Early childhood care and education (ECCE) and family benefits and services (FBS)\(^1\) for parents with young children in industrialised countries have developed in tandem with increased female participation in the labour market. As more mothers work outside the home, the question arises of how to take care of young children left at home.

Government responses to the need and demand for ECCE-FBS in developed countries have varied, however. Those with a strong conviction concerning gender equality and social democracy (e.g., the Nordic countries) have responded swiftly and positively with measures to reconcile the needs of work and family. But countries with liberal and market-oriented ideologies (e.g., the US, UK and Australia) have tended, until recently, to leave the matter up to individual families, minimising government involvement. Approaches also vary: Some countries have focused on supporting parents (both mothers and fathers), others on providing services for children.

Female employment is certainly not the only factor influencing the development of ECCE-FBS in industrialised countries. Child protection was an important concern in the early 20\(^{th}\) century, as were the enhancement of child development and the need to prepare children for primary school. Recently, the growing value placed on education as the foundation of the child’s lifelong learning has driven many developed countries to step up their policy attention to ECCE-FBS.

At a minimum, the presence of more working mothers raised governments’ awareness of the issues surrounding ECCE-FBS, which were previously considered to be of private concern. In many cases, growing female labour forces led governments to examine the ECCE-FBS issue more closely across sectors at the public policy level.\(^2\) To be sure, rising female employment is among the most frequently mentioned rationales for government involvement in ECCE-FBS.\(^3\)

With the greying and shrinking of their populations, the expansion of their service sectors and rising levels of women’s education, developed countries are likely to see female employment rise even more rapidly, and policies to reconcile work and family responsibilities will continue to be critical to their economic and social strategies.\(^4\) The causality between female employment and the expansion of ECCE-FBS is difficult to quantify, but the interrelationship is indisputable.

Can the same pattern be expected in developing countries, with increased female employment spurring government concern and support for ECCE-FBS? Before answering this question, one particular aspect of the link between female employment and ECCE-FBS must be understood. The fact is that the perceived demand for ECCE-FBS does not arise with all types of female employment, but mainly with that which requires the mother to be absent from home and which makes it impossible for her to be a full-time caretaker at home. Speaking in terms of employment status, wage/salaried employment is more likely to increase the perceived demand for ECCE-FBS than self-employed or contributing/unpaid family work.\(^5\)

This, of course, does not mean that mothers in non-wage jobs, employed around the house or in the neighbourhood, do not have the need for ECCE-FBS. In fact any working mother, regardless of the type of work she does, has the burden of combining the two responsibilities, at least more than a father would in the same situation. And given the greater hardships often associated with non-wage work (e.g., longer, irregular hours, labour-intensive work, seasonal, low-paying situations), not to mention the poverty factor, the need for ECCE-FBS among mothers in self-employed or in unpaid family work would be equal to if not greater than that of mothers in wage jobs.

But a distinction must be made between demand and need for ECCE-FBS. A need does not necessarily translate into a demand, unless the agent responsible for supply is led to perceive the need and feel liable for meeting the need. In this regard, wage work is

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\(^{1}\) Maternity, paternity, parental leaves, tax benefits, child allowances, etc.


\(^{5}\) These are three broad categories of employment status recognised by ILO. “Employees are all those workers who hold the type of job defined as paid employees, where the incumbents hold explicit or implicit employment contracts which give them a basic remuneration which is not directly dependent upon the revenue of the unit for which they work.” Self-employed are “jobs where the remuneration is directly dependent upon the profits derived from the goods and services produced and in this capacity have engaged one or more persons to work for them.” Contributing family workers are “who hold a self employment job in a market oriented establishment operated by a related person living in the same household.” Unpaid family worker works “ without pay in a business operated by a related person who lives in the same household.” A high proportion of own-account workers operating their own economic enterprise indicates slow growth in the formal sector and rapid growth of the informal sector. A high proportion of unpaid family workers is associated with slow development, a weak job market and a rural economy. An economy with a large informal sector tends to have a higher proportion of self-employment and unpaid family work (Key Indicators of the Labour Market 2001-02. Geneva: ILO).
more advantageous than self-employed or contributing/unpaid family work in that it is more likely to be recognised as work. In addition, it takes place in an environment where collective action and negotiation for workers’ welfare is possible and more frequent. From this point of view, if the mother is employed around the house or in the neighbourhood, despite the need on her part, the perceived demand for ECCE-FBS would not be so great as it would if her workplace is located away from home.

