



Federal Ministry for
Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,
Women and Youth



Who takes care of children, household and the elderly?

A dossier on the societal dimension of a private question

Dear readers,

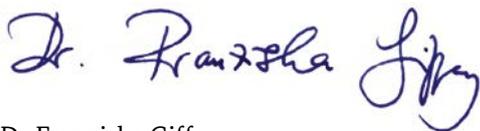
Women and men are both confronted with the challenge of reconciling professional obligations and care responsibilities—for example childcare or caring for relatives. Despite this, women perform an average of 1.5 hours more unpaid care work per day than men, and at the same time work fewer hours in paid employment. This means that they are worse off in terms of income and pension entitlements.

The aim of gender equality policy is therefore to create good framework conditions that enable women and men to allocate and divide their employment and care work in partnership. To this end, the experts for the Second Gender Equality Report of the German Federal Government recommended that the government should reshape employment and care work. We have already initiated a range of measures to this end—such as the Good Childcare Services Act (*Gute-KiTa-Gesetz*). And we want to tackle a number of other things that are also enshrined in the coalition agreement—such as all-day care at primary schools.

All these measures are bundled in the Federal Government's Gender Equality Strategy. This strategy is a milestone that sets standards for government action in this as well as in future legislatures. In addition, a focus of the German presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2020 will be to support women and men in sharing paid and unpaid care work equally.

Our aim must be to enable equal partnership and fair sharing of paid and unpaid care work between women and men. This dossier is intended to provide suggestions in this regard. I hope you will find it informative and wish you an interesting read.

With best regards



Dr Franziska Giffey

German Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth





The project was funded by the REC programme 2014–2020 of the European Union (Grant Agreement No. 820208).

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Introduction

Gender equality is possible—if unpaid care work is distributed equally between women and men.

When it comes to care work, that is childcare, elderly care, cooking and cleaning, it still appears that women are primarily “responsible”. In any case, they spend considerably more time each day on unpaid activities in the household and in the family. Who does the laundry? This question is rarely asked at all, and if it is, the answer is usually: the woman! This also applies to cooking, picking up the children from day care and supporting elderly relatives.

People decide for themselves how they organise their everyday life. However, these decisions are influenced by their surroundings. As a result of this interplay of private decisions and social surroundings/circumstances, we observe how divergently the life courses of women and men develop: in many cases men are more consistently employed, and for longer. Women, on the other hand, spend an average of 52.4 percent more time—the equivalent of 87 minutes—than men on unpaid care work each day. This is the so-called Gender Care Gap.

This unequal distribution is also a societal problem. Due to the taking-on of care work, women are less likely to pursue paid work that would provide them with financial security up to and in old age. Men are less involved in care work, even though such care work is essential for social life and economic growth.

Why are life courses diverging? Why do people become “carers” or “earners”? What factors influence the distribution of unpaid care work? And how can (unpaid) care work and employment be allocated and distributed more fairly? This dossier provides answers to these questions. It summarises the results of a research report (Gärtner et al., 2020).

After all, equal allocation of employment and care work is a prerequisite for reducing inequalities in society in order to enable all people—regardless of gender—to lead self-determined lives.



Status quo

The Gender Care Gap—what it means and what results it has

Women perform more (unpaid) care work—why this is a societal problem

On average, women in Germany earn less and thus have lower independent pension rights than men. In addition, unpaid care work is unequally distributed between women and men: women spend considerably more time on this per day than men.

Whenever people become responsible for a child or the care of relatives, an important course is set. Now, unpaid care work in the household—childcare, cooking, cleaning or elderly care—is on the increase, and couples or individuals are re-allocating their employment and care work. First, care work is redistributed within the family and, second, support is sought for part of the care work. However, how women and men allocate their employment and care work does not only depend on their own preferences. The distribution is also influenced by the legal, occupational and infra-structural conditions as well as by social values and images.

The result

- Women take on more unpaid care work: Women are less likely to take up paid work which will provide them with financial security up to old age and can also guarantee them an independent livelihood.
- Men take on more paid work: The pressure to provide financially for the family rests mainly on them. Men do therefore have less time to take over care work responsibilities.

Therefore, sharing of care work on a partnership basis can be a key to the equal participation of women and men in the labour market.

Gender equality can be measured: Gender Pay Gap, Gender Pension Gap, Gender Care Gap—and how they interact

The inequality of women and men in working life, in securing their own livelihood and in the distribution of unpaid care work can be described with several indicators. Some of these indicators show a gap between men and women with regards to salary, pensions and time allocation. This is illustrated by the Gender Pay Gap, Gender Pension Gap and Gender Care Gap.

INDICATOR Gender Pay Gap

How much less than men do women earn, on average and in percentages?

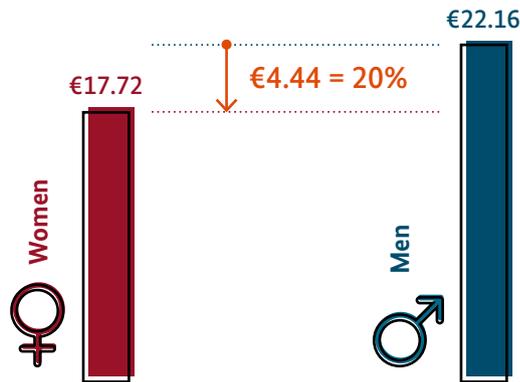
This is illustrated by the Gender Pay Gap—the pay gap between women and men. In 2019, the difference in gross hourly wages in Germany was 20 percent. Women earned an average of €17.72 per hour before tax, and men €22.16 (Destatis, 2020).

Why is this the case?

- Women occupy fewer management positions and are more likely to work in lower-paid sectors and professions than men. This is also known as horizontal and vertical segregation of the labour market. It reinforces the tendency to allocate care work and paid work according to gender stereotypes.
- Women interrupt or reduce their employment more often, for example for phases,
 - in which they care for infants or relatives in need,
 - in which they work part-time due to child-care or elderly care.
- The processes of wage determination as well as the wage structures bear risks of discrimination.

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Gender Pay Gap



In 2019, women earned an average of €4.44 per hour less than men. The Gender Pay Gap was thus at 20 percent.

What differences exist in Germany and in Europe?

In 2019, the Gender Pay Gap for the whole of Germany was 20 percent; for western Germany it was 21 percent and for eastern Germany seven percent (Destatis, 2020). This puts Germany in second-to-last place at an EU level (Eurostat, 2019).



Women: more frequently in employment— but often in part-time or precarious work

An increasing share of women are in employment: in 2018, it was 72.1 percent—the employment rate for women thus is only five percentage points lower than for men (Destatis, 2019a). However, the so-called employment volume of women has remained the same: this means that more women are in part-time employment or the number of paid hours is spread over more women. In 2018, almost 48 percent of women in employment subject to social insurance contributions were working part-time, compared with just under eleven percent of men (BA Statistik, 2019b).

Part-time employment has a double effect on income: first, part-time workers on average earn less than full-time workers. Second, part-time workers earn less per month because they work fewer hours.

Moreover, women predominate in precarious employment. In 2019, 2.85 million women and 1.80 million men worked exclusively in so-called marginal employment (BA Statistik, 2020). Moreover, 64 percent of all female employees aged between 25 and 55 earn too little to secure their livelihood in the long term. The corresponding figure for men is at 31 percent (Pimminger, 2015).

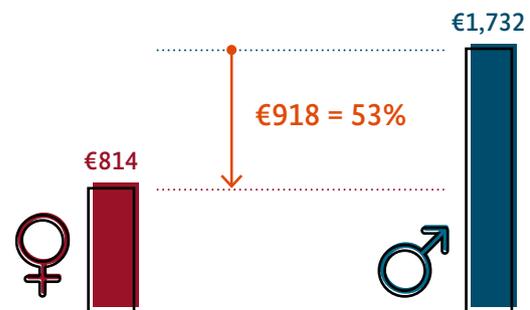
INDICATOR Gender Pension Gap**How do claims to retirement benefits differ between women and men?**

The Gender Pension Gap indicates the differences in pensions. In 2015, women in Germany received 53 percent less in pension payments than men (BMAS, 2016). Only independent entitlements were taken into account in this. Derived entitlements such as surviving dependants' pensions were not included. The Gender Pension Gap therefore does not primarily describe poverty among women in old age, but rather differences in independently secured old-age provisions—as an indicator of the chances of actual application and realisation in old age.

Why is this the case?

- Women have a lower employment rate (particularly in western Germany) and a lower number of total years of employment
- Women work to a lesser extent, that is more often in part-time employment (especially in western Germany)
- Women have less continuous employment histories—mainly because they interrupt their working lives more often and for longer periods due to family responsibilities and care
- Women earn less than men and are more often employed in mini-jobs that are not subject to social insurance contributions.

Since all these factors interact and accumulate over the entire employment history/career, the Gender Pension Gap is significantly larger than the Gender Pay Gap.

Gender Pension Gap

In 2015, women in Germany received 53 percent less in pension payments than men (BMAS, 2016).

What differences exist in Germany and in Europe?

In 2015, women in western Germany received 58 percent less in pensions than men; in eastern Germany the difference was 28 percent (Wagner et al., 2017). In 2014, the gender-related pension gap in the statutory pension insurance system was 42 percent in western Germany and 23 percent in eastern Germany (Grabka et al., 2017). In Scandinavian and Eastern European countries (for example Estonia, Denmark, the Czech Republic, Hungary) the pension gaps are comparatively small. In contrast, they are highest in Luxembourg, Spain and Portugal. In this comparative analysis,

1 Status quo

eastern Germany ranks fifth within Europe with 20.1 percent, while western Germany comes in on 15th place with 48.8 percent (Hammerschmid/Rowold, 2019).

INDICATOR Gender Care Gap

More unpaid care work means less time for paid work

The Gender Pay Gap and Gender Pension Gap show the differences between women and men in terms of income and pension provisions based on paid work. Unpaid care work also plays a role in this regard: the amount of time individuals spend on unpaid care work each day determines how much time they have left to devote to other areas of life such as employment/paid work.

The distribution and allocation of unpaid care work between women and men and across households is illustrated by the **Gender Care Gap**. This indicator for the gap due to (unpaid) care work has been developed by the Expert Group for the Second Gender Equality Report of the German Federal Government.

The Gender Care Gap—what it shows

The Gender Care Gap in Germany has now been calculated for the first time, based on the 2012/2013 time usage surveys by the Federal Statistical Office (Destatis). It shows how much more time (in percent) women spend daily on unpaid care work than men.

Women

Women generally perform daily, less flexible activities, such as cleaning, cooking and washing, which generally cannot be postponed and are more difficult to reconcile with the demands and constraints of employment.



The Gender Care Gap includes the following activities and tasks (all including travel times):

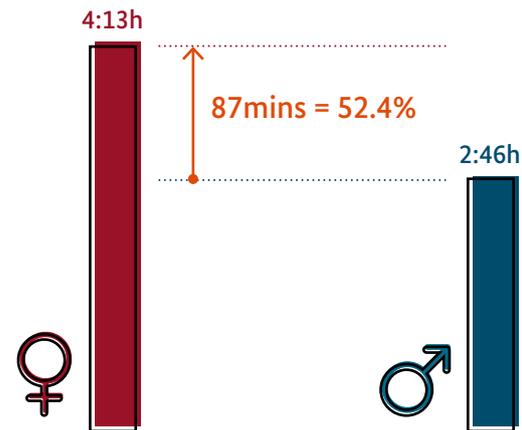
- housekeeping (including repair work, gardening, care of animals/pets),
- care and supervision of children and adults as well as
- voluntary work and informal help for other households.

