

3. Gender, family, and policy in the Netherlands: reconciling work and care for children in the 21st century

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INTRODUCTION

Significant advancements have been made in gender equality in recent decades in the Netherlands. Increases in women's labour market participation, girls' and women's participation in (higher) education, and the rapid expansion of childcare services are notable historical developments (e.g., van den Brakel et al., 2020; Yerkes and den Dulk, 2015). More recently, gender equality has improved through the introduction of five days of paid birth leave for fathers and partners in 2019, the expansion of this leave to six weeks in 2021, and the 2021 introduction of a gender quota to increase diversity in corporate boards. To date, the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have had only a limited effect on gender equality at the aggregate level (Remery et al., 2021). However, within households, the impact has been potentially much larger, an issue addressed later in the chapter.

Internationally, the Netherlands is also seen to perform relatively well on multiple gender equality indicators. In 2020, the United Nations Development Programme index ranked the Netherlands in the 10th position on its gender equality index related to human development. Within Europe, the Netherlands consistently scores above the European Union (EU) average on EIGE's (European Institute for Gender Equality) annual Gender Equality Index. Based on EIGE's ranking, gender equality in the Netherlands has primarily improved in relation to health, and women's power in recent years (EIGE, 2019).

Despite these historical developments and the relatively high score of the Netherlands in international rankings, gender inequality remains persistent. EIGE notes in their 2019 review that the Dutch score has mostly been stagnant since 2010. Gender inequality remains particularly persistent in work and family. Gender equality advancements in the labour market are marred by the persistence of part-time employment, which significantly disadvantages

women in the long term (Nicolaisen et al., 2019; Yerkes, 2009). Work–family policy advancements, while significant, continue to lag behind other countries (Koslowski et al., 2020) and continue to support gender-unequal divisions of work and care.

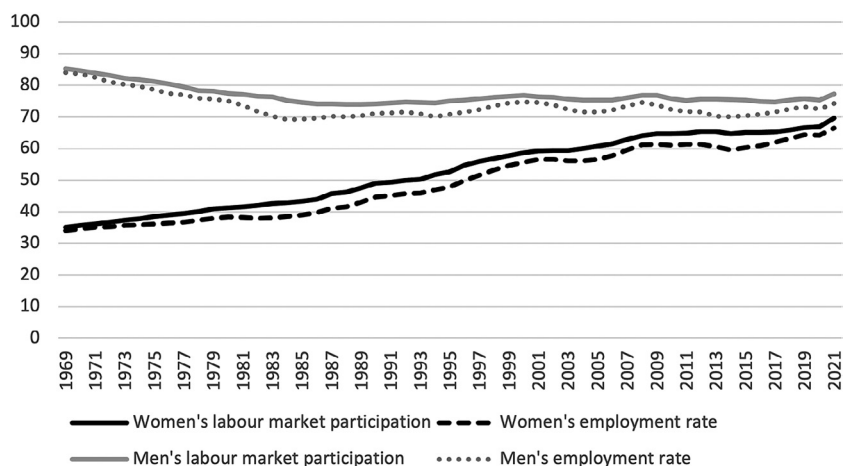
This chapter looks in-depth at the pervasive nature of this gender inequality in work and family. In the Netherlands, gender-unequal work and care relations emerge around the birth of children (Portegijs and van den Brakel, 2018). Childcare and leave policies are crucial supports in this regard, facilitating or hindering gender-egalitarian divisions of work and care. We therefore focus on the developments in these policy areas. Given space limitations, we focus on heterosexual work–care relations among parents in the Netherlands, while recognising the need for diverse gender equality perspectives (e.g., including non-binary or LGBTQ+ perspectives) as well as literature focused on persistent and important gender inequalities evident in informal caregiving. For more information on these topics, see Kaufman et al. (2022) and Verbakel et al. (2017).

We start by providing a short historical overview of labour market developments, including key labour market policies and an historical overview of men and women’s labour market participation in the Netherlands. We then describe developments in work–family policy supports that are relevant for facilitating gender-equal divisions of work and care, including childcare policies and parenting leave policies. This is followed by a discussion of contemporary gendered patterns in work and care, with particular attention given to the effects of the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, some conclusions are provided.

