

Family-friendly workplaces in the public and private sectors

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Abstract

Purpose – The study aimed to examine family-friendly practices of employers in Hungary and compared public and private sector organisations to better understand their approaches to promoting the work–life balance of employees.

Design/methodology/approach – A cross-sectional, quantitative survey was carried out between April and June 2023, involving 702 organisations certified as family-friendly workplaces in Hungary, of which 101 managers responded. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's chi-squared tests to examine associations between sector and the prevalence of family-friendly practices.

Findings – The findings indicate sectoral variation in the implementation of family-friendly practices. Private sector organisations more frequently reported flexible working arrangements, whereas public sector employers more often reported traditional measures such as childcare services and child-friendly work environments. Teleworking was available in 87.3% of private organisations, compared with 67.4% of public organisations ($p = 0.016$). Similarly, part-time work was offered by 87.3% of private organisations and 63.3% of public organisations ($p = 0.004$). Conversely, on-site childcare (52.2% vs. 21.8%, $p = 0.002$) and child-friendly workplaces (58.7% vs 23.6%, $p < 0.001$) were more prevalent in the public sector.

Research limitations/implications – The study is geographically limited to Hungary and focuses mainly on certified family-friendly workplaces, which may not represent all organisations uniformly. However, it provides a basis for benchmarking international research on family-friendly workplace policies. In addition, it does not include a qualitative study to provide more in-depth insight or to capture the views of employees, but identifies further research directions in this way.

Practical implications – Based on these findings, organisations should consider implementing family-friendly policies that better promote work–life balance. The study recommends that the public sector extend flexible working arrangements and increase family benefits to improve recruitment and retention. Conversely, private sector employers should focus on developing childcare facilities on-site and fostering family-friendly work environments to support their employees' needs effectively, thereby increasing job satisfaction.

Social implications – A better understanding of family-friendly workplace policies can help to raise awareness of the importance of promoting work–life balance. The implementation of these policies has the potential to improve the well-being of employees and contribute to wider societal goals, including gender equality, family stability and the development of a more sustainable society.

Originality/value – The study provides a comprehensive analysis of family-friendly workplace policies in the various sectors in Hungary, highlighting sectoral strategies and practical recommendations for better promoting work–life balance and organisational efficiency.

Keywords Work–life balance, Work–family balance, Family-friendly workplaces, Public sector, Private sector

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1. Introduction

Today, more and more employees face the challenge of balancing work and family responsibilities. In recent decades, with the increasing participation of women in the labour market and the rising number of families with two earners, there has been a growing scientific interest in the relationship between work and family (Amstad *et al.*, 2011). The challenges of reconciling work and family responsibilities have become a focus of interdisciplinary research (Shabir and Gani, 2020). It is not only scientists who are interested in how to bring these two spheres of life closer together, but also employers. The high interest in this issue is justified by the fact that the successful integration of work and private life is important not only for individuals and families, but also for organisations and society as a whole (Li and Zhang, 2023). Recent research also highlights the increasing importance of work–life balance, particularly in the context of changing work arrangements and increased flexibility (e.g. Chung, 2020; Kumar *et al.*, 2023; Blom *et al.*, 2025).

Organisational practices that promote work–life balance bring significant benefits not only to employees but also to employers. Efforts to reconcile work and family life can improve the physical and mental well-being of individuals, increase the satisfaction of employees and thus provide employers with a more balanced, motivated and engaged workforce, which can even lead to a more effective organisation (Sirgy and Lee, 2018; Chang *et al.*, 2025; Rahaman *et al.*, 2025). Recognising this, a growing number of organisations, both in the private and public sector, have recently introduced family-friendly policies and practices, such as flexible working arrangements and child-related benefits (Dolcos and Daley, 2009; Chang *et al.*, 2025).

The implementation of family-friendly policies often varies across sectors and countries due to influences such as cultural, economic and policy contexts (Chung, 2020). Despite extensive research, evidence at the sectoral level on which work–family policies are effective in promoting work–life balance is still limited, particularly in Hungary. While international studies have looked at different countries and different sectors (e.g. Evans, 2001; den Dulk and Groeneveld, 2012; Chung, 2020; Chung, 2024), sectoral variation in Hungary has not been fully explored. The study fills this gap by providing empirical comparisons of family-friendly practices in the Hungarian public and private sectors, expanding the theory with sectoral insights.

The study aims to examine measures taken by family-friendly employers in Hungary to promote their employees' work–life balance. It seeks to show how family-friendly organisations can be developed across sectors to increase employee satisfaction and organisational competitiveness, while at the same time supporting broader societal goals such as family stability and sustainability. The study addresses the gap by providing empirical data on sectoral policies for the adoption and implementation of family-friendly policies in Hungary. The study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) What are the most common family-friendly practices implemented at organisational level in Hungary? (2) How do public and private sector organisations differ in their work–family policies? The findings will inform theoretical discussions on organisational practice and the practical formulation of policies to promote work–life balance in various institutional settings.