In 2012/13, the Gender Care Gap stood at 52.4 percent. This means that women spend 52.4 percent more time (4 hours and 13 minutes) on unpaid care work than men (2 hours and 46 minutes). This amounts to 87 minutes daily (Klunder, 2017).

This proves that there is a gender-based division of labour in Germany. Across all educational, occupational and age groups as well as household

arrangements, women perform more unpaid care work on a daily basis than men.

Gender Care Gap



At 4 hours and 13 minutes, women allocate 52.4 percent more time for (unpaid) care work than men with 2 hours and 46 minutes (Klunder, 2017).

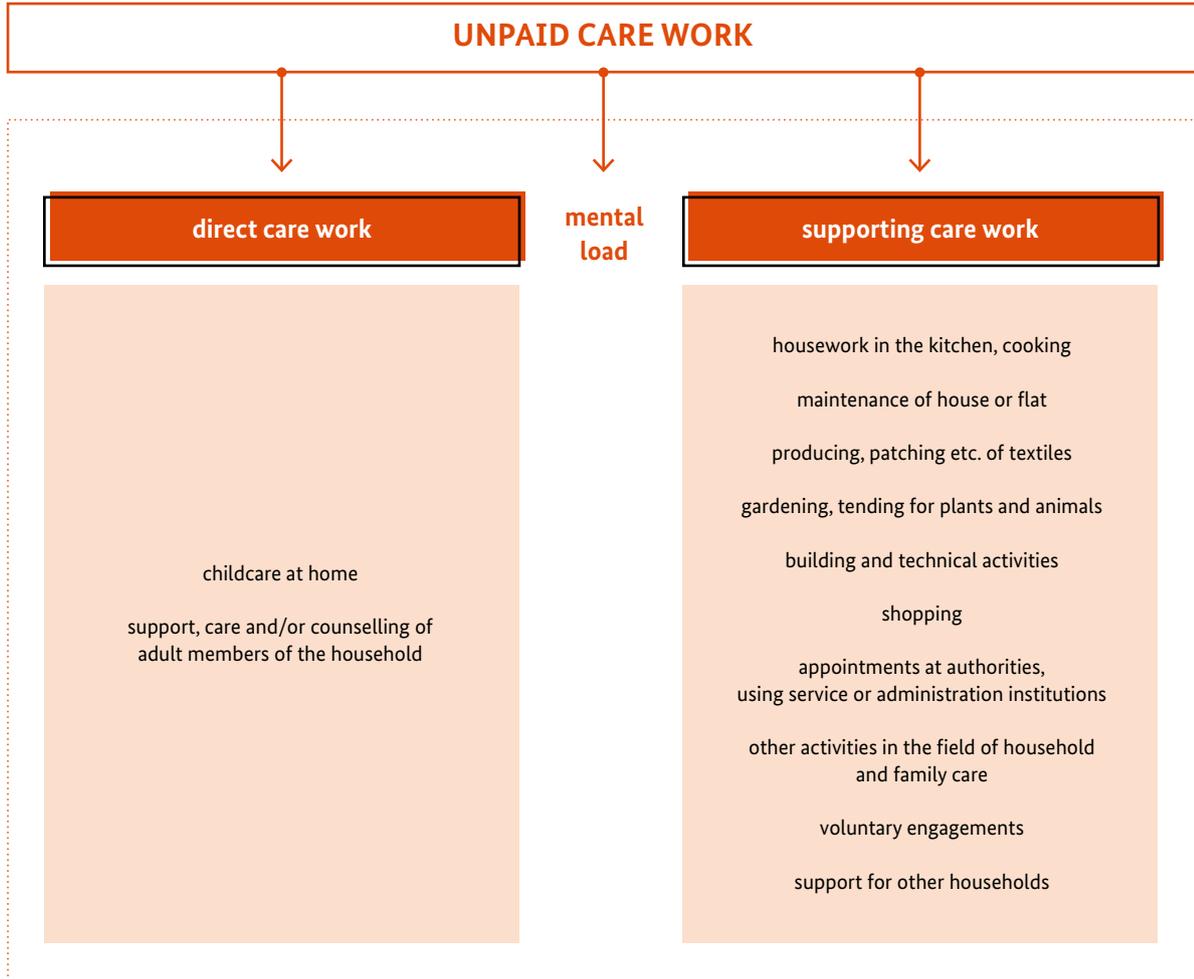
Men

Not only do men perform less unpaid care work than women, they also tend to perform more occasional tasks that can be postponed, for instance to the weekend (for example house and car repairs). These tasks are easier to reconcile with their working hours.



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Unpaid care work

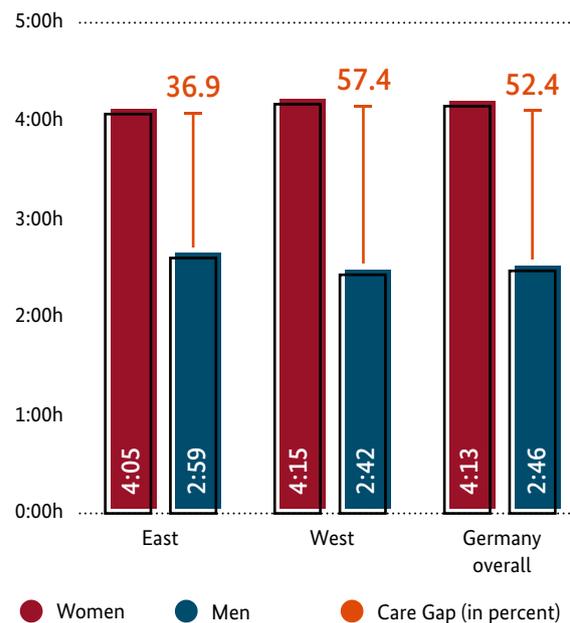


Direct care work involves other people and includes, for example, childcare and the support and care of adult household members. Supporting care work refers to all household activities or voluntary work. The difference is particularly pronounced in the case of direct care work: women perform more than twice as much direct care work as men—the Gender Care Gap here is at 108.3 percent (versus 47.4 percent for supporting care work) (Klünder, 2017).

What differences exist in Germany and in Europe?

The Gender Care Gap differs significantly between eastern and western Germany (36.9 percent versus 57.4 percent). Eastern German women spend ten minutes per day less on care work than women in western Germany; eastern German men spend 17 minutes per day more on care work than men in western Germany.

Gender Care Gap in eastern and western Germany



Time usage surveys also exist in other European countries (for example France and the United Kingdom). However, for a European comparison, the different national survey dates are particularly problematic since some of them are several years apart and are therefore difficult to compare. Already since the 1990s, the European Union has set itself the goal of harmonising national time usage surveys at European level.

Gender Care Gap—depending on life phase, children and income

Life phase

At 110.6 percent, the highest Gender Care Gap can be found at the age of 34 and thus in the so-called “rush hour of life” (Panova et al., 2017). It is in this phase that central decisions on career, partnership and children are concentrated. These decisions also have a long-term effect on a couple’s allocation of work and tasks.

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Children in the household

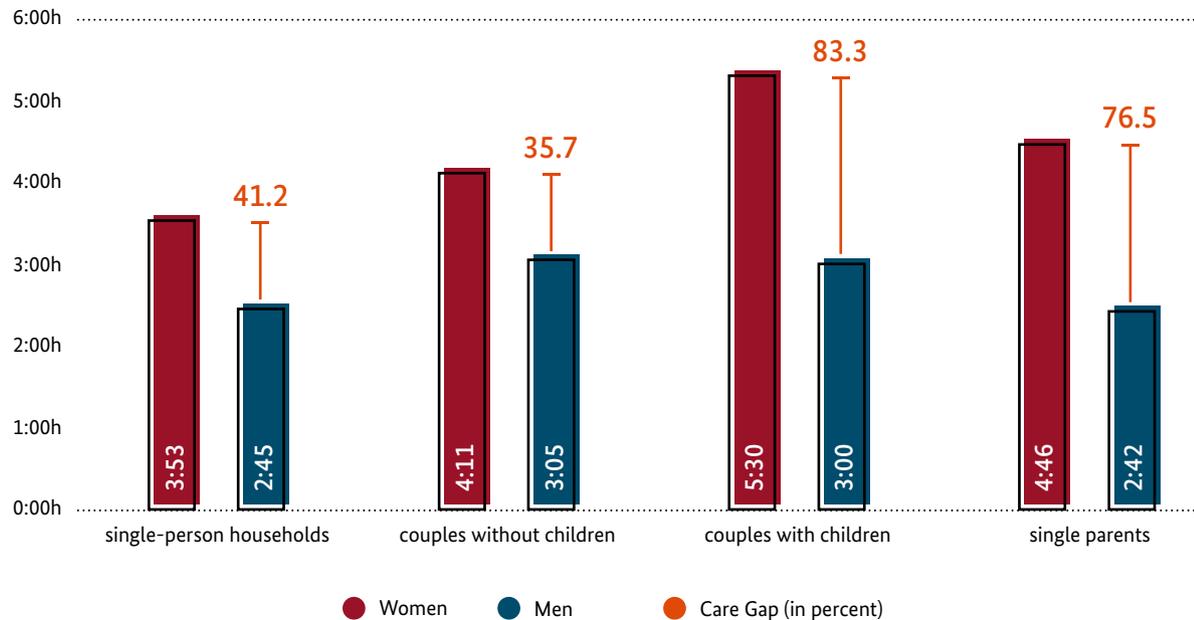
- Women in both western and eastern Germany perform significantly more care work than men when children live in the household.
- In couple households with children, mothers perform two and a half hours more care work per day than fathers. The Gender Care Gap thus stands at 83.3 percent. By comparison, the Gender Care Gap in couple households without children is at 35.7 percent (Klünder, 2017)

- Women take on larger shares of the care work with each additional child in the household (Klünder, 2017).

Life models

- In the **breadwinner model** (father full-time, mother not employed), the traditional division of labour is particularly pronounced, with a Gender Care Gap of 154 percent.

