



Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe

How do European countries support family carers? A look at work-life balance policies in Germany, Austria and Belgium

Editorial

By Lena Reinschmidt and Dr. Jonas Pieper, Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe

In Europe, 80 per cent of all care is provided by informal carers – most of them family members or friends.¹ Family carers thus form the backbone of long-term care systems in all European countries (OECD 2011).² This also corresponds to the wish of many old and dependent people to be cared for by a person close to them.

However, in view of current demographic trends, more care will be needed in the future. A growing number of elderly persons – and consequently a growing number of persons in need of care – will soon be facing a diminishing number of people of working age.



The question of how care can be ensured in the future is therefore at the center of policy debates. The focus is increasingly shifting to measures that improve the work-life balance of family carers. Traditionally it is mostly women who have assumed the responsibility of caring for their relatives. In view of rising female employment rates, but also considering higher retirement ages in many European countries, the supply of care in the future will depend decisively on how work and family responsibilities can be combined.

Both the European Commission and the European Parliament have been discussing the reconciliation of work and care and the support of family carers within the context of a number of initiatives.³ In their outline for a reconciliation package, the European Commission in April 2017 proposed, inter alia, an individual entitlement to five working days of carers' leave per year (see infobox, page 2).

The member states of the European Union put into practice a wide range of instruments intended to allow employed family carers to care and work. Important government measures include options to take time off from work for the purpose of caring – so called carers' leave – as well as financial benefits.

The present newsletter shows how employed family carers in Germany, Austria and Belgium are supported by government measures. The country contributions focus on the range of carers' leave options and related financial benefits. In the first article of the newsletter, Sue Yeandle presents the diversity of policy options to support caregivers and explains how they relate to each other.

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- ¹ Eurocarers, cf. <http://www.eurocarers.org/about>.
- ² OECD (2011): *Help wanted? Providing and Paying for Long-Term Care*.
- ³ Cf., for example, the joint report of the European Commission and the Social Protection Committee (2014) "**Adequate social protection for long-term care needs in an ageing society**", as well as the European Parliament's (2016) "**Report on creating labour market conditions favourable for work-life balance**".

In the context of the reconciliation package proposed by the European Commission, the Observatory is organizing a series of European Expert Meetings. This newsletter is being published in the run-up to the second workshop of the series, which will take place on 4 and 5 September and focus on the reconciliation of work and care. The series kicked off on 29 and 30 May with an event on promoting involvement of fathers in family work.

And finally, the “News from the Observatory” section will, as usual, inform you about our current topics and publications.

Rights, services and workplace measures: Necessary support for carers of older and disabled people

By Sue Yeandle, PhD, University of Sheffield⁴

Around the world, care of older people and others with support needs is under pressure, leaving families stressed in the face of inadequate systems of support. Carers’ organisations, in a movement begun in the UK, have campaigned for support for carers for over 50 years. Across Europe, and in Australia, Canada, Japan and elsewhere, carers are now in focus, and many governments see work-care reconciliation for carers of older and disabled people as a key issue. In a report for Germany’s Ministry for Family Affairs⁵, I showed that, although each of eight countries had adopted legislation to support working carers, none yet had a ‘full suite’ of available options.

A framework of carer recognition and rights, I have argued, is the foundation needed for a nation’s carer support policies (Fig. 1). Services are vital too, so governments must ensure accessible services are in place. And as most carers are of working age, employment rights are required, to cut their risk of giving up work to care. In some countries, carers get publicly-funded financial support, needed most when care services are weak and there is limited flexibility at work. To minimise pressure on public finances, therefore, I believe emphasis should be given to *rights, services and workplace measures*.

In Australia and Canada, Human Rights Commissions have discussed a rights approach to caring, suggesting that a right to both give and receive care would help. Some argue caring must, to be good care, be a real and positive choice for individuals. Japan, Germany, France, Belgium and Sweden are examples of countries using long-term care insurance or tax measures to stimulate new care, household and personal services. Many governments are now experimenting with ways of tackling challenges in managing work and care, seeking solutions acceptable to employers and to workers, and responding to campaigns or to pressures in their healthcare systems or employment systems.

