



Høgskolen
i Innlandet



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Facilitation of Employability for Maternity and Parental Leavers in Europe

a Scoping Review

Skriftserien 7 - 2020



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Facilitation of Employability for Maternity and Parental Leavers in Europe

a Scoping Review

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Høgskolen
i Innlandet



FOSTERING
EMPLOYMENT
OF MATERNITY
LEAVERS

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Summary

This report presents the findings of an European project concerning facilitation of employability for parental leavers in European countries. The conclusions and recommendations in this report build on comparisons of relevant European policy documents, country notes from five European countries (France, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway and Slovakia) and a search in relevant databases. Taken together, these data form an approximate scoping review – to map a wide range of literature.

Both the concepts of maternal and parental leave are used in the present report. Research related to leave in connection with young children use the term maternity leave until the last decades where more frequent parental leave is used. We are aware that a distinction between parental and maternity leave does not apply in some countries.

A main finding is that parental leave and employability is a complex and context sensitive area. This relates to the fact that parental leave must be seen in connection with both individual, organisational, cultural, historical and political (legislative) issues on both national and European level. In this study, the focus has been mainly descriptive on the political (legislative) level, while a more interpretative analysis is made on how to develop tools and educational programs concerning development of employability skills relevant for parental leavers and employers.

Analysis of the situation regarding parental leavers' employment in the partner countries shows that maternal employment in France, Slovakia and Hungary is rather low. Although, in Hungary there are networks which provide special counselling for women and support them when it comes to their (re)integration into the labour market. In Western Europe, such as the Netherlands and Norway, the situation is more favourable, employers are more flexible and part-time job is a frequent option offered. However, the up-to-date level of skills of parental leavers coming back to work may be a challenge in these countries too.

The duration and generosity of paid parental leave seems to affect when (after what time) parents return to work. The period of leave cannot be too short, nor too long. The optimal length of the leave varies greatly depending on national conditions and cultural frameworks. In any case, it should not be so long that the parental leavers become uninteresting for the labour market and lose working competence (Kalb, 2018; Whitehouse, Romaniuk, Lucas & Nicholson, 2013).

The main conclusions are

- Women who have maternity leave between seven months and up to one year maintain contact with their own work more often according to research
- Investing in maternity coaching may ease the transition back to work for women after maternity leave and increase retention and job satisfaction
- Coaching and learning programs may help with practical aspects such as preparing for discussions and negotiations in relation to return to work
- Social norms and management decisions and attitudes have influence on women's return after maternity leave
- Lack of daycare for children is a challenge for returning to work after maternity leave
- Each countries laws and guidelines, culture and attitudes related to women's employment opportunities have to be acknowledged in developing learning programs for maternity and parental leavers.

Keywords: maternity leave, parental leave, employability, coaching and learning programs

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1. Introduction

The longer the parents, and in most countries, mothers stay at home with children, the more difficult it seems for them to return to work (European Commission, 2018). Over the years, they may lose working habits, overview of the opportunities available on the labour market and they lack new skills required. In addition, they may have trouble with the work-family life. Despite these challenges, most parental leavers find it important to return to work after maternity or parental leave, but the working opportunities for especially women with small children are weak in some countries in Europe (European Commission, 2018). Legislative measures that govern the maternal leave, welfare and business rules as well as employers that have prejudices and limited part time work opportunities may influence their decisions and situation.

1.1 Background

Mothers still make up the majority among parents that stay at home with the child until the children start at school. As confirmed by the statistics, employment of women is 67.4 % (Eurostat, 2019) whereas the employment rate of women with children under six years of age in the EU is on average eight percentage points lower than that of childless women. However, in Central Europe, including Hungary and Slovakia, the difference is more than 30 percentage points (European Commission, 2017). The difference is even bigger when it comes to employment of mothers with the smallest children.

1.1.1 Parental and maternity leave as European policy interest

The European Union (EU) highlights several issues concerning female employment, unemployment and related subjects to this such as caring responsibilities. Achieving a 75 % employment rate is one of the Europe 2020 strategy goals. Enhancing women's participation in the labour market may help to reach this employment rate besides the target of lifting 20 million people out of poverty or social exclusion. Therefore, to support female employment and importantly to contribute to gender equality, work-life balance is one of the forefront EU policy initiatives. This also implies legislation through directives, the two most relevant being the Maternity Leave Directive and the Parental Leave Directive.¹ The 1992 Maternity Leave

¹ This section builds on: European Parliament, A new directive on work-life balance, EPRS, Legislative Briefing, April 2019. Retrieved from: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/614708/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)614708_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/614708/EPRS_BRI(2018)614708_EN.pdf)

Directive (EU Council, 1992) set the minimum period for maternity leave at 14 weeks, with two weeks' compulsory leave before and/or after confinement and an adequate allowance subject to national legislation.

The Parental Leave Directive (EU Council, 2010) replaced Directive 96/34/EC, following the adoption of a revised Framework Agreement on Parental Leave, concluded by the European social partners on 18 June 2009. The Parental Leave Directive sets minimum requirements for parental leave for male and female workers, and for related employment protection. The main elements of this directive are:

- workers are entitled to parental leave on the birth or adoption of a child
- men and women workers must get equal treatment, irrespective of their type of employment contract
- parental leave must be granted for at least four months as an individual right of both parents; provisions on taking leave; provisions on the right of workers to return to work after taking parental leave, and on their right to non-discrimination

A revised proposal has been made for an update on the parental leave directive.

A so-called provisional agreement (European Parliament, 2019) was approved by the European Parliament's Employment and Social Affairs Committee in February 2019, and then adopted in plenary June 2019.

1.2 Glossary

Maternity leave: leave generally available to mothers only (except in a few cases where part of the leave can be transferred to other carers under certain circumstances)². Usually understood to be a health and welfare measure intended to protect the health of the mother and new-born child, to be taken just before, during, and immediately after birth (Kosłowski, Blum, and Moss, 2016).

Paternity leave: leave generally available to fathers only, usually to be taken soon after the birth of a child and intended to enable the father to spend time with his partner, new child and older children (Kosłowski, Blum, and Moss, 2016).

Parental leave: leave available equally to mothers and fathers – generally understood to be a care measure, intended to give parents the opportunity to spend time caring for a young child; can usually only be taken following the end of maternity leave (Kosłowski, Blum, and Moss, 2016).

² In some countries, e.g. Slovakia, maternity leave can be taken by both mothers as well as fathers.

Employability: Combination of factors (such as job-specific skills, soft skills) which enable individuals to progress towards or enter into employment, stay in employment and progress during their careers (Cedefop, 2019).

Both the concept maternal and parental leave are used in the present report. Research related to leave in connection with young children use the term maternity leave until the last decades where more frequent parental leave is used. We are aware that a distinction between parental and maternity leave does not apply in some countries.

2. Purpose of the study

The study elaborates different approaches and good practices in partner countries as well as in other countries in supporting parental leavers on the labour market. Through this international exchange of best practice, more systematic solutions to address the issue of parental leavers will be presented.

Further, based on a scoping review, the study will investigate and present research-based evidence concerning facilitation of employability of parental leavers. Scoping reviews, a type of knowledge synthesis, follow a systematic approach to map evidence on a topic and identify main concepts, theories, sources, and knowledge gaps (Levac, Colquhoun & O'Brien, 2010).

Based on these different sources, the study will identify and analyse successful practices and policies which facilitate employment opportunities as well as employability skills of parental leavers. In addition to positive examples and results, the analysis will look at the barriers and limits encountered by our target group in finding a good quality employment.

The study also maps the possibilities for parental leavers to gain professional experience during the period of parental leave.

2.1 Method

The findings in the study build on three main sources. The first is five country reports prepared by the partners in this project concerning the current situation for parental leavers in their countries (France, Hungary, Norway, Slovakia and the Netherlands). The second is a literature overview related to the theme of this project from relevant databases. As a third supplementary source, the report includes analysis of relevant European policy documents. The different sources are chosen to safeguard the inclusion of a multitude of perspectives on the issue of employability for parental leavers as a quality assurance of the conclusions made in the report.

2.1.1 Design of the review

This study has a design similar to a scoping review of literature. This seems to be an appropriate method to meet the aim of this study. The purpose of a scoping study is to map a wide range of literature, and to envisage where gaps and innovative approaches may lie (Ehrich, Freeman, Richards, Robinson, & Shepperd, 2002). This kind of review may report types of evidence that address and inform practice in the field and the way the research has been conducted (Munn et al., 2018). The general purpose for conducting scoping reviews is to identify and map the available evidence and try to be as comprehensive as possible. It is often a precursor to a systematic review.

Scoping study research questions are broad in nature as they summarize breadth of evidence. However, the question must have a direction, clarity and focus to identify and make decisions about study inclusion. In addition, to make an effective search strategy, the concepts, target group and outcome must be defined (Levac, Colquhoun, & O'Brien, 2010). This scoping review addresses the following question:

- *What is known from the literature on examining the facilitation of employability of parental leavers in partner countries by scrutinizing articles and documents that concern maternity and parental leave, guidance and support from the state, support from the employers and education opportunities?*

2.1.2 Search strategy

The search strategy developed from the research question and the criteria for selecting studies were determined before the literature search was conducted in three databases and definitions of key concepts stated: Scopus, Academic search premier and ORIA (search engine) were searched for articles published between 2009 and 2019. Initial keywords were broad to capture the salient concepts of maternity and parental leave, employability and education opportunities.

Subject Headings/Mesh Terms were defined and adapted for each database, allowing more sensitive search of the literature, and consequently, broader results. The initial perusal of the articles indicated that the search strategy picked up a large number of irrelevant articles (tbl. 1). Reference lists of selected articles were also reviewed for novel studies. In addition, existing networks, and relevant organizations, were searched.

Table 1: Search strategy

Search strategy	Number of records identified including duplicates
Database and search	Hits
Academic search premier: 28.02.2019 ((maternity OR parent* OR family) N1 leave*) AND (employ* OR work* OR labour OR job OR mobility OR career*(1657)) AND TI review*(15)/ qualitative* OR narrative* OR interview*(182) Articles published between 2009 and 2019. Limitations: Title and abstract, subject headings word and/or text word. Research article, peer reviewed. Language: English, Norwegian, Danish or Swedish.	1854

Scopus: 21.02.2019	
((maternity OR parent* OR family)	2434
PRE/3 leave) AND (employ* OR work*	
OR labour OR job OR mobility OR career*))	
ORIA: 28.02.2019	
Morspermisjon* ELLER fødselspermisjon* ELLER barselpermisjon* ELLER	73
svangerskapspermisjon* ELLER familiepermisjon*	

2.1.3 Identifying relevant articles - selection of studies

The literature was retrieved by searching three electronic databases; primarily the Academic search premier, which covers articles in full text, mainly in English. The database was searched by using Subject Headings word and text words. Scopus is a large database of citations and abstracts of peer-reviewed literature in the fields of science, technology, medicine, social science and the humanities. Last Oria was used; it is a search engine that lets you search the library's total resources; books, articles, magazines, music, movies and electronic resources etc. This database was searched in Norwegian language.

A specialist librarian was consulted when developing the search strategy to ensure the search process. References were handled using the EndNote software (Tricco et al., 2018).

The flow chart shows (Fig 1) the identification and selection process (Moher et. al. 2013). The search identified 4288 records, but 88 were duplicates and removed. Through reading reference lists four records were identified. Title and abstracts were screened related to the aim of the study. As a result, 3640 articles were rejected and left 560 articles. To give a certain overview, the articles were categorized into: maternity and paternity leave, work and life balance, work and parental leave, education and counselling programs. The abstracts were read again and most articles were read in full text. After this review, 543 articles were excluded and 17 read in full text again. Finally, 14 articles were included. Of these, four were found by examining the reference lists.

