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Work and care regimes and women's employment outcomes: Australia, France and Sweden compared

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Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to analyse how national care regimes interact with the employment regime to influence female employment outcomes. We do this with a comparative analysis of Australia (population 24 million), France (62 million) and Sweden (9.5 million), three advanced market economies that have distinct and contrasting employment and care regimes. For the employment regime, we focus on paid work across the life course and we focus on parental leave and childcare as indicative of the care regime. The chapter draws on the theoretical framework developed by Rubery and colleagues (1999, 2001) and Rubery (2002). This theoretical tradition emphasises that the gender division of labour between employment and unpaid care and domestic work is structured by the articulation of family policies and the organisation of employment and working time, as well as other elements of the welfare state regime such as the taxation system. This approach has drawn attention to important societal differences in the shape and degree of gender inequalities. Comparative studies of time (see, for example, Anxo *et.al.*, 2011) have clearly shown that the gender division of labour between paid work, care and domestic activities is strongly dependent on prevailing societal norms and the institutional and societal contexts.

Australia is regularly referred to as a liberal welfare state even though the Australian system does not fit easily into the standard Esping-Andersen (1990) typology. For most of the twentieth century Australia had a centralised mechanism to set wages and working conditions, leading to Australia also being referred to as the (male) wage-earners' welfare state. As a consequence, the

provision of leave entitlements has been a result of the industrial relations system rather than welfare policies (Baird, 2005). Having had a strongly oriented full-time male breadwinner/female carer model, the care and employment regimes in Australia have not kept pace with the social changes in female education levels, gender roles and expectations nor with the demographic changes in the workforce. This has resulted in an 'institutional lag' and, since the turn of the millennium, the need for a fresh focus on work and family policies (Baird and Williamson, 2009).

In terms of social protection models, France belongs to the Continental model, including quite high levels of social redistribution and a well-developed family policy. Until the 1970s, it was characterised by a male breadwinner model, encouraging mothers' inactivity through the tax system and through the under-development of formal childcare for younger children (under the age of three). The necessity to increase employment rates to finance social protection, as well as the increase in women's education level, has led to a progressive development of childcare, although some incentives to maternal inactivity remain in public policies. Gender equality at work (in terms of wages, but also employment conditions and job quality) has also emerged as a policy goal over recent years, partly influenced by European gender equality policies.

Often presented as the ideal type of social democratic welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990), Sweden emphasises the principles of universalism, egalitarianism and individual rights. The Swedish model is also founded on a strong political commitment to the goal of full employment. Sweden stands out as providing one type of societal system based on high employment rates, with only a small gender gap; a high incidence of dual-earner households; extensive and generous family policies; strong welfare support systems for childcare, parental leave and elderly care; and egalitarian wage structures, including relatively low gender wage inequality. Furthermore, the overall political context, which is characterised by gender mainstreaming combined with high female involvement in the political process and institutions (government bodies, parliament and labour market organisations), creates an institutional set-up conducive to a more balanced gender division of labour and responsibilities over the life course.

Two propositions guide the chapter: the first is that policies relating to care are changing in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, even in national regimes that are very different (such as Australia, France and Sweden); the second is that policies do impact on women's labour market activity across the life course in relation to both overall participation and hours of work. To consider these propositions, the chapter proceeds in the following way. The first section of the chapter considers women's key social and labour market features in each of the countries, highlighting current

employment outcomes. The second section provides an overview of the work and care policy regimes in each country, with a focus on parental leave, child-care and hours flexibility. This section demonstrates the different policy trajectories of each of the three countries to date. For consistency, OECD data are used where possible, mainly from the family database (OECD, 2016b), supplemented by official country-specific statistics. We conclude with a discussion of the relationship between the policy regimes and female employment outcomes, suggesting some similar policy issues and trends are occurring in Australia and France, but not to the same degree in Sweden, the country with the longest history of gender equitable policy goals.

Female and maternal employment rates

In this first section, we characterise the three countries and their employment regimes using a gender perspective, building on empirical evidence about gender gaps in employment rates, working time, earnings and job quality.

