

State of Europe's Fathers: Men's Caregiving in the European Union

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Abstract

Gender equality is one of the founding values of the EU and Member States have established the promotion of the equality of men and women in the labour market, as well as in their work-life balance and responsibilities as priorities for the EU. Data shows that increasingly women and men work outside the home, but, at the same time, women remain the main household caregivers and take on a double burden in the private domain. Although true equality between men and women will only be achieved when men take on 50 percent of the caregiving and domestic work, equal distribution is the exception rather than the rule. This report explores trends in men's caregiving in Europe (with a particular focus on fatherhood) and five key areas for change: implementing laws and policies to promote gender equality; transforming gender norms that reproduce harmful gender stereotypes; supporting the physical and financial security of families; helping couples and co-parents thrive together; and, putting fathers care into action. The main objective of the State of Europe's Fathers is to contribute to theoretical and policy approaches that understand how gender equality, including caregiving, constitutes a collective social good to be promoted in general and in particular in times of crisis and develop an evidence-based and detailed roadmap for social policies toward gender equality and men's greater participation in caregiving. By taking into account the current state-of-the-art of gender-based violence prevention and gender justice, this report focuses on concrete strategies for promoting gender equality in Europe and the engagement of men in caregiving and unpaid care work as a way to prevent gender-based violence and promote healthy and more equal gender relations.

About the Publication

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List of Abbreviations

ECEC	Early childhood education and care
EU	European Union
EU-LFS	European Union Labour Force Survey
IMAGES	International Men and Gender Equality Survey
PPD	Percentage point difference

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I. Introduction

The development of the European Union (EU) was based on a common set of principles, including stable and sustainable development and the prevention of social exclusion. In line with these principles, gender equality is one of the founding values of the EU and Member States have established the promotion of the equality of men and women in the labour market, as well as in their work-life balance and responsibilities as priorities for the EU.¹ Although true equality between men and women will only be achieved when men take on 50 percent of the caregiving and domestic work², equal distribution is the exception rather than the rule^{3,4}.

In the EU-27, the share of the population between 30 and 34 years old who completed higher education steadily increased, yet the increase was greater for women producing a widening gap between men and women who complete tertiary education.⁵ Since women make up a greater portion of the population that have completed tertiary education (e.g. university, higher technical institution, etc.), women are a significant portion of the qualified pool of candidates; however, the data shows that men have a greater ease in accessing employment. Among recent graduates, men enjoy a greater employment rate (83.2%) than women (78.6%) with the greatest percentage point differences (ppd) observed in the Czech Republic (15.8 ppd), Slovakia (14.3), Estonia (14.0), and Bulgaria (9.1) (Figure 1).⁶ The difference in graduate employment between men and women have been relatively steady since 2008 (Figure 2).

¹ Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU.

This document cites: the ratification of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 18(1)); the 2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Point (i) of Article 153(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union; the second subparagraph of Article 3(3) of the Treaty on European Union; Article 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Charter); Article 33 of the Charter; and, Principles 2 and 9 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, among others.

² <https://men-care.org/what-we-do/advocacy/paid-parental-leave/>

³ Eurofond: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef18065en.pdf

⁴ 2019 Report on equality between women and men in the EU, p.9:

https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/aid_development_cooperation_fundamental_rights/annual_report_ge_2019_en.pdf

⁵ Eurostat. Tertiary educational attainment by sex. (6 August 2020). Retrieved from:

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_04_20/default/table?lang=en

⁶ Eurostat. Employment rate of recent graduates by sex. (6 August 2020). Retrieved from:

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00053/default/table?lang=en>

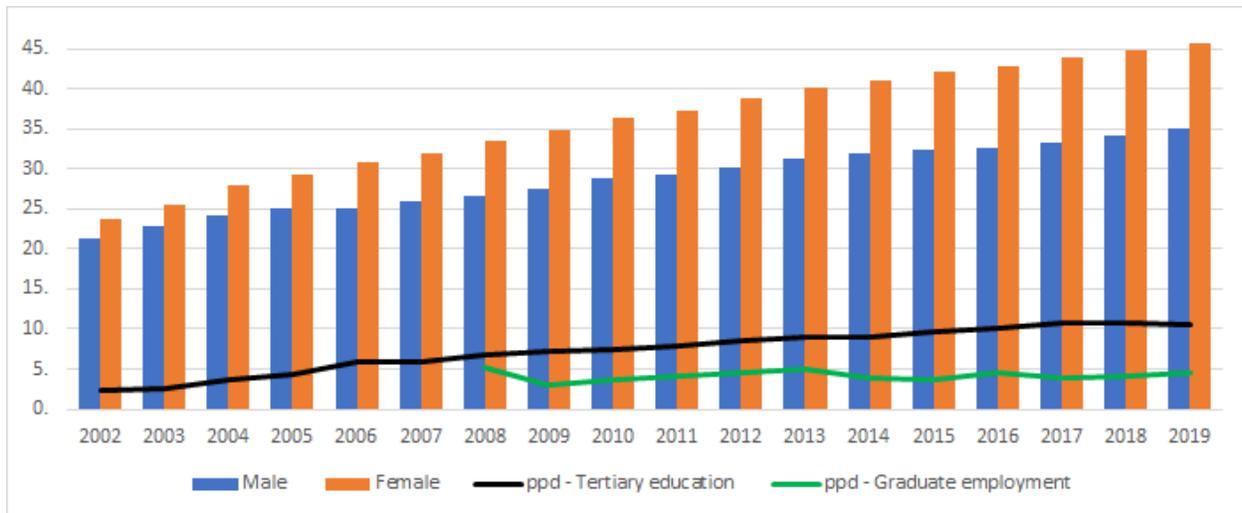


Figure 1. Share of the EU-27 population aged 30-34 who have successfully completed tertiary studies, percentage point differences in tertiary study completion & ppd in employment rate for recent graduates, by sex.

Source: Created using data from the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) presented by Eurostat. (Last update of data: 06 August 2020).

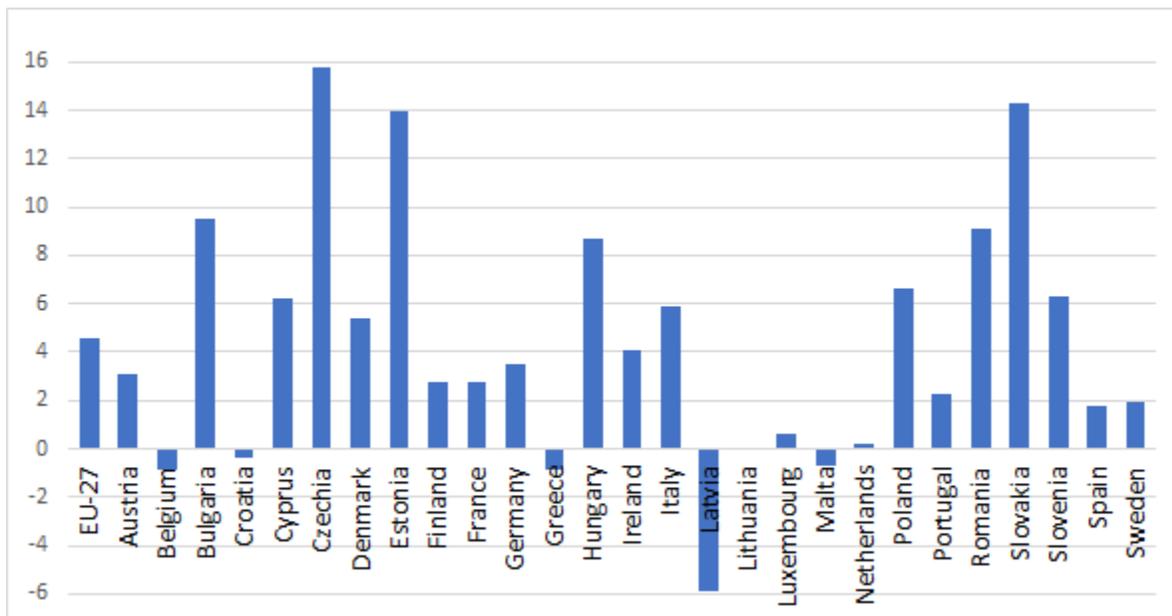


Figure 2. Gender employment gap among recent graduates, by EU-27 country.

Source: Created using data from the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) presented by Eurostat. (Last update of data: 06 August 2020).

Overall, among adults aged 20 to 64, the gender gap in the employment rate exhibited a decreasing trend from 2000 to 2012 until stagnating at approximately 11.7 ppd (Figure 3). The EU-27 countries with the greatest differences in employment rate by gender in 2019 were: Greece (20.0 ppd), Malta

(20.0 ppd), Italy (19.6 ppd), Romania (19.0 ppd), Hungary (15.5 ppd), Poland (15.4 ppd), Czech Republic (15.0 ppd), and Slovakia (13.0 ppd).

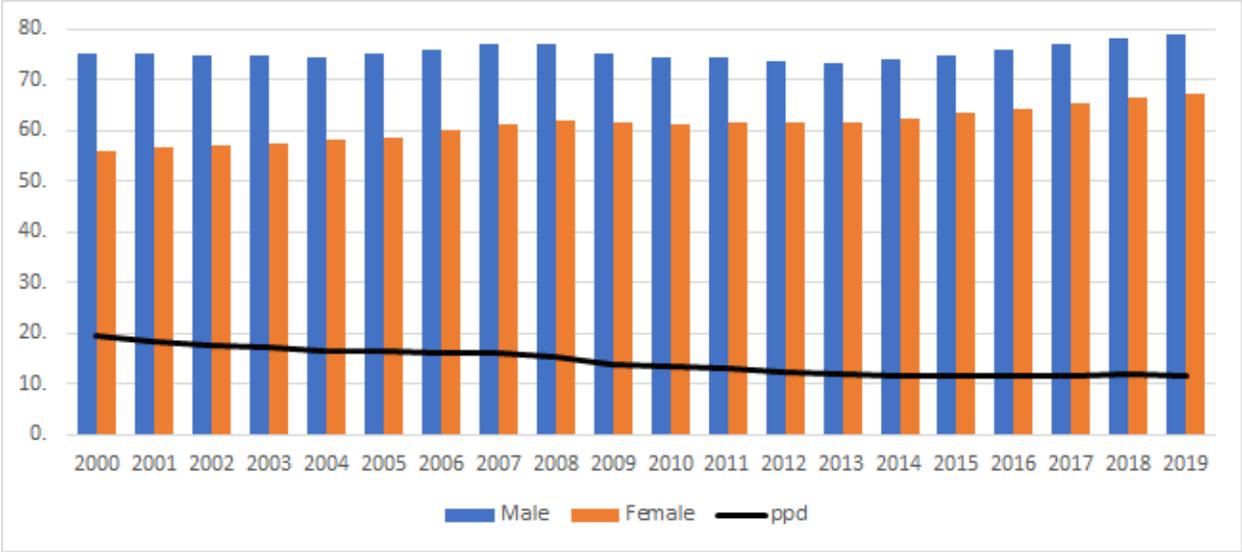


Figure 3. Employment rate by sex in EU-27 from 2000 to 2019.

Source: Created using data from the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) presented by Eurostat. (Last update of data: 07 July 2020).

In addition to the gender gap in employment, the unadjusted gender pay gap⁷ measures the difference between average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees and of female paid employees as a percentage of average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees. The unadjusted gender pay gap gives an overall picture of gender inequalities in terms of pay and measures a concept which is broader than the concept of equal pay for equal work. In the EU-27, the gender pay gap has been relatively stable since 2006, but country comparisons show that most countries exhibited decreases in the gender pay gap between 2008 and 2018 with the exception of Portugal, Slovenia, Malta, Latvia and Bulgaria (Figure 4).

⁷ Eurostat. Gender pay gap in unadjusted form. (17 February 2020). Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_05_20/default/table?lang=en

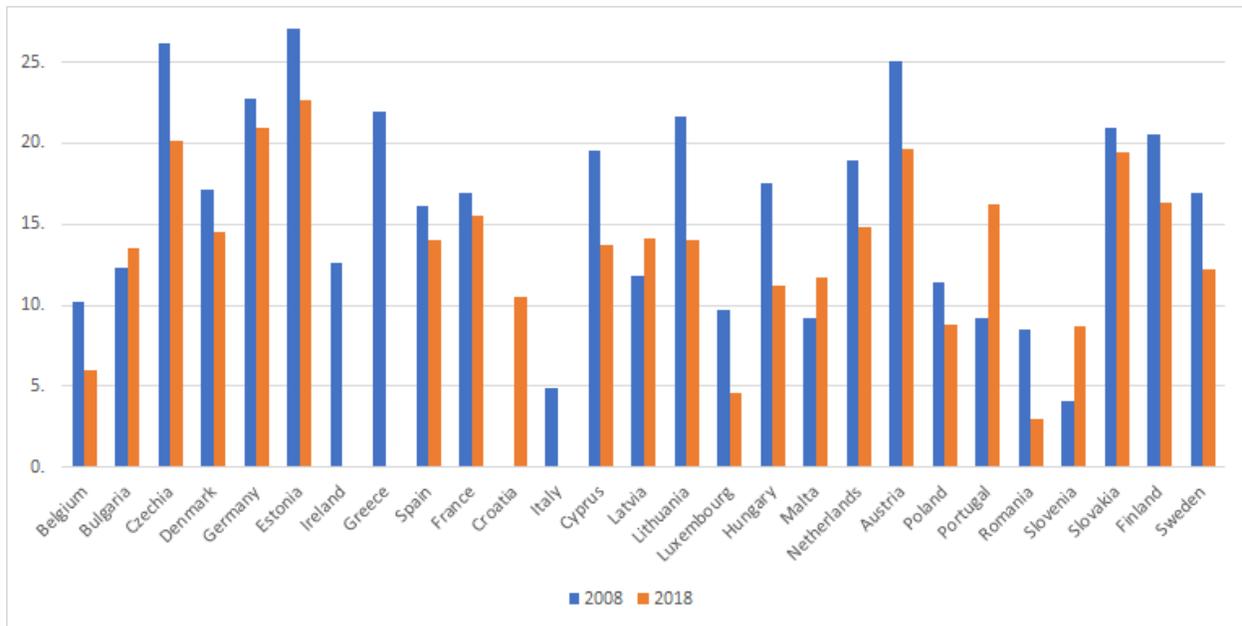


Figure 4. Gender pay gap in unadjusted form in EU-27, 2008 and 2018.

Source: Created using data from the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) presented by Eurostat. (Last update of data: 17 February 2020).

The differences in women’s labour participation and pay can be partially explained, by the type of job occupied by women, by the lack of hiring due to pregnancy and by having the socially induced responsibility of caring for children, the family in general, and the home. Considering this background, this report aims to contribute to the discussion of gender equality by compiling and analyzing the barriers to eliminating gendered roles and expectations, specifically in terms of the equal distribution of unpaid care work of children in the EU.

II. Work-Life Balance & Men’s Caregiving in the EU

When discussing “Europe’s Fathers” we recognize the plurality within families and across contexts; however, there are certain patterns that can be observed from modern caregiving practices within families. Informal caregivers are people who provide unpaid “caregiving” or “care work” to fulfill the physical and emotional needs of others, normally children, the elderly, or people with disabilities. Although both men and women can be caregivers, rigid traditional gender norms have normalized women as the “natural” caregivers and promote the unequal distribution of unpaid domestic and caregiving work.

In every EU country, women spent on average at least 10 hours more on caring for children than men weekly (Figure 5). Overall in the EU, women spent 18 hours a week more than men with caregiving tasks and the biggest gender gaps were found in average weekly hours spent on caregiving in the Netherlands, Austria, Italy, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and the Czech Republic (difference of 26, 24.7, 21.5, 21.5, 20.8 and 20.7 average hours by sex, respectively).

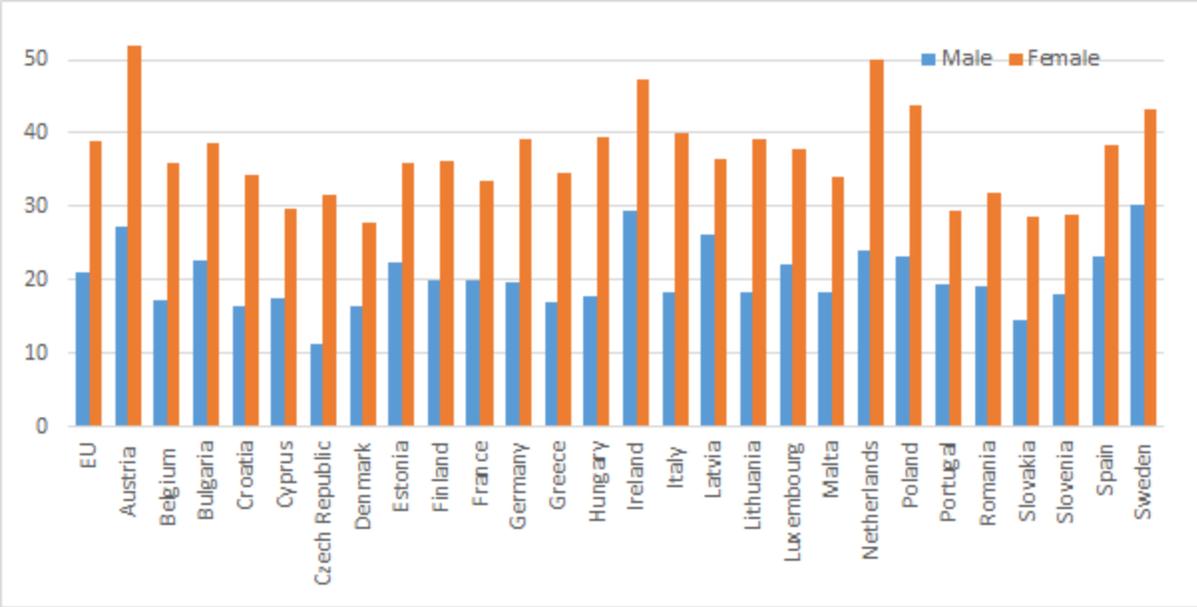


Figure 5. Average hours per week spent caring for children by sex, by country

Source: Created using data from the European Quality of Life Survey, 2016.