In response to the research questions, the author carried out a questionnaire survey between April and June 2023 among the managers of employers certified as family-friendly workplaces in Hungary. Firstly, the study provides a literature review on the background to this subject: clarifying what is meant by the concept of work–family conflict and why it is important that employees and organisations manage conflicts with the right tools. It then reviews the definition of family-friendly workplaces and the most important family-friendly

policies. The second part of the study presents the results of empirical research and answers the research questions.

2. Literature review

2.1 Work–family theories

Initially, work and family were considered to be separate, independent units and not to interact (Parsons and Bales, 1955; Dubin, 1956). However, as research on work–family relationships spread in the second half of the 20th century, scientists realised that these two areas of life were intimately linked. The famous research duo of Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) was one of the first to define the concept of work–family conflict. Researchers have interpreted work–family conflict (WFC) as a form of conflict between roles in which the demands of work and family roles are incompatible in certain respects. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) distinguish three forms of conflict: time-based, stress-based and behaviour-based conflicts. Time-based conflicts arise when the time demands of one role make it difficult to meet the needs of another, such as if long hours prevent a person from spending sufficient time with their family. A stress-based conflict occurs when tensions in one role affect the performance of another role. For example, stress at work may lead to irritability and fatigue, which may negatively impact family life. A behaviour-based conflict occurs when the behaviour required in one role conflicts with the behaviour expected in another. For example, the style of conduct required in the workplace may be counterproductive in family life.

Conflict between work and family life has been identified as one of the most common stress factors today (Chou and Cheung, 2013). Systematic literature reviews have shown that conflicts can have negative consequences at both individual and organisational level (e.g. Amstad *et al.*, 2011; Cavagnis *et al.*, 2023; Ratnaningsih and Idris, 2024). This research shows that work–family conflict can have a negative impact on family life and work satisfaction, contribute to a deterioration of mental and physical health, and ultimately lead to the development of diseases. From an organisational perspective, work–family conflict can reduce commitment to the organisation and increase absenteeism, but can also be associated with reduced effectiveness.

It is important to note that, while literature up to the turn of the millennium focused on the negative aspects of the work–family relationship, modern theories, such as work–family enrichment or work–family balance, are increasingly highlighting the benefits of the relationship between the two spheres of life (French and Johnson, 2016). According to Greenhaus and Powell (2006), work and family do not work as enemies, but as allies: enriching work and family through the transfer of resources between roles through both instrumental and affective pathways. It emphasises resource gains and positive results, in contrast to the focus of conflict theory on resource depletion and pressure. The model defines the instrumental route (transfer of skills, knowledge, perspectives, social capital and flexibility) and the affective route (transfer of positive impacts) as ways in which resources generated in one domain increase performance or influence in another. Empirical and conceptual work stresses that enrichment and conflict can coexist and even interact (enrichment can mitigate some of the negative effects of conflict) and that the two perspectives are complementary rather than opposites (Powell and Greenhaus, 2006).

Work–family balance refers to the fulfilment of roles that are negotiated and shared between the individual and the partner in the work–family relationship, and it goes beyond simple measures of conflict and enrichment (Maertz and Boyar, 2010). There are many operationalisations – e.g. balance as the joint pattern of low conflict and high enrichment, as an attitude about allocation satisfaction, or as effectiveness in meeting interdependent

expectations – which produce different empirical predictions and applications (Hennessy, 2008; Carlson *et al.*, 2013; Casper *et al.*, 2018).

Literature has identified a number of positive effects of work–family balance, both for individuals and for societies. Achieving a balanced life is essential for employees and their families, as it can contribute to personal well-being and increase satisfaction with family and private life. On the other hand, a successful work–family balance may have a positive impact on job satisfaction and commitment and may improve organisational performance (Sirgy and Lee, 2018; Thilagavathy and Geetha, 2023; Bello *et al.*, 2024; Maraqa *et al.*, 2025).

It is important to distinguish between work–family balance and work–life balance, as the latter represents a broader conceptual framework. While work–family balance focuses specifically on the compatibility of work and family roles, work–life balance covers a broader range of non-work-related areas, including family, social relations, community engagement, leisure activities and personal development (Joseph and Sebastian, 2017). Recent theoretical perspectives have further expanded this approach by introducing the concept of work–life fit, which emphasises dynamic alignment, individualised flexibility and context-specific adaptation rather than a static balance between work and non-work domains. This perspective reflects changing expectations of employees, digital transformation and the spread of hybrid working arrangements (Vydrová, 2025).

Organisational experts now recognise that balanced employees are important not only for individual well-being but also for organisational outcomes, which has contributed to the growing attention given to the development of family-friendly workplaces in both the private and public sectors (Dolcos and Daley, 2009).

2.2 Family-friendly workplaces

There is no universally accepted definition in the literature of a family-friendly workplace. Family-friendly workplaces include formal and informal support to help employees reconcile their work and family responsibilities (Blom *et al.*, 2025). Today, more and more organisations are trying to create more family-friendly workplaces. Formal family-friendly practices and informal support are part of the ingredients of a family-friendly workplace (Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran, 2006; French and Shockley, 2020; Blom *et al.*, 2025). The OECD (2007) defines formal family-friendly practices as complementing legal requirements by organisations to promote work–life balance. There are a number of family-friendly practices at the organisational level, the categorisation of which is not universally accepted in scientific discourse. These include flexible working arrangements, leave benefits, child allowances and other family benefits (den Dulk, 2001; Kim *et al.*, 2023; Chang *et al.*, 2025).

