

Men in care

WORKPLACE SUPPORT FOR CARING MASCULINITIES

Carving out space for caring masculinities. Results from a European study.



Men in Care. Workplace support for caring masculinities | Action grant VS-2018-0417



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ABOUT MiC PROJECT

Men in Care is a European 3-year project (March 2019-Feb 2022) of 12 national organizations (universities, social partners and NGOs) co-funded by the European Commission under the EaSI program (PROGRESS axis). Men in Care (MiC) aims to improve workplace conditions to promote men taking caring roles in seven countries (Austria, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Poland, Slovenia and Spain). MiC will assess how policies and workplace cultures can change to enable men to become more active in caring for children, elderly, partners, co-workers and friends. MiC partners are: National Distance Education University (project coordinator, Spain), Fundación 1 de Mayo (Spain), Verein für Männer- und Geschlechterthemen Steiermark (Austria), European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence (Germany), University of Iceland, REFORM (Resources Centre for Men, Norway), Jagiellonian University (Poland), PLinEU (Poland), Diversity Hub (Poland), The Peace Institute (Slovenia), the Association of Employers of Slovenia and the Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia. Fourteen [associated organizations](#) from seven countries also participate in the project.

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AUTORSHIP

This report has been written by Irina Fernández-Lozano and Teresa Jurado-Guerrero from UNED (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Spain), based on the information contained in MiC national reports by Marc Gärtner (AT, DE), Elli Scambor & Oliver Posch (AT), Ralf Puchert and Francesca Elsey (DE), Paco Abril Morales, Cristina Castellanos-Serrano, Juan-Ignacio Martínez-Pastor, Alicia Martínez and Jesús Cruces (ES), Kolbeinn Stefánsson, Guðný Björk Eydal and Ingólfur V. Gíslason (IS), Reaktor-Resarch in Action (MK), Ole Nordfjell and Danel Hammer (NO), Marta Warat, Ewelina Ciaputa and Ewa Krzaklewska (PL) and Živa Humer, Majda Hrženjak and Mojca Frelih (SI). Contact: tjurado@poli.uned.es.

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1. MiC objectives and the EU Directive on work-life balance objectives

The project *Men in Care* (MiC) aims to analyse and improve organizational conditions for men carving out space for caregiving in a wide sense (Hobson & Morgan, 2002). Its main focus are organizational players, structures and cultures that can help men to do what they – according to many studies – want, but fail to do: be more involved in caring roles, responsibilities and professions. **Care is defined in this project as encompassing emotional support, showing affection, providing attention to a partner's needs, children's needs, and the needs of the elderly, work colleagues and other family members, as well as self-care.** MiC will identify and share best practice models for achieving a high level of work and life balance to enable both men and women to have time and flexibility for care, and reduce the gender bias of family support measures in the public and private sectors. A first step to do this was the necessary analysis of the social and legal contexts in which these best practice models are developed, which is the purpose of the eight national reports¹ and this comparative cross-national report.

The objectives of this project are in line with the Europe 2020 objectives and the [Directive \(EU\) 2019/1158](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers (EU Directive on work-life balance). Initially this project wanted to make recommendations for the design of the Directive, but its fast approval, when MiC only had run for three months, redirects this objective. Now, in the eight contextual country reports and in this transnational report we will refer to the national legal situations in 2019-2020 and comment on some differences between national norms and the EU Directive.

It is expected that this project will benefit the individuals and companies involved in the partner countries and the wider society. Both men and women will profit from improved work-life balance as men increase their care role, resulting in **more women starting or maintaining employment**. This will positively impact families' economic prosperity, social inclusion and health. Companies will benefit from a **more motivated and productive labour force**, as well as less absenteeism, reduced fluctuation, increased satisfaction of employees and increased reputation of the organization among business partners and in a society at large. Also, the implementation of work-life balance measures can lead to an increase in capital gains, which supports the claim that work-life balance measures benefit businesses.

¹ The eight countries participating in MiC are: Austria (AT), Germany (DE), Spain (ES), Iceland (IS), Norway (NO), Poland (PL), Slovenia (SI) and North Macedonia (MK).

2. Diagnosis of the situation in eight European countries.

This diagnosis is based on the exploitation of the harmonised European Labour Force Survey microdata and Harmonised Time Use Data conducted by the UNED, on secondary international sources (EIGE, Eurostat, OECD and the International Parental Leave Network), and national sources provided by the eight partners of MiC².

2.1. Gender gaps in care and domestic work

It is widely accepted in sociological and economic literature that gender gaps in the labour market are to a great extent due to the ‘double burden’ that most women face, especially (but not only) those in middle age who live with a partner and have childcare responsibilities. This happens although men and women actually want to share care more equally (Grunow, Begall, & Buchler, 2018), and although men’s attitudes have changed through the last decades. The eight countries participating in MiC are no exception, although they differ not only in the magnitude of the gender gap in unpaid work and care but also on how it has evolved over recent years.