The unequal distribution of caregiving responsibilities is a barrier for women’s economic empowerment and a third (32.2%) of economically (formally) inactive women said they could not be employed due to having to take care of their children, whereas only 4.5% of men reported this reason (Figure 6).⁸ The greatest gender gaps in abstaining from the labour market due to caring responsibilities was found in Cyprus which had a 46.1 percentage point difference by respondent sex, followed by Ireland (39.6 ppd), the Czech Republic (39.3 ppd), Estonia (37 ppd), Spain (35.6 ppd), Italy (35 ppd) and Romania (34 ppd).⁹

⁸ European Union. Sustainable development in the European Union: Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context, 2020 edition. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2020.

⁹ Eurostat. Inactive population due to caring responsibilities by sex. (1 September 2020). Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_05_40/default/table?lang=en

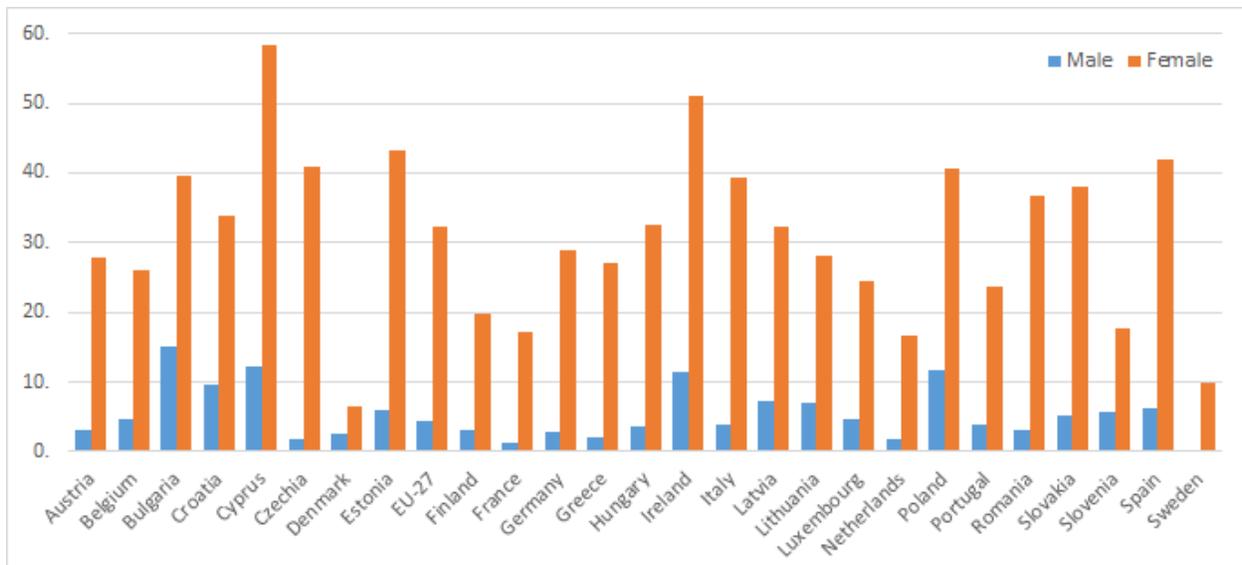


Figure 6. Inactive population (20-64 years old) due to caring responsibilities by sex, by country, in 2019.

Source: Created using data from the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) presented by Eurostat. (Last update of data: 01 September 2020).

Women are still under-represented in leadership positions throughout the EU-27. In policy-making positions, women occupied a third of seats in national parliaments in the EU in 2019. Although this has improved, no EU country had a majority of women in its parliament at the beginning of 2019. The situation in the private sector was similar: only 28.4% of senior management positions were held by women in 2019 and Estonia (9.4%), Cyprus (9.4%), Malta (10.0%), Greece (10.3%), Lithuania (12.0%), Romania (12.6%), and Luxembourg (13.1%) presented the lowest gender parity in senior management positions. Between 2003 and 2019 there was an overall increase of 20.2% in the EU-27, but men are still 71.6% of leadership in the private sector.¹⁰ The professional and leadership gender gap go hand-in-hand with social inequalities faced by women: numerous research studies have identified difficulties in balancing work-life responsibilities as a major barrier to women's professional development in addition to stereotypes and biases.^{11, 12, 13, 14, 15}

¹⁰ Eurostat. Positions held by women in senior management positions. (14 February 2020). Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_05_60/default/table?lang=en

¹¹ ILO. *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*. Geneva: International Labour Office, 2018.

¹² Johns, M. L. (2013). Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Structural, Cultural, and Organizational Barriers Preventing Women from Achieving Senior and Executive Positions. *Perspectives in Health Information Management*, 10(winter).

¹³ Hill, C., Miller, K., Benson, K., Handley, G. *Barriers and Bias: The Status of Women in Leadership*. Washington, DC: American Association of University Women (AAUW).

¹⁴ Kalaitzi, S., Czabanowska, K., Fowler-Davis, H. B. (2017). Women leadership barriers in healthcare, academia and business. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, 36(5). Doi: 10.1108/EDI-03-2017-0058.

¹⁵ Xiang, X., Ingram, J., Cangemi, J. (2017). Barriers Contributing to Under-Representation of Women in High-level Decision-making Roles Across Selected Countries. *Organization Development Journal*, 35(3), pp. 91-106.

The EU recognizes that “work-life balance remains a considerable challenge for many parents and workers with caring responsibilities”¹⁶. Work-family conflicts arise when there are simply too many activities to be done than the available time allows for or when they face conflicting demands from intertemporal problems (e.g., children’s appointments during work hours, professional meetings during school pick-up or drop-off time, etc.).

In most EU countries, women perceive greater work-family conflict than men and the differences between the perceived work-family conflict among men and women are greater in Romania (31.3 ppd), Cyprus (21.3 ppd), Bulgaria (14.9 ppd), Ireland (14.5 ppd), Croatia (14.4 ppd), Poland (14.1 ppd) and Greece (12.5 ppd) (Figure 7). Slovakia, Spain, Estonia, Czech Republic, Germany and Austria were the only countries where the percentages of men who reported difficulty in combining work with care responsibilities was greater than women but the gender differences were small (between 1.2 to 4.6 ppd).¹⁷

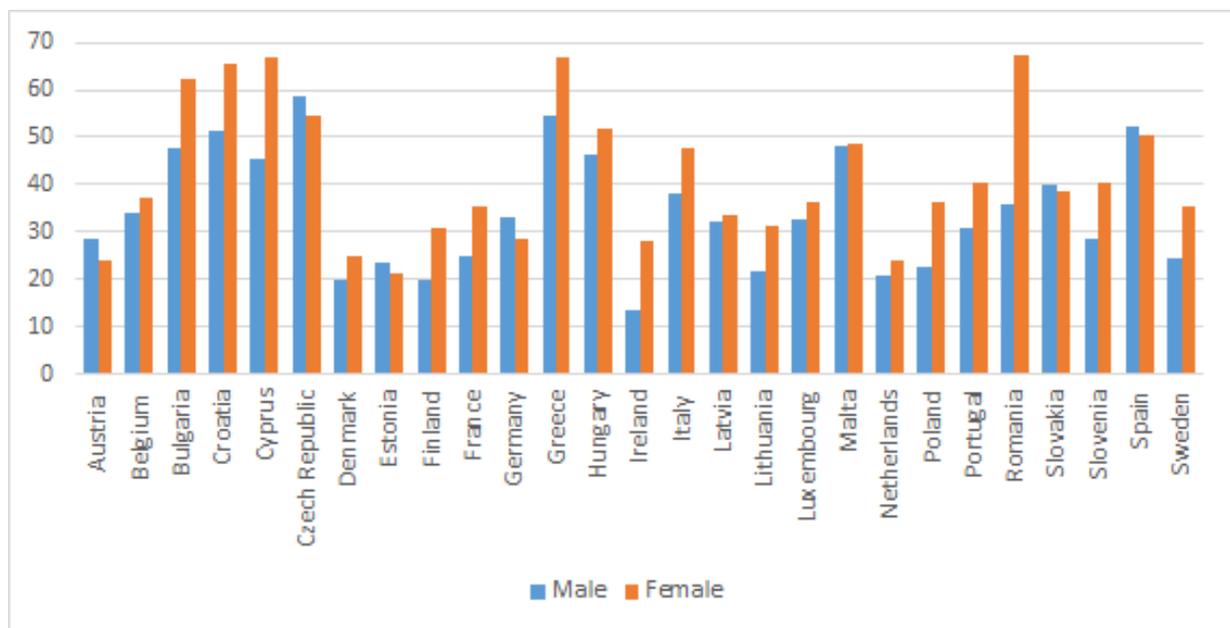


Figure 7. Percentages of men and women who report that it is rather difficult or very difficult to combine paid work with care in EU-27 countries.

Source: Created using data from the European Quality of Life Survey, 2016.

The greater perceived conflict between work and life for women can have a negative impact in their employment. Particularly during their child’s early childhood years, more than a third of women leave their jobs in comparison with approximately 5% of men. In attempts to reconcile the responsibilities of both work and family, women also reduce their working hours for longer

¹⁶ Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU.

¹⁷ European Quality of Life Survey 2016, How easy or difficult is it to combine paid work with your care responsibilities? A/ Rather difficult or Very difficult by sex. Retrieved from: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/data/european-quality-of-life-survey>

periods, which has an impact on their professional career, income and pensions. All of this is aggravated or repeated when there are multiple children in the family.¹⁸ In Southern and Eastern European countries with Postsocialist or Familialistic policy contexts¹⁹, the role of work-family life, as well as decisions regarding family planning, were influenced by women's perceived job security and state support to combine employment and parenthood.²⁰

For the EU, increasing gender equality in the labour market has had a positive effect on per capita and total GDP growth rate, as well as other indicators like social security contributions, social capital, children's human capital and fertility.^{21, 22} For the private sector, employee quality of life has positive influences on productivity and company profitability²³. Furthermore, advancements in gender equality signify collective social progress, affecting significantly the lives of women but also society as a whole.²⁴ An important strategy for increasing gender equality has been the promotion of engaged fatherhood and caregiving. However, beyond the macroeconomic benefits of gender equality, the promotion of men and women's equal participation in professional and domestic spheres benefits men, women and children directly. Equal engagement in care and parenting by men promotes greater work-life balance for the family. For children, the benefits of having engaged fathers are multiple. In neurological studies, father's caregiving was a protective factor against aggression and externalizing symptoms in children and adolescents.²⁵ The quality of father-child-relationships has also been found to influence the development of positive peer

¹⁸ Paull, G. (2006). The Impact of Children on Women's Paid Work. *Fiscal Studies*, 27(4), pp. 473–512.

¹⁹ The authors describe the Familialistic policy model as characterized by strong familial connections and participation of extended family and weak institutional support for working mothers. Fahlén & Oláh (2018) used Spain as an example to represent the Familialistic model. The Postsocialist policy model is characterized by an institutional setting that promotes the dual-earner family and maternal/ paternal leave, but provides limited public childcare options. Examples of Postsocialist policy countries provided were the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland.

²⁰ Fahlén, S. & Oláh, L. S. (2018). Economic uncertainty and first-birth intentions in Europe. *Demographic Research* 39, pp. 795-834. Doi: 10.4054/DemRes.2018.39.28

²¹ European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). (2017). Economic benefits of gender equality in the European Union, Literature review: existing evidence and methodological approaches.

²² Martínez García, M. L. (2016). *La cara oculta de la protección por maternidad y paternidad*. [Doctoral dissertation, Universidad de Murcia, Facultad de Derecho]. Digitum Biblioteca Universitaria. <http://hdl.handle.net/10201/50999>

²³ Mercader Urguina, J. R., & Parejo Alfonso, L. (2008). *Productividad y conciliación en la vida laboral y personal* (1st ed.). Barcelona: Editorial Ariel, S.A.

²⁴ Ribes Ortega, C. (2018). *Los permisos para el cuidado de los hijos en la Unión Europea: Es la regulación e implementación de los permisos por maternidad, por paternidad y parental en la Unión Europea una herramienta de resolución en relación con la discriminación contra mujer o, por lo contrario, contribuye a mantener la desigualdad de género?* [Graduate Dissertation, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Dret Públic i de Ciències Historicojurídiques]. https://ddd.uab.cat/pub/tfg/2018/194293/TFG_cribesortega.pdf

²⁵ Abraham, E., & Feldman, R. (2018). The neurobiology of human allomaternal care; implications for fathering, coparenting, and children's social development. *Physiology & Behavior*, 1;193(Pt A): pp. 25-34. Doi: 10.1016/j.physbeh.2017.12.034

relationships and prosocial behaviors.^{26, 27} Another study found that when fathers engaged with their children in challenging parenting behavior, or behavior that playfully encourages their children to push their limits, children presented significantly less anxiety.²⁸

Fathers themselves definitely also experience benefits from active, engaged parenting. Men who are engaged in caring for their children have healthier relationships with their children and partners. They also report greater physical and mental health themselves. For example, men expressed increased emotional satisfaction, particularly love and pride in their children, brought on by participating in caregiving.²⁹ Engaged fathers also report less risk-taking behaviors and drug consumption.³⁰

The caregiving gender gap does not go unnoticed by women: over 75% of women perceived that they spend more time on childcare than their partners in Austria (80%), Greece (80%), Malta (78%), Slovakia (78%), Poland (77%), Czech Republic (76%), and Spain (76%). When looking at the percentage point difference (ppd) between men and women regarding who does more caregiving work, the largest differences were in Slovakia (76 ppd), Czech Republic (76 ppd), Latvia (74 ppd), Greece (73 ppd), Austria (71 ppd), and Bulgaria (71 ppd) (Figure 8).³¹ However, while women still generally carry the greatest burden of unpaid care work, women also make up a large part of any nation's labour force and end up carrying a triple burden of employment, domestic work and childcare.³²

²⁶ Lux, U., & Walper, S. (2019). *A systemic perspective on children's emotional insecurity in relation to father: links to parenting, interparental conflict and children's social well-being*. *Attachment & Human Development*, pp. 1–18. doi:10.1080/14616734.2019.1582597

²⁷ Ferreira, T., Cadima, J., Matias, M., Vieira, J.M., Leal, T., Matos, P.M. (2016). Preschool Children's Prosocial Behavior: The Role of Mother-Child, Father-Child and Teacher-Child Relationships. *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 25, 1829-1839. Doi: 10.1007/s10826-016-0369-x

²⁸ Möller, E.L., Nikolic, M., Majdandzic, M., Bögels, S.M. (2016). Associations between maternal and paternal parenting, anxiety and its precursors in early childhood: A meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review* 45, 17-33. Doi: 10.1016/j.cpr.2016.03.002.

²⁹ DeGeer, I., Carolo, H., & Minerson, T. *Give Love, Get Love. The Involved Fatherhood and Gender Equity Project*. Toronto, ON: White Ribbon Campaign, 2014.

³⁰ Levitov, R., Van der Gaag, N., Greene, M., Kaufman, M., & Barker, G. (2015). *State of the World's Fathers: A MenCare Advocacy Publication*. Washington, DC: Promundo, Rutgers, Save the Children, Sonke Gender Justice, and the MenEngage Alliance.

³¹ European Quality of Life Survey 2016, Work-life balance and care / Childcare compared with partner, Do you look after your children more, the same or less than your partner does? Retrieved from: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/data/european-quality-of-life-survey>

³² Breilh, J. *La Triple Carga (Trabajo, Práctica Doméstica y Procreación), Deterioro Prematuro de la Mujer en el Neoliberalismo*. Quito: Centro de Estudios y Asesoría en Salud, CEAS, 1991.