Gender Care Gap according to type of household

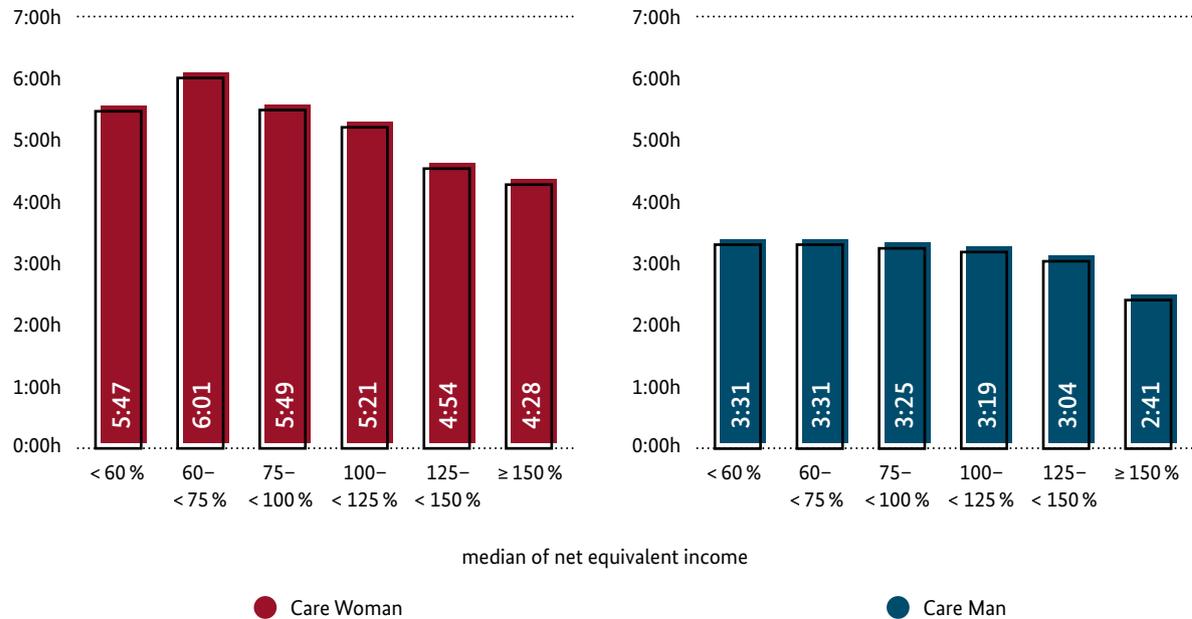


- In the **supplementary-earner model** (father full-time, mother part-time) the Gender Care Gap stands at 78.8 percent.
- In the **universal adult worker model** (both parents working full-time), the Gender Care Gap is significantly lower, at 41.3 percent. However, even in this model, mothers bear the main responsibility for care work (Klünder, 2017).

Net income

- As household incomes rise, men spend less time on care work.
- Women in households with higher net income spend on average less time on care work than women in households with lower income.

Gender Care Gap according to household income



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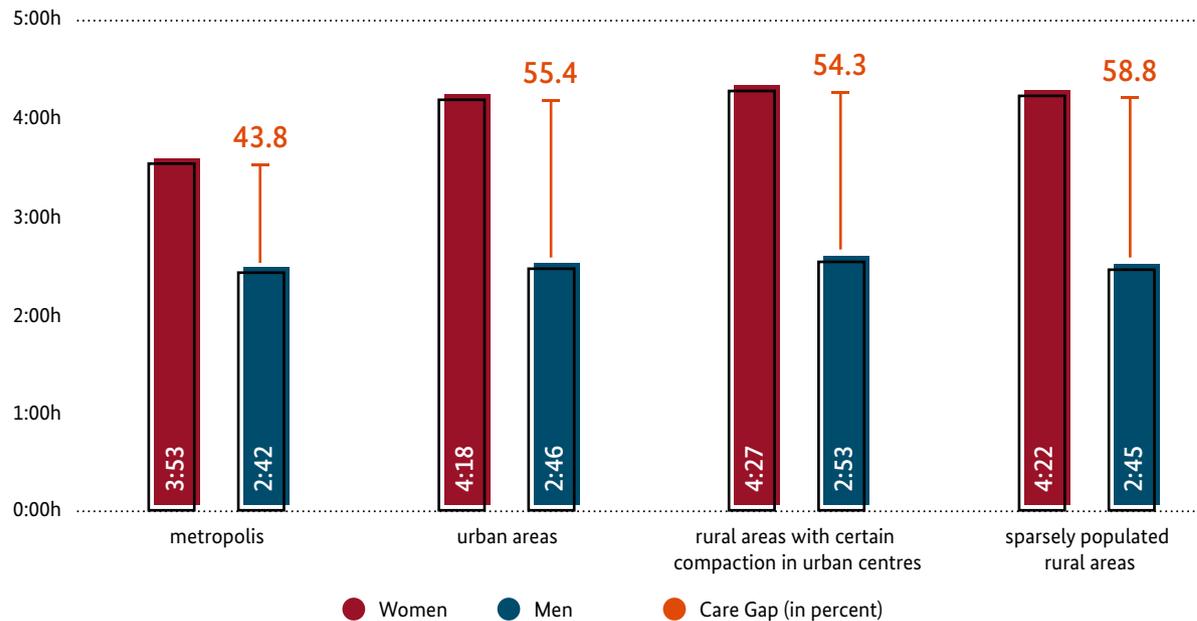
Amount of paid work/employment

- In couple households with child(ren) in which the mother works full-time, the Gender Care Gap is at 35.7 percent (Klüber, 2017).
- The amount of time spent by men on unpaid care work is almost independent of whether or not their partner works full-time: men whose partner works full-time spend about as much time on unpaid care work as men whose partner works part-time.
- In contrast, women with a full-time working partner spend 27 minutes more per day on unpaid care work than women with a part-time working partner (Calahorrano et al., 2019).

Size of location of residence

- Women in rural areas spend 34 minutes more time on care work than women in large cities.
- The largest Gender Care Gap can be found in sparsely populated, rural regions. There, women perform around 58.8 percent more care work than men, while the gap in urban areas is only at 43.8 percent. One reason is the availability of infrastructure such as childcare facilities or lack thereof. Moreover, longer travel times (especially commuting from home to work) in rural regions increase the time needed for employment/paid work (Calahorrano et al., 2019).

Gender Care Gap according to settlement structures



How Gender Gaps influence each other

Gender Care Gap—Gender Pay Gap

Does the Gender Care Gap influence the Gender Pay Gap or the other way around? Or do they influence each other in both directions? The correlations are manifold:

- Overall, women and men spend similar amounts of time on work. But a much larger proportion of men spend this working time in paid jobs, and a much larger proportion of women work unpaid.

- Economic analyses show that one's own share of household income also influences whether or not one reduces working hours in order to perform unpaid care work (Boll, 2017).

If the Gender Pay Gap, and thus also the relative contribution to household income, is reduced, the Gender Care Gap is also reduced. Measures aimed at reducing the Gender Pay Gap may accordingly also reduce the Gender Care Gap (Calahorrano et al., 2019).

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The influence of the Gender Pay Gap on the Gender Care Gap was investigated by the Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Information Technology (FIT). The FIT has analysed what would happen if the Gender Pay Gap were smaller. Although effects can be found here, they are rather minor:

- A ten percent increase in the gross hourly wages of all women would reduce the Gender Care Gap among all employed persons by about 2.2 percent.
- Women perform less care work if they have
 - higher gross hourly wages,
 - higher household incomes and
 - a comparatively higher income in partnerships.

Gender Care Gap—Gender Pension Gap

The Gender Pension Gap is essentially a balance sheet of working life. If the employment rates of women and men became more equal, this would reduce both the Gender Pay Gap and the Gender Pension Gap. In concrete terms this means that if women were to take fewer career breaks (and men possibly more), women tend to work full-time rather than part-time (and men possibly reduce their working hours) and women earn more from their work, this would reduce both the Gender Pay Gap and the Gender Pension Gap. These changes would in turn also (slightly) reduce the Gender Care Gap.

Gender Care Gap—Working hours

A change in working hours would have the greatest impact on the Gender Care Gap:

- If women and men were to align their weekly working hours, the Gender Care Gap would be significantly reduced. Statistically, the Gender Care Gap would be reduced by 22 percent for a 35-hour week for women and men and by 14.3 percent for a 30-hour week.
- If the proportion of fathers working part-time were increased to 20 percent, this would reduce the Gender Care Gap among parents by 9.2 percent.
- There is also a clear statistical correlation between parental allowance and the Gender Care Gap: if the proportion of fathers receiving parental allowances increased to 50 percent, this would reduce the Gender Care Gap among parents by 13.6 percent.

The allocation and distribution of unpaid care work between women and men is significantly influenced by the time spent on paid work—and less by the money earned through paid work. The reduction of the Gender Care Gap is thus significantly greater if working hours are adjusted than if incomes are adjusted.

2

Causes

Between wishful thinking and reality: how traditional task-sharing becomes manifest over the course of life

All people perform unpaid care work. Be it for themselves or for others, as a single or a couple, with/for or without children. How care work is allocated between women and men in our society has many reasons. Here are these reasons and an explanation on how the allocation and sharing of work between women and men come about.

Historic differences in Germany— and their influence up to this day

HISTORY Federal Republic of Germany:
From the breadwinner model to the supplementary-earner model

Since the 1950s, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) has oriented itself along the so-called **breadwinner model**: the family's breadwinner alone earns the entire income for his family. He is married to a housewife who is not equal to the man and takes over the unpaid care work in the household. In this capacity, she receives protection from the state.

This has been enshrined in law: women in the FRG were only allowed to be employed if this was compatible with their “duties” in marriage and family life. In 1958, spouses were finally treated equally in law. However, the breadwinner model still remained legally valid.

A series of legal regulations and welfare benefits reinforced the disadvantages of the breadwinner model for women. Some of these are still valid, such as the income splitting between spouses and the non-contributory co-insurance for married couples in the German statutory health insurance.



The breadwinner model from a gender equality policy point of view

- This arrangement assigns unpaid care work to women and makes it more difficult for them to pursue a professional career; they become financially dependent.
- Since the majority of care work is performed within the family, the public care infrastructure remains underdeveloped.
- At the same time, the (mostly male) family breadwinners are required to devote time and energy exclusively to their jobs.

Source: Expert Commission for the Second Gender Equality Report

At the beginning of the 1960s, the demand for labour increased. This led to a societal change towards the **supplementary-earner model**. In this arrangement, the man remained the breadwinner of the family. Women added earnings to the family income by working part-time. With the reform of marriage and family law in 1977, women were released from the obligation to run the household. They were given an unrestricted right to work and were allowed to conclude and terminate employment contracts independently of their husbands.

In divorce law, the principle of irrevocable breakdown [of a marriage] was introduced together with pension right adjustments in order to provide social security for divorced and non-employed women and mothers. State support in the form of an expanded care infrastructure and social policy services for the care of relatives was largely lacking until well into the 1980s. Caring for relatives was primarily a family task. It was provided and performed unpaid by family members, mostly women.



The supplementary-earner model from a gender equality policy point of view

- The supplementary-earner model is merely a variation of the breadwinner model. For the (mostly male) family breadwinner, little changes, and he or she continues to have little time for the family.
- The (mostly female) additional earner, on the other hand, has to reconcile part-time work with family care work. In addition, part-time work makes it difficult for her to secure her own livelihood and to develop her career.
- The supplementary-earner model thus maintains an imbalance in terms of gender equality policy: those who perform more unpaid care work and less paid work are also more economically dependent and can make less provision for their own retirement.

HISTORY German Democratic Republic: Women do more in the household—despite the universal adult worker model

The German Democratic Republic (GDR) oriented itself along the **universal adult worker model** in which two adults both perform full-time paid work. The model aims for permanent, full employment of the mother.

From the very beginning, the constitution of the GDR enshrined the principle of equal rights in marriage: spouses were obliged to divide unpaid care work in such a way that the woman could balance her professional activity with motherhood. Couples were obliged to support each other. After a divorce, unlike in the FRG, each person had to take care of himself/herself on his/her own responsibility.

The state facilitated the implementation of the universal adult worker model mainly through a well-developed childcare and nursing care infrastructure, starting for children only several weeks old. As a rule, people in need of care were accommodated in state-subsidised homes. A series of family policy benefits included incentives for mothers to return to work, for instance.

Nevertheless, the state demanded that women take greater responsibility for all family matters.

