

After parental leave: Incentives for parents with young children to return to the labour market



After parental leave: Incentives for parents with young children to return to the labour market

Abstract

This study examines the employment situation of parents with young children in the EU and specifically, the factors that affect parents' return to the labour market. The paper identifies interventions that could help parents return to work after family-related leave and improve labour-market integration of unemployed or inactive parents. The study outlines possible additional actions at the EU level.

This document was provided by the Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies at the request of the committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL).

This document was requested by the European Parliament's committee on Employment and Social Affairs.

AUTHORS

RAND Europe: Joanna HOFMAN, Madeline NIGHTINGALE, Michaela BRUCKMAYER, Annemari de SILVA, Natalie PICKEN, and Linda KUNERTOVA

Country experts: Belgium: Emma LEENDERS, Annemari de SILVA, RAND Europe; Germany: Michaela BRUCKMAYER, RAND Europe; Greece: Akis GKOUSIS, RAND Europe; Hungary: Jekatyerina DUNAJEVA; PPMI; Ireland: Emma LEENDERS, RAND Europe; Lithuania: Justė VEZIKAUSKAITE, PPMI; Poland: Iga MAGDA, Mateusz SMOTER, IBS; Sweden: Anita NYBERG, Stockholm University

ADMINISTRATOR RESPONSIBLE

Stefan SCHULZ

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Roberto BIANCHINI

LINGUISTIC VERSIONS

Original: EN

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Policy departments provide in-house and external expertise to support European Parliament committees and other parliamentary bodies in shaping legislation and exercising democratic scrutiny over EU internal policies.

To contact the Policy Department or to subscribe for email alert updates, please write to:

Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies

European Parliament

L-2929 - Luxembourg

Email: Poldep-Economy-Science@ep.europa.eu

Manuscript completed: September 2020

Date of publication: November 2020

© European Union, 2020

This document is available on the internet at:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/supporting-analyses>

DISCLAIMER AND COPYRIGHT

The opinions expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the European Parliament.

Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy.

For citation purposes, the publication should be referenced as: Hofman, J. et al., *After parental leave: Incentives for parents with young children to return to the labour market*, Publication for the committee on Employment and Social Affairs, Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies, European Parliament, Luxembourg, 2020.

© Cover image used under licence from Adobe Stock

CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	6
LIST OF BOXES	9
LIST OF FIGURES	9
LIST OF TABLES	10
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	11
1. INTRODUCTION	14
1.1. Background	14
1.2. Study objectives, research questions and methods used	15
1.3. Key concepts and definitions	16
1.4. Report structure	16
2. PARENTS WITH CHILDREN: WORK PATTERNS IN THE EU	17
2.1. Employment	17
2.2. Self-employment	19
2.3. Part-time employment	20
2.4. Temporary employment	21
2.5. Home working	23
2.6. Impact of COVID-19 on parents with young children	24
3. FACTORS AFFECTING PARENTS' RETURN TO WORK	26
3.1. Socio-demographic and household characteristics	26
3.1.1. Education	26
3.1.2. Immigration status and migrant background	30
3.1.3. Household characteristics	31
3.1.4. Family and other social networks (availability of informal childcare)	36
3.2. Attitudes and cultural values	37
3.3. Employment characteristics	39
4. NATIONAL POLICIES FACILITATING PARENTS' RETURN TO WORK	41
4.1. Family leave	41
4.2. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)	44
4.3. Job protection	47
4.4. Legislation to promote flexible working	48
4.5. Legislation to support the rights of breastfeeding mothers	49
4.6. Child and family cash benefits	49

5. EMPLOYER PRACTICES TO HELP PARENTS RETURN TO WORK	51
5.1. Company practices that facilitate parents' return to work after leave	52
5.1.1. Career-development support and coaching	52
5.1.2. Sustained contact during leave	53
5.1.3. Flexible work arrangements	53
5.1.4. Breastfeeding at work	54
5.1.5. Childcare at work	55
5.1.6. Supporting leave uptake for fathers	55
5.1.7. Supervisor and line-manager support	57
5.1.8. Family-friendly company practice awards	59
5.1.9. Small and medium-sized organisations	60
5.2. Workplace culture	60
6. ALMPS SUPPORTING INACTIVE OR UNEMPLOYED PARENTS INTO WORK	62
6.1. Policies and programmes	62
6.1.1. Work-related benefit top-ups and tax credits	63
6.1.2. Job subsidies and job creation	65
6.1.3. Job search requirements and job search support	66
6.1.4. Changes to child and family benefits eligibility	68
6.2. Beneficiaries and target groups	69
6.2.1. Single parents	70
6.2.2. Inactive parents with a migrant background	71
7. EU LEGISLATION, POLICIES AND FUNDING	73
7.1. Maternity leave Directive (92/85/EEC)	73
7.2. Directive on equal treatment of men and women in employment (2006/54/EC)	74
7.3. Parental leave Directive (2010/18/EU)	75
7.4. Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers (EU 2019/1158)	76
7.5. Directive on equal treatment of parents engaged in self-employment (2010/41/EU)	77
7.6. The European Social Fund (ESF)	78
8. OVERALL CONCLUSIONS	80
8.1. The employment situation of parents after childbirth in the EU since 2008	80
8.2. Main factors affecting parents' return to work after family-related leave	80
8.3. Promising company approaches to ensure a smooth return of parents from leave	83
8.4. Promising ALMP programmes helping parents with young children	83
8.5. Effect of existing EU legislation, policies and funding instruments	84

REFERENCES	85
ANNEX – METHODS USED	110

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALMPs	Active Labour Market Policies
AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
CCTR	Child Care Tax Rebate
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czechia
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EC	European Commission
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
EE	Estonia
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
EL	Greece
EPIC	European Platform for Investing in Children
ES	Spain
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
EU-LFS	EU Labour Force Survey
FI	Finland
FPA	Full participation arrangement
FR	France
HETUS	Harmonised European Time Use Survey

HR	Croatia
HU	Hungary
IE	Ireland
IT	Italy
IWC	In-Work Credit
JST	Jobseekers Transition Payment
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
LV	Latvia
MT	Malta
NL	The Netherlands
NSA	New Start Allowance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFP	One-parent Family Payment
PL	Poland
PPP	Parenting Payment Partnered
PPS	Parenting Payment Single
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
RPA	Reduced participation arrangement
RQ	Research question
SE	Sweden
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia

SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
WFP	Working Family Payment

LIST OF BOXES

Box 1:	Home working and maternal employment: evidence from the UK	24
Box 2:	Effect of education on the motherhood wage penalty: evidence from the US	30
Box 3:	Single mothers' employment trajectories: evidence from Switzerland	36
Box 4:	Maternity-return programme: evidence from the UK	53
Box 5:	Supervisor and co-worker support: evidence from the South Africa	58
Box 6:	In-work benefits, employment and career progression: evidence from the UK	64
Box 7:	Work search requirements for single parents: evidence from the UK	67
Box 8:	Work incentives for single parents: evidence from Australia	69
Box 9:	Activation of single parents: evidence from the UK	70

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1:	Maternal and paternal employment gap in 2019	18
Figure 2:	Changes over time in maternal and paternal employment gap (2009–2019)	18
Figure 3:	Maternal and paternal employment gap for the self-employed in 2019	19
Figure 4:	Changes in maternal and paternal employment gap for the self-employed (2009–2019)	20
Figure 5:	Maternal and paternal employment gap for the part-time-employed in 2019	20
Figure 6:	Changes in maternal and paternal employment gap for the part-time-employed (2009–2019)	21
Figure 7:	Employment gap for those with temporary employment contracts in 2019	22
Figure 8:	Employment gap change for those with temporary employment contracts (2009–2019)	22
Figure 9:	Maternal and paternal employment gap for those working from home in 2019	23
Figure 10:	Changes in employment gap for those working from home (2009–2019)	23
Figure 11:	Maternal employment gap by educational attainment in 2019	27
Figure 12:	Changes in maternal employment gap by educational attainment (2009–2019)	27
Figure 13:	Paternal employment gap by educational attainment in 2019	28
Figure 14:	Changes in maternal employment gap by educational attainment (2009–2019)	28
Figure 15:	Maternal employment gap by number of children in 2019	32
Figure 16:	Paternal employment gap by number of children in 2019	32
Figure 17:	Maternal employment gap by household situation in 2019	34
Figure 18:	Paternal employment gap by household situation in 2019	35
Figure 19:	Share of adults in households with young children by working pattern in 2019	35

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1:	Factors affecting parents' return to work	82
Table 2:	Research questions mapped by methods used	110
Table 3:	Variables in the quantitative analysis	111
Table 4:	Sources reviewed for Research Question 1	113
Table 5:	Sources reviewed for Research Question 2	115
Table 6:	Sources reviewed for Research Question 3	117
Table 7:	Sources reviewed for Research Question 4	120
Table 8:	Sources reviewed for Research Question 5	121
Table 9:	Interviews conducted with EU stakeholders	123
Table 10:	Rationale for selecting countries as case studies	124
Table 11:	Interviews conducted with national stakeholders	127

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Before the COVID-19 crisis caused a sharp drop in employment, in 2019 the employment rate in the European Union (EU) reached 73.1%¹, the highest annual average ever recorded for the EU, and the closest to the 75% target set out in the Europe 2020 strategy². Yet the employment rate for men (at 79%) was still 11.7 percentage points higher than for women (67.3%). Childcare responsibilities have been attributed as an important reason for this gender employment gap³, with many parents, especially women, deciding not to return to work after childbirth. The most common policies that support parents in returning to work include those around family leave and the provision of high quality and accessible childcare.

While different practices and policies have been implemented across the EU to support parents in returning to work, a number of factors still discourage them from doing so. The adverse effects of the COVID-19 crisis are likely to persist over time, because the newly unemployed will find it harder – and take longer – to secure a new job. Therefore, it is particularly relevant to examine measures that could effectively incentivise and facilitate the return of parents to work.

Aim and methods

The objectives of this study are to: (i) understand if and how the employment situation of parents with young children in the EU differs from those without, and how it has changed in recent years; (ii) identify factors that affect parents' decisions to return to work and examine effective interventions that support that; and (iii) identify ways to increase labour market participation of parents with young children.

The methods utilised in this study comprised: quantitative analysis of EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) data (2009–2019), targeted literature reviews, a limited number (12) of semi-structured telephone interviews with stakeholders at the EU and national level (representing public institutions, social partners and academia), and eight country case studies: Belgium (BE), Germany (DE), Greece (EL), Hungary (HU), Ireland (IE), Lithuania (LT), Poland (PL) and Sweden (SE).

Key findings

The employment situation of parents after childbirth in the EU since 2008

There are no major changes over time in work patterns for parents with young children in the EU: (i) women with young children are less likely to be in employment than those without (and more likely to be working part-time); (ii) men with young children are more likely to be in employment than those without; and (iii) parents with young children are more likely than those without to be self-employed and to be working from home.

However, these patterns will be affected by COVID-19, which is likely to exacerbate gender differences and employment gaps among parents of young children.

The main factors facilitating and hindering parents' return to work after family-related leave

Among socio-demographic factors affecting the return to work, the following play an important role: (i) education – the maternal employment gap is largest for women with a low level of education; (ii) migrant background – the employment rate of women born outside the EU is much lower than that of

¹ Eurostat (2020).

² European Commission (2010).

³ Steiber and Haas (2012); Newton et al. (2018).

men in the same group, and immigrant mothers and mothers with a migrant background face particular challenges in the labour market; (iii) households characteristics – mothers with more children are generally less likely to be in work: among households with three or more children, working full-time among adults becomes less common; and (iv) single parents (and single mothers in particular) are the most underrepresented in employment.

Evidence points to societal and cultural attitudes towards women in society and their place in the family, which (i) affect the distribution of unpaid care work among men and women and (ii) impact mothers' employment.

Employment characteristics (such as job satisfaction, skills needed, job tenure, flexibility in the workplace) also play a role, either facilitating or hampering the return to work.

The key policy levers include: (i) family leave – in particular, well-compensated and non-transferable parental leave increases uptake from fathers, thus improving employment outcomes for mothers; (ii) accessible and affordable Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC); (iii) job protection for mothers; and (iv) promoting flexible working arrangements.

Promising employer approaches to ensure a smooth return of parents from leave

Employers may draw on a wide range of programmes to help parents with young children return to work. These measures include: (i) career development or maternity-return coaching, which can support women returning to work after leave; (ii) sustained contact with parents during leave, which enables workers to stay up to date with company developments and mitigates stress upon return to work; (iii) childcare provisions and breastfeeding facilities at the workplace, which help parents better manage family obligations (but are not always feasible); and (iv) supporting higher uptake of leave by men (through well-paid leave or supplemental leave beyond statutory requirements, and role models within the organisation).

The evidence suggests that the availability of policies to support return to work (regardless of uptake) is associated with higher levels of productivity, working hours and labour-force attachment of parents. Companies that provide provisions beyond what is required tend to benefit from this effect.

The level of support from supervisors and managers can impact workers' return to work experiences. Similarly, job quality, work conditions and workplace culture more broadly appear to be important factors in encouraging or limiting uptake of available incentives to return to work – both in terms of practices offered by an employer and the policies adopted at the national level.

Promising Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) helping inactive or unemployed parents with young children

Inactive and unemployed parents often need access to childcare to participate in ALMPs, such as training and job-search support, job subsidies, job creation, work-related benefit top-ups and tax credits, and changes to child and family benefit eligibility. In terms of their effectiveness, most evidence relates to ALMPs for single parents – who are often identified as a vulnerable group – and generally had positive job outcomes but mixed results in terms of poverty reduction. However, ALMPs do not tend to target many other sub-groups of parents with young children and as such, the effect of ALMPs on parents with migrant backgrounds, with more children, or with children with disabilities, has not been widely explored.

The extent to which existing EU legislation, policies and funding instruments help to increase the labour market participation of parents after leave

Evidence is scarce on the actual impact of the EU legislation implemented so far. However, EU legislation has been helping advance the provisions of family-related leave across EU Member States, which are considered among the most generous around the world.

The new legislation is expected to bring net benefits, to increase female labour force participation, to increase productivity and to reduce recruitment and training costs.

In addition, the European Social Fund (ESF), one of the EU's primary funding mechanisms, supports projects across EU Member States to provide millions of participants (including parents with young children) with education, training and employment support. However, the EU-level data on ESF effectiveness is not granular enough to draw conclusions on employment outcomes for participating.

Areas where the EU might take new or additional actions include:

- Improve gender equality by addressing the unequal distribution of unpaid (care) work and reducing the gender pay gap, both of which would help to increase women's – and therefore mothers' – employment;
- Review the need to further enforce or strengthen leave provision for the self-employed and people in precarious employment; and
- Address evidence and knowledge gaps highlighted in this study by conducting additional research to further help different groups of parents with young children.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Before the COVID-19 crisis rocked the labour markets of European Union (EU) Member States, in 2019 the employment rate reached 73.1%⁴, the highest annual average ever recorded for the EU, and the closest to the 75% target set out in the Europe 2020 strategy⁵. Yet, the employment rate for men (at 79%) was still 11.7 percentage points higher than for women (67.3%). Nearly 42 million adults in the EU lived in households with at least one child under 6 years of age⁶. The largest group (39%) lived in households in which at least one adult was not working, and one adult was working. Only about one third (32%) lived in households where all adults worked full-time. A further 22% lived in households where one of all working adults worked part-time, and 7% lived in households where none of the adults were working⁷.

Childcare responsibilities have been attributed as an important reason for the gender employment gap⁸, with many parents – especially women – deciding not to return to work after childbirth. The most common policies that support parents in returning to work include family leave and the provision of high quality and accessible childcare. Returning to work is an essential decision – among other choices – over an individual's life course. Reproductive decision-making (such as the timing of parenthood or family size) depends on a number of factors, ranging from economic and labour market conditions to gender equality, marital status, income and cost of having and rearing children, to name a few. The dynamics between these factors are complex⁹.

Parents' return to work is an important topic in the context of the EU's ambition to increase the labour force participation in the EU to achieve goals around inclusive growth. The EU has introduced significant changes in recent years, gearing its policy and legislation towards achieving a balance in work and childcare for parents and carers. These efforts are in turn promoting the EU's commitment for gender equality and tackling key challenges that women face today, including access to the labour market. This commitment is reiterated in the **2020 Commission Work Programme**¹⁰, and will be implemented in the **Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2024**¹¹.

EU actions to reconcile work and family life are grounded in the **European Pillar of Social Rights**¹². The Pillar includes as core principles work-life balance (Principle 9) and the right to affordable, quality early childhood education and care (Principle 11), both of which support better and flexible work arrangements for parents. Principle 9 of the Pillar led to the **Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers (EU 2019/1158)**¹³, which strengthens leave policies and ensures that all workers with children up to the age of 8 have the right to request reduced or flexible working hours and flexibility on the place of work. Principle 11 of the Pillar has resulted in various EU actions related to early childhood education and care (ECEC). The **2019 Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems**¹⁴ recognises that the availability, accessibility and

⁴ Eurostat (2020).

⁵ European Commission (2010).

⁶ Eurostat (2020a).

⁷ Eurostat (2020).

⁸ Steiber and Haas (2012); Newton et al. (2018).

⁹ Hoorens et al. (2011).

¹⁰ European Commission (2020b).

¹¹ European Commission (2020a).

¹² The European Parliament, the Council and the EC (2017).

¹³ Official Journal of the European Union (2019b).

¹⁴ Official Journal of the European Union (2019a).

affordability of high-quality childcare facilities are key factors that allow parents to participate in the labour market and to balance professional and family lives.

While different programmes and policies have been implemented across the EU to support parents in returning to work, a number of factors still discourage them from doing so. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, women were more likely to be underemployed than men – even when controlling for age, education or citizenship¹⁵. Emerging evidence suggests that the impact of COVID-19 on employment will on average be greater for parents than for non-parents¹⁶, and greater for women than for men^{17,18}. The employment drop related to social-distancing measures affects female-dominated sectors, and the closure of childcare services impacts working mothers more than fathers^{19,20}. These adverse effects are likely to persist over time, because the newly unemployed will find it harder – and take longer – to secure a new job. Therefore, it is particularly relevant to examine measures that could effectively incentivise and facilitate the return of parents to work.

1.2. Study objectives, research questions and methods used

The objectives of the assignment are to:

- Understand if and how the employment situation of parents with young children in the EU differs from those without and how it has changed in recent years;
- Identify factors that affect parents' decisions to return to work, and examine effective interventions which support that; and
- Identify possible ways to increase labour market participation of parents with young children.

The analysis addresses the five research questions outlined below:

- **RQ1:** Has the employment situation of parents after childbirth evolved in the EU since 2008, and if so, how (including socio-demographic characteristics and consequences for longer-term career development and material well-being)?
- **RQ2:** What are the main factors facilitating and hindering the return of parents to work after leave (whether maternity, paternity or parental)? How do they differ across Member States?
- **RQ3:** What are promising practices in Member States in terms of company approaches to ensure a smooth return of parents from leave?
- **RQ4:** What are promising practices of public interventions – in terms of active labour market policy (ALMP) programmes – to help inactive or unemployed parents with small children back into employment?
- **RQ5:** To what extent can existing EU legislation, policies and funding instruments help to increase the labour market participation of parents after leave?

The methods comprised: quantitative analysis of EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) data (2009–2019), targeted literature reviews, 12 semi-structured telephone interviews with EU and national stakeholders, and eight country case studies: Belgium (BE), Germany (DE), Greece (EL), Hungary (HU),

¹⁵ There are more women than men among underemployed part-time workers, and the relative risk of being a discouraged worker rather than unemployed is measured to increase by a factor of 1.33 for a woman compared with a man. See: Eurofound (2017).

¹⁶ ONS (2020).

¹⁷ Blundell et al. (2020).

¹⁸ Alon et al. (2020).

¹⁹ Alon et al. (2020).

²⁰ Qian & Fuller (2020).

Ireland (IE), Lithuania (LT), Poland (PL) and Sweden (SE). The Annex to this study provides further methodological detail.

1.3. Key concepts and definitions

The focus of the study is on incentives for **parents with young children** (defined as 0–6 years of age) to return to work after leave (maternity, paternity or parental). However, the policies and measures designed to promote and enable parents' return to work that were considered to fall within the scope of the study are broader than those targeted in this group. The study considers measures such as flexible working policies (which benefit parents of children of all ages, as well as non-parents), alongside measures such as childcare leave and ECEC provision that are targeted at parents of young children.

This study concentrates on **returning to work after leave**, which implies a focus on the employed population (including both employees and the self-employed). However, the research questions (in particular RQ4) have a broader focus on enabling employment for all parents, including those who are unemployed or inactive. As such, the study also examines **ALMPs**, which describe labour market interventions that support people who are in work or out of work, to encourage them to engage in paid work and to assist them in doing so.

Finally, there are different types of **family-related leave**: maternity leave (for employed women, and taken prior to and after childbirth), paternity leave (for employed men, and typically taken soon after the birth of a child), parental leave (for employed parents, in addition to maternity or paternity leave and taken to care for children in their first years of life), and home or childcare leave (for employed parents or guardians until the child is 2 or 3 years old, and taken to allow for the care of a child). The study considers different types of leave, not just parental leave.

1.4. Report structure

After a preliminary overview of parents' return patterns by country (Section 2), the study focuses on the following factors facilitating and hindering parents' return to work from leave: socio-demographic, household, employment and attitudinal factors (Section 3), national policies (Section 4), and company practices (Section 5). Section 6 focuses on programmes to activate parents of young children who are unemployed or inactive. Section 7 considers the role of the EU in facilitating parents' employment. This is followed by a summary of key findings and overall conclusions (Section 8). Supplementary information – including the methods used – are presented in the Annex. At times, this study also features evidence from outside the EU. These pieces of evidence are presented in Boxes throughout.

2. PARENTS WITH CHILDREN: WORK PATTERNS IN THE EU

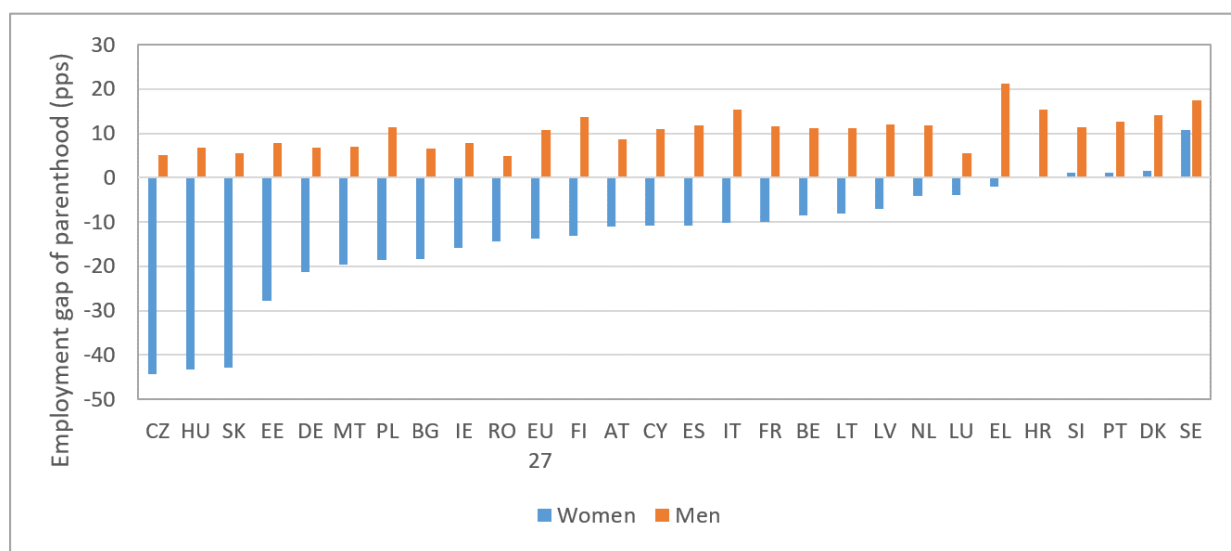
KEY FINDINGS

- In the EU, women with young children are less likely to be in employment than those without, while for men the situation is the opposite: new dads are more likely to be in jobs, compared to men without young children. This pattern does not change much over time.
- In the EU, both men and women with children under the age of 6 are more likely than people without young children to be self-employed, although the likelihood is higher for men. This difference is consistent over time.
- In the EU, mothers of children under the age of 6 are more likely than women without small children to be working part-time. The differences between men with young children, and men without young children are minimal. This situation is stable over time.
- In the EU, the presence of a young child makes it less likely for their mothers and fathers to be employed on a temporary contract, compared to those without small children. The differences between men and women and changes over time are negligible.
- In the EU, both men and women with young children are more likely than people without children under 6 years of age to be working from home. In recent years, this likelihood has increased for men.
- COVID-19 is likely to affect these patterns. Early evidence shows that parents are more likely to be furloughed, and women (including mothers) work fewer hours in paid jobs and are more likely to be made redundant, while taking the brunt of childcare responsibilities (leading to widening gender employment gaps among parents of young children).

2.1. Employment

In most EU Member States, women aged 20–49 with children under 6 years of age are less likely to be in employment than women without young children (henceforth referred to as the **maternal employment gap**). Comparing the maternal employment gap across Member States (Figure 1), there is variation in the magnitude and direction of the gap. In a minority of EU Member States (DK, HR, PT, SE, SI) women with young children are equally or even more likely to be in employment than women without young children. In the remaining countries (especially in CZ, HU and SK) women with a child under the age of 6 are less likely to be employed. The situation of the opposite sex – while also varied – is the opposite. Men with children under 6 years of age are more likely to be in employment than men without young children in all Member States, albeit to varying degrees.

Figure 1: Maternal and paternal employment gap in 2019

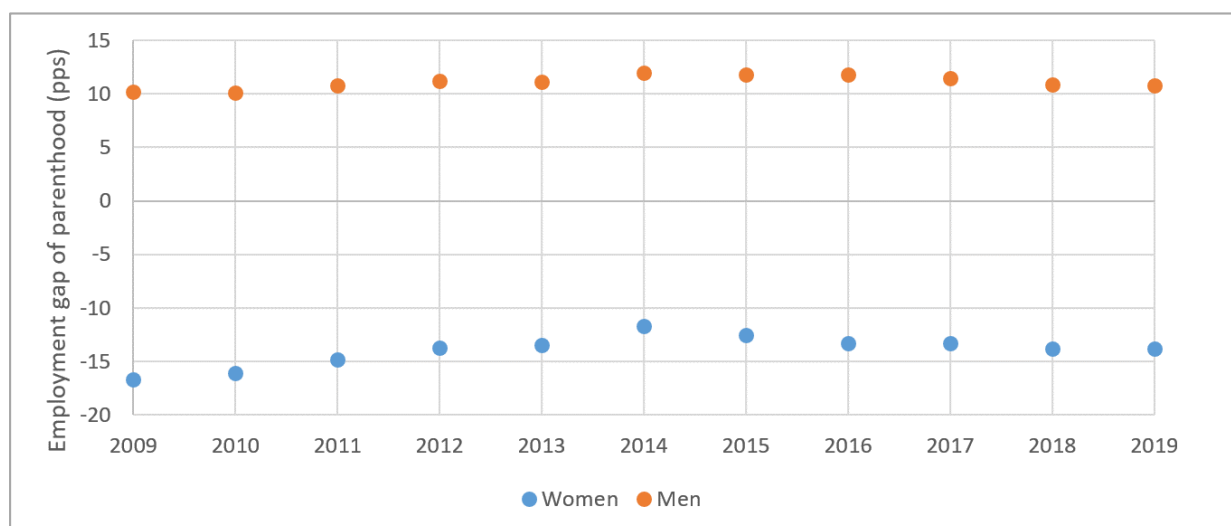


Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS) 2019 [lfst_hheredch].

Note: The parental employment gap is represented by the difference in employment rate (in percentage points) between men and women aged 20–49 with a child under the age of 6 compared to those without young children in 2019. The "minus" value of y-axis indicates the "lower" employment rate in those with young children.

At the EU level, these differences have been fairly stable over time (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Changes over time in maternal and paternal employment gap (2009–2019)



Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS) 2009–2019, [lfst_hheredch].

Note: The parental employment gap is represented by the difference in employment rate (in percentage points) between men and women aged 20–49 with a child under the age of 6 compared to those without young children (EU 27 average from 2009–2019). The "minus" value of y-axis indicates "lower" employment rate in those with young children.

The EU 27²¹ maternal employment gap is consistently negative, indicating that women with young children are less likely to be in employment than those without young children. The size of the maternal employment gap declined from -16.7 percentage points in 2009 to -11.7 percentage points in 2014, although it subsequently rose again to -13.8 percentage points in 2019. During the same period, men

²¹ The EU includes 27 EU Member States. The United Kingdom (UK) left the EU on 31 January 2020.

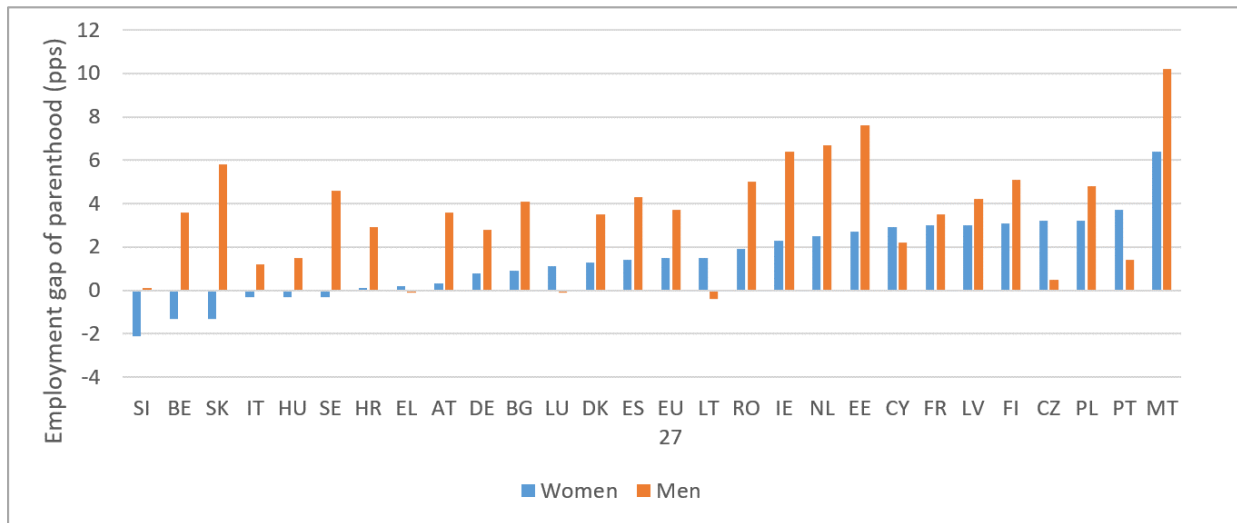
with young children were consistently more likely to be in employment than men without young children (in the region of 10–12 percentage points).

Looking at the change over time within Member States, a varied pattern emerges. In some countries, for instance Germany, there has been a stable decline in the size of the maternal employment gap, from a 29.3 percentage point difference in 2009 to 21.3 in 2019. In Portugal, the maternal employment gap moved from negative (–4.1 percentage point difference) – indicating that women with young children are less likely to be in employment than those without – to positive (1.1 percentage point difference) over this period. The positive paternal employment gap (i.e. men with young children being more likely to be in employment than those without young children) is fairly stable in most countries, with small fluctuations, although it has risen in Greece from 15.2% in 2009 to 21.3% in 2019 (the highest in Europe).

2.2. Self-employment

In most Member States (except BE, HU, IT, SE, SI, SK) the rate of self-employment is higher for both men and women with a young child compared to those without young children (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Maternal and paternal employment gap for the self-employed in 2019



Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS) 2019 [lfst_hhsechi].

Note: The parental employment gap is represented by the difference in employment rate (in percentage points) between men and women aged 20–49 with a child under the age of 6 compared to those without young children in 2019. The "minus" value of y-axis indicates "lower" employment rate in those with young children.

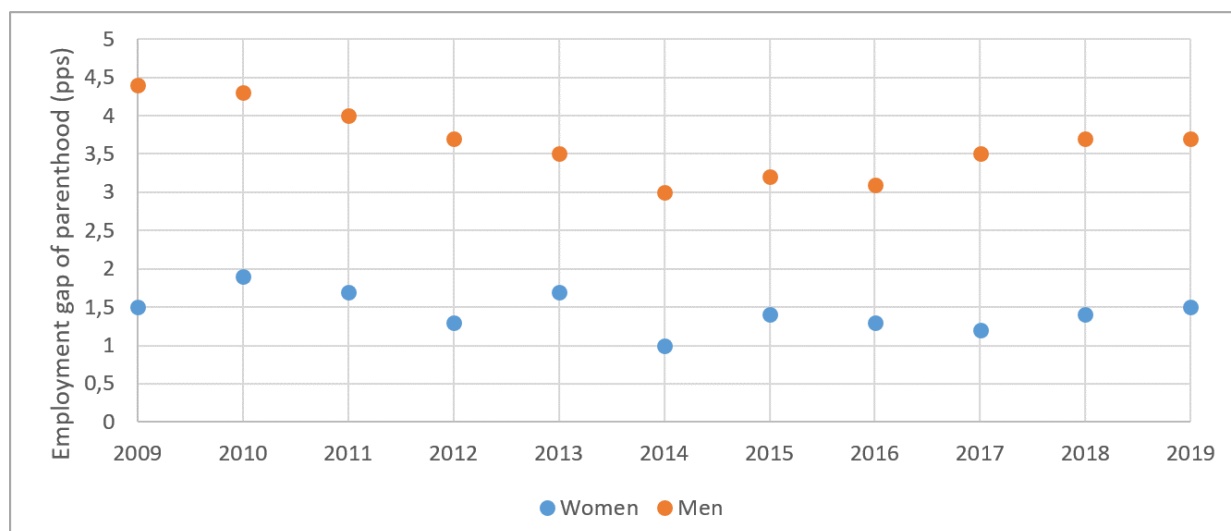
The fact that in most Member States women with young children are more likely than those without to be self-employed suggests that self-employment may help women overcome some of the barriers associated with returning to work. However, mothers may be forced to search for an alternative to waged employment out of necessity, rather than of their own choice²². While self-employment may form such an alternative, the female gender-earnings gap is larger in self-employment than in paid employment²³.

In most countries (and in the EU 27 on average), the difference is greater for men than for women. Looking at the 2009–2019 period, there is no clear trend in these differences over time (Figure 4).

²² Carrasco & Ejrnæs (2012).

²³ Hegewisch & Gornick (2011).

Figure 4: Changes in maternal and paternal employment gap for the self-employed (2009–2019)



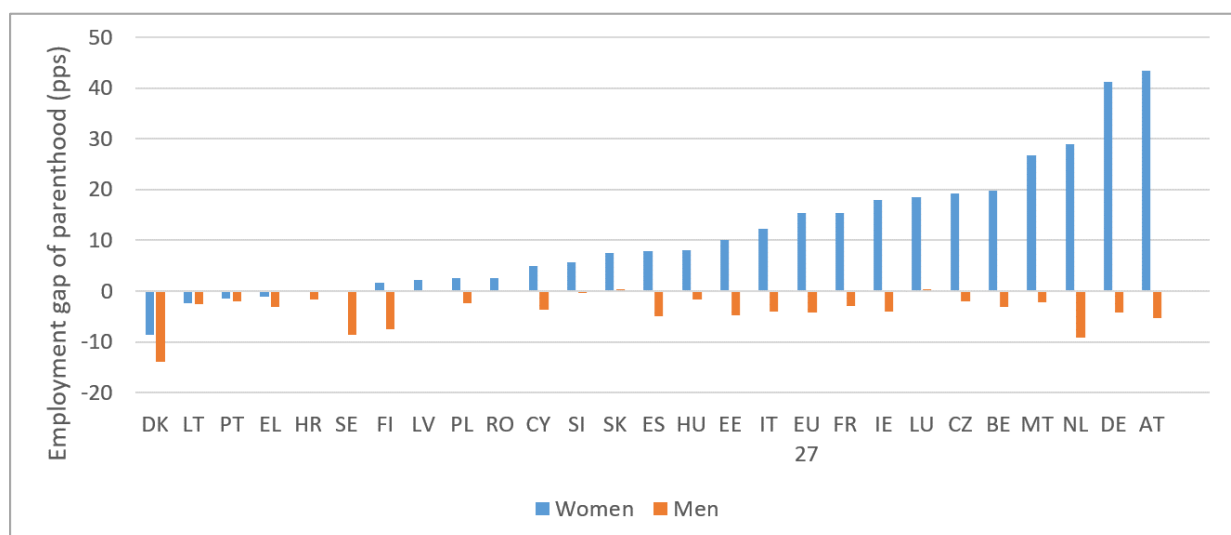
Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS) 2019 [lfst_hhsechi].

Note: The parental employment gap is represented by the difference in employment rate (in percentage points) between men and women aged 20–49 with a child under the age of 6 compared to those without young children (EU 27 average from 2009–2019). The "minus" value of y-axis indicates "lower" employment rate in those with young children.

2.3. Part-time employment

There is a clear gendered pattern to the impact of parenthood on both the extensive margin (whether people are in work) and the intensive margin (how many hours people work). Not only are women who are parents of young children less likely to be in employment than women without young children, but they are also more likely to work part-time (Figure 5). The reverse is true for men: in all Member States, the difference in part-time employment shows that men with young children are less likely to work part-time than men without young children.

Figure 5: Maternal and paternal employment gap for the part-time-employed in 2019



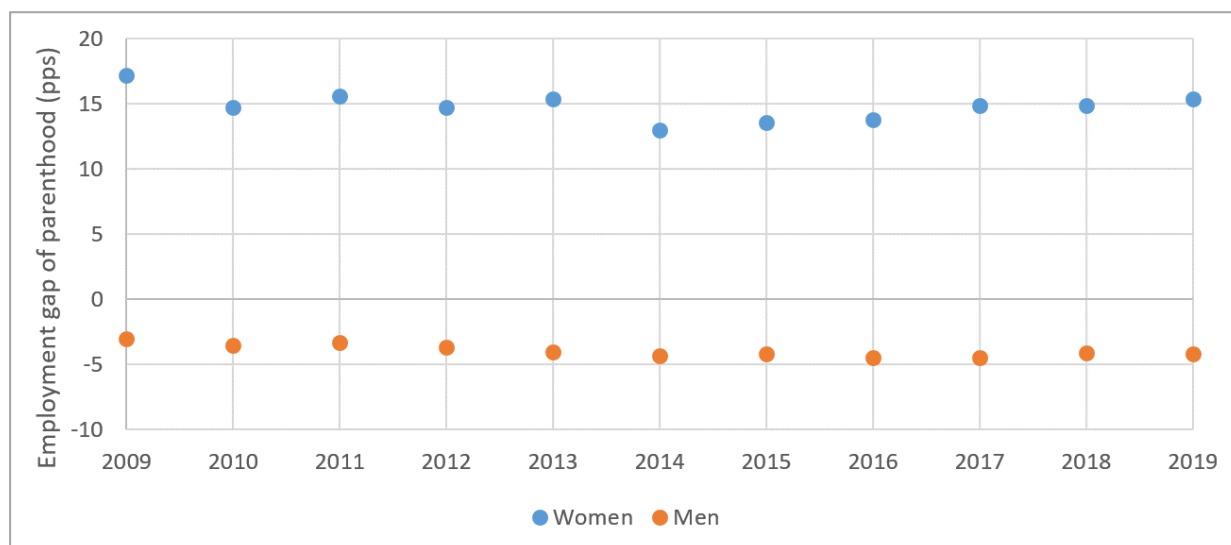
Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS) 2019 [lfst_hhptechi].

Notes: The parental employment gap is represented by the difference in employment rate (in percentage points) between

men and women aged 20–49 with a child under the age of 6 compared to those without young children in 2019. The "minus" value of y-axis indicates "lower" employment rate in those with young children. No data available for BG, and for LV (for men).

This pattern is consistent over the period 2009–2019 (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Changes in maternal and paternal employment gap for the part-time-employed (2009–2019)



Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS) 2009–2019 [lfst_hhptechi].

Notes: The parental employment gap is represented by the difference in employment rate (in percentage points) between men and women aged 20–49 with a child under the age of 6 compared to those without young children (EU 27 average from 2009–2019). The "minus" value of y-axis indicates "lower" employment rate in those with young children. No data available for BG, and for LV (for men).

These data suggest that part-time employment may play a role in facilitating employment for mothers. However, concerns are raised in the literature regarding the degree to which part-time employment channels mothers into poorer quality, lower paid employment²⁴. The long-term effects are likely to depend on how long mothers stay in part-time employment and whether this acts as a "stepping stone" to full-time employment. This is the focus of one longitudinal study, which shows that the majority of German women who transition to part-time employment after becoming parents later transition back to full-time employment²⁵. However, it is common for mothers, particularly in West Germany, to work part-time for a long period of time; and the duration of part-time employment following childbirth is longer for younger age-cohorts compared to older age-cohorts²⁶.

