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Article

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AT A GLANCE

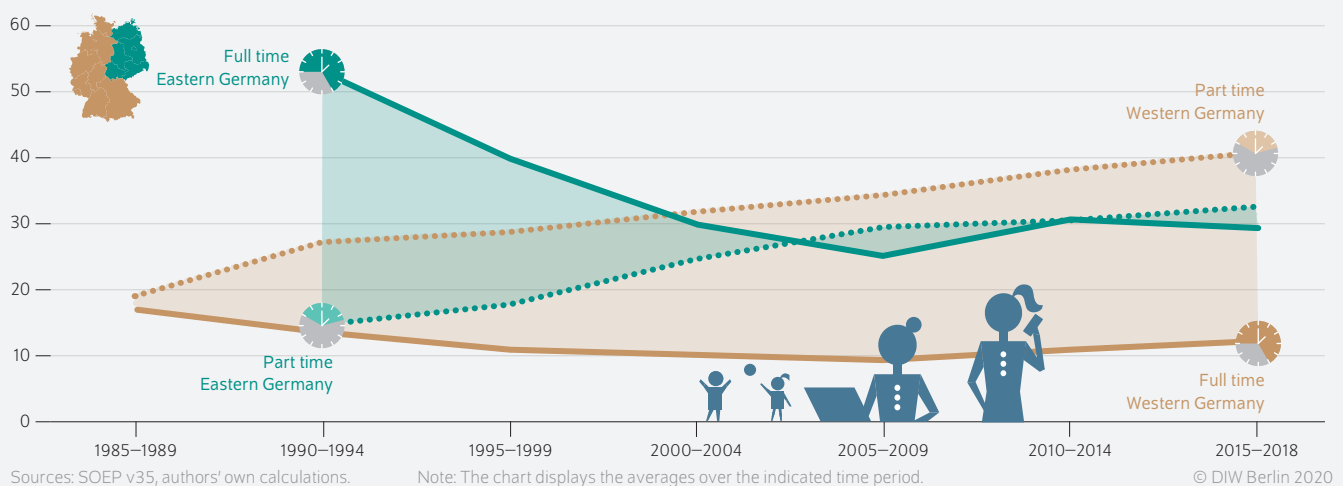
Mothers in Eastern and Western Germany: Employment Rates and Attitudes Are Converging, Full-Time Employment is Not

By Denise Barth, Jonas Jessen, C. Katharina Spieß, and Katharina Wrohlich

- This report analyses working mothers of children under 11 in eastern and western Germany following reunification
- Maternal employment rates in both parts of the country are converging
- Part-time employment rate of women is rising in both eastern and western Germany
- Full-time employment of mothers in eastern Germany still substantially higher
- Especially in the east, lower approval of mothers with toddlers working full time among younger cohorts of women, compared to older cohorts

Working mothers with young children since reunification: less full-time employment in the east, more part-time employment in both east and west

Share of full-time or part-time working mothers with a youngest child under 11 in percent



FROM THE AUTHORS

"It remains to be seen if the further expansion of day care for children under 11 will have an impact on part-time and full-time employment of mothers."

— C. Katharina Spieß —

MEDIA



Audio Interview with C. K. Spieß (in German)
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Mothers in Eastern and Western Germany: Employment Rates and Attitudes Are Converging, Full-Time Employment is Not

By Denise Barth, Jonas Jessen, C. Katharina Spieß, and Katharina Wrohlich

ABSTRACT

Work and family life arrangements differed greatly between the east and west before German reunification in 1990. Since reunification, however, the employment rates of mothers with children requiring childcare have converged. This trend is accompanied by a growing approval of maternal employment, especially in western Germany. However, differences in actual working hours remain. Mothers in the east work full time markedly more often compared to mothers in the west. However, women in younger age cohorts approve less of working mother with toddlers compared to women in older age cohorts, especially in the east. It remains to be seen whether a further expansion of day care in childcare centers and elementary schools will lead to a change in attitudes and thus also in the full-time employment of mothers with young children.

