

Morales, Marina

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The Impact of Paid Paternity Leave Reforms on Divorce Rates in Europe

Marina Morales^{1,2}

¹Universidad de Zaragoza

²Global Labor Organization (GLO) and IEDIS

Abstract

Using a panel dataset covering 27 European countries over a 53-year period, this study examines the relationship between paid paternity leave reforms and divorce rates. Controlling for policy-related factors and other legislative changes affecting divorce, the dynamic analysis reveals that while the introduction of any paid paternity leave is initially associated with higher divorce rates, the effect becomes negative when focusing on policies offering 2 weeks or more of leave. The decrease in divorce rates becomes more significant as the length of leave increases and grows over time. Specifically, providing fathers with at least 2 weeks of paid leave after childbirth reduces divorce rates by 0.36 percentage points 15 years after implementation. Additional analyses of the underlying mechanisms suggest that, in the absence of extended paternity leave, the results are likely driven by improved labor market opportunities for women—a factor that may unintentionally increase the likelihood of divorce.

JEL Codes: J48, J12, J16

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1. Introduction

The enactment of Directive (EU) 2019/1158 has significantly transformed the framework of work–life balance by requiring states to ensure explicitly paid paternity leave. While most European countries have now adopted reforms to comply with its provisions, the regulation of paternity-related leave in Europe had previously been marked by considerable heterogeneity in terms of both timing and length of leave. As of the early 1980s, only two European states — Finland and Sweden—had established paid paternity leave provisions granting fathers 2 weeks of leave. The onset of the 21st century, however, witnessed a significant transformation in policy development, with numerous EU countries introducing paternity leave permits—a trend that has intensified in recent years (see Figure 1). A central feature of these legal reforms, providing entitlements reserved to fathers and non-transferable to mothers, aimed to rebalance the traditional roles of parents in the household. Despite notable advances in female labor market opportunities, women continue to undertake more caregiving responsibilities than men. By easing intra-couple negotiations over leave-taking and granting both partners an individual, enforceable right to a designated portion of leave, paternity leave policies may contribute to shifting deeply entrenched gender norms within the household.

With the possible advancement of gender equality, a key question that emerges is whether—and to what extent—paternity leave affects the risk of divorce. According to the role theory (Goode, 1960; Hecht, 2001), sharing childcare responsibilities more equally may help alleviate role strain and competing demands, thereby enhancing both relationship satisfaction and stability (Carlson et al., 2016; Schwartz & Gonalons-Pons, 2016). Recent empirical evidence indicates that paternity leave is positively correlated with increased paternal involvement and enhanced relationship quality among couples in European countries and the United States (Almqvist & Duvander, 2014; Bünning, 2015). A reduction in the risk of conflict among partners is also suggested by Curull-Sentís (2024) who find that the incidence of intimate partner violence decreases after paternity leave extensions. Thus, it is plausible that the implementation of paternity leave policies may be inversely related to the risk of marital dissolution. However, drawing on the benefits of specialization (Becker, 1981), paternity leave may also affect the likelihood of divorce by altering the opportunity cost in the labor market for both spouses. For men, paternity leave may have negatively affected this cost. Paternity leave allows fathers to engage in childcare and domestic responsibilities that have traditionally been undertaken by mothers. Furthermore, the likelihood that fathers maintain elevated levels of involvement in childcare increases even after the leave period concludes (Cabrera et al., 2008; Huerta et al., 2014; Petts & Knoester, 2018), hence weakening their labor market position and diminishing their economic prospects outside of marriage. Conversely, increased paternal involvement in childrearing may have allowed mothers to allocate more time to paid employment, thereby improving their labor market opportunities in the case of divorce (Becker, 1985; Oppenheimer, 1994).

The gender revolution theory integrates all the previously mentioned effects and connects union dissolution to two distinct phases of change in gender roles and behaviors among women and men. Goldscheider et al. (2015) argue that there is a first phase marked by a rise in female labor force participation and growing financial independence for women. Yet, despite their increasing economic contributions, the traditional gender division of labor within households remains largely intact. This dual burden on women strains family dynamics and heightens the risk of union dissolution. In the second phase, men begin to assume domestic responsibilities more equally, leading to a more balanced division of labor. This shift fosters improved work–life balance and more egalitarian partnerships, which in turn enhance union stability. Thus, according to this theory, in the first phase, union dissolution is primarily driven by women’s rising employment, whereas in the second phase, a lower risk of dissolution is attributed to men’s

increased cooperation in adapting to new gender norms. Another important unanswered question is how substantial paternity leave needs to be to move beyond the initial stage and reach the second, rather than remaining stalled in the first.

In this paper, we aim to answer these questions by examining the impact of legal reforms recognizing paid paternity leave on divorce rates across Europe over the past five decades. We develop a 53-year panel and leverage variations between countries in the timing and duration of paternity leave introduced through legislation. This approach contributes to the growing literature on the effects of paternity leave policies. Although evidence remains limited due to the recent implementation of such policies, previous research has explored their influence on fertility rates (Farré & González, 2019; Feldman & Gran, 2020), labor market outcomes (Corekcioglu et al., 2024; Gorjón & Lizarraga, 2024; Rege et al., 2013), gender role attitudes (Farré et al., 2022; Fontenay & González, 2024; Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2017), and long-term child development at school (Cools et al., 2015). This study also relates closely to recent research investigating whether paternity leave affects relationship stability. In Europe, Lappegård et al. (2020) demonstrate that early paternal involvement, through the use of father-specific leave, is linked to a lower risk of union dissolution in Nordic countries; however, no effect is observed for extended paternal leave beyond policy requirements. Similar findings are reported by Avdic and Karimi (2018) in Sweden, while studies from Norway find no significant link between paternal leave-taking and union dissolution (Dahl et al., 2014; Cools et al., 2015). Conversely, evidence from the United States indicates that short paternity leaves are associated with increased relationship stability (Petts et al., 2020). Overall, the evidence remains mixed, showing no clear consensus and highlighting the need for further investigation into this relationship.

Compared to these studies, which primarily assess the impact of a single policy reform or focus on a single national context, the present analysis seeks to leverage cross-national variation and historical developments in paternity leave policies across European countries. While the introduction of any paid paternity leave is positively associated with divorce, the association becomes negative when we focus on reforms involving 2 weeks or more of leave. The effect grows over time and becomes stronger when the entitlement is extended for longer periods, underscoring the importance of providing longer, non-transferable leave for fathers to support family stability. Our estimates control for maternity and additional parental leave provisions as well as other legislative reforms affecting divorce rates. Additional evidence supports the gender revolution theory, identifying advances in gender equality—across both labor market participation and the domestic sphere—as potential mechanisms underlying these effects.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the data. Section 3 details the empirical strategy. Section 4 presents the results, and Section 5 concludes.

2. Data

2.1. Paid paternity leave policies

The data on leave policies utilized in this study are sourced from the *Women, Business and the Law* (WBL) project conducted by the World Bank. The WBL index systematically measures legal gender disparities affecting women's economic participation across their working life cycle—from entry into the labor market through retirement. The composite index is based on eight distinct legal domains: Mobility, Workplace, Pay, Marriage, Parenthood, Entrepreneurship, Assets, and Pension.¹ The present analysis focuses specifically on data collected for the development of the Parenthood indicator. These data specify the exact number of days of paid leave granted to mothers, fathers, or both parents under national maternity, paternity, and parental

¹ See section 4.1 for a detailed description. The entire dataset is accessible through <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/wbl-data>

leave policies from 1971 onwards. Paternity leave is defined as leave provisions exclusively available to fathers before, during, and immediately after childbirth. Correspondingly, maternity leave designates leave entitlements reserved solely for mothers to be utilized immediately upon the birth of a child. While maternity and paternity leave constitute gender-specific allocations for mothers and fathers, respectively, parental leave represents childcare provisions that either supplement or substitute these leave categories and may be distributed through shared arrangements or specific allocations to either parent.

Our empirical analysis primarily relies on detailed legislative data that explicitly recognizes paid paternity leave. In addition, the total paid parental allowance available to fathers is used as a robustness check, while maternity-related measures serve as control variables. This approach is adopted for several reasons. First, in many cases, parental benefits are designed to be shared between both parents; however, uptake among fathers tends to be low, as mothers have traditionally been the primary users of such leave (Ekberg et al., 2013). Second, although several countries provide for extended parental leave periods, these are paid at lower rates and therefore less relevant for assessing effective support. Even when countries have adopted regulations to comply with the EU Work-Life Balance Directive (2019/1158) (see Table B1 in Appendix B), which specifies that 2 months of parental leave should be non-transferable and adequately compensated, it is frequently available for use up to the child's 6th, 8th, or 12th birthday—an eligibility window that is too broad for the temporal focus of this study. In contrast, paid paternity leave—often referred to as a "daddy quota"—is characterized by its non-transferable, use-it-or-lose-it nature. It is reserved exclusively for fathers, cannot be allocated to the mother, and it intervenes at a pivotal life stage—childbirth—when parents, particularly fathers, may be more receptive to behavioral change (Tanaka & Waldfogel, 2007). These factors make paternity leave policies a more precise and policy-relevant measure for our analysis. We have also considered paid parental leave when it meets these criteria.² In any case, our main conclusions remain robust when accounting for the total leave entitlements granted to fathers as shown in Section 4.1. Additionally, we consider public expenditure on parental leave to get a broader picture of the actual use of these systems in Section 4.2.1. The parenthood indicator is also utilized in a supplementary analysis, which is discussed in detail in Section 4.2.2.

The maps presented in Figure 2 illustrate the geographic variation in the paid paternity leave in Europe during the last five decades.³ Several patterns emerge over time that point to both temporal and cross-national trends in the adoption and expansion of paternity leave policies. The

² This was the case for Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland and Romania. In Denmark, fathers (and co-mothers) are entitled to 2 weeks of mandatory paternity leave immediately following the birth of the child, plus 9 weeks of earmarked parental leave that must be taken before the child turns one-year-old (Act No. 343 of 22 March 2022 amending the Maternity Act, Secs. 15 and 35). A new parental reform in Finland took effect on 1 August 2022, fundamentally restructuring leave entitlements. Under the new legislation, traditional paternity leave was replaced by an equal allocation of 160 parental allowance days for each parent. Parents are permitted to transfer up to 63 of their days to the other parent or to another caregiver. Thus, fathers are entitled to 97 days of "use it or lose it" parental leave, which we have considered as paid paternity leave (Health Insurance Act, Ch. 9, Secs. 6 and 7). Since 2021, fathers in Estonia are entitled to 30 calendar days of paid parental leave, which is a non-transferable, up to the child's third birthday (Family Benefits Act, Art. 34 (2); Employment Contracts Act, Arts. 60 and 62). In Ireland, an additional 3 weeks of parental leave and associated benefits were made available to each parent of a child born or adopted after 1 November 2019. This entitlement was later extended to five weeks, and subsequently to seven weeks. The leave can be taken at any point within the first 2 years following the child's birth or adoption (Parent's Leave and Benefit Act 2019, Art. 5; Family Leave and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2020). Due to directive 2010/18/UE, since 2012 Romanian law requires fathers to take at least 1 month of the parental leave until the child turns the age of 2 years (Emergency Ordinance No.111 of 8 December 2010, Arts. 2 and 11).

³ The early 1980s were selected as the starting point due to the limited number of countries that had implemented explicit paternal leave policies before that time. We report 2022 as the final year in the sample, as the inclusion of lagged variables in the estimated model implies that these are the most recent observations available for analysis.

history of paternity leave in Europe begins in 1971 (Panel A), when two Western countries—France and Belgium—as well as Spain in the South, introduced paid leave of minimal duration, lasting only a few days. It was not until the early 1980s (Panel B) that two Nordic countries, Finland and Sweden, established paid paternity leave provisions granting fathers 2 weeks of leave. In contrast, most other countries during this period offered no paid paternal leave. In the late 1990s (Panel C), eight countries had introduced some form of paternity leave, although the majority provided relatively modest durations. Nordic countries continued to stand out as leaders: Sweden maintained a 2-week leave policy, which Denmark had also adopted, and Finland extended paternity leave to 3 weeks. By 2010 (Panel D), the provision of paid paternity leave had expanded significantly, with a total of seventeen countries offering some form of entitlement, eight of which provided durations of 2 weeks or longer. Interestingly, Romania in Eastern Europe and Slovenia in Central Europe also exhibited moderate provisions, offering 3 weeks of paid leave. Furthermore, as reflected in darker colors, Portugal and Lithuania had implemented legislation recognizing four weeks of leave, while Finland provided the longest duration at five weeks. In 2023 (Panel E), the trend toward more generous paid paternity leaves continued and became more pronounced. While two countries—Germany and Slovakia—still did not explicitly recognize paid paternity leave after childbirth, the majority of European countries had introduced significantly extended durations of paid leave.⁴ This shift reflects the broader diffusion of family policy reforms across the continent over the last decade. Countries such as Austria, Estonia, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia offered at least four weeks of paid leave for fathers. Among the most expansive provisions, Finland granted around 14 non-transferable weeks, while Spain led the group, offering the most generous policy with sixteen weeks of paternity leave.