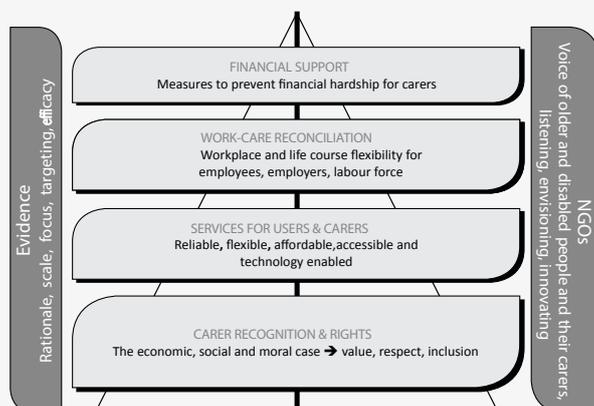


Figure 1 Delivering sustainable and inclusive support for carers
Source: Figure developed by Yeandle & Fast, in: Cass, B. et al. (2014): **The challenge of caring, now and in the future: learning from across the world.** University of Leeds.

Yet few countries have thought radically about how to reorganise their systems to make them carer-friendly, and many carers report difficulty combining work and care. Much change is piecemeal: Canada has amended its Labour Code and extended its Compassionate Care Leave; when care is needed, this may be shared with another family member and workers can draw on employment insurance funds

The Reconciliation Package

The Commission’s proposal on work-life balance aims at supporting working parents and working carers. It consists of a proposal for a directive (**COM (2017) 253 final**) and of non-legislative measures. The package proposes an individual entitlement to five days of carers’ leave per year for family carers who are employed. This leave should be paid at the level of sick pay at least. Family carers – as well as parents of children up to twelve – should also have the right to request flexible work arrangements.

For working parents, the member states should introduce schemes that guarantee at least four months of paid parental leave per parent. This leave should be non-transferable. In addition, the draft proposes an individual entitlement to ten days of paternity leave.

The Council and the Parliament must agree with the Commission’s proposal. Intensive consultations are expected in both EU institutions.

Working Paper by the Observatory on the 2030 Agenda and the goal of gender equality – European approaches in comparison

Sustainable and comprehensive support for family carers is an important topic in the context of the 2030 Agenda. With the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the 193 member states of the United Nations committed themselves to gender equality as an important aspect of sustainable development. The responsibility for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs, is at the national level. The member states are confronted with the task of formulating national measures to translate the SDGs into concrete action.

The working paper provides an overview of the current developments in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Germany, Estonia and Sweden. The focus is on gender equality and the target on recognizing and valuing care work, since the gendered division of unpaid and time-intensive care is one of the main obstacles to gender equality.

Since the national implementation processes commenced in 2016, the **working paper** provides a first overview of the national approaches and the progress in implementation.

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- 5 *Work-care reconciliation policy: Legislation in policy context in eight countries.*

to reimburse a proportion of their pay. Australia has legislated for full-time, regular employees to have 10 days paid care leave per year. Sweden gave workers with a seriously ill relative a right to six weeks paid leave in 1989, extending this, in 2010, to 20 weeks. Danish employers pay full wages during care leave, a cost substantially reimbursed via local taxation. Japan has just amended its scheme obliging employers to offer up to 93 days family care leave, providing more flexible options and raising the compensation available.

Slowly, policy and legislative arrangements in different countries seem to be converging. No surprise perhaps, given their similar trends: population ageing, smaller family size, fewer multigenerational households, and more women in the workforce. With a growing preference for 'ageing in place' and shorter hospital stays, there is also more caring to do, and more people living at home with illness or disability. A country's carer support investments – developing care services; providing allowances to carers who quit work; offering work-care reconciliation measures; invoking human rights and non-discrimination legislation – depends not only on its history, culture and politics but also on how statutory, private sector and voluntary organisations interact. Carers' organisations have found international 'common cause', sharing knowledge of how caring is experienced and of the help they need. Learning from international experience would help employers and governments too.

Employer-led approaches have also emerged, as in the UK's *Employers for Carers forum*, with 130 members. Most offer simple, low-cost changes almost any firm could make. Their motivating rationale is that supporting caring workers delivers business benefits. Supporting, informing and engaging with working carers, they say, raises productivity, customer satisfaction and organisational effectiveness, improving the company 'bottom line'. Some say supporting caring workers builds trust and generates workforce loyalty and commitment to company values; for others, it's just the 'right' thing to do.