GENDER, WORK AND CARE IN THE NETHERLANDS: A CULTURAL AND HISTORIC PERSPECTIVE

The Netherlands is currently characterised by gendered patterns in work and care tasks, and work-care policies have only recently begun to challenge these gendered assumptions. Understanding why this is the case requires a cultural and historical perspective. Such perspectives offer an understanding of time and space-dependent expectations of women and men in society (Pfau-Effinger, 2012; van Nederveen-Meerkerk, 2019). In this section, we focus on understanding the development of gendered patterns of work and care in this historical and cultural perspective, shaped by historically important legislative developments.

When considering the gendered nature of work and care, the Netherlands is often presumed to be a comparative latecomer: characterised by a male breadwinner model (Lewis, 1992). Women’s labour market participation was slow to develop in the 20th century. Indeed, the Netherlands experienced a relatively late industrialisation process, making factory work less



Note: Definition of employment rate: at least one hour of work per week among the population between the ages of 15 and 75.

Source: CBS¹ (2018); CBS Statline (2022); edited and translated based on raw data.

Figure 3.1 Percentage of women and men's labour market participation and employment rates in the Netherlands, 1969–2020²

common for Dutch women than for women in surrounding countries (i.e., Germany, Belgium). Yet women historically played a crucial role in the Dutch labour market, for example, in the 18th century in the textile industry (van Nederveen-Meerkerk, 2019). Most women from the lower classes needed to work for economic reasons. Consequently, the low labour market participation rates among women in the 20th century reflect the fact that *not* working was a status symbol for middle- and higher-class Dutch women in the early 20th century. The subsequent increase in women's employment did not start until the late 1980s and early 1990s (Figure 3.1).

In relation to care and the household, Dutch women culturally and historically were responsible for the care of children, although within the household, women had a relatively strong position with several unique characteristics. From the Middle Ages onwards, the Dutch housewife played a central role in the family. Housewives were not subordinate; they were responsible for organising the household and household expenses (Kloek, 2009). Despite their overall independence in the household, however, Dutch women were dependent on the income of their partner. This dependence was legally enforced for married women, who were seen to be 'incapacitated' upon marriage. This law, which was in effect from 1838 until 1957, meant women could not open a bank

account on their own, take decisions about the children, or even choose where to live without the consent of their husband. Until 1957, Dutch marital law described married women as ‘incompetent actors’, with a duty to obey their husbands (In ’t Veld-Langeveld, 1969).

The traditional gendered division of labour was further legally enforced in the early 20th century. From 1924 onwards, women working in government jobs had to resign their position following marriage, a policy implemented to protect the male breadwinner wage during the economic crisis of the 1920s and 1930s. The private sector largely followed these public sector developments. Consequently, most married women were required to stay at home and take care of their children and the household. Exceptionally, women who needed to work alongside their husbands for financial reasons (i.e., in households with fewer economic resources) were unofficially allowed to do so, even in government jobs.

This historical and legal legacy was also reflected in cultural norms of the time, with the gender culture fully dominated by a male breadwinner/female caregiver model following World War II. Shortly thereafter, in the 1950s, legal changes paved the way for potential new gender patterns in work and care. The law ‘incapacitating’ women upon marriage was revoked in 1956, followed by the removal of the ban on married women’s employment in 1957. But it would take decades before cultural norms and later, actual behaviour began to change, discussed below. As Figure 3.1 shows, real changes to women’s employment did not occur before the mid-1980s, thus almost 30 years later.

Indeed, despite multiple potential drivers of gender equality, more gender-equal work-care cultures, policies, and practices were slow to develop in the Netherlands. Culturally, several movements rooted in the second wave of feminism of the 1960s pleaded for greater equality between men and women and asked for more attention to be given to the combination of work and care for children. A further driver of gender equality came from the European level, with an increase in European Union (EU) directives about equal rights for men and women, as well as equal pay for equal work from the 1970s onwards. The establishment of a formal emancipation policy in the Netherlands in 1974 meant that women now had the right to have a job while raising a child. Consequently, there was more political recognition of the position of women in paid employment, but little recognition of the role of men in caregiving or the need for work-care reconciliation policies. Thus, the male breadwinner model remained dominant (Pfau-Effinger, 2012). With the slow increase of women’s labour market participation, a mother’s double burden of having to carry out both work and care tasks increased (cf. Hochschild, 1983) while gendered patterns of care remained unchallenged. These practices were reflected in gender role attitudes at the time, with an increasing proportion of the popula-

tion accepting the combination of work and care, but care tasks were still seen to be the main priority for women (Oudijk, 1983).

