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Parental Labour in Austria and Sweden

(De-)Genderization in Care and Leave Policies between 1990 and 2023

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Introduction

The division of paid and unpaid labour carried out by parents still shows gender specific patterns in all European countries, but there are differences in the dimension of the gender gap, as is in Austria and Sweden:

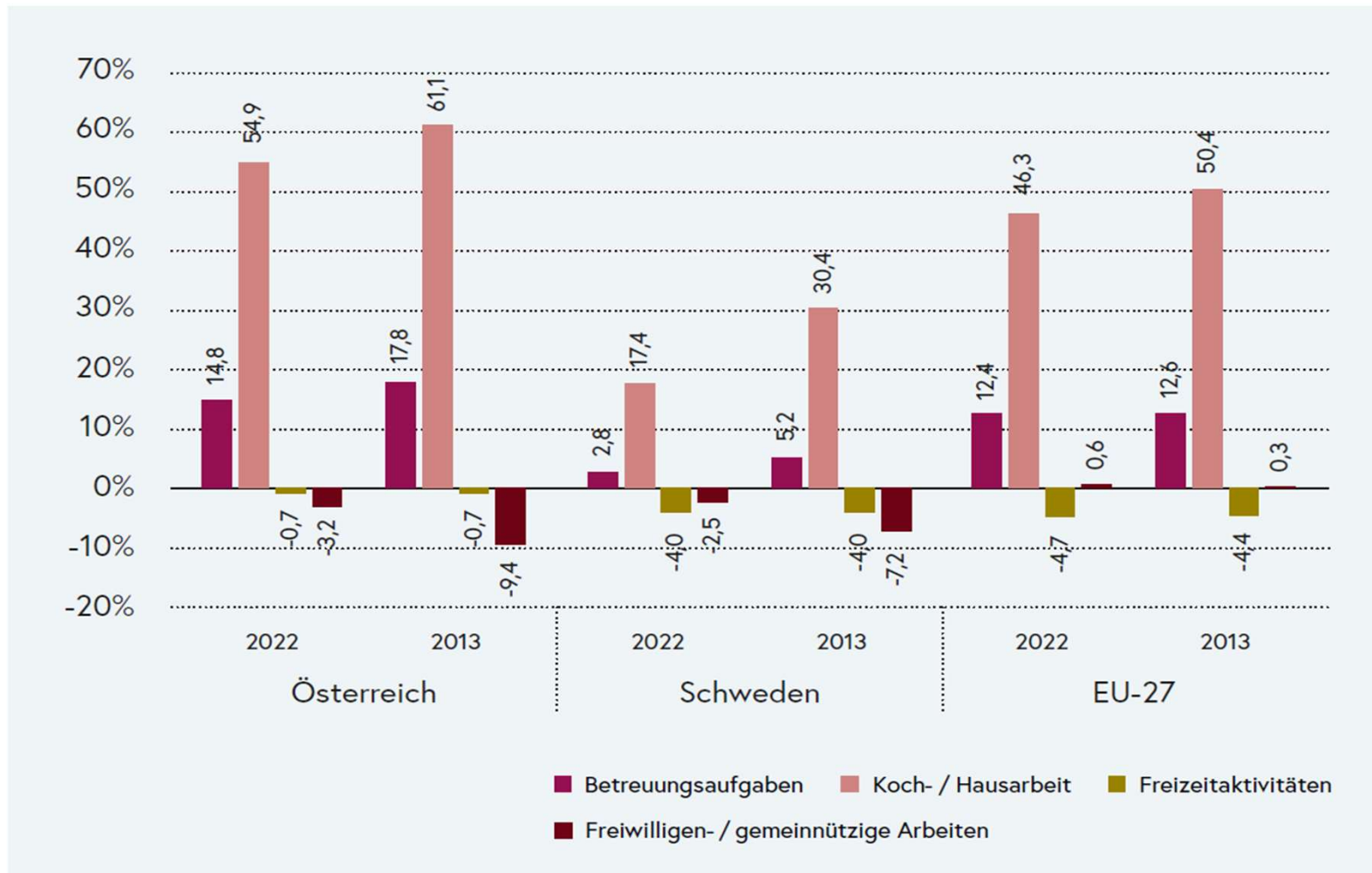
- Around 50 % of mothers with children under the age of 3 are in work in Sweden (2020); in Austria only around a third (2021)
- Austrian mothers are more often on parental or maternity leave (around a third) than Swedish mothers (around a quarter). These numbers reflect the different lengths of the leave in the two countries.
- In Austria there are more mothers neither working nor on leave (35 %) than in Sweden (around a quarter). (EU Labour Force Survey)

→ On the whole Swedish mothers of young children show a significantly stronger attachment to the labour market than those in Austria.