For example, there were restrictions on fathers' access to family policy benefits. In terms of gender equality policy, the universal adult worker model remained inconsistent in its actual design and implementation. The state's enforcement of equal opportunities for women was ultimately limited to the labour market. It did not lead to parallel equality for women in the allocation of unpaid care work within the household.

In 1985, women performed two thirds of unpaid care work, men one third. Thus, the GDR, too, maintained a traditional gender-based allocation of work in the household, albeit somewhat softer when compared to the FRG.

HISTORY Unified Germany (as of 1990): The supplementary-earner model gains in prevalence

After reunification in 1990, fundamental structural changes occurred in the former GDR: the percentage of women in paid work decreased significantly. The general conditions changed drastically due to the increase in unemployment, fixed-term contracts and the decline of full employment. There was a drop in birth rates and also a significant reduction in childcare infrastructure. The supplementary-earner model became increasingly important in eastern Germany, too.

As the institutional structure of the Federal Republic was transferred to the territories of the former GDR, the legal regulations based on the breadwinner model as well as related norms continued to exist throughout the whole of Germany.

A paradigm shift was brought about by the addition of Article 3 (2) of the Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*) in 1994, in which the state was actively mandated to promote actual gender equality. Subsequently, numerous legal regulations and norms were reformed, for example the law on alimony.

Current legal frameworks for people with care responsibilities—an overview

The state sets the framework for care and education of children as well as care of relatives via various regulations. They all have an impact on the allocation of unpaid care work—and have been repeatedly realigned against the background of societal processes.

A brief overview of the current framework conditions in Germany:

Care and education of children

- **Maternity protection:** Regulation on health protection, dismissal protection and available benefits
- **Parental leave (since 2007):** Dismissal protection, legal right to part-time work
- **Parental allowance (since 2007):** Individualised benefit that compensates for reduced income when parents interrupt or reduce their paid work.
- **Parental allowance plus (*ElterngeldPlus*, since January 2015):** Enables parents working part-time to receive parental allowance, also means-tested
- **Sickness allowance:** Sickness allowance for the employed parent performing care work
- **Alimony regulation:** Following a reform, alimony payments for spouses after divorce only until the youngest child is three years old
- **Pension “points” (*Rentenpunkte*):** Under certain conditions, one parent receives pension points in the statutory pension insurance system; these are initially automatically assigned to the mother.

2 Causes

- **Legal entitlement to a childcare placement for one- to three-year-olds (since 2013)**, combined with a massive expansion of the infrastructure, as of 2019: almost 790,000 places for children under three years of age (childcare rate in eastern Germany: 51.5 percent versus 29.4 percent in western Germany).
 - **Guaranteed care of children in primary schools:** In 2017, 41 percent of children attended all-day care (more than 35 hours per week) and another 47 percent attended extended half-day care (more than 25 and up to 35 hours per week).
- Care for relatives**
- For decades, the care system in (western) Germany has been structurally based on the assumption that relatives should primarily take on care activities.
- **Personal care allowance:** Paid when relatives perform care work. With these care allowances, people in need of care can pay relatives a certain financial appreciation for their services/care work. However, family carers cannot derive any independent entitlements from this work.
 - **Law on “care periods” (*Pflegezeitgesetz*, 2008):** Release options for employed close relatives who take on unpaid care work for a person in need of care.
 - **Law on family caregiver periods (*Familienpflegezeitgesetz*, revised in 2015):** Possibility for employees to reduce working hours to up to 15 hours per week for a period of up to 24 months in order to perform care work for a close relative.
 - **“Pension points” in statutory pension insurance:** Under certain conditions, family carers receive pension points within the statutory pension insurance system.
 - **Nationwide outpatient and inpatient services:** No legal entitlement, relatives are often cared for at home, for example because of the high costs of inpatient care. This restricts especially low-skilled women in their professional development and in securing their own livelihood.
 - **Personnel needs for care for the sick and elderly:** High personnel needs or shortage of skilled workers; with its Concerted Action for Nursing (*Konzertierte Aktion Pflege*), the Federal Government has already started to make adjustments.
 - **Household-related services:** Under certain conditions, tax relief for households that externalise unpaid care work to single persons or service providers.

The supplementary-earner model: not wanted, but practiced—the crossroads family foundation, re-entering work and care

Only few parent couples allocate their tasks in a genuinely egalitarian manner—even though they would like to. Why do they nonetheless follow traditional allocation patterns? Which factors besides institutional frameworks influence their decisions?

The allocation and division of work in families, especially with regard to domestic and care work, is often not explicitly negotiated. In many cases, it arises from lived practice and routines that are also rooted in implicit gender roles. Individuals fall back on these roles precisely when they find themselves in or just before a transition phase.

Thus, the father's full-time employment is hardly ever questioned. Couples are less likely to consider an egalitarian division of work, as this is considered more costly and there is a fear of loss of income. Moreover, couples often do not perceive the advantages of an egalitarian division of work (long-term flexibilisation, equal capabilities for both parents to realise their career goals, as well as time for the family), or regard them as bringing less benefits than the costs and efforts involved.

Only a small proportion of parent couples with at least one child actually distribute the tasks in an egalitarian way. At the same time, most men today would like to have a partnership in which both partners are employed and both take care of the household and children to about the same extent (2007: 33 percent of all men aged 18 and over; 2015: 42 percent, according to Wippermann, 2017). While full-time working parents—both mothers and fathers—would like to work less, part-time working and non-working parents would like to work more.

Studies show the supplementary-earner model is not ideal and not wanted by many, but it is a model that is practiced because of the economic incentives—and in theory only temporarily. However, attitudes are changing, especially among young men. The desire to reduce or interrupt their work with paternity leave in order to do justice to their role as fathers in everyday life is particularly high in upper educational strata and milieus.

But why are these egalitarian attitudes not reflected in actual behaviour? At which crossroads during the life course does the allocation and distribution of employment and unpaid care work manifest and foster itself? In which phases of life are decisions made that cannot simply be changed and adapted later on?

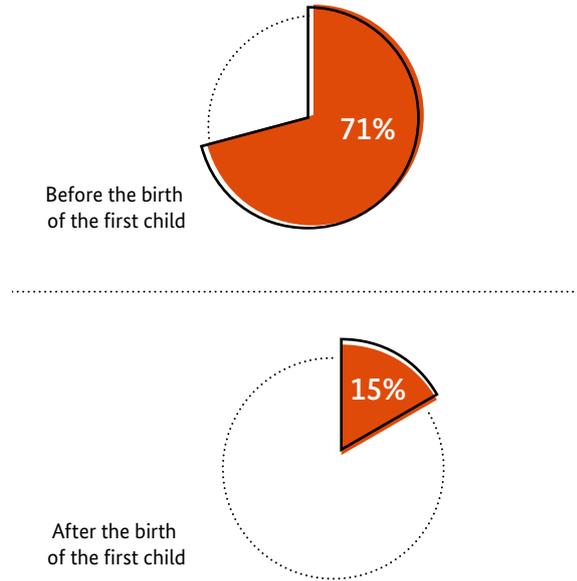
2 Causes

CROSSROADS Starting a family: after the birth of a child, couples tend to live a more traditional lifestyle

Before a child lives in the household, paid work/employment and housework are distributed in a relatively egalitarian manner, as many empirical studies show.

- However, with the birth of the first child, a so-called “re-traditionalisation” takes place: mothers interrupt their own employment during parental leave (or longer) and become responsible for unpaid care work during this time. The fathers, in contrast, mostly remain continuously employed and are in charge of the family income.
- Following the initial maternity leave, the vast majority of mothers take further parental leave and receive parental benefits. They stay at home with their child.
- While couples discuss the allocation of parental leave and the parental benefit months before birth, most couples do not talk about the distribution of housework. So, in the course of parental leave, the person who is at home often takes over the housework. Since mothers on average take significantly longer parental leave, in most cases they also perform the housework.

Couples in the universal adult worker model



Before the birth of the first child, more than two thirds of couples (71 percent) pursue a universal adult worker model, but only 15 percent do so after the birth of the child.

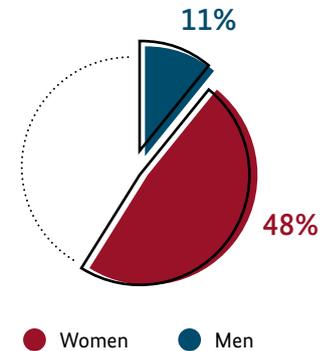
Therefore, the birth of children is usually a crossroads at which the professional careers of the two partners develop differently.

- Even though more than two thirds of couples (71 percent) pursue a universal adult worker model before the birth of their first child, only about 15 percent do so after the birth of the child.
- 55 percent of mothers work with reduced earning levels, 17 percent stop working entirely.
- In a mere four percent of families, fathers work part-time after parental leave for their first child, totalling 25 to 34 hours of work a week.

Another representative survey among fathers (Wippermann, 2017) draws similar conclusions:

- For fathers, full-time employment is the social norm.
- On the one hand, they want more time for their child and family; on the other hand, they work even more after starting a family.
- The majority of men consider part-time work to be theoretically possible, but also financially risky and potentially damaging to their career. Men experience their full-time employment as an economically rational choice and at the same time as proof of general manliness.

Proportion of part-time work among women and men 2019



In 2019, almost 48 percent of women in employment subject to social security contributions were working part-time, compared with just under eleven percent of men (BA Statistik, 2019b).

Eastern Germany: universal adult worker model rather taken for granted

Even though the **universal adult worker model** has come under pressure after the reunification, it is still dominant in eastern Germany.

- In eastern Germany, 27 percent of couples with underage children have both parents working more than 36 hours a week, whereas in western Germany only nine percent of parents do so (BMW, 2019). Dual employment is still an arrangement that is taken for granted, familiar and normal in eastern Germany.

2 Causes

- The employment rate of mothers is still significantly higher in eastern Germany than in western Germany, especially for mothers with infants: in 2017, 57 percent of mothers with their youngest child between two and three years of age were in employment in western Germany, compared to 72 percent in eastern Germany (BMW, 2019).
- Moreover, eastern German mothers with infants work predominantly full-time or near-full-time, while western German mothers work predominantly part-time with few hours: whereas in 2017 in the eastern part of the country 49 percent of mothers with underage children worked part-time, the proportion in the western part was 74 percent (Destatis, 2018b).

However, the **supplementary-earner model** plays an increasingly important role in eastern Germany, too. Between 1996 and 2013, the share of employed parents in couples in eastern Germany in which both parents work full-time fell by around 26 percentage points. In comparison, the share of employed parents in couples in eastern Germany, where the father works full-time and the mother part-time, increased by 22 percentage points.

Mothers continue to be responsible for childcare

- Even after the 2007 parental allowance reforms, which aimed to strengthen the involvement of fathers, mothers continue to be responsible for the care of infants.
- For mothers, in turn, it has become an established practice—regardless of their income or the entire household’s income—to interrupt their paid work for twelve months.
- Mothers in eastern Germany take shorter parental leave periods than mothers in western Germany.

More fathers take parental leave, but for shorter periods

- A change can also be observed among fathers: more men are taking parental leave. In 2007, only 3.5 percent of all recipients of parental benefits were male. One year after the parental benefit reform, the participation of fathers climbed to over 15 percent. Since then, there has been a continuous increase to 35.7 percent (basic parental allowance) in 2015, almost 37 percent in 2016 (Unterhofer et al., 2017/ Samtleben et al., 2019) and most recently 41 percent (Destatis: Statistik zum Elterngeld, 2020).

