Making families visible: Closing EU data gaps for better policies

DECEMBER 2025

Making families visible:

Closing EU data gaps for better policies

Table of contents

For further information contact Holly Shorey
COFACE Senior Project and Advocacy Officer: hshorey@coface-eu.org

Glossary

EELN	The European Equality Law Network (EELN) produces reviews on the progress of transposition and implementation of EU equality and non-discrimination directives, including key work in monitoring the EU Work Life Balance Directive.[1]
EQLS	The European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) administered from Eurofound (the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions) concentrates indicators measuring Europeans quality of life from a wide variety of factors: income, housing, education, family, health and more. [2]
ESS	The European Social Survey (ESS) is a cross-national survey conducted to measure the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour patterns across Europe. [3]
EU-LFS	The EU- Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) is a large EU household survey providing data on labour market participation of those in and out of the labour force. [4]
Eurobarometer	The EU's Eurobarometer survey assesses public opinion on a wide range of topics, including social topics, in the EU.[5]
EU-SILC	The EU statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC) is an EU survey collecting cross-sectional and longitudinal data on income, poverty, social exclusion, and living conditions.[6] It also includes ad-hoc modules on specific thematic areas.
EWCS	The European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) administered from Eurofound provides EU-wide data on the working conditions of workers across the EU.[7]
GGS	The Generations and Gender Survey collects data on life-course and family dynamics across many countries in and out of Europe. It conducts follow-up surveys to track how people's lives unfold.[8]
HBS	Every EU Member State conducts a household budget survey (HBS) which provides data on household expenditure on goods and services and helps to inform national consumer price indexes.[9]
ILO GCP Portal	The International Labour Organisation has a Global Care Policy Portal which contains over 60 indicators related to care leaves and services across the world. [10]
LIS	The Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) is a global database of household and person level data on income, social benefits, pensions, employment, expenditure and more.[11]
LP&R	The International Networks on Leave Policies and Research produce annual reviews on maternity, paternity, parental leaves,

---

[1] https://www.equalitylaw.eu/publications/law-reviews
[2] https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/surveys-and-data/surveys/european-quality-of-life-survey
[3] https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/
[4] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/european-union-labour-force-survey
[5] https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/screen/home
[6] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/european-union-statistics-on-income-and-living-conditions
[7] https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/surveys-and-data/surveys/european-working-conditions-survey
[8] https://www.ggp-i.org/data/generations-and-gender-survey/
[9] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/household-budget-survey
[10] https://webapps.ilo.org/globalcare/
[11] https://www.lisdatacenter.org/our-data/lis-database/

	leaves to care for sick children and other employment-related measures to support working parents, and early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy provision in 52 countries including all EU Member States.[12] The Annual Reviews present country insights through assessing the state of play regarding current policies, how leave and employment related policies interact with ECEC policy, highlights any changes in the system since the previous review, and the take up of leaves. They also conduct cross-country comparative overviews.
MISSOC	The Mutual Information System on Social Protection (MISSOC) database, coordinated by the European Commission, provides comparable data on social protection systems across EU Member States plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.[13] The System is updated twice a year, giving timing and detailed updates on twelve key areas of social protection: financing, health care, sickness- cash benefits, invalidity, old-age, survivors, accidents at work and occupational diseases, family benefits, unemployment, guaranteed minimum resources, long-term care, and maternity/paternity.
OECD Family Database	The OECD Family Database provides cross-national indicators on family outcomes and family policies in OECD countries, non-member countries working closely with the OECD, and EU Member States.[14] This includes data on the structure of families, labour market position of families, public policies for families (including six indicators on child related leaves) and child outcomes.
SHARE	The Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) is a European social science panel study that collects information on health, ageing and retirement of Europeans over their life-course.
SPIN- PLB	The Social Policy Indicators Database (SPIN) is home to comparative data on social rights and duties of citizens across 36 countries including all EU Member States.[15] There is a specific dataset on Parental Leave Benefits (SPIN-PLB).
WORLD	The WORLD Policy Analysis Centre aims to provide comparative international data to aid policy development, including in the field of care where there is a specific database.[16]

---

[12] https://www.leavenetwork.org/annual-review-reports/
[13] https://www.missoc.org/missoc-database/
[14] https://www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/oecd-family-database.html
[15] https://www.su.se/social-policy-indicators-database/
[16] https://www.worldpolicycenter.org/topics/care/policies

1.Introduction: Why family data matters?

