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Working Paper

The labor market situation of women in the Visegrad countries

CERS-IE Working Papers, No. CERS-IE WP - 2020/45

Provided in Cooperation with:

Institute of Economics, Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Suggested Citation: Cukrowska-Torzewska, Ewa; Lovasz, Anna; Rigo, Mariann (2020) : The labor market situation of women in the Visegrad countries, CERS-IE Working Papers, No. CERS-IE WP - 2020/45, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Economics, Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, Budapest

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/237534>

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The Labor Market Situation of Women in the Visegrad Countries

EWA CUKROWSKA-TORZEWSKA – ANNA LOVASZ – MARIANN

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CERS-IE WP – 2020/45

[November] 2020

<https://www.mtaki.hu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/CERSIEWP202045.pdf>

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ABSTRACT

The Visegrad 4 countries are characterized by low female and maternal employment rates compared to other Western and Nordic countries. Employment rates of mothers with children aged 0-2 years old are especially low, except in Poland. Work-family balance indicators and gender wage gaps are also unfavorable. The poor labor market situation of mothers in V4 countries has to do with the peculiarities of the national family policies: excessively long parental leaves coupled with poor childcare coverage for children under the age of 2. The only exception is Poland, which provides a shorter leave of 1 year. Though parental leaves are aimed at both parents, the provision of leaves for the exclusive use of fathers is low. Company-level corporate attitudes also play a role. Specifically, part-time work and time flexibility of working hours could be useful tools, however, they are scarcely used in V4 countries compared to other countries in Europe.

JEL codes: Jo8, J16, J21

Keywords: Female employment, maternal employment, gender gaps, family policies, company level institutions

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A nők munkaerőpiaci helyzete a visegrádi országokban

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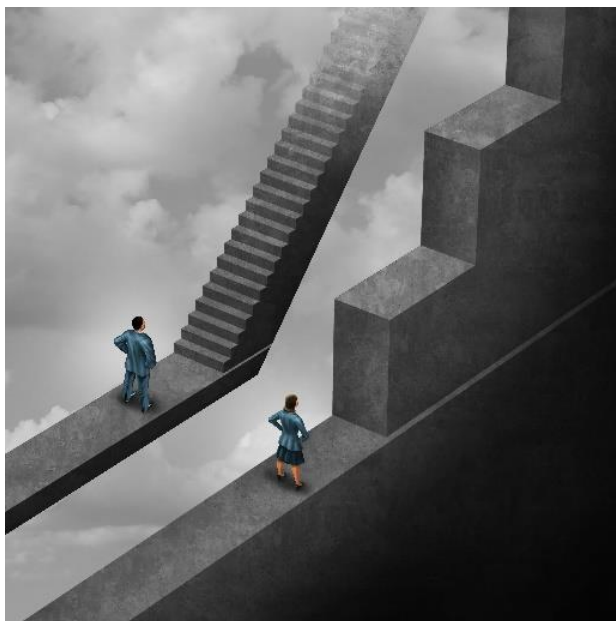
ÖSSZEFOGLALÓ

A V4 országokban a nyugati és északi országokhoz viszonyítva a nők és anyák foglalkoztatottsági aránya alacsonyabb. A 0–2 éves korú gyermeket nevelő anyák foglalkoztatottsági aránya – Lengyelország kivételével – különösen alacsony. A munka-család egyensúly mutatói és a nemek közötti bérkülönbségek tekintetében szintén gyenge teljesítmény mutatkozik. A V4 országokban az anyák rossz munkaerőpiaci helyzete a nemzeti családpolitikák sajátosságaira vezethető vissza: hosszú szülői szabadság, amely a 2 éves kor alatti gyermekek esetében meglehetősen korlátozott gyermekgondozási lehetőségekkel párosul. Ez alól Lengyelország az egyetlen kivétel, amely rövidebb, azaz 1 év szülői szabadságot biztosít. Annak ellenére, hogy a szülői szabadságot mindkét szülő igénybe veheti, igen ritka, hogy kizárólagosan az apák használják fel azt. A vállalati szemlélet is magyarázhatja az anyák kedvezőtlen munkaerőpiaci helyzetét. A részmunkaidős és a rugalmas munkaidős foglalkoztatás különösen hasznos lenne, ezeket a lehetőségeket azonban más Európai országokhoz viszonyítva csak igen ritkán alkalmazzák a V4 országokban.

JEL: Jo8, J16, J21

Kulcsszavak: női foglalkoztatottság, anyák foglalkoztatottsága, nemek közötti különbségek, családpolitikák, vállalati intézmények

The Labor Market Situation of Women in the Visegrad Countries



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September 15, 2020



This project was supported under grant number 21830237 by the Visegrad Fund, and carried out by the Virtual Research Collaboration on Gender and Family in the Labor Market. The project is co-financed by the Governments of Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia through Visegrad Grants from International Visegrad Fund. The mission of the fund is to advance ideas for sustainable regional cooperation in Central Europe. M. Rigó also acknowledges funding from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation - grant number: 392132829 “LU 2211/1-1”).

Highlights

- V4 countries are characterized by low female and maternal employment rates compared to other Western and Nordic countries.
- Employment rates of mothers with children aged 0-2 years old is especially low, except for Poland.
- Work-family balance indicators and gender wage gaps are also evaluated as being poor.
- The poor labor market situation of mothers in V4 countries has to do with the peculiarities of the national family policies: excessively long parental leaves coupled with poor childcare coverage for children under the age of 2. The only exception is Poland, providing a shorter leave of 1 year.
- Though parental leaves are aimed at both parents, the provision of leaves for the exclusive use of fathers is poor.
- Company-level corporate attitude can also explain the disadvantageous labor market situation of mothers. Specifically, part-time work and time flexibility of working hours could be useful tools. However, they are scarcely used in V4 countries compared to other countries in Europe.

Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Overview of the labor market situation of women in the Visegrad countries.....	5
3. Factors determining the labor market situation of women.....	15
3.1. Country-level institutional factors	15
3.2. Comparative data on country specific conditions in V4 and European countries	17
2.2. Company-level factors impacting the labor market situation of women	22
4. Policy implications for improving the labor market situation of women in V4 Countries	26
Publication bibliography	Błąd! Nie zdefiniowano zakładki.

1. Introduction

Improving the labor market situation of women – by increasing their employment and relative earnings and improving their work-life balance – is a declared policy goal of EU countries. This is important for both economic and social reasons. Higher female employment is key in countries with ageing populations, as women are a potential source of further labor supply, and can thereby enable higher competitiveness and lower budgetary burdens. Gender equality has become a much-discussed issue of social fairness. Health benefits have also been highlighted: the smooth return of mothers to work has additional favorable impacts on their mental and physical health (Frech and Damaske 2012).

Women's, and specifically mothers' employment patterns are influenced by a variety of factors at the national, company, and individual level. At *the level of the country family policies*, such as leave policies and childcare availability have a fundamental role in shaping mothers' employment and fertility decisions (Matysiak and Węziak-Białowolska 2016; Thévenon 2011). Another important factor at national level is how *societal views* on mothers' roles and the division of household work are formed (Matysiak and Węziak-Białowolska 2016; Thévenon 2011). The implementation of national-level regulations is often directly linked to the workplaces. A variety of *company-level factors* influence mothers' - and thereby women's - career paths. The importance of a *supportive organizational atmosphere* has been pointed out by several papers (Allen et al. 2014; Lucia-Casademunt et al. 2018; van Breeschoten and Evertsson 2019). Companies can also offer *part-time work* and various *flexibility schemes* to foster the return of mothers with young children and to make the balance between work and family duties easier. At the *individual level*, a variety of *demographic and personal characteristics* may influence mothers' return to work, such as educational background or career aspirations.

