Family policies
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Introduction

Family policies as a specific set of policies aimed explicitly at supporting socially desirable behaviours and relationships are relatively recent. An important exception is France, whose pro-natalist policies date back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Governments’ intervention in family matters, regulating what constitutes a family and what obligations family members have to each other, however, dates back to the formation of nation states, when these started to compete with kin, churches, local communities and traditions for the power to regulate this sphere of life and relationships. Social family policies, which constitute the focus of this chapter, are only a – certainly important – manner of public intervention in family matters.

Family policy goals have changed, and change over time and across countries (Gauthier 1996; Saraceno et al. 2012; Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser 2015), as have the instruments. Kaufmann (2002) and Bahle (2008) identify a variety of possible motives for family policy. Concern for (“too low” or “too high”) fertility and demographic reproduction is among the main reasons for states’ intervention. Poverty among families with children has also been traditionally an important policy driver both in Europe and the USA, and it is becoming the main concern of both anti-poverty and family policies in many developing countries. A radical change in goal witnessed in many OECD countries concerns the role of women and more generally of gender relations. While at the origins of the welfare state social policies as well as legal norms directly or indirectly supported the male breadwinner/family carer model, in recent years family policies have been argued as a means to support the dual earner and in some cases also the dual earner/dual carer model, supporting both mothers’ participation in the labour market and, although to a lesser degree, fathers’ participation in childcare.

In the following sections, first, the concept of (social) family policies itself and the various dimensions of such policies will be analysed, with particular regard to the distinction between goals and outcomes, between different kinds of instruments and their possible interplay and to whether it is possible to identify specific family policy patterns that distinguish clear country clusters. Next, the main targets and instruments of family policies will be presented and discussed from a comparative perspective. The concluding section will synthesize the main issues discussed in the chapter.
**Concepts and dimensions**

Kamerman and Kahn (1978; see also Kamerman 2010) proposed to distinguish between explicit and implicit family policies. Explicit family policies are deliberately designed to achieve specific objectives with regard to individuals within families and/or the whole family. Implicit family policies include actions taken in various policy domains for non-family-related goals, but which nevertheless have important consequences for children and families. Kaufmann (2002) used this distinction to identify not so much policies as between countries that have an explicit family policy, i.e. those that explicitly formulate policies aimed at influencing how families are organized and behave, and countries that have no such explicit goal in mind when formulating their policies. In his view, France and Belgium are typically explicit family policy countries, while English-speaking countries are typically implicit ones. Boundaries between these two groups are not clear-cut however, and many countries lie in between.

In this chapter, the choice is made to use an operational definition of family policies. Included are all those public policies that are explicitly designed to affect the situation of families or individuals in their gender and intergenerational family roles, and to thus have clear, though possibly unintended, consequences for such families and individuals: direct and indirect income transfers designed to support the cost of children and/or of a dependent spouse, services and cash transfers aimed at dealing with the caring needs of young children or other not fully self-sufficient family members. Financial and caring responsibilities within families, between generations and between partners are, in fact, the main areas of family policy intervention, even if in different ways across time and space.

In analysing policies, sectors, goals and instruments must be kept analytically distinct. The caring needs of a small child (sector) may be, in fact, answered (measured) both by providing services and by supporting parents (usually the mother) to provide all necessary care, through various kinds of income transfers. Whether one or the other instrument is used depends on the specific goals of the policy and on the implicit or explicit behavioural norms it wants to promote.

Typologies of family policies differ depending on the criteria used as an identifying base as well as on the number and types of countries considered. In the 1990s, Anttonen and Sipilä (1996) clustered (Western European) countries according to the degree to which the state (at the time of their analysis) assumed care responsibilities for the welfare of children and the frail elderly. They identified four distinct groups focusing on indicators that capture defamilialisation: service coverage that is (1) generous to the elderly but not to children, as in the Netherlands, Norway and Great Britain; (2) generous to children but not to the frail elderly, as in France, Belgium and Italy; (3) generous to both children and the frail elderly, as in Denmark, Finland and Sweden; (4) generous to neither children nor the frail elderly, as in Portugal, Greece, Spain, Ireland and Germany. In a later work, however, the same authors, together with Baldock (Anttonen et al. 2003), concluded that it is not possible to construct a typology, since care policies are a mixed package and include services alongside different kinds of leave of different length and with different levels of compensation. Bettio and Plantenga (2004) and Bettio et al. (2006) also develop a typology of what they define as caring regimes, which includes the market and pays particular attention to migrant care labour.

