

# Do households live the family model they prefer? Household's work patterns across European policy regimes

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## Abstract

Studies have investigated the equalizing effect of childcare provision and parental leave schemes on gendered work patterns. However, as the relationship between policies and individual time allocations to paid work is complex and challenging to empirically assess, previous research has clarified single aspects of this complexity. The present study theoretically and empirically combines a household perspective by considering the work behaviours of two partners within one household (i.e. a household's lived family model) with a comparative approach to systematically analyse relationships between specific policy designs and households' paid work patterns in a large sample. The findings imply that extensive childcare policies are systematically related to an egalitarian household organization, mostly among those with small children. This association can be observed across households with varying levels of egalitarian norms. Conversely, the findings suggest that the current design of parental leave policies in the 21 European countries does not allow for a true assessment of the potential of leave schemes to influence the within-household division of labor.

**Key words:** family economics, gender inequality, part-time employment, social norms, social policies

**JEL classification:** I38 Government policy, provision and effects of welfare programmes, J22 time allocation and labor supply, J13 childcare

## 1. Introduction

Extensive research has aimed at shedding light on determinants of individuals' or households' organization of different spheres of work and on how state policies targeting work and family affect these patterns. Work–family policies, especially public childcare provision and moderately long but well-paid parental leave schemes, can facilitate women's labour

market involvement (Sainsbury, 1994; Mahon, 2002; Gornick and Meyers, 2003; Hegewisch and Gornick, 2011; Stadelmann-Steffen, 2011; Asai, 2015; Blofield and Martínez Franzoni, 2015; Geyer *et al.*, 2015; Nollenberger and Rodriguez-Planas, 2015; Vuri, 2016; Olivetti and Petrongolo, 2017; Ferragina, 2019; Gambaro *et al.*, 2019; Hook and Paek, 2020). Moreover, scholars have argued that we need to look beyond maternal employment to better understand the relationship between different spheres of work and consider the consequences of specific policies and work organizations on gendered work patterns within households. In this vein, previous research has evaluated how individual and household processes affect gender-related inequalities in housework and care work (e.g. Greenstein, 2000; Hook, 2010; Aassve *et al.*, 2014; Jansen *et al.*, 2016; Chesley and Flood, 2017) and have highlighted the importance of the national context—that is, norms and policies (e.g. Hook, 2010, 2006). Finally, while still an underdeveloped area, several studies have emphasized the role of fathers and have investigated how work–family policies affect men’s (unpaid) work behaviour (Hook, 2006; Sullivan *et al.*, 2009; Bübbing, 2015; Bübbing and Pollmann-Schult, 2016).

What most of these studies and perspectives have in common is that they emphasize the complexity and interdependencies between paid and unpaid work and between female and male work behaviour. Hence, in an ideal world, the gender-specific division of work should be investigated by simultaneously analysing paid and unpaid work behaviours of men and women, not only integrating a household perspective (Hook, 2006, p. 656; Angelov *et al.*, 2016; Musick *et al.*, 2020) but also considering differing national (or even regional) contexts (Cooke, 2011; Stadelmann-Steffen, 2011; Hook and Paek, 2020; Musick *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, the effects of the role of policies may depend on their specific design, the way they interact, the broader welfare and labour market context in which these policies are embedded, and the fact that the same policies can have varying effects on different individuals and households. A comparative account is therefore needed to systematically analyse policy effects (Thébaud, 2010, p. 331). However, given this complexity and associated methodological challenges (Olivetti and Petrongolo, 2017), especially the lack of such encompassing, detailed and comparative data (see Section 3 and Online Appendix A), explicit empirical tests that assume such an ideal integrative perspective do not exist.

The present study aims at taking previous research a step further by making full use of existing comparative data. We combine existing observational data at the individual and household levels—namely, the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) 2012—and detailed contextual policy data on childcare and leave policies (Ciccia, 2017), including 21 countries.<sup>1</sup> We ask the following question: *To what extent is the division of paid work within families in European countries a reflection of country-specific work–family policy contexts?*

The present study integrates several under-researched aspects of the above-mentioned complexity. First, it theoretically and empirically combines a household perspective with a comparative approach that enables us to systematically analyse the relationship between specific policy designs and households’ work patterns in a large country sample. The

1 Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Unfortunately, we needed to exclude the UK as a traditional liberal country due to missing data.

household perspective considers the work behaviours of two partners within one household (i.e. a household's lived family model). Moreover, with respect to the policies, according to [Gornick and Meyers \(2003, p. 100\)](#), the state can get active in three policy areas to improve the reconciliation of family and work duties and thus to define a country's promoted gender-specific division of labour: parental leave schemes, childcare policies and the regulation of working time and working place. We focus on the first two, a strategy that follows most previous research (e.g. [Meyers et al., 1999](#); [Datta Gupta et al., 2008](#); [Hegewisch and Gornick, 2011](#); [Vuri, 2016](#); [Stadelmann-Steffen and Oehrlí, 2017](#); [Hook and Paek, 2020](#)), and for data-related reasons. Based on fuzzy-set ideal type analysis, [Ciccia \(2017\)](#) provided comparative policy data corresponding to the claim that we should consider how various policy elements are designed and combined for childcare policies and parental leave. We refer to these two policies as family policies ([Hook and Paek, 2020](#)).

Our approach does not fully correspond to the ideal world described above. For example, our dependent variable is an index describing households' division of work between partners, based on the partners' *paid* work, while *unpaid* work is not considered. Whereas ISSP 2012 provides variables on individual hours spent on work at home, we considered these data unreliable and did not use them to identify a household's within-household division of labour. Therefore, we consider our index of households' division of paid work a reasonable approximation of households' lived family model (see Section 3). Moreover, utilising time-use data is considered the most valid approach to measure how much time individuals devote to different spheres of work ([Sullivan et al., 2009](#); [Hook, 2010](#)). However, such data are not available for partners within the same household and for a comparative country sample. Although our information on working time might not be optimal, it is useful, especially also because we did not rely on concrete numbers of hours but categorized respondents' responses to facilitate comparison between contexts.

A second challenge that we cannot accommodate with our design is the endogeneity problem ([Olivetti and Petrongolo, 2017](#)). Based on our cross-sectional study, we document correlations whereas we cannot identify causal relationships between policies and lived family models. Previous studies using time-series data before and after important policy reforms and/or natural experiments imply that childcare policies and parental leave schemes causally affect individual work behaviour ([Lalive and Zweimüller, 2009](#); [Bünning, 2015](#); [Gangl and Ziefle, 2015](#); [Ravazzini, 2018](#)). However, these studies focus on single countries. We aim to investigate whether the correlations between policies and households' lived family models support these existing causal findings when brought to a comparative and household perspective. Moreover, by integrating individual gender attitudes, we provide evidence that the patterns we find are not merely the result of reversed causality ([Hook, 2006, p. 656](#)).

