



Governing Body

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GB.312/POL/4

Policy Development Section
Employment and Social Protection Segment

POL

FOURTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Work–life balance

Overview

Summary

This paper briefly reviews the scope of work–family tensions and their detrimental effects on gender equality at work and at home, as well as on poverty reduction, social protection and business performance. It also highlights the benefits stemming from addressing these conflicts and identifies, drawing upon good practices from around the world, the policies that can help mitigate these tensions while benefiting families, businesses and societies at large. The paper concludes by putting forward suggestions for the consideration of the Governing Body concerning the promotion of further work on integrated work–family policy measures by the Office and ILO constituents.

Policy implications

For guidance on the design of integrated work–family policies, including in the context of recovery from the global financial and economic crisis.

Legal implications

None.

Financial implications

None.

Decision required

The paper is submitted for debate and guidance. See paragraph 47.

Follow-up action required

None.

Author unit

Conditions of Work and Employment Programme (TRAVAIL).

References to other Governing Body documents and ILO instruments

GB.312/POL/2, GB.312/INS/12.

Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183).

Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175).

Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156).

Introduction

1. Over the last decade, the issue of work–life balance has gained visibility in international and national policy agendas. The term “work–life balance” is used in policy debates concerned with the distribution of time and effort between work and other aspects of life.¹ While “work–life balance” is broader in scope, for the purpose of this paper the term “work–family reconciliation” is employed in accordance with the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156). Family constitutes a large part of personal life for most people across their life course. Moreover, the term “reconciliation” reflects the tensions underpinning the relationship between work and family responsibilities.
2. The current policy interest in work–family reconciliation stems from a set of new challenges which include, among others, the rise in women’s paid work, the growth in non-standard work, work intensification, ageing and changes in family patterns, including the growth of single-parent households. The current economic crisis and the accompanying austerity measures have further exacerbated these competing pressures of paid work and family duties.
3. Convention No. 156 requires that signatories² make it an aim of national policy that all workers with family responsibilities – both women and men – can engage in employment without discrimination or, as far as possible, conflict between work and family obligations. To this end, the Convention puts forward a set of policy devices including leave policies, social care services, social security, flexible working time and work organization arrangements³ and workforce reintegration policies as well as gender-responsive awareness-raising and education (Articles 4–7). More recently, the International Labour Conference (ILC), through the 2009 Conclusions concerning gender equality at the heart of decent work and the 2011 Conclusions concerning the recurrent discussion on social protection (social security), has called for measures to facilitate reconciliation of work and family responsibilities for women and men, effective access to comprehensive social care services for dependants and maternity protection.⁴ In 2010, as part of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Acceleration Framework, the United Nations identified leave policies and infrastructure for childcare and dependant care as key to speeding up progress in respect of the attainment of MDG1 (Poverty reduction); MDG3 (Gender equality); MDG4 (Child mortality); MDG5 (Maternal health); and MDG6 (HIV/AIDS and other diseases) by 2015. This counters the view that work–family reconciliation is relevant only to high-income countries; it is also essential for improving livelihood strategies and social protection in the informal economy.

¹ C. Fagan et al.: *The influence of working time arrangements on work–life integration or “balance”: A review of the international evidence* (Geneva, ILO, forthcoming).

² As of August 2011, 41 countries had ratified Convention No. 156.

³ The term “flexible” in this paper refers to those arrangements that provide workers with the ability to adjust their hours of work and/or work schedules and/or place of work in line with their individual circumstances and family status.

⁴ ILO: *Conclusions concerning gender equality at the heart of decent work*, Provisional Record No. 13, International Labour Conference, 98th Session, Geneva, 2009, para. 28 and ILO: *Conclusions concerning the recurrent discussion on the strategic objective of social protection (social security)*, Provisional Record No. 24, International Labour Conference, 100th Session, Geneva, 2011, para. 20(h).

4. A failure to address work–family conflicts has negative impacts not only on the employment opportunities and job quality, health and productivity of the workers concerned, but also on their families, children and adults alike, both in developed and developing countries. The reconciliation of work and family is to be viewed as integral to social protection strategies and programmes aimed at enhancing the social and economic security and well-being of families and, in particular, of working mothers. If properly designed, work–family reconciliation measures can also contribute to gender equality both in the labour market and in personal life.

Part 1. The determinants and effects of work–family tensions

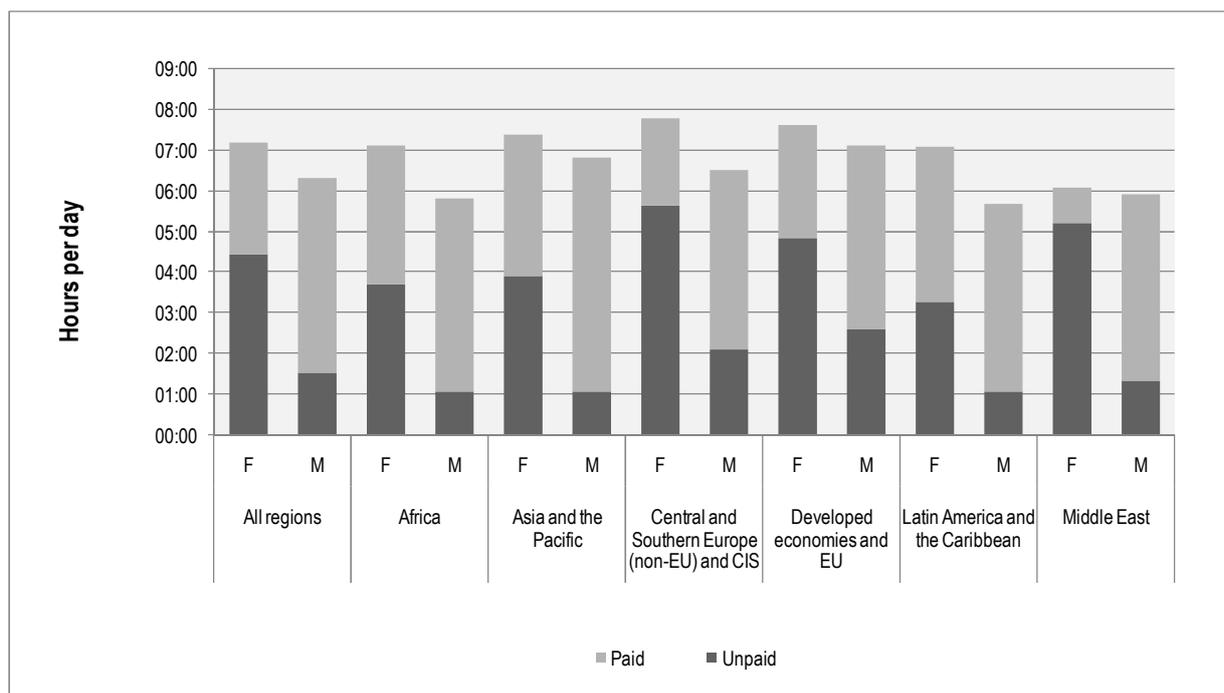
The unequal share of caregiving work between men and women

