

LMF2.4. Family-Friendly Workplace Practices

Definitions and methodology

Workplace practices are key determinants of families' ability to reconcile work and family life. These practices are especially important for employees who do face constraints in access to public supports in the tax/benefit (e.g. PF1.1 to PF1.5), parental leave (PF2.1 to PF2.5) and childcare and out-of-school-hours (OSH) care systems (PF3.1 to PF4.3). Not all parents have access to family-friendly workplace measures to the same extent, and even if they have access to such support, they do not always feel comfortable with using it. In all, working schedules differ widely across and within economic sectors as well as countries.

OECD (2007) defines family-friendly workplace arrangements as those practices that facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life, and which firms introduce to complement statutory requirements. Family-friendly arrangements include: extra-statutory leave from work arrangements; employer-provided childcare, OSH-care, and elderly care supports and flexible working time arrangements. As childcare, parental leave support and part-time employment are considered elsewhere (LMF1.6 to LMF2.3), the focus here is on flexibility in working time arrangements that do not necessarily involve reduced working hours. For example, teleworking, working at home, and working a full-time working week at non-standard hours.

Flexibility in working time, for example, allows parents to adjust their working schedule to map with school and/or childcare centre hours. The extent to which flexi-time practices help workers balance work and family life is co-determined by the extent to which workers have control over these arrangements. In practice, flexible working schemes are primarily designed to address employer needs in the production process, and their use as a reconciliation tool is determined by the extent to which employees can use these arrangements (for example, by working at home) to reflect their preferred working time schedule (Chung *et al.*, 2007); also flexi-time arrangements can be awarded occasionally (to meet urgencies) or on regular basis. Riedman *et al.* (2006) introduced the following categorization of four types of working time arrangements on basis of the opportunity to re-arrange working hours over time:

- Schemes that only allow the start and end times *to vary on the same day*, but not the total number of hours per day, and without possibility of accumulating credit or debit hours.
- Schemes that allow employees to accumulate credit or debit hours within certain limitations, over a long period of time (such as a week or a month); *it is not possible to "save" working hours to obtain full days off*.
- Schemes that allow employees *to take full days off* to compensate for accumulated credit hours.
- Schemes that allow credit hours *to be compensated for by prolonged periods of work, often within a year*; such schemes are referred to as "working time accounts" or "annualised working hours".

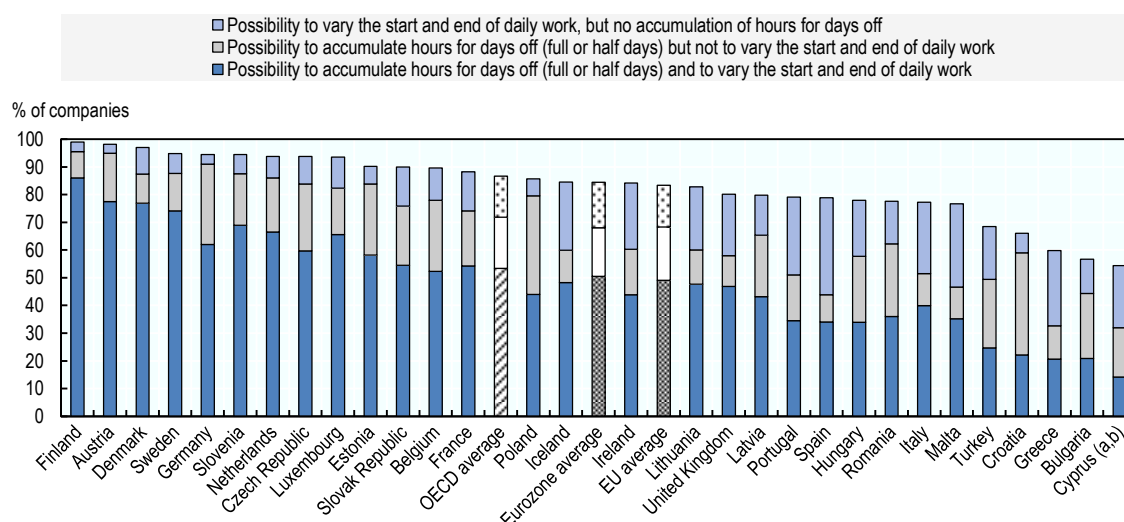
This indicator present information on the proportion of companies (establishments) which provide the flexible working time arrangements to their employees (Chart LMF2.4.A); the extent to which male and female employees have some sort of control over their working hours (Charts LMF2.4.B and LMF2.4.C); and, the incidence of working from home (Chart LMF2.4.D). For the most part, the data presented here cover European countries only. Some data on flexible working arrangements in OECD countries outside Europe do exist, but these data are generally not comparable with the information on European countries (see Box LMF2.4.A).