For the past 40–50 years, two of the most salient features and persistent trends in Sweden, France and Australia have been the rising education levels of women and the increased feminisation of the labour force, with a related shift from the single male breadwinner household towards the dual-earner household. This feminisation of the labour force has occurred despite very different policy frameworks in each of the three countries. Both France and Australia have experienced a gradual and marked growth in female employment from around the late 1980s. The trend shows that for the prime working age population (25–64) in 2014 the employment rates for women in both France and Australia is approximately 68 per cent, with the surge in female employment beginning early in the 1980s for France and a few years later for Australia.

Sweden stands out as the exception among the three countries, with female employment rates consistently higher since the 1970s. In 1985, for example, the female employment rate in Sweden was 79 per cent compared to France at 54 per cent and Australia at 44 per cent. By 2014, the Swedish female employment rate was still higher at 81 per cent, although France and Australia are narrowing that gap as their female employment rates grow. Interestingly, as Table 16.1 shows, education outcomes for women are considerably higher than for men and higher than the OECD average in Australia and Sweden yet, as we later discuss, this investment is not reflected in higher employment rates or pay outcomes for Australian women.

Observing these trends, it would seem therefore that the economic and social shifts of the 1980s in all three countries, including more human capital

Figure 16.1 Female and male employment rates in Australia, France and Sweden 1970–2014 (%)

Source: OECD, 2016d

Table 16.1 Percentage of population with tertiary education by gender for individuals aged 25–64, 2014

	Men	Women
Australia	38	45
France	30	34
Sweden	33	45
OECD-34 average	32	36

Source: OECD (2016e): Table CO3_1_Educational attainment by gender.

investment for women and economic and industry restructuring from manufacturing to services, are associated with increases in female employment rates. Shifts in government objectives are also noteworthy. The need to increase employment rates in order to finance social protection has been an incentive for national policies to encourage female labour force participation in Sweden and France (see Rubery *et al.*, 2001; Rubery 2002). In Australia, the need to increase

female employment rates has been driven by the perceived need of governments to increase the size of the labour market and gross domestic product.

By international standards, Sweden is characterised by high employment rates at the two ends of the age distribution, high employment continuity over the life course and relatively low gender disparities in labour market integration. This has not been the case for Australia and France. In Sweden, neither couple formation nor childbirth impacts on women's employment rates, with the latter positively correlated to female labour market participation (Anxo *et al.*, 2011). The main impact of childbirth in Sweden is therefore a combination of a period of parental leave followed by a temporary reduction of working hours to long part-time hours while children are young (preschool children) rather than a reduction of employment rate.

In France, maternal employment stands at a relatively high level, above the OECD average. However, important barriers and disincentives to employment remain for mothers, especially for the lower qualified. Indeed, in terms of mothers' activity rates, important differences emerge according to the age and the number of children. Labour market participation is lower for mothers of young children and decreases with the number of children. In 2013, 78.6 per cent of mothers of one child (aged 0–14) were active, as well as 73.1 per cent of mothers of two children, but only 53 per cent of mothers of three or more children.¹ Part-time employment is also more developed for mothers of young children, and at least partly results from constraints in the availability or the cost of child-care. In France, 15.1 per cent of women still declare that their inactivity or part-time work is due to a lack of care services (Eurostat, Compendium 2010).²

Lower maternal employment rates are the distinguishing feature of female employment in Australia (see Table 16.2). Relative to other OECD nations, Australian maternal employment rates for mothers with a child under 15 are

Table 16.2 Population and female and maternal employment rates, 2015

Country	Population	Female employment rate 25–64 (%)	Maternal employment rate child <15* (%)
Sweden	9.5 million	80.7	83.1
France	62 million	68.2	72.4
Australia	24 million	68.7	63.5
OECD average		63.3	66.8

Note: *Year 2013 for Australia

Source: Employment rate: OECD (2015). Maternal employment rate: OECD (2016e), Data for Chart LMF1.2.A. Maternal employment rates.

lower, at 63.5 per cent compared with the OECD average of 66.8 per cent. The rate is even lower for mothers of children younger than three years. In Australia, female employment has been closely associated with family formation. The major shift in the last four decades has been that, rather than withdrawing completely from the labour market after childbirth, Australian women move to part-time hours (Baird, 2016).

To summarise, despite some convergence among the three countries in terms of increasing female employment rates, there continues to be considerable divergence in relation to maternal employment rates for women with children under the age of 15. Sweden stands out with relatively high maternal employment rates. It is in relation to maternal employment therefore that we see the impact of the differing policy frameworks most profoundly, which we discuss in the next section.