In all eight countries, more women than men aged 25 to 44 (a stage of the life course with large needs of work) participate in routine household activities and the time they spend on average is higher. Overall, the gender gap in unpaid domestic work (including care) is especially noticeable in North Macedonia, Poland and Austria³, as shown in Figure 1, while the lowest one can be found in Norway. However, the gender gap does not perfectly correlate with men’s lower contribution to unpaid work in absolute terms. Of all population analysed by MiC, **Polish women are those who contribute more to unpaid work in absolute minutes, while Austrian, German and North Macedonian men are those who contribute less in absolute time.**⁴

In the same way, there is not a perfect trade-off between unpaid work and paid work hours, as complemented by **Figure 2**, which only focuses on parents with children aged 1 to 2, when care needs are particularly high. In this sense, **women in Poland and Slovenia bear a particularly heavy double burden** (due to long hours of both paid and unpaid work).

² See national reports for more details: <https://www.men-in-care.eu/results>.

³ The percentages of total unpaid care work performed by women are: 72.5% (MK), 70% (AT), 69% (PL), 67% (SI, ES), 65% (DE), 58% (NO). Source: European Time Use Surveys (HTUS), Eurostat, and Charmes (2019) for MK.

⁴ More recent but methodologically imprecise data for 2015 show similar gender gaps in cooking and housework, and on caring for and/or educating their children or grandchildren (EIGE, 2019)

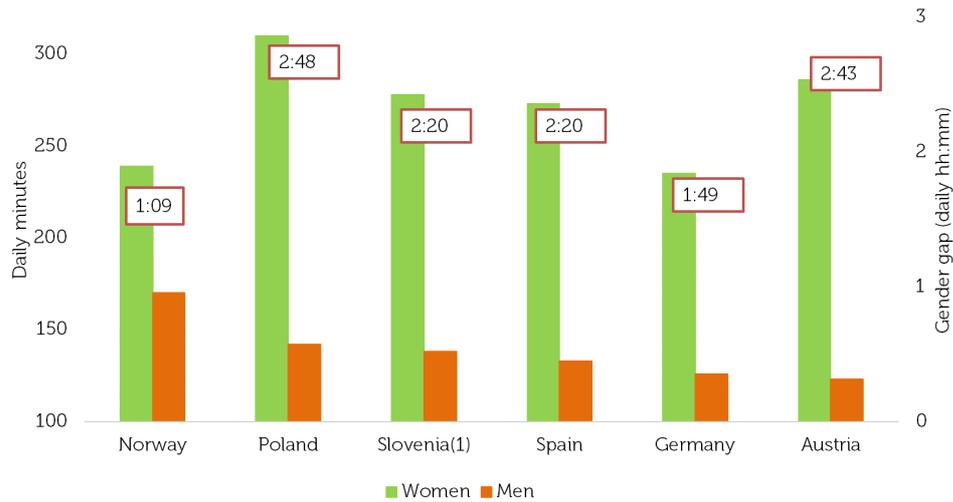


Figure 1. Daily minutes spent and gender gap in household and care activities by people aged 25-44, 2010. Source: own elaboration with Harmonized European Time Use Surveys (HTUS), Eurostat. No comparable data available for Iceland and North Macedonia. (1) Data for Slovenia refer to 2000. The following activities within own household are included: food management, household upkeep, making and care for textiles, gardening and pet care, construction and repairs, shopping and services, household management, childcare, help to an adult family member and unspecified household and care activities. Figures in boxes (hh:mm) show the daily gender gap.

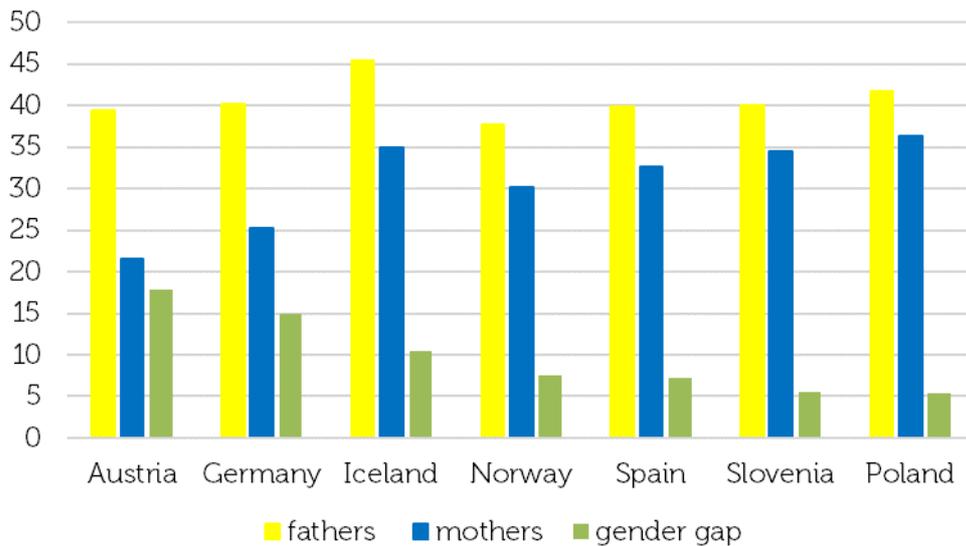


Figure 2. Weekly paid work hours and gender gaps of parents with youngest child aged 1-2, 2017. Note: For Norway data are for 2016 and for child aged 0-1. No comparable data available for North Macedonia. Source: Eurostat and country studies.