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. In Section 2, we discuss the theoretical background and derive our hypotheses. Next, we describe our methodological approach before presenting and discussing our empirical results. The article closes with a summary of the most important results and an outlook on possible future research.

## 2. Theoretical background

Comparative welfare state research has extensively discussed the role of social policies in shaping gender relations and associated assumptions about social positions occupied by the sexes ([Sainsbury, 1994](#); [Orloff, 2010](#)). A fundamental conclusion of this discussion is that

reliance on a male-breadwinner model has been characteristic of the social policy development of modern welfare systems across Europe and beyond (Lewis, 2001; Mahon, 2002). However, against the background of women's increased labour market participation, their rising educational achievements, changing family structures and the advancement of women's rights, the proportion of households to which the traditional male breadwinner model applied has been continuously shrinking over the past decades (Lewis, 2001; Mahon, 2002; Oláh, 2011). This development has been accompanied by the emergence and promotion of policies aimed at facilitating the reconciliation of family and working duties.

In this section, we discuss previous research on the role of family policies in the gendered division of labour. We structure the presentation around three topics that earlier studies have focused on: how family policies affect women's employment, determinants of unpaid work and work behaviours of men. We then derive our hypotheses regarding the role of family policies for actual lived family models.

## 2.1 Family policies and women's employment

Extensive research has evaluated role of policy measures, such as childcare provision and parental leave schemes, for women's labour market behaviour in general and maternal employment in particular. The most consistent finding within the literature is that the provision of childcare correlates with increased maternal employment (for a recent review, see Ferragina, 2019). The underlying rationale is straightforward: Childcare policies (partly) dispense mothers from their childcare activities and, thus, provide them with opportunities to become (more intensively) employed. Thus, childcare services alter traditional work–family relations by distributing women's sole responsibility in caregiving to external institutions and by providing a signal that working mothers are normatively (more or less) acceptable (Mahon, 2002; Blofield and Martínez Franzoni, 2015; Gangl and Ziefle, 2015; Hook and Paek, 2020). The probability of women staying in the labour market or taking up employment after childbearing is supposed to be the highest if childcare services are available, affordable, of reasonable quality and covering extended time slots (Hegewisch and Gornick, 2011, p. 128). To facilitate reading, we refer to this kind of childcare supply as 'extensive childcare provision'.

Compared with childcare services, the employment effects of leave schemes are less clear-cut (Ray *et al.*, 2010). On the one hand, 'parental leave schemes have the potential to shore up women's employment' (Ray *et al.*, 2010, p. 198). They prevent women's permanent withdrawal from the labour market after childbearing and decrease their job turnover (Ray *et al.*, 2010). On the other hand, a broad scientific consensus exists that parental leave schemes can have adverse and even offsetting effects on maternal employment. In practise, the actual effect of these leave schemes seems to strongly rely on policy design. Taking maternal leaves for an extended period reduces the employment probability of mothers, as long leaves deteriorate their human capital and make them less attractive to (future) employers (Gornick and Meyers, 2003; Datta Gupta *et al.*, 2008; Lalive and Zweimüller, 2009; Gangl and Ziefle, 2015). Conversely, short to moderate maternal leaves combined with opportunities and incentives for paternity leave, as well as the granting of monetary compensations, not only raise the likelihood that mothers return to (the same) employment after the leave period but also reduce mothers' comparative disadvantages and wage penalties associated with motherhood (Gornick and Meyers, 2003). We call this version of leave policies 'egalitarian parental leave schemes'.

Moreover, different policy measures vary in their aims and abilities to reshape work and family relations, depending on their specific design (Olivetti and Petrongolo, 2017; Stadelmann-Steffen, 2011), and their impacts also hinge on the broader policy and cultural context in which they are operating (e.g. Meyers *et al.*, 1999; Pfau-Effinger, 2005; Cooke, 2011; Budig *et al.*, 2012; Ciccio and Bleijenbergh, 2014; Boeckmann *et al.*, 2015; Gangl and Ziefle, 2015; Vuri, 2016; Daly and Ferragina, 2018). Numerous authors have discussed normative ideals underlying different reconciliation strategies, as well as policy configurations and combinations resulting thereof (Lewis, 2001; Gornick and Meyers, 2003; Olivetti and Petrongolo, 2017; Ferragina, 2019).

## 2.2 Gendered work patterns in (un)paid work

Whereas the current literature clearly suggests that family policies are an important factor in promoting female labour market participation, controversially discussed is whether they also generally enhance an egalitarian division of labour, particularly between partners and related to unpaid work.

Some evidence indicates that family policies, if designed in a way to promote female employment, equalize gender-specific work patterns, including home and childcare work (Hook, 2006; Sullivan *et al.*, 2009; Stadelmann-Steffen and Oehrli, 2017). Theoretically, egalitarian family policies can have a dual effect on unpaid work. On the one hand, stronger labour market involvement increases women's resources and opportunities and, hence, their bargaining position within the household (Greenstein, 2000; Hook, 2010). On the other hand, family policies and stronger female employment contribute to the erosion of patriarchal norms and associated cultural imperatives of how work should be allocated between spouses. Hence, family policies may not only trigger a change in individuals' attitudes towards gender roles but also indirectly affect their behaviour concerning labour division (Hook, 2006; Stadelmann-Steffen and Oehrli, 2017). In this context, Hook (2010) demonstrates that stronger labour market involvement of married women—which is likely a result of egalitarian family policies—is associated with less gender segregation in housework tasks. Sullivan *et al.* (2009) illustrated that patterns of fathers' and mothers' time spent on childcare co-vary with the policy context, that is, the design of childcare policies and parental leave schemes in Norway, Sweden and the UK.