Flexible forms of work are often cited in the literature as key tools to promote the integration of work and family life (Allen *et al.*, 2013; Kelly *et al.*, 2014; Choudhary and Brookes, 2025). According to Kossek and Michel (2011) flexibility can be achieved in terms of time (e.g. flexitime, compressed workweek), location of work (e.g. telework, flexplace), amount of work (e.g. job sharing, part-time work) and work continuity (e.g. long-term leaves, sabbaticals). Workplace flexibility can have positive effects on employees' health and well-being, as it has been shown to reduce stress, anxiety and burnout experienced by workers (Grzywacz *et al.*, 2008; Brown and Pitt-Catsouphes, 2016; Shifrin and Michel, 2022). On the other hand, flexibility can also bring significant benefits to organisations. Extensive research points out that the use of family-friendly policies at organisational level has a positive impact on job satisfaction, employee engagement and performance (e.g. Chou and Cheung, 2013; Masterson *et al.*, 2020; Choudhary and Brookes, 2025).

Besides formal family-friendly practices, another key element of a family-friendly environment is a supportive organisational culture (Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran, 2006).

A family-friendly corporate culture refers to the common assumptions, beliefs and values through which the organisation promotes the integration of work and family life. A well-known study by Thompson and co-authors (1999) stresses that formal family-friendly practices will not achieve their objectives unless the organisational culture supports employees' efforts to achieve a work–family balance. Researchers have often argued for the positive effects of a family-friendly corporate culture, both for employers and employees. A supportive work culture can increase employee commitment and reduce employee turnover (Thompson *et al.*, 1999; Timms *et al.*, 2015; Straub *et al.*, 2018). Workers who benefit from informal support at work are more likely to take advantage of family-friendly policies such as flexible working arrangements, part-time work and childcare services (Dikkers *et al.*, 2007) and are less likely to experience conflicts in reconciling work and family life (Thompson *et al.*, 1999; Bobbio *et al.*, 2022).

2.2.1 Family-friendly workplaces in the public and private sectors. Unlike national-level statutory policies, where access to national family-friendly measures for employees, such as parental leave, is regulated by law, the implementation of family-friendly policies at organisational level is largely left to the employer's discretion (Chung, 2020). Literature shows that both public and private sector employers tend to provide similar types of family-friendly programmes (e.g. flexible working arrangements, leave policies and child support) but there are differences in some aspects. Public organisations are more likely to introduce formalised, codified programmes and bundles of offers, linked to organisational rules and collective agreements. Private organisations, especially larger ones, also implement formal work–family practices, but informal support is also very common, particularly in smaller companies (Rossin-Slater, 2017).

The literature shows a great diversity in the private sector: while large, resource-rich private companies often provide paid leave and childcare services outside the statutory minimum, many smaller companies stick to statutory minimums. By contrast, public organisations are more likely to offer comprehensive and standardised packages – including longer leave from work and on-site or subsidised childcare – reflecting the greater prevalence and generosity of family-related provisions (Chatterji *et al.*, 2007; Bueno and Oh, 2022). At the same time, public sector organisations have recognised the importance of family-friendly measures that not only cover women and employees of childbearing age but also take into account the diversity of the workforce (Kim and Wiggins, 2011). A good example is that public sector organisations are increasingly focusing on benefits and services that support the private life of employees in a broad sense, such as work–life stress management programmes. They provide employee assistance programmes, organise stress management workshops and even offer seminars on family and private life issues (Secret *et al.*, 2000).

Incentives for the adoption of work–life balance policies also vary between private and public organisations. The main drivers of family-friendly public sector behaviour are institutional factors, such as government regulations (den Dulk and Groeneveld, 2012). Public organisations often base their adoption of family-friendly policies on principles of equality, the obligation to maintain a stable public service workforce, the observance of public employment standards and gender mandates (Schimpf and Main, 2014). Women in the public sector often struggle to maintain a work–life balance, mainly because of the burden of multiple and competing roles in the workplace and family life, which can have a negative impact on well-being and career development (Marthalina *et al.*, 2025). Feeney and Sritch (2017) consider family-friendly policies to be of the utmost importance in promoting the work–life balance of women and promoting their public service careers, as well as increasing the gender balance in the public sector. Family-friendly policies make a significant contribution to higher earnings, especially for women, and are associated with a positive relationship with wages. The presence of such family-friendly practices is a key factor in the gap between public and private incomes, which increases the attractiveness of

the workplace and employee satisfaction (Chatterji *et al.*, 2007). Private employers, on the other hand, are motivated primarily by economic factors such as employee retention, increased productivity and reputation (Lewis *et al.*, 2009). Competition for talent on the labour market may arise between for-profit and public organisations, with employers implementing family-friendly policies gaining a competitive advantage (Groeneveld *et al.*, 2009; Vavilova and Bagirova, 2022).