Families are at the heart of care, education, and social protection systems, yet families' challenges, experiences, and needs are not always reflected fully in EU wide comparable data. High quality, comparative data is fundamental to achieving positive outcomes for families and society for several key reasons. Data is essential across the entire policy cycle, from agenda setting and policy development, to implementation, and to monitoring and evaluation. It acts as both the foundation and feedback loop of effective evidence-based policies supporting families across Europe.

Firstly, data is key for developing EU policies based on the realities of families: reflecting different family types in all their diversity and responding to the different challenges, experiences and discriminations they can face across a wide range of policy domains such as care, disability, housing, employment, digitalisation, education, and financial inclusion. Without data insights, those working in policy and practice to support families risk developing interventions that do not adequately address challenges, provide solutions, or support families in the way necessary to respond to their needs. Granular data is needed to target measures appropriately, to invest political action and funding in the right places at the right time. Data shows us where the gaps are and where we need to do more. Without it, inequalities and unmet needs remain invisible.

Beyond policy design, monitoring and evaluation are equally dependent on strong data foundations. Comparative data allows for policies to be measured over the course of their implementation, providing clear indicators to assess whether they are reaching their intended goals and outcomes for families, in efficient and effective ways. At the EU level, cross-country comparative data is essential to get a clear picture of the variation across EU countries. Having a common evidence base allows for a unified approach to social cohesion, inclusion, and upward convergence which is especially key for strengthening efforts to promote a more social Europe. For example, in feeding EU priorities supporting families such as in the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Child Guarantee, the European Care Strategy, and the EU Work Life Balance Directive. These policies are complimented by monitoring frameworks which provide a set of key indicators to measure policy progress, but rely on the available data from EU surveys and databases to be able to produce a clear representation of the state of play across Europe.[17] Thus, with better data, better monitoring can be done. Furthermore, countries can see how they are doing in comparison to others and learn from others on what policies can produce positive outcomes for families in their setting. This also helps target EU funds towards where they are most needed, for example, Member States with higher child poverty than the EU average are required to allocate at least 5% of the European Social Fund+ resources on efforts tackling child poverty.[18]

The need for stronger data on families and key areas that impact families has also been stressed by the EU itself, with the Council of the EU adopting conclusions on European statistics in November 2025.[19] The conclusions stress the importance of high-quality integrated European social statistics for furthering the EU social agenda, notably the European Pillar of Social Rights. In the field of housing, the Council emphasises how crucial making available timely and high-quality statistics can be for policy development.

---

[17] EU monitoring frameworks such as on the EU Work Life Balance Directive published in 2020 (available online), for the Council Recommendation on access to affordable high-quality long-term care (available online), and on the European Child Guarantee (available online)
[18] Council of the EU (2021), Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee, 2021. Available online
[19] Council of the EU (2025), Council Conclusions on EU Statistics, 2025. Available online

This policy brief explores the role cross-country comparative data plays across Europe in achieving positive outcomes for families and society. It considers the state of play of data on family diversity and household data, care for adult family members, labour market discriminations, and family leaves as examples of where data is key yet data gaps persist and must be addressed. It identifies the implications these gaps can have for families in Europe, before putting forward potential solutions. The aim of this policy brief is to stress how crucial data is in the policy cycle, share key databases and surveys related to families and family life across the EU, and present recommendations for richer data going forward.

2.Family diversity and EU household data

Europe is home to a wide diversity of families, with there being no single family configuration that constitutes what family is. Care is exchanged across generations in single parent families, blended families, intergenerational families, rainbow families, two parent families and many more. To provide targeted support to address the different vulnerabilities, challenges, and experiences that different family types face, it is essential that we can see this diversity of families in cross-national data.

