



## PROGRESS OF COUNTRIES IN WORK LIFE BALANCE: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

To manage and balance demands and responsibilities of work and non-work sphere of the life is getting more difficult. There are many factors that make difficult to balance work and life. Academic literature contributes to reveal individual, organizational, societal factors that affect work life balance. Not only benefits of work life balance on individuals and organizations, but also its benefits on well-being, life satisfaction and happiness of the society revealed that it requires to prepare policies and regulations at the country level. Each country formulates different work life balance supportive policies by taking into consideration national context such as cultural, structural and economic factors. It is expected that effect of government efforts on work life balance varies across countries. This study aims to compare countries in terms of work life balance. Countries are compared based on the potentially related indicators with work life balance such as “labor force participation of women”, “public social expenditures on families”, “enrolment rates in pre-primary education or primary school”. To reach this aim, secondary data provided by the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) reports and databases is used.

**Keywords:** work life balance, countries, comparison

**JEL Codes:** J00, J17

## İŞ YAŞAM DENGESİNDE ÜLKELERİN GELİŞİMİ: KARŞILAŞTIRMALI BİR YAKLAŞIM

### Öz

Yaşamın iş ve iş dışı alanlarındaki talepleri ve sorumlulukları yönetmek ve bu iki alan arasında denge kurmak gittikçe zorlaşmaktadır. Bu dengeyi kurmayı zorlaştıran birçok faktör vardır. Akademik literatür iş yaşam dengesi üzerinde etkili olan bu bireysel, organizasyonel, toplumsal faktörlerin belirlenmesine katkı sağlamaktadır. İş yaşam dengesinin sadece bireyler ve organizasyonlar üzerindeki faydası değil, toplumun refahı, yaşam tatmini ve mutluluk seviyesi ile de ilişkisinin olması konunun ülke düzeyinde hazırlanan politikalar ve düzenlemeler ile ele alınması gerektiği gerçeğini ortaya çıkarmıştır. Her ülke kendi ulusal dinamiklerini oluşturan kültürel, yapısal, ekonomik faktörleri dikkate alarak iş yaşam dengesini destekleyici farklı politikalar geliştirmektedir. Hükümetlerin farklılık gösteren bu çabalarının iş yaşam dengesi üzerindeki etkisinin de farklı olması beklenmektedir. Bu çalışma iş yaşam dengesi açısından ülkeleri karşılaştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Ülkeler, potansiyel olarak iş yaşam dengesi ile ilişkili olabilecek “kadınların iş gücüne katılımı”, “aileler için yapılan kamu sosyal harcamaları”, “okul öncesi eğitime ya da ilkökul eğitimine kayıt oranları” göstergeleri açısından karşılaştırılmıştır. Bu amaç ile OECD (Ekonomik İşbirliği ve Kalkınma Örgütü) tarafından sunulan raporlar ve veri tabanları üzerinden elde edilen ikincil veri kullanılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** iş yaşam dengesi, ülkeler, karşılaştırma

**JEL Kodları:** J00, J17

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## Introduction

Increasing awareness of the fact that work and non-work sphere of the life should be managed. Enhanced attention of academic, political, professional and popular literature broadened the frame of the work life balance (Lewis, Richenda, & Rapoport, 2007). Accumulated knowledge about reasons and consequences of the imbalance between work and life, measurement ways of work life balance advanced our understanding (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999; Caproni, 2004; Fagan, 2001). Policies, laws, programs are formulated at the organizational and governmental level that help to manage both of them.

Vocational, family and child raising responsibilities transform the life of people from “life” to “bustle” to meet these responsibilities. Non-work sphere of the life is mostly dominated by the family. Accordingly, work life balance and work family conflict are studied as nested in the academic literature. Even the policies such as maternity leave, parental leave are so specific policies for individuals with families, they help people to balance work and life. To achieve work life balance makes possible to do activities that makes us happy, have more time with family and friends, have healthier and less stressful life (Hobson, 2011).

To response clearly what makes difficult to balance work and the rest of the life individual, organizational and societal level factors should be examined together (Guest, 2002). Relationship between these factors can be interpreted as interrelated. For instance, labor force participation of women concluded with dual income career families. This situation questioned cultural norms about gender roles. On the other hand, economic concerns of organizations, difficulties to sustain competitive advantage in the globalized world and advances in technology abolished borders between home and work. Workers are expected to be accessible all the time irrespective of weekends or leisure time. Definition of ideal worker has changed. Brandth & Kvande (2001) stated that ideal workers are who give priority to paid work in many workplaces.

Interrelated relations among these factors make the work-family conflict not only problem of families or organizations but also societies (Davis & Kalleberg, 2006). Impacts of all attempts to reduce conflict can be seen at societal level. According to “Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] (2007) report, there is a significant relationship between policies formulated for work life balance and welfare of the countries. Norwegian, Denmark, Iceland, Switzerland are among the top countries that happiness of the citizens is the highest. It is not coincidence that these countries are also among the top countries that support work life balance.

