



closing gaps in European social citizenship

Fostering work-life balance for precarious workers: culture and social protection systems in comparative perspective

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- i) to advance the knowledge base that underpins the formulation and implementation of relevant policies in Europe with the aim of exercising the EU social rights as an integral part of EU citizenship and promoting upward convergence, and
- ii) to engage with relevant communities, stakeholders and practitioners in the research with a view to supporting social protection policies in Europe. Contributions to a dialogue about these results can be made through the project website euroship-research.eu, or by following us on Twitter: @EUROSHIP_EU.

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Abstract

In this report, we study how, since the 2008-2013 crisis, main Work Life Balance (WLB) policies, in interplay with social protection and labour market regulations can help precarious workers to combine work, family and personal life. We focus on access to Early Care and Education for children under 3 years of age (ECEC), paid leave, child and family benefits, the evolution of main gender gaps, and working-time autonomy. In line with EUROSHIP's capabilities perspective, we discuss to what extent WLB realities and entitlements improve the opportunities to make meaningful choices for workers at the intersection of various dimensions of inequality (gender, class, migratory background, age).

Our selected countries (Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom) present different welfare and employment systems. Nevertheless, despite their political, historical and economic differences –as detailed in the coming sections, most countries are making efforts to increase publicly funded ECEC, fathers-only paid leave, reducing the gender gaps, and facilitating parental flexible working-time arrangements. This has translated into important cross-country advances that include, though to different degrees, growths in female labour force participation, unequal and bumpy progresses in reducing gender occupational and salary gaps, access to ECEC, and a gaining weight of the dual earner model as a political reference. Besides, easier access to ECEC and means-tested child and family benefits, have improved the bottom line of protection for the most vulnerable children.

However, when we pay attention to the situation of low-paid workers who are in and out of relative poverty, in most countries, with the probable exception of Norway, the last two decades' advances in WLB are often overwhelmed by the deregulatory labour market trends that shape income inequalities. The most revelatory evidence of this situation is the increasing presence of dual-low-paid-long-hours-earners households with narrow margins of choice.

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List of Acronyms

Active Labour Market Policies (ALMP)
At Risk Of Poverty and/or Exclusion (AROPE)
At Risk of Poverty (AROP)
Early Care and Education for children under 3 years of age (ECEC)
European Union (EU)
Female full-time equivalent employment rate (FFTEER)
Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
Labour market (LM)
Long Term Care (LTC)
Spanish Survey of Living Conditions (INE)
Shared Parental Leave (SPL).
Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP)
Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP)
The Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (EUIF)
The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
United Kingdom (UK)
Work Life Balance (WLB)
Working Time (WT)

1. Introduction

In this report, we study how, since the 2008-2013 crisis, main Work Life Balance (WLB) policies, in interplay with social protection and labour market regulations can help precarious workers to combine work, family and personal life. We focus on access to Early Care and Education for children under 3 years of age (ECEC), paid leave, child and family benefits, the evolution of main gender gaps, and working-time autonomy. In line with EUROSHIP's capabilities perspective, we discuss to what extent WLB realities and entitlements improve the opportunities to make meaningful choices for workers at the intersection of various dimensions of inequality (gender, class, migratory background, age).

Our selected countries (Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom) present different welfare and employment systems.¹ Nevertheless, despite their political, historical and economic differences—as detailed in the coming sections, most countries are making efforts to increase publicly funded ECEC, fathers-only paid leave, reducing the gender gaps, and facilitating parental flexible working-time arrangements. This has translated into important cross-country advances that include, though to different degrees, growths in female labour force participation, unequal and bumpy progresses in reducing gender occupational and salary gaps, access to ECEC, and a gaining weight of the dual earner model as a political reference. Besides, easier access to ECEC and means-tested child and family benefits, have improved the bottom line of protection for the most vulnerable children.

However, when we pay attention to the situation of low-paid workers who are in and out of relative poverty, in most countries, with the probable exception of Norway, the last two decades' advances in WLB are often overwhelmed by the deregulatory labour market trends that shape income inequalities. The most revelatory evidence of this situation is the increasing presence of dual-low-paid-long-hours-earners households with narrow margins of choice.

2. Recent WLB agendas

The main aim of this report is to better understand how different European welfare states have dealt with the WLB needs of vulnerable groups. This implies looking at the extent to which recent WLB policies face the traditional challenges of decoupling access to social rights from the unequal outputs of labour market (LM) participation (or non-participation). For example, how does the extension of ECEC create new potential to reduce the impact of income inequalities and to improve vulnerable social groups' wellbeing?

In most European countries, the beginning and development of the welfare state during the 20th century meant the consolidation of employment rights, pensions, education and health systems, that protected and continue to protect large numbers of citizens. This was crucial for the autonomy and wellbeing of those in vulnerable positions in the labour market; and, during

¹ This report substantially draws from the «Country reports on national social protection systems» drafted within the EUROSHIP framework. The authors are grateful to the national teams in the EUROSHIP project for their fruitful cooperation.

the last decades, these traditional welfare institutions, by correcting and complementing market outputs such as salary and income inequalities, have played a central role in legitimizing contemporary democracies.

However, before the 2008-2014 crisis, several of the most developed European welfare states, without forgetting their historical diversity, had already experienced labour market deregulation and financial constraints, whilst demographic pressures kept increasing (ageing, low fertility rates). In this context, the WLB agenda gained social relevance and political visibility. Academic and political agendas started paying greater attention to how the organization of work and family responsibilities affects other aspects of life, such as training and education, social and political participation, or the quality of time off work. The most discussed issues were gender gaps, flexible working time, paid and unpaid paternity leaves (eligibility and remuneration), shared parental leaves, childcare, and family and child benefits.

In the seven selected countries (Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom), WLB agendas were framed in their welfare cultures, with more or less proximity to the main political and regime typologies. These countries show significant differences in expenditure levels and in the distribution of these expenditures between cash, services, and tax-breaks for families.² For example, Norway, similar to other Nordic countries, provides a service-heavy family support, while countries like Hungary provide universal cash benefits to all families, and countries like the UK design targeted benefits for specific groups. In general, the UK, Eastern, and Southern European countries deal with higher-inequality contexts; and one of the main differences between continental countries such as Germany, and Nordic ones such as Norway, is how their different WLB policies still shape female employment participation.

Simultaneously, despite their historical differences, most countries are applying serious efforts in increasing public-funded ECEC, fathers-only paid leaves, and flexible working-time arrangements (Adema, Clarke, Thévenon 2020). However, disadvantaged families are having troubles to benefit from these trends, and WLB realities and entitlements vary with different employment and family trajectories.

A major force behind the convergence trends across European countries is the European Union context, policies, and institutions. WLB balance has kept gaining political salience as a main element of the European Pillar of Social Rights. By April 2017, the Commission announced the New Start to Support Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers, to improve workers' WLB. In early 2019, important European agreements were reached on The Work-Life Balance Package and the Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions Directive. Finally, the EU 2019/1158 WLB Directive was passed by the European Parliament in April 2019, and was enforced on August 2019.

This Directive wants to support parents and carers with the specific aim of reaching an equal sharing of caring responsibilities between men and women. The Directive introduces the right to paternity leave at the EU level (at least ten days of paternity leave following the birth of a child –paid at a rate at least equivalent to that of sick pay). It also makes provision for carers'

² see OECD Family Database, <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>

leave (though not remunerated) and consolidates the right to parental leave (extending from one to two months the minimum period not transferable between parents). Finally, the WLB Directive extends the right to request (though not an enforceable legal entitlement) flexible working arrangements to working parents with children up to the age of eight. After 2019, Member States have three years to adopt the laws, regulations, and administrative provisions necessary to comply with the Directive. However, the final relevance of this directive is unclear, given the disparity among European countries and the lack of support by employer organisations, who were sceptical, arguing that the directive would encourage more parents not to work (EUROFOUND 2019).

3. WLB and precarious workers

In most countries, WLB measures and initiatives are increasingly oriented towards the consolidation of a dual earner model. However, in relation to poverty and precarious jobs, the impacts of political answers to the financial crisis, or the pressures for major regulatory reforms, are unclear. At the same time, the European countries considered here had very different political and financial capacities to buffer the effects of the crisis. For example, few countries could have afforded the high financial interventions of the German government to support the short-time work allowances (“kurzarbeit”).

In general, most European countries have experienced the continuous growth of non-standard jobs, many of them linked to the extension of low-paid social and personal services, whereas it is still difficult to assess the real magnitude of digitalization. The exception is Norway, where between 2007 and 2019, the share of temporary employment for the working age population as a whole decreased slightly from 10% to 8%, even if temporary employment keeps being more common among young and female Norwegian workers (Halvorsen et al. 2021). Besides, by 2019, in contrast with the polarization suffered by many European labour markets, the Norwegian labour market had experienced an occupational upgrading with a relative growth of skilled employment (Berghlund et al. 2019, Halvorsen et al. 2021).

For all the other countries, during most of the last decade, the de-regulation and flexibilization trends have gone hand in hand with the main political focus on employment growth at the expense of some employment rights (falling compensation costs, weakening of collective bargaining and unions’ voice, de-unionization...) (Eichhorst et al. 2016, Emmenegger et al. 2012). This has produced effects such as the increasing employment intensity in many low-income households, often as a response to reduced incomes (Verdin and O’Reilly 2021, Smith and McBride 2020).

We have not identified enough political change to revert this process of labour market segmentation in the majority of the countries studied (see also Jessoula 2021). The UK, Spain, and Germany have managed to improve the working conditions of many precarious workers thanks to increases in the minimum wage. By contrast, in other countries, such as Hungary, where the minimum wage remains very low, low-qualified workers may have benefited from selective measures such as salary increases at the organizational or sectorial level, tax allowances for low-paid workers and participation in public work schemes (Albert et al 2021).