Other relevant indicators: Key characteristics of parental leave systems (PF2.1); Additional leave entitlements (PF2.3); LMF1.6 Gender differences in employment outcomes; and, Distribution of working hours among adults in couple or single parent households (LMF2.2 and LMF2.3).

Key findings

On average across OECD countries with available comparable data, about 87% of companies provide at least some employees with at least some kind of flexible working time arrangement (Chart LMF2.4.A). Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany and Sweden are the countries with the highest proportion of firms providing at least some employees with at least some flexibility in working time arrangements, with the proportion of firms offering at least some kind of flexible arrangement reaching as high as almost 99% in Finland. Employers are least inclined towards allowing flexibility in Greece and Turkey, although even in these countries more than 50% of companies offer at least some kind of flexible working time arrangement to at least some employees. Annex Table LMF2.4 provides summary information on the nature of flexible working time legislation across countries.

Chart LMF2.4.A. Incidence of employer-provided flexible working time arrangements, 2013
 Proportion (%) of companies that report providing flexible working time arrangements to at least some employees, by type



a) Footnote by Turkey: The information in this document with reference to « Cyprus » relates to the southern part of the Island. There is no single authority representing both Turkish and Greek Cypriot people on the Island. Turkey recognizes the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Until a lasting and equitable solution is found within the context of United Nations, Turkey shall preserve its position concerning the "Cyprus issue";

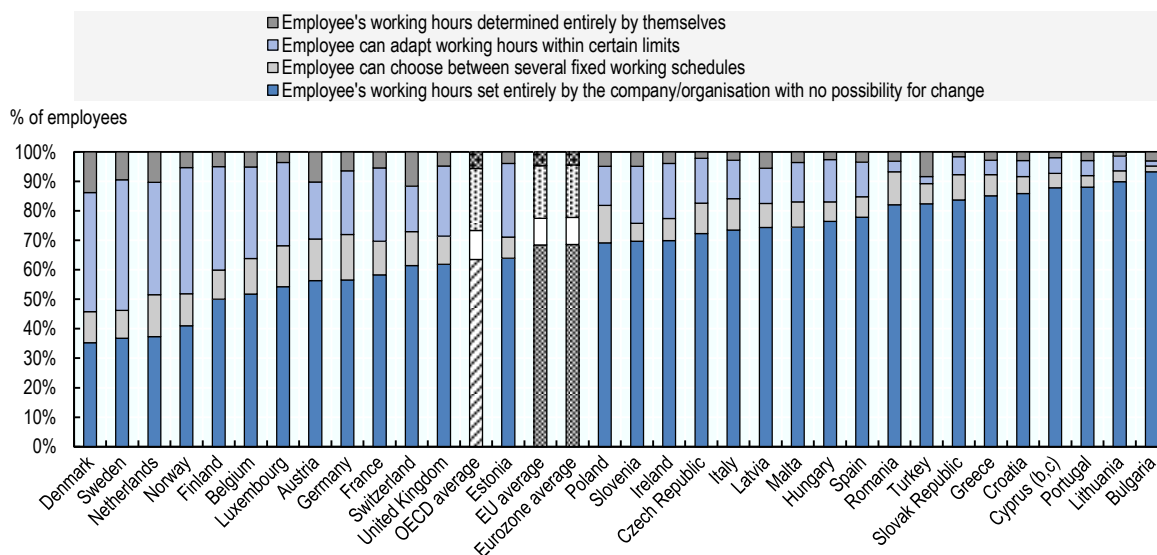
b) Footnote by all the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Commission: The Republic of Cyprus is recognized by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Turkey. The information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

Sources: [For all countries, European Company Survey 2013](#)