Barriers to the implementation of labour and family policies also vary between sectors. In the private sector, the main barriers are high implementation costs, a lack of institutional pressure and a weak organisational culture (den Dulk and Peper, 2007). In some contexts, urgent business priorities and economic considerations often come before initiatives on flexibility (McNamara *et al.*, 2012). In the public sector, although less frequently reported, high pressure to work may counter the benefits of a supportive culture and policies (Dolcos and Daley, 2009). Moreover, the effectiveness of these policies is sometimes limited by the fact that implementation varies from organisation to organisation (Lewis *et al.*, 2009). In some regions, such as the Nordic countries, gender and occupational segregation may further limit the scope of family-friendly practices in certain groups (Nielsen *et al.*, 2004).

2.2.2 Family-friendly workplaces in Hungary. Research shows that regionality plays a crucial role in implementing family-friendly measures at organisational level. Northern European countries (e.g. Finland, Sweden and Denmark), which have strong family policies at national level, also offer a range of organisational solutions that are family-friendly. In contrast, formal institutional work–family practices are much less common in Southern European countries (e.g. Portugal, Greece and Cyprus) and in Central and Eastern Europe. According to Chung (2020), this is because in countries where national policies strongly promote work–family balance, organisations are more likely to be family-friendly as well.

The OECD (2022) notes that in recent years European policies have increasingly promoted the creation of flexible work environments and atypical employment has become more widespread across Europe. At the same time, as in other Central and Eastern European countries, family-friendly forms of employment, particularly part-time work, are only very limited in scope in Hungary. However, a growing number of initiatives by civil society and the government recognise family-friendly employers in Hungary. These initiatives offer funding opportunities and recognise organisations that are family-friendly with an award or a trademark, thus enhancing the reputation of employers and increasing general social awareness and acceptance of family-friendly approaches (Pátkainé Bende, 2022).

The Family-Friendly Hungary Centre developed the Family-Friendly Workplace trademark in 2019, which recognises the family-friendly functioning of employers in the public, private and non-profit sectors. To obtain the trademark, employers must meet a comprehensive set of objective criteria relating to family-friendliness. During the certification process for family-friendly workplaces, the Centre examines atypical and flexible forms of employment, employee benefits and family support, as well as other services available within the organisation. Other criteria include the way in which the organisation promotes community building and health promotion, as well as external and internal communication related to family-friendly approaches (Family-Friendly Hungary Centre, 2025).

The results of empirical research carried out among organisations with the family-friendly workplace trademark are set out below.

3. Methodology

As part of this research, a structured, self-administered online questionnaire was conducted among managers of organisations holding the Family-Friendly Workplace trademark in Hungary. The questionnaire was developed on the basis of existing literature and best practices

in family-friendly workplace policies to help ensure that it covers the main areas of concern in the context of promoting work-life balance. The purpose of the survey was to collect comprehensive data on organisational practices related to family-friendliness, including policies and measures that employers most commonly adopt. To achieve this, the questionnaire was structured around specific items that are directly relevant to the research questions: (1) What are the most common family-friendly practices implemented at organisational level in Hungary? (2) How do public and private sector organisations differ in their work-family policies? The items have been carefully formulated to elicit clear and measurable responses, which allowed an efficient comparison and analysis across sectors and types of organisation.

In terms of structure, the questionnaire included a series of themes with different questions. The first two questions outlined demographic characteristics of the surveyed organisations, such as location, type of settlement, sector of activity and size of the organisation. Other demographic questions focused on the respondent's specific role and management level in the organisation. Further questions focused on family-friendly practices, in particular on flexible working arrangements, family-friendly leave policies, family benefits and services, family events and training and on how organisations support the reintegration of workers with young children and the health and well-being of employees. The sample questions included items such as: "Does your organisation offer flexible working hours?" and "Does your organisation provide a child-friendly environment?" The questionnaire consisted mainly of closed-ended questions asking respondents whether they had implemented such family-friendly practices in their organisation (yes or no).

The questionnaire was designed as a descriptive inventory of family-friendly organisational practices, rather than as a psychometric scale to measure latent constructs. Items focused on the presence or absence of specific practices (e.g. flexible working arrangements, childcare services, family benefits) that are well-documented in the literature. Content validity was ensured by basing the questionnaire items on established theoretical frameworks and previous empirical studies on family-friendly workplace policies. In addition, the questionnaire was piloted with a small group of managers to assess the clarity, comprehensibility and practical relevance of the items. The feedback from this pilot phase led to minor refinements in wording and ordering, which further strengthened the content validity of the instrument. As the questionnaire was designed to record the presence or absence of specific organisational practices, rather than to create scales of multiple items, formal testing of reliability (e.g. internal consistency measures) was not performed.

Employers holding the Family-Friendly Workplace trademark were invited to participate in the questionnaire survey. This amounted to 702 employers at the time of the research, conducted between April and June 2023. Of these, 101 managers (middle and senior managers) from public or private sector organisations completed the online questionnaire. The descriptive characteristics of the responding organisations are presented in [Table 1](#).

More than half of the participants (54.5%) were from the private sector, while the proportion of organisations from the public sector was 45.5%. In terms of organisation size, the largest group of organisations (44.6%) comprised micro and small enterprises (1–49 employees), followed by medium-sized enterprises with 50–249 employees (33.7%) and the least represented category was large enterprises with more than 250 employees (21.8%). According to the type of settlement, the sample included county cities (40.6%) and other towns and villages (45.5%) in almost equal proportions, while the study included organisations from the capital city with only 13.9%.

