

Strong Families

Sustainable Governance Indicators 2024



Indicator

Family Policies

Question

To what extent does the current family policy approach support or hinder unpaid family care work?

30 OECD and EU countries are sorted according to their performance on a scale from 10 (best) to 1 (lowest). This scale is tied to four qualitative evaluation levels.

- 10-9 = Family policies are fully aligned with the goal of creating the conditions for strong families.
- 8-6 = Family policies are largely aligned with the goal of creating the conditions for strong families.
- 5-3 = Family policies are only somewhat aligned with the goal of creating the conditions for strong families.
- 2-1 = Family policies are not at all aligned with the goal of creating family-friendly conditions.

Denmark

Score 9

By international comparison, Denmark excels in its family policy. Daycare centers, preschools and kindergartens offer parents the flexibility needed to work. In fact, the female employment rate in Denmark is among the OECD's highest. Comparative research indicates that Danish men do more household work than their counterparts in many other countries. Danes view daycare and preschool facilities as essential public services, and recent debates have raised questions about whether work-life balance can be improved.

The system of parental leave in connection with childbirth is relatively generous. Men also have parental leave rights. Municipalities are responsible for daycare facilities, which can be either public or private. These facilities contribute to improving the work-life balance. Social parties and businesses also play a role in this field. The government has sought to increase the number of employees per child for such facilities, resulting in a proposal that increases spending by DKK 1.4 billion through 2024.

The great majority of children attend daycare facilities in Denmark. In 2022, about 70% of children aged two and under were in daycare, the highest such rate in the OECD. Approximately 95% of children aged three to five attended some kind of preschool institution (Statistics Denmark 2023). There is a user payment for daycare – means tested – but it does not cover the full cost, so the system is tax-subsidized. There are substantial differences in the fees paid to have a child in kindergarten across municipalities.

Citation:
Statistics Denmark, 2023. "Børnepasning før skolestart."
<https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/dokumentation/statistikdokumentation/boernepasning-foer-skolestart>

Finland

Score 9

Family policy in Finland adheres to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as other international agreements. Finland's family-policy programs aim to create a secure environment for children, while also providing parents with the physical and mental resources they need. By and large, family policy has been successful. For example, child poverty has been greatly alleviated.

Support for families has three main elements: financial support for services and family leave, child benefits, and the provision of childcare services. The family support system includes maternity leave policies that provide job protection and adequate wage replacement schemes beyond the WHO guidelines of six months. The family support system also provides parents with paid leave to care for sick children, but not for the care of elderly family members in need of assistance. Access to public day care is guaranteed to all children under seven years of age, and allowances are paid for every child until they turn 17.

The traditional nuclear family pattern, with two parents of opposite sexes, is changing. Nontraditional families already account for around one-third of all families in Finland, and the number of blended families and rainbow families is increasing. Existing benefits schemes and service models do not always meet the real needs of families (Eydal et al. 2018). For example, the government program mentioned that access to services – such as couples counseling or divorce counseling, which foster the well-being of families and support parents when they experience parenting or relationship problems – is not systematic or equal across the country.

The core aims of policies aimed at families with children in Finland are twofold: to improve equality among children by ensuring that all children can enjoy a good and safe childhood, regardless of family structure or socioeconomic status, and to enhance gender equality by enabling both parents to work and provide care. Family policies in Finland ensure that parents are supported in caring for their young children by guaranteeing paid parental leave and offering subsidized childcare and family benefits.

However, family policy remains somewhat problematic with regard to gender equality. Although the employment rate among women, especially the full-time employment rate, is among the highest such figures in the European Union, family policies have not fully addressed the challenge of combining parenting and employment. While the number of fathers taking paternity leave has somewhat increased, childcare responsibilities still fall predominantly on women. Additionally, the home care allowance of up to three years encourages Finnish women to leave the labor market for longer periods than is the practice for women in many other countries.

Comparative examinations of Nordic family policies suggest that Finland's family policies have not fully developed to match the more flexible arrangements seen in countries including Norway and Sweden. In general, evidence has shown that family-centered thinking is increasing among Finnish adults and within Finnish culture more broadly.

Additionally, there are social, healthcare and school services aimed at ensuring children receive the best possible care and outcomes. These services are either fully funded by the public sector or require parents to pay small user fees. Parents are entitled to paid leave from work after the birth of a child, and the law guarantees they can return to the same job after the leave period. Under the Employment Contracts Act, employees are entitled to leave during which they can receive maternity, special maternity, paternity or parental allowances (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare 2020).

Finland grants children legal rights to early childhood education and care (ECEC) services. These services are designed to support women's labor market participation, ensure children's well-being, and, in more recent years, additionally to foster the development of children's social and cognitive skills. In essence, ECEC is an investment in children's present and future. The public sector subsidizes ECEC services, resulting in relatively modest user fees for parents compared to those in other countries.

The most important family cash benefit in Finland is the child benefit, which is paid to parents regardless of their income or means and is the same for all children. Finland provides additional benefits to single parents and a supplement for additional children. In addition to child benefits, if a partnership is dissolved resulting in single parenthood, the parent who legally resides with the child often receives a child maintenance payment from the nonresident parent. The amount and arrangement of the payment are decided during divorce proceedings or in connection with the birth of a child out of marriage, either through mutual agreement or a decision from the court or local authorities. Public authorities guarantee maintenance payments for children. Poverty among families with children is most common in single-parent families and in families where children are under the age of three.

Over the last few years, the value of family benefits have eroded due to the high rate of inflation. However, it is still fair to say that policies and regulations provide financial support (e.g., child benefits, child supplements, tax-free allowances for children) that maintain economic stability for families, ensure basic financial security and support individuals in their decision to have children.

Katja Repo. "The Contradiction of Finnish Childcare Policies." www.ungdata.no/reassessassets/20608/20608.ppt

Eydal, G. B., T. Rostgaard, and H. T. Hiilamo. 2018. "Family Policies in the Nordic Countries: Aiming at Equality." In G. B. Eydal and T. Rostgaard, eds., *Handbook of Family Policy*, 195-208. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781784719340.00024>

France

Score 9

There is a long tradition of support for families going back to the 1930s. The comprehensive policy mix that has developed since then has been successful in providing childcare, financial support and parental leave, and has resulted in generous fiscal policies (income is not taxed individually, but in each family unit, dividing up total income by the number of people in a family).

Beginning in 2019, nursery schooling has been mandatory from the age of three, a policy that will strengthen inclusion for immigrant children. In addition, families using childcare support at home are given rebates on their social contributions. The fact that income taxes are calculated on the basis of the family unit and not individually is also very favorable to families, since (nonworking or lower-paid) spouses and children lower the amount of taxable income per head. These policies have been effective. Not only is the birth rate in France one of Europe's highest – despite a slight fall from an average of two births per woman before 2014 to 1.83 births per woman in 2020 – but the percentage of women integrated into the labor market also compares favorably to that seen in the Scandinavian countries, Europe's leaders in this domain.

After a series of reforms under President Hollande that restricted child allowances for high income earners, Macron's presidency has added both more restrictive and more generous measures (e.g., parental leave has been extended from 14 to 28 days) without major impact on the existing pattern of family policy. Child poverty rates and the risk of poverty are greater than the OECD average and remain a concern.

Norway

Score 9

Unpaid family care work is broadly associated with a traditional, subordinate role for women and stands in contrast to an official social and tax policy promoting female labor market participation. Economic benefits and tax incentives to sustain one-earner households have been abandoned and replaced with a generous system of child-related services and benefits for economically active parents. Full wage continuation is granted for 12 months of parental leave for a new child.

Ninety-five percent of children aged 1 – 5 attend preschool, and parents have a maximum of 20 days of paid leave in case of child sickness. If a child is chronically ill or disabled, more generous needs-tested schemes exist. Preschools are heavily subsidized, and there is a national maximum on parent co-payment.

Gender equality objectives are reflected in the exclusive right for fathers to take four months of the parental leave period, and the right to stay at home with a sick child is equally distributed among parents. There is a universal, flat-rate child allowance paid

per child until the age of 18. Single parents receive an allowance for an extra child. Rights to leave paid work to care for elderly parents are less developed and exist only as a needs-tested scheme administered by local authorities.

Citation:

OECD. 2023. Exploring Norway's Fertility, Work, and Family Policy Trends. Paris: OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/f0c7bddf-en>

Slovenia

Score 9

Slovenian inhabitants have a good work-life balance, with only 6% of Slovenians working long hours and similar amounts of time devoted to personal care and leisure. The share of employed women is high: 68% compared to 74% of men. Mothers are likely to return to their jobs once the baby reaches 11 months of age.

Maternity leave lasts 15 weeks: 4 weeks before the birth and 11 weeks after. Paternity leave lasts 15 days and must be taken before the child reaches 3 years of age. In 2022, roughly 93% of fathers took up to 15 days of paternity leave, with around half opting to take more than 15 days. A same-sex partner can also take paternity leave.

In addition to maternity and paternity leave, parental leave promotes the division of childcare. Each parent is entitled to 160 days of parental leave, with up to 100 days transferable to the other parent. Biological, adoptive, and foster parents have the right to parental leave, and one parent must begin this leave immediately after maternity leave. Up to 60 non-transferable days per parent may be taken any time until the child reaches 8 years of age. Most mothers take advantage of their entire parental leave allocation or a significant portion of it, while very few do not take any leave.

Despite full compensation for earnings during leave, fathers' low participation may be attributed to traditional family roles. A strong network of public and private preschools – supported by concessions – enables parents to return to work once the child reaches the age of one. In the 2022–2023 school year, nearly 82% of children aged 1–5 were enrolled in Slovenian kindergartens.