2.4. Temporary employment

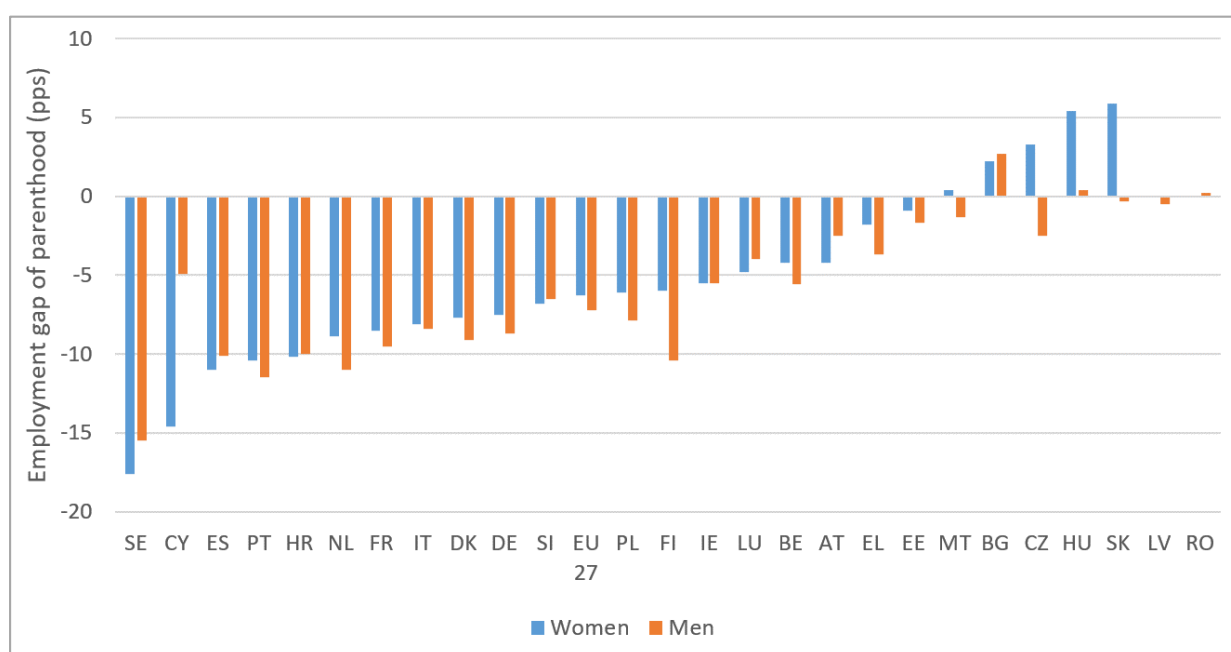
In most Member States, men and women with a child aged under 6 are less likely to be employed on a temporary contract than those without young children (Figure 7). There are certain Member States (BG, CZ, HU, SK) where women and men (BG) with young children are more likely to be employed on a temporary contract than adults without young children. However, differences are modest.

²⁴ Hegewisch and Gornick (2011).

²⁵ Kelle et al. (2017).

²⁶ Kelle et al. (2017).

Figure 7: Employment gap for those with temporary employment contracts in 2019

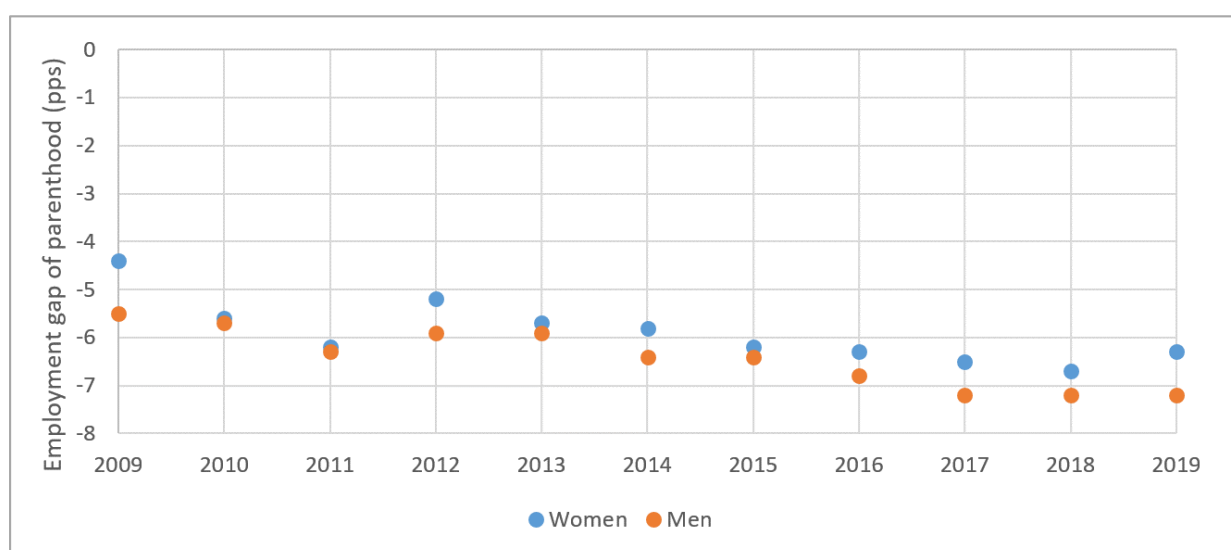


Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS) 2019 [lfst_hhitemchi].

Note: The parental employment gap is represented by the difference in employment rate (in percentage points) between men and women aged 20–49 with a child under the age of 6 compared to those without young children in 2019. The "minus" value of y-axis indicates "lower" employment rate in those with young children. No data available for LV, for LT and RO (for women) and for LT (for men).

The over-time trend (Figure 8) shows that the average difference has remained fairly stable over time, deepening slightly over the period 2009–2019.

Figure 8: Employment gap change for those with temporary employment contracts (2009–2019)



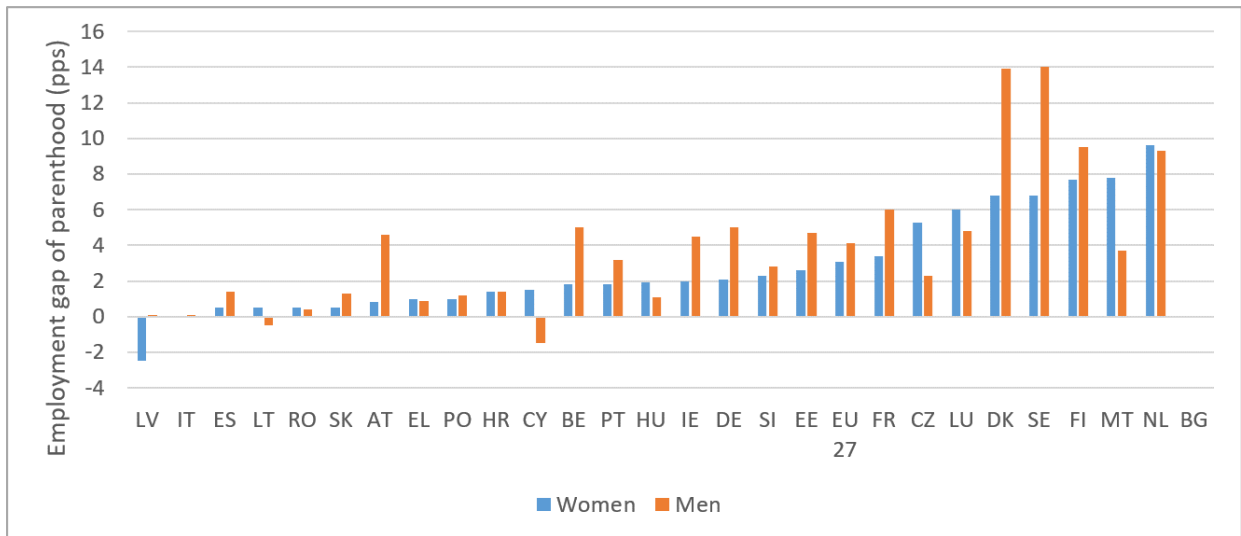
Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS) 2009–2019 [lfst_hhitemchi].

Notes: The parental employment gap is represented by the difference in employment rate (in percentage points) between men and women aged 20–49 with a child under the age of 6 compared to those without young children (EU 27 average from 2009–2019). The "minus" value of y-axis indicates "lower" employment rate in those with young children. No data available for LV, for LT and RO (for women) and for LT (for men).

2.5. Home working

In nearly all Member States, both men and women with young children are more likely to work from home compared to those without children under the age of 6 (Figure 9). In many Member States the difference is greater for men than for women (AT, BE, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, PT, SE, SI, SK), whereas in a few countries the reverse is true (CZ, HU, LT, LU, MT).

Figure 9: Maternal and paternal employment gap for those working from home in 2019

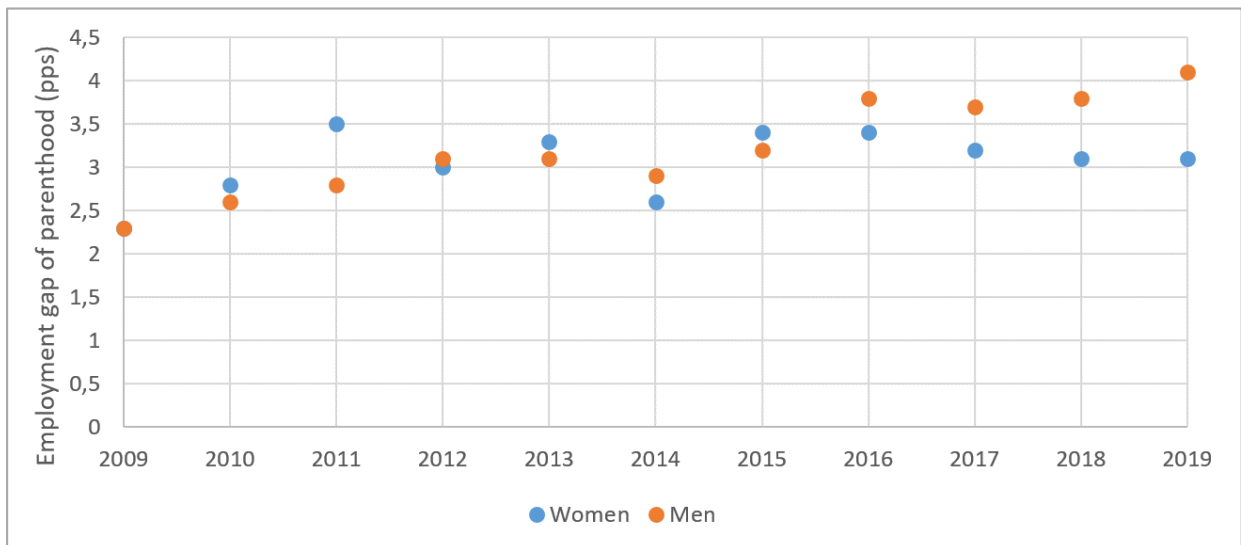


Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS) 2019 [lfst_hhwahchi].

Note: The parental employment gap is represented by the difference in employment rate (in percentage points) between men and women aged 20–49 with a child under the age of 6 compared to those without young children in 2019. The "minus" value of y-axis indicates "lower" employment rate in those with young children. No data available for BG.

Across the EU as a whole, the effect is greater for men than for women, a pattern that has emerged in recent years (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Changes in employment gap for those working from home (2009–2019)



Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS) 2009-2019 [lfst_hhwahchi].

Note: The parental employment gap is represented by the difference in employment rate (in percentage points) between men and women aged 20–49 with a child under the age of 6 compared to those without young children (EU 27).

average from 2009–2019). The "minus" value of y-axis indicates "lower" employment rate in those with young children. No data available for BG.

Along with evidence from the UK (see Box 1), the fact that in most Member States women with children under the age of 6 are more likely to be home working (LV is the only exception) could suggest that home working might be a means of overcoming the challenges associated with returning to work for women. However, emerging evidence indicates that this might not be the case, when home working is combined with more childcare responsibilities (see Section 2.6 below).

Box 1: Home working and maternal employment: evidence from the UK

One longitudinal study from the UK follows a sample of women over time (2010–2013) to explore how flexible working conditions affect employment and working hours after childbirth. All things being equal (the study controls for a range of socio-demographic, household and employment characteristics), women who have the option to work from home are less likely to reduce their working hours after having a child.

Source: Chung and van de Horst (2017).

2.6. Impact of COVID-19 on parents with young children

Findings from the Eurofound survey carried out in April 2020 across the EU show that 23% of respondents lost their job temporarily (and 5% permanently) – young men being affected most²⁷. A survey carried out later that year (in July 2020), 10% of respondents left the workforce (8% became unemployed and 2% became inactive), with young women and the self-employed most likely to lose their jobs²⁸. Many respondents had their working hours reduced (50% of April respondents and 37% of July respondents)²⁹.

The Eurofound results also confirm that teleworking is on the rise in all Member States, with over a third of those in employment working remotely. Of all those who work remotely, over a quarter have children under 12, with 22% struggling much more than other groups to concentrate on work and achieve a work-life balance³⁰. This seems to get worse over time, with 34% of July respondents with children under 12 reporting that their job prevents them from giving time to the family, compared to other groups of respondents³¹. Unsurprisingly, women struggle with work-life balance more than men, especially if they have young children: in April, 24% of women felt too tired after work to do household work, compared to 20% of men. This only worsened when businesses started to open in July 2020, when 31% of women and 26% of men with children under 12 reported most work-life conflicts, compared to other groups of respondents³².

This can be partially explained by gender differences in time spent on childcare (and housework) during the pandemic: women respondents spent 35 hours per week caring for children or grandchildren (compared to 25 hours for men), and 18 hours per week doing housework (12 hours for men)³³. These differences increase among respondents with children under the age of 12: in this group women spent 62 hours per week on childcare (compared to 36 hours for men) and 23 hours on housework (15 hours for men). Unsurprisingly, single mothers with children under 12 years old spent

²⁷ Eurofound (2020a).

²⁸ Eurofound (2020b).

²⁹ Eurofound (2020b).

³⁰ Eurofound (2020a).

³¹ Eurofound (2020b).

³² Eurofound (2020b).

³³ Eurofound (2020b).

the longest hours on childcare and housework, compared to all other groups³⁴.

Similarly, the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) pointed to the pandemic having a disproportionate effect on women in terms of their work-life balance and caring responsibilities³⁵.

Research examining the impact of COVID-19 in third countries shows that:

- In the US, due to increased care-giving responsibilities for working parents caused by COVID-19, mothers with young children reduce their work hours four to five times more than fathers (increasing the gender gap in work hours by 20% to 50%)³⁶. Fathers were less likely to be made redundant compared to mothers, men without children, and women without children³⁷. The employment and hours of unincorporated self-employed workers decreased for all groups, but differential effects by gender, couple status and parental status were found³⁸;
- In the UK, parents were almost twice as likely to be furloughed (13.6%) as those without children (7.2%); women carried out on average two-thirds more of the childcare duties per day than men (3 hours and 18 minutes and 2 hours respectively); and in households with a child aged under 5 years, women contributed on average 78% more childcare than men (this reduced to just 20% with children aged 5- to 10-years)³⁹; and
- In Canada, gender employment gaps among parents of young children widened (controlling for differences in job and personal characteristics), and they also increased more for parents of children in the primary school age compared to parents of younger children⁴⁰. The authors suggest that fostering accessible childcare and implementing flexible leave policies beyond the period of infancy could help working parents return to work.

³⁴ Eurofound (2020b).

³⁵ FRA (2020).

³⁶ Collins et al. (2020).

³⁷ Dias et al. (2020).

³⁸ Kalenkoski & Wulff (2020).

³⁹ ONS (2020).

⁴⁰ Qian & Fuller (2020).

3. FACTORS AFFECTING PARENTS' RETURN TO WORK

KEY FINDINGS

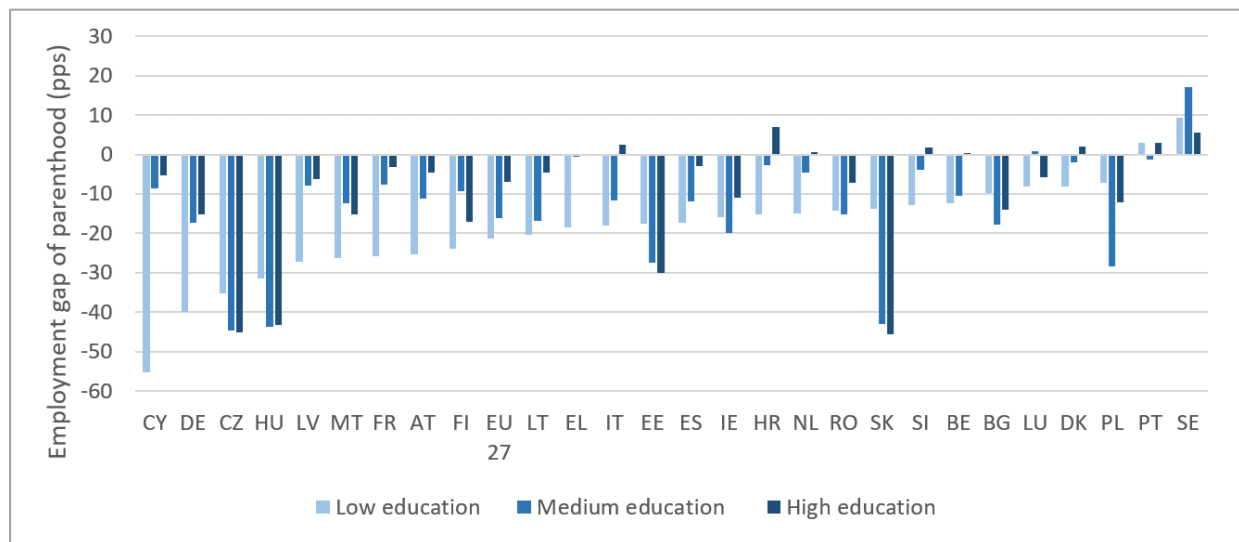
- At the EU level and in most Member States, the maternal employment gap is largest for women with a low level of education, and smallest for women with a high level of education.
- While gender employment gaps exist for native, EU and non-EU born populations, there is some evidence that suggests that immigrant mothers and mothers with a migrant background face particular challenges in the labour market.
- There is a correlation between the number of children and parents' employment. It is negative for mothers (and generally worsens with the number of children), and positive for fathers – especially those with one child. The household types matter for parents' employment too, with single parents (and single mothers in particular) being most underrepresented in employment, when compared to other family configurations.
- Evidence points to societal and cultural attitudes towards women in society and their place in the family impacting on mothers' employment. Some sources also note that the unequal distribution of unpaid care work among men and women impacts the labour force participation of women.
- Employment and job characteristics (such as job satisfaction, skills needed, job tenure and flexibility in the workplace) also play a role, either facilitating or hampering the return to work.

3.1. Socio-demographic and household characteristics

3.1.1. Education

At the EU level, the maternal employment gap is largest for women with a low level of education and smallest for women with a high level of education (Figure 11). In 2019, the average maternal employment gap in EU Member States was -21.4 percentage points for women with the lowest level of education, and -6.9 percentage points for women with the highest level of education. In some Member States (DK, HR, IT, SI), mothers with low educational attainment are less likely to be in employment than women with a similar educational background who have no young children, but mothers with high education levels are more likely to be in employment than women with a similar educational background who have no young children. However, there are some Member States (BG, CZ, EE, HU, PL, SK) where the pattern is reversed, i.e. the maternal employment gap is smallest for women with a low level of education. Sweden is the only Member State where women with young children are more likely to be in employment than those without young children across all educational groups.

Figure 11: Maternal employment gap by educational attainment in 2019

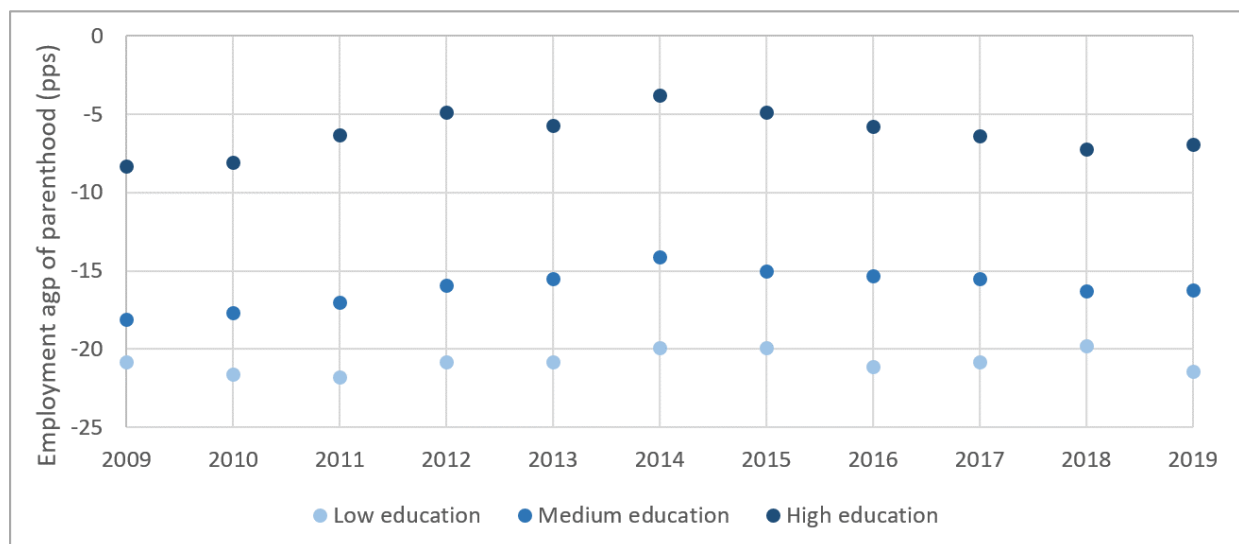


Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS) 2019 [lfst_hheredch].

Note: The maternal employment gap is represented by the difference in employment rate (in percentage points) between women aged 20–49 with a child under the age of 6 compared to those without young children in 2019 by education level. The "minus" value of y-axis indicates "lower" employment rate in those with young children. Educational status is operationalised according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) in three categories: Low education: ISCED 0–2; medium education: ISCED 3–4; high education: ISCED 5–8.

In 2019, the average maternal employment gap in EU Member States was -21.4 percentage points for women with the lowest levels of education and -6.9 percentage points for women with the highest levels of education; this pattern is fairly stable over time (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Changes in maternal employment gap by educational attainment (2009–2019)

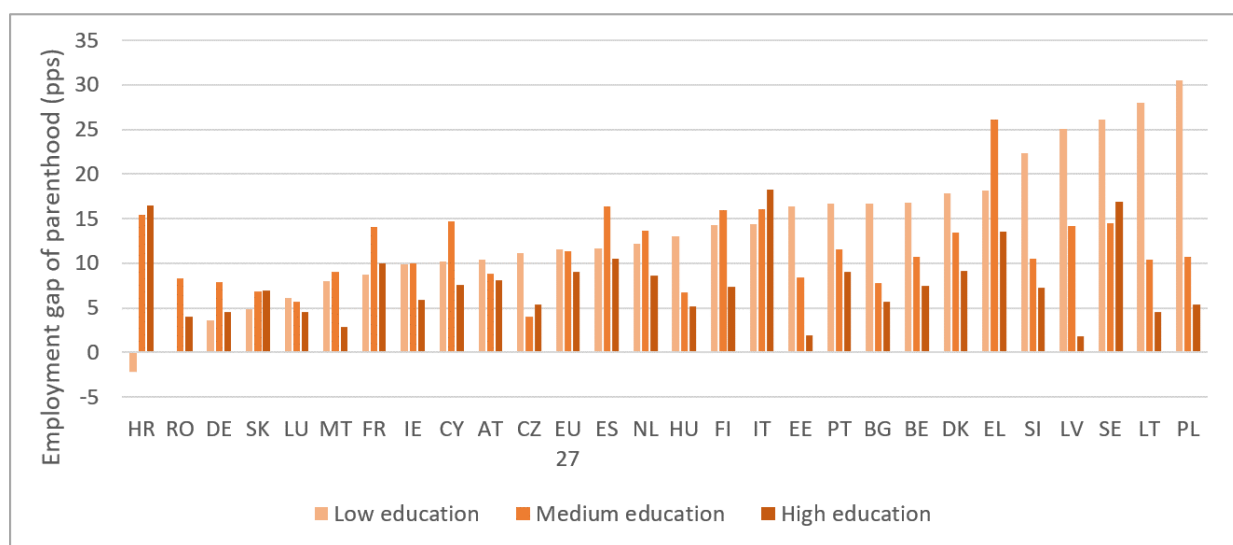


Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS) 2009–2019 [lfst_hheredch].

Note: The parental employment gap is represented by the difference in employment rate (in percentage points) between men and women aged 20–49 with a child under the age of 6 compared to those without young children (EU 27 average from 2009–2019). The "minus" value of y-axis indicates "lower" employment rate in those with young children. Low education: ISCED 0–2; medium education: ISCED 3–4; high education: ISCED 5–8.

A mixed pattern is observed in differences across educational groups in the size of the differences among men in EU Member States (Figure 13). In all countries except Croatia (HR), men with a child aged under 6 are more likely to be in employment, regardless of their education level. In a number of countries (PL, LT, LV, SI) the effect is most pronounced for men with a low level of education and least pronounced for men with a high level of education. However, in other countries (IT, SK) the pattern is reversed. In some Member States (and at the EU level) differences are modest, whereas in others (notably PL and LT) they are pronounced.

Figure 13: Paternal employment gap by educational attainment in 2019

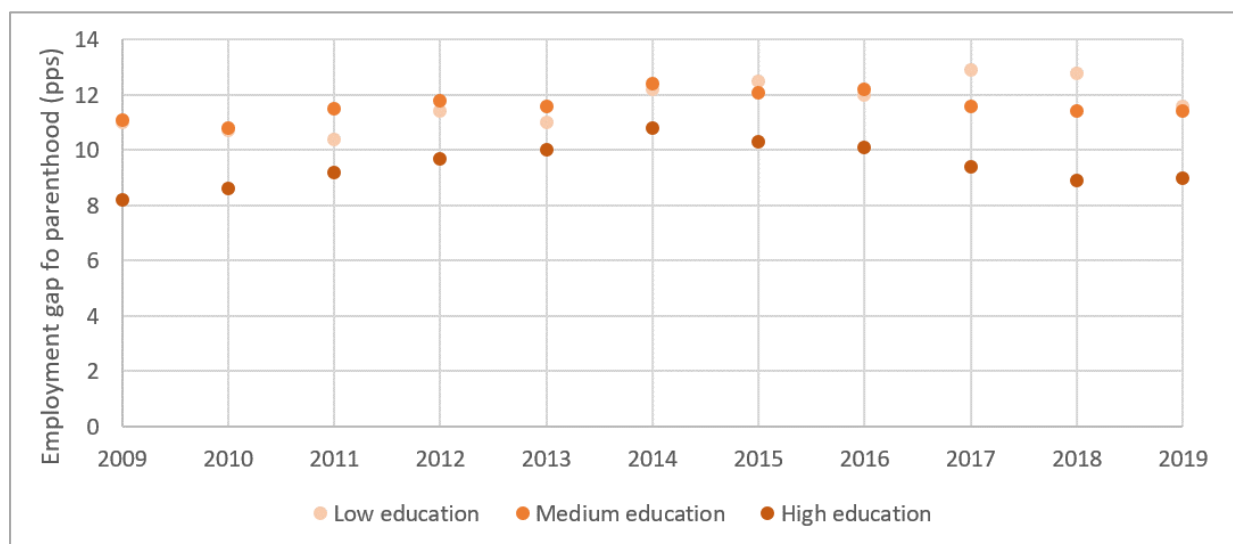


Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS) 2019 [lfst_hheredch].

Notes: The paternal employment gap is represented by the difference in employment rate (in percentage points) between men aged 20–49 with a child under the age of 6 compared to those without young children in 2019 by level of education. The "minus" value of y-axis indicates "lower" employment rate in those with young children. Low education: ISCED 0–2; medium education: ISCED 3–4; high education: ISCED 5–8.

Looking at the over-time trend (Figure 14), differences between educational groups narrowed until 2014 but widened thereafter.

Figure 14: Changes in maternal employment gap by educational attainment (2009–2019)



Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS) 2009–2019 [lfst_hheredch].

Note: The parental employment gap is represented by the difference in employment rate (in percentage points) between men and women aged 20–49 with a child under the age of 6 compared to those without young children (EU 27 average from 2009–2019). The "minus" value of y-axis indicates "lower" employment rate in those with young children. Low education: ISCED 0–2; medium education: ISCED 3–4; high education: ISCED 5–8.

Evidence from several of the case study countries selected for this study also showed that education (along other factors) affects the likelihood of employment among parents with young children:



In **Ireland**, unemployment rates are especially high among parents with low education, low work experience and a lack of work-related skills⁴¹. Single parents (of whom women form a majority) with a low level of education are recognised to face particular challenges in seeking work⁴².



In **Germany**, data for 2018 show that among mothers with a child under the age of 18 living in the household, more than 70% who have mid-to-high levels of education are employed, compared to only 43% of mothers with low levels of education⁴³. Mothers who have completed a high level of education are significantly more likely to work full-time (or close to full-time) than mothers with mid-level educational qualifications⁴⁴. The less educated a mother is, the more likely it is that she is employed under so-called "mini-job" conditions⁴⁵.



In **Poland**, there is no clear pattern of how motherhood influences women's employment⁴⁶. The analysis suggests that among women with higher education who have no or one child, the employment rate is very high⁴⁷. However, the number and age of children matter, as the employment rate among women with two children – especially when the youngest child is under 6 years old – is low, regardless of mothers' education levels. This holds true for women with both higher and lower education levels (although the employment gap for mothers with low levels of education is growing)⁴⁸.

Further evidence from the targeted literature reviews demonstrates the effect that education can have on the earnings of mothers in particular. An analysis of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARELIFE) across 13 European countries demonstrates that gaps in employment result in the lower income of mothers, and medium and higher educated women receive a significantly higher income than lower educated women⁴⁹. A recent systematic review and meta-regression analysis shows a small, but robust, motherhood wage penalty, which is largely driven by the US, the UK, Germany, and Norway⁵⁰ (see also Box 2).

⁴¹ Browne et al. (2018).

⁴² Millar & Crosse (2016).

⁴³ BMFSFJ (2020a).

⁴⁴ BMFSFJ (2020a).

⁴⁵ BMFSFJ (2020a).

⁴⁶ Magda (2020).

⁴⁷ No exact Figures are provided.

⁴⁸ Magda (2020).

⁴⁹ Möhring (2018).

⁵⁰ de Linde & Stanley (2020).

Box 2: Effect of education on the motherhood wage penalty: evidence from the US

One study from the US highlights differences according to educational background in the *motherhood wage penalty* (i.e. the earnings gap between women who are mothers and those who do not have children). The motherhood wage penalty exists for all mothers, but is smaller for women with a higher level of education and larger for women with a low level of education. Mothers with a low level of education are also disadvantaged in trying to augment their earnings by switching jobs. The study finds that they change jobs voluntarily (as opposed to being made redundant) less often than those with a higher level of education, particularly if they are younger; they also benefit less in terms of earnings from such employment changes.

Source: Looze (2014).

3.1.2. Immigration status and migrant background

There is some evidence that suggests that immigrants and people with a migrant background face particular challenges in the labour market⁵¹. This is especially the case for women. In 2019, the EU 27 employment rate ranged from 64.4% among people born outside the EU, through 73.9% among the native-born population, to 75.3% for persons born in another EU Member State. Within all three groups, a gender employment gap exists in nearly all EU Member States: women born outside the EU, born in another EU Member State, and born in the native country have lower employment rates than men in all groups. In particular, women born outside the EU have an employment rate 19.7 percentage points lower than that of men in the same group⁵².

However, these data do not account for having children. Instead, the role that migrant origin or immigration status may have on the employment opportunities of parents with young children was explored through case-study research and a targeted review of literature:



In **Belgium**, a longitudinal study draws attention to the challenges faced by both foreign-born women and second-generation migrant women (both considered together by the source as "women of migrant origin") in the labour market⁵³. Differences between native women and women of migrant origin predated parenthood: both inactivity and unemployment were more prevalent among women of migrant origin. A decrease in activity and employment levels associated with parenthood is observed for all women, but the effect is greater for women of migrant origin than for native women: for example, women of migrant origin who were unemployed prior to parenthood were significantly more likely to remain unemployed (with differences between 15 and 25.8 percentage points depending on country of origin and generation). The effect is greatest for foreign-born women rather than second-generation women (which generally can be explained by other socio-demographic differences, including the likelihood that foreign-born women are more likely to lack language skills, equivalent qualifications and experience in the local labour market). The impact of parenthood on full-time versus part-time employment is similar for women of migrant origin than native women, suggesting that differences are predominantly in relation to the choice to stay in the labour market, rather than the choice to reduce working hours⁵⁴. The largest employment gap exists between Belgian-born

⁵¹ 'Migrant background' here refers to people who have at least one parent who was born in a country other than the current country of residency.

⁵² Eurostat ((2020b).

⁵³ Kil et al. (2018).

⁵⁴ Kil et al. (2018).

mothers and foreign-born mothers: in 2014 (the latest available data), the Figures were 81.6% and 46.8% respectively⁵⁵. Since it is difficult for migrants in Belgium to access stable employment, it can mean that many are not eligible for entitlements such as maternity, paternity or parental leave⁵⁶.



In **Germany**, the government reports that in 2018, mothers with a migrant background had a significantly lower employment rate (54%) than mothers without a migrant background (76%)⁵⁷. Mothers with a migrant background also tend to work fewer hours than their native-born counterparts. According to the report, "the proportion of mothers who work full-time (over 36 hours) or close to full-time (28 to 36 hours) among all employed mothers is 45% for those with a migration background and 51% for those without a migrant background"⁵⁸. In addition, 22% of mothers with a migrant background work in so-called "mini-jobs" (earning less than 450 EUR per month), compared to 13% of mothers without a migrant background.



In **Sweden**, no data exist to compare the employment rate for foreign-born and Swedish-born parents specifically, but comparisons are possible for the Swedish- and foreign-born populations at large. According to 2019 data, the employment rate is 89.9% for Swedish-born women and 66.9% for foreign-born women; for men the corresponding Figures are 92.1% for Swedish-born men and 79.8 percent for foreign-born men⁵⁹. The unemployment rate is higher for immigrants (12.3% for foreign-born women; 15.2% for foreign-born men) than for people born in Sweden (2.6%⁶⁰), and the gap widened over the period 2008–2019⁶¹. Lower rates of employment and higher rates of employment for immigrants compared to people born in Sweden are linked to challenges with labour market integration of the large refugee population in Sweden⁶². These challenges include language barriers, low levels of education, a lack of networks and contacts in Sweden and discrimination⁶³.

3.1.3. Household characteristics

a. Number of children

In most Member States, the maternal employment gap widens as the number of children in the household increases, and is greatest for women with three or more children (Figure 15)⁶⁴. Averaged across EU Member States, the maternal employment gap is -9.9 percentage points for women with one child⁶⁵ aged under 6, -11.2 percentage points for women with two children and -27.9 percentage points for women with three or more children. In some countries (AT, BE, ES, FR), the maternal employment gap is considerably larger for women with three or more children in the household compared to women with fewer children. This may be related to the cost of childcare, which – even with state

⁵⁵ OECD (n.d.).

⁵⁶ Kil et al. (2018).

⁵⁷ BMFSFJ (2020a).

⁵⁸ BMFSFJ (2020a), p. 22.

⁵⁹ Statistics Sweden SCB (2020).

⁶⁰ This reflects the average for both women and men; data disaggregated by gender are not available.

⁶¹ Statistics Sweden (SCB) (2020).

⁶² OECD (2007).

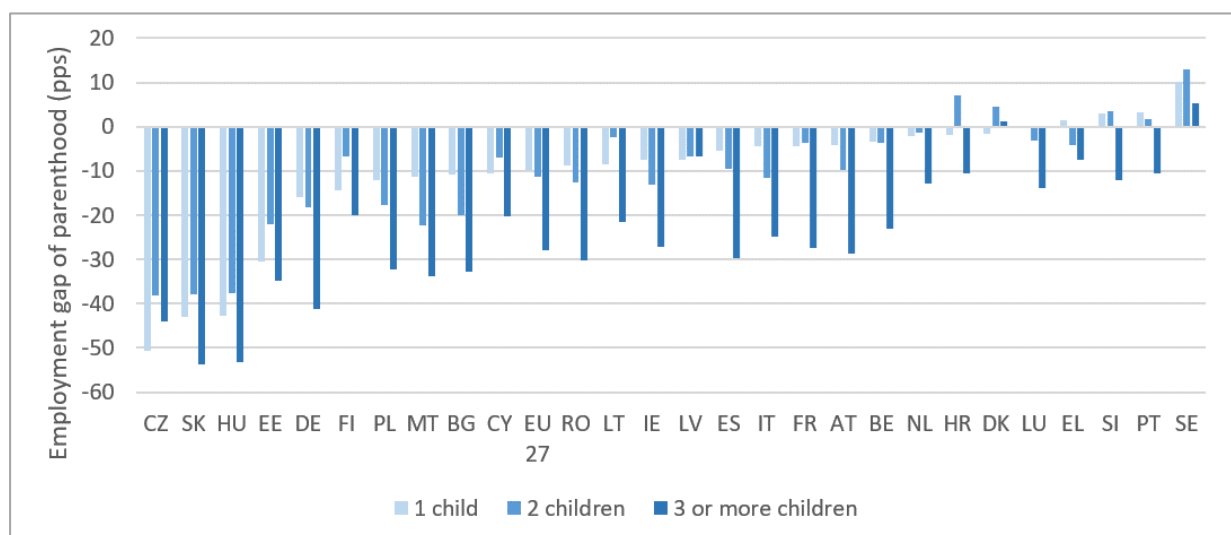
⁶³ SOU (2016).

⁶⁴ This is not the case in Poland, where childless women as well as women with one or three and more children work more often than the EU average, but mothers with two children – especially under the age of 6 – are less likely to be in work (see Magda, 2020).

⁶⁵ With at least one child aged under 6.

subsidies – could prove prohibitive for families with more than one child⁶⁶. However, differences in the maternal employment gap according to the number of children in the household might also reflect a selection effect, where women who choose to have larger families are less inclined or able to work. There are some Member States (CZ, SK, HU) where women with one child as well as women with two, three or more children, are much less likely to be in employment, which indicates more widespread barriers to maternal employment.

Figure 15: Maternal employment gap by number of children in 2019

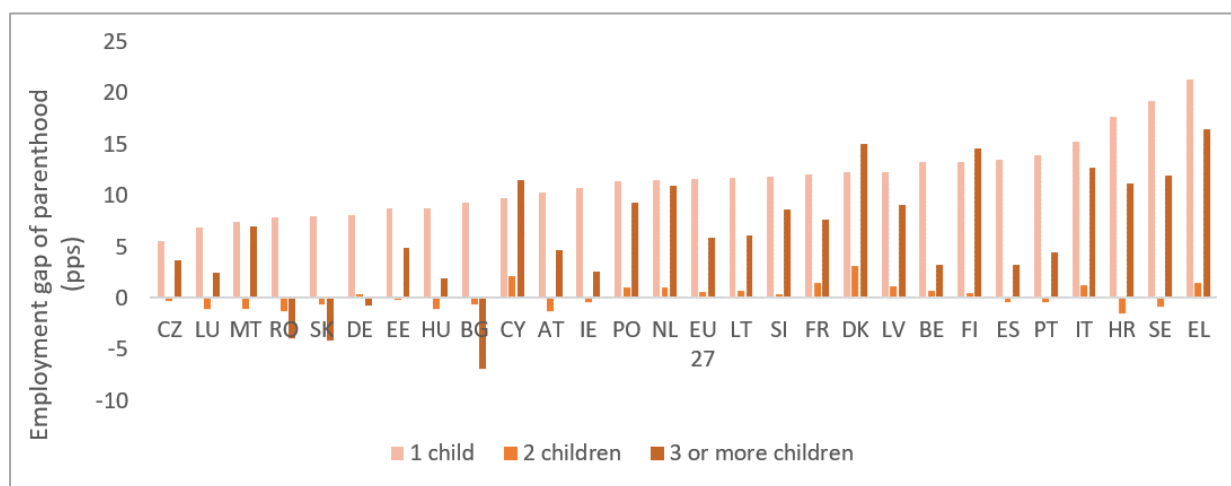


Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS) 2019 [lfst_hheredch].

Note: The maternal employment gap is represented by the difference in employment rate (in percentage points) between women aged 20–49 with one, two or three or more children under the age of 6 compared to those without young children in 2019. The "minus" value of y-axis indicates "lower" employment rate in those with young children.

The average difference in employment rate between men with children under six – compared to those without – is greatest for men with one child (11.6 percentage points) and three or more children (5.9 percentage points), and smallest for men with two children (0.6 percentage points) (see Figure 16). In some Member States (BG, SK, RO), men with three or more children are least likely to be in employment.