When it comes to work-life balance, eastern and western Germany have taken very different paths. The “universal employment” model was common for most mothers in former East Germany and due to a nationwide, state-funded day care system, mothers as well as fathers generally worked full time. This employment model was actively supported by the East German government. Not working, according to the Criminal Code of East Germany, was considered “anti-social behavior” and could even be punished with a prison sentence.¹ In contrast, in West Germany, the “breadwinner” model was common, whereby the father worked full time and the mother took care of the children. Over time, the *Zuverdienstmodell*, in which mothers increasingly began to work part time, established itself in West Germany.² This trend can be partly explained by the fact that until the mid-2000s, the majority of day care in western Germany was limited to children aged three years and older. In addition, for a long time, publicly financed facilities only offered half-day care in the mornings, which made it difficult for both parents to work full time.³

The first part of this report investigates the development of parental, particularly maternal, employment in both eastern and western Germany following reunification.⁴ The second part analyzes attitudes towards working mothers. The focus in both parts is on mothers’ employment, as even in 2020, there are significant differences between the work lives of mothers and fathers. In particular, parents with children under 11—infants, toddlers, and elementary school-aged

¹ § 249, GDR Criminal Code. See also: Miriam Beblo and Luise Görjes, “On the nature of nurture. The malleability of gender differences in work preferences,” *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 151 (2018): 19–41.

² For more on the different societal models in former East and former West Germany and differences in labor market participation, see Rachel A. Rosenfeld, Heike Trappe, and Janet C. Gornick, “Gender and Work in Germany: Before and After Reunification,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 30 (2004): 103–124. For a summary, cf. Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, “Zweiter Gleichstellungsbericht der Bundesregierung,” *Deutscher Bundestag Drucksache* 18/12840 (2017) (in German; available online; Accessed on August 30, 2020. This applies to all other online sources in this report unless stated otherwise).

³ Cf. C. Katharina Spieß and Felix Büchel, “Müttererwerbstätigkeit und Kindertageseinrichtungen – neue Ergebnisse zu einem bekannten Zusammenhang,” *Vierteljahrshefte zur Wirtschaftsforschung* 7, no. 1 (2002): 96–114.

⁴ In the following analyses, Berlin is considered a part of eastern Germany. Data from West Berlin is therefore only used from 1990 onward.

Box

Data

SOEP

The analyses of employment rates use data from the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), a representative annual survey of private households in Germany that has been conducted since 1984.¹ As of 2020, over 30,000 individuals in approximately 17,000 households across Germany are surveyed annually on different topics. The present analyses use data from 1985 to 2018, with 2018 being the most current SOEP wave available to researchers. Former East Germany was integrated into the survey in 1990 before formal reunification was complete. In the analysis, the distinction between eastern and western Germany refers to the current geographical location of the household.

Respondents are labeled as gainfully employed when they are employed full time, part time, marginally, or irregularly, or if they are apprentices. The full-time employment rate is limited to respondents who indicated being employed full time and the part-time employment rate is limited to respondents who indicated being employed part time. The part-time group does not include the marginally employed or apprentices. The reported rates refer to the five-year average, with the exception of the most recent survey period of 2015 to 2018. This allows a sufficient number of cases to calculate the employment rates of the different groups.

ALLBUS

The ALLBUS (*Allgemeine Bevölkerungsumfrage der Sozialwissenschaften*) is a cross-sectional survey that investigates the attitudes and behaviors of the German population. ALLBUS has been conducted every two years since 1980 by the Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (GESIS) together with a coordinating group (KG), the KG ALLBUS, as a scientific advisory body.²

Each survey wave includes variables such as marital status, household composition, education, and occupation, as well as relevant information such as political stance and voting behavior. Moreover, there is a smaller set of questions on specific topics, which are repeated every four to six years. This makes it possible to form long time series of socio-scientific relevant variables and observe social change over the long term.

Up to and including 1990, the respondents of the ALLBUS survey consisted of all eligible voters in the Federal Republic of Germany and West Berlin living in private households. Following reunification, an additional survey was conducted outside of the regular rotation. Since 1991, the entirety of the respondents consists of

the adult population living in both former East and former West Germany. Until 1990, the sample consisted of 3,000 respondents from the population of eligible voters in private households in former West Germany and former West Berlin. In 1991, the ALLBUS Baseline Study was conducted and included many interviews in both eastern and western Germany. The new German federal states (the states of former East Germany: Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, and Thuringia) are overrepresented in the ALLBUS sample. Since 1992, 2,400 interviews have been conducted in the old federal states and 1,100 in the new federal states.