Financial incentives for parents with more than one child also contribute to increased participation in the labor market. Parents with two children enrolled in kindergarten simultaneously are exempt from paying for the younger child. In addition, parents are exempt from kindergarten fees for the third and every subsequent child from the same family, regardless of whether they are enrolled in kindergarten at the same time as their siblings.

Insured persons are entitled to take leave to care of a family member (spouse and children) who has fallen ill. Generally, seven working days of leave may be taken per family for each episode of illness. Absence from work is significantly higher among women, and the gender gap is increasing year after year. This is due to the

full employment of women, who more often take care of children and the poorly regulated long-term care system.

Depending on the family's income class, a parent can receive a child allowance as a supplementary benefit for supporting, raising, and educating a child. For income taxpayers, the tax base can be reduced by a special allowance to maintain family members – children.

Citation:

OECD. OECD Better Life Index Slovenia. <https://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/work-life-balance/>

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Sweden

Score 9

Sweden has a long tradition of public policies supporting families. The main pillars of these policies are extensive childcare benefits and family support measures. These are regulated by the Parental Leave Act (SFS: 1995, 584). Mothers are entitled to at least seven weeks of maternity leave before their due date and seven weeks after the child's birth. Two of these weeks before and after delivery are mandatory. Employees also have the right to maternity leave for breastfeeding. The other parent or carer is entitled to ten days of paid leave for a child's birth or adoption. In 2022, the parental leave benefit was 77.6% of the individual's full salary. Additionally, a parent has the right to fully paid or unpaid parental leave until the child is 18 months old.

Each parent has the right to 240 paid days of leave. The first 195 days are paid at 77.6% of the individual's salary, and the subsequent 45 days are paid SEK 180 (approximately €16) each day. Of these days, 90 are reserved for each parent and cannot be transferred to the other parent, except in special cases and in single-parent families (Duvander & Löfgren, 2023). It is illegal to disadvantage an employee or job seeker due to reasons related to parental leave (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2022).

The fact that these social benefits are generational rather than means-based and are coupled with institutionalized parental leave for fathers contributes to employers not discriminating against job seekers who are women of childbearing age or have small children.

The family support system also provides paid leave to care for sick children and relatives. This regulation generally covers children between 8 and 12 years old, and a

doctor's note is required for a leave longer than seven days. Employees have the right to care for a close relative or friend with a significant health impairment for up to 100 days. Compensation amounts to approximately 80% of the individual's salary (Försäkringskassan, 2023a; Försäkringskassan, 2023b).

Day care is provided to children after their first birthday, a service that is a municipal competence (SFS 2010:800). After the age of three, all children have the right to free public preschool for up to 525 hours per year (Skolverket, 2024). The state provides a child subsidy for each child living in the country (SFS 1947, 529). Families may also be eligible for further financial support depending on income or if the parents are students.

Despite these policy efforts, Sweden currently scores just above the OECD average in terms of the child poverty rate. In 2022, 10% of children experienced poverty, and 20% were at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Citation:

Duvander, A-Z., and Löfgren, N. 2023. "Sweden country note." In Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufman, G., Koslowski, A., and Moss, P., eds., *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023*. https://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/user_upload/k_leavenetwork/annual_reviews/2023/Sweden2023.pdf

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Skolverket. 2024. "Rätt till förskola." <https://www.skolverket.se/regler-och-ansvar/ansvar-i-skolfragor/ratt-till-forskola>

Belgium

Score 8

Belgium's family support policies vary based on the individual (mother or co-parent) and their employment status. These policies, which also apply to adoptive parents, focus heavily on women, potentially limiting shared responsibility within households. Maternity leave in Belgium is 15 weeks for employees and the unemployed, including up to 6 weeks of pre-natal leave (with 1 mandatory week) and 9 weeks of compulsory post-natal leave. For the self-employed, it is 12 weeks

with only 3 weeks compulsory. This aligns with the WHO Convention No. 183 but falls short of the WHO's 18-week recommendation. Birth leave (for co-parents) is 20 days, available to both employed and self-employed individuals. Wage replacements are generally over 75% of gross earnings. Belgian parents can take parental leave of four non-transferable months per parent per child until the child's 12th birthday, but the wage compensation is relatively low, amounting to €78.24 per month, below Belgium's poverty line. Childcare leave or career breaks also exist as a "Time Credit with motive system," which requires a valid motive, such as caring for a child younger than 8 years, a disabled child up to 21 years, providing palliative care, or caring for a severely ill relative (Fusulier and Mortelmans 2023).

Belgium provides universal access to affordable, high-quality childcare for children below school age and is one of the few countries to offer free access for children under three (Gromada and Richardson 2021). More than half of the children under three participate in formal childcare, above the EU average but below Denmark. For children over three years old, Belgium has the highest participation in formal childcare or education, with over 98% of all children according to Eurostat data. These results become slightly more nuanced when considering children who spend more than 30 hours in formal childcare or education.

Belgium also provides financial support to families in the form of child benefits. Almost every child living in Belgium is entitled to child benefit, paid monthly. Parents are also entitled to a one-time maternity/adoption allowance for the birth/adoption of a child. The basic amount of child benefit for every child born from 2020 onwards ranges from €64.36 to €81.61 per month, supplemented with additional allowances depending on the situation (EC 2024).

Citation:

WHO international standards on maternity protection: <https://www.who.int/data/nutrition/nlis/info/maternity-protection-compliance-with-international-labour-standards>

Information on poverty line: <https://statbel.fgov.be/en/themes/households/poverty-and-living-conditions/risk-poverty-or-social-exclusion>

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Gromada, A., and Richardson, D. 2021. "Where do rich countries stand on childcare?" UNICEF Office of Research. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/where-do-rich-countries-stand-on-childcare.pdf>

Eurostat data on Children in formal childcare or education by age group and duration - % over the population of each age group:

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ILC_CAINDFORMAL__custom_9142490/default/table?lang=en

European Commission (EC). 2024. Belgium – Family Benefits. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1102&intPageId=4414&langId=en>

Germany

Score 8

According to International Labor Organization (ILO) standards, maternity leave with a duration of at least 18 weeks, but no less than 14 weeks, is recommended. While it is also suggested that the cash benefits during maternity leave should represent the full amount of the income received before the leave, benefits received should not be less than two-thirds of that income (WHO, 2023).

Germany's maternity leave system follows the Maternity Protection Act (Mutterschutzgesetz). The act pertains to all pregnant and breastfeeding women in an employment relationship and includes regulations for health and safety at the workplace, protection from dismissal, and benefits before and after childbirth. Regarding job protection, women have the right to be employed under the terms of the contract existing before the pregnancy. Employers are prohibited from terminating an employment contract from the beginning of a pregnancy until at least four months after childbirth. In the case of parental leave, the protection from dismissal is extended until the end of the registered parental leave. Additionally, employers are banned from preparing measures for a dismissal once the protection period is over.

The protection periods before and after childbirth are six weeks before and eight weeks after delivery, ensuring Germany meets the minimum ILO requirement for maternity leave duration. In cases of premature birth, multiple birth, or if the child has been diagnosed with a disability, the leave after delivery can be extended to 12 weeks. During that period, women on maternity leave are entitled to maternity benefits replacing the full pay received before the pregnancy (BMFSFJ, 2020).

Maternity leave in Germany lasts 14 weeks, which places the country below the OECD average of 18.5 weeks and the EU average of 21.1 weeks in 2022 (OECD, 2023).

In addition to maternity leave, both men and women are entitled to request parental leave from their employer. Parental leave is regulated under the Federal Parental Allowance and Parental Leave Act (Bundeselterngeld- und Elternzeitgesetz) and can be taken for up to three years (BMFSFJ, 2020). Parental allowance is paid by the government and is divided into three different types: the Basic Parental Allowance, Parental Allowance Plus, and the Partnership Bonus.

The Basic Parental Allowance can be paid for up to 12 months and generally consists of 65% of the net income before the child's birth, up to a maximum of €1,800 per month. Low-income households can receive 100%. Households with very high incomes (€300,000 joint income) are not eligible. If both parents take parental leave, this period can be extended to 14 months to encourage sharing family and household responsibilities.

Parental Allowance Plus, on the other hand, is available to parents who work part-time during parental leave (up to 32 hours per week) and is paid for twice as long as the Basic Parental Allowance. However, the benefit is only half of that of the Basic Parental Allowance. Lastly, parents who work part-time can also apply for the Partnership Bonus, which is paid for up to five months (BMFSFJ, 2023a).

Taking parental leave into account, Germany has an average total paid leave of 58 weeks, which is above the OECD average of 50.8 weeks but below the EU average

of 64.6 weeks (OECD, 2023). While the parental leave policies enable both parents to take parental leave to promote shared responsibilities, in 2022, only 3% of fathers compared to 45.2% of mothers with children below three years were on parental leave (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2024).

According to Article 45 of Book Five of the German Social Code, people with statutory health insurance are entitled to 10 days of sick pay per child if a child under the age of twelve falls ill. Additionally, as of December 2023, parents can receive sick leave by telephone if their child falls ill and care is necessary.

Moreover, the Caregiver Leave Act (Familienpflegezeitgesetz) allows employees up to six months in caregiver leave, with a complete or partial release from work. This release from work is available for close adult relatives in need of long-term care, as well as close relatives who are minors. A partial release from work is possible for up to 24 months. To compensate for income losses, caregivers can apply for interest-free advances with the Federal Office for Family and Civil-Social Duties (BMFSFJ, 2019).

