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## Family Policies and Family Outcomes in OECD Countries

Willem Adema, Chris Clarke, and Olivier Thévenon

Families are a cornerstone of society. Families and the way they function have huge effects on the well-being of their members. Families provide social support networks, offering love, care, and friendship. They also play an important economic role in the production of household goods, and in the provision of protection against hardship.

Families are also a source of economic and social externalities that have major effects on wider society. For example, it is individual adults who decide when and how to establish formal partnerships and when and how to have children. These choices are important to family members themselves, but also have implications for countries as a whole; today's birth rates strongly influence the size of the future labor force, for instance, with knock-on effects on future economic performance, tax revenue and the sustainability of

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W. Adema · C. Clarke · O. Thévenon (✉)  
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),  
Paris, France  
e-mail: [olivier.thevenon@oecd.org](mailto:olivier.thevenon@oecd.org)

W. Adema  
e-mail: [willem.adema@oecd.org](mailto:willem.adema@oecd.org)

C. Clarke  
e-mail: [chris.clarke@oecd.org](mailto:chris.clarke@oecd.org)

social protection systems. In addition, family decisions vary with the socio-economic status and contribute to the transmission of inequalities from one generation to the next (OECD, 2018a).

All member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have policies in place to support families with children, though the types of support and the underlying goals differ widely. Family policy is often complex and multifaceted and supports families across a range of overlapping and interdependent objectives (Adema, 2012; Thévenon, 2011). These include: combating child and family poverty; promoting child development and enhancing child well-being; helping parents balance work and family life; mobilizing female labor supply and promoting gender equality to foster economic growth; and, promoting conditions that help adults have the number of children they desire at the time of their choosing. The importance of each of these objectives in the family policy mix varies across countries and over time. Moreover, not all of these objectives have the same function: some seek to “resource” families while others aim rather to “regulate” family behavior and align it to social norms (see Chapter 2 by Daly in this volume).

Since the early 2000s, many countries have increased their support for balancing work and family life (OECD, 2007). Recent cross-national research on family policy has identified family policy models, differentiating in particular by the extent to which countries aim to “de-familialize” or even “de-gender” child care work (Gauthier & Koops, 2018; Kang & Meyers, 2018; Saxonberg, 2013; for a detailed discussion on these and related concepts, see Chapter 6 by Zagel and Lohmann in this volume).

Overall, the literature assessing the effect of these policies highlights positive effects on family and work outcomes at population level (Thévenon, 2014). In particular, the expansion of parental leave rights and the provision of early childhood education and care (ECEC) has helped increase women’s employment (Thévenon, 2016). Together with improvements in public financial supports, this has helped reduce poverty risks for families (Gornick & Nell, 2018; OECD, 2011; Thévenon, 2018). A better work-life balance also has a positive impact on fertility and the well-being of parents and their children (Collins & Glass, 2018; Luci-Greulich & Thévenon, 2013).

However, family policies may also have unintended consequences. Several authors have suggested that while some family policies can strengthen female labor force participation, they may at the same time encourage gender job segregation and reinforce “glass ceilings” on women’s careers (Mandel, 2011; Mandel & Semyonov, 2006). Many female workers end up in *feminized occupations* in the public and/or care sectors, where conditions are family-friendly

but opportunities for earnings progression are often limited compared to the private sector. For example, the Nordic countries have extensive family supports and high levels of female employment, but there is a high concentration of women in feminized occupations and low female representation in managerial occupations (Datta Gupta, Smith, & Verner, 2006; Mandel, 2011; Mandel & Semyonov, 2006; OECD, 2018b). The effectiveness of family policy measures often depends on the degree of coherence with other policies. For example, participation in ECEC by children under three appears more effective at boosting women's employment when tax and leave policies are also supportive (Thévenon, 2016). Effectiveness also depends on the cultural context. For instance, supportive cultures amplify the relationship between parental leave length, the provision of childcare services for very young children and earnings (Budig, Misra, & Boeckmann, 2012).

Finally, family living arrangements are changing. For example, cultural changes in many countries mean that parenthood outside of marriage is more socially acceptable now than in the past, as are family dissolution and reconstitution. This leads to a diversification of family living arrangements, to which family policies must adapt.

This chapter first provides an overview of changes in family and work behaviors. It highlights the diversification of family models and points to the inequalities associated with these changes. It then presents how policies have developed to reconcile work and family commitments and reduce gender inequality, with results that can vary with the socio-economic status of families. An important challenge remains to better support the most vulnerable families and address the inequalities that are widening with the transformation of family living arrangements.

## **Families and Their Work Arrangements Are Changing**

Families in OECD countries have changed in many ways over the past half-century or so. Only a few decades ago, most families in most OECD countries followed the traditional married couple male-breadwinner model. Birth rates were high by today's standards (if already falling) and separation and divorce were relatively uncommon. Many women left work on marriage or parenthood, and often did not return to the labor market until after children had left education, if at all.

Things look very different today. Across most OECD countries, partnering behaviors have changed, and families are living in increasingly diverse arrangements. Many children now live in “re-constituted” families or “move” between two homes. In the labor market, for most couples, dual-earner families have become the norm.

Marriage, divorce, fertility, and employment patterns differ considerably between (and within) OECD countries. For example, marriage remains a much stronger and more important social institution in the OECD’s two East Asian countries—Japan and Korea—than in other OECD countries (OECD, 2019c), while the commitment to full-time dual-earning remains stronger in the Nordic countries than almost anywhere else.