In the following analysis, both the attitude towards working mothers and the attitude towards how their employment affects their children are analyzed. Attitudes have been surveyed every four years since 1992 in the form of the following questions:

There are different opinions when it comes to the familial and child-care duties of a woman. Please read the following statements and indicate if you

- Agree completely
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree completely

"A working mother can have just as loving and trusting a relationship to her children as a mother who does not work."

"A toddler will definitely suffer if its mother is working."

"It is good for a child if its mother works and does not only concentrate on the household."

The responses to these statements were grouped into "Agree" ("Agree completely," "somewhat agree") and "Disagree" ("Somewhat disagree" and "completely disagree"). A supplementary index was formed over these three answers, whereby question 2 was coded with a reversed order. Using this definition, respondents were divided into "traditional" and "egalitarian" groups.³

¹ Jan Goebel et al., "The German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP)," *Jahrbücher für Nationalökonomie und Statistik* 239, no. 2 (2019): 345-360.

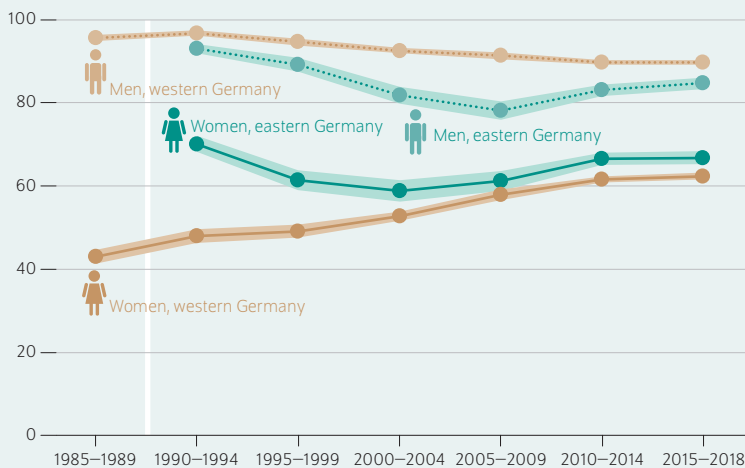
² Martina Wasmer et al., "Konzeption und Durchführung der „Allgemeinen Bevölkerungsumfrage der Sozialwissenschaften" (ALLBUS) 2014," GESIS Papers, no. 20 (2017) (in German; available online).

³ Cf. Michael Blohm and Jessica Walter, *Traditionelle und egalitäre Einstellung zur Rolle der Frau im Zeitverlauf. Datenreport 2018 der Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (2018) (in German; available online).

Figure 1

Employment rate of mothers and fathers with a youngest child under 11

In percent



Note: Share of each group who is of working age, including the marginally employed and apprentices (cf. Box). The chart displays averages over the indicated time period. The shaded backgrounds of the lines indicate the 95 percent confidence interval.

Source: Authors' own calculations using SOEP v35.

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The employment rates of mothers in eastern and western Germany have converged.

children—are investigated.⁵ The employment analysis uses data from the SOEP, a household and individual panel survey representative of Germany as a whole. The study of attitudes is based on data from the General Population Survey of Social Sciences (*Allgemeine Bevölkerungsumfrage der Sozialwissenschaften*, ALLBUS, see Box).

Employment rate of mothers in the east and west converging

Immediately after reunification, there were significant differences between mothers, but not fathers, of children requiring care in eastern and western Germany (Figure 1).⁶ Between 1990 and 1994 the average employment rate of fathers in eastern and western Germany differed by only four percentage points, with a somewhat higher rate in the west. By contrast, there was a 22 percentage points difference between mothers, with an employment rate of 48 percent in western Germany and a substantially higher rate of 70 in eastern Germany.