- In March 2024 in Austria 3,3% (HVS) of all recipients of KBG were fathers. In total 16,3% of all Austrian fathers (children born in 2019) received KBG after the birth of each child (BKA). Swedish fathers took 30 % of all parental leave days in 2022 and 88% of Swedish fathers take some parental leave after the birth of each child (leave network).

→ On the whole fathers' involvement in paid parental leave is significantly lower in Austria than in Sweden.

Gender Gap in different activities, in Austria, Sweden and average of the EU-27, 2022 und 2013



Source: Gender-Statistics (EIGE 2023). Differenz der Anteile von Frauen und Männern in der Gesamtbevölkerung ab 18 Jahren

Causes of the gender gap in division of parental labour

Two main approaches

- The **institutional approach** brings political decisions, laws, public infrastructure etc. in to focus in search of explanatory models for different outcomes in different societies. The main question: identify the political framework and policies that endeavour to eliminate gender roles, encourage fathers to share leave and establish a double earner/double carer society.
- The **cultural approach** explains division of labour as result of attitudes, values and the gender roles that emerge from it. Parent's decisions regarding the division of labour are dependent on the value system that surrounds them. Attitudes vary between different welfare states and the social groups therein.

The two approaches should **not be viewed as contradictory**, because **change** within society **occurs on both levels via a mutual process**.

Saxonberg's (2013) institutional approach Parental Leave

Typology that is based on the distinction of genderizing and degenderizing policies and is rooted in previous typologies of the welfare state and family policies (e.g. Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999; Leitner, 2013; Sainsbury, 1999).

Degenderizing policies promote the elimination of gender roles while genderizing policies promote different gender roles for men and women either implicitly or explicitly.

Parental leave, it is considered **degenderizing**, if the following criterias are met:

- Open to both parents, minimum length of 9 months (in most European societies breastfeeding lasts until the child is 6 months),
- the income replacement rate is at least 65% of the previous income to encourage fathers (in most European societies men earn more than their female partners),
- the benefit ceiling is not too low that it discourages fathers to take the leave,
- there is some form of fathers' quota for the paid parental leave.

Saxonberg's (2013) institutional approach

Parental Leave

Parental leave can be considered **explicitly genderizing** if it gives strong incentives for mothers to leave the labour market (for at least two years), without giving incentives for fathers to share the leave. Policies that encourage this are:

- Long maternity leave (minimum 15 weeks) with a high income replacement rate,
- maternity leave is followed by a long extended leave (2 to 3 years) that might be open to fathers, but due to a low flat rate generally discourages them,
- no paternity leave or fathers' quota other than a short period (up to 2 weeks) in which the father can assist the mother after the birth.

Parental leave is **implicitly genderizing**, if mothers don't get paid explicitly by the state to take time off work for a longer period. The characteristics are:

- leave does not offer any payment or just for a short period of the maternity leave (up to 4 months or less),
- if parental leave offers payment for a longer period of time, it is means tested, which discourages fathers from sharing it, due to the likelihood of higher income.

Analysing the development of parental leave regulations, Austria and Sweden, 1990–2023

