

Mothers' work hours and fathers' share of childcare in cross-national perspective

Dads: Facilitating mothers' employment?

One impediment to gender equality in the labor force are women's responsibilities caring for children at home. Studies show that although fathers do a greater share of childcare when their wives work more hours outside the home, this relationship is stronger in some countries than others (Gracia & Esping-Andersen, 2015). We test three hypotheses to explain cross-national differences:

- **Cultural hypothesis:** Men caring for children is *more accepted* in countries with higher gender empowerment scores, thus fathers feel encouraged to assume a greater share of childcare when their wives work more hours.
- **Policy hypothesis:** Father-friendly policies such as paternity leave *structurally enable* fathers to take over childcare while mothers are at work.
- **Gender pay gap hypothesis:** A lower gender pay gap signifies an economy where women's incomes contribute substantially to household income. Working mothers in these countries have *more bargaining power* to convince fathers to assume caring responsibilities.

Time-structuring vs. time-flexible tasks? Not all types of childcare have the same structuring influence on parents' work days. We expect a stronger relationship between mothers' work hours and fathers' share of *time-structuring* childcare tasks, such as picking children up from school. *Time-flexible* tasks can be performed at any time and are less likely to be assumed by fathers when mother are at work.

Generations and Gender Surveys, wave 1

Intact families with working mothers and children under 16. N=22,480 people, 17 countries.

Dependent variables: 0 = always mother; 4 = always father

Father's share of time-structuring tasks:

- Dressing the child
- Putting the child to bed
- Staying home with the child when ill
- Transporting the child

Father's share of time-flexible tasks:

- Playing with the child
- Helping the child with homework

Independent variable:

Mother's average weekly work hours (0-50)

Macro variables:

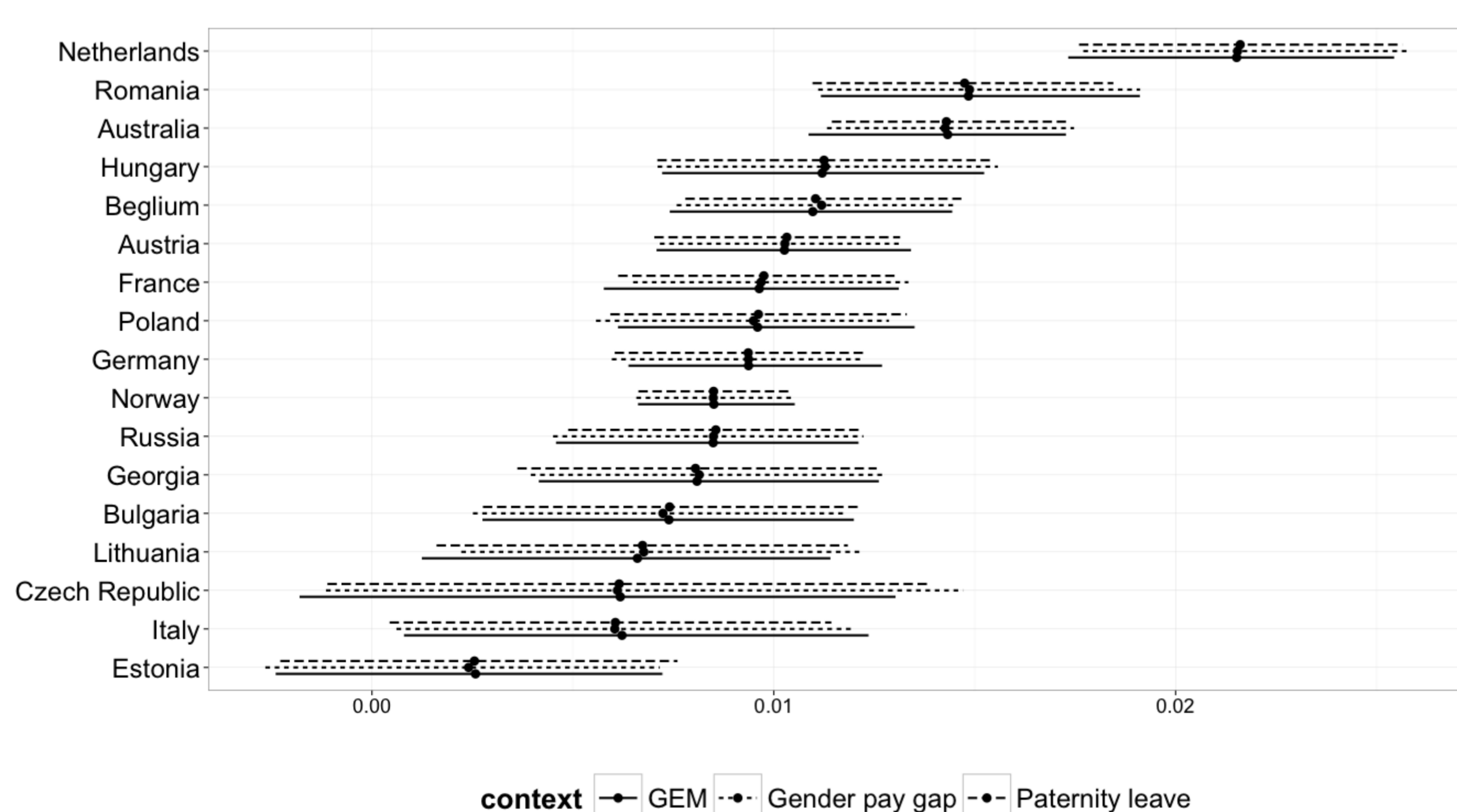
Gender Empowerment Measure (0-1)

