

OBSERVATORY FOR SOCIOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN EUROPE



EQUAL CARE How the EU supports a gender-equal division of care work

CONTENT

EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES

Foreword: Irena Moozova, European Commission..... 3

Introduction: Friederike Sprang, Observatory..... 5

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES 12

CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVES

Attila Bóhm, COFACE Families Europe 16

SCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVES

Caroline de la Porte, Copenhagen Business School..... 18

Editorial

Throughout Europe, unpaid care work, whether in childcare or other care, is still mostly carried out by women*¹. This has drastic effects on gender equality: women* have less time for paid work and thus less income in the long run than men*.

The vision of the “universal caregiver” prioritises unpaid care work as a relevant task of every person, regardless of gender and family constellation (more on this in the excursus: → [Is equal care binary?](#)). Current political measures in Europe, in contrast, are primarily aimed at equal care in the form of a gender-equal division of care work between two people as well as a better reconciliation of family and work.

A corresponding initiative by the European Union is the [Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers](#). It was adopted by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union in 2019 and had for the most part to be transposed into national law by 2 August 2022. The Directive regulates EU-wide minimum standards for various types of leave of absence and flexible working hours for care work. Its national implementation provides examples of how a redistribution of employment and care work in a spirit of partnership as well as better framework conditions for family carers can be promoted by means of policies.

In her foreword to this Dossier, [Irena Moozova](#), Deputy Director General – International Dimension of Justice Policies, Rule of Law and Equality in the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers at the European Commission, provides an overview with a **European perspective** of the Directive and its equality policy dimension. The subsequent introductory contribution by [Friederike Sprang](#), Research Officer at the Observatory, first deals with **care work in general**: What is care work, who performs it and why is it a political issue? The focus here is on the socio-economic effects. Against this background, **EU reconciliation policy** as well as the **contents, goals and implementation of the Work-life Balance Directive** are then examined in more detail.

This is followed by insights into the **national implementation of the Directive**, based on three country examples from **Denmark, Finland and Portugal**. To do so, the reformed regulations on leave in the three countries are presented in an overview form. This is followed by nine facts that shed light on national reconciliation policies in Europe in general. [Attila Bóhm](#) of COFACE Families Europe then provides a **civil society perspective** on the issue. Finally, [Caroline de la Porte](#), professor at the Copenhagen Business School, includes a **scientific perspective** and shows which conditions can lead to a higher take-up of leave by fathers, as is aimed for in the Directive. Furthermore, she provides corresponding recommendations.

Friederike Sprang, Observatory

Foreword

Irena Moozova is Deputy Director General – International Dimension of Justice Policies, Rule of Law and Equality at the **European Commission’s department for Justice and Consumers** (DG JUST). DG JUST is responsible for the EU Commission’s policies on justice, consumer rights and gender equality.

I am pleased to acknowledge this Research Dossier focusing on the crucial topic of the implementation of the Work-life Balance Directive across Europe. The Work-life Balance Directive, adopted by the European Union in 2019 represents a significant stride towards fostering equality, enhancing well-being, and promoting a more inclusive and progressive society across our Member States. This Directive, which had to be transposed by all Member States by August 2022 stands as a testament to the European Union’s unwavering commitment to advancing gender equality and ensuring a harmonious work-life equilibrium for all citizens.

The Work-life Balance Directive addresses a pivotal challenge that modern societies face: how to effectively reconcile work responsibilities with personal and family life commitments. By acknowledging the diverse needs of individuals and families, this Directive aspires to provide an essential framework that empowers workers to maintain a balanced lifestyle while pursuing their professional aspirations. The Directive introduces ground-breaking provisions such as

- improved parental leave rights,
- paternity leave, a carer’s leave, and
- the right to request flexible working arrangements.

At its core, the Work-life Balance Directive is not only a legislative achievement but also a resolute step towards gender equality within the European Union.

By addressing the unequal distribution of caregiving responsibilities that often fall disproportionately on women (→ see endnote 64), the Directive addresses an inherent barrier to gender parity in the workforce.

The introduction of measures that encourage and support fathers to take on, from the start, a more equal share of family responsibilities, and offer greater flexibility inherently challenges traditional gender roles, paving the way for more women to engage in the labour market on equal terms. Furthermore, the Directive contributes to diminish gender pay gaps by fostering an environment where women can fully participate in the workforce without sacrificing their role as caregivers. Finally, the leaves introduced by the Directive send a signal to the labour market that both men and women are equally ‘at risk’ of a career break when they have a child therefore reducing the risk of discrimination at the recruitment stage.

The relevance of the Work-life Balance Directive is further underscored by its alignment with [the European Pillar of Social Rights](#), → [the European Care Strategy for caregivers and care receivers](#) and the broader commitment to a fair and just society. By emphasising the importance of work-life balance, the Directive not only enhances the well-being of individuals and families but also contributes to the overall socio-economic development of Member States. A workforce that is supported in managing their personal and professional responsibilities is better equipped to thrive, innovate, and contribute effectively to the economy.

At this stage, the European Commission is looking into the implementation of the Directive by Member States and assesses the transposition into the national law. It is our hope that this Dossier will contribute as a valua-

ble resource for policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders alike, fostering informed discussions and collaborative efforts to further enhance work-life balance policies.

In conclusion, the Work-life Balance Directive marks a defining moment in the pursuit of gender equality and social progress within the European Union. By sup-

porting individuals in harmonising their personal and professional lives, we aspire to create a more inclusive, diverse, and equitable Europe. The European Commission remains steadfast in its commitment to monitoring and promoting the effective implementation of this Directive, and we eagerly anticipate the insights and solutions that this Research Dossier will contribute to this ongoing endeavour.



© Sabrina Bracher/shutterstock.com

Realising equality with the Work-life Balance Directive: Why care work is political

Friederike Sprang is Research Officer at the **Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe**. The Observatory analyses socio-political developments within Germany and other EU Member States as well as at the European level.

Looking after the children, caring for relatives and running the household – all have to be managed, often simultaneously. The main responsibility for these unpaid work activities continues largely to be borne by women*, even if they pursue paid work. The EU Work-life Balance Directive is intended to counteract this.

The **European Union Directive on Work-life balance for parents and carers** aims at better reconciliation and a more equal distribution of paid work and care work between partners. In doing so, it strengthens gender equality and creates better framework conditions for parents and family carers.

What is care work and why do we need it?

„We would all be dead if it weren't for the work of caring for children, the elderly [sic!] and the sick. We would be in very bad shape if our day-to-day needs for food, clean clothes, and a habitable place to live weren't cared for. There wouldn't even be a labor force to go to their jobs or businesses if it weren't for the work of caregiving.“

(Riane Eisler, *the Real Wealth of Nations*, 2007: 35)

Caring, nurturing, comforting. These activities are indispensable for our society and our economic system, and even necessary for their survival. Yet unpaid care work still does not receive the appreciation it deserves. Oftentimes, it is not even seen as work, but as an activity that is done out of love and devotion and therefore does not require financial remuneration.

GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE

In this Dossier, the terms women* and men* are used to draw attention to the fact that gender is socially constructed. The asterisk (*) is meant to be inclusive of all persons who define themselves as women* or men*, thus breaking away from the binary language that describes only cis-hetero persons (more on this in the excursus → [Is equal care binary?](#)). Furthermore, the terms birthing parent and non-birthing parent as well as second parent (in reference to the Work-life Balance Directive) are used in addition to the terms “father” and “mother”. This is to include parents who do not fit into the binary gender system as well as queer parents. However, many cited studies in this Dossier are based on a binary gender categorisation into men and women / fathers and mothers. This is in particular done to highlight unequal treatment of women and men. In these cases, too, the asterisk and the addition of the terms “birthing” and “non-birthing” parent are used, as it cannot be assumed per se that only people identifying as cisgender participated in said studies.

Care work in general refers to “all activities of caring for, giving attention to and providing for oneself and others”.² Care work is divided into paid and unpaid work: paid care work is, for example, the work of nurses, educators, midwives, social workers and other social

and/or household service providers.³ Unpaid care work includes, for instance, care and support in the private sphere, everyday care task and also the mental effort (“mental load”⁴) needed for organisation as well as the responsibility that goes hand in hand with these tasks.

In addition, household chores such as cooking, shopping, washing, maintenance and cleaning fall under the sphere of care work.⁵

EUROPEAN CARE STRATEGY

On 7 September 2022, the European Commission presented its [European Care Strategy](#). The strategy's aim is to ensure high-quality, affordable and accessible care and support services across the European Union and to improve both the situation of those in need of care and those who care for them, be it professionally or on an informal basis.

A [focus issue](#) of the **Observatory's** EU monitoring (only available in German) presents the Council's recommendation on the revision of the Barcelona objectives on early childhood care, education and the Council's recommendation on long-term care. In addition, a synopsis compares changes between the Commission's initial proposal and the Council's adopted recommendation in a table.

In order to give care work the appreciation it deserves, feminist economists call for a so-called **care economy** that is based on the recognition, valorisation and redistribution of care work. The adoption of the → [European Care Strategy](#) is an initiative at EU level inspired by these demands. Moreover, it is also shaped by the implications of demographic change and the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶

Who performs unpaid care work?

Unpaid care work is unequally distributed between women* and men* (→ [Gender Care Gap](#)). The goal of equal care has thus not been achieved. Starting a family significantly increases care work within the household, which is why this phase of life has a particularly strong impact on the unequal distribution of care work: A survey by the European Institute for Gender Equality in 2022 shows that about 56 percent of women* in the EU with children under 12 years of age spend at least five hours a day on childcare, compared to 26 percent of men* with children under the age of 12.⁷ Data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) furthermore highlight that men* continue to take parental leave less fre-

quently than women* - and when they do, it is for a much shorter period of time.⁸ Although the difference is particularly strong for couples with children, women* also tend to take on a larger share of unpaid care work in couple relationships without children.⁹ Gender-related differences at the disadvantage of women* can also be observed when it comes to the care for ageing parents or other relatives.

This again makes it more difficult for women* to reconcile care and paid work.¹⁰

In some EU countries, care work is increasingly being outsourced to migrants in order to compensate for deficits in care and childcare services. However, this phenomenon of so-called *global care chains* leads to care gaps (*care drain*) in the respective countries of origin.¹¹

GENDER CARE GAP

In Germany, the Gender Care Gap was developed as part of the Second Gender Equality Report of the German Federal Government. It is based on data from the Time Use Survey 2012/13. The indicator shows how much time women* spend on private care work as compared to men*. Overall, women* performed 52.4 percent more care work than men*. This corresponds to 87 minutes more per day. In families with small children, the Gender Care Gap rises to over 110 percent. This is a difference of more than two and a half hours per day of women* performing more care work.

Excursus: Is equal care binary?

The discourse on equal care usually assumes that care work is divided equally between two persons or two binary genders, namely cis¹²-men and cis-women. Gender, however, is a spectrum consisting of a multiplicity of genders, on which cis-men and cis-women merely represent the respective ends of the spectrum.¹³ If the discourse on equal care refers to a largely binary gender system, people, couples and family constellations that do not correspond to this heteronormative system¹⁴ are consequently excluded. This concerns, for example, trans*, inter* or non-binary persons¹⁵ and couples as well as single parents, rainbow¹⁶ and chosen families or other forms of care partner-/relationships.¹⁷

Nevertheless, it is important to make these binary genders, the roles assigned to them and the associated traditional family images of a heterosexual, married nuclear family consisting of father-mother-child(ren) visible in the discourse on a gender-equal distribution of care work. This is due to the fact that in the past, cis-women and cis-men were assigned certain social role models that they had to fulfil. This entailed a caring and nurturing role for women and the role of the family's "breadwinner" for men. This binary role ascription finds expression in the breadwinner model (father employed full-time, mother not employed) and the additional income model (father full-time, mother part-time) and has significant influence on a still existing gender-based division of care work. Both models are supported by normative, labour-organisational, infrastructural and institutional structures up to this day.¹⁸ The extent to which queer couples and other family forms can or want to comply with this unequal distribution of roles and tasks varies. Some queer relationships or non-traditional family constellations follow established heteronormative patterns, others transcend them.¹⁹

Consequently, to avoid the term "equal care" reproducing heteronormative structures that are supposed to be overcome, it is important to understand equal care as a gender-equitable division of care work between different genders, persons and within different family constellations. Nevertheless, women* and men* must also be named as such in the discourse in order to

make the structural gender-related discrimination of women* visible. Meanwhile, Nancy Fraser's "Universal Caregiver Model" puts care work in the foreground as a main task of every individual. This allows to dissolve gender-related binary attributions as well as the focus on traditional nuclear families.²⁰ Karin Jurczyk and Ulrich Mückenberger's option time model also offers a solution, as this model entitles everyone, regardless of gender and marital status, to a financially compensated time period for care work.²¹

What are implications of the unequal distribution of care work?

The disproportionate workload in care tasks taken on by women* has implications that go beyond the private sphere. This is particularly visible when founding a family: women* usually take a longer break from work after the birth of a child, then more often go part-time or leave the labour market altogether.²² However, the influence of care work is not limited to childcare: taking on care work for dependent relatives can also lead to reduced working hours for the caregiver.²³ As a general rule, those who do more unpaid care work have less time for paid work.

This phenomenon was confirmed during the COVID-19 pandemic: women* were more likely to take paid or unpaid leave, reduce their working hours or quit their jobs to meet increasing care responsibilities during the lockdowns.²⁴



© Cavan-Images/shutterstock.com



© Halfpoint/shutterstock.com

Fundamentally, women's reduced employment leads to them receiving less income (→ [Gender Pay Gap](#)) and ultimately lower pension payments (→ [Gender Pension Gap](#)) in comparison to men. This ultimately increases the risk of old-age poverty for women. In short, this means that women do not have the same opportunities for economic independence and financial security as men, as the possibility of earning an income and advancing one's own professional career is closely linked to the distribution and organisation of care work.²⁵

In order to achieve equality, it must therefore become possible to distribute both paid work and unpaid care work in an egalitarian way between partners and between genders. A fair and equal distribution of private, unpaid care work thus has a political dimension which requires an adequate political framework.

How can the goal of equal care be promoted on policy level?