Against this background, the increase in women's labour market participation mostly took place in the form of part-time employment (Visser, 2002; Yerkes, 2009). While part-time work is now very common among women in the Netherlands, the initial rise in part-time work among mothers reflected the absence of alternatives for women. Dutch work-care policies did not support a dual-worker/dual-carer model whereby parents equally share paid work and care responsibilities. In other words, women's roles in paid work shifted but women's caregiving role remained embedded in the cultural and historical legacies of the male breadwinner model. This period thus helped to establish a gender culture of a one-and-a-half earner model whereby men work full time, taking on few care tasks, and women work part time and have the primary responsibility for the care of children (Pfau-Effinger, 2012).

As the labour market participation of women increased from the 1990s onwards, emancipation policies were aimed at improving women's economic independence and the position of part-time workers (Yerkes and Visser, 2006). This period also marks a number of key developments in policies aimed at supporting the reconciliation of work and care, discussed in the next section. Between 1990 and 2000, women's labour market participation doubled to 57 per cent and fewer women withdrew from the labour market following the birth of their first child. But the increase in women's and particularly mothers' employment continued to be in the form of part-time work (Hooghiemstra and Pool, 2003). And despite efforts at improving women's labour market position, they remained overrepresented in low-income jobs and faced a significant gender pay gap. There was also little attention for men's roles in care tasks.

WORK-CARE POLICY SUPPORTS: CHILDCARE AND PARENTING LEAVE POLICIES

The historical development of a gender-unequal one-and-a-half earner model in the Netherlands is also reflected in the development of work-care policies (Pfau-Effinger, 2012). Family policies, such as those facilitating work-care reconciliation, can play an important role in facilitating gender equality at work and at home. In particular, childcare and leave policies offer parents crucial resources for combining work and care commitments (Nieuwenhuis and van Lancker, 2020). These policies, often studied separately (van Lancker and Zagel, 2022), should be considered together to evaluate the extent to which gender-equal divisions of work and care are facilitated once couples have children. Parenting leave policies, including paternity or partner leave and parental leave, are essential in the weeks and months after childbirth, allowing (first-time) parents to adjust to the joys and demands of raising

children (Dobrotić et al., 2022). Childcare policy, which sets out the structure, financing, and regulation of (mostly) formal childcare services, is an essential resource for parents wanting or needing to reconcile childcare responsibilities with paid employment or other valued activities, such as training and education (Yerkes and Javornik, 2019). The design of both parenting leave policies and childcare policies and the interrelationship between these policies matter for gender equality in multiple ways.

First, work–family scholarship suggests that in relation to parenting leave, multiple policy design aspects are important: the duration of leave, the payment of leave (i.e., generosity), the combination of these two aspects (i.e., whether payment is offered for the entire duration of leave), leave flexibility (i.e., until what age the leave can be taken, whether it must be taken full time or part time), the nature of the entitlement (i.e., whether leave is an individual or family entitlement), and whether gender incentives are provided, encouraging leave take-up by fathers (den Dulk and Peper, 2016; Javornik and Kurowska, 2017; Koslowski et al., 2020). Other aspects of leave (not discussed here for space reasons) can also be important for work–family outcomes, such as the broader scope of eligibility (i.e., who can take leave and under what conditions, a crucial aspect for same-sex families), eligibility for funding (e.g., whether employees require a certain period of employment before becoming eligible), and job protection regulations (e.g., see Kaufman et al., 2022; Yerkes et al., 2022).

Second, the interrelationship between parenting leave policies and childcare policy also matters for gender equality. When gaps exist between parenting leave policies and the availability of childcare services, particularly in countries where traditional gender norms are culturally dominant, parents may default to childcare provision by mothers. Research suggests such gaps exist in multiple country contexts, even in countries attempting to facilitate gender-egalitarian divisions of work and care. For example, in Iceland, despite the existence of a legal entitlement to childcare services, in practice a significant gap exists between the end of paid parental leave (when children are 12 months old) and the start of this legal entitlement (when children are two years old), significantly impacting parents' opportunities for combining work and care (Yerkes and Javornik, 2019).