The questionnaire data were analysed using IBM SPSS. As the questionnaire mainly consisted of closed-ended items, the analysis was quantitative, focusing on frequency distributions and cross-tabulations. No qualitative thematic analysis was conducted, as the

Table 1. Sample characteristics ($n = 101$)

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Sector</i>		
Private	55	54.5
Public	46	45.5
<i>Number of employees</i>		
1–49	45	44.6
50–249	34	33.7
> 250	22	21.8
<i>Type of settlement</i>		
Capital city	14	13.9
County city	41	40.6
Other town or village	46	45.5

Source(s): Author's own work

survey did not include open-ended questions. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the information collected from the participating employers, providing a broad overview of the prevalence of various family-friendly practices across sectors. Pearson's chi-square tests were used to examine the association between the sector (public vs private) and the presence of specific family-friendly practices, with $p < 0.05$ being considered statistically significant.

4. Results

Consistent with previous literature on family-friendly organisational practices (e.g. [den Dulk, 2001](#); [Kossek and Michel, 2011](#)), the most prevalent categories of family-friendly measures reported by employers with Family-Friendly Workplace trademarks ($n = 101$) were atypical and flexible working arrangements (99.0%), family leave arrangements (98.0%) and family and children's programmes (95.0%). The survey results also indicate a high proportion of benefits for parents with young children and for workers returning from parental leave (93.1%). There was also a strong focus on prevention and healthcare programmes (89.1%) and on monetary and non-material benefits and services supporting private life (87.1%). Family-friendly training was found in the toolbox of employers in slightly lower proportions (66.3%). For family-friendly employers, family support was least visible in terms of wages (34.7%). The results of the private and public sectors are illustrated in [Table 2](#).

The findings suggest that the prevalence of family-friendly practices varies across sectors. The most notable patterns concern the types of flexible working arrangements offered, the availability of childcare and child-friendly services, the scope of monetary and in-kind benefits, the provision of training and well-being services, and the extent to which family considerations are integrated into pay policies.

4.1 Flexible working arrangements

Based on the survey results, all private sector organisations and 97.8% of public sector organisations reported using atypical or flexible working arrangements. These findings are in line with the literature highlighting flexible working opportunities as a key element of family-friendly employment policies ([Kossek and Michel, 2011](#); [Chou and Cheung, 2013](#)). This almost equal proportion suggests that both sectors consider the introduction of flexible

Table 2. Proportion of family-friendly practices among the surveyed organisations by sector (*n* = 101)

Family-friendly practices	Private sector (%)	Public sector (%)	All employers (%)	<i>p</i> -value
Atypical/flexible forms of work	100.0	97.8	99.0	0.272
Teleworking, working from home	87.3	67.4	78.2	0.016*
Part-time work	87.3	63.0	76.2	0.004*
Flexible working hours	81.8	76.1	79.2	0.480
Unrestricted work schedule	58.2	28.3	44.6	0.003*
Job sharing	20.0	17.4	18.8	0.738
Compressed working weeks	12.7	2.2	7.9	0.050*
Seasonal work	10.0	2.2	6.9	0.085
Family-friendly leave policies	96.4	100.0	98.0	0.191
Flexible leave arrangements	94.5	89.1	92.1	0.316
Emergency leave for family reasons	74.5	76.1	75.2	0.858
Extra-statutory leave (e.g. parental leave, paternity leave)	34.5	43.5	38.6	0.358
Family and children's programmes	100.0	89.1	95.0	0.012*
Work-life balance training	76.4	54.3	66.3	0.020*
Support for the reintegration of workers with young children	94.5	91.3	93.1	0.523
Maintaining contact with employees on parental leave	85.5	82.6	84.2	0.696
Reintegration training	34.5	26.1	30.7	0.359
Mentoring support for reintegration	47.3	45.7	46.5	0.871
Providing childcare services (e.g. summer camp, workplace nursery)	21.8	52.2	35.6	0.002*
Creating a child-friendly work environment (e.g. children's room)	23.6	58.7	39.7	<0.001*
Prevention and health promotion programmes	90.9	87.0	89.1	0.525
Screening programmes	56.4	56.5	56.4	0.987
Private medical services	21.8	6.5	14.9	0.031*
Supporting sport activities (e.g. fitness room, workplace sport programmes)	52.7	37.0	45.5	0.113
Workplace massage	27.3	15.2	21.8	0.144
Creating employee break rooms	25.5	34.8	29.7	0.307
Creating ergonomic work environment	50.9	30.4	41.6	0.038*
Providing healthy meals at work	25.5	15.2	20.8	0.207
Stress management training	49.1	23.9	37.6	0.009*
Psychological support for employees	29.1	23.9	26.7	0.558
Family benefits and services	96.4	76.1	87.1	0.002*

(continued)

Table 2. Continued

Family-friendly practices	Private sector (%)	Public sector (%)	All employers (%)	p-value
Support for children's education	47.3	32.6	40.6	0.135
Childbirth and marriage benefits	60.0	32.6	47.5	0.006*
Employee loan	56.4	39.1	48.5	0.084
Housing allowances for families	27.3	32.6	29.7	0.559
Support for family holidays	20.0	28.3	23.8	0.331
Employee assistance programmes	32.7	32.6	32.7	0.990
Family-friendly wage policies	45.5	21.7	34.7	0.013*

Note(s): *statistically significant

Source(s): Author's own work

forms of work as a key priority in their family support measures. At the same time, the types of atypical forms of employment used in both sectors should be examined.

