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## Institutional change and women's work patterns along the family life course

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines country variation and change over time in mothers' work patterns along the family life course, focusing on the effect of policies and labor market characteristics. Using ISSP data from 1994 and 2012, the findings show that in many countries, although not in all, mothers increased their attachment to market work. Family policy and the opportunities open for women affected the decision to work when children were young, as well as the choice of strong or moderate attachment to the labor force. Family policy also had an effect on reducing educational differences in mothers' work patterns.

## 1. Introduction

Over the last half-century, women have made impressive gains towards equality. In particular, women improved their educational attainment, in many countries surpassing men in rates of college graduation. Concomitantly they entered new areas of studies (DiPrete & Buchman, 2013). Women's participation in economic activities also increased considerably changing the landscape of the labor force. In part this was due to policies encouraging women's employment and facilitating work-family balance which were implemented in most industrial societies. These policies allowed more women, especially mothers of young children, to join the labor force on a continuous basis and to enter a more diverse array of occupations. Indeed, occupational gender segregation declined in many countries (Charles & Grusky, 2004; Reskin & Maroto, 2011; Charles, 2011) as many women entered formerly male-dominated occupations (England, 2010; Mandel, 2012). Consequently, the gender gaps in wage and position narrowed over time (England, 2010; O'Reilly, Smith, Deakin, & Burchell, 2015).

Attitudes concerning gender roles and women's work also changed and have become more egalitarian across the Western world since the 1960s (Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Brewster & Padavic, 2000). Yet, many aspects of gender inequality still persist and, although gaps have been narrowed, the movement towards gender equality has stalled in many countries (England, 2010). Working women continue to perform the lion's share of household tasks, while their spouses' contribution remains relatively small and did not change significantly in recent decades (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milke, 2006).

As numerous studies have shown, the uneven division between paid and unpaid work still has a profound effect on mothers' work patterns along the family life course, and on the ensuing consequences (Moen &

Han, 2001; Budig, Misra, & Boeckmann, 2012; Kahn, Garcia-Mangano, & Bianchi, 2014; Stier, Lewin-Epstein, & Braun, 2001). Although women increased their labor force participation in general, they are still more likely than men to interrupt their employment when family demands are high and to work part time or engage in less demanding work (Gash, 2008, 2009). Yet opportunities for work in general, and mothers' work in particular, vary over time and in different institutional contexts (Boeckmann, Misra, & Budig, 2014). This is due to structural changes in labor markets, the growth of policies and arrangements that support mothers' work, and changes in workers' characteristics. There is a tendency towards convergence in family-supportive policies, with growth particularly in countries that used to provide lower level of support (Clarke, 2015). Such changes may lead to the expectation that mothers' work patterns will converge as well. However, there are relatively few studies that examined changes in the work patterns of mothers over time and across countries in the context of institutional and policy changes (see for example, Yarkes, 2010; Simonson, Gordo, & Titova, 2011; Ziefle & Gangl, 2014).

The main interest of this study is to illuminate changes over time in mothers' attachment to paid employment as revealed in their labor market behavior, and relate these changes to individual characteristics, market opportunities, and social policies. We focus our attention on the period when mothers have young children and family responsibilities are most likely to be at odds with labor market activity. In particular we examine whether mothers adopted a strong attachment to paid work, that is worked full time continuously when the children were young; whether mothers displayed a weak attachment and refrained from work during this period; or whether they had a moderate attachment, moving from full to part time work or interrupting employment for a short time to combine work and family demands.

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The study has two main goals, one is descriptive in nature and aims at exploring whether and where mothers' attachment to paid work changed in recent years. The second is to identify the conditions under which changes took place and to estimate their relative importance. Specifically, we aim to evaluate the effect of policies and labor market characteristics on changes in mothers' employment during the time they had young children at home, and how these effects vary across time.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. Micro-level determinants of women's attachment to the labor force

The effect of family demands on women's employment patterns is well documented in the literature. Because women assume the major share of care-work and housework they are more likely than men to interrupt their employment when family demands are high. Some may drop out of the labor force; others may work part time, or engage in less demanding work (Stier, 1998; Gash, 2008; Moen & Han, 2001; Stier et al., 2001). The major consequence is gender inequality in pay and position which further affect the power relations in the family (Boeckmann et al., 2014; Budig & England, 2001; Gash, 2009; Cooke, 2014; Stier et al., 2001). Variation in women's level of attachment to the workforce (as indicated in their employment patterns), especially when having young children, is often attributed to their individual resources and their preferences for market work. In particular, higher education improves women's opportunities in the labor market and increases their motivation to be gainfully employed.

According to human capital theory, education increases the opportunity costs of women staying at home or reducing their labor-force attachment because wages increase with education (Becker, 1991). In addition, higher education is associated with high-skilled jobs that offer also good working condition and higher quality of employment (Stier & Yaish, 2014). Indeed, numerous studies have documented the effect of education on women's labor force participation, the choice of full-time employment, work continuity along the life course, and the ability to combine work with family life (England, 2010; Evertsson, England, Hermsen, & Cotter, 2007; Nieuwenhuis, Need, & van der Kolk, 2012; Steiber & Haas, 2012; Stier et al., 2001).

Higher education is also related to attitudes and preferences for market work, as highly educated women have more egalitarian attitudes than women with lower education. In turn, women's preferences and attitudes towards family and work affect their employment decisions, especially when family demands are high (Hakim, 2002; Crompton & Lyonette, 2008; Gash, 2009; England, 2010). Higher education was found to affect also the organization of households (Stier & Lewin-Epstein, 2007), mainly the participation of fathers in housework and child care or outsourcing of household chores (Poortman & van Der Lippe, 2009; Raz-Yurovich, 2014; van der Lippe, Frey, & Tsvetkova, 2013).