5. Even as more women than ever work for pay, they continue to bear a disproportionate burden of caregiving work for dependant family members such as children, the elderly and members with disabilities or illnesses. Available data show that everywhere women still spend considerably more hours in unpaid care work⁵ than men do, and less time in paid work (see figure 1). When considering the total number of hours spent in paid and unpaid care work, women tend to have longer working days than men (on average almost one hour more), with less time for education, training, unionization, leisure or even health care. In low-income countries, the working days of many women are especially long, and longer than those of their male peers, as they also spend considerable time in other unpaid work, such as water, firewood and crop transportation (see paragraph 9 below).⁶

⁵ Unpaid care work consists of: providing care (active and passive) for infants and children, or for temporarily or permanently ill or frail older relatives and the disabled; travelling time to obtain medical care for these persons; household maintenance, cleaning, washing, cooking, shopping; and all volunteer work for community services (S. Razavi: *The political and social economy of care in a development context: Conceptual issues, research questions and policy options*, Gender and Development Programme Paper No. 3 (Geneva, UNRISD, 2007), p. 6.

⁶ World Bank, FAO and IFAD: *Gender in agriculture sourcebook* (Washington, DC, 2009), p. 292.

Figure 1. Daily hours allocated to paid work and unpaid care work by sex and region, 1998–2010 (53 countries)



Notes: Numbers of countries: Africa, 5; Asia and the Pacific, 7; Central and Southern Europe (non-EU) and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), 6; Developed economies and European Union, 23; Latin America and the Caribbean, 9; Middle East, 3. Regional averages are unweighted and not strictly comparable, but reveal a general trend. Data are the most recent available (1998–2010).

Sources: For Asia, Africa and the European Union, UN: *World's women 2010: Trends and statistics* (New York, 2010); for Latin America and the Caribbean, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (Santiago, 2011).

Demographic, social and environmental trends

6. Rapidly ageing populations as well as HIV and AIDS and other health pandemics have contributed to increasing demands on individual workers to provide family care for adults, often carried out simultaneously with the care of children.⁷ A substantial imbalance in family-related workloads between women and men, alongside an increase in women's educational attainments and labour market participation, has translated in some Asian countries into delayed marriage or non-marriage and a downward pressure on fertility rates well below replacement levels.⁸ Changing family structures, with fewer extended families and high levels of single-parent households, urbanization and national and international migration have also diminished traditional and informal support mechanisms. In low-income countries, demands on women's time are also greatly increased by escalating pressures from drought, deforestation and the energy and food crises, which prolong the hours needed for water and fuel collection.

Shifts in work patterns

7. The workplace has also faced difficulties in adjusting to the needs of workers with family responsibilities, and the mismatch between working conditions and family needs has

⁷ ECLAC: *Social panorama of Latin America 2009* (Santiago, 2010), p. 200.

⁸ G.W. Jones: *Changing marriage patterns in Asia*, Asia Research Institute Working Paper No. 131 (Singapore, ARI, 2010), p. 20.

overall resulted in an intensification of work–family conflict. Over the last two decades, employment growth in most regions has been characterized by an increase in the incidence of non-standard employment in total employment, such as part-time employment. While part-time work, especially in the absence of childcare and parental leave, has enabled many women to juggle work and family,⁹ it often comes, nonetheless, with a substantial “penalty” in terms of lower hourly wages, job security, non-wage benefits, social protection, career advancement and training.¹⁰ Also, fixed-term, agency and seasonal work, on the rise in high-income countries, tends to pay less than standard work.¹¹ In many African, Asian and Latin American countries, the incidence of informal employment is growing¹² and the current crisis is accentuating these trends.¹³ As women are over-represented in non-standard jobs,¹⁴ they are at risk of an increased marginalization in labour markets, as evidence from previous economic crises has shown.¹⁵

8. Simultaneously, long or unpredictable working hours and the upward trend of non-standard work schedules (for example in the evenings, at night or weekends), as part of the spread of a more globalized, 24/7 economy,¹⁶ has also put considerable strain on workers and their families. In some instances, parents may be working 24-hour shifts, one on child duty while the other works. While this may permit families to make ends meet, it has negative effects on workers’ well-being.¹⁷

Inadequate or lacking family-supportive social policies

9. Lack or inadequacy of public transport services to work or of social services, especially in lower-income countries, has also been found to exacerbate work–family tensions, while also affecting workers’ well-being and productivity.¹⁸ In many developing countries,

⁹ European Commission: *Report on progress on equality between women and men in 2010: The gender balance in business leadership* (Brussels, 2011), pp. 211–212, 238–242.

¹⁰ OECD: “How good is part-time work?”, in *OECD Employment Outlook 2010* (Paris, 2010), p. 211.

¹¹ ILO: *Global wage report 2010–11* (Geneva, 2010), p. 34.

¹² ILO: *World of work report 2008: Income inequalities in the age of financial globalization* (Geneva, 2008), pp. 119–121.

¹³ ILO: *World of work report 2010: From one crisis to the next?* (Geneva, 2010), pp. 8–9.

¹⁴ ILO: *World of work report 2008*, op. cit., p. 118; ILO: *Global wage report 2010–11*, op. cit., p. 42.

¹⁵ ILO: *Women in labour markets: Measuring progress and identifying challenges* (Geneva, 2010), p. 46; A. King Dejardin and J. Owen: *Asia in the global economic crisis: Impacts and responses from a gender perspective*, Technical Note for the Conference “Responding to the Economic Crisis – Coherent Policies for Growth, Employment and Decent Work in Asia and Pacific”, Manila, Philippines, 18–20 February 2009, pp. 2–7.

¹⁶ S. Lee et al. (eds): *Working time around the world: Trends in working hours, laws and policies in a global comparative perspective* (Geneva, ILO/Routledge, 2007), pp. 45, 113.

¹⁷ See C. Fagan et al., op. cit., pp. 35–46; C. Hein: *Reconciling work and family responsibilities: Practical ideas from global experience* (Geneva, ILO, 2005), p. 10.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 8.

provisioning of drinking water and electricity is lacking, especially in rural areas, compelling women and children to secure these goods. For example in Madagascar, 83 per cent of the girls who did not attend school spent time collecting water, compared to 58 per cent of girls who went to school. Investment in basic public infrastructure is thus an important factor in easing work–family tensions, particularly for women.¹⁹

10. Today, privately-supplied home-based childcare – whether provided by a family member or a domestic worker – is still prevalent. Just 53 per cent of the world’s countries have at least one public early childhood programme for children under 3.²⁰ In addition, where programmes do exist, coverage is limited. In the European Union (EU), only 30 per cent of children under 3 were covered by formal care services in 2007, with considerable variation between countries.²¹ Similar figures are less available for developing countries, some exceptions being Brazil (15.5 per cent) and Chile (4 per cent) in 2006.²² The gross enrolment ratio in pre-primary education is broader in high-income countries (73 per cent in 2004), while it remains low (32 per cent), although expanding, in developing countries. Coverage in poor and rural communities as well as in sub-Saharan Africa (10 per cent) is the lowest.²³ Even when childcare and pre-primary education are available, they often do not meet the needs of working parents in terms of costs and functional hours.²⁴