However, other studies emphasize that a stronger integration of women in paid labour does not necessarily translate into a more egalitarian division of labour in other spheres. For example, women, independently of their labour market involvement, still do a large part of unpaid work at home (Lewis, 2001; Sayer, 2005; Sullivan *et al.*, 2009; Hook, 2010; Nitsche and Grunow, 2016). Especially those women who are strongly integrated in the labour market often feel guilty for their 'norm-deviant behaviour' and therefore tend to overcompensate their engagement at home (Greenstein, 2000). Furthermore, not doing or avoiding unpaid work is one way men display masculinity and reinforce their structural and cultural power (Risman, 1998). In this context, women, in a situation of time conflict, tend to cut back their working hours in paid labour or their leisure time rather than their childcare and household work (Craig, 2007). The persistence of the household and care domain as a 'female domain' is also reflected in previous research finding little support for changes in ways men allocate their times between different spheres of life (Lewis, 2001; Lewis *et al.*, 2008). In their analysis of panel data, Nitsche and Grunow (2016) found a clear link between an egalitarian gender ideology of partners and a more egalitarian division of housework, whereas resources

do not affect this division. This latter perspective suggests that family policies that are conducive to increasing women's labour market involvement may only affect gender equality in the sphere of unpaid work to a limited degree.

### 2.3 Family policies and men's work behaviours

Few studies have investigated how family policies affect men's work behaviour. The focus is mostly on unpaid work, as paid work hours are theoretically expected to be largely insensitive to family policies, especially childcare policies that shift childcare responsibility to the state rather than to fathers.

Nevertheless, childcare policies may have normative effects and therefore shape men's behaviours. Brandth and Kvande (1998) argue that, whereas being a good father traditionally meant to generate income, a 'new-father image' (Brandth and Kvande, 1998, p. 294) has developed in recent decades. Accordingly, fathers are supposed to more strongly participate and get involved in childcare and household duties. However, Wall and Arnold (2007) note in their analysis that although the role of fathers appears to be changing, both cultural expectations and their effective behaviour have not yet substantially changed. Rather, they assume that fundamental structural changes are needed and expect that early childhood education and care (ECEC) policies add to this change by altering taken-for-granted understandings of women's sole caregiving responsibilities.

Although the normative policy signal is also relevant with respect to parental leave policies (PL), research in this area has strongly evaluated how these policies directly affect men's unpaid work, especially their time spent on childcare and housework. On the one hand, studies in this area mirror findings from research on parental leave and female employment. Hook (2006) investigated men's unpaid work and found that (long) parental leave, by reinforcing women's role as caregivers, reduces the time men invest in unpaid work. Conversely, men spend more time on unpaid work at home if parental leave is rather short and is also assigned to fathers.

One crucial condition for policies to unfold an effect on fathers' behaviours is that policies targeted at fathers are actually used by them. Even in countries that have integrated father quotas into their parental leave schemes, the share of the total leave taken by women is still very high (Morgan and Zippel, 2003; Datta Gupta *et al.*, 2008; Morgan, 2009). Furthermore, leave taking by fathers is influenced by norms about masculinity, fatherhood and gender roles in general. Therefore, a combination of generous income-related benefits and a father's quota appears essential to encourage leave taking by fathers (Bünning, 2015; Karu and Tremblay, 2018).

Finally, Bünning (2015) demonstrated that, based on panel data, the actual use of parental leave uptake makes a difference. Even a short paternity leave made fathers increase their childcare activities, and fathers who took a leave of more than two months or while their partner was working increased their share of housework.

### 2.4 Family policies and actual lived family models: the hypotheses

Existing research demonstrates how family policies affect specific elements of gendered work patterns, namely, on female employment and on women's or men's unpaid housework and childcare work. Conversely, where a household perspective has been assumed, research has often been limited to single or few countries, and/or the policy perspective has not been investigated explicitly (Musick *et al.*, 2020, p. 645).

This study fills a gap by combining a household perspective and a comparative approach to systematically theorize and empirically test the role of childcare policies and parental leave schemes for actual lived family models in European countries.

We formulate the first hypothesis relying on research on female employment as well as on studies emphasizing the normative and indirect effects of family policies on gendered work behaviours of women and men. From this perspective, family policies designed and intended to promote egalitarian family models (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh, 2014), that is, by generating both resource-related and normative effects, should affect households in their allocation of time and lead to a more egalitarian division of labour within households. Thus, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H1: Extensive childcare provision and egalitarian parental leave schemes are associated with a more egalitarian within-household division of paid work (Policy-Design Hypothesis).

It is important to note that even though there is ample evidence that extensive childcare provision increases *mothers'* employment (see, e.g. Ferragina, 2019), it is not evident that these policies influence the *patterns of paid work within households* more generally and in a relevant way. As women's maintenance in the labour market after childbearing does not automatically imply a fundamental change in gender-specific work patterns (Lewis, 2001), childcare policies may increase female employment somewhat, and thus maybe slightly modernize the male breadwinner model, but not lead to substantially more egalitarian family models (Lewis, 2001; Gornick and Meyers, 2003).

Current research also emphasizes varying effects of family policies emerging from different policy configurations (i.e. combinations of policies) and contexts. Based on this literature, we conclude that childcare and leave policies will be most effective in shaping lived family models if within a country, they are designed in a way that leads to a common goal. Specifically, generous childcare policies may most effectively lead to egalitarian family models if these policies are accompanied by according leave policies that promote fathers' roles in childcaring from the start. Conversely, if the different family policies do not consistently promote the same model, the effectiveness of each will be limited. Thus, we formulate the following hypotheses:

H2: The equalising effect of family policies is the greatest if effective childcare policies are combined with effective leave policies (Policy-Configuration Hypothesis).

The controversial debate on the effects of family policies on the division of labour between genders outlined above may be partly due to potential effects being contingent on various other factors. Particularly, the influence of family policies on the opportunities and decisions of parents depends on different individual factors, especially on their household situations, their own work-lifestyle preferences, and associated norms and beliefs related to childcare ideals (Becker, 1985; Petitclerc *et al.*, 2017).

Family policies may be particularly important when children are small, that is, during the time when children are most dependent. Parental leave schemes are used during the first years of children's lives and will thus have the most immediate effect on the within-household division of labour during this period. Regarding childcare supply, this period also seems to be crucial, as it is when households need to decide on how to organize childcaring. Empirically, most studies analysing the role of childcare services focus on small (i.e. pre-school) children (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh, 2014). Therefore, although we expect that family policies due to changing norms and family practises may have long-lasting effects on the within-household division of labour (i.e. still observable when the children are older), country differences in family policies should be most strongly reflected in varying patterns of actual lived family models among households with small children.

H3: Extensive childcare provision and egalitarian parental leave schemes most strongly affect the within-household division of labour of households with small children.