Nevertheless, the long term and structural impacts of Minimum Wage policies remain unclear. The German case illustrates these doubts. In 2018, the German Minimum Wage Commission (Mindestlohn-kommission) proposed increasing the minimum wage to €9.19 per hour for 2019 and to €9.35 per hour for 2020 (EC 2020d). But the way these increases were linked to past developments in negotiated wages involved a weakening of the relative level of the minimum wage since 2015 (in 2015, the minimum wage was 43% of the average wage, by 2018 it had decreased to 40% of the average one EC 2020d) (Grages et al. 2021).

So far, we have not identified major/structural innovative policy measures in relation to specific WLB conflicts of vulnerable workers. In this sense, in our qualitative work, it will be interesting to pay attention to meso and micro-level initiatives (organizations, firms, local administrations) that may be innovative in these aspects and inform possible future structural actions. For example, we will pay attention to when and under which circumstances non-standard jobs are not “bad jobs” that trap workers in poverty, as opposed to when non-standard jobs cause in-work poverty, or even in-long-hours-work poverty.

From a capability perspective, vulnerable mothers in most European countries see their WLB decisions heavily constrained by their low-income. According to several experts (Adema, Clarke, Thévenon 2020; Begall and Van der Lippe 2020), this is only relatively alleviated by measures in the fields of child benefits, remuneration for parental and carer’s leaves, affordable good childcare, and/or the eligibility criteria of paid leaves. When considering the vulnerability risks for working parents and the policies to support them, there is a large diversity in the countries considered, but in all of them, motherhood significantly increases the risk of poverty of non-standard workers, since benefits and entitlements are often related to past income and have little impact in improving employment trajectories.

The fact that WLB policies across Europe do not suit well the needs of non-standard workers, reflects the contradictions faced by most WLB agendas. One of the main reasons behind the development of non-standard employment was, and still is, to facilitate the employment of women with caring responsibilities. From the earliest days when women started to enter formal employment, they often went for part-time and fixed-term contracts given the troubles to find proper WLB arrangements within standard long full-time contracts. There is already a long European tradition of using flexible working-time and non-standard contracts to support the combination of family responsibilities, personal life and employment. But there are serious doubts about how this flexibility and contractual diversity may have been abused by employer-led and market-oriented strategies to promote low-paid non-standard employment (Chieragato 2020; Smitch & McBride 2020; Lewis & Beauregard 2018).

In Germany, for example, a strong “male breadwinner/female part-time care” family ideal favoured a general increase of female (mostly voluntary) part-time work (Jensen et al. 2017; Pfau-Effinger 2012). This took place in a context where atypical and non-standard employment grew from 30% to 44% in the period of 1996-2015 (Hipp et al. 2015), at the same time that the deregulation introduced by the Agenda 2010 in the early 2000s favoured the growth of the “low-wage” sector. Today, “mini-jobs”, part-time work, self-employment, and temporary work are associated with poverty risks in Germany (Absenger and Priebe 2016, Hanesch 2015b). Besides

employment deregulation, the lowering of pensions with the pension reform –also in the early 2000s, and the political weakening of trade unions (Ebbinghaus and Göbel 2014), all these factors reinforced each other in vicious circles that increased risk poverty for a significant number of German employees (Grages et al. 2021).

Across Europe, a large number of atypical employees (zero-hours contracts, false self-employed, gig workers, trainees and domestic workers) do not equally benefit from WLB regulations. For many workers on low-paid jobs raising children is a daily struggle far from reconciliation; to such an extent, that many authors find it misleading to speak of balance as if suggesting harmony (Smith and McBride 2020, Crompton 2006). Moreover, as Rubery et al. (2018) point out, well-intended activation, employability and life-long learning policies oriented towards precarious workers, risk contributing to the unintended normalization of precarious employment trajectories. In this sense, activation policies, as one of the main goals of the social investment paradigm's focus on employability, may have also been used as discursive tools for justifying immediate cuts in direct income protection measures for the most vulnerable (see Jessoula 2021).

In the UK, activation measures coupled with disinvestment in income maintenance have brought the growth of low wage during the last decades. In fact, the growth of employment in low-income households has been cited as a response to reduced incomes and rising costs (Verdin and O'Reilly 2021, Bell and Gardiner, 2019; Blix, 2020: 159). Estonia also kept a high level of ALMPs after the crisis, with the EUIF (The Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund) expanding the range of services gradually since already before the crisis, but with the crisis having no radical impact in terms of redesigning neither employability nor subsistence benefit policies (Hunt et al. 2021). The major change in the EUIF was launched in 2016 with the workability reform.

In these six countries, the focus on absolute levels of employment and activation policies, mask the realities of a high number of precarious workers (Jessoula 2021). Actually, in the last decades, absolute employment rates' growth led to considering activation policies as successes by several of the main political actors, and this has contributed to the little attention paid to precariousness.

For example, in Estonia, between 2008 and 2010, job regulations were eased markedly (OECD 2020), with a liberalization of the labour market that made firing an employee easier and cheaper. In Hungary, the current conservative government, in place since 2010 introduced significant amendments to the Labour Code aimed at bringing flexibility to the labour market and lowering the unemployment rate (Huzjak and Overmeyer 2012). These changes included an increase in the annual overtime hours allowed, reduction of protection to employees on maternity leave, and an increase in probation periods from three months to six months (Albert et al. 2021, Rindt and Krén 2010). According to Meszman (2016), most of the employment growth in the late crisis and post-crisis periods were due to the increase in precarious forms (participation in public work schemes, agency work, fixed-term employment, part-time employment, and bogus self-employment).

This growth of precarious employment, however, is linked to in-work poverty to different degrees across the European countries (Spasova et al 2017). When assessing the daily struggles

of parents with precarious jobs, Ba (2019) urges us to consider to what extent activation agendas are contributing to a re-commodification of labour via contractual insecurities and precariousness, and, thus, reproducing inequalities. In WLB-related policies, issues such as the definition of work, intersectionality, use value and monetary valorisation, are more problematic. It is here, in the WLB domain, where the interactions between work, families, ECEC, education and LTC systems further blur the distinction between reproductive and productive labour (Ba 2019). When we look at the wellbeing and autonomy of vulnerable workers, the WLB area shows how gender, class and other intersecting inequalities in paid and unpaid work, are testing the social investment and activation perspectives' main concerns with employability (Van Lancker and Nieuwenhuis 2020).

In all the countries studied (with the exception of Norway), the rise of non-standard employment together with high diversity in family formation are opening up new sources of inequalities. For example, non-standard workers are, in some countries, 40-50% less likely to receive any form of income support during an out of-work spell than standard employees, due to statutory and practical barriers limiting their access to social protection (for eligibility conditions and periods of benefits of non-standard workers across Europe (see Spasova et al 2017, OECD 2019b).

Workers at the intersection of various dimensions of inequality have problematic access to WLB entitlements. For example, in all countries women with a migrant background are overrepresented in atypical employment with less access to WLB entitlements. This calls for an intersectional approach, understanding "intersectionality" as 'the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities' (Hill Collins 2015, in Chieragato 2020). This intersectional perspective helps to make more visible some vulnerabilities that hitherto have received little attention in the WLB discussions: intra-group differences, unequal distributions between men and women, but also among women and among men, and a better frame to understand realities such as the racialisation of precarious work in low-paid sectors (Ba 2019).

Attention to the WLB difficulties experienced by low-skilled and precarious workers in our qualitative research, will contribute to the scholarship that has called for correcting the overrepresentation in the WLB literature of needs and concerns of the higher-paid employees' (Chieragato 2020, Warren T 2017). For example, as Chieragato points out, whereas higher-paid workers are more concerned with issues such as how to disconnect, lower-paid workers suffer insufficient income per hour that forces them to long working hours and unpredictable schedules (for example in low-paid sectors: restaurants, domestic services or home care). Probably the most telling example is the case of domestic workers, their working conditions being one of the strongest test to assess a WLB agenda.

4. Access to Childcare and parental leave for vulnerable workers, cross-national comparison

In the last two decades, most European countries have expanded those WLB policies with an ‘activation’ dimension rather than traditional child benefits or tax deductions. As we will see, the fast pace to which ECEC enrolment has grown and the continuous expansion of paid leaves for mothers and fathers contrasts with the stagnation of family and children benefits. On the one hand, this may be related with a public interest in fostering female labour force integration, and meeting the new risks derived from this change in the labour market structure (Table 1). On the other hand, this may create concerns for precarious worker’s access to WLB. Universal or targeted benefits usually decrease child poverty levels regardless of the working status of their parents. Furthermore, recent studies suggest that there is socio-economic and ethnic bias in access to both ECEC services and parental. In any case, the degree of policy expansion and the characteristics of policy design vary cross-country.

Table 1. Female (Full-time equivalent) participation rate

	2000	2010	2019
Estonia	55.8	56.8	66.0
Germany	46.4	50.4	55.6
Hungary	49.4	48.9	61.1
Italy	35.2	38.4	41.3
Norway	56.5	56.6	57.1
Spain	38.7	47.3	50.9
U.K	50.8	50.8	57.6

Sources: Authors’ own elaboration on OECD social expenditure data.

4.1 Childcare

Across Europe, ECEC services for children under the age of three have been expanding (see Table 2). There is, however, large variation with regards to total percentages and growth rate. Actually, these differences, since they do not follow closely the registered public expenditure of countries (Table 2), may be very helpful in understanding different public policy choices, the importance of cultural trends and values, and the impact of these macro factors in the lifestyle opportunities and choices of low-paid workers. When further assessing the dilemmas around expanding 0-3 ECEC, we could benefit from a better understanding of what has happened in Denmark and Sweden, two pioneering counties in 0-3 ECEC who have seen significant decreases during the last decade (though from very high percentages; in Denmark, from 73% in 2009 to 66% in 2019, and in Sweden, from 63% in 2009 to 53.1% in 2019). When evaluating the 0-3 childcare from an educational and social justice perspective, three main issues arise: access for vulnerable children, quality and staff working conditions.

Table 2 Children aged less than 3 years in formal childcare (%) and public spending on ECEC.

