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**Building the Dual Earner/Dual Carer Society:  
Policy Developments in Europe\***

by

**Janet C. Gornick**  
Associate Professor  
Department of Political Science  
Baruch College and  
The Graduate Center  
City University of New York  
Janet\_Gornick@baruch.cuny.edu

**Marcia K. Meyers**  
Associate Professor  
School of Social Work  
University of Washington,  
Seattle  
mkm36@u.washington.edu

**Abstract**

A new model of work and family life is emerging out of contemporary debates on social citizenship and the characteristics of the “woman-friendly” welfare state. The *dual-earner/dual-carer* model refers to a social and economic arrangement in which men and women engage symmetrically in both paid work in the labor market and in unpaid work in the home. Parents’ ability to balance family and market responsibilities, and to allocate employment and childcare-giving equally between mothers and fathers, could be facilitated by a package of state policies. Three areas of supportive policy – all in various states of development across Europe – include: (1) *family leave schemes* that provide job protections and wage replacement for parents of young children; (2) *affordable, high quality early childhood education and care*, to a limited extent for very young children and to a much larger extent for children aged three to school-age; and (3) *labor market regulations* aimed at shortening the standard work week and strengthening remuneration for reduced-hour employment. In this paper, we review European policy provisions, and then turn our attention to the United States case. We suggest that embracing the vision of the *dual-earner/dual-carer* society may help to draw diverse but unified support for family policy development in the United States.

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## I. Introduction

Since the 1980s, many feminist social theorists – mostly in Europe – have engaged in a critical reexamination of the concept of social citizenship. A crucial shortcoming in twentieth-century citizenship theory, beginning with the influential work of T. H. Marshall, has been the failure to recognize the consequences of women’s disproportionate assumption of unpaid care work. One of the central feminist insights is that women’s socially-constructed responsibilities in the private sphere bar their full participation as citizens in the public sphere.

A crucial schism emerged out of this feminist scholarship on citizenship. Some feminists argued that women’s attainment of equality or “sameness” vis-à-vis men – especially in the labor market – is a prerequisite to their attainment of full citizenship status. Others called instead for new conceptions of citizenship that recognize and value women’s “difference,” rooted in their unique responsibilities for care work. The two suggest sharply different perspectives of what society might look like if women achieved full citizenship rights. Moreover, they suggest alternative contours for what Helga Hernes has labeled the “woman-friendly” welfare state. While the “sameness” or “employment” perspective focuses on state policies aimed at strengthening women’s attachment to the labor market, the “difference” or “care” perspective calls for social policies that recognize and reward women’s caregiving working in the home.

Meanwhile, families across the industrialized countries are grappling with balancing the realities of “employment” and “caring” responsibilities. Many are navigating the uncertain terrain between a society that expects mothers to bear primary responsibility for private caring in the home, and one that expects, and increasingly requires, all adults to be at work in the market. Everywhere, mothers have entered employment in record numbers during the last three decades. In most countries, although market work is consuming time that mothers traditionally devoted to caregiving work in the home, there has much been less change in *fathers’* allocation of time between the market and the home.

Across multiple family forms, parents struggle to craft private solutions to the problem of “Who will care for the children if everyone is working for pay?” Often, contemporary private solutions are exacerbating long-standing problems of gender inequality in employment and earnings. Furthermore, current arrangements are generating new problems of “time poverty” for parents, and exacerbating concerns about the cost and quality of non-parental care for young children.

Most of the welfare states of Europe host an assortment of state programs – from paid parental leave to high-quality child care to statutory limitations in the standard work week – that aid families’ efforts to combine market work with caregiving. Although these policies have not fully resolved the dilemmas of gender inequality and overburdening, several countries – especially the Nordic countries – provide encouraging models for policies that could help resolve the “employment” and “care” schism.

In this paper we engage in the contemporary debates about social citizenship and the characteristics of the “woman-friendly” welfare state by drawing on cross-national research to consider a particular model of work and family life: *the dual earner/dual carer society*. This model envisions social and economic arrangement in which men and women engage symmetrically in both paid work in the labor market and in unpaid work in the home. The lion’s share of child rearing for infants and toddlers is located in the home, with substantial reliance on non-parental forms of care for pre-school aged children. Parents’ ability to balance family and market responsibilities, and to allocate employment and child caregiving equally between mothers and fathers, would be facilitated by a package of state policies that grant generous paid parental leaves, provide high-quality early childhood education and care, and protect workers’ rights to spend time in caregiving without undue economic hardship or career sacrifices.

Envisioning the dual earner/dual carer society<sup>1</sup> is admittedly idealistic. Nevertheless, we situate our comparative analysis of family policy in this vision because it offers a number of theoretical and analytic advantages. Conceptually, the earner/carer model has the potential to resolve the tension between “sameness” and “difference” in feminist theoretical welfare state scholarship, in that it both promotes gender equality and values caregiving. Analytically, it provides a blueprint for comparing and evaluating family and other policies across modern welfare states, and for enlarging contemporary debates about family policy development.

In the next section, we provide an overview of the feminist “re-appropriation” of the concept of social citizenship, and contrast the alternative visions of those working from the “employment” and “care” perspectives. In a third section, we outline the central assumptions of the dual-earner/ dual-carer model, and consider its implications for gender equality, especially vis-à-vis the allocation of mothers’ and fathers’ time between market and care work. We close section three with a thought experiment that illustrates how families might choose to allocate their time in an earner/carer society. We then compare this allocation to families’ actual labor market hours in the late 1990s – using as an example the United States, where women’s labor market attachments are nearly average within the European context.

In the fourth section, we turn to the question of what states can do to foster opportunities, and create incentives, for the development of an earner/carer society. We concentrate on three areas of supportive policy that are in various states of development across Europe: (1) *family leave schemes* that provide job protections and wage replacement for parents caring for children below age three and/or combining employment with caregiving for older children; (2) *affordable, high quality early childhood education and care*, to a limited extent for very young children and to a much larger extent for children aged three to school-age; and (3) *labor market regulations* aimed at shortening the standard work week and strengthening remuneration for reduced-hour employment. We summarize the goals and mechanics of these policies and synthesize evidence as to their effects on maternal employment and fathers’ engagement in caregiving. In section five, we ask: how *are* the European welfare states faring against this blueprint? We summarize policy provisions in child care, in various forms of family leave, and in working-time regulations.

In the sixth and final section, we turn our attention to the United States case, and suggest that the development of policies that support earning and caring could also contribute to reversing the decline in civic engagement that Robert Putnam recently documented, and we consider the advantages of organizing around the earner/carer vision for building what Theda Skocpol has called a new “Movement for America’s Families” (2000:171).

## **II. Citizenship and social rights: reconsidering gender, work, and care**

Since the 1980s, and especially in the 1990s, feminist social theorists and welfare state scholars have located their analyses of gender equality, and the “woman friendly” welfare state, in the literature on citizenship and social rights (Bussemaker and van Kersbergen 1994; Crompton 1999; Ellingsaeter 1999; Fraser 1994; Lister 1990; Lister 1997; O’Connor 1996; Orloff 1993; Pateman 1988; Pfau-Effinger 1999; Sainsbury 1994, 1999).

Probably the most influential feminist citizen theorist has been British social policy scholar and activist Ruth Lister, who argues that feminists have much to gain from citizenship theory because a citizenship approach helps clarify the nature of achieved rights, the goals and consequences of social provisions, and fundamental problems of exclusion. Lister argues that feminists should reclaim citizenship as a concept because of its strategic value in bringing “political and intellectual excitement” to feminist social theory. As she notes, a feminist embrace of citizenship theory necessarily involves a critical rethinking of many of its

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<sup>1</sup>While we prefer the full label – the “dual earner/dual carer society” – as it signals an image of time allocation for a couple, rather than an individual, we will shorthand this as the “earner/carer” society (or model), from here on out.

central concepts: “the combination of its salience and contested nature underlines the importance of a sustained feminist analysis of the meaning, limitations and potential of the notion of citizenship... A feminist project to (re)appropriate citizenship does not, however, imply an uncritical acceptance of its value as a concept” (1997:3).