These gender inequalities of work performed for social reproduction are questioned due to unfairness but there are also other reasons to support a reevaluation of individuals' involvement in care understood in a wide sense as MiC project proposes. First, an ageing society strongly demands this general involvement, even if some part of care work is outsourced to the market, because many tasks cannot be outsourced or people do not like to. Second, psycho-sociological research has found evidence of the benefits that men's increasing participation in care related tasks has for them, "including reduced risk-taking and improved physical, mental, and sexual health" (van der Gaag, Heilman, Gupta, Nembhard, & Barker, 2019, p. 45). The difficulties in balancing work and life in conjunction with a lack of gender equality produces many negative outcomes for families. Social scientists have found that this reality is related to a delay in family formation and to a decrease in final fertility rates (Adsera, 2011) and to more unhappiness among women due to an overload with family tasks (Mencarini & Sironi, 2010).

2.2. Trends towards Caring Masculinities

Many men do not like to devote their lives only to careers and work, and to pay the price of absence from their families and social environments (Scambor, Wojnicka, & Bergmann, 2012). In all participant countries excepting North Macedonia, men are more affected by overwork (desired work hours being lower than real work hours) than women, with gender differences especially remarkable in Austria and Germany⁵ (Eurofound, European Working Conditions Survey, 2015). The demand for a shift in men's access to work-life balance resources is expressed timidly yet, given the strongly rooted 'male breadwinner/female caretaker' model, as well as other structural economic factors.

Trends to caring masculinities are slow and differ by country. They become visible in two ways: in men's participation in care work in the family and their use of fathers leave. Men are getting more and more involved in unpaid work, especially in care of children as the MiC country reports show. In Norway, fathers have increased their daily care work of children in the last decades on average half an hour until 2010 (Table 5 in country report). In Spain, fathers with children in preschool age have also increased their participation in housework and care between 2003 and 2010 (see Figure 17 in country report). In Poland, between 2000 and 2010 among couples with the youngest child below age 6, men participated slightly more in household and significantly more in the care of children (12 pp increase) (Figure 8 in country report). Likewise, the gender gap in care of family members has narrowed similarly in Slovenia since 2005. In Iceland, fathers' participation in care of their children has increased constantly from 2000 and since the legislation on equal rights of both parents to paid parental leave was enacted. In North Macedonia, the current legislative framework, especially due to the limited entitlement of fathers to paternity or parental leave, hinders change towards a more equal distribution of care work.

Repeated surveys among parents of their first-borns in different countries show clearly how fathers increase their share in care of children, not only during the paid parental leave but also after that. Interestingly, we have no information on changes in the last decade in Germany and Austria, both countries with the lowest involvement of men in unpaid care in 2010.

⁵ In Austria the percentages are 25% (women) and 32% (men), in Germany 25% and 34%, in Spain 28% and 34%, in Norway 28% and 29%, in Poland 20% and 26%, in Slovenia 24% and 28% and in North Macedonia 40% and 39%. No data available for Iceland.

Related to a higher involvement of fathers in the care of children is the increasing uptake of fathers' leave, when it is non-transferable and highly paid (see respective country reports, OECD 2019, Parental Leave Network 2019 and **Table 1** for legal provisions).

Fathers in Iceland have always used on average all their non-transferable entitlements, the take up was around 100 days between 2003-2009 but after austerity measures it settled a just under 90 days. In Spain, as much as 80% of employed fathers had used their entitlement to paternity leave (an average of 30 days) in 2018. In Norway 71% of men who fathered children in 2013 and 2014 used the 50-days father's quota or more days of paid leave. In Slovenia, fathers' use of paid paternity leave increased from 70% of fathers who used 15 paid days in 2004 to 81% of fathers in 2017. So, **in Iceland, Norway, Spain and Slovenia fathers show high take-up rates (70-90%) of their 15 to 90 days fathers' leave**, which is surely related to a leave design that offers highly-paid (90 to 100% of earnings) and non-transferable individual leaves.

In Poland, men's use of the fully paid statutory paternity leave of two weeks was of 51 men per 100 live births and on average they used 12.3 days in 2018. In Germany, in 2016 the non-transferable two-month parental benefit was claimed by up to 39% fathers per births with an average of 3.4 months used. In Austria, men's take-up rate is 31% within the income-dependent childcare family allowance without information on average use length (2016). **In Germany, Austria and Poland around one third to half of the fathers make use of fathers' quotas.** In Germany wage replacement of the non-transferable parental leave is only at 65% of previous net earnings and it is topped up at 1.800€ a month. In Austria until 2017 there was no statutory entitlement to paternity leave and parental leave is a family right. So, in these two countries the relatively low payment of leaves for fathers may explain the low uptake rates. In Poland parental leave is a family entitlement, but men have 13,5 days of an individual paternity leave paid at 100%. In fact, the uptake rate in Poland is higher than in Austria and Germany because it is better paid, but it is lower than in the other four MiC countries. Probably, this is due to a conservative hegemonic culture and very gendered family policies at a whole. No data are available on the take-up rates or average proportion of wage replacement of paternity leave in North Macedonia⁶ (the maximum of seven days is subject to collective work agreements and covered by companies) but since 2018 positive developments in terms of legislative changes have been announced. As an EU candidate country, North Macedonia is also expected to implement the EU Directive 2019/1155 on work-life balance. The government is trying to legislate a leave for fathers and a shared parental leave models for parents. The latter will be a family right and the wage replacement is foreseen to be 100% of the salary. The new Law project on labour relations has been in a prolonged process of drafting and consultations with different stakeholders⁷.