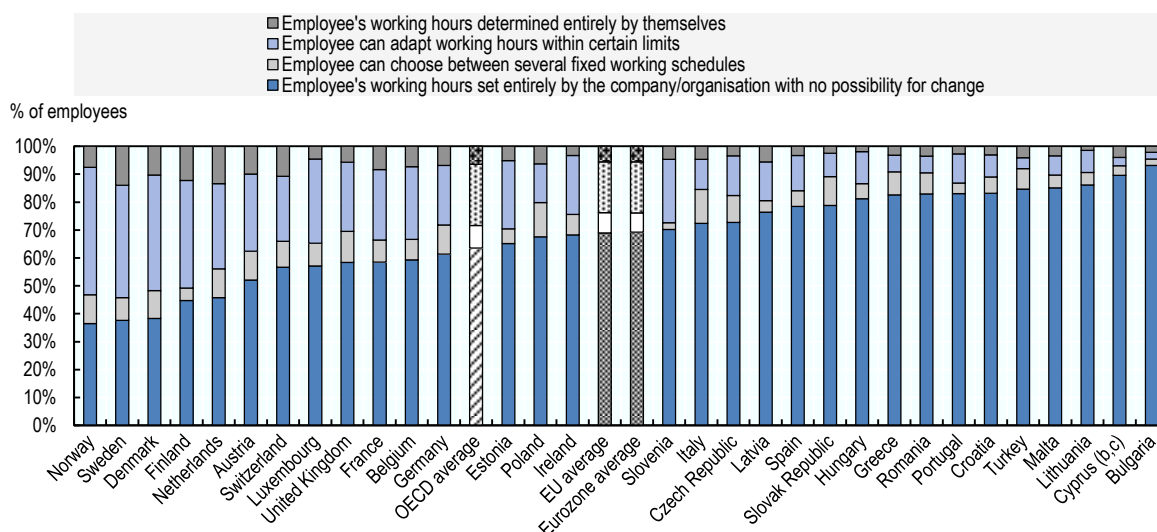
Charts LMF2.4.B considers the proportion of employees who: (i) face working times entirely set by the company; (ii) can choose between fixed working schedules set by the company; (iii) can adapt working time within certain limits; and, (iv) are free to decide their own working hours. The extent to which employees have some control over their working time varies considerably across countries. In Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, half or more of male and female employees have at least some ability to set their own working time. By contrast, the control of working time by employees is limited in Greece, Portugal, Slovak Republic and Turkey, where more than 80% of employees report that working time is entirely fixed by the company.

Chart LMF2.4.B. Ability of employees to set working time arrangements, 2010

Panel A. Proportion (%) of female employees^a that report having working time



Panel B: Proportion (%) of male employees^a that report having working time



a) Data exclude respondents who answered 'don't know/no opinion' or who refused

b) See note a) to chart LMF2.4.A

c) See note b) to chart LMF2.4.B

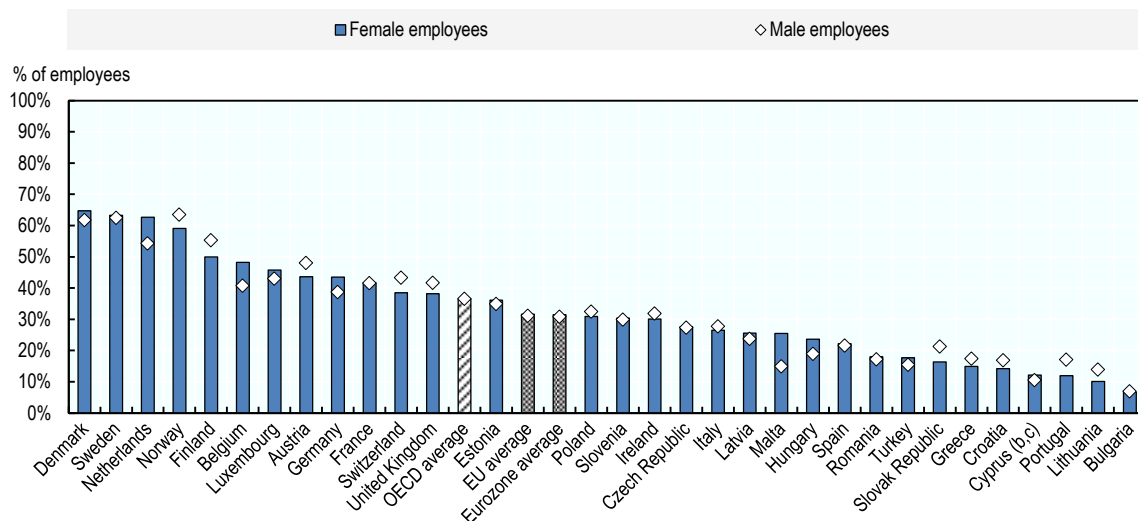
Source: [For all countries, European Working Conditions Survey, 2015](#)