Feminist citizenship theorists take as their starting point Marshall’s influential 1950 work, *Citizenship and Social Class*. Marshall proposed three core elements of citizenship in the modern welfare state: civil, political, and social rights. Marshall understood the civil element of citizenship, achieved mainly in the eighteenth century, to include the rights necessary for individual freedom, including the rights to free speech, thought, and faith. His political element, largely secured in the nineteenth century, encompassed the right to vote and to seek political office in free elections.

By the social element of citizenship, Marshall referred to “the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society” (10-11). Marshall’s social citizenship, which took hold in the twentieth century with the development of the welfare state, refers primarily to individual rights to economic welfare and social security. Social rights are understood to be the fundamental concept underlying the development of the welfare state and, in turn, are granted and secured by law through the welfare state. As Pateman describes it, “the moral basis of the welfare state lies in the provision of resources for what T. H. Marshall called the ‘social rights’ of democratic citizenship” (1988:235).

When feminists revisited Marshall’s concept of citizenship, they found his exposition of social rights wanting with respect to women’s complex relationships to both family and market. Gillian Pascall noted that “[w]hile Marshall asserts the rights of citizenship, nowhere does he analyze the problematic relationship between citizenship and dependency in the family” (1986:9) Lister (1990) notes that women were nearly invisible insofar as Marshall failed to appreciate the implications of women’s lack of access to and integration in the labor market, and their disproportionate assumption of caregiving work in the home. “Whether trapped in the home full time or exhausted by the double shift, women’s caring and domestic responsibilities in the private sphere make it very difficult for many of them to participate as citizens in the public sphere” (457).

The principal weakness of Marshall’s conception of social rights is the failure to appreciate that women’s unequal burden of caregiving in the home constrains their participation in market work and, therefore, their access to employment-based welfare state provisions. Women’s social rights are constrained in that entitlements for income-securing benefits – from unemployment compensation to old-age pensions – are linked to past or current labor market attachment. American political theorist Carole Pateman (1988) notes that in the democratic welfare state, employment is “the key to citizenship” (239); theoretically and historically, the central criterion for citizenship has been ‘independence,’ and the elements encompassed under the heading of independence have been based on masculine attributes and abilities” (238). As long as women’s standing as “workers” is limited and precarious, so will be their standing as democratic citizens in modern welfare states. Julia O’Connor (1997) also reconsidered Marshall and concluded that women on the whole experience exclusion both from political rights – women are “grossly under-represented in the formal political system and at the decision-making level in public policy bodies” (1997:50) – and from social rights as well.

The link between women’s exclusion from citizenship theory – as well as from welfare state provisions – was brought into relief with Gosta Esping-Andersen’s 1990 cross-national analysis of social welfare provisions, *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Esping-Andersen’s central axis of welfare state variation – decommodification, the extent to which individuals are freed from dependence on the labor market – drew heavily on Marshall’s idea of social citizenship. An outpouring of feminist criticism followed the publication of *Three Worlds*, much of it a familiar echo to the criticism of Marshall’s work (see, e.g., Lewis and Ostner 1991; Orloff 1993; Sainsbury 1994). The central criticism was that as long as women, as a group, are

not fully commodified (i.e., engaged in market work), decommodification is hardly emancipatory for women. Hence, the core dimension along which cross-national welfare state achievements were compared in this influential work entirely missed key programs, such as child care, that shore up women's social rights.

### *Employment versus Care*

As feminists grappled with “engendering” mainstream citizenship and welfare state theory, a deep and consequential split emerged in these feminist literatures. One group of feminists, predominantly from the English-speaking countries, argues that because women's access to a full range of citizenship rights rests on labor market attachment, women's emancipation requires strengthening women's employment until gender equality in the labor market is achieved. From the “women's employment” or “universal breadwinner” perspective, the role of the “woman-friendly” state is to support women's employment opportunities and achievements. An opposing “care” or “caregiver parity” perspective rejects the mainstream equation of citizen with wage-earner, and calls instead for new concepts of citizenship that stress women's unique caregiving responsibilities. “Care” feminists call for reconstructing citizenship so that it recognizes, values, and rewards women's care work. From this perspective, the ideal role of the state is to grant women “the right to time for care” and to remunerate women for care work performed in the home – in essence, to render “women's difference costless” (Fraser 1994:611).

“Employment perspective” feminists vigorously critique the “care perspective,” arguing that while it may value and reward women's unpaid work in the short run, it works at cross purposes with reducing gender inequalities in the long run, as it cements gendered divisions of labor into place. They contend that as gender divisions in paid work disappear over time, gender divisions in care and other household work will adapt and erode. “Care perspective” feminists reply that failing to support women as caregivers neglects women's heterogeneity – it disregards many women's desires to engage deeply in care work – and denies women the options of remuneration for time spent at home.

### *The Realities of Employment and Care in Modern Welfare States*

The theoretical divide between the women's “employment” and “care” perspectives corresponds to practical dilemmas for families in all modern welfare states. Women's participation in employment has grown substantially during the last four decades, across the industrialized countries. Employment growth has been particularly sharp for women with very young children. Although several countries have shifted toward a “women's employment” or “universal breadwinner” model, the realization of gender equality in employment and the provision of supportive alternatives to parental care remains incomplete. And while policies in some welfare states appear to embrace the “career” perspective, by providing extensive paid family leaves, because these benefits are taken up overwhelmingly by women they continue to reinforce gender divisions in both market and caregiving work.

To a greater or lesser degree, parents in all the industrialized welfare states continue to grapple with the dilemmas of balancing work and family responsibilities. One of the most pressing problems for many employed parents is now “time poverty.” Women, in particular, are often characterized as working a double shift, combining full-time paid work with their continued responsibility for home and caregiving work. Women's time poverty reflects both changes in women's behaviors, as they have increased their commitment to market work, and the *limited* change in men's behavior vis-à-vis caregiving in the home (Aldous, Mulligan, and Bjarnason 1998; Reskin and Padavic 1994). Many mothers avoid the double shift by seeking part-time employment, but this choice can impose serious costs in terms of job quality and compensation. Employment for fewer than 35 hours a week is associated with lower hourly wages (Bassi 1995; Gornick and Jacobs 1996), reduced access to occupational and public social welfare benefits (Tilly 1990), restricted opportunities for advancement (Rosenfeld 1993), and limited job security (Belous 1989).

Even as mothers have moved into employment in record numbers, the impact of the gendered nature of caring work on women's employment equality remains substantial. Because married mothers continue to

assume the majority of caregiving responsibilities everywhere, and single parents are overwhelmingly mothers, women's labor market attachment remains substantially weaker than that of men, even within couples with similar levels of education. In dual-parent families with children below school-age, married mothers' labor market income continues to account for, at most, a third of their families' total labor market income. In Germany and the Netherlands, mothers command as little as 12-13 percent of parental earnings; even in the most gender-egalitarian welfare states of Northern Europe, mothers take home, at most, 35 percent of parental income (Gornick 1999). Mothers' shares of labor market income lag their husbands' because mothers of young children are more likely to withdraw from the labor market completely, and, when employed, are much more likely to work part time and/or intermittently. Women also pay a wage penalty associated with parenthood that men do not (Blau, Ferber, and Winkler 1998; Waldfogel 1998), due at least in part to employer discrimination. Clearly, in all modern welfare states, albeit to varying degrees, the economic security of mothers with young children remains largely in the hands of their husbands.

The movement of mothers into employment while their children are young has also exacerbated child care dilemmas in the industrialized world. In some countries, most notably the Nordic countries, the state has responded to heightened demands for substitute care by vastly increasing the supply of public child care. In others, especially the English-speaking countries, the provision of substitute care has been left largely to private markets. The movement of children into substitute care at a very young age is viewed by some as problematic, potentially disrupting early parent-child relationships and compromising children's healthy development. In countries that rely heavily on private markets to supply care – most notably, the United States – care arrangements are of questionable quality for many children (Vandell and Wolfe 2000) and impose a highly unequal burden of payment on families (Hofferth 1999; Blau 2000). The expansion of market-based child care arrangements, most notably in the English-speaking countries, has also contributed to the growth of large, low-wage employment sectors dominated by women. Ironically, even as some women have gained economic and social rights by their movement into employment, others have been segregated into low-wage, often insecure jobs that provide little in the way of employment-based benefits (Whitebook 1999).

