

Babies and bosses - Reconciling work and family life (Volume 4): Canada, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom ^[1]

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E-book to browse online (pdf) ^[2]

Text of the press release: Canadian social policy is evolving to encompass a broad range of anti-poverty, family-friendly parental employment and child development issues. There is a wide variety of federal and provincial/territorial government support programmes for families. Babies and Bosses focuses on the situation in the province of Québec, and relevant federal government policies. Many parents manage to reconcile their work and care commitments adequately, although it remains a challenge for others. The female employment rate in Canada is high at 76% compared to the OECD average of 64%, and in two out of three two-parent families both parents work. Access to affordable, high-quality childcare remains one of the key issues in helping Canadian parent reconcile work and family responsibilities. The coverage of formal childcare in Canada is patchy. The Government of Canada is taking a lead in improving access to quality childcare, with a focus on children under six years of age, by earmarking additional funding of about CAD 5 billion over the next five years. Childcare policy in Quebec provides for quality affordable full-day childcare: parents pay about 19% of the full cost of childcare, and projected increases in capacity (already Québec has 40% of Canada's total of childcare places, serving just 22% of Canadian children) will go a large way to address high demand for childcare. Babies and Bosses notes that even in Québec, wealthier families make more use of the day-care system than those with lower incomes, and urges provincial authorities to ensure that affordable, quality childcare facilities are available for all low-income families who wish to use it. One in three Canadian sole parents are without work and face an increased risk of poverty. Sole parents face a particular challenge looking for a job and caring for their children. Although employment rates among sole parents in Canada have increased satisfactorily in recent years, more can be done to reduce the risk of children growing up in poverty. In addition to providing greater support for childcare, governments should consider strengthening the system of employment supports for example, through providing more intensive employment counselling, training, work-experience placements for those on income support. A comparatively high rate, 67%, of women who work in Canada are employed in the private sector. Babies and Bosses recommends that the government use the current review of the federal labour code to encourage more family-friendly policies in the workplace. This would motivate and retain the existing workforce, reducing their stress and enhancing their job satisfaction and productivity. Companies that have introduced policies such as flexible working hours have noted significant reductions in staff turnover, recruitment and training costs. Based on its review, the OECD's Babies and Bosses report suggests the following policy recommendations to improve the balance of work and family life in Canada and Québec: - Increase government childcare support (including out-of-school-hours care services) to ensure that a broader group of Canadians have access to affordable good-quality childcare. Ideally, funding should follow parental choices, and use could be made of a mixture of financing tools. Recognizing the current absence of a pan-Canadian childcare system, direct subsidies should be made towards capital investment, providers in deprived and/or scarcely populated areas, or concerning the provision of services to children with special needs. In addition, earmarked support (or vouchers) could be awarded to parents in order to improve: efficiency through competition; and, choice in terms of providers and types of care, including out-of-school-hours care. Further, in order for a voucher system to contribute to quality care provision, vouchers should be linked to use of licensed providers only. Through income-testing and (partial) linkage of entitlements to working hours, employment objectives can be pursued while scarce resources are targeted at those most in need. - Parents who wish to use childcare in the province of Québec already have access to public childcare support. However, low-income families cannot always access the CAD 7 per day childcare places. Extension of childcare capacity is underway: it should be priority to ensure access to childcare facilities for all low-income families who wish to use it. - To reduce long-term and intergenerational benefit dependency and child poverty, extend employment supports (financial incentives to work, case management, work-experience places, training, and childcare) for sole parents on social assistance support in the province of Québec, while retaining the current work-test for clients with children. Current caseloads of social assistance clients per case manager are too high for employment counselling to be effective and should be reduced initially to around 1 staff member to 100 to 125 clients. - Federal and provincial governments can enhance the family-friendly nature of workplaces, for example, through the introduction of subsidies to employers for participating in assessment processes that give enterprises advice on family-friendly measures tailored to workplace needs. Ensure long-term commitment of enterprises to family-friendly policies through regular re-assessment of workplace practices. - To give employers due notice on the return of their employees consider increasing the notice period for those on parental leave to approximately two months.

Related link: Babies and bosses - Reconciling work and family life (Volume 3): New Zealand, Portugal, Switzerland ^[3]

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