WORK-LIFE BALANCE:

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EU COUNTRIES

CONCENTRATING ON FAMILY RELATED LEAVE
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COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EU COUNTRIES CONCENTRATING ON

FAMILY RELATED LEAVE

Submitted to University College Cork, in fulfilment of the requirements leading to the award of
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DECLARATIONS
This Management Research Report is a presentation of my original research work.

Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature.

The research for this report was conducted ethically. The participants contributing to the study provided information unanimously and any private information presented is treated as strictly confidential and will be accessed, kept and used by the researcher for the purpose of the Management Research Project only.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ...........................................................................................................1
# DECLARATIONS

2

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

3

# LIST OF TABLES AND CHARTS

6

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

7

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

8

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

9

## 1.2. WORK LIFE BALANCE/ FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES

9

## 1.3. OBJECTIVES OF THE MANAGEMENT RESEARCH REPORT

10

## 1.4 METHODOLOGY

10

## 1.5 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

12

# CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

13

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

14

## 2.2 DEFINING THE TERMS OF FAMILY RELATED LEAVES

14

## 2.3 THE EU INVOLVEMENT AND HISTORY OF PARENTAL LEAVE DIRECTIVE

15

## 2.4 NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PARENTAL LEAVE DIRECTIVE

17

## 2.5 COUNTRIES DIFFERENCES

18

## 2.6 PARENTAL LEAVE POLICIES IN EACH COUNTRY

18

### 2.6.1 SWEDEN

19

### 2.6.2 ITALY

20

### 2.6.3 GERMANY

21

### 2.6.4 IRELAND

22

## 2.7 COUNTRIES TYPOLOGY

23

### 2.7.1 Privatised (Noninterventionist) Care Model

23

### 2.7.2 Family-Centred Care Model

24

### 2.7.3 Market-Oriented Care Model

24

### 2.7.4 Valued Care Model

25

## 2.8 GENDER DIVISION OF LABOUR AND TAKE UP OF PARENTAL LEAVE BY MOTHERS AND FATHERS

25

## 2.9 ACCESSIBILITY, ATTITUDES AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PARENTAL LEAVE IN COMPANIES

27

## 2.10 EMPLOYMENT PATTERN OF MOTHERS FOLLOWING PARENTAL LEAVE

28

## 2.11 HUMAN RESOURCES APPROACHES TO MANAGING PARENTAL LEAVE

29

## 2.12 COMPANIES’ EXPERIENCES

31

## 2.13 CONCLUSION

32

# CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

33

## 3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND OBJECTIVES

34

## 3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

34

## 3.3 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

35
TABLE 1: Take-up rates of parental leave by sex according to different sources .......... 26
TABLE 2: Fathers take up of parental leave ................................................................. 27
TABLE 3: Establishments reporting problems related to parental leave, by country (%) ... 29
TABLE 4: Sample Design .................................................................................................. 37
TABLE 5: Options of work life balance .............................................................................. 50

CHARTS

CHART 1: Level of education .......................................................................................... 41
CHART 2: Employers' offer of parental leave to its employees ....................................... 42
CHART 3: Implementation of parental leave ..................................................................... 43
CHART 4: Attitudes towards parental leave, employer ...................................................... 44
CHART 5: Attitudes towards parental leave, colleagues & management ......................... 45
CHART 6: Take up of Parental Leave .............................................................................. 46
CHART 7: Return rate after parental leave ....................................................................... 48
CHART 8: Changes in the working hours ........................................................................ 49
CHART 9: Paid vs. Unpaid Leave .................................................................................... 51
CHART 10: Duration of leave ............................................................................................. 52
CHART 11: Transferability of leave .................................................................................. 53
CHART 12: Flexibility of leave .......................................................................................... 54
CHART 13: Combining work and family .......................................................................... 55

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Management Research report seeks to outline, analyse and compare the provisions of family related leave, concentrating on parental leave, as a work life balance instrument in four EU countries - Sweden, Italy, Germany and Ireland.
The main objective of the comparison is to determine the differences and present them to working parents in Ireland to see if their implementation would possibly make the Irish parental leave policies more desirable.

The appropriate parental leave policies and other work life balance arrangements are important instruments to help the employee in creating the fulfilment with both life outside work and work inside the organisation, and this satisfaction in return enhances employees’ contributions to work.

Parental leave is regulated by EU Directives, which draw minimum standards of leave for all parents in EU countries.

Parental leave policies contain different components (duration, level of payment, flexibility and organisation of the leave) and the take up by mothers and fathers, accessibility, attitudes and implementation of the leave varies considerably in Sweden, Italy, Germany and Ireland.

We placed the four countries into four different care policy models, on the basis of how the government’s policies support the working parent.

There are considerable differences in the care policy models. While Italian Privatised model and Irish Market-Oriented model promotes the traditional divisions of labour between men and women, German Family-Centered model encourages women to combine multiple roles by sequencing care work and paid employment. Swedish Valued care model is the most advanced and supports gender equality and children’s well being in the policies and legislation.

Care policy models adapted in Germany and Italy are comparable to the one implemented in Ireland. Valued Care Model adapted in Sweden varies the most in comparison to Irish Market Orientated model.

Quantitative research in the form of survey of public and private employees in Ireland revealed that the parental leave is not a very popular instrument to help balance work and family life. This is due to the fact that the leave is unpaid. Gender inequality in using parental leave was confirmed and the differences in public and private sectors were exposed. Public sector employees find it easier to combine work and family responsibilities, in comparison to private sector employees who find this difficult.

Most of the employees report back to employment after the leave without change in their working hours.

The working parent in Ireland, when presented with four care policy models, favoured most elements of Valued care model implemented in Sweden.

Management needs to be adequately trained in provision of parental leave to its employees. Line managers need to raise awareness, provide support and address the unpaid parental leave in creative ways to make the work life balance arrangements more attractive.

The employer can also plan, offer and appropriately implement other work life balance working arrangements to fulfill the goals of a successful company and satisfied employees. Work of satisfied employees will create a positive image of the company which can lead to “employer of choice” trademark on the market.
What is work life balance? Kodz, Harper and Dench define work life balance in their publication Work-Life Balance: Beyond the Rhetoric as "a balance between an individual's work..."
and their life outside work, and that this balance should be healthy....Work Life Balance accepts that choice, control and flexibility are important in work, that personal fulfilment is important outside work and, further, that satisfaction outside work may enhance employees' contributions to work" (Drew et al, 2002).

Work-life balance is the term used in the literature to refer to policies that try to achieve a greater balance between work and family responsibilities. These policies apply to all workers, not just working parents, and their absence in an organisation may have negative effect on employees and the organisational culture.

1.2. WORK LIFE BALANCE/ FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES

In the current era both parents need to work to provide for the family and their children. The increasing demand for labour in the growing services sector shifted the traditional family pattern, where the father is the assumed breadwinner and the mother undertakes the role of the care giver, towards both parents actively involved on the labour market. This change brought considerable challenges for parents trying to reconcile their work and family commitments. The new dual role parent/professional creates a difficult environment especially for women. While it has been more common for women to use the family friendly policies to balance work and family life the onus is increasingly on men to seek and to achieve a more equitable balance between working and non-working life.

The governments, policy makers, public and private sector employers and trade unions are responsible for contributing towards smoother reconciliation of work and family lives. Family-friendly policies are those policies that facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life, ensure the adequacy of family resources, enhance child development, facilitate parental choice about work and care, and promote gender equity in employment opportunities. Family-friendly policies include improved access to affordable and quality childcare, financial support for children, arrangements that allow working parents to take leave to care for children, and flexible workplace practices that allow a better reconciliation of work and care commitments.

Today, when men and women struggle with increasing pressure to combine work and family responsibilities, more family-friendly policies are needed to promote better living and working conditions for all European citizens.

The work life balance policies contain different components and their implementation and use varies considerably from country to country.

INTRODUCTION

1.3. OBJECTIVES OF THE MANAGEMENT RESEARCH REPORT
Family related leave is a major component for promoting work–life balance for employees with caring responsibilities. Maternity, paternity, parental leave and leave to care for sick children vary widely across Europe.

The primary focus of this Management Research Project is to examine the availability of family related leave provisions, especially parental leave, in four EU countries - Sweden, Italy, Germany and Ireland. Each of these countries has different government’s policies to support the working parent, i.e. opportunity for leaves from work to care for young children, level of financial compensation while on leave, job security and benefits and encouragement of equality in care responsibilities between women and men. Work life balance opportunities and parental leave policies differ in each of these four countries.

Secondly we will explore the differences in components of parental leave in Sweden, Italy, Germany and Ireland and compare Irish parental leave policies with other three countries.

Finally, the information about the differences will be used in the quantitative research of the project. The quantitative research part of the Management Report will raise the questions: Is the working parent in Ireland satisfied with the current parental leave policies? & Is there any room for improvement, implementing various parts of the different countries parental leave policy models, which would help the parent in Ireland to reach greater satisfaction with work-life balance?

1.4 METHODOLOGY

The research method for the project used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.

Qualitative Research

The purpose of qualitative research was to learn about the differences in parental leave policies in Sweden, Italy, Germany and Ireland. The research work began by examining existing studies and literature including EU reports, analysis and legislation on parental leave policies in four countries.

INTRODUCTION

Quantitative Research
Quantitative research is based amongst working parents in Ireland. The purpose of the quantitative research was to investigate how satisfied is the working parent with the parental leave policies established in the working environments. Participants of the research were also introduced to components of the parental leave policies from Sweden, Germany and Italy with an objective to observe whether they would like to implement any of the elements to improve their work life balance. We conducted quantitative research through survey of 48 working parents employed in public and private sector, stratified according to gender and employment sector, using structured questionnaires.

The family related leave is a great instrument to balance work and personal life for all employees. However it needs to be applied appropriately. The employer needs to recognise how to create a balanced working environment which will best fulfil the goals of successful company and satisfied employees. The state in most EU countries provides direction for the employer in provision of parental leave. The companies’ HR policies and procedures can be creative and modify the parental leave arrangements for employees to satisfy their particular needs.

The significance of this report is to outline the differences of parental leave arrangements and work life balance policies in different countries, learn from this experience and determine whether it is possible to implement what we learned in the Irish business environment.

INTRODUCTION

1.5 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS
Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the Management Research Report.

It is followed by Chapter 2 with a literature review setting out the concepts and definitions of family related leave and the history of parental leave. It contains description of parental leave policies in Sweden, Italy, Germany and Ireland and examines different countries’ care policy models. We also look at take up, implementation and accessibility of parental leave and Human resources approaches to managing parental leave.

Chapter 3 concentrates on research methodology. Qualitative research and comparison of Irish care policy model with other countries care policy models. Quantitative analysis in the form of survey of working parents in Ireland.

Chapter 4 contains a detailed findings, analysis and discussion on data collected from employees in public and private sector in Ireland. The analysed data discuss accessibility and implementation of parental leave in companies, attitudes towards parental leave in workplace, flexible working arrangements available and the ideal conditions of parental leave for working parent in Ireland.

Chapter 5 sets out the conclusions, the gender imbalance issues as well as differences in public and private sector when implementing parental leave. The aspirations of Irish employees and advantages for the employer when discussing parental leave.

Chapter 6 includes Recommendations for the Irish employer in the line of parental leave policies and implementation of work life balance arrangements.
2.1 INTRODUCTION

The literature review of this study is trying to offer the reader a limited summary of researched facts on family related policies. Starting from the history of parental leave policies, detailed description of leave provision in four selected EU countries and their positions in care policy models. Finally we would like to show how the parental leave provisions work in reality, their accessibility, take up rates, acceptance, advantages and disadvantages for the employee and the employer.

Reconciliation of work and family life has become increasingly important in recent years across the EU, due to changes in the pattern and demands of work and changes in family structure. Specifically, globalisation of the economy, the fast pace of technological development and an increasingly ageing population, combined with the increase in female employment and the renewed Lisbon targets for increased participation in the labour market, necessitate organisational changes and higher flexibility, fulfilling the needs of workforce and employees simultaneously (Demetriades, S. et al., 2006).