Motiejunaite and Kravchenko (2008) highlighted the role of prevalent gender-related norms and the interaction between these norms, goals of policies and actual lived family models. It can be assumed that households are most likely to adopt a family model in accordance with the model promoted by existing policies if they share the underlying gender norms (see also Hook, 2006). Conversely, households with strong conservative gender norms will probably not live an egalitarian family model even if the policy context provides advantageous conditions to do so. Thus, from this perspective, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H4: Extensive childcare provision and egalitarian parental leave schemes influence households most strongly if they share the underlying gender norms of these policies.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Individual-level data and operationalization

Data for the individual (household) level (see also note 10) are derived from the International Social Survey Programme-Module 2012 *Family and Changing Gender Roles IV ISSP (2016)*.<sup>2</sup> This module contains various questions about the household and attitudes towards the family and its organization. In addition, it contains questions on weekly hours on all three types of work (paid, care and housework) spent by respondents and their partners. To the best of our knowledge, these data provide the only dataset that enabled us to study the work behaviours of two partners within a household from a comparative perspective and include a rich set of attitudinal and norm-related variables. [Online Appendix A and Table 2](#) provide a systematic overview of the other data sets considered.

The analyses conducted in the present study concentrate on those parts of the population that are most likely affected by family policies and for which the reconciliation of paid work, care work and housework is relevant. The sample is restricted to respondents living in the same household with their partner and in a household with at least one child under the age of 17 years. To capture only those who are potentially employed, we excluded retired and permanently sick and disabled persons. To avoid including grandparents, we set 62 years as the age restriction for women and excluded women over 50 years with toddlers.<sup>3</sup> Since men, unlike women, have much fewer age-related reproductive limitations due to biological differences, we had to use a different filtering method for male respondents. Therefore, we did not use their own age but included and excluded male respondents based on the age of their partners with the aforementioned rules. Despite these restrictions, the total number of observations is still 4254 and between 71 and 375 per country.<sup>4</sup>

2 Data and documentation are available from <http://w.issp.org/menu-top/home/> (accessed March 29, 2019).

3 The assumption is that women give birth until around the age of 45 years. Given that children until 17 years are considered, the age limit for mothers is set at 62 years. However, if the children in the household are toddlers, the age limit is set at 50 years because in these cases, older women are more likely to be the grandmother than the mother of these small children.

4 This already excludes all cases that had missing values in other variables. The number of cases has decreased significantly, particularly due to the control variable *household income*.

The data provide information on the weekly hours spent on paid work by both parents. The consolidation of these two variables enabled us to identify households' actual lived family models, that is, the measurement for the within-household division of labour. Weekly hours spent on paid work by both partners are initially categorized into four groups: (1) no gainful employment (0 h per week), (2) marginal part-time (1–19 h per week, i.e. <50% workload), (3) substantial part-time (20–35 h per week, i.e.  $\geq 50\%$ ) and (4) full-time employed ( $\geq 36$  h per week, i.e.  $\geq 90\%$  workload).<sup>5</sup> Next, this employment information of both partners is used to construct a variable capturing different actual lived family models<sup>6</sup>:

- (1) *Male breadwinner*: The woman stays at home while the man represents the family breadwinner (i.e. typically works full-time).
- (2) *Modern male breadwinner*: The woman has a marginal part-time job (<50%), whereas the man is the main breadwinner (i.e. works full-time).
- (3) *Modern male breadwinner plus*: The woman engages in a higher percentage part-time job (>50%), whereas the man remains the main breadwinner (i.e. works full-time).
- (4) *Universal breadwinner*: Both partners work full-time.
- (5) *Universal caregiver*: Both partners work part-time.

The ISSP data also include variables on childcare and housework of both spouses. However, an inspection of these data indicates that reported involvement in childcare and housework results in unrealistic total work hours—that is, we observed a substantial group of respondents with the total work hours exceeding 24/7 h per week.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, we did not use this information for the classification of family models; instead, we focused on the analysis of paid work patterns.

5 These categories were based on a 40 h working week in correspondence the median of the data and the average full-time job in the EU according to Eurostat (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20180125-1> (accessed May 10, 2019)).

6 We excluded cases where women work full-time and men work part-time and households where the father stays at home and the mother is the breadwinner (independent of her workload). Altogether, this concerned 448 cases.

7 This is not necessarily a result of false information but might be due to the blurred boundaries between childcare and other tasks at home (Hook, 2006). For example, most parents do their laundry or cooking while taking care of their children. Since the ISSP asks for hours spent on care and housework separately, respondents may have correctly assigned hours to these tasks, but since they could not indicate that they did these tasks simultaneously, this leads to an overreporting of total hours if the different types of work are summarised. Indeed, we do not know whether this conceptual over-reporting affects all respondents similarly. For some respondents, the data may document the correct amount of time spent on housework and care, either because their work behaviour is not affected by the blurred boundaries between these types of work or because they anticipated this complexity and tried to provide realistic total hours. As a result, we think these data not only systematically overestimate total unpaid work at home but, even worse, the degree of overestimation likely varies between respondents. Lastly, the fact that the data all come from one person per household exacerbates the problem of data validity. While statements on the partner's gainful employment may be relatively valid, since the employment is more clearly defined and is often also regulated by fixed work hours or contracts, unpaid work is much more fluid and is, therefore, considerably more difficult for the partner to report in an exact number of hours.

To further validate the usefulness of our indicator, we calculated the mean and median of the indicated hours spent on care work for the different employment groups. We excluded all persons whose total work hours (the sum of paid work, housework and childcare) exceeded 112 h per week, as this number would mean an average of 16 h of work per day, with a minimum allowance of 8 hours for sleep, personal hygiene, commute and other essential activities. We considered all total numbers higher than that as unrealistic. The results of these analyses are shown in [Online Appendix B in Table 3](#) and indicate that our typology correlates with hours spent on unpaid work. This is further confirmed in a more differentiated analysis by gender (see [Table 4, Online Appendix](#)). Thus, these analyses document a strong link between paid work and care for those respondents with fairly realistic total work hours and, thus, corroborate our claim that our indicator based on paid work is a reasonable approximation of households' lived family models.

Based on previous research ([Dotti Sani, 2014](#); [Stadelmann-Steffen and Oehrli, 2017](#)), we integrated the following control variables: the respondent's gender, education and age; the presence of at least one toddler in the household (child up to the age of school age); number of children (up to and including 17 years old); type of neighbourhood (i.e. urban or rural); income difference between spouses and household income (absolute amounts in the respective national currencies are z-standardized separately for each country). More information on the variables, including descriptive statistics, can be found in [Online Appendix C](#).