### 2.2. Structural and contextual factors

In one of the first comparative studies on the issue of unpaid work, Kalleberg and Rosenfeld (1990: 332) stated that 'Cross-national research is necessary to examine how variation in institutional structures, policies, and cultural values affect the division of labor between men and women in the family and in the labor market'. Since then numerous studies have shown how the context of structural characteristics and institutional arrangements such as employment opportunities for women, work and family policies, and normative views at the country level affected women's employment behavior (e.g., Stier et al., 2001; Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Gash, 2008, 2009; Nieuwenhuis et al., 2012). The next paragraph will address each of these factors in greater detail.

Women's work patterns are affected, first and foremost, by the opportunities available to them in the labor market. The demand for

female typed jobs; white collar occupations and public sector employment, the wage offers in such jobs and the conditions of work all affect the decisions of mothers whether to join the labor market, and how many hours to allocate to market work (Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Misra, Budig, & Boeckmann, 2011). These factors affect the opportunity costs in general and that of mothers in particular, especially in an era of rising educational attainment.

The availability of part time work and the possibility of moving between part- and full-time employment appears to affect mothers' decisions regarding their labor market participation especially when they have young children at home (Gornick & Jacobs, 1996; Stier et al., 2001; Diekhoff, Gash, Mertens, & Gordo, 2016). Part time employment varies considerably across countries. In some countries, such as the post-socialist countries, opportunities for part time employment are hardly available; in other countries (e.g., the Netherlands), part time employment is readily available and is a major characteristic of women's employment. Countries also differ in the quality of part time employment, the number of hours worked and the ability to return to full-time employment when family demands decline (Lewis, Campbell, & Huerta, 2008; Stier et al., 2001).

Most contemporary family-supportive policies, such as paid maternity leave and child-care arrangements are aimed at facilitating the employment of mothers by providing them with the necessary conditions to combine work and family (Boeckmann et al., 2014; Gornick & Meyers, 2003). Furthermore, in most industrialized societies, anti-discrimination laws and wage regulations were enacted to reduce gender-related income gaps and to improve women's position in the labor market. These policies contributed to the entrance of women into male-dominated fields of study in higher education and in the labor market (England, 2010).

Many studies focused on the effect of family-supportive policies on women's work patterns, showing that in countries that provide support for working mothers, their labor market attachment is high and they are less constrained in employment choices by family demands (Stier et al., 2001; Gash, 2008; Kalleberg & Rosenfeld, 1990). Findings also show that family-friendly policies reduce the motherhood penalty (Boeckmann et al., 2014; Gash, 2009; Budig et al., 2012; Budig, Misra, & Boeckmann, 2016) and the costs of employment interruptions (Stier et al., 2001). However, the effect of family policies is more complex, as several studies suggest. Family policies (such as generous maternity-leave arrangements) are expected, in general, to improve women's ability to maintain continuous attachment to the labor market, yet they may, at the same time, preserve the gendered division of labor. In this regard, Korpi, Ferrarini, and Englund (2013) highlight the variation in family policies across countries, which reflects different underlying ideologies regarding gender roles and women's rights and also interact with social class. In some countries these policies promote women's high involvement in paid work while in others they discourage such involvement. Moreover, these policies seldom target men's involvement in family work or their role as parents (although more paternity leave schemes were introduced recently) and, thus, they do not always alter the behavior of women and men in the family.

Culture also plays a role in terms of the norms and expectations that shape mothers' employment and earnings, as well as the gendered division of household labor (Cooke, 2006; Pfau-Effinger, 1998, 2004). Normative perceptions of gender roles and women's work may affect the decision of mothers whether to work full time, part time or not at all when the children are young (Janus, 2013; Uunk, 2015). At the country level, a high rate of part time employment reflects both the structure of employment opportunities and traditional normative perceptions of the role of women as secondary (rather than equal) bread-winners.

### 2.3. Changes over time

Social structures offer diverse conditions that affect mothers' employment patterns. But, in addition to synchronic differences, there are

also dynamic processes over time at the societal levels. These include the rise of individualistic and egalitarian values concerning gender, growing policy awareness of gender and family, and changing behaviors of individuals. As mentioned earlier women increased their educational attainment, entered new fields of study and improved their human capital. At the same time, changes in the demand for highly educated workers and the growth of the service economy opened up new employment opportunities for women.

The above changes also contributed to changing attitudes towards mothers' work (Fernandez, 2013). Furthermore, the postponement of childbirth has allowed women to establish careers before having children and, consequently, to increase their attachment to paid employment (Gustafsson, 2001; Miller, 2010; Mills, Rindfuss, McDonald, & Te Velde, 2011; O'Donoghue, Meredith, & O'Shea, 2011). Indeed, in most countries women's labor force participation has risen, although there is still considerable variation in rates and trends in part time employment. As Lewis et al. (2008) show, the proportion of employed women working part time has increased in some countries such as Austria, Germany and Ireland, but has fallen in others, including among others, Sweden and the UK.

Family policies have changed significantly since the 1970s in all countries aiming at promoting women's employment and the dual-earner family (Gauthier, 2002). However, as Gauthier (2002) shows, this did not result in a convergence of family policies across countries, but rather a growing divergence. The liberal countries such as the US and Australia, remained with lower level of support for working families while others (such as Norway, Germany or Austria) increased their support. Because the level of support and changes in the different elements of policies (i.e., cash benefits; paternity leave) vary across countries, the outcomes of these policies are not entirely straightforward.