## Partnership, Marriage, and Divorce

Partnership patterns have changed dramatically in OECD countries in recent decades. Women’s gains in educational attainment—and the associated narrowing of the gender gap in education—is one of the main drivers of change, with major implications for gender equality, the formation and/or dissolution of partnerships and childbearing decisions (Van Bavel, 2012). Women’s rising levels of education reduce the economic need for (early) marriage, raise minimum standards for acceptable partners and, at least in theory, increase the chances of women not marrying at all. Women’s gains in education have also contributed to an increase in partnership between individuals with a similar level of education (so called “educational homogamy”) and a broader shift toward “assortative mating”—i.e., the pairing of individuals with similar socio-economic and educational characteristics (De Hauw, Grow, & Van Bavel, 2017; Esteve et al., 2016). Less-educated men are likely to be the main losers, since they are more likely to remain single and be in low-paid employment than any other group (De Hauw et al., 2017). More “homogamy” in the marriage market also leads to increased income inequalities between couples with high and low educational attainment and income potential (see also Chapter 25 by Nieuwenhuis in this volume).

Marriage is still the dominant form of partnership in the vast majority of OECD countries, but its prevalence has declined considerably. On average, marriage rates have fallen by almost half since 1970; in some countries, including the Netherlands, Portugal, and Slovenia, they have fallen by around two-thirds. Increasingly, many young people are choosing to marry later or not at all. Data from the OECD Family database show that, between 1990 and 2017, the OECD average mean age at first marriage increased by almost

six years (OECD, 2020a). Women are now, on average, 30 years old when they marry for the first time; men are almost 33 years old.

Cohabitation is becoming increasingly popular, especially among young people. As of the last round of major population and housing censuses (for most countries around 2011), on average across the OECD 17% of 20- to 34-year-olds reported living as part of an unmarried cohabiting couple. This is not far off the 23% living either as part of a married couple or in a civil or register partnership (OECD, 2020a). Cohabitation is most common among young people in several of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway and Sweden), and Estonia, France, the Netherlands, and New Zealand (OECD, 2020a). In addition, many people are choosing new forms of partnerships, including relationships that involve partners keeping their own place of residency, “weekend-relationships”, and couples “living apart together”.

Alongside declining marriage rates, the frequency of divorce has risen considerably. Between 1970 and 2017, the OECD average crude divorce rate—the number of divorces per 1000 people—increased from 1.4 per 1000 people to 2.0 per 1000 people (OECD, 2020a). In several OECD countries, including Belgium, France, Portugal, and Spain, each year there is now more than one divorce for every two marriages. The increase in divorce rates has opened up new opportunities for re-partnering. In 2017, on average across OECD countries, almost one in five marrying persons had previously been divorced (OECD, 2020a).

Divorce behavior has also changed across socio-economic lines. While divorce rates increased across all types of couples during the 1960s and 1970s, trends have since leveled off and then reversed for highly educated couples but continued to rise among couples with low levels of educational attainment (Härkönen & Dronkers, 2006). The impact of divorce on families' standard of living is typically high, and just under one-third of single-parent families are income-poor, which is three times higher than the poverty rate for two-parent families. Moreover, children who have experienced divorce have on average lower psychological well-being, more behavioral problems, and lower educational achievements than children who grew up in “intact” families (Amato & Boyd, 2013). The higher prevalence of income poverty among single-parent families is one explanation, but the loss of income experienced by more affluent families also contributes to the lower achievements of children with divorced parents (Bernardi & Boertien, 2016).

## Parenthood and Fertility

Alongside changing partnerships, fertility behaviors have changed radically. Improved access to contraceptives has given more adults control over the timing of births and birth rates have fallen everywhere in the OECD over the past half-century: the OECD area as a whole now records two million (or 15%) fewer births each year than it did in the 1960s (OECD, 2019d). The OECD average total fertility rate—measuring the average number of children born per woman given current age-specific fertility rates—has almost halved over the same period, falling from 3.17 children per woman in 1960 to 1.65 in 2017. Chile, Mexico, Turkey, and especially Korea recorded the sharpest declines (OECD, 2020a).

One major driver of the long-run decline in fertility is that couples are increasingly postponing parenthood until after they have established themselves in the labor market (Luci-Greulich & Thévenon, 2013; OECD, 2011). Across OECD countries with available data, the average age at which women first give birth has increased by roughly three years since the mid-1990s, from 26.2 in 1995 to 29.1 in 2017 (OECD, 2020a); in ultra-low fertility countries such as Italy, Japan, Korea, and Spain, the average age of a woman at first birth now exceeds 30. In Japan and Korea, childbirth remains closely associated with marriage; not so in other OECD countries, where the decline in marriage rates has been accompanied by an increase in the number of births outside marriage (OECD, 2020a).

The postponement of the first birth leads to a narrower age-interval in which women can have children, leaving less space for multiple births and large families. Between 1960 and 2017, on average across the 18 European OECD countries with available data, the share of births that were third or higher order births fell from just over one-third to just under one-fifth. Today, only about 5% of households with children contain three or more children on average across the OECD (OECD, 2020a).