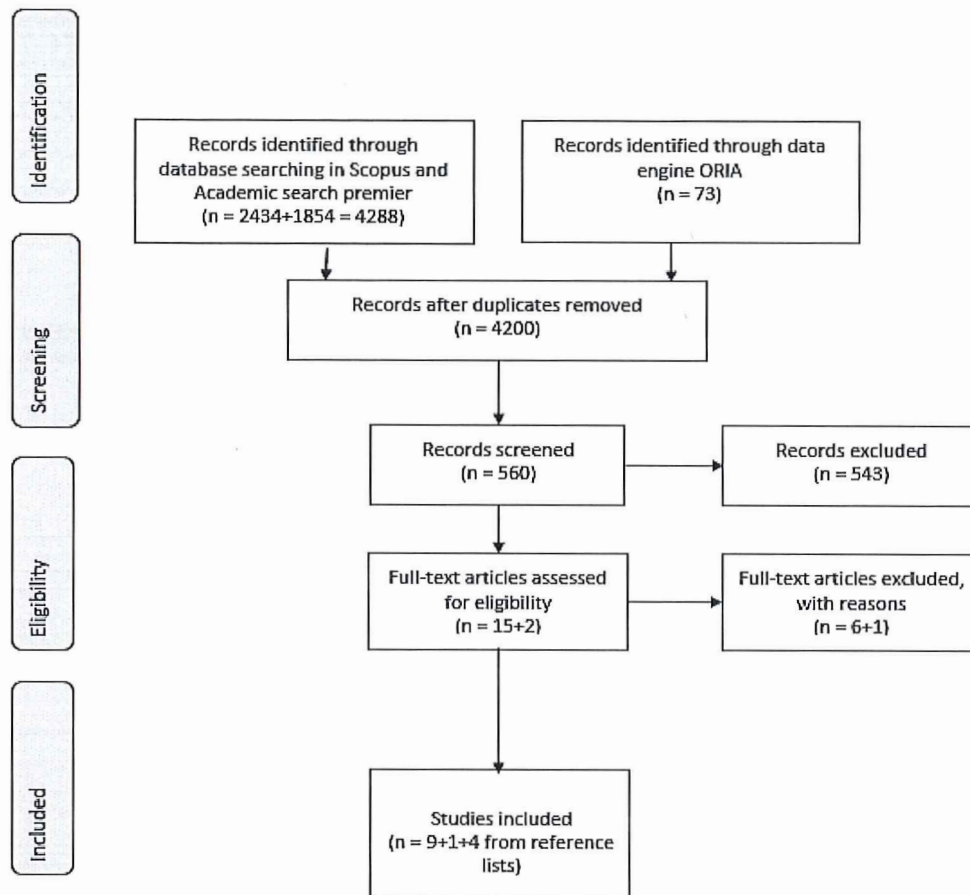


Figure 1. Flow diagram of the selection process.
Source: modified version of flow diagram as reported by Moher et al. 2013

2.1.4 Appraisal and data extraction

Selected articles were evaluated by using the Kunnskapssenterets (Knowledge Center's) checklists for various scientific articles³. They were not rated for high or low quality, but considered whether they responded to the study's purpose; parental leave or/and guidance and educational programs for parents who had parental leave. Two researchers (Else Berit Steinseth, Anne Kjersti Myhre Steffenak) carried out all steps in the selection process and evaluation of the articles. The researchers carefully discussed all differences or disagreements until agreement was reached.

³ https://www.fhi.no/globalassets/dokumenterfiler/skjema/bruker erfaring/k-handbok_11_vedlegg2_sjekklister.pdf.

3. Results

In the results section, the findings from the national reviews made by partners are presented, before presenting the findings from the data search.

3.1 Overview of parental leave and employability prospects of parental leavers in partner countries

The following section details the partner countries' situation when it comes to parental leavers' support from the state and/or employers. A more comprehensive presentation of country papers is available in Annex 1.

3.1.1 FRANCE

The current maternity leave in France lasts 16 weeks for mothers with one child and 26 weeks for mothers with two or more children. The number of weeks increases with a twin birth up to 34 weeks or with a multiple birth 46 weeks. The protection status for biological and adoptive mothers are the same.⁴

The law ensures that maternity leavers return to their former job or an equivalent with the same salary. To be eligible for this policy, an employee must be employed in the company for at least one year. The employee is entitled to receive paid annual leave and all the maternity leave time is counted for the retirement calculation. During the maternity leave, the Security System pays 100 % of the employee's salary. After the coming back, an interview with the employer is compulsory to consider a career guidance or a repositioning.

In France, around 93 % of mothers use the complete maternity leave. Around half of them come back to their previous posts in the same conditions after the maternity leave. According to an OECD study⁵ updated in 2016, around 66 % of mothers with children aged 0-14 are in employment (in OECD countries). This rate is higher in France (around 75 %).

⁴ Ministère du Travail (2018). Le congé de maternité [online text]. <https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/droit-du-travail/les-absences-pour-maladie-et-conges-pour-evenements-familiaux/article/le-conge-de-maternite>

⁵ OECD Family Database (2016). Maternal employment rates [online text]. <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>

Nevertheless, in the year following a birth, 50 % of women reduced or stopped their professional activity (compared to only 6 % of men)⁶, what highlights the inequalities between women and men. The changes in the working conditions (reduction of timetables, part-time contracts) are caused mainly by the lack of adequate nursery services and the financial aspects.

One of the financial schemes is the so-called *La Prestation partagée d'éducation de l'enfant (PreParE)* which is a lump sum paid to parents who work part-time or do not work at all. The amount paid takes into consideration the number of children and their age. Other kind of financial support are reduction in taxes for different categories of parents.

In France, there are many regulations (including the Work Code), laws, conventions and collective agreements, which aim to protect and improve the conditions of women in the workplace during the pregnancy and after the childbirth or adoption. All these regulations are complementary – and sometimes redundant or incompatible – with other policies aimed at the family protection and gender equality. These regulations have been updated constantly to answer new needs and cultural changes. At first, these policies were aimed to guarantee the employment of women, but they have been modified to include the gender gap, the recognition of fathers' right of raising their children and the inclusion of the work-life balance.

According to the OEP survey⁷, more than 90 % of employees are worried about their work-life balance and 80 % have the feeling they don't have enough time for the private life. According to the report of Cnaf⁸, children under three years old are most often taken care by their parents, and essentially mothers. Apart from this type, the maternal assistant is the most frequent one (one quarter of children under three years old), but the number is reducing every year. Parents prefer the collective nurseries (32 %) but finding a place is very complicated (only 18 %).

3.1.2 HUNGARY

In Hungary, parents are allowed to stay at home with the child for up to three years. During this period, they can take three forms of support. For the first one they are entitled until the child is six months old, for the second until the child is two years old, while for the third until

⁶ Secrétariat d'Etat chargé de l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes et de la lutte contre les discriminations (2019). *Prise en compte de la parentalité dans la vie au travail* [online text]. <https://www.egalite-femmes-hommes.gouv.fr/prise-en-compte-de-la-parentalite-dans-la-vie-au-travail/>

⁷ Observatoire de l'équilibre de temps et de la parentalité en entreprise (2018). *Baromètre OPE de la conciliation entre la vie professionnelle, vie personnelle et familiale* (online text). <https://www.observatoire-qvt.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/BAROMETRE-OPE-2018-VD-VALIDJBdu280518-FOCUSUNAFdu210618.pdf>

⁸ Caisse Nationale des Allocations Familiales (Cnaf) (2016). *Résultats du rapport 2016 de l'Observatoire national de la petite enfance* (online text). <https://www.caf.fr/sites/default/files/cnaf/Documents/DCom/Presse/Communiqu%C3%A9s%202016/06122016DossierPresse.pdf>

the child is three years old. The available total is getting lower and lower along with the progressing of time. The higher total that is due in the first two funding periods can only be taken if the parent, who applies for the funding, was insured for at least 365 days within two years preceding the birth of the child, i.e. he/she worked or studied at a higher education institution (Act LXXXIV of 1998 on family support). From 2020, if the parents decide to do so, they can transfer the entitlement for childcare allowance to the grandparent. This refers to grandmothers and grandfathers who are active employees, i.e. who are not retired.

During the time of childcare benefit (GYES)/childcare allowance (GYED), the employment is not terminated, so in general, it has to be continued as it used to be before having children. It is important that if the parent would like to return to work before the child reaches the age of three, then he/she can ask to be employed within a part-time job that equals to the half of the full-time work. In this case, the employer is obliged to modify the contract to part-time that can last until the child reaches the age of three years. The employee, who takes care of three or more children, is entitled to this right until the child reaches the age of five years. As regards wage adjustment, after returning to work, the employer is obliged to make an offer to the employee about the modification of wage so that his/her wage follows the pay rise that has taken place in the meantime. What is more, one has to take the average pay rise implemented within the employer as a basis.

Concerning restriction of dismissal, if the mother or the father, who raises their child alone, goes back to work before the child reaches the age of three, then there is a limited opportunity for dismissal until the child reaches the age of three.

3.1.3 NORWAY

In Norway, the leave is 49 weeks with a 100 per cent coverage or 59 weeks with an 80 per cent coverage. It has only been an adjustment for a total of seven weeks in the last 25 years. Four of them have been justified by the extension of the father's quota, father's-imposed part of the parental leave. In addition to the 49 weeks, each parent is entitled to one year's unpaid leave each for each birth. This leave has to be completed immediately after the first year.

Parental leave entitles parents to paid leave in connection with childbirth or adoption. The right is anchored in the Working Environment Act. In 2019, parents have had the right to leave for a total of 49 weeks (100 %) in connection with childbirth. These 49 weeks include mother's right to leave for up to 15 weeks during pregnancy and six weeks of leave after birth.

In 2019, the third parental leave was completed. Father and mother each get their own quota of 15 weeks, and the remaining 19/29 weeks can be freely shared between parents. Three weeks before childbirth and six weeks after childbirth, the mother is still reserved for health reasons, so this is the obligatory period for mothers. Father does not have an independent

entitlement, which means that father cannot withdraw his allowance for 15 weeks unless a mother is in activity (work or education).

Parents with no income or with little income during six of the last ten months before birth or adoption are entitled to a state grant of NOK 83,000. Parent can receive cash benefits for children from the age of 13 months until 23 months. In order to be eligible for cash benefits, the child cannot attend full-time daycare with a public grant. Parents can receive cash support if the child does not have full space or day care at all and the parents have at least five years membership in the national insurance. The support is reduced if the child has part-time space.⁹ All children are entitled to a day care center from the age of one year.¹⁰

3.1.4 SLOVAKIA

A woman or a man in a work relationship or a similar work relationship can only take the maternity leave for 34 weeks. In the case of a single mother, the maternity leave is 37 weeks and in the case of a woman who has given birth to two or more children up to 43 weeks. If a woman does not exhaust her entire six weeks of maternity leave before childbirth because she gives birth at an earlier date, as determined by the doctor, she is entitled to maternity leave of 34 weeks, 37 weeks if she is solitary and 43 weeks if she gives birth to two and more children as described above.

Since childcare requires sufficient time, the employer is obliged to provide parents who have requested a prolongation of maternity leave for the period until the child reaches the age of three, the so-called "parental leave".

If a parent is on maternity leave, she or he is entitled to a maternity allowance – financial allowance which is payable to all persons eligible for maternity leave. In particular, a woman, who is pregnant or cares for a new-born child and who had had sickness insurance for at least 270 days (about nine months) in the last two years prior to childbirth, is entitled to maternity allowance. The insurance was either paid by the employer or paid as a self-employed person or by a voluntarily unemployed person (Section 48 of Act No. 461/2003 Coll. On Social Insurance).¹¹ After finishing the period of receiving the maternity allowance, usually after the 34th week, the parent is entitled to receive parental allowance up to max. until the child reaches the age of three. However, this contribution is significantly lower than the maternity allowance.

⁹ <https://www.nav.no/no/Person/Familie/Barnetrygd+og+kontantstotte/kontantst%C3%B8tte#chapter-3>

¹⁰

¹¹ Slovensko.sk (website). Accessible at: <https://www.slovensko.sk/sk/zivotne-situacie/zivotna-situacia/materska-dovolenka>.

Slovakia is among the countries with the highest discouraging impact of motherhood and care responsibilities on employment. This is likely due to a long parental leave, rarely taken up by men (7 %), as there is no simultaneous compensation for both parents, coupled with a low take-up of flexible work arrangements and missing childcare facilities. Measures have been put in place to improve access to childcare, but capacities are still insufficient. Only 0.9 % of children below three were enrolled in formal childcare in 2016, one of the lowest rates in the EU. Childcare costs in Slovakia are also among the highest in the EU, which has a negative impact on work incentives. On the positive side, an EU-funded construction of childcare facilities, including for marginalised Roma communities, has been slowly taking up. As of January 2018, the Social Services Act has expanded access to childcare to unemployed parents, on the condition that their child does not take the place of a child whose parents are employed or in education. The coverage rate is higher for children aged between four and six (78.4 %; 2016) but is still below the EU average (94.8 %). Furthermore, the number of rejected applications for kindergartens remains high, particularly in Bratislava (4,677 out of 12,486 in total in 2016). Following 2017 amendment of the Act on Financing of Schools the financial support will be extended to all families receiving the benefit in material need with children above the age of three in kindergartens.¹²

At present, in order to reduce the negative implications of the parents' employment there is a discussion about the possibility of introducing a more flexible parental leave through:

- the possibility of combining a shorter period of receiving and a higher financial level of parental allowance;
- the possibility of using it in separate time blocks depending on the working and family needs of the parents.

3.1.5 THE NETHERLANDS

In the Netherlands, women are entitled to 16 weeks of fully paid leave, which include maternity leave and parental leave (National Government, 2016). Paternity leave in the Netherlands is small. In Europe, the Netherlands is at the bottom of the list together with Italy, Estonia and Malta (European Parliament Research Service, 2014; International Labor Organization, 2014). From 2017, men are eligible for five days of paid leave. This includes two days of "maternity leave" – also known as paternity leave – and three days of "parental leave" – also known as partner leave (National Government, 2016). After that, both mother and father can demand for parental leave. The following applies to each child: 26 x the number of

¹² European Commission (2018). Country Report Slovakia 2018. Accessible at: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2018-european-semester-country-report-slovakia-en.pdf>. p. 26.

hours the mother or father works. This is unpaid leave, unless stated otherwise in the collective labour agreement or additional employment conditions (WOMEN Inc., 2015b).

Currently, one in two employees combines work with caring for children. Almost one in five employees combines work with informal care tasks. A modern employer takes the child care duties of employees into account and contributes to a good balance between work and child care. Employers and corporate cultures therefore play an important role in the possibility for men to combine work and care for children (WOMEN Inc., 2016).

Men increasingly take parental leave in the public sector, in large organizations and organizations in which relatively many women work. There is therefore a clear segregation with regard to organizations and possibilities for taking leave. The options are more limited in the private sector (Plantenga & Remery, 2014). In the Netherlands, the unemployment rate is just over three percent (February 2019). The number of vacancies is 277 000 (December 2018). For that reason, several employers have problems to find employees.