As of January 2023, Germany has enacted the KiTa-Qualitätsgesetz, focusing on the further development of quality and the improvement of participation in child daycare. The act aims to create equal living conditions for children, with the federal government planning to invest €4 billion in 2023 and 2024 (BMFSFJ, 2023b).

As described in the indicators addressing a sustainable education system, children aged one to three, as well as three to the beginning of primary school, have a legal claim to early childhood care based on Article 24 of Book 8 of the German Social Code – Child and Youth Services. However, childcare is not free throughout Germany. While certain states, such as Berlin or Hesse, offer some exemptions from charges for daycare, fees must be paid in other states (Deutsches Jugendinstitut, 2018).

In 2017, average costs for children below the age of three were €1,710, while parents paid €1,630 on average for children between the ages of three and five (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2021). The overall attendance rate in Germany is 36.4% for children under 3, while 90.9% of children attend daycare from the ages of three to six (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2023).

A more detailed description of attendance is outlined under “Policies Targeting Equitable Access to Education,” which shows that, despite not all children having access to childcare, the German average is still above the OECD average. Financial support for children in Germany to assist families mainly consists of the child benefit (Kindergeld) and the supplementary child allowance (Kinderzuschlag). Parents who are subject to income tax without restriction and live in Germany receive a monthly sum of €250 per child. Generally, the child benefit is paid until the age of 18, or 25 if the child is completing vocational training or a course of study (BMFSFJ, 2023c).

In addition to the child benefit, employed parents can receive supplementary child allowance if their income is insufficient for the whole family. This supplementary allowance includes a monthly benefit of €292 as of January 2024 and offers additional benefits such as coverage for school trips, €195 for school supplies per school year, or a monthly charge for social or cultural activities up to €15 (BMFSFJ, 2023d).

In 2020, expenditure on family-children benefits amounted to 3.7% of GDP, which was above the EU average of 2.5% of GDP (Eurostat, 2023).

Citation:

BMFSFJ. 2019. “Better Reconciliation of Family, Care and Work.” <https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/93366/d49d4b8cdb3824e28c89cac6473145dc/bessere-vereinbarkeit-von-familie-pflege-und-beruf-flyer-englisch-data.pdf>

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Latvia

Score 8

Over the past decade, family policy has emerged as a significant political priority, reflecting an increased recognition of its importance in societal and governmental agendas. This area, specifically “children and family policy,” was first included in the ministerial cabinet’s regulations in 2002 under employment and social policy. The focus on this area has led to the development and implementation of various policies and programs aimed at supporting families.

For non-insured individuals in Latvia (those neither employed nor self-employed), benefits include a one-time childbirth benefit of €421.17 and child care benefits starting at €171 monthly (up to 1 year), reducing to €12.69 monthly (1.5 to 2 years). Family state benefits escalate with the number of children: €25 for one child, €100 for two, €225 for three, and €100 per child for four or more children. These benefits extend until the child reaches 20 years if they continue in general or vocational education and are unmarried. There are also specific provisions for children with disabilities.

In 2022, the family state benefit in Latvia was distributed to 353,000 children. Due to changes in allocation conditions, the benefit amount per child increased from €28.68 per month in 2021 to €49.13 per month in 2022. Additionally, the care benefit for children with disabilities was raised from €13.43 per month in 2018 to €313.43 per month starting July 1, 2019. The number of children receiving this benefit increased from 2,072 in 2018 to 3,023 in 2022.

For socially insured individuals, there are additional benefits. These include a maternity benefit of 80% of the average insured salary for 56 or 70 days before and after childbirth and a choice of parental benefits for 19 or 13 months at varying percentages of the average insured salary. The child care benefit for insured persons is €171 monthly, with additional parental benefits possible. The family state benefit structure is similar to that for non-insured individuals. Additionally, fathers are eligible for a paternity benefit, calculated at 80% of the average insured salary, based on 10 days of paternity leave granted within the child's first six months.

Over the past decade, the percentage of people in Latvia leaving work to care for others has steadily declined from 2.1% in 2013 to 1.1% in 2022. The rates were at their lowest in 2018 and 2022, reaching 1.1%, despite a slight increase to 1.7% in 2021, which shows a brief rise before continuing to fall.

There are financial support mechanisms for families with children, including increases in state benefits and other assistance. In 2022, a one-time support payment of €500 per child was provided to all families with children, regardless of criteria such as income loss or the number of children, to ensure families in need were not excluded from receiving support due to COVID-19 restrictions.

The duration of the parental benefit has been extended to 19 months, an increase from the previous maximum of 18 months. Alternatively, it can be taken for 13 months, up from the previous 12 months. This change is in response to the European Directive, which mandates a two-month non-transferable portion of the benefit for the other parent, now incorporated into Latvian law. Consequently, the total parental allowance period now includes both the fundamental and non-transferable portions designated for each parent.

For a parental allowance period spanning 19 months, the payment will equate to 43.75% of the average salary contributions of the beneficiary. Within this timeframe,

15 months constitute the primary segment and must be utilized before the child turns one and a half years old. This segment encompasses the maternity benefit duration as well. In scenarios where the parental allowance spans 13 months, the payment will correspond to 60% of the average salary contributions. The core segment for this option is nine months, which should be used by the time the child is one year old. This, too, includes the duration of the maternity benefit.

Both parents can avail their non-transferable two-month share of the allowance any time until the child reaches eight years of age. The new policy reflects an expansion of the total parental leave by one month compared to the provisions available up to 2023.

To ensure universal access to affordable, accessible, and high-quality childcare for children below school age, data indicate that Latvia is taking steps to improve the family state benefit system, which may include support for childcare services. According to the Education Law, if a local government cannot offer a spot in a public kindergarten for a child aged one and a half or older who is registered within the municipality's jurisdiction, and the child is enrolled in a preschool education program at a private kindergarten, the city is responsible for covering the private kindergarten expenses. This coverage is subject to the regulations prescribed by the Cabinet of Ministers. In 2023, there has been municipal support for children attending private kindergartens.

Citation:

Valsts sociālās apdrošināšanas aģentūra. 2023. "Pensionēšanās vecumu un apdrošināšanas stāžu izmaiņas." <https://www.vsaa.gov.lv/lv/media/5745/download?attachment>

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Valsts sociālās apdrošināšanas aģentūra. 2023. "Pensionēšanās vecumu un apdrošināšanas stāžu izmaiņas." <https://www.vsaa.gov.lv/lv/media/5745/download?attachment>

Eurostat. 2023. "Gender Statistics - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion." https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_05_40/default/table?lang=en

Āboliņa, L. 2017. "Bērnu un ģimeņu politika Latvijā: prioritātes, aktualitātes un izicinājumi." https://www.bernulabklajiba.lv/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Liga_Abolina.pdf

Spain

Score 8

Maternity leave in Spain consists of 16 weeks for a single child, during which the mother receives 100% of her salary. If the baby has a disability, an additional two weeks are allowed. To promote shared responsibility within households, fathers are also entitled to up to 16 weeks of paid leave for the birth of a child. Adoptive and host parents are also entitled to paid leave.

The family support system provides job protection and wage replacement schemes for up to eight months. After maternity or paternity leave, parents can apply for unpaid leave, allowing them to take up to three years off work to care for their children and then return to their workplace.

In the first half of 2023, 109,731 paternity leaves were taken by the first parent, usually the mother, and 122,044 by the second parent, usually the father. However, more women (21,089) than men (3,853) have requested additional leave for child or family care (Meil et al. 2023). Work-life balance is a growing concern in Spain. The government has addressed this with the introduction of the Family Law (Royal Decree Law 5/2023), aiming to improve work-life balance for employees by introducing three new leaves of absence focused on childcare and family care:

Employees can apply for unpaid leave to care for their child for an extended period beyond one year.

Employees can request up to five days a year to care for a family member or partner in cases of accident or serious illness.

Employees have the right to be absent from work in situations of force majeure for up to four days.

Access to affordable childcare for children below school age is not guaranteed (see “Sustainable Education System”). Boosting schooling for children aged 0-3 is one of the main investments of the RRP. Between 2021 and 2023, a total investment of €70.1 million has been earmarked for the creation of more than 65,000 publicly owned places. According to Eurostat, the enrollment rate in the first cycle of preschool has reached 46.5%, its highest level since data became available. The number of children aged 0 to 3 enrolled in school increased by 6.8% in the 2022–2023 academic year compared to the previous year, with 29,919 more pupils.

At the state level, there is a tax deduction for “childcare expenses.” Fourteen autonomous communities use their regulatory capacity to apply different deductions related to childcare costs in early childhood education centers or costs in other educational stages, such as the purchase of textbooks.

Citation:

Meil, G., Escobedo, A., and Lapuerta, I. 2023. “Spain country note.” In *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023*. http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports/

Royal Decree Law 5/2023 of 28 June

Australia

Score 7

The Australian government provides numerous programs and benefit schemes to support families (Department of Social Services 2024), including the family tax benefit, paid parental leave, and substantial childcare subsidies. However, commentators argue that more needs to be done to support families juggling work and child-rearing commitments. For example, the Australian Human Rights Commission has argued that significant improvements can be made to make workplaces more family-friendly, such as flexible working arrangements and job re-design, and that existing policies do not adequately recognize unpaid caring work.

Protections for people taking parental leave to ensure they can return to their job exist but are not comprehensive and can be circumvented by employers.

