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# Review of government initiatives for reconciling work and family life

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# Abstract

This AIFS Research Report presents a review of government initiatives that help families balance their work and family responsibilities, highlighting innovative ideas and including a discussion of international trends and themes. Most of the information reviewed in this report pertains to OECD countries, especially New Zealand and countries in the European Union, as work and family policies have been extensively developed in these countries. Some East Asian countries have also been included, and for some countries, state (as opposed to federal) policies are discussed. The wide range of policies that have been used in different countries, combined with significant variation in approaches, means that those reviewed in this report are necessarily selective, and much of the discussion is quite broad. This review particularly focuses on government policies and approaches that address work and family issues for people with caring responsibilities for children or the elderly. The report outlines some of the broader aims, approaches and considerations of governments in the area of work and family, and then reviews policies related to leave and return-to-work policies; child care, child payments and early childhood education; working hours and other aspects of employment; and governance, support and promotion of work–family initiatives. This review reflects work–family policies that have recently been implemented (up to 2014) across developed countries, but not necessarily the state of play at the time of publication.

# 1

## Introduction

This AIFS Research Report presents a review of government initiatives that help families balance their work and family responsibilities, highlighting innovative ideas and including a discussion of international trends and themes. Across the world, the importance of work–family policies to the wellbeing of families has been apparent for a number of decades now. The importance of these policies was highlighted through both the United Nations International Day of Families (in May 2012) and the East Asian Ministerial Forum on Families (EAMFF, 2–4 October 2012) having had themes of “Ensuring Work–Family Balance”. In addition, one of the key themes for the 20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014 was work–family balance, as highlighted in the publication, *Family Futures* (Griffiths, 2014).

This review focuses on policies and approaches implemented by governments that address work and family issues for people with caring responsibilities for children or the elderly. While work–family programs may be developed and are often implemented at the level of the workplace, we have focused here on policy development that has occurred at a state or national government level. Such policies include those related to parental leave, working hours, child care, and various other issues.

The wide range of strategies that have been used by different countries, combined with significant variation in approaches, means that the policies reviewed in this report are necessarily selective, and much of the discussion is quite broad. The references cited provide more detail for the interested reader. The annual series *International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research* (Moss, 2014, was the most recent issue at the time of writing) is especially valuable as a resource concerning work–family policies relating to families with children. Numerous other country-specific and cross-country examinations of work–family policies were also referenced in undertaking this review. Less information was available on work–family policies that related to those with other caring responsibilities, perhaps reflecting the relative lack of attention to work–family policies in this area. Throughout, we have referred to summaries and analyses of these policies by Kröger and Yeandle (2013), Lechner and Neal (1999) and Bernard and Phillips (2007). Of course, governments’ policy approaches can and do change over time, so this review should be considered to reflect work–family policies that have recently been implemented (generally, up to 2014) across developed countries, but not necessarily the state of play at the time of publication.

Most of the information reviewed in this report pertains to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, especially New Zealand (NZ) and countries in the European Union (EU), as work and family policies have been extensively developed in these countries. Some approaches of East Asian countries, such as Singapore, Japan and Korea, have also been noted. Some state (as opposed to federal) policies have been discussed where appropriate (for example, specific examples from selected states of the United States, and Québec, in Canada).

In the area of work and family, governments have taken different approaches, sometimes reflecting different objectives and funding arrangements. We begin, then, by providing an overview of some of these issues in section 2 of this report, before turning to the specifics of work–family policies and programs. The areas covered are as follows:

- leave and return-to-work policies (section 3);
- child care, child payments and early childhood education (section 4);

- working hours and other aspects of employment (section 5); and
- support and promotion of work–family initiatives (section 6).

The final section of the report draws out some of the overriding issues and challenges for the development of work–family policies.

Our review does not include detailed discussion of Australian work–family approaches. For a recent outline of work–family policies in Australia, refer to Hayes and Baxter (2014) and other articles pertaining to Australia in Griffiths (2014). For additional analyses and critiques of work–family programs in Australia, refer, for example, to Baird, Williamson, and Heron (2012), Burgess and Strachan (2005), Craig, Mullan, and Blaxland (2010), the OECD (2002, 2007), Skinner and Chapman (2013), Skinner, Hutchinson, and Pocock (2012), and Whitehouse, Baird, and Alexander (2014).



# 2

## Work and family: Objectives and contexts

### 2.1 Policy objectives

A number of factors have led governments to develop policies to address work–family reconciliation. Pressures have come from workplace change, technological change, as well as demographic change. For example, the demise of the “standard” 9-to-5 work day means that long work hours and work during non-standard hours spills over into what has conventionally been family time. Also, technological advances have resulted in improvements in connectivity between home and work. This can both be helpful in managing work–family balance, and harmful in making it more difficult to keep work from encroaching into family time. Commuting time can also contribute to families’ difficulties in managing their work and care responsibilities. A special case of this is with “fly-in-fly-out” employment that can be associated with a family member living apart from the family for days or weeks at a time. Demographic change—in particular, declines in fertility and the ageing of the population—have also been behind a focus on work–family policies, given an awareness of associations between availability for caring (for children and others) and workforce participation.

Each of the subsections below describes more specifically some of the objectives that have led to the development of work–family programs. These policy goals, as with the actual details of the policies, vary considerably across countries, and specific examples are provided.

Note that the policies covered in this report were not always developed with the explicit goal of addressing work and family issues. Neither were they always specifically aimed at those with caring responsibilities. For example, some of the policies reviewed in this report were developed to address labour productivity. Others were developed to address the broader concept of “work–life”, in which it is recognised that it is not just those with family responsibilities who seek a better balance between work and outside-work interests.

### Paid employment: The labour market

For some governments, building up the paid labour market is a significant concern, and some of the strategies discussed in this report were primarily developed to address this. For example, this has been an objective of work–family programs in the EU (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions [EFILWC], 2006). Most relevant to this report is the delivery of policies that provide supports for those with family responsibilities to engage in paid work, such as child care programs. However, other policies developed outside of the sphere of work and family have implications for those with family responsibilities, including those intended to stimulate growth in employment. The clearest example of this is in France, where the establishment of a 35-hour week had a primary objective of reducing unemployment. A secondary objective was to improve the quality of life for workers, given reduced work hours would mean more time for leisure or family (Hayden, 2006).

## Paid employment: Financial wellbeing and social inclusion

An outcome of successful work–family policies—inasmuch as they enable more family members to work—is that poverty rates (including child poverty rates) can be reduced, and concerns about social exclusion addressed. Addressing such concerns has been a central goal of the UK government in its approach to work–family issues (OECD, 2005), and this has also been recognised in the EU (Commission of the European Communities, 2008c).

## Paid employment: The wellbeing of workers

Paid employment can provide more than money; providing opportunities for social interaction and support, such that research has found that workers experience higher levels of self-esteem (London, Scott, Edin, & Hunter, 2004) and exhibit more positive parenting (Marks & MacDermid, 1996; Marshall & Barnett, 1993) compared to those outside of employment. However, work can spill over to families through loss of time or having more pressured time together, and to individuals by way of poorer health, wellbeing and life satisfaction (Pocock & Clarke, 2005; Strazdins, Clements, Korda, Broom, & D’Souza, 2006). A policy approach that addresses the employment conditions of workers may alleviate the negative consequences of work on family, and thereby improve outcomes for all family members, including children. Just as work can spill over to family, family can spill over to work. Family responsibilities can cause stress or time management difficulties that affect functioning at work (Barnett, 1994; Voydanoff, 2005), and so addressing issues of work–family spillover can have positive flow-on effects back to the workplace (Duxbury & Higgins, 2003).

## Child wellbeing

Improved child wellbeing is a key objective of addressing financial and employee wellbeing through work–family policies, as discussed above. In the UK, promoting parental employment has been a major strategy in addressing child poverty, and in Canada also, addressing child wellbeing has been an objective of supporting families in work (OECD, 2005).

Also, the wellbeing of children is central in regard to the provision and use of non-parental child care. Even when child care policies are developed primarily to help address parental employment, the wellbeing of children is still a key concern. As such, the provision of high-quality child care and early childhood education has been an important focus of governments, to ensure families have access to options for their children that address minimum standards in quality. Where policies are developed in the related areas of early childhood education and school, work–family issues tend to be less-often considered, sometimes causing tensions between work and caring (see section 4).

## Gender equity

An inability to combine work and family is more likely to result in women rather than men withdrawing from the labour market, since the unpaid work associated with caring is more often done by women. It is therefore women’s employment that is affected more than men’s when work–family supports, such as adequate child care and leave, are not available (Orloff, 2002). This affects women’s earnings and future labour market involvement, having longer term implications for their financial wellbeing and placing them at greater risk of poverty (Commission of the European Communities, 2008c). Gender issues are therefore paramount in the area of work and family.

Improving gender equity has been a very significant priority in many countries, reinforced by the priorities of the EU and International Labour Organization (ILO), who advocate addressing gender equity through work–family policies (Commission of the European Communities, 2008c).

ILO, 2009). The Nordic countries have a strong gender equity focus, with the aim of enabling men and women to be able to contribute equally to the paid labour market and also to take on equal sharing of care responsibilities (O'Brien, Brandth, & Kvande, 2007). A specific gender equity objective has been important in the development of working hours and child care policy elsewhere, including the Netherlands (OECD, 2007).

While work–family policies initially focused on improving ways for women to reconcile work and family, since the late 1990s the focus has shifted to men. Flexible leave options and parental leave policies have been targeted as a means of encouraging more equal take-up of family-friendly policies between men and women, and increasing men's involvement in care responsibilities (Moss, 2008; O'Brien et al., 2007). Several countries have followed this approach, not just because of gender equity, but also because, with mothers increasingly involved in the paid labour market, other options for caring for children or other family members have been needed. These changes have also been influenced by increased awareness of the benefits to children of having greater involvement with their father (O'Brien et al., 2007). The shift to father-oriented policies is an important one, for as long as family-friendly programs are considered relevant only to women, it is likely to be women who continue to shoulder the responsibility for caring.

In many countries, however, take-up rates of family-friendly work options continue to be lower for men than for women. This is in part explained by the gender gap in pay, which means that couples making decisions about who should curtail their labour market participation are likely to have the higher earner—usually the man—more fully employed (see the gender gap for selected OECD countries in Table 1). Beyond policy and financial reasons, broader cultural and attitudinal influences regarding the care of children or others are strong determinants of the roles men and women undertake.

Table 1 (on page 6) presents a number of key employment indicators for women among selected OECD countries, showing considerable diversity in the employment contexts across these countries. There are significant differences in female employment rates, and more specifically, maternal employment rates, with relatively low rates in Japan and Germany and relatively high rates in the Nordic countries. There are also large differences in the use of part-time work, with high rates for women in the Netherlands. Further, the gender wage gap is relatively large in Japan and Korea, while in countries such as Denmark, New Zealand, France and Poland, the gap between male and female earnings is narrower.

In almost all of the OECD countries listed in Table 1 employment rates are lower for mothers of children aged less than 3 years than for those with children aged 3–5 years. Maternal employment rates for mothers with children less than 3 years are also shown in Figure 1 (on page 7), separately showing the percentages in work and on maternity or parental leave. This is important—mothers who are employed are not all at work, and this varies considerably according to the availability of different maternity or parental leave arrangements (discussed in section 3).

## Fertility

One response by men and women to perceived or actual difficulties in managing work–family balance is to minimise family obligations, or defer them for as long as possible. These responses result in men and women having fewer children than they might prefer, due to the effects of declining fertility levels among those who delay childbearing for too long (Gray, Qu, & Weston, 2008). In many countries it is recognised that women's difficulties in combining work and family may be contributing to their fertility decisions, and to subsequent lower aggregate fertility rates (Commission of the European Communities, 2008c). One reason, then, for developing good work and family policies, is to address concerns about fertility declines. Countries that have attempted to address fertility issues using work–family policies include Singapore (National Population and Talent Division, 2013), Japan (OECD, 2003; Ogawa, 2003) and Germany (Morel, 2007).

**Table 1: Key employment indicators for women in selected OECD countries**

	Employment/population ratio				All employed women, part-time employment, 2013 <sup>d</sup> (%)	Gender wage gap 2010 <sup>e</sup> (%)
	All women, 2013 <sup>a</sup> (%)	Mothers, 2011 <sup>b</sup> (youngest child aged < 3) (%)	Mothers, 2011 <sup>b</sup> (youngest child aged 3–5) (%)	Single mothers 2009 <sup>c</sup> (%)		
Australia	68.3	48.3	58.5	52.0	38.1	20.4
Austria	68.6	66.3	68.1	78.3	33.3	24.1
Belgium	57.6	62.1	72.7	59.2	31.4	10.0
Canada	71.6	64.5	70.4	67.6	26.5	17.4
Denmark	71.2	71.4	77.8	82.0	24.7	14.7
Finland	69.0	51.8	76.0	70.2	16.7	20.6
France	60.9	58.1	69.5	69.9	22.5	19.9
Germany	70.1	52.8	65.5	64.6	37.9	18.9
Greece	40.5	49.2	55.4	76.0	15.6	9.3
Hungary	53.2	6.0	62.0	61.6	6.2	16.3
Iceland	83.1	n.a.	n.a.	81.0	24.6	20.6
Ireland	56.9	58.8	52.6	52.0	36.2	n.a.
Italy	47.7	53.4	50.6	76.4	32.8	12.4
Japan	68.8	29.8	47.9	85.4	36.2	29.4
Luxembourg	59.5	72.7	55.6	80.2	27.7	n.a.
Netherlands	70.8	75.8	75.6	63.8	61.1	20.4
New Zealand	71.2	42.2	61.3	54.4	33.4	11.4
Norway	75.5	n.a.	n.a.	69.0	28.8	14.7
Portugal	60.7	67.6	77.8	78.1	14.0	8.1
Spain	51.4	55.0	57.1	78.0	23.4	6.1
Sweden	74.4	71.9	81.3	81.1	18.4	18.2
Switzerland	76.6	58.3	61.7	67.0	45.7	n.a.
United Kingdom	68.5	56.9	61.2	51.8	38.7	21.3
United States	65.7	53.9	73.8	72.8	16.7	21.2
OECD average	59.9	52.2	65.6	67.0	26.1	17.3

Notes: <sup>a</sup> Data for female employment include women aged 15 and over.

<sup>b</sup> Data are for 2011 except for Finland and New Zealand (2009), Sweden (2007), Switzerland (2006), Japan (2005), Iceland (2002), and Denmark (1999). In the OECD database the Australian data were reported for mothers with a child aged less than 5 years (48.7%, as at 2009). The data shown here were calculated from the 2011 ABS Child Care and Education Survey Unit record file. Note that the percentage employed includes those on maternity or parental leave, which varies considerably across countries (refer to OECD, LMF1.2 Maternal employment).

<sup>c</sup> Data are for sole mothers aged 15–64 years, except for Canada, Denmark, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, which show data for sole parents. Australian data were derived from ABS labour force data and refer to all single mothers with children aged under 15 years. Age ranges of children vary across other countries' statistics.

<sup>d</sup> Data are for 2009, except for Canada, Japan, Denmark, Switzerland and Sweden (2005); and New Zealand (2006).

<sup>e</sup> Data are as at 2010, except for Canada, Hungary, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, UK and US (2011); France and the Netherlands (2009); and Iceland (2008). The gender wage gap is unadjusted and is calculated as the difference between median earnings of men and women relative to median earnings of men. Estimates of earnings used in the calculations refer to gross earnings of full-time wage and salary workers. However, this definition may slightly vary from one country to another.

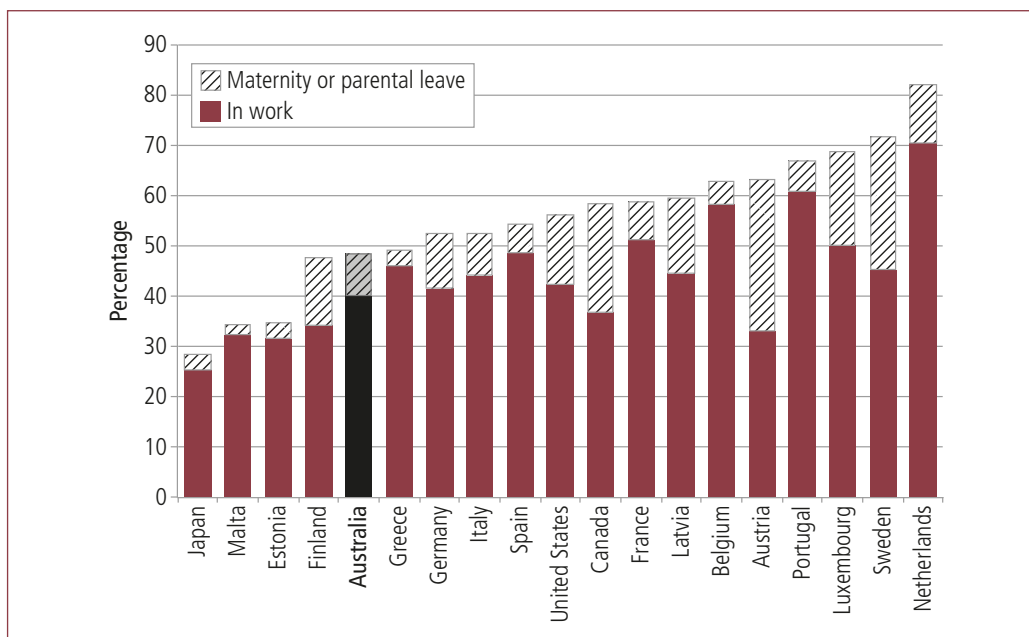
Sources: OECD employment database (downloaded August 2014, LFS by sex and age)

<sup>a</sup> OECD Family database (downloaded August 2014, LMF1.2 Maternal employment); Australian estimates are derived from ABS (2011) Child Care and Education Survey confidentialised unit record file

<sup>b</sup> OECD Family database (downloaded August 2014, LMF1.3 Maternal employment by family status); Australian estimate is from ABS Labour Force Status (ST FM1) by Sex, State, Relationship (downloaded July 2013)

<sup>c</sup> OECD Employment database (downloaded August 2014, FTPT employment based on a common definition)

<sup>d</sup> OECD Family database (downloaded August 2014, LMF1.5 Gender pay gaps for full-time workers and earnings by educational attainment)



Note: The Australian figure is an estimate derived from the ABS 2011 Child Care and Education Survey. Total employed is differentiated into “in-work” and “on maternity or parental leave” based on actual hours worked previous week. Those who worked no hours or fewer than one hour are counted as “on maternity or parental leave”. This is therefore an over-estimate since it includes those on forms of leave other than maternity leave. For notes about and sources for other countries, refer to OECD Family database, LMF1.2 Maternal employment. Data are as at 2011, except Finland and Malta (2009), Sweden (2006), Denmark (2004), and Canada and Japan (2003).