The EU has set targets for employment, as well as for some institutional factors that impact women's labor market outcomes. The *Europe 2020 Strategy*¹ aims for an employment rate of 75% among those aged 20-64. Female and maternal employment in particular needs to be improved to achieve this aim (Vuri 2016). The *EU Action Plan 2017-2019: Tackling the gender*

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%200007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf>

*pay gap*² describes steps national governments need to take to decrease pay gaps, though without any specific targets. The *Work-life Balance Directive*³ of the EU, enacted in 2019, highlights the more equal use of parental leave between parents, and the provision and utilization of flexible working arrangements to parents. The Barcelona Targets⁴ set childcare coverage targets of 33% for children aged 0-3, and 90% for children aged 3-6. While these steps are all based on strong empirical evidence supporting their importance, it is important to note that different countries have different institutional contexts, and the underlying causes of labor market inequalities by gender also differ. This means that achieving the goals of higher female employment and lower pay gaps require different combinations of policy changes, be more or less difficult and costly.

The Visegrad Four (V4) countries – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland – share some historical, economic, and social elements that have led to certain similarities in the particular disadvantages women face (Lovász 2016). During socialism, the employment of women was relatively high, childcare was widely available, and maternal benefits were generous. While a greater equality of women in the labor market was claimed to be achieved, women still carried out the overwhelming share of household duties while working in lower-paid occupations. This led to an anti-feminist turn in sentiments, with mothers focusing less on career aspirations and more on caring roles. Childcare institutions also did not have a great reputation, further strengthening societal preferences for within-family childcare. Following the transition, many women lost their employment due to recessions, and the childcare system was largely dismantled. Childcare coverage in these countries is now among the lowest in the EU, especially under age 3 of children. Paired with long paid leaves and the low availability of flexible work forms, these factors have led to particular disadvantages in the labor market.

In this study, we focus on these particular challenges of women in the labor markets of the V4 countries. First, we give an overview of the labor market situation of women, comparing V4 countries' outcomes to other EU countries. Next, we discuss the factors impacting women, and how these effect women in V4 countries. We conclude by summarizing the key policy implications of the comparative analysis.

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52017DC0678>

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&furtherNews=yes&langId=en&newsId=9438>

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/bcn_objectives-report2018_web_en.pdf

2. Overview of the labor market situation of women in the Visegrad countries

The current section provides a snapshot of the labor market situation of women in European countries, highlighting key trends in the V4 countries relative to other country groups. The next sections analyze the key factors impacting women, and provide policy recommendations. The countries are grouped to represent clusters that have been highlighted in previous research (e.g. Thevenon, 2011; Matysiak and Węziak-Białowolska, 2016; Cukrowska-Torzewska and Matysiak, 2020). In particular, we distinguish between Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway), Austria and Germany, which we term as German speaking countries, Western Europe (France, Belgium and the Netherlands), Southern Europe (Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece), Anglo-Saxon countries (Ireland and the UK) in addition to the Visegrad countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland).

Table 1 contrasts the employment rate of males and females and points to relatively high gender gaps in V4 and in Southern countries compared to the other country groups. The employment rate of women is closest to those of men in the Nordic countries where the gender employment gap lies between 3-5 percent. It is higher, but below 10 percent, in German speaking countries and Western Europe, while the highest rates well above 10 percent are seen in Southern Europe (except for Portugal) and in V4 countries. In these groups, not only is there a large gender gap, employment within the whole population also lags behind other countries. The disadvantage of females is apparent in each educational group (Table 2). However, the female-male employment gap is most pronounced among those with the most disadvantageous socioeconomic position (below upper secondary school).

Table 1: Gender difference in the employment rate and the full-time equivalent employment rate, aged 15-64, 2018

V4 COUNTRIES	Employment rate (%)			FTE employment rate (%)		
	Male	Female	Gender Gap	Male	Female	Gender Gap
Hungary	76.3	62.3	14.0	76.7	60.6	16.1
Poland	74.0	60.8	13.2	76.6	58.5	18.1
Czechia	81.8	67.6	14.1	84.1	64.6	19.5
Slovakia	73.9	61.2	12.7	74.6	58.9	15.7
GERMAN SPEAKING COUNTRIES						
Austria	77.4	68.6	8.9	77.4	54.3	23.1
Germany	79.7	72.1	7.6	76.5	54.9	21.7
NORDIC COUNTRIES						
Denmark	78.2	72.7	5.5	67.6	55.8	11.8
Finland	73.7	70.6	3.1	70.5	61.4	9.1
Norway	77.0	72.7	4.3	69.7	57.1	12.6
Sweden	79.0	76.0	3.0	74.4	65.8	8.6
WESTERN EUROPE						
Belgium	68.2	60.7	7.5	67.3	50.2	17.1
France	69.4	62.5	6.9	67.9	53.6	14.3
Netherlands	81.6	72.8	8.8	69.7	45.6	24.1
SOUTHERN EUROPE						
Greece	64.7	45.3	19.5	68.3	43.0	25.3
Italy	67.6	49.5	18.1	66.8	40.3	26.5
Portugal	72.7	66.9	5.8	75.1	63.7	11.3
Spain	69.0	57.8	11.3	68.3	49.6	18.6
ANGLO-SAXON COUNTRIES						
Ireland	73.8	63.4	10.3	72.6	50.7	21.9
United Kingdom	79.6	70.5	9.1	80.8	56.7	24.1

Source: OECD Family database (<http://www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm>)

Notes: The full-time equivalent employment rate is calculated as the employment rate for those aged 15-64, multiplied by the average usual hours worked per week per person in employment (both dependent and self-employment), divided by 40.

Table 2: Employment rates for men and women by level of education, aged 25-64, 2016

V4 COUNTRIES	Below upper secondary			Upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary			Tertiary Education		
	Male	Female	Gender Gap	Male	Female	Gender Gap	Male	Female	Gender Gap
Hungary	66.0	46.9	19.1	84.8	69.3	15.6	92.4	79.6	12.7
Poland	52.9	30.5	22.4	78.9	58.7	20.1	93.3	84.6	8.7
Czechia	61.7	43.2	18.5	89.2	74.4	14.8	93.9	78.9	14.9
Slovakia	45.4	34.3	11.1	80.9	69.0	12.0	88.6	77.1	11.5
GERMAN SPEAKING COUNTRIES									
Austria	60.6	49.9	10.8	80.4	72.5	7.8	89.2	83.6	5.5
Germany	68.4	52.8	15.6	85.0	78.3	6.7	91.7	84.7	7.1
NORDIC COUNTRIES									
Denmark	70.9	51.2	19.7	84.1	77.4	6.7	88.4	83.9	4.5
Finland	58.6	42.5	16.1	76.6	70.9	5.7	87.7	82.8	4.9
Norway	66.9	54.5	12.4	82.8	75.7	7.1	89.6	88.2	1.4
Sweden	72.9	60.0	12.9	88.3	82.9	5.5	90.4	88.8	1.6
WESTERN EUROPE									
Belgium	55.2	37.2	18.1	79.8	65.9	13.9	88.3	82.6	5.7
France	60.7	45.5	15.2	76.8	68.9	7.8	88.3	82.6	5.7
Netherlands	73.5	49.5	24.0	85.4	74.6	10.8	91.7	86.0	5.7
SOUTHERN EUROPE									
Greece	62.9	35.4	27.5	72.1	46.5	25.5	78.1	66.4	11.7
Italy	66.7	35.5	31.3	81.0	60.8	20.1	85.7	77.1	8.7
Portugal	75.9	60.3	15.6	84.0	79.8	4.3	87.9	86.2	1.7
Spain	65.1	44.7	20.4	77.0	63.4	13.6	85.0	77.5	7.5
ANGLO-SAXON COUNTRIES									
Ireland	62.3	35.2	27.1	81.6	62.5	19.1	89.5	81.0	8.5
United Kingdom	71.2	54.5	16.7	86.4	75.3	11.1	90.0	81.3	8.7