Postponing the first birth also increases the risk of involuntary childlessness. In addition to those women who cannot conceive or decide not to have children, the upper limit to the childbearing years, set by the so-called biological clock, makes it difficult for women who delay parenthood to have children at later ages. Despite advances in fertility-related medical procedures, definitive childlessness has increased in many (although not all) OECD countries in recent years (MPIDR & VID, 2019).

Changes in parenting styles coincide with the postponement of births. Older parents usually have more resources to invest in children than younger parents, and parents with high levels of educational attainment devote more

material resources to parenting and child education than parents with lower education usually can do (Doepke & Zilibotti, 2019; Kalil, 2015). These differences contribute to the transmission of disadvantage and the limited degree of inter-generational social mobility that is observed across OECD countries (OECD, 2018a).

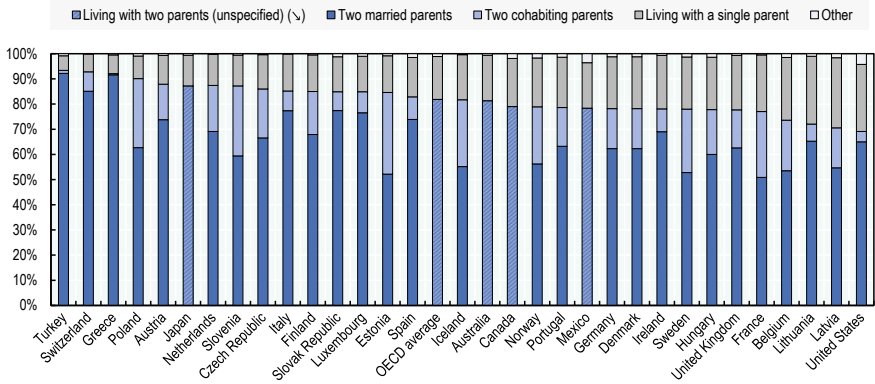
## Family Living Arrangements

Changing partnership patterns and falling birth rates have had a profound effect on the types of families in OECD countries. Declining fertility and population aging have led to a growing share of households without children. In 2015, on average across OECD countries, more than two-thirds of households did not contain any children (OECD, 2020a).

Most children in most OECD countries still live with two married or officially registered/partnered parents (Fig. 9.1). However, the share of children living with cohabiting parents has increased by 50% in the last decade, on average across OECD countries with available data (OECD, 2020a). Living with two cohabiting parents is most common in countries where marriage occurs late and births outside marriage are common (e.g. France, Iceland, Slovenia, and Sweden). Countries where births to unmarried couples are rare (e.g. Greece, Italy) or divorce is common (e.g. Lithuania, and the United States) have much lower shares of children living with cohabiting parents (Fig. 9.1).

In 2017, on average across OECD countries, about 17% of children (aged 0–17) were living with one parent (Fig. 9.1). The share of children living in single-parent families is highest (at around or above 25%) in countries with historically high divorce rates (e.g. Belgium, Latvia, Lithuania and the United States). It is lowest (at less than 10%) in countries like Greece, Poland, and Turkey, where both divorce and births outside marriage remain relatively uncommon.

Increasing divorce rates and the growth of re-partnering mean that “reconstituted” families, including step-, mixed- and blended families, are becoming more frequent (Bernardi & Mortelmans, 2018). The complex nature of reconstituted families, together with the limitations of traditional household surveys, means that comparable information on the frequency and structure of reconstituted families is scarce (Miho & Thévenon, 2019). However, data from the Health Behaviour in School-age Children (HBSC) study suggest that across participating OECD countries, close to 10% of adolescents (11- to 15-year-olds) live in a step family of some form (Inchley et al., 2016). In some OECD countries, such as Belgium, Estonia, and Finland, this increases to



**Fig. 9.1** On average across the OECD, one in five children live with one parent or less. Distribution of children (aged 0–17) by presence and marital status of parents in the household, 2018 or latest (*Note* “Parents” generally refers to both biological parents and step-, adoptive parents. “Living with two married parents” refers to situations where a child lives in a household with two adults that are considered parents and these parents are married to each other. “Living with two cohabiting parents” refers to situations where a child lives in a household with two adults that are considered parents and these parents are not married to each other. “Living with a single parent” refers to situations where a child lives in a household with only one adult that is considered a parent. “Other” refers to a situation where the child lives in a household where no adult is considered a parent. For Japan and Mexico, children aged 0–14. Data for Mexico refer to 2010, for Australia to 2012, for Japan to 2015, for Canada and Iceland to 2016, and for France, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg, Turkey, the Slovak Republic, and Switzerland to 2017. Exact definitions vary for some countries. See the OECD Family Database [<http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>] Indicator SF1.2 for more detail. *Source* OECD Family Database, <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>)

14% or more (Inchley et al., 2016). The rise of shared custody also increases the likelihood of children moving from one household to another on a regular basis. According to data from the Children’s Worlds survey—which covers 15 countries worldwide, including eight OECD countries—more than 5% of 10- to 12-year-olds in Israel, Germany, and Spain, and over 10% of 10- to 12-year-olds in Estonia, Norway, and the United Kingdom, report “regularly sleep[ing] in two homes with different adults” (Rees & Main, 2015).

Re-partnering and the establishment of a reconstituted family often takes place gradually. Re-partnered couples frequently continue to live apart for at least a certain length of time, perhaps with one partner “commuting” from one household to another or with the couple living together only on a part-time basis.