3.2 Possibilities for parental leavers to develop professionally during the period of parental leave

In what follows, an overview of guidance and education opportunities to parents on maternity leave, which exist in five partner countries, is provided.

3.2.1 FRANCE

French women and men are entitled to get back equivalent work as before parental leave. There are no specific training tools for parents taking parental leave. As the parental leavers are not considered as “jobseekers”, the Public System does not finance the training. When parents return to work after parental leave the company should propose the necessary updates. For those who are jobseekers or decide to stop their contracts after the parental leave, the Labour offices propose usually a “Skills Assessment”¹³ to define their professional project. In addition, there are not studies about the missing skills for this group as it is too large to do a generalisation. What Labour Offices consider is that after a break in their careers, some parents need a tool to redefine their professional projects; to identify their skills and competences; and to gain confidence. That is why the “skill assessment” is the main tool recommended for parents by Labour Offices.

¹³ Ministère du travail (2019). Bilan de compétences (online text). <https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/formation-professionnelle/droits-a-la-formation-et-orientation/bilan-competences>

3.2.2 HUNGARY

In the framework of a project “Women in the family and at work” 71 Family and CareerPOINTS were set up in the area of Hungary until the end of 2018. The two main target groups of the service offered by the centres are the employers and the families, and within that, especially women raising little children or disadvantaged women. Those who were stuck in career building or those who find it hard to return to the labour market can get in touch with the centre. In addition, the professionals working there help or provide guidance on whom one can turn to with a particular issue.

Supporting services are also connected to education and preparation, for example while a mother attends a training facilitating labour market reintegration, her little child is looked after by a qualified child sitter. CareerPOINTS organize trainings targeting returning to work, trainings targeting reconciliation of work-life balance, awareness raising trainings for employers or trainings facilitating networking and establishment of social relationships. Each center is required to contact at least 20 local employers and enter into a cooperation agreement.¹⁴

Another good example of a platform supporting maternity leavers to return to work is the Well-Being Foundation, which has become known as the first mother-friendly employment agency in Hungary. They established the NÓRA network, the first national, independent, professional labour market network that facilitates the enhancement of women’s abilities and talents as well as the establishment of labour market equality.¹⁵

Another organisation, which is unique in Hungary but also internationally, is the Single Parents’ Centre. The centre functions as a community place where parents can get practical help and advice, take part in consultations, join parental clubs and helping groups. The institute organizes various trainings and workshops to improve both the parents’ labour and parental skills. Its START incubation program helps some of the parents to start an enterprise under very beneficial conditions.¹⁶

3.2.3 NORWAY

There are no specific training programmes or guidance services for parental leavers to facilitate their return to work, as they are not viewed to be a specifically vulnerable social group when it comes to their employability.

¹⁴ https://www.csaladbaratorszag.hu/csalad_es_karrierpont

¹⁵ <http://jol-let.com>

¹⁶ <https://www.egyszulos-kozpont.hu/single-parents-center>

3.2.4 SLOVAKIA

Systematic support for maintaining or deepening qualifications during parental leave is not among official policies in the Slovak Republic as there are virtually no supporting tools in place, which would facilitate the education or training of this target group. Therefore, in general, parental leavers must rely on themselves and look for individual opportunities when it comes to keeping their knowledge and skills updated. Career planning during and after maternity leave has been a topic of group counselling conducted by the Adult Advisory Centres. Participants were presented with opportunities to participate in the work process during maternity leave and recommended concrete steps to facilitate a smooth transition to the working environment after it was completed. In particular, the need for continuing education, keeping in touch with their professional environment, continuous assessment of competences and, last but not least, the possibilities of education and self-realization during maternity leave were highlighted. Participants were given the opportunity to verify the appropriateness of their profession or to opt for a different profession through professional diagnosis by the method of Occupational Choice Questionnaire and Career Planning. All participants have the opportunity to continue to advise on career planning and career development individually.¹⁷ In order to prevent parental leavers' professional knowledge and skills from falling during the maternity/parental leave period, or to deepen or expand their competencies, it would be beneficial to allow their participation in education and training programmes for the labour market under Section 46 of Act No. 5/2004 Coll. on Employment Services. At company level, it is important to improve the access of part-time workers to training programmes organized by the employer and create necessary conditions for career growth.¹⁸

3.2.5 THE NETHERLANDS

Due to the short period of maternity leave in the Netherlands, the situation around education and development of skills and competencies of parental leavers regarding their return to work is not so relevant.

¹⁷ Husenicová, I. (2017). Vzdelávanie žien na materskej dovolenke. Accessible at: <https://ec.europa.eu/epale/sk/content/vzdelavanie-zien-na-materskej-dovolenke>

¹⁸ Inštitút pre výskum práce a rodiny [Institute for Labour and Family Research] (2014). Zdroje a prekážky rastu zamestnanosti žien s dôrazom na stratégiu zosúladenia rodinného, pracovného a osobného života [Sources and barriers to the growth of women's employment with an emphasis on a strategy for reconciling family, work and personal life]. Accessible at: https://www.ceit.sk/IVPR/images/IVPR/vyskum/2014/Hanzelova/2167_hanzelova_keselova_o.pdf. p. 54.

3.3. Research in three databases

	Author	Title	Year	Journal	Country	Method	Results
1	Bartoš, V. Pertold- Gebicka, B.	Parental leave length, social norms, and female labor market re-entry frictions	2018	International Journal of Manpower	Czech Republic - Germany	The authors use a controlled correspondence field experiment that orthogonally manipulates parental leave length and the quality of fictitious female job candidates. The experiment is complemented with a survey among human resource managers	High-quality candidates receive more interview invitations when applying after a short parental leave, while low-quality (LQ) candidates receive more interview invitations when applying after a typical three years long parental leave. Survey results suggest that the difference in invitations between short and typical leave treatments is driven by a social norm that mothers should stay home with children younger than three.
2	Begall, K. Grunow, D.	Labour force transitions around first childbirth in the Netherlands	2015	European Sociological Review	The Netherlands	Detailed life-history couple data and estimate multinomial logit models.	Our results show that over time, new mothers became less likely to exit the labour market and more likely to reduce their working hours. Eligibility for parental leave and public sector employment reduced the probability of exiting the labour market but had no effect on reducing working hours. In the 1990s and for those eligible for parental leave, the likelihood that a working hour reduction was associated with a lower job level or an employer change decreased. New mothers with an occupational status at least as high as that of their male partner were less likely to reduce their labour supply. Policy changes did not alter the importance of partners' relative occupational resources.

3	Bergemann, A. Riphahn, R. T.	Female labour supply and parental leave benefits - the causal effect of paying higher transfers for a shorter period time	2011	Applied Economics Letters	Germany	Panel survey, 23 000	The reform yields most of the intended effects: the fraction of mothers who plan to return to the labour market within a year after the interview increased by 14 percentage points.
4	Fodor, É. Glass, C.	Negotiating for entitlement: Accessing parental leave in Hungarian firms	2018	Gender, Work and Organization	Hungary	Qualitative data gained from 33 highly skilled professional women in Hungary	Parental leave provisions have become conditional on company needs, and as a result have become increasingly informal, individualized and subject to negotiation. Despite broad leave entitlements and job protections in Hungary, many of our respondents were required to scale back on their career aspirations, drop out or change jobs following leave.
5	Fodor, E. Kispeter, E.	Making the 'reserve army' invisible: Lengthy parental leave and women's economic marginalisation in Hungary	2014	European Journal of Women's Studies	Hungary	38 semi-structured interviews	Generous family policies do not necessarily indicate the 'women friendliness' of the state and may not lead to the relatively favourable trade-off between stable public sector work and lower wages suggested recently by comparative researchers. Instead, in this specific context, which combines legacies of state socialism, a backlash against women's emancipation before 1990 and a peripheral, vulnerable labour market, familialist policies are associated with a high degree of marginalisation for women with small children in which the state is at best complicit, at worst, an active agent.
6	Huppatz, K. Sang, K. Napier, J.	'If you put pressure on yourself to produce then that's your responsibility': Mothers'	2018	Gender, Work and Organization	Scotland and Australia	Interviews were conducted with 35 non-STEMM (science, technology, engineering,	There are tensions between organizational policies, such as maternity leave and flexible work, and the contemporary demands of academic labour. New managerial discourses which individualize and make use of moral systems are particularly effectual in driving

		experiences of maternity leave and flexible work in the neoliberal university				mathematics and medicine) academics	women to take up marketized research activity and compromise leave entitlements.
7	Kalb, G.	Paid Parental Leave and Female Labour Supply: A Review	2018	Economic Record	Australia	Review	Four aspects of paid parental leave are explored, including the impacts of: introducing paid parental leave; changing the duration of existing paid parental leave; changing the generosity of existing paid parental leave payments; and paid paternity leave
8	Maxwell, N. Connolly, L. Ní Laoire, C.	Informality, emotion and gendered career paths: The hidden toll of maternity leave on female academics and researchers	2019	Gender, Work and Organization	Irish	A qualitative study of the lived experiences of female academics and researchers	The findings point to the need for better structural accommodations for maternity leave which address the relationship between caring and career disadvantage within academia. The article adds to existing literature on the intersection of motherhood and academia by unpicking the specific role of maternity leave as both a lived experience and an institutional practice that can reinforce gender inequalities in academia.
9	Nowak, M. J. Naude, M. Thomas, G.	Returning to Work After Maternity Leave: Childcare and Workplace Flexibility	2013	Journal of Industrial Relations	Australia	Survey questions were designed following a review of the literature and prior empirical work.	Respondents experienced dissonance between the stated organizational family-friendly policy of their workplaces and practices at the management level. Employer-centred flexibility often disrupted their child-care arrangements. We identify important employment policy issues for workplaces that would facilitate the optimal return to the workforce by professional women following maternity leave.

3.3.1 Data extraction from research articles - Maternity Leave

Norms appear to influence return after maternity leave. A study by Bartoš and Pertold-Gebicka (2018) referred to a social norm that mothers should stay home with children younger than three years of age. This has a strong effect on job search prospects of women returning to the labor market after parental leave.

In academic contexts, mothers experienced other challenges. Women with young children reported need to continue labouring on academic research outputs while on maternity leave. Those who have traditional gender relationships in the home appear to experience much more stress in keeping up with the demands of the labour process (Huppatz, San & Napier, 2018). Maxwell, Connolly and Ní Laoire (2019) identified in an Irish university context that maternity leave and flexible working arrangements often are governed by informal attitudes rather than institutional practices that support women to avail of such provisions without a career penalty resulting.

Some women experienced dissonance between stated organizational family-friendly policy and line management decisions and attitudes (Nowak, Naude & Thomas 2013). A study by Fodor and Glass (2018) identifies employers as critical gatekeepers who translate public entitlements into the lived experience of workplace gender inequality. Companies can use maternity leave to discipline workers, to screen out those who have become superfluous or whose performance does not meet their expectations. The workers were dependent on personal alliances and employer goodwill in order to access basic legal guarantees. They appealed to the goodwill and understanding of companies and individual supervisors and felt lucky and grateful when they received any form of accommodation. Mothers of young children in Hungary experience the dearth of work opportunities, the inflexibility of work schedules, and employers' discrimination as a challenge to return to work. Women on the lengthy insured parental leave become the ideal supply of ad hoc informal employment, an invisible reserve army of labor (Fodor & Kispeter 2014).

Given the role that the partner is expected to have in the provision of the child care, that facilitates the mothers return to work, is the importance of workplace flexibility for men (Nowak, Naude & Thomas 2013).

Begall and Grunow (2015) describe that leaving employment after the first birth has become less common in the Netherlands and that over time the probability that new mothers reduced their working hours increased substantially. This trend has been facilitated by three related policy developments: the introduction of part-time parental leave (reducing the exit probability), the strong growth in part-time jobs, and concurrent improvements in the labor market position of part-time workers (increasing the probability of a work hour reduction).

In Germany they modified the parental leave benefit and its entitlement period. At the same time, the parental leave period, which involves job protection for three years, remained unchanged. The study described that the reform yields most of the intended effects: the fraction of mothers who plan to return to the labor market within a year after the interview increased by 14 percentage points (Bergemann & Riphahn 2011).

Kalb (2018) claims that the period of leave cannot be too short, since then women are at risk of exiting the labour force at childbirth rather than having to return to work too quickly, nor too long, since then women are at risk of losing human capital which is likely to affect their earnings growth and career development. From seven months up to around one year as a maximum appears to be optimal. Linking the payment level of paid parental leave to previous earnings would encourage women to participate in the labour market and pursue a (well-paid) career before starting a family as this investment is likely to be worthwhile (Kalb 2018). However, with the right length of payment period it also induces mothers to return to work. Fodor and Kispeter (2014) also refer to the lack of daycare for children as a challenge to return to work after maternity leave.