The data we call on for measuring family relationships comes from EU household data. Families are often more than those who reside together in one household, especially for families where children live across more than one household for example, but the household is taken as a simplified and workable proxy to turn complex interpersonal relations into something more workable for social surveys. This workable approach does not come without problems, with research of the rEUsilience consortium highlighting that key European social surveys struggle to adequately identify families in households.[20] Only four of the nine European social surveys studied - EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS), Generations and Gender Survey (GGS-1), and the Household Budget Survey (HBS) - included a household type variable, meaning that the amount of surveys that endeavour to understand the family dimension are already limited. The EU-SILC (pre-2021) and the HBS construct household types by counting the number of adults and then the number of children. An approach which does not take into account the family relationships between them. For example, two adults and two children could be a couple with two children or two single parents residing in one household with their separate children. This methodology would have no way of distinguishing the two. The other surveys (EU-SILC post 2021, LFS, HBS, and GGS-1) do make use of family relations in the household, but only for a limited number of categories. These surveys can identify single persons, couples, and two-generation households (parents with children). Other family types such as multigenerational households are not accounted for and therefore labelled as 'other'.

[20] Bártová, A., Thaning, M., Lancker, W. V., & Nieuwenhuis, R. (2025). The families in households typology: searching for families in social surveys. *Community, Work & Family*, 1–13. Available online

What are the implications for families?

The invisibility of many family types in European social surveys means that we do not have adequate cross-country data on the reality of family diversity in Europe today. If we cannot see the frequencies of these family types, then we cannot provide proportional policy responses targeted to their specific situations. The first element important to highlight here is the variation in the frequency of certain family types across European countries. For example, the prevalence of multi-generational families in some parts of Europe are relatively rare (e.g. Sweden), whilst in other parts it is a common family set up (e.g. Poland). A one-size fits all approach to family diversity in Europe is certainly limiting, only giving a small part of the European picture.
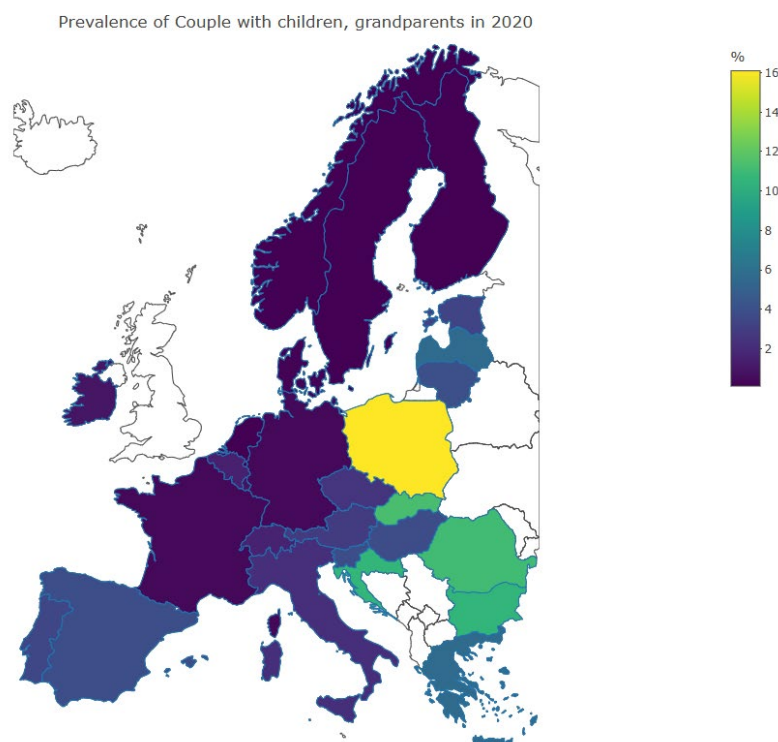
Figure 1: Visualisation of prevalence of couple with children living with grandparents across Europe in 2020 from the rEUsilience compendium of families' risks, resources and resilience, (Nieuwenhuis, R., Thaning, M., Bártová, A., Van Lancker, W., (2024))

Unpacking families in households can also give helpful insights into other vulnerabilities, challenges, and experiences that families are facing regarding income and employment, housing, care responsibilities and needs. For instance, some adults with children may decide to move in with their parents as a coping strategy in response to unemployment or loss of income. Single parents may decide to co-reside together with their children due to excessive housing costs or non-sufficient housing stock. This is essential context for policy development.

What are potential solutions?

We need to move further towards embedding a family diversity perspective into EU household data. The rEUsilience research project funded under the EU's Horizon Europe programme made great strides in developing a potential solution to reducing the invisibility of diverse family types and reducing the number of families that are simply referred to as 'other' by the EU data infrastructure. Bártová, Thaning, Van Lancker, and Nieuwenhuis developed the 'Families in Households Typology' which provides a richer classification of household types based on family

relations.[21] The Families in Households Typology pays specific attention to how care and resources are shared within families, expanding on family types such as those in multigenerational households. Analysis shows how this approach can strengthen key surveys such as the EU-SILC. However, attention still needs to be paid to family relations beyond the household to fully grasp many families' realities, especially in the case of blended families which is a growing group of families with specific policy responses needed to support them.

