

Government-subsidized childcare and mandated paid family leave sound good for women but result in lower wages and fewer high-level jobs.

European countries generally offer more extensive benefits to employees, particularly female employees, than the U.S. For example, in Germany, women are given 14 weeks of fully paid maternity leave and another 12 months of partially paid support.

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However, a study of 22 countries by two Cornell economists found that women in the European Union are more likely to work part-time and in lower-paid positions and are less likely to hold managerial positions than in the U.S.

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Related reading: “I Live in a Country with Paid Family Leave. It’s No Magic Bullet.” – Carrie Lukas, The Washington Post

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In the U.S., women account for over 40% of senior management positions. In more “progressive” Europe, they account for just over 30%.

In the U.S., women hold 43 percent of managerial positions. They hold less than 30 percent of such positions in Germany.

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The dramatic disparity appears to be connected to the difference in the two countries’ various employment policies, particularly German’s “women-friendly” policies. The German government mandates 14 weeks of fully paid maternity leave and another 12 months of partially paid support.

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Related reading: “How Family-Friendly Policies Can Hurt Women’s Careers” – Shana Lebowitz, Business Insider

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“Women-friendly” government mandates encourage businesses to assume women will be more expensive and less productive.

Research has found that Europe’s employment mandates and generous women and family-friendly policies, including the right to work part-time and the mandatory provision of child care, “make women more expensive to employ and result in lower take-home pay and fewer job opportunities,” writes Independent Women’s Forum President Carrie Lukas.

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Related reading: “The Impact of Family-Friendly Work Policies for Women” - Heather LaCombe & Sarah Schupp, Cornell

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In 2017, a combination of tax cuts and deregulation was followed by women’s earnings increasing and their unemployment rate dropping.

The free market does a much better job at creating opportunities for women than big government. Since 2017, a combination of tax cuts and deregulation have resulted in women thriving in the workplace. Women’s weekly median earnings have gone up by almost 5 percent.

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The unemployment rate for women has fallen to 3.4 percent, which is a historic low.

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Between 2017 and 2018, women started almost 2,000 businesses a day, with an estimated 12.3 million businesses owned by women, which is a 6% increase since 2016.

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A majority of American businesses voluntarily offer their employees paid leave.

Despite no federal mandate to do so, a majority of American businesses voluntarily offer some paid leave because they recognize the need to be competitive with other employers.

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Many American companies expanded their benefit packages for employees when the 2017 tax laws took effect.

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The most truly women-friendly employment policies are those that offer the most flexibility to both employees and employers.

Studies have repeatedly found that federally mandated “family-friendly” policies end up unintentionally hurting women by encouraging employers to perceive them as potentially more expensive and less productive.

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Flexibility is the key to approaching employer-offered benefits, Independent Women’s Forum President Carrie Lukas maintains: “Many employees value paid leave benefits (which is why most American business voluntarily offer some paid leave benefits). But some workers would rather have larger paychecks and fewer benefits. That should be their right. Moreover, some businesses can’t afford to offer paid leave benefits to all workers, and forcing them to do so would require job cuts or closures. Companies need and deserve flexibility.”

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