

## The Impact of National Policy on Work–Family Experiences

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### Abstract

Work–life scholars emphasize the need for cross-national studies in order to understand the variety of ways in which people experience the work–life interface across the world. Within this chapter an overview is given of national work–family policies present in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries and the changes in policy that occurred across time. This is followed by a review of research that examines the impact of national policies on work–family outcomes. Research on this topic is increasing but scarce. Research to date suggests that policies are beneficial for the general contentment of working parents with the way they are able to combine work and family life, but are less effective in reducing experienced work–family conflict or time pressure.

**Key Words:** work–family policies, cross-national comparison, policy impact, leave policies, work–family outcomes

### Introduction

In the past few decades national governments have increasingly introduced and developed social policies, such as parental leave, public child care, and the right to reduce working hours, to support working parents who combine paid work with family life. Although this development occurred across most developed countries, large variations do exist between countries. Sweden, for instance, was one of the first countries to introduce national policies in this area and is still famous for its generous parental leave system and extensive public daycare. The United States, in contrast, stands out for the near absence of country-level social support (Allen et al., 2014; Ekberg, Eriksson, & Friebel, 2013; Heymann, McNeill, & Earle, 2013; Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006).

Because social policy context varies across countries, lack of awareness of the effects of national policies presents a barrier to the understanding of work–family experiences in different societies (Ollier-Malaterre, Valcour, den Dulk, & Kossek,

2013). Therefore, work–life scholars have emphasized the need for cross-national studies in order to understand the variety of ways in which people experience the work–life interface across the world. This chapter offers an overview of the nature and type of social policies developed by national governments in developed countries,<sup>1</sup> which aim to support the combination of work and family life, and our knowledge so far about their impact on work–family outcomes.

The chapter unfolds as follows. Differences in policies across countries have inspired scholars to develop welfare state classifications in an effort to compare different policy models and their impact across countries (i.e., Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999; Korpi, 2000; Korpi, Ferrarini, & Englund, 2013; Sainsbury, 1996). These different country classifications are discussed followed by an overview of national work–family policies present within developed countries across the world. With regard to policies, we first discuss the nature of social policies currently present within different countries.

A distinction is made between leave policies (maternity, paternity, and parental leave), availability of public child care, and policies with respect to flexible work arrangements. The latter refers in particular to legislation with respect to the right to reduce working hours.

We next review changes that have occurred over time by applying a historical perspective. Some countries are, in fact, characterized by quite dramatic and rapid changes, such as Eastern European countries that transitioned from socialism to capitalism, affecting state support for combining work and family life (Trefalt, Drnovšek, Svetina-Nabergoj, & Adlešič, 2013). Trefalt and colleagues (2013) have argued that it is not only the level of state support but also the changes in national context that affect individuals' work–family experiences. Therefore, attention is given to developments and changes over time with respect to national work–family policies within various countries.

The question of how social policies relate to work–family outcomes, such as work–family conflict, work–family enrichment, and overall satisfaction with managing work and private life, is addressed. We draw on the growing number of studies that attempt to investigate the effect of policies. The chapter ends by summarizing key debates in relation to this topic and by identifying knowledge gaps that need to be addressed in future research.

### Comparative Studies on Work–Family Policies

In the comparative literature on national work–family policies, the difference between various welfare state regimes is an important and recurring theme. Countries vary with respect to the degree and nature of policies introduced to support working parents. These differences in policies across countries have led to the development of various welfare state classifications to compare and to explain different policy models (i.e., Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999; Korpi, 2000; Sainsbury, 1996).

The most used welfare states typology is that developed by Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999). He describes the dominant character of the welfare package in each country in terms of the role of the state, of the family, and of the market, and this classification offers a way of investigating how institutional context influences the level and nature of work–family support offered by the state and by workplaces (den Dulk, 2001). The Esping-Andersen welfare regime classification is based on the concepts of defamiliarization and decommodification.

Defamiliarization refers to the degree to which welfare state or market provisions ease the burden of caring responsibilities of families, whereas decommodification refers to the degree of social rights that permits people to make their living standards independent of market forces. For instance, dependence on the family or the market can be reduced when the state offers social policies such as parental leave, public child care, or unemployment benefits.

Originally, the classification resulted in three welfare state regimes: the social democratic, the conservative, and the liberal. A classic example of the social democratic regime is Sweden in which the state offers extensive support for combining work and family life. Countries such as Italy and Germany represent the conservative regime, in which the family takes a more central role and the level of national policies is more limited. In the liberal regime, support for working parents is left to the market, also resulting in a lower level of social policies initiated by the state. The United Kingdom and the United States are examples of this regime type.

This classification of welfare state regimes has not been without criticism and debate. First, the classification focused mainly on the Northwestern part of Europe and the United States. A strong case has been made for a separate fourth Mediterranean model for Southern European countries (e.g., Antonnen & Sipilä, 1996), and for a fifth model to include postsocialist countries (Blossfeld & Drobnič, 2001). Moreover, some Western European countries are characterized by a hybrid form or mix of different welfare state regimes. The Netherlands, for instance, is seen as an ambiguous case because it combines the traditional family support characteristic of the conservative regime with several universal social policies that are more in line with the social democratic welfare regime (Sainsbury, 1996). Moreover, within the conservative regime, some countries place more emphasis on the role of the state (France, Belgium) whereas others rely more on employers and the family in combination with modest state support (the Netherlands, Germany). In addition, recent neoliberal trends in these countries in relation to the restructuring of the welfare state has led to a stronger emphasis on the role of the market, that is work–family policies offered by employers instead of by the state (den Dulk & Groeneveld, 2012).