Figure 16: Paternal employment gap by number of children in 2019



Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS) 2019 [lfst_hheredch].

⁶⁶ Hegewisch & Gornick (2011).

Note: The paternal employment gap is represented by the difference in employment rate (in percentage points) between men aged 20–49 with one, two, three and more children under the age of 6 compared those without children in 2019. The "minus" value of y-axis indicates "lower" employment rate in those with young children.

Evidence from the case-study research provides additional insights into the relationship between the number and ages of children living in a household and maternal employment:



In **Belgium**, the effect of maternity on employment is comparatively low and the effects of paternity are insignificant⁶⁷. In 2014, a maternal employment rate of 72.4% for mothers with children under 14 was higher than the EU 27 average of 66.2%⁶⁸. Rates of employment for women whose youngest child is aged 0–2 are 65.7% and 70.3% for women whose youngest child is aged 3–5. Belgian mothers with a youngest child aged 0–14 have higher rates of full-time (49.9%) rather than part-time employment (22.1%)⁶⁹. Between 2003–2014, women with at least one child aged 0–14 had consistently higher rates of employment than women without at least one child under 14⁷⁰.



In **Germany**, until the youngest child in the household is 12 years old, mothers work on average less than 26.7 hours per week⁷¹. In addition to the age of the children, the number of children living in the household impacts mothers' working patterns. While in 2018 more than 70% of mothers with either one or two children were in work, the figure was only 52.7% for mothers with three children, and only 30.4% for those with more than three children⁷². Also, dual-income households in Germany are subject to joint taxation (*Ehegattensplitting*), which imposes a high tax threshold for secondary earners in the household (who are primarily women). According to one interviewee, this policy may act as a disincentive for women to be employed, but there are no empirical studies to show causality between this policy and labour market participation⁷³.



In **Lithuania**, low-income families with two or more children are not always motivated to participate in the labour market since their salaries are only marginally higher than the state support they are eligible for, making them the most prone to long-term unemployment⁷⁴.



In **Poland**, mothers of two children are much less likely to participate in the labour market, compared to mothers of one child or three or more children⁷⁵. Other household characteristics also play a role: women living in large cities participate in the labour market much more often compared with those from rural areas. This is likely due to limited access to ECEC and non-flexible working hours for people in rural areas⁷⁶. For some women, in particular single mothers, taking up work is simply not profitable. The tax and benefit system – set thresholds, amount of benefits and the rules of their withdrawal – means that taking up a low-paid job would lower the total income of a household. This difference becomes even greater if the cost of childcare provision is considered. Consequently, working becomes unprofitable in the short-term cost-benefit analysis (which fails to

⁶⁷ Maron (2010).

⁶⁸ Statistics quoted in this Section are from the OECD Family Database (OECD n.d.). Latest statistics are based on 2014 data.

⁶⁹ OECD (n.d.).

⁷⁰ OECD (n.d.).

⁷¹ BMFSFJ (2020a).

⁷² BMFSFJ (2020a).

⁷³ Interview DE1.

⁷⁴ Ministry of Social Security and Labour (2020).

⁷⁵ Magda (2020).

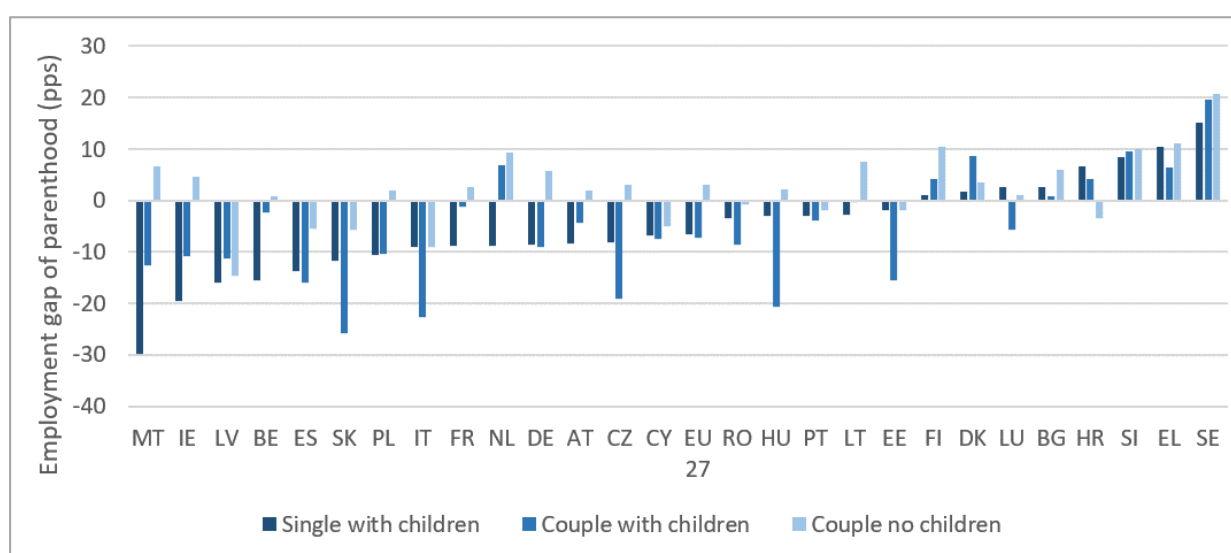
⁷⁶ Magda (2020).

include long-term benefits of work, such as gaining experience or accumulating pension contributions).

b. Different household types

Women form the vast majority of single-parent households in the EU⁷⁷, and the EU-LFS data offer additional insights on their situation compared to other households. Figure 17 compares the employment rate for women in different households to those who live alone as the reference group (i.e. without children or a partner). At the EU level, the employment rate is highest for women who live with a partner without children (82.9%), followed by single women (79.8%), single mothers (73.2%) and women who live with a partner and children (72.6%). However, the pattern varies markedly across Member States. In some countries (MT, NL, IE, BE) the gap is largest for single mothers in employment compared to single women. In other countries (SK, IT, CZ, HU, EE), the gap is largest for mothers living with partners.

Figure 17: Maternal employment gap by household situation in 2019



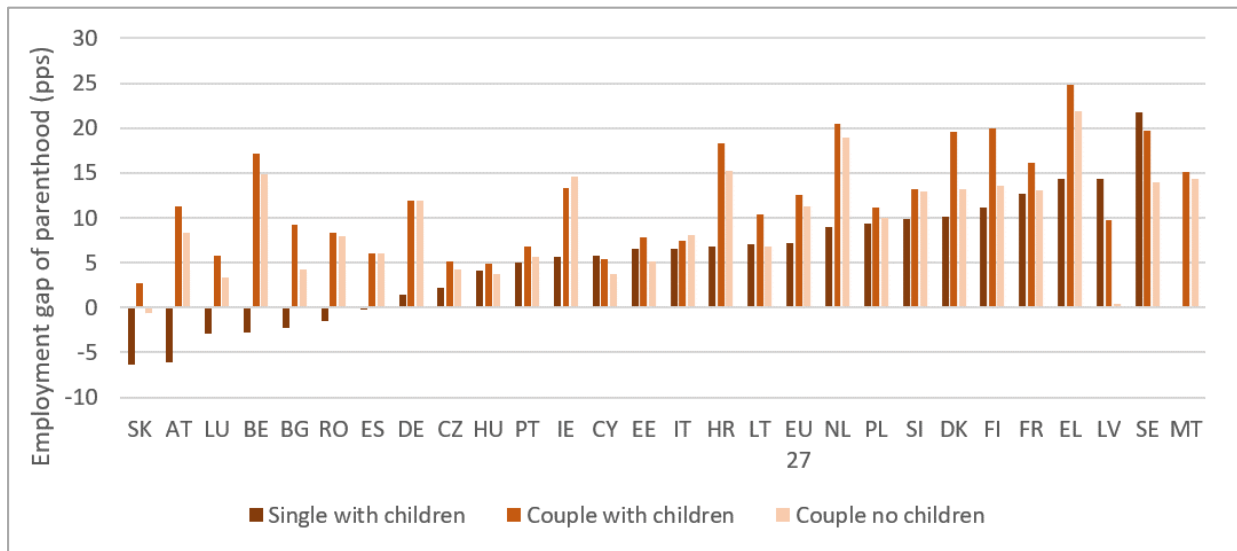
Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS) 2019 [lfs_hheredch].

Note: The maternal employment gap is represented by the difference in employment rate (in percentage points) between women aged 20–49 with a child under the age of 6 compared to those without young children in 2019 by household situation. The "minus" value of y-axis indicates "lower" employment rate in those with young children.

At the EU level, the employment rate is highest for men who live with a partner and children (92.7%), followed by those who live with a partner and no children (91.4%), single fathers (87.3%) and men who live alone (80.1%). In the majority of Member States (except AT, BE, LU, RO, SK), men who live with a partner or children are more likely to be in employment than those who live alone (Figure 18).

⁷⁷ Ruggeri & Bird (2014).

Figure 18: Paternal employment gap by household situation in 2019



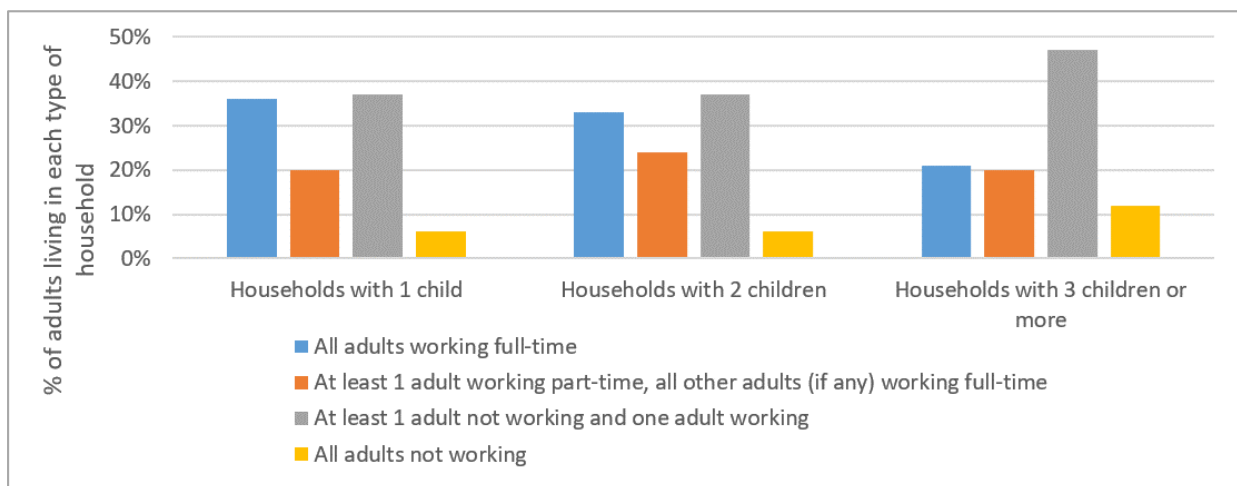
Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS) 2019 [lfst_hheredch].

Note: The paternal employment gap is represented by the difference in employment rate (in percentage points) between men aged 20–49 with a child under the age of 6 compared to those without young children in 2019 by household situation. The "minus" value of y-axis indicates "lower" employment rate in those with young children.

c. Household types and number of children

According to Eurostat, having one or two young children in the household does not lead to a significant difference in the work pattern of the adults living in that household. The majority of adults in these households were working full- or part-time (56% and 57% respectively)⁷⁸. However, working full-time is less common among those with three or more children (of which at least one is below the age of 6) (Figure 19). This affects about 8 million adults in the EU⁷⁹.

Figure 19: Share of adults in households with young children by working pattern in 2019



Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS) 2019 [lfst_hhwhacc].

Related evidence from country case studies and the targeted literature review (Box 3) provide further insights:

⁷⁸ Eurostat (2020a).

⁷⁹ Eurostat (2020a).



In **Belgium**, women whose partners work full-time or take parental leave are more likely to work⁸⁰. According to 2004 data, unemployment is five times higher amongst lone parents (32.3%) compared to dual earner families with children (6.5%), and unemployment among lone mothers is higher than for lone fathers⁸¹. Lone parent families account for almost one fourth of households, although regional differences exist⁸². About 68% of lone parents are working, with 35% of lone parents working part-time; lone mothers show high labour force attachment but younger lone mothers are less likely to be engaged in paid work compared to older lone mothers (but the age categories were not given)⁸³.



In **Lithuania**, single parents with two or more children are most at risk of poverty⁸⁴. However, single parents (similar to low-income families with two or more children) are also not strongly motivated to participate in the labour market, since their salaries are only marginally higher than the benefits they are eligible for, making them likely to remain long-term unemployed⁸⁵.

Box 3: Single mothers' employment trajectories: evidence from Switzerland

One study explores transitions to parenthood for single mothers in Switzerland and how this affects their employment decisions. Using cluster analysis, the authors explore the most common trajectories for single mothers following the transition to parenthood. The study finds that the majority of single mothers maintain steady attachment to the labour market, whether in full-time or part-time employment. However, a sizable minority (around 17%) are consistently out of employment in the years following childbirth. This is more common for younger women (aged 18–24) and women with a low level of education. Single mothers are most likely to be out of the labour market when their children are aged 2 or younger. This study points to heterogeneity within single mothers as a group, as well as differences across countries between single and coupled mothers.

Source: Struffolino et al. (2020).

3.1.4. Family and other social networks (availability of informal childcare)

High childcare costs have been shown to negatively impact women's employment rates⁸⁶. This particularly affects mothers who have low income and low skills, and are single⁸⁷. Even for those who are employed, their jobs may not pay sufficiently to comfortably cover childcare⁸⁸. Childcare costs include the costs associated with travelling to and from a centre, which may not be affordable for some parents and dissuade them from using formal childcare, as seen in the case studies on Belgium and Poland⁸⁹.

The availability of informal childcare support, such as from grandparents and other family members, can be a factor encouraging parents to return to work⁹⁰, although this is likely to interact with the provision of publicly provided or subsidised childcare (see Section 4). The case study research in

⁸⁰ Kil et al. (2015).

⁸¹ Struffolino & Mortelmans (2018).

⁸² Wagener and Mortelmans (2014).

⁸³ Herbeaux & Ndaye (2019).

⁸⁴ Statistics Lithuania (2020).

⁸⁵ Ministry of Social Security and Labour (2020a).

⁸⁶ Ferragina (2019); Magda (2020); Newton et al. (2018).

⁸⁷ Ferragina (2019).

⁸⁸ Newton et al. (2018).

⁸⁹ Departement Werk & Sociale Economie (2019); Magda (2020).

⁹⁰ Newton et al. (2018).

Belgium highlighted that this can pose a struggle, especially for migrant families who frequently lack kinship networks and are therefore unable to rely on informal childcare or afford formal childcare⁹¹.

3.2. Attitudes and cultural values

Evidence from literature reviews and case studies demonstrates that cultural values and attitudes are important factors in mothers' and fathers' employment. A comprehensive review of research⁹² and a rapid evidence assessment⁹³ demonstrated that in particular, women with more traditional gender attitudes are more likely to leave employment upon motherhood and take longer to return to work after childbirth. As demonstrated by case studies, the prevalence of such attitudes varies between Member States and between different demographic groups within Member States.

The fact that women (including mothers) undertake more unpaid care work than men also creates the "double burden" of work for women⁹⁴ and limits their capability to engage in paid employment⁹⁵. There is a negative correlation between the amount of time spent on unpaid care work (including childcare) and female labour force participation: the higher the gender inequality in distribution of the unpaid work, the higher the gender gap in labour-force participation⁹⁶. Data from the Harmonised European Time Use Survey (HETUS) shows that between 2008 and 2015 women spent more time on childcare than men in every country participating in the survey⁹⁷. The gender gap for childcare is above 30 minutes on average per day in some countries (DE, EE, FI, HU, RO). According to Eurofound, among couples with a youngest child under 7, women on average spent 20 hours per week more than men on unpaid work in 2016⁹⁸ (see changes in the time spent on childcare and housework during the COVID-19 pandemic in Section 2.6).

However, evidence also suggests that various factors may act as a counter-point to cultural values. Being in employment may regardless increase women's motivation to keep the job after becoming a mother⁹⁹. Evidence suggests that traditional gender roles are less common amongst highly educated women and men¹⁰⁰ and that factors such as the availability of childcare (see Section 4) are more important than culture in explaining cross-national differences in maternal employment¹⁰¹.

Finally, childbirth and the decision to return to work is not simply a variable influenced by a range of endogenous and exogenous factors, such as education, migrant status, etc. Reproductive decision-making – considering choices such as the timing of parenthood or family size – is also dependent on a number of factors, and there are complex dynamics between reproductive and employment-related decision-making¹⁰². These factors range from economic and labour market conditions to gender equality, marital status, family employment, income and the cost of having and rearing children.

The impact of traditional gender roles, attitudes and cultural values on parents' employment was a significant theme in several of the case studies:

⁹¹ Kil, Neels, Wood, & de Valk (2018).

⁹² Steiber & Haas (2012).

⁹³ Newton et al. (2018).

⁹⁴ Ferrant et al. (2014).

⁹⁵ Criado Perez (2019).

⁹⁶ Ferrant et al. (2014).

⁹⁷ Eurostat (2019c).

⁹⁸ Eurofound (2017b).

⁹⁹ Steiber & Haas (2012).

¹⁰⁰ Newton et al. (2018).

¹⁰¹ Steiber & Haas (2012).

¹⁰² Hoorens et al. (2011).



In **Belgium**, there is a high level of outsourcing of family responsibilities to the state or market in order to free both partners for economic activity¹⁰³. Childcare is still seen as primarily the mother's responsibility, a perception that is reinforced by the differences between lengths and obligations of maternity and paternity leaves (see Section 4)¹⁰⁴. An analysis of Belgian register-based panel data on dual-earner couples also shows gender differentials in leave uptake and labour force exit around the time of birth – both are greater among women compared to male partners¹⁰⁵. Kil et al. (2018) argue that societal pressures to conform with traditional views on motherhood can be greater on migrant women in Belgium than on native-born mothers¹⁰⁶.



In **Ireland**, the role of the family is defined in the Irish constitution. The state recognises the family as the fundamental unit group of society, and aims to ensure that mothers are not forced by economic necessity "to engage in labour [leading] to the neglect of their duties in the home" (Constitution of Ireland 1999, Article 41.2)¹⁰⁷. This article endorses the male breadwinner model¹⁰⁸ and reaffirms traditional gender roles¹⁰⁹. Support for a dual-earner model when children are young is relatively low – with just over one quarter of 25- to 35-year-olds being in favour of a stay-at-home mother and almost half of this age group approving women working part-time¹¹⁰ – and one interviewee thought that the legacy of the male breadwinner model is still felt today¹¹¹. However, the perceptions on women's role in society are changing, including a growing awareness at the government level that greater inclusion of women in the workplace will be necessary for pension provisions because of the aging population¹¹².



In **Hungary**, the role of the woman as primary care-giver for children was re-emphasised, since Hungary's departure from its socialist past¹¹³. Prior to that, the country had supported women's employment through a generous system of child-related benefits¹¹⁴. Lovász (2016) argues that there is a general dislike of nurseries and a view persists that children must be cared for by family at least until they are aged 3¹¹⁵. In 2014 and 2016, national surveys revealed that three-quarters of respondents preferred mothers to stay at home with their young children, rather than re-entering the labour force¹¹⁶. Parental duties overwhelmingly lie with mothers, although there are efforts to encourage fathers to participate more in childcare (most importantly, by allowing fathers to receive childcare allowance (GYED) since 2014)¹¹⁷.

¹⁰³ Marynissen et al. (2019).

¹⁰⁴ Marynissen et al. (2019); Wood & Marynissen (2019).

¹⁰⁵ Wood & Marynissen (2019).

¹⁰⁶ Kil, Neels, Wood, & de Valk (2018).

¹⁰⁷ Department of the Taoiseach (1999). Article 41.2.

¹⁰⁸ Millar et al. (2012).

¹⁰⁹ Cicia & Verloo (2012).

¹¹⁰ Röder et al. (2018).

¹¹¹ Interview IE1.

¹¹² Interview IE1.

¹¹³ Lovász, A. (2016).

¹¹⁴ Lovász (2016).

¹¹⁵ Lovász (2016).

¹¹⁶ Hungarian National Assembly (2019); Kovacs-Angel (2018).

¹¹⁷ Kovacs-Angel (2018).



In **Germany**, societal and individual expectations of gender roles and the division of caring responsibilities in families continue to influence the extent of parent's employment¹¹⁸. However, some progress in this area can be detected. According to a 2019 survey, 43% of Germany's general population, and 53% of mothers with small children, believe that mothers should be employed. However, only 13% of people believe that this was also expected of their parents' generation¹¹⁹. According to one interviewee, some policies in Germany could be reinforcing the traditional breadwinner model of the family, such as a dual-income tax (*Ehegattensplitting*) that imposes a higher tax-rate on secondary earners – who are primarily women – or the child allowance (*Kindergeld*), which is paid to one parent until a child is 18, both of which might disincentivise women to work¹²⁰.

3.3. Employment characteristics

Less commonly discussed than socio-demographic, household or cultural factors, differences across the labour market in how likely parents are to return to work after leave, depending on their job characteristics are highlighted by some studies.

A review of factors affecting parents' return to work¹²¹ shows how employer and job characteristics can help parents to return to work from leave (or not). Parents are more likely to return to work sooner if they feel (or perceive there is) pressure from their employer, or if they fear losing out on work opportunities. Both factors are more common for parents in high-skilled occupations in the private sector. Being self-employed or a business owner is also associated with returning to work from leave sooner, compared to those employed by organisations. Employment factors that increase the "opportunity cost" of leave (such as job satisfaction or job tenure) are likely to speed up the return to work.

In addition, the traditional workplace is often rigid and not always suitable for workers who care for young children: working times and locations that are rarely compatible with the locations and opening hours of nurseries, childcare centres, healthcare practices, etc. make the errands of working parents a logistical nightmare¹²².

Evidence from the country case studies further shows that:



In **Belgium**, there is a relationship between a mother's employment status and the positions held prior to childbirth¹²³. Women who have more work experience and higher salaries before childbirth are more likely to return to work after childbirth: every 3 months of work (that a woman worked before her first child) increases her chance of returning to the labour market full-time by 25% and returning part-time by 21%¹²⁴. Parents with low-wage or part-time jobs incur costs for childcare and transport that they cannot always afford, forming a barrier to work¹²⁵. Similarly, one interviewee suggested that people in lower skilled jobs had limited access to family-friendly measures that could facilitate their return to work¹²⁶.

¹¹⁸ BMFSF (2020).

¹¹⁹ BMFSF (2020).

¹²⁰ Interview DE1.

¹²¹ Newton et al. (2018).

¹²² Criado Perez (2019).

¹²³ Kil et al. (2015).

¹²⁴ Kil et al. (2015).

¹²⁵ Departement Werk & Sociale Economie (2019).

¹²⁶ Interview BE1.



In **Ireland**, challenges for low-skilled parents might be particularly severe in certain sectors. For example, the collapse of the real-estate sector during the recession of 2008 led to persistent unemployment among people in the construction sector¹²⁷. The long spells of unemployment made the skills of the former construction workers obsolete for employers¹²⁸.

¹²⁷ Browne et al. (2018).

¹²⁸ Browne et al. (2018).

4. NATIONAL POLICIES FACILITATING PARENTS' RETURN TO WORK

KEY FINDINGS

- Family leave (its different configurations, including length and level of pay, eligibility and flexibility) is one of the key policies that facilitate (or hinder) parents' – and more specifically mothers' – employment. Well-compensated and non-transferable parental leave increases uptake from fathers, thereby improving employment outcomes for mothers.
- Publicly provided or subsidised Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is a key facilitator of parents' employment, particularly for mothers. The accessibility and cost of ECEC services is crucial, particularly for low income families.
- Job protection could mitigate the negative effect of long periods of leave on mothers' employment and earnings, since it enables women to return to the same job, building up tenure and seniority with the same employer.
- Legislation to promote flexible working could also facilitate parents' employment. However, some forms of flexible working might be a "double edged sword", e.g. part-time employment, which can facilitate maternal employment at the expense of job quality.
- Child and family cash benefits tend to disincentivise employment, particularly for mothers with a low level of education.

4.1. Family leave

The reviewed literature and the country case studies highlight that leave that allows parents to take childcare is an important factor in shaping parents' decisions to return to work.

All European Member States offer some form of family leave that is designed to allow parents to take time off work to care for their child. Leave arrangements differ considerably from country to country in length, compensation, eligibility requirements, rationales and names¹²⁹. This Section draws upon literature and country case studies to examine different types of leave, compensation, eligibility criteria and lengths available to parents.

A legal entitlement to leave helps women to maintain formal attachment to the labour market and return to their former position¹³⁰. The majority of mothers with access to job-protected leave will make use of that leave and return to work at the end of it, or at least have higher rates of return than mothers who are not entitled to leave¹³¹.

An association between the length of leave and women's employment outcomes is U-shaped: if the leave is too short or too long it negatively influences mothers' employment outcomes^{132,133,134}. Long

¹²⁹ For further information, see [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2019/635586/EPRS_ATA\(2019\)635586_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2019/635586/EPRS_ATA(2019)635586_EN.pdf) <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=19932&langId=en>, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=16676&langId=en>.

¹³⁰ Steiber & Haas (2012).

¹³¹ Hegewisch & Gornick (2011).

¹³² Hegewisch & Gornick (2011).

¹³³ Rossin-Slater (2017).

¹³⁴ Ferragina (2019).

periods of leave without the right to return to the same job (such as types introduced in Finland, France, Hungary and Norway in the 1990s) can lead to a reduction in maternal employment¹³⁵. The authors also suggest that the effect of leave on maternal employment becomes negative from around 20 weeks in duration. Long periods of leave also have a negative effect on women's future wages and career progression as well as their likelihood of returning to work¹³⁶. However, research also indicates that there are positive benefits for children's development¹³⁷.

The length of time when leave is paid and the level at which it is compensated affects uptake of leave and the timing of parents' return to work¹³⁸. On average, parents return to work sooner in countries where the duration of paid leave is shorter¹³⁹. Evidence suggests that some parents are disproportionately affected (e.g. mothers from low income households and those with low-paid partners) and return to work sooner than they would like due to a lack of (adequately) paid leave¹⁴⁰. Further evidence on the length of leave and the level of benefits also emerges from the case study research:



In **Germany**, Parental Leave Allowance – consisting of 12 to 14 months of paid parental leave, introduced in 2007 – had a positive impact on new mothers' labour market participation¹⁴¹. This was driven by two factors. First, the new leave provision stipulates a specific point in time for the return to work. Second, the more generous benefit, which however only lasts a certain amount of time, can help facilitate continuity of existing full-time employment relationships.



In **Hungary**, parents can access up to 2 years of paid parental leave (linked to previous earnings), as well as a cash benefit (flat rate) for parents or grandparents taking care of a child up to 3 years of age. The rate of employment for mothers is low until their child turns three, with a sharp increase thereafter¹⁴². Parental leave may have adverse effects on young parents re-entering the labour market in Hungary, as parents tend to become detached from work, their skills depreciate, and they face discrimination on return to the labour market¹⁴³.



In **Ireland**, recent legislation, the Parental Leave Amendment¹⁴⁴, allows parents to take 22 weeks of unpaid leave before the 12th birthday of each eligible child. One of the aims of this extension was to support mothers in paid employment¹⁴⁵. However, this leave is unpaid, which means it will be inaccessible to some parents¹⁴⁶.



In **Lithuania** long periods of leave (3 years, 2 years of which are paid) are associated with long interruptions of employment due to childcare responsibilities, which could worsen parents' career prospects and income in the long term¹⁴⁷.

¹³⁵ Hegewisch & Gornick (2011).

¹³⁶ Rossin-Slater (2017).

¹³⁷ Cabrita & Wohlgemuth (2015).

¹³⁸ Criado Perez (2019).

¹³⁹ Newton et al. (2018).

¹⁴⁰ Newton et al. (2018).

¹⁴¹ Kluve & Schmitz (2018).

¹⁴² Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2020).

¹⁴³ Boeckmann et al. (2015).

¹⁴⁴ Oireachtas (2019).

¹⁴⁵ Department of Justice and Equality (2017).

¹⁴⁶ McGinnity et al. (2013).

¹⁴⁷ Braziene & Vysniauskiene (2019).

Studies also focus more on the effect of childcare leave on mothers' employment than on fathers' employment, but there is a growing interest in how fathers' behaviour can shape mothers' employment and future earnings¹⁴⁸. Emerging evidence suggests that longer paternity leaves and periods of parental leave reserved for fathers positively influence mothers' employment outcomes^{149,150}.

Sweden was an early adopter of non-transferable parental leave. Historically, use of parental leave was low amongst fathers in Sweden¹⁵¹ and uneven across the population – higher-educated couples, public sector workers and non-immigrant parents are more likely to share parental leave in a gender-equal manner¹⁵². In response to this issue, the government introduced a so-called "fathers' month" in 1995 (i.e. 1 month of non-transferable leave for the father), a second "fathers' month" in 2002 and a third in 2016 (and corresponding 3 months of non-transferable leave for the mother) out of a total of 16 months (480 days) of shared parental leave. These reforms mean that each parent has an exclusive right to 90 days of the parental benefit days; these days cannot be transferred to the other parent. The allocation of a third month for the father contributed to a more equal use of parental leave within a couple, but this effect was smaller than the corresponding effects for the first and second month¹⁵³. This suggests that the positive effect of non-transferable leave in terms of promoting uptake from fathers may decline with the length of non-transferable leave, although this will also be shaped by other factors, such as the level at which leave is compensated and whether this declines overtime.

Eligibility for paid leave may also be used to promote fathers' use of parental leave, with a view to facilitating maternal employment^{154,155}, a factor that was touched on in several of the case studies:



In **Belgium** low and flat-rate benefits for parental leave are a crucial factor in low leave uptake by fathers, since it entails large opportunity costs for fathers, especially higher income fathers¹⁵⁶.



In **Lithuania** the set-up of parental leave – which allows for paid parental leave to be combined with employment (at full pay) in the second year of a child's life – resulted in more fathers taking parental leave¹⁵⁷. Even so, relatively few fathers take parental leave; it is more common for the mother to care for the child full-time when the father works, even if he is officially the one in receipt of paid parental leave¹⁵⁸. This policy also results in the vast majority of households (95%) applying for 2 years of leave rather than 1 year¹⁵⁹.



In **Sweden** in 2008 a "gender equality bonus" was introduced in the form of a tax credit paid to parents who shared parental leave equally¹⁶⁰. Parents could receive a maximum of SEK 100 (EUR 9) per day if they used more than the minimum amount of leave reserved for each parent (at that time 60 days)¹⁶¹. However, the gender equality bonus was abolished

¹⁴⁸ Johansson (2010).

¹⁴⁹ Hegewisch & Gornick (2011).

¹⁵⁰ Ferragina (2019).

¹⁵¹ Nyberg (2013).

¹⁵² Försäkringskassan (2020c).

¹⁵³ Försäkringskassan (2019).

¹⁵⁴ Hegewisch & Gornick (2011).

¹⁵⁵ Ferragina (2019).

¹⁵⁶ Marynissen et al. (2019).

¹⁵⁷ Sodra – The State Social Insurance Fund Board (n.d.).

¹⁵⁸ Braziene (2019).

¹⁵⁹ Sodra – The State Social Insurance Fund Board (n.d.).

¹⁶⁰ SOU (2017).

¹⁶¹ Försäkringskassan (2010).

in 2017 because it did not lead to a more equal sharing of parental leave¹⁶². An evaluation of the policy identified a number of possible reasons for this: the rules to receive the bonus might be too complicated, it could take a long time before the parents received the money, and the economic incentives might not be sufficiently strong to change how parents share parental leave¹⁶³.

The flexibility of leave was a factor highlighted in some of the country case studies:



In **Belgium** parents have flexibility in taking leave: the leave can be split over multiple time periods and parents can also combine paid parental leave (at a reduced rate) with part-time employment¹⁶⁴.



In **Greece**, parents can take parental leave as continuous paid leave (approximately 3.5 months in total in the private sector, and longer in the public sector) or work reduced hours at full pay for a commensurate period¹⁶⁵.



In **Sweden** parents can take leave in a single continuous period or as several blocks of time, and the leave can be taken over a longer period by working a shorter week¹⁶⁶. Parental leave can be used for whole days, but also for three quarters, a half, a quarter, and an eighth of a day. Parents can also access paid parental leave when their child is ill and cannot attend formal childcare¹⁶⁷.

These examples illustrate how leave policies can facilitate a flexible and gradual return to work, where leave and employment overlap for a degree of time whilst the child is still young. In this regard, leave policies interact and overlap with flexible working policies (Section 4.4). However, none of the reviewed studies evaluated the impact of flexible leave policies relative to more rigid, traditional arrangements with a single transition between leave and employment.

4.2. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

Publicly provided or subsidised Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is a key facilitator of parents' employment, particularly mothers' employment^{168,169,170,171}. Hegewisch and Gornick (2011) conclude that childcare enables mothers to be in employment, stay in employment and hold better jobs. However, the authors add that childcare needs to be affordable and of reasonable quality to achieve these effects¹⁷².

Cost is a crucial factor mediating the effect of ECEC on parents' employment: there is a strong negative association between childcare costs and maternal employment and working hours¹⁷³. The negative effect of childcare costs – and therefore the positive effect of free or subsidised childcare provision – on maternal employment is more pronounced for mothers with a low level of education^{174,175}, with low

¹⁶² Försäkringskassan (2010).

¹⁶³ Försäkringskassan (2010).

¹⁶⁴ Marynissen et al. (2019).

¹⁶⁵ Iason Skouzos & Associates (2020).

¹⁶⁶ Försäkringskassan (2020a).

¹⁶⁷ Försäkringskassan (2020a).

¹⁶⁸ Hegewisch & Gornick (2011).

¹⁶⁹ Steiber & Haas (2012).

¹⁷⁰ Morrissey (2017).

¹⁷¹ Ferragina (2019).

¹⁷² Hegewisch & Gornick (2011).

¹⁷³ Morrissey (2017).

¹⁷⁴ Hegewisch & Gornick (2011).

¹⁷⁵ Steiber & Haas (2012).

earnings¹⁷⁶, unmarried and single mothers¹⁷⁷, mothers with very young children¹⁷⁸ and mothers with more than one child¹⁷⁹.

The importance of ECEC is also clear in all eight case studies. The cost of childcare is a factor highlighted in some of these:



In **Germany**, reforms introduced in 2013 guaranteed families' access to publicly funded childcare after a child's first birthday. These reforms had a positive effect on labour market attachment for mothers of children aged 3–6 (families with younger children were outside the scope of the study)¹⁸⁰. Germany also ensures the legal right to a kindergarten place for children, which – according to one interviewee – was shown to have positive effects on mothers' employment¹⁸¹. Increasing public childcare attendance rates positively affects maternal employment rates¹⁸².



In **Ireland**, the cost of childcare is high compared to other EU and OECD countries^{183,184}, a factor that disincentivises mothers' employment, particularly in families with two or more children¹⁸⁵. The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme provides 15 hours of free childcare per week for children between 3 and 5 years old¹⁸⁶. The National Childcare Scheme¹⁸⁷ provides a universal subsidy for children between 6 months and 3 years old, which is not means-tested. However, these childcare initiatives are relatively new and their impact on maternal employment is not yet well understood.



In **Sweden**, extensive financial support is available for parents accessing childcare. Childcare costs are predominantly covered by the state, although parents pay some fees¹⁸⁸. In 2002, a maximum childcare fee was established to place a ceiling on the fees payable by parents. Preschool fees cannot exceed 3% of the household's taxable income for the first child, 2% for the second child, 1% for the third child and no fee for the fourth or additional child. There is also an absolute ceiling for the fee: in 2020 the maximum was SEK 1,478 (EUR 132) per month for the first child, SEK 986 (EUR 88) for the second, SEK 493 (EUR 44) for the third child and no fee for the fourth and more children. In addition, all 3- to 5-year-olds are entitled to 525 free-of-charge hours of pre-school every year. None of the reviewed studies evaluated the effect of childcare subsidies in Sweden. However, most children start attending ECEC when they are about 1.5 years old¹⁸⁹ and the employment rate for parents in Sweden is high¹⁹⁰.

Ferragina (2019) notes that effects of childcare subsidies depend on the institutional and labour market context: they were effective at increasing maternal employment in some Member States, but recent increases in such subsidies in Sweden and Norway (where family policies are generous and well-

¹⁷⁶ Morrissey (2017).

¹⁷⁷ Morrissey (2017).

¹⁷⁸ Morrissey (2017).

¹⁷⁹ Hegewisch & Gornick (2011).

¹⁸⁰ Fichtl et al. (2017).

¹⁸¹ Interview DE1.

¹⁸² Bauernschuster & Schlotter (2015).

¹⁸³ McGinnity et al. (2013).

¹⁸⁴ Regan et al. (2018).

¹⁸⁵ Millar & Crosse (2018).

¹⁸⁶ Early Childhood Ireland (2020).

¹⁸⁷ Citizens Information (2020c).

¹⁸⁸ Nyberg (2013).

¹⁸⁹ Nyberg (2013).

¹⁹⁰ Statistics Sweden (SCB) (2020).

established, and maternal employment is already high) did not have an effect¹⁹¹. This sentiment is echoed by Morrissey (2017), who notes that childcare subsidies have substantial effects in the US – where childcare is largely private and relatively expensive – but that the effects could be more muted in other contexts¹⁹².

The country case studies highlighted accessibility of childcare as another factor in facilitating or hindering parents' employment:



Although **Belgium** assures universal childcare for young children, there are issues with access and availability, particularly for lone parents¹⁹³. Parents are not guaranteed a place for their child in a crèche, so might be unable to obtain a placement for their child that is suitably located in relation to their work or residence. Additionally, childcare services are operational between 7.30am and 6pm, which does not accommodate parents with irregular working hours¹⁹⁴. Crèches can also choose their own eligibility criteria, resulting in many requiring at least one parent to be involved in full-time work, which puts single parents and those in part-time employment at a disadvantage¹⁹⁵.



In **Hungary**, there is a relatively low number of nursery places¹⁹⁶. In 2019, state nurseries were able to accommodate 17% of children, compared with 29% of the EU average^{197,198}. Shortages of nurseries further show an uneven regional distribution: in 2017 there were 2,610 towns with no available childcare facility, resulting in about a quarter of children under the age of 3 with no access to local childcare services at all^{199,200}. The Hungarian government has announced plans to achieve full day-care coverage by 2022²⁰¹. To mitigate regional disparities, where nurseries are not available, families now qualify for additional financial support (of 40,000 HUF)²⁰². Based on earlier official announcements, this additional support seems to be a temporary measure until nursery coverage is extended²⁰³.



In **Lithuania**, the Law on Education does not grant a place in public kindergartens for all children, and the ability of parents to obtain a place in ECEC depends on their place of residence and their determination²⁰⁴. To support parents whose children were not admitted to public kindergartens, some municipalities (e.g. Vilnius and Kaunas) provide a monthly compensation of 100 EUR per child to parents who take their child to a private kindergarten or educate the child themselves. However, this incentive has encouraged the establishment of private kindergartens, which are more expensive than public ones and might be not affordable for some of the parents.

¹⁹¹ Ferragina (2019).

¹⁹² Morrissey (2017).

¹⁹³ Herbeaux & Ndaye (2019).

¹⁹⁴ Herbeaux & Ndaye (2019).

¹⁹⁵ Herbeaux & Ndaye (2019).

¹⁹⁶ Korintus (2008).

¹⁹⁷ Hungarian National Assembly (2019).

¹⁹⁸ BBJ (2019).

¹⁹⁹ Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2019b).

²⁰⁰ Bucsky (2019).

²⁰¹ Novak (2019).

²⁰² Novak (2019).

²⁰³ Novak (2019).

²⁰⁴ Cizauskaite (2018).



In **Poland**, local governments implemented policies to increase the affordability of private provision due to the low availability of public childcare facilities. Several local authorities have introduced nursery vouchers, which allow parents to cover part of the fees at private nurseries. These measures are targeted at parents who are not able to access a public childcare facility due to a lack of places. Initiatives vary across local governments as the local governments have a considerable degree of discretion over the vouchers. One study, which was conducted in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie region, found that vouchers create flexibility in choosing the form of the childcare, and could increase the availability of childcare facilities in rural areas where access to public nurseries is limited²⁰⁵. However, overall there is little evidence of the effectiveness of the measures introduced by local authorities to increase the affordability of private ECEC provision.

In many Member States there is a period – referred to as the childcare gap – in which parents with young children cannot benefit from adequately compensated childcare leave or a guaranteed (or otherwise state-supported) place in ECEC. This gap could be as long as 5 or 6 years (in IE, IT, LT, RO)²⁰⁶ or closer to 4 years (in AT, BG, EL, NL, PT)²⁰⁷. The childcare gap determines the options available to parents with young children: in the absence of state support, their choices might be limited to private care, informal care or staying out of work²⁰⁸.

