

# **Gender Equality and Fertility: Which Equality Matters?**

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## **FIRST PRELIMINARY DRAFT**

(This draft is based on a preliminary study which we carried out to check whether we get interesting results for our approach. The draft only sketches our results for the intention to have a first child; it contains only a small number of countries and of variables. We could not do a multilevel analysis with the data we had at hand for this preliminary study.  
(please do not cite)

### Abstract (for the final paper):

Does gender equality matter for fertility? Demographic findings to this question are rather inconclusive. We argue that there are several dimensions of gender equality, situated in place and time, and they are differently related to fertility.

To substantiate our position we study the impact of three gender dimensions on women's and men's intention to have a first and a subsequent child in countries with different gender-equity status and different fertility levels: France, Germany, Norway, Italy, The Netherlands, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Russia, and Georgia. We apply multilevel logistic regressions to data of the Generations and Gender Survey. We find that full-time employment, the maintenance of financial resources and the availability of childcare are essential for women's and men's parenthood intentions, but women seem to make their decisions more dependent on them than men do. As regards subsequent children, gender inequality becomes more prevalent in countries which do not support gender equity.

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## **Gender Equality and Fertility: Which Equality Matters?**

### **The Political Interest in Demographic Change: Gender equality and demographic policies**

Since the end of the twentieth century, demographic issues have come to the fore in the European Union. Documents issued by the European Commission address the issue of low and declining birth rates in European member states<sup>1</sup> and view it as a major challenge to Europe's future development. In line with most EU member states, the Commission stresses the need for policies to raise fertility and it regards policy interventions to increase birth rates as realistic (European Commission 2007). It proposes a wide range of policies to improve the possibilities for women and men to found a family, including financial support, improved access to housing and services, and the flexibilization of working hours and work organization (ibid). Since the authority to pass policies that affect childbearing behavior directly lies mainly with the member states, the EU links its suggestions to its employment and its gender mainstreaming agendas as specified in the Lisbon strategy, the Barcelona targets, and the gender equality roadmap (European Commission 2007). Their strategies focus on the reconciliation of work and family life, primarily in order to increase female labor-force participation rates in the EU to at least 60% by 2010 (European Council 2002, 12). To reach this goal they suggest an expansion of childcare provisions to offer childcare to at least 33% of children under age 3 and to 90% of children between age 3 and the mandatory school age by 2010 (European Council 2002, 12), an expansion of flexible working arrangements, and an increase in incentives to encourage men to take parental leave (Commission of the European Communities 2006b).

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<sup>1</sup> For cases in point, see the Green Paper on demographic change and the new solidarity between the generations (Commission of the European Communities 2005), the Commission's communication on the demographic future of Europe (Commission of the European Communities 2006a) and the Commission's first report on Europe's demographic future (European Commission 2007).

Placing fertility issues within the gender and employment objectives of the EU has major implications for fertility-related policy approaches and for fertility research. It calls for a broadening of the perspectives of the policy/fertility nexus to encompass gender equality and to examine the interlinkages between gender equality, employment, care, and fertility.

We take this as a starting point to explore whether gender equality in employment, care, and financial resources plays a role in childbearing intentions in selected Western and Eastern European countries. We make use of the first wave of the national Generations and Gender Survey in Bulgaria, Germany, France, Russia (in our preliminary study presented here) as well as Romania, Hungary, Georgia, Italy, Norway, and the Netherlands (in our final study). Among many other features, these data permit us to study women's and men's intention to have a first or subsequent child in the near future. Previous studies have mostly focused on Western Europe, but we have the opportunity to also include some countries in Eastern Europe. This greatly expands our possibilities to assess the general impact of gender equality on fertility. While one usually assumes that women in Western societies progress from less to more gender equality, women in Eastern Europe have experienced considerable setbacks in gender equality after the collapse of the state-socialist regimes (Gal and Kligman 2000a and 2000b, Funk and Mueller 1993, Moghadam 1994). These different developments of gender equality suggest that we can hardly assume that countries take a similar route towards gender equality. Studies about the impact of gender equality on fertility should therefore take the gender history and the gender equality status of a country into account. In our study we thus attempt to elicit gender-equality impacts paying attention to the different systemic developments during recent decades. This will also greatly enhance our possibility to assess whether more gender equality leads to higher fertility, since, in our final study, we will have countries with very different routes and levels of gender equality (on the various dimensions of gender equality which we focus on).

We furthermore acknowledge that gender equality cannot be captured by one measurement, only. Gender equality comprises several dimensions. The most commonly known are the distinction between gender equality in the public sphere (labor market, politics) and gender equality in the private sphere (division of household work or care

between partners). These dimensions of gender equality may have different impacts on childbearing intentions and they may work differently for different parity, in different countries, and different strata of the society. Drawing on feminist research we try to capture specific dimensions of gender equality and investigate which impact they have on women's and men's childbearing intentions.

