

# TIME'S UP

Achieving gender-equal  
time management through  
parental leave reform



A report to the King Baudoin Foundation  
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FRIDAY  
GROUP

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# ABSTRACT

Women and men have the same amount of hours in a day, yet spend them very differently. Unpaid work is still mainly done by women, even when they spend as many hours on paid work as men. Why is that? Does it help explain why women are still so underrepresented in leadership positions? And what can we do about it? This paper argues that time inequality is at the heart of tackling the two-way participation challenge: enabling more women to participate in paid work and more men in unpaid work. Amongst other new policy initiatives, this paper advances a concrete, budgeted and financed reform of parental leave in Belgium as a way to overcome gender based time inequality and hence unequal access to economic and social opportunities.

## 10 SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A GENDER-EQUAL TIME MANAGEMENT

1. Pay the first 10 days of the paternity or co-parental leave at 100% if the father or co-parent makes use of the entire 10 days (and not only the first three days at 100%, as is the case at present).
2. Pay the first 10 days of the maternity leave at 100%, and not at 82%, as it is at present.
3. Make it possible for fathers and co-parents to double their parental leave pay to 1,400 euros a month, for a leave duration of two and a half months, if they take it within the first year after the birth of a child. This gives Belgian fathers and co-parents the opportunity to take a total three months of paternity leave for the birth of the child, and the family retains 700 euros net extra.
4. Investigate the link between gender, time inequality and the overrepresentation of women on sick leave receiving disability payments.
5. Integrate the budget and legislation on parental leave from the RVA/ONEM (National Employment Agency) into the RIZIV/INAMI (National Service for Health and Disability Insurance), which covers the maternity or paternity or co-parental leaves, so that a more coherent and efficient policy can be implemented.
6. Reduce the high VAT rate of 21% on hygiene products for women to 6%, the rate which applies to other basic products.
7. Carry out a thorough screening and reform of the marriage quotient (and other gender-unfriendly fiscal policies), which makes it fiscally beneficial for one of the spouses to work very little or not at all. The marriage quotient now costs over 600 million euros and could finance the estimated cost of 49 million euros from recommendations 1, 2, and 3, as well as the extra cost of the necessary VAT reform (recommendation 6).
8. There should be temporary quotas for women, among others on executive boards, so that more role models can emerge.
9. Education should tackle gender stereotyping more proactively.
10. A diverse task force of labour market specialists, economists, sociologists, and lawyers should objectify the gender pay gap and propose solutions to bridge it.

# CONTENTS

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. What is gender time inequality?</b>	<b>5</b>
The reinforcing impact of having children	6
<b>3. Why we need an active push toward modern parenthood</b>	<b>9</b>
Outdated policies	10
The social reproduction of gender norms	11
<b>4. What could we do? Recommendations</b>	<b>12</b>
(1). Deliver coherent policy	12
(2). Reform paternity leave	12
What are the Nordics doing?	13
Our paternity leave proposal	13
(3). Parental leave reform in Belgium: a concrete proposal	13
(4). Counter gender stereotypes through education	17
(5). Use quotas to provoke deadlocked change	17
(6). Research the link between gender time inequality and health	18
<b>Definitions</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>20</b>

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## Where are the (wo)men?

*Why has it been more difficult for the Friday Group to recruit women than men?* This question was our starting point. We wrote this report to discover why women have, despite equal qualifications, been less inclined to both join our think tank and, seemingly, to take on or lead projects.

### FRIDAY GROUP GENDER COMPOSITION 2013 - 2016

Metric	Women / Men	% women / % men
Membership (on 11/11/2016)	7 / 17	29 % / 71 %
Project leaders (incl. this project)	5 / 14	26 % / 74 %
Report authors (incl. this report)	6 / 34	15 % / 85 %
Op-eds (on 11/11/2016)	24 / 87	22 % / 78 %

These figures tell us that once involved, women are pulling their weight. Involving women, however, seems to be the challenge.

Unequal participation in extracurricular work (that pursued in addition to normal expectations) is not a phenomenon limited to the Friday Group. Speaking events are regularly dominated by men, to the point of being dubbed the “male talk fest” by the New York Times (Bayrahsli & Bohn, 2015).

## Why does this matter?

This tells us something important: Men appear to have more occasion and/or inclination to advance their careers in these informal yet meaningful ways, not to mention contribute to public debate. With this imbalance we are replicating an unsaid message: that an expert is a man. In the US 40% of teenage boys prefer male over female leaders and only 4% prefer female leaders (Making Caring Common

Project, 2015). How much longer are we going to allow outdated gender norms and expectations shape our future? Despite our own flaws, the Friday Group wishes to be part of the solution, not the problem.

The Economist eloquently summarised the powerful arguments in favour of diversity in its Schumpeter piece “Diversity Fatigue” (13/2/2016). “The most obvious is that diversity is simply a fact about the modern world. Women have entered the workforce in huge numbers. Mass immigration has transformed Western societies (...). Gay men and women increasingly feel no need to stay closeted, in or out of the workplace. Companies that ignore this may starve themselves of talent, as well as be out of touch with their customers. Adding to the evidence for diversity’s benefits (...) the more female executives firms have, the more profitable they seem to be. There is also evidence to support the commonsense idea that encountering people with different ideas and different perspectives can boost creativity. (...) mixed-sex teams can produce more creative solutions than

those dominated by either men or women.” Gender equality is thus not only a matter of social fairness, it is also crucial for economic prosperity.

### What have we found?

This report centres on time, specifically that women and men have the same amount of hours in a day, yet spend them very differently. In every single country across the world women spend more time on unpaid work than men, are more likely to work part-time than men (often to have time to do unpaid work) and have less free time than men.

Furthermore, we see that these differences increase when a couple has children, when, likely in order to manage family and work life, women and men often turn to role specialisation: Where one partner takes the bulk of paid work (in the sense of productive work) and the other the bulk of unpaid work (in the sense of reproductive work, like domestic and care works, see definition at the end of this report). Due to several reasons, key among them outdated

policy and gender stereotypes, the most ‘rational choice’ for Belgian couples is often to specialise in traditional roles and family models, where the man does most of the paid and the woman most of the unpaid work.

While the Friday Group does not take issue with the arrangements of each couple – in fact this is a freedom we wish to enhance – we do take issue with what is effectively a systematic reproduction of highly gendered choices, happening across a society which purports to strive for gender equality. This dynamic recreates the same discriminating dilemma for the next generation. This is why **time inequality is at the heart of tackling the two-way participation challenge: enabling more women to participate in paid work and more men in unpaid work.**

We hope that overcoming role specialisation among couples will contribute to giving women and men more options, especially when they wish to manage both a career and family life. Further down the line, we hope this could mean more gender equal participation in extracurricular work like the Friday Group.