There have been some improvements in recent years, such as introduction and expansion of a government-funded paid parental leave scheme and increased childcare subsidies. However, family benefits like the Family Tax Benefit have become less generous and increasingly only available to low-income families. Despite increased childcare subsidies, out-of-pocket expenses remain high.

Policy settings do not promote dual caring for children, as the paid parental leave scheme is geared around one primary carer. Labor economist Barbara Broadway highlights issues in the relationship between the family benefits system and the tax system (Broadway 2023), showing that under current arrangements, a family with two working parents can be financially worse off than a family with one working parent, despite having the same total income. This inequity, caused by childcare costs and loss of benefits when a parent returns to work, disproportionately affects women, who are more likely to give up work. To address this issue and improve equity and women's labor market participation, reforms are needed in the tax and family benefits systems. One component of family benefits, Family Tax Benefit Part B, is based on individual circumstances rather than family circumstances. Moving the focus to families in benefit assessment and consolidating and simplifying the range of benefits would improve the family support system.

Citation:

Broadway, B. 2023. "Time to Reform Australia's Unfair Family Support System." Pursuit March 16. <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/time-to-reform-australia-s-unfair-family-support-system>

Department of Social Services. 2024. "Families and children." <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/programmes-services/family-finance>

Austria

Score 7

Both the federal government and mainstream public opinion acknowledge that the traditional nuclear family model, defined by stable and clearly divided gender roles, does not represent the reality for all families in the 21st century. Still, family policies are often viewed as reflecting a decidedly "conservative" notion of families and the roles of women and men within them.

Public childcare centers exist but – despite some recent improvements – fail to meet demand. Childcare facilities for children aged one and under are often lacking outside the capital, Vienna, while facilities for children aged two to five fail to meet the needs of working parents. The overall share of children (age 0-2) in formal childcare or education for 30 hours or more has been very low, clearly below the OECD average. Remarkably, the share identified for 2022 is lower than that for both 2021 and 2015. The figures for children aged 3 to 5 in formal childcare or education for 30 hours or more have been relatively stable, without significant setbacks over time.

Access to the labor market for married women is not seriously disputed. Nevertheless, the provision of childcare is still overwhelmingly left to families, which effectively means that primary responsibility falls to mothers. The current length of paid maternity, parental, and home care leave for women is 60 months, slightly above the OECD average of 56 months. In terms of ranking, Austria is among the top third of OECD countries. However, the Austrian Chamber of Labour has recently highlighted numerous deficiencies in the day-to-day performance of this system, making it rather difficult for women to secure the funds they are legally entitled to (Mittelstaedt 2020).

There is a specific maternity leave scheme in place that covers 16 weeks – eight weeks before birth and eight weeks after. Taking this leave is mandatory. There is also a one-month paternity leave, known as “Papamonat.” However, the proportion of men taking advantage of this paternity leave has been slightly decreasing recently.

About 80% of sick and elderly people in need of regular care are being taken care of by their families – a task overwhelmingly met by women. Austrian governments have supported such activities by providing specific resources, known as “Pflegegeld.”

Austrian governments have continuously expanded the flow of resources directed to family policy. However, although overall entitlements for families rose by nearly 50% net between 2000 and 2020 (accounting for inflation), Austria still lags behind many OECD countries. The current Nehammer government has continued to improve the living conditions for families. In 2023, the Family Bonus Plus was increased from €1,500 per child per year to €2,000 per child per year. For births after December 31, 2022, the “family-time bonus” no longer reduces a later childcare benefit. Starting in 2023, the childcare benefit and the “family-time bonus” are automatically adjusted for inflation each January. Additionally, the government introduced a special bonus for family-based care if the person to be cared for is seriously or mentally ill.

Citation:

<https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000135152647/oesterreich-gibt-immer-mehr-fuer-kinder-aus-und-hinkt-dennoch>

https://www.momentum-institut.at/system/files/2020-03/pb_200304_kinderbetreuung.pdf

https://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/user_upload/k_leavenetwork/annual_reviews/2023/Austria2023.pdf

https://www.parlament.gv.at/aktuelles/pk/jahr_2023/pk1151

Mittelstaedt, Katharina. 2020. “Die Schikanen nach dem Kinderkriegen.” <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000119510651/die-schikanen-nach-dem-kinderkriegen>

Canada

Score 7

Canada has a fairly family-friendly policy and tax system. Maternity leave is offered through the employment insurance (EI) program, allowing eligible individuals to take up to 15 weeks of maternity leave with partial wage replacement. In addition to maternity leave, there is parental leave that can be shared between parents, providing an additional 35 weeks of leave. Canada also has various financial support programs for families, often run through the tax system. These include the Canada Child Benefit (CCB), which provides tax-free monthly payments to eligible families to help with the cost of raising children. There are also additional supplements for families with children with disabilities.

In addition to maternity and parental leave, the Canadian government provides compassionate care leave under the EI program. This provision allows eligible individuals to take up to 27 weeks of leave to care for a family member who has a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death within 26 weeks.

Childcare services are subpar outside of Quebec, which has a state-run pre-kindergarten daycare system at modest prices. Daycare is primarily the responsibility of provinces and territories, resulting in variations in availability and affordability. The federal government has made a \$27 billion investment over five years to support the expansion of affordable childcare in provinces and territories and has now signed Early Learning and Childhood agreements with all provinces and territories. Some provinces have implemented subsidized childcare programs. However, universal access to high-quality and affordable childcare remains an aspiration at best (Prentice 2006).

Citation:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/child-family-benefits/canada-child-benefit-overview.html>

Prentice, Susan. 2006. "Childcare, Co-Production and the Third Sector in Canada." *Public Management Review* 8 (4): 521-36.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/early-learning-child-care-agreement/agreements-provinces-territories.html>

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14719030601022890>

Estonia

Score 7

Estonia inherited a tradition of double-breadwinner families from Soviet times, during which mothers typically worked full time. Despite significant social changes, this family pattern has continued, as evidenced by the high female employment rate. However, the share of children born outside marriage has outnumbered that of those born within marriage in Estonia for decades, making its family model more similar to that of Nordic countries than to patterns seen in Western or Eastern European countries.

Family policy has remained high on the political agenda due to the country's low fertility rate and labor market needs. The share of social spending devoted to family benefits is twice as high as in OECD countries on average. This high share is explained both by generous leave policies and universal child allowances.

Estonia has one of the most generous parental benefit systems in the OECD, entitling parents of newborns to benefits equal to their previous salary for 435 days (Pall 2023). This system, in place since 2004, has undergone several revisions to make it more flexible and gender-neutral. Recent amendments have extended the period in which parents can take parental leave from one and a half years to three years, and parental leave can now be divided into several periods according to the parents' choice. Additionally, steps have been taken to increase fathers' involvement in childcare by increasing the joint parental leave period and extending the leave reserved for fathers up to 30 days.

While parental leave is still predominantly taken by mothers (84%), the share of fathers taking leave has quickly risen (Pall 2023). However, these numbers do not necessarily reflect the actual level of parental leave taken by fathers, as most fathers continue working. This indicates that many fathers, although receiving the benefit, are not the primary caregivers. This reflects the high gender pay gap and regulations that allow individuals to receive 150% of the average wage plus the parental benefit simultaneously (Pall 2023).

Parental leave is dependent on previous salary. While there is an upper limit, the maximum benefit level is more than four times the minimum level. In addition to parental leave, child allowances are relatively generous. These allowances are universal by design, with extra allowances for larger families starting from the third child. However, given the generous parental leave and child allowances, the high share (12.7%) of single parents living in absolute poverty is worrisome. This suggests that family policies do not emphasize inclusivity. The generosity of parental leave has also affected young parents' labor market situation, as the prospect that they may take long leaves might influence employers' recruitment decisions.

While the parental benefit system prioritizes stay-at-home parents, access to preschool childcare is generally good and reasonably affordable. However, childcare has a tuition fee of up to 20% of the minimum salary, with the exact rate decided by municipalities. While municipalities are obliged to provide a childcare place starting at 18 months, not all can fully meet this obligation. Consequently, the share of preschoolers above age 3 is very high at 95%, but for those below age 3, it is only 21%.

Citation:

OECD Stats. 2019. "The OECD Social Expenditure Database."

Pall, K. 2023. "Estonia Country Note." In Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufman, G., Koslowski, A., and Moss, P., eds., *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023*. <https://www.leavenetwork.org/annual-review-reports/>

Statistics Estonia. 2023. "Absolute Poverty." <https://www.stat.ee/en/avasta-statistikat/valdkonnad/heaolu/sotsiaalne-torjutus-ja-vaesus/absolute-poverty>

Ireland

Score 7

The family support system in Ireland includes maternity and paternity leave systems consistent with WHO guidelines. Parents can access paid leave to care for sick children and elderly family members through the insurance-based Carers Benefit and a means-tested Carers Allowance, predominantly claimed by women. The system ensures universal access to affordable, accessible, and high-quality childcare for children aged 2-5, although this is not full-time. In practice, maternal employment rates drop significantly with the birth of the first and particularly the second child due to the inaccessibility and unaffordability of early-years childcare, which is the highest in the OECD for lone parents and the second highest for two-children families. Policies and regulations provide financial support primarily through universal monthly child benefits for all children, child supplements for families dependent on social welfare, and working family dividends to supplement low pay for working families. These supports are provided through the social welfare system rather than the tax system (CTW 2023). While these measures maintain economic stability for families, high levels of child poverty persist. However, fertility rates in Ireland (1.8) are relatively high compared to other EU countries, reflecting a cultural orientation toward having children. In 2022, the DoT established a priority coordination unit to tackle high levels of child poverty, but no significant policy actions or outcomes have yet been forthcoming.