Table 3. Education programs and coaching during maternity leave

Author	Title	Year	Journal	Country	Method	Results
1 Alstveit, M. Severinsson, E. & Karlsen, B	Readjusting one's life in the tension inherent in work and motherhood	2011	Journal of Advanced Nursing	Norway	Nine Norwegian employees who were individually interviewed during the first months after their return to work following maternity leave	Returning to work after maternity leave appears to be a transitional phase that can be critical to the well-being of first-time mothers. To support women during this phase, employers and public health nurses should monitor the work in relation to the women's capacity and value their competence both as employees and mothers.
2 Houston, D. M. M., Gillian.	The Role of Planning and Workplace Support in Returning to Work after Maternity Leave	2003	British Journal of Industrial Relations	England	A questionnaire survey of women who were pregnant with their first child Regression analyses	Women who did not return to work as intended were differentiated from those who did return to work by the amount of planning, they had done in pregnancy, as well as having lower pre-natal income and less anticipated support within the workplace. Almost one third of those who returned to work part-time reported reduced job status. The study shows the importance of workplace planning and support in return to work after maternity leave. The paper describes social support within the workplace. It seems likely that women will be more likely to re-enter the workplace if they perceive their colleagues and managers to be supportive of women returning to work after childbirth. The respondents indicate three areas of support they anticipated; practical, domestic and at the workplace.
3 Moffett, J.	'Adjusting to that new norm': How and why maternity coaching can help with the transition back to work after maternity leave	2018	International Coaching Psychology Review	UK	Semi-structured interviews were used. Eleven participants from five different participating organizations.	The study found that coaching was influential in enabling high-performing women to engage on a deep level, developing increased self-awareness and finding ways to navigate their way back into the workplace at this time of major transition. The relationship with the

4	Mainiero, L. A.S., Sherry E	Kaleidoscope careers: An alternate explanation for the "opt-out" revolution	2005	Academy of Management Perspectives	coach, and the breadth and depth of the outcomes of coaching were key findings.	
5	Millward, L. J.	The transition to motherhood in an organizational context: An interpretative phenomenological analysis	2006	Journal of England Occupational and Organizational Psychology	Semi-structured interviews. 10 women were recruited on the assumption that some may not return to work as intended or may not be available for a second interview.	The article concludes with guidelines on how women executives can increase their career success and how organizations can create an improved workplace that will attract and retain talented women given the anticipated labour shortages beginning in 2012. Women appeared to struggle subjectively with prevailing their rights, needs and concerns as mothers while simultaneously also maintaining their identity as valued and functional members of the organization. To this extent it is possible to draw out implications for a more effective management of the transition process from pregnancy to return to work. The results highlight the need for organizations systematically to reckon with the maternal side of the mother - baby separation process and its inextricable link with the work readjustment process.

3.3.2 Data extraction - education programs and coaching during maternity leave

One study (Moffett, 2018) describes that investing in maternity coaching can ease the transition back to work for woman after maternity leave and increase retention and job satisfaction. It does not describe a common element, but coaching relationship, approach and understanding of the transition to motherhood which may give women the opportunity to work on a deeper level than just on a practical one; an understanding of what her new identity as a mother in the workplace means and how this can be reflected in her behaviour.

Another study describes an unique transitional phase - a time when "first-time mothers readjust their lives in terms of the tension between work and motherhood" (Alstveit, Severinsson, & Karlsen, 2011).

Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) described the attention in media "granted to "the opt-out revolution," a term coined to describe the alarming talent drain of highly trained women, largely working mothers, who choose not to aspire to the corporate executive suite". Their article reviews explanations for "this phenomenon, and posits an alternate explanation of the kaleidoscope career model that fits workers' concerns for authenticity, balance, and challenge, vis-a-vis the demands of their careers in this new millennium. In particular, the kaleidoscope model fits women's careers well as a means of understanding how women operate relationally to others in both work and non-work realms. Like a kaleidoscope that produces changing patterns when the tube is rotated and its glass chips fall into new arrangements, women shift the pattern of their careers by rotating different aspects in their lives to arrange their roles and relationships in new ways". They concluded with following recommendations as; offer flexible schedules, career paths, state support for the advancement of women, create reward systems based on outcomes and actual performance, not face time.; provide family-friendly programs; efforts by governmentally and the community to create programs that value families.

Moffet (2018) refers to other studies and describes that support for the woman returning from maternity leave is identified as key for the women. As well as helping women to plan their return to work, maternity coaching can help with other practical aspects of embarking on and returning from maternity leave; for example, preparing for discussions and negotiations (Millward, 2006). A link between maternity coaching and career re-engagement are described, particularly noticeable in women who did not plan to have any more children.

Houston & Marks (2003) describe that one of the most important aspects to being able to return to work as intended is planning. If women make plans during pregnancy about how to return to work, they are much more likely to do so. Houston & Marks (2003) did not examine planning during maternity leave. For that reason, we do not know if planning is more important during pregnancy than after the child is born, but there are psychological and

practical reasons why planning before maternity leave may be more effective. It seems likely that it is important for women to make their plans for return while they are still in work when they feel identified with their role as workers. This may give implications for career guidance; women who intend to return to work after the birth of their first child should be given guidance and time to plan their return before they take maternity leave. This might take the form of an action plan constructed in co-ordination with managers. It might also include time off work and support in looking for appropriate childcare. If women leave the workplace with no clear idea of how they will implement their return to work, the period of maternity leave may reduce their motivation and/or opportunity to make plans to implement their return to work.

4. Main findings and recommendations

- Women who have maternity leave between seven months and up to one year maintain contact with their own work more often according to research
- Investing in maternity coaching may ease the transition back to work for women after maternity leave and increase retention and job satisfaction
- Coaching and learning programs may help with practical aspects such as preparing for discussions and negotiations in relation to return to work
- Social norms and management decisions and attitudes have influence on women's return after maternity leave
- Lack of daycare for children is a challenge for returning to work after maternity leave
- Each countries laws and guidelines, culture and attitudes related to women's employment opportunities have to be acknowledged in developing learning programs for maternity and parental leavers

5. Literature

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6. Annex 1: Comprehensive Overview of Employment Situation of Maternity and Parental Leavers in Partner Countries

FRANCE

The situation of women after maternity and parental leave in France

In France, there are many regulations (including the Labour Code), laws, conventions and collective agreements which aim to protect and improve the conditions of women in the workplace during the pregnancy and after the childbirth (or adoption). All these regulations are complementary, and sometimes redundant or incompatible, with other policies aimed at the family protection and gender equality. These regulations have been updated constantly to answer new needs and cultural changes. At first, these policies were aimed to guarantee the employment of women, but they have been modified to include the gender gap, the recognition of fathers' right of raising their children and the inclusion of the work-life balance.

The first maternity protection regulation in France was implemented in 1909 to guarantee the job post for mothers and established a compulsory rest of 8 weeks. Many other laws and regulations have been implemented since then to improve and widen the women protection.

Nowadays, the protection status for adoptive mothers are the same as for pregnant women.

Pregnant women have a certain number of rights in workplace to assure a healthy pregnancy and protect them from possible abuse by an employer in different sectors. For example: protection in hiring and against dismissal or any kind of discrimination in the workplace because of their pregnancy; and different measures to improve the working conditions (authorizations of absences, reinforced medical surveillance, scheduling timetables, change of assignment if the post can be a risk...). All these protections are established in the Labour Code and developed in other laws and collective conventions.

The current maternity leave in France is in the lower average of Europe. It lasts 16 consecutive weeks for mothers with less than 2 children and 26 weeks for mothers with 2 or more children. It can be extended by medical circumstances. The number of weeks increases with a twin birth (34 weeks) or a multiple birth (46 weeks). Self-employed women have the same conditions as female employees.¹⁹

The maternity leave ensures that women returning from maternity leave must be reinstated in their previous posts, or, failing that, in a similar job with an equivalent remuneration. The employee is entitled to receive paid annual leave and all the maternity leave time is counted for the retirement

¹⁹ Ministère du Travail (2018). Le congé de maternité [online text]. <https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/droit-du-travail/les-absences-pour-maladie-et-conges-pour-evenements-familiaux/article/le-conge-de-maternite>

calculation. After the coming back, an interview with the employer is compulsory to consider a career guidance or a repositioning. Apart from the protection on pregnant women and the maternity leave, other policies have been implemented to reconcile the childcare and the professional sphere. It is here where the parental leave comes.

In France, around 93 % of mothers use the complete maternity leave. Around half of them come back to their posts on the same conditions after the maternity leave. According to an OECD study²⁰ updated in 2016, around 66 % of mothers with children aged 0-14 are in employment (in OECD countries). This rate is higher in France (around 75 %).

Nevertheless, in the year following a birth, 50 % of women reduced or stopped their professional activity (compared to only 6 % of men)²¹, what highlights the inequalities between women and men. The changes in the working conditions (reduction of timetables, part-time contracts...) are caused mainly by the lack of adequate nursery services and the financial aspects.

Standards – laws, regulations and directives

There are two potential brakes for parents when it comes to the reconciliation of family and career. On the one hand, parents are worried of leaving their jobs for the childcare and not being able to find another one after. On the other hand, the reduction of working time is not always possible as it has an impact on the family budget. To avoid that, two main tools (halfway between employment and family policies) have been put in place.

1. The Parental leave (CPE)²²

Following the birth or adoption of a child, the parental leave allows parents to suspend temporarily their working contracts (or to reduce the working time) to bring up the children; having the assurance of returning to their former job or equivalent with the same salary. It was created in 1977 for mothers and was extended to fathers in 1984. The employee can ask a complete suspension of the working contract or a reduction of the working time and the employer does not have the right to refuse it. To be eligible for this policy, an employee must be employed in the company for at least one year on the date of birth or the arrival of the child in case of adoption.

The CPE has an initial duration of one year maximum (it can be less) and can be extended two times without exceeding the third birthday of the child or the period of 3 years after an arrival of a child if he/she is adopted. Under certain conditions, parents can also have financial benefits paid by the Family Allowances Fund (CAF), including the CLCA (below). The main objective of the CPE is to limit the barriers to return to employment.

²⁰ OECD Family Database (2016). Maternal employment rates [online text]. <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>

²¹ Secrétariat d'Etat chargé de l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes et de la lutte contre les discriminations (2019). Prise en compte de la parentalité dans la vie au travail [online text]. <https://www.egalite-femmes-hommes.gouv.fr/prise-en-compte-de-la-parentalite-dans-la-vie-au-travail/>

²² Ministère du Travail (2018). Le congé parental d'éducation [online text]. <https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/droit-du-travail/les-absences-pour-maladie-et-conges-pour-evenements-familiaux/article/le-conge-parental-d-education>

2. The financial benefits: La Prestation partagée d'éducation de l'enfant (PreParE)²³, before called Le complement de libre choix d'activité (CLCA).

It's a lump sum paid to parents who do not work at all or work part-time (until the third birthday of the child). Created in 1985 (for parents with 3 children), extended in 1994 (for parents with two) and in 2004 (for parents with 1 child). The amounts change taking into consideration the number of children and their ages. There are other kinds of financial support as lump sum or reduction in taxes for different categories of parents (single parents, large families etc).

These two measures can be complementary and allow parents to temporarily interrupt their work or reduce the working time to take care of the children. Even if they are available for mothers and fathers, in practice, more than 98 % of the beneficiaries are women. In fact, there are many studies which analyse the "undesirable" effects of these policies regarding the equality of men and women as most of the beneficiaries are women.

One study²⁴ shows that almost three-quarters of French mothers change their activity behaviour because of the maternity: they stay at home or they change to a part time working contract. Also, the INSEE (National Institute of Statistical) and the Anact (the National Agency for the improvement of the working conditions)²⁵ show that the interruption of the employment activity is associated to lower employment rates in the future compared to the mothers who only reduced their activity or did not stop to work at all. As the access to childcare facilities, in particular nursery, is very difficult for a child of two years, some mothers remain inactive until the three years of their youngest child, even if they are not compensated, resulting in an interruption of the professional career associated with a loss of income. The INSEE study shows that women's wages fall by 2 to 3 % after a birth, while those of men increases by around 3 %. INSEE has calculated that the wage gap is significantly higher between mothers and fathers (23 % on average in the private sector) than among women and men without children (7 %).

One of the most thorough studies about this topic was published in 2012 in the magazine of "Social and Family Policies"²⁶. It shows that mothers change business less often than men and are quite limited when they look for a job as they prefer companies close to the nurseries which suits their timetables and in which they are flexible enough to better reconcile family and professional life. Consequently, this reduces a number of companies and the margins of negotiation with employers e.g. about their salary opportunities.

Taking into account all these studies and surveys, it can be concluded that a rupture of the professional activity from the first child endangers the chances of reintegration into the labour

²³ Service Public (2019). Prestation partagée d'éducation de l'enfant (online text). <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F32485>

²⁴ P. Domingo Pauline, M. Céline (2012). Trajectoires professionnelles des mères, quels effets des arrêts et réductions d'activité?. In: Politiques sociales et familiales, n°108, 2012. pp. 87-96; https://www.persee.fr/docAsPDF/caf_2101-8081_2012_num_108_1_2692.pdf

²⁵ Anact (2019). Parentalité et égalité professionnelle : une difficile conciliation (online text). <https://veille-travail.anact.fr/produits-documentaires/parentalite-et-egalite-professionnelle-une-difficile-conciliation>

²⁶ L. Lequien. (2012). Durée d'une interruption de carrière à la suite d'une naissance : impact sur les salaires. In : Politiques sociales et familiales, n° 108, 2012- http://www.persee.fr/doc/caf_2101-8081_2012_num_108_1_2687

market and increases the risk to have worse conditions of employment (precarious and part time contracts).

