



# Analysing A Selection of Family Policies from the Perspective of Resilience

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# rEUsilience

**Risks, Resources and Inequalities:**

**Increasing Resilience in European Families**

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# Executive Summary

## Executive Summary

This report undertakes an analysis of social policy provision in the six rEU resilience countries from the perspective of resilience and the role of social policy. On the basis of a review of literature and also the empirical research undertaken for the other Work Packages, a theoretical framework is developed which highlights resilience as families' capacity to adjust to situations of risk without negative outcome and social policy as having both protective and promotive functions in affecting the conditions for families to be resilient. The protective elements reside in support with family-based transitions and compensation for disadvantage caused by family structure or negative familial experience, and the promotive factors include adequate income and adequate support for family life in general. This report, the first deliverable of Work Package 6, prioritises the protective aspects (general income support and support for family life in general will be considered in the second deliverable). It therefore considers how policy supports transitions for all parents between care and employment and how policy treats three particular types of family situation that the research identifies as needing extra support: parenting alone, caring for a disabled or ill child, and coping with a migrant background. In all, five areas of policy are analysed: parenting-related leaves, early childhood education and care (ECEC), provisions for lone-parent families, provisions for families coping with a disability or illness on the part of a child, and provisions for families with a migration background adjusting or integrating into the new country. In each case, the policy field is first scrutinised for what existing research conveys about what works or general effectiveness in policy design and content and then an analysis is presented of how the six countries compare in relation to principles or benchmarks of good practice.

In response to the question of the extent to which the national and EU policy systems support families to be resilient, there are eight main findings.

- Some policy fields seem to be better equipped, or further along the road, than others in helping families to be resilient. The policies oriented to transitions - in this analysis parental leaves and ECEC – generally seem to be better developed than those treating the three types of family situation with heightened risk.
- The factors that act to undermine the resilience-supporting capacity of policies relate in a major way to conditions that exclude people and families from benefits and services. For example, significant numbers of people are excluded from various parenting-related leaves because of employment-related conditions and ECEC does not feature enough mechanisms to include low-

resourced families in general. So, the degree of inclusiveness or exclusiveness in policies and provision is crucial.

- Where the EU has set legal benchmarks most countries meet them, and so the significance of the EU as a policy agent is confirmed. But where the EU only makes 'soft recommendations', they do not seem to penetrate deeply into the national systems.
- While it might be the case that policies operate with the assumption that families can manage work and care with some support, the recognition that some families need more has not fully penetrated the policy systems. In other words, there is variation in the family situations that are recognised as deserving of additional support and the degree of support on offer. Of the three, it is migrant families that seemed to receive the least recognition and support. However, this should not be taken to mean that the other two types of family situation – parenting alone and coping with child disability or illness – have their needs fully addressed.
- One very big issue is that of equivalence in support for lone-parent families vis-à-vis those with two parents. Only Sweden approaches equivalence for these families when it comes to parenting-related leaves for example. This is an issue for all countries though and it transcends eligibility for leaves alone.
- Needless to say perhaps, the variations among countries are also striking. This analysis has avoided identifying countries as strong or weak as the variations are such that no country stands out across the board in terms of the characteristics considered in the analysis. But, of course, countries pattern and differences exist and in this regard it does appear that, looked at in the round, Sweden is most oriented to enabling transitions and supporting families in different types of situation of need whereas the UK offers the least support.
- Families are faced with a landscape that does not always point clearly in one direction. So, for example, non transferability is a principle increasingly governing parental leaves in most countries but it tends not to be applied to either maternity leave or paternity leave. And when it comes to parental and family agency, countries are very clear about limiting what they offer for young children but the existence of a gap between the end of parental leave and the beginning of guaranteed ECEC leaves parents in every country (albeit to varying degrees) having to manage much of the transition between care and paid work themselves, especially when their children are young.
- The dearth of information on (and one might add system knowledge about) certain types of families, especially those coping with child illness and migrant families, is a general weakness found across countries.





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# Analysing A Selection of Family Policies from the Perspective of Resilience

This report is part of Work Package 6 (WP6) which is tasked with developing and road-testing policy solutions. As the first deliverable of WP6, the report has two specific aims. The first is to identify the relevant policy considerations that are highlighted by resilience as a concept or goal for policy thinking when it comes to families especially. This leads to the development of an analytical framework. The second aim – and the major part of the report - is to apply this framework to identify evidence on what is considered to be effective in the relevant policy fields and, using this evidence, assess how countries' policies compare. This is done through two sets of applications. The first is an examination of the extent to which policies support transitions (especially parenting-related leaves and early childhood education and care (ECEC)), and the second focuses on particular family situations or family types identified by the research as challenging from a resilience perspective – in particular, lone-parent families, those with a child experiencing disability or illness and families with a migrant background.

The main problematic of WP6 as a whole is to examine family resilience as a challenge for policy, to critically review existing provisions in the national policy systems and in EU policy approaches from a resilience perspective and to develop a set of policy recommendations which have been tested through a variety of methodologies. In other words, the purpose is to consider what the resilience approach when applied to family means for policy, identify the relevant policy fields and make recommendations for policy to address resilience, having examined the extent to which the existing policy configurations (both nationally and at EU level) support or target resilience as an objective or perspective for family policy and social policy.

The report rests on a mixed evidence base. It draws from both the empirical information collected from the focus groups with family members as part of WP4 and the policy reviews carried out for the completion of WP5. In addition, specific additional analyses were undertaken – especially of the relevant national and EU policy systems (to be presented in the report's second section especially). The report is also informed by the preparatory work for and discussions at the Policy Lab. Two sessions have been held to date. The first (held in March 2024) considered the supports needed for family care-giving and for transitioning from care to employment and the second (held in June 2024) considered family support as a policy approach and how it might become a feature of family policy at national and EU levels. Two more sessions of the Policy Lab are planned, both focusing on finalising a set of policy proposals.

# 1. The Thinking on Resilience, Families and Policy

## 1.1 Resilience as Concept

The most influential literatures on resilience come from psychology and psychiatry on the one hand and ecological sciences on the other. In the former, resilience is mainly developed as the capacity to adapt or respond after a traumatic event – in essence, a set of capacities and orientations that occasion behaviour on the part of individuals in a crisis situation of some kind. There is a strong sense of overcoming adversity and of being able to continue in an improved state. This perspective links individual dispositions and behaviour, viewing resilience in terms of the development of protective factors which may take the form of intrinsic elements of character or orientation, acquired attributes or learned behaviours. Ecological perspectives emphasise how an ecosystem (or an entity within it) can cope with a change of state, return to a previous state or maintain its function(ing) in the face of disturbance. The core interest is in systemic robustness coupled with explaining a system's ability to either remain stable or adapt and transform. As units and resources become stretched, the question of how much they can bear becomes vitally important as does that of a system or individual's capacity for learning.

With these kinds of origins, the resilience concept has a number of key features.

There is, first, a strong sense in it of overcoming adversity and having the capacity to sustain and advance well-being in the face of challenges (Hall and Lamont, 2013). This emphasises stability but also adaptive capacity. More precisely, resilience thinking problematises how major, typically unexpected, changes impact on existing ways of operating, what behaviours and activities they call forth and the capacities of people, families, communities, societies or cultures to adapt and respond. Viewed in more micro terms, resilience draws attention to how people navigate a difficult or unexpected situation or trajectory and their use of resources and agency in that context. For example, Keck and Sakdapolrak (2013) differentiate between absorptive agency, adaptive agency and transformative agency as three types of coping in the context of seeking or maintaining resilience. They frame a typology around these different types encapsulating variations in the nature of the response in terms of being ex-post or ex-ante, the temporal scope (short- or long-term) and degree of change involved.

Another characteristic or feature of the resilience concept is the notion of an ecosystem (which derives especially from the strong contribution of ecological thinking/scholarship to resilience studies). This draws attention to system structure, context and interactions highlighting both the external conditions of a situation or entity as well as what is happening internally. In fact, it is the interaction between these two that signally affects the capacity to be resilient. Bourbeau (2015: 375) suggests that resilience be understood as an inherently dynamic and complex process. The capacity of the unit for self-organisation is highlighted here as is the capacity for learning and adaptation.

## 1.2 Resilience as Applied to Families

Family has not featured strongly in the scholarship on resilience. Of the two originating literatures, family is far more present in the psychology and psychopathology literature. There are parallels between this scholarship and the more general literature just described, especially in a shared conviction about the importance of disturbance or trauma and the nature and significance of both ecosystem and agency. Its strong point is in its therapeutic orientation, highlighting both risks and solutions. It has contributed deep insights on the experiences of individuals and families under stress, their ways of coping and adapting to the adversities that they experience and how they can be helped (Ganong and Coleman, 2004).





The field is generally credited with having transformative effects on the study of risk in children and families (Maston and Monn, 2015). Led by theorists, researchers and practitioners, a classic research question is articulated by Henry et al (2015: 22): When families face significant risk, what helps them resist, successfully navigate, or recover from the challenges?

Much of the originating and continuing interest lies in resilience of individuals, children especially. In the more long-standing child-oriented literature, the family tends to be treated as a context for human development, a resource and protective (or not) system for the individual family members and sometimes a risk itself (ibid). However, there is a large body of work that seeks to identify the features of resilient families, the resources families call upon during times of stress and the balance of demands and capabilities (inter alia) as defining features of resilient families (Patterson, 1998; Patterson, 2002). Some of this literature has been very strongly systems oriented, influenced especially by general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968), ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and family stress theory (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1988). This systemic focus influenced the understanding of families coping with stress through modelling family-based behaviours and drawing attention especially to family cohesion and family emotional and control systems as contributing to resilience (Maston and Monn, 2015).

There has been a lot of interest also in processes and adjustments over time, so-called 'family adaptation and maladaptation'. The guiding question here was: How do families adapt? The interest in family as a unit in its own right was important here, seen as larger than the behaviours of individual members, and marked out especially by internal relations and characteristics such as the emotional system, the set of meanings applied to particular events and patterns, and the handling of developmental transitions (Henry et al., 2015: 28). This work contributed significantly to the elucidation of protective family strengths, with such factors as positive outlook, accord between family members, communication patterns, financial management and time spent together being identified as important (Black and Lobo, 2008). This literature also investigated specific risks to families, differentiating between what are called vertical risks such as ongoing risks or stressors (including risk statuses such as ethnicity immigrant status, lone parent) and risks in ongoing family interaction patterns (such as poor communication, family violence, addiction) and horizontal risks which are depicted as time-specific disturbances to ongoing family interaction patterns (mental ill-health, family violence, illness, economic stress) (Henry et al., 2015: 29). Above all, perhaps, systemic family therapists redefined the concept of 'normal' and healthy families from those that have no problems to families that are capable of coping and solving problems (Maurović et al., 2020: 339). In the process, it was made clear that families (especially those described as 'dysfunctional') could be helped.

According to Henry and colleagues (2015), scholarship is broadening further with family resilience itself contextualised in multi-level systems. The driving assumption is that many systems interact to shape the course of individual and family development and that resilience is emergent from processes and interactions among interdependent systems (Maston and Monn, 2015). One good example of this kind of approach is a family resilience model developed by Henry and colleagues (2015). They depict family resilience as consisting of four basic elements: the presence of family risk; the presence of factors of a protective nature that facilitate families' ability to restore balance between demand and capabilities after risk; family vulnerability that acts to heighten the potential for significant risks or of risks piling up; short adjustment and long-term adaptation. One very interesting line in the current scholarship is the differentiation between factors that promote family resilience and those that protect against risks. The core differentiation here is that promotive resources are seen to foster competence when risk is not present – facilitating family functioning generally - whereas protective resources foster competence despite or in a context of significant risk.

Some insights from this scholarship can be taken forward.



The first is that there is no singular entity of resilient families. That is, there is no fixed set of attributes that can be identified and no particular type of family that can be pointed to as resilient. The second related point about the family resilience scholarship is that it shies away from determinism regarding outcomes. Families are considered to achieve resilience or be characterised by resilience when they are able to keep going at a satisfactory level or avoid breakdown, especially when faced with trauma or major challenge. Thirdly, the family resilience literature places a strong focus on family adaptation and the associated processes whereby families and individuals can adjust or adapt to the circumstances, especially disruption and crisis. The notions of problem solving and coping have resonance here. Fourthly, resources matter. Although it lays most emphasis on psychological resources and emotional and other aspects of family interaction and functioning, the scholarship recognises that the availability of a range of resources in and to families is important. In this it also highlights protective and promotive factors. Finally, how the resources are used matters greatly, underlining again the importance of agency and also capabilities of individuals and families as resources in their own right and also as influencing outcomes. The family resilience literature, therefore, invites us to turn attention to the resources and processes that contribute to family resilience.

### 1.3 Family Resilience as a Perspective for Policy

The unique contribution of the rEUsilience project is to locate resilience in the intersection between family life, the economic system, especially the labour market, and the state, especially the welfare state. The state, therefore, is critical to the project, and, since it is hardly considered in the family resilience literature, this section thinks through both the contribution of the existing literature and what we know about families as shaped by state policies and states as seeking to shape family behaviour. Its overall purpose is to develop a framework of analysis of this set of relations in the context of family resilience.

To start with, we are convinced by some of the insights from the family resilience literature, especially in identifying resilience in terms of capacities and processes and of it as emergent rather than a singular outcome or type of family situation. For the purposes of this analysis then, family resilience is conceived as, first, agentic process - families having the resources to react to risks and adapt to transitions but also other unforeseen changes – and, second, as outcome that avoids large trade-offs between employment and care and enables family stability and risk avoidance.

What are the significant elements about family and families that play out here, especially from the perspective of families as socio-economic (as well as inter-personal) institutions?

First, although the notion of family evokes stability, families undergo major transitions to the extent that one could say that transition is a normal feature of family life. We refer here especially to life course transitions – the growth and development of children, transition of children through different levels of schooling, transition of relationships and partnerships. These are important in affecting both the family's need for resources and the levels of family resources at any one point in time. There is an associated transition-related factor also which is the capacity for parental employment. As children progress through their development phases, parents' availability for labour market participation is affected, leading to another set of transitions associated with parents' movements into and out of the labour market. It tends to be mothers who are most affected here although fathers are being increasingly drawn into the paid-work/care dynamic by policies specifically targeting their practices.

Broader thinking on family life also opens up the matter of the resources that are necessary for family life. One insight from the rEUsilience and other empirical research with families with low resources is that outcomes are achieved through the availability and use of a range of resources; it follows therefore that resources have to be conceived of as broader than psychological and emotional resources.



In effect, people and families need both material and immaterial resources. The family well-being and poverty literatures reveal the significance of money and support of various types (Daly and Kelly, 2015). In addition, what came across very clearly from the rEUsilience focus groups with families was the importance of sufficient information and skills for families to manage their situation, including cognitive and relational resources, and also how much social and other forms of support they have available.