Source: OECD Family database (<http://www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm>)

Focusing on the situation of mothers (Table 3), maternal employment rates are relatively low in V4 and Southern countries compared to German speaking, Nordic, and Western countries. Among the V4 countries, the maternal employment rate is highest in Poland reaching 67.6 percent, and lowest in Slovakia with a value of 56.6 percent. The share of part-time employment is also relatively low in each V4 country. For instance, in German-speaking countries part-time employment is at least as common as full-time employment. On the other hand, the part-time employment rate of mothers is very low - between 4 and 7 percent - in V4 countries.

Table 3: Employment rates (%) for women (aged 15-64) with at least one child aged 0-14, by part-time/full-time status, 2014

V4 COUNTRIES	Employment rate	Employed - full-time	Employed - part-time
Hungary	58.1	52.0	4.2
Poland	67.6	61.0	6.6
Czechia	61.6	56.2	5.4
Slovakia	56.6	50.3	4.0
GERMAN SPEAKING COUNTRIES			
Austria	75.7	35.3	40.5
Germany	69.0	30.0	39.0
NORDIC COUNTRIES			
Denmark	82.0	72.2	9.6
Finland	73.6	63.6	7.2
Norway	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Sweden	83.1	n.a.	n.a.
WESTERN EUROPE			
Belgium	72.4	49.9	22.1
France	72.2	55.7	15.5
Netherlands	74.8	24.0	50.8
SOUTHERN EUROPE			
Greece	52.2	43.1	9.2
Italy	55.3	34.8	20.4
Portugal	75.7	68.4	5.4
Spain	59.5	43.2	14.9
ANGLO-SAXON COUNTRIES			
Ireland	60.2	35.2	24.4
United Kingdom	67.1	33.0	33.3

Source: OECD Family database (<http://www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm>)

Table 4 provides further statistics on part-time employment. It demonstrates the percentage of employees working in the specified working hour bands by gender. The high share of the groups 35-39 and 40 or more is common in each country group. However, the striking dominance of the standard working hour regime of 40 hours or more is remarkable in the V4 countries. For instance, in Hungary, more than 90 percent of female employees work 40 hours or more. Part-time work is practically nonexistent in Hungary. The situation is slightly different in Poland,

where close to 7 percent of female employees works 20-29 working hours. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the share of female employees working 35-39 hours is higher, though still lagging behind the other group of countries with 11.3 percent in the Czech Republic and 22.3 percent in Slovakia.

Table 4: Distribution (%) of employed men and women (all ages) by usual weekly working hours

V4 COUNTRIES		1 to 19 hours	20 to 29 hours	30 to 34 hours	35 to 39 hours	40 hours or more
Hungary	Male	0.4	2.0	1.1	0.3	96.2
	Female	0.8	4.4	2.8	0.6	91.4
Poland	Male	1.0	2.4	1.6	1.1	93.9
	Female	2.5	6.9	3.8	3.1	83.7
Czechia	Male	1.1	1.7	1.2	11.3	84.7
	Female	2.9	5.8	4.5	11.3	75.6
Slovakia	Male	1.6	2.5	0.6	13.5	81.8
	Female	2.6	5.3	1.8	22.3	68.0
GERMAN SPEAKING COUNTRIES						
Austria	Male	4.6	4.0	3.0	26.2	62.2
	Female	14.6	20.1	12.4	16.7	36.2
Germany	Male	6.3	3.1	2.8	21.5	66.3
	Female	18.6	18.3	11.6	18.5	33.0
NORDIC COUNTRIES						
Denmark	Male	12.0	4.0	3.5	62.4	18.0
	Female	17.2	8.2	16.1	50.9	7.7
Finland	Male	6.2	4.7	3.8	31.9	53.5
	Female	9.6	7.8	8.9	51.6	22.1
Norway	Male	8.2	3.6	4.7	62.4	21.1
	Female	16.4	10.3	9.7	53.8	9.8
Sweden	Male	5.4	5.0	5.2	13.2	71.1
	Female	8.3	9.2	15.1	16.5	50.9
WESTERN EUROPE						
Belgium	Male	2.6	3.9	4.8	43.5	45.3
	Female	11.1	16.7	16.9	34.9	20.5
France	Male	2.9	4.1	2.4	49.6	41.0
	Female	8.9	13.3	8.3	46.0	23.5
Netherlands	Male	13.0	5.9	9.6	20.6	50.9
	Female	28.3	30.4	17.3	11.3	12.7
SOUTHERN EUROPE						
Greece	Male	2.3	4.8	4.0	1.8	87.0
	Female	4.5	11.9	8.3	2.8	72.5
Italy	Male	2.9	5.4	3.6	15.5	72.6
	Female	10.6	21.8	9.8	19.5	38.3
Portugal	Male	3.3	2.8	1.7	10.3	81.9
	Female	5.4	5.6	2.7	18.1	68.2
Spain	Male	2.3	4.4	2.1	13.7	77.5
	Female	8.1	14.0	7.3	22.0	48.7
ANGLO-SAXON COUNTRIES						
Ireland	Male	5.1	6.4	2.9	29.1	56.5
	Female	13.5	20.3	9.0	32.0	25.2
United Kingdom	Male	5.9	5.6	4.0	23.0	61.6

Female	18.7	18.2	10.2	24.1	28.7
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Source: OECD Family database (<http://www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm>)

Table 5 reveals interesting information regarding how mothers' career paths are impacted by having a child. In most countries, maternal employment rates drop at a very young age of the child. It is common that mothers with children aged 0-2 years stay at home, and resume work at a later age of the child. However, the marked drop in maternal employment rates with children 0-2 years is notable in some of the V4 countries. The drop is largest in Hungary, where the employment rate of mothers with children aged 3-5 years was 67.9 percent in 2014, while the statistic for mothers with children below age 2 was 13.4 percent. This drop is similarly pronounced in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The situation is different in Poland, where mothers with young children have a surprisingly high employment rate. The employment rates of mothers increase sharply in V4 countries as children age, and are similar to levels found in northern and western EU countries.