Impact of the economic crisis

11. The governmental austerity reforms, recently adopted by many countries in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis to counter the fiscal imbalances stemming from the fiscal packages, have resulted in the freeze or decrease of public-sector jobs and wages and cuts to work–family expenditures. In the European Union, for example, the highly-feminized public administration, traditionally at the forefront of work–family policies, is the fourth largest sector in terms of planned net job losses (after manufacturing, transport and the financial sector).²⁵ Following the trade shock experienced during the crisis, in developing countries women have been the most vulnerable to job cuts in the garment, electronics and other export manufacturing industries, in which they are over-represented.²⁶ Workers in the informal economy have also been affected.
12. As for the impact of the austerity measures on work–family related expenditures in advanced economies, the main targets have been the abolition of birth grants (e.g. Spain: 2,500 euros(€) per newborn) and reductions of parental leave benefits (e.g. Denmark, Germany) or parental leave duration (e.g. Luxembourg – from four to six months) and tax breaks (e.g. Italy). Ireland has lowered the age of children eligible for family allowances,

¹⁹ J.W.B. Bredie and G.K. Beehary: “School enrolment decline in sub-Saharan Africa”, World Bank Discussion Paper No. 395 (Washington, DC, World Bank, 1998).

²⁰ UNESCO: *Strong foundations: Early childhood care and education*, Education For All Global Monitoring Report 2007 (Paris, 2006), p. 106.

²¹ European Commission: *Report on equality between women and men 2010* (Brussels, 2010), p. 17.

²² C. Hein and N. Cassirer: *Workplace solutions for childcare* (Geneva, ILO, 2010), p. 30.

²³ UNESCO: *Strong foundations: Early childhood care and education*, op. cit., p. 133.

²⁴ Hein and Cassirer, op. cit., p. 49.

²⁵ European Commission: *Report on equality between women and men 2010*, op. cit., p. 16.

²⁶ ILO: *Women in labour markets*, op. cit., pp. 36–43.

while the United Kingdom has reduced the number of families eligible for child tax credits as well as for maternity allowances. Means tests have also been introduced to access the formerly universal child grant. Of 24 OECD countries for which data are available, 15 had reductions in the number of beds available in nursing and residential care facilities. The long-term care worker headcount also fell (relative to the number of people aged 65+) in Denmark, Estonia, Ireland and Switzerland, and the per capita spending on long-term care (US\$ PPP) fell from 2008 to 2009 in Hungary and Iceland.²⁷ At the workplace level, where labour demand has decreased most employers have been less keen to facilitate work–family reconciliation for employees.²⁸ Many managers are in fact in a conflicted situation: wanting to respond to the work–family needs of workers, but also under organizational demands to achieve results with limited human resources.²⁹

13. Middle-income countries with “fiscal space” for countercyclical social policies, such as Brazil, China, India and Mexico, have proved more resilient to economic shocks. However, the crisis has left many low-income countries with widening deficits, which are forcing cuts in health and education spending. As of 2009, growth in per capita health expenditure levels in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and the Middle East stagnated or fell compared to 2008 levels in Central, Southern European (non-EU) and CIS countries.³⁰
14. These cuts are typically offset by women’s additional time and efforts devoted to caregiving work. Moreover, women may also take on more paid work in the face of declining male employment and earnings, thus acting as a “safety net of last resort” in economic downturns.³¹

The effects of work–family tensions

15. In the absence of effective work–family reconciliation measures and the upholding of traditional stereotypes of men in caregiving, the social and reproductive roles of women continue to constrain their opportunities to participate in the labour market on an equal footing with men. In industrialized countries, the employment rate of mothers tends to be lower than that of women without children; and the higher the number of children, the lower the women’s employment rate (see figure 2). Women with children also tend to be over-represented in part-time work and flexitime work.³²

²⁷ OECD: Stat Extracts, 2011, available at: http://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?DataSetCode=HEALTH_STAT [accessed 18 Aug. 2011].

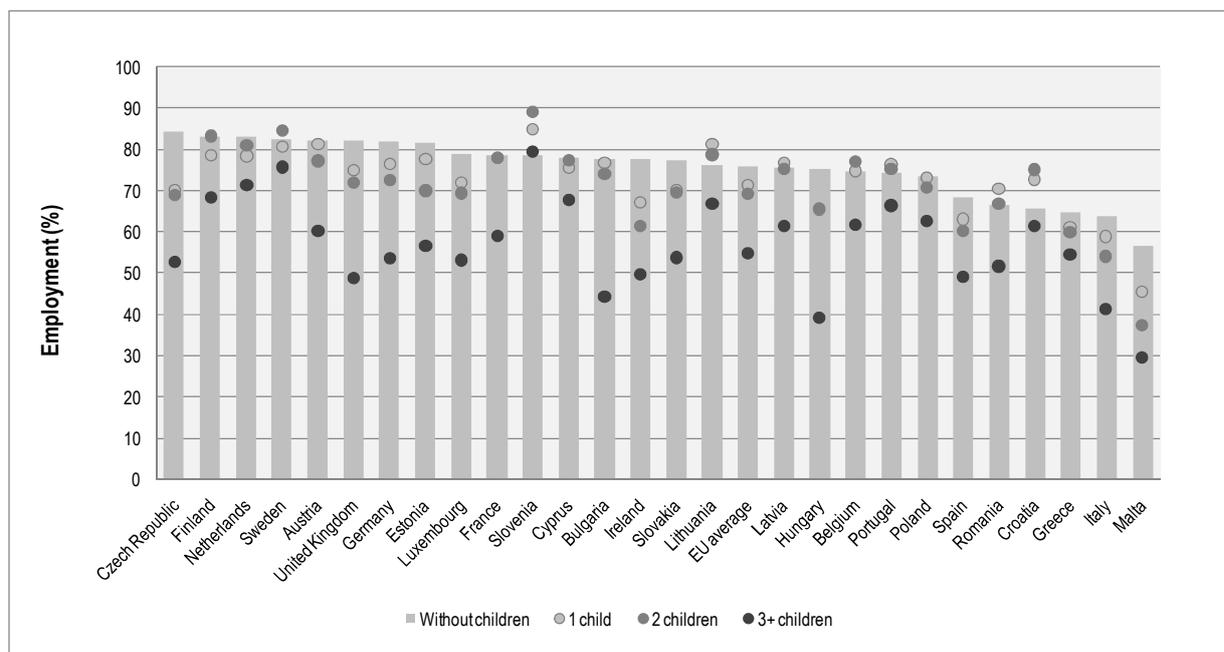
²⁸ D. Vaughan-Whitehead (ed.): *Inequalities in the world of work: The effects of the crisis*, presented at the conference organized by the International Labour Office in cooperation with the European Commission (Brussels, 20–21 January 2011), p. 18.