The results indicate that flexible working arrangements are reported more frequently by organisations in the private sector than in the public sector. Teleworking and working from home were available in 87.3% of organisations in the private sector, compared with 67.4% in the public sector. The provision of teleworking was statistically associated with the sector ($p = 0.016$). Part-time work was also more commonly reported in the private sector (87.3%) than in the public sector (63.3%), with a statistically significant association between the sector and the availability of this form of work ($p = 0.004$). Unrestricted work schedules were reported more often in the private sector (58.2%) than in the public sector (28.3%), and a significant association with sector was also observed ($p = 0.003$). Other forms of flexible work, such as job sharing, compressed working weeks and seasonal work, were not widely used in either sector.

These findings suggest that the private sector tends to favour a wider range of flexible work options, often as part of its HR strategies (Groeneveld *et al.*, 2009; Kossek and Michel, 2011). This approach is in line with the findings of de Menezes and Kelliher (2011), who stress that organisations that adopt a wider range of flexible measures can gain a competitive advantage in attracting, motivating and retaining talent. Conversely, public sector organisations generally provide less flexible working arrangements, which can be attributed to legal or institutional constraints. These constraints are often imposed by administrative frameworks and collective agreements that emphasise stability and standardisation, reflecting broader sectoral interests in equity, transparency and social responsibility (Chatterji *et al.*, 2007; Kim and Wiggins, 2011).

Moreover, these contrasts can have a tangible impact on the everyday lives of employees and on organisational outcomes. The availability of flexible options, such as teleworking and reduced working time, can significantly improve work–life balance, reduce stress and increase overall job satisfaction for workers (Grzywacz *et al.*, 2008; Sirgy and Lee, 2018; Shifrin and Michel, 2022). For organisations, especially in the private sector, this flexibility is associated with higher productivity, lower turnover and a better reputation for the employer, which are key competitive advantages in today’s labour market (Groeneveld *et al.*, 2009; Kossek and Michel, 2011; Choudhary and Brookes, 2025). Conversely, more limited flexibility in public organisations could reduce the work–life balance of employees, which could affect their motivation, well-being and commitment to the organisation.

4.2 Family-friendly leave policies

The results of the survey indicate that family-friendly leave arrangements are widely available in both the private and public sectors. Notably, all employers in the public sector (100.0%) reported that family-friendly approaches were typical. This is reflected in flexible leave arrangements, i.e. arrangements in which the needs of employees are taken into account when granting leave: 89.1% of public sector organisations did so. 76.1% of respondents in the public sector provided emergency leave for family reasons and 43.5% provided extra-statutory leave for employees (e.g. parental leave, paternity leave, adoption leave). The share of organisations in the private sector was slightly lower (34.5%) for extra-statutory leave granted for family situations.

The pattern observed is consistent with international evidence that the public sector tends to operate with stronger regulation and formalised frameworks (Kim and Wiggins, 2011; Schimpf and Main, 2014), which support the consistent implementation of family-friendly leave policies. Although these associations were not statistically significant, it is still important to consider their potential practical implications. Even small variations in the availability or

predictability of leave can have an impact on the everyday lives of employees: more formal and predictable leave in the public sector may help reduce stress and increase job satisfaction and retention (Sirgy and Lee, 2018; Masterson *et al.*, 2020).

4.3 Family programmes and training

Family-friendly employers surveyed considered it very important to implement programmes and events involving family members. The results indicate that there is sectoral variation in the provision of family programmes, such as family days and children's days. While all respondents in the private sector (100.0%) provided family-based programmes, the proportion in the public sector was 89.1%. The p -value ($p = 0.012$) indicated a statistically significant relationship between the sector and the provision of family programmes. Moreover, work-family training activities were reported more frequently in the private sector than in the public sector. 76.4% of private sector respondents and 54.3% of public sector respondents regularly organised work-family training (e.g. on effective time management and strengthening the role of the family) to help employees achieve better work-life balance ($p = 0.020$).

These patterns suggest that private sector organisations prioritise community building and employee development, often through family events and work-family training that may foster well-being, cohesion and organisational commitment (Thompson *et al.*, 1999; Timms *et al.*, 2015). In contrast, employers in the public sector tend to prefer stability, equity and institutional support rather than targeted community initiatives (Schimpf and Main, 2014). These differences reflect diverging interests and organisational cultures: private companies invest in visible, competitive schemes, while public organisations favour formalised measures. This is consistent with the evidence that context-related factors shape family-friendly practices and their effects on the well-being of employees and on the performance of the organisation (den Dulk and Peper, 2007; Rossin-Slater, 2017).