	Children aged less than 3 years in formal childcare (%)			Public spending on ECEC (0-6), % GDP		
	2005	2008	2019	2000	2010	2019
EU 28		28.0	35.5			
Estonia	12.0	17.0	31.8	0.12	0.34	0.76
Germany	16.0	19.0	31.3	0.33	0.46	0.60
Hungary	7.0	7.0	16.9	0.59	0.65	0.73
Italy	25.0	28.0	26.3	0.48	0.52	0.56
Norway	33.0	37.0	50.1	0.69	1.21	1.33
Spain	37.0	38.0	57.4	0.43	0.54	0.50
U.K	29.0	35.0	38.6 *	0.64	0.77	0.65

Sources: authors' own elaboration on Eurostat and OECD data.

First: how is the access to 0-3 ECEC for the most vulnerable children? In our seven countries, usage of ECEC is segmented across income, occupation, and education categories. As a result, access for vulnerable children to 0-3 ECEC is lower. Firstly, several country reports and empirical studies show evidence that ECEC enrolment across Europe is strongly dependent on household income (Ghysels and van Lancker, 2011; Bonoli et al., 2017). As Table 3 shows, there are great variances in ECEC usage between different income tertiles, except in Estonia. The greatest inequality is to be found in the UK, where more than double of the richest households use ECEC compared to the poorest. Italy and Spain get close by, with a ratio of almost 2 to 1. On the other hand, differences are smaller for Norway and Hungary, but the latter shows low levels of ECEC enrolment overall. Secondly, mother's education is also a strong predictor of ECEC usage. Differences between those who attained tertiary education and those who do not are higher than 10 percentage points for all of our seven countries, expect again for Estonia (Table 4). Thirdly, income, education and working categories are strongly correlated. Access to ECEC is unequally distributed not only between working and non-working mothers, but also across working categories and levels of income. Pavolini and van Lancker (2018) also show that social class and ethnic background of working mothers also determines ECEC use. Results indicate that precarious and atypical workers, concentrated in lower skilled occupations, benefit to a lower extent from ECEC investment. Overall, this raises the question of to what extent the children who would benefit the most from participating in 0-3 ECEC do actually access the services.

Table 3. Children aged less than 3 years in formal childcare (%) by equivalised disposable income tertile, 2017 or latest available.

	Overall	1st tertile	2nd tertile	3rd tertile
EU 28	35.7	27.5	36.1	43.2
Estonia	28.4	29.1	25.7	30.4
Germany	45.6	41.8	50.2	44.7
Hungary	15.1	12.5	17.0	15.6
Italy	29.7	20.9	27.1	38.4
Norway	48.8	36.0	58.5	51.3
Spain	46.3	37.2	46.8	51.9
U.K	37.7	23.4	36.5	52.8

Source: Authors' own elaboration on OECD family database.

Table 4. Children aged less than 3 years in formal childcare (%) by mother's education level, 2017 or latest available.

	Overall	Not attained tertiary	Attained tertiary
EU 28	35.7	31.2	41.1
Estonia	28.4	30.5	27.2
Germany	45.6	41.5	50.9
Hungary	15.1	12.3	22.4
Italy	29.7	23.6	42.5
Norway	48.8	43.8	53.5
Spain	46.3	40.4	54.3
U.K	37.7	31.2	43.2

Source: Authors' own elaboration on OECD family database.

Second: is the quality of 0-3 ECEC compromised by its fast expansion? Quality in ECEC can be measured through structural measures such as group sizes or infrastructural environment, or through particular teaching practices and pedagogical approaches (Leon et al. 2019). A fast pace of ECEC expansion may hinder the capacity of policymakers and professionals to adapt these aspects to a rapidly growing number of children. Difficulties may particularly arise when ECEC coverage expansion is not accompanied by a growing expenditure (Tables 1 and 2). Particularly in countries with financial restraints such as Italy and Spain, budget pressures may lower the quality of the service through greater child-to-staff ratio, externalization practices and worsening working conditions (León et al. 2019).

Lastly, but closely linked to quality issues as well: which are the implications of 0-3 ECEC expansion for the working conditions of educators and carers? In the second half of the 20th

century, the development of public health and education were the main sources of high-paid employment across most European countries. In contrast to that, the present extension of 0-3 ECEC (public, subsidized private, and private), as that of LTC, is taking place in many countries on the shoulders of a majority of low-paid educators and carers. Many receive salaries that are not far from the minimum wage, in low quality and frequently atypical jobs, most of them women and migrant workers (van Hooren, 2014). Care workers suffer the consequences of fast expansions driven by a growing marketization (Razavi 2020), with the race to the bottom favoured by many provision tenders in market-based sectors and the deregulatory trends in the labour markets. This affects the recruitment and wellbeing of workers, and, obviously, the quality of the personal interactions children experience.

These realities are present in different degrees across the selected countries. Therefore, in the mix of factors behind ECEC expansion, it is worth wondering to what extent those linked to a logic of promoting female labour force participation prevail over those linked to improving the well-being of both children in worse socioeconomic conditions and their educators. It would be helpful to further explore to what extent the different national systems, in their admission criteria to ECEC, prioritize the employment status of mothers and fathers over the vulnerability of children. For example, in contrast to Norwegian universally subsidized ECEC, admission procedures in Spain give priority to the employment status of parents, which means that children of non-working parents may have troubles to find a childcare place.

In the medium-to-long term, it looks as if the 0-3 ECEC supply-demand mismatches could decrease in most countries, with an increasing consensus around the positive effects of the extension of ECEC, especially among vulnerable groups. But, as more and more vulnerable children get access to ECEC services, the debates on access will leave room to the more traditional debates taking place in the other educational levels, such as the schools' urban, territorial and socioeconomic segregation dynamics and the extent to which educational systems contribute to decrease or to strengthen existing inequalities. Market-based and demand-based solutions raise serious doubts about the inequalities embedded in differentiated forms of provision for different socio-economic groups. These inequalities in access to ECEC would erode the potential of formal childcare to reduce socio-economic inequalities. Actually, as with some forms of elitist private education, formal childcare, in segmented contexts, could end up strengthening existing social divisions. However, little is known about the extent of dualization favoured by marketized systems compared to public provision ones (Van Lancker and Nieuwenhuis 2020). Let us now address our seven country cases.

Despite the severe impacts of the 2008 crisis and the budget constraints, Spain is the country in the EU that has had the fastest expansion of 0-3 ECEC to the point that 0-3 ECEC is the only area of the European Pillar of Social Rights in which Spain is among the top positions (Table 1; Eurostat³). Undoubtedly, this expansion from under 10% in 2000 to 37% in 2010 and 57.4% in 2019 is, in many senses, a major achievement when it comes to give visibility to a fundamental social need and trying to face it. The spectacular growth in 0-3 enrolment between 2008 and 2019, went together with the largest growth, among the selected countries, in female full-time equivalent employment rate, from 38.7 in 2000 to 50.9 in 2019. There is no doubt that these

³ <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>

developments are linked with the positive trends in female participation, dual earner model growth and reducing gender gaps; and that they constitute the main social change Spain has experienced in the last two decades. However, in a context of stagnating salaries for low-paid workers, there is also the reality of young households struggling to cope with rising housing, childcare and living costs, even if they have two full-time salaries.

Hungary and Estonia have done relevant improvements in the funding of ECEC (see Table 2), with the main aim of helping parents to participate in the labour market. In the case of Hungary, the systematic development of ECEC from 2014 onwards, included a structural reform of the Act on child protection in 2016, clearly linked to favouring the employment of women (Eurydice 2019), even if this went together with the promotion of female non-standard employment as a WLB measure (Albert et al 2021). However, by 2020, Hungary is still a country with very low percentage of children aged less than 3 years in formal childcare (<17%), which clearly puts in a disadvantaged position children of poor parents. This is linked with low participation rates among mothers of children below the age of two, and the long parental leaves that many mothers take to stay at home (Albert et al 2021). Realities in line with the international findings link long parental leave arrangements and lower participation rates of young mothers (Hook and Paek 2020), especially in high inequality contexts. The fact that these long motherhood employment interruptions are quite generalised in Hungary, at the same time that the country shows a high full-time equivalent female employment rate, translates in income and occupational gender gaps larger than EU averages.

In the case of Estonia, there are several best practices at the local government level. Examples include: subsidizing partly or fully the costs of institutionalized child-care for low-income families; subsidizing partly or fully the extra-curricular activities of children from low-income families; and providing 24-hour institutionalized child-care for parents working non-standard schedules/hours.

In Germany, there have been significant efforts to improve ECEC services. Funding support for childcare provision in the Lander increased importantly in 2001 and 2008 (Seeleib-Kaiser, 2010). This allowed for a relevant expansion in ECEC enrolment, also fixing the issue of most childcare centres opening part-time in the western area. More recently, the 2019 Good Kindergarten Law (Gute-Kita-Gesetz) meant a serious increase in funding support for childcare provision in the Lander. However, despite the German legal entitlement to 0-3 ECEC and that co-payment of parents are small, take-up rates are low, particularly among low-income and migration background households (Bildungsberichterstattung, 2018). This is related to cultural values and tax policies. Regulation, such as joint taxation, seems to disincentive many women to working more hours, and there is room for reducing tax disincentives for second and low-wage earners. Furthermore, other limits to the major increase in childcare attendance remain in terms of quality of provision and regional differences (Schober, 2014).

4.2 Benefits

There are important differences in how countries try to support families via family and children benefits. There is the generous German universal child cash benefit (around 200 € per child per month), and there are also important benefits in Norway, Hungary, Estonia and in the UK, that help to alleviate the situation of children from poorer backgrounds. Other specific measures for low-income families include additional allowances, tax deductions, and subsidized childcare fees. Besides, in countries like Norway and Germany, individual or collective agreements may include extra support for fathers and mothers in terms of paid care leaves.

