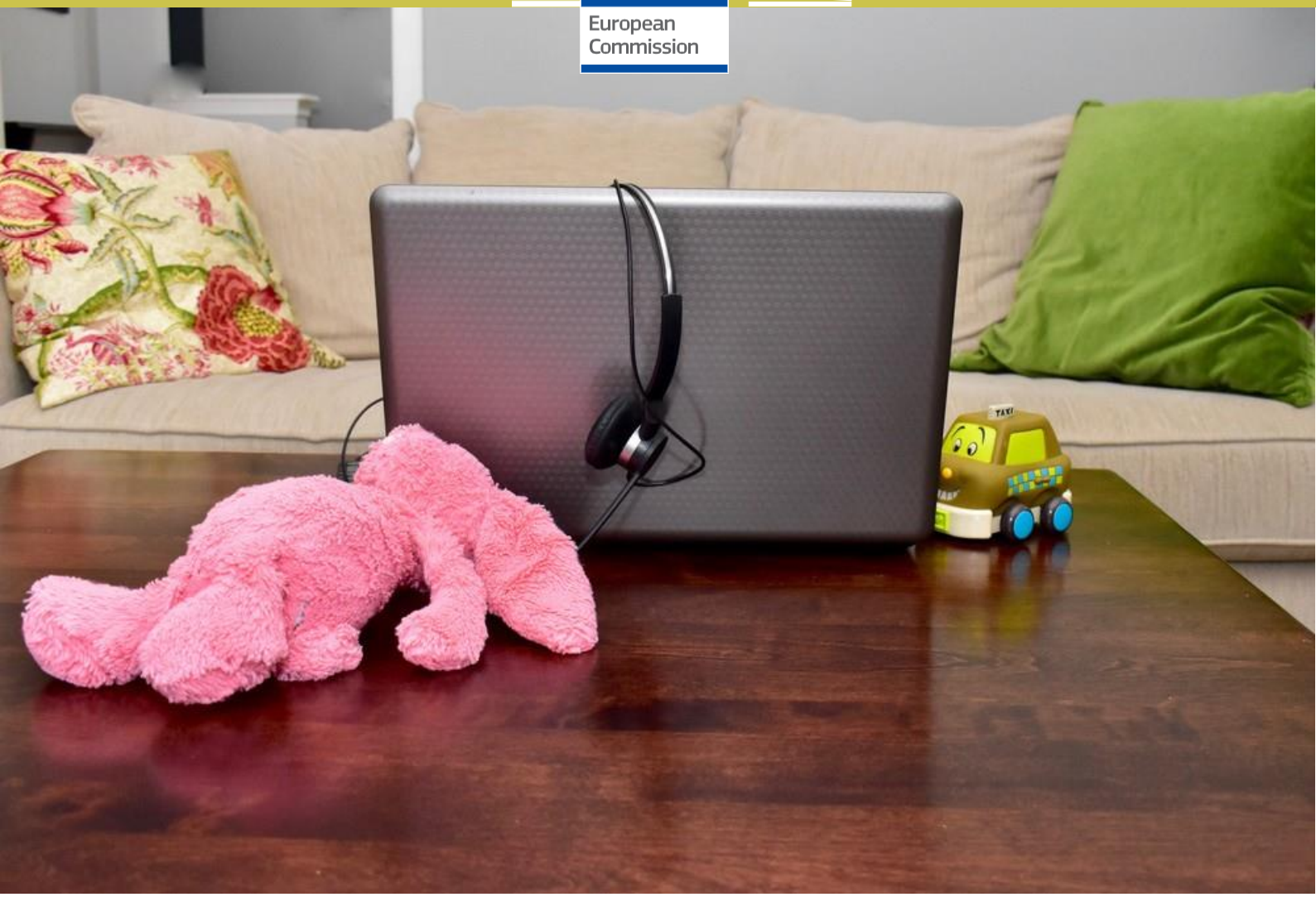


Gender Equality and Work-Life Balance Policies during and after the COVID-19 crisis

Thematic Review 2022

Synthesis

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate - General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
Directorate - DG - Employment and Social Governance
Unit F.1 - European Semester, EMCO
Contact: Moritz Bizer
E-mail: Moritz.BIZER@ec.europa.eu
European Commission
B-1049 Brussels

LEGAL NOTICE

Manuscript completed in December 2022

The information and views set out in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Neither the European Union institutions and bodies nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein. More information on the European Union is available on the Internet (http://www.europa.eu).

The European Commission is not liable for any consequence stemming from the reuse of this publication.

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022

PDF ISBN 978-92-76-61808-9 doi:10.2767/50106 KE-04-23-014-EN-N

© European Union, 2022

The reuse policy of European Commission documents is implemented by the Commission Decision 2011/833/EU of 12 December 2011 on the reuse of Commission documents (OJ L 330, 14.12.2011, p. 39). Except otherwise noted, the reuse of this document is authorised under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC-BY 4.0) licence (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). This means that reuse is allowed provided appropriate credit is given and any changes are indicated.

For any use or reproduction of elements that are not owned by the European Union, permission may need to be sought directly from the respective rightsholders.

© Shutterstock

Thematic Review 2022: Gender Equality and Work-Life Balance policies during and after the COVID-19 crisis Synthesis

European Centre of Expertise (ECE)
in the field of employment and labour market policies

Directorate-General for *Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion*

2022

European Centre of Expertise (ECE) in the field of Labour Law, Employment and Labour Market Policies

ICF SA

Avenue Marnix 17,

1000 Brussels,

Belgium

E-mail: ece@icfi.com

Coordinator: Anna Manoudi

Manager: Ellen Murray

Editors: Anna Manoudi, Claire Walkey

Acknowledgements

This synthesis report was produced by the European Centre of Expertise (ECE) in the field of Employment and Labour Market Policies, based on [unpublished] country articles for the 27 EU Member States, prepared by independent experts from the ECE pool of labour market experts, as listed below.

Country Articles Prepared by

Austria:	Nadja Bergmann and Claudia Sorger, Lechner, Reiter und Riesenfelder Sozialforschung OG
Belgium:	Zoltan Vadkerti, WorkLife HUB
Bulgaria:	Latchezar Bogdanov, Institute for Market Economics (IME)
Croatia:	Ivana Dobrotic, University of Zagreb
Cyprus:	Maria Angeli, Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies
Czechia:	Lenka Formánková, Czech Academy of Sciences
Denmark:	Rikke Voergård-Olesen, Normvaerk
Estonia:	Mari-Liis Sepper, PRAXIS Centre for Policy Studies
Finland:	Kevät Nousiainen, University of Turku
France:	Christine Erhel, Cnam
Germany:	Nicola Duell, Economix Research & Consulting
Greece:	Evi Hatzivarnava Kazasi, Panteion University of Athens
Hungary:	Ágota Scharle, Eszter Szedlacsek and Áron Hajnal, Budapest Institute for Policy Analysis Ltd
Italy:	Manuela Samek, Flavia Pesce, Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale (IRS)
Ireland:	Paul Redmond, Klavs Ciprikis, Adele Whelan & Seamus McGuinness, Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)
Latvia:	Kristine Dupate, University of Latvia
Lithuania:	Boguslavas Gruževskis, Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences

Luxembourg:	Patricia Scherer, ICF
Malta:	Suzanne Gatt, University of Malta
Netherlands:	Dominique Danau, Eftheia
Poland:	Magdalena Zadkowska, University of Gdańsk
Portugal:	Reinhard Naumann, DINAMIA-CET
Romania:	Carmen Ioana Borza, ICF
Slovakia:	Barbora Holubová, Central European Labour Studies Institute (CELSI)
Slovenia:	Tanja Istenič and Daša Farčnik, University of Ljubljana
Spain:	Elvira González Gago, Research4Consulting
Sweden:	Dominique Anxo, The Centre for European Labour Market Studies HB (CELMS HB)

Contents

Key messages

Unpaid care duties are key to gender gaps in the labour market. As illustrated in the report, across the Member States, care responsibilities are equally shared between women and men only in about one-third of families. The interplay between labour market and household conditions may create vicious cycles. The unequal division of unpaid care work between men and women reduces women's access to and permanency in the labour market, and leads to a concentration of women in sectors and jobs allowing greater working time flexibility at the price of lower wages and career opportunities. Gender gaps in the labour market themselves reinforce the unequal division of unpaid care work in households.

Work-life balance policies are therefore key for supporting women's labour market participation and employment and achieving gender equality in the labour market. Although cultural and social norms on the gender division of unpaid work in the household are still relevant, the availability, affordability and quality of childcare and long-term care services, eligibility criteria, length and compensation level of parental, paternity and carers leaves, and flexible working arrangements all play an important role in promoting equal sharing of care tasks in the household enabling full and equal labour market participation.

The pre-pandemic situation

The availability of quality **childcare facilities and services** is crucial to promoting women's continuing participation in the labour market. There is a direct link between the availability of childcare facilities and the possibility for mothers to engage in paid employment, particularly during the first three years of a child's life. Thereby childcare facilities are critical for maintaining the labour market connection for mothers. The use of **formal childcare for children under three** was still relatively low in the EU in 2019 (35%), while almost half were cared for exclusively by their parents, often mothers. Lack of childcare places still exists in the majority of Member States (16), while the cost challenge particularly affects (single) mothers, who tend to earn less compared to fathers and are thus likely to opt out of formal childcare when it is too expensive.

The report discusses how **legal entitlement to childcare and compulsory attendance** are important elements to support the move towards using childcare services and therefore a broader provision of childcare facilities and easier access to them. They also contribute to the shift in cultural perceptions and norms towards increased acceptability of mothers returning to the labour market. However, the legal entitlement to childcare exists only in few Member States and is often only available to older children.

When considering parental leave, all Member States offer statutory parental leave as required by the Work-Life Balance Directive[1]. EU Directives contain minimum requirements and Member States are allowed to go beyond these. Therefore, **significant variations across Member States** exist regarding duration, payment, flexibility in relation to how leave can be taken and other associated rights and protections beyond the minimum requirements.

In relation to **paternity leave**, Member States had introduced legislation whereby fathers are entitled to a period of leave following the birth of a child and/or during the first few months of a child's life ranging from two (in Greece) to 30 calendar days (Slovenia and Lithuania). Eleven Member States provided longer paternity leave. The level of payment for paternity leave was also relatively high, with the majority of Member States offering medium to high rates of compensation.

Turning to long-term care, care needs for the elderly and other dependent adults are increasing with the ageing population. Women provide informal long-term care more often and for longer hours per week than men, with wide Member States differences reflecting variations in long-term care arrangements and social norms. The difference

[1] Directive 2019/1158. See EU rights to work-life balan ce | European Commission (europa.eu).

between men and women is greatest in the 45-64 age group, where in most Member States 10-30 % of men and 20-40 % of women provide informal care. The share of working carers among the working-age population was highest in France (18.3%) and lowest in Czechia and Portugal (3.6% each). **Quality of working conditions and labour shortages are an issue in many Member States**. Long-term care workers, largely low-qualified personal care workers, are among the lowest-paid in the EU, often employed in non-standard forms of employment (e.g. shift, part-time or temporary work), although arrangements that may be introduced based on the Work-Life Balance Directive may improve this picture.

When it comes to flexible working arrangements, the approach to regulating them differs significantly between Member States, reflecting the variety of approaches based on whether the Member States provides statutory entitlement, legal right to request flexible work, or whether such work is negotiated via collective agreements or a more general regulation of flexible work by law. The Work-Life Balance Directive introduces the right to request flexible working time arrangements for workers with care responsibilities but at the time of writing, only five Member States provided the most binding mechanism, such as a statutory entitlement to a form of flexible work, most frequently part-time work. From a gender perspective, such legislation generally relates to parents and workers with care responsibilities, without 'positive' discrimination for women. While this can help to reinforce the message that flexibility in working arrangements is not a 'gender issue', it prevents prioritising specific target groups, such as single mothers.

Changes in response to COVID-19

The pandemic has put considerable strain on the work-life balance of men and, particularly women with caring responsibilities due to restrictions on formal and informal care and education services combined with confinement and telework from home. Single mothers and women working in essential jobs faced the strongest work-life balance pressures.

Childcare

A combination of emergency approaches were adopted by Member States to help parents with childcare, although without specific measures aimed at mothers. The research for this review found that the most widespread policy response was to provide **direct financial support to parents** to help with childcare costs. Nine Member States gave **priority to keeping childcare facilities open or to reopen them after lockdowns**. The provision of **emergency childcare for essential or frontline workers**, including healthcare and social care workers, was another relatively widespread measure (in eight Member States). While no such measures were adopted in Denmark and Greece, a wide range of childcare measures were implemented in Belgium and Germany, including expanding legal entitlement to childcare and other more structural measures.

Future policy focus should remain on improving the **affordability, availability of places, and flexibility of service hours, as well as the quality of childcare provision**. Such measures can be expected to positively impact gender equality, insofar as the high cost and low affordability of childcare is a key challenge to its more extensive use. Improved quality could also support a greater take-up of formal childcare contesting the social norm that only mothers can provide adequate care for their children. Increases in the quantity and quality of provision and use of formal childcare can also increase female employment and improve working conditions, since women make up the majority of workers in childcare ser- vices.

Long-term care

Restrictions in residential and home care created an additional burden on families, particularly for women as the main providers of informal care to elderly and family members in need. Women have been more affected by **additional long-term care responsibilities** in Member States with less developed residential care, and where substantial restrictions have been put in place. Residential care facilities have not admitted new patients, have restricted

long-term care to cases most in need, or restricted their services altogether. The quality of long-term care also deteriorated due to labour shortages, additional stress on staff, lack of protective equipment and restrictions on family visits. Shortages of carers from abroad, including live-in carers, also increased due to travel restriction. Illness and school closures affected female care workers, who often had to care for their own children.

National emergency responses to the increased long-term care burden during COVID-19 focused primarily on granting more leave to carers; offering **financial compensation** to family members needing long-term care, independently of whether the carer needed to reduce working hours or take leave; **easing travel restrictions for live-in carers**. No gender-specific measures were reported, although additional leave benefits for carers are likely to have involved more women than men since women are more likely to become carers; measures to ease labour migration may also have had a greater impact for women given that the majority of home care workers being migrant women.

Parental and paternity leave

In most Member States, carer, parental or sickness leave was crucial to supporting workers with children when kindergartens and schools were closed, or when individual children had to quarantine. Leave measures were generally aimed at working parents with no specific attention to gender. Evidence shows that **more women than men took extra carers' leave, suggesting a gender imbalance in the division of household tasks**.

Flexible working arrangements

Flexible working arrangements increased considerably during the pandemic, particularly through the widespread use of teleworking. **Only a few governments changed laws and regulations around flexible working** or introduced financial schemes to compensate for reduced working hours because of childcare, or combined this with the use of time accounts. Companies introduced **various models of flexible working**, in some cases without consulting trade unions or considering a specific gender perspective. There is also evidence that **more women than men took advantage of flexible working** (e.g. reducing their working hours) to accommodate care responsibilities.

Information gaps exist in relation to take up of measures broken down by gender to feed into gender-specific monitoring and impact assessment of government support measures, and of the restrictions imposed during the pandemic. Comparable information, especially by gender is still scarce, thus conclusions must be drawn with some caution and efforts for better data must be made. Major and potentially high-impact measures should be assessed for their gender-specific impact and to support that, appropriate data should be collected. If this was not possible when a policy was introduced in response to COVID-19 (e.g. due to the time pressure of the pandemic), then doing so is important during or after implementation to support drawing evidence-based conclusions.

1. Introduction

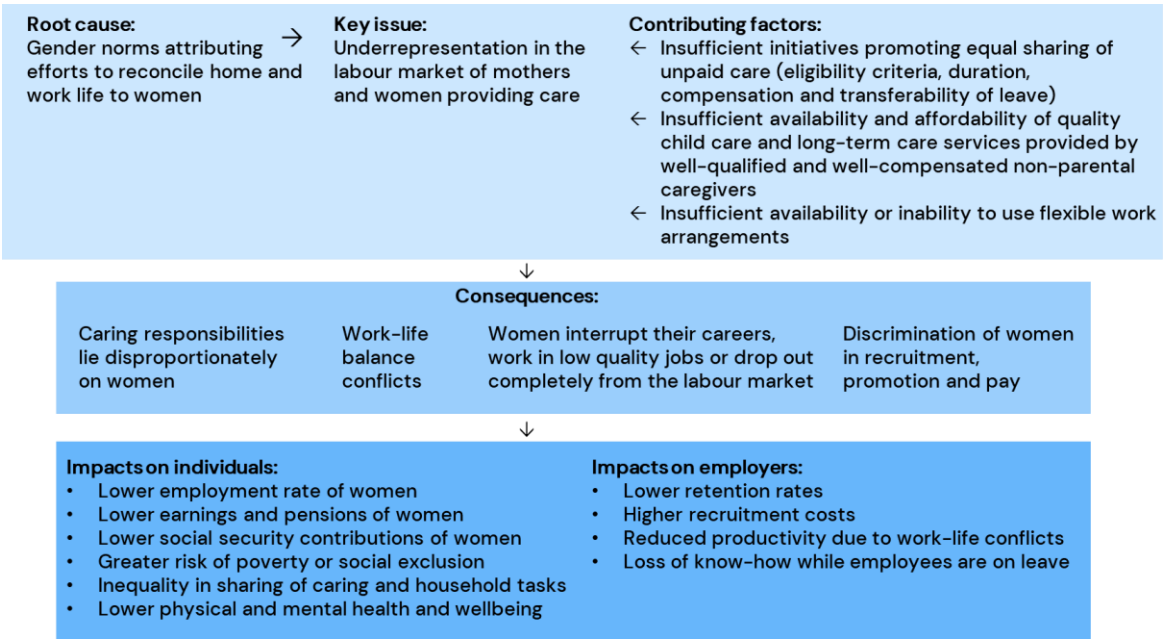
This report presents home-care related policy responses to COVID-19 and the potential or actual impact they had on work-life balance provisions and consequently on gender equality, compared to relevant policies before the pandemic. The purpose of the review is to support the European Semester through up-to-date analysis at Member State (MS) level on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on gender inequality through policy and employers' actions. The overview of national legislation and other measures relating to work-life balance (family leaves and flexible working) in this report is without prejudice to the outcome of the European Commission's verification of the completeness and correctness of Member States' transposition of *Directive (EU) 2019/1158 on work-life balance for parents and carers* into national law. Data herein are mainly drawn from evidence on responses by various actors (governments, social partners, companies) to the crisis regarding gender equality and work-life balance in the EU-27, plus published

comparative and country-specific evidence. This body of evidence was collected from unpublished country articles – see Annex 1 for their scope.[2]

1.1. Work-life balance: key to gender equality in the labour market

This review considers two important policy areas: **labour market (LM) policies and work-life balance policies**. The two are closely connected since gender equality depends on equal participation chances of women in the labour market. While practices and cultural norms relating to the division of household labour shape outcomes to a large extent, policies offer access to formal or informal childcare and long-term care, parental and paternity leave, carers leave and flexible working arrangements. Parameters of policies, such as eligibility criteria, duration and compensation levels of leave, availability and quality of childcare and long-term care services can play an important role in promoting equal sharing of household care tasks to enable equal participation in the labour market (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Impact of work-life balance measures on gender equality in the labour market



Source: ICF elaboration based on EIGE 2021 and UN Women, ILO 2020.

