

DOMINIKA POLKOWSKA  
Maria Curie-Skłodowska University

## **Work at Home, Home at Work: Difficulties in Achieving Work–Life Balance in Selected European Countries**

*Abstract:* The work-family balance is a state of globally assessed equilibrium in which labour resources enable employees to meet the requirements and expectations of the family, while family resources enable family members to meet the requirements and expectations of the work, making it possible to act effectively in both areas.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that the problem of reconciling work and family life is of global reach (and particularly acute in Western societies). Also, to present differences between selected countries in this aspect. Our hypothesis assumes that, taking work-life balance into consideration, Poland is in the worst situation among these countries.

Following Korpi's classification, the countries we have selected for the analysis are: Germany, Belgium (examples of the general family support model), Sweden, Finland (the dual earner support model) and the United Kingdom (the market-oriented model). Although Poland is not present in Korpi's classification, we include it in our analysis as an example of a different model, not mentioned by Korpi, namely, the paternalistic-market model.

*Keywords:* Work-life balance, general family support model, dual earner support model, market-oriented model, work-to-home conflict, paternalistic-market model

### **Introduction**

Changes occurring in contemporary societies, remarkable technological progress and frantic pace of life make it increasingly challenging to reconcile the needs and expectations belonging to specific life roles. The most significant imbalances are observed between family and work. The subject literature refers to this specific type of balancing in fulfilling different roles as work-life balance. From the point of view of an individual, work-life balance means ability to prioritise properly between work and other areas of life: home, family, health, social activity, private interests, etc. Balance between them is achieved when work does not substitute home or family life and vice versa: when the regular life is not at work's expense (Daniels).

From the state's perspective, reconciling work and family life is the domain of three aspects of social policy: employment, family and gender equality policy. The difficulties in reconciling the two basic areas of human activity require specific countermeasures employed by all possible entities: state, local authorities, companies, and, finally, family members who should support one another in sharing duties and roles in an optimum manner.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that the problem of reconciling work and family life is of global reach, particularly acute in Western societies. It is also to present differences between selected countries in the manner in which they endeavour to face this challenge. In particular, I am presenting the situation of Poland in comparison with selected European countries. Using Korpi's classification, I attempt to prove that Poland does not match any of Korpi's models and, therefore, that it represents a different, namely fourth, type of family model. I form a thesis that, in comparison with the other analysed countries, in Poland it is most difficult to integrate work and family life. In my opinion, it results from, on the one hand, the so-called mental heritage of communism (Mrozowicki et al. 2013), that is, from a lack of ability to adapt to changes which obviously follow neoliberal globalisation. Among these changes we should count flexibility of work, initiative (entrepreneurship) and individual readiness for mobility. On the other hand, the situation in Poland regarding work-life balance is also a consequence of the structure of family models still prevailing in Poland. The traditional and the mixed model are more frequently realised in practice (26% and 32% respectively) than it was indicated in declarations in which the partnership model was recalled more frequently (CBOS [Public Opinion Research Centre] 2010, 2012). Another fact worth mentioning is that the difficulties in achieving work-life balance result from lack of a developed complete model of family-oriented policy. Such lack of a coherent model causes that there is not enough support for families on the institutional level (regarding, for example, children day-care, especially nurseries and kindergartens). Neither there is enough motivation for employers: we mean particularly appropriate actions encouraging them to facilitate reconciliation of these two spheres of life through, for instance, flexible forms of employment that create better conditions for integrating family life and work. Certainly these arguments do not display the whole list of possible reasons for a worse situation in Poland in comparison with the selected European countries, however, they do seem the most important factors in this case.

In the context of the discussed subject it is worth to add that hitherto prevailing comparative analyses concerning these issues did not take Poland into consideration, while the works regarding Poland did not assume a wider, international context. This is only a fragmentary understanding of work-life balance which, in a broader context, concerns also self-actualization or taking care of dependants (these may be children, but also elderly parents). However, due to the availability of data and limited room for analysis in one single article, these areas will not be addressed.

This text consists of two main parts. The first one comprises a theoretical introduction in which ideas concerning family-work relationship and selected family models are presented. The second part of the text is devoted entirely to analyses concerning the problem we are investigating. In this part we also attempt to verify the hypothesis that we have formed. The conclusions and the summary are presented in the last part of the article.

### **Work-to-Home Conflict**

The subject literature offers various models that provide some insight into the work-family relationship. Edwards and Rothbard (2000) list the most popular mechanisms: spillover,

compensation, segmentation, resource drain, congruence, work-family conflict. In later works they also include facilitation (Rothbard 2001).

In majority of cases, the issue of work-life balance is being approached through conflict. A conflict between the roles erupts

when the expectations associated with one role are contrary to the requirements of other roles fulfilled by the same person. If superiors demand work after hours or taking work home, this may be against the requirements of the wife who wants her husband to focus on his family only off-hours. This is how a conflict arises between the role of the central person as an employee and his role as a father and husband (Katz, Kahn 1966).

With regard to the professional and family life, the most universal definition of conflict, at least the most frequently referred to, was proposed by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). They are of the opinion that work-to-family conflict is a form of conflict between the roles where the requirements of the professional and family roles are irreconcilable, so that meeting requirements in one area hampers the same in another (Moen, Kelly and Huang 2008).