A further consideration relates to family structure. While it is difficult (and unwise) to be deterministic in this regard, research confirms a patterning in the availability of various types of resources by family structure. Among the structural elements that are crucial is the size of the household. Two outstanding elements here are the number and ages of children and the number of parents. There is research to show that families with larger numbers of children tend to have a higher risk of poverty in most countries (Fusco and Islam, 2020). In addition to family size in terms of number of children, another structural characteristic that is highlighted from this and other research as pivotal for resource capacity is the number of parents in the family. One group that stands out here are parents raising children alone. These tend to be (but are not always) families where the trade-offs between care and paid work are heightened. In a nutshell, they tend to have fewer resources to undertake paid work (and hence secure income) and provide care compared with two-parent families. They may also face other risks, given that the phenomenon of lone parenthood is strongly patterned by gender inequality and disparities of income.

Fourthly, matters of demand for resources in the context of the supply are important. In this regard, it is very important to bear in mind that the family is a care provider, charged with catering especially for care needs associated with immaturity, illness and disability. Families may also have to provide care in the context of old age frailty (although this as a family obligation varies by country and culture). Hence, the capacity for family functioning and resilience will be affected by the level and nature of the demand for care. Whereas the family resilience literature takes this more or less for granted, social and economic policies have long recognised this as a 'problem' with work-life balance policies (amongst others) seeking to support parents' (mainly) ability to care – especially through parenting-related and carers' leaves. Services to help with care are important here too. So, another factor that has to be theorised explicitly as affecting resilience in a family context is the level or intensity of the care need which will serve to determine the scale of the trade-off between paid work and care. Hence, families coping with illness and disability are another risk group from the perspective of policy oriented to familial resilience.

The differentiation between protective and promotive resources has helpful application for developing an analytic framework. It will be recalled that protective factors are depicted as helping families to cope with risk or in situations of risk whereas promotive factors help families to foster competence when risk is either not present or threatening (in other words they are preventive factors). Protective factors lead to a discussion of risks as occasioned by or associated with transitions and the requirement for families to transition as children arrive and mature. As outlined above, transitions are normal in families and so in a resilience context it is important for families to be able to make transitions without them increasing risks and vulnerabilities. A second type of risk situation is when structural and/or experiential factors act to diminish the resources available to cope or manage. Who are these families or, better put, what family situations need to be taken account of when thinking through a risk perspective? For the present purposes, three family situations are considered as foremost in heightening risk: parenting alone, caring for a disabled or ill child, and migration. Turning to promotive factors, the matter of the range and sufficiency of resources available to families, especially those that enhance families' capacities, is to the fore. It is helpful here to think of the resources for family life, centring on support with and for raising children which in turn means parental roles and capacities. As emphasised above, one needs especially to think of resources for family life in a broad manner, as involving material resources but also social and cognitive



resources. As well as being broadly conceived, the recognition that these are built up or depleted over time is important, as is the emphasis on how families can be helped to avoid crises.

For social policy then, the key questions centre on how to help families facing significant risk in the sense of what helps them resist, successfully navigate, or recover from challenges, and how to prevent risks and challenges from either arising or being unmanageable when they do arise? We do not necessarily see these as two separate questions, just like we do not think that a strict separation between protective and promotive resource is either possible or desirable.

There are three broad functions for the state in this, as follows:

- **enabling families to make transitions** – across the life course (maturation of children, parents and grandparents) and between family and employment (being able to manage a changing care and employment mix) – **protective**;
- **compensation for structural and experiential challenges** – especially lone parent families, families with ‘heavy care needs’ and migrant families – **protective**;
- **ensuring sufficient resources being available for family life and well-being**– **promotive**.

Of course, states already undertake these functions and so existing policy needs to be interrogated (the function of the next section of the report). A number of state policies for families become relevant here. They are as follows: income support (offering the resource of money), employment leaves (offering the resource of time to care), ECEC (offering the resources of time and support with child rearing) and other family support services (offering the resources of knowledge and general and particular support with family life).

The following discussion will concentrate on the two sets of protective policies: those enabling transitions and those seen to compensate for risks. The promotive factors and policies – especially general policies for family support - will be the focus of the second deliverable of WP6.

## 2. Policy Review and Cross-national Comparisons

This section turns to policy and is oriented to good practice as identified by the evidence on what elements of policy are considered to work and what is recommended or set out as benchmarks. Its logic of analysis is, first, to consider the evidence about ‘good practice’ and, second, to examine how countries compare in their policies. It follows on from the theoretical framework outlined in the previous section in treating family-based transitions and risks. This sees the analysis consider the main policies oriented to, first, enabling family-based transitions between care and paid work and, second, support for the three types of family situation that have been identified to be at risk from the perspective of resilience (parenting alone, coping with child disability or illness, and migration).

Although used widely, good practice can be problematic and great care needs to be exercised in applying the notion to family policy, for several reasons. The first is that good practice requires a clear specification of desirable outcomes and this is not always possible when it comes to family well-being and family resilience. As we have seen, even the literature on family resilience resists this. In any case, family-related policy rarely sets out specific goals to be achieved (although the EU has set targets in some respects, as will be discussed below). Of course, indicators such as poverty rates or income level are a guide but focusing on family from a resilience perspective requires a close look at family operation and resources that policy provides in these regards. Second, the targeting of family is not always straightforward. For example, commonly-used indicators such as employment participation or health tend to be conceived more as characteristics of individuals rather than families. In any case, they do not say much about the



dynamics involved in key aspects of family functioning, especially the management of family and working lives, and associated decisions, resource use and risks.

On a further point, the goal of the classic good practice literature is to identify successful programmes (often on the basis of extensive research through, for example, randomised control trials which are often conceived as stand-alone intervention). Apart from the fact that this and other types of evaluative research rarely range across programmes and policy areas, the approach itself carries risks in the broader context of policy learning because ‘successful’ programmes are signally shaped by context and this cannot be reproduced across countries. We, therefore, avoid identifying particular programmes as good practice mindful of the complex of factors that contributes to their success, including embeddedness in a particular policy context.

The general approach adopted is to review the evidence, where it exists, for elements or features of policy that the existing research suggests lead to the outcomes intended (a general notion of effectiveness). The analysis is therefore situated on the terrain of what is known to work rather than good practice. However, identifying what is known to work depends on evidence being available. For the five discussions that follow, the available evidence varies. In particular, relatively little is known about services or provisions for families coping with child disability or migrant families. This is true at both cross-national and country levels. The evidence is strongest for parental leaves and ECEC (the two policy types considered here as oriented to supporting family-based transitions). There is some evidence available on the effectiveness of lone parent-related provisions but it, too, needs to be treated with care. Where effectiveness evidence is not available, we take benchmarks or policy recommendations as indicators, relying especially on the EU and the OECD in this regard. But, again, the relative lack of attention to two of the three family situations considered as crucial for resilience has to be borne in mind.

It is to be noted that the subsequent policy reviews concentrate on a number of policy fields treated individually rather than taking the whole spectrum of policies. This is for manageability purposes given space limits especially. The rEUsilience project as a whole is informed by a recognition that the package of policies taken together can be as important as the features of individual policies and that many policies have numerous aims or goals.

The section is organised as follows. The five fields of policy are discussed in turn, each presenting both an outline of the main evidence on what the literature has identified as helping policies to work and a review of existing provisions in the six rEUsilience countries in light of the factors identified as crucial. The latter is intended to reveal the country comparisons in relation to each other but especially in relation to gaps between what is perceived or recommended as good practice and what exists in the countries. The analysis is sometimes outline in nature because of the lack of comparative evidence. In the main the data on provisions are valid for mid-2023 but data scarcity sometimes means that earlier dates are taken with 2019 as the latest year (and 2017 and 2018 in a few exceptional cases). The sources include both international databases and national sources. The evidence on the six countries is mainly presented in appendix tables A1 to A5a.

## **2.1 Supporting Family-based Transitions between Care and Employment**

There are two main policies to consider in this respect: parenting-related leaves and childcare. We are aware that these policies fulfil other functions apart from easing transitions between care and employment but here it is their approach and effectiveness in regard to their transition function that is to the fore.



### 2.1.1 What Works in Parenting-related Leaves?

Parenting-related leaves support parents caring for their newborn (or, more broadly, young child) whilst ensuring their employment. Three types of leave have become the norm across Europe since the mid-1990s, in a policy field that is very vibrant and driven by a work-life balance approach (Daly and Ferragina, 2018). The first two types of leave are maternity and paternity leaves and the third is parental leave. Of these, maternity leave is the most long-standing, deeply institutionalised in most European welfare states as a right of female workers.

Entitlement and other aspects of design are crucial as parents choosing between care and employment are faced with difficult decision-making. The evidence suggests that these decisions are conditional on two things: the design features of the leave and internal family- or couple-related considerations such as parents' relative economic power in the sense of how much each earns and the respective share of their earnings in the family income as a whole (Uzunalioglu, 2023; Valentova, 2024). Family members make decisions based on personal and interpersonal relationships and also societal norms about family roles and responsibilities. The details of the policy design matter hugely in all of this.

A considerable amount is now known about the features of the leave that affect take-up. The literature suggests that four such features have the most significant effect. These are: eligibility criteria (governing who has access), compensation (whether the leave is paid and at what level), length or duration, and flexibility (the respective entitlements of mothers and fathers and the degree of leeway in the use of ECEC).

The eligibility criteria define the degree to which leave is available and hence the inclusiveness of the leaves. Leave is typically contingent on employment characteristics, such as type of contract, social insurance record, or residency status (O'Brien et al., 2020). This can and does lead to exclusions (whether intended or not). **The general perception is that the more inclusive the leaves the better, as inclusiveness serves to increase the number of parents who can claim the entitlement.**

A second criterion is duration or length of leave. Longer leaves, especially if unpaid, are now known to be associated with adverse employment effects for mothers, widening the pay and employment gap between mothers and fathers and between mothers and women without children (Boeckmann et al., 2015; Hook and Paek, 2020). There is also evidence, for example from Germany, suggesting that long parental leaves delay mothers' return to employment (Gangl and Ziefle, 2015). Longer parental leaves for mothers have also been said to lead to more traditional gendered approaches in families (Schober and Zoch, 2019). The causal pathway here is such that, as mothers extend their leaves, their contribution to housework and childcare increases more than that of their partners, reproducing the traditional gendered division of labour. A comparative study based on the EU-LFS found an association between parental leaves that are longer than 9 months and gender segregation in the labour market, leaving women in feminised sectors and men in male-dominated employment sectors (Hook et al., 2022: 8).

The EU has been prescriptive in this regard, setting out clear duration benchmarks for each type of leave. **The recommended duration of maternity leave is a minimum of 14 weeks**, following Directive 92/85, which made paid maternity leave a statutory entitlement for mothers in the EU.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Council Directive 92/85/EEC of 19 October 1992 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding (tenth individual Directive within the meaning of Article 16 (1) of Directive 89/391/EEC) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A31992L0085>



A later directive, Directive 2019/1158<sup>2</sup>, set **the minimum duration of paternity leave as 10 days**. The same directive set **a minimum recommended standard length of parental leave of 4 months**.

Level of remuneration – the third key feature - is hugely important as research has repeatedly demonstrated that financial constraints are the key determinants of parents' leave-taking decisions (Duvander et al., 2022). Another piece of relevant evidence is that parental leave take-up, especially on the part of fathers, tends to be higher in countries with generous compensation. Relative generosity is defined differently. Blum et al. (2023) set the benchmark at 66% of average, pre-leave earnings, a practice followed also now by Eurostat.<sup>3</sup> A related element is the mode of remuneration in the sense of whether it is a percentage of wage replacement or paid at a flat-rate. Research generally indicates that parental leave take-up is higher when the remuneration is provided as a percentage of the previous wage, as opposed to a flat rate payment. Luxembourg offers a telling example. When the compensation was changed from a flat-rate payment to a percentage calculation of previous wage, fathers' uptake of parental leave increased by 20% (Uzunalioglu, 2023).

The final relevant dimension is transferability between parents. This is a relatively recent consideration in Europe as a whole, although the Nordic countries have been active in this regard for a number of decades. It centres crucially on addressing gender inequalities in the leaves, and especially aims to get fathers to take paternity leave and share in parental leave. Policy is moving towards a more blended approach targeting a reduction in the gendered division of leave provision and instituting a more gender-neutral conception. For example, Spain switched to gender-neutral terminology in 2019, and now all parenting-related leaves are known as birth and childcare leave (Meil et al., 2023).

This kind of movement is at root about **flexibility**, which involves not just the chances of parents to share the leaves but also the degree of choice they are given around the timing and other aspects relevant to family-employment organisation. There are many reasons why the degree of flexibility of parenting-related leaves might be important. One is to do with growing flexibility and insecurity in the labour market. A second is to enable the leave better to accord with parents' wishes. Two prime policy levers here have been the **transferability** of leave between the parents and choice around when to take the leave and how to organise it. Non-transferability (or open choice between the parents) was for long the principle governing EU thinking on parental leaving. However, in Directive 2010/18<sup>4</sup>, the EU recommended 1 month of the 4 months of parental leave be non-transferable and the latest update (Directive 2019/1158 which repealed Directive 2010/18), stipulated that **at least 2 of the 4 months of parental leave be transferable**. The EU does not specify any conditions regarding flexibility of leave taking but its discourses emphasise fathers' leave-taking and encourage flexibility in leave taking.

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<sup>2</sup> Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L\\_.2019.188.01.0079.01.ENG](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2019.188.01.0079.01.ENG)

<sup>3</sup> The question of whether 66% constitutes well-paid leave, or what percentage should be considered well-paid leave, remains a topic of ongoing scholarly debate.

<sup>4</sup> Council Directive 2010/18/EU of 8 March 2010 implementing the revised Framework Agreement on parental leave concluded by BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC and repealing Directive 96/34/EC (Text with EEA relevance) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32010L0018>



### 2.1.2 What Is the Comparative Situation in the rEUsilience Countries Regarding Parenting-related Leaves?

The foregoing discussion identified four dimensions of parenting-related leaves as crucial for take-up and meeting parents' needs: eligibility and inclusiveness in terms of the conditions applied; duration; compensation; flexibility. These will be considered in turn with Table A1 in the appendix presenting the detail of provision in the countries.

In relation to eligibility, as wide an access as possible to the leaves is recommended. There are different ways of conceiving of this but the inclusiveness of leaves is a key concept used by the rEUsilience project. At its simplest it describes coverage but is a more profound concept in that it identifies insiders and outsiders and points to the stratification or hierarchies in the system. Looking at practice across countries, three main criteria are used to govern access to leaves: employment conditions; record of social insurance contributions; and citizenship or residence status. Taking employment situation first, the norm across the six countries is for all workers as well as the self-employed to be eligible for the leaves (first set of data rows in Table A1). There are some exceptions in this regard though, with the UK as the most exclusive – there self-employed persons are not eligible for any of the three leaves. In Belgium and Spain, self-employed workers are ineligible for parental leave but eligible for both maternity and paternity leave. Belgium is even more selective regarding parental leave, making it conditional on 12 months of continuous employment in the previous 15 months but it is, on the other hand, the most inclusive in regard to access to maternity leave (making the unemployed eligible also). Apart from these specificities, countries generally apply similar conditions for the three types of leave but maternity leave is the most inclusive in terms of employment-related conditions.