### **III. Resolving the tension: the dual earner/dual carer society**

With the incomplete realization of either a “universal breadwinner” or “career” model of the welfare state, women across varied welfare states continue to pay an economic penalty for providing care both as family caregivers and as child care workers, especially when care is market-based. Children may pay a developmental price in terms of the quality of their early care, and men pay a social price in their absence from the early years of their children's lives. The full realization of these models is also potentially problematic, with the former denying both men and women the opportunity to engage in caregiving work when their children are young, and the latter cementing gendered divisions of labor.

The resolution of these tensions may lie in a new model of the “dual earner/dual carer” society as an idealized social and economic outcome. In a recent book, Rosemary Crompton (1999) illustrates a continuum of models from traditional male breadwinner/female carer arrangements, to current partial modifications, to an idealized earner/carers society. Crompton emphasizes that “the point of this exercise is not to provide a matrix, or static taxonomy, within which nation states may be precisely located. Rather, the aim is to develop a flexible framework through which change may be conceptualized (1999:203-203).” Although largely theoretical in its conception, this continuum also serves as a useful tool for comparing the current resolution of the “employment” and “care” schism across the industrialized welfare states.

traditional gender division of labor <-----> less traditional gender division of labor
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male breadwinner/female carer	dual earner/ female part-time carer	dual earner/ state carer – or – dual earner/ marketized carer	dual earner/ dual carer
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The left end of the continuum illustrates the traditional division of labor, with a male breadwinner and full-time female homemaker. The second, dual-earner/female part-time carer arrangements, represents a partial modification of the breadwinner model. This gender-differentiated arrangement has emerged strongly in some countries, most especially in the United Kingdom, where many women combine part-time employment with substantial hours spent in care work in the home.

At the third point on the continuum are two alternative dual-earner / substitute career arrangements. Both models leave the bulk of caregiving to substitute caregivers. In some societies in which most employed women engage in full-time jobs, high levels of substitute care are provided in a state sector. This model was observed primarily in the ex-state-socialist countries that developed extensive systems of state child care. To a lesser extent, this is also the model in some of the Nordic countries, although part-time work remains common for mothers in some Nordic countries. Alternatively, widespread full-time maternal employment can be combined with private child care provided by a marketized female domestic economy. This is the dominant arrangement in the United States, and to some extent in the United Kingdom. As Crompton notes, because many women succeed economically in the marketized career model, it can be consonant with greater gender equality. On the other hand, high levels of market care can have a bifurcating effect as large numbers of women purchase care, often at a low price, from a highly feminized workforce. The extensive use of substitute care arrangements raises additional concerns about the quality of care for very young children, and the engagement of parents in caregiving during their children’s earliest years.

*The dual earner/dual carer society*

The right end of the continuum suggests a new arrangement, the dual earner/dual carer society. This model differs from the others in two key respects. First, it envisions a social and economic arrangement in which men and women, as groups, engage symmetrically in both paid work and in unpaid caregiving in the home; as such, it is fundamentally gender egalitarian. Second, it places primary responsibility for caring for very young children in the home, rather than in hands of out-of-home careers. *This possibility rests on the assumption that men will shift substantial portions of time from the labor market to the home.*

Varied portraits of the earner/carers society have been painted by other feminist scholars, including Ruth Lister, also in the United Kingdom, Birgit Pfau-Effinger in Germany, Anne-Lisa Ellingsøeter in Norway, and Diane Sainsbury in Sweden. In an influential article, the American political theorist Nancy Fraser (1994) argues that the “sameness” and “difference” perspectives on transforming gender relations are both unsatisfying. She suggests that “a third possibility is to induce men to become more like most women are now – that is, people who do primary care work... The key to achieving gender equity in the postindustrial welfare state, then, is to make women’s current life patterns the norm” (1994:611). Despite Fraser’s contribution, images of the achieved earner/carers society have not compelled anywhere near as much attention in the United States as they have in Europe.

What is clear from all accounts is that the earner/carers society embodies a new vision for domestic, labor market and welfare state arrangements. It rests on a radical transformation in gender relations, especially vis-à-vis the allocation of care work between women and men. It also calls for a major alteration of the

workplace, as it imagines a substantially different allocation of time, for the vast majority of fathers and for many mothers as well, when their children are young. As Crompton observes, “full-time work as we know it might be superseded” (Crompton 1999:208). In addition, it envisions a virtual end to full-time home-making as it makes a place for all women in the world of employment. Placing caregiving for the youngest children in the home is “child friendly,” and also has broader implications for equality, because it neither depends on, nor encourages, a large (typically-feminized) low-paid, childcare sector. Finally, it calls for innovative new roles for the state, both in social policy provision and in labor market regulation. In short, the earner/carer model is gender egalitarian, it strengthens parenting, and it values care.

### *Imagining the earner/carer society*

The earner/carer model suggests significant modifications in the time allocations of both fathers and mothers.<sup>2</sup> It also suggests the elements of a package of supportive policies that would allow parents to balance market and family responsibilities. How might families allocate their time in a fully achieved earner/carer society? And what forms of government assistance would be needed to support these choices?

Table 1 offers an illustration of how two types of families – dual-parent and single-parent families – *might* choose to allocate their time in a society that supported commitments to both work and family. This thought exercise represents just one possible outcome. In reality, we would expect families to choose various combinations of market and home time, depending on their preferences, their children’s needs, and the total resources of their extended families. We undertake this exercise because concrete images of end results, in the earner/carer society, have rarely appeared in the largely theoretical literature. Considering one possible allocation allows us to consider the nature and magnitude of changes in time allocation that would allow parents to engage deeply in both market and caring work. It also provides a framework for considering a package of welfare state supports that would allow parents to make gender-egalitarian commitments to both market work and family.

Beginning with the dual-parent family, we have imagined four possible time allocations, one each for parents with children of various ages. For the sake of simplicity, this illustration allocates time during a standard 40-hour work week, and assumes that two parents could organize their time so that one is in market work while the other is caregiving; outside this 40-hour period, most parents would not be in market work. It also imagines that, on average, mothers and fathers would allocate their time symmetrically, that parents would perform the majority of child care giving for infants and toddlers, and that parents’ labor market hours would increase as children get older.

For infants in the first twelve months of life, we assume full-time care by one parent, i.e. *no* non-familial child care. Parents would support their families by sharing, between the two of them, the equivalent of a full-time job in the labor market, combined with twelve months of paid parental leave (approximately the level currently available to parents in Sweden and Norway), also to be shared between them. We begin with this assumption to frame a scenario supporting maximum parental involvement in the critical first year of a child’s life.

**Table 1.**

**How Families Might Allocate Their Time in a Dual-Earner / Dual-Carer Society:  
An Illustration.**

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<sup>2</sup>This paper’s analysis of the earner/carer model focuses on heterosexual couples because we are concerned with problems of gendered divisions of labor within families. It is important to note that our earner/carer society would include and support same-sex as well as heterosexual couples. In fact, same-sex couples raising children could serve as a model, to some extent, in that paid and unpaid work hours are not allocated, within couples, according to gendered expectations.



<b>dual-parent family</b>	<b>single-parent family</b>
<b>families with infants and toddlers (birth to age 3)</b>	
<p><b>before the first birthday</b>  each parent:  20 hours in marketwork  20 hours caregiving at home  -----  children:  40 hours parental care  zero hours child care</p>	<p><b>before the first birthday</b>  single parent:  zero hours in market work  40 hours caregiving at home  -----  children:  40 hours parental care  zero hours child care</p>
<p><b>ages 1 and 2 years old</b>  each parent:  25 hours in market work  15 hours caregiving at home  -----  children:  30 hours parental care  10hours child care</p>	<p><b>ages 1 and 2 yearsold</b>  single parent:  10 hours in market work  30hours caregiving at home  -----  children:  30hours parental care  10 hours child care</p>
<b>families with pre-school-age children (3 to 5 years old)</b>	
<p>each parent:  35 hours in market work  5 hours caregiving at home  -----  children:  10 hours parental care  30 hours pre-school</p>	<p>single parent:  30 hours in market work  10 hours caregiving at home  -----  children:  10 hours parental care  30 hours pre-school</p>
<b>families with young school-age children (6 to 12 years old)</b>	
<p>each parent:  37.5 hours in market work  2.5 hours caregiving at home  -----  children:  5 hours parental care or supervised activities  35 hours school or child care  (e.g., summers)</p>	<p>single parent:  35 hours in market work  5 hours caregiving at home  -----  children:  5 hours parental care or supervised activities  35 hours school or child care (e.g., summers)</p>

Note: (1) To simplify, this illustration allocates time during a standard 40-hour work week (exclusive and travel and commuting time), and assumes that two parents could organize their time so that one is in market work while the other is caregiving. (2) In this scenario, children spend the same amount of time in out-of-home arrangements (child care, pre-school, and school) regardless of their family structure.

