



Gender Equality in the German Labor Market: Current Challenges and Untapped Potential

In Germany, the employment rate for women is impressive, standing at just under 78%, one of the highest in Europe. However, as nearly half of all women aged 20 to 64 (48%) work part time, the actual total number of working hours within this group is comparatively low. Yet women in Germany are often highly skilled and eager to work more provided overall working conditions improve. Unlocking this untapped potential is crucial, both from an **equality-policy and economic perspective**.

Particularly at a time of accelerated structural change, and as the shortage of skilled workers is growing, differentiated measures are needed in order to expand women's ability to engage in paid employment. Increasing women's labor-force participation would not only help mitigate discrimination in the labor market but also alleviate the shortage of skilled workers, ultimately contributing to overall economic prosperity. Moreover, it would empower women to exercise greater choice in the pursuit of their careers, attain greater financial independence, and safeguard against old-age poverty by ensuring sufficient income levels for their livelihoods.

Key facts and findings on women's labor-force participation are presented below. It is imperative that women who are willing and able to engage in paid work are well informed about the nature and extent of occupational inequalities. This information is not only crucial for individual decisions but also for policymakers, businesses and civil society leaders. Without such data, informed decisions cannot be made. This overview also identifies gaps in the present state of knowledge that should be the subject of further research.

The factsheet begins by describing current gender gaps, including the nature and extent of inequalities and the ways in which they interconnect - for example, how working fewer hours can increase the risk of poverty in old age. It then highlights potential solutions that are categorized into thematic areas within the current policy landscape. In sum, aside from improving employment incentives, two approaches are seen as offering particular leverage with regard to realizing women's untapped employment potential in Germany. The first involves increasing the control women have over the length and scheduling of their working time, also referred to as time sovereignty. The second entails introducing measures designed to help change traditional gender norms, encouraging a more fluid distribution of labor and household tasks.

Table of contents

Structural barriers in the labor market	3
Gender (work) time gap: Do employed women and men work the same amount?	3
Gender care gap: How much time do women invest in unpaid work on a daily basis?	4
Gender pay gap: How much do women earn for one hour of paid work in comparison to men?	5
Gender lifetime earnings gap: How much less than men do women earn over the course of their lives?	5
Motherhood lifetime penalty: How does being a mother affect the earnings gap?	6
Gender pension gap: What impact do structural labor-market inequalities have on women’s retirement incomes?	6
Financial literacy gap: What impact does financial education have on women and men’s retirement-income inequalities?	7
Policy options and measures for enhancing equality in the labor market	8
What financial incentives work against women’s equal participation in the workforce?	8
The tax system favors single-earner marriages with a traditional distribution of gender roles ...	8
Traditionally female-dominated professions receive less financial recognition	9
What time constraints prevent women from participating equally in the labor market?	11
A lack of childcare options limits the time available for paid work	11
Inflexible working time models prevent women from doing more paid work	12
What effect do traditional gender roles have on women’s employment?	13
Traditional gender roles and gender-specific norms are slow to change	13
Conclusion: Enhancing women’s time sovereignty and facilitating fluidity in traditional gender norms offer key points of leverage in unlocking the untapped employment potential of women in Germany	14
List of sources	15

Structural barriers in the labor market

Do employed women and men do the same amount of paid work?

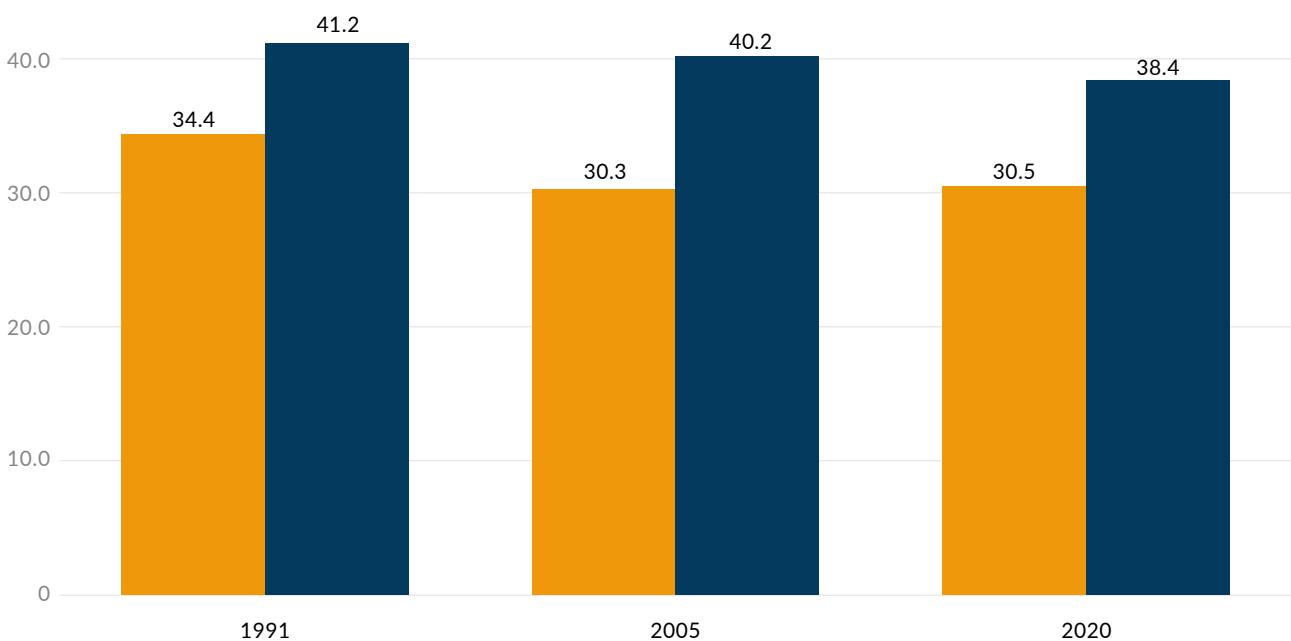
The employment rate for women in Germany stands at a remarkable 77.8%, making it one of the highest rates in Europe. Yet almost half of all 20- to 64-year-old women (48.1%) work only part time, meaning that the average number of hours worked is relatively low. This situation is particularly pronounced for women in partnerships with children, as indicated by data from Q2/2023 (Eurostat 2023a, b).

From a statistical standpoint, this translates to women spending significantly fewer hours in paid work compared to men. This gender-specific difference is referred to as the gender¹ (work) time gap. In 2020, this gap averaged 7.9 hours per working week, making it the third-highest gender time gap in Europe. It's worth noting that the reduction in this gap since 2005 isn't due to women working more; instead, it's primarily due to a decrease in the average hours worked by men (Lott et al. 2022).