Family policy and gender norms shape men's and women's opportunities and expectations regarding work-life balance (Hobson & Fahlen 2009; Pfau-Effinger 2012; Powel et al. 2009) and influence the way people perceive their ability to make use of the options available to them. Hobson, Fahlen and Takacs (2011) argue that inequalities in achieving work-life balance reflect constraints at the societal level, as well as demands and expectations at the workplace. For instance, in societies where women are expected to be the main carers, the provision of childcare facilities and parental leave entitlements can expand mothers' ability to combine work with family life. If such facilities and entitlements do not exist, women may feel less entitled to aspire to work-life balance and be forced to withdraw from the labour market during the childbearing years (Drobnic & Guillien 2011). In addition, workplace cultures tend to strengthen traditional gender roles, which can result in different working experiences for men and women (Gregory & Milner 2009).

### Family Models

In the studies on work-life balance, a special role belongs to the adopted family models that significantly generate (or reduce) obstacles in reconciling the work and family life.

The subject literature provides numerous classifications and typologies of the family. For the purpose of this study, the most adequate one seems the economic typology of family models by Leira (2002) in which the division criterion is the attitude towards the woman's paid job. Consequently, the following can be distinguished: the traditional model with a male breadwinner and a woman performing unpaid work at home; the second model is actually model one, only slightly modified, as it assumes that the woman is engaged only in part-time work; the third one, the so-called mixed model, assumes that the working husband helps his full-time employed wife in home and family duties, yet the responsibility for the seamless functioning of the household lies predominantly with a woman (dual earner/female double burden); and finally, the partnership model which implies equality in the spouses' family and professional involvement (dual earner/dual-career family) and in which each of the spouses has an equal chance of pursuing their career and is given possibility of self-actualization.

Korpi (2000) proposes another classification of family models that covers, on the one hand, different welfare states within the European Union (EU) and, on the other hand, gender issues. The basis of his typology is the extent to which public family support is organized within the society.

In this context, the first choice the governments have to make is whether to leave the formation of agencies for gender inequality to markets and families or to develop public policy that would grant citizens possibility to claim their rights. In the latter case, governments have a choice between two dimensions of social rights. One dimension reflects support for the dual earner family model, encouraging women's participation in labour force and redistribution of social care work within the society and within the family. The other dimension reflects general support for a nuclear family, presuming a traditional gender-based division of labour within the society as well as within the family.

The differences in institutional support for the dual earner family model indicates the extent to which policy-making institutions encourage women's continuous participation in labour force, enable parents, men as well as women, to combine parenthood with paid work, and attempt to redistribute caring responsibilities within the family. In identifying institutions that should handle general family support, it is important to look at the extent to which public policy offers support for nuclear families, while maintaining their institutional attitude presuming, or being neutral to, whether or not wives have the primary responsibility for the caring and reproductive work within the family and only take up paid work on a temporary basis as secondary earners. Countries in which none of the two above said policy dimensions is well developed offer their citizens relatively few possibilities to claim rights in this area. These countries can be assumed to have chosen to largely allow the dominance of market forces in shaping gender relations, letting individuals find their private solutions sensitive to their market resources and/or family relations. In the choice between the politics and the markets, such countries can therefore be described as having market-oriented gender relation policy (Korpi 2000: 144).

We can thus distinguish three broad and ideal typical models of gendered welfare state institutions: models of general family support, dual-earner support and market-oriented policy. Pfau-Effinger (2012) argues that not only tendencies in family policy, but also the differences in gender norms and values, help explain these cross-national differences. Also, it is worth to mention a comparative work on fatherhood, masculinities and family policy in Poland and Sweden by Suwada and Plantin (2014).

Taking up comparative analysis with the usage of a conception elaborated in a different institutional context, I was aware of its capabilities, as well as of its limitations. On the one hand the elaborated set of indicators makes it possible to compare different countries (even those not specified in Korpi's classification) in a transparent way. However, what at first sight seems an advantage of such an approach, on the other hand might be perceived as a disadvantage. There is no certainty that criteria used for an analysis of three countries will be equally helpful in an analysis of countries unregarded in the typology. Nevertheless, they seem transparent enough to be used in comparative analyses that go beyond the three specified models of countries. What is more, it seems justified to create additional models on this base to complete the existing specification.

The analyses including Poland prove that it definitely does not reflect any of the already described models, which also signifies that the classification created by Korpi might be completed with other models, including such one that could unequivocally describe Poland and countries similar to Poland. Ferrarini (2006) argues that several post-socialist countries fit in a model of their own. We could take advantage of Mirosław Księżopolski's analyses in which he applies a term of paternalistic-market hybrid (2004) regarding the model of social policy typical of Poland. On this base we could apply a term of paternalistic-market model.

Taking all of the above into account, and following Korpi's classification, I have selected the following countries for my analysis of the difficulties in achieving work-life balance in the European dimension: Germany, Belgium (a general family support model), Sweden, Finland (a dual earner support model) and the United Kingdom (a market-oriented model) and, although not present in Korpi's classification, but often added by other researchers (Fahlen 2014), Poland (as an example of paternalistic-market model).

The analysed countries also represent different models of social policy. I am using the most popular typology of systems of social policy by Gosta Esping-Andersen (1990). In this way, Great Britain represents the liberal model whose main features are social assistance benefits, which comprise modest universal transfers. The benefits are means-tested, only citizens of low income are entitled to them, the amount is moderate, the access to benefits is limited and benefiting is connected with lowering social status (Księżopolski 1999: 96). On the contrary, Finland and Sweden are typical representatives of the social democratic model. Main features of this model are: versatility, high degree of institutionalisation of social benefits, commonness of benefits, faint relationship between an individual's input and the amount of benefits received (Księżopolski 1999: 97). Finally, Germany and Belgium are countries where a conservative model of social policy prevails. It is characterised by combining status segmentation with familism: family's solidarity and responsibility are expected in the first place, and only when its capacity is exhausted will the state give aid (Księżopolski 1999: 97).