Table 5. Public expenditure in total social protection benefits, and family & children social protection benefits (% GDP)

		2000	2009	2018
EU-28	Family & children		2.4	2.2
	Total		27.5	26.5
Estonia	Family & children	1.6	2.2	2.3
	Total	13.6	18.5	16.1
Germany	Family & children	3.2	3.1	3.3
	Total	27.8	29.4	28.4
Hungary	Family & children	2.5	2.9	2.0
	Total	19.2	22.3	17.1
Italy	Family & children	0.9	1.2	1.1
	Total	22.9	27.4	27.9
Norway	Family & children	3.0	3.2	3.1
	Total	23.5	24.2	26.4
Spain	Family & children	0.9	1.5	1.3
	Total	19.0	24.2	23.1
UK	Family & children	1.6	2.9	2.3
	Total	22.4	27.5	25.5

Source: Authors' own elaboration on Eurostat data.

However, all the countries within the restrictive budgetary context of the last decade, have seen little or no relevant growth in the total funding of key social protection policies affecting WLB (see Table 5). This may suggest that the massive social demands put by the growing presence of women in the LM may not be followed by ambitious public policies. At least, not in the terms of funding levels equivalent to those seen in the second half of the 20th century, when different European Welfare states saw their first consolidation (health, pensions and education). If this remains so, unless there are main budget redistributions within stagnant total expenditures, this may leave low-paid working parents in a very weak. If there is an insufficient consensus to back serious funding growth in WLB public policies expenditure, alternative ways of redistributing the

available funding with different priorities may be explored. Alternatives that are more aware of the short-term needs of vulnerable social groups, but perhaps miss structural developments.

Starting with child benefits, a highly effective policy in reducing poverty, German family policies include the most generous measures, such as a child benefit of around 200€ per child per month, or equivalent high income tax relief (for parents with higher incomes) for all families that are not entitled to minimum income benefits. There is an additional child benefit for low wage earners. However, in Germany as well, there have been criticisms that the system of child-related benefits mainly privileges families with higher incomes (Grages et al. 2021, Stichnoth, 2016).

Still, the German government tried to support families and children in poverty risk with specific interventions such as benefits for education and participation (*Leistungen für Bildung und Teilhabe*), the supplementary child benefit (Kinderzuschlag), and the 2019 “Strong Family Law” (*Starke-Familien-Gesetz*, 2019). However, the insufficient funding made several political actors, trade unions, and experts question the real efficiency of these measures, while the share of children who receive social assistance/UB II had remained, more or less, around 14.5%, from 2011 to 2017 (Der Paritätische Gesamtverband, 2020, Hanesch, 2015b). Besides, children of disadvantaged groups (single parent households, families with three or more children, low-qualified parents, and migrant background) remain the most vulnerable to poverty.

4.3 Paid leaves

Many European non-standard workers face difficulties in having access to paid family-related leaves, since employment-based eligibility and payments rates tend to privilege standard workers. Reducing eligibility criteria to the minimum would help narrowing the gap between workers on short-term and permanent contracts. Introducing maximum assignment periods would also help to reduce companies’ abuse of temporary employment (Adema, Clarke, Thévenon 2020). The EU WLB Directive also aims at protecting temporary workers, with specific reference to the case-law of the European Court of Justice, but it remains to be seen how this reference is going to be interpreted (Chierigato, 2020). At the company level, low-paid temporary workers continue to have less access to parental leave policies and family-friendly working-time arrangements (Begall and Van der Lippe 2020), and, even if they are legally entitled, they may not use these options if they anticipate future repercussions.

Among our seven countries, there are large disparities in paid parental leave provisions (Table 4) and parental leaves in total (Table 5). Leave schemes range from a total paid leave for mothers of 84 weeks in Estonia to a full-rate paid equivalent of 11.7 weeks in the United Kingdom (Table 4). Paternity leaves also vary strongly, reaching 8.7 weeks in Germany paid at a 65% (5.7 full-rate equivalent weeks) but only one week in Hungary (Table 5).

The effect of parental leave depends on their eligibility criteria, extension, replacement rate, and the proportion that must be taken by the other partner. In this respect, Estonia and Hungary offer long paid leaves for mothers but very small for fathers. Contrastingly, although Spanish maternity leave is short (16 weeks), paternity leave have recently been equalized to 16 weeks

as well with full salary. In addition, Norway offers a generous paid leave at a full replacement rate of 43 weeks, from which 15 weeks are reserved for each progenitor.

Table 6. Paid parental leaves, statutory maternity leave entitlements (2018)

	Total Paid leave mothers (weeks, full-rate equivalent)	Paid leave reserved fathers (weeks, full-rate equivalent)	Paid maternity leave, maximum duration weeks (paid)	Eligibility criteria for payments (Public expenditure on maternity and parental leaves per live birth, in USD 2010 PPP, 2015)	Payment
Estonia	84.4	2.0	20.0	All employees with contracts lasting at least one month, and all self-employed. (≈28.000)	100% of earnings with no maximum.
Germany	42.6	5.7	14.0	All insured women employees. Self-employed women are not entitled (≈ 13.000)	100 % of earnings with no ceiling on payments
Hungary	68.2	1.0	24.0	All women employees and self-employed with at least 365 calendar days of employment in the 2 years preceding the leave. (≈ 18.000)	70 % of earnings with no maximum.
Italy	25.2	0.8	21.7	All insured women employees and registered self-employed (≈ 7.500)	80% with no maximum
Norway	43.0	9.4	13.0	All who have been employed for six of the ten months prior to birth and who have earned at least half the basic national insurance benefit payment over the previous year (≈ 35.000)	
Spain	16.0	4.3	16.0	Women employees and self-employed with 180 days of contributions in the 7 years immediately preceding the birth of the child or 360days of contributions across the whole working life. (≈ 1.000)	100% of earnings up to a ceiling of EUR 3751.2per month
UK	11.7	0.4	52.0 (39.0)	Women employees who have worked for the same employer for 26 weeks up to the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth and who meet an earnings test. Some ineligible employees and self-employed women may be eligible for an alternative benefit (≈ 5.000)	First 6 weeks: 90% of earnings with no maximum. Remaining 33 weeks: 90% of earnings up to a maximum of GBP145.18per week.

Source: Authors' own elaboration on OECD data.

Table 7. Maternity, paternity and parental leave (2019)

	Maternity leave		Paternity leave		Parental/Childcare/Child raising level	
	Description	Duration (weeks) Paid maternity leave (Average payment rate %, Full-rate equivalent weeks) Total paid leave (Average payment rate %, Full-rate equivalent weeks)	Description	Duration (weeks) Total paid leave reserved for fathers (Average payment rate %, Full-rate equivalent weeks)	Description	Duration (weeks)
Estonia	Compulsory social insurance scheme for employees and self-employed with earnings-related benefits	20 weeks /140 calendar days of which 30days (4.3 weeks) before delivery 20 166 (50.8%, 84.4) 18 months of well-paid leave, and growing attendance to ECEC after 18 months, but still bellow EU average.	Insurance-based paternity benefit for employees	10 days within 2 months before delivery or 2 months after birth	Paid Parental leave followed by paid Childcare leave. Tax financed universal scheme for all residents, incl. non-working parents Low uptake by fathers From 2020, all fathers will have a non-transferable right to receive fathers' additional parental benefit for 30 days	Up to 140 weeks –until the child reaches the age of 3 years
Germany	Compulsory social insurance scheme for female employees. Benefits in kind and earnings-related cash benefits	14 paid weeks- 6 weeks before and 8 weeks after delivery 58 (73.4%, 42.6)	No special provisions for paternity leave	8.7 (65%, 5.7)	Unpaid parental leave of 36 months per child in total for both parents (family right)	36 months / 156 weeks per child for both parents

		No gap between ECEC and well-paid leave			In 2018, 42.1% of mothers of under 3 on parental leave; 2.7% of fathers	
Hungary	Infant Care Allowance –paid maternity leave for employees and self-employed. Compulsory social insurance scheme with earnings-related cash benefit	24 weeks, of which 4 before and 20 after confinement 24 (70%, 16.8) 160 (42.6%, 68.2) A one-year gap between ECEC and well-paid leave	Compulsory social insurance scheme for employees and self-employed	1 (5 days)	Paid childcare leave - compulsory social insurance scheme financed by employers and employees with earnings-related cash benefits to persons insured against all risks Most likely low uptake by fathers	136 weeks until 3 years of the child
Italy	Paid maternity benefit/ leave for employed and self-employed women Nursing leave—for the mother or father	20 weeks /5 months of maternity leave: 1-2 months prior to confinement and 3-4 months after 21.7 (80%, 17.4) 47.7 (52.7%, 25.2) Gap of more than two years between ECEC and well-paid leaves	Paternity benefit for employed and self-employed Nursing leave –for the mother or father	0.80	Optional supplementary parental leave for employed mothers or fathers with reduced pay and after a means test, or unpaid Very low uptake by fathers	48 weeks, of which 26 weeks paid until the child becomes 3; up to 22 weeks till the child is 12
Norway	Parental leave with reserved quota for the mother and the father. Compulsory social insurance scheme for employees and self-	27 weeks; up to 12 weeks of pre-natal leave; 15 weeks of post-natal leave is reserved for the mother; mandatory 3	No statutory paternity leave	15 weeks of reserved quotas for the mother and for the father 10 (94.2%, 9.4)	49 weeks if paid at full rate or 59 weeks if paid at 80 percent. The rest of the period is to be divided upon parents' discretion	

	employed with earnings-related benefit. Unemployed are also eligible under certain conditions.	weeks before and 6 weeks after delivery 13 (94.2%, 12.2) 91 (47.3%, 43.0) No gap between ECEC and the end of well-paid leave			High % of eligible fathers take leave of some length since the introduction of the father's quota	
Spain	Contributory Maternity Allowance-compulsory social insurance scheme with contributions-related benefit Non-contributory Maternity Allowance for employed women who do not satisfy the qualifying conditions for Contributory Allowance	16 weeks, of which 6 weeks compulsory after delivery 16 16 (100%, 16) 4 months of well-paid leaves Fast expansion of levels of attendance to childcare for under 3	Contributory Paternity Allowance-compulsory social insurance scheme A new 2019 law to gradually increase the paternity leave up to 16 weeks (equal to maternity leave)	4.3 (100%, 4.3) Significant levels and growth of uptake amongst eligible fathers	Unpaid parental leave to take care of a child governed by labour legislation, for all employees Low uptake by fathers	Up to 3 years / 156 weeks for each child
UK	Social insurance scheme. Ordinary maternity leave of 26 weeks and Additional maternity leave of 26 weeks	52 weeks, can start 11 weeks before childbirth; 2 weeks after birth are mandatory 39 (30.1%, 11.7) 39 (30.1%, 11.7) Gap of almost 3 years between ECEC and well-paid leaves	Paid paternity leave for employees	2 (19.2%, 0.4)	Statutory Shared Parental Pay for employees. Part of the maternity and paternity leave scheme No recent data on uptake, but estimations of very low uptake by fathers	Maximum 50 weeks (52 weeks minus the used maternity leave which is at minimum 2 weeks)