4.3. Job protection

Evidence shows that women are more likely to return to work after leave if their job is protected^{209,210}. Job protection could mitigate the negative effect of long periods of leave on mothers' employment and earnings, since it enables women to return to the same job²¹¹, building up tenure and seniority with the same employer²¹². As well as short-run effects, job protection is associated with longer term increases in maternal employment and job tenure²¹³. However, job protection could have a negative effect on promotion and career progression, because it increases time away from work²¹⁴.

In most country case studies (BE, EL, IE, LT, PL, SE), parents have the right to return to the same job with the same employer, when they return to work after leave. In the case of Germany (DE), employees are usually able to return to the same job and the same employer. However, employers have a certain degree of authority in terms of deciding an employee's role and their place of work²¹⁵. Accordingly, the extent of an employee's legal right to return to the exact same role depends on their contract. Usually, when the employee returns from parental leave employers are required to offer them a role of a similar nature as the one they had prior to taking leave²¹⁶.

None of the reviewed studies assessed the impact of job protection on parental employment.

²⁰⁵ Frankowski et al. (2019).

²⁰⁶ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2019).

²⁰⁷ Blum et al. (2018).

²⁰⁸ Nightingale & Janta (forthcoming).

²⁰⁹ Hegewisch & Gornick (2011).

²¹⁰ Newton et al. (2018).

²¹¹ Rossin-Slater (2017).

²¹² Hegewisch & Gornick (2011).

²¹³ Rossin-Slater (2017).

²¹⁴ Rossin-Slater (2017).

²¹⁵ BMFSFJ (2020b).

²¹⁶ BMFSFJ (2020b).

4.4. Legislation to promote flexible working

Another factor identified in the literature as facilitating maternal employment is flexible working policies, which guarantee or encourage access to forms of flexible employment. These might include part-time employment, flexible hours and remoteworking²¹⁷.

Part-time employment is vastly more common for mothers than women without children in some Member States, as explored in Section 2.3 of this report. For some mothers, part-time employment is a long-term situation rather than a temporary stepping-stone to full-time employment²¹⁸. Hegewisch and Gornick (2011) note that part-time employment can promote maternal employment after leave, but often at the expense of job quality. Even when the individual's job is protected, they might be forced to switch employers if they prefer to work part-time, or they could face barriers to full-time employment²¹⁹.

The extent to which national policies facilitate part-time employment versus full-time employment is therefore a pertinent question, and was explored in some country case studies:



In **Hungary**, the employment rate of mothers with young children strongly correlates with the availability of part-time work opportunities²²⁰. Since 2012, with the introduction of "flexible regulation and new forms of atypical employment", employers have been legally required to allow part-time work for parents of children under 3 years²²¹. However, such flexible employment options are still not common in Hungary, with 2.5% of men and 6.2% of women employed under these schemes in 2019, compared to 8% and 30.8% in the EU respectively²²².



In **Ireland**, when parents return to work after leave they are entitled to request changes in working patterns for a set period²²³. However, employers can refuse such requests. In 2018, around half (47%) of the Irish respondents in a Eurobarometer survey indicated that they currently use or have used flexible working arrangements²²⁴. In a survey of new mothers²²⁵, the majority (80%) preferred to work part-time and felt that flexible working hours would help them in their return to work (83%). However, a large proportion were concerned about the potential negative implications of flexible working, including part-time employment, for career progression (41%).



In **Poland**, parents have the option to return to the labour market on a part-time basis after taking leave: they can request to lower their number of working hours, but not by more than 50%, and the employer must grant this request²²⁶.



In **Sweden**, parents have the right to reduce their working hours by up to one quarter until the child has reached the age of 8²²⁷. Parents can also use paid parental leave to work

²¹⁷ Hegewisch & Gornick (2011).

²¹⁸ Kelle et al. (2017).

²¹⁹ Hegewisch & Gornick (2011).

²²⁰ Lovász (2016).

²²¹ Makay (2015).

²²² Hungarian National Assembly (2019).

²²³ Government of Ireland (2019b).

²²⁴ Kantar Public (2018).

²²⁵ New Ireland.ie (n.d.).

²²⁶ Labour Law (1998), Article 186.

²²⁷ Government Offices of Sweden (1995), 584, Section 7.

shorter days, although this is not very common²²⁸. Over a third of mothers of young children (34.3%) work part-time, compared to one in ten fathers (9.6%)²²⁹.

4.5. Legislation to support the rights of breastfeeding mothers

Legislation has been introduced in some Member States to protect the rights of breastfeeding mothers to facilitate their return to work, as touched on in the following case studies:



In **Belgium**, mothers have a right to take breaks to breastfeed. If a woman works less than 7 hours a day, she has the right to one breastfeeding break of half an hour. If she works more than 7.5 hours, she has the right to two half-hour breastfeeding breaks. This right is guaranteed up to 9 months after childbirth²³⁰.



In **Ireland**, mothers are entitled to paid breastfeeding/lactation breaks or a reduction of working hours until 26 weeks after their baby is born²³¹. However, a 2016 survey of Irish mothers indicated that they felt there was a lack of support from employers, including issues with facilities to express and store breastmilk at work²³². The 16 women who were surveyed believed that legislative protection for breastfeeding women after 26 weeks would help women to feel more confident in asking employers for support to continue to feed while returning to work²³³. The Irish government aims to extend paid breastfeeding/lactation breaks during working hours from 26 to 104 weeks after the birth of the child²³⁴, but this policy change has not been implemented yet.

However, no studies were identified as part of the review that evaluated the effect on maternal employment of national legislation guaranteeing breastfeeding rights.

4.6. Child and family cash benefits

Child and family cash benefits – particularly generous and/or unconditional benefits – tend to hinder or disincentivise mothers' employment^{235,236,237,238}. Steiber and Haas (2012) note that the negative effect of family cash benefits on female employment differs according to education: primarily women with a low level of education (whose earning potential is lower) are affected²³⁹. Family cash benefits might be motivated by other goals, such as reducing child poverty and increasing fertility rates, which might come into conflict with the objective of stimulating maternal employment²⁴⁰. Reducing cash benefits available to families can stimulate maternal employment²⁴¹ (see Section 6).

²²⁸ Försäkringskassan (2020b).

²²⁹ Statistics Sweden (2020).

²³⁰ Belgium.Be (2020b).

²³¹ Government of Ireland (2019a).

²³² Desmond & Meaney (2016).

²³³ Desmond & Meaney (2016).

²³⁴ Government of Ireland (2019a).

²³⁵ Hegewisch & Gornick (2011).

²³⁶ Steiber & Haas (2012).

²³⁷ Ferragina (2019).

²³⁸ Magda et al. (2018).

²³⁹ Steiber & Haas (2012).

²⁴⁰ Ferragina (2019).

²⁴¹ Hegewisch & Gornick (2011).

A few country case studies addressed the relationship between child and family cash benefits and parents' employment:



In **Greece**, some cash benefits are restricted to large families with three or more children²⁴². As a result, parents of one or two children could be more affected by financial constraints, which could influence their decision of when to return to work²⁴³. However, parents with three or more children might be disincentivised from seeking employment by generous cash benefits²⁴⁴.



In **Germany**, every family receives EUR 204 per month for a first and second child, EUR 210 per month for a third child, and EUR 235 per month for every further child. The amount is not related to parents' income but is available universally. A previous policy, child-care allowance (2013–2015), also offered a cash benefit to families with young children, awarding EUR 150 per month for children between their first and third birthdays, provided that the family does not use any other publicly funded childcare. It does not matter whether parents provide childcare themselves or involve other (unpaid) support, for example from families or neighbours. Fichtl et al. (2017) conclude that these child cash benefits – awarded irrespective of employment – negatively impact parents' labour market participation²⁴⁵.



In 2016, the **Polish** government introduced new family cash benefit (the Family 500+ policy), which aimed to increase fertility rates and reduce child poverty. Until 2019, the benefit was universal for the second and every further child, and means-tested for the first child, but in 2019 the income threshold was lifted, making the benefit universal for every child. The benefit was worth approximately a third of net minimum wage in 2016 (a fourth in 2020). Magda et al. (2018) suggest that the programme had a significantly negative impact on labour force participation and employment of mothers (especially among those with low levels of education), and that labour force participation and employment would have been 2.5–3.0% higher in the absence of the reform²⁴⁶.

²⁴² Papadopoulos (2002).

²⁴³ Matsaganis (2012).

²⁴⁴ Papadopoulos (2002).

²⁴⁵ Fichtl et al. (2017).

²⁴⁶ Magda et al. (2018).

5. EMPLOYER PRACTICES TO HELP PARENTS RETURN TO WORK

KEY FINDINGS

- Career-development support and maternity-return coaching can support women who face challenges in returning to work after leave – such as confidence, skills-development, career planning and work-life balance – while also enabling companies to both gain higher working hours and improve retention among female employees.
- Sustained contact with parents during leave enables workers to stay up to date with company developments, supports their confidence and mitigates stress when returning to work.
- Childcare provisions and breastfeeding facilities at the office help parents better manage family obligations and maintain work-life balance. However, smaller companies might find it difficult to provide dedicated spaces for breastfeeding.
- Workplaces that encourage and support fathers to make use of leave indirectly support women to return to work, since this enables more equal sharing of childcare responsibilities. Practices that support higher uptake of leave by men include well-paid leave, supplemental leave beyond statutory requirements and role models within the organisation to create a culture of uptake.
- Policies to support return to work (regardless of uptake) are associated with higher levels of productivity, working hours and labour force attachment of parents. Companies that offer provisions beyond statutory requirements, such as through the provision of supplemental leave, stand to benefit from this effect.
- The level of support from supervisors significantly impacts workers' return-to-work experiences. Empathetic line managers can have a positive impact on employee well-being and work-life balance.
- Research into practices in SMEs to support parents who return to work is limited. Company owners and managers are wary of costs associated with maternity and paternity.
- Culture appears to be an important factor in influencing both the return-to-work experiences of mothers and fathers, and the impact of company practices designed to support their return to work. The availability of policies does not necessarily translate to uptake.

The practices included in this Section are those that arose from the targeted review and the eight country case studies. It includes practices from the private and public sector, and small, medium and large enterprises. It is not an exhaustive list and reflects practices that show positive results through evaluations, or which show promise but still need to demonstrate their effectiveness.

5.1. Company practices that facilitate parents' return to work after leave

5.1.1. Career-development support and coaching

The results of a maternity-return coaching tool trialled in the UK and Germany in a large multinational company showed that maternity-return coaching can ease women's transition back to work and increase their loyalty towards the company²⁴⁷. The tool offered individualised support for returning mothers and a platform for parental exchange, and provided directive coaching to address issues of confidence, guilt, professional reputation, career planning, managing personal boundaries, networking and work-life balance. Three sessions of coaching were offered: two 1-hour coaching sessions early on within a short span of time, and another session about 3–4 months later. Participants valued both the individualised approach of the tool and having someone to speak to in a secure and personal space, off-record and away from employers. The depth and quality of the coaching sessions enabled self-reflection, which the women valued more than other conversations held with internal staff – including HR – or personal networks. The tool also enabled women to recognise that others faced the same challenges. Additionally, including line-managers in the coaching or training team also helped to ensure full support of the policies. In this qualitative study, there was no control group for comparison.

Career-development support has a nuanced and beneficial impact on women's working hours²⁴⁸. In their study of 667 female doctors in the Netherlands, Pas et al. (2011) showed that women who felt supported in achieving career goals worked more hours than those who did not. The study compared the effects of providing full participation arrangements (FPAs), such as flexible hours and teleworking – which enable full-time working hours or no reduction in working hours – with providing reduced participation arrangements (RPAs), such as part-time work – which cuts working hours. The study showed that RPAs had a negative effect on working hours, but career support tempered this negative effect. The study also showed that FPAs had no effect on working hours (i.e. did not reduce or increase them), but the provision of career-development support created a positive effect on working hours. Career-development support included having a mentor or coach, work-life balance courses, joining women's networks, and special support programmes for women aiming to move into top positions²⁴⁹. This study examined women's working hours in general rather than focusing on mothers (or parents) who returned to work after leave, so it is unclear whether the same results would be observed for this specific group. However, this research does provide some empirical support for career-development support for mothers as a means of facilitating employment and increasing working hours.

The case study on **Ireland** identified "Return to Work with Confidence" workshops, which are run in partnership with New Ireland Assurance to support new mothers in returning to work. The workshops are facilitated by a career psychologist and are run every 6 weeks in Dublin, focusing on themes such as a 100-day return-to-work strategy and designing one's own success²⁵⁰. There were no evaluations available for this practice so the evidence on its effectiveness is not available.

In France, as a signatory to the Parenthood Charter, Ernst & Young offered a range of support for maternity. These include individual meetings with a Human Resources (HR) representative and a partner from the service line, to enable employees to raise issues they might be facing regarding their return-to-work conditions²⁵¹. Similar support has been offered in the UK, though neither this practice nor the practice by Ernst & Young have been evaluated (see Box 4).

²⁴⁷ Vitzthum (2017).

²⁴⁸ Pas et al. (2011).

²⁴⁹ Pas et al. (2011).

²⁵⁰ New Ireland Assurance (2020).

²⁵¹ European Platform for Investing in Children (n.d.-b).

Box 4: Maternity-return programme: evidence from the UK

The Maternity Returners Programme is a one-year programme that has been run by Accenture in the UK since 2005. It aims to increase maternal return rates and ensure retention 1 year after returning from maternity leave. The programme includes improved contact with Human Resources representatives, career counsellors and line managers in order to ensure sensitive communications with an employer before, during, and after the return to work. Accenture also provide a "new and expectant parents" brochure that details its support programmes and policies for parents. There has not yet been a publicly available evaluation of the Maternity Returners Programme.

Source: European Platform for Investing in Children (n.d.-c).

5.1.2. Sustained contact during leave

Case studies of Germany Hungary, and Poland identified that companies stayed in touch with parents on leave as a matter of policy, both to keep them informed of work developments and ease the return to work. However, the practices did not have evidence of effectiveness:



In **Germany**, Bernd Münstermann GmbH & Co. KG, a special deposits company employing about 220 employees, and Steyler Bank GmbH, a finance company employing about 60 people, both emphasise the importance of keeping close contact with parents while they are away. Parents on leave are involved in company activities such as away days and strategic meetings – this continuous involvement means that people feel more confident and have fewer questions when they re-enter the workforce, making it easier for both the employee and the employer²⁵².



In **Hungary**, the "Mommies Program" run by Magyar Telekom – a formerly state-owned telecommunications service that employs 9,000 people – creates continuous contact with parents during their leave, through clubs and young mothers' clubs. This practice was awarded the national Family-Friendly Workplace Award in 2014²⁵³. Telekom also runs a peer-mentoring programme in which an experienced worker, who has also been through the return-to-work process after parental leave, is paired with a returning employee²⁵⁴. However, the latter is not easily replicated in companies employing fewer staff.



In **Poland**, NatWest Poland supports parents who wish to return to the labour market through the "keep in touch" programme. Women are encouraged to participate in integration meetings during their absence, and supervisors keep in touch with them to inform them about changes to the company while they are on leave. This support is offered by the supervisor and HR staff to mitigate stress associated with returning to work²⁵⁵.

5.1.3. Flexible work arrangements

Flexible working arrangements, such as teleworking, working from home, flexible hours, onsite childcare facilities and supplemental leave, are an important factor in supporting parents returning to work. This includes the flexible working provisions required by national legislation (as discussed in 4.4), but can also refer to additional practices from companies that are beyond the statutory requirements.

²⁵² BMFSFJ (2015).

²⁵³ Ministry of Human Resources (2014).

²⁵⁴ Ministry of Human Resources (2014).

²⁵⁵ Fundacja Share the care (n.d.).

In Hungary, a survey conducted with major enterprises showed that one of the most popular incentives to support with returning to work earlier was the opportunity of intermittent work while on parental leave, along with additional financial support during parental leave and the option of reduced working hours²⁵⁶.

The flexible working arrangements in the Netherlands discussed in Section 5.1.1 were as follows. Full participation arrangements (FPA) included flexible working hours, teleworking, input into scheduling, onsite childcare facilities, financial support for childcare, offer of childcare arrangements at home, leave of absence and facilities for breastfeeding. Reduced participation arrangements (RPA) included the possibility to work part-time, participation in part-time training programmes, extra maternity, care, paternity and adoption leave arrangements on top of the statutory minimum, the possibility of saving up holidays, the possibility of taking sabbatical(s) and the ability to take a part-time management position (through job-sharing). The availability of the types of FPAs and RPAs offered varied across institutions. Pas et al. (2011) find that offering FPAs increased doctors' working hours, whereas offering RPAs decreased working hours. The use of RPAs had a negative effect on doctors' contracted working hours while no significant change in working hours was seen as a result of FPA take-up. Additionally, the study found that while part-time workers felt fairly satisfied with the support received for career goals and work-life balance, they perceived themselves hindered in career growth due to working part-time.

Flexible work arrangements are also important in enabling fathers to reconcile work and family life. In a case study of three large companies in Italy (where the rate of parental leave uptake is low for men), narrative interviews with fathers revealed that flexible working arrangements enhanced men's well-being as well as work-family reconciliation²⁵⁷. Although leave uptake remained low, fathers achieved better work-family reconciliation through flexible working arrangements, such as modifying working times, teleworking and especially by using company crèches (which were deemed superior in quality compared to public or general-private childcare facilities)²⁵⁸. Research using qualitative comparative analyses of interviews with fathers in three German workplaces (two private companies and one public-sector organisation) similarly found that fathers used family-friendly flexible working arrangements – such as working from home – rather than taking leave in order to better balance their work and family obligations²⁵⁹. Increasing flexibility for parents returning to work was also identified as one of the key elements of a successful parental leave policy by one interviewee²⁶⁰.

5.1.4. Breastfeeding at work

A review of literature on maternity management in small and medium-sized enterprises showed that business lactation programmes support women to breastfeed at work by providing both time and private space to express milk. These programmes result in short- and long-term rewards, such as reduced maternal absenteeism, improved morale, retention and recruitment²⁶¹. Breastfeeding support makes up one of the many full-participation arrangements (as opposed to reduced participation arrangements, such as part-time work) that support women to maintain high working hours and achieve their career goals²⁶². However, the capacity to provide lactation facilities varies according to the size of the organisation – larger organisations are better positioned to provide dedicated spaces,

²⁵⁶ Egyenlítő Alapítvány (2018).

²⁵⁷ Bosoni & Mazzucchelli (2018).

²⁵⁸ Bosoni & Mazzucchelli (2018).

²⁵⁹ Reimer (2019).

²⁶⁰ Interview E4.

²⁶¹ Stumbitz et al. (2017).

²⁶² Pas et al. (2011).

whilst smaller organisations are more likely to have to make use of spaces that were less suitable, such as vacant offices or bathrooms²⁶³.

5.1.5. Childcare at work

Section 4.2 examined the significance of access to childcare in relation to publicly provided or subsidized childcare; the provision of childcare at work can similarly enable better work-life balance and fulfilment of family obligations for parents²⁶⁴. Forte, a furniture company in Poland, opened a kindergarten within their premises, and while there is no information on how this measure impacted parents' return to work, the company experienced an increase of 15% per year in job applications from parents of children below the age of 6, and limited parents' job rotation by 10% per year²⁶⁵. In 2018, the Office of the Government of Lithuania opened a childcare room consisting of two spaces – one dedicated to leisure time and the other for creative workshops – to be used by employees' children while their parents are at work. Currently, there are discussions taking place to recreate these care rooms in other public institutions²⁶⁶. In a study using interviews with fathers in three companies in Germany, onsite childcare facilities were also identified as a family-friendly policy that enabled men to better combine work and family obligations, and reduced their need to take parental leave²⁶⁷.

5.1.6. Supporting leave uptake for fathers

Sections 3.2 and 4.4 identified greater equality in the division of childcare responsibilities as a factor that can support women to return to work. In their study of Italian companies, Bosoni and Mazzucchelli (2018) highlight that when men did take leave, the father noticeably became a "full-time parent," participating fully in care activities. The uptake of substantial paternity leave relates to greater equality in division of childcare even after the period of leave, thus also providing long-term support to women returning to work²⁶⁸. The relationship works both ways: fathers' use of parental leave facilitates mothers' return to work after leave²⁶⁹, and mothers taking shorter periods of leave facilitates fathers' use of leave^{270,271}. Although leave provisions exist for men across Europe, uptake is relatively low in some countries^{272,273,274}. This Section considers how employers can support fathers' use of parental leave and the implications of them doing so.

Employers might offer supplemental leave (i.e. leave additional to statutory requirements). In Poland, IKEA introduced 1 month of paid family leave for fathers as of 2020, to be taken within the first 18 months after the birth of a child, which supports men to take leave for childcare and thereby helps mothers to re-enter the workforce²⁷⁵. Using findings from the 2015–2016 European Sustainable Workforce Survey, Begall et al. (2020) showed that the provision of supplemental leave is associated with higher organisational commitment, even when the uptake of that leave is low. Their findings support the theory that the effect of an organisation's work-family policy on individuals' performance

²⁶³ Stumbitz et al. (2017).

²⁶⁴ Bosoni & Mazzucchelli (2018).

²⁶⁵ Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu (n.d.).

²⁶⁶ Lrytas.lt (2018).

²⁶⁷ Reimer (2019).

²⁶⁸ Haas & Hwang (2019).

²⁶⁹ Haas & Hwang (2019).

²⁷⁰ Narvi & Salmi (2017).

²⁷¹ Reimer (2019).

²⁷² Haas & Hwang (2019).

²⁷³ Bosoni & Mazzucchelli (2018).

²⁷⁴ Reimer (2019).

²⁷⁵ IKEA (2019).

relates to the signal the policy sends about organisational support, rather than practical benefits alone. Workers show higher organisational support when the workplace signals support for work-family balance, even if the worker does not utilise the available policies²⁷⁶. The study was conducted on a wide-ranging sample – spanning Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK – of 250 small (1–99 employees), medium (100–249 employees) and large companies (250 and more employees) across manufacturing, healthcare, higher education, transport, financial services and telecommunications²⁷⁷.

Employers might supplement or exceed statutory requirements in terms of compensating paternity and parental leave, which matters because fathers are more likely to take up leave when it is better paid²⁷⁸. In Italy, leave uptake was higher amongst men in the public sector, who were remunerated at 100% of their income, compared to those in the private sectors, who were remunerated at 30% of their income²⁷⁹. Importantly, this low payment is also a technique used by companies to dissuade men from taking leave: a retail company in Finland employing unskilled blue-collar workers used low-paid leave to discourage men from taking leave²⁸⁰.

Employers could also support fathers' use of leave in other ways. One study found that fathers' leave uptake was higher in public institutions in Finland where the management set-up promoted the perception that men's workload allowed time for taking leave²⁸¹. Other suggested company practices to support men to take leave include: having a formal policy to support fathers to take leave, having champions of fathers' leave-taking, and ensuring managers do not assume that the legal entitlement to leave is sufficient on its own for fathers to actually take the leave they are entitled to^{282, 283}. Novartis Hellas, a company in Greece identified through the case study, introduced a policy of 14 weeks of paid leave to all birth or adoptive parents; this policy has primarily supported fathers, who by law are only entitled to 2 days of paid leave²⁸⁴.

There might be situations where company practices designed to promote work-life balance actually lower the likelihood of fathers taking leave. One study of three German workplaces found that the ability to work from a home office enabled fathers to better combine work and family obligations, but reduced the likelihood of them taking parental leave²⁸⁵.

Some studies highlighted instances where company practices had not been effective in facilitating fathers' use of leave. Even when income compensation in private companies in Italy was raised to 60%, parental leave-taking remained low²⁸⁶. Although a private bank included in the study offered leave, childcare places and flexible work options aimed at accommodating work-life balance, only a few fathers used a significant number of months of parental leave. The availability of work-life balance measures does not necessarily result in uptake; a working culture supportive of uptake needs to exist²⁸⁷. Fathers' reluctance to use leave could also stem from gendered norms concerning work and care²⁸⁸, as well as expectations about the role of employers. Although perceived lack of organisational support

²⁷⁶ Kurtessis et al. (2017).

²⁷⁷ Begall et al. (2020).

²⁷⁸ Narvi & Salmi (2017).

²⁷⁹ Bosoni & Mazzucchelli (2018).

²⁸⁰ Narvi & Salmi (2017).

²⁸¹ Haas & Hwang (2019).

²⁸² Haas & Hwang (2019).

²⁸³ Interview E5.

²⁸⁴ Μπούλια (2019).

²⁸⁵ Reimer (2019).

²⁸⁶ Bosoni & Mazzucchelli (2018).

²⁸⁷ Lucia-Casademunt et al. (2018).

²⁸⁸ Bosoni & Mazzucchelli (2018).

negatively impacts fathers' leave-taking, research from Sweden shows that fathers tend not to see fault with their workplaces regarding accommodation for parental leave²⁸⁹, while in Switzerland, interviews with fathers working in a public administration showed that men saw leave more as a favour than a right²⁹⁰.

A discouraging workplace culture and lack of organisational support are identified in the literature as factors contributing to a low uptake of parental leave for fathers^{291,292}. Valarino and Gauthier (2015) examined the public sector in Switzerland, where fathers were given a total of 1 month's parental leave to be taken at any time up to 1 year after the birth. Leave uptake remained relatively low, with a mean rate of 17 days taken. While the organisational policy allowed for replacement personnel to be hired, this was rarely done; instead, work was either put on hold until the fathers' return or absorbed by colleagues²⁹³. Some evidence suggests that leave can be more harmful to men's careers than women's, and it forces them to choose between family and career commitments²⁹⁴. When there are high perceived career costs associated with taking leave, fathers are less likely to take up leave^{295,296}.

5.1.7. Supervisor and line-manager support

Managers play a key role in the return-to-work experiences of parents, and studies call for tailored supervisor support for both men and women upon returning to work^{297,298}. In a study of EU Member States, supervisor support was shown to improve maternal well-being at work after childbirth²⁹⁹. The support of supervisors and line managers has also been shown to be more important than support from human resources or any formal organisational provisions^{300,301}. While the mere availability of work-life balance policies does not automatically engender workplace well-being for mothers, the combination of work-life balance policies and supervisor support significantly enhanced women's job well-being³⁰². In companies where women perceived to have low work-life balance, supervisors can play an important compensating role by being supportive and receptive to female employees' family needs. However, in companies with high work-life balance practices, the effect of supervisor support was less relevant and had little effect on improving employee well-being³⁰³.

Support from a line manager can also be crucial to determining the uptake of available work-life balance policies. In one Finnish study, while most men felt unsupported by their work environment to take up leave due to a responsibility towards their workload, leave uptake was higher in the public sector, where line managers were responsible for the redistribution of work³⁰⁴. In the UK and Germany, lower rates of participation in a maternity-return coaching tool was a result of unsupportive line managers³⁰⁵. In relation to breastfeeding policies at work, manager discretion might also impact

²⁸⁹ Haas & Hwang (2019).

²⁹⁰ Valarino & Gauthier (2015).

²⁹¹ Reimer (2019).

²⁹² Haas & Hwang (2019).

²⁹³ Valarino & Gauthier (2015).

²⁹⁴ Reimer (2019).

²⁹⁵ Reimer (2019).

²⁹⁶ Lucia-Casademunt et al. (2018).

²⁹⁷ Stochkendahl et al. (2015).

²⁹⁸ Lucia-Casademunt et al. (2018).

²⁹⁹ Lucia-Casademunt et al. (2018).

³⁰⁰ Lucia-Casademunt et al. (2018).

³⁰¹ Makola et al. (2020).

³⁰² Lucia-Casademunt et al. (2018).

³⁰³ Lucia-Casademunt et al. (2018).

³⁰⁴ Narvi & Salmi (2017).

³⁰⁵ Vitzthum (2017).

employees' access to these facilities – greater adaptations were made for high performers, and managers with relevant experience were more supportive of the policy³⁰⁶.

The line manager's support and the role they play in modelling the behaviour of staff was also emphasised in one interview: when a male manager sets a precedent in a workplace by signalling work-life balance through their own actions, they become a role model for other men in the workplace³⁰⁷. Research with small companies in Austria showed that when parental or paternity leave was taken by some male employees, particularly senior managers, this behaviour would snowball and more men would take leave³⁰⁸. Support from co-workers can also play a supportive role in addition to support from supervisors, as evidenced in South Africa (Box 5).

Box 5: Supervisor and co-worker support: evidence from the South Africa

A qualitative study of social support received from the workplace during pregnancy, maternity leave and returning to work in South Africa demonstrated the significance of support received from co-workers compared to supervisors, as well as flexible work arrangements. The study showed that flexible work arrangements that allowed time off during pregnancy for medical visits or to take care of sick children were helpful for first-time mothers at work. Supervisor support also played a crucial role in managing stress and helping mothers return to work, but workers also reported disappointment with the lack of support received from their HR managers and the failure of compassion from their direct supervisors, including negative comments about uptake of leave. The study argues that the response of an immediate supervisor could be more important than that of general management, since it is the immediate supervisor who can resolve workplace balance tensions through managing workloads. Co-workers were generally supportive towards new mothers and played a positive role, for example by throwing baby showers at work, visiting them at hospital, updating them about goings-on at work and enquiring about the child.

Source: Makola et al. (2020).

Some studies contradict these findings, showing a minimal or neutral role for supervisors and/or co-workers. A study of 267 part-time workers in Switzerland, Germany and Austria showed that neither supervisor support nor co-worker support was associated with work adjustment when re-entering work³⁰⁹. Another intervention in 15 large companies in the Netherlands attempted to enhance supervisor contact with women in order to prevent work disability and reduce sick leave resulting from post-partum recovery³¹⁰. The study showed that there was no difference between work presenteeism or productivity-loss hours between groups that received the intervention and control groups, both of which had the minimum practice of supervisors calling to congratulate their workers, sending cards and visiting them.

In a study with 19 hospital managers in Denmark, interviews with supervisors showed that they struggled to support employees who became parents whilst also managing the impact on the business and on other team members³¹¹.

³⁰⁶ Stumbitz et al. (2017).

³⁰⁷ Interview E5.

³⁰⁸ Aumayr-Pintar (2019).

³⁰⁹ Wiese & Heidemeier (2012).

³¹⁰ Uegaki et al. (2011).

³¹¹ Stochkendahl et al. (2015).

5.1.8. Family-friendly company practice awards

Several countries have systems of recognition for family-friendly workplaces, both set up by the state and at the initiative of civil society organisations and other stakeholders (see below and Box 6).



In **Belgium**, in 2009 a civil society organisation in Flanders called *Gezinsbond* established the *Charter for a Family-Friendly Company*, an agreement signed by both the employer and staff representatives (either a Trade Union member or a simple majority of individual staff members) that confirms the employer's commitment to ensuring family-friendly workplace practices, respecting the worker's role in their family, openness to dialogue, equal opportunities between men and women, and respect of existing labour laws³¹². Signatories' family-friendly practices included organising meetings outside of rush hour, provision of childcare during school holidays, flexible hours and annual leave to coincide with family obligations, bringing children to work during school holiday, and flexible working hours, encouragement of paternity leave uptake and paid parental leave³¹³.



In **Hungary**, the Ministry of Human Capacities recognises family-friendly employers through the "Awards for Family-Friendly Workplaces", which has been operational since 2010 and provides financial assistance to help companies provide better work-life balance measures³¹⁴. Magyar Telekom, the largest telecommunications company in Hungary, has won this award multiple times for such initiatives as the White Box Program (awarded in 2013), which evaluated employees' work potential after returning to work from long absence, usually parental leave, and for the Mommies Programme (awarded in 2014) where employees on extended absence, such as parental leave, remained in continuous contact with the workplace through clubs and young mothers' gatherings³¹⁵.



In **Lithuania**, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour organises the "National Responsible Business Award", which also includes nominations for the most family-friendly workplaces³¹⁶. Previous award winners included practices such as setting up a day-care centre for workers' children and offering flexible working hours and remote working.



In **Sweden**, a trade union for professionals in the private sector called Unionen is responsible for the "Golden Dummy" Awards, which since 2003 has recognised companies that demonstrate good family-friendly practices with the aim of encouraging other companies to follow suit³¹⁷. Awards are given on an annual basis to one of Unionen's 65,000 members. Members can nominate their workplace along with a justification for nomination, and the board members of Unionen choose the winner each year, who receives SEK 10,000 (EUR 890)³¹⁸. The Golden Dummy award expanded into another two categories, the "Golden Ladder", which awards gender equality in management, and the "Golden Coin", awarded for gender equality in wages³¹⁹. The 2019 winner of the Golden Dummy Award, Sogeti Sverige AB had practices such as supporting costs of in vitro fertilisation treatment for employees, increasing the top-up amount for paid parental

³¹² European Platform for Investing in Children (n.d.-a).

³¹³ Gezinsbond (2020).

³¹⁴ Ministry of Human Resources (2014).

³¹⁵ Telekom (2015).

³¹⁶ Ministry of Social Security and Labour (2020b).

³¹⁷ Unionen (2019a).

³¹⁸ Unionen (2019a).

³¹⁹ Unionen (2019a).

leave, and engaging parents in discussions about salary and ensuring salary development continues whilst on leave³²⁰.

5.1.9. Small and medium-sized organisations

Reviewing the literature, Stumbitz et al. (2017) find that maternity-return in smaller organisations tends to be characterised by more ad hoc, informal processes that rely on the individual employee's ability to negotiate terms. In some cases, individual adjustments might become part of a company's culture or practices. At the same time, the adjustments rely on the employee's ability to assert herself as a scarce or valued worker. This suggests that parents (mothers) returning from work could face additional challenges in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), where there is often less of a top-down, systematic approach to supporting parents. Owners and managers might be more concerned about the (assumed) costs of supporting parents to return from leave in SMEs³²¹, making them less inclined to take action. A large Irish business and employer association identified in the Ireland case study similarly expressed concerns that increased parental leave would be problematic for SMEs as they would face the challenges of lost productivity, training, absent expertise and costs of administration³²².

Research into practices to support parents to return to work in SMEs is limited³²³. However, some examples of good practices in SMEs were identified through the Germany case study. MOBImed Pflegeservice GmbH, an organisation of 26 employees working in health care, aims to mitigate potential skills loss during time away by providing obligatory training and staff meetings for mothers³²⁴. Together with another company – M&M Software GmbH, a software company of 172 employees – they support parents by offering flexible working arrangements such as part-time work, flexible home-office days and flexible working hours³²⁵. Bernd Münstermann GmbH & Co. KG, a special deposits company employing about 220 employees, have workers who often take 1 to 2 years' leave following the birth of a child³²⁶. Prior to re-entry, the management and employee on leave discuss the return procedure, agreeing on how many hours the employee will work and the kind of training required to ease their transition back to work³²⁷. Bernd Münstermann GmbH & Co. KG and another finance company, Steyler Bank GmbH, which employs about 60 people, both emphasise the importance of keeping close contact with parents while they are away and involve parents on leave in company activities, such as away days and strategic meetings. This continuous involvement means that people feel more confident and have fewer questions when they re-enter the workforce, making it easier for both the employee and the employer³²⁸.

5.2. Workplace culture

Different roles (of a worker, parent or carer, etc.) require reconciling the time needed to perform these roles alongside the benefits and pressures arising from both work and family settings. Parents with children have to meet the same job demands as workers living in households without children, but working parents are confronted with considerable demands from additional unpaid work related to care³²⁹. According to the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), almost half of the respondents

³²⁰ Unionen (2020b).

³²¹ Stumbitz et al. (2017).

³²² Ibec (2019).

³²³ Stumbitz et al. (2017).

³²⁴ BMFSFJ (2015).

³²⁵ BMFSFJ (2015).

³²⁶ BMFSFJ (2015).

³²⁷ BMFSFJ (2015).

³²⁸ BMFSFJ (2015).

³²⁹ Eurofound (2019a).

living with children (49%) state that they get on better with their children because they have a job, 22% feel they get on worse, while 29% has no strong opinions either way³³⁰. Single parents and workers in households with children experience more challenges in terms of work–family conflict than other groups³³¹. As such, job quality and working conditions play an important part³³².

Results of the targeted review suggest that workplace culture is key in encouraging or limiting uptake of available incentives. On the one hand, hostile work cultures can attenuate and undermine the effect of company practices to support parents. Hostile work environments were seen in Section 5.1.6 as one of the major factors behind low uptake of parental leave by fathers. When a maternity-return programme was made available for a large multinational company based in Germany and the UK, some women felt discouraged from making use of this and other company benefits due to a hostile work environment³³³. The study found that even though organisational support and provision exist, they are ineffective unless there is full implementation and encouragement for uptake throughout the organisation. On the other hand, the atmosphere of the workplace was found to be more important than the availability of company policies³³⁴. More accepting employers' attitudes (see Section 5.1.7) were also associated with lower work stress and better job functioning, which supported the finding that a supportive workplace culture is key to parental work adaptation^{335,336}.

A review of managerial practices regarding breastfeeding women employees similarly concluded that the mere availability of work-life balance practices in a firm does not result in enhanced job well-being, and work-related social support might moderate the effect of such practices³³⁷. The study highlighted that other factors play a role, such as the company's awareness of women's challenges after childbirth or the recognition that women can access work-life balance practices while still showing good performance at work.

Finally, while job quality is comparable between men and women in many categories, gender difference exists in a number of sub-dimensions, putting women in a relatively worse position on many features of job quality. These include women's exposure to emotional demands and adverse social behaviours, their limited access to training and career prospects, unfair pay and the widening gender gap³³⁸. While this evidence is not granular enough to outline differences between parents with young children and those without, it seems that incentives for mothers and fathers to return to work might not be equally strong, considering the job quality alone. Combined with diverse workplace cultures, this helps to explain the varying levels of success in bringing parents with young children back to work.

³³⁰ Eurofound (2017a).

³³¹ Eurofound (2017a).

³³² Eurofound (2017a).

³³³ Vitzthum (2017).

³³⁴ Mennino et al. (2005).

³³⁵ Feldman et al. (2004).

³³⁶ Russell & Hwang (2004).

³³⁷ Gatrell (2011).

³³⁸ Eurofound (2020c).

6. ALMPs SUPPORTING INACTIVE OR UNEMPLOYED PARENTS INTO WORK

KEY FINDINGS

- While not an ALMP, access to childcare is a crucial factor that supports ALMPs in helping inactive and unemployed parents to return to the labour market.
- There is considerable heterogeneity in how different groups of parents respond to ALMPs. While policies "work" for some groups, they might be less impactful for others or could have unanticipated effects.
- ALMPs for single parents generally had positive effects in terms of employment, but could have more mixed effects in terms of poverty reduction. Activation measures might be successful at getting parents into work, but this is often in low-paid part-time jobs with little potential for career progression.
- ALMPs included a variety of aspects, and disentangling the impact of each one on the ALMP's overall effectiveness can be challenging. These aspects include the provision of work-related benefit top-ups and tax credits, the use of job subsidies and job creation, setting job-search requirements, providing job-search support for single parents and changing eligibility to or generosity of child and family benefits.
- The majority of ALMPs found through the targeted literature review focused on single parents, often because they had been identified as a group vulnerable to poverty and low employment rates within Member States.

6.1. Policies and programmes

Section 4.1 explored the importance of childcare as a policy that facilitates all parents' return to the labour market. However, having access to childcare is also vital for inactive and unemployed parents attempting to return to the labour market – difficulty accessing childcare was identified as a barrier in several studies^{339,340,341}. Support with childcare access either formed part of the reform or policy being examined^{342,343}, or often accompanied changes that might have influenced the outcomes of the reform or policy under examination^{344,345}. Some interviewees at the national level also identified childcare options as an important factor in helping economically inactive parents return to the labour force³⁴⁶. EU Member States have implemented a range of policies to encourage parents who are inactive or unemployed to find paid employment. There is considerable evidence of the ability of ALMPs to boost employment and reduce unemployment on a macroeconomic scale, across a range of beneficiary

³³⁹ Redmond et al. (2020).

³⁴⁰ Taylor (2017).

³⁴¹ Coleman & Riley (2012).

³⁴² Knoef & Van Oers (2016).

³⁴³ Griffith (2011).

³⁴⁴ Millar (2019).

³⁴⁵ Gong & Breunig (2014).

³⁴⁶ Interview IE1, BE1.

groups and programmes³⁴⁷. Systematic reviews of ALMPs that targeted young people also found positive effects on youth employment and earnings³⁴⁸.

Some policies (including, for example, work-related benefit top-ups or tax credits and income "disregards" – in which a certain portion of income from work is "disregarded" when calculating social assistance benefits – for benefit recipients) operate as "positive financial incentives" for parents, making paid employment more attractive vis-à-vis inactivity or unemployment³⁴⁹. Policies of this kind are introduced to overcome possible financial disincentives to accept paid work, which is recognised to be an issue in many EU Member States, particularly for single parents and parents who are second earners in couple households³⁵⁰. Other policies operate more as a "negative" incentive for parents (including, for instance, job-search requirements or reductions in the generosity of child and family benefits) by encouraging parents to search for paid employment in order to avoid negative consequences³⁵¹.