Citation:

Commission on Tax and Welfare. 2023. "Foundations for the Future." <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7fbeb-report-of-the-commission>

Lithuania

Score 7

Family policies are largely aligned with the goal of creating strong families. Lithuanian family policy is based on both passive (financial support for families) and active (social services and infrastructure) measures. The government provides support for women seeking to combine parenting and employment, including family and social-welfare legislation (e.g., special conditions for various types of flexible work arrangements in the Labor Code applicable to families), financial assistance to families raising children (child benefits and partial housing subsidies), and social services targeted at both children and parents (including preschool education and psychiatric help for parents or children).

According to OECD data for 2022, the length of paid maternity, parental and home care leave for women in Lithuania was 62 weeks, exceeding the OECD average of 56 weeks. The length of paid father-specific leave was four weeks, which is below the OECD average of 10 weeks. Information from the Social Insurance Fund Board (SODRA) indicates that in 2022, mothers accounted for 75.6% of all users of parental leave benefits, while fathers accounted for 24.4%. Additionally, 100% of

employed women in Lithuania take their full entitlement to maternity leave (Braziene and Vysniauskiene 2023).

Access to kindergartens and other childcare facilities remains insufficient. Overall, family policy is fragmented and focused on supporting families facing particular social risks, primarily through financial support for families with children. More attention should be paid to developing universal family services with NGO engagement. The previous government (2016 – 2020) placed substantial emphasis on family policy, including proposals to help parents balance child-raising and work, as well as increases in financial benefits for families with children. The current Šimonytė government has continued to increase financial benefits, raised salaries for specialists in the field, and introduced some new services.

Starting in 2022, new preventive social services were introduced (The Government Annual Report for 2022, 2023). Additionally, 250 individual care specialists began providing care services for families.

Beginning in 2023, two nontransferable months of leave were implemented. This means the father or mother, adoptive parents, or guardians must take at least two months (60 calendar days) of parental leave. The remaining leave can be shared according to the family's needs. Nontransferable months of parental leave can be taken all at once or in blocks, alternating with the other parent. Parental benefits for nontransferable months are higher, amounting to 100% of previous earnings. Nontransferable leave (or portions of the leave) for the same child cannot be taken by both parents simultaneously.

Parental leave benefits have changed as follows: parents receive 77.34% of previous net earnings until the child turns 18 months of age, or 58% of net earnings until the child turns 12 months of age, and then 38.67% of net earnings until the child turns 24 months of age.

Citation:

OECD. "Dataset: Employment – Length of maternity, parental and home care leave, and paid father-specific leave." https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=GENDER_EMP

Braziene, R., and S. Vysniauskiene. 2023. "International Network on Leave Policies and Research, Country Report: Lithuania." <https://www.leavenetwork.org/annual-review-reports/country-reports>

The Government Annual Report for 2022, 17 May 2023 (in Lithuanian), <https://epilietis.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/seimui-teikiama-vyriausybes-2022-metu-veiklos-ataskaita>

Portugal

Score 7

In Portugal, the social security system provides various benefits related to parental leave aimed at ensuring job protection and adequate wages. These benefits include parental allowances, extended parental allowances, and parental social allowances to compensate parents with insufficient remuneration records. The family support system also offers paid leave for parents caring for sick children and elderly family members requiring assistance.

In 2023, as part of the “Decent Work Agenda” initiative, additional measures were implemented to harmonize the personal, family, and professional aspects of workers’ lives, primarily through modifications to parental leave (Law 53/2023, DR 129/2023). The approved changes now permit parents to stay home with children up to 12 months old, receiving allowances ranging from 90% to 40% of gross salary, with the option to combine parental leave with part-time work.

The government is intensifying efforts to achieve universal access to affordable and accessible childcare for preschool-aged children through the “Creche Feliz” program (DRE, 2022). Since 2022, children born after September 2021 have had access to free daycare. Initially applicable to public and social sector daycares, the program was later extended to the private sector. However, challenges persist, as the program has yet to fully address existing needs, with a shortage of available daycare places – meeting only half of the demand (Expresso, 2023).

Furthermore, the government has expanded coverage and financial support for families intending to have children, promoting economic stability. This is achieved through child benefits, tax credits for taxpayers with dependent children (especially those with multiple children), and a recent addition for lower-income families known as the “Child Guarantee” (Social Security Institute, 2023).

However, as the country’s aging demographics reflects, a considerable gap remains in ensuring that policies provide sufficient economic and financial stability for families and individuals to have children. This issue is compounded by wage inequality between men and women, as a recent study indicates (Faria, 2023).

Citation:

DRE. 2023. Lei n.º 53/2023: Procede à regulamentação da Agenda do Trabalho Digno. Diário da República n.º 129/2023, Série I de 2023-07-05.

<https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/decreto-lei/53-2023-215210816>

Expresso. 2023. “Não há vagas nas creches e pais já equacionam despedir-se para ficar com filhos.” 05 de setembro de 2023.

<https://expresso.pt/sociedade/ensino/2023-09-05-Nao-ha-vagas-nas-creches-e-pais-ja-equacionam-despedir-se-para-ficar-com-filhos-7d51356c>

Social Security Institute. 2023. “Guia prático – garantia para a infância.” Departamento de Prestações e Contribuições, 26 de janeiro de 2023.

<https://www.seg-social.pt/documents/10152/19882026/4004+--+Garantia+para+a+infancia/6126c563-7fcc-4695-a0f2-0b5af03c113d>

DRE. 2022. Ordinance No. 198/2022 – Regulamenta as condições específicas de concretização da medida da gratuidade das creches e creches familiares, integradas no sistema de cooperação, bem como das amas do Instituto da Segurança Social, I. P.

<https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/portaria/198-2022-186721643>

Czechia

Score 6

The length of paid maternity and parental leave exceeds the OECD average, offering 28 weeks of maternity leave. Both parents can take leave until the child's third birthday, although only one parent can benefit at a time. In addition to maternity and parental allowances, there is also a paternity allowance – father-specific leave that, starting in 2022, can be taken for a maximum of two weeks. Employees can also take leave to care for a sick child under ten or a child with a serious illness.

Under the labor code, a parent can return to a position corresponding to the employment contract's job description until the child reaches the age of three. Returning to work can be problematic for women due to poor provision of care for very young children. Enrollment in formal childcare for the age group 0 – 2 years is only 1.8% and 54.5% for the age group 3 – 5 years. The situation improves among older age groups, reaching 93% for five-year-olds, as kindergarten attendance during the last year of preschool has been mandatory since 2017.

While public support for alternative forms of childcare, including kindergartens and so-called children's groups, has expanded, the gap in childcare facilities has persisted. In 2022 and 2023, there was an additional need to admit children with temporary protection coming from Ukraine to kindergartens and children's groups. The NPO offers the prospect of some help for a few years with calls for projects to expand childcare facilities – identified as a cause of gender inequality – from non-state bodies and from regional and municipal authorities.

Returning to the labor market after parental leave and balancing family and work life are also hindered by the limited use of part-time work or flexible working hours. In 2022, only 6.2% of employees in the Czech Republic worked part-time; of these, three-quarters were women.

Greece

Score 6

Greece's family support system includes maternity leave provisions that ensure job protection and adequate wage replacement, in line with international standards. In 2021–2022, new and improved legislation was adopted in this policy area. There are two types of maternity leave: “basic” leave, which lasts 17 weeks, and “special” leave, available nine months after the “basic” leave. Additionally, each parent is entitled to four months of parental leave per child. In 2022, the “special” leave, initially available only to public sector employees, was extended to private sector employees and increased from six to nine months (Hatzivarnava and Karamesini 2023).

Greece still relies on EU funding for nursery services provided by local governments. However, the country ranks below the EU average in terms of the percentage of very young children (aged 0-2) and young children (aged 3-5) enrolled in formal childcare or education (Eurostat 2022a).

This likely stems not only from the shortage of state-run nurseries but also from traditional Greek culture, where women are primarily responsible for caring for the elderly and young children within households. Grandparents often care for preschool-aged children if both parents work, while women tend to elderly or disabled family members at home. In 2021, new legislation introduced the “nannies of the neighborhood” program, with a dedicated budget to compensate childcare workers who assist families with very young children (2 months to 2.5 years old).

Greece remains one of the worst-performing EU countries in terms of the share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Eurostat 2022b). Relatively few resources are allocated to combating child poverty, as the Greek welfare system primarily focuses on pensioners.

However, there has been progress in family policy over time, primarily through cash outlays rather than benefits-in-kind. For example, poor families can receive a combination of a monthly Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI), a child allowance, and a housing benefit. During the COVID-19 crisis, additional allowances were provided to families in economic distress. Tax breaks are also available to all families with children, regardless of income.

Overall, the government aims to support poor families and encourage couples to have children to help curb the demographic decline of the Greek population. This focus was emphasized in 2023 with the establishment of the new Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family.

Greece ranks average among OECD countries in terms of work-life balance (OECD 2023). Despite improvements in childcare and cash transfers, gender equality and resources available to families are still shaped by the traditional household model prevalent in Greece. This model contributes to relatively low female labor force participation. In poorer families, the best option might be for the mother to enter the labor force, particularly in the public sector, but this depends on labor market conditions and traditional views on gender roles.