1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2023	
Duration 2 years, open to both parents, no fathers' quota, low flat rate (€340), option of part time leave. Mandatory maternity leave 8 weeks before and after birth with 100% income replacement; no paternity leave (<i>Status quo 1990</i>)	Introduction of 6 months fathers quota, payment: low flat rate (1997)	Introduction child care allowance (KBG): low flat rate (€436), payment duration 3 years (fathers' quota 6 months), income ceiling of €14.600 p. a., duration of leave differs (2 years) and is open to both parents without a fathers' quota (2002)	KBG: Creation of additional shorter alternatives with higher flat rate: 24 months (€524) and 18 months (€800), fathers' quota 4 and 3 months respectively (2008)	KBG: 2 additional shorter variations for 14 months (2 months fathers' quota), 1. €1000 flat rate, 2. income replacement rate of 80% (2010)	KBG: 4 flat rate variations transformed into a more dynamic system (12–36 months; min. €436–max. €1016, fathers quota: 20%) Gender Equality Bonus: €1000 for equally sharing KBG paternity leave: for the first month after birth (€22,60 per day, amount subtracted from KBG, if father claims KBG later) (2017)	paternity leave: for the first month after birth (€47,82 per day, no longer subtracted from KBG) Introduction of 2 month fathers quota for the leave (2023)	Austria
<i>explicitly genderizing</i>	<i>Elements of degenderizing, mainly explicitly genderizing</i>	<i>explicitly genderizing</i>	<i>Reforms towards degenderizing, still predominantly explicitly genderizing</i>	<i>Mixed System explicitly genderizing/degenderizing</i>		<i>Reforms towards degenderizing still mixed System</i>	Analysis
Duration 15 months, open to both parents, no fathers' quota, 12 month income replacement of 90% + 3 month flat rate (€200); option of part time leave until the 8 th birthday; Parents not eligible to earnings-related leave receive a flat-rate (€630 for 8 month) 2 weeks paternity leave, no maternity leave (<i>Status quo 1990</i>)	Introduction of child care allowance for 1–3-year old children, low flat rate €200 (1994) Abolition of child care allowance, introduction of 1 months fathers' quota 2 weeks mandatory maternity leave (1995) Reduction of income replacement to 78% (1998)	Extension of paid parental leave by one month, fathers' quota extended to 2 months (income replacement 78% (2002)	Gender-Equality-Bonus: for each day after the fathers' quota (€5,60) (2008)		Parts of paid parental leave can be used until the child is 12 years old (2014) Introduction of a 3 rd month of fathers' quota (2016)	Introduction of the 3 month fathers' quota to the flat rate version (2022)	Sweden
<i>with some limitations degenderizing</i>	<i>briefly explicitly genderizing; then degenderizing</i>	<i>degenderizing</i>	<i>Reforms further towards degenderizing</i>				Analysis

Sources: Dörfler (2019), Ekberg, Eriksson & Friebe 2005, Ellingsaeter (2012), Ellingsaeter & Leira (2007), Martin-Korpi (2007), retrieved from <http://oif-fpdb.oif.univie.ac.at/Login>; <https://www.leavenetwork.org/annual-review-reports/country-reports/>.

Cultural approach: *Hypothesis, Data Basis, Operationalisation*

We hypothesized: In both countries a change in values towards a more progressive thinking took place and that these attitudes and values converge between the two countries.

Using 2 different survey data sources from the last 25 years: The European Values Study (EVS) and the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP).