In many OECD countries, there are small gender differences in access to flexible working time arrangements with male employees often slightly more likely to have at least some ability to set their own working time arrangements (Chart LMF2.4.C). Control over working time is likely to be related to the position of employees within companies, and more senior staffers are most likely to have access to flexible working time schedules. As men are more likely to be in senior positions than women (see indicator [LMF1.6](#)), they are sometimes more likely to have some control over their working hours than women (Chart LMF2.4.C). Yet, in all OECD countries any gender difference in access to flexible working

arrangements is only very small, and women are on average a bit more likely to have at least some ability to set their own working time in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. (See OECD (2016) for more detail and discussion.)

Chart LMF2.4.C. Gender differences in the ability of employees to set working time arrangements, 2015

Proportion (%) of employees that have at least some ability to set their own working time arrangement^s, by gender



a) Includes employees who report that they can either 'choose between several fixed working schedules', 'adapt working hours within certain limits' or have the ability to 'determine working hours entirely by themselves'. Data exclude respondents who answered 'don't know/no opinion' or who refused

b) See note a) to chart LMF2.4.A

c) See note b) to chart LMF2.4.B

Source: [5For all countries, European Working Conditions Survey, 2010](#)

Box LMF2.4.A. Information on flexible workplace practices in OECD countries outside Europe

Information on flexible workplace practices in OECD countries outside Europe is available from country surveys and contains information on employers who provide flexi-time and employees who use it. However, results are not directly comparable to the information for European countries in Charts LMF2.4.A to LMF2.4.D.

Flexible working time is an important feature of Australian workplace practices and in 2005, 41% of Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) among working parents facilitate flexible working hours (this was 44% of AWAs covering working mothers (Australian Government, 2006). According to the 1999-2002 Workplace and Employee Survey in Canada about 54% of female and 58% of male workers work in a company which avail of flexitime, with about 70% of workers using such schemes (Ferrer and Gagné, 2006 and OECD, 2007).

Flexitime options also exist in Japan, but generally without the possibility to accumulate overtime and take extra holidays in lieu. Collective labour agreements which facilitate arrangements whereby workers can decide autonomously when to clock into and out of work are present in 6.3% of Japanese workplaces; 17.5% of Japanese companies provide regular start and finishing hours outside the norm, while 46% of Japanese companies allow for flexible start and finishing times on an occasional basis (EIRO, 2008).

In New Zealand, the most commonly offered arrangements are flexible start and finish times on an occasional basis, permitted by 89% of employers to all or some of their employees according to the 2008 Employers Survey (DoL, 2008). Flexible start and finish times on a regular basis are available to some or all staff in 63% of workplaces.

Similarly in the United States, 37% of employers with at least 50 employees allow most of their employees to vary the start and end of work periodically (Galinsky et al., 2008). Only 10% of employers grant it on a daily basis. Most of employees work in companies where flexitime schemes are available only to a limited number of employees: generally those in more senior positions. About 48% of both male and female employees report some flexibility in the scheduling

of working hours; 38% of male employees and 42% of female have some flexibility in the days they work (US CEA, 2015).

Working from home can also help workers match their work and family commitments. Chart LMF2.4.D presents the proportion of male employees (panel A) and female employees (panel B) who report how frequently they have worked from home over the 12 months preceding the interview. Generally, few employees (8.2% of male and 9.3% of female employees, on average across OECD countries with available data) report that work from home on a daily basis or several times a week, but this is more than one-in-six employees in Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, Norway, Belgium and France.

Yet, in many OECD countries a considerable proportion of employees report that they have worked from home several times a month or less so in the past twelve months. For instance in Denmark, around 12% of male and female employees report having worked from home several times a month over the past 12 months, while 16% of male and 18% of female employees have worked from home though on a less regular basis. Still, the vast majority of both male and female employees have never worked from home over the past year, with for instance nine-in-ten employees in this situation in Italy. (See OECD (2016) for more detail and discussion.)