FIGURE 1: Gender (work) time gap: Women work an average of eight hours less than men per week in paid employment

Average weekly working hours of employed women and men in Germany (in hours)

■ Women ■ Men



Source: Lott et al. (2022)

| BertelsmannStiftung

¹ Gender refers to the social construction of gender identities. This results in gaps that describe inequalities in access to society and the labor market. This stratification is an effect of sociocultural conditioning, not an expression of inherent characteristics.

How much time do women invest in unpaid work?

Despite engaging in less paid work than men, women often find themselves working at full capacity due to their significant involvement in **reproductive labor**. Reproductive labor encompasses the essential tasks required to sustain a person’s life and raise the next generation of waged labor by, for example, preparing food, maintaining a household, caring for family members and raising children. This happens on the one hand through the production of goods, and on the other through individual, social and generative reproduction. Examples of reproductive work include **maintaining the working population by bearing and raising children; caring for dependent adults; meal planning and preparing; as well as household cleaning and hygiene-related tasks**. Volunteer work can also be regarded as a form of social reproductive work (EIGE Glossary 2023).

Care work makes up a significant share of all reproductive labor. In Germany, this category of labor has historically and predominantly been carried out by women (Bauhardt 2010; Power 2004). The gender care gap denotes the disparity in the average daily hours spent on care work by men and women, which is quite substantial. According to the German government’s second gender equality report, women engage in an average of 52.4% more care work per day than men. Women’s total daily commitment to these tasks averages at four hours and 13 minutes, which is 87 minutes (nearly 1.5 hours) longer than that of men. The difference is even more pronounced in the group of 34-year-olds. Here, women perform more than twice as much care work (+110.6%) as men. While 34-year-old men perform an average of two hours and 31 minutes of unpaid care work per day, the average for women of the same age is five hours and 18 minutes (BMFSFJ 2019).

In addition, reference is often made to **emotional care work** (emotional labor) and the **mental (work) load** (e.g., Lott and Bünger 2023; Cammarata 2020). Emotional care work specifically involves attending to the emotional needs of others and includes activities such as listening, offering comfort and providing (mental) support. This can also be seen as necessary reproductive labor. However, emotional care work often goes unnoticed as labor since it typically occurs outside of formal working hours or during leisure time, making it difficult to depict, especially in qualitative terms. Finally, the term “mental (work) load” refers to the responsibilities associated with household management, involving the continuous oversight of household and family affairs. For example, this includes anticipating **needs**, evaluating **options** (what, when, who, how, where), making **decisions** (planning, organizing and **setting** deadlines and structures) and monitoring **various aspects of daily life**. It encompasses **knowledge** about **essential household** purchases, arrangements, and scheduling routines as well as crucial events and appointments (e.g., doctor visits, school activities, birthdays, meal planning, homework deadlines, playtime, workload, bedtime routines, etc.). This kind of mental processing and care work largely operates **behind the scenes** and is exceedingly difficult to measure in terms of its extent or quality. Consequently, the **mental (work) load** is also difficult to quantify. Irrespective of whether women work full-time or part-time, and regardless of whether their households include children or not, it is often women who disproportionately bear the brunt of cognitive household management (Lott and Bünger 2023). Care work also often extends beyond the boundaries of a person’s own family or partnership and includes other social contexts such as kindergartens, schools, churches, clubs and so on. This further exacerbates the mental strain on women.

FIGURE 2: Gender care gap: Women perform an average of four hours and 13 minutes of unpaid care work per day, or around 1.5 hours more than men.

In hours of care work per day

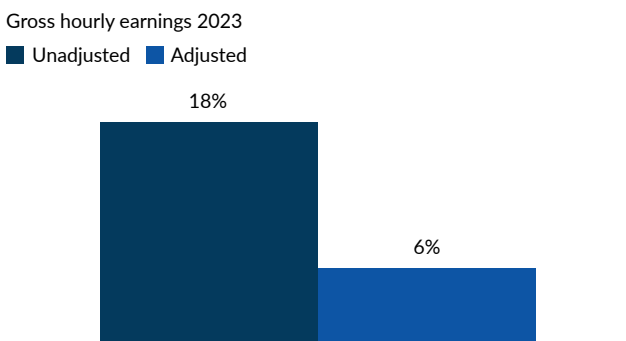


Source: BMFSFJ (2019)

How much do women earn for one hour of paid work in comparison to men?

The (unadjusted) **gender pay gap** – that is, the difference between women’s and men’s **average gross hourly earnings** – averaged **18% in Germany** in 2023. This means that women earn 18% less than men. With an average pay of €20.84 per hour, they receive **€4.46 less** than men (average €25.30).

FIGURE 3: Gender pay gap: On an unadjusted basis, women earn an average of 18% less than men – that is, more than €4 less per hour before taxes.



Source: German Federal Statistical Office (2024) | BertelsmannStiftung

While the unadjusted **gender pay gap** reflects purely gender-specific differences, the **adjusted gender pay gap** also takes structural differences between men and women into account – for example, incorporating qualification levels, career choices, work in specific sectors, working hours (part-time vs. full-time), and a range of other factors. In 2023, the **adjusted gender pay gap** was 6%.

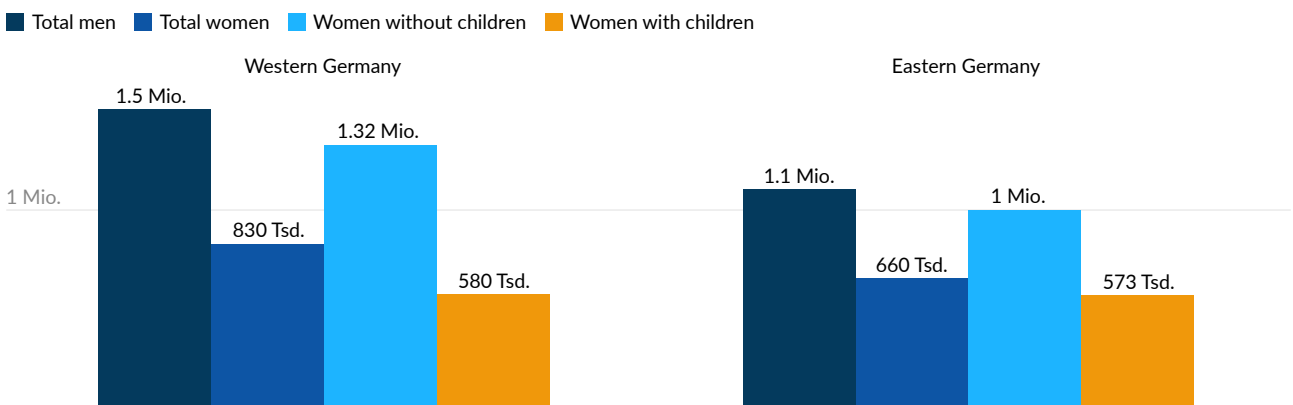
How much less do women earn compared to men over their lifetimes?