Figure 16.2 displays the age–employment profiles of men and women in the three countries. As illustrated, Australia, compared to France and Sweden, exhibits the largest gender gap in employment rates across the life course. In contrast to the two other countries, Australia also shows a slight decrease in the female employment rate during the period of childbearing (around two percentage points between 25 and 39 years old). Sweden has the highest female employment rates across the life course and exhibits the smallest gender employment gap with, as in France, high employment continuity over the life course. In 2013, according to the OECD (2016b), Sweden had also the highest incidence of dual full-time earner couples: 45.6 per cent compared to 41.4 per cent in France and only 23.4 per cent in Australia.

One of the most interesting developments in these countries since the 1970s is that children are no longer associated with a permanent or temporary withdrawal from the labour market. The continuity of female employment patterns conceals, however, large gender disparities in working time. Motherhood still implies a significant reduction of female labour supply. The presence of young preschool children significantly increases the incidence of part-time work, implying a significant reduction of working time. This is most pronounced in Australia, where 48 per cent of mothers work less than 35 hours (with the vast majority of these working less than 30 hours), compared to 31 per cent and 35 per cent in France and Sweden respectively (see Table 16.3). In France only a small proportion of women work less than 35 hours. The share of short part-time work (1–19 hours) is low in Sweden and France (less than 10 per cent), contrasting with Australia with a share of short part-time work above 20 per cent. By contrast, for men in all three countries, fatherhood entails an increase of labour supply in terms of both participation and working hours.

Figure 16.2 Age-employment profile in Australia, France and Sweden, 2014

Source: OECD (2016a).

Table 16.3 Working time distribution among Australian, French and Swedish women with at least one child under 14 years of age, 2014 (%)

Working-time band	Australia	France	Sweden
1 to 19 hours	21.0	9.1	8.2
20 to 29 hours	17.4	13.2	10.1
30 to 34 hours	9.7	8.7	16.4
35 to 39 hours	23.4	46.3	17.4
40 hours or more	28.5	22.7	47.8

Source: OECD (2016a).

Job quality and gender gaps

Job quality has been introduced among policy goals at the international level since the 2000s, and has received attention in the comparative literature, together with the development of specific indicators (Davoine *et al.*, 2008; Green *et al.*, 2013). Job quality is usually considered as a multi-dimensional concept, including pay and earnings, employment quality and the type of contract, training opportunities and working conditions. Here we focus more specifically on wage and part-time employment for which gender gaps are particularly important, before presenting a more global perspective on job quality by gender on the basis of OECD data.

As noted above, part-time work has been developing in the three countries since the 1990s, for mothers of young children but also more generally for women. In 2015, 38 per cent of employed Australian women were working part-time, well above French and Swedish female part-time employment rates (22.3 per cent and 18 per cent respectively). The gender gap in part-time employment rates is higher in Australia and in France than in Sweden (almost 24 per cent in Australia, 15 per cent in France and 7 per cent in Sweden in 2015).³ The links between part-time and job quality are ambiguous, as they can be seen as a way to reconcile family and work or as a constraint for women, resulting either from insufficient childcare or from bad labour market conditions. The concept of involuntary part-time work may help differentiate between these different situations, although it mainly reflects labour market and care constraints. According to OECD data, involuntary part-time amounts to 39.2 per cent of part-time employment in France for women and has been strongly increasing since 2012 (in a context of high-level unemployment), whereas it stands at lower levels in Australia (25.5 per cent) and in Sweden (28.4 per cent). Thus involuntary part-time does not directly connect with the level of part-time rates; in the Australian case part-time may be considered by women as a way to stay in the labour market when then have children, whereas most French women would prefer to work full-time in a more regulated labour market (with a 35-hour legal working time) and in a context of quite well-developed childcare. However, part-time work has a direct incidence on women's earnings and gender pay gaps, and may also affect future career prospects.