Since the division of paid work and unpaid care work is closely interrelated²⁶, policy levers in the past were mainly aimed at increasing the employment rate of women in the labour market and thus implicitly distributing care work more evenly.²⁷ However, even in couples where both partners work full-time, the main burden of care work is borne by women.²⁸

GENDER PAY GAP AND GENDER PENSION GAP

The **Gender Pay Gap** calculates the percentage difference in the average gross hourly earnings of men and women. In the EU average, this difference amounted to 12.7 percent (unadjusted) in 2021.²⁹ A distinction is made between the "adjusted" and "unadjusted" Gender Pay Gap. The unadjusted gap also highlights structural differences – i.e. the fact that sectors and occupations in which women are more likely to work are often lower paid. The adjusted Gender Pay Gap only compares salaries for comparable jobs, qualifications and sectors. To explain why men are more likely to perform more paid work and less unpaid care work, the unadjusted Gender Pay Gap is more relevant.

The **Gender Pension Gap** indicates the difference in men's and women's personal retirement benefits. On EU average in 2021, women received 25.9 percent less pension benefits than men.³⁰

Therefore, policy measures that bring about a long-term change in social norms in the realm of care work are particularly important to really achieve shared care responsibilities between people. This could be done, for example, by increasing the take-up of leave times by fathers or other non-birthing parents.³¹ Political levers for this lie primarily in the **concrete design of**

parental leave schemes: reforms in this field can create incentives for this group of non-birthing people to really claim and use their parental leave.³² If these parents take a longer, sole leave of absence after the birth of the child, they are also likely to be more involved in concrete childcare tasks afterwards and more likely to take on more care work.³³ After all, it has been shown that the division of care work that the partners decided upon after the birth of the first child is reinforced and becomes entrenched in the further course of time.³⁴

Flexible working hours, for instance, could enable family caregivers to better combine care responsibilities with paid work. A **care salary** for family carers would serve to remunerate care work appropriately and thus make it easier to reconcile care and paid work.³⁵

Time policy initiatives, such as the **option time model,** can also increase the appreciation of care work. In this model, each individual has a time budget of six years in which paid work can be interrupted or reduced in order to perform care work. These periods are financially secured. It is intended to make “breathing life-courses” the new norm, with the result that more men* will also take on care work.³⁶

Policy measures and instruments can thus positively influence a gender-equal division of care work as well as better reconciliation of family and work for parents and family carers. With the Work-life Balance Directive, the EU has adopted an instrument that influences national policy frameworks in this area by setting minimum standards on EU level.

How does the European Union promote equal care?

At the European level, the issue of equal care is reflected in the European Union’s reconciliation policy, for instance. Improving the reconciliation of family and work is part of the EU’s social policy, which is a shared competence of the EU institutions and the Member States (Art. 4, para. 2 TFEU).

In the area of reconciliation policy, the EU makes use of the instrument of Directives, among other levers.

Directives provide provisions which the Member States have to transpose into national law within a certain time period.

With the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) (EPSR) of 2017 and its corresponding 2021 [Action Plan](#)³⁷, the issue of reconciliation policy gained renewed importance at EU level. Principle 9 of the Pillar, on work-life balance, provides a right to adequate leave and flexible working arrangements, as well as access to care services for parents and people with care responsibilities. Women* and men* are encouraged to make balanced use of leave times for care. In addition to Principle 9, other principles of the EPSR are also relevant to a gender-equal distribution and sharing of unpaid care work.³⁸

The EPSR is not legally binding. To implement it, the Commission flanks EPSR with concrete policy initiatives. One of these initiatives is Directive 2019/1158, the [Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers](#). Other EU initiatives relevant to the issue of equal care include the → [European Care Strategy](#) and the → [Gender Equality Strategy](#).

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF DIRECTIVES ON RECONCILIATION OF FAMILY AND WORK LIFE

In 1996, [Council Directive 96/34](#) was adopted. It implemented a framework agreement on parental leave concluded by the European social partners. Among other things, the Directive established an individual right to parental leave of at least three months in the event of the birth or adoption of a child. The Directive was replaced in 2010 by [Directive 2010/18](#), which extended the right to parental leave to a minimum standard of four months upon the birth or adoption of a child. In addition, the new Directive stipulated that one month of this may not be transferred to the other parent, thus providing for an individual entitlement per parent. Furthermore, the Directive indicates that the compensation for parental leave is a determining factor for its take-up and use. As its predecessor, this Directive also implemented the framework agreement on parental leave as revised and recommended by the European social partners.

What does the Work-life Balance Directive entail?

Directive 2019/1158, the [Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers](#), henceforth called Work-life Balance Directive, entered into force on 1 August 2019. It regulates EU-wide minimum standards for leaves of absence and flexible working arrangements for care work reasons. It raises existing EU standards for Member States' reconciliation policies from previous Directives. Nevertheless, the Commission's original proposal in 2017 was more ambitious.³⁹ And even after several amendments to the original proposal, four Member States voted against the Directive in the Council of the EU, while two others abstained.⁴⁰

The adopted Work-life Balance Directive introduces a completely new leave scheme for family carers and fathers or second parents⁴¹ (if recognised under national law).⁴² It also increases the non-transferable months of parental leave and imposes adequate compensation for parental leave.

Overview on leave regulations within the Directive

Type of leave	Former EU regulations	Work-life Balance Directive
Paternity leave Article 4	No minimum standards	Ten days paid leave for fathers or equivalent second parents (if recognised under national law) for the birth of the child Compensation at least on the level of paid sick leave
Parental leave Article 5	Four months per parent, one of which is non-transferable No minimum standard for compensation	Four months per parent, two of which are non-transferable Adequate compensation
Leave for family carers Article 6	No minimum standards	At least five working days per year with flexibility in how these are allocated and divided between partners No fixed compensation

Flexible work hours, dismissal protection and leave due to force majeure

Furthermore, the Directive stipulates a **strengthened right to apply for flexible working arrangements** (Article 9). Previously, only parents returning from parental leave could apply for flexible work schedules. The Work-life Balance Directive, in contrast, gives all parents with children up to the age of eight as well as

GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY

On 5 March 2020, the European Commission presented its new [Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025](#). The strategy defines policy objectives and measures to achieve measurable progress towards equality in Europe by 2025. These include combating gender stereotypes, reducing gender gaps in the labour market, tackling the pay and pension gaps between women* and men* as well as reducing the gap in care responsibilities.

A [focus issue of the Observatory's EU monitoring](#) (only available in German) covers the Gender Equality Strategy.

In addition to introducing new leave schemes and increasing the non-transferable months of parental leave, the Directive flexibilises the way in which parental leave can be taken – full-time, part-time or some other flexible form. In addition, equivalent second parents are explicitly mentioned as being eligible for periods of paternity leave, insofar as their status is recognised under national law (Article 4, para. 1).

family carers the right to apply for flexible working. The employer does not have to agree to a request for flexible working hours, but there is a duty to provide reasons in case of refusal (Article 9, para. 2).

As in previous Directives, the EU Member States must ensure that workers have the **right to leave for urgent family reasons** if illness or accident requires their immediate presence (Article 7).

The Work-life Balance Directive also provides for **better protection against dismissal**. It prohibits any discrimination or dismissal of workers for requesting or taking up leave or flexible working arrangements (Articles 11 and 12).

What are the Directive's goals?