While the gender pay gap takes a cross-sectional view to examine a single year, the **gender lifetime earnings gap** offers a longitudinal perspective, considering income over time. Expressed in 2015 prices, **women from the former West Germany** born in the 1985 cohort can expect an **average lifetime income** of around **€830,000** (€1.32 million for women without children, and around €580,000 for women with children). West German men, on the other hand, can on average expect an income of **€1.5 million**. The **gap in lifetime earnings** (the **gender lifetime earnings gap**) is therefore around **45%** (40% in eastern Germany) for the youngest of the cohorts examined in western Germany (Bönke et al. 2020). In practical terms, this translates to an average of €670,000 (or €450,000 in eastern Germany).

Quite clearly, **children** are the most critical determining factor influencing the **gender lifetime earnings gap**. Typically, the time mothers dedicate to caring for and raising children leads to reduced participation in paid work, resulting in substantially lower lifetime earnings. Women without children are the only group of women whose average lifetime earnings approach those of men. Particularly in eastern Germany, men and childless women earn nearly identical amounts over their lifetimes (€1.1 million vs. €1 million).

FIGURE 4: Gender lifetime earnings gap: Women in the former West Germany earn an average of €670,000 less than men over the course of their lives – with children being the key factor.

Average gross lifetime earnings (in 2015 prices) of various groups in the former West Germany (calculated for the 1985 cohort) and East Germany (calculated for the 1982 cohort), rounded, in €



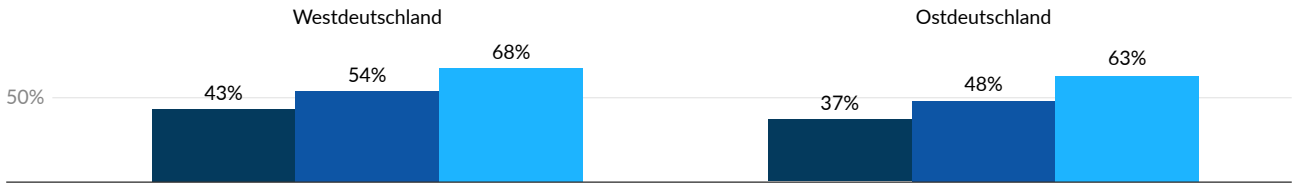
Source: Bönke et al. (2020)

| BertelsmannStiftung

FIGURE 5: **Motherhood lifetime penalty: Becoming a mother results in an average reduction of approximately 40% in lifetime earnings for women with children when compared to women without children.**

For women born in 1982; values indicate the average proportion of lifetime earnings lost by women with children as compared with women without children.

■ One child ■ Two children ■ Three or more children



Source: Barišić and Consiglio (2020)

| BertelsmannStiftung

How does being a mother affect the earnings gap?

The **motherhood lifetime penalty** describes the **income gap between childless women and mothers** as measured in a longitudinal analysis. The loss of income associated with being a mother adds up over time and becomes apparent at the end of a person’s working life. Due to financial incentives, time constraints and traditional perceptions of the division of labor in partnerships, women are more likely to take on care work than men. They invest correspondingly less time in paid employment. Mothers with one child earn an average of 40% less income over their lifetimes than do childless women. For women with three or more children, the motherhood lifetime penalty is almost 70% (Barišić and Consiglio 2020).

One important contributor to the motherhood penalty is the prevalence of marginal employment, as women work mini-jobs with above-average frequency. Of the 3.8 million employees in Germany whose main paid work is within a marginal employment context, 65% are women (Consiglio and Göbler 2021). As a result, women often accrue lower levels of social security eligibility, and are consequently subject to a higher risk of poverty in old age.

What impact do structural labor-market inequalities have on women’s retirement incomes?

The **gender pension gap**² describes the gap between the **retirement incomes** of women and men. In 2021, women aged 65 and over received an average gross retirement income of €17,800 per year, while men received an average of around €25,400. The gender-specific difference was therefore **almost 30%**. In addition to social security and survivors’ benefits, individual private pensions also count as retirement income.

The employment and income gaps for women discussed above are inevitably reflected in lower average retirement incomes. With average lifetime earnings that are €670,000 lower than the equivalent average for men, less money also flows into women’s statutory and private pension plans. The high proportion of women working part-time or in marginal employment exempt from social security contributions increases the risk of poverty in old age. This risk increases if there are no additional derived claims.

Around 29% of women aged 65 or over received retirement income from **survivor’s benefits** in 2021. The corresponding figure for men was just over 5%. If these derived retirement income claims are **excluded** from the analysis, the result is an even greater **gender pension gap of 42.6%**. The gender-specific pension gap is thus larger if the analysis takes in only the individual’s own pension entitlements. However, even when derived entitlements are taken into account, women have a higher risk than men of experiencing poverty in old age. **About 20% of women aged 65 or over** were at risk of poverty in 2022 – compared to 17.5% of men.

FIGURE 6: **Gender pension gap: Women have a greater risk than men of poverty in old age; they receive an average of €7,600 (gross) less in retirement income per year than men.**

For the year 2021; in € (gross/year)

■ Women ■ Men



Source: German Federal Statistical Office (2023)

| BertelsmannStiftung

2 The gender pension gap is based on income received by the individual person, not the household as an economic unit. Accordingly, conclusions about older women’s overall access to retirement income cannot be drawn from the gender pension gap.

What impact does financial education have on women and men’s retirement-income inequalities?

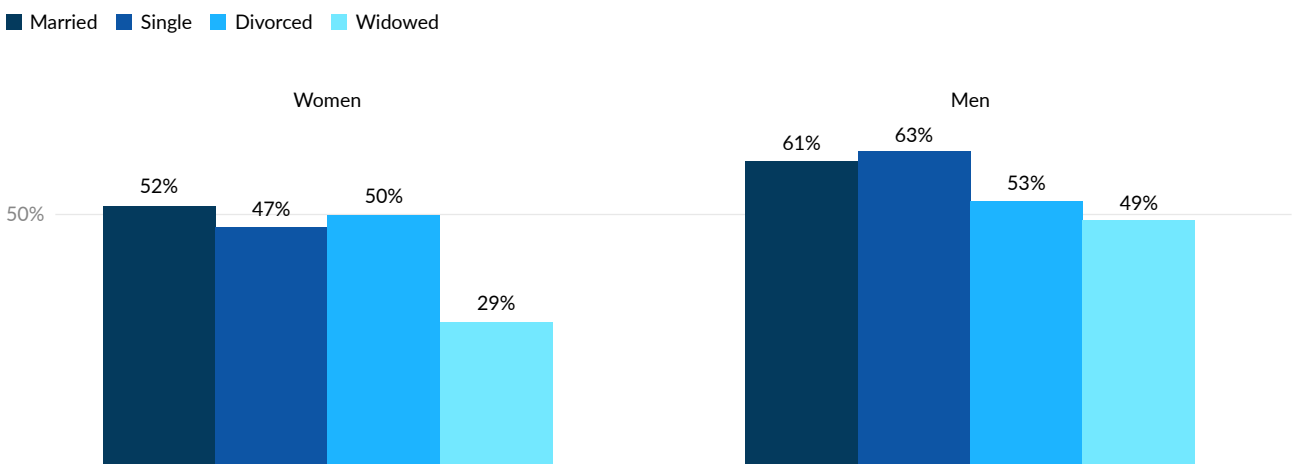
As the gender pension gap shows, women are exposed to a disproportionately high risk of poverty in old age. This is reason enough to be particularly careful and well informed when it comes to issues of financial security. However, in studies measuring men and women’s financial literacy – that is, in which they are asked questions about financial concepts such as inflation, risk diversification and investment behavior (Bucher-Koenen et al. 2016) – women generally perform worse than men. This does not reflect their natural competencies in terms of financial knowledge, but is rather an effect of having less access to financial education. Cultural values also play a role when it comes to financial decisions. These are often not perceived as women’s tasks, and continue to be **handled by men in accordance with traditional expectations**.