2.2. Crude divorce rates

In our main analysis, we use data on Crude Divorce Rates (CDR) across the 27 European countries from Eurostat available since the 1960s. According to Eurostat, the CDR in the European Union (EU) is defined as the number of divorces per 1,000 inhabitants in a given year.⁵ The dataset exhibits certain limitations due to the legal unavailability of divorce in some countries during a part of the study period. Specifically, divorce was not legally permitted in Spain prior to 1981, in Ireland prior to 1995, and in Malta prior to 2011, resulting in incomplete data coverage for these countries during the respective periods.⁶

Figure 3 displays the evolution of the average CDR in Europe during our period of study. From 1971 to the mid-1980s, the average CDR increased steadily, indicating a growing incidence of divorce across European countries. This upward trend continued at a more moderate pace through the 1990s and into the early 2000s. A sharp rise is observed around the mid-2000s coinciding temporally with the expansion of paternity policies and the increase in their duration,

⁴ In accordance with the EU Work–Life Balance Directive (2019/1158), the 27 Member States were required, by August 2022, to provide a minimum of 2 weeks of paid paternity leave. Germany, however, does not offer a separate entitlement to paternity leave. This is permissible under the exemption provisions outlined in Article 20(6) and (7) of the Directive, which allow Member States to forgo the specific paternity leave requirement if equivalent support is provided through alternative arrangements (see Table B1 in Appendix B). Germany meets these conditions through its extensive parental leave provisions (in terms of time off) and parental allowance (in terms of financial compensation); however, as *Elternzeit* (the term for parental leave in Germany) can be taken until the child's 8th birthday, it is not included in the main analysis for the reasons detailed in Data section. As of 1 November 2022, Slovakia grants fathers 2 weeks of paid leave regardless of whether the mother is concurrently receiving maternity or parental allowance. While both parents may take parental leave simultaneously, only one parent may receive the parental allowance at any given time (Labor Code, Secs. 166 and 169).

⁵ The following missing data on CRD in Eurostat database has been completed using demographic yearbooks (<https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789210582209s006-c002/read>): France 1971–1994; Denmark 2022–2023; Germany 2022–2023; Ireland 2019–2020; Cyprus 2020–2023.

⁶ We also run regressions without those countries and results are robust. See section 4.1.

as discussed in the previous section. The CDR peaks slightly above 2.2 divorces per 1,000 people around 2007–2008. Following this peak, however, the CDR began a gradual decline, which became more pronounced after 2010. A particularly sharp drop is evident around 2020, likely reflecting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted administrative processes and may have postponed divorce proceedings. Although there is a slight recovery post-2020, the rate remains below pre-pandemic levels.⁷

2.3 Summary statistics

By merging the two datasets described above, we construct a long panel comprising the 17 European countries over the period 1971–2023, corresponding to the time span for which data on paternity leave legislation and crude divorce rates are available. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for our main sample of EU-27 countries, focusing on two main variables: the length of paid paternity leave (in weeks) and the crude divorce rate (per 1,000 inhabitants). Countries are ranked in ascending order according to the paternity leave. On average, European countries in the sample report a duration of paternity leave for fathers of 0.80 weeks, with a considerable variation. Finland provides the longest average duration of paternal leave (3.88 weeks), whereas Croatia, Germany, and Slovakia offer no leave.⁸ As for the crude divorce rate, the average across countries is 1.89 per 1,000 inhabitants. Latvia (3.63) reports the highest divorce rates, while Ireland (0.66) exhibits the lowest values. A direct comparison between the two columns does not reveal a clear relationship. For example, Finland exhibits both a relatively long average duration of paternity leave and a comparatively high crude divorce rate, while the Czech Republic, despite offering only minimal paternal leave, also reports high divorce rates. These mixed patterns highlight the need for further econometric analysis to rigorously assess the relationship.⁹

3. Empirical strategy

Our empirical strategy exploits cross-country variation in the timing of paid paternity leave implementation across Europe to identify the impact of these policy reforms on divorce rates. Since the exact date on which paid paternity leave was introduced can be considered exogenous, the use of the history of recognition of paid paternity leave allows us to analyze the causal link between them and divorce rates. In addition, we rely on cross-sectional and temporal differences in the duration of paid paternity leave entitlements. The strategy differentiates between the static and dynamic effects of paid paternity leave reforms. Initially, we estimated the following expression:

$$CDR_{ct} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Paid paternity leave}_{ct-1} + X_{ct-1} + \delta_c + \theta_t + \varepsilon_{ct} \quad (1)$$

Here, CDR_{ct} denotes the crude divorce rate in country c and year t , defined as the number of divorces in year t divided by the average population in that year, and expressed per 1,000 inhabitants. Our primary explanatory variable, Paid paternity leave $_{ct-1}$, is the first lag of a dummy variable that takes a value of ‘1’ when country c has implemented a paid paternity leave in year t , and ‘0’ otherwise. Holding constant the rest of the explanatory variables, the parameter β is interpreted as the average shift in the crude divorce rates after the law reform. Alternatively, we redefine that as the length of paid paternity leave (in weeks) in country c in the previous year. In this case, β_1 captures the effect of the duration of paid paternity leave on divorce rates across European countries. The explanatory variables are lagged, as the primary mechanism linking

⁷ We also conducted analyses using a pre-pandemic sample, and the conclusions remain the same. See section 4.1.

⁸ As detailed in Section 3, our main analysis relies on the first lag of paid paternity leave duration, which restricts the sample period to 1972–2023. For the same reason, Croatia offers no leave during the analyzed period as it was first introduced in 2023 (Act on Maternity and Parental Benefits, 12a).

⁹ Summary statistics for the remaining variables are reported in Table A1 and A2 in Appendix A.

paternity leave to divorce—shifts in gender behavior—requires time to influence marital dissolution.¹⁰ Moreover, a lag can also occur between the decision to divorce and the actual date of divorce (González-Val and Marcén, 2017). The vector X includes controls for policy-related measures. Without considering the parental leave legislation in its entirety, there may be some concerns about what exactly is being captured by the estimated coefficients on earmarked paternity leave laws. Thus, we control for the number of weeks of paid maternity leave, parental leave weeks specifically reserved for mothers and fathers, and any additional parental leave not explicitly reserved for either parent—herein designated as shared parental leave. Additionally, country fixed effects (δ_c) and year fixed effects (θ_t) are included, along with linear country-specific time trends, to control for evolving unobserved attributes that can vary across countries and/or over time.¹¹

A possible concern with the above strategy is that the impact of paid paternity leave entitlements has different short-term and long-term. To address this issue, we also estimated the dynamic response of divorce rates to paternity leave policies as in Wolfers (2006):

$$CDR_{ct} = \beta_0 + \sum_s \beta_s \text{Paid paternity leave}_{ct-s} + X_{ct-1} + \delta_c + \theta_t + \varepsilon_{ct} \quad (2)$$

This model differs from the previous specification by incorporating a series of dummy variables to capture the dynamic effects of the policy shock. Specifically, the variable Paid paternity leave $_{ct-s}$ is redefined as a set of dummy variables equal to ‘1’ if country c has had any form of paid paternity leave in place for s years as of year t , and ‘0’ otherwise. These dummies are intended to trace the full dynamic response of divorce rates following the introduction of paid paternity leave. A negative coefficient on the parameter β_s implies that the crude divorce rate in country c declined s years after the reform, whereas a positive coefficient indicates an increase. Again, we also add country fixed effects and year fixed effects, in addition to linear country-specific time trends, as in Equation (1). To further investigate the role of paternity leave in marital dissolution, we redefine the policy shock to reflect thresholds based on the minimum duration of leave entitlement. Specifically, we estimate dynamic effects separately for the recognition of paid paternity leave lasting at least 1, 2, 3, and 4 weeks.¹²

To further assess the validity of our identification strategy, we explore the potential presence of pre-trends by estimating an event study. The results, presented in Figure A1 in Appendix A, reveal no significant pre-treatment trends, lending support to the parallel trends assumption and reinforcing the credibility of our specification. In addition, Section 4.2 extends the analysis by examining potential mechanisms underlying the observed effects on divorce rates, focusing on changes in gender equality in both the labor market and within the household.

4. Results

4.1. Main results

Table 2 presents the estimates for Equation (1). First, we estimate the static effects of legal reforms providing any form of paid paternity leave on divorce rates in column (1). The estimated coefficient is not statistically significant; however, the coefficient turns negative and significant when we consider the length of the leave in column (2). It indicates that a one-week increase in the duration of paid paternity leave in the previous year decreases the divorce rate by 0.03 divorces

¹⁰ Following González and Marcén (2017), we consider 1 lag in our main analysis. Yet, as the duration of the lag is not clear, we have also tried alternative specifications adding 2 to 3 lags. Our conclusions do not change. See section 4.1.

¹¹ Our conclusions are maintained when including quadratic country-specific time trends, as shown in section 4.1.

¹² We use the first lag of each shock which allow us to maintain the same sample as when we estimate Equation (1).

per 1,000 inhabitants. To assess the dynamic impact of introducing paid paternity leave, we estimate Equation (2), with the results presented in Table 3. Column (1) shows that the provision of any form of paid paternity leave is associated with an increase in divorce rates over time. These findings may provide limited insights, given that many early paternity leave policies in our sample granted only very short durations—often less than one week—which are unlikely to trigger significant shifts in intra-household gender norms, a central pathway through which paternity leave reforms may affect marital stability.

Hence, to better capture the impact of leave policies on divorce, we examine legal reforms that grant paternity leave of at least a certain minimum length. Accordingly, the remaining columns report the effects of reforms providing paid paternity leave of at least 1, 2, 3, and 4 weeks, respectively. When we exclude from the analysis legal reforms granting less than one week of paternity leave, the estimated coefficients turn negative, though they are only significant in two periods and at the 10% level in one of them (see column (2)). Yet, a negative and statistically significant effect at the 1% level emerges from 3 years onward following the implementation of policies providing 2 weeks or more of paternity leave (see column (3)). In particular, reforms granting fathers at least 2 weeks of paid paternity leave are associated with a reduction in divorce rates of approximately 0.14 within 3 to 4 years following the reform. The magnitude of the effect grows over time, reaching 0.36 percentage points 15 years post-reform, which accounts for approximately 19% of the average crude divorce rate observed during the study period.¹³ Although the effects do not emerge until later periods, the size of the coefficients increases notably as the duration of leave is extended (see columns (4) and (5)).¹⁴

While all our previous specifications incorporate controls for unobservable characteristics that can vary at the state level and/or over time, we run additional regressions to check whether our findings are driven by omitted economic and/or demographic variables. The impact of these omitted variables, if correlated with the outcome of interest, could be captured by the coefficients measuring the effect of paid paternity leave legislation. To tackle this issue, we additionally incorporate controls for legal frameworks affecting divorce at the country and year levels. As gender equality is a central element of the underlying mechanism, other gender-related legislative changes may also shape divorce decisions, potentially leading to omitted variable bias if excluded. Specifically, we control for seven WBL indicators covering various legal dimensions influencing woman's working life: *mobility* indicator analyzes legal provisions that restrict women's freedom of movement; *workplace* indicator evaluates legislation that may limit women's access to employment opportunities; *Pay* indicator examines statutory measures influencing gender-based pay disparities; *Marriage* indicator assesses legal constraints associated with marriage and divorce; *Entrepreneurship* indicator investigates the extent to which legal structures facilitate or hinder women's ability to establish and operate businesses; *Assets* indicator considers legal limitations on women's rights to own, manage, and inherit property. *Pension* indicator examines the legal determinants that influence the adequacy of women's retirement benefits. There is one more indicator focused on paid leave policies, which is discussed in detail in the subsequent section. Indicator-level scores are calculated by averaging the responses to the five binary (yes/no) questions and then scaling the result to 100 (see Table B2 in Appendix B for a detailed description). Results in Table 4 show that even with the addition of these controls, the estimated coefficients bear substantial similarity. Another potential concern regarding our previous results on the impact of paternity leave legislation on divorce rates is the omission of other legal reforms that may also influence divorce. As demonstrated by González and Viitanen (2009), reforms facilitating access to divorce have affected divorce rates in Europe. Similarly, the replacement of sole custody regimes with legal provisions enabling joint custody has been associated with changes in divorce rates (González-Val & Marcén, 2012; 2017). To address this issue, we incorporate controls for unilateral divorce legislation—the legal change with the greatest variation

¹³ The average crude divorce rate in our sample is 1.89 divorces per 1000 people.