Work–life balance is an important issue on the EU political agenda. In order to reach the Lisbon employment objectives of more and better jobs for everyone, governments and companies are being encouraged to implement policies aimed at achieving more harmony between work and family life.

Strategies to support work-life balance include a number of different elements and require the commitment of various players. Adequate provision of childcare facilities, entitlement to leave and flexible working arrangements are core components of the policy mix (Europa Press Releases, October 2008).

2.2 DEFINING THE TERMS OF FAMILY RELATED LEAVES

The main area of work-life balance discussed in this report is provision of family related leave.

Family related leave is one of the important areas to create a balance between family and working life. The provisions of family related leave, like maternity, paternity and parental leave and leave to care for sick children, vary widely across EU countries however each of these countries recognises the importance of work life balance and its connection to family related leave.
This study will look closely at parental leave.

Parental leave refers to job protected, longer-term leaves. This type of leave is gender neutral and is available to both parents. Time off is granted in addition to, and following, maternity and paternity leave. Parental leaves policies allow parents to care for their children up until about the age of preschool-entry and help mothers and fathers to reconcile work and family life.

If there is no specified maternity leave, a portion of these leaves is usually reserved for women, to ensure a period of physical convalescence and recovery after childbirth. Recently, in some countries, some portion of the parental leave is reserved for fathers, on a "use it or lose it" basis, to create an incentive for fathers to play a more active parenting role. (Kamerman, S. and Gatenio, S., 2002)

2.3 THE EU INVOLVEMENT AND HISTORY OF PARENTAL LEAVE DIRECTIVE

The existence of a supra-national body such as the EU creates EU Directives, which draw minimum standards of leave for all parents in EU countries. EU policy in this area has played a significant role in harmonising social legislation in the countries so that countries, which were behind, have been forced to catch up with countries more advanced in this area.

The first EEC proposal to mandate parental leave was introduced in 1983 to ensure that diverse national policies would not hinder European economic integration. At this point, the EEC still was not interested in developing social policy; therefore, equality concerns were not high on the legislative agenda (Ostner, 2000). The first parental leave proposal did not progress very far because it was seen as too radical, proposing leave rights to men as well as women (Lohkamp-Himmelhoften and Dienel, 2000). The United Kingdom is typically credited with blocking this first parental leave proposal (Ruber et al, 1998).

The first parental leave directive gave the right to leave for all male and female workers who were in employment in late 1991. This agreement was included in the Maastricht treaty, signed by 11 of the 12 member governments. The UK refused to sign because it disapproved of policy that would support married mothers' employment (Stratigaki, 2000). Because the UK did not sign the agreement, it was not bound by EU law to adopt a parental leave policy.

The Maastricht treaty covering parental leave broke new ground by being "the first binding EEC instrument primarily aimed at the reconciliation of occupational and family life" (Schmidt, 1997). It is recognised more for being the first agreement on any social policy issue under the new treaty than it is for its impact on member states' national parental leave provisions (Hall 1998).

LITERATURE REVIEW
The directive lacked specifics, so it was followed by a 1994 "white paper," *directing member states to adopt a minimum of three months of unpaid parental leave*, available up to the child's second birthday, with guaranteed job reinstatement and continuous insurance coverage (Stratigaki, 2000) (Goliath, 2003).

In 1997, all 15 EU member states signed the *Amsterdam Treaty on European Union*, which included a social policy agreement with a specific directive on parental leave developed by the Advisory Committee on Equality (Goliath, 2003).

**Council Directive 96/34/EC** was a first Agreement obtained as a part of a European Social Dialogue between EU and its social partners. The agreement obligated all EU members (including the UK) to grant *three months of unpaid parental leave to both men and women workers* (with at least one year tenure with an employer) *as an individual "non-transferable right," available until biological or adopted children were eight years old* (Lohkamp-Himmelhoften and Dienel, 2000). Parental leave rights are gender neutral so that "*men should be encouraged to assume an equal share of family responsibilities*" (Stratigaki, 2000). The directive requires member states to take necessary measures to protect workers against dismissal on the ground of an application for, or the taking of, parental leave and to guarantee workers the right to return to the same job or to an equivalent or similar contract, on their return from parental leave. Member states should provide for the maintenance of entitlements to benefits during leave, such as sickness insurance. It was left up to individual governments to decide if parental leave would be transferable from one parent to the other, if it could be taken part time, and whether it should be paid. Individual nations would also decide the length of notice to be given to employers, the circumstances under which parental leave may be postponed by the employer, whether employees of small businesses could be exempt from leave rights, and whether to grant parents on leave entitlement to social security benefits. All member states except the UK were obligated to follow the parental directive by changing their national legislation within one year of the signing of the Amsterdam Treaty, i.e., by the end of 1998. The UK was granted a two-year compliance period (until the end of 1999), because it had not earlier developed parental leave legislation in response to EU directive (Goliath, 2003).

*The critics of Parental leave directive stated:*

Eugenia Caracciolo (2001) argues that the fact that Member States are not obliged to ensure a payment to parents on leave is one of the weak points of the Directive. According to this analyst, the Directive also implies that it is mainly women who are responsible for taking care of children.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**
Stephen Hardy and Nick Adnett (2002) argue that the Directive is inadequate for meeting its objectives of work/life balance and equality between men and women: the participation rate of fathers remains low, thus maintaining or even reinforcing gender inequality in the labour market. (Bernard Fusulier, The EC Directive on Parental Leave)

2.4 NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PARENTAL LEAVE DIRECTIVE

Almost 15 years after the first agreement on parental leave was enforced across Europe the social partners and the cross-industry social dialogue institutions decided to negotiate improvements to the Directive as a part of ongoing discussion on reconciliation of private, working and family life. The negotiations started in September 2008 and were completed in March 2009.

New developments in parental leave were introduced in summer 2009. The European social partners signed the revised version of the Framework Agreement in Brussels on 18 June 2009. The aim of the introduction of new terms is to introduce more efficient measures to encourage men to assume an equal share of family responsibilities.

"This agreement proves that the European social partnership works and delivers concrete results for workers and companies in Europe", stated Vladimír Špidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities "This agreement specifically addresses one of the priority objectives of gender equality and shows a determination to find ways of improving the balance between family and working life, while at the same time taking account of the diversity of national regulatory frameworks, practices and traditions." (Europa Press Releases, June 2009)

The new Framework Agreement increases the duration of parental leave from three to four months per parent and applies to all employees regardless of their type of contract. One of the four months shall be non-transferable between the parents. The arrangement gives parents returning to work after parental leave the opportunity to request a change to their working conditions and increases protection not just against dismissal but also against any unfavourable treatment as a result of the exercise of the right to parental leave.

LITERATURE REVIEW
2.5 COUNTRIES DIFFERENCES

Parental leave, however regulated by EU Directives, differ in many aspects across European countries. Four countries were chosen for this project. The countries were chosen across Europe from geographical perspective:

1. **Northern Europe: Sweden**
2. **Southern Europe: Italy**
3. **Western Europe: Germany**
4. **Ireland** as a fourth country in the pack was added with an objective to compare the parental leave and questions related to this topic with the above three countries.

The differences in parental leave are mainly in these aspects:

- The *duration* of parental leave.
- Level of *payment* during the leave (Some countries offer flat rate payments, other countries offer parental leave compensation that depend on parents' labour earnings in the period before the birth of the child.)
- Parental leave organised along *family or individual lines*
- Opportunities to take the leave on *part time or flexible basis*

2.6 PARENTAL LEAVE POLICIES IN EACH COUNTRY

The review was carried out in each of the four countries on their national policies and the current availability.

The main focus of this section is an introduction of parental leave policies of each country and the assessments of the level of support provided to parents though parental leave policies. The accessibility, take up, attitudes and implementation of parental leave in the company environment is observed in the subsequent sections of the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW
2.6.1 SWEDEN

**Parental leave in Sweden**

Sweden is one of the countries that support gender equality and children's well being in their policies and legislation. Parental leave is considered as one of the instruments to bring about gender equality and Sweden was the first country to mandate paid parental leave for both mothers and fathers in 1974.

Maternity and parental leave are blended into a single program. The mother and the father of a newborn child may share the statutory parental leave in Sweden. The mother to be may use part of the parental leave from 60 days before the calculated birth. The parental leave contains in all **480 days to share by the mother and father**, after their own decisions. The parents however have a right to half of the parental leave each. The parents also have a right to turn away from her or his share - but the one who resigns from the most time must keep 60 days of leave for him/herself (Parental Leave Act, 1995) (EIROnline, December 2007).

The total of 480 days leave have to be taken before the child is 8 years old or finishes first year in the school.

The **parental benefit** is a substitute for lost income. Generally the payment is based on a calculation of the yearly income up to a ceiling amount. The **first 390 days of the parental leave the 80% paternal benefit** is paid out, the last 90 days the pay is at a flat rate per day for all.

There are many **flexible solutions** possible to organise the time off and the payment during the parental leave. Up to the child is 8 years old the parents may for example choose a cut in working time with one or two hours per day. The parental pay may be divided in pay for full days, half days, one quarter of a day or three quarters of a day.

Adoptive parents have the same right to parental leave as biological parents. To be pregnant or at home with a newborn child is no legal ground for a dismissal (Parental Leave Act).

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**LITERATURE REVIEW**
2.6.2 ITALY

Parental leave in Italy

Each parent, mother and father, has a right to take parental leave of eleven months up to an eight-year of a child. The parents may also take leave simultaneously.

Working mother can take parental leave for a continuous or piecemeal period lasting no longer than six months. Working father is entitled to continuous or piecemeal period of leave of up to six months, which may be increased to seven months if the father claims parental leave for more than three months. This is a provision aimed to encourage fathers to make use of parental leave rights. In case of a lone parent the parental leave last no longer than ten months.

The mother and father requesting parental leave are entitled to an allowance equal to 30% of pay for a maximum total period of six months and this until the child’s third year. For periods subsequent to those six months, and until the child’s eighth birthday, the 30% allowance is paid only to parents with incomes below certain threshold.

Supplementary parental leave and allowances are also granted for adoption and fostering: leave may be taken in the first three years after the child’s entry into the family. Child age limit for entitlement to the allowance is six years.

Unemployed mothers, domestic workers and home workers are not entitled to supplementary parental leave.

Dismissal of workers requesting or taking parental leave is prohibited and workers have the right to return to their previous jobs after the leave.

During the first year of the child’s life, the mother in subordinate employment is entitled to two hours of rest per day (if her working hours are less than six hours a day she is entitled to one hour of rest in the day). The rest hours are remunerated and can be taken in two distinct periods of one hour each, or in a single two-hour period (Goliath, 2003).
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.6.3 GERMANY

Parental leave in Germany

Statutory arrangements for leave to care for children are laid down in the Federal Childcare Payment and Parental Leave Act, which were revised in 2000. The reform was aimed at overcoming the traditional division of tasks between men and women regarding childcare.

According to the revised Parental Leave Act, both parents have the right to take parental leave for the purpose of caring for their child for a period of up to three years after the child’s birth. The parental leave is a family entitlement and parents are allowed to take parental leave at the same time.

Entitled to parental leave are employees who live in a household with a child and are responsible for the child’s care.

Parents have the right to work part-time for between 15 and 30 hours per week, with employers able to reject such requests only if this creates considerable problems for the company. After the period of parental leave, the employees concerned have the right to return to full-time work. The right to work part-time during parental leave, however, is limited to companies with more than 15 employees. Smaller companies are excluded from this provision (Goliath, 2003).

Parents can postpone the third year of parental leave until the eighth birthday of the child. If parents want to postpone their third year of parental leave, they require, however, the approval of the employer.

Germany took up a new more generous payment system for parental leave called parental money (Elterngeld), on 1st January 2007. The new system offers a 67% replacement rate of previous labour earnings for either father or mother for up to 12 months postpartum. If both father and mother participate, they can receive an extra 2 months, and the resulting total leave of 14 months can be freely distributed between the two parents. Single parents can receive a total of 14 months alone.