In my analyses concerning work-life balance I actually concentrate only on one aspect of the "life" part: I reduce this area exclusively to the sphere of family activity. Naturally, I am aware of the fact that apart from work and family there are also other areas of activity which complete our daily existence, such as sport, hobby, meeting friends or distant relatives etc. I am also aware that the work-life balance problem does not affect solely families with children but it may concern also childless families and single people. Nevertheless, I consciously abandoned these analyses owing to the limitations of article's length on the one hand and to my personal conviction on the other hand; conviction (supported by the analysis of the bibliography) that the work-life balance issues concern to the highest degree conflicts between professional and family roles in the case of families with children.

### Analysis

It is important to determine main indicators of achieving work-life balance. These data show that there are certain key elements that are conducive to achieving work-life balance by an individual. Korpi, as well as the OECD, created catalogues of indicators that can be

used for comparative cross-national studies on the issue that I am going to explore. The analysis will comprise two areas: *the labour market position of families* (family-friendly workplace practices, temporary employment, gender differences in employment participation, distribution of working hours among adults in couple families) and *public policy for families and children* (parental leave systems, use of childbirth-related leave benefits by mothers and fathers, enrolment in childcare and pre-school establishments). These indicators have been chosen as allowing the best assessment of whether work-life balance is achievable or not.

I used the following indicators in my analyses: incidence of employer-provided flexible working time arrangements, working from home, share of temporary employment among all employees, employment patterns among couple families with children, distribution of working hours among women and men in couple families in relation to the first analysed aspect, that is, *the labour market position of families*. In relation to *public policy for families and children* I have used the following indicators: maternity and paternity leave, parental leave, proportion of employed parents on leave with a child aged under 1, average rate of enrolment in formal childcare or in pre-school educational programmes of children aged 0–p5.

Basing on these data, I answer the question concerning the differences between particular countries and test the hypothesis whether Poland is in the worst situation in this aspect among all analysed countries or not.

According to the OECD's definition, family-friendly workplace practices is a set of arrangements that facilitate reconciliation of work and family life, and which companies introduce to complement the statutory requirements. In relation to this aspect I have chosen the following indicators: *incidence of employer-provided flexible working time arrangements*, *possibility to work from home* and *share of temporary employment among all employees*.

Looking at the indicators proposed by Riedman et al. (2006), we can check what the situation is like in the countries of our interest:

Table 1

**Incidence of Employer-provided Flexible Working Time Arrangements, 2009**

	Possibility to use accumulated hours for longer periods of leave	Possibility to use accumulated hours for full days off	Possibility to accumulate hours, but without accumulation of full day off	Possibility to vary the start and end of daily work, but without accumulation of hours	Total
Sweden	27	19	8	11	65
Finland	23	23	11	5	62
United Kingdom	10	11	7	28	56
Poland	12	19	6	18	55
Germany	21	18	6	6	41
Belgium	10	9	5	14	38

Proportion of establishments providing flexi-time, establishments with 10 or more employees; all economic sectors are covered, except for agriculture.

Source: OECD Family Data Base.

The extent to which employees have some control over their working time varies considerably across countries. **Table 1** shows that Sweden and Finland are countries with the highest percentage of companies offering flexibility in working time arrangements. The percentage of companies providing flexitime is also relatively large in the United Kingdom, but in this country the flexibility is often limited to the modification of working hours without the possibility to convert accumulated hours into holidays. By contrast, Germany and Belgium provide very few employer-provided flexible working time arrangements.

Data from **Table 1** show that flexibility of working hours, which is crucial for achieving work-life balance, differs significantly depending on particular models. The highest flexibility is present in the dual earner support model, while the lowest occurs in the general family support model. In this aspect, the paternalistic-market model is approximate to the market-oriented model.

Another noteworthy indicator is an option of working from home. Working from home can help the employees fulfill their work and family commitments. This flexible form allows considerable independence in organising one's day depending on other (most frequently family-related) commitments. It is necessary, however, to remember about negative consequences of such a form of work regarding both its effectiveness and the quality of how employees carry out their family duties (how they perform their family roles).

**Table 2** shows the proportion of male and female employees who work from home estimated by gender and by intensity (for at least  $\frac{1}{4}$  of their time, with the distinction made between those working at home between  $\frac{1}{4}$  and half of their time and those who do so for at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  of their working time). It demonstrates that about 15% of employees work from home on a regular basis in Belgium and Finland (the proportion for women is lower). On the contrary, working from home is rare in Germany. Gender differences are visible in Finland, Sweden and the UK, where women use the possibility to work from home less than men. The detailed data are shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2

**Working from Home (proportion of male and women employees working from home), 2010**

Country	Men			Women		
	More than $\frac{3}{4}$ of time	Between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ of time	Total for men	More than $\frac{3}{4}$ of time	Between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ of time	Total for women
Belgium	5.0	10.4	15.4	5.9	8.9	14.8
Finland	3.8	11.2	15.0	3.6	6.0	9.6
Sweden	1.4	10.6	12.0	1.3	6.8	8.1
United Kingdom	4.1	7.7	11.8	2.4	3.1	5.5
Poland	4.2	5.9	10.1	6.6	6.8	13.4
Germany	0.9	6.5	7.4	4.5	3.1	7.6

Source: European Survey on Working Conditions, 2010.

Taking this aspect into consideration we can observe that Poland differs from the UK model, constituting a separate type. On the one hand, one out of ten men has the possibility of working from home, which does not differ from average values in the analysed countries, yet, on the other hand, these are women who take advantage of this possibility to a greater extent (13%).