Impact area of the work life imbalance heightened necessity to form laws and policies at the governmental level. Countries attempt to solve this problem with laws and policies that meet necessities by taking into consideration country context such as developmental level of the country, rate of male and female in the labor force, family structures, societal norms. Importance of national context for work life balance is signified (Ollier-Malaterre, Valcour, Den Dulk, & Kossek, 2013). Diversified country contexts differentiate countries in terms of policies and laws that aim to help individuals to balance their work and life (Allen et al., 2014).

When the literature is revised, there are studies that investigate antecedents (e.g., Fisher, 2001; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) and consequences (e.g., Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Hill, Miller, Weiner, & Colihan, 1998; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Kossek & Ozeki, 1999; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1986) of the work family conflict or work life balance. We can read meta-analytic review of work and non-work balance (e.g., Allen et al., 2012; Byron, 2005) and measurement techniques to reveal what extent there is imbalance between work and family life (e.g., Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000; Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrin, 1996). In the Turkish literature, studies that examine the

antecedents and consequences of work life balance or work family conflict are relatively more dominant. For instance, Karabay (2015) examined the effect of job stress and work family conflict on intention to leave and turnover intention in the health industry. Arslan (2012) stated negative relationship between work family conflict and job satisfaction of women employees. Çelik & Turunç (2011) confirmed the significant effect of work family conflict on psychological distress. Turgut (2011) investigated to what extent work family conflict affects work engagement. Turunç & Erkuş (2010) explained negative effect of work family conflict on job satisfaction and organizational commitment in the banking industry. Özdevecioğlu & Aktaş (2007) emphasized that work life conflict causes negative effects on life satisfaction.

This study aims to compare countries in terms of work life balance. The comparison is strengthened with relevant indicators such as labor force participation of women, enrolment rates in pre-primary education or primary school for children aged 3-5, public social expenditures on families to integrate country context to interpret work life balance of OECD countries. Countries may evaluate their situation and understand necessities, factors that inhibit to exercise better policies, lack of the system as a whole without ignoring the country specific factors.

## 1. Theoretical Background

Individuals spend their time in work and non-work sphere of the life. Today's conditions trigger conflict between these two spheres of the life. Imbalance between work and life influences individuals, families, organizations, societies. That makes the work life balance “complex and multi-layered phenomena” (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013: 444). To reduce this complexity and enhance the knowledge about reasons, conclusions, what can be done to improve at all layers were examined theoretically.

### 1.1. Work Life Balance

There are definitions for work life balance that are shaped according to different theoretical perspectives. Work life balance is defined by (Byrne, 2005: 54) as “juggling five aspects of our lives at any one point in time: work, family, friends, health and spirit (or self). A 'balanced' living then occurs when activities and aspirations in one domain do not have negative effects on activities in the other ones.” *Balance* is defined as harmony or equilibrium between work and life (Clarke, Koch, & Hill, 2004). There are studies that narrow down the scope of the work life balance to balance between work and family and use the term “work family conflict”.

Greenhaus & Beutell (1985: 77) defined the work–family conflict as “a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect”. This conflict occurs under three conditions (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985: 76); “(a) *time devoted to the requirements of one role makes it difficult to fulfill requirements of another*; (b) *strain from participation in one role makes it difficult to fulfill requirements of another*; and (c) *specific behaviors required by one role make it difficult to fulfill the requirements of another*”. Accumulated knowledge related to work family conflict revealed that not only “work interfered with family” direction, but also “family interfered with work” direction should be taken into consideration to fully understand inter-role conflict between work and family (Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992).

Generally, work-life balance or conflict between work and family life is perceived salient to women in the labor force (Lewis, Richenda, & Rapoport, 2007). Social norms are effective in shaping the perceptions. There are widespread social norms that assign child care role to women and breadwinner role to men. Women participation to labor force with their care responsibilities make them primary victim of work-life imbalance. Being active at home and labor market create a dual burden for working mothers (Dominique et al., 2007; Lewis, Richenda, & Rapoport, 2007). Hakim (2003) explained women focused work life imbalance with their orientations into three

broad categories; family oriented; work oriented and work and family oriented women. This theoretical perspective was criticized because of assuming women's orientations stable. Conducted studies concluded with changes in the women's orientations (e.g., Man, 2007; Proctor & Padfield, 1999). For instance; Fagan (2001: 242) stated that motherhood changes work orientations of women and mother prefers to spend less time in work. While personal choices play role to experience imbalance between work and life, Caproni (2004) and Fagan & Rubery (1996) emphasized the effect of cultural differences on work and family orientations of women.