¹⁴ Note that these results should be interpreted with caution, as only a small number of countries in our sample can be observed 15 years after the introduction of paternity leave policies of four weeks or more.

during the period under study—as well as for adoption of laws permitting joint custody.¹⁵ Including these variables enables us to disentangle their influence on divorce from that of paid paternity leave in determining the behavior of EU divorce rates. These results are reported in Table 5. Our conclusions are maintained, and the coefficients do not change.

Although paternity leave reforms remain our preferred legislative focus, as outlined in the data section, we also re-estimate our models using detailed legislative data that capture any form of paid parental allowance available to fathers. We now exploit national and temporal variation in the total duration of paid leave entitlements for fathers (measured in weeks), which include both paternity leave and any portion of parental leave specifically reserved for their use. Additional parental leave weeks not explicitly reserved for either parent—herein designated as shared parental leave—have not been included. This relies on the assumption that mothers are more likely than fathers to take parental leave not specifically allocated to either parent (Ekberg et al., 2013). Following the same structure as in Table 3, Table 6 presents the dynamic effects of reforms granting paid parental leave of any duration, as well as thresholds of at 1, 2, 3, and 4 weeks. While the estimated effects are smaller in magnitude, the overall conclusions remain consistent.

To reinforce the robustness of previous results, we also conduct estimates incorporating quadratic trends and country-specific controls (the logarithm of real GDP per capita, the unemployment rate, and the female labor force participation rate (FLFP)) (see Tables A4 and A5 in Appendix A). We have additionally rerun the analysis using different subsamples. We drop those countries in which divorce was not legal during the whole period of study—Ireland, Malta, and Spain—and those offering no leave during the analyzed period—Croatia, Germany and Slovakia—(see Tables A6 and A7 in Appendix A). We have also experimented by excluding the year 2020 from the analysis, as potential delays in divorce proceedings may lead to the postponement of divorce cases. Overall, the results of these robustness checks further underscore the importance of providing extended paternity leave in reducing divorce rates.

4.2. Mechanisms

4.2.1. Gender equality in the labor market

The gender revolution theory (Goldscheider et al., 2015) centers on family dynamics, linking union dissolution to two distinct phases of change in gender roles. The first phase, which we focus on in this subsection, is characterized by a substantial increase in women's labor market opportunities and a corresponding rise in their financial independence. Evidence from various countries indicates that paid leave for fathers can enhance women's labor market outcomes (see a review in Canaan et al., 2022). For instance, in Denmark, Andersen (2018) and Druedahl et al. (2019) observe that paternity leave led to higher female earnings. Similarly, Farré & González (2019) document that Spain's 2-week paternity leave increased mothers' employment rates and earnings. Nevertheless, despite women's growing contributions as breadwinners, the division of labor within households often remains unaltered in the absence of greater paternal engagement. If paternity leave is not of sufficient duration to promote meaningful involvement by fathers in caregiving and to shift entrenched gender roles, traditional dynamics are likely to prevail. This imbalance places a disproportionate share of domestic responsibilities on women, which—combined with their increased financial independence—may strain family relationships and heighten the risk of union dissolution.

¹⁵ This information is obtained from González and Viitanen (2009), González-Val & Marcén (2017) each national legislation, the Commission on European Family Law, the Council of Europe, European Judicial Network in civil and commercial matters (<http://ec.europa.eu/civiljustice>), the European e-Justice Portal-Family Matters (<https://e-justice.europa.eu>).

In this subsection, we further examine how the expansion of paternity leave entitlements affects divorce rates and whether this relationship is mediated by enhanced labor market opportunities for women following childbirth. To that end, we rerun Equation (1) by using the Parenthood indicator from the WBL as our main explanatory variable. The Parenthood indicator gauges the effective implementation of laws enhancing women’s employment outcomes after having children, intending to advance gender equality at work. It analyzes three types of paid leave policies—maternity leave, paternity leave, and parental leave—and is based on five binary variables: (1) whether mothers are eligible for at least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave; (2) whether maternity leave benefits are fully administered by the government; (3) whether fathers have access to paid paternity leave; (4) whether paid parental leave is available; and (5) whether the law prohibits the dismissal of pregnant workers. The Parenthood score is calculated by averaging the answers to the five binary questions above and then scaling the result by 100. The highest possible score is 100, indicating equal rights and opportunities for men and women in the five areas of measurement (see Table B3 in Appendix B for a detailed description). Results are presented in Table 7. We find that countries with higher parenthood scores—reflecting stronger legal frameworks supporting women’s employment during and after pregnancy—tend to exhibit higher divorce rates. These results are consistent with the first phase of the gender revolution theory, suggesting that greater gender equality in the labor market following childbirth, and the resulting increase in women’s independence, may contribute to higher divorce rates. Hence, the coefficients reported in column (1) of Table 3 could reflect the effect of paid paternity leave entitlements on divorce rates, operating through the promotion of women’s professional careers after childbirth.

4.2.2. Gender equality within the household

The second phase of the gender revolution is marked by a shift in which men assume an equal or greater share of domestic responsibilities compared to women. According to the theory, this transition fosters a more balanced work–life dynamic and promotes greater gender equality within partnerships, which, in turn, enhances union stability (Goldscheider et al., 2015). Our previous findings thus far suggest a negative and statistically significant relationship between both paid paternity and parental leave entitlements for fathers of 2 weeks or more and divorce rates in Europe. The underlying argument is that taking such leave may foster greater paternal involvement in childcare, which can contribute to higher relationship satisfaction and, in turn, lower the likelihood of marital dissolution. To further explore this, an alternative to cross-country comparisons of statutory leave entitlements is to consider public expenditure on paternity leave. This metric may reflect the actual uptake of these policies and, therefore, a change in gender roles within the household.

In this subsection, we rerun Equation (1) by redefining our main explanatory variable as the first lag of the percentage of general government expenditure allocated to parental leave. In doing so, we utilize data from the OECD Social Expenditure Database (SOCX) on public spending on parental leave.¹⁶ A limitation of this dataset is that it does not disaggregate spending by gender; it includes expenditure on both fathers and mothers. Nevertheless, as illustrated in Figure 4, the variation over time captured by this measure appears to stem primarily from paid parental leave for fathers. The figure displays the temporal variation in the average length of paid parental leave by gender relative to the baseline year 1971. While maternal entitlements approximately doubled by the end of the period, paternal entitlements increased more than elevenfold. Additionally, the bottom panel of the figure helps rule out the possibility that changes in public expenditure are simply reflecting trends in fertility, as the total fertility rate (TFR) exhibits a consistent decline throughout the period under study. Even so, our empirical model includes controls for both the TFR and the duration of paid parental leave for mothers, to partially solve the concern that the estimated coefficient on public expenditure may capture country differences in these factors. Results are shown in Table 8. Our findings indicate that higher public expenditure on parental

¹⁶ <https://www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/social-expenditure-database-socx.html>

leave is associated with lower divorce rates, suggesting that our previous results may be linked to a rebalancing of gender roles within the household when a certain duration of paid leave is available.¹⁷

5. Conclusions

Since the 1970s, EU member states have gradually implemented paid paternity leave policies aimed at fostering gender equality in the labour market and encouraging a more balanced sharing of family responsibilities. These policies are particularly influential in shaping parental behaviour, as they are reserved exclusively for fathers, cannot be transferred to mothers, and are implemented around childbirth—a critical moment in the life course when behavioural change, especially among fathers, is more likely (Tanaka & Waldfogel, 2007). In turn, greater paternal involvement may influence family dynamics, particularly the risk of divorce, which is the primary focus of this study.

We examine both the static and dynamic effects of paid paternity leave reforms on crude divorce rates across European countries over approximately the last five decades. The findings indicate a positive but not significant association between the introduction of paternity leave—regardless of its duration—and crude divorce rates. However, when the length of paid leave is taken into account, a negative relationship emerges: countries that offer longer durations of paid paternity leave tend to experience lower divorce rates. We further exploit cross-country variation in the timing of paid paternity leave reforms using dynamic models based on a minimum duration of leave entitlement. While the introduction of any paid paternity leave is positively associated with divorce, the association becomes negative when focusing on policies providing 2 weeks or more of leave, and this effect persists over time. In particular, we observe a decline of 0.36 percentage points in the crude divorce rate 15 years after the implementation of legislation granting fathers at least 2 weeks of paid leave—a sizeable effect considering the average rate of 1.89 divorces per 1,000 people during the period under study. The effect becomes even more pronounced when the entitlement is extended to longer durations. Our estimates control for the number of weeks of paid leave granted to mothers under maternity leave, or to both parents under other parental leave policies, as well as for other national legislative changes that may influence divorce rates. Our conclusions are maintained when we extend the analysis to total paid leave reserved to fathers under both paternity and parental leave provisions. Additionally, this study has sought to explore the mechanisms underlying the main findings. Prior theoretical research suggests that paternity leave entitlements can influence union stability by promoting gender equality in two key dimensions: (1) improving women’s position in the labor market and (2) encouraging a more equitable distribution of domestic responsibilities. Supplementary analyses support this framework, drawing on two indicators: the parenthood indicator from the WBL, which serves as a measure of the legal environment supporting gender equality in the labor market post-childbirth, and public expenditure on parental leave, used as a proxy for paternal involvement in caregiving. While these findings align with theoretical expectations, they should be interpreted with caution due to the limitations of the data.

All in all, these results contribute to a growing body of literature on the broader implications of paternity leave entitlements, extending beyond their immediate effects on fertility or employment. They highlight the critical role of policy duration in implementing paternity leave, offering valuable insights for designing family policies that simultaneously promote gender equality and support family stability.

¹⁷ The findings should be taken with caution, given the limited sample size resulting from incomplete data on general government expenditure—particularly for Malta and Cyprus, and for select years in other countries.