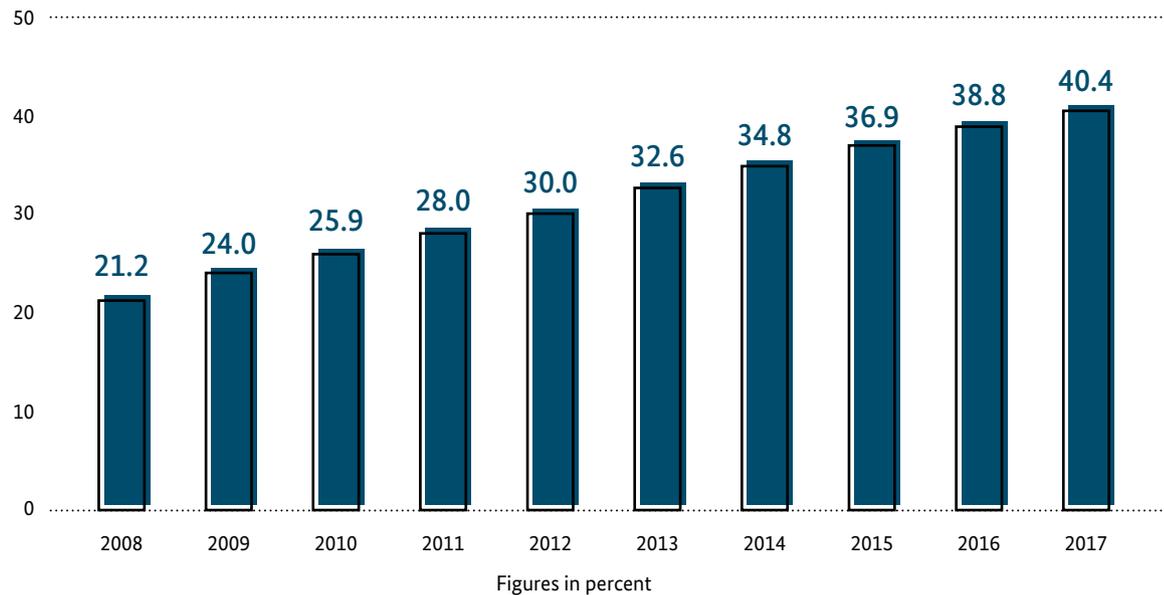
- However, what is decisive is the duration of parental leave: at 3.8 months, the average planned period of receiving parental allowance for fathers is significantly lower than for mothers at 14.2 months. Moreover, almost 80 percent of fathers take only the two months of the basic parental allowance that would otherwise be forfeited (Destatis, 2019c).

Established in practice: mothers take twelve months parental leave, fathers two

- Women not only receive parental allowance more often, but also for a much longer period of time. The introduction of “parental allowance plus” (*ElterngeldPlus*) has hardly changed this situation.
- Although more mothers and fathers take advantage of the opportunity to combine parental leave with part-time work, the overall share of fathers on parental leave has not increased.
- The reforms in parental leave regulations have only marginally affected the duration of parental leave: whereas in 2015 the proportion of fathers who took up to two months of parental leave was still around 77 percent, by 2018 it had fallen to about 72 percent, to the benefit of the proportion of fathers with longer parental leave (Samtleben et al., 2017).
- The number of fathers receiving parental allowance has increased every year: the number was at 326,000 fathers (21 percent) in 2015, 365,000 (22 percent) in 2016 and 406,000 (23 percent) in 2017. In the year 2018, a total of 433,000 fathers received parental allowance.
- At 3.8 months, the average planned parental benefit period for fathers was still significantly lower than for mothers (average 14.2 months). The new parental allowance plus, which was introduced in July 2015, is now taken up by 13 percent of fathers receiving parental allowance (in comparison: 30 percent of mothers).
- Even though the parental allowance is designed in such a way that parents are free to divide up the months of parental allowance and the “partner months” are a minimum rule, in practice it has become established that fathers usually take two months parental leave.

2 Causes

Reception of basic parental allowance and parental allowance plus according to gender



Fathers' share refers to the percentage of children for whom (at least) one male recipient of benefits has received parental allowance out of all children born in the period under consideration. (Destatis, 2020).

A matter of money? What arrangements do couples opt for?

Money is valued differently across individual couples. Couples in similar financial situations consider very different parental leave arrangements to be economically reasonable. For example, the higher income of one partner may, on the one hand, be considered as justification for parental leave with a higher or even maximum state benefit of €1,800. On the other hand, the

higher income may justify rather short parental leave or no parental leave at all, because the couples want or have to generate the highest total income possible. In low-income households, the level of income and the amount of possible compensatory benefits is particularly relevant. About half of the mothers and fathers believe that the parent who earns more should continue to pursue their paid work.



Parenthood continues to be the time in life when the allocation of unpaid care work becomes more traditional. The distribution depends to a large extent on

- **social norms**, like “babies and infants should be raised at home by their mother”,
- **stereotypes**, like “mothers are better equipped to care for babies after birth”,
- **traditional role ascriptions**, like “women are responsible for unpaid care work, men for the family’s income”.

After the expiry of state-supported parental leave, however, social norms continue to have a strong impact, with fathers working full-time and mothers working part-time at most.

CROSSROADS Re-entering work: a “traditionalisation trap”?

Many mothers continue working—after having interrupted their work for childcare—only with reduced hours. Returning to work after this family phase is thus also regarded as a “traditionalisation trap” in the partnership. Various welfare state

benefits—together with gender role attributions—legitimise several years of time off work. Women often perceive a complete return to work as not rewarding and worthwhile. These three factors interact with each other:

- **A shortage or, at times, high cost of childcare services:** despite government subsidies, the cost of public childcare is often too high for low-income households, and private childcare services are only affordable for higher income households.
- **The benefits of the social and tax system** in the form of income splitting between spouses and compensation via different wage tax categories mean women face a high tax burden when re-entering paid work and make it therefore more difficult for them to return to gender equal models.
- The **non-contributory co-insurance for married couples** in the statutory health insurance system may lead to marginal employment being potentially more lucrative than paid work that is subject to social insurance contributions.

2 Causes

In many cases, couples are quite subjective in evaluating whether the woman re-entering work is actually “economical”. Mothers pursuing paid work is thereby materially and symbolically devalued and sometimes even classified as an individual risk of poverty, for example due to the loss of family co-insurance or costs incurred for care outside of the own family. It is also due to gender-based attributions of “responsibility” for care work that couples must offset the costs of childcare against the mother’s additional earnings and thus justify the mother’s employment.

In the case of **single parents**, the question is rather how and to what extent they can pursue paid work again. For mothers of underage children, there is little difference in employment between single parents (70.1 percent) and mothers in partnerships (67.7 percent). However, single mothers are much more likely to work full-time (42 percent) than mothers in partnerships (29 percent) (Destatis, 2018c).

One way to work more despite also having care responsibilities is **working from home**. However, the unequal distribution of paid work and unpaid care work between women and men can become entrenched within home office arrangements. For example, at a total of 21 hours a week, mothers who work from home invest almost three hours more in childcare than mothers who do not have a home office, while fathers—regardless of whether they work from home or not—spend 13 hours on childcare (Lott, 2019).

Increasingly traditionalised allocation of work—a one-way road

With the (in some cases unavoidably reduced) re-entering into work of the mother, the one-sided responsibility of the father as the family’s breadwinner is consolidated. The father pursues his career and professional development full-time, whereas the mother puts her professional development second—and often faces unemployment or dequalification.

Once these traditional arrangements are adopted and lived, this way of life stabilises and will in most cases never again be balanced or revised in the future course of the relationship. This is underlined by facts like

- after the birth of further children, most parents pursue the same employment arrangement that they chose for the first child (this is true for 89 percent of fathers and 66 percent of mothers of two or more children).
- 58 percent of women are in full-time employment up to the age of 30, but less than 50 percent thereafter (IfD, 2015).
- women increase their unpaid care work significantly more than men if one child lives in the household. Moreover, they also take on the greater share of care work for a further child (Calahorrano et al., 2019).

Studies show that if fathers take more than two months of parental leave, this already has a positive effect on the working hours and the further career path of the partner after re-entering the workforce, as she can return to work earlier. The effect is even stronger if the father slightly reduces his own working hours after the parental leave period. This strengthens his commitment to the family and makes it easier for the partner to concentrate on her professional advancement—which in turn increases the chance that couples will allocate their employment and (unpaid) care work in a more egalitarian way.

CROSSROADS Care for relatives:
home care is female

Those caring for children can expect that the amount of time spent performing care work for them will decrease over time. This is because there is a fixed sequence of institutions that provide support (day care centre, kindergarten, all-day school, etc.). When a need for care arises within the family, things are different though; such cases typically occur very suddenly, and it is often uncertain how the eventual need for care will develop.



Home care—facts and figures

Approximately three quarters of all people in need of long-term care (2.59 million people) were cared for at home in 2017, 1.76 million of them usually by relatives only (Destatis, 2018a). On average, the relatives providing care are 55 to 64 years old, and the majority are married. Two thirds of the main carers (1.65 million people) are female (Rothgang/Müller, 2018). Compared to men, women (wives, daughters, daughters-in-law or granddaughters) more than twice as often perform unpaid care work within the family. Private home care is still predominantly provided by women.

Various cross-sectional and longitudinal studies show:

- people performing home care work are less likely to be employed.
- they often provide home care in combination with part-time employment.

2 Causes

- women with their (in most cases) lower income tend to reduce their weekly working hours because of the care they provide, while their partner remains in full-time employment. Thus, 33 percent of the main female carers work part-time (or by the hour).

Since family carers performing care work do not receive any compensation, they use long-term care allowances paid under long-term care insurance as financial compensation. In the case of low incomes in particular, that is more often in the case of women, long-term care allowance is passed on to the relatives performing care work as a form of financial appreciation; in this regard, the persons concerned view these “payments” as income even though they do not acquire any pension entitlements with them.

For many carers, reconciling care work at home with their own employment is a tremendous challenge—in addition to the often-stressful work of providing care. An additional emotional burden is that care at home by relatives is often the greatest wish of older people in Germany (BMFSFJ, 2012), and is often also complied with. This wish corresponds to a strong social norm and belief that care at home is better than inpatient care.

Thus, it is mostly female relatives who perform care work at home. The average length of time that people in need of care aged 60 and above stay in home care is about 2.1 years for men and 2.9 years for women (Müller et al., 2010: 235).

Gender stereotypes: “Women are good at caring, men can ask for help”

The fact that women do most of the work in home care has been confirmed by many studies. Less well known is that almost a third (30 percent) of carers today are male. The decisive difference: men develop their care and nursing responsibilities in a later phase of life. Most men start performing care work from the age of 80—usually for their partner. In contrast, sons of working age who care for a parent (or in-law) are still a marginal phenomenon. Only a few men are willing to reduce working hours to accommodate care work for relatives, thereby accepting disadvantages at work or a loss of income (BMFSFJ, 2012). In addition, male relatives performing care work are increasingly making use of professional assistance and are generally taking on a stronger role in care management and/or the accompanying care logistics, and are choosing to have professional services provide body-related assistance and care services (BMFSFJ, 2012).

Again, gender role ascriptions and stereotypes have effects: these imply that women can, by their very nature, provide good care and therefore have to do so, while men are allowed to ask for help and assistance.

