



Deutsches
Jugendinstitut

Policy Brief

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Dads Working from Home

What Really Changes Parents' Division of Care Work

- Regular working from home by fathers leads to a significantly more egalitarian division of housework within couples.
- The effects are concentrated on the division of housework—no significant impacts are found for the division of childcare.
- Mothers' working from home shows no significant effects on intra-household labor division.
- Fathers' working from home has spillover effects beyond their own time use, including reduced housework time and increased paid work time for mothers, as well as more egalitarian gender role attitudes among fathers.
- Based on: Schüller (2026), AID:A longitudinal data 2019 and 2023, Germany (quasi-experimental panel IV analysis)

Relevance and Motivation

Flexible and remote work arrangements, particularly working from home (WFH), have shifted from a marginal arrangement to a permanent feature of modern employment. In Germany, roughly 56% of employees have jobs that are WFH-feasible (Alipour, Falck & Schüller, 2023), and WFH has become a regular component of many occupations.

For parents, this flexibility has particular significance. Economists have long argued that working from home could reshape the temporal and spatial structure of work, offering employees more leeway to reconcile professional obligations with family responsibilities (Goldin, 2014; Mas & Pallais, 2017, 2020). Yet, research and policy debates have historically framed work-life balance as primarily a “women’s issue,” focusing on mothers’ experiences (Goldin 2021). A broader perspective, considering both parents and the household as a unit, remains underexplored.

Policy Context: EU Work-Life Balance Directive

The EU Work-Life Balance Directive (2019/1158) frames flexible work arrangements as an instrument for promoting gender equality. Its objectives include achieving a more equal distribution of paid and care work between women and men by encouraging fathers’ participation in caregiving and household responsibilities. This policy shift raises a key question: can flexible work arrangements, particularly WFH, reshape household labor divisions and serve as a complementary tool to advance gender equality?

Identifying the Causal Effect of Parents’ WFH

Assessing the impact of remote work on parents’ division of care work requires careful empirical identification, since flexible work is typically chosen selectively. In Schüller (2026), I introduce an instrumental variable (IV) approach that leverages pandemic-driven changes in WFH access as a quasi-experimental setting. Combined with occupation-specific WFH feasibility (Alipour, Falck & Schüller, 2023) as an instrument, this approach identifies causal effects on parental care work division regarding housework and childcare.

Data come from the German Youth Institute’s Growing Up in Germany: Daily Life (*Aufwachsen in Deutschland: Alltagswelten* AID:A) survey, waves 2019 and 2023 (Kuger et al, 2020, 2024), which is based on a nationally representative probability sample. The analysis sample includes parents with minor children, providing detailed information on employment, WFH use, time use for housework and childcare, and gender role attitudes.

Fathers as Key Drivers of Change

Instrumental variable estimates reveal that fathers' WFH usage drives causal shifts in parental care work division:

- Weekly WFH by fathers increases their share of housework by 21 percentage points, a substantial effect given a pre-pandemic average of 25 percent.
- Mothers' WFH shows no robust causal effect on parental division of unpaid work, neither in terms of housework nor childcare.
- Childcare responsibilities remain largely unaffected, reflecting their time-sensitive and less substitutable nature.

Spillover Effects

Fathers' frequent WFH also reshapes maternal work patterns:

- Mothers increase weekly paid work by roughly 10 hours, as housework responsibilities are partially redistributed.
- Fathers' engagement in WFH correlates with more egalitarian attitudes, signaling normative as well as behavioral change.

Broad Applicability

The compliers—the fathers whose WFH use changed due to occupational feasibility—tend to be less educated, lower income, and less involved in housework pre-pandemic, suggesting that flexible work can promote domestic gender equality broadly, not just among privileged groups.

Policy Implications

The evidence points to several actionable insights for EU policymakers and firms seeking to promote gender equality:

1. Encourage fathers' routine WFH use: Especially in male-dominated sectors where a presence culture remains strong.
2. Combine flexible work with accessible childcare: WFH alone cannot replace high-quality childcare infrastructure.
3. Promote egalitarian norms through practical experience: Fathers' engagement in WFH serves as a “norm experiment” that shapes attitudes and behavior.

4. Target all households: Effects are observed in lower-income and less-educated families, highlighting the potential for broad-based impact.
5. Integrate with broader work-life policies: WFH works best alongside parental leave initiatives that incentivize paternal involvement and company-level measures preventing gendered segmentation of remote work.

Conclusion

Flexible work is more than a labor market instrument—it is a lever for behavioral and normative change within households. Fathers’ adoption of WFH drives measurable shifts in housework distribution, frees mothers’ time for paid employment, and fosters more egalitarian attitudes.

However, WFH does not significantly affect childcare distribution, highlighting the need for complementary family policies. Combined with high-quality childcare, parental leave reforms, and cultural change initiatives, flexible work can be a powerful tool for advancing gender equality across the EU.

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