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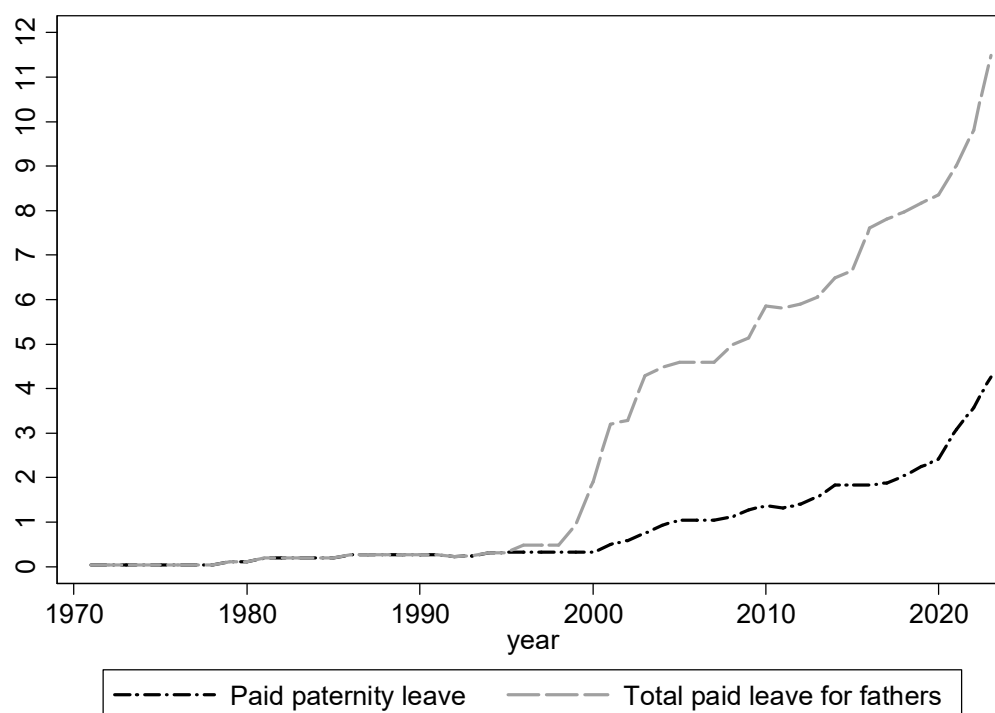
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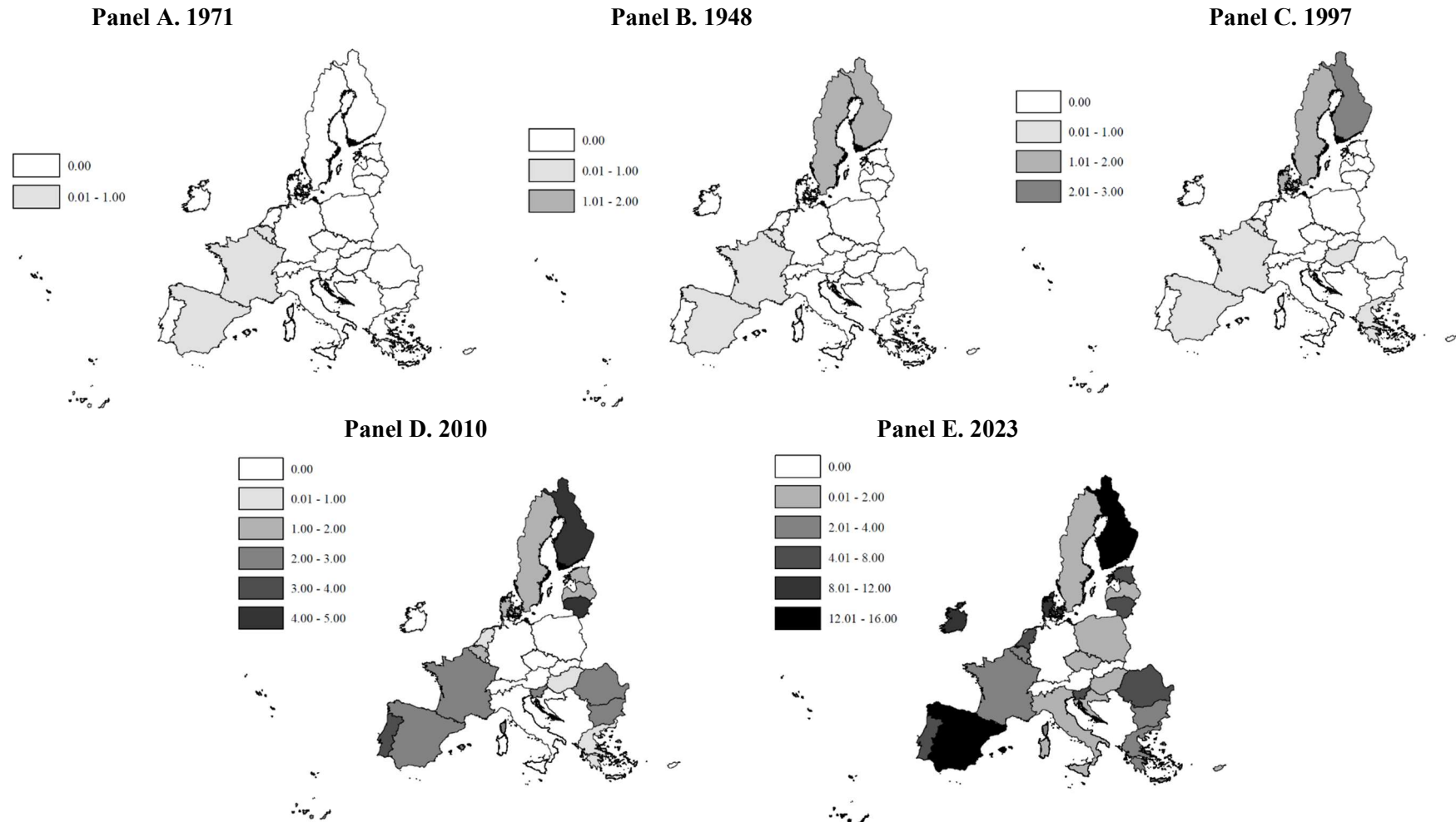
Figures

Figure 1: Average length of paid leave entitlements reserved for fathers (in weeks) in Europe over time



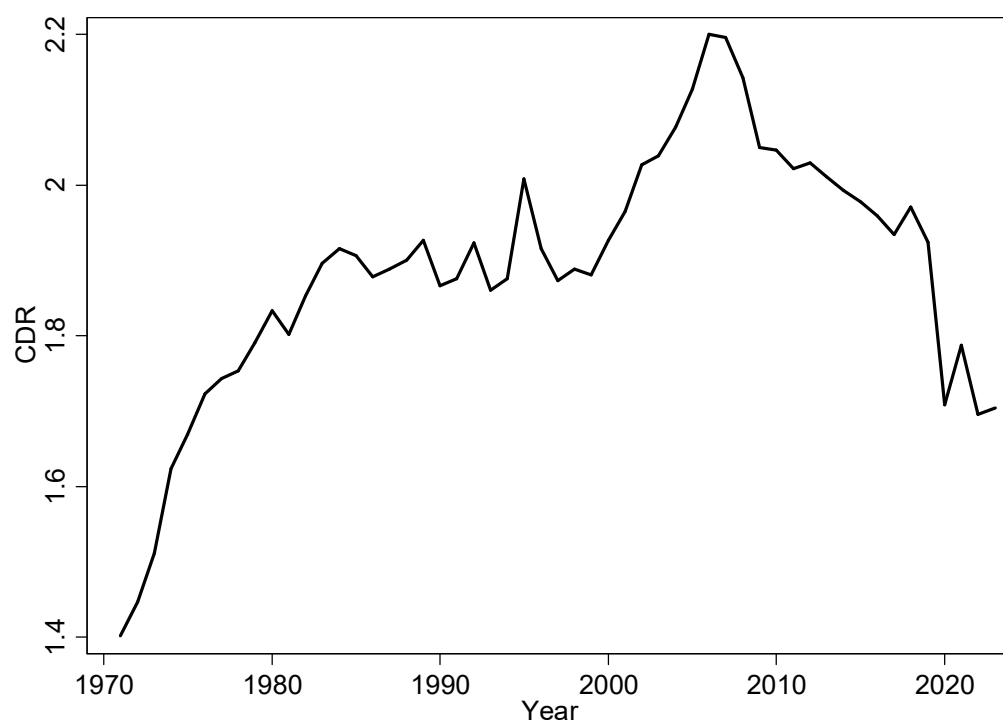
Note: Data comes from Women, Business and the Law (WBL) provided by World Bank Data. Paternity leave refers to paid leave entitlements reserved solely for fathers to be utilized immediately upon the birth of a child. Total leave for fathers comprises paid paternity leave duration combined with paid parental leave weeks explicitly allocated to them, which may be taken from childbirth up to the child's 6th, 8th, or 12th birthday, depending on national regulations.

Figure 2: Geographic variation in the paid paternity leave (in weeks) over time



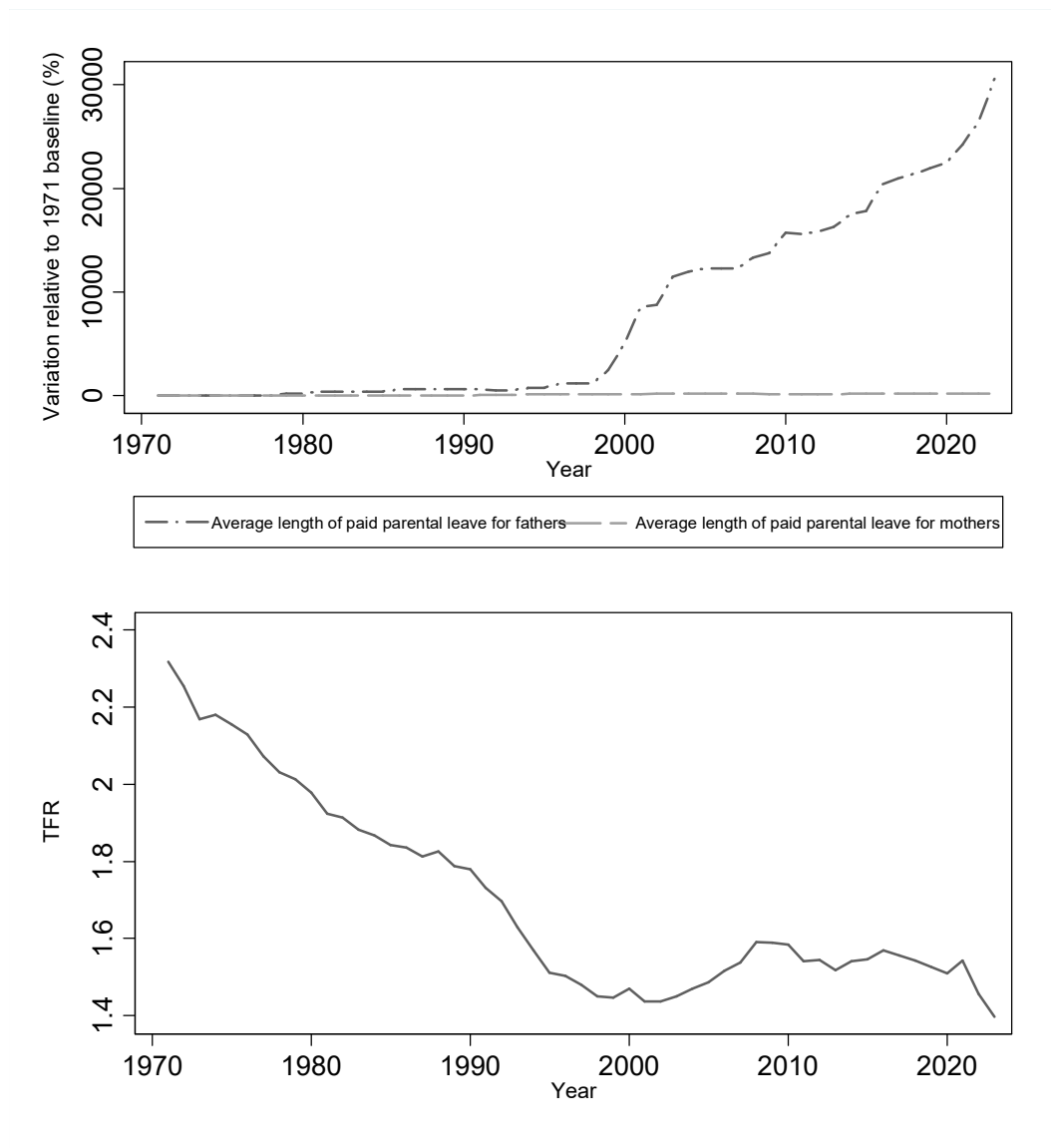
Notes: Darker colors correspond to higher duration of total paid paternity leave in each country and year.

Figure 3: Average CDR in Europe over time



Note: Data comes from Eurostat.

Figure 4: Evolution of temporal variation in average parental leave entitlements by gender relative to the 1971 baseline and average TFR



Note: Data on the length of total paid parental leave is from Women, Business, and the Law (WBL), provided by the World Bank Data. The average variation in parental leave entitlements by gender is calculated as: $\left(\frac{\text{the average length of total paid parental leave for fathers (or mothers) in year } t - \text{the corresponding average in 1971}}{\text{the corresponding average in 1971}} \right) \times 100$. Data on Total Fertility Rate (TFR) are sourced from the World Bank Data. The total fertility rate represents the number of children that would be born to a woman if she were to live to the end of her childbearing years and bear children in accordance with age-specific fertility rates of the specified year.

Tables

Table 1: Summary statistics for main variables by country

Country	Paid paternity leave (in weeks)	Crude divorce rate (per 1,000 inhabitants)
Croatia	0.00	1.18
Germany	0.00	1.96
Slovakia	0.00	1.66
Czechia	0.08	2.73
Cyprus	0.12	1.30
Italy	0.12	0.69
Malta	0.14	0.70
Austria	0.16	1.97
Greece	0.17	0.89
Ireland	0.17	0.66
Luxembourg	0.19	1.92
Netherlands	0.30	1.91
Poland	0.42	1.34
Hungary	0.44	2.34
Latvia	0.52	3.63
Bulgaria	0.54	1.43
Estonia	0.86	3.22
France	0.92	1.82
Belgium	1.02	2.13
Slovenia	1.14	1.13
Lithuania	1.15	3.13
Denmark	1.42	2.66
Sweden	1.62	2.41
Spain	1.72	1.33
Portugal	1.81	1.46
Romania	2.08	1.47
Finland	3.88	2.36
Mean	0.80	1.89
Std.dev	1.64	0.88

Notes: This table presents average values across UE countries for the two main variables used in estimates, namely, the first lag of the length of paid paternity leave (in weeks) and the first lag of the crude divorce rate. Countries are listed from lowest to highest mean total length of paid leave for fathers (in weeks). Paternity leave data comes from Women, Business and the Law (WBL), provided by World Bank Data. Crude divorce rates come from Eurostat.