Our paper proceeds as follows: We first give a brief overview over recent studies of the relationship between gender equality, employment, financial resources, care, and fertility (not provided fully in this draft). This is followed by an outline of the gender-relevant meaning of these features and of their representation in the fertility-related policy orientation of the countries of our interest. In the present draft, we present only France, Germany, Bulgaria, and Russia, since data from these countries were available to us to test of our approach; in the final paper, we will also include Hungary, Romania, Georgia, Italy, the Netherlands, and Norway. These countries represent different types of welfare states or took different welfare (and partly gender equity) paths after the breakdown of state socialism. We then present the some first and preliminary results of our analysis with a focus on intentions to have a first child within the next three years. The analysis is based on data from the first waves of the Generations and Gender Survey of the respective countries. The present analysis uses information about the current status of the respondent (and her or his household), and her or his assumptions of what kind of effect motherhood resp. fatherhood would have on different aspects of her or his life. In the final paper we will supplement these variables by additional variables which capture gender-relevant aspects of employment, income, financial resources and care in more detail. We will furthermore extend our analysis to the second (and subsequent) child, for several reasons: (a) preliminary tests have shown that the relationship between gender equality dimensions and childbearing intentions reverses in countries which do not strive for gender equity; (b) preliminary tests have also shown that gender inequality among different social groups (measured as respondent's and her/his partner's education) tends to increase; (c) gender issues in Eastern European countries may play out more explicitly with the second (and subsequent) child because, since nearly everyone has a first child, the second child is usually the first child of choice. Moreover, we will incorporate macro-level indicators of (un)employment, childcare, and gender equality in

our final analysis to study the potential influence of the socio-economic, welfare-state, and gender-equity context on the intentions to have a child.

We conclude with some reflections on the policy implications of our findings (based on our first findings).

### **Gender equality and fertility – some research results**

A number of studies related to Western European countries point to the importance of gender equality for fertility development. Policies that promote women's labor-force participation, that alleviate women's care obligations, that further fathers' uptake of parental leave, and that reduce the motherhood penalty in employment are regarded as conducive to increased childbearing and improved fertility development. McDonald (2000a and 2000b) argues that cleavages in gender equity between individual-oriented social institutions (such as education or employment) and family-oriented social institutions (such as familial childcare) lead to lower fertility: If women's educational attainment and labor-force participation increase to levels higher than or close to those of men, while familial care primarily remains a woman's tasks, fertility will drop to very low levels (ibid). These theoretical assumptions are partly confirmed by empirical macro-level studies which show that the negative association between female labor-force participation and fertility has weakened over time or even changed to a positive one (Brewster and Rindfuss 2000; Ahn and Mira 2002; Engelhardt, Kögel, and Prskawetz 2004; Castles 2003). These changes are largely attributed to institutional changes, in particular to the increase in institutional childcare facilities for children under the age of three (Castles 2003) and to a concurrent de-familialization of care and welfare services (Esping-Andersen 1999), that is, to a shift from the family to the state as the main provider of care and private welfare. However, there are great differences in institutional care services for children across Europe (Neyer 2003 and 2005). As a consequence, the observed change in the macro-level relationship between employment and fertility is mainly driven by change in the Nordic countries and in France. These countries have geared their social policies towards extending childcare, promoting women's

employment, and, particularly in the Nordic countries, towards furthering gender equality (Neyer 2005; Neyer 2003). Studies of the relationship between employment and childbearing in these countries regularly find a positive impact of women's employment on childbearing (in that employed women have higher fertility), while the effects of employment on childbearing are mostly negative in countries that adhere to motherism, that is, whose policies endorse women as sole carers (Andersson 2000; Kravdal 1994; González 2000; Vikat 2004).

On the level of the family, greater equality in the gender division of care seems to be conducive to childbearing as well. Several studies on the Nordic countries show that fathers' engagement in childrearing increases further childbearing; couples in which the father takes some parental leave are more inclined to have another child than couples in which the father has not taken out any parental leave (Oláh 2003; Duvander and Andersson 2006; Duvander, Lappegård, and Andersson 2008, Esping-Andersen, Güell, and Brodmann 2007; Brodmann, Esping-Andersen, and Güell 2007). However, as Lappegård points out, the share of father's uptake of parental leave depends on the gender balance in breadwinning. The more equal the mother's and father's income are and the larger the mother's contribution to the household income is, the more parental leave the father takes (Lappegård 2008). Just as with the changing relationship between employment and fertility, the positive impact of a father's parental leave and of his engagement in childcare on fertility is found mostly in the Nordic countries, which have actively promoted a gender-equal distribution of work and care between the partners and which have encouraged men's contribution to (unpaid) family work since the 1970s/1980s. In countries which do not challenge the prevalence of the male-breadwinner/female-carer family organization, the findings are more ambivalent, ranging from no effects or even negative effects of gender equality to some positive effect among specific socio-economic groups (Esping-Andersen, Güell, and Brodmann 2007; Mills et al 2008). In the latter countries, having a child increases the gender inequality in the distribution of time and of financial resources. After the birth of a child, fathers tend to work more than before while mothers tend to work less or to withdraw from the labor market (Misra, Budig, and Moller 2007a).

In countries which in effect support a gendered division of care and employment, women also face a greater motherhood penalty, which means that there is a greater decrease in income or in personal financial resources due to motherhood than in countries which put more store on gender equality. In fact mothers incur the largest wage penalties (Misra et al. 2007a); Misra, Budig, and Böckmann 2008) in the conservative welfare states of Europe, which put the emphasis on women as primary caregivers (Austria, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands). In the Nordic countries, in France, and in the Eastern European countries, the motherhood penalty is considerably lower. In these countries, mothers actually do not earn much less than women without children do (ibid).

