

CHAPTER 6

TRENDS IN POLICIES FOR FAMILY-FRIENDLY SOCIETIES

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Introduction: Geneva, Cairo, and the policy context

The UNECE 1993 European Population Conference and Cairo's 1994 ICPD Programme of Action emphasised the need for actions and policies directed at the promotion of gender equality, the reconciliation of work and family life, the respect and support for a diversity of family structures and composition, and socio-economic support of the family.¹ In particular, the recommendations of the 1993 European Population Conference included:

- The promotion of a more child-friendly and family-friendly environment (Recommendation 3);
- The support of parents in their combination of professional life and parental roles (Recommendation 4);
- The financial support of families, particularly for those with limited resources (Recommendation 5);
- The promotion of equality between men and women, including equal opportunities for employment and equality in family responsibilities (Recommendation 6).²

As to the ICPD Programme of Action, it included references to:

- The adoption of laws, programmes and policies to enable employees of both sexes to harmonise their family and work responsibilities (chapter IV);

- The promotion of equal participation of women and men in all areas of family and household responsibilities, including, among others, responsible parenthood, (...) and shared control in, and contribution to, family income and children's welfare (chapter IV);
- The provision and promotion of means to make participation in the labour force more compatible with parental responsibilities (chapter V);
- The formulation of policies which are sensitive and supportive of the family (chapter V).³

How have countries fared in the promotion of these aims during the past ten years? What has been the place of family and children's issues on the political agendas? And what has been the impact of these policies on families? These questions are at the core of this paper. Through a review of policy initiatives since 1994, this paper aims at assessing the extent to which member states of the UNECE have moved closer to creating a child- and family-friendly society.

The paper is divided in seven sections: after the introduction, the second section reviews the social, demographic and economic context of countries since 1994 and discusses some of the main responses. The next section discusses more specifically some of the policies and initiatives that have been introduced since 1994 and discusses the importance given to family issues by national governments. The following section reviews the trends in financial assistance given to families since 1994 and the fifth section reviews the trends in state support for working parents. The sixth section reviews empirical evidence regarding the effects of these policies. The final, concluding section includes speculations on future trends in state support for families.

At this point it is important to stress that reviewing the efforts of countries in the field of state support for

¹ Some of these recommendations were also included in subsequent documents; among others the 1998 UNECE Conclusions of the Regional Population Meeting, the 1999 UN review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the ICPD, and the 2002 UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing.

² Adapted from the UNECE, European Population Conference Recommendations, March 1993: <http://www.unece.org/ead/pau/epc.htm>.

³ Adapted from the ICPD Programme of Action: <http://www.unfpa.org/icpd/summary.htm>.

families is a daunting task - and this, for two main reasons. First, there is no systematic monitoring and reporting of state measures to support families.⁴ The information and data reported in this paper were compiled from various sources: the result of several weeks of work. As a result, the paper is relatively complete when it comes to cash support for families and support for working parents. However, the paper fails to capture the total level of state support for families, as it omits key areas such as health, education, family law and housing, which would have been impossible to include in a summary paper and for which cross-nationally comparable data is limited. Policies in the field of pensions, employment/unemployment, social assistance, transport, agriculture, etc. are also excluded, even though they may possibly have an impact on partnerships, childbearing and parenting. Second, support from national governments is not the only external source of support for families: state, provincial, regional or local governments may also be key players. These are, however, not covered in this paper, as we focus strictly on national-level support.

An overview of the social, demographic and economic contexts and the policy responses

Member states of the UNECE have been facing very different economic contexts in the past ten years: contexts that have constrained in some cases the ability of governments to support families, and contexts that have also called for a reordering of governmental priorities. For this reason, any attempt at generalising trends across member states is bound to distort the specificities of national realities. One common point, however, has been the competing demands for public money stemming from declining revenues and population ageing. The sectors of pensions, family policy, unemployment, health, education and social assistance have all been competing for public finance. The policy response to this situation has varied across countries:

- Some countries have preserved their level of support for families;
- Some countries have maintained some support for families but have targeted it to families in greatest need;
- Some countries have been forced to reduce their level of support for families, especially with regard to cash transfers to families.

⁴ There are obviously some comparative sources of data that include description of various programmes for families with children but these sources are not complete and oftentimes do not distinguish the programmes by type of recipients. This is for example the case for housing benefits. Moreover, there are no sources that systematically report development in family policies.

Norway illustrates well the first of these responses. Despite the fluctuations of the economy during the past ten years, the Norwegian government has maintained its level of support for families. For example, expenditures on family cash benefits remained relatively constant throughout the 1990s (OECD, 2004). Other countries also seem to have been able to preserve their support for families despite competing demands. For instance, the analysis by Gornick (2001) on patterns of social expenditure in 14 western countries suggest that - on average - countries have increased their spending on family cash transfers per child throughout the 1980-1995 period.^{5,6} The increase in cash transfers to families has not been as large as that on old-age spending per elderly person, but nonetheless it reflects a commitment of governments to state support for families.^{7,8}

In some countries, governments have maintained their support for families but have substantially changed its nature by targeting it to families in greatest need. While in the 1980s family allowance programmes were universal in most countries, a large number of countries have since subjected these programmes to means-testing. Canada did so in 1992, Italy in 1988, Kazakhstan in 2001, Kyrgyzstan in 1999, Lithuania in 2000, Malta in 1996, the Russian Federation in 1995, Slovakia in 1994, Spain in 1994 and Turkmenistan in 1998. This radical change in the nature of state support for families has been a response to budgetary constraints, but has also been a response to the problem of child poverty. The success of this policy change is, however, unclear, especially since the family allowance rates in several countries are too low to lift families out of poverty. For example, estimates from Hungary suggest that more than a quarter of households who receive social transfers remain below the poverty line (Allison and Grooteiot, 1996).

Finally, some countries have been forced to reduce public expenditure in key areas such as cash transfers to families, education and health. This was especially the case in Eastern and Central Europe in the years immediately following the end of the socialist regime. For example, child allowances in Romania, which had the largest governmental cash transfer programme, declined from nearly 3 per cent of GDP in 1989 to less than 1 per cent in 1994 (World Bank, 1997). The impact has been considerable on families, resulting in rising levels of poverty. There are, however, signs that the

⁵ Since then the OECD has released the data for 1997. However, more recent data is not available.