Table 2: Static effects of paid paternity leave reforms on divorce rates across European countries

<i>D.V.</i> : CDR	(1)	(2)
Paid paternity leave _{t-1}	0.051 (0.038)	
Length of paid paternity leave _{t-1}		-0.030*** (0.010)
Year FE	Yes	Yes
Country FE	Yes	Yes
Country FE x time	Yes	Yes
Length of paid maternity leave	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for mothers	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for fathers	Yes	Yes
Length of shared parental leave	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,313	1,313
R-squared	0.905	0.905
D.V. Mean	1.89	1.89
D.V. Std. Dev.	0.88	0.88

Note: The panel dataset covers the 27-UE countries for the period 1971-2023. The dataset exhibits missing values due to historical legal restrictions on divorce in some countries, as well as to no data availability in certain cases. We estimate equation (1). The dependent variable in all columns is the crude divorce rate (CDR) by year and country. The explanatory variable in column (1) is the first lag of a dummy taking the value 1 if country *m* has paid paternity leave in year *t*, and 0 otherwise. We use the first lag of the length of paid paternity leave (in weeks) in column (2). All columns include controls for the length of paid maternity leave (in weeks), parental leave weeks specifically reserved for mothers and fathers, and any additional parental leave weeks not explicitly reserved for either parent—herein designated as shared parental leave. We use the first lag of these controls. We also include country fixed effects, year fixed effects, and linear country-specific time trends. Robust standard errors reported in parentheses. *** Significant at the 1% level, ** Significant at the 5% level, * Significant at the 10% level.

Table 3: Dynamic effects of paid paternity leave reforms on divorce rates across European countries

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Paid paternity leave of any length	Paid paternity leave of at least 1 week	Paid paternity leave of at least 2 weeks	Paid paternity leave of at least 3 weeks	Paid paternity leave of at least 4 weeks
<i>D.V.</i> : CDR					
First 2 years	0.041 (0.048)	0.026 (0.052)	-0.009 (0.052)	-0.069 (0.087)	-0.063 (0.078)
Years 3-4	0.038 (0.051)	-0.059 (0.057)	-0.135** (0.064)	-0.055 (0.086)	-0.035 (0.080)
Years 5-6	-0.004 (0.058)	-0.154** (0.068)	-0.200*** (0.066)	-0.037 (0.087)	-0.092 (0.087)
Years 7-8	0.151** (0.067)	-0.086 (0.072)	-0.258*** (0.068)	-0.028 (0.089)	-0.091 (0.100)
Years 9-10	0.201*** (0.058)	-0.056 (0.067)	-0.190*** (0.070)	-0.003 (0.085)	-0.077 (0.091)
Years 11-12	0.181*** (0.056)	-0.121* (0.066)	-0.259*** (0.069)	-0.188** (0.081)	-0.276*** (0.076)
Years 13-14	0.260*** (0.061)	-0.115 (0.076)	-0.288*** (0.074)	-0.218** (0.085)	-0.399*** (0.083)
Years 15 onwards	0.354*** (0.068)	-0.115 (0.082)	-0.359*** (0.081)	-0.289*** (0.105)	-0.640*** (0.122)
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE x time	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of paid maternity leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for mothers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for fathers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of shared parental leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,313	1,313	1,313	1,313	1,313
R-squared	0.908	0.905	0.907	0.905	0.907
D.V. Mean	1.89	1.89	1.89	1.89	1.89
D.V. Std. Dev.	0.88	0.88	0.88	0.88	0.88

Note: The panel dataset covers the 27-UE countries for the period 1971-2023. The dataset exhibits missing values due to historical legal restrictions on divorce in some countries, as well as to no data availability in certain cases. We estimate equation (2). The dependent variable in all columns is the crude divorce rate (CDR) by year and country. The set of dummy variables captures the entire dynamic response of CDR to the following policy shocks: the introduction of any paid paternity leave in column (1), paid paternity leave of at least 1 week in column (2), at least 2 weeks in column (3), at least 3 weeks in column (4), and at least 4 weeks in column (5). We use the first lag of each shock. All columns include controls for the length of paid maternity leave (in weeks), parental leave weeks specifically reserved for mothers and fathers, and any additional parental leave weeks not explicitly reserved for either parent—herein designated as shared parental leave. We use the first lag of these controls. We also include country fixed effects, year fixed effects, and linear country-specific time trends. Robust standard errors reported in parentheses. *** Significant at the 1% level, ** Significant at the 5% level, * Significant at the 10% level.

Table 4: Dynamic effects of paid paternity leave reforms on divorce rates across European countries, controlling for legislative frameworks affecting gender equality

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Paid paternity leave of any length	Paid paternity leave of at least 1 week	Paid paternity leave of at least 2 weeks	Paid paternity leave of at least 3 weeks	Paid paternity leave of at least 4 weeks
<i>D.V.</i> : CDR					
First 2 years	0.040 (0.047)	0.029 (0.050)	-0.006 (0.053)	-0.039 (0.089)	-0.014 (0.080)
Years 3-4	0.013 (0.051)	-0.084 (0.059)	-0.163** (0.067)	-0.059 (0.091)	0.031 (0.090)
Years 5-6	-0.036 (0.056)	-0.194*** (0.066)	-0.239*** (0.067)	-0.058 (0.084)	-0.066 (0.081)
Years 7-8	0.117* (0.068)	-0.114 (0.071)	-0.290*** (0.071)	-0.057 (0.096)	-0.073 (0.103)
Years 9-10	0.153*** (0.057)	-0.089 (0.067)	-0.235*** (0.074)	-0.026 (0.088)	-0.060 (0.092)
Years 11-12	0.125** (0.055)	-0.149** (0.064)	-0.308*** (0.072)	-0.203** (0.082)	-0.264*** (0.081)
Years 13-14	0.186*** (0.061)	-0.144** (0.073)	-0.337*** (0.077)	-0.217** (0.085)	-0.381*** (0.090)
Years 15 onwards	0.302*** (0.065)	-0.126 (0.080)	-0.384*** (0.086)	-0.242** (0.106)	-0.590*** (0.126)
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE x time	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of paid maternity leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for mothers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for fathers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of shared parental leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
WBL indicators	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,313	1,313	1,313	1,313	1,313
R-squared	0.912	0.910	0.912	0.910	0.911
D.V. Mean	1.89	1.89	1.89	1.89	1.89
D.V. Std. Dev.	0.88	0.88	0.88	0.88	0.88

Note: The panel dataset covers the 27-UE countries for the period 1971-2023. The dataset exhibits missing values due to historical legal restrictions on divorce in some countries, as well as to no data availability in certain cases. We estimate equation (2). The dependent variable in all columns is the crude divorce rate (CDR) by year and country. The set of dummy variables captures the entire dynamic response of CDR to the following policy shocks: the introduction of any paid paternity leave in column (1), paid paternity leave of at least 1 week in column (2), at least 2 weeks in column (3), at least 3 weeks in column (4), and at least 4 weeks in column (5). We use the first lag of each shock. All columns include controls for the length of paid maternity leave (in weeks), parental leave weeks specifically reserved for mothers and fathers, and any additional parental leave weeks not explicitly reserved for either parent—herein designated as shared parental leave. We additionally add WBL indicators measuring legal gender disparities affecting women's economic participation across their working life cycle in the following domains: Mobility, Workplace, Pay, Marriage, Entrepreneurship, Assets, and Pension. We use the first lag of these controls. We also include country fixed effects, year fixed effects, and linear country-specific time trends. Robust standard errors reported in parentheses. *** Significant at the 1% level, ** Significant at the 5% level, * Significant at the 10% level.

Table 5: Dynamic effects of paid paternity leave reforms on divorce rates across European countries, controlling for unilateral divorce and joint custody legislation

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>D.V.</i> : CDR	Paid paternity leave of any length	Paid paternity leave of at least 1 week	Paid paternity leave of at least 2 weeks	Paid paternity leave of at least 3 weeks	Paid paternity leave of at least 4 weeks
First 2 years	0.039 (0.046)	0.001 (0.049)	-0.033 (0.051)	-0.084 (0.081)	-0.056 (0.077)
Years 3-4	0.030 (0.049)	-0.082 (0.055)	-0.165*** (0.061)	-0.092 (0.079)	-0.024 (0.081)
Years 5-6	-0.022 (0.054)	-0.169*** (0.064)	-0.232*** (0.064)	-0.084 (0.083)	-0.068 (0.084)
Years 7-8	0.111* (0.067)	-0.119* (0.072)	-0.291*** (0.069)	-0.067 (0.089)	-0.049 (0.099)
Years 9-10	0.172*** (0.059)	-0.079 (0.068)	-0.219*** (0.072)	-0.043 (0.093)	-0.017 (0.092)
Years 11-12	0.135** (0.057)	-0.179*** (0.067)	-0.304*** (0.073)	-0.267*** (0.090)	-0.218*** (0.080)
Years 13-14	0.214*** (0.061)	-0.177** (0.075)	-0.329*** (0.077)	-0.282*** (0.090)	-0.325*** (0.088)
Years 15 onwards	0.300*** (0.066)	-0.203** (0.080)	-0.415*** (0.083)	-0.304*** (0.101)	-0.486*** (0.119)
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE x time	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of paid maternity leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for mothers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for fathers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of shared parental leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Unilateral divorce and joint custody legislation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,313	1,313	1,313	1,313	1,313
R-squared	0.911	0.909	0.911	0.909	0.910
D.V. Mean	1.89	1.89	1.89	1.89	1.89
D.V. Std. Dev.	0.88	0.88	0.88	0.88	0.88

Note: The panel dataset covers the 27-UE countries for the period 1971-2023. The dataset exhibits missing values due to historical legal restrictions on divorce in some countries, as well as to no data availability in certain cases. We estimate equation (2). The dependent variable in all columns is the crude divorce rate (CDR) by year and country. The set of dummy variables captures the entire dynamic response of CDR to the following policy shocks: the introduction of any paid paternity leave in column (1), paid paternity leave of at least 1 week in column (2), at least 2 weeks in column (3), at least 3 weeks in column (4), and at least 4 weeks in column (5). We use the first lag of each shock. All columns control for the length of paid maternity leave (in weeks), parental leave weeks specifically reserved for mothers and fathers, and any additional parental leave weeks not explicitly reserved for either parent—herein designated as shared parental leave. We additionally add controls for unilateral divorce and joint custody legislation. We use the first lag of these controls. We also include country fixed effects, year fixed effects, and linear country-specific time trends. Robust standard errors reported in parentheses. *** Significant at the 1% level, ** Significant at the 5% level, * Significant at the 10% level.

Table 6: Dynamic effects of total paid leave for fathers on divorce rates across European countries

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>D.V.</i> : CDR	Total paid leave for fathers of any length	Total paid leave for fathers of at least 1 week	Total paid leave for fathers of at least 2 weeks	Total paid leave for fathers of at least 3 weeks	Total paid leave for fathers of at least 4 weeks
First 2 years	0.024 (0.047)	0.033 (0.050)	0.008 (0.049)	0.004 (0.067)	-0.030 (0.066)
Years 3-4	0.013 (0.050)	-0.021 (0.057)	-0.075 (0.062)	-0.017 (0.072)	-0.043 (0.068)
Years 5-6	-0.019 (0.058)	-0.099 (0.066)	-0.147** (0.063)	-0.052 (0.076)	-0.073 (0.074)
Years 7-8	0.067 (0.063)	-0.037 (0.067)	-0.184*** (0.064)	-0.108 (0.078)	-0.130* (0.078)
Years 9-10	0.144** (0.059)	0.015 (0.067)	-0.101 (0.070)	-0.098 (0.095)	-0.114 (0.095)
Years 11-12	0.131** (0.057)	-0.062 (0.062)	-0.185*** (0.064)	-0.233*** (0.079)	-0.226*** (0.082)
Years 13-14	0.207*** (0.061)	-0.054 (0.068)	-0.206*** (0.065)	-0.243*** (0.082)	-0.253*** (0.085)
Years 15 onwards	0.324*** (0.068)	-0.048 (0.076)	-0.260*** (0.074)	-0.259*** (0.100)	-0.280*** (0.104)
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE x time	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of paid maternity leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for mothers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of shared parental leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,313	1,313	1,313	1,313	1,313
R-squared	0.908	0.905	0.906	0.906	0.906
D.V. Mean	1.89	1.89	1.89	1.89	1.89
D.V. Std. Dev.	0.88	0.88	0.88	0.88	0.88

Note: The panel dataset covers the 27-UE countries for the period 1971-2023. The dataset exhibits missing values due to historical legal restrictions on divorce in some countries, as well as to no data availability in certain cases. We estimate equation (2). The dependent variable in all columns is the crude divorce rate (CDR) by year and country. The set of dummy variables captures the entire dynamic response of CDR to the following policy shocks: the introduction of any paid leave for fathers in column (1), paid leave for fathers of at least 1 week in column (2), at least 2 weeks in column (3), at least 3 weeks in column (4), and at least 4 weeks in column (5). We use the first lag of each shock. Total paid leave for fathers comprises paternity leave weeks combined with parental leave specifically reserved for their use. All columns control for total paid leave for mothers defined as the sum of maternity leave, parental leave days explicitly designated for the mother, and any additional parental leave weeks not explicitly reserved for either parent—herein designated as shared parental leave. We use the first lag of these controls. We also include country fixed effects, year fixed effects, and linear country-specific time trends. Robust standard errors reported in parentheses. *** Significant at the 1% level, ** Significant at the 5% level, * Significant at the 10% level.