Source: Authors' own elaboration on OECD 2020, World Bank 2021, Leavenetwork 2021

At the other extreme, countries like the UK show low Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) and Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP) in the European context, and, according to childcare and parental leave policies, the UK is in the bottom third of OECD countries (Earle and Heymann, 2019; Sanders et al., 2019). In 2015, the UK Government introduced and improved paternity leave, and it implemented Additional Paternity Leave and then Shared Parental Leave (SPL). Still, SPL is low paid and reliant on the mother sacrificing her entitlement, which explains the extremely low take up (Committee, 2018b; Kaufman, 2018). When this is combined with an employment activation policy aimed at improving parents' participation in the labour market, low-paid parents may end up among the most prejudiced. Even if the British government increased funding for childcare and early education schemes, alongside tax measures, these went together with changes in maternity leave, tax changes and benefit cuts. As a result, the growth of low wage employment may have worsened the relative situation of low-income working families, with lone parents being the most detrimentally affected group (Verdin & O'Reilly 2021; Sanders et al. 2019).

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Overall, these different combinations of ECEC services, unpaid, and paid parental leaves affect the set of choices available to mothers and fathers, but their total effects depend on how these options interact with the labour market and social dynamics. Paid leave and childcare improve gender inequality, but their effects are not so clear in terms of social class divisions. The evidence of childcare provision and paid leaves on the employment opportunities of women across educational levels is still unclear, as higher-income highly-educated mothers make greater use of formal childcare, and appear more concerned about quality criteria (Van Lancker and Nieuwenhuis 2020).

Long paid parental leaves, and arrangements like the Norwegian cash-for-care benefit, offer mothers the possibility of a bigger involvement in the care and education of their young children, though the real margin of choice depends as well on the availability of 0-3 ECEC. In the cases of Estonia and Hungary, the long child-care leaves mean that mothers usually remain 2-3 years out of labour when a child is born, with very few men taking parental leave, as in most other European countries. Since fathers-only paid parental leave were first introduced in Norway in 1993 (initially 4 weeks reaching 9 weeks in 2018), the provisions are slowly spreading to other countries. However, given present labour markets dynamics across Europe, one's career and good job positions are often linked to long periods of long hours and full-time involvement. In

the end, this organizational culture diffuses over the whole occupational structure, including low-paid positions, where long hours are often also a requirement to make ends meet. This long-hours culture does not favour workers taking parental leaves, and Estonian and Hungarian women who opt for long paid leave, or German women who choose to work part-time, end up suffering large gender pay and occupational gaps.

5. Cultural values and Working time

5.1 Cultural values

The growth and/or consolidation of female employment in all the selected countries is favouring a multiplicity of solutions to reconcile paid employment and unpaid care. Besides, as the household models and forms of cohabitation diversify, and public policies are more aware of it, this further adds light to relevant issues that need to be dealt with. Just thinking of couples, they may include all the possible intermediate combinations that rank from very vulnerable situations such as couples where both members have troubles to get paid employment, and both are defective carers; to those gender-equal dual earner/dual carer model couples that are becoming a main reference for family and employment policies across Europe. Between these two extremes, there are many intermediate possibilities depending on how many less hours of care men do, and how many less hours of paid employment women do because of their increased care responsibilities, with the resulting different gender gaps.

There are a significant number of all these situations in the selected countries. Currently, none of them are a clear dual earner/dual carer, male breadwinner/female carer, or one-and-a-half breadwinner model. Nevertheless, the differences in the relative proportion of different household situations, and in the policies supporting them, are still idiosyncratic in each country, at the same time as the dual earner/dual carer model is gaining normative and regulatory support in all of them.

In Germany, the “male breadwinner/female part-time carer” is still the most prevalent family ideal, and this is also the case for Norway and the UK, where women occupy the majority of part-time, temporary, zero hour, casual and fixed term contract workers. But, whereas in the UK, this exposes one of the main sources of inequalities within emerging labour markets (Daly, 2020; Taylor, 2017); in the case of Norway, it shows a very interesting case of family policy “double-track” with both generous cash transfers and policies that support the dual earner model (paid parental leaves, childcare) (Ellingsaeter 2003)

However, as countries become more ideologically, culturally, and ethnically diverse, the intra-country differences in WLB arrangements and practices, may become as or even more important than those between countries. This may challenge one-size-fits all policies. For example, in Norway, detailed research has found that working-class and middle-class parents have different preferences in relation to formal childcare. Working-class ones prefer to defer ECEC enrolment until their children are well into their second year of life, but, in the present institutional framework, they seem to experience a bigger mismatch between ideals and opportunity

structures (Halvorsen et al. 2021; Bjørnholt and Stefansen, 2018; Stefansen and Farstad, 2010; Stefansen and Skogen, 2010). Besides, when this interacts with ethnicity (Nadim 2014), the complexity increases.

In the case of Estonia, a dual earner model is consolidating where the differences between men's and women's work-home orientations are not big, however the actual roles and division of (domestic) tasks within households in Estonia are still quite traditional. According to Estonian Time Use Survey (2010), Estonian women spent almost 4.5 hours a day on housework related tasks, whereas men spent on it about 1.5 hours less, though there is a convergence.

In the UK, Hungary, Italy, and Spain, the dual earner model among low-paid workers, during the last decade, may have advanced more as a strategy to cope with necessity than because of changing preferences.

5.2 Working Time

Table 8. Average number of usual weekly hours of work in main job (total)

	1983	1990	2000	2008	2013	2019
EU-27				38	37.3	37.1
Netherlands	37.7	33.1	31.8	31	30	30
Germany	39.9	38.2	37.1	35.6	35.3	34.8
Estonia			40.2	39.4	38.8	38.1
Spain		41.1	40.2	39.1	38.0	37.5
Italy	39.9	39.8	39.1	38.2	36.9	37.1
Hungary			41.2	40.1	39.5	39.5
Norway			35.4	33.7	33.7	33.7
UK	38.5	38.9	37.6	36.9	36.5	36.6

Source: Authors' own elaboration on EUROSTAT data

Table 9. Average number of usual weekly hours of work in main job (full-time employed persons)

	1983	1990	2000	2008	2013	2019
EU-27				41.6	41.3	40.9
Netherlands	43	41.1	41	41	40.7	40.7
Germany	42.6	41.6	41.8	41.7	41.7	41
Estonia			41.8	40.9	40.8	40.5
Spain		42.3	42.1	41.8	41.7	40.6
Italy	40.7	40.5	40.6	41	40.4	40.7
Hungary			41.9	40.8	40.7	40.5
Norway			39.3	39.2	39	38.8
UK	43.5	44.9	44.2	43	42.8	42.5

Source: Authors' own elaboration on EUROSTAT data

During the last two decades, at the macro level, the gendered growth of female part-time is the only clear trend in terms of working-time flexibility linked to a WLB agenda. This has clearly consolidated in Germany and also to a significant extent in Norway and the UK (even if Norwegian and British women work more hours, and Norwegian men care more hours). A one and a half model that, in smaller degrees, is also present in the other countries considered, with the growth of female part-time. Here, given that the more or less involvement of men in family

care does not combine with significant reductions of male working-hours, female part-time goes together with wide gender pay gaps, reflecting differences in the number of hours worked and in the occupational composition across genders. However, pay gaps are not just a result of gendered part-time employment, with several other factors contributing to gender gaps (occupational discrimination, care burden, long maternity leaves, and long-hours culture). In this sense, it is striking that Estonia shows both the higher female labour market participation rate and, at the same time, the higher pay gap in the EU (Estonia=22.7 compared to 14.8 in the EU), resulting from a strong gendered labour market segregation.⁴

Other than that, the 40-hour working week as the main reference for full-time employees persists across European countries, and there are precariousness risks linked to a large number of part-time jobs. This means that working-time flexibility, reduction or redistribution, has not kept the weight these measures enjoyed in the main political agendas in the second half of the last century.

There have been advances in several countries in the statutory right to request reduced working hours and in the complementary right to return to full-time work (UK, Germany, Spain,). But it is difficult to assess the quantitative impact of these measures in a context where career-oriented jobs often feel the pressure of the long-hours culture, and lower-skilled and lower-paid workers have less access to good quality part-time, and, above all, are increasingly less likely to be able to afford to work part-time.

6. Conclusions

After a decade of general social expenditure retrenchment (Taylor-Gooby, Leruth, & Chung, 2017), family policy is probably the only core area of social policy that has not been affected by spending cuts (Adema, Clarke, & Thévenon 2020). This may further change in a post-covid context. As Jenson (2020) shows, changing the conception of “family policy” from being a burden to a precondition for growth, may have played a major role during the last decades, helped by the positioning of supranational organizations such as the OECD and EU. Family policies have contributed in reducing inequalities between genders and between families, and even if, on the one hand- after the 2008 crisis, most countries reduced family transfers; on the other, parental leaves and childcare kept gaining relevance in the political and public expenditure agendas. In countries like Germany, generously paid parental leaves of 12-14 months (mid-2000s) and increasing access to ECEC services for children aged 0 to 6, meant a possible structural turn towards a “social democratic” type of policy with regard to family policies (Grages et al. 2021).