Following reunification, employment in eastern Germany declined fundamentally due to the economic situation.⁷ Since then, the employment rate of fathers in the east has fallen much more sharply than in the west, although they have been converging again in more recent years. Employment rates of mothers in eastern Germany also declined substantially; immediately following reunification – 1990–1994 – the employment rate was 22 percentage points higher than the western German rate. Ten years later – between 2000 and 2004 – the difference had shrunk to six percentage points. In contrast, the employment rate of mothers with children under 11 in western Germany increased over the entire period. Since the period of 2005 to 2009, the employment rate of mothers in eastern and western Germany has almost converged, with a difference of only four percentage points in recent years.⁸

Moreover, supplementary analyses of parents whose youngest child is below either three or six years of age show a similar convergence between the regions over the entire observation period; during the period of 2015 to 2018, only the employment rate for mothers with children under three is higher in the east than in the west, by eight percentage points.

Substantial differences remain in full-time employment of mothers

Although employment levels of mothers and fathers are converging, substantial differences in hours worked per week remain.⁹ Patterns of full- and part-time employment of mothers with children under 11 in eastern and western Germany have evolved quite differently from those of other women (women with older children or women without children). In the years following reunification, the differences in full-time employment between women with and without young children requiring childcare were relatively low in eastern Germany (Figure 2, left panel). Irrespective of children, full-time employment was more prevalent in the East than in the West. In eastern Germany, even mothers with a child under 11 were working full time more frequently than women without young children in the west. Between 1990 and 1994, about 14 percent of mothers with children under 11 were working full time in western Germany, while the percentage was almost three times as high for the other group of women (41 percent).

Since then, the full-time employment of mothers with children under 11 in eastern Germany has decreased significantly. Nevertheless, large differences between the east and west remain. Almost 30 years after reunification, the rates

⁵ Although some German states have six years of elementary school, such as Berlin and Brandenburg, the analyses focus on parents with children under 11, as these are the majority of children who have not yet reached the first level of secondary school.

⁶ For a look at how the employment rate of mothers has developed based on the Microcensus, cf. Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, *Ausgeübte Erwerbstätigkeit von Müttern. Erwerbstätigkeit, Erwerbsumfang und Erwerbsvolumen 2010* (2010) (in German; available online). With corresponding groups, the employment rates are comparable to the calculations in this report based on the SOEP.

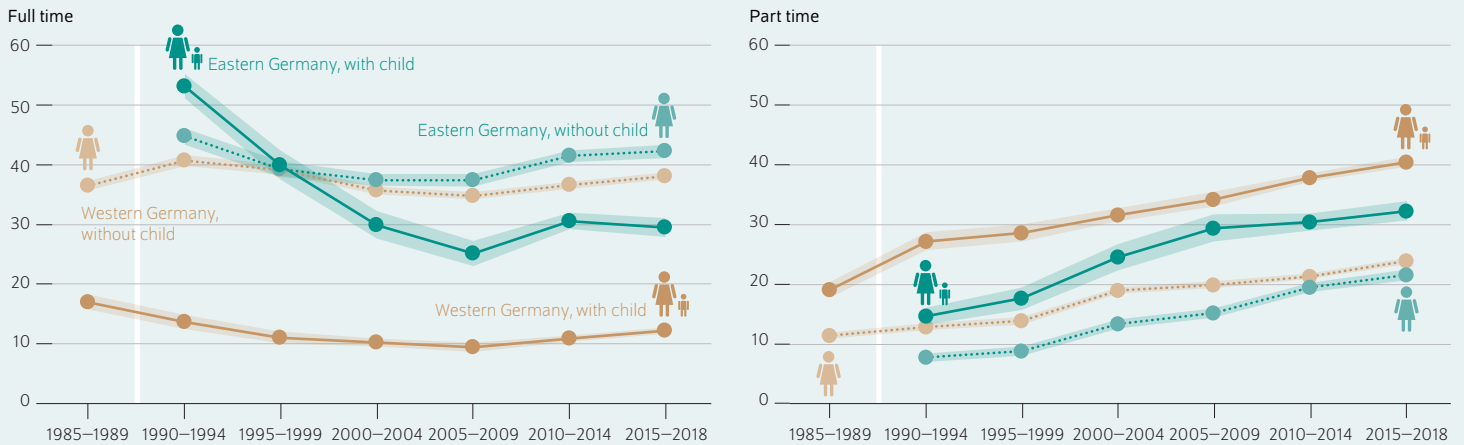
⁷ Cf. Peter Krause, "30 Jahre seit dem Mauerfall: Fortschritte und Defizite bei der Angleichung der Lebensverhältnisse in Ost- und Westdeutschland," *DIW Wochenbericht* no. 45 (2019): 827–838 (in German; available online).