Table 7: The effect of the implementation of laws enhancing gender equality in the labor market after having children on divorce rates across European countries

<i>D.V.</i> : CDR	(1)	(2)
Parenthood indicator _{t-1}	0.003*** (0.001)	0.002** (0.001)
Year FE	Yes	Yes
Country FE	Yes	Yes
Country FE x time	Yes	Yes
WBL indicators	No	Yes
Observations	1,313	1,313
R-squared	0.902	0.906
D.V. Mean	1.89	1.89
D.V. Std. Dev.	0.88	0.88

Note: The panel dataset covers the 27-UE countries for the period 1971-2023. The dataset exhibits missing values due to historical legal restrictions on divorce in some countries, as well as to no data availability in certain cases. We estimate equation (1). The dependent variable in all columns is the crude divorce rate (CDR) by year and country. The explanatory variable in all columns is the first lag of the Parenthood indicator. The highest possible score is 100, indicating equal rights and opportunities for men and women in the five areas of measurement (see Table B3 in Appendix B for a detailed description). We use the first lag of these controls. All columns include country fixed effects, year fixed effects, and linear country-specific time trends. In column (2), we additionally control for the rest of the WBL indicators measuring legal gender disparities affecting women's economic participation across their working life cycle in the following domains: Mobility, Workplace, Pay, Marriage, Entrepreneurship, Assets, and Pension. Robust standard errors reported in parentheses. *** Significant at the 1% level, ** Significant at the 5% level, * Significant at the 10% level.

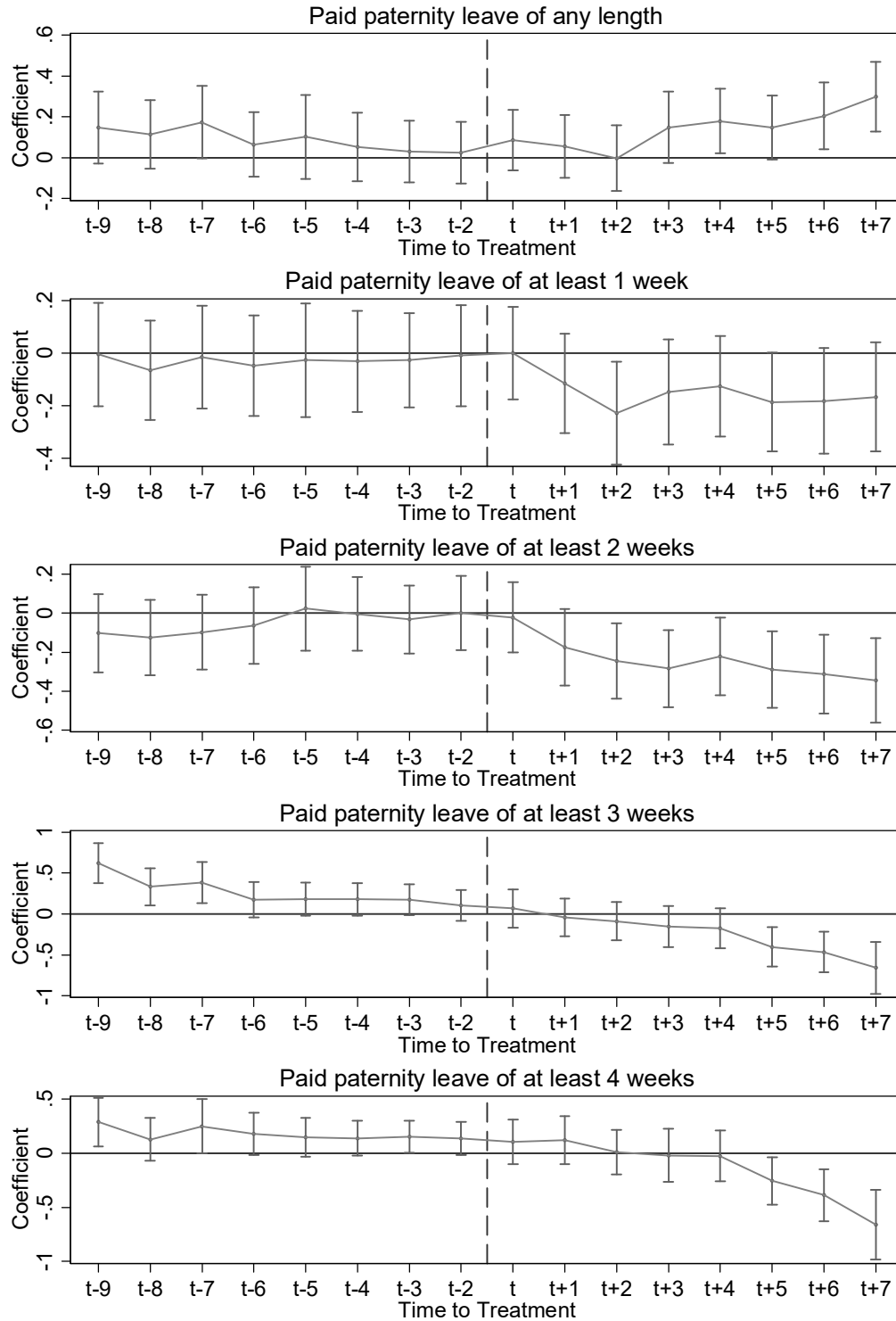
Table 8: The effect of public expenditure on total parental leave on divorce rates across European countries

<i>D.V.</i> : CDR	(1)	(2)
Percentage of general government expenditure _{t-1}	-0.075** (0.035)	-0.077** (0.035)
Year FE	Yes	Yes
Country FE	Yes	Yes
Country FE x time	Yes	Yes
Length of paid maternity leave	No	Yes
Length of parental leave for mothers	No	Yes
Length of parental leave for fathers	No	Yes
Length of shared parental leave	No	Yes
TFR	No	Yes
Observations	635	635
R-squared	0.920	0.927
D.V. Mean	2.02	2.02
D.V. Std. Dev.	0.68	0.68

Note: The panel dataset covers the 27-UE countries for the period 1971-2023. The dataset exhibits missing values due to historical legal restrictions on divorce in some countries, as well as to no data availability in certain cases. The variation in the sample size is due to the lack of information on the percentage of general government expenditure for Malta and Cyprus, and for some years in other countries. We estimate equation (1). The dependent variable in all columns is the crude divorce rate (CDR) by year and country. The main explanatory variable in all columns is the first lag of the Percentage of general government expenditure (in cash) on total parental leave for both mothers and fathers—that is, the sum of maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave explicitly designated for the mother or father, and any additional parental leave not explicitly reserved for either parent. We use the first lag of these controls. All columns include country fixed effects, year fixed effects, and linear country-specific time trends. In column (2), we additionally incorporate controls for the total fertility rate as well as for the length of paid maternity leave (in weeks), parental leave weeks specifically reserved for mothers and fathers, and any additional parental leave weeks not explicitly reserved for either parent—herein designated as shared parental leave. Robust standard errors reported in parentheses. *** Significant at the 1% level, ** Significant at the 5% level, * Significant at the 10% level.

Appendix A

Figure A1: Event studies



Note: These figures display the coefficients from the event studies for our main specifications, along with 95% confidence intervals. The event period is defined as the year in which the first lag of the length of paid paternity leave exceeds 0, 1, 2, 3 and 4 weeks. Due to limited observations in some years, the data is aggregated in 2-year intervals. Robust standard errors reported in parentheses. *** Significant at the 1% level, ** Significant at the 5% level, * Significant at the 10% level.

Table A1: Summary statistics on leave entitlements by country

Country	Length of paid maternity leave (in weeks)	Length of paid parental leave reserved to mothers (in weeks)	Length of paid parental leave reserved to fathers (in weeks)	Length of shared parental leave (in weeks)	Total length of paid leave for fathers (in weeks)
Croatia	37.67	3.87	3.87	0.00	3.87
Germany	14.00	2.47	2.47	44.67	2.47
Slovakia	28.58	0.00	0.00	81.46	0.00
Czechia	25.92	0.00	0.00	86.85	0.08
Cyprus	15.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.12
Italy	21.10	10.38	12.69	0.00	12.81
Malta	16.83	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.14
Austria	15.69	0.00	0.00	48.16	0.16
Greece	14.85	0.18	0.18	0.00	0.35
Ireland	21.83	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.17
Luxembourg	15.85	11.37	11.37	0.00	11.57
Netherlands	14.46	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.30
Poland	17.31	0.00	0.00	5.19	0.42
Hungary	18.92	0.00	0.00	68.15	0.44
Latvia	15.92	0.00	0.00	16.13	0.52
Bulgaria	28.54	0.00	0.00	26.28	0.54
Estonia	16.78	0.00	0.00	30.74	0.86
France	15.60	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.92
Belgium	14.60	6.68	6.68	0.00	7.70
Slovenia	17.10	7.14	7.14	0.00	8.28
Lithuania	17.00	0.00	0.00	17.83	1.15
Denmark	17.80	0.00	0.00	15.00	1.42
Sweden	1.48	4.37	4.37	45.16	5.98
Spain	15.53	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.72
Portugal	10.03	1.50	1.07	2.79	2.88
Romania	14.81	0.00	0.00	38.66	2.08
Finland	21.64	0.00	0.00	20.89	3.88
Mean	17.95	1.89	1.97	21.70	0.80
Std.dev	8.93	5.74	6.08	39.50	1.64

Notes: This table presents average values across UE countries. Countries are ordered from lowest to highest mean length of paid paternity leave, as in Table 1. Data comes from Women, Business and the Law (WBL) provided by World Bank Data.

Table A2: Summary statistics on indicators measuring legal frameworks for gender equality and public expenditure by country

Country	Parenthood indicator	Mobility indicator	Workplace indicator	Pay indicator	Marriage indicator	Entrepreneurship indicator	Asset indicator	Pension indicator	Percentage of general government expenditure on parental leave
Croatia	70.00	100.00	55.29	30.29	86.92	81.25	100.00	40.38	1.39
Germany	65.77	100.00	49.04	58.17	76.92	82.21	100.00	92.31	0.46
Slovakia	63.46	100.00	48.08	22.60	86.15	83.65	100.00	56.73	1.42
Czechia	73.46	100.00	45.67	62.98	86.15	81.73	100.00	50.00	1.52
Cyprus	47.06	75.00	51.47	65.69	90.20	81.37	91.37	98.53	-
Italy	70.77	95.19	62.02	81.25	60.77	82.69	98.08	64.42	0.35
Malta	60.00	100.00	100.00	75.00	90.00	100.00	100.00	50.00	-
Austria	67.69	97.12	73.56	61.06	79.62	81.25	89.62	47.60	0.45
Greece	57.87	93.09	53.19	57.98	73.19	78.72	83.40	48.40	0.36
Ireland	61.74	100.00	91.30	100.00	98.26	94.57	98.26	100.00	0.29
Luxembourg	68.46	98.56	63.94	79.33	68.46	77.40	97.31	84.62	1.16
Netherlands	49.62	100.00	63.46	80.77	82.69	88.46	100.00	100.00	0.04
Poland	64.62	100.00	42.79	35.58	89.23	80.29	100.00	42.79	0.81
Hungary	91.54	100.00	40.87	54.81	84.62	83.65	100.00	41.35	1.39
Latvia	73.46	100.00	51.92	36.54	83.08	81.73	100.00	49.04	1.51
Bulgaria	60.00	100.00	59.62	46.15	86.54	83.65	100.00	66.83	1.46
Estonia	78.46	100.00	50.96	35.58	80.00	80.77	100.00	28.37	2.61
France	80.00	96.67	67.22	50.56	68.44	87.22	85.78	90.56	0.61
Belgium	79.62	96.63	50.96	42.79	86.54	72.12	94.62	68.27	0.39
Slovenia	73.85	100.00	53.85	59.62	85.38	83.65	100.00	37.02	1.19
Lithuania	72.69	100.00	70.19	37.02	83.85	83.17	100.00	42.31	1.60
Denmark	81.15	100.00	57.69	81.25	83.85	81.73	100.00	89.42	0.99
Sweden	86.15	100.00	60.58	89.90	92.69	79.33	100.00	86.06	1.21
Spain	73.02	98.26	79.65	71.51	89.30	83.72	97.21	100.00	0.45
Portugal	63.46	87.02	47.12	78.85	68.46	70.19	93.85	88.46	0.49
Romania	64.23	100.00	67.79	68.75	87.31	82.21	100.00	26.44	1.13
Finland	71.92	100.00	58.17	82.69	88.85	81.25	100.00	83.17	1.36
Mean	69.68	97.60	57.80	59.69	82.37	81.70	97.41	65.06	0.97
Std.dev	22.55	8.16	33.62	33.06	14.99	15.02	10.38	30.37	0.65

Notes: This table present average values across UE countries. Countries are ordered from lowest to highest mean length of paid paternity leave as in Table 1. Data come from Women, Business and the Law (WBL) provided by World Bank Data and from the OECD Social Expenditure Database (SOCX).