## 2. WHAT IS GENDER TIME INEQUALITY?

*“Women are the main carers, spending disproportional amount of time doing unpaid work and providing care for their children and other family members. In order to do this, they often choose working part-time. They also dominate positions in sectors and occupations that allow for better balance between work and family life. This results in women being often employed in low-paid jobs and not to take on management positions. But while men work longer hours than women in the workplace, if women’s paid and unpaid working hours are combined they are significantly longer than men’s.”*

Report on (...) the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation, European Parliament, 2015

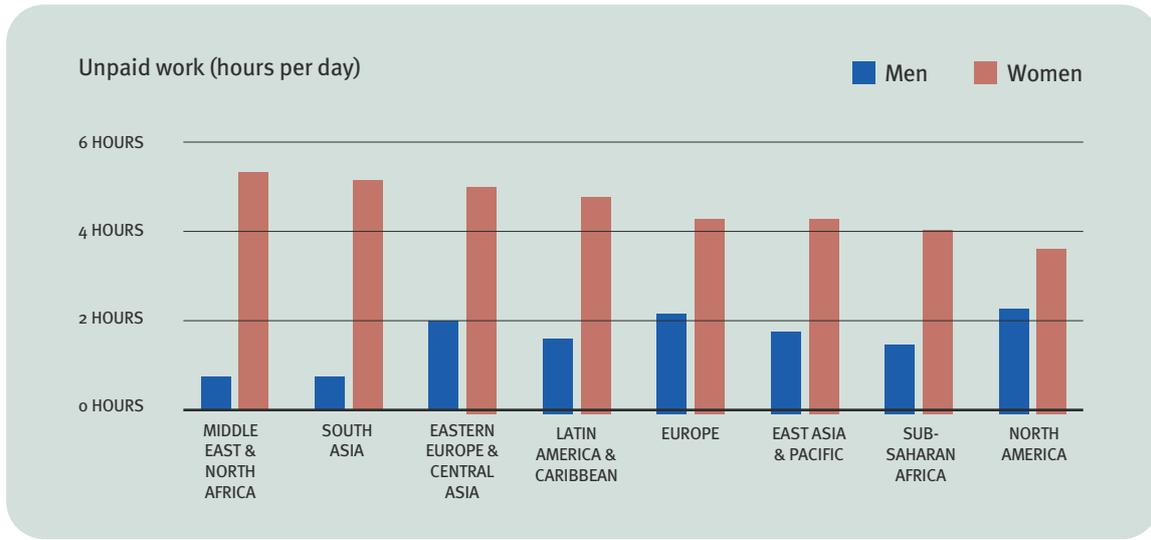
In every single country women spend more time on unpaid work than men. The European Institute for Gender Equality finds Europe’s gender equality score in the last ten years

has risen from just 51 to 54 of 100 – leaving us about half way to equality (EIGE, 2012). Belgium scores 58/100, quite a distance from leader Sweden’s 74/100. Looking at separate

categories, **time is the most unequal aspect of European women and men’s lives, scoring a mere 38/100.**

Gender time equality in Belgium is 44/100, above the European average, yet not even half way to equality. Every day Belgian women spend on average 4h05 and Belgian men 2h30 on unpaid work (OECD, 2013). This means

every week Belgian women spend more than a full working day (±1h) more on unpaid work than men. **By the end of a year Belgian women have done unpaid work equivalent to roughly three months’ (14 weeks) full-time work more than Belgian men.** Note that women are penalised for this in their paid work too! (see text box “Breaking the vicious gender pay gap cycle” below)



Source: OECD (2014), Gender, Institutions and Development Database

### The reinforcing impact of having children

It is a well-known phenomenon that women work part-time more often than men. Belgium has one of the highest disparities in Europe, with 10% of men and 46% of women working part-time (FOD, 2015). Women are most often the party in a couple who reduces their paid work to part-time or give it up completely in order to manage the increasing demands for unpaid work that come with having children.

Household employment patterns change dramatically when children arrive, with a consistent reduction in couples where both partners work full-time (Figure 4.3, EC, 2012). The arrival of children is, in other words, what changes an otherwise

egalitarian couple, at least in hours of paid work, to become more different and specialised in their roles.

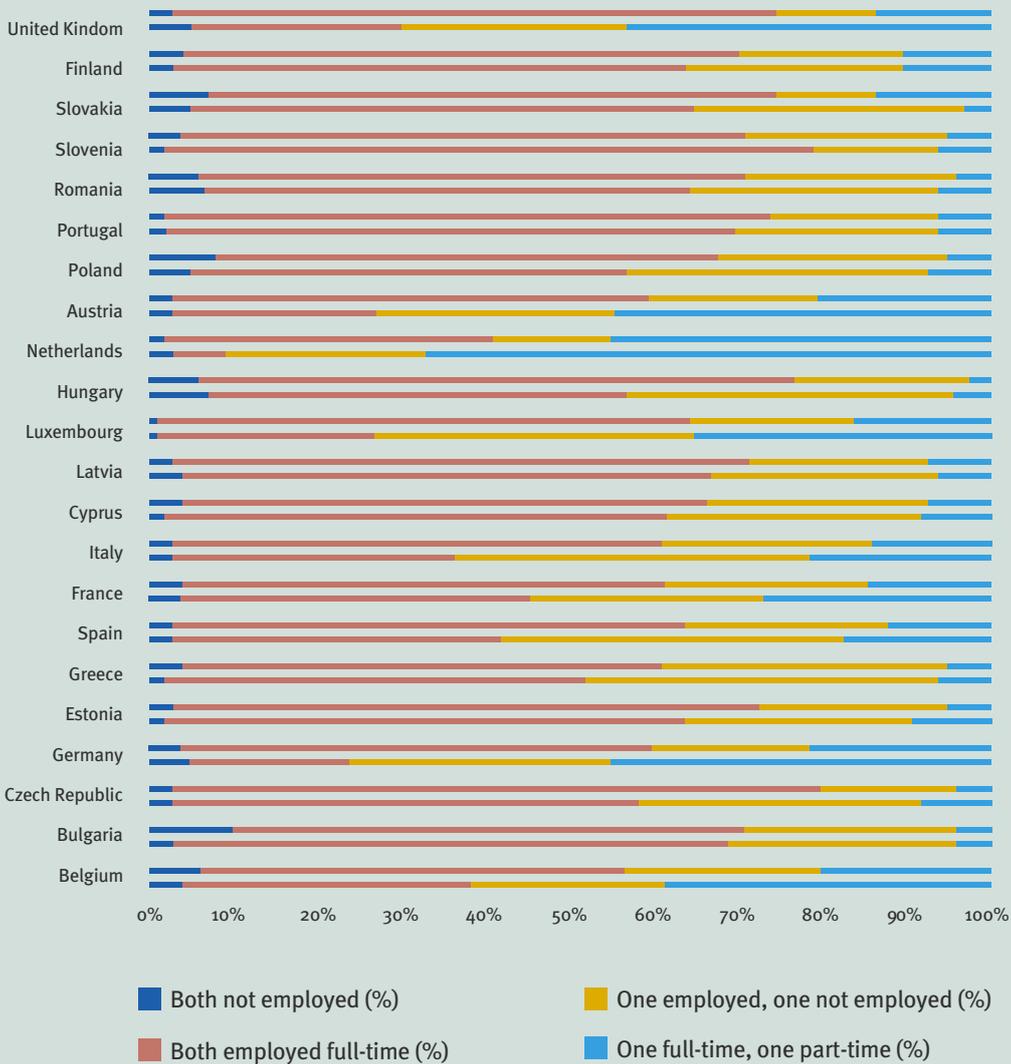
Usually it’s the woman’s routine that changes the most. When a child is born, women’s paid working time sharply decreases, presumably so as to manage more unpaid work, while men’s time remains largely unchanged. For example, in France *“over 45% of women with at least three dependent (...) children work part-time (...). For men, the number and age of dependent children have little influence on whether they work part-time or not, in fact, they are more likely to work part-time when they have no children in their charge”* (Pak, 2013).