⁸ In eastern Germany, the employment rate of mothers is slightly higher than the rate in western Germany. For fathers, it is the other way around. Thus, gender differences in labor force participation are much less pronounced in eastern Germany.

⁹ For a corresponding analysis up until 2002, cf. Michaela Kreyenfeld and Esther Geisler, "Müttererwerbstätigkeit in Ost- und Westdeutschland," *Zeitschrift für Familienforschung* no. 3 (2006): 333–360.

Figure 2

Employment of women with and without a youngest child under 11 In percent



Note: Share of each group who is of working age, marginally employed and apprentices are excluded (cf. Box). The chart displays averages over the indicated time period. The shaded backgrounds of the lines indicate the 95 percent confidence interval.

Source: Authors' own calculations using SOEP v35.

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While women in all groups are increasingly working part time, mothers are employed full time in eastern Germany significantly more.

still differ substantially with full-time rates of 12 percent in the west and 29 percent in the east. In addition, the difference between the two groups –women with a child under age 11 and women without a young child –was still much greater in the west (26 percentage points) than in the east (13 percentage points), where the incidence of full-time employment among mothers of young children is closer to that of women without children requiring childcare. The full-time employment rate of women without children requiring childcare has barely changed in the east and west since reunification, although the rate in the east was and remains higher than in the west.

However, a supplementary analysis of full-time employment rates exclusively for mothers whose youngest child is under three shows that in this respect, mothers in the east have converged with the corresponding group in the west. Between 2015 and 2018, the rate was only 14 percent. Changes to parental leave regulations must also be taken into consideration when analyzing this development.¹⁰

Especially strong increase in part-time employment rate of mothers in the east

A similar trend appears when observing the development of the part-time employment rate over the same time period: Since reunification, part-time employment has increased for

all women (Figure 2, right panel). Moreover, the part-time rate of women in the west is still higher than the rate of the corresponding group in the east. The highest part-time rate over the entire period following reunification is for mothers with children requiring childcare in the west (40 percent in the period of 2015 to 2018), followed by mothers in the east, whose part-time employment rate has increased the most over the years (to 32 percent in the period of 2015 to 2018). Women without children under 11 work part time the least. For these women, with a rate of 24 percent in the west and 22 percent in the east in the period of 2015 to 2018, there were no more marked differences since the corresponding group in the east experienced a relatively strong increase. This also applies when only observing women with young children.

Attitudes towards working mothers becoming more egalitarian in the west

There could be many factors influencing the differing employment rates of mothers and how many hours they work per week in the east and west. Institutional differences, such as the expansion of day care places, could play a role, as well as changes in the propensity to start a family.¹¹ In addition, attitudes towards working mothers in the east and west

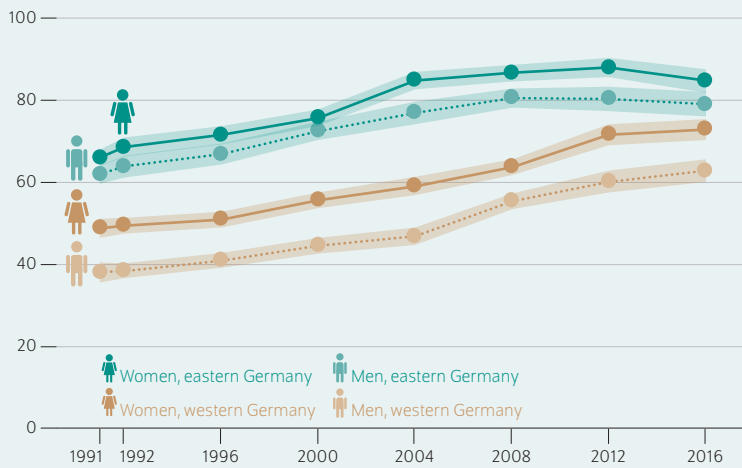
¹⁰ Since 1992, parents in both eastern and western Germany are granted parental leave of up to three years. Before reunification, women in East Germany could take a paid "baby year" following the birth of a child. Cf. Katharina Heisig and Larissa Zierow, "Elternzeitverlängerung in der DDR: Langfristig höhere Lebenszufriedenheit der Kinder," *ifo Dresden berichtet*, no. 2 (2020): 7–9.