Re-partnered couples make up a significant share of non-cohabiting couples. In Belgium (28%), France (27%), the Netherlands (33%), and



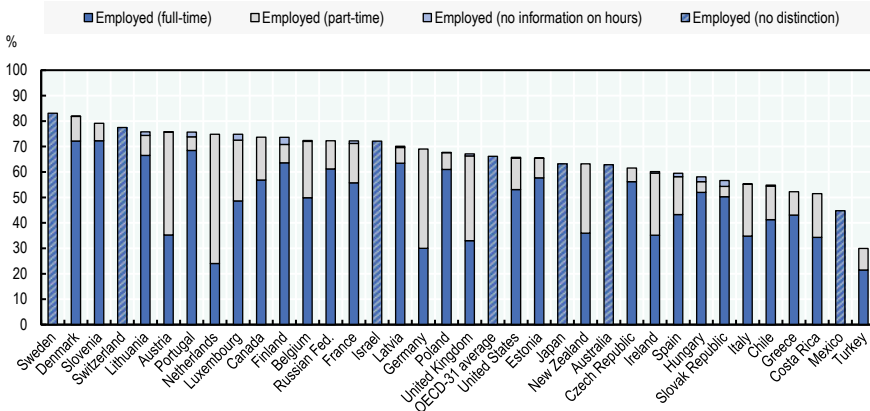
Norway (28%), more than one-quarter of all non-cohabiting couples are partners aged around 40 who have had previously been in a union of some form, and who intend to start living together within the next three years (Mortelmans et al. 2015).

## Family Work Arrangements

Women are increasingly engaged in the labor market, as related to women's gains in educational attainment, enhanced family-friendly policies, and changing attitudes toward women's roles in society. Ireland and Spain have seen some of the largest increases in recent years: in both, the employment rate for 15- to 64-year-old women has grown by well over two-thirds since 1990 (OECD, 2020b). In contrast, in the Nordic countries, female employment gains have been limited—or even negative—as female employment rates in these countries were already high in the 1980s (OECD, 2018b).

A large part of the increase in women's employment has been driven by a growing number of women staying in paid work after becoming parents. On average across OECD countries in 2014, two-thirds of women with children (aged 0–14) were in paid employment (Fig. 9.2). Maternal employment rates are highest in countries like Denmark, Slovenia, and Sweden, where extensive public ECEC policies allow both parents to return to work after a few months of paid leave. They are lower in many of the Eastern European OECD countries, where family policy provides financial incentives for mothers to stay at home at least until children enter pre-primary education at around age three, and in several of the Southern European and Latin American OECD countries, plus Turkey, where working parents are offered little work/life balance support in general.

Highly educated women are particularly likely to continue working after becoming mothers. In 2014, on average across OECD countries, more than three-quarters (78%) of highly educated mothers (with children aged 0–14) were in paid employment, compared to less than half (42%) of mothers with low educational attainment (OECD, 2020a). A particularly concerning trend is that, in several OECD countries, the employment gap between mothers with high- and low levels of education is growing, not shrinking. In Canada, for example, the gap has increased by one-third since the mid-2000s, largely because employment rates for mothers with low education fell sharply following the financial crisis and they have not yet recovered (OECD, 2020a). Similar patterns can be found in Belgium, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States.



**Fig. 9.2** The level and intensity of maternal employment varies considerably across OECD countries. Employment rates for women (15- to 64-year-olds) with at least one child aged 0–14, by part-time/full-time status, 2014 or latest (*Note* Part-time employment is defined as usual weekly working hours of less than 30 hours per week in the main job. In some countries, it is possible for individuals to report that they do not have usual set hours in their main job. Where this is the case, the individual's actual hours worked in their main job during the survey reference week are used in place of their usual weekly working hours. For Chile, the distinction between part-time and full-time work is based on actual hours worked in the main job in the previous week, rather than usual weekly working hours in the main job. No distinction between part-time and full-time employment in Australia, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Sweden, and Switzerland. Data for Denmark and Finland to 2012, and for Chile, Germany, and Turkey to 2013. For Japan, women of all ages, and for Sweden women aged 15–74. Children aged 0–15 for Canada, 0–14 for Japan, 0–18 for Sweden, and 0–17 for the United States. The OECD-31 average excludes Japan. *Source* OECD Family Database, <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>)

In several OECD countries, many mothers use part-time work as a means of combining work and family responsibilities (Fig. 9.2). Part-time maternal employment is most common in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and especially the Netherlands, where over two-thirds of working mothers work part-time (OECD, 2019b). Short working hours are less common for mothers in other countries, especially the Nordic countries, where comprehensive childcare supports help mothers work full-time, as well as many of the Baltic and Eastern European OECD countries like the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, and the Slovak Republic, where part-time opportunities in general are rare.