Gender arrangements are at the basis of numerous typologies of family policies. The concept of gender regimes was first developed by Orloff (1993), who elaborated on Esping-Andersen’s concept of decommodification by including a gendered notion of social citizenship; that is, the degree to which policies support women to access paid work and balance it with family life, rendering them financially independent from the relationship with a man. Also, Lewis (1992)
based her classification on the degree to which policies support or, on the contrary, weaken the male breadwinner model.

Work–family reconciliation issues are at the basis of specific typologies, more or less loosely linked to gender-based ones. Gornick and colleagues (1997; see also Gornick and Meyers 2004) have classified countries according to the degree to which they support employment for mothers of children under school age. Bahle (2008) constructs his typology (which includes 25 EU countries) on the basis of the degree of state support for the family–work relationship (in the form of maternity/parental benefits and childcare services) and family income (via family/child allowances). This results in five country clusters, ranging from the most generous and universal to the least. According to his interpretation, cross-cluster differences in the way in which the needs of families with children are addressed may be the outcome of historical differences, in the relationship between states and churches in particular.

The well-being of children is at the basis of Bradshaw’s (2006) typology, which includes 15 European countries and focuses on the generosity of the provision of cash benefits, tax credits and services for children in different family situations.

Daly (2011) distinguishes family policy profiles on the basis of the strength of particular underlining motivations and the diversity of national philosophical orientations, which shape distinct family–market–state relationships. Focusing on a selected number of countries, she therefore distinguishes between (1) countries, such as France and Belgium, with a pro-natalist and pro-family orientation, linking together fertility, family and national interest; (2) countries, such as post-war West Germany, where, on the contrary, the state should interfere as little as possible in families and should support their autonomy mainly through income transfers; (3) states, such as the Scandinavian ones, whose goal is egalitarianism between men and women, but also among children, and therefore underplay the role of the family as an economic and redistributive unit while assigning to the state the role of supporting individual autonomy; (4) states such the UK, the USA and Australia, where policies are intended not to support families as such, but to contrast poverty.

Kaufmann (2002) distinguishes four family policy profiles (“families of nations”) within Western Europe on the basis of their overall generosity; that is, the level of financial (cash benefits) and infrastructural (services) support they offer to families, irrespective of explicit or implicit goals. These profiles range from the most generous in terms of both benefits and services (the Nordic countries and France) to the least generous (Italy and the other Southern European countries).

Leitner (2003) and Saraceno (2010, with Keck 2010) have proposed to categorize policies on the basis of whether they relieve family members from some of their financial and caring obligations or support them in performing them by giving them money and/or time. They distinguish between (1) familialism de facto, when or by “default”, when supports are minimal or non-existent; (2) supported familialism, when policies, usually through financial transfers (including taxation and paid leave) support (specific) family members in keeping up their financial and care responsibilities; and (3) defamilization, when policies reduce family responsibilities and dependencies, shifting them more or less partly to the public sphere. These different policy approaches have also a different impact on the gender division of labour in families. In particular, both familialism by default and supported familialism tend to crystallize the gender division of labour, while defamilization helps reduce it (Korpi 2000). Yet, supported familialism may be also intended as an instrument to acknowledge the desire to care and to change the gender division of labour, as in the case of specific quotas of parental leave allocated to fathers. While single policies may be assigned to one or the other category in the familialization–defamilization continuum, the overall package of a given country’s family policies results from a combination of all
three approaches. Cross-country variation derives from the relative incidence of each in one or more areas. Based on the public/private divide and on the degree of institutionalization of policies, Hantrais (2004) distinguishes between four types of family policies. In particular, she distinguishes between “traditional” familialism, which in her view is typical of Mediterranean countries, and re-familialization, which would be typical of the former communist countries.