### 3.2 Contextual level: measuring European family policy regimes

To operationalize our main variables of interest at the country level (i.e. childcare and PL), we derived data at the country level from the family policy regime typology by [Ciccia \(2017\)](#), who combined two fuzzy-set ideal-type analyses ([Ciccia and Verloo, 2012](#); [Ciccia and Bleijenbergh, 2014](#)). For each country included, [Ciccia \(2017\)](#) calculated a score for the parental leave policy area and a score for ECEC policies. We used these scores, which assume values between 0 and 1, to capture how different elements of ECEC and PL, respectively, are designed and combined in a country. High values describe a policy configuration that can be expected to promote egalitarian work patterns between men and women in a household. We argue that this measurement approach is a good middle way that acknowledges that family policies consist of various elements and dimensions that need to be considered jointly while still allowing an evaluation of the role of specific policies ([Hook, 2006](#)). Further information on [Ciccia's \(2017\)](#) measurement can be found in [Online Appendix D](#).

At the country level, we controlled for a communist past and economic development by including GDP per capita. We integrated the 'missing' family policy dimension, namely, cash benefits ([Thévenon, 2011](#)), by including public social expenditure on cash benefits for families as a % of GDP<sup>8</sup> (see also [Online Appendix C](#)).<sup>9</sup>

8 For both variables: Data from the OECD for the year 2012 (<https://stats.oecd.org/>).

9 We did not control for varying working time regimes. Given that our dependent variable was a relational measure and that we applied a rather broad definition of full-time employment for our coding, we considered this variation not to importantly affect our result.

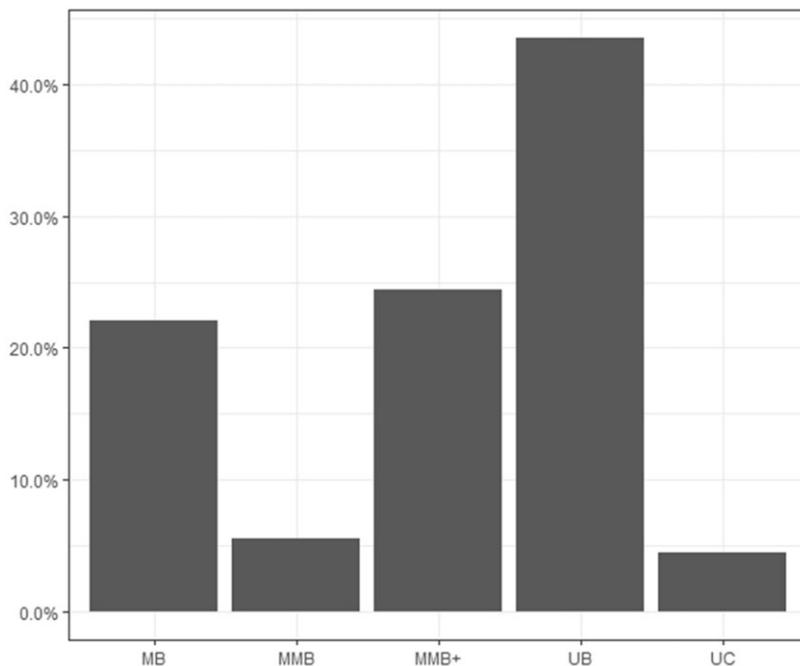
As previously mentioned, our research design cannot solve the well-acknowledged endogeneity problem in this area of studies (Olivetti and Petrongolo, 2017)—namely—whether the observed work patterns are chosen on the basis of present policies or whether it is the other way around (i.e. these current policies are a result of preferences and shaped by the already practiced labour division within households). Nevertheless, we further addressed this issue by including individual gender norms in our models and their interaction with the policy context (Hook, 2006, p. 656). We used the following question to capture gender norms: ‘Do you think that women should work outside the home full-time, part-time or not at all under the following circumstances: when there is a child under school age?’ We operationalized our norm variable in such a way that the response categories *should work full-time*, *part-time* and *stay at home* were transformed into the categories *egalitarian*, *modernized* and *conservative*. Given the rather large number of missing values on this variable (318 cases out of 4254 in total), we included a category for respondents for whom we do not have this information (‘NA Norms’).<sup>10</sup> It is important to emphasize that this variable is only available for the main respondent. Therefore, we do not know the extent to which these norms are shared by the respondent’s partner and, thus, describe the prevalent norms in the household.

### 3.3 Bayesian multilevel models

Outcomes of different family policy regimes were analysed by estimating random intercept models, whereby the within-household division of labour measured at the individual level is nested within countries.<sup>11</sup> To accommodate the ordinal scale of our dependent variable, we estimated ordered logit models.

We applied a Bayesian estimation approach, which performs better than maximum likelihood, especially with non-linear hierarchical models with a rather low number of observations at the contextual level (Stegmueller, 2013). We used the MCMCglmm package in R (Hadfield, 2010) and estimated Bayesian models with uninformative priors.<sup>12</sup>

- 10 ISSP contains several other variables related to gender ideology. However, we did not consider these alternatives mainly because they are not available for Spain and would therefore lead to the exclusion of this country. Moreover, further analyses presented in [Online Appendix C](#) reveal that the different items on gender norms are all significantly correlated.
- 11 Strictly speaking, our dependent variable is a household characteristic, which we aim to explain using individual-, household- and country-level factors. Although our data thus consists of a three-level structure, we measured the household information based on the information given by one respondent per household. To account for this mingling of individual and household characteristics, particularly for the possibility that men and women perceive household characteristics differently, we integrated interaction effects between the individual-level variables and the respondent’s gender into the model.
- 12 A fully Bayesian analysis requires the specification of priors for unknown parameters. We used non-informative normal priors  $N(0, 108)$  for the fixed effect parameters and inverse Wishart priors  $W^{-1}(2, 2)$  for the variance component. We let the respective models run 1 000 000 iterations, with a burn-in of 800 000 and a thinning of 1, unless otherwise indicated. We validated our Bayesian models with various tests and found that they all converged well. Their density plots show standardized normal distributions. Based on Heidelberg diagnostics and Geweke’s convergence diagnostics, we conclude that the chains have well mixed and converged.



**Figure 1** Distribution of actually lived family models.

*Notes:* Share of each family model in %. The family models presented are the male breadwinner (MB), the modern male breadwinner (MMB), the modern male breadwinner plus (MMB+), the universal breadwinner (UB) and the universal caregiver (UC).

*Source:* Prepared by the authors.

## 4. Empirical results

### 4.1 Family models across Europe

Initially, all five conceptual family models are actually lived by households in the countries under investigation (Figure 1). The universal breadwinner (i.e. both partners working full-time) is the most common model in our sample (almost 40%), whereas the modern male breadwinner (with women working less than 50%) and the universal caregiver models are least frequently lived. Depending on the country, however, this distribution varies considerably, suggesting that context-specific characteristics affect what family models households choose. The family models lived, arranged by country, can be found in [Online Appendix E](#).