To sum up, caring masculinities are advancing (slowly) in some countries with respect to men's participation in unpaid work and their use of fathers' leaves (Norway, Iceland, Slovenia and Spain), while there is much less evidence about men's increasing participation in care in Germany, Austria, North Macedonia and Poland. **According to research and gender equality activism, best policy practice is the establishment of individual, non-transferable and highly paid leaves for fathers** (Castro-García and Pazos-Moran 2016, Duvander and Johansson 2012, [MiC associated organization PiiNA](#)). These leaves have to be as long as possible to become equal to mothers' leaves, e.g. the longest

⁶ For parental leave, only 0.6% of beneficiaries were men in 2019.

⁷ It is foreseen to enter in a parliamentary procedure followed by a public debate during the summer and get passed by the autumn 2021.

individual and **gender equal** leaves are found in Spain since 2021 (16 weeks for each). Additionally the job must be protected during leave, payment ceiling must be high enough to ensure the great majority of fathers get their previous wage nearly totally replaced (Sigurdardottir and Garðarsdóttir 2018) and it must be a right of the father to take the leave when and how it is best for the child (not subjected to employers' potential pressures and heteronomous flexibility, cf. Kvande 2009).

How does the work-life balance directive compare to this theoretically best practice and to MiC countries situation? Briefly, **there are several shortcomings of the EU directive on work-life balance to further promote caring masculinities**: 1. The provision of 10 days of paternity leave paid at sick level and two months of non-transferable parental leave to be paid at a level set by Member States has defined standards below the existing entitlements in Iceland and Spain with respect to length and wage replacement level, and below Norway, Slovenia and Poland with respect to the payment level. 2. The prescription that the needs of both the employer and the worker shall be considered for decisions on how and when to use leave departs from mothers' rights to use leave according to their children's needs. Thus there is a double standard by which the promotion of caring masculinities leads to a regression of the former prioritisation of family welfare over companies' organisational issues. 3. On the positive side, Member States must ensure that dismissal on the grounds that a worker has applied for or has taken a leave is prohibited. 4. The Directive may lead to longer individual and non-transferable entitlements to leave in Austria, Germany, Poland and North Macedonia as a candidate country⁸, but the wage replacement levels may be lower than in the other MiC countries. We have to wait for the implementation of the Directive in the countries in the coming years, latest at 2024, to see if uptake rates of fathers in Austria, Germany and Poland grow with the reforms and the use does not fall in Spain and Slovenia.

2.3. Gender gaps in work and work-life balance

Aside from legal incentives to care, men are getting more involved in care for other reasons: more gender egalitarian values, increasing preferences to share time and experiences with children, and growing situations of need. More mothers work longer hours, have more job responsibilities, work on afternoon or atypical shifts and therefore fathers decide to step in. Also, older men care more of their frail elderly partners when over age 80. Last, statutory rights to flextime and paid leave of absence for caring reasons promote men taking care also of other family members besides children.

In most European Union member states current work-life balance arrangements have negative outcomes for women's employment and career opportunities. **In all participant countries, employment rates are lower for mothers⁹ with small children (ranging from 46 in North Macedonia to 81 in Slovenia) than for childless women aged 25 to 49** (see details in figures in country reports) or compared to fathers (ranging from 77 in North Macedonia to 96 in Slovenia). The employment rates for childless women oscillate from 80 to 87% in Austria, Germany, Poland, Slovenia, Iceland and Norway, amount to 73% in Spain and drop to 50% in North Macedonia. Childbirth diminishes female employment rates, since they fall in all MiC countries, despite the wide diversity in figures. In Iceland and Norway mothers of older children, i.e. from age 3 to 12, display similar or higher employment

⁸ As a country candidate for the EU, North Macedonia is obliged to follow the EU law as well as good practices of member states. Breast-feeding leave right might be applicable to the father too with newer regulations.

⁹ At least one children less than 6 years old.

rates than childless women, which seems to indicate that female work life balance in these Nordic countries becomes easier as children grow. By contrast, in the remaining western and southern countries **once employment rates drop with motherhood, they do not reach previous levels even if children grow up**. This shows that work-life balance is partly solved by women refraining from jobs to care for children. Fatherhood is not penalised, and on the contrary, fathers have higher employment rates than childless men in all MiC countries.

A particular challenge that all eight countries face (as well as others in Europe) is the integration in the labour market of mothers with a low educational attainment, which to a lower extent also applies to lower educated fathers (see figures 3 of country reports). As seen in Figure 3, the difficulties of mothers with lower secondary education or less to continue on the job is a common pattern in all studied countries. Work care conflicts push most lower educated women out of paid employment compared not only to their male counterparts but also to other women, which may be related to different opportunity costs of precarious jobs, more traditional gender values and class bias of some policies of work-life balance (e.g. flat rate payments for parental leave which are more attractive to mothers with lower earnings).

