

Technical Support to Reduce the Gender Employment Gap in the Hungarian Labour Market

Report on international practice in policies to close gender employment gaps

Executive summary

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Willem Adema (Willem.ADEMA@oecd.org)
Valentina Patrini (Valentina.PATRINI@oecd.org)



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Executive summary

This executive summary refers to the “**Report on international practice in policies to close gender employment gaps**”, corresponding to Output 2.1. of the Action “Reducing the employment gender gap in the Hungarian labour market”, as established in the Grant Agreement for its implementation. It provides a selection of policy practices in the areas of **parents’ leaves, early child education and care (ECEC) and flexible working arrangements**, and additional examples in other policy areas of relevance for the labour market participation and attachment of mothers of young children.

The key sources used are a **literature review and insights from an international workshop** on international practices to boost women’s integration in the labour market. The identification of international experiences took into account **key policy developments**, such as the European Union work-life balance Directive.

International practice in paid leaves around childbirth

Leave policies can stimulate a more equal sharing of caring responsibilities between parents and therefore support mothers’ labour market participation. **Entitlements to paid parental leave in OECD countries are often shareable**, with each family having the right to a certain number of weeks of parental leave payments to divide as they see fit. While this allows both parents to take paid parental leave, it usually makes economic sense for the mother to take most of it, because she often is the second earner (OECD, 2017^[6]). Moreover, societal attitudes around caring for children and potential career implications contribute to a **general reluctance among many fathers towards taking long leave**. The EU Work-life balance directive aims to face some of these barriers and contribute to a more equal leave sharing between parents (EU, 2019^[2]).

Individual paid parental leave entitlements are used to encourage leave take-up among men. Some OECD countries offer **paid parental leave as an individual, non-transferable entitlement for each parent, on a “use it or lose it” basis**. These parent-specific entitlements can follow different models. The most common are “mummy and daddy quotas”, whereby specific parts of an overall parental leave period are reserved exclusively for each parent. This model is common in the Nordic countries. In 1993, Norway was the first OECD country to implement fathers-only paid parental leave, with a four-week father quota, followed by Sweden two years after. Since 2000, many OECD countries have moved to provide fathers with strong financial incentives to take parental leave for at least two months. **Fathers’ leaves and non-shareable entitlements bring positive effects, e.g. in terms of leave take-up by men and fathers’ engagement in unpaid work and childcare** (OECD, n.d.^[7]; Adema, Clarke and Thévenon, 2020^[10]).

International practices identified include the provision of **non-transferable and paid parental leave in Iceland**, which follows principles of non-transferability, flexibility in use and generosity in compensation (Eydal and Gíslason, 2021^[11]); **mother’s and father’s quotas in Sweden**, which progressively introduced non-transferable leave for the father and flexibility in leave use (Duvander and Löfgren, 2021^[15]); as well as **EU countries’ reforms to implement the EU Work-life balance directive**, such as the **extension of family leave duration and supports of flexibility in parents’ choices in Finland** (European Commission, 2021^[17]; Finnish Government, 2021^[18]).

Bonus periods in parental leave aim to incentivise fathers' uptake of child-related leave entitlements following a distinct policy design compared to quotas. Their key principle is that **a couple may qualify for additional days of paid leave if the father/ both parents use a certain amount of shareable leave**. International examples include the **“Partner months” in Germany**, whereby 12-month benefit provided after the birth of the child is **extended by two months if both parents take at least two months of leave** (Reinschmidt, 2018^[19]; Reimer et al., 2021^[20]; OECD, 2017^[6]), and the **“Sharing bonus” in Portugal**, whereby **an additional 30 days is available if parents share their leave** (Correia, Wall and Leitão, 2021^[22]). Similarly, **in Canada, the Employment Insurance Parental Sharing Benefit** promotes greater gender equality by **adding weeks of benefits when parents share parental benefits** (OECD, 2020^[23]; Doucet et al., 2021^[24]).

Targeted support has also shown positive effects in terms of both parents' involvement in childcare and the labour market. For instance, measures have been launched to **face constraints related to the eligibility criteria for leave** around childbirth and its remuneration. According to EIGE (2020^[25]), one in five people in the EU is not eligible for parental leave. Eligibility may depend on criteria related to the labour or migrant status, the sector or tenure, the type of work (self-employed or employee) or couple's characteristics. When parents have no alternatives to parental leave, ineligibility can inhibit having children and employment. International examples were identified in **Denmark**, where a specific **reimbursement fund** was set up **to cover self-employed** people who were reimbursed for the equivalent 31 weeks for women and 23 weeks for men **around childbirth** (Rostgaard and Ejrnæs, 2021^[27]), as well as in **Poland**, where **“care allowance”** (*zasilek opiekuńczy*) is one of few examples of a relatively **comprehensive right to leave for family care reasons** that existed before COVID-19 (Social Security Department of Poland, 2015^[28]; OECD, 2020^[5]).