Single-country studies indicate that policies that help women sustain their income level during employment interruption after childbirth, may facilitate the decision for motherhood, while (severe) reductions of their financial resources due to childbirth may constrain childbearing. An analysis of developments in Hungary (Aassve 2006) showed that there was a considerable decline in first-birth intensities among highly educated women when an income-related childcare benefit of 75 percent of a mother's previous income during her care leave<sup>2</sup> was changed to a means-tested flat rate allowance amounting to only about half of the previous childcare benefit. Similarly, in his study of women's labor-force attachment and childbearing in Finland, (Vikat 2004) demonstrated that despite a severe economic crisis and high unemployment in Finland during the 1990s fertility levels did not drop. He attributed this to a home-care benefit<sup>3</sup> which allowed mothers to maintain their income levels during the first years after childbirth.

Such studies allow us to draw a fairly consistent picture of the relationship between gender equality and fertility: On the macro-level, a de-gendering of labor-force participation and a de-familialization of childcare work seem to be necessary to create conditions supportive of childbearing and highest-low fertility. On the micro-level, the link between employment and childbearing appears to be largely intermediated by the

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<sup>2</sup> The care leave could be taken after maternity leave, that is it could start six months after the child's birth and last until its second birthday (Aassve, Billari, and Spéder 2006, 135). Care leave (and also parental leave) was mostly taken by mothers (ibid).

<sup>3</sup> The Finnish home-care allowance is a benefit granted to parents who do not make use of public childcare. In the 1990s the home-care allowance was paid on top of other benefits, such as possible unemployment benefits (Vikat 2004). While it sustained fertility levels during the crisis, it led to a considerable decline in female labor-force participation (Rønsen and Sundström 2002).

institutional support offered to women. De-feminization of private care, which means a more equal distribution of care between mothers and fathers, has proved to be conducive to childbearing in countries which strive towards a gender-equal society. The fertility impacts of a more equal division of care between parents are more ambiguous in countries that support female-carer/male-breadwinner family forms or in countries which regard the distribution of care as a matter of parental choice. Finally, a lower birth penalty and the prospect of maintaining one's own financial resources after childbirth seem to further childbearing while severe income cutbacks tend to reduce childbearing.

### **Employment, care, and financial resources from a gender and welfare-state perspective**

As our review of previous research indicates, fertility development in Europe seems to be increasingly tied to the gender development in employment, care support, and financial resources in society and/or within the family. Employment, financial resources, and care also represent different dimensions of gender equality and of welfare-state policies which regulate gender relationships in society and in the family. In all European societies, employment provides the main source of economic independence; it ensures one's own and one's family's living and grants comprehensive welfare protection over the life course. In most countries, this can only be achieved through full-time employment or through employment which secures an income on the level of full-time employment. Having a full-time employment may thus be regarded as a proxy for a person's capacity to *“form and maintain an autonomous household”* (Orloff 1993, 319), to assure her independent social protection, and to maintain her bargaining power in a partnership. By contrast, working part-time usually implies less income, lower social-security benefits, a reduced capacity to sustain a household, and in couples with an unequal amount of paid work, a reduced bargaining power. For childless women and for men in general, working part-time may also be a sign of tenuous labor-market integration and accompanied by greater risks of unemployment.



The financial resources available to a person are usually seen as an indicator of her/his material standard of living. From a gender perspective, however, we can also consider them as an indicator of a person's *agency*, that is, of the scope of alternatives available to her, of her capabilities to choose, and of her potential to achieve well-being (Korpi 2000, 132; Sen 1992; Lister 1997). Financial resources are thus not simply a sign of possessions or of wealth, but are also an indicator of the power to act, of the capacity to participate in the active life of society, and of the potential to decide one's own life course.

Since in most countries, it is women who attend to small children, care offers (such as institutional childcare provisions and parental leave) can be viewed as a public *recognition* of women's work and as the state's effort to alleviate women's care burden. Public childcare services may also be regarded as a *substitute* for the male carer, enabling both, women and men, to devote equal time to employment. However, while institutional childcare provisions promote gender equality by enabling mothers' employment, parental-leave options may undermine gender equality if the regulations allow long leaves, grant only low (or no) benefits, and are not also specifically designed to induce men/fathers to take parental leave. One can therefore regard a country's care options as a sign of the extent to which it attempts to further gender equality or to reinforce gender inequality.

European welfare states have pursued different gender strategies regarding the support which they grant women or men to maintain their own employment, sustain their independent financial resources, and alleviate their care obligations or enable their care giving during parenthood (Meyers, Gornick, and Ross 1999; Leitner 2003). The four countries which we look at in this preliminary study, France, Germany, Bulgaria, and Russia, represent different approaches in this respect.

