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# Routledge Handbook of the Welfare State

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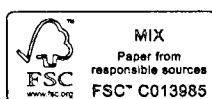
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# Gender issues in welfare states

*Sheila Shaver*

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## Introduction

Gender is a primary feature of the institutions that make up welfare states, the politics that shape them and the policy outcomes that result. It is central to contemporary transformation of advanced economies, from the industrial societies of the post-war period to the post-industrial societies of the future. Its empirical importance is obvious in labour market shifts towards a substantially female service sector, demographic changes in family structure and fertility, and the increased salience of gender issues in politics and community affairs. Theoretically, questions about gender have driven productive engagement between mainstream theory of politics and the state and feminist theorising of gender, power and agency. Comparative study of welfare state development has been a particularly effective area of this intersection (Orloff 2009).

This chapter discusses the part played by welfare state institutions in forming and maintaining gender relations. Welfare institutions bridge the public sphere of economic and political life and the private sphere of family, parenthood and personal life. The key ideas informing the analysis of gender and social policy derive from this interaction between the public and the private. The chapter introduces these ideas and their application to the welfare states of nations with advanced economies, primarily in Europe, North America and Australasia. It then examines the way gender has been institutionalised in the social policy frameworks of advanced welfare states, and the way policy institutions are changing in response to the new social risks posed by post-industrial transformation.

## Gender and gender equality

### *Gender*

Gender is a social concept that applies to both women and men. It is useful to distinguish between sex and gender, with sex referring to the biologically based dimensions of male and female and gender to the socially constructed identities of men and women. At its most basic level, gender refers to men's and women's ways of seeing themselves and the world, roles and life course patterns, resources and capacities. Although not reducible to biology, gender is closely

intertwined with male and female bodies and bodily capacities. These include sexuality and sexual orientation, fertility and reproduction, and bodily changes over the life course. Gender is no longer seen as a simple binary of male and female, masculine and feminine, but as encompassing a spectrum of potential identities (Westbrook and Saperstein 2015). As a social construction, gender has its foundations in time, place and culture, so that societies vary in expectations about social identities of masculinity and femininity and the social behaviour of men and women.

Being social, gender is relational with male and female, masculine and feminine, understood in relation to one another. Gender inheres not only in the social identities of individuals but also in the social fabric that connects them as members of society. These relations are patterned in both personal lives and collective social arrangements. Gender thus forms a primary dimension of social structure shaping relations between men and women, and, just as importantly, relations among women and among men.

The social structuring of gender relations has multiple dimensions, most importantly the division of labour in paid and unpaid work, the hierarchy of power and authority in public and private life, the discursive framing of social relations, and the structuring of emotion in social and sexual bonding (Connell 1987; Orloff 2009). These dimensions are interwoven in the institutions of daily life, in families, workplaces, schools, sports and leisure activities, political organisation, and media and entertainment. In families parents earn income, care for children, shop and clean: how these roles are shared matters for their autonomy as individuals and their attachment to their children and to each other. Gender is a central feature of paid work, in the jobs people do, the pay and authority attached to them, and the personal identities realised through them. It also shapes citizenship, democratic government, and the identities and expectations of the citizens themselves.

Gender is deeply embedded in the material forms and ideological discourses of social policy and the welfare state. There are obvious gender interests in forms of social provision such as pensions, sickness and unemployment compensation, sole parent support, and child and elder care. Perhaps less obviously, social policies form part of the social scaffolding on which men and women live their lives, and in this way play a part in constituting gender identities and gender relations. Early feminist writing observed that at the same time that welfare states assisted women with vital needs, they also institutionalised women's roles as wives and mothers dependent on breadwinner husbands. It was argued that the welfare state fostered gender inequality by reinforcing patterns of male dominance and female dependence in economic and family life (McIntosh 1978; Wilson 1977). In the three decades since, feminist analysis has established the centrality of gender in the forces motivating welfare state development, the forms and functions of welfare institutions, and the outcomes of these for men and women. This literature has pointed to significant variation in the gendering of national policy frameworks and charted ongoing changes in the frameworks themselves (Hernes 1987; Bock and Thane 1991; O'Connor *et al.* 1999). These developments and their implications for gender will be discussed below.

*Gender equality.* Gender is a complex dimension of social inequality entailing both material inequalities and unequally valued social identities. Welfare states are implicated in both dimensions, in the kinds of social protection they offer and the ideological frames that surround them.

