



Family-friendly workplaces

Overview of policies
and initiatives in Europe

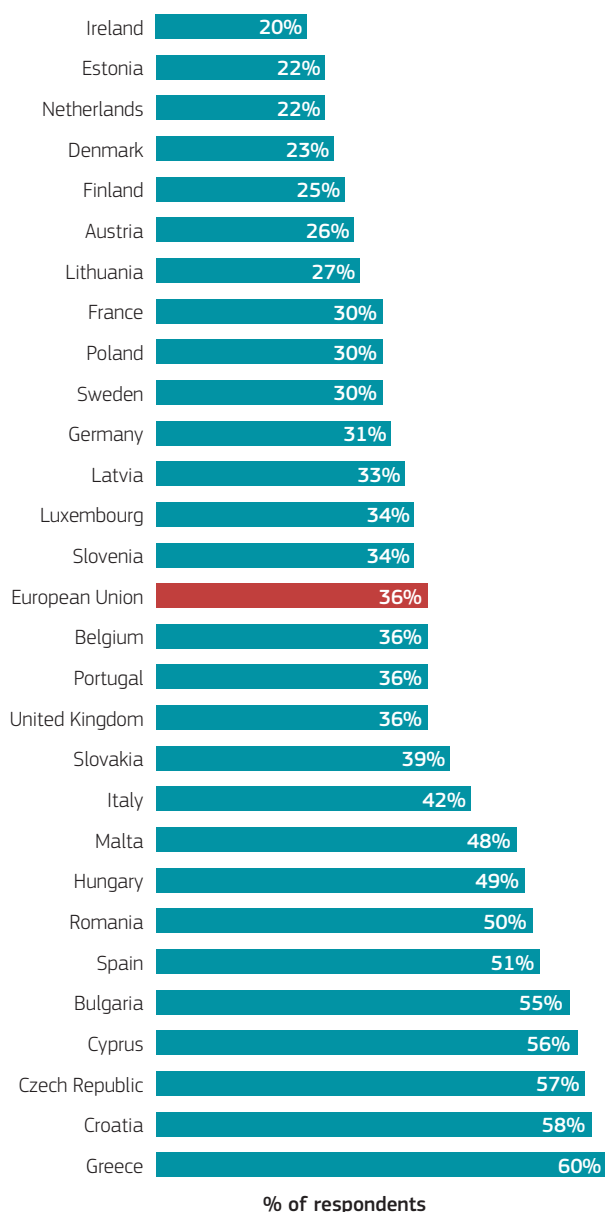


Employment,
Social Affairs
and Inclusion

Overview

This policy memo provides an overview of policies and initiatives in EU member states supporting family-friendly workplaces. EU citizens face significant challenges in balancing their professional and family lives. Family-friendly workplaces allow employees flexibility both in their working hours and location of work. This can help individuals reconcile conflicts between their domestic and professional responsibilities. Parents and families are therefore better placed to care for their children's wellbeing. Family-friendly workplaces can benefit individuals, economies and societies as a whole.

FIGURE 1: SHARE OF RESPONDENTS WHO REPORTED THAT IT WAS 'RATHER DIFFICULT OR VERY DIFFICULT' TO COMBINE PAID WORK WITH CARE RESPONSIBILITIES