This synthetic overview of attempts at developing typologies testifies to the different dimensions involved in family policies, as well as to the different goals they may be perceived to (have to) address. Within the EU and OECD countries, however, in recent years there has been a growing convergence in explicit goals, also because of the active role played by these two national organizations, and particularly the EU, through its directives (e.g. the 96/34 parental leave directive, revised and strengthened with Directive 2010/18), recommendations and jointly agreed targets (e.g. the 2000 Lisbon target concerning women’s labour force participation or the 2002 Barcelona target concerning childcare coverage for pre-school children). In particular, the joint goal of increasing women’s labour force participation and supporting work–family conciliation has taken first place, in a more or less coherent conjunction with that of supporting fertility and investing in children. In this perspective, and specifically with regard to work–family conciliation and to the development of childcare services, in all countries, the family has become a more explicit target of policies, whether or not they are called “family policies”. Country-specific policy packages, as well as their generosity, remain different however, although, as Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser (2015) have shown with regard to child-linked policies, some countries have moved nearer to each other more than others.

Furthermore, in recent years family policies have become an important part of the social policies which individual companies develop for their employees, not only in the USA (given the reduced role of public policies in this field), but also in Europe. They may top up existing public policies (e.g. increasing the length of leave or raising the amount of benefits), integrate them, through the offer of ad hoc services, as well as widen their scope including family-friendly working hours or time schedules and quality of jobs (see e.g. Hoyman et al. 2004; Appelbaum et al. 2009; Drobnic and Guillen 2011; Seeleib-Kaiser and Fleckenstein 2009; Seeleib-Kaiser et al. 2011).

Areas and instruments of family policies

We may distinguish policies on the basis of their goal, their target and of whether they are in income (financial transfers) or in kind (time/services). In the following, policies are grouped on the basis of their targets.

Policies for families with children

A first group of policies addresses the presence and cost of children. Children cost both as consumers of goods and as consumers of time. The first type of cost is usually addressed through direct or indirect (tax allowances) financial transfers. The second kind of cost is addressed both through time allowances and financial transfers, as in the case of paid maternity and parental leave, and through services. In the first case we might speak of supported familialism, in the second case of – more or less extended – defamilialization, insofar as part of the caring time is provided outside the family.

In all EU countries, but not in all OECD or the developing countries, we find all three instruments. But there is a wide cross-country variation in the generosity of direct and indirect income transfers aimed at relieving the cost of children as consumers of goods as
well as in whether they are means-tested – as in Italy, Spain, Portugal and all the former communist Eastern European countries – or whether the amount differs with the rank and/or the age of the child or in particular household cases (e.g. lone parent or disabled children). Given the complexity of these different rules and of their interaction with the taxation system, it is difficult to compare the overall generosity of child-related income transfers. Some systems, in fact, are more generous towards lone-parent households, others towards poor households, others towards households with more than one child, and so forth (Bradshaw 2011; OECD 2014).

Substantial variation exists also in the second set of measures. Statutory in all EU countries and targeted to working parents, both maternity and parental leave differ in (1) who among workers has access to them (exceptions may concern short-term workers, the self-employed as well as all irregular workers); (2) duration, and (3) whether they (particularly parental leave) are paid and with what degree of substitution of lost wages. A further difference concerns whether there are specific incentives for fathers to take up a portion of the parental leave. These incentives are present in all Nordic countries (except Denmark), and in Belgium, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and Portugal. They usually consist in a “take-it-or-leave-it” reserved quota, which however appears to be efficacious only if the level of compensation is substantial: around 60 per cent of lost pay (e.g. UNICEF 2008). In all countries where there is both a reserved quota and an adequate compensation, most fathers take at least part of their quota (see e.g. Grunow and Evertsson 2016). Offering an additional bonus on top of the reserved quota and of a fair compensation, as in Sweden since 2008, in order to encourage equal sharing seems instead of little or no efficacy (Duvander and Johansson 2012). In some countries there is specific fatherhood leave to be taken around the birth of the child, ranging from very few days (one in Italy) to two weeks (in Spain). Cross-EU differences across these dimensions are shown in Figure 38.1.

