

equimundo's STATE OF

Across 14 Countries,
Fatherhood is
“RESPONSIBILITY”
“LOVE” &
“CARE”

“I think we often forget
the ... beauty in
fatherhood.”

— Father, Canada

3 IN 4
PARENTS

Worry
About Their
Financial
Future

equimundo

THE WORLD'S
FATHERS 2026

STRETCHED TO THE
BREAKING POINT



Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	5
Foreword	6
Executive Summary	8
Introduction	11
Methodology: Who Did We Survey and Interview?	12
Section 1. The System Trap – Why Caregiving Comes at a Steep Cost.....	14
Empty Wallets, Heavier Hearts.....	16
The Care Penalty: Too Few Choices, Too Little Time.....	21
Overwhelmed and Overlooked: Parental Stress, Worry, and Mental Health.....	26
Section II. The Disconnect – What Parents Want Versus What Systems Allow	32
Fathers Care About Care.....	34
One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: How Care Equality is Under Threat	38
How Partners Discuss Their Way to Equal Care	42
Section III. Care as Power – From Personal Crisis to Political Force.....	46
The Verdict Is In: Policy and Public Services Fall Short	48
Parents Don't Trust Governments But They Will Vote for Care	52
Section IV. What Parents Want – Solutions in Their Own Words	58
Annex 1. How Did We Gather and Analyze Our Data? Study Design.....	62
Annex 2. Promising Practices from Study Country Partners	65
Annex 3. Exclusive Contributions from Partners to SOWF 2026.....	68
Endnotes.....	72

Figures

Figure 1. Predicted Care Equity Norms, by Level of Economic Precarity and Gender	18
Figure 2. Average Care-Related Sacrifices, by Gender and Country	23
Figure 3. Top Worries of Parents	28
Figure 4. Mean Well-Being Risk and Distress Scores for Fathers and Mothers.....	29
Figure 5. Predicted Well-Being Risk and Distress Score, by Gender and Care Sacrifice Level.....	29
Figure 6. What It Means To Be a Dad: Words Used by Men to Describe “Fatherhood” Across 14 Countries....	34
Figure 7. Agreement That Men’s Participation in Care Work Is More Normal Today, by Country and Gender	37
Figure 8. Agreement That Taking Care of Home Is as Important as Paid Work, by Country and Gender	37
Figure 9. Agreement With Gendered Norms Around Caregiving, by Country and Gender.....	39
Figure 10. Fathers’ Average Gender-Equitable Care Norms Score, by Age Group.....	40
Figure 11. Agreement That Things Are Better if Men Do Paid Work and Women Do Care Work, by Country and Gender	41
Figure 12. Predicted Couple Communication Associated with Care Outcomes for Fathers	42
Figure 13. Predicted Parental Leave Barriers by Economic Precarity Level and Gender	51
Figure 14. Mistrust in Public Institutions, by Country and Gender	52
Figure 15. Voters’ Reasons for Voting in Last Country Elections, by Gender.....	54
Figure 16. Policy Asks: Percent Agreement with Intention of “Voting for a Political Party that Supports...”	57
Figure 17. Cross-Country Policy Frameworks on Work Flexibility and Childcare Support	69
Figure 18. Disparities in the Duration of Paid Parental Leave, Mothers Versus Fathers (days by law)	70

Boxes

Box 1. Who's Hurting Where? Economic Precarity by Country	19
Box 2. Painful Choices: Migration and Parenthood.....	20
Box 3. Failing Systems in Different Ways.....	25
Box 4. The Lived Realities of Sacrifice.....	25
Box 5. The Sandwich Generation	31
Box 6. “The best gift you can give is love”: Fathers’ Love for Care.....	35
Box 7. The Fertility Divide: Men Want More Children, Women Want Out.....	45
Box 8. “Enough for pulling a tooth, not having a child”: What Fathers Say About Paternity Leave	51
Box 9. “They Don’t Deliver:” Parents’ Lack of Trust in Government	55

Tables

Table 1. Demographic Information for Fathers and Mothers (in percentages)	13
Table 2. Sacrifice “Scorecard”: Economic and Professional Disruptions Due to Care Responsibilities, by Gender	22
Table 3. Barriers to Taking Parental Leave, by Gender.....	50
Table 4. Gender of Survey Respondents by Country.....	63
Table 5. Total Number of Interviews Per Country.....	64

PhotoVoices

PhotoVoice 1. Financial Worry	16
PhotoVoice 2. Homeownership Worry.....	18
PhotoVoice 3. Time Worry	23
PhotoVoice 4. Social Media Worry.....	26
PhotoVoice 5. Late-Night Worry.....	27
PhotoVoice 6. Caregiving Worry.....	31
PhotoVoice 7. Hope in Bonding.....	35
PhotoVoice 8. Hope in the Everyday	36
PhotoVoice 9. Hope in Future Heroes	40

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Foreword

If the answer is caregiving, what is the question?

When we discuss gender equality and the work with men to achieve it, we often hear – it's not zero sum. But then what is it, exactly? Is it dual sum? Is it win-win? Such labels feel incomplete, inadequate, and far too simplistic to answer the challenges that families face in caring for, protecting, and providing for those in their households.

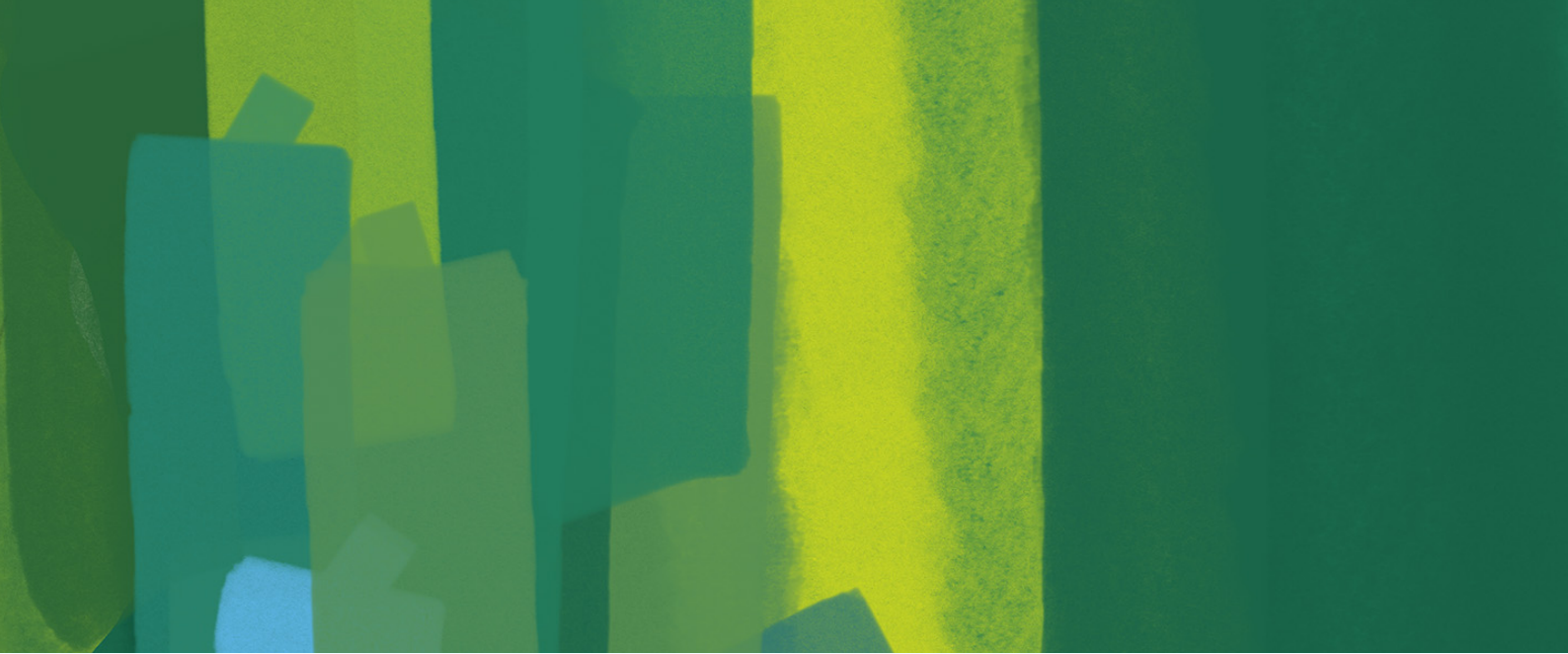
We need gender equality when it comes to caregiving. We need men doing their equal share of it. We need workplaces that support caregivers. We need services that support individuals through pregnancy, parenthood, and the complete guarantee of women's rights. We must achieve full pay and political equality for women and redouble our efforts to end men's violence against women. But our data tells us quite clearly that moving beyond zero sum is not nearly enough.

In the case of caregiving, this research in more than 16 countries covering every region of the world affirms that all of us – mothers, fathers, caregivers – are stretched to the breaking point. There are few benefits to divide equally and fairly because parents, in every country we asked, report being stressed to the limit. The lack of political will to provide the care services and support families need means there is not much sum to share. Zero doesn't divide by anything.

We have carried out the *State of the World's Fathers* study every two years since 2015, asking mothers and fathers around the world about their caregiving experiences – whether they are supported to provide care, have access to paid leave, are offered workplace accommodations, and much more. We have seen progress. Over the past 10 years, women and men say that men are doing a greater share of the care work. Increasing numbers of women and men say that they share care duties more or less equally. Big gaps remain, but the equality gap between men and women when it comes to hands-on care work is reducing.

If equality in who does the care work is increasing, we have seen that the stress on families to provide care has also steadily increased. This report contains a sacrifice scorecard that asked mothers and fathers what they have had to give up – the one in four who have had to refinance their homes to pay for care services, the one in three who turned down a professional advancement to provide care, the three-quarters who have worked overtime to bring home extra pay, and the half who have taken on a second or third job to increase their income.