The way a couple adapts to family life

is usually intended to only last while the child is young. However, as children get older and women return to work, women's unpaid work continues to remain significantly higher than men's. While recognizing that there are a multitude of interconnected reasons for this dynamic, **how we cope with the arrival of children**

**and manage our time is largely determined by our welfare models, a central policy of which is parental leave.** Hence this report explores the impact of parental leave design on the degree of role specialisation in couples and thence the sharing of paid and unpaid work between men and women.

Employment status of persons from 25-49 living in households as couples, by country, 2006.  
Explanation: Upper bar: Without children; lower bar: with children



Source: Labour Force Survey, Eurostat; Eurostat (2009): Reconciliation between work, private and family life in the European Union, Luxembourg.  
Notes: Malta and Lithuania: extremely unreliable data / no data available, Denmark, Ireland and Sweden: No data available.

<sup>4</sup> Defined as the average difference between men's and women's aggregate hourly earnings.

<sup>5</sup> Defined as the difference between median earnings of men and women relative to median earnings of men, considering full-time employees and self-employed).

## Same-sex couples reveal ‘economic rationality’ is essential

*There’s few studies on this topic, and almost only qualitative rather than quantitative ones, but a study which uses American Time Use Survey Data from 2003-2011, finds high levels of specialisation rather than sharing in same-sex couples, where one partner focuses on paid and the other on unpaid work (Schneebaum, 2013). Factors like income, education, age and race play a role in who specialises in what (though to a lesser extent than in different-sex couples) and the lower earner in same-sex couples tends to spend more time on unpaid work. It has also been found that the legal protections and fiscal rewards offered by marriage are likely factors increasing role specialisation, with the lower earner in both married female and male same-sex couples spending even more time on unpaid work (Schneebaum, 2013).*

## Breaking the vicious gender pay gap cycle

*The gender pay gap (GPG) persists across Europe. The pay gap in Belgium is 10% according to the European Commission (2014)<sup>4</sup>, compared to 16,4% on average in the EU, and 3,3% according to the OECD (2016)<sup>5</sup> which only takes into account full-time employment and thus controlling for the overrepresentation of women doing part-time work (as shown in the figure above). Even after controlling for the fact that women and men often work in different industries, have different work experience, union status, education, race and amount of hours worked, a meta-analysis from Georgetown University (2014) has shown that between 41% and 9% of the gap (depending on what factors you take into account) remains unexplained. In other words, uncontrolled factors such as employer discrimination would explain these differences in earnings between men and women. Translated to the Belgian context and net average Belgian salary, that means women could be bearing an average discrimination penalty of up to 4% per hour, the equivalent of 1000€ per year or 2 extra weeks of unpaid work per year.*

*Every year on equal pay day, the gender pay gap is the subject of heated discussions. Critics advocate that the GPG almost completely disappears taking into account such factors as part time work, sectoral differences, education level and type, etc., which we briefly discussed above. They ask you to see 1000€ per year as a negligible pay difference. What we should be asking is why should gender-based educational and occupational segregation count as evidence against gender discrimination? Why do boys and girls make the study and career choices they do? Why do we continue valuing female dominated sectors, such as primary education or nursing, lower than male dominated sectors?*

*Pay is a core factor in how parents choose to organise their family life and work patterns. Rather than reduce or loose the highest (potential) earner’s salary – which remains most often the man’s – the woman reduces or gives up her paid work and then enables her partner’s paid work by taking on the majority of unpaid work. An expectation, conscious or not, among employers that women will quit or start part-time work to care for children is a contributing factor to keeping women’s wages for the same work lower than men’s. If employers expected male and female employees to be equally available throughout their careers, the terms of competition in the work place would be fairer, which could help break the pay gap cycle.*

*The pay gap also extends to pensions, where gender inequalities in labour market participation, including gender occupational segregation, enhance the pension gap, which is about double the pay gap (EP(b), 2015, p.6).*

*We therefore recommend to put together a diverse and multidisciplinary task force of labour market experts, economists, sociologists and lawyers who would have to objectivise the GPG and propose suggestions to bridge it.*

## 3. WHY WE NEED AN ACTIVE PUSH TOWARD MODERN PARENTHOOD

*“Even in the most gender equal parts of Europe, a young man and a young woman deciding to create a family are not faced with the same choices”*

The Role of Men in Gender Equality - European strategies & insights, European Commission, 2012

The number of active fathers is growing, yet society doesn't seem to know how to react to these men's redefining of traditional gender stereotypes. Reactions of either friends or colleagues lead some full-time fathers prefer to say they are consultants or work from home (Kantor & Silver-Greenberg, 2013). Studies show these fathers are right to be timid. When full-time fathers return to work, even after very short periods, they often get even more negative performance reviews than the women who return from parental leave (Butler & Skattebo, 2010).

According to us, an active push toward modern parenthood involves disruption of such outdated expectations by moving from role specialisation to sharing. This can help overcome outdated and repressing gender norms that maintain gender inequalities, from stigmatizing men who prioritise family to upholding the gender pay gap. Encouraging sharing instead of dividing is about ensuring more options and freedom for the modern family and the individuals in it.