Temporary employment is, without doubt, contradictory to family-friendly workplace practices. The higher the values of this indicator, the more difficult it is to reconcile family and professional life, as the latter may turn into unemployment at any moment. In 2014, the highest percentage of contracts for specified period was noted in Poland (27,9%), while the lowest percentage in the analysed countries was noted in Great Britain (5,6%), among the countries representing the general family support model in Germany (11,2%) and Belgium (8,1%), whereas among the countries representing the dual earner support model 14,1% and 15,1% in Finland and in Sweden respectively (data by Eurostat for people aged 20–64). These data show that the situation in Poland is not conducive to work-life balance. They also prove that high values of indicators of work market flexibility do not always guarantee achieving work-life balance.

The second set of indicators is related to *gender differences in employment participation*. I have used two measures: employment patterns among couple families with children aged 0–14 and employment patterns among couple families by age of the youngest child.

Taking into account the distribution of working hours among adults in couple families, I am going to present information concerning the distribution of paid working weekly hours among adults in couple families aged 15 to 64 with at least one dependent child in the 0–14 age group. The data presented cover five combinations of working arrangements: 1) full-time dual earners (both partners working full-time); 2) one-and-a-half earners (one partner working full-time and one partner working part-time); 3) sole earner (one partner working full-time and one partner not working); 4) no earners (neither of partners is employed) and 5) ‘others,’ which includes any other combination.

**Table 3** shows the employment patterns among couple families in 2011. In many of the studied countries, the most common employment pattern comprises both partners working full-time. This arrangement is true for over 50% of couple families with children in Finland and Poland, these countries also have fewer (less than 11%) one-and-a-half earner households. The latter model, albeit increasing over time, is the most usual arrangement in Germany, Belgium and the UK. In those countries, the most common pattern among couple families with children aged 0–14 is one parent full-time and one parent part-time, especially in Germany. In Poland there are two prevalent models: both parents working full-time or one parent full-time, which testifies to the very low rate of flexible arrangements in part-time employment.

Data from **table 3** show that in the context of reconciling career and family life in Poland major difficulties may occur. Part-time job is the least popular from among all the analysed countries. At the same time, this feature of the labour market is characteristic for majority of East-Central European countries (Polkowska 2016) and may testify to the existence of so-called mental heritage of communism in this region and be, therefore, also a characteristic feature of the paternalistic-market model. Both in the general family support model and in the market-oriented model employing one of the parents part-time is very popular and in the countries which represent these models it helps at least one of the parents reconcile career and family life and enables the other parent to work full time.

Data from **Table 4** complement the data from **Table 3**. **Table 4** presents employment arrangements by the age of the youngest child in couple families (0–2, 3–5, and 6–14). In most countries, the one-earner model applies to many couples with very young children



Table 3

**Employment Patterns Among Couple Families with Children Aged 0–14, 2011**

	Both parents full-time	One parent full-time	One parent full-time, one parent part-time	Neither parent in employment	Other
Finland	58.0	26.8	10.4	2.8	2.1
Poland	53.0	34.2	6.7	4.3	1.7
Sweden	41.0	15.1	35.3	3.2	5.4
Belgium	34.9	21.8	34.9	4.7	3.8
UK	24.8	24.8	39.8	5.8	4.9
Germany	16.5	29.3	43.8	4.9	5.5

Sources: Eurostat Labour Force Survey 2011.

(under 3) because of the long periods of parental leave (during which the leave taker is not counted as employed). Still, the situation differs across the studied countries. Poland reports high employment indicators both in the case of both parents working and in the one parent full-time model for families with the youngest children (over 42%). But, as the child grows, the number of families operating in the full-time model for both parents (53% for children aged 3–5 and 57% for children aged 6–14) increases, while the number of families with the one parent full-time decreases. This means that parents who have been involved in the upbringing so far (the other parent employed full-time) return to work for full-time employment. The example of Poland shows that either both parents work full-time (which means that in the meantime somebody else is looking after their children) or that one of the parents does not work at all because of difficulties in finding child daycare and/or because of lack of available solutions in the labour market. A contradictory model is the general family support model, which we can observe on the example of Germany.

However, in Germany, among the parents of the youngest children, the one parent full-time, one parent part-time model prevails, nevertheless, as children grow it does not change into the full-time model for both parents. Interestingly, however, the percentage of couples implementing this model of employment increases to 52% in families with children aged 6–14.

With reference to facilities and reconciling career and family life it is necessary to call attention to the dual earner support model. For instance, in Finland, the one parent full-time system prevails in families with very young children; but after the child turns 3, both parents full-time model grows in popularity, which may be related to the high availability of child care facilities. Parents of children aged 6–14 both work full-time in almost 73% of cases.

The third set of indicators is related to *the distribution of working hours among adults in couple families*. In particular, I have compared the distribution of working hours among women and men in couple families by number of children aged 0–14.