Key policy messages from the above examples include:

- **Individual rights, bonuses and targeted actions** contribute to a more equal sharing of caring responsibilities, supporting mothers' employment;
- **Length, generosity and eligibility** of leave entitlements and benefits play a key role in leave access and use; and
- **Contextual factors, social and cultural norms** and the whole policy setting influence the effectiveness of leave systems.

International practice in care and services for children of very young age

The provision of accessible and affordable childcare has been identified as one of the most effective family-friendly policies in reducing gender gaps in employment, and instrumental to address social inequities affecting children (Olivetti and Petrongolo, 2017^[11]). **All OECD governments support and help fund ECEC in one way or another, but the scale and form of support are highly diverse** – including comprehensive publicly-operated ECEC systems, extensive publicly-operated pre-primary services for children from around age three, or a greater use of cash supports and demand-side subsidies directed at parents (OECD, 2020^[9]).

Public investment to ensure universal, affordable and accessible ECEC have been increased in different OECD countries, stressing the role of **ECEC as part of a continuum of supports for families with children**. Nordic countries provide a continuum of supports for parents of young children. **Childcare is part of a comprehensive policy**, which ensures

continuity between birth and compulsory school age; a combination of **high quality and universal access** to ECEC contribute to the success of childcare provision in these countries. International examples include the case of **Sweden** which **provides extensive financial support to parents accessing childcare** (Hofman et al., 2020^[14]), and **Denmark**, where **municipalities must provide a place in a day-care facility for all children older than 26 weeks** that is appropriate for their age until the child starts school (Hofman et al., 2020^[14]). Public efforts to increase ECEC participation and quality are also well exemplified by the case of Germany, which **promoted a policy shift towards growing public support for ECEC**. During the mid-2000s the German federal government started to **increase public investment** and moved towards a Nordic-style legal entitlement to ECEC for all children aged one and older; in addition, support is available for **land-specific measures and to enhance participation in childcare; public childcare attendance rates have increased over the years**, also positively affecting maternal employment rates (Hofman et al., 2020^[14]).

Flexibility in ECEC use and provision is an increasingly important feature for a successful ECEC offer – taking into account the changing schedules of the world of work and the existence of different family models and work-life balance preferences. **Adapting the childcare offer to the changing needs of working parents can support their labour market participation and attachment**. For example, The Danish government took action to increase the quality of **ECEC facilities, adapting them to both working hours and family preferences** (Rasch-Christensen et al., 2018^[36]), while in Germany, ECEC facilities have long opening hours, which provides working parents with great flexibility, and the KitaPlus programme launched in 2016 supports parents who have unusual working hours through **customised care time** (ICF, 2019^[37]).

The application of **proportionate universalism** contributes to overcome the dichotomy between universal ECEC policies and targeted support provision and the equity concerns deriving from their use. In all EU countries, funding mechanisms to make ECEC affordable have been reinforced, and this is often built on the basis of proportionate universalism principles, i.e. **ensuring access for all whilst compensating or further supporting those in a more vulnerable financial position**. The European Union Child Guarantee and policy priorities for children also supports the combination of universal actions with targeted measures addressing vulnerable groups of children (European Commission, 2021^[30]). Examples include the case of Flanders, Belgium, where extra attention is paid to vulnerable families within a universal offer: different policies have introduced **income-related parental fees**, when there are shortages of places, **special day-care schemes** are offered to vulnerable families, and some Flemish cities have a **central enrolment policy** for all childcare centres - establishing quotas for different target groups (Vandenbroeck, 2020^[31]). In some countries, Roma parents benefit from special conditions to access ECEC. In Croatia, for instance, they are exempt from paying kindergarten fees (ICDI, n.d.^[42]).

Employer-provided childcare is an alternative option for childcare provision. Employers can play a key role in supporting and/or directly providing ECEC services, for their employees exclusively or as a broader offer also open to the local community. These services can take different forms, from facilities (e.g. kindergarten or other childcare amenities, including in-company crèches) to financial support (e.g. for parents using private childcare facilities or other care support services). Depending on the company's resources, it can either provide **on-site childcare services**, partner with other employers for the provision of **inter-company nurses**, or **collaborate with a private childcare provider or the government**. Other options include linking with facilities in the community, providing financial support to employees, or offering advice, referral services and back-up emergency

solutions, which decrease the need for parents to take unscheduled time off from work. **This type of childcare services benefits both companies and employees**, nonetheless, there are **challenges to the feasibility and sustainability of such services**.