¹¹ For more on the relationship between employment and day care, cf. Kai-Uwe Müller and Katharina Wrohlich, "Does subsidized care for toddlers increase maternal labour supply? Evidence from a large-scale expansion of early child care," *Labour Economics* 62 (2020): 101776; as well as Kai-Uwe Müller, C. Katharina Spieß and Katharina Wrohlich, "Kindertagesbetreuung: Wie wird ihre Nutzung beeinflusst und was kann sie für die Entwicklung von Kindern bewirken," *Vierteljahrshefte zur Wirtschaftsforschung*, no. 83 (2014): 49–68. For more on the development of couples having their first child(ren), cf. Dirk Konietzka and Michaela Kreyenfeld, "Angleichung oder Verfestigung von Differenzen? Geburtenentwicklung und Familienformen in Ost- und Westdeutschland," *Berliner Debatte Initial*, no. 15 (2004): 26–41.

Figure 3

Egalitarian attitudes towards working mothers

Share of respondents with egalitarian views in percent



Note: The chart displays the share of respondents who indicated egalitarian attitudes towards working mothers (cf. Box). The shaded backgrounds of the lines indicate the 95 percent confidence interval.

Source: Authors' own calculations using ALLBUS data from 1991 to 2016.

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Attitudes have become much more egalitarian, especially in western Germany.

have differed historically and remain different in 2020, even if attitudes have become more similar over the last 30 years.¹²

Examining ALLBUS data (Box) shows that at the beginning of the 1990s, women and men in east Germany had significantly more egalitarian¹³ attitudes towards working mothers than those in the west (Figure 3). In 1992, 69 percent of women and 64 percent of men in the east indicated egalitarian attitudes towards working mothers, significantly higher than the shares of women (49 percent) and men (38 percent) in the west. Since then, the attitudes in both parts of Germany have become more egalitarian overall and the gaps between eastern and western respondents have narrowed.

Younger women have more traditional attitudes towards full-time working mothers with toddlers

In addition to general questions about working mothers, ALLBUS also includes questions specifically about mothers of *toddlers working full time*. The respondents should indicate if they agree or disagree with the statement, “A mother who works full time can usually have just as meaningful a relationship to their toddler as a mother who does not work.” The answers, surveyed in 2016, were compared for three different

age cohorts: those born before 1950, those born between 1950 and 1975, and those born after 1975. These answers were compared to the answers to the more general statement of “A working mother can have just as loving and trusting a relationship to her children as a mother who does not work.”

First, this comparison shows differences in the approval of working mothers in general (Figure 4, left panel) and the approval of mothers of toddlers who work full time (Figure 4, right panel). Approval of working mothers in general is relatively high in all four groups observed (women and men in the east and west) and all three cohorts. For all groups, approval is close to 90 percent or higher; only for men in the west is approval somewhat lower—between 80 and 84 percent—depending on the cohort.

However, when asked specifically about full-time working mothers of toddlers, approval is markedly lower in almost all groups. The group of women in the east is the only group to display a high share of approval that decreases with age: 94 percent of those born before 1950 approve, 89 percent of those born between 1950 and 1975 approve, and only 79 percent of those born after 1975 approve. There is a similar decline in approval for women in the west, although from a baseline lower level. Among women born in western Germany before 1950, 69 percent approve; 63 percent of those born between 1950 and 1975 approve, and 58 percent of those born after 1975 approve. For men, the approval percentage varies less strongly between the cohort groups. In the east, men’s approval ranges between 73 and 77 percent, and in the west, between 52 and 55 percent.

The results show that attitudes towards full-time working mothers with toddlers are more traditional among younger female cohorts than their older cohorts.¹⁴ Furthermore, the comparison between the age cohorts shows that the decline in the full-time employment rate of mothers in eastern Germany and the increase in the part-time employment rates of mothers in both parts of Germany are correlated with changes in attitudes towards full-time employment.