²⁹ P.H. Raabee: “Work, families and organizations in transition: European perspectives”, in *Community, Work and Family*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Apr. 2011), p. 384.

³⁰ World Bank: *World development indicators* (Washington, DC, 2011), pp. 94–96.

³¹ UNRISD (ed.): *Combating poverty and inequality: Structural change, social policy and politics* (Geneva, 2010), p. 185.

³² S.A. Hewlett et al.: “Off-ramps and on-ramps revisited”, in *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 88, No. 6 (June 2010), p. 30.

Figure 2. Employment of women with and without children, European Union countries, 2008

Sources: Eurostat, 2011; for Sweden: OECD, Family database, 2011.

16. Similarly, in middle- and low-income countries, family responsibilities appear to constitute a barrier to women's employment and to good-quality jobs. A survey in Chile shows that 70 per cent of inactive women would like to have a paid job, but are unable to work due to childcare problems.³³ In Malaysia, it was estimated that the percentage of women who stopped work due to childcare reasons was 23 per cent.³⁴
17. In the absence of state-provided or workplace-supplied work-family support measures, many households turn to individual coping strategies. These may include the reduction of desired fertility; reliance on often low-paid domestic workers, who also face the challenge of juggling work and family; or dependence on low-quality childcare arrangements such as enlisting older children to care for younger ones, leaving children unsupervised or taking them to the workplace. This, in turn, can lead to lower school enrolment and a higher incidence of child labour, thus perpetuating the poverty cycle, or may contribute to antisocial or criminal behaviour by youth left to their own devices by working parents.

Part 2. Work-family policies: Components and lessons learned

The components of work-family policy packages

18. Work-family measures are national, community or workplace policy solutions intended to facilitate workers' access to decent work by explicitly and systematically addressing and supporting their family responsibilities (see table 1). These measures are most effective when approached in a holistic manner and if family responsibilities are addressed according to the life course needs of all workers and their dependants.

³³ ILO-UNDP: *Work and family: Towards new forms of reconciliation with social co-responsibility* (Santiago, 2009), p. 64.

³⁴ Nagaraj (2004), quoted in Lee et al., op. cit., p. 67.

Table 1. Measures that facilitate reconciliation of work–family responsibilities, by type of workers’ challenges

Types of measures	Types of workers’ challenges in reconciling work and family		
	Establishing workable routines	Coping with major family events/needs	Coping with emergencies
Leave policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ At least three working weeks’ annual leave as per the ILO Holidays with Pay Convention (Revised), 1970 (No. 132) ■ Ability to choose when to take leave 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Leave for health risks during pregnancy or breastfeeding^W ■ Maternity^W, paternity^M and parental leave^{W, M} ■ Extra leave for multiple births, complications or maternal death^{W, M} ■ Adoption leave^{W, M} ■ Long-care leave 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Annual leave ■ Sick leave that can be used for family emergencies ■ Emergency/compassionate leave ■ Parental leave days
Social security benefits		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Maternity, paternity, parental, child or other benefits ■ Prenatal, childbirth and postnatal health care ■ Tax breaks ■ Pension credits for caregivers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Infant health care ■ Benefits during short-term leave
Working time and organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Reduction in long hours and overtime ■ Work schedule predictability (e.g. overtime, shift work) ■ Part-time with pro-rata entitlements as per the ILO Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175) ■ Flexitime 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Flexitime and/or teleworking ■ Ability to reduce hours temporarily ■ Career breaks ■ Time off for pre- and postnatal care ■ Paid breastfeeding breaks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Flexitime or time banking scheme (workers have some control over hours) ■ Occasional teleworking
Care services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Access to affordable, appropriate care services for dependants ■ Home help and home care services ■ Before/after-school programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Breastfeeding facilities at work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Emergency care access ■ Ability to bring child to work in an emergency ■ Ability to use workplace phone

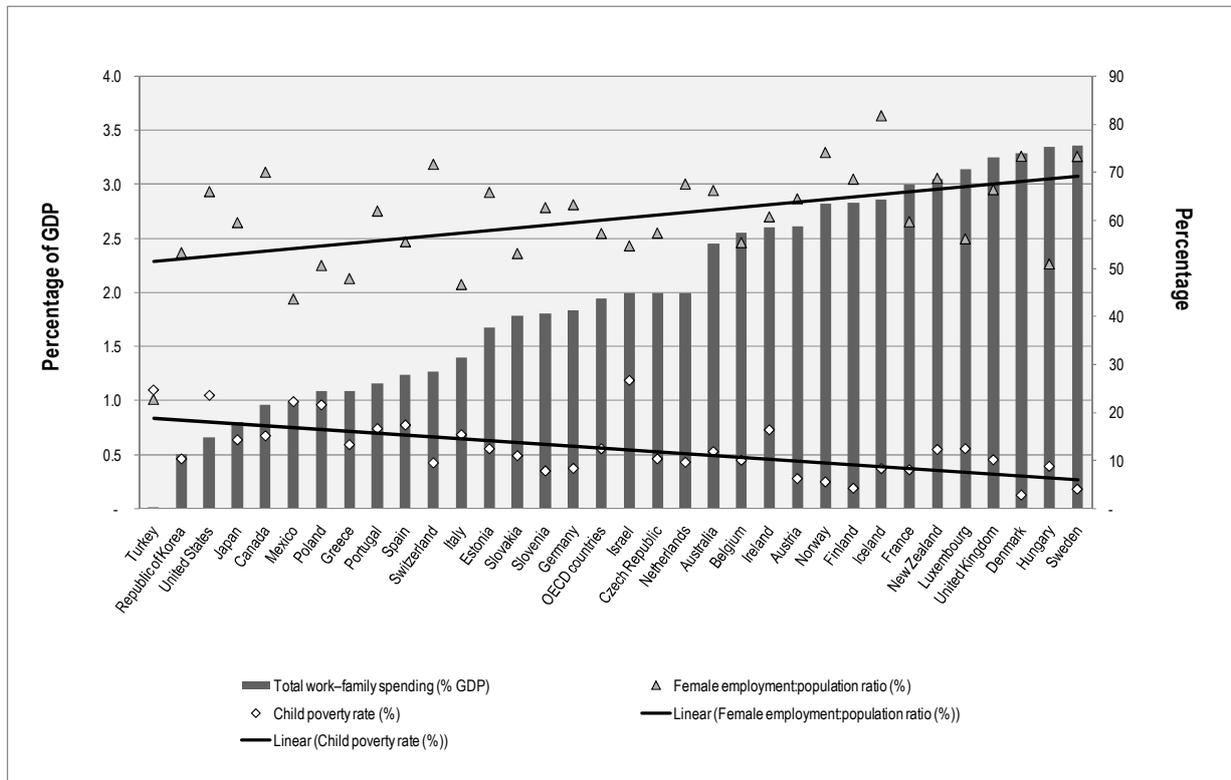
Types of measures	Types of workers' challenges in reconciling work and family		
	Establishing workable routines	Coping with major family events/needs	Coping with emergencies
Labour market reintegration		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ "Stay-in-touch" programmes ■ Vocational guidance and training ■ Job search assistance and in-job training ■ Paid educational leave 	
Reducing unpaid work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Infrastructure (roads, water, energy, sanitation) ■ Transportation ■ Schools, health and day care centres ■ Family planning ■ Labour-saving technology, services ■ Integrated school and work hours ■ School canteens ■ Opening hours of government, medical services 		

Note: W = leave policies for women; M = leave policies for men.

