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U.S. TRAILS COMPETITORS IN PRO-FAMILY WORKPLACE POLICIES

In the United States, as in the majority of wealthy countries, most parents with children work outside the home. But only in America do individual families carry so much of the weight of preparing the next generation to be fully engaged and productive citizens while contributing to the economic health of the nation. It is this glaring incongruity that was addressed in today's *Agenda for Shared Prosperity* forum, [Getting Real About Families](#), sponsored by the Economic Policy Institute and *The American Prospect* magazine.

In the developed world, most working families can count on paid sick leave, subsidized child care, and even paid parental leave – policy advances working families in the U.S. can only dream of. In an attempt to take the first steps toward a more family-friendly society, Representative Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) is sponsoring the Healthy Families Act, which requires employers to provide at least seven days of sick leave per year.

Rep. DeLauro was the keynote speaker at today's forum. Her remarks were followed by a presentation by Dr. Heidi Hartmann, President and Founder of the Institute for Women's Policy Research, and Dr. Janet Gornick, professor of political science and sociology at the City University of New York (CUNY).

"139 nations provide paid leave for short or long term illnesses, and 117 of those nations guarantee their workers a week or more of paid sick days per year," said DeLauro. "However, no federal law in the United States guarantees a single day of paid sick leave to employees. This is wrong - we need to do more to guarantee our workers the paid sick time they deserve."

But working families in the United States will need more than paid sick leave to reach the level of support offered by other wealthy countries. Dr. Heidi Hartmann presented a broad-ranging policy program to support families, outlined in a briefing paper she co-authored, [An Economy That Puts Families First](#). Hartmann's vision of a new social contract includes policies that spread the costs of family care beyond the immediate family and redistribute the burden of care more equitably between men and women within the family.

"The United States needs to institute a comprehensive family policy program to meet the needs of our workers, get our children off to a good developmental start, and to catch up with the rest of the economically advanced world," said Hartmann. "In short, we need to move beyond pro-family rhetoric to real, concrete family-friendly programs."

The three main features of Hartmann's policy program are subsidized child and elder care, paid caregiving leave, and greater flexibility on the job. Specifically, the program calls for income replacement when workers must be absent from work to provide family care, including birth, adoption, and illness of family members; and subsidies for the costs of care, particularly for young children and long-term care for the frail elderly. The third part of the program calls for incentives for employers to provide job security, flexible work schedules, and fair treatment of care-giving adults on the job.

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If Hartmann's family-friendly policy program sounds like utopia to frazzled parents in the United States, Dr. Janet Gornick offers a perspective of how sorely these policies are needed to bring the United States up to the standards of other wealthy countries. Gornick co-authored the briefing paper, [*The Work-Family Balance: An Analysis of European, Japanese, and U.S. Work-Time Policies*](#), a presentation of successful family-friendly policies offered in the advanced industrialized countries of the world, with a focus on working time policies.

"Various countries have adjusted their labor policies to accommodate the influx of mothers into the workforce, but one thing is clear," said Gornick. "The United States has taken a very different path than most of the other rich countries in the world."

Gornick illuminates the gaping holes in U.S. policy by focusing on a range of family-friendly work policies found throughout Europe and other industrialized countries. Most EU countries set the normal full-time working week for a majority of workers below 40 hours, and have a statutory minimum number of paid days away from work. Part-time work in other wealthy countries is of better quality and comes with fewer inequities compared to full-time workers.

Gornick not only reveals outstanding policy supports for families that are working in other countries, she outlines the lessons the U.S. should learn from these policies, like reducing the full-time work week below 40 hours, guaranteeing adequate paid days away from the workplace, and raising the quality and availability of part-time work.

What is clear from the three presentations at the **Getting Real About Families** forum is that policy can make a difference and government can play an active role in supporting the positive development of its nation's children.

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About the lead authors...

Heidi Hartmann is the president of the Washington, D.C.-based Institute for Women's Policy Research, a scientific research organization that she founded in 1987 to meet the need for women-centered, policy-oriented research. Dr. Hartmann is also a research professor at The George Washington University.

Janet C. Gornick is professor of political science and sociology at the Graduate Center, and professor of political science at Baruch College, both part of the City University of New York. She is also director of the Luxembourg Income Study, a cross-national research institute and data archive, located in Luxembourg. She is co-author of *Families That Work: Policies for Reconciling Parenthood and Employment* (Russell Sage Foundation 2003), a comparative study of work-family reconciliation policies in 12 countries.

The Economic Policy Institute is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan research institute – or “think tank” – that researches the impact of economic trends and policies on working people in the United States and around the world.