

Parental leave and career interruption of mothers after childbirth in Hungary and France

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For several years Hungary has been criticized for its long parental leave which encourages mothers to interrupt their career and to stay at home after childbirth. Employment rates of mothers with children below three show indeed a break in career after the arrival of the first child – in a country where the two bread-winner model has spread since the 1960s'. In this paper an international comparison of career interruptions is carried out by involving France into the analysis. The two countries spend indeed the same proportion of their GDP on family policy and on families with children below three and in both paid parental leave of three years exists, even if the benefit is not universal in France. The aim is to quantify time spent outside the labour market after childbirth and to analyse the effect of family policy legislation, social norms, previous employment and maternal characteristics on career interruptions. Data come from the Generations and Gender Survey: both countries have carried out three waves of interview which allows a follow up of the working history of the respondents. They have also collected data concerning past career. It is therefore possible to analyse career interruptions in connection with births between 1976 and 2008. Results show that career interruptions after childbirth are longer and more frequent in Hungary. Parental leave legislation has also a stronger influence on re-entry into the labour market: once the payment of the benefits ceases, more than 20% of mothers return all of a sudden to the labour market. In France birth order has at the mean time a stronger effect on career interruptions. Main factors which affect labour market participation are the same in both countries: a previous job, education level, a new child, the personal opinion about maternal work during the first three years.