Only about one-third of families shared care tasks equally in the EU in 2012[3] and this affects employment patterns across genders. Providing care creates value, but often means that women work fewer paid hours than men, have interrupted employment histories or are not active in the labour market. Around 7.7 million women were kept out of the labour market due to care responsibilities, compared to 450 000 men in 2019.[4] In 2018, a higher share of employed women than men reported experiencing some change in employment due to childcare responsibilities (60% of women and only 17% of men) or reduced working

[2] The information contained in the country articles and this synthesis report covers the period up to 31 July 2021 when experts completed the manuscripts.

[3] See EIGE 2021; EIGE calculations based on International Social Survey Programme 2012 data

[4] See EIGE 2021; calculations based on EU-LFS, [lfsa_igar].

hours (18% of women and only 3% of men).[5] Care duties were the main reason for working part-time for 25.7% of women and only 5.5% of men.[6]

There are other effects besides the direct one on employment that create gender gaps in the labour market. Employers may view women's care responsibilities as a source of weaker labour market attachment. Studies show that the mothers of children under five have the lowest participation rates in managerial and leadership positions (ILO, 2018 & 2019). Career breaks, a higher incidence of part-time work, a lower share of women in management positions and occupational segregation contribute to generating a gender pay gap. Finally, care responsibilities can induce women to retire sooner. Gender inequalities in providing care are therefore important drivers of all three expressions of gender inequalities in the labour market: employment gap, pay gap[7], and pension gap.

Some experts forecast a risk of a widening gender divide during COVID-19 in relation to care within households. Work published during the first lockdown stage warned that effects can be unbalanced (Blasko et al. 2020). Research in the US found that women have carried a heavier load than men in providing childcare during the COVID-19 crisis, even while still working, and higher levels of psychological distress was reported by mothers of elementary school-age and younger children (Zamaro, Prados, 2020). During the COVID-19 crisis, employed women with children younger than 12 years spent around 54 hours per week on childcare, compared to 32 hours for employed men (Eurofound, 2020). Eurofound's surveys also show a general deterioration of work-life balance among EU workers during the pandemic compared to 2015. During the first wave of COVID-19, a higher share of employed women than men found it difficult to concentrate on their job because of family reasons (29% of women and 11% of men with children aged 0-11) or to devote sufficent time to work (26% of women and 7% of men with children aged 0-11) most of the time or all of the time (Eurofound, 2020).

The COVID-19 crisis, some argue, is also an opportunity to narrow the gender gap. The support of institutions and fathers' increased involvement in unpaid work may lessen the load of women both during lockdown and perhaps also afterwards through behavioural changes. Men's employment was more affected by COVID-19. EU male employment decreased by 0.6 percentage points (pps; from 78.9% to 78.3%) from the second quarter of 2019 to the second quarter of 2021, while female employment went down by 0.2 pps in the employment rate (from 67.4% to 67.2%) during this period.[8] Hours worked, on the other hand, have decreased more for women.[9] Their increased take-up of telework and often extremely flexible working hours may lock them into employment and working arrangements generally associated with lower-paid and less stable jobs (JER, 2021). Nevertheless, such outcomes are speculative, largely due to lack of comprehensive and structured information.

1.2. Scope of this review

This review seeks to provide new evidence on how the COVID-19 lockdown periods have changed needs, practices and policies regarding unpaid care and related areas and how this may have impacted gender equality. Of particular interest is how the demand for and the supply of care within the household has changed in terms of its amount and, importantly, the division of labour between cohabiting adults.

The synthesis is based on available literature, policy documents and data, integrated with country-level interviews, collected in country articles produced by country experts. It

[5] See EIGE 2021; calculations based on EU-LFS, [lfso_18ceffed].

[6] Eurostat, [lfsa_epgar], 2020 value.

[7] The pay gap is linked to a higher incidence of part-time work, a lower share of women in management positions, and, most importantly, occupational segregation.

[8] Eurostat, [lfsi_emp_q].

[9] Eurostat, [lfsi_emp_q].

provides an overview of practices in the Member States as well as their change during COVID-19 and potential effect on gender equality in terms of:

- Childcare and other care provision;
- Parental leave (also paternity and sickness leave);
- Flexible working arrangements (working from home, teleworking, flexible working time).

Section 2 presents the long-term trends in public and private provision of childcare services before the COVID-19 pandemic, the baseline for the analysis. Section 3 then examines the availability of childcare services during the pandemic. Section 4 focuses on the availability of long-term care during the COVID-19 period. Section 5 synthesises the changes to parental leave schemes and sickness leave schemes in response to COVID-19. Section 6 presents employers' and government approaches to flexible working and telework during the pandemic. Finally, Section 7 presents conclusions and policy pointers.

2. Baseline situation before January 2020

2.1. Childcare pre-pandemic

The availability of quality childcare facilities and services is crucial to promoting women's continuing participation in the labour market. The official EU level Barcelona targets for participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) have existed since 2002, aiming to ensure high-quality and affordable childcare facilities from birth to compulsory school age through two targets, to cover 90% of children from age three until mandatory school age and 33% of children under three (European Commission 2018). Employment during the first three years of a child's life is critical to maintaining the labour market connection for parents, particularly mothers, yet in 2019, only one-fifth of parents used formal childcare arrangements enabling them to work full-time. Most frequently, nearly half of children under three are cared for exclusively by their parents, often mothers. The European Pillar of Social Right Action Plan foresees the revision of the Barcelona targets in 2022.

Childcare arrangements in the EU, in 2019:

47.0% children under 3 cared exclusively by their parents

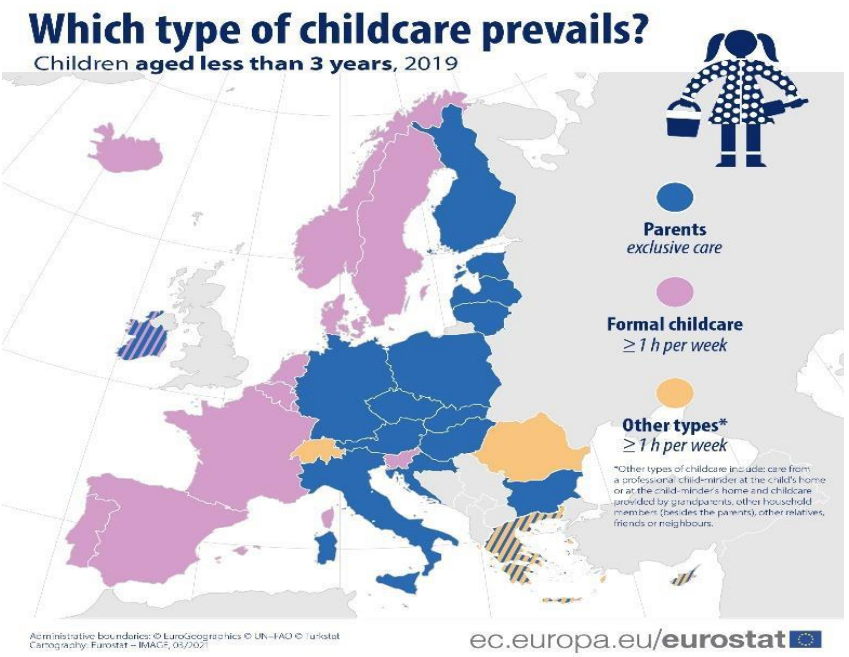
21.5% in formal care more than 30 hours per week (enabling full time work)

13.8% in formal care for less than 30 hours per week (enabling part time work)

25.9% in other types of care (childminder, grandparents etc.)

The take-up of formal childcare arrangements continues to differ significantly across Member States (see Figure 2 below). A divide exists between Member States, with parents' exclusive care prevailing in eastern and southern Member States, and formal childcare prevailing in western and northern ones. Exceptions to this broad pattern are Finland, Germany and Austria where parents' exclusive care prevails.

Figure 2: Prevailing childcare arrangements, in the EU, children under 3, 2019



Source: Eurostat (2021b)

Legal entitlement to childcare is an important element of ECEC provision to foster gender equality. Such legal rights create a basis for broader provision of childcare facilities and easier access to them. Take-up of these facilities is high, as Member States with such legal rights and obligations also tend to be those where formal childcare arrangements prevail (cf. Figure 2). Entitlement and compulsory attendance thus enable households to assign fewer resources - often of female family members - to childcare. This possibility supports the move towards gender equality in the distribution of care responsibilities between men and women, despite the fact that the choice of care arrangements may be narrower in some cases.

Shortage and cost of ECEC places are two key challenges to ensuring a broader participation in ECEC. Research for this review revealed the lack of childcare places as a key factor hindering the use of ECEC in 16 Member States [Austria (by region), Bulgaria (in big cities), Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark (in larger cities), Germany, Croatia, France, Italy (by region), Lithuania, Latvia (in larger cities), Luxembourg, Hungary, Poland, Romania (by region), Slovenia (by region)]. Cost and affordability emerged as a key barrier in 10 Member States [for example in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia (for low income families), Spain, Croatia, Ireland (lone parents), Italy], sometimes childcare centres not matching the parents' working schedules (Austria, Cyprus).

Member States have adopted several policies to address these challenges emphasising funding and reducing the cost of childcare for parents. Such policies include offering free childcare (12 Member States), subsidising the cost of childcare via direct payments to parents in nine Member States and providing extra funding directly to childcare centres to create new places or expand existing provision (three Member States) – see Table 1. Such measures are expected to positively impact gender equality, insofar as the high cost and low affordability of childcare prevent extensive use. The cost challenge particularly affects mothers who tend to earn less than fathers and are thus likely to opt out of formal childcare when it is too expensive for their income, remaining the main childcarers and severing their labour market connection.

Table 1: Policies in place to improve access to formal childcare, before January 2020

Policy type	MS
Countries providing free childcare	**13: AT (half-day for last compulsory year), BE (children over 2.5), CY (recipients of minimum income and for children over 4.5), CZ (last year), DE (some regions), EL (children over 4), FI, FR, MT, HU, IE (3 hours per day), LU (20 hours per week), LV (municipal)**
Subsidies to parents accessing childcare (vouchers, payments, reduction of fees)	**9: DK, EL, ES, HU, IE, IT, LU, PT, SI**
Increased funding and funding of new places in nurseries and schools	**3: BE, HU, PT**
Policies aimed at improving quality	**4: BE, DK, EL (pilot), SI**

Source: country articles

In some Member States such as Belgium, Denmark and Slovenia**, policy emphasis has focused on improving the quality of childcare provision.** Quality measures such as reducing the number of children per group, appointing educational advisers to improve quality and support the professionals and appointing a minimum number of pedagogues were put in place in these countries. Focus on quality childcare should make ECEC more attractive, generate greater take-up of formal childcare and let more women return to work (ENEE 2018). Good quality childcare encourages parents to use it and counteracts the social norm that only mothers can adequately care for their children.

2.2. Long-term care pre-pandemic

The type of LTC provision varies widely across Member States. LTC provision takes many forms, including residential care, home care services, as well as cash benefits (European Commission, 2021). Sweden and the Netherlands provide the highest number of beds per 100 000 inhabitants for patients requiring long-term care and Greece and Bulgaria provide the lowest.[10] In many Member States, a lack of formal care supply puts additional pressure on providing informal care. Family members combining work with informal care of a disabled or elderly relative face a heavy burden, often reducing their working hours or giving up work altogether. Long-term care has a strong gender dimension when almost 90% of workers in the sector are women, and so are most informal carers (European Commission, 2021).

Typically, more women than men provide informal care to elderly and other family members in need. On average in the EU, 59% of all informal carers (aged 18 or over) are women, ranging from 52% (Romania) to 65-66% (in Czechia, Lithuania and Poland) (Van der Ende et al., forthcoming, cited in European Commission 2021). The difference between men and women is greatest in the 45-64 age group, where in most Member States 10-30 % of men and 20-40 % of women provide informal care. The gender difference in this age group is largest in Belgium and Spain (14 p.p., in both countries) (Van der Ende et al., forthcoming, cited in European Commission 2021). Informal care often comes on top of formal work. The share of working carers among the working age population was highest in France (18.3%), Latvia (14.8%), Luxembourg (11.5 %), Romania (10.4%) and lowest in Czechia and Portugal (3.6% each) (Zigante, V. 2018).

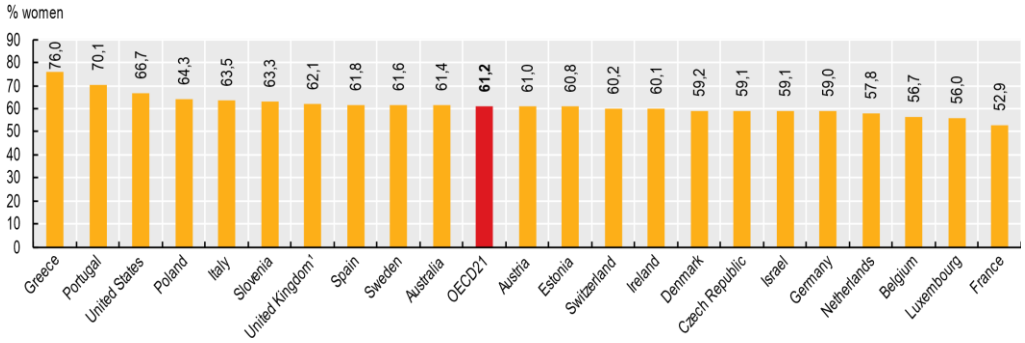
Long-term care provided by informal carers plays a major role. Roughly half of informal care in the EU is provided to people outside the household. Between 2013 and 2016, the number of people providing informal care at least once a week as a percentage of all those aged 18-75 was highest in France (21%), Latvia (18%) and Denmark (17%); and lowest in

[10] Eurostat (2020b) Health Care Resource Statistics, data extracted August 2020.

Portugal and Sweden (8%), and Germany (6%) (European Commission 2021 Van der Ende et al. forthcoming).

Likewise, the OECD shows that informal carers aged 50 and above are more likely to be women than men in all OECD countries for which data are available, as shown below.

Figure 3: Share of women among informal daily carers aged 50 and above, 2017 (or nearest year)



Source: OECD, Health at a Glance, 2019

2.3. Parental and paternity leave measures pre-pandemic

Parental leave measures have powerful effects on chances on the labour market. Parental leave policies catered to the needs of children, but being targeted at a carer have important side-effects, too. Evidence shows that well-designed parental leave policies can boost female labour market participation.[11] Also, in some cases, rather long parental leave leads to extended absences from the labour market, with demonstrable negative consequences for employability, career development and opportunities for re-integration into the labour market.[12] The final impact depends a lot on parameters of the relevant legislation.

All EU Member States offer statutory parental leave as required by relevant EU legislation, but significant differences exist among them. Such differences are observed in the maximum duration of parental leave and payment during leave as well as in terms of the flexibility of how it is taken and other associated rights and protections. The duration of parental leave in terms of individual entitlement ranges from four (Belgium) to 36 months (Lithuania), with most Member States offering less than 12 months.

Table 2: Duration of parental leave, before January 2020

Duration	MS
Low: 4 to 12 months	13: BE, DK*, EL (private sector), ES, FI, HR, IE, IT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT
Medium: 12 to 24 months	5: BG, DE, FR, LV, SE
High: more than 24 months	9: AT, CZ, EE, EL (public sector), FR, HU, LT, RO, SK

Source: country articles

* While writing this report, the federations of Danish trade unions and Danish employers agreed to earmark 11 weeks of paternity leave for fathers instead of the current two weeks.

The rate of compensation for parental leave also differs considerably between Member States, most of them offering relatively low levels of payment. Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, and Malta do not provide any compensation. Austria, Belgium and Czechia pay a

[11] OECD (2012), Closing the Gender Gap; OECD (2004) Economic Studies No. 37 2003/2; Thevenon (2013); Eurofound (2016) The gender employment gap: challenges and solutions.