Different **public interventions can support employer-provided childcare so that more companies –of any size– can offer such services**. These range from increasing incentives (e.g. increasing the threshold of childcare costs for each child that can be fiscally deducted); increasing employers and employees' awareness of the benefits of these services, as well as employers' good knowledge of the needs of employees; facilitating dialogue between local communities and stakeholders to promote public-private partnerships and forms of territorial welfare; and supporting the design of *ad hoc* solutions (OECD, 2021^[2]). International examples are found in Spain, Lithuania, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, among others. Similarly, employer-provided childcare can function as a service for the territory. In Italy, relevant examples of employer-provided childcare include the **creation of public-private partnerships**. Typically, companies in a specific territory bear part of the costs of running a public childcare facility, which is open to the children of companies' employees and to citizens from the local area.

Key policy messages from the above examples include:

- **Integrating the offer of childcare** supports and services can increase their relevance, especially if supported via territorial and partnership approaches; and
- ECEC use can be enhanced through **flexible, adapted solutions** and alternative childcare provision modes.

Flexible working arrangements: a focus on teleworking practices

Teleworking can support women to stay in employment and in higher-paying full-time jobs after childbirth. By reducing commuting times and enabling higher schedule control it allows to better shape work around family demands. It represents a valid alternative to part-time options, which are likely to relegate women in lower-paying jobs, with worse career development opportunities. Nonetheless, it also bears risks for gender equality (OECD, 2021^[2]).

In recent years, **OECD governments have increasingly supported flexible working** for all workers. Several OECD countries have introduced broader rights to request flexible working arrangements including not just the number of working hours, but also, in some countries, the scheduling of hours and the place of work. In many OECD countries workers have a statutory right to request reduced working hours. In some of these countries, they also have a complementary right to return to full-time work and/or to previous hours after a specific period. In some countries these rights are restricted to parents with young children and/or workers with caring responsibilities, while in others they are provided to all workers. In most cases, employers can refuse requests on business grounds, but in some countries (e.g. Portugal, Norway and Slovenia) there are restrictions whereby employers cannot refuse while children are under a certain age.

Teleworking regulations in OECD countries can be classified according to whether they have an **encompassing legal framework and/or an enforceable right to request telework** or not (OECD, 2021^[48]). The Netherlands, Portugal and the United Kingdom employees have an **enforceable right to request teleworking**. In both The Netherlands and the United Kingdom, all employees meeting certain tenure criteria have the **right to request flexible working**, including the scheduling of hours and the place of work, which

employers can refuse only on serious business grounds. Widening the “right to request” to all employees confers bargaining power and reduces the risk of discrimination against specific groups of workers (e.g. parents). In Portugal, **the possibility for unilateral decision to opt for telework was introduced later for specific categories or workers**, including parents of children until three years of age (since 2015). Employers can refuse regular requests on any ground. However, for parents of children under the age of three or victims of domestic violence, refusal is only possible if the employees’ activities are not compatible with telework or if the employer does not have resources for teleworking arrangements (OECD, 2021^[2]).

Also in countries that do not necessarily have enforceable rights to request in place, various **interventions are supportive of telework practices**. Italy has an **enforceable right to request occasional teleworking**: agile working is a modality of execution of the subordinate employment relationship characterised by the **absence of time or spatial constraints and an organisation by phases, cycles and objectives, established by agreement between employee and employer** (Polytechnic University of Milan, 2021^[53]). As another example, Poland introduced dedicated financial incentives for employers in order to encourage the development of telework practices (Vandeninden and Goraus-Tanska, 2017^[54]).

Key policy messages from the above examples include:

- Teleworking has important **pros and cons for gender equality** in the labour market and work-life balance;
- Frameworks that support **flexible working arrangements include telework** as one of their pillars; and
- Teleworking regulations encompass several aspects, including **rights to request**, whereby the consensus is that teleworking should be based on mutual agreement between the employee and the employer.

Other policy areas of relevance

Girls’ and young women participation in STEM. Different OECD countries have promoted **actions to enhance female involvement in STEM** education and professions and to tackle the problem of gender stereotyping at school and the effect that may have on future education and career choices. Initiatives in OECD countries, encompass **motivation support and awareness raising at school** and typically involve non-governmental and private actors in their implementation. In Poland, for example, several measures target recently graduated women with **webinars for potential new employees, training programmes and internships** (EIGE, n.d.^[60]); while the Irish Teen-Turn initiative **provides disadvantaged girls with different modules in the STEM field** (Equals Global Partnership, n.d.^[61]).