The OECD recommends three actions to tackle the unequal division of unpaid work:

- *Recognise* that unpaid work is work
- *Reduce* the amount of time and energy it takes
- *Redistribute* the tasks between men and women

Recognizing unpaid work can be done by calculating the value of unpaid work to a country's GDP or by continuing to award

pension points during parental leave, as Belgium does.

Reducing unpaid work can be done by increasing access to public services, like child care, or technology (from washing machines to more modern gadgets like fridges that automatically order groceries that are running low), that lighten the unpaid workload. In many countries, including Belgium, the scope for enhancing access to affordable full-time child care is large.

However, it is redistributing that can catalyse a move from role specialisation to sharing and this is therefore the most important. As Gutting and Fraser (2015) put it, redistributing is key because gender equality is not simply achieved when there is less unpaid work to do, but only when the gendered distinction between paid and unpaid work is overcome. The danger of only focusing on reducing unpaid work is that it effectively 'outsources' gender equality to public services (Gutting & Fraser, 2015). By providing services to an extent that they 'take over' unpaid work we fail to provoke a conflict that redistributes unpaid work between women and men. **Failing to redistribute means failing to tackle the discrimination women and men face in the work force for women being presumed to be the primary care giver.** If men were equally likely to do unpaid work – to work part-time or be the parent called when a child is sick – already outdated and discriminatory expectations from employers and society would be even further delegitimised.

## Outdated policies

“While [child care] policies are formulated in neutral ways, in practice women are the main target (98% of beneficiaries in 2009). In 2012, more than half of the mothers with a child of 8 years old had temporarily stopped or reduced their activity, while only 12% of fathers had done so. When women stop or reduce their employment activity, they become the main person in charge of domestic/family work”

The policy on gender equality in France, European Parliament, 2015

In today’s Belgium, a toxic mix of misconstrued policy and social reproduction of outdated gender norms is maintaining the traditional role specialisation between women and men as the most attractive – or in some cases the only sensible – choice, despite many women and men desiring to choose otherwise.

Family policy is central in shaping how we use our time. Different family policies encourage different work patterns which vary in the degree to which they encourage the specialisation or sharing of paid and unpaid work in a couple.

The Nordic countries, which are the closest to gender equality, base their family policies on a *dual earner model* where each member of a couple, man or woman, is encouraged to *share* both parental leave and continued full-time paid work. By encouraging shared responsibilities dual earner models ensures

individual freedoms and accommodates the growing variation of family structures. Dual earner models show the least traditional work patterns, paid and unpaid, among women and men (Boye, 2009a).

Other countries, Belgium among them, maintain a *traditional model*, in which family policies encourage *divided* responsibilities, in other words role specialisation. Here it appears each partner is encouraged to do either the majority or all of the paid or unpaid work. This model itself is not gender discriminatory, however, its operation in a gender unequal world ‘paves the way’ to maintaining inequalities. It makes a couple’s rational choice for the lowest earner – which thanks to the gender pay gap is most often the woman – to give up or reduce paid work and in turn take on the bulk of the unpaid work. In this way, a traditional family policy model forces choices that are often no longer the only or necessarily desired ones.

Family policy model	Characteristics	Found in
Dual-earner	High levels of dual-earner/dual-carer provisions, i.e. policies consciously targeted at both genders; unpaid work associated with children is actively allocated to the state.	Nordic countries
Dual-earner	High levels of support for traditional family structures, meaning unpaid work associated with children is actively allocated to the family and there are low levels of active support for equal labour market participation.	Continental countries (Belgium)
Market- oriented	Low levels of both dual-earner and traditional support, unpaid work associated with children considered a private responsibility with related services largely allocated to the market. Equal labour market participation is encouraged by dependency on the market.	USA, UK, Ireland, Switzerland
Combined model	High levels of both dual-earner and traditional support, with high female labour force participation and traditional division of unpaid work.	Post-communist countries

More than stemming from a clear political or societal will, continuing with the traditional model is often due to blindness to its real, highly gendered, effects. Moreover, these are exacerbated by interacting with a myriad of other similarly gender blind policies.

Employment policies can reinforce the traditional family model by in effect ‘rewarding’ having one partner out of employment, which again, due to the gender pay gap, will usually be the woman. In France, a household receives a “solidarity income” (complement-RSA (revenu de solidarité active)) if one adult is out of work, which in lower-income households may act to discourage the partner not in employment from seeking employment as the couple runs the risk of losing the complement-RSA (EP, 2015(b)).

Fiscal policies like Belgium’s marital quotient weaken the rationale for increasing the pay of the lowest-earning spouse. This policy combines a married or co-habiting couple’s income in a single, joint tax statement. If one of the spouses earns less than 30% of the total household income, the couple can deduct up to 10 200 euros in tax revenue (2016, fiscal year 2015). This in effect becomes an incentive to specialise for either one or both of the partners (Lemière, 2013). As the female partner is more likely to be the lowest earner, the rational economic choice becomes for her to specialise in unpaid work so as to enable her male partner to specialise in paid work.

The actual impact of the traditional model has been to reinforce a division of family responsibilities between men and women which is increasingly contradictory to society’s egalitarian values and to individual wishes, which is why the Female Council (2013), the High Council for Employment (2015) and the High Council for Finance (2015) all recommend reforming and even abolishing the gender unfriendly and employment discouraging marital quotient (but more on this in the recommendations section).

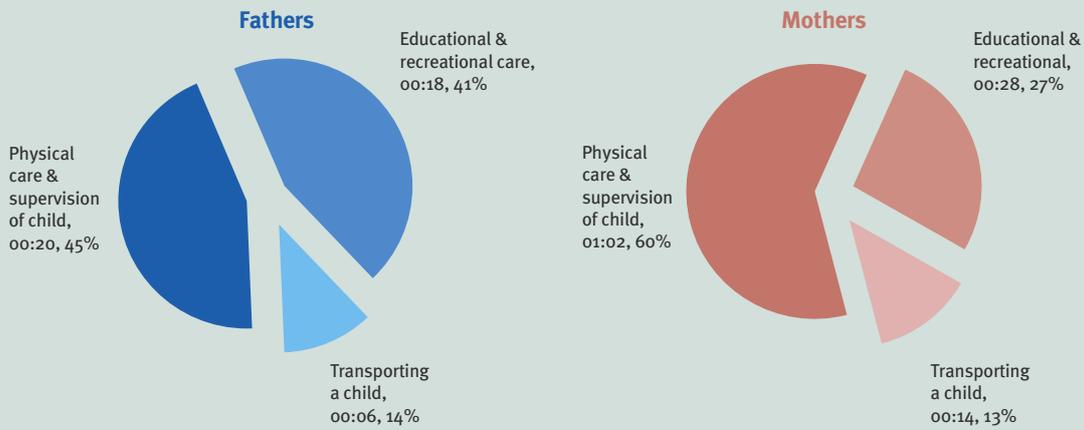
Outdated family policy coupled with gender blind employment and fiscal policy creates an economic rationality which plays systematically against women’s economic freedom and men’s familial freedom. The outcome is preservation of gender time inequality and thereby *gendered agency inequality*: inequality of the freedom to choose between many potential achievements.