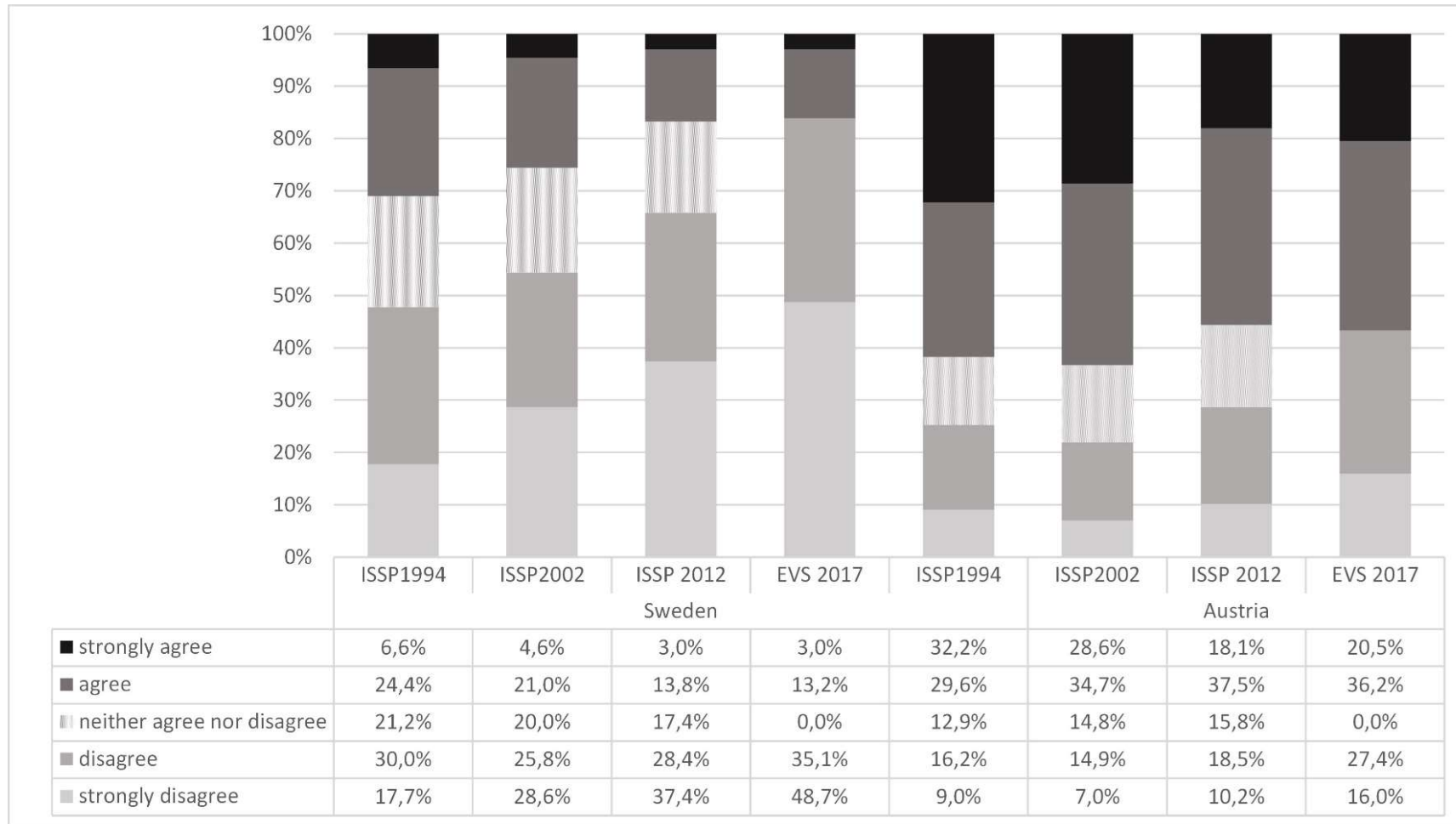
We focus on two indicative questions:

Q1: *All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job.*

Q2: *A job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children.*

Cultural approach

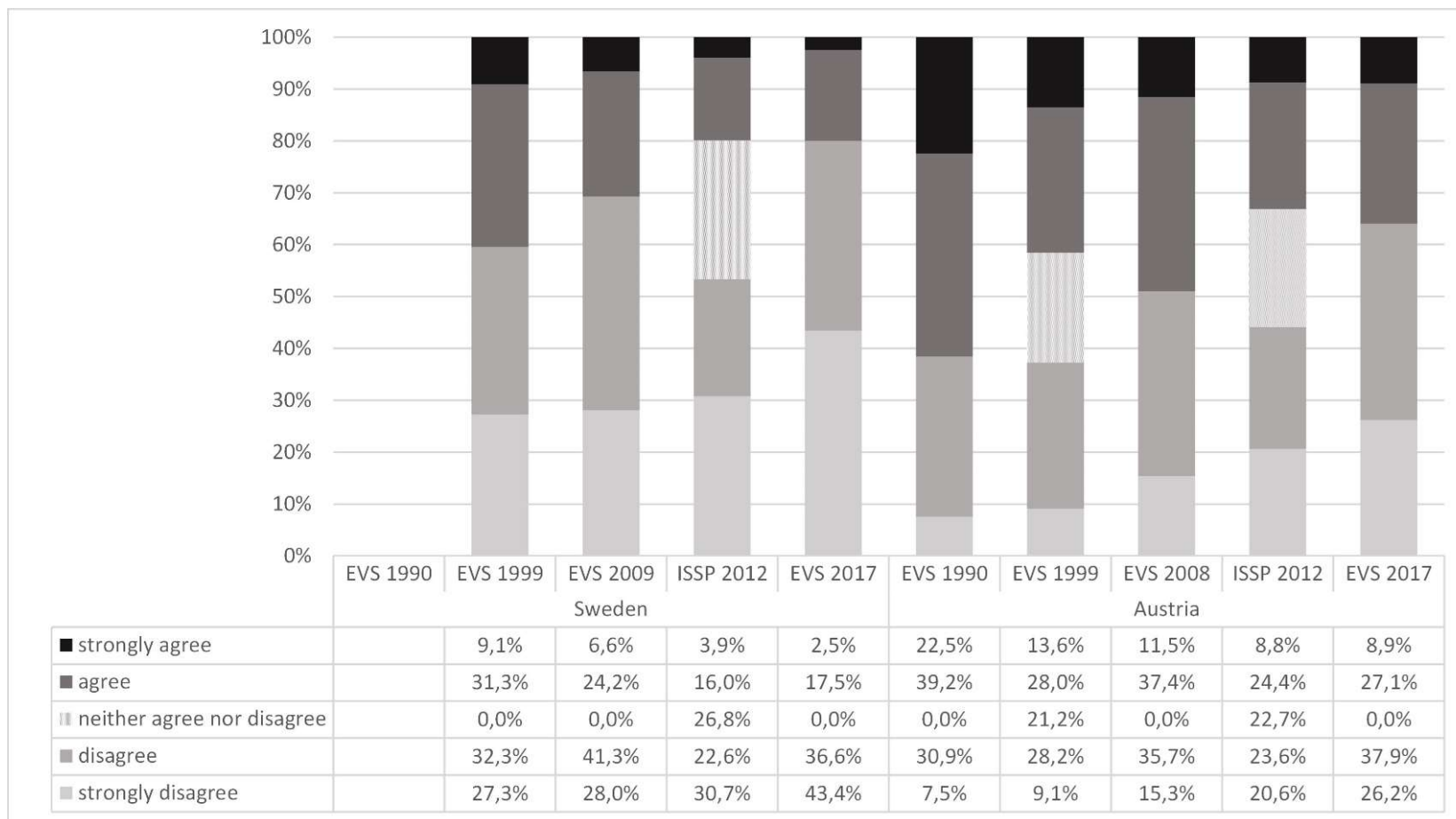
Q 1: All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job.



Source: European Value Survey 2017; International Social Survey Programme 1994,2002,2012

Cultural approach

Q 2: A job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children.



Source: European Value Survey 2017; International Social Survey Programme 1994,2002,2012

Cultural approach

Results

For both countries: a **clear trend towards more progressive views** about the gender division of parental labour. In Austria this trend is on a (statistically significant) lower level than in Sweden, marking Austria as distinctively more traditional than Sweden.

Due to the already high level of progressiveness in **Sweden**, there is some indication **that the trend begins to plateau**, while in **Austria there is still “room to grow”**. To achieve full convergence however with Sweden there is still a long road ahead for Austria.

As expected the **younger, higher educated** respondents and **women** in general have **more progressive views** than older, lesser educated and male groups.

Conclusion

In both countries, a progressive change in the division of parental labour has been taking place since the 1990s on three levels: sphere of cultural norms, at the level of the institutional framework and on the level of parents' actual behaviour.

While Austria remains apparently more traditional in its attitudes, values and policies, one has to take into account that these changes began much earlier in Sweden and therefore remain markedly advanced to this day.

The development in leave policies in Sweden was far more straight forward in dissolving separate gender roles than in Austria, where policies did not have such a clear direction in enhancing degenderization. Here a policy of "Freedom of Choice" tends to solidify pre-existing values rather than actively pushing towards a more progressive behaviour.

As an implication for policy makers we can conclude that particularly clear degenderizing policies have the potential to change cultural norms and behaviour and vice versa.



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Thank you for your attention!



Further reading:

Dörfler, Sonja (2019): Elterliche Arbeitsteilung in Österreich und Schweden. Die Entwicklung institutioneller und kultureller Rahmenbedingungen von 1990 bis heute. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Saxonberg, Steven (2013): From Defamilialization to Degenderization: Toward a New Welfare Typology. *Social Policy & Administration*, 47(1), 26–48.

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