Next, we compared the lived family models with the preferred family models to get an impression of whether the included households live according to their preferences or to what extent differences between preferences and reality can be observed. Table 1 illustrates that for both the male breadwinner and the modern male breadwinner, the largest proportion of respondents, with 43% and 54%, respectively, actually live the family model they prefer. A large proportion of respondents who live a universal breadwinner or universal caregiver model prefer a modern male breadwinner model. This result may highlight that these egalitarian models are often chosen for economic rather than normative reasons (Stadelmann-

**Table 1** Relation between lived and preferred family model

Lived family models		Preferred family models				Row total
		MB	MMB	UB	UC	
MB	N	403	327	81	129	940
	Row-%	43%	35%	9%	14%	22%
	Column-%	40%	18%	11%	17%	
MMB	N	196	693	122	265	1276
	Row-%	15%	54%	10%	21%	30%
	Column-%	20%	39%	17%	36%	
UB	N	379	703	478	291	1851
	Row-%	20%	38%	26%	16%	44%
	Column-%	38%	39%	68%	39%	
UC	N	25	74	27	61	187
	Row-%	13%	40%	14%	33%	4%
	Column-%	2%	4%	4%	8%	
Column Total	N	1003	1797	708	746	4254
	Column-%	24%	42%	17%	18%	

*Note:* The family models presented are the male breadwinner MB, the modern male breadwinner MMB (including the modern male breadwinner plus), the universal breadwinner UB and the universal caregiver UC. The grey highlighted cells show the families who live the model they prefer.

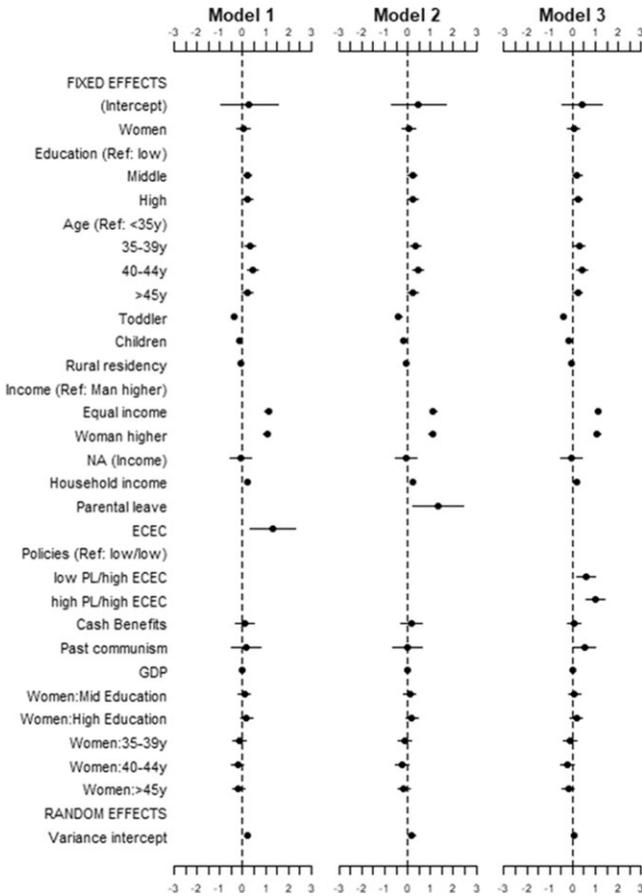
*Source:* Prepared by the authors.

Steffen, 2011). However, only 8% of those who prefer a universal caregiver model actually live in such a way. Across all respondents and family models, the households where preferred and lived family models are in accordance are highlighted in grey. The results clearly show that the majority do not live according to their preferences. What the underlying reasons for this gap are and to what extent family policies offer explanations require further investigation.

## 4.2 Regression results

Figure 2 indicates that most individual-level variables are systematically associated with the lived family models and confirm earlier research. The income difference between partners is among the strongest variables in the model. Not surprisingly, as the income of the woman increases in comparison to her partner's income, her share of paid work augments as well (i.e. related to a more egalitarian family model). Moreover, higher levels of education, school-aged children (compared with toddlers) and larger household income are associated with a higher probability of a more egalitarian division of labour, whereas households with many children exhibit less egalitarian family models.<sup>13</sup> Finally, with regard to age, parents under the age of 35 years are more likely to live a more traditional division of labour. Although the scope of this article does not include further investigation of these age patterns,

13 Women in our sample report more egalitarian divisions of labour in their household than men. The most obvious reason for this difference is that the female and male samples are different with respect to their household situations. However, separate models for women and men largely confirm our results.



**Figure 2** Explaining lived family models with family policies.

*Notes:* Log odds of ordered logistic random intercept models (mean as well as 95% credible interval), reference categories are: Men, Low education, age under 35 years, no toddler in the household (only children between school age and 17 years), living in an urban setting and for the income difference between spouses: man has a higher income.

*Source:* Prepared by the authors.

younger households might be more likely to be in a situation where the child(ren) are very young, with the traditional division of labour being a temporary status.

In our central hypotheses on the relationship between the family policy context and actual lived family models, the results in Models 1 and 2 demonstrate that policy design—namely, extensive ECEC and egalitarian PL—are systematically related to more egalitarian lived family models.

Further analyses presented in [Online Appendix F](#) corroborate that varying elements of parental leave schemes correlate with lived family models in a different way ([Figure 7](#), [Online Appendix](#)). Whereas long leaves are associated with less egalitarian family models,

monetary compensation, distribution of entitlements and incentives for fathers are positively related to an egalitarian division of labour. This corroborates the relevance of our encompassing indicator, capturing existing *combinations* of these different dimensions of parental leave schemes in European countries. Concerning external childcare, all sub-dimensions are positively (but not always significantly) related to more egalitarian division of labour within households (Figure 6, Online Appendix F).

In Model 3, shown in Figure 2, and in accordance with Hypothesis 2, we tested whether a combination of ECEC and egalitarian parental leave schemes (i.e. policy configurations) are paralleled by a particular strong reliance on egalitarian within-household divisions of labour for egalitarian family models. We recoded the two policy indicators into dummy variables, where each value above 0.6 is assigned as 1.<sup>14</sup> Since there is a strong positive correlation between the policies, we could not compute a classical interaction. Therefore, we generated a new variable combining the two policy dummies, resulting in three country groups: countries with extensive ECEC policies and egalitarian PL, countries with weak policies in both areas and some countries with extensive ECEC policies but less egalitarian PL. The combination of egalitarian PL with weakly developed ECEC was not found in any of the countries studied.