In essence, the Directive is intended to make it easier for parents and family carers to reconcile family and professional life by providing for (paid) leave and flexible working arrangements.

First, the Work-life Balance Directive is intended to encourage in particular fathers or equivalent second parents to take leave of absence. If they take on more care work, this is supposed to also improve the situation of mothers and other birthing persons on the labour market, as they will have more time at their disposal for paid work and an interruption of paid work in favour for care work is no longer seen as gender-specific.

A compensatory **leave benefit** offers fathers a greater incentive to take time off than leaves without financial support or with a lump sum would, as for structural reasons, men* often earn more than women* (→ [Gender Pay Gap](#)). Furthermore, the **non-transferability of two months of parental leave** creates greater incentives for fathers or equivalent second parents to take leave, as this time off work would otherwise lapse. Making the **take-up of parental leave more flexible** also makes it more likely that fathers or equivalent second parents will in fact take it. After all, such flexibility means they do not have to interrupt their professional career.⁴³

Second, the Directive aims to improve the reconciliation of care and work for family carers. The **right to leave for caregivers** and the **right to apply for flexible work arrangements** are intended to provide employees with caregiving responsibilities with more time for these care tasks.

Implementation of the Directive

The EU Member States had to incorporate the Directive on work-life balance into national law by 2 August 2022, with the exception of the regulations regarding compensation or benefits for the last two weeks of parental leave. The latter provision must be implemented by 2 August 2024 (Article 20, para. 2). Various 2022 reports⁴⁴ evaluated the implementation and transposition of the Directive into national law. They show that by 2 August 2022, the majority of Member States have not yet fully implemented the Directive.

INFRINGEMENT PROCEDURES

In September 2022, the European Commission launched the first step of infringement procedures against 19 EU Member States by issuing a letter of formal notice for non-communication of measures. Based on the replies, eleven states were found not to have fully implemented the Directive. In the second step of the procedure, these countries received a reasoned opinion from the Commission.

According to the [report of the Equality Law Network](#), the greatest difficulties in implementing the Directive lie in parental leave and the corresponding compensation/benefits as well as in the regulations on flexible working arrangements. There are fewer problems with the implementation of the second parent's leave, including compensation, and with leave from work due to force majeure.

Member States must provide the European Commission with all information on the implementation of the Directive, including available data on the take-up of the different leave and flexible working time arrangements by men* and women*, by 2 August 2027. The Commission is then obliged to draw up a report on the basis of this information (Art. 18 of the Directive).

Implementation of the Directive on national level in Denmark, Finland and Portugal

Several EU Member States have carried out **national reforms** to implement the Directive. This section takes a closer look at three countries – **Denmark, Finland** and **Portugal** – which, as part of the implementation of the Directive, have reformed their parental leave regulations and, in the case of Finland, also family carer's leave regulations. The section gives a brief insight into the **reformed regulations** in the three countries and presents them in tables. A more detailed overview of the currently applicable parental leave regulations in the three countries can be found in the [respective overview by the Observatory](#) on the website.

Denmark⁴⁵

The **new parental leave model** contained within the [Maternity Leave Act](#) entered into force on 2 August 2022 to implement the Work-life Balance Directive. In Denmark the non-transferability of benefits implements the Work-life Balance Directive with regards to parental leave as follows:

If the parent is a worker, eleven of the 24 weeks maternity leave benefits are non-transferable. The eleven weeks include two weeks for each parent in connection with the birth of the child. The remaining nine weeks non-transferable benefits must be used before the child is one year old or they will lapse. 13 of the 24 weeks maternity leave benefits may be transferred to the other parent.

Maternity Leave benefits in total: 24 weeks (168 days)⁴⁶

Non-transferable leave benefits

11 weeks (77 days)

Transferable leave benefits

13 weeks (91 days)

Finland⁴⁷

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Sanna Marin, Finland introduced a [Family Leave Reform](#) on 1 August 2022 to implement the EU Directive on work-life balance.

The other 97 days are thus individually assigned and non-transferable. With this reform, the eligibility for parental leave in Finland increased by roughly two months.

Since then, both parents have equal eligibility for **parental leave**. This leave amounts to 160 days, of which up to 63 days can be transferred to the other parent.

In addition, the reform introduced the right to a five-day unpaid **leave of absence for family carers**.

Total eligibility parental leave: 160 days

Non-transferable eligibility

97 days

Transferable eligibility

63 days

Portugal⁴⁸

To implement the Work-life Balance Directive, Portugal has adjusted its parental leave provisions on 1 May 2023 as part of the [Agenda do Trabalho Digno](#).

In the process, the leave to which only the father or second parent is entitled was increased from 20 to 28 days. These days of leave are compulsory. Of these, seven days must be taken immediately after the birth and the 21 other days must be taken within the first 42 days after birth.⁴⁹

Similarly, the reform **increased the compensation for parental leave** if it is shared more equally between the partners: If each parent takes at least 60 consecutive days or two periods of 30 days after the first 42

days after birth, the 180 total days are remunerated at 90 percent of the reference salary (see table).

After the end of this first parental leave period, both parents are individually entitled to three months of extended leave. If both parents each take the entire extended leave, the compensation increases to 40 percent (instead of 30 percent) of the reference salary.⁵⁰ Before the reform, the compensation was at 25 percent.

Since the reform, extended leave can also be combined with part-time work arrangements. In this case, parents receive 20 percent of the reference salary in addition to their part-time salary.

Overall leave: 180 days

Parent 1	Parent 2	Compensation
120 days (or less)	60 days (or more)	90 percent
150 days (or less)	30 days (or more)	83 percent



© AnnaStills/shutterstock.com

Good to know: Nine facts on national reconciliation policy in Europe

Friederike Sprang, Research Officer at the Observatory

Despite the minimum standards set across the EU, the reconciliation of paid work and family life for parents and family carers varies greatly between the EU Member States. The following nine facts map this diversity and highlight particularly interesting regulations. In doing so, it firstly becomes clear that we are dealing with a policy area that is subject to considerable dynamism: many states have undertaken reforms in recent years. Second, the research shows that certain countries have introduced models, some of them very ambitious, that go far beyond the minimum requirements of the EU's Work-life Balance Directive.

1. Spain was the first EU country to fully equalise parental leave.⁵¹

In 2021, the Spanish government aligned the leave for fathers / second parents with the leave for mothers / birthing persons. Both parents are thus equally entitled to a total of 16 weeks parental leave with full salary compensation.⁵² These are not transferable to the other parent. Birthing persons may take up to four of these 16 weeks before the birth of the child.

2. 15 countries explicitly grant the parental leave to second parents regardless of gender.⁵³

According to the Equality Law Network report, 25 EU countries have implemented the second parent leave regulation as of 2 August 2022. Fifteen of these guarantee the right to leave to any (equivalent) second parents regardless of gender; ten countries do not.

3. In Belgium, self-employed fathers or self-employed co-parents can under certain conditions receive vouchers for household-related services such as cleaning, ironing or shopping.⁵⁴

In Belgium, all fathers and second parents are entitled to 20 days of paid leave within the first four months after the birth of the child. If they are self-employed, they can take this in a block, as individual days or even as half days. If the self-employed second parent takes a maximum of nine days or 18 half days, they are entitled to 15 free service vouchers (titres services/dienstcheques) with a total value of 135 euros.