International analysis shows options for work-care reconciliation can include:

- **Care leave options**, paid and unpaid, with cost-sharing arrangements acceptable to all (employers, workers with and without care responsibilities, governments and families).
- **Flexible working options**, including some arrangements offering salary stability (varying when and where, but not how much, work is done), and others with reduced hours/workload/pay while caring (ideally compensating for lost earnings through insurance-funded payments).
- **Job protection and return to work guarantees**, so that short or longer spells away from work to care do not jeopardise career trajectories, job security or promotion prospects.
- **Pension and employment insurance protections**, so that work-related benefits are not lost by carers who opt to reduce their employment, fully or partially, on a temporary or permanent basis.

Employment rights and flexible working arrangements help keep carers in their jobs and careers and maintain their incomes and pensions. They benefit employers (who retain experienced staff and keep recruitment and training costs low) and the wider economy (working carers contribute via taxation, while many carers outside the labour force need welfare support). Paying carers to care may offset short-term financial disadvantage, but rarely addresses this longer-term. Supporting carers within local health and care systems, through respite, training, counselling and advocacy schemes helps maintain their health and wellbeing, offering a low-cost way of helping them stay in work.

My recent report showed many countries are not deploying the full range of measures which could help their citizens reconcile work and care and their businesses function better. It also indicates that policy learning about work-care reconciliation across national boundaries could have benefits for their economy, society, citizens and communities.

Report by the Observatory on support for family carers

How do European member states support family carers through different forms of carers' leave and financial benefits? The report by the Observatory on "**Leave and financial support for family caregivers in EU member states**" provides an overview of policies in 14 European countries. The different support arrangements are presented in the form of brief descriptions and overview tables.

The country profiles are structured according to different forms of carers' leave. Regulations concerning general care for dependent relatives are at the centre of each chapter. In addition, the report also presents regulations concerning other forms of leave, such as leave for terminal care or time off from work in order to care for a minor. Information is also presented on the amount, design and eligibility of financial benefits supporting family carers as well as people in need of care. You can access the report [here](#).

Current developments in Germany with regard to work-care balance in a digitized world

By Dr. Christine Stüben, Head of Unit at the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ)

Starting point

According to figures of the Federal Statistical Office of Germany, in December 2015 there were more than 2.9 million people who needed care in the sense defined by the Social Security Code XI. The number of people in need of care had thus increased by 234,000 (+8.9 per cent) compared to December 2013. Nearly three quarters of these persons (73 per cent, or 2.08 million people) were being cared for at home, 1.38 million of them most of the time by relatives only. It is estimated that the total number of people in need of care in Germany will increase to 4.5 million by 2050. There are more people in need of care than there are children under the age of three.

A majority of Germans feel that the challenge of reconciling work and care will become more important in the future. This became evident by a survey conducted by TNS Emnid⁶ on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs in October 2015. Almost half of the respondents even believe it will become much more important. The survey also reveals that six out of seven employed persons would consider taking time off from work to care for a close relative. Almost nine out of ten employees consider the entitlement to carers' leave as useful.

Legal framework for improved work-life balance

The government has therefore dovetailed and improved provisions of the Caregiver Leave Act (Pflegezeitgesetz) and the Family Caregiver Leave Act (Familienpflegezeitgesetz), for instance by offering an allowance for persons taking short-term leave from work. A legal entitlement to family caregiver leave has been introduced, i.e. the option of part-time leave for periods of up to 24 months with a minimum weekly working time of 15 hours. Another option available since 1 January 2015 has been leave to care for close relatives who are minors, even though the children may be cared for outside the home, and leave to be with a close relative in the last phase of life. For these periods, employees are entitled to financial assistance in the form of an interest-free loan.

Other important measures for family carers are information and counselling on offers relating to assistance and relief. These information and offers are especially helpful when a family member just started to care for a relative. Information on these subjects can be found at "wege-zur-pflege.de". Furthermore a hotline (+49 (0)30 20179131) offers telephone counselling and support in stressful or critical situations.

The Federal Government does not keep official figures on how many people take advantage of leave entitlement, as this is not subject to reporting. In 2016, the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth therefore commissioned a population survey in order to obtain information on the use of leave options under the Caregiver Leave Act and the Family Caregiver Leave Act. The results allow the assumption that since the legislation came into force on 1 January 2015 approximately 70,000 people have taken advantage of caregiver leave, family caregiver leave, leave to be with a closely related minor child being cared for away from home or leave to provide support in the last phase of life. Since 1 January 2015, a total of 556 applications have been submitted for the provision of an interest-free loan during leave periods. 478 have been approved.