Second, Esping-Andersen's original typology of three welfare state regimes was criticized for not paying enough attention to gender, the role of the family, and unpaid work (Lewis, 1992; Orloff, 1993; Plantenga & van Doorne-Huiskes, 1993; Sainsbury,

1996). According to Gornick and Meyers (2003), however, classifications that incorporate gender show large similarities to Esping-Andersen's typology, suggesting that "the welfare state principles underlying these clusters are highly correlated with those that shape family policy" (Gornick & Meyers, 2003, p. 23). In social democratic welfare states there is a strong commitment to gender equality, whereas in the conservative and Mediterranean regimes this is less prevalent, resulting in lower levels of national policies. Social policy in the conservative regime is traditionally focused on supporting the (male) breadwinner, who is considered to be able to support his home caring partner. In the liberal welfare state regime, men and women are treated as equal despite differences in caring responsibilities, and work-family support is mainly left to market forces and treated as an individual, private responsibility (Plantenga & van Doorne-Huiskes, 1993). The question is whether workplaces are indeed taking an active role in this regime type given the emphasis on market forces. So far, research indicates that an active role of the state stimulates work-family support offered by employers rather than the absence of policies (den Dulck, Groeneveld, Ollier-Malaterre, & Valcour, 2013).

Third, scholars have argued that typologies are less suitable for analyses of change over time and that more emphasis should be placed on investigating the impact of policies. Welfare regime typologies are static and represent a configuration of driving forces and institutions (Korpi et al., 2013). To disentangle the influence of policies of other factors present in countries, it makes sense to decompose welfare regimes into various dimensions and types of work-family policies (den Dulck et al., 2013; Korpi et al., 2013; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). Korpi and colleagues (2013) make a distinction between three policy dimensions when analyzing national work-family policies: the traditional-family dimension, the dual-earner dimension, and the dual-carer dimension. The first dimension, the traditional-family dimension, refers to policies that support women's unpaid work at home, i.e., the traditional breadwinner model in which women carry the main responsibility for child care and domestic work. Examples of policies that fall under this dimension are child allowances, part-time public daycare services, home care allowances to a parent who stays at home to care for children, or tax benefits to the head of the household who has an economically nonactive partner. The dual-earner dimension refers to policies that support families in which both parents have a substantial paid job, by offering full-time public child care and paid parental leave.

Finally, the dual-carer dimension reflects policies that encourage fathers to take on more caring responsibilities by offering paid paternity leave and/or weeks of paid parental leave specially reserved for fathers ("daddy quota") (Korpi et al., 2013). When considering how countries score on these policy dimensions three country clusters appear, which are in fact quite similar to the welfare state regimes distinguished by Esping-Andersen: a group of countries with relatively many traditional-family policies and low values on dual-earner and dual-carer support (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands); Scandinavian countries that score high on both the dual-earner and dual-carer dimension; and a group of countries with what Korpi and colleagues (2013) call market-oriented family policies, that is, low level of all types of public policies and a reliance on the market as a provider for support (e.g., Australia, Canada, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States). In the next section, the national policies currently present within developed countries are discussed in more detail.

### Review of National Policies on Work and Family Life Support

There is a growing body of research mapping the level and development of national policies aiming to support the combination of work and family life, and this research shows substantial variations between countries in the presence of policies and with respect to the type of support that is developed and emphasized (Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Korpi et al., 2013; Moss, 2014; OECD, 2007; Thévenon, 2011). In Tables 22.1 and 22.2 an overview is given of national work-family policies present within European and non-European Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. First we will discuss the main elements in these tables and point to differences and similarities between social policies in the countries.

Tables 22.1 and 22.2 provide an overview of statutory leave: maternity leave, paternity leave, and parental leave. For all three leave forms, the amount of time people are entitled to as well as whether the leaves are paid for are described. Next to statutory leave we look at the amount of children in formal daycare until the age of 3 years, and from the age of 3 years to the moment children reach the age of compulsory school. In addition to formal daycare, parents can also adjust their working hours and do the care task themselves. National governments increasingly develop legislation in relation to reduction of working hours. First an overview is

Table 22.1. State Support in European OECD Countries, Statutory Leave, and Flexible Work Arrangements, 2014 and Percentage of Children in Formal Child Care in 2011.

Country	Maternity Leave	Paternity Leave	Parental Leave	Child Care: Formal to 3 Years	Child Care: Formal 3 Years to Compulsory School Age	Right to Reduce Hours
Austria	16 weeks***		24 months**	14	85	Until the child is 7 years*
Belgium	15 weeks***	2 weeks***	4 months per parent**	38	98	None
Croatia	14 to 30 weeks***	None	6 + 2 bonus months**	15	51	Until the child is 3 years
Czech Republic	28 weeks***	None	36 months**	5	74	None
Cyprus	16 weeks***	None	3 months per parent*	23	73	None
Denmark	18 weeks***	2 weeks***	32 weeks***	74	98	None
Estonia	20 weeks***	2 weeks***	36 months***	19	92	None
Finland	17.5 weeks****	3-4 weeks****	158 working days****	26	76	Until the end of the second year at school**
France	16 weeks***	2 weeks***	36 months**	44	95	None
Germany	14 weeks***	none	36 months***	24	90	None
Greece	17 weeks***	2 days***	4 months per parent*	19	76	Until the child is 2.5 or 4 years***
Hungary	24 weeks***	5 days***	36 months****	8	75	None
Iceland	3 months	3 months	3 months	39	99	Employers must enable men and women to balance their lives
Ireland	42 weeks**	none	18 weeks per parent*	21	82	Employee may request, employer not required to grant
Italy	20 weeks***	1 day***	10 or 11 months**	26	95	Until the child is 6 years
Latvia	19 weeks	10 days***	36 months***	16	73	Until the child is 1 year (only mothers)

(continued)

Table 22.1. Continued

Country	Maternity Leave	Paternity Leave	Parental Leave	Child Care: Formal to 3 Years	Child Care: Formal 3 Years to Compulsory School Age	Right to Reduce Hours
Lithuania	18 weeks***	1 month***	36 months***	8	65	None
Luxembourg	16 weeks***	2 days <sup>3</sup> ***	6 months per parent**	43	73	None
The Netherlands	16 weeks***	2 days***	26 weeks per parent**	52	89	All employees*
Norway	9 weeks***	2-14 weeks	47-57 weeks	42	87	Until the child is 10 years (unpaid)
Poland	26 weeks***	2 weeks***	36 months**	3	44	None
Portugal	17 <sup>4</sup> weeks***	20 days***	3 months per parent**	35	81	Until the child is 12 years*
Russian Federation	20 weeks***	none	36 months**	18	Na	None
Slovenia	15 weeks***	13 weeks**	37 weeks***	37	92	Until the child is 3 years**
Spain	16 weeks***	3 weeks***	36 months*	39	86	Until the child is 12 years*
Sweden	7 <sup>4</sup> weeks***	2 weeks***	480 days***	51	95	Until the child is 8 years*
Switzerland	16 weeks***	none	none	24	77	Employers need to take into account family responsibilities of employees until the child is 15 years
United Kingdom	52 weeks**	2 weeks**	18 weeks per parent*	35	93	None

Sources: Moss (2012, 2013, 2014), International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research (2014), OECD (2011), OECD Family Database, except for Latvia and Cyprus (source for leave arrangements: Anxo, Fagan, Smith, Letablier, & Perraudin, 2007).