The **financial literacy gap** describes these differences in knowledge about and access to wealth creation and wealth management. The fact that women average fewer hours of paid work than men (see gender work time gap) means that women pay less into state pension systems over the course of their lives. More personal responsibility for **private pension provision is becoming increasingly relevant due to demographic change**. However, this requires knowledge of complex financial products such as insurance products or wealth-building mechanisms.

Being in a partnership can play a role in one’s financial literacy. But even unmarried women, who tend to make financial decisions alone, answer financial questions incorrectly more often than unmarried men do. The gap therefore exists even when financial decisions are made alone. This gap is **between 6% and 20%**, depending on the individual’s partnership status.

FIGURE 7: Financial literacy gap: Women are often less aware than men of the long-term financial impact of their employment decisions – at 20%, the gap is highest between men and women who have lost a partner.

Distribution of correctly answered financial literacy questions by marital status for women and men



Source: Buecher-Koehnen et al. (2016)

BertelsmannStiftung

Policy options and measures for enhancing equality in the labor market

What financial incentives work against women's equal participation in the workforce?

The expression “work must pay” is well known, and should be taken seriously. However, given the statistical reality of the gender gaps discussed above, it can be assumed that work often pays significantly less for women than for men. Improving **financial incentives** and placing greater (cultural and financial) value on paid employment for women offer key points of leverage with regard to enhancing labor market equality. The following section discusses current financial disincentives and what can be done about them.

The tax system favors single-earner marriages with a traditional distribution of gender roles.

The German **tax and transfer system** leads to a high marginal tax burden on second earners. This favors **traditional gender roles** with a single earner in a marriage. In the course of joint income tax assessment for married or partnered couples, Germany's spousal income splitting rule ensures that the tax burden for a married couple is lower than for two unmarried people with the same combined income, due to the progressive tax rate. The greater the proportion of income earned by just one person, the greater the splitting advantage. In addition, spousal splitting means that both partners are subject to the same marginal tax rate. This means that the tax burden on each additional euro earned is the same for both partners. In a single-earner household, that earner is usually in full-time employment, and is subject to a correspondingly high marginal tax rate. If the partner also wishes to enter paid employment, he or she must pay the same marginal tax rate as the primary earner beginning with the very first euro earned. This creates a **strong disincentive** to entering paid employment.

The construct of **marginal employment (mini-jobs)** can at best mitigate this situation. Under Germany's current mini-job regulation, gross income received by second earners up to the amount of €538 per month is not counted into a household's taxable income, and is largely exempt from social security contributions. On the one hand, this removes one hurdle for potential second earners seeking to enter the workforce. However, it only postpones the problem. Gross income above €538 must be fully taxed from the first euro onward, which thus leads again to high marginal burdens (Thode 2011). The spousal splitting rule and mini-jobs therefore provide strong incentives for a “1.25 earner” model.

This is precisely what happens very frequently in Germany: Women in partnerships that file joint income tax returns often **do not seek to expand the supply of labor they offer to the market, or even reduce this amount**. In addition to working at a mini-job, they spend time on unpaid care work, while 90% of employed men have a full-time job (Becker 2022). Staying in seemingly rewarding mini-jobs **for a long time often brings serious disadvantages**, such as a lack of security in the event of job loss, few opportunities for further training or promotion, and an increased risk of poverty in old age. Spousal splitting and mini-jobs thus often prove to be a trap for second earners (Consiglio and Göbler 2021).

Research indicates that **reforms of the spousal splitting rule and the marginal employment system** offer considerable potential. A variety of reform approaches are conceivable here that would stay within constitutional constraints, and would not impose any initial additional tax burden. For example, basic personal income-tax exemption levels could be raised, thus returning additional state tax revenue to households. In one possible variant, mini-jobs and the subsequent transitional period of work could be converted into employment subject to social insurance contributions, while the spousal splitting rule could be converted into real splitting (a mechanism already found in alimony law). The resulting additional income tax revenue could then be redistributed to households by raising the basic personal exemption level. A reform of this kind would result in around 140,000 more people working in full-time positions, almost 100,000 of which would be due to women's increased willingness to work longer hours (Blömer et al. 2021).

Thus, seen as a whole, the spousal taxation rules and the system of marginal employment today perpetuate an unequal distribution of paid employment and care work in marriages. The incentives lead second earners to seek less work, and often prompt them to remain in mini-jobs, which results in a widening of the lifetime earnings gap and lower social security benefits. Reform of the tax, contribution and transfer system is a frequent topic of discussion among policymakers and in the public sphere. However, despite the clear tax disincentives due to the spousal splitting rule and mini-jobs (especially for women), **no fundamental reform is envisaged in the German government's current coalition agreement**. In fact, rather than any effort to restrict this form of employment, the earning cap for mini-jobs was raised at the beginning of the current legislative period.

Traditionally female-dominated professions receive less financial recognition.

The sectors with the highest proportion of women employees are largely personal services, especially **health and social work (77%), education (71%), and other services/private households (65%)**. Many of these activities are essential for the functioning of society, but tend to be associated with poor working conditions. Wages are comparatively low, working conditions are inflexible (e.g., due to shift work, fixed opening hours or the inability to work from home) and many such sectors suffer from personnel shortages. This leads to increased burdens on

employees, who often have to work part-time and without dependable working hours in order to compensate for staffing shortfalls.