Turning to the second type of conditionality - social insurance record - Poland is the most inclusive in that it applies no such conditions to any of the three leaves. Sweden is the next most inclusive in granting both maternity and paternity leave to those entitled regardless of their social insurance record. Belgium, too, tends to be inclusive with social insurance contributions required only for some non-citizens. The situation in Spain is also noteworthy in that while, a record of 6 months of insurance contributions is required for both maternity and paternity leaves, the period to which this is applied is 7 years before the start of maternity leave, giving the claimant a higher chance of being eligible. Croatia and the UK apply the strictest conditions and generally use the same conditions across all 3 types of leave requiring a contribution record of either 6 months in the case of Croatia or a minimum of 9.5 months in the UK. There is a pattern for countries to apply more restrictive conditions to parental leave as compared with maternity or paternity leaves (although Croatia and Poland might be considered exceptions here). In Sweden, claimant parents must have an income (with insurance) minimum of SEK240 per day for 240 consecutive days preceding their parental leave; Belgium requires the claimants to have a minimum of 12 months of continuous employment in the 15 months preceding the start of parental leave. The UK's rules are more restrictive again, where 12 months of continuous employment with the same employer is required before one qualifies for parental leave. This also applies to the UK's maternity and paternity leave, meaning that a job change prior to pregnancy and childbirth would render the parent ineligible. In general, citizenship status – the third criterion - is not used for the leaves in any country apart from Croatia where farmers, unemployed, and those on non-traditional employment contracts must have a minimum of 3 years of residency to be eligible for all three leaves. The minimum residency requirement increases to 5 years if the claimant is inactive or a student.

Duration of leave is another criterion and, as outlined earlier, the EU has set benchmarks for the minimum duration of each type of leave. Looking at the cross-country evidence (Table 1), it is clear first of all that all the countries exceed the EU Directive 92/85 benchmark of 14 weeks of maternity leave. The UK has the longest duration at 52 weeks, but 19 weeks are unpaid. Croatia and Poland grant the longest paid





maternity leave. Sweden has an arrangement that is unusual in the current comparative context in that maternity leave is a two-week-long compulsory leave after which each parent is entitled to 240 days of parental leave (of which 90 days are allocated exclusively to mothers). The roots of this are in an interpretation of gender equality as gender neutrality. Turning to paternity leave, the general pattern is for countries to be either in line with the recommended minimum of 2 weeks (Croatia, Poland and the UK) or in excess of it (by 2 weeks in Belgium and a massive 14 weeks in Spain, all of which is paid and 6 weeks are compulsory). Parental leave shows more variation and the comparisons with the EU benchmarks become more complicated. Spain and the UK, for instance, well exceed the recommended 4 months (or 17.2 weeks) but none of the parental leave is paid in either country. Sweden and Poland stand out as the most generous countries, each well in excess of the recommended duration with 154.8 and 41 weeks respectively of paid parental leave. Belgium and Croatia are at the EU benchmark.

**Table 1 Gap Between EU Stipulated Duration of Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave and National Provision**

	Belgium	Croatia	Poland	Spain	Sweden*	UK
Maternity leave (weeks in excess of the benchmark of 14 weeks)	+1	+11.8	+6	+2	+0.8	+38
Of which paid:	All	All	All	All		33 of the 52 weeks
Paternity leave (weeks in excess of the benchmark of 2 weeks)	+2	-	-	+14	+12.8	-
Of which paid:	All	All	All	All		All
Parental leave (weeks in excess of the benchmark of 17.2 weeks)	-	-	+23.8	+137.6	+ 25.8	+0.8
Of which paid:	All	All	All	None	All	None
*Note on Sweden: Formal terminology differs from that of the other countries. Maternity and paternity leaves are officially 2 weeks each. However, mother-only and father-only leave are differentiated under parental leave (90 days each), making a total of 14.8 weeks for mothers and 14.8 weeks for fathers.						

Turning to remuneration level, as Table A1 shows, Croatia recompenses the worker's full wage for all three leaves and Spain does so for both maternity and paternity leave (but it imposes a ceiling and recall also that Spain offers no paid parental leave). Poland offers full recompense only for paternity leave. All the other countries recompense a percentage of the wage. Of these, Sweden applies a 78% wage replacement rate for all three leaves; Poland replaces around 75% for maternity and parental leaves whereas Belgium uses a replacement rate of between 75% for both maternity and paternity leave (with an upper ceiling for both at some €171 a day) and a flat rate payment (€978 a month) for parental leave. The UK relies largely on flat-rate payments for maternity and paternity leave (and has no paid parental leave). This payment arrangement is known to make the leave less attractive, especially to fathers. Of all these countries, the UK uses flat-rate payments the most, applying them for both maternity and maternity leave (although a 90% wage replacement formula is used for the first 6 weeks of the former). In addition, the flat-rate payment is a comparatively low £172.48 a week.

When it comes to the final criterion – flexibility – two factors are relevant. The first is transferability of leave between parents. The non-transferability component ordains that each parent holds the right to leave and treats each parent as equally responsible for leave-taking. The country data show that the non-transferability principle is absolute in regard to paternity leave - none of the six countries allows paternity leave to be transferred, confirming it as a right of fathers only (Table A1).



The situation is different (and more complex) for the other two leaves. To take the example of maternity leave first, Croatia, Poland and the UK offer some form of transferability between parents as opposed to Belgium, Spain and Sweden which designate maternity leave solely for mothers. In the countries that allow transferability, the usual pattern is for a certain number of weeks to be designated as compulsory for mothers allowing the remainder to be transferred. Turning to parental leave, transferability is more widespread, although Belgium, Spain and the UK have non-transferable parental leaves. Of the other three countries, Croatia allows 2 of the 4 months to be transferred from one parent to the other, in accord with Directive 2019/18. Poland is also in accord with the EU Directive but has a different arrangement: 23 weeks are defined as a family entitlement and 18 weeks as an individual entitlement, of which each parent has 9 non-transferable weeks. In Sweden, each parent has 90 days on a non-transferable basis (also known as mothers' quota and fathers' quota), and the remaining 150 days of the total 240 for each parent can be transferred between them.

A second important dimension of flexibility is the freedom to decide the timing and form of the leave (Table A1 final row). Generalising most widely, the typical approach is to allow the parents decide the start of leave. In regard to maternity leave, for example, mothers have most choice in Belgium, Spain and the UK. They are given a window of opportunity to decide when to commence their leaves, ranging from up to 6 weeks before the estimated date of delivery in Belgium and 11 in the UK. Spain takes a different approach and offers 10 weeks of the 16 weeks of maternity leave to be taken flexibly within a year. Mothers can spread these 10 weeks over a period of time, or use it in parts. Paternity leave is the most flexible of the 3 leaves, apart from in the UK where fathers have no flexibility. Belgium, for example, allows fathers to take paternity leave at any time during the first 4 months after childbirth and self-employed fathers (or second parents) can also take it in part-time mode. In Croatia, paternity leave can be taken at any time until the child reaches 6 months of age and in Poland at any time within 12 months after childbirth, which is the same in Spain for 10 weeks of the total of 16 weeks of paternity leave. In Sweden, fathers can use their leave anytime during the first 60 days after childbirth. Parental leave is the most flexible type of leave and parents in all the countries are allowed a range of options. Belgium offers the widest choice, allowing parents to take their leave in blocks or spread over a period of time before their child reaches the age of 12. Similarly, in Croatia, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the UK, claimant parents can take their parental leave in one block, in parts or part-time. However, the UK applies the restriction of a maximum of 4 weeks per year of the (unpaid) 18 weeks in all any time before their child reaches the age of 18.

Looked at as a whole, it would be erroneous to represent the situation as either uniform or optimum in enabling parental transitions between care and employment. There are childcare gaps in every country for example apart from Sweden for the youngest age group and the leave situation and conditions are complex and generally not aligned well with each other. While maternity leave is the most standardised and institutionalised, the fine print and details of the other two leaves vary widely although in terms of duration the countries follow the standards as set out in the EU legislative frameworks. Looking at parenting-related leaves as a whole, the UK is the country with the most restrictive approach with Poland and Sweden as the most inclusive in general. And looking across the three types of leave, parental leave has the most restrictive conditions and shows the most cross-country variation. Different aspects of leave provision (regardless of the type of leave) appear to be independent of one another. In other words, wide eligibility does not equate with a well-paid leave or vice versa. Furthermore, with diverse eligibility criteria in place, especially when certain workers or types of work are excluded or conditions relating to continuous insurance or employment with the same employer are applied, one can question which and whose transitions between care and employment are supported. In essence, these leaves become realisable only by a sector of parents who are in more secure employment positions with possibly better earning power, rendering them a limited good.



### 2.1.3 What Works in ECEC?

ECEC is also a prominent concern of the EU and member countries. For over 20 years now, the EU has set specific targets for young children engaging with ECEC outside the home (the so-called Barcelona targets) (European Council, 2002). There is a double rationale and aim here – participation in ECEC is seen as crucial for child development but also, and especially, as enabling parental transition between family and labour market. The 2013 Commission Recommendation on investing in children (European Commission, 2013), for example, makes explicit links between supporting parents’ participation in the labour market and children’s access to ECEC. The latest iteration of the targets for participation in ECEC were set out in the European Care Strategy of 2022 which targets **at least 45% of children under the age of 3 and at least 96% of those between 3 and compulsory schooling age participating in ECEC by 2030** (European Commission, 2022). With these supranational ambitions, European nations have become forerunners in the provision of ECEC and ECEC continues to be a vital policy to support transitions between caregiving and employment (OECD, 2018).

As with parental leave and other provisions, the nature of the provisions and the eligibility conditions determine access and take-up. The literature highlights the following characteristics of ECEC as critical: availability, affordability, accessibility, quality and flexibility (Yerkes and Javornik, 2018). These are rather general characteristics which are not easily separable from each other, however. We suggest that they hinge upon three underpinning factors: funding, accessibility and quality.

There are different aspects of funding that matter, including level, public/private source and mode of funding.

To take the level of funding first, there is no widely-agreed benchmark regarding the level of expenditure but in 1996 the European Commission Network on Childcare recommended to European countries **an investment level of at least 1% of GDP in ECEC** (OECD, 2006: 105) and in 2013 the ILO also mentioned this as a benchmark to ensure parity between ECEC and primary education (ILO, 2013). As well as the level of expenditure, the public share of it is also important as higher public expenditure has been found to be generally associated with higher participation rates (OECD, 2006; Pavolini and Van Lancker, 2018). The sustainability of funding is also important. The OECD has reported that, without sustained public funding (either directly for services or indirectly through parent subsidies), ECEC services tend to be patchy and of poor quality in all but the more affluent neighbourhoods (OECD, 2006: 118).

Thinking further about the composition of funding, **the public/private distribution** is also important. **The evidence on impact favours public funding.** The OECD has been very vocal about this and why it is important. The reviews it has undertaken<sup>5</sup> indicate that “direct public funding of services brings, in the majority of countries reviewed, more effective control, advantages of scale, better national quality, more effective training for educators and a higher degree of equity in access and participation than consumer subsidy models” (OECD, 2006: 114). While a funding mix of public and private seems to be the norm, there is no definitive conclusion in the literature about the optimum public/private division.

When it comes to provision, the existing evidence indicates that **public provision is generally associated with better outcomes.** One reason is that when provision is organised on a public basis, it is made a public responsibility and tends to lead to legislation being enacted to set a standard for quality (OECD, 2006). A second causal link is related to accessibility and, in particular, whether children and parents from low-resourced backgrounds have effective access. According to a meta-analysis of 30 studies conducted between 2005 and 2017 using experimental designs, public provision generates better child outcomes

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<sup>5</sup> On the following 17 countries: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Korea, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, UK and USA.



than private or mixed provision (Van Huizen and Plantenga, 2018). Part of the reason for this is that public provision of services is more effective in enabling a larger group of children to participate in ECEC (OECD, 2006; Van Lancker and Ghysels, 2016). But there is also evidence to suggest that, while increased spending positively affects availability, it does not per se directly lead to the eradication of inequalities in participation – the so-called Matthew effects (ME) whereby higher-income population sectors benefit more from public provision than low-income sectors (Van Lancker, 2018a). Supply is vitally important according to Pavolini and Van Lancker (2018). They argue that: “Structural constraints in childcare provision matter everywhere and tend to limit the uptake of childcare, especially for children growing up in disadvantaged circumstances. In contrast, dominant cultural norms on motherhood are a less important predictor of the ME in childcare use” (Pavolini and Van Lancker, 2018: 891).

Another aspect of availability and indeed accessibility is whether children **have a guarantee of a place and the age at which that comes into effect**. Guarantees have featured increasingly in national policies in relation to children’s access to ECEC in recent years (Daly, 2020) and the EU has started to institutionalise this through the Child Guarantee (in which free access to ECEC for children who are considered ‘disadvantaged’ is one of the pillars) (European Commission, 2021).

Affordability is crucial for access to ECEC. The OECD argues for universal free access especially in the context of addressing existing inequalities. Others, too, have made similar arguments, relying on evidence of the beneficial relationship between public spending and universalism in provision in terms of eligibility conditions (and hence availability). For example, a systematic review and meta-analysis of evidence on ECEC (from Argentina, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Norway, Spain, UK (England) and the USA) concluded that universal ECEC provision especially benefits children growing up in disadvantaged situations (Schmutz, 2024). Research based on the UK’s Millennium Cohort Study also supports this argument by showing that universal ECEC provision can potentially reduce inequalities in children’s socioeconomic and developmental outcomes (Green et al., 2021). While access to affordable and quality childcare is a policy recommendation put forward as part of the Barcelona Targets for 2030, there is no set benchmark regarding the degree of financial support that should be offered to families (Social Protection Committee, 2024). **The amount of free hours (if any) and starting age for this are vital considerations as are the fees paid** (Stewart and Waldfogel, 2017).

Thinking from the perspective of parents especially, one concept and measure that has become popular in recent years is that of **the childcare gap**. This is typically calculated as the gap (if any) between the end of parenting-related leaves and the beginning of a guaranteed place in ECEC. This gap can be very telling in understanding how countries approach early years support for families and the extent to which families are left to themselves to arrange care for young children. It is a classic example of the degree of complementarity between policy fields. As mentioned, Eurostat now uses this measure for some of its key statistics, calculating well-paid leave as 66% of average earnings or above.<sup>6</sup> A notable example in this regard is the Nordic countries, especially Iceland and Sweden, which arrange provisions such that no gap exists between publicly-provided and funded ECEC services and parenting-related leaves (Gupta et al., 2014).

Quality is another essential piece of the ECEC jigsaw. This has featured strongly as a goal especially for the EU and the OECD. Quality has many elements (OECD, 2006) but is a function specially of the staff/child ratio, the educational standards for staff and working conditions (Van Huizen and Plantenga, 2018). **While there is no consensus on the ideal staff-child ratio, the lower the ratio the better the quality** (OECD, 2015; 2017). A low staff-child ratio is argued to be especially beneficial for children from more disadvantaged backgrounds. Turning to the second dimension, there is no benchmark that specifies the

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<sup>6</sup> See [https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-11/ECEC\\_Access\\_factsheet\\_0.pdf](https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-11/ECEC_Access_factsheet_0.pdf)



minimum level of qualifications although the Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems emphasises the importance of staff qualifications, how staff are crucial for quality in ECEC and that qualification should be supported (Council of the European Union, 2019). A further element of quality is **flexibility, in terms for example of whether services have long opening hours and allow children to attend at the hours that suit their parents**. The need for flexibility in ECEC has grown as labour markets have evolved towards more flexible working schedules, especially with the rise of non-standard employment modalities (Simon et al., 2017). However, there is little evidence on either the extent or impact of flexibility.