[12] OECD (2012) Closing the gender gap; Van Lancker, W. (2016).

flat-rate allowance during parental leave. There are significant differences between the flat rate allowances payable. In some Member States, the level of allowance depends on the length of leave being taken. Seven Member States replace between 60-80% of previous earnings, whereas Croatia, Hungary, Romania pay between 80-100%.

There are explicit gender differences around eligibility and compensation levels for parental leave, which can put mothers to a disadvantage. Often, access depends upon a previous employment record, or social security contributions for a certain time. For example, in Spain, to claim parental leave, individuals must have made social security contributions for a minimum of 180 days during the seven previous years or for 360 days over the course of their entire working careers. Such eligibility conditions disadvantage mothers, who were inactive before having children and further distances them from the labour market in case they have to go on parental leave. In many Member States, a lower flat rate benefit is paid where beneficiaries are ineligible for full-rate parental leave compensation (Croatia, Spain, Sweden). Another gender-related disadvantage is when leave payments are reduced for part-time workers. For example, in France, the parental leave allowance is limited, not related to previous earnings, and the replacement rate is low overall and lower for part-time workers, who are more likely to be women.

Table 3: Compensation levels for parental leave before January 2020

Compensation	MS
Low: 0 to 60%	11: AT (flat rate), BG, BE (flat rate), CZ (flat rate), CY (unpaid), EL (unpaid), FR (flat rate, decreasing for part-time workers), IE (unpaid), IT, MT (unpaid), PT
Medium: 60 to 80%	10: DE (65%-100% net income), DK, ES, FI, LT, LU (capped), LV, NL, SE, SK
High: 80 to 100%	4: HR, HU, RO, SI

Source: country articles, no information for EE, PL.

Current take-up levels of parental leave are significantly higher for women than men. In nine Member States, less than 10% of employed fathers on average are estimated to take up parental leave. More than a quarter of men take parental leave in only five Member States, with Belgium and Sweden reaching the highest proportion of 30-40% - see Table 4.

Table 4: Take up of parental leave by men before January 2020

Level of take up	MS
Low: below 10%	**9: AT, CZ, EL, ES, FR, HR, LT, MT, SI**
Medium: 10 to 20%	**5: DK, FI, IT, LV, PL**
High: above 20%	**7: BE, DE, LU, NL, SE, PT, SK**

Source: country articles, no information for BG, CY, EE, HU, IE, RO.

Parental leave can be a family or an individual entitlement and its type may have an effect on take-up by men. Most frequently, in 15 Member States,[13] parental leave is an individual entitlement, mostly non-transferable. However, in Croatia, Czechia, Slovenia and Sweden, some unused entitlements can be transferred to a partner. Parental leave is a family entitlement in seven Member States, divided between parents as they choose (Austria, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia); a mixed entitlement (part family, part individual) in three (Portugal, Romania, and Sweden); while in Malta, it is a family entitlement for public sector workers and an individual entitlement in the private sector.

[13] These are: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain.

Paternity leave is a specific legislation that Member States have introduced or developed whereby fathers are entitled to a period of leave (immediately, or with some delay) after the birth of a child. Most Member States examined provide a form of statutory paternity leave ranging from two (Greece) to 30 calendar days (Slovenia, Lithuania). Eleven Member States provide a long duration of paternity leave – see Table 5. The level of payment for paternity leave is also relatively high, with the majority of Member States offering medium to high rates of compensation for paternity leave.

Table 5: Duration and compensation of paternity leave before January 2020

Duration	MS
Low: below 5 days	3: EL, MT, NL
Medium: 5 to 10 days	7: BE, CZ, HU, IT, LV, RO, SE
High: above 10 days	11: AT, BG, CY, DK, FI, FR, IE, LT, PL, PT (mandatory), SI
Compensation level	**MS**
Low: 0 to 60%	1: AT
Medium: 60 to 80%	6: CZ, CY, IE flat rate, IT, LT, LV
High: 80 to 100%	10: BG, BE, EL, DK, FI, FR, HU, MT, NL, RO, SE, SI

Source: country articles, no information for DE, EE, ES, HR, LU, SK.

In conclusion, parental and paternity leave regulations before January 2020 appear to have encouraged women to take parental leave. Policies have had limited success in encouraging more equal sharing of parental leave between mothers and fathers and a greater take-up by fathers. The policy mix around designing the duration, access, eligibility and compensation appears to have changed little in terms of promoting greater gender equality.

2.4. Flexible working arrangements pre-pandemic

Access to flexible working arrangements plays an important role in supporting the continued participation of people with care responsibilities in the labour market[14]. The impact of flexible working arrangements on pay and career progression depends on the particular form of flexible work adopted, with the main forms being temporal (the reduction of working hours), geographical (flexibility around the place of work) and the reorganisation of (unchanged) working hours during the working week/month. Before January 2020, there was considerable diversity among Member States regarding the availability of different flexible working time arrangements. They were rather widespread among Nordic and western Member States (such as Luxembourg) and some southern ones (Spain, Portugal and Malta) compared to eastern Member States.

The approach to regulation of flexible working arrangements differs significantly between Member States. Based on the type of flexible work, three main clusters were identified based on whether the Member States provide for a statutory entitlement, legal right to request flexible work, or whether that is negotiated rather through collective agreements or a more general regulation of flexible work in legislation. Five Member States (Austria, Lithuania, Latvia, Spain and Portugal) provide the most binding mechanism, a statutory entitlement to a form of flexible work, most frequently part-time work. As shown in Table 6, the first cluster comprises nine Member States with an existing legal entitlement or a right to request at least one form of flexible work arrangement for parents, applying to both parents equally in all cases. The second cluster comprises six Member States where flexible working arrangements were also addressed (often alongside the legislative route)

[14] See EIGE (2021), Gender inequalities in care and consequences for the labour market.

through the mechanism of collective bargaining agreements and social dialogue either at cross-sectoral and/or sectoral level. Finally, in ten Member States, existing legislation recognised the various forms of flexible work without providing for a statutory entitlement or the right to request such work. Here, provisions apply to workers in general, rather than being specific to parents or mothers.

Table 6: Legal provision for the main forms of flexible working arrangements and their presence in Member States before January 2020

Form of flexible work	MS: a legal right	MS: collective agreements	MS: legal regulation
Temporal: through the reduction of working hours	Entitlement: AT (companies with 20+ employees), LT (child under 3), LV (child under 12, maternity, disabled under 18), ES and PT (for children under 12) Right to request: FI, IE (civil service), SE (child under 8)	BE, DK, ES, LU, FI	BG, CZ, CY, EL, HR, HU, PL, RO, SI
Geographical: flexibility with regard to the place of work	Entitlement: PT (child under 3) Right to request: FI, IE (civil service), MT	BE, DK, ES, FI, IT (private sector)	BG, CZ, HR, HU, IT (public sector), PL, SI
The re-organisation of (unchanged) working hours over the working week/month	Entitlement: AT (companies with 20+ employees), PT (child under 12) Right to request: FI, IE (civil service)	BE, DK, ES, LU, FI	BG, CZ, HR, HU, IT (public sector), PL, SI

The degree to which flexible working arrangements were used by workers in the labour market prior to 2020 is strongly related to the strength of the legislative basis. Broadly, in 11 Member States such arrangements were used rarely, by approximately below 5% of the workforce regularly. Most of these do not have a strong legislative basis for flexible working, but Austria, Latvia and Spain are exceptions. In contrast, in Member States with a more embedded legislative basis or collective bargaining coverage of flexible work, the use of such arrangements was more widespread – see Table 7 below.

Table 7: Uptake and use of flexible working arrangements before January 2020

Frequency of usage	Member States
Low (below 5%)	11: AT (telework), BG, CY, CZ, DE (telework), ES (telework), HR, HU, IT (telework and smart work), LV, RO
Medium (5 to 15%)	8: BE (telework), ES (reduction working hours), FI (telework), IE, MT, PL, PT, SI
High (above 15%)	3: DK, LU (telework), SE

Source: country articles. No data for LT.

Women use flexible working arrangements, including part-time, temporary and/or precarious working, more often to combine care responsibilities and work.[15] The share of women working part-time was 29.9% in 2019, while the corresponding share was 8.4% for men. In 2019, the incidence of part-time employment was highest in the

[15] See EIGE's Beijing+25 review, EIGE (2020).

Netherlands (75.2%), Austria (47.1%) and Germany (46.7%). Caring for children and adults was the main reason for working part-time for 25.2% of women in the EU-27, while this was the main reason only for 4.9% of men. According to Eurostat data (Eurostat, 2020c), women were much more likely to work from home compared to men in 2019, on average in the EU. Cross-country differences are significant here, too: in Germany, Ireland, Poland and Sweden, men were more likely to work from home than women. Reasons for take-up of telework are manifold and may include combining care responsibility and work, particularly among women.[16]

3. Changes to provision of childcare services in response to COVID-19

The provision of both formal and informal childcare services was severely disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. During the different waves of the pandemic, most Member States experienced extensive closures of primary schools, kindergartens and day cares, shifting the responsibility of childcare, particularly for children under the compulsory school age, back to their families (ILO, 2021). During times of contact restrictions and closure, parents needed to find alternative solutions for the care of their children, since informal care provided by unpaid informal carers or privately paid carers at home were also hardly available. Mostly, parents looked after their children themselves while often also working from home, putting an extra burden on them but also on children to combine private life with work and education time (ILO, 2021).

Governments placed different emphasis on supporting childcare in their COVID-19 policy responses. The policy mix relied on a combination of approaches, including direct financial support to parents, extra leave for parents to provide care and prioritising the opening of childcare facilities in contrast to schools for older children – see Table 8 below. The coverage of measures adopted specifically to help with childcare differed between Member States, from no such measures adopted in Denmark and Greece to a wide range of child- care-relevant measures in Belgium and Germany.

Table 8: Types of childcare-related policies adopted in the COVID-19 context

Types of measures	MS	Take up
Financial income support to parents	11: BE (upon justification), BG (on conditions, several schemes), DE (several schemes), ES, IE, IT, LT, LU, PL, PT, SI	BG: first scheme limited, second scheme more successful (no data by gender) DE: limited take-up, no data by gender ES: 3 million, 57% women IT: high take up, 1 million, mostly women LT: high take up, no data by gender PL: low take up, no data by gender
Extra leave to provide childcare	(see Section 5 for details)	
Prioritising the reopening of kindergartens and primary schools	9: AT, FI, HR, HU, IT, LT, LV (remained open), RO, SE (remained open)	Not applicable
Emergency childcare for essential workers	8: AT, BE, CZ, DE, FI, HR, PT, SI	No information

[16] As shown by Eurostat indicator [lfs_eppga]

Types of measures	MS	Take up
Additional funding for extended childcare to childcare providers	6: AT (summer holiday period) DE, ES, FR, IE, IT	No information
Employer level measures	4: BE, ES, IE, SI	ES: around 18% companies offering special work life balance measures
Other measures	Providing online tools and platforms for children: CY, EL, LU CY and EL: The movements of divorced/separated parents necessary for contact with their children were exempt from the general restrictions FI: food bags, money or service vouchers to students DE: legal entitlement for full-day care for primary school children	No information

Source: country articles. No information on the take up of measures in Austria, Belgium, Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia.

The take up of financial income support to parents differed, while monitoring data indicated that take up was higher by women, for example in Spain and Italy. The most popular policy response was to provide direct financial support to parents to help with childcare costs, involving reducing childcare costs (e.g. Belgium, Spain), or a one-off or regular direct additional childcare allowance (e.g. Bulgaria, Germany, Lithuania). The babysitting voucher was a novel and successful measure in Italy (see box below). These measures were aimed equally at both parents, without specifically being addressed to mothers or fathers. While take-up was relatively low in Bulgaria (possibly due to a low amount), Spain registered high uptake with 3 million users, among which 57% were women. One of the success factors in Spain was relatively decentralised delivery where the regions developed different measures and policy responses regarding care services[17]. Similarly, heavy use was registered in Lithuania where the benefits to parents were provided unconditionally. In contrast, in Germany, where the benefits access was conditional, use remained low.

Box 1: The babysitting voucher in Italy

The *Cura Italia Decree* (D.L. 18, 17 March 2020) granted a babysitting voucher for private-sector, self-employed and freelance workers. The voucher was up to EUR 600 for parents of children under 12, who decided not to take parental leave. It could amount to EUR 1 000 for workers in the health sector and other essential services (e.g. security and protection personnel and health care workers). With the *Rilancio Decree* (D.L. 34, 19 May 2020) the voucher was doubled (being useable for two months) from EUR 600 to 1 200 and from EUR 1 000 to 2 000 for workers in the health care sector and other essential occupations/sectors. The Decree also allowed the use of the babysitting bonus to pay for assistance services provided by child summer centres. The babysitting voucher proved to be a more flexible and attractive measure than parental leave since it did not require absence from work and did not involve a pay reduction. Consequently, the number of people requesting vouchers in 2020 was very high, with eventually more than

[17] In some Autonomous Communities, the policy response was the provision of subsidies for hiring domestic workers as caregivers to children and/or to other dependent relatives at home due to emerging needs related to the outbreak of COVID-19 (e.g. Balearic Islands, Castilla y Leon or Navarre). Other regions (e.g. Castilla y León, the Valencia region, the Basque Country) supported -particularly low income- families to compensate for income loss due to the use of work flexibilization possibilities granted under the Plan MECUIDA such as the unpaid reduction of working hours or the uptake of unpaid leave due to care responsibilities. The Madrid region provided digital equipment for the self-employed to facilitate a smooth transition to telework and to contribute to work-life balance facilitated by the flexibility of working hours.

1 million applications accepted. Most of the applicants were women; 70% of bonus applicants worked in the private sector or were self-employed and 61% worked in the public sector. Women also represented 79% of the babysitters paid through vouchers. Its key shortcoming was the fixed value of the voucher that penalised households with more than one child below school age. Also, the vouchers could also be used to pay grandparents, which was contrary to the idea of protecting their health. Conversely, the inclusion of self-employed and freelance workers among the beneficiaries of the babysitting voucher was important. These workers cannot benefit from any type of parental leave and the voucher represented the main work-life balance measure for them.

Source: country article.

Prioritising the reopening of kindergartens and primary schools was an important and popular response in some Member States, while other countries kept kindergartens and primary schools closed, affecting parents of small children particularly.

Emergency childcare for essential or frontline workers often helped women directly to stay in employment. Such measures were reported in eight Member States in sectors such as healthcare, social care and security. Importantly, such frontline workers are very often women, hence such measures had a positive effect on supporting predominantly women in jobs requiring close contact (JRC, 2019). Noteworthy is the experience of **Ireland**, where the government did not provide such childcare to emergency and frontline workers, drawing significant criticism nationally from a range of stakeholders, including the media and opposition parties.

Additional funding to existing childcare providers or to fund additional childcare provision was reported in six Member States. In Ireland, for early learning and school-age childcare providers and their employees, a temporary wage subsidy childcare scheme was introduced at the onset of the pandemic to cover overhead costs that may still be incurred during the pandemic closures. In France, CNAF (*Caisse Nationale d'allocations Familiales*, responsible for financing family policy) provided exceptional financing of EUR 724 million in 2020 to all types of childcare centres (even private ones which do not receive any direct financing in normal times). Also, childminders were eligible to short-time work during the lockdowns and even during other periods if their activity was reduced. In Spain, Italy and Germany this type of policy response was a major scale-up of investment in childcare provision, the benefits of which may continue in the aftermath of the pandemic. In Germany, in the Act on Accompanying Measures to Implement the Stimulus and Crisis-relief Package on 14 July 2020, the Federal Government launched the 2020–2021 Childcare Financing Investment Programme and scaled up the Special Fund for the Expansion of Childcare Services by EUR 1 billion to create an additional 90 000 childcare places in childcare facilities and home-based child day care. Similarly, in Italy, the government allocated EUR 331 million for new investments in health and safety measures to ensure the opening of educational facilities in September 2020; EUR 15 million in 2020 to the National Fund for the integrated ECEC system 0-6; while EUR 165 million were devoted to non-state child- hood schools. In Spain, an immediate response to the childcare challenge was an Extraor- dinary Contingency Fund endowed with EUR 490 million to finance social and care services.

Employer level initiatives to support parents with childcare were reported in Belgium, Spain, Ireland and Slovenia. For example, in Belgium, companies provided their own additional measures, such as insurance services if a child was ill (free home day care), financial advantages to offset part of the day care costs, company day nurseries or childcare options during school holidays. A survey undertaken in Spain showed that 18% of surveyed companies[18] offered social benefits to their workers such as the payment or co-payment of work-life balance services, online school activities for the children of employees, school support or extracurricular activities.

[18] 73 companies were surveyed between July-September 2020, representing 43% of all DIE network companies

4. Changes to the availability of long-term care (LTC) in response to COVID-19

COVID-19 containment measures affected the provision of long-term care services as day care centres were temporarily closed or made subject to limited access, homecare services were limited to strictly necessary visits. The placement of new residents in residential care was temporarily restricted (European Commission 2021). Residential care facilities restricted their services in several Member States. In France, during the first lockdown, many dedicated centres for persons with disabilities were closed. The quality of long-term care suffered in many Member States, as a result of labour shortages, additional stress on staff, lack of protective material and restrictions on family visits.

Labour shortages of carers, including home-based carers, were magnified by travel restrictions (typically live-in carers come from abroad, e.g. in Austria and Germany), and through school closures, as many, usually female care workers, had to cope with school closures and sickness. Restrictions in both residential and homecare have led to an extra care burden on families, particularly women (as reported for example in Bulgaria, Czechia, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Luxembourg, Malta).

As a result, families, and particularly women, had to take on more long-term care responsibilities. In principle, in Member States where formal care arrangements are well developed, and where no substantial restrictions took place, women were less affected by additional care responsibilities.