For toddlers (age one and two), we assume that both parents will combine employment and care work, choosing, for example, to place their children in non-parental care for ten hours a week and to provide direct care in the remaining hours of the workweek. Family income would come from a combination of reduced-hour employment (twenty-five hours each), and support from extended paid parental leave (which

could be taken up at varying levels until the child’s third birthday, a policy feature common in Europe).

For pre-schoolers (age three through five), we assume that each parent would engage in thirty-five hours of paid employment, with some non-overlapping hours, and rely on up to thirty hours per week in universal early childhood education and care programs (based on the weekly hours of the French *écoles maternelles*). For children over age six, we assume parental employment at 37.5 hours (increasingly, the standard European work week), with children attending school for 35 hours per week (corresponding roughly to average European weekly school hours). Non-parental child care for school-age children would be needed primarily during school holidays and summers.

As part of this thought exercise, we consider how this illustrative family’s time allocation might be adapted for single-parents in the earner/carer society. Clearly, many single parents do in fact share caregiving with a second adult – a grandparent, a partner – and parents in these alternative families may in fact allocate their time, on average, similarly to dual-parent families. Yet many single parents really have no second caregiver, and that raises complex questions regarding the obligations of the welfare state. As Kilkey and Bradshaw (1999) observe: “a welfare state can really claim to provide women’s social rights only if lone mothers are enabled to live independently of men, out of poverty, and also are not forced to choose between paid work or full-time care to avoid poverty” (1999:176). Here, we simply imagined a scenario in which the children of single parents spend the same amount of time in out-of-home care as do the children of dual parents.

One purpose of this exercise is to help gauge the direction and magnitude of change in families’ time spent in market work that would result from a shift to an earner/carer society. In Table 2, we use data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) to compare this hypothetical time allocation to the actual time that families in the United States spent in the labor market as of the late 1990s. We chose the United States, as an example, to meet the needs of our larger study (which has a U.S. focus). However, the United States case is useful in the European context as well, in that the labor market attachment of U.S. mothers is about average within the European context (see, e.g., Gornick 1999).

In dual-parents families,<sup>3</sup> U.S. mothers of *infants and toddlers* (i.e., below age three) spent an average of twenty-four hours per week in market work in 1997, while fathers were engaged in market work for twenty hours more each week. If these parents each chose a market time allocation of twenty to twenty-five hours, as we imagine in the hypothetical earner/carer society, mothers’ market time would remain nearly constant while fathers’ market time would be dramatically reduced (from forty-four to twenty or twenty-five hours) – indeed, fathers “become more like most women are now.” During this stage of child rearing, the family’s total employment would decline (from sixty-eight to forty to fifty hours).

When we repeat this exercise for parents of *pre-school age* children (approximately age three to five), we see a different result. If our illustrative earner/carer family reallocated their hours such that each worked thirty-five hours per week, mothers’ hours would rise (from twenty-four to thirty-five hours) and fathers’ would fall (from forty-four to thirty-five hours), until they met just about in the middle. The family’s total market time would remain nearly the same. The story of family time re-allocation for parents of young *school-age* children is essentially the same; mothers’ labor market attachment might increase, as fathers’ decreases by about the same amount. Thus for children over age three, in this scenario, the result is a gender egalitarian outcome that might hold family employment hours nearly constant.

**Table 2.**  
**Families in the United States, 1997**  
**Average Weekly Hours Spent in Market Work**  
**(parents, age 25 - 50 years old)**

dual-parentfamilies	single mothers
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<sup>3</sup> This includes both married and cohabiting couples.

<b>families with infants and toddlers (ages 0 -2)</b>	
<b>mothers:</b> 24 hours per week <b>fathers:</b> 44 hours per week	26 hours per week
<b>families with pre-school-age children (ages 3 - 5)</b>	
<b>mothers:</b> 24 hours per week <b>fathers:</b> 44 hours per week	29 hours per week
<b>families with young school-age children (ages 6- 12)</b>	
<b>mothers:</b> 28 hours per week <b>fathers:</b> 44 hours per week	32 hours per week

**Note:** Data: 1997 Current Population Survey (CPS). Hours refer to “usual hours worked per week,” exclusive of commuting time and breaks. Average hours include persons spending zero hours in market work. Age groups refer to the age of the youngest child.

As for the single parents – mothers, in this exercise – it is interesting that while the market time of single mothers with children under age three falls (from twenty-six to zero to ten hours per week), market time for single mothers of pre-school and young school-age children might remain at the levels that U.S. single mothers actually reported in 1997. As we noted, for the purposes of this exercise, we assumed that the children of single parents would spend the same amount of time in out-of-home care arrangements as would the children of dual parents. Clearly, we could imagine a combination of market time and social policy supports that would reflect a different type of equity across family types, for example, where all parents spend the same amount of hours in the market regardless of whether or not they have a partner. That would imply a substantially higher level of labor market engagement for single mothers with infants and toddlers, and substantially more time in substitute care for their children.

#### **IV. Public policy in support of the dual earner/dual carer society.**

Our illustration of parents’ allocation between market and home hours in a dual earner/dual carer society suggests dramatic changes in the employment and caregiving patterns of parents, particularly men, during the earliest years of their children’s lives. Throughout the rest of childhood, however, it suggests a re-allocation of hours between men and women with no net decrease in total employment hours. The feasibility of these market outcomes rests on the availability of supportive welfare state and labor market policies that would allow parents to reduce their employment hours, provide alternative sources of income support during the early years of children’s lives and substitute care when they are older, and create incentives for men to assume a larger share of caregiving work in the home.

Policy packages along these lines have been partially or fully developed in several European welfare states. On a conceptual level, these policies would shift the basis of entitlement to a gender-egalitarian approach that premises benefits on individual rights linked to both caring and market work. On a practical level, they

would provide gender-egalitarian support that allows parents to combine caregiving and market work when their children are young without undue economic hardship.

In the following sections we describe the components and likely impact of supportive policies in three areas: *Family leave policies* that support parents' time in caregiving, *early childhood education and care programs* that provide affordable, high quality substitute care during parents' market hours, and *labor market policies* that support a reduction in the length of the standard work week and strengthen remuneration in reduced-hour work.

### *Family Leave*

For parents to reduce market hours when their children are young, they need both job protections and alternatives to market income. All of the European welfare states provide some supports through state-funded leave policies. A package of leave provisions consonant with the earner/carer model would begin with generous short-term job-protected leave with wage replacement – typically labeled *maternity and paternity leave benefits* – during the first year after the birth or adoption of a child. For the next two years of the child's life (ages one and two), it would include longer-term *parental leave* rights and benefits that support a combination of caregiving and market work. For older children, it would include temporary paid leave, known across Europe as *leave for family reasons (LFR)*, that allows parents to take brief interruptions from employment to care for a sick child or other family problems.

The most vexing problems in the design of leave policies concern gender equality. An obvious first step is to extend benefits to mothers and fathers. Yet it is equally important to design policies that create incentives for men to take up the benefits to which they are entitled, as women already do nearly everywhere.