## Notes:

\* Statutory entitlement but unpaid;

\*\* statutory entitlement paid but either at a low flat rate or earning related at less than 66% of earnings or not universal;

\*\*\* statutory entitlement paid for all or part of the duration to all parents at 66% of earnings or more (Moss, 2014). Na = no comparable data available.

<sup>1</sup> In Finland 6 working days per week are calculated in leave arrangements.

<sup>2</sup> In Hungary there are two types of parental leave: a higher and lower paid leave: first 2 years 70% of earnings, third year flat rate payment (Moss, 2014; Anxo et al., 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Luxembourg: in legislation there is no mention of paternity leave but fathers can use another type of leave at the time of the birth of a child. Greece: paternity leave is paid by the employer but public sector employees do not get paid.

<sup>4</sup> In Portugal and Sweden legislation does not refer to maternity leave but the leave is part of parental leave. In Portugal paternity leave is also mentioned under parental leave in the legislation.

Table 22.2. State Support in Non-European OECD Countries, Statutory Leave, and Flexible Work Arrangements, 2014 and Children in Formal Child Care in 2010.

Country	Maternity Leave	Paternity Leave	Parental Leave	Child Care: Formal to 3 Years	Child Care: Formal to 3 Years to Compulsory School Age	Right to Reduce Hours
Australia	18 weeks***	2 weeks	24 months**	33	80	Until the child is 5 or 6 years
Brazil	4 or 6 months***	1 or 2 weeks***	None	Na	Na	None
Canada	15 weeks**	None	35-37 weeks	Na	47	None
Japan	14 weeks***	None	12-14 months**	26	90	Until the child is 3 years*
Mexico	12 weeks***	Na	Na	8	90	Na
New Zealand	14 weeks	1-2 weeks	12 months	37	94	Employees with care tasks may request variation of working hours
South Africa	4 months**	None	None	Na	Na	None
South Korea	13 weeks***	Na	Na	51	83	Na
United States	12 weeks*	None	None	43	67	None

Source: Moss (2012, 2013, 2014), International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research, OECD (2011), and OECD Family Database.

## Notes:

\* Statutory entitlement but unpaid;

\*\* statutory entitlement paid but either at a low flat rate or earning related at less than 66% of earnings or not universal;

\*\*\* statutory entitlement paid for all or part of the duration to all parents at 66% of earnings or more (Moss, 2014). Na = no comparable data available.

given of the main social policies in place in different European OECD countries. European countries are on the forefront when it comes to the reconciliation between work and family life through social policy (Gornick & Meyers, 2003). Most of the social policies on work and family are developed in Europe, and most of the literature was for a long time focused on policy development in Europe, although currently there is a considerable amount of social policy that aims to support working parents in other OECD countries as well. Table 22.2 provides an overview of the social policies for several other non-European OECD countries.

Maternity leave is, despite country differences, the most established social policy. The medical aspect, that a child bearer and the newborn child need support for the physical inconveniences before and after birth, explains the relatively steady state

support for this leave arrangement. Maternity leave can partly be understood as a health issue, which is one of the traditional social policy fields in welfare states (Beveridge, 1942). Most European countries are more generous than the minimum of 14 weeks for maternity leave set in the European Union (EU). The bulk of the countries support a maternity leave for 15 to 20 weeks. In Eastern Europe some countries are more generous, for instance in Hungary the maternity leave is 24 weeks and in the Czech Republic it is 28 weeks. In almost all countries maternity leave is paid for all or part of the duration at 66% of earnings or more. Outside of Europe some other OECD countries offer a relative short maternity leave; the United States offers 12 weeks unpaid leave, Mexico offers 12 weeks paid maternity leave, and South Korea offers 13 weeks paid leave. On the other hand, several countries

offer far more than the 14 week minimum of the EU; Australia offers 18 weeks and South Africa offers 4 months (see Table 22.2).

Paternity leave is less well established. Leave for fathers is also much shorter, from 1 to 2 days in Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, to 2 weeks or more in countries such as France, Slovenia, or Iceland. At the same time, a considerable number of countries do not offer paternity leave. When fathers want to care for their newborn and/or partner, they will have to take annual leave days. Paternity leave is not considered to be a policy related to health issues such as maternity leave, despite psychological studies on the well-being of children that point to the need for both parents to bond with their child in the first year. Paternity leave seems not very widespread outside of Europe, although Brazil and New Zealand both offer 1 to 2 weeks, and Australia offers 2 weeks.

Parental leave enables men and women “to take care of (a) child until a given age” (Directive 2010/18/EU). It can be a family entitlement as is the case in for instance Austria, Canada, Finland, France, Hungary, and Russia; or it can be an individual entitlement as in for instance Australia, Greece, the Netherlands, and Spain; or it can be a mixed entitlement, which is the case in Iceland, Norway, Portugal, and Sweden (Moss, 2014). Parental leave shows a huge variety across European countries. In most of the Eastern European countries a 3-year (36 months) period seems the norm, as it is in Germany, France, and Spain. Some countries allow a 2-year period, for example, Austria and Australia. The rest of the countries offer less than 2 years parental leave. In the Scandinavian countries parental leave is accompanied by a so-called daddy

quota, which implies that the male partner is required to take a part of the parental leave, otherwise the couple lose this leave period. The special “daddy” months aim to encourage fathers to take leave, thereby stimulating the equal division of care duties between men and women (Brandt & Kvande, 2002; Rostgaard, 2002), representing the dual-carer dimension as distinguished by Korpi et al. (2013).