The need for comprehensive and coordinated policy interventions

19. Work–family policies are essential components of activation policies³⁵ and play a key role in boosting women’s employment and curbing child poverty. Figure 3 shows the relationship between total government family spending (as a percentage of GDP) and the rates of female employment and child poverty in 34 OECD countries. The graph suggests that higher public spending is associated with both higher female employment rates and lower child poverty.³⁶ High investment in work–family policies is also linked to higher fertility rates.³⁷

Figure 3. Public spending on work–family policies, women’s employment and child poverty, 34 OECD countries, 2007



Note: Public spending on work–family policies corresponds to the primary (left) vertical axis. Employment-to-population and poverty rates correspond to the secondary (right) vertical axis. Work–family expenditure comprises family allowances, maternity and parental leave, day care and home help, and other in-kind benefits. Linear regression lines show the relationship between spending and (i) women’s employment-to-population ratio; and (ii) child poverty rates. Regression statistics: Employment-to-population ratio = 6.53* (family spending) + 46.90, R2 = .303 (p < .01); child poverty = -3.48*(family spending) + 18.80, R2 = .279 (p < .01).

Source: OECD: Stat Extracts, 2011, spending and employment; child poverty.

20. A higher female labour participation rate in turn yields socio-economic benefits. It is estimated that GDP in the EU-27 as a whole could rise by almost 30 per cent if gender

³⁵ S. Carcillo and D. Grubb: *From inactivity to work: The role of active labour market policies*, OECD Working Paper No. 36 (Paris, 2006), pp. 35–37.

³⁶ The OECD defines “child poverty” as the share of children living in households with incomes less than 50 per cent of the median for the entire population.

³⁷ OECD: *Doing better for families* (Paris, 2011), pp. 12–15.

gaps in full- and part-time employment and wages were eliminated.³⁸ Similar results are found in studies in Asia and Latin America.³⁹

21. There is also a “business case” for work–family measures linked to efficiencies generated by the optimal use of parents’ (especially women’s) human capital. Benefits include: productivity gains from lower absenteeism, higher worker commitment, better performance, improved work organization, skills preservation, savings from higher retention and lower turnover, and health cost reductions due to healthier parents and children.⁴⁰
22. While public spending on work–family reconciliation does make a difference, the nature and mix of supportive policies may produce different employment outcomes and may either narrow or worsen gender inequalities in the labour market. For instance, when these policies are directed only to women or discourage women’s attachment to the labour market, or when employers are liable for the direct cost of their provisioning, women’s employment is likely to suffer.⁴¹ Childcare spending has the strongest association with lower child poverty.⁴² Policy design is therefore of paramount importance.
23. The State has a key role in setting the enabling legislative and policy framework in collaboration with employers’ and workers’ organizations. Policies and practices at the workplace level can go far in making workplaces more responsive to the family and household obligations of workers and should include measures related to leave entitlements, working time and care arrangements at workplace or community levels. Collective bargaining can help workers and employers to collaboratively determine a “regulated flexibility”, which enables “workers to integrate paid work with their domestic obligations”.⁴³ Social services and infrastructure are other essential components.

Lessons learned from around the world

24. Comprehensive work–family policies should not only support parents’ real preferences for care arrangements, but also encourage parents’ and especially women’s access to decent work opportunities. The following considerations should be taken into account in policy design.

³⁸ European Commission: *Report on equality between women and men 2010*, op. cit., p. 16.

³⁹ UN–ESCAP (2007), Costa et al. (2009), quoted in UN: *2009 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women’s control over economic resources and access to financial resources, including microfinance* (New York, 2009), pp. 8, 14.

⁴⁰ J.C. Gornick and A. Hegewisch: *The impact of “family-friendly” policies on women’s employment outcomes and the costs and benefits of doing business*, a commissioned report for the World Bank (Washington, DC, 2010), pp. 29, 38; International Organisation of Employers (IOE): *Trends in the workplace survey 2008: Enterprises in a globalizing world* (Geneva, 2008), p. 35.

⁴¹ Gornick and Hegewisch, op. cit., pp. 45–46.

⁴² OECD: *Doing better for families*, op. cit., pp. 182, 205.

⁴³ S. Lee and D. McCann: “Negotiating working time in fragmented labour markets: Realizing the promise of ‘regulated flexibility’”, in S. Hayter (ed.): *The role of collective bargaining in the global economy: Negotiating for social justice* (Geneva, ILO, 2011), pp. 55–56.