The implementation of employment-supportive policies in most industrialized countries seems to have improved the balance of work and family over time (Lewis, 2009; Stier, Lewin-Epstein, & Braun, 2012). They also tend to facilitate mothers' employment, especially when policies also target men (e.g., parental leave for fathers). Yet, some studies have shown that generous policies result in a lower level of attachment of women to the labor market (Mandel, 2009; Diekhoff et al., 2016). It is also the case, that family-friendly policies do not uniformly affect all women and in general they are less consequential for highly educated women (Mandel, 2009; Korpi et al., 2013; Gronlund, Hallden & Magnusson 2017) although this was not the case regarding the motherhood pay penalty as Halldén, Levanon, and Kricheli-Katz, (2016) have documented. While the effect of policies on mothers' employment is well documented, as pointed above, relatively few studies examined how changes in policies across time affect women's employment. Exploring this issue, Nieuwenhuis (2014) found that changes in maternity leave did not affect all mothers equally and had especially pronounced effect among mothers with more education (2014: 108).

In addition, cultural shifts towards greater gender equality and support of mothers' work (Cotter, Hermsen, & Vanneman, 2011; Mills et al., 2011; Fernandez, 2013) may have affected the attachment of mothers to paid employment even when family requirements demand much of their time. Nonetheless, studies that examine mothers' employment across countries report high variation in their pattern of work, their preferences, and constraints (Gash, 2009; Yarkes, 2010; Simonson et al., 2011).

To sum up, prior research studied contextual and individual effects on mothers' employment patterns cross nationally. The current paper adds a time dimension focusing on how mothers' work patterns along the family life course have changed in different countries. The time dimension is important, as during the two decades under study most countries have experienced changes in the institutional arrangements of mothers' work and the opportunities open to them, alongside a rise in higher education and attitude change (England, 2010). We examine the

individual and societal-level determinants of these patterns and seek to incorporate changes over time, expecting a general trend towards higher attachment to the labor market for mothers in the most recent period. We further expect that in a social environment that supports mothers' employment or has become increasingly supportive, mothers will show a stronger attachment to the labor market when children are young. Moreover, we explore how policy changes over time interact with women's education. Such an examination will contribute to the understanding the role of policies in helping to balance work and family among mothers with different levels of skills. Following Korpi et al. (2013) we expect that higher levels of support for mothers will be less consequential to the work decision of highly educated women, but will facilitate a higher attachment for less educated women. That is, educational differences in work attachment are expected to decline in contexts that provide more support for mothers.

### 3. Data and measurements

The study utilizes two waves of the ISSP module on "Family and Changing Gender Roles"- collected in 1994 and 2012. The time span of almost 20 years seems sufficient for observing changes in women's work patterns and in institutional characteristics. The analysis includes 19 countries that participated in the two waves of data collection and provided data for the variables of interest. These are Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Norway, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, Sweden, the UK, and the US.<sup>1</sup> In the current study we focus on employment status during two phases of the family's life course when demands on women's time are high: when they had pre-school children and when their youngest child was still in school. The analysis, therefore, is limited to mothers who went through these two phases (that is, have at least school-aged children). In each period we included a cohort of mothers aged 30–50, in order to capture groups that did not "overlap" in the two surveys. The final sample in the analyses includes 8,127 mothers.

#### 3.1. The dependent variable

The variable of interest in this study is women's labor force attachment during early phases of motherhood. In the survey women were asked whether they worked full time, part time or did not participate in paid employment during two periods of life: when they had pre-school children, and when their youngest child was in school. Based on their answers we constructed the employment pattern variable. The combined answers to the two questions result in 9 possible patterns, some of which are quite rare. The nine possible outcomes were therefore collapsed into three meaningful patterns: (1) women who worked full time when they had pre-school children at home AND when their youngest child was still in school were categorized as having strong attachment to the labor force. (2) Women who did not work for pay during both time periods (when they had pre-school or school-aged children) and those who did not work during one period and worked part time during the second, were categorized as having weak attachment. (3) Women who worked part time continuously (during period 1 and period 2), or worked part time one period (the first or the second) and full time during the other period were categorized as having moderate attachment. A small number of women who did not work during the first period and worked full time only during the second period were also included to this category.

<sup>1</sup> Spain that participated in the two modules was dropped because information was missing on education.

### 3.2. Analytical strategy

The study focuses on mothers' work attachment and how it varies across countries and over time. Because we are interested in the effect of individual as well as contextual attributes on work attachment, we employ multi-level modelling techniques (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). We analyze individual women embedded in the specific context of the country, in the specific time period (1994 or 2012). This strategy results in 38 macro level units (19 countries X 2 periods).

The main interest of this study is in the role of macro-level indicators in shaping mothers' employment patterns. To denote family supportive arrangements, we attribute to each country and period the number of weeks of paid maternity and parental leave for mothers, and the percent children 0–2 in daycare. These data were obtained from the OECD family data base with additional country-specific information for those not available in the data set. Because we are interested also in the effect of policy change over time we included a measure of relative change in maternity leave defined as (weeks maternity leave at t2-weeks maternity leave at t1) divided by weeks maternity leave at t1. For the earlier period we used data from the 1980s and 1990s to calculate the change, and for the later period we used information from mid-2000 and 2010. To capture market characteristics and opportunities we included the rate of female labor force participation and the percent of women in part time employment for each country and period (obtained from OECD statistical data base on labor force participation and ILO publications, various years. For a few countries the information was obtained from country reports).<sup>2</sup>

In order to control for country variation in socio-demographic attributes of the female labor force we included several individual-level variables: mothers' educational level (denoting primary, secondary or tertiary education in order to achieve comparability across time); age (measured in years); whether the spouse worked full time during the time children were young (when they had a preschool child, and when the youngest was in school); and an indicator for missing spouse. Education reflects the mothers' human capital and therefore indicates her opportunity costs when children are young. Age was included to control for variation within the broad cohorts. The spouse's work pattern during child-rearing years served as an indicator for economic conditions of the household and to a certain degree also of the labor market, and the indicator for missing spouse serves as a proxy for marital status at this period. Because of the retrospective nature of the dependent variable it was not possible to include other variables (such as gender-role attitudes, household division of labor or occupational characteristics) as they were measured at the time of the survey only. Appendix A Table A1 presents descriptive statistics for the micro- and macro-level variables.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Descriptive analysis

We begin the analysis by presenting the distribution of work patterns by country during the two time periods. Table 1 presents the three states of mothers' work for all countries separately, for the 1994 and 2012 surveys, respectively. Starting with the earlier period, in 7 of the 19 countries, the majority of mothers had a weak attachment to the

<sup>2</sup> Other measures such as the country's GDP, unemployment rate and gender-role attitudes (obtained from the ISSP surveys) and changes in other macro-level indicators (e.g., female labor force participation) were tested in preliminary analyses. For other characteristics (e.g., size of the public sector) data were not available for earlier periods for all countries. Because of such data limitations, high correlation with other macro-level variables, and non-significant effects on the employment patterns they were not included in the final model.