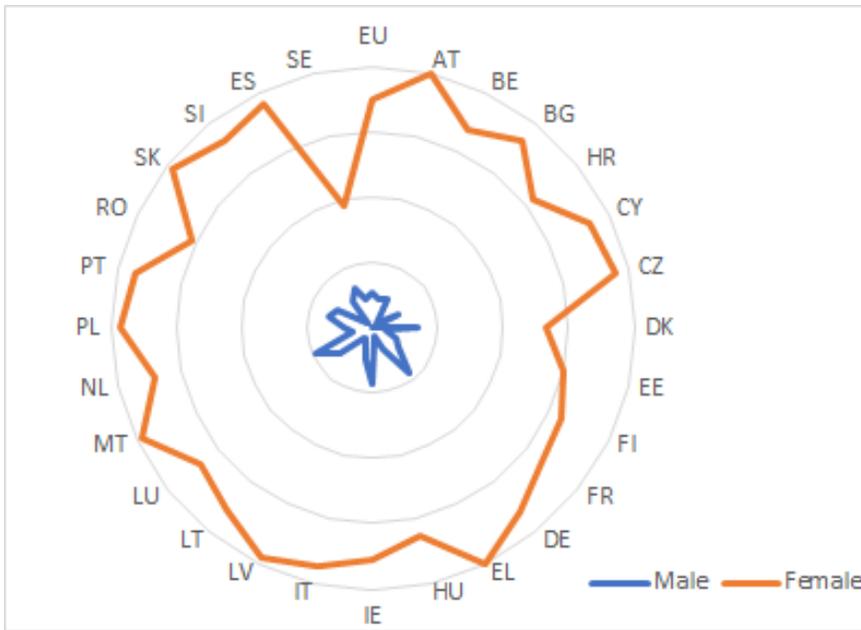


Figure 8. Percentages of men and women who perceive that they spend more time than their partners looking after their children. (EU-27)

Source: Created using data from the European Quality of Life Survey 2016.

However, the data suggests that men may not realize the extent of the imbalance: when asked to compare their time spent looking after their children with the time spent by their partners, in most countries a greater proportion of men reported doing the same amount of caregiving as their partners (Figure 9), despite the fact that in every country women spent more hours a week on caregiving. Yavorsky et al. (2015) found that even among couples where neither partner reduced their paid work hours per week after becoming parents, women's total work increased by approximately 15 hours compared to a 5 hour increase for men; however, both women and men reported in surveys that their workloads were significantly increased after becoming parents.³³ Although perceptions around the distribution of domestic and caregiving responsibilities may not match the real distribution, perceived participation is important because they may serve as predictors of conflict or harmony within the couple.³⁴ Perceived fairness or injustice of distributions of roles in the household may also catalyze or serve as barriers to renegotiating roles in the home.

³³ Yavorsky, J. E., Dush, C. M. K., & Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J. (2015). The Production of Inequality: The Gender Division of Labour Across the Transition to Parenthood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 77 (June), pp. 662-679. Doi: 10.1111/jomf.12189.

³⁴ Johnson, M. D., Galambos, N. L., Anderson, J. R. (2015). Skip the Dishes? Not So Fast! Sex and Housework Revisited. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 30(2), pp. 203-213. Doi: 10.1037/fam0000161

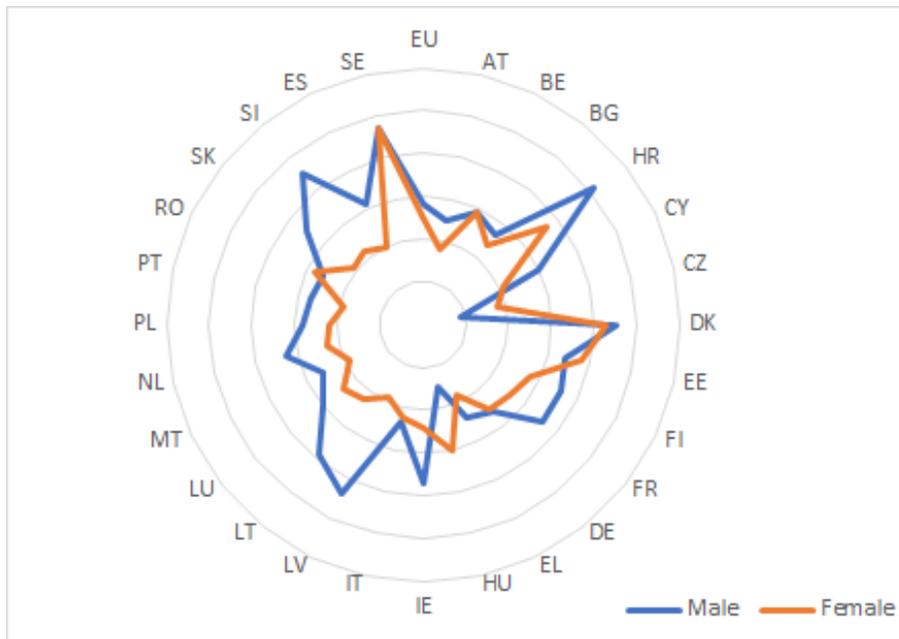


Figure 9. Percentages of men and women who perceive that they spend the same amount of time as their partners looking after their children. (EU-27)

Source: Created using data from the European Quality of Life Survey 2016.

No country has reached 50/50 division of child caregiving or domestic tasks, but not only is the quantity of time spent in caregiving relevant to children-parent relationships and family outcomes, it is important to also consider how men and women participate in caregiving. Caregiving, particularly for young children, involves varying forms of time use: physical care refers to the daily tasks required to fulfill children’s basic physical needs, such as feeding, bathing, diapering and dressing, whereas developmental care includes play and other activities intended to stimulate the development of specific skills. Even when the gender gap in caregiving begins to converge it is important to consider the types of care activities performed by men and women. Several studies highlight fathers’ participation in play or leisure activities with children whereas the physical care activities were mostly performed by mothers.³⁵ The literature shows that father play with infants and toddlers usually incorporates physical forms of play such as tickling, wrestling, chasing, etc. and is associated positively with children’s self-regulation, cognitive and language development and negatively with child emotional and behavioral problems.³⁶

Although play is an integral component of caregiving and child development, gender gaps in the labour-intensive physical care tasks still generate unequal burdens among parents. Data from Spain

³⁵ Brown, G. L., McBride, B. A., Bost, K. K., Shin, N. (2011). Parental involvement, child temperament, and parents' work hours: Differential relations for mothers and fathers. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 32(6), 313–322. Doi: 10.1016/j.appdev.2011.08.004

³⁶ Amodia-Bidakowska, A., Laverty, C., Ramchandani, P. G. (2020). Father-child play: A systematic review of its frequency, characteristics and potential impact on children’s development. *Developmental Review* 57(100924), 1-17. Doi: 10.1016/j.dr.2020.10094.

shows that, between 2002 and 2010, both mothers and fathers intensified their parenting practices, but fathers increased their participation in physical care more. By 2010, there was “no gender gap in developmental child care time, while for physical care, mothers spent more than double the time of fathers” (p.10) even with the greater investment by fathers in physical care.³⁷

These findings show that gendered divisions of caregiving roles persist in the EU. However, [Promundo](#)³⁸ proposed five key areas for change for moving towards the goal of men doing 50% of the unpaid care work in the home (Figure 10).³⁹ The following sections of this report looks at the EU in light of each of these key areas.



Figure 10. Five keys to unlocking the power of men's caregiving.

Source: van der Gaag, et al. (2019).

³⁷ Cano, T. (2019). Changes in Fathers' and Mothers' Time with Children: Spain, 2002-2010. *European Sociological Review*, pp. 1-21. Doi: 10.1093/esr/jcz020

³⁸ Promundo is an NGO dedicated to advancing gender equality and preventing violence by engaging men and boys in partnership with women, girls and people of all gender identities by transforming harmful gender norms and unequal power dynamics.

³⁹ Van der Gaag, N., Heilman, B., Gupta, T., Nembhard, C., & Barker, G. *State of the World's Fathers: Unlocking the Power of Men's Care*. Washington, DC: Promundo-US, 2019.

III. Laws and Policies

Although true equality between men and women will only be achieved when men take on 50 percent of the caregiving and domestic work⁴⁰, equal distribution is the exception rather than the rule⁴¹. However, national policies and legislation targeted at the equal distribution of unpaid care work, which is the focus of the first key (Figure 10), can effectively change gender dynamics and even elevate the status of caregiving⁴². Leave for fathers, when recognized by the national legal systems and combined with other structural solutions, contributes to recognize and redistribute care work and to end structural inequalities between men and women⁴³.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, in its Article 33(2), recognizes the right to reconcile family and professional life as a fundamental right of the EU and explicitly guarantees a right to paid maternity leave and parental leave following the birth or adoption of a child, as well as to protection from dismissal for reasons connected to maternity⁴⁴.

The European Pillar of Social Rights, proclaimed by EU institutions (the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission) in 2017, gathered a set of 20 key social rights and principles with the aim of serving as “a guide towards efficient employment and social outcomes when responding to current and future challenges”⁴⁵. Item 09, which is dedicated to the right to work-life balance, states that

“Parents and people with caring responsibilities have the right to suitable leave, flexible working arrangements and access to care services. Women and men shall have equal access to special leaves of absence in order to fulfil their caring responsibilities and be encouraged to use them in a balanced way”⁴⁶

In its preamble, it stresses that implementing those 20 rights and principles is a shared responsibility and should be implemented at both the European Union level and Member State

⁴⁰ Men Care, A Global Fatherhood Campaign. Parental Leave Platform. (September 15). Retrieved from:

<https://men-care.org/what-we-do/advocacy/paid-parental-leave/>

⁴¹ Eurofound (2018). Striking a balance: Reconciling work and life in the EU, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, p. 9. Doi:10.2806/560184.

⁴² Men Care, *supra* note 1.

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ European Institute for Gender Equality (2015). Reconciliation of work, family and private life in the European Union Policy review, Vilnius, p.19. Doi:10.2839/94734

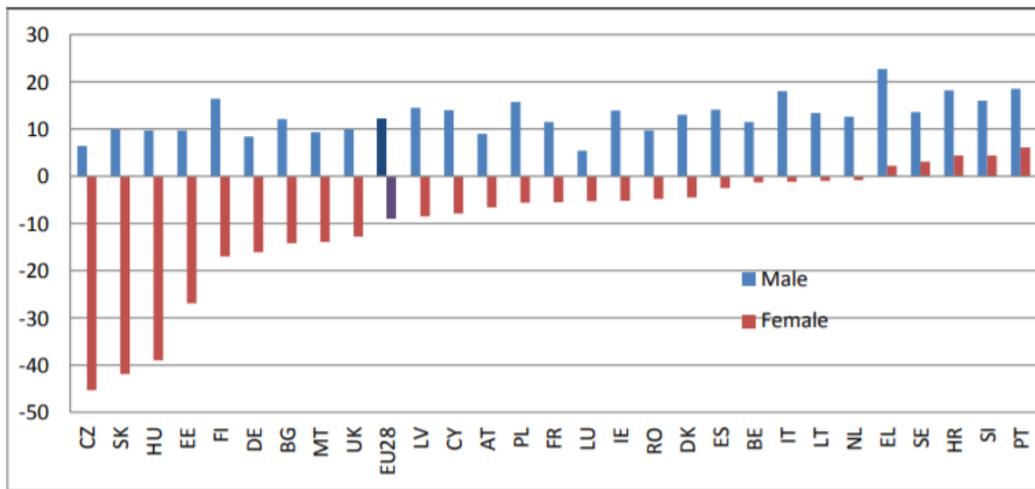
⁴⁵ European Pillar of Social Rights, Preamble, item 12.

⁴⁶ *Id.*, at Chapter II, item 09.

level, taking into account the particularities of each national system and socio-economic situation⁴⁷.

One of the steps taken by the European Commission with the aim of putting the European Pillar into practice and addressing women's underrepresentation in the labor market was the creation of the Work-life Balance Initiative⁴⁸. The initiative brings legal and policy measures to enable “parents and people with caring responsibilities to better balance their work and family lives and to **encourage a better sharing of caring responsibilities** between women and men”⁴⁹.

The European Commission’s 2017 Communication on the Initiative to support the Work-life balance points out that one of the main reasons for the existing employment gap between men and women is the unequal distribution of caring responsibilities between them⁵⁰. While the employment rate of women that have children under 6 years old tends to lower 8.8 percentage



Source: Eurostat

points on average when compared with women without children, parenthood increases the employment rate of men 12 percentage points on average (Figure 11)⁵¹.

Inadequate work-life balance policies can discourage men from taking leaves and more flexible working arrangements and push women to reduce working hours in order to undertake unpaid care

Figure 11. Employment impact of parenthood for one child under 6, 2015

⁴⁷ *Id.*, at Preamble, item 17.

⁴⁸ European Commission. Work-life balance. (September 15). Retrieved from: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1311&langId=en>

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ European Commission (2017). An Initiative to Support Work-Life Balance for Working Parents and Carers, Brussels, p. 4. Retrieved from: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017DC0252&from=EN>

⁵¹ *Id.*

work⁵². This results in lower salaries, a higher concentration in part-time work (31.3% of women and 8.3% of men work part-time in the EU) and career gaps for women, which fosters economic dependence on their partners or the state and puts many women under an increased risk of poverty and social exclusion⁵³. The document highlights adequate leave arrangements for both parents, flexible working arrangements, accessible and affordable childcare, and the elimination of economic disincentives to work for second earners as important tools to foster women's participation in the labor market⁵⁴.

The directive was passed by the European Parliament in April 2019 and entered into force on August 1st, 2019⁵⁵. Member States will have up to three years to adopt the necessary laws and provisions to comply with the directive⁵⁶. The directive also demands that national governments compile data on leave uptake and flexible working arrangements, which will be used by the European Commission when analyzing whether Member States are complying with the new directive⁵⁷. According to Marius-Constantin Budăi, the Minister of Labor and Social Justice of Romania, the document provides men with new opportunities to take on care responsibilities, which will contribute to closing the gender gap by reducing the amount of unpaid work undertaken by women and allowing them more time for paid employment.⁵⁸

The legal measures introduced by the initiative build on the existing EU legal framework to develop and improve existing rights and guarantees.⁵⁹ Some of these measures are: a) mandatory paternity leave of at least 10 working days around the time of birth, for which men must be compensated at least at a level of sick pay; b) making two out of the four months of parental leave non-transferable between the parents (each parent can take 4 months of paid parental leave until the child turns 8 years old, of which two months are transferable) - each Member State will decide the level of payment and must set it up in a way that encourages both parents to take the leave; c) five days of leave per year for workers providing care for relatives, and; d) the right to request flexible working arrangements to carers and parents of children up to eight years old.⁶⁰ As for the policy measures targeted at helping Member States achieve a better work-life balance, they include: a) protecting parents against discrimination and dismissal; b) ending economic

⁵² *Id.*

⁵³ *Id.*, at p. 5

⁵⁴ *Id.*, at p. 6

⁵⁵ European Commission. EU Work-life Balance Directive enters into force. (September 17). <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&furtherNews=yes&langId=en&newsId=9438>

⁵⁶ European Council. Better work-life balance for parents and carers in the EU: Council adopts new rules. (September 17). Retrieved from: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/06/13/better-work-life-balance-for-parents-and-carers-in-the-eu-council-adopts-new-rules/>

⁵⁷ Unión de Asociaciones Familiares (UNAF). Acuerdo provisional de la UE sobre medidas de conciliación. (September 18). Retrieved from: <https://unaf.org/acuerdo-provisional-de-la-ue-sobre-medidas-de-conciliacion/>

⁵⁸ European Council. Better work-life balance for parents and carers in the EU: Council adopts new rules. (September 17). Retrieved from: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/06/13/better-work-life-balance-for-parents-and-carers-in-the-eu-council-adopts-new-rules/>

⁵⁹ European Commission, *supra* note 9.

⁶⁰ European Commission, *supra* note 16.

disincentives for second earners; and c) improving formal care services through the use of European funds.⁶¹

Since the level of protection differs from one Member State to another, these directives set minimum standards in Europe, from which countries can go as far as they want.⁶² It is important to point out that, in relation to preexisting EU regulations, the directives recognized the important role of carers, introduced a minimum standard for paternity leave, which did not exist at the EU level before, made an additional month of parental leave non-transferable, introduced the obligation to pay an allowance during parental leave and to facilitate that parental leave is taken by both parents, which also did not exist.⁶³

Although the Work-Life Balance Directive was welcomed by many, political groups in the European Parliament complained about the lack of ambition of the initiative, since many decisions are still left in the hands of the Member States.⁶⁴ While some countries will have to promote real change in order to meet the new European standards, countries that already have more generous leave systems won't have to make any improvements – in fact, they are even allowed to lower the existing benefits, as long as they meet the minimum standards set by the directive.⁶⁵ Although the directive establishes a threshold for paternity leave pay, it leaves national governments in charge of deciding the compensation for parental leave.⁶⁶ Also, in order to access certain types of leave, parents need to have worked for a minimum amount of time for their employer (one year of service before qualifying for parental leave and 6 months of service before qualifying for paternity leave).⁶⁷ Mental Health Europe concludes that “it is now up to each EU Member States to decide whether to raise the bar and exceed the minimum standards when transposing the Directive into national legislation”.⁶⁸

Having analyzed the EU minimum standards on work-life balance, it is important to address some of the main tools commonly used to achieve these goals and some brief examples of good practices that have been introduced by Member States to foster gender-equal sharing of care and related housework.

The maternity, paternity, and parental leaves are the main types of leaves available for parents during the child's first years of life and the way each one of them is used in each country varies a

⁶¹ European Commission, *supra* note 16.