## The social reproduction of gender norms

The challenges of sharing paid and unpaid work are not limited to the economic rationality of role specialisation in couples, but are also affected by the set of values, attitudes and norms that are implicitly conveyed to children via education, educators, organisational processes operating at places children frequent and the examples set by their parents. In Belgium, the only type of couple in which unpaid work is equally shared is in couples with an employed woman and unemployed man (Glorieux & Vandeweyer, 2002). Even single Belgian women’s weekly combined paid and unpaid work exceeds that of men’s by 5h26 (30h29 to 25h13). Moreover, single fathers spend less time than single mothers on unpaid work. This illustrates the very real impact of societal expectations on men and women’s behaviour.

The distinction between women and men’s behaviour is visible in both the duration and the type of unpaid work they do. For example, in France, mothers spend half an hour longer than fathers on caring for their children’s physical or medical needs, but only six minutes longer than fathers on playing and education (INSEE, 2012). Overall it could be said that fathers do more of the ‘fun’ and educational child engagement, whereas mothers do more of the menial tasks. This demonstrates that in the choices made by men and women, there is an element that supersedes any economic rationality of role specialisation as gender stereotypical expectations

Women devote most of their time to physical childcare, while men devote most of their time to teaching, reading and playing with their children.



Source: OECD (2014), Gender, Institutions and Development Database

and roles continue to carry weight. These stereotypical norms act to allow men to ‘free themselves’ of the drudgery of unpaid work and to choose more of the tasks deemed interesting. Therefore, public policies must first stop

legitimising women’s unquestioned domination of unpaid work, and second, take a step further to establish mechanisms that actively correct for attitudes about unpaid work, especially which unpaid tasks ‘should’ befall women or men.

## 4. WHAT COULD WE DO? RECOMMENDATIONS

### (1) Deliver coherent policy

Policies considered neutral should be reviewed in order to erase their pseudo ‘economic rationality’ that forces couples to specialise or divide rather than, where they would wish to, share paid and unpaid work. This comprises three elements:

- Be careful of and avoid gendered effects of ‘neutral’ policies
- Transition to a dual earner model
- Some concrete adjustments, for instance fiscal policies better value sharing through tax benefits to couple’s where both, not just one, work-part time while children are young.

Furthermore, the huge disparity in parental, maternity and paternity leave provisions

across Europe calls for further setting of minimum standards by the European Union.

### (2) Reform paternity leave

Fathers who have taken paternity or parental leave of four weeks or more have increased their share of unpaid work more than fathers who have taken shorter or no leave. Fathers who take more paternity leave also maintain a higher participation in the child’s later life, especially if the father spends time with the child without the mother (Brandth & Kvande, 2003). While a growing body of research shows the benefits to children of fathers who are able to engage early (Fogarty & Evans, 2009), this report focuses on the benefits to parents. Not only do 3 out of 4 of (Belgian) fathers want to spend more time with their

kids, (Gezinsbond survey, 2013), fathers who engage early and without the mother present also develop ‘care skills’ which would otherwise mainly befall the mother (Nordahl, 2014). These are important both for the quality of the time fathers spend with their children, but also for fathers to support their partners as active and engaged co-parents that share unpaid work.

Early engagement of fathers is crucial because the immediate time after children arrive lays much of the foundation for how a couple will share paid and unpaid work for years to come. If a father’s leave is too short or non-existent, there is not enough time to establish habits of sharing unpaid work. Today mothers simply have far more occasion to establish habits of caring for children, which underlines traditional role specialisations which the couple otherwise might not have wanted or foreseen.

### ***What are the Nordics doing?***

Known to lead on gender equality, the Nordic countries’ policy is driven both by ideals and economics, focusing on family friendly services that encourage equal male and female labour force participation and therefore also gender equal sharing of unpaid work. To achieve this, Iceland, Sweden and Norway share parental leave in three parts: one reserved for the mother, one for the father and one to be divided among the parents as they choose. The aim of the generous paternity leave has not just been to engage fathers, but for their engagement to have a knock-on effect on how active fathers are in the longer-term as parents and partners in unpaid work. Key to achieving this has been for the paternity leave to be encouraged and non-transferable: If the father does not take his leave, it cannot pass to the mother but is lost. Another key aspect is that Nordic parents’ leave is remunerated much closer to their original salaries than is the case in Belgium. This is having tangible results. In Norway, 80% of fathers take their full 10 weeks paid paternity leave. As men have taken more of this paternity leave,

they have also gradually taken a larger share of the parental leave that parents can choose how to share. In Sweden 25% of total parental leave days are now taken by the father in addition to his paternity leave. Sweden also rewards parents who share the parental leave period 50/50 with a tax-free daily bonus (sweden.se).

### **(3) Parental leave reform in Belgium: a concrete proposal**

When it comes to paternity leave for fathers, there is a lot of room for improvement in Belgium, albeit at an acceptable budgetary cost that, moreover, can be financed by reforming or abolishing existing gender and employment unfriendly policies.

**In a nutshell (extended version below), we recommend**

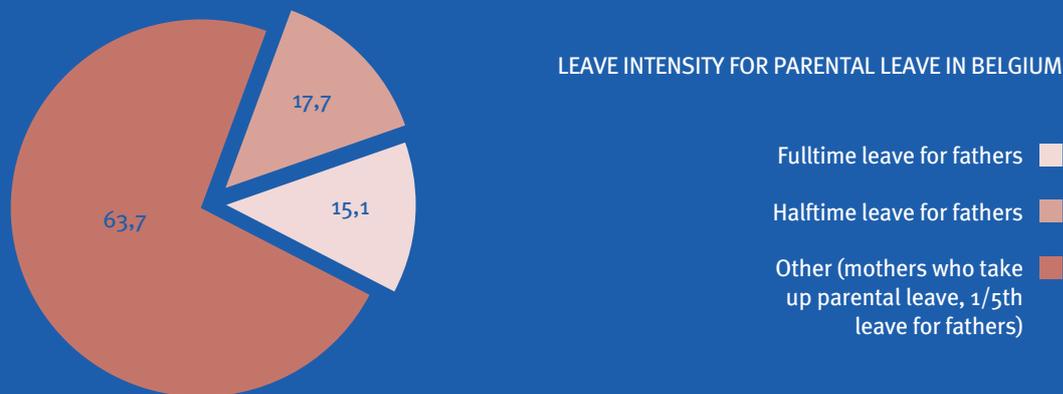
- a. merging the parental leave policies and budget from RVA/ONEM into RIZIV/INAMI for policy management synergies and coherence;**
- b. paying birth leave at a 100% to i) the mother and ii) the father / co-parent for the full 10 days if the latter makes use of the full 10 days;**
- c. opening the possibility for fathers / co-parents to double their parental leave allowance for 2,5 months if they take it up within the first year following the birth of the child;**
- d. financing the total estimated annual budgetary cost of 49 million euros of this reform by tweaking the gender and employment unfriendly marital quotient which accounts for more than 600 million euros of fiscal income losses per year.**