Across countries, there are serious efforts towards designing and implementing specific policies against child poverty and severe deprivation among vulnerable groups. Local, national, and European initiatives are becoming more and more decisive in alleviating the situation of the worst-off children and families, with the upcoming European Child Guarantee being a major step to help reduce family poverty. However, we have argued in this report for the need to focus on more structural trends. In several of the selected countries, up to a third of the population suffer poverty and major inequalities. For these larger groups, progress in family and ECEC policies seem to be overwhelmed by the structural labour market trends and policies that shape income

⁴ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/compare-countries/work/2/bar>

inequalities and working time autonomy. In these last two areas, we have not identified any major departure from previous deregulatory paths.

The cross-country advances towards a dual earner model include, though in very different degrees, growth in female labour participation, bumpy progresses in reducing gender gaps, and in the public policies that support it (childcare, paid parental leaves, working time autonomy, gender equality). All of these have helped to reduce household inequalities (Nieuwenhuis 2020). At the same time, when considering, from a capability perspective, the evolution of WLB issues for vulnerable groups in the last two decades, there are several realities. The unsteady march towards a dual earner model includes an unequal variety of models: dual-high-paid-earner, dual-low-paid-earner, dual-no-earner households, and all the not-dual situations in between. For each of them, there are very different links between their employment situations and people intimate lives (Pugh 2015).

In one extreme, there is the persistent problem of households with all their adult members having trouble to maintain a sufficient regularity in their participation in the labour market to guarantee them a main source of income and social rights. This hampers their ability to actively participate in society. But employability is not always a neat solution, since there are also a growing number of households where increases in female labour, coupled with no reductions in male working time, have translated into massive increases of total working hours per household, with unclear proportional gains in terms of wellbeing, working time autonomy or choice. Dual-low-paid-earner households face both strenuous financial and time pressures in a context of stagnating or decreasing salaries for a third or even 50% of employees, who suffer rising child-rearing and housing costs, and the continuous pushing up of what is considered a decent standard of living by dual-high-paid-earner households. Most of those living in dual-low-paid-earner households have little margin for other alternatives. There is little redistribution of paid and unpaid working hours among genders, with mothers having scarce options to a significant reduction of the total time pressure resulting from combining paid and unpaid work. The presence of a significant number of struggling dual-low-paid-earner households was discussed in all the countries reports.

For low-paid workers and their children, the balance is mixed. Employability measures and the progressive extension of ECEC services, mean higher participation in the labour market for mothers, and more care and educational opportunities for vulnerable children. However, there are doubts about the real improvements in the working conditions of mothers and fathers, and there are also doubts about the quality of the childcare received especially for children from vulnerable backgrounds. The growth in ECEC services in several European countries may have prioritized fast expansion over quality issues (large ratios, poor working conditions of carers/educators), and there is no clear impact in terms of its contribution to equality since the risk of 'Matthew effects' is high. Externalization trends in the form of privatisation, marketisation, or funding costs might also hinder the equal opportunities function of ECEC.

In this report we have also tried to identify policies that may be innovative within a capabilities framework, but most WLB policies during these decades have been concerned with how to reconcile employment and family life in terms of a trade-off. In the best scenario, paid work should allow for family and personal time. Parents (with a focus on mothers) with caring responsibilities should maintain the possibility of participating in employment to the best of their abilities and preferences, but also in other social areas, as well as enjoying satisfactory

leisure. WLB policies often try to make employment participation (especially of women) and family life as compatible as possible. Besides, traditional WLB agendas are oriented towards the more or less explicit target of reaching the replacement rate of 2.1, as policies that lower the childcare burden for mothers may increase the fertility rate (Doepke and Kindermann, 2019) with a strong impact on the decision to have a first and a second child (Hétfa, 2019). However, we need to explore further in the WLB agenda if we try to depart from a trade-off framework too circumscribed by employability and fertility issues, towards a richer set of opportunities and choices. To see if the mix of WLB policies can create a wider and more supportive space for any person's capabilities. For example, could we imagine a situation where the support network of WLB measures (child benefit, formal childcare, and paid leaves) may even increase the time autonomy and set of resources available for mothers? A capability oriented WLB approach may offer her a wider choice between available combinations of caring, employment, life-long training, some kind of social or political participation, or any other autonomous activity, including leisure.

All this calls for cross-domain policy evaluations and interventions, as a growing number of experts and stakeholders claim (Dykstra and Djundeva 2020). In the end, the well-being, long-term expectations and self-confidence of children are closely linked to the well-being, expectations and self-confidence of their parents, carers, educators, neighbourhoods and communities. Otherwise, entrenched inequality trends have perverse consequences for children growing up in multiple forms of deprivation. Indeed, life chances of children growing up in different households may be "diverging" (Van Lancker & Vinck 2019).

There is qualitative evidence of individual trajectories coming from vulnerable contexts, highly affected by intersectional inequalities, who manage to overcome these obstacles, and to lead autonomous and participatory lives. Many of them have benefited from recent public policies facilitating their access to education, the labour market, or their work life balance. For example, across Europe, many young migrant mothers with little formal education and almost no previous labour market experience, meet a more supportive institutional framework than ever before. Among them are some promising biographies, usually at the centre of best practice cases around activation, benefits, and online training policies. But it is very difficult to know how generalizable this evidence is for the less lucky or less proactive ones. Statistically, the persistence of structural inequalities makes it difficult to assess the potential reach of new specific policies. Many WLB policies have the ultimate target of helping more individuals, families and communities to participate in the creation of social value - both use and exchange value. However, assessing the creation of social value, and compensating it with decent salaries, is not always within the reach of clear-cut productivity assessments. Participative, creative and care activities have traditional difficult relations with economic cost/benefit rationalities. In Europe in 2021, regardless of how committed and creative a care worker is, her wage remains structurally constrained to the low-income zone in all countries.

In all the countries studied, the key factors behind workers' low salaries and their constrained WT autonomy are the most limiting factors of their WLB capabilities. Since the 2008 crisis, aside from occasional increases of minimum wages, we have not identified any major improvement in the mechanisms that shape the wage formation system of low-paid workers (many of them in the personal and social services linked to the WLB agenda) or their real working time choices. It is unclear to what extent their low salaries and time-squeezed lives result from skill gaps to produce social value, or to what extent their entrenched poverty and inequalities result from

institutional trends that struggle in recognizing and rewarding the economic and social contributions of the less fortunate.

7. References

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8. Annexes: Main recent developments in poverty/inequalities and WLB (outputs and policies), per each country in the last decade.

Table 10. Main trends WLB precarious workers during 2010-2019 period

	Employment, atypical employment	Risk of poverty or social exclusion, inequality and in work poverty	Gender gaps	Childcare
Germany	Employment rates > EU average, but among highest female part-time Growth of atypical employment with stagnating salaries	Average income inequality, but high wealth inequality. AROEPE < EU-27, and stagnating Stagnating total public expenditure in total social protection (\approx 20% GDP)	Wide gender pay gap linked to high female part-time High proportion of women in low wages FFTEER (Female full-time equivalent employment rate) around EU-27	Children <3 in formal childcare around EU average (EU average 35.1%) Family/children expenditure > EU-28, & growing public expenditure in 0-6
UK	Employment rates > EU average, but employment polarization, high %s atypical employment Growth of atypical employment with stagnating/decreasing salaries	>EU average Higher inequality than EU average AROEPE around EU-27, and stagnating Stagnating total public expenditure in total social protection (\approx 15% GDP)	Persistent gender employment and pay gaps Female inactivity because of caring responsibilities FFTEER around EU-27 and growing	High childcare costs children <3 in formal childcare around EU average Family/children expenditure (%GDP) around EU-28, & stagnated public expenditure in 0-6
Italy	Very low employment and activity rates, especially for women Growth of atypical employment with stagnating/decreasing salaries	In-work poverty increasing in recent years AROEPE > EU-27 Increasing total public expenditure in total social protection (\approx 21% of GDP)	Large gender employment gap FFTEER < EU-27, stagnating	children <3 in formal childcare less than EU average Family/children expenditure (%GDP) <EU-28, & stagnated public expenditure in 0-6
Spain	Low employment rates <EU average LM segmentation	High income inequality Stagnating/increasing AROPE	Average EU gender employment and pay gaps	Among best EU performers in children <3 in formal childcare, >> EU-27

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	Growth of atypical employment stagnating/decreasing salaries	High in work poverty, High % of low-paid jobs AROPE>EU-27	FFTEER around EU-27 and growing	But, family/children expenditure (%GDP)<EU-28, & stagnating public expenditure in 0-6
		Increasing total public expenditure in total social protection (≈ 18% of GDP)		
Hungary	Better employment outcomes than EU averages,. Growth of Temporary work agencies, bogus self-employment, misuse of casual work, undeclared work But decreasing poverty (increasing salaries, tax allowances for lower-paid workers,) Public work schemes for low qualified	Income inequality close to EU average, though increasing ↓↓ decreasing AROPE since 2012 (check with partners) Decreasing total public expenditure in total social protection (≈ 12.7% of GDP)	FFTEER > EU-27 and growing, but this goes together with gender pay and employment gaps larger than EU averages, since participation rate of mothers of 0-2 is very low, Very low ECEC Long parental leave arrangements	Limited availability of childcare, children <3 in formal childcare below EU average, Family/children expenditure (%GDP) around EU-28, & stagnating public expenditure in 0-6
Norway	Stagnating salaries but no growth of atypical employment	AROPE<<EU-27 Increasing total public expenditure in total social protection (≈ 20% of GDP)	FFTEER around EU-27, and stagnating	children <3 in formal childcare >> EU-27 Family/children expenditure (%GDP)> > EU-28
Estonia	High employment and activity rates, Growing precariousness but increasing salaries	AROPE>EU-27 ↑↑ AROPE for >65, growing since 2011 (check with Estonia partners) Stagnating total public expenditure in total social protection (≈ 13.5% of GDP)	FFTEER > EU-27 and growing Gender employment gap below EU average, But gender pay gap among the highest in the EU	Fast improvements in children <3 in formal childcare, around EU average Family/children expenditure (%GDP) around EU-28, & growing public expenditure in 0-6 No childcare for <1.5

Sources: authors' own elaboration on partners reports, 2020 EU semester reports, EUROSTAT, OCDE and tables uni-mi.