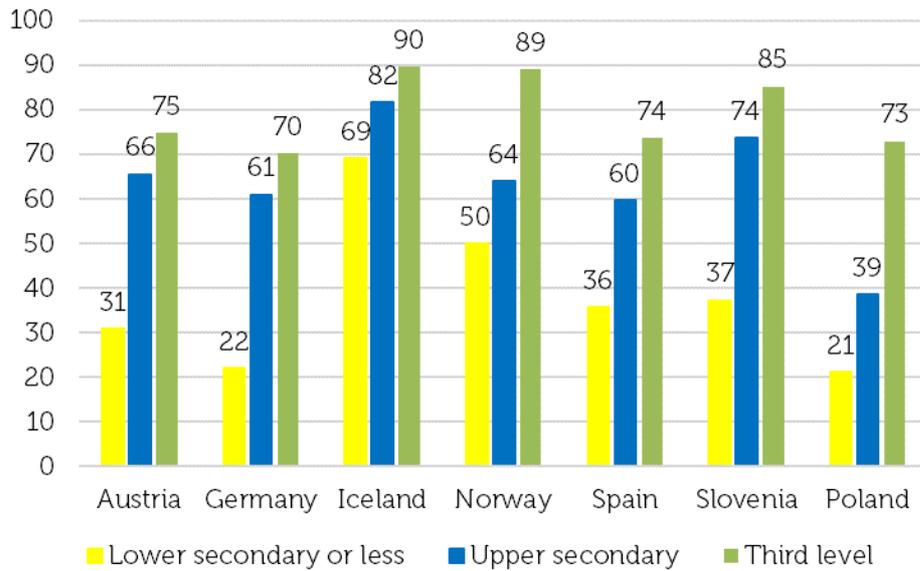


Figure 3. Mothers (youngest child 1-2 years old) employment rate by educational attainment, 2017. No comparable data available for North Macedonia. Source: Eurostat.

Gender gaps in the labour market find their roots, to a great extent, in an unequal division of unpaid work, as seen in the previous section. Which countries penalise mothers less? Three of our participating countries clearly outstand in terms of mother’s employment: Iceland (85% of mothers whose youngest child is 1-2 are employed), Slovenia (77%) and Norway (76%). In these countries we can find some of the lowest gender gaps in domestic work too, which may point to men taking over more caring roles. However, it must be pointed out again that correlations among the two phenomena (labour participation of mothers and gender gap in domestic work) is not perfect. Motherhood penalisation not only depends on men’s caring behaviour; the reasons for gender inequalities in work hours, salaries or access to power positions are deeply rooted in economic and cultural structures. On the one hand, policies have a great capacity to shape societal behaviours towards gender (in)equality if they are (not) designed in a gender-neutral way (family policies for male earner and female caregiver). On the other hand, the working world is in general developed around the male abstract worker (Acker, 1990) supposedly without any private commitments. Thus, mothers and carers in general meet many cultural, structural and ideological obstacles that explain their different labour market attachments. However some of the country reports describe how motherhood penalisation has been decreasing from 2007-2017.

During the last decade, an increasing trend in mothers’ employment can be seen in all countries excepting those (Norway and Slovenia) who already had high initial levels. With respect to fathers, the general trend¹⁰ has been to maintain high employment rates, with the exceptions of Norway (sustained, slight decrease), Poland (sustained, slight increase) and Spain (a V shape reaching the bottom in 2013). So, gender gaps between mothers and fathers were diminishing over time until the pandemics in 2020¹¹.

¹⁰ No comparable data available on parents working hours for North Macedonia.

¹¹ This report as well as national reports will be updated when post-covid19 data are made available.

With respect to work hours of parents with children aged 1 to 2, the highest gender gaps in paid work hours are found in Austria and Germany (Figure 2), where mothers work on average 22 to 25 hours a week whereas in the remaining countries they work between an average of 30 to 36 hours, longest in Poland, Iceland and Slovenia. Mothers may balance work and care the best in Austria and Germany due to their job hours being more similar to school hours, but at the cost of fathers being more absent from home there, too.

Shorter working weeks of mothers can be caused by a higher diffusion of shorter working weeks in female dominated jobs (public sector), more female part-time jobs or more working time adaptations of mothers. The latter is the case in Austria with the highest gender gap in Europe in terms of part-time work for family reasons: 0.8% male employees aged 25-45 versus 26.9% for female employees. In MiC countries male's highest working time reduction rate is found in Austria and the lowest in Norway, Poland and Spain (0,1-0,2). In Austria also, most women reduced hours and the lowest female rates are found again in Norway, Poland and Spain (1,6-4,4%) (see more detail in country reports). As a result gender gaps in part-time work for family reasons are very high in Austria and Germany and lowest in Poland, Norway and Spain. So, part-time work may diminish the work to family conflict but at the cost of creating high gender gaps in the access to full-time jobs that guarantee economic independence to women.