**Table 1**

Distribution of mothers' pattern of attachment to the labor force, 1994 and 2012.

	1994			2012		
	Strong	Moderate	Weak	Strong	Moderate	Weak
Czech Rep.	53.3%	36.4%	10.3%	46.1%	35.6%	18.4%
Hungary	63.2%	26.1%	10.7%	54.4%	19.5%	26.2%
Slovenia	83.1%	8.0%	9.0%	75.8%	16.4%	7.8%
Poland	45.1%	25.3%	29.6%	51.2%	23.2%	25.6%
Bulgaria	74.8%	15.0%	10.2%	70.8%	16.2%	13.0%
Russia	71.6%	20.1%	8.3%	70.1%	19.5%	10.4%
USA	39.5%	38.3%	22.2%	55.5%	23.0%	21.5%
Canada	36.3%	31.9%	31.9%	41.5%	43.4%	15.1%
UK	12.0%	42.0%	46.0%	18.3%	54.1%	27.5%
Ireland	14.0%	14.0%	72.0%	29.8%	40.9%	29.3%
Australia	9.9%	38.1%	51.9%	14.5%	51.2%	34.3%
Israel	33.4%	34.4%	32.1%	37.6%	41.2%	21.3%
Germany	35.3%	31.4%	33.2%	26.9%	44.5%	28.6%
Austria	30.6%	24.3%	45.1%	13.9%	51.1%	35.0%
Netherlands	3.1%	24.2%	72.7%	7.8%	63.8%	28.4%
Norway	17.4%	50.3%	32.3%	50.6%	40.0%	9.4%
Sweden	16.6%	62.6%	20.9%	38.5%	54.8%	6.7%
Philippines	17.2%	30.4%	52.5%	11.6%	30.4%	58.0%
Japan	24.0%	21.0%	55.0%	17.5%	34.0%	48.5%

labor market – that is, they hardly worked for pay when they had young children at home. Most notable is Ireland where almost 80% of mothers had a weak attachment, but the rate was high also in the Netherlands, Australia, Japan, and the Philippines with more than half of the mothers only weakly attached to the labor market, followed by the UK and Austria with more than 40% staying out of the labor force during both phases. In contrast, in former socialist countries (Russia, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Hungary and, to a lesser extent, Poland and the Czech Republic) most women had a strong attachment to the labor market and only few stayed out of the labor force even when family demands were high. A moderated pattern of employment also characterizes many countries, led by Sweden where more than half of the mothers combined full and part time employment when they had young children, followed by Norway (50% of the mothers) and the UK, the US, Australia, the Czech Republic, Israel, Canada, Germany, and the Philippines – with a third of all mothers.

Two decades later mothers reported clearly different work patterns. In most countries, though not in all, mothers increased their involvement in paid employment when they had young children at home. In only two countries, the Philippines and Japan, most women stayed out of the labor force when their children were young. Again, in the post-socialist countries the employment behavior of most women reflected strong attachment to the labor market, and this was also the case in the US and Norway with more than half of all women working full time when their children were young, and the rate was high also in Canada (41%). A moderate attachment was the most frequent pattern in many countries including the Netherlands, the UK, Australia, Ireland, Canada, Austria, Germany, Sweden, and Israel.

To clearly present the pattern of change Fig. 1 depicts the changes in each pattern over time. Starting with weak attachment (Panel A) the figure indicates a considerable decline in 11 countries. This was especially salient in the case of Ireland and the Netherlands, both experienced a decline of over 40 percentage points (from about 70% in 1994 to 29% in 2012). A substantial decline is evident also in other countries – Norway, the UK, Canada, Australia, and, to some extent, Sweden. However, in three countries – Hungary, the Czech Republic, and the Philippines the rate of weak attachment increased during the years.

In line with the decline of weak attachment to the labor market, many mothers increased their attachment to paid work; in some cases, adopting a moderate attachment and in other cases revealing a strong attachment working full time during the childrearing years. For example, the rate of strong attachment (Panel B) increased in Norway (by