Source: OECD Family database (downloaded August 2014, LMF1.2 Maternal employment); Australian estimates are derived from ABS 2011 Child Care and Education Survey

**Figure 1: Employment of mothers with children aged less than 3 years, selected OECD countries, 2011**

## 2.2 Work–family (and work–life) policies over the life course

As difficulties in balancing work and family are greatest within families with young children, many work–family policies focus on that life stage. Such policies include leave for parents for a period after the birth of a child or for other times children need care, access to flexible or otherwise suitable jobs on return to work, and addressing the availability of child care. The OECD has noted that to provide the most help to families with young children, it is best for governments to provide work–family policies that give a continuum of support across the life cycle (OECD, 2007), from the planning of births through to when children are grown up. Countries such as Sweden and Denmark provide such support. In other countries, such as the US and the Netherlands, there are policy gaps at particular times, such as when parental leave ends, or when children go to school. For example, the length of parental leave (and whether or not, and at what value, this is paid) in relation to the age at which children start preschool gives an indication of how long parents will be required to depend on other forms of care if intending to return to work at the end of the period of parental leave. Plantenga and Siegel (2005) reported considerable variation in this gap.<sup>1</sup> The longest gaps were experienced by families in the Netherlands and Greece (around 185 weeks), while extended leave and/or early entrance to preschool made the gap far narrower in Finland, Spain, Hungary, Sweden and Latvia

<sup>1</sup> This gap was the difference between “effective parental leave”—a measure incorporating the length and value of parental leave, as derived by Plantenga and Siegel (2005)—and the age of commencement in pre-primary school. This does not take into account that, for some countries, including Australia, the hours during which children attend preschool are likely to be too few to cover care needs. Commencement of primary school may be more appropriate as the end of the potential “gap” period in some countries.

(around 40 weeks or less). Updated analysis of these gaps is also presented in the International Review of Parental Leave and Related Research series (see Moss, 2014).

Some governments have incorporated into their frameworks that caring responsibilities may include not only children, but also adults, so ensuring that policies are accessible to all those with caring responsibilities. For example, the Netherlands *Work and Care Act 2001* applies to anyone with caring responsibilities. The definition of “caring responsibilities” is not uniform across countries, however, particularly in regard to whether the care recipient must be a relative or not, the severity of the condition of the care recipient, and whether the care recipient resides with the carer. For example, Hegewisch and Gornick (2008) reported that in New Zealand, “caring responsibilities” encompasses any relationship in which one person is caring for another, and is not restricted by any provision regarding the care recipient’s needs.<sup>2</sup> They noted that in the UK, the caring relationship must be with a relative, partner or someone living at the same residence.<sup>3</sup> Like New Zealand, in the UK it was also decided that no limitations should be placed based on need, as incentives for abuse are low and the administrative burden caused by such a limitation is thought to be excessive.

As the labour force participation of women in later life increases, the ageing of the population progresses, and the care for elderly family members remains predominantly the responsibility of the family, elder care issues are expected to become more significant. Internationally, the development of work–family policies relevant to those with elder care responsibilities has not been expansive (Anderson, 2004; Kröger & Yeandle, 2013; Lechner & Neal, 1999). Governments have often focused more on policies directed towards the person needing care, rather than the caregiver (Lechner & Neal, 1999), although some governments have addressed elder care more fully. For example, the New Zealand government explicitly outlined a commitment to improve the choices of those caring for adults of all ages in its 2006 ten-year plan, *Choices for Living, Caring and Working* (Taskforce on Care Costs, 2007). The Japanese government has also explicitly recognised the needs of working carers, and several policies have been developed in this area (Neal & Hammer, 2007).

Many work–family policies for those with elder care responsibilities have evolved from those designed for families with children (Bernard & Phillips, 2007). However, there are important points where work–family policies for those with elder care responsibilities differ from policies for those caring for young children:

- For families with elder care responsibilities, the degree to which elder care supports or services are available in the community, and also the interaction with the health sector, are relevant.<sup>4</sup>
- Elder care responsibilities can be protracted and unpredictable. There may also be additional issues if the care recipient lives some distance from the care provider (Bernard & Phillips, 2007; Davey & Keeling, 2004).
- Workers with elder care responsibilities are likely to be older, and perhaps contemplating retirement themselves. It may be very important for these workers to remain in employment, despite their caring responsibilities, in order to preserve pension/superannuation entitlements and to ensure their longer term financial security. It might be particularly difficult for these workers to recommence employment if they need to leave work to undertake care responsibilities. Employers may be less willing to allow these workers access to flexible work options, especially if retirement or partial retirement is likely in the near future (Lechner & Neal, 1999). Also, employees may be less willing to ask for help with issues related to elder care than they are for child care (Bernard & Phillips, 2007).

2 A 2010 review of the New Zealand legislation recommended that the right to request flexible work arrangements be extended to all employees, not just those with caring responsibilities. See the *Review of Part 6AA: Flexible Working Arrangements* <[www.dol.govt.nz/publications/research/part-6aa/potential-options.asp](http://www.dol.govt.nz/publications/research/part-6aa/potential-options.asp)>.

3 “Partner” and “relative” are quite broadly defined (Taskforce on Care Costs, 2007).

4 For more extensive discussions on issues related to employed adults with elder care responsibilities, refer to Hegewisch & Gornick (2008), Hein (2005, pp. 90–94), Hoskins (1997), Kröger and Yeandle (2013), Lechner & Neal (1999), Merrill (1997), Neal & Hammer (2007), the Taskforce on Care Costs (2007), and Watson & Mears (1999).

Some countries have made their focus “work–life”, rather than “work–family”, policies acknowledging that those without family responsibilities also have a need to balance their work time with other elements of their life. This has been the approach in the Netherlands, Germany and France, regarding the right of all employees to access (or request) changes in working hours.<sup>5</sup> As discussed by Hegewisch and Gornick (2008), broadening access can address gender equity issues and lessen the danger of a “mummy track”.<sup>6</sup> It can also be easier from a manager’s perspective, in terms of having a range of people with differing yet possibly complementary scheduling preferences, and also in terms of avoiding resentment that can exist among those who would like to access but are not eligible for certain working arrangements.

## 2.3 Policy contexts

To fully understand different countries’ approaches to work–family issues, it is necessary to consider how the policies in each country work together to form a “package”, and to consider how they operate within country-specific economic, social, demographic, cultural and institutional contexts.

The range of policies and objectives across countries reflect different governments’ priorities and policy approaches more generally. In some countries, a broad range of policy measures have been introduced to support families, such as the provision of services, funding of paid leave and regulation of employer behaviour through sanctions (e.g., Sweden and Denmark). In other countries, government intervention is minimal and the provision of work–family balance supports is left to employers (e.g., the US). Most countries fit in the middle of these two extremes and have a mix of government intervention and private provision (Hein, 2005). The different approaches countries have taken are founded in their overall approaches to social welfare, employment and family policy. The often-used classification of countries suggested by Esping-Anderson (1999) is useful way of thinking about these approaches:

- *Liberal welfare states* are characterised by relatively low levels of state-provided welfare, and a greater reliance on the market. Care needs are largely considered the responsibility of the family. State assistance is more often targeted to those in need, rather than being universally provided. Countries often classified as such include Australia, the US, the UK and Canada.
- In *conservative welfare states* the family is the central focus, and government support tends to reinforce the family as the main provider of welfare to individuals. Targeted assistance is available where this family-based (and primarily male breadwinner) model fails. Examples are Italy and Germany. Various policies exist in these countries in relation to parental leave and child care, but they are less about increasing maternal employment than they are about reinforcing families as the main care providers. Access to particular policies or entitlements tends to depend upon occupational status, rather than being equally available to everyone.
- In *social democratic welfare states*, state provision of services and benefits, equally available to everyone, is the central feature. There is a high degree of assistance to families, in the form of services and cash payments. Gender equity is an important goal, and therefore policies have been developed to facilitate women’s involvement in employment, and increasingly, men’s uptake of care responsibilities. These policies include comprehensive parental leave policies. Child care and elder care needs are also met by the state. Taxes are relatively high to fund these services and benefits. This is how Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland are classified.

While this classification is not thought to fully capture the differences across countries and types of welfare regimes, and various other classifications have been offered, it nevertheless shows some of the diversity in the environments in which work–family policy is being developed and applied (Blunsdon & McNeil, 2006; Edlund, 2007).

5 There are some restriction that apply, such as length of tenure in current job, but no restrictions with respect to the nature of the caring responsibilities.

6 The “mummy track” is a term used to describe the lesser opportunities for career or work progression by women who combine work with motherhood.

Country-level objectives are also influenced by those set out by supranational organisations such as the ILO and EU. The ILO has a particular role in promoting its Decent Work Agenda, which involves the four strategic pillars of: employment, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue, with additional cross-cutting objectives of gender equality and non-discrimination (Cruz, 2012). Various ILO conventions are relevant to the broad area of work and family, although the most closely related are no. 156, Workers With Family Responsibilities (with supplementary ILO Recommendation No. 165), and no. 183, Maternity Protection. (See Box 1 and the ILO [2009] publication *Work and Family: The Way to Care is to Share!*, which outlines and discusses ILO approaches). Countries that sign up to particular ILO conventions are required to submit regular reports and be supervised with regard to their government's adherence to the standards set out in a particular convention.<sup>7</sup> The ILO report by Cruz (2012) summarises and provides some examples of country-level information on ILO Convention No. 156 and No. 183.

### Box 1: International labour standard instruments on work and family

The Workers With Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), and the Workers With Family Responsibilities Recommendation, 1981 (No. 165) are the main international standards addressing the issues and concerns regarding the reconciliation of work and family life. They provide considerable guidance on policies and measures which are needed to help workers with family responsibilities and to reduce work–family conflict. The foundation of the convention and recommendation is based on the principle of creating equality of opportunity and treatment in employment and occupation between men and women workers with and without family responsibilities.

ILO Convention No. 156 applies to all branches of economic activity and all categories of workers. Countries that ratify this convention make it the aim of national policy to enable persons with family responsibilities to exercise their right to obtain or engage in employment without being subject to discrimination and, to the extent possible, without conflict between their employment and family responsibilities. It also provides that all measures compatible with national conditions and possibilities shall be taken to:

- enable workers with family responsibilities to exercise free choice in employment;
- take account of their needs in terms and conditions of employment and in social security needs and community planning;
- develop or promote community services, such as child care and family services and facilities;
- provide vocational training and guidance to help workers with family responsibilities get into and remain in the labour force;
- promote information and education that contribute to a broader public understanding on the principle of equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women workers with family responsibilities.

Finally, it states that family responsibilities, as such, should not constitute a valid reason for termination of employment.

Source: International Labour Standard Instruments on Work and Family, <[www.ilo.org/travail/aboutus/WCMS\\_119237/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/travail/aboutus/WCMS_119237/lang-en/index.htm)>

Both the ILO and the EU have had a very significant focus on addressing gender equity through the development of appropriate work–family policies. The EU establishes a range of directives, targets and goals for member countries that relate specifically to gender equality and work–family policy (e.g., refer to Commission of the European Communities, 2008a, 2008c; EFILWC, 2006).

At the 2012 East Asian Ministerial Forum on Families, the “Brunei Darussalam Statement on Ensuring Work Family Balance” set out a range of issues that the governments of the participant

<sup>7</sup> These reports are available from the ILO website. For example, all reports and requests relating to ILO Convention No. 156 are listed at <[tinyurl.com/qh56jmf](http://tinyurl.com/qh56jmf)>.



countries agreed on in relation to the development of work–family policy.<sup>8</sup> (See the Appendix for a copy of the statement.)

## 2.4 Implementation and funding of work–family policies

The implementation of governments’ work–family policies varies across countries. Some policies may be written into legislation—for example, the 35-hour work week in France, and access to parental leave and rights to request flexible or part-time work in several countries—while others involve the government’s provision of a range of supports and services (see examples in section 6). Of course, even when a policy is legislated, access to and take-up of that policy may depend upon the employers’ roles in delivery of a policy, and depend on individuals’ wishes or needs to make use of particular policies.

The funding of work–family policies—both the amounts directed to specific policies, and in the way funds are delivered—differ considerably across industrialised countries (Blunsdon & McNeil, 2006; Fagnani & Math, 2008). Typically, funds allocated to work–family policies in liberal welfare states are the lowest, as individuals depend upon such solutions to be made available by employers, as negotiated on an individual or collective basis. To varying degrees, there is some provision of public services such as early education for young children. At the other end of the spectrum, in the social democratic countries, benefits and services are provided to all, through a high tax base.

Many countries use social insurance (or social security) schemes to fund parental leave arrangements, as well as other entitlements, such as unemployment benefits. In these schemes, all employed people make contributions to a fund, which is also added to by employers and the state. Countries in which such schemes are used to fund paid maternity leave include Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands and the UK. In Sweden, paid maternity leave is funded through health and parental insurance, which is also based on state and employee contributions, but the larger contributions are made by employers. Few countries require employers to fully bear the cost of parental leave, but in some (e.g., Switzerland and Germany) leave is funded partly by employers and partly through social security. Also, even when the parental leave scheme is fully funded through social insurance, rates of payment are often at less than 100% of prior earnings. Collective agreements within particular workplaces may provide for wage replacement to be topped up to 100% by employers (see Moss, 2014).

For governments, the costs of some policies can be significant, especially in regard to the public provision of child care. On the other hand, benefits to governments can accrue if child care (or other work–family policies) facilitates maternal employment and a subsequently larger tax base. Given the costs, these funding issues are important. As Gault and Lovell (2006) noted in their discussion of US work–family policies, “state and federal battles concerning leave policies and early care and education policies often stand or fall on the basis of cost and financing mechanisms” (p. 1156).

With the recent global recession, funding of work–family policies came under pressure in a number of countries. For example, since 2009 in Spain, there have been reductions in payments and/or income ceilings introduced for parents taking leave provided by regional governments (Escobedo & Meil, 2014). In Greece, the recent financial crisis resulted in significant changes affecting workers’ rights, including reductions in minimum wage levels and, consequently, levels of unemployment and other payments (Hatzivarnava-Kazassi, 2012). Hatzivarnava-Kazassi also noted that work flexibility (including part-time work) increased, but without adequate or adequately enforced safeguards in place. Further, they noted that the poorer economic circumstances were likely to lead to lower take-up rates of leave in the private sector, due to fear of dismissal. A report on parental leave policies and the economic recession in Nordic countries (Parrukoski, Lammi-Taskula, & National Institute for Health and Welfare, 2012), on the other hand, noted that Iceland was the only Nordic country for which parental leave policies were affected by the global recession, with the most significant change being the lowering of the

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8 The forum was attended by official delegations from Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam.

income ceiling for parental leave payments. The home child care allowance was also abolished in many municipalities. Eydal and Gíslason (2014) also noted that a proposed increase in parental leave in Iceland has been put on hold given the country's financial circumstances, pending a decision about how the increased leave would be financed.

## 2.5 Financial support to families and implications for employment

Governments vary in the way they support individuals and families—the total amount varies, as does whether this support is provided through cash payments or through the funding of services, and whether support is provided universally or targeted to those deemed to be most in need. Without aiming to summarise variation in these areas, below we identify some issues that are relevant to work–family decisions arising from particular approaches to government support. Further information and international comparisons can be found in OECD (2007) *Babies and Bosses* report.

Across OECD countries, financial arrangements to support individuals to remain out of employment are most often in place for the period immediately after a new child is born. This may be in the form of parental leave (see section 3.1) or child care payments (see section 4). The incentive to withdraw from employment to care for a child at this time is likely to be influenced by the availability and generosity of this financial support relative to potential wages. For those with higher earning potential, these payments may not be sufficient to encourage a withdrawal from work, while for those with lower earning potential, financial incentives to move into employment can be low. When children are very young, the availability and cost of non-parental child care will also be an important part of the decision. The degree to which governments subsidise the costs of non-parental child care varies considerably across countries.

Outside the period of time of new parenthood, governments may provide some financial support to those who are out of employment for other reasons. However, in most OECD countries, men and women are required to be seeking work in order to receive income support or social assistance, unless they have some other—for example, health-related—exemption. In a few countries, extended periods of support are available for not-working parents of young children, which can act as an incentive to remain out of employment for a longer time (see section 4).

Financial incentives to work are also affected by the availability of other support provided to families. Governments (including in Australia) often provide financial assistance to help with the costs of raising children through cash payments or the tax system, and government support can also be made through assistance with housing costs, health care costs and funding of school services. The “package” of assistance varies considerably across countries and within countries, and often varies in value according to family structure (couples versus single parents, and numbers of children) and family earnings (see Bradshaw & Finch, 2002). When these payments and services are targeted to those most in need, increased earnings from paid employment often reduce entitlements. Tests to determine eligibility for such benefits and allowances are often based on family, or couple, income. Therefore, for families with children, as the earnings of either parent increases, government entitlement to such payments may be withdrawn.