#### 2.1.4 What Is the Comparative Situation in the rEUsilience Countries Regarding ECEC?

Taking enrolment rates first, as of 2022, all the countries were over the EU benchmark for enrolment in ECEC for children aged up to 3 years and four of them (Belgium, Spain, Sweden and the UK) were over the benchmark for children aged between 3 and school age.

**Table 2** Gap Between the EU Targets on ECEC and National Enrolment Levels for Children aged 0-3 and 3 to School Age

% of age group enrolled in excess of/below the benchmark	Belgium	Croatia	Poland	Spain	Sweden	UK
0-3 (benchmark 45%)	+5.7	+14.8	+6	+26.4	+30.8	+10.9
3 to compulsory school (benchmark 96%)	+2.3	-12.5	-3.6	+0.7	+0.1	+4

Source: Derived from Table A2.

With regard to expenditure level, as mentioned the recommendation is for expenditure in the range of 1% of GDP. The second row of Table A2 – which presents the OECD information for expenditure on both ECEC and pre-primary provision for 2019 or latest year – makes clear that only Sweden (at 1.6%) is ahead of that target. The next closest is Belgium (at 0.8%) followed by Poland (0.6%) and Spain and the UK (each with an expenditure level of 0.5%). Data are not available for Croatia.

Another important funding-related criterion is the breakdown between public and private expenditure (in the latter regard Eurostat distinguishes between the non-educational private sector (which is defined by Eurostat as including households, enterprises, non-profit organisations and religious institutions<sup>7</sup>) and international organisations). The most reliable data here is for provision for children from 3 years until school age (what Eurostat calls ‘early childhood education’). The third row of data in Table A2 makes clear that Sweden is the only country of the six to have a fully publicly-funded system. Belgium comes close with 97% government funding and the UK is next with 94%. Croatia is the country with the most reliance on non-governmental funding, nearly one-third of its funding coming from the non-educational private sector and some 2% from international organisations. In both Poland and Spain, around one-fifth of the expenditure on ECEC derives from non-governmental sources.

This does not translate in any simple way to the public/private distribution of service provision (as measured by the distribution of pupils in different types of provision), however (fourth row of Table A2). While Sweden stands out here again with 81% of the cohort (3 to school age) in public as against private provision, Croatia is actually the country with a marginally higher proportion of public provision (82%). Poland follows next with 72%, followed by Spain with 64% and Belgium with 47% and the UK with 41%.

<sup>7</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Educational\\_expenditure\\_statistics#Overall\\_educational\\_expenditure](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Educational_expenditure_statistics#Overall_educational_expenditure)



Clearly, there is a difference between funding and provision; all the countries have some public/private split but this is greatest in the UK where the share of publicly-provided ECEC is smallest. The reason is that in England and the UK as a whole provision is dominated by subsidies for both service providers and families (Lloyd, 2020). Demand-side subsidies take the form of childcare vouchers or tax credits. However, a demand-side approach has been said to be problematic due to the high reliance on private provision which in turn leads to discrepancies in the supply of ECEC and hence access (Lloyd and Penn, 2010; Van Lancker, 2018a).

There is no cross-national information available to assess how the public/private split relates to socio-economic divisions in take-up.

Moving on to measures that enable accessibility, an insightful indicator is the age at which the child is guaranteed a place in ECEC (the fifth row in Table A2). All six countries have an ECEC guarantee in place but there is great variation in the age at which the guarantee starts. It is lowest in Sweden (at around 1 year of age) but in this Sweden is widely adrift of the other countries where some time around the age of 3 years is usually when the guarantee starts, apart from Croatia where it is 6 years of age (effectively the last year before compulsory schooling). This, of course, leads to gaps between when parental leave ends and guaranteed access to childcare begins. The sixth row in Table A2 presents the gap<sup>8</sup> with well-paid leave (based on the 66% benchmark) and when legal entitlement to ECEC starts and compulsory ECEC. Sweden again stands out in a positive light in that the period of relatively well-paid leave overlaps by one month with the age at which the child has a legal entitlement to ECEC. The other countries are as follows: UK has the next smallest gap – with nearly 2 years between when well-paid leave ends and a place in ECEC is guaranteed, Poland has a gap of 2 years, Belgium of 2.2 years and Spain 2.5 years (no information is available on Croatia). The gap is far bigger when the comparison is made between the end of well-paid leave and the onset of compulsory ECEC (the second set of data in the sixth row of Table A1). This is an indirect measure of school age also because the UK has the shortest gap of any country (2.9 years) but that is mainly because children can start school in September after their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday, with the September after their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday the age for compulsory schooling. All the other countries – even Sweden – have gaps in the region of 5 years.

A root difference is in regard to the underlying philosophy about inclusiveness which can be interpreted in terms of universalism or targeting as regards access and fees. A number of indicators relevant to this are reproduced in Table A2. In particular, it presents the number of free hours per week (the seventh row), starting age for free ECEC (the eighth row), and the net ECEC costs for two-parent families as a percentage of their household income (the ninth row). When it comes to the number of free hours, Croatia again comes out as the country with the least access, averaging only some 4-7 hours a week per child. The maximum is 25 hours of free childcare a week (offered in both Poland and Spain) followed closely by Belgium (23 hours). Sweden and the UK offer 15 hours of free ECEC per week. The starting age at which ECEC is free of charge ranges from 2 in UK to 6 in Croatia. These differences reflect different national systems of provision which in turn reflect national value systems and the history of provision and also what is defined as ECEC in the country (Scheiwe and Willekens, 2009). The final set of data here relates to the net childcare costs of full-time, centre-based care for two-parent families. The most striking case here is for the UK where nearly a quarter of income goes on ECEC (compared to Belgium which at 12% is the next

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<sup>8</sup> As defined by Eurostat, the ECEC gap is the difference between the maximum length of well-paid leave and the earliest start of a universal place guarantee in ECEC (legal entitlement or compulsory ECEC). When there is no guaranteed place in ECEC, the gap is calculated until the start of compulsory primary education. Most of the data on well-paid leave comes from the International Network on Leave Policies & Research and refers to April 2022. It includes post-natal maternity, paternity, and parental leaves. Well-paid means earnings-related payment at 66% of earnings or above. Eurostat converts the total amount of 'well-paid' leave available to parents expressed in child's age in months (Koslowski et al., 2022: 53-58) to years dividing the number by 12.



most expensive country). In the other countries (apart from Croatia for which no data is available) families pay around 6% of their net income on ECEC.

The final criterion relates to quality. Two indicators are used for this. The first is the qualification levels of ECEC staff and, in particular, the necessary minimum qualification level. As the penultimate row of Table A2 shows, this differs for ECEC provision for the under 3s as against those between 3 and school age. The qualification is higher for the latter in all countries. Croatia and Sweden set the highest standard in relation to provision for the younger age group, both requiring a bachelor's level degree for ECEC. The qualification level for all the other four countries for this level of ECEC is below the bachelor's degree standard, with the UK having the lowest standard with no compulsory minimum qualification level. Looking at provision for the older age group, Poland sets the highest standards requiring a masters level qualification whereas all the others again with the exception of the UK require a bachelor's degree.

The second indicator of quality staff/student ratio but in this regard there is evidence available only for Sweden and the UK, where the ratios in ECEC are 5.8 and 2.7 respectively.

Overall, variation is again very noticeable. But apart from Sweden, countries are spending less than recommended on ECEC and while funding and public provision dominate for the older age group (i.e., from age 3 to school age) only in Sweden is public provision and funding of ECEC the norm. This makes for gaps and inequalities in access to ECEC. One very noticeable finding as in regard to what is called the childcare gap, that is the period between the end of well-paid leave and the onset of an ECEC guarantee, when parents have to make their own childcare arrangements. Sweden offers the most help and choice to parents in this regard by having no childcare cap for children of one-year old. All the other countries force trade-offs on parents, making the transition from family to paid work a very individualised decision. Stratifications are again evident in ECEC, not just in relation to which children and families get access but also across countries. The role of established norms is clear, in that the longer-established public responsibility for pre-school education sees the state more actively engaged in provision.

The discussion now turns to the second part of the analysis which focuses on the three types of family situation that the theoretical framework identifies as requiring particular measures to compensate for structural and/or experiential challenges.

## 2.2 Supporting Particular Family Situations

The discussion will focus in turn on lone parenthood, the presence of child disability or serious illness and families with a migration background.

### 2.2.1 What Works in Provision for Lone-Parent Families?

The supports and services that matter for families generally also matter for lone-parent families. Not all lone-parent families are the same of course – one differentiation that is crucial is that between female- and male-headed lone-parent families. Scholars have conceptualised the situation facing lone-parent families in terms of a triple bind: inadequate resources, employment challenges and policies that do not adequately support their well-being (Nieuwenhuis and Maldonado, 2018). As with other families then, a range of measures including financial support, employment leave and ECEC come into play for lone parents. Arguably, the policy provision matters even more for them, for at least two reasons. First, lone parenthood is a situation in which a range of factors assert themselves and intersect, in particular, gender and socio-economic status, to elevate the possibility of disadvantage. The gender division is very strong amongst these factors, with around 85% of lone-parent families headed by a woman in the EU and UK (Nieuwenhuis, 2020). Second, lone-parent families – especially when they are headed by a woman – tend



to be more dependent on state support to avoid deprivation than families with children as a whole (Calegari et al., 2024). They are especially economically vulnerable.

That said, a considerable amount of what we know about the effectiveness of policies comes from research on two-parent families. Nieuwenhuis (2020: 18) makes an important point when he says that policies can be inadequate for lone parents either because they fail to sufficiently address their generally disadvantaged situation or because they indirectly contribute to their disadvantage. Examples of the latter include policies that promote strong breadwinner models which provide less support to families in general (including lone-parent households) to combine work and care responsibilities. Looking at family policy as a whole, the degree to which lone-parent families are often 'downstream' or secondary in family policy is striking; in other words policy is not built around them specifically but rather adjusted for their circumstances (if such adjustments are made at all).

One option for countries is to offer additional financial support to lone-parent families, in the sense of **an income supplement that recognises the specific situation of lone-parent families** (Bernardi et al., 2018). There is strong support for a dual system of financial supports (Aerts et al., 2022; Morissens, 2018; Van Lancker and Van Mechelen, 2015). Whether known as targeting within universalism or targeted universalism, the most effective financial support approach for families generally is said to be an allowance for children paid universally (that is, directed to all families with dependent children) combined with specific additional benefits targeted to lone parents (among other groups) (Aerts et al., 2022). Part of the reason here is that child benefit packages for those on the lowest incomes tend to be higher in countries with universal cash benefits. So, there is an issue about the mode and level of income support offered to all families and lone-parent families.

The research on lone-parent families also highlights the significance of child support (also known as 'child maintenance') - a policy that enforces the financial responsibilities of the non-resident parent (most usually the father) for their children. However, the evidence suggests varying levels of effectiveness, resulting especially from the way the payment is organised and whether it is guaranteed. The **existence and design of child support policies** is crucial, especially given the evidence on enhanced effectiveness when public institutions give these payments in advance on behalf of the defaulting parent (Gornick and Smeeding, 2018). An additional issue is that child support is often calculated on incorrect assumptions and that its implementation and administration have become increasingly complex (Nieuwenhuis, 2020).

Turning to parenting-related leaves, these leaves may even matter more for lone parents given that many of them do not have a second parent to share the care. Eligibility and conditions of access come to the fore again. **A key question, then, is around the equivalence between the entitlements of lone parents and two-parent families in regard to leave.** Given that one strong line of development in parenting-related leaves is towards non-transferability of leaves between parents (as indicated earlier), the question has to be posed of whether lone parents are disadvantaged by this. A benchmark has not been set on this but looking at it in practice across different countries will indicate its significance.

Bartova et al. (2022), in research that identified individual-level entitlements to parental leave for 27 European countries and used this to test the effect of individual-level eligibility for different types of parental leave on the employment outcomes and working hours of lone mothers with children under 6 years, report that, first, **eligibility for leave matters for employment by these women and, second, the existence of a payment matters**, even if the benefits are flat-rate, in that for lone mothers who were not working before childbirth a payment is associated with a higher probability of employment and more working hours when their children are young. The more generous the benefit and the longer the leave, the stronger the effect. They conclude from this that parental leave designed with economically inactive mothers in mind may be beneficial for their labour market activity later on.





The evidence also indicates that ECEC is among the most important measures for lone-parent families; Van Lancker's work (2018b) has suggested that the share of lone mothers using formal childcare is roughly similar to that of partnered mothers in most EU countries. **Access and cost of ECEC** can be, however, issues for lone parents and the comparison with two-parent families is another important element of equivalence. Nieuwenhuis (2020: 47) presents data to show that in a number of countries lone parents pay a larger proportion of their income on childcare compared to otherwise similar two-parent families.

### 2.2.2 What is the Comparative Situation Regarding Provision for Lone-parent Families in the rEUsilience Countries?

To open the discussion, Table A3 presents some background statistics on the situation regarding lone-parent families in the six countries. It first shows the proportion of children living in a lone-parent family (no data is available for Croatia). On average, nearly a quarter of children are being reared in this family situation in both Belgium and the UK, compared to 1 in 10 in Poland. Spain and Sweden are roughly similar at 15% and 19% respectively. Looking at the poverty rates, the next set of data in the table shows that not only do lone-parent families have a high risk of poverty - with poverty rates between 22% in Poland and 43% in Spain - but the poverty rates of these families far exceed those of two-parent families in all countries. In Poland which has the lowest difference the risk of poverty in lone-parent families is over double that of two-parent families. A slightly greater disparity obtains in Spain. It is in Belgium that these families are most disadvantaged compared to two-parent families - with respective poverty rates of 30% and 4.6%. The UK too, though, has a very large disparity – with lone parents' poverty rate some 5 times that of two-parent families.

The third row in Table A3 presents figures on lone parents' employment status, underlining the complex relationship between lone parenthood and employment. Up to a third of such parents are not in paid work in Belgium, Poland, Spain and the UK. Croatia and Sweden are exceptional in the comparison with only around 18% of these parents outside the labour market and around three-quarters of lone parents in both of these countries in full-time employment. Lone parents in these countries are clearly carers and engaged full-time in paid work. In the other countries, part time employment is the dominant employment form for lone-parent families.