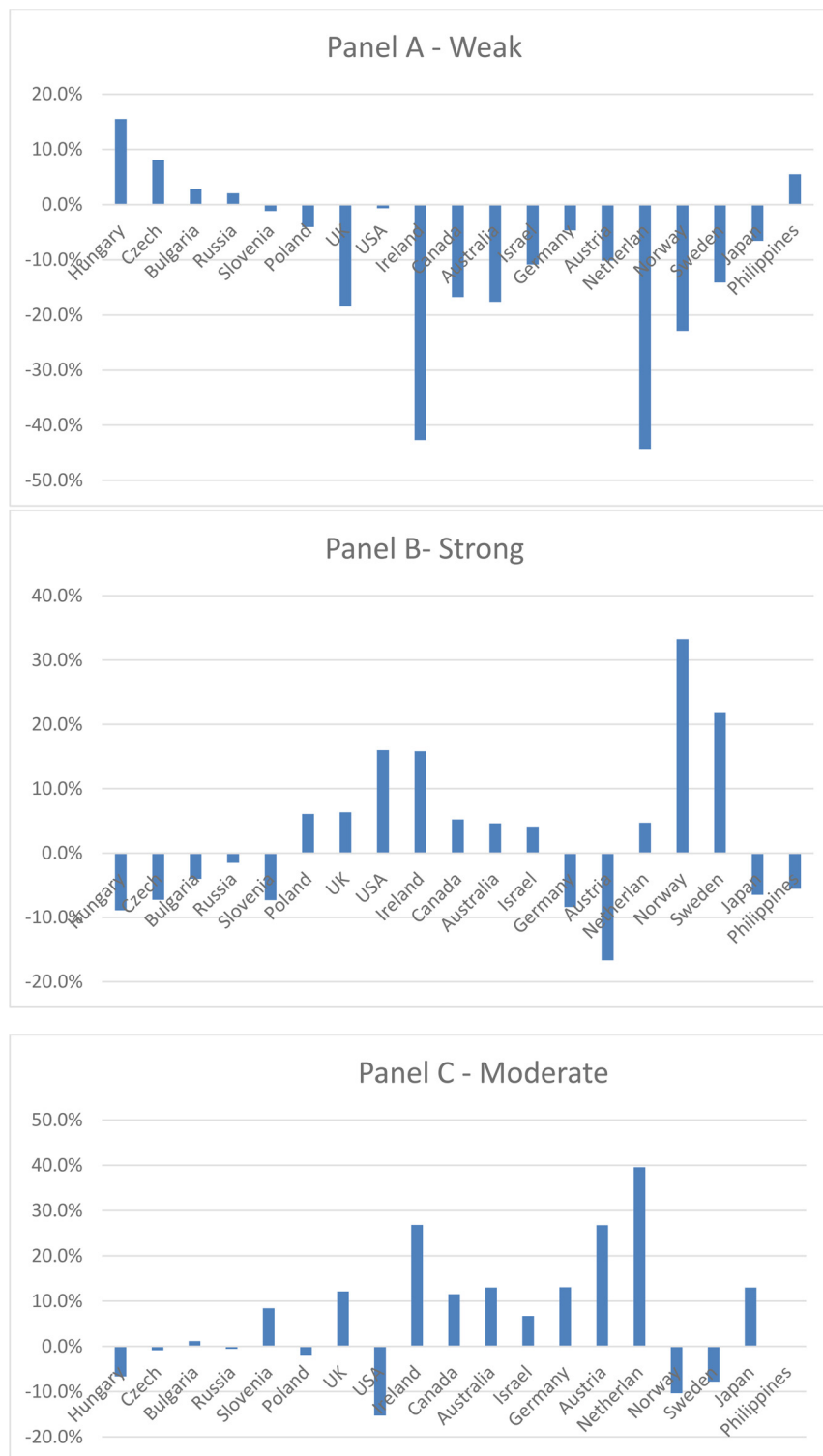


Fig. 1. Change in mothers' work patterns, 1994–2012.

more than 30 percentage points), in Sweden (by 20 percentage points), the US and Ireland (by about 15 percentage points), and Canada (by more than 10 percentage points). The rise was more modest in Poland, the UK, Israel, Australia, and the Netherlands. In contrast, the rate of mothers who reported working full time when they had young children at home declined in most post-socialist countries (except for Poland where it increased), in Austria, the Philippines and, to a much lesser extent, in the Czech Republic.

A comparison of women in moderate attachment (Panel C) reveals a

somewhat more diverse pattern. In ten of the countries mothers increased their participation in accordance with the moderate pattern, which combines both full- and part time employment. This is especially pronounced in countries that had a low level of mothers' employment during the time their children were young – Ireland, the Netherlands, and also the UK, Australia, and Austria. Labor market attachment increased also in Japan, Israel, Germany, and Slovenia. In contrast, the probability of having a moderate attachment declined in several countries, in particular Sweden, Norway, and the US. These are

countries with high attachment of women to the labor force and this cohort of mothers exhibited a stronger attachment to the labor market as compared with their counterparts in 1994. The tendency to adopt a moderate attachment declined somewhat also in Hungary and Poland.

To summarize – the pattern of changes in labor market attachment of women reveals considerable diversity across countries. In some countries there is a clear increase in women's attachment, whether on a full-time or more moderate pattern of work. This pattern appears primarily in countries where women's attachment to the labor market was not strong to start with (such as Ireland, Australia, the UK, the Netherlands but also Norway, Sweden, and Canada). At the same time, women in countries where most women used to work full time and where part time is almost not an option – such as the case of the post-socialist countries – reduced their attachment to the labor market. The largest change is observed in Ireland – in 1994 about 72% of mothers stayed out of the labor force. By 2012 the percentage of mothers with weak attachment declined sharply to 29%. This comparison indicates that over time more mothers joined the labor force, increasing their participation both in moderate and in strong attachment. This may reflect a cultural or structural change that drew more women (with or without high family demands) to paid employment.

Interestingly, structural characteristics of the labor market do not seem to be the driving force here – in the post-socialist countries part time employment opportunities are scarce and most women were always expected to work (policy also supported this expectation), although this might have changed in recent years. So, on the one hand in these countries the percentage of those who worked full time during the childrearing phase is the highest but the change indicates that women are more likely to withdraw from this pattern, probably because they prefer a different combination of work-family arrangements (and this might be open to them now as the working norms change). It is also possible that the conditions of combining work and family deteriorated (Saxonberg & Sirovatka, 2006). Overall, it is not possible to determine from these figures what mechanisms produced a change in the employment attachment patterns. In the next section we analyze these patterns in a multivariate and multilevel framework in order to examine this issue.