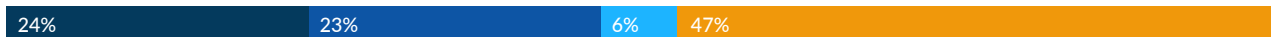
Both the institutional framework for such work and the cultural (and therefore also financial) value ascribed to traditionally female-dominated professions and sectors also play a role. In addition to factors such as the scope of employment, education levels and occupational requirement levels, that is, the qualifications, skills or competencies needed for a specific occupation (see adjusted gender pay gap), the differential distribution of women and men

FIGURE 8: Employment subject to social security contributions: Women are significantly more likely than men to work in personal-services sectors

Employees aged 15 to 64 subject to social insurance contributions by sector, gender and working hours in June 2021, Germany

■ Full-time women ■ Part-time women ■ Part-time men ■ Full-time men

Total (33.37 million)



Health and social services (5.10 million)



Childcare and education (1.35 million)



Other services, priv. households (1.15 million)



Public admin., defense; social ins. (1.94 million)



Financial and insurance services (0.96 million)



Hospitality (0.97 million)



Automobile sales, maintenance and repair (4.49 million)



Business services (4.88 million)



Information and communication (1.21 million)



Agriculture, forestry and fishing (0.25 million)



Manufacturing (6.72 million)



Transportation and storage (1.85 million)



Mining, energy, water/waste management (0.57 million)



Construction (1.95 million)



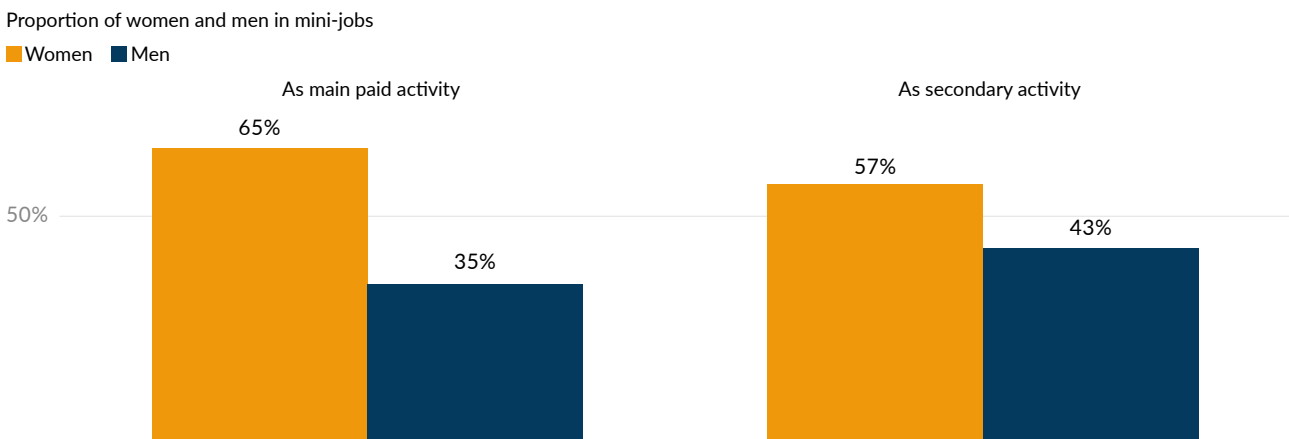
across sectors and occupations – that is, the **horizontal segregation in the labor market** – also has the effect of reducing women’s earnings. The work performed by women and men is thus **perceived and evaluated in a gender-differentiated way** (see, for example, Busch and Holst 2013).

If **traditional definitions of productivity** are applied, personal services are generally also less productive than business-related services or manufacturing activities. The primary reasons for this include the lower use of capital inputs in support of these jobs, and the comparative lack of opportunities for automation (see, for example, Hartwig and Krämer 2017). In addition, many of the employment relationships in these sectors are not bound by collective agreements, a fact that also leads to comparatively lower wages. However, such conditions often do not do justice to the **actual demands placed on employees**: Earnings levels in occupations and sectors traditionally associated with women remain low even when on-the-job requirements are comparable with those in other sectors. The Comparable Worth Index³ shows that professions that involve a high amount of care (e.g., nonacademic nursing professions) are paid less than professions with comparable responsibility levels (e.g., managers in business-related services) (Klammer et al. 2018).

This offers a promising point of leverage for activating **skilled-labor potential**. Analyses suggest that nursing staffers, for example, would return to work in the care sector under better working conditions and with higher salaries, or would be prepared to increase their part-time work hours. Improving working conditions in the care sector would result in an estimated potential of 302,000 additional care workers (full-time equivalents), or in an optimistic scenario, even as many as 661,000 (Auffenberg et al. 2022).

In Germany, significantly more women than men work in **mini-jobs**, meaning they are only marginally employed. Women constitute about two-thirds of those whose mini-job is their main paid activity. The majority of mini-job holders work in the fields of **education, health and social work (30%), wholesale and retail trade (28%), and services (15%)**. This means that many of the women engaged in personal services are also in marginal employment. Better pay and working conditions in the **personal and social services professions**, as well as a transition from mini-jobs to employment subject to social insurance contributions, can therefore directly promote **women’s employment**. Such steps would help to combat gender inequality and mitigate the shortage of skilled workers.

FIGURE 9: Mini-jobs: Significantly more women than men work at mini-jobs, especially among those who see mini-jobs as their main paid activity.



Source: Consiglio and Göbler (2021)

| BertelsmannStiftung

3 The Comparable Worth (CW) Index can be used to compare occupations in different sectors that have similar requirement levels – for instance, occupations that involve similarly high standards in terms of knowledge, psychosocial and physical skills, or responsibility levels. For example, nonacademic nursing professions have a comparatively high CW score of 28 (the mean score is 24). However, earnings levels are comparatively low compared to other professions with a CW score of 28 (Klammer et al. 2018).

What time constraints prevent women from participating equally in the labor market?

The above description of the structural obstacles reflected in the various gender gaps has shown how unequally care and paid work is distributed between women and men. It is easy to understand that the time invested in either care work or paid work influences the time available for the other. For example, if a woman in a partnership does significant amounts of unpaid care work within the family household, she will have little time remaining for paid work. Conversely, a father who works full-time has less time available for care work. Consequently, an important point of leverage in developing and realizing women’s employment potential lies in reducing the **workload associated with reproductive work**.