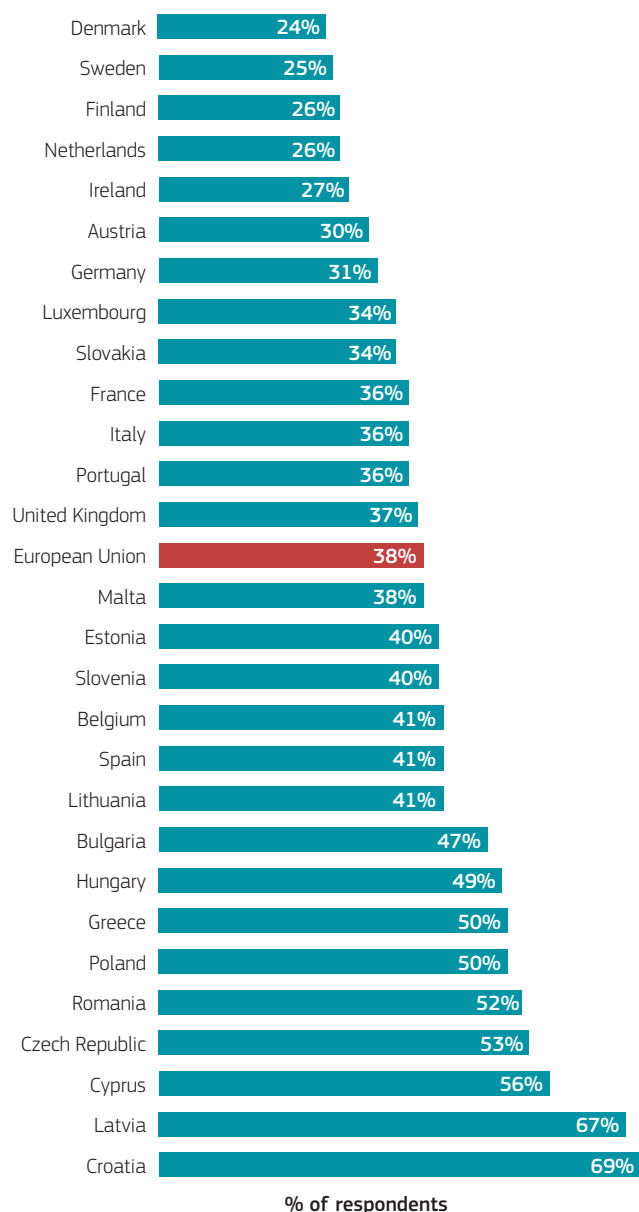


Source: Eurofound (2018), European Quality of Life Survey 2016.

The challenge: many families struggle to balance work and family obligations

The 2016 European Quality of Life Survey found that many families in the European Union struggle to effectively balance their professional and domestic responsibilities. Over one third of respondents stated that they found it difficult to combine paid work with their care responsibilities (Figure 1).¹ In some countries, more the half of respondents were in this category. A similar proportion of respondents stated that it had been difficult to fulfil family responsibilities because of time spent at work (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: SHARE OF RESPONDENTS WHO REPORTED THAT IT HAD BEEN DIFFICULT TO FULFIL FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES BECAUSE OF TIME SPENT AT WORK



Source: Eurofound (2018), European Quality of Life Survey 2016.

There are a number of reasons behind the tensions between work and family life. Long and increasingly unpredictable work schedules make it difficult to spend time with families.² Inadequate social services have also been found to exacerbate the situation.³ This is particularly significant for women, who are much more likely to reduce their working hours for family reasons.⁴

Family-friendly working: what is it and what are the benefits?

The achievement of a better work-life balance can lead to a number of positive social outcomes. Flexible working arrangements have been shown to help address the negative effects of caring responsibilities, of which women still bear the substantial burden.⁵ As a result, policies that facilitate a better work-life balance can lead to an increase in female labour force participation.⁶ The countries in which reconciliation between work and family life is deemed to be 'very easy' are those in which female labour force participation is highest.⁷

This is significant in the context of key EU policy priorities. An employment rate of 75 per cent is a key 'Europe 2020' target.⁸ A central part of the strategy of the proposal for a Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers is the adoption of more family-friendly flexible working practices to address conflicts between individuals' domestic and professional lives.⁹ Family-friendly practices are defined as those that 'facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life, and which firms introduce to complement statutory requirements'.¹⁰