Increasing maternal employment has contributed to the growth of dual-earning. Most two-parent families in most OECD countries are now two-earner families, even if there are still large gaps in earnings between parents (OECD, 2017b). In some countries, especially Austria, Germany,

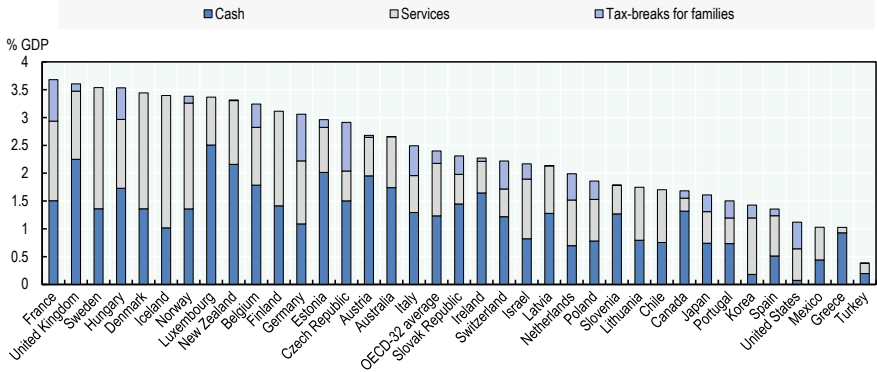
the Netherlands, and Switzerland, one-and-a-half earner families (with one partner working full-time and the other part-time) are most common (OECD, 2020a). In others (e.g. Denmark, Slovenia and Sweden), the majority of two-parent families are full-time dual-earner families. Only a minority of families continue following the traditional single-earner model. Indeed, on average in 2014, fewer than one-third of couples with at least one child (aged 0–14) had one partner working full-time and the other not working at all (OECD, 2020a). In Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Sweden, this was below one-fifth.

Despite the gains made by women in the labor market, women in OECD countries still do far more unpaid work than men. On average across OECD countries with recent data, women spend just over two hours more each day on unpaid work than men (OECD, 2020d). In some countries (Mexico and Turkey), the gender gap remains as large as four hours. In most OECD countries, women's disproportionate hours spent on unpaid work result in women spending more hours in total on combined paid and unpaid work (OECD, 2020d). In all but three OECD countries (the Netherlands, New Zealand and Norway), women devote more time than men on combined hours of paid and unpaid work.

## Family Policies in OECD Countries

Family policies have become a core part of national social protection systems in OECD countries over recent decades. Public spending on families has grown almost everywhere in the OECD, reflecting shifting priorities and the greater emphasis many countries now place on childhood. In dollar terms, on average, public spending per head on family cash benefits and services has more than doubled since the early 1990s, rising from USD 417 in 1990 to USD 844 in 2015 (OECD, 2020c). In some countries, including Chile, Japan, Korea, Mexico, and Spain, it increased by more than four times over the same period (OECD, 2020c).

There are many differences in countries' family policy approaches (Fig. 9.3). All OECD countries provide family support in at least some form, but differences in countries' histories, their attitudes toward marriage and gender roles, the role of government, and the relative weight given to the various underlying family policy objectives mean that each takes their own approach to family policy. An insightful and well-known literature has grown up around trying to describe these differences (e.g. Eydal & Rostgaard, 2018; see also Chapter 2 by Daly in this volume).



**Fig. 9.3** The level and type of public family support differs strongly across OECD countries. Public expenditure on family benefits by type, as a % of GDP, OECD countries, 2015 (Note Public spending accounted for here concerns public support that is exclusively for families [e.g. child payments and allowances, parental leave benefits and childcare support], only. Spending in other social policy areas such as health and housing support also assists families, but not exclusively, and is not included here. Spending on in-work benefits such the Earned Income Tax Credit in the US can be important to families [worth around 0.5% of GDP], but the program is also open to workers without families and therefore not categorized as a family benefit. The data in Panel A cover public expenditure on family cash and in-kind benefits only, and do not include spending on tax breaks for families. Data for the Netherlands and New Zealand refer to 2011, and for Poland to 2014. For Lithuania, data on tax breaks toward families are not available. The OECD-32 average excludes Lithuania, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and Poland. Source OECD Family Database, <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>)

Some OECD countries, most notably the Nordic countries, provide service-heavy family supports to families with young children aimed primarily at encouraging full-time dual-earning and fostering child development. These countries provide parents with a continuum of support, from birth up to when children leave school. Parents can access generous paid parental leave for at least a few months after birth, followed by an entitlement to a place in a local public ECEC center, and, particularly in Denmark and Sweden, out-of-school-hours care services for children in full-time education up to at least age 11–12.

Other countries focus more on providing families with financial support through family cash benefits and tax breaks (Fig. 9.3). In some countries (e.g. the Czech Republic and Hungary), this is done largely through universal cash benefits provided to all families. These benefits are often structured in such a way as to encourage one parent (typically the mother) to care for children at home, at least until they enter pre-primary education at around age 3.

Other countries (e.g. Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom) put greater emphasis on targeted benefits aimed at achieving specific objectives or directed at specific groups such as single-parent families or families on low incomes. France is something of an outlier, in that it combines both generous (and largely universal) cash and tax benefits with relatively high spending on family services, especially for families with children in pre-primary education.