Hence, at minimal budgetary cost and suggesting a credible financing source, we have designed a father or co-parent/parental leave scheme that encourages father or co-parents to stay at home during the first months after the birth of their child, as these are the defining weeks for a father or co-parent to learn the ‘care skills’ which will lead to more gendered time use for the couple (and would otherwise mainly have befallen the mother)<sup>6</sup>.

## A closer look at The Friday Group's concrete, budgeted and financed birth and parental leave reform for fathers and co-parents

The parental leave system<sup>7</sup> in Belgium in the private sector is a federal authority. It consists of two main dimensions: **the birth leave** (“*geboorteverlof*” – “*congé maternité*”) system and the **parental leave** system (“*ouderschapsverlof*” – “*congé parental*”). In the first system, the leave is granted to parents who have registered a newborn in the family but have not given birth themselves. The worker is granted ten days of leave, of which three are paid by the employer. The latter system is a more general right to reduce an employee's working time for raising a child. Note that mothers can take up this right as well in addition to their already existent maternity leave of 15 weeks on average.

There's a range of choice on intensity as well: from the employee suspending all activity for four months to half-time suspension or less for a longer period of time.



### A. Today's system

**Birth leave:** father or co-parent gets 3 days at 100% paid by the employer and 7 days at 82% paid by RIZIV/INAMI.

**Parental leave:** While mother leave and birth leave fall under the responsibility of the RIZIV/INAMI today, parental leave is managed by RVA<sup>8</sup>/ONEM. Father or co-parents are entitled to 4 months of parental leave at 707 euros / month (fulltime) paid for by the RVA/ONEM before the child turns 12 years old. Fathers or co-parents can choose the intensity of the leave (full-time, half-time or part-time).

### B. What we propose

In order to be able to conduct a coherent and integrated policy, and to maintain maximum control over the total budget, we recommend merging the parental leave policies and budgets into RIZIV/INAMI.

<sup>6</sup> See the German Institute for Economic Research's (DIW Berlin) scientific roundup of November 13, 2014 and an article from Rutger Bregman “Zo krijg je mannen achter het aanrecht” from February 6 2014 in which the author cites research from Norway and Quebec, Canada.

<sup>7</sup> In general it should be noted that these leave systems apply to same-sex marriages as well, e.g. gay couples. Therefore, the form “father” is false and hence never mentioned.

<sup>8</sup> RVA – Dienst Studies, Ouderschapsverlof 2002-2012, [www.rva.be](http://www.rva.be)

<sup>9</sup> According to research from the Institute for Equal Rights for Women and Men (2010) this concerns about 15% of the father or co-parents.

<sup>10</sup> Calculation on basis of figures in INAMI/RIZIV, Beheerscomité Uitkeringen, Note 2015/35 – General Budget

1) **The birth leave** for a father or co-parent will stay at 100% paid by the employer for the first 3 days. But if the father or co-parent takes up the full 7 days remaining, s/he will be paid at 100% by RIZIV/INAMI (notwithstanding the current ceiling). If the father or co-parent doesn't take up the full 7 days remaining<sup>9</sup>, s/he will be paid at 82% for the days s/he does take up their birth leave by RIZIV/INAMI as is the case today (notwithstanding the current ceiling). The cost is represented below. The percentage stated in the top row indicates the relative take-up presuming co-parents do use their 10 days following the new incentive (in euro), with a near-perfect take-up by 2019.

2016 as-is (85%)	2017 (90%)	2018 (95%)	2019 (98%)
8.397.835,49	10.234.734,20	12.071.632,90	13.908.531,61

2) **In the parental leave system** the father or co-parent gets the choice to i) either stay in today's system, but with the obligation to have started the parental leave scheme before the child turns 2, or ii) step into the following new system: If a father or coparent commits to using the full 10 days with 100% pay and s/he takes the full-time equivalent of 2,5 months parental leave within the first year following the birth of the child (instead of within the first 12 years), then s/he is entitled to double pay (1414 euros/month instead of 707 euros/month) for those 2,5 months. The father or coparent, however, loses the remaining 1,5 months of parental leave from the current system.

Consequently, the father or co-parent will stay at home for an equivalent of 3 months within the child's first year, which equals average mother leave time. This should in turn lead to a more equal distribution of domestic and child caring tasks in the couple.

We expect these to be big enough incentives since 1. The father or co-parent will have to use their parental leave a lot sooner than in today's system; 2. The father or coparent will take full-time leave for the family rather than a working time reduction and 3. The father or co-parent is paid an extra month of parental leave (2 times 2,5 = 5 months instead of 4 months in the current system) hence increasing the family income by 707 euros per child.

3) When doubling the lump-sum for fathers or co-parents, in many cases the father or co-parent will receive more than the mother. To tackle this, we propose that the mother (women who gave birth in the case of co-parenting) receives 100% pay for their first ten days of maternity leave as well. This is in order to compensate for their partners, who enjoy the benefit of 100%-paid birth leave. This is supposed to cost €12.335.527 presuming a stable birth rate.<sup>10</sup>

### C. Cost and financing of the reform

The total budgetary costs of the reforms for the private sector in Belgium as computed in the table below and given our uptake hypotheses (in red) equals approximately 49 million euros on cruising speed (2019 or 2020 depending on the year of implementation). Although 5,5 euros per citizen is not an astronomically high sum for this de facto father or co-parent leave of 3 months at 1414 euros per month, a government may find 49 million euros difficult to finance in these budgetary harsh times. We therefore recommend reforming the gender unfriendly and employment discouraging marital quotient which amounted to a fiscal cost of 580 million euros in 2011 according to the High Council on Finance (2014). Concretely, the maximum deduction of 10 200 euros (2016, fiscal year 2015) could be lowered as much as to find the amount needed to finance a / our birth and parental leave reform<sup>11</sup>.