⁶ The 14 countries were: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.

⁷ Data for Germany, Italy and the Netherlands, however, revealed a decrease in family cash spending per child during the 1980-1995 period.

⁸ This increase in state support for families is significant as it suggests that population ageing may not necessarily translate into declining support for families as was suggested by Preston (1984).

situation has since improved - at least in some countries. For example, in the Slovak Republic state expenditure on child allowances amounted to around \$370-400 million per year in the 1982-1990 period. It then decreased sharply to \$175 million per year in 1993, but has since increased steadily to reach around \$350 million in 1998 (Bednàrik, 1998).

In summary, the economic climate of the 1990s has prevented countries from vastly expanding their support for families. Instead it has forced countries to either maintain (but not expand) their support, or even to substantially reduce it. In some countries the result has been an increasing gap between what the public demands in terms of state support for families, and what they are actually getting: a situation summarised in Estonia as a 'conflict between expectations and the actual policy' (Estonian Human Development Report, 2002).

Competing demands for public money have also resulted in a shift away from state support for families. Although fertility is now below replacement in nearly all UNECE member states, no active pronatalist policies have been pursued in recent years. Instead, during the past ten years the key priorities of governments have been to (1) combat child poverty, and (2) reconcile work and family responsibilities. These two priorities are discussed further below. But first, I reflect on other family-related initiatives launched by national governments since 1994 and which reflect the importance attached to family issues.

Types and levels of state support for families across the UNECE region

Very few countries have an explicit family policy. All countries have policies and infrastructure in place to support families, but in most cases these policies are not part of a comprehensive family policy or a comprehensive strategy to support families.⁹ In this section, I review various initiatives launched by national governments since 1994 as a way of capturing the political importance attached to family issues, and as a way of illustrating the priorities and directions of state support for families in UNECE member states. More detailed information regarding financial support for families and support for working parents will be provided in the subsequent sections.

Since 1994, most governments have launched initiatives related to families: these initiatives have been

varied, and range from the setting-up of a parliamentary or ministerial commission to study families, to the adoption of new policies. Generally speaking, they fall into three main categories: (1) Adoption of a family policy or creation of administrative or political institutions for families; (2) Actions related to gender equality and work-family reconciliation; and (3) Actions related to children, including children's rights and early childhood education.

Family policy or new institutions for families

Since 1994, only two countries have adopted a new family policy - Slovakia and Spain - and a third one, Norway, has produced a white paper on family policy (in 2003). The scope of these policies is wide. In the case of Spain, the policy, adopted in 2003, covers tax and housing policies, family law, social and cultural participation, and policies relating to balancing work and family life.¹⁰ It is a 3-year initiative that was in part motivated by the country's very low fertility rate: this was perceived to be the result of the absence of a coherent family policy and the result of the country's low support for families, especially working mothers.

Slovakia's 'Strategy of State Family Policy', adopted in 1996, was also partly motivated by the country's demographic situation. However, as with the Spanish one, it goes beyond the demographic dimension and covers other aspects - in this case human rights, the rights of parents to decide on the number and spacing of their children, children's education and support for young people (Magvasi, 1999).

If very few countries have adopted a comprehensive family policy during the past ten years, several countries have, on the other hand, created specific institutions for the family or the child. Examples of such initiatives include: a National Council for Children (in Denmark); a Ministry for the Child and the Family (in France); a Family Council (in Iceland); an Ombudsman for Children (in Iceland); a Standing Committee on Family Affairs (in Italy); a High Commissioner for the Promotion of Equality and the Family (in Portugal); and a Ministerial Group on the Family (in the United Kingdom). And while the impact of these initiatives is bound to vary, depending on their mandate, power and budget, the impetus for their setting up reflects the fact that some level of attention has been paid to the family by their national governments since 1994.

Actions related to gender equality and work-family reconciliation

Of all the family-related initiatives launched since 1994, the areas that appear to have received the highest

⁹ Historically, France was the only Western European country with an explicit and comprehensive family policy (Gauthier, 1996b). In contrast, numerous Central and Eastern European countries had such a policy throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Since the fall of the socialist regime, however, the family policies in Central and Eastern European countries have been mainly dismantled. It should also be noted that some provincial and regional governments may have in place a family policy, such as the Province of Québec in Canada, but these policies are not covered in this paper.

¹⁰ Information from The Clearinghouse on International Developments in Child, Youth and Family Policies (Columbia University, 2003).

level of priority are that of gender equality and work-family reconciliation. This may not be surprising considering the visibility given to these areas in international events such as the 1994 Cairo conference and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Initiatives in these areas were also prompted by the adoption of specific recommendations by the European Union (more details in later section). The country-specific initiatives are again varied and include, for example, the adoption of the following: a National Plan for Equality (in Portugal); a National Plan for Employment - Reconciling of Family and Working Life (in Spain); and a Special Ban on Discriminating Against Workers on Parental Leave (in Sweden). What these various initiatives reflect is the recognition that working parents require special support, and that in the absence of such support, gender equality cannot be achieved. As will be seen in the later discussion, since 1994 numerous countries have improved their provision regarding maternity leave and have adopted new parental leave schemes.

Actions related to children including children's rights and early childhood education

Ever since the adoption of the 1989 Declaration on the Rights of the Child, the issue of children's rights has continued to receive the attention of governments and to lead to the adoption of specific policies and initiatives. The setting up of the National Council for Children in Denmark in 1997 and the appointment of an Ombudsman for Children in Iceland in 1994 are good examples.

During the past ten years, numerous initiatives related to early childhood education have also been launched. This includes the adoption of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Early Childhood Development Agreement in Canada in 2000 and the adoption of a Government Resolution concerning the National Policy Definition on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland in 2002. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine in detail the many specific initiatives related to early childhood education. Interested readers are referred to the OECD Early Childhood Education and Care Initiative,¹¹ the Early Child Development initiative of the World Bank¹² as well as various UNICEF and UNESCO documents. What is, however, important to mention here is that the emphasis on children and early childhood education has dominated the agenda of some countries and has eclipsed other family issues. For example, the Canadian government has never adopted an explicit family policy and has no nationwide policy on childcare. However, the adoption

of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Early Childhood Development Agreement in 2000 has rallied the different political parties and has laid the grounds for initiatives related to children's education and children's development.