Relatedness of work life balance with women is discussed and tested whether the greater the percentage of women in the labor force of organizations, the more tendency organizations have to provide work family practices (Goodstein, 1994; Ingram & Simons , 1995; Milliken, Martins, & Morgan, 1998; Bardoel , Tharenou, & Moss, 1998). It is not possible to generalize the finding the higher percentage of women; the more organizational level work-life practices are provided. Bardoel et al., (1998) suggested to explore further. The positive correlation expectation between proportion of female and provision of work life balance practices is explained by Milliken, Martins, & Morgan, (1998) according to resource dependence theory. Resource dependence theory indicates that demands and expectations of the resource providers should be met to receive their support (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). In that case, increase in the rate of women in the labor force will enhance organizational responsiveness to their needs. Hobson & Fahlen (2009) framed the issue more critically and stated that there is no agreement on best policy that solve men's care deficit, women's discrimination and lack of labor market participation as a result of assumption that women responsible for doing the care-work. Emslie & Hunt (2009) supported availability of different ways of doing work-life balance based on semi structured interviews with men and women. They concluded that paid work is more dominant in the life of men while women complain about balancing their role at home and at work. Even, men complain not to participate in their children's activities, they balance this regret with the importance of financial gain (Emslie & Hunt, 2009).

Discussions about work life balance become intense pertain to women. Therefore, preliminary governmental sanctions and organizational policies related to work life balance are formulated to reduce dual burden of women at home and work. Another discussion that shapes work life balance policies is dichotomy on framing it as a business or social issue (Ollier-Malaterre, 2009).

If work life balance is framed as a business issue, organizations are expected to take the initiative for provision of work life practices for their employees. Family supportive practices at the organizational level generally become salient when human resource officers thought that output of these practices is higher organizational performance (Milliken, Martins, & Morgan, 1998). Bardoel & De Cieri (2014) stated that work life balance practices are indispensable part of the business because of the empirical researches that demonstrate the effect of work life practices on performance and employees. Supportive activities for work life balance contribute to competitive advantage and social responsibility in addition to facilitate work life balance (Bardoel & De Cieri, 2014). On the other hand, framing it as a business issue question to what extent government regulate this area.

One of the reasons to assess the work life balance as a business issue is explained by the dominance of individualism in the society as a result of neoliberalism (Todd & Binns , 2013). Employers, co-workers, society are not expected to care about to what extent their colleagues balance their work and life and have time for leisure, child care or elder care (Todd & Binns , 2013). Another reason of implementation of work life balance policies as business case is organizational concerns to attract and motivate high skilled employees to retain (Todd & Binns , 2013; Hogart, Hasluck, Pierre, Winterbotham, & Vivian, 2001).

Framing it as a social issue questions is it the organization's responsibility to act in this area and reduces work-life initiatives at the organizational level (Ollier-Malaterre, 2009). Work-life balance policies are generally perceived as threats to achieve operational goals of the organization (Todd & Binns, 2013). Hogart et al., (2001: 227) examined the attitudes of employers to work life balance and concluded that even employers accepted their responsibility to help employees to balance their work and life (59%), employers stated that their primary responsibility is achieving organizational goals (85%). Economic utility orientation of organizations directs them to comply with the minimum requirements of governmental regulations. Likewise, organizational level family friendly practices do not appear to solve work-life imbalance (Guest, 2002; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000) without governmental regulations. Similarly, effectiveness of laws and policies formulated by the government can be inadequate to solve conflict between work and the rest of the life without organizational level initiatives.

Coherence should be created between governmental and organizational level practices by taking into consideration the individual needs and expectations. They are "closely interlinked" as stated by (Ollier-Malaterre, 2009: 174). Government forms work life balance policies and laws as "formulator"; organization transfers these laws and regulations into practices as "practitioner"; individuals make use of these practices as "beneficiary". Effective family supportive policies require to take into consideration the tripod of work life balance. Otherwise, there will be a gap between formulated policy and practiced policy. For instance, maternity leave is significant part of solution alternatives for work life conflict. Countries arrange maternity leave as governmentally sponsored family supportive policy. Its implementation is guaranteed by laws. But it does not mean that countries provide longer period of maternity leave are the top on the list of work life balanced countries. Even the policy is practiced by organizations, individual needs and expectations should not be ignored. For instance, working mothers are asked "whether they would prefer longer period of maternity leave or greater flexibility in their working arrangements on their return to work" and 55 percent of working mothers from all occupations preferred greater flexibility according to work-life balance survey report in the UK (Hogart et al., 2001: 31).

Family friendly policies that take part in law is not enough for changes in the practices (Hobson & Fahlen, 2009). There are organizational level and individual level factors that prevent to use these family friendly rights and utilize from the policies. Hobson (2011: 148) called this problem as "agency gap" that refer to gap between policies and possibilities for employees to exercise them in work life balance. National policy frameworks, organizations are effective on reflection of these rights and options to individual lives (Hobson, 2011).