Model 3 in Figure 2 only provides partial support for Hypothesis 2. Compared with the policy combination where both policy areas are weakly developed, families organize themselves in a significantly more egalitarian way when strong ECEC policies are in place and/or PL take a rather egalitarian form. Further analyses show, however, that the driving force behind this variation is the design of ECEC policies. The marginal effect of a policy configuration with high values on both ECEC and parental leave is not significantly stronger than the marginal effect for a configuration with high values on the ECEC dimension but low values regarding PL. The reason for this finding might be the fact that only very few countries exhibit high values on the parental leave dimension. Moreover, even the most egalitarian countries in that respect—namely, Sweden, Norway and Iceland, with scores around 0.7—are still rather far away from the ideal. Therefore, with respect to leave policies, a truly egalitarian version of these policies has not yet been implemented at the time of data collection.

The ordered structure of the five defined family models can be criticized. Whereas the evolution from the male breadwinner model to its modernized versions and to the universal breadwinner model is a shift towards more egalitarian within-household divisions of labour, which can theoretically be clearly linked to more extensive family policies, the step from a universal breadwinner to a universal caregiver model (i.e. towards Fraser's, 1994 normative ideal) may be different. This development, which necessitates male behavioural changes (i.e. more care work and less paid work) probably requires somewhat different policy measures (see Bünning, 2015). We have therefore calculated various other models with different operationalizations of the dependent variable *lived family models*, taking into account this

14 The cut-off point was chosen based on the aim to distinguish between cases that clearly tend towards an egalitarian version of these policies (i.e. must therefore have a value of considerably over 0.5, and those countries with more limited policies). However, using the same threshold for both policy areas, we could not go beyond 0.6, as both categories must contain a few cases for further calculation and only 5 out of 21 countries show an average score of more than 0.6 for parental leave.

potential non-linearity.<sup>15</sup> As the results do not differ significantly in these additional analyses, we conclude that our family model operationalization with five categories is useful.

Models 4–6 (Figure 3) demonstrate that the relationship between family policies and the within-household division of labour is systematically moderated by the presence of young children. In accordance with Hypothesis 3, family policies are more strongly related with the within-household division of labour of those households that, based on the age of their children, most strongly use these policies. Model 4 shows that whereas extensive ECEC policies are associated with more egalitarian family models for households with small children, the ECEC coefficient is not systematically different from zero for households with older children. However, the interaction model with parental leave (Model 5) reveals that the marginal effect of PL does not systematically vary between households with small and older children. Finally, in accordance with Model 4, the significant interaction terms in Model 6 confirm that policy configurations including ECEC are particularly conducive to egalitarian employment patterns if toddlers are in the household.

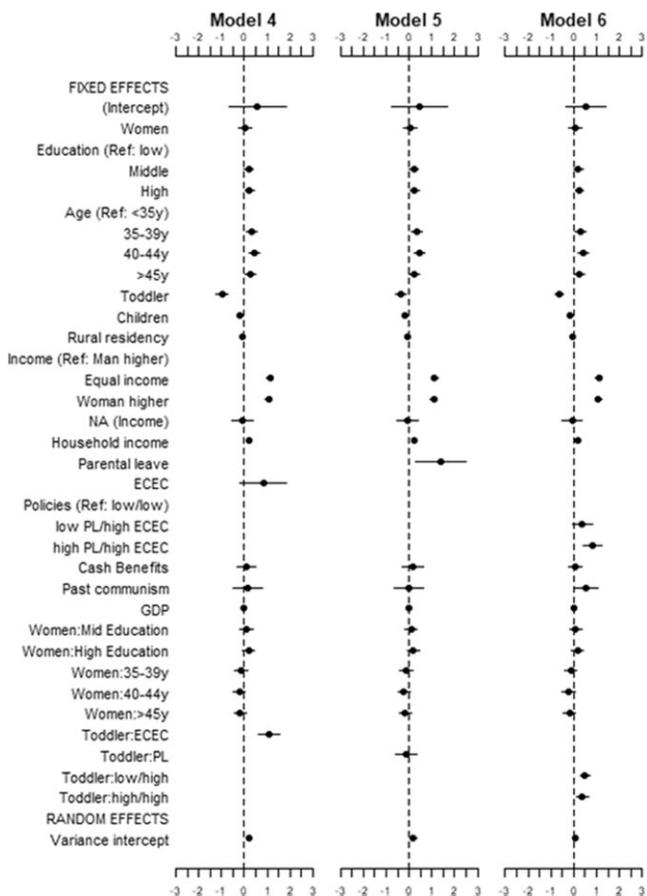
To test Hypothesis 4, in the three models of Figure 4, we included the norm conceptions of the respondent. They confirm that conservatively minded people tend to report more traditional intra-family work assignments than people with egalitarian attitudes. This is a first indication of the relevance of Hypothesis 4—in other words—that a more detailed analysis of the interaction between norms and policies could be important. What is most significant at this point, however, is that including the gender norms does not substantially affect the conclusions reported above. Although this finding does not exclude endogenous processes between policies and norms, it excludes the possibility that the significant relationship between the policy configurations and actual lived family models is solely the result of reverse causality.

The models in Figure 8 (in Online Appendix G) further depict the interaction effects between individual norms and family policies. These analyses corroborate that ECEC and egalitarian PL positively relate to egalitarian lived family models. However, these additional analyses also reveal that neither the ECEC nor the parental leave effect systematically varies between households with varying norms regarding the gender-specific division of labour. Advantageous policy conditions not only enable households with egalitarian norms to live according to the egalitarian family model but are also associated with more egalitarian family models of households with conservative norms. Thus, these findings may indicate that the policy effects are broader than anticipated in Hypothesis 4 and can also be observed among conservative households. This result further lends support to the conclusion that the relationships we document are not merely endogenous relationships between norms and policies.

## 5. Conclusion

Family policies—namely, childcare and leave policies—are important to increase women's employment and can affect work patterns within households. We aimed at an integrative and comparative perspective by investigating whether and how these policies are associated with the within-household division of paid labour from a comparative perspective. We

15 (1) Four categories, where the universal breadwinner and the universal caregiver models are merged into one category; (2) three categories, with the three forms of the male breadwinner combined in a single category and (3) six categories with the additional inclusion of female breadwinner families.