In the autumn of 2015, the independent advisory committee for the reconciliation of work and care was formed. The committee is provided for in Section 14 of the Family Caregiver Leave Act and consists of 21 members, who usually meet twice a year. Its task is to deal with questions regarding reconciliation of work and care, to monitor the



implementation of the relevant legal regulations, and to discuss their effects. Every four years, the committee will submit a report to the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), the first one expected on 1 June 2019. Within the report recommendations for action can be made. The BMFSFJ has also commissioned an extensive research project on this topic.

The role of enterprises

Work-life balance with regard to care is also an important issue for companies in Germany. Seven out of ten members of a network of companies called "Erfolgsfaktor Familie" (Family as a factor for success) have stated that the issue of reconciling work and care will gain in importance over the next three to five years.⁷ 49.75 per cent of the companies surveyed also stated that they were aware of the legal regulations and that they applied them, while only 10.49 per cent claimed not to know them. Supporting employees' care responsibility is therefore the subject of a memorandum entitled "Familie und Arbeitswelt. Die NEUE Vereinbarkeit" (Family and Work. The NEW Work-Life Balance), endorsed by the Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA), the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (DIHK), the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH), the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB), the "Erfolgsfaktor Familie" corporate network and the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. The "NEW Work-Life Balance" emphasized in the title of the memorandum means improving basic conditions for working parents with children as well as for employed persons with relatives in need of care. Since three-quarters of family carers are women, it is of paramount importance to make further progress here for improving gender equality.

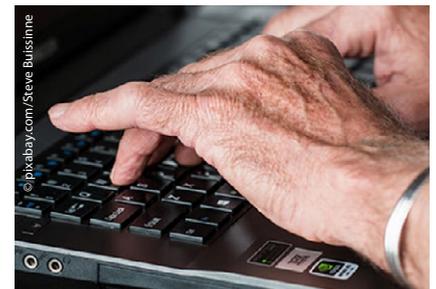
Opportunities through digitization

The working world is becoming more digital and networked. This will also impact upon reconciliation of work, family and care. Currently more than 80 per cent of the German workforce use digital information and communication technologies in their professional activities. Digitization frees work from its time and location constraints. Telecommuting – working from home – allows for more self-determination and better work-life balance. Employees no longer have to physically commute to the workplace and can use this time for care commitments. In an evaluation of changes in the world of work, a survey of enterprises commissioned by the BMFSFJ ("Familienfreundlichkeit 2016") has shown that offering family-friendly human-resources measures to make working hours and jobs more flexible normally leads to higher employee satisfaction. According to this study, companies that have embraced the latest digital developments ("Industry 4.0") place greater importance on family friendliness for employees with relatives in need of care than less strongly digitized companies. They therefore tend to offer significantly more part-time options, leave and other supportive measures. A relatively large proportion of employees with care obligations is also convinced that work-life balance can be achieved more easily within the framework of digitization.

Support measures for family carers in Austrian law

By Dr. Petra Peyerl, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection in Austria

The Austrian legal system includes a wide range of legal provisions supporting family carers. Depending on their specific purpose, these can be classified into four different categories. First of all, certain measures are intended to allow or facilitate the care of close relatives from the point of labour law carers' leave (Pflegekarenz), part-time work options for carers (Pflegekarenzteilzeit), terminal care leave (Familienhospizkarenz)]. Secondly, certain legal provisions were instituted to give employed family carers financial security and to compensate for loss of income due to care obligations (carers' leave allowance, grants from the support fund). It is also an explicit aim of



⁷ A lightning poll conducted by the network "Erfolgsfaktor Familie" in the summer of 2016 showed that 85.1 per cent of companies classified compatibility of care and work in their company as being either very important or important.

Austrian law to ensure that informal carers are adequately covered by social insurance (non-contributory self or voluntary insurance in both health and pension insurance schemes, or non-contributory inclusion in the insurance scheme of the person being cared for). And fourthly, family carers may, if they wish, receive personal advice from professionals (home visits, support talks) to support them in stressful care situations.

I. Leave options under labour law

On 1 July 2002, the legal concept of terminal care leave was introduced in Section 14a of the Employment Contract Law Amendment Act (AVRAG). Under this section of the Act, employees may apply in writing for a change in normal working times or for leave to provide terminal patient support for a close relative. Section 14b of the Act specifies that this instrument also extends to critically ill children living in the same household. Terminal care leave can be agreed for a maximum period of three months, or, for critically ill children, five months. The employee may, by written application, request a prolongation of the measure, whereby total duration may not exceed six months or – in the case of critically ill children – nine months.