Besides increasing the birth rate in Germany, the regulation intends to achieve three objectives:

1. First, prevent or smooth the earnings decline for working parents in the postpartum period.
2. Second, make it thus more attractive for working fathers to stay home for some months and take care of the child.
3. Third, make parenthood more attractive in particular for women with a working career, who receive a generous transfer reflecting the labour earnings they forfeit in order to become mothers and take care of the child for the first year.

Taking into consideration accompanying developments such as an increase in the birth rate since January 2007 and an increasing take-up rate of fathers, the Elterngeld reform has
LITERATURE REVIEW

fundamentally changed the situation and labour market behaviour of young parents in Germany (Kluve, J., Tamm, M., 2009).

During the period of parental leave, the employment relationship is suspended, the employee does not have to perform work and the employer does not have to pay remuneration. Employees are protected from dismissal during parental leave and are entitled to all entitlements as any other active employee. The employer is permitted to appoint a substitute employee for a limited period of time to replace the employee on leave.

2.6.4 IRELAND

Parental leave in Ireland

Parental leave in Ireland is covered in Parental Leave Act 1998 legislation, which was last updated in 2006.

Parental leave is an individual entitlement of men and women to avail of unpaid leave from employment to enable them to take care of their young children. Parental leave may be taken either as a continuous block of 14 weeks or, with the agreement of the employer, broken up over a period of time. The leave must be taken before the child reaches 8 years of age, except in certain circumstances in the case of an adopted child. In the case of a child who is under 3 years at the time of the adoption, the leave must be taken before the child reaches 5 years of age. However, if the child is aged between 3 years and 8 years at the time of the adoption, the leave must be taken within 2 years of the adoption order.

Generally, the employee must have at least one year’s continuous service with the employer before she/he is entitled to take parental leave. However, where the child is approaching the age threshold and the employee has more than three months’ but less than one year’s service with the employer, she/he shall be entitled to pro rata parental leave. In such a case the employee will be entitled to one week’s leave for every month of continuous employment completed with the employer when the leave begins. The employer may decide to postpone the parental leave if satisfied that granting the leave would have a substantial adverse effect on the operation of the business. The postponement may be for a period not exceeding six months, to a date agreed on by both the employer and the employee. Each parent has a separate entitlement to parental leave from his or her job. The leave may not be transferred between the parents – i.e. the mother cannot take the father’s leave, and vice versa.

The employment rights of the employee are protected while on parental leave, and the employee has the rights to return to work after such an absence.
LITERATURE REVIEW

The study, Fathers and Mothers - Dilemmas of the Work-Life Balance: A Comparative Study in 4 European Countries revealed that although, in theory, parental leave is designed to support childcare, the study reports that very few parents are availing of parental leave when childcare arrangements break down. Only 6% of Irish women and 8% of Irish men said they used parental leave in these circumstances. The low usage of parental leave in Ireland, the authors suggest, may be related to the fact that it is unpaid (Fine-Davis et al., 2002).

The summaries of parental leave policies in four countries are outlined in the table in the Appendix 1.

2.7 COUNTRIES TYPOLOGY

We would like to place the four chosen countries into care policy models on the basis of how the government's policies support the working parent, i.e. opportunity for leaves from work to care for young children, level of financial compensation while on leave, job security and benefits and encouragement of equality in care responsibilities between women and men. The purpose of this exercise is to identify different models, which will be, at the later stage, presented to our survey respondents in the research part of the project.

2.7.1 Privatised (Noninterventionist) Care Model

Out of the 4 countries observed, the country that falls into this category is Italy. The government does not recognize or value "harmonization of paid work and care" (Knijn and Kremer, 1997). Care of young children is a privatised, not collectivised, responsibility, done primarily by mothers or extended family members. Social expectations call for men to be strongly oriented toward the labour market as family breadwinners, whereas women are held responsible for home and care giving (Duncan, 2000).

Parental leave has been available only since 1998 in response to EU directives. Italy offers parents some financial compensation for taking leave, but this amount is too low to be regarded as adequate compensation for giving care. There is some incentive for Italian fathers to take leave, however the parental payment is so low it does not encourage fathers to avail of it. In general, governments following this care model do not promote or encourage fathers' use of leave benefits. Virtually no fathers take leave under normal circumstances, partly because the leave is not an individual non-transferable right of fathers (Italy; den Dulk, 1999; Fagnini, 1999; Valiente, 2000). Policymakers assume that an employee who takes leave has an employed spouse or other means of financial support. Because women on average earn less than men, this creates a financial incentive for leaves to be taken by mothers, reinforcing the idea that women are secondary earners (Rubery et al., 1998) (Goliath, 2003).
2.7.2 Family-Centred Care Model

Germany fits family centred care policy model. Policymaking is shaped by a traditional religious heritage and/or a strong public commitment to the preservation of the traditional family (Rantalaiho, 1997). Women's contribution to the economy is much more recognised than it is in the privatized care model, but men are still held more responsible for family income provision (Lewis, 1992).

The government is actively concerned about family support, with an interest in raising birth rates back up above replacement levels. Work-family reconciliation model encourages women to combine multiple roles by sequencing care work and paid employment or by working part time (van Doorne-Huiskes, 1999a). Public support for care giving assumes that mothers will stay home with children during their first few years of life. Public policies therefore focus on long maternity and parental leaves but limited public child care provision for very young children. Leave takers receive a low flat rate of compensation, far from the equivalent of lost earnings, representing care giving’s low status (Feyereisen, 1999).

Theoretically, leave can be taken by either parent. However in reality, few fathers take leave. This low take-up rate is partly blamed on the low level of financial compensation offered. (Devan and Nuelant, 1999; European Commission, 1998; Pettinger, 1999; Rost, 1999; Thenner, 1999) (Goliath, 2003).

2.7.3 Market-Oriented Care Model

Ireland belongs to this care policy model. Ireland has held strong traditional values concerning the role of women and men and the importance of mothers devoting themselves to home and children (Duncan, 2000; Lewis, 1992; Pfau-Effinger, 1999). The parental leave was non-existent before the European Union imposed its directive. There are no special incentives for fathers to take unpaid parental leave.

Instead of developing state policies, the Irish government is looking for the private sector to become more involved in work-life reconciliation. In 1999, a program for “prosperity and fairness” was agreed upon, calling for companies to develop family-friendly policies such as flexitime, job sharing, telecommuting, and parental leave. So far, family-friendly companies are mostly in the public sector or in companies employing large workforces. Many medium- and small-sized firms still regard work family benefits as unnecessary costs on business (Dobbins, 2000). To supply day-care, the Irish government is looking toward informal caregivers like grandparents, and other family members and also private sector institutions in local communities (Goliath, 2003).
2.7.4 Valued Care Model

Sweden as one of the three Scandinavian EU nations belongs to the valued care group. Sweden is the only country that aspires to fully implement the valued care model although it has not yet succeeded in reaching it.

In the valued care model employees have control over their work schedules so they could take paid time off to care for family members, and taking leave would not jeopardize job security, career opportunities, or long-term income. "Valued care" implies that care is a joint private-public responsibility, offering families financial compensation for parental leave and access to affordable, high-quality care services.

The goal of work-family reconciliation is to share equally the paid and unpaid work between men and women. Both women and men feel entitled to government support for reconciling work and family roles (Lewis and Smithson, 2001). Because men's involvement in childcare is promoted, parental leave would be adequately paid, not transferable to mothers, and there are financial incentives for fathers to take leave. Maximum flexibility in taking leave is offered (e.g., it can be taken part time, it can be transferred several times between parents, and it can be taken anytime until the child reached school age) to encourage parents to share the childcare equally. High-quality publicly subsidised day-care is offered to complement the parental leave program (Goliath, 2003).

2.8 GENDER DIVISION OF LABOUR AND TAKE UP OF PARENTAL LEAVE BY MOTHERS AND FATHERS

Peter Moss and Fred Deven (1999) describe the gendered effects of parental leave: "If parental leave were equally taken by women and men, it might promote or consolidate gender equality. But to be equally taken requires gender equality to be achieved already, or to be further advanced than at present. If gender equality is not already advanced, then parental leave may retard or even reverse progress towards its achievement (p. 14)" (Gornick, J.C. and Meyers, M.K., 2002).

As long as women rather than men take advantage of care provisions, there are employers who will perceive women as less committed to their career than men, and are therefore less likely to invest in female career opportunities, depressing female earnings a whole. To some extent this is a vicious circle: since female workers have limited incentives to pursue a career if they perceive the likelihood of advancement is more limited than for men, they are indeed more likely to withdraw from the labour force, only to return, if at all, in jobs that are often low in job-content compared with their potential. However, if fathers also take leave, in principle it
LITERATURE REVIEW

becomes possible to ensure that one or other parent can spend time with their young children without such deleterious effects. Increasing the amount of parental leave taken by fathers can also reduce the demand for (expensive) formal care arrangement for very young children, and whilst increasing female labour supply generate more gender equitable employment and care outcomes (OECD, 2007).

TABLE 1: Take-up rates of parental leave by sex according to different sources, (Meulders, D., Gustafsson, S., 2002).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Female take-up</th>
<th>Male take-up</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Lourie (1999); <a href="http://www.childpolicyintl.org">http://www.childpolicyintl.org</a>; Plantenga and Remery, 2005, p. 49; supplemented by Fagan and Hebson, 2006, p. 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Hennech (2003) (data 1998); Plantenga and Remery, 2005, p. 49; supplemented by Fagan and Hebson, 2006, p. 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IE</td>
<td>Of the 6.74% of the workforce eligible, 20% used parental leave of which 84% are women (2002)</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Eiro (2002); Plantenga and Remery, 2005, p. 49; supplemented by Fagan and Hebson, 2006, p. 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>Lourie (1999); <a href="http://www.childpolicyintl.org/">http://www.childpolicyintl.org/</a>; Plantenga and Remery, 2005, p. 49; supplemented by Fagan and Hebson, 2006, p. 49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Take up rates presented in the Table 1 above are extremely low for fathers in Germany, Italy and Ireland. Swedish men’ participation in the childcare during the parental leave is considerably higher.

Fathers and parental leave

McKeown et al. (1998) carried out a literature review concerning fathering, referring to the Irish experience in an international context. One of the main conclusions was that: “There appears to virtual unanimity among researchers that the more extensive fathers involvement with his children the more beneficial it is for them in terms of cognitive competence and performance at school as well as for empathy, self-esteem, self-control, life-skills and social competence, these children also have less sex stereotyped beliefs and a more internal focus of control” (McKeown et al., 1998, p. 423) (Fine-Davis et al., 2002).
LITERATURE REVIEW

Men’s attitudes towards parental leave in 15 European countries were examined in survey study Europeans’ attitudes to parental leave. Sweden, Italy, Germany and Ireland were part of this study.

The study examined levels of awareness of the right to take parental leave. Levels of awareness were particularly high in Sweden (97%). At the other end of the scale, only 57% of Irish men claimed to be aware of their right to take parental leave. 74% of German men were aware of their entitlements to take parental leave. 64.7% of Italian men knew that they are entitled to parental leave (European Opinion Research Group, 2004).

34% of Swedes answered that they had taken or were considering taking parental leave for all or several of their children in contrast to figures of 1% in Germany and Ireland. 3% Italian men answered positively when asked this question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men who have taken or are thinking of taking parental leave for all or several of their children</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Ireland</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


2.9 ACCESSIBILITY, ATTITUDES AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PARENTAL LEAVE IN COMPANIES

Case studies of organisations revealed that while policies make parental leave and other measures to reconcile work and family life available to women and men, in practice the assumption is that they are provided mainly for mothers. Consequently, fathers can face negative attitudes in the workplace and other barriers which can obstruct their ability to make use of their parental leave entitlement. Mothers who want to take parental leave can also face obstacles or fear they will incur career penalties afterwards by using the ‘mummy track’ (Lewis, 1997; Moss and Deven, 1999) (Anxo et al., 2007).

Positive attitudes towards work-life balance policies in the workplace are very important part of company’s culture. Supportive attitudes on the part of colleagues, supervisors and employers make a great deal of difference to the success of working parents in balancing work and family (Fine-Davis et al., 2002).
LITERATURE REVIEW

Wider economic and competitive conditions also impact on the operation of parental leave. An employee may be deterred from taking parental leave for fear that this could make them more vulnerable to job loss in situations where redundancies and unemployment are high or rising.