VOUCHERS FOR HOUSEHOLD AND DOMESTIC SERVICES IN BELGIUM

The service voucher system has been in place in Belgium since 2004. Any person living in Belgium can buy up to 500 heavily state-subsidised vouchers per year and redeem them for household-related services, such as cleaning the home or preparing meals. In addition, mothers receive 105 free vouchers after the birth of a child. This is intended to facilitate their return to paid work.⁵⁵

4. In France, Italy, Portugal and Spain, leave for second parents is mandatory, at least for a certain period of time.⁵⁶

In all four countries, leave of absence for fathers or second parents has a mandatory time period. These compulsory leave times amount to the first seven days after birth in France⁵⁷, the entire ten working days of leave in Italy, 28 days in Portugal and the first six weeks (42 days) after birth in Spain.

5. In Bulgaria, mothers are entitled to 410 calendar days of leave.⁵⁸

45 calendar days of this must be taken before the child's calculated due date; and a total of 135 days is mandatory. When the child is six months old, the remaining leave can also be transferred to the father if he meets certain requirements. The leave is compensated at 90 percent of the average gross income of the past 24 months, but cannot be less than the minimum wage.

6. In Portugal and Spain, both parents have a right to a paid break during working hours to breastfeed or feed the child.⁵⁹

A right for mothers or other birthing persons to take a break to breastfeed or feed the child exists in many EU countries. In Portugal and Spain, however, *both* parents have this right: This amounts to two hours per day for the first twelve months in Portugal, and one hour per day for the first nine or twelve months in Spain, depending on the respective employer.

7. Denmark and parts of Austria offer a care salary for family carers in certain cases.⁶⁰

Since 2019, the Austrian state of Burgenland has made it possible for family carers to be officially considered employed and receive a care wage in the so-called "Burgenland-Modell". To be eligible for this, they must complete a basic training course. In Denmark, people caring for a seriously ill, dying or disabled relative can receive a care salary as well.

8. In Ireland, family carers are entitled to leaves of up to 104 weeks.⁶¹

Eligibility for this leave is based on twelve months of continuous employment. The person being cared for must be in need of full-time care and support, but need not be a family member or spouse. The leave of absence must be at least 13 weeks. During the leave, the caregiver does not receive a salary from the employer but can apply for a care benefit or a means-tested care allowance.

9. In Luxembourg, 53 percent of the recipients of parental leave benefits are men*.⁶²

However, most men* in Luxembourg opt for part-time leave, whereas most women* take full-time parental leave. Furthermore, fathers / second parents in Luxembourg have a much shorter entitlement to paid leave than mothers / birthing parents.⁶³



© Davide Zanin Photography/shutterstock.com

Breaking away from gender stereotypes: COFACE advocates towards a work-life balance for all

Attila Bóhm is Policy and Advocacy Officer at the Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (**COFACE Families Europe**). COFACE carried out the transposition assessment of the Work-Life Balance Directive focusing on the regulation of paternity, parental and carers' leaves.

COFACE Families Europe, a civil society network of 50+ family organisations spanning 23 countries, intensively promoted and advocated for specific EU measures on Work-life Balance for years. Over the last decade, COFACE campaigned to EU lawmakers highlighting the challenges that families and carers face in reconciling their professional and private life. COFACE has supported the notion of work-life balance for all, based on measures that tackle the stereotypical vision of "traditional" and old-fashioned distribution of roles, where women⁶⁴ are caregivers and men are breadwinners.

Structural and cultural shift needed

Equality between women and men, and sharing of family care responsibilities, is a cornerstone of the reconciliation of family and professional life. Of course, this requires a culture shift towards greater family teamwork⁶⁵. But such equality also relies on structural arrangements such as comprehensive policies based on a mix of Resources, Services and Time to support families and give them real options for work-life balance.

The EU Work-life Balance Directive (Directive (EU) 2019/1158) covers these key pillars by providing:

- **Time** (family leaves and flexible working arrangements)
- **Resources** (through the adequate payment for certain leaves)
- And paves the way for future action on access to **Services (Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and Long-Term Care (LTC))**

Diverse families call for diverse measures

The Directive contains legal elements which acknowledge the diversity of families in the 21st century, for instance with the mention of "equivalent second parent" under the paternity leave article. It provides for adequate payments of paternity, parental and carers leave. This is to ensure take-up of leaves. At the same time, it functions as an anti-poverty measure so workers with care duties do not fear loss of income. The Directive also includes a provision of non-transferability of parental leave for fathers, to ensure that they use their right and are able to invest time in family care for their children, hence also promoting gender equality between women and men.

What is missing?

The scope of the Directive unfortunately does not cover self-employed workers, which is a shortcoming and does not acknowledge the reality of the labour market today where a huge number of workers are self-employed. Furthermore, the minimum standard of five days of carers leave per year is simply not adequate if you think of some of the heavy care needs that some family members have – in some cases, due to the lack of professional services, family carers even need to stop working entirely in order to care full-time.

Advocating for families of today and tomorrow

Overall, we consider it crucial to launch a new dynamic in all Member States' social policies by setting out new minimum standards for gender-responsive family leaves which respect diversity of social systems and family-friendly policies at workplaces by providing flexible working arrangements for both men and women. While COFACE Families Europe acknowledges the importance of the new social acquis of the Direc-

tive, it will continue to advocate for higher standards by using all tools available (EU, national, statistical, policy, research and more) working closely with its member organisations to monitor national reforms, ensuring that national family policies and systems are fully compliant with EU law. This includes both hard law like the EU Work-life Balance Directive and soft law like the

EU Child Guarantee, → the EU Care Strategy, the EU Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities, and → the EU Gender Equality Strategy – all fundamental policy frameworks to consolidate and rethink welfare systems so that families of today can be supported and resilient to different social and economic shocks.

REPORT: EU WORK-LIFE BALANCE DIRECTIVE TRANSPOSITION IN ACTION: A MIXED PICTURE

COFACE carried out the transposition assessment of the Directive focusing on the regulation of paternity, parental and carers' leaves. The aim of the assessment was to have a clear overview on how the different kind of leaves are regulated in the respective countries and whether these parts of the Directive were transposed into the national legislation. The assessment underlines how the Directive paves the way for strengthening the European values of gender equality, social inclusion, diversity and non-discrimination but also accentuates some derogation clauses which require further assessment.

The transposition assessment focused on ten countries, namely: Belgium, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Poland and Spain. This is based on the expertise of members in the COFACE network and represents a geographical balance. The document ends with guidelines for transposition to consolidate national policies and legislation.

The COFACE assessment on the transposition of the Directive was published on 12th October 2022: [EU Work-life Balance Directive transposition in action: A mixed picture – From non-compliance and basic minimum standards to ambitious reforms for modern gender-responsive family policies.](#)



© everymmnt/shutterstock.com

Paid Parental Leave via the Work-life balance Directive: Could it lead to upwards social convergence?

Caroline de la Porte is Professor (MSO) at the Department of International Economics, Government and Business at **Copenhagen Business School**. Her research on European social policy covers regulatory initiatives in the realm of family policy and flexible work as well as soft law initiatives in social investment. She has published several articles on the Work-life Balance Directive.