France has followed a strategy of choice (Misra, Budig, Böckmann 2008). It focuses on women as workers and offers comprehensive childcare to support women's full-time employment. But it has also policies in place which allow mothers (of several children) to retreat from the labor market for a longer period of time (for details see: Toulemon, Pailhé, and Rossier 2008, 531f). German policies, by contrast, have targeted

women as carers and men as earners.<sup>4</sup> Childcare facilities for children below age three are rare (except in East Germany), and the German tax and parental leave policies pose(d) an incentive for married women to withdraw from the labor market or reduce their employment substantially. [For full study: The Netherlands: since the late 1990s, policies to encourage both, women and men, to work part-time; extension of childcare via employers and trade-union engagement; gender equality via labor-market policies; Norway: universal welfare state, encourage gender equality through women's employment and men's care, strong gender equality focus on all policies; introduction of cash-for-care partial withdrawal from gender equality focus.]. Prior to 1989, Bulgaria and Russia emphasized women's participation in the workforce and at the same time furthered childbearing through comprehensive population policies, which included childcare services, long leave options, and various in-kind and cash benefits (Koytcheva and Philipov 2008; Zakharov 2008; Rieck 2006; 2008). Since the fall of state socialism, unemployment has risen markedly, and the financial situation of women and men has tightened. The gender and social inequality in labor-force participation and in wages has increased. In Russia, childcare services were reduced considerably, and cash benefits and private care have been prioritized. In both countries, there has been a tendency to extend care leave options and emphasize maternalism (ibid; Rostgaard 2004; Pascall and Manning 2000). [add Hungary, Romania and Georgia in full study. Hungary: only country where women's employment did not decline drastically immediately after transition, see: Szalai; Spéder 2002] Despite differences in employment, care, and financial support policies, in all countries which we study in our preliminary study, up to 2005, there has been no concerted endeavor to change gender relationships towards gender equality in employment, care, and financial resources. Given the changes in women's social and economic situation (e.g.: through changes in women's and men's labor-force participation), we expect that this may have a bearing on the fertility intentions voiced by women and men in these countries.

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<sup>4</sup> As of 2007 Germany has changed its parental leave policies towards promoting women's labor force participation and father's care. Since 2005 Germany has also taken steps to improve childcare options. Since our study is based on data collected in 2005, we sketch the policies relevant then.

## **Gender equality and fertility intentions - findings from the Generations and Gender Survey**

For our analysis of the impact of employment, care, and financial resources on women's and men's intention to have a first child in the near future, we make use of the harmonized datasets of the first wave of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS1) in France, Germany, Bulgaria, and Russia. The datasets were provided by UNECE/PAU. The fieldworks of the GGS1 were carried out in 2004 (Bulgaria and Russia) and 2005 (France and Germany). All Generations and Gender Surveys are expected to use a standardized questionnaire which guarantees comparability across countries (see Vikat et al 2007 and UNECE/PAU 2008a and UNECE/PAU 2008b).<sup>5</sup>

The GGS1 was specifically designed to capture social, economic, and institutional aspects of gender and generational relationships on the individual and on the kinship level. It contains detailed information on individual fertility and family histories and on intentions regarding demographic events for women and men alike. It is therefore particularly well suited for the study of the impact of gender equality on fertility.

We make use of a series of survey questions on the respondent's intention to have a child within the next three years (as of the interview date). The GGS1 also asks what effect childbearing would have on various aspects of the respondent's (and her or his partner's) personal life and whether the decision to have a child would depend on any of these aspects. By limiting the questions on the respondent's fertility intention to a foreseeable time period and by embedding it into questions about what would influence her/his fertility decision, the GGS1 overcomes some of the problems associated with the surveying of intentions. Answers to questions about an individual's fertility intention in general, such as "how many children do you intend to have (i.e., ever)", are likely to capture a social norm as well, that is the number of children the individual thinks she/he should have rather than will have. Such general questions therefore render findings which confound intentions and social norms, and this may be (partially) avoided by the more concrete question used in the GGS. Moreover, questions on intentions which are not

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<sup>5</sup> A detailed documentation of the Generations and Gender Program, its guidelines, concepts, its survey instruments, and of GGP-related conferences can be found on the homepage of UNECE/PAU at: <http://www.unece.org/pau/ggp/Welcome.html>

contextualized tend to relate to a rather abstract ideal universe and do not elicit the conditions which either constrain or support the realization of the reported intention. Questions on intentions which cover an overseeable time period and which therefore are in close temporal proximity to the prospective behavior ((Misra, Budig, and Moller 2007b), 49) are generally considered to be the better predictors of actual behavior. The same applies if determinants and perceived consequences of the intended behavior are taken into consideration (Ajzen 1991). They offer the possibility to assess which personal or contextual circumstances are crucial in the decision to carry out the intended action.

As we have mentioned, in this preliminary study, we concentrate on women's and men's intention to have a first child within the next three years (i.e., three years following the GGS1) and we focus on the influence which employment, care options, and financial resources have in shaping this intention. We have chosen to study the impact of employment, care options, and financial resources, because, as outlined, they are indicators of one's capacity to maintain one's own household and family, to acquire independent social protection, to retain one's bargaining power and one's agency; and, as regards care, an indicator of one's reliance on the state or on the partner. We have furthermore chosen to look at the intention to have a first child because the birth of the first child is one of the most crucial events relevant to gender equality. Women's childbearing (and her reproductive potential) has always been an anchor point for engendering and maintaining gender inequality (Pateman 1989; Wikander, Kessler-Harris, and Lewis 1995). Often, the birth of the first child, more so than the birth of subsequent children, constitutes a turning point in the gender division and gender distribution of employment, care, and financial resources. [In our full study, we will also study the relationship between gender equality and the intention to have a second (and subsequent) child, because as mentioned, the first child may induce a change in behavior towards a more gendered pattern (e.g., reduction in employment by women vs. increase in employment hours by men) and thus increase the gender inequality within couples and within society.] We may therefore expect that women and men assess such features differently when they consider having a child. We have therefore carried out our analyses separately for women and men. For each gender we have employed logistic regressions with the intention to have a first child within the next three years as the dependent