Conversely, from the employers’ point of view, managing parental leave absences can become difficult in various circumstances. On the one hand, in workplaces where few employees request parental leave, line managers may be ill-equipped to devise arrangements for temporary cover. On the other hand, a high take-up of parental leave may create problems for temporary cover and longer term planning if establishments have to deal with restricted labour market conditions, skill shortages or instances where a sizeable proportion of mothers do not return to work after their leave period (Anxo et al., 2007).

The employee satisfaction survey conducted by RecruitIreland.com in 2004 found that many employees in Ireland are afraid of taking their parental leave entitlements, perceiving that it hinders their promotion prospects. Over 56% of the 475 respondents to the survey believe that taking parental leave hinders their future promotion prospects, with a widespread perception that discrimination against parents is the norm.

According to the survey, many employees in Ireland cannot afford to take parental leave – which is unpaid - and fear that they would be discriminated against if they did. For almost 53% of respondents it is not financially feasible to take unpaid parental leave in order to spend more time with their children. Even if they could afford it, 19% of respondents claimed that their employers would not facilitate unpaid leave (EIROnline, December 2007).

2.10 EMPLOYMENT PATTERN OF MOTHERS FOLLOWING PARENTAL LEAVE

Changes to work arrangements following the parental leave:

- reductions in working hours (part-time work and/or job/sharing),
- term-time only working contracts,
- teleworking and working at home,
- flexible working time arrangements (including working a full-time working week but at nonstandard hours) and
- career breaks (OECD, 2007).

Returning to work following a period of parental leave is a major issue for both employers and employees. In terms of company policy, it is a relevant question regarding the replacement of staff absent due to childcare leave. One reason why parental leave results in women exiting the labour market is due to the limited provision of childcare services. Another reason for this
LITERATURE REVIEW

choice by women is that employers may be resistant to reintegrating mothers at the end of the leave period.

To resume employment with reduced working hours is particularly common in Germany and Sweden. In Germany, the second most common pattern among women who have taken parental leave is to exit the labour market afterwards. In Sweden mothers who do not reduce their working hours tend to resume their previous working pattern.

Sizeable proportions of establishments in Italy report that mothers who take leave reduce their working hours following the leave period in the form of part time work or job sharing (Anxo et al., 2007).

Many women in Ireland do not return to the formal workforce following the period of maternity or parental leave due to the fact that the costs of childcare can be so high, that in the short term work does not pay for many second earners in couple families (OECD, 2007).

2.11 HUMAN RESOURCES APPROACHES TO MANAGING PARENTAL LEAVE

Family-related leave may create difficulties for managers dealing with the day-to-day management of work in organisations where employees are absent due to parental leave. Temporary cover can be difficult to arrange for absent employees, and there is uncertainty as to whether the individual employee on parental leave will resume work as before or perhaps on a reduced working time basis. Thus, a range of reasons exist why managers may report implementation problems and/or negative experiences with employees taking longer periods of leave.

One reason is that if a sizeable number of employees take parental leave, this may create problems arranging cover and continuity of tasks, especially if these employees are concentrated in particular departments or activities. Problems might also be reported more frequently in countries with very flexible parental leave systems than in those where options are more limited. This might partly explain the relatively high incidence of parental leave problems reported by company managers in Sweden.

**TABLE 3: Establishments reporting problems related to parental leave, by country (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>No. of establishments reporting problems (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IE</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Establishments with experience of parental leave reported most frequently difficulties in:
- finding staff to replace absent workers (57%),
- lack of continuity of work (52%) and
- uncertainty if or when employees on parental leave will return to work (44%).

There were difficulties in reintegrating the staff resuming work after a period of leave (22%).

How do establishments cope with staff absence due to parental leave:
- Hiring new staff with fixed-term contracts.
- Employing temporary agency workers.
- Distributing work among the remaining employees and
- Hiring new permanent staff.


The study conducted by Institute for Employment Research in 2000 indicated the way companies dealt with parental leave: Companies - especially relatively new, expanding, medium-sized companies - try to keep contact with female employees during the break and offer them tailor-made flexible support. This reflects the wish of the company (and the women) to keep the time of absence short (EIROOnline, December 2007).

Where policies to improve the work-life balance have been introduced, they may potentially generate mutual gains for both employers and workers.

Potential employer benefits include: • the recruitment of new staff and the retention of valued existing staff; • reduced absence; • increased morale and commitment; • reduced overtime levels; • increased productivity; and • a better corporate image and employer of choice mark.

Potential employee benefits include: • an opportunity to achieve a better balance between work and their interests and responsibilities outside work; • less stress and pressure; and • greater equality of opportunity (Dobbins, 2000).

Family-friendly workplaces are essential for the reconciliation of work and family life. Even where countries have good public policies, if the workplace is not family-friendly, they will have little effect. Governments remain reluctant to intervene in the workplace because of the fear of increasing labour costs and in the belief that this is an area best left to employers and employees to negotiate. In many countries therefore, public policy limits itself to encouraging enterprises to make more family-friendly supports available (OECD, 2007).
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.12 COMPANIES’ EXPERIENCES

Provisions of additional payments for parents who want to stay at home to look after their children are contained in the agreements of the Swedish telecommunication company Ericsson, the oil company Statoil, and the Folksam insurance company.

The government sector has the most generous rules: employees in this sector receive 90% of their salary, regardless of how much they earn, when on parental leave. A motivation for this provision is the high level of competition between companies and their desire to attract qualified workers (Demetriades et al., 2006).

In Italy a company agreement signed at Ferrero introduced job-sharing, and was designed to meet the needs of working mothers who have completed their maternity leave and whose children are still under the age of three years.

Italian employer Marazzi Gruppo Ceramiche SpA employs about 1,000 workers at company plants in Sassuolo and Fiorano. The company allows working mothers to have more convenient shifts and working times until their child reaches the age of three years. Moreover, the company provides financial contribution of €50 to help working mothers to pay for day-care facilities for a maximum period of 18 months.

Among the most innovative and original forms of support is that introduced by the Kraft company - Krafts Foods Italia. The company offers a regulated flexibility in working hours and provides its employees with the option of benefiting from a range of supplementary services, i.e. home delivery of groceries, dry-cleaning, bank, postal and registry office-related services (Demetriades et al., 2006).

German cosmetics giant Henkel was named the most family-friendly large company in May 2005. For years, Henkel KGaA has been known to foster programmes that assist its employees in meeting their needs to be successful in both their professional and family lives. A task group draws up projects on establishing more flexible working schedules and providing care for family members. For example, the Gerda Henkel nursery takes care of children from six months of age. Employees on parental leave are given the opportunity to achieve additional qualifications via the Internet, and they can work on projects on a part-time basis.

A small steel and metal construction company with 28 (mainly male) employees, Anton Schoenberger Stahlbau und Modelltechnik in Germany is a great example of employer that fully supports its employees in reconciling family life and work. It is run by two sisters, Sabine and Andrea Schönberger, who allow the workers to bring their children to work in the event of emergency or can work at home if necessary. For occasions such as a child’s birthday or the first day of school, employees receive a day’s paid leave. (Demetriades et al., 2006).
LITERATURE REVIEW

For the *Electricity Supply Board* in *Ireland*, flexible working arrangements are an integral part of its Equal Opportunities Policy. It contends that flexibility in the workplace enables each individual to combine their working career with family life and other commitments and thus assist them in reaching their full potential as valued employees.

Apart from statutory leave arrangements the company provides the following family-friendly policies: Flexitime, domestic leave, work/job sharing, reduced working hours, career breaks, crèche, education support, learning centres, sports club, employee assistance programme, staff insurance scheme, social clubs and many more schemes tailored to employees needs.

*Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs* in *Ireland* introduced "Term Time" working to its employees. Term Time leave is unpaid leave which is intended primarily as an additional facility to assist staff with young children to combine work and family responsibilities by enabling them to take up to 3 months (10 or 13 weeks) leave during the school summer holiday period. The scheme is also available to employees who wish to avail of Term Time to provide care for incapacitated relatives aged over 18 years. This work life balance option was run first on pilot basis in 1998, when 1000 of the Department’s employees availed of the scheme (Work Life Balance).

The summary of Work life balance reconciliation policies in four European countries are explained in the Appendix 3.

2.13 CONCLUSION

*Parental leave policies are an important instrument to establish work life balance on national as well as on the company’s level.*

Different countries offer different solutions to their working fathers and mothers. It is very hard to determine which is the best solution for the working parent, for the company and for the country as a whole. However it is very important to establish the right balance and implement parental leave policy, which would trigger higher employee’s satisfaction, higher productivity for the employers and increasing numbers of women and mothers in formal employment.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND OBJECTIVES

The research method for the project used the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The research work began by examining qualitative studies in the four researched countries. The findings were presented in the literature review. We will use the secondary data uncovered through qualitative research in building the quantitative research.

3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Initially the literature review was carried out to identify secondary information on parental leave in the four chosen countries. The secondary research established different variations of parental leave and four different care policy models, which are operating in European countries. We would like to compare Ireland and its care model to other three countries and use the information from this assessment in the primary research of this project.

Ireland is one of the countries that fit the description of Market-Oriented Care Model. This model is operating on the traditional divisions of male and female roles in the family. Mothers are devoted to home and children and fathers are the main family earners. There are no special incentives for fathers to take parental leave. The leave is unpaid and the length of the leave is the shortest in comparison to the other three models. The childcare is fully privatised and is one of the most expensive in Europe. There is no flexibility in transferring the leave entitlement from one parent to another. Irish government is reluctant to intervene and encourages the employers to implement the tools of work-life balance.

The most desirable and most flexible Valued Care Model promotes equal sharing of responsibilities of work life balance between the government and the employers – public and private companies. Most of the countries aspire to employ this model, however only Sweden, as one of our researched countries, has managed to implement the valued care model.

In comparison to Ireland the goal is to achieve equal share of paid and unpaid work between mothers and fathers. The fathers are encouraged to take parental leave through countries policies and different companies incentives. The parental leave is paid leave and both women and men feel entitled to government support for reconciling work and family roles. Parental leave is offered with maximum flexibility and is longer than in Ireland. The entitlement to parental leave is fully transferable where in Ireland it is an individual leave entitlement. In comparison to Ireland the childcare is subsided and does not impose such high financial burden on parents when returning to work.
The Family centered model is in some elements similar to the one applied in Ireland. Both countries, Germany and Ireland, believe in traditional roles in the family. However women’s contribution to the economy is more recognised in Germany. Women are encouraged to multitask and take on both roles paid employment and caring for the family. Parental leave allowance is paid, unlike in Ireland, however it is so small that it does not encourage fathers to fully commit to childcare. Government is encouraging the work life balance policies; however the objective is to reach replacement levels, rather than establishing work life balance environment. The length of the parental leave is significantly longer than in Ireland and it is the longest amongst the countries observed for this research project. The childcare, in contrast to Ireland, is subsidised and the leave can be freely transferred from father to mother.

Privatised care model established in Italy is the most similar to the Irish model. Traditional roles in the family and privatised model of childcare is used in both countries. The differences are in the length of the parental leave, it is longer in Italy, and the compensation for the leave, which is paid in Italy at very low level to encourage the fathers’ involvement.

3.3 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

The purpose of the primary research outlined in this chapter is to investigate how satisfied is the working parent in Ireland with the parental leave policies established in Irish working environments. We would also like to introduce the survey participants to some elements of the above researched care models. The objective is to learn if there is any room for improvement, implementing various parts of the four models, which would help the parent in Ireland to achieve greater satisfaction in work-life balance.

We conducted quantitative research through self-reports which gathered information through questionnaires. Questionnaire survey was chosen as the most appropriate research method. When choosing this method we considered its advantages and disadvantages. We believe that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages and problems expected.