Effective paternity leave year of survey (length*pay)

Relative gender pay gap (0-100)

Method: Bayesian multilevel analysis

Figure 1. Regression coefficients: Mothers' work hours on father's share of **TIME-STRUCTURING** childcare tasks



Analysis controlled for: gender, mother's and father's education, father's age, number of kids, any kids under 4

Figure 2. National context

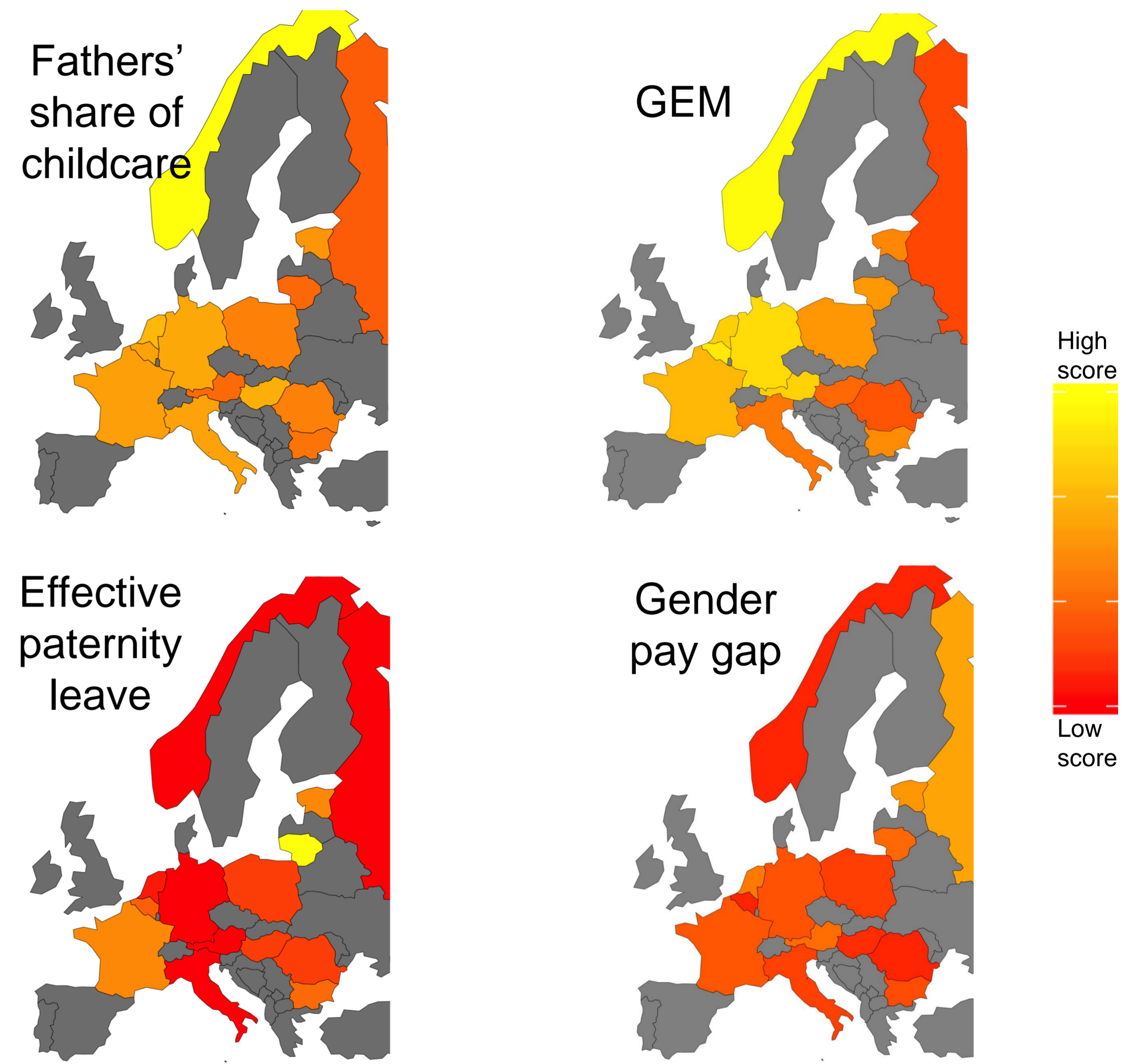
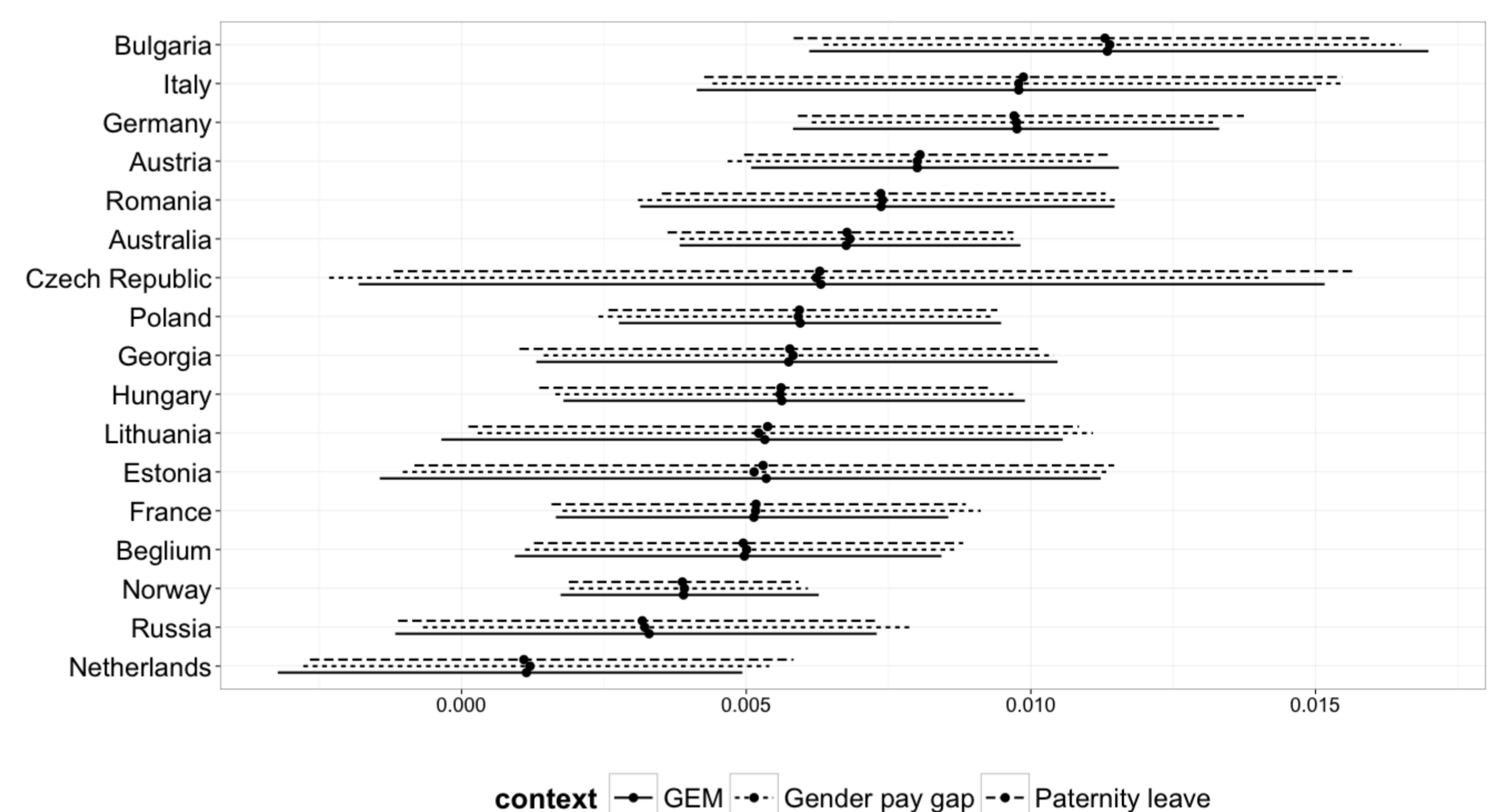


Figure 3. Regression coefficients: Mothers' work hours on father's share of **TIME-FLEXIBLE** childcare tasks



Analysis controlled for: gender, mother's and father's education, father's age, number of kids, any kids under 4

Major conclusions

1. Fathers perform a greater share of childcare when mothers work more hours
Yet mothers in all countries perform the lion's share of unpaid labor
2. This relationship is stronger in some countries than others
Fathers are quick to assume time-structuring tasks in the Netherlands and time-flexible tasks in Bulgaria
3. But the culture, policy, and economic indicators we used can't explain differences between countries
GEM score, paternity leave, and gender pay gap cannot explain country differences, and patterns do not follow traditional East/West divisions.
4. The type of childcare matters
Mothers' work hours are a stronger predictor of father's share of time-structuring tasks than time-flexible tasks

Want to know more?



Families in Context

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References:

Gracia, P., & Esping-Andersen, G. (2015). Fathers' child care time and mothers' paid work: A cross-national study of Denmark, Spain, and the United Kingdom. *Family Science*, 1-12.