Maternity leave is specific for women only, but parental leave is meant for both parents. However, when we look at the use of both maternity leave and parental leave (see Figure 22.1), almost none of the working men use parental leave. Only in Romania and Finland do working fathers seem to use parental leave, although still much less than women do. The use of maternity leave and parental leave is also dependent on whether it is paid or unpaid. For parental leave the low use in the first year of having a child, for instance in the United Kingdom, Greece, or Belgium, can be explained by either the fact that the leave is unpaid and/or by the duration of the leave. Norway and Sweden are not shown in Figure 22.1, but the daddy quota introduced in these countries has led to greater use of parental leave by fathers (Brandt & Kvande, 2002).

Until children enter formal education, in most countries between the ages of 5 and 7 years, working parents need a child care solution during their working hours. Tables 22.1 and 22.2 show the proportion of children in formal child care. The reasons for offering formal child care can differ. Governments can introduce child care for a variety of reasons: an economical, a pedagogical, and a gender equality reason. The economic reason for formal child care is that

the parents can participate in the labor market as long as others take care of their children during working hours. This system is economically rational only as long as the costs for formal child care do not outweigh the earned income of the working parent(s). For many governments, the economic reason has become increasingly important as most welfare states need full participation in the labor market. In times with a low fertility rate and a growing amount of people not working—young people stay longer in education and elder people live longer after their retirement—there is an increasing need for people who are able to work and who participate in the labor market to finance the social security system. But even in the past, when there was a need for women to participate in the labor market, the establishment of child care became necessary. A second reason for supporting formal child care is that a child benefits socially and culturally from interaction with its peers (Esping-Andersen, 2009). This is a pedagogical reason, children benefit from the socialization with their peer group. Additional, formal child care minders are more and more trained in educating young children instead of only watching them. A third reason for establishing formal child care is that formal child care increases gender equality between the parents (Esping-Andersen, 2009), enabling mothers to combine work and care. For instance, in Sweden in the 1960s the idea rose that family members would all benefit more when gender relations were more equal, and caring for children in publicly funded day-care was the solution (Lundqvist, 2011).

The availability and use of formal child care vary widely between countries, especially for children under the age of 3 years, from 3% in Poland and 5% in the Czech Republic, and around 50% in South Korea, the Netherlands, and Sweden, to 74% in Denmark. Therefore, in addition to formal child care, in some countries informal child care remains very important. Informal child care can consist of grandparents, neighbors, friends, or a combination of people from the social network of working parents, taking care of the children. Informal child care can also be chosen as the most socially desirable option, especially in countries with a strong motherhood ideology, such as the Netherlands (Yerkes & Peper, 2011). Countries with a strong motherhood culture emphasize the importance of caring for the children by their mothers. Despite recent changes toward dual earners on the labor market in these countries, the cultural ideal still favors women caring for their children at home (Kremer, 2007; Morgan, 2006). In addition to a motherhood ideology, informal child care can also be the most economically

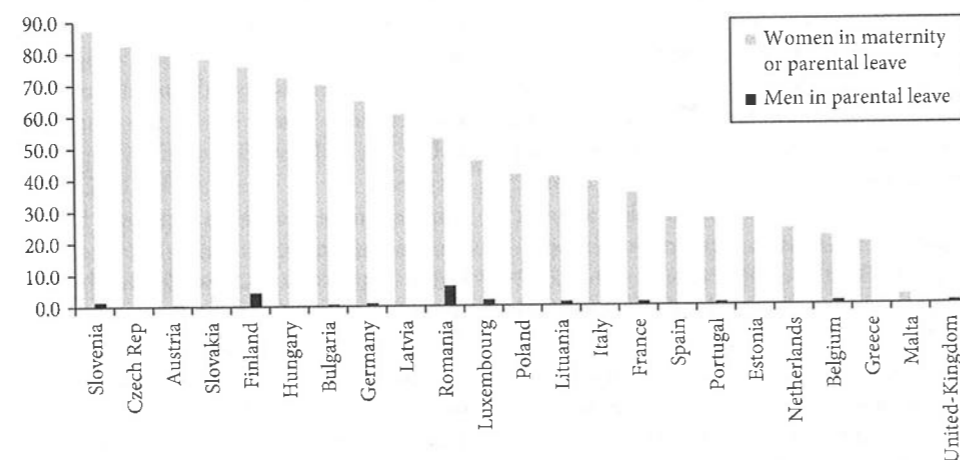
feasible solution for working parents if there is no state support, as is the case in the United Kingdom (Yerkes & Peper, 2011).

Next to the above-mentioned leave policies the right to reduce working hours enables parents to take care of their children. Countries differ very much with respect to this right (see Tables 22.1 and 22.2). In some countries women have a right to temporarily reduce working hours to enable them to breastfeed their children; other countries enable both fathers and mothers to reduce their hours until the child reaches a certain age: for instance in Australia, Austria, Greece, Finland, Japan, and Spain. Many countries do not have any formal rights for employees to reduce their working hours to be able to care for children. Alternatively, working parents can reduce their working hours on a more structural basis by taking a part-time job; however, in almost all countries such a choice leads to a weaker position on the labor market. The Netherlands is the only country in which the reduction of working hours, as well as asking for more hours, is a legal right for all employees, not only for parents. In addition, part-time workers in the Netherlands have the same rights as full-time employees (Smithson et al., 2012).