	Family in household type	Definition
Non-family	No relation	Co-residing individuals without any family relations
	Single-person household	One member living on their own
Family	Couple household	Two members who identify each other as partners.
	Two-generational household	Single parents with dependent children
		Single parents with adult children
		Couples with dependent children
		Couples with adult children
		Couples who co-reside with at least one of their parents
	Multi-generational household	Single parents with dependent children living with the children's grandparents
		Single parents with adult children and grandparents
		Couples with dependent children and grandparents
		Couples with adult children and grandparents
	Complex household	Household with more than one family unit eg single parent co-reside with their sibling and their parents

Figure 2: Families in Households Typology (Bártová, A., Thaning, M., Lancker, W. V., & Nieuwenhuis, R. (2025))

---

[21] Idem

3.Care in families and EU data

Caring for family members, whether that be for children, persons with disabilities, or older people, is for most a key part of family life. Research shows that whilst EU surveys such as EU-SILC are strong on issues related to childcare responsibilities and how this effects the employment of parents, there is a lack of comparative EU data on how much care adults provide for other adult family members in and between households and how this affects their ability to participate in paid work.[22] For example, the EU-SILC does not have comparative data on care between adults and the resulting impact on family carers employment outcomes. The 2018 EU LFS ad-hoc module on reconciliation between work and family life made progress in this area, with two questions tapping into the number of adults across Europe that provide care for another adult and one on whether this led them to stop or reduce working time.[23] However, the ad-hoc module focused mainly on the situation of parents looking after children, with more comparative data needed on those who provide care for other adults.

What are the implications for families?

Lack of high quality and comparative EU data in this field has a number of key implications for families and our societies. With the main message being that we cannot support family carers if we cannot see them. Firstly, attaining this level of data would enable us to understand further the labour market risks resulting from care responsibilities in different intensities. Do family carers drop out of the labour market, need to change their working schedule, responsibilities at work, have access to caring related leaves/flexible working arrangements et cetera? How does caring affect their financial situation and work-life balance? Comprehensive data in these areas would support the implementation of key EU policies, for example the European Pillar of Social Rights headline targets that at least 78% of the working age population should be employment and that there should be a reduction of at least 15 million people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 2030.[24]

Additionally, this data would boost the implementation of the European Care Strategy, in particular actions highlighted in Chapter 3.2 of the 2022 European Commission Communication on the European Care Strategy focusing on informal care 'A better balance between work and care responsibilities'.[25] Strong data on adult work and care would provide a more holistic understanding of which adjustments can be made to support family carers in the labour market and in securing a decent income. Especially concerning labour market discriminations to carers, access to family leaves, flexible work arrangements, social protection, financial benefits and other types of support for family carers. It would also help support the wellbeing of those providing care, producing more targeted support to their realities in and between paid work and care.

Further unpacking the gender dimension of adult work and care would aid the implementation of the EU Gender Equality Strategy through efforts to close the gender care gap. This would also be helpful in the context where adults, primarily women, care both for another/other adults and for children at the same time. The unique challenges and precarity of this population are essential to understand and respond to.

[22] Bártová, A. & Van Lancker, W. (2025) *'Adult Care & Work': Blueprint of an EU-SILC ad hoc module.* rEUsilience working paper series 15.
[23] Eurostat (2018), Reconciliation between work and family life LFS ad-hoc module 2018 — Quality report. Available online
[24] European Pillar of Social Rights, 2017. Available online
[25] European Commission (2022), European Care Strategy, Chapter 3.2. Available online

What are possible solutions?

There is a possible solution already available to respond to the lack of data in this area. The rEUsilience project funded under Horizon Europe, produced a blueprint of an EU-SILC ad hoc module on adult care and paid work.[26] Here researchers put forward 10 questions covering the existence and intensity of respondents care responsibilities for adult family members and how these care responsibilities impact their interaction with paid work. This blueprint module could be included as one of EU-SILC's ad hoc modules which are fielded every three or six years, complementing the already existing annual variables on childcare, employment, and poverty risks.