Consider for annex tables comparing countries (similar to the Norwegian report) comparing WLB rights and benefits (child benefit, paid mother/father/parental leaves, cash-for-care benefits for children, sick pay, paid absence to care for sick children, care/attendance allowance, occupational pensions, unemployment benefits, occupational injury benefits, collective rights) for permanent/temporary employees, self-employed, freelancer. Issues such as unconditional, conditions (duration and rate).

Table 11. Main recent developments in poverty/inequalities and WLB (outputs and policies), per country in the last decade 2008-2019. Germany

Poverty & inequalities	WLB
2011-2019: employment and wage growth.	Fertility rate has significantly increased from 1.36 in 2009 to 1.57 in 2018. Among the highest increases in EU, after decades of decreases or stagnation.
Income inequality as average EU, but high wealth inequality.	0-3 childcare in 2019 (31.3%) < EU average (35.5%), but growing fast, ECEC doubled from 19 % in 2008 to 31.3 % in 2019. Growing support to vulnerable groups to access 0-3 ECEC, but inequalities in the availability and quality of 0-3 ECEC.
Risk of poverty keeps decreasing, but income inequality rises.	Measures to expand childcare facilities, "childcare financing", Starting Nursery School"
At Risk of Poverty (AROP) stagnated at 2018: 16% In-work AROP stagnated at 2018: 9.1%	Among top EU public expenditure in family/children benefits (in 2018, 3.3% of GDP; EU-28: 2.2 %).
Social inequalities in life expectancy have increased over time.	Most vulnerable children to poverty live in: single parent households, in numerous families (3 or more children), parents with low educational attainment background, parents with a migrant background.
Severe material deprivation rate has decreased from 2013: 5.4% to 2018: 3.1%	2019 Quality Childcare Act (Gesetz zur Weiterentwicklung der Qualität und zur Teilhabe in der Kindertagesbetreuung). Measures adopted by the Lander
Introduction of statutory general minimum wage, but since 2015 losing relative level.	Good Kindergarten Law (<i>Gute Kita Gesetz</i>) will increase support (€5.5 billion) for childcare provision (2019-2022) in the Lander.
Low pension net replacement rates for low-income earners.	2019 Strong Family Law (<i>Starke-Familien-Gesetz</i>) aimed at improving social protection of children (Increased child supplement and improved benefits for education and participation) (<i>kinderzuschlag; Leistungen für Bildung und Teilhabe</i>)
High tax burden on low-income workers. Low progressivity of labour taxation. Despite recent improvements, the interplay of income taxes, social security contributions and transfer withdrawals result in very high marginal tax rates for certain low-paid workers.	2019 Law on the right to return to the former full-time job from part-time.
Non-standard work decreasing in the past few years. 2017 legal changes supporting equal pay after 9 months, and introducing limitations to the duration of atypical contracts (18 months).	Possible introduction of a child guarantee (<i>Kindergrundsicherung</i>) to cover all services for children under a single framework. Possible future inclusion of children's rights in the German constitution.
Temporality overrepresented among women, low-skilled males, young people with a migrant background, and refugees.	Socioeconomic inequalities have a strong impact on education outcomes. Significant performance gap for pupils born abroad.
Important Gender pay gap. 25% of women in low wages because of high part-time and employment composition. Women prejudiced by high tax wedge for low-paid workers	

5 Lampert, T., Kroll, L. E., Kuntz, B. and Hoebel, J. (2018), Health inequalities in Germany and in international comparison: trends and developments over time, *Journal of Health Monitoring*, 2018 Special Issue 1.

and second earners. Joint taxation favours persistence of low-wage trap for second earners.

Given too bureaucratic procedures, unclear impact on equal pay of the 2017 Transparency in Wage Structures Act (*Entgelttransparenzgesetz*).

Large differences between gender gaps of those born in the EU and those born outside.

The 2018 Participation Opportunity Law (*Teilhabechancengesetz*) supported the hiring of long-term unemployed.

The 2019 Qualifications Opportunities Act' (*Qualifizierungschancengesetz*) and the Act on Strengthening Continuing Vocational Training and Insurance Protection, improve training that is relevant for employment for low-skilled.

Sources: authors' own elaboration on partners reports

Important gender gaps remain, despite reductions of the tax wedge and \uparrow 0-3 ECEC.

Female full-time equivalent employment rate (FFEER) keeps increasing from 50.4% in 2010 to 55.6% in 2019

2007 Federal Parental Benefit and Leave Act (Bundeselterngeld- und Elternzeitgesetz), standard period for parental leave and benefits up to 12 months (14 if shared by both parents). This measure increased the share of fathers taking parental leave (from 21.2% in 2008 to 40.4% in 2017).⁶

However, the fathers uptake of leave for children below the age of six is very low (2.7%)

Youth emancipation age around 23

⁶ Statistisches Bundesamt, '22922-0011 – Väterbeteiligung: Deutschland, Jahre'. In [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/662491/IPOL_STU\(2020\)662491_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/662491/IPOL_STU(2020)662491_EN.pdf)

Table 12. Main recent developments in poverty/inequalities and WLB (outputs and policies), per country in the last decade 2008-2019. U.K

Poverty & inequalities	WLB
↑ Employment growth mitigates exclusion and severe poverty.	Fertility rate has decreased from 1.89 in 2009 to 1.68 in 2018
But stagnated productivity and ↑segmentations of the LM.	0-3 childcare has increased (2008: 35%; 2019: 38.6%), particularly public funded childcare. But for low-income earners, net childcare costs remain among the highest in EU (45% of their disposable income). Inequalities in the availability and quality of 0-3 ECEC
↑ Non-standard jobs, increases in-work poverty.	Public expenditure in family/children benefits has decreased from 2.9% in 2009 to 2.3% in 2018
High socio-economic inequalities in life expectancy. Advances in life expectancy significantly slowed from 2011.	High child poverty, most vulnerable children to poverty live in: single parent households, children with a minority background, in large families (3 or more), unemployed and low-paid workers households.
↑ income inequality, but social benefits have a strong poverty-reducing effect	Child poverty is projected to increase because of cuts and caps in means-tested support, alongside rollout of Universal Credit (less generous than previous system).
AROP and In-work AROP have increased during the decade (In 2018: 18.9% and 11.3%)	↓ in central government expenditure in child protection linked with ↑ local councils overspending.
But, severe material deprivation rate has significantly decreased from 8.3% in 2013 to 4.1% in 2017	Important gender gaps remain (In 2019: 9.4, with 37.6% % of women not working due to caring responsibilities in 2018, > EU: 31.8%).
Advances in statutory general minimum wage.	FFEER keeps increasing from 50.8% in 2010 to 57.6% in 2019
Temporality overrepresented among women, low-skilled males, young people with a migrant background, and refugees.	In 2018, 42% of women worked part-time due to caring responsibilities.
Important Gender pay gap.	In April 2017, mandatory gender pay gap reporting came into force, though it does not require employers to address it. However, in 2019, 52% of in-scope employers published action plans to tackle gender pay gaps.
Large differences between gender gaps of those born in the EU and those born outside.	Since 2015, employed mothers have the right to transfer up to 50 weeks of maternity leave to the fathers
	Very low uptake of SPL (Shared Paternity Leave) by fathers
	Youth emancipation age up from 23.8 in 2008 to 24.6 in 2019

Sources: authors' own elaboration on partners reports

Table 13. Main recent developments in poverty/inequalities and WLB (outputs and policies), per country in the last decade 2008-2019. Italy.

Poverty & inequalities	WLB
Employment growth in recent years, but with subdued wage growth.	Fertility rate has significantly decreased from 1.45 in 2009 to 1.29 in 2018, among the highest decreases in EU.
Among the highest income inequality in the EU	0-3 childcare has stagnated during the last decade (2008: 28%; 2019: 26.3%)
Real gross disposable income in 2018 was 10% lower than in 2007.	Inequalities in the availability and quality of 0-3 ECEC, recent support to vulnerable groups' access to 0-3 ECEC
AROP remains around 20%, and In-work-AROP at 12.2%	Low public expenditure in family/children (in 2018, 1.1% of GDP; EU-28: 2.2 %).
Slight decreases in severe material deprivation rate (2018: 8.5%)	Low ECEC, low benefits, and high gender gaps show very weak WLB strategy. No clear plans to increase the supply of childcare.
Large regional disparities.	Among the highest gender gap in the EU, and stagnated.
In 2019 and 2020 legislative initiatives and lively debate on statutory general minimum wage. This debate stalled during the pandemic.	Slow increases in FFEER from 38.4% in 2010 to 41.3% in 2019, among the lowest in EU.
Temporality overrepresented among women, low-skilled males, young people with a migrant background, and refugees. Non-standard employment increases the risk of in-work poverty.	2012 Fornero Reform, introduced compulsory paternity leave Legislative Decree 80/2015 extended parental leave
In 2015, limitations to the duration of atypical contracts ⁷ . Also, atypical workers entitled to the same economic conditions as permanent and full-time employees in the same company. The reform of unemployment benefits improved the protection of non-standard workers (↑coverage, ↑replacement rate)	Legislative decree 81/2015 provides the possibility to ask for the transformation of the employment contract from full-time to part-time (art. 8)
Recently shift from fixed-term to permanent contracts.	Youth emancipation age up from 29.7 in 2008 to 30.1 in 2019
The tax-and-benefit system has had little effectiveness in reducing poverty, and largely benefits pensioners (pensions have a large weight in social expenditure). More focussed on preserving income levels than on protecting against poverty.	
In 2019, the new minimum income scheme (RdC, <i>Reddito di cittadinanza</i>) replaced the REI (<i>Reddito d'inclusione</i>). It is targeted at low-income groups, and it will improve the situation	

⁷ Legislative Decree 15 June 2015, n. 81, available at: <https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:decreto%20legislativo:2015-06-15;81>.

of vulnerable groups. It will significantly increase social transfers in cash. It includes 3 pillars: income support, labour activation measures, and support from social services. However, it is yet unclear if it will reach-out to the most vulnerable groups, non-Italian citizens, and how it will specifically affect poor children. Besides, the active labour market component remains to be developed.