We find ourselves running out of adjectives to convey this level of stress. We've called it a crisis, which it is. We've called this report, *Parents Stretched to the Breaking Point*, which families are. We've called out the indifference of policymakers, workplaces, and others, which is still the case. Now we're tempted to call it what it is: the willful neglect and destruction of our humanity.



If care is the most basic need of all humans, how can we sit with this? Five out of six parents say they do not have enough time to care for their families. More than four out of five say their employer won't allow flexible working. The sacrifices caregivers are forced to make play out in increased anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and higher alcohol consumption, among other outcomes. The suffering is real and it pays forward in the lives of our children.

It feels egregious to talk about care and caregiving in such stark and negative terms. After all, care is life, love, and happiness. Nine in 10 mothers and fathers say caring for children and loved ones is one of the most enjoyable things in their lives, often the most enjoyable thing in their lives.

This is the good news: in a world at war, facing economic uncertainty, in which climate disasters are real, and AI is confusing us all, we all find meaning and hope in caregiving. Reviewing the data here, we arrive at the conclusion that it is absurd to compare who suffers most. There are gender inequalities to be sure - and in many countries, women are making different sacrifices than men. But an increasing number of men are doing more caregiving in many countries and households, they are also facing an equal share of stress.

But still our data highlights hope. As men do more caregiving, they are as likely as women to say that care policies, and other policies affecting their families, are one of their greatest concerns. Women and men are ready to vote for politicians who support care policies. They are ready to change jobs (when they have the means to do so) to work for employers who support them in their care duties. You would think intelligent politicians and employers would heed that news. Some already are. Now we need a tidal wave of politicians, many of whom themselves are parents, to listen and to act.

The question is simple: what do humans need to survive and thrive? The answer is - and always has been - care. To be loved and cared for by caregivers who are supported in their roles by their communities, governments, and workplaces. That's when the sum becomes bigger than zero.



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Executive Summary

Parents are stretched to the breaking point. Across 16 countries, data from 8,000 mothers and fathers affirm that economic precarity and affordability are their main worries, followed by concerns for their children's online lives. Parents don't have the time, resources, or support to care for their families without constant strain. That collision, along with powerful and restrictive messages on social media, is threatening democracy and more. For fathers, the provider role feels increasingly impossible. Fathers want to care equally in the home, and are doing more caregiving than previous generations, but they are often hindered by work and life conditions from providing the equal care their families need – and that they want to do.

There is a perfect storm brewing around caregiving, driven by economic and social crises. Parents and other carers feel their governments, employers, and institutions are failing them by undervaluing and underinvesting in care. Parents want paid parental leave, affordable childcare, flexible work, and policies that reflect the real costs of raising children and supporting their own aging parents. They want time with their children. They want an equal sharing of care in the home. They want care to be at the heart of all decision-making, not on the periphery. Together, these factors create an untenable situation for many parents. Fathers and mothers are ready to vote for change. Politicians should take note.

The evidence is unambiguous: placing care at the center of social and economic systems is a matter of fairness and it eases stress on caregivers. It is also a strategic investment in healthier families, stronger economies, and more equal societies. Our report shows that this is needed now more than ever, as our world struggles with conflict, climate change, deepening inequalities, increasing misogyny, and economic crises.

The System Trap: Why Caring Comes at Such a Steep Cost

Our most striking finding is that most parents say they are financially stretched to the point of breaking – and the system isn't catching them as

they fall. Three in four fathers and more than four in five mothers tell us they lose sleep over their financial future. Nearly one in three households runs on a single income, half of all parents say caregiving costs consume at least half their income, and even parents who feel stable report that they are unable to cover a small emergency.

The consequences don't stop at the wallet. Across 16 countries, parents are making six to eight separate sacrifices to provide care for children and others in their household – draining savings, cutting hours, staying in jobs they want to leave, and giving up study and leisure time. And our data show that things are getting worse, not better. Overall, workplaces haven't improved, costs have risen considerably, and economic security has declined.

Our data also confirms how stresses multiply and interact. Only one in six parents say they have enough time to care for their families. More than four out of five say their employer won't allow flexible working. More caregiving sacrifices mean more anxiety, more suicidal thoughts, and higher alcohol consumption, consistently, across every age group, country, education level, and employment status. Fathers have higher odds than mothers of falling into the high-distress group, and younger fathers are most at risk.

Parents' worries – including children's financial futures, aging parents, work-life balance, and online safety – surface with striking similarities across 16 diverse countries. Notably, a third of parents rank not knowing what their children are doing online as a top three concern, sitting alongside financial stresses. Our findings reveal that we have not just collected accounts of individual struggles. We have revealed widespread commonalities that point to longstanding, and widening, structural gaps.

What Parents Want: The Gap Between Desire and Delivery

Nine in 10 mothers and fathers say caring for children and loved ones is one of the most enjoyable things in their lives – a figure that hasn't

moved since 2023, despite worsening economic conditions. In fact, nine out of 10 mothers and fathers also say they value what they do in the home as much as paid work. In a world with systems that do not value unpaid care and domestic work, this is a remarkable statistic. In addition, 90 percent of fathers and mothers across 14 countries say it's far more normal for men to do care work than in their fathers' generation. And 91 percent of fathers and 94 percent of mothers agree that men who do their fair share make better partners.

But the gap between desire and delivery is growing. Our data show a significant retreat to traditional norms, even since our 2023 report. This is especially palpable among younger dads. In 2023, around 25 percent of fathers agreed that boys shouldn't be taught to cook, clean, or care for siblings. By 2025, that figure almost doubled – to 40 percent. Agreement that childcare is a mother's responsibility has risen among men, while it has fallen among women. Young fathers aged 18–30 hold less equitable care attitudes than older fathers, while young women the same age are more progressive than any other group.

Economic pressure is sharpening the divide: 58 percent of men say they don't feel “man enough” unless they can provide, and 62 percent say their job doesn't give them status. Importantly, these beliefs aren't held only by men. Seventy percent of fathers and 62 percent of mothers identify financial provision as a father's core role and only a third of all respondents see unpaid care as central to fatherhood.

These beliefs and pressures affect couple relationships. Couples who embrace traditional roles report more than double the care-related conflict of those who reject them – and for men, holding traditional beliefs makes them four times more likely to experience couple conflict. The perception gap is just as telling: 88 percent of fathers feel there is mutual support in caregiving, while only 76 percent of mothers agree. More than half of mothers say their partner doesn't understand the financial stress they are under. Parenting together matters; our study affirms that how and how much partners talk to each other turns out to be one of the strongest predictors in the entire study – linked to better mental health, greater enjoyment of caregiving, and stronger support for care policies.

Care as Power: From Personal Crisis to Political Force

The support system most parents need is either inadequate or non-existent. Eighty-seven percent of fathers and 78 percent of mothers in our study say they aren't getting the support they need. Only one in three children has access to child or family benefits. While 92 percent of mothers and 87 percent of fathers say time with their newborns is a source of health and happiness, one in four parents doesn't know their full leave entitlements, fathers consistently take less leave than they're entitled to, and, for the 60 percent of the global workforce in informal employment, leave often doesn't exist at all.

Fathers face more barriers to parental leave than mothers – though mothers everywhere face the motherhood penalty, where becoming a mother means they lose out in the labor force – and those under the greatest financial pressure report nearly three additional barriers on top of that. Fewer than half of fathers know that parenting support exists for them. Only 39 percent have ever been offered any. Before a baby arrives, fathers are already invisible to the systems meant to help families, and that absence shapes everything that follows.

What parents are asking for is not complicated. Across 16 countries, they are asking for the same things: (1) workplace flexibility, (2) paid parental leave, (3) pre- and post-natal guidance, and (4) affordable childcare – basic conditions for raising a child while holding down a paid job. When these needs are unmet, trust in the institutions that are responsible for supporting carers collapses. Nearly four in 10 fathers don't trust their political representatives, and that distrust shapes how they think about care: after accounting for country, age, and education, institutional trust still explains nearly 12 percent of whether increasing economic precarity among fathers will translate into valuing care as a public good at all, and 41 percent of whether they will be moved to vote for care policies. In other words, the fathers most failed by current systems are also the most movable on these issues – but only if those systems can demonstrate they work.

Despite widespread distrust in politicians and political institutions, parents will vote for care policies. In fact, parents facing the highest financial insecurity are 1.7 times more likely to vote for care policies. Nearly four in 10 fathers say they lean conservative, yet many also support care

investment, flexible work, and family benefits. More than half of both mothers and fathers say political activism for care matters to them.

What Parents Want: Solutions in Their Own Words

Fathers and mothers want employers and governments to give them the time, resources, and flexibility to succeed and thrive both at home and at work. They want high-quality, affordable childcare and good schools. They want parental leave – and they want it fully paid. For the quarter of respondents caring for elderly parents alongside children, they want safety nets that support multi-generational caregiving.

Parents and carers across the globe are asking for systems that work. They are calling for change, and they are prepared to vote for it. As countries around the world face a decline in fertility, only when families feel supported are they able to care for and have the families they want. Ten years after its first edition, this *State of the World's Fathers* report is both a call to account, and a call to action for systemic change.



Introduction

“...[The] hardest thing about being a parent is when my children need me, but I can’t be there because of work. What we need is ... support that will ... allow us to balance family and work, such as more flexible working hours and inclusive childcare”.

– FATHER, 30 YEARS OLD, CHINA

Like previous *State of the World's Fathers* reports, this edition dismantles the myth that men don't – or aren't able to – care. It also illuminates how parents are navigating an increasingly complex, stressful, and uncertain world, and how both mothers and fathers are demanding change, to allow them to be the parents they dreamed of being.

Our findings highlight strong support for policies that enable fathers to care for their families on an equal footing with mothers, and that place care at the center of social, political, and economic systems. The evidence is clear. Putting care at the heart of every institution is a matter of basic good and human rights. It is also a strategic investment in social cohesion, workforce participation, and sustainable growth. Not only this, but we know that centering care, and building gender equality,

is good for women. It is also good for men. And it is good for everyone. Yet young men appear to be moving away from gender equality rather than toward it.