The challenges of designing gender egalitarian policies differ somewhat for short- and longer-term leaves. Mothers' needs for time at home are likely to exceed fathers' during the early postpartum period, perhaps the first three months, as they recover physically from the birth. If they breast-feed, mothers' needs for leave time may exceed men's during the entire first year. Nevertheless, a fully-egalitarian worker/career society rests on equal participation by mothers and fathers, in which fathers take responsibility for a substantial share, ideally half, of caregiving during the course of the first year. After the first birthday, and throughout their children's lives, "earner/carer" mothers and fathers are envisioned to share caregiving equally.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, shorter- and longer-term leave policies raise distinct concerns, and are understood to have different effects on both maternal employment and fathers' caregiving.

Shorter-term maternity rights and benefits have been found to have two important effects. First, paid leave shores up family income in the aftermath of a new child's arrival. Second, maternity leave (paid and unpaid) strengthens women's attachment to the labor market. A number of single-country and cross-national studies conclude that the availability and/or generosity of public maternity leave schemes are associated with increasing mothers' postnatal employment rates, shortening new mothers' return time to work, increasing the probability that mothers return to the same employer after childbirth, raising women's employment rates overall, and/or lessening the wage penalty associated with the time away (see, e.g., Glass and Riley 1998; Ruhm 1998). By strengthening maternal labor market attachment, this literature provides encouraging evidence that shorter-term leaves can contribute to a third goal of reducing gender inequality in the labor market.

The effects of longer-term parental leave rights and benefits, which are extended to both mothers and fathers, are much more complex. Long leaves that result in extended absence from the labor market have mixed consequences for women's employment and for gender equality, largely because they are taken

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<sup>4</sup>Ellingsæter (1999) underscores the difference between the early and later years of motherhood, by distinguishing "biological motherhood," which lasts about one year, from "political motherhood," which includes "all the other care work mothers do in connection with children (including economic provision, physical and psychological care), and its content is defined politically and socially, by prevailing practices and ideas (45)."

overwhelmingly by women. Recent findings from Europe reveal that the percentage of paid parental leave days taken by fathers totals well less than 10 percent across a group of European countries, and less than 3 percent in half (Bruning and Plantenga 1999). Peter Moss and Fred Deven (1999) describe the gendered effects of parental leave as a Catch-22: “If parental leave were equally taken by women and men, it might promote or consolidate gender equality. But to be equally taken requires gender equality to be achieved already, or to be further advanced than at present. If gender equality is not already advanced, then parental leave may retard or even reverse progress towards its achievement” (14). Persistent gender differences in the take-up of extended leaves not only solidify gender differences in caregiving, they also exacerbate gender inequality in the labor market. Gender inequality is worsened when mothers take substantially more leave time than fathers – even if they remain officially employed – as that differential increases human capital gaps between men and women. Gender inequality is further exacerbated by demand-side factors, insofar as employers’ hesitate to hire and promote workers, overwhelmingly women, who are expected to take long periods of leave (Moss and Deven 1999; OECD 1995).

A recent body of European research addresses the factors that suppress men’s take-up of their parental leave rights and benefits. While sociological, economic, and ideological factors are clearly influential, recent research concludes that policy designs also play an important role. At least three features of parental leave design “matter”: the level of wage replacement, the inclusion of non-transferable (“use or lose”) benefits for fathers, and public education campaigns (Ellingsøeter 1999; Haas and Hwang 1999; Leira 1999; Moss and Deven 1999).

High wage replacement rates are the most straightforward of the three policy instruments. Because men tend to have higher wages than women, in the absence of wage replacement, it often makes economic sense for couples to decide that the mother should withdraw from the labor market to provide needed caregiving. With flat-rate or low-to-medium earnings-related benefits, the incentives for the lower earner to withdraw from the labor market remain. Very high parental leave wage replacement rates maximize fathers’ propensity to take advantage of leave rights and benefits (Moss and Deven 1999).

Second, the European parental leave literature finds that men’s incentives to take up leave increase when fathers’ rights are granted on an individual basis, or are otherwise non-transferable. Non-transferable rights can be granted through individual rights that grant each parent her/his own period of leave. Alternatively, “non-transferable” leave can be granted by reserving for fathers some portion of a family-based entitlement. Both approaches create “use or lose” provisions for fathers; leave time that is not taken by the father is lost to the family. The implementation of “use or lose” leave in Norway has been associated with a sharp increase in fathers’ take-up (Lister 1997, Ellingsøeter 1999), although the introduction of a “daddy leave” quota in Sweden has had less effect (Haas and Hwang 1999), possibly because fathers’ take-up was already relatively high (Leira 1999). The importance of “use or lose” entitlements for fathers was incorporated in the 1995 European Union (EU) *Directive on Parental Leave and Leave for Family Reasons*, which called for male and female workers to have individual entitlements to parental leave, in order to promote equal opportunities and treatments for men and women (Moss and Deven 1999).

Third, political and policy actors in several European countries have addressed cultural resistance to leave-taking by fathers through public education campaigns aimed at altering public and private discourse about fathers’ engagement in caregiving. The Swedish government has undertaken a series of public campaigns, most recently in the late 1990s, when a campaign directed at employers and unions emphasized the “benefits of fathers’ taking parental leave for families, work organizations, children and society” (Haas and Hwang 1999:62). Ellingsøeter (1999) reports that in Norway, policy actors have successfully pushed fatherhood onto the political agenda: “While employment for women was the main issue of policies in the 1980s... the caring father, and thus the domestication of men, is the new issue of the 1990s” (45).

In sum, research suggests that public maternity leave provisions strengthen mothers’ attachment to the labor market, while longer-term parental leave provisions have a more ambiguous effect due to women’s

disproportionate take-up of the benefits to which both parents are entitled. Fathers' low use of family leave has been exacerbated by policies that extend limited paternity benefits, and that provide less than 100 percent wage replacement during parental leave. The implementation of substantial periods of non-transferable "father leave" still remains very limited, even in the Nordic countries, where the strategy was pioneered.

#### *Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)*

When parents are engaged in market work, provision of early childhood education and care provides a second essential form of support, especially in the years before children enter primary school. Given the time allocation described in our earlier thought experiment, a typical family might rely on a moderate amount of substitute care for toddlers below age three, and as much as thirty hours per week of care during the preschool years (age three to five) and, for school-age children, during school holidays and summers.

Designing child care for the earner/carer society raises a series of challenges for policymakers. A primary goal would be to make high quality early care and education universally affordable and available. Care provided as a universal child entitlement, i.e., not categorically linked to parental employment, could both improve the availability and affordability of care and provide a critical employment support available to both mothers and fathers. To assure that care is consonant with employment, it must be available during hours that are consistent with standard employment schedules. A third goal is to provide care through systems that do not create a gender-segregated and poorly paid female caregiving work force.

From the perspective of reducing gender-inequality in employment participation, the effect of policies that improve child care options is unambiguous. Labor supply theory suggests two approaches to understanding the effects of child care on women's employment. The first depicts child care conditions as affecting the value that a woman places on her time at home. In the second approach, the cost of child care is viewed as a tax levied on mothers' wages so that higher-priced care would have the same effect as lower net wages – decreasing employment and hours of paid work. Both approaches predict that improvements in women's child care options will be associated with increases in her labor supply (see, e.g., Blau, Ferber, and Winkler 1998).

The predicted effects of child care policies on maternal employment patterns is supported by a large body of single- and multi-country studies that include varied measures of direct public provision and/or the extent to which public programs alleviate out-of-pocket child care expenses. Gornick, Meyers, and Ross (1998) document substantial cross-national variation in the "child penalty," or estimated reduction in mothers' probability of employment if they care for children under age six, and they find a strong correlation between the size of the child penalty and the availability of publicly-provided child care.<sup>5</sup> In countries with extensive early childhood education, such as Sweden and France, they find no child penalty. Although the two countries differ in overall maternal employment rates, in neither country is there a significant difference in labor market attachment rates between otherwise similar mothers with and without pre-school aged children. Very large child penalties are observed in countries with weak policy provisions. In the United Kingdom, with notably limited child care policies, the probability of employment is an estimated thirty-one percentage points lower for a mother with a preschool-aged child than for an otherwise similar mother whose children are all school-age.