4.4 Support for employees returning from parental leave

A large number of employers in both the private and public sectors provided some form of support for their employees returning from parental leave with young children: 94.5% of for-profit employers and 91.3% of public sector employers. However, there were differences between the measures applied in the two sectors. Childcare facilities were reported more frequently in the public sector, with 52.2% of respondents providing nursery, kindergarten and summer camp facilities for children, compared with 21.8% in the private sector ($p = 0.002$). Moreover, child-friendly working environments were also more prevalent in the public sector: 58.7% of employers in this sector created a work environment suitable for receiving children ($p < 0.001$), while only 23.6% of for-profit organisations did so.

The more frequent provision of childcare facilities and child-friendly working environments in the public sector may reflect a strategic focus on creating supportive and child-friendly workplaces which cater for the specific needs of parents with young children (Schimpf and Main, 2014). These measures may serve as a compensatory mechanism for the relatively lower availability of flexible working arrangements and underline how public organisations seek to promote work-family balance through infrastructure support. Conversely, private sector employers, when providing family support, tend to rely less on physical childcare and more on flexible working arrangements (e.g. teleworking or flexible working hours), which research suggests can effectively increase the ability of employees to balance work and family life (Kossek and Michel, 2011; Chou and Cheung, 2013).

From an organisational perspective, these sector-specific patterns can have practical implications. Public sector initiatives such as childcare facilities can help reduce stress and

increase the satisfaction of employees with young children in the workplace, which may lead to increased retention and organisational engagement (Marthalina *et al.*, 2025). However, reliance on infrastructure support rather than on flexible working arrangements may reduce adaptability in a dynamic work environment. The focus on flexible working arrangements in the private sector, on the other hand, is in line with current trends towards tailored working conditions, which empirical evidence suggests can increase organisational performance and employee well-being (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011; Choudhary and Brookes, 2025).

4.5 Health and well-being programmes

Family-friendly organisations in both the private and public sectors considered it important to promote employee health and well-being: 90.9% of for-profit organisations and 87.0% of employers in the public sector provided measures to promote employee health and well-being. The results show that measures with higher cost requirements, such as workplace massage, ergonomic workplace environments or the provision of private medical services, were the most popular among for-profit organisations. For example, one fifth (21.8%) of for-profit employers provided private medical care for their employees, whereas this type of benefit was present in only 6.5% of respondents in the public sector ($p = 0.031$). Almost half of all for-profit organisations (49.1%) organised stress management training to support employee mental health, while this proportion was only 23.9% in the public sector ($p = 0.009$). At the same time, other measures that also serve the interests of health protection, such as the provision of screening programmes or the establishment of rest facilities at work, were also emphasised in the public sector, or even present in greater proportions than in for-profit organisations.

These sectoral patterns in health and well-being programmes suggest contrasting priorities and strategies: employers in the private sector tend to invest more in high-cost, personalised benefits to attract and retain their staff (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011; Sirgy and Lee, 2018). Conversely, public organisations tend to highlight infrastructure and preventive health measures and rest facilities that address wider community health concerns and promote equity and accessibility (Nielsen *et al.*, 2004). These approaches reflect different organisational cultures and resource allocation, with public strategies tending to focus more on collective well-being (Schimpf and Main, 2014).

4.6 Family benefits and wage policies

Family benefits supporting employees' family life were provided by 96.4% of for-profit employers, compared with 76.1% of public sector employers, with a statistically significant association between sector and the provision of family benefits ($p = 0.002$). Sectoral variation was also evident in financial support for children's education, as well as in financial or material support provided in connection with childbirth and marriage. This was the case, for example, for 60.0% of private sector employers and 32.6% of public sector employers ($p = 0.006$). At the same time, it should be stressed that certain types of benefits that are common among family-friendly employers were more prevalent in the public sector. Housing and holiday allowances were granted more frequently in the public sector than in the private sector. Moreover, it was clear that, when developing wage policies, for-profit organisations were better able to take account of the views of families than public sector employers. While almost half of the private sector respondents (45.5%) replied that family considerations were reflected in wage policies, only 21.7% of the public sector respondents did so ($p = 0.002$).

The observed sectoral variation in family allowances and wage policies may reflect different organisational priorities and strategies for resources. The increased provision of

family support benefits by the private sector is in line with the literature, which highlights their role in attracting and retaining talent in competitive markets (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011; Sirgy and Lee, 2018). These targeted benefits are strategic tools for employers to support their commitment to a stakeholder-oriented approach that addresses the needs of individuals and families (Chou and Cheung, 2013). By contrast, public sector benefits – such as housing and holiday allowances – are more widespread but may be influenced more by historical wage structures and sectoral employment conditions than by deliberate family policy considerations (Schimpf and Main, 2014).

5. Conclusions

Today, the reconciliation of work and family life is a major challenge for employees, affecting not only the health and well-being of individuals and families, but also having a significant impact on employee engagement and organisational performance (Sirgy and Lee, 2018). It is therefore of the utmost importance that organisations provide work–life policies to achieve more balanced and engaged workers. Family-friendly policies are becoming increasingly important in public sector organisations employing the majority of women and can help to improve gender equality (Feeney and Stritch, 2017). In addition, the introduction of various family-friendly organisational practices can be an important tool in the competition for talent on the labour market.