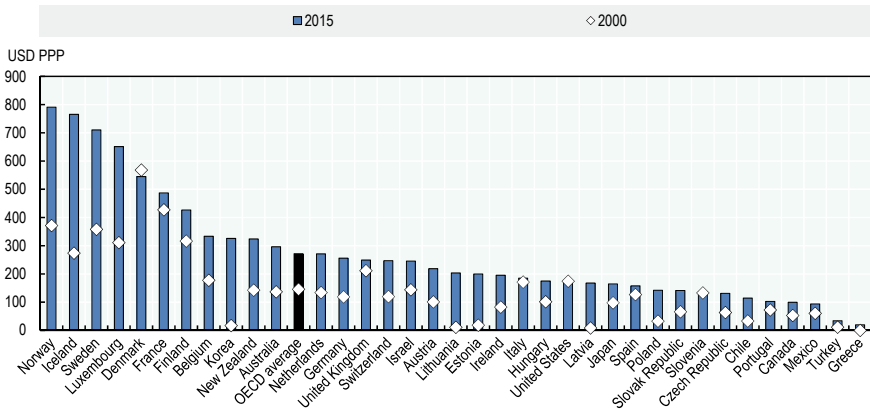
Some OECD countries (e.g. Greece, Mexico, and Turkey) provide relatively little in the way of either cash benefits or public services for families (Fig. 9.3). However, in several of these countries, limited public spending on families is balanced by comparatively low effective tax rates when entering work and, in some cases, considerable tax advantages for dual-earner families. In these countries, the emphasis is on delivering family income through market earnings rather than state support.

In many respects, cross-country differences in family policy continue to be as distinct today as they were when first discussed in the 1990s. OECD countries have not ‘converged’ on one single family policy model (Adema, Ali, & Thévenon, 2014; Gauthier, 2002); both the level and types of support provided to families remain diverse.

At the same time, however, there are clear common trends and developments in family policy that stretch across most if not all OECD countries. In particular, in many OECD countries, policy has shifted in recent years to become more supportive of women’s employment, as well as to be more encouraging of a more equal gender division of labor. The following provides three specific examples of these developments: the growth of public support for ECEC; the rise of fathers-only paid leave; and the introduction in several countries of new measures to support flexible working.

## Public Support for Early Childhood Education and Care

Public support for ECEC has grown substantially in OECD countries over the past few decades. Recognizing the significance of good-quality ECEC for child cognitive and social development (Camilli, Vargas, Ryan, & Barnett, 2010; Havnes & Mogstad, 2011; OECD, 2013), as well as the importance of ECEC for parental employment (Del Boca, 2015; Jaumotte, 2003; Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2017; Thévenon, 2013), OECD countries are increasingly introducing measures to improve access, affordability, and quality in ECEC (see also Chapter 8 by Vandenberg in this volume). Since around 2000, per head public spending on ECEC has increased in all OECD countries other than Denmark (where public spending on ECEC was already very high) and



**Fig. 9.4** On average across OECD countries, public spending on early childhood education and care has almost doubled since the turn of the century. Public expenditure per head on early childhood education and care, constant (2010) USD PPP, 2000 and 2015 (Note In some countries, local governments play a key role in financing and providing childcare services. Such spending is comprehensively recorded in Nordic countries, but in some other [often federal] countries it may not be fully captured by the OECD social expenditure data. For Poland, data refer to 2014 rather than 2015. Source OECD Family Database, <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>)

the United States (Fig. 9.4). Over the same period, the OECD average per head spend grew by more than three-quarters, from USD 146 in 2000 to USD 272 in 2015 (Fig. 9.4).

Germany provides one of the clearest examples of growing public support for ECEC (OECD, 2017a). Beginning with increased public investment during the mid-2000s, the German federal government has since (in 2013) introduced a Nordic-style legal entitlement to ECEC for all children age one and over, followed by a series of major spending programs, including on all-day ECEC (the KiTaPlus program) and through the recent Gute-Kita Gesetz (the ‘Good Child Care Law’). Partly as a result, the number of children enrolled in ECEC increased by over 25% between 2008 and 2017, from 1,565,000 to 2,024,000 (Destatis, 2018). Germany still faces many challenges in ECEC—supply continues to fall short of demand, for instance, and providers are likely to face severe staff shortages over the next decade or so (BMFSFJ, 2019; OECD, 2019a)—but further reforms and investment are in the pipeline.

Korea provides a second example. Since the early 2000s, the Korean government has introduced a series of major reforms aimed at increasing the availability and affordability of ECEC services, including extensive subsidies for childcare providers and generous cash benefits for parents using ECEC (OECD, 2019c). Korea backed these reforms with heavy public investment:

real-terms per head public spending on ECEC increased by over 18 times between 2000 and 2015, from USD 17 to USD 326 (Fig. 9.4). The result is some of the lowest out-of-pocket childcare costs in the OECD, and ECEC enrolment rates that are now well above the OECD average (OECD, 2020a).

The growth in public support for ECEC had a considerable impact on enrolment. On average across European OECD countries, participation in formal ECEC by children under age 3 increased by well over one-third in the decade to 2017, from 26% in 2007 to 35% in 2017 (Eurostat, 2019). In Korea, the participation in center-based services by children under age 3 has grown by more than ten times since the early 2000s, from 3% in 2001 to 40.9% in 2018 (Statistics Korea, 2018).

There are, however, still many challenges in ECEC policy. Several European OECD countries (e.g. the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and the Slovak Republic) are still a long way from meeting the Barcelona target of 33% participation by children under age three that should have been met by 2010. Quality in ECEC is also an ongoing concern, as is affordability, particularly in many of the English-speaking OECD countries (OECD, 2018c). Related to this, there are also important ongoing concerns around equity, since in many OECD countries children from less advantaged backgrounds are much less likely to participate in ECEC than their better-off peers (OECD, 2016b; Pavolini & Van Lancker, 2018; Van Lancker & Ghysels, 2016; see also Chapter 8 by Vandenbroeck and Chapter 11 by Hook & Li in this volume). Gaps in participation across socio-economic groups are often widest in countries that rely largely on private service provision (e.g. Ireland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom), as well as in France, where affordable public services for the under-threes are in short supply (HCFEA, 2018; OECD, 2016b; Van Lancker & Ghysels, 2016).