De Cieri, Holmes, Abbott, & Pettit (2005) compared the implementation of work life balance practices and usage of the work life balance practices by the employees in Australian organizations. They emphasized that usage rate is less than implementation rate of work life balance practices (De Cieri, Holmes, Abbott, & Pettit, 2005). This conclusion is important to pay attention barriers that make people restrain from using work life balance practices.

Kirby & Krone (2002) examined whether discourses about work family benefits available to employees reinforce or undermine work family policies and concluded that negative signals of employers, pressure of other peers against to employees who want to use family supportive practices prevented them to use work life strategies. Even there are written policies that allow to leave for some reasons such as maternity or parental leave, in practice these policies are not followed as written because of unsupportive culture. They stated that communication has a critical role to put pressure on people not to utilize supportive policies or to create cultural norms that support the usage of family supportive policies (Kirby & Krone, 2002).

Relation between organization and government is another aspect to understand the gap between formulated policy and practiced policy. Dobbin & Sutton (1998) emphasized the importance of

perceived legitimacy of the governmental regulations to explain the gap between intended and realized consequences of the employees' rights revolution in the United States. Ambiguity about the terms of legal compliance, changing rules frequently, indecisive sanctions (Dobbin & Sutton, 1998), weak enforcement mechanisms (Edelman, 1992) cause not to be regarded the policy. These kind of uncertainties can be opportunity for organizations to demonstrate symbolic compliance instead of implementation of policies (Sutton & Dobbin, 1996). On the other hand, personnel administrators and labor lawyers are "interdependent and mutually constitutive" on organizational responses to policies focuses on employee rights (Sutton & Dobbin, 1996: 798). These represent, instead of dominant influence of government on work life balance policies, work life balance of individuals can be ensured through the interaction between government policies and organizational practices and interaction reduces the gap between intended and realized conclusion.

## **1.2. Progression of Countries to Balance Work and Life**

Industrialization force countries to make regulations regarding working conditions. While managers aim to maximize output in a cost efficient way, employees compare what they get in return for all the work they have done (Todd & Binns , 2013). In the late 1960s and 1970s, employee rights started to take place among the concerns of governments (Sutton & Dobbin, 1996).

Labor force participation of women, dual income career families, an increase in hours worked and an increase in the number of single parent households (Davis & Kalleberg, 2006), increasing workforce diversity (De Cieri, Holmes, Abbott, & Pettit, 2005) are common global changes that oblige countries to be responsive for work-life balance.

Female work shifts, maximum weekly hours for women were regulated in the mid-19th century. Some European countries lead to provide unpaid maternity leave in the late of the 19th century. Especially, in the 20th century, both number of countries adopt maternity leave and content of maternity leave broadened. Leave arrangements were extended with partial income support and job protection (Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2017).

Each society has its own deterministic factors effective on national regulations (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999). Social norms and attitudes towards gender roles in countries affect the introduction of family related policies and legislation in the related country (Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2017). Literature includes example work life balance policies-defined by Ryan & Kossek (2008: 295) as "any organizational programs or officially sanctioned practices designed to assist employees with the integration of paid work with other important life roles such as family, education, or leisure". For instance; Bardoel, Tharenou, & Moss (1998: 37) classified work family practices, which were referenced in the literature, under five categories such as "flexible work options, individual support policies and programs, leave options, life-career policies, child and dependent care benefits". Differently, Kirby & Krone (2002:74) categorized policies under three categories; "flexible work options, forms of family leave, dependent care benefits".

The existence of a policy does not guarantee to be among the high level of work life balanced countries. The more important is how these polices are implemented (Ryan & Kossek, 2008). Bruning & Plantenga (1999) investigated which parental policy models are implemented in terms of time for care and services for care. First one is "time model" that countries offer "time" to care and facilitate child care. Austria and Germany are given example countries for time model policies. Second one is "sequential model" offers not only "time" for child care but also offers "services" to parents after leave period such as in the Sweden. Third, parents evaluate their conditions and preferences and choose between time and services-is called "parallel model". Finland policies are close to third model. Denmark and France are given examples of fourth model that mainly focus on "facilitation of services" (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999: 208).

Framing of work life balance by the governmental level is reflected to policies and the ways of implementation of policies. While some countries advocate voluntarism in family supportive policies and left responsibility to employers, some countries advocate the coercive legal mechanisms for provision of work life balance practices. Voluntarily practiced work life balance practices make employer's initiatives legitimate. On the other hand, coercive mechanisms that impose sanctions on organizations to comply with the laws and regulations represent the legitimate government that takes responsibility. Ollier-Malaterre (2009) compared France, UK and the US in terms of legitimacy of state or employer for family interventions and concluded that the perceived government legitimacy is the highest in France in terms of family interventions. Even perceived government legitimacy is greater in the UK, employers' initiatives are also significant. Perceived government legitimacy for family interventions is the least in the U.S. (Ollier-Malaterre, 2009).