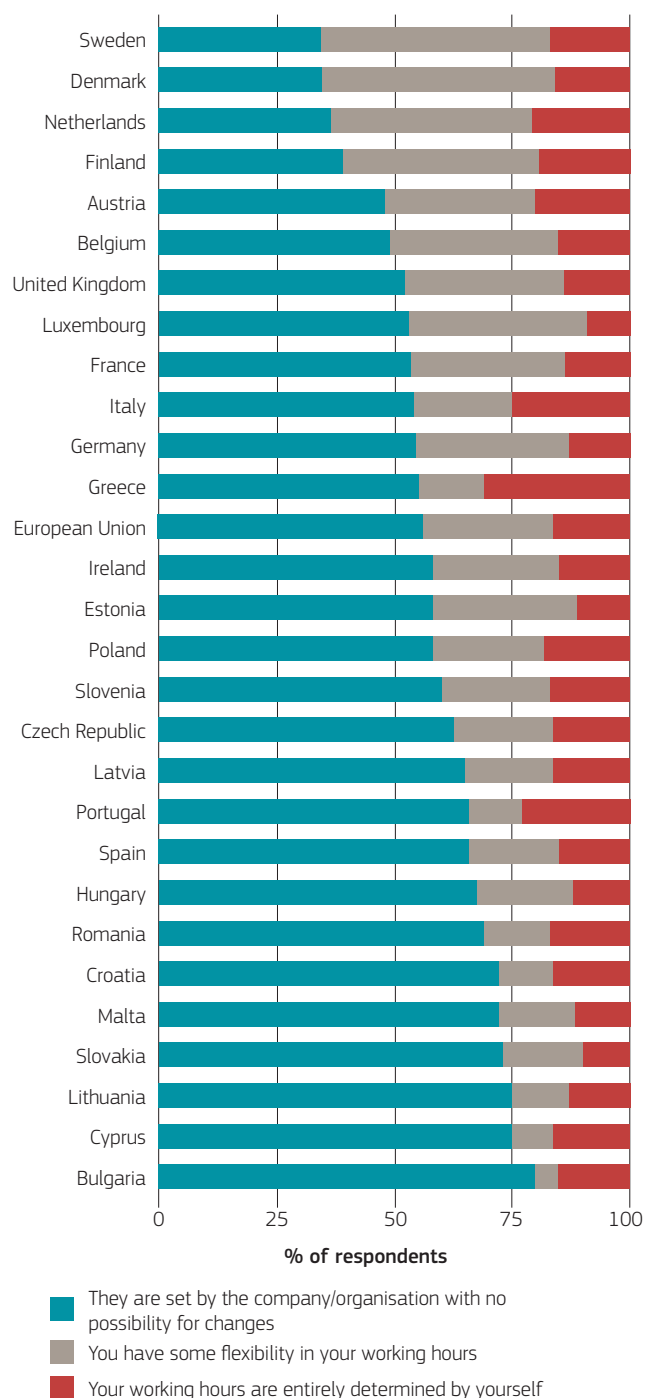
Legislative provision for flexible working in member states

Despite the benefits associated with flexible working, the majority of employees in most EU countries still do not have flexibility in their working hours (Figure 3). In addition, legal provisions for the arrangements that facilitate a balance between work and family life are inconsistent across member states. For example, a 2017 legal gap analysis carried out as part of a study for the European Commission found that only five member states give parents with children up to the age of 12 the right to request flexibility in their place of work.¹¹ The situation is even more restricted for those without children up to the age of 12. Only two member states – the Netherlands and the United Kingdom – specifically give those with caring responsibilities, but without children up to the age of 12, the right to request flexibility in their working schedules.¹²

Despite this, a number of legislative provisions in member states do address family-friendly working practices.

The right to request flexibility in working arrangements is guaranteed in many member states. In Portugal, employees with children under the age of 12, or regardless of age if they are disabled or chronically ill, have the opportunity to choose part-time or flexible work. Parents with children up to age of

FIGURE 3: SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION 'HOW ARE YOUR WORKING TIME ARRANGEMENTS SET?'



Source: Eurofound (2017), *European Working Conditions Survey 2015*.

three can request to work from home.¹³ The Netherlands has similarly strong protections: employees who have worked in an organisation employing over 10 people for over a year are entitled to ask for an increase or decrease in working hours, or request a change in location in their place of work, and unless this request causes significant problems for the employer, such as causing safety problems, the employer should honour the request.¹⁴

TABLE 1: EXAMPLES OF FAMILY-FRIENDLY FLEXIBLE WORKING PRACTICES

Practice	Description
Term-time working	Employees are employed on a permanent basis but can take leave during school holidays
Flexitime	Employees build up hours worked, so that they can come in late, leave early or take days off as needed
Compressed hours	Employees are employed on a full-time contract, but may work their contracted hours in four days rather than five
Commissioned outcomes	Employees have no fixed hours, but rather an agreed output level that must be met over a certain period of time
Mobile working	Working away from the typical workplace, including working from home
Annual hours	Employees must work a fixed number of hours over the year, but this may not be consistent across the entire year
Childcare support	Employers may have an on-site nursery (either permanent or during set periods, such as school holidays) or subsidise childcare costs