3. How can society support caring masculinities

3.1. Time policies that guarantee income maintenance.

Sociological literature has provided three main explanations to the involvement of spouses in domestic work (including care work)(Hook, 2006): relative resources (of individuals within couples), gender ideology and time availability. This theoretical proposal is a good starting point to understand the conditions that policies have to fulfil to promote the involvement of men in care work. First, policies must guarantee sufficient resources to men and women so that care decisions within households are not taken out of material constraint. Second, policies have to be designed in a gender neutral way, that is, they must not directly nor indirectly promote inequalities between male and female beneficiaries. Third, policies must provide caregivers (all individuals, indeed) with sufficient quality time, as care tasks are time consuming and most people do not want to outsource them completely (e.g. the responsibility over the care of a newborn baby). According to our analyses and following the EU Directive on work-life balance, gender neutral work-life balance policies that enable caregivers to devote time to care can be generally classified as follows:

- > **Access to flexible work arrangements**, which implies employers' legal obligation to a certain adaptation of employees' schedules to their care needs (including protected reduced schedule, flexihours /days, remote work and other schedule adaptations).
- > **Time off work to respond to (unforeseen) care demands**, such as carers' leave and time off work on the grounds of *force majeure*. This would comprise the right to take some hours/days off to respond to (in many cases unforeseen) care needs, such as caring for suddenly ill children /relatives.
- > **Periods off work to care for a newborn**. This would comprise parental, maternity paternity and any related time off work such as breastfeeding leaves.

The main legislation at national levels related to these policies in the eight MiC countries is analysed in Table 1, with a special focus on family versus individual entitlement/use and on income maintenance. This information may be subject to changes, in particular in the case of remote work due to pandemics. Information is referred to December 2020 and it is not necessarily comprehensive of all existing measures, but refers to the most relevant ones concerning the diagnosed gender gaps.

As stated before, laws are very important drivers in the promotion of caring masculinities, because they become institutional reference points for people's care decisions (normative character of laws), and in addition they offer economic incentives to opt for one or another strategy to reduce work to life conflict. Through these two mechanisms they also influence care strategies of couples. As mentioned for parental leave, the type of entitlement (individual versus family right, non-transferable versus transferable) and the level of wage replacement (paid versus non paid, high versus low wage replacement) are crucial design principles to promote a gender equitable or a gender biased use of time policies. Table 1 shows again a grouping of MiC countries into two groups:

First, countries where policy designs favour gender equitable use of WLB measures, such as Iceland, Norway, Slovenia and Spain. Second, countries where many entitlements are for the family as a unit and not for the citizen or where wages are not or lowly replaced, as in Germany, Austria and Poland.

However, in most countries designs of some policies still directly or indirectly target women and create gender biases in its use against fathers:

- > In Austria, Germany, Norway, Poland and Slovenia, employed mothers are entitled to breastfeeding leaves, while in Spain each parent, mothers and fathers alike are entitled this (breast)feeding leave.
- > In Austria, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Poland and Slovenia parental leaves, even if they are based on individual rights and well paid, include a part that is transferable from one parent to the other. In these cases mothers end up taking these (for cultural and economic reasons), which creates a great gender bias in WLB at the beginning of the family cycle, which later is more difficult to revert, as mentioned above. Only Spain has a non-transferable leave for birth and care of an infant of 16 weeks without any transferable part. Yet, also in this case some design details may constitute a barrier for men's use of full-time parental leave and for taking turns with the mother.
- > In North Macedonia, the design of maternity, paternity and parental leave is the most asymmetric. Working mothers have the right to a fully paid, 9 month maternity leave, covered by the Health Insurance Fund. Fathers are entitled up to seven days of paternity leave if recognized in their collective agreement (companies cover this leave). Breastfeeding leave is allowed only for the mother. However, this could change with the new legislation.
- > In all countries work hours reduction for care reasons (part-time work) leads to an important reduction of wages, because no payment is foreseen or this is low, as in Germany, which leads to mothers using these measure nearly exclusively and short working hours affecting mothers over fathers (see Figure 2).

Table 1. Work-life balance policies in MiC countries around 2020

	AUSTRIA	GERMANY
1) Flexible work arrangements.	<i>Elternteilzeit</i> (parental part time), <i>individual right</i> to a reduction of regular working time (minimum 20 %) and right to return to original working time. No financial support. Until child is seven years old in large companies (+20 employees) or until four years in small companies. Protection against dismissal. Working Mothers are entitled to ‘nursing’ leave of 45 or 90 minutes per day, depending on her working hours.	The <i>Teilzeit- und Befristungsgesetz</i> created an individual right to part-time work during Elternzeit and three years after (until child is 6 years old). The Parental Allowance plus (Elterngeld plus) supports part-time of parents financially (from €150 to €900 per month); a special bonus is paid for parents who both reduce their working time to 25-30 hours/week (Partnerschaftsbonus). With protection against dismissal. Working mothers have a right of 60 to 90 minutes for breastfeeding per day.
2) Carers leave, force majeure time off work	Employees who cannot go to work because of care for a sick close relative living in the same household are individually entitled to paid nursing leave. The limit is one week p.a. (Krankenpflegefreistellung).	In 2012, an individual right was introduced that enables employees doing family care to reduce their working hours to up to 15 hours per week over maximum two years; losses of income are compensated by the state, partly by benefit, partly by a loan.
3) Paternity/maternity/parental leave	Leave regulation has changed often. It is a family right . Since 2019, 20% of the parental leave period (up to three years) is reserved for the second partner. Since 2017 leave is paid with a flat rate (max. 33,88€ per day). Parents can also choose an income-dependent benefit 80% of net income for a max. of 426 days. Since September 2019 employed fathers living with the mother can ask their employer for a one-month paternity leave paid at flat rate level (22.60€ per calendar day), but the employer must agree (no right).	Parental leave is individual and non-transferable . In 2007 an income-dependent payment (65% of net wage with a limit of €1,800 per month) for fathers on parental leave was established. When both parents apply for at least two months of parental allowance, the full 14-month period can be used up. Since 2015 the entitlement to leave benefit can be extended by reducing the monthly amount (to up to 28 months). Employment protection during this time.