To help families organize the care of a close relative in the initial phases of the care situation, Section 14c AVRAG also establishes the legal entitlement to care leave; this provision started applying as of 1 January 2014. It allows employees to agree a time off from work for the purpose of providing care for close relatives. Such an employee-employer agreement is permitted if the relative in need of care receives at least a level-three or higher care allowance (monthly care needs exceeding 120 hours) or a level-one allowance (monthly care needs exceeding 65 hours) in cases of dementia or illness of a minor child.

According to Section 14c AVRAG, carers' leave can be agreed for a period of at least one month and up to three months. Carers' leave can be taken once per person being cared for. If care need rises significantly (at least by one level), a one-time renewal of the agreement is permitted.

If the prerequisites for carers' leave are met, caregiving employees may also, under Section 14d (1) AVRAG, agree on temporary part-time work with their employer, thus giving them the option of reducing their normal weekly working time down to a minimum of ten hours.

II. Financial support

If an employee and his employer have agreed a period of carers' leave or temporary part-time work for care purposes, the employee is legally entitled to carers' leave allowance (paid proportionally if the employee chooses to work part-time) according to Section 21c (1) of the Federal Act Governing Long-Term Care Benefits (Bundespflegegeldgesetz – BPGG). This also applies to persons who have suspended their unemployment insurance benefits or social assistance for the duration of carers' leave or temporarily suspended their registration for social security as well as for persons who apply for terminal care leave. Carers' leave allowance is payable for a maximum of six months per person being cared for; in the case of a substantial increase in care requirements this period can be extended once to a maximum of six additional months.

The amount of the carers' leave allowance corresponds to the basic amount of the unemployment allowance, and thus to 55 per cent of the employee's previous net income plus any child benefits – however, at least 55 per cent of the minor employment threshold (Geringfügigkeitsgrenze) of 425.70 Euro. The allowance is paid directly to the carer.

In addition, family carers can receive grants from the support fund for people with disabilities in accordance with section 21a of the BPGG if they have assumed the primary care of a person who receives level-three care allowance, or level one (for minor children or dementia patients) for at least one year. The following conditions must be fulfilled in order to be entitled to this grant: Social hardship (monthly net income below 2,000 Euro or 2,500 Euro) and prevention from fulfilling care duties for a maximum of four weeks per year due to illness,

holiday or other important reasons. The grant is thus intended to cover the cost of replacement care during the absence of the primary caregiver. The maximum annual grant is between 1,200 Euro and 2,200 Euro for four weeks, plus an additional 300 Euro for the care of a minor child or dementia patient.



III. Social security protection

Caregiving relatives who take carers' leave or terminal care leave are covered by the health and pension insurance schemes. Contributions are borne entirely by federal funds (Section 6 (4) of the Unemployment Insurance Act).

In addition to carers' leave or terminal care leave, the Austrian legal system also provides carers with the right to self-insurance in the pension insurance scheme if they are caring for a handicapped child (Section 18a ASVG) or a close relative (Section 18b ASVG). A prerequisite is that the disabled child receives an increased family allowance or that the person in need of care receives a level-three care allowance, and that the working capacity of the carer is predominantly/significantly reduced as a result of caring for the close relative. The insured person does not incur any costs in these cases; pension contributions are borne entirely by the equalization fund for family allowances (Ausgleichsfonds für Familienbeihilfen) and by the Federal Government, respectively. A notional contributory basis of 1,735.06 Euro applies.

Family carers may also choose to continue to be insured under the pension insurance scheme in accordance with Section 17 in conjunction with Section 77 (6) ASVG if they have left the compulsory insurance scheme in order to provide full-time care to a close relative with a claim to a level-three care allowance. Here, too, contributions are to be borne entirely by the federal government; they are based on the contributory basis in the year prior to departure from compulsory insurance (Section 76a ASVG).

Finally, informal carers who provide full-time care to a handicapped child or to an insured person who receives level-three care allowance can also take out self-insurance in the health insurance scheme (see Section 16 (2a) and (2b) ASVG) or be included free of charge in the insurance of the person receiving the care (Section 51d (3) in conjunction with Section 123 (7b) ASVG).