Trends in financial assistance to families since 1994

I have already referred to the financial constraints that have forced some countries to curb their cash support for families and/or to impose means-tests. As of 2002, family allowance schemes were means-tested in 20 countries as compared to about half that number in 1993. As to the actual level of cash support, programmes are difficult to compare because of cross-national differences in eligibility conditions, family allowance rates and cost of living. Nonetheless, data on expenditure on family cash benefits as a percentage of GDP reveals large cross-national differences between the OECD countries, from a minimum of 0.22 per cent in the United States to a maximum of 2.40 per cent in Luxembourg (in 1998).

Data on different indicators of family cash benefits are reported in table 1. Data on family cash benefit expenditure as a percentage of GDP reveal a general decline between 1993 and 1998 (latest year available). Only in Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain, Switzerland and Turkey were increases observed. However, the general downward trend in family cash benefit expenditure could well reflect a decline in the number of children. As discussed earlier, analyses on family cash expenditure expressed per child, in selected OECD countries for the period 1980-1995, had instead revealed an increase (Gornick, 2001). The alternative indicator reported in table 1 expresses cash support for 2-child families as a percentage of the disposable income of single earners. According to this indicator, cash support for families increased in about half the countries between 1990 and 1999.

When looking at these indicators, one should not lose sight of the fact that for Central and Eastern European countries, the changes in cash support for families took place in the context of major economic challenges which resulted in rising family poverty and which also radically changed the funding of key services to families, including health care and childcare facilities. A more accurate assessment of trends in cash support for families would, therefore, require one to also consider other forms of cash and in-kind support for families, including social assistance (which is not formally part of family allowance schemes in several countries). In the absence of such data, one can indirectly assess the trends in state support for families, and in the economy, by looking at trends in infant mortality rates. Between 1989 and 1993, infant mortality rates stagnated or even increased in nearly a dozen Central and Eastern European countries. And while the situation improved during the

¹¹ OECD (2003) and OECD early childhood education website: http://www.oecd.org/linklist/0,2678,en_2649_34511_2735951_1_1_1_1,00.html

¹² World Bank (2003) <http://www.worldbank.org/children/>

TABLE 1

Indicators of cash benefits, selected countries and years

	<i>Family cash benefits expenditures as a per cent of GDP 1993</i>	<i>Family cash benefits expenditures as a per cent of GDP 1998</i>	<i>Cash support for families as a per cent of disposable income 1990</i>	<i>Cash support for families as a per cent of disposable income 1999</i>
Austria	2.48	1.92	23.6	26.5
Belgium	2.17	2.06	39.1	36.5
Canada	0.82	0.76	15.0	14.4
Czech Republic	2.13	1.61	..	..
Denmark	1.80	1.54	26.3	24.3
Finland	2.91	1.92	20.8	14.7
France	2.19	1.46	19.2	17.6
Germany	1.23	1.93	21.2	36.5
Greece	1.27	1.18	18.8	19.9
Iceland	1.50	1.23	..	..
Ireland	1.72	1.58	17.1	18.3
Italy	0.46	0.58	14.5	19.3
Luxembourg	2.25	2.40	34.1	36.5
Netherlands	1.10	0.81	16.5	18.3
Norway.....	2.35	2.23	25.7	17.7
Poland	1.59	0.93	..	..
Portugal	0.67	0.65	12.0	11.2
Slovakia	2.50	2.10	..	..
Spain	0.25	0.29	6.5	11.3
Sweden	2.26	1.63	15.0	12.4
Switzerland	1.16	1.20	14.1	17.1
Turkey	0.47	0.91	..	..
United Kingdom	1.88	1.73	12.7	10.8
United States	0.30	0.22	9.7	14.5

Source: Data on cash expenditures from the online OECD database (<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/43/14/2087083.xls>). Data on cash support for families: Author's own computation from published OECD data (for details see Gauthier's family policy database: http://www.soci.ucalgary.ca/fypp/family_policy_databases.htm)

subsequent years, infant mortality rates in several Central and Eastern European countries are still above the average observed in Western European countries (UNICEF, 2003).

As we can see, the trends in financial support for families during the past ten years have been mixed. On the one hand, and despite competing demands, especially from population ageing, many countries have maintained or even increased their financial support for families. In some cases however, this trend has been accompanied by a targeting of support to families in greatest need through means-tests. On the other hand, it is clear that financial support for families was badly affected in Central and Eastern Europe in the years immediately following the collapse of the socialist regimes. Since then, state support for families has been gradually restored but its expansion has been limited by financial constraints and other competing demands, especially child and family poverty.

Trends in state support to working parents since 1994

In spite of the economic constraints discussed already, state support for working parents has expanded in several countries since 1994. Below, I briefly review

the factors that have been driving the increase in state support for working parents. I also review the trends in the actual state support for working parents, and assess the extent to which the current provisions meet some of the international recommendations.

The driving forces

Two main factors appear to have driven the trend towards increased state support for working parents: (1) the continuous increase in female labour force participation, including women with young children, and (2) the call for gender equality.

The increase in female labour force participation is obviously not a new phenomenon and has been observed since the 1960s in most countries. It was, in fact, one of the key impetuses behind the introduction of Sweden's first maternity leave programme and subsequently its parental leave programme in 1974 (Gauthier, 1996b). In Central and Eastern Europe, female labour force participation has been traditionally higher than in the west. Under the socialist system, women were encouraged to be part of the labour force in order to contribute to the economy (especially in the post-war period), and also as a way of bringing greater gender equality (which was a central tenet of the socialist regime). But women in these socialist societies were also

crucial to the demographic reproduction of these countries, and numerous programmes were therefore put in place in the immediate post-war period as a way of allowing women to combine their dual role of mothers and workers (Klinger, 1985).

In more recent times, female labour force participation in the west has continued its increase. This has been particularly noticeable in countries such as the Netherlands and Luxembourg, where female labour force participation had been below the average of other western countries until recently. This increase in the participation of women in the labour force has undoubtedly contributed to the political importance attached to the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities (see below).