Table 5: Maternal employment rates by age of youngest child, 2014

V4 COUNTRIES	Employment rate by the age of the youngest child (%)			
	aged 0-14	aged 0-2	aged 3-5	aged 6-14
Hungary	58.1	13.4	67.9	79.1
Poland	67.6	58.5	65.5	74.5
Czechia	61.6	22.3	71.9	86.6
Slovakia	56.6	16.7	59.4	79.8
GERMAN SPEAKING COUNTRIES				
Austria	75.7	66.4	74.7	81.6
Germany	69.0	51.5	70.3	77.7
NORDIC COUNTRIES				
Denmark	82.0	75.8	79.9	86.4
Finland	73.6	51.6	78.3	89.2
Norway	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Sweden	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
WESTERN EUROPE				
Belgium	72.4	65.7	70.3	76.9
France	72.2	59.1	76.4	78.8
Netherlands	74.8	73.5	73.0	76.3
SOUTHERN EUROPE				
Greece	52.2	50.6	50.1	53.7
Italy	55.3	53.6	54.6	56.4
Portugal	75.7	73.2	76.5	76.4
Spain	59.5	59.7	58.8	59.8
ANGLO-SAXON COUNTRIES				
Ireland	60.2	60.9	58.1	60.7
United Kingdom	67.1	59.3	62.1	76.1

Source: OECD Family database (<http://www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm>)

Table 6 illustrates maternal employment rate by the number of dependent children. A drop between the employment rates of mothers with at least three and less than three kids is visible in each country. However, this drop tends to be more pronounced in V4 countries, especially in Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. The gap between the employment rates of the two groups of mothers may be explained by families' financial necessity, national-level fertility policies, and also by the lack of availability of part-time and flexible work.

Table 6: Employment rates (%) for women (15-64 years old) with dependent children (aged 0-14b) by number of children aged 0-14, 2014

V4 COUNTRIES	Employment rate (%)			
	At least one child aged 0-14	One child aged 0-14	Two children aged 0-14	Three or more children aged 0-14
Hungary	58.1	64.2	58.1	27.5
Poland	67.6	70.9	66.8	50.8
Czechia	61.6	65.0	61.2	39.0
Slovakia	56.6	63.6	55.1	29.9
GERMAN SPEAKING COUNTRIES				
Austria	75.7	79.6	75.7	57.5
Germany	69.0	73.7	67.5	46.3
NORDIC COUNTRIES				
Denmark	82.0	79.7	85.4	79.0
Finland	73.6	76.4	76.7	60.6
Norway	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Sweden	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
WESTERN EUROPE				
Belgium	72.4	74.6	76.3	56.6
France	72.2	77.2	74.7	50.2
Netherlands	74.8	73.5	78.6	67.7
SOUTHERN EUROPE				
Greece	52.2	53.1	52.3	46.4
Italy	55.3	58.3	53.5	37.4
Portugal	75.7	76.2	76.5	63.8
Spain	59.5	61.6	59.2	45.1
ANGLO-SAXON COUNTRIES				
Ireland	60.2	63.8	61.4	51.3
United Kingdom	67.1	72.9	68.7	45.3

Source: OECD Family database (<http://www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm>)

As Table 7 shows, the careers of mothers in disadvantaged socioeconomic positions (lower levels of education) are especially disadvantaged compared to mothers with higher level of education. Here, we do not see marked differences between the V4 and other group of countries. However, the employment rates of mothers with lower education levels are remarkably low in

the Czech Republic (27.9 percent) and Slovakia (25.9 percent). These statistics compare to a roughly 60 percent employment rate among mothers with tertiary educational background.

Table 7: Maternal employment rates by level of education, 2014 or latest available year

V4 COUNTRIES	Employment rate (%) for women with a youngest child aged 0-14:			
	Total	Low education	Medium education	High education
Hungary	58.1	34.5	62.0	65.8
Poland	67.6	35.4	59.7	83.5
Czechia	61.6	29.7	64.7	61.8
Slovakia	56.6	25.9	59.9	59.2
GERMAN SPEAKING COUNTRIES				
Austria	75.7	53.6	78.2	83.5
Germany	69.0	40.8	73.0	80.1
NORDIC COUNTRIES				
Denmark	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Finland	73.6	47.2	69.9	80.8
Norway	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Sweden	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
WESTERN EUROPE				
Belgium	72.4	37.7	71.4	88.0
France	72.2	44.7	70.4	85.9
Netherlands	74.8	50.2	75.7	86.6
SOUTHERN EUROPE				
Greece	52.2	37.5	45.5	73.0
Italy	55.3	34.3	59.9	78.5
Portugal	75.7	67.0	77.3	86.5
Spain	59.5	42.2	58.0	74.5
ANGLO-SAXON COUNTRIES				
Ireland	60.2	27.4	52.6	75.4
United Kingdom	67.1	43.3	66.3	80.2

Source: OECD Family database (<http://www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm>)

Previous literature points to the interdependency between mothers' decisions to re-enter the labor market and their work-life balance perspectives (Lunau et al. 2020). A useful indicator relating to women's labor market performance is their ability to balance between work and family duties. The satisfaction of mothers with at least one child aged 0-15 is summarized by Table 8. Mean scores are the highest in the Nordic and Anglo-Saxon countries, in Austria from the German speaking group, and in Belgium and Netherlands from the Western countries. Mean scores are generally lower in Southern Europe, France, Germany, and the V4 countries.

The variability in the scores is not as pronounced as in the case of employment rates. Relatively low work-life satisfaction scores have also been found by previous studies in France (Crompton and Lyonette 2006), illustrating the complex interactions between national policies, attitudes towards gender roles, and the division of household work. In France, the relatively generous childcare support is coupled with a traditional division of household work, however, gender views are modern. Therefore, women perceive the traditional division of household work as unfair, leading to lower work-life satisfaction scores (Crompton and Lyonette 2006). On the other hand, in V4 countries, traditional division of household work is coupled with traditional gender views, leading higher satisfaction (Strandh and Nordenmark 2006).

Table 8: Work-life balance scores of mothers with at least one child under 15, 2015

V4 COUNTRIES	How do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work? mean (1: not at all well, 4: very well) % well and very well	
Hungary	2.887	75.4%
Poland	2.971	78.5%
Czechia	3.000	75.9%
Slovakia	2.941	77.0%
GERMAN SPEAKING COUNTRIES		
Austria	3.232	85.4%
Germany	2.905	76.1%
NORDIC COUNTRIES		
Denmark	3.159	82.5%
Finland	3.049	81.3%
Norway	3.285	88.9%
Sweden	3.104	80.9%
WESTERN EUROPE		
Belgium	3.078	82.8%
France	2.897	69.6%
Netherlands	3.042	83.2%
SOUTHERN EUROPE		
Greece	2.838	68.5%
Italy	2.886	78.1%
Portugal	2.827	73.3%
Spain	2.832	70.2%
ANGLO-SAXON COUNTRIES		
Ireland	3.114	82.3%
United Kingdom	3.163	81.1%

Source: European Working Conditions Survey, Wave 2015, own computation

In terms of mean gender pay gaps (Table 9), we can see an improvement over time in each country, and do not detect markedly different trends in V4 countries compared to the other groups. The reported gaps represent unadjusted (raw) gaps, which are defined as the simple

difference in median earnings of men and women, without taking into account differences between men and women in endowments that affect their wage levels (such as education or experience). It is important to evaluate these gaps in parallel with employment levels. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between female employment and the gender pay gap for each country. The gender gap is relatively low in Denmark, Belgium, Italy, and Greece with values around 5 percent. Achieving low pay gaps along with high female employment (Denmark, Belgium) reflects greater equality. However, low pay gaps that are due to the low employment of women, and particularly less skilled women (Italy, Greece), is not such a positive outcome. Among the V4 countries, the pay gap is the highest in Slovakia and the Czech Republic at around 15 percent, and somewhat lower at 9.4 and 11.5 percent in Hungary and Poland. Large motherhood penalties play a significant role in the gender pay gaps (Cukrowska-Torzewska and Lovasz 2020).