⁶² EURACTIV. EU lawmakers give green light to strengthening parents and carers' rights. (September 24). Retrieved from: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/middle-ground-politics/news/eu-lawmakers-give-green-to-strengthening-parents-and-carers-rights/>

⁶³ Mental Health Europe (MHE). **Mental Health Europe's Analysis of the Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers. (September 27). Retrieved from:** <https://www.mhe-sme.org/analysis-of-the-directive-on-work-life-balance-for-parents-and-carers/>

⁶⁴ EURACTIV, *supra* note 23

⁶⁵ Unión de Asociaciones Familiares (UNAF). Acuerdo provisional de la UE sobre medidas de conciliación. (September 18). Retrieved from: <https://unaf.org/acuerdo-provisional-de-la-ue-sobre-medidas-de-conciliacion/>

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ *Id.*

⁶⁸ Mental Health Europe, *supra* note 24.

lot⁶⁹. Maternity leaves have a long history in all European countries and were created to protect pregnant and nursing women's right to health and to recognize the need for postnatal care of mothers (and newborn children) without the risk of them losing their jobs⁷⁰. The European Commission's 2018 assessment on paternity and parental leaves, defines paternity leave as a short period of leave offered exclusively to fathers around the birth of the child⁷¹. It was developed more recently with the goal to allow fathers to be around their partners during and right after childbirth and to participate in early child-care⁷².

Parental leave is a period of leave offered to both parents to take care of their children in their first years of life and, in most cases, it is supplementary to maternity or paternity leave⁷³. Some countries do not offer paternity leave but reserve a share of parental leave exclusively for fathers (non-transferable parental leave for fathers)⁷⁴.

The European Commission points out that parental and paternity leave taken by fathers can greatly benefit children, mothers, fathers, and even their employers⁷⁵. Fathers' leave allows them to undertake more family responsibilities and participate in their children's lives, which has positive and long-lasting effects on children's cognitive and emotional development and physical health⁷⁶. Partner presence also influences the mother's decision to breastfeed, which benefits maternal and child health⁷⁷.

Recognizing the men's right to parenthood, as well as their caring responsibilities helps deconstruct traditional social attitudes and leads to improved gender equality in the labor market and at home, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO)⁷⁸. Moreover, it helps women keep their jobs, decreases their care and domestic burden, and improves their well-being⁷⁹. It is reported that fathers involved in their children's upbringing have more personal satisfaction, foster

⁶⁹ Unión de Asociaciones Familiares (2019). Políticas de conciliación de la vida laboral, personal y familiar en la Unión Europea, Madrid, p. 52. Retrieved from: <https://unaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Informe-UNAF-Poli%CC%81ticas-de-conciliacio%CC%81n-en-la-Unio%CC%81n-Europea.pdf>

⁷⁰ *Id.*

⁷¹ European Commission (2018). Paternity and parental leave policies across the EU - Assessment of current provision, Luxembourg, p.2. Retrieved from: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8120&furtherPubs=yes>

⁷² *Id.*, at p. 53

⁷³ Van Belle, J. (2016). Paternity and parental leave policies across the European Union. Santa Monica, p. 5. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR1666>.

⁷⁴ European Commission, *supra* note 32

⁷⁵ *Id.*, at p. 5

⁷⁶ European Commission, *supra* note 32, at p. 5

⁷⁷ International Labour Organization (2014). Maternity and paternity at work, Law and practice across the world, Geneva, p. 52. ISBN 978-92-2-128631-8

⁷⁸ *Id.*

⁷⁹ MenCare.The MenCare Parental Leave Platform. (September 29). Retrieved from: <https://men-care.org/resources/the-mencare-parental-leave-platform/>

better relationships, and live healthier lives⁸⁰. Paid leave improves work productivity and morale, promotes employee retention, and reduces absenteeism, which benefits businesses⁸¹.

As of 2018, all EU Member States offered paternity and/or parental leave after the birth of a child. However, the leave length, compensation levels, and whether leave was treated as a family or individual right (transferable or non-transferable) varied significantly from country to country⁸². Countries such as Portugal and Sweden chose to integrate maternity and paternity leaves into their parental leave programs⁸³, although periods of parental leave might be reserved for mothers or fathers only⁸⁴. In some cases, the total duration of parental leave depends on the uptake of each parent. In France, for example, families are entitled to a total parental leave of eight months (four months for each parent), but the leave is reduced to six months if only one parent takes it⁸⁵.

In Sweden, each parent can take up to 240 days of paid parental leave, of which 90 days are untransferable, besides an unpaid leave until the child is 18 months old⁸⁶. Although maternity leave can also be taken before or after birth, parental leave has more relevance in the Swedish system, which is viewed as a more gender-neutral approach⁸⁷. The recent addition of a third untransferable month in its parental leave system is expected to increase men's uptake of parental benefit days and reduce women's proportion of leave⁸⁸.

Portugal offers a single parental leave, with no distinction between maternity and paternity leave. Parents can choose between the option to take 120 leave days paid at 100% and 150 days paid at 80% and can have 30 extra days if they share the leave period⁸⁹. Fathers and mothers can take any part of the parental leave, except for the initial leave period reserved for the mother⁹⁰.

In Finland, leave policies have been the focus of the political debate over the last years⁹¹. In 2016, fathers only used about ten percent of all reimbursed family leave days, and almost one in five

⁸⁰ European Commission, *supra* note 32, at p. 5

⁸¹ *Id.*

⁸² European Commission, *supra* note 32, at p. 2

⁸³ Unión de Asociaciones Familiares, *supra* note 30, at p. 53

⁸⁴ International Network on Leave Policies and Research (2019). 15th International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2019, p. 20. Retrieved from: https://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/user_upload/k_leavenetwork/annual_reviews/2019/2_2019_Compiled_Report_2019_0824-.pdf

⁸⁵ Van Belle, J., *supra* note 34, at p. 8

⁸⁶ European Parliament. Infographic March 2019, Maternity and paternity leave in the EU. (October 1). Retrieved from: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2019/635586/EPRS_ATA\(2019\)635586_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2019/635586/EPRS_ATA(2019)635586_EN.pdf)

⁸⁷ *Id.*

⁸⁸ Government Offices of Sweden (2019). Sweden's report on Beijing +25, p.23. Retrieved from: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/64/national-reviews/sweden.pdf?la=en&vs=2355>

⁸⁹ European Parliament, *supra* note 47

⁹⁰ *Id.*

⁹¹ Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (2019). Twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), Comprehensive national-level

dads did not take any family leave at all⁹². In February 2020, the government published its leave reform plan, which is currently under discussion and proposes that the leave is divided symmetrically between the parents⁹³. Each parent would get 164 working days of leave, of which 69 working days would be transferable to the other parent⁹⁴. On top of this, the pregnant parent is entitled to 30 leave days before the birth of the child⁹⁵. The new proposal increases the total number of leave days (the extra 1.6 months were added to the father's quota) but also puts more emphasis on parent-specific quotas when compared to the current leave system⁹⁶, which offers 105 days of maternity leave, 54 days of paternity leave, and 158 days of parental leave (considered a family entitlement that can be freely shared between parents)⁹⁷. The new model is considered to foster gender equality and ensure equal leaves for children regardless of the type of the family⁹⁸.

The Spanish Government issued, in March 2019, a legal decree fixing the terms and timeline for a leave reform that has the objective to reach gender equality in entitlement to well-paid maternity and paternity leave by January 2021⁹⁹. The country offers a fully-paid maternity leave of 16 weeks (with a 100% wage replacement and a ceiling of 4070€ per month) and a fully-paid paternity leave¹⁰⁰, which has been gradually increased since 2019 until it reaches 16 weeks in 2021¹⁰¹. By 2021, “Spain will be the first country in the world with a 100% paid individual and non-transferable leave of four months for both genders alike”¹⁰².

Norway introduced, in 2018, a parental leave divided into three equal parts: parents can choose benefits with 100% coverage, where 15 weeks are reserved for each parent (mother and father) and the remaining 16 weeks can be allocated between them, or they can choose benefits with 80% coverage, where 19 weeks are reserved for each parent and 18 weeks can be allocated between them.

review Finland, p. 14. Retrieved from: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/64/national-reviews/finland.pdf?la=en&vs=5132>

⁹² *Id.*, at p. 15

⁹³ International Network on Leave Policies and Research (2020). 16th International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2020, p. 254. Retrieved from: https://ub-deposit.fernuni-hagen.de/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/mir_derivate_00002067/Koslowski_et_al_Leave_Policies_2020.pdf

⁹⁴ *Id.*

⁹⁵ *Id.*

⁹⁶ Helsinki Times. [Finland's €100m family leave reform to set seven-month quotas for both parents](https://www.helsinkitimes.fi/finland/finland-news/domestic/17313-finland-s-100m-family-leave-reform-to-set-seven-month-quotas-for-both-parents.html). (October 5). Retrieved from: <https://www.helsinkitimes.fi/finland/finland-news/domestic/17313-finland-s-100m-family-leave-reform-to-set-seven-month-quotas-for-both-parents.html>

⁹⁷ International Network on Leave Policies and Research, *supra* note 54, at p. 255

⁹⁸ Helsinki Times, *supra* note 57

⁹⁹ PLENT. In-depth: Paid father's leave of 8 weeks in Spain. Towards gender equality in entitlement to well-paid leaves. (October 5). Retrieved from: <https://equalandnontransferable.org/in-depth-paid-fathers-leave-of-8-weeks-in-spain-towards-gender-equality-in-entitlement-to-well-paid-leaves/>

¹⁰⁰ *Id.*

¹⁰¹ International Network on Leave Policies and Research, *supra* note 54, at p. 547

¹⁰² PLENT, *supra* note 60

In 2000, Iceland introduced a non-transferable and paid parental leave, where 3 months are reserved for the mother, 3 months are reserved for the father, and 3 months are shared¹⁰³. The entire period is paid at 80% of the parent's previous earnings (with a cap)¹⁰⁴. The ground-breaking parental leave legislation enacted in 2000 has been a success and has led to a high uptake of leave by men (90% of fathers use their right to paternity leave)¹⁰⁵. Fathers' uptake had some small variations over the years, but stays at around 80% in general, with around 15-20% of fathers using more than 3 months in recent years¹⁰⁶. Recent studies have shown that this parental leave scheme has led to a more equal distribution of domestic responsibilities and a more equal standing in the labor market in the first years following the leave¹⁰⁷.

Many studies show that individual, untransferable and well paid leaves increase uptake by fathers and their engagement in care work, while low compensations (or the lack thereof) results in lower leave uptake by fathers and increases the chance of mothers leaving the job market¹⁰⁸. Some of the most successful schemes in European countries are based on individual, non-transferable, and moderately well-paid leave for both the mother and the father¹⁰⁹. Unfortunately, many parental leave policies across Europe still offer very low compensations or, in some cases, are still not paid at all¹¹⁰. The European Commission Assessment of current provisions on paternity and parental leave policies across the European Union points out low compensation levels, lack of flexibility, cultural norms and perceptions about gender roles, and eligibility criteria (such as employment length) as the main challenges for the uptake of paternity and parental leave by fathers¹¹¹.

The 2018 Eurobarometer survey on work-life balance showed that 31% of Europeans consider that it is not easy for employees in their workplace to take family leave and 27% feel that managers and supervisors discourage them from using this benefit¹¹². The fear of being affected at work affects the success of work-life balance policies, so it is important to protect employees who chose to take family leave against dismissal and unfavorable treatment in the workplace¹¹³. In 2018, a study on "Family leave: enforcement of the protection against dismissal and unfavorable

¹⁰³ International Labour Organization, *supra* note 38, at p. 61

¹⁰⁴ *Id.*

¹⁰⁵ Government of Iceland Prime Minister's Office (2019). Iceland's report on Beijing +25, Twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), p. 23. Retrieved from: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/64/national-reviews/iceland.pdf?la=en&vs=114>

¹⁰⁶ European Commission (2019). 2019 Report on equality between women and men in the EU, Luxembourg, p.12. Doi:10.2838/395144

¹⁰⁷ Government of Iceland Prime Minister's Office (2019), *supra* note 66

¹⁰⁸ Unión de Asociaciones Familiares, *supra* note 30, at p. 54

¹⁰⁹ Maternity Action. Overdue: a new system of paid maternity, paternity & parental leave. (October 10). Retrieved from: <https://maternityaction.org.uk/2019/11/overdue-a-new-system-of-paid-maternity-paternity-parental-leave/>

¹¹⁰ Unión de Asociaciones Familiares, *supra* note 30, at p. 53

¹¹¹ European Commission, *supra* note 32, at p. 5

¹¹² European Commission (2018). Flash Eurobarometer 470, Report Work-life balance, European Union, p.4. Doi:10.2838/173898

¹¹³ European Commission (2019), *supra* note 67, at p. 13

treatment” mapped the situation of all EU Member States and listed some interesting initiatives in that sense¹¹⁴.

The Danish Institute of Human Rights conducted a study that showed that 45% of women and 23% of men who took parental leave experienced discrimination after taking the leave and that 12% of women and 21% of men took less parental leave as they would have liked. The study highlights the fear of negative treatment and the difficulty for victims to prove the link between pregnancy and discrimination as important factors that influenced the parents’ decision¹¹⁵. In order to address this issue, Finland shifted the burden of proof towards the employer and decided that “there is a presumption of discrimination if a fixed-term contract of a pregnant worker is not renewed”¹¹⁶. In Belgium and Portugal, the labor inspectorates work in cooperation with the respective national government bodies in charge of promoting equality between men and women to deal with discrimination in the workplace¹¹⁷.

The Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, which has been in force since January 2018, explicitly prohibits discrimination based on pregnancy, leave in connection with childbirth or adoption, and care responsibilities (among other things) and sets up an Anti-Discrimination Tribunal with expanded powers to provide effective enforcement of protection from discrimination¹¹⁸. Listing leave and care responsibilities as separate grounds for discrimination is an important step towards protecting men and women against dismissal and unfavorable treatment and incentivizing fathers to use more leave days.

The last European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS), conducted in 2016, shows that on average 36% of mothers and fathers in the European Union find it rather difficult or very difficult to combine paid work with care responsibilities. Ireland has the highest score, with 80% of the population believing that it is not difficult to conciliate both activities, and Greece has the lowest number, 40%¹¹⁹. In countries where the reconciliation between work and life is considered very easy, the female labor force participation is higher¹²⁰.

Family-friendly work policies allow citizens more flexibility in their working hours and location, which can help them reconcile their professional and domestic lives¹²¹. Such policies have a special

¹¹⁴ *Id.*

¹¹⁵ *Id.*

¹¹⁶ *Id.*

¹¹⁷ *Id.*, at p. 14

¹¹⁸ Norwegian Ministry of Culture (2019). The situation of women and girls in Norway: Development, progress, and measures 2014–2019, p. 32. Retrieved from: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/64/national-reviews/norway.pdf?la=en&vs=2303>

¹¹⁹ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. (2018). European Quality of Life Survey Integrated Data File, 2003-2016. [data collection]. 3rd Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 7348, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7348-3>

¹²⁰ European Commission (2018). Family-friendly workplaces, Overview of policies and initiatives in Europe, Luxembourg, p. 3. Doi 10.2767/488841

¹²¹ *Id.*, at p. 2

effect on women, who are more likely to reduce their working hours to deal with family-related issues, because they help relieve the heavy burden of caring responsibilities that women still bear¹²². Flexible working arrangements offer numerous benefits for the children, families, and society as a whole¹²³.

Despite all the benefits that result from flexible work arrangements, the 2015 European Working Conditions Survey¹²⁴ shows that many EU employees still did not have flexible working hours and that legal provisions to facilitate a work-life balance were very inconsistent throughout the EU¹²⁵. In countries such as Portugal and the Netherlands, the right of parents to request flexible working arrangements is embedded in the national legal provisions¹²⁶. The Portuguese legislation allows parents that have children up to 12 years old (there is no age limit in case of chronically ill or disabled children) to opt for part-time or flexible work and parents of children up to 3 years old to work from home¹²⁷. In the Netherlands, parents who have worked for over a year in an organization or company that employs over 10 people have the right to request a decrease in working hours or a change in work location (unless this causes significant problems for the employer)¹²⁸.

The Icelandic Gender Equality Act sets the employer's obligation to take necessary measures to allow men and women to coordinate their work and family responsibilities and emphasizes the need to increase work flexibility, not only in working hours but also in the way work is organized so that both families' and employers' needs are taken into consideration¹²⁹. One example is the employee's right to take leave when faced with unavoidable and urgent family circumstances¹³⁰.

Belgium introduced the option for parents to take a "career break" to help them balance work and family life¹³¹. The career breaks allow employees to reduce working hours or interrupt their employment while receiving a state allowance for a specific period, after which they can return to the same job¹³². France and Italy introduced measures to prevent work from interfering with the employees' family time, such as the right to disconnect from work-related communications¹³³. One common practice among European governments is to offer accreditation to family-friendly workplaces (such as in Slovenia and Finland) or to combine accreditations with financial support

¹²² *Id.*, at p. 3

¹²³ *Id.*

¹²⁴ Eurofound (2017). Working conditions of workers of different ages: European Working Conditions Survey 2015, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Doi:10.2806/879475

¹²⁵ European Commission, *supra* note 81, at p. 3

¹²⁶ *Id.*

¹²⁷ *Id.*

¹²⁸ *Id.*

¹²⁹ Government of Iceland Prime Minister's Office, *supra* note 66, at p. 22

¹³⁰ *Id.*

¹³¹ European Commission, *supra* note 81, at p. 4

¹³² Vandeweyer, J., Glorieux I. (2010). The Belgian Career Break System. Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe, p.1. Retrieved from: http://www.sociopolitical-observatory.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Dateien/Bulletin_Europaeische_Seniorenpolitiken/Gastkommentar_Bulletin_Europ_Seniorenpolitiken_Mai_2011.pdf

¹³³ European Commission, *supra* note 81, at p. 4

to help these organizations adopt family-friendly practices (such as in Austria, Hungary, and Germany)¹³⁴

Besides family leaves and flexible working arrangements, accessible, affordable, and high-quality childcare is an important instrument in achieving a better work-life balance and helping men engage in more caring responsibilities. Access to professional childcare, apart from benefitting children and providing them with quality education, ensures that parents are not in a vulnerable position in the labor market due to their care duties¹³⁵. Therefore, coordination between family leaves and childcare is essential¹³⁶.