Child care policies, and particularly the extent of public provision, have additional implications for the wages and benefits of the overwhelmingly female caregiving workforce. While the effects of a large child care sector would seem to be unambiguously positive for gender equality in employment, reliance on poorly regulated private child care systems can have serious repercussions for women who provide that

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<sup>5</sup>Child penalties are calculated as the intra-country difference in the probability of employment between married women with and without young children, controlling for the presence of other children, human capital variables (mother's age and education), and other income in the household.

care, especially for the youngest children. In most European countries, although the child care sector is highly feminized (Christopherson 1997), a large share of these workers are on the public payroll, where they have access to the public sector wage premia that characterize the European labor markets (Gornick and Jacobs 1998). In some countries, such as Denmark, child care workers receive comparatively high wages (Christopherson 1997). In contrast, in largely market-based systems, child care providers are among the lowest paid members of the workforce. In the United States, for example, child care center teachers average between \$13,125 and \$18,988 for full-week, full-year employment (Whitebook 1999). Women who work in other capacities – as assistant teachers and aides – earn even less. Among women providing unregulated family child care or relative care, between 50 and 65 percent have family incomes below \$20,000 (Galinsky et al. 1994). Christopherson (1997) finds low wages to be the norm for child care workers in the United Kingdom as well.

In sum, the literature suggests that extensive public child care provision that lowers the cost of substitute care for parents has positive implications for maternal employment. A large childcare sector has somewhat contradictory effects, however, in that the child care workforce is feminized in all countries. State-, rather than market-based, provision – the dominant arrangement throughout continental and Northern Europe – appears to reduce the wage and benefit penalties for these female workers.

#### *Regulating Working Time: Strengthening Reduced-Hour Work*

Central to the earner/carer model is the assumption that both men and women will reduce working hours in order to provide care in the home, particularly during their children's earliest years. This suggests an important regulatory role for the state vis-à-vis working time. Supportive policy reforms would, first, aim to shorten the length of the standard work week, from forty to thirty-five to thirty-seven and a half hours. Second, public policies would secure equitable remuneration (pay and benefits) for employees working a range of part-time hours, including employees working for pay as few as ten or twenty hours per week.

Calls to reduce the standard work week have received considerable attention throughout Europe, where labor and other advocates have fought for the shorter work week as a strategy for reducing unemployment and, in some cases, for increasing family time (ILO 1995; 32 HOURS 2000). Several public policy strategies could work to *reduce the standard work week*. These include amending basic legislation to reduce the standard week (such that overtime pay would be required for any hours over, say, thirty-five per week); creating incentives for employers to voluntarily reduce working hours (by, e.g., removing the ceiling on payroll taxes); providing subsidies to firms that institute job-sharing or other programs that increase options for reduced-hour work; and implementing “right to work less” policies, which enable individual workers to choose shorter hours, free of the threat of dismissal or non-promotion (ONDP 1998). These strategies could be implemented across the board or targeted to parents.

Policies that *shore up remuneration and job security for part-time workers* have also been designed and implemented in several European countries. These policies have potentially important implications for gender equality, in that the vast majority of part-time workers are now female. In an earner/carer society, where both women and men reduce market hours to engage in caregiving, policies to secure equitable job opportunities and remuneration for part-time workers would be important to both protect families' economic well-being and to provide incentives for more men to engage in part-time market work. Policy measures include mandated pay equity between part-time and full-time workers in the same or equivalent jobs (Thurman and Trah 1990), and policies that disallow discrimination against part-time workers in access to benefits and job security (Maier 1994). While these policies have been adopted as law or regulation in several countries, there is little empirical evidence about the success of their implementation or the consequences for women's employment. Cross-national comparative studies do find, however, that pay gaps between full- and part-time workers are comparatively larger in the United States, relative to other countries with stronger part-time work protections (Gornick and Jacobs 1996; Bardasi and Gornick 2000).

#### **V. How are the European welfare states faring against this blueprint?**

The policies described above provide a “blueprint” for a package of policies that would be consistent with the earner/carer model. These policies constitute a package that is consistent with multiple goals: supporting gender equality in caregiving; eradicating gender-based inequalities in the labor market, and strengthening parents’ capacity to spend adequate time with their children. In this section, we report the results of a study of family leave provisions, early childhood education and care, and the regulation of working time, across eleven European welfare states as of the middle 1990s. Our countries include four “social democratic” countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden); six continental (or “conservative”) countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands); and one “liberal” welfare state exemplar (the United Kingdom).

#### *Family Leave.*

While there is substantial variation across the industrialized welfare states, nearly all provide generous support during the first year of childhood, typically funded through the national sickness and maternity funds, or other social insurance funds. Provisions for more extensive parental leaves, and temporary leaves for family reasons such as care for a sick child, are more varied in extensiveness, benefits and financing.

The most substantial *maternity leave* benefits are provided in two *social democratic* countries – Norway and Sweden – that have consolidated their maternity and parental leave schemes into one system. Drawing on the combined maternity/parental leave rights and benefits, Norwegian mothers are entitled to one year of leave at 80 percent wage replacement (or forty-two weeks at full wage replacement), while Swedish mothers can take a year of leave, with most wages replaced, plus three additional months at a lower rate. In the other *social democratic* countries – Denmark and Finland – mothers are entitled to twenty-eight and eighteen weeks, respectively, of maternity pay, with about 65 percent wage replacement. The six *conservative* countries provide somewhat shorter maternity leaves – three to five months – but they pay relatively high replacement rates (80 to 100 percent). The United Kingdom has a two-tiered program (depending on workforce attachment) with benefits that are low by European standards.

While fathers’ rights to short-term paternity benefits were extremely limited as of the middle 1990s, all of these countries extended longer-term benefits to fathers through various *parental leave* policies (i.e., rights and benefits available to both parents). Both fathers and mothers had rights to *paid* parental leave in all four *social democratic* countries. The combined maternity/parental leave programs granted families wage replacement (ranging from 66 to 100 percent) for a year or more in Sweden and Norway. Following mothers’ maternity leave options, parents in Denmark were entitled to share approximately nine additional months of parental leave, and in Finland, six months (where parents also had a secondary low flat-rate option for up to three years.) In general, these benefits can be “fractioned” – i.e., spread out – over longer periods of time, for example, until the child’s third birthday in Norway and the eighth and ninth birthday in Sweden and Denmark, respectively. This offers parents the opportunity to take up these benefits later in their children’s lives if they choose to do so.

As of the middle 1990s, more limited parental leave cash benefits were paid in four of the *conservative* countries, and unpaid leave was granted in a fifth (the Netherlands). Belgium had a system of “career breaks,” payable at a low flat-rate; France and Germany paid low flat-rate benefits until the child’s third birthday (although, in France, only for second and subsequent children), and Italy offered 30 percent wage replacement for six months to be used before the child’s first birthday. In the last three years, the *conservative* countries have seen marked expansion in parental leave policies. Following the December 1995 European Union (EU) *Directive on Parental Leave and Leave for Family Reasons*, Belgium supplemented “career breaks” with a new parental leave program, and Luxembourg and the Netherlands introduced new paid parental leave schemes (Moss and Deven 1999).

Parental leave rights and benefits were even more limited in the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom had no statutory parental leave as of the middle 1990s, although it did implement unpaid parental leave at the



end of 1999 (Moss and Deven 1999).

As we noted, one of the most vexing challenges in designing parental leave is how to build in incentives for fathers to take up the benefits to which they are entitled. The two most direct policy instruments that create incentives for fathers are (1) high replacement rates, which reduce the incentive for the lower earner (usually the mother) to take up most or all of the leave granted to the family; and (2) the establishment of leave rights and benefits that are granted to the father and that cannot be transferred to the mother. On both fronts, the *social democratic* countries stand out as leaders. In addition to the comparatively high replacement rates, three of them now include a “use or lose” component of the family’s share-able benefits; outside of the *social democratic* countries, “use or lose” days are reported only in Italy (and there, only since January 2000). In the other *conservative* countries and in the United Kingdom, policy designs that provide incentives for fathers’ take up are almost entirely lacking. Low and moderate wage replacement, if any, encourages the family to have the lower earner take most if not all of the leave. And, while rights to leave or benefits are fully individualized (fathers have their “own” rights) in the Netherlands, fathers’ incentives to take the leave to which they are entitled are clearly weakened by the absence of wage replacement.

