Walking the tightrope: tensions between work and family life across the OECD

Families on the Move - COFACE

Brussels, 12 May 2017

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Only around four-in-ten adults in households with children work and report little difficulty in combining work and family roles.

Proportion (%) of working adults in households with at least one child aged 0-17 that report little or no difficulty combining their work and family roles, 2012.
Mothers are often less likely to be at work when children are very young.
A scarcity of suitable childcare is a common reason for mothers reducing their paid work

Proportion of economically-inactive women (25-to-54-year-olds) with at least one child aged 0-to-14 who report they are inactive because suitable care services for children are not available or affordable, by age of youngest child, 2014 or latest

% of inactive

- Youngest child aged 0-2
- Youngest child aged 3-5
- Youngest child aged 6-14
Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are disproportionately likely to miss out on formal ECEC

Participation rates in formal ECEC by equivalised disposable household income tertile, children under age three, European countries, 2014
Out-of-school-hours care is widely used in some countries, but in most it remains underdeveloped.

Proportion (%) of children aged 6-to-11b using centre-based out-of-school-hours (before and/or after school) care servicesc during a usual week, by age group, 2014.
Gender gaps in unpaid work widen upon parenthood

Time spent on unpaid work by partnered men and women aged 25-44 with and without at least one child aged 0-17, in minutes per day

- **Men**
- **Women**

![Graph showing gender gaps in unpaid work](image-url)
Unequal division of unpaid work between men and women

Panel A: Gender gap in overall work of partnered men and women

Panel B: Unpaid work of partnered men and women
Needs to develop work-life support

- To meet families’ needs in time, money and services
  - Time to care for children and for the elderly (=> leave entitlements and flexible working arrangements)
  - Money: ensure that leave to care offer income protection
- To avoid gap in support, e.g. between the end of parental leave and entering formal care
- To provide parents with a continuum of support (work-life balance issues do not stop when children enter into compulsory school => role of out-of-school care services
- To foster gender equal division of paid and unpaid work
  - Role of individual leave rights, well-paid and with flexibility
- To change workplace culture
Increasing paid leave for fathers: 10 weeks in one third of OECD countries

Note: Information refers to entitlements to paternity leave, 'father quotas' or periods of parental leave that can be used only by the father and cannot be transferred to the mother, and any weeks of sharable leave that must be taken by the father in order for the family to qualify for 'bonus' weeks of parental leave.

Source: OECD Family Database
Unequal use of leave entitlements by parents: where are the fathers?

Panel B. Gender distribution of recipients/users of publicly-administered parental leave benefits or publicly-administered paid parental leave

Duration of leave entitlements to care for a relative, 2014

*In the Czech Republic, Estonia, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, and Switzerland, the entitlement is per spell of illness*
Fathers are often more likely than other employees to work from home

Percentage of employees who have worked from home over the past 12 months, 2015

Source: OECD calculations based on the 6th European Working Conditions Survey (2015),
Pay offs from investing in early childhood programs include:

Increasing coverage of childcare services for children under age 3 has a positive influence on both female labour market participation and fertility trends. By fostering female employment, contribute to drastically reduce child poverty.

OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data show that 15-years old students who attended pre-primary education for at least a year are likely to have higher maths scores than those who did not, the gap being equivalent to almost one year of formal schooling after accounting for students’ socio-economic status.

Investment in children’s child well-being must start in early childhood and be sustained throughout childhood and that the benefits are especially large for children from a disadvantaged background (Heckman, OECD, 2011).
Positive influence of childcare services for very young children on female employment

- The increase in the coverage of childcare services for children under age 3 doubled on average since the mid-1990s and was found to be responsible for a 2.5 percentage point increase in female employment rates (for women aged 25-54) – i.e. ¼ of the total increase of female employment from 1995 to 2008 (Thévenon, 2013; 2016).

- Interaction between policy instruments matters to understand the effectiveness and efficiency of policies:
  - Strongest influence of the development of childcare services in countries with overall strong support to female employment, with long leave and greater employment protection.
  - Positive influence of incentive to work part-time, and negative of marginal taxation rates
  - Ambiguous effect of the extension of leave duration

- The effect of policies is highest for highly educated women (Cipollone, 2014)
Influence of childcare policies on fertility
(Luci-Greulich and Thévenon, EJP 2013)

- Positive effect of the increasing coverage of childcare services for children under age 3
  - While the extension of paid leave and spending on leave and birth grants have no (or very weak) effect on fertility trends
- Positive effects of in-cash « regular » support
- => Work and family life reconciliation (and associated child opportunity cost) has become central in fertility decision.
Changing workplace cultures is key to fostering inclusive growth

There are no quick fixes and change requires a sustained effort, but labour market institutions, employers and workers need to change to make more efficient use of available economic resources and human capital:

• Limit prevalence of long working hours
• Equal access to entry in career tracks and career progression
• Make workplace cultures conducive to use of maternity and parental leave rather than mothers leaving the labour force.
• Reduce the dichotomy between regular and non-regular employment and take down barriers to mother returners resuming work in regular employment.
• Leadership is important: Senior management should lead by example; make middle managers accountable for change, e.g. for staffers using their leave in full.
Further information

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<td>OECD Gender Data Portal</td>
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<td>OECD (2017) Dare to Share: Germany's Experience Promoting Equal Partnership in Families</td>
<td><a href="http://oe.cd/DtS">http://oe.cd/DtS</a></td>
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<td>OECD (2016) Walking the tightrope: Background brief on parents’ work-life balance across the stages of childhood</td>
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<td>OECD (2016) Be Flexible! Background brief on how workplace flexibility can help European employees to balance work and family</td>
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<td>OECD (2016) Who uses childcare? Background brief on inequalities in the use of formal early childhood education and care (ECEC) among very young children</td>
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