Where adequately compensated leave is comparatively short and services scarce, as in Italy and other Southern European countries, the proportion of caring time and responsibilities left to the family, de facto mostly to the mother, is high. But this occurs also when leave is long and well compensated, but once they expire (typically after a year), services are not available, as happens in many Eastern European countries.

Leave is considered adequately compensated if parents receive at least 65 per cent of previous earnings or the minimum wage.

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**Figure 38.1** Length of adequately compensated postnatal maternity, paternity and parental leave in the EU (in weeks).

Country-specific notes

**Greece:** Maternity leave includes basic leave (nine weeks after birth) and special leave (26 weeks granted to insured mothers). Civil servants are entitled to 36 weeks of adequately compensated leave in total.

**Hungary:** The information on adequately compensated parental leave concerns only insured parents. The flat rate received by non-insured parents is not considered as adequately compensated leave.

**Czech Republic:** Various options of childcare benefits are available to parents.

**Austria:** Various options of childcare benefits are available to parents. The amount of payments depends on the period of time when parents receive the payments. The information given in Figure 38.1 is based on 80 per cent of earnings.

**Italy:** There is an optional parental leave of ten months, of which each partner may not take more than six months, with an additional month for fathers who take at least three months. But it is compensated only at 30 per cent of pay and only for the first six months.

**Romania:** Two options of financing parental leave/payments of childcare benefits are available to parents: during one or two years. The minimum and maximum amounts of payments differ depending on the period of payments.

**Finland:** The child home care allowance is paid as a flat rate, which does not correspond to the adequately compensated rate of 65 per cent of previous earnings (or minimum wage). However, it may also include a supplement depending on the size and income of the family. Moreover, some local authorities pay municipal supplements. Around 88 per cent of families take advantage of such home care leave which may be taken directly after parental leave.

**Turkey:** The situation described in Figure 38.1 refers only to civil servants.

Important cross-country differences exist, in fact, also in the coverage rate offered by publicly financed services for children under school age and particularly for those under 3. A growing literature has pointed out that early childcare and education is an important means of reducing social inequalities among children in cognitive development (Mahon 2006), an issue that has been taken up by the proponents of the social investment approach to welfare state reform (Esping Andersen 2002). However, while services for children over the age of 3 are generally defined as educational services, in many countries services for the under3s are still defined either as social assistance, or health services, or both (Moss 2010).

Unfortunately, neither OECD nor EU data on coverage distinguish between public (or publicly funded) and market services; thus it is difficult to assess the actual effort by the state in this field, as done, for instance, by Saraceno and Keck (2010) with the Multilinks data that are now rather outdated. According to the most recent European/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat report, which includes data not only on overall coverage, but also on time schedules and fees, as well as on access rules, in 2014, only eight EU countries, Denmark, Germany (from August 2013), Estonia, Malta (from April 2014), Slovenia, Finland, Sweden and Norway, guarantee a legal right to Early Child Care and Education (ECEC) for each child soon after birth, often immediately after the end of childcare leave. Typically, parents are expected to contribute to the cost of provision until the beginning of compulsory education. However, the fees are relatively low and means-tested reductions are offered. In all other countries, the gap between the end of adequately compensated (65 per cent of prior earnings) childcare leave and the legal entitlement to ECEC is more than two years. In around one-third of European education systems (the communities of Belgium, Ireland, Spain, France, Luxembourg, Hungary, Portugal and all parts of the United Kingdom), the legal entitlement to publicly subsidized ECEC starts when children reach the age of 3. Typically, children are entitled to ECEC free of charge. Usually, the
length of free ECEC provision corresponds to a typical school day, except in Ireland and all parts of the United Kingdom, where the free entitlement covers only 10 to 15 hours a week. Given these cross-country differences, it is not surprising that the percentage of children in formal care is not only lower, but also more differentiated cross-country in the 0 to 2 age bracket than in the 3 to school age bracket (Figures 38.2 and 38.3). It is also more differentiated based on the mothers’ education, with children of higher educated mothers attending formal childcare more often than children of lower educated mothers (Bradshaw et al. 2015), although many studies have shown that the former are those who most benefit from ECEC with regard to cognitive development.