So, what can be done? Parents have told us what they want. In May 2026, Equimundo will host 100 changemakers from around the world to curate some of the solutions to centering care and ensuring that men play an equal role in caregiving – because mothers, fathers, carers, children, and families deserve nothing less. And because our world desperately needs change.¹

We hope this report evokes outrage at the injustice of failing systems, urgent attention to what parents want but can't achieve, and the recognition that across countries and contexts, millions – including fathers – will march, organize, and vote for change.

Methodology: Who Did We Survey and Interview?

The findings presented here draw on data from approximately 8,000 parents and caregivers across 16 countries, including 5,371 fathers, 2,615 mothers, and 31 nonbinary or trans parents aged 18 to 65. Additionally, 400 parents and caregivers participated in in-depth interviews. These interviews included 271 fathers and 129 partners across 15 countries. The in-depth interviews included a photovoice activity, a participatory visual method used to document and interpret caregivers' experiences through images and reflection. Photographs from this are featured throughout the report. For more details about study design, data collection, and analysis, please refer to Annex 1.

Data Collection

Between July and September 2025, data were collected primarily through established online panels administered by a professional survey research firm, RepData, with respondents having previously consented to participate in online research. For the core 14 countries (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Croatia, Ireland, Mexico, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, and Türkiye), data were collected in August and September of 2025, with additional comparative samples from the United States and the United Kingdom drawn from aligned national

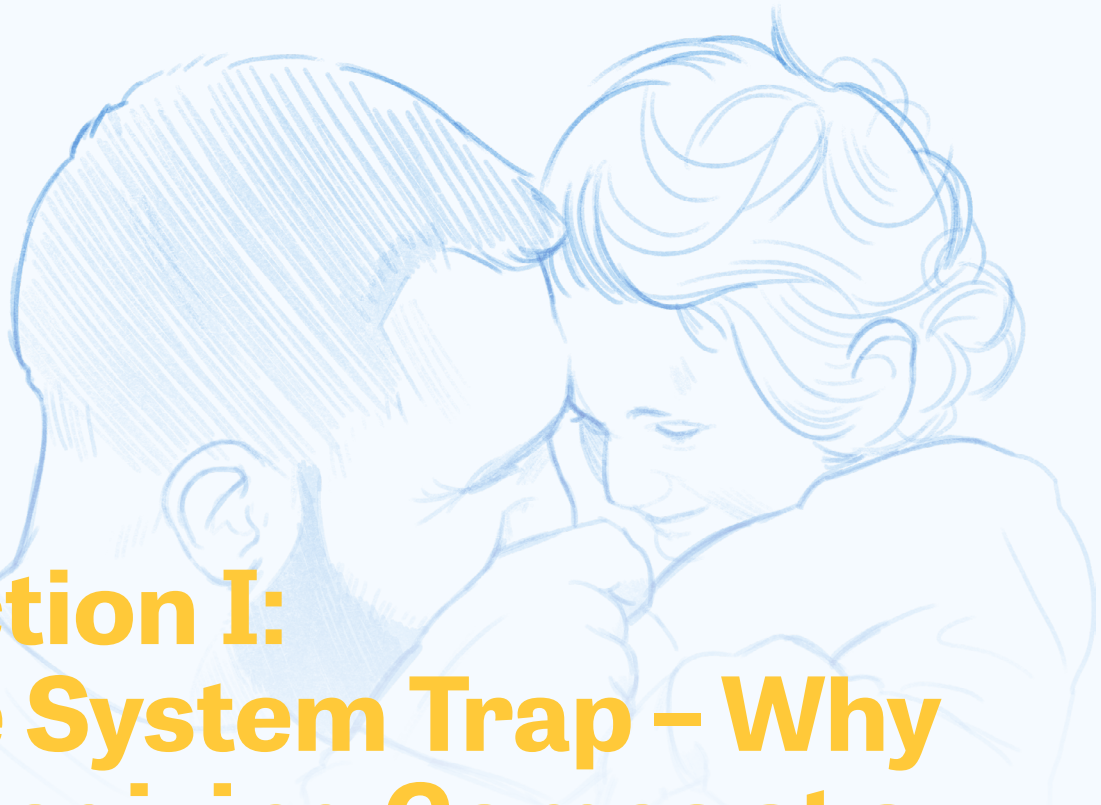
studies conducted in 2025 (that is, the State of American Fathers, May 2025²; and the State of UK Men, July 2025³). Data for the qualitative component were collected via in-person and virtual interviews, with both survey participants who expressed interest in participating in a follow-up interview and additional fathers and mothers who met sampling characteristics for the study.

Sampling

Sampling included quotas to ensure the participation of individuals with multiple caregiving responsibilities – such as those caring for adults, older family members, or people with disabilities – to more faithfully reflect the diversity of caregiving experiences within households and communities (approximately 200 per country). While the sampling strategy aimed to have a nationally representative sample for each country, the use of online panels means an overrepresentation of urban and higher-income respondents. As such, the data are best interpreted as illustrative of cross-national patterns and associations rather than as fully nationally representative estimates. For analytical clarity and consistency across countries, the primary analyses presented in this report focus on respondents who identified as men or women. Table 1 presents demographic information for study respondents.

Table 1. Demographic Information for Fathers and Mothers (in percentages)

	Mothers	Fathers
Age		
18–30 (youngest third)	36.29	34.48
31–45 (middle third)	36.98	32.19
46–65 (oldest third)	26.73	33.33
Relationship Status		
Unpartnered (including single, separated, divorced, and widowed)	22.22	14.65
Partnered, not living together	5.51	3.41
Married and/or living with a partner (including open and polygamous marriage)	71.55	81.64
Other/not reported	0.73	0.30
Education		
Up to primary completed	4.10	10.78
Up to secondary completed	37.67	30.16
Vocational college/technical school/associate's degree	18.20	14.84
Bachelor's degree or higher	40.04	44.13
Employment		
Employed (including full- and part-time, self-employed, students, and informal work)	78.97	93.93
Unemployed (including retired, unable to work, students)	15.03	5.70
Unpaid domestic work	6.00	0.37
Age of Children		
Early childhood (0–7 years old)	55.42	49.99
School-aged (8–12 years old)	36.38	37.88
Adolescent (13–18 years old)	33.31	31.88
Over 18 years old	14.92	12.39
Current Caring Responsibilities		
Child(ren)	72.73	70.17
Other adult(s) - elderly or ill parents, relatives, or friends	27.27	29.83
Both - children and other adult(s)	26.65	29.38
Has a disability	12.78	10.48
Identifies as LGBTQA+	6.62	6.05
Migrant	16.45	14.43



Section I: The System Trap – Why Caregiving Comes at a Steep Cost

“I think we often forget the ... beauty in fatherhood. [Fathers are portrayed] as unengaged or incapable, or even irrelevant at times, and ... that does a disservice to everyone ... it can make it easy for fathers to fall into those expected roles.”

– FATHER, 51 YEARS OLD, CANADA

Ask parents what matters most, and they’ll talk about their child’s laugh, bedtime routines, and being there for the small moments that turn out to be everything. Across genders and countries, parents describe caregiving as central to who they are and what gives their lives meaning. The cultural evidence is everywhere: as parenting podcasts rack up millions of downloads, videos of fathers doing their daughters’ hair go viral, and mothers share raw truths about the intensity of caring and are met with floods of recognition.

While there is a desire to care, we are surrounded by systems that prevent or even punish people for caring. Alongside the joy of caring sits the

grinding reality of actually doing it: the mental load of tracking doctor’s appointments no employer acknowledges, the financial anxiety that comes with a child getting sick and when the parents’ leave balance is empty, or the constant calculation of whether parents can afford to stay home or afford not to stay home. Parents carry worries that workplaces dismiss and wages do not cover. Parental leave is not enough for what is needed. All of this causes a background hum of stress that never quite turns off, even in the sweetest moments. This is the system trap: caring comes at such a high cost – financially, professionally, emotionally, that parents are forced to choose between being present and staying afloat.

emptier Wallets, Heavier Hearts

“Fifteen years ago, we had a much more comfortable life. Now, we are struggling. I am genuinely worried about our children’s future.”

– FATHER, 45 YEARS OLD, TÜRKIYE

Parents are grappling with rising costs, stagnant wages, short-term insecure contracts, and the relentless pressure of making ends meet. This economic strain has effects on their bank accounts but more importantly, it reaches into the heart of how families care for one another. When money worries keep parents up at night, the ripple effects touch everything – from who picks up the kids or stays home when they are sick, to who has the mental space to offer comfort at bedtime. **Financial insecurity often intensifies traditional breadwinner expectations**, creating a tension – for fathers in particular – between providing and being present. Mothers feel this weight, too, navigating their own economic pressures while shouldering disproportionate care responsibilities, which, for many, forces them to leave the labor force entirely.

We term this sense of **financial anxiety “economic precarity,”** borrowing from the writings of Pierre Bourdieu who defined precarity “as a generalized state of insecurity that cuts across traditional social-status divisions.”⁴ This idea was then popularized by economist Guy Standing, who describes those who feel economically precarious as “a distinct global class characterized by unstable, insecure labor, lacking benefits and a secure occupational identity.”⁵

The commonality of carers feeling crushing pressure to make ends meet to provide for their loved ones is revealed in both our quantitative and qualitative findings. As stated earlier, we also asked parents to capture photos to show us the highs and lows of how they feel in their caregiving lives. In PhotoVoice 1, the yellow piggy bank says it all.

- ▶ **Quantitatively, economic precarity is the one thing that defines parenthood today, especially since it is associated with every single care indicator that**

we measured in our survey. Equipundo developed a 12-item scale to measure economic precarity,⁶ with higher scores indicating more economic anxiety and insecurity. The findings from this study were not surprising – **both fathers’ and mothers’ scores indicate high average levels of precarity for both parents.**

PhotoVoice 1. Financial Worry



“What worries you about being a parent?”