Third, like parenting leave policies, multiple aspects of childcare policy design also matter for who takes on care responsibilities and thus for establishing gender-(un)equal care patterns among heterosexual couples. Key factors include childcare availability, accessibility, quality, affordability, and flexibility (Plantenga and Remery, 2015; Sirén et al., 2020; van Lancker and Ghysels, 2016; Yerkes and Javornik, 2019). Empirical and evaluative studies on childcare services and their outcomes show significant cross-country differences in these design aspects, for example, in the dominant mechanisms of

provision (e.g., public, private, not-for-profit), with consequences for gender equality (Brennan et al., 2012). The public provision of childcare services in countries like Sweden and Iceland, for instance, often guaranteed through legal entitlements, creates more space for gender-equal patterns of work and care than marketised provision, such as in countries like the UK and Australia, which can create problems related to affordability and quality and, consequently, more gendered care solutions (Yerkes and Javornik, 2019). We now turn to the development of these policies in the Dutch context, paying attention to these aspects of policy design.

Parenting Leave Policies³

The Netherlands, like other EU member states, meets EU requirements for parenting leave policies, offering maternity leave, partner (previously paternity) leave, parental leave, and adoption leave (den Dulk and Yerkes, 2020). Historically, however, with the exception of maternity leave, other forms of parenting leave remained unpaid (Yerkes and den Dulk, 2015). As we are focusing on the period following childbirth, when gendered divisions of work and care emerge, the remainder of this section addresses paternity/partner leave (aimed at fathers and partners) and parental leave (leave available to both parents following an initial period of maternity or paternity leave).

The Netherlands was comparatively late in introducing parenting leaves to support parents in reconciling work and care. Fathers had no paternity leave entitlements in the Netherlands until 2001 with the passage of the Work and Care Act (*Wet Arbeid en Zorg*). This law introduced, among other things, paternity leave of extremely short duration (two days), which was unpaid. Parental leave entitlements also developed relatively late, at the end of the 20th century, and only following the EU directive of 1996 entitling men and women to three months of unpaid leave. Dutch legislation was in line with the directive, with parents entitled to 13 weeks of unpaid leave. Parental leave was extended to 26 weeks (26 times the number of weekly working hours per parent) in 2009. Although parental leave remained unpaid, parents were now entitled to a tax reduction when taking leave (Groenendijk and Keuzenkamp, 2009). With the passage of the European directive on work-life balance (European Parliament, 2019), fathers and partners gained access to so-called 'birth leave', which replaced paternity leave in 2019. Initially, fathers and partners were entitled to one week of fully paid leave, to be taken within the first four weeks following childbirth. This leave was extended with a further five weeks of paid leave (with a benefit ceiling at 70 per cent of the maximum daily wage) in 2021. Moreover, since 2022, parents have access to nine weeks of partially paid parental leave. This leave is paid at 70 per cent of a parent's daily pay, with a benefit ceiling of 70 per cent of the daily minimum wage. The

remaining 17 weeks of leave (of the 26 weeks) are, in principle, unpaid (den Dulk and Yerkes, 2021).

Even prior to the introduction of paid parental leave in 2022, some parents had access to (partially) paid parental or paternity leave through collective agreements. Studies of these agreements suggest the availability of parental leave payments was generally quite limited and mostly available in the public sector (den Dulk, 2001; Yerkes and Tijdens, 2010; Yerkes and den Dulk, 2015). Based on a study of the hundred largest collective agreements, 16 per cent offered some parental leave payment ranging from 25 to 75 per cent of one's salary (den Dulk and Yerkes, 2021; Torenvliet et al., 2018). Similarly, 15 per cent of the collective agreements offered some form of paid paternity leave to fathers and partners (usually extended from two to five days) (de la Croix et al., 2014).