In the framework of the draft of law on gender equality in 2015, the public authorities have shown the interest in encouraging fathers to take parental leave (as 96 % are used by women). To do that, they modified the text of the parental leave law to punish the couples who don't share it. The compensation decreases from 36 to 24 months if the parental leave is taken only by one of the parents. But this reform has not had the expected effects and even the number of fathers benefiting from the parental leave decreased. The inequalities between women and men remain to be a problem to be faced.

Support for employers

The mentioned regulations establish the specific rights and obligations for employers regarding the maternity and the parental leaves of their employees. During the maternity leave, the Security System pays the 100 % of the employee's salary. During the parental leave, the working contract is suspended temporally, so it is considered that the cost for the employer is very limited. Of course, there is an organizational cost for the company, but the regulations have been established to protect the employee's side, and the organizational work is taken for granted as an employer's obligation.

There is not specific support for employers in this field. Nevertheless, there are many initiatives to create awareness among employers about the women discrimination, and the importance of the work-life balance and the quality of work for employees. The Observatory of the Quality of Life in Work (OPE)²⁷ helps employers to put in place concrete actions for a better balance of life and parenting in the workplace.

Skills/education

The beneficiaries of the "parental leave status" can do a training during the parental leave. But this training should be a part time one. Also, as the parental leavers are not considered as "jobseekers", the training will not be financed by the Public System. Taking into account these elements, it can be concluded that parents are not seen as priority in the training programs. When parents return to work after a parental leave, the companies should propose the necessary updates. If the company has changed some tools or methodologies, the employer has to propose a training to update the knowledge and competences of the employee.

For those who are jobseekers or decide to stop their contracts after the parental leave, the Labour offices propose usually a "Skills Assessment"²⁸ to define their professional project. As parents are not considered a target group in France, there are not specific training tools for them. Also, there are not studies about the missing skills of this group as it is too large to do a generalisation. What Labour Offices consider is that after a break in their careers, some parents need a tool to redefine their

²⁷ Observatoire de la qualité de vie au travail: <https://www.observatoire-qvt.com/>

²⁸ Ministère du travail (2019). Bilan de compétences (online text). <https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/formation-professionnelle/droits-a-la-formation-et-orientation/bilan-competences>

professional projects; to identify their skills and competences; and to gain confidence. That is why the “skill assessment” is the main tool recommended for parents by Labour Offices.

The skills assessment aims to analyse one's professional and personal skills, aptitudes and motivations in order to define one's professional project. The duration of the skills assessment depends on the needs of each person. It is provided by a certified provider financed by public funds and in cooperation with the Labour offices. It is free of charge and jobseekers and employees can benefit from it.

The Lequien study shows that there's also a discrimination regarding the level of qualification. The short interruptions and the flexible working contracts concern usually women with high qualifications and/or working in the public sector. On the contrary, women with low qualifications and those in a precarious situation before having children have a more complicated integration in the labour market.

Work-life balance

The reconciliation of the private and working life has become one of the priorities when we talk about the working quality. It raises several types of issues and dimensions which explains the complexity of this topic. At first, the measures regarding this topic have been limited to time work arrangements. Nevertheless, trying to achieve the work-life balance by concentrating only on individual measures is not efficient. It is necessary to take into consideration all the different factors and dimensions of the problem and re-think constantly the work organisation.

According to the ANACT (the National Agency for the improvement of the working conditions)²⁹, there are three different dimensions to take into consideration:

- The equipment of the territory: public transport, access to public nursery services...;
- The individual working time arrangements: telecommuting, flexible working hours, part time work...;
- The actions on work organisation: new distribution of workload, versatility etc.

The achievement of work-life balance depends on the mix of these three axes. That is why the work-life balance conditions are not the same e.g. in every territory. Usually, people living in big cities have more possibilities of nursery services.

The childcare services are particularly diversified in France³⁰. The most frequent are **nurseries**. This is a certified place with qualified professionals who welcome children from 2 months to 3 years old under certain conditions (prior registration request is necessary). Parents pay a financial contribution that varies according to their resources and family situation. There are financial support and tax reductions for parents.

²⁹ Anact (2014). Travail & changement- La conciliation des temps, une question à plusieurs dimensions. Bimestriel du réseau Anact-Aract pour l'amélioration des conditions de travail, n°355 Mai/Juin 2014.

³⁰ Ministère de la Santé et des Solidarités (2016). Accueil de la petite enfance, guide pratique (online text). https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/Accueil_de_la_petite_enfance.pdf

There are different types:

- Collective nursery: can generally accommodate up to 60 children and it is managed by a local authority or a private company but always under the control and supervision of the Maternal and Child Health Department.
- Parental nursery: can accommodate up to 25 children on a regular or occasional basis. It is created and managed by the parents themselves, under the control of the Maternal and Child Protection. The care of the children is ensured by professional educators.
- Companies nurseries: They accommodate children from the staff of the companies or public institutions and sometimes can offer places to families of the neighbourhood.

Alternative service is that of a **maternal assistant**: a person (accredited as a professional of the early childhood) which takes care of children (maximum 4) in his/her home or in an assistant maternal house. The parents and the maternal assistant sign a working contract so that parents become "employers". This service is quite extended in France. To become a certified maternal assistant, one must undergo an accredited training organized and financed by the relevant department. The accreditation is granted for a period of 5 years and can be renewed. Also, there is another similar service (*la garde à domicile* – the home care) with one person taking care of the child in the family house. These options have the advantage of having a free choice person that can be more flexible to the specific needs of the parents.

There are also financial supports for these methods.

- Halte-garderie (drop-in centre): these centres welcome children under 6 years old on an occasional basis (for a few hours or half-days a week). It helps to reconcile the personal and professional life of parents. They can be public or private.
- Kindergarten: they welcome children from 2 to 6 years old who are out of school or in part-time. It offers a daily mode of accommodation and it is located halfway between collective nursery and maternal assistant house. They provide a more individualized services as the groups are usually smaller than in a nursery.

From 2000, significant progress has been made in legislation and regulations to simplify and harmonize standards of all the diverse institutions and reception services for children. According to the report of Cnaf³¹, children under 3 years old are most often taken care by their parents (essentially mothers). Apart from this type, the maternal assistant is the most frequent one (one quarter of children under 3 years old), but the number is reducing every year. Parents prefer the collective nurseries (32 %) but finding a place is very complicated (only 18 %).

All the stakeholders (parents, authorities, childcare professionals, ...) agree with the need of increasing the number of nurseries and reducing the price. But doing that is quite expensive and

³¹ Caisse Nationale des Allocations Familiales (Cnaf) (2016). Résultats du rapport 2016 de l'Observatoire national de la petite enfance (online text). <https://www.caf.fr/sites/default/files/cnaf/Documents/DCom/Presse/Communiqu%C3%A9s%202016/06122016DossierPresse.pdf>

despite the promises and the improvements, the number is still insufficient for the needs of families and the differences when it comes to their location continue to persist.

Regarding the second dimension (the individual work arrangements) and third one (organizational work), it can be concluded that companies are more aware of their responsibility in support of the work-life balance of their employees. Nevertheless, the practice is still limited.

According to the OEP survey³², more than 90 % of employees do worry about their work-life balance and 80 % have the feeling they do not have enough time for the private life. Around 60 % of them think that their employers are not inclined to facilitate the work-life balance. On the contrary, 91 % of employers estimate that they do lots of things for improving that. According to this survey, the most typical measures to improve the work-life balance are:

- Timetables arrangements: to avoid meetings before 9:00 and after 18:00; the possibility of changing timetables in case of family constraints, ...
- Flexibility in timetables
- Teleworking
- Flexibility in organizational work
- Nursery solutions and financial support
- Provision of experts in parenting and introducing work-life balance in the annual interview.

In 2013, a national interprofessional agreement on the quality of life at work (QVT)³³ was presented to give ideas about the new ways of dealing with issues of equality, reconciliation of work and private life and reflection of different organizational approaches. Nevertheless, this topic continues being a “voluntary” option that depends on the awareness and capacity of each employer. That’s why there are so many differences between groups, for example public-private sector, big-small companies, city-village... The work-life balance is still an agreement of good intentions but with a very slow and little space extension.

Good practices

Avip – The nurseries with vocational professional³⁴

These nurseries have been created initially by the *Institut d'éducation et des pratiques citoyennes (IEPC, The Institute of Education and citizen practices)*. The aim is to facilitate access to employment

³² Observatoire de l'équilibre de temps et de la parentalité en entreprise (2018). Baromètre OPE de la conciliation entre la vie professionnelle, vie personnelle et familiale (online text). <https://www.observatoire-qvt.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/BAROMETRE-OPE-2018-VD-VALIDJBdu280518-FOCUSUNAFdu210618.pdf>

³³ Ministère du travail, de l'emploi, de la formation professionnelle et du dialogue social (2013). Accord national interprofessionnel – qualité de vie au travail (online text). http://www.journal-officiel.gouv.fr/publications/bocc/pdf/2013/0041/boc_20130041_0000_0011.pdf

³⁴ Ministère des Solidarités et de la Santé (2019). Les crèches à vocation d'insertion professionnelle (Avip) (online text). <https://solidarites-sante.gouv.fr/affaires-sociales/familles-enfance/accueil-du-jeune-enfant/article/les-creches-a-vocation-d-insertion-professionnelle-avip#>

for parents with young children, especially single mothers, by giving them a place in a nursery for the child and professional coaching for the parents. The target group is parents of young children (0-3 years) who are away from employment and volunteers to engage in an active search for employment (a contract is signed between parents and the structure). A special effort is done to benefit single-parent families, primarily when they live in a discriminated district of the city.

Parents have appointments with an expert of career guidance to help them to identify their professional pathway and to elaborate the job search tools, increase their self-confidence etc. The beneficiary parent engages in an active job search process and the nursery is committed to welcoming the child at least 3 days a week.

The contract is concluded for an initial period of six months and may be renewed, following a shared assessment when the beneficiary parent is still actively looking for work, up to a maximum of 12 months. The Job Office advisors are specifically dedicated to global support, thus ensuring intensive, personalized follow-up adapted to the needs of the parent. Personalized interviews make it possible to establish a job search path adapted to each situation and articulated with the actions proposed by the social worker.

The government wanted to develop this concept and harmonized the practices. To do that, they have created a charter of practices and a label of AVIP for nurseries which meet the requirements, for example they must commit to receiving at least 30 % of children whose parents are without professional activity. This label will give nurseries an extra financial support.

This project has been implemented from 2016 between different Ministers, the Job Office and the Cnaf as main partners. The initial target was to develop 100 Avip nurseries by the end of 2016. According to the Ministry's data, the successful rate of this tool is around 80-90 % of participants (they have found a job or a training after 6 months). And the main beneficiary is mostly women raising their children alone. This tool has been reaffirmed in September 2018 when the President of the Republic has launched the deployment of 300 Avip nurseries until 2020.

Ma cigogne³⁵

In 2016, Pôle emploi (Job office) and the the Cnaf have developed another interesting practice to help parents to reintegrate in the labour market by proposing solutions for keeping the children from 0 to 3 years old. It is called "Ma cigogne".

This service allows parents to find places in nursery for short periods so that they can do the necessary steps in their job search (for example attend a job interview, a meeting with a career counsellor or a training course...). The inscription is free of charge, but parents must be registered in job offices as jobseekers. The financial participation of parents depends on their resources.

³⁵ <https://www.macigogne.fr/>

The Charter of Corporate Parenthood³⁶

La charte de la parentalité (the Charter of Corporate Parenthood) was initiated in 2008 to encourage companies to offer employed parents an environment better for the family responsibilities and reconciliation of work and family life. It has three purposes:

- to change the employers' point of view related to parenthood,
- to create a favourable environment for parents who are employees, especially for pregnant women,
- to respect the principle of non-discrimination in the career development of employed parents.

Today, more than 30 000 employers (or 5 million of employees who represent 15 % of active population) have already committed to this Charter. The Observatory of Parenthood and Companies supports the signatory companies in the implementation of their commitments. The signatories of this charter are committed to creating a work environment where parents employee can better reconcile their professional and family lives. They set up concrete actions organized around four categories: work organization, managers awareness, employee services and financial support.

Even if this charter is not compulsory, this kind of actions highlights the importance and the dimensions to pay attention to for employers and authorities and can promote other more integral policy.

Conclusion

In general, it can be concluded that in France there are enough protection regulations for parents. These regulations are aimed at supporting the childcare by guaranteeing the employment of parents, so they promote the breaks in their professional careers. This, in turn, leads to a situation where one can observe negative impacts on their employment rate, salary and the kind of jobs (precarious and part time contracts).

The regulations in this domain are made by different structures which represent the different dimensions of the policy, including employment, family protection, children, gender etc, what, unfortunately, provokes redundant and complicated regulations which are sometimes incompatible with each other. There is not a comprehensive regulation that takes all the dimensions together.

Despite these regulations and the implementation of different tools and policies, the work-life balance is complicated for most of the families and the number of childcare solutions is not enough.

³⁶ Observatoire de la qualité de vie (2008). La Charte de la Parentalité (online text). <https://www.observatoire-qvt.com/charte-de-la-parentalite/presentation/>

HUNGARY

The situation for women after maternity and parental leave in Hungary

The Hungarian society has a historically family-centred attitude, the burden of which is primarily born by women. Still today, many families prefer traditional division of labour, i.e. the role of the husband is that of a breadwinner, and the task of the woman is to do the household chores. This view has already been changing among the young generations and the distribution of roles has become the principle. The role of employment is becoming more and more significant in the life of women, they put much effort into career building, while many of them would like to have children and a family. It is impossible to avoid the question of how one can harmoniously reconcile a family life with a career. Reconciliation of work and family is a serious challenge for parents with small children (0-3 years).