“A piggy bank – which represents financial worries, economic uncertainty, and saving for my child’s future.”

– FATHER, 41 YEARS OLD, CANADA

Other data find the same thing. As the global economy continues to face high inflation, and ever-increasing energy prices and interest rates, most adults in 18 of 24 countries surveyed by Pew Research Center rate their nation’s economic situation poorly. A median 70 percent of adults across these countries say their nation’s economic situation is bad. Just 29 percent offer positive assessments.⁷

It is the generalized feeling of insecurity – above and beyond just income – that impacts two

Below are some specifics across all countries:

Feeling like they are on thin ice

- **Three in four** parents (76 percent of fathers | 82 percent of mothers) say they worry constantly about their financial future.
- **More than half** (56 percent of fathers | 53 percent of mothers) worry about losing their job.

A generational divide

- **74 percent** of fathers | **80 percent** of mothers say, “It’s much harder for my generation to feel financially secure than my father’s generation.”

The debt trap

- **27 percent** of fathers | **42 percent** of mothers are either in financial trouble, in debt and cannot meet regular expenses, or feel financially insecure and cannot consistently cover regular expenses.

Living on the edge

- About **25 percent** of both fathers and mothers feel financially secure but would struggle to cover a small emergency.

One income

- **1 in 3 households** (33 percent of both fathers and mothers) survives – and struggles – on a single income.

Homeownership is out of reach

- **50 percent** of fathers | **53 percent** of mothers say home ownership is beyond their grasp.

State assistance as a fragile lifeline

- **30 percent** of fathers | **28 percent** of mothers receive state or public benefits (rates vary significantly by country – for example, 50 percent of mothers and 34 percent of fathers in Canada versus approximately 10 percent of mothers and 20 percent of fathers in Colombia and Mexico).

Caregiving expenses devour family budgets

- **49 percent** of fathers | **51 percent** of mothers say caregiving costs represent half or more of their total income.

Goodbye to pleasures

- **49 percent** of fathers | **51 percent** of mothers say they reduced their spending on non-essential activities like shopping, outings, and vacations.

fundamental components of equitable caregiving: valuing care and believing that care should be distributed equally. The feeling of insecurity overshadows all other findings about care and who does it.

- ▶ **Economic precarity undermines attitudes around care equity.** For both fathers and mothers, **stress caused by financial worry is linked to the belief that care is a woman’s role**, not a man’s (see Figure 1). This is particularly true for the fathers who struggle most financially.

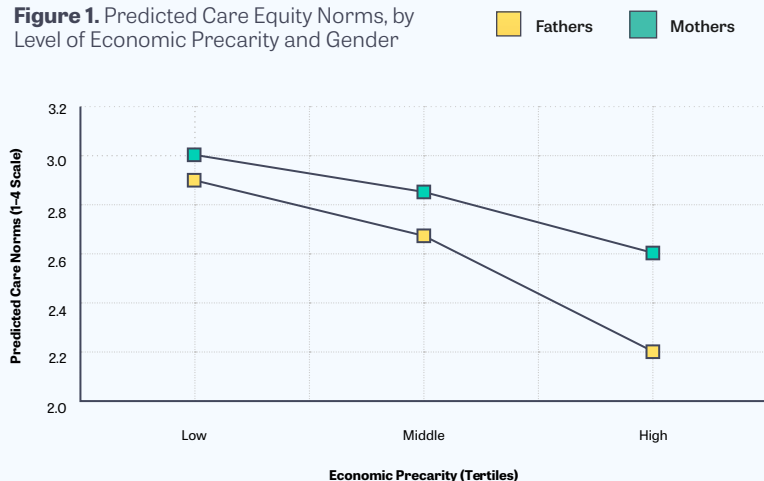
For fathers there is a sharper decline in beliefs about care equity as their own sense of economic precarity increases. **Men are mostly still seen as the main financial providers, where male identity is synonymous with career success**, and

where their purpose is **tied to making money and providing for their family** (State of American Men 2025⁸). Social norms still position men’s earnings as central to family financial security – even when women are also in paid work. Thus, when men are living in a world where their core expected identity is in flux and their options feel narrowed, our data show that they retreat to more inequitable care norms.

“You don’t know how hard it is to smile every day and bring joy to your child’s life knowing that you can’t afford anything.”

– MOTHER, 26 YEARS OLD, CROATIA

Figure 1. Predicted Care Equity Norms, by Level of Economic Precarity and Gender



→ Care norms are measured using a six-item scale, where higher scores reflect stronger support for equal sharing of caregiving between women and men. The values shown are adjusted estimates from OLS regressions showing that as precarity increases, support for gender-equal caregiving declines – especially among men – even after taking into account differences in income, age, education, and county. Data includes 14 countries; the United States and United Kingdom were excluded because these questions were not asked.

“If I had had the financial means, would I have worked less to spend more time at home? Yes, of course. I would have traded everything for that. Because children grow up and you don’t even realize it.”

– FATHER, 56 YEARS OLD, CHILE

World Values Surveys⁹ and others find that when paid work is scarce, men’s jobs are seen as more important than women’s. This attitude is reinforced by the fact that men still earn more than women in most countries and contexts and that women still do most of the caregiving. Worldwide, in 2023, 748 million people aged 15 and above were outside the labor force due to care responsibilities, of whom 708 million were women and 40 million were men. The highest percentages were in Northern Africa (63 percent) and the Arab States (59 percent).¹⁰

▶ **The more men and women experience economic precarity, the more they agree that care should be as valued as paid work.** In a regression model predicting care valuing – and controlling for income gender, age, education, and country – we found that as economic precarity increases, so does care valuing. Questions around valuing care measure if parents agree or disagree with statements such as “Taking care of the home is just as important as paid work” or “All employees should receive childcare support (for example, daycare in the building) from their employers,” and “A four-day work week would allow caregivers to get a better work-life balance.”¹¹

Economic precarity forces parents to confront a harsh reality: **care labor – the daily work of feeding, comforting, cleaning, and nurturing – has enormous value, yet our society treats it as if it costs nothing.**¹²

Mothers and fathers understand intimately that **caring for family is real work**, often more demanding than paid employment.

Parents facing economic insecurity are acutely aware that **if they had to pay someone else** to do the caregiving they provide – the round-the-clock availability, the emotional labor, the crisis management – it would cost them **a huge proportion of their monthly income.**¹³

Childcare in most countries is a huge drain on family resources. The average household with children in the United States spends nine percent of its income on childcare across the lifespan, while families with lower incomes spend more than 20 percent. At the same time, estimated lifetime out-of-pocket costs for adult long-term care services average \$140,000 a year.¹⁴ In England, a two-child family spends an average of 40 percent of disposable income on childcare.¹⁵

PhotoVoice 2. Homeownership Worry



“My fear for our children is they will not be able to afford a home. We have four adult children who are frustrated with the cost of housing and rent.”

– MOTHER, 49 YEARS OLD, CANADA

ARGENTINA

Economic insecurity follows a clear pattern: it hits hardest in young adulthood (18–30) for everyone. In early to mid-life, this economic insecurity affects fathers more than mothers, then it reverses – mothers aged 46 and over face greater financial precarity than their male peers.

CHILE

In Chile, economic precarity is relatively similar between men and women overall, but it diverges slightly (but not significantly) by age – women's peak economic precarity occurs in midlife and then declines sharply, while men dip in midlife and rise again in older age, narrowing the gap and slightly reversing it among older adults.

IRELAND

Fathers and mothers follow different paths. Fathers start with high economic precarity (18–30) and experience a decrease during ages 31 to 45, finally stabilizing through retirement. Mothers experience a steady, gradual decline – highest in their youth and continuously declining until age 65.

SPAIN

Economic precarity varies significantly by age but not by gender, following different trajectories for fathers and mothers. Fathers start with high economic precarity (18–30), see gradual decline in their 30s and 40s, and then experience a sharp drop after age 45. Mothers' peak also from ages 18 to 30 and then stabilize at a lower level from age 31 onward through retirement.

AUSTRALIA

The age story differs dramatically by gender. Young mothers (18–30) face significantly more economic precarity than older mothers, with financial security improving notably at and after age 46. For fathers, economic insecurity stays relatively constant across their lifespan.

CHINA

In China, age matters more than gender when it comes to economic insecurity. Young adults (18–30) face the toughest financial pressures. Things ease in the middle years (31–45), but precarity climbs again at and after age 46 – affecting fathers and mothers similarly.

MEXICO

Gender and age create a shifting story. Young mothers (18–30) carry the heaviest economic anxiety. Mid-life brings a reversal: fathers (31–45) suddenly face more economic stress than mothers. This shifts once again as older fathers (46–65) experience less economic stress than their female peers.

TÜRKIYE

Economic precarity moves in opposite directions. Fathers begin high (18–30) and drop sharply toward retirement. Mothers begin lower but climb steeply ending with higher stress than fathers in later years (46–65).

BRAZIL

Economic precarity affects all ages and genders similarly – no significant differences emerge.

COLOMBIA

Economic precarity affects all ages and genders – no significant differences emerge.

PORTUGAL

Both fathers and mothers experience the same economic rollercoaster: high stress in young adulthood (18–30), lower stress mid-career (31–45), and then stress creeping back up at and after age 46.

UNITED KINGDOM

Economic precarity affects all ages and genders similarly – no significant differences emerge.

CANADA

Canada's economic precarity story follows a U-shaped curve. Young adults (18–30) struggle most, parents in their middle years (31–45) catch a break, and then financial pressure creeps back up at and after age 46.

CROATIA

Economic precarity follows different paths for fathers and mothers. Young fathers (18–30) experience the highest financial insecurity – more than young mothers. In the middle years (31–45), fathers and mothers face similar levels. Then a divergence emerges: fathers' economic precarity drops sharply at and after age 46, while mothers' remains steady throughout their lives.