Tables 5 and 6 present the distribution of usual working hours per week for women and men in couple families by the number of children. The data show that, in most countries, the presence of children is linked to the woman's working hours, but not to those of the man. The proportion of women working 1–29 hours is the largest for women with two or more children in Belgium, Germany and the UK. In the other countries, having one or more

Table 4

**Employment Patterns Among Couple Families by Age of Youngest Child, 2011**

		Country					
		Belgium	Finland	Germany	Poland	Sweden	UK
Couple families with youngest child aged 0–2	Both parents full-time	36.8	38.5	23.3	42.5	41.9	21.2
	One parent full-time	22.9	45.8	36.2	43.9	20.8	32.5
	One parent full-time, one parent part-time	29.6	9.3	27.9	6.4	27.7	35.4
	Neither parent in employment	6.5	4.0	6.7	5.5	5.3	6.4
	Other	4.2	2.4	5.9	1.7	4.3	4.6
Couple families with youngest child aged 3–5	Both parents full-time	32.2	62.8	13.0	53.4	33.0	18.6
	One parent full-time	23.1	18.9	30.0	34.5	14.7	27.7
	One parent full-time, one parent part-time	35.7	11.6	46.8	6.7	43.2	42.8
	Neither parent in employment	4.6	2.5	5.2	3.8	3.3	6.0
	Other	4.4	4.2	4.9	1.6	5.9	4.9
Couple families with youngest child aged 6–14	Both parents full-time	34.5	72.8	13.8	57.0	44.8	30.4
	One parent full-time	19.9	13.7	24.5	29.5	12.7	16.7
	One parent full-time, one parent part-time	37.9	9.3	52.2	6.9	34.8	42.2
	Neither parent in employment	4.0	2.5	3.7	4.8	2.1	5.5
	Other	3.6	1.8	5.8	1.8	5.6	5.3

Sources: Eurostat Labour Force Survey 2011.

children has little or no effect on the number of hours that women spend in paid work. In Finland and Poland, the number of children does not influence the number of working hours for women. There is no available data for Sweden.

Table 5

**Distribution of Working Hours Among Women in Couple Families by Number of Children Aged 0–14, 2011**

	Women with no children				Women with one child				Women w/two or more children			
	1–29	30–39	40–44	45+	1–29	30–39	40–44	45+	1–29	30–39	40–44	45+
Belgium	31.9	45.3	11.7	11.1	26.3	52.3	12.5	9.0	38.8	42.5	9.6	9.1
Finland	14.1	63.0	16.8	6.1	9.1	70.8	14.8	5.3	9.6	66.7	17.6	6.1
Germany	29.6	33.0	30.0	7.5	50.7	27.4	18.7	3.3	68.3	17.1	12.0	2.6
Poland	15.3	7.2	62.3	15.1	14.5	7.3	64.5	13.7	15.2	8.0	60.4	16.4
UK	27.3	37.2	19.4	16.0	44.8	32.9	12.0	10.3	60.8	23.9	8.1	7.3

Sources: Secretariat calculations on basis of the ELFS 2011.

Data from [Tables 5](#) and [6](#) show that in Poland women with two children work more than 40 hours per week. This is the only case of such nature among the analysed countries. Interestingly, giving birth to a child (or two children) does not affect the number of hours

Table 6

**Distribution of Working Hours Among Men in Couple Families by Number of Children Aged 0–14 Years, 2011**

	Men with no children				Men with one child				Men w/two or more children			
	1–29	30–39	40–44	45+	1–29	30–39	40–44	45+	1–29	30–39	40–44	45+
Belgium	8.2	46.5	21.8	23.6	4.5	49.5	24.9	21.0	3.8	42.2	24.8	29.2
Finland	8.7	35.7	39.2	16.4	2.7	36.5	41.8	19.0	3.0	34.3	42.6	20.1
Germany	6.4	29.2	44.4	20.0	4.2	26.1	50.3	19.4	3.6	25.3	47.1	24.0
Poland	6.4	3.9	59.2	30.4	2.8	2.3	62.0	32.9	3.2	2.3	55.9	38.7
UK	7.9	26.2	27.8	38.1	4.3	23.4	30.1	42.2	4.3	21.6	29.3	44.8

Sources: Secretariat calculations on basis of the ELFS 2011.

worked. This also gives evidence that Poland constitutes a separate model in Korpi's classification. This may result from, as Bohle and Greskovits wrote (2012: 164) that Poland (like other countries from the Visegrad Group) *has expressed the common ambitions of the countries of the region to return to the West*. It might be a reason for so called "immersion in the work," which might push Poland closer to catching up with the living standards in Western Europe.

In Finland, women work a little less (30–39 hours weekly) and this is not related to giving birth to children either. We can assume, though, that in the case of dual earner support model childcare facilities are developed well enough to enable working to such extent, while it is not indispensable for providing the family with sufficient financial resources (as is the case of Poland).

Whereas in the general family support model we can see precisely how the increasing number of children coincides with decreasing number of hours worked in the case of women. We can relate this to a smaller than in the dual earner support model state's support for institutional child care.

The second area that has significant impact on the level of work-life balance is public policy for families and children. First, some indicators related to parental leave systems were analysed: maternity leave,<sup>1</sup> paternity leave<sup>2</sup> and parental leave.<sup>3</sup>

With regard to parental leave entitlement, most OECD countries allow parents to decide among themselves as to who goes on leave and claims certain financial support. In practice, this generally means that the parent who earns less, most often the mother, takes the leave.