<b>1. BIRTH LEAVE</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
take-up ratio of birth leave	85%	90%	95%	98%
amount of users birth leave	56.337,00	59.650,94	62.964,88	64.953,25
budget for allowance 82% of pay	€ 38.256.806,13	€ 40.507.206,4	€ 42.757.606,85	€ 44.107.847,07
total expenses for allowance 100% of pay (capped)	€ 46.654.641,62	€ 49.399.032,31	€ 52.143.422,99	€ 53.790.057,40
social security tax income loss	-	€ 1.342.908,38	€ 2.685.816,77	3.491.561,80
delta (costs in birth leave)	8.397.835,49	10.234.734,20	12.071.632,90	13.173.772,13

<b>2. PARENTAL LEAVE</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
take-up ratio for parental leave for men	2,04%	2,18%	2,32%	2,46%
take-up ratio for parental leave for women	5,50%	6,00%	6,50%	7,00%
men who take parental leave in the old system	58374	59483	60613	61765
budget parental leave in the old system (€)	€ 110.248.469,00	€ 110.468.965,94	€ 110.689.903,87	€ 110.911.283,68
budget for fathers leave in the old system	€ 28.333.856,53	€ 29.767.086,63	€ 31.103.862,99	€ 33.273.385,10
percentage of full time leave for fathers	17,7%	30,0%	40,0%	50,0%
percentage of halftime leave for fathers	15,1%	12,5%	11,0%	10,0%
percentage of one-day (1/5) leave for fathers	66,9%	57,5%	49,0%	40,0%
budget of full time leave for fathers	€ 4.993.940,80	€ 8.892.462,02	€ 12.389.071,36	€ 16.566.525,14
budget of halftime leave for fathers	€ 4.254.954,15	€ 3.700.484,51	€ 3.402.665,53	€ 3.309.094,98
budget of one-day (1/5) leave for fathers	€ 19.139.227,31	€ 17.282.110,12	€ 15.388.737,88	€ 13.438.462,07
parental leave in the new system	€ 18.452.279,47	€ 23.900.045,33	€ 29.621.451,04	€ 35.979.208,78
delta (total in fathers leave)	€ 9.881.577,06	€ 5.867.041,30	€ 1.482.411,95	€ 2.705.823,67
surplus mothers leave (82% → 100% first ten days)	€ 12.335.527,45	€ 12.335.527,45	€ 12.335.527,45	€ 12.335.527,45
relative gain of number of parental leaves compared to basis	0,00%	5,00%	10,00%	13,00%
relative loss of parents >2y (old system) and 1/5 & 1/2 regimes	35,00%	25,00%	15,00%	5,00%
cost of the double allowance (€)	€ 6.268.865,76	€ 11.162.657,49	€ 15.551.931,49	€ 20.795.865,69
total cost in parental leave	€ 3.612.711,31	€ 5.295.616,19	€ 14.069.519,55	€ 23.501.689,36
Total cost of proposal	€ 17.120.651,64	€ 27.865.877,84	€ 38.476.679,90	€ 49.010.988,94
<b>3. TOTAL COST OF PROPOSAL</b>	<b>€ 17.120.651,64</b>	<b>€ 27.865.877,84</b>	<b>€ 38.476.679,90</b>	<b>€ 49.010.988,94</b>

#### (4) Counter gender stereotypes through education<sup>12</sup>

The school system plays a central role in transmitting the values and orientations for a Belgian society where every child regardless of gender can flourish in a freely chosen way. Achieving this may require more training for teachers and redefining curriculums to deconstruct old models and put forward a model of society where women and men are on an equal footing.

One could introduce classes on household management, like cooking. This is already provided in the Nordics as a way to ensure all children, regardless of home situation and gender, are familiar with the demands of unpaid work.

Incorporating gender sensitisation into subjects, especially at higher education level, can highlight how the world is designed and experienced differently according to gender. It could be particularly useful in the medical fields, where research is revealing that both health conditions only faced by women as well as women's experience of common health conditions are under-researched.

On another topic, the course on citizenship is a unique opportunity to define and instil in our youth a model of society based on true equality. This is especially important in mixed neighbourhoods of Belgium where children are more likely to face conflicting value sets between home and public life, especially regarding gender roles.

Finally, it is no longer acceptable that some sectors are almost exclusively populated by men while others by women. Education, in cooperation with these sectors themselves, must better inform and challenge

unquestioned choices to relieve us of gender straitjackets.

#### (5) Use quotas to provoke deadlocked change

Many countries practice some form of quotas: In Norway boards of publicly listed companies are required to have minimum 40% of the least-represented gender and in Belgium political parties are required to put forward election lists where every other top spot is occupied by a man and woman.

The most common criticisms of quotas, that they lead to less qualified women taking the earned positions of men or that it would not be possible to find enough qualified women to fill positions, have been disproven. In Sweden quotas have increased the overall qualification level of elected officials, as qualified women take the places of previously under-qualified men. Quotas in fact act to level competition by compensating for the gender discrimination preventing many qualified women from even competing. In other words, **quotas are effective temporary measures to remove an existing disadvantage to women.**

Furthermore, quotas can be very effective in gaining visibility of female leadership, which in turn will propel more qualified women to seek leadership positions. Research shows role models are key to achieving true diversity in leadership positions. Once the previous barriers have been dismantled, quotas should no longer be required and could be abolished.

For these reasons, the Friday Group will institute its own quota of no less than 40% of the least represented gender and as close to 50% as possible in both membership and output.