Policy measures introduced in the Member States in response to the increased care burden during the COVID-19 period focused mainly on granting more leave to workers, who care for family members, offering financial compensation as well as easing labour mobility. There are no gender-specific measures, but it can be assumed that measures enabling additional leave, benefit more women than men since women are more likely to take on the role of carer, and measures to ease labour migration may have a bigger impact for women. Financial compensation does not per se have a gender specific effect, since it generally benefits the whole household. Measures included, as illustrated in Table 9 below:

- **Extended possibilities to take leave to care** for elderly family members and persons with disabilities (e.g. Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg).

- **Financial compensation for family members with disabilities or in need of long-term care for other reasons**, regardless of whether the care-giver needed to reduce working hours or take leave (e.g. Czechia, Italy, Slovakia). These measures help to alleviate the financial burden on family members in need of care, but do not per se help reconcile work and family life.

- **Mobility measures.** One reason behind reduced homecare provision was travel restrictions, aggravating labour shortage of carers. Domestic workers, particularly female migrant workers, have been particularly affected by travel restrictions, dismissals, and increased workload without additional pay (EIGE, 2021a).

- **Improving the care infrastructure, increasing the number of staff and improving the working conditions of carers.** Such measures are likely to benefit more women than men. Care professionals are typically female and it was reported that working conditions for healthcare workers worsened during the pandemic and that women were more affected than men.

Table 9: Types of LTC-related policies adopted in the COVID-19 context

Type of measures	Member State
Granting more leave to workers who care for family members	**Extended possibilities to take leave to care** for elderly family members and persons with disabilities (DE, IT, LT, LU)
Offering financial compensation	**Financial compensation for family members with disabilities or in need of long-term care for other reasons**, regardless of whether the care-giver needed to reduce working hours or take leave (e.g. CZ, IT, SK).
Easing labour mobility	Travel restrictions were eased for 24-hour live-in carers in Austria
Investments and reforms in LTC	**Improving the care infrastructure, increasing the number of staff and improving working conditions of carers** have been included in the recovery and resilience plans of several Member States (e.g. CY, ES, IT, PT, SK). **The pandemic may have advanced reforms to the long-term care system** that were being planned over time (e.g. DE, SE, SK). The pandemic increased awareness of a need for reforms in some Member States (e.g. EE, EL).

Boxes 2 and 3 below, give examples of key reforms intended to improve the effectiveness of the long-term care system in Germany and Spain.

Box 2: Leave and loan scheme for care givers in Germany

In Germany, according to the care time law (*Gesetz über Pflegezeit*[19]), people working in companies with more than 15 employees are entitled to reduce their working hours or take a break from work for a maximum of six months. It is possible to combine the family care time and the care time scheme but, before the pandemic, care-givers had to use one scheme immediately following the other. In May 2020, this regulation was suspended temporarily due to the pandemic (Schmieder/Wrohlich 2020). For now, these regulations remain in force until December 2021[20].

Also in Germany, under both the family care time and the care time scheme, care-givers can apply to take an interest-free loan from the Federal Office for Family and Civil Society Tasks (BAFzA[21]) for the period they are on leave from their job entirely or partially. This loan must be paid back in instalments after the (family) care time ends. In May 2020, the Government decided that, on request, months with a pandemic-related loss of income can be disregarded when determining the loan amount to be paid back.[22] According to Schmieder/Wrohlich (2020), the extension of the period of entitlement for care support allowance and easing access to care leave or family care leave during the COVID-19 pandemic are to be welcomed from a gender equality perspective as most care-givers are women. However, these measures do not help to reduce the care gap between men and women.

Source: Germany country article

[19] Bundesministerium der Justiz and für Verbrauherschutz (2008)
[20] Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren und Jugend (2021b)
[21] Bundesamt für Familie und zivilgesellschaftliche Aufgaben (2021)
[22] Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (2020)

Box 3: Improving long-term care systems in Spain with emphasis on gender equality

The Spanish RRP[23] specifies the 'economy of care services', which also includes long-term care services, as a key goal to facilitate the functional autonomy of older people and at the same time to facilitate labour market entry and retention, particularly for those with care responsibilities. Likewise, it highlights the importance of reducing the structural barriers that hinder women's access to the labour market with equal rights and conditions. The 'Shock plan'[24] for the care economy and the reinforcement of equality and inclusion policies aims to develop new telecare networks, to modernise care systems for dependent people and to deploy new residential infrastructures that facilitate long-term care and the autonomy of elderly and dependent people. A specific reform agenda for care services was also launched, aimed at initiating the right to care services regardless of the person's employment status.[25] It builds on three pillars: professional (as opposed to informal) care services for families with children under-14; creation of quality employment in the care sector; and accreditation of prior non-professional care experience and competences of workers to facilitate their entry into the professional labour market and improve their working conditions.

Source: Spain country article

5. Changes to parental- and sickness leave schemes in response to COVID-19

This section discusses the changes to parental, paternity and sickness leave measures to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, which were crucial in supporting workers with children.

5.1. Parental and paternity leave benefit measures

A number of Member States introduced changes to parental and paternity leave measures in response to COVID-19 – see Table 10.[26] The wages of workers across Europe decreased due to absences and reduced working hours during the pandemic (Eurostat, 2020). In consequence, Lithuania and Germany introduced changes in how maternity, paternity and parental benefits were calculated to mitigate the impact of downtime on the amount of benefits received by parents. For example, returning to the labour market during the pandemic, particularly during lockdown, might have been challenging for partners on parental leave. Therefore, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia extended the potential length of parental leave for the emergency period. Data on take-up by gender is not available, however, as discussed in Section 2, most such leaves were taken by women before the pandemic. If this pattern continued during the emergency measures, the consequences for gender equality could be negatively perpetuated as women would experience longer breaks in employment with negative career consequences.

[23] See Spain's Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan
[24] The 'Shock plan to reinforce the long-term care system' was endowed with EUR 3.5 billion in total, of which EUR 730 million will be distributed in 2021
[25] The Plan Corresponsables was endowed with EUR 190 million for 2021.
[26] During the pandemic, but unrelated to it, an additional six Member States transposed the work-life balance Directive (EU) 2019/1158. These cover paternity leave (Belgium, France), parental leave (Estonia, Ireland and Spain), parental, paternity and carers' leave (Greece).

Table 10: Types of parental and paternity leave changes adopted during COVID-19

Types of measures	MS
Favourable way of calculating benefits for parents	**2: DE, LT**
Extension of leave during the pandemic	**4: HU, LV, RO, SK**

Source: country articles

Box 4: Examples of parental leave measures

- In **Hungary**, parental leave benefits (GYES, GYED, GYET) were extended for all recipients until the end of the emergency situation (March-June 2020 and March-April 2021) in case they ended during the state of emergency. Also, as of January 2021, the maternity leave allowance (Csecsemőgondozási Díj (CSED)) increased from 70% to 100% of previous earnings.
- In **Latvia**, a parent whose parental leave came to an end and who, due to COVID-19 restrictions, could not return to work or continue self-employment could claim continuation of parental leave.
- **Romanian** parents on parental leave were given the option to remain on parental leave (on similar conditions) during the emergency period (March-July 2020). By mid-May 2020, more than 4 000 parents prolonged their parental leave (sex disaggregated data unavailable). For parents who returned to work from parental leave before their child turned two, the period of payment of the financial incentive of EUR 130 (RON 650)/month was prolonged until the child turns three, or four for children with disabilities. On April 2021, these legislative provisions changed and parents, who returned from parental leave before the child turned six months, or one year for children with disabilities, receive a financial incentive of EUR 300 (RON 1 500)/month until the child turns two, or three in the case of child with disabilities. Where parents decide to remain on parental leave until the child turns two, or three for children with disabilities, after returning to work, they receive a financial incentive of EUR 130 (RON 650) until the child turns three, or four in the case of children with disabilities.
- **Slovakia** modified parental allowance and extended payment for some parents. Since April 2020, the payment of regular parental allowance (so-called pandemic parental allowance) was extended for parents whose entitlement would end in March 2020 or later in lockdown. Parents were eligible if they were receiving a parental allowance and had no income from employment, business or self-employment, or social benefits or pensions. The number of parental allowance receivers increased from approximately 139 000 in 2019 to 142 000 per month in 2020. The amount of parental allowance also increased. Starting from January 2020, the uniform parental allowance (in 2019, EUR 211 per month) was replaced with a two-tier system for (i) parents previously on the maternity benefit (EUR 370) and (ii) parents who did not receive maternity benefit (EUR 270 per month).

5.2. Carers' leave, sickness leave and parental leave during school closures

To support parents in their home-schooling responsibilities, 22 Member States introduced COVID-19 related leave measures. Five Member States extended the length (Austria, Germany), increased the compensation rate (Austria, Czechia, Slovenia) or changed the eligibility criteria of existing carers' leave (Austria, Czechia, Slovenia and Sweden) – see Table 11. For example, Austria extended caregiver leave from two to four weeks, in- creased

compensation from 30% to 100% of wage costs and broadened the leave eligibility to parents of children under 14 (from 12 before the pandemic). Five Member States introduced flexibility in the use of existing leave measures. The Irish government asked employers to allow flexibility for employees to take Force Majeure Leave when childcare services were closed, even where they may technically not qualify under the legislation. In Bulgaria, employers were obliged to allow paid or unpaid leave for some types of employees, including pregnant women, mothers of children under 12, and employees under 18.

To support parents looking after children during childcare and school closures, thirteen Member States introduced additional special COVID-19 leave/allowances. The eligible age of children looked after varied from under eight to teenagers under 15-16. Eight Member States also provided leave to parents caring for a child with a disability, and when a child contracted COVID-19 or had to quarantine. Latvia granted an allowance to adult carers of a person with a disability, who could not attend a day care centre. Only a small number of Member States extended the carers' leave to the self-employed and working grandparents. Eligibility in a few cases depended on the employment/insurance status of one or both parents, lack of other adults in the household who could take care of children, lack of possibility to work from home and approval by the employer. Leave eligibility, duration and compensation levels did not differ depending on gender. However, compensation of leave based on past salary meant that parents were more likely to choose the lower earner (woman) to take care of children. Five countries specified that only one parent at a time could take leave. During the pandemic, Member States amended carers' leave several times in response to new waves of infections and calls from social partners to extend the eligibility and compensation rate of measures (e.g. in Austria, Italy and Slovakia). Frequent changes and measure fragmentation caused confusion to parents in Greece and Romania.

Table 11: Carers' leave and/or sickness leave changes adopted during COVID-19

Types of measures	Member State				
Extension of length, compensation and/or eligibility of existing carers' leave	5: AT, CZ, DE(b), SE, SI				
Flexibility in use of the leave	5: BG, HR, DE(d), IE, ES				
	MS	**Child's age**	**Children with a disability**	**Taken by**	**Eligibility**
New additional special leave/allowance while childcare/schools were closed due to COVID	BE	<12	■		Working parents (fathers or mothers).
	CY	<15	■	One parent at a time	Insured workers with a gross monthly salary of up to EUR 2 500. Both parents working or one hospitalised or PWD.
	DK	<13			(Self-)employed parents; people at risk of prolonged infection and their relatives.
	DE(a)	<12	■		Working parents (fathers or mothers).
	DE(b)	<12			Parents where no other person is present in the household who

Types of measures	Member State				
					can take care of the child, both the parent and the child have statutory health insurance.
	EL(a)	<~14/15	▪		Working parents (fathers or mothers).
	EL(b)	with COVID-19			Working parents (fathers or mothers).
	FR	<16	▪	One parent at time	(Self-)employed in the private or public sector (except civil servants). Both parents unable to work from home.
	IT	<12			(Self-)employed parents on condition that neither is beneficiary of alternative wage support, unemployed or currently not working. Employees working from home can also benefit from this leave.
	LV	<10	▪		Parents not working from home and caregivers for PWD.
	LT	<~10/11	▪		Insured parents, guardians and working grandparents.
	LU	<13	Children in hospital	One parent at time	Fulltime employed, parents working from home and cross-border workers were entitled.
	MT	<16			Fulltime or part time employed parents not able to work from home
	PL	<8			Insured parents (employees, contractors, self-employed).
	PT	<12	▪	One parent at time	(Self-)employed.
	RO	<12	▪	One parent at time	Upon employers' approval, when alternatives were considered (schedule change, working from home, teleworking).
	SK	15	▪		Insured parents (mothers, fathers, adoptive parents).

Note: PWD – person with a disability.
Source: country articles and Eurofound (2020a)

Duration and compensation of carers' leave are usually medium to high and show no strong association across Member States. Most Member States offered relatively long leave periods over 15 days or for the duration of childcare/school closure – see Table 12.[27] In contrast, Irish parents could take only three days of Force Majeure Leave, given at the employer's discretion. The length and compensation of leave was not dependent on gender. In some countries, separate provisions applied to civil servants, as in Cyprus and France or those employed in the public sector in Romania. Seven MS offered relatively high leave payment levels of more than 80% of salary. Among them, Greece created very favourable conditions for parents taking care of children during childcare/school closures and when children had COVID-19 (see Box 5, further below). In contrast, Italy compensated only 50%

[27] Clustering of Member States in low, medium or high provisions should be read with some caution since the compensation base varies across Member States from net salary (Germany) to maternity/sickness/unemployment benefits (Belgium, Denmark, Ireland).

of the parents' salary, which was topped up by some employers (see Box 6). In France, compensation for absence was transferred to the short-time leave scheme (see Box 7). Both duration and compensation were in the medium-high range, duration varying more at medium compensation levels, while compensation was more varied when duration was long.

Table 12: Duration and compensation of carers' and sickness leave during COVID-19

	Compensation			
Duration	Low: 0 to 60%	Medium: 60 to 80%	Medium: Variable	High: 80 to 100%
Short: below 5 days		IE (3 days, illness benefit)		
Medium: 5 to 15 days		LV (14 days, 60% average salary) LT (14 days, 65.94% of the gross salary)		EL (14 days, 100% salary)
Long: above 15 days/Duration of childcare, school closure	IT (30 days, 50% salary)	CY (4 weeks, 60% for first EUR 1 000 and 40% for salary from EUR 1 000 to EUR 2 000, capped at EUR 1 000 per month) DE(a) (10 weeks, 67%) FR (21 days, 50% of previous wage and 100% for civil servants) SK (duration of school closure, 75% salary)	DK (duration of school closure, maternity benefit)	DE(b) (20 days, 90% net wages) AT (4 weeks, 100% wage costs) PL (over 60 days per year, 80% base salary) SE (120 days, 80% salary) CZ (duration of school closure, 80% of the daily assessment) EL(a) (duration of school closure, 100% salary)
Not specified	BE (n/a, temporary unemployment benefit)	PT (n/a, 2/3 basic pay) RO (n/a, 75% of the gross salary of one paid day)		SI (n/a, 80% salary)

Note: information not available for Luxembourg.

Source: country articles

Box 5: Special leave measures in Greece and Sweden

In **Greece**, in addition to regular options, during the pandemic working parents could take:

- Leave of special purpose: Parents (fathers or mothers) working as employees and with children attending kindergarten or nurseries or school classes up to the level of third grade of Gymnasium (up to 14-15 years of age) could be absent from work during the temporary closure of these facilities. Working parents of children with a disability whose schools or day care centres were closed, irrespective of age, were also entitled to this leave. The leave was fully compensated to the level of earnings from labour and except for annual leave which is fully compensated by the employer, the rest of the leave was compensated for two-thirds by the employer and one-third by the State. Following the reopening of schools, this leave was restricted to cases where a child was obliged to stay at home for reasons related to the pandemic.

- A special 14-day (or more if needed) leave to care for children ill with COVID-19, over and above the other available sickness leave for children, was also introduced.

In **Sweden**, if a childcare/nursery facility or primary school was closed because of COVID-19, one of the parents had the right to **receive an extended additional parental leave support for sick children**, even if the child was not sick (for children between eight months and 12-years). Compensation was 80% of actual income, as with the ordinary parental leave scheme for sick children (120 days per child and year). Not only dependent but self-employed people and registered unemployed were also eligible for extended parental leave. Between 2019 and 2020, the number of compensated leave days for sick children significantly increased by 24.1% (an increase by 26.4% for fathers and 22.7% for mothers).

Source: country articles

Box 6: Examples of successful collective bargaining in Italy

- Allianz Bank increased the parental leave allowance envisaged to cover 50% of the wage up to 100% provided that the employee had already taken their annual leave/ holiday for the current and previous year.

- For employees on parental leave during COVID-19, Cattolica Insurance Society paid into the Pension Fund as if the employee was in regular service, integrating the INPS payment (equal to 50%) with a contribution equal to 20% of the salary corresponding to the leave, paid for all parental leave days, for two or more children under 12.

- ENEL paid an allowance equal to 100% of the salary to employees whose work could not be accomplished via teleworking, who took COVID-19 parental leave for the school quarantine of cohabiting children under 14.

Source: country articles

Box 7: Short-time work compensation during the COVID-19 crisis in France

France introduced sickness leave to workers (employees and self-employed) in the private or public sector (except civil servants), who were unable to work because of school/childcare centres closures or because their child contracted COVID-19 or was a contact case. The maximum duration of the leave was 21 days and the minimum compensation amounted to 50% of the previous wage. To reduce the cost for employers (who had to complement the social security allowance to comply with collective agreements) and to unify employees' coverage, compensation of these absences was transferred to the short-time leave scheme under certain conditions.

Source: country articles

Carers' leave provided additionally during the COVID-19 crisis has been taken by more women than men, therefore has not generated a more gender-equal division of tasks within the household – see Table 13. In response to unequal take-up of the exceptional family support in Portugal, where 80% of leave users were women, the government increased (from two-thirds to 100% of remuneration) the support for parents who declared that childcare would be shared between parents. Similar findings emerge from EIGE indicating increased unpaid care by both genders, without substantial change in the distribution of responsibilities (EIGE, 2021a).

