

PRESS RELEASE

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Mothers in Western Germany Work Less than Those in the East – This Amounts to Two Months per Year, Study Reveals

- **Social norms in the west discourage full-time work for mothers**
- **EPOS Economic Research Center at Bonn and Mannheim presents new paper**

Bonn, Mannheim, 10.06.2026 – **West German mothers work about two months less per year compared to mothers in the east. According to new economic research, the gap in working hours has not changed more than three decades after reunification. This is not only important in light of demographic change and the shortage of skilled labor, but also for policies helping mothers to better combine career and family life, such as parental leave and childcare services. The researchers argue that economic policies alone cannot raise female participation in employment as long as traditional beliefs about a mother’s role keep them at home. The study is published by the EPOS Economic Research Center at the Universities of Bonn and Mannheim in the discussion paper, “Economic Incentives or Social Norms? Labor Supply Differentials between East and West German Mothers”.**

“We used the large dataset of the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) from 2000 until 2017 to simulate the effects of economic incentives and social factors on mothers’ employment decisions,” says Zainab Iftikhar from the EPOS Economic Research Center. “We find that the traditional role model of a mother – staying at home to care for her children – is by far the most important factor for employment decisions. In the west, this traditional belief is still widely held – limiting the effects of policies designed for better combining work and family life.”

The findings suggest that higher wages partly compensate working mothers in the western states for disregarding the traditional role model. The researchers caution, that any policies reducing this compensation could have amplified negative effects on female employment.

Maternal labor market participation in the east and west

Overall, the female employment rate has increased since reunification and converged to around 75 percent in both regions, according to the Federal Statistical Office of Germany. However, different work-time models of mothers continue to characterize the two regions. The current study shows: In the west, the proportion of mothers with children under the age of twelve who worked full-time was only about half that in the east.

PRESS RELEASE

The eastern states inherited a culture of full-time working mothers, which is reflected in the figures, although the share declined by about 13 percentage points between the year 2000 and 2017. In both regions, women often work part-time after giving birth. German governments have aimed to raise the number of hours worked by women. However, the researchers suggest that policies, such as parental allowances or childcare subsidies, should be complemented by additional measures helping couples to share parenting duties more equally.

“One proposal would be to extend existing paternity leave and provide better pay for it,” says Zainab Iftikhar. “Generally speaking, it is difficult to change social norms. As long as traditional beliefs about the roles of fathers and mothers persist, they can limit the effectiveness of economic policy tools.”

The presented discussion paper is a publication without peer review of the Collaborative Research Center Transregio 224 EPoS. Access the full discussion paper here:

<https://www.crctr224.de/research/discussion-papers/archive/dp753>

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The Collaborative Research Center (CRC) Transregio 224 EPoS

Established in 2018, [the Collaborative Research Center Transregio 224 EPoS](https://www.crctr224.de), a cooperation of the universities Bonn and Mannheim, is a long-term research institution funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG). EPoS addresses three key societal challenges: how to promote equality of opportunity; how to regulate markets in light of the internationalization and digitalization of economic activity; and how to safeguard the stability of the financial system.

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