The main advantage of the self-reports questionnaires was that we were able to access large number of participants in relatively short space of time. The participants were approached via e-mail, post and directly in the months of November and December 2009. The participants were able to provide their opinions privately and anonymously and were not influenced by the interviewer at any stage of the survey. Another advantage of questionnaires is that they are standardised and it is easier to conduct data analysis.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We were aware that by not choosing to have direct individual contact with every participant we will encounter number of not returned or spoiled questionnaires. 60 questionnaires were distributed and we received back 50 completed questionnaires. 2 of these were not completed fully and 48 questionnaires could proceed to data analysis. At the start of our research, we aimed to gather 40 completed questionnaires and with 48 completed questionnaires we successfully exceeded this amount.

Another expected disadvantage of this method of research was that the participants might not provide sufficient detail to satisfy the research. To prevent this occurrence the questions used in the survey were mostly closed questions. This would encourage the participants to give truthful and adequate answer.

The alternative method which could have been used to gather information for the quantitative research were one-to-one interviews. We decided not to use the one-to-one interviews as it would not be logistically possible to interview the large sample in short space of time. We were aware that by using this method we would have more control over the interviewing process and we would have been able to possibly gather more information, however the time constrains prevailed over these advantages.

3.4 SURVEY

Questionnaires were distributed to working parents employed in public and private sector. Our aim was to locate 40 working parents, 50% of females and 50% of males, equally employed in private and public sector. The aim of the survey was to explore people’s attitudes and experiences in coping with balancing work and family with particular reference to the different perspectives of men and women. What would best suit the working parent in Ireland in the line of administration of parental leave as a work life balance instrument was also explored.

3.5 QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

Structured questionnaire was used in the survey. The questions used in the design were closed-end questions, some with choices of multiple answers. The use of close-end questions suited our research as the participants contributed to the survey unsupervised and this question type would keep them on track with their answers. The respondents were also able to answer the questionnaire in the shortest possible time and did not find the questions difficult to answer. Respondents were encouraged to add any additional comments at the end of the questionnaire. This space for participants to expand on any issue or provide any vital information proved very beneficial in data analysis.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire contained 22 questions and took 5 minutes of participant’s time to fill in all the answers. The first three questions were demographical questions and the rest of the questionnaire concentrated on the following:

1. Take up rate of parental leave
2. Accessibility and implementation of parental leave in companies
3. Attitudes towards parental leave in workplace
4. Reasons of not taking parental leave
5. Changes to work arrangements after the parental leave.
6. What would suit the parent more in the line of compensation, length, type and flexibility of parental leave.
7. How do parents in Ireland cope with combining work and family life.

3.6 SAMPLING DESIGN

When sourcing the sample we aimed to represent the target population for the research, which are employed parents working in Ireland.

The sample selection criteria were: 1) The participant is in employment and 2) The participant has at least one child in the age between 1 and school attendance age.

The sample was stratified by sex and employment in the public vs. private sector. The participants were living in different parts of Ireland and we did not distinguish between rural and urban living families.

Part of the questionnaire was a schema of the socio-economic status, which was based on the educational background of the participants. The schema contained four levels from primary education to postgraduate education and the participants were able to specify any other educational level which we did not include.

Respondents were located through employers in public and private sector, through friends and family of the researcher, childcare centres and community groups.

TABLE 4: Sample Design:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PUBLIC SECTOR</th>
<th>PRIVATE SECTOR</th>
<th>NUMBER of participants</th>
<th>TOTAL NUMBER of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.7 GENERALISATION OF THE FINDINGS TO THE LARGER POPULATION

It should be borne in mind that our sample is too small to generalise the finding to the larger population. Additionally, the participants were of both rural and urban populations we did not however examine this categorisation deeper and did not include this classification into our sample selection criteria. Thus while we can be confident of the differences and relationships based on the categorisation of our sample, we cannot generalise to the larger population with sample of this size.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When introducing the research part of this research project we were aware that the participants will be asked to reveal private information, such as information about their families, their feelings and confidential information about their employers. We need to take into account the ethical principles of conducting the survey with confidential information disclosed.

The key issue of ethics with relation to privacy is the intrusiveness of the research and the fact that different individuals have to some extent different boundaries and these need to be respected. (Kraemer, 1981)

To respect the privacy of each contributor, the questionnaires were anonymous. We also informed all participants that any information provided in the survey will be treated as strictly confidential and will be used for the purpose of completing this Management research report only.

The statement: “The information given in questionnaires will be treated as strictly confidential and will be accessed, kept and used by the researcher for completing the research part of the above mentioned Management Research Project only,” was included in the opening paragraph of the questionnaire.

The opening paragraph informed all involved about the purpose of the survey and the use of information they disclose.

The initial statement of the questionnaire gave the participants the freedom to choose if they like to participate on the research study or opt out.

Please see the Questionnaire sample with the opening statement in the Appendix 4.

Appendix 3 outlines parental leave compensation in Sweden, Italy, Germany and Ireland.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION
4.1 BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVES

The data analysis serves two purposes:

- to analyse the findings about the current conditions of parental leave and work life balance in Ireland and
- to determine what conditions of parental leave would best suit working parent in Ireland to help us to develop recommendations for the Irish employers.

48 completed questionnaires were analysed and evaluated. This chapter presents the results of the analysis, along with a discussion about the outcomes.

In the research we targeted male and female from public and private sector working in Ireland. The sex and the sector of employment were the key independent variables in the stratification design. We systematically selected half of the respondents in the public sector and half in the private sector. The survey participants were 50% male and 50% female.

**Education**

As may be seen below, none of the respondents participating on the survey finished only primary school. All participants were well distributed along the rest of the educational continuum, with some having completed secondary education and others having completed postgraduate studies.

The vast majority of the respondents had completed their university or postgraduate degree. Almost 42% of female respondents had completed university and postgraduate degree. 37.5% of male participants completed university degree and one third of the male respondents completed postgraduate degree.
4.2 ACCESSIBILITY AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PARENTAL LEAVE IN COMPANIES

Offer of parental leave.

Participants were asked if their employers offer parental leave to its employees. According to Irish legislation, Parental Leave Act, 1998 every employee who is the natural or adoptive parent of a child shall be entitled to leave from his or her employment. The employee, who meets the conditions of the law, is entitled to parental leave despite the fact the employer does or does not offer the leave. Our question “Does your employer offer parental leave to its employees?” is in that case irrelevant, as the answer from all participants should have been unanimous.

We wanted to find out the employee awareness of their rights to leave to look after their children and whether the employers promote the opportunity to take parental leave as one of the options to balance work and life when having small children.

Nearly 15% of the all participants claim that their employer does not offer the parental leave to its employees. These employees are possibly not informed by their employer and do not know their entitlements regarding parental leave.

It is interesting that all employees in public sector, male and female, answered: Yes, my employer offers parental leave.

Nearly all female employees in private sector, apart from one employee, are aware that their employers offer parental leave.

However 50% of male employees employed in private sector claim that their employer does not offer parental leave to look after their children.
We can only speculate, as we did not investigate further and did not ask additional questions, that reason for the significant difference in public and private sector is the amount of information the employers provide to its employees. Most of the female participants were aware of their parental leave entitlements, this might be due to the fact that women are more likely to take the parental responsibilities upon themselves and look after small children when both parents are employed. The take up of parental leave between men and women will be analysed further in the questionnaire.

CHART 2: Employers’ offer of parental leave to its employees
Q5: Does your employer offer parental leave to its employees?
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of the parental leave

The participants who answered that their employer offers parental leave were further asked about the implementation of the leave. The main objective of this question was to find out the flexibility and openness of the employers when putting the parental leave to practice.

Over half of all respondents reported that it is easy to implement the parental leave and majority of employees working in the public sector found the process easy. However the employees working in the private sector, especially female workers, found the implementation quite difficult. 67% of male respondents and 73% of females claimed the execution of parental leave is difficult. One of the male respondents, working in the private sector, commented: “The flexibility and attitude towards implementation of the leave depends on the employee’s position in the company.”

CHART 3: Implementation of parental leave

Q6: Is the implementation of parental leave easy or cumbersome?

IS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PARENTAL LEAVE EASY OR CUMBERSOME?
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.3 ATTITUDES TOWARDS PARENTAL LEAVE IN WORKPLACE

Due to the fact that parents spend so much time at work, the workplace environment, both in terms of policies and attitudes is a crucial factor in coping with issues of work life balance.

We asked our respondents how is the take up of the parental leave perceived by their employers.

Overall almost 50% of the respondents agreed that their employers welcome and are open to employees taking parental leave.

However when looking at detailed analysis from public and private sector perspective, the reactions are not so positive, especially with employees in private sector. Respondents were asked: To what extent do you agree with: My employer is resentful when a parent takes parental leave to look after a small child.

Most of the employees in private sector (46%) replied they agree with the above statement to some extend and most of male respondents in private sector (42%) strongly agreed that their employer is not happy when their employees take parental leave.

Employers’ positive attitude towards parental leave and a disagreement with the statement, in the Question 7 of the questionnaire, was expressed by majority of male and female public employees.

CHART 4: Attitudes towards parental leave, employer

Q7: To what extent do you agree with: My employer is resentful when a parent takes parental leave to look after a small child.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents were also asked how understanding their colleagues and supervisor were around their family responsibilities. Most of the employees answered that their employers are understanding. When evaluating the answers in more detail most of the female and male employees from public sector answered positively, that their employers are understanding with their family responsibilities. However in private sector most employees replied that their colleagues are not always understanding with their family responsibilities.

CHART 5: Attitudes towards parental leave, colleagues & management
Q11: How understanding are your colleagues and supervisor to your family responsibilities?

4.4 TAKE UP OF PARENTAL LEAVE

We asked the participants whether they used parental leave for their children. Over two thirds of the respondents (69%) did not take parental leave to look after their children. This trend is quite apparent among male employees where only 5 employees (2 from public and 3 from private sector) availed of parental leave. Twice as many female employees, most of them from the public sector, took parental leave to look after small children.
Employees who were able to take the parental leave used it mostly on flexible basis. The length of parental leave taken by respondents varied between 4 weeks and 5 years.

We asked the participants what was the reason for them to not avail of the parental leave. This was a multiple choice answer and the participants were presented with number of options to choose from. Most of the employees answered that taking parental leave would not be financially feasible for the family.

The parental leave is an unpaid leave. Using the leave to look after small children means giving up part of family income. The participants in our survey responded that this would put their family finances into serious difficulty. This was expressed by male respondents especially, who are presumed to be family breadwinners. 85% of all men responded that taking parental leave would not be financially feasible.

The second reason for not taking the leave was a fear that the career of the employee would be affected. Of all respondents the biggest group that chose this answer were female employees (22%), all employed in private sector.

We believe that this answer is strongly connected with previous question about attitudes in the workplace. Most of the female employed in the private sector answered that their colleagues and supervisors are not always understanding with their family responsibilities. Taking parental leave is one of the options when dealing with family responsibilities and looking after small
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

children. The employer who is not always understanding towards the employee with family responsibilities can perceive an employee, who applies for parental leave, as not completely serious about their career in the company. This means fewer opportunities in career advancement, which would consequently affect the career possibilities.

Another obstacle for implementation of the parental leave as reported by small amount of respondents (8%) is when the employer would not approve it. This was equally expressed by male and female in public and private sectors.

4.5 CHANGES TO WORK ARRANGEMENTS AFTER THE PARENTAL LEAVE

The rate of return to employment after the leave

Respondents were asked whether they returned to work after taking parental/maternity leave. We wanted to find out what the return rate was and whether it was feasible for parents to return to work following the leave from employment when considering childcare arrangements and other family responsibilities.

82% of all employees, 79% of female and all male respondents, returned to work after the leave from employment.

The biggest group which chose not to return to work after the leave was one quarter of the female respondents employed in the private sector. This was also the biggest group reporting the most difficulty with the implementation of parental leave when asked in the Question 6.

Most of the private sector female employees commented that it would not be financially feasible to pay for full time childcare and return to work with the same remuneration. As one of the female participants commented: “Most of my salary would go to pay for the childcare.”
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

CHART 7: Return rate after parental leave

Q13: Did you return to work straight after your parental/maternity leave?

DID YOU RETURN TO WORK STRAIGHT AFTER YOUR PARENTAL/MATERNITY LEAVE?