Financial disincentives to work may also apply to those who receive financial assistance for their provision of elder care, whether such payments are made directly by government or through the care recipient. However, it appears that financial assistance to carers, where it exists, is unlikely to generate large disincentives to enter the workforce, as these payments tend to be quite low in value. See the report of the Taskforce on Care Costs (2007) for examples of carer allowances in a range of countries.

In recognition that some working parents may not be able to access jobs with earnings sufficient to sustain a family—and to address issues of child poverty—various governments also have a system by which working parents are eligible for support (in-work support). This has been a major focus of the UK government, as a means of encouraging parents into work (the Working Tax Credit), and has also been the approach of the US, Canada and New Zealand (Brewer, Francesconi, Gregg, & Grogger, 2009). As stated by Brewer et al.:

These governments have used tax credits in an attempt to alleviate poverty without creating adverse incentives for participation in the labour market. In-work benefits achieve this goal by targeting low-income families with an income supplement that is contingent on work. (p. F1)

The availability of these in-work payments can be very important for those moving out of income support into employment, who otherwise might face a loss of government support greater than the gain in earnings.

The extent to which reducing engagement in employment for caring purposes is financially feasible is strongly related to the financial incentives generated by the tax and benefit systems of a country. While not conventionally thought of as work–family policies, their importance in framing choices regarding whether or not to take up paid employment, and how many hours to work, mean they have direct relevance to individuals in regard to work and family (Adema & Whiteford, 2008; Kelly, 2006; OECD, 2007). The take-home income from employment is affected not only by the initial wages, but by the amount and nature of taxation, and other payments such as social insurance contributions, that may vary with hours of work or levels of income.

Tax systems based on individual, rather than household, income provide stronger employment incentives for household members with lower potential earnings. Given the continuing gender wage gap in all OECD countries (Table 1), women are usually the lower earner in couples, and therefore most sensitive to such employment incentives. Most OECD countries' tax systems are now based on individual income. Tax systems vary in other ways, however; for example, in the extent to which tax rebates allow for a dependent spouse. This has implications for work decisions of the “dependent spouse”, since this rebate will be lost if she takes up employment, and would need to be taken into account in determining the extent to which there were financial gains to her employment (OECD, 2007).

Where taxation is household-based—leading to income splitting within the household—the tax burden is put on the lower earners in families and because of the lower earnings of women, this type of taxation favours husbands and discourages wives from full-time employment (Jaumotte, 2003). The US and Germany are two countries in which taxable income is based on joint income for couples, and there are resulting disincentives for wives' employment (Haan, Morawski, & Myck, 2008; Kelly, 2006).

## 2.6 Summary

We have shown here that work–family policies have been developed with a range of objectives, and within a broad range of policy contexts. These contexts vary in the nature of the labour market and the degree to which women, and especially mothers, are engaged in paid work. There are additional factors that distinguish the OECD countries examined here (and distinguish countries over time), including economic conditions and societal or cultural views regarding maternal employment. We will see in this report that “work–family policies” are diverse in both their purpose and their design. Within a particular policy setting, the “package” of work–family policies is what is important in understanding how such policies affect how men and women can reconcile work and family across the life course, as they become parents, as their children grow, and also, if and when other caring needs arise. For those without such caring responsibilities, as well as those with them, policies developed to address work and family can be beneficial more broadly in consideration of work–life issues. The next sections now describe different work–family policies in more detail, again focusing on policies that have been developed at the government or state level.

# 3

## Leave and return-to-work policies

Provision of leave to undertake caring responsibilities is clearly a central part of many governments' approaches to work–family issues. Details of different leave arrangements used for the care of children around the time of a birth are considered here first; that is, maternity, paternity and parental leave. Adoptive parents are usually able to access the same policies. The section also examines other types of leave, including those used for caring purposes.

In relation to leave from employment following a birth, while most countries have separate arrangements for maternity, paternity and parental leave, these separate arrangements are becoming less distinct, with some countries, such as Sweden and Iceland, having no specific period of maternity leave, but instead offering parental leave with a portion sanctioned for mothers (Moss, 2014). This is discussed further below.

Across OECD countries the variation in leave policies is vast, in relation to eligibility requirements, the length and remuneration of the leave, coverage and funding. This section does not provide a comprehensive review, but highlights some of the main differences. Across the EU, member states are required to adhere to minimum standards regarding maternity leave, parental leave and job protection for pregnant women, and new and breastfeeding mothers. This has occurred through the EU's 1992 maternity leave directives, and the 1996 and 2010 parental leave directives. Even across these countries some have more generous provisions than others.

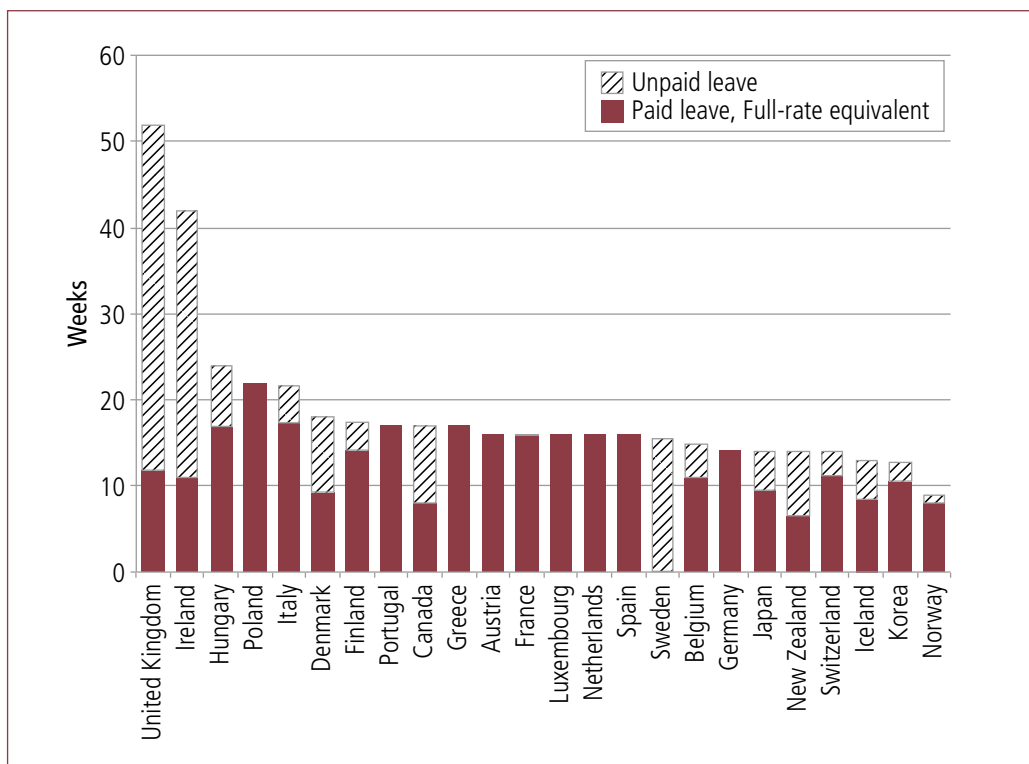
### 3.1 Maternity leave

There are clearly gendered arrangements in place for the time immediately after the birth of a child in many countries, with maternity leave only applicable to mothers to provide a period of time for recovery from the pregnancy and birth, and time for breastfeeding and bonding with an infant. Maternity leave provides a job-protected absence from work for a period around the birth, including a number of weeks before and after. There is some variation across countries in regard to when maternity leave is to start (how many weeks before the birth), and also in regard to whether any or all of the maternity leave is obligatory.

Paid maternity leave is offered in the vast majority of countries, although the rate and length of payment varies. The usual length of leave is between 14 and 18 weeks, paid at a percentage of prior earnings (usually between about 70% and 100%). As seen in Figure 2 (on page 15), the Scandinavian maternity leave entitlements are particularly generous, although Eastern European countries also have extensive maternity leave periods (see especially Bulgaria and Estonia, which have the longest periods of paid maternity leave). Some examples of maternity leave policies are given in Box 2 (on page 15).

Maternity leave arrangements are particularly comprehensive in the EU through the maternity leave directives (most recently amended in 2008), which address working conditions as they relate to the safety and health of pregnant workers, workers who have recently given birth and breastfeeding mothers.<sup>9</sup> The directives also provide for protection against dismissal. From 1996,

<sup>9</sup> Proposed amendments to the maternity leave directives set a new leave length at 18 weeks, of which 6 weeks (instead of 2) must be taken after the birth, and payment to be at 100% wage replacement (with ceilings allowable). Coverage would extend maternity leave to self-employed workers (Commission of the European Communities, 2008a). To date, these proposed amendments have not gained universal support and so have not been adopted.



Note: Includes mother quota of parental leave. The entitlement to paid leave is presented as the full-rate equivalent (FRE) of the proportion of the duration of paid leave if it were paid at 100% of last earnings. FRE is calculated as duration of leave in weeks × payment (as a percentage of average wage earnings) received by the claimant. There are some inconsistencies in calculation across countries. For notes and sources for other countries, refer to OECD Family database, PF2.1 Key characteristics of parental leave systems.

Source: OECD Family database (downloaded August 2014), PF2.1 Key characteristics of parental leave systems

**Figure 2: Duration of employment-protected maternity leave, paid and unpaid, selected OECD countries, 2013**

## Box 2: Examples of maternity leave policies

<b>Belgium</b>	Employees can take 15 weeks maternity leave (1 week before and 9 weeks after are obligatory). Self-employed women have 8 weeks of maternity leave. Employees in the public sector receive full salary, others receive 82% in the first month and 75% in remaining months (capped). Up to 2 weeks of leave can be taken as “free days” to allow mothers to more gradually return to work (Merla & Deven, 2014). This means using those “free days” along with reduced days at work for a period of time, rather than returning directly to usual work hours.
<b>France</b>	Maternity leave is obligatory. Mothers can access 16 weeks of leave at up to 100% of their earnings (capped in the private sector, although employers can make up the difference), including at least 2 weeks before the birth. Longer leave of 24 weeks is available to women having a third or higher order birth (Fagnani, Boyer, & Thevenon, 2014).
<b>Japan</b>	Women employees are entitled to 14 weeks of paid maternity leave at 66% of prior earnings, paid through a health insurance system, and financed by contributions from employees, employers, local government and the state. Six weeks of leave are obligatory (Nakazato & Nishimura, 2014).
<b>United Kingdom</b>	Mothers have access to leave for 52 weeks, of which 2 weeks’ leave after the birth is obligatory. This leave comprises 6 weeks’ payment at 90% of prior earnings (with no cap), 33 weeks paid at a low flat rate, and the remainder unpaid. Eligibility is based on employment conditions (employees with 26 weeks continuous employment with their employer, into the 50th week before the baby is due) and a minimum earnings test. Mothers who are not eligible for this leave may be eligible for a maternity allowance (O’Brien, Moss, & Daly, 2014).

all EU countries have been required to enact legislation that allows parents to care for children full-time for the first three months of their lives (Plantenga & Siegel, 2005). Many countries have policies in place that provide entitlements beyond those required in the 1996 directives (National Framework Committee for Work Life Balance Policies, 2007). Also, entitlements vary in many countries in the case of multiple births, disabled or very ill children, or in exceptional situations, such as if the mother or child dies.

Some innovation in maternity leave policy is evident in Portugal, where mothers can choose to take their leave over a longer period, paid at 80% of the usual rate. In Poland, mothers can access 26 or 52 weeks of paid maternity leave, with payment level somewhat lower if taken over 52 weeks. The first 20 weeks of leave is referred to as maternity leave (the balance referred to as parental leave), and of this, 14 weeks is obligatory. The remainder can be taken part-time (combined with part-time working), or can be transferred to the father (Michoń & Kotowska, 2014).

Other countries' innovative approaches also relate to bringing fathers into the caring role by allowing for some of the maternity leave entitlement to be transferred to the father. This is possible in the Czech Republic, Croatia, Poland (as noted above), Portugal, Spain and the UK (Moss, 2014).

Quite different models apply in those countries that subsume maternity leave into the parental leave entitlement, such as in Sweden and Norway. In both these countries, parental leave entitlements are generous, allowing for a long period of leave with high wage replacement. Parental leave is discussed in section 3.3.

Paid maternity leave tends to have a high take-up rate. Taking all or part of the leave is obligatory in most countries (Moss, 2014). However, in most countries, the extent to which mothers are in employment prior to birth will significantly affect the proportion of mothers across the population who are able to take up paid maternity leave, as entitlement is often conditional on having previous work experience and subject to various job tenure restrictions. Many countries have an alternative allowance for those who are not eligible to an earnings-based payment (e.g., Austria, Germany, Luxembourg, United Kingdom) (Moss, 2014; National Framework Committee for Work Life Balance Policies, 2007).

## 3.2 Paternity leave

Paternity leave is generally made available to fathers in the weeks following the birth of the child, and is sometimes provided as part of parental leave, rather than specifically identified as paternity leave. While not required under EU directives, the majority of EU member countries provide for a minimum of 10 days of paternity leave (Commission of the European Communities, 2008c). Australia has no statutory paternity leave. Some examples of paternity leave policies are shown in Box 3 (on page 17), and a comparison of selected countries with paternity leave is shown in Figure 3 (on page 17).

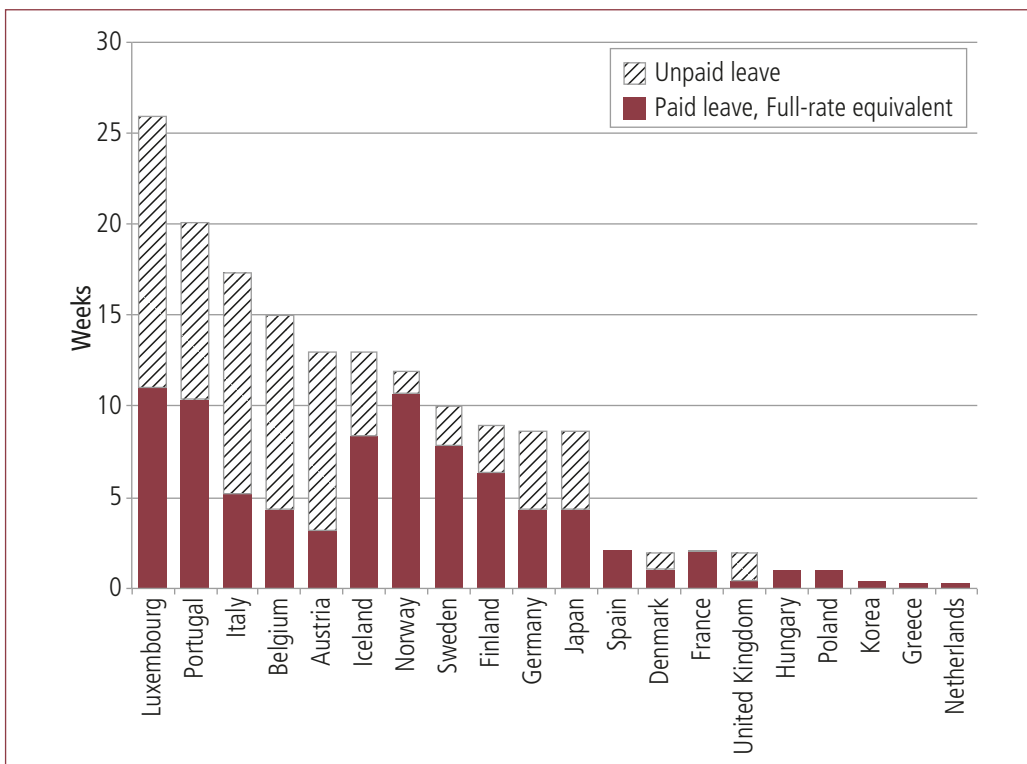
Obligatory paternity leave is rare. In Portugal, fathers are entitled to 20 days of "fathers-only parental leave", which equates to paternity leave. Of this, 10 days are obligatory, including 5 that must be taken immediately after the birth and another 5 that must be taken in the first month after the birth (Wall & Leitão, 2014). In some countries, a portion of maternity leave can be transferred to the father (see in Maternity leave, above). Leave for fathers is also available through parental leave in some of those countries that do not specifically have an entitlement to paternity leave (see below).

In Norway, the purpose of paternity leave is considered to be to assist the mother, and so this leave can be transferred to someone else if the father does not live with the mother (Brandth & Kvande, 2014).

An important aspect of paternity leave is the rate at which it is paid. Men are unlikely to take unpaid paternity leave (Commission of the European Communities, 2008c), but when salary compensation during the period of leave is earnings-related, take-up rates are relatively high (O'Brien et al., 2007). Take-up rates of paternity leave are lower than those of maternity leave, although in several countries (e.g., Denmark, Finland, France, Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK) take-up rates of around two-thirds are reported (Moss, 2014).

### Box 3: Examples of paternity leave policies

<b>Canada (&amp; Québec)</b>	No statutory paternity leave in Canada—only in Québec. As with their maternity leave policy, paternity leave in Québec can be taken for a shorter period at a higher rate of pay (for three weeks at up to 75% of their average weekly income, capped), or for a longer period at a lower rate of pay (for 5 weeks at up to 70% of their income, capped) (Doucet, Lero, & Tremblay, 2014).
<b>France</b>	Men can access 2 weeks of paternity leave at up to 100% of their earnings (capped in the private sector, although employers can make up the difference), which must be taken within 4 months of a birth (Fagnani et al., 2014).
<b>The Netherlands</b>	Fathers are entitled to 2 days of paternity leave, paid in full by the employer, which can be taken within 4 weeks of the birth of a child (den Dulk, 2014).
<b>Spain</b>	Employed fathers are entitled to 15 days of paternity leave, paid at 100% of earnings (with a ceiling). In addition, 10 weeks of maternity leave may be transferred to the father in some circumstances (if mothers have taken 6 weeks of maternity leave after the birth, the father fulfils contributory requirements, and the transfer does not endanger the mother's health) (Escobedo & Meil, 2014).
<b>Sweden</b>	Fathers can take 10 days of “temporary leave in connection with a child's birth or adoption” within 60 days after the birth. Payment is up to 80% of their earnings, capped. Self-employed fathers are also covered (Duvander, Haas, & Hwang, 2014).
<b>United Kingdom</b>	Fathers are eligible for 2 weeks of paternity leave, paid at the flat rate of maternity pay, which must be taken within 55 days of the child's birth (O'Brien et al., 2014).