Given existing OECD data, it is only possible to compare gender pay gaps of full-time employees. According to OECD data (Table 16.3), the three countries have persistent pay gaps, with the gender pay gap being highest in Australia. Additionally, according to OECD data, the gender wage gaps stand at

Table 16.4 Gender gap in median earnings of full-time employees

	2000	2006	2012/2013*
Australia	17.2	16.7	18*
France	14.6	14.0	13.7
Sweden	15.5	14.6	15.1
OECD average	18.2	16.1	15.2

Note: *Year 2013 for Australia

Source: OECD (2014)

a relatively high level for tertiary educated workers in all three countries, even for the prime-age cohorts (35 to 44).

The causes of the persistence of gender pay gaps are varied, but as argued by Rubery and colleagues (2005), the wage structure of economies and labour market segregation are understood to be important contributors, and more so than individual characteristics, such as educational attainment. Sweden is a pronounced example of this; from the early 1970s up to the early 1990s, the creation and development of a modern and encompassing welfare state and the related expansion of public sector employment in Sweden contributed not only to the feminisation of the labour force and the increase of the overall employment rate, but also to the upgrading of the job structure in Sweden. By contrast, although Australian women have high educational attainment, it also has a highly sex-segregated labour market which may explain the relatively higher gender pay gap in Australia.

To characterise women's employment position, it is also important to adopt a job quality perspective, that goes further than a wage perspective and includes other dimensions of job quality, such as employment conditions (especially job security) and working conditions (such as, physical constraints, stress). When disaggregated by gender, such analyses show that women are generally disadvantaged in terms of employment conditions but that men experience more onerous working conditions on average (Fagan and Burchell, 2002).

Several multi-dimensional indicators of job quality have been developed over recent years, but here we refer to the OECD index as it is the only one that includes information for Australia. The OECD job quality index is composed of three main dimensions (Cazes *et al.*, 2015): earnings quality is measured by an index that accounts for both the level of earnings and their distribution across the workforce; labour market security takes into account both the coverage of unemployment benefits and their generosity; and quality of the working environment is measured by the incidence of job strain, which is a combination of high job demands and limited job resources.

Figure 16.3 OECD job quality index by gender, 2010

Note: Earnings quality in USD PPS and labour market insecurity and job strain in %

Source: OECD (2016c).

For all three countries, the results confirm that women are penalised in earnings quality (level and distribution), whereas their protection against unemployment is very similar to men's. Job strain is higher in France than in Sweden for both men and women, but its level is higher for men in both countries. (Australia is not included in the job-strain index.) This is related to the type of jobs that men hold; as noted above they are over-represented in the industrial manufacturing sector. However, according to national data for France, working conditions have been declining for women: 58 per cent of muscular-skeletal disorders hit women (42 per cent men) and stress at work (resulting from high demands and low autonomy, following the Karasek model) affects 28.2 per cent of women (19.6 per cent of men) (Lemière, 2013). Similarly, for a larger set of European countries, Burchell and colleagues (2007) also found a reduction in gender gaps in exposure to some physical risks. The OECD index does not take into account the problem of involuntary part-time employment that concerns more women than men, as mentioned above.

Job quality gaps are observed throughout the life course. According to a French study, young women, even the well-educated, face a lower job quality when they enter the labour market (the gender wage gap amounts to 20 per cent for a Master's degree and above); older women (over 50) tend to make more frequent transitions towards inactivity (Lemière, 2014). These differences by gender tend to persist despite a general and significant increase in women's education levels in all three countries.

In summary, the three countries have experienced an overall increase in education and female employment rates, continued occupational and industry segmentation and persistent gender pay gaps in favour of men. The divergence in women’s employment between Australia, France and Sweden is evident in rates of maternal employment and part-time working hours. In this respect, Australia stands in sharp contrast to Sweden and France, with lower maternal employment and considerably shorter part-time work hours. These patterns may be explained, at least in part, by the policy regimes in each of the countries, which we discuss next.