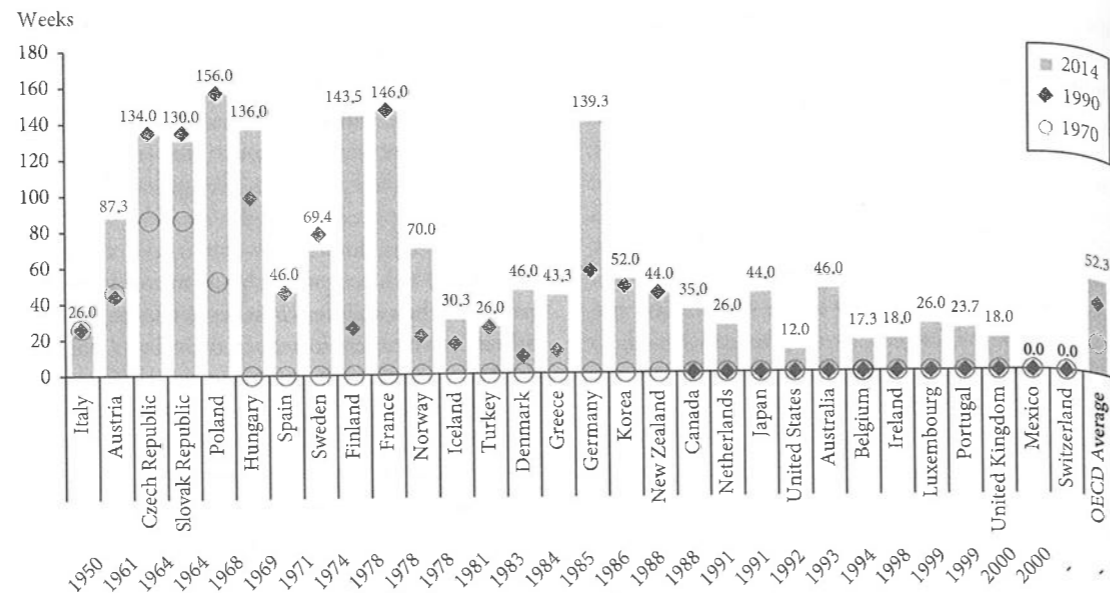
### Static and Dynamic Approaches to Social Policies

Tables 22.1 and 22.2 are a static representation of the work-family policies in place. Specifically, they represent the state of affairs on leave policies in 2014, on child care in 2011 and 2010, and on legislation concerning the reduction of working hours in 2014. As Trefalt et al. (2013) argued, to truly understand the work-family experiences of individuals we need a dynamic perspective, especially since there have been considerable policy changes in recent decades. This dynamic perspective takes into account that the national context is not a static situation, but that “. . . individuals’ experiences are colored not only by what currently is but also by what has been” (Trefalt et al., 2013, p. 450). Individuals make decisions on the reconciliation between work and care not only based on the contemporary policies at hand, but they explicitly or implicitly make choices based on their past experience (Trefalt et al., 2013). Many countries are, in fact, characterized by substantial policy changes over time.

The OECD family database (2015) enables us to show a more dynamic perspective on work-family policies. Figure 22.2 shows the historical development regarding the period of job-protected parental leave for mothers. The x axis starts on the left side



**Figure 22.1.** Use of maternity and parental leave by mothers and fathers with a child under the age of 1 year (in percentages).  
Source: Database, OECD Paris, accessed on September 7, 2014, <http://www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm>.



**Figure 22.2.** Weeks of job-protected parental leave available to mothers, regardless of income support, by year of introduction (1970, 1990, 2014).  
 Source: OECD (2015), OECD Family Database, OECD Paris, accessed on September 7, 2014. <http://www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm>.

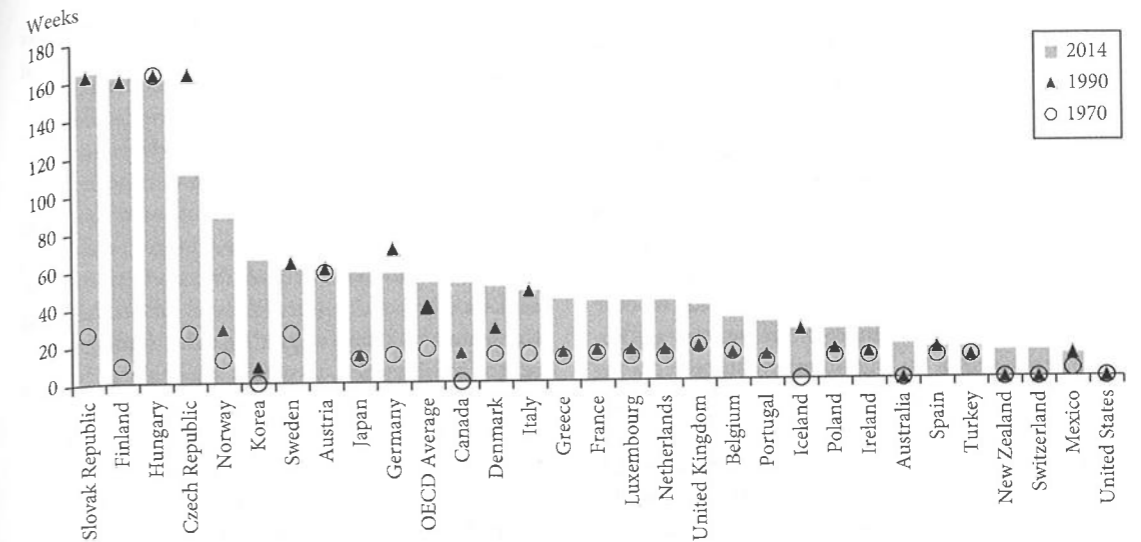
with countries in which parental leave was introduced first, followed toward the right side of the *x* axis by countries in which parental leave was introduced later. For instance, in the Czech Republic parental leave was introduced in 1964. In 1970 the duration of job-protected parental leave for mothers was 86 weeks, and in 1990 the amount of weeks increased to 134 weeks. In 2014 the duration of job-protected parental leave was still 134 weeks. Many countries did not have parental leave policies in 1970. In Canada, for instance, these policies were introduced in 1991, and the duration of job-protected parental leave for mothers was 35 weeks, which was not changed in 2014.

Interestingly, most countries in which parental leave was introduced first, in the 1960s and 1970s (Austria, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Poland, Hungary, Finland, and France), still offer the longest job-protected parental leave for mothers, except for Italy. And in these countries the parental leave period is increasing when we compare the 1970 data with data from 1990 and 2014. All the countries that introduced job-protected parental leave for mothers from the 1980s onward offer a shorter period, except for Germany. It seems that social policies also need time to establish themselves, but they are not likely to disappear. It will be interesting to see if the countries that introduced parental leave more recently, such as Canada, the Netherlands, or Ireland, will also

show a comparable trend in the increase of parental leave weeks in the near future.