outcome. In our test phase, we have included only a few covariates, such as the respondent's age and her/his family status and living arrangement. We have restricted a woman's age to being below 40 and a man's to below 45, since there are very few women and men who intend to have a first child beyond these ages. (We have also included education in some of our preliminary analyses, but since we did not have a standardized, comparable education variable by the time we did this preliminary analysis, we only report the results for those variables, which we could use for all the preliminary test countries). To get a picture of the main gender-equality factors related to fertility intentions and to avoid very small data sets, we have pooled the data for the four countries in most of our analysis, but to be on the safe side we have also carried out separate analyses for each country to account for country specificities. The pooled datasets for women and for men contain 2.447 and 3.001 cases, respectively.

### ***Country Differences, Age, and Family Status***

As expected, women and men in Germany and in France have much lower intentions to have a first child within the next three years than women in Bulgaria and in Russia, *ceteris paribus* (see Table 1). The higher intention rates in Russia and in Bulgaria correspond to the universal childbearing in these two countries; almost all women and men in these two countries become parents and they still do so at a comparatively young age (Kesseli 2007; Rieck 2008; Frejka, Sobotka, Hoem, and Toulemon 2008). In the four countries taken together, women are most likely to consider motherhood between ages 25 and 35, while younger and older women are much less prone to want to become mothers. Men have a somewhat greater span in which they plan first fatherhood, namely between ages 25 and 40. We find remarkable gender differentials in parenthood intentions by family status. Among women who live in a union, marital status does not seem to matter much for their childbearing intentions; cohabiting women do not have significantly lower intentions to become mothers than married women do. By contrast, men in consensual unions are noticeably less inclined to become fathers in the near future than married men are. Not surprisingly, childbearing intentions were lowest for women and men who did not have a partner at the time of the interview.

**Table 1****Intention to have a first child within the next three years (childless women and men)**

	<b>women</b>		<b>men</b>	
	odds ratio		odds ratio	
<b>country</b>				
Bulgaria	1,20		2,09	***
Russia	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>	
Germany	0,40	***	0,61	***
France	0,37	***	0,71	***
<b>marital status and living arrangement</b>				
living apart together	0,40	***	0,35	***
cohabiting (not married)	0,80		0,67	**
married	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>	
no partner	0,23	***	0,27	***
<b>respondent's age</b>				
< 20	0,22	***	0,24	***
20 < 25	0,45	***	0,48	***
25 < 30	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>	
30 < 35	1,40	*	1,10	
35 < 40	0,43	***	0,86	
40 < 45			0,44	***
N=	2447		3001	

Notes:

(1) \*\*\* p&lt;0.01; \*\* p&lt;0.05; \* p&lt;0.1

(2) Missing values are not shown but were controlled for

***Employment***

As pointed out, in order to use employment as an indicator of whether a person can afford to form and maintain a household independently of the support of a partner, we differentiate between full-time, part-time, and no employment when we look at the relationship between employment and the intention to have a first child within the next three years. Following Ajzen and Fishbein's suggestions (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980), we

furthermore consider the importance which the respondent attributes to her/his own work in the decision to have a child by including the response to two additional questions, namely (1) "How much would having a child within the next three years affect your employment opportunities?" and (2) "How much would the decision to have a child within the next three years depend on your work?"

Our analysis shows that women who are in full-time employment are much more prone to intend to have a child than women who are in part-time work or who are not employed resp. are in education.<sup>6</sup> For men the activity status is much less important for their childbearing intentions: Men in full-time work are somewhat more inclined to become fathers than those who work part-time or are not employed, but the results are less pronounced and not significant (Table 2). What is furthermore surprising is the fact that women who work part-time show the same reservation against becoming mothers as women without employment do. (The same may be said for men; however, the results for men are not significant) Full-time employment seems to be a pre-condition for women (and men) to intend to have a child. Part-time work or non-employment appears to entail a greater risk for women than it does for men as far as the intention to have a first child is concerned. If, as suggested, full-time employment can be regarded as an indicator for the possibility to maintain one's own household and to retain one's bargaining power vis-à-vis a partner, then the results show clearly that for women being able to support themselves (and their child) and to retain their independence has become a pre-requisite for motherhood in the four countries in our analysis.

This interpretation is further confirmed by the results regarding the effects a child would have on the respondent's employment situation.<sup>7</sup> Women and men who expect negative consequences of childbearing for their work are much less likely to intend to have a child in the near future than those who think that parenthood would have no effect,

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<sup>6</sup> Our preliminary analysis for the second (and for subsequent) children shows that in Germany women in part-time work or non-working women are much more prone to have another child than women in full-time employment. This lets us assume that the welfare-state context may matter and that in countries which do not support gender equality in employment, the relationship between gender equality and fertility may reverse.