A key characteristic of the European leave programs is that they are all funded through either social insurance schemes or general tax revenues. Nearly everywhere, maternity benefits are paid out of consolidated sickness and maternity funds, although in some cases (Norway, France, and the United Kingdom) they are paid out of social insurance funds that finance a broader array of programs; in most cases government subsidies fill in some of the costs. The exceptions to this pattern are found in Luxembourg, where the government pays the whole cost out of general revenues. A crucial feature is that none of these countries relies on mandating employers to provide wage replacement for their own employees and when the insurance funds do draw heavily on employer contributions, they do not “experience-rate” at the firm level (as the United States, alone, does with unemployment insurance). These European financing mechanisms work to reduce employer resistance, both because they spread the “risk” for individual employers and because contributions are supplemented by general funds. These design features also reduce the likelihood that leave takers (and potential leave takers) will face employment discrimination.

#### *Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)*

The provision of early childhood education and care varies markedly across Europe, in the distribution of responsibility, dominant forms of care, and financing arrangements. These policy variations incorporate a number of interlocking choices about the division of responsibility between public (government) and private (family and market) spheres, the assignment of responsibility across levels of government (national, regional or local), and the allocation of responsibility between social, educational or other divisions of government. They also establish critical parameters for the services available to families, from the level of provision of any public services to the hours of program operation.

The *social democratic* countries provide care until the start of school through a single system, traditionally under the authority of the social welfare system, although Sweden recently shifted to educational auspices. In all of the *social democratic* countries, care is provided largely through childcare centers and, to a lesser extent, organized family day care schemes. In Denmark, child care is supplemented by public preschool programs for children age four to six through the education system, and in Sweden, optional preschool classes are provided in the public school system for all six year-old children. Care providers are either public organizations (the dominant pattern in Sweden, Finland and Norway), or a mixture of public programs and private organizations that are funded and regulated by public authorities (e.g., in Denmark an estimated one-third of providers are private organizations).

The *conservative* countries are more diverse in their organization of public care. In Belgium, France, Italy and the Netherlands, public ECEC is provided through both social welfare and education systems. For younger children, day care centers (and some publicly-supervised child minder or family day care schemes) are under the authority of the social welfare system. Older children are served in pre-primary or

nursery school programs under the authority of the education systems, including the *école maternelle* in France and Belgium, the *scuola materna* in Italy, part-day *kindergartens* in Germany, and compulsory pre-primary school beginning at age four in Luxembourg. In the Netherlands, a single system under the authority of the national welfare ministry and local authorities serves children until the start of school, usually at age four. The Netherlands has also moved in the direction of greater reliance on employer-provided care. By the mid-1990s, an estimated 28 percent of care for children under age three was provided in employer-sponsored settings.

The dominant model in the United Kingdom is private provision. Child care for younger children is provided through day care centers and family daycare homes that are private in both the source of financing (families) and provision (market or private entities). While a small number of low-income parents receives subsidies to offset child care costs, the majority of care remains private in both financing and provision.

Variations in both institutions and financing have critical implications for the levels of ECEC provision (typically captured by enrollment rates in public care). The democratic countries generally provide high levels of care, with some notable and interesting exceptions. Provision of public services for children under age three are generally high in cross-national terms, with 20 to 48 percent of children in some form of full-day, publicly-supported care. However, the share of the “over-threes” in public care (including the early years of primary school) varies substantially. Denmark and Sweden’s systems serve large percentages of children over age three. In Norway and Finland, in contrast, only 53 to 63 percent of the three to five age group are in public care, and while public school began at age six in Norway (as of 1997), only 57 percent children in Finland are in some form of public care at age six.

Among the *conservative* countries, variation in both institutional arrangements and in public investments translates into considerable variation in enrollments. Belgium and France provide full-day child care services for a large number of the “under-threes” (30 and 24 percent respectively), and for nearly all children aged three to five. Italy provides full-day public care for nearly all children in the three to five group, but for only six percent of those under three. In Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, services for the under-threes are extremely limited (two to eight percent), and available for 67 to 78 percent of those in the older age group. In Germany, and in some care settings in the Netherlands, these services are also provided only part-day.

Parents in the United Kingdom consistently receive the least from government – particularly when their children are young. For children under age three, fewer than 2 percent are served in public child care. By the age of three to five, only about 60 percent are in any form of publicly-supported care (and that includes five year olds attending primary school.)

#### *Regulating Working Time: Strengthening Reduced-Hour Work*

As of the middle 1990s, standard statutory or collectively-bargained working times were forty hours per week in most of these eleven European countries (ILO 1995). Exceptions were in France (thirty-nine hours) and Denmark (thirty-seven hours). In recent years, shortening the standard work week has become an active political issue, and major changes are underway in several countries in Europe.

Working time reductions are in progress in both *social democratic* and *conservative* countries. A recent study by the organization *32 Hours* (1998) reports that in Denmark, which currently has the lowest average annual work hours in Europe, work time reduction is nevertheless an active issue, and, interestingly, job creation is not a major theme. The Danish movement around working time is focused on restructuring working time to meet the needs of families; in June 1998, the government announced that it will hold talks with business and labor to make working time more “family friendly.” In Finland, two major labor federations recently called on the government to cut the work week to thirty-five hours, largely as a job growth effort. In Sweden, also with low annual work hours, further work time reduction remains at the top of the public policy and collective bargaining agendas. As in Denmark, the theme in Sweden is not job creation

but instead, “shorter work time is seen mainly as a way to improve the well-being of workers and increase equality between men and women” (32 HOURS 1998).

Active efforts to reduce the work week are gaining strength throughout the *conservative* regime countries of Europe as well. In 1997, prominent labor and academic leaders called for Belgium to shift to a thirty-five-hour work week; the main trade unions and the Socialist Party endorsed a four-day, 32-hour week. In February of 2000, the thirty-five-hour workweek became law in France for firms with more than twenty employees; smaller firms will be covered by the law in 2002 (32 HOURS, 2000). In Germany, while the legislated standard week has remained at forty-eight hours since the 1930s, collective bargaining has reduced the average work week, in the west, to thirty-seven and a half hours. Between 1987 and 1997, average annual work hours in Germany fell by 5 percent (32 HOURS 1998). The work week in Italy is to be reduced from forty to thirty-five hours by 2001 through legislation and financial incentives to guide collective bargaining, and in the Netherlands, as part of a long government- business-labor negotiation dating to the early 1980s, the work week has been reduced to thirty-six hours for half the workforce.

Along with efforts to shorten working hours for all workers, some European countries have adopted policies specifically aimed at freeing parents’ time for caregiving. In Sweden, for example, all parents have the right to work six hours per week, with job protection (but not remuneration), until their children reach the age of eight (Haas and Hwang 1999).

At the same time that several European countries were reducing the standard work week, employment protections for part-time workers were also strengthened. Supra-national organizations have taken the lead in this policy movement abroad, as seen in the 1994 adoption of the ILO’s *Part-Time Work Convention* (175) & *Recommendation* (182), and the 1997 passage of the Council of the European Union’s *Directive on Part-Time Work*. Both the ILO and the EU measures called for legal assurances of equal treatment – in pay and benefits – of part-time workers relative to full-time workers (Bolle 1997). Smith, Fagan, and Rubery (1998) report that, in Europe, there has been a gradual extension of employment protections to part-time workers in most countries, through a combination of rulings established using European sex discrimination legislation combined with collective bargaining.

#### *Summary: The Cross-National Portrait*

How are the European welfare states performing against the “blueprint” suggested for the earner/carer society? Policies in many of the European countries provide encouraging models for leave, early childhood education and care, and labor market policies that promote greater gender equality in both caring and market work. Yet nowhere is a package of policies consonant with full gender equality and active involvement in the early years of children’s lives fully developed.

