Babies and Bosses: OECD Recommendations to help families balance work and family life

A new OECD report reviews family-friendly policies in Canada, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom and makes recommendations to further ensure the well-being of parents and children. This fourth volume in the series of Babies and Bosses urges Canada and the UK to create more, and more affordable, childcare to help parents juggle work and family commitments. At the other end of the spectrum, the report argues that Finland needs to restrict use of long leave periods, and commends Sweden’s excellent family support measures, but warns the government to control costs.

Families looking for a way to balance work and life-style commitments may choose not to have children or, if they do, not to work. Governments need to get family-friendly policies right if they are to reduce poverty and promote child development and gender equity, underpin economic growth and bolster pension systems.

Finland and Sweden started to invest in family-friendly policies more than 30 years ago, while in Canada and the UK widespread work-family policies are much more recent. Finland and Sweden have policies which provide a continuum of support for parents until their children are in their teens: flexible parental leave, affordable high-quality childcare, and reduced working hours for parents with young children. As this approach is expensive, Canada and the UK have generally opted for lower tax rates over more social service costs, though both have recently started to expand the help they give to parents.

In all four countries the labour market is healthy for women: three out of four women between the ages of 25 – 54 hold down jobs, though there are substantial differences in the working hours of mothers. Full-time jobs are the norm in Canada, Finland and Sweden, whereas women in the UK often work part-time. The wage gaps between males and females are similar too, and are higher than the OECD average for women in the high-wage bracket.

See the country notes on Canada, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom for details about the OECD’s policy recommendations, available on the website at www.oecd.org/media.

Journalists can obtain a copy of Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life – Canada, Finland, Sweden and the UK by contacting the OECD’s Media Relations Division (tel. 33 1 45 24 97 00 or news.contact@oecd.org). For further information, please contact Mark Pearson, OECD’s Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (tel. 33 1 45 24 92 69 or mark.pearson@oecd.org).