The second driving force has been the call for gender equality, especially in the context of increasing female labour force participation. While in the 1970s the issue of gender equality was mainly focused on equality in employment opportunities and in pay, in the 1990s it was focused on the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities. The European Commission and the European Union have been very active in this field in recent years through the adoption of several key policies including:

- The 1992 Council Recommendation on childcare
- The 1996 Council Directive on the framework agreement on parental leave
- The 1998 Employment Guidelines, Council Resolution (which includes a section on “reconciling work and family life”)

The 2000 ‘Resolution of the Council and of the Ministers for Employment and Social Policy on the balanced participation of women and men in family and working life’.

And while not all these policies have binding powers, they nevertheless reflect the importance attached to the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities by the European Union. In fact, several of the parental leave programmes adopted in recent years by EU member states were in direct response to these policies (these programmes are discussed in more detail below).

State support for working parents

State support for working parents covers a wide range of programmes. Below, I review the trends with regard to maternity leave, parental leave and childcare provision.¹³

¹³ There is no unanimity in the literature regarding the definition of these programmes. Maternity leave normally refers to the leave granted to mothers immediately before and after childbirth. In some countries this leave is also called parental leave to reflect the fact that fathers are

Maternity leave

In 2000, the International Labour Office adopted the Maternity Protection Convention (C183) which stipulates that maternity leave of no less than 14 weeks should be provided, with cash benefits that provide a suitable standard of living. As of 2002, all countries except Azerbaijan, Israel, Turkey and the United States had complied with the ILO recommendation in terms of the duration of the leave. Azerbaijan provides 10 weeks of leave, Israel and Turkey provide 12 weeks of leave, and the United States provides 12 weeks of unpaid leave (though only to employees in firms with 50 or more workers).

In 2000, the International Labour Office also adopted the Maternity Protection Recommendation (R191), which raised the bar beyond that of its sister Convention. In particular, the Recommendation stipulated a minimum duration of maternity leave of 18 weeks, with cash benefits equal to 100 per cent of previous earnings. Several UNECE member states have provisions which exceed those contained in this ILO recommendation, including Estonia, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. As such, these former socialist countries extend a long tradition of state support for working women introduced at the time of the Second World War (Hecht, 1986).

In table 2 below, provisions regarding maternity/parental leave are classified depending on the duration of the leave and the cash benefits received during this period. Note that, unless indicated otherwise, the table refers to the maternity/parental leave provision and does not include provision regarding additional childcare leave, which will be discussed later. Note also that the table does not take into account the eligibility and coverage of programmes. We know that in some countries a non-negligible proportion of women who are employed while being pregnant do not qualify for maternity leave benefits. Unfortunately information on the take-up rate and coverage is not available for all countries, and is not included in the table.

As can be seen in table 2, the majority of countries complied with or exceeded the entitlements proposed by the ILO Convention. This is not, in fact, surprising considering that the ILO adopted its first Maternity Convention back in 1919, with a revised one in 1952 - thus it has for a long time been promoting the adoption of measures to support working mothers.¹⁴ What is, however, important to remember is that despite the

also eligible to it. The duration of this leave is usually 3 to 4 months although it is longer in some countries. In contrast, parental or childcare leave usually refers to additional leave granted until the child is 1, 2 or 3 years old. In some countries this leave is unpaid or is paid at a lower rate than maternity leave.

¹⁴ These earlier conventions were, however, more concerned with protecting the health of mothers and infants than promoting gender equality.

TABLE 2
 Classification of countries according to the duration of the maternity/parental leave
 and cash benefits paid during the leave

	<i>Cash benefits equal to 80 per cent of earnings or more</i>	<i>Cash benefits equal to 50-79 per cent of earnings or more</i>	<i>Cash benefits equal to less than 50 per cent of earnings</i>
Duration of leave 18 weeks or more	Armenia Belarus Bulgaria Estonia* Iceland Italy Kyrgyzstan* Liechtenstein Norway Moldova* Portugal* Romania Russian Federation* San Marino* Slovakia Sweden Ukraine* Uzbekistan*	Albania Canada Czech Republic Denmark Finland Hungary Ireland United Kingdom	Finland
Duration of leave between 14 and 17 weeks	Andorra Austria* France* Georgia* Germany* Latvia* Luxembourg* Monaco Netherlands* Poland* Slovenia* Spain* Turkmenistan*	Belgium Cyprus Greece Malta Switzerland	
Duration of leave below 14 weeks	Azerbaijan Israel*	Turkey	United States

Source: Compiled by the author from information contained in the publication *Social Security Programs throughout the World*.

Notes: * Denotes cash benefits equal to 100 per cent of earnings.

economic constraints that have affected many countries since the beginning of the 1990s, most countries still meet minimum standards when it comes to maternity leave.

Parental/childcare leave

The ILO Maternity Protection Recommendation referred to above also recommends the adoption of parental leave to extend the period during which the mother or father can stay at home to look after their young child.¹⁵ As mentioned above, the European Union has also given its support to the adoption of parental leave through its 1996 Council Directive on the

framework agreement on parental leave. In 1993, about one third of UNECE member states had already put in place a parental or childcare leave programme. By 2002, this was the case in half of them. Table 3 below classifies countries according to the nature of their parental leave, its duration and cash benefits.

The introduction of parental leave schemes in a large number of countries did not take place in a vacuum. In particular, it may be explained by three factors. First, it is obvious that the recommendations and directives adopted by various international organisations and supra-national governments laid the groundwork for such programmes. For example, the European Union Directive on parental leave had an undeniable impact on the introduction of parental leave in countries that did not previously have any such provisions. Secondly, and very importantly, the introduction of parental leave also responded to a demand from parents. For example,

¹⁵ The article states that "The employed mother or the employed father of the child should be entitled to parental leave during a period following the expiry of maternity leave" (ILO, R191).

TABLE 3

Childcare/parental leave provision regarding the first child^a

Paid leave of more than 2 years	
Austria	France
Azerbaijan	Germany
Czech Republic	Hungary
Estonia	Slovakia
Finland	
Paid leave of 1 to 2 years	
Albania [*]	Poland
Armenia	Romania
Bulgaria	Serbia
Croatia	Sweden [*]
Denmark	Switzerland
Kyrgyzstan	Ukraine
Lithuania	Uzbekistan
Norway	
Paid leave below 1 year	
Canada	San Marino
Italy	Slovenia
Luxembourg	
Unpaid leave	
Belgium	Netherlands
Georgia	Portugal
Greece	Spain
Ireland	United Kingdom
Israel	
No provision for leave	
Andorra	Malta
Belarus	Moldova
Cyprus	Monaco
Kazakhstan	Switzerland
Latvia	Turkey
Liechtenstein	United States

Source: Compiled by the author from information contained in the publication *Social Security Programmes throughout the World* as well as country-specific information from various sources.