The specificity of the Hungarian regulation is that basically it seeks to facilitate this by providing an extremely long period of childcare (3 years). However, the Hungarian labour law, that provides an exceptionally long period of absence among the OECD countries, is rather provoking critics than recognition. According to the study "Labour law tools of facilitating parenthood and raising children, paying special attention for atypical employment" (Kártyás-Répáczki-Takács, 2014), the separation from the labour market with the objective of childcare will become counter-productive beyond to a certain point, and it makes more harm by making returning more difficult than how much advantage it has by providing a close parent-child relationship.

In Hungary, labour shortage is very high. The roughly half million vacancies are accompanied by 500,000-550,000 potential employees, a significant part of them are totally uneducated (GKI Economic Research Co., 2018). Due to the labour shortage, women with small children mean an important reserve, if the state and/or employers manage to introduce atypical forms of employment successfully and besides that increase the number of nursery and crèche capacities and their territorial coverage. Currently there are 48,000, but at least 60,000 would be needed (Ministry of Human Capacities Of Hungary, 2019). It is planned that mini, family and employment nurseries will be established at every settlements, where there are at least forty children below the age of three. However, most of local governments in small communities do not have enough money for that, because this requires new infrastructure and at least two new pedagogues. From 2020, grandparent childcare allowance will be introduced, but according to the opinion of experts, this will not mean a breakthrough solution.

The guaranteed paid maternity leave that is given for 3 years causes serious damages not only to the economy, but also to the men/women staying on maternity leave, because they cannot, or can only difficultly get back into the world of employment. Theoretically, of course, everybody is free to decide: if the employee would not like to make use of the maternity leave until the child reaches the age of 3, then the employer is obliged to reemploy her after 30-day-long grace period. However, if a woman has more children, then this in many cases will lead to her own labour market segregation: typically, the higher is the number of children, the lower is the employment rate of mothers. This is true despite of the fact that in the recent years, they also try to help them in reintegration by offering them tools of family, - and employment policy. One of its elements is that if the parent returns to work, then, besides his wage, he also gets the childcare benefit.

Standards (Support from state) – laws, regulations and directives

In Hungary, parents are allowed to stay at home with the child for 3 years. During this period, they can take 3 forms of support. One is entitled for the first one until the child is 6 months old, for the second, until the child is 2 years old, while for the third until the child is 3 years old. The available total is getting lower and lower along with the progressing of time. The higher total that is due in the first two funding periods can only be taken if the parent, who applies for the funding was insured for at least 365 days within 2 years preceding the birth of the child, i.e. he/she worked or studied at a higher education institution (Act LXXXIV of 1998 on family support).

From 2020, if the parents decide to do so, they can transfer the entitlement for childcare allowance to the grandparent. This refers to grandmothers and grandfathers, who are active employees, i.e. who are not retired.

Support from employers

During the time of childcare benefit (GYES)/childcare allowance (GYED), the employment is not terminated so after return to work it must be continued as it used to be before having children. This means that the returning employee must be employed in the same job according to his/her employment contract, and the employee is obliged to work in this position. Just like in other cases, there is an option that parties change the working position by common agreement, i.e. the employee is only obliged to return to another position, if he agreed upon that with the employer.

Returning takes place based on the working time according to the labour contract. If the worker was employed within a full-time 8 hour working time, then his working time will be the same after returning as well. Of course, one can differ from that by mutual consent. It is important that if the parent would like to return to work before the child reaches the age of 3, then he/she can ask to be employed within a part time job that equals to the half of the full-time work. In this case, the employer is obliged to modify the contract to part time that can last until the child reaches the age of 3 years. The employee, who takes care of 3 or more children, is entitled to this right until the child reaches the age of 5 years.

After a return to work, the employer is obliged to make an offer for the employee about the modification of salary so that the salary follows the pay rise that has taken place in the meantime. More specifically, one must take the average pay rise in that particular company as a basis. Concerning restriction of dismissal, if the mother or the father, who raises their child alone, goes back to work before the child reaches the age of 3, then there is a limited opportunity for dismissal until the child reaches the age of 3.

Supporting employers

As a result of the Job Protection Act, the employer can take several tax and social contribution. The employer can reduce his expenses by employing an employee, who has a little child. The employer is entitled to a partial reduction from contribution tax and vocational training contribution after the returning into work of the mother or the father, who has little children. The employer can take a

contribution reduction also when employing a new employee, if he raises a child, who is 6 years old or younger, or in case of an employee having a large family, if he raises a child, who is 8 years old or younger. The full reduction can also be enforced in case of parents having small children, who are employed part time.

Work-life balance

Hungary belongs to the post-socialist countries, where people got used to the wide safety net of guaranteed and full employment, state and company care. The economic and social impacts of regime change also modified the relationship towards the reconciliation of work and private life (Koltai 2010).

Besides the accelerated pace of modern life, and in the continuously changing economic situation, it is not only the interest, but at the same time, it is also the responsibility of the families, but also of both employers and employees to adapt to the changing markets. Employers should recognize that the protection of human capital, and so the bearing in mind of the balance of work and private life, the flexibility of work organization can be turned into a competitive edge (Keveházi, 2007).

The source of conflicts between work and family life is composed basically by the following two factors:

- the tension between conservative and modern family values that influences the women's willingness to have a child and a job (family or career?), and
- the pressure of increasing requirements at work: due to the concern about career aims, or simply just about losing their job, employees many times subordinate or marginalize their individual needs against the job and employment, which generates tension and might lead to the deterioration of emotional relationships within the family (Pongrácz – Molnár 2000: 37-38).

Besides family conflicts, also conflicts at work are having impact on the emotional stability of the employee, most frequently the conflicts at work deriving from raising a child are put into the foreground, such as working time (one has to go for the child earlier than the end of the working time), or the question of how to fix the situation when the child gets ill. Due to the transforming, but still currently dominating traditional role perception, the reconciliation of obligations about employment and family life arises mostly from the point of women, both on behalf of employers and employees, even despite of EU measures targeting the equality between genders. A remedy for this problem could partially be atypical employment, but in Hungary, this kind of employment is much less widespread than in the European Union.

Based on the literature, the self-made focus group examination and its further consideration, as a summary, we list those factors that limit the chances of women having little children for getting into employment in Hungary. The differences appearing in terms of employment can be attributed to difficulties about the reconciliation of work and family obligations of women. These are the following:

- (1) The traditional approach according to which the place of the woman is not on the labour market, but in the household is still strongly present in Hungary;
- (2) The world of work does not adapt to the needs of women: the number of institutions adapted to the needs of female employees and to work schedules is few;

- (3) Supervision of children is difficult: the opening hours of childcare facilities do not adapt to the needs of female employees and to work schedules;
- (4) A female employee with little children means an extra cost;
- (5) “Demanding” employees: in many cases, employers avoid employing mothers of children of young age because of the protection of women staying on maternity leave, the prohibition of their dismissal, or the extra leave of women having small children, The reason why they are not admitted is also that they are not flexible (they cannot work overtime and cannot undertake more working schedules);
- (6) Stereotypes about women having small children: their child is always ill; it is not their work that is the most important thing in their life; their knowledge becomes outdated etc.

All in all, it can clearly be concluded that there are stereotypes about women with little children on the Hungarian labour market, according to which they are „demanding” employees, i.e. the stereotype-based discrimination exists. A “fine-tuning” is necessary anyway about facilitating the employment of women with little children. Clearly detectable contradictions are visible between the stereotypes defined by women having little children and HR/society, so it is indispensable that both parties get to know each other’s needs, characteristics and opportunities. Awareness-raising about both actors of labour market is important: on behalf of the employer, in order to avoid that women having little children are considered as a disadvantaged employee, but instead as a potential source of work, while on behalf of the employees, they have to imply that one has to return to the labour market consciously, with self-confidence after the birth of their child.³⁷

Approaches and good practices

1. Family and **CareerPOINTS**. In the framework of application entitled *Women in the family and at work*, 71 Family and CareerPOINTS were set up in the area of Hungary until the end of 2018. The two main target groups of the service offered by the centres are the **employers and the families**, and within that, especially women raising little children or disadvantaged women. Centres are operating according to a uniform system of rules which are established for the following aims:

- to improve the labour market situation, the atypical employability of women, and to improve the cooperation of employers and employees on a local level, popularisation and introduction of atypical forms of employment (part time and other working time models, telework, incorporation, occasional work and others) paying special attention to local needs;
- to facilitate compatibility and harmonization of family/private life and work, to establish operating conditions of supporting local employers/service providers and communities cooperating with them;
- to break down – economic and social – prejudices against women by using local awareness raising tools;

³⁷ Corvinus University of Budapest (BCE) Budapest Management Review: http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://unipub.lib.uni-corvinus.hu/3373/1/VT_2018n3p41.pdf

- implementation of trainings: trainings targeting returning to work, trainings targeting reconciliation of work-life balance, awareness raising trainings for employers, trainings facilitating the establishment of social relationships.

Those, who got stuck in career building, or those, who find it hard to return to the labour market can get in touch with the centre, but people can contact Family and CareerPOINTS even with problems about raising their children or with relationship problems. Also, the professionals working there themselves help or provide guidance through their relationship system about where one should turn with a particular issue.

Supporting services are also connected to education and preparation, for example while a mother attends a training facilitating labour market reintegration, her little child is looked after by a qualified child sitter.³⁸

2. The **Well-Being Foundation** has become known as the first mother-friendly employment agency in Hungary. One can find individual solutions at companies, especially from the point of work organisation, atypical employment can reach changes in order to make returning easier, but in Hungary, this is still only typical for a small number of enterprises.

They established „**Re-engaging employer award**”, for which mothers returning can nominate their employers. They established the **NÓRA network**, the first national, independent, professional labour market network that facilitates the enhancement of women’s abilities and talents, as well as the establishment of labour market equality.³⁹

3. **Single Parents’ Centre**: training opportunities, community programmes, entrepreneurial opportunities and consultation.⁴⁰

4. "**Be our grandparent programme**". Among others, it helps to solve the periodical childcare by extending social umbrella network. These support programmes and initiatives are readily available at the service of those, who are interested.⁴¹

SLOVAKIA

The situation for women after maternity and parental leave in Slovakia

Women with small children make up a significant proportion of the population. The official sources of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family in the Slovak Republic show that young families - and hence mothers - are among the most vulnerable social groups in the labour market. Young families are mostly dependent on one main income. At present, the mother receives a maternity or parental allowance (up to 3 years of age), but, as confirmed by a bulk of sociological research, it is not (according to the public opinion) sufficient. Mothers with children and young families are an attractive group of customers for economic entities. Marketing attention to mothers with children in

³⁸ https://www.csaladbaratorszag.hu/csalad_es_karrierpont

³⁹ <http://jol-let.com>

⁴⁰ <https://www.egyszulos-kozpont.hu/>

⁴¹ <https://www.egyszulos-kozpont.hu/legyel-a-mi-nagyink>

the consumer market is a different matter than attention paid to mothers in the labour market. Mothers in the labour market represent a model for family-based women with the potential of a powerful workforce, strong motivation, loyalty to the employer, refining their expertise and skills. In addition, caring for and bringing up young children also entails responsibility, perseverance and ingenuity, which become characteristics of the mother's personal outfit. The market is therefore a competition in which mothers, if competition is fair, can stand as well as anyone else. Naturally, they are more difficult to compete if the starting conditions are not fair or threaten mothers at a vulnerable place, which is childcare.⁴²

Employment of mothers in Slovakia in the first three years of their children's life lags significantly behind the labour outcomes observed in other EU countries. That has a negative impact on their medium-term labour outcomes and wages. Mothers with higher previous labour market income, higher level of education and longer work experience tend to enter into the labour market faster after childbirth. On the other hand, factors as being a single mother or low availability of informal childcare provided by grandparents have a strong negative impact on maternal employment. Moreover, women appear to be treated unfavourably when applying for jobs typically requiring lower educational background, thus potentially creating an additional barrier to return to work.⁴³

Slovakia is among the countries with the highest (discouraging) impact of motherhood and care responsibilities on employment. This is likely due to a long parental leave, rarely taken up by men (7 %), as there is no simultaneous compensation for both parents, coupled with a low take-up of flexible work arrangements and missing childcare facilities. Measures have been put in place to improve access to childcare, but capacities are still insufficient. Only 0.9 % of children below 3 were enrolled in formal childcare in 2016, one of the lowest rates in the EU. Childcare costs in Slovakia are also among the highest in the EU, which has a negative impact on work incentives. On the positive side, EU-funded construction of childcare facilities, including for marginalised Roma communities, has been slowly taking up. As of January 2018, the Social Services Act has expanded access to childcare to unemployed parents, on the condition that their child does not take the place of a child whose parents are employed or in education. The coverage rate is higher for children aged between 4 and 6 (78.4 %; 2016) but is still below the EU average (94.8 %). Furthermore, the number of rejected applications for kindergartens remains high, particularly in Bratislava (4,677 out of 12,486 in total in 2016). Following 2017 amendment of the Act on Financing of Schools financial support will be extended to all families receiving the benefit in material need with children above the age of 3 in kindergartens.⁴⁴

⁴² Marošiová, L., Šumšalová, S. (2006). *Matky na trhu práce a života* [Mothers in the labor market and life]. Inštitút pre verejné otázky [Institute for Public Affairs]. Accessible at: http://www.ivo.sk/buxus/docs//publikacie/subory/Matky_na_trhu.pdf p. 5.