IV. Personal support from professionals

According to Section 33a of the Federal Act Governing Long-Term Care Benefits (BPGG), a family carer may request a house visit by a qualified professional. Caregiving relatives who during such a visit explain that they suffer from psychological stress are offered psychological counselling.

Supporting measures in Belgium for persons with dependent relatives⁸

By Frederic De Wispelaere and Jozef Pacolet, HIVA – KU Leuven

In 2013, 9.4 per cent of the Belgian population aged 15 and over indicated they were informal carers. The percentage of informal carers increases with age, up to 15 per cent for the 55–64 years age group. Also, a higher percentage of women are providing in-formal care (women 10.9 per cent versus men 7.8 per cent). Figures suggest that it is particularly persons with a low income who are providing informal help or care. Questions on the time spent on informal care reveal that two out of three informal carers of working age spent less than 10 hours per week on the provision of informal care,



8 Based on the ESPN-report prepared for the European Commission, DG EMPL: De Wispelaere F., Pacolet J., (2016): **ESPN Thematic Report on work-life balance measures for persons of working age with dependent relatives. Belgium.**



16 per cent spent 10 to 19 hours per week and 17 per cent spent more than 20 hours per week. However, on average 26 per cent of the retired informal carers (sometimes already dependent) spent more than 20 hours per week on the provision of informal care.

Belgium’s public expenditure on Long-Term Care (LTC) was relatively high in 2013 at 2.1 per cent of GDP.⁹

Public expenditure on LTC is mainly the result of a high coverage of formal systems of institutional care and home care. The organisational landscape of LTC provisions in Belgium is fragmented because of a division of competencies between the Federal Government (responsible for medical care through the health care system) and the Communities (responsible for non-medical care). As a result of the sixth state reform since July 2014, the division of competencies between the different state entities is set to change in order to increase the homogeneity of competences, allowing policy to better meet local needs. Aspects of LTC are transferred from the federal level to the communities, and many of these new competences involve direct service delivery to patients. This represents a shift whereby not only home care but also intra-mural care will be more in the hands of the communities, allowing for different regional policy accents and priorities to emerge and develop. In Flanders, for instance, the new competences will be integrated in a so-called Flemish Social Protection system ‘Vlaamse Sociale Bescherming’.

The coverage rate of LTC (LTC recipients as per cent of dependent population) is only higher in Norway and Finland. In 2013, a total of 13.3 per cent of the Belgian population aged 65 years and over was receiving LTC, either in residential care (8.4 per cent), or at home (4.9 per cent). Moreover, Belgium’s level of legal entitlements for the reconciliation of work and care are relatively generous. As a result, it is considered a country with fully developed policies for the reconciliation of work and care whereby informal caregivers (mantelzorgers/aidants proches) are supported through home care, the service voucher scheme and by day centres, short-stay care centres, and old age/nursing homes which partly/fully alleviate the burden of informal caregivers.

Table 1: A non-exhaustive overview of carers’ leaves, carers’ cash benefits and carers’ benefits in-kind in Belgium

Carers’ leaves	Carers’ cash benefits	Carers’ benefits in-kind
Time credit leave with a specific reason	Child benefits: Supplementary allowance for children with disabilities under the age of 21	Home care
Thematic leaves: Career break in the context of leave for medical assistance or for palliative care	Allowance for assistance to the elderly (AAE)	Medical home nursing care
Palliative care for self-employed persons	Integration allowance (IA) for those persons with a handicap	Centres for day care and ‘short-stay’ care
	Flemish Care Insurance	Service flats
		Residential old age home/nursing homes
		The Service Voucher Scheme

In recent years, a wide range of new and more diversified services have been developed and implemented that allow the provision of LTC in settings other than a residential one. Combining care-giving with a career is further facilitated by carers’ leaves. These leaves allow one to take time off to care for a needy person whilst receiving a replacement income. Figures reporting the average monthly amount paid for care

⁹ The OECD has elaborated the following definition of LTC: “Long-Term Care brings together a range of services for people who are dependent on help with basic activities of daily living (ADL) over an extended period of time. Such activities include bathing, dressing, eating, getting in and out of bed or chair, moving around and using the bathroom. These Long-Term Care needs are due to long-standing chronic conditions causing physical or mental disability.”

leaves suggest that most of the persons are taking a part-time career break rather than a full-time career break. It consists of a temporary reduction of working hours rather than a full-time leave, with a subsequent return to the job. Moreover, the risk of poverty is (partly) reduced by combining part-time employment with part-time care leave. The broad coverage and the long duration of the carers' leaves are positive elements for persons of working age with dependent relatives. Nonetheless, a higher replacement rate could avoid informal carers showing high losses in income and a high at-risk-of poverty rate. In addition, we conclude that more efforts to increase awareness and knowledge about the entitlement to carers' leaves and LTC benefits in cash and in kind are still needed to avoid a low take-up rate. Granting carers' leaves or benefits automatically, as for instance the Flemish Care Insurance in some cases, would be even better.