Gender is a primary axis of social stratification, with women generally occupying lower positions than men in hierarchies of social status, economic power and political authority. Women's disadvantage is most evident in their economic vulnerability. In all OECD countries, they face a greater risk of poverty than men, with this difference widening significantly in old age. Although wage gaps have been decreasing in most OECD countries, women continue to earn less than men; in 2014 the average wage gap in European countries was 19 per cent, with gaps in individual countries varying, from less than 5 per cent to nearly 30 per cent. More women

are in paid work than in the past, although employment rates vary considerably among countries. These rates are generally low for mothers of young children. Women spend more time – in most countries of the OECD more than twice as much – as men on unpaid care work for children or another adult (OECD 2017). They are underrepresented in national legislatures and government cabinets. It is nevertheless important to recognise that not all women are vulnerable, poor or disadvantaged relative to men. In many countries professional women especially earn incomes comparable with those of equivalently qualified men. Gender inequalities interact with inequalities of class, race, ethnicity, and bodily abilities and disabilities (see Cho *et al.* (2013) on intersectionality), and there are substantial inequalities among men and among women.

Many feminists challenge concepts of gender inequality based on conventional economic measures such as income and employment, arguing that such comparisons are blind to the realities of many women's, and some men's, lives. Women's economic vulnerability and political marginality are closely linked to responsibility for children and family. Feminists have been critical of mainstream social theorising for its blindness to the social division between public and private spheres of social life encoded in the separation of state and civil society. Such theorising privileges the public worlds of economy and politics while obscuring their interdependence with the private worlds of personal and domestic life. The effect has been to valorise an apparently autonomous individual unencumbered by responsibility for the care of others, while denying full personhood to those supplying the kinship, nurturance and household provisioning underlying the appearance of independence. Much of mainstream welfare state theory has been similarly gender blind, according central place to capital, labour, church and class interest as developmental forces of the capitalist welfare state. These arguments have focused most squarely on social provision for risks faced by employed workers, such as pensions, disability benefits, and unemployment and sickness compensation. In effect these theories have portrayed welfare state citizenship as implicitly masculine, framed by beneficiaries' status as wage earners and breadwinners (Pateman 1989; Lister 2003).

Feminists argue for understanding the welfare state in terms not simply of state and market but of state, market and family. This brings into the theoretical frame the largely unpaid work of social reproduction such as domestic labour, childcare and the provisioning of the household. It also opens analysis to the social values of mutual concern that reflect the interdependence of the human condition.

### Concepts of interdependence, care and family models

These arguments have provided starting points for important feminist theoretical innovation with concepts such as *care*, *interdependence*, *male breadwinner* and *dual-earner family models*, and *defamilialisation*.

*Care* refers to the socially necessary work that men and mainly women do outside the paid labour force to meet the needs of dependent others. More specifically, it concerns the care of dependent children, spouses, and others such as elderly parents and persons with disabilities by members of the nuclear or extended family. Care is a form of labour, requiring the commitment of time, the application of skills and the maintenance of responsibility, but because it is usually embedded in close familial relationships it often has an emotional character that distinguishes it from work for pay in the public sphere. Ideologically, care has been seen as a natural expression of women's concern with home and family. As work, its demands of time and schedules framed by the needs of others weaken the positions of carers in paid labour markets, while its affective dimension imbues it with distinctive rewards, power relations and ethical significances.

Welfare states have long been recognised as supporting and regulating paid employment. Feminist argument has shown that they also support and regulate the social organisation of care,

through the direct provision of services and indirect measures facilitating care within the household. This shows that the individual wage earner is not the independent actor of labour market exchange, but part of a larger social relation of work and care. The normal human condition is thus not independence but *interdependence* (Daly and Lewis 2000; Jenson 1997; Lister 2003).

Welfare states play an important part in shaping the contours of such interdependence. Social policy arrangements contain a variety of family models reflecting different expectations about marital partnership and family life, of which two are most salient (Lewis 1992; Sainsbury 1996). The *male breadwinner model* builds on societal norms of the traditional family of the post-war period. Under this model, policy is framed on the expectation of the husband having primary responsibility for the economic support of the household through full-time paid employment, and the wife having the main responsibility for the work of the household and the care of its dependent members. The welfare states of most advanced industrial countries first took shape around this model, and at least remnants of it remain in most. It has commonly been rewritten in gender-neutral terms allowing either husband or wife to be the breadwinner, and more importantly modified to enable the partner with domestic responsibility to also be a secondary earner. Increasingly, policy frameworks concentrate support for a partner engaged in full-time care in the life course period when children are young and facilitate increasing paid labour as they mature. Contrasting with these is the *dual-earner family model* predicated on the expectation that both partners are employed, usually on a full- or near-full-time basis. The same development is also referred to as the *adult worker model*, the term signalling individualisation of status and entitlements. This model is most commonly found in Nordic countries. Increasingly, welfare arrangements based on this model have been incorporating policy measures aimed at inducing male partners to take a greater part in the care of children.