Policies and work-care regimes

The differences in labour market outcomes for women have to be understood in relation to the nation’s institutions and public policies, including parental leave, childcare and flexible work policies, as well as social and fiscal policies and labour market regulations. The differences in the care regimes in the three countries are summarised in Table 16.5 below. Sweden exemplifies the dual earner-carer model, whereas in France and Australia institutional arrangements favour

Table 16.5 National policy frameworks compared

	Parental Leave	Childcare	Flexible work
Australia	12 months per parent of unpaid parental leave with 18 weeks paid for mothers and 2 weeks ring-fenced for fathers/ same-sex partners	Fragmented childcare system for preschool children (aged <5), some government subsidy and mix of formal and informal care	Right to request (RTR) flexible work arrangements for parents and carers
France	Two years’ leave with an allowance, extended by a year if fathers share the care	Government subsidies for formal care for children aged <3 and free preschool for all children aged 3–5	Right to request part-time in the public sector. In the private sector depends on collective agreements
Sweden	480 days’ parental leave with payment, 90 days ring-fenced for each parent	Publicly financed childcare facilities for children aged 1–5	Large possibilities of reversible time options over the life course through statutory regulations and collective agreements

a maternalist model, with policies only more recently encouraging fathers' involvement in care.

Australia

The current care regime in Australia has emerged relatively recently. Although community and political debates relating to parental leave and childcare policies have been high on the agenda in Australia for the past 20 years, it was not until the election of the Labour government in 2007 that any substantial reform was introduced. Previous governments had adopted a neoliberal, market-based philosophy, relying on individual employer–employee negotiations or employer–union bargaining. This situation resulted in polarised outcomes in the labour market. Higher-skilled workers in certain industries and with higher bargaining power had better entitlements than lower-skilled, less-powerful workers. For example, in relation to employer provision of paid parental leave, women in the finance and higher education sectors were much better off than those in the retail or hospitality sectors (Baird *et al.*, 2009).

The childcare system in Australia is complex and under review. The delivery of formal childcare and school education is the responsibility of the state and local governments, but funding is from a mix of state and federal governments. Preschool education (that is under five years) tends to also be organised at the state level, and out-of-school-hours care is generally a local or state government responsibility. Formal childcare for 1–3 year olds is even more mixed, being offered between private and public providers; and although public expenditure on childcare has been increasing, it still remains at less than 1 per cent of GDP (OECD, 2016b). Approximately 30 per cent of preschool-age children attend formal childcare services in Australia (Australian Government, 2014) and for working families, grandparents provide the bulk of informal childcare for children aged 0–12. There is a commitment to provide access to one year of preschool education for all children; however, this has not yet been achieved. The review of the childcare system has a focus on early childhood education *and* care and, as well as concerns about the provision of adequate and quality childcare, there is debate about the availability of trained care workers, including 'nannies', and their working conditions.

Australia's paid parental leave system is also a relatively recent policy innovation. Introduced by the federal Labour government in 2011, it provides for 18 weeks' pay at the national minimum wage. Eligibility is wide and covers those with the equivalent of one day's work a week for the ten months prior to birth. Self-employed women can also access the scheme. Use of the scheme, however, is inflexible and the 18 weeks must be taken in one block and before the child's

first birthday. Although called parental leave, the scheme is aimed at the primary carer and has been overwhelmingly used by mothers (Whitehouse *et al.*, 2015). The paid parental leave scheme is underpinned by a right to unpaid parental leave in the labour legislation, the Fair Work Act. Unpaid parental leave has been available to women since 1979, to adoptive parents since 1980 and to men since 1990, and each parent is now eligible to 12 months' unpaid parental leave and a job guarantee, or up to 24 months for one parent. In addition, employers may supplement the government scheme with their own paid parental leave scheme. Approximately 50 per cent of employers do this, although provisions are more generous in certain sectors such as finance and education. Public sector employees also have access to between 12 and 14 weeks paid parental leave at replacement wages, which can be taken in addition to the 18 weeks noted above. In 2013, a modest scheme of two weeks' pay at the national minimum wage was introduced for fathers and same-sex partners. This might be seen as the first policy step to directly address gender role behaviour and an attempt to encourage fathers to share the care load.

Although it can be argued that parental leave and childcare policies are now embedded in the macro-policy framework, aspects of the policies remain highly contested. For example, the current government is proposing to reduce the paid parental leave scheme and the proposed changes to the childcare and tax transfer system remain unresolved. Income tax in Australia is based on individual incomes, whereas many welfare benefits are based on family income. Combined with the costs of childcare this creates a disincentive for women with young children to return to work. Furthermore, there is ongoing disagreement about the best way to resolve Australia's dilemma of low maternal employment rates, with an explicit aim of the federal government to increase female participation rates (see Baird and O'Brien, 2015).