Table A3: Robustness check #1: Adding two and three lags

<i>D.V.</i> : CDR	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Paid paternity leave _{t-2}	0.066 (0.040)			
Length of paid paternity leave _{t-2}		-0.030*** (0.011)		
Paid paternity leave _{t-3}			0.068 (0.042)	
Length of paid paternity leave _{t-3}				-0.032*** (0.012)
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE x time	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of paid maternity leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for mothers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for fathers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of shared parental leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,289	1,289	1,265	1,265
R-squared	0.906	0.906	0.906	0.906
D.V. Mean	1.90	1.90	1.91	1.91
D.V. Std. Dev.	0.88	0.88	0.87	0.87

Note: The panel dataset covers the 27-UE countries for the period 1971-2023. The dataset exhibits missing values due to historical legal restrictions on divorce in some countries, as well as to no data availability in certain cases. We estimate equation (1). The dependent variable in all columns is the crude divorce rate (CDR) by year and country. We use as explanatory variables the second and third lag of a dummy taking the value 1 if country *m* provides paid paternity leave in year *t*, and 0 otherwise, in columns (1) and (3), respectively. We use the second and third lag of the length of paid paternity leave (in weeks) in columns (2) and (4), respectively. All columns include controls for the length of paid maternity leave (in weeks), parental leave weeks specifically reserved for mothers and fathers, and any additional parental leave weeks not explicitly reserved for either parent—herein designated as shared parental leave. We use the second and third lags of these controls. We also include country fixed effects, year fixed effects, and linear country-specific time trends. Robust standard errors reported in parentheses. *** Significant at the 1% level, ** Significant at the 5% level, * Significant at the 10% level.

Table A4: Robustnesscheck#2: Adding quadratic country-specific time trends

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Paid paternity leave of any length	Paid paternity leave of at least 1 week	Paid paternity leave of at least 2 weeks	Paid paternity leave of at least 3 weeks	Paid paternity leave of at least 4 weeks
<i>D.V.</i> : CDR					
First 2 years	0.042 (0.047)	0.001 (0.051)	-0.079 (0.056)	-0.026 (0.072)	0.002 (0.072)
Years 3-4	-0.028 (0.053)	-0.087 (0.063)	-0.138** (0.055)	-0.018 (0.076)	0.037 (0.098)
Years 5-6	0.104 (0.071)	-0.002 (0.078)	-0.176*** (0.057)	-0.032 (0.091)	0.067 (0.120)
Years 7-8	0.149** (0.059)	0.049 (0.071)	-0.086 (0.054)	-0.019 (0.103)	0.127 (0.130)
Years 9-10	0.134** (0.062)	0.023 (0.073)	-0.112** (0.047)	-0.212** (0.107)	-0.016 (0.147)
Years 11-12	0.204*** (0.070)	0.080 (0.084)	-0.078 (0.048)	-0.253** (0.114)	-0.085 (0.173)
Years 13-14	0.215*** (0.081)	0.108 (0.100)	-0.037 (0.053)	-0.273** (0.125)	-0.099 (0.211)
Years 15 onwards	0.224** (0.096)	0.151 (0.113)	-0.112* (0.065)	-0.389** (0.154)	-0.354 (0.257)
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE x time	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE x time ²	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of paid maternity leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for mothers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for fathers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of shared parental leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,313	1,313	1,313	1,313	1,313
R-squared	0.938	0.938	0.938	0.938	0.938
D.V. Mean	1.89	1.89	1.89	1.89	1.89
D.V. Std. Dev.	0.88	0.88	0.88	0.88	0.88

Note: The panel dataset covers the 27-UE countries for the period 1971-2023. The dataset exhibits missing values due to historical legal restrictions on divorce in some countries, as well as to no data availability in certain cases. We estimate equation (2). The dependent variable in all columns is the crude divorce rate (CDR) by year and country. The set of dummy variables captures the entire dynamic response of CDR to the following policy shocks: the introduction of any paid paternity leave in column (1), paid paternity leave of at least 1 week in column (2), at least 2 weeks in column (3), at least 3 weeks in column (4), and at least 4 weeks in column (5). All columns include controls for the length of paid maternity leave (in weeks), parental leave weeks specifically reserved for mothers and fathers, and any additional parental leave weeks not explicitly reserved for either parent—herein designated as shared parental leave. We use the first lag of these controls. We also include country fixed effects, year fixed effects, and linear and quadratic country-specific time trends. *** Significant at the 1% level, ** Significant at the 5% level, * Significant at the 10% level.

Table A5: Robustness check #3: Adding country-specific controls

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>D.V.</i> : CDR	Paid paternity leave of any length	Paid paternity leave of at least 1 week	Paid paternity leave of at least 2 weeks	Paid paternity leave of at least 3 weeks	Paid paternity leave of at least 4 weeks
First 2 years	0.104** (0.044)	0.068 (0.046)	0.058 (0.051)	0.011 (0.073)	0.031 (0.073)
Years 3-4	0.086* (0.052)	-0.052 (0.055)	-0.106* (0.063)	-0.047 (0.075)	0.019 (0.072)
Years 5-6	0.005 (0.057)	-0.202*** (0.065)	-0.184*** (0.066)	-0.052 (0.076)	0.014 (0.085)
Years 7-8	0.150** (0.075)	-0.179** (0.076)	-0.266*** (0.072)	-0.085 (0.093)	0.017 (0.099)
Years 9-10	0.173*** (0.061)	-0.188*** (0.072)	-0.211*** (0.076)	-0.088 (0.102)	0.056 (0.098)
Years 11-12	0.142** (0.063)	-0.272*** (0.071)	-0.272*** (0.075)	-0.308*** (0.095)	-0.146 (0.090)
Years 13-14	0.175*** (0.068)	-0.311*** (0.076)	-0.306*** (0.080)	-0.359*** (0.099)	-0.250** (0.102)
Years 15 onwards	0.245*** (0.082)	-0.390*** (0.091)	-0.377*** (0.095)	-0.409*** (0.123)	-0.400*** (0.134)
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE x time	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of paid maternity leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of shared parental	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
TFR	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
FLFP	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Log (GDP per capita)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Unemployment rate	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	931	931	931	931	931
R-squared	0.915	0.917	0.917	0.915	0.915
D.V. Mean	1.89	1.89	1.89	1.89	1.89
D.V. Std. Dev.	0.74	0.74	0.74	0.74	0.74

Note: The panel dataset covers the 27-UE countries for the period 1971-2023. The dataset exhibits missing values due to historical legal restrictions on divorce in some countries, as well as to no data availability in certain cases. The variation in the sample size arises from missing values in country-specific controls for certain countries and years. We estimate equation (2). The dependent variable in all columns is the crude divorce rate (CDR) by year and country. The set of dummy variables captures the entire dynamic response of CDR to the following policy shocks: the introduction of any paid paternity leave in column (1), paid paternity leave of at least 1 week in column (2), at least 2 weeks in column (3), at least 3 weeks in column (4), and at least 4 weeks in column (5). We use the first lag of each shock. All columns include controls for the length of paid maternity leave (in weeks), parental leave weeks specifically reserved for mothers and fathers, and any additional parental leave weeks not explicitly reserved for either parent—herein designated as shared parental leave. We use the first lag of these controls. We also include country fixed effects, year fixed effects, linear time trends, as well as additional country-specific controls. Robust standard errors reported in parentheses. *** Significant at the 1% level, ** Significant at the 5% level, * Significant at the 10% level.

Table A6: Robustness check #4: Excluding Ireland, Malta and Spain

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Paid paternity leave of any length	Paid paternity leave of at least 1 week	Paid paternity leave of at least 2 weeks	Paid paternity leave of at least 3 weeks	Paid paternity leave of at least 4 weeks
<i>D.V.</i> : CDR					
First 2 years	0.052 (0.049)	0.012 (0.053)	-0.029 (0.055)	-0.012 (0.094)	-0.002 (0.080)
Years 3-4	0.029 (0.050)	-0.059 (0.057)	-0.142** (0.064)	0.047 (0.086)	0.069 (0.075)
Years 5-6	-0.004 (0.059)	-0.148** (0.070)	-0.200*** (0.068)	0.075 (0.074)	0.022 (0.071)
Years 7-8	0.155** (0.069)	-0.078 (0.074)	-0.264*** (0.070)	0.032 (0.091)	-0.039 (0.101)
Years 9-10	0.202*** (0.059)	-0.039 (0.069)	-0.182** (0.071)	0.052 (0.086)	-0.027 (0.091)
Years 11-12	0.172*** (0.057)	-0.088 (0.066)	-0.231*** (0.068)	-0.121 (0.081)	-0.221*** (0.075)
Years 13-14	0.253*** (0.062)	-0.082 (0.076)	-0.260*** (0.074)	-0.146* (0.084)	-0.341*** (0.082)
Years 15 onwards	0.371*** (0.069)	-0.094 (0.081)	-0.343*** (0.079)	-0.218** (0.105)	-0.584*** (0.120)
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE x time	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of paid maternity leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for mothers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for fathers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of shared parental leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,235	1,235	1,235	1,235	1,235
R-squared	0.905	0.902	0.904	0.902	0.904
D.V. Mean	1.95	1.95	1.95	1.95	1.95
D.V. Std. Dev.	0.87	0.87	0.87	0.87	0.87

Note: The panel dataset covers the 27-UE countries for the period 1971-2023. The dataset exhibits missing values due to historical legal restrictions on divorce in some countries, as well as to no data availability in certain cases. The variation in sample size is due to the exclusion of Ireland, Malta, and Spain from our sample. We estimate equation (2). The dependent variable in all columns is the crude divorce rate (CDR) by year and country. The set of dummy variables captures the entire dynamic response of CDR to the following policy shocks: the introduction of any paid paternity leave in column (1), paid paternity leave of at least 1 week in column (2), at least 2 weeks in column (3), at least 3 weeks in column (4), and at least 4 weeks in column (5). We use the first lag of each shock. All columns include controls for the length of paid maternity leave (in weeks), parental leave weeks specifically reserved for mothers and fathers, and any additional parental leave weeks not explicitly reserved for either parent—herein designated as shared parental leave. We use the first lag of these controls. We also include country fixed effects, year fixed effects, and linear country-specific time trends. Robust standard errors reported in parentheses. *** Significant at the 1% level, ** Significant at the 5% level, * Significant at the 10% level.