To the role of welfare states in shielding workers from the most abject dependence on the labour market, feminists add that of protecting citizens, and especially those responsible for children, from unchosen dependence on the support of a partner. Orloff (1993) terms this 'capacity to form an autonomous household', by which she refers to support enabling an individual to survive without being forced into marriage or other family relationships. The poverty rates of sole parents are generally high, and most welfare states provide some form of income support, usually subject to conditions such as means-testing and limited time periods. Other forms of assistance include housing, childcare and the enforcement of the child support obligations of non-custodial parents. Hobson (1990) has argued that the conditions faced by lone mothers are a measure of this capacity to form an autonomous household, since they give married mothers an indication of their 'exit options' from marriage. For this reason, Hobson argues that strong support for sole parents also empowers women within marriage.

*Defamilialisation* (Lister 2003) is a similar idea. It refers to the degree to which individual adults can maintain an adequate standard of living independently of family relationships. Coined originally to refer to the way that welfare provision may underpin women's economic independence, it has also come to be used in the more general sense of the extent to which welfare states contribute to the work of care and in so doing facilitate women's paid employment. The latter usage avoids any reference to gender inequalities.

## Gender and social policy regimes

Comparative analysis of welfare state formation and change has helped identify the important elements of gender in the social policy frameworks of nation states. Marking key points of connection between state, market and family, these show characteristic patterns of gender logic

extending across multiple institutional and policy domains. There are three principal dimensions of gender in the social rights of citizenship in such countries.

The first is the social division of paid work and unpaid care, and the assumptions about gender and family that underpin it. Expectations about how men and women will share the rewards and burdens of paid and unpaid work are encoded across the social policy spectrum. These expectations inform labour market regulation and the terms under which men and women have access to paid jobs and services facilitating labour market participation. The same is true of policies mitigating the social risks attending rising rates of maternal employment. Gender ideologies permeate income support systems, in rules of eligibility and provisions for workers and dependants in retirement and disability pensions, unemployment and sickness benefits, the taxation of income, and access to social services such as child and elder care.

A second dimension lies in social bonding in emotional and reproductive relationships and associated capacities and vulnerabilities. It concerns the meaning of individual personhood and gender-specific expectations about sexuality and sexual expression, fertility and reproduction, bodily integrity, and personal safety at home and on the streets. In policy terms, it shapes the contours of access to services supporting reproductive rights and fertility management, the privileging of heterosexual over same-sex relationships in the definition of family entitlements, and the kinds of services provided to the victims of rape, incest and domestic assault. There are closely related concerns in policy areas such as health, law and policing, the control of sexual and domestic violence, drug and alcohol policies and the treatment of prostitution.

Legal rights form a third gender dimension in social policy frameworks. These include political rights as well as basic human rights such as equal protection under the law, access to courts and legal services, and freedom of speech and assembly. Most countries have legislation regulating hours and conditions of employment, and many also prohibit discrimination in hiring and pay on the basis of gender. Laws governing marriage specify the rights of husbands and wives as partners and as parents, as well as their rights in separation, divorce, and child custody and support.

Most debate about the gender structures of social policy regimes has focused on women's employment and policy stances towards the gender division of labour between earning and caring in the family household. These have significant consequences for income, employment and economic security over the life course. There has been less systematic comparative discussion of differences in the way welfare states support social bonding and individual legal rights.

The gender logics of social policy regimes reflect the gendered politics of their formation and development, including national history and ideology, economic development and political contestation. Relevant political forces have included political parties and trade unions, religious bodies, military and veterans' organisations and social reform groups, all of whose programmes have had gender subtexts. In some periods feminist movements have been influential. Early visions were explicitly maternalist, seeking to support women as mothers and imbue society with a feminine ethos of care, while second-wave feminist movements envisioned a welfare state oriented to equal opportunity in employment and shared care in the home (Bock and Thane 1991; Fraser 1997). In some countries women's policy units within government have represented women's interests within the machinery of the state (Stetson and Mazur 1995; Eisenstein 1996). Contemporary welfare reform ideologies envision gender equity in the more limited terms of a universal obligation to paid employment in which the social identities of men and women are constituted as the same (Orloff 2006, 2009).