Source: CIPD (2017); ACAS (2015).¹⁵

Employees in some member states also have the right to take extended periods of leave in order to engage with family life. In Belgium, for example, employees are entitled to a 'career break' to facilitate the combination of work and family life: they can either reduce their working hours by a fifth for five years, work half-time for one year or take an unpaid complete interruption for a period of one year.¹⁶ The Flemish government also gives an additional premium to every worker who takes a career break under the scheme.¹⁷ In addition, all member states have legal provisions to enable paid maternity leave,¹⁸ as well as some provision for paid or unpaid paternity or parental leave.¹⁹

Other member states have introduced arrangements that focus on preventing work from intruding on family time. In France, since January 2017, employees have had a 'right to disconnect' that targets work-related communications in non-work hours. Companies must come to agreements with union representatives about the right to disconnect as part of mandatory annual negotiations with trade unions.²⁰ Italy introduced legislation that enshrined this right in 2017, as part of a wider package of measures aimed at promoting smart working practices to allow workers to reconcile their work and domestic commitments.²¹

Non-legislative measures and initiatives

Member states have also undertaken many non-legislative initiatives that seek to promote family-friendly workplaces by encouraging practices such as those listed above.

For example, some member states have state-supported family-friendly workplace accreditation schemes. In Germany, the government promotes family-friendly working environments through the 'Success Factor Family' programme, which encourages employers to offer flexible working hours.²² In Slovenia, the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs offers a 'Family-friendly Company' certificate to companies that adopt family-friendly workplace practices.²³ In Finland,

Väestöliitto, the Family Federation of Finland, monitors and accredits employers as 'family-friendly' employers.²⁴ The organisations are supported to introduce new family-friendly practices into their workplaces. Many major Finnish employers already take part in the scheme, including a leading global construction firm and a leading telecommunications group.

Some member states combine accreditations with financial support to make workplaces more family-friendly. In Austria, firms can apply for a 'work and family audit' certificate. Firms' needs to create a family-friendly workplace are identified with external auditor, with goals specified to be achieved in a set period. They receive funding and support for the development and implementation of related projects.²⁵ The Hungarian government awards funding of up to €9500 per workplace to help companies and public sector institutions work towards becoming family-friendly.²⁶ This funding can be used, for instance, to build areas in the workplace in which children can play, or to equip special rooms in which mothers can breastfeed. In Germany, the Betriebliche Kinderbetreuung ('Onsite childcare') programme incentivises firms to create daycare slots internally by paying €400 for each newly created full-time slot.²⁷

There have also been wider initiatives to raise awareness and provide guidance regarding family-friendly working practices. In Estonia, the Estonian Smart Work Association promotes smart working practices that help reconcile work and family commitments. For example, in 2013 it established a smart working centre at the Kolga Village Hall in a rural area of Northern Estonia, at which women shared their knowledge, jobs and childcare duties with each other.²⁸ In Germany, the government Familienbewusste Arbeitszeiten ('Family-conscious working hours') initiative was launched in 2010. This provides firms with guidance on how to make it easier for employees to reconcile their work and family lives.²⁹

Various actions can also be taken at firm or organisation level to facilitate a family-friendly workplace. Examples of flexible working practices are summarised in Table 1 above.

Member States' initiatives in this field can also be supported by the European Social Fund. For example, Lithuania's Success Project, from 2009–2012, provided childcare services for people struggling to combine work and family commitments. It also gave training to employers and workers' representatives about developing family-friendly work environments and flexible work organisation.³⁰

In sum

The conflict between individuals' professional and family lives is a pressing policy concern for the European Union. Its solution is crucial to the realisation of many principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, particularly gender equality, adaptable employment and work-life balance.³¹ The promotion and expansion of working practices and environments that allow individuals to reconcile professional and domestic obligations is of vital importance in improving the wellbeing of both children and adults, as well as in encouraging higher levels of labour force participation, particularly amongst women.

Endnotes

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