Note: Includes father quota of parental leave. The entitlement to paid leave is presented as the FRE of the proportion of the duration of paid leave if it were paid at 100% of last earnings. FRE is calculated as duration of leave in weeks × payment (as a percentage of average wage earnings) received by the claimant. There are some inconsistencies in calculation across countries. For notes and sources for other countries, refer to OECD Family database, PF2.1 Key characteristics of parental leave systems.

Source: OECD Family database (downloaded August 2014), PF2.1 Key characteristics of parental leave systems

**Figure 3: Duration of employment-protected paternity leave, paid and unpaid, selected OECD countries, 2013**

### 3.3 Parental leave

Parental leave is a job-protected absence from work, usually additional to maternity and paternity leave, and has been introduced in the majority of developed countries, although the conditions of this leave vary enormously across countries. This leave has tended to be available to both parents, for one or both to take, although it is taken much more by mothers than by fathers (Moss, 2014). In some countries in more recent years, parental leave entitlements have included a period of time quarantined for use only by the father, to encourage their take-up of the leave (discussed further below). In fact, an emerging trend in relation to leave for parents is for parental leave to subsume maternity leave, but with parental leave including separate amounts of leave that are designated for use by the mother and by the father (Moss, 2014).

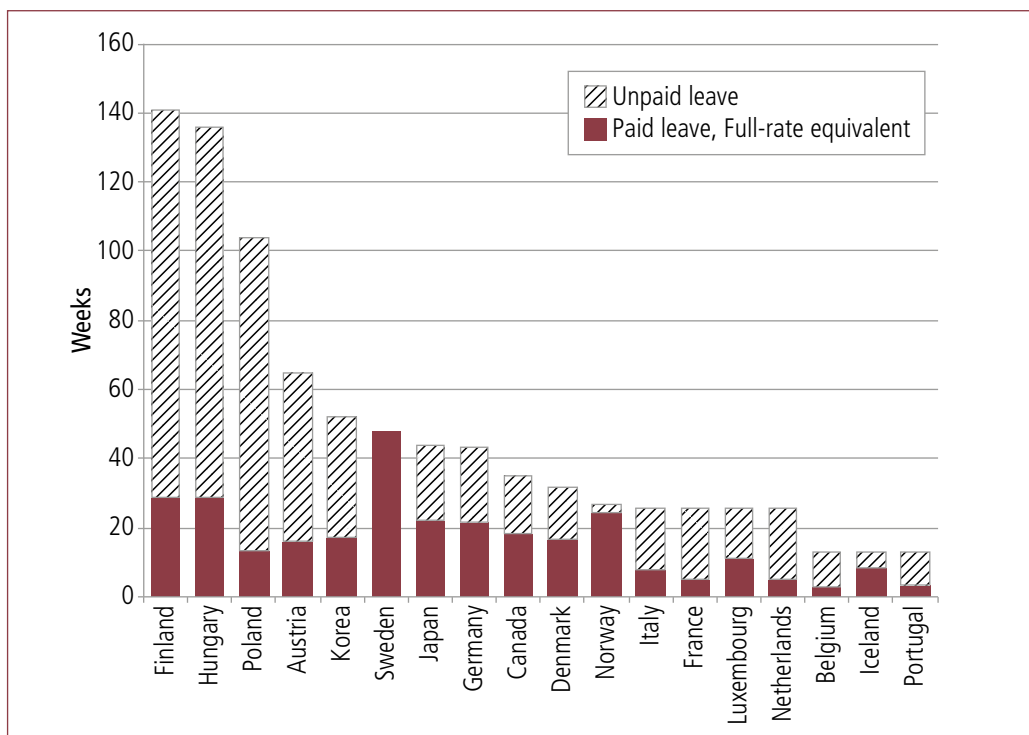
EU countries are bound by the parental leave directives to provide parental leave, with minimum conditions specified relating to time off after the birth, unlawful dismissal during parental leave, and further time off to attend to family emergencies or illness (Ray, 2008). As with maternity leave, there are, however, many differences across EU countries, as there are across all developed countries. Refer to Box 4 for examples and to Figure 4 (on page 19) for comparisons of leave entitlements across selected OECD countries. Below, we elaborate on some of the ways in which parental leave varies across countries.

As at 2014, few developed countries provided no parental leave (Switzerland, South Africa and the US) (see Moss, 2014).

#### Box 4: Examples of parental leave policies

<b>Finland</b>	Paid parental leave of 158 working days is available as a family entitlement. The rate of payment is earnings-related and, on average, is 70–75% of their usual earnings (capped), paid through the national insurance system. Leave can be taken part-time only if both parents work part-time and employers agree. Leave can be taken by each parent in two parts of at least 12 days duration (Salmi & Lammi-Taskula, 2014).
<b>Germany</b>	Parental leave of 3 years is available as a family entitlement. For the first 12 months, parents are entitled to a “child-rearing benefit” of up to 67% of their average earnings (capped). This payment can be taken at half-pay for 24 months instead. The payment period is extended to 14 months if at least 2 months of the leave is taken by the father. Parents can also combine parental leave with part-time work, with a reduced benefit. The final year of parental leave can be available up to the child’s 8th birthday, if the employer agrees (Blum & Erler, 2014; Commission of the European Communities, 2008c).
<b>The Netherlands</b>	The amount of leave each parent can take is equal to 26 times the hours they worked before the birth, per child. Leave has to be taken part-time, unless the employer agrees to full-time leave. Leave can be taken up to the child’s 8th birthday, in two or three blocks of time, with the agreement of the employer. Parental leave is unpaid, but parents taking parental leave are entitled to a tax reduction. Some parents have access to partially paid parental leave through their employer (den Dulk, 2014).
<b>New Zealand</b>	Up to 52 weeks of extended leave can be taken by parents after the birth, including any paid maternity leave taken. Most of the leave, then, is unpaid. Extended leave must be taken in one continuous period in the child’s first year, after paid maternity or paternity leave. The leave can be shared by both parents and can be taken simultaneously or consecutively (McDonald, 2014; NZ Department of Labour, 2008a).
<b>Sweden</b>	Paid parental leave of 480 days is available per family. Of this, 60 days are quarantined for the mother and 60 days for the father. Half of the remaining days are also reserved for each parent; however, these days can be transferred from one to the other upon the parent giving up his or her days by signing a consent form. Parental leave is paid at up to 78% of their usual earnings (capped) for the first 390 days of leave and at a flat (low) rate for the remaining 90 days (Duvander et al., 2014). (See also Sweden’s “gender equality bonus”, in Box 5.)





Note: Does not include periods of leave for exclusive use by mothers and fathers and is regardless of income support. Includes subsequent prolonged periods of leave to care for young children (sometimes under a different name, e.g., "child care leave" or "home care leave", or the *complément de libre choix d'activité* in France). The entitlement to paid leave is presented as the FRE of the proportion of the duration of paid leave if it were paid at 100% of last earnings. FRE is calculated as the duration of leave in weeks \* payment (as a percentage of average wage earnings) received by the claimant. There are some inconsistencies in calculation across countries. For notes and sources for other countries, refer to OECD Family database, PF2.1 Key characteristics of parental leave systems.

Source: OECD Family database (downloaded August 2014), PF2.1 Key characteristics of parental leave systems

**Figure 4: Duration of employment-protected parental leave, selected OECD countries, 2013**

## The length and level of remuneration

Many countries provide a year or more of parental leave, although this period of leave is not always paid at full wage replacement for the entire period. While job protection is therefore guaranteed for those who can afford to take a longer absence from work, the financial incentive to remain out of employment will vary depending on what the specific arrangements are. The variation is evident in Figure 4, by looking at the differences in full-rate equivalent paid leave across countries. Compensation during parental leave is dependent on prior earnings in countries such as Finland (70–75% of prior earnings), Germany (67%), Iceland (80%), Sweden (78%) and Italy (30%), although this tends to be capped at a certain level and/or after a certain number of days, beyond which a lower percentage or a fixed rate of payment applies. Parents in Denmark who are employees covered by collective agreements can access parental leave at 100% of their prior earnings, up to a ceiling. Elsewhere, compensation is in the form of a flat-rate payment (e.g., Austria, Belgium, France and Luxembourg), or parents receive financial compensation through the tax system (e.g., the Netherlands and Luxembourg). In other countries, parental leave is unpaid (Greece, Ireland, Spain and the UK; see specific country notes in Moss, 2014, for details).

## The flexibility of leave and return-to-work arrangements

It has been suggested that good leave schemes give parents choice in their return-to-work decisions, and allow flexibility in taking leave entitlements (OECD, 2007, p. 21)

The more flexible parental leave models allow parents to share the leave between parents, to take parental leave at any time from the end of maternity leave to some specified age of child (e.g., up to 12 years old in Sweden, and 3 years old in France and Germany), and to combine parental leave with part-time work, as a gradual return-to-work strategy. There have been considerable developments over recent years in these various flexible options.

In recognition that it is difficult to combine full-time work with the care of a young infant, in several countries, as part of the parental leave “package”, parents are able to return to work at reduced hours for a specified period. This “gradual return to work” is facilitated through parental leave that can be taken part-time. When this parental leave is paid, the part-time parental leave compensates for the reduced hours at work (or part-time work “tops up” the parental leave). Gradual return-to-work models provide job protection and a right to return to previous working hours. For example:

- Sweden has promoted part-time work in this way (Fagan, 2003) and, indeed, part-time work is most often used this way—for a relatively short period of time after the birth of a child as a transition from leave back to full-time hours (Evans, Lippoldt, & Marianna, 2001). In Sweden, parents have the right to request a reduction in work hours by up to 25%, up until the child’s 8th birthday (Duvander et al., 2014).
- In Germany, parents can work part-time while on parental leave (with a right to return to full-time work afterwards), and the third year of parental leave can be taken any time until the child’s 8th birthday with the employer’s agreement (Blum & Erler, 2014).

The part-time work option may not be available in all jobs, such as those in small businesses. For example, in Germany, access to part-time work is not guaranteed in workplaces of 15 or fewer employees. Further, employers may be able to refuse a request for part-time work if it would detrimentally affect the business or workplace (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2008; OECD, 2010).

As seen in these examples, access to part-time work through parental leave can continue beyond the immediate post-maternity period. In countries such as Sweden, Germany and Finland, this parental leave/part-time work option can be saved up and taken in blocks of time, rather than using it all up before returning to work full-time. Other countries that have similar approaches are Belgium, Estonia and the Netherlands (Moss, 2014; OECD, 2014a). Being able to take some of the leave at a later time can lead to a higher take-up of leave by fathers (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2008).

Another flexible approach to parental leave, or to parental leave payments, is the ability for parents to transfer some of this to others (such as grandparents) who are assisting the parents by providing care to children. This is possible, for example, in Estonia and Hungary, and will be discussed when exploring child care provisions in section 4.4.

## Eligibility requirements and special conditions to encourage take-up by fathers

One difference across countries is how parental leave entitlement is determined—whether it is per family or per parent—and if a parental entitlement, whether two parents can take parental leave at the same time (Moss, 2014; OECD, 2014a). This is most relevant in considering whether or not fathers will take some of the parental leave. While parental leave has, for some years, been available to share between the mother and father in general, fathers still take significantly less time out of employment to help care for children. As stated by the OECD:

taking a few weeks of leave after childbirth or around summer and Christmas holidays does not reflect a fundamental behavioural change. Paternal attitudes are not the only issue, as mothers frequently seem reluctant to give up leave in favour of their partner ... The debate about individualisation of the entire paid parental leave entitlement which could contribute to a more equal sharing of care responsibilities has yet to start in earnest. (OECD, 2007, p. 22)

Moss (2008) summarised the key features of fathers' use of leave as, fathers:

- using high paid “fathers only” leave;
- not using low paid or unpaid parental leave;
- not using a “family entitlement” to leave, even if high paid, if there is also a “fathers only” entitlement;
- making only limited use of the “family entitlement” to leave if there is no “fathers only” entitlement, that is, mothers are using most or all of the leave that is a “family entitlement” (pp. 80–81).

As take-up of parental leave has continued to be very low for fathers, various approaches have been developed with the goal of increasing fathers' take-up of leave. Some countries have attempted to increase the role of fathers in providing care by allowing or even requiring that some of the parental leave be used by the father. This has been done, for example, by incorporating a bonus period of leave that can only be accumulated if the father takes his portion of leave (e.g., in Finland, Germany and Italy). These approaches are referred to as “ring-fencing” fathers' leave, or a “use it or lose it” approach (see examples for Iceland and Norway, in Box 5).

Another approach is the availability of bonus payments for families in which the fathers take up leave (e.g., in Sweden; see Box 5). Also, as noted in section 3.1, some countries enable a portion of maternity leave (not just parental leave) to be shared between mothers and fathers.

An important consideration for fathers, and for their families, is that fathers are very often the higher income earner, and it can therefore be very costly for families if this income is reduced due to a period of unpaid, or reduced-pay, leave (O'Brien et al., 2007). Gornick and Meyers (2003) suggested that high wage replacement, along with public education campaigns, may be what is required to encourage fathers to take parental leave.

<b>Box 5: Examples of policies to encourage take-up of leave by fathers</b>	
<b>Finland</b>	Up until the end of 2012, fathers were eligible for 24 bonus days of leave if they took the last 2 weeks of parental leave. Together, this was referred to as the “father's month”. At 2014, all fathers' leave has been subsumed into paternity leave (Salmi & Lammi-Taskula, 2014).
<b>Iceland</b>	Of a total of 9 months of paid parental leave, 3 months are allocated to the mother, 3 months to the father and the remaining 3 months can be taken by either parent (parents' joint rights). Payment of up to 80% of parents' earnings (capped). In 2010, 95% of fathers took some leave, including 17% of fathers who used some of the parents' joint rights. Fathers took about one-third of the total parental leave days (Eydal & Gislason, 2014).
<b>Norway</b>	Up to mid-2014, the total length of parental leave was 46 weeks with 100% wage replacement (capped), or a longer leave with lower payment. Of the 46 weeks, 14 weeks were for the mother and 14 weeks for the father (the father's quota), with the remaining weeks being a shared family entitlement. Previously, the fathers' quota was less and the shared period longer, the change having intended to achieve more equal rights between mothers and fathers in access to leave. However, a new government changed entitlements again, such that from mid-2014, the mothers' and fathers' quotas were to be reduced to 10 weeks and the shared quota increased by 8 weeks. Changes introduced at this time also made it easier to transfer fathers' entitlements to mothers, with the fathers' work situation being a valid justification for such a transfer (Brandth & Kvande, 2014).
<b>Sweden</b>	Couples are entitled to a “gender equality bonus” (an additional payment) if they share parental leave equally. The bonus is also available to parents who do not live together (Duvander et al., 2014; Ray, 2008).

## 3.4 Return-to-work employment rights

Job protection is a central feature of maternity, paternity and parental leave, such that this leave is sometimes referred to as “job-protected” leave. For example, the 2010 amendments to the

EU parental leave directives state: “At the end of parental leave, workers shall have the right to return to the same job or, if that is not possible, to an equivalent or similar job consistent with their employment contract or employment relationship”.<sup>10</sup>

Rights to return to the same, or equivalent, job after returning from leave are usually addressed in relation to these forms of leave. On return to work, some countries offer parents options for varying their working arrangements to better fit within their care requirements. Rights to request variations in hours or flexible work arrangements are discussed in section 5.

## 3.5 Breastfeeding breaks and facilities

An important work and family issue is how breastfeeding is managed for women who wish to continue breastfeeding after returning to work. This has implications beyond the parents’ sense of work–family balance, to child and maternal health.<sup>11</sup> Returning to work has been linked to lower breastfeeding rates, or shorter breastfeeding durations, especially if mothers return to full-time work (e.g., Baxter, 2008; Fein & Roe, 1998; Kimbro, 2006). Policies can help in both facilitating the return to work for women who are still breastfeeding, and helping women to continue breastfeeding given they need or wish to return to work.

The main area to which government policy has been directed is in relation to breastfeeding breaks. The ILO Maternity Protection Convention states that:

A woman shall be provided with the right to one or more daily breaks or a daily reduction of hours of work to breastfeed her child. The period during which nursing breaks or the reduction of daily hours of work are allowed, their number, the duration of nursing breaks and the procedures for the reduction of daily hours of work shall be determined by national law and practice. These breaks or the reduction of daily hours of work shall be counted as working time and remunerated accordingly. (Article 10)<sup>12</sup>

One option is to legislate for the provision of such breaks for working mothers. The ILO estimated, in 2010, that at least 92 countries had legislation that provided for breastfeeding breaks (ILO, 2010; see Box 6 on page 23 for some examples). Many EU countries do not specify breaks for breastfeeding, because more generous parental leave entitlements mean a high proportion of mothers are at home when they are still breastfeeding.

Another important issue is for breastfeeding mothers to have access to facilities at work that enable them to continue breastfeeding or to express breast milk. Not having access to such facilities may mean they delay their return to work, or that they cease breastfeeding sooner than they would like (Cohen & Mrtek, 1994).

There are also health and safety implications for women who need to fit breastfeeding (or expressing of milk) into their workday. In European countries, the EU Council Directive 92/85/EEC addresses the health and safety aspects of pregnant workers, women who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding (Council of European Communities, 1992). For these women, employers must evaluate whether there is a need to temporarily alter working conditions or hours of work, offer alternative work, or otherwise offer a period of leave. This seems to apply more to the actual scheduling of work, rather than the workplace facilities.