Gender is central in the new social risks associated with the transformation to the post-industrial economy. The shift in employment from manufacturing to services has changed gender balances in labour markets, weakening the position of unskilled men and strengthening

demand for occupations in which women are most commonly employed. The accompanying shift from Fordist to flexible employment patterns has compounded these effects, increasing the share of non-standard and precarious employment. Families are less stable and more diverse in form than in the past, with two-earner households increasingly the norm but sole-parent households also more common and especially disadvantaged. Welfare states are adapting to these new risks in different ways, but with common concerns for labour market activation, including for sole parents, and family policies to alleviate conflicts between employment and care (Taylor-Gooby 2004; Yerkes 2011).

The past two decades of comparative welfare state discussion have been dominated by Esping-Andersen's (1990) typology in which he identified three types of social policy regime: 'liberal', 'corporatist' and 'social democratic'. Derived from 1980s data, the typology has become dated by three decades of continuous policy evolution, but its use continues as a set of ideal types illustrating policy choices and trade-offs. The original three regime types, and others identified in subsequent argument, show systematic differences in the characteristic gender logics shaping the nexus of state, market and family across multiple policy domains and associated patterns of path-dependent change. These differences have important consequences for the gendering of social rights and gender equality. Gender went unacknowledged in the typology's original formulation but is now recognised as central to the way different policy regimes work. In particular, family models of breadwinner and dependent spouse or dual-earner partnership impart distinctive gender logics across a broad range of policy areas. The extent of defamilialisation – social provision relieving households of care work – is most salient from a gender perspective, but policy effects on employment and social stratification also matter.

Liberal welfare regimes are found in those countries where the liberal political tradition has been dominant, most clearly the United Kingdom, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Their social policy frameworks are marked, though to varying degrees, by traditions of liberal individualism and ideological privileging of the market, with welfare playing a residual role when market and family fail. There is a traditional presumption against public authority intruding into the private relations of household and family, though feminism and new social risks have put this presumption under challenge. The central gender logic of liberal regimes is largely neutral with respect to male breadwinner or dual-earner family models, which are regarded as matters of choice for the individuals concerned, but the family unit is expected to play a strong safety-net role for its members. Because of women's generally lower earnings capacities, market solutions to needs such as retirement income and social care often have gendered outcomes.

In actuality, liberal welfare regimes differ considerably from country to country. O'Connor and colleagues (1999) found both broad similarities and significant variations in the liberal welfare regimes of Australia, Canada, Great Britain and the USA. Dual-earner households are increasingly the norm, but it is more usual for mothers to be employed full-time in the USA and Canada than in Australia and Great Britain. Gender wage gaps are around the OECD average, but lower in Australia than in the other three countries. These countries have largely residual welfare systems with low levels of social provision geared primarily to the alleviation of poverty. Poverty rates are higher than in comparable European countries, with sole-mother poverty especially high. UK and Australian governments provide significant support to families, mainly as cash allowances. The USA and Canada offer only low levels of support, in Canada primarily as cash allowances and in the USA as tax breaks. In all four countries there is little public support given to defamilialisation and care needs, such as in paid parental leave and early childhood education and care (OECD 2017; LIS 2017). Especially in the USA, there are wide economic disparities among women, with professional women especially able to purchase services



supporting their full-time employment. Activation has taken the form of welfare reform sharpening economic incentives to paid work, tightening rule compliance and conditionality, and in the USA instituting lifetime limitations on eligibility for assistance. In all countries it has reduced sole-parent access to forms of support enabling them to be full-time mothers or fathers.

Corporatist welfare regimes have developed in countries with political histories of conservative and religious party rule and policy traditions of concertation between organised interests/social partners. Found mainly in continental Europe, corporatist regimes have generous welfare states designed to foster stability and social integration. Reflecting religious party influences, their gender logic has policy biases towards traditional gender roles with low levels of female labour force participation, male authority and the principle of subsidiarity, by which the state avoids taking on roles that would supplant that of the family. As a result, women's social protection is often provided through their husbands rather than in their own right. Services defamilialising care responsibilities are often little developed.