<sup>1</sup> Maternity leave: an employment-protected leave of absence for employed women at around the time of childbirth, or adoption in some countries. In some countries, there is no separate regulation for maternity leaves, except for stipulations integrated in parental leave schemes

<sup>2</sup> Paternity leave: an employment-protected leave of absence for employed fathers at the time of childbirth. Paternity leave is not stipulated by any international conventions. In general, the periods of paternity leave are much shorter than for maternity leave. Because of the short period of absence, workers on paternity leave often continue to receive full remuneration. In some countries, father-specific leave entitlements are part of a parental leave scheme, rather than established as a separate right

<sup>3</sup> Parental leave: an employment-protected leave of absence for employed parents, often supplementary to specific maternity and paternity leave periods and usually, but not in all countries, follow the period of maternity leave. The entitlement to the parental leave period is either for each parent or for the family, but the entitlement to public income support is often family-based, so that, in general, only one parent can claim such an income support at any one time

Table 7

**Maternity Leave**

	Weeks of entitlement	FRE	Unpaid leave
United Kingdom <sup>a</sup>	52.0	11.7	40.3
Poland	22.0	22.0	0.0
Finland	17.5	14.1	3.4
Sweden	15.6	0.0	15.6
Belgium	15.0	10.9	4.1
Germany	14.0	14.0	0.0

<sup>a</sup>The length of maternity leave in the UK is 52 weeks according to statutes, 39 weeks of which are paid. The length of this period and the type of income received over this time may depend on the type of contract of employment, remuneration and the period of employment.

Sources: OECD Social Expenditure database and demographic data.

Table 8

**Paternity Leave**

	Weeks of entitlement	FRE	Unpaid leave
UK	2.0	0.4	1.6
Poland	1.0	1.0	0.0
Finland	9.0	6.3	2.7
Sweden	10.0	7.8	2.2
Belgium	15.0	4.3	10.7
Germany	8.7	4.3	4.4

Sources: OECD Social Expenditure database and demographic data.

Table 9

**Parental Leave**

	Weeks of entitlement	FRE	Unpaid leave
United Kingdom <sup>a</sup>	0.0	0.0	0.0
Poland	104.0	13.3	90.7
Finland	140.8	28.3	112.5
Sweden	44.4	48.0	-3.6
Belgium	13.0	2.6	10.4
Germany	43.3	21.4	21.9

<sup>a</sup>The situation in the UK differs from the other EU countries with regard to parental leave. Each parent can take up to 13 weeks of parental leave for each child until the child is 5. According to statutes, parental leave is unpaid (people with low income can apply for an income-related allowance for that period).

Sources: OECD Social Expenditure database and demographic data.

Tables 7, 8, 9 present paid child-related leave periods by duration (FRE<sup>4</sup>) of the leave period if paid 100% of the regular earnings, and the remaining “unpaid” weeks in 2013.

<sup>4</sup> FRE = Duration of leave in weeks × payment (as the percentage of average earnings) received by the applicant.

It is worth noting that in some countries parents on unpaid parental leave can receive cash payment, such as child/home care allowance, which does not result from the parental leave regulations. Such payments are accounted for while assessing the overall parental leave payment rates. There are differences in other forms of help within national child-related policy that affect the cross-national comparison of the leave systems. Some countries offer high additional child benefits to families with very young children or “home-care payments” to families with very young children (about 3) who do not use public childcare facilities (Finland). Local governments can provide additional financial support for parents on leave, like some authorities in Germany which offer leave payments for the third year after the childbirth.

Apart from the disparities between the studied countries in relation to their parental leave systems, it is worth having a look at the use of childbirth-related leave benefits by mothers and fathers in the studied countries.

There are considerable cross-national differences in the use of leave entitlement by parents. To some extent it is related to the entitlement to leave around childbirth (maternity, paternity and parental leaves) subject to the previous work experience. Furthermore, even when parents are entitled to parental leave periods, they do not always make full use of these benefits. Some parents (and this is often truer for fathers than mothers) are reluctant to take advantage of their leave entitlement for a longer period, as not being at work may hinder their career development and income. The availability of financial support during the leave period is another key factor determining parental use of leave entitlement. In most countries, maternity leave is both obligatory and paid at a relatively high proportion of the previous earnings, while prolonged parental leave periods (and/or home care payments) are generally paid at a much lower rate. Paternity leave often takes a relatively short period (frequently up to two weeks), meaning that it is often paid 100% of the regular earnings.

A comprehensive assessment of the use of leaves should ideally include two indicators: the proportion of parents entitled to leaves among the working parents with children and the take-up rates of leave among those parents entitled to leaves.

**Table 10** shows data for all employed parents with a child under the age of 1. The data concern parents on maternity, paternity or parental leave and/or contractual employer-provided leave. Parents who do not work after the period of leave is over, or who have ceased to receive parental leave payments, are not counted as “on leave,” but are categorized as inactive. Since paternity leave periods are generally short, the probability for fathers with children under the age of 1 to be on paternity leave at the time of the survey is low.

Maternity and parental leaves are examined jointly because they cannot be separated by the date and because they are often provided within the first year of childbirth or adoption. The data in **Table 10** clearly demonstrate that fathers are much less likely to be on parental leave than mothers. Furthermore, mothers in the countries which have such policy in place that favours prolonged leave periods (e.g. Finland) are most likely to be on leave during the first year. The data for the UK is not comparable due to the differences in domestic legislation.

The European Labour Force Survey only allows rough estimation of the use of leaves which is likely to be underrated for variety of reasons; parents on prolonged (over one year) unpaid leave can be identified as inactive in most countries, while parents on part-time

Table 10

**Proportion of Employed Parents on Leave with a Child Aged Under 1, 2011**

	Women in maternity or parental leave	Men in parental leave
Finland	75.9	4.2
Germany	64.7	0.8
Poland	41.4	0.1
Belgium	21.7	1.1
UK	0.6	0.7

Source: The European Labour Force Survey (ELFS).

leave will be counted as employed. In addition, the proportion of leave-takers is estimated and the probability of being on leave is thus determined by the available period of leave (particularly paid one). Since the period of leave taken by fathers is generally much shorter than taken by mothers, the probability to identify fathers on parental leave is relatively low.