Overall, in relation to work and family public policies, Australia has shifted ground in the past 10 years from a conservative neoliberal position to a greater focus on the role of government in addressing labour market and gender equality needs. It is important to note that the policy rhetoric is typically couched in business case arguments rather than equity goals or welfare needs. More attention is also being paid to the deficit of women in leadership positions and the persistent gender pay gap, with the government's Workplace Gender Equality Agency taking a lead in this regard. Reporting on gender participation and pay gaps in firms with 100 or more employees is obligatory, but targets rather than quotas are the preferred method of addressing the leadership gap.

There continues to be significant gender gaps in the labour market and these are of concern to all stakeholders – individuals, employers, unions and governments. As noted above, the participation and employment rates of women,

and especially of mothers, are lower than men's, there is a large gap in terms of hours of work, and there remains a significant gender pay gap and care gap between men and women. While there are major public policy debates underway, there is also a considerable debate among employers and in the labour movement about how best to reconcile the pressures of working and family lives for men and women.

However, work and family public policies tend to remain maternal in focus and there is little attention to shifting the dominant male full-time worker/female part-time worker model to a more shared-work and care model.

France

France is characterised by a well-developed childcare system that has been expanding through a diversification of childcare for children under the age of three (including childminders and different forms of private childcare). However, several features of the French social protection and tax system are still inherited from the male breadwinner model that was predominant until the end of the 1970s. After a brief description of the components of the French 'model', and of some persistent contradictions, we focus on new trends in gender and employment policies that focus on labour market inequalities.

The French childcare system is based on free pre-primary school starting at the age of three (and two for a minority of children) and on a set of subsidised childcare solutions for younger children. Indeed, the originality of the French childcare system for young children (0–3) is that its growth relies on the development of both public 'collective' childcare and 'individual' childcare (childminders working at their home, or at parents' home). All these childcare types are sustained by public financing, including 'individual' childcare arrangements for which parents benefit from specific allowances (income-related) and tax cuts. The result of this system is that 99.6 per cent of children aged 3–5 go to school on a full-time basis, and that 49.7 per cent of children aged 0–2 are enrolled in formal childcare or preschool services.⁴ For younger children, the growth in childcare supply results mainly from the development of childminder and individual childcare.

However, despite the development of childcare, French social and labour market policies are inherited from the male breadwinner model, and are still wavering between a goal of protection for women (and mothers) and incentives to work. Firstly, as far as mothers of young children are concerned, the French family policy provides inconsistent incentives for some women; although women's labour market participation is a policy goal, low-wage (i.e. low-qualified) mothers with two or more children are encouraged to stop working or to take

a part-time job through the parental leave programme. This parental leave can be quite long (three years until 2014; two years since 2015), which creates difficulties in returning to work (even when the working contract is maintained). A reform implemented in January 2015 introduced an incentive to 'share' the leave between the two parents: the allowance is now limited to two years, unless the father also takes a leave (in which case the allowance can be received until the child is three years old).

Secondly, the French tax and social policy system is family-based and creates an incentive for the specialisation of one spouse in market activities if he/she has a higher income. In practice, 75 per cent of women earn less than their husband, which places them in a situation where their incentive to work or to increase their working hours is lower (Lemière, 2014). Major social policies are also family-based, such as the minimum income – the *Revenu de Solidarité Active* (RSA). The RSA is work-oriented and provides a differential allowance for beneficiaries who are working (under a certain income threshold). Although the issue of individualised income tax is not yet a priority (and still a debated issue), gender equality has been promoted to a major policy goal over recent years.

The law on 'real equality between men and women' (*loi pour l'égalité réelle entre les femmes et les hommes*) was voted in in July 2014. It includes two important and quite innovative tools, in addition to the reform of parental leave (already mentioned above). Firstly, it creates an obligation for firms to bargain on the topic of gender equality at work (wages, careers, access to training). Firms who do not comply will be unable to contract with public administrations. Secondly, it reinforces existing quotas that nominations for directors in public administrations and CEOs for large firms should include at least 40 per cent of women after 2017 (to reach an actual share of 40 per cent in firms over 250 employees in 2020).