While high income countries and some European countries prepared family supportive policies, the United States was lately started to prepare maternity leave legislation (Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2017). The family and medical leave act of 1993 in the United States was the first passage parental leave was introduced and allow 12 weeks of unpaid leave for pregnancy and new born care (Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2017). In the U.S., organizations generally prepare their work-life practices voluntarily. Responsibility to meet the family needs of employees has been largely left to the employer (Orloff, 1993). The United States is a country that evaluates the work life balance as a business issue.

At the EU level parental leave conditions were improved to help working parents to meet the demands of work and responsibilities of being parent with the "2010 Parental leave directive". Leave rights became transferrable across parents to ensure equal participation of mother and father in child care (Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2017). Sweden was the first country has regulation on parental leave that allow mother and father to share six months of parental leave (Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2017).

There are two important reasons of government efforts to support families. First, household role of women and men is redefined. Breadwinner role of the men is shared with women. Second, demand of making both career and motherhood increased (Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2017).

At that point effectiveness of work life balance policies in terms of labor force participation of women become controversial. Effectiveness tells us to what extent aim is achieved. One of the intended aim of these policies is rise in the women labor force in addition to child development, reduced abortions, work-life balance and gender equality. Studies were conducted to determine the ideal length and rules of leaves for effective work life balance practices. Ruhm (1998) confirmed that paid leaves around three months rise female employment rate around 3 to 4 percent female while paid leaves around nine months impact female wages negatively according to conducted research included 9 EU countries during 1969-1993. Thevenon & Solaz (2012) comprehensively examined the situation with a sample included in 30 countries during 1970-2010 period and confirmed the same finding. Weakness of female employment growth in the U.S. in relation to unpaid parental leave (Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2017) is another proof that shows importance of these policies on labor force participation. Rønsen & Sundström (2002) suggested that it is possible to see negative consequences of the long leave rights and child-raising supportive programs by triggering gender inequality in the family and work.

Length and rules of leaves on female employment may expand gender gap in employment also. Gender equality requires that "men and women can contribute fully at home, at work and in public life, for the betterment of societies and economies at large" (OECD, 2017c: 3). Link between gender issues and work life balance policies cannot be ignored. While international organizations aim to reduce the gender gap in the labor force participation rates by 25% by 2025 (OECD, 2017c),

work life balance policies are expected to support this aim. Offering financial incentives to fathers to take parental leave for at least two months is one of the way adopted by several countries (OECD,2017c). While some countries introduce paid paternity leave (e.g., Czech Republic, Ireland, Italy and Turkey), several countries extended paternity benefits (e.g., Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Estonia) to increase fathers' participation to unpaid work at home. The longest father specific leave is about one year leave period and it is provided in Japan and Korea (OECD, 2017b: 6). These policies help to reduce the time that women spent in unpaid work and enhance the time that men spent in unpaid work. Balance between time spent in paid and unpaid work for both men and women contributes to labor force participation of women, reduces the gender gap and contributes to economic growth of countries by using the whole potential of their human resources. Average OECD rate for gender gap in the labor force participation for aged 15-64 years old is 12,2% in 2015(OECD, 2017c).

Childcare subsidies are significant practices to support labor force participation of women and child development simultaneously. The more share of early childhood education and care in the GDP and the more flexible working time, the more female employment was confirmed (OECD,2017c). Lefebvre & Merrigan (2008) stated that childcare subsidies rise female participation to labor force in Canada. The most effective policy to abolish borders in front of the female employment is selected as "making childcare more accessible" according to response of 23 countries (OECD,2017b: 24). Countries increasingly recognized that lack of childcare subsidies may alienate women from labor market. Several countries attempt to facilitate access to affordable childcare through increase in subsidies or benefits, introduction or expansion of free childcare. The United Kingdom and Norway can be given example to these countries. Lowering of compulsory attendance age, introduction of legal entitlements to childcare places from a certain age, making public investments to build childcare places especially for children under 3years old are other strategies help countries to support both labor force participation of women and work life balance (OECD, 2017c).

The effect of childcare subsidies on female employment participation is relatively more significant in countries with high childcare cost than in countries with lower childcare costs (Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2017). High childcare costs negatively influence the enrolment rates in pre-primary education especially for low income families. If mothers' earnings are equal to the cost of child care service, they prefer to look after child on their own instead of enrolment to day care center or employ a babysitter at home. At that point, public social expenditure on families contributes to support families and facilitate their usage of childcare services. Increasing share of public social expenditure in GDP shows that countries are aware of the relationship between female labor force and child care. Public social expenditure on families exceeded 3% of GDP in several countries (Denmark, Finland, France, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom) according to OECD statistics (OECD Stat, Family database, Indicator-public policies for families and children). Introduction or expansion of free child care hours is a way countries use to improve affordability and reduce costs to parents. For instance, Korea provides free child care program for all children up to age six. Outputs of this extensive public investment are higher rate in female employment, increasing the proportion of children aged 0-2 using childcare services and rises the enrolment rates of children aged 3-5 in pre-primary education (OECD, 2017b).