## Statutory Fathers-Only Paid Leave

Encouraging fathers to take paid leave has been a long-standing challenge for OECD countries (see also Chapter 15 by Bartova & Keizer in this volume). In many OECD countries, fathers have had the right to take paid leave for decades, usually through parental leave entitlements sharable among partners. However, in almost all cases, the use of sharable leave has been dominated by mothers (Moss, 2015). There are several possible reasons. Fathers often earn more than their partners (OECD, 2017a), so unless leave benefits (almost) fully replace previous earnings it usually makes economic sense for the mother to take the bulk of the leave. Societal attitudes toward the roles of mothers and fathers in caring for young children and concerns around potential career

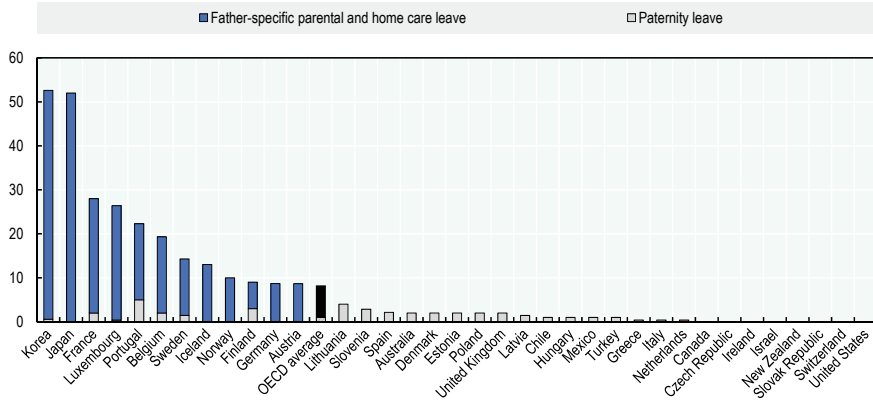
implications also contribute to a general reluctance among many fathers toward taking leave (Duvander, 2014; Rudman & Mescher, 2013).

To encourage fathers' use of paid leave, countries from across the OECD are turning to "fathers-only" paid leave entitlements that cannot be used by the mother and are lost if not taken by the father. In many cases, this means paid paternity leave—usually very short but often well-paid periods of leave that fathers can use within the first few months after childbirth. A few countries (e.g. Belgium, Luxembourg, and Spain) have actually provided paternity leave lasting at least a day or two since the 1960s, but it was not until the 1980s that OECD countries introduced anything longer than three days (OECD, 2020a). In 1980, Sweden became the first OECD country to provide fathers with a paid paternity leave lasting at least one week. In 1984, Denmark became the first to offer two weeks or longer (OECD, 2020a). In the years since, a further 18 OECD countries have introduced paid paternity leave in some form. This includes a diverse range of countries from across the OECD's regions, including Australia, Chile, Korea, Mexico, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Turkey. In 2016, just under two-thirds (23) of OECD countries provided fathers with a statutory entitlement to at least one day of paid paternity leave (Fig. 9.5).

By 2016, 12 OECD countries (Fig. 9.5) provided two months or more of "fathers-only" paid parental leave—usually longer periods of paid leave that again can be used only by the father but that need not necessarily be taken directly around childbirth. These "fathers-only" parental leaves often take the form of "father quotas", or specific portions of an overall parental leave period that are reserved exclusively for the father, as in many of the Nordic countries. Other options include "father bonuses", where a couple may qualify for some extra weeks of paid leave if both parents use a certain amount of shareable leave, as in Germany, for instance—or more simply the provision of paid parental leave as an individual, non-transferable entitlement for each parent (e.g. Belgium, Japan, Korea, and Luxembourg).

Norway was the first OECD country to implement fathers-only paid parental leave, with the introduction of a four-week father quota in 1993 (OECD, 2020a). Sweden followed closely with a similar father quota in 1995. However, it was not until the 2000s that fathers-only parental leave became common cross-nationally. Nine OECD countries introduced or expanded fathers-only paid parental leave during the between 2000 and 2009, including Germany, Iceland, Portugal and, most notably, Japan and Korea, where fathers now hold an individual non-transferable entitlement to one year of paid parental leave (although in the latter two countries, take-up among fathers remains low).