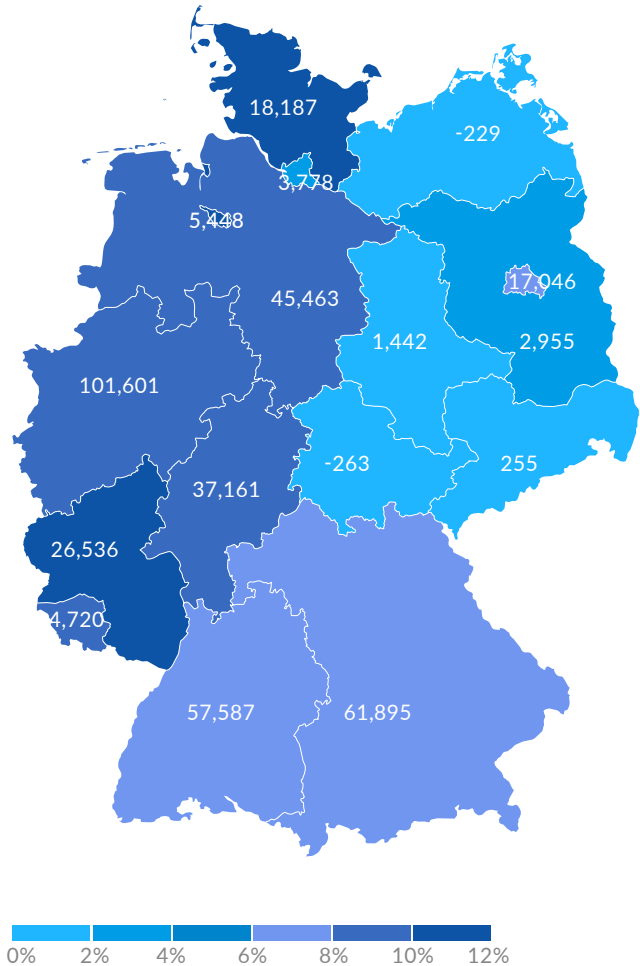
In order to preserve their human capital, it is also important that women avoid losing contact with the labor market. Given that women are often overqualified for the activities they are carrying out, improved time sovereignty can help them make the best possible use of their human capital in the labor market, maintaining and even expanding it. Above all, therefore, women need time to engage in paid employment. The following section addresses the structural factors and other circumstances that limit the time available for paid work, and discusses measures to address them.

A lack of childcare options limits the time available for paid work.

Studies show that the **share of preschool children in childcare** throughout Germany as a whole is well below the **actual level of demand for childcare**. In 2023, there was a shortage of around 383,600 day care spaces across Germany, although the care situation varied greatly from region to region. There is a particularly great difference between eastern and western Germany in this regard: While there was a shortfall of around 21,200 nursery places in eastern Germany, unmet demand in western Germany amounted to around 362,400 spaces (Bock-Famulla et al. 2022). Without sufficient access to day care for their children, couples face clear constraints in their ability to divide and organize their care and paid work according to their individual desires and capabilities. It is often the mothers who stay at home to look after the children, and who are therefore much less flexible and available for paid work than their partners. Parents who work outside of the typical day care hours in particular face difficulties finding suitable childcare.

FIGURE 10: Childcare situation: Across Germany, about 383,600 more day care places would be needed to meet parents’ current demand.

Total additional day care places needed to meet parental demand (absolute figures); children with unfulfilled legal entitlement to care, until starting school (share in %, see color scale)



Eastern Germany (including Berlin): 20,720 (under 3 years); 487 (over 3 years)

Western Germany: 250,256 (under 3 years); 112,122 (over 3 years)

Germany: 270,975 (under 3 years); 112,608 (over 3 years)

Source: www.laendermonitor.de

Data source: RDC of the Statistical Offices of the Federation and the Federal States, Children and people working in day care facilities and publicly funded day care centers, 2021; Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (“Kindertagesbetreuung Kompakt,” 2021) and other official statistics, calculated by Economix Research & Consulting, 2022.

Source: www.laendermonitor.de

| BertelsmannStiftung

Inflexible working time models prevent women from doing more paid work.

Employees must be given more **working time sovereignty** so that women can enter paid employment despite their care obligations and the often inadequate supply of childcare. In this regard, it is essential to prioritize and promote company measures that enable employees to reconcile family life and careers. Company programs and agreements on **flexible working hours** or even remote workplace arrangements can help employees reconcile work and family life.

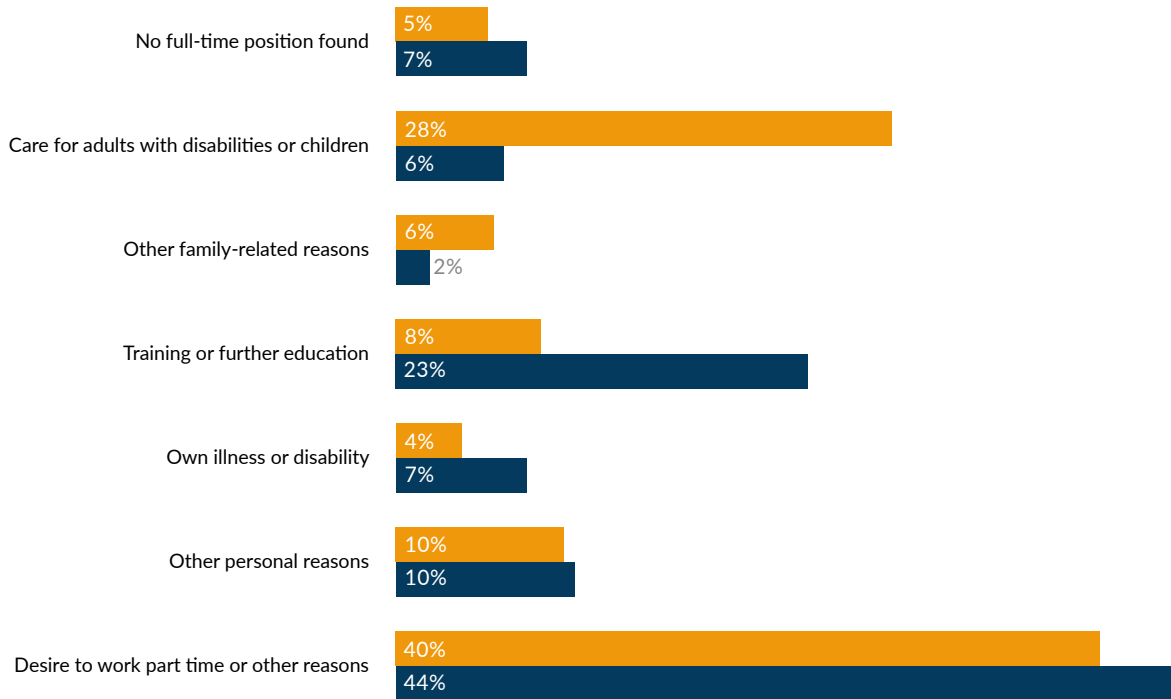
In this regard, it is important both to provide employees with greater working-hour flexibility and to offer a variety of different **part-time models**. More than a third of part-time female employees say they do not work full time due to care responsibilities or other family-related reasons. Flexible part-time models are necessary in order to account for people’s different desires and reasons for part-time work, while still offering good jobs with suit-

able working hours. In addition to options for part-time work that comes close to full-time status – for instance, a 30-hour week (Lott and Zucco 2021) – recent discussions have focused on job-sharing programs and working time models based on life phases.

Flexible working arrangements require an **open corporate culture** that recognizes and supports family and social obligations. In the future, there will be a need for workplaces that facilitate flexible working by ensuring sufficient levels of staffing, and by offering binding opportunities for worker substitutions. Subsidies for childcare and company childcare services can also be used to support various working time models, thus helping employees reconcile work and family life.

FIGURE 11: Reasons for part-time work: Around one-third of women work part time due to care obligations or other family-related reasons.