The website of the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family: <https://minscfa.gov.gr/>

The website of the program “Nannies of the neighbourhood”: <https://ntantades.gov.gr/>

Eurostat. 2022a. “Dataset: Children in Formal Childcare or Education by Age Group and Duration – % over the Population of Each Age Group – EU-SILC Survey [ilc_caindformal].” https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_caindformal/default/table?lang=en

Eurostat. 2022b. “Dataset: People at Risk of Poverty and Social Exclusion by Age and Sex [ILC_PEPS01N] URL” https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ILC_PEPS01N/default/table?lang=en

Hatzivarnava-Kazassi, E., and Karamessini, M. 2023. “Greece country note.” In *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023*, eds. S. Blum, I. Dobrotić, G. Kaufman, A. Koslowski, and P. Moss. Available at: <https://www.leavenetwork.org/annual-review-reports/>

OECD. 2023. “Work-Life Balance.” <https://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/work-life-balance/>.

Israel

Score 6 Israeli family policy includes 15 weeks of maternity leave on full pay for employees who have been employed for the last 12 months, along with an additional 11 weeks of unpaid leave. For families with more than one child, the mother is eligible for an additional three weeks of paid leave. After six weeks, the second partner can replace the mother and take parental leave. The second partner is also eligible for three sick days after the birth of a child. The employer cannot fire a woman returning from maternity leave for 60 days following the end of the leave.

Parents have eight sick days to care for children and elderly parents. However, Israeli policies largely fail to promote shared responsibility. For example, the second partner can only take parental leave by replacing the first partner.

Childcare is accessible and available for children from the age of three, with mandatory free public education. For children under three years old, there are very few publicly subsidized childcare slots and those that do exist are provided by non-governmental organizations. These organizations face difficulties recruiting staff due to low wages, which also limits the number of available slots. Single-parent and low-income families are eligible for reduced tuition fees. Tuition for other families is relatively high but not as high as in private childcare centers. Most childcare for children under three is private. In some areas, there are waiting lists of several months for childcare. Tuition in private childcare centers is extremely high and can be 1.5 times more than in public childcare centers.

All parents receive a child allowance from the National Insurance Institute. These allowances are universal and automatic upon the child's formal registration at birth. Therefore, their take-up is high. Additionally, working parents receive tax exemptions for children under the age of five.

Netherlands

Score 6 The fallout from the child benefit scandal has significantly impacted family policy. Despite assurances of priority assistance for those in challenging situations, an October 2013 report by the Tax, Benefits and Customs Inspectorate reveals escalating damage to affected parents and young individuals.

Efforts to combat domestic violence, often tied to economic self-sufficiency, have been criticized for their narrow focus, neglecting crucial social and cultural patterns. The Trimbos Institute reports that more than one-quarter of children living at home have parents suffering from mental illness or alcohol or drug addiction, making these children two to four times more likely than their peers to develop mental health issues.

The country has seen a sharp decline in its international ranking for child rights compliance, dropping from fourth to 20th place in the latest KidsRights index. Poor scores in the categories of “health” and “favorable climate for children’s rights” are attributed to the decentralization of youth care in 2015, which has resulted in unpredictable protection levels among municipalities.

In response, the government introduced the Child and Family Protection Future Scenario, aiming for a simplified, system-oriented approach covering youth protection and the entire care process. Challenges persist, including issues of child poverty and inadequate conditions in asylum-seekers’ centers. The free school breakfast program, which has been criticized as a short-term solution, reflects a lack of structural planning.

In the area of social assistance benefits, the municipality of Utrecht has defied the Participation Act by implementing policies making it easier for young individuals to apply, turning a trial program into a permanent policy against The Hague’s wishes.

Positive statistics show that most children outgrow the effects of parental poverty after 25 years, but disparities based on migrant descent persist. Changes to paid parental leave in 2022 allow both mothers and fathers to receive payment for nine weeks. Plans to make childcare almost free face delays until 2027, raising concerns about affordability and the impact on labor force participation, especially for mothers.

Despite partial tax refunds, childcare and after-school care remain expensive, affecting mothers’ workforce participation rates and causing delays in entering school for children in vulnerable families. Alternative, more affordable care options like host parent care are being considered, with debate on their effectiveness for the development of children within the target group.

To alleviate poverty, municipalities have implemented measures like child packages covering school supplies, magazine subscriptions and sports memberships. During the COVID-19 crisis, such packages helped provide children with essential tools for remote learning.

According to “Staat van het gezin” research, the Netherlands is perceived as being not particularly family-friendly. Parents appreciate well-established programs such as maternity care and youth healthcare, but express concerns about childcare, school hours, leave arrangements, mental health support and parenting support. Childcare, now ranking first among parental concerns, is cited for its high price and turmoil due to staff shortages. Leave arrangements, despite improvements, remain an issue, with the 70% financial allowance considered as being too low, especially for low-income parents.

Citation:

Ven, Liam v/d. 2023. "Utrecht maakt bijstand voor jongeren definitief toegankelijker tegen Participatiewet in, kabinet sribbelt niet tegen." NRC, April 11.

Vos, S. 2024. "Gevaarlijke aannames in beleidsopvattingen partnergeweld." Binnenlands Bestuur, January 3.

Wafa Al Ali. 2022. "Gemeenten zijn veel te veel geld kwijt aan het helpen van jongeren." NRC, December 7.

Georganiseerde onmacht: Over de rol van de rijksoverheid bij de jeugdbescherming, Algemene Rekenkamer, 13-04-2023

Gratis kinderopvang wordt twee jaar uitgesteld, kabinet bezuinigt voor het eerst in jaren, NOS Nieuws, woensdag 26 april 2023, 13:54, Aangepast woensdag 26 april 2023, 18:02

New Zealand

Score 6

New Zealand's family policy approach aims to support unpaid family care work. Several measures are in place to provide support, most importantly the Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act, legal entitlement to sick leave days (which can be used to care for sick children or other family members), government funding for early childhood education programs (children aged two to five years old are entitled to 20 hours of ECE per week), Working for Families tax credits, and family support payments such as Best Start.

New Zealand's family policy aims to support unpaid family care work, but ongoing efforts are needed to address gaps and expand support services. New Zealand lags behind other developed countries in terms of paid parental leave and is among the few OECD countries that do not legislate for paid partner's leave (Tilo 2023). Additionally, dedicated paid leave for caregiving responsibilities could better support parents caring for sick children. Although the government subsidizes early childhood education (ECE), childcare costs can still be a significant expense for some families. New Zealand has some of the highest childcare costs in the Western world. A typical couple – both earning the average wage and with two children – spends around 23% of their income on childcare (Taunton 2022).

Citation:

Taunton, E. 2022. "By the numbers: The true cost of childcare." Stuff, November 8. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/130397657/by-the-numbers-the-true-cost-of-childcare>

Tilo, D. 2023. "New Zealand Trails Other Developed Nations on Paid Parental Leave – Report." Human Resources Director, August 29. <https://www.hcamag.com/nz/specialisation/benefits/new-zealand-trails-other-developed-nations-on-paid-parental-leave-report/457742>

Poland

Score 6

For the formerly governing PiS party, family policy was a political as well as merely a social concept. The official understanding of family narrowed mostly to formalized marriages entailing traditional gender roles. The PiS government's flagship policies involved generous benefits for families.

Beginning in 2024, the family support program for households with at least one child, previously known as 500+, became the 800+ program. Another initiative aimed at supporting demographics is the Family Care Capital program. Under this program, a family receives PLN 12,000 per child, distributed monthly. Additionally, an extra “incentive” for having a child is a one-time grant for the birth of a child or, in the case of an uninsured mother giving birth, a benefit of PLN 1,000 per month for 12 months.

In Poland, the length of official parental leave is based on the number of children born in a single delivery: 20 weeks for one child, 31 for two, 33 for three, 35 for four and 37 for five or more. The mother must take 16 weeks of this time, and the remaining time can be transferred to the father. Parents also have additional parental leave available for 41 weeks (one child) or 43 weeks (two or more children). The first category of leave provides a 100% allowance, while the second parental leave offers a 70% allowance.

Paid caregiving leave consists of 16 hours, or two days, for a child up to 14 years old, with five days of unpaid caregiving leave provided in the case of serious medical reasons. Each parent can take up to 30 days of medical leave for childcare. Parental leave is designated for working parents, with each entitled to exclusive leave for nine weeks. This leave cannot be transferred, and the total period cannot exceed 41 weeks for one child or 43 weeks for multiple children. Employers cannot refuse the leave request unless this renders the work impossible.

Fathers are also entitled to two weeks of paid paternity leave, which can be taken until the child is 12 months old. Children aged three to five are guaranteed a spot in state kindergartens, and six-year-olds are required to attend school. Children up to five years old can attend kindergarten free for five hours daily, with parents paying for any additional hours. Six-year-olds are exempt from kindergarten fees.

Overall, pro-family policies have not resulted in higher birth rates. Financial transfers, especially in lower-income groups, have contributed to the perpetuation of a family model in which caregiving responsibilities are predominantly assigned to women. The employment gap between men and women among individuals aged 25 to 44, particularly after 2015, has also widened. Most alarming is that the Polish population is both aging and decreasing in number. In 2022, over 305,000 children were born, the smallest such figure in decades, and a steadily declining trend has been evident since 2017 (GUS 2023).