Other recent measures were intended to improve women's labour market situation, although they were not gender-specific. Concerning part-time work, the social partners and the government introduced a threshold for part-time jobs of 24 hours a week in 2013 (the reform *Accord National Interprofessionnel*), to avoid the development of part-time with limited number of hours worked (less than 25 hours) in France. However, there are many limits to its actual implementation, as the employer can depart from the minimum 24 hours if the employee agrees. Besides, branch-level social bargaining can also modify the 24-hour threshold and introduce a lower minimum duration, which happened in 48 industries (until March 2015), so that 44 per cent are now covered by an industry agreement setting a shorter minimum duration.⁵ As a consequence of this bargaining process, the 24-hour threshold adopted in 2013 can be expected

to have only a limited impact on part-time duration in France and on the incidence of part-time contracts including those with less than 25 hours for women.

To encourage work–family reconciliation, childcare is still in a process of development, with some efforts to reduce territorial inequalities. Thus French policy has evolved over the last 10 years; it is now focusing both on work–family reconciliation and on gender equality in the job, mixing services supply, social dialogue and quota policies for nominations.

Sweden

The Swedish childcare regime is a mixed system of outsourcing and insourcing (in-house provision). During the first two years of age the majority of children are cared for in the home within the framework of a generous and flexible parental leave system (see below). After the leave period, childcare is mainly provided by day-care centres. Childcare in Sweden is highly subsidised and financed and administrated by local authorities, with parents co-financing childcare activities by paying a fee. The continuous growth of publicly financed childcare facilities has contributed to the growth of female labour supply. In the early 1970s, only 30 per cent of preschool children (1–5 years old) were enrolled in public-financed childcare compared to 83 per cent in 2015. Since the mid-1990s Swedish municipalities have the obligation to provide childcare facilities for working fathers and mothers.

The Swedish parental leave programme, introduced in 1974, has clearly sustained the feminisation of the labour force and contributed to the changes in women's behaviour in the labour market, specifically halting their withdrawal from the labour market. The length of parental leave was initially six months but was successively extended to 16 months (480 days) in the 1990s, with full job security on return.⁶ The level of compensation is 80 per cent of gross earnings for the first 390 days. For the remaining 90 days, parents receive a flat rate of 180 SEK.⁷ It is interesting to note that the parental leave system is one of the few social/citizen rights that is not fully individualised. In order to favour a more equal gender distribution of absence, a designated non-transferable leave benefit of a month for each parent was introduced in 1993, a second month was introduced in 2002 and a third in 2016. This rule constitutes, therefore, a strong incentive for fathers to use their right to parental leave for at least 90 days. The gender division of parental leave remains, however, unevenly distributed; in 2015, 74 per cent of the total number of net compensated days were taken by mothers (see Swedish Social Insurance Agency, 2016).⁸

Since the amount of income-related benefits is based on the income during

the six months immediately preceding the birth of the first child, this constitutes a strong economic incentive for parents to be gainfully employed and work full-time prior to childbirth. This benefit system has, therefore, a great influence on labour market behaviour and working-time patterns for presumptive parents. Typically, young, childless, cohabiting, employed women and men work full-time before childbearing in order to maximise their income level during parental leave. Also worth noting is the fact that their working time increases smoothly in order to maximise pension benefits after retirement.⁹ This strategy appears to be an efficient tool to secure women's labour market integration, foster employment continuity and improve gender equal opportunities.

The question of how to raise men's take-up rates of extended leave and other working-time adjustments over the life course and bring about a stronger involvement of men in unpaid domestic and care activities is a crucial political issue and could provide a policy instrument for reducing gender inequality in the division of labour and income development over the life course.

To a considerable extent, the positive employment outcomes in the Swedish economy during the last three decades, particularly the high and growing female employment rate, are clearly related to the creation of a modern welfare state; strong public involvement in the financing and provision of healthcare, social care, childcare and education; and the related expansion of public employment. An individualised taxation system in a context of high average and marginal tax rates has also reinforced the dual breadwinner model.