Supporting women in **business creation and entrepreneurship**, credit and financial market **can contribute to reducing gender gaps in the labour market and boost women’s economic empowerment**. Women typically face **greater difficulties than men in business creation**, related to lower levels of entrepreneurship skills, greater difficulty accessing finance, smaller and less effective networks and negative social attitudes regarding female entrepreneurship. Policies that can leverage the **untapped potential of the “missing” women entrepreneurs** range from fostering a gender-sensitive entrepreneurship culture, supporting entrepreneurship skills for women, improving

women's access to finance, supporting networks for women entrepreneurs, to creating supportive regulatory environments, promoting work-life balance and access to social protection (OECD, 2021^[62]; Halabisky, 2018^[63]). In Germany, for example, "*Frauen Unternehmen*" is a national initiative that has created a **network of role model women entrepreneurs** who visit universities, schools and events to promote entrepreneurship to women, while the "*Entreprendre au féminin*" plan was launched as a collaboration between various French ministries aiming to improve **information dissemination to women entrepreneurs on available public support**. A way to improve access to social protection for the self-employed is to reduce the contribution rates since the self-employed often pay proportionally more than employees. In Spain, **self-employed women under 35 years old are entitled to a reduction of social contributions for 30 months**. A crucial, and often missing, aspect in policies for women business owners is the **plan for their coverage**, namely who leads or at least manages business operations **during the maternity leave** of the business owner. A virtuous example is the case the Business Continuation Aid scheme (*Betriebshilfe*) in Austria, providing for a qualified replacement if the entrepreneur is "temporarily unavailable", also including maternity leave (Halabisky, 2018^[63]).

Other policies focus on **tackling discrimination and promoting equality in pay and employment opportunities** (Das and Kotikula, 2018^[64]; OECD, 2020^[65]). Countries have been increasingly engaging in the **fight against gender discrimination in employment**. They have implemented **policies and regulations prohibiting discrimination, ensured a stronger involvement of public institutions** in guaranteeing the correct enforcement of these provisions, and raised awareness as well as supported voluntary actions among key stakeholders regarding non-discrimination and equal pay. International examples include the Norwegian Equality and anti-discrimination act (OECD, 2020^[23]), as well as an increasingly important role of **the Ombudsman and other relevant institutions in the fight against (gender) discrimination** in various OECD countries, including Belgium, Finland, Greece, the Slovak Republic and the United Kingdom (European Commission, 2019^[12]).

Pay transparency measures also contribute to increase women's salaries, lower poverty rates among women, reduce the gender gap in old age pensions, increase women's confidence and allow them to progress into leadership positions, and **encourage more women to participate in the labour market**. International examples include, at European level, the adoption of a legislative **proposal for binding pay transparency measures** to help combat discriminatory pay practices by employers (European Commission, 2021^[68]). Various examples of pay transparency measure can be identified in OECD countries: **Iceland**, a pioneer in pay transparency, has one of the most comprehensive **gender wage gap reporting obligations** in the world, including publicly published information, third party oversight, and financial sanctions for non-compliance (OECD, 2020^[5]); the **United Kingdom** has a **dedicated government website on gender pay gap data** (OECD, 2020^[5]); inspired by the European Commission's proposal, **Spain** established various mandatory transparency measures for companies, including: **having pay records, developing an equality plan and conducting a remuneration audit** (European Commission, 2021^[69]); **Austria** has gradually implemented **bi-annual "income reports"** for companies, which must contain information on average or median wages disaggregated by gender and by job classifications (OECD, 2020^[5]); and in **Finland**, companies with at least 30 employees must conduct a **pay audit** every two/ three years, **including pay data disaggregated by gender across groups of workers**, based on job requirements (Eurofound, 2018^[66]).

Women's access to leadership and decision-making positions is also key to their economic empowerment and to overcome the leaky pipeline. Key policy approaches to promote women in leadership roles include laws that set a minimum quota for women on boards, rules on disclosure of the gender composition of company boards and of diversity policies, comply-or-explain provisions on gender in corporate governance codes, and voluntary targets for gender diversity on boards and/or senior management. Several countries have adopted **initiatives to promote gender balance in leadership and decision-making positions also in public institutions** (OECD, 2019^[70]).

Finally, **pension systems and retirement ages** also play an important role as regards labour market participation of men and women. In most OECD countries there is still a **gender pension gap**, with women receiving a lower retirement income than men on average. **Equalising the retirement ages of men and women has been a main trend across the OECD**. In half of OECD countries, the normal retirement age has been the same for men and women, at least for people born since 1940. Most of the countries where there was a gender difference, either have already eliminated it or are in the process of eliminating it. Only Hungary, Israel, Poland, Switzerland and Turkey will maintain a lower retirement age for women now entering the labour market, legislations, although Turkey will phase out the gender difference for those entering the labour market in 2028 (OECD, 2019^[73]).

Key policy messages from the above examples include:

- **Girls' potential to pursue STEM education and careers** can be mobilised through awareness raising actions and science-related experiences;
- Awareness raising, integrated support and better social protection can **support the expansion of the female entrepreneurship ecosystem**;
- Measures **counteracting gender segregation and discrimination** can support women's labour market participation and attachment; and
- **Pension systems' sustainability** can be enhanced with measures supporting labour market participation of both women and men.

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