Table 1. Work-life balance policies in MiC countries around 2020 (cont.)

	ICELAND	NORTH MACEDONIA
1) Flexible work arrangements	The Equal Status Act requires employers to make the necessary arrangements for employees to balance family life and work (flexible work arrangements, leave from work for parents in the case of serious or unusual family circumstances).	Reduced working hours (50%) allowed for either parent if they are both employed or for a self-supporting parent, when the child has special needs . The reduced working hours is considered full-time hours of work, and the right to salary compensation is exercised in accordance with the social welfare regulations (Article 169). Breast-feeding leave is currently allowed only for the mother for a child up to one year old. It is calculated as an additional hour of the day-time work break (in total of 1,5h daily) and it is fully paid at 100% of the wage (article 171).
2) Carers leave, force majeure time off work.	Individual right to leave of absence for a certain number of days per year to take care of their children when they fall ill are part of collective agreements.	According to the Labour Relations Law the worker has a right to fully paid leave for personal or family matters (getting married, childbirth in the case of fathers, and/or death of immediate family member) up to seven working days (article 146). The worker can take up to three-month unpaid leave for whatever reasons, including parental leave for a child up to three years of age (articles 147 and 170). Caring for an ill family member or other reasons not specified above are not regulated by the law, hence are not paid.
3) Paternity/maternity/parental leave.	In the year 2000 each parent became entitled to three months individual non-transferable paid parental leave and three months transferable (3+3+3). The social insurance pays working parents 80% of their income up to a certain limit. Other parents receive a lump sum benefit. Since 2021 the leave was extended to 12 months, 6 months for each parent, but they can transfer 1.5 to each other.	Individual right to maternity leave of up to nine months (15 in case of multiple birth/adoption) paid at 100% by social security, which is transferable to the father in case of mother's death or if she resigns. First 45 days are compulsory. Parental leave (3 months, unpaid) is mother's entitlement. Employers may offer a paid leave related to family matters, which fathers can use after birth/adoption for seven days, depending on the respective collective agreement.

Table 1. Work-life balance policies in MiC countries around 2020 (cont.)

	NORWAY	POLAND
1) Flexible work arrangements.	<p>Employees individually entitled to flexible working hours, as long as carried out without significant inconvenience to the enterprise. Part-time work is allowed until child is 10. Regulation on home office and telework, prior to corona an exception, are now under review.</p> <p>Working mothers are entitled to one hour off per day with pay to breastfeed (family right). Reduced working hours for reasons of “age, health, social or welfare” is a formal individual right, with the right to return to the previous position.</p>	<p>Telework is regulated by article 67 of the Labour Code.</p> <p>If an employee has an individual right to parental leave, he or she can apply for unpaid reduced working hours to combine work and care for a child (for 32 weeks). Mothers, who work at least four hours per day and breastfeed, are entitled to breastfeeding breaks at work.</p>
2) Carers leave, <i>force majeure</i> time off work	<p>Individual entitlement of parents to 10 days paid sick leave a year to care for ill children (below 12), extended to 20 days after pandemic. Employees individually entitled to statutory leave with pay for several reasons: care for hospitalised child, care for child with injury, chronic illness or disability (until 3 years), care for person in terminal life face (until 60 days). If parent, spouse, cohabitant, or registered partner is in need of care, employees are entitled to up to 10 days' leave annually. This leave is not compensated with social security, albeit, for many paid leave is laid down in collective or local agreements.</p>	<p>1. Individual right to leave of 2 paid days (or 16 hours) each year off for parents with at least one child up to age 14.</p> <p>2. Employed women and men can also take an individual statutory leave for specific reasons, as to care of dependents (up to 60 days, until child turns 8 years old/14 years old if disabled, and up to 14 days for other family members). These leaves are paid at 80 per cent of earnings.</p>
3) Paternity/maternity/parental leave	<p>Since 2018 the total length of 100% paid leave is 46 weeks, and father's quota (or for same sex parent) is 15 weeks. To stretch leave to 59 weeks with an 80 % monthly coverage is a much-used option. The length of the father's quota is then of 19 weeks. A part of parental leave is a family entitlement (16 weeks) and a mother's quota (15 weeks).</p> <p>In addition, fathers are individually entitled to 14 days leave of absence straight after birth. This leave is not compensated from the public, albeit, for most fully paid leave is laid down in collective or local agreements.</p> <p>An unpaid childcare leave up to 36 months after birth is granted to each parent as individual right.</p>	<p>1. In 2010 a 100%-paid paternity leave was introduced up to 2 weeks, as individual right for a father and not transferable to the mother/family member.</p> <p>2. There is also a 80%-paid parental leave with family entitlement, 34 weeks per family granted to both parents, i.e. transferable.</p> <p>3. An unpaid childcare leave up to 36 months is granted to the family and one month is reserved for each parent.</p>

Table 1. Work-life balance policies in MiC countries around 2020 (cont.)