Table A7: Robustness check #5: Excluding Croatia, Germany and Slovakia

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Paid paternity leave of any length	Paid paternity leave of at least 1 week	Paid paternity leave of at least 2 weeks	Paid paternity leave of at least 3 week	Paid paternity leave of at least 4 weeks
<i>D.V.</i> : CDR					
First 2 years	0.021 (0.048)	0.014 (0.052)	-0.027 (0.053)	-0.044 (0.089)	-0.038 (0.079)
Years 3-4	0.006 (0.051)	-0.090 (0.059)	-0.176*** (0.067)	-0.035 (0.086)	-0.019 (0.078)
Years 5-6	-0.036 (0.057)	-0.173** (0.068)	-0.229*** (0.066)	-0.019 (0.087)	-0.068 (0.088)
Years 7-8	0.123* (0.067)	-0.097 (0.070)	-0.278*** (0.065)	0.006 (0.084)	-0.058 (0.096)
Years 9-10	0.179*** (0.059)	-0.064 (0.067)	-0.209*** (0.070)	0.045 (0.086)	-0.028 (0.093)
Years 11-12	0.163*** (0.058)	-0.125* (0.066)	-0.270*** (0.069)	-0.114 (0.087)	-0.200** (0.084)
Years 13-14	0.252*** (0.061)	-0.106 (0.075)	-0.292*** (0.073)	-0.136 (0.091)	-0.326*** (0.092)
Years 15 onwards	0.361*** (0.068)	-0.087 (0.083)	-0.345*** (0.082)	-0.183* (0.110)	-0.540*** (0.128)
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE x time	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of paid maternity leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for mothers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for fathers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of shared parental leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,157	1,157	1,157	1,157	1,157
R-squared	0.912	0.909	0.911	0.909	0.910
D.V. Mean	1.93	1.93	1.93	1.93	1.93
D.V. Std. Dev.	0.92	0.92	0.92	0.92	0.92

Note: The panel dataset covers the 27-UE countries for the period 1971-2023. The dataset exhibits missing values due to historical legal restrictions on divorce in some countries, as well as to no data availability in certain cases. The variation in sample size is due to the exclusion of Croatia, Germany, and Slovakia from our sample. We estimate equation (2). The dependent variable in all columns is the crude divorce rate (CDR) by year and country. The set of dummy variables captures the entire dynamic response of CDR to the following policy shocks: the introduction of any paid paternity leave in column (1), paid paternity leave of at least 1 week in column (2), at least 2 weeks in column (3), at least 3 weeks in column (4), and at least 4 weeks in column (5). We use the first lag of each shock. All columns include controls for the length of paid maternity leave (in weeks), parental leave weeks specifically reserved for mothers and fathers, and any additional parental leave weeks not explicitly reserved for either parent—herein designated as shared parental leave. We use the first lag of these controls. We also include country fixed effects, year fixed effects, and linear country-specific time trends. Robust standard errors reported in parentheses. *** Significant at the 1% level, ** Significant at the 5% level, * Significant at the 10% level.

Table A8: Robustness check #6: Using pre-COVID-19 period

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Paid paternity leave of any length	Paid paternity leave of at least 1 week	Paid paternity leave of at least 2 weeks	Paid paternity leave of at least 3 week	Paid paternity leave of at least 4 weeks
<i>D.V.</i> : CDR					
First 2 years	0.080 (0.054)	0.024 (0.059)	-0.013 (0.060)	0.088 (0.112)	-0.012 (0.122)
Years 3-4	0.093* (0.052)	-0.027 (0.059)	-0.107* (0.063)	0.051 (0.078)	-0.025 (0.075)
Years 5-6	0.018 (0.059)	-0.147** (0.066)	-0.200*** (0.065)	0.072 (0.065)	-0.022 (0.066)
Years 7-8	0.152** (0.076)	-0.084 (0.080)	-0.268*** (0.071)	0.035 (0.079)	-0.098 (0.108)
Years 9-10	0.227*** (0.071)	-0.082 (0.080)	-0.235*** (0.079)	0.067 (0.082)	-0.066 (0.096)
Years 11-12	0.251*** (0.068)	-0.145* (0.082)	-0.312*** (0.082)	-0.104 (0.103)	-0.259*** (0.094)
Years 13-14	0.329*** (0.074)	-0.079 (0.100)	-0.276*** (0.093)	-0.105 (0.113)	-0.375*** (0.108)
Years 15 onwards	0.369*** (0.077)	-0.101 (0.104)	-0.290*** (0.100)	-0.246** (0.119)	-0.619*** (0.154)
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE x time	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of paid maternity leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for mothers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of parental leave for fathers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of shared parental leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,217	1,217	1,217	1,217	1,217
R-squared	0.916	0.914	0.915	0.914	0.914
D.V. Mean	1.91	1.91	1.91	1.91	1.91
D.V. Std. Dev.	0.91	0.91	0.91	0.91	0.91

Note: The panel dataset covers the 27-UE countries for the period 1971-2019. The dataset exhibits missing values due to historical legal restrictions on divorce in some countries, as well as to no data availability in certain cases. We estimate equation (2). The dependent variable in all columns is the crude divorce rate (CDR) by year and country. The set of dummy variables captures the entire dynamic response of CDR to the following policy shocks: the introduction of any paid paternity leave in column (1), paid paternity leave of at least 1 week in column (2), at least 2 weeks in column (3), at least 3 weeks in column (4), and at least 4 weeks in column (5). We use the first lag of each shock. All columns include controls for the length of paid maternity leave (in weeks), parental leave weeks specifically reserved for mothers and fathers, and any additional parental leave weeks not explicitly reserved for either parent—herein designated as shared parental leave. We use the first lag of these controls. We also include country fixed effects, year fixed effects, and linear country-specific time trends. Robust standard errors reported in parentheses. *** Significant at the 1% level, ** Significant at the 5% level, * Significant at the 10% level.

Appendix B

Table B1: Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and careers

<i>Article 4. Paternity leave</i>
<p>1. Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that fathers or, where and insofar as recognised by national law, equivalent second parents, have the right to paternity leave of 10 working days that is to be taken on the occasion of the birth of the worker's child. Member States may determine whether to allow paternity leave to be taken partly before or only after the birth of the child and whether to allow such leave to be taken in flexible ways.</p> <p>2. The right to paternity leave shall not be made subject to a period of work qualification or to a length of service qualification.</p> <p>3. The right to paternity leave shall be granted irrespective of the worker's marital or family status, as defined by national law.</p>
<i>Article 5. Parental leave</i>
<p>1. Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that each worker has an individual right to parental leave of four months that is to be taken before the child reaches a specified age, up to the age of eight, to be specified by each Member State or by collective agreement. That age shall be determined with a view to ensuring that each parent is able to exercise their right to parental leave effectively and on an equal basis.</p> <p>2. Member States shall ensure that two months of parental leave cannot be transferred.</p>
<i>Article 8. Payment or allowance</i>
<p>1. In accordance with national circumstances, such as national law, collective agreements or practice, and taking into account the powers delegated to the social partners, Member States shall ensure that workers who exercise their right to leave provided for in Article 4(1) or Article 5(2) receive a payment or an allowance in accordance with paragraphs 2 and 3 of this Article.</p> <p>2. With regard to paternity leave as referred to in Article 4(1), such payment or allowance shall guarantee an income at least equivalent to that which the worker concerned would receive in the event of a break in the worker's activities on grounds connected with the worker's state of health, subject to any ceiling laid down in national law. Member States may make the right to a payment or an allowance subject to periods of previous employment, which shall not exceed six months immediately prior to the expected date of the birth of the child.</p> <p>3. With regard to parental leave as referred to in Article 5(2), such payment or allowance shall be defined by the Member State or the social partners and shall be set in such a way as to facilitate the take-up of parental leave by both parents.</p>
<i>Article 20. Transposition</i>
<p>6. For the purposes of complying with Articles 4, 5, 6 and 8 of this Directive and with Directive 92/85/EEC, Member States may take into account any period of, and payment or allowance with respect to, family-related time off work, in particular maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave and carers' leave, available at national level which is above the minimum standards provided for in this Directive or in Directive 92/85/EEC, provided that the minimum requirements for such leave are met and that the general level of protection provided to workers in the areas covered by those Directives is not reduced.</p> <p>7. Where Member States ensure a payment or an allowance of at least 65 % of the worker's net wage, which may be subject to a ceiling, for at least six months of parental leave for each parent, they may decide to maintain such system rather than provide for the payment or allowance referred to in Article 8(2).</p>

Notes: This table summarizes the provisions from Directive (EU) 2019/1158 referenced in the main text. The full text of the Directive can be consulted at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2019/1158/oj/eng>

Table B1: The eight WBL indicators and questions

Indicator	Questions
Mobility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can a woman choose where to live in the same way as a man? 2. Can a woman travel outside her home in the same way as a man? 3. Can a woman apply for a passport in the same way as a man? 4. Can a woman travel outside the country in the same way as a man?
Workplace	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can a woman get a job in the same way as a man? 2. Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender? 3. Is there legislation on sexual harassment in employment? 4. Are there criminal penalties or civil remedies for sexual harassment in
Pay	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value? 2. Can a woman work at night in the same way as a man? 3. Can a woman work in a job deemed dangerous in the same way as a man? 4. Can a woman work in an industrial job in the same way as a man?
Marriage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is the law free of legal provisions that require a married woman to obey her 2. Can a woman be “head of household” in the same way as a man? 3. Is there legislation specifically addressing domestic violence? 4. Can a woman obtain a judgment of divorce in the same way as a man? 5. Does a woman have the same rights to remarry as a man?
Parenthood	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is paid leave of at least 14 weeks available to mothers? 2. Does the government administer 100 percent of maternity leave benefits? 3. Is paid leave available to fathers? 4. Is there paid parental leave? 5. Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?
Entrepreneurship	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does the law prohibit discrimination in access to credit based on gender? 2. Can a woman sign a contract in the same way as a man? 3. Can a woman register a business in the same way as a man? 4. Can a woman open a bank account in the same way as a man?
Assets	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do women and men have equal ownership rights to immovable property? 2. Do sons and daughters have equal rights to inherit assets from their parents? 3. Do male and female surviving spouses have equal rights to inherit assets? 4. Does the law grant spouses equal administrative authority over assets during 5. Does the law provide for the valuation of nonmonetary contributions?
Pension	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is the age at which women and men can retire with full pension benefits the 2. Is the age at which women and men can retire with partial pension benefits the 3. Is the mandatory retirement age for women and men the same? 4. Are periods of absence due to childcare accounted for in pension benefits?

Note: Data comes from Women, Business and the Law 2024 database. Responses are coded as 1 for “yes” and 0 for “no”. The score for each indicator is calculated by taking the unweighted average of responses to the questions within that indicator and then scaling that value to a maximum of 100.

Table B3: The five component variables of the Parenthood indicator

Variable	Definition
Whether paid leave of at least 14 weeks is available to mothers	A score of 1 is assigned when national legislation guarantees mothers at least 14 weeks (equivalent to 98 calendar days) of paid leave in connection with childbirth, whether through maternity leave, parental leave, or a combination thereof. Conversely, a score of 0 is recorded if the law either does not provide for paid leave for mothers or mandates less than 14 weeks of such leave
Whether the government administers 100 percent of maternity leave benefits	This scoring framework evaluates the administrative structure and financing mechanisms of maternity leave benefits through a binary classification system. A score of 1 is assigned when leave benefits are exclusively administered through governmental entities, encompassing mandatory social insurance programs (e.g., social security systems), public funding mechanisms, government-mandated private insurance schemes, or employer reimbursement arrangements for maternity benefits paid directly to employees. A score of 0 is allocated under several conditions: (a) when employers bear any portion of the financial burden, (b) when mandatory contributions or taxation apply exclusively to female employees, (c) when the social insurance scheme providing maternity benefits operates on a voluntary basis, or (d) when no compensated leave provisions exist for expectant or new mothers.
Whether paid leave is available to fathers	This scoring system evaluates statutory provisions for paternal leave entitlements using a binary classification scheme. A score of 1 is allocated when legislation guarantees fathers either: (a) a minimum of one day of compensated paternity leave following childbirth, (b) designated portions of paid parental leave exclusively reserved for fathers through non-transferable allocation mechanisms or paternal quotas, or (c) individual entitlement to paid parental leave. Conversely, a score of 0 is assigned in cases where legal frameworks fail to provide fathers with guaranteed compensated paternity leave or specific birth-related leave provisions, or when such allowances require deduction from existing annual or sick leave entitlements
Whether there is paid parental leave	This scoring framework assesses legal provisions for parental leave entitlements through a dichotomous measure. A score of 1 is attributed when statutory frameworks provide parents with compensated full-time parental leave under any of the following conditions: (a) shared parental leave arrangements between both parents with a minimum duration of two weeks, (b) individual entitlements permitting each parent to access at least one week of leave independently, or (c) equivalent duration of paid maternity and paternity leave provisions. A score of 0 is assigned when legislative frameworks lack mandatory compensated parental leave policies.

Whether dismissal of pregnant workers is prohibited

This scoring mechanism evaluates legal protections against pregnancy-based employment discrimination using a binary classification system. A score of 1 is assigned when legislation provides comprehensive anti-dismissal protections for pregnant employees through: (a) explicit statutory prohibition of termination based on pregnancy status, (b) designation of pregnancy as an inadmissible ground for contract termination, or (c) classification of pregnancy-related dismissals as unlawful, unfair, or wrongful termination. A score of 0 is allocated when legal frameworks either lack provisions protecting pregnant workers from dismissal or provide only limited protections that restrict coverage to specific periods (during maternity leave or partial pregnancy duration) or circumstances (pregnancy-related illness or disability).

Note: Data comes from Women, Business and the Law 2024 database. Responses are coded as 1 for “yes” and 0 for “no”. The score for parenthood indicator is calculated by taking the unweighted average of responses to the five questions and then scaling that value to a maximum of 100.