Overall, care work is thus allocated according to

- **time availability** due to no or less paid work
- **social norms** (“outpatient is better than inpatient”)
- **stereotypes** (“women just do it better”) and
- **gender role ascriptions** (“women are responsible”).
- **Path dependencies**, because often the care of parents or parents-in-law follows the care of children. This greatly increases the time spent with care tasks and reduces or interrupts employment and career. (Unabhängiger Beirat für die Vereinbarkeit von Pflege und Beruf, 2019, p. 16 f.)

The “traditionalisation trap”: why the traditional allocation of unpaid care work is difficult to change again later

The decisions and the setting of a course for how parents allocate their paid work and (unpaid) care work often determines their future lives and careers. An initial division of work based on partnership almost always changes towards traditionalisation later.

The longer the relationship lasts, the less couples change or adjust their allocation of work. This is influenced by (Dechant et al., 2014):

- **Share of income generation:** Men take on a significant amount of housework if their partners work full-time or return to full-time work after parental leave. On the other hand, the re-entering of mothers into their work life on a part-time basis has little impact.
- **Education:** The higher the level of education, the more egalitarian the attitudes. In the course of a relationship between a couple who both have a similar level of education, the allocation of domestic work is less gender-based.

2 Causes

- **Income:** Income also has an influence on the allocation of housework—but there are no entirely clear study results in this respect.
- **Working hours:** Part-time work has a strong impact on unpaid care work. It is only since 2019 that there has been a right to temporary part-time employment (*Brückenteilzeit*).
- **Duration of break from paid work:** Couples in which women return to work early (that is after one year) share the workload more equally than couples in which women take a longer career break.

Over the course of time, men usually participate less in housework rather than vice versa, that is partnership-based arrangements for the allocation of labour change—usually in the direction of traditionalisation. Here, role conceptions have such a strong influence on behaviour that established roles are retained even if there is no longer an actual reason for this and, for example, the “carer” is working more again. The long-term consequences of a supposedly rational decision to divide the care work unequally are often not taken into account at the time of the decision-making process.

Later on, couples usually find it difficult to reverse the consequences of their decision. Analyses show that if mothers leave work for several years, this has a long-term negative effect on their professional career as well as social security in the further course of their lives and also on the future household income (BMFSFJ, 2001; Bothfeld, 2005; Ziegler, 2005, quoted according to Ruling, 2007).

The effect of specialisation in either paid work or unpaid care work can also be observed in the retirement income of women (Gender Pension Gap). The more frequently interruptions in the employment biography/career occur and the longer they last, the more drastic the effects on retirement income.

Benefits of specialisation: if couples and families strive for egalitarian work allocation, their costs are higher

The allocation of paid work, domestic and family work has become the subject of negotiation in couple relationships. However, research does not agree on the extent to which couples actually negotiate this issue or whether it is rather a kind of “self-evident” agreement to assign the man the role of main breadwinner. Moreover, even a reflected negotiation does not necessarily lead to new forms of allocation of work.

Thus, the patterns of interpretation of motherhood and fatherhood have become increasingly pluralised. In the majority of cases, however, these are merely “rhetorical” modernisations, that is parents reflect and discuss their understanding of their roles, but practical changes in their behaviour are far less pronounced.

- In many cases, concrete ideas about how tasks could/should be shared exist from the very outset (58 percent).
- One third of couples decide how to divide their paid work and care work even before their first pregnancy. 54 percent address this issue during the course of pregnancy, while 16 percent do not allocate family work until after the birth of the child.
- In this respect, the great majority of parents say that negotiation and decision-making processes were relatively short. Very few couples discuss the allocation of domestic work after the birth of the child in advance, whereas they mostly do plan the future allocation of paid work and childcare (Dechant et al., 2014)—especially the length of maternal parental leave and the extent of the mother’s later employment.

- Fathers are generally expected to remain in full-time employment. Discussions are held at most on the decision of whether paternal parental leave should be taken or not, and the extent to which fathers participate in childcare and other family work (IfD, 2015).

Many couples generally perceive a specialised allocation and division of work as being more efficient: they might have to re-negotiate their allocation of work less often if both partners always take on their very own, same tasks.



Examples for benefits of specialisation for parents of infants

- If it is always the same person picking up the child from the day care centre, this person knows what is going on and can better link and understand (new) information.
- If it is always the same person coming to see a doctor, he or she will (in the best case) have an overview of the different medication.
- If a person is at home “anyway”, there is no need to make arrangements when the child is ill or for instance the heating meter has to be checked. Thus, no appointments or shifts have to be changed at work.

Examples for benefits of specialisation with regard to paid work

- Career and/or promotions are often dependent on presence in the company, time and location flexibility as well as availability.
- In most cases, career jumps and promotions come with higher salaries.

Avoiding overloads

An important criterion for the allocation of paid work and care work is that the manifold tasks and demands can be handled conveniently. The framework conditions must therefore be designed in a way that excessive demands and overloads are avoided.

- **Time overload** occurs when couples are unable to outsource certain tasks for payment (for example, when no household-related services are available), especially in the case of low and middle income groups: a saleswoman, bus driver or dustman can often not work flexitime and leave a day earlier or stay a bit longer to make it for an appointment with the doctor, at school or at a local administration office.

- **Emotional overload** may occur when a feeling of not being able to live up to the tasks prevails. In this respect, tasks can range from raising and caring for children, nursing those in need of care, paid work, but also self-care, that is caring for oneself. The guilty conscience of not having done any exercise again and thus having further worsened one's back pain instead of actively tackling it can intensify the feeling of being overburdened.

Overload is not only caused by time restrictions for the completion of tasks but also by the permanent mental load in everyday life.



Mental load

Besides the visible tasks in unpaid care work, there are also many invisible tasks that are called mental load: When is the child's next appointment with the dentist? Who is going to the PTA meeting? How do I make sure that someone is at home when the heating meters need to be checked? What do I have to take with us for the holidays? What has to be organised for my mother to be able to apply for care allowance? This refers to the entire management of pending tasks and activities of unpaid care work, be they everyday, extraordinary, direct or supportive, for the entire family.

Higher income for the woman does not automatically lead to a more egalitarian allocation of paid work and unpaid care work

Couples in which both partners have roughly the same income generally have a lower risk of traditionally allocating the work than couples in which the man earns significantly more than the woman. However, studies show that apparently not all women succeed in using this economic advantage when negotiating the actual allocation of work (Grunow et al., 2007).

- First of all, western German women behave differently from eastern German women as well as men from eastern and western Germany. Women from western Germany allocate more rather than less time for household work if they earn more than their partner (Lippmann et al., 2019).
- From the point where women become the main earner, the distribution of domestic work tends to become more traditional. Gender norms again have a stronger effect than economic rationality (Bittmann et al., 2003; Bertrand et al., 2015, quoted according to Lippmann, 2019).

- In contrast, as income rises and the share of household income increases, men in eastern and western Germany and women in eastern Germany reduce the time they spend on unpaid care work (Lippmann et al., 2019).
- Men who live together with female breadwinners spend on average more time on housework and care work than men in egalitarian income arrangements or those who are themselves the breadwinner. In these households, too, women and men do not divide household and childcare equally. This holds true for both western and eastern Germany (Schmidt, 2011, quoted by Klenner et al., 2012).

Thus, a higher income for the woman does not automatically lead to the couple allocating household and care work in a more egalitarian way (Klenner et al., 2012).



Solutions

How to achieve a more egalitarian allocation of tasks—measures and approaches

Overcoming the Gender Care Gap—what to do

How can we support women and men in reallocating unpaid care work and paid work? Adjustment options can be found in different areas and at different levels. How reallocation can be successful.

The question of how women and men allocate unpaid care work depends on many factors: social norms, gender stereotypes and role ascriptions, but also on the institutional and legal frameworks. In this regard, the state creates framework conditions (macro level), which are shaped in the direct living environment (meso level). In turn, individuals decide how they deal with these framework conditions that have been set (micro level).

A traditional allocation of paid work and unpaid care work develops over time. Starting a family, re-entering the workplace and caring for relatives are decisive crossroads that arise over the course of a life. Paths taken by women and men in these phases of life cannot simply be abandoned or reversed later.

Options for a new allocation of unpaid care work exist above all in the four areas of paid work, infrastructure, state benefits and social norms. These aspects influence each other mutually.

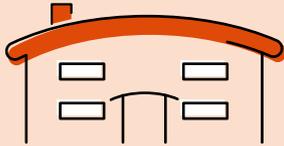
Four aspects influencing the allocation of unpaid care work

1. Social norms, gender stereotypes and gender role ascriptions

These play a crucial role by influencing the acceptance of actions, and thus the actual actions of individuals, and by being incorporated into laws and state regulations, thus contributing to people becoming “carers” or “earners” in the course of their lives.



- **Social norms** are values in society that influence the actions of individuals and groups. One example where this is relevant is when parents have their two-year-old child looked after in a day care centre. Whether this action is viewed positively or negatively may be subject to change: day care centres are in currently widely accepted as *educational institutions* by the public. In the area of nursing or elderly care, in contrast, inpatient care is often assessed as being not equivalent to home care.
- **Gender stereotypes** are conceptions about the nature of men and women, for instance *women clean better and more thoroughly—just because they are women*.
- **Gender role ascriptions** assign certain tasks to women or men, for instance *the idea that mothers are responsible for ensuring that their children come to school well rested, fed and washed*.



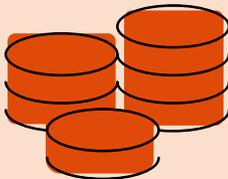
2. Infrastructure

How much unpaid care work women and men can perform depends on how much care work can be performed exclusively privately. The decisive factor here is whether a high-quality and cost-effective care and nursing infrastructure and household-related services are available and accepted. Similarly relevant is how close or easily accessible (for example by public transport) the places of care and the workplaces are, and whether rents in the vicinity are affordable. Furthermore, good broadband internet connection is important when working from home.



3. Paid work

How much time people can allocate for unpaid care work also depends on the structure of their paid work, that is how the labour market is regulated by law, how working hours are structured (for example the possibility of part-time work or unpaid leave) and whether mothers and fathers can take parental leave without risking career damages.



4. State benefits, social security system and income tax system

The income tax system, the social security system and state benefits also have an impact on how women and men allocate paid work and unpaid care work. The arrangements in place can make either partnership-based or gender-based division of work more attractive. Regulations such as the non-contributory co-insurance for married couples in the German statutory health insurance system, the tax classes for the splitting of income between spouses as well as mini-jobs support a gender-specific division of work and tasks. State benefits such as parental allowance in turn tend to promote an allocation of work based on partnership.

3 Solutions

Promoting and stabilising arrangements based on partnership—the “balance model”

So far, policymakers have given priority to increasing the employment rates of women—and have achieved considerable success. More rarely, however, have men been supported in performing more unpaid care work, as was the case with the introduction of parental benefits.

As a result, arrangements in which couples equally allocate paid work and unpaid care work are often unstable. Women and men still specialise throughout their lives either in paid work—mostly men—or in unpaid care work. Men therefore tend to become the “earner”. Women, in contrast, take over most of the care work and become “carers”.

This specialisation often establishes itself insidiously in situations of great insecurity (for example the birth of a child, illness of a family member)—and persists over the course of life, even as, for example, the children get older or the person being cared for dies.

To reduce the Gender Care Gap, we have to

- support earners in performing more unpaid care work and
- support carers to allocate more time for paid work.