Directly comparable data is not available for non-European OECD countries, but home-based work is important in both Australia and New Zealand. In Australia, 13% of employees worked from home in 2005. In New Zealand, about 28% of male workers and 20% of female report to regularly work from another location, including homes but not exclusively (DoL, 2008). In Canada, working from home is far less frequent as only 5.6 % of female workers and 5.9% of male workers declare to do so for at least some hours of their regular schedule (Ferrer and Gagné, 2006). In the US, about half of employers allow some employees to work some regular paid hours at home occasionally and 23% on a regular basis, but it is unclear to what extent home-working opportunities are being used (Galinsky *et al.*, 2008).

Comparability and data issues

Measures of family-friendly workplace supports are taken from different national surveys with different sample sizes, categorizations and questions for employers and employees (see for an overview of issues, Evans, 2001). Comparisons are therefore difficult, but some indicators on flexible working hours from national surveys have been summarized in Box LMF2.4.A.

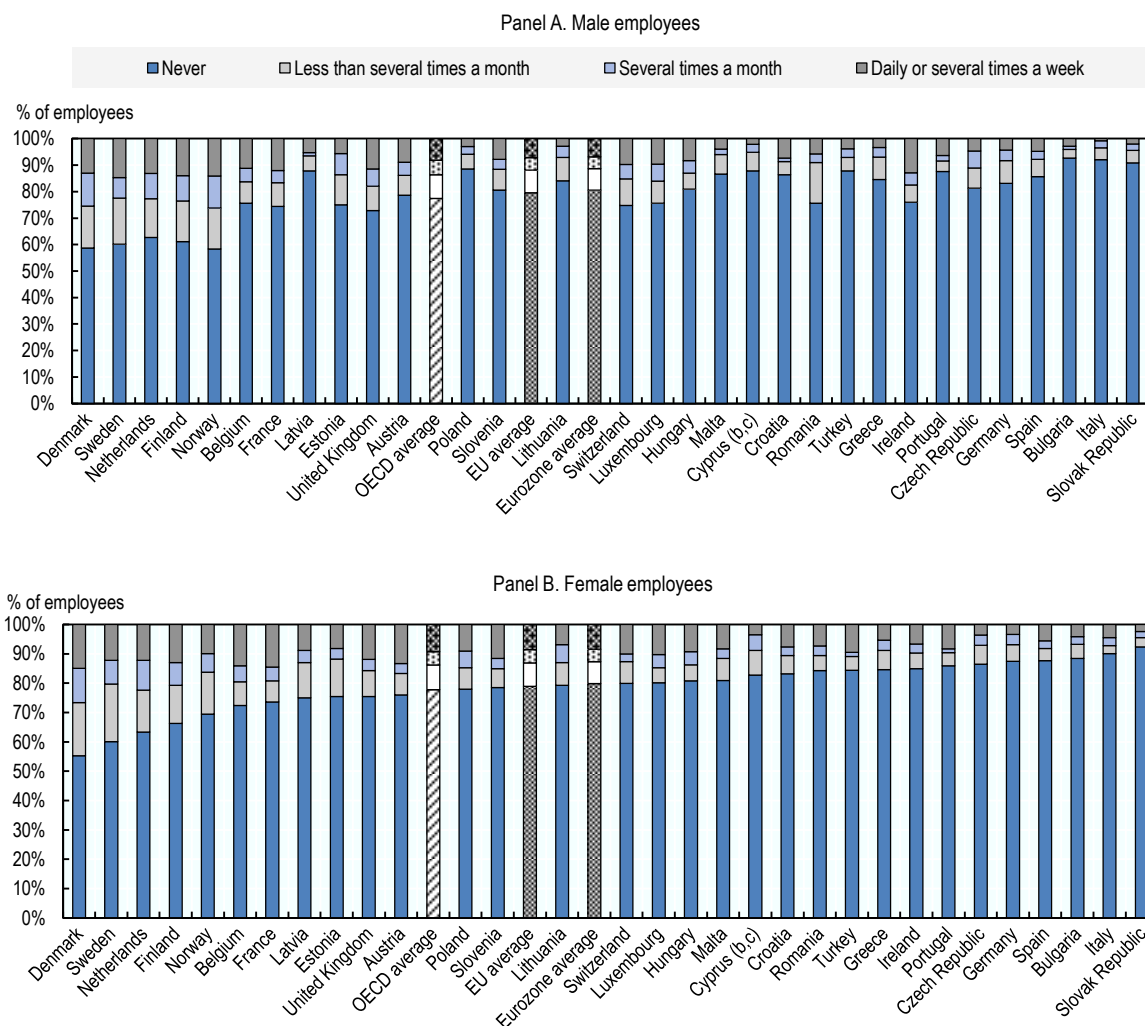
For European countries, the *European Company Survey (2013)* provides a comparable dataset on workplaces and workplace practices. The survey was based on sample of almost 30,000 establishments across industry and service sectors in 32 countries. The survey focused on a variety of working time arrangements, including flexible working hours, overtime, part-time work, work at unusual hours such as shift work, night work and weekend work, parental leave and other forms of long-term leave, and phased or early retirement. The survey response is largely based on interviews with personnel managers (e.g. human resources staff in companies). There is no guarantee that employees would have answered survey questions in the same way as personnel managers. Moreover, employers may, out of economic necessity, perceived negative career implications, or otherwise decide not to make use of the flexible workplace practices that are made available to them.