Some countries have also developed alternative childcare services, particularly for younger children, such as play groups or home-centred care. Furthermore, in some countries (e.g. in the Netherlands), compulsory school starts at 4 years old.

Childcare services seem to be the area of family policies least affected by austerity measures following the crisis, at least according to the most recent available data (see e.g. OECD 2016, referring to 2014), although in some countries there may have been a slowdown or interruption of the enlargement in coverage and/or a partial devolution to the private sector. A likely reason

![Figure 38.2](image1.png) **Figure 38.2** Proportion of children aged 0 to 2 attending centre-based childcare, 2013.
Source: Bradshaw et al. (2015, fig. 2).

![Figure 38.3](image2.png) **Figure 38.3** Proportion of children aged 3 to school age attending centre-based childcare, 2013.
Source: Bradshaw et al. (2015, fig. 3).
for the relative protection of this sector from welfare retrenchment is its dual role as a means of investing in children and of work–family reconciliation for parents and particularly mothers.

**Policies supporting mothers’ employment**

Whatever the specific national context, policies addressing the caring needs of children increasingly overlap with those addressing a second policy aim, that of supporting mothers’ labour market participation, insofar as they may be framed also (if not prevalently) as “work–family conciliation” policies. The policy goal to increase women’s labour force participation through work–family conciliating policies has multiple grounds. One is the concern for equal opportunities between men and women. Another is to increase the proportion of contributors to the social security system in ageing societies. Still another is that of reducing poverty among lone-mother households and therefore also among children, reducing also their dependency on social assistance. Finally, since the turn of the century, work–family conciliation policies are often argued from the perspective of supporting fertility in the OECD countries, where fertility rates have become positively related to women’s labour force participation rates, although the link with policies is far from being clear and univocal (OECD 2011).

Whether simple participation by women in the labour market may be equated with gender equality or even equal opportunities is debatable and debated. From the point of view of family policies, however, promoting a family model where all adults are (also) in paid work represents a radical shift in the state’s intervention in family and gender arrangements. For a long time, in fact, policies have, directly or indirectly, supported mothers to stay at home, either through supporting the male breadwinner household (e.g. through favourable taxation such as the splitting system in Germany or the family quotient in France or generous tax allowances for a dependent spouse, as well as survivor pensions), or through acknowledging motherhood and mothers’ caring responsibilities as an autonomous entitlement to benefits, particularly in the case of income support for the poor. Even where policies in favour of the male breadwinner were not particularly generous, as in the Southern European countries and the USA, this normative model was the implicit legitimizing ground for not providing services and for considering working mothers as an exception to be treated as such. The innovation is so radical that someone (e.g. Daly 2011) has argued that family policy is becoming de facto mainly labour market policy and that policies have shifted from a “maternalist” (but also wifehood) focus, to considering mothers (and wives) mainly as earners, with or without adequate service support (see also Orloff 2006). Countries, however, differ not only in the degree to which they actively support this model through policies, but also in the radicality with which they try to implement it, particularly in the case of couple households. Thus, in countries such as the Netherlands or Germany, social security protected part-time work (mainly for women) is actively supported as a way of balancing paid work and care, incentivizing a one-and-a-half earner and carer household model rather than a dual-earner one (e.g. Lewis et al. 2008).

Work–care conciliation policies are overall less generous and institutionalized in the non-EU OECD countries, where maternity and parental leave have been introduced later, and are generally shorter and often unpaid. In the developing countries, the presence of a large informal economy sector renders it difficult not only to finance but also to implement a generalized system of leave, since many women do not have formal contracts or pay contributions (Beneria 2008).
Family policies as anti-poverty policies

Contrasting family poverty, particularly when there are children, has been traditionally achieved through a complex system of indirect and indirect income transfers, within which child allowances are an important item but not the only one: housing benefits, tax deductions, targeted benefits constitute a complex package, the value of which may change on the basis not only of the single item, but of their interaction, of the household type and of the overall system of taxation. Furthermore, the value of this package may differ depending on the way it is measured: using the purchasing power parity measure rather than the percentage of average earnings. In 2009, Bradshaw (2011) has shown that using the purchasing power parity measure, Austria, Belgium, Slovenia and Germany had the most generous packages, and Romania, Lithuania and Portugal the least generous packages in 2009. The UK came seventh. When the comparison was made using the percentage of average earnings, Slovenia, Austria and Hungary had the most generous packages, while Spain, the Netherlands and Norway had comparatively low child benefit packages. The UK came fifteenth.