Turning to the policies in place, starting with whether these families receive additional child financial support, two countries – Croatia and Poland – have such additional supports built into their family benefit system. The Polish Family Allowance pays a benefit per child of lone parents that is more than double that paid for other children; Croatia's means-tested child allowance is offered at a different rate according to the type of family with the children of lone parents receiving a higher benefit. Turning to Belgium, Flanders used to pay additional benefits for lone parents with children through its Social Allowance but this has been discontinued for children born after the end of 2018. The UK child benefit system grants no additional child benefits for lone-parent families – although when such families qualify for the minimum income support (Universal Credit) their lone-parent situation is taken into account (but it should be noted that a two-child limit is applied to support for all families whereby no support is paid for the third or any subsequent child). Neither Spain nor Sweden grants extra child payments for lone-parent families.

Turning to child support, it can be seen that advancing such support is a widespread policy with all countries except the UK having this in place. However, outcome evidence shows that receipt varies widely and cannot be read off from the stated conditions (Hakovirta and Mesiäislehto, 2022). In terms of the six countries included in this study, Poland has the highest rate of receipt (at over 50%), followed by Sweden and Belgium (at around 40%), Spain (at 37%) with the UK bringing up the rear (at 27%) (Croatia was not included). Examination of the amounts mandated officially also highlights variation. Research by Hakovirta et al (2022) - using a vignette model to calculate amounts - indicates that, of the four rEUsilience countries



for which data are available, the mandated amounts of child support (calculated for a median-income family) are lowest in Sweden and highest in Spain (Catalonia). Belgium and the UK are mid-way between these two poles. To put substance on what families actually receive, data from the EU-SILC from 2017–2018 show mean annual amounts ranging from between \$2,000 and \$5,000 in Belgium, Spain and Sweden and around or less than \$2,000 in the UK (Hakovirta and Mesiäislehto, 2022).

Looking at parenting-related leave (the sixth row in Table A3), Sweden is the only country that has fully equivalent leave for lone-parent and two-parent families, allowing the parent with custody to take all of the leave as desired. Croatia and UK are at the other end of the spectrum in that their parenting-related leaves make no extra allowances for lone parents or attempt equivalence. Poland is closest to Sweden in recognising that lone parents might need longer leave, offering a flat-rate allowance for an additional 12 months. Spain gives an additional 14 days of maternity allowance while Belgium provides lone parents with a significant increase in the value of the parental leave benefit (with an additional 68% of the usual leave compensation) but no longer leave duration.

The entitlement conditions matter greatly. The table below, based on an individual calculation of entitlement to parental leave and applied to a sample of lone mothers from EU-SILC data (from 2013 to 2019) for all the rEUsilience countries except the UK, once again underlines how hard it can be for some parents to qualify for leave. These data indicate that in Belgium, Poland and Spain between a fifth and a quarter of lone mothers may be ineligible for parental leave. In contrast, the data for Croatia and Sweden indicate no ineligibility. The table also shows the comparative prevalence of entitlement to flat-rate versus income-replacement benefits, with quite widespread variation in this regard across countries (albeit reflecting general variation in the provisions). Examining the impact of features of the leave that make a difference (in aggregate models) shows a negative association between parental leave generosity and the likelihood of employment, whereby across countries a 10% increase in replacement rates is associated with about a 1% decline in the likelihood of employment (ibid).

**Table 3 Estimations of Lone Mothers’ Eligibility for Parental Leave (2013-2019)**

	Belgium	Croatia	Poland	Spain	Sweden	UK
Ineligible	25.4%	-	22%	18.6%	-	Not available
Income-related benefit	-	84.5%	38.2%	2.3%	74.4%	Not available
Flat rate benefit	74.6%	15.5%	39.8%	-	25.6%	Not available
Unpaid leave	-	-	-	79%	-	Not available

Source: Bartova et al., 2022.

Looking at ECEC, the penultimate row in Table A3 shows that only Belgium gives lone parents priority for access to childcare, identifying them as one of a number of priority groups. It is safe to say, therefore, that ECEC is not considered a priority service for lone parents. Access is one factor but cost is another. The final row presents what lone parents pay from their net income on full-time, centre-based childcare compared to two-parent families. It shows that they pay more in Poland and Spain but in the other countries significantly less, especially in the UK. Sweden is the only country where the costs are equivalent for the two types of families. These data, too, need to be treated with care as they do not take account of the amount of ECEC used by families which will affect the costs, of course.

Looking at provisions as a whole, the matter of equivalence between the treatment of lone parents and that of two-parent family emerges as a primary issue. There is no country that has full equivalence,



although Sweden does approach this in regard to the use of parenting-related leaves. The available data suggests that quite significant numbers of lone parents are excluded from leaves in each country except Sweden (the data is not available for the UK). Only two countries give extra financial support to lone-parent families through their child benefit systems (Croatia and Poland) and while all countries have provisions in place to advance child support payments the evidence raises doubts about the effectiveness of these in practice. Nieuwenhuis (2020) has recommended enhancing the application of joint physical custody for separated parents, removing administrative and bureaucratic barriers that can impede the obtainment of benefits, and expanding joint legal custody.

### 2.2.3 What Works for Families with a Child with a Disability?

Illness or disability of a child is another situation that affects family resilience. When children have high care needs, parents will be challenged both to provide care and participate in the labour market. This has consequences. Recent EU-wide research has concluded that: “Families with children with disabilities tend to be poorer than other families, have less access to good-quality services, more difficulty in securing employment, and fewer opportunities to develop their social networks” (Hunt, 2019: 7). The evidence within and across countries is scarce, however; the situation of these children and families is often unknown with large evidence gaps in regard to both families’ actual situation and what supports, especially in the form of services, are available to them. These families are in many respects a hidden population. This is true also for knowledge about policies. A recent EU-wide review concluded that the policies aimed at providing and/or regulating services are mostly silent on children with disabilities or envision only the minimum requirements, such as accessibility of public infrastructure or waiving of fees for services (ibid). Policy attention has been particularly focused on the long-standing structural issues of de-institutionalisation.

The trend in policy over time is for greater recognition of the needs of these families accompanied by a second trend which is greater recognition and emphasis on rights for the person with the disability, whether child or adult. At EU level, the rights of children has been a strong line of policy recommendation. The European Child Guarantee is especially important in this context – it identifies categories of children that should be given priority for policy purposes and ordains that the following five policy measures are key to addressing child poverty and disadvantage: free early ECEC, free education, adequate nutrition, decent housing and free health care (European Commission, 2021). For the purposes of the Guarantee, children with disabilities have been made one of four target groups (along with children in precarious family situations, children residing in institutions and children of recent migrants and refugees). The orientation taken by the EU has been to emphasise the chances of children with disabilities to have an autonomous life, in line with a general move away from a deficit approach – which implicitly or explicitly takes able-bodied people as the standard against which disability is judged, almost inevitably negatively (Nuri et al., 2020).

It is now accepted that the terms disability or severe illness cover a variety of situations and needs to which families and policies have to respond. For the purposes of the Child Guarantee the term used is ‘children with disabilities and other children with special needs’ but even this may hide as much as it reveals. More explicit definitions include that of the European Disability Strategy 2010- 2020 (European Commission 2010: 8) which makes reference to those ‘who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others’. A first point to note, therefore, is that this is a diverse population with quite different levels of ability and care-related need. It also should be pointed out that illness and disability are changing fields with a significantly greater recognition now of cognitive impairment which has led to growth in the numbers of children (and adults too) being diagnosed with



learning difficulties, behavioural disorders, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, as well as other social and behavioural impairments. For example, in Great Britain over the past decade, the number of children classified as disabled has increased by more than half a million to 1.2 million in 2022-23, with more than four-fifths of this increase being children with a social or behavioural impairment (Murphy 2024).

The gold standard approach is that policies to address the needs of such families require a comprehensive and cross-sectoral approach (Harris, 2008). Four types of support have been identified as crucial: **financial assistance, employment support, health services, and general support policies**. The first seeks to recognise and compensate for the care-related need. Common aims are to financially support formal or informal care-giving and/or to compensate for the costs involved in the illness or disability. Employment support policies relate to a range of measures but for parents coping with disabilities policies in the work-life balance sphere are crucial. Relevant here are the parenting-related leaves discussed above but also the carer's leave which the EU mandated in 2019 (as part of Directive 2019/1158) as a statutory entitlement in situations of short-term care need or emergency of up to 5 days a year. But there are more long-term leaves specifically for parents or carers for a family member with heavy or severe care needs. Health services, too, are central, whether focused directly on health or on assistance with care-giving. Respite care is one of the latter types of service identified as central here as well as professional services supporting the family members providing and receiving care. A review of 13 studies conducted in Australia, Canada, Ireland, the UK and the USA on respite services for families with children with disabilities underlined the contribution of even short breaks to family well-being, especially in reducing parents' stress (Strunk, 2010).

Support services for families caring for a child with a disability extend beyond health services and respite however (Nuri et al., 2020). These are generally less well-recognised and resourced as part of the policy package for families. Support services can be of various forms from **help with technical or specialised needs to general information or knowledge, and social and emotional support**. These 'softer' forms of support are deemed to be especially important in light of the coordination and organisational work that can be involved for families coping with disability and illness (Østerud and Anvik, 2024). The third shift - a term coined by Arlie Hochschild (1997) - denotes the cognitive and administrative work done in families around caring (in addition to the first shift – employment – and the second – childcare). This kind of 'work' – which is vastly increased in the context of disability - is far less recognised by public policy, which struggles to even provide professional care services. Furthermore, it is known that **informational support** can improve the adaptations families with children with disabilities have to make by, for example, improving optimism and parental confidence (Bailey et al., 2007).

#### **2.2.4 What Is the Comparative Situation Regarding Provision for Families with a Child with a Disability in the rEUsilience Countries?**

The discussion here will outline the measures in place in the six countries, starting with financial assistance, parental leave, childcare and moving on to support services (Table A4). As there are no benchmarks in this field, the analysis will focus on what exists rather than its standard or quality.

One should first note the prevalence of families with disability (measured as the proportion of children under 16 with a disability) as varying between 8.4% in the UK and 2.8% in Croatia. The other countries report prevalence rates of between 4% and 7%. A sense of caution is apposite here, however, as the reported prevalence is in key respects dependent on diagnosis which in turn depends on resources and practices of national health and education systems and national medical and educational norms. The figures do give a sense of the scale of the 'problem' facing countries, however.



All rEUsilience countries offer specific financial assistance for families where there is a child with a disability or some other health-related need requiring care-giving (Table A4 and Daly, 2023). There is great variation, however, especially in terms of the modalities of provision, whether it is universal or targeted, the recipient of the payment and how the degree of disability and care need is recognised and recompensed. Most widely, the needs of these families are recognised by a special allowance, except for Croatia where the level of the child allowance (given to families on a means- or needs-tested basis) is increased in the case of a child with a disability or illness (if the child has a severe health-related need the additional allowance is given regardless of family income).

Poland and Sweden have the most specific provision. Poland has three different cash benefits: a Special Attendance Allowance, a Medical Care Allowance and a Nursing Benefit (ibid). The intention overall is to compensate for extra disability-related expenses or for familial carers' inability to participate in the labour market due to care responsibilities. The Special Attendance Allowance is means-tested but the others are not. However, the Nursing Attendance Allowance which is the most generous in terms of payment is specifically for a child who becomes disabled under the age of 18 (or if at school under the age of 25). Sweden, too, has a number of income support provisions in place for children with a disability. These are not income-tested but eligibility and the amount paid vary according to the degree of disability. The provisions include an Assistance Allowance (when the child needs personal assistance for more than 20 hours per week on average), an Additional Cost Allowance for children (when the child has a disability that is expected to last for at least 6 months and disability costs are above a certain threshold) and a Care Allowance for a child with disabilities (when the care and supervision needed for the child exceeds what is typical for a child of the same age without a disability). The UK system also recognises child illness or disability for income support purposes. The Disability Living Allowance for children, which is provided in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and Scotland's Child Disability Payment are available for the care of children aged up to 16 years.<sup>9</sup> Once the age threshold is passed, the child can become entitled to individual payments, known as Personal Interdependence Payment in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, equivalent to Scotland's Adult Disability Payment (Daly, 2023). Additionally, if the family is a recipient of Universal Credit, they can claim extra support if they have a child with disabilities. The amount of support they receive depends on their children's condition. Recent analysis has indicated that there is a sharp drop off in disability benefit receipt between the ages of 15 and 17 when the child becomes an individual claimant (Murphy, 2024). In Spain, the child benefit is mainly conceived of as a benefit for disabled children. This is not means-tested but the amount paid differs according to the degree of disability. In Belgium, the Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels regions offer a Care Allowance for Children with Specific Support Needs which is available for all children who meet the illness condition provided they are not in receipt of any other social benefit.

All countries (except the UK) recognise child disability for paid leave purposes. There are different approaches to how these parents are accommodated, however, with some countries using the general parenting-leaves whereas others have particular leaves for parents caring for a child with a disability or long-term illness. Belgium applies the former approach, allowing parents to use the unpaid parental leave (4 months per parent) until their child is aged 21, as opposed to the regular cut-off at 12 years. Polish parents of children with disabilities are given an additional 14 weeks of parental leave; Spain also extends the leave but only by 1 week and only in the case of maternity leave. Croatia and Sweden have disability-specific leaves. Croatian parents of children with disabilities can take parental leave paid at a monthly flat

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<sup>9</sup> There has been a dramatic increase Child Disability Living Allowance awards over the past decade, with the number of children in England and Wales who are in receipt of this benefit more than doubling between 2013 and 2023 (Murphy 2024). By 2023, 1-in-16 (6%) children aged 0-15 were in receipt of Child Disability Living Allowance double the proportion in 2013. Another point to note is that the awards increasingly relate to care rather than the second type of need: mobility.



rate of €551.80 or reduce their working hours to part-time (receiving 70% of the budgetary base) until the child reaches the age of 8. Sweden offers a temporary paid parental leave of 120 days a year until the child is 12 years (which can be extended to 15 years in certain circumstances). Poland also offers a disability-specific leave (in addition to the extra weeks of parental leave). This comprises 36 months of childcare leave paid at a monthly flat rate of €89.38 until the child reaches the age of 18. This period can also be extended to 72 months in certain circumstances. In Spain, parents of children with disabilities are allowed to reduce their working time; this is considered a form of unpaid leave but is credited for up to 2 years of full-time social security contributions.

When it comes to access to ECEC, the provisions for children with disabilities vary not only between but also within countries. Except for Belgium, children (2 years old) with special needs have priority access to ECEC services in the other 5 countries (León and Cerrillo, 2023).<sup>10</sup> The provisions differ when the child is 4 years old, with Spain and the UK joining Belgium with no priority access to ECEC for children with special needs of this age and beyond (ibid).

There is no centralised source of data on either policies on support services for families with children with disabilities or the actual services that exist. The closest we can come to policies or planned policies apart from the above are the commitments made regarding children with disabilities by EU member states in their National Action Plans (NAPs) in response to the EU Child Guarantee.<sup>11</sup> The five country NAPs, with the UK excluded, were scrutinised for their measures on the basis of ‘mentions’ in the texts. Informed by the framework used by COFACE (2023) to examine the NAPs, eight themes specific to children with disabilities were examined: whether children with disabilities are included as a target group; whether the NAPs include measures to improve ECEC for children with disabilities (without promoting segregation); whether they include measures promoting inclusive access to school-based activities for children with disabilities; whether they contain measures targeting children with disabilities in healthcare services; whether they contain measures targeting children with disabilities in relation to nutrition; whether they have measures on respite services for the families of children with disabilities; and whether they have measures to provide information and knowledge support for families. As mentioned, this is reported here a simple yes or no exercise (although the substance of the measures was examined as well).