SOUTH AFRICA

Fathers struggle more with economic insecurity at every life stage, and that gap grows even wider at and after age 46. For mothers, it's the same story: their economic stress does not ease with age – it builds over time, worsening with age.

UNITED STATES

Economic precarity affects all ages and genders similarly – no significant differences emerge.

“The state of the nation is a disaster. We are struggling and underpaid. Our children cannot enjoy life to the fullest because sometimes we can't even afford their basic needs.”

– FATHER, 37 YEARS OLD, SOUTH AFRICA



Photo: Joep van de Sande via Unsplash

Millions of people around the world, many of them parents, migrate to support their families. Many must leave their children behind. In our study, 27 percent of fathers and 20 percent of mothers say they migrated to another country to find work and be able to meet caregiving responsibilities at some point. Currently, 17 percent of mothers and 14 percent of fathers were migrants.

In many countries, while struggling to make ends meet, parents also face xenophobia – a significant number of respondents in the survey blamed their country's problems on immigrants, and parents who had migrated had a strong sense of this.

Migration adds emotional and relational strain to caring. Among people who said that they live far from family, **81 percent of fathers and 76 percent of mothers agree or strongly agree that working away makes them feel they are missing out on their children's growth.** Around two-thirds of those respondents report that migration has strained their relationship (69 percent of fathers and 60 percent of mothers).

CHILE

“Even if we are migrants, we are not all bad. For children, one does everything so that they do not have what we had at their age.”

– MOTHER, 26 YEARS OLD

AUSTRALIA

“As a migrant parent, the challenges of having no support from family make it harder for both parents to work. One needs to take care of the kids' education in a different language and other parental challenges. It's impossible to live with one income.”

– MOTHER, 40 YEARS OLD

SOUTH AFRICA

“One of the challenges is that working far away from home and not enough jobs nearby in my community makes life harder for my family because my children need my support.”

– FATHER, 28 YEARS OLD

CANADA

“At the end of the day when you emigrate, you take a lot of your support circle away... it's difficult for people that leave their homes and their support groups. We don't think it's a support circle until we have to live without it.”

– FATHER, 51 YEARS OLD

“There are communities that have historically been neglected by care services. An example of this is migrants, who are often unable to access public care services due to their irregular migratory status or the requirement of official documentation. In addition, a large part of the migrant population is employed in informal jobs or in unconventional work schedules, with long working hours that make it difficult to access care services that operate on fixed schedules, designed for people who have traditional working hours.

Their working conditions, added to the lack of family or community support networks, because they come from another country, leave them in a situation of high vulnerability to care needs, forcing them to resort to improvised and precarious care.”

Head of the Women and Gender Department
Renca, Chile (interview for this report).

The Care Penalty: Too Few Choices, Too Little Time

“I love being a present parent, but it’s hard. I think that scares me most of the time... Juggling everything whereby I feel like I’m not giving enough in terms of time, the quality time, because I’ve got to work when I am not parenting.”

– MOTHER, 45 YEARS OLD, SOUTH AFRICA

Parents today are making costly work adaptations to meet caregiving needs. Fathers who actively parent face what researchers call a “flexibility stigma”¹⁶ – where requests for adjusted hours or time off risk labeling them as less committed workers, even as becoming a father initially triggers a “fatherhood bonus” based purely on the assumption of increased stability and dedication. The paradox is unsustainable: **men are rewarded for the status of fatherhood but penalized for actual fathering.** In a longitudinal study of more than 12,000 men and women, researchers from University of Oregon found that men who leave the workforce for family reasons can expect to earn 26.4 percent less later in their careers than they would have had they never left the workforce.¹⁷ Meanwhile, mothers encounter the “**motherhood penalty,**” **losing approximately 23.2 percent of earning as a financial penalty when they have children, an effect which lasts up to a decade after a birth.**^{18,19} For both types of parents, **each caregiving responsibility becomes a career calculation – every school pick-up, every sick day, every moment of presence with their children potentially costs them promotions, raises, or professional credibility.**

Research shows that half of working fathers find it “very or somewhat difficult” to balance responsibilities at work and home,²⁰ with many fathers reducing work hours, turning down promotions, or changing jobs entirely to be present during their children’s formative years.²¹ Parents are making tough choices every day: Do I take this promotion that requires travel, or do I stay present for my toddler? Do I risk professional marginalization by asking for flexibility, or do I miss my child’s milestones? These calculations don’t just affect paychecks; they determine who gets to be both economically secure and emotionally

present. Increasingly, parents are realizing that they cannot have both. Our survey reveals that **across all countries, parents are making hard decisions because workspaces and institutional structures are counterintuitive to prioritizing care for loved ones,** see Table 2.

“*Work overload and a lack of adequate resources make it nearly impossible to balance family life and life for your family.*”

– MOTHER, 35 YEARS OLD, ARGENTINA

The choices parents make often reflect gendered patterns: **fathers in our study are more likely than women to be in full-time paid employment. In our dataset, 79 percent of men worked full time compared with only 53 percent of women.** This reflects global statistics: women, especially those with young children, are less likely to be in paid work than men. In high-income countries, women’s part-time rates are often **three to four times higher** than men’s. In low- and middle-income countries, part-time work is less common, but **the gender gap remains,** leading to a global gender gap in labor force participation of 27.5 percentage points (2023).²²

- ▶ **Women’s employment in our study varies dramatically by country, from more than 90 percent to 60 percent.** Women’s employment is far more sensitive to national context than men’s, including factors such as the availability and affordability of childcare, norms around maternal employment, and the fact that more women than men are in informal or part-time paid work, underscoring how employment shocks and caregiving demands are unevenly absorbed within households.

Table 2. Sacrifice “Scorecard”: Economic and Professional Disruptions Due to Care Responsibilities, by Gender

	Fathers	Mothers
Reduced spending on non-essential activities like shopping, eating out, vacation, etc.	67%	77%
Delayed major life purchases	64%	71%
Tapped into emergency savings funds	57%	64%
Worked overtime	63%	54%
Reduced work hours	53%	58%
Changed job to have more flexible work hours	44%	49%
Taken on a second or third job or income stream	49%	42%
Delayed or stopped your education or professional training	42%	48%
Stayed in a precarious job (e.g. low pay, poor condition, no benefits, long hours, limit or no growth opportunities)	40%	42%
Tapped into a retirement savings account	39%	34%
Left my job/stopped work	28%	40%
Turned down a promotion or professional opportunity	31%	34%
Refinanced or sold your home	28%	20%

► **We assessed 16 types of sacrifices that parents report they make for caregiving, spanning both employment and personal life** (see Table 2).

- **Nearly six in 10 mothers** reduced work hours, while half of fathers picked up second or third jobs.
- **Four in 10 parents** stayed trapped in precarious jobs – such as jobs with low pay, poor conditions, and no benefits – because they needed something to meet care needs.
- **More than half** of parents drained their emergency savings for routine survival.
- **One in four fathers** refinanced or sold their homes for care responsibilities.

► Across countries, men’s average scores range from 5.4 (United States) to 8.2 (Colombia) and women’s from 5.8 (United States) to 8.5 (Colombia), with most countries clustering around 6 to 8 sacrifices on average. While women report higher scores in many countries (Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Ireland, Mexico, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States), in Australia, Croatia, South Africa, and Türkiye, men are either on a par or slightly higher in their scores than women,

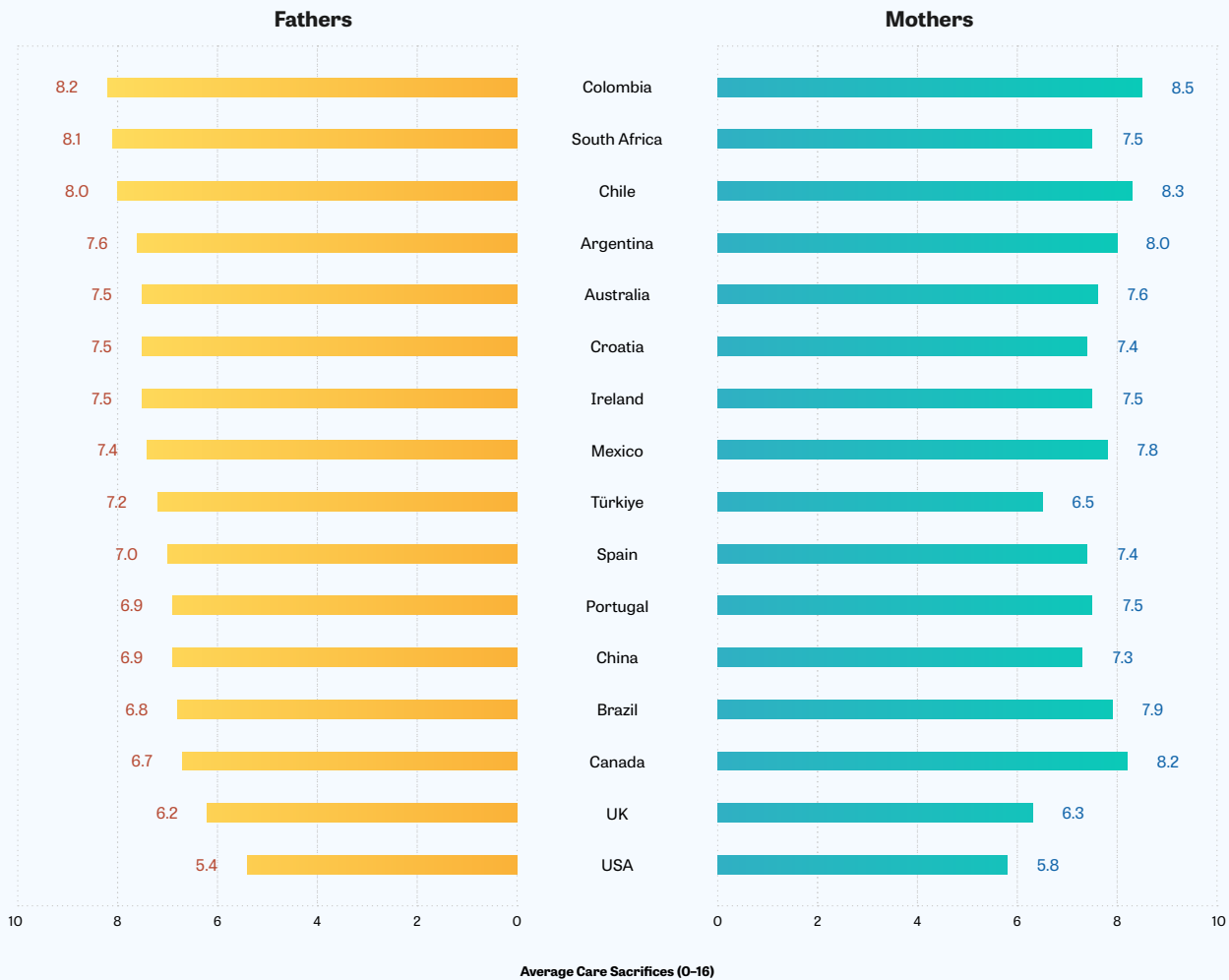
indicating that no matter what, parents experience a broader range of caregiving-related trade-offs across work, finances, and personal life.