While not an ALMP, the targeted literature review found that access to childcare is a vital facilitator for inactive and unemployed parents who are looking to return to the labour market^{352,353,354}. Other studies noted improved childcare access either formed part of the reform or policy being examined^{355,356}, or accompanied changes intended to influence the outcomes of the reform or policy under examination^{357,358}.

The sources often described the impact of policies and programmes that included a range of different aspects of ALMPs (i.e. in-work benefits and tax credits, job subsidies and job creation, job-search requirements and support, and changes to benefit eligibility – described in turn below) as a package. As a result, there is considerable complexity involved in disentangling the impact that different aspects of ALMPs have on the policy's overall effectiveness.

6.1.1. Work-related benefit top-ups and tax credits

One form of ALMPs that could be targeted at parents are those that augment earnings and/or income from benefits whilst in work. Such policies might take the form of work-related benefit top-ups, tax credits or income disregards designed to augment earnings from work and strengthen work incentives.

Knoef and Van Ours (2016) – described in more detail in Section 6.1.2 – evaluated the effect of an experiment to activate single mothers with children under 12 in several municipalities in the Netherlands. The experiment included an earnings disregard: single mothers were allowed to earn income whilst also receiving social welfare benefits. This component was associated with an increase in employment and a reduction in welfare benefits for single mothers who were immigrants, but not for those born in the Netherlands. The earnings disregard was associated with an increase in earnings for single mothers regardless of immigration status.

³⁴⁷ Martin et al. (2014).

³⁴⁸ Kluve et al. (2018).

³⁴⁹ Dinan (2019).

³⁵⁰ European Commission (2017a).

³⁵¹ Dinan (2019).

³⁵² Redmond et al. (2020).

³⁵³ Taylor (2017).

³⁵⁴ Coleman & Riley (2012).

³⁵⁵ Knoef & Van Oers (2016).

³⁵⁶ Griffiths (2011).

³⁵⁷ Millar (2019).

³⁵⁸ Gong & Breunig (2014).

In-work benefits represent one aspect of welfare reform designed to strengthen work incentives for single mothers in Norway³⁵⁹. Implemented in 1998 and targeted at single parents, the reforms imposed new work requirements (for those with children aged 3 and over), decreased the generosity of out-of-work benefits, and increased the generosity of in-work benefits. The reforms were associated with a reduction in the employment and earnings gap between single and married mothers, particularly for mothers who were single parents over a longer period. However, there was not necessarily an increase in the disposable household income of single mothers. An increase was only observed for mothers who were newly single; long-term single mothers saw a substantial drop in their household income and a concomitant rise in poverty. For some groups of single mothers, the loss of out-of-work benefits was not offset by gains in earnings or in-work benefits, and this led to a rise in poverty and financial hardship. This study demonstrates the importance of considering how different ALMPs or elements of welfare reform interact, including in this case the links between an increase in in-work benefits and the retrenchment of out-of-work benefits, as well as heterogeneity in how different groups are affected by ALMPs. Findings from the study are limited but show that an increase in in-work benefits does not necessarily help to escape poverty or increase earnings for all groups of parents.

Evidence from the case studies provides further examples of ALMPs that contain work-related benefit top-up support. However, evidence behind their effectiveness was not always available:



In **Ireland**, the Back to Work Family Dividend was introduced in 2015 to provide work incentives by continuing to pay claimants who find work the full amount of their previous social welfare benefit during the first year of employment, and half of the amount during the second year of employment, regardless of their earnings. Initial analysis shows that this has improved the financial incentive to work for these families³⁶⁰.

Also in **Ireland**, the Working Family Payment (WFP) is a tax-free payment for employees on low pay who have children (Citizens Information, 2020e), with the aim of reducing child poverty and incentivising employment. An evaluation demonstrated that the WFP was effective in incentivising people to remain in employment or take up employment³⁶¹. However, the evaluation also found that nearly 20% of recipients stayed on the payment for more than 5 years, indicating that the WFP was not effective in increasing work intensity and supporting parents' in-work progression³⁶².

Box 6: In-work benefits, employment and career progression: evidence from the UK

The In-Work Credit (IWC) is a tax-free payment of £40 per week (£60 in London) to single parents who enter employment of 16 hours per week or more in the UK³⁶³. The IWC evaluation identifies a modest positive effect on employment but little evidence that parents were able to advance or progress in work to the extent that they were able to offset the loss of IWC when it ended (after 52 weeks). IWC reduced child poverty via its direct effect on household income, but the effect was short-lived because parents were unable to progress in work, and therefore household income declined after the benefit was stopped.

Source: Griffiths (2011).

³⁵⁹ Mogstad & Pronzato (2012).

³⁶⁰ Savage et al. (2015).

³⁶¹ Government of Ireland (2019b).

³⁶² Government of Ireland (2019b).

³⁶³ EUR 44.66 and EUR 66.97 respectively (exchange rate as of 12 November 2020: EUR 1 = GBP 0.89).

6.1.2. Job subsidies and job creation

Job creation might also be used as a means of activating unemployed and/or inactive parents, or specific groups of parents.

As noted earlier, one experimental programme aimed to activate single mothers with children under 12 in several municipalities in the Netherlands in 2009–2010³⁶⁴. It was comprised of two components: an earnings disregard (allowing single mothers to earn income whilst also receiving social welfare benefits, as discussed in Section 6.1.1), and a job creation scheme (municipalities subsidised employers to hire single mothers). The authors explore differential effects according to immigration status in light of the fact that immigrant single mothers might face additional challenges.

Overall, the study identified positive effects: the experiment was associated with an increase in employment (generally part-time employment), earnings and household income for single mothers. However, while the job creation element was associated with an increase in earnings and reduction in welfare benefits for single mothers regardless of immigration status, only those mothers born in the Netherlands saw an increase in employment as a result.

Other examples of job subsidies and employer support have also been identified through case study research, although evaluations of their impact on employment rates, poverty and earnings were not always present:



In **Greece**, the government subsidises the salaries of mothers with two or more children for up to a year for each child, with the goal of reducing female unemployment³⁶⁵. None of the studies reviewed evaluated the effects of the programme.



In **Germany**, one programme works with employers and aims to encourage them to employ men and women who have taken long career breaks for family reasons. The action programme "Perspective re-entry" (*Perspektive Wiedereinstieg*) supports parents by creating local networks that can provide support and advice to men and women who are considering returning to work^{366, 367}. These local networks establish connections with employers and business associations with the aim of helping employers recognise parents' attempts to re-enter the workforce as potential job candidates³⁶⁸. The programme further assists private companies in implementing measures to support women wanting to return to work³⁶⁹. In addition to support provided to employers, recipients also have access to an online portal with relevant information and an online calculator that can help people estimate the "economic benefits" of returning to work³⁷⁰. A 2015 evaluation of the programme focused on how the experiences of female participants compared to the experiences of women in similar situations who receive support from other channels (e.g., the federal employment agency). It found a higher level of satisfaction (80% vs 40%) and higher likelihood to re-enter the workforce (62% vs 52%) among programme participants compared to other women³⁷¹. However, the evaluation did not explore the impact of the different aspects of support (for example, whether the support given to employers had

³⁶⁴ Knoef & Van Ours (2016).

³⁶⁵ Τράπεζα Πληροφοριών Νομοθεσία (2004).

³⁶⁶ UNECE (2020).

³⁶⁷ Perspektive Wiedereinstieg (2020).

³⁶⁸ Perspektive Wiedereinstieg (2020).

³⁶⁹ UNECE (2020).

³⁷⁰ Perspektive Wiedereinstieg (2020).

³⁷¹ Diener et al. (2015).

more of an impact than the support given to the employees).



In **Hungary**, mothers with young children are one group covered by the Hungarian Job Protection Action Plan, a wage-subsidy programme launched in 2013. The programme reimburses employers for some of the wage costs of eligible employees. While no evaluation of the policy has yet taken place, the Ministry for National Economy claims this programme created jobs for over 40,000 mothers with small children until 2015³⁷².

6.1.3. Job search requirements and job search support

The job-seeking element of ALMPs has been shown to have positive effects on supporting labour force re-entry³⁷³. Parents of young children may be encouraged to seek work by the provision of job-search support and/or requirements to engage in job-search activities as a condition of receiving social welfare benefits. These elements often form part of wider ALMPs (i.e. targeted at a broader group than simply parents). However, recognising that parents might require additional or customised support in searching for work whilst balancing family responsibilities, other policies include specific offers of support for parents seeking to return to work.

Almost all of the ALMPs examined in the reviewed literature included an element that required participants to search for jobs and/or to receive support in job searching. In particular, job-search support (including meetings with job counsellors and access to training and workshops) often acts as a condition for receiving certain social welfare benefits, work-related benefit top-ups or tax credits, and demonstrates the way in which the ALMPs explored include a variety of different types of measures to support parents returning to employment.

Comparing France and the UK, Taylor (2017) observes that the UK system relies more heavily on conditionality and sanctions than the French system. Both countries offer job counselling for out-of-work parents (in France via the *Pôle Emploi/référent RSA*; in the UK via Jobcentre Plus), but couples interviewed as part of the study (all of whom were unemployed or inactive) indicated that job search support was more personalised and tailored to individual needs in the French system. Respondents in France were more likely than those in the UK to describe building a personal relationship with their job-search advisers. Advisers in France were more likely than those in the UK to refer their clients to longer term, more in-depth or more innovative training courses. This study is explorative rather than evaluative; it does not assess which approach is more effective in helping parents into work. However, the author notes hypothetical advantages and disadvantages associated with job-search support for out-of-work parents in both countries. Extensive conditionality (as in the UK) could be counterproductive and contribute to tension between job searchers and support organisations. However, looser job-search requirements (as in France) might leave parents demotivated or isolated. One similarity in the French and British systems noted in the study is a lack of support for out-of-work parents with complex needs, such as those with a criminal record.

Some examples from case study research (and a review of literature – see Box 7) also demonstrate other recent projects in individual Member States that aimed to provide support to parents seeking employment while having young children:



In **Belgium**, a local project by the Non-Governmental Organisation "Parents in Action in West-Flanders" brings together social workers and 15 vulnerable parents who are jobseekers to provide job application support and help with administrative problems and

³⁷² Blaskó et al. (2016)

³⁷³ Liu et al. (2014).

family issues³⁷⁴. The project finished in 2019 and while no evaluation has taken place, at the end of the project, 10 parents had found a paid job³⁷⁵.



In **Poland**, an ESF-funded project targeted directly at unemployed women offers a set of complex support measures: from childcare vouchers, through job counselling to psychological support³⁷⁶. Local labour offices supplement this offer through specific projects, including one in Gdańsk that provides unemployed mothers with job counselling, access to training, workshops on soft skills and a childcare voucher. However, this project has not been evaluated.

Box 7: Work search requirements for single parents: evidence from the UK

In the United Kingdom, between 2008 and 2012 the Lone Parents Obligations gradually reduced the age of the youngest child at which single parents lost the right to an unconditional benefit (Income Support) from 16 to 5. This meant that more single parents received benefits on the condition that they searched for work (Job Seeker's Allowance). One study found that overall, the reforms were associated with a 10% increase in the proportion of single parents in work³⁷⁷. However, the impacts were heterogeneous: while some single parents moved into work (particularly those with strong previous labour-market attachment), others (particularly those with weak labour-market attachment) moved onto disability benefits (with no search requirements) rather than into work. In total, the authors found that the proportion of single parents moving onto other, non-conditional, benefits was larger than the proportion moving into work³⁷⁸.

According to the evaluation commissioned by the UK government, these reforms were associated with an increase in single parents in work or looking for work: 81% when receiving Job Seeker's Allowance compared to 59% when receiving Income Support³⁷⁹. Around a quarter (24%) of single parents leaving Income Support started work, over half (55%) moved to Job Seeker's Allowance and around one in ten (12%) began to claim Employment and Support Allowance (a health-related benefit). Single parents who started employment generally moved into part-time and low-skilled work at the minimum wage. Despite this, starting work was associated with a decrease in low income and material deprivation, although these issues still affected a number of working single parents. Although work-search requirements associated with Job Seeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance were combined with personalised support, many claimants (37% and 74% respectively) reported not receiving help or advice about finding work when receiving these benefits. Single parents claiming these benefits were more likely to believe that they were pushed into things they did not want to do compared to those claiming Income Support.

This example demonstrates that while work-search requirements are intended to incentivise and stimulate employment, there is a chance that introducing these without specific supports in place might induce parents with low levels of labour-market attachment to give up the search entirely.

Source: Avram et al. (2016); Coleman and Riley (2012).

³⁷⁴ Samenlevingsopbouw West-Vaanderen (2020).

³⁷⁵ Samenlevingsopbouw West-Vaanderen (2020).

³⁷⁶ Frankowski et al. (2019).

³⁷⁷ Avram et al. (2016).

³⁷⁸ Avram et al. (2016).

³⁷⁹ Coleman & Riley (2012).

6.1.4. Changes to child and family benefits eligibility

Child and family benefits are a means of investing in children and reducing child poverty, helping to ensure that families have sufficient income for children to grow up in a safe and healthy environment³⁸⁰. However, family cash benefits can reduce the incentive for parents to participate in paid employment. For this reason, a number of Member States (CZ, EL, ES, FI, HR, HU, IE, LV, PT, RO and SI) have reduced the generosity of child and family benefits or imposed additional conditions and means-testing³⁸¹, despite warnings that reductions in the generosity of and entitlement to child and family benefits run the risk of undermining children's rights and stigmatising children from low-income households³⁸².

Redmond et al. (2020) evaluates the effect of restricting eligibility for the One-parent Family Payment (OFP) in Ireland from 18 years (or 21 years if in full-time education) to 7 years of age. This change was implemented between 2012 and 2015 with the aim of increasing employment rates and reducing the risk of poverty for single parents. After the change was implemented, single parents with older children could transition to Jobseekers Transition Payment (JST) with some support attached: one-to-one meetings with a case officer, creation of a personal development plan and an obligation to take part in recommended training courses (although there was no obligation to actively seek work). It is possible to combine employment with claiming both OFP and JST, although OFP recipients are subject to a maximum weekly earnings limit.

Using a difference-in-differences design, the study found that the reform was associated with an increase in employment (12 percentage points) and average working hours (2 to 5 hours per week) for lone parents, as well as an increase in earnings from employment (from 20% to 29%) and household income (from 8% to 12%), resulting in a reduction in the poverty rate of single parent households (10–13 percentage point reduction). This study suggests that restricting eligibility for family cash benefits for single parents of older children could be an effective way to help unemployed or inactive single parents into employment. It also shows that helping single parents into employment and/or encouraging them to increase their working hours can improve the financial situation of single-parent households. However, it is not possible to disentangle the effect of reducing benefit payments relative to other aspects of the reform, such as activation measures and the lack of a weekly earnings limit for JST. The authors note that having one-to-one case-officer meetings was likely to be an important element contributing to the positive outcomes observed³⁸³.

Focusing on the OFP reforms in Ireland, another study found that 46% of single parents had looked for new employment as a result of the changes and 51% aimed to increase their working hours³⁸⁴. A higher proportion of single parents who lost eligibility for OFP (60%) were in work in 2016, compared to 44% of those still claiming OFP, and their earnings from employment were higher on average. However, a number of single parents who became ineligible for OFP became unemployed or took up part-time and/or low-paid employment. The proportion of single parents deemed to be "welfare dependent" declined as a consequence of the reforms. In contrast to the reduction in poverty noted by Redmond et al. (2020), in this study, just over half of single parents surveyed felt that their family's financial situation had deteriorated since the changes to OFP, and there was an increase in the proportion saying they could not afford basic household items³⁸⁵. However, actual household income was similar for

³⁸⁰ European Commission (2017a).

³⁸¹ The source indicates that such changes have taken place in the following Member States: CZ, EL, ES, FI, HR, HU, IE, LV, PT, RO and SI (European Commission, 2017a).

³⁸² European Commission (2017a).

³⁸³ Redmond et al. (2020).

³⁸⁴ Indecon (2017).

³⁸⁵ Indecon (2017).

single parents who lost eligibility for OFP compared to others. The authors conclude that the changes reduced welfare dependency and increased employment. Estimates from a cost-benefit analysis indicate that the reforms resulted in a net benefit of 45 million EUR for the Irish government³⁸⁶.

Box 8 outlines initiatives implemented in Australia.

Box 8: Work incentives for single parents: evidence from Australia

In the 2000s, two key reforms were implemented in Australia to strengthen work incentives for parents. In 2004, the taper rate for family tax credits (the rate at which benefits are reduced as income increases) was reduced, augmenting earnings for parents who are low earners. A second reform in 2006–2007 tightened eligibility for a cash benefit – Parenting Payment Single (PPS) and Parenting Payment Partnered (PPP) – by restricting access to only single or partnered parents with children under 8 (previously it had been 16). Parents with older children transitioned to New Start Allowance (NSA), a less generous benefit with associated activation measures (training and job-search requirements). However, parents who were already working were not affected by the reforms. The government also introduced the Child Care Tax Rebate (CCTR) in 2006–2007: families were able to claim 30% of out-of-pocket costs for childcare up to a maximum of \$4,000 per child per annum³⁸⁷.

The 2004 reforms were not associated with an increase in employment for out-of-work single parents, but they were associated with an increase in working hours (associated predominantly with changing employers)³⁸⁸. The increase in working hours was greatest for single mothers with a low level of education and those with fewer and older children (who likely face lower costs associated with increasing their working hours). The 2006–2007 reforms were associated with an increase in employment for single mothers who were previously out-of-work, especially those with a low level of education, but had a neutral or negative impact on working hours for those already in employment. Responses to work incentives created by policy reform were diverse: not all single mothers responded to the reforms in the same way. Importantly, non-workers and those already in employment responded differently to the reforms. Only the second set of reforms in 2006–2007 were associated with an increase in employment for inactive and unemployed single mothers³⁸⁹.

The 2006–2007 reforms had a positive effect on the likelihood of exiting welfare, and the effect was larger for partnered parents than for single parents³⁹⁰.

Source: Gong and Breunig (2014); Fok and McVicar (2013).

6.2. Beneficiaries and target groups

While ALMPs might be targeted at parents in general, or at specific groups of parents who face challenges in engaging in paid work, the majority of ALMPs examined in the reviewed studies focused on single parents. One of the reviewed studies also focused on migrant parents, and this group was also a focus of studies reviewed as part of the case studies. The following Sections focus on these two groups respectively.

³⁸⁶ Indecon (2017).

³⁸⁷ EUR 2,461.88 (exchange rate as of 12 November 2020: EUR 1 = AUD 1.62).

³⁸⁸ Gong & Breunig (2014).

³⁸⁹ Gong & Breunig (2014).

³⁹⁰ Fok & McVicar (2013).

6.2.1. Single parents

The majority of ALMPs identified in the targeted literature review were directed at single parents. As explored in Section 3.1.3, there are considerable differences in the employment rates of single parents between Member States. Some authors noted that this focus was a result of lower employment rates^{391, 392} or higher rates of poverty and deprivation for single parents compared to other parents and adults^{393, 394}. Policies and programmes to support single parents' employment were evaluated in Ireland^{395, 396}, Norway³⁹⁷ and the Netherlands³⁹⁸, as well as other OECD countries, such as Australia³⁹⁹ and the UK^{400, 401, 402, 403, 404} (see Box 9).

A common trend has been the strengthening of work-related requirements for single parents. Finn & Gloster (2010) note that evidence on the effectiveness of ALMPs for single parents is more developed in Anglophone countries outside the EU (including the UK and US). While Finn & Gloster (2010) conducted case studies in the Netherlands and Sweden, they noted that evaluations of ALMPs in these countries do not tend to distinguish between (single) parents and other participants. For Sweden, some evidence indicates that job-search requirements might be more effective for other groups – such as unemployed young people and immigrants – than for single parents⁴⁰⁵. Studies from the Netherlands highlight variations – both across municipalities and between individual staff members – as to whether single parents are granted exceptions from job-search requirements^{406, 407}.

Box 9: Activation of single parents: evidence from the UK

Single parents (comprised primarily of single mothers) have been a key target group for activation policies in the UK. Over a relatively short period of time the UK system changed from treating single parents primarily as carers to treating them primarily as workers. The majority of single parents in the UK are required to be in work, or to be actively seeking paid work, in order to access state support. The New Deal for Lone Parents (1997) introduced voluntary employment support for single parents, which was made compulsory in 2008. This was accompanied by other policy changes designed to facilitate parents' employment, such as working tax credits and childcare support. More recently, Universal Credit has placed new requirements on single parents, imposing pressure to increase working hours for those already in work.

Based on qualitative interviews with single mothers in the UK, Millar (2019) concludes that support from a Lone Parent Advisor through the New Deal Programme was highly valued, both for practical support – such as claiming benefits and tax credits – and also in terms of building confidence. A number of mothers commented that financial support in the form of tax credits was invaluable in their journey back to work. However, the shift towards compulsory participation and greater conditionality resulted in pressure for some single mothers to apply for jobs that were not compatible with their caring responsibilities.

Source: Millar (2019).

³⁹¹ Gong & Breunig (2014).

³⁹² Redmond et al. (2020).

³⁹³ Finn & Gloster (2010).

³⁹⁴ Redmond et al. (2020).

³⁹⁵ Redmond et al. (2020).

³⁹⁶ Indecon (2017).

³⁹⁷ Mogstad & Pronzato (2012).

³⁹⁸ Knoef & Van Ours (2016).

³⁹⁹ Gong & Breunig (2014).

⁴⁰⁰ Finn & Gloster (2010).

6.2.2. Inactive parents with a migrant background

As discussed in Section 3.1.2, immigrant parents or parents with a migrant background face particular challenges in the labour market, such as lack of local networks and language barriers.

As explored in more detail in Section 6.1.2, Knoef and Van Ours (2016) explore the impact that a policy had on immigrant single mothers: while the job creation element (as explored in Section 6.1.2) was associated with an increase in employment for single mothers who were born in the Netherlands, this was not the case for those who had migrated to the Netherlands (although the element was associated with an increase in earnings and a reduction in welfare benefits for both groups)⁴⁰⁸. Conversely, while the earnings disregard component (see Section 6.1.1) was associated with an increase in earnings for both groups, it was associated with an increase in employment and a reduction in welfare benefits only for single mothers who had migrated to the Netherlands (and not for those born in the Netherlands). The authors suggest a range of reasons why the impacts varied in this way, including a suggestion that immigrant single mothers might have looser connections to the labour market, lower education levels, less opportunity to benefit from informal financial support and lower wage rates than native single mothers prior to the experiment⁴⁰⁹.

Accordingly, countries are trying to address some of these challenges, including by providing programmes for currently inactive immigrants or people with a migrant background. The case study research highlighted two examples:



In **Germany**, only 52% of mothers with a migrant background are in employment, compared to 73% of mothers without a migrant background⁴¹⁰. To combat this, the "Strong in the Job" (*Stark im Beruf*) programme was launched to provide individual support to mothers with migrant backgrounds through coaching, qualifications, language courses and access to networks of employers and funding opportunities. Offered in 80 service centres nationwide, as of April 2017, 35% of 3,200 mothers who participated in the programme had obtained employment with social security benefits⁴¹¹.



In **Sweden**, the government implemented measures that encourage migrant parents on parental leave to participate in Swedish for foreigners ("sfi") language courses. Since parental leave is open to parents who are unemployed in Sweden, unemployed foreign-born parents have an opportunity to improve their language skills and therefore their employment opportunities. Offered by municipalities, different regions make different offers to include parents, including by providing free childcare for those taking part. A recent study concluded that this policy promotes integration to migrant parents by offering the opportunity to study the Swedish language⁴¹². However, this was a small, qualitative study rather than a full evaluation and no full-scale evaluations have been

⁴⁰¹ Avram et al. (2016).

⁴⁰² Griffiths (2011).

⁴⁰³ Coleman & Riley (2012).

⁴⁰⁴ Millar (2019).

⁴⁰⁵ Finn & Glost (2010).

⁴⁰⁶ Finn & Glost (2010).

⁴⁰⁷ Knoef & Van Ours (2016).

⁴⁰⁸ Knoef & Van Ours (2016).

⁴⁰⁹ Knoef & Van Ours (2016).

⁴¹⁰ BMFSFJ (2017).

⁴¹¹ BMFSFJ (2017).

⁴¹² Nikqi, Arbresha (2019).

conducted to assess the effectiveness of language courses – and the measures facilitating the attendance of parents – in improving the labour-market situation of migrant parents.

7. EU LEGISLATION, POLICIES AND FUNDING

KEY FINDINGS

- There is little evidence available on the actual impact of past EU legislation. Previous assessments pointed out some limitations and areas for improvements, some of which were addressed by the EC in subsequent proposals.
- Impact assessments of these new pieces of legislation suggest that net benefits could be expected, as well as increases in female labour-force participation, parents returning to work after leave, and productivity, and reduced recruitment and training costs.

The main legal texts facilitating the labour-market inclusion of parents are outlined below:

- **Maternity leave Directive** (92/85/EEC) on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding;
 - Proposal for a Directive amending Council Directive 92/85/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding, COM (2008) 637 final—2008/ 0193 (COD);
- **Directive on equal treatment of men and women in employment** (2006/54/EC) on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (recast) [2006] OJ L 204/23;
- **Parental leave Directive** (2010/18/EU) implementing the revised Framework Agreement concluded by Business Europe, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC and repealing Directive 96/34/EC [2010] OJ L 68/13;
- **Directive on Work-Life Balance for parents and carers** (EU 2019/1158); and
- **Directive on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in self-employment** (2010/41/EU) and repealing Council Directive 86/613/EEC, OJ L 180, 15.7.2010, pp. 1–6.

In addition to the legal framework, the **European Social Fund** (ESF) is the main financial instrument to invest in people, focusing on improving employment and equal opportunities across the EU.

Each of these measures – and their role in the labour market – are explored in more detail below.

7.1. Maternity leave Directive (92/85/EEC)

The Directive (92/85/EEC) protects workers who are pregnant and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding from exposures to hazards at work, guarantees them a minimum period of maternity leave of 14 weeks – compensated at the level of national sick pay or above – of which at least 2 weeks are compulsory, guarantees time off for antenatal appointments and protects workers from dismissal related to their condition.

In 2008, the European Commission proposed a new Directive amending Directive 92/85/EEC. The impact assessment accompanying the proposal describes its objectives as aiming to: (1) reduce the difference in employment rates of women with and without children; (2) widen the scope of family-

related leave and the conditions for taking it; (3) reduce the gender imbalance in taking the leave; (4) give financial support during leave; and (5) ensure that taking family-related leave does not lead to discrimination or to weakened job security⁴¹³. The impact assessment notes that if no action is taken at EU level the increase in labour-market participation by women with children is likely to remain slow⁴¹⁴.

The proposal recommended extending the minimum length of maternity leave from 14 to 18 weeks, of which 6 weeks are compulsory, and requiring Member States to grant additional maternity leave in the case of premature childbirth, children hospitalised at birth, children with disabilities and multiple births. The proposed new Directive also ensures that any period of sick leave due to illness or complications arising from pregnancy that occurs 4 weeks or more before the due date does not impact on the duration of maternity leave.

The impact assessment notes that the economic cost of these measures would be low, ranging from 0.006% of GDP in Hungary to 0.05% of GDP in Belgium (based on calculations assuming a rise in compensation level to 100% of former salary, which was not included in the proposed new Directive)⁴¹⁵. Costs could be offset by a rise in female labour-force participation, although the impact assessment notes that evidence on this point is inconclusive.

7.2. Directive on equal treatment of men and women in employment (2006/54/EC)

The Directive on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (2006/54/EC) covers (a) access to employment, including promotion and vocational training; (b) working conditions, including pay; and (c) occupational social-security schemes. The Directive does not address parents' employment directly, but greater equality between women and men in employment is a means of facilitating mothers' employment. In 2012, the European Parliament's resolution (2011/2285(INI)) called on the European Commission to review and amend Directive 2006/54/EC.

Assessment of Directive 2006/54/EC has focused primarily on its role in closing the gender pay gap. This has important implications for parents' return to work as it often puts mothers in the position of the second earner, whose employment is more easily sacrificed if the leave is not fully paid⁴¹⁶.

The assessment reaffirms the need for EU action in light of disparate actions and uneven progress in closing the gender pay gap across EU Member States⁴¹⁷. In particular, the report calls for binding measures and estimates that a 1% reduction in the gender pay gap could result in an increase in GDP of 0.1%⁴¹⁸.

The impact assessment that accompanies the 2014 Recommendation on strengthening the principle of equal pay between men and women through transparency (2014/124/EU) affirms the importance of EU action to reduce the gender pay gap⁴¹⁹. It estimated that the combined voluntary measures will have an annual positive EU-wide effect of EUR 17 billion, compared to EUR 49 billion for the combined effect of binding measures, which were not considered an optimal option due to higher administrative

⁴¹³ European Commission (2008a).

⁴¹⁴ European Commission (2008a).

⁴¹⁵ European Commission (2008a).

⁴¹⁶ European Added Value Unit (2013).

⁴¹⁷ European Added Value Unit (2013).

⁴¹⁸ European Added Value Unit (2013).

⁴¹⁹ European Commission (2014).

cost for companies⁴²⁰.

However, the implementation assessment of Directive 2006/54/EC argues that wider benefits for companies in terms of the retention and skill-level of female staff have not been considered⁴²¹. Overall, the voluntary measures have not been widely implemented, and the EC is pursuing options for making these measures binding⁴²².

Issues around the equal treatment of men and women in employment and the role of the EU were also raised during the stakeholder interviews. One interviewee believed that making some of the pay-transparency measures binding would help to address pay imbalance and equalise incentives for both parents to take up childcare from the start⁴²³. Another interviewee pointed to persistent occupational segregation – with a number of professions dominated by female and male workers respectively – and called for exploration of how this can be addressed⁴²⁴. Some interviewees also highlighted the importance of recognising that the group of parents is very heterogeneous and emphasised the need to examine and address the situations of targeted groups, such as migrant parents, parents with disabilities, parents of children with disabilities⁴²⁵ or parents with other care obligations, such as caring for the elderly⁴²⁶. Some interviewees also recognised that EU legislation does more to address the challenges of parents who are already working, rather than those who are unemployed or inactive⁴²⁷.

Some interviewees also remarked on how the COVID-19 crisis affected men and women differently due to its impact on female-dominated sectors⁴²⁸. Stakeholders from EU institutions recognise a need to tailor post-pandemic recovery policies to remedy the impact it has had on women's employment⁴²⁹.

7.3. Parental leave Directive (2010/18/EU)

The Directive (2010/18/EU) – now replaced by the Work-Life Balance Directive (Section 7.4) – set out the minimum requirements for parental leave as a means of reconciling work and family responsibilities and promoting equality between men and women. All workers had a right to parental leave on the grounds of birth or adoption of a child for a period of at least 4 months. At least one of the 4 months was provided on a non-transferable basis to encourage a more equal take-up of leave. At the end of parental leave, workers had the right to return to the same job or, if that was not possible, to an equivalent or similar job consistent with their employment contract or employment relationship. Member States had to ensure that when returning from parental leave, workers could request changes to their working hours and/or patterns for a set period of time.

Ramalho et al. (2015) note that a number of Member States did not implement the Directive because they considered that national legislation already complied with – or indeed exceeded – its requirements. Their assessment stresses that uptake of leave is strongly associated with the level of compensation, which should be taken into consideration in future EU measures.

However, as early as 2000 an analysis of the implementation of the (first) parental leave directive (96/34/EC) concluded that the implementation of the parental leave agreement had considerable legal

⁴²⁰ European Commission (2014).

⁴²¹ European Parliament (2015).

⁴²² Hofman et al. 2020.

⁴²³ Interview E2.

⁴²⁴ Interview E5.

⁴²⁵ Interview E1, E6, E7.

⁴²⁶ Interview E7.

⁴²⁷ Interview E6, E7.

⁴²⁸ Interview E5.

⁴²⁹ Interview E5, E6.

implications in Member States, but this effect was hindered by the lack of change in society where more fathers would take parental leave⁴³⁰. This was confirmed in 2017 by the evaluation of the 2010 directive, which suggested that the EU provisions on parental leave were insufficient to address the gap between aspirations and practice⁴³¹.

In this context, a number of interviewees noted continuous disparities in time spent on childcare responsibilities between men and women⁴³². Some stakeholders commented on the increase in fathers engaging in childcare, which was seen as a positive development⁴³³, and observed that practice at the Member State level could be further guided by, for example, Country Specific Recommendations⁴³⁴.

7.4. Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers (EU 2019/1158)

The Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers (EU 2019/1158) entered into force in 2019 and must be transposed into national law by 2022. It is too early to assess the effects of this Directive, but the impact assessment⁴³⁵ outlines the anticipated effects of the proposed changes.

- **Maternity leave:** The Directive does not introduce changes to maternity leave.
- **Paternity leave:** Article 4 of the Directive states that Member States should ensure that fathers (or equivalent second parents) have the right to paternity leave of 10 working days. Paternity leave should be remunerated at least at the level of national sick pay (Article 8). In the impact assessment, enhanced paternity leave is positioned as a means of giving fathers the opportunity to spend more time with their children and play a greater role in childcare⁴³⁶. The total cost to employers of 2 weeks of paternity leave equivalent to the level of national sick pay is estimated to be EUR 7.8 billion between 2015 and 2055. Although the aggregate cost to companies is high, when disaggregated the cost is estimated to be EUR 14 per company in 2030 and EUR 43 per company in 2050. The cost to Member States of providing 2 weeks of paternity leave equivalent to the level of national sick pay is estimated to amount to EUR 24 billion over the period 2015–2055⁴³⁷.
- **Parental leave:** Article 5 of the Directive states that workers should have the right to parental leave of 4 months to be taken before the child reaches a specified age (up to the age of 8); at least 2 months of parental leave should be non-transferable. The Directive does not set a minimum level of remuneration for parental leave, leaving this up to Member States (Article 8). The enhanced parental leave is positioned as facilitating the use of leave by both parents and increasing the chance that parents return to work after leave, thereby reducing recruitment and training costs and increasing productivity⁴³⁸. Figures are not included in this report because none of the options considered in the impact assessment are closely aligned with the Directive.
- **Flexible working:** Article 9 of the Directive ensures that parents of young children (up to the age of 8) have the right to request flexible working arrangements (in terms of place of work,

⁴³⁰ Clauwaert & Harger (2000).

⁴³¹ European Commission (2017a).

⁴³² Interview E5.

⁴³³ Interview E7.

⁴³⁴ Interview E5.

⁴³⁵ European Commission (2017a).

⁴³⁶ European Commission (2017a).

⁴³⁷ European Commission (2017a).

⁴³⁸ European Commission (2017a).

working schedule and working hours) for caring purposes. Employers must provide a justification for refusing requests or for postponing flexible working arrangements. Workers have the right to return to their original working pattern at the end of the agreed period. The impact on companies of a right to request flexible working for parents (encompassing place of work, working schedule and working hours) was estimated to amount to EUR 126.4 billion over the period 2015–2055⁴³⁹. However, losses would be offset by improved staff retention (98.2 billion EUR) and reduced absenteeism (EUR 21.7 billion). For Member States, the economic impact is expected to be net positive (EUR 309.1 billion over the period 2015–2055), driven by an increase in labour-market participation (leading to reduced expenditure on unemployment benefits of EUR 93 million, and increased tax revenue of EUR 308.8 billion), as well as reduced demand for healthcare (EUR 215 million). There is expected to be a net gain of EUR 653.1 billion to GDP over the period 2015–2055⁴⁴⁰.

Many interviewees – representing EU institutions, national institutions and academia – viewed this directive as a key policy initiative that pushes Member States to institute policies to support women by challenging the traditional division of childcare in families⁴⁴¹ (keeping in mind that the Directive sets the minimum requirements but allows Member States to exceed them)⁴⁴².

Some interviewees mentioned the importance of increasing flexible working to accommodate the caring needs of working parents to encourage them to stay in employment⁴⁴³. According to another interviewee, costs arising from increased duration of leave are not born symmetrically across the EU, as the design of social protection systems varies from country to country⁴⁴⁴.

7.5. Directive on equal treatment of parents engaged in self-employment (2010/41/EU)

This Directive – which was required to be transposed into national legislation by 2012 – states that there should be no discrimination on the grounds of sex for self-employed workers. Article 8 on maternity benefits states that Member States should ensure that female self-employed workers are granted a sufficient maternity allowance to enable interruptions in their occupational activity owing to pregnancy or motherhood for at least 14 weeks (Article 8). The allowance is deemed sufficient if it guarantees an income at least equivalent to: (a) national sick pay; (b) the average loss of income or profit in relation to a comparable preceding period; or (c) any other family-related allowance established by national law (Article 8(3)).

Bernard & Blackham (2015) note that few countries have amended legislation to comply with Article 8 on maternity benefits. The requirement of sufficiency in Article 8(3) caused issues for some Member States. In some cases, the amount of the allowance was dependent on the self-employed worker's declared income, which could be significantly lower than their actual income. The report concludes that there seems to have been a lack of interest in the content of the Directive, aggravated by poor understanding of its purpose⁴⁴⁵. As pointed out by one interviewee, there has been a growing tendency in recent years to work as self-employed among young families, particularly mothers, as it allows for

⁴³⁹ European Commission (2017a).

⁴⁴⁰ European Commission (2017a).

⁴⁴¹ Interview E1, E3, E4, E6, E7, IE1, BE2.

⁴⁴² Interview E3.

⁴⁴³ Interview E2, E3, E4.

⁴⁴⁴ Interview E4.

⁴⁴⁵ Bernard & Blackham (2015).

greater flexibility and work-life balance⁴⁴⁶. The interviewee argued that this growing trend only underlines the need for policymakers to put more focus on the leave conditions of the self-employed.

7.6. The European Social Fund (ESF)

The ESF's overall budget for the 2014–2020 funding period is EUR 120.4 billion, aimed at supporting approximately 15 million people each year⁴⁴⁷. Because one of its thematic objectives is promoting employment⁴⁴⁸, the ESF constitutes a funding instrument that can help support parents' return or integration into the labour market.

The 2016 evaluation showed that all but two Member States (Bulgaria and Portugal) planned to use the ESF over the 2004–2013 period to increase labour-market participation of women, 16 Member States intended to use it to support participation of migrants, and 11 Member States aimed to use the ESF to help improve access to ECEC (even if the Country Specific Recommendations indicate that 10 more countries could consider actions in this area)⁴⁴⁹.

The following constitute some examples of projects aimed at supporting parents into work that received ESF support:

- The Swedish Public Employment Service implemented a project called Mirjam, which between 2016 and 2019 focused on supporting newly arrived migrant women between the ages of 25 and 65 into either work or training. The project was based on the recognition that migrant women might face challenges accessing the labour market because of their educational background, lack of language skills and lack of knowledge of the local labour market⁴⁵⁰. According to a survey, 86% of the women who have participated say that taking part in the Mirjam project helped them identify what jobs they would like to do⁴⁵¹.
- The Czech town of Kroměříž used ESF funding between 2017 and 2019 to create a "micro-nursery" for children between the ages of 6 months and 4 years old⁴⁵². The rationale for the project was to help meet demand for childcare for families with young children who would like to return to work.
- Between 2011 and 2012 an ESF-funded initiative in Poland helped 242 women (out of 323 total participants) to establish their own businesses, and hence overcome unemployment⁴⁵³. At that time, the Polish province Lubelskie had some of the highest levels of unemployment in the country, with women being affected in particular. The project provided participants with specialist training and grants of EUR 3,000 to start their own business. To ensure that women were able to participate in the project, they were given access to a small nursery⁴⁵⁴.
- In Slovakia, between 2013 and 2014 the ESF improved the employability of parents of children under the age of 3 by contributing to cost of childcare services. The project supported 1,215

⁴⁴⁶ Interview E4.

⁴⁴⁷ European Social Fund (n.d.-a).

⁴⁴⁸ Official Journal of the European Union (2013).

⁴⁴⁹ European Commission (2016).

⁴⁵⁰ European Social Fund (2020).

⁴⁵¹ European Commission (2020d).

⁴⁵² European Social Fund (2019).

⁴⁵³ European Social Fund (2013).

⁴⁵⁴ European Social Fund (2013).

parents (95% of whom were women) with an average contribution of EUR 200 per month for 1 year, allowing them to take up childcare and continue working or studying⁴⁵⁵.

The latest data at the EU level show that by 2018 the ESF helped over 27 million participants by providing them with education, training or employment support⁴⁵⁶. There is also some evidence that jobless ESF participants tend to find work⁴⁵⁷, but data are not granular enough to provide information about the results for participating parents with young children. The ESF provides guidance on how to evaluate funded programmes⁴⁵⁸, but more work is needed to build the body of evidence of the impact of the EU on the level of parents' participation in the labour market.

⁴⁵⁵ European Commission (2016).

⁴⁵⁶ European Commission (2020e).

⁴⁵⁷ Hofman et al. (2018).

⁴⁵⁸ European Commission (2018).

8. OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

This Section provides responses to the research questions and outlines areas that require further action or evidence.