Figure 22.3 shows the differences in parental leave allowances between countries by presenting the total duration of *paid* leave for mothers after childbirth, thus summing paid maternity leave and paid parental leave. This figure provides an overview of the bulk of the paid leave that has been established in the past 45 years. The left side of the figure shows countries in which there had been a large increase in the total duration of paid leaves since the 1970s, and the right side of the figure shows countries with small increases in leave duration. However, since 1990s there has been an enormous increase in the total duration of paid leave after child birth, except for the United States, which offers no paid leave after child birth. However, since 1990 some countries, such as Germany or Czech Republic, show a reduction in the total duration of paid leave. This reduction "... is partly explained by the introduction of an option which offers higher payment rates to parents for a relatively short period of leave" ([www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database](http://www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database)).

Since 1990, thus only in the past 25 years, we witness an increase and establishment of policies that enable working parents to start reconciling work and care tasks. Work-family policies are relatively new, and are also quite often adjusted, which may affect the use of these policies. Working parents and employers have to get used to the existence and



**Figure 22.3.** Length of paid leave available to mothers' 1970, 1990, and 2014.  
 Information refers to weeks of paid maternity leave and any weeks of paid parental leave and paid home care leave (sometimes under a different name, for example, "child care leave" or "child raising leave," or the Complément de Libre Choix d'Activité in France) that are available to mothers.  
 Source: OECD family database (<http://www.oecd.org/els/family/oecdfamilydatabase.htm>).

possibilities of these policies. Furthermore, parents need a certain stability with regard to the care of their child. Thus when policies such as child care are in a constant state of change, parents might fall back to or remain with earlier forms of care. For example, in the Netherlands, recent changes in child care policies led to a retreat from the labor market of women, in particular among those in lower wage jobs (Portegijs, Cloin, & Merens, 2014).

The review of the national policies shows a great variety between countries. However, a historical perspective points to a trend toward more extensive social policies to reconcile work and family life, at least with respect to leave policies. In the next section the impact of national policies will be discussed.

### The Impact of National Policies on Work-Family Experiences

Comparative research including a substantial number of countries investigating the impact of national work-family policies is still scarce but increasing. Within this chapter we focus on studies that look at the impact of these policies on work-family outcomes. Although there is a related body of research investigating the impact of national work-family policies on gender equality (e.g., Korpi et al., 2013; Mandel, 2011; Misra, Budig, & Boeckmann, 2011), it falls beyond the scope of this chapter.

Cross-national research looking at the impact of policies on work-family outcomes often compares

a limited number of countries, between 5 and 12 countries (Abendroth & den Dulk, 2011; Allen et al., 2014; Fahlén, 2014; Ruppanner, 2013; Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006; van der Lippe, Jager, & Kops, 2006). An exception is the study of Steiber (2009) based on the European Social Survey, which includes 23 countries. Within these studies there is a strong focus on European countries. Existing studies differ with respect to the way national work-family policies are measured. Studies including a limited number of countries often use the country as a proxy for the level and nature of work-family policies (see for instance Abendroth & den Dulk, 2011; Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006; van der Lippe et al., 2006). As argued before, this is problematic because the impact of work-family policies cannot be distinguished from other country-level factors such as labor market conditions or cultural norms and values (Korpi et al., 2013). More recent and large-scale studies, on the other hand, either make use of a work-family policy index (see for instance Fahlén, 2014), investigate one specific policy, or investigate the impact of different types of policies (e.g., Allen et al., 2014; Steiber, 2009). The latter is preferable because policies can have different aims, such as supporting the traditional family, dual-earner families, or the father's involvement in care (Korpi et al., 2013).

The general assumption in all studies is that national policies make it easier to combine paid work and caring responsibilities and consequently

help to diminish work-to-family and family-to-work conflict among working families (Allen et al., 2014; Fahlén, 2014; Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006). Public child care provides the possibility of outsourcing care during time at work and allows parents to stay in employment. Leave policies, such as parental leave, enable parents to temporarily care for their children at home without losing their job. Time/spatial flexibility allows parents to adjust working hours and place of work to responsibilities outside work.

Although national work-family policies are frequently viewed as an important resource reducing work-family conflict, current research does not always confirm this expectation. Countries with relatively generous national work-family policies such as Sweden also score high on experienced work-family conflict (e.g., Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006; van der Lippe, Jager, & Kops, 2003). Moreover, in countries in which national policies are nearly absent, such as the United States, relatively low levels of reported work-family conflict are found (Spector et al., 2005). On the other hand, an eight country study investigating the impact of various sources of support on overall satisfaction with the way the work-life balance is managed rather than the degree of work-family conflict did find relatively high satisfaction rates in Sweden, Finland, and the Netherlands compared to countries with less extensive policies (Abendroth & den Dulk, 2011).

A first explanation for the contradictory finding of high reports on work-family conflict in countries characterized by generous policies is that extensive national policies increase women's labor market participation without an equal increase in men's time spent on care and household work in the home, leading to greater tensions between work and family life among working women (Gallie & Russell, 2009; Korpi et al., 2013; Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006). In countries in which it is more difficult to combine paid work with caring responsibilities, women may withdraw from the labor market or decide to reduce their working hours. Hence, sample selection effects might result in finding that in countries with generous national policies relatively high levels of work-family conflict are found (Fahlén, 2014; Scherer & Steiber, 2007). Strandh and Nordenmark (2006), for instance, examined work-family conflict in five different European countries: Sweden, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Czech Republic, and Hungary. They found that Swedish women report the highest level of work-family conflict. However, this was partly related to national differences in working conditions of women: "Swedish women experience more work-family conflict because

they more often hold qualified jobs and work longer hours compared to women in the Netherlands and the UK" (Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006, p. 608). When controlling for working conditions, differences between these countries disappeared. However, working conditions did not explain the lower levels of conflict among Czech and Hungarian women compared to Swedish women. Like Sweden, Hungary and Czech Republic are also characterized by extensive national work-family policies (see Table 22.1). Strandh and Nordenmark (2006) suggest that this finding might be due to differences in gender ideology: in Sweden egalitarian gender attitudes are more frequently present (Lundqvist, 2011), compared to a more traditional gender culture in Czech Republic and Hungary, and consequently Swedish women may perceive an unequal division of paid and unpaid work as unfair or problematic. This gap between attitudes and the actual division of labor forms a second explanation for the higher levels of work-family conflict found in countries with generous national work-family policies: i.e., the gender-culture hypothesis (Steiber, 2009).