10 See Council Directive 2010/18/EU at: <eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32010L0018>.

11 It therefore also goes beyond the scope of this paper in many ways, as there are issues for how governments can, more generally, encourage and support breastfeeding, regardless of work status.

12 See C183—Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 at: <www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\_ILO\_CODE:C183>.

<b>Box 6: Examples of approaches to breastfeeding breaks</b>	
<b>Japan</b>	Mothers of children up to 12 months old are entitled to two unpaid breaks of at least 30 minutes per day. These can be used for breastfeeding, or for other child care reasons, such as picking up children from child care centres (Nakazato & Nishimura, 2014).
<b>New Zealand</b>	Since 2009, through legislation, employers are required, as far as is reasonable and practicable, to provide appropriate breaks and facilities for employees who wish to breastfeed their infants or express milk during work hours. In 2010, a Code of Employment Practice on Infant Feeding was released, which provides advice on the meaning of “reasonable and practicable”, and provides guidelines on how employers can ensure they comply with this legislation (NZ Department of Labour, 2010).
<b>Portugal</b>	There is a family entitlement to two hours of paid “nursing” leave per day during the first year after the birth. If mothers are not breastfeeding, this leave can be shared between mothers and fathers, such that “nursing” includes other means of feeding a newborn. Breastfeeding mothers can access this leave for as long as they are still breastfeeding (Wall & Leitão, 2014).
<b>United States</b>	A small number of states have laws that provide mandates for workplace support of breastfeeding, but there is considerable variation in what these laws require of employers (Vance, 2005).

## 3.6 Carers’ leave

It can be a particular strain for workers to manage their work and family commitments when family members require care because of an illness, disability or old age. Most often, this is relevant to parents needing short-term leave to care for sick children. However, some workers may have longer term carer obligations that cause issues with work–family balance. The policies that help parents or carers are likely to vary considerably according to the nature of the caring responsibility. For example, care needs of a resident child with a short-term illness are very different from those of an elderly parent whose health may be declining, and may not live with or even close by to the carer. The protracted nature of this type of care and the unpredictability of what will be required can make it difficult to fit it within policies that may originally have been designed with the short-term care of children in mind.

Several countries offer short-term leave to cover workers with caring responsibilities, while others have considerable long-term carer leave arrangements. See Box 7 for examples.

<b>Box 7: Examples of carers’ leave arrangements</b>	
<b>Belgium</b>	There are different forms of leave available for caring. Unpaid leave of up to 10 days per year is available for employees to deal with unexpected or sudden circumstances, which can include illness of a member of the household. Employees may take leave of 12 months full-time or 24 months part-time (in blocks of one to three months) to look after a seriously ill family member, for which benefits are paid, as they are for parental leave. Similarly, up to two months of leave can be taken for palliative care, also paid as for parental leave (Merla & Deven, 2014).
<b>France</b>	All employees are eligible for periods of unpaid leave of up to 3 days to care for sick children, and most collective agreements further extend this period. More extensive leave arrangements (or access to part-time work) are available for those caring for a child with a serious illness or disability, or for a relative “at the end of life” (Fagnani et al., 2014).
<b>The Netherlands</b>	Short-term carers’ leave of up to 10 days a year is available for workers to look after sick family members, including a child living at home, a sick partner or parent (paid at 70% of earnings). Further, unpaid long-term leave can be used to care for a child, partner or parent with a life-threatening illness, conditional on approval by their employer. (den Dulk, 2014).
<b>Sweden</b>	Carers can access temporary parental leave of up to 120 days per year per child to care for a sick child, paid at up to 78% of earnings, capped. This can be used to fund someone else to care for the family member. (Duvander et al., 2014).

When employees do not have access to paid carers' leave, other forms of leave, such as sick leave or annual (personal) leave may be used to provide care for sick family members. For example, in the US, in most states, public sector employees are able to use their paid sick leave (if eligible) to care for family members. For private sector employees, this is only so in six states. Californian employees can access paid leave to care for family members (Sloan Work and Family Research Network, 2007).

## 3.7 Sick leave and annual leave

Having access to paid sick leave and holiday leave is important for personal reasons (and in the case of sick leave, is a public health issue). Lack of access to such leave or when it has to be used for caring responsibilities instead of their intended purposes can have flow-on effects for both work and family. Having no sick leave, or no paid sick leave, has implications for the health of the worker affected and their family, and also for others in the workplace if it means they continue to work while sick (Gault & Lovell, 2006). This may be especially difficult for those who cannot afford to take time off, or who risk losing a job if they take time off (see, for example, Clawson & Gerstel, 2014).

Holiday or annual leave is meant to provide a reprieve from work, and when it is not available or must be used for pursuits that do not provide opportunities for rest, relaxation or pleasure, then employees may be at increased risk of the effects of overwork (Dennis, 2004). In the EU, all workers are mandated to have access to a minimum entitlement of four weeks of paid annual leave (European Trade Union Confederation, 2008). Some countries offer more leave to reduce the length of the average work week (with weekly work hours calculated as an average over a year). For example, Fagan (2003) reported that at 2002 the statutory minimum period of annual leave was 25 working days in Denmark, Austria, Sweden, Spain and Luxembourg; 22 days in Portugal; and 21 in Norway. Some collective agreements, or specific employers, offer more than the minimum entitlement (Gornick, Heron, & Eisenbrey, 2007).

Having an entitlement to some paid leave is important; however, it is also relevant to note that workers do not always take the leave to which they are entitled. This has been noted as being particularly an issue in Japan and Korea, for example (Lee, McCann, & Messenger, 2007).

## 3.8 Career breaks and time credit schemes

A few countries have had in place "career break" schemes, by which employees could take a fairly lengthy period of leave at some stage in their working life. While such leave is not typically designed as a work-family policy, this career break can be used to take care of family responsibilities.

The most significant of these schemes is in Belgium, where all eligible workers have a right to one year of paid "career break" or "time credit" leave over their working life. Employees are not required to specify reasons for taking up time credits; therefore the credits can be used for a variety of purposes, including parental leave or leave to care for an ill family member (including care of children or elderly relatives). In fact, the period of leave may be extended by collective agreement (for up to 36 months) if the leave is used for caring reasons (Merla & Deven, 2014). Morel (2007) stated that "the underlying idea of this new [2001] time credit is that men and women must be given the opportunity to reconcile a professional career with family responsibilities, thanks to flexible entry and exit options" (p. 629).

In some countries, leave is self-funded through time savings credits. For example, the Netherlands' Life Course Savings Scheme (established in 2006) gave employees the option to have up to 12% of their income withheld for later use as payment for leave. While this gave no rights to leave beyond those existing through statutory rights, employees could negotiate with their employer to use this in addition to other leave. Otherwise, they could use it to fund leave that would otherwise be unpaid, or to fund early retirement (Todd, 2004). The scheme has not

taken on new participants since January 2012, and transitional arrangements apply to those participating in the scheme prior to this time.<sup>13</sup>

## 3.9 Longer term issues, including pension credits

Considering a longer term perspective, withdrawal from employment to undertake caring can have implications for future earnings. This is so for families with children, and also for those caring for older people. For older workers with caring responsibilities, having to retire from work early or take a break from employment can have serious consequences for the carer's longer term financial security. This can be, to some extent, addressed through government policy. For example, in Canada, the Canada Pension Plan has provisions for those who leave employment temporarily or have to retire early due to caring responsibilities (Neal & Hammer, 2007). Several European countries allow for pension or social insurance credits to accrue during parental leave (see Hegewisch & Gornick, 2008, and refer to Orloff, 2002, for country-level details).

## 3.10 Summary

Provision of appropriate forms of leave for parents—mothers as well as fathers—in the time following a birth has been one of the approaches (along with provision of child care) given greatest attention by governments around the world in the area of work–family policy. There is very great variation across countries, and also considerable change over time in how this policy approach has been made. Funding issues to some extent contribute to changes in these policies over time, but it appears that greater pressures come about through social change, especially with regard to providing support for policies that might increase the take-up of leave by fathers.

Policies concerning return-to-work arrangements appear widespread with regard to the right to return to the same or similar job, and in section 5 we will discuss policies that address working arrangements on return to work. Above, we noted that several countries provide breastfeeding breaks to mothers, or even to fathers who might be involved in the care of young children.

Parental leave policies have been developed, or revised, in the context of different objectives. Maternity leave and breastfeeding breaks largely concern the health and wellbeing of mothers and children, while paternity leave and parental leave are largely concerned with broader issues of allowing parents to provide (and share) care to young children. Within these forms of leave, measures have been added that encourage the take-up of leave by fathers, with a view to encouraging a more gender equal distribution of caring.

It is important to note that the take-up of parental leave, and the value of this leave to parents, is likely to depend upon how these policies are implemented (employer issues), general views about the take-up of leave, the remuneration of leave, and also the availability of other policies or supports that “fit” with parental leave to allow parents to work (or conversely, support them to remain out of employment).

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13 For more information, see Life-course Savings Scheme at <[www.eur.nl/english/workingat/hr\\_information/employment\\_conditions/salary/life\\_course\\_savings\\_scheme/](http://www.eur.nl/english/workingat/hr_information/employment_conditions/salary/life_course_savings_scheme/)>

# 4

## Child care, child payments and early childhood education

For working parents, having access to child care that fits around work schedules and is affordable, accessible and of high quality is very important in reconciling work and family needs (OECD, 2007). While some parents rely on informal providers of child care (such as the grandparents of their children), the availability of formal care options (such as child care centres and outside-school-hours care [OSHC]) is important for those who want or need other options. A lack of such places can restrict the ability of mothers to return to work.

In the EU, in recognition that child care provision is essential for parental employment, and for achieving equality in employment opportunities between men and women, the European Employment Strategy recommends the development of accessible and affordable child care provisions. Following from this, in 2002, EU member states adopted the “Barcelona targets”, which set targets for the provision of child care services by 2010:

Member States should remove disincentives to female labour force participation and strive, taking into account the demand for childcare facilities and in line with national patterns of provision, to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age. (European Council, 2002, p. 12)

As is evident in Figures 5 and 6 (on page 27), several countries have child care enrolment rates well short of these targets. These enrolment figures, however, can be difficult to interpret since children’s participation in child care will vary not only with the availability of child care, but also with the demand for that care. Specifically, demand is likely to depend upon levels of maternal employment for children of different ages, as well as the availability of alternate (informal) options for care of children.

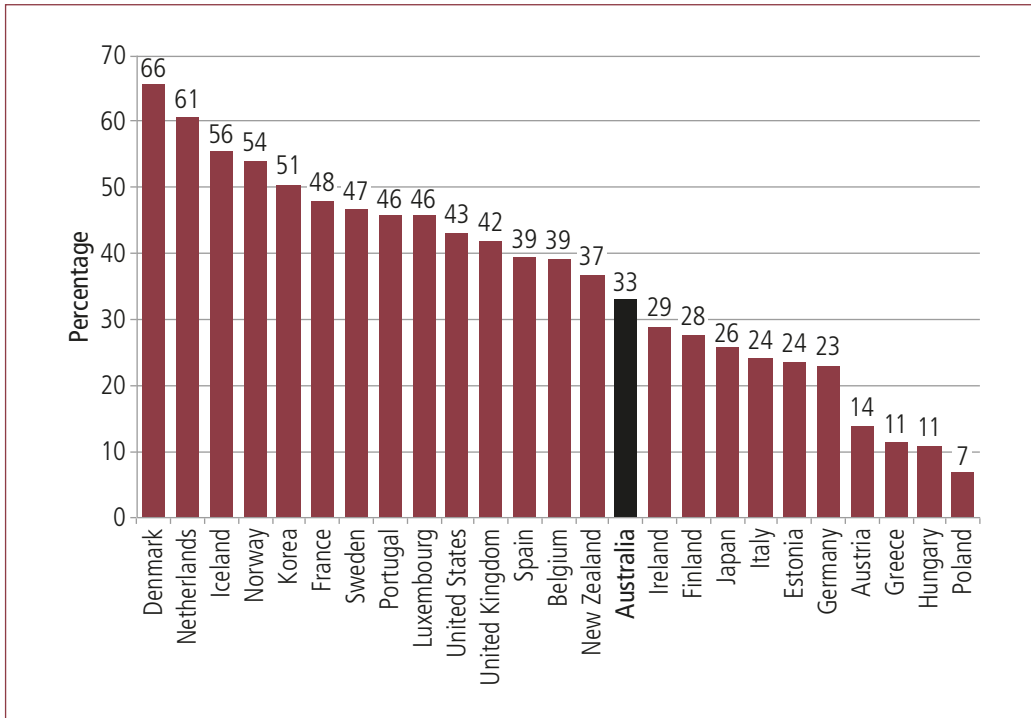
### 4.1 Child care and early education approaches and enrolment rates

In most countries, attention to the provision or funding of child care is a very significant part of the approach to work–family, although the way in which this is done varies considerably across countries. Some of the models that exist are:

- direct funding and provision of public child care and early education services (e.g., Sweden);
- subsidies to non-government child care providers (supply subsidies), which in the Netherlands has supported large-scale provision of for-profit child care; and
- indirect means-tested support to families who purchase market-provided child care (demand subsidies), which may be provided through tax allowances and credits (e.g., Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) or through cash rebates or “child care vouchers”, possibly directed more to low-income families (e.g., the UK).

Countries may “mix and match” the above options depending on what is thought most appropriate for particular age groups, and for infants in particular, there is considerable variation across countries in the child care approaches. The differences are, in part, a reflection of different parental leave systems: if parental leave is more generous, there is less need for

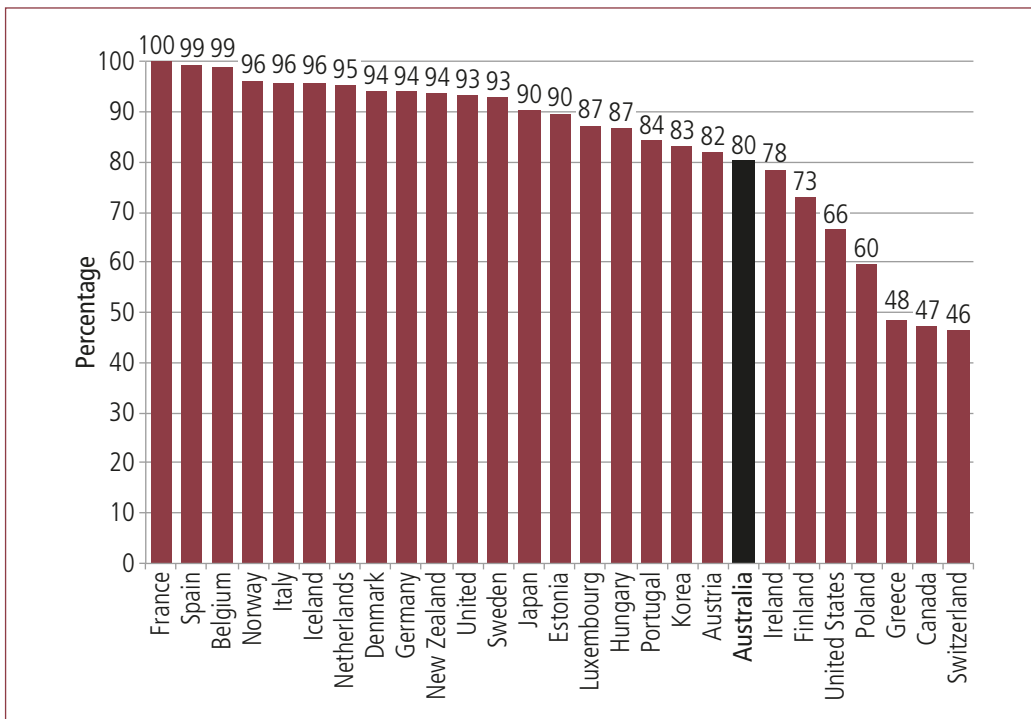




Note: There are some inconsistencies in calculation across countries. For notes and sources for other countries, refer to OECD Family database, PF3.2 Enrolment in child care and pre-schools.

Source: OECD Family database (downloaded August 2014), PF3.2 Enrolment in child care and pre-schools

**Figure 5: Enrolment in formal child care or preschool for under-3-year-olds, selected OECD countries, 2010**



Note: There are some inconsistencies in calculation across countries. For notes and sources for other countries, refer to OECD Family database, PF3.2 Enrolment in child care and pre-schools.

Source: OECD Family database (downloaded August 2014), PF3.2 Enrolment in child care and pre-schools

**Figure 6: Enrolment in early childhood education for 3–5 year olds, selected OECD countries, 2010**

non-parental care (Plantenga & Siegel, 2005; Waldfogel, 2001). In fact, a country's approach to child care may not include the provision of funding of formal child care places, but instead may deliver funds as child care benefits paid to parents, to allow them to either: (a) return to work and outsource child care; or (b) remain at home, the benefit partially compensating for lost income. This is the situation in Canada. A variation of this is the public provision of child care, but with child benefits paid to those who do not use those services (e.g., Finland and Norway).

While usually considered outside the scope of work and family, policies concerning the early learning opportunities for children, including early childhood education and school, are also relevant to families who are managing work and family commitments.