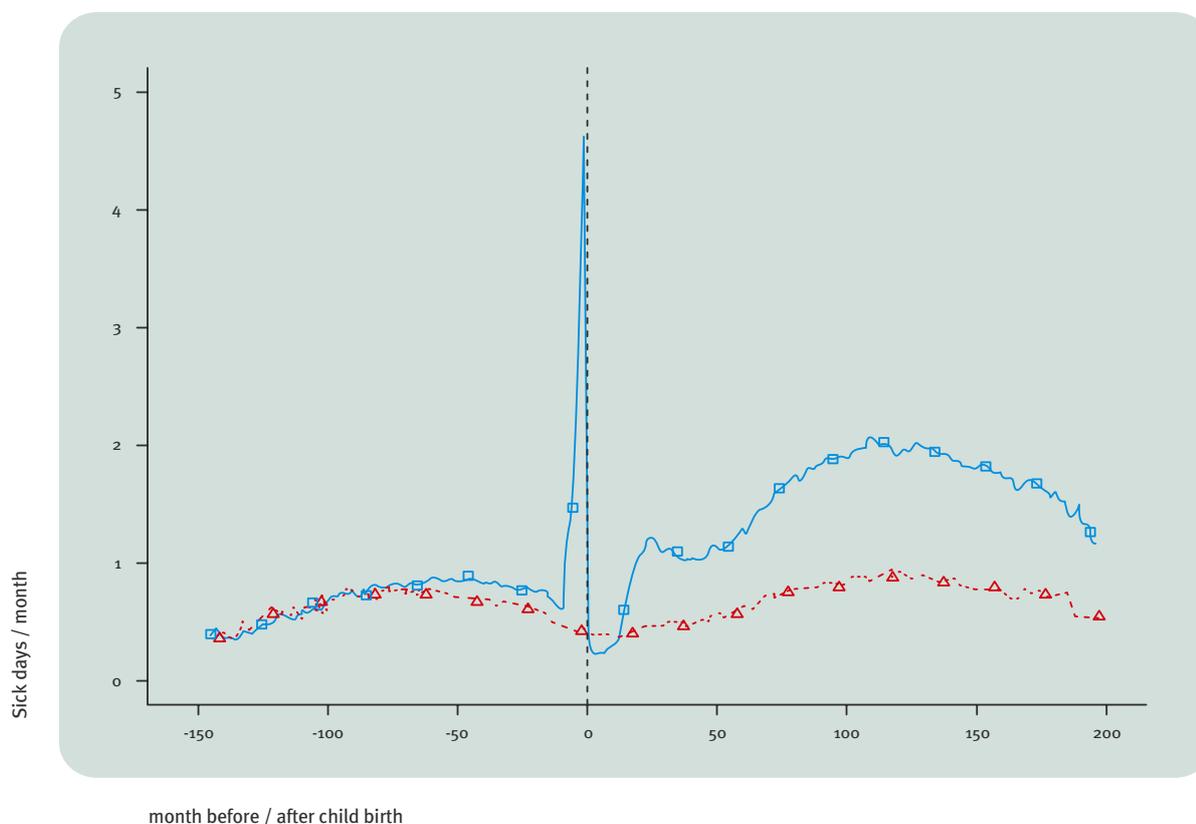
<sup>11</sup> It is worth noticing 1) that the Female Council (2013), the High Council for Employment (2015) and the High Council for Finance (2015) all recommend reforming the marital quotient, albeit for different reasons (respectively a more gender equal distribution of (un)paid work, minimizing the employment trap and a nondiscriminatory and fairer fiscal treatment); and 2) that today, close to 60% of the budgetary cost benefits 60-plussers. This recommended reform would thus be a gradual transfer from the older generation to young families with kids.

<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere, Nathalie and Brieuc, together with Thomas Dermine, have argued that longer school days are both beneficial for improving gender equality and decreasing educational inequality between kids with different social backgrounds. See the [Dutch version](#) of our op-ed and here for the [French version](#).

## (6) Research the link between gender time inequality and health

Another aspect we discovered in our study of gender time inequality is that women are over-represented when it comes to work disability in Belgium: they are disproportionately sicker than men. In Belgium about 54% of disability payments go to women, with the overall burden of disability being led with 35% by psychological illnesses such as depression, burn-out, anxiety

and psychosis by the age group 20-35 years – the age when one typically has children (NIHD, 2015). These psychological illnesses in particular are known to be the cause of longer work absences than other physically-caused illnesses. The World Health Organisation predicts an increase in work disability in coming years as the prevalence of psychological disorders continues to rise. Evidently, these should be monitored even more closely (Securex, 2016). In particular, the relationship between sick leave, gender and children should be explored.



There has been no study of this relationship in Belgium, but the ground-breaking Swedish study 'Gender differences in sickness absence and the gender division of family responsibilities' (Angelov et al., 2013) sought to identify why women are taking sick leave at increasingly higher rates than men. It found that once children arrived, sick leave among working mothers soared,

reaching the double of working fathers and remaining around this level for at least the next 15 years.

A possible explanation is that an overburdening of women, who take on most of the unpaid work associated with having children in addition to their paid work, is to blame. The study found that men who do an

<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere, Nathalie and Briec, together with Thomas Dermine, have argued that longer school days are both beneficial for improving gender equality and decreasing educational inequality between kids with different social backgrounds. See <http://www.knack.be/nieuws/belgie/korte-schooluren-zijn-vrouw-enkindonvriendelijk/article-opinion-723641.html> for the Dutch version of our op-ed and [http://www.lecho.be/agora/analyse/Pourquoi\\_allonger\\_la\\_journee\\_scolaire\\_est\\_une\\_bonne\\_idee.9778502-2338.art?ckc=1&ts=1479251731](http://www.lecho.be/agora/analyse/Pourquoi_allonger_la_journee_scolaire_est_une_bonne_idee.9778502-2338.art?ckc=1&ts=1479251731) for the French version.

equal amount of unpaid work as their female partner have a 10% higher chance of being on sick leave, and men who do the majority of unpaid work have a 20% higher risk. As a newspaper wrote of the findings: “Equal men are more sick.”

But the study also proposes possible psycho-social causes, such as finding oneself constrained to a traditional role specialisation despite valuing more egalitarian sharing. It may not just be the burden of unpaid and total working time or

the difficulties in balancing paid and unpaid work to blame, but stress caused by a feeling of unfairness could also be making us sicker.

Understanding which factors are at play could be highly valuable in determining how to approach fixing gender time inequality and crucially for this report, parental leave. Family welfare policy reforms targeting the distribution of unpaid and paid work, such as parental leave, could potentially have a beneficial side-effect on work disability. Such a possibility warrants further study.

## DEFINITIONS

### Unpaid work

Unpaid work is a catch-all term that is widely applied, in research and policy, to mean the work that has historically been done by women without wage, ranging from reproductive labour such as household task like cleaning, to emotional labour like caring for children or family members. It is distinct from paid work, employment, or productive labour. In this report we use unpaid work to mean both reproductive and emotional labour.

### Parental leave

Employment-protected leave of absence for parents, supplementary to maternity and paternity leave (though in some countries they are combined). Entitlement is often individual to each parent while entitlement to income support is often family-based, so that except immediately after birth, generally only one parent takes remunerated leave at a time.

### Home care leave

Follows parental leave and typically allows one parent to remain at home for a few years after childbirth. Less common and most often unpaid but with a small benefit or flat rate.

### Maternity leave

(Alternatively pregnancy leave) Employment-protected leave of absence for mothers around the time of childbirth or adoption. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) convention stipulates minimum 14 weeks. Most often combination of leave before and after birth, sometimes compulsory. Almost all OECD countries provide income support, though the amounts vary widely.

### Paternity leave

Employment-protected leave of absence for fathers or partner which does not give birth around the time of childbirth. Not stipulated by international convention. In general much shorter than maternity leave, which often means remuneration levels are higher. Some countries also have additional, non-transferable, parental leave reserved for the father or partner not giving birth.

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## COLOPHON

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