There is much agreement on policy and the direction in which the LTC system should evolve. The overall goal is to enable older people to remain at home as long as possible and to ensure their autonomy. Keeping more people at home also requires more attention to the recognition of and the support for informal carers (mantelzorgers, aidants proches). This cannot replace the need for more formal LTC infrastructure and services.

Moreover, a major forthcoming challenge for Belgium will be to combine a higher level of employment (in order to reach the EU 2020 target of an employment rate of 75 per cent) with a relatively high level of informal care. Despite the budgetary restraints, further development of both LTC benefits in kind and carers' leaves is therefore essential in order to achieve a higher level of employment and a sustainable work-life balance for persons of working age with dependent relatives. In view of the ageing population, a growing share of informal care will be provided by the retired partner, sometimes already dependent. The growing need for professional care to support the main carer will contribute to further job creation.

News from the Observatory

The Observatory analyses sociopolitical developments in Europe and considers their potential impact on Germany. It carries out research and studies – often comparative analyses of the general European context –, monitors European developments and organises international conferences. Its aim is to link stakeholders so as to promote European exchanges and encourage mutual learning.

Focus on family and reconciliation

One of the focal points of the Observatory's work in 2017 will be how European countries help their populations to better reconcile work, elderly and child care.

Involve fathers in family work

In May, the Observatory hosted the European Expert Meeting "Towards an Equal Partnership in Families. How European States Promote Father Involvement in Family Work".

The meeting formed the starting point of a series of European Expert Meetings on the subject of reconciliation policy (for the second event in the series, see below). In addition to experts from the academic world, European NGOs and politics, the event was also attended by Dr. Ralf Kleindiek, Permanent State Secretary in the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, and Tiina Astola, EU Director-General for Justice and Consumers. The aim was to promote Europe-wide exchange about policy instruments designed to strengthen the involvement of fathers in family work. A documentation of the Meeting including the results of discussions will be available shortly. A discussion paper on the event will soon also be published on our [website](#).



Support for family carers

In addition to this issue of our newsletter, the Observatory has already published an **overview of policies supporting family carers** in 14 European countries (see infobox on page 3). On the basis of this overview, the authors have looked more closely at concrete models in five European countries. Detailed information on leave options and financial benefits for informal care in France, Belgium, Spain, Ireland and Austria are presented in a working paper. The paper focuses on regulations that allow several carers to take leave simultaneously or consecutively to provide care for the same person. Support for self-employed family carers is also discussed. The working paper will soon be published in German on our **website**.

European Expert Meeting on reconciling work and elderly care

The second event in the series of European Expert Meetings on work-life balance policy measures will take place in early September. This time, the focus will be on support for family carers. This includes, in addition to leave options and financial support, the opportunities offered by digitization as well as counselling. Experts from different European countries, the European Commission and European NGOs will discuss approaches and experiences.

Preventing violence and supporting caregiving relatives of people with dementia

The documentation of the European Expert Meeting on "Avoiding elder abuse in the home care of people with dementia" will shortly be published on our **website**. This documentation will include best-practice examples and information about government approaches in France, Scotland, Austria and Switzerland on how to prevent violence against people with dementia.

Update on the situation of LGBTI in European comparison

In another expertise, the Observatory presents the changes in the Rainbow Europe Index 2017 compared to previous years. The analysis is based on a previous **working paper** and an expertise on this topic and takes up where these left off.

U-turn: How Sweden wants to roll back the marketization of social services

The Observatory will prepare an expertise on the reform plans for a re-regulation of social services currently being discussed in Sweden.

You can find all the results of our work here:

<http://www.sociopolitical-observatory.eu/en/publications.html>

Stay tuned and subscribe to our mailing list. You will then receive our Newsletter regularly as well as additional information about our work. Register **here**.

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