

## WHO CARES? European fathers and the time they spend looking after their children

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This project examines the time spent by co-resident fathers on childcare across the European Union during the period 1994-2001, combining descriptive comparison with explanatory analyses. Individuals' characteristics as well as institutional factors will impact on a father's ability to spend time with his children.

Where household data are used longitudinally, the basic approach for the analysis is panel data modelling. Estimates show cross-national variation in paternal time and in the proportion of childcare done by fathers (as opposed to mothers). Intrinsically linked to levels of paternal time is the issue of the gender division of labour. With regard to the latter, the dominant sociological and economic theories are particularly interested in explaining how parents combine care and financial duties towards their children. Two competing models in this context are those of specialisation and non-specialisation. Whilst the findings routinely reflect the employment of both strategies by parents, the key finding is that they are defined not only by the mother's financial contribution, but also by the father's contribution to care.

### Key research questions and findings

**Question:** Do fathers spend more paternal time if the mother is participating to a greater or equal extent in the labour market?

**Answer:** Across Europe, parental household employment type was correlated with whether or not a father spent substantial paternal time. Fathers in households where mothers were participating to a greater or equal extent in the labour market were found to be more likely, on average, to spend substantial paternal time than would be predicted were there not a relationship between the two variables. This was particularly the case for those fathers in the small percentage of households where the mother was the breadwinner.

Fathers in households where mothers were participating to a lesser extent in the labour market were found, on

average, to be less likely to spend substantial paternal time than would be predicted if there was no relationship. However, in work poor households, in which neither partner worked more than 15 hours per week, it was found that fathers were more likely to spend substantial paternal time than would be predicted if there was no relationship between substantial paternal time and parental employment type.

**Question:** Do fathers spend more paternal time in countries with more father-friendly legislation?

**Answer:** National legislation (in 1997) clearly fell into three categories of father-friendliness, which clustered regionally according to Esping-Andersen's typology of welfare regimes. In Scandinavia, synonymous with the social democratic regime type, the most extensive father-friendly provision was observed alongside the highest levels of paternal time in Europe. Similarly, other European countries showed corresponding levels of father-friendly legislation and paternal time, as was predicted by the hypothesis. The bivariate analysis carried out at the country-level suggested some correlation between father-friendly legislation and paternal time, but both the UK and Ireland appeared as outliers in the analysis.

**Question:** Do fathers earn more and work longer hours than non-fathers?

**Answer:** Fathers did indeed earn more than non-fathers, *ceteris paribus*. On average, across the EU-14, child-free men earned 5% less and pre-fathers (those men who would become fathers within the next couple of years) earned 2% less than fathers. In terms of weekly working hours, however, there seemed to be very little difference between fathers, pre-fathers and child-free men. Fathers were not working longer hours than non-fathers.

**Question:** Do fathers, who spend more paternal time, work fewer hours and earn less than fathers spending less paternal time?

**Answer:** Firstly, and in contradiction to the expected finding, there was a positive relationship between paternal time and earnings. Fathers who reported spending a high or medium level of paternal time earned

around 1% more than other fathers. Secondly, the analysis found a negative relationship between paternal time and weekly working hours. All other things being equal, fathers who reported spending a high level of paternal time worked slightly shorter hours than all other men. A new relationship became evident: fathers who spend more paternal time work fewer hours and earn more per hour than fathers who spend less paternal time.

## Project data and methods

The European Community Household Panel (ECHP) is a particularly unusual data source since it is both longitudinal and comparative. Through repeat annual interviews, this longitudinal survey follows men in the context of the households within which they live, for the eight years from 1994 to 2001. The survey provides information on time spent by respondents looking after children as well as rich socio-economic contextual information.

The analysis focuses on a representative sub-sample of all working men, employed and self-employed, across the European Union. Results are reported for resident social fathers, i.e. men who are living in a household with dependent children for whom they care, regardless of their legal or biological connection to the child.

The ECHP contains annually collected longitudinal data for 14 countries (Figures 1 and 2). With panel data it is possible to analyse labour market outcomes over an individual's lifecourse. The life-changing event observed here is the onset of fatherhood. With fixed effects models, which are the predominant statistical specification employed in the project, panel data provides the possibility of controlling for unobserved heterogeneity due to unobservable person-characteristics which are assumed not to change across time.

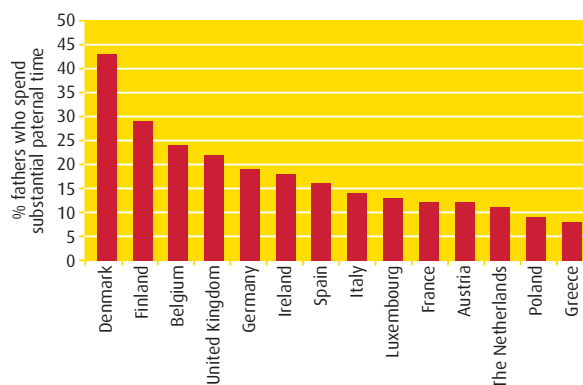
## Paternal time across Europe

- While mothers across Europe still spend more time caring than fathers, there are considerable cross-national differences in father's participation in childcare.
- Fathers in the Nordic countries spend the most childcare time and fathers in Greece and Portugal spend the least.

## Policy recommendations

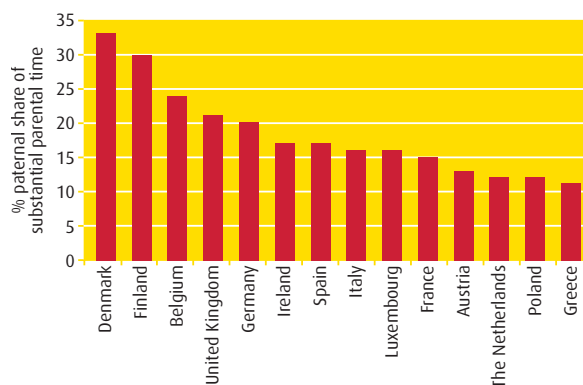
If policy makers strive to increase fathers' time with their children, including those fathers of a lower socioeconomic background, then they should adopt policies with the following characteristics:

- Fathers should have greater access to leave from employment.



**FIGURE 1. THE PERCENTAGE OF ALL FATHERS WHO SPEND SUBSTANTIAL CHILD CARE TIME**

Notes: 1. Substantial childcare time is defined as more than 28 hours per week. 2. Children are under six years old.



**FIGURE 2. THE PERCENTAGE OF SUBSTANTIAL CHILD CARE TIME DONE BY FATHERS (AS OPPOSED TO MOTHERS) BY COUNTRY**

- There should be high wage compensation for such leave.
- Fathers should be able to work flexibly to combine employment with childcare responsibilities.
- Increased child maintenance payments and state-funded childcare provision may reduce the need for fathers to work such long hours, which could rather be spent looking after their children.

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