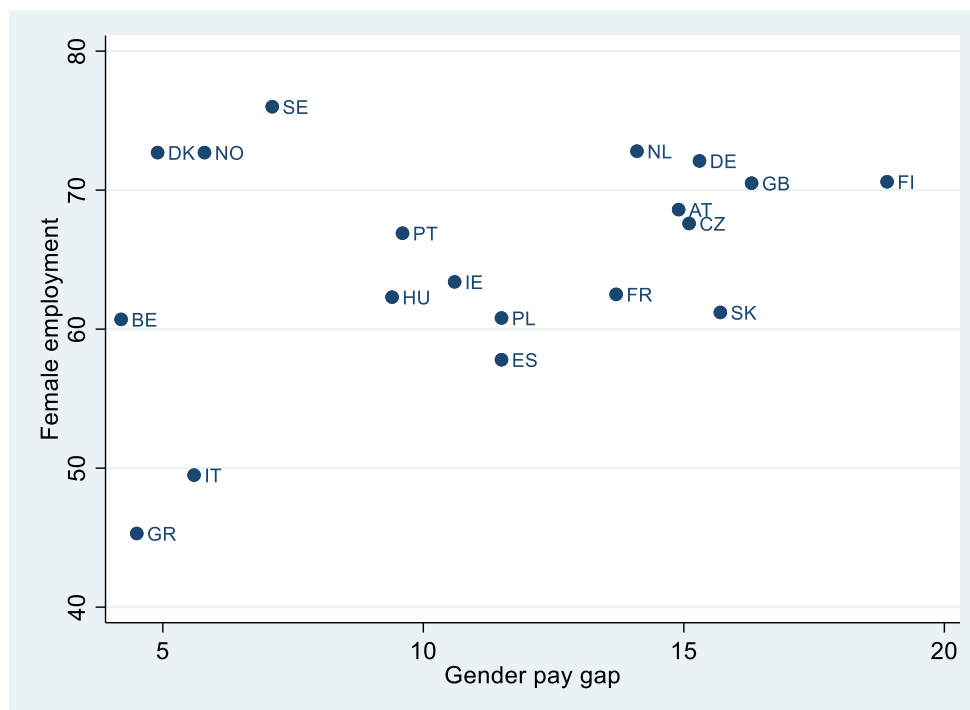
Table 9: Unadjusted (raw) gender gap in median earnings of full-time employees

V4 COUNTRIES	Gender wage gap		
	2002	2010	2018 or latest
Hungary	9.1	6.4	9.4
Poland	11.3	7.2	11.5
Czechia	16.0	15.8	15.1
Slovakia	20.4	14.9	15.7
GERMAN SPEAKING COUNTRIES			
Austria	24.5	19.2	14.9
Germany	19.1	16.7	15.3
NORDIC COUNTRIES			
Denmark	10.8	8.9	4.9
Finland	20.4	18.9	18.9
Norway	11.6	8.4	5.8
Sweden	11.9	9.4	7.1
WESTERN EUROPE			
Belgium	11.6	7.0	4.2
France	15.2	14.1	13.7
Netherlands	16.1	17.9	14.1
SOUTHERN EUROPE			
Greece	n.a.	12.2	4.5
Italy	10.3	9.9	5.6
Portugal	n.a.	13.5	9.6
Spain	17.2	13.5	11.5
ANGLO-SAXON COUNTRIES			
Ireland	17.2	14.3	10.6
United Kingdom	24.4	19.2	16.3

Source: OECD Family database (<http://www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm>)

Note: The gender wage gap is unadjusted, and is calculated as the difference between the median earnings of men and of women relative to the median earnings of men. Estimates of earnings used in the calculations refer to gross earnings of full-time wage and salary workers.

Figure 1: Female employment (%) and the unadjusted (raw) gender gap in median earnings



Summing up, the core findings of our overview point to the lower employment rates of women in V4 countries. Employment rates are lagging behind the Nordic countries by, on average, 10 percentage points. Maternal employment rates among mothers with children aged 0-2 are strikingly low in V4 countries, with the exception of Poland. In terms of pay gaps, mothers and women in general suffer relatively high disadvantage compared to other countries in the EU, though some other countries show similar gaps. As discussed next, the labor market situation of women is shaped by the interplay of country-, company- and individual-specific factors, with country-specific factors playing a prominent role.

3. Factors determining the labor market situation of women

3.1. Country-level institutional factors

Research shows that country-specific conditions that include family policies, labor market flexibility, and cultural norms are among the key drivers that determine women's, and especially mothers' situation in the labor market (Matysiak and Węziak-Białowolska 2016; Thévenon

2011). Among the family policies, the authors in particular highlight the roles of childcare services and leaves. Childcare services are considered to be one of the most important instruments that help women combine paid work with family related obligations. First, the increased availability of institutionalized childcare has been found to positively impact women's employment (e.g. Del Boca 2002; Pettit and Hook 2005; Misra et al. 2011; Nollenberger and Rodríguez-Planas 2015). Second, because of mothers' increased labor market reintegration, childcare services have been found to positively affect their wages, leading to a lower "motherhood wage penalty" (Budig et al. 2012) and thereby lower gender wage gaps (Cukrowska-Torzewska and Lovasz 2016, 2020).

The size of the positive impact of childcare provision on maternal labor force participation and employment varies, however, depending on the country that is analyzed. This suggests that other country specific institutional context affects the way childcare impacts the work and family reconciliation (Lovász 2016). In general, the existing findings prove that the positive effects of increased institutional childcare on mothers' employment and labor force participation depends on the initial level of maternal labor force participation (if it is high, the expected positive impact is likely to be small) and existing social norms about gender and mothers' roles (the less egalitarian the society is, the lower the expected positive impact) (Lovász 2016; Cascio et al. 2015; Budig et al. 2012).

In relation to leave policies, the research is mostly consistent that having an option to take child related leave positively affects employment of mothers. There are various types of leaves: maternity leave that is intended for mothers, parental leave that is directed to both parents following the maternity leave, homecare leave that extends the parental leave but is usually accompanied with a low income benefit and a paternity leave that is for a sole use of a father. Keck and Saraceno (2013) show that unless the leaves are too short, they positively affect women's employment after the childbirth. Boeckmann et al. (2015) partly confirm this finding and document a curvilinear relationship between leaves' length and mothers' employment: too short and too long leaves have less positive (if not negative) effects than moderate length leaves.

Not only the length of the leave, but also the level of compensation that is paid during the leave is of importance. For example, well paid but short leaves have been found to have a positive impact on women's employment (Thevenon and Solaz 2014). It should be noted, however, that

the research is inconsistent on reporting the optimal length of child related leave, and various studies point to the length of six months to even two years (e.g. Baker and Milligan 2008; Misra et al. 2011; Thevenon and Solaz 2014). This inconsistency once again proves that, as in the case of childcare services, the role of child related leaves cannot be assessed without taking into account other factors, such as labor market conditions and its flexibility, gender and cultural norms regarding women's employment and also the availability of childcare (Cukrowska-Torzewska 2017; Budig et al. 2012).