- Male: 100% Yes, 0% No
- Female: 79% Yes, 21% No
- All: 83% Yes, 17% No

Changes in working hours

We asked the respondents whether they changed their working hours in order to balance work and family life.

Two thirds of all participants did not choose to change their hours of work to balance work and family life.

The answer to this question corresponds, to some extent, with Question 8 where we asked our respondents if they took parental leave for any of their children. Taking parental leave, especially on flexible basis, which was a choice of most of our participants, would mean change in the working hours. Most of the respondents did not take parental leave and as we can see from the answers to the above question most of our respondents did not change their hours of work.

Most of the female requested to modify their working hours and most of them were employed in private sector. This indicates the role of mothers who are in the traditional Market-Oriented Care Model devoted to home and children.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

CHART 8: Changes in the working hours

Q14: Did you request any change in your working hours in order to balance work and family life?

![Bar chart showing changes in working hours]

Work life balance alternatives

Participants were asked if there were any work life balance options offered to them by their employers. The majority of the participants (80%) were not offered any of the options we presented in the questionnaire. The participants did not reveal any other work life balance alternatives either.

Of the options offered the most popular was the reduction in the working hours. 56% of female participants were offered the reductions in working hours. One of our participants commented: “Working on a part-time contract has made things of work life balance much easier.”

The male participants seemed not to be offered any alternatives of work life balance. The reason for the low offer of work life balance alternatives to our respondents might be that their employers do not offer the work life balance options or our participants did not express any interest in the work life balance opportunities to look after the family.

This is quite apparent with the male respondents of our group and possibly indicates the traditional role of male breadwinner whose main responsibility is to financially secure the family. Women asked for reduction of working hours in the way of part-time work or job sharing. Traditionally female incomes would be lower than male salaries. The reduction in working time would therefore mean less of an impact on the family income if the mother chooses this option rather than the father.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 5: Options of work life balance

Q15: What options of work life balance alternatives, if any, were offered to you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options of work life balance</th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
<th>ALL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reductions in working hours (part-time work or job/sharing)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term-time working contract</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teleworking or working from home</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career break</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please specify</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the options above offered</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6 THE IDEAL CONDITIONS OF PARENTAL LEAVE FOR WORKING PARENT IN IRELAND

The following set of questions were aiming to determine what conditions of parental leave would suit parent working in Ireland in order to balance the work and life in the best possible way.

As we discovered in the earlier qualitative research the various care policy models offer the employee different conditions of parental leave.

We presented our survey group with these various conditions in the next questions and asked them to select to the one which they most prefer.

**Paid vs. Unpaid parental leave.**

We asked the participants if they would welcome paid parental leave. Nearly all participants were highly favourable towards paid parental leave. All female respondents expressed positive attitude towards paid parental leave and only two male respondents preferred current unpaid parental leave.
The participants who favoured paid parental leave were asked whether they would prefer flat rate payments or flexible compensation derived as a percentage of one’s earnings. The answers of our participants were quite balanced between the two options. 52% of respondents preferred flat rate payments of parental leave and remaining 48% choose compensation depending of parents’ earning. The same trend emerged in the answers of the female respondents. Male respondents were perfectly balanced with their choices, half of them favoured flat rate payments and half of them supported the idea of compensation calculated on basis of parents’ compensation.

Duration of parental leave.

The participants were asked what duration of parental leave they would prefer. The answers to this question were rather diverse.

The ideal length for female group of respondents was 12 months as expressed by nearly 55% of respondents. The second most favourite length of parental leave was 3 years, this was also the longest possible option in the questionnaire.

The opinions of male participants were more varied than in the female group. Most men chose 18 months as the ideal length of parental leave (37,5%). This group was closely followed by male respondents who were happy with 3 months of parental leave (30%), the length which is
similar to the one offered in Ireland currently. Only 21% of male agreed with female on 12 months of parental leave and the smallest group 12.5% would choose 3 years for the leave. It is quite interesting that most of male respondents would choose longer period of parental leave than female respondents. It is also interesting that almost one third of men would be happy with only 3 months of parental leave in comparison to none of the female respondents preferring this option. It seems that male respondents have varied attitude towards the length of the leave in comparison to women and this raises a question whether greater uniformity in answers of the female respondents originate from their experience considering that they mostly take parental leave to look after small children.

CHART 10: Duration of leave

Q18: In an ideal situation what duration of parental leave would you prefer?

Transferability of parental leave.

Respondents reported on what type of organisation of parental leave they would prefer. We gave the participants two options either family parental leave, where the leave is transferable from one parent to another or individual leave, which does not allow any transferability between parents. Nearly all participants (96%) chose the transferable option of family parental leave. Only small number of respondents (4%, all women) preferred individual parental leave.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

CHART 11: Transferability of leave

Q19: As regards to organisation of parental leave, would you prefer Family parental leave or Individual parental leave?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Family parental leave</th>
<th>Individual parental leave</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Flexibility of parental leave.

We questioned the participants on the flexibility of parental leave. When availing of the leave would they like the time off in one time block or would they prefer to take it with maximum flexibility? Only 6% of participants favoured leave as one time block. Majority of the respondents chose the option of flexible implementation of the leave.

The flexible execution of parental leave is officially permitted to parents working in Ireland as stated by Parental Leave Act, 1998 (part II, sec. 7b). The flexible periods of leave must be however agreed by the employer. Some of the respondents commented that the flexible distributions of days and hours of the leave were quite difficult to get approved and implemented.

We can presume that parents working in Ireland are familiar with the flexible implementation of parental leave and considering most of our respondents chose this option, they are also familiar with the benefits this type of leave entails.
4.7 COMBINING WORK AND FAMILY

Participants were asked how easy or difficult it was for them to combine their work with the family lives. Surprisingly the highest number of participants, almost 30%, found it “very easy-easy” to combine work and family life. The male respondents said it was “very easy” to reconcile work and family life and women found it a bit more difficult however still stated “easy” to combine work and private life on the Likert scale. There was no extreme variation between answers of men and women. However the difference in responses between public and private sector were significantly different. Most frequent response in public sector (38%) was “very easy” to combine work and family time. Most of the respondents in private sector (25%) on the other hand responded that it is “very difficult” for them to reconcile time at work and time at home.

One of the participants remarked: “Takes planning when two parents are working and looking after family.”
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

CHART 13: Combining work and family

Q21: How easy/difficult is it for you to reconcile your job and family life?

HOW EASY/DIFFICULT IS IT FOR YOU TO RECONCILE YOUR JOB AND FAMILY LIFE?

4.8 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that parental leave is not very popular instrument to help balance work and family life in Ireland.

We can state that most of the Irish employers (85%) offer parental leave to its employees, however it seems that public service employees are possibly more aware of their entitlements to avail of the leave to balance their working and family lives.

When we compare our results with the study conducted by Newmarket Consulting in 2001, the outcomes are parallel. The study comprised of case studies of 25 organisations in Ireland, 87% of employees interviewed had heard of parental leave, though the level was higher in the public sector than in the private sector organisations. (The Danish National Centre for Social Research, 2007)

Also the study by European Opinion Research Group as mentioned in the Chapter 2 reveals the low level (57%) of awareness of the right to take parental leave by Irish men.

The take up of parental leave is very low. Less than one third of the respondents (31%) took parental leave to look after their children. Most of the women (42%) availed of parental leave and most of them were employed in public sector (58%).

Similar data were collected in a survey in 2001 for the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (MORI MRC, 2001) on the uptake of parental leave. Almost 7% of employees in the
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

655 organisations surveyed (517 in private and 138 in public sectors) were eligible for Parental leave during the course of 2001. In all, it was estimated that 20% of these eligible employees had taken Parental leave. The survey showed that 84% of Parental leave was taken by women. (The Danish National Centre for Social Research, 2007)

The data studied as a part of the qualitative research of this report show parallel results. The study, Fathers and Mothers - Dilemmas of the Work-Life Balance: A Comparative Study in 4 European Countries revealed that only 6% of Irish women and 8% of Irish men use parental leave when the childcare arrangements break down.

So why do parents in Ireland not take parental leave to look after small children and balance their life responsibilities?

As most of our respondents stated the implementation of the leave is easy. The differences between public and private sector emerged as majority of employees working in the public sector found the process easy, however the employees working in the private sector, especially female workers, found the implementation quite difficult.

When examining the attitudes of Irish employers towards parental leave overall almost 50% of the respondents agreed that their employers welcome and are open to employees taking parental leave.

The comparative study of the dilemmas faced by working parents with young children in four European countries – France, Italy, Ireland and Denmark, Fathers and Mothers: Dilemmas of the Work-Life Balance, presents similar results indicating that Irish parents received most acceptance with their childcare responsibilities by their employers. (Fine-Davis et al, 2002)

When examining attitudes of Irish employers in our survey by sector of employment the differences surfaced again. Most of the female and male employees from public sector answered positively, that their employers are understanding with their family responsibilities. However in private sector most employees replied that their colleagues are not always understanding with their family responsibilities.

Implementation of the parental leave and employers’ attitudes towards the leave are not the reasons for low uptake of this work life balance option.

When investigating further the survey revealed that the reasons for not availing of parental leave were of a financial nature. Most of the employees (73%) answered that taking parental leave would not be financially feasible for the family. This was expressed by male respondents especially.

This reason was also expressed in the EIROnline 2007 study as mentioned in Chapter 2: Literature Review: According to the survey, many employees in Ireland cannot afford to take
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

parental leave – which is unpaid - and fear that they would be discriminated against if they did. For almost 53% of respondents it is not financially feasible to take unpaid parental leave in order to spend more time with their children. Even if they could afford it, 19% of respondents claimed that their employers would not facilitate unpaid leave (EIROnline, December 2007).

We established that the majority of Irish employees do not choose parental leave to balance work and family lives. Do Irish employers encourage them to use any other work life balance option?

There was high number of employees returning to work after the leave under the same conditions and surprisingly high percentage (80%) of employees were not offered any of the options of work life balance by their employers.

Only small number of female employees chose to reduce their working hours and work part time or use the job sharing option of employment.

The return rate to employment after the leave, to the satisfaction of the employers, was high. 82% of all employees, 79% of female and all male respondents, returned to work after the leave from employment.

This is contrary to the information provided by OECD report, Babies and Bosses Reconciling work and family life: Many women in Ireland do not return to the formal workforce following the period of maternity or parental leave due to the fact that the costs of childcare can be so high, that in the short term work does not pay for many second earners in couple families (OECD, 2007).

Even though most of the employees returned to work following their leave they mostly did not change their working hours. Two thirds of all participants did not choose to change their hours of work. Most of the female requested to modify their working hours and most of them were employed in private sector.

It is surprising, considering the instruments of work life balance are not principally implemented in Irish work environments, that most of our participants did not report high levels of stress when balancing work and family.

Highest number of participants, almost 30%, found it “very easy-easy” to combine work and family life. However we discovered the differences between sectors of employment where public sector employees most frequently (38%) replied that it is “very easy” to combine work and family time, most of the respondents in private sector (25%) responded that it is “very difficult” to reconcile time at work and time at home. This might be due to the fact that most of the private sector employees did not avail of parental leave to balance the work and family.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

responsibilities and when they decided to take the leave they found the implementation quite
difficult and the attitudes of their colleagues were described as not always understanding with
their family responsibilities. One of our participants employed in private sector stated: “It is very
hard to combine both family and work; you miss out a lot on your children’s development and
rearing.”

4.9 THE CHOSEN CONDITIONS OF PARENTAL LEAVE

The survey indicates low up take of parental leave, so what needs to be changed to
increase the implementation of this work life balance instrument?

Not surprisingly, considering the parental leave is currently unpaid and this is the reason for its
low uptake, nearly all participants were highly favourable towards paid parental leave.

The answers of our participants were quite balanced between the two options of method of
parental leave payment. 52% of respondents preferred flat rate payments of parental leave and
remaining 48% choose compensation depending on parents’ earning. Private sector employees
(58%) would prefer flat rate payments and most of the public sector workers (54%) would
favour the second option: compensation depending on parents’ earnings in the period before
the birth of the child.