The Work-life Balance Directive, a highly contentious piece of legislation, represents a litmus test for the possible impact of the **European Pillar of Social Rights** (EPSR), on social rights of EU citizens. In contrast to the past EU Directives on parental leave, the Work-life Balance Directive's father-specific leave provisions require financial compensation. Paternity leave (10 days) must be compensated at least at the level of sick pay, while reserved paid parental leave (2 months per parent, following a use-it or lose-it logic) must be compensated at a level which precludes a loss in standard of living for the family.⁶⁶ As the deadline for transposing the Directive into national law was August 2022 it is now possible to make a preliminary assessment of the extent to which the formal parental leave rights have been implemented. Implementation, not only de jure but also de facto, is important because it is crucial for legitimising the role of the EU in the regulation of social rights. In this article, I will briefly delineate the promises but also the possible risks in placing hope of quasi-automatic 'upwards social convergence' if Member States comply with the father-specific provisions of the Work-life Balance Directive. Then, I will make recommendations targeted at policy actors in Member States, to increase the likelihood that the new formal social rights through the Work-life Balance Directive will be used by citizens.

Divergence in the implementation of parental leave

Regarding formal implementation, the Work-life Balance Directive has prompted a degree of convergence on paternity leave, while there is divergence on parental leave. This is because, although Member States have reserved two months of leave per parent, there is considerable divergence in the level of compensation for the new parental leave right. Some countries provide high compensation, while others provide a medium or even low level of compensation. The divergence between countries in implementation of parental leave is, however, not surprising, considering the weaker EU provisions regarding compensation and stronger de-genderisation norms embedded in reserved leave for each parent.⁶⁷

Which other conditions can induce a higher take-up of leave among fathers?

Yet, from a social rights perspective, a generous compensation for leave is one of the necessary, but not sufficient conditions to induce actual use of the new leave right. In our study we found that, even in countries with similar formal implementation of the Work-life Balance Directive's parental leave provision, with a high level of compensation, there is likely to be variation in the take-up of leave among fathers.⁶⁸ We posit that the reason for this lies in 'instrumental resources' that tie formal social rights with actual use of rights by citizens.⁶⁹ The instrumental resources we examined in our study are, firstly, information provision and, secondly, administrative procedures. These two aspects linking rights with take-up are developed in conjunction with formal de jure implementation by relevant

authorities and other actors (including unions, employers and civil society organisations). Thus, the risk of assuming that take-up of rights would be equal among countries with similar de jure implementation overlooks potential challenges with actual access to social rights.

Recommendations to ensure the actual use of the new leave rights

Based on our findings, we have several recommendations.

First, information on new parental leave rights should be thorough and detailed, yet simple and easily understandable. This includes leave terminology, such as parental leave (reserved or shared), but also maternity and paternity leave, as well as other types of paid and unpaid leave schemes. It also comprises leave rights and compensation for different categories of workers (self-employed, part-time employed) across sectors. Furthermore, actors who provide information to citizens or workers should be considered the most important information agents. As leave rights are accrued through the workplace, information is channelled by shop-stewards and HR-personnel to their staff. It is thus essential that fathers – who are targeted through reserved leave – receive information about compensation and rights for various types of workers, which can

be communicated to staff, especially on new gender equalising aspects of parental leave.

Second, regarding administrative procedures, they should be organised so that individuals do not have to navigate multiple systems to access their parental leave rights and benefits. Where the formal right to leave and access to compensation is separate, application for leave and for remuneration should be simplified and, if possible, joined or at least linked. Also, planning instruments could be integrated alongside the formal application procedure, whereby parents could plan their leave, including part-time leave, joint leave, or successive leave periods between mothers and fathers/second carers. Such instruments should also include information about remuneration during different periods of leave.

A holistic examination of social rights implementation is needed

The broader policy implication of our work is that new social rights introduced through the European Pillar of Social Rights should be examined not only in terms of formal legislative changes, but also regarding their practical implementation, with a focus on instrumental resources. Perhaps that is what is needed to truly enhance the social legitimacy of the EU among citizens in all EU countries.



© Ground Picture/shutterstock.com

- 1 Regarding the usage of the terms women* and men*, see → [Infobox: Gender-neutral language](#).
- 2 Quoted in [Zweiter Gleichstellungsbericht der Bundesregierung](#) [Second Gender Equality Report of the German Federal Government], p. 92.
- 3 In Germany, the acronym SAHGE has been developed as a new umbrella term for care occupations: **Soziale Arbeit, Haushaltsnahe Dienstleistungen, Gesundheit, Pflege, Erziehung** [social work, household services, health, care, education] (see also: [Zweiter Gleichstellungsbericht der Bundesregierung](#) [Second Gender Equality Report of the German Federal Government], p. 93).
- 4 The German Initiative Equal Care has developed a [Mental Load Test](#) (only available in German) to make invisible care work more visible. The blogger Emma created a [cartoon](#) on the mental load issue.
- 5 Care Work is defined differently. [The Equal Care Initiative](#), for example, also takes into account categories such as social class, age or migration experience.
- 6 See: Karamessini (2023): [From Work-life Balance Policy to the European Care Strategy: Mainstreaming Care and Gender in the EU Policy Agenda](#).
- 7 EIGE (2023): [A Better Work–Life Balance: Bridging the Gender Care Gap](#).
- 8 Detailed data and graphs can be found in chapter 23 [Supporting equal parenting: Paid parental leave](#) of the OECD study (2023) [Joining Forces for Gender Equality: What is Holding us Back?](#)
- 9 In Germany in 2017, women* in couple relationships without children performed 35.7 percent more care work than men*. More information can be found in the Dossier [Kinder, Haushalt, Pflege – wer kümmert sich](#) [Children, household, care work – who cares?] by the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, p. 16 and in Gärtner / Lange / Stahlmann– ISS e. V. (2020): [Was der Gender Care Gap über Geld, Gerechtigkeit und die Gesellschaft aussagt. Einflussfaktoren auf den Gender Care Gap und Instrumente für seine Reduzierung](#) [What the Gender Care Gap tells us about money, justice and society. Factors influencing the Gender Care Gap and instruments for its reduction], pp. 14ff.
- 10 See: Grigoryeva (2017): [Own gender, sibling’s gender, parent’s gender: The division of elderly parent care among adult children](#) in *American Sociological Review*, 82(1), pp. 116–146, the [2016 European Quality of Life Survey](#) as well as Eurocarers (2021): [The gender dimension of informal care](#).
- 11 See: Zacharenko (2023): [Long-term care in EU policy 1999-2022: women’s responsibility, migrants’ work?](#) In *Journal of Common Market Studies*. Advance online publication; as well as the Observatory’s working paper: Rada (2016): [Migration of health-care workers from the new EU Member States to Germany](#).
- 12 Cis means that a person’s gender identity coincides with the sex assigned to them at birth.
- 13 A distinction is made between biological gender (sex) and social gender (gender). Both exist on a spectrum. See: Ainsworth (2015): [Sex redefined](#). *Nature* 518 S. 288–291 and DISW (2021): [Sex vs. Gender: Biologisches & Soziales Geschlecht](#) [Sex vs. Gender: On biological & social gender]. Judith Butler argued in her book *Gender Troubles* (1990) that both are socially constructed. We therefore always perceive bodies through a “cultural lens” that is influenced by discourses.
- 14 In a heteronormative order, heterosexuality is the social norm. Heteronormativity is thus based on a binary gender system and vice versa.
- 15 Trans* refers to persons whose own gender identity does not correspond to the gender/sex assigned at birth. Inter* refers to persons with variations in gender characteristics. Non-binary persons identify neither as purely male nor as purely female. The decisive factor in this regard is their own perception.
- 16 Rainbow families are defined as families in which children live together with at least one LGBTIQ* parent (Lange (2022): [Equality of Rainbow Families](#), p. 5).
- 17 taz (2 August 2023): [Auch Kinderlose kümmern sich](#) [Childless people do care, too].
- 18 An overview of the historical development of life models and the role of care work envisaged therein in Germany can also be found in the report of the Gender Care Gaps Project: [Was der Gender Care Gap über Geld, Gerechtigkeit und die Gesellschaft aussagt](#) [What the Gender Care Gap tells us about money, justice and society], pp. 29ff.
- 19 Raab (2020): [Elterliche Care-Arrangements in konsensuell nichtmonogamen Beziehungsnetzwerken](#) [Parental care arrangements in consensual non-monogamous relationship networks]. In *Elternschaft und Familie jenseits von Heteronormativität und Zweigeschlechtlichkeit*, 1st ed., pp. 156–71. Verlag Barbara Budrich; Van der Vleuten et al. (2021): [Same-Sex Couples’ Division of Labor from a Cross-National Perspective](#), *Journal of LGBT Family Studies*, 17: 2, pp. 150–167; Seeck, (2021): [Care trans_formieren. Eine ethnografische Studie zu trans und nicht-binärer Sorgearbeit](#). [Trans_forming care. An ethnographic study on trans and non-binary care work] Bielefeld: transcript; Dionisius (2021): [Queere Praktiken der Reproduktion. Wie lesbische und queere Paare Familie, Verwandtschaft und Geschlecht gestalten](#) [Queer practices of reproduc-

