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Labour market and working conditions of parents with pre-school children: indicators on the quality of reconciliation of work and family life

The purpose of this contribution is to gather and discuss indicators that can be used for dimensioning the scope for reconciling work and family life that parents of pre-school children have in different countries, and for describing the quality and effects of different work-family arrangements and policies.

In general terms we will refer to two big areas:

1) Indicators on the employment situation and working conditions of parents –and potential new parents- that affect their parental roles and capacities (e.g. parent's employment rates, casual and atypical employment rates in the focused groups, part-time and working time averages, average wages and gender pay-gaps...)

2) Indicators trying to capture the incidence, quality and impacts of the various work-family arrangements and policies for families with pre-school children (use of leave arrangements by mothers and fathers, childcare services coverage, public social expenditure on family benefits and services, mother-infant health indicators, opinion and attitude surveys dealing with preferences or satisfaction about different arrangements).

We will both explore quantitative and qualitative indicators, comparative and national sources, and the limits and need to complement both. The relevant information we need for a deep understanding allowing a proper evaluation of present situation and trends of this topic is not always provided by well-established harmonised and continuous quantitative data sources (e.g. qualitative information on leave arrangements for which we can not find comparative nor even national data, information on the extent of companies and collective agreements involved in family-friendly policies...).

Furthermore, rarely indicators are provided from the perspective of children (probably with the exception of childcare and early education coverage). Usually the focus of interest are parents as employees, the interest on gender equality at between mothers and fathers at work –more recently also at home-, mothers and fathers use of leave schemes -rather than leave schemes coverage for newborns-, and adults opinions and rather than trying to capture children's preferences between various childcare solutions.

First the more commonly used indicators in international policy and research reports on the topic (basically in the European Union or the OECD context) will be reviewed and discussed in relation to various research and policy discourses and objectives they serve. Secondly gaps and shortcomings will be identified. Thirdly the potential of some secondary international harmonised sources to fill these gaps will be discussed. Fourth proposals will be presented in order to reformulate some indicators from the

perspective of the child, i.e. based on children under school age as units of observation and analysis. Finally as conclusion a proposal will be formulated to fill one gap of the EC Social Policy Key Indicator on childcare, which “needs to be complemented with information on national systems for maternity, paternity and parental leave”.

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