The ideal length of parental leave is 12 months as expressed by nearly 38% of respondents.
Nearly all participants (96%) chose the transferable option of family parental leave.
Majority of the respondents chose the option of flexible implementation of the leave.
Participants’ answers describe the elements of preferred care policy model adapted in Sweden.
The Valued Care policy model promotes adequately paid parental leave, implemented with
maximum flexibility. The entitlement is partly transferable and partly individual to encourage the
equal sharing of the leave by both men and women. The duration of parental leave in Sweden
is a bit over 12 months.

The elements most preferred by our participants would support equality in care responsibilities
between women and men and especially encourage higher take-up rates of fathers. This would
consequently lead to higher numbers in implementation of the parental leave.

The adequate level of financial compensation when on parental leave would mean financial
stability for the family. Financial reimbursement is crucial to men’s willingness to take leave, as
most of the men (nearly 85%) answered taking the unpaid leave would not be financially
feasible for the family. Whether or not leave is paid, and how much are very important factors in whether men take leave.

The transferability with elements of individual right to parental leave is important to make the parental leave more attractive. When the leave is transferable the parents can share the responsibility of looking after small children. The element of individual entitlement encourages the fathers to get involved in caring for their children.

The flexibility of leave is important for our respondents and is promoted by valued care policy model. The assumption is that the more flexible leave is the better.

The parents in our survey expressed their opinion on the ideal age limit for the take up of the parental leave: "Parental leave should be available to parents up to the child’s time in national school." & “I believe parental leave should be available for parents of children up until the age of 12 years, until children go to secondary school. This would allow parents to spread their parental leave more evenly over number of years which would be more beneficial to both the employer and employee."

Valued care model is the most developed in providing comprehensive support systems for working parents. It is not surprising our respondents leaned towards the components of parental leave operating in the countries like Sweden, where the valued care model became reality.

The valued care model needs to be supported by various countries structures, public and private, in order to operate.

Some of our respondents were not very positive when commenting on the attitudes and openness of the employers (especially in private sector) towards work life balance policies. As one of the employees expressed: “Over the coming years I believe matters such as parental leave will be more and more difficult. Companies are under pressure and know that unlike before they now have the driving seat when deciding about such matters. I believe we will not see paid parental leave in Ireland for some time.”
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

The main focus of this study has centred on the provision of parental leave as a work life balance instrument.

The objectives of the Management research report were to analyse the provision of parental leave in four EU countries, compare the parental policies in these countries and present the differences discovered to working parents in Ireland to see if their implementation would possibly make the Irish parental leave policies more desirable.

The first part of the report concentrated on an analysis of different parental leave policies in Sweden, Italy, Germany and Ireland.

The existing studies indicated the gender imbalances in the take-up of parental leave in all four countries. Individual take-up rates vary across countries but in each country it is mainly women who take parental leave. The main reason for low take up of parental leave by fathers is the low financial compensation during the period of leave. High awareness and positive attitude towards the implementation of the leave are other factors which help working parents to better balance work and family.

Numerous work arrangements are available for parents following the parental leave. EU studies and reports used in the quantitative research of this report indicate that reduced working hours are the most popular work-life balance arrangement in Sweden, Italy and Germany. However the studies suggest that Irish women do not return to employment following the leave to care for small children.

Finally we researched examples of how companies in Sweden, Italy, Germany and Ireland manage the implementation of parental leave and the difficulties and advantages for both the employee and the employer.

Secondly, the comparative review of countries parental leave policies confirms considerable variability. The EU establishment creates minimum standards and regulates the area of leave for all parents in EU countries; however it is up to each country to draw and implement their own policies.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

The differences in the parental leave policies in the four researched countries were mainly in:

- Duration
- Level of payment during the leave
- Flexibility of the leave and
- Organisation of the leave on individual or family basis.

Considering further differences in opportunities for leaves from work to care for young children, job security and benefits and encouragement of equality in care responsibilities between women and men, we placed Sweden, Italy, Germany and Ireland into four different care policy models.

Care policy models adapted in Germany and Italy are comparable to the one implemented in Ireland. The main differences are in the length of the parental leave, it is longer in Italy and Germany, and the compensation for the leave, which is paid in both countries in comparison to unpaid leave in Ireland.

It is evident that parental leave policies are the most developed in Valued Care Model adapted in Sweden and this model varies the most in comparison to Irish Market Orientated model. Parental leave policies are established to bring about gender equality and especially encourage men involvement in take up of parental leave. Indeed the fathers’ take-up rates are the highest among our four examined countries.

The main incentives for higher take up of the leave are: the leave is paid adequately and parts of the leave are especially dedicated for fathers. Parental leave is offered with maximum flexibility. The length of the leave is intermediate, in comparison to other three countries, which stimulates higher rates of parents’ participation and helps to reconcile work and family life issues.

In contrast the parental leave in Ireland is unpaid, and the fathers’ involvement is very low. The leave is an individual entitlement and there are no special incentives for men to take time off to look after their families. The short length of parental leave creates more of a work disincentive than support for working parent.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

We used the above differences in the quantitative research of the report. Our aim was to find out: Is the working parent in Ireland satisfied with the current parental leave policies? The quantitative survey indicated that most parents in Ireland do not use parental leave to help balance work and family life. The main reason for low application of parental leave is the fact that it is unpaid.

Gender inequality in using parental leave was confirmed in our survey of working parents in Ireland. Majority of women were aware of parental leave entitlements and were availing of the leave in contrast to men involved in the survey. Most women also used other work life balance arrangements when returning to work after parental leave in contrast to men, who did not avail of this option at all.

Financial reimbursement is crucial to men’s willingness to take leave, as most of the men answered taking the unpaid leave would not be financially feasible for the family. Whether or not leave is paid, and how much are very important factors in whether men take leave. Unpaid leave may retard or even reverse progress towards achievement of balance between men and women and their work and family responsibilities. Bigger pressure on women to cope with both family and employment might be discouraging their return to employment after the period of leave. The EU research studies confirm this trend.

However our survey revealed that almost all respondents, women and men, returned to employment after the period of parental leave. This proves the fact that in the current era both parents need to work to provide for the family and their children.

The survey of parental leave policies exposed differences in Irish public and private sectors. There is higher implementation of parental leave in public sector than private sector. Employees in public sector seem to be more aware of the leave entitlements than employees in private sector. They also reported easier implementation and better attitude from management and colleagues towards the time off to look after small children. As a result the public sector employees find easier to combine work and family responsibilities, in comparison to private sector employees who find this difficult.

The second question of our research was: Is there any room for improvement, implementing various parts of the different countries parental leave policy models, which would help the parent in Ireland in reaching greater satisfaction with work-life balance? Working parent in Ireland, when presented with four care policy models, favoured the Valued care model implemented in Sweden. This is not surprising considering this model contains most developed work life balance policies. The parent working in Ireland would prefer parental leave
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

that is adequately paid, fully flexible with transferable periods between parents and is of intermediate length (12 months).

The Management Research report confirms that employers in Ireland do not seem to encourage parental leave and other work life balance policies to their employees.

It is notable from the survey of employees that the Irish public sector is more open and supportive than employers in private sector. It seems that private sector employers can learn a work life balance lesson from the public sector players.

The primary business orientation of private companies and their attitudes that employees should not expect to be able to change their working pattern if it disrupts the business goals of the organisation mean that the work life balance does not take the priority. This approach however cannot be sustained long term. Employees’ goals of work life balance need to be incorporated into the business goals of the organisation to create win-win environment for both the employee and the employer.

Private sector as well as the public sector employers need to be aware of the benefits of work life balance policies like parental leave.

The direct benefits like increased satisfaction, morale and commitment, productivity and loyalty among the employees outweigh the constraints and costs of implementation. There are additional indirect benefits through reduced absence and subsequent reduction in overtime levels, increased retention and reduction in recruitment/training and development costs of replacing valued staff.

The employee will benefit from an opportunity to achieve a better balance between work and their interests and responsibilities outside work, less stress and pressure and greater equality of opportunity.
CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN
CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The advantages of work life balance for both employee and employer are evident. The research conducted in this report indicated very low promotion and offer of work life balance alternatives by Irish employers. So why did the work life balance alternatives not become a widespread phenomenon amongst Irish companies?

6.2 HUMAN RESOURCES CHALLENGES AND PARENTAL LEAVE

Parental leave policies and other work life balance alternatives may create difficulties for the employer’s day to day business.

The problems arise with a need to cover for employees who are taking the leave. It might be difficult to find appropriate replacements and some managers might be reluctant to deal with temporary recruitment of new staff.

The business goals of most companies are orientated on profit and productivity, rather than welfare of their employees. Possible disruption of business continuity due to number of employees on parental leave is another reason why the work life balance does not take the priority.

Also employers cannot predict whether the individual employee on parental leave will resume work as before, on reduced working time basis or does not return to employment at all. Even though most of the respondents in our survey returned to work following the parental leave and did not change the working hours in order to balance work and family life, some employees might choose this option and managers need to deal with issues of interrupted continuation of production and business.

The large costs connected to introduction of work life balance policies are considered to be a disincentive in their implementation. The employers do not see that advantages outweigh the costs at the start and it can be difficult to evaluate the effects of work life balance policies as all of the costs and benefits may not be quantifiable.

There is a challenge in many organisations to make access to flexible working and leave arrangements more equitable among individual employees while balancing this against organisational needs and priorities.
CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

It is evident from our report that the main obstacle to greater implementation of parental leave is the lack of financial compensation. In order to make the parental leave and most of the work life arrangements attractive to parents, and especially to the fathers, they need to be paid adequately. As we can see from the Swedish valued care model example this leads to gender equality and more support for the working mothers and fathers.

It is questionable if the Irish public or private sector employers can afford to pay their employees while on parental leave. However this would bring greater support and improve the work life balance of the employees it would not be practically and financially feasible for any business.

The government structures would need to be involved in creation and implementation of paid parental leave policies if this idea would have any chance to succeed and all involved would benefit from the work life balance.

This report does not cover the scope of recommendation for the government. We would like to introduce some recommendation for the employers and the steps they can take to make the work life balance options more attractive and effective for both business and the employees.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EMPLOYER

Parental leave as a statutory leave arrangement to introduce work life balance to working parent may not be suitable for everyone. Not all employees could afford to avail of arrangements of unpaid parental leave that would imply a loss of earnings.

HR Departments however should be raising awareness and support the implementation of the leave. Positive attitudes towards the leave to look after small children are extremely important as is the possibility to implement parental leave on a flexible basis with maximum openness and assistance from line management. Management needs to be adequately trained to deal fairly and consistently with employees’ requests for parental leave and other work life balance alternatives.

To address the unpaid parental leave the employer can offer the option of having employee’s annual basic salary spread in equal amounts over a 12 month period. This would help to manage the family budget during the 14 weeks of parental leave otherwise unpaid.

Parental leave is only one option when establishing work life balance environment. There are many work life balance working arrangements that can be implemented into companies culture.

It is difficult to arrive at a ‘one size fits all’ formula that would result in successful work life balance policies. We need to take into account differences among employers (sector, business, operating hours) and employees.
CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

When planning to implement the work life balance arrangements as a part of Human Resources’ policies and procedures these steps should be followed:

1. **Identify people’s ideals**
   It is important to identify the challenges employees face in managing work and home life, and to learn what kinds of things your company can do to help them be more effective. It is also very insightful to speak with managers to find out how work/life issues affect company’s ability to meet business needs. Failure to survey the staff about what they need can result in a lot of time and effort going into devising schemes that are of little practical interest.

2. **Identify the company’s ideals**
   The company need to identify the business objectives and needs. The schemes developed need to be realistic in terms of running the business and it needs to be accepted that there may be practical limits to what can be implemented.

3. **Select arrangements to develop**
   There are many family friendly arrangements which are accessible to every employer:
   - Flexible Working/Flexitime
   - Job Sharing
   - Part-time Work
   - Telecommuting/Home-working/Teleworking
   - Career Breaks
   - Adaptability, Flexibility - These include changes to work patterns, by way of shorter weeks, shorter days, condensed weeks and new forms of shift work which allow start and finishing times to meet the demands of school runs, etc
   - Annualised Hours
   - Term-time working
   - E-Working
   - Virtual teams
   - Special Leave for Domestic Purposes
   - Optional day off or week off at own expense
   - "Banking" time off
   - Crèche Facilities
   - Education Support
   - On-line Learning
   - Leave of Absence for educational and personal reasons.