Notes: * This provision corresponds to the maternity/parental leave one.

^a In some countries, more extensive provision is available for higher-order births.

results from the Eurobarometer survey of 1993 indicated that 22 per cent of respondents across the European Community identified parental leave as a high priority for policy (Malpas and Lambert, 1993). Furthermore, numerous studies on children's development have indicated the positive impact of parental presence at home during the first year of a child's life (Ruhm, 2004).¹⁶ Thirdly, the apparent popularity of parental leave programmes among governments has also been a response to the increase in female labour force participation and has been seen as a way of reducing the demand for childcare. For example, the OECD report on

early childhood education and care policy for the Czech Republic states that 'the political changes after 1989, particularly the introduction of an extended period of maternity leave, drastically reduced the demand for public childcare outside the home' (OECD, 2000). Similarly, Germany's extended parental leave has often been viewed as a response (or justification) for its very limited childcare provision (Gauthier, 1996b).

What should not, however, be forgotten is that extended parental leave often carries a heavy opportunity cost for parents, not only in terms of foregone earnings, but also in terms of degradation of human capital and missed opportunities for promotion. For these reasons, the take-up rate for these programmes is not 100 per cent. For example, data from Germany show that although more than 90 per cent of parents who were employed prior to childbirth took some parental leave, only about two-thirds of mothers intended to use the full three years of parental leave (Pettinger, 1999). Data also suggest that the take-up rate may vary with income and profession. For example, data from Finland reveal that 72 per cent of blue-collar fathers took paternity leave in 1997, as opposed to 56 per cent of fathers in a managerial position (Samli and Lammi-Taskula, 1999).

The gender dimension of state support for working parents

As mentioned earlier, the introduction and extension of state support for working parents were a response to the increase in female labour force participation and the ongoing call for gender equality. When it comes to state support for working parents, gender equality is in fact a tricky issue. On the one hand, while maternity and extensive parental leave programmes were initially introduced as a way of allowing women to combine work and family responsibilities, the emphasis has gradually shifted away from working mothers towards the promotion of gender equality in the division of both paid and unpaid work. This shift in emphasis is well illustrated by the change of name of one of the ILO's initiatives. While in 1965 the ILO was adopting the 'Recommendation on Female Workers with Family Responsibilities', in 1981 it was working on the 'Convention on Workers with Family Responsibilities' - thus dropping the reference to female workers.

On the other hand, the reality is that parental and childcare leave programmes have been mainly taken up by women, and have thus contributed to the further widening of the gap between men and women in their division of paid and unpaid work. There is no systematic data on take-up rates by gender, but data from Sweden suggest that in the late 1990s only one third of fathers took parental leave, and that fathers accounted for only 10 per cent of all days taken (Haas and Hwang, 1999). The situation is even less equal, from a gender perspective, in Germany where the proportion of leave-takers among fathers is less than two per cent (Rost,

¹⁶ These studies, however, also suggest that parental presence at home may be less important during subsequent years. In fact, a large number of studies have shown a positive impact of the mother's employment on a child's development (Parcel and Menaghan, 1994).

1999). The reasons given by fathers for not participating in parental leave schemes are numerous, but generally they fall into four main categories, according to a study carried out in Germany (Rost, 1999: p. 255): (1) profession-related reasons (e.g. "I do not want to miss professional opportunities"); (2) attitudinal reasons (e.g. "I could not imagine staying at home"); (3) workplace-related reasons (e.g. "I was worried about the reaction of managers and colleagues"); and (4) financial reasons (e.g. "the allowance would not have been enough to compensate for lost income").

As a reaction to this situation, some countries have started to introduce additional paternity leave and/or have earmarked part of the parental/childcare leave to fathers (which is non-transferable). Earmarking was the strategy adopted by the Norwegian government in 1993 when four of the 52 weeks of parental leave became reserved for the father. This is an individual entitlement that cannot be transferred to the mother (Leira, 1999). This so-called 'father's quota' has been a success: while only about 2 to 3 per cent of Norwegian fathers shared parental leave with the mother before its introduction, close to 70 per cent of fathers have claimed the father's quota since (Leira, 1999). Other examples of such attempts at bringing more gender equality into the sharing of parental responsibilities appear in table 4. In general, Western European countries have been moving faster in this direction than other countries. Very likely, this is an issue that will be attracting more attention in the years to come.

Childcare and early childhood education programmes

Finally, another policy response to the increase in female labour force participation and the call for gender equality has been the provision of childcare and early education programmes. Under their former socialist regimes, countries of Central and Eastern Europe had in place an extensive system of public childcare and early childhood programmes. The fall of these regimes drastically affected these provisions. For example, in Armenia the percentage of 3-6 year olds in pre-primary school programmes declined from 49 per cent in 1989 to 25 per cent in 2001. In Lithuania, the decline was from 54 per cent in 1989 to 40 per cent in 1993. Since then, however, the figure has increased again and reached 66 per cent in 2001 (see table 5). The percentage of children enrolled in pre-primary school programmes has in fact increased in several Central and Eastern European countries since 1993; a reflection of the improvement in the countries' financial situation, and in some case a reflection of a shift to privately owned or church-operated programmes.

In other countries of the UNECE, the provision of childcare and early childhood education programmes has always varied widely, ranging from very minimal provisions to very extensive ones. Since the 1990s, these

TABLE 4

The gender dimension in parental/childcare leave programmes in selected countries as of 2002^a

	<i>Paid leave</i>	<i>Unpaid leave</i>
Father's quota or individual entitlement.....	Belgium	Greece
	Denmark	Ireland
	Luxembourg	Netherlands
	Norway	Portugal
	Sweden	Spain
		United Kingdom
Both parents are eligible	Austria ^b	..
	Finland ^c	
	France	
	Germany	
	Italy ^d	
Only the mother is eligible .....	..	..

Source: Compiled by the author from information contained in the publication *Social Security Programmes throughout the World*, in Moss and Deven (1999), as well as country-specific information from various sources.

Notes:

^a Note that this information is not available for all countries.