Spending on child- and family-related benefits shrank in absolute terms and as a share of total social protection in 31 European Countries and Turkey during the economic crisis and austerity, including some countries, such as Lithuania, Poland Bulgaria and the United Kingdom, that had increased them in preceding years. Overall, children were less financially protected than by the old austerity measures, although to a varying degree (Chzen, Nolan, Cantillon, Handa 2017). More recently, the means to prevent household poverty has been individuated in increasing the household “work intensity”, i.e. the percentage of actual working time by all working age household members with reference to the potential if they all worked. Low work intensity (a percentage below 20) has even become one of the indicators of “at risk of poverty” in the EU system of social indicators. Although in-work poverty – i.e. living in a household with working adults – is far from uncommon for households with children and in many European Countries and the US has increased during the years of the crisis (Chzen, Nolan, Cantillon, Handa 2017), low work intensity is associated with increased child poverty risks. In 27 out of 31 European Countries, more than half of children living in very low work intensity households were poor in 2014 (Cantillon et al. 2017).

Raising a household’s work intensity means to a large degree increasing women’s, and particularly mothers’, employment, thus further strengthening the focus on work–family conciliation policies. The shift from maternalism to considering mothers as breadwinners is particularly evident in the case of poor lone mothers asking for social assistance. Encouraging mothers to work while subsidizing low-income earners, rather than simply providing income transfers, has become the preferred policy choice in the case of poor lone mothers and generally of poor households since the turn of the century, through the “activation rhetoric”. This approach configures an indirect family policy for the poor, through a mixture of incentives and deterrents (for an overview see OECD 2011). Its extreme form is represented by the 1996 TANF reform in the USA, where it is also explicitly coupled with attempts at “normalizing” the moral behaviour of poor (and often black or Latino) lone mothers, discouraging them from having further children and promoting marriage (see Smith 2006). A similar approach with regard to “making work pay”, or “welfare to work”, stressing the breadwinning responsibilities of poor lone mothers, may be found in the New Labour “new deal for lone mothers” approach in the UK, which has remained in place also with the change of government.

Family policies are being developed as explicit anti-poverty policies in various developing countries, with a specific focus on children (Fiszbein and Schady 2009). In such diverse countries as Mexico, Brazil, Uruguay, South Africa and others, minimum income transfers have been...
introduced for families with children below the poverty line, with the requirement that they attend school and have regular medical check-ups. Mothers, rather than fathers, are the recipients of the benefit as well as the parent held responsible for implementing the required behaviour. This choice has caused a debate on whether it represents an empowerment of women or rather a further crystallization of their role as mothers (e.g. Molineux 2006). Another policy that is proving successful in developing countries in supporting poor households with children is the introduction of an old age pension, insofar as the old are generally embedded in extended, three-generational households and their access to a secure income becomes an asset for all household members, particularly children.

**Policies for the frail old**

Similarly to what happens for children, the ways and extent to which the caring needs of the frail old are addressed by public policies are largely based on implicit or explicit assumptions concerning individual entitlements and family responsibilities (e.g. Saraceno 2010). Policies addressing the needs of the frail old may also therefore be defined as at least indirect family policies.

Three important dimensions of welfare state arrangements are relevant from this perspective. The first is whether support (not related to healthcare) is income-tested or universal. The second is the threshold of dependency above which one is entitled to receive support. The third is how much of the individual need is covered. These dimensions define who is entitled and under which conditions, and what is left to his or her own and family resources. Two other important dimensions of programme design must be added: whether support is offered in kind or in money or via a combination of the two; and, when monetary support is provided, whether there are specific rules as to how it should be spent. These two further dimensions allow for distinguishing between defamilialization via publicly provided services, defamilialization via market services supported by public money, and supported familialism (Saraceno 2010). Figure 38.4 shows the country-specific patterns and levels of coverage of the dependent population.