<sup>7</sup> The Norwegian GGS does not include the questions on the potential impact a child would have on the respondent's resp. the partner's various situations. In our final study, Norway will be excluded when we study these variables. However, since we will include more indicators as regards work (e.g.: type of contract, more than one employment, sector of employment), we think that we will be able to better assess the impact of employment on behavior than in this preliminary study.

or even a positive effect, on their employment situation (Table 2). These results should be seen in light of the gender distribution of the expected consequences of parenthood: The vast majority of women, namely two thirds of them, fear that having a child would impair their employment opportunities, while only a quarter of the sampled men have reported this concern. Only about 30% of the women expect that motherhood would have no effect on their employment situation, compared to 66% of the men. Men who believe that becoming a father would improve their work situation (about nine percent of all interviewed men) are about twice as inclined to intend to have a child within the upcoming years as those who do not expect any impact of fatherhood on their work. The four percent of the female respondents who think that a child would improve their employment opportunities do not differ much in their childbearing intentions from those women who do not expect any consequences of motherhood on their work. From a gender perspective, these results show that there still exist considerable differences between women and men in the (perceived) implications of motherhood and fatherhood for their employment situation. However, there are essentially no differences as to the consequences of these implications for their fertility intentions: For both men and women, the possibility of maintaining or even improving their employment opportunities after becoming a parent is essential in order to intend having a child, while negative labor market prospects due to childbearing decrease the intentions to have a first child in the near future considerably.

The importance that women and men attribute to their employment in their fertility intentions is further underlined by their answers to the question whether their intention to have or not have a child would depend on their work. There is not really much difference between those who reported that their intention to have a child within the next three years is not influenced at all by their work situation and those who believe that their decision depends on their situation only to a small extent, although women and men tend to lean in different directions at this point. Women who say that their work has no importance for their childbearing intentions (about a fourth of all women) tend to show a somewhat reduced intention to have a child (as compared to women who report that employment issues play a slight role in their decision-making process). Conversely men who claim that their employment situation is irrelevant for their fertility intentions



(about a third of all men) are somewhat more inclined to intend to have a child (than men who say that their intentions for fatherhood depend only a little on employment aspects). By contrast, both women and men who say that their intention whether to become a parent depends strongly on their employment situation (which is nearly half of all women and about 45 percent of all men) are much the less likely to intend to have a child. The effect is in fact stronger among women than among men (Table 2, Panel 3). As with the results on the impact of employment and the expected effects of childbearing on employment, this confirms that employment has become an essential factor in women's considerations on whether to become a mother. The findings also indicate that women realize that their employment situation may become (and most often does become) more volatile with childbearing. To a greater extent than men, women consider their work when they weigh whether to have a child, and, viewing parenthood from the employment perspective, this reduces their childbearing intentions to a greater extent than it does for men.

For respondents who have a partner, we have also examined whether the partner's employment plays a role in the respondent's own childbearing intentions. As Table 2 shows (Panel 4), the partner's activity status has no visible impact on the intention to have a child within the next three years. (The intention of respondents whose partner currently is not in employment does not differ markedly from those whose partner currently is in employment.<sup>8</sup>) The same can be said of the importance that the partner's work is reported to have on the respondent's own fertility intentions. Respondents (both women and men) who state that their childbearing intentions depend a lot on the partner's employment show somewhat lower intentions to have a first child than those for whom the partner's employment is said to be of minor influence; those for whom the partner's employment is irrelevant for the decision to have a child are somewhat more inclined to have a child in the near future. In neither case is the finding significant, however. By contrast, the effect that parenthood could have on the partner's employment seems to have a significant influence on childbearing intentions and with partly deviating effects

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<sup>8</sup> In our regressions we have included (i) the respondent's and the partner's employment, (ii) the respondent's views on the effect of childbearing on her/his own and (iii) on the partner's employment and (iv) her/his views on the dependence of her/his and the partner's childbearing decision on employment, all in a single model in order to control for these factors mutually.

for women and men (Table 2, Panel 5): Women who state that having a child would worsen their partner's employment opportunities, are much less inclined to intend to have a child than those who do not expect any consequences of family formation on their partner's employment. Women who think that their partner's employment situation will improve by becoming a father tend to be somewhat more prone to become mothers, although the result is not significant. Among men, negative consequences for their partner's employment seem to impact on their intention to have a child in the next three years only marginally (and non-significantly). Yet, if they expect an improvement for their partner's employment, their odds of intending to have a child more than triple. There are, however, only a small number of men (7 percent) who think that their partner's work opportunities will improve with childbearing; the majority of men (54 percent) expect that their partner's employment situation will worsen. By contrast, among women, the vast majority (77 percent) sees their partner's work situation as untouched by childbearing and 12 percent expect that their partner's employment will improve with fatherhood.

**Table 2: Childbearing intentions and employment****Intention to have a first child within the next three years (childless women and men)**

	women		men	
	odds ratio		odds ratio	
activity status of respondent				
employed (full-time)	1		1	
employed (part-time)	0,61	**	0,80	
not employed/in education	0,62	***	0,88	
effect of having a child on employment				
better	1,09		2,05	***
neither/nor	1		1	
worse	0,51	***	0,58	***
dependence of decision to have a child on work				
not at all	0,85		1,12	
a little	1		1	
a lot	0,62	***	0,80	***
activity status of partner				
employed	1		1	
not employed/in education	1,07		0,95	
effect of having a child on partner's employment				
better	1,40		3,36	***
neither/nor	1		1	
worse	0,43	***	0,83	
dependence of decision to have a child on partner's work				
not at all	1,10		1,15	
a little	1		1	
a lot	0,81		0,80	
N=	2447		3001	