Table 13: Take up of carers' and sickness leave by gender during the pandemic

	MS
Gender	**AT:** By mid-April 2021 (latest available data), 30 000 people (for 35 000 cared-for persons) had used the extended special care period, 66% of whom were women. **BE:** In 2020, on average, 252 046 workers per month have used the parental leave allowance (incl. the Corona Parental Leave), 68.9% of whom were women. Parental leave use increased by 31.5% compared to 2019. **DE:** The extension of the period of entitlement for care support allowance and easing access to care leave or family care leave during the COVID-19 pandemic did not help to decrease the care gap between men and women (Schmieder/Wrohlich, 2020). **IT:** Women represented 79% of the 320 540 workers who benefited from extraordinary parental leave regulated by the Cura Italia Decree between March and August 2020. **LU:** In March 2020, 40 338 employees (8.6% of people working in Luxembourg) used leave for family reasons. Women were the main beneficiaries (58.1%). **PT:** More than 80% of exceptional family support beneficiaries in 2020 were women. No data on the impact of introduced changes promoting equal sharing of leave. **SI:** More women than men were absent from work due to force majeure or quarantine: from May 2020 to May 2021, nearly 42 000 claims for work absences were filed by men (43%), while 56 000 claims were filed by women (57%). **SK:** In the early phase of the pandemic in 2020, women comprised 65% (or 219 452 people) of all pandemic nursing benefit receivers (335 397). There were differences in the average monthly amount of the benefit (EUR 299 for men and EUR 248 for women).

Source: country articles

6. Employer and government approaches to telework and flexible working during COVID-19

This section discusses policy responses by governments and the social partners to promote telework and flexible working arrangements as key responses to the COVID-19 pandemic for keeping businesses operating and those workers that could telework, safe.

6.1. Telework

Use of telework

The need to keep businesses afloat while keeping workers safe generated a huge increase in teleworking (particularly home working) across all Member States, albeit with great variation. Eurofound survey data show that since its peak in April 2020, telework declined somewhat but increased again during each lockdown. In general, telework remained largely above 2019 levels (Eurofound, 2020). As Eurofound (2020) shows, the largest proportions of employees working from home before the pandemic were in the Nordic and Benelux countries. In addition, telework has increased considerably in the Member States that had low pre-pandemic levels of telework.

The more educated and women could telework more, but outcomes are not clear cut. National surveys are not fully comparable[28], but evidence from them shows that in general,

[28] They cover different time periods (yearly average or during a specific lockdown phase), and type of telework (always/sometimes telework).

the propensity to telework tends to increase in line with the level of education, since associated occupations can more often be performed remotely. The share of women in occupations suited to telework is estimated to be much higher than the share of men, due to occupational segregation, with women overrepresented in less physical occupations, such as office-based work, involving secretarial and administrative tasks (EIGE, 2021a). However, gender differences in adopting telework varied across Member States related to differences in the occupational structure and the availability of other measures. For example, while in Belgium, Greece, Spain, Hungary, Italy and Slovakia, more women than men adopted teleworking during the pandemic, the reverse is true for Germany and Luxembourg. In Czechia, Finland and Croatia there was no gender gap in teleworking. However in Czechia, more women than men took advantage of sick leave to care for their children. One issue undermining the full exploitation of telework by women is the digital gender divide, with women having less access to ICT, and older women having less developed digital skills than men (EIGE, 2021a).

Changing rules for teleworking during the pandemic

Member States took a number of measures to facilitate the use of telework during the pandemic, ranging from recommendations to imposing obligations to employers – see Table 14. Without necessarily changing regulations, workers often could choose the distribution of their working hours to suit their care responsibilities during school closures (e.g. Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Greece). In some Member States, governments obliged private sector employers to offer the choice to telework whenever possible to all employees (e.g. Belgium, Czechia, Germany, Spain, France[29], Lithuania[30] and Latvia), or to a share of employees (e.g. 50% in Greece, 30% and 50% in Cyprus) or to public sector employees only, as was the case in Sweden. In Greece, in the public sector, parents were given priority if they chose telework. In other Member States, governments **recommended** that companies adopt teleworking, e.g. in Austria, Belgium (certain periods), Bulgaria, Finland, Luxembourg (including trans-border work[31]).

Only a few Member States changed the legal framework or introduced new laws related to telework. Such changes were in some cases driven by the implementation of the EU Directive on Work-Life Balance, as in Austria, Greece, Spain, Hungary, Ireland and Latvia). New rules contain different elements, focusing mainly on protecting employees, but there are also examples of easing implementation by companies, even at the expense of employees' protection. In particular, Member States that had a low level of telework take-up pre-pandemic, changed the rules in favour of employers. Protective measures have generally only been implemented after the first or the second wave of the pandemic had passed.

Some Member States are discussing necessary amendments to regulation. Challenges relate to the separation of work and private life, mental stress, ergonomics, costs and use of equipment, management of teams, control of working time and work performed. In Slovenia, on 13 November 2020, the Economic and Social Council established the Expert Committee on the Regulation of Telework, which discussed potential solutions to improve home working. In Belgium the social partners are also engaged in transposing the Work-Life Balance Directive (2019/1158), which particularly specifies new options for flexible working to reconcile work and family responsibilities. Bipartite discussions are underway within the National Labour Council, based on a draft bill prepared by the Minister of Employment. In Germany, there has been a debate around introducing the right for employees to telework, claimed by the trade union confederation (DGB) and strictly opposed by the employers' organisation.

[29] The obligation was controlled by the Ministry of Labour, with frequent exchanges with social partners on its implementation. The rule of 100% working time on remote work, when possible, imposed during the first lockdown, was relaxed during the second and third lockdowns (one day on site was authorized).
[30] Obligation at the request of employees, introduced in August 2020.
[31] An agreement signed between the finance ministers of Belgium, France, Germany and Luxembourg ruled an extended derogation concerning double taxation for teleworkers.

Table 14: Amendments to legislation and rules for telework during the pandemic

Rules to better protect workers and employee rights	Rules to facilitate employers to use telework	Working time regulations
Voluntary consent of employers and workers (AT, as of April 2021) **The government's National Remote Work Strategy aims to provide legal framework for requesting remote work and for employers to deal with such requests (IE)** **Provision of digital work equipment or flat-rate reimbursement of costs. The concrete arrangement is to be specified within the framework of company agreements; guidelines for this (AT, as of April 2021)** **Obligation of the employer to bear the costs of equipment (EL, LV, as of August 2021, SK according to second change of rules)** **Set rules for the health and safety of employees, and forbiddance of the use of cameras in order to check employee performance and other (EL)** **Right to disconnect (ES, as of Sept 2020, IE, EL, SK latest changes)** **Right to work-life balance to equal treatment, equal opportunities, and non-discrimination for remote workers as for on-site workers, (ES, as of Sept 2020).**	**Possibility of an employer to order employees to work from home upon defined circumstances (SK)** **Easing the administrative burden by the introduction of a flat rate for financing employee's costs (HU)** **Simplification of the reporting process to the Labour Inspectorate (SI) and previously established need for registration was repealed (BE)** **In IT, in the face of the emergency, the legislator lifted employer's obligations to provide the necessary devices and ensure their functioning, and the requirement to sign an individual agreement regulating daily and weekly rest, right to disconnect and employer's power to control an employee. In some cases, also the employer's obligation to regularly inform on health and safety risks (Article 22(1) Law No 81/2017) was suspended.**	**Following a first change of the rule, the worker is operating from home, the employment relationship is not subject to weekly working hours, daily and weekly rest, and idle-time provisions. No wage supplements are paid to the employee for the overtime and night work and for working on Saturdays and Sundays unless the employee and the employer agree otherwise (SK, Eurofound, 2020).** **A second round of changes rules that the employer will primarily schedule working hours for working from home and teleworking. The employer and the employee will also be able to agree that the employee will schedule their own working hours throughout the week (SK, Eurofound, 2020).**

Source: country articles

Regulations through collective agreements

Only a few Member States addressed work-life balance issues through collective agreements. In **Germany**, before the pandemic, teleworking arrangements were sometimes stipulated within works council agreements (*Betriebsvereinbarung*) and specified in job contracts (Hans Boeckler Stiftung, 2021). Overall, employees working in SMEs and men are more likely to work for organisations covered by a works council agreement than women and workers in other business forms. There are no studies investigating whether works council agreements have been amended or newly introduced since the start of the pandemic. In Austria, a country with robust social partners and wide coverage of collective agreements, the new home office regulation, which entered into force in April 2021 states that a concrete arrangement must be stipulated within the framework of company agreements and there are proposals and guidelines for this. The Cypriot RRP[32] seeks to promote flexible work arrangements through the introduction of new legislation and promotion of collective agreements to regulate telework alongside a scheme for subsidised telework. In Italy, where telework regulations have been relaxed, there have been several collective agreements regulating the use of telework, paying specific attention to offering telework to parents of young children ('smart work'). For example, the Poste Italiane agreement of 18 December 2020 confirmed the validity of smart working to support the work-life balance

[32] See the Cyprus Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026

needs of workers. Particular attention is given to the smart working requests for three years after the end of maternity and paternity leave; to workers with disabilities or with children with disabilities; and single parents.

Examples of measures implemented by companies

There exists very scarce evidence on companies' practices supporting telework.[33] Through interviews, the country articles have nevertheless collected some good practice examples implemented by companies. More examples may exist, but this has been little investigated in the literature thus far.

Box 8: Company good practices to facilitate the combination of telework and family life during lockdown

- In **Estonia**, private sector employers with less than 30 employees gave employees the freedom to choose their working hours during the first wave of the pandemic. Meetings were banned during lunch hours (12:00-14:00) to ensure that parents could eat with their children at home due to closed schools. Friday became the meeting-free day of the week. Employees with children were encouraged to get together and share their experiences of reconciling work and family life and offer each other support. During the second wave of the pandemic, employers offered free mental health support, online mindfulness sessions and reimbursed therapy costs.

- The **Cyprus** Telecommunication Authority (CYTA), a state-owned enterprise, expanded the company's telework scheme. Teleworkers were provided with equipment to work during normal working hours. All employees who are able to work remotely are eligible for the teleworking scheme, with priority given to employees facing work-life balance challenges (pregnancy, childcare etc.) (Eurofound, 2020).

- In **Belgium**, the private bank Argenta set up a crisis management team at the onset of the pandemic, with the involvement of HR and the communication department. To support its personnel working from home, several rounds of training modules were developed, for example, for local branch managers on how to manage their employees working remotely (Eurofound, 2020b).

Source: country articles

Good practice examples of initiatives offering guidance

Many employers, line managers and employees were badly prepared for telework when the pandemic started. Therefore, in some Member States, different actors provided guidebooks, as illustrated in box 9, below.

Box 9: Examples of government initiatives offering guidance

- In **Austria**, a state-owned non-profit enterprise named 'Familie & Beruf Management GmbH' was established by law to coordinate and facilitate family-friendly national measures, focused on how companies can implement the home office in a family-friendly way.

- In **Germany**, a number of guides and toolboxes have been developed to help companies to implement telework. For example, the Corona Toolbox of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ, 2021) collects general advice

[33] A survey conducted among employees in LU showed that less than one-third of employers asked their tele-workers if they needed additional equipment, even less asked if they needed extra support such as training, or offered additional extraordinary leave. In all questions, male respondents indicated more often than women that they received support (source: unpublished LISER survey to be completed by end of 2021 mentioned in the country article).

on how to implement flexible working arrangements plus practical examples from companies across different industries. The Competence Center for Securing Skilled Workers (KOFA, 2021) published a Checklist for SMEs that want to help their employees to work from home. Templates for works council agreements on flexible working agreements are available on the website of the Institute for Works Council Training (*Institut für Betriebsräte-Fortbildung – W.A.F.*, 2021).

- In **Ireland**, improving work-life balance is a main goal of remote working, as outlined in the report published by the Irish Government in January 2021, *Making Remote Work: National Remote Work Strategy*. Likewise, the Code of Practice on the Right to Disconnect should also facilitate better work-life balance (Workplace Relations Ireland, 2021). To address this, the government plans to develop remote working hubs and to 'map commuter, skills and childcare facilities data to inform future hub development decisions'.

- In **Lithuania**, the State Labour Inspectorate (VDI) provided several recommendations on how to combine teleworking and childcare for parents who do not use an incapacity certificate.

Source: country articles

Regulations and policies to improve work-life balance of teleworkers

Overall, little has been done by governments to help balance telework with family life. In Italy, telework has been perceived as an option to reconcile work with family life and the government has even avoided the possibility of combining it with other measures. To contain public expenditure, the legislator imposed a choice between 'smart work', vouchers for babysitting and special parental leave. This rule strengthened traditional gender roles and increased female inactivity (Alleri et al. 2021). Germany introduced **tax deductions or special tax allowances for expenses related to telework**, but these measures do not help improve the reconciliation of telework with family life and do not reduce associated gender inequalities. In Belgium, on 13 March 2020, the government introduced the office allowance for teleworkers legislation, an allowance of EUR 126.94 per month to cover the costs of heating, electricity, small office equipment and other necessary facilities for working from home (Eurofound, 2020).

The impact of telework on work-life balance depended heavily on school and childcare closures, thus the burden on women to combine telework and family life is estimated to have been higher than for men. Evidence collected in several Member States indicate that gender roles sometimes shifted so that fathers spent more time on care and household chores than pre-pandemic. However, in a context where care responsibilities are still not equally shared between men and women, women are more often interrupted in their work by their children, and suffer from additional workload. This is likely to reduce their productivity as compared to teleworking men (EIGE, 2021). National studies and surveys confirm this finding. In Estonia, interviews among parents revealed that the adaptation to the pandemic was smoother for those already used to working from home (Haugas and Sepper, 2021). However, even for those with such experience, working with children at home due to school and day care closure was perceived a difficult task. The burden was higher for women than for men. Similar results were found in Finland (Kaltiainen et al., 2021) and Slovakia (Holubová and Kahancová, 2021). In Latvia, in a survey on the impact of telework, one-third of all respondents considered that working from home negatively affected work-life balance (Riga Stradiņa University, 2020). Research from Greece shows teleworking mothers felt dissatisfied with the help they could offer their children to a greater extent than fathers. Having children (under 18) greatly affects the level of satisfaction from this method of work (48% of parents compared to 63% of non-parents expressed satisfaction) (Simeonaki et al., 2020).

6.2. Flexibilisation of working time, use of annual leave and working time accounts

Women tended to reduce their working hours more often than men to accommodate specific caring obligations. In Denmark, in households where both parents teleworked, women often had to reduce work time (Potential Co, 2020). In Ireland, more men than women took paid or unpaid leave during the pandemic, although during the pandemic the burden of unpaid homework and home schooling of children was disproportionately allocated to women (Forsa, 2020). In Germany, more women than men reduced working hours during the pandemic (Brücker et al., 2021).

Companies put in place different models of working time flexibilisation, leading to good and bad practices, but generally without differentiation by gender:

Box 10: Good practices at company level to improve work-life balance through flexibilisation of working time

- In **Spain**, according to the survey of the Women's Institute, before the pandemic, 82% of companies already offered the possibility of flexible working hours, which has increased to 90%. Other commonly implemented measures are intensive working day (75% of companies, 67% before the pandemic), customised working hours through the calculation of hours (23% of companies, compared to 15% before the pandemic). Furthermore, 11% of surveyed companies have relaxed the criteria to request a reduction in working hours as another flexibility measure.
- In **Ireland**, LinkedIn gave the whole company a paid week off and introduced reduced working hours during summer months (CNN, 2021). Also, An Post offers its employees extended leave during the school summer holidays (An Post, 2021).
- At Telekom in **Slovenia**, rotation of workers and redistribution of workload were introduced due to COVID-19. Employees over 55 or with concerns about proximity to customers were given the option of not working in the field (Deloglasnik, 2020).
- In **Slovakia**, a company in the insurance and bank sector piloted a 4-day working week from January 2021 to June 2021. The aim was to relieve employee stress due to the pandemic and increased workload. Working 4-days per week was voluntary and the working hours per day were increased to 9.7 hours instead of 8 during the 5-day week. The internal evaluation survey revealed that 70% of involved employees considered a 4-day week to be a positive step. They appreciated the work-life balance, mental wellbeing, flexibility and more free time the most. Managers noted an overall improvement in prioritising work tasks. The project will continue and be re-evaluated at the end of 2021 (Bakoš, 2021).
- In **Hungary**, according to the interviews, large employers used paid and unpaid leave, often combined with the short-time work scheme to avoid redundancies. Other employers organised on-site childcare to help parents, who could not work from home (due to the nature of their work).
- In **Lithuania**, flexible working arrangements adapted by employers during the quarantine were mainly targeted at a) annualised hours – standard working hours for the entire reference period are fulfilled during the reference period; b) flexible work schedule – requirement for the employee to be present at the online workplace during certain hours of the workday and flexibility for the remaining hours; c) split shift working time arrangements – work is performed on the same day/shift with a longer break to rest and eat than previously established breaks; d) personalised working time arrangements. A study on employers' attitudes towards family-friendly policies and measures was conducted in Spring 2021 by the Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences. It shows that the implementation of family and work reconciliation measures is beneficial to the employer. (Pilinkaite-Sotirovic, 2021).

Source: country articles

Interviews with stakeholders in Croatia revealed an example of a problematic practice: at the beginning of lockdown, employers widely resorted to the practice of recording annual leave as taken, without the workers' consent/awareness. After workers became aware of such practices, trade unions raised the issue of their legality and some employers returned annual leave to their workers; however, many cases ended up in court.