From a gender equality perspective, the introduction of paid birth leave for fathers and partners can, in the long term, lead to changes in gendered divisions of work and care. However, it remains unclear what the combined effects of changes in birth leave and parental leave will be. The introduction of nine weeks of paid parental leave is unlikely to affect gendered divisions of work and care given the low generosity of the policy. Without remuneration at full wage levels, dual-carer norms are not supported (Kvande and Brandt, 2020). While fathers are encouraged to take some leave in the first weeks following childbirth, the continuation of this involvement (e.g., through parental leave) is absent. Take-up rates of parental leave in the Netherlands suggest that fathers in fact do increasingly make use of parental leave (van den Brakel et al., 2020). But the period following childbirth continues to have a greater impact on the weekly working hours of mothers than fathers. In 2018–19, nine out of ten fathers continued to work the same number of hours after having children (van den Brakel et al., 2020). In contrast, 37 per cent of mothers reduced their working hours after having a child.

This one-and-a-half earner model, whereby mothers take on most care tasks and work part time, is supported by the policy design of parenting leaves in the Netherlands. Gendered patterns of work and care are further emphasised by the flexibility of parental leave legislation. While full-time take-up is possible (until the child reaches the age of eight), culturally, part-time use is the most common form of take-up (i.e., to reduce a full-time workweek to part time), supported by gendered part-time work norms as discussed above. These norms are not countered by any gender-specific incentives (e.g., a father's quota). Only one aspect of parental leave supports more gender-equal divisions, which is the fact that parental leave is an individual (rather than a family) entitlement. In short, historically, Dutch parenting leaves do little to support gender equality in work and care. Recent changes to parenting leave legislation, including

those introduced in 2022, are more likely to support a further embedding of the one-and-a-half earner model rather than challenge its existence.

Childcare Policy

The historical absence of paid parenting leaves in the Netherlands and the absence of an active role for fathers in caregiving made the availability of affordable, high-quality childcare crucial for women's labour market participation. Childcare services remained underdeveloped until the mid-1990s, however (Tijdens and Lieon, 1993). The absence of childcare services was typical of welfare states with male breadwinner histories and Christian Democratic political traditions (Seeleib-Kaiser et al., 2008). When the development of childcare policy accelerated in the mid- to late 1990s, it was a policy instrument to facilitate women's labour market participation (Yerkes, 2014). Childcare was not developed as a pedagogical instrument supporting children's development, a more common approach in the Nordic countries where childcare policies were developed much earlier (Yerkes and Javornik, 2019). Rather, childcare facilities in the Netherlands were developed with an underlying economic argument: employment of everyone (including mothers) was needed to maintain the affordability of the Dutch welfare state, in essence supporting an adult worker model (Lewis and Giullari, 2005). As a result, Dutch parents have rather ambivalent ideas about childcare facilities. Although many parents are positive about childcare facilities, the majority feels that formal childcare should only be used for a maximum of three days a week (van den Brakel et al., 2020), and care provided by parents (mostly mothers) or grandparents is often still viewed as better for children. Most parents are still quite negative about the use of childcare services for babies.

As childcare policy developed, issues remained regarding availability, accessibility, affordability, and quality. Whereas the public provision of childcare is generally viewed as making care more accessible and affordable and thus better for facilitating gender equality (Korpi et al., 2013), the Netherlands has relied on a marketised model of childcare policy since 2006 (Yerkes, 2014). The political focus on improving women's labour market participation in an effort to facilitate the reconciliation of work and care created space for innovative childcare policy solutions (Knijn and Saraceno, 2010). But political legacies and the interplay between collectively organised employer organisations, trade unions, and the welfare state led to a reliance on the market and demand-driven financing, thus subsidising parents' purchasing of childcare services on the private market (Plantenga, 2012; Yerkes, 2014).

The choice for market-driven childcare services has consequences for the availability, accessibility, affordability, and quality of childcare, and gendered divisions of work and care (Yerkes and Javornik, 2019). Comparatively, and

following decades of investment in childcare provision, the market-driven Dutch system of childcare now exhibits a high availability of childcare services similar to public childcare systems in the Nordic welfare states (*ibid.*). But scholars have been critical of such market-driven approaches to care provision, questioning the impact on both quality and affordability (Brennan et al., 2012). Indeed, for many years childcare services in the Netherlands struggled with quality issues (Fukkink et al., 2013). Recent legislation focused on innovation in childcare has, however, led to increases in childcare quality (Slot et al., 2019). Affordability and accessibility remain problematic, however. Childcare services, as a labour market instrument, are not provided as a right to children but are dependent on parents' ability to purchase services on the market. While parents can receive a subsidy to help cover costs, these subsidies are dependent upon both parents being in paid employment, with subsidies only available during brief periods of unemployment or return-to-work trajectories. Care services are accessible to very young children (ten weeks and older), reflecting the comparatively short duration of maternity leave in the Netherlands. With the absence of paid parental leave until 2022, in practice, this means parents enrol their children in part-time care, with mothers taking on greater care responsibilities than fathers (Yerkes and Javornik, 2019).