There is considerable variation in the particular forms that corporatist social policy frameworks take. Increasing labour force participation of married women with children has brought pressures for adaptation, especially of family models assuming a family of male breadwinner and dependent wife. In Germany, France and Netherlands it is now more common than not for women with children to work for pay; in France most mothers work full-time or nearly so, while in Germany and especially in the Netherlands they generally work part-time. All three countries support motherhood with long periods of paid maternity leave and extended periods of further unpaid parental leave. Support to families is especially generous in France and Germany, with France providing much of such assistance in the form of childcare and other services. While poverty rates are generally low, those for sole mothers with children are high, especially in Germany. Activation policies have aimed at increasing women's labour force participation, combining social investment measures such as training with liberal elements such as sharpening work incentives and individualised case management. Policies to reconcile conflicts between work and family have featured strongly in all three countries, including improved access to childcare and extended parental leave. In a discourse of concern about poverty, sole parents, previously supported as primarily mothers, have been a particular focus of activation (OECD 2017; LIS 2017; Weishaupt 2010; Knijn *et al.* 2007).

In Southern Europe policy regimes predicated on the traditional male breadwinner family have also been coming under pressure from women's growing labour force participation. In countries such as Italy, Greece and Spain women's employment rates remain low compared to other OECD countries, and pay gaps are large. Portugal is an exception where a majority of households have both parents employed full-time. These welfare states are small, and family services and childcare little developed. Low fertility is one expression of the unresolved tensions between employment and family. In Portugal, where fertility has declined particularly sharply, parental leave reform includes incentives for fathers to share in leave (OECD 2017).

The social policy frameworks of the Nordic countries of Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland provide a sharp contrast. Evolved through long histories of social democratic government, these regimes put the state at the centre of policy frameworks. These are large welfare states with generous provision through both transfers and services. This developmental legacy has been eroded somewhat in the past decade, especially in Sweden, but the Nordic group nevertheless continue to stand out from other welfare states. With entitlements predicated on employment, their policy frameworks have long incorporated activation stances. Their gender logic aims to combine high labour force participation by women over the life course with equality between men and women. Generous parental leave, subsidised childcare and the treatment of partners as individuals in the tax and benefit systems underpin a family model of

dual-earner couples. The occupational structures are highly segmented by gender, with much of women's employment in public sector service positions. Except in Finland, gender pay gaps are comparatively low. The Nordic countries have low levels of poverty, including among sole mothers.

There are fewer policy variations among countries in this group. All have faced pressures to reduce public spending and achieve public sector efficiencies by introducing market mechanisms into service provision. At the same time, several have introduced dedicated parental leave for fathers on a 'use it or lose it' basis.

There have been common policy shifts towards dual-earner family arrangements and measures to reconcile tensions between work and family across most Western welfare states. There is debate about the new policy paradigms into which these developments are being incorporated. Some analysts see a paradigm shift from the passive, protective welfare state of the twentieth century to a pro-active post-industrial welfare state concerned with social investment and the development of human capital. This view sees promoting female labour force participation with measures such as parental leave and early childhood education and care as part of a larger policy agenda, also including lifelong learning, employability and the social inclusion of marginalised groups (Esping-Andersen *et al.* 2002; Jenson 2009). Others see social policy responding to economic demands for labour market flexibility with reforms addressing the new social risks of post-industrial employment and facilitating transitions between work and care. Still a third paradigm envisages a radical shift from collective to individualised social provision enabling individuals to use private savings schemes to move between employment, care, education and other choices (Knijn and Smit 2009). Importantly, in all three of these paradigms concerns for national economic competitiveness in the knowledge-based economy have displaced earlier policy concerns with gender equality. In actuality, as Daly (2009) shows, in some countries at least welfare reform continues to frame policy in family rather than in individual terms. She sees contemporary European policy as tending, for different reasons in its conservative neo-familialist and liberal 'third-way' variants, towards a dual-earner, gender-specialized family model of one full-time and one part-time worker. In both cases, the objectives of the model put a higher value on economic competitiveness than gender equality and the equal distribution of care work.