This study presents the results of a questionnaire survey conducted in the spring of 2023 among Hungarian organisations using the Family-Friendly Workplace trademark. The family-friendly measures identified by the survey, such as flexible working arrangements, family-friendly leave policies, programmes for families and children, and procedures to support the reintegration of workers with young children, as well as various measures to promote employee health, are widely available in Hungarian family-friendly organisations. The findings are in line with the typology of formal family-friendly procedures, highlighting the differences between time-based, location-based and resource-based measures, and show how organisations combine these types in sector-specific ways (den Dulk, 2001; Allen *et al.*, 2013; Chang *et al.*, 2025). Recognition of the economic benefits of these practices provides an additional incentive for companies to incorporate them into strategic HR management.

The results indicate sectoral variation in the implementation of family-friendly policies across public and private organisations. In many areas, in particular flexible working arrangements and family benefits, for-profit organisations offer more opportunities for employees than public sector organisations. Private sector organisations offer greater time and space flexibility to employees, e.g. by prioritising part-time work and teleworking. Moreover, the results show that private sector organisations have more resources to provide various family benefits and programmes to promote health and well-being than public sector organisations. As regards wage policies, the private sector is much better able to take family needs into account, whereas the public sector is more limited in this regard as well. This economic advantage often allows private companies to create more flexible and innovative working environments, increasing operational performance, and illustrates how family-friendly practices can be reconciled with business goals (Lewis *et al.*, 2009; Choudhary and Brookes, 2025). This is consistent with the finding that private employers are motivated primarily by economic factors such as retention, productivity and reputation and that family-friendly policies can give them a competitive advantage (Lewis *et al.*, 2009; Groeneveld *et al.*, 2009).

In contrast, the public sector relies on more traditional family-friendly measures. Public sector organisations place greater emphasis on the provision of childcare services and the creation of child-friendly work environments, which can be a significant support for

employees with young children. This suggests that public sector organisations rely more on childcare infrastructure, where flexible working arrangements and family benefits are less widespread. These measures may serve as a compensatory mechanism for the relatively lower availability of flexible working arrangements, and underline how public organisations are trying to promote work–family balance through infrastructure support.

Overall, the research highlights that although both sectors are committed to family-friendly policies, the practical implementation methods and emphases are different. The mutual adoption of family-friendly measures can be beneficial for both sectors, but it is particularly recommended that public sector organisations adopt flexible working arrangements to attract and retain employees in the long term. Moreover, the introduction of other family benefits in the public sector can also be important, especially to promote women’s careers and gender equality. In practice, employers should aim for a balanced range of interventions – combining flexible work and family benefits with childcare facilities and structured reintegration programmes – to maximise employee retention, well-being and productivity (Kelly *et al.*, 2014; Rossin-Slater, 2017).

Government policies need to actively encourage public sector organisations to expand family-friendly benefits and policies. Policymakers can promote more family-friendly workplaces by introducing a number of specific measures, such as tax breaks for organisations that implement flexible working arrangements or extend family benefits. Moreover, the provision of subsidies or matching funds can significantly reduce financial barriers, particularly for SMEs facing resource constraints. Such support could include cost-effective implementation programmes, best practice guidelines and mentoring initiatives to facilitate the adoption of family-friendly policies. By creating such incentives and removing financial barriers, policymakers can promote a more inclusive work environment that not only promotes the work–life balance of employees, but also increases organisational productivity and societal well-being.

There are several limitations to the research which need to be taken into account when interpreting the results of the study. The findings should be interpreted in the light of the methodological constraints associated with the survey questionnaire. In addition, the study is geographically limited to Hungary and focuses primarily on certified family-friendly workplaces, which may not represent all organisations uniformly. However, it provides a basis for comparative international research on family-friendly policies in the workplace. On the other hand, the present research only assesses quantifiable family-friendly practices and does not take into account other aspects of developing a family-friendly corporate culture, such as informal support for employees. Nevertheless, the results highlight that formal policies are necessary but not sufficient: the critical mediators of policy uptake and effectiveness are organisational culture and informal support from management (Thompson *et al.*, 1999; Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran, 2006).

Further qualitative research is needed, such as in-depth interviews with staff and human resources managers, to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural aspects of family-friendly workplace policies. These interviews can provide valuable insights into how these policies are perceived and experienced at the individual level, thereby bridging the gap between quantitative data and employees’ experiences. Exploring individuals’ personal views and attitudes towards family support procedures would help to identify the root causes of their effectiveness and acceptance in organisations.

The practical implications of the results of this research provide valuable input for organisations to design family-friendly policies that better support workers’ needs, potentially improving employee satisfaction and engagement. To compete effectively on the labour market, the study recommends that flexible working arrangements and increased family

benefits should be implemented by the public sector, whereas private sector organisations could provide more childcare support.

The social implications of the results raise awareness of the importance of supporting work–life balance, which can contribute to the well-being of workers and to wider societal goals such as gender equality, family stability and a more sustainable society. In conclusion, by documenting the complementarities and shortcomings across sectors, the study identifies actionable pathways: the integration of flexible work, targeted benefits and childcare facilities, supported by an informal support culture and public incentives, can improve employee well-being as well as organisational and broader societal outcomes.

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