Notes:

(1) \*\*\* p&lt;0.01; \*\* p&lt;0.05; \* p&lt;0.1

(2) Controlled for marital status, age of respondent, and country

(3) Missing values are not shown but were controlled for

Similar to the assessment that women and men have of the relationship between their own employment situation and childbearing, they also seem to have a rather realistic picture of the effect of childbearing on their partner's employment (given the gender differences in impact of childbearing on women's and men's employment reported by other studies). But women and men draw different consequences from their assessment. Women seem rather to abstain from intending to have their first child in the next three years if they expect negative impacts of childbearing on their own and their partner's employment. Men's childbearing intentions seem to be less affected by potentially negative outcomes of motherhood for their partner's employment. The fact that a man's intention to have a child in the near future decreases markedly if he expects negative consequences for his own work, but that his intention does neither decline much nor significantly if he expects negative impacts of childbearing on his partner's employment may reflect a gendered attitude to work: Men may perhaps regard negative consequences of childbearing on women's work as the "normal" costs of childbearing for women.

### ***Financial situation***

We consider the financial situation as a proxy for women's and men's agency, that is for their capability to pursue goals which they value (Sen 1992). For both women and men, the financial situation plays a considerable role in their intentions to have a first child within the next three years (Table 3). If childbearing is expected to worsen their financial situation, women and men are much less inclined to intend parenthood than if they expect no impact on their financial situation. A foreseen aggravation of their financial situation reduces women's childbearing intentions even somewhat more than men's. It should be noted that about two thirds of women and men alike expect that childbearing will depress their financial situation. Men who think that their financial situation will improve with fatherhood are much more inclined to have a child in the next three years than those who do not expect any consequences. Women seem to be much more reserved; there is only a slight tendency toward higher childbearing intentions if they expect the financial situation to improve, and the result is not significant.

Women and men who state that their decision to have a child within the next three years would depend a lot on their financial situation (about half of all women and men,

separately) are less inclined to have a child than those who feel that their childbearing decisions depend on their financial situation only to some extent (Table 3, Panel 2). Although the results are not significant, men for whom their financial situation has no influence on their childbearing decisions tend slightly more towards fatherhood than those for whom the financial situation does not play a great role in their deliberation about having or not having a child. Women who say that their financial situation is irrelevant for their childbearing show slightly lowered intentions compared to those who make their childbearing decisions somewhat dependent on their financial situation. For women and men alike, the prospect of impairing their financial situation through parenthood severely lowers their intentions to have a first child in the next three years. This implies that both for women and for men, maintaining their living standard and their agency (measured in terms of maintaining their financial standard) seems to be crucial for their childbearing intentions.<sup>9</sup>

**Table 3: Financial situation and childbearing intentions**  
**Intention to have a first child within the next three years (childless women and men)**

	women	men
	odds ratio	odds ratio
<b>effect of having a child on financial situation</b>		
better	1,28	1,81 ***
neither/nor	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
worse	0,45 ***	0,52 ***
<b>dependence of the decision to have a child on financial situation</b>		
not at all	0,78	1,10
a little	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
a lot	0,75 **	0,79 ***
N =	2447	3001

Notes: (1) \*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.1  
(2) Controlled for marital status, age of respondent, and country  
(3) Missing values are not shown but were controlled for

<sup>9</sup> We also experimented with the income of the woman, the man, and the household. Our very rudimentary tests show that couples with income equality are more prone to consider having a child within the next years., and we attempt to include income in our final analysis.

### *Care options and fertility intentions*

As regards care options, we have examined two possibilities. First, the GGS1 allows us to assess whether the opportunity to go on parental or care leave has an impact on the intention to have a first child (again within three years after the interview). We must take into account, however, that the question may have different connotations for women and men. Since parental leave regulations for women have been in place in all four countries for several decades, the question posed to women may pick up aspects of an entitlement to parental leave, such as the fulfillment of employment or of income requirements. This may be different for men. Due to the EU-directive on parental leave,<sup>10</sup> fathers in the European Union are also entitled to parental leave (of at least three months). Parental leave options for fathers are also part of national Russian family policies. Nevertheless only a minority of fathers have made use of the opportunity to go on parental leave (for more than very short periods of time) in any of the four countries which we have examined.<sup>11</sup> For men, the question concerning the impact of parental-leave opportunities on their intentions to have a child may thus indicate their willingness to devote some time to childcare and may signal a step towards a changing perception of fatherhood and greater gender equality in family issues.

Second, we are also able to investigate whether the availability of childcare affects childbearing intentions, but we cannot distinguish between different types of childcare, such as institutional care or private care. Nevertheless, the question offers the possibility to assess the significance which women and men attribute to having some assistance in and relief from childcare obligations.

As Table 4 reveals, the opportunity to go on parental leave has no visible effect on women's and men's intentions to become a parent within the next three years. The intentions of women and men who state that their decision to have a child in the near

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<sup>10</sup> Council Directive 96/34/EC of 3 June 1996 on the framework agreement on parental leave concluded by UNICE, CEEP and ETUC (OJL 145, June 19, 1996, 4-9).