Q1		Is there anyone living with you who needs support due to disability, age or illness whom you look after or give special help to (accompanying to medical appointments, regular shopping, …)? Please, don't include anyone who you care for as part of your job.
	1	Yes
	2	No
Q2		Is there anyone not living with you who needs support due to disability, age or illness whom you look after or give special help to (accompanying to medical appointments, regular shopping, …)? Please, don't include anyone who you care for as part of your job.
	1	Yes
	2	No
Q3		How many people who are elderly, sick and/or disabled living both in and outside your household do you care for or provide regular help to? Please, don't include anyone who you care for as part of your job.
	#	People living in my household
	#	People not living in my household
Q4		Are any of these people your children who are less than 15 years old?
	1	Yes, all of them
	2	Yes, some of them
	2	No
Q5		How many hours in total each week do you typically spend on providing care or regular help to all persons you mentioned in the previous questions who are elderly, sick or disabled? For those not living in your household, please, include the time it usually takes you to reach them and return. Please, don't include anyone who you care for as part of your job.
	1	0-4 hours
	2	5-9 hours
	3	10-19 hours
	4	20-34 hours (about 1-1.5 days a week)
	5	35-49 hours (about 1.5-2 days a week)
	6	50-99 hours (about 2-4 full days a week)
	7	100 or more hours per week/ I provide continuous care (at least 4 full days a week)
Q6		Now, think of the period since you first started providing care or regular help to someone who needed support due to disability, age or illness until now. Have these care responsibilities affected your employment status in any way at any point during that period? [multiple choice]
	1	Yes, I changed something about my work to earn more money
	2	Yes, I reduced my working hours
	3	Yes, I took on less demanding tasks in job(s)
	1	Yes, I changed working times without changing the volume of my work
	2	Yes, I changed job or employer to facilitate reconciliation
	3	Yes, I quit my job

	4	Yes, other effect
	5	No, I experienced some of these changes but they were not due to my care responsibilities
	6	No, I did not experience any of these changes
Q7		Did you ever have to turn down a job offer due to conflicts with your care responsibilities for someone who needed help due to disability, age or illness?
	1	Never
	2	Yes, once or twice
	3	Yes, more times
	4	Not applicable
Q8		Thinking about the care or help you provide to all persons you mentioned in the previous questions (elderly, sick or disabled persons), how important are these care responsibilities in your decision to work less than full-time hours? [Question only for respondents who work less than full-time hours]
Q9		Thinking about the care or help you provide to all persons you mentioned in the previous questions (elderly, sick or disabled persons), how important are these care responsibilities in your decision to be self-employed? [Question only for respondents who are self-employed]
Q10		Thinking about the care or help you provide to all persons you mentioned in the previous questions (elderly, sick or disabled persons), how important are these care responsibilities for your not actively looking for a job? [Question only for respondents who are unemployed and are not actively looking for a job]
	1	Not at all important
	2	Slightly important
	3	Important
	4	Fairly important
	5	Very important

Figure 3: Blueprint of an Ad-Hoc Module on 'Adult Care and Work' for the EU-SILC (Bártová, A. & Van Lancker, W. (2025))

It is also promising to see the work that the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has done on furthering data in the field of intersectional dimensions of care, (such as the work-life balance of parents with disabilities[27]) which contributes greatly to filling existing data gaps. EIGE collected and analysed the 1st wave of the CARE survey - an EU-wide survey on women's and men's engagement in unpaid care, individual, and social activities, adopting gender equality and intersectional perspectives from the onset.[28] The aim of the survey was to fill in current data gaps, to complement the existing EU surveys, and to improve the Gender Equality Index's[29] capacity to capture changes in the domain of time in a more conceptually sound, coherent, and regular way.[30] The survey reached 60.000+ respondents across 27 EU countries.