Women's access to decent paid work

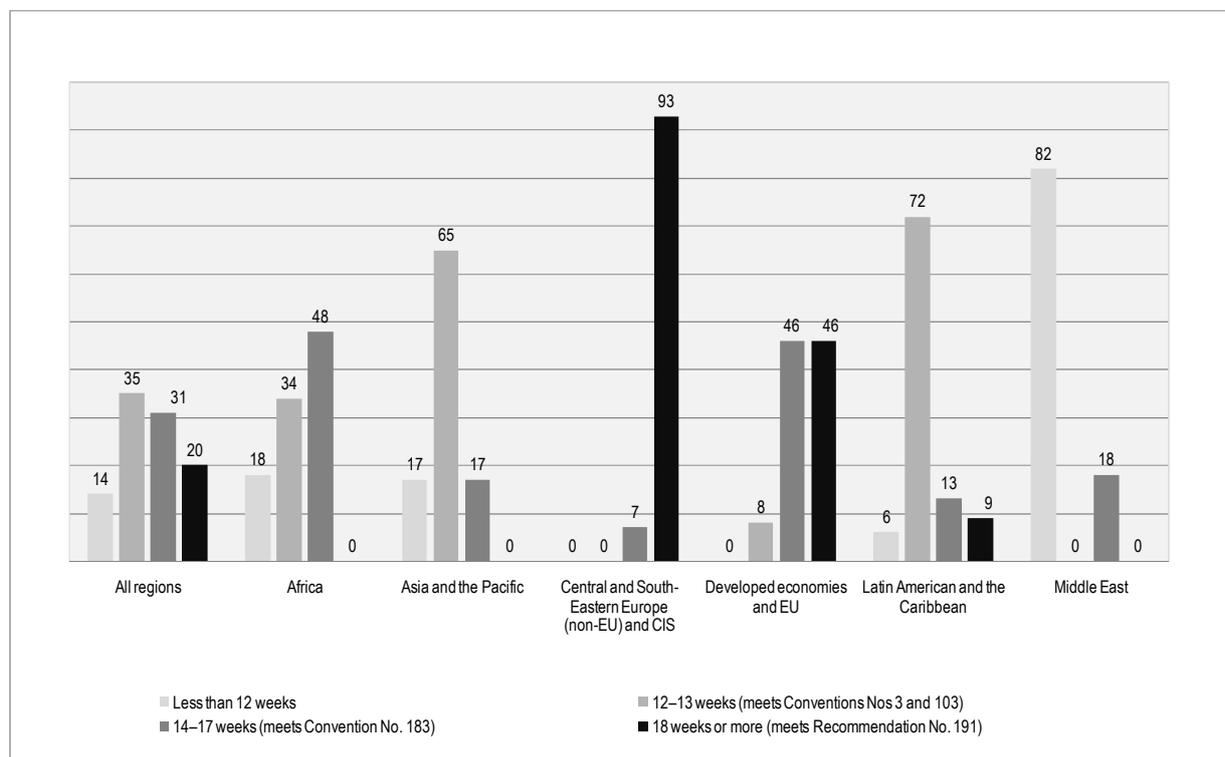
25. Maternity leave and job protection during and immediately after pregnancy are found to increase women's labour participation, with neutral effects on earnings. Available research finds no evidence of negative impacts on productivity and suggests possible substantial benefits for employers.⁴⁴ While a statutory right to paid maternity leave is virtually universal,⁴⁵ many women, however, do not enjoy it, owing to poor enforcement of the law and the exclusion of many categories of workers – such as self-employed, agricultural, domestic or non-standard workers – from the scope of the law. This implementation gap has severe consequences for women's and children's health.
26. The duration of maternity leave (see figure 4) and the level of income replacement are other important factors. When leave is too short, mothers might not feel ready to return to work and drop out of the workforce.⁴⁶ However, very long maternity leave periods, especially when not conditioned to employment, may also damage women's work attachment to and advancement in paid work, resulting in wage penalties.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Gornick and Hegewisch, op. cit., pp. 10, 19–20; M.V.Q. Caparas (ed.): *Work–life balance: Best practices from family responsible employers and executives* (Pasig City, University of Asia and the Pacific, 2008), pp. 13–62.

⁴⁵ ILO: *Maternity at work: A review of national legislation* (Geneva, second edition 2010), p. ix.

⁴⁶ OECD: *Doing better for families*, op. cit., p. 129.

⁴⁷ Three Conventions on maternity protection have been adopted by the International Labour Conference: the Maternity Protection Convention, 1919 (No. 3); the Maternity Protection Convention (Revised), 1952 (No. 103); and the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183). These provide for a duration of maternity leave of at least 12 or 14 weeks. The ILO Maternity Protection Recommendation, 2000 (No. 191) recommends a duration of at least 18 weeks. Comparative research suggests a neutral effect on women's wages of leaves of up to six months and a positive effect on female labour force participation if the leave is of moderate duration (five to nine months) (Gornick and Hegewisch, op. cit.), p. 10.

Figure 4. Duration of mandatory maternity leave, by region, 2009 (167 countries, percentages)

Source: ILO Database of Conditions of Work and Employment Laws – Maternity protection (2009).

27. Parental leave for both women and men, namely leave in addition to maternity and paternity leave, can also help women remain in paid work while encouraging a better share of family responsibilities between the sexes (see next section). Conversely, very long parental leave periods may have detrimental consequences on women's employment. Workers also seem to prefer better-paid leave for both women and men during shorter periods, followed by flexible working arrangements and childcare, rather than extended leave periods with little compensation.⁴⁸ In high-income countries, additional emergency care leave varies from two days in Spain to 17 days in Sweden, while in Slovenia, 30 days of paid leave are afforded to employees in case of severe illness of a relative (extendable to six months).⁴⁹

28. It is also equally important to improve the quality of part-time work by providing pro-rata entitlements, as well as to increase the availability of quality jobs on a part-time basis. Working parents in Austria, Greece, Finland, Portugal, Italy and the United Kingdom have the "right to request" flexible working hours, which could be reduced hours. Even without legislation, a number of enterprises in Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Uruguay allow flexitime and other working time arrangements for family reasons as part of collective bargaining agreements, workplace measures or informal practices, mainly in order to retain personnel and avoid turnover costs.⁵⁰ In Latin America, collective bargaining has proven a crucial tool for advancing work-family balance. Almost 91 per cent of gender-specific

⁴⁸ L. Thornthwaite: *Work-family balance: International research on employee preferences*, Workplace Research Centre Working Paper No. 79, for Working Time Today Conference, University of Sydney, 16 August 2002, p. 20.

⁴⁹ OECD: *Doing better for families*, op. cit., p. 136.

⁵⁰ ILO-UNDP, op. cit., pp. 97-98, 118.

clauses deal with protecting maternity and/or family responsibilities. Just over half (55 per cent) go beyond minimum legal requirements, while the remaining specify rights already covered by law.⁵¹

29. Affordable and adequate childcare services when leave periods expire should also be part of the continuum of supports. Out-of-school hours care services are broadly available in countries such as Australia, Estonia and Hungary,⁵² and in many others at a developmental stage, including Costa Rica and Chile.
30. Tax breaks have been widely used to support the cost of family responsibilities. However, parents, and especially mothers, might be discouraged from working if the returns from often low-paid or part-time work are offset by a strong reduction of tax benefits in couple households. The tax systems of Italy, Turkey and the United States encourage shifts from inactivity to part-time work in single-earner households, while the systems of Slovakia, Spain and Portugal promote the move from part-time to full-time work or permanence in the latter.⁵³