- tion. How lesbian and queer couples shape family, kinship and gender], *Queer Studies*, 31 Bielefeld: transcript.
- 20 Fraser (1997): *After the Family Wage: A Post Industrial Thought Experiment*, pp. 41–66 in Fraser: *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the 'Post-socialist' Conditions*.
- 21 See Jurczyk / Mückenberger (2020): *Selbstbestimmte Optionszeiten im Erwerbsverlauf* [Self-Determined Option Times in the Course of Employment]. Forschungsprojekt im Rahmen des [Research project within the framework of] „Fördernetzwerks Interdisziplinäre Sozialpolitikforschung“ (FIS).
- 22 See: Samtleben / Müller (2022): *Care and careers: Gender (in)equality in unpaid care, housework and employment*. In: *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 77.
- 23 Van Houtven / Coe / Skira (2013): *The effect of informal care on work and wages*.
- 24 Gencer et al. (2022): *Gendered impact of COVID-19 containment measures on unpaid care work and mental health in Europe: a scoping review protocol*. *BMJ Open*. Kohlrausch / Zucco (2020): *Die Corona-Krise trifft Frauen doppelt. Weniger Erwerbseinkommen und mehr Sorgearbeit* [The COVID-crisis hits women twice: less income and more care work]. No. 40 Policy Brief WSI 05/2020; Derndorfer / Disslbacher / Lechinger / Mader / Six (2021): *Home, sweet home? The impact of working from home on the division of unpaid work during the COVID-19 lockdown*; EIGE (2021): *Gender equality and the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic*; Arabadjieva / Franklin (2023): *Home-based telework, gender and the public-private divide*. In: *The future of remote work*, ETUI.
- 25 See: *Zweiter Gleichstellungsbericht der Bundesregierung*, or Samtleben / Müller (2022).
- 26 For a more detailed overview of the factors influencing the division of paid work and unpaid care work, see the Observatory's overview by Hoyer / Reich / Reinschmidt (2018): *Father Involvement in Family Work. How European States Promote Equal Partnership in Families*.
- 27 For the factors influencing the division of paid work between partners, see: Hipp / Leuze (2015): *Institutionelle Determinanten einer partnerschaftlichen Aufteilung von Erwerbsarbeit in Europa und den USA* [Institutional determinants of a partnership-based division of paid work in Europe and the U.S.].
- 28 See the report by the Gender Care Gaps Project: *Was der Gender Care Gap über Geld, Gerechtigkeit und die Gesellschaft aussagt*, p. 19 as well as Lott / Bünger (2023): *Mental Load, Frauen tragen die überwiegende Last* [Women bearing the majority of (mental) load]. WSI Report, Düsseldorf.
- 29 See the *Gender Pay Gap in the European Union*.
- 30 See the *Gender Pension Gap in the European Union*.
- 31 See: Unterhofer et al. (2017): *Elterngeld hat soziale Normen verändert* [Parental allowance has altered social norms]. *DIW Wochenbericht* 34 / 2017 pp. 659–667.
- 32 See: Kvande (2022): *Individual Parental Leave for Fathers: Promoting Gender Equality in Norway* In: *Engaged Fatherhood for Men, Families and Gender Equality*; Bünning / Hipp (2020): *How can we become more equal? Public policies and parents' work-family preferences in Germany*.
- 33 See: Moreno-Mínguez et al. (2022): *Labour markets, families and public policies shaping gender relations and parenting: Introduction to the Special Issue*. *Journal of Family Research*, 34(3), pp. 847–863; Eerola et al. (2022): *Can fathers' leave take-up dismantle gendered parental responsibilities? Evidence from Finland*. *Journal of Family Research*, Vol. 34 No. 3, pp. 958–982; O'Brien / Wall (2017): *Comparative Perspectives on Work-life Balance and Gender Equality. Fathers on Leave Alone*. In *Life Course Research and Social Policies*, Vol. 6, or chapter 23 *Supporting equal parenting: Paid parental leave in the OECD study* (2023): *Joining Forces for Gender Equality: What is Holding us Back?*
- 34 More information in the Observatory's Newsletter 2/2017: *New fathers wanted – fathers as the target group of current reconciliation policies*.
- 35 The Observatory conducted non-published research on a potential care salary in 2022. Such a salary is a financial compensation for family carers, which in theory is based on a 20 to 40-hour week and on the minimum wage. More information [here](#).
- 36 See Jurczyk / Mückenberger (2020).
- 37 For a more detailed depiction of the European Pillar of Social Rights, see the Observatory's Newsletter 1/2022: *For a strong social Europe: The European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan*.
- 38 The other relevant principles and an explanation of why they are important for gender-equal sharing of care work can be found in the report of the Gender Care Gaps Project: *Was der Gender Care Gap über Geld, Gerechtigkeit und die Gesellschaft aussagt*, on pp. 25f.
- 39 On the controversies surrounding the Directive and a comparison of the Commission's proposal and the Directive, see Arabadjieva (2022): *Reshaping the Work-Life Balance Directive with Covid-19 lessons in mind*. Working Paper 2022.01. ETUI, p.10.