---

[26] Bártová, A. & Van Lancker, W. (2025) 'Adult Care & Work': Blueprint of an EU-SILC ad hoc module. rEUsilience working paper series 15. Available online

[27] COFACE (2025) EU policy review on the work-life balance of parents with disabilities. Available online

[28] Survey of Gender Gaps in Unpaid Care, Individual and Social Activities (CARE) 1st wave | European Institute for Gender Equality. Available online and breakdown in the Annex of the Policy review. The dataset can be downloaded from the GESIS public repository here

[29] EIGE Gender Equality Index 2024. Available online

[30] Survey of Gender Gaps in Unpaid Care, Individual and Social Activities (CARE) 1st wave | European Institute for Gender Equality. Available online and breakdown in the Annex of the Policy review. The dataset can be downloaded from the GESIS public repository here

4. Intersectional labour market vulnerability and EU data

Another key area of interest is EU data concerning labour market vulnerabilities. Labour market vulnerabilities affect different groups in society and different families to different extents and it is essential that these are reflected in EU surveys that concern employment and labour market information. Research from the PATHS2INCLUDE project funded under the EU's Horizon Europe programme assesses to what extent EU surveys identify groups at risk of labour market vulnerabilities. Valls et al highlight that there are key data gaps regarding identifying at risk groups in key EU surveys such as EU-SILC and EU-LFS, both of which are key repositories for labour market questions.[31] Notably, these surveys have no or scarce information on the presence of disabilities, gender identity, race or ethnicity, and care responsibilities. For example, EU-SILC and EU-LFS do not ask any questions related to race or ethnicity and only have generic questions on health or long-lasting illness but no specific questions on disability in a more targeted manner. See the below visual representation for a better visualisation of this concern.

Figure 4: Summary of at-risk groups that can be identified in European and international databases (Valls et al, 2024).

What are the implications for families?

Labour market inclusion is key for families to avoid poverty risks and social exclusion and to maintain a decent income and wellbeing while also fulfilling their care responsibilities. Without adequate, high quality, comparable EU data, it is harder to identify barriers and vulnerabilities faced by certain at-risk groups and in turn develop targeted labour market policy interventions.

Of course, in reality, many families will face labour-market vulnerabilities and complex labour market trajectories that stem from number of these at-risk factors: for instance, a mother from a minority ethnic background who cares both for a family member with disabilities and her children whilst navigating the world of work. Therefore, it is also crucial that EU surveys can respond to the need for data on many different vulnerabilities to be able to tackle labour market discriminations in an intersectional way.

---

[31] Valls, O., Ugreninov, E., Samuel, R., Bjørnshagen, V., Buttler D., Ciana., Rozszczypała, A., Trifan, E., Tufa, L., Viñas, A., Vivoli, A. (2024) At-risk groups in the labour market: A comprehensive overview of relevant theoretical and methodological literature, political measures, and existing data across Europe and national surveys and register data. Available online

What are possible solutions?

To foster a stronger evidence based policies in this area, EU surveys such as EU-SILC, EU LFS and others should expand their variables on groups at risk of labour market vulnerability, especially in the areas of race and ethnicity, care responsibilities, gender identity, and disability.[32] The blueprint for an ad-hoc module on adult care and paid work and the Families in Households Typology presented previously could also act as a supportive measure here. To ensure that these at-risk groups are statistically large enough for this level of high quality, comparative data, efforts should be made to increase sample sizes of underrepresented populations. This is especially relevant to capture intersectional labour market vulnerabilities affecting groups at the intersection of several compounding at-risk groups, such as racialised single fathers or young migrant women with disabilities. It could also be valuable to expand and strengthen longitudinal data structures so that it is possible to understand how labour market vulnerabilities affecting individuals and families change over time.

5.Family leaves and EU data

The main piece of EU legislation related to family leaves is the EU Work-Life Balance Directive, adopted in 2019, which puts forward minimum standards for paternity leave, parental leave, carers leave, and access to flexible work arrangements.[33] Member States were required to transpose the Directive by August 2022, with many Member States having now undertaken ambitious reforms whilst others have struggled to bring their national legislation up to compliance.[34] Quality comparable EU data is required to sufficiently support the monitoring and implementation of the Directive. To this aid, the Social Protection Committee Indicator Sub-Group and the Employment Committee Indicator Group produced an indicator framework to pool all available data from key databases and surveys related to the Directive into one monitoring approach.[35] This is especially useful since Member States are required to provide data on the take-up of family leaves provided for in the Directive for a monitoring report in 2027. The indicator framework provides a cohesive way forward, but more can be done within the specific databases and surveys to develop the data available.