Out of the 27 EU Member States, only three governments changed their laws and regulations for working time flexibilisation (Finland, Slovenia and Spain) due to the pandemic, or have introduced schemes to cope with the financial consequences of reduced working hours for exceptional childcare needs (Belgium).

- In **Belgium**, a time credit system for employees of companies in difficulty and/or restructuring due to the COVID-19 pandemic was introduced. Time credit is a specific system that already existed before the crisis. It was originally meant as a way for employees to take a form of leave to either follow a specific education/training or provide care. The employee receives a benefit from the federal unemployment services instead of a wage during this period of absence (Eurofound, 2020). The use of time credit by women increased from 60 040 'physical units' in 2019 to 70 507 in 2020 (ONEM, 2021).

- In **Finland**, the new Working Hours Act increased the potential for flexible working time arrangements.[34] For some, the flexibility of their paid work meant the possibility of working part-time or using vacation days during lockdown.

- In **Slovenia**, guidelines were issued at the beginning of the pandemic to ease the use of flexibilisation tools. The guidelines mainly addressed the general rules for ordering home office work, the possibility of unilaterally ordering other work and home work in case of exceptional circumstances, the use of annual and collective leave, furlough, absence from work for childcare due to the closure of kindergartens and schools, unpaid leave, and additional information from Health Insurance Institute regarding compensation for work absences.

- In **Spain**, the immediate impact of lockdown on work-life balance was addressed via the introduction of work flexibilisation measures such as the Plan MECUIDA (art.6, RDL 8/2020) and the shift to telework when possible (art. 5 RDL 8/2020). However, the use of telework arrangements fell below expectations and particularly women with caring responsibilities had to reduce working hours instead.[35]

Box 11: Examples of policy measures to compensate for reduced working hours due to the extraordinary caring responsibilities during lockdowns in Spain and Belgium

- In **Spain**, the Plan MECUIDA allowed adapting working hours to meet care needs; it allows changes in shifts and time schedules, change of place of work, remote work or any other adaptations in the organisation of working hours and workspace, including a reduction of working hours by 100%. While such adaptations do not include salary reduction, the reduction of working hours is accompanied by a proportionate reduction in salary as discussed above. The uptake

[34] Sorsa T and Rotkirch, A Perhebarometri 2020 (Family barometer 2020), Väestöliitto.

[35] According to a survey of 7 561 female respondents with children, 37% of surveyed mothers have been denied the option of teleworking although their tasks were compatible with remote work (Asociacion Yo no renuncio, 2021). Furthermore, 22% of them have given up all or part of their job to look after their children, either by taking up an unpaid family leave or unpaid free days (21%), by requesting unpaid reduction of working hours by 100% (11%) or by using their vacation days (74%). Nearly one fourth of mothers in the study could not adapt work responsibilities to their care responsibilities and had to reduce working time.

of these measures is seen as an individual right both in the Workers' Charter[36] and in the Plan MECUIDA, which also takes into account the situation of the company.

- In **Belgium**, during the third wave between March and April 2021, the Belgian government introduced a temporary Corona unemployment scheme. It was made available to parents whose children's holiday camps were fully or partially cancelled, for the days on which they took care of the child. The benefit scheme was also made available to employees who decided, after the official call of the authorities, not to let their children go to childcare to curb the spread of the virus (ONEM, 2021).

  In terms of gender, according to data by Forem, at the end of October, 95 748 people used the 'Corona Parental Leave' – which was, from the beginning of October, called temporary unemployment for lack of childcare – of which 65 952 were women (68.9%) and 29 796 were men (31.1%) (RTBF, 2021).

- In **Greece**, public sector employees could opt for work rotation and could also adjust their working hours to suit caring for their children and their work needs. If a parent was obliged to stay at home due to COVID safety, they could work remotely if possible. If this was not possible, instead of special leave, they could opt for reduced hours of work (up to 25% of their working time daily) without a loss of earnings. In which case, the employee, once restrictions ended, should make up the lost hours in unpaid overtime.

Source: country articles

6.3. Short-time work and other job retention schemes

Short-time work schemes, partial unemployment schemes and other job retention schemes represent a key policy measure to prevent unemployment and to support companies with flexible working. There is mixed evidence across Member States whether more women than men were included in these measure (e.g. in Germany, Luxembourg more men than women were included and in Spain slightly more women than men). In some Member States, gender issues have been detected regarding gender gap in the level of net compensation (as in Germany[37]) and non-coverage of some non-standard forms of employment, as recorded e.g. in Czechia (self-employment) and Germany (self-employment and mini-jobs).

7. Conclusions

Unpaid care duties are key to gender gaps in the labour market. As illustrated in the above sections, across the Member States, care responsibilities are equally shared between women and men only in about one-third of families. The interplay between labour market and household conditions may create vicious cycles. The unequal division of unpaid care work between men and women reduces women's access to and permanence in the labour market, and concentrates women in sectors and jobs allowing greater working time flexibility at the price of lower wages and career opportunities. Gender gaps in the labour market themselves reinforce the unequal division of unpaid care work in households.

Work-life balance policies are therefore key for supporting women's labour market participation and employment and achieving gender equality in the labour market. Although cultural and social norms on the gender division of unpaid work in the household

[36] Article 34.8 of Workers' Charter includes the right to adapt and article 37.6 the right to reduce working time for those with children aged less than 12. Art 6 of RDL 8/2020 expands the right to reduce working time to 100% of working time and to second degree relatives.

[37] The compensation rate as such does not differ between men and women, however, the German splitting principle in the tax model leads to a lower net compensation for women.

are still relevant, availability, affordability and quality of childcare and long-term care services, eligibility criteria, length and compensation level of parental, paternity and carers' leaves, and flexible working arrangements all play an important role in promoting equal sharing of care tasks in the household, enabling full and equal participation in the labourmarket.

Information gaps exist in relation to take up of measures broken down by gender to feed into gender-specific monitoring and impact assessment of government support measures, and of the restrictions imposed during the pandemic. Comparable information, especially by gender, is still scarce, thus conclusions must be drawn with some caution and efforts for better data must be made. Major and potentially high-impact measures should be assessed for their gender-specific impact and to support that, appropriate data should be collected. If this was not possible when a policy was introduced in response to COVID-19 (e.g. due to the time pressure of the pandemic), then doing so is important during or after implementation to support drawing evidence-based conclusions.

The COVID-19 pandemic may have long-lasting effects on the labour market conditions of women. The pandemic is likely to have aggravated gender inequalities in the labour market though the unequal division of exceptional unpaid care work between men and women due to the closure of schools and care services, reinforcing traditional gender roles and jeopardising progress achieved prior to the pandemic. This affects women's wellbeing but also their longer term labour market prospects, in terms of wage penalties, lower social protection and pension contributions. However, it also underlined the importance of care services and workers for socio-economic growth. The emergency measures implemented during the pandemic were often temporary and did not adopt a gender perspective, nor addressed the specific problems of disadvantaged groups (e.g. single mothers, migrant women).

Long-term recovery strategies boosting female employment and addressing work-life balance are needed to address the structural weaknesses of care systems and work-life balance policies. This requires strong investment in the provision of good quality, affordable and accessible care and social services, the promotion of leave policies and flexible working time arrangements that do not penalise women, and measures supporting a more equal division of care responsibilities between women and men in households, promoting new care arrangements, gender roles and attitudes. The implementation of the Work-Life Balance Directive in all Member States, and the launch of the Next Generation EU Instrument, with the Recovery and Resilience Facility and Recovery and Resilience Plans, can have an important role in supporting the measures mentioned above. To ensure the contribution of work-life balance measures to gender equality, close monitoring and evaluation of their implementation and outcomes from a gender perspective is needed.

Legal entitlement to full-time childcare and compulsory attendance, as well as attention to the quality of services provided, are important to support the move towards greater use and provision of formal childcare services. They also help shift cultural perceptions and norms towards increased acceptability of mothers returning to the labour market. However, the legal entitlement to childcare exists only in few Member States and is often only available to older children. Other important drivers behind take-up of formal childcare relate to their affordability, the availability of places, and the flexibility of service hours. Lack of childcare places still exists in many Member States (16), while the cost challenge affects parents and particularly (single) mothers who tend to earn less compared to fathers and are thus likely to opt out of formal childcare when it is too expensive.

Even before COVID-19, women provided informal long-term care more often and for longer hours per week than men. The report also shows that during the pandemic, women have been more affected by additional long-term care responsibilities in Member States with less developed residential care, and where substantial restrictions have been put in place. The quality of long-term care deteriorated due to labour shortages, additional stress

on staff, lack of protective equipment and restrictions on family visits, while female care workers were affected by illness and school closures.

Hence, the first priority to support womens' labour participation and employment is to increase investment in good quality childcare and long-term care services. The availability (also in peripheral and rural areas), affordability, and flexibility of opening hours of childcare services should be expanded. The increase in care facilities and services reduces the unpaid care burden on women, facilitates their participation in the labour market, and also expands employment opportunities in the care sector for women.

The baseline situation before January 2020 in relation to parental and paternity leave and flexible work arrangements encouraged their use by women and the COVID-19 crisis has not changed this. Progress was small in ensuring more equal sharing of parental leave between mothers and fathers and a greater uptake of paternity leave by fathers. Although care and work arrangements may in part reflect personal preferences, they keep impacting women's career development, the continuing wage gap between men and women and the accumulation of pension rights. During the COVID-19 crisis, policymakers in general have not addressed or directly considered gender equality and the consequences for both women and men for either of these measures. Very few measures focused on specific target groups from a gender perspective, such as single mothers.

In case of gender-neutral measures, the low take-up of fathers in fulfilling parental leave rights remains an issue. Encouraging the use by fathers is thus particularly needed through targeted incentives, sensitisation of employers and information campaigns. Continuous efforts should be undertaken to raise men's take-up rates of parental leave and other working-time adjustments over the life-course and favour stronger involvement of men in domestic and care activities. For example, additional non-transferable months to fathers within the framework of parental leave could provide an efficient policy instrument for reducing gender inequality in the division of labour and income development over the life-course. Policies and agreements favouring that women work more hours, by promoting full-time open ended employment contracts, should be encouraged and could constitute an efficient policy instrument to foster gender equality.

There is evidence in some Member States that more women than men took advantage of flexible working arrangements during the pandemic, such as reduced working hours to accommodate care responsibilities. In Belgium, Greece, Spain, Hungary, Italy and Slovakia, more women than men adopted teleworking during the pandemic, while the reverse was true for Germany and Luxembourg. Prior to the pandemic, only five Member States provided the most binding mechanism, such as statutory entitlement to a form of flexible work, most frequently part-time work.

Companies and social partners also have an important role in paving the way towards greater gender equality within working environments and ensuring that any gendered effects of telework are alleviated. The national reports present a great deal of good practices, in many cases introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, in bargaining agreements at national and/or company levels. These agreements have generally extended the categories of eligible workers or increased the use of flexible working arrangements, primarily teleworking and distance working. From a gender perspective, this has a double effect. Telework offers workers time and location flexibility, greater autonomy, and reduced commuting time as well as potentially allowing women with children to remain in employment. However, telework may also lead to longer working hours, increased intensity of work, blurred boundaries between work and family life, greater sense of isolation and loneliness. In addition, teleworking can strengthen the glass ceiling, reducing the visibility of women teleworking from home and their career perspectives. The ultimate effect of telework on the working and living conditions of both women and men depends on many factors, including the regulatory framework on telework, the provision of care services, and companies' organisational culture and practices. To this end, it is also important that social partners in collective bargaining pay attention to the gendered effects of proposed measures on working time and work organisation.

8. References

An Post (2020), An Post Gender Pay Gap Report 2020, 'We are building a sustainable future'. Available at: https://www.anpost.com/AnPost/media/PDFs/An_Post_Gender_Pay_Gap_Report_2020.pdf

Arntz, M., Sarra Ben, Y., and Berlingieri, F. (2020). Working from Home and COVID-19: The Chances and Risks for Gender Gaps. Intereconomics 55, no. 6 (November 2020): 381– 86. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10272-020-0938-5.

Beauregard, T. Alexandra and Basile, K.A. and Canónico, E. (2019) Telework: outcomes and facilitators for employees. In: Landers, R.N. (ed.) The Cambridge Handbook of Technology and Employee Behavior. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 511-543. See also ILO report Report IV: Inequalities and the world of work (ilo.org)

Blasko, Z., Papadimitriou, E. and Manca, A.R. (2020). How will the COVID-19 crisis affect existing gender divides in Europe. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, ISBN 978-92-76-18170-5 (online), doi:10.2760/37511 (online), JRC120525.

Brücker, H.; Gundacker, L.; Hauptmann, A.; Jaschke, P. [Brücker et al.](2021): Arbeitsmarktwirkungen der COVID-19-Pandemie. Stabile Beschäftigung, aber steigende Arbeitslosigkeit von Migrantinnen und Migranten. IAB-Kurzbericht 9/2021. Available at: http://doku.iab.de/kurzber/2021/kb2021-09.pdf.

Bundesamt für Familie und zivilgesellschaftliche Aufgaben [Federal Office for Family and Civil Society Tasks] (2021), Familienpflegezeit [Family care time], Available at: https://www.bafza.de/programme-und-foerderungen/familienpflegezeit/

Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend [Federal Ministry of Family Affairs], BMFSFJ (2020), Akuthilfe für pflegende Angehörige beschlossen [Acute help for caring relatives decided], May 2020, Available at: https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/aktuelles/alle-meldungen/akuthilfe-fuer-pflegende-angehoerige-beschlossen-155552

Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend [Federal Ministry of Family Affairs], BMFSFJ (2021), Vereinbarkeit von Beruf und Familie? Echt jetzt? Gerade jetzt! [Work-life balance? Really now? Just now!] Available at: https://www.erfolgsfaktor-familie.de/toolbox-vereinbarkeit-und-corona.html

Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren und Jugend [Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth], BMFSFJ (2021b), Informationen für pflegende Angehörige [Information for family carers], November 2021. Available at: www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/themen/corona-pandemie/informationen-fuer-pflegende-angehoerige

Bundesministerium der Justiz and für Verbrauherschutz [Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection] (2008), Gesetz über die Pflegezeit (Pflegezeitgesetz - PflegeZG) / Law on care leave (Care Leave Act – PflegeZG. Available at: https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/pflegezg/

CNN Business, To prevent burnout, LinkedIn is giving its entire company the week off**,** 5 April 2021, Available at: https://edition.cnn.com/2021/04/02/success/linkedin-paid-week-off/index.html

Changes transposing Directive (EU) 2019/1158 cover: paternity leave (Belgium, France), parental leave (Estonia, Ireland and Spain), parental, paternity and carers' leave (Greece).

EIGE (2020) Beijing +25: the fifth review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States, eige.europa.eu/publications/beijing-25-fifth-review-implementation-beijing-platform-action-eu-member-states

EIGE (2021). Gender inequalities in care and consequences for the labour market. https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-inequalities-care-and-consequences-labour-market

EIGE (2021a). Gender equality and the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-and-socio-economic-impact-COVID-19-pandemic

ENEE (2018) Benefits of early childhood education and care and the conditions for obtaining them. Study for the European Commission. (europa.eu)

OECD (2012), Closing the Gender Gap; OECD (2004) Economic Studies No. 37 2003/2; Thevenon (2013) Labour Market Effects of Parental Leave in OECD countries; Akgündüz and Plantenge (2013) Labour market effects of parental leave in Europe; Eurofound (2016) The gender employment gap: challenges and solutionshttps://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/14194adc-fc04-11e7-b8f5-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

Eurofound (2016) The gender employment gap: challenges and solutions. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Eurofound (2017). European Quality of Life Survey 2016: Quality of life, quality of public services, and quality of society, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Eurofound (2020). Living, working and COVID-19, COVID-19 series, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2020/living-working-and-COVID-19

Eurofound (2020a), Database of national level policy measures, *EU PolicyWatch, Dublin, https://static.eurofound.europa.eu/covid19db/database.html*

European Commission (2018). The Barcelona objectives. Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the development of childcare facilities for young children with a view to increase female labour participation, strike a work-life balance for working parents and bring about sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe, (europa.eu)

European Commission (2021). '2021 Long-Term Care Report, Trends, challenges and opportunities in an ageing society', *Volume I. Joint Report prepared by the Social Protection Committee (SPC) and the European Commission (DG EMPL)*, https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=24079&langId=en

European Commission, EU rights to work-life balance. Accessed August 2021. Available at: EU rights to work-life balance | European Commission (europa.eu)

European Commission, Joint Employment Report 2021, 9 March 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=23156&langId=en

Eurostat (2020). Impact of COVID-19 on employment income - advanced estimates. Impact of COVID-19 on employment income - advanced estimates - Statistics Explained (europa.eu) (Accessed 28/08/2021)

Eurostat (2020b) Health Care Resource Statistics, data extracted August 2020. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Healthcare_resource_statistics_-_beds#:~:text=There%20were%20six%20Member%20States,by%20far%20the%20lowest%20ratios. (Accessed 28/08/2021)

Eurostat (2020c) How usual is it to work from home? 24/04/2020. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20200424-1

Eurostat (2021), Part-time employment as percentage of the total employment, by sex and age (%), September 2021, accessed 13.10.2021. Available at: ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data-browser/view/lfsa_eppga/default/table?lang=en

Eurostat (2021b), How do parents organise childcare in the EU? 30 March 2021, accessed 24/08/2021. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20210330-1 .

Farré, L., Yarine F., González L., and Graves J. (2020). How the COVID-19 Lockdown Affected Gender Inequality in Paid and Unpaid Work in Spain. IZA Discussion Paper No. 13434.