^b If the father shares some of the leave, the duration of the leave is extended from 18 months to 24 months.

^c As of 2003, fathers are allowed to an additional two weeks of paternity leave, if they also use the last two weeks of the parental allowance period.

^d If the father takes at least 3 months of leave, the duration of the leave is extended from 10 months to 11 months.

inter-country variations have been maintained. Several countries have increased their provision of childcare and early childhood education, but the increases have often been limited by severe budget constraints as well as political reservations concerning the role of the state in the provision of childcare.

The effects of state support for families

As discussed throughout this paper, state support for families encompasses a wide range of measures as well as different objectives. In this section, I review the literature regarding the effects of different policies on (1) child and family poverty; (2) work-family reconciliation and gender equality; and (3) fertility.

Effects on child and family poverty

Are the current cash transfer schemes effective in tackling child and family poverty? Empirical data show that in some countries the current systems of cash transfers to families are indeed significantly reducing child poverty. For example, the child poverty rate - pre-tax and pre-cash transfers - in Poland in the 1990s was estimated to be around 44 per cent. After tax and transfers, it was only 15 per cent (poverty being defined here as the percentage of children living in households with income below 50 per cent of the national median) (UNICEF, 2000). The comparable figures for Hungary are 38 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. A study on

TABLE 5

Provision of early childhood education expressed as the gross enrolment rate^a and characteristics of the public early childhood education

Country	1989	1993	2001
Albania	42.5	27.8	43.0
Armenia	48.5	29.1	24.6
Austria	70.3	74.7	83.0
Azerbaijan	21.6	16.2	24.0
Belarus	63.2	61.5	68.9
Belgium ^b	104.2	116.2	113.0
Bosnia and Herzegovina	..	..	8.7
Bulgaria	66.7	59.7	73.6
Canada	61.3	61.9	64.0
Croatia	29.4	26.1	42.4
Cyprus	57.0 ^c	63.0	60.0
Czech Republic ^d	81.3	76.7	86.6
Denmark ^e	96.5	84.0	90.0
Estonia	62.2	59.9	80.3
Finland ^f	33.4	36.7	54.0
France	83.4	83.9	114.0
Georgia	43.6	19.0	30.2
Germany	..	88.8	103.0
Greece	56.4	60.2	72.0
Hungary	85.7	86.2	86.4
Iceland	49.0 ^g	48.0	109.0
Ireland	100.6	105.4	..
Israel	83.0 ^h	81.0	113.0
Italy ⁱ	92.4	95.7	96.0
Kazakhstan	53.1	31.6	13.9
Kyrgyzstan	31.3	8.8	9.0
Latvia	53.9	40.1	65.6
Lithuania	61.0	33.3	52.6
Luxembourg	90.1	98.7	119.0
Malta	105.0 ^j	115.0	100.0
Netherlands ^k	98.3	97.4	97.0
Norway ^l	83.1	93.7	79.0
Poland	48.7	44.3	50.4
Portugal ^m	36.1	57.5	70.0
Republic of Moldova	61.2	37.0	40.8
Romania	61.6	57.4	67.7
Russian Federation	73.4	62.8	66.4
Serbia and Montenegro	24.1	24.6	44.0
Slovakia	77.9	61.2	69.5
Slovenia	56.3	62.8	68.3
Spain	57.1	69.9	102.0
Sweden ⁿ	64.4	65.5	75.0
Switzerland	59.6	92.5	..
Tajikistan	16.0	9.4	5.9
FYR Macedonia	24.2	23.5	28.5
Turkey	5.0 ^o	6.0	6.0
Turkmenistan	33.5	28.3	21.4
Ukraine	64.2	54.5	43.9
United Kingdom ^p	51.4	27.8	81.0
United States ^q	58.7	67.0	61.0
Uzbekistan	36.8	26.1	19.4

Source: Data is from UNESCO's website, the *UNESCO 1997 Statistical Yearbook*, and *UN (2001)*.

Notes:

^a Defined as the number of pupils enrolled in the given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the relevant official age-group (see information below on the characteristics of the programmes). This rate can exceed 100 per cent in some countries. This also means that the data is not fully comparable across countries because the intake corresponds to children of different ages. The emphasis here is on the historical trends, and not so much on the cross-national differences in the provision of early childhood education.

Information on the characteristics of the early childhood education programmes is not available in all countries. The information reported below is drawn from UN (2001).

^b Free for children 2½-5 years old (85 per cent coverage at age 2½ and almost 100 per cent at ages 3-4).

^c Data is for 1990.

^d Free for children 3-6 years old (66.5 per cent of children enter public fee-paying, full-day pre-school at 3 years reaching 98 per cent at 5-6 years old).

^e For children 5-7 years old (98 per cent of children of 5-7 years old are enrolled in free pre-school class. At the age of 4, 89 per cent of children are enrolled in kindergartens or age-integrated centres).

^f Free for children 6 years old (78 per cent of children of this age attend pre-school class. Among 3-6 year olds around 68 per cent are enrolled in childcare centres, and among those aged 1-3 about 24 per cent are in early children education centres).

^g Data is for 1990.

^h Data is for 1990.

ⁱ For children 3-6 years old (70-90 per cent of children attend pre-school from the age of 3, reaching over 96 per cent at age 5-6).

^j Data is for 1990.

^k For children 4-6 years old.

^l For children 3-6 years old (48 per cent of children aged 1-4 years old are enrolled in some child care centre, and 80 per cent of 4-6 years old are enrolled in kindergartens).

^m For children 3-6 years old (60 per cent enrolment in pre-school for children 3-4; 75 per cent for children 4-5; and 90 per cent for children 5-6 years old).

ⁿ For children 6-7 years old (91 per cent of children of that age attend pre-school; 64 per cent of children aged 1-6 attend a full-day pre-school).

^o Data is for 1990.

^p For children 3-5 years old (59 per cent of children 3-4 are enrolled in early education centres).

^q For children 4-6 years old (more than 60 per cent of 4-year olds are enrolled in nursery schools, and 90 per cent of 5-year olds are enrolled in kindergartens).

the impact of cash transfers on child poverty in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland confirmed that social transfers in general, and family benefits in particular, did indeed contribute significantly to reducing child poverty in these three countries (Forster and Toth, 2001).