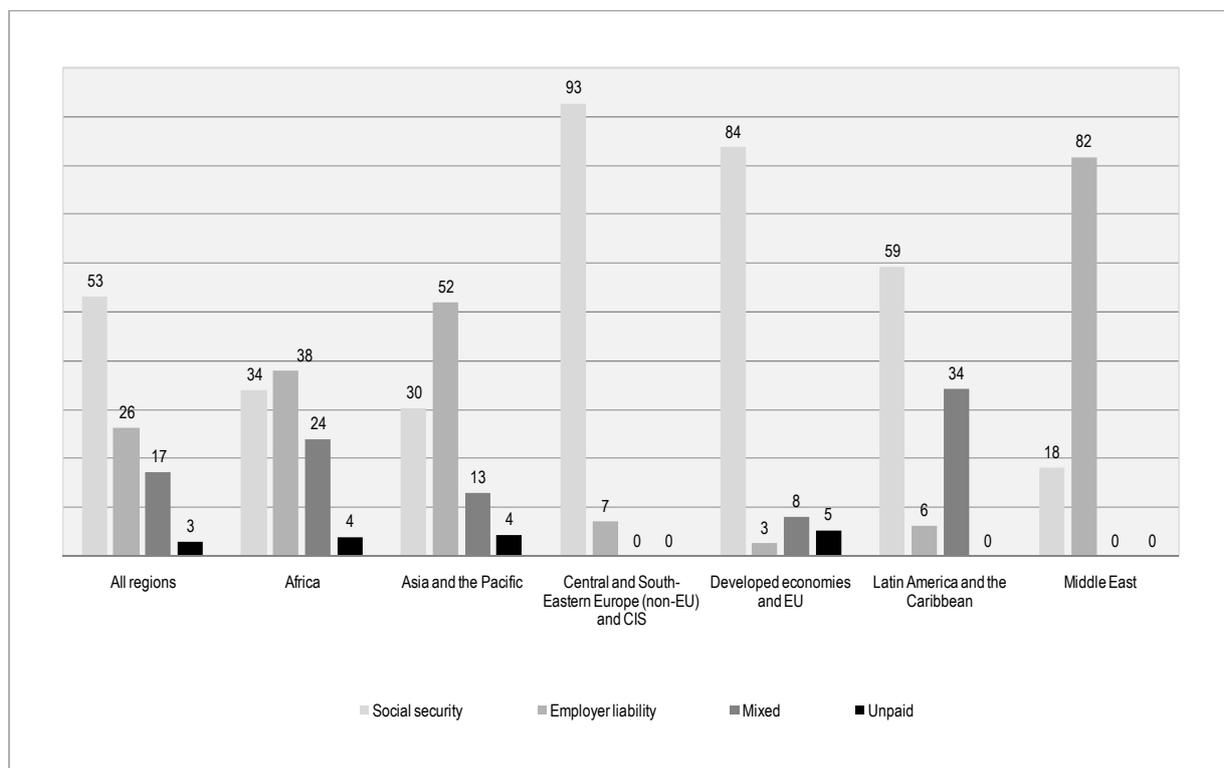
Family responsibilities as collective responsibilities

31. When employers are statutorily mandated to shoulder fully the direct cost of work-family reconciliation measures, by financing for instance wage replacement during leave (employer liability) or care facilities, this may create disincentives to hiring workers with family obligations. Between 1994 and 2009, the share of ILO member States that financed maternity cash benefits through employer liability systems decreased from 31 to 26 per cent, with a shift towards cost-sharing systems between employers and social security. However, employer liability is still the prevalent system in Africa, Asia and the Pacific and the Middle East (see figure 5).

⁵¹ Abramo and Rangel (2005), quoted in ILO–UNDP, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁵² The proportion of children aged 6 to 11 years attending these services in these countries is in the 40–50 per cent range (OECD: *Doing better for families*, *op. cit.*, p. 146).

⁵³ *ibid.*, pp. 166–167.

Figure 5. Source of funding of statutory maternity leave, by region, 2009 (167 countries, percentages)

Source: ILO Database of Conditions of Work and Employment Laws – Maternity protection (2009).

- 32.** Even when the direct costs of wage replacement are collectively borne, costs for employers might arise from the administration of leave, including the cost of temporary replacement of staff on leave. The data, however, show that these indirect costs are often low or outweighed by benefits in retention and human capital development.⁵⁴ Good practices, which are found also in small enterprises, that appear to further lower such costs include: information/training sessions on leave policies; occupational safety and health during pregnancy; “maternity planning” among workers and employers/supervisors; coaching and “stay-in-touch” during leave; update, counselling and gradual return to work through temporary part-time work and flexiwork. Social dialogue at the workplace proves essential for mutually agreed maternity planning.⁵⁵
- 33.** Public subsidies and other incentives, such as tax breaks or reductions in social security contributions from employers, have been made available to support the provision of workplace childcare in France; the introduction of maternity benefits for domestic workers in El Salvador; and the establishment of breastfeeding facilities in the Philippines. In the United States, the 2010 Affordable Care Act introduced support for workplace breastfeeding by allowing both employers and workers to claim breast pumps and lactation equipment as medical tax deductions. Often these incentives, however, cover only large enterprises.

⁵⁴ Gornick and Hegewisch, op. cit., p. 20. In Italy, maternity management represents 0.23 per cent of the overall cost of staff management in Italian companies. See S. Cuomo and A. Mapelli (eds): *Maternità quanto ci costi? Un’analisi estensiva sul costo di gestione della maternità nelle imprese italiane* (Milan, Bocconi School of Management, 2009), p. 85.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 87–92.

34. A number of work–family measures are often low-cost and with high returns. Employer surveys in the United Kingdom, including SMEs, show vast support for extending the right to request flexible work to employees with children aged 6 to 15, which did not result in detrimental costs or implementation challenges for business.⁵⁶

Promoting gender equality and the equal share of family responsibilities between parents

35. Work–family measures should be available to both women and men. Where women are the primary or sole recipients of such measures and where their provision is conditional upon the number of female employees in a particular enterprise (e.g. workplace nursing facilities), discrimination or reduced demands for women’s work might result. The provision of behaviour-changing measures to encourage men’s involvement in family responsibilities from the very birth of their children is essential for a fulfilling parenthood, children’s well-being and gender equality.⁵⁷
36. Paternity leave and granting both parents time off for prenatal and postnatal care visits are a step in the right direction. In Iceland maternity and paternity leave are distributed in an equitable and gender-neutral manner. Both parents share a quota of nine months: three are reserved for the mother and three for the father, which if not used are lost. The remaining months can be divided between the two as they please. A growing number of countries provide flexibility as to when parental leave may be taken, directly after maternity/paternity in one block or as time off from work until the child reaches school age, and as to whether it can be taken full- or part-time (e.g. Belgium, Germany and Norway). In the Russian Federation, parental leave benefits can be transferred to grandparents or other caregivers.
37. The way parental leave is designed has a bearing on men’s take-up. Empirical evidence⁵⁸ shows that a combination of measures results in higher take-up rates: compulsory paternity leave periods (e.g. Portugal; in Ecuador, the right to paternity leave is set in the Constitution); flexible and well-compensated leave (e.g. Norway); gender-equality bonus in the tax system when men use parental leave (e.g. Sweden); “father quotas”, i.e. individual non-transferable rights for the specific use of leave periods by fathers (e.g. Iceland, Germany).
38. Another measure to reduce the penalty associated with being a worker with family responsibilities is through the extension to all workers, irrespective of their sex and family status, of schemes allowing shorter working weeks and possibly shorter working days, with pro-rata entitlements (e.g. Denmark, the Netherlands); or providing for career breaks for varied reasons. Pension credits for caregivers also help improve pension adequacy by compensating for periods of unpaid work, with limited or no pension contributions. In 2010, France extended pension credits to fathers.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Confederation of British Industry (2008) and British Chamber of Commerce (2007), cited in Gornick and Hegewisch, op. cit., pp. 27–28.

⁵⁷ R. Asher (ed.): *Shattered: Modern motherhood and the illusion of equality* (London, Harvill Secker, 2011), pp. 192–193.

⁵⁸ OECD: *Doing better for families*, op. cit., pp. 137–138.