	SLOVENIA	SPAIN
1) Flexible work arrangements.	<p>Statutory individual right to unpaid family related part-time work for children up to age three or longer if two children. 50% or more of the previous time must be worked.</p> <p>Mothers can take a 1-hour daily work reduction to breastfeed babies up to 18 months (9 first months paid at minimum wage).</p>	<p>Statutory, unpaid individual right to reduce working hours for family reasons (until child is 12, etc.). In 2019 an individual right to adaptations of the work schedule for family reasons was introduced. Also, individual right for each parent to a one hour (breast) feeding leave (with no salary reduction) until a baby is 9 months old. In some companies these hours can be accumulated into weeks of absence. Paid by employer.</p> <p>A new law on teleworking conditions has been launched after Covid-19 crisis.</p>
2) Carers leave, <i>force majeure</i> time off work.	<p>Each employee has an individual right to 7 days to 6 months (in extreme cases) leave. 80% of individual's average earnings paid, by the employer.</p>	<p>Unpaid individual right to a 2-3 years' leave of absence for care of dependent family members. Job position is maintained as well as, in case of care for children, social security contributions. Paid 2-4 days leave in case of illness /death of relative (up to 2nd degree of consanguinity) and other personal reasons.</p>
3) Paternity/maternity/parental leave.	<p>Individual paternity leave of 30 days and maternity leave of 14 weeks, both paid at 100% of average monthly earnings. In addition, working parents have an individual entitlement of 165 paid calendar days (with payment ceilings) until child in first grade of elementary school, of which 30 belong to the mother are non-transferable, but the father can transfer all his days to the mother.</p>	<p>In 2021 individual entitlement to a 100%paid, non-transferable leave for birth and care of infant up to age 1 (16 weeks) for both parents. Leave may be paid at flat rate for workers without sufficient previous contribution to social security.</p>

3.2. Societal support for male caregivers

There is a variety of ways in which society can contribute creating the proper environment for men to engage in care activities, either paid or unpaid. Male caregivers need first of all to gain visibility, through lobbying, research, campaigns and other far-reaching coordination activities. In recent times, networks, campaigns and organizations promoting alternative forms of masculinity have spread in several European countries, such as the German office *Men in Kindergartens* or the Polish campaign to promote the use of paternity leave (*"Pole! Go on paternity leave!"* 2008). More examples can be found in the contextual reports for **Germany and Poland**.

In **North Macedonia**, trade unions, employers' associations and other **stakeholders** have been recently participating in the **public consultation for the new labour legislation**, which is expected to regulate paternity, parental and breastfeeding leave for fathers, harmonizing legislation with the EU standards. Trade unions play indeed a decisive role in putting work-life balance issues in the political agenda. In **Iceland**, this is the case for the demand of a shorter work week for all working population. In some countries (like **Norway**) some companies have already pioneered this change, with positive results in terms of productivity and employees' wellbeing. A 40-hours work week is quite unsustainable for most dual-earner couples with childcare responsibilities, especially for those in the low and middle-class who cannot outsource domestic work. Therefore, families tend to adopt the 'one-and-a-half' earner model (Hook & Wolfe, 2013) by which it is women who end up decreasing their participation in the labour market. Public discourses on work-life balance should underscore the business case for serious commitments with employees' work-life balance needs, without any gender (or other) bias. Providing employees with family and personal time is in companies' best interest too.

The introduction of company certificates can enhance companies' adoption of good practices. In some countries, Family-friendly certificates are acquiring increasing popularity among companies, but, as in the case of **Slovenia** or **Spain**, they do not introduce a clear gender perspective, so indicators end up being targeted at women. Gender equality plans are important instruments to contribute overcoming these biases.

In general, companies are taking steps to create parents-friendly environments in workplaces through a variety of measures: from establishing "office core hours" for meetings to mentoring systems for men on leave. As our **Austrian** and **German** partners point out, how effective these measures are depends substantially on their being based on (space and time) flexibility for employees, and having a long-term scope. Supervisors and co-workers engagement with male employees' adopting work-life balance measures is crucial. As our Icelandic partners put it: "[e]mployees may be more attuned to such [supervisors' and coworkers' support] signals as they are more immediate and in any case, costs of caring are accrued on the floor rather than in vaguely worded policy documents". Organizational cultures and best practice models are more thoroughly analysed in the **case studies within the national reports**, summarized in the organizational transnational report.

To end with, it must be underscored that care goes beyond parenting. A further step to take by national and company level policies must be to overcome the assumption that care equals parenting, as the variety of caregivers' models will increase with the ageing of society, and alternative forms of care (as care for the elderly or disable) should gain more visibility.

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