On the other hand, child poverty remains high in several countries even after cash transfers. Among the countries for which the data are available, child poverty was equal to or above 20 per cent in Italy, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States (UNICEF, 2000). What this means is that although countries have been paying attention to Recommendation 5 of the European Population Conference regarding the provision of financial support for families - particularly for those with limited resources - several countries still fall short of eradicating child poverty and of ensuring an adequate standard of living for all families with children.

Effects on work-family reconciliation and gender equality

Are the current maternity, parental and childcare leave programmes effective in helping families reconcile work and family responsibilities? And are they effective

in promoting gender equality? As already discussed, maternity, parental and childcare programmes tend to receive wide support in public opinion surveys. They are also effective in that they allow parents to temporarily withdraw from the labour market in order to care for their newborn, and to resume work when their children are older.¹⁷ However, parents on leave face discontinuity in their careers, although the opportunity cost of such discontinuities is partly compensated by job security and cash benefits. As discussed before, countries still vary enormously in their provision of maternity, parental and childcare leave programmes, both in terms of their duration and cash benefits. In particular, some countries still do not meet all the standards proposed by the International Labour Office.

If they are effective in allowing parents to combine work and family responsibilities, these programmes do not, however, have the same impact on men and women. As discussed earlier, mothers are usually the ones who take leave. They are the ones who have to face career discontinuities and they are the ones who assume the role of primary caregivers. Several countries have started to tackle this issue by introducing fathers' quotas (non-transferable leave). The empirical evidence suggests that such programmes have been effective so far - obviously not in bringing complete equality in the sharing of childcare responsibilities, but in encouraging fathers to take at least some time off work to look after their children. In other words, countries have been moving closer to supporting parents in their combination of professional life and parental roles (Recommendation 4 of the European Population Conference), and to bringing equality between men and women, including equal opportunities for employment and equality in family responsibilities (Recommendation 6 of the European Population Conference). However, countries have been endorsing these recommendations to different extents.

In terms of the actual impact of policies on employment, two different issues have been addressed in the literature. First, there is a large body of literature on the impact of policies on employment, with a focus on the possible work disincentives of welfare programmes. This literature is mainly based on American data and suggests that, overall, welfare programmes do carry some work disincentives and that these work disincentives come from the imbalance between welfare benefits on the one hand, and low wages and high childcare costs on the other (see the review in Blank, 1997). The literature, however, also suggests that the impact of these work disincentives is small. In Europe, a recent paper by Dingeldey (2001) examines the possible impact of tax systems on family employment patterns and especially in

their impact on dual-earner families. The study found no clear evidence that tax systems are promoting single-earner families as opposed to dual-earner ones. However, the study also notes the fact that contradictory incentives or restrictions may be present in other concurrent policies and complicates the analysis of the effect of tax policies on employment.

A second body of literature examines the effect of policies on a woman's return to work after childbirth. Literature from the United States and Scandinavian countries does confirm the impact of childcare costs and childcare quality on mothers' labour force participation (see, for example, Blau and Robins, 1988, and Hofferth and Collins, 2000). Higher childcare provision and lower costs have a positive impact on mothers' labour force participation (Gustafsson and Stafford, 1992). Results are not, however, unanimous in the literature. For instance, a study by Kreyenfeld and Hank (2000) on German data found no evidence that variations in the regional provision of public day care had any impact on female labour force participation.

As to the link between parental leave and female labour force participation, a recent study on the employment patterns of women after their first and second births in Finland, Norway and Sweden by Ronsen and Sundstrom (2002) showed that women who are entitled to paid leave have a much higher overall employment re-entry rate during the first three years following a birth than non-eligible women. However, the study also stresses that long absences from work may have large opportunity costs in addition to reinforcing gender inequality. The authors write: "Very long leave entitlements and child-minding benefit programmes could have negative consequences for women's career and earnings potentials and may preserve an unequal division of labour in the family" (Ronsen and Sundstrom, 2002: p. 121).

Effects on fertility

As pointed out in this paper, although low fertility may have motivated the introduction of family policies or specific measures, explicit pronatalist aims are nowadays absent from most national policies.¹⁸ Nonetheless, the assumption that is often made by governments and some scholars is that part of the reason why fertility is so low is that parents do not receive sufficient state support, especially in their efforts to combine work and family responsibilities. Is there, however, empirical evidence to suggest that state support for families can have an impact on fertility? First of all, it should be stressed that the link

¹⁷ There are significant cross-national differences in the degree of job protection given to parents on leave. In some countries, parents are allowed to resume exactly their same job, while in others they are guaranteed a similar job.

¹⁸ According to the UN 2001 National Population Policies data, 28 UNECE member states perceived their fertility level as too low and 20 claimed that they had implemented policies to raise fertility. However, the UN survey does not include information on the actual measures in place to raise fertility. On the basis of the evidence reviewed in this paper, it appears that pronatalism is not an explicit objective of most governments.

between policies and fertility is a complex one involving the promotion and aims of policies, the level of female employment, economic context and social norms regarding gender equality (Brewster and Rindfuss, 2000; Demeny, 2003). For these reasons, the quantification of the effect of policies on fertility has been plagued by methodological problems. Bearing this in mind, the papers by Gauthier (1996a, 2001) and Sleetbos (2003) provide extensive reviews of the empirical literature on the effect of policies on fertility. The conclusions are two-fold:

- (1) There does indeed appear to be a positive - albeit very small - impact of cash benefits on fertility, when the analysis is carried out at the aggregate level. For instance, Gauthier and Hatzius (1997), having studied 22 industrialised countries, suggest that a 25 per cent increase in family allowances would result in an increase of 0.07 children per woman. Similarly, the analysis by Whittington, Alm and Peters (1990) on aggregate fertility data for the United States suggest that tax benefits have a positive impact on fertility. On the other hand, mixed results are found when the analysis is carried out at the micro-level. The analysis by Cigno and Ermisch (1989) on the 1980 United Kingdom Women and Employment Survey confirmed that higher child benefits raise completed fertility. However, analyses based on American data, and focusing on means-tested and other targeted benefits, are inconclusive. For example, An, Haveman and Wolfe (1993) found that teenage girls whose mothers received welfare are more likely to give birth out of wedlock. However, the analysis by Acs (1996) suggests that welfare benefits have no statistically significant impact on subsequent childbearing decisions.