Status quo: supplementary-earner model



Objective: earner-carer-model



It should socially be possible for both partners in a couple to reduce their working hours and share a large part of the unpaid care work between themselves. For the remaining part of the care work, support from third parties is needed. (Source: <https://www.gleichstellungsbericht.de/de/topic/24.themenbl%C3%A4tter-zum-bericht.html>).

How can men and women be supported in reconciling unpaid care work and paid work?

The “balance” model clearly shows the levers with which this can be achieved. For only when these developments occur in equilibrium do egalitarian arrangements become more stable. Therefore, the measures must be directed at carers on the one hand and earners on the other, because:

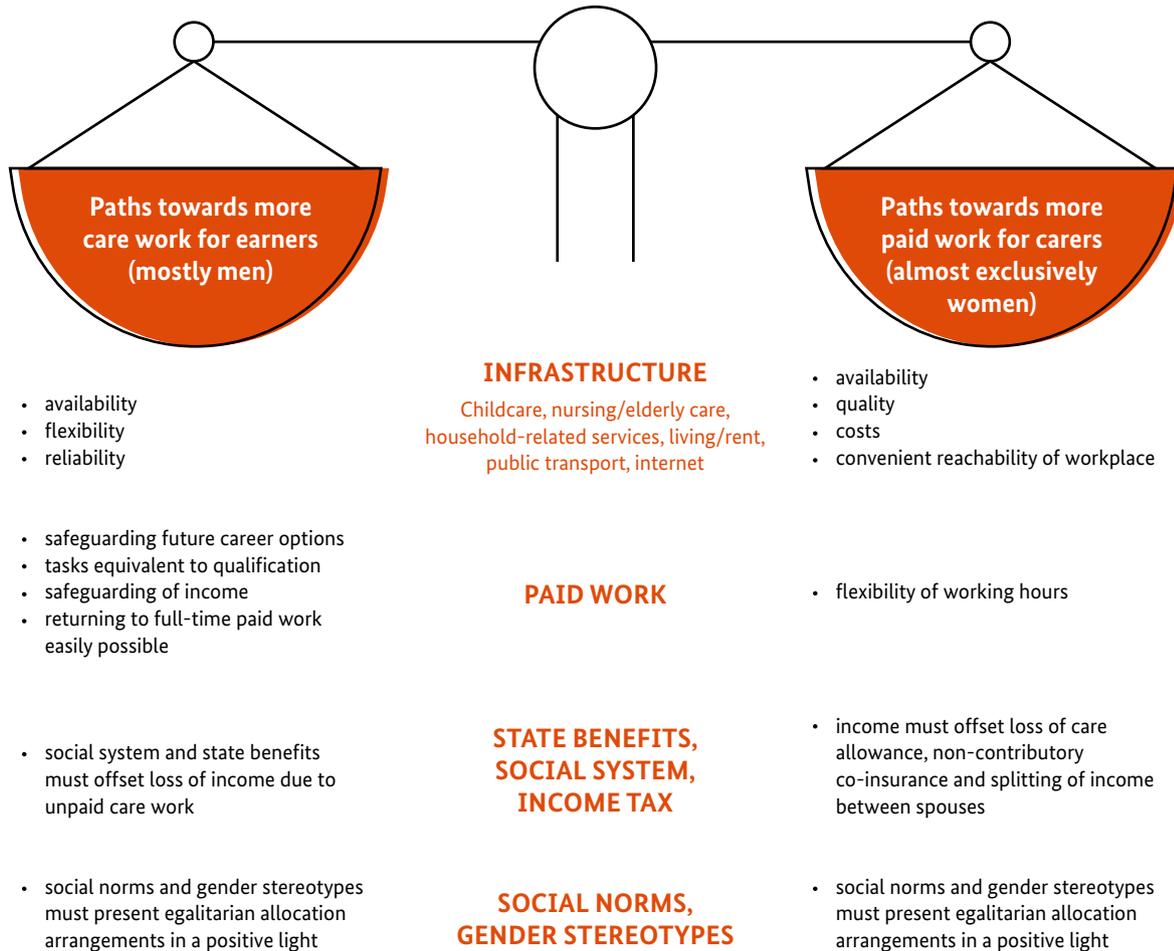
- For **carers**, the costs incurred by the carer’s additional employment are often thought of as being deducted from the carer’s potential income. If these persons wish to return to paid work, couples deduct the costs of a day care centre, other care infrastructure, mobility (for example a second car), household-related services, etc. from the expected wage. It therefore often seems that this additional work would not be economically viable.
- For the **earners**, in turn, a reduction in their income should they perform more (unpaid) care work is regarded as a reduction in the overall family income.

It seems that couples do not necessarily balance the various arrangements of paid work and unpaid care work in the family as a whole, and even less often include their entire life courses. Therefore, the so-called opportunity costs of unpaid care work for the earners and the costs of paid work for carers need to be reduced.

Measures only tackling the carer-side may in fact entrench the existing allocation of work. If it becomes easier for carers to pursue paid work, this does not change the allocation of unpaid care work to those same carers. If that person continues to take responsibility for the unpaid care work, it is likely that he or she will continue to work part-time—because external care is often only available for a limited period of time, because of the higher mental load, and because of tasks that cannot be performed by external services. This reinforces and cements the Gender Care Gap rather than reducing it. Since the measures taken so far have primarily addressed the issue of paid work for carers, predominantly women, it is now important to make it more attractive for the earners to take on and perform more (unpaid) care work.

3 Solutions

The “balance model”



The model can be visualised as a set of scales that weighs up four topic areas: infrastructure, paid work, state services, and social norms/gender stereotypes. The weighing pans contain, on one side, measures to provide paths towards (more) paid work for carers, and on the other side measures to enable more unpaid care work by earners. Both pans must be in balance to support and stabilise arrangements for a genuine allocation of work on a partnership basis.

What is relevant for **earners**:

- Their current income should not decrease significantly. State benefits, which provide financial compensation for the loss of income, make it easier for these people to take on and perform unpaid care work. In terms of parental leave, this is already being implemented with parental benefits as a compensation payment amounting to 65 percent of the previous income.
- Taking on unpaid care work should not limit career options too much. Legal regulations and good implementation in the company/organisation can keep career development options open. After phases with reduced working hours, it is possible to return to full-time work, for example through the so-called right to temporary part-time employment.
- Places for living, employment and care as well as nursing/elderly care must be accessible in such a way that daily journeys for care work are feasible. A needs-based and reliable care and nursing infrastructure with long opening hours would provide the necessary support in this respect.

For **carers**, it is relevant that paid work is economically viable even after the deduction of “costs”. Moreover, it is crucial that care tasks are being safeguarded:

- First, the existing infrastructure must therefore support carers in reducing their unpaid care work. This means that the infrastructure must provide care and nursing services of high quality, which are available/accessible and cost as little as possible. This is because the costs are calculated against the carer’s income—which in turn influences whether it is really “worth it” to expand one’s paid work activities.
- Moreover, the opportunity costs of paid work for carers are also relevant. The loss of care allowances, splitting of income between spouses and non-contributory co-insurance for married couples in the German statutory health insurance system are thus “offset” against the carers’ income.
- Additionally, flexible working hours must be possible in the field of paid work. However, this is more relevant for the earners to ensure that unpaid care work is no longer allocated solely to the carers.

Making a partnership-based allocation of unpaid care work equally attractive for women and men—what measures can help?

Policymakers are already working to make the allocation of unpaid care work fairer. The Federal Ministry for Family Affairs has already initiated numerous measures to tackle the Gender Care Gap—and will continue to pursue this path.

The German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) has already taken action in relevant aspects, aiming to pave the way for gender equality also when it comes to the allocation of unpaid care work. This chapter takes a look at options for further measures. These suggestions stem from the Second Gender Equality Report of the German Federal Government, among other sources. In addition, in a joint project by the Institute for Social Work and Social Education (ISS e.V.) and the BMFSFJ, further options for action were analysed and elaborated (further information on the empirical and qualitative analyses in this European Union-funded project can be found at the end of this dossier).

FIELD OF ACTION Paid work

The options for action in the field of paid work might allocate the earners more time for unpaid care work—and carers more time for paid work.

The basic insight is that the right to care work is more effective when designed as an individual right. The fact that parents make so much use of the partnership months for parental allowance shows that individual rights influence behaviour.

It is also crucial to safeguard and maintain career options—even if parents perform unpaid care work—as well as to reduce income losses and partially compensate for them through compensation payment measures.

Financial security is essential when it comes to reconciling paid work and unpaid care work—especially for people with low incomes or in insecure employment conditions. In particular in households in which only one person can pursue paid work (for example single parents or people with health problems), financial compensation facilitates the taking on of (unpaid) care work.

For people caring for children and performing paid work

Designing working hours in a way that makes care work possible

- With a new standard for “full-time” work amounting to 30–35 hours a week, parents would be enabled to coordinate and combine paid work and unpaid care work without suffering career disadvantages. Even people without children of their own and without relatives in need of care would thus be given the opportunity to perform unpaid care work, for instance in their role as uncle or aunt, boyfriend or girlfriend, or neighbour.
- A right of choice for overall working times, allocation of working hours and place of work could be enshrined in law. An Elective Working Time Act (*Wahlarbeitszeitgesetz*) on flexible working times and hours could extend and merge existing rights and be combined with a new guiding principle for working hours that are genuinely reconcilable with care work. The proposal for such a flexible working time law by the German Women Lawyers Association has also been picked up in the Second Gender Equality Report.
- The regulation on temporary part-time employment already introduced the right to return to full-time employment. With an extension to the law on part-time employment, employees

who have reduced their working hours without the right to return would also be able to increase their working hours again. This would in particular affect carers.

Revaluating SAHGE employment

- A revaluating of the so-called SAHGE-professions (social work, household-related services, health and care, as well as child-rearing)—by means of increased salaries and improved working conditions (in particular for women)—would indirectly support a more egalitarian allocation of unpaid care work and at the same time strengthen professional care work which is necessary to avoid overloads and overburdening.

Strengthening allowances for unpaid care work

- The aim of parental allowance is to support and promote an egalitarian distribution of unpaid care work. An expansion of the number of partner months for parental allowance would underline this (in line with the recommendation in the Second Gender Equality Report of the Federal Government, 2017). A higher income replacement rate would also be beneficial in terms of gender equality policy. However, the effect of distribution policy would have to be balanced against that of gender equality policy. A corresponding benefit should support all families in their allocation of unpaid care work, including low-income families.

3 Solutions

- In addition to parental leave, working mothers are in most cases entitled to maternity leave. The father or co-mother also plays a relevant role in family-building as well as the health of mother and child. Therefore, a certain period of paternity leave after birth is also being discussed. Such a leave period—whether voluntary or compulsory—would signal even right after the birth of a child that it is not only the mother who is relevant for the health of the child, but also the father (or a co-mother).
- Moreover, **time off for early detection screenings** (so-called U-examinations in Germany) **of the children as well as parent discussions in childcare institutions for both parents** would make it possible to accompany the children's development on an equal footing and to have joint discussions with doctors, teachers and educators.
- The **introduction of half days off due to a child's sickness** would equally foster a more egalitarian allocation of tasks. It could also be assessed whether it would, from a gender equality policy point of view, make sense when a child is ill to make the receipt of sickness benefit within the statutory health insurance scheme easily transferable.