Recent research paying attention to both the policy context and gender culture suggests that men and women in different country contexts have different perceptions and expectations regarding role conflict and work-life balance (Fahlén, 2014; Nilsen, Brannen, & Lewis, 2012). Fahlén (2014) looked at the total gender gap in perceived conflict (i.e., the overall gender differences in reported work-to-family and family-to-work conflict by men and women in a country). She found the smallest gap between men and women in the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, and Sweden) and the largest in Spain, Czech Republic, and Hungary. Both the policy context and cultural norms were highly correlated with the total gender gap in perceived conflict present in a country.

Scholars argue that national work-family policies interact with cultural norms about the role of men and women in employment and families. Work-family policies, like parental leave, may reflect and reinforce cultural notions about motherhood and fatherhood (Budig, Misra, & Boeckmann, 2012). For instance, the emphasis on long leaves or part-time work may reflect the notion of parental care of young children at home by the mother. As stated before, feminist scholars have pointed out the influence of gender ideology on welfare state policies (Lewis, 1992; Orloff, 1993).

Budig et al. (2012) argue that cultural norms and values do not only play a role through policies but they play a role because norms and expectations

influence the division of domestic work, care for children, and paid work. Hence, cultural norms also affect the way existing policies are used and play out. For instance, cultural norms about motherhood and fatherhood influence the take up of leave policies by working mothers and fathers, that is, a strong motherhood culture may result in high take up by mothers and low take up by fathers.

Hence, scholars increasingly argue that it is important to consider how policies are structured and formulated and embedded in the larger societal context since this influences the actual utilization of policies and consequently work-family outcomes. Hobson, Fahlén, and Takács (2011), for instance, show that although Sweden and Hungary both have generous parental leave systems the ways in which this affects work-family experiences differ. Within Hungary, despite the long and relatively well-compensated parental leave (36 months), take up among women in employment remains low due to precarious labor market conditions. In addition, the long parental leave reinforces traditional gender role expectations as it assumes that the mother takes leave. The Swedish parental leave in contrast is characterized by a strong incentive for fathers to take leave and great flexibility in take up (Hobson et al., 2011).

Research also indicates that policies play out differently for different groups or classes of women within countries (Korpi et al., 2013; Mandel, 2011). Korpi and colleagues (2013), who investigated the impact of work-family policies on employment rates, found that effects of policies were most visible among women without university-level education. Higher educated women appeared to have their own resources, such as financial resources to outsource care and to stay in employment once they started to have a family.

Qualitative research studying the everyday life of working parents in various European countries confirms the salience of both class and gender in the way working parents experience policies (Nilsen et al., 2012). In particular for lower-skilled women, affordable public child care forms an important condition to find a satisfactory work-life balance, next to decent housing, support from their partner, and help from extended family members. For fathers these conditions were less crucial, in particular when their partner is doing most of the unpaid work at home, including care for the children (Nilsen et al., 2012). In a case study on social policy and the lived experience by women in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, Yerkes, Standing, Wattis, and Wain (2010) found on the one hand

that a lack of social policies constrains women from realizing a satisfactory work-life balance, but on the other hand "an abundance of work-life policies can hinder individual opportunities for care, thereby disregarding individual caring preferences" (p. 423).

A third and related reason why studies at first instance find a limited effect of national work-family policies is that in order for policies to be effective workplace support is crucial. It is at the workplace that policies are implemented, where requests to use policies are granted or denied. Within organizations (direct) supervisors play a crucial role in the conversion of rights into entitlements of employees to use work-family policies. Within an unsupportive work environment, parents may fear that when they take up leave or reduce their hours in order to combine work and family responsibilities it may harm their career (Allen et al., 2014; den Dulk et al., 2013). Fathers with a high-status job in the study of Nilsen and colleagues (2012), for instance, indicated that they felt they were punished for taking up parental leave because it was seen by their employer as a sign that they were less committed to their job. Allen and colleagues (2014) found in their 12 country study that both general organizational support for the combination of work and family life and support from the supervisor moderate the relationship between national paid leave and work-family conflict.

Finally, to investigate the impact of national policies longitudinal data are needed. There are very few studies that include such data. Most studies rely on cross-sectional data and apply a cross-national comparative approach to obtain policy variation (Allen et al., 2014; Steiber, 2009; Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006; van der Lippe et al., 2006). Many studies include only a limited number of countries. This is problematic because using such an approach makes it difficult to identify causal effects and to determine the impact of a specific policy on work-family outcomes because within countries different factors and conditions are at play, i.e., other policies, the normative context, or labor market conditions (Duvander, 2014). Recently, scholars started to study variations within country contexts using longitudinal data (Duvander, 2014; Kluge & Tamm, 2013; Kotsadam & Finseraas, 2011). They use what they call natural experiments as a way to determine the causal effect of policies: investigating work-family experiences before and after policy reform. Research on the impact of parental leave within a specific country context is mainly done in countries with substantial policy provisions, such as Sweden and Norway. Kotsadam and Finseraas (2011), for

instance, studied the impact of the introduction of the specific daddy month in Norway. Their findings indicate that after the daddy quota was introduced, respondents reported less conflict about household work. Ekberg et al. (2013) found a short-term effect of the daddy quota in Sweden: after the introduction of the quota fathers took up more parental leave. They did not, however, find an increase in the share of leave taken by fathers to care for sick children, which would have a more long-term effect on the division of paid work between men and women.

Overall, research seem to suggest that national work-family policies are successful in increasing female employment participation, in particular among middle-class and lower educated women, women's continued employment, and the number of hours they work. So far, policies appear to be less effective in reducing experienced work-family conflict, although there are indications that policies contribute to the overall level of contentment combining paid work and family life. However, the policy impact on work-family outcomes such as experienced role conflict might be obscured by the integration of women on the labor market. National work-family policies do enhance the abilities of parents to combine work with family life, resulting in more dual-earner families and increasing the likelihood for conflicting demands.