In Norway, all children from two to five years old who come from low-income households are entitled to 20 hours of free kindergarten per week¹³⁷. The Norwegian Government also set, with effect from 1 January 2019, a maximum price for kindergarten places with the goal of making the service available to all children regardless of their parents' financial situation¹³⁸. Additionally, parents with children aged between one and two years who attend kindergarten on a part-time basis or do not attend it at all, are entitled to cash-for-care benefits that allow them to spend more time with their children and give them more freedom to choose different childcare arrangements¹³⁹.

Latvia, which is among the countries with a traditionally high employment rate of both men and women, implemented a project called 'Vouchers for the provision of flexible child-minders service to workers with nonstandard work schedules', that introduced a new child-care service through the use of flexible child-minders¹⁴⁰. The model is subsidized through public vouchers and private co-financing from enterprises with nonstandard work schedules¹⁴¹.

The 2018 European Commission report on the Barcelona Objectives shows that, since 2013, the number of children under mandatory school age there are in childcare has increased¹⁴². However, there are still considerable differences in childcare availability across Member States¹⁴³. Some countries, such as Greece, Poland, Czechia, and Slovakia had participation rates lower than 10%¹⁴⁴. European Union funds (the Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, and

¹³⁴ *Id.*

¹³⁵ COFACE Families Europe (2018). An EU Deal for Childcare, p. 5. Retrieved from: http://www.coface-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/COFACE-paper_Childcare.pdf

¹³⁶ *Id.*

¹³⁷ Norwegian Ministry of Culture, *supra* note 79, at p. 49

¹³⁸ *Id.*

¹³⁹ *Id.*, at p.50

¹⁴⁰ European Commission (2019), *supra* note 67, at p. 16

¹⁴¹ *Id.*

¹⁴² European Commission, *supra* note 81, at p. 15

¹⁴³ *Id.*

¹⁴⁴ *Id.*

the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) can be used to help address the low availability and affordability of these services¹⁴⁵.

Public awareness campaigns also have an important role in raising awareness and encouraging fathers to take leave¹⁴⁶. In Denmark, for example, where fathers take only around one-tenth of the total available leave¹⁴⁷, the government launched a nationwide campaign to promote the use of parental leave by fathers in 2017, which reached over a million people on social media and fostered dialogue about fathers' use of parental leave¹⁴⁸. The campaign aimed at promoting cultural change through the use of debate, education, and inspirational material for companies. Companies and organizations carried out government-funded projects such as a study on the effect of father's use of parental leave, after-work meetings about parental leave in Danish unions, and a roadshow informing citizens about the benefits of paternity leave¹⁴⁹.

For Fathers' Day 2018, Belgium launched a campaign to inform fathers about all the existing possibilities concerning parental leave¹⁵⁰. Studies show that many parents would like to spend more time with their children, but they were not informed on the possibilities of parental leave at their disposal or feared that taking the leave would harm their professional lives¹⁵¹. The number of fathers who take parental leave in Belgium increases every year, but women are still the ones who use it in most cases¹⁵².

In December 2018, the Portuguese Government launched an intersectoral program that aims to help men and women balance professional, personal and family life. The program conducts 33 different actions that range from promoting work-life practices in private and public organizations, improving infrastructures, services, and incentives in different sectors (care, education, transport, and health), developing measures in the public administration, and producing knowledge.¹⁵³

Collecting data on unpaid care work and time use is also a critical tool to inform policy-making and budgeting decisions that will influence work-life balance and gender equality. Data collection

¹⁴⁵ *Id.*

¹⁴⁶ Van Belle, J., *supra* note 34, at p. 16

¹⁴⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark (2019). Denmark Comprehensive national review report Beijing+25, p.11. Retrieved at: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/64/national-reviews/denmark.pdf?la=en&vs=5118>

¹⁴⁸ *Id.*, at p.19

¹⁴⁹ *Id.*

¹⁵⁰ ____ (2019). Vingt-cinquième anniversaire de la quatrième conférence mondiale sur les femmes et de l'adoption de la Déclaration et du Programme d'action de Beijing (1995), Note d'orientation concernant les examens approfondis au niveau national : Belgique, p.27. Retrieved from: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/64/national-reviews/belgium.pdf?la=en&vs=2401>

¹⁵¹ *Id.*

¹⁵² *Id.*

¹⁵³ Comissão para a Cidadania e a Igualdade de Género (2019). Twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), National-level reviews – Portugal, p. 4. Retrieved from: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/64/national-reviews/portugal.pdf?la=en&vs=2304>

increases knowledge, raises awareness, mainstreams gender equality issues, strengthens public discussion on this matter, and reorients future actions.¹⁵⁴ With that in mind, Portugal conducted a National Survey that aimed at understanding time usage by men and women in the country.¹⁵⁵ It produced solid knowledge and data on time use by women and men, therefore contributing to the creation of effective evidence-based policies.¹⁵⁶

The path towards the equal distribution of unpaid care work between men and women is still long, but laws and policies provide the basis for evolution. Caregiving practices will not change while public policies continue to reflect gender biases and reinforce an unfair division of work. Although the European Union has successfully established a minimum set of standards regarding work-life balance, it is not enough to close the reality gap between Member States. The directive takes the necessary step of recognizing the importance of fathers' participation in children's lives and pushes states to advance their national policies and legislation. The states that already have more generous policies in place can be seen as good examples to inspire further evolution and continuous improvement.

IV. Social and Gender Norms

The existence of a legal framework that supports gender equality is a necessary foundation for the advancement of women's rights at home, work and in society; however, the mere existence of laws and policies does not in itself guarantee gender equality if they are not supported by the prevailing social norms, or shared expectations regarding what is considered normal or appropriate behavior among the members of a group.¹⁵⁷

Men and women are socialized from birth to believe that there are certain ways to be a man or a woman. Traditional gender norms emphasize rigid characteristics for men as self-sufficient, emotionally and physically tough, hypersexual and breadwinners in the family, among other characteristics. There are gender norms regarding characteristics that men and women should display and also roles they are expected to play in society. The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) data shows that low-, middle- and upper-income countries have social norms suggesting that women are "natural" caregivers. In Eastern European countries, for example, between 29% and 85% of surveyed men believed that "changing diapers, giving baths to children, and feeding children are the mother's responsibility".¹⁵⁸ Figure 12 shows the percentage

¹⁵⁴ *Id.*, at p. 33

¹⁵⁵ *Id.*

¹⁵⁶ *Id.*

¹⁵⁷ Mackie, G., Moneti, F., Shakya, H., Denny, E. *What are Social Norms? How are They Measured?* UNICEF & Gerry Mackie, 2015. Retrieved from:

https://www.unicef.org/protection/files/4_09_30_Whole_What_are_Social_Norms.pdf.

¹⁵⁸ Levtov, R. G., Barker, G., Contreras-Urbina, M., Heilman, B., & Verma, R. (2014). Pathways to Gender-equitable Men: Findings from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey in Eight Countries. *Men and Masculinities*, 1-35. DOI: 10.1177/1097184X14558234

of men and women who agree or strongly agree with gendered statements and for every statement the differences in attitudes were significant by the respondents gender (p-value ≤ 0.00). Data from the European Values Study (EVS) also shows that there are statistically significant differences between men and women’s work-life priorities: men were more likely to consider work “very important” to their life than women (p=0.000), whereas, women were more likely to consider family “very important” (p=0.000). Their values regarding what makes a successful marriage were also statistically significant with women more frequently expressing that sharing household chores was very important.

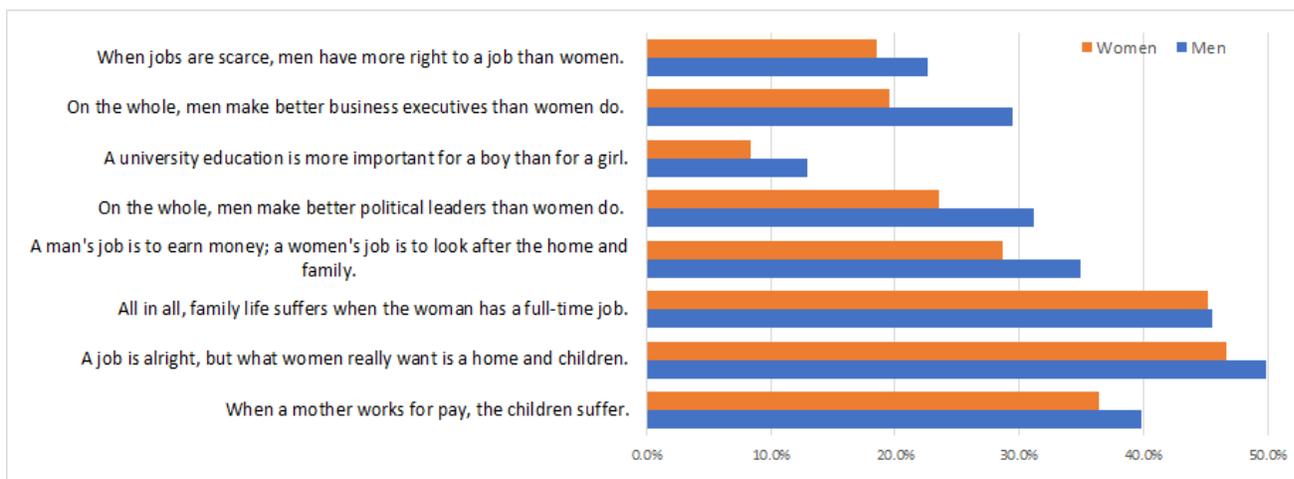


Figure 12. Gender attitudes of European men and women.

Source: Created using data from the European Values Study, 2017.

It’s not just men who believe in gendered roles: 14% to 75% of the women included in the IMAGES surveys from Eastern Europe also agreed that basic childcare tasks were the mother’s responsibility¹⁵⁹ and Figure 12 shows that more than a third of European women agree with statements that prioritize family life for women. Although the data ranges, rigid gender social norms mean that women are expected to be the caregivers and that men are expected to be breadwinners who are exempt from caregiving responsibilities.¹⁶⁰ These norms have real world impacts for men and women. Men who feel greater pressure to fulfill these expectations may have more problems with depressive symptoms, fear of appearing vulnerable or more easily turn to the

¹⁵⁹ Van der Gaag, N., Heilman, B., Gupta, T., Nembhard, C., Barker, G. *State of the World’s Fathers: Unlocking the Power of Men’s Care*. Washington, DC: Promundo-US, 2015.

¹⁶⁰ Van der Gaag, N., Heilman, B., Gupta, T., Nembhard, C., & Barker, G. *State of the World’s Fathers: Unlocking the Power of Men’s Care*. Washington, DC: Promundo-US, 2019.

use of violence¹⁶¹ and across the EU women feel that they spend more time in childcare than their partners (Figure 8).¹⁶²

This doesn't have to be the case: no one is born a 'specialist' in caregiving and men are just as capable of providing the emotional and physical care needed by children. In fact, recent neurochemical research shows that men and women, engaged as primary caregivers for their biological or adopted children, exhibit similar brain activity when spending time in direct childcare.¹⁶³ Men's brains are also affected by engaged involvement with their children, which changes their neurological responses in support of parent-infant bonding and reaction to infants' social cues.¹⁶⁴, ¹⁶⁵

In addition to being capable of direct parenting, research shows that globally men also want to actively engage as caregivers: on average, 85% of fathers say that they would be willing to do anything to be very involved in the early care of their child and, among the participating countries in the region, that average was 91%.¹⁶⁶ Yet, pressures faced by men from social norms limit their involvement as active caregivers.¹⁶⁷, ¹⁶⁸ These pressures can be related to perceptions regarding what men and women are expected to do, or injunctive norms, according to key members of their reference groups, which may be coworkers, family members or friends. Even when men and women themselves believe that both parents should be heavily involved in caregiving, they may still believe that their community members, other family members or coworkers expect mothers to hold the majority of the caregiving responsibilities. For example, Promundo and Dove Men+Care carried out an online survey of men and women from 25 to 45 in the Netherlands and found that Dutch respondents expected their immediate managers and coworkers to believe in more traditional, gendered divisions of caregiving than they and their spouses did. Although almost 81% of Dutch fathers believed that fathers should take all available parental leave to bond with their child, 50% of respondent felt that their managers would not find paternity leave a priority for men and 39% thought that their co-workers didn't agree that it is a top priority for fathers to take

¹⁶¹ Heilman, B., Barker, G., Harrison, A. (2017). *The Man Box: A Study on Being a Young Man in the US, UK, and Mexico*. Washington, DC and London: Promundo-US and Unilever.

¹⁶² European Quality of Life Survey 2016, Work-life balance and care / Childcare compared with partner, Do you look after your children more, the same or less than your partner does? Retrieved from: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/data/european-quality-of-life-survey>

¹⁶³ Abraham, E., & Feldman, R. (2018). The neurobiology of human allomaternal care; implications for fathering, coparenting, and children's social development. *Physiology & Behavior*, 1,;193(Pt A): 25-34. Doi: 10.1016/j.physbeh.2017.12.034

¹⁶⁴ Abraham, E., & Feldman, R. (2018). The neurobiology of human allomaternal care; implications for fathering, coparenting, and children's social development. *Physiology & Behavior*, 1,;193(Pt A): 25-34. Doi: 10.1016/j.physbeh.2017.12.034

¹⁶⁵ Feldman, R., & Bakermans-Kranenburg, M.J. (2017). Oxytocin: a parenting hormone. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 15: 13-18. Doi: 10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.02.011.

¹⁶⁶ Van der Gaag, N., Heilman, B., Gupta, T., Nembhard, C., & Barker, G. *State of the World's Fathers: Unlocking the Power of Men's Care*. Washington, DC: Promundo-US, 2019.

¹⁶⁷ Thebaud, S. (2010). Masculinity, bargaining and breadwinning: Understanding men's housework in the cultural context of paid work. *Gender & Society*, 24(3), 330-54. Doi: 10.1177/0891243210369105

¹⁶⁸ Kaufman, G. (2018). Barriers to equality: why British fathers do not use parental leave. *Community, Work & Family*, 21(3). Doi: 10.1080/13668803.2017.1307806

all parental leave, even though the total number of days fathers could take of parental leave was only 5 days.¹⁶⁹ In some cases, men's fears of appearing as "uncommitted workers" were so invasive that they perceived workplace resistance to their use of paternity leave even before exploring the possibility of leave with their employer.¹⁷⁰ In addition to gender norms, the expectations regarding the characteristics of an "ideal worker" may be unrealistic and disregard that workers are people with responsibilities and interests outside of the workplace, bringing more pressures on employees to live up to unrealistic ideals.¹⁷¹ Concerns regarding workplace stigma are particularly strong among men in part because social norms dictate that it is the father's responsibility to guarantee the financial security of the family even when mothers are also employed.¹⁷² Although these expectations may not actually represent what managers and coworkers believe, they may still serve as barriers to men's complete use of available paternity leave.

Practices are also influenced by descriptive norms, or beliefs around what other people do based on their observations of the people around them. Men who grew up in households where their fathers exhibited restrictive, inequitable gender attitudes may believe that this is what "normal" men think and how they behave.¹⁷³ Data from Norway suggests that the employment gender gap may be transmitted intergenerationally: children raised in a household with an employed mother presented a gender gap in fulltime employment that was 7.7 percentage points smaller when compared to children raised in households where the mother never worked.¹⁷⁴ The relationship between mothers' employment status and the dependent variable of their children's full-time employment at 40 years old remained even after controlling for other socioeconomic and municipal factors. Halland et al. (2019) found that "at the family level, mother's employment and parental education predict large reductions in the size of the gender gap" (p.144).

In multiple settings, men's reports regarding their father's participation in domestic work have been positively associated with their gender attitudes as adults: for example, those who witnessed their fathers participating in care work had more equitable gender attitudes.¹⁷⁵ Gender attitudes, in

¹⁶⁹ Promundo US and Dove Men+Care (2018). *Helping Dads Care Research Project: Netherlands Country Report*. Washington, DC and New York, NY: Promundo US and Unilever. *Unpublished draft provided by authors.*

¹⁷⁰ Kaufman, G. (2018). Barriers to equality: why British fathers do not use parental leave. *Community, Work & Family*, 21(3). Doi: 10.1080/13668803.2017.1307806

¹⁷¹ Blair-Loy, M. & Williams, S.J. "Long hours and the work devotions schema: the case of the United States". In: Brandth, B., Halrynjo, S., Kvande, E. (Eds.) *Work-Family Dynamics: Competing Logics of Regulation and Morals*. New York: Routledge, 2017.

¹⁷² Van der Gaag, N., Heilman, B., Gupta, T., Nembhard, C., & Barker, G. *State of the World's Fathers: Unlocking the Power of Men's Care*. Washington, DC: Promundo-US, 2019.