The data in Table A4 show that children with disabilities were identified as a target group in all the NAPs. It also makes clear that improving the access of these children to ECEC, school-based education and health services are national goals (although the latter not in Spain). It also shows, though, that the concerns of these children and families are not widely taken account of in housing services or in provisions relating to nutrition (which is one of the five pillars of the EU Child Guarantee). None of the NAPs mention respite services for families. The provision of information and knowledge services to families is also included in all of the NAPs.

Again a word of caution is required here. These data have to be interpreted with care, not least because the exercise undertaken is overview in nature, responding to the question of whether or not rather than

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<sup>10</sup> Note, however, that the data are not nationwide in the case of Croatia (data pertains to Zagreb) and Spain (data pertains to Barcelona in this case).

<sup>11</sup> Article 11(c) of the Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee asks the EU Member States to submit National Action Plans (NAPs) on how they will implement the Child Guarantee. These should include, if appropriate when considering the national circumstances, targeted measures for children with disabilities. As one of 4 groups of children prioritised. The NAPs were submitted between 2022 and 2023 and are available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1428&langId=en>.



how. Also it is important to bear in mind that the NAPS include children with disabilities only as one of four groups and is limited to five pre-ordained policy fields.

Taken as a whole, child disability or illness in families is recognised by policies to a differential degree. It is most recognised for additional specific financial support, which in Poland and Sweden is quite wide-ranging and relatively differentiated in terms of the situation of the child or family. Special arrangements in regard to parenting-related leaves are also relatively widespread although countries vary in the degree to which they support these children and families, with Croatia, Poland and Sweden having the most supportive provision. When it comes to ECEC, only Belgium recognises these families by making them one of the priority groups for access purposes. A review of the NAPS for the purposes of the EU Child Guarantee indicates that children with disabilities are on countries' radar but we have been unable to assess either the degree of depth of the policy concern or the extent to which prioritising children leads to support for families. In the latter regard, the typology of support for families coping with disabilities developed by Tétreault and colleagues (2014) is helpful in its inclusiveness. They highlight four types of provision or service as follows: general and specific support (such as help with decision making, legal support, psychosocial support, assistance with daily living activities and support with social activities and transportation); respite care that provide the family with a break from care-giving for a short (few hours) or an extended (several weeks) time period; child minding offered on an occasional or recurrent basis when the parent of a child with disabilities must leave to perform daily activities, work or leisure; emergency support provided to allow families of children with disabilities to be replaced during an unusual or unplanned situation (e.g. death or medical emergency in the family). Note that a further goal of Tétreault and colleagues in developing the typology was to facilitate a systematic classification of the different services available, a noble aim in the context of major information gaps.

### 2.2.5 What Works for Migrant Families?

'Migrants' in the context of the EU are understood to be non-EU, or third-country, nationals who reside legally in the EU (OECD/European Commission, 2018: 225). This is the population considered in this section, with focus where possible on third-country nationals given their higher social and economic vulnerability vis-à-vis other groups of migrants (and especially migrants born in other EU member states). Close to 22 million residents in the EU as of January 2023 were third-country nationals, some two-thirds on average of the migrant population as defined above (OECD/European Commission, 2023). To add the UK into the comparative picture, there are some 6.8 million third-country nationals residing in the UK, according to the Census of 2021/22, equivalent to 66% of the immigrant population (and 16% of the total population) (Cuibus, 2024).

Providing for migrant families is very complex for several reasons.

A first factor is the diversity of migrants as a population sector, given that they are drawn from different countries or regions as well as varying in terms of immigration status, socio-economic situation, ethnicity and educational background. The family situation of migrants also varies widely (although the information on this is relatively patchy). While most migrants migrate alone in the initial instance anyway, immigrants in the EU are overrepresented among households with children (as well as single-person households, with the latter as their most common living arrangement) (OECD/European Commission, 2023). Also relevant is the fact that in 2022 family reunion was the single most popular ground for the granting of a residence permit in the EU, followed closely by employment.<sup>12</sup> Overall, around one-third of immigrant households have children in the EU although this varies regionally, with immigrant households far less likely to include

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<sup>12</sup> The breakdown was as follows: family reunion: 35%; employment: 20%; education: 4%; other: 26%; asylum: 15%. See: [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-of-life/statistics-migration-europe\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-of-life/statistics-migration-europe_en)



a child in Central and Eastern European countries, where shares of older immigrants are greatest (ibid). A second and related source of complexity is in structural composition - migration is closely patterned along the lines of ethnicity and minoritised status, making immigration a classic intersectional policy issue.

One of the questions that has featured strongly in the literature is around the goal and orientation of migration policies. Historically, the 'problem' of migration was mainly conceived as a phenomenon to be closely controlled, if not policed, governed especially in terms of entries and exits, including the management of asylum seekers and refugees, and procedures for legalisation of status through residence or citizenship ('naturalisation'). While this still dominates in most countries, integration of migrants has found its way into policy. The EU, for example, has shown increasing interest in this, albeit on the agreement that the responsibility for integration lies primarily with the member states. Integration and especially economic integration have long been a concern in European countries, although this varies in terms of the nature and history of migration. Castles and Schierup (2010) chart how over 40 years European welfare states developed policies to recognise the cultural identities and social rights of minorities and immigrants. These had some roots (again with national variations) in diversity and multiculturalism but, since the 1990s, it is integration that has been a more explicit concern (Sainsbury, 2006). Again, there are different variants of this, but in the last decades there has been a strong emphasis on social cohesion and 'national values' with the expectation that the migrant should work to fit in (Castles and Schierup 2010: 284).

Access to the institutions of the welfare state is viewed by European countries as a primary condition for the integration of immigrant populations (Entzinger and Biezeveld, 2003: 16). It is now widely accepted that countries need integration policies and that such policies should be multi-dimensional, extending beyond the economic focus, or at least recognising that some migrants will need to be supported to be economically inactive (ibid). At EU level, common basic principles and policy foci have been agreed, with the EU conceiving of integration as a dynamic two-way process of mutual accommodation between migrants and residents (MILE, 2023: 19). The EU's most recent approach is articulated in the European Commission's EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027) (European Commission, 2020). This sets out 4 main sectoral priorities for migrant integration: **access to education and training from early childhood to higher education; integration in employment; access to health services; access to housing.**

Looking at these – all important services – and other policy discussions, it is striking how the typical migrant is seen as an individual which means that – other than family reunion as a legal right of individuals – there is little focus on migrant families. A scoping review of the literature (covering the period between 2013 and 2018 for both Europe and elsewhere) on supporting migrant parents and their children stressed **the importance of including a family focus in more generic social and financial support interventions** (Kouta et al., 2022).

### **2.2.6 What Is the Comparative Situation Regarding Provision for Migrant Families in the rEUsilience Countries?**

The table below opens the analysis by presenting some relevant comparative information on migration and the situation of migrants. Taking migration trends first, Sweden is exceptional in its downward trend in the number of immigrants residing in the country. In contrast, Croatia and Spain experienced more than a threefold increase in the number of immigrants in the last decade, with migrants accounting for 13% and 15.4% respectively of the population as of 2021. Belgium and the UK are the other two countries seeing considerable growth in immigrant populations, with immigrants accounting for nearly 18% of the population in Belgium and 14% in the UK. The number of immigrants in Poland doubled in the last decade, but, overall, migrants comprise a very small proportion of the population, accounting for 2.2% as of 2021.





It should be noted that, while Sweden observed an 8% decline in migrant numbers, it is the country with the highest share of immigrant populations in this group (see the second row in Table 4).

Turning to economic well-being, relative poverty rates are higher for immigrants than native-born populations in all the rEU silence countries. The gap is the most substantial in Spain (39.9% as opposed to 7.6%), followed by Sweden (32.5% compared to 3.9%). Belgium has the lowest relative poverty rate for the native-born population sector (2.7%) but a migrant poverty rate of 30%. Croatia and Poland have gaps in the region of 16%. The UK exhibits a contrasting pattern in that immigrants and native-born populations have roughly equivalent poverty rates.

The employment rates of immigrants hover around 65%, hence below the native-born population. They vary from 59% in Belgium and 80% in Poland.

**Table 4 Some Key Statistics on Migration and Migrants**

	Belgium	Croatia	Poland	Spain	Sweden	UK
% increase in the number of immigrants between 2013 and 2022 (2019 for the UK) <sup>13</sup>	+82% (from 106,844 to 194,166)	+462% (from 9,305 to 52,335)	+116% (from 109,003 to 235,409)	+354% (from 259,177 to 1,177,285)	-8% (from 100,412 to 92,501)	+34% (from 456,156 to 612,793)
Share of immigrants in the population, 2021	17.9%	13.2%	2.2%	15.4%	20.1%	14%
Relative poverty rates of immigrants vs. native-born populations (aged 16+), 2020 (2018 for the UK)	29.7% (vs. 2.7%) Gap: +25%	26.8% (vs. 9.7%) Gap: +17.1%	23.4% (vs. 7.4%) Gap: +16%	39.9% (vs. 7.6%) Gap: +32.3%	32.5% (vs. 3.9%) Gap: +28.6%	20.9% (vs. 19.5%) Gap: +1.4%
Employment rate of immigrants	59%	65%	80%	60%	65%	75%

Source: OECD/European Commission (2023).

Turning to policy, it is difficult if not impossible to identify policy and provision for this population other than for family reunification, which is an official policy in relation to migration in the six countries. Some very general comparable information is available in the Migration Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), which is a database covering eight areas of migrant integration policy (using 58 indicators) for 56 countries with the latest data valid to 2019. For the purposes of the index, each country is assessed in terms of how immigrants fare regarding basic rights, equal opportunities and security of a future vis-à-vis nationals in each of the following eight areas: labour market mobility; family reunification; education; political participation; permanent residence; access to nationality; anti-discrimination; health. The data are derived mainly from national experts and scored on the basis of a systematic set of criteria for assessment, with scores measuring the extent and depth of the policy.<sup>14</sup> While this, too, mainly relies on data for

<sup>13</sup> See [https://doi.org/10.2908/MIGR\\_IMM3CTB](https://doi.org/10.2908/MIGR_IMM3CTB)

<sup>14</sup> Countries have sorted in groups based on their scores on the 3 dimensions (basic rights, equal opportunities and security of future, vis-à-vis nationals). These groups represent different country's approaches to integration with countries ordered into one of 10 different relative ranking on each criterion (ordered from most to least favourable to migrant integration): 1. Comprehensive Integration (top 10); 2. Comprehensive Integration (slightly favourable); 3. Temporary Integration (slightly favourable); 4.



individuals or data conceived from an individual rights perspective, it has the advantage of comparability in covering all six rEUsilience countries (although it mainly gives aggregate scores) and three of the four fields identified as crucial by the EU (detailed data on housing is missing). We stress, however, that it is not a test or assessment of the EU or other integration measures, since it is an experts' assessment of the quality of provision in the countries and contains no directly link to the policy set.

Table A5 reproduces the relevant scores for the six countries in regard to education, labour market, health and reunification.

The first row - presenting the overall score on migrant integration across policies and indicators - shows Sweden and Belgium as the top two scoring countries, scoring 86 and 69 respectively out of 100. In fact, these two countries are rated in the top 10 of the 56 countries in the index – they are described as adopting a comprehensive approach to integration, which fully guarantees equal rights, opportunities and security for immigrants and citizens. Spain at 60 falls into the next grouping, and the UK at 56 is in the third grouping. Poland and Croatia fall into the second lowest band, described as having equality on paper, in the sense that immigrants do not enjoy equal opportunities and the two countries are considered to only go halfway towards providing immigrants with basic rights and a secure future. In these countries also policies may encourage the public to see immigrants as subordinates, rather than equals, and not as potential citizens.

How do the countries achieve these scores? Table A5 presents the comparable information prioritising the four areas identified by the EU action plan (along with family reunification).

To take education and training first, all countries achieve a score of at least 50 in regard to their efforts to address the educational situation of migrant groups. Sweden is the top performer here followed by Belgium (75) with the other 4 countries scoring similarly (at 50). Access to education and vocational training and study grants are also present in the national policy sets (apart from Croatia), with Belgium and Spain scoring top here, Sweden next and Poland and the UK scoring poorly. Specific migrant support does not generally extend to third-level education, however, as Sweden is unique in having specific support measures to allow migrants to attend university. Provision of continuous and ongoing educational support in language is present everywhere but of varying quality. Language instruction is adjudged to be top class in Belgium and Sweden but all the other countries have some weaknesses in this regard, the UK especially.

Turning to integration into employment, Table A5 makes clear that only in Spain do migrants have full immediate access to the labour market on a par with nationals. All the other countries grant access but only score around mid-way in terms of the comparative degree of labour market access and openness. In general, countries are much more selective when it comes to targeted training and whether there are programmes to encourage the hiring of migrants - Sweden scores at the top here followed by Belgium at 50, but all the other countries score zero. Third-country nationals' access to social security is somewhat better although countries are polarised with Croatia, Spain and Sweden scoring 100 and the other three countries scoring zero. When it comes to access to social security and assistance for third-country nationals, Croatia, Spain and Sweden are at the top here but the other three countries receive a score of zero. All countries score at the top in terms of migrant access to public employment services. However, none of the countries apart from Sweden (which scores 100) scores on targeted measures to further the labour market integration of women and youth third-country nationals

When it comes to access to health services, the overall score varies from 83 and 81 in Sweden and Spain respectively to 27 for Poland and Croatia. Belgium and the UK also score relatively highly here with 73 and

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Comprehensive integration (halfway favourable) 5. Equality on paper (halfway favourable); 6. Temporary integration (halfway unfavourable); 7. Immigration without integration (Halfway unfavourable); 8. Equality on paper (Halfway unfavourable); 9. Equality on paper (slightly unfavourable) 10. Immigration without integration (most unfavourable).



75 respectively. On the second health-related measure - information for migrants on entitlements and use of health services - all the countries except, interestingly, the UK (with its National Health Service) score well here. All the countries except Croatia and Poland score at the top in terms of the cost and availability of interpreters. On the final health-service related indicator – the involvement of migrants in information provision, service design and delivery – Croatia and Poland again score zero here with Sweden and UK at the top and Poland and Spain with scores at the midway point.

The index also contains information on family reunification, measuring especially the nature and strictness of the attaching conditions in relation to, for example, the stage at which reunification is possible, which family members are eligible and what the integration requirements are. The overall score on family reunification, taking all of the factors into account, shows Sweden at the top at 71 and the UK as the lowest-scoring country at 29. Spain scores 69, Poland 58 and Croatia and Belgium 48. All of the countries restrict who is considered 'family' for the purpose of reunification and none score especially well in this regard, a measure that can be taken to indicate the degree of inclusiveness of the reunification regime.