Citation:

GUS. 2023. Ludność. Stan i struktura oraz ruch naturalny w przekroju terytorialnym w 2022 r. Stan w dniu 31 grudnia. Warszawa.
https://stat.gov.pl/files/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/5468/6/34/1/ludnosc_stan_i_struktura_oraz_ruch_naturalny_w_przekroju_terytoryalnym_na_31-12-2022.pdf

Slovakia

Score 6

Maternity leave in Slovakia lasts for a maximum of 34 weeks, with six to eight weeks taken before birth and 26 to 28 weeks after (Dančíková, 2023). Following childbirth, it is mandatory to take at least 14 weeks of maternity leave, extending at least six weeks beyond the birth. Employment is guaranteed upon return, as stipulated by the labor code. The maternity benefit is 75% of average earnings from the previous calendar year, with a minimum of €413 and a maximum of €1,851 as of 2023. Paternity leave is also available.

Parental leave extends until the child reaches three years of age, with a parental leave benefit of €413 (as of 2023). Employment is guaranteed upon return from leave. With employer agreement, parental leave can be extended until the child turns five. Both parents may take parental leave simultaneously. Employees also have the right to take leave to care for a sick relative at home and to look after a child under 11 years (or 18 years if the child has long-term health problems), with insured parents receiving 55% of their previous daily earnings for 14 calendar days.

The system of nurseries for children below the age of three has insufficient capacity. According to Mikulíková (2023), there are 208 nurseries in Slovakia with the capacity to accommodate 3,800 children. This issue also affects kindergartens, leading many women to stay home with their small children if they can afford it.

Starting in 2025, parents will have the right to a kindergarten place for their child, with the last year of kindergarten becoming compulsory. Municipalities will be responsible for managing this demand and will receive subsidies from the state to build new capacities. However, many representatives complain that financial support is slow.

There are various forms of financial support, such as child benefits, supplements to child benefits, and tax base deductions, aimed at aiding families but not ensuring economic stability or basic financial security. These measures are insufficient to encourage individuals to have children, given their low levels (the standard child benefit is €60 per month). Additionally, the measures taken by the previous OĽaNO-led coalition (2020–2023) to support families, particularly through tax base deductions, did not offer specific support for Roma families. Roma children are at long-term risk of poverty and social exclusion, as Roma citizens face discrimination in the workplace.

In the EU SILC MRK survey (Markovič and Plachá, 2021), 87% of households in marginalized Roma communities (MRK) are at risk of poverty, and 52% face serious material deprivation. These figures are alarming when compared to data on the overall population of Slovakia, where 11% are at risk of poverty and 6% face serious material deprivation (Kadlečíková, 2022).

Citation:

Dančíková, Z. 2023. "Slovak Republic." International Network on Leave Policies & Research. https://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/user_upload/k_leavenetwork/annual_reviews/2023/SlovakRepublic2023.pdf

Mikulíková, Ž. 2023. "Chýbajúce jasle bránia mladým rodičom vrátiť sa do práce." Pravda, April 15.

[https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/663869-navrat-do-prace-chybajuce-jasle-to-handlovcanom-neulahcuju/Markovič, F., and Plachá, L. 2021. "Príjmy a životné podmienky v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách: Vybrané ukazovatele zo zisťovania EU SILC_MRK 2020."](https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/663869-navrat-do-prace-chybajuce-jasle-to-handlovcanom-neulahcuju/Markovič, F., and Plachá, L. 2021.)
https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/site/assets/file/1563/analyticka_sprava_eu_silc_mrk_2020_elektronicka_final.pdf?csrt=4502439748116953159

Kadlečíková, J. 2022. "Situation in Roma Communities – When Will We Move On?" Minority Policy 2022/01. <https://mensinovapolitika.eu/en/situation-in-roma-communities-when-will-we-move-on/>

United Kingdom

Score 6

Over the last 20 years, policy initiatives aimed at improving work-life balance and increasing women's participation in the labor market have included expanding childcare facilities, extending maternity leave, and introducing paternity leave. Statutory maternity leave in the UK is 52 weeks – double the WHO standard – divided into two six-month segments labeled "ordinary" and "additional." Pay entitlements are more complicated, with some costs met by employers, lasting up to 39 weeks. In the first six weeks, the amount payable is 90% of the recipient's average weekly earnings (before tax), then drops to £172.48 or 90% of the recipient's average weekly earnings (whichever is lower) for the next 33 weeks. Statutory paternity leave is two weeks, with the option to share maternity leave, extending paternity leave using some of the mother's entitlement. Fathers also have the right to take unpaid time off work to accompany mothers to antenatal appointments.

High childcare costs, mainly due to private provision, and the overstretched budgets of local authorities responsible for social care are two evident problems in UK family policy. Recent reforms could transform childcare provisions, but comparisons with Sweden suggest that the UK's plans lack a supportive wider architecture (Cohen et al. 2021). Previously, workers earning around average wages had little left after paying for childcare, but for single earners, Universal Credit offers additional support. However, there is an acknowledged problem of "tapering" – the progressive withdrawal of benefits as more is earned – creating a high marginal disincentive to work more.

Cuts in welfare spending, driven by central government policies to reduce public expenditure, have negatively affected core family policy measures, especially for single mothers who rely disproportionately on social benefits, and larger families. There is a disability allowance for children, and carers for disabled children can claim an allowance under Universal Credit. Employees have the right to take time off work to help someone who depends on them in an unexpected event, but whether this time is remunerated is at the discretion of employers.

A rebranded “troubled families” program, introduced during the coalition government (in office from 2010), was subsequently renamed “supporting families.” It targets families facing “multiple and often overlapping vulnerabilities, such as financial or housing insecurity, poor mental or physical health, domestic abuse, children at risk of harm, poor educational attainment, or substance misuse.” From March 2023, the program will support an additional 100,000 families, having already supported 650,000. However, it has faced criticism for stigmatizing families and being used to explain the London riots of 2011, with dedicated funding offset by cuts to local authority budgets (Crossley 2015).

Citation:

Cohen, B., Moss, P., Petrie, P., and Wallace, J. 2021. “A New Deal for Children?” – what happened next: A cross-national study of transferring early childhood services into education.” *Early Years* 41 (2-3): 110-127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2018.1504753>

Crossley, S. 2015b. *The Troubled Families Programme: The Perfect Social Policy?* (London: Centre for Crime and Justice Studies. <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/publications/troubled-families-programme-perfect-social-policy>)

Hungary

Score 5

The Orbán government has strongly emphasized family policy in a broad sense, spending 6.2% of GDP on this policy area, which is very high compared to international standards. Still, the government has done little to enable women to combine child care and careers. Most of the government’s measures have been financial, providing assistance to families purchasing real estate or larger cars for families with many children. By contrast, few measures – most notably one that allows grandparents to take “parental” leave – have helped young parents combine work and family duties. The background of these measures is a decline in the size of Hungary’s population and the government’s refusal to balance low birth rates and brain drain with immigration. So far, the measures have not stopped this trend, and have favored high-income families over poorer ones. Recent data show that family sizes have stabilized only within the highest income groups (Vida 2021).

Support for and protection of families has figured prominently in the Fidesz agenda for some time. After Katalin Novák, the former family minister without portfolio, ascended to the office of Hungarian president in 2022, her responsibilities were transferred to the Prime Minister’s Office. The Orbán government’s family policy has emphasized traditional Christian values and the primary role of women as caretakers, leading it to be labeled a “carefare regime” (Fodor 2021). The government has generated political hysteria around the perceived danger of gender issues for Hungarian families, particularly focusing on the alleged Western practice of gender-affirming surgeries on young children. The Orbán government has presented these controversies as a primary reason for its clash with the European Union over recovery funds. In Hungarian family policy, the illiberal narrative of the

government is very present (Grzebalska and Pető 2018). Interestingly, family policy is one of the priorities of the Hungarian presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of 2024. Domestically, Hungary announced a “family policy 2.0” initiative aimed at increasing childbirth rates and fostering home ownership among families, with a particular focus on mothers. One of the measures is tax exemptions for mothers with at least three children (previously: four).

Citation:

Vida, C. 2021. “Jövedelmi tizedek, avagy a hazai családpolitika hatásai a háztartások létszámának alakulására.” In: Magyar Közgazdasági Társaság, December 15. <http://fejlodegazdasagtan.hu/2021/12/15/jovedelmi-tizedek-avagy-a-hazai-csaladpolitika-hatasai-ahaztartasok-letszamanak-alakulasara/>

Grzebalska, W., and A. Pető. 2018. “The Gendered Modus Operandi of the Illiberal Transformation in Hungary and Poland.” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 68: 164-172.

Fodor, E. 2021. “A Carefare Regime.” In: *The Gender Regime of Anti-Liberal Hungary*, 29-64. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Italy

Score 5

The family, often in its extended form, remains one of the most important institutions providing financial support for members with precarious and low-paid jobs and ensuring assistance to the elderly. Within the family, significant work and income redistribution occur, with services such as preschool childcare often provided by grandparents. Partly because of this reliance, state support for families has generally been weak in Italy. Apart from relatively generous provisions for maternity leave, including social security payments and limited tax deductions for children, the state has not offered much assistance. Public daycare facilities for preschool children are limited and vary considerably between regions. Families often must use more expensive private services, which receive only some state support.

The lack of significant policy measures has contributed to limited (although slowly increasing) participation of women in the labor force and a low overall employment rate. This, in turn, has also led to a very low birth rate, which continues to decline. Women in Italy are entitled to five months’ pay at 80% of their last salary for maternity leave. There is also an optional parental leave, which can be taken by both parents, for up to 12 months, paid at 80% of the last salary for the first month and 30% for the subsequent months. Self-employed workers are excluded from this provision.