¹⁷³ Klann, E.M., Wong, Y.J., Rydell, J. (2018). Firm Father Figures: A Moderated Mediation Model of Perceived Authoritarianism and the Intergenerational Transmission of Gender Messages from Fathers to Sons. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 65(4): 500-11. Doi: 10.1037/cou000296.

¹⁷⁴ Haaland, V.F., Rege, M., Telle, K., Votruba, M. (2018). The Intergenerational Transfer of the Employment Gender Gap. *Labour Economics* 52, pp. 132-146. Doi: 10.1016/j.labeco.2018.04.004

¹⁷⁵ Levtov, R.G., Barker, G., Contreras-Urbina, M., Heilman, B., Verma, R. (2014). Pathways to Gender-equitable Men: Findings from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey in Eight Countries. *Men and Masculinities*, 1-35. Doi: 10.1177/1097184X14558234.

turn, influence gender relations and practices in the home. In Croatia, two thirds of male study participants held stereotypical beliefs about what it means to be a man and the men who expressed gender-equitable attitudes were significantly less likely to use physical and sexual violence against their partners.¹⁷⁶

Luckily, these are changing and although policy change alone is insufficient, policy can play an important role in promoting social norm change according to its design. Specifically, leave policies can: a) unintentionally reinforce traditional gender norms that the mother is the responsible parent for caregiving, b) provide circumstances for families to decide to implement more equitable roles within the home or, c) actually promote norm change by establishing father's active participation in caregiving as the default instead of as an option. Universal, non-transferable and mandatory paternity leave can normalize men's involvement as caregivers and create expectations regarding the equitable distribution of domestic activities.¹⁷⁷ However, the length of leave is important if the objective is to establish equal sharing of the care responsibilities in the family instead of temporary 'assistance' especially because qualitative studies have shown that men see their contributions as a supporting actor to the women (mothers and sometimes grandmothers) who are leading childcare responsibilities.¹⁷⁸

According to social norms theory, there are four important characteristics that influence people's norm-compliance: 1) whether the practice is independent or interdependent, 2) how detectible the practice is, 3) what the sanctions involved are, and 4) how directly the social norm relates to the practice.¹⁷⁹ Taking full paternity leave is a practice that is highly interdependent and coordinated between the couple and other key members of their support network. It is also highly detectable by coworkers and family who will notice compliance or non-compliance. Men may also perceive sanctions for taking or for not taking the full allotted paternity leave. In some cases, especially when leave is not earmarked and individualized, men may perceive sanctions from employers or coworkers for taking the maximum amount of allotted time. However, when leave is earmarked and there is a "use it or lose it" approach, the reverse occurs, whereas men and their families perceive sanctions for not using the full allotted time. Finally, the previously cited studies have shown that the practice of using paternity leave is related to norms. These criteria suggest that the practice of using paternity leave would be under relatively strong normative control. In support of this conclusion, among European migrants to Norway, research found that migrants departed from the dominant norms of their communities of origin and adopted the social norms and practices

¹⁷⁶ Bijelic, N. Muškarci i rodna ravnopravnost u hrvatskoj: rezultati istraživanja IMAGES - International Men and Gender Equality Survey. Zagreb: CESI - Centar za edukaciju, savjetovanje i istraživanje, 2011.

¹⁷⁷ Kvande, E. & Brandth, B. (2020). Designing parental leave for fathers - promoting gender equality in working life. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 40:5/6, 465-477. Doi: 10.1108/IJSSP-05-2019-0098

¹⁷⁸ Boratov, H. B., Fisek, G. F., Ziya, H. E. (2014). Unpacking masculinities in the context of social change internal complexities of married men in Turkey. *Men and Masculinities* 17(3), pp. 299-324. Doi: 10.1177/1097184X14539511.

¹⁷⁹ Cislighi, B., Manji, K. & Heise, L. (2018). *Social Norms and Gender-Related Harmful Practices, Learning Report 2: Theory in support of better practice*. Baltimore & London: Learning Group on Social Norms and Gender-related Harmful Practices, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

regarding paternity leave of their host country. Additionally, by earmarking paternity leave, the perceived pressures that men felt from the workplace to return to work were alleviated because the full available paternity leave became the default that they were expected to take.¹⁸⁰

Although women still provide the most physical care, men's care can be normalized through social norms change eliminating a barrier to father's caregiving. Additionally, norm change can bring additional benefits such as liberating men and women's potentials by reducing restrictive expectations around their behaviors, and lowering the risk of intimate-partner violence.¹⁸¹

V. Protecting and Providing for Families

Despite the participation of women in the workplace, and even when women are the primary breadwinners, families still mostly follow a gender-based distribution of domestic responsibilities. This is particularly true in contexts that place high social value on paid work and income level, such as Slovenia and other countries of Southern and Eastern Europe.¹⁸² By seeing their participation through the lens of men's economic role in the family, men's contributions beyond bread-winning are under-valued and under-performed.

However, there are many situations that strain these traditional roles, such as unemployment and economic crisis. Economic and physical insecurity can also lead to changes in household roles in order to meet immediate needs: specific markets, such as paid care work, are more readily available to women. In interviews with women from Slovakia and Romania who commute to Austria to work as 24-hour care workers, husbands became the main caregivers in re-arrangements to meet childcare and elder care needs.¹⁸³ Although most male partners in the study did not participate in these tasks prior to the wife's labour migration, men can and should have important roles in domestic tasks beyond economic and physical security. In countries that prioritize work culture less¹⁸⁴, families tend to have a greater ability to adjust the household roles: men who are not the primary breadwinners report doing a greater share of housework than men who are the primary breadwinners.¹⁸⁵ These findings highlight the importance of promoting partnerships and redistributing domestic roles according to family needs. Yet, even in these contexts of greater role

¹⁸⁰ Kvande, E. & Brandth, B. (2017). Individualized, non-transferable parental leave for European fathers: migrant perspectives. *Work & Family*, 20(1): 19-34. Doi: 10.1080/13668803.2016.1270258.

¹⁸¹ Herrero, J., Torres, A., Rodríguez, F. J., & Juarros-Basterretxea, J. (2017). Intimate partner violence against women in the European Union: The influence of male partners' traditional gender roles and general violence. *Psychology of Violence*, 7(3), 385–394. Doi: /10.1037/vio0000099

¹⁸² Thebaud, S. (2010). Masculinity, bargaining, and breadwinning: Understanding men's housework in the cultural context of paid work. *Gender & Society*, 24(3), 330–54. doi:10.1177/0891243210369105

¹⁸³ Bauer, G., & Österle, A. (2016). Mid and later life care work migration: Patterns of re-organising informal care obligations in Central and Eastern Europe. *Journal of Aging Studies* 37, pp. 81-93. Doi: 10.1016/j.jaging.2016.02.005

¹⁸⁴ Thebaud (2010) utilized the "Work Culture Index", a country-level measure used to reflect values around "breadwinning".

¹⁸⁵ Thebaud, S. (2010). Masculinity, bargaining, and breadwinning: Understanding men's housework in the cultural context of paid work. *Gender & Society*, 24(3), 330–54. doi:10.1177/0891243210369105

flexibility, women still perform the majority of domestic work and women with non-working husbands report greater work-family conflict than women without a spouse.^{186, 187}

It is important to consider the impact of men's "provider and protector identity" on them, on families and on society, particularly as the world and the region face periods of economic and social instability. Pressures on men to provide financial and physical security can have negative effects on their health, for example: German men who were unemployed were more likely to have mental health problems, smoke and be sedentary.¹⁸⁸ Particularly in economically insecure settings, unemployment, underemployment and job insecurity can have a particularly negative impact on men's health compared to more stable contexts and time periods because there is increased stress due to the perception of fewer opportunities for alternative employment.¹⁸⁹ Additionally, both men and women who are self-employed perceive much more work-family conflict than people who are formally employed.¹⁹⁰ People who have formal employment contracts, although they have greater restrictions regarding the use of time, have a dependable salary and several social benefits that provide them with a certain level of well-being, thus reducing the stress that job uncertainty brings. Job insecurity (which will increase due to the pandemic) and low wages, in many opportunities make it difficult to overcome family poverty, which generates an increase in the social inequality gap. In this way, labour conditions, analyzed from a gender perspective, must consider not only if there is a sufficient minimum income for the development of the families' vital projects, but also the stability and quality of working conditions.¹⁹¹

Not only does employment status affect the individual's wellbeing, the mechanisms are mediated by gender norms and attitudes. For example, unemployed husbands actually experience worse psychological health if their wives are permanently employed, highlighting that the effects of unemployment on men are not purely financial but also related to their perceived incomppliance with their gendered role in the family.¹⁹² Furthermore, there is a gendered "spillover effect" of

¹⁸⁶ Remery, C., & Schippers, J. (2019). Work-Family Conflict in the European Union: The Impact of Organizational and Public Facilities. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 16, 4419. Doi: 10.3390/ijerph16224419.

¹⁸⁷ Thebaud, S. (2010). Masculinity, bargaining and breadwinning: Understanding men's housework in the cultural context of paid work. *Gender & Society*, 24(3), 330-54. Doi: 10.1177/0891243210369105

¹⁸⁸ Kroll, L.E., Müters, S., Rattay, P. Lampert, T. (2016). Employment, family and health in men of working age in Germany: Results of the GEDA studies 2009-2012. *Bundesgesundheitsblatt, gesundheitsforschung, Gesundheitsschutz*, 59(8):932-941. Doi: 10.1007/s00103-016-2377-9

¹⁸⁹ Inanc, H. (2018). Unemployment, Temporary Work, and Subjective Well-Being: The Gendered Effect of Spousal Labour Market Insecurity. *American Sociological Review* 83(3), pp. 536-566. Doi: 10.1177/0003122418772061.

¹⁹⁰ Remery, C., & Schippers, J. (2019). Work-Family Conflict in the European Union: The Impact of Organizational and Public Facilities. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 16, 4419. Doi: 10.3390/ijerph16224419.

¹⁹¹ Campillo Poza, I. Políticas de conciliación de la vida laboral, personal y familiar en la Unión Europea. Barcelona: Unión de Asociaciones Familiares (UNAF), 2019.

¹⁹² Inanc, H. (2018). Unemployment, Temporary Work, and Subjective Well-Being: The Gendered Effect of Spousal Labour Market Insecurity. *American Sociological Review* 83(3), pp. 536-566. Doi: 10.1177/0003122418772061.

men's unemployment or temporary employment affecting the family, where women's well-being are particularly negatively impacted in this situation compared to vice versa.¹⁹³

On the other hand, the gendered expectation for men to be the primary breadwinner, even in dual-earner families, in addition to societal factors such as an insufficient minimum wage and lack of employment protection, can push men to unhealthy and unrealistic workloads that also negatively impact their health.¹⁹⁴

These gendered expectations also impact families from the decisions they make to the quality of the relationships. For example, some authors have found that economic stress affects the intentions and desires around prioritizing family life for men more than for women. Analysis of the impact of the economic crisis of 2008 on parenthood intentions in Europe found that higher unemployment rates, worsening employment protection and job insecurity are particularly associated with reduced childbearing intentions among men and that the impact of these factors on men's desires to become fathers was greatest after the crisis. These findings may be related to "men's provider responsibilities being strengthened in times of economic crisis across various institutional contexts, unlike for women" (p. 819).¹⁹⁵

Economic insecurity can also generate loss of advancements made in terms of redistributing caregiving and domestic work: in Iceland, with the economic crash, gender imbalances in the use of leave increased and men had reduced their use of the non-transferable days of paternity whereas women increased their number of leave days with partial pay. The turning point in the use of parental leave by fathers occurred even before the maximum parental leave payment was adjusted, particularly for men in the lowest income groups.¹⁹⁶ These findings show that economic insecurity is a major barrier to taking the full allocated paternity leave and men who face greater employment insecurity due to type of employment or contract, may feel the need to not take paternity leave to affirm themselves as hard workers or dedicated employees due to beliefs that it will negatively impact their ability to advance at work, their job security, reputation at work or reputations with their immediate managers.

On the other hand, even men in leadership positions in the workplace may feel pressured to not take paternity leave or to take less than the allotted time for leave: in a study conducted with workers from the metal sector in Spain, the workplace social norms around work-family balance were associated with the perceived status and power of men in managerial positions who took paternity leave, where participants in organizations with less perceived support for work-family

¹⁹³ Inanc, H. (2018). Unemployment, Temporary Work, and Subjective Well-Being: The Gendered Effect of Spousal Labour Market Insecurity. *American Sociological Review* 83(3), pp. 536-566. Doi: 10.1177/0003122418772061.

¹⁹⁴ Kroll, L.E., Müters, S., Rattay, P. Lampert, T. (2016). Employment, family and health in men of working age in Germany: Results of the GEDA studies 2009-2012. *Bundesgesundheitsblatt, gesundheitsforschung, Gesundheitsschutz*, 59(8):932-941. Doi: 10.1007/s00103-016-2377-9

¹⁹⁵ Fahlén, S. & Oláh, L. S. (2018). Economic uncertainty and first-birth intentions in Europe. *Demographic Research* 39, pp. 795-834. Doi: 10.4054/DemRes.2018.39.28

¹⁹⁶ Sigurdardottir, H.M. & Garðarsdóttir, Ó. (2018). Backlash in gender equality? Fathers' parental leave during a time of economic crisis. *Journal of European Social Policy* 28(4), pp. 342-356. Doi: 10.1177/0958928717739243.

balance reported lower competence evaluation scores, less power and less status to men who took leave.¹⁹⁷ Also, analysis of the 2015 European Quality of Life Survey by Remery & Schippers (2019), showed that managers and professionals perceived greater work-life conflict than lower white-collar and blue-collar workers. This data suggests the need for greater alliance with the private sector to promote equitable gender norms in the workplace.

In that sense, the UN Global Compact and UN Women established the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) to guide businesses on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace. This initiative recognizes that employers and workplaces must establish high-level corporate leadership, train their human resources staff and carry out workplace-based campaigns and employee outreach programmes that create a workplace environment supporting the fair treatment and wellbeing of all employees. In recognition of the importance of a more equal distribution of caregiving duties of women and men for advancing gender equality and women's economic empowerment¹⁹⁸, the WEPs [Gender Gap Analysis Tool](#) includes questions on the company's implementation of paternity leave and other measures related to work-life balance.

WEPs and other business-centred initiatives to promote gender equality are important strategies, especially when national laws may not promote work-life balance, but not all families are covered by employer measures. Families without full employment may not be able to access the benefits of family-friendly company policies. Furthermore, these families may face economic hardships from inconsistent or insufficient forms of income. Importantly, unemployment, under-employment, and "bad employment"¹⁹⁹ generate stressors that contribute to family conflicts from increased disagreements between partners to intimate partner violence.²⁰⁰

In addition to economic (in)security, some families face additional threats to their physical security. Families who have experienced displacement, armed conflicts, urban violence or other forms of violence also face peculiar challenges in terms of caregiving and gender. In 2019 there were globally over 33 million new displacements and 26 million new refugees.²⁰¹ More than 120 thousand new migrants and asylum seekers entered Europe just in 2019.²⁰² Although the European Union presents high percentages of immigrant population overall, the highest percentages occur in countries such as Sweden and Norway with percentages between 16 and 19%, followed by

¹⁹⁷ Gartzia, L., Sánchez-Vidal, M.E., Cegarra-Leiva, D. (2018). Male leaders with paternity leaves: effects of work norms on effectiveness evaluations. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 27:6, 793-808. Doi: 10.1080/1359432X.2018.1540466

¹⁹⁸ WEPs. "Attracting and Retaining Talent through Inclusive Family-Friendly Policies". WE Empower – G7 Programme, 2020. <https://www.weps.org/resource/attracting-and-retaining-talent-through-inclusive-family-friendly-policies>

¹⁹⁹ "Bad employment" refers to employment in undesirable positions, often with several of the following characteristics: low wages, toxic work environment, limited to no possibility of professional development, limited fringe benefits such as health insurance, limited flexibility in work hours, and limited professional autonomy. (Inanc, 2018)

²⁰⁰ Inanc, H. (2018). Unemployment, Temporary Work, and Subjective Well-Being: The Gendered Effect of Spousal Labour Market Insecurity. *American Sociological Review* 83(3), pp. 536-566. Doi: 10.1177/0003122418772061.

²⁰¹ <https://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data>

²⁰² <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/21811/migration-to-europe-in-2019-facts-and-figures>

Germany, France and the United Kingdom with percentages between 12 and 14%.²⁰³ In countries like Poland, Romania and Bulgaria, the percentages of the emigrant population are between 1 and 3% because they are the main points of emigration of Europeans to the rest of the continent. These families, in general, face multiple, concurrent challenges including family separation, severed social networks, increased risk of poverty, language and other barriers to access to public services. Additionally, women and girls are often tasked with navigating the new challenges while simultaneously attending to multiple caregiving and domestic responsibilities, exacerbating the need to promote practices that support women, such as increased caregiving by fathers, but also poverty alleviation policies, including guaranteeing a living wage, both to ensure the financial stability of families and to nudge men to do more care work.