Research conducted by the Sustainability@Leave COST action reviewed key comparative family policy databases to assess how fit they are to monitor the implementation and impact of the EU Work-Life Balance Directive.[36] These six databases are as follows: the OECD Family Database, MISSOC, SPIN, the International Network of Leave Policies, the WORLD policy analysis centre, and the ILO Global Care Policy Portal

These comparative databases each take different approaches in producing comparative data on family leaves and can be useful to different extents in guiding the monitoring and impact of the EU Work Life Balance Directive. Figure 5 below highlights that the two databases that provide the richest data across the board here are the European Commission's MISSOC database and the Annual Reviews conducted by the International Network on Leave Policies and Research. However, unlike the other databases, these two databases only contain textual qualitative data

---

[32] Valls, O., & Samuel, R. (2025). Employment diversity in Europe: Intersectionality and data gaps. Available online
[33] EU Work Life Balance Directive 2019. Available online
[34] COFACE Families Europe, EU work-life balance directive transposition : a mixed picture 2022. Available online
[35] Social Protection Committee Indicator Sub-Group & Employment Committee Indicator Group. (2020). Work-life balance indicator framework: methodological manual. Available online
[36] Bártová, A., Dobrotić, I., & Aðalbjörg Arnalds, A., (2024) Parenting leave policy data gaps: Monitoring the implementation and impact of the EU Work-Life Balance Directive: Policy Brief. Available online

and there can be discrepancies concerning how national systems are defined, classified, and interpreted between these databases. Sustainability@Leave highlights that none of these databases manages to provide all the data needed on its own, a more piecemeal approach looking between databases is required, see Figure 5.

	LP&R	MISSOC	OECD Family Database	SPIN-PLB	WORLD	ILO GCP Portal
paternity leave duration	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
paternity leave benefits	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
paternity leave qualifying period	✓	✓	✕	✕	✕	✕
parental leave duration	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
parental leave - non-transferable leave	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
parental leave benefits	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
parental leave benefits - qualifying period	✓	✓	✕	✕	✕	✕
parental leave benefits - ceilings	✓	✓	✓	✓	✕	✕
parental leave flexibility	✓	✓	✕	✕	✕	✕
type of data	textual	textual	numerical	numerical	numerical	numerical
annual data	✓	✓	✓	✕	✕	✕
all EU MS	✓	✓	✕	✓	✓	✓
use of model families	✕	✕	✓	✓	✕	✕

Figure 5: Elements of parenting leave design covered by major international databases (Bártová, Dobrotić, and Aðalbjörg Arnalds, 2023).

This research also identified key gaps in European survey data which is key for measuring the impact of the EU Work Life Balance Directive. The previously mentioned databases can give us insights on the legal frameworks for family leaves that are in place across different countries providing rights to families to take leaves, but they cannot help us understand how citizens are making use of them in practice. This is where European survey data such as the EU-SILC and the EU-LFS can play a key role. Sustainability@leave evaluated seven European surveys' capacity to monitor the take-up of family leaves, with Figure 6 below visualising a mixed picture. For example, the EU-LFS is strong across the board, with the ad hoc module on reconciliation between work and family life giving a particular boost in this area to the main survey. With it being an ad hoc module, it is not fielded every year, meaning that this richer data cannot be relied upon year after year.[37] In contrast, the EU-SILC does not contain any data relating to family leaves. It does contain questions tapping in to whether respondents are economically active or not, but does not include the option to declare that you are taking a family leave. As a result, persons taking family leaves are either defined as in employment or at home fulfilling household tasks, which causes ambiguity and makes this group not visible through this survey. Another strong survey is the GGS-1, especially since it provides rich information on how leaves are used, notably in terms of whether the leave was taken full or part-time with employment, the length of the leave, whether it was paid or unpaid. However, this data is not available for all EU member states which makes it hard to rely on for monitoring the impact of an EU-wide directive.

---

[37] The ad hoc module has been fielded so far in 2005, 2010, and 2018 and next in 2025.

	EU-LFS	EU-SILC	EQLS	EWCS	Eurobarometer	GGS-I	LIS
leave use	✓	✕	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
duration of leave	(✓)*	✕	✕	✕	✕	✓	✕
leave benefits	✓	✕	✕	✕	✕	✓	✓
flexible use of leaves	(✓)^	✕	✕	✕	✓	✓	✕
leave use/benefit receipt differentiated by type of leave	✓	✕	✕	✕	✓	✓	✕
ad-hoc modules on WLB	✓	✕	✕	✕	✕	✕	✕
annual data	✓	✓	✕	✕	✓	✕	✕
all EU MS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✕	✕

Figure 6: Elements of parenting leave design covered by major international surveys (Bártová, Dobrotić, and Aðalbjörg Arnalds, 2023).

