterprises, agriculture, SME, social profit, self-employed entrepreneurs
- **Workers' representatives:**
FGTB-ABVV, CSC-ACV, CGSLB-ACLVB

Private sector

On social questions

(labour law, social security, social dialogue,...)

- **Economic and labour market**
questions: joint opinions with Central Economic Council (CRB-CCE)

Since 1953: 2.311 opinions

- At the request of a Minister or Parliament
- On own initiative
- *83,4% unanimous – 16,6% divided*
(NAR 2021)

Since 1970: 160 intersectoral collective agreements (Law of 1968)

Data & methodology

- Selection of opinions and reports of National Labour Council, period 1953 - 2022
- **Thematic and textual analysis:**
 - Women's work (pregnancy, motherhood,...), gender equality (equal pay, equal treatment, parenthood), work-life, family, care & domestic work
 - Gender equality in social security rights
- **Contextual analysis:**
 - Welfare state investment, social security budgets
 - Labour force demands, political and macro-economic context (national + EU)

First selection: 550 documents
Detailed analysis: +-208
Contextual analysis: +-342

- ➔ Gendered motivations and considerations of actors
 - Unanimous or
 - Divided arguments
- ➔ Informed by
 - Social reproduction needs,
 - Labour force demands,
 - Macro-economic factors?

Women's labour force (1960s-mid1970s)

- Retention of **women** - integration of **mothers** in economic production
 - No promotion but acceptance of **part-time work** as convenient for mothers
- Women's labour rights (law 1968): equal pay, maternity protection & leave
- Focus on **biological reproductive** labour (pro-creation):
 - Pregnancy protection, pre- and postpartum leave for working mothers
 - Anti-discrimination linked to 'physical condition'
 - Unpaid leave for urgent family matters (10 days)
 - Refusal of paid breastfeeding leave (European Social Charter & ILO)
 - Refusal of parental leave for fathers ('extension of maternity leave')
 - Refusal of adoption leave

Changing discourse on (the value of) social reproduction work (1970s-1980s)

- Separate spheres of the economy & family: employers' responsibility limited to sphere of (*for profit*) production (until 1970s)
- Maintain equality between workers, no discrimination based on family situation (1970s-)
- Social security budget deficits and international competition based on labour costs ➡ negotiate new entitlements only during biannual negotiations (1980s-)

Gradual and partial recognition of social reproduction

Gradual harmonisation of different statutes and (partial) extension of labour regulation and social security entitlements of

- Household workers
- Domestic workers
- Childminders
- Part-time workers
- ...

Contextual factors:

- Labour force demands & (active) employment policy: women and other groups workers (migrant, disabled, youth)
- Parliamentary proposals, ILO Conventions, ESR & EU policies

Collectivisation of social reproductive labour: childcare infrastructure (1960s-1990s)

- **1960s: Children's playground supervisors:** extra income for widows with survivor's pension
 - 1990s: extra income for unemployed workers
- **1970s: Childcare infrastructure fund** (social security family allowances)
 - 1990s: additional fund, but no structural funding & administrative difficulties
- **1970s: Childminders:** only expenses, no employment statute (derived rights through marriage)
 - 1990s-2010s: partial social security coverage & employment statute

Individual solutions to workers' social reproduction needs (1975-)

Parental leave, adoption leave, family leave,... (parliamentary initiatives)

Breastfeeding leave (ILO & European Social Charter)

Debates whether leaves are :

- Paid: for particular family events (birth, marriage,...)
- Unpaid: career breaks (until 1985), urgent family matters (1975)
- With social security allocation: career breaks (1985), parental and paternity leave, breastfeeding leave
- Assimilation as working time for social security entitlements (pension, annual holiday)

Part-time work:

- 1960s: extra income for family well-being
- 1980s: solution to unemployment, working-time reorganisation

Discussion

Gradual extension of domain of social dialogue to include non-profit work, homework and care work

Recognition of social reproduction:

- **Collective** : from semi-voluntary or atypical employment statutes to more standard employment contracts

But: low paid, often part-time, and insufficient quantity

- **Individual workers' reproductive needs (work-life):**

- Paid leaves for family events: birth, marriage, death,...
- Leaves with allocation for informal care work: parental leave, adoption,...
- Unpaid: part-time work, housewives
- In poverty: single parents

Social reproduction work remains gender segregated, mostly unpaid, underpaid or underfinanced (*gender employment and gender pay gap*)