It should be also noted that child related leave, while beneficial for mothers' employment, may have a different impact on their earnings. Any leave leads to a break in employment continuity, which is reflected in lower human capital accumulation and its depreciation that is likely to lead to lower earnings (Keck and Saraceno 2013). This is particularly important in the case of long leaves directed to mothers (Cukrowska-Torzewska 2017).

As for gender norms, the empirical evidence generally confirms that more egalitarian norms are linked to women's increased employability and wages (Fortin 2005; Budig et al. 2012). Empirical evidence also suggests that these norms are not linked to fathers' relative earnings, i.e., the size of the wage premium for fatherhood (e.g. Cukrowska-Torzewska and Lovasz 2020; Böckmann and Budig 2013). Böckmann and Budig (2013), however, find that norms affect men's working conditions, and in countries in which men are perceived the main breadwinners in the family, fathers are more likely to work long hours. Similarly, the opportunity to switch from full-time to part-time work has been found to increase women's labor market participation (Del Boca 2002). This comes, however, at the cost of mothers' reduced earnings, contributing to the existence of the motherhood wage gap (Budig and England 2001; Waldfogel 1997).

3.2. Comparative data on country specific conditions in V4 and European countries

Table 10 presents data on childcare services, and Table 11 provides summary information concerning leave policies for V4 countries and the other country groups for the year 2018.

The V4 countries are characterized by very low childcare provision, especially for children below the age of 3, and long child related leaves. In all four V4 countries, the percentage of children aged less than 3 that uses childcare services is lowest in Europe. The worst situation in this respect is seen in Slovakia, where in 2018 only 1,4% children of that age attended childcare.

In the Czech Republic and Poland, the percentage was comparable (10,9% for Poland and 9% for Czech Republic); in Poland, however, a relatively higher share of children uses the services on a full-time basis (more than 30 hours per week). The highest number is seen in Hungary, where 16,9% of children aged less than 3 use institutionalized childcare. For children aged between 3 and compulsory school age, the situation was better, yet it is still the worst in Europe. The notable exception is Hungary, where more than 90% of children of that age attend kindergarten, in line with the recent introduction of compulsory attendance from age 3. In Poland, the situation in is the worst in Europe, as only around 60% of children in this age group are enrolled into childcare.

Table 10. Characteristics of childcare services in V4 and other European countries: the percentage of children of each age group in institutionalized childcare.

Country	Less than 3 years - childcare from 1 to 29 hours weekly	Less than 3 years - childcare 30 hours or more weekly	Less than 3 years - total	Between 3 years and compulsory school age - childcare from 1 to 29 hours weekly	Between 3 years and compulsory school age - childcare 30 hours or more weekly	Between 3 years and compulsory school age - total
V4 COUNTRIES						
Hungary	2,8	13,7	16,5	8,9	83	91,9
Poland	2,1	8,8	10,9	15,3	44,1	59,4
Czechia	5,2	3,8	9	25,8	53,6	79,4
Slovakia	0,2	1,2	1,4	9,9	58,8	68,7
GERMAN SPEAKING COUNTRIES						
Austria	12,9	7,1	20	54,8	29,6	84,4
Germany	7,7	22,1	29,8	30	59,5	89,5
NORDIC COUNTRIES						
Denmark	8,7	54,5	63,2	15,3	79,8	95,1
Finland	12,3	24,9	37,2	21,4	63,8	85,2
Norway	5,2	50,4	55,6	7,5	80,9	88,4
Sweden	15,1	34,3	49,4	25,5	69,6	95,1
WESTERN EUROPE						
Belgium	20,3	34,1	54,4	19,3	79,4	98,7
France	19,6	30,4	50	34,8	59,9	94,7
Netherlands	50,5	6,3	56,8	69,4	15,3	84,7
SOUTHERN EUROPE						
Greece	31,5	9,4	40,9	65,6	29,1	94,7
Italy	9,6	16,1	25,7	21,8	69,2	91
Portugal	1,4	48,8	50,2	5,5	88,4	93,9
Spain	30,2	20,3	50,5	52,5	42,4	94,9
ANGLO-SAXON COUNTRIES						
Ireland	26,1	11,6	37,7	69,2	25,9	95,1
United Kingdom	31,6	7	38,6	38	31,6	69,6

Notes: Data from Eurostat for 2018.

As already noted, the lengths of child-related paid leaves are generally long in V4 countries compared to other European countries. The notable exception is Poland, in which the leaves are shorter than in other V4 countries, but still longer than in most other European countries. In 2018, maternity leave in Poland was 20 weeks and paid parental leave was 32 weeks, which gave a total of 52 weeks (a year) of leaves. The leaves are well paid – at 80% of the earnings if the mother takes the total 52 weeks immediately at the beginning of the leave period, or at 100% for the maternity leave and 60% for the parental leave if the leaves are taken sequentially. The parental leave can be shared by both parents or taken solely by a father.

In all three other V4 countries the leave lengths are longer than in Poland. For example, in the Czech Republic the maximum length of parental leave is set up to the child's third birthday. The leave length and monetary payments are, however, not directly linked, and parental allowance can be received even if the parent is not on leave. In any case – whether on leave or not – there are upper limits with respect to the amount that the parent receives. In 2018, the maximum total amount of payment was set to 220 000 CZK (app. 8 500 EUR), but the maximum monthly payment had to be at most 70% of the previous earnings, but not more than 32 000 CZK (app. 1 200 EUR). The data presented in the Table, in which paid parental leave is expressed in weeks, present the scenario when the maximum monthly payment (32 000 CZK) is received by a parent for app. 7 months to give a total of 220 000 CZK.⁵ The payments can be, however, received even up to the child's fourth birthday, but in that case the monthly installment is substantially lower (so-called long option).

The leaves are also long in Slovakia and Hungary. In Slovakia, the leave length is 3 years (164 weeks), with 34 weeks of maternity leave and 130 weeks of parental leave. During the maternity leave, the mother receives 75% of previous earnings (with a ceiling of twice the national average monthly salary) and the parental leave is paid at a flat rate of 220 EUR per month. The parental leave benefit is considered to be low, given that the minimum costs to cover basic needs in Slovakia in 2014 were estimated for 250 EUR per month.⁶ In Hungary, the length of combined maternity and parental leaves is twice longer than in Poland, but shorter than in Slovakia. Hungarian parents – in addition to maternity and parental leaves - may, however, spend one

⁵ This has been modified in 2020. Since 2020, the maximum total amount is set to 300 000 CZK, and the maximum monthly payments to 40 080 CZK.

⁶ <https://www.trend.sk/financie/existencne-minimum-dostojny-zivot-nestaci-iba-ak-prezitie> (access 13.08.2020).

more year (52 weeks) on homecare leave, for a total of 160 weeks of paid leave. Mothers receive 70% of their previous earnings during the 6-month maternity leave. During parental leave – up to age 2 of the child - either parent can take care of the child, and receive 70% of their previous earnings, with a cap of twice the minimum wage. Home care leave gives a flat rate benefit up to age three of the child, in the amount of roughly 90 Euros.