## **2. Comparison of OECD Countries**

Employment and family policies at the governmental level cannot be ignored to implement work family practices effectively. OECD countries were examined for comparison of work life balance in this study. Relevant indicators with work-life balance such as labor force participation, public social expenditure on families and enrolment rates in pre-primary education or primary school



were included to the comparison. These indicators were chosen to understand the difference between work life balance of countries without ignoring the national context. Effectiveness of work life balance policies of countries can be evaluated in terms of their contribution to female employment, enrolment rates in pre-primary education or primary school. Public social expenditure on families can be sign of to what extent financial investment has potential to contributes to work life balance level of countries. In this study firstly secondary data related to these variables were collected from the OECD employment and family database according to availability of the updated data (see Table 1). And then, relatedness of these indicators with work life balance were checked through correlation analysis as shown in the Table 2. Correlation analysis aims to examine inter-correlations among variables (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, Black,1998).

**Table 1:** *Cross-country Variation of Chosen Indicators*

Countries	Work life balance Sex: Men and Women Unit: 10point scale Time:2017 -a-	Labor force participation Sex: <u>Men</u> ; Age:15-64 Unit:Percentage Time:2017 -b-	Labor force participation Sex: <u>Women</u> ; Age:15-64 Unit:Percentage Time:2017 -c-	Total public social expenditure on families as a% of GDP Unit:Percentage Time:2015 -d-	Enrolment rates in pre-primary education or primary school Age:3-5 Unit:Percentage Time:2016 –e-
Australia	5,6	82,6	72,3	2,7	85
Austria	6,8	81,0	71,8	2,7	90,3
Belgium	8,4	72,8	63,2	3,2	98,7
Canada	7,3	81,9	75,0	1,7	n.a.
Chile	5,0	77,6	57,1	1,7	79,5
Czech Republic	7,6	82,9	68,7	2,9	86,6
Denmark	9,0	81,5	76,1	3,4	97,6
Estonia	7,9	82,6	75,0	3	90,7
Finland	8,0	78,7	74,9	3,1	79
France	8,7	75,9	67,9	3,7	100
Germany	8,4	82,4	74,0	3,1	94,9
Greece	7,1	76,4	60,3	1	63,1
Hungary	8,0	78,2	64,2	3,5	92,1
Iceland	5,1	90,8	85,7	3,4	97,4
Ireland	7,9	78,7	66,4	2,3	77,2
Israel	4,6	75,6	68,7	2,2	99,3
Italy	9,4	75,0	55,9	2,5	94,9
Japan	4,6	85,5	69,4	1,6	91,8
Korea	4,1	79,3	59,0	1,4	93,4
Latvia	6,9	79,8	74,3	2,1	92,6
Lithuania	8,6	77,4	74,6	n.a.*	83,8
Luxembourg	8,0	74,0	66,2	3,4	85,3
Mexico	1,1	81,8	46,7	1	82,6
Netherlands	9,5	84,2	75,2	n.a.	94,6
New Zealand	5,9	85,7	76,2	n.a.	93,2
Norway	8,5	79,4	75,3	3,4	96,7
Poland	6,8	76,6	62,6	n.a.	84,9
Portugal	7,0	77,9	71,6	1,5	89,5
Slovak Republic	7,9	78,9	65,9	2,3	73,4
Slovenia	7,4	77,1	71,2	1,8	88,6
Spain	8,8	80,2	69,9	1,4	96,9
Sweden	8,4	84,3	80,6	3,5	95,9
Switzerland	8,4	88,5	79,3	2,2	49,8
Turkey	3,1	78,2	37,6	0,4	37,2
United Kingdom	6,4	83,4	73,6	3,6	100
United States	6,0	79,0	67,9	1,1	65,6
OECD Average	6,9	80,2	61,2	2,4	86,3

Source: Column (a): OECD Better Life Index. See: <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/work-life-balance/>

Source: Columns (b) and (c): OECD Stat, Gender-Employment database: EMP1:Labor force participation rate,by sex and age group See: <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54741>

Source: Columns (d): OECD Stat, Family database: By indicator-public policies for families and children See: <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54741>

Source: Columns (e): OECD Stat, Gender-Employment database:Enrolment rates in pre-primary education and primary school-Children aged to 3-5 year old. See: <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54741>

\*n.a.:not available

Objective indicators make possible to compare effectiveness of countries in terms of work life balance. Many definitions of the work-life balance focused on time and role enactment to prevent subjective perceptions of balance (Guest, 2002). If legislation defines working hours as 48 hours a week and people work much beyond more than legally defined work hours a week, it is possible to say people have imbalance between work and non-work objectively (Guest, 2002). The objective indicators to define work-life balance are “hours of work and hours of uncommitted or free time out-side work and other activities in the home and elsewhere” (Guest, 2002: 266). OECD, “How's life? 2017:Measuring Well-being” report measures *work life balance* of countries based on two items; “employees working hours” (working 50 hours or more per week means long working hours), “time devoted to leisure and personal care”. Average rate across OECD countries is 11% of employees work 50 hours or more per week. The average “time devoted to leisure and personal care” for full time employees is under 15 hours per day (including sleeping) across OECD countries (OECD, 2017a).