8.1. The employment situation of parents after childbirth in the EU since 2008

The analysis of EU-LFS shows that the employment situation of parents with young children varies considerably depending on gender and forms of employment:

- For fathers, the form of employment that increases the likelihood of being in work are regular, full-time contracts; for mothers it is self-employment and part-time work;
- Home-working increases the likelihood of being in work for both fathers and mothers (and slightly increasing for men in recent years);
- Temporary contracts decrease the likelihood of being in work for both fathers and mothers alike; and
- These patterns do not change considerably over time.

The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to affect these patterns. Early evidence suggests that parents are more likely to be furloughed, and that women (including mothers) work fewer hours in paid jobs and are more likely to be made redundant, while taking the brunt of childcare responsibilities (leading to widening gender employment gaps among parents of young children).

The group of parents with young children and their employment situation is heterogenous. While permanent and full-time contracts benefit fathers, parents on temporary contracts are worse off. This is particularly concerning, given the evolution of the labour market and the rise of non-standard forms of work. This means that the number of parents with young children who struggle to maintain or find work after their transition to parenthood could also be on the rise.

The position of remaining groups – especially the self-employed and part-time workers – is less straightforward: while these employment forms seemingly increase the likelihood of being in work for mothers, it is uncertain to what extent this is a real choice, or whether the leave conditions of the self-employed – as stipulated in Directive 2010/41/EU – are met and sufficient (see below).

In light of the impact of COVID-19 on employment, the following risks can be identified: (i) worsening in the situation of parents compared to other groups (this means reducing the advantages and deepening gaps where they currently exist); and (ii) further "gender polarisation," with mothers likely to pay a higher price than fathers.

8.2. Main factors affecting parents' return to work after family-related leave

Certain groups of parents with young children face additional challenges when returning to work, namely parents (predominantly mothers):

- With low levels of education;
- With large families (with three or more children);
- Of migrant origin (in some Member States); and

- Single parents (in some Member States).

Employment for parents with young children is highly affected by gender. Reflecting this, the literature on parents' employment has focused predominantly on women and factors facilitating maternal employment. However, in recent years there has been a focus on promoting fathers' involvement in care as a means of enabling women to return to employment (e.g. by introducing non-transferable leave, adopting the Work-Life Balance Directive, etc.).

The two most important factors affecting parents' return to work are leave policies and ECEC, both of which have been high on the EU agenda:

- Debates about leave have focused on striking the optimum balance in terms of leave length, compensation rates, eligibility, uptake and flexibility. Well-compensated and non-transferable parental leave increases uptake from fathers, thereby improving employment outcomes for mothers.
- Policies relating to ECEC have focused on dismantling barriers associated with cost and availability. The cost of ECEC can fuel socio-economic inequalities, since low-income families and single parents struggle most with the cost.

Overall, a number of factors can facilitate or hinder parents' return to work. These are grouped in four main categories (socio-demographic and household characteristics, attitudes and cultural values, employment characteristics, and policy levers), as summarised in Table 1.

The reviewed literature focused more on employment and less on job quality. Job protection can help to protect job quality, since it enables parents to stay in the same (or equivalent) job. Yet, even if a worker's job is protected, they might be forced to switch to a new job if they want to work part-time or require a job that fits around their childcare schedule, and this might channel them into a lesser job. Other policies could have a more mixed impact on job quality, but the evidence on this is lacking. Job quality received more attention in the literature on ALMPs (see below).

Table 1: Factors affecting parents' return to work

	Factor	Summary role
Socio-demographic and household characteristics	Gender	Mothers with young children are less likely to be in work compared to fathers
	Education	Poorly educated parents with young children struggle more to return to (or find) work than those with higher education
	Immigration status and migrant background	Migrant mothers could be facing more challenges than men in the same group
	Number of young children	Mothers with a growing number of children are less likely to be in employment
	Household type (single parents and couples)	Single mothers are most disadvantaged, when compared to other household types
	Family and social networks (informal childcare)	Informal childcare support can be a factor encouraging parents to return to work when childcare costs are high
Attitudes and values	Gender roles	Traditional gender attitudes could affect parents' return to work after childbirth
	Distribution of unpaid work	Unequal share of unpaid care work constrains mothers of young children to maintain or find paid work
Employment characteristics	Form of employment	Regular, full-time contracts help fathers more than mothers, while temporary contracts disadvantage both parents
	Job factors (e.g. job satisfaction, flexibility)	Parents are more likely to return to work if they are satisfied in it, stay with the same employer for longer and can enjoy flexible working arrangements
	Employer family-friendly practices	Where in place, practices such as career-development support, keeping in touch during leave, arrangements for breastfeeding, flexible working and childcare can help
	Employer/line manager attitudes	Having a supportive employer/line manager might facilitate parents' return
Policy levers	Availability and affordability of formal childcare	The combination of these factors acts as a facilitator or barrier for parents' return to work
	Family-related leave	
	Legislation to promote flexible working	Where in place, flexible working could help parents return to or find employment
	Job protection legislation	Where in place, job protection legislation enables mothers to return to the same job and build up tenure with the same employer
	Child and family cash benefits	These benefits tend to disincentivise employment, particularly for mothers with low levels of education

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

8.3. Promising company approaches to ensure a smooth return of parents from leave

There is little evidence on effective company practices that facilitate the return of parents from leave. The information gap is particularly pertinent for SMEs, which could face more challenges in implementation than large companies. However, a number of promising practices was identified:

- Lactation programmes (to help women who breastfeed) showed reduced maternal absenteeism, supported women in maintaining high working hours and achieving their career goals, and improved morale, retention and recruitment; unfortunately, small and medium-sized employers face barriers to implementing such programmes.
- The following practices dedicated to mothers returning from leave still lack evidence on their effectiveness:
 - Coaching and/or mentoring programmes;
 - Workshops facilitated by career psychologists;
 - Enhanced contact with HR, career counsellors and/or line managers before, during and after the return to work; and
 - Continuous contact among company staff during leave through parents' clubs, young mothers' clubs and integration meetings.
- Other interventions – targeting both parents (or just fathers) – that also require (more) evidence to demonstrate whether they work or not (and any unintended effects, e.g. on the level of uptake of parental leave among fathers) include:
 - Flexible working arrangements, including intermittent work while on parental leave, with additional financial benefits and a possibility to reduce working hours;
 - Employer-based childcare facilities could result in increase of job applications from parents of young children and limit job rotation; also, such interventions are less feasible for smaller employers; and
 - Supporting leave uptake for fathers through (i) offering supplemental leave for fathers (which could also result in higher organisational commitment, even when the uptake of that leave is low); (ii) offering pay that exceeds statutory requirements in terms of compensating paternity and parental leave; and (iii) having champions of fathers' leave-taking at work.
- Finally, evidence-based programmes aimed at women more broadly could also help mothers with young children:
 - Career-development programmes were effective in increasing working hours; and
 - Flexible working arrangements increased working hours, but evidence suggests that part-time work might hinder career growth.

8.4. Promising ALMP programmes helping parents with young children

The reviewed studies focused more on employed parents compared to those who are further from the labour market, even if unemployed and inactive parents also benefit from policies, such as accessible and affordable ECEC. However, there is little evidence on how to reach and assist parents with young children, with the notable exception of lone parents. The study findings show that:

- Access to childcare is vital for inactive and unemployed parents who are looking to return to the labour market.

- There is considerable heterogeneity among inactive and unemployed parents, and in which ALMPs work for different groups:
 - ALMPs for single parents generally had positive effects in terms of employment, but might have more mixed effects in terms of poverty reduction;
 - Activation measures (such as in-work top-ups or tax-credits) might be successful at getting parents into work, but often result in low-paid part-time jobs with little potential for career progression, and fail to facilitate an increase in earnings in the long term; and
 - The effect of ALMPs on other target groups – such as migrants – is less well understood.

A key challenge in relation to the literature on ALMPs is that studies generally evaluate the impact of a package of policy/legislative changes, e.g. tax credits combined with job-search support, rather than a single change. This makes it difficult to assess the effect of individual components, or different types of ALMPs.

8.5. Effect of existing EU legislation, policies and funding instruments

There is little evidence available on the actual impact of EU legislation implemented so far. Impact assessments of new legislation that suggests net benefits, increased female labour force participation and return to work, increased productivity and reduced recruitment and training costs are yet to materialise.

However, what should not be overlooked is the fact that EU legislation is in force in the first place, and that it has been advancing the provisions of family-related leave, with the most recent example being the Work-Life Balance Directive. These provisions are some of the most generous around the world, but the work is far from being completed. Areas where the EU might take new or additional actions include:

- Reinforcing work to improve gender equality by addressing the unequal distribution of unpaid (care) work and reducing the gender pay gap, both of which would help to increase women's – and therefore mothers' – employment;
- Reviewing the need to further enforce or strengthen leave provision for the self-employed and people in precarious employment; and
- Addressing evidence and knowledge gaps highlighted in this study by conducting additional research to further help different groups of parents with young children.

REFERENCES

Legislation and official documents

- Belgium.Be (2020a), *Congé d'adoption*, Informations et Services Officiels, available at: https://www.belgium.be/fr/emploi/conges_et_interruption_de_carriere/conge_dadoption.
- Belgium.Be (2020b), *Congé de Maternité et Pauses d'allaitement*, Informations et Services Officiels, available at: https://www.belgium.be/fr/emploi/conges_et_interruption_de_carriere/conge_de_maternite_et_pauses_dallaitement.
- Belgium.Be (2020c), *Congé de Paternité et Congé de Co-Parentalité*, Informations et Services Officiels, 2020, available at: https://www.belgium.be/fr/emploi/conges_et_interruption_de_carriere/conge_de_paternite_et_conge_de_co_parentalite.
- Cantillon, B. et al. (2010), *De sociale gelaagdheid van het gebruik van verlofstels door ouders met jonge kinderen*, Antwerpen: CSB.
- Central Statistics Office (2016), *Census of Population 2016: Profile 4 Households and Families*, available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp4hf/cp4hf/fmls/>.
- Central Statistics Office (2019), *Women and Men in Ireland 2019*, available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-wamii/womenandmeninireland2019/work/>.
- Chancellery of the Government of Lithuania (2018), *Vyriausybės kanceliarijoje atidarytas vaiku kambarys*, available at: <https://lrvk.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/vyriausybes-kanceliarijoje-atidarytas-vaiku-kambarys>.
- Citizens Information (2020a), *Adoptive Benefit*, available at: https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social_welfare/social_welfare_payments/social_welfare_payments_to_families_and_children/adoptive_benefit.html#l62fd2.
- Citizens Information (2020b), *Maternity benefit*, available at: https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social_welfare/social_welfare_payments/social_welfare_payments_to_families_and_children/maternity_benefit.html.
- Citizens Information (2020c), *National Childcare Scheme*, available at: https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/pre_school_education_and_childcare/national_childcare_scheme.html.
- Citizens Information (2020d), *Paternity benefit*, available at: https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social_welfare/social_welfare_payments/social_welfare_payments_to_families_and_children/paternity_benefit.html.
- Citizens Information (2020e), *Working Family Payment*, available at: https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social_welfare/social_welfare_payments/social_welfare_payments_to_families_and_children/family_income_supplement.html.

- Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (2019), *Public Consultation: Pathways to Work Strategy Call for Submissions*, available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/ab78ac-public-consultation-pathways-to-work-strategy-call-for-submissions/#:~:text=Pathways%20to%20Work%20is%20the,a%20time%20of%20high%20unemployment>.
- Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (2020), *Parent's benefit*, available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/b321b1-parents-benefit/#:~:text=Parent%27s%20Benefit%20is%20a%20new,Maternity%20Benefit%20and%20Paternity%20Benefit>.
- Department of Justice and Equality (2017), *National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017–2020*, Dublin.
- Department of the Taoiseach (1999), *Constitution of Ireland*.
- Departement Werk & Sociale Economie (2019), *Arbeidsmarktkrapte in Vlaanderen*, Brussels: Vlaamse Overheid.
- Early Childhood Ireland (2020), *The ECCE scheme*, available at: <https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/work/information-parents/choosing-childcare/ecce-free-preschool-year/>.
- Försäkringskassan (2010), *Jämställdhetsbonusen – en effektuvärdering*, [The gender equality bonus – an impact assessment], available at: https://www.forsakringskassan.se/wps/wcm/connect/249a8f02-6e59-4337-aa1b-0c109671ea22/socialforsakringsrapport_2010_5.pdf?MOD=AJPERES.
- Försäkringskassan (2011), *Föräldrapenning. Båda föräldrarnas försäkring? Socialförsäkringsrapport*, [Parental allowance. Both parents' insurance? Social insurance report], 2011:13, available at: https://www.forsakringskassan.se/wps/wcm/connect/c18218dc-3d5f-4721-b1dc-a800f7e9d713/socialforsakringsrapport_2011_13.pdf?MOD=AJPERES.
- Försäkringskassan (2019), *Jämställd föräldraförsäkring – Utvärdering av de reserverade månaderna i föräldraförsäkringen*, [Equal parental insurance – Evaluation of the reserved months in the parental insurance], available at: <https://www.forsakringskassan.se/wps/wcm/connect/7bdc2540-0e28-4766-8e27-02f82244d358/socialforsakringsrapport-2019-2.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=>.
- Försäkringskassan (2020a), *Föräldrapenning*, [Parental benefit], available at: https://www.forsakringskassan.se/privatpers/foralder/nar_barnet_ar_fott/foraldrapenning.
- Försäkringskassan (2020b), *Parental benefit. Number of recipients and number of compensated days 2019*, available at: <https://www.forsakringskassan.se/statistik/barn-familj/foraldrapenning>.
- Försäkringskassan (2020c), *Betald och obetald föräldraledighet – Hur flexibla är föräldrar under barnens två första levnadsår?* [Paid and unpaid parental leave – How flexible are parents during the children's first two years of life?], available at: <https://www.forsakringskassan.se/wps/wcm/connect/ba06e05a-0723-49e0-94eb-d004afd64558/socialforsakringsrapport-2020-3.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=>.

- German Civil Code (n.d.), *Mutterschutz- und Elternzeitverordnung vom 12. Februar 2009* (BGBl. I S. 320), die zuletzt durch Artikel 2 des Gesetzes vom 20. Mai 2020 (BGBl. I S. 1061) geändert worden ist [Maternity Protection and Parental Leave Ordinance of February 12, 2009 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 320), last amended by Article 2 of the law of May 20, 2020 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1061)], available at: <http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/muscheltzv/index.html>.
- Government of Ireland (2019a), *First five: A whole-of-government strategy for babies, young children and their families 2019–2028*.
- Government of Ireland (2019b), *Lone Parents and In-Work Supports for Families with Children: Spending Review 2019*, Dublin: Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service.
- Government Offices of Sweden (1995), *Föräldraledighetslag* [Parental Leave Act 1995:584], available at: <https://www.government.se/4ac87f/contentassets/d163a42edcea4638aa112f0f6040202b/sfs-1995584-parental-leave-act>.
- Hilde, C. (n.d.), *VDAB wordt meer dan ooit de regisseur van de Vlaamse arbeidsmarkt*, available at: <https://www.hildecrevits.be/nieuws/vdab-wordt-meer-dan-ooit-de-regisseur-van-de-vlaamse-arbeidsmarkt/>.
- Hungarian National Assembly (2014), *Családpolitika* [Family politics], Képviselői Információs Szolgálat, available at: https://www.parlament.hu/documents/10181/73472/Infojegyzet_2014_9_csaladpolitika.pdf/00dc5263-cd83-4fe0-9905-184f7dc57b53.
- Hungarian National Assembly (2019), *Kisgyermekes anyák foglalkoztatása* [Employment of young mothers], Képviselői Információs Szolgálat, available at: https://www.parlament.hu/documents/10181/1789217/Infojegyzet_2019_48_Kisgyermekes_anyak_foglalkoztatasa.pdf/7c2d9a99-777a-0b39-ad8d-3f282553c0ec?t=1573810293701.
- Joint Committee on Employment Affairs and Social Protection (2018), *Labour Activation*, Dublin: House of the Oireachtas.
- Journal of Laws [Dziennik Ustaw] (1974), *Labour Code of 26 June 1974* [Ustawa z dnia 26 czerwca 1974 r. Kodeks pracy], (Dz.U. 1974 Nr 24 Poz. 141).
- Journal of Laws [Dziennik Ustaw] (2004), *Act of 20 April 2004 on the promotion of employment and labour market institutions* [Ustawa z dnia 20 kwietnia 2004 r. o promocji zatrudnienia i instytucjach rynku pracy] (Dz.U. 2004 nr 99 poz. 1001).
- Journal of Laws [Dziennik Ustaw] (2011), *Regulation of the Minister of Health of 28 October 2011 amending the regulation on guaranteed benefits for outpatient care specialist* [rozporządzenie ministra zdrowia z dnia 28 października 2011 r. zmieniające rozporządzenie w sprawie świadczeń gwarantowanych z zakresu ambulatoryjnej opieki specjalistycznej], (Dz.U. 2011 Nr 235 Poz. 1394).
- Law Reform Commission (2016), *Unfair Dismissals Act*, available at: https://www.lawreform.ie/fileupload/RevisedActs/WithAnnotations/HTML/EN_ACT_1977_0010.htm#SEC6.
- Law Reform Commission (2020), *Maternity Protection Act 1994 Revised*, available at: <http://revisedacts.lawreform.ie/eli/1994/act/34/revised/en/html>.

- Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania (2018), *Švietimas skaičiais 2018. Ikimokyklinis ir priešmokyklinis ugdymas*, [Education in numbers 2018. Early childhood and pre-school education], available at: https://www.smm.lt/uploads/lawacts/docs/1075_7788224ba9edf62a895e4e5fa22915f1.pdf.
- Ministry of Finance (2019), *Budgetpropositionen för 2020. Uo. 13*, available at: <https://www.regeringen.se/4adae6/contentassets/c689564aa19c4d29bcebb1c037a2e37b/utgiftsomrade-13-jamstalldhet-och-nyanlanda-invandrades-etablering.pdf>.
- Ministry of Human Resources (2014), *Minister of State Soltész hands over 'Family-friendly Workplace' awards*, available at: <https://2010-2014.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-human-resources/news/miklos-soltesz-hands-over-family-friendly-workplace-awards>.
- Ministry for National Economy (2013), *Twenty-year record in women's employment*, available at: <https://2010-2014.kormany.hu/en/ministry-for-national-economy/news/twenty-year-record-in-women-s-employment>.
- Ministry for National Economy (2016), *Labour Market Outlook is Improving*, available at: <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/download/6/6d/d0000/Employment%20outlook%20is%20improving%20in%20Hungary.pdf>.
- Ministry of Social Security and Labour (2017), *Aktyvios darbo rinkos politikos priemonių ir socialinės paramos suderinimo integruojant nedirbančius asmenis į darbo rinką tobulinimo tyrimas* [Study on the improvement of the compatibility of active labour market policy measures and social support in integrating the unemployed into the labour market].
- Ministry of Social Security and Labour (2018), *Finansinių paskatų ir paslaugų jaunoms ar vaikus auginančioms šeimoms plėtros galimybių analizės tyrimas* [Feasibility study on the development of financial incentives and services to young families and families with children].
- Ministry of Social Security and Labour (2020a), *Overview of Financial Incentives for Employment*, available at: http://socmin.lrv.lt/uploads/socmin/documents/files/Trumprastis_METR_2020_final.pdf.
- Ministry of Social Security and Labour (2020b), *National Responsible Business award*, available at: <https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/veiklos-sritys/darbo-rinka-uzimtumas/imoniu-socialine-atsakomybe-isa/nacionalinio-atsakingo-verslo-apdovanojimas>.
- Novak, K. (2019), *Gyermekeink jövőjét támogatni a legjobb befektetés* [Supporting our children's future is the best investment], The Government of Hungary, available at: <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/hu/emberi-eroforrasok-miniszteriuma/csalad-es-ifjusagugyert-felelos-allamtitkarsag/hirek/gyermekneink-jovojet-tamogatni-a-legjobb-befektetes>.
- Novak, K. (2020), *2010-ben gazdasági, politikai és morális válságból kellett visszahozni Magyarországot* [In 2010 we had to get Hungary back from an economic, political and moral crisis], The Government of Hungary, available at: <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/hu/emberi-eroforrasok-miniszteriuma/csalad-es-ifjusagugyert-felelos-allamtitkarsag/hirek/2010-ben-gazdasagi-politikai-es-moralis-valsagbol-kellett-visszahozni-magyarorszagot>.
- Office de la naissance et de l'enfance n.d., *Plan Cigogne III*, available at: <https://www.one.be/professionnel/milieus-daccueil/plan-cigogne-3/>.

- Oireachtas (2016), *Paternity Leave and Benefit Act*, available at: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2016/act/11/section/23/enacted/en/html#sec23>.
- Oireachtas (2019), *Parental Leave (Amendment) Act 2019*, available at: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2019/act/11/enacted/en/html>.
- Persson, G. (2000), *Proposition 1999/2000: 129 Maxtaxa och allmän förskola m.m.* [Maximum rate and general preschool etc]. 25 May 2000, available at: <https://www.regeringen.se/49b72c/contentassets/659e1f7b2fa147bcb4ae69680f3438df/maxtaxa-och-allman-forskola>.
- Rijksdienst voor Arbeidsvoorziening (2020), *Tijdscrediet met motief*, available at: https://www.rva.be/nl/documentatie/infoblad/t160#h2_0.
- SACO (2020), *Föräldralön - så fungerar det*, available at: <https://www.saco.se/karriar/jag-ar-eller-ska-bli-foralder/foraldralon---sa-fungerar-det/>.
- Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania (1991), *Republic of Lithuania Law on Education* available online (25 June 1991), available at: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/df672e20b93311e5be9bf78e07ed6470?jfwid=4t02bsoca>.
- Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania (1994), *Republic of Lithuania Law on Benefits for Children* (3 November 1994), available at: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.419820?jfwid=fhhu5mhaw>.
- Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania (2000), *Republic of Lithuania Law on Sickness and Maternity Social Insurance* (21 December 2000), available at: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/275abc00b30e11e59010bea026bdb259?jfwid=bnp209lom>.
- Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania (2006), *Republic of Lithuania Law on Social Services* (19 January 2006), available at: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.277880>.
- Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania (2016), *Republic of Lithuania Labour Code* (14 September 2016), available at: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/da9eea30a61211e8aa33fe8f0fea665f?jfwid=5v2xfe6ag>.
- Skolverket (2020), *Förskola – Barn och grupper – Riksnivå*, available at: <https://www.skolverket.se/skolutveckling/statistik/sok-statistik-om-forskola-skola-och-vuxenutbildning?sok=SokC&verkform=F%C3%B6rskola&omrade=Barn%20och%20grupper&lasar=2019&run=1>.
- Sodra (2020), *The State Social Insurance Fund Board*, available at: <https://atvira.sodra.lt/lt-eur/>.
- SOU (1972), *Barnstugeutredningen*, available at: https://weburn.kb.se/metadata/562/SOU_260562.htm.
- SOU (2016), *Begränsningar i föräldrapenningen för föräldrar som kommer till Sverige med barn*, 2016:73, available at: https://www.regeringen.se/4aabda/contentassets/f40edaa4a3424459bfcc6b66c8916fe1/begransningar-i-foraldrapenningen-for-foraldrar-som-kommer-till-sverige-med-barn-sou-2016_73.pdf.

- SOU (2017), *Jämställt föräldraskap och goda uppväxtvillkor för barn – en ny modell för föräldraförsäkringen*, 2017:101, available at: <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/statens-offentliga-utredningar/2017/12/sou-2017101/>.
- Statistics Lithuania (2020), *Poverty indicators*, 22/07/2020, available at: <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/informaciniai-pranesimai?eventId=219155>.
- Statistics Lithuania (n.d.), Database of Indicators, available at: <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/statistiniu-rodikliu-analize#>.
- Statistics Sweden (SCB, 2012), *Arbetstider och arbetsmiljö 2010–2011*, available at: https://www.scb.se/statistik/publikationer/LE0101_2012A02_BR_00_LE126BR1201.pdf.
- Statistics Sweden (SCB, 2019), *23 000 barn går inte i förskola*, available at: <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/artiklar/2019/23-000-barn-gar-inte-i-forskola/>.
- Statistics Sweden (SCB, 2020), *Grundtabeller AKU, 15–74 år, årsmedeltal enligt internationell definition, 2008 and 2019*, available at: <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/statistik-efter-amne/arbetsmarknad/arbetskraftsundersokningar/arbetskraftsundersokningarna-aku/pong/tabell-och-diagram/icke-sasongrensade-data/grundtabeller-aku-1574-ar-ar/>.
- The State Audit Office of Hungary (2019), *A családátmozgatások rendszere Magyarországon* [The system of supporting families in Hungary], available at: https://www.asz.hu/storage/files/files/Publikaciok/Elemzesek_tanulmanyok/2018/aktivitasi_rata_20180416.pdf?download=true.
- Vandeuren, Ujo (2016), *Nota van de Vlaamse Regering over de krachtlijnen voor een nieuwe organisatie voor de opvang en vrije tijd van kinderen*, Edited by Vlaams Parlement.
- Vlaamse Overheid (2020), *Aanmoedingspremies*, available at: <https://www.vlaanderen.be/aanmoedigingspremies>.
- Vlaamse Regering (2019), *Vlaamse Regering 2019–2024: Regeerakkoord*.

EU publications

- Bernard, C. and Blackham, A. (2015), *Self-Employed: The implementation of Directive 2010/41 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity*, Brussels: European Commission.
- EIB (2015), *The European Social Fund: Financial Instruments*, European Commission, available at: https://www.fi-compass.eu/sites/default/files/publications/ESF_The_european_social_fund_EN.pdf.
- EIGE (2019), *Gender Equality Index 2019*, available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2019/LT>.
- Eurodyce (2020), *Hungary: Early Childhood Education and Care*, available at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/early-childhood-education-and-care-35_en.
- Eurofound (2013) *European Company Survey*, available at: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-company-surveys/european-company-survey-2013>.

- Eurofound (2017), *Estimating labour market slack in the European Union*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Eurofound (2017a), *Sixth European Working Conditions Survey – Overview report (2017 update)*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.
- Eurofound (2019), *Greece: Working time flexibility*, available at: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/emcc/erm/legislation/greece-working-time-flexibility>.
- Eurofound (2019a), *Working conditions and workers' health*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.
- Eurofound (2020a), *Living, working and COVID-19 dataset*.
- Eurofound (2020b), *Living, working and COVID-19*, COVID-19 series, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.
- Eurofound (2020c), *Gender equality at work*, European Working Conditions Survey 2015 series, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.
- European Added Value Unit (2013), *Application of the principle of equal pay for men and women for equal work of equal value. An assessment accompanying the European Parliament's legislative own-initiative report* (Rapporteur Edit Bauer, MEP), Brussels: European Parliament, available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/504469/IPOL-JOIN_ET%282013%29504469_EN.pdf.
- European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2019), *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition*, Luxembourg.
- European Commission (2008a), *Proposal for a Directive amending Council Directive 92/85/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding*, COM (2008) 637 final—2008/0193 (COD), Brussels: European Commission.
- European Commission (2008b), *Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Directive 92/85/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding: Impact Assessment Report SEC(2008) 2526/2*, Brussels: European Commission.
- European Commission (2010), *Europe 2020: A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf>.
- European Commission (2013), *Study of the ESF-Intervention, its set-up and impact in Germany: Summary*, available at: <https://op.europa.eu/de/publication-detail/-/publication/a53444be-a8a6-4942-a53e-432f03285e22>.
- European Commission (2014), *Impact Assessment on costs and benefits of measures to enhance the transparency of pay between men and women through transparency* (SWD(2014) 59 final), Brussels: European Commission.
- European Commission (2016), *ESF Ex-post Evaluation Synthesis 2007–2013: EU synthesis report – final version*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

- European Commission (2017a), *Impact Assessment accompanying the document Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU* (SWD(2017) 203 final), Brussels: European Commission.
- European Commission (2017b), *Factsheet on Undeclared Work – HUNGARY*, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/ajax/BlobServlet?docId=18165&langId=en>.
- European Commission (2017c), *Taking Stock of the 2013 Recommendation on 'Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage'*.
- European Commission (2018), *Programming Period 2014–2020, Monitoring and Evaluation of European Cohesion Policy. European Social Fund. Guidance Document*, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/sfc/en/system/files/ged/ESF%20monitoring%20and%20evaluation%20guidance.pdf>.
- European Commission (2020a), *Gender equality strategy 2020–2024. Communication*, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12114-Gender-equality-strategy-2020-2024>.
- European Commission (2020b), *Commission Work Programme 2020: A Union that strives for more*, Brussels.
- European Commission (2020c), *Greece: Policies and progress towards investing in children*, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1248&langId=en&intPagelId=3643>.
- European Commission (2020d), *European Social Fund. Projects. From empowerment to employment: job-related support for refugee women*, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=46&langId=en&projectId=2799>.
- European Commission (2020e), *Key achievements of Regional Policy 2014–2020*, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/key-achievements/#inclus.
- European Commission (n.d.-a), *Ελλάδα - Παροχές μητρότητας/πατρότητας*, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1112&langId=el&intPagelId=4561>.
- European Commission (n.d.-b.), *EU database of labour market practices*, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1080>.
- European Commission (n.d.-c), *Database of National Labour Market Practices of the Mutual Learning Programme*, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1080&langId=en>.
- European Platform for Investing in Children (n.d.-a), *Charter for a Family-Friendly Company*, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1252&langId=en&reviewId=17>.
- European Platform for Investing in Children (n.d.-b), *Ernst & Young*, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1252&langId=en&reviewId=47>.
- European Platform for Investing in Children (n.d.-c), *Accenture*, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1252&langId=en&reviewId=1>.
- European Social Fund (2013), *Helping women reach their business potential*, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=46&langId=en&projectId=326>.
- European Social Fund (2019), *Little Chickens: closing the employment gender gap*, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=46&langId=en&projectId=3200>.

- European Social Fund (2020), *Specialist employment help is inspiring women*, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=46&langId=en&projectId=3617>.
- European Social Fund (n.d.-a), *Mirjam – Facilitating entry into the labour market for newly arrived refugee women within the labour introduction assignment*, available at: <https://www.esf.se/sidhuvud/the-swedish-esf-council/articles-about-our-projects/mirjam--facilitating-entry-into-the-labour-market-for-newly-arrived-refugee-women-within-the-labour-introduction-assignment/>.
- European Social Fund (n.d.-b), *FI-Compass.eu*, available at: <https://www.fi-compass.eu/esif/esf>.
- Eurostat (2018a), *Fertility indicators*.
- Eurostat (2018b), *Live births by mother's age*.
- Eurostat (2019a), *Employment rates by sex and age*.
- Eurostat (2019b), *Gender pay gap*.
- Eurostat (2019c), *Employment and Unemployment (LFS)*. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/lfs/data/database>.
- Eurostat (2020), *Employment rates and Europe 2020 national targets*, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Employment_rates_and_Europe_2020_national_targets.
- Eurostat (2020a), *Working parents with young children in the EU*, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20200501-1>.
- Eurostat (2020b), *Migrant integration statistics – labour market indicators*, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migrant_integration_statistics_%E2%80%93_labour_market_indicators#Employment_rates.
- Eurostat (n.d.), *Statistics on small and medium sized enterprises*, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics_on_small_and_medium-sized_enterprises.
- Hofman, J., Barberi, M., Butkute, M., Caturianas, D., Sacher, M., Dimova, S., Stewart, K. (2018), *Ensuring high-quality job creation from EU funding programmes: How can the best practice of Horizon 2020 be better integrated into other programmes (ESF, Youth Guarantee, Globalisation Fund)?* Policy Department for Budgetary Affairs, European Parliament, Luxembourg, European Parliament, Luxembourg, available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/603832/IPOL_STU\(2018\)603832_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/603832/IPOL_STU(2018)603832_EN.pdf).
- Hofman, J., Nightingale, M., Bruckmayer, M., Sanjurjo, P. (2020), *Equal Pay for Equal Work: Binding pay-transparency measures*, Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies, European Parliament, Luxembourg, available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/642379/IPOL_STU\(2020\)642379_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/642379/IPOL_STU(2020)642379_EN.pdf).
- Kantar Public (2018), *Flash Eurobarometer 470: Work-life balance*, Brussels: European Commission.

- Nicaise, I. and Schepers, W. (2014), *ESPN Thematic Report on Social Investment*, Brussels: European Commission.
- Official Journal of the European Union (2013), *Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Social Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006*, OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, pp. 470–486.
- Official Journal of the European Union (2019a), *Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems*, available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2019.189.01.0004.01.ENG.
- Official Journal of the European Union (2019b), *Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU, PE/20/2019/REV/1*, OJ L 188, 12.7.2019, pp. 79–93, available at: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2019/1158/oj>.
- Ramalho, M.R.P., P. Foubert and S. Burri (2015), *The Implementation of Parental Leave Directive 2010/18 in 33 European Countries*, European Commission.
- The European Parliament, the Council and the EC. (2017), *The European Pillar of Social Rights*. 16 November 2017, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/social-summit-european-pillar-social-rights-booklet_en.pdf.
- Werner, H. (2015), *Gender equality in employment and occupation: Directive 2006/54/EC: European Implementation Assessment*, Directorate for Impact Assessment and European Added Value, European Parliamentary Research Service, European Parliament, Luxembourg, European Parliament, Luxembourg, available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/547546/EPRS_STU\(2015\)547546_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/547546/EPRS_STU(2015)547546_EN.pdf).

Reports and studies

- BMFSFJ (2015), *Checkheft – familienorientierte Personalpolitik fuer kleine und mittlere Unternehmen DIHK – Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag e. V.*, available at: https://www.erfolgsfaktor-familie.de/fileadmin/ef/data/mediathek/1505_EF_Checkheft-familienorientierte-Personalpolitik-KMU_barrierefrei.pdf.
- BMFSFJ (2017), *Gelebte Vielfalt: Familien mit Migrationshintergrund in Deutschland* [Lived Diversity: Families with Migration Background], available at: <https://www.bmfsfj.de/blob/116880/83c02ec19dbea15014d7868048f697f2/gelebte-vielfalt--familien-mit-migrationshintergrund-in-deutschland-data.pdf>.
- BMFSFJ (2020a), *(Existenzsichernde) Erwerbstätigkeit von Müttern. Konzepte, Entwicklungen und Perspektiven* [(Livelihood securing) Gainful Employment of Mothers. Concepts, developments and perspectives. Monitor genealogy], Monitor Familienforschung. Beiträge aus Forschung, Statistik und Familienpolitik, Issue 41, available at: <https://www.bmfsfj.de/blob/158744/aa2f911741e48e33f260ce0d12a5dad4/existenzsichernde-erwerbstaetigkeit-von-muettern-data.pdf>.

- BMFSFJ (2020b), *Was Sie zur Elternzeit wissen müssen: Kann ich nach der Elternzeit an meinen Arbeitsplatz zurückkehren?* [What you need to know about parental leave: Can I return to my old job after taking parental leave?], available at: <https://familienportal.de/familienportal/familienleistungen/elternzeit/faq>.
- Cabrita, Jorge and Wohlgemuth, Felix (2015), *Promoting uptake of parental and paternity leave among fathers in the European Union*, Eurofound, available at: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/customised-report/2015/working-conditions-industrial-relations/promoting-uptake-of-parental-and-paternity-leave-among-fathers-in-the-european-union>.
- Clauwaert, S. & Harger, S. (2000), *Analysis of the implementation of the parental leave directive in the EU Member States*, European Trade Union Institute (ETUI). Brussels, October 2000.
- Coleman, N. and T. Riley (2012), *Lone Parent Obligations: following lone parents' journeys from benefits to work*. London: Department for Work and Pensions.
- Diskrimineringsombudsmannen (2020), *5. Föräldraskap och arbete*, available at: <https://www.do.se/framja-och-atgarda/arbetsgivarens-ansvar/foraldrar-arbetslivet/>.
- Druciarek, M., Przybysz, I. (2018), *Działania na rzecz równości szans kobiet i mężczyzn w małych firmach* [Actions for equal opportunities for women and men in small businesses], Instytut Spraw Publicznych, available at: <https://www.isp.org.pl/pl/publikacje/dzialania-na-rzecz-rownosci-szans-kobiet-i-mezczyzn-w-srednich-firmach>.
- Egyenlítő Alapítvány (2018), *Nem csak a szavak szintjén* [Not only in words], available at: http://www.egyenlitoalapitvany.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/noi_programok_marcius_web.pdf.
- Frankowski, J., Kalinowski, H., Matejczuk, A., Ośka, M. (2019), *Ewaluacja mid-term dotycząca postępu rzeczowego RPO WK-P na lata 2014-2020 dla potrzeb przeglądu śródkresowego, w tym realizacji zapisów ram i rezerwy wykonania* [Mid-term evaluation of the material progress of ROP K-P for 2014-2020 for the purposes of the mid-term review, including the implementation of the provisions of the framework and the performance reserve], Urząd Marszałkowski Województwa Kujawsko-Pomorskiego, available at: <http://www.mojregion.eu/index.php/rpo/ewaluacja-baza-badan>.
- Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Anikó Gregor and Závecz Research Center (2018), *Nőügyek 2018 - Társadalmi problémák és megoldási stratégiák* [Women's Affairs 2018 – Social Problems and Solving Strategies], *Women issues 2018: Social problems and solutions*, available at: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/budapest/14461.pdf>.
- Fundacja Share the care (n.d.), *Rola pracodawców w wyrównywaniu prawa obojga rodziców do opieki nad dzieckiem*, [The role of employers in equalizing the right of both parents to childcare], available at: <https://sharethecare.pl/>.
- Gábos, A. and Makay, Zs. (2019), *Hungary*, available at: https://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/user_upload/k_leavenetwork/annual_reviews/2019/Hungary_2019_0824.pdf.
- Griffiths, R. (2011), *Helping more parents move into work: an evaluation of the extension of New Deal Plus for Lone Parents and In Work Credit: Final report*, London: Department for Work and Pensions.

- Grubb, D., S. Singh and Tergeist, P. (2009), *Activation Policies in Ireland*, In OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers: OECD.
- Hoorens, S., Clift, J., Staetsky, L., Janta, B., Diepeveen, S., Morgan Jones, M. & Grant, J. (2011), *Low fertility in Europe: Is there still reason to worry?* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.
- Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2019a), *A gyermekek napközbeni ellátása* [Daycare services], available at: <https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/stattukor/kisgyermnapkozbeni/kisgyermnapkozbeni16.pdf>.
- Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2019b), *Oktatási adatok 2018/2019*, [Educational data 2018/2019], available at: <https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/oktat/oktatas1819.pdf>.
- Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2020), 2.3.3. *Munkaerő-piaci esélyegyenlőség (2004–2019)* [Inequality in the labour market, 2004–2019], available at: https://www.ksh.hu/thm/2/indi2_3_3.html.
- ICLG (2020), *Hungary: Employment and Labour Laws and Regulations 2020*, available at: <https://iclg.com/practice-areas/employment-and-labour-laws-and-regulations/hungary>.
- Karacsony, S. and Millán, N. (2017), *Portraits of labor market exclusion. Country policy paper for Hungary*, The World Bank Group, Social Protection and Labor Global Practice Europe & Central Asia Region, available at: <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/345971522094492370/pdf/Final-Hungary-CPP-forPublication-website.pdf>.
- Kotowska, E., Magda, I. (2017), *Family policy and labour supply in Poland*, In: Lewandowski and Rutkowski (eds): *Population Ageing, Labour Market And Public Finance In Poland*, European Commission Representation in Poland, available at: <https://ibs.org.pl/en/publications/population-ageing-labour-market-and-public-finance-in-poland/>.
- Lider project, IPC, Openfield (2019), *Ewaluacja działań podejmowanych w zakresie opieki nad dziećmi do lat 3 i usług opiekuńczo wychowawczych dla dzieci do lat 6 w ramach RPO WKP 2014-2020* [Evaluation of activities undertaken in the field of care for children up to 3 years of age and care and educational services for children up to 6 years of age under the RPO WKP 2014-2020], Urząd Marszałkowski Województwa Kujawsko-Pomorskiego, available at: <http://www.mojregion.eu/index.php/rpo/ewaluacja-baza-badan>.
- Liu, S., Huang, J.L. & Wang, M. (2014), Effectiveness of job search interventions: A meta-analytic review, *Psychological bulletin*, 140(4), p. 1009.
- Magda, I., (2020), *Increasing female labour force participation in Poland*, IBS Policy Paper, available at: <https://ibs.org.pl/en/publications/increasing-female-labour-force-participation-in-poland/>.
- Magda, I., Kiełczewska, A., Brandt, N. (2018), *The Effects of Large Universal Child Benefits on Female Labour Supply*, IZA Discussion Paper 11652, July, available at: <https://www.iza.org/publications/dp/11652/the-effects-of-large-universal-child-benefits-on-female-labour-supply>.
- Maria Kopp Institute for Demography and Families (2019), *Csaladbarat Munkahely Pályázatok elemzése*, [Analysis of Family-Friendly Workplace Awards], available at: <https://www.koppmariaintezet.hu/docs/KINCS%20Csala%CC%81dbara%CC%81t%20Munkahelyek%20elemz%C3%A9s.pdf>.