![Figure 38.4](image_url)

*Figure 38.4* Country-specific rates of long-term care recipients as a percentage of the dependent population, 2009 to 2013.

*Source: European Commission/European Policy Commission (2016, fig. 5.5.1).*
As shown in Figure 38.4, cash-for-care allowances exist in several countries, although under different conditions. In some cases they are meant to substitute services, in others to pay for services of one’s own choice; or, as in the case of Germany, an option may be given between receiving cash or services. Allowances may be more or less generous, flat rate or varying with the degree of dependence. In most countries they are paid to the care-dependent person, but in some (e.g., the United Kingdom) they are paid directly to the family carer. While cash-for-care allowances are relatively widespread, the traditional instrument of supported familialism in the case of childcare – leave for the carers – is also provided in most European countries for caring for a dependent person, but it is far less generous in terms of length and compensation. There is a great heterogeneity with regard to who is entitled, what kind and duration of leave is available and whether it is paid. Generally, however, while short leave of a few days is compensated, long leave tends not to be compensated. Finally, some countries, but in a smaller number than in the case of children, acknowledge spending time caring for a frail old relative through “fictitious contributions” towards the old age pension. Overall, however, spending time to care for a frail old relative, although often expected by the policy design, is acknowledged as a less deserving behaviour than caring for a small child.

Long-term care is increasingly perceived as financially unsustainable for public budgets in a context of demographic ageing. Even in the traditionally more generous countries in this area one can document attempts at shifting back part of the responsibility to families and local communities, while the countries with less developed policies are wary to develop them further, particularly after the crisis (e.g. Pavolini and Ranci 2015; Leon and Pavolini 2014). These trends, however, partially conflict with changes in family arrangements and particularly with the increasing labour force participation of women throughout their adult life course and even with pension reforms that in many countries have raised the pension age. Due to these tensions, strengthened by the largely gendered nature of informal, family care, debates concerning the sustainability of long-term care are increasingly being developed at the crossroads of financial and work–life balance concerns. Long-term care policies, therefore, have become more explicitly framed as a sector of family policies that deal with work–family reconciliation issues (see the recommendation by the Commission of 26 April 2017 concerning the European Pillar of Social Rights). Thus, how to support (female) family carers of working age has become a policy concern.

Conclusions

Goals and instruments of family policies differ over time and across countries. Also the degree to which countries try actively to influence family-linked individual behaviour and family arrangements varies. Furthermore, many policies addressing families are outside the realm of social policies and welfare state arrangements. On the one hand, they concern civil law and the way it regulates what is a family, what relationships create family ties and obligations and what these obligations are. On the other hand, they concern labour market and working time regulations.

With regard to the social policies addressing families, within the EU and OECD countries, the ideal family model implicitly or even explicitly supported seems to have shifted over time from the male breadwinner/female carer to the dual or one-and-a-half-breadwinner/carer family. There has, therefore, been an increase in so-called work–family conciliation policies, also with some timid effort at rebalancing the gender division of unpaid care in the case of small children through a mixture of income transfers and services. The overall policy package, however, varies greatly across countries. This variation is further articulated, both cross- and
intra-nationally, by the policies developed by companies for their own employees, as well as by the activity of social actors such as charities, foundations, NGOs and private insurances. For a long time a marginal field in social policy, due to changing family arrangements, women’s labour market participation and demographic ageing, family policies have actually become an arena where multiple players interact or compete with their own agendas, as well as one where new forms of inequality may arise (e.g. Seeleib-Kaiser et al. 2011).

Most policies address the presence of young children through the combination of financial, time and service transfers. Care for the frail old has only recently emerged as one possible sector of family policies. Kinship ageing, increasing women’s labour force participation and raising the pension age, in fact, suggest an emerging risk of family overburden and caring deficit precisely in this area in the developed countries.

In the developing countries, with their much younger population and high poverty rates, child poverty is the main driver of family policies, which show distinct, and to some degree original characteristics, compared both to the European countries and to the USA.

References


Family policies