WORK, CARE, AND COVID-19 IN RELATION TO GENDER

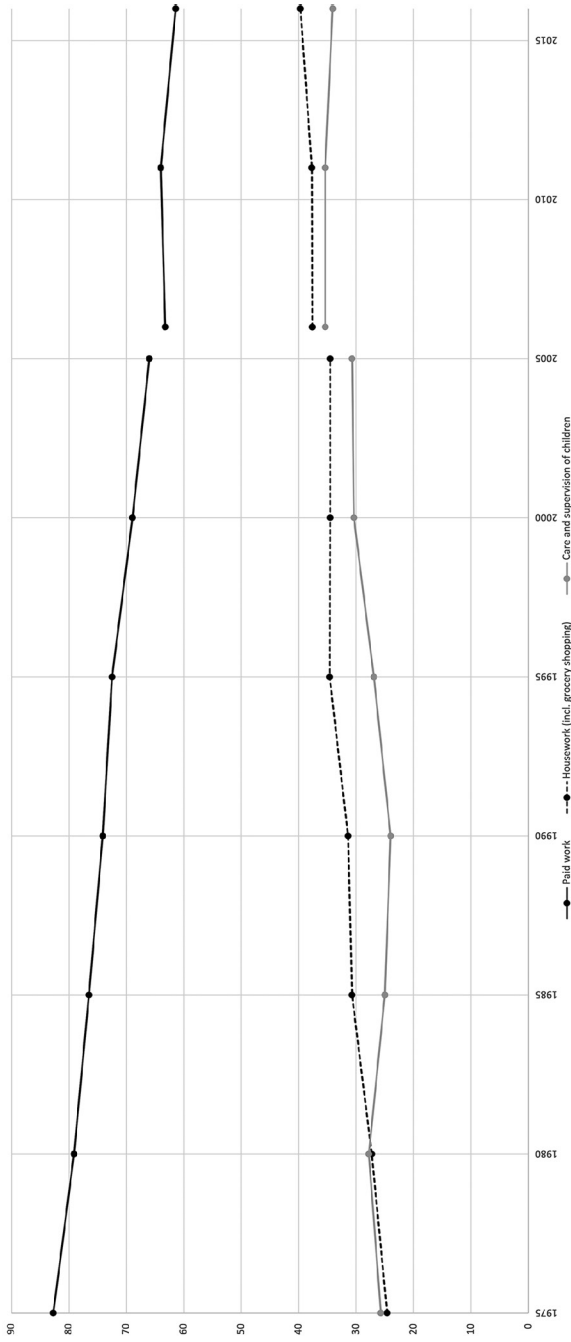
As outlined in this chapter, patterns of work and care were clearly gendered in the Netherlands prior to the COVID pandemic. On the one hand, we've shown that key developments towards gender equality had occurred, including the rise in women's labour market participation, the exponential growth in the availability of childcare services, and more recently, the introduction and extension of paid birth leave for fathers and partners. On the other hand, we've noted several barriers to gender equality prior to the pandemic. For example, women's labour market participation is marked by the highest rate of part-time work in the industrialised world (OECD, 2023). Childcare services, while highly available and increasingly of higher quality, remained expensive and were used part time given the absence of paid parental leave and persistent societal norms suggesting formal care is only acceptable for a few days a week. The increasing popularity of childcare services also introduced problems of accessibility in certain regions. Most parenting leave policies do not provide full remuneration of salary, with the exception of maternity leave and the first week of leave for fathers and partners. The result of these developments across several decades has therefore been some noticeable decreases in gender inequalities in work and care but also lingering traditional gendered patterns,

particularly among mothers and fathers with lower education levels (van den Brakel et al., 2020).