#### 4.2. Determinants of changing work patterns among mothers

In the following section we examine the effects of varying structural conditions across countries and time on the likelihood of mothers' labor market attachment. We use a multilevel framework in which individuals are viewed as embedded within the context of country and time. The analysis includes more than 8000 respondents in 38 units (19 countries \* two time periods – 1994 and 2012). For the analyses we employ multinomial multilevel estimation as our dependent variable is composed of three categories of labor force attachment (strong, weak, and moderate as the reference category). The macro-level variables include the percentage of female labor force participation and the proportion of women working part time; paid weeks of maternity leave (to denote family policies); the proportion (or ratio) of children aged 0–2 in child care; the rate of change in weeks of maternity leave. We also include an indicator for survey year and interactions of year and weeks of maternity leave. At the individual level we control for education as the major determinant of women's mode of attachment to the labor force; age, to account for variation within respondents in each year, whether the spouse worked full-time during the period when the family had young children at home, and whether there was no information on a spouse.

The results of the multilevel analysis are presented in Table 2. Models 1a, 2a, and 3a pertain to the likelihood of having a strong, compared to a moderate, pattern of attachment, while models 1b, 2b, and 3b show the results for a weak attachment compared to a moderate pattern. Turning to model 1a and 1b and focusing first on the individual level variables, we find that education affects the work patterns of

mothers as expected. Having a higher level of education is associated with a higher likelihood of strong attachment to the labor market and with a reduced likelihood to have a weak attachment, as compared to having a moderate attachment. The effect of age is not statistically significant. Full-time employment of spouses at the same stage of the family's life course is associated with a higher probability of the mother having a strong rather than moderate level of labor force attachment, and this is also the case when spouse is missing. Spouses' characteristics, however, have no significant effect on the decision whether to have a moderate rather than a weak attachment.

Turning to the effect of the macro-level variables on the work pattern, model 1a in Table 2 reveals that the likelihood of having a strong rather than a moderate attachment is especially high in countries with little opportunities for part time employment (such as the former socialist countries ( $b = -0.073$  and statistically significant). The likelihood to have a strong attachment is affected by maternity leave in a complex way. Generous maternity leave arrangements reduce the likelihood of having a strong rather than moderate attachment to the labor force ( $b = -0.004$  and statistically significant). This is in line with the argument that support for a long leave discourages mothers from being involved in paid employment continuously (e.g., Mandel, 2009). However, in countries where maternity leave expanded over time mothers had a higher tendency to work full time during the time their children were young ( $b = 0.016$ ).

A closer look at the countries that considerably improved the benefits of maternity leave reveals that it happened both in countries that used to have low support for mothers (such as the Netherlands, Poland, Canada, the Philippines and Ireland) and in countries that had high level of support such as Norway, Sweden, Germany and the Czech Republic. In some countries support grew during the early periods, in others it grew only later or continued growing during the second period (e.g., the UK, the Netherlands, Japan and Norway). These patterns suggest a more complex effect of maternity leave that probably interacts with individual and other structural characteristics. We test some of these possible interactions in later models.

Still looking at model 1a, the likelihood to have a strong attachment to the labor force is not affected by the rate of female labor force participation, or by the availability of child-care arrangements. There were also no changes over time in the likelihood to have a strong rather than a moderate attachment after controlling of all other variables.

The picture is different when examining the likelihood of maintaining a weak vs. a moderate attachment (model 1b). Women are less likely to display a weak attachment to the labor market in countries characterized by high female labor force participation ( $b = -0.045$  but unexpectedly they are more likely to have a weak attachment in countries where part time employment is more prevalent ( $b = 0.015$ ). The likelihood of weak attachment is also influenced significantly by work-family policies; more generous maternity leave ( $b = -0.007$ ) and higher rates of children in day care ( $b = -0.015$ ) reduce the likelihood to have a weak attachment. However, this behavior was not affected by changes in the generosity of maternity leave schemes. The tendency to have a weak rather than moderate attachment became stronger over time.

The overall pattern is similar when comparing the likelihood to have a weak attachment to the likelihood of having a strong attachment (not shown here). That is, policies and market conditions affect women's decision or ability to work when the children are young. Whether they work continuously in full-time employment or shift between full- and part time is determined both by the structural conditions that enable these shifts and by policies (and changes in policies) that provide support for mothers' work.

In order to uncover some of the complexities associated with the effects of family policies we estimated several additional models. First, we examine the differential effect of family policies over time on women's employment attachment by adding an interaction term of survey year and maternity leave (model 2a and model 2b). As evident from the