In all four V4 countries, the leave entitlements for exclusive use by fathers are poor – when compared to other European countries. There is no part of parental leaves that is reserved for a sole use of fathers, though fathers have a right to use the whole leave or share it with a mother. In practice, however, the percentage of fathers that uses parental leave is extremely low; in Poland it was estimated to be only around 1%.⁷ The paternity leave for fathers exists in Poland (2 weeks), Hungary and the Czech Republic (1 week) but not Slovakia. Given the recent introduction of an EU Work-life Balance Directive that requires all the EU Member States to provide fathers with 2 weeks of paternity leave and ensure two out of four months of parental leave to be non-transferable between parents, the policies targeted at fathers in V4 countries will have to be properly adjusted.⁸ The introduction of 2 month parental leave for the sole use of fathers will certainly be the greatest challenge and innovation in family policy structures in V4 countries. According to EU regulations, all Member States must adopt the policies by mid-2022.

Table 11. Characteristics of leave policies in V4 and other European countries.

Country	Number of weeks of maternity leave	Number of weeks of paid parental leave	Number of weeks of payments associated with home care leave	Total weeks of paid maternity, parental and home care payments	Weeks of paid paternity leave for exclusive use by the father	Weeks of paid leave parental and childcare reserved for exclusive use by the father
V4 COUNTRIES						
Hungary	24,0	84,0	52,0	160,0	1,0	0,0
Poland	20,0	32,0		52,0	2,0	0,0
Czech Republic	28,0	35,34 / 186*		63,34 / 214	1,0	0,0
Slovak Republic	34,0	130,0		164,0	0,0	0,0
GERMAN SPEAKING COUNTRIES						
Austria	16,0	44 / 122*		60 / 138	0,0	8,7
Germany	14,0	44 / 96*		58 / 110	0,0	8,7
NORDIC EUROPE						

⁷ <https://sharethecare.pl/> (access 13.08.2020).

⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&furtherNews=yes&langId=en&newsId=9438> (access 13.08.2020)

Denmark	18,0	32 / 46*	117,2 52,0	50 / 64	2,0	0,0
Finland	17,5	26,3		161,0	3,0	6,0
Norway	13,0	26 / 36*		91 / 101	0,0	10,0
Sweden	19,9	42,9		55,7	1,4	12,9
WESTERN EUROPE						
Belgium	15,0	17,3		32,3	2,0	17,3
France	16,0	26 / 94**		42,0 / 110 **	2,0	26 / 52
Netherlands	16,0	0,0		16,0	0,4	0,0
SOUTHERN EUROPE						
Greece	43,0	0,0		43,0	0,4	0,0
Italy	21,7	26,0		47,7	0,8	0,0
Portugal	6,0	24,1 / 28,4*		30,1 / 34,4	5,0	17,3
Spain	16,0	0,0		16,0	4,3	0,0
ANGLO-SAXON COUNTRIES						
Ireland	42,0	0,0		26,0	2,0	0,0
United Kingdom	52,0	0,0		39,0	2,0	0,0

Notes: Data from OECD Family Database for 2018. * refers to weeks of paid parental leave in so-called "long" option, ** the first numbers refer to the entitlement for families with one child, the latter to families with two or more children.

Combining the above data with indicators that are usually used to capture gender norms⁹ shown in Table 12, and very low part-time employment that is seen in Central European (CEE) countries (Table 3), it can be inferred that V4 countries are among the least supportive of work and family reconciliation. Similar conclusions have been reached by for example by Matysiak and Węziak-Białowolska (2016) or Thévenon (2011).

Table 11. Indicators of gender norms in V4 and other European countries.

Country	Overall men are less competent than women to perform household tasks	A father must put his career ahead of looking after his young child	All in all, family life suffers when the mother has a full-time job
V4 COUNTRIES			
Hungary	71%	48%	77%
Poland	57%	40%	68%
Czech Republic	51%	35%	60%
Slovak Republic	51%	48%	58%
GERMAN SPEAKING COUNTRIES			
Austria	58%	41%	73%
Germany	52%	26%	60%
NORDIC EUROPE			
Denmark	22%	14%	32%
Finland	37%	23%	27%
Norway	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sweden	30%	6%	32%
WESTERN EUROPE			
Belgium	36%	26%	58%
France	31%	14%	51%
Netherlands	20%	16%	46%
SOUTHERN EUROPE			

⁹ E.g. Matysiak and Węziak-Białowolska (2016), Budig et al. (2012), Cukrowska-Torzewska and Lovasz (2020).

Greece	55%	30%	75%
Italy	71%	43%	72%
Portugal	57%	24%	79%
Spain	58%	35%	72%
ANGLO-SAXON COUNTRIES			
Ireland	54%	31%	54%
United Kingdom	37%	25%	47%

Notes: Data based on Eurobarometer 2004.

Indeed, research has found that mothers face the greatest obstacles for combining work with childcare in CEE countries. Motherhood related employment gaps, defined as the difference in employment rates of mothers and childless women - obtained net of their difference in age, marital status, non-labor income and partners' employment - have been estimated to be the largest in Europe (Cukrowska-Torzewska 2017), amounting to 10% in Poland, 30% in Hungary, and a high of 40% in Czech Republic and Slovakia. The motherhood wage penalty is also the largest in these countries (Cukrowska-Torzewska and Matysiak 2020; Cukrowska-Torzewska and Lovasz 2020), and is the key contributor to the gender wage gap (Cukrowska-Torzewska and Lovasz 2020).

Interestingly, despite family policies that do not encourage fathers to engage in childcare and the traditional perception of gender norms in V4 countries, the positive wage premium that fathers receive compared to childless men (so-called fatherhood wage premium) is not significantly larger than in other European countries (Cukrowska-Torzewska and Lovasz 2020). Given that the enforcement of EU Work-life Balance Directive imposes greater engagement of fathers into childcare, the upcoming changes in the family policies in V4 countries should have a positive impact on both the situation of fathers – by providing them with the option to stay home and develop stronger ties with the child and by lowering societal expectations towards fathers to be the main provider to the family – and of mothers – by lowering their labor market disadvantage in relation to childless women and men.

2.2. Company-level factors impacting the labor market situation of women

This section highlights the role of companies in promoting the labor market performance of mothers. For companies, an important concept facilitating the better labor market performance of mothers is *work-family balance*. The decision to enter the labor market cannot be isolated from

mothers' expectations of the possibility to balance between work and family duties. Work-family balance outcomes are also shaped by a variety of factors in the nexus of family policies, social norms, companies' corporate attitude and employees' individuals characteristics (Lunau et al. 2020; Allen et al. 2000). A conceptual framework on the country-, company- and individual-level links has already been formulated by Lunau et al. (2020).

Workplaces have a wide range of tools available to help this maneuver, such as offering part-time work or flexibility in terms of time or location. Better work-life balance is often argued to be a win-win situation both for the company and the employee. Theoretically, employees with better work-life balance can be a real asset to the company – they might have fewer absent days, higher job satisfaction and be more productive (Wheatley 2017). For employees, it may be associated with lower stress, higher wellbeing and better mental health (Allen et al. 2000; Borgmann et al. 2019).