Overall, it is difficult to draw conclusions about countries' policies for migrant families because of a lack of concrete information either on the policies in place or their effectiveness. These families are a hidden or neglected set of families. The EU has identified four sets of provisions and the little evidence we have been able to access suggests that these feature in the relevant national policy systems but their extent is unknown. In any case, the extent to which general support services are offered to these families, covering information and knowledge, is unknown and gathering information is compounded by the often localised nature of these services (Hernández-Plaza et al., 2005).

### 3. Overview and Conclusion

While this report has a number of guiding interests, its main purpose has been to undertake a systematic analysis of countries' support for resilience in families. The opening section of the report reviewed what the literature has to say about family resilience and, drawing from that, developed a unique framework in relation to family resilience from the perspective of social policy and family policy. This emphasised especially families' capacities to make transitions and the needs of particular types of families. The research undertaken applied this framework to examine and critique strengths and weaknesses in national policy systems, covering five policy areas: parenting-related leaves, ECEC, provisions for lone-parent families, provisions for families with a disabled or ill child, and provisions for migrant families. Throughout, the degree and nature of support offered and the agency allowed families have been to the fore.

In response to the question of the extent to which the national and EU policy systems support families to be resilient, there are eight main findings.

- Some policy fields seem to be better equipped, or further along the road, than others in helping families to be resilient. The policies oriented to transitions - in this analysis parental leaves and ECEC – generally seem to be better developed than those treating the three types of family situation with heightened risk.
- The factors that act to undermine the resilience-supporting capacity of policies relate in a major way to conditions that exclude people and families from benefits and services. For example, significant numbers of people are excluded from various parenting-related leaves because of employment-related conditions and ECEC does not feature enough mechanisms to include low-resourced families in general. So, the degree of inclusiveness or exclusiveness in policies and provision is crucial.



- Where the EU has set legal benchmarks most countries meet them, and so the significance of the EU as a policy agent is confirmed. But where the EU only makes 'soft recommendations', they do not seem to penetrate deeply into the national systems.
- While it might be the case that policies operate with the assumption that families can manage work and care with some support, the recognition that some families need more has not fully penetrated the policy systems. In other words, there is variation in the family situations that are recognised as deserving of additional support and the degree of support on offer. Of the three, it is migrant families that seemed to receive the least recognition and support. However, this should not be taken to mean that the other two types of family situation – parenting alone and coping with child disability or illness – have their needs fully addressed.
- One very big issue is that of equivalence in support for lone-parent families vis-à-vis those with two parents. Only Sweden approaches equivalence for these families when it comes to parenting-related leaves for example. This is an issue for all countries though and it transcends eligibility for leaves alone.
- Needless to say perhaps, the variations among countries are also striking. This analysis has avoided identifying countries as strong or weak as the variations are such that no country stands out across the board in terms of the characteristics considered in the analysis. But, of course, countries pattern and differences exist and in this regard it does appear that, looked at in the round, Sweden is most oriented to enabling transitions and supporting families in different types of situation of need whereas the UK offers the least support.
- Families are faced with a landscape that does not always point clearly in one direction. So, for example, non transferability is a principle increasingly governing parental leaves in most countries but it tends not to be applied to either maternity leave or paternity leave. And when it comes to parental and family agency, countries are very clear about limiting what they offer for young children but the existence of a gap between the end of parental leave and the beginning of guaranteed ECEC leaves parents in every country (albeit to varying degrees) having to manage much of the transition between care and paid work themselves, especially when their children are young.
- The dearth of information on (and one might add system knowledge about) certain types of families, especially those coping with child illness and migrant families, is a general weakness found across countries.



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## Appendix

**Table A1 Key Features of Parenting-related Leaves in the rEUsilience Countries**

<b>Maternity leave</b>						
	Belgium	Croatia	Poland	Spain	Sweden	UK
<b>Eligibility conditions</b>						
Dependence on employment	All employees, women on unemployment benefits and self-employed, are eligible	All employees and self-employed are eligible	All employees and self-employed are eligible	All employees and self-employed are eligible	All employees and self-employed are eligible	All employees are eligible, self-employed ineligible
Minimum duration of social insurance contribution/employment	Non-citizens and immigrants only must be employed for a minimum of 120 days and pay insurance. If they are temporary workers, the minimum is 400 hours of work across 6 months	6 months of continuous insurance or 9 months within 24 months prior to the leave	None	6 months of social insurance during the 7 years prior to the leave	None	9.5 months of continuous employment with the same employer
Dependence on citizenship status		A minimum of 3 years of residency is required if the claimant is a farmer or registered with the unemployment office and has health insurance	No	No	No	No
<b>Total duration</b>	15 weeks	25.8 weeks	20 weeks	16 weeks	2 weeks (additional 90 days (12.8 weeks) of mother-only leave in parental leave)	52 weeks



<b>Paid duration</b>	15 weeks	25.8 weeks	20 weeks	16 weeks	2 weeks (additional 90 days (12.8 weeks) of mother-only leave in parental leave)	33 weeks
<b>Amount of payment</b>	82% to 75% of daily gross wage with an upper ceiling of €170.69 per day	100% of the average wage in the 6 months prior to the leave	81.5% of the claimant's average wage in the 12 months prior to the leave	100% of the average wage prior to the leave, an upper ceiling of €4,495.50 per month	77.6% of the average wage prior to the leave	90% of the average wage for the first 6 weeks thereafter flat-rate payment of £172.48 per week until the 33 <sup>rd</sup> week
<b>Transferability (if some part of the leave can be transferred)</b>	No	Yes, the non-compulsory part can be shared	Yes, the non-compulsory part can be shared	No	No	Yes, the non-compulsory part can be shared
<b>Flexibility (freedom to decide the timing and form of the leave)</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

#### Paternity leave

	Belgium	Croatia	Poland	Spain	Sweden	UK
<b>Eligibility conditions</b>						
Dependence on employment	All employees and self-employed are eligible	All employees and self-employed are eligible	All employees and self-employed are eligible	All employees and self-employed are eligible	All employees and self-employed are eligible	All employees are eligible, self-employed ineligible
Minimum duration of social insurance contribution/employment	None	Yes, 6 months of continuous social insurance or 9 months within 24 months prior to the leave	None	Yes, 6 months of social insurance during the 7 years prior to the leave	None	Minimum 9.5 months of continuous employment with the same employer



Dependence on citizenship status	None	A minimum of 3 years of residency is required if the claimant is a farmer or registered with the unemployment office and has health insurance	None	None	None	None
<b>Total duration</b>	4 weeks	2 weeks	2 weeks	16 weeks	2 weeks (additional 90 days (12.8 weeks) of father-only leave in parental leave)	2 weeks
<b>Paid duration</b>	4 weeks	2 weeks	2 weeks	16 weeks	2 weeks (additional 90 days (12.8 weeks) of mother-only leave in parental leave)	2 weeks
<b>Remuneration (flat rate/% of previous wage)</b>	100% for the first three days and 82% of gross daily wage with an upper ceiling of €170.69 per day	100% of the average wage in the 6 months prior to the leave	100% of the average wage in the 12 months prior to the leave	100% of the average wage prior to the leave	77.6% of the average wage prior to the leave with an upper ceiling of SEK1,175 per day	Flat-rate payment of £172.4 per week, or 90% of average weekly earnings if that is less
<b>Transferability (if some part of the leave can be transferred)</b>	No	No	No	No	No	No
<b>Flexibility (freedom to decide timing and form of the leave)</b>	Yes, can be taken within 4 months after childbirth	Yes, can be taken within 6 months after childbirth	Yes, can be taken within 12 months after childbirth	Yes, the non-compulsory part can be taken within 12 months after childbirth	Yes, can be taken anytime within the first 60 days after childbirth	No



<b>Parental leave</b>						
	<b>Belgium</b>	<b>Croatia</b>	<b>Poland</b>	<b>Spain</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	<b>UK</b>
<b>Eligibility conditions</b>						
Dependence on employment	All employees with at least 12 months of continuous employment with the same employer in the 15 months prior to the leave; self-employed are ineligible	All employed and self-employed are eligible	All employed and self-employed are eligible	All employees are eligible, self-employed are not eligible	All employees and self-employed are eligible	All employees are eligible, self-employed ineligible
Minimum duration of social insurance contribution/ Employment	12 months of continuous insurance in the 15 months prior to the leave	6 months of continuous insurance prior to the start of the leave or 9 months within 24 months prior to the leave	None	None	240 consecutive days of insurance with income of over SEK250 per day prior to the birth	At least 12 months of continuous employment with the same employer prior to the leave
Dependence on citizenship status	None	A minimum of 3 years of residency is required if the parent is a farmer or registered with the unemployment office and has health insurance	None	None	None	None
<b>Total duration</b>	17.2 weeks	17.2 weeks	41 weeks	154.8 weeks	43 weeks	18 weeks
<b>Paid duration</b>	17.2 weeks	17.2 weeks	41 weeks	0	43 weeks	0
<b>Remuneration (flat rate/% of previous wage)</b>	Flat-rate at €978.24 per month	100% of the average wage in the 6 months prior to leave, with an upper ceiling of 225.5% of the	70% to 81.5% of the average wage in the 12 months prior to the leave	None	77.6% of the average wage prior to the leave, with an upper ceiling of	None



		budgetary base rate (€441.44) per month			SEK1,116 per day	
<b>Transferability (if some part of the leave can be transferred)</b>	No	2 of 4 months can be transferred	23 weeks is a family entitlement, the remaining 18 weeks are non-transferable, with each parent being allocated 9 weeks	No	150 of the 240 days can be transferred between parents	No
<b>Flexibility (freedom to decide the timing and form of the leave)</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<p>Measure descriptions:</p> <p><b>Eligibility conditions</b> correspond to employment, social insurance and citizenship-related criteria that affect parents' eligibility for the leaves.</p> <p><b>Length</b> corresponds to the duration of leave.</p> <p><b>Remuneration</b> corresponds to whether the leave is paid and whether it is paid at a flat-rate or a percentage of the previous wage.</p> <p><b>Transferability</b> corresponds to whether parents can transfer any part of the leave between each other or if it is an individual entitlement with no transferability option.</p> <p><b>Flexibility</b> corresponds to whether parents can decide the timing and format of their leave (whether they can postpone it or use in blocks spread around a time window).</p> <p>Note: All policy details refer to the legislation as of 2023. 1 month is calculated at 4.3 weeks.</p> <p>Sources: Dobrotić (2023); Dobrotić and Iveković Martinis (2023); Duvander et al. (2023); Kurowska et al. (2023); Meil et al. (2023); O'Brien et al. (2023).</p>						



**Table A2 Key Features of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Provision in the rEUsilience Countries**

		Belgium	Croatia	Poland	Spain	Sweden	UK
<b>Enrolment rates, 2022 or the latest available<sup>15</sup></b>	0 - 3	50.7%	60.2%	56%	71.4 %	75.8%	55.9% (2018)
	3 to the compulsory school age	98.3%	83.5%	92.4%	96.7%	96.1%	100% (2019)
<b>Public spending on ECEC, as % of GDP, 2019 or latest available</b>		0.8%	Data not available	0.6% <sup>16</sup>	0.5%	1.6%	0.5%
<b>Distribution of expenditure on early childhood education by source of funding, 2021 or the latest available (2019 for the UK)<sup>17</sup></b>	Government	96.5%	67%	80.7%	78.5%	100%	94.4%
	Non-educational private sector	3%	31.4%	18.3%	19.4%	Not applicable	5.6%
	International organisations	0.5%	1.7%	1%	2.2%	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Private	Data not available	19.3%	Not applicable	46.5%	21.3%	81.8%
<b>Distribution of pupils in early childhood education by type of institution, 2022 or the latest available (2018 for the UK)<sup>18</sup></b>	Public	47%	81.5%	72%	63.9%	80.6%	41.4%
	Private	53%	18.5%	28%	36.1%	19.4%	58.6%
<b>Age from which a place in ECEC is guaranteed 2022/23<sup>19</sup></b>		3	6	3	3	1	3
<b>The gap in years between childcare leave and</b>	The gap in years between start of legal entitlement	2.3 (Well paid leave = 0.3)	Not available	2 (Well paid leave = 1 year)	2.5 (Well paid leave = 0.5)	-0.1 (Well paid leave = 1.1)	1.9 (Well paid leave = 0.12)

<sup>15</sup> Source: Eurostat (online data codes: educ\_uoe\_enra21 educ\_uoe\_enra23) [https://doi.org/10.2908/EDUC\\_UOE\\_ENRA21](https://doi.org/10.2908/EDUC_UOE_ENRA21) [https://doi.org/10.2908/EDUC\\_UOE\\_ENRA23](https://doi.org/10.2908/EDUC_UOE_ENRA23)

<sup>16</sup> Source: OECD. The data for Poland includes expenditure for pre-primary education. Data cannot be disaggregated by educational level.

<sup>17</sup> Source: Eurostat (online data code: educ\_uoe\_fine01), 2019 for the UK [https://doi.org/10.2908/EDUC\\_UOE\\_FINE01](https://doi.org/10.2908/EDUC_UOE_FINE01)

<sup>18</sup> Source: Eurostat (online data code: educ\_uoe\_enrp01) [https://doi.org/10.2908/EDUC\\_UOE\\_ENRP01](https://doi.org/10.2908/EDUC_UOE_ENRP01)

<sup>19</sup> Eurydice 2023.



<b>ECEC place guarantee 2022/23<sup>1</sup></b>	to ECEC and end of well-paid leave						
	The gap in years between compulsory ECEC and well-paid leave	4.7 (Well paid leave = 0.3)	5.5 (well paid leave = 0.5)	5 (Well paid leave = 1 year)	Not applicable	4.9 (Well paid leave = 1.1)	2.9 Well paid leave = 0.12)
<b>Number of free-of-charge hours of ECEC per week<sup>1</sup></b>		23	4-7	25	25	15	15
<b>Starting age at which ECEC is free of charge<sup>1</sup></b>		2.5	6	3	3	3	2 (although restricted to particular families)
<b>Net ECEC costs for two-parent families as % of household income 2022 or the latest available (2018 for Sweden and the UK)<sup>20</sup></b>		12%	Data not available	6%	7%	5%	23%
<b>Minimum qualification levels (ISCED) required to enter ECEC core practitioner profession, 2022/2023<sup>1</sup></b>	Under 3	4 (below Bachelor's level)	6 (Bachelor's level)	3 (below Bachelor's level)	5 (below Bachelor's level)	6 (Bachelor's level)	Early Years Qualifications Criteria (Level 2 for Early Years Practitioner) <sup>21</sup>
	3 years and over	6 (Bachelor's level)	6 (Bachelor's level)	7 (Master's level)	6 (Bachelor's level)	6 (Bachelor's level)	Early Years Qualifications Criteria (Level 3 for Early Years Educator) <sup>22</sup>
<b>The ratio of pupils to teachers</b>	Early childhood education	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available	5.8	3.7

<sup>20</sup> OECD 2024 <https://www.oecd.org/en/data/indicators/net-childcare-costs.html> This indicator measures the net childcare costs for parents using full-time centre-based childcare after any benefits designed to reduce the gross childcare fees. Net childcare costs are calculated for both couples and lone parents, assuming two children aged 2 and 3.