## Current developments in welfare and work

In 2002 to 2007 the OECD conducted a comprehensive review of policies concerned with tensions between work and family in 13 member countries. With the dual-earner household now the norm across most of the OECD, it found good cause for governments to assist families in achieving their desired balance between employment and family life. Arguing for social investment benefiting economic growth, demographic balance, poverty alleviation and child development, its final report *Babies and Bosses* (OECD 2007) cautiously advanced a policy agenda for reconciliation of work and family life. Its founding proposition was systemic support for families, from support to parents at home with young children, assured childcare, pre-school education and out-of-hours care for schoolchildren. Such care will, it is argued, give families the necessary confidence to have the number of children they desire and employers the confidence to manage their labour forces. The agenda called for tax/benefit policies strengthening work incentives, especially for sole parents; paid parental leave of moderate duration and with measures encouraging fathers to take leave; affordable, good-quality childcare and out-of-hours care; and family-friendly employment practices such as part-time work, flexible workplaces and leave to care for sick children.

Underlying the *Babies and Bosses* agenda is a gender-neutral, dual-earner family model with cautious aspirations towards the sharing of earner and carer roles. It endorses gender equity as a

desirable policy goal likely to be in the national interest, defining equity in terms of women's increasing parity with men in matters such as income and opportunity. The *Babies and Bosses* agenda does not give any support to maternalist arguments for gender equity based on claims to support for sole parents to be full-time mothers. Contrarily, it advocates policies giving sole parents strong incentives to undertake substantial employment. *Babies and Bosses* notes that, for most welfare states, gender equity is only an incidental policy objective. Only in the Nordic countries and Portugal is it given primacy. It also observes that even after several decades of women's movement into paid work, gender equity remains far off. Women remain responsible for the main work of caring while they miss out on jobs with future prospects, pay parity and career opportunities.

A further consequence of the movement of women into the paid labour force has been increased outsourcing of domestic work, including that of care for children and the elderly. In a number of countries, migrants, usually women from poorer countries, are taking up this work. The phenomenon reflects a feminisation of migration, with women making up some 51 per cent of international migrants and, more than in the past, migrating on their own account rather than as part of a family group. Many of these women have left their own children behind to be cared for by others. The remittances they send back are important sources of income in their home countries, and migration may open a path to wider opportunities. As employees, their circumstances make them vulnerable, especially if their migration has been illegal or their employment conditions are irregular. Feminist writers have characterised these relations as 'global care chains' enmeshing women across social boundaries of class, race and nation (Hochschild 2002). Gender concerns relations among women as well as with men, and global care chains entail condensed relations of power and interest between women.

The phenomenon is not wholly new, but globalisation has given it new impetus. Its growth may be facilitated by social policy developments supporting the reconciliation of tensions between work and family in some countries. This is particularly the case for policy strategies emphasising individual choice and market-based arrangements for the care of children and the elderly, where measures such as tax allowances and cash payments facilitate private solutions to care needs. To create jobs for unskilled women, counter work outside the tax and benefit system, and enable full-time employment of high-skilled women, a number of European countries have instituted tax concessions for households employing domestic labour. These concessions cover but are not limited to caring work (Carbonnier and Morel 2015).

## Conclusion

The past decade has seen convergences in some areas of gender and social policy. The dual-earner household is increasingly the norm in OECD countries, even among families with young children, so that the daily lives of women and men, mothers and fathers, are becoming more similar. There is some evidence that the increase in women's paid work is inducing men to do more unpaid work, though the extent of this change and the nature of the work are disputed.

The gender logic of social policy institutions has been changing in concert, with family models reframed in gender-neutral terms supportive of parental employment. Measures such as maternal and parental leave and childcare commonly facilitate a pattern in which women withdraw from employment when their children are very young but return by the time they reach school age. The general tendency is towards policy frameworks assuming a parental division of labour in which although both are in paid employment one remains a primary and the other a secondary earner. To some extent also, policy agendas driven by globalisation are tempering the contrasting gender logics of liberal, corporatist and social democratic social policy regimes. Countries with liberal regimes are doing more to support and regulate early childhood education

and care. Corporatist and Southern European countries are also moving to accommodate dual-earner households. Nordic countries are seeing the public provision of care services and the associated large public sector challenged by neoliberal pressures to reduce taxes and increase service sector competition. Substantial policy differences nevertheless remain. Gender continues to be an important constituent factor, with class, race and others, in the old and new social risks with which welfare states are concerned, including low pay, precarious employment, fragile families, the personal cost of unpaid work, and the vulnerabilities of sole parenthood and old age.

Policies concerned with work–life balance and social investment in children and education, such as the OECD's *Babies and Bosses*, stress the contribution of current social expenditure to future economic growth. Importantly, gender equality is not an objective of these policies, which are concerned rather with raising fertility rates and improving economic competitiveness. Gender equality has thus moved both into the mainstream of social policy and out of focus as an objective in its own right.

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