- Medlingsinstitutet (2020), *Förhandlingar och avtal*, available at: <https://www.mi.se/forhandling-avtal-2/>.
- New Ireland.ie. (n.d.), *Women Returning to Work Survey*, available at: <https://www.newireland.ie/returnwithconfidence/>.
- Nightingale, M. & Janta, B. (Forthcoming), *The Childcare Gap in European Union Member States*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- OECD (2007), *Jobs for Immigrants (Vol. 1): Labour Market Integration in Australia, Denmark, Germany and Sweden*, available at: <https://www.oecd.org/sweden/jobsforimmigrantsvol1labourmarketintegrationinaustraliaanddenmarkgermanyandsweden.htm>.
- OECD (2016), *Faces of Joblessness in Lithuania. Anatomy of Employment Barriers*, available at: <https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/Faces-of-Joblessness-in-Lithuania.pdf>.
- OECD (2016a), *Family-friendly Workplace Practices*, available at: https://www.oecd.org/els/family/LMF_2-4-Family-friendly-workplace-practices.pdf.
- OECD (2016b), *Maternal employment rates*, available at: http://www.oecd.org/els/family/LMF_1_2_Maternal_Employment.pdf.
- OECD (2016c) *Who uses childcare? Background brief on inequalities in the use of formal early childhood education and care (ECEC) among very young children*, available at: https://www.oecd.org/els/family/Who_uses_childcare-Backgrounder_inequalities_formal_ECEC.pdf.
- OECD (2019a), *Children in households by employment status*, available at: https://www.oecd.org/social/family/LMF_1_1_Children_in_households_employment_status.pdf.
- OECD (2019b), *Informal childcare arrangements*, available at: <https://www.oecd.org/els/family/PF3-3-Informal-childcare-arrangements.pdf>.
- OECD (n.d.), *OECD Family Database*, available at: <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>.
- Peer, Van (2016), *Alleenstaande ouders op de arbeidsmarkt in Vlaanderen en de EU* [Single parents on the labor market in Flanders and the EU]. Brussel: Vlaamse Overheid.
- Pracuj.pl (2018), *Rodzice w pracy. Życie na pełen etat*. <http://media.pracuj.pl/31872-rodzice-w-pracy-zycie-na-pelen-etat>.
- Samenlevingsopbouw West-Vaanderen (2020), *Ouders in Actie*.
- Skills and Engagement Team (2016), *Developing Talent, Changing Lives: An Evaluation of Springboard+, 2011-2016*.
- SpringBoard+ (2020), *Springboard courses*, available at: <https://springboardcourses.ie/>.
- Stone, L. (2018), *Is Hungary experiencing a policy-induced baby boom?* Institute for Family Studies, available at: <https://ifstudies.org/blog/is-hungary-experiencing-a-policy-induced-baby-boom>.
- Szabó-Morvai, Á. (2015), *Essays on Maternal Employment Policies*, 10.14754/CEU.2015.05, available at: <https://www.ceu.edu/sites/default/files/attachment/event/14186/szaboagnes.pdf>.

- Szűcs, B. (2011), *Gyes, gyed: visszamennék, de nincs hova* [GYES and GYED – I'd like to return work, but where?], RSM, available at: <https://www.rsm.hu/blog/2011/03/gyes-gyed-visszamennek-de-nincs-hova>.
- UNECE (2020), *Gender Equality in Ageing Societies*, UNECE Policy Brief on Ageing No. 23. March 2020, available at: http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/pau/age/Policy_briefs/ECE_WG-1_34.pdf.
- UNICEF Hungary (2020), *Kettős elvárás várja a kisgyermekes anyákat a munka világában* [Double expectations of women in the labour market], available at: <https://unicef.hu/igy-segitunk/hireink/kettos-elvaras-varja-a-kisgyermekes-anyakat-a-munka-vilagaban>.
- Vighová, V. (2015), *Parental leave policy in Slovakia and Hungary: Shifting in the same direction?* CEU, available at: https://eige.europa.eu/docs/77_HU.pdf.

Academic articles

- Aidukaite, J. and Senkuvienė, K. (2019), *The family support system in Lithuania: Experts' views and citizens' evaluation*, *Problemy Polityki Społecznej*, 47(4), pp. 29–46.
- Alon, T., M., Doepke, M., Olmstead-Rumsey, J. & Tertilt, M. (2020), *The impact of COVID-19 on gender equality* (No. w26947), National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Angelov, N., Johansson, P. and Lindahl, E. (2020), *Sick of family responsibilities?*, *Empirical Economics*, 58 (2), pp. 777–814.
- Avram, S., Brewer, M. and Salvatori, A. (2016), *Can't Work or Won't Work: Quasi-Experimental Evidence on Work Search Requirements for Single Parents*, IZA Discussion Paper No. 10106, available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2819388>.
- Azmat, Ghazala, Hensvik, Lena and Rosenqvist, Olof (2020), *Workplace presenteeism, job substitutability and gender inequality*, Uppsala: IFAU, available at: <https://www.ifau.se/globalassets/pdf/se/2020/wp-2020-9-workplace-presenteeism-job-substitutability-and-gender-inequality.pdf>.
- Bauernschuster, S. and Schlotter, M. (2015), *Public child care and mothers' labor supply – Evidence from two quasi-experiments*, *Journal of Public Economics* 123 (2015): pp. 1-16.
- Begall, K., Van Breeschoten, L., Van der Lippe, T. & Poortman, A.-R. (2020), *Supplemental family leave provision and employee performance: Disentangling availability and use*, *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, DOI:10.1080/09585192.2020.1737176.
- Bergqvist, C. (ed. 1999), *Equal Democracies: Gender and Politics in the Nordic Countries*. Oslo: Oslo University Press.
- Blaskó, Zs. and Fazekas, K. (2016), *The Hungarian Labour Market 2016*, Institute of Economics, Center for Economic and Regional Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, available at: http://www.econ.core.hu/file/download/HLM2016/TheHungarianLabourMarket_2016_onefile.pdf.
- Blaskó, Zs. and, András, G. (2013), *Redistribution effects of the childcare system in Hungary - Who is cared for?* available at: http://www.budapestinstitute.eu/uploads/V4_child_care_enrolment_HU1.pdf.

- Blum, S., Koslowski, A., Macht, A. & Moss, P. (2018), *14th International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research*, International Network on Leave Policies and Research.
- Blundell, R., Costa Dias, M., Joyce, R. & Xu, X. (2020), *COVID-19 and Inequalities*, *Fiscal Studies*, 41 (2), pp. 291-319.
- Boeckmann, I., Misra, J., Budig, M.J. (2015), *Cultural and institutional factors shaping mothers' employment and working hours in postindustrial countries*, *Social Forces* 93-4: 1301-1333.
- Bosoni, M.L. & Mazzucchelli, S. (2018), *The invisible gap between public policy and company practices in supporting fatherhood: the Italian case*, *Community, Work & Family* 21:2, pp. 193–208, DOI:10.1080/13668803.2018.1428176.
- Boye, K. (2015), *Care more, earn less? The association between care leave for sick children and wage among Swedish parents*, IFAU (Institute for evaluation of labor market and education policy) Working Paper 2015:18, available at: <https://www.ifau.se/globalassets/pdf/se/2015/wp2015-18-care-more-earn-less.pdf>.
- Braziene, R. and Vysniauskiene, S. (2019), *Evaluation of Paid Leave Policies in Lithuania*, *Public Policy and Administration*, 18.3, pp. 9–19.
- Browne, J., Immervoll, H., Fernandez, R., Neumann, D., Pacifico, D. and Thevenot, C. (2018), *Faces of joblessness in Ireland: A people-centred perspective on employment barriers and policies*, Bonn, Germany: IZA Institute of Labor Economics.
- Carrasco, R. and Ejrnæs, M. (2012) *Labor market conditions and self-employment: a Denmark-Spain comparison*, *IZA Journal of Labor Policy*, 1(13): 1–16.
- Chung, H. and Van de Horst, M. (2017), *Women's employment patterns after childbirth and the perceived access to and use of flexi time and teleworking*, *Human Relations* 71(1): 47–72.
- Ciccia, R. and Verloo, M. (2012), *Parental leave regulations and the persistence of the male breadwinner model: Using fuzzy-set ideal type analysis to assess gender equality in an enlarged Europe*, *Journal of European Social Policy* 22 (5): 507–528, DOI:10.1177/0958928712456576.
- Cizauskaite, A. and Gruzevskis, B. (2018), *The Role of Preschool Education Services on Parents Employment in Lithuania*, *Socialinė Teorija, Empirija, Politika Ir Praktika*, 17, pp. 74–91, available at: <https://doi.org/10.15388/STEPP.2018.17.11932>.
- Collins, C., Landivar, L.C., Ruppanner, L. and Scarborough, W.J. (2020), *COVID-19 and the gender gap in work hours*, *Gender, Work & Organisation* 2020; pp. 1-12, DOI:10.1111/gwao.12506.
- Criado Perez, C. (2019), *Invisible women. Exposing data bias in a world designed for men*. London.
- Cygan-Rehm, K. (2016), *Parental leave benefit and differential fertility responses: Evidence from a German reform*, *Journal of Population Economics* 29(1), S. 73–103.
- De Linde, L.M. and Stanley, T.D. (2020), *The Wages of Mothers' Labor: A Meta-Regression Analysis*, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12693>.
- Desmond, D. and Meaney, S. (2016), *A qualitative study investigating the barriers to returning to work for breastfeeding mothers in Ireland*, *International Breastfeeding Journal* 11 (1):16, DOI:10.1186/s13006-016-0075-8.

- Diageo (2019), *Diageo starts global roll-out of ambitious maternity and paternity leave policy*, available at: <https://www.diageo.com/en/news-and-media/features/diageo-starts-global-roll-out-of-ambitious-maternity-and-paternity-leave-policy/>.
- Dias, F.A., Chance, J., and Buchanan, A. (2020), *The motherhood penalty and the fatherhood premium in employment during COVID-19: evidence from the United States*, Research in Social Stratification and Mobility, Volume 69, October 2020, 100542.
- Diener, K., Gotz, S., Schreyer, F., Stephan, G., Lenhart, J., Nisic N. and Stohr, J. (2015), *Rückkehr ins Berufsleben nach familienbedingter Unterbrechung: Befunde der Evaluation der zweiten Förderperiode des ESF-Programms "Perspektive Wiedereinstieg" des Bundesministeriums für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend* [Return to working life after a family-related break: Findings of the evaluation of the second funding period of the ESF program "Perspective return to work" of the Federal Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women and Youth], IAB-Forschungsbericht, No. 7/2015, Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung (IAB), Nürnberg.
- Dinan, S. (2019), *A typology of activation incentives*, Soc Policy Admin.; 53: 1–15, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12456>
- Dustmann, C. and Schönberg, U. (2012), *Expansions in maternity leave coverage and children's long-term outcomes*, American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, 4 (3): 190–224.
- Duvander and Viklund (2014), *Kvinnors och mäns föräldradighet*, in Lönsamt arbete – familjeansvarets fördelning och konsekvenser, SOU 2014:28, available at: <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/statens-offentliga-utredningar/2014/09/sou-201428/>.
- Duvander, A.-Z. and Eleonora, M. (2016), *Föräldradig nu eller senare? Invandrade kvinnors användning av föräldrapenning*, Socialvetenskaplig tidskrift, 3–4, pp. 259–282, available at: <https://journals.lub.lu.se/svt/article/view/16797/15188>.
- Evertsson, M. and Duvander, A.-Z. (2009), *Parental leave – Possibility or Trap? Does Family Leave Length Affect Swedish Women's Labor Market Opportunities?*, available at: http://www.stressforskning.su.se/polopoly_fs/1.18722.1320939636!/WP_2009_2.pdf.
- Fazekas, K. and Telegdy, A. (2007), *Labour Market Trends in Hungary*, available at: <http://econ.core.hu/doc/mt/2007/en/trends.pdf>.
- Feldman, R., Sussman, A.L. and Zigler, E. (2004), *Parental leave and work adaptation at the transition to parenthood: Individual, marital, and social correlates*, Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology 25(4), pp. 459–479.
- Ferragina, E. (2019), *Does family policy influence women's employment? Reviewing the evidence in the field*, Political Studies Review 17(1): 65–80.
- Ferrant, G., Pesando, L.M. and Nowacka, K. (2014), *Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes*, OECD Development Centre, December 2014.
- Fichtl, A., Hener, T. and Rainer, H. (2017), *Familienpolitik in Deutschland: Kausale Evaluationsstudien und ausgewählte* [Family policy in Germany: causal evaluation studies and selected results], Ergebnisse, Perspektiven der Wirtschaftspolitik 18(2), pp. 117–131. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/pwp-2017-0010>.
- Finn, D. and Gloster, R. (2010), *Lone parent obligations: A review of recent evidence on the work-related requirements within the benefit systems of different countries*, Department for Work and Pensions.

- Fodor, É., Glass, C. (2018), *Negotiating for entitlement: Accessing parental leave in Hungarian firms*, *Gender Work Organ* 25: 687–702.
- Fodor, E. and Kispeter, E. (2014), *Making the 'reserve army' invisible: Lengthy parental leave and women's economic marginalisation in Hungary*, *European Journal of Women's Studies* 21(4), pp. 382–398.
- Fok, Y.K. and McVicar, D. (2013), *Did the 2007 welfare reforms for low income parents in Australia increase welfare exits?*, *IZA Journal of Labor Policy* 2: 1–21.
- Gatrell, C. (2011), *Managing the maternal body: a comprehensive review and transdisciplinary analysis*, *International Journal of Management Reviews* 13, pp. 97–112.
- Geis-Thöne, W. (2018), *Kinderbetreuung - Betreuungslücke sinkt leicht auf 273.000 Plätze* [Childcare – the lack of available childcare places reduces slightly to 273,000 places], *IW-Kurzbericht* 68/2018, available at: https://www.iwkoeln.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Studien/Kurzberichte/PDF/2018/IW-Kurzbericht_2018-68_Betreuungs%C3%BCcke_2018.pdf.
- Ghysels, J. and Van Lancker, W. (2010), *De terugkeer van het mattheuseffect? De casus van de kinderopvang in Vlaanderen*, *Tijdschrift voor Sociologie* 2:151-163.
- Giannikis, S. and Mihail, D. (2011), *Flexible work arrangements in Greece: a study of employee perceptions*, *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*.
- Gong, X. and Breunig, R. (2014), *Channels of labour supply responses of lone parents to changed work incentives*. *Oxford Economic Papers*, 66 (4), pp. 916-939.
- Gyulavári, T. and Kártyás, G. (2015), *Effects of the new Hungarian labour code: the most flexible labour market in the world?*, *The Lawyer Quarterly* 5-4, pp. 233-245, available at: http://real.mtak.hu/81493/1/166_711_1_PB_u.pdf.
- Haas, L. and Hwang, C.P. (2019), *Policy is not enough – the influence of the gendered workplace on fathers' use of parental leave in Sweden*, *Community, Work & Family* 22:1, 58–76, DOI:10.1080/13668803.2018.1495616.
- Hammermann, A., Schidt, J. and Stettes, O. (2019), *Unternehmensmonitor Familienfreundlichkeit 2019*, [Family-friendly Employer Monitor 2019], Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, available at: <https://www.bmfsfj.de/blob/138446/b9fd33ee4455a4f67595790080da7196/unternehmensmonit-or-familienfreundlichkeit-2019-data.pdf>.
- Hegewisch, A. and Gornick, J.C. (2011), *The impact of work-family policies on women's employment: a review of research from OECD countries*, *Community, Work and Family* 14(2), pp. 119-138.
- Herbeaux, V. and Ndaye, S. (2019), *Les familles monoparentales: un défi de société à relever*, *Centre Jean Gal*, p. 36.
- Ichino, A., Olsson, M., Petrongolo, B. and Skogman Thoursie, P. (2019), *Economic incentives, home production and gender identity norms*, *IZA DP No. 12391*, available at: <https://www.iza.org/publications/dp/12391/economic-incentives-home-production-and-gender-identity-norms>.
- Johansson, E.A. (2010), *The effect of own and spousal parental leave on earnings*. *Working paper No. 2010: 4*, IFAU - The Institute for Evaluation of Labour Market and Evaluation.

- Kalenkoski, C.M. and Wulff Pablonia, S. (2020), *Initial Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Employment and Hours of Self-Employed Coupled and Single Workers by Gender and Parental Status*, IZA Discussion Paper No. 13443.
- Kelle, N., Simonson, J. and Gordo, L.R. (2017), *Is part-time employment after childbirth a stepping-stone into full-time work? A cohort study for East and West Germany*, *Feminist Economics*, 23(4): 201–224.
- Kil, T., Wood, J., De Wachter, D., Vergauwen, J., Van den Berg, L. and Neels, K. (2015) *Arbeidsparticipatie en gebruik van ouderschapsverlof bij moeders in Vlaanderen: Een longitudinale analyse*, In *Arbeid en Gezin: Een paar Apart*, edited by L. Vanderleyden and M. Callens, pp. 21–43. Brussels: Studiedienst Vlaamse Regering.
- Kil, T., Wood, J. and Neels, K. (2018), *Parental Leave Uptake among Migrant and Native Mothers: Can Precarious Employment Trajectories Account for the Difference?*, *Ethnicities* 18 (1): 106–141.
- Kil, T., Neels, K., Wood, J. and de Valk, H.A.G. (2018), *Employment After Parenthood: Women of Migrant Origin and Natives Compared*, *European Journal of Population* 34 (3): 413–40, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-017-9431-7>.
- Kluge, J. and Schmitz, S. (2018), *Back to Work: Parental Benefits and Mothers' Labor Market Outcomes in the Medium Run*, *ILR Review* 71(1), pp. 143–173, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019793917710933>.
- Knoef, M. and Van Ours, J.C. (2016), *How to stimulate single mothers on welfare to find a job: Evidence from a policy experiment*, *Journal of Population Economics* 29 (4): 1025–1061.
- Korintus, M. (2008), *Early Childhood Education and Care in Hungary: Challenges and Recent Developments*, *ICEP* 2, pp. 43–52.
- Kurtessis, J.N., Eisenberger, R., Ford, M.T., Buffardi, L.C., Stewart, K.A. and Adis, C.S. (2017), *Perceived organisational support: A meta-analytic evaluation of organisational support theory*, *Journal of Management* 43(6), 1854–1884, DOI:10.1177/0149206315575554.
- Looze, J. (2014), *Young Women's Job Mobility: The Influence of Motherhood Status and Education*, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 76 (4): 693–709.
- Lovász, A. (2016), *Childcare expansion and mothers' employment in post-socialist countries*, *IZA World of Labor* 319.
- Lovász, A. and Szabó-Morvai, Á. (2019), *Childcare availability and maternal labor supply in a setting of high potential impact*, *Empir Econ* 56, pp. 2127–2165.
- Lucia-Casademunt, A.M., García-Cabrera, A.M., Padilla-Angulo, L. and Cuéllar-Molina, D. (2018), *Returning to Work after Childbirth in Europe: Well-Being, Work-Life Balance, and the Interplay of Supervisor Support*, *Frontiers in Psychology* 9(68), p. 68, Advance online publication.
- Makay, Z. (2015), *Family support system – childraising – employment*, In *Demographic Portrait of Hungary 2015*, edited by Monostori, J., Őri, P., Spéder, Z., pp. 57–74. HDRI, Budapest.
- Makola, Z.S., Rudolph, E.C. and Joubert, Y.T., (2020), *First-time mothers' perceptions of workplace social support: An exploratory qualitative study*, *Journal of Psychology in Africa* 30:2, pp. 151–156, DOI:10.1080/14330237.2020.1746563.
- Maron, L. (2010), *La Parentalité et l'emploi: Quel Défi Pour Les Politiques Publiques Belges Au Regard de La Situation En Europe?*, Université Libre de Bruxelles.

- Marx, I., Nolan, B. and Olivera, J. (2015), *The Welfare State and Antipoverty Policy in Rich Countries*, In: Atkinson, A.B. and Bourguignon, F. (eds) *Handbook of Income Distribution*. Elsevier Matsaganis, M. (2012), *Social policy in hard times: The case of Greece*, *Critical Social Policy* 32(3).
- Marynissen, L., Mussino, E., Wood, J. and Duvander, A.-Z. (2019) *Fathers' Parental Leave Uptake in Belgium and Sweden: Self-Evident or Subject to Employment Characteristics?*, *Social Sciences* 8 (11): 312, available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci8110312>.
- McGinnity, F., Murray, A. and McNally, S. (2013), *Growing up in Ireland: Mothers' return to work and childcare choices for infants in Ireland*, Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs.
- Mennino, S.F., Rubin, B.A. and Brayfield, A. (2005), *Home-to-job and job-to-home spillover: The impact of company policies and workplace culture*, *The Sociological Quarterly* 46(1), pp. 107–135.
- Millar, J. (2019), *Self-Responsibility and Activation for Lone Mothers in the United Kingdom*, *American Behavioral Scientist* 63(1): 85–99, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764218816804>.
- Millar, M. and Crosse, R. (2016), *Lone Parents and Activation, What Works and Why: A Review of the International Evidence in the Irish Context*, Galway: The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland.
- Millar, M. and Crosse, R. (2018), *Lone parent activation in Ireland: Putting the cart before the horses?*, *Social Policy & Administration* 52 (1):111–129, DOI:10.1111/spol.12296.
- Millar, M., Coen, L., Bradley, C. and Rau, H. (2012), *Doing the Job as a Parent': Parenting Alone, Work, and Family Policy in Ireland*, *Journal of Family Issues* 33 (1):29–51, DOI:10.1177/0192513x11420957.
- Millar, M., Gray, J., Rooney, C. and Crosse, R. (2018), *The (in)adequacy of in-work benefits in Irish lone parent labour market activation policy*, *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice* 26 (3):379-400, DOI:10.1332/175982718X15299561388618.
- Mogstad, M. and Pronzato, C. (2012), *Are lone mothers responsive to policy changes? Evidence from a workfare reform in a generous welfare state*, *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics* 114 (4): 1129-1159.
- Möhring, K. (2018), *Is there a motherhood penalty in retirement income in Europe? The role of lifecourse and institutional characteristics*, *Ageing & Society*, 38(12): 2560–2589.
- Morrissey, T.W. (2017), *Child care and parent labor force participation: a review of the research literature*, *Review of Economics of the Household*, 15(1), pp. 1–24.
- Mussino, E., Duvander, A.-Z. and Ma, L. (2016), *Does time count? Immigrant fathers' use of parental leave in Sweden*, Working Paper 2016: 05. Stockholm University, available at: https://www.su.se/polopoly_fs/1.299117.1474874344!/menu/standard/file/WP_2016_05.pdf.
- Narvi, J. and Salmi, M. (2019), *Quite an encumbrance? Work-related obstacles to Finnish fathers' take-up of parental leave*, *Community, Work & Family* 22:1, pp. 23–42. DOI:10.1080/13668803.2018.1487828.
- Newton, B., Tamkin, P., Gloster, R., Cox, A., Everett, C. and Cotton, J. (2018), *Rapid evidence assessment: parents' decisions about returning to work and child caring responsibilities*, Government Equalities Office.
- Nikqi, A. (2019), *SFI för föräldralediga – En studie om föräldralediga invandrares integrationsprocess*, available at: <https://muep.mau.se/handle/2043/29952>.

- Nyberg, A. (2013), *Hur gick det sen? Femtio år av vårdnadsbidrag, föräldraförsäkring och jämställdhetspolitik*, In *Arbete & Jämställdhet. Förändringar under femtio år*, edited by Eva Blomberg & Kirsti Niskanen. Stockholm: SNS förlag.
- Ortiz, B., Rasschaert, D. and Van Hove, H. (2018), *Mama blijft aan boord: Zwangerschapsdiscriminatie op het werk*, Over. Werk Tijdschrift van het Steunpunt Wekr 1:68-75.
- Papadopoulos, T. (2002), *Family Policy in Greece*, University of York, available at: https://people.bath.ac.uk/hsstp/TP-Publications/TP_Family_Policy_Greece_2002.pdf.
- Pas, B., Peters, P., Doorewaard, H., Eisinga, R. and Lagro-Janssen, T. (2011), Feminisation of the medical profession: a strategic HRM dilemma? The effects of family-friendly HR practices on female doctors' contracted working hours, *Human Resource Management Journal* 21: 285-302, DOI:10.1111/j.1748-8583.2010.00161.x
- Qian, Y. and Fuller, S. (2020), *COVID-19 and the Gender Employment Gap among Parents of Young Children*, *Canadian Public Policy*, (aop), e2020077, DOI:10.3138/cpp.2020-077.
- Raute, A. (2016), *Can financial incentives reduce the baby gap? Evidence from a reform in maternity leave benefits*, *Working Paper*, available at: <https://annaraute.wordpress.com/research>.
- Redmond, P., McGuinness, S. and Keane, C. (2020), *The Impact of One Parent Family Payment Reforms on the Labour Market Outcomes of Lone Parents*, IZA Discussion Paper 13109.
- Regan, M., Keane, C. and Walsh, J.R. (2018), *Lone-parent incomes and work incentives*, Dublin: Economic & Social Research Institute.
- Reimer, T. (2019), *Why fathers don't take more parental leave in Germany: comparing mechanisms in different work organisations*, *Community, Work & Family*, DOI:10.1080/13668803.2019.1608157.
- Röder, A., Ward, M. and Frese, C.-A. (2018), *From labour migrant to stay-at-home mother? Childcare and return to work among migrant mothers from the EU accession countries in Ireland*, *Work, Employment and Society* 32 (5):850-867, DOI:10.1177/0950017017713953.
- Rossin-Slater, M. (2017), *Maternity and family leave policy*, Working Paper No. w23069. National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Ruggeri, K. and Bird, C.E. (2014), *Single parents and employment in Europe: Short Statistical Report No. 3.*, European Union.
- Russell, G. and Hwang, C.P. (2004), *The Impact of Workplace Practices on Father Involvement*. In M.E. Lamb (Ed.), *The role of the father in child development*, pp. 476–503. John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Savage, M., Colgan, B., Callan, T. and Walsh, J.R., (2015), *Making work pay more: Recent initiatives*, Dublin: The Economic and Social Research Institute.
- Schönberg, U. and Ludsteck, J. (2014), *Expansions in maternity leave coverage and mothers' labor market outcomes after childbirth*, *Journal of Labor Economics* 32(3), S., pp. 469–505.
- Stanfors, M. and Welandar Tärneberg, A. (2020), *Det obetalda hem- och omsorgsarbets fördelning mellan kvinnor och män – en fråga om jämställdhet med relevans för ekonomisk jämlikhet*, available at: https://jamlikhetskommisionen.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Rapport-Stanfors_webb_v2.pdf.

- Steiber, N. and Haas, B. (2012), *Advances in explaining women's employment patterns*, Socio-Economic Review 10(2):343–367, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwr039>.
- Stochkendahl, M.J., Myburgh, C., Young, A.E. and Hartvigsen, J. (2015), *Manager experiences with the return to work process in a large, publically funded, hospital setting: Walking a fine line*, Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation 25, pp. 752–762.
- Struffolino, E. and Mortelmans, D. (2018), *Lone Mothers in Belgium: Labor Force Attachment and Risk Factors*, In *Lone Parenthood in the Life Course*, edited by Laura Bernardi and Dimitri Mortelmans, 257–82. Life Course Research and Social Policies. Cham: Springer International Publishing, available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63295-7_12.
- Struffolino, E., Bernardi, L. and Larenza, O. (2020), *Lone parenthood and employment trajectories: A longitudinal mixed-method study*, Comparative Population Studies.
- Stumbitz, B., Lewis, S. and Rouse, J. (2017), *Maternity management in SMEs: a transdisciplinary review and research agenda*, International Journal of Management Reviews 20 no. 2: 500–522.
- Szilas, I. (2015), *Sikeres-e a magyar családpolitika?* [How successful is the family policy?], Pénzügyi Szemle, available at: <https://www.penzugyiszemle.hu/vitaforum/sikeres-e-a-magyar-csaladpolitika-3>.
- Taylor, A. (2017), *Active Labour Market Policies towards Out-of-Work Partnered Parents in France and the UK during austerity*, Observatoire de la société britannique 19: 247–265.
- Thevenon, O. (2011), *Family policies in OECD countries: A comparative analysis*, Population and development review, 37.1, pp. 57–87.
- Uegaki, K., Stomp-van den Berg, S.G.M., De Bruijne, M.C., Van Poppel, M.N.M., Heymans, M.W., Van Mechelen, W. and van Tulder, M.W., (2011), *Cost-utility analysis of a one-time supervisor telephone contact at 6-weeks post-partum to prevent extended sick leave following maternity leave in The Netherlands: results of an economic evaluation alongside a randomized controlled trial*, BMC public health 11, no.1: 57.
- Valarino, I. and Gauthier, J.-A. (2015), *Paternity leave implementation in Switzerland: a challenge to gendered representations and practices of fatherhood?*, Community, Work & Family 19:1, 1–20, DOI:10.1080/13668803.2015.1023263.
- Vansteenkiste, S., Scholiers, B. and Van Lancker, W., (2020), *Een profielschets van de baanloze gezinnen in Vlaanderen*, Over.Werk, Tijdschrift van het Steunpunt Wekr (1):56–65.
- Vitzthum, C. (2017), *How can maternity-return coaching complement structural organisational benefits?*, International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring, p. 15.
- Wagener, M., Defever, C. and Mortelmans, D. (2014), *Les Familles Monoparentales En Belgique: Une Approche Par Les Trajectoires Professionnelles*, Pauvreté en Belgique, p. 93.
- Wiese, B.S. and Heidemeier, H. (2012), *Successful return to work after maternity leave: Self-regulatory and contextual influences*, Research in Human Development 9, no. 4: 317–336.
- Wood, J. and Neels, K. (2019), *Does Mothers' Parental Leave Uptake Stimulate Continued Employment and Family Formation? Evidence for Belgium*, Social Sciences 8 (10): 292.
- Wood, J. and Marynissen, L. (2019), *Qui Reste à La Maison ? Organisation Du Travail Rémunéré et Des Congés Après Une Naissance Au Sein Des Couples Bi-Actifs En Belgique*, Population 74 (3): 323, available at: <https://doi.org/10.3917/popu.1903.0323>.

- Zimanyi, E. (2020), *Family borders: Hungary's Campaign for the Family Protection Action Plan*, *Feminist Media Studies*, 20-2, pp. 305-309.

Other sources

- ARAG. (n.d.), *Tagesmutter statt Kita – Die alternative Kinderbetreuung* [Childminder instead of daycare - the alternative childcare], available at: <https://www.arag.de/auf-ins-leben/rechtsanspruch-kita/tagesmutter-statt-kita/>.
- BBJ (Budapest Business Journal, 2019), *Private child daycare prices show significant differences*, available at: https://bbj.hu/economy/private-child-daycare-prices-show-significant-differences_172348.
- Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej (n.d.-a), *Childminder voucher in Sosnowiec*, available at: www.bip.um.sosnowiec.pl/Article/get/id,533646.html.
- Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej (n.d.-b.), *Childminder voucher in Torun*, available at: www.mopr.torun.pl/index.php/projekty-efs/1107-wsparcie-zatrudnienia-osob-pelniacych-funkcje-opiekuncze-2.
- Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej (n.d.-c.), *Nursery voucher in Warsaw*, available at: <https://zlobki.waw.pl/bon-zlobkowy/>.
- Bouliia, E. (2019), *Greek private firm gives 14 weeks of paid leave to all new parents*, [Μπούλια, Ε. 2019. "Ελληνική ιδιωτική εταιρεία δίνει 14 εβδομάδες αμειβόμενης άδειας σε όλους τους νέους γονείς."], available at: <https://www.infokids.gr/elliniki-idiotiki-etaireia-dinei-14-evd/>.
- Bucsky, P. (2019), *Százezer ember nem tud dolgozni, mert nincs elég bölcsőde* [One hundred thousand people can't work because there is no daycare], G7, available at: <https://g7.hu/adat/20190307/szazezer-ember-nem-tud-dolgozni-mert-nincs-eleg-bolcsode/>.
- Country Economy (2020), *Greece unemployment rate*, available at: <https://countryeconomy.com/unemployment/greece>.
- Δελτίον Εργατικής Νομοθεσίας (n.d.), *Δικαιώματα εγκύων και τεκουσών γυναικών*, available at: <http://www.den.gr/Post/4/788/el/Dikaiomata-egkuon-kai-tekouson-gunaikon/>.
- Department of the Taoiseach (1999), *Constitution of Ireland*.
- Departement Werk & Sociale Economie (2019), *Arbeidsmarktkrapte in Vlaanderen*, Brussels: Vlaamse Overheid.
- Dercsenyi, D. (2019), *Az Orbán-kormány demográfiai csodafegyvere a főállású anyaság lesz?* [Full-time motherhood is the demographic magic tool of the Orban government], HVG, available at: https://hvg.hu/itthon/20190130_Orban_demografiai_csodafegyvere_a_foallasu_anyasag_lesz.
- Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (2013), *Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, Rechtsanspruch auf Kita-Platz: Was Eltern Wissen Müssen* [Legal entitlement to a day care center: What parents need to know], available at: <https://www.dgb.de/themen/++co++2ebc5a5a-d367-11e2-8cee-00188b4dc422>.
- Εφημερίδα της Κυβερνήσεως (2007), *ΝΟΜΟΣ ΥΠ' ΑΡΙΘ. 3528*, available at: https://www.kodiko.gr/nomologia/download_fek?f=fek/2007/a/fek_a_26_2007.pdf&t=4a34b31d0f7cd2fc8c6050ffb17b3baf.

- Εφημερίδα της Κυβερνήσεως (2010), *NOMOS YΠ' APIΘ. 3896*, available at: https://www.kodiko.gr/nomologia/download_fek?f=fek/2010/a/fek_a_207_2010.pdf&t=c967e9425585e1ae341f5b5d706dd283.
- Εφημερίδα της Κυβερνήσεως (2011), *NOMOS YΠ' APIΘ. 3996*, available at: https://www.kodiko.gr/nomologia/download_fek?f=fek/2011/a/fek_a_170_2011.pdf&t=c66ea02e62a3d21477e0a1fba03986c9.
- Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu (n.d.), *Company good practices*, available at: <https://odpowiedzialnybiznes.pl/dobre-praktyki/?tm%5B%5D=2097&ppp=5>.
- Gdański Urząd Pracy (2020), *Mama na etacie powraca!*, available at: https://www.gup.gdansk.pl/formy_aktywizacji/aktualnosci_komunikaty_ogloszenia/idn:1039.html.
- Gdanskie Centrum Swiadczen (2019), *Nursery voucher in Gdańsk*, available at: www.gcs.gda.pl/gdanski-bon-zlobkowcy.
- Gezinsbond (2019), *100 bedrijven maken zich bekend als gezinsvriendelijke organisatie*, available at: <https://nieuws.gezinsbond.be/100-bedrijven-maken-zich-bekend-als-gezinsvriendelijke-organisatie>.
- Gezinsbond (2020), *Gezinsvriendelijk bedrijf aan het woord*, available at: <https://www.gezinsbond.be/Gezinspolitiek/Paginas/Charter-Promofilmpjes.aspx>.
- Gezinsbond (n.d.), *De Gezinsbond - Pressroom*, available at: <https://nieuws.gezinsbond.be/>.
- Γενική Συνομοσπονδία Εργατών Ελλάδας (2008), *Εθνική Γενική Συλλογική Σύμβαση Εργασίας*, available at: https://www.gssee.gr/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/egsse_2008-2009.pdf.
- Η Καθημερινή (2018), *Όμιλος ΟΠΑΠ: Ένα σύγχρονο εργασιακό περιβάλλον*, available at: <https://www.kathimerini.gr/956335/article/epikairothta/best-workplaces/omilos-opap-ena-sygxrono-ergasiako-perivallon>.
- HVG (2011), *Munkába visszatérő kismamák: 'a jogszabályok túl bonyolultak'* [Young mothers returning to work: 'laws are too complicated'], available at: https://hvg.hu/kkv/20110214_munkaba_visszateres_gyes_gyed.
- Iason Skouzos & Associates [Ιάσων Σκουζός & Συνεργάτες] (2015), *Η Έννομη Προστασία της Μητρότητας στην Εργασία*, available at: <https://www.taxlaw.gr/kladoi-dikaiou/ergatiko-dikaio/i-ennomi-prostasia-tis-mitrotitas-stin-ergasia/>.
- Iason Skouzos & Associates [Ιάσων Σκουζός & Συνεργάτες] (2020), *Special leave for maternity protection* [Ιάσων Σκουζός & Συνεργάτες 2020. "Ειδικές άδειες για την προστασία της μητρότητας"], available at: <https://www.taxlaw.gr/kladoi-dikaiou/ergatiko-dikaio/eidikes-adeias-gia-tin-prostasia-tis-mitrotitas/>.
- Ibec (2019), *Parental Leave Bill a cause for concern for business*, available at: <https://www.ibec.ie/connect-and-learn/media/2019/04/23/parental-leave-bill-a-cause-for-concern-for-business>.
- IKEA (2019), *Family leave for fathers at IKEA*, available at: <http://biuroprasowe.ikea.pl/80442-urlop-ojcowski-w-ikea-nowa-forma-wsparcia-dla-obojsza-rodzicow>.
- Indecon (2017), *Indecon Independent Review of the Amendments to the One-parent Family Payment since January 2012*, Dublin: Indecon.

- Κέντρο Πληροφόρησης Εργαζομένων και Ανέργων (n.d.), Άδεια για τη φροντίδα υιοθετημένων παιδιών, available at: <https://www.kepea.gr/aarticle.php?id=87>.
- Κέντρο Πληροφόρησης Εργαζομένων και Ανέργων (n.d.), Γονική Άδεια, <https://www.kepea.gr/aarticle.php?id=88>.
- Kiraly, B. (2017), *Kismamák, akik inkább feketén dolgoznak a gyed extra helyett* [Young mothers who work "under the table" instead of GYED extra], HVG, available at: https://hvg.hu/gazdasag/20170525_Kismamak_aki_inkabb_feketen_dolgoznak_a_gyed_extra_helyett.
- Kovacs-Angel, M. (2018), *Rákapcsoltak az apák: megduplázódott a GYED-en lévő férfiak száma* [Dads got it: The number of fathers on paternal leave has doubled], 24.hu, available at: <https://24.hu/belfold/2018/06/17/rakapcsoltak-az-apak-megduplazodott-a-gyed-en-levo-ferfiak-szama/>.
- Kovacs, Z. (2020), *The next phase of Hungary's extensive family support policy is here*, About Hungary, available at: <http://abouthungary.hu/blog/the-next-phase-of-hungarys-extensive-family-support-policy-is-here/>.
- Lrytas.lt (2018), *Vyriausybė svarsto įrengti vaikų kambarius valstybinėse įstaigose* [The Government considers establishing childcare rooms in public institutions], available at: <https://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvosdiena/aktualijos/2018/02/22/news/vyriausybe-svarsto-irengti-vaiku-kambarius-valstybinese-institucijose-4844278/>.
- Mamo Pracuj (n.d.), *Parents friendly employers*, available at <https://mamopracuj.pl/baza-pracodawcow/>.
- New Ireland Assurance (2020), *Mum Talks Return to Work with Confidence workshops*, available at: <https://www.newireland.ie/news/mum-talks-return-to-work-with-confidence-workshops/>.
- ONS (2020), *Parenting in lockdown: Coronavirus and the effects on work-life balance*, available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/parentinginlockdowncoronavirusandtheeffectsonworklifebalance/2020-07-22>.
- Pénzcentrum (2018), *Hiába luxus a magánbölcsőde: lassan már oda is lehetetlen bejutni* [It's hard to get in to luxury private daycares], available at: <https://www.penzcentrum.hu/otthon/hiaba-luxus-a-maganbolcsode-lassan-mar-oda-is-lehetetlen-bejutni.1069694.html>.
- Perspektive Wiedereinstieg (n.d.), *Aktionsprogramm Perspektive Wiedereinstieg im Überblick*, [Action programme Perspective Re-Entry: An Overview], available at: https://www.perspektive-wiedereinstieg.de/Navigation/DE/Das_Aktionsprogramm/Aktionsprogramm/aktionsprogramm_node.html.
- Statistics Sweden SCB (2020), *Grundtabeller AKU, 15–74 år, årsmedeltal enligt internationell definition, 2008 and 2019*, available at: <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/statistik-efter-amne/arbetsmarknad/arbetskraftsundersokningar/arbetskraftsundersokningarna-aku/pong/tabell-och-diagram/icke-sasongrensade-data/grundtabeller-aku-1574-ar-ar>.
- Technology Ireland Software, and Skillnet (n.d.), *About Women ReBOOT*, available at: <https://www.softwareskillnet.ie/about-women-reboot/>.
- Telekom (2015), *Telekom official website, Company News Section*, available at: https://www.telekom.hu/rolunk/sajtoszoba/sajtokozlemenyek/2015/majus_18.