⁴³ Inštitút finančnej politiky [Institute for Financial Policy] (2018). *Women Still Can't Have It All: Barriers to Higher Maternal Employment in Slovakia*. Accessible at: <http://www1.finance.gov.sk/Default.aspx?CatID=11753>. p. 2.

⁴⁴ European Commission (2018). *Country Report Slovakia 2018*. Accessible at: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2018-european-semester-country-report-slovakia-en.pdf>. p. 26.

Standards (Support from state) – laws and regulations and guidance

The maternity leave needed for a childbirth and care for a new-born child can only be taken by a woman in a work relationship or a similar work relationship for 34 weeks, in the case of a single mother 37 weeks and in the case of a woman who has given birth to 2 or more children up to 43 weeks. If a woman does not exhaust her entire 6 weeks of maternity leave before childbirth because she gives birth at an earlier date, as determined by the doctor, she is entitled to maternity leave of 34 weeks, 37 weeks if she is solitary and 43 weeks if she gives birth to two and more children.

Since childcare requires sufficient time, the employer is obliged to provide parents who have requested a prolongation of maternity leave for the period until the child reaches the age of 3, the so-called "parental leave".

If you are on maternity leave, you are entitled to a maternity allowance – financial allowance which is payable to all persons eligible for maternity leave. In particular, a woman who is pregnant or cares for a new-born child and who had had sickness insurance for at least 270 days (about 9 months) in the last two years prior to childbirth is entitled to maternity allowance. The insurance was paid either by the employer or paid as a self-employed person or by a voluntarily unemployed person (Section 48 of Act No. 461/2003 Coll. On Social Insurance).⁴⁵ After finishing the period of receiving the maternity allowance, usually after the 34th week, the parent is entitled to receive parental allowance up to max. until the child reaches the age of 3. However, this contribution is significantly lower than the maternity allowance.

At present, in order to reduce the negative implications of the parents' employment there is a discussion about the possibility of introducing a more flexible parental leave through:

- the possibility of combining a shorter period of receiving and a higher financial level of parental allowance;
- the possibility of using it in separate time blocks depending on the working and family needs of the parents.

As already stated above, the access to formal childcare for children under three is very low in Slovakia. Provision of formal childcare for children under three relies on municipalities and private providers. Private childcare services are very expensive, and their availability is limited, they are concentrated in big towns and cities. An insufficient supply of public providers is caused also by the fact that childcare facilities for children under three are not a formal responsibility of any of the ministries, in contrast to kindergartens for older children of preschool age, which are part of the educational system. As a result, facilities for children under three have not been included in policy planning, and their development has not been supported or even recognised as a public policy issue.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Slovensko.sk (website). Accessible at: <https://www.slovensko.sk/sk/zivotne-situacie/zivotna-situacia/materska-dovolenka>.

⁴⁶ Gerbery, D. (2018). Improving access to formal childcare for children under three in Slovakia. ESPN Flash Report 2018/60. Accessible at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=19998&langId=en>.

Support from employers

Employer's obligation to re-take the original job employee returning from maternity leave was introduced back in 1966. Since that step, however, the support of employers towards better conditions of employment for parents experienced only slow progress.

The policies of the employers themselves play an important role in the process of reconciling work and family life. However, in Slovakia they take form of more ad hoc solutions to acute problems rather than a permanent, explicit and systematic corporate policy.

On the other hand, one can eventually observe a more frequent implementation of practices such as:

- Flexible working time, part-time jobs
- Expansion of practically applicable models of work organization
- Establishment or support of pre-school facilities with the employer
- Family days – social and family events
- Unpaid supplementary leave.

Home working and teleworking, which was a few years ago seen in Slovakia more or less as a science-fiction theory, is getting more common in Slovak working life. According to surveys, flexible working time helps to stabilize personnel costs, and can even reduce them, as overtime allowances are reduced, staff turnover is reduced, and considerable recruitment costs are also reduced.

Education/Skills/Competencies

Systematic support for maintaining or deepening qualifications during parental leave is not among official policies in the Slovak Republic as there are virtually no supporting tools in place which would facilitate the education or training of this target group. Therefore, in general, parental leavers must rely on themselves and look for individual opportunities when it comes to keeping their knowledge and skills updated.

Career planning during and after maternity leave has been a topic of group counselling conducted by the Adult Advisory Centres. Participants were presented with opportunities to participate in the work process during maternity leave and recommended concrete steps to facilitate a smooth transition to the working environment after it was completed. In particular, the need for continuing education, keeping in touch with their professional environment, continuous assessment of competences and, last but not least, the possibilities of education and self-realization during maternity leave were highlighted. Participants were given the opportunity to verify the correctness of their profession, or to opt for a different profession through professional diagnosis by the method of Occupational Choice Questionnaire and Career Planning. All participants have the opportunity to continue to advise on career planning and career development individually.⁴⁷

In order to prevent parental leavers' professional knowledge and skills from falling during the maternity/parental leave period, or to deepen or expand their competencies, it would be beneficial to allow their participation in education and training programmes for the labour market under Section 46 of Act No. 5/2004 Coll. on Employment Services. At company level, it is important to

⁴⁷ Husenicová, I. (2017). Vzdelávanie žien na materskej dovolenke. Accessible at: <https://ec.europa.eu/epale/sk/content/vzdelavanie-zien-na-materskej-dovolenke>

improve the access of part-time workers to training programmes organized by the employer and create necessary conditions for career growth.⁴⁸

Work-life balance

When we look at the strategic concepts developed by policy makers in Slovakia, better work-life balance should be achieved in particular through creating flexible forms of employment, creating and developing skills and strengthening continuity and workplace contact.

Homework and various forms of flexible working time are particularly helpful to employees who care for young children. These measures are not a burden for the company, but rather an investment in "human capital". Adjusting working time according to employees' ideas reduces their conflicts between work and family and rewards their gratitude with higher loyalty to their employers. The possibility of raising a child with old parents also increases the chances of parents to enter earlier or return to the labour market after childbirth.

In the context of social innovation, some companies offer e.g. option of the so-called self-planning, in which employees can also intervene in the schedule of their working time or shifts and choose them according to their personal needs, whether physical or social. Employees can thus better organize their free time and adapt to the needs of the family, which will be appreciated especially by parents who have to take care of little children and the household. While some employers in Slovakia are developing family-friendly policies to attract and retain highly qualified women (and more and more men), it is generally true that attitudes to work organization still do not favour work-life balance to the point the parental leavers would need to.

Approaches and good practices

The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak republic supported the employment of mothers of small children in flexible forms of work through the National Project "Family and Work". 765 employers were involved in the pilot project, supporting 1 406 jobs for mothers of small children, for flexible forms of work - shorter working hours, shared jobs and home work. At the same time, 33 facilities for flexible forms of childcare were supported. A continuation of national project entitled Family and Work is currently being prepared. The main objective of the project is to support the creation of a family-friendly working environment and conditions for reconciling family and working life.

In particular, the project focuses on 2 activities:

- promoting innovative facilities for the provision of childcare services;

⁴⁸ Inštitút pre výskum práce a rodiny [Institute for Labour and Family Research] (2014). Zdroje a prekážky rastu zamestnanosti žien s dôrazom na stratégiu zosúladenia rodinného, pracovného a osobného života [Sources and barriers to the growth of women's employment with an emphasis on a strategy for reconciling family, work and personal life]. Accessible at: https://www.ceit.sk/IVPR/images/IVPR/vyskum/2014/Hanzelova/2167_hanzelova_keselova_o.pdf. p. 54.

- encouraging the use of flexible forms of work – reimbursement of part of wage costs to the employer.

It will be supported:

- Flexible forms of childcare ("children's play areas") that target pre-school children from 3 years of age and/or compulsory school children. These "children's corners" can be established and operated either directly by the employer of the parent of the child or by any other legal or natural person with whom the employer or parent has a childcare agreement. New or existing facilities providing flexible forms of childcare will be supported. Existing facilities must fulfil the condition that they expand their capacities and at least a quarter of the increased number of children will be occupied by children with special educational needs, i.e. children with disabilities or from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. This measure aims to increase the inclusion of children from disadvantaged groups while allowing their mothers to work for the time they choose;
- Flexible forms of work for mothers of pre-school children by providing financial support to a newly created flexible job for a total of 6 months, if the employer recruits a mother of a child of pre-school age and allows for a flexible form of work. At the same time, as a condition for the financial support, the employer must provide for the care of the child of such an employee if she/he requests it.⁴⁹

THE NETHERLANDS

The situation for parents after maternity and parental leave in the Netherlands

On 20 August 2015, the Volkskrant newspaper headlined: "Paternity leave in 2017 from two to five days". An improvement, but also a reminder that the five days of fully paid leave that fathers in the Netherlands receive to take care of their newly born child is still poor compared to the 16 weeks that mothers receive.

Paternity leave in the Netherlands is very minimal. In Europe the Dutch are at the bottom of the list together with Italy, Estonia and Malta. The front runners are Iceland, Finland and Slovenia, where paternity leave can run for up to 3 months (European Parliament Research Service, 2014; International Labor Organization, 2014).

Worldwide maternity leave has been implemented in almost all countries, but paternity leave has only been implemented in 92 countries, half of which receive less than three weeks of leave (MenCare, 2016). And that while in the Netherlands one in five men who combine work and care want to work fewer hours. The 'double taxation' is also heavy for men, but for most men working shorter hours is only a wish. On average men like to work two hours less per week to spend more time on care (Portegijs et al. 2016).

The government plays an important role in promoting gender equality: it can implement policies that promote gender equality. But the existence of measures that maintain the traditional division of roles hamper progress on emancipation in the Netherlands. The current policy on paternity leave and

⁴⁹ <https://www.gender.gov.sk/projektu-rodina-a-praca-pokracuje-formou-projektov/>

parental leave is an example of policy that maintains the traditional role distribution of caring women and working men. While paternity leave can make a significant contribution to the valuation and redistribution of care tasks and can also bring about a change in the deep-rooted inequalities between men and women.

The Figures

- 60 % of fathers would like to spend more time caring for children if practical issues and costs do not play a role (WOMEN Inc., 2015a);
- In the Netherlands, a woman is entitled to 16 weeks of fully paid leave. This includes maternity leave and parental leave (National Government, 2016);
- From 2017, a man is entitled to five days of fully paid leave. This includes two days of "maternity leave" – also known as paternity leave – and three days of "parental leave" – also known as partner leave (National Government, 2016);
- After that, both mother and father can claim parental leave. The following applies to each child: 26 x the number of hours the mother or father works. This is unpaid leave, unless stated otherwise in the collective agreement or additional employment conditions (WOMEN Inc., 2015b);
- Applying for parental leave is done by many men to be actively involved in the raising up of their children. However, the conditions of parental leave vary widely between different labor sectors, making it financially more difficult for some men to fulfill their role as parents as they wish (WOMEN Inc., 2015b);
- Currently, one in two employees combine work with caring for children. Almost one in five employees combines work with informal care tasks. A modern employer takes the care duties of employees into account and contributes to a good balance between work and care. Employers and corporate cultures therefore play an important role in the possibility for men to combine work and care (for children) (WOMEN Inc., 2016);
- Men increasingly take parental leave in the public sector, in large organizations and organizations in which relatively many women work. There is therefore a clear segregation with regard to organizations and possibilities for taking leave. The options are more limited in the private sector (Plantenga & Remery, 2014).

When it comes to the labour market participation of women, the government in the Netherlands can easily take substantial steps. In recent years, the government has tried to increase the number of working women by providing childcare allowances, parental leave schemes and by combating pay discrimination. But it has not changed enough. Still, about half of Dutch women cannot stand on their own two feet (71 percent of highly educated women are economically independent, 25 percent of low-educated women). They often work part-time and earn less than 70 percent of the net minimum wage.

Women naturally have the responsibility to be financially self-reliant. But it is easy to lend a hand, and also necessary because it does not happen automatically. The educating parties that are sitting at the table can set better conditions to combine work and care, to offer women equal opportunities and to allow men and women to play an equal role in education.

Dutch culture

One of the reasons why it has failed so far is Dutch culture, where the traditional division of roles is still of paramount importance. Many women start working considerably less at the birth of the first child. The upbringing is the domain of women, and a large part of the care tasks are shifted to her. For example, mothers spend more than twice as much time on caring for the children and housekeeping as fathers. This traditional division of labour is maintained by Dutch government policy.

How to change this? The four parties currently sitting at the formation table can send a powerful signal by organizing a more generous 12-week paternity leave, which starts after the maternity leave of the mother has expired. The father now has five days of maternity leave, three of which are unpaid. One day is meant for holding the hand during delivery and the other day for declaring the child at the town hall. This leave arrangement seems to be based on the division of roles from the previous century.

That while many young fathers want to spend more time with their child but do not dare to take parental leave because they fear for their career opportunities, research by the Central Bureau of Statistics shows. That fear is justified, says sociologist at Erasmus University Laura den Dulk. "Research shows that fathers applying for parental leave are assessed more negatively by their employer than a woman: she is expected to do so." The government does little to eliminate that shudder. And so parental leave remains primarily a women's affair.