In the area of family leave, the *social democratic* countries stand out with the provision of extensive paid leave during the first twelve months following the birth of a child and generous provisions for reductions in working time and temporary leaves thereafter. The *social democratic* countries are also leading in the development of policies that provide incentives for fathers to engage in caregiving work, through the extension of leave benefits to fathers, the adoption of high wage replacement rates during paid leave, and the implementation of various schemes that create “use or lose father days” for dual-parent families. Despite these measures, fathers’ take up of their family leave benefits remains disappointingly low, even in the Nordic countries. In some of the Nordic countries, policy officials are now actively engaged in efforts to reduce cultural and employer resistance to fathers’ take up of leave rights and benefits. In Norway, in particular, these issues are gaining momentum as part of a “new politics of fatherhood.” Until leave provisions throughout Europe incorporate stronger gender egalitarian features – higher replacement rates and longer periods of non-transferable rights – family leave that is completely supportive of an earner/carer society remains incomplete.

In terms of early childhood education and care, Denmark and Sweden provide the most extensive provi-

sions for children under age three. These Nordic countries, along with Belgium, Italy and France, have also developed nearly universal, child-based entitlements to full-day public care. Relative to the policy “blueprint” suggested above for the earner/carer society, two directions of change are needed. If mothers and fathers of children under age three were to take advantage of reduced-hour work weeks and extended paid leaves, the level of public child care provision for young children might actually *decline* in some countries. In countries such as Belgium and Denmark, where one-third to nearly one-half of children under age three are now in substitute care, children in an earner/carer society might spend more hours at home in parental care. For children over age three, on the other hand, levels of public provision would need to rise in most countries. Enrollment of pre-school age children remains limited in Finland, Norway, and the United Kingdom; and care for preschool-aged children is still lacking – and for the most part available only part-day – in Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

Several European countries provide models for labor market regulations that address the goals of a shorter work week, overall, and wage and benefit protections for part-time workers. A shorter workweek has already been adopted in France and Denmark, and active campaigns are underway to shorten the standard work week to thirty-five or thirty-seven and a half hours in most of the other *conservative* and *social democratic* countries. In the *social democratic* countries, in particular, calls for a shorter work week are explicitly tied increasing time for parents to care for children and to promoting gender equality. Several European countries have also adopted statutory protections for part-time workers that guarantee pay equity and benefits.

## **VI. Implications for the U.S.: Lesson borrowing and prospects for change**

Translating European policy configurations, in support of an earner/carer society, to the United States would require fundamental adaptations for the American institutional context. This would also require a substantial mobilization of political support and the exercise of political will. In many respects, confidence in government and support for welfare state expansion appear to be at a particularly low ebb in the United States. Given the new administration, is the development of policies that support an earner/carer society politically feasible in the United States? And are U.S. policymakers willing to look abroad for lessons in the development of family policy?

Support for any form of social policy expansion may seem unlikely in the current political climate, most certainly at the national level, in the wake of the 2000 elections. And the prior administration presided over the 1996 passage of the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act*, in which Congress reversed the sixty-one-year-old entitlement to public assistance for families with children, and drastically reduced cash benefits. While the 1996 reforms clearly constituted a sharp cut in assistance to poor families, they also, paradoxically, strengthened support for new forms of government assistance to low-income families. With the public assistance cutbacks, Congress authorized a large expansion in child care subsidy assistance for the working poor. Other federal policies have also been directed toward helping poor working families, including expansions of the Earned Income Tax Credit, and health insurance for children through Medicaid and the Child Health Insurance Program. These federal policy reforms provide encouraging evidence that support for expansions in some forms of family policy co-exist with widespread opposition to traditional public assistance programs.

Alongside some growing commitments to working poor families at the national level are several rapidly accelerating state-level efforts aimed at policy developments that would benefit families more widely. Some of the most active social policy debates across the fifty states now concern proposals for universal forms of family support. Two initiatives receiving close attention in several states – notably, paid family leave schemes and universal pre-school – are similar in design to the universal policies in place in European countries, and to the elements of the package that we have described. This suggests that, now, more than ever, American policy-makers have much to gain from studying European family policy designs.

The European experience also provides encouraging evidence that family policies have robust political support, and that they are economically feasible, even in times of fiscal austerity. In recent years, European welfare states have frequently been characterized in the U.S. press as undergoing severe retrenchment in their social policy commitments across the board. But far from dead or dying, many of the European welfare states are in fact increasing commitments in several areas of social provision. Expansions have been particularly great during the 1980s and 1990s in the policy areas that we have outlined, including child care and parental leave (Gornick and Meyers 2001). These remain politically popular, in part because there is strong evidence for their effectiveness in reducing child poverty (Smeeding, Danziger, and Rainwater 1995) and increasing the stability of mothers' employment (Gornick, Meyers, and Ross 1998), and in part because their financing is designed to avoid placing an undue share of the cost on employers.

It is encouraging that the willingness to borrow policy ideas from abroad appears to be on the rise, in the United States and elsewhere, due in part to the globalization of national interests and the associated "death of distance" (deLeon and Resnick-Terry 1998). To effect a transfer of family policy models from Europe to the United States, however, a broad base of political support will need to be mobilized. Although the challenge of mobilizing such support is great, a policy package that would support an earner/carer society has much potential in this regard.

As more families struggle to combine employment and parenthood, the possibility that government could do more to help families is resonating across a broad spectrum of Americans. A recent survey of public attitudes toward family policy (Zero to Three, 2000) reports that four in five adults support "paid parental leave that allows working parents of very young babies to stay home from work to care for their children." With regard to the current state of policy in the United States, only 26 percent of respondents rated as "good" or "excellent" government's current efforts to make changes in the workplace to help workers meet the needs of their very young children.

An expansion of public supports that help families manage work and family responsibilities also resonates with growing concerns about the decline of civic engagement and political participation in the United States. In *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam (2000) argues that civic engagement has declined precipitously in the U.S. during the last thirty years. Adults are less likely to volunteer their time, to engage in community activities, or to join social and civic organizations. In his evocative metaphor, he notes that while Americas are still bowling, they are less and less likely to be doing so as members of community bowling leagues – they are now "bowling alone," and, in the process, losing important connections to the broader community. The benefits of community, civic, and faith-based activities go beyond immediate social benefits. As Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995) document, these forms of social and civic engagement are also the vehicles through which many Americans develop political skills and political engagement.

While the "time squeeze" for parents is only one of the factors contributing to the decline in civic engagement, it is an important one. If all parents need to work full time or more than full time to make ends meet, while also providing or purchasing care for their children, they are simply less available for engagement in political or civic activities outside the home and workplace. As Putnam suggests, "one practical way to increase community engagement in American would be to make it easier for women (and men) to work part time if they wished (201)." In this sense, social citizenship rights, and political and civic engagement are intertwined. As Lister (1990) describes it for mothers, "whether trapped in the home full time or exhausted by the double shift, women's caring and domestic responsibilities in the private sphere make it very difficult for many of them to participate as citizens in the public sphere" (457). A package of policies that support earning *and* caring, without imposing exhausting double shifts on either parent, may yield important dividends not only in private well-being but in political, community, and civic engagement as well.

For a new approach to family policy to become a reality, public support will need to be translated into

political demands. Theda Skocpol (2000) envisions mobilization of these demands through broad political alliances that transcend generational, race, and class divisions. In *The Missing Middle*, she outlines a package of social insurance reforms and “family friendly” policies, parallel to the package that we describe as crucial for the dual-earner/dual-carer family. By aligning interests on both social insurance and family benefits, and shifting the focus of social policy from compensatory means-tested programs for the disadvantaged to a broad package of universal supports, she suggests that “there are bright prospects for a new progressive politics focused on social supports for all working parents” (143).

Broadening the end vision of family policy to incorporate the development of a gender-egalitarian world – where men and women share both earning and caring – has the potential to close other political cleavages as well. As long as family policies are viewed as “women’s issues,” with only tangential relevance for men, they will remain marginalized from larger political interests. Formulating leave, child care, and labor market policies that explicitly extend benefits to fathers as well as mothers has the potential to engage and intensify men’s support for family policy expansion. Designing these policies as supports for both employment and caring, shared equally by women and men, holds promise for closing the schism between feminists oriented to reducing gender differentials, especially in the labor market, and those focused on rewarding caregiving in the home. Finally, advocating for a policy package that enables parents to care for young children at home holds promise for bridging the gap that often separates feminists struggling for gender equality from advocates concerned with children’s well-being. Embracing the vision of the dual-earner/dual-carer society may help to draw diverse but unified support for family policy development in the United States.

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