- Trading Economics (2020), *Greece Employment Rate*, available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/greece/employment-rate>.
- Τράπεζα Πληροφοριών Νομοθεσίας (2003), *Προεδρικό Διάταγμα 41/2003*, available at: <https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-ergasia-koinonike-asphalise/pd-41-2003.html>.
- Τράπεζα Πληροφοριών Νομοθεσίας (2004), *Μέτρα για την αντιμετώπιση της ανεργίας και άλλες διατάξεις*, available at: <https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-ergasia-koinonike-asphalise/n-3227-2004.html>.
- Unionen (2019a), *Unionens jämställdhetspris 2019*, available at: <https://unionenopinion.se/kampanjer/unionens-jamstalldhetspris-2019/>.
- Unionen (2019b), *Konsult och småbarn – här funkar det!*, available at: <https://unionenopinion.se/nyheter/konsult-och-smabarn-har-funkar-det/>.
- Wysokie Obcasy Praca (2020), *Wspieranie kobiet na rynku pracy to także zachęcanie mężczyzn do korzystania z urlopów rodzicielskich* [Advantages for parents returning from parental leave at Philip Morris], available at: <https://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/7,158669,26015837,wspieranie-kobiet-na-rynku-pracy-to-takze-zachecanie-mezczyzn.html>.

ANNEX – METHODS USED

Table 2 maps each of the methods used in this study against the research questions. Further methodological details are presented below.

Table 2: Research questions mapped by methods used

Research question (RQ)	Methods			
	Quantitative data analysis	Targeted literature reviews	Interviews	Case studies
RQ1. Employment situation of parents after childbirth	•	•		
RQ2. Factors facilitating and hindering parents' return to work after leave		•	•	•
RQ3. Company approaches to help parents return to work after leave		•	•	•
RQ4. ALMP programmes to help parents return to the labour market		•		•
RQ5. EU actions that help increase parents' labour-market participation		•	•	

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Quantitative data analysis

The ideal approach to analysing parents' employment status after childbirth is to use longitudinal panel data to explore within-individual change. The advantage of this approach is that analysing data on repeated measures from the same individual minimises the risk of bias from unobserved characteristics (i.e. characteristics that are not measured in the data). Since there is no longitudinal EU-wide dataset suitable for this purpose, we conducted analysis at the population (rather than individual) level and complemented this with a literature review of national panel studies (see Section 1.3).

The analysis was conducted using aggregated data from the EU Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2009–2019, which allowed us to examine yearly changes in employment status at the population level across Member States. Aggregated data from the EU-LFS was accessed via Eurostat's online dissemination database⁴⁵⁹.

The sample was restricted to individuals aged 20–40 to focus on people of reproductive age, generating a more useful comparison (i.e. parents of young children compared to childless adults of a similar age). Omitting younger adults – many of whom will be in full-time education – and older adults nearing retirement age also minimises bias from differences across Member States in participation in higher education and retirement age.

Table 3 outlines the variables used in the quantitative analysis. The key variable is the difference between the employment rate of women or men with a child under the age of 6⁴⁶⁰ compared to those

⁴⁵⁹ See Eurostat (2019c): <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/lfs/data/database>.

⁴⁶⁰ The decision to focus on parents with a child under the age of 6 is guided by data availability. This measure allows us to identify parents of young children, although it does not allow us to identify parents with children in the youngest age groups.

without children⁴⁶¹ in the same age group (the **maternal employment gap** and the **paternal employment gap**). Although it does not capture the effect of parenthood directly, this indicator provides the best available proxy for new parenthood. In addition to differences in the employment rate, we explored differences in the type of work undertaken by parents of young children compared to those without children. We assessed whether parents of young children are more or less likely than childless adults to be self-employed, to work part-time, to be employed on a temporary contract and to work from home.

This analysis was undertaken separately for men and women because previous evidence indicates that the relationship between parenthood on employment is gendered, with effects differing in magnitude and even direction for men and women (see Section 1.1). To explore whether differences between parents of young children and childless adults are more pronounced for certain groups, sub-group analysis was conducted according to educational level and the number of children in the household. For the employment rate, we also explored differences across household types, comparing single adults, single parents, couples with children and couples without children. Although this variable does not identify parents of young children specifically, it does allow us to take into account whether the individual lives with a partner, which gives an indication of whether single parents face particular challenges returning to work.

Table 3: Variables in the quantitative analysis

EU-LFS variable	Derived variable from the EU-LFS	Sub-group analysis
Employment rate ⁴⁶²	Difference between employment rate for childless men/women compared to men/women with a child under the age of 6	Educational level (ISCED 0–2, 3–4 and 5–8); number of children in the household
	N/A	Household type (single adult, couple, couple with children, single adult with children)
Self-employment rate	Difference between self-employment rate for childless men/women compared to men/women with a child under the age of 6	
Part-time employment rate	Difference between part-time employment rate for childless men/women compared to men/women with a child under the age of 6	
Temporary employment	Difference between the share of temporary contracts for childless men/women compared to men/women with a child under the age of 6	
Working from home	Difference between the prevalence of home working for childless men/women compared to men/women with a child under the age of 6	

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

⁴⁶¹ Aggregate statistics available on the Eurostat website do not allow a comparison of parents with a child aged under 6 and all other adults in the same age group (only to childless adults). However, this comparison is revealing of the challenges faced by parents returning to the labour market, and how this varies according to gender and Member State, and how it has changed over time.

⁴⁶² In the EU-LFS, employed persons are persons aged 15 years and over who, during a reference week, performed work – even for just 1 hour a week – for pay, profit or family gain or who were not at work but had a job or business from which they were temporarily absent because of factors including illness, holiday, industrial dispute or education and training, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/lfs/methodology/main-concepts>.

The quantitative analysis focused on two dimensions: 1) differences across Member States; and 2) change across time (for specific Member States and for the EU as a whole). Conducting this analysis allowed us to build a clearer picture of the employment situation of parents of young children in EU Member States, thus providing an answer to Research Question 1 (RQ1).

It was not possible to answer certain aspects of RQ1 – namely, consequences for longer term career development and material well-being – using aggregated EU-LFS data available from the Eurostat database. These aspects of RQ1 are addressed by the targeted review of national panel studies (see below).

Literature reviews

Five targeted literature reviews were conducted to answer each of the research questions (RQs):

- RQ1: Targeted review of selected national studies using panel data that showed change in employment situation (employment status, earnings, etc.) during the transition to parenthood and/or in the years following this transition;
- RQ2: A "review of reviews" looking at factors affecting decisions to return to work after leave (including obstacles and effective incentives);
- RQ3: Targeted review of (1) literature on and (2) databases of practices that facilitate parents' return to work;
- RQ4: Targeted review of literature on active labour-market policies used internationally to support unemployed or inactive parents in returning to work; and
- RQ5: Targeted review of EU impact assessments and evaluations of measures planned and/or adopted at the EU level.

RQ1: Has the employment situation of parents after childbirth evolved in the EU since 2008, and if so, how (including socio-demographic characteristics and consequences for longer term career development and material well-being)?

To complement the quantitative analysis, we conducted a targeted review of **studies of nationally representative panel data that included within-individual change in employment situation across the transition to parenthood**. Studies on within-individual change in employment status after childbirth provide important evidence after controlling for individual differences (e.g. socio-demographic characteristics) that could differentiate the rate of returning to work after childbirth. Focusing on within-individual change also minimises the risk of bias from observed factors, since certain individual-level characteristics will be consistent over time.

A structured search was conducted using the criteria outlined below. Further results were identified via snowballing:

- **Databases:** IZA Discussion Paper Series, Google Scholar⁴⁶³;
- **Search terms:** (employment OR labour market) AND (childbirth OR parenthood OR motherhood) AND (EU) AND (panel OR longitudinal);
- **Inclusion criteria:**
 - Published between 2010–2020 (and drawing on data from 2010 or later);
 - Published in English;

⁴⁶³ Articles included in the screening from this source were restricted to those on the first two pages of the search (10 results per page = 20 results).

- Focused on high-income countries (EU Member States, OECD countries);
- Examined change in employment situation (employment status, earnings etc.) during the transition to parenthood and/or in the years following this transition;
- Used longitudinal panel data to explore within-individual change; and
- **Exclusion criteria:**
 - Examined the effect of employment situation on decisions about fertility and parenthood.

A total of **five sources** were included in the review: four were identified via the structured search and one via snowballing.

Table 4: Sources reviewed for Research Question 1

	Reference	Identified via
1	Chung, H., Van de Horst, M. (2017), <i>Women's employment patterns after childbirth and the perceived access to and use of flexi time and teleworking</i> , Human Relations 71(1): 47–72.	Structured search
2	Struffolino, E., Bernardi, L., Larenza, O. (2020), <i>Lone parenthood and employment trajectories: A longitudinal mixed-method study</i> , Comparative Population Studies.	Structured search
3	Kelle, N., Simonson, J. & Gordo, L.R. (2017), <i>Is part-time employment after childbirth a stepping-stone into full-time work? A cohort study for East and West Germany</i> , Feminist Economics, 23(4): 201–224.	Structured search
4	Looze, J. (2014), <i>Young Women's Job Mobility: The Influence of Motherhood Status and Education</i> . Journal of Marriage and Family, 76 (4): 693–709.	Snowballing
5	Kil, T., Wood, K., Neels, J. and De Valk, H.A.G. (2018), <i>Employment After Parenthood: Women of Migrant Origin and Natives Compared</i> , European Journal of Population 34: 413–440, available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-017-9431-7 .	Structured search

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

RQ2: What are the main factors facilitating and hindering the return of parents to work after (maternity, paternity and parental) leave? How do they differ across Member States?

There are four main components of this research question:

- Identifying factors (incentives and obstacles) that affect decisions to return to work after leave;
- Identifying obstacles that prevent parents from returning to work (or make it more difficult) – what sort of barriers these are (material, financial) and their origin (company-level, government-level, other);
- Identifying incentives that help parents return to work – what sort of incentives these are (material, financial), their origin (company-level, government-level, other) and the evidence that they work; and
- Exploring how these factors vary across EU Member States.

In order to respond to these questions, we carried out a **"review of reviews" of existing literature on the subject**.

An advantage of this approach is that it enabled us to consider a broad range of literature in terms of the factors considered, the geographical scope and the time span. Drawing on reviews carried out in the past also allowed us to build a clearer picture of the overall weight of evidence. One disadvantage of this approach is that we relied on other researchers' summaries and interpretations of the literature,

resulting in a loss of detail regarding specific aspects of study design. Relying on published reviews could also have missed the most recent research on factors affecting parents' return to work (published from 2019 onwards).

A structured search was conducted using the criteria outlined below. Further results were identified via snowballing.

- **Databases**⁴⁶⁴: Campbell Collaboration Library of Systematic Reviews, Science Direct, SSRN, Academic Search Complete, Google Scholar;
- **Search terms:**
 - Search term 1: (return to work OR employment OR job) AND (maternity OR paternity OR parental OR family leave OR child*) AND (review OR meta* OR rapid evidence assessment OR REA);
 - Search term 2: (employment OR "labour market") AND (childbirth OR parenthood OR motherhood) AND (EU) AND (panel OR longitudinal);
- **Inclusion criteria:**
 - Published between 2010 and 2020 (review should include at least one study published since 2010/drawing on data published since 2010 but may include articles published prior to 2010 and/or drawing on earlier data);
 - Published in English;
 - Reviewed articles on factors (including barriers and enablers) affecting parents' decisions to return to work after leave;
 - Articles focused on any sectors, occupations or professions;
 - Focused on high-income countries (EU Member States, OECD countries); and
 - Reviewed articles (systematic review, Rapid Evidence Assessment, literature review);
- **Exclusion criteria:**
 - Articles on health, education and development implications for children;
 - Articles that focus on return-to-work not related to childbirth or adoption (e.g. sick leave, carers leave, etc.);
 - Theoretical descriptions of incentives that have not been implemented;
 - Articles focused on factors set in countries other than identified high income countries; and
 - Editorials, commentaries, letters, protocols, guidelines.

A total of **seven sources** were included in the review: six identified via the structured search and one via snowballing.

⁴⁶⁴ We restricted the articles to be included in the screening to those that were found on the first five pages of the search (10 results per page = 50 results).

Table 5: Sources reviewed for Research Question 2

	Reference	Identified via
1	Rossin-Slater, M. (2017), <i>Maternity and family leave policy</i> , Working Paper No. w23069. National Bureau of Economic Research.	Structured search
2	Ferragina, E. (2019), <i>Does family policy influence women's employment? Reviewing the evidence in the field</i> , Political Studies Review 17(1): 65–80.	Structured search
3	Newton, B., Tamkin, P., Gloster, R., Cox, A., Everett, C. and Cotton, J. (2018), <i>Rapid evidence assessment: parents' decisions about returning to work and child caring responsibilities</i> . Government Equalities Office.	Structured search
4	Hegewisch, A. and Gornick, J.C. (2011), <i>The impact of work-family policies on women's employment: a review of research from OECD countries</i> . Community, Work and Family, 14(2), pp. 119–138.	Structured search
5	Morrissey, T. W. (2017), <i>Child care and parent labor force participation: a review of the research literature</i> , Review of Economics of the Household, 15(1), pp. 1–24.	Structured search
6	Finn, D. & Gloster, R. (2010), <i>Loneparent obligations: A review of recent evidence on the work-related requirements within the benefits systems of different countries</i> . Department for Work and Pensions.	Structured search
7	Steiber, N. and Haas, B. (2012), <i>Advances in explaining women's employment patterns</i> . <i>Socio-Economic Review</i> 10(2): 343–367, available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwr039 .	Snowballing

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

RQ3: What are promising practices in Member States in terms of company approaches to ensure a smooth return of parents from leave?

There is a sizable amount of information available on the topic of family-friendly work environments, of which ensuring a smooth return to work following parental leave constitutes a sub-section⁴⁶⁵. Employers are increasingly starting to recognise that supporting employees in their struggle to juggle family and work responsibility is important; however, identifying evidence that provides enough information on what constitutes promising practice might be challenging. We focused on *promising practices* rather than best practices, because this allows for including innovative approaches that may not have been fully evaluated.

Additionally, while finding existing practices in large companies is relatively easy, the differences in resources and team size between large companies and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) limits how useful and applicable these practices can be for different businesses. Given that SMEs are the backbone of the EU economy (representing 99% of all businesses in the EU and two thirds of total employment)⁴⁶⁶ we focused on practices found in SMEs – or which can offer a transferable experience to SMEs – to ensure that our research adds practical value.

⁴⁶⁵ Examples of where this information is available include the Eurofound European Company Survey (Eurofound 2013) and the OECD Family-friendly Workplace Practices database (OECD 2016a). These sources contain information on the family-friendly work environment, with parental leave as a sub-section.

⁴⁶⁶ Eurostat (n.d.).

The preliminary search showed that existing employer programmes to support parents' return to work can be grouped into the following broad categories:

1. Breast-feeding support;
2. Keep-in-touch schemes;
3. Buddy/mentoring schemes;
4. Child care support; and
5. Flexible working hours.

These groups were used as search terms to guide a **targeted review of (1) literature and (2) relevant databases**.

Step 1: Targeted review of literature

We conducted a systematic search of academic databases and journals, with further sources identified via snowballing.

- **Databases/Journals:** The International Journal of Human Resource Management preliminary searches suggest this is the most relevant journal.
- **Search terms:**

Search 1: (breastfeed* support) AND (small OR medium* firm OR enterprise OR employer);

Search 2: (keep in touch) AND (small OR medium* firm OR enterprise OR employer) AND (parental* leave, maternity leave, paternity leave);

Search 3: (buddy* OR mentor*) AND (small OR medium* firm OR enterprise OR employer) AND (parental* leave, maternity leave, paternity leave);

Search 4: (childcare support) AND (small OR medium* firm OR enterprise OR employer);

Search 5: (flexible working) AND (small OR medium* firm OR enterprise OR employer) AND (parental* leave, maternity leave, paternity leave); and

Search 6: (return to work) AND (parent* OR patern* OR matern*) AND (company).
- **Inclusion criteria:**
 - Published 2010–2020;
 - Published in English;
 - Sources relating to employment practices supporting parents in their return to work Currently operating in EU Member States or other high-income countries (or in operation between 2010 and 2020).
- **Exclusion criteria:**
 - Employment practices operating prior to 2010.

A total of **15 sources** were included in the review: 12 identified via the structured search and 3 via snowballing.

Table 6: Sources reviewed for Research Question 3

	Reference	Identified via
1	Begall, K., Van Breeschoten, L., Van der Lippe, T. & Poortman, Anne-Rigt (2020), <i>Supplemental family leave provision and employee performance: Disentangling availability and use</i> . The International Journal of Human Resource Management, DOI:10.1080/09585192.2020.1737176.	Structured search
2	Pas, B., Peters, P., Doorewaard, H., Eisinga, R. & Lagro-Janssen, T. (2011) <i>Feminisation of the medical profession: a strategic HRM dilemma? The effects of family-friendly HR practices on female doctors' contracted working hours</i> . Human Resource Management Journal 21: 285–302, DOI:10.1111/j.1748-8583.2010.00161.x	Structured search
3	Wiese, Bettina, S. and Heidemeier, H. (2012), <i>Successful return to work after maternity leave: Self-regulatory and contextual influences</i> . Research in Human Development 9, no. 4: 317–336.	Structured search
4	Uegaki, K., Stomp-van den Berg, S.G.M., De Bruijne, M.C., Van Poppel, M.N.M., Heymans, M.W., Van Mechelen, W. and Van Tulder, M.W. (2011), <i>Cost-utility analysis of a one-time supervisor telephone contact at 6-weeks post-partum to prevent extended sick leave following maternity leave in The Netherlands: results of an economic evaluation alongside a randomised controlled trial</i> . BMC public health 11, no.1:57.	Structured search
5	Vitzthum, C. (2017), <i>How can maternity-return coaching complement structural organisational benefits?</i> International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring 15.	Structured search
6	Stumbitz, B., Lewis, S. and Rouse, J. (2017), <i>Maternity management in SMEs: a transdisciplinary review and research agenda</i> . International Journal of Management Reviews 20 no. 2: 500–522.	Structured search
7	Bosoni, M.L. & Mazzucchelli, S. (2018), <i>The invisible gap between public policy and company practices in supporting fatherhood: the Italian case</i> . Community, Work & Family 21:2, pp. 193–208, DOI:10.1080/13668803.2018.1428176.	Structured search
8	Makola, Z.S., Rudolph, E.C. & Joubert, Y.T. (2020), <i>First-time mothers' perceptions of workplace social support: An exploratory qualitative study</i> . Journal of Psychology in Africa 30:2, pp. 151–156, DOI:10.1080/14330237.2020.1746563.	Structured search
9	Thordis, R. (2019), <i>Why fathers don't take more parental leave in Germany: comparing mechanisms in different work organisations</i> . Community, Work & Family, DOI:10.1080/13668803.2019.1608157.	Structured search
10	Haas, L. & Hwang, C.P. (2019), <i>Policy is not enough – the influence of the gendered workplace on fathers' use of parental leave in Sweden</i> . Community, Work & Family 22:1, pp. 58–76, DOI:10.1080/13668803.2018.1495616.	Structured search
11	Valarino, I. & Jacques-Antoine Gauthier (2015), <i>Paternity leave implementation in Switzerland: a challenge to gendered representations and practices of fatherhood?</i> Community, Work & Family 19:1, pp. 1–20, DOI:10.1080/13668803.2015.1023263.	Structured search
12	Narvi, J. & Salmi, M. (2019), <i>Quite an encumbrance? Work-related obstacles to Finnish fathers' take-up of parental leave</i> . Community, Work & Family 22:1, pp. 23–42, DOI:10.1080/13668803.2018.1487828.	Structured search
13	Lucia-Casademunt, A.M., García-Cabrera, A.M., Padilla- Angulo, L. & Cuéllar-Molina, D. (2018), <i>Returning to Work after Childbirth in Europe: Well-Being, Work-Life Balance, and the Interplay of Supervisor Support</i> . Frontiers in Psychology 9(68), 68. Advance online publication.	Snowballing

	Reference	Identified via
14	Stochkendahl, M.J., Myburgh, C., Young, A.E. & Hartvigsen, J., (2015), <i>Manager experiences with the return to work process in a large, publically funded, hospital setting: Walking a fine line</i> . <i>Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation</i> 25, pp. 752–762.	Snowballing
15	Gatrell, C. (2011), <i>Managing the maternal body: a comprehensive review and transdisciplinary analysis</i> . <i>International Journal of Management Reviews</i> 13, pp. 97–112.	Snowballing

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Step 2: Targeted review of practices contained in relevant databases

A search was conducted of the European Platform for Investing in Children (EPIC) database, an evidence-based online platform that provides information about policies and practices aimed at supporting European children and families. EPIC covers topics including – but not limited to – supporting work-life balance, formal and informal childcare and parental leave provisions. The platform currently contains information on more than 200 practices⁴⁶⁷. They are grouped into three different categories, based on the level of available evidence: evidence-based practices; social innovation practices (newly developed practices that are promising, but have not been evaluated yet or where evaluation results are pending); and practices submitted by European stakeholders that have been implemented, but not yet evaluated⁴⁶⁸.

We recognise that, by the nature of the way in which practices are added to EPIC (through submission by companies), they could be more likely to indicate policies followed by larger companies rather than SMEs. Where possible, we prioritised examples from SMEs when searching the EPIC database and other relevant databases.

To complement this, we conducted similar searches on other databases that were likely to contain company-level practices:

- Eurofound European Company Survey (2013);
- OECD Family-friendly Workplace Practices database; and
- EU database of labour market practices.

A total of **eight company practices** were included in the review. Further practices were identified as part of the eight country case studies (see below).

RQ4: What are promising practices of public interventions in terms of active labour market policy (ALMP) programmes to help inactive or unemployed parents with small children back into employment?

A range of ALMPs might support parents to enter (or re-enter) employment, including:

- Financial transfers to support families (such as income support, birth benefits, family allowances) and the conditionality attached to them;
- Tax measures (that might help or hinder parents' return to work);
- Measures to improve employability (training, upskilling or reskilling);
- Parental leave and flexible leave policies enabling childcare;

⁴⁶⁷ As of October 2019.

⁴⁶⁸ RAND Europe reviews all practices for the quality of information submitted.

- Flexible arrangements for place of work;
- Working time, including flexible hours, part-time, and innovative conceptions of "taking time away";
- Support for ECEC (including free or subsidised provision);
- Policies promoting equalising childcare responsibilities; and
- Policies promoting gender equality in the workplace.

We conducted **a targeted review of literature relating to ALMPs as they pertain to parents**. There is a large, well-established literature on ALMPs, the focus of which has often been activation of unemployed individuals, particularly the long-term unemployed. Although they might experience spells of unemployment, parents (particularly mothers) are more likely to fall into the economically inactive category, and some ALMPs might be targeted at parents in work as well as those who are not currently in employment. In order to identify the most relevant literature, the scope of the search was restricted to ALMPs targeted at parents. In order to identify effective practices, we prioritised evaluations of ALMPs targeted at parents or studies estimating the effect of such policies.

A structured search was conducted using the criteria outlined below. Further results were identified via snowballing.

- **Databases:** Database of National Labour Market Practices of the Mutual Learning Programme, European Observatory on Working Life, Science Direct, SSRN, Academic Search Complete, Google Scholar⁴⁶⁹.
- **Search terms:** ("active labour market policies" OR "activation")⁴⁷⁰ AND ("parent*" OR "mother*" OR "father*").
- **Inclusion criteria:**
 - Published 2010–2020;
 - Published in English;
 - Articles focused on EU Member States or other high-income countries; and
 - Sources related to ALMPs targeted at parents.
- **Exclusion criteria:**
 - Sources relating to ALMPs not targeted at parents and/or that do not consider the effect on parents.

A total of **12 sources** were included in the review: four identified via the structured search and eight via snowballing.

⁴⁶⁹ We restricted the articles to be included in the screening from this source to those on the first five search pages (10 results per page = 50 results).

⁴⁷⁰ One challenge was that relevant policies/measures might not be labelled as ALMPs, but this limitation should be addressed by also identifying studies via snowballing.

Table 7: Sources reviewed for Research Question 4

	Reference	Identified via
1	Marx, I., Nolan, B. & Olivera, J. (2015), <i>The Welfare State and Antipoverty Policy in Rich Countries</i> . In: Atkinson, A.B. & F. Bourguignon (eds) <i>Handbook of Income Distribution</i> . Elsevier.	Structured search
2	Avram, S., Brewer, M. and Salvatori, A. (2016), <i>Can't Work or Won't Work: Quasi-Experimental Evidence on Work Search Requirements for Single Parents</i> . IZA Discussion Paper No. 10106, available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2819388 .	Structured search
3	Redmond, P., McGuinness, S. and Keane, C. (2020), <i>The Impact of One Parent Family Payment Reforms on the Labour Market Outcomes of Lone Parents</i> . IZA Discussion Paper No. 13109, available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3568313 .	Structured search
4	Taylor, A. (2017), <i>Active Labour Market Policies towards Out-of-Work Partnered Parents in France and the UK during austerity</i> . <i>Observatoire de la société britannique</i> 19: 247–265.	Structured search
5	European Commission (2017c), <i>Taking Stock of the 2013 Recommendation on 'Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage'</i> .	Snowballing
6	Indecon (2017), <i>Indecon Independent Review of the Amendments to the One-parent Family Payment since January 2012</i> , Dublin: Indecon.	Snowballing
7	Knoef, M. and Van Ours, J.C. (2016), <i>How to stimulate single mothers on welfare to find a job: Evidence from a policy experiment</i> . <i>Journal of Population Economics</i> 29 (4): 1025–1061.	Snowballing
8	Mogstad, M. and Pronzato, C. (2012), <i>Are lone mothers responsive to policy changes? Evidence from a workfare reform in a generous welfare state</i> . <i>The Scandinavian Journal of Economics</i> 114 (4): 1129–1159.	Snowballing
9	Fok, Y.K. and McVicar, D. (2013), <i>Did the 2007 welfare reforms for low income parents in Australia increase welfare exits?</i> <i>IZA Journal of Labor Policy</i> 2: 1–21.	Snowballing
10	Millar, J. (2019), <i>Self-Responsibility and Activation for Lone Mothers in the United Kingdom</i> . <i>American Behavioral Scientist</i> 63(1): 85–99, available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764218816804 .	Snowballing
11	Griffiths, R. (2011), <i>Helping more parents move into work: an evaluation of the extension of New Deal Plus for Lone Parents and In Work Credit: Final report</i> . London: Department for Work and Pensions.	Snowballing
12	Coleman, N. and Riley, T. (2012), <i>Lone Parent Obligations: following lone parents' journeys from benefits to work</i> . London: Department for Work and Pensions.	Snowballing

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

RQ5: To what extent can existing EU legislation, policies and funding instruments help to increase the labour-market participation of parents after leave?

In order to respond to this question, we conducted a **targeted review of impact assessments or evaluations of key EU policy measures**:

- Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers;
- Directive 2006/54/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation;
- Directive 2010/41/EU on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity;

- Council Directive 2010/18/EU implementing the revised Framework Agreement on parental leave;
- Council Directive 92/85/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding; and
- Proposal for a Directive amending Council Directive 92/85/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding.

A total of **eight sources** were included in the review.

Table 8: Sources reviewed for Research Question 5

	Reference
1	European Commission, (2008a), <i>Proposal for a Directive amending Council Directive 92/85/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding</i> , COM (2008) 637 final—2008/ 0193 (COD). Brussels: European Commission.
2	European Commission, (2008b), <i>Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Directive 92/85/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding: Impact Assessment Report SEC(2008) 2526/2</i> . Brussels: European Commission.
3	European Commission (2017), <i>Impact Assessment accompanying the document Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU (SWD(2017) 203 final)</i> . Brussels: European Commission.
4	European Added Value Unit (2013), <i>Application of the principle of equal pay for men and women for equal work of equal value</i> . An assessment accompanying the European Parliament's legislative own-initiative report (Rapporteur Edit Bauer, MEP). Brussels: European Parliament. Retrieved 27 July 2020, from http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/studies.html .
5	Bernard, C. & Blackham, A. (2015), <i>Self-Employed: The implementation of Directive 2010/41 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity</i> . Brussels: European Commission.
6	European Commission (2014), <i>Impact Assessment on costs and benefits of measures to enhance the transparency of pay between men and women through transparency (SWD(2014) 59 final)</i> . Brussels: European Commission.
7	European Parliament (2015), <i>Gender equality in employment and occupation: Directive 2006/54/EC: European Implementation Assessment</i> . Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service.
8	Ramalho, M.R.P., Foubert, P. and Burri, S. (2015), <i>The Implementation of Parental Leave Directive 2010/18 in 33 European Countries</i> . European Commission.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Data extraction and analysis

In order to structure all types of reviews undertaken, we developed data-extraction tools to enable us to record information from the reviewed papers. These tools – contained within a spreadsheet – captured the details of the source, including an assessment of the quality of the sources. Data-extraction tools were adjusted for each of the reviews proposed as part of this study. Following the data extraction, we synthesised findings from the different data sources for each research question in a tabular format with a narrative commentary.

Interviews with European stakeholders

Interviews held with European stakeholders⁴⁷¹ primarily addressed RQ5, which examined the EU actions that help improve labour-market participation. A total of seven interviews with European stakeholders were conducted via telephone, each lasting approximately 45 minutes. Interviews were semi-structured, based on a topic guide. A semi-structured approach offers comparability whilst allowing for unique discussions to capture any context-specific views and insights. This provides a flexible approach that allows respondents to offer their own perspective and raise issues most salient to them, at the same time as providing a way of gathering more structured responses to allow the comparative analysis of cases. In selecting the interviewees, the study team aimed to engage with stakeholders from key EU institutions (including the European Commission, Eurofound and EIGE) and organisations (EU social partners and civil society organisations) relating to the subject matter, and mandates within the organisation.

Data safeguarding measures were put in place to protect the anonymity of interviewees and meet the requirements of GDPR. Data were collected on the basis of an informed consent model, clearly communicating how personal data will be handled and explicitly collecting participants' permission for this. Participant information sheets were developed to give a brief introduction to the purpose and aims of the study, and to explain RAND's method of processing and protecting information gathered during interviews. The information sheet was shared with participants before the interview, allowing them to consider taking part in the study, and discussed verbally at the beginning of the interview.

The main topics discussed included:

- Welcome and introduction;
- Overview of EU policy:
 - What do you consider the key developments in facilitating the employment of parents with young children in the EU and why?
 - What are the key factors that have influenced the approach at the EU level to facilitating parents' employment?
 - This study focuses on two elements: 1) facilitating parents return to work after (family) leave and 2) helping inactive or unemployed parents into employment. Which aspect do you think has been allocated greater priority at the EU level and why?
- EU initiatives to facilitate parents' return to work after (family) leave:
 - Which EU initiatives have been most effective and why?
 - Are there any policies, legislation or funding instruments that are or should be considered or implemented at the EU level in the next few years to facilitate parents' return to work after leave?
 - What else could the EU institutions do to support Member States in facilitating parents' return to work after leave?
- EU initiatives to help inactive or unemployed parents into employment:
 - Which EU initiatives have been most effective and why?
 - Are there any policies, legislation or funding instruments that are or should be considered or implemented at the EU level in the next few years to help inactive or unemployed parents into employment?

⁴⁷¹ For the purpose of this study, a "stakeholder" is an individual, group or organisation that has an interest in and knowledge about the EU's work in relation to parental leave or the gender gap in employment.

- What else could the EU institutions do to support Member States in helping inactive or unemployed parents with small children into employment?
- Future developments:
 - How do you think the priorities of the European Commission might change in the future in relation to facilitating parents' employment?
 - What factors might slow down or accelerate this change?
- Wrap up and close.

For analysis of the interview data, the study team prepared notes from each interview. Notes were analysed thematically, focusing on recurring themes that reflect specific patterns or meaning found in the data, by categorising the themes through codes applied to a portion of data, and by describing the range of examples, factors, attitudes, behaviours, etc., to explore and explain key themes and findings in more detail.

Table 9: Interviews conducted with EU stakeholders

Country	Stakeholder Type	Interview Code
EU	EU social partner	E1
EU	EU social partner	E2
EU	EU social partner	E3
EU	EU social partner	E4
EU	EU Institution	E5
EU	EU Institution	E6
EU	EU Institution	E7

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Case studies

The purpose of case studies is often to explain abstract or complex matters with the help of concrete examples. Case studies were used in this study to provide more concrete, in-depth information about parents returning to work after leave or a period of unemployment/inactivity, and how this was facilitated by national-level policies and company practices.

A total of eight case studies were conducted, each focusing on a single Member State: **BE, DE, EL, HU, IE, LT, PL and SE**. These Member States were selected to represent a diverse set of countries in terms of performance in relation to parents' (mothers') employment, as well as background factors, such as population size, accession to the EU and geographical spread (see Table 10 below).

Table 10: Rationale for selecting countries as case studies

MS	DE	BE	SE	HU	IE	EL	LT	PL
Old or new ^a	Old	Old	Old	New	Old	Old	New	New
Size ^b	Large	Large	Medium	Medium	Small	Medium	Small	Large
Region ^c	Central	Western	Northern	Eastern	Western	Southern	Eastern	Eastern
Gender employment gap (%) ^d	8.1	8.4	4.2	15.3	12.2	7.6	2.3	14.4
Gender employment gap category ^e	Medium	Medium	Small	Large	Large	Small	Small	Large
Maternal employment gap ^f	-21.5	-5.4	4.9	-44.3	-15.8	-1.8	-7.2	-17.7
Maternal employment gap category ^g	Large	Small	Small	Large	Large	Small	Medium	Large

Note: ^a Old Member States include countries with EU membership pre-dating 2004. New Member States joined the EU in or after 2004.

^b Source: Eurostat (2020). Population on 1 January – data for 2019 [TPS00001]; size categories: Large (above 11 million); Medium (between 11 and 5 million); and Small (under 5 million).

^c Authors' categorisation.

^d Source: Eurostat (2020). Employment and activity by sex and age – data for 2018 [lfsi_emp_a].

^e Categories defined as Large (12.2 and above); Medium (between 12.1 and 8); Small (lower than 8).

^f Source: Eurostat (2020). Employment rate of adults by sex, age groups, educational attainment level, number of children and age of youngest child – data for 2018 [lfst_hheredch].

^g Categories defined as Large (below -15); Medium (between -7 and -15); Small (higher than -7).

National experts collected data following the guidelines developed by the study team and presented information for each country in the following format:

- Introduction;
- Factors facilitating and hindering parents' return to work:
 - Socio-demographic and household characteristics;
 - Employment characteristics; and
 - Social attitudes and cultural values.
- National policies to facilitate parents' return to work after leave:
 - Childcare leave;
 - Publicly provided or subsidised childcare;
 - Job protection; and
 - Flexible working policies.
- Company practices to facilitate parents' return to work after leave:
 - Overview of company practices; and
 - Examples of promising practices.

- ALMP programmes to help inactive or unemployed parents with small children back into employment;
- Conclusion; and
- References .

Case studies were based on desk research and interviews and the findings are integrated in the main text of the report.

Desk research

Desk research was conducted on the following topics:

1. Factors facilitating and hindering parents' return to work after leave, including incentives created to help parents return to work;
2. National policies designed to facilitate: (1) parents' return to work after leave (including legal provisions that guarantee the right to return to work (e.g. to the same or equivalent position vs to the previous employer, but not necessarily to the same position)); and/or (2) parental employment more broadly (including parents who are unemployed or inactive); and
3. Company practices designed to facilitate parents' return to work after leave – particularly from small and medium-sized enterprises (both private and public).

Data sources included policy documents, academic literature available in the language of the country, and research on and evaluations of programmes and practices implemented by public authorities, the private sector and civil-society organisations in the country.

We looked for policies and practices currently in place (or planned), or those enacted in the last 10 years (2010–2020) but discontinued.

Literature searches were conducted in the national language, supplemented by English-language searches where appropriate. The search terms below were adapted to the national language and/or context:

1. Factors facilitating and hindering parents' return to work after leave:
 - a. Search 1: (factor OR incentive*) AND (return to work OR employment OR job) AND (matern* OR patern* OR parent* OR family OR child*) AND (leave) AND (Member State);
2. National policies designed to facilitate (1) parents' return to work after leave and/or (2) parental employment more broadly:
 - a. Search 1: (polic* OR intervention* OR program*) AND (employment OR work) AND (matern* OR patern* OR parent* OR family OR child*) AND (leave) AND (Member State); and
 - b. Search 2: (active labour market polic* OR ALMP OR activation) AND (parent* OR mother* OR father* OR child*) AND (Member State);
3. Company practices designed to facilitate parents' return to work after leave:
 - a. Search 1: (breastfeed* support) AND (firm* OR enterprise* OR employer* OR company*) AND (Member State);
 - b. Search 2: (keep in touch) AND (firm* OR enterprise* OR employer* OR company*) AND (matern* OR patern* OR parent* OR family OR child*) AND (leave) AND (Member State);

- c. Search 3: (buddy* OR mentor*) AND (firm* OR enterprise* OR employer* OR company*) AND (matern* OR patern* OR parent* OR family OR child*) AND (leave) AND (Member State);
- d. Search 4: (childcare support) AND (firm* OR enterprise* OR employer* OR company*) AND (Member State); and
- e. Search 5: (flexible working) AND (firm* OR enterprise* OR employer* OR company*) AND (matern* OR patern* OR parent* OR family OR child*) AND (leave) AND (Member State).

In order to identify practices adopted by employers (both private and public companies) to support parents' return to work, we gathered information on employers recognised by national award schemes and competitions for their family friendly practices, supplemented by a hand search.

Germany

- Total E-Quality Label:
<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1252&langId=en&reviewId=174>.

Belgium

- Charter for a Family-Friendly Company:
<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1252&langId=en&reviewId=17>.

Sweden

- Golden Dummy Prize:
<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1252&langId=en&reviewId=71>.

Hungary

- Awards for Family-Friendly Workplaces:
<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1252&langId=en&reviewId=9>.

Poland

- Mom-friendly Company Award:
<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1252&langId=en&reviewId=105>.
- Mother at Work Competition:
<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1252&langId=en&reviewId=107>.

Interviews with national-level stakeholders

Five interviews were conducted where necessary to complement the desk research and fill in the gaps (see Table 11).

The desk research and interview results were analysed together to identify which ones, how and why some of the country initiatives may form promising practices in terms of facilitating the return to work of parents with young children and to determine what elements could be adapted, transferred, upscaled or otherwise used to improve policy-making in this field.

Table 11: Interviews conducted with national stakeholders

Country	Stakeholder Type	Interview Code
Belgium	Civil Society	BE1
Belgium	Expert/academic	BE2
Germany	Expert/academic	DE1
Ireland	Government	IE1
Ireland	Private Sector	IE2

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Topic guide for national-level stakeholders

The main topics discussed included:

- Welcome and introduction;
- Overview of national context and policy:
 - What are the key factors that affect parents' employment decisions in [Member State]?
 - What are the key factors that have influenced the approach to facilitating the employment of parents of young children in [Member State]?
 - This study focuses on two elements: 1) facilitating parents return to work after (family) leave and 2) helping inactive or unemployed parents into employment. Which aspect do you think has been allocated greater priority in [Member State] and why?
- EU context and policy:
 - Which EU initiatives have been most effective in increasing the labour market participation of parents after (family) leave and why?
 - Which EU initiatives have been most effective in helping inactive or unemployed parents into employment and why?
- National policies to facilitate parents' return to work after (family) leave:
 - Specific questions to fill in gaps from the desk research;
 - Are there any other policies or initiatives that we should be aware of to facilitate parents' return to work after leave in [Member State]?
 - Are there any new or different policies/initiatives that you would like to see implemented in [Member State] to facilitate parents' return to work after leave?

- Company practices to facilitate parents' return to work after (family) leave:
 - Specific questions to fill in gaps from the desk research;
 - Are you aware of any other examples of companies who have implemented practices to facilitate parents' return to work after (family) leave in [Member State]?
- National policies to help inactive or unemployed parents into employment:
 - Specific questions to fill in gaps from the desk research;
 - Are there any other policies or initiatives that we should be aware of to help inactive or unemployed parents into employment in [Member State]?
 - Which policies have been most effective in helping inactive or unemployed parents into employment in [Member State] and why?
 - Are there any new or different policies/initiatives that you would like to see implemented in [Member State] to help inactive or unemployed parents into employment?
- Future developments:
 - How do you think the priorities of the policy makers in [Member State] might change in the future in relation to facilitating parents' employment?
 - What factors might slow down or accelerate this change?
 - What else could the EU institutions do to support Member States?
- Wrap up and close.

This study examines the employment situation of parents with young children in the EU and specifically, the factors that affect parents' return to the labour market. The paper identifies interventions that could help parents return to work after family-related leave and improve labour-market integration of unemployed or inactive parents. The study outlines possible additional actions at the EU level.

This document was provided by the Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies at the request of the committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL).