From the sole perspective of female employment status, the question of whether developing countries will follow the same pattern as developed countries in ECCE-FBS issues seems to have both Yes and No answers. Labour market researchers predict that developing countries will eventually follow a similar pattern of changes in labour force participation to that of developed countries. Data show that female workers in developing countries are indeed moving away from the informal sector (e.g., agriculture) to manufacturing, services and commerce, out of unpaid family workers status and into wage employment. It is thus predicted that the number of women working outside the home in developing countries will also eventually increase, with a corresponding increase in the perceived need and, importantly, demand for ECCE-FBS.

However, the linkage between female employment and government support for ECCE-FBS in developing countries is likely to solidify more slowly. This prognosis has little to do with the actual size of the female labour force in developed and developing countries, as there is no particular difference. For example, in 1998, the female labour force as a percentage of total labour force in low-income, middle-income, low and middle-income and high-income countries was 40.6%, 38.6%, 40.1%, and 42.9%, respectively. Concerning the status of female employment, however, a wide gap is seen between North and South which is expected to underlie a difference in perceived demand for ECCE-FBS for the two regions. In developed countries, most women work in wage jobs, while in developing countries, especially in Asia-Pacific and in Africa, the majority are assumed to have contributing/unpaid family worker status. In developed countries, women’s participation in the labour market is easily paid jobs in factories, offices and service activities that sprang up as industrialisation swept across most of Western Europe and North America in the early 20th century. As shown in Table 1 below, as early as the 1940s and 1950s, most female workers in developed countries already had salaried status.

In the case of Norway, 88.4% of economically active women were salaried workers in 1946, and this rate was reached even within an overall female labour force participation of less than 25%, implying that salaried jobs were what drew early female workers to the labour market. It is also interesting to note that Norway and Sweden, two of the most advanced countries in terms of the government support for ECCE-FBS, had the highest rates of women working in salaried employment. In Sweden, the economically active female population with salaried status already reached 96.5% by 1985. According to recent OECD data, the proportion of female employment in unpaid family work is falling steadily in 11 out of 13 of its member countries. (to be continued in Brief no. 5)

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Table 1: Economically Active Female Population by Industry Division in Selected Developed Countries (1946-1960), as a % of all industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Employers / own account workers</th>
<th>Employees / salaried</th>
<th>Unpaid family workers</th>
<th>Not classified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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The UNESCO Policy Briefs on Early Childhood is a series of short, flash notes on early childhood and family policy issues. It seeks to answer various questions that policy makers have about the planning and implementation of early childhood and family policies. For further information and the electronic version of the Briefs, please check: http://www.unesco.org/education/eduprog/ecf/html/policy/ecbrief.htm

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The perceived demand for ECCE-FBS could also be influenced by the availability of other family members to care for children while their parents are away for work, cultural attitudes and traditions about women and their participation in the society, and the degree to which women perceive their status to come from being mothers, not to mention the country’s ideological and political system.

Key Indicators of the Labour Market 2001-02. Geneva: ILO.

This trend is particularly pronounced in Latin America and the Caribbean.

World Development Indicators (2002). The World Bank. When the labour force participation rates of women aged between 25-54 years are compared, developing countries show even a higher rate than developed countries: The average of 21 developing countries in the Low Human Development status identified by Human Development Report 2001 (UNDP) in the year between 1995 and 2000 was 78.4%, whereas that of 24 developed countries in 1999/2000 (except Greece, of which data were from 1998) was 72%. Data calculated from Key Indicators of the Labour Market 2001-02. Geneva: ILO.