- 40 De la Porte et al. (2022): [Strengthening European social rights via the Work-life balance directive?](#) EuSocialCit Working Paper.
- 41 From here on, the terminology of the Directive is applied and therefore the term “fathers” or “equivalent second parents” is used.
- 42 On 7 December, the European Commission adopted a [proposal for a regulation](#) to recognise parenthood established in one EU Member State in all other Member States. This is to provide legal clarity for all forms of families in the EU when they travel or change their place of residence within the EU.
- 43 For a detailed presentation of family policy instruments for more father participation and involvement, see the Observatory’s overview by Hoyer / Reich / Reinschmidt (2018): 5f.
- 44 COFACE (2022): [Work-life balance Directive transposition: A mixed picture](#); Equality Law Network (2022): [The transposition of the Work-life Balance Directive in EU Member States: A long way ahead](#).
- 45 The information on Denmark has been compiled with the assistance of the Centre for Labour Law and International Affairs of the [Danish Ministry of Employment](#). The overview on the transferability of leave benefits was depicted by the Observatory.
- 46 For better comparability between the countries, the corresponding days are also given for Denmark, where the regulations are based on weeks.
- 47 Information on Finland was researched by Carlotta von Westerholt, Research Officer at the Observatory. Sources used: Equality Law Network (2022); press release by the Finnish government (1 August 2022): [Family leave reform increases equality and takes better account of different types of families](#); COFACE (2022); Kela, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland and Blum et al. (2023): [19th International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2023](#).
- 48 Information on Portugal was researched by Friederike Sprang, Research Officer at the Observatory. Sources used: Equality Law Network (2022); Blum et al. (2023); [Website of social services in Portugal](#); Dinheiro Vivo (5 July 2023): [Subsídio parental pago a 90% com retroativos a 1 de maio](#); Cofina Media (5 July 2023): [Pais a gozar licença parental têm um mês para mudar para novas regras](#).
- 49 The second parent is entitled to an additional seven days as long as they take these seven days within the first 42 days after the birth.
- 50 The minimum compensation is at 6.40 euro per day.
- 51 See [Süddeutsche Zeitung](#) (18 January 2021): [Meine Zeit, deine Zeit, Elternzeit](#) [My time, your time, parental time]; Blum et al. (2023): 529f.
- 52 A maximum of 4,495.50 Euro per month applies. For persons who do not meet the eligibility requirements, a lump sum of 600 euro per month or 20 euro per day for 42 calendar days is paid.
- 53 Equality Law Network (2022).
- 54 See: [The Village](#) (19 June 2023): [Self-employed in Belgium with a baby on the way? Here’s what you need to know](#).
- 55 See: Initiative Equal Care: [Gutscheine für hausnahe Dienstleistungen – nach Corona endlich einführen!](#) [After the pandemic: Time to finally introduce vouchers for household-related services]
- 56 See: Blum et al. (2023).
- 57 The first three days are paid childbirth leave; the four following days count towards the total 25-day leave.
- 58 See: Blum et al. (2023): 143ff.
- 59 See: Blum et al. (2023): 41ff.
- 60 See: → [endnote 35](#).
- 61 More information on [Citizens Information](#).
- 62 See [Indicator PF2.2 of the OECD Family Database](#).
- 63 See [Indicator PF2.1 of the OECD Family Database](#).
- 64 The use of the terms women and men without the asterisk was chosen by the authors in the external contributions and will be retained for this reason.
- 65 This was also the focus of the [COFACE campaign for the 2022 international day of families](#).
- 66 See: [Directive 2019/1158 on work-life balance for parents and carers](#).
- 67 See: De la Porte et al. (2023): [The EU’s Work-life balance Directive: Institutional change of father-specific leave across member states](#). *Social Policy & Administration*, 57(4), 549-563; Pircher et al. (2023): [Actors, costs and values: the implementation of the Work-life Balance directive](#), *West European Politics*. Poland for example is using the reform to strengthen the role of the family and the conservative father instead of promoting gender equality.
- 68 See: De la Porte et al. (2023 forthcoming): An examination of ‘instrumental resources’ in earmarked parental leave: the case of the Work-Life Balance Directive, *Journal of European Social Policy*; De la Porte, C. et al. (2022): [Strengthening European social rights via the Work-life balance directive?](#), EuSocialCit Working Paper.
- 69 Ferrera et al. (2023 forthcoming): Social citizenship as a marble cake: the changing pattern of right production and the role of the EU, *Journal of European Social Policy*.

ABOUT THE OBSERVATORY

The Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe is a project by the Institute for Social Work and Social Education (ISS). The team of the Observatory analyses sociopolitical developments in Europe and their potential impact on Germany. We publish working papers on relevant sociopolitical topics, monitor European social policies and organise European Expert Meetings. The aim of our work is to connect key sociopolitical actors across Europe, promote the exchange of expertise and foster mutual learning. The Observatory is funded by the German Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth.

SERIES OF EUROPEAN EXPERT MEETINGS ON RECONCILIATION POLICY

Against the background of the [work-life balance package of the European Commission](#), the Observatory in 2017/18 has together with the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth organised a [series of European Expert Meetings](#). The aim was to support the Europe-wide exchange of ideas and good practices with regard to different aspects and issues of reconciliation policy. Detailed documentation is available for each expert meeting:

- [Towards an Equal Partnership in Families - How the European States Promote Father Involvement in Family Work](#). Documentation of the European Expert Meeting on 29 and 30 May 2017 in Berlin.
- [Reconciling Work and Care – Experiences from Different European Countries](#). Documentation of the European Expert Meeting on 4 and 5 September 2017 in Berlin.
- [How Childcare Services contribute to the Reconciliation of Family and Work. Supporting Disadvantaged Families](#). Documentation of the European Expert Meeting on 17 and 18 May 2018 in Berlin.
- [Farewell to the supplementary-earner model – but where to now? Aims and requirements of reconciliation policy from a gender equality perspective](#). Documentation of the European Expert Meeting on 1 and 2 October 2018 in Berlin.

There are also further topic-related [publications](#).

PUBLISHING INFORMATION

Published by:
Institute for Social Work and Social Education Observatory
for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe Main Office:
Zeilweg 42, D-60439 Frankfurt am Main, Germany

Funded by:



+49 (0)69 - 95 78 9-0
Berlin office: Lahnstraße 19 D-12055 Berlin
+49 (0)30 - 616 717 9-0

Editorship:
Responsible according to the German press law: Benjamin Landes (V. i. S. d. P.)
Friederike Sprang, Katrin Lange
beobachtungsstelle@iss-ffm.de

The German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 11018 Berlin, provides funding for the project "Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe". This publication does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany. The publishing institute and/or the authors of individual articles bear responsibility for its content.

The agency responsible for the Observatory is:
Institute for Social Work and Social Education

Design: www.avitamin.de
Translation: Tim Steins
Date of publication: December 2023

This is a publication of the Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe and may be downloaded at: www.sociopolitical-observatory.eu.

The content and the structure of the Observatory's Dossier are copyrighted. Feel free to use our articles, but please inform us in advance and state the author's name and the Observatory as the source of the material.

Picture credits:
© Martin Novak / shutterstock.com
© Sabrina Bracher / shutterstock.com
© everymmnt / shutterstock.com
© Cavan-Images / shutterstock.com
© Halfpoint/shutterstock.com
© Davide Zanin Photography / shutterstock.com
© Anna Stills / shutterstock.com
© Ground Picture/shutterstock.com