However, it is important to highlight that refugees face particular challenges related to the circumstances, such as wars, political conflicts and persecution, that catalyze precarious journeys to Europe. This population faces extreme burdens, such as trauma, that affect all aspects of life, including maternity and paternity. Trauma can have negative outcomes for children and add stress on caregivers. Early severe stress can generate enduring consequences throughout the life course and an intergenerational effect of paternal trauma has been found in a study with Swedish men where children born to fathers who experienced trauma in childhood had lower birth weights.²⁰⁴ Fortunately, positive, engaged fatherhood has been shown to mediate these negative effects, especially when fathers present psychological resilience and positive attitudes towards their children.^{205, 206}

Furthermore, there may be multiple, concurrent circumstances that increase the burden of caregivers. For example, although the condition of father-migrant-European-informal worker is quite difficult and limits the exercise of paternity, the burden of a father-refugee-African-informal worker is much heavier. Racism, xenophobia, poverty and the patriarchy work together to limit the wellbeing of families and opportunities available to parents. In some situations, the present, acute needs of survival out shadow concerns related to engaging in stimulating child development practices.

As such, the realities of families are complex and require the use of several analytical lenses, especially of gender, race/ ethnicity and class, to develop the appropriate intersectional approach

²⁰³ Inmigración. Porcentaje total de inmigrantes 2019.

<https://datosmacro.expansion.com/demografia/migracion/inmigracion>

²⁰⁴ Rajaleic, K. & Vagerö, D. (2019). Stress resilience in young men mediates the effect of childhood trauma on their offspring's birth weight - An analysis of 250,000 families. *SSM - Population Health*, 8, 100429. Doi: 10.1016/j.ssmph.2019.100429

²⁰⁵ Rajaleic, K. & Vagerö, D. (2019). Stress resilience in young men mediates the effect of childhood trauma on their offspring's birth weight - An analysis of 250,000 families. *SSM - Population Health*, 8, 100429. Doi: 10.1016/j.ssmph.2019.100429

²⁰⁶ Lopez, S., McWhirter, A.C., Rosencrans, M., Guiliani, N.R., McIntyre, L.M. (2019). Father Involvement with Children with Developmental Delays. *Global Education Review*, 6(1), pp.40-62.

to impact the lives and to promote the minimum necessary conditions for wellbeing that facilitate the development of active, non-violent forms of paternity and maternity.

Overall, concerns regarding economic and physical security present different and complex mechanisms that push and pull men into or away from caregiving roles: expectations around the “provider” and “protector” components of traditional masculinity serve as a barrier to men’s caregiving especially in situations of economic insecurity, while the opportunities to meet families’ demands may promote re-arrangements of domestic roles. Yet, families need the economic and social support to overcome the barriers to increasing egalitarian distributions of roles.

Aggravating Factors: Fatherhood and Caregiving in times of COVID-19

Today the world is facing a serious epidemic that has changed the dynamics of work, daily routines and family relations. With the need for physical isolation to contain the escalation of contamination caused by COVID 19, families face serious challenges in dealing with work, financial obligations and family relationships. With schools closed and children at home, with the need to adjust to online-work for some, or with the need to continue work activities at their workplaces for others, the levels of anxiety and uncertainty are very high and, in many cases, people have lost or are at risk of losing their jobs and incomes.

Attitudes, practices and political decisions validated by patriarchal views of masculinities (and gender relations) have affected the world in these times of pandemic, with visible manifestations in everyday life. Some impacts are already known, highlighting society's expectations regarding the roles of men and women. Male discourses have dominated international and government responses to COVID-19, and the global approaches and proposals adopted are strongly shaped by masculinized policies, such as declarations of "war" on the virus. This is a problematic analogy, since the key to tackling this crisis in the short term is the antithesis of "war" – care, social solidarity or community support. Some world leaders have shown disdain for the pandemic, acting as if their countries were too strong to be affected by it.

These patriarchal discourses may have significant consequences both for national and global policies, encouraging militarized and authoritarian approaches and prioritizing economic and social sectors dominated by men, while neglecting the vital sectors where women are most present. Furthermore, women's jobs are more precarious and are not included in the protective measures that have been developed. Finally, the increase in caring responsibilities has fallen on women, exacerbated by men's lower propensity to care for themselves and others.

It is necessary to rethink the moments of transition in times of crisis, using as an analytical and epistemological focus on the transformations and choices that have generational and gender implications. It is essential, in the short and medium term, to understand how this crisis has been intensified by patriarchal policy approaches and responses – how it has shaped masculinities,

gender relations and domestic/family dynamics. Above all, it is urgent to understand how moments of crisis defy patriarchal constructions of masculinities, creating spaces of non-violence and equality. We are, therefore, at the right moment to understand the factors associated with non-violent and equitable pathways of masculinity and gender relations, bringing to the debate the concept and practices of (formal and informal) care, which is essential to prevent violence and achieve more equitable societies in the long term. This means understanding the emancipatory potential of promoting caring masculinities and thus challenge the dominant patriarchal structures and the hierarchy of policies.

In Europe, labour underutilization and in-work poverty were concerns even before the COVID-19 pandemic generated an unprecedented halt to the EU and global economies.²⁰⁷, ²⁰⁸ Throughout the region, unemployment continues to increase. In July 2020 the unemployment rate for men was 7.0% and 8.3% among women.²⁰⁹ These figures only include people actively looking for work, which excludes many people who are no longer looking for a job, such as those who need to care for children. In addition to unemployment data, labour market slack and absences from work increased while actual hours worked in the first quarter decreased throughout the EU.²¹⁰

Although all have been impacted, the effects of the crisis differ according to the characteristics of local economies and hit the most vulnerable the hardest.²¹¹ The intersectionality of race, gender, poverty and COVID have highlighted “the considerable hurdles women face in achieving their rights and fulfilling their potential”.²¹² One of the many challenges faced by women and exacerbated by the pandemic is work-life conflict since a large portion of essential workers are women: in the EU, 78% of healthcare workers are women.²¹³ Women are also the majority in essential services such as paid caregivers, grocery, food processing, pharmacy aides and technicians, retail workers. For paid caregivers, in many EU Member States, there is the added burden that migrant domestic workers may be part of informal economies, leaving them highly

²⁰⁷ International Labour Organization (ILO). *World Employment and Social Outlook, Trends 2020*. Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2020.

²⁰⁸ Harvey, R. Barcelona: Raising Their Voice Against Precariousness: Women's Experiences of In-work Poverty in Europe. Oxfam International, 2018.

²⁰⁹ Eurostat. News Release, Euroindicators. July 2020 Euro area unemployment at 7.9%, EU at 7.2%. 130/2020, 1 September 2020. Retrieved from: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/10568643/3-01092020-BP-EN.pdf/39668e66-2fd4-4ec0-9fd4-4d7c99306c98>

²¹⁰ Eurostat. News Release, Euroindicators. EU labour market in the first quarter 2020, Absences from work at record high, Sharp drop in hours worked. 110/2020, 8 July 2020. Retrieved from: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/11070754/3-08072020-BP-EN.pdf/6797c084-1792-880f-0039-5bbbca736da1>

²¹¹ Conte, A., Lecca, P., Salotti, S., Sakkas, S. (2020). The territorial economic impact of COVID-19 in the EU. A RHOMOLO Analysis. Territorial Development Insights Series, JRC121261, European Commission. Retrieved from: <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/sites/jrcsh/files/jrc121261.pdf>

²¹² Excerpt of the address by UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, at a virtual town hall on August 31, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/08/1071372>.

²¹³ Eurostat. “Majority of health jobs held by women”, Eurostat News, 09 April 2020. Accessed 27 August 2020, Retrieved from: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20200409-2>.

vulnerable to abuse and precarious work. Overall, across the EU, women are more than 10% more likely to be in precarious employment than men.²¹⁴

In addition to women's overrepresentation in high-risk, essential but low-paying employment, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) report on the impact of COVID-19 in the workplace establishes that the relative decrease in employment has affected women more than men in almost every country. This situation is even worse for migrants, youth and workers in the informal sector.²¹⁵ Additionally, as containment measures were implemented, the need to adjust caregiving roles was exacerbated. With the loosening of these measures, children are re-entering school systems, but new outbreaks or rises in infection rates can lead to reimplementation of containment measures and the situation is still dynamic. For families this means multiple, concurrent concerns that can impact family dynamics related to negotiating childcare and domestic roles, as well as generate stressors that impact conflict resolution.

VI. Couples and Co-Parents Thriving Together

Paternity and caregiving involve relationships beyond just the parent and child: the relationships between co-parents whether living apart or together, in a romantic relationship or not, are greatly affected by and impact caregiving roles. In turn, the quality of these relationships impact children. Children who perceived interparental conflict are more likely to feel insecure about their parents' affection and less likely to show prosocial behavior.^{216, 217} Parent relationships with high levels of conflict increase adult stress, undermines their responsiveness to the child, increases child's stress and "puts high demands on children's coping abilities" (p. 480).^{218, 219}

Additionally, witnessing or experiencing violence as a child is an important driver of violence in adult relationships: for example, the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) found that men who witnessed violence against their mothers as children were 2.5 times more likely to use physical violence against their partners as adults.²²⁰ On the other hand, equitable

²¹⁴ EIGE. (2020). Beijing +25: the fifth review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States, pp.88-89

²¹⁵ ILO. (2020). ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Sixth edition Updated estimates and analysis.

²¹⁶ Lux, U. & Walper, S. (2019). A systemic perspective on children's emotional insecurity in relation to father: links to parenting, interparental conflict and children's social well-being. *Attachment & Human Development*, 21(5), pp.467-484. Doi: 10.1080/14616734.2019.1582597.

²¹⁷ Tan, E. S., McIntosh, J. E., Kothe, E. J., Opie, J. E., Olsson, C. A. (2018). Couple relationship quality and offspring attachment security: A systematic review with meta-analysis. *Attachment & Human Development*, 20(4), pp. 349-377. Doi: 10.1080/14616734.2017.1401651.

²¹⁸ Lux, U. & Walper, S. (2019). A systemic perspective on children's emotional insecurity in relation to father: links to parenting, interparental conflict and children's social well-being. *Attachment & Human Development*, 21(5), pp.467-484. Doi: 10.1080/14616734.2019.1582597.

²¹⁹ Turunen, J. (2017). Shared Physical Custody and Children's Experience of Stress. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 58(5), 371-392. Doi: 10.1080/10502556.2017.1325648

²²⁰ Fleming, P. J., McCleary-Sills, J., Morton, M., Levtoy, R., Heilman, B., & Barker, G. (2015). Risk Factors for Men's Lifetime Perpetration of Physical Violence Against Intimate Partners: Results from the International Men and

gender relationships in the childhood home and positive parenting is associated with reproduction of equitable relationships in adulthood.²²¹

In the EU-27, divorce rates have been trending upwards (Figure 13) and Portugal, Luxembourg, Spain, Belgium, Estonia, Netherlands, and Finland presented divorce rates greater than 50 divorces per 100 marriages in 2017.²²² Although divorce rates are lower among families with young children, children seem to present a destabilizing effect on marriages over time in low to high-income families.²²³ The “role conflict model” explains this finding by arguing that marital dissatisfaction increases with the reorganization into more gendered, traditional social roles in the family when children are born.²²⁴ Particularly for women, the new role as mothers, in addition to their ongoing obligations and roles, adds burdens that create tensions and conflict within the couples. Women are more likely to initiate divorce than men, yet women also face the greatest chronic consequences of divorce including “disproportionate losses” (p.792) in household income and associated increases in their risk of poverty and single parenting.²²⁵

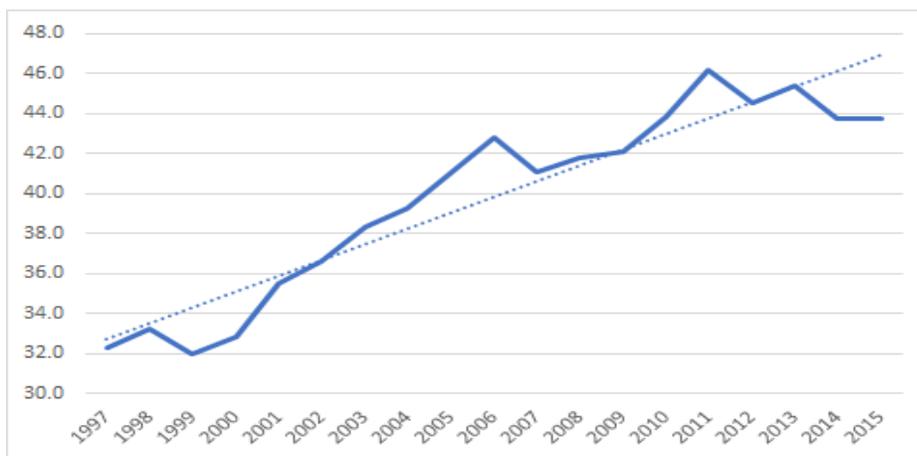


Figure 13. Divorces per 100 marriages in EU- 27 countries from 1997 to 2015.

Source: Created using data from Eurostat. Last updated: 3 July 2020.

Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) in Eight Countries. *PLOS One*, 10(3), e0118639. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0118639.

²²¹ Levtov, R., Van der Gaag, N., Greene, M., Kaufman, M., & Barker, G. (2015). *State of the World’s Fathers: A MenCare Advocacy Publication*. Washington, DC: Promundo, Rutgers, Save the Children, Sonke Gender Justice, and the MenEngage Alliance.

²²² Eurostat. *Divorce Indicators*. (03 July 2020). Accessed 31 August 2020. Retrieved from: <https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>

²²³ Kaplan, A., Endeweld, M., Herbst-Debby, A. (2020). Chapter 6: The More the Merrier? The Effect of Children on Divorce in a Pronatalist. In Mortelmans, D. (Ed.) *Divorce in Europe: New Insights in Trends, Causes and Consequences of Relation Break-Ups* (pp. 123-143). Cham: Springer.

²²⁴ Twenge, G. M., Campbell, W. K., Foster, C. A. (2003). Parenthood and marital satisfaction: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 65(3), pp. 574-583. Doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2003.00574.x

²²⁵ Leopold, T. (2018). Gender Differences in the Consequences of Divorce: A Study of Multiple Outcomes. *Demography*, 55, pp.769-797. Doi: 10.1007/s13524-018-0667-6

In general, having a child increases risk of divorce^{226, 227}, but Kaplan *et al* (2020) found that the positive relationship between children and divorce was particularly strong for couples with high earnings.²²⁸ This study did not investigate the role of women's employment directly, but dual-earner families are more common among high-income families since both adults are contributing to the family's earnings. Although other studies have also found that couples with children have significantly higher risks of divorce than similar childless couples, in Britain the association was strongest in low-income households where children increased the economic stress of couples.²²⁹ Among the high-earning couples, the associations between economic stress from limited financial resources and divorce are not as relevant, but a few hypotheses to explain this finding are that in higher income families a) the couples may have had a more egalitarian division of roles between the dual-earners before the birth of the child, so the changes generated greater dissatisfaction in comparison to couples that more closely followed traditional gender roles before becoming parents, and b) the couple did not face the financial barriers to divorce, facilitating decisions to end the union. Recent findings from Folke (2020) support these possible explanations by highlighting the role of gender-traditional roles in the heightened risk of divorce among women who received promotions in the private sector or in government (by winning elections).²³⁰ The division of domestic tasks has previously been associated with marital satisfaction and a study with German couples found that the perception that men contribute fairly to housework is related to "more frequent and satisfying sex in the future" (p. 208).²³¹ Additionally, Leopold (2018) found that women's daily time spent on domestic work decreased half an hour after divorce,²³² supporting the hypothesis of the role of the traditional gendered distribution of domestic tasks on divorce.

Divorce between parents does not equate to the end of the relationship between any of the divorced parents and the child; however, divorce has important implications for parenting. First of all, custody arrangements may limit the time and types of interactions between parent and child. Household changes may distance the non-resident or non-custodial parent and his/her child, as may a tumultuous relationship between the divorced parents.

²²⁶ Svarer, M., Verner, M. (2008). Do children stabilize relationships in Denmark? *Journal of Population Economics*, 21(2), pp. 395-417. Doi: 10.1007/s00148-006-0084-9.

²²⁷ Kaplan, A., Endeweld, M., Herbst-Debby, A. (2020). Chapter 6: The More the Merrier? The Effect of Children on Divorce in a Pronatalist. In Mortelmans, D. (Ed.) *Divorce in Europe: New Insights in Trends, Causes and Consequences of Relation Break-Ups* (pp. 123-143). Cham: Springer.

²²⁸ Kaplan, A., Endeweld, M., Herbst-Debby, A. (2020). Chapter 6: The More the Merrier? The Effect of Children on Divorce in a Pronatalist. In Mortelmans, D. (Ed.) *Divorce in Europe: New Insights in Trends, Causes and Consequences of Relation Break-Ups* (pp. 123-143). Cham: Springer.

²²⁹ Chan, T. W., Halpin, B. (2001). Children and Marital Instability in the UK. Retrieved from: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/summary?doi=10.1.1.25.4583>.