Cross-country differences in parental employment patterns may help explain why mothers and fathers appear to report relatively similar levels of economic and professional sacrifice in some contexts, see Figure 2. The items included in the sacrifice scorecard primarily capture adjustments linked to labor market participation – such as working overtime, changing jobs for flexibility, delaying professional training, or taking on additional income streams. In countries where mothers’ employment rates remain substantially lower than fathers’, these indicators may disproportionately capture fathers’ economic trade-offs while under-representing sacrifices made by mothers outside of formal employment. Our qualitative interviews were full of stories where women spoke about large personal sacrifices, which had major consequences for their economic independence, health, and autonomy.

“As a caregiver for my children, I faced physical and emotional exhaustion, stress, health problems, and difficulties in social and professional life.”

– FATHER, 48 YEARS OLD, SPAIN

Figure 2. Average Care-Related Sacrifices, by Gender and Country



→ Average number of care-related sacrifices reported by mothers and fathers in each country, measured on a 0–16 scale (higher values indicate more reported sacrifices). Countries are ordered by fathers' average score.

Indeed, countries with some of the largest gender gaps in parental employment in our sample – including Argentina, Canada, Chile, Türkiye, and the United States – also show relatively similar reported sacrifice patterns between mothers and fathers. Men are sacrificing financially (such as by taking second jobs and refinancing) while women are sacrificing professionally and personally (such as by reducing hours or leaving the workforce). In these countries, these patterns reinforce the breadwinner model for fathers and the caregiver model for mothers. As a result, comparable sacrifice scores should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence of equal burden, but rather as reflecting adjustments among those engaged in paid work

► In the *State of the World's Fathers 2023*, **fewer than half of parents said caregiving was worth sacrificing career**

PhotoVoice 3. Time Worry



"I am using the photograph to show the lack of time to be able to personally invest in caring for my child and the person I care for."

– FATHER, 31 YEARS OLD, CHILE

The new viral phenomenon of “tradwives” – where some women who retreat into the home as a solution and espouse strict traditional gender roles – showcase a surrender to structures that offer only two options: exhaust yourself trying or give up entirely while evoking a nostalgia from the past of traditionalism.

Borrowing from Klein’s concept of “mirror world,” Banet-Weiser and all (2026)²⁶ suggest that the rage from tradwives and feminists is one and the same against a system that is failing women, even if their fury flows in the opposite directions.

Feminist mothers direct their anger at institutional inequities and organize collectively to demand change while tradwives focus on individual suffering and choose personal retreat as their solution.

For women who fit into the tradwife category, the movement gives women permission to stop attempting the impossible, but it abandons the fight for a world where such choices would not be necessary.

advancement. By 2025, that number jumped to 78 percent of both mothers and fathers.

What changed? Not workplace policies, as those remain brutally inflexible. Not childcare costs, those keep climbing. Not economic security, that’s deteriorated further. **What changed is parents’ willingness to fight for both.** The shift from 50 to 78 percent does not represent parents becoming more family-oriented; it represents them becoming more exhausted, more realistic, and more resigned to a world that allows them to care and work. **“Worth it” here is the language of acceptance, not triumph.** The numbers make it clear: **fewer than one in five parents** (17 percent of fathers and 18 percent of mothers) feel they have enough time to care for their families, while nearly half (47 percent of fathers and 48 percent of mothers) **struggle to balance work and care** (See PhotoVoice 3).

There is a severe time scarcity experienced by both mothers and fathers. Despite evidence that parents today spend more time with their children than parents did 50 years ago, the subjective experience tells a different story: roughly half of all employed parents report feeling they don’t have enough time with their children.²³ This paradox – investing more hours but still feeling like it is not enough time – stems from what researchers call “intensive parenting” and it is combined with workplace demands that refuse to bend.²⁴

- ▶ **Parents who worry most intensely about their financial future are most likely**

to trade away career advancement, financial security, and self-care to meet caregiving needs. In other words, those who have the highest economic anxiety are also the most likely to make sacrifices. This relationship persists across all demographics – age, education, country, and income level.

- ▶ Despite the increase in remote working possibilities post-COVID pandemic and now that flexible work is enshrined in law in many of our study countries, **83 percent of fathers and 85 percent of mothers note that “My employer won’t allow flexible working” and 86 percent of fathers and 84 percent of mothers report “I can’t take a pay cut from work to support caregiving.”** This might allude to something else entirely: the perception that work norms are rigid, not supporting parents to juggle care and work simultaneously.

Our data confirm that **workplaces are not designed for enabling employees’ caregiving roles.** This is disheartening, especially since research finds that if workplaces invest in supporting caregivers, they are likely to reap several benefits from the soft skills that caregivers bring to the workforce. In the United States, the Rutgers Center for Women in Business²⁵ found that caregivers excelled in their paid work through improvements in key competencies as varied as conflict resolution, time management, and strategic foresight when matched against the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics’ 17 core workplace skills.

→ Photo: Rupinder Singh via Unsplash

**CHILE**

"I have two jobs. Both are as a cleaning assistant, but the daytime job is a couple of days a week and the night job is every day. [...] It's a bit exhausting ... I couldn't continue studying."

– MOTHER, 26 YEARS OLD

SPAIN

"Another thing I'm not liking about parenthood is that my partner had to give up a job to focus on raising [our daughter]. That feeling of imbalance and that women are losing out again, even in my own relationship, is costing me a bit and making me question a lot of things... the consequence of all this is creating ... an imbalance in which I am coming out on top in certain ways."

– FATHER, 34 YEARS OLD

AUSTRALIA

"If I could tell a local political representative one thing about the challenges I face as a parent it would be the lack of time I have for taking care of my kids and spending time with them due to my job."

– FATHER, 27 YEARS OLD

CANADA

"I feel like I have spent 13 years [as a parent] running a marathon with constant hurdles, barriers and challenges that do not get me ahead and have left me totally unable to contribute to society because of the burnout of trying to do it all."

– MOTHER, 35 YEARS OLD

SOUTH AFRICA

"We make small sacrifices every day. We have three kids now. The financial sacrifices are too much because I am also taking care of my parents. We're just not as well off financially as before."

– FATHER, 40 YEARS OLD

SPAIN

"I've had precarious contracts for a long time, always two or three-year contracts, and that causes a lot of anxiety."

– MOTHER, 37 YEARS OLD

Overwhelmed and Overlooked: Parental Stress, Worry, and Mental Health

“Parents carry too many responsibilities, lack of community support generates deep physical, mental and emotional exhaustion.”

– FATHER, 22 YEARS OLD, ARGENTINA

Our data clearly reveal that **economic precarity is related to higher mental distress.**

For fathers, the anxiety of financial insecurity does not just create stress – it fundamentally undermines fathers’ health and happiness. It’s not abstract. The daily sacrifices parents are forced to make – choosing between career advancement and being present, between financial security and caregiving – **account for 22 percent of fathers reported overall poor well-being. The grinding choices fathers must make explains almost a quarter of why economic anxiety is linked to mental health.**

Other data support this – the United Nations Population Fund’s 2025 State of the World’s Population finds that parents are more stressed than ever.²⁷ In 2023, in the United States, the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General reported that **48 percent of parents said that most days their**

stress was completely overwhelming, compared with 26 percent of other adults.²⁸ A study in Ghana found that fathers with **higher levels of stress had lower overall well-being** – although, as with our findings, this was counterbalanced by **“the sense of pride and joy that fatherhood brings, counterbalancing the stress-related findings. Being a father earned them homage among their peers, reaffirmed their “manhood,” elevated their status in society, and made them heroes in the eyes of their children.”**²⁹

If we want to allow parents and children to enjoy time with each other, we must reduce parental stress. We also need to acknowledge that our **economic system is harming those who already feel most financially insecure.**

When we asked parents to rank their concerns, the findings were remarkably similar across countries:

PhotoVoice 4. Social Media Worry



“Yes. The cell phone. Yes, I think that’s something that worries me in the present and in the future, and suddenly, yes, everything like content, social media, ... the whole issue of influencers and propaganda.”

Why influencers?

“Because I think that often, they have a misconception about life. Let’s say that many people only care about travel, physical appearance, money? They believe that ... and it gives them the idea ... that is happiness? ... access to those things like travel, cars, houses, luxuries, is something very simple, something easy to acquire. ... I think that fills children with ... a false idea of happiness. So, until they have that, they won’t be happy, and without that, they won’t have access to ... friendships, relationships. So, for me, that seems a little difficult ... suddenly in adolescence it’s not so easy to explain those things to them, and for them to understand them.”