Conclusion: Attitudes and actual employment status of mothers remain intertwined

Different societal models regarding the employment of men and women in former East Germany and former West Germany, as well as different family policies, led to significant differences in the actual labor market participation rate of mothers and to even more significant differences in attitudes towards working mothers. At the beginning of the 1990s, the employment rate of mothers in eastern Germany was markedly higher than the rate in western Germany. Furthermore, men and women in eastern Germany had more egalitarian attitudes towards working mothers than those in the west. However, both aspects—the actual labor

¹² Cf. Quentin Lippmann, Alexandre Georgieff, and Claudia Senik, “Undoing gender with institutions: Lessons from the German division and reunification,” *The Economic Journal* 130, no. 629 (2020): 1445-1470.

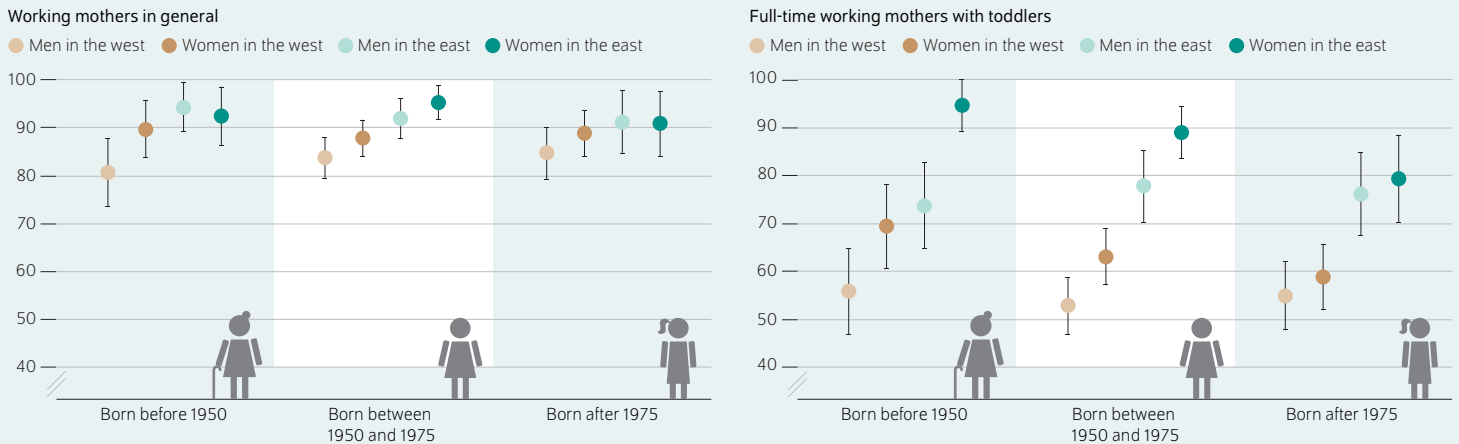
¹³ In this report, a person with an egalitarian or a traditional attitude indicates a person who views working mothers positively or negatively. For this, we use the common definition found in the literature, such as Blohm and Walter, “Traditionelle und egalitäre Einstellungen”.

¹⁴ A similar result was also found in Christian Ebner, Michael Kühnert, and Philipp Lersch, “Cohort Changes in the Level and Dispersion of Gender Ideology after German Reunification: Results from a Natural Experiment,” *European Sociological Review* (2020).

Figure 4

Attitudes towards working mothers by age cohorts

Share of respondents with egalitarian views in percent



Note: The chart on the left shows approval rates for the statement "A working mother can have just as loving and trusting a relationship to her children as a mother who does not work." The chart on the right shows approval rates for the statement "A mother who works full time can usually have just as meaningful a relationship to their toddler as a mother who does not work." Black bars indicate the 95 percent confidence interval.

Source: Authors' own calculations using ALLBUS data from 2016.

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Women of younger cohorts have more traditional views towards full-time working mothers with toddlers than women of older cohorts, especially in eastern Germany.

market participation of mothers as well as attitudes towards working mothers—have converged between east and west since reunification in 1990.