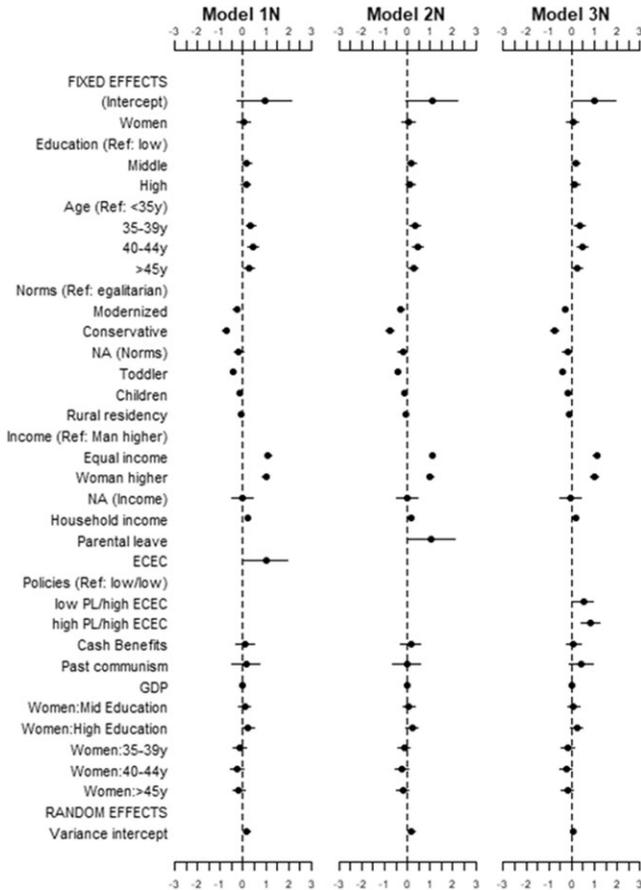
**Figure 3** Group-specific policy effects—toddlers.

*Notes:* Log odds of ordered logistic random intercept models (mean as well as 95% credible interval), reference categories are: Men, Low education, age under 35 years, no toddler in the household (only children between school age and 17 years), living in an urban setting and for the income difference between spouses: man has a higher income.

*Source:* Prepared by the authors.

estimated Bayesian multi-level models and compared households in 21 European countries. To capture country differences in available family policies, we relied on recent and encompassing data provided by Ciccia (2017). Our primary aim was to analyse to what extent actual lived family models in European countries are a reflection of country-specific family policy contexts.

Our empirical results corroborate the importance of ECEC and egalitarian parental leave designs. Most important, households organize themselves in a more egalitarian way if corresponding ECEC policies are available. These effects are statistically robust for households with young children and persist across varying model specifications, especially if individual norms on the ideal within-household division of labour are integrated. Based on our cross-



**Figure 4** Group-specific policy effects—norms.

*Notes:* Log odds of ordered logistic random intercept models (mean as well as 95% credible interval), reference categories are: Men, Low education, age under 35 years, no toddler in the household (only children between school age and 17 years), living in an urban setting and for the income difference between spouses: man has a higher income.

*Source:* Prepared by the authors.

country comparative perspective, the positive association between ECEC and actual lived family models is not limited to households that exhibit egalitarian gender norms. Rather, it can also be observed for households that do not share the underlying egalitarian norms. Conversely, our descriptive results illustrate that within-country variance is large. For example, even in a country like Sweden, famous for its egalitarian family policies, a substantial part of the households in our sample live more conservative family models than we might have expected (in accordance with [Motiejunaite and Kravchenko, 2008](#)).

The results regarding parental leave schemes are somewhat less clear-cut. While we find positive correlations between the parental leave indicator and actual lived family models, a closer look at the interaction between childcare and PL, however, clearly shows that

generous childcare policies are the driving force behind this association in our statistical models. If we look at the specific fuzzy set scores of PL, only five out of 21 countries have a value above 0.6 and even the most egalitarian country in that respect, Sweden, is rather far away from the ideal (different from the childcare dimension; see [Table 7 in Online Appendix D](#)). We, therefore, argue that based on the observed policies in the European countries, we cannot really assess the full potential of how leave schemes and related policy configurations affect the within-household division of labour. One reason is conceptual: The theoretical ‘effect’ of leave schemes on women and men is difficult to assess ([Gornick and Meyers, 2003](#); [Morgan and Zippel, 2003](#); [Datta Gupta et al., 2008](#); [Ray et al., 2010](#); [Blofield and Martínez Franzoni, 2015](#)). Moreover, existing leave policies in the countries under investigation do not come close enough to an equality-promoting version, according to [Ciccia \(2017\)](#). However, such a design would probably be necessary to more strongly involve fathers in child caring and housework ([Bünning, 2015](#)). In this context, future research needs to engage more thoroughly with the precise mechanisms between leave policies and the within-household division of labour and to reflect on suitable research designs to better investigate these matters.

Our study has limitations. The main problems are related to data limitations and the issue of endogeneity. In terms of included countries, the operationalization of family models and the potential to identify causal effects, we were highly constrained by the availability and depth of existing data. Hence, we see our analysis as a study that adds new insights into existing literature in the field, which has been struggling with similar challenges. Previous studies have provided important findings concerning the (causal) effect of these policies on women’s and men’s paid and unpaid work behaviours while lacking a comparative and household perspective. In this vein, we also consider our study as a first step into a comparative research agenda delving deeper into the effects of family policy design on the gender-specific within-household division of labour. Our results document a gap between theoretical ideals, as for example proposed by [Fraser \(1994\)](#), the current policies and lived family models, as well as substantial variance between households within countries (i.e. within-family policy regimes).

By limiting the analysis to paid work, it does not take into account the full complexity of family models. Rather, it is an examination of the distribution of paid work, which we consider to be a reasonable approximation of paid and unpaid work patterns within households. For future research, however, to explore family models in their entirety, unpaid work must be appropriately captured in surveys and taken into account.

Moreover, our analysis opens paths for future research. A particularly important field concerns the role of parental leave schemes, which requires further research to assess the theoretical and empirical effects of varying policy designs. Given the limited empirical variance in this area, case studies or experimental approaches could be particularly valuable strategies. Finally, further effort is needed to identify policies that support a shift from a universal breadwinner to a universal caregiver model. The previous and current discussions have been very much concentrated on the transition from a male breadwinner model to a universal breadwinner model, that is, on the question of how to bring both parents, especially mothers, into the labour market. However, the transition to a universal caregiver poses a different question, namely, how to make both parents, especially fathers, invest *less* time in paid work. It is very questionable whether the same policies will do both.

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## Supplementary material

Supplementary material is available at *SOCECO Journal* online.

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