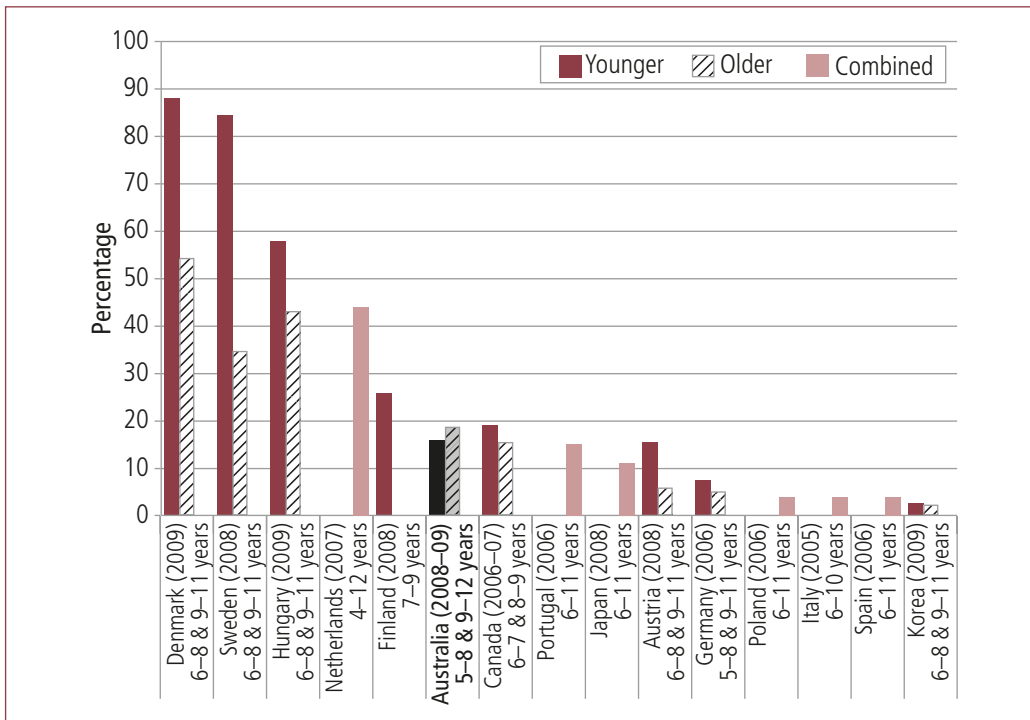
Cross-country differences in rates of child care enrolment follow from these different approaches. Also, within countries, differences in rates of enrolment by age of children in part reflect that approaches to child care (including early childhood education) vary for children of different ages. For children aged under three years a range of formal care settings is available in many countries, including child care centres and family day care. The wide variation in enrolment rates for this age group across selected OECD countries is apparent in Figure 5 (showing enrolment rates at approximately 2010). For example, in Denmark 66% of under-3-year-olds were in formal care, while in France and Japan the figures were 48% and 26% respectively. Note that some of this variation reflects the availability of other policies that potentially affect employment decisions for mothers with young children. For example, the availability of parental care may allow mothers to remain at home at least for their first year, reducing the demand for formal child care. Also, as will be discussed in subsection 4.4, the availability of a child care benefit may also mean mothers remain at home with very young children, instead of returning to work and seeking formal child care.

At age 3–5 years, formal care options begin to include programs that address the early educational needs of children, in preparation for school commencement. The development of early childhood education and school policies is often quite removed from those relating to work and family, sometimes because employment and education matters are the responsibilities of different parts of government. This can lead to tensions for parents who need to balance their work responsibilities around the timing of early education or school (for Australia, for example, see Hand, Baxter, Sweid, Bluett-Boyd, & Price-Robertson, 2014). Nevertheless, the provision of preschool can go some way towards a child care solution for parents of children aged 3–5 years, although where programs are not full-time (either across the week or across the day), there is a need for “wrap-around care” to meet the needs of working parents. Gornick and Meyers (2003) reported that in the US, many states moved from half-day to full-day kindergarten sessions because of this. Inter-country variation in participation in early childhood education (preschool and also school in some countries) for selected OECD countries at 2010 is apparent in Figure 6. There does not appear to be a strong concordance between these data and the formal care enrolment rates for younger children (in Figure 5).

For employed parents of school-aged children, the structure of the school day is relevant to work–family matters. The timing of the school day may not always match that of a “standard” work day, causing possible conflicts for parents trying to reconcile the demands of each. The main policy response has been in the provision of OSHC. The OECD noted in 2007 that provision of care to this age group was yet to be fully developed: “the development of outside of school hours services deserves a higher priority than it currently gets in many OECD countries” (OECD, 2007, p. 24). The typical forms of such care include provision of before-school and after-school programs. Comprehensive programs are provided in schools in countries such as Denmark and Sweden (Björnberg & Dahlgren, 2008; Gornick & Meyers, 2003). Similar programs are available in other countries, such as the policy initiative of “Extended Schools” in the UK (Cummings et al., 2007). Specific programs available in Paris, France, offer after-school care for all pre-primary and primary school children, which for the older age group may take the form of supervised study or cultural or sporting activities (Hein, 2005). More innovative initiatives include transport services and holiday camps, but examples of these tend to be found at the local area level, not the national level.

Figure 7 (on page 29) shows that school-aged children's enrolment in OSHC is quite low in several countries. Higher enrolment rates are evident in Denmark and Sweden, where there is more comprehensive OSHC provision. Of course, use of OSHC will depend on demand for it,

and so where maternal employment rates are lower, demand is expected to be lower. Where mothers more often work part-time, demand for OSHC may also be lower. (For Australia, for example, see Hand and Baxter, 2013.)



Note: Figure shows age ranges (in years) over which the calculations were made, and the year to which the data apply. Data were not available for all countries. There are some inconsistencies in calculation across countries. For notes and sources for other countries refer to OECD Family database, PF4.3 Out-of-school-hours care.

Source: OECD Family database (downloaded August 2014), PF4.3 Out-of-school-hours care.

**Figure 7: Outside-school-care enrolment rates, selected OECD countries, 2005–09**

## 4.2 The fit between parental employment and child care

Enrolment rates are not sufficient to show the considerable variation in the usual hours of attendance at child care across countries. Clearly, part-time attendance at child care, especially short hours of care, will not facilitate full-time employment, unless it is complemented with other informal care arrangements or flexible work arrangements. In 2006, across the EU, there was an average of 26% of children aged up to 3 years in formal child care. This included 14% in child care for under 30 hours per week and 12% for 30 hours or more (Commission of the European Communities, 2008b). Similarly, the 84% of children aged 3 years to under-school age in formal child care included 44% in child care for under 30 hours and 40% for 30 hours or more. Very significant differences by country are apparent. For example, in the Netherlands the majority of children are in care for fewer than 30 hours per week. This has implications for parents' employment, although it is not clear whether child care constrains parents in their choices regarding hours of work, or whether child care needs are chosen to fit into preferred work hours (Commission of the European Communities, 2008b).

For parents who work outside standard hours, child care is often a problem, as most care providers operate on a "standard" day and week cycle (Statham & Mooney, 2003). Most government initiatives directed toward the provision of child care services outside of standard hours have been implemented at the local government level. For example, in Sweden, several municipalities offer child care outside standard hours, including overnight (Björnberg & Dahlgren, 2008). In 2004–05, in 16 US states, child care providers were given incentives (a higher reimbursement of rates by the state) to offer evening, overnight and weekend child care

(Sloan Work and Family Research Network, 2005). Washington state (in the US) pays a bonus to service providers who cater for outside standard hours care (Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, 2007).

Further, when parents' jobs involve schedules that are not fixed, finding care solutions can be particularly difficult, as formal centres typically require children's places in care to be booked on an ongoing basis, although some might offer occasional or casual bookings. Government involvement in guaranteeing the availability of flexible child care in this way appears limited.

Governments have instead been more likely to address the issue of flexible child care through the support of child minders. These child care providers may operate in their own home or the home of the child, to provide a more flexible service, including at non-standard hours. Letablier (2006), for example, noted that this has been the direction of policy in France.

To encourage expansion of child care to support parental employment, one strategy is for governments to give tax incentives to employers to provide child care. For example, the Canadian government provides tax incentives to employers who create new child care spaces in the workplace (Government of Canada, 2008). While employer-provided child care has the benefits of allowing parents to spend more time with their children and facilitating breastfeeding after return to work, the availability of employer-provided child care is limited by the fact that many workplaces are of insufficient size to fund or administer such an arrangement. Another drawback of employer-provided child care is that it can create problems when parents change employers.

### 4.3 Cost and quality of child care

Cost of child care can be a significant deterrent to the take-up of formal care options and in some countries, the cost to families of caring means that returning to work results in little or no immediate financial gain. This is not the case in the Nordic countries, where public subsidisation of care means cost is not an issue for parents; if anything, the universal availability of care is likely to encourage women to work. The care is also of high quality and available on a full-time basis. Sweden, in particular, has universally available child care for children of all ages (Avdeyeva, 2006). However, this model does not suit all countries, as the cost is high, and tax systems in other countries are not established in a comparable way (OECD, 2007).

Across most countries, child care is seldom viewed as an employer's responsibility, despite the link between parental employment and child care (Fine-Davis, Fagnani, Giovannini, Højgaard, & Clarke, 2004). Child care costs are usually met by governments (federal, state or local) or individual families, but the degree to which costs are borne by government or families varies across countries (Commission of the European Communities, 2008b). For example, the OECD estimated that in 2012, for a dual-earner family with full-time earnings of 150% of the average wage and with two children (aged 2 and 3) in full-time child care, the net cost of child care (taking into account fees, subsidies and tax rebates) as a percentage of net family income ranged from a low of under 5% in several countries, including Korea, Austria, Portugal and Sweden, to a high of around 30% in the US, New Zealand, Ireland and UK (OECD, 2014b).

Provision of high-quality child care is important for the sake of children's wellbeing, and also is more likely to encourage parents to enter employment. Important quality measures include health and safety concerns, child development goals, staff qualifications, staff-to-child ratios, and the involvement of parents in the supervision of the child care facilities (OECD, 2007). Most countries address quality issues in their approach.

### 4.4 Child care benefits or related payments

Rather than directing funds to the provision of child care, an alternative approach taken by several European countries in recent years, is the payment of universal child care benefits to parents of young children. Such payments are usually framed as giving parents more choice as to whether or not to work, and which types of child care to use, if any. One approach is that parents may be able to use the benefit to pay for a place in a child care centre, fund their own informal child care arrangement or fund their own non-employment. In some countries, the

payment is conditional on the child not being in publicly funded child care, but parents may still choose to use the payment to pay for informal care. For governments, this can be a cost-effective solution, although this depends on the generosity and take-up of the payments. It also means an expansion of employment in the informal care sector, as parents can use the benefit to pay informal care workers (Morel, 2007).<sup>14</sup>

However, such payments are not always well regarded, as they can cause disincentives to return to work. As these payments tend not to be very high in value, the disincentive applies more to women who face relatively low wage rates upon return to work (Morel, 2007). There can also be more negative effects on female employment if employers are reluctant to take on someone who, due to the availability of these payments, is likely to have an extended break from work during the childbearing years.

An example of such a payment is the home care benefit in Germany (enacted in February 2013) for parents with children aged 1–2 years who are not in state-funded child care (Blum & Erler, 2014). The objective of the benefit is that of giving parents choice, in that they may use the benefit to pay for child care that is not state-funded, or may care for their child themselves. Other examples are described in Box 8.

<b>Box 8: Examples of child care payments</b>	
<b>Finland</b>	Parents may take “home care leave” from the end of parental leave until a child’s 3rd birthday. The home care allowance is payable to a parent who takes this leave, and is also sometimes topped up by local governments. This allowance is an alternative to taking up a publicly funded child care place. It has been claimed that payment has led many women to remain out of employment when they have young children; however, others note that these mothers are those who would have difficulties entering the labour market. A flexible care allowance was introduced in 2014 for parents of children under 3 years whose work hours were up to 30 hours per week, or 80% of full-time hours in their field. This was intended to promote part-time work, and to promote the transition from home care leave into work (Salmi & Lammi-Taskula, 2014; Sipila & Korpinen, 1998).
<b>Norway</b>	As in Finland, parents are entitled to a cash benefit if they do not use publicly funded child care. They can receive a partial benefit if their child uses part-time public child care (Brandth & Kvande, 2014).
<b>Sweden</b>	A child-raising allowance is available to parents in some municipalities of Sweden, for children aged 1–3 years who do not use publicly funded child care. The allowance is conditional on parents having used 250 days of parental leave, cannot be used simultaneously with parental leave, and the other adult in the household must be working or studying. Very few people have taken up this allowance, however. The value is low relative to average earnings (Duvander et al., 2014).

## 4.5 Summary

Funding of child care is one of the very significant ways in which governments across the world have contributed to work–family policy, although policies that relate to child care and early childhood education span broader areas than those specifically related to parental employment. In particular, the focus on quality of care and on addressing children’s educational needs is often the responsibility of areas within government that do not have a role in the workplace or broader family policy. It is in this area of work–family policy that there is greatest diversity across countries, with variation in the nature (and amount) of funding directed to child care. Within countries there is also considerable variation depending on the ages of children.

In respect to parental employment, the main way in which governments have progressed child care solutions is through the funding of formal child care options, whether that is through organised child care in a centre-based arrangement, or in homes, such as in family day care. Some governments have implemented policies that give parents the flexibility to choose their child care provider; for example, by providing options for families who wish to use relatives or other unregulated carers to mind their children while they work.

<sup>14</sup> This is also true of cash payments made to older or disabled people, who are encouraged to use these payments to make informal arrangements for their care (Morel, 2007).

The different ways in which child care policy intersects with other policies (such as parental leave) contribute to there being much diversity across countries in families' child care solutions. While policy settings explain some of the variation, the potential demand for child care within countries (or regions) is also partly a result of attitudes among parents and society more generally about appropriate care options for children, and of mothers' employment participation, which may be constrained because of other factors (such as inflexibility in the labour market).

# 5

## Working hours and other aspects of employment

### 5.1 Number of working hours

The degree of work–family conflict experienced by employed men and women is strongly associated with the number of hours worked, with longer work hours leading to more conflict (e.g., for Australia, see Alexander & Baxter, 2005; Baxter & Alexander, 2008; Hill, 2005; Pocock & Wilson, 2001). It is relevant, therefore, to consider how policy shapes working hours. Here we have considered this in terms of government policies concerning maximum working hours, the extent to which changes to working hours can be brought about by employees, access to flexible work hours, and the right to refuse working schedules due to family responsibilities.

There is considerable variation across OECD countries in the distribution of working hours and gender differences in working hours. Of the countries for which average hours worked are available for 2011, for males, the mean weekly hours worked varies from 35.7 hours in the Netherlands to 51.9 in Turkey, while for females, the range was from 24.5 hours in the Netherlands to 41.7 in Korea (Table 2 on page 34). As suggested by differences in average work hours of men and women, in all OECD countries, part-time work is more common among women than men, with the highest rates of female part-time work in 2013 being in the Netherlands and Switzerland (Table 1 on page 6). The countries in which women's share of part-time work is highest are Austria, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland. Part-time work is somewhat more evenly distributed between men and women in Korea and Turkey (Table 2).

Different supply effects may mean that part-time work is more attractive in some countries than in others (Evans et al., 2001; Gornick & Heron, 2006). Where child care is limited or expensive, or where part-time jobs are fairly accessible and the job conditions attractive, parents may choose to work part-time. Where long work hours are common (and job pressures greater) among full-time workers, more workers with family responsibilities may elect to work part-time to avoid this strain. The variation in hours worked across countries is in part explained by differences in whether work hours are legislated or set by collective agreements; however, it is difficult to draw links between working hours policies and the distribution of hours worked because of the range of factors likely to affect working hours decisions.

### 5.2 Legislating the length of the work week

Legislating the length of the work week involves establishing a maximum standard full-time work week, beyond which overtime rates may apply. Implementation of the maximum work week varies between countries, with provisions often made for certain occupations or workplaces to be excluded from this requirement. Within countries, specific collective agreements may vary the standard work week and introduce additional benefits and conditions.

All countries in the EU are covered by the EU Working Time Directive, which established a maximum average work week of 48 hours (including overtime) (European Trade Union Confederation, 2008).<sup>15</sup> The main objective of this directive is to promote health and safety at work, given evidence that people who work long hours run a higher risk of becoming ill and

<sup>15</sup> This directive was issued in 1993 and has subsequently been amended, most significantly in 2003. Other directives around access to breaks and annual leave, and maximum amounts of shift work are also included.

**Table 2: Mean weekly hours worked and women's share of part-time work, selected OECD countries**

	Women's share in part-time work, 2013 <sup>a</sup>	Mean usual weekly hours worked in main job, 2011 <sup>b</sup>	
		Male	Female
Australia	70.3	40.5	30.8
Austria	79.3	42.1	32.8
Belgium	80.8	40.5	32.6
Canada	66.6	39.8	33.9
Denmark	61.1	35.9	31.2
Finland	62.2	39.2	35.1
France	76.9	41.0	34.7
Germany	78.2	39.9	30.5
Greece	61.7	44.0	39.4
Hungary	63.5	40.2	38.7
Iceland	67.5	43.9	34.9
Ireland	71.9	39.2	30.5
Italy	74.0	40.5	33.1
Japan	70.3	n.a.	n.a.
Korea	60.5	46.7	41.7
Netherlands	73.2	35.7	24.5
New Zealand	72.7	41.9	32.3
Norway	69.4	36.6	30.9
Poland	67.9	42.4	38.2
Portugal	57.9	40.8	37.3
Spain	73.4	41.1	35.2
Sweden	61.2	38.4	34.3
Switzerland	80.0	40.4	29.1
Turkey	59.9	51.9	41.4
United Kingdom	73.8	41.0	31.2
United States	65.5	n.a.	n.a.

Note: Average hours are reported for main job only and so will underestimate the hours worked in all jobs. n.a. = not available.

Source: <sup>a</sup> OECD Employment database (downloaded August 2014), Average usual weekly hours worked on the main job.

<sup>b</sup> OECD Employment database (downloaded August 2014), Average usual weekly hours worked on the main job.

having accidents. However, in each country, employees can voluntarily choose to work more than these standard hours (European Working Conditions Observatory, 2008). For example, those who “self-determine” their working hours, including the self-employed and, in some cases, managers and professionals, may be exempt from this regulation. As a result, a significant proportion of the labour force in a number of EU countries still works hours in excess of the legislated work week (Fagan, 2003). In the UK, the 1998 Working Time Regulations provides for a limit of 48 hours a week (averaged over the year), but any worker can choose to work more than this (UK Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, 2008).