### 3. Findings

Denmark, Italy and Netherlands are among the highest level countries in terms of work life balance, above 9point/10. Work life balance in Mexico (1,1 point) is the lowest among OECD countries. Turkey (3,1 point), Korea (4,1 point), Japan and Israel (4,6 point) are countries that work life balance is low if they are compared with OECD average (6,9 point).

There is a positive relationship between work life balance and labor force participation of women ( $r=0,502$ ). The rate of labor force participation of women in Denmark that has high level of work life balance is 76,1%. Similarly, labor force participation of women in Netherlands (75,2 %) is higher than OECD average value of labor force participation of women (61,2 %). Italy is relatively low in terms of percentage of labor force participation of women (55,9 %) although it is one of the countries that work life balance is in high level. Mexico and Turkey are two countries that have the lowest rate of labor force participation of women and the lowest rate of work life balance.

Correlation between work life balance and total public social expenditure on families indicates positive relationship ( $r=0,573$ ). The lower rate of total public financial investment on families, the lower work life balance is seen in countries such as Turkey and Mexico. The share of public social expenditure on families in GDP is 0,4 % for Turkey; 1% for Mexico. These rates are lower than the average OECD value (2,4 % of GDP). On the other hand, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom are countries that invest on families above the 3% of their GDP. Work life balance of these countries-except United Kingdom-are higher than the OECD average value of work life balance (6.9 point).

Positive relationship between labor force participation of women and total public social expenditure on families ( $r=0.579$ ) and positive relationship between labor force participation of women and enrolment rates in pre-primary education or primary school( $r=0,445$ ) can be accepted as an argument to test influence of advancement of governmental efforts for work life balance on integration of women into the labor force.

Another significant positive correlation is available between total public social expenditure on families and enrolment rates in pre-primary education or primary school( $r=0,586$ ). The lowest enrolment rates in pre-primary education or primary school is in Turkey (37,2 %) among OECD countries. Low percentage of labor force participation of women and low level work life balance in Turkey facilitate to interpret low enrolment rates in pre-primary education or primary school.

It is possible to find relationship between female employment and child care subsidies or cost of child care in Turkey. Enrolment rates in early childhood education and care services for 0-to 2-year-olds is the lowest (less than 1%) in Turkey among the OECD countries. Average enrolment rate in early childhood education and care for OECD countries is around 33% (OECD Social

Policy Division, 2018). The rate of women who get back to work after maternity leave should be followed yearly to control the effectiveness of the family supportive policies. The length of maternity leave, high cost of child care service, lack of childcare subsidies may enhance the time spent in unpaid work for women. Likewise, Fagan (2001, p.244) stated that current circumstances, needs and alternatives direct women's decision from full time employment to part time work. Policies formulated by several countries such as Belgium, France, Germany and New Zealand offer employees to request flexible working arrangements. Australia, Hungary, Portugal, Slovenia, Turkey are among countries that introduced or extended the rights of flexible work arrangements. Beyond these countries, Norway and the United Kingdom widen the "right to request" to all workers not taking into caring responsibilities into consideration (OECD, 2017c: 40).

**Table 2:** *Correlations between "Work Life Balance" and "Labor Force Participation, Public Social Expenditure, Enrolment Rates in Pre-primary Education/Primary School"*

		<b>Work life balance</b>	<b>Labor force participation _men</b>	<b>Labor force participation _women</b>	<b>Total public social expenditu re on families</b>	<b>Enrolment rates in pre- primary education or primary school</b>
<b>Work life balance</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	-,144	,502**	,573**	,258
	Sig.(2 tailed)		,401	,002	,001	,134
<b>Labor force participation_ men</b>	Pearson Correlation	-,144	1	,525**	,113	,014
	Sig.(2 tailed)	,401		,001	,538	,935
<b>Labor force participation_ women</b>	Pearson Correlation	,502**	,525**	1	,579**	,445**
	Sig.(2 tailed)	,002	,001		,001	,007
<b>Total public social expenditure on families</b>	Pearson Correlation	,573**	,113	,579**	1	,586**
	Sig.(2 tailed)	,001	,538	,001		,001
<b>Enrolment rates in pre-primary education or primary school</b>	Pearson Correlation	,258	,014	,445**	,586**	1
	Sig.(2 tailed)	,134	,935	,007	,001	

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0,01 level (2-tailed)

#### 4. Conclusion

Countries aim to provide better life for their citizens. Governments have power to make the life better that citizens cannot be done on their own. Today economic indicators are not enough to evaluate to what extent government use its power effectively to satisfy citizens. Well-being, life satisfaction, happiness of countries are indicators that are taken into consideration to be one of the best governed countries in the globalized world. International organizations show their sensitivity with the published reports and evaluate these issues at the international level. OECD prepares well-being report of countries and releases every two years. United Nations indicate the importance of well-being as part of the universal Sustainable Development Goals.