**Table 2**  
Results of multinomial analysis, work pattern along the life course.

	<u>Model 1a</u> Strong attachment	<u>Model 1b</u> Weak attachment	<u>Model 2a</u> Strong attachment	<u>Model 2b</u> Weak attachment	<u>Model 3a</u> Strong attachment	<u>Model 3b</u> Weak attachment
<u>Individual level</u>						
Education	0.381 <sup>*</sup> (0.067)	−0.541 <sup>*</sup> (0.079)	0.380 <sup>*</sup> (0.067)	−0.547 <sup>*</sup> (0.079)	0.396 <sup>*</sup> (0.069)	−0.559 <sup>*</sup> (0.087)
Age	0.000 (0.008)	−0.002 (0.008)	0.000 (0.008)	−0.002 (0.007)	0.001 (0.008)	−0.002 (0.008)
Spouse worked full time	0.388 <sup>*</sup> (0.143)	0.094 (0.114)	0.386 <sup>*</sup> (0.143)	0.091 (0.114)	0.390 <sup>*</sup> (0.143)	0.079 (0.109)
Spouse missing	0.706 <sup>*</sup> (0.162)	0.023 (0.155)	0.704 <sup>*</sup> (0.162)	0.018 (0.154)	0.707 <sup>*</sup> (0.159)	−0.017 (0.155)
<u>Macro-level</u>						
Female LF participation	−0.012 (0.011)	−0.045 <sup>*</sup> (0.010)	−0.012 (0.011)	−0.045 <sup>*</sup> (0.009)	−0.015 (0.010)	−0.053 <sup>*</sup> (0.010)
% women Part-time	−0.073 <sup>*</sup> (0.006)	0.015 <sup>*</sup> (0.004)	−0.073 <sup>*</sup> (0.007)	0.015 <sup>*</sup> (0.004)	−0.071 <sup>*</sup> (0.007)	0.016 <sup>*</sup> (0.003)
Maternity leave	−0.004 <sup>*</sup> (0.002)	−0.007 <sup>*</sup> (0.002)	−0.004 <sup>*</sup> (0.002)	−0.010 <sup>*</sup> (0.001)	−0.005 <sup>*</sup> (0.002)	−0.010 <sup>*</sup> (0.004)
Child care participation	0.008 (0.008)	−0.015 <sup>*</sup> (0.003)	0.008 (0.008)	−0.015 <sup>*</sup> (0.004)	0.009 (0.008)	−0.009 <sup>*</sup> (0.002)
Change in maternity	0.016 <sup>*</sup> (0.006)	0.001 (0.006)	0.016 <sup>*</sup> (0.006)	0.002 (0.005)	0.022 (0.006)	0.007 (0.004)
Year	−0.109 (0.222)	0.502 <sup>*</sup> (0.168)	−0.105 (0.296)	0.182 (0.184)	−0.112 (0.270)	0.334 <sup>*</sup> (0.140)
Year(2012) *maternity			−0.000 (0.003)	0.008 <sup>*</sup> (0.002)	−0.001 (0.003)	0.007 <sup>*</sup> (0.002)
Effect on education						
Maternity leave					0.001 (0.001)	0.003 (0.002)
Change in maternity					−0.019 <sup>*</sup> (0.004)	0.025 <sup>*</sup> (0.006)
Intercept	−0.091 (0.080)	−0.256 (0.063)	−0.091 (0.080)	−0.257 (0.058)	−0.105 (0.081)	−0.253 (0.059)
Chi Square (df)	248.2 (31)	147.3 (31)	248.5 (30)	127.6 (30)	210.7 (30)	124.4 (30)
N	8127 (38)					

\*  $p < 0.05$ .

coefficient in model 2a, there is no significant change over time in women's likelihood of a strong attachment to the labor market due to the level of support. However, a more generous maternity leave differently affects women's decisions to detach themselves from paid employment or participate in a moderate pattern, over time (model 2b). In 2012 mothers in countries that offer long maternity leave were more likely to have a weaker attachment to the labor force, compared to mothers in 1994. This finding is in line with the argument that leave arrangements that are “too generous” have a detrimental effect of mothers' attachment to paid employment but this is a recent effect that was not observed in the 1990s.

Next, we examine whether policies that facilitate mothers' work, affect differently the work pattern of mothers with different levels of education, as suggested by some scholars (e.g. Korpi et al., 2013; Halldén et al., 2016; Grönlund, Halldén, & Magnusson, 2017). In the last two models we test two interaction terms with education: the level of and change in maternity leave. Model 3a shows that the (positive) effect of education on the likelihood to have a strong rather than modified attachment to the labor market declines in countries that increased their maternity leave provisions. That is, an increase in maternity leave over time reduces the costs of full-time employment and therefore allow the less educated to join the labor force on a fulltime basis thereby reducing difference between educational groups. To demonstrate this conclusion, Fig. 2 presents the predicted probabilities of having a strong attachment for women with low (primary) and high (tertiary) education by different rates of change in maternity level.

Model 3b in Table 2 shows similar results regarding the effect of changes in maternity leave on women with different levels of educational. Again, the difference declines with the rise in support for mothers, as the second panel of Fig. 2 shows. In other words, an increase in

support for mothers allows less educated women to join the labor force (on a full time continuous basis or only moderately) while the strong attachment of highly educated women is not affected as Korpi et al. (2013) show. At the same time, highly educated women who prefer to stay out of the labor force when children are young are more likely to do so in settings where support for mothers increases as the second panel of Fig. 2 indicates.

## 5. Discussion

Women's economic activity has always been constrained by their family demands. Yet, ample research has documented important changes in women's attachment to paid work in most economically developed societies. Even so, women are still the main caretakers of children and while many countries implemented family and child-related policies to allow the combination of work and family demands, women's work patterns along their family life course still differ from that of men. That said, the current study aimed to document women's employment patterns during phases of intensive family demands and to examine whether, where, and how they have changed across time and generations.

The findings of our study reveal important changes in women's attachment to the labor market, although the changes are not uniform across countries. First, in most countries women join, or remain in, the labor force when they have young children. Only in a small number of countries, the majority of women have a weak attachment to the labor force. However, as the figures indicated, changes over time are not uniform across countries; in some countries women increased their attachment over time (partly by adopting a continuous full-time employment when their children were young, and partly by combining