2022, shares by gender
 ■ Women ■ Men



Source: German Federal Statistical Office (2023)

What effect do traditional gender roles have on women’s employment?

In addition to financial incentives and time restrictions, individual and social values and norms also determine how women participate in working life. These aspects of the cultural environment interact with economic and policy conditions. They influence the opportunities provided by institutions, while also being shaped by them. This in turn influences the perception of women and men in paid employment.

Traditional gender roles and gender-specific norms are slow to change, and influence women’s participation in paid employment.

Women face particular challenges and disadvantages in seeking to meet the **competing demands of paid employment** and responsibilities within the family or partnership – and sometimes even the demands of social obligations. For couples in particular, approaches to the division of labor are influenced by cultural values, often to the woman’s disadvantage. This is especially true of the decision to work full time for parents with young children. However, negotiation processes and power relations at the level of the couple itself must also be taken into account: Who makes the final decisions? Who works, and for how long? What work has priority if, for example, external childcare is not available for a sick child? Material imbalances also play a role in the division of labor, especially when disposable incomes differ greatly. **These factors mean that supposedly gender-neutral instruments such as parental leave or flexible working hours can actually have a gender-specific impact.** This is true despite the fact that most people would like to see an equal division of paid work and care work.

More and more mothers and fathers believe that a **fair division of care work and paid work in a partnership** means that the associated **tasks and times are equally distributed** (Allensbach Institute for Public Opinion Research 2022). Though this attitude has gained significant ground on both sides since 2014, the share of mothers who consider an equal division of tasks to be appropriate in a partnership has shown particular growth – from 30% to 50%. Yet even if both parents would like to share care and paid work as partners in this way, the gender equality policy instrument of parental leave is used primarily by mothers, for example. Since the introduction of the parental allowance in 2007, the share of mothers electing to receive the allowance has remained above 98% – usually for a period of more than 10 months (Brehm et al. 2022). Although the proportion of fathers taking parental leave has more than doubled since 2008, from 21.2% to 43.7% in 2020, this also means that more than half of Germany’s fathers have never taken advantage of the parental leave allowance. In addition, fathers’ parental leave period is usually limited to the two partner months, so that the average duration of allowance receipt is consistently short, at around 3.6 months.

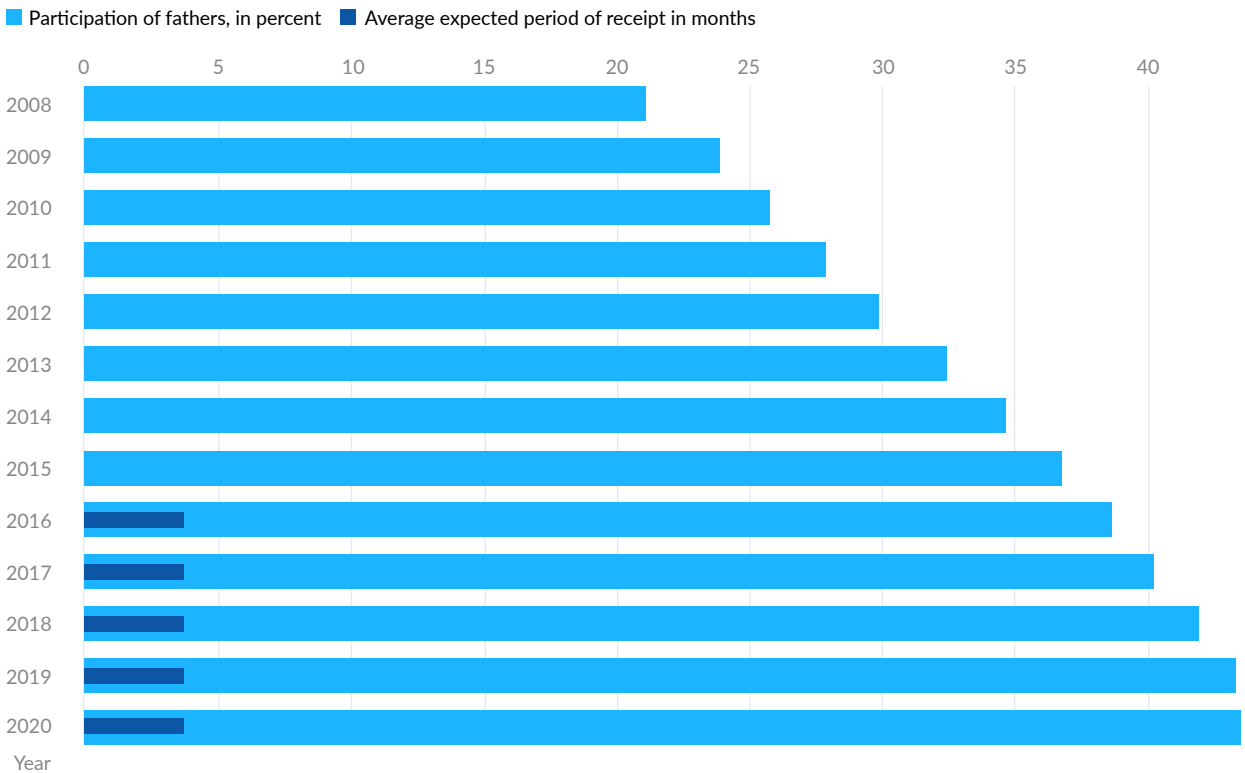
FIGURE 12: Partnership-based distribution of tasks: In 2021, significantly more mothers and fathers envisaged an equal distribution of care and paid work than was the case in 2014.

To me, if a couple with children are to share work and family responsibilities as partners, this means that both partners will do a similar number of hours of paid work, and take care of household chores and raising the children together. Tend to agree:



Source: Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach (2022)

FIGURE 13: Fathers' use of parental allowance: Although the proportion of fathers who elect to receive the parental allowance has increased, more than half still do not, and the average duration of receipt remains consistently short, at around 3.6 months.



Source: German Federal Statistical Office (2023)

| BertelsmannStiftung

This means that the majority of women continue to take advantage of the parental allowance months, devoting themselves to care work rather than to paid work. Studies show that greater early involvement of men in child-care has a positive effect on their future commitment to the family (see, for example, Tamm 2018, Samtleben et al. 2021). In addition to the planned two-week leave of absence for the partner after the birth of the child, other measures make sense – for example, an overall expansion of the number of months of parental allowance allocated to partners. In the short term, these policy instruments would support the intra-partner negotiation of care arrangements, as well as the participation of both partners in paid employment.

However, studies also show that the tradeoffs mothers and fathers make between paid employment and care work do not constitute a zero-sum game. When care work is redistributed, the positive effects on the labor supply of mothers are significantly greater than the negative effects on the labor supply of fathers (Heimer et al. 2023). Over the long term, this could yield a double dividend: Pressures on the labor market could be relieved at the same time as the division of tasks and labor could be organized according to individuals' actual skills and preferences, rather than on the basis of gender." This would help individuals become

“ CONCLUSION: *Enhancing women's time sovereignty and facilitating fluidity in traditional gender norms offer key points of leverage in unlocking the untapped employment potential of women in Germany.*”

more productive, while making both kinds of work more fulfilling.