The literature also suggests that policies that support working parents can sometimes have a positive effect on fertility - although contrary evidence is also reported in the literature. The analysis by Hyatt and Milne (1991) on Canadian data suggests that a 1 per cent increase in maternity benefits would result in a 0.26 per cent increase in fertility. The analysis by Kravdal (1996) on Norwegian data suggests that a 20 per cent increase in childcare enrolment would result in an increase in cohort fertility of .05 children per woman. And the recent analysis by Castles (2003) suggests a positive relationship between the provision of childcare and aggregate level of fertility in 20 OECD countries. On the other hand, some studies have found no evidence that work-related policies have an impact on fertility. For example, the analysis by Hank and Kreyenfeld (2003) on German data revealed no statistically significant impact of childcare availability on fertility. Similarly, the analysis by Andersson, Duvander and Hank (2003) on Swedish

data reveals no evidence that the provision of childcare has an effect on the probability of a second or third birth.

- (2) In analysing the impact of policies on fertility, there is a need to distinguish between the short-term impact of benefits (on the timing of births) and the long-term impact (on cohort fertility). For example, the analysis of Ermisch (1988) on British data suggests that an increase in family allowances increases the chance of third and fourth births but that it also encourages early motherhood. Evidence of the impact of policies on the timing of fertility was also reported by Hoem, Prskawetz and Neyer (2001) in their analysis of the impact of policies on third births in Austria, and by Hoem (1993) on Swedish fertility.

I have already referred to methodological difficulties which have confronted studies on the impact of policies on fertility. These methodological issues include the difficulty of disentangling the impact of policies from other determinants of fertility, as well as the possible contradictory effects of different types of policies. There are two further issues that should be stressed. First, the empirical literature has tended to be limited in scope in that it has often ignored issues of eligibility and receipt of benefits, especially employer-provided benefits. Data from the OECD suggests that in some countries a non-negligible proportion of employers offer extra-statutory arrangements regarding child sick leave, maternity leave and parental leave, as well as offering flexi-time and childcare (OECD, 2001). The impact of these benefits on fertility has not been analysed in the literature. And secondly, one may speculate that it is not just specific measures that may influence fertility but that it is instead the whole package of measures. As pointed out above, there is no encompassing measure of state support for families that is cross-nationally comparable. Consequently, although empirical studies have been able to test the impact of specific policies on fertility, they have not been able to assess the impact of the whole package of state support for families.

Conclusions and future trends

I started this paper by referring to some key recommendations adopted by the UNECE, including the nurturing of a child-friendly and family-friendly environment, the support of parents in their combination of professional life and parental roles, the financial support of families, particularly for those with limited resources, and the promotion of equality between men and women, including equal opportunities for employment and equality in family responsibilities. Have countries implemented these recommendations? I offer three conclusions...

First, there is no way of measuring the degree of child- and family-friendliness in countries. However, it is

clear that the majority of countries have been devoting resources to improving the well-being of families and children. In some countries, this has been done through the adoption of a comprehensive family policy, while in others it has been through the adoption of specific programmes. The nature and the extent of these programmes are an indication of their level of support for families but also of their priorities (themselves being partly dictated by the needs of families). Thus, while issues of child poverty have dominated the agenda of governments in Central and Eastern Europe, issues of gender equality and early childhood education have dominated the agenda of other UNECE member states. From a researcher's perspective, the monitoring of these developments is very difficult, as there is no systematic reporting of policies and initiatives related to families. If the UNECE is serious about its recommendation concerning the promotion of a more child-friendly and family-friendly environment (Recommendation 3 of the 1993 European Population Conference), it should put in place the instruments to monitor and assess the developments in this field. Such monitoring should include not only policies and programmes related to cash support for families and support for working parents, but also a wider range of measures that may also influence partnership, childbearing and parenting, including grants and subsidies for higher education, support for youth employment, etc.

Secondly, with regard to the financial support of families, particularly for those with limited resources (Recommendation 5 of the 1993 European Population Conference), the available data do not allow one to fully assess the extent to which programmes are successful in lifting families out of poverty. What we have seen, however, in this paper is that financial support for families was badly hit following the collapse of the socialist regime in Central and Eastern Europe, but since then the situation has gradually improved. What we have also seen is that several countries have moved away from universal cash benefit programmes and have opted for more targeted programmes. Again, it is difficult to assess the success of these programmes. There is in fact a large controversy in the literature regarding the pros and cons of universal versus targeted programmes (see for example Battle and Torjman, 2001).

Thirdly, with regard to the support of parents in their combination of professional life and parental roles (Recommendation 4 of the 1993 European Population Conference), and the promotion of equality between men and women, including equal opportunities for employment and equality in family responsibilities (Recommendation 6 of the 1993 European Population Conference), most countries have been devoting effort to this field. In most countries the current provisions now exceed the minimum standards included in the ILO Maternity Protection Convention (2000). However, two points emerge from the analysis. First, it is clear that the

provisions vary enormously across countries both in terms of duration of maternity, parental and childcare leave, and in terms of cash benefits. While in some countries parents may take up to three years of leave with some financial compensation, in other countries paid leave is restricted to the period immediately before and after childbirth. Secondly, it is also clear that different countries have not endorsed the issue of gender equality to the same extent. While some countries have started to explore ways of encouraging more fathers to take leave and to care for their newborn, other countries have continued to promote a traditional gender division of labour. Again, this is something that should be monitored more closely; however, data are limited, especially when it comes to the take-up rate of parental leave.

Finally, where are countries heading? The evidence reviewed in this paper suggests that issues of child and family poverty, the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities, and gender equality are issues that are not going to disappear from the political agenda in the near future, as they are issues to which governments are highly committed. However, during the past decade countries have been restricted economically in the pursuit of these objectives and this is a situation that is also unlikely to disappear. In particular, there is always the threat that competing demands may eclipse state support for families on the agendas of national governments. Continuing the promotion of family issues at the international level should therefore be a priority, in order to maintain them on the political agendas of national governments. International institutions should also develop better tools to measure and monitor state support for families and support provided by employers. Only with these tools can we start to understand the choices, opportunities and constraints offered to parents and would-be parents.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to my research assistants at the University of Calgary, Fiona Lui and Berenice Monna, for their help in compiling information on the changes in family policy programmes in UNECE member states.

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