– FATHER, 37 YEARS OLD, COLOMBIA

- ▶ Mothers' and fathers' main worries are about their **children's and their own financial future, how to care for aging parents, and how to balance family and work life**. When asked to rank nine common concerns, 64 percent of fathers and 69 percent of mothers placed their children's financial future among their top three worries. Around 55 percent of both fathers and mothers also ranked their own financial security and ability to provide for their family among their top concerns. Concerns about aging parents were more prominent among fathers (34

"I think [social media and technology are] another front you have to ... worry about. ...I think that if before there was one universe for you to take care of, now you have two universes to take care of."

– FATHER, 48 YEARS OLD, BRAZIL

percent) than mothers (26 percent), as were worries about work-life balance (35 percent versus 28 percent).

- ▶ Parents also worried about what their **children were doing online**, with 32 percent of fathers and 26 percent of mothers ranking this among their top three concerns.

Across the top worries, mothers and fathers most frequently mention children's health, education,

and safety (see Figure 3). However, fathers are relatively more likely to emphasize economic strain and financial pressures, while mothers more often highlight broader developmental and well-being concerns.

“*The most difficult part [of being a dad] ... I think it's the responsibility of raising a child in today's society, with all the dangers that exist, issues with social media, cell phones, video games, etc."*

– FATHER, 36 YEARS OLD, ARGENTINA.

Digital safety and supervision are one of their core caregiving anxieties: "I don't know what my child(ren) is/are doing on the internet," showed up as one of the top three parental worries for a third of parents in many countries. **Fathers seem to worry more about this than mothers, perhaps because they recognize the harmful content they see online that is guided by algorithms adjusted for their gender.** Navigating children's online environments may be adding to existing caregiving pressures, as they exist within a much larger stress-inducing environment, and in a context where there is already elevated parental stress and anxiety.³⁰ Australia's ban of social media for those under age 16 is one of the world's first-ever national policies aimed to address these concerns (see Annex 2).

- ▶ **Fathers have higher odds than mothers of being in the high-distress group** – with 29 percent reporting suicidal thoughts – alongside chronic worry, and heavy episodic drinking. **Overall, younger fathers have the highest likelihood of reporting distress.**

PhotoVoice 5. Late-Night Worry

What do we see in this photo?

"A photo of a bedroom light left on late at night, with the rest of the room in shadow."

What does it mean to you?

"The light represents uncertainty and worries about the future. It reflects concerns about whether they will be safe, independent, or supported when I cannot always be there."

Why did you choose this picture?

"I chose this image because worry is often invisible and constant rather than obvious. The light being on shows that even when everything looks calm, there are ongoing concerns that are hard to switch off."

– FATHER, 34 YEARS OLD, IRELAND

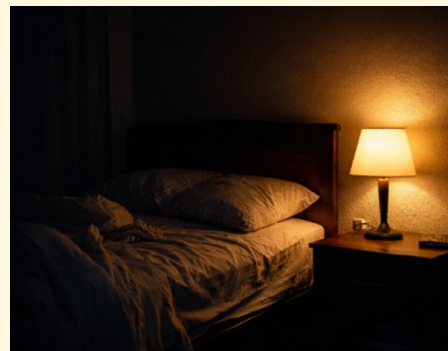
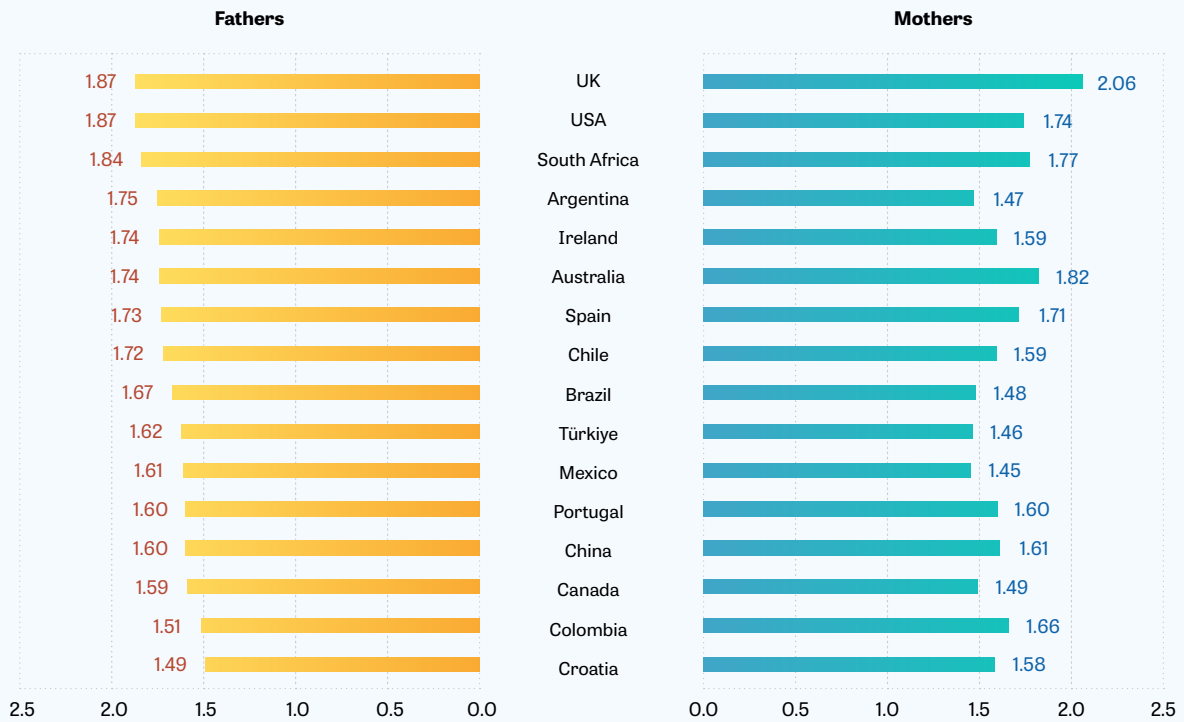
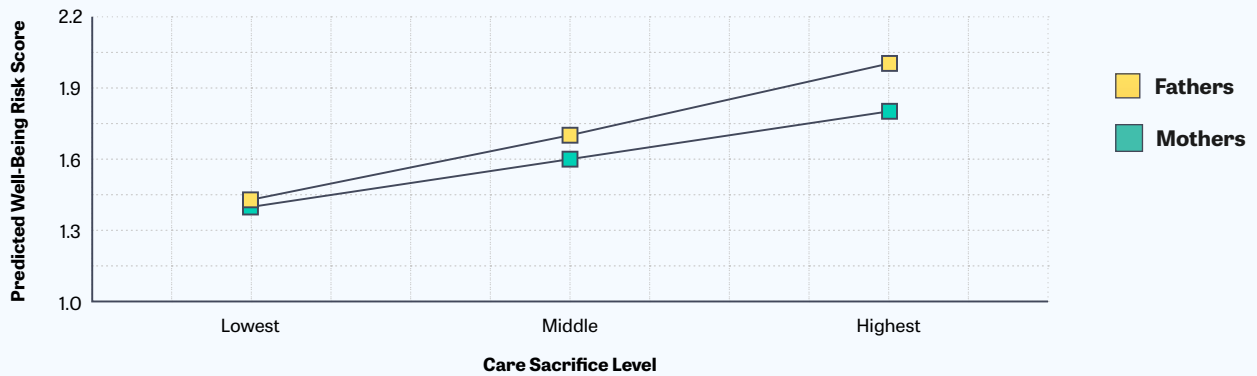


Figure 4. Mean Well-Being Risk and Distress Scores for Fathers and Mothers



→ Mean well-being risk and distress scores for mothers and fathers in each country, measured using five questions about experiences in the past two weeks (e.g., suicidal thoughts, anxiety symptoms, alcohol-related impairment, persistent worry, and heavy drinking), on a 1–4 scale where higher scores indicate greater reported risk and distress. Gender differences are highly statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) albeit small in magnitude.

Figure 5. Predicted Well-Being Risk and Distress Score, by Gender and Care Sacrifice Level



→ Predicted estimates are drawn from OLS regressions and account for case sacrifice level, gender, economic precarity, age, education, and country differences. As care burden rises, distress levels also rise significantly for all parents – and fathers’ increases more steeply than mothers’. These differences are highly statistically significant.

the higher their distress – as Figure 5 shows. This is true irrespective of age, gender, education, employment, and country. Though Figure 5 displays general mental health, the results found that higher care burden is consistently associated with more anxiety, more suicidality, and higher alcohol consumption.

What these data on parents’ mental health reveal: parents are not coping, families are suffering mental distress, with consequences for children and for society.

Increasing numbers of parents looking after children are also looking after older relatives. By 2050, the number of people over 60 is projected to double from approximately 1.1 billion in 2023 to 2.1 billion, which will constitute 22 percent of the world's population. More than 80 percent of that group will be living in low- and middle-income countries. The number of people aged 85 and over is growing faster than those over 65, so the need for long-term care (institutional, formal or informal care at home) is likely to increase rapidly in the coming years.^{35 36} On average, women make up the majority (87 percent) of formal caregivers globally, and 60 percent of informal carers.³⁷

- ▶ **One in four parents in our study say they are caring for older relatives, friends, or others in the community, as well as children.** The majority say they are doing this with no or little support. **Nineteen percent of mothers and 12 percent of fathers report having no support whatsoever, while 13 percent of mothers and 20 percent of fathers report accessing part-time support only** and doing the care themselves on a part-time basis. Very few mothers and fathers (18 percent of mothers and 21 percent of fathers) said they were using full-time care services for elderly relatives – apart from anything else, the cost of these is often prohibitive – and many talked about the stresses of caring for children and ageing parents at the same time.
- ▶ The need to support older parents is offset in some ways by the **increasing numbers of grandparents who are an essential part of looking after children, especially when costs are so high for paid childcare.** Our data find that while three out of five parents say they rely on childcare or a nanny/childminder for care, **25 percent of mothers and 20 percent of fathers say they get support from grandparents or relatives.** This is likely to rise as populations age: while there are currently approximately 1.5 billion grandparents globally, by 2050 it is projected that there will be 2.1 billion grandparents.³⁸

SOUTH AFRICA

"My father is still under my financial care even though he's living in his own house. I buy him things like a satellite television and pay for his subscription every month ...When [the kids] come and say there's no ice cream, I say that I had to pay for their grandfather's subscription. As soon as I get money, I will get them ice cream. Those are sacrifices that we make ... Taking care of parents takes a financial toll."