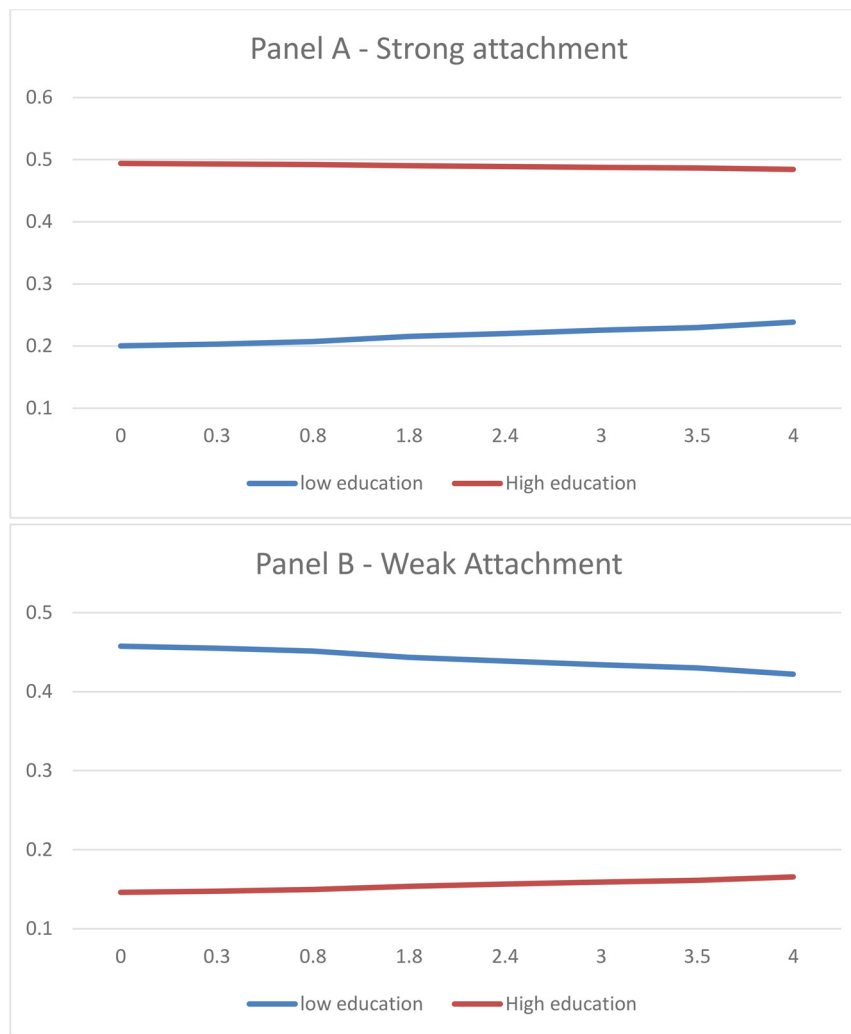


Fig. 2. Predicted probabilities of having strong (Panel A) and weak (panel b) attachment by education and the rate of change in maternity leave.

full- and part time employment). In several countries there is a decline in women's attachment and a larger share of mothers withdraw from employment altogether when they have young children at home. What explains these patterns and their changes?

Regarding the likelihood of women to adopt one pattern rather than another, we find that a number of country level characteristics affected the decision to work as well as the choice of strong or moderate attachment to the labor market. The opportunities open for women affected their decision whether to stay out of the labor market or to work for pay when family demands are high. In countries that provide part time employment women are more likely to have a moderate rather than a strong attachment to the labor force; but they are also more likely to stay out of the labor force for a prolonged period than to combine work and family in a moderate way. Part time employment can be viewed, then, as a way to discourage a stronger attachment to the labor force, possibly reflecting normative perceptions regarding women's role as providers. Supportive family policy, in contrast, facilitates the incorporation of women to paid employment in a moderate pattern of attachment, discouraging both strong and weak attachment to the labor force. The findings also imply a multifaceted effect of policy support for mothers. Overall, and in line with prior studies (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2011; Korpi et al., 2013; Mandel & Semyonov, 2005; Halldén et al., 2016; Grönlund et al., 2017), generous maternity leave helps mothers to combine work and family. However, there is a change among the more recent cohort of mothers. The effect of maternity leave has weakened for these women, especially in countries that provide

long leave. In countries that provide only moderate support or relatively short maternity leave and, especially, where part time is available, contemporary mothers are more likely than mothers in the past to work for pay when children are young. In contrast to this general finding, we also found that in countries that extended the period covered by maternity leave, more mothers maintained a continuous strong attachment to the labor market.

Our findings suggest then, that generous maternity leave encourages withdrawal from paid employment altogether, strengthening the “reproduction of gender role” arguments. At the same time, increasing the extent of paid maternity leave in countries where the leave is not sufficient to combine work and family allows more women to maintain a continuous, full-time attachment to the labor force. These findings point to the importance of balancing the length of maternity leave, so it will both allow mothers to adopt a continuous pattern of work without detaching themselves for a too long time from paid employment.

As Korpi et al. (2013) and others have argued, different groups of women may react differently to the availability of support to mothers' work. The findings show that extending the generosity of maternity leave reduces educational differences regarding the choice whether to maintain a continuous full-time employment when children are young or to combine full- and part time involvement in paid employment. It also reduces educational disparities in the decision to work instead of staying out of the labor force, by allowing less educated women to work full or part time. This is to say that increasing the support for mothers reduces the heterogeneity among women in terms of education or in



**Table A1**  
Descriptive statistics of micro and macro-level variables included in the analyses.

	Mean (SD)	Range
Micro-level variables		
Age	41.2 (5.7)	30–50
Education	1.93 (0.7)	1–3
Spouse worked full time	0.85 (0.4)	0–1
Spouse missing	0.08 (0.3)	0–1
N	8127	
Macro-level Variables		
Female labor force participation rate	55.6 (8.8)	35.5–73.3
% women in part-time employment	23.7 (14.2)	2.04–59.9
Weeks paid maternity leave	42.5 (43.9)	0–162
Change in weeks paid maternity leave	1.54 (4.95)	–0.32–30.0
% children 0-2 in day care	20.1 (17.7)	0–68.4
N	38	

other word, equalizing the opportunity costs of women with varied levels of human capital. While most highly educated women are not affected by more generous maternity leave, those with lower level of education are capable to maintain a more continuous and even strong attachment to paid employment.

Overall, our study underscores a change in women's attachment to the labor market, in line with the "stalled revolution" arguments or the lack of opportunities to combine work and family demands. Our findings support, in part, these two explanations. In countries where part time employment is scarce, young women today are more likely to withdraw from paid employment. This is probably the case in post-

socialist countries where labor force participation is high and where traditionally most mothers worked for pay and in full-time employment. To the extent that other conditions did not change much (especially in the form of support to mothers' employment), the behavioral change is likely to be driven by normative change.

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## Appendix A

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