According to the European Labour Force Survey, there are large differences in the use of leave across countries, also by gender. It is worth mentioning that there are countries (like Finland) where the proportion of fathers taking paternity leave is higher than those taking parental leave, but it is because paternity leave is relatively short and well-paid compared with the parental leave benefit. The cross-national differences in the relative number of fathers taking parental leave are also large. The proportion is relatively high in Sweden where there are about 77 fathers taking parental leave per 100 mothers; by contrast, not even 2 men per 100 women take advantage of their entitlement to parental leave in Germany.

In Poland, the fathers seldom decide to stay on parental leave. For working parents, a very important issue is the possibility of enrolment in childcare and pre-school facilities (the last set of indicators). The organisation of childcare provision differs greatly in particular countries. The enrolment rates for children aged 0–2 concern formal childcare arrangements such as group care in childcare centres, registered home-based child-minders looking after one or more children and care provided by a professional child-minder at home.

The enrolment rates for children aged 3–5 concern those enrolled in formal childcare, as mentioned above, but mainly in formal pre-school services and also, in some countries, in primary schools for children aged 4–5. Thus, this indicator covers all children aged 3–5 enrolled in day-care and pre-school establishments.

**Tables 11** shows the rate of participating in childcare and pre-school services among children aged 0–5.

The data shown in **Table 11** reveals big differences between the analysed countries. The enrolment rates of children aged 0–2 indicated less than 7% in Poland, and more than 40% of children in this age group were enrolled in formal childcare in Sweden and in the UK. The situation improves for children aged 3–5, but still in Poland only 60% were enrolled in formal childcare or pre-school programmes in 2010, whereas in the other analysed countries (except Finland), the rates were above 92%.

Taking into consideration the previous data concerning both parents' employment in Poland, as well as a very small (in comparison with other countries) percentage of children

Table 11  
**Average Enrolment Rate of Children Aged 0–5 in Formal Childcare  
 or in Pre-school Educational Programmes, 2010**

Country	0–2 years	3–5 years
Sweden	46.7	92.9
Finland	27.7	73.0
UK	42.0	93.3
Belgium	39.2	99.0
Germany	23.1	93.9
Poland	6.9	59.7

Sources: Nordic countries: NOSOSCO (2010–11); Other: National Authorities, OECD Education database.

taking advantage of institutional forms of child care under the age of 5, also the lack of other forms of help from state, all of this causes that Poland does not fit in any of the models described by Korpi and that is why, in my opinion, it constitutes a separate model which, due to its characteristics, should be determined as a paternalistic-market model.

### Conclusion

This paper analyses two aspects of the possibility of achieving work-life balance: the labour market position of families and public policy for families and children. Basing on these data, I attempted to answer the question about the cross-national differences regarding work-life balance.

The analysis of the first factor reveals that in the countries offering state support for the family (Finland, Sweden), manifested in flexible working arrangements, it is easier to achieve work-life balance than elsewhere. Parents may combine upbringing with professional career. Another evidence for that might be the level of satisfaction from achieving work-life balance, the highest from among all the models. (European Quality of Life Survey 2007).

We observe, however, that countries like Germany or Belgium (general family support model) pursue policy in which women are offered support and at the same time are expected to assume the primary responsibility for caring and for reproductive work within the family and to take up paid work only on a temporary basis as secondary earners. These arrangements are not aimed to facilitate the combination of work with family life, but intend to make mothers take care of their young children for as long as possible. Therefore, employment flexibility is not widely available there, hence the popularity of part-time employment and a very high popularity of the one parent full-time model (usually male) and the one parent part-time model (usually female).

The third policy model of family support (market-oriented policy) practised in the UK differs fundamentally from the other two. As Korpi describes, “these countries can be assumed to have chosen to largely allow market forces to dominate the shaping of gender relations, leaving individuals to find private solutions within the context of their market resources and/or family relations” (Korpi 2000). In practice, that means that the flexible

employment opportunities in the UK are just average but go together with a large percentage of women working only part-time, even when upbringing school-age children (6–14).

Poland, the last of the studied countries, falls outside any of the discussed models. On the one hand, Poland presents a fairly low level of employment flexibility in relation to: opportunities to change working-hours and part-time employment (such forms facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life). On the other hand, Poland reports a very high percentage of both parents working full-time (especially when having children over 3). The only “flexibility” here is the high proportion of temporary employment (27,9%) which, however, does not favour the pursuit of work-life balance; rather the opposite. It demonstrates the lack of stability and the transitional nature of employment in Poland.

The analysis of the other factor, public policy for families and children, confirms the conclusions drawn so far. First, in all the studied countries, all kinds of parental leaves are intended mainly for women. The exception is Sweden where parental leave is 480 days and each parent needs to take a minimum of 60 days of such a leave. Furthermore, we observe that Sweden offers formal childcare arrangements, such as group care in childcare centres, registered child-minders based in their own houses looking after one or more children and, finally, care provided by a professional child-minder at home for the vast majority of young citizens. With regard to pre-school education in Sweden, the UK, Germany and Belgium, more than 93% of children are provided with care. The exception is Finland, where only 73% of children attend pre-school educational facilities, and Poland, where the relevant indicators both for the youngest and older children are at a very low level.

In this respect, the case of Poland is very interesting, as, on the one hand, there are as many as 42.5% of families with children aged under 2 with both parents working full-time, and, on the other hand, only 6.7% of them can expect to get a place in a nursery or another child-care facility. The only explanation is that their parents are able to find alternative ways, not covered or measurable by statistics, to provide the necessary care (e.g. grandparents or nannies working off-the-books).