By early 2020, despite women's historically strong position in the household and the strong increase in women's labour market participation since the end of the 20th century, gender equality at work and at home remained absent. By the end of 2019, just prior to the pandemic, 76 per cent of women aged 15–65 were active in paid employment, compared to 87 per cent of men. Within the working population of women, 70 per cent of women worked less than 35 hours a week compared to 18 per cent of men (CBS, 2020). Consequently, the economic independence of Dutch women was low, placing many women in precarious positions. In 2019, 64 per cent of women were economically independent, meaning they earned at least the minimum wage (versus 81 per cent of men) (van den Brakel et al., 2020). The predominance of part-time work means women accrue fewer social security and pension rights, with fewer opportunities for career development. The hours women worked in part-time jobs increased, however, from 27 hours per week in 2009 to 28.5 hours per week in 2019. In contrast, men's average weekly working hours declined from 40 hours to 39 hours in this same period. Clear differences existed in part-time working hours across educational levels, with higher educated women more likely to work in part-time jobs made up of substantial hours (van den Brakel et al., 2020; Yerkes and Hewitt, 2019). Women also experience a significant child penalty: having a first child leads to a 46 per cent decline in a mother's earnings, whereas a father's earnings remain unaffected by childbirth (Rabaté and Rellstab, 2021).

Prior to the pandemic, while many parents expressed a desire to share care equally (six out of ten parents would prefer an egalitarian division of care), in practice, an equal division of care happened in only one out of six households despite the increase in more gender-egalitarian attitudes (van den Brakel et al., 2020). Men's share in the division of both household and childcare tasks has also increased in recent years, but a significant gender gap remained on the eve of the pandemic (Figure 3.2).

Against this background, the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown measures taken to slow the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus had the potential to create a context in which work-care patterns would become increasingly gender-equal or lead to a re-traditionalisation of work and care, with mothers taking on greater care tasks in lieu of paid work. An increase in gender equality could be expected given women's overrepresentation in essential occupations, such as in the health care and education sectors (CBS, 2020). If mothers were more likely to work outside the home, fathers working from home could take up more care tasks, including the home schooling of children during school closures. A further increase in gender inequality could result, however, if



Note: This figure includes women and men without paid work and without children. The gap from 2005 to 2006 denotes a new form of measurement from 2006 onwards.

Source: SCP⁴ (TBO 1975–2005 and '06); SCP/CBS (TBO 2011–2016); edited and translated based on raw data (www.scp.nl).

Figure 3.2 Proportion of men in the provision of care and household tasks, 1975–2016

gender assumptions remained unchallenged and mothers took on a greater share of childcare and household tasks.

During the initial months of the pandemic, there appeared to be trends towards more gender-equal as well as gender-unequal patterns of work and care in the Netherlands (Yerkes et al., 2020; Yerkes et al., 2021). Fathers took up an increased role in childcare during the first lockdown as well as in the weeks and months that followed. Nearly one-quarter (22 per cent) of fathers initially reported doing more childcare than prior to the pandemic, relative to their partner, a percentage which increased to 31 per cent in June 2020. But as the pandemic continued, the percentage of fathers reporting a relatively greater share of care work started to decline (Yerkes et al., 2021). Moreover, the proportion of respondents reporting a gender-equal division of childcare shifted only marginally during the first year of the pandemic, returning to pre-pandemic levels by November 2020 (Remery et al., 2021).

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gendered labour market patterns is not yet clear (van den Brakel et al., 2020; Yerkes et al., 2021). During the first lockdown, mothers more than fathers adjusted the times at which they worked, working more often during evenings and at weekends (Yerkes et al., 2020). They also consistently experienced greater work pressure throughout the pandemic. But trend data throughout the pandemic suggest women and men equally experienced negative effects of the pandemic in the Netherlands. Primarily self-employed and flexible workers experienced the negative impacts of the pandemic. Women were impacted more than men because they are more often in flexible positions. Yet men were more impacted than women as they are more likely to be self-employed and less likely to have a permanent contract than women in the Netherlands (van den Brakel et al., 2020). The impact of the pandemic on working hours also remains unclear, although by the third quarter of 2020, the average weekly working hours of both men and women were similar to the year prior (*ibid.*). Women in essential occupations, particularly mothers, reported working more hours than prior to the pandemic, however, the gender effect of additional working hours receded as the pandemic continued (Yerkes et al., 2021).