This study examined the work life balance that is related with well-being, life satisfaction or happiness. Work life balance is investigated with cross national perspective without ignoring the relevant factors based on the OECD family and employment database.

Different from the studies that investigate antecedents or consequences of work life balance or work family conflict in the Turkish literature (e.g., Karabay, 2015; Arslan, 2012; Çelik & Turunç, 2011; Turgut, 2011), this study is touched on framing work life balance as a business or social issue, mentioned the importance of the way of policy implementation to explain the gap between government attempts and work life balance of people. Relationship between labor force participation of women and work life balance; relationship between total public social expenditure on families and work life balance were confirmed in this study.

Framing work life balance as a business issue and leave responsibility to employers or framing work life balance as an issue that government should take responsibility has potential to explain work life balance of countries. Instead of leaving responsibility to employers or government, cooperation between government and employer may enhance the positive effect of government attempts on work life balance. One of the significant example country is the United States that leave the responsibility to employers and refrain to provide family supportive policies. Family is perceived as private matter in the U.S. (Kamerman & Kahn, 1997) and all related issues such as childcare, diversity and gender is integrated to human resources practices of organizations (Friedman & Galinsky, 1992). Unpaid parental leave in the U.S. weakens female employment growth and motherhood is delayed as a result of short maternity leave (Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2017). On the other hand, there are governments take the responsibility and attempt to provide family supportive policies such as in France. Most of the work life practices in the country is supported by the government (Ollier-Malaterre, 2009). Total public social expenditure on families as a percentage of GDP in France is the highest among the OECD countries (3,7 % of GDP). Additionally, Korea and Japan can be given example to countries that have progressed for provision of work life balance practices by government. The longest paid father-specific leave is provided in Korea and Japan-around 52 weeks (OECD, 2017b). Social norms that assign role to women and men are the most challenging factor for governments that take responsibility to increase work life balance. Paid father specific leave is important step to deal with the social norms that assign care role for women and breadwinner role for men. Countries support the idea that advocates to reduce the sharp distinction between these roles contributes to work life balance and female employment growth.

The role of government is undeniable to improve work life balance of people that live in the country. Formulated laws, policies at the governmental level became unavoidable to impose sanctions on organizations for provision of supportive practices. These are the part of coercive mechanisms force organizations to comply with these pressures (DiMaggio, Powell, 1983). Influence of institutional pressures on work life balance was confirmed by some of the studies. Goodstein (1994) examined the organizational responsiveness to institutional pressures related to work-family issues. This study concluded that strength of institutional pressures and expectations related to effects of compliance behavior to pressures on technical outcomes are significant to explain compliance behavior of organizations to pressures related to work life balance. Ingram & Simons (1995) explained the significant effect of institutional pressures on responsiveness of public organizations to work family issues. They proposed that public organizations impose to institutional pressures intensively. Davis & Kalleberg (2006) similarly concluded that institutional pressures and economic concerns are the reasons of using family friendly practices.

Suggestion for countries that aim to improve work life balance is, firstly current status of work life balance level should be measured. Then, employer and employee survey should be conducted such as conducted in the United Kingdom as part of the work life balance campaign in 2000. According

to gap between real and intended situation, new policies can be formulated. At that point, policies and regulations from other countries can be transferred without ignoring structural, demographic, economic, technological, cultural differences across countries. Pilot test can be implemented to reduce unintended consequences of attempts to reduce imbalance between work and life.

Additionally, governments are criticized that work life balance policies do not focus on fundamental changes. Generally, these policies aim for “quick fixes” (Lewis, Richenda, & Rapoport, 2007: 368). To eliminate this criticism, scholars, practitioners, policy makers, community members and employees should be part of the process to disseminate knowledge, understand problems and difficulties that prevent work-life balance (Bardoel & De Cieri, 2014).

One of the limitations of this study is usage of secondary data to evaluate work life balance with cross national perspective. Project that has participant scholars from different countries can produce primary data and investigate this topic at the international level. Another limitation of the study is relevant indicators with work life balance are limited with labor force participation of women, public social expenditure on families and enrolment rates in pre-primary education or primary school. Country context can be studied more comprehensively to direct governments for better work life balance policies

The role of the government and employer, legal framework, evaluation perspectives of HR managers related to work life balance practices can be studied in Turkey context. Perceived inequities in work family policies is another study suggestion. Policies, regulations can be shaped with the idea of what can be done for people without families/children to reduce the perception of discrimination between people with/without families and/or children. To behave in an equal manner to all employees is as important as to help employees to balance their work and family life (Kirby & Krone, 2002). Accumulated knowledge on these topics may help to improve practices.

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