There are many reasons for this development. For example, the expansion of day care facilities for children and the expansion of all-day schools, which has been promoted since 2005 in western Germany particularly, has contributed to increasing mothers' labor force participation. However, (former West German) policies such as *Ehegattensplitting* (joint taxation of married couples with full income splitting), the subsidization of marginal employment, free co-insurance in statutory health insurance for married spouses, and parental leave regulations have reduced the financial incentives for mothers from eastern Germany to work full time. Other factors, such as women migrating to the west from the east, could have played a role in the change in attitudes towards working mothers.¹⁵

In Germany, it is planned to further expand day care for children younger than three, all-day care for children three years until school-entry-age, and all-day care for school-aged children.¹⁶ It remains to be seen if these changes will have

an impact on the attitudes towards working mothers with young children. Previous studies suggest that offering day care for children can at least support a change in attitudes.¹⁷ Should this be the case, and more mothers take up full-time employment, this would counteract the declining labor force potential associated with demographic changes. Higher full-time employment rates would also combat the gender pay gap,¹⁸ as the hourly wages and incomes of women would increase.¹⁹ This would lead to a higher retirement income for women, thereby reducing the gender pension gap too.²⁰

Yet working full time with a child requiring childcare is challenging and puts a double burden on mothers, as documented in the case of many women in former East Germany.²¹ Moreover, studies show that especially mothers working full time would like to spend more time with their children and thus would prefer to reduce, rather than

¹⁵ Cf. another report by Sophia Schmitz and Felix Weinhardt which is included in the German version of this Weekly Report. This study shows that women in western Germany increase their work hours especially if they lived in a region to which relatively many people from former East Germany moved shortly after reunification. Sophia Schmitz und Felix Weinhardt, "Zuzug aus der ehemaligen DDR hatte positive Effekte auf den Beschäftigungsumfang westdeutscher Frauen," *DIW Wochenbericht*, no. 38 (2020): 707–711 (in German; available online).

¹⁶ Cf. Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, *Kita-Ausbau: Gesetze und Investitionsprogramme*. Hintergrundmeldung from June 17, 2020 (in German; available online).

¹⁷ Cf. Gundula Zoch and Pia S. Schober, "Public Child-Care Expansion and Changing Gender Ideologies of Parents in Germany," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 80 (2018): 1020–1093.

¹⁸ For more information, see the entry on the gender pay gap in the DIW Berlin Glossary (in German; available online).

¹⁹ Part-time work is associated with lower monthly incomes as well as lower hourly wages: cf. Patricia Gallego Granados, Rebecca Olthaus, and Katharina Wrohlich, "Teilzeiterwerbstätigkeit: überwiegend weiblich und im Durchschnitt schlechter bezahlt," *DIW Wochenbericht*, no. 46 (2019): 845–850 (in German; available online).

²⁰ Cf. Anna Hammerschmid and Carla Rowold, "Gender Pension Gaps in Europa hängen eindeutiger mit Arbeitsmärkten als mit Rentensystemen zusammen," *DIW Wochenbericht*, no. 25 (2019): 439–447 (in German; available online).

²¹ Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, *25 Jahre Deutsche Einheit Gleichstellung und Geschlechtergerechtigkeit in Ostdeutschland und Westdeutschland* (2015) (in German; available online).

increase, their work hours.²² In this respect, the full-time employment of both parents, as proposed in the context of *Familienarbeitszeit* (family working time model),²³ for exam-

22 Verena Lauber et al., "Vereinbarkeit von Beruf und Familie von Paaren mit nicht schulpflichtigen Kindern – unter spezifischer Berücksichtigung der Erwerbskonstellation beider Partner. Ausgewählte Ergebnisse auf der Basis der FiD-Daten (»Familien in Deutschland«)," *DIW Berlin Politikberatung kompakt* 88 (in German; available online).

23 Cf. See the entry on *Familienarbeitszeit* in the DIW Berlin Glossary (in German; available online). For an explanation of the term in English, see also Kai-Uwe Müller, Michael Neumann and Katharina Wrohlich, "The family working-time model: Towards more gender equality in work and care," *Journal of European Social Policy* 28, no. 5 (2018): 471-486.

ple, could be a solution, as it provides more income security for women with young children while allowing them more time together. In addition, many other employment combinations for couples exist that increase the work hours of mothers and reduce those of the fathers. Furthermore, specific solutions for single parents must be found.²⁴

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