Forsa (2020). Public consultation on guidance for remote working Submission from Fórsa to the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation public consultation. Dublin, Ireland.

Government of Spain, (2020), Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan. Available at https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/presidente/actividades/Documents/2020/07102020_PlanRecuperacion.pdf

Government of Spain, (2021), Plan Corresponsables, https://www.igualdad.gob.es/comunicacion/notasprensa/Documents/NdeP/NdeP_Corresponsables_090321.pdf)

Hans Boeckler Stiftung (2021), THIS IS HOW GOOD WORK IN THE HOME OFFICE WORKS: VOLUNTARY AND WITH FAIR RULES – CREATING BINDING WORK AGREEMENTS [in German], 14 February 2021. Available at: https://www.boeckler.de/de/pressemitteilungen-2675-so-klappt-gute-arbeit-im-homeoffice-freiwillig-und-mit-fairen-regeln-32175.htm

Holubová, B, Kahancová M. (2021). *Revisiting the Concept of Precarious Work in Times of Covid-19.* In Edited by Joseph Choonara, J., Murgia A. and Renato Miguel Carm, R. Critical Perspectives on Precarity and Precariousness. Bristol policy Press. Bristol (forth- coming, 2021).

JRC (2019) The changing nature of work and skills in the digital age, Gonzalez Vazquez, I., Milasi, S., Carretero Gomez, S., Napierala, J., Robledo Bottcher, N., Jonkers, K. and Goenaga Beldarrain, X. editor(s), EUR 29823 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019, ISBN 978-92-76-09207-0, doi:10.2760/373892, JRC117505.

JRC (2020) Teleworkability and the COVID-19 crisis: a new digital divide?, Sostero M., Milasi S., Hurley J., Fernández-Macías E., Bisello M., Seville: European Commission, 2020, JRC121193. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/eur-scientific-and-technical-research-reports/teleworkability-and-covid-19-crisis-new-digital-divide

ILO (2018). Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work. Geneva: ILO.

ILO (2019). A Quantum Leap for Gender Equality: For a Better Future of Work for All. Geneva: ILO.

ILO, UN Women (2020). The Impact of Marriage and Children on Labour Market Participation. Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/05/the-impact-of-marriage-and-children-on-labour-market-participation#view

ILO (2021), 'ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work', 7th edition, briefing note, 25 January 2021. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_767028.pdf

Kaltiainen, J, Hakanen, J Miten (2021) Suomi voi? Tutkimus. Missä määrin ja miksi uorten aikuisten työhyvinvointi heikkeni korona-aikana? Työterveyslaitos 20.4.2021.

KOFA Fachkraftesicherung fur kleine und mittlere Unternehmen [KOFA Securing skilled workers for small and medium-sized companies] (2021), Arbeit im Homeoffice [Working in the home office – a checklist]. Accessed 28/08/2021. Available at: https://www.kofa.de/fileadmin/Dateiliste/Publikationen/Checklisten/Homeoffice.pdf

Koslowski, A., Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufman, G. and Moss, P. (2021) 17th International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2021. DOI: 10.18445/20210817-144100-0. Available at: www.leavenetwork.org/annual-review-reports/review-2021/

McCarthy, A., Bohle Carbonell, K., Ó Síocháin, T. and Frost, D. (2020). Remote Working during COVID-19: Ireland's National Survey - Phase II Report. Galway, Ireland: NUI Galway Whitaker Institute & Western Development Commission. Available at: https://whitakerinstitute.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Remote-Working-National-Survey-Phase-II-Report-Oct-2020-Final.pdf

Potential Co, Innovator Q. (March 2020*). Hvem tager ansvaret derhjemme under COVID-19?*. Available at: http://www.potentialco.dk/COVID-19-undersgelse

Republic of Cyprus, (2021), Cyprus Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026. Available at: http://www.cyprus-tomorrow.gov.cy/cypresidency/kyprostoavrio.nsf/all/B37B4D3AC1DB73B6C22586DA00421E05/$file/Cyprus%20RRP%20For%20Upload%2020052021.pdf?openelement

Riga Stradiņa University, Vidzemes University Rēzekne Technology Academy, Research 'Life with COVID-19 in Latvia'. Research result No.29 'Report on work – priate life balance oppurtunities for different demograpich groups in Latvia during COVID-19 related restrictions', December 2020, pages 99-100, available in Latvian at https://lzp.gov.lv/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/29_zinojums_21022021_FINAL_c.pdf

Simeonaki et al., (2020) [in Greek] Work, family, companionship and parenthood during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic [Εργασία, οικογένεια, συντροφικότητα και γονεϊκότητα κατά το πρώτο κύμα της πανδημίας COVID-19]. *Social Policy, Issue 13, December 2020. Available at:* http://eekp.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PERIODIKO-T13.pdf (accessed: 27.7.21)

Sorsa T and Rotkirch, A Perhebarometri 2020 (Family barometer 2020), Väestöliitto.

OECD (2004), Economic Studies No. 37 2003/2, OECD Publishing, Paris.

OECD (2012), Closing the gender gap: Act Now, OECD Publishing, Paris.

OECD (2020), Workforce and Safety in Long-Term Care during the COVID-19 pandemic, OECD Publishing, Paris. Update 22 June 2020.

Thévenon, O. and A. Solaz (2013), Labour Market Effects of Parental Leave Policies in OECD Countries, *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*, No. 141, OECD Publishing, Paris. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1787/5k8xb6hw1wjf-en.

Van der Ende et al., forthcoming. Data refer to a combination of EHIS (wave 7, 2013-2015) and EQLS (2016).

Van Lancker, W. (2016), Effects of poverty on the living and working conditions of women and their children, European Parliament.

W.A.F. Betriebsrat Wissen (2021), Musterbetriebsvereinbarungen: Home-Office und Telearbeit [Model works agreements: home office and teleworking]. Available at: https://www.betriebsrat.com/musterbriefe-checklisten/musterbetriebsvereinbarungen/home-office-und-telearbeit

Workplace Relations Commission Ireland (2021), Tánaiste Signs Code of Practice on Right to Disconnect. Available at: https://www.workplacerelations.ie/en/news-media/workplace_relations_notices/tnaiste-signs-code-of-practice-on-right-to-disconnect.html

Zamarro, G., Prados, M.J. Gender differences in couples' division of childcare, work and mental health during COVID-19. *Rev Econ Household* **19,** 11–40 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-020-09534-7

Zigante, V. (2018), "Informal care in Europe. Exploring Formalisation, Availability and Quality", LSE Consulting, European Commission.

Zoch, G., Bächmann, A., and Vicari, B. (2021). Who cares when care closes? Care-arrangements and parental working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic in Germany. European Societies, 23:sup1, S576-S588, DOI: 10.1080/14616696.2020.1832700.

Annex 1 – Scope of the country articles

Each country article summarises the developments in work-life balance policies in the Member State during 2019 and 2020 to briefly describe the situation before the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus of the country articles is on employers' work arrangement and governments' policy responses to challenges related to care provision, including childcare services and long-term care services on the one hand as well as parental and paternity leave and flexible working arrangements on the other hand that can influence women and men's engagement in the labour market. Care for children is the primary focus, although other recipients of care within the household are also considered, including care of the elderly or disabled. Auxiliary information about response of people with unpaid care responsibilities to children and other relatives was included where possible but was not the focus of the articles.

The key questions answered by country articles include:

Policy area	Baseline (before January 2020)	COVID-19 (after January 2020)
Childcare services	What policies were in place prior to January 2020 regarding childcare services e.g. policies to encourage/discourage uptake, improve quality, reduce costs? How did the provision of childcare services vary according to: a) region (e.g. urban/rural) b) cost (e.g. public and private provision)_ c) eligibility (e.g. is it available for employees, self-employed, unemployed etc.) d) quality in terms of: access; staff; curriculum; monitoring and evaluation; and governance and funding (as outlined in the Council Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems) What were the trends of childcare services users (e.g. age of child, income bracket) and levels of uptake? Is there evidence on unpaid provision and on paid provision and the split between the two?	What policy changes were introduced in response to the pandemic and beyond regarding provision and access to childcare services. This section also examined financial measures supporting the use of these services and financial support to compensate for lost work-related income due to otherwise unpaid care responsibilities, focusing on the gender impact. Where possible, long-term care for elderly and disabled family members other care were also considered in this sub-section. Examples available on the involvement of employers to support their employees' caring responsibilities and their work-life balance e.g. through helping their workers financially to obtain care services, with or without the support of public authorities. Insights gained from the interviews on what happens at company level.
Flexible working arrangements	What policies were in place regarding flexible working arrangements such as working from home, teleworking, working time flexibility prior to January 2020?	Policy changes introduced in response to the pandemic and beyond regarding flexible working arrangements in the short term and in the medium and long

Policy area	Baseline (before January 2020)	COVID-19 (after January 2020)
	What were the trends in the uptake of flexible working arrangements (e.g. gender, income bracket, age of child, sector of work)?	term, as well as their gender impact. Availability and uptake of these provisions change (in comparison to the pre-Covid situation). Intersectional perspective was applied to consider how uptake varied according to, for example, women working in particular sectors and occupations, income brackets, employment sectors, immigration status and disability. Support provided to any parent irrespective of gender and support offered to women only was distinguished. Examples available of the involvement of employers to support their employees' uptake of flexible working arrangements. How has work organisation affected men and women? Insights gained from the interviews on what happens at company level.
Parental and paternity leave	What policies were in place regarding parental and paternity leave? What was the level of uptake of parental leave? What were the trends in who took up parental leave (e.g. gender, age, age of child, income bracket; sector or employment status/type of employment contract)? Based on existing evidence, to what extent were the policies implemented (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic) successful in terms of bringing women into the labour market or increasing their engagement in the labour market? What were the reasons for the success or lack of success? Taking an intersectional approach, which women were impacted most by the COVID-19 crisis and policy responses?	Policy changes introduced in response to the pandemic and beyond regarding provision of parental leave and gender impact. Sickness leave (in case children's schools and childcare facilities were closed, etc.) was also covered. Other schemes such as short time work schemes used as a reaction to closed childcare facilities. Paternity leave was covered where relevant. Examples of the involvement of employers to support their employees' uptake of family-related leave and gender impact.

Annex 2: The influence of gender, occupation and sector on the use of flexible working arrangements before January 2020

	MS
Gender	**BE:** in 2019, 20.4% of female employees worked from home sometimes or usually, compared to 17.4% of men. **CZ:** 4.3% of female employees and 2.6% of men reporting that the home was their primary place of work; 10.9% of employed women work part-time, compared to 6.3% of men **DE:** Men were roughly twice as often alternating working in the office and working from home compared to women. **ES:** 20.8% of all mothers eligible for a reduction in their working hours (i.e. those with a child under 12) in permanent jobs reduced their working hours, while this increased to 47.66% if part-time working mothers were considered. The proportion of eligible men who reduced their working hours was only 1%. In 2019, 3.5% of workers occasionally teleworked (2.9% of women and 4% of men) and 4.8% teleworked for more than half of their days (4.7% of women and 4.9% of men). **IE:** Approximately 47% of men and 73% of women worked in flexible work environments that offered part-time work. **LU:** teleworking is more common among men (20.5%) **LV:** 7% of men worked part-time compared to 12.3% of women **MT:** teleworking arrangements across gender had more females (17.4%) than males (11.4%); more females also reported flexibility in organising their working time to take whole days off (41.1% females compared to 31.2% males) **NL:** The Act on Flexible Work (*Wfw – Wet Flexibel Werken*) came into force on 1 January 2016 but an evaluation of the implementation of this Act published in January 2021 (ten Hoeve, et al, 2021)[38], shows that, up until 2020, employees used the possibilities offered by the Act to a relatively low extent. The evaluation also found that men appeal more often to the Wfw; the Act is less known by women. Yet, more requests submitted by women are granted; requests by men are more often partially granted. **PT:** 24.5% interrupted their professional activity to provide care, 84.1% of them were women. While 97% of the men's career interruptions had a duration of up to 6 months, women tended to have longer interruptions. **RO**: more women – 1.1% - compared to men – 0.5% using telework. **SI:** In 2019, more employed men (83.6%) than women (80.5%) never worked from home. 94.5% and 86.6% of employed men and women, respectively, were employed full-time.
Occupation / sector	**BE:** In 2019, 35.6% of highly-skilled employees sometimes or usually worked from home. For medium-skilled and low-skilled workers, this share amounted to 6.7% and 2.7%. Very few blue-collar workers work from home. Working from home (teleworking) is most common in the sectors of education (more than 52% of the workforce worked sometimes or usually from home) and information and communication (45.3%) and least common in the sectors of transportation and storage (7.4%) and human health and social work activities (8.6%). **CZ:** Female entrepreneurs work from home more frequently for most of the working hours.

[38] ten Hoeve, Y., Talman, J., van Mierlo, J., and M., Engelen, (2021), *Evaluatie Wet Flexible Werken*, Research for the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, de Beleidsonderzoekers

	MS
	IE: The incidence of homeworking in the ICT, finance and education sectors ranged from 26% to 37%, compared to 2% in the accommodation and food sector. **IT:** teleworking was only mainly used in big companies and by managers.[39] **LU:** teleworking is more common for workers in the 30 to 50 age group (22 %) with a high level of education (30 %) and in skilled white-collar occupations (27.5%). **SE:** The prevalence of teleworking in Sweden varies by industries with around 65% in knowledge intensive business services and around 70% in IT and communication services

Source: country articles

Annex 3: Types of parental and paternity leave changes adopted in the COVID-19 context

MS	Measure
AT (carers' leave)	Irrespective of the COVID-19 pandemic, parents are entitled to caregiver leave for a period of one week, for children under 12 years up to 2 weeks. From November 2020 to July 2021, special care time was extended to 3 weeks (after workers organisations pressure it was increased to 4 weeks) to care for children under 14 years of or relatives in need. Initially the state covered 30% of the wage costs which was later increased to 100%. The legal entitlement applies when kindergartens and schools are closed, and no care is offered there, or the own child has to be quarantined. If the conditions are not met, a special care period can be agreed with the employer.
BE (paternity leave)*	From 1 January 2021 paternity leave was extended to 15 days, as the result of the transposition of the work-life balance directive. It can be taken separately or in a row as well as split up to up to 30 half-days. From 1 January 2023 paternity leave will gradually increase to 20 days (SPF, 2021).
BE (carers' leave a)	The 'Corona Parental Leave' scheme that was made available for parents, who have children under the age of 12 or a child with a disability, and who needed to be taken care of as a result of the partial or full suspension of care in nurseries or schools, and for whom this was incompatible with work. The leave allowance was 25% higher compared to the usual parental leave (150% for single parents and parents of a child with a disability). The leave arrangement, first, was available between 1 May to 30 June 2020. From 1 July 2020, the Corona Parental Leave was extended up to 30 September 2020 (ONEM, 2020).
BE (carers' leave b)	Once the mandate of the Corona Parental Leave finished on 30 September 2021, a temporary unemployment scheme for lack of childcare was introduced. The leave arrangement provides support for parents of children whose school or childcare fa-

[39] In Italy, two concepts are used – the concept of telework and smart work. The main difference between smart work and telework is that, in the former, the employee does not have any working time or workplace but they can work inside or outside the company within the limits of maximum daily and weekly working time. Smart workers can work for maximum 48 hours per week deciding freely when and where to work during the day; however, the employer can agree availability periods with the employee and health and safety rules must be respected.

MS	Measure
	cility needed to close down due to the COVID-19 pandemic or their child is in quarantine. The employee may not be entitled to a salary, but he/she received temporary unemployment benefits of EUR 6.63 per unemployed day.
BG (sickness leave)	In May 2020, amendments were made to Art 173 of the Labour code, introducing specific rules regarding the use of leave during states of emergency and emergency epidemic situations. The amendment allows employers that fully or partially stopped working to send employees on paid leave without their consent. At the same time, in such conditions employers are obliged to allow the use of paid or unpaid leave for certain types of employees, including pregnant women, mothers of children under-12, single fathers, employees under-18 and others. At the beginning of 2021 with amendments to Art 173 of the State of Emergency Act it was decided that unpaid leave used during 2020 will be considered as 'length of service' for the purposes of pension calculation and others.
CY (carers' leave)	The Childcare Special Leave Allowance was provided to parents responsible for the care of children up to 15 years of age and/or children with disabilities, regardless of age. Eligible applicants were employees insured with the Social Insurance Services with a gross monthly salary of up to EUR 2 500. Cases of single parent families where the last monthly salary exceeded EUR 2 500 were examined on a case-by-case basis. In case one of the parents was not employed, the working parent was not entitled to Special Leave, unless the non-working parent had himself/herself been infected with COVID-19 or was hospitalised or was a person with a disability or he/she was under mandatory quarantine. For the parents of persons with disabilities, the Special Leave for Childcare was granted if they did not benefit from any other care allowance by the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Security. The period of Special Leave for Childcare could not exceed a four-week period in total, for both parents. Only one parent could benefit from the Special Leave for Childcare Permit during the same period. Employer consent was needed to qualify for a Special Childcare Allowance. The Childcare Special Leave allowance was calculated based on salary as follows: For the first EUR 1 000 of the monthly salary, an allowance of 60% was calculated for that part of the salary. For the part of the salary from EUR 1 000 to EUR 2 000, an allowance of 40% was calculated. The maximum amount of allowance for a period of one month could not exceed the amount of EUR 1 000. For single parent families the above rates increased to 70% and 50% respectively and the maximum allowance for a one-month period could not exceed EUR 1 200. The period of Special Leave for Childcare was credited to the Social Security Fund.
CZ (carers' leave)	From 11 March 2020 until 30 June 2020, employees could take leave to care for a child under 14, as schools were closed. Before 11 March 2020, the allowance was used by an insured employees who could not work because she or he took care of a sick child under-10 years. The benefit, which normally amounts to 60% of a daily assessment base (the amount received is usually between 50-70% of net income; higher incomes are reduced more), increased on 30 April 2020 to 80% of a daily assessment base and could be claimed by parents for the whole school and kindergarten closure period (from 11 March 2020 to 30 June 2020 in one block). The allowance was paid for as long as the ban on school attendance remained in force to prevent the parents of younger schoolchildren from finding themselves without funds.

