

B. Implementing a comprehensive approach to harmonize work and family responsibilities

As demonstrated in a 2014 Eurobarometer survey covering 28 European Union countries, women and men respondents identified flexible working arrangements and accessible childcare as effective ways to increase women's participation in the labour market (European Commission, 2015b). Failure to acknowledge and address the challenges faced by workers with unpaid household and care responsibilities perpetuates and deepens existing gender inequalities in the labour market. In fact, unpaid work strongly affects women's employment opportunities, their access to quality jobs, including adequate social protection and working conditions. The ILO has put forward a comprehensive set of international labour standards, which provide an integrated framework for addressing work-family challenges. In addition to the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183), the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) and the newly adopted Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204), among other standards, make the right to maternity protection a precondition for the achievement of equality of opportunity and treatment at work between women and men. These and other UN instruments highlight the universality of the right to maternity protection and call for its extension to all women (Addati, 2015).

Lastly, the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) and its accompanying Recommendation No. 165 require that signatories make it an aim of national policy that all workers with family responsibilities – both women and men – can engage in employment without discrimination and, as far as possible, work-family conflict. Accordingly, non-discrimination and effective gender equality in the labour market and at home should be an explicit objective of evidenced-based national policy (see Recommendation No. 165, para. 10(a)). To this end, the Convention and Recommendation put forward a set of measures, including:

- leave policies (parental leave, in addition to maternity leave, and other family leave);
- social care services by qualified personnel (childcare, family and other community services; home-help and home-care services);
- social security benefits (in-kind and cash benefits, including tax breaks or other family allowances);
- family-friendly working time and work organization arrangements;
- workforce reintegration policies (training, vocational guidance, counselling and information and placement services);
- community services and infrastructure to reduce unpaid work (public transport; supply of water and energy; housing with labour-saving layout);
- information and education aimed at encouraging the sharing of family responsibilities between women and men (ILO Convention No. 156; ILO Recommendation No. 165).

Figure 35 shows the relationship between total government family policy spending (as a percentage of GDP) and the rates of women's employment in 34 OECD countries in 2011. In most countries, public spending is more concentrated in the form of family allowances. In others, including Iceland, Norway and Sweden, where there is a high female employment-to-population ratio, a significant share of public spending on work-family policies is dedicated to early childhood care and education. When countries are ordered according to their share of public spending on work-family policies, the resulting graph suggests that higher public spending is associated with higher female employment-to-population ratios.⁵⁸ While some countries, such as Canada and the United States, have traditionally displayed a combination of lower public expenditure in work-family benefits and higher female employment rates, over the last ten years, in the United States, women's labour force participation has declined. As Blau and Kahn (2013) demonstrate, the lack of investment in work-family policies in the United States explains nearly 30 per cent of the decline of female labour force participation from 1990 to 2010 relative to other OECD countries which expanded family-friendly policies over the same period.⁵⁹

58. Note: public spending on work-family policies corresponds to the primary (left) vertical axis. Employment to population corresponds to the secondary (right) vertical axis. Work-family expenditure comprises: in-kind benefits (early childhood education and care, home-help and accommodation services and other benefits) and cash benefits (maternity and parental leave; family allowances; and other cash benefits such as tax breaks). Linear regression lines fitted on to the relationship between spending and women's employment-to-population ratio. Regression statistics: Employment-to-population ratio = $y = 4.8795x + 49.106$; $R^2 = 0.2627$.

59. Blau and Kahn (2013) also suggest that, while the female labour force participation rates in the United States have decreased relative to the rates in other OECD countries, women in the United States who are working are likely to be in higher paid positions. This is linked to the uptake of part-time work and generous parental leave by women in other OECD countries, which affects their access to high-level jobs that typically requires full-time and full-year employment. As has been noted, in the United States, women's success in higher-level jobs is also based on reliance on low-paid labour, mainly female, to substitute for public care services and policies (Mandel and Shalev, 2009).