<sup>21</sup> Definitions are based on Ofqual Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF). Level 2 corresponds to GCSE, and Level 3 corresponds to A-levels, both of which are below Bachelor's degree level.

<sup>22</sup> Definitions are based on Ofqual Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF). Level 2 corresponds to GCSE, and Level 3 corresponds to A-levels, both of which are below Bachelor's degree level. See: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65844707ed3c3400d3bfd40/Early\\_years\\_qualification\\_requirements\\_and\\_standards\\_-\\_Jan\\_24.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65844707ed3c3400d3bfd40/Early_years_qualification_requirements_and_standards_-_Jan_24.pdf)





<b>and teacher aides by education level and programme orientation</b> <sup>23</sup>	Early childhood educational development	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available	5.1	2.7
	Pre-primary education	13.4	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available	6.1	4.6

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<sup>23</sup> Source: Eurostat (online data code: educ\_uoe\_perp05); 2021 for Belgium, 2022 for Sweden and 2019 for the UK.



**Table A3 Key Measures for Lone Parents in the rEUsilience Countries**

		Belgium	Croatia	Poland	Spain	Sweden	UK
<b>% of children living in lone-parent families, 2017<sup>24</sup></b>		24.6%	Data not available	9.9%	15.3%	18.8%	23.2%
<b>Child poverty rates in lone-parent families (vs. child poverty rates in two-parent families)<sup>25</sup></b>		30.5% (vs. 4.6%)	Data not available	22.2% (vs. 8.6%)	43.2% (vs. 18.1%)	23.6% (vs. 6.5%)	39.8% (vs. 7.8%)
<b>Lone parent employment status, 2021 or the latest available (2019 for the UK)<sup>26</sup></b>	Not in paid work	33%	18.1%	31.2%	31.4%	17.5%	31.9%
	In part-time employment	13.8%	4.1%	3.7%	15.2%	6.6%	33.7%
	In full-time employment	53.2%	76.9%	61.2%	53.4%	75%	34%
	In employment (no info on hours)	-	0.9%	3.9%	-	0.9%	0.5%
<b>Lone parenthood recognised as needing extra financial support<sup>27</sup></b>		Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
<b>Child support as advance support on payments<sup>28</sup></b>		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Additional support for lone parents in parenting-related leaves<sup>29</sup></b>		Parental leave for lone parents leave is paid at €1,479.99 monthly after taxation (€1,646.81 before taxation) as compared to monthly flat rate of €978.24	None	A flat-rate allowance is paid for an additional 12 months for lone parents	An additional 14 days of maternity allowance is paid for lone mothers	Parent with custody is allowed to use all parental leave benefit days (480 days)	None
<b>Priority access for ECEC for the children of lone parents<sup>30</sup></b>		Yes	No	No	No	No	No

<sup>24</sup> OECD (2019).

<sup>25</sup> LIS Inequality Key Figures <https://www.lisdatacenter.org/lis-ikf-webapp/app/search-ikf-figures>

<sup>26</sup> OECD Family Database LMF2.3 Patterns of employment and the distribution of working hours for single parents <https://web-archive.oecd.org/temp/2024-06-21/69263-database.htm>

<sup>27</sup> Daly (2023).

<sup>28</sup> Nieuwenhuis (2020).

<sup>29</sup> Dobrotić and Iveković Martinis (2023).

<sup>30</sup> León and Cerrillo (2023).



<b>Net ECEC costs for lone parents as % of household income (vs coupled parents), 2022 or the latest available (2018 for Sweden and the UK)<sup>31</sup></b>	9% (vs. 12%)	Data not available	10% (vs. 6%)	12% (vs. 7%)	4% (vs. 5%)	13% (vs. 23%)
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<sup>31</sup> OECD 2024 <https://www.oecd.org/en/data/indicators/net-childcare-costs.html> This indicator measures the net childcare costs for parents using full-time centre-based childcare after any benefits designed to reduce the gross childcare fees. Net childcare costs are calculated for both couples and lone parents, assuming two children aged 2 and 3.



**Table A4 Key Measures for Families of Children with Disabilities in the rEUsilience Countries**

	Belgium	Croatia	Poland	Spain <sup>32</sup>	Sweden	UK
<b>% of children (under 16) with a disability, 2021 or the latest year available (2017 for the UK)<sup>33</sup></b>	6.6%	2.8%	4.3%	7.2%	6.9%	8.4%
<b>Financial support for parents (or carers) of children with disabilities<sup>34</sup></b>	Yes, Care Allowance for Children with Specific Support Needs	Yes, Child Allowance	Yes, Special Attendance Allowance, Medical Care Allowance, Nursing Benefit	Yes, Child Allowance	Yes, Assistance Allowance, Additional Cost Allowance, Care Allowance	Yes, Disability Living Allowance (England, Wales and Northern Ireland), Child Disability Payment (Scotland)
<b>Additional parenting-related leave in the case of children with disabilities<sup>35</sup></b>	Yes, parents can use parental leave until the child's 21 <sup>st</sup> birthday	No	Yes, 65 weeks of parental leave (instead of regular 41 weeks)	Yes, one week of additional maternity leave	No	No
<b>Specific leaves in the case of children with disabilities</b>	No	Yes, until the child is 8, parents can take leave paid at 125% of the budgetary base rate a flat-rate payment (€551.80 per month), or reduce	Yes, an additional 36 months of means-tested childcare leave that can be taken up to the child's 18 <sup>th</sup> birthday and paid at a flat rate of €89.38 per month	Yes, parents can reduce their working time to receive unpaid leave which is credited for up to 2 years of full-time social security contributions	Yes, a temporary parental leave of 120 days per year until the child is 12 (can be extended until age 15), paid at 77.6% of the average wage with an upper	No

<sup>32</sup> The defined measures and corresponding provisions vary widely across the regions of Spain, and there is a general data availability problem to assess the scope of provisions and take-up across the country.

<sup>33</sup> Source: Eurostat Online data code : ilc\_hch13 [https://doi.org/10.2908/ILC\\_HCH13](https://doi.org/10.2908/ILC_HCH13)

<sup>34</sup> Source: Daly (2023).

<sup>35</sup> Source: Dobrotić and Iveković Martinis (2023).



		their working hours and receive a payment to the value at 70% of the budgetary base	(which can be extended up to 72 months)		ceiling of SEK 393,750 per annum	
<b>Financial support for ECEC for children with disabilities<sup>36</sup></b>	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Assessment of the National Action Plan (NAPS) for the European Child Guarantee 2022 – 2030<sup>37</sup></b>						
Children with disabilities included as a target group	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not applicable
Measures to improve ECEC for children with disabilities (without promoting segregation)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not applicable
Measures promoting inclusive access to school-based activities for children with disabilities	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not applicable
Measures targeting children with disabilities in healthcare services	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Not applicable
Measures targeting children with disabilities in	Yes	No	No	Yes (Murcia)	No	Not applicable

<sup>36</sup> Source: León and Cerrillo (2023).

<sup>37</sup> Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1428&langId=en>



housing services						
Measures targeting children with disabilities in regard to nutrition	Yes	No	No	No	No	Not applicable
Respite services for families	No	No	No	No	No	Not applicable
Measures to provide information and knowledge support for families	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not applicable



**Table A5** Key Measures for Migrant Integration in the rEUsilience Countries

	Belgium	Croatia	Poland	Spain	Sweden	UK
<b>Overall score</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Education (from early childhood to higher education) and training</b>						
Targeted policies to address the educational situation of migrant groups	75	50	50	50	100	100
Education and vocational training and study grants	100	0	33	100	67	33
Support measures to attend university education	0	0	0	0	50	0
Provision of continuous and ongoing education support in language	100	67	33	50	100	17
<b>Integration in employment</b>						
Immediate access to the labour market for foreign residents	50	50	50	100	50	50
Whether third-country nationals have access to targeted training and whether there are programmes to encourage the hiring of them	50	0	0	0	100	0
Equal access for third-country nationals to social security	0	100	0	100	100	0
Access to public employment services	100	100	100	100	100	100
Targeted measures to further the integration of women and youth third-country nationals into the labour market	0	0	0	0	100	0
<b>Access to health services</b>						
Overall health service access	73	27	27	81	83	75
Information for migrants concerning entitlements and use of health services	100	67	67	100	67	33



Cost/availability of interpreters	100	0	0	100	100	100
Involvement of migrants in information provision, service design and delivery	50	0	0	100	50	100
<b>Family reunification</b>						
Family reunion in general	48	48	58	69	71	29
Eligibility for dependent relatives (parents and grandparents)	25	0	25	50	25	25
Source: Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020. <a href="https://www.mipex.eu/">https://www.mipex.eu/</a> Note: All the data represent 2019 values.						

**Table A5a Definitions Used in MIPEX**

Indicator	Measure	Value
Overall score	Overall score is based on the average score in 8 policy areas: labour market mobility, family reunification, education, political participation, permanent residence, access to nationality, anti-discrimination, and health, where 100 indicates a policy meeting the highest standard for equal treatment.	
Access to compulsory and non-compulsory education	a) Access to compulsory education is a legal right for all compulsory-age children in the country, regardless of their residence status (includes undocumented) b) Access to non-compulsory education (e.g. pre-primary, vocational training and university education): Access is a legal right for all categories of migrants in the country, regardless of their residence status (includes undocumented).	100 - Explicit obligation in law for all categories of migrants to have the same access as nationals to (a), and no restrictions in law on access for some categories of migrants for (b) 67 - Explicit obligation in law for all categories of migrants to have the same access as nationals to (a), and restrictions in law on access for some categories of migrants for (b) (please specify) 33 - For a): No impediment to equal access in law. e.g. No link between compulsory education and residence, or no category of migrant excluded; regardless of policies of (b) 0 - Restrictions in law on access for some categories of migrants (please specify) for (a) regardless of policies on (b)
Education and vocational training and study grants	Equality of access to: a) higher education and vocational training b) study grants  What categories of foreign resident adults have equal access to 1) or/and 2)? a. Permanent residents	100 - All of them has access to both (a) and (b) 67 - All of them has access to (a) 33 - (a) and (c) or certain categories of (b) has equal access to 1) 0 - Only (a) or none has equal access to 1)





	<p>b. Residents on temporary work permits (excluding seasonal)</p> <p>c. Residents on family reunion permits (same as sponsor)</p>	
Support measures to attend university education	<p>Support to access to university education:</p> <p>a) Targeted measures to increase migrant pupils' access to academic routes that lead to higher education.</p> <p>b) Targeted measures to increase acceptance and successful participation of migrant pupils, e.g. admission targets, additional targeted language support, mentoring, campaigns, measures to address drop-outs.</p>	<p>100 - Both of these</p> <p>50 - One of these</p> <p>0 - None. Migrants only benefit from general support for all students (and targeted non-governmental initiatives where provided).</p>
Provision of continuous and ongoing education support in language	<p>Average of:</p> <p>1) Language instruction: Provision of continuous and ongoing education support in language(s) of instruction for migrant pupils:</p> <p>a) In compulsory education (both primary and secondary);</p> <p>b) In pre-primary education.</p> <p>2) Communicative/academic fluency: Provision includes:</p> <p>a) Communicative literacy (general fluency in reading, writing, and communicating in the language);</p> <p>b) Academic literacy (fluency in studying, researching, and communicating in the language in the school academic setting).</p>	<p>Language instruction:</p> <p>100 - Both of these</p> <p>50 - One of these</p> <p>0 - No provision. Only through private or community initiatives.</p> <p>Communicative/academic fluency:</p> <p>100 - Both of these</p> <p>50 - Only one of these</p> <p>0 - Level/goals not specified or defined.</p>
Immediate access to the labour market for foreign residents	<p>What categories of foreign residents have equal access to employment as nationals?</p> <p>a) Permanent residents</p> <p>b) Residents on temporary work permits (excluding seasonal) within a period of ≤ 1 year</p> <p>c) Residents on family reunion permits (same as sponsor)</p>	<p>100 – All</p> <p>50 – (a) and (c) or certain categories of (b)</p> <p>0 - Only (a) or none</p>
Whether third-country nationals have access to targeted training and whether there are programmes to encourage the hiring of them	<p>Do all of third-country nationals have access to:</p> <p>a) Targeted training of third country nationals other than generic language training (e.g. bridging courses, job-specific language training, etc.)</p> <p>b) Programmes to encourage hiring of third country nationals (e.g. employer incentives, work placements, public sector commitments, etc.)</p>	<p>100 – (a) and (b)</p> <p>50 – (a) or (b)</p> <p>0 - Only ad hoc (mainly through projects implemented by NGOs)</p>
Equal access for third-country nationals to social security	<p>What categories of third country nationals have equal access to social security? (unemployment benefits, old age pension, invalidity benefits, maternity leave, family benefits, social assistance)</p> <p>a. Long-term residents</p> <p>b. Residents on temporary work permits (excluding seasonal)</p>	<p>100 – All</p> <p>50 – (a) and (c) or certain categories of (b)</p> <p>0 - Only (a) or none</p>



	c. Residents on family reunion permits (same as sponsor)	
Access to public employment services	What categories of foreign residents have equal access? a) Permanent residents b) Residents on temporary work permits (excluding seasonal) c) Residents on family reunion permits (same as sponsor)	100 - All of them 50 – (a) and (c) (or certain categories of (b)) 0 - Only (a) or none
Targeted measures to further the integration of women and youth third-country nationals into the labour market	A) National programmes to address labour market situation of migrant youth b) National programmes to address labour market situation of migrant women	100 - Both 50 - One of these 0 - Only ad hoc (mainly through projects implemented by NGOs)
Overall health	Average score of the health strand	
Information for migrants concerning entitlements and use of health services	Migrant groups reached by information for migrants on entitlements and use of health services: a) Legal migrants b) Asylum seekers c) Undocumented migrants	100 - All three groups 67 - Two groups 33 - One group 0 – None
Cost/availability of interpreters	Availability of qualified interpretation services for patients with inadequate proficiency in the official language(s)	100 - Interpreters are available free of charge to patients 50 - Interpreters are available but patients must pay all (or a substantial part) of the costs 0 - No interpretation services available
Involvement of migrants in information provision, service design and delivery	a) Migrants are involved in service delivery (e.g. through the employment of 'cultural mediators') b) Migrants are involved in the development and dissemination of information c) Migrants are involved in research (not only as respondents) d) Migrant patients or ex-patients are involved in the evaluation, planning and running of services. e) Migrants in the community are involved in the design of services. Mention only forms of migrant involvement that are explicitly encouraged by policy measures (at any level)	100 - 3-5 of these 50 - 1-2 of these 0 - None of these
Family reunion in general	Average score of the Family Reunification strand	
Dependent relatives	Eligibility for dependent relatives: a) parents/grandparents b) adult children	100 - Allowed for both (a) and b) 75 - Allowed for either (a) or (b) 50 - Restrictive definition of dependency (e.g. only one ground e.g. poor health or income or no access to social benefits) for both (a) and (b) 25 - Restrictive definition of dependency (e.g. only one ground e.g. poor health or income or no access to social benefits) for either (a) or (b) 0 - Not allowed or by discretion/exception for both (a) and (b)





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