Conclusions

Rubery (2011) convincingly argued that researchers and policy-makers should not take for granted 'the argument that regulation hinders outsider groups such as women' and urges us to examine more closely 'how gender differences may interact in specific and varying ways with employment and social regulations'. In this chapter, we have canvassed the impact on women of differing labour market and care regime forms of regulation and show that there is indeed a difference between men's and women's employment outcomes, which may be said to advantage the 'insiders', that is, men. Taking a closer look *within* gender, however, we also show that by comparing the data on female and maternal employment, hours of work and job quality in each of the countries, the interaction of care and employment regimes influence women's and mother's employment outcomes differently. Australia's lower maternal employment rates and high part-time work rates reflect that country's strongly regulated industrial male

breadwinner legacy and less-developed parental leave and childcare regime. In France, the regime has produced relatively high employment rates for women and mothers, although with some inequalities among mothers but there are still clear gender wage and job quality gaps. By contrast, Sweden's long-term gender equity approach and supporting parental leave and childcare policy regime are reflected in high employment rates and longer hours of work for Swedish women, including mothers, over the life course.

The interaction of care and employment regimes is ever more significant as women's labour market attachment increases. At the same time, care regimes are in transition in each of the countries, and especially so in Australia and France. Australia appears most concerned with female labour market attachment, but from an economic rather than a social or gender equality perspective. It also has the most market-oriented care regime of the three countries. France sits in the middle, with a mixed welfare-economy orientation, and Sweden is the most gender equitable and welfare-oriented country. Our overview suggests that some policy change is occurring in Australia and France, both in response to, and leading to, a modest decline in the pervasiveness of the traditional male breadwinner model. Policies such as providing leave for parenting, addressing childcare demands and encouraging fathers to actively participate in care are becoming more evident, although the emphasis on changing gender roles is still in its infancy in France and nascent in Australia. By contrast, policies to encourage more gender equitable care outcomes have been a feature of the Swedish system for many years.

Our analysis demonstrates that the institutional context and the interaction of national care regimes with the employment regimes in each of the countries have influenced female employment outcomes. Furthermore, social context is important. For instance, attitudes to motherhood and increasing education rates of women in all three countries suggest the need to pay more attention to the interaction of regulation with social norms and trends. The comparison of Australia, France and Sweden shows that, despite differing policy regimes, common across all three countries are persistent gender pay gaps and the continued dominance of female caregiving. While this situation remains, the reduction of gender difference and inequality remains elusive under both welfare-oriented and more market-oriented regimes. As Rubery (2011: 1104) has eloquently said: 'what is required is both a more gendered analysis of institutions and a more social analysis of gender as the starting point for the more positive task of analysing how reregulation could be used to reduce gender difference and inequality.'

Notes

- 1 All the figures cited here come from DREES (Direction de la recherche des études, de l'évaluation et des statistiques), except when another source is indicated; data available at http://www.data.drees.sante.gouv.fr/ReportFolders/reportFolders.aspx?sCS_referer=&sCS_ChosenLang=fr.
- 2 Care services might also correspond here to elderly care. Note that the average proportion in the EU stands at a higher level (27.9 per cent).
- 3 Figures: OECD (2016a).
- 4 OECD Family database (2016b).
- 5 Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Formation Professionnelle: 'Bilan de la loi de sécurisation de l'emploi du 14 juin 2013 au 03 avril 2015' (Review of the law on employment security), http://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/CONFERENCE_THEMATIQUE_DU_3_AVRIL_2015_-_Bilan_de_la_loi_de_sécurisation_de_l_emploi.pdf.
- 6 The parent leave system is associated with full employment guaranty and the employment contract is not suspended during the work absence.
- 7 Parents not in employment before the birth or adoption of their child are entitled to a flat rate of 180 SEK (1 SEK = 0.11 Euro; 1 Euro = 9.15 SEK).
- 8 The incidences of fathers taking parental leave and the average duration of the father's absence have, however, continuously increased since the introduction of the parental leave system: from 1 per cent of compensated days in the mid-1970s to 26 per cent in 2015 (corresponding to around 80 working days of absence; see Swedish Social Insurance Agency, 2016).
- 9 It should also be stressed that the Swedish pension system takes into consideration the diversity in patterns of labour market integration over the life course and the uneven distribution of risks by limiting the cost of necessary work interruptions linked to parenting, care activities and involuntary employment disruptions such as unemployment, disability or sickness. The time that workers devote to higher education, to small children or to national military service, as well as absence due to unemployment and sickness, also gives rise to pension rights. In other words, future entitlements to a pension are currently not only related to work history and earnings but are also linked to other forms of activity and periods of benefit receipt, including parental, unemployment, sickness and partial disability benefits.

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