<sup>11</sup> Since 2002, France has a statutory paternal leave which grants father the possibility to take an 11 day leave. About 60% of fathers have made use of it (Toulemon, Pailhé, and Rossier 2007, 541). In Germany fathers' use of parental leave has increased substantially after the recent amendment of the parental leave regulations, which reserve two non-transferable months of the parental leave to the either the father or the mother.

future depends a lot on the possibility to take parental leave do deviate much from those who say they pay only little attention to parental-leave options in their fertility considerations. The same applies to those who do not pay any attention to parental leave options when considering having a child (Table 4, Panel 1).

The results are quite different as regards the availability of childcare. Women and men who declare that their childbearing decisions depend a lot on the availability of childcare are much less inclined to plan a first child within the next three years than those for whom childcare availability is of less or no importance. Women who attribute great significance to the availability of childcare are even somewhat more hesitant to have a first child than the respective men are. These results suggest that those women and men who may depend on the availability of childcare (i.e.: those who state childcare is of great significance for their decision to have a child) may have some doubts whether the childcare that they need or seek is actually available. (In our preliminary test of the impact of childcare on second and subsequent childbearing intentions, we could also test which effect different childcare options used for the first child had on women's and men's intention to have another child. Women were more inclined to consider another child if their first child used (some) public childcare; men's intention risks were highly elevated when the child was cared for privately, that means, by the child's mother. We will comment on the issue of a "secondary" gain from private care for men, and the implication for gender equality and fertility in our final paper).

**Table 4: Care options and childbearing****Intention to have a first child within the next three years (childless women and men)**

	women	men
	odds ratio	odds ratio
<b>dependence of childbearing on opportunity to go on parental/childcare leave</b>		
not at all	1,07	0,92
a little	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
a lot	1,04	0,87
<b>dependence of childbearing on availability of childcare</b>		
not at all	1,07	1,12
a little	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
a lot	0,64 ***	0,74 ***
N=	2447	3001

Notes:

(1) \*\*\* p&lt;0.01; \*\* p&lt;0.05; \* p&lt;0.1

(2) Controlled for marital status, age of respondent, and country.

(3) Missing values are not shown but were controlled for

**Conclusion – Moving towards gender equality**

We have taken the recent suggestions by the EU that national governments should implement policies to increase fertility as a starting point to explore the relationship between fertility intentions and gender equality. We have concentrated on aspects of gender equality that correspond to the EU-goals of the Lisbon agenda and to the EU-roadmap for gender equality: gender equality in employment, care, and financial resources. For our explorations, we have chosen a life-course event which often marks a turning point from more to less gender equality, namely the birth of the first child, and we have looked at the impact of employment, care, and financial resources on women's and men's intention to have a first child in the near future. The results of our study underline



the importance of employment, care, and financial security for fertility intentions of women and men, as well as the greater weight that women put to most of these issues in their fertility intentions. Women who only have a part-time job or no employment at all are much less inclined to intend to have a child in the near future than women who have a full-time job are. A precarious employment situation (part-time work or no employment) seems to have a less strong effect on men's intention to become a father.

Negative employment prospects associated with childbearing reduce fertility intentions significantly, for women and men alike. However, men hardly lower their fertility intentions if they expect that a child would impair their partner's employment situation, while women seem to abstain from childbearing intentions if they expect negative consequences for their partner's work. In general, women who have a potentially risky employment situation (part-time work or no employment), who pay a lot of attention to their work in their fertility decisions, and who expect negative impacts of motherhood on their own or their partner's work, are much less likely to consider a first child in the near future than those with a full-time job. The same applies to women who do not expect negative consequences of childbearing for their work or do not make their fertility decisions dependent on their work situation. However, positive prospects of employment do not raise women's fertility intentions. Men, by contrast, tend to be encouraged to consider a child if they expect a positive impact of parenthood on their or their partner's work situation.

Retaining their financial situation after the birth of a child seems to be a crucial element in women's and men's intentions to have a child. Both react with strongly reduced fertility intentions if they expect their financial situation to worsen or if their financial situation plays a great role in their fertility decisions. As with the employment situation, women hardly increase their fertility intentions if they expect a positive effect of childbearing on their financial situation. Men, however, react with highly elevated fertility intentions if they expect that having a child will improve their financial situation.

The opportunity to go on parental leave or care leave does not affect women's childbearing intentions of the near future, nor do we find any discernable effect on men which would signal that the possibility of active fatherhood (and greater gender equality in care) affects their childbearing intentions. The availability of childcare, however,

seems to influence childbearing plans: Both women and men who state that their intentions to have a child in the next three years depend heavily on the availability of childcare are much less likely to plan a child than those who say that for them childcare availability is of no or little importance.

Although our study is only a first attempt to explore the relationship between gender equality and fertility and more in-depth research is needed to back policy conclusions, our results provide some indications as to which directions fertility-related policies should take. Having a job which allows one to maintain a household and retain one's agency and also sustain one's financial resources seems to be essential for women and men to consider having a child in the near future. So does the availability of childcare. Given that these aspects seem to be even more essential for women than for men, this does not only call for policies which strengthen women's and men's employment and financial situations, but for policies that strengthen women's employment and financial resources vis-à-vis men. This clearly calls into question policy strategies which aim at easing part-time options for women as a route to increase fertility, at least as far as the transition to parenthood is concerned. It rather calls for a shift in employment policies towards a focus on gender equality in employment and income, but these policies must be designed from the perspective of childrearing and childcare.

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