Sources: authors' own elaboration on partner reports

Table 14. Main recent developments in poverty/inequalities and WLB (outputs and policies), per country in the last decade. Spain.

Poverty & inequalities	WLB
Strong employment growth alleviated some social indicators.	Fertility rate has significantly decreased from 1.38 in 2009 to 1.26 in 2018
Still, high unemployment, especially among young people, low-skilled workers and workers with a migrant background.	0-3 childcare, highest growth in the EU from 38% in 2008 to 57.4% in 2019
In January 2019, 22.3% increase in the minimum wage. In January 2020, new raise in the minimum wage by 5.6% (up to €950 in 14 payments)	But inequalities in the availability and quality of 0-3 ECEC, even if increasing support to vulnerable groups' access to 0-3 ECEC
Extensive use of non-standard contracts behind high inequality and in-work poverty. Income inequalities among the highest in the EU, despite some recent decreases. Besides, temporary workers have troubles to access unemployment benefits (long qualifying periods).	Low public expenditure in family/children benefits (in 2018, 1.3% of GDP; EU-28: 2.2 %). Lowest family benefits in the EU. It decreased from 1.5 in 2009 to 1.3 in 2018, after having almost doubled in the 2000-2009 decade. These low family/children benefits and weak income guarantee schemes severely limit the impact on poverty reduction of social transfers (lowest in the EU).
So far, little advances in tackling LM segmentations. Plan for Decent Work 2018-2020 may have had some impact. No key changes in hiring incentives or types of contracts.	Recent rises in child benefits for poor families (2019) were the first in 18 years, but are limited.
AROP stagnated above 21% and In-work AROP at 12.9% Severe material deprivation rate has slightly decreased to 5.4% in 2018	Tax allowances offer little benefit for lower income families. Child-related tax deductions in Spain show a regressive pattern.
Non-EU migrants and Roma suffer much higher social vulnerability.	Significant gender gaps remain (employment gap > EU average, pay gap < EU average), but main recent legislation efforts to promote gender equality.
Among the highest child poverty in the EU. Social transfers have the lowest impact in the EU in reducing child poverty. Strict means tests for child benefits result in low coverage.	FFEEER has slowly increased from 47.3% in 2010 to 50.9% in 2019
In 2018, income share of the poorest 40% below its pre-crisis (2008) levels.	In 2019, measures to promote equal rights in the workplace (wages reports, equality plans). By 2021, parental leave of 16 weeks for each parent will replace maternity and paternity leaves.
Contributory unemployment benefits much stronger than non-contributory unemployment assistance.	In the present, Fathers can take 12 non-transferable weeks of paid paternity leave, 4 weeks uninterrupted after birth.
The 2019-2023 National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, approved in March 2019, including a subsistence minimum income (" <i>Ingreso Mínimo Vital</i> "), to be developed.	Spain Organic Las 3/2007 equality among men and women, pay transparency. Unclear implementation
Large regional socio-economic disparities in employment, poverty and inequality. Important problems of portability of benefits across regions remain.	Youth emancipation age up from 28.4 in 2008: to 29.5 in 2019

Large differences between gender gaps of those born in the EU and those born outside.

Sources: authors' own elaboration on partners reports.

Table 15. Main recent developments in poverty/inequalities and WLB (outputs and policies), per country in the last decade 2008-2019. Hungary.

Poverty & inequalities	WLB
Good economic performance and income per capita converging to the EU average. Significant employment growth, but modest productivity growth.	Fertility rate has significantly increased from 1.32 in 2009 to 1.55 in 2018, after decades of decreasing
High social inequalities in life expectancy (gender, educational level), lowest life expectancy among Visegrad countries (HU: 76; EU: 80.9)	Limited 0-3 childcare (16.5%), among the lowest in the EU, behind wide gender gaps. But fast recent increases in 0-3 childcare.
Decreases in most poverty indicators, with significant decreases in severe material deprivation rate (2013: 27.8%; 2018:10.1%). But stable In-work AROP (2018: 8.4%).	Severe material deprivation among children (15.2%) among the highest in the EU (EU: 6.4%), but significant decreases in children AROP (2013: 43.9%; 2018: 23.8%)
↑ Wages and minimum wage growth.	Higher gender pay and occupational gaps than EU averages, linked to generous parental (mothers) leave system. Small progresses in the last decade. Much higher gender gaps among Roma.
Poverty situation improved, but widening income inequalities, due in part to changes in the tax and benefit system, with social transfers not keeping pace with the improving economy. So, less people in poverty, but wider poverty gap.	But among the highest FFEER in EU, with high increases from 48.9% in 2010 to 61.1% in 2019
LM (Labour Market) outcomes for women and vulnerable groups < EU average.	Family benefits during parental leave, among the highest in the EU, have strong poverty-reducing impact (48.8%). However, public expenditure (% GDP) in family & children benefits decreased from 2.9 in 2009 to 2.0 in 2018. Important cuts in protection against social exclusion.
Minimum income benefit unchanged since 2012, one of the lowest in EU (in 2019, 15% of the minimum wage).	Some improvements in child tax credit, reducing the tax burden of some low-income families. However, the tax wedge for low-income single persons remains above the EU average.
The public works wage has decreased relative to the minimum wage.	Tax and benefit system provides weak protection against economic cycles. Scarce improvements in social assistance and unemployment benefits. Reforms in tax and benefit systems may have contributed to increase LM participation, but at the cost of higher inequality.
Low social protection for casual and seasonal workers	The 2019 new family support scheme (preferential loans/grants to parents) may favour more couples with high income.
Weak and short unemployment benefits.	
The 2011 flat personal income tax prejudiced low-income earners.	
Weak housing support (affordable rental) for low-income households.	
Strong socioeconomic segmentation.	
Increasing gaps between wages and pensions.	
Strong territorial inequalities	

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Households with several children suffer high %s of severe material and social deprivation.

High proportion of Roma families suffering difficult living conditions.

High % of Roma children suffer material and social deprivation.

Educational segregation of Roma children and socio-economic disadvantaged children deteriorated between 2008 and 2018.

Youth emancipation age down from 27.8 in 2008 to 27.2 in 2019

Sources: authors' own elaboration on partners reports

Table 16. Main recent developments in poverty/inequalities and WLB (outputs and policies), per country in the last decade 2008-2019. Norway.

Poverty & inequalities	WLB
Occupational upgrading as opposed to polarisation. This seems to be linked to growth in sectors working with new technologies.	Fertility rate has significantly decreased from 1.98 in 2009 to 1.56 in 2018
Stagnating salaries but no growth of atypical employment. Atypical employment more common among young people and women.	High increase in 0-3 childcare, from 37% in 2008 to 50.1% in 2019. Strong support to vulnerable groups' access to 0-3 ECEC
All poverty indicators are well below EU averages	High public expenditure in family/children benefits (in 2018, 3.1% of GDP; EU-28: 2.2 %).
	Hybrid WLB policy dualism: combines generous paid parental leaves & ↑0-3 childcare; with generous family cash support (unconditional child benefits, cash-for-care benefits). However, the universal child benefit has significantly lost weight in total families income, since its nominal value remain unchanged between 1996 and 2018. Towards a dual earner/dual carer model.
	Cultural differences across class and ethnicity in WLB preferences.
	Gender gaps remain. FFEER stagnating around 57%

Sources: authors' own elaboration on partner reports

Table 17. Main recent developments in poverty/inequalities and WLB (outputs and policies), per country in the last decade 2008-2019. Estonia.

Poverty & inequalities	WLB
Life expectancy increasing, but high inequalities across class, gender, and regions.	No change in fertility rate, 1.7 in 2009 and 1.67 in 2019
Employment and activity rates growth	0-3 childcare has increased from 17% in 2008 to 31.8% in 2019. Inequalities in the availability and quality of 0-3 ECEC .
Recent reforms (Youth Guarantee, work ability reform, parental leave and benefits system) have increased activity rates across most social groups.	Public expenditure in family/children benefits around EU average (in 2018: 2.3% of GDP; EU-28: 2.2 %).
Recent income inequality decreases, below average income inequality in the EU. But the income share of poorest 40% is below pre-crisis (2008) levels.	Substantial increases in child benefits have decreased child poverty.
Poverty and social exclusion is high for the elderly and low qualified workers. Their incomes are outperformed by average wages. Inadequate pension system	Among highest FFEER in the EU, and high increases from 56.8% in 2010 to 66% in 2019.
Elderly are specially exposed to high poverty and social exclusion risks (for 65+, in 2018, EE: 46.3% vs EU: 15.9%). 26.3% of 65-74 year olds work to increase their income.	However, among the highest gender pay gap in the EU, linked to generous parental (mothers) leave system and caring responsibilities.
High AROP, stagnated at 2018: 21.9%	The 2016-2023 Welfare Development Plan addresses gender segregation in the LM, reorganizing the parental leave and benefit system. From 2020, increases in paternal leave (from 10 to 30 days), increased flexibility for parental leaves, and incentives for parents to take up jobs. Steps in increasing pay transparency, but the government abolished plans on legislation for wage transparency.
In-work AROP, stagnated at 2018: 9.3%	
Significant decreases in severe material deprivation rate from 7.6% in 2013 to 3.8% in 2018. Large regional disparities.	New law in force on 01/06/2020 will provide for leave of 30 days (4 weeks; paid at 100%)
There have been reductions of the tax burden of low-income workers.	Youth emancipation age down from 24.8 in 2008 to 22.2 in 2019

Sources: authors' own elaboration on partner report