MS	Measure
DK (carers' leave)	Parents of children who are either sent home from school etc. due to COVID-19 or infected with COVID-19 could stay at home with the children and receive maternity benefits. The scheme applied to both employees and the self-employed and included children up to and including 13 years of age.
EE (parental leave)*	As of 1 July 2020, the payment of the parental benefit may, based on the wishes of the parent, be stopped and resumed by calendar months until the child reaches 3 years of age. Amendments aiming to provide more flexibility for parents to combine being on parental leave and being active at the labour market include also the possibility for parents to receive parental benefit as well as earn income at the same time. In this case the parental benefit will be reduced only when the monthly income exceeds 1.5 times Estonian average salary (EUR 1 910.77 in 2021; EUR 2 021.54 in 2022).
DE (paternity leave)	Regulation on paternity leave schemes was adopted in May 2020. The receipt of short-time working benefits or unemployment benefit I was changed to mean it will not reduce the level of parental allowance granted if parents initially received parental allowance while working part-time. Also, months with a lower income can be excluded from the parental allowance calculation which affects soon-to-be parents that plan to apply for paternity leave benefits whose income decreased due to the pandemic (e.g. because of short-time work). If parents fall below the threshold of 25 and 30 weekly working hours, they will still receive the partnership bonus (*Partnerschaftsbonus*) if the reduction of working hours is caused by the pandemic. Currently, these adaptations are in force until the end of December 2021.
DE (carers' leave, a)	At the end of March 2020, a wage compensation regulation due to the closure of childcare facilities was established via the Infection Protection Act. The compensation rate was set at 67% of net income (maximum of EUR 2 016 per month) for up to six weeks in cases where schools or childcare facilities were closed and no 'reasonable alternative childcare service' was available. This entitlement was extended in May 2020 to ten weeks for each parent or 20 weeks for lone parents and could then also be used in a more flexible way for single days only. Benefits were paid for children not older than 12 or for children with a disability.
DE (carers' leave, b)	In January 2021, the child sickness allowance scheme (*Kinderkrankentagegeld*) was adapted. Parents were entitled to benefits of usually 90% of lost net wages if a child younger than 12 was sick, but also if the child was cared for at home because the school or the childcare facility was closed due to the pandemic, classroom attendance had been suspended, or access to childcare had been restricted. With the reform, the number of days for child sickness allowance were also doubled from 10 days to a total of 20 per parent and per child (from 20 days to 40 for lone parents), with a maximum of 45 working days per year (90 working days for lone parents). Parents are only eligible if there is no other person present in the household who can take care of the child and both the parent and the child have statutory health insurance.
DE (carers' leave, c)	Access to family care time (*Familienpflegezeit*, in force since 2015) was also eased. Under the scheme, employees can take partial leave from work for up to 24 months to care for a close relative by decreasing their working time to 15 hours per week (or more). In May 2020, the Government made the scheme more flexible by decreasing the employer notification period to ten days in advance (before it was eight weeks in advance) and by allowing the minimum weekly working time to be below 15 hours for a period of up to one month.

MS	Measure
DE (carers' leave, d)	According to the care time law (*Gesetz über Pflegezeit*), persons working in companies with more than 15 employees are entitled to decrease their working hours or take a break from work for a maximum period of six months. It is possible to combine the family care time and the care time scheme, but before the pandemic caregivers had to use one scheme immediately following the other. In May 2020, this regulation was suspended temporarily due to the pandemic. For now, these regulations are in force until December 2021. Under both the family care time and the care time scheme, caregivers can apply to take an interest-free loan from the Federal Office for Family and Civil Society Tasks (BAFzA) for the time in which they are on leave from their job entirely or partially. This loan must be paid back in instalments after the (family) care time ends. In May 2020, the Government decided that, on request, months with a pandemic-related loss of income can be disregarded when determining the loan amount that must be paid back.
EL (parental and carers' leave)*	In June 2021, a new law (4808/2021) on the system of parental and carers' leave was enacted that included provisions corresponding to the requirements of the EU Directive 1158/2019. According to the Law, two months of parental leave, for each parent, are now paid with the minimum legislated wage (Article28), paternity leave is going up from two to 14 working days (Article 27), a five-day carers' leave is instituted for the care of relatives and cohabiting people in need for such care (Article 29) and a two-day leave on grounds of force majeure is also instituted (Article 30).
EL (carers' leave a)	Leave of special purpose: parents (fathers or mothers) working as employees and with children that attended kindergarten or nurseries or school classes up to the level of third grade of gymnasium (up to around 14-15 years of age) could be absent from work during the temporary closure of these facilities. Working parents of children with a disability whose schools or day care centres were closed, irrespectively of their age, were also entitled to this leave. The leave was fully compensated to the level of earnings from labour and except for the annual leave part that is fully compensated by the employer, the rest of the leave was compensated by two-thirds by the employer and by one-third by the State. After the reopening of the schools, this leave was restricted to cases where a child was obliged to stay at home for reasons related to the pandemic.
EL (carers' leave b)	A special 14 day (or more if needed) leave to care for children sick with COVID-19, over and above the other available sickness leaves for children, was introduced.
FR (carers' leave)	Sickness leave introduced by the end of January 2020 with some conditions specified in March 2020. The measure applied to cases in which both parents were unable to work from home, for children aged under 16 (no age limitation for disabled children). The maximum duration of the leave was 21 days, starting on the first day of absence (no waiting period), and the minimum compensation amounts to 50% of previous wage (financed by social security, generally complemented by the employer on the basis of collective agreements). For civil servants, the leave took the form of the so-called '*autorisation spéciale d'absence*' (ASA, special absence authorization), in which full remuneration is maintained. To reduce the cost for employers (who had to complement the social security allowance to comply with collective agreements) and to unify employees' coverage, the compensation of these absences was transferred to the short-time leave scheme on the 1 May 2020. The conditions were specified in a decree by the end of 2020 and are applicable until the end of 2021. These conditions are the following: • the child must be under-16, except for disabled children (no age limit); • his/her school, childcare centre etc. is closed or the child is declared as a contact case by health services;

MS	Measure
	• both parents are unable to work from home. Only one parent can benefit from the leave and get short-time activity compensation. The general rules of short-time work compensation during the COVID-19 crisis apply.
HU (parental leave)	Government decree 59/2020 (III.23.) extended parental leave benefits (GYES, GYED, GYET) for all recipients in case they ended during the state of emergency introduced. As of January 2021, the amount of CSED (Csecsemőgondozási Díj – Infant Care Allowance) increased from 70% to 100% of previous earnings.
HR (sickness leave)	When ECEC/schools fully re-opened in September 2020 and a need for (self-)isolation increased due to the COVID-19 outbreaks, parents could use a sickness leave to take care of a child. The representative of trade unions stated that they managed to amend many collective agreements so that employers agreed to top-up state-provided sickness leave benefits in the case of COVID-19 related events.
IE (parental leave)*	Policies that were implemented in response to the EU Work-Life Balance Directive include changes to parent's leave and to parental leave. Regarding parent's leave, from April 2021, parents can take five weeks leave within the child's first two years, compared to the previous policy of two weeks within the first year. From September 2020, parental leave increased from 22 weeks to 26 weeks, which can be taken before the child's 12th birthday.
IE (carers' leave)	Force Majeure Leave is usually only available 'for urgent family reasons owing to accident/illness of an immediate relative, or of a person in a relationship of domestic dependency'. During the COVID-19 pandemic, and given the closure of childcare and crèches, the Irish government asked employers to allow flexibility for employees to take Force Majeure Leave, even where they may technically not qualify under the legislation. The maximum amount of leave is three days in any 12-month period.
IT (carers' leave)	Art. 23 of the Cura Italia Decree specified the provisions for extraordinary parental leave up to 15 days. This COVID-19 parental leave allows working parents with children below 12 years to look after their children during the closure of schools and childcare services, contagion or quarantine. It provides for 50% of the normal salary for workers with children under-12; and notional coverage of the contribution. Such special leave is granted to only one parent per household for a total of 15 days, provided that the other parent is not unemployed, non-worker, or beneficiary of income support instruments (Article 23 § 6 Law Decree n. 18/2020). The Rilancio Decree extended the support measures for several more months (Art. 72), granting a maximum of 30 days of extraordinary parental leave to be taken by 31 July continuously or as separate periods of leave. Workers who had already taken 15 days of leave were permitted to take the remaining 15 days. The leave is always paid at a rate of 50% in families with children up to the age of 12.
LV (carers' leave)	The Law on Maternity and Sickness Insurance: During the period from 30 November until 31 December 2020 and from 1 January 2021 until 30 June 2021 a parent who was working at the workplace (not at home or remotely) was entitled to sickness allowance, which was 60% of their average salary, for a child until the age of 10 or for a disabled child until the age of 18, if the child, due to the epidemiological situation, was not able to attend kindergarten or a school. The allowance was also granted to disabled adult caregivers if a disabled person could not attend day-care centre. Respective sickness allowance, however, was granted only once and for no longer than 14 days.

MS	Measure
LT (maternity and paternity leave)	Parents who have declared downtime during the pandemic and the downtime period or part of it falls within the maternity, paternity and childcare benefits calculation period, benefits will be calculated from the period before the announcement of the quarantine. For them (incl. self-employed persons), the amounts of maternity, paternity and childcare benefits will be calculated on the basis of the insured income from 1 February 2019 until 31 January 2020. Persons who have already been granted maternity, paternity andchildcare benefits will have to apply to the territorial branch of Sodra for their recalculation by 1 January 2022 at the latest. The difference will be transferred to the personal account by 28 February 2022 at the latest. Maternity, paternity and childcare benefits reduced as a result of the pandemic will be reimbursed from the state budget.
LT (carers' leave)	Sickness benefits may be paid to parents, guardians and working grandparents when during the emergency and quarantine they have to look after a child under Grade 4, or a disabled child studying under a general or special education curriculum. A certificate of incapacity for work shall also be issued and a sickness benefit shall be paid when it is necessary to look after a child under Grade 4 and a disabled child due to compulsory isolation or the declared procedure restricting the spread of infections. The sickness benefit is 65.94% of the gross wage. The benefit is paid for a maximum of 14 calendar days, except for particularly complex illnesses, which are treated for a long time. When another sick family member is being cared for, the carer may be entitled to receive a sickness benefit of 65.94% of gross salary, but for no longer than seven calendar days. Employees who have at least 3 months of sickness social insurance during the last year or at least 6 months during the last two years are entitled to sickness benefits.
LU (carers' leave)	In addition to leave for family reasons, until the 14 September 2021, parents have the possibility to request leave for family reasons to mind a child or children up to the age of 13, as well children between 13 and 18 years who were in hospital, in case childcare facilities and schools were closed or offering distance learning only, or the children were under quarantine related to a COVID-19. In addition, such leave could be requested for children particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, who could not attend school or use childcare services in order to avoid an infection. Parents minding the same child or children were not entitled to take such leave at the same time, and parents on temporary unemployment were not eligible. However, parents working from home were entitled to leave for family reasons, including cross-border employees teleworking in their home country; they were eligible if COVID-19 related closures of schools and child-care facilities were decided in that country.
PL (carers' leave)	The additional care allowance (a benefit for parents and carers of children up to the age of 8, amounting to 80% of the base salary) was introduced by the Act of 2 March 2020 on special solutions related to preventing, counteracting and combating COVID-19, other infectious diseases and crises caused by them. The allowance was provided from 11 March 2020 until 29 June 2021, but summer and Christmas holidays.
PT (carers' leave)	Absences from work due to urgent assistance to a child or other dependent under the age of 12 or, regardless of age, with a disability or chronic illness, arising from the suspension of school and non-school activities in a school establishment or social equipment for early childhood support or disability, shall be considered justified without loss of rights, except as regards remuneration. The Decree-Law stated in such a situation, employees had 'the right to receive a monthly, or proportional, exceptional support corresponding to two thirds of their basic pay, paid in equal parts

MS	Measure
	by the employer and social security. This support had a minimum limit of one Guaranteed Minimum Monthly Remuneration (RMMG) and a maximum limit of three RMMG. The Decree-Law created a similar support for self-employed workers whose care responsibilities made it impossible for them to continue their activity and who had paid their social contributions for at least three consecutive months during the 12 months before the situation. The value of the support corresponded to one-third of the measured contribution base for the first quarter of 2020 and had a minimum limit of 1 Social Support Index (IAS) and a maximum limit of 2 1/2 IAS. The support was automatically granted on request by the employer (in the case of employees) or by the self-employed, 'provided that there are no other ways of providing the activity, namely teleworking.' The support could not be 'received simultaneously by both parents' and was only paid once, regardless of the number of dependent children or dependents'.
RO (carers' leave)	Law 19/2020 regulated leave days for employed/working parents to stay home with their children when the care are educational institutions are closed. There were several conditions under which employed/working parents could benefit of these measures: only children up to 12 years old, with no disabilities, enrolled in an educational institution; early child education was accepted too; for children with disability, their maximum age should be 26, enrolled in an education institution; only one parent – in case the child lives in couple family – could ask for the leave, and she/he bring prove that the other parent did not request the leave; it depends on the approval of the employer and only after all other measures were considered (change of schedule, working from home, teleworking); in case any of these possibilities were accepted, parents were not entitled to the leave; certain areas – e.g. civil protection, medical – were restricted from these provisions; in other working areas , employers had to ensure continuity of the work flow before accepting the parents' request. Where such restriction existed and none of the parents could apply and have the request accepted, they were financially compensated. The parents received a 'daily allowance' of 75% of the gross salary of one paid day of work but restricted to an upper amount and the payment was done by the employer.
SK (parental leave)	Since April 2020, the payment of the regular parental allowance (so-called pandemic parental allowance) was extended for parents whose entitlement would end in March 2020 or later in lockdown (Koslowsky, et al. 2020). Parents have been eligible if they were receiving a parental allowance and had no income from employment, business or self-employment, and social benefits or pensions (Dančíková, 2020). The pandemic parental allowance is pursuant to the Regulation of the Slovak Government No. 302/2020 Coll., amending the Regulation of the Slovak Government No. 102/2020 Coll. on specific measures in the field of social affairs, family and employment services in time of emergency, a state of emergency or the state of emergency declared in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic.
SI (carers' leave)	With the declaration of the epidemic, workers who have not worked due to force majeure because of childcare obligations due to the closure of childcare facilities and schools (up to grade 5 of primary school) initially received 50% wage compensation, but not less than 70% of the minimum wage. As of 1 October 2020, the salary compensation due to force majeure or quarantine has been increased to 80% of the salary, which may not be less than the minimum wage.

MS	Measure
ES (parental leave)*	Birthing parents were entitled to 16 weeks of parental leave and non-birthing parents to 12 weeks in 2020. In January 2021, the equal, equally paid and non-transferable parental leave has been fully enacted. Similarly, unpaid leave for the purpose of caregiving to children up to 12 years of age were still in effect.
ES (sickness leave)	Workers during the periods of isolation or contagion caused by COVID-19 are considered as entitled to temporary disability payments. If there is evidence that the contagion occurred during the performance of the job, it would be considered as a work accident. One much-debated issue has been the case of children who test positive and should be in isolation and the case of children who test negative but who need to be in preventive isolation due to a close contact with a positive case. Regarding the first case, the working parents are granted sickness leave as they are in direct contact with a positive case and in line with the public health protocols for COVID-19, they are required to stay in isolation. Regarding the second case, parents are not required to stay in isolation since the protocols only apply to the direct contacts of a positive case and, thus, they are not entitled to sick leave. If they need to look after their children, they are expected to use the flexibilization measures offered by the Plan MECUIDA.
SE (sickness leave)	From 25 April 2020, when childcare/nursery facility or primary school was closed, one of the parents has the right and is eligible to receive an extended additional parental leave support for sick children, even though the child is not sick (children between eight months and 12 years old). Compensation is 80% of the actual income, as with the ordinary parental leave scheme for sick children (120 days per child and year). Not only dependent but self-employed persons and registered unemployed are eligible to receive the extended parental leave scheme.

*Note: * change not related to COVID-19*

Source: country articles

GETTING IN TOUCH WITH THE EU

In person

All over the European Union there are hundreds of Europe Direct information centres. You can find the address of the centre nearest you at: https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en

On the phone or by email

Europe Direct is a service that answers your questions about the European Union. You can contact this service:

– by freephone: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (certain operators may charge for these calls),
– at the following standard number: +32 22999696 or
– by email via: https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en

FINDING INFORMATION ABOUT THE EU

Online

Information about the European Union in all the official languages of the EU is available on the Europa website at: https://europa.eu/european-union/index_en

EU publications

You can download or order free and priced EU publications at: https://op.europa.eu/en/publications. Multiple copies of free publications may be obtained by contacting Europe Direct or your local information centre (see https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en).

EU law and related documents

For access to legal information from the EU, including all EU law since 1952 in all the official language versions, go to EUR-Lex at: http://eur-lex.europa.eu

Open data from the EU

The EU Open Data Portal (http://data.europa.eu/euodp/en) provides access to datasets from the EU. Data can be downloaded and reused for free, for both commercial and non-commercial purposes.

Publications Office
of the European Union