**Fig. 9.5** The majority of OECD countries provide paid paternity leave, and one-third offer fathers-only paid parental leave. Paid paternity leave and paid father-specific parental and home care leave, in weeks, 2016 (Note Information refers to entitlements to paternity leave, “father quotas” or periods of parental leave that can be used only by the father and cannot be transferred to the mother, and any weeks of sharable leave that must be taken by the father in order for the family to qualify for “bonus” weeks of parental leave. Data refer to entitlements in place as of April 2016. Data reflect entitlements at the national or federal level only, and do not reflect regional variations or additional/alternative entitlements provided by states/provinces or local governments in some countries [e.g. Québec in Canada, or California in the United States]. Source OECD Family Database, <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>)

Because fathers-only leave remains relatively new in most OECD countries, it is still somewhat difficult to estimate precisely the effects on leave take-up and the downstream impact on engagement in childcare and unpaid work. Nonetheless, a growing literature from across the OECD points in many cases toward positive effects. Several quasi-experimental studies find that the introduction of a fathers-only leave increases leave take-up by men (see, for example, Cools, Fiva, & Kirkeboen, 2015; Kluge & Tamm, 2009; Patnaik, 2018). In Sweden, for instance, the introduction and subsequent expansion of a “father quota” led not only to increases in the number of fathers using any leave, but also to a steady and sustained increase in the share of days used by men (Duvander & Johansson, 2012; Ekberg, Eriksson, & Friebel, 2013). Moreover, there is also a growing body of quasi-experimental evidence to suggest that fathers-only parental leave produces lasting positive effects on fathers’ engagement in various forms of unpaid work and childcare (Kotsadam & Finseraas, 2011; Patnaik, 2018; Tamm, 2018). A drawback of fathers-only leave is that it may discourage fathers from having additional children (Farré & González, 2019), while it may instead encourage fertility in a more gender equitable environment (Duvander et al., 2016).

## Support for Flexible Working

Historically, compared to many other areas of family policy, the provision of flexible working supports has often been left to the employer and is subject to employee-employer negotiations (see also Chapter 21 by Chung in this volume). Flexible working arrangements are often informal, especially for workers in smaller firms. Modest and irregular arrangements, such as occasionally taking an hour or two off work for family reasons, are more common than more substantial arrangements such as working from home on a regular basis (OECD, 2016a).

However, there are strong equity concerns involved with leaving the provision of flexible work to the market alone. All else being equal, higher-skilled workers with greater bargaining power are more likely than others to be able to negotiate access to flexible working arrangements. Indeed, looking across European countries, professionals and managers enjoy much greater access to flexible working than low-skilled workers and those in clerical or service jobs (OECD, 2016a, 2017b). Workers in lower skill occupations are also much less likely to work from home, largely because work is organized on the basis of fixed schedules (OECD, 2016a, 2017b; see also Chapter 22 by Begall & Van der Lippe in this volume). And yet, in many cases, it is lower-skilled workers on lower wages who likely need flexible working arrangements the most. These workers are less likely to be able to afford to work part-time, and less likely to be able to buy in external services (such as additional childcare or cooking and cleaning services) to help balance work and family commitments.

In recent years, OECD governments have increasingly stepped-in to help promote flexible working for all workers regardless of status or occupation. Many OECD countries (e.g. Australia, Austria, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, and the United Kingdom) now provide workers with a statutory right to at least request reduced working hours. Several of these countries also provide a complementary right to return to full-time work and/or automatically revert to previous hours after a certain specified period (Blum et al., 2018; OECD, 2017b). Some countries (e.g. Australia, Austria, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, and Sweden) restrict these rights to parents with young children and/or workers with caring responsibilities, while others provide the right to all workers regardless of circumstances (e.g. the Netherlands, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom). In most countries, employers can refuse requests on business grounds, although in several (e.g. Portugal, Norway, and Slovenia) employers cannot refuse while children are under a certain age (Blum et al., 2018; OECD, 2017b).

The Netherlands and the United Kingdom provide two of the most comprehensive examples of the “right to request” policy (Blum et al., 2018; OECD, 2017b). While in most OECD countries employees are entitled to request changes to working hours only, in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the right extends to other areas of flexible working, such as the scheduling of working hours and the place of work. In both cases, these rights apply to all employees who have worked for their current employer for at least six months, although in the Netherlands, employers with less than ten employees are exempt. Also in both cases, employers can refuse if there is a clear business reason for doing so (Blum et al., 2018; OECD, 2017b).

An ongoing challenge for public policy is that, in many countries, flexible working arrangements are often regulated by collective bargaining or enterprise-level agreements (Cabrita, Boehmer, & Galli da Bino, 2016; Hegewisch, 2009). Nevertheless, governments can still help by providing information of flexible, facilitating the exchange of best practice, and encouraging collective bargaining on flexible workplace issues (OECD, 2016a).

## Concluding Remarks

This chapter has highlighted important and relatively recent developments in family policy aimed largely at helping parents to balance work and family commitments and reducing gender inequality. These developments have helped promote women’s employment in particular, with positive effects on poverty risks and fertility. However, the most disadvantaged families often do not make use of ECEC and flexible working arrangements to the same extent as higher income groups. An ongoing challenge for all OECD countries is to improve family policies so that they better serve the most needy families and better counteract growing income inequalities.

A second challenge is to adapt family policies to changing family living arrangements. In particular, family dissolution and reconstitution are more common than in the past and patterns of family reconstitution today more heterogeneous than they were only few years ago. This creates new challenges for policies to support single parents (see also Chapter 13 by Maldonado & Nieuwenhuis in this volume) and child support policies (see also Chapter 12 by Skinner & Hakovirta in this volume). A growing number of parents cohabit informally, and a growing number of children move from one household to another on a regular basis. This poses obvious challenges to calculating benefit entitlements and service delivery, but it is vital that children have access to family supports regardless of the marriage status of their

parents, and in this respect at least enjoy equal starting opportunities in life (Miho & Thévenon, 2019).

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