The “Assegno Unico per i figli” project, launched under the second Conte government and completed under the Draghi government, provides an allowance for every child from birth to age 21. The NRPP also allocates resources to strengthen families, including increasing the number of nursery schools. A significant reform, Law 32/2002 “Family Law,” approved in 2022, requires the approval of several government decrees. The most important decrees, concerning the reorganization and strengthening of financial measures to support children’s education and the support and promotion of family responsibilities, have not yet been approved. The deadline

is May 2024. The 2024 budget law, approved by the Meloni government, has allocated additional funds for nursery school bonuses and promoting women's employment in private companies.

Japan

Score 5

Against the background of a rapidly aging society and low fertility rates, the Japanese government has been paying increasing attention to problems related to the costs of sustaining families. Parents of newborn children are entitled to a maximum of 14 months of paid post-natal leave – eight months for mothers and six months for fathers. This can be extended until the child reaches 24 months of age if the child was denied admission to a childcare center. There is also unpaid leave for a maximum of five days per year in case of a child's illness or injury, as well as paid leave of up to 93 days per lifetime for a family member who requires long-term care. Employers are prohibited from imposing excessive overtime on employees who have children below compulsory school age or who discriminate against workers who take parental or family care leaves. Parents of children below the age of three are entitled to an unpaid reduction in working hours to six hours per day. Fees for early childhood education and care services are fully subsidized for children between three and five years of age.

While the family support system is generous, not all families can take full advantage of it. Only women covered by the Employees' Health Insurance system may receive maternity benefit payments. Moreover, paternity and parental leave are unavailable for self-employed workers, day laborers, some workers on fixed-term contracts and same-sex couples. Overall, Japanese politics is still strongly shaped by traditional ideas of family, which may partially explain why single-parent households face significantly higher poverty risks than in most other economically advanced democracies.

In April 2023, the Children and Families Agency was established, combining various child-related departments previously spread across different ministries. The agency is composed of three departments in charge of policy planning based on data analysis, pregnancy and childbirth support, care for preschool children, measures for single-parent families, prevention of child abuse and poverty reduction.

The Kishida government announced in the summer of 2023 that all families will be entitled to receive a child allowance of JPY 15,000 (€100) per month for children up to three years old and JPY 10,000 (€65) per month for children up to 15 years old. From October 2024, the payment will increase to JPY 30,000 (€200) for the third and subsequent children. In addition, the Kishida government provided several extraordinary financial assistance packages to low-income households, such as JPY 30,000 (€90) per household, with an additional JPY 50,000 (€320) per child, announced in March 2023.

Citation:

“Child Allowances in Japan to be Expanded from Oct. 2024.” The Yomiuri Shimbun, June 15. <https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp/politics/politics-government/20230615-116165>

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Iwamoto, Kentaro. 2023. “Aging Japan opens Children and Families Agency: 5 things to know.” Nikkei Asia April 3. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Aging-Japan-opens-Children-and-Families-Agency-5-things-to-know>

United States

Score 5

There are some federal policies designed to facilitate or offset the costs of family care work.

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 allows for up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for family care, including childcare (after the birth or adoption of a child) or care for a spouse or parent with a serious medical condition. Although the leave is unpaid, legal protection is provided to prevent the employee from being dismissed. However, there are few paid family leave options, which depend on the beneficence of the employer or, in rare cases, on state law. Many states operate their own programs to subsidize childcare and early childhood education after means testing. The child tax credit was created in 1997 (Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997). Under President Donald Trump, the amount was increased to \$2,000 per child (Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017). The credit was temporarily expanded further in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, increasing the credit to \$3,000 – \$3,600 per child. Families earning (jointly) \$150,000 or less were eligible, covering 88% of children in the United States. Since 2022, the amount has reverted to \$2,000 per year. Millions of children are lifted out of poverty thanks to this program.

The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit allows taxpayers to reduce their childcare costs from their tax bill, with the maximum deductible amount ranging from \$3,000 to \$6,000 depending on the number of children in a household.

In 2023, the Biden administration issued an executive order on increasing access to high-quality care and supporting caregivers. This order aims to provide high-quality care for older Americans and support family caregivers, long-term care workers, early educators, and veterans.

Switzerland

Score 4

In general, Swiss family policy has a clearly conservative outlook with a strong liberal undertone (Häusermann and Bürgisser 2022; 2023). It is mildly supportive of the traditional family. For example, there is a period of 14 weeks of parental leave for mothers (introduced after a popular vote only in 2004), as well as a very limited number of childcare facilities. In September 2020, a constitutional amendment was accepted in a public vote. The amendment, which establishes two weeks of parental leave for fathers, while covering 80% of the father's wage, came into effect on 1 January 2021. This clearly falls short of the WHO guideline of six months of maternity leave, and likewise does very little to promote shared responsibility within households and families. There are no federal rules providing parents with paid leave to care for sick children or elderly family members in need of assistance.

Recent statistics show that women spend an average of 16.6 hours a week in paid employment compared to 27.3 hours for men. Likewise, women spend a weekly average of 28.1 hours on domestic work and men 17.9 hours (FSO 2017). Other figures show that within couples that live together, domestic chores are carried out by women in 60% of cases. In 33.7% of households, the tasks are divided equally between men and women. However, it was noted that inequalities in the distribution of domestic chores explode with children. Tasks are distributed equally among 49.5% of couples without children, as compared to 25.9% of couples in households with children under 25 (FSO 2019).

In international comparison, Swiss family policy has done relatively little to enable women to enter the workforce. Policies facilitating the reconciliation of work and family lag behind those in other comparable modern societies. Overall spending for family benefits is low in international comparison, and Switzerland ranks very low with regard to the length of paid maternity leave as well as enrollment of children between the ages of three and five in formal pre-primary education (Bürgisser and Häusermann 2022). Along with Turkey, Switzerland is at the bottom of enrollment rates in early childhood education and care (OECD 2022: 89). Additionally, the tax system with its high marginal personal income taxation of second earners, combined with high costs for external childcare, is a major impediment for caregivers, typically women, to move into the labor market. The OECD reports that “for a family with two young children using childcare facilities, the cost for a second earner to move from inactivity ... to full-time employment (earning the average wage) represents 75% of the average wage, versus 53% on average in the OECD countries” (OECD 2022: 89).

A January 2009 federal law providing subsidy payments to families – amounting to 3.7% of all social policy spending in 2020 (FSIO 2022) – has done little to change the country's ranking in international comparison. Nor has it changed the substantial variation between cantons, one of the most salient characteristics of Swiss family

policy. The new federal law defines minimum child and education benefits, but cantons may add a variable amount to this basic federal benefit level. Single-parent families suffer in particular from lack of public support both with regard to income as well as affordable childcare facilities (FSIO 2023).

In 2020, the WEF's Global Competitiveness Report, which focused on the road out of the pandemic, ranked Switzerland 12th among 37 countries regarding expansions of care for the elderly, childcare, and healthcare infrastructure and innovation, after countries including Canada, the United States and Germany (WEF 2020: 74). It is also notable that many measures introduced to mitigate the pandemic placed a greater burden on women than on men. For example, the closure of schools and childcare facilities, as well as quarantine periods for children, were mostly compensated for by women who were pushed back into the household, reinforcing the traditionally conservative division of labor.

There are substantial variations in family policy at the cantonal and municipal levels. The canton of Ticino has a very extensive family policy aimed at helping mothers reconcile work and family; other cantons and their municipalities frequently fail to offer any substantial help, such as childcare facilities, on a broad scale. Differences and reform dynamics are particularly pronounced between municipalities with regard to external childcare. For example, in the largest canton, Zürich, 75% of the costs of preschool care (Kitas) are covered privately by parents (NZZ 9 December 2020). Local communities with minimalistic family policies coexist with municipalities that strongly facilitate the reconciliation of work and family for young mothers. The interplay of local, cantonal and federal family policies makes the policy process and power distribution very disparate.

Likewise, tax policies providing incentives either to stay at home or reenter the labor market vary from canton to canton. However, taking the median canton and municipality, the portrait of a liberal-conservative family policy applies. Policies tend to create incentives for young mothers to stay at home during the first years of their children's lives (the short duration of the maternity leave notwithstanding). Afterward, mothers are provided with reasonable opportunities to find employment; however, these are in most cases part-time jobs. This incentivizes mothers to care for their children while also having some limited employment. Taking part-time jobs usually reduces the ability to have a sustained career compared to the opportunities offered by full-time employment (FSIO 2023; OECD 2022: 79). In this regard, the OECD recently suggested expanding affordable childcare and access to early childhood education so women can expand their working hours (OECD 2022: 89). Currently, the system works in the sense that it mobilizes women within the labor market, but without giving them opportunities for income and career advancement equal to those afforded to men – with considerable regional variation.

Citation:

Chzhen, Y., Anna Gromada, and Gwyther Rees. 2019. Are the World's Richest Countries Family Friendly? Policy in the OECD and EU. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research.

Federal Council (Bundesrat). 2017. Familienbericht 2017. Bern: Bundesrat.

FSIO (Federal Social Insurance Office, Bundesamt für Sozialversicherungen). 2022. Schweizerische Sozialversicherungsstatistik 2022. Bern: FSIO.

Federal Social Insurance Office, Bundesamt für Sozialversicherungen. 2023. Die wirtschaftliche Situation von Familien in der Schweiz. Bern: FSIO.

FSO (Federal Statistical Office, Bundesamt für Statistik). 2017. Schweizerische Arbeitskräfteerhebung, Unbezahlte Arbeit (Modul der Schweizerischen Arbeitskräfteerhebung SAKE), No je-f-03.06.00.01

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