²³⁰ Folke, O., Rickne, J. (2020). All the Single Ladies: Job Promotions and the Durability of Marriage. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 12(1), pp. 260-287. Doi: 10.1257/app.20180435

²³¹ Johnson, M. D., Galambos, N. L., Anderson, J. R. (2015). Skip the Dishes? Not So Fast! Sex and Housework Revisited. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 30(2), pp. 203-213. Doi: 10.1037/fam0000161

²³² Leopold, T. (2018). Gender Differences in the Consequences of Divorce: A Study of Multiple Outcomes. *Demography*, 55, pp.769-797. Doi: 10.1007/s13524-018-0667-6

In the Czech Republic, there were important differences between men and women's acceptance of shared custody: only about a third of women (31-39%) as compared to over half of men (52-61%) agreed that shared custody was beneficial for children after divorce. The acceptance of shared custody increased with greater education and personal experience also influenced in the acceptance of shared custody, whereas "women without children and without having experienced a divorce are more likely to hold positive attitude toward shared custody" (p. 266). The existence of accepting attitudes toward shared custody in this example did not reflect the custody arrangements in the country since only 16% of children/ adolescents were in shared custody after divorces in 2016, 77% stayed with their mothers and 7% with fathers.²³³ In the EU, "a mother automatically has parental responsibility for her child, as does a married father", however, "the rules on whether an unmarried father has these rights and duties differ depending on the country"²³⁴.

In divorce, traditional gender roles may be reinforced if the discourse around fathers' possible contributions is limited to alimony payments or father-child leisure activities on weekend visits. Research from Lithuania shows that geographical distance between parent and child place of residence does not necessarily interfere with the relationship quality, even in cases where children live abroad, but father-child relationships exhibit more emotional intimacy and approval with increased contact frequency. The results also showed that fathers were more engaged in the emotional and practical work involved with caregiving when he had better a relationship with the mother.²³⁵

The data shows that parenting is complex, but decisions regarding childcare after divorce should be made based on the best interest of children, considering the specificities of each family and situation, and not based on gender roles. However, attitudes regarding shared custody, gender and ethnicity, as well as, biases among gatekeepers, such as members of the judiciary, are still critical factors in determining what parenting after divorce looks like. Overall, data shows that children and families do better in families with less conflict.

Although the focus of the data has been on heteronormative relationships between couples consisting of a man and a woman, families exist and thrive in a wide variety of compositions, including single-parent households, LGBTQ parents, dual-households, blended, extended, adoptive families and other arrangements as needed to promote wellbeing, fulfillment and life satisfaction. Compositions that go beyond the traditional mother-father dyad have also been shown to produce supportive and healthy relationships, for example of the adopted children in gay father families are at least as likely to be securely attached as children in lesbian mother or heterosexual

²³³ Fučík, P. (2020). Chapter 12: Public Attitudes Toward Shared Custody: The Czech Republic. In Mortelmans, D. (Ed.) *Divorce in Europe: New Insights in Trends, Causes and Consequences of Relation Break-Ups* (pp. 123-143). Cham: Springer.

²³⁴ European Union. (2020) *Parental responsibility*. Retrieved from https://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/family/children/parental-responsibility/index_en.htm.

²³⁵ Maslauskaitė, A., Tereškina, A. (2020). Chapter 14: Quality of Non-resident Father-Child Relationships: Between "Caring for" and "Caring about". In Mortelmans, D. (Ed.) *Divorce in Europe: New Insights in Trends, Causes and Consequences of Relation Break-Ups* (pp. 123-143). Cham: Springer.

parent families.²³⁶ In order to support family well-being, there are conditions and strategies that can be implemented to support the construction of harmonious, caring relationships.

VII. Transforming Father's Care

In order to promote greater gender equity in caregiving and domestic work across Europe programmes have been implemented with men and boys, in addition to women, girls and non-binary individuals.

One approach has been to build parents' confidence and competence through curriculum focused on fathers and caregiving, such as Program P. Program P was developed by Promundo to promote concrete strategies and action steps to engage men in active fatherhood from pregnancy until early childhood and has been used to inform and adapt programming for fathers, their partners, health workers, and others who aim to promote maternal and child health, family well-being and gender equality. At the European level, Program P has been adapted by the PARENT project,²³⁷ led by the Centre for Social Studies at the University of Coimbra and Promundo Portugal.

The Council of Europe Recommendation Rec(2006)19 on Policy to Support Positive Parenting recognizes the importance of implementing governmental policies and programmes on positive parenting, stating that "key messages on positive parenting should be issued to all parents and persons providing care and involved in the rearing of a child on a daily basis".²³⁸ Although several programmes to support positive parenting have been evaluated, they infrequently include information specifically on fathers.^{239, 240} Among positive parenting programmes with a specific lens towards fatherhood and gender equitable parenting, experimental evaluation showed that the [Responsible Engaged and Loving \(REAL\) Fathers Initiative](#) produced a reduction in fathers' use of harsh punishments and increase in positive discipline methods.²⁴¹ Participating fathers also reported greater confidence in implementing positive parenting strategies to manage their child's behaviours. A randomized-controlled trial of an adaptation of Program P also found reduced use

²³⁶ McConnachie, A. L., Ayed, N., Jadv, V., Lamb, M., Tasker, F., Golombok, S. (2019). Father-child attachment in adoptive gay father families. *Attachment & Human Development*, 110-123. Doi: 10.1080/14616734.2019.1589067

²³⁷ <https://parent.ces.uc.pt/>. PARENT Project has received funding from the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme under grant agreement N° 810458.

²³⁸ Child Rights International Network (CRIN). Council of Europe Recommendation REC(2006)19 on Policy to Support Positive Parenting. Retrieved from: <https://archive.crin.org/en/library/legal-database/council-europe-recommendation-rec200619-policy-support-positive-parenting.html>

²³⁹ Gardner, F., Montgomery, P., & Knerr, W. (2015). Transporting Evidence-Based Parenting Programmes for Child Problem Behavior (Age 3-10) Between Countries: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 45(6). DOI: 10.1080/15374416.2015.1015134

²⁴⁰ Morrison, J., Pikhart, H., Ruiz, M., & Goldblatt, P. (2014). Systematic review of parenting interventions in European countries aiming to reduce social inequalities in children's health and development. *BMC Public Health*, 14. DOI: 10.1186/1471-2458-14-1040

²⁴¹ Ashburn, K., Kerner, B., Ojamuge, D., & Lundgren, R. (2017). Evaluation of the Responsible, Engaged and Loving (REAL) Fathers Initiative Partner Violence in Northern Uganda. *Prevention Science*, 18(7), 854-864. DOI: 10.1007/s11121-016-0713-9.

of physical punishments of children among participating mothers and fathers. The evaluation also found that fathers spent an average of 55 more minutes per day on caregiving and household tasks at 21 months after the intervention.

Other approaches focus on beginning early by transforming gender attitudes of youth. Although for many young people, gender norms are changing, the European Commission's Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019 report states, young people are not immune from gender stereotypes or inequalities, and thus should be considered a key target group of the EU.²⁴² Moreover, gender-based violence among youth is being expressed in new ways that still lack the adequate knowledge and tools to address them, such as online violence and cyber-bullying driven by rigid stereotypes around masculinity. Evidence demonstrates the impact that experiencing violence in childhood can have on the use of violence as an adult²⁴³ and developing the psychosocial skills for building healthy, equitable, non-violent relationships should begin even before parenthood. It is in this context, and to address the European Commission's call to raise the awareness of boys and girls about gender equality, a recent pilot, conducted in Belgium, Croatia, Germany, Portugal and Spain of the "EQUI-X – Engaging youth at promotion of nonviolent and equitable masculinities"²⁴⁴ was developed to address gender, relationships, violence and health behaviors with adolescents in schools and/or in juvenile detention centres. Among the participants, boys were 64% more likely to show improved gender attitudes at the end of the sessions and among the items with the greatest improvement towards more equitable attitudes was the "changing diapers, giving kids a bath and feeding them is the mother's responsibility". The findings from the pilot pointed to future areas of improvement: in Belgium, the items with the lowest average scores suggest that future gender-transformative programmes with youth should focus on reproductive and sexual health and the division of unpaid care work; specifically among the Spanish youth, male friendships and emotional support networks should be a focus.²⁴⁵

In addition to working with families directly, efforts should include professionals who may serve as gatekeepers to men's participation. Frascarolo et al. (2016) describe how healthcare professionals can restrict father's participation in caregiving by reinforcing traditional roles of mothers as the primary actors responsible for children through institutional practices, such as using the mother's name to identify the newborn in the maternity ward, to social cues utilized during interactions, like predominantly focusing discussions, questions and orientations on the mother.²⁴⁶

²⁴² European Commission Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers. (2015). Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/eu-policy/strategic-engagement-gender-equality-2016-2019_en

²⁴³ Taylor, A. Y., Moura, T., Scabio, J. L., Borde, E., Afonso, J. S., & Barker, G. This isn't the life for you: Masculinities and nonviolence in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) with a focus on urban violence. Washington, DC and Rio de Janeiro: Promundo, 2016.

²⁴⁴ <http://equixproject.eu/>

²⁴⁵ <http://equixproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Guide-EU.pdf>

²⁴⁶ Frascarolo, F., Feinberg, M., Sznitman, G. A., Favez, N. (2016). Professional gatekeeping towards fathers: A powerful influence on family and child development. *World Association for Infant Mental Health*, pp. 4-7.

Qualitative research in the scope of the “Promotion, Awareness Raising and Engaging of men in Nurture Transformations” (PARENT) Project²⁴⁷ in the EU has found that among health professionals involved in antenatal, perinatal and postpartum care, there has been increasing recognition of fathers as central participants in pregnancy and childcare instead of as merely companions. Positive changes in health professionals’ attitudes and practices can set precedents promoting more equitable engagement of men in parenthood. However, gains in new attitudes and practices are not necessarily permanent and must be continually reinforced to avoid returning to traditional gender roles in healthcare services. For example, many advancements in recognizing father’s role and encouraging their involvement have been lost during the pandemic:

“In most hospitals they are not allowing any companions, I think that a good thing of the last few years was the involvement precisely of the partners, in the consultations and in the delivery itself. This expectation that if it is their will and the woman's, yes, they are supposed to be there, and until recently the argument was “the father is the father, he is not a companion” and things like that, and nowadays, from a moment to another, it has become freely accepted that the woman goes completely alone, without a companion, and the father has returned to being a mere expendable companion during labour, including in consultations and ultrasounds.”

Although COVID-19 forced everyone to make exceptional adaptations, care must be taken to not allow emergency measures, taken to halt the pandemic, to become long-term, common practices that reinforce gatekeeping.

Health workers are one example of service providers who should be included in transforming fathers care, but social workers are also another key target group. Research with social workers has found intrinsic biases against fathers - often overlooking their role as caregivers or viewing them as a threat in the family. In complex family dynamics where parents may need support caring for children, the mother is generally considered the “default parent” and offered services such as counseling and classes on parenting strategies, while the father’s removal from the family unit is considered at much earlier stages and often before offering similar support services. Migration and/or ethnic minority status of fathers can also add biases against his potential participation as a caregiver on top of traditional gendered expectations held by professionals.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ [PARENT](#) aims to pilot a gender-synchronised approach aiming to tackle the challenges of prevention and eradication of violence against women and children by engaging men in co-responsible parenting and caregiving and promoting an equal share of unpaid care work. Through PARENT, implementing partners, together with local partners providing services directly to families, in Portugal, Austria, Italy and Lithuania, designed and implemented context-specific adaptations of Programme P, a gender transformative parenting programme developed by [Promundo](#).

²⁴⁸ Nygren, K., Walsh, J., Ellingsen, I. T., Christie, A. (2019). What about the fathers? The presence and absence of the father in social work practice in England, Ireland, Norway and Sweden - A comparative study. *Child & Family Social Work* 24(1), pp. 148-155. Doi: 10.1111/cfs/12592

Rohrmann (2019) also identified the potential role of mothers and early childhood education and care (ECEC) as gatekeepers to men's increased involvement in the female-dominated ECEC, but increased presence of male ECEC workers was identified as a potential means to improve father involvement.²⁴⁹

Starting from early childhood and continuing throughout a child and adolescent's schooling, educators play a key role in establishing precedents for non-discriminatory practices and preventing the repetition of gendered stereotypes. For example, in the school-context, gender stereotypes can limit aspirations and life trajectories because young people construct their desired futures based on perceptions of what is possible and expected. Studies have shown relationships between student outcomes and both teachers' explicit expectations and implicit biases.^{250, 251} For girls, this may be a contributing factor in limiting their professional aspirations to focus on family and their perceived roles as caregivers.²⁵² For boys, their roles as future caregivers may be invisible in comparison to the drive for economic 'success'. Notably, among the factors that pull boys away from schools is the perception of employment opportunities and a pull towards work versus education. Although boys are overrepresented among young people who do not conclude high school, girls who were early-leavers of school take longer to transition into the labour market and show greater underemployment than boys.²⁵³

An initiative co-funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Union ([Boys in Care](#)) aims to expand the educational and vocational perspectives of youth by addressing gender stereotypes, particularly those related to care. In addition to expanding educational and professional horizons, young people with more equitable gender attitudes are less likely to perpetrate violence, including dating violence and sexual harassment,²⁵⁴ and schools serve as a relevant setting for implementing gender transformative programming with peer groups that can reinforce behaviors.²⁵⁵

Although health, education and social services generally recognize the importance of promoting engaged fatherhood and gender equality, they still consist of people with their own gender attitudes

²⁴⁹ Rohrmann, T. (2019). The Role of Male Caretakers and Pre-School Teachers for Father Involvement in ECEC. *Global Education Review*, 6(1), pp. 26-39.

²⁵⁰ Peterson, E. R., Rubie-Davies, C., Osborne, D., & Sibley, C. (2016). Teachers' explicit expectations and implicit prejudiced attitudes to educational achievement: Relations with student achievement and the ethnic achievement gap. *Learning and Instruction*, 42, 123-140.

²⁵¹ Van Houtte, M. & Dermanet, J. (2016). Teachers' beliefs about students, and the intention of students to drop out of secondary education in Flanders. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 54, 117-127. DOI: 10.1016/j.tate.2015.12.003

²⁵² Machado, A. L. & Muller, M. "If it's already tough, imagine for me..." *A qualitative Perspective on Youth Out of School and Out of Work in Brazil*. Policy Research Working Paper 8358. World Bank Working Group, 2018.

²⁵³ Struffolino, E. & Borgna, C. (2020). Who is really 'left behind'? Half a century of gender differences in the school-to-work transitions of low-educated youth. *Journal of Youth Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2020.1713308

²⁵⁴ Miller, E., Culyba, A. J., Palisotti, T., Massof, M., Gao, Q., Ports, K. A., et al. (2020). Male Adolescents' Gender Attitudes and Violence: Implications for Youth Violence Prevention. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 58(3), 396-406..

²⁵⁵ Tsouroufli, M. (2020). School related gender-based violence in England (SRGBV): An intersectional analysis. *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Equality and Diversity*. Retrieved from: <https://bura.brunel.ac.uk/handle/2438/19181>

and influenced by the gender norms of their societies. Continued initiatives can contribute to changing gender attitudes of service providers and also promote their roles as replicators of equitable gender attitudes in their institutions and among the serviced families.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

The data shows that across Europe advances have been made towards gender equality, but the unequal distribution of caregiving and domestic work continue to serve as a barrier to women's economic, social and political equality. 1 in 3 European women cite caregiving as a barrier to employment and women spend, on average, a minimum of 10 hours more a week caring for children than men. Women's participation in leadership positions in the public and private sectors is also limited by work-life conflict. To address these barriers, this report focused on the data related to men's involvement in caregiving and active fatherhood as a strategy for promoting gender equality.

The disparities in women and men's caregiving is not natural nor unchangeable. National policies can provide the needed contexts for equality in unpaid care and domestic work, especially when they are developed to support the dismantling of rigid gender norms that designate gendered roles within the home and society. In order to achieve equality, it is urgent to develop public policies and strategies that catalyze men and boys to assume their responsibilities in doing half of the paid and unpaid care work. These strategies can be aimed at guaranteeing fully paid, earmarked and non-transferrable paternity leave, in addition to maternity or parental leave, that goes beyond the first months of a child's life. Policies can also promote father's participation in caregiving as partners with women from the earliest moments by promoting men's engagement in the health sector as an active participant during prenatal, childbirth and postnatal health care. Additionally, public services that provide safety nets for families - such as those related to early childhood care, education, poverty alleviation and social services – should be strengthened and can also promote change by re-examining how they engage fathers and men to not reproduce harmful gender stereotypes.

To change the socialization that limits men's participation in caregiving and normalizes harmful gender attitudes and practices, boys need to be engaged at an early stage in doing hands-on care at home, exposed to care professions and to positive examples of men around them proudly carrying out unpaid care and domestic work. Early childhood professionals, schools and educators must address gender as a transversal theme and develop care practices from an early age. Government training programs can support educators, as well as other service providers, to change institutional practices that may inadvertently reinforce harmful gender stereotypes, their own gender attitudes, and prepare them to engage families in gender equality and gender equitable programs. Changing social norms also expands how men's contributions are interpreted, particularly those that go beyond traditional economic roles.

Furthermore, families are facing particularly urgent and pressing social and economic concerns in the volatile context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Family dynamics have changed and the gendered divisions of labour will be impacted as labour markets are hit and social isolation measures modify daily routines and available social support. To better understand the impacts of the pandemic, data disaggregated by sex, ethnicity, employment, sexuality, parental status, and other relevant indicators should be collected and publicly available. During this time, paid and unpaid care work should be particularly valued and its economic and social contributions recognized.

Finally, the benefits of gender equality are extensive and the responsibility is everyone's. Men need training to build their confidence and self-efficacy in performing care work; but they also need to commit to being agents of change and carrying out 50% of caregiving in their homes. Together, gender equality is possible, but to get there change in terms of who does the daily care work in homes is needed.