

of workplace childcare solutions in cases from Brazil, Chile, India, Kenya, South Africa and Thailand (Hein and Cassirer, 2010).

Workplace initiatives can supplement, but cannot substitute for, public policies aimed at improving the availability, quality and affordability of childcare services and facilities. In fact, state-funded or subsidized childcare services are a core element of the continuum of support measures for adequate maternity and paternity provision at work. The Workers with Family Responsibilities Recommendation, 1981 (No. 165) encourages countries to take appropriate steps to ensure that childcare and family services and facilities meet the needs and preferences of workers with family responsibilities. In particular, taking account of national and local circumstances and possibilities, national authorities should “organise or encourage and facilitate the provision of adequate and appropriate child-care and family services and facilities, free of charge or at a reasonable charge in accordance with the workers’ ability to pay, developed along flexible lines and meeting the needs of children of different ages, of other dependants requiring care and of workers with family responsibilities” (Paragraph V, 25(b)).

Evidence confirms the vital role of childcare in enabling parents and especially women to engage in paid work after childbirth, by addressing their care needs (IMF, 2013). Better access to comprehensive, affordable, and high-quality childcare, including out-of-school care services, frees up women’s time for formal employment (ILO, 2013c; IMF, 2013). In fact, when they do not prevent women from getting into paid work, family responsibilities still normally determine, and de facto limit, the type, location and working arrangements of women’s employment. In the absence of affordable, quality and both child- and worker-responsive care services, women are more likely to take up informal work opportunities, especially self-employment or home-based work, that afford them the flexibility to manage their care responsibilities while generating income. They are also more likely to keep the size of these undertakings small in terms of employment and capital (Cassirer and Addati, 2007; ILO, 2013e).

In addition, provision of care services also increases employment opportunities in childcare, and contributes to job creation in the social services sector, which

in turn replaces some of the unpaid care and household work done by women and girls and expands their income-earning options (Antonopoulos and Kim, 2011). Finally, the economic return from early intervention is much higher than the return from later intervention. Therefore, investing in young children by means of quality childcare will pay large dividends later on in terms of tax revenues and reductions in social spending, thus contributing to sound public budgets and therefore to society at large (Heckman and Masterov, 2007).

Notwithstanding these benefits, privately supplied home-based child care – whether provided by a family member or a domestic worker – remains the prevalent form of childcare provision. In one-third of the over 140 countries for which information is available, national legislation does not establish public provision of childcare services or public subsidies or allowances to offset childcare costs for pre-school children (World Bank, 2014). However, even where programmes do exist, coverage is often inadequate and not responsive to the needs of children and workers. In several high-income countries, particularly where childcare provisions were still limited, the supply of childcare facilities has grown in the last few years in spite of the economic crisis and the associated austerity programmes (e.g., Austria, Germany, Hungary, Republic of Korea and Slovenia) (Gauthier, 2010; OECD, 2012). However, on average, only 33 per cent of children under the age of 3 were enrolled in formal childcare in 2010, with considerable variation between countries (OECD Family Database, 2013). In almost all high-income countries, except certain Scandinavian countries, childcare coverage is not universal and is socially stratified, meaning that children from low-income families have much more limited opportunities of attending formal childcare than children from high-income families (Lancker, 2012). Similar data are less widely available for developing countries, some exceptions being Brazil (15.5 per cent) and Chile (4 per cent) in 2006 (Hein and Cassirer, 2010). Gross enrolment ratio in early childhood education is also broader in high-income countries (85 per cent in 2011), while it remains low, although expanding, in low-income countries. Coverage in poor and rural communities as well as in sub-Saharan Africa is the lowest (UNESCO, 2014). Even when childcare and