Note: * categorical variable (less or more than 3 months) and only refers to parental leave, ^ accessibility of flexible employment rather than parental leave, available in the ad-hoc module

What are the implications for families?

Progression of data in this area can help lay a path for policy reform and further implementation of existing rights laid out in the EU Work Life Balance Directive. Stronger data would allow us to better understand where more work needs to be done to ensure that all parents and carers, with no discrimination, can access family leaves to undertake care responsibilities. Without progression here, the full potential of the Directive may not materialise, leaving especially families in more vulnerable situations behind. This is especially true for how leave policies relate to labour market participation, income, poverty risks, and gender equality.

In addition, research from the rEUsilience project reinforces the idea that flexibility should be a key part of family policy design due to the inherent nature of family life which is seldom stagnant.[38] It is clear that existing surveys do not fully expand on the question of flexibility in leave systems and as a result fail to adequately tap into families' realities. For example, assessing how many parents are taking up leaves on a part-time basis.

What are possible solutions?

All in all, there is room for development in this area to better be able to monitor the implementation and impact of the EU Work Life Balance Directive. Particularly in ensuring consistency across datasets and surveys to ensure sufficient alignment between data and policy design. For example, as the researchers from the Sustainability@Leave COST action promote, this could involve harmonising the terminology used by social surveys and datasets regarding parenting leaves. The COST action conducted a study working towards a comprehensive terminology on paid parental leave which could be seen as a starting point for future development.[39] Advancements in terminology, more nuanced data collection regarding how parents use leaves and are compensated through the adequacy of cash benefits could make a significant difference in how the EU Work Life Balance Directive is monitored going forward. This would complement the work of the European Equality Law Network which needs high quality data in order to adequately makes their assessments.[40]

---

[38] Dobrotić, I., Iveković Martinis, A. (2023) Inclusiveness and Flexibility of Work Life Balance Policies. *rEUsilience Working Paper Series*, 2023:5. Available online

[39] Meil, G. and Romero-Balsas, P. (eds.) (2025), Towards a comprehensive terminology on paid parenting leave, COST Action Parental Leave Policies and Social Sustainability (Sustainability@Leave). Available online

[40] European Equality Law Network https://www.equalitylaw.eu/

6.Conclusions

To conclude, making families and their realities visible within EU data is essential for building policies that help us to ensure positive outcomes for families and societies. Across the highlighted policy domains of family diversity in household data, care, intersectional labour market vulnerability, and family leaves, this policy brief highlights a persistent mismatch between the complexity of families' experiences and the data currently available to capture them. When surveys overlook the nuances of family life, policymakers lack the evidence required to design targeted interventions or assess the effectiveness of existing measures. As a result, inequalities persist and support may not reach families most in need of support.

This policy brief has highlighted several key areas where more can be done but also highlighted potential solutions that can already make a difference in moving towards a European data infrastructure that better captures families and their realities.

- **In the field of family diversity and EU household data,** the Families in Households Typology developed by Bártová, Thaning, Van Lancker, and Nieuwenhuis can be used to strengthen key surveys such as EU-SILC to ensure that families in all their diversity can be seen in the data.
- **Concerning the need for more comparative EU data on how much care adults provide for other adult family members and the implications this has on their ability to engage in paid work,** the blueprint for an EU-SILC ad-hoc module on 'Adult Care and Work' developed by Bártová and Van Lancker can be introduced into the rotation of ad-hoc modules.
- **To strengthen data on intersectional labour market vulnerabilities,** efforts can be made to strengthen variables on key groups at risk, such as on race and ethnicity, care responsibilities, gender identity and disability and push for a more intersectional approach to data collection and policy design.
- **In order to ensure the implementation and impact of the EU-Work Life Balance Directive,** work can be done to ensure greater consistency across datasets and surveys to give key stakeholders the base to be able to push for continuing reform and development of family leaves that respond to families' realities going forward.

coface-eu.org

@COFACEEU.BSKY.SOCIAL

@COFACE.EU

Families Europe

Families Europe

COFACE Families Europe