Company’s survey should identify the needs of employees and the areas of strongest interest should be selected for further development.
CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

4. Research best practice
In order to avoid "re-inventing the wheel" the company can identify examples of organisations to benchmark against.

5. Generate a set of proposals
A set of proposals can be generated to meet the aspirations of employees. Flexibility is essential as a solution for one staff member may not be necessary or feasible for others. This is why the communication and consultation with line management is important to make appropriate changes to best suit the individual. The proposals must be practicable and the management needs to consider their impact on other aspects of employment such as annual leave, lunch and tea breaks, overtime, etc.

Practical operational decisions have to be made including the setting of a trial periods, pilot schemes and providing for notice periods for either the company or an individual to terminate an arrangement once entered into.

6. Offer to people
Once the set of proposals are finalised the formal offer can be extended to all employees.

7. Introduce on a pilot basis or trial period
The chosen schemes should be introduced on trial basis first. The company should act cautiously and various schemes should be expanded on a progressive basis allowing time for each section to absorb the changes. Enough time needs to be allowed for trial periods to uncover any defects during infrequent situations like holiday situations or shut downs.

8. Monitor and refine
All schemes should be continually monitored to identify any areas which need refinement. Managers should respond to and record any operational queries arising during the trial period to allow the schemes to adjust and create a sound system for the future.

9. Review
At the end of the trial period each scheme should be reviewed. The HR Department needs to make the decision, based on the views of the participants and the company, whether to continue with the schemes into the future (Work Life Balance).
CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The website worklifebalance.ie provides support and funded consultation to work with small to medium sized enterprises in developing and implementing work-life balance policies and arrangements. It helps the employers in training for management and employees in designing and operating such arrangements.

It also provides practical advice and ideas for companies considering the work life balance policies:

- Start small and establish a pilot group.
- Provide sufficient information to all managers.
- Train line managers in the promotion and implementation of work life balance initiatives to ensure a consistent approach throughout the organisation.
- Consider the area’s most likely to benefit from Flexible Working first as these will then pave the way for other teams.
- Promote internally.
- Continuous communication is imperative for the schemes to succeed. Employees availing of the schemes might feel ‘out of the loop’ with their colleagues and managers. Technology, in the form of emailing, shared electronic diaries and time planners are the best way for the employees to stay in touch.
- Awareness raising and training is an important element of work life balance implementation. The awareness should be promoted on an ongoing basis at organisation level and through line managers.
- Top level management recognition and commitment is vital for success. (Work Life Balance)

6.5 COSTS OF WORK LIFE BALANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The cost of providing Work Life Balance policies will vary depending on the types of arrangements in place. For example, companies will obviously be aware of the cost of providing a childcare facility. It is often more difficult to establish the cost of providing job sharing or part-time work.

The following should be considered when assessing the costs:

- Administration costs in relation to rosters and salaries.
- Record keeping for monitoring purposes.
- Insurance and security.
- Health and safety costs for alternative working arrangements like telecommuting/home-working.
- Temporary cover costs (e.g. recruitment and training costs)
- Cost of equipment (e-working software, computer equipment, etc)

(Work Life Balance)
CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

6.6 IRISH BEST PRACTICE CASES

There are many companies in Ireland that succeeded in introduction of work life balance arrangements to its employees. Irish website promoting work life balance lists companies’ case studies.

*Western care association* identified a need for childcare by a number of members of staff as necessary to achieve Work Life Balance. The company was however unable to provide childcare solution to meet the needs of all staff members. The company identified these solutions to resolve the problem:
- One person was nominated to hold current information on approved childcare services in the region.
- Links to childcare services became available on the Association’s website.

Another company *Abbott Vascular Devices Ireland Ltd* (formally Biocompatibles), recognised a requirement for home working amongst its employees. The company implemented secure home-working software and employees were able to work remotely. The software was used for further future developments, people travelling were able to use the technology to work while travelling which meant they did not have to spend as much time catching up when they returned to the office.

*Jurys Doyle Hotel Group Plc* recruited coordinator especially for Family Friendly / Work Life Balance policies. This person is responsible for the implementation and co-ordination of the following areas: term time, compressed week, flexible hours, e-working / flexible workplace, training and development and working time watch-dog.

6.7 CONCLUSIONS

Work life balance initiatives represent a challenge for the company and its employees. Literature and practical case studies of companies portray many benefits and advantages for all involved. Properly promoted and implemented work life balance policies create positive image of the organisation amongst employees.

The positive image reflected to the outside environment forms “employer of choice” trademark, which is an important factor for the company to succeed on the current highly competitive market.
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## APPENDIX 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Age limit</th>
<th>Payment</th>
<th>Family or individual entitlement</th>
<th>Flexibility</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Paid father quota</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>480 days to be shared between the parents, 60 days reserved each parent.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>First 390 days: 80%, for people who have been working legally in Sweden for over 240 days, subject to the max amount. Applies to salaries under app. 3325 EUR per month. People who earn more than this will get 80% of the highest permissible salary of app. 2670 EUR per month. Next 90 days: app. 6 EUR p/d</td>
<td>Family (partly individual non-transferable)</td>
<td>May be taken part time.</td>
<td>Parental leave is fully flexible: may be divided in full days, half, 1/4, 1/8 (1 hour); same leave for adoptive parents.</td>
<td>60 days for fathers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>11 months per child to be shared: 6 months max. for the mother and 6 for the father, extended to 7 if the father claims at least 3 months; 10 months for lone parent.</td>
<td>8 (6 if adoption)</td>
<td>Child under 3: 30% for 6 months maximum; 30% over 6 months only if incomes below a maximum; child aged 3-8: unpaid.</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td></td>
<td>Also for adoption. Duration of paid leave up to 3 year for severely handicapped child. Also 3 months 30% paid leave for self-employed during first child year.</td>
<td>6 months dedicated for the father. If the father decides to take more than three months optional leave, the couple is entitled to an extra month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>3 years per parent per child; the 2 first years of the child, and the 3rd year before the child is 8. Couple parents working part-time (15-30 hours) can take leave simultaneously.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Separate benefit during first 2 years (means tested and income related) Max: EUR 300 per child and month during first 24 months or EUR 450 during 12 first months.</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>May be taken part time and at the same time by both parents.</td>
<td>Lone parent working up to of 30 hours maximum is entitled to parental leave. Also for adoptive parents.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IE</td>
<td>14 weeks per parent (in one block or broken up with employer’s agreement).</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Unpaid</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Can be taken part time with consent of the employer.</td>
<td>Also in case of adoption.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## WORK LIFE BALANCE RECONCILIATION POLICIES IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Reconciliation of work and private life is important, especially with regard to gender equality. Publicly financed childcare is more or less universal and leave facilities are well developed. The new government is going to introduce a gender equality bonus in order to encourage fathers to take up parental leave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>In Italy, the reconciliation of work and family life is primarily seen as a woman’s issue. The most important policy tool is maternity and parental leave. Take-up rates by fathers are very low, notwithstanding the fact that the law on parental leave has been designed to achieve a fairer distribution of family responsibilities between fathers and mothers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Reconciliation of work and family is high on the policy agenda; there are targets set to increase the number of childcare places and the parental leave scheme has been reorganised. However, the resistance to a more modern concept of working mothers has been rather strong and is not yet accompanied by a convincing concept of equal opportunities for women and men in society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>A number of significant new policies have recently been introduced, including extended leave entitlements and additional financial support to parents of young children. Yet Ireland lacks a developed system of reconciliation policies, which has been identified at both national and EU level as a major barrier towards further increases in women’s employment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## PARENTAL LEAVE COMPENSATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Compensation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>First 390 days at 80% of income (up to an income ceiling). Next 90 days: SEK 60 (€6.20)(^1) per day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Child under 3: 30% for 6 months maximum; 30% over 6 months only if incomes below a maximum; child aged 3-8: unpaid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>Separate benefit during first 2 years (means tested and income related) Max: EUR 300 per child and month during first 24 months or EUR 450 during 12 first months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IE</td>
<td>Unpaid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^1\) The exchange rate used here is 1 SEK = €0.1039.
1. **Sex**
   - F
   - M

2. **What is the highest level of your education?**
   - Primary □
   - University Degree □
   - Secondary □
   - Postgraduate Degree □
   - Other, please specify ________________________________________________

3. **Do you work in public or private sector?**
   - PRIVATE / PUBLIC

4. **How many of your children are between 1 and school attendance age?** ____________________________

5. **Does your employer offer parental leave to its employees?**
   - YES / NO

6. **IF YES: Is the implementation of parental leave easy or cumbersome?**
   - EASY / DIFFICULT

7. **To what extent do you agree with: My employer is resentful when a parent takes parental leave to look after a small child.**
   - (1-Strongly agree, 2-Agree to some extend, 3-Disagree) ____________________________

8. **Did you take parental leave for any of your children?**
   - YES / NO

9. **IF YES: What was the length of parental leave taken?** ____________________________

10. **Did your employer approve your parental leave on a flexible basis □ or in one block □?**

11. **How understanding are your colleagues and supervisor to your family responsibilities?**
    - (1- Very understanding, 2- Understanding, 3- Not always understanding, 4- Not understanding at all) _______

12. **IF YOU DID NOT TAKE PARENTAL LEAVE: What was the reason for not taking the parental leave?**
    - (Please circle multiple answers if relevant)
    - 1. My employer would not agree to the parental leave
    - 2. Taking parental leave would not be financially feasible for our family
    - 3. Not enough information about parental leave
    - 4. My career would be affected
    - 5. I fear I would be stuck at home and would have less social life

13. **Did you return to work straight after your parental/maternity leave?**
    - YES / NO

14. **Did you request any change in your working hours in order to balance work and family life?**
    - □ YES I requested changes to my working hours
    - □ NO I carried on working as before my leave

15. **What options of work life balance alternatives, if any, were offered to you?**
    - (Please circle one of the options below)
    - 1. Reductions in working hours (part-time work or job/sharing)
    - 2. Term-time working contract
    - 3. Teleworking or working from home
    - 4. Career break
    - 5. Other, please specify:
    - 6. None of the options above offered

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My name is Michaela Mac Carthy and I would like to ask you to fill in the questionnaire below. The questionnaire that you see underneath is part of my Research project for Higher Diploma in Personnel Management that I am currently attending at UCC. I am concentrating on Work-life balance especially parental leave in my research study and the information you provide in this survey will help me to analyse the satisfaction or dissatisfaction with parental leave that is provided for parents in Ireland to help them to reconcile their work and personal lives.

The information given in questionnaires will be treated as strictly confidential and will be accessed, kept and used by the researcher for completing the research part of the above mentioned Management Research Project only. Thank you for taking the time to fill in the questionnaire!
16. Would you welcome paid parental leave?  
   YES / NO  
   (If you answered NO, please continue with Question 18)

17. IF YES: Would you prefer:  
   □ Flat rate payments  
   □ Compensation depending on parents' earnings in the period before the birth of the child

18. In an ideal situation what duration of parental leave would you prefer? (Please circle one of the options below)  
   1. 3 months  
   2. 12 months  
   3. 18 months  
   4. 3 years  
   5. No leave  
   6. Other, please specify__________________________________________________________

19. As regards to organisation of parental leave, would you prefer:  
   □ Family parental leave (Possibility to transfer parts or full entitlement of leave from one parent to the other.)  
   □ Individual parental leave (No possibility to transfer the leave to other parent, on if you don't use it, you lose it basis.)

20. If you had a choice would you prefer to take the parental leave:  
   □ In one time block  
   □ Take the leave with maximum flexibility (e.g. taken part time, in separate sections)

21. How easy/difficult is it for you to reconcile your job and family life? (1 - extremelly easy, 6 extremelly difficult)  
   ____________

22. Any other comments: ________________________________________________________________  
   _______________________________________________________________  
   _______________________________________________________________  
   _______________________________________________________________