The Dutch government created comparatively few policy supports to facilitate gender-equal divisions of work and care during the pandemic (Koslowski et al., 2020; Yerkes et al., 2020). Parents retained access to existing parenting leave policies, including parental leave and birth leave. In theory, parents also had access to existing leave for ‘exceptional circumstances’, although in practice, some employers advised against using it (den Dulk and Yerkes, 2020). No additional supports in the form of paid or unpaid leave were provided during the closure of schools and childcare centres. Parents did, however, receive a full refund of childcare costs during this period (den Dulk and Yerkes, 2020; Koslowski et al., 2020). Various policy supports were enacted to support the

labour market position of various workers, which comparatively provided high support amongst European welfare states (Nieuwenhuis and Yerkes, 2021). The effect of these measures on the medium- and long-term position of men and women in the labour market is not yet clear, however.

In short, while the pandemic presented a possibility for either an increase or a decrease in gender equality in work and care patterns in the Netherlands, neither seems to have yet materialised. The pandemic has not led to significantly more or less gender equality, which differs from the impact in other countries like the UK and Australia where significant pandemic-related gender inequalities are more evident (Chung et al., 2020; Craig and Churchill, 2020). The pandemic has also had little to no impact on the trajectory of work-care policies in the Netherlands, which have made slow shifts towards aims of gender equality in work and care while continuing to support a one-and-a-half earner model.

CONCLUSION

The focus of this chapter is the development of work-care policies and practices from a gender perspective in the Netherlands in the 20th and 21st centuries. Since the 20th century, the Netherlands has maintained a rather gender-traditional division of care and work tasks. While some women worked due to economic necessity, most Dutch women entered the labour market comparatively late during the 20th century. The 20th-century Dutch image was the traditional male breadwinner model, with men operating in the public domain and women responsible for the private domain. Nowadays the labour market participation of Dutch women is relatively high, but the majority of women's employment is part time and therefore the economic independence of women remains an issue. Moreover, the role of fathers has only recently come to the fore. Family policies aimed at accommodating more gender-equal patterns of work and care, in particular, parenting leave and childcare policies, were introduced at the end of the 20th century. In comparison with other European countries, however, these policies were not very extensive. The duration of parental leave was always precisely in line with EU directives and remained unpaid. Limited payment through collective bargaining was available. Parenting leave policies have traditionally been quite gendered, with the policy design implicitly or explicitly targeting mothers as caregivers. The role of fathers as caregivers was mostly ignored. Only recently has more attention been given to fathers. Moreover, despite changes to parenting leaves in recent years, the design of these policies is unlikely to challenge gender-unequal caregiving patterns to a large extent. Childcare policy, primarily designed to increase mothers' labour market participation, continues to be faced by challenges of affordability and accessibility. Moreover, an important element

of the dominant culture of childcare in the Netherlands is the idea that parents (i.e., mothers) care for their children rather than use childcare services or to only use childcare part time.

The growing popularity of the one-and-a-half earner model in the 21st century, in which men work full time and women work part time, does little to challenge the persistent economic and social inequality between men and women in the Netherlands. In addition, women continue to do the majority of unpaid work, being primarily responsible for the care of children and the household. A dual-earner/dual-carer model in which men and women equally share paid work and care tasks is far from being realised in the Netherlands, nor fully supported by family policies.

Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted gender inequalities in work and care in most European countries, widening existing gender inequalities. In the Netherlands, however, the effect of the pandemic has been mixed. Despite an increase in fathers' relative share in care tasks at the beginning of the pandemic, most care tasks are still done by mothers. The absence of a major effect of the pandemic on gendered work and care relations in the Netherlands shows the persistence of the one-and-a-half earner model. Despite key changes in work and care legislation and social policies aimed at increasing gender equality in the Dutch labour market and in the division of care work in the home, the historical and cultural legacies continue. A more gender-equal reconciliation of work and care will likely continue to be a long-term process over the coming decades.

NOTES

1. CBS is Statistics Netherlands (www.cbs.nl).
2. We thank Aniek de Hond for retrieving the data and compiling the graphs.
3. The term parenting leave encompasses *all* types of leaves aimed at parents (e.g., maternity, paternity, and parental leave; see also Dobrotić et al., 2022).
4. SCP is the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (www.scp.nl).

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