Paternity leave is not only good for the bond between father and child, it also contributes to the career of women. Research in Sweden shows that for every month that a father took leave, the income of the mother increased by seven percent. If fathers are given substantial leave, the inequality between men and women on the labor market will also be tackled, Smit predicts. "An employer will not admit it quickly, but if he can choose between a man of thirty years of age or a woman of the same age, the man will be hired sooner because there is no risk of him going on maternity leave for 4 months."

Pregnancy discrimination

The risk of maternity discrimination is also reduced with the introduction of father's leave. According to the College of Human Rights, 45 percent of women who have had a child in the last four years have had an experience that the Equal Treatment Commission considers discrimination. In Iceland, maternity discrimination rates have fallen since the introduction of paternity leave. Furthermore, research in the Scandinavian countries shows that father's leave has a positive effect on the division of tasks at home. Men are going to do more in the household.

Unlike five years ago, almost all political parties included paternity leave extension in their program. The parties with whom the VVD is negotiating do not want paternity leave of days but of months. D66 argues for three months of paid paternity leave at 70 percent of the salary, CDA wants to give parents three months of extra leave together and GroenLinks wants four weeks of maternity leave for fathers and two months of paid parental leave. Only the VVD says nothing about it in its program. The liberals recently declared the subject to be "controversial", postponing the bill from outgoing Social Affairs Minister Lodewijk Asscher to extend paid maternity leave in 2019 for fathers from two to five days. It will therefore have to be arranged in the formation by CDA, D66 and GroenLinks.

Internationally, the Netherlands is gradually becoming the risk of the West. The OECD average is eight weeks. In Germany, Iceland, Finland, Norway and Sweden, fathers have nine weeks or more of leave. And the European Commission now also believes that fathers should be given at least ten days' paid leave when their child is born. If the forming parties now simply arrange the father's leave, the country does not have to be forced by Brussels. Political parties such as D66, GroenLinks and CDA already agree: two days of paternity leave is no longer of this time, three months should be the standard. A more generous paternity leave also leads to a higher participation of women in the labour market.

Measures

Increase the paid paternity leave from two days to 12 weeks. This gives fathers the chance to take care of their baby, is good for the development of the child but also provides better career prospects for women and a higher labor participation of women.

Reserve specific leave for the father. When the husband and wife are allowed to decide for themselves who takes the leave, you see that women take the leave more often. Women often earn less than men, so in many cases it is financially cheaper if the mother stays at home and the father keeps working. Countries such as Germany, Portugal, Sweden, Norway and Iceland have therefore introduced the so-called daddy quota, whereby: the leave is only intended for fathers, if they do not take it, it will expire.

Let the father's leave only start after the mother has returned to work (so not sitting together on the couch at home). Solo care, where the father takes care of the child independently and the mother does not look at her all the time, in the long term ensures an equal position of the man in the upbringing.

Arrange paid paternity leave by law and not by collective agreement. Otherwise, differences per sector will continue to exist. You can already see that parental leave is mainly taken up in the female public sector. While the behavioral change must also apply in men's sectors.

Provide paid paternity leave. According to the CPB, the costs for three months of paid paternity leave at 70 percent of the wage amount to approximately EUR 200 million on an annual basis. That may seem like a lot, but it pays for itself in the long term, according to a study commissioned by the European Parliament in 2010. Moreover, just like the maternity leave, the government has to pay the costs so that small entrepreneurs do not suffer. In addition, the following applies: Now the father with a higher income can rather afford to take unpaid parental leave than someone with a lower salary or with a temporary contract. Paid paternity leave therefore reduces the gap between rich and poor.

Standards (Support from state) – laws and regulations and guidance's

The Care and Labor Act (Wet Zorg en Arbeid) has been applicable since 16-11/2001, which sets rules for creating a new balance between work and care in the broadest sense. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the law deal with pregnancy, childbirth, (adoption and foster care), short-term leave and birth leave and costs and long-term care leave. Chapter 6 deals with Parental leave. This describes:

1. An employee who is related to a child as a parent in family law is entitled to leave without pay. If the employee becomes involved in family law with more than one child from the same time, there is a right to leave in respect of each of those children.
2. An employee who, according to the basic registration of persons living at the same address as a child and who has taken on the permanent care and upbringing of that child as his own child, is entitled to leave without pay. If the employee has taken on the care and upbringing of more than one child with a view to adoption from the same time, there is a right to leave in respect of each of those children. In all other cases where the conditions set out in the first sentence are met for more than one child with effect from the same time, there is only a right to one leave.
3. If the work is performed outside the Netherlands, the employee is entitled to the leave referred to in this article, unless an important business or service interest arises. opposed to this. A parent is entitled to parental leave for his / her child up to the age of 8 (i.e. up to and including 7 years). The child must live at the same address as the parent, and the parent must provide sustainable care for the child. This means that parental leave can also be taken for adopted children, stepchildren and foster children. A parent is entitled to parental leave once per child.

From a legal point of view, the parent is not entitled to continued payment of wages during parental leave. The employer may continue to pay the wage. The parent can also finance the parental leave by withdrawing money from his life-course credit.

The parent is entitled to a parental leave equivalent to 26 times his weekly working time. The parent normally works 40 hours a week, then he / she is entitled to $26 \times 40 = 1,040$ hours (130 days) of parental leave. Nowadays there is no longer a standard rule about the amount and duration of parental leave. Employee can take the parental leave flexibly. In principle, the employer may not refuse the application for parental leave. This is only allowed if the leave seriously hurts the company. The amount of parental leave applies per child. Even if the parent has twins, he / she is entitled to twice the maximum amount of parental leave. A parent cannot be fired because he / she is taking parental leave. The parent can be fired for other reasons during the parental leave.

A new European directive (dated 4 April 2019) requires the Dutch government to introduce paid parental leave of at least 2 months within 3 years.

The European Parliament has determined that parents are entitled to at least four months of parental leave, of which at least two months are paid. How much must be paid, as well as whether the employer or the government pays the leave, is up to the cabinet. This new directive must be introduced in the Netherlands by April 2022 at the latest.

The leave scheme used to last for 13 weeks, but as of January 1, 2009, the parental leave has been extended to 26 weeks.

Parental leave is leave that someone (male / female) can take for the care of a child younger than 8 years. So that this parent can temporarily spend more time on the child (ren). Someone is entitled to parental leave for 26 times the number of hours that he / she works per week.

Parental leave rules

The following rules apply to parental leave:

- Someone can take parental leave for children up to 8 years;
- Parents are entitled to parental leave for each child. Someone can take parental leave for several children at the same time. It is therefore not necessary to first prepare the leave for 1 child before the leave for another child starts;
- Both parents are entitled to parental leave;
- With twins, someone is entitled to twice parental leave;
- Someone can request parental leave from his/her employer as soon as he/she is employed;
- Someone can get parental leave for a child, adopted child or recognized child;
- Someone can also take parental leave for a foster child, stepchild or prospective adopted child. The child must then live with the parent according to the basic persons registration.

Parental leave at birth of child

The earlier entitlement to three days of parental leave that could not be refused by the employer has lapsed since January 1, 2019. The total number of weeks of parental leave does not change, but the employer can ask someone to do so since January 1, 2019 due to important business or service interests. to schedule the leave differently. This applies from then on to the entire parental leave.

Parental leave and vacation days

The statutory parental leave entitlement is unpaid. No vacation is built up over this. Sometimes employers and employees have agreed on (partly) paid parental leave. Holiday accrual does take place on parental leave hours that are paid (how much does not matter).

Will the employee continue to work partially? Then he / she accrues vacation days over the hours that are worked. The employer may not deduct parental leave from the days off.

Parental leave on public holidays

Does parental leave coincide with a public holiday? Then that day is simply regarded as parental leave. Someone is not entitled to reimbursement on that day. Agreements can be made about this in consultation with the employer.

Parental leave and unemployment

If someone becomes unemployed, parental leave ends on the first day of unemployment.

Parental leave during reintegration process

It is legally possible to take parental leave if someone is (partially) unfit for work. But the leave can cause problems with reintegration. Together with the employer, the employee must ensure that he can return to work as quickly as possible. The employee is obliged to cooperate in this. The company doctor or occupational health and safety service can in the first instance advise whether the leave stands in the way of reintegration.

When the Work and Care Act (Wazo) came into force in 2002, it was determined that maternity leave should be taken full-time without interruption. Since 1 January 2015, the last weeks of the maternity leave can be taken flexibly.

The source used for this is a report containing the report of the evaluation that was carried out for the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. The maternity and maternity leave is 16 times the weekly working time. The employee may have the maternity leave commence six to four weeks before the expected delivery date. The remaining weeks are intended as maternity leave.

If the delivery takes place later than expected, the leave will be extended by the number of days that the delivery is later. If the child, or one or more children in the event of a multiple birth, has been in hospital, the leave is extended by the number of days of admission counting from the eighth day of admission up to and including the last day of maternity leave up to a maximum of 10 weeks.

On 9 October 2014, the amendment by Van Weyenberg and Pia Dijkstra was accepted, which provides for the possibility for female employees to take the maternity leave flexibly after the sixth week after the birth. They can spread their remaining hours of leave over a period of 30 weeks. The number of days that can be taken flexibly depends on the starting date of the maternity leave, the actual date of birth and special circumstances such as the hospitalization of the child. The size of the maternity leave is the same regardless of whether the leave is taken in a continuous or flexible manner.

The request must be made no later than three weeks after the maternity leave commences. The employer agrees to the request no later than two weeks after the request has been made, unless compelling business or service interests dictate otherwise. This importance is not further defined in the amendment. The underlying objective of the amendment is formulated as follows in the motion by Van Weyenberg/Dijkstra: "This gives women more control over their work and family division after childbirth. This is important because childbirth can be very varied; a fixed arrangement does not fit in with this. In this way it is better to meet the wishes of women when they return to work."

Support from employers

In the Netherlands the unemployment rate is 3,4 % (February 2019). The number of vacancies is 277.000 (December 2018). So many employers have problems to find good employees. Having said that, employers have to do more than only paying a good salary to get or keep employees in their company. Like ING did, some of the employers are very innovative, want to have young and serious employees and therefore try to get them with innovative solutions on maternity leave.

Legislation in the Netherlands is a strong agreement of which we call the so-called Polder model: employers and employees work closely together on collective labour agreements which are obligated to be followed by all the companies active in that special market or industry. Therefore, we can pull the conclusion that basic items around maternity leave (out of nation legislation) is being followed and accepted by all employers.

Education/Skills/Competencies

Due to the short period of maternity leave in the Netherlands, to situation around education, skills and competencies regarding business issues is not so relevant. Many, in fact most companies, small or large, are used to work with part-time employees. Therefore, also new parents who start to work part-time, don't have many problems to do this in the same organisation as where they worked before. Maybe the new job has less responsibilities, but also items like job-sharing may help to solve this issue.

A challenge which comes out of research of new parents is how to combine private life and working life. Making career and having a household isn't an easy situation. Themes like time management, combining private and working life etc are seen as quite relevant for this target group. In the Netherlands, however, the leave is so short or done in a part-time way that new competencies due to the new parenthood are not an issue.

Work-life balance

The work-life balance in the Netherlands is at this moment of writing mostly a female issue. Whether the man can't or won't take a part-time job to use his maternity leave, the new mother is probably the one who must solve all the issues.

Unions, national and local government are helping these mothers with all kinds of advices and subsidies. The main goal is to equalise the difference between fathers and mothers when it comes to maternity leave and the issue that mothers should be able, also when they are alone, to be self-sufficient.

Approaches and good practices

An example of an employer that is sensitive to the issue of working parents is ING which is going to give young fathers a month of paid parental leave. Following on from foreign predecessors such as Netflix, ING is the first large Dutch company to grant generous parental leave to its male employees. While in the Netherlands the House of Representatives is still discussing a modest extension of the paid paternity leave from two to five days, ING immediately gives young fathers paid leave for a whole month. ING has recorded this in the new collective labour agreement for all 14,000 employees. After all, the survey shows that 87 % of employees work harder for a company that helps with work-family related issues.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ <https://proparents.nl/ing-jonge-vaders-betaald-ouderschapsverlof/>

This report presents the findings of an European project concerning facilitation of employability for parental leavers in European countries. The conclusions and recommendations in this report build on comparisons of relevant European policy documents, country notes from five European countries (France, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway and Slovakia) and a search in relevant databases. Taken together, these data form an approximate scoping review - to map a wide range of literature.

Both the concepts of maternal and parental leave are used in the present report. Research related to leave in connection with young children use the term maternity leave until the last decades where more frequent parental leave is used. We are aware that a distinction between parental and maternity leave does not apply in some countries.

A main finding is that parental leave and employability is a complex and context sensitive area. This relates to the fact that parental leave must be seen in connection with both individual, organisational, cultural, historical and political (legislative) issues on both national and European level. In this study, the focus has been mainly descriptive on the political (legislative) level, while a more interpretative analysis is made on how to develop tools and educational programs concerning development of employability skills relevant for parental leavers and employers.

Analysis of the situation regarding parental leavers' employment in the partner countries shows that maternal employment in France, Slovakia and Hungary is rather low. Although, in Hungary there are networks which provide special counselling for women and support them when it comes to their (re)integration into the labour market. In Western Europe, such as the Netherlands and Norway, the situation is more favourable, employers are more flexible and part-time job is a frequent option offered. However, the up-to-date level of skills of parental leavers coming back to work may be a challenge in these countries too.