⁵⁹ E. Fultz: *Pension crediting for caregivers: Policies in Finland, France, Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Canada and Japan*, Report D479 for Institute for Women’s Policy Research (Washington, DC, 2011), p. 6.

Addressing reproduction and caregiving concerns in social protection strategies

39. Pregnancy and childbirth are associated with serious health and economic risks. Maternity protection for all working women is essential to enhanced maternal and newborn health and to families' economic security. The progressive establishment of national social protection floors offers a promising framework for supporting unpaid care work by extending non-contributory child and maternity benefits and comprehensive care services for dependants to vulnerable parents, through minimum guarantees. This includes adequate prenatal, childbirth and postnatal health care and income and other supports for women during the last weeks of pregnancy and the first weeks after delivery.⁶⁰ In 2012 the International Labour Conference will discuss the possible adoption of a Recommendation on social protection floors.
40. A growing number of low- and middle-income countries already provide these benefits to the most vulnerable as part of their national social protection floors. In Ghana and Thailand, a universal health-care scheme grants all those who are not covered by mainstream schemes a comprehensive health package, including maternal health benefits. Bolivia set up a pregnancy cash transfer, the "Bono Juana Azurduy", which is intended to cover 250,000 mothers currently lacking social security by 2011. In Argentina, the newly established Pregnancy Allowance for Social Protection (*Asignación por Embarazo para Protección Social*) provides cash benefits from the 12th week of pregnancy until delivery or miscarriage to women in the informal economy earning less than the minimum wage. In India, the Unorganized Workers (Social Security) Act, 2008, establishes the set of minimum social security guarantees that informal employees are entitled to, which includes maternity benefits. As part of their anti-crisis response, countries such as Belarus, Brazil, Guatemala, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan and Ukraine have expanded cash transfer programmes to poor households with children.
41. Other countries are extending contributory maternity benefits in line with up-to-date ILO social security standards, including China, Jordan, Namibia and the United Republic of Tanzania. In 2010, the European Union adopted a new directive on the application of the principle of equal treatment between women and men engaged in self-employment. It requires measures to ensure that self-employed women workers, including contributing family workers, be granted adequate maternity benefits for a minimum duration of 14 weeks.
42. The development of affordable and reliable childcare services is among the most cost-effective measures to promote integrated social protection to vulnerable groups.⁶¹ These services help strengthen the social and economic security of families, especially low-income and single parents, and promote child health and development. Chile launched "Chile Crece Contigo" (Chile grows with you) to provide free childcare for the most vulnerable 40 per cent of the population. In 2009, around 3,500 new free centres were opened, caring for 70,000 infants. In Mexico, a national childcare programme (*Estancias Infantiles para Apoyar a Madres Trabajadoras*) provides parents in paid work or study with access to day-care services. It also includes financial support for the setting up of day-care centres. In 2009, the programme cost less than 0.01 per cent of GDP, covered 261,728 children (in 8,923 centres) and generated around 45,000 paid jobs for childcare providers and assistants. Childcare centres are open at least eight hours per day, five days a

⁶⁰ ILO: *Provisional Record* No. 24, op. cit., para. 20(h).

⁶¹ See N. Kabeer (ed.): *Mainstreaming gender in social protection for the informal economy: New gender mainstreaming series on development issues* (London, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2008), pp. 135–147; UNRISD, 2010, op. cit., pp. 188, 195, 203.

week. In India, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme assures nutritional support and health care for expectant mothers and infants, while also providing pre-school education to children under 6 through a vast network of ICDS centres or *anganwadis* pre-schools.

Addressing unpaid work in poverty reduction and decent work creation strategies

43. In the wake of the recent economic crisis, public job-creation programmes and employment guarantee schemes have expanded to address seasonal, cyclical and structural unemployment for the poor. These schemes can offer an avenue for also addressing the hurdles that low-income workers with family responsibilities face in juggling paid work and family care in poverty-stricken areas.
44. In Ethiopia, the Productive Safety Net Programme includes the provision of time off for pregnancy and breastfeeding, crèche facilities and flexible working hours so that parents can balance paid work with domestic and care-work responsibilities. Similar provisions are included in Botswana's Labour-Intensive Rural Public Works Programme and India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Schemes, which offer work close to participants' homes in the state of Maharashtra, while in some other states on-site crèches have started.
45. Public works can also be designed with the explicit objective of reducing unpaid work, by investing in the expansion of community social care services. It is estimated that this strategy holds potential for significant employment creation and pro-poor income growth.⁶² In South Africa, the Expanded Public Works Programme involves job creation in early childhood development (ECD) and home- and community-based care for people with AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. The target workers are unpaid volunteers, unemployed and/or underemployed parents and caregivers. The ECD component provides temporary jobs, training and accreditation to caregivers. Gender-responsive road projects and transportation (e.g. in India), lighten girls' and women's unpaid work, enhance their income opportunities and increase access to health-care facilities. Low-cost, labour-saving technologies for energy, water and farm-related activities such as decentralized rural energy (e.g. in Nepal); community water systems based on rainwater harvesting or solar pumps made available to women for domestic purposes (e.g. in Kenya); fuel-efficient improved stoves and alternative fuels (e.g. in China and Sudan), are also promising strategies.

Conclusions and guidance for future policy directions

46. This paper has presented the scope of work–family tensions and their detrimental effects, especially during economic downturns. It has also discussed the role that the effective implementation of well-designed and integrated work–family policies can play in: easing these tensions while balancing the share of work between genders both at home and at work; enhancing economic benefits for business; and improving social protection and reducing poverty. Work–family policies are preconditions for inclusive and sustainable economic recovery, since they act as social stabilizers, create jobs and promote women's work. The development of well-equipped community services and home help for non-parental care of children and other dependants has the potential to create economies of

⁶² R. Antonopoulos and K. Kim: *Public job creation programs: The economic benefits of investing in social care. Case studies in South Africa and the United States*, Levy Economics Institute Working Paper No. 671 (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, 2011), p. 4.

scale and bring high returns, including in times of austerity. Also, investment in basic public infrastructure can reduce the time burden of unpaid care work on women and children, thereby freeing time and energy for better job opportunities and education. Employers' and workers' organizations have a key role to play in devising and applying work–family measures. Nationally defined social protection floors, combining income transfers to families with children with access to essential health and education, can favour work–family balance in the informal economy.

47. The Governing Body may wish to provide further guidance to the Office's future work on work–family policies. The areas in which the Office could strengthen its action include:

- ensuring that the needs of workers with family responsibilities are systematically addressed in the strategies, indicators and activities of the Office related to the four strategic objectives of the Decent Work Agenda, in particular:
 - strengthening its research agenda and knowledge base on work–family issues, especially in the context of the global economic crisis; and
 - developing the capacity of ILO constituents to integrate unpaid care work into social and economic policies and social dialogue, as well as to design and effectively implement integrated work–family policies with gender equality and decent work objectives.

Geneva, 19 September 2011