Additionally, previous studies often come to the conclusion that family-supporting practices (both at the national and company levels) can only reduce the work-family conflict effectively if they are implemented in a supportive organizational atmosphere (Allen et al. 2014; van Breeschoten and Evertsson 2019; Lucia-Casademunt et al. 2018). The role of a family-supporting company culture has been emphasized further in previous research. In case employees have the perception that the utilization of family-supporting programs affects them negatively (e.g. it may be seen as a reflection of lower commitment), they will refrain utilizing them. Company culture has also been shown to affect the utilization of national-level family policies. Allen et al. (2014) provided the first evidence that paid leave policies are most beneficial in reducing work-family conflict when they are coupled with a supportive company atmosphere.

Part-time employment can be one important tool for mothers to balance between work and family obligations. While the empirical evidence on the general relationship between part-time work and work-life conflict is mixed, more supporting evidence has been found for mothers (van Breeschoten and Evertsson 2019; BOOTH and van OURS 2009). There are a variety of mechanisms through which part-time work can affect employability. From the mother's side, part-time work may imply lower earnings, however, may be associated with better work-life balance outcomes and better health. From the company's perspective, part-time work may lead

to a weaker attachment of the employee to the company. On the other hand, through better work-life balance and better health, part-time work may lead to lower absenteeism (Jacobsen and Fjeldbraaten 2020). Grobe (2016) found gender-specific results where part-time male employees tended to have longer sick leaves due to mental disorders while this was not the case for women, and overall, sickness absence was shorter among part-time compared to full-time workers.

Part-time work may be potentially a useful tool for mothers to achieve a better work-life balance – leading to their higher employment - and beneficial effects may be also realized by the companies. However, as Table 4 shows, V4 countries lag behind others significantly in the use of part-time working schemes. This may be due to unsupportive corporate environments and/or disincentivizing tax regulations. The role of the corporate culture needs to be emphasized again. Previous research has shown that family-supporting organizational culture affects the relationship between short part-time work (<25 hours) and work-life conflict for women (van Breeschoten and Evertsson 2019).

Flexibility in terms of time is another tool for companies to facilitate the work-life balance of their employees. Several arguments have been proposed pointing to beneficial impacts both for the company and the employee (Shagvaliyeva and Yazdanifard 2014; Wheatley 2017). From the employee side, better work-life balance, lower levels of stress, and better mental health could be mentioned, while from the side of the company, the signaling role of such practices is to be pointed out, having beneficial impacts on organizational commitment, employee turnover, and job satisfaction.

Despite this whole range of potentially beneficial impacts, flexibility schemes are not widespread in V4 countries. Table 13 provides information about companies' corporate attitudes in terms of offering flexibility in working time to their employees. The V4 countries and Southern Europe clearly stand out as having the highest share of companies not offering any kind of time flexibility to their employees. In the V4 countries, 70-80 percent of companies have fixed working time, with no possibility for flexible work time offered to employees, while in Nordic countries and in Western Europe the corresponding statistic is around 35-50 percent. This situation could have been possibly affected by the COVID19 pandemic and the lock-downs that were introduced all around Europe. The several weeks long lockdowns had an immediate consequence, and the everyday business and the way in which companies functioned had to be

rearranged. The V4 countries had not been an exception. Numerous companies were forced to close down their offices, transferring to on-line and “home-office” way of working. The question is still open how the present situation will affect the way the businesses operate and people work in the long-run, and we may only speculate that some of the present arrangements that certainly give more work flexibility will be used by companies also in the times after the “coronavirus era”.

However, a final note needs to be added when advocating for part-time and flexible work. Claudia Goldin in her seminal article “A Grand Gender Convergence: Its Last Chapter” (Goldin 2014) argues that flexible schedules may be costly and might be responsible for a part of the gender wage gap. Employees working less and more flexible hours might be seriously disadvantaged in terms of wages, especially in the corporate, financial and legal fields. Therefore, while female employees may benefit from such situations in terms of work-life balance, they may have to pay high price for it. The role of the companies is to be highlighted here again introducing individual, company-level programs to reduce the disincentives for part-time and flexible work.

Table 13: Ability of employees to set working time arrangements, 2015

V4 COUNTRIES	Proportion (%) of female employees that report having working time:			
	Employee's working hours set entirely by the company	Employee can choose between several fixed working schedules	Employee can adapt working hours within certain limits	Employee's working hours determined entirely by themselves
Hungary	76.4%	6.6%	14.3%	2.7%
Poland	69.1%	12.8%	13.3%	4.9%
Czechia	72.4%	10.3%	15.1%	2.2%
Slovakia	83.7%	8.5%	6.1%	1.6%
GERMAN SPEAKING COUNTRIES				
Austria	56.4%	14.1%	19.3%	10.2%
Germany	56.5%	15.5%	21.6%	6.4%
NORDIC COUNTRIES				
Denmark	35.3%	10.5%	40.4%	13.8%
Finland	50.0%	9.8%	35.1%	5.0%
Norway	41.0%	10.9%	42.8%	5.4%
Sweden	36.7%	9.6%	44.3%	9.4%
WESTERN EUROPE				
Belgium	51.8%	12.1%	31.1%	5.1%
France	58.3%	11.4%	24.9%	5.4%
Netherlands	37.3%	14.2%	38.1%	10.4%
SOUTHERN EUROPE				
Greece	85.1%	7.2%	4.9%	2.8%

Italy	73.5%	10.7%	13.0%	2.9%
Portugal	88.0%	4.0%	5.1%	2.9%
Spain	77.8%	6.9%	11.8%	3.5%
ANGLO-SAXON COUNTRIES				
Ireland	69.9%	7.5%	18.7%	3.9%
United Kingdom	61.9%	9.5%	23.8%	4.8%

Source: OECD Family database (<http://www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm>)

4. Policy implications for improving the labor market situation of women in V4 Countries

Women in V4 countries face significant disadvantages in the labor market, which are strongly related to motherhood. Their employment rate is relatively low, and that of mothers with young children is extremely low compared to other EU countries. This, in turn, leads to significant wage penalties related to motherhood – due to mothers’ return to work after long absences – that contribute to significant gender pay gaps.

There are particular institutional elements that make it hard for mothers in these countries to reconcile family and work obligations, and succeed in the labor market. These include country-level factors, such as the lack of formal childcare under age 3 of children and long leaves, which, together with societal views that strongly support in-home childcare for young children, are strongly encouraging mothers to stay out of the labor market. Company-related factors also hinder their return to work, in particular, the lack of flexible work opportunities, which are much more widespread in Northern and Western European countries. It is important to note that in these countries, higher employment due to part-time comes at a cost of greater gender pay gaps. Enabling mothers to return to work more easily does not necessarily translate to greater gender equality in all aspects.

In order to achieve higher maternal employment – and greater work-life balance – these countries need to align their family policies to encourage the earlier labor market participation of new mothers, rather than pushing them towards caring duties at home. This includes the reform of leave policies – which has been started in the last few years – towards better paid, but shorter length leaves, coupled with a significant expansion of childcare availability, especially under age 3 of children. Transparent information on the quality of childcare services would be also vital to facilitate the trust between parents and childcare institutions (Vuri 2016). High-quality childcare services with operating hours that align with work hours of parents could encourage mothers to

return to work. At the company level, the provision of increased part-time work and company-level flexibility opportunities also has the potential to improve the labor market performance of mothers with young children. National policies – such as taxation and administrative burdens – should be adjusted to incent companies to offer more of such working opportunities.

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