- A more general proposal is for a **flexible time budget** for parents of underage children, as proposed by the Expert Commission for the Second Gender Equality Report. Leave for U-screenings and for parent discussions could then be drawn from such a 120-day budget.

For people performing (elderly) care as well as paid work

Time rights for family carer

- The Expert Commission for the Second Gender Equality Report has proposed exemption options with remuneration compensation for informal care, specifically: a 120-day time budget (Bundesregierung, 2017).
- In order to allocate unpaid care work in a more egalitarian way, women and men must also be able to use the various services in an equal manner. This could be facilitated if relatives were not required to commit themselves to one main carer, and instead several people could share the main care tasks.

Strengthening the workplace rights of earners with care obligations

Reconciliation supported by clear commitments and set structures for both women and men.

- Rules on mandatory representation in companies make it easier for earners to actually claim and use their time rights.
- Reconciliation officers could make the reconciliation of work and family life an issue for men AND women in companies by addressing fathers and mothers, male and female carers.
- Advisory services on working time flexibilisation and support in payroll accounting could support and relieve small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
- The additional expenditure that companies might incur from supporting an egalitarian allocation of unpaid care work could be offset by tax advantages or bonuses.

FIELD OF ACTION Infrastructure

Infrastructure has an influence on whether earners can reliably take on unpaid care work, whether carers have time for paid work and whether both can do so without excessive overloads.

On the one hand, this is a question of infrastructure that provides direct care work and thus affects the amount of unpaid care work that must be allocated between the partners. These are, for instance, childcare institutions, other care infrastructure and household-related services.

Another option for action is to expand the infrastructure—transport infrastructure and digital infrastructure as well as health infrastructure—which influences the amount of time that needs to be spent on care work in terms of travel time. In particular this refers to travel time between places of residence, the workplace and care facilities. Accordingly, affordable housing, a well-developed local public transport system, a good supply of broadband internet and health services also promote an egalitarian allocation of unpaid care work.



Costs of infrastructure

Analyses show that the costs of care and nursing infrastructure are “offset” against the potential income of the carer when he or she re-enters paid work. This increases the incentives for unequal allocation, rather than supporting an egalitarian distribution of care work.

At present, childcare costs can be partially deducted from income tax. However, tax relief has a retrospective effect. Secondly, such tax deductions have different effects for families with different incomes. And thirdly, they have particularly significant effects on earners as their tax burdens decrease more sharply.

Offers free of costs could reduce the time and effort needed for applications as opposed to means-tested (income-based) cost sharing. Regarding the allocation of unpaid care work, it is argued that the costs of infrastructure in the area of childcare and nursing/elderly care should in principle be borne by society as a whole.

Childcare infrastructure

- An allocation of unpaid care work on a partnership basis is supported by an infrastructure that is available nationwide, of high quality, reliable, flexible and easy to use, easily accessible, and inexpensive or even free of charge.
- All-day care from the age of one until at least the tenth birthday would be helpful. The legal entitlement would already apply to children from one year old until they start school. A legal entitlement to all-day care in primary schools is planned (CDU/CSU/SPD, 2018). Moreover, all-day care should also be guaranteed during the holidays and school breaks (Bundesregierung, 2017). In addition, a reliable care infrastructure for older children could facilitate the transition from primary school (fifth grade) up to adolescence at the age of 14.

(Elderly) care infrastructure

- An affordable care mix of inpatient, day-care and outpatient services would facilitate the reconciliation of paid work and unpaid care work.
- A legal entitlement to an inpatient care placement would create better choices between inpatient, day-care and outpatient care.
- And in the case of elderly care, too, a qualitative expansion could be followed by making the services available free of charge.
- Another way of strengthening equal participation in unpaid care work would be to provide advice to relatives via social services as soon as a person is admitted to the assistance system. This proposal, based on the Dutch model, would also open up the possibility of entering into discussions at the micro level of the household—about maintaining career prospects on the one hand and the potential for sharing care responsibilities on a partnership basis on the other. Such advice could also counteract the creeping acceptance of care responsibilities, which reinforces unequal allocation of care work and makes overload more likely.

Household work

Options for reducing the Gender Care Gap by facilitating the use of household-related services are

- the setting of minimum standards in labour law,
- the development of standards and certification for good household-related services as well as
- the introduction of state-supported vouchers for household-related services (see Second Gender Equality Report of the German Federal Government, 2017).

FIELD OF ACTION State benefits

Currently, state benefits, the social security system and income tax are based on various conceptions of family, gender and care work. This means that an egalitarian allocation of unpaid care work is not consistently supported.

3 Solutions

The Expert Commission for the Federal Government's Second Gender Equality Report (Bundesregierung, 2017) presents **options for action** to achieve the synchronous orientation of regulations towards a more partnership-based allocation of work:

with regard to reducing income tax incentives that promote traditional task sharing:

- Abolition of income tax bracket V
- Further development of the splitting of income between spouses towards real splitting

with regard to contribution-free co-insurance of the partners:

- Introduction of independent access to health and long-term care insurance
- Time limit for contribution-free insurance
- Extension of contribution-free insurance to members of chosen families

with regard to mini-jobs:

- Individual taxation of income from marginal employment
- Introduction of compulsory social security insurance for marginally employed persons

FIELD OF ACTION Social norms

Social norms, gender stereotypes and gender role ascriptions are major reasons for the unequal allocation of unpaid care work. These cannot be changed by policy instruments and measures alone. They do, however, change over time if the framework conditions change and are oriented more towards the model of an egalitarian allocation of unpaid care work. Societal change and the changes implemented in the current framework conditions have already altered some social norms.

Options for action to foster continued societal change:

- Explicitly naming and specifying gender equality in the allocation of paid work and unpaid care work as a general goal in political measures.
- Strengthening women in economic and political positions. After all, country comparisons show that if women have economic and political influence, are financially independent and have a high employment rate, men also tend to participate more in domestic work.

- Simplifying and enabling communication about unpaid care work and its allocation, for example through free, easy-to-use tools (brochures, checklists, apps).
- In order to sensitise parents and individuals towards an egalitarian allocation of unpaid care work, they are best addressed directly where they are—for example through materials laid out in the offices of gynaecologists, in birth preparation courses, at clinics, day care centres, schools, family centres, youth welfare offices (it is also conceivable for the so-called ANE information letters to be extended to expectant parents).
- In addition to this, expectant fathers could be addressed separately and explicitly. When they acknowledge their paternity or register at the registry office, fathers should therefore receive a letter that includes their rights and benefits as fathers and addresses the issue of how they may obtain more time for care work (for instance, clarifications on parental allowance and parental leave should be the focus in this regard).
- Many decisions are made long before the actual birth of the child. These include the allocation of unpaid care work and the management of everyday life. However, many related issues, for example the distribution of housework, are not reflected upon. These questions might be addressed and taught in an “everyday life skills” school subject, and different life models and their consequences could be discussed in such classes.
- In addition, the issue is also relevant in vocational guidance. Here, gender equality-oriented vocational guidance and counselling could be further expanded, as was also recommended by the Expert Commission for the Second Gender Equality Report (Bundesregierung, 2017).

Conclusion and look ahead

Reducing the Gender Care Gap will not happen overnight. The causes of the Gender Care Gap are closely interwoven and influence each other.

The many political and legal reforms of recent years have contributed to the fact that more women and mothers are now performing paid work. For them, the duration of family-related career breaks has also been significantly reduced. In addition, more men are now taking (at least short-term) parental leave. At the same time, however, women still pursue less paid work than men. In turn, they perform far more unpaid care work than men and earn less in entitlements to support independent livelihood security in old age. However, it is too narrow a view to interpret these decisions solely as the result of individual choices. Which allocation of tasks is perceived as being “appropriate” and which mother and father roles are perceived as “right” also influences the institutional framework.

In a future- and equality-oriented society, the framework conditions must make a partnership-based allocation of unpaid care work equally attractive for both women and men. As has been shown, the greatest impact on the Gender Care Gap is achieved if men and fathers reduce their working hours.

Couples should be empowered and enabled to live in dual-earner arrangements (universal adult worker model) without being overburdened and without experiencing any disadvantages to their own livelihood security. From a societal perspective, it should be possible for both persons in the partnership to organise their working hours in such a way that they can allocate and share the unpaid care work among them. If this is achieved, chances of greatly advancing gender equality are good.

The Federal Government has therefore, in its Gender Equality Strategy, formulated the goal of strengthening the reconciliation of family, care and paid work, and of promoting an equal division and allocation of paid work and unpaid care work. The Gender Equality Strategy outlines measures to be achieved during the 19th legislative period. This dossier offers suggestions for advancing the Gender Equality Strategy and taking further steps to get closer to the set goals.

Equal allocation arrangements for paid work and unpaid care work are also a topic for the German EU Council Presidency in 2020—with the aim of adopting Council conclusions on how Europe can close the wage gap and create more equal rights by establishing new allocation arrangements for unpaid care work.



Further information

The Federal Government's Gender Equality Strategy: www.gleichstellungsstrategie.de

Gender equality as an issue of the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union: www.eu2020.de/eu2020-de/programm/gleichstellung-von-frauen-und-maennern-europa/2365248

Website of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth on unpaid care work: www.bmfsfj.de/gendercaregap

Information on the research report

This dossier is based on a research report that documents the results of the project “Pay Gap, Care Gap, Pension Gap: Interlinking Key Gender Gaps for Germany for monitoring Gender Equality and taking action“ (in short: project Gender Care Gap, December 2018 through September 2020) (Gärtner et al., 2020). The project is implemented by the Institute for Social Work and Social Education (ISS e.V.) and the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ). It is being financed via the “Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme 2014–2020” of the European Commission’s Directorate General Justice and Consumers.

The ISS e.V. conducted the qualitative-empirical analyses, that is

- literature review on the Gender Care Gap and the current state of research,
- six exploratory, semi-standardised individual interviews with experts on the Gender Care Gap and the different forms of care work,
- four moderated discussions with focus groups of four to nine local experts (for example women’s representatives/gender equality officers in municipalities, equal opportunities representatives in regional employment agencies, representatives of family centres, care centres, multi-generational houses), on problems arising from important crossroads during the life course (such as the birth of a child) and good practices in regional support,
- safeguarding and supplementing the results through workshops with national and international experts.

The research report also incorporates the results of a quantitative-empirical analysis by the Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Information Technology, Department of Microsimulation Models (FIT), that is

- statistical evaluations of the underlying causes of the Gender Care Gap as well as the interrelation of the Gender Gaps
- quantitative studies on potential effects when implementing the options for action.

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Imprint

This brochure is part of the public relations work of the Federal Government; it is made available free of charge and is not intended for sale.

Published by:

Bundesministerium
für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend
Referat Öffentlichkeitsarbeit
11018 Berlin
www.bmfsfj.de

Available from:

Publikationsversand der Bundesregierung
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Tel.: +49 30 18 272 2721
Fax: +49 30 18 10 272 2721
Telephone service for the deaf: gebaerdentelefon@sip.bundesregierung.de
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Monday–Thursday: 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.
Fax: +49 30 18 555-4400
E-Mail: info@bmfsfj.service.bund.de

Public service telephone number for all government agencies and offices: 115*

Art. no.: 4BR231

As of: August 2020, 1st edition

Designed by: www.zweiband.de

Picture credit Dr Franziska Giffey: Bundesregierung/Jesco Denzel

Picture credit: Cover picture © BMFSFJ/Phillip Arnoldt

Printer: MKL Druck GmbH & Co. KG

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