Taking into consideration everything that has been written about difficulties in achieving work-life balance in particular countries, it must be stated that the assumed hypothesis stating that *in Poland the difficulties in reconciling career and family life are on the highest level from among all the analysed countries* has been confirmed. The difficulties occurred in both analysed aspects: the position of families in the labour market and the public policy for families and children. In the remaining analysed models at least in one of the aspects mentioned above the situation in the countries representing certain model was favourable considering possibilities of achieving work-life balance.

## References

- Bohle, D. and Greskovits, B. 2012. *Capitalist Diversity on Europe's Periphery*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- CBOS [Social Opinion Research Centre]. 2010. Postawy prokreacyjne Polaków. Raport z badań, [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K\\_004\\_10.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K_004_10.PDF) (22.04.2013).
- CBOS [Social Opinion Research Centre]. 2012. Potrzeby prokreacyjne oraz preferowany i realizowany model rodziny. Raport z badań, [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2012/K\\_061\\_12.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2012/K_061_12.PDF) (22.04.2013).
- Daniels, L. 2014. What does Work-Life Balance Mean? [www.w-lb.org.uk](http://www.w-lb.org.uk). Last access: 6 Feb. 2014.



- Drobnič, S. and Guillén, A. 2011. Tensions Between Work and Home: Job Quality and Working Conditions in the Institutional Contexts of Germany and Spain, *Social Politics* 18: 232–268, doi:10.1093/sp/jxr008.
- Edwards, J. R. and Rothbard, N. P. 2000. Mechanism linking Work and Family: Clarifying the Relationship between Work and Family Constructs, *Academy of Management Review* 1(25): 178–199.
- Esping-Andersen, G. 1990. *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Fahlén, S. 2014. Does Gender Matter? Policies, Norms and the Gender Gap in Work-to-Home and Home-to-Work Conflict across Europe, *Community, Work & Family* 17(4): 371–391, doi: 10.1080/13668803.2014.899486.
- Family-Friendly Workplace Practices. 2014. OECD—Social Policy Division—Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs.
- Ferrarini, T. 2006. *Families, States and Labour Markets: Institutions, causes and Consequences of Family Policies in Post-war Welfare States*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Greenhaus, J. H. and Beutell, N. T. 1985. Sources of Conflict between Work and Family Roles, *Academy of Management Review* 10 (1): 76–88.
- Gregory, A. and Milner, S. 2009. Editorial: Work–life balance: A Matter of Choice?, *Gender, Work and Organization* 16(1): 1–13, doi:10.1111/j.1468hbox-0432.2008.00429.x.
- Hobson, B. and Fahlén, S. 2009. Applying Sen’s Capabilities Framework within a European Context: Theoretical and Empirical Challenges. REC-WP 03/2009. Edinburgh: RECOWE, Dissemination and Dialogue Center.
- Hobson, B., Fahlén, S. and Takács, J. 2011. Agency and Capabilities to Achieve a Work-life Balance: A comparison between Sweden and Hungary, *Social Politics* 18: 168–198, doi:10.1093/sp/jxr007.
- Katz, D. and Kahn, R. L. 1966. *The Social Psychology of Organizations*. New York: Wiley.
- Key Characteristics of Parental Leave Systems. 2014. OECD—Social Policy Division—Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs.
- Korpi, W. 2000. Faces of Inequality: Gender, Class, and Patterns of Inequalities in Different Types of Welfare States, *Social Politics* 2(7): 127–191.
- Księżopolski, M. 1999. *Polityka społeczna; wybrane problemy porównań międzynarodowych*. Katowice: Śląsk.
- Księżopolski, M. 2004. Co dalej z polityką społeczną w Polsce? od socjalistycznych gwarancji do paternalistycznorynkowej hybrydy, in: M. Rymśza (ed.), *Reformy społeczne. Bilans dekady*. Warszawa: Instytut Spraw Publicznych.
- Leira, A. 2002. *Working Parents and the Welfare State: Family Change and Policy Reform in Scandinavia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Maron, L., Meulders, D. and O’Dorchai, S. 2012. Le congé parental en Belgique, *Brussels Economic Review* 51(2/3): 347–363.
- Moen, P., Kelly, E. L. and Huang, R. 2008. “Fit” Inside the Work–Family Black Box: An Ecology of the Life Course, Cycles of Control Reframing, *Journal of Occupation and Organizational Psychology* 81 (3): 411–433.
- Pfau-Effinger, B. 2012. Women’s Employment in the Institutional and Cultural Context, *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 32: 530–543.
- Polkowska, D. 2016. *The Precarity Trap in the Youth Labour Market. Flexible Employment—a Barrier or Opportunity?* Forthcoming.
- Powell, G. N., Francesco, A. M., and Ling, Y. 2009. Toward Culture-Sensitive Theories of the Workfamily Interface, *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 30: 597–616.
- Riedmann, A., Bielenski, H., Szczurowska, T., and Wagner, A. 2006. *Working Time and Work-life Balance in European Companies*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. European Companies Survey 2009 <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/ecs/2009/index.htm>.
- Rothbard, N. P. 2001. Enriching Or Depleting? The Dynamics Of Engagement in Work And Family Roles, *Administrative Science Quarterly* 46: 655–684.
- Suwada, K. and Plantin, L. 2014. On Fatherhood, Masculinities, and Family Policies in Poland and Sweden—a Comparative Study, *Polish Sociological Review* 4 (188): 509–524.

balance (dilemma between the professional and personal choices) and processes of precarization (in particular how precarity becomes a structural feature of the modern world of work).

E-mail: [dominika.polkowska@umcs.pl](mailto:dominika.polkowska@umcs.pl)