Individual decisions on care and paid employment result from complex processes of negotiation. They are shaped by cultural values, financial incentives and opportunities, partnership dynamics, and time commitments. An **effective economic and equality policy** must recognize these financial, time and cultural factors as real problems, and address them in a focused manner. This will be the only way to develop differentiated and effective reforms – reforms that make significant strides toward activating employment potential without overburdening employees over the long term, and which help us to meet the challenges of a labor market undergoing structural change. In the “Women's Employment Potential” project, we take a detailed look at which measures might produce the most leverage in which contexts.

List of sources

- Auffenberg, Jennie et al. (2022).** *„Ich pflege wieder, wenn... – Potenzialanalyse zur Berufsrückkehr und Arbeitszeitaufstockung von Pflegefachkräften.“* Chamber of Employees in Bremen.
- Barišić, Manuela and Valentina Sara Consiglio (2020).** *„Women in the German labor market. The cost of being a mother.“* Expert Briefing. Bertelsmann Stiftung. Gütersloh.
- Becker, Johannes (2022).** *„Ehegattenbesteuerung in Deutschland.“* Bertelsmann Stiftung. Gütersloh.
- Blömer, Joseph Maximilian, Przemyslaw Brandt and Andreas Peichl (2021).** *„Raus aus der Zweitverdiener:innenfalle – Reformvorschläge zum Abbau von Fehlanreizen im deutschen Steuer- und Sozialversicherungssystem.“* Bertelsmann Stiftung.
- BMFSFJ (2019).** *„Gender Care Gap – Ein Indikator für die Gleichstellung.“* Backgrounder, BMFSFJ.
- Bock-Famulla, Kathrin et al. (2022).** *„Kita-Personal braucht Priorität!“* Bertelsmann Stiftung. Gütersloh.
- Bönke, Timm et al. (2020).** *„Wer gewinnt? Wer verliert? Die Entwicklung und Prognose von Lebenserwerbseinkommen in Deutschland.“* Bertelsmann Stiftung. Gütersloh.
- Brehm, Uta et al. (2022).** *„15 Jahre Elterngeld: Erfolge, aber noch Handlungsbedarf.“* *Bevölkerungsforschung Aktuell* (6) 2022. Bundesinstitut für Bevölkerungsforschung.
- Bucher-Koenen, Tabea et al. (2016).** *„How financially literate are Women? An Overview and New Insights“.* GFLEC. Working Paper Series.
- Busch, Anne and Elke Holst (2013).** *„Geschlechtsspezifische Verdienstunterschiede bei Führungskräften und sonstigen Angestellten in Deutschland: Welche Relevanz hat der Frauenanteil im Beruf?“* *Zeitschrift für Soziologie.* Lucius Verlagsgesellschaft mbH. Stuttgart. (42) 4. pp. 315–336.
- Cammarata, Patricia (2020).** *„Raus aus der Mental-Load-Falle: Wie gerechte Arbeitsteilung in der Familie gelingt.“* Beltz.
- Consiglio, Valentina Sara and Konstantin Göbler (2021).** *„Minijobs in Deutschland. Die Entwicklung und Struktur einer umstrittenen Beschäftigungsform.“* Factsheet. Bertelsmann Stiftung. Gütersloh.
- EIGE Glossary (2023).** *„Reproductive Labour.“* Glossary and Thesaurus. EIGE: European Institute for Gender Equality.
- Eurostat (2023a).** *„Employment and activity by sex and age – quarterly data.“*
- Eurostat (2023b).** *„Part-time employment and temporary contracts – quarterly data.“*
- Hartwig, Jochen and Hagen Krämer (2017).** *„50 Jahre Baumol'sche Kostenkrankheit.“* *Wirtschaftsdienst* (97), pp. 793–800.
- Heimer, Andreas et al. (2023).** *„Partnerschaftliche Vereinbarkeit und Fachkräftebedarf. Auswirkungen einer veränderten Rollenaufteilung von Vätern und Müttern auf das Arbeitskräfteangebot.“* Expert Briefing: Kompetenzbüro Wirksame Familienpolitik und Prognos.
- Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach (2022).** *„Partnerschaftliche Aufgabenteilung in der Familie. Repräsentative Bevölkerungsbefragungen in Dezember 2021 und Januar 2022.“* ifd-Umfragen 12047, 12048.
- Klammer, Ute, Christina Klenner and Sarah Lillemeier (2018).** *„Comparable Worth: Arbeitsbewertungen als blinder Fleck in der Ursachenanalyse des Gender Pay Gaps?“* IAQ-Forschung 2018-04. Institut Arbeit und Qualifikation. Duisburg.
- Lott, Yvonne and Aline Zucco (2021).** *„Stand der Gleichstellung. Ein Jahr Corona.“* *WSI Report* (64). Hans-Böckler-Stiftung. Düsseldorf.
- Lott, Yvonne et al. (2022).** *„Stand der Gleichstellung von Frauen und Männern in Deutschland.“* *WSI Report* (72). Hans-Böckler-Stiftung. Düsseldorf.
- Lott, Yvonne and Paula Bünger (2023).** *„Mental Load – Frauen tragen die überwiegende Last.“* *WSI Report* (87). Hans-Böckler-Stiftung. Düsseldorf.
- Samtleben, Claire, Katharina Wrohlich and Aline Zucco (2021).** *„Auswirkungen des Elterngeldes auf die partnerschaftliche Arbeitsteilung.“* *Eltern sein in Deutschland.* Sachverständigenkommission des Neunten Familienberichts (Hrsg.). DJI Verlag. Munich.
- Tamm, Marcus (2018).** *„Fathers' Parental Leave-Taking Childcare Involvement and Mothers' Labor Market Participation.“* *Ruhr Economic Papers* (773).
- Thode, Eric (2011).** *„Minijobs – Hemmschuh für die erfolgreiche Vereinbarkeit von Familie und Beruf.“* *Neue Juristische Wochenschrift* (24) 2011. p. 14.

Legal Notice

© Bertelsmann Stiftung, February 2024

Bertelsmann Stiftung
Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256
33311 Gütersloh
Phone +49 5241 81-0
bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Authors
Michaela Hermann
Sustainable Social Market Economies
Phone +49 5241 81-81295
michaela.hermann@bertelsmann-stiftung.de
Luisa Kunze
Sustainable Social Market Economies
Phone +49 30 275788-175
luisa.kunze@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

With the collaboration of
Charlotte Böker
Editing
Dr. Thomas Orthmann

Design
Ines Meyer
Cover
© elenabsl - stock.adobe.com

DOI 10.11586/2024033