Furthermore, gender and social class are highly salient to the analysis of the impact of policies on work-family outcomes. They shape the way policies are experienced and play out in everyday life. A supportive work environment is crucial for the success of policies, in particular a supportive supervisor (Allen et al., 2014). The assumption that the ideal workers are those who are always available for work prevents the actual use of policies, in particular among fathers (Nilsen et al., 2012), diminishing the impact of policies.

Conclusions based on existing research should be drawn with caution, however. Most studies are cross-sectional and are based on a limited number of countries and the samples upon which the findings are based are not always representative of the countries included.

### Conclusions

Governments in most developed countries have introduced social policies that aim to support working parents in reconciling work with family life. A review of national policies in European and non-European OECD countries shows large differences between countries. Countries can be grouped

together by means of the concept of welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999), and the variation within the welfare regimes points to the path dependency of the development of work-family policies in countries. When a more dynamic approach is used (cf. Trefalt et al., 2013), national policies do not only differ, but they also develop over time. In the past decades we have witnessed an increase in the availability of social policies that enable working parents to balance their work and private life. A second trend is the extension of the length of the leaves in most countries. It takes adjustment time for social policies to settle. Maternity leave is the least contested social policy. Child care and parental leave have found a place in most countries, but few countries have well-established policies to enable working fathers to provide care. Despite the increase in work-family policies, the male breadwinner model still plays an important role in national cultures.

Although there is a substantial body of research mapping existing policies and policy change over time, research investigating the impact of those policies on work-family outcomes is still limited. More large-scale cross-national studies that include a large number of countries are needed to disentangle the impact of national policies from other country-level factors, in particular national gender culture. Moreover, most studies focus on developed countries. Future research should also include transitional or third world country contexts. In addition, longitudinal research is needed to take into account policy changes over time and to increase our knowledge of causal mechanisms that explain the influence of national work-family policies.

Studies should look at various work-family outcomes. So far, most studies investigate the impact on experienced work-to-family and family-to-work conflict, whereas less attention is paid to positive outcomes such as work-family enrichment or the overall satisfaction with the way work-life balance is managed. Research so far suggests that policies are beneficial for the general contentment of working parents with the way they are able to combine work and family life but are less effective in reducing experienced work-family conflict or time pressure. However, more research is needed before substantive conclusions can be drawn.

Future studies should continue to examine the interplay between social policies, national culture, organizational support, and household and individual variables in order to fully understand how social policies help to reduce work-family conflict and to enhance people's satisfaction with their

work-life balance (Allen et al., 2014). Scholars have argued that it is important to look not only at the presence of policies but also at the actual use of policies. Sense of entitlement to work-family support is an interesting concept in this respect. It refers to the extent to which people expect support and believe that they are allowed to use it (Lewis & Smithson, 2001). The concept refers to both the availability of policies and the cultural notions present in countries. Amartya Sen's capabilities and agency approach (Sen, 1999), which has recently been applied in the work-family field, provides a valuable framework for studying the impact of policies within their cultural context (Hobson, 2014).

In sum, this chapter provided an overview of the nature and type of social policies developed by national governments in European and non-European OECD countries, which aim to support the combination of work and family life, and of our knowledge so far about their impact on work-family outcomes. Research on the impact of national policies is still emerging and much remains to be done to advance it. To fully understand the way fathers and mothers across different classes and countries experience work and family life and how this is affected by existing and changing social policies, multilevel comparative research is needed as well as longitudinal research within countries evaluating policy reforms. Policy impact needs to be studied in conjunction with systematic changes in culture and institutions over time.

### Note

1. OECD countries: Members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

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## Cross-National Work–Life Research: A Review at the Individual Level

Ariane Ollier-Malaterre

### Abstract

This chapter reviews comparative research regarding individuals' work–life experiences. It summarizes current knowledge on how culture (e.g., individualism/collectivism, gender egalitarianism, humane orientation), institutions (e.g., public policy and provisions, family structures), and the economy (e.g., stage of development, unemployment rates) at the country level impact work–life conflict (WLC), work–life enrichment, work–life balance, and boundary management. More research has focused on cultural than on institutional or economic factors, and only WLC has been truly investigated empirically. Studies show that (1) work and family demands, respectively, are associated with greater work-to-family and family-to-work conflict in individualistic than in collectivistic cultures; (2) in less egalitarian cultures, women experience greater family-to-work conflict and lower work-to-family conflict than men do; (3) there are fewer differences between WLC perceived by men and WLC perceived by women in more egalitarian cultures; (4) except for sick leave regulations, public policies alone seem to have little alleviating effect on WLC; and (5) family structures and domestic help are associated with WLC.

**Key Words:** work–family, work–life conflict, work–life enrichment, work–life balance, boundary management, cross-national, comparative, national context, culture, institutions, economy

### Introduction

This chapter reviews research that compares individual work–life experiences, such as work–life conflict and enrichment, across countries. Work–life conflict (WLC), work–life enrichment (WLE), and most of the other key concepts studied in the work–life literature are embedded in deep-seated cultural assumptions as well as specific socioinstitutional regimes (Powell, Francesco, & Ling, 2009; Rothausen, 1999). In particular, social expectations about what it means to be a good employee and a good parent, and public policies regarding work and family at the country level, are closely linked to individuals' perceptions of their work and life roles and to their behaviors at the microlevel (Bardeel & De Cieri, 2006). Thus, country context, also termed national context, may impact how individuals view

and combine the realms of work and family (Shaffer, Joplin, & Hsu, 2011). Given that cultural expectations and institutional settings vary widely across societies, individual experiences of the work–life interface across countries might show both similarities and differences (Hill, Yang, Hawkins, & Ferris, 2004; Poelmans et al., 2003; Shaffer et al., 2011). Thus, my objective is to examine and summarize current knowledge on how national context might influence individual work–life experiences.

In the next section, I will present definitions for national context and its cultural, institutional, and economic components, and explain how current work–life research addresses the importance of national context and how I chose to focus this chapter. In the following sections, I will systematically review and synthesize cross-national research that