Some EU countries have chosen to set their maximum working hours at less than the 48 hours in the EU directive. The most significant application of a reduced standard work week in recent years occurred in France, where the standard work week was reduced, through legislative means, from 39 hours to 35 hours a week, on a voluntary basis in 1998, and compulsorily in 2000. The goal was to reduce unemployment and to improve the quality of life of workers. In subsequent years, laws were relaxed, largely in response to criticism of the 35-hour work week. Such criticism usually centred around arguments that the aims of this legislation were not being realised. More recent changes mean that, from August 2008, the work week is nominally defined as being 35 hours, but 35 hours is no longer the maximum (Tran, 2008).



Several other countries have standard work weeks considerably below the 48-hour maximum, although few are close to the 35-hour limit that was set in France. For example, Fagan (2003) reported that in 2002 Belgium had a legislated maximum of 39 hours, and Austria, Finland, Norway, Portugal, Spain and Sweden have a maximum of 40 hours. Outside the EU, Japan has implemented laws to reduce the work week down to a legal limit of 40 hours, with the intention of changing the culture of working long hours and improving workers' quality of life (Lee et al., 2007).

In France, the main objective of the reduction in working time was to address the country's high rates of unemployment, although a secondary objective was to facilitate better sharing of unpaid work in the home. Employers were able to implement the reduced working hours through changes to work schedules: some reduced the standard work day, others introduced additional days off, while others introduced flexibility such that work schedules varied across the year. For some parents, this increased the time available for families and improved work–family balance, but this was not the case in all families, and in fact for some the opposite occurred (Fagnani & Letablier, 2004; Hayden, 2006; Letablier, 2006). Employees who became subject to employer-imposed work schedule changes were less likely than others to experience an improvement in work–family balance (see discussion in section 5.3). Also, some workers experienced a deterioration in their working conditions; for example, an increase in work-related stress (see discussion in section 5.7). Fagnani and Letablier (2004) concluded that a reduction in hours is not sufficient in itself to improve work–family balance. Their assessment was that whether an improvement occurs with a reduction in hours depends also on how work hours are decided upon and whether the resultant schedule is compatible with work–family demands.

In the Republic of Korea, a working hours limit (of 44 hours) was initially imposed to address unemployment, but as the economy improved, work–family reconciliation and quality of life became the focus. A 40-hour work week was phased in between 2004 and 2011. This was commonly referred to as the “five-day-week”, as this was how the new limit was expected to be implemented (Lee et al., 2007). However, the pervasiveness of overtime hours still contributes significantly to the culture of working long hours in this country (see average work hours for Republic of Korea in Table 2). While both men and women work long hours, the employment rate of mothers in Korea, on average, is relatively low, reflecting the incompatibility of work and caring in this country (along with gendered approaches to caring).

Government intervention around working hours policies has also been through the introduction of annualised hours. This approach means that average work hours are calculated over a year instead of a week, taking into account periods of leave. Increasing the availability or length of annual leave therefore reduces average work hours, even if the “normal” work day or work week length is unchanged (see the discussion on annual leave in section 3.7). Calculating averages over the year also means that week-to-week variations in hours can be accommodated, in particular to allow work hours to be longer in peak times of demand or supply, and lesser at other times.

While there is some evidence that establishing a standard full-time work week is important in limiting total working time in a country (Gornick & Heron, 2006), most countries have not pursued this option, but have rather addressed the work–family balance issue by encouraging or enabling more flexible work options, including part-time work (Fagan, 2003).

## 5.3 The right to access or request changes to working hours

This section discusses policies that make it easier for workers to change their hours, whether to reduce or increase them as the need arises. Across countries, a fundamental difference is whether employees have the right to access or request such changes. There are also differences in whether this applies to parents, those with more broadly defined caring responsibilities, or all employees.<sup>16</sup> While the focus is usually on access to part-time work, some countries have

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<sup>16</sup> As discussed earlier, access to part-time or flexible work may be available to parents of young children, as part of the return-to-work strategy after parental leave.

also provided workers with the ability to increase their hours if their circumstances change and they wish to commit more time to the labour market.

Part-time work offers great advantages to those who wish to divide their time between paid work and caring, but it can reinforce gender stereotypes since it is predominantly taken up by women, and has implications for their wages and career prospects (Commission of the European Communities, 2008c). However, part-time work is very clearly a means of managing work and family responsibilities, and even in countries such as Sweden, with good work–family entitlements, a large proportion of women working full-time would prefer to work part-time (Pocock, 2005).

In the Netherlands, part-time work has been actively encouraged through government policy. This country has the highest rate by far of part-time work of all EU countries (see Table 1). Its *Working Hours Adjustment Act 2000* gives all workers the right to request a decrease or increase in working hours, without the requirement to specify the reasons (Knijn & Selten, 2002). Legislation prohibits discrimination based on working hours. The basis of the Netherlands approach is the Combination Model, which aims to encourage equal sharing between men and women in paid and unpaid work. However, women still predominate in part-time work (75%; see Table 2) and often prefer these hours, and men still tend to work relatively long hours, with only a small proportion working part-time hours. There is not a strong unmet demand for part-time work among men (Cousins & Tang, 2004).

It is now quite common for developed countries to have legislation that ensures full-time workers have a right to request to work part-time hours. In 2010, the OECD reported that in eight out of ten OECD countries, parents could request part-time work through parental leave (taking their leave part-time) or through reduced hours (OECD, 2010). Further, several countries have extended the right to request part-time work to other workers, including those who have caring responsibilities, are sick or disabled, are undertaking education or training, or are themselves older.

In the UK and New Zealand, the focus is not on access to part-time work, but on the broader notion of flexible work options (see section 5.5). In reality, for women (but not men), this is predominantly applied through requests for part-time work (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2008).

There are other mechanisms that provide employees with access to part-time work. For example, in Belgium, workers are entitled to a one-year career break within their working life (see section 3.8). They can elect to take this part-time by reducing their hours to 80% over five years. In Finland, if supported by employees and employers, workers can reduce their hours to part-time and receive partial compensation for this if the hours are made up by the employer taking on an unemployed person (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2008). In France, a time savings account can be used to accrue leave, and can also be used to change to part-time work (Todd, 2004).

As with the parental leave/part-time work option (see section 3.3), a right to access or request part-time hours may only apply to workplaces over a minimum size (e.g., 10 employees in the Netherlands and 15 in Germany) (Meyers & Gornick, 2004). Further conditions may also apply, thus giving the employer some say in whether or not these hours can be accommodated within the workplace. The OECD (2010) highlighted the diversity of such conditions across countries, with refusal by employers sometimes being possible on any grounds (e.g., in Italy), or on serious business grounds (e.g., in Norway, for all workers except parents in the Netherlands, and for all workers except parents and students in France). There are cases where no acceptable grounds for refusal are available (e.g., for parents and carers in Japan and Spain).

Regarding the ability to change from part-time to full-time hours, rights to request changes in hours are often implemented in relation to preferential treatment in filling full-time positions. For example, in many OECD countries, part-time workers have a right to be notified of full-time vacancies in the workplace (e.g., Belgium, Germany, Japan), and in several countries (such as Belgium, Germany, Japan, Korea, Spain and Sweden), preferential treatment may be given to part-time workers applying for full-time vacancies (OECD, 2010).

## 5.4 Guaranteeing the quality of part-time work

In a number of countries, there is recognition that encouraging *high-quality* part-time work can assist employees to balance work and family responsibilities.

The 1997 EU Directive on Part-time Work (or the Atypical Work Directive) aims to ensure that part-time workers have pro rata access to pay and conditions (Meyers & Gornick, 2004). Following this directive, legislation in Portugal (since 1999), Italy (2000) and the UK (strengthened in 2000) provides for equal treatment of part-time workers. The principle of equal treatment of part-time work was introduced into legislation in Belgium, France and the Netherlands earlier and more comprehensively than in other EU countries such as Germany or UK (Maier, 1994). See also OECD (2010) for information about other countries.

Quality part-time work is also addressed through legislation forbidding discrimination on the basis of sex or family responsibilities, since part-time work is often taken up by women as a means of managing family caring responsibilities (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2008).

Ensuring quality part-time work has been an important element of the Netherlands' approach to part-time work (Fox, Pascall, & Warren, 2006). Fox et al. suggested that giving employees the right to part-time work may encourage higher quality part-time work, and this may also encourage more fathers to take it up, a view also expressed by Visser (2002). High-quality part-time work in the Netherlands has been achieved through the *Equal Treatment of Working Hours Act 1996*, which ensures part-time workers have the same rights as full-time workers to training and promotion opportunities (Todd, 2004).

One of the characteristics of part-time work in the Netherlands is the relatively high degree of “time autonomy”—the degree to which employees can decide their own working hours or negotiate them with their employer. In Cousins and Tang's (2004) comparison of the Netherlands, UK and Sweden, part-time workers in the Netherlands had a considerably higher rate of “negotiated flexibility” than in the other countries (see also Grimshaw, Kerstholt, Lefevre, & Wilthagen, 2000).

Another aspect of quality is the degree to which part-time work is part of the permanent labour market. This is one negative feature of the part-time labour market in Australia, as well as the UK, where part-time work is more likely than full-time work to be temporary or casual. As these temporary/casual jobs don't have the same rights of access to job entitlements, such as leave, this has implications for the quality of part-time work. For example, in the Netherlands and Sweden, a very small percentage of female part-time workers have no employment contract (6% and 1% respectively), compared to the UK (27%) (Cousins & Tang, 2004).<sup>17</sup>

Part-time work also may not always be available in higher status occupations. Some governments, such as in the UK and Germany, have specific programs aimed at increasing the acceptability of part-time work in higher status occupations (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2008).

Because of quality and other issues, part-time work is not always guaranteed to contribute to a successful work–family balance:

The attractiveness of part-time work as a reconciliation measure is contingent upon the volume and schedule of working hours, the availability and social acceptability of alternative forms of child care, and the quality of pay and other working conditions. (Fagan, 2003, p. 15)

## 5.5 Flexible work arrangements

Some countries have adopted the approach of giving employees the right to request flexible work arrangements, potentially providing opportunities to change working arrangements in

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<sup>17</sup> See Campbell and Burgess (2001) for a discussion of permanent versus casual work and equivalent measures in Europe.

ways other than just reducing hours. While flexible working arrangements typically include part-time or reduced work hours, they also encompass the following work practices:

- flex time—employees work for an agreed total number of “core hours” but choose when their working day begins and ends;
- annualised hours—an agreed number of hours worked on a yearly rather than weekly basis;
- compressed hours—weekly full-time hours are worked over a shorter time period;
- job-sharing;
- “hot-desking” (temporary use of a desk);
- shift self-selection—employees contribute to the development of shift work schedules and choose their own shifts;
- unpaid or paid leave during school holidays; and
- staggered hours—different start and finish times for employees in the same workplace (NZ Department of Labour, 2008b; Todd, 2004).

In the UK, for example, since June 2014, all employees have a right to request flexible working hours and such requests must be considered by employers, although some restrictions based on tenure apply. This is an expansion from the original policy where only employees with children aged less than 6 years (or disabled children aged less than 18 years) had a right to request flexible work arrangements (Lewis & Campbell, 2007; Meyers & Gornick, 2004). In 2007, eligibility was expanded again to include workers caring for adults, as surveys showed that these workers had more difficulty than others in getting voluntary agreement from their employer to gain access to flexible work arrangements (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2008).

The take-up of flexible work in the UK has been quite high, although men are more likely to request flexible work arrangements than they are to request part-time work, given the negative effects on earnings of working part-time (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2008). A 2005 UK survey (Holt & Grainger, 2005) found that 60% of male and 71% of female employees were aware of the right to request flexible working, with somewhat higher rates for employees with children (pp. 5–6). The same survey found that 10% of male and 19% of female employees had requested flexible working in the previous two years, with higher rates for those with dependent children (p. 12). The most common requests were for part-time work and for access to flex time. Some of the apparent take-up may be that workers have formalised arrangements that were previously informally in place.

New Zealand also has a strong focus on flexible work options in its strategy to address work–life balance. This has been enacted through the *Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act 2007*, which gives the statutory right to request flexible work to workers with caring responsibilities (broadly defined, including care of adults and regardless of familial relationship) (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2008). This Act came into effect on 1 July 2008 (NZ Department of Labour, 2008b). Entitlement applies to those who have at least 6 months’ job tenure. As in the UK, employers have to consider requests for flexible work, but can refuse on certain grounds.

As discussed previously, flexible working time is also part of the approach taken in other EU countries. In France, how working time schedules were negotiated (if they were at all) in the change to the 35-hour week was strongly associated with whether workers perceived that there could be improvements in how they were able to combine work and family. Those with the least control over how these hours were established were the least likely to say there was an improvement in their work–family combination (Fagnani & Letablier, 2004).

The policy focus on flexible work arrangements is consistent with findings that flexible hours are usually found to help families to balance their work and family responsibilities (Baxter & Alexander, 2008; Haddock, Zimmerman, Ziembra, & Lyness, 2006; Hill, Hawkins, & Ferris, 2001). Flexible work in this context is when the employee has some control over work times. This “positive flexibility” is in contrast to flexibility that gives more control over working arrangements to the employer, creating instability of hours from the point of view of the employee. As noted by Hegewisch and Gornick (2008), what workers often want is “less flexibility but more

predictability, together with a greater range of alternatives for arranging when, where and how much they work” (p. 9).

Increasing employer and employee awareness of flexible work practices is an important part of improving employee access to them. Governments can play a key role here by providing information and advice about the existence and value of such work options. In the UK and New Zealand, for example, various information resources are available to employers and employees to help encourage and support the development of flexible work options. Governments can also help by encouraging innovation in alternative work arrangements, by rewarding it and/or by providing access to funds to develop and implement appropriate strategies targeted to individual workplaces. This is discussed further in section 6.

Another approach has been to allow some flexibility as to *where* work is done; in particular, allowing working at home, either on a part-time or full-time basis. This is one of the options listed in New Zealand’s flexible work strategy. Technological advances that allow workers be connected to their workplace through different telecommunication media increase the potential for work to be done from home for certain types of jobs. However, there are some concerns that working from home may not be a successful strategy for balancing work and family, as blurring the lines between the workplace and home can add to the conflict between the two domains (see discussion of the advantages and disadvantages in Hein, 2005). Given that working from home is only feasible for a limited range of jobs, government policies that can help to promote this are quite limited. The Japanese government, however, has attempted to encourage “tele-working” as a work–family strategy for workers with elder care responsibilities (Neal & Hammer, 2007).

An alternative to the above is the option of remote working from a location other than the office or home, with connectivity to the office through mobile phone and/or the Internet. Remote working options may be particularly attractive to those employees who would otherwise face long commutes to a central place of employment.

## 5.6 The right to refuse overtime or non-standard hours

It can be particularly problematic when the expansion of flexible work options leads to more employer-driven (rather than employee-driven) flexibility, and to more work during atypical times (evenings, nights or weekends). Working unpredictable hours can also be difficult, especially so if hours change with little notice (as has been shown to be the experience in France). Managing child care needs is especially hard in these situations. Fragmented days might also mean more commuting time, and having less time available to spend with family and children (Fagnani & Letablier, 2004). Also, where a work schedule is not spread over a “standard” week, but over a different cycle, this can cause problems when organising care or other outside-work commitments (Gornick & Heron, 2006).

In some countries, including Switzerland, France and Norway, workers with family responsibilities have a legal right to turn down work schedules or overtime if they interfere with those family responsibilities (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2008). Japan also has legislation to protect workers with care responsibilities (defined as caring for a spouse, parent, child or parent of a spouse; or for grandparents, siblings or grandchildren who co-reside and are dependent on the worker). These workers do not have to work excessive overtime, and the amount of night work they are required to do is limited, although exceptions exist for particular businesses (Taskforce on Care Costs, 2007).

Through the 1992 EU Maternity Leave Directives, across EU countries, the working hours of pregnant women, and new and breastfeeding mothers are monitored to ensure there is no health or safety risk associated with their working hours. Particular attention is given to night work. Employers are obliged to offer alternative work hours where a risk is identified, or if this is not possible, must grant a period of leave (Commission of the European Communities, 1999).

## 5.7 Reducing work intensification and job stress

Increased intensification of work, excessive stress and unrealistic workloads are concerns in a number of OECD countries. Such experiences of work can have a negative effect upon the ability of parents to reconcile their work and family responsibilities (Skinner & Pocock, 2008; Todd, 2004). For example, work intensification appears to have been a by-product of the introduction of the shorter work week in France—while working shorter hours, employees often report their workloads have not changed, and therefore feel the pressure of having to do more in less time. In analyses reported by Fagnani and Letablier (2004), some said this meant that, even though they were scheduled to have more days off, they were working from home on those days to keep up with their workload.

In a number of countries, such as Australia and New Zealand, workplace stress is addressed by occupational health and safety legislation. Governments can legislate against employers placing an employee at undue risk of harm, and provide information to employers to help them address the physical and mental aspects of work that may cause problems for employees. In conjunction with this, in a number of countries the relevant government body makes information available to employers and employees on how workplace stress can be minimised. For example, in 2003, the New Zealand government released a report for employers titled *Healthy Work: Managing Stress and Fatigue in the Workplace* (NZ Department of Labour, 2003).

Some governments, however, have a stronger focus on addressing job stress. As noted by LaMontagne, Shaw, Ostry, Louie, and Keegel (2006):

Various legal, legislative, and other approaches to job stress issues are emerging across the industrialized world. The concept of policy level intervention includes governmental regulatory policy, voluntary best practice guidelines published by non-governmental organizations, collective bargaining agreements, company policies, and more. The European Union provides an example of a recent broad-based effort to address job stress, with its dedicated European Union OHS week 2002 on *Working on Stress: Preventing Psychosocial Risks at Work*.<sup>18</sup> (p. 38)

While not usually thought of as work–family policy, these occupational health and safety policies that directly recognise job stress as an issue, if successful, should result in better work–family balance for families.