The *Sixth European Working Conditions Survey (2015)* was carried out by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions between September and November 2015 (Eurofound, 2015). More than 43 000 workers were interviewed in 35 countries, with between 1,000 and 3,300 respondents in each country. The survey includes information on job characteristics, employment status and the nature of contract, and on the individual and household characteristics of workers. In most countries, a sample of around 1,000 workers was interviewed. As sample sizes are

similar, while the employer populations differ markedly across countries, the potential for error in sample-representativeness may vary across countries.

Chart LMF2.4.D. Employees working from home, 2010

Proportion (%) of employees^a who report they have worked from their 'own home' in the past twelve months, by gender



a) Data exclude respondents who answered 'don't know/no opinion' or who refused.

b) See note a) to chart LMF2.4.A

c) See note b) to chart LMF2.4.B

Source: [For all countries, European Working Conditions Survey, 2015](#)

Sources and further reading; OECD (2016), *Be Flexible! How Workplace Flexibility can help European Employees to Balance Work and Family*; Australian Government (2006), "Work and Family, The Importance of Workplace Flexibility in Promoting Balance between Work and Family", Paper prepared by the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, September; Chung H., M. Kerkhofs and P. Ester (2007), *Working time flexibility in European Companies*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions; EIRO (2008), "Working time in the EU and the other global economies – Industrial relations in the EU and the other global economies 2006-2007"; Evans, J. M., (2001), "Firms' Contribution to the Reconciliation Between Work and Family Life", Labour Market and Social Policy Occasional Papers, no. 48, OECD (www.oecd.org/els/workingpapers); Ferre A., and L. Gagné (2006), "The use of family friendly workplace practices in Canada", *IRPP Working paper 2006-02*; Galinsky S., J. Bond and K. Sakai (2008), *2008 National Study of Employers, The Families and Work Institute*, New York; Golden L. (2001) "Which Workers Get Flexible Work Schedules?" *American Behavioral Scientist*, 44 (7):1157-78; Golden L. (2006) "Working in Interesting Times: Three Flexibility Gaps for US Workers", *Congressional briefing on the Work and Family Bill of Rights*, May 11, 2006; Hardarson O. (2007), "The flexibility of working time arrangements for women and men",

Statistics in Focus, 96, Eurostat; Hegewisch A. and J. Gornick. (2008), *Statutory Routes to Workplace Flexibility in Cross-National Perspective*, Institute for Women's Policy Research; McCrate E. (2005), "Flexible hours, workplace authority, and Compensating wage differentials in the US," *Feminist Economics*, 11(1):11-39; OECD (2007), *Babies and Bosses: reconciling work and family life. A synthesis of findings for OECD countries*, OECD, Paris; Parent-Sloan Center on Aging Work (2008): *Measures that govern rights to alternate work arrangements in 2007*; Eurofound (2016) [Sixth European Working Conditions Survey](#); European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions; US CEA (2015) *Economic Report of the President, the United States White House Council of Economic Advisors*.