

Social policy change: Work–family tensions in Sweden, Australia and Canada ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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Abstract

The rise of the adult worker family norm across countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has created challenges for reconciling work and family life as the unpaid work of the female caregiver can no longer be assumed. The article compares childcare arrangements and maternity/parental leave programmes in Sweden, Australia and Canada that attempt to address these challenges. Sweden was an early innovator, establishing the 'gold standard' for such arrangements in the form of publicly funded, universally accessible, centre-based childcare and generously paid parental leave, including a 'daddy quota'. Yet policy development remains open to contestation and change even here. Australia and Canada have shown a preference for market-based solutions although each has taken steps towards Swedish style solutions. In particular, Canadian federalism has left space for such experiments at the provincial scale. The broader institutional arrangements embedded in each country have helped to shape the responses. Yet political contestation, enlivened by the transnational flow of ideas (and ideals), has played an important role in shaping the direction and velocity of change. In the first section we develop this argument, beginning with reflections on how to identify the significance of changes, then moving on to explore the role of institutions, actors and ideas in accounting for these developments. Subsequent sections examine developments first in Sweden then Australia and Canada.

Region: International ^[3]

Tags: work/family balance ^[4]

social policies and programs ^[5]

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