## 5.8 Summary

Being able to access hours of employment that allow family obligations to be met is one of the key aspects that determines the extent to which individuals are likely to experience work–family conflict, and also to be able to actually make the decision to be employed rather than stay out of employment or to take a more extended break when caring demands are high. The focus on facilitating parents to work hours that better match their care needs is therefore an important one, and it is not surprising that this has been the approach taken across many countries. Of course, legislating access to certain working hours or conditions does not guarantee that all parents have access to their preferred work conditions. The nature of the labour market will matter to how such conditions are actually implemented in the workplace, and to what extent they are available to all workers. Further, take-up of certain work arrangements will depend upon other factors, including gender role attitudes within the home, financial constraints on being able to work shorter hours, and the availability of alternative care options that may limit parents' needs for flexible or shorter work hours.

While policies that facilitate access to part-time work or flexible work is one way in which governments have addressed work–family issues, the continued gender differences in working hours in most countries highlights that work–family reconciliation more often involves the adjustment of working hours for women, but not for men. Having access to family-friendly jobs across the span of occupations and industries would guard against a “mummy track”, to the extent that even if women continue to be the ones reducing their work involvement to

<sup>18</sup> The *Working on Stress* report is available from the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work at: <osha.europa.eu/en/publications/reports/104>.

care for children or others, they can continue on their work or career path while working part-time or flexibly, and can then increase their work hours if they wish to do so once their caring responsibilities have diminished. However, there remain important questions about why work–family policies are slow to be taken up by fathers, and a likely future direction for governments is to explore whether policies need to be varied in some way to improve this take-up, to achieve more of a gender balance.

# 6 Support and promotion of work–family initiatives

The approaches discussed in the preceding sections of this report have largely centred on how governments have addressed work–family policy through legislative means and through the provision of services or entitlements to workers. Governments have also used “softer” approaches, by providing information to employers and workers about work and family issues, providing incentives for employers to implement work–family policies, encouraging workers to make use of family-friendly working arrangements, and providing supports to both employers and individuals to help them manage their work and caring responsibilities. This section discusses some of these approaches.

## 6.1 Coordination, information repositories and other supports

As it is often the case that work–family policies cross over the policy responsibilities of more than one portfolio, some governments, such as in Singapore and the UK, have set up work–family (or work–life) units in order to liaise across these areas (Hein, 2005).

Several governments have also established websites that are designed to promote work–life balance and disseminate information to employers and employees. This has been done, for example, in the UK, New Zealand and Canada. Features of the websites include links to press releases and research studies, information guides and booklets on implementing work–life friendly practices, and links to relevant government policies and legislation and case studies.

Many governments have helped to address work–life reconciliation by developing and distributing information resources aimed at employers, employees and/or the general public. Information resources generally take the form of booklets, manuals and websites, but may be supplemented by help desks. This information may also be distributed by way of talks on work and family, organised for presentation at workplaces or public forums.

## 6.2 Work–family, work–life and gender campaigns

Campaigns on work–family, work–life or gender have been conducted in many regions and countries.

The UK and New Zealand governments have launched work–life balance campaigns containing a series of integrated policy measures aimed at improving employees’ abilities to reconcile work with other aspects of life. The UK’s Work–Life Balance Campaign was introduced in 2000 by the Department of Trade and Industry. The campaign targeted employers, with two main areas of focus. The first was on providing information about good work–life practices, why they are important and how employers benefit. The second related to the implementation of work–life enhancing practices and providing support to businesses (Todd, 2004). In order to monitor the effects of its Work–Life Balance Campaign and to examine the overall progress of improving work–life balance in the UK, the UK government commissioned separate research studies of employers and employees. Results can be found in Hayward, Fong, and Thornton (2007);



Hogarth, Hasluck, and Pierre (2001); Hooker, Neathey, Casebourne, and Munro (2007); Stevens, Minnotte, and Kiger (2004); Stevens, Brown, and Lee (2004).

The New Zealand government's approach to work–life balance and the measures they have undertaken are very similar to those in the UK; however, there appear to be three key differences between the two countries' campaigns. Firstly, compared to the employer focus of the UK, New Zealand has been more inclusive of employees in their campaign. Also, New Zealand has a particular emphasis on flexible work practices, whereas the UK campaign is more broadly framed. Finally, New Zealand's campaign has had a large research component aimed at developing innovative practices that work for both employees and employers.<sup>19</sup>

Work–family issues may also be addressed in campaigns aimed more generally at achieving greater gender equality in the home or in the workplace. For example, information campaigns were an important aspect of the Netherlands' approach, aimed at increasing men's involvement in caring (European Commission, 2006). The Netherlands made use of annual radio and television campaigns to encourage families to find a better fit between work and family (Hein, 2005). To promote more equal gender division of domestic labour, the Dutch Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs launched a media campaign with the slogan "Men Taking the Lead". The message they wished to convey was that if men became more involved at home, more women would be able to enter the labour market and better balance work and family life. The campaign included television and radio commercials, as well as press conferences, a website, talk shows and events (European Commission, 2007).

A broad information campaign was also an aspect of the Synergy in Family and at Work project, conducted in 2002–03 in Greece, France and Italy. A primary objective of this project was to "promote new mentalities that encourage the fair distribution of family and professional responsibilities and the eradication of gender stereotypes" (European Commission, 2007, p. 36). It included organising meetings, press publications and a television campaign.

Several countries have taken the approach of designating a particular day on which families should focus on spending time together, recognising that paid work can get in the way of shared family time. For example, Korea introduced Family Love Day, which is designated to be every Wednesday. On this day, workers are encouraged to leave work at 6 pm (rather than at much later times) in order to have time with their families. "Family Love Day was initiated to promote the idea that spending time with family at least one day per week is the first step in strengthening love within the family" (East Asia Ministerial Forum on Families [EAMFF], 2012). It has been adopted by all public organisations, and is being promoted across the private sector.

In October each year, since 2003, the US has held a National Work and Family Month. As described on the campaign website, it works on the principle that "dedicating a month to work and family issues encourages all workplaces to pause once a year and consider the progress made towards work–life effectiveness and challenges employers to raise the bar each year to ensure their workplaces are meeting the needs and challenges facing their employees."<sup>20</sup>

## 6.3 Awards and accreditation

An additional way in which the governments of several countries, including New Zealand, Hungary, Germany, Singapore and Japan have endorsed work–life balance is with award schemes, which give public recognition, through ceremonies and press coverage, to employers who offer family-friendly work arrangements to their employees (EFILWC, 2006; Hein, 2005). In some countries this has been done through the certification of companies as being family-friendly if they meet certain conditions around access to work–family policies for employees. This is the case, for example, in Korea (EAMFF, 2012). In Hungary, award winners were able to use the award scheme logo in their business stationery. Winning companies were also given grants that could be used for putting toward offering holidays to staff members to spend time with their families (European Commission, 2007).

19 This employment research is available from the New Zealand Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment website at <[employment.govt.nz/er/bestpractice/worklife/research/](http://employment.govt.nz/er/bestpractice/worklife/research/)>

20 See the National Work and Family Month website at <[awlp.org/awlp/nwfm/index.jsp?nonav=y](http://awlp.org/awlp/nwfm/index.jsp?nonav=y)>.

As an alternative to the direct provision of workplace supports by government, another way that governments can be involved in work family reconciliation is by encouraging businesses to develop their own tailored strategies to address these issues:

The Babies and Bosses reviews found that publicly supported “consultancy” initiatives which provide tailored advice to companies are an innovative way of fostering family-friendly workplaces, especially when they included re-assessment to ensure long-term enterprise commitment. However, there is not much evidence that such initiatives have become widespread. (OECD, 2007, p. 25)

One such initiative was the UK’s Challenge Fund. This fund provided grants to organisations to pay for consultancy services to help organisations to assess the benefits of providing flexible work arrangements; identify their employees needs; and find and implement practices that meet employers’, customers’ and employees’ needs. Between its launch in 2000 and publication of the Challenge Fund Evaluation Report in 2004, approximately 400 organisations from the private, public and voluntary sectors, across the UK and Scotland, received funding. Employers most commonly applied to the Challenge Fund to address problems with recruitment and retention of staff (Nelson, Nemeč, Solvik, & Ramsden, 2004).

## 6.4 Programs, supports and services for employment

While not directly implemented for the purposes of addressing work–family balance, programs, supports and services that address parents’ or carer’s ability to be able to return to or sustain employment often need to take account of work–family issues. In some countries, programs exist that are specifically aimed at: those re-entering the labour force after a caring break, addressing job search techniques, specific job skills, or factors such as confidence levels. For example:

- In one area of Switzerland, a Women and Employment Program provides assistance to women who have been out of the labour market and wish to return to work (Hein, 2005).
- In France, a woman returning to work after completing parental leave is eligible for retraining with pay (Fine-Davis et al., 2004).

More generally, lack of skills or perceived lack of skills may prove to be a barrier to employment for those wishing to re-enter the labour market after taking a break for family reasons. In these cases, programs that address these barriers can be of benefit; in particular, active labour market programs that involve training, job search assistance and/or on-the-job training (Hein, 2005). This is an important aspect of assisting not-employed single parents to move into employment (OECD, 2007). While these supports have a focus beyond work and family, they are relevant when considering those who wish to return to employment after taking a break to address family needs.

There are other broad-ranging issues that can affect the work–family balance and the ability to re-enter employment after a break. For example, in the community or local government area, access to reliable public transport and access to shops and services outside work hours can be important to families trying to balance caring and work responsibilities (Fox et al., 2006; Hein, 2005). Such issues can be particularly pertinent to low-income families.

## 6.5 Summary

While we have placed this section last, the approaches outlined here underlie the various policies discussed throughout this report, by raising awareness among employees and employers of the existence and benefits of different policies. More general campaigns may encourage families to talk about work–family issues and to think about different solutions to the “traditional” models of work and care. These approaches are all important, as while government may initiate work–family policies, their application in the workplace, their take-up and their interaction with other policies can make a significant difference to the success or otherwise of work–family policies achieving their objectives.

# 7

## Concluding remarks

The purpose of this report was to review the range of policies that governments have in place that are relevant to the reconciliation of work and family. As well as outlining several policy areas, within this report we outlined some of the broader contextual issues that are relevant in considering and comparing country-level work–family policies.

A key message from this review is that the work and family policies adopted by different countries can only sensibly be understood by considering *all* of the policies that affect work and family life, as a package. While country-specific work–family policies can be identified, within countries these policies interact with each other in complex ways, and the ways in which they are operationalised vary depending on broader government policies and institutions. The interaction of different approaches within countries is most apparent when considering how parental leave and child care policy relate to each other, with fewer formal child care supports for very young children being needed when parental leave policy supports mothers (or fathers) to remain out of employment for a longer period. We can nevertheless learn from other countries, keeping such contextual factors in mind. For example, having better information about the facilitators or barriers to the take-up of specific policies, and the consequences of those policies, can provide insights that may be of relevance in Australia and elsewhere. There is a role for country-specific studies that can place findings within a specific context, as well as comparative research that can describe and compare policies and outcomes across a range of settings.

A second key message is that some policies explored here in the context of work–family reconciliation were not all designed and implemented for the specific purpose of addressing work and family issues. Some policies described here were developed to address fertility concerns, others to address gender equity, and others labour market productivity. However, the reconciliation of work and family may be recognised as a conduit to reaching various outcomes, as is often the case in those policies developed for these other primary objectives. It is apparent that work–family issues emerge across a range of areas of government policy, which is why some governments have set up work–family or work–life units to provide a means of coordinating cross-portfolio interests in this area. Ensuring awareness of work–family issues across policy areas has the potential of identifying unintended consequences of new policy developments upon workers with family responsibilities.

Managing the unintended consequences of policies is a challenge for government, even when such policies are developed in areas that are closely concerned with family wellbeing. For example, policies that address early childhood education and are very focused on the wellbeing of children may not fit well with parents' employment. Exploring policy outcomes from different perspectives is clearly important in order to understand how well such policies are meeting families' needs.

Funding work–family policies appropriately is obviously an ongoing issue for governments, and funding approaches and priorities vary within countries over time, as well as across countries. From an economic perspective, work–family policies are particularly relevant in relation to governments' interests in maintaining or building the labour market, and ensuring that parents can engage in paid work to capacity. While several policies (such as government-funded leave and child care) come at a cost to government, the lack of provision of such policies can also be costly, because of lost productivity due to parents' (mostly mothers') withdrawal from employment. Economic and social consequences may also flow through due to a lack of

policies that address the wellbeing of workers and their families. As noted by Hein (2005), if governments neglect the policy area of work–family reconciliation, some negative consequences may include an increased use of suboptimal child care, the under-use of women’s human capital, the economic vulnerability of women and families, increased income inequality, and reductions in fertility.

The continued disparity between men and women in their use of work–family policies is an important area for government, and also further research. Broad labour market issues, as well as social norms and attitudes, no doubt play a role in explaining the differential use of policies by men and women. Internationally, a strong focus on work–family policies over recent years has been on finding means of bringing fathers more into the caring role, especially in sharing the care of young children. This, it is hoped, will not only improve the labour market opportunities for women, but will be beneficial for the wellbeing of fathers and families as these men become more involved in family life.

Since most government policies that relate to work–family issues are directed at families with children, this was the key focus of this review, although we noted some policies that apply to those with broader family responsibilities, such as elder care. Policies directed at those caring for older persons appear to remain quite limited compared to those caring for young children, despite growing awareness across OECD countries of the ageing of the population. This may be one area where policy development grows over the coming years.

This review has highlighted the variability in governments’ approaches to work and family, discussed some of the contextual issues and provided examples of policies in place in recent years. Of course, what is particularly important to families is the extent to which these policies actually make a difference, and this is where an understanding of the broader setting within countries is important. It is also important to note that workers may also have access to work–family policies through their employer. As noted in the section on leave arrangements, when payment during maternity or parental leave is capped according to government policy, workers may actually have their payment topped up to full wage replacement by their employer. On the other hand, more vulnerable workers, including those in self-employment or other insecure employment, may have little access to the policies that have been discussed here. Many of the parental leave payments, for example, are paid to eligible employees, whose eligibility is based on prior employment and earnings.

For Australia, as with other countries around the world, we can expect that men and women will continue to be faced with the challenges of combining paid work with caring responsibilities, and perhaps increasingly so in regard to care for our older relatives. To address these continuing challenges, we need to continue to learn from other countries’ experiences, looking out for successful innovative approaches and considering their usefulness within our own policy settings.

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# Appendix

## East Asian Ministerial Forum on Families Brunei Darussalam Statement

3rd October 2012

### Brunei Darussalam Statement on Ensuring Work Family Balance

We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegation responsible for families from Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Kingdom of Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Republic of Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Republic of the Philippines, Republic of Singapore, Republic of Korea, Kingdom of Thailand, Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste and Socialist Republic of Vietnam gathered in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam on 1st to 3rd October 2012 for the Fifth East Asia Ministerial Forum on Families (5th EAMFF) had considered various issues on the broader role of the family and:

ACKNOWLEDGING that families have always been the basic unit of society that perform essential functions, and serve as sources of stability, continuity and development;

RECOGNISING that families are essential to the world's future whose strengths and weaknesses have direct impact on the fabric of the larger society;

AWARE that gender equality and women's empowerment are needed for work-family balance;

RECOGNISING the diversity of families and that all kinds of families, especially the most vulnerable ones, deserve political, legal and social protection;

REALISING that the fast growing global economy has led to profound changes in family structure, which include the rise in dual income families, an increase in female workforce participation and declining fertility rates;

CONCERNED that there are increasing challenges in securing incomes for viable living, and inadequate flexibilities in the workplace to meet family needs and caring responsibilities;

NOTING that a balance between work and family life would encourage people with caring and family responsibilities to enter and remain in the workforce, and enjoy equitable opportunities to progress in their careers;

AFFIRMING that assistance in balancing between work and family responsibilities will mutually benefit both families and workplace organisations;

RECOGNISING that the allocation of sufficient quality time for workers with their families will contribute to resilient, happy and harmonious families;

COGNIZANT that balancing work and family has direct benefits on intra-family relationships and children's development;

CONCERNED that insufficient policies and ineffective implementation of programmes to assist workers balance work and family responsibilities can cause work and family conflict;

ACKNOWLEDGING that work family imbalance can lead to social, psychological and somatic problems, family instability, and reduce productivity at the workplace.

We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegation at the 5th East Asia Ministerial Forum on Families (EAMFF) resolve to:

1. Strengthen our commitment to the implementation of policies and programmes on work family balance;
2. Strengthen our commitment to research and development undertakings to drive evidence based policies and programmes in addressing the need for work family balance;
3. Incorporate family and gender perspectives in the formulation of policies and programmes that foster the participation of all family members in the achievement of work family balance;
4. Introduce and develop policies and programmes that promote work family balance such as flexible work policies, family friendly workplaces, paid parental leave, and availability of nursing facilities and child care centers;
5. Encourage public, private and people sectors to work in partnership in the formulation, promotion and implementation of policies and programmes on work family balance;
6. Empower individuals to better balance work and family commitments through the provision of skills training such as time management, parenting, stress management, financial management and caring for members of the family;
7. Promote family friendly values and messages such as work-life balance, gender equality and shared responsibilities in the family;
8. Enhance networking and collaboration among EAMFF participating countries especially in the sharing of information on family policies, data, research, best practices and capacity building to address common family issues.

WE THANK the Government of Brunei Darussalam for hosting this forum and express our gratitude for the warm hospitality, excellent preparation and organization of the Forum; and

WE LOOK FORWARD to meet at the Sixth Forum to be held in 2014 in the Republic of Korea.