– FATHER, 55 YEARS OLD

CANADA

"My parents ... they're quite old, and my mother is not well ... they live about an hour away from us, and I do all of their finances for them, and we're often down helping them with tasks at their house."

– FATHER, 46 YEARS OLD, WITH TWO CHILDREN AGED 13 AND 11. HIS ADULT STEPDAUGHTER AND HIS IN LAWS ALSO LIVE WITH THE FAMILY

CHILE

"Eldercare and childcare together overwhelm families with emotional and financial burdens."

– FATHER, 63 YEARS OLD

TÜRKIYE

"Where I can't manage, my grandmother [or] my mother, step in."

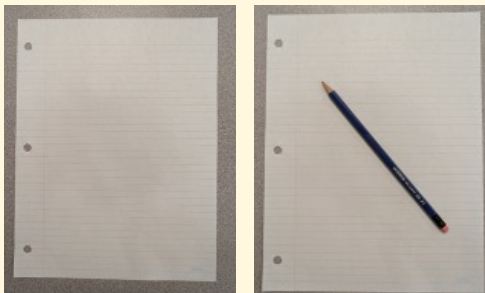
– FATHER, 45 YEARS OLD

CHILE

"My mother-in-law helps us in that regard: she buys little things for the children and takes good care of them in the afternoon. When we arrive, they are happy."

– FATHER, 26 YEARS OLD

PhotoVoice 6. Caregiving Worry



"When I took the picture, the worry is the empty page, because I was thinking more of caregiving for my parents when I took that picture, but it was more because my mother has dementia and I see her losing more and more of her memories, and so, like, an empty page and then, the other one with the page and the pencil. It gives me hope for my kids, because, you know, they're able to author their own. I see more and more that they're able to write their own story and follow their own path."

– FATHER, 46 YEARS OLD, CANADA



Section II. The Disconnect – What Parents Want Versus What Systems Allow

We saw in the last section the pressures that fathers and mothers are under, the sacrifices they make, and the toll this takes on their mental and physical health. But parents also tell us of the joy of caring for their children and of the importance of good communication. Dads want to provide care. But if we compare today's data with the last *State of the World's Father's* report (2023), we see that more fathers, and even more mothers, are reverting to traditional norms about

fathers as providers and mothers as carers. This is driven both by financial pressures and systems that do not support equal parenting, and by the anti-equality backlash that is spreading around the world. This thread of contradiction runs throughout this report. It is not that parents are failing to live up to modern values, it is that they are not able to navigate systems designed for a world that no longer exists.

Fathers Care About Care

“I really enjoy it when my daughter gives me a hug. We’re both a bit shy about showing affection sometimes. But that, you know, makes me very emotional. I mean, it only takes 30 seconds, but those 30 seconds fill you with energy.”

– FATHER, 48 YEARS OLD, ARGENTINA

One of the clearest messages from our research – reinforced across every *State of the World’s Fathers* report – is that despite their differences, mothers and fathers see care as central to their lives. Our data consistently reveal that **caregiving is a source of profound joy for both mothers and fathers.**

- ▶ **Nine out of 10 fathers and mothers agree or strongly agree that “most of the time, I feel that caring for children or my loved ones is one of the most enjoyable things in my life”** (91 percent of men, 90 percent of women).

This figure has held steady since our 2023 survey – despite increasing instability/uncertainty, precarity, and inequality in almost every context across the globe. As one 51-year-old Canadian father told us: “Family is an important part of life. It’s really, you know, probably the most important thing.”

“I have realized that almost all the responsibilities of raising children and being a parent are generally and culturally passed on to women ... For me, that [being more involved in the care and upbringing of my children] has been very rewarding because you can bond with the kids and they start to trust you.”

– FATHER, 59 YEARS OLD, COLOMBIA

We asked respondents what words come to mind when they think of “fatherhood” (see Figure 6). Using percentages within each gender, men and women show strikingly similar patterns in how they define it – both most frequently emphasize responsibility, love, and care as core elements – suggesting broad consensus that fatherhood is fundamentally about commitment and emotional connection, with only modest differences in whether that commitment is framed more as an identity (in the case of men) or a relational experience (in the case of women).

Figure 6. What It Means To Be a Dad: Words Used by Men to Describe “Fatherhood” Across 14 Countries



→ Word size reflects the percentage of fathers using each term. Similar words were harmonized (e.g. care/caring/carer) and prompt-linked words were excluded (e.g. father/fatherhood).

Across countries, we also found resounding agreement that men today are doing more care work than their fathers. This isn't just what fathers say, even mothers agree. In line with multiple studies documenting this trend, the evidence is unambiguous: although mothers are still doing more, fathers today care about providing care and are more prepared to get involved than in the past.

“I feel that men express their feelings more now ... I think that before, men were like, I work, I come home ... I bring home the money, period ... It doesn't mean that they didn't love you, ... they had a bigger shield when it came to showing feelings.”

– FATHER, 48 YEARS OLD, CHILE

Box 6.

“The best gift you can give is love”: Fathers’ Love for Care

→ Photo: Amonwat Dumkrut via Unsplash

TÜRKIYE

“Meeting their needs makes me happy... Taking care of them, spending time with them.... For example, my son plays soccer: going with him every weekend, watching his games, attending his training sessions, gives me pleasure. I enjoy that responsibility.”

– FATHER, 45 YEARS OLD

SOUTH AFRICA

“I think the best gift you can give is love. Yes, money is important, but the basic one is love.”

– FATHER, 23 YEARS OLD

AUSTRALIA

“I'm a single dad. I have two daughters. I have a nine-year-old and a two-year-old. I just really love spending time with them and seeing them grow and seeing their personalities come out and I feel really proud of them and all the things that they choose to do. Like my nine-year-old is starting to cook. She's developing her own interests in a lot of things and it's just, it's really cool. I feel incredibly proud of them.”

– FATHER, 46 YEARS OLD

CROATIA

“Fatherhood...was one of the most beautiful periods in my life. That's my word for it. When I was at home with my child and followed her as she grew up. When she was healthy, happy, cheerful, playing.”

– FATHER, 61 YEARS OLD

CANADA

“I guess it's watching my children grow, whether it's my son or my daughter, just watching them grow and develop into human beings with their own identities and everything, and becoming independent. I think that's the best part for me, being a father.”

– FATHER, 46 YEARS OLD

CHILE

“Learning to show affection. That has been the biggest thing. I used to be closed off, cold. Not anymore. Now I tell them I love them, I hug them. That's what I value most... Being present is the most important thing. Not just money. Being there.”

– FATHER, 40 YEARS OLD

PhotoVoice 7. Hope in Bonding



A 30-year-old father in Chile shares that what gives him hope about being a parent is his children's drawings. He says they “give me hope that all the effort, sacrifice, and difficulties a parent faces are rewarded in moments spent together, drawing and painting with them.”

- ▶ Dads say they are more involved in care than their own fathers were. **On average globally, across 14 countries, 90 percent of fathers and 85 percent of mothers agree that “It’s a lot more normal for men to do care work than it was in my father’s generation.”** This represents one of the most consensual attitudes shared in our research.

As Figure 7 shows, fathers agree with this statement more than mothers in most countries (China, Ireland, and Türkiye are exceptions). Agreement ranges from 96 percent in Chile to 84 percent in China. Even where mothers agree less than fathers, the lowest agreement rate among mothers is still 78 percent (South Africa), with the highest at 94 percent (Türkiye).

For men, **the agreement rates grow modestly but significantly with age** – among the youngest men (18–30), 89 percent across the countries agree, for men aged 31 to 45 percent, 91 percent of men agree, and for men aged 46 to 65 years, 93 percent of men agree.

This finding requires a caveat: **progress relative to a previous generation is not the same as progress toward equality.** The relevant benchmark here is not “how much more involved is today’s father compared to his own father,” but “how far is today’s father from sharing care equitably with his partner?” And our data throughout this report reveal that the answer is quite a long way away. **Fathers want to do more care, but this does not necessarily translate into hands-on, daily, equal caregiving with mothers.** This is particularly relevant to housework and the

mental load that mothers carry disproportionately. There is still no country in the world where mothers and fathers share this work equally.

We recorded several statements about valuing care and found that, on aggregate, **fathers said they valued care almost as much as mothers, even though women’s care work is more normalized than men’s** (see Figure 8).

- ▶ **Nine out of 10 mothers and fathers (91 percent of mothers and 89 percent of fathers) say they value what they do in the home as much as paid work.** In a world where systems and institutions do not value unpaid care and domestic work and where patriarchal values still drive much human behavior, this is a remarkable statistic. Figure 8 shows the gender differences per country.

“Today, in most cases, fathers are much more involved. Compared to our grandparents’ generation, the difference really is like day and night.”

– FATHER, 30 YEARS OLD, CROATIA

- ▶ Parents are also on the same page about what makes a good partner. An overwhelming **91 percent of fathers and 94 percent of mothers** agree that men who do their fair share of housework and care work make good partners. **Eighty-four percent of fathers and 90 percent of mothers** say involved caregivers are seen as desirable partners.

A contribution from Princeton University’s School of Public and International Affairs for this report shows that closeness from non-biological fathers, often stepfathers, is linked to positive outcomes for children – a finding that suggests that caring for children runs deep within fathers, regardless of biology (see Annex 3).

PhotoVoice 8. Hope in the Everyday



What do we see in this picture?

“A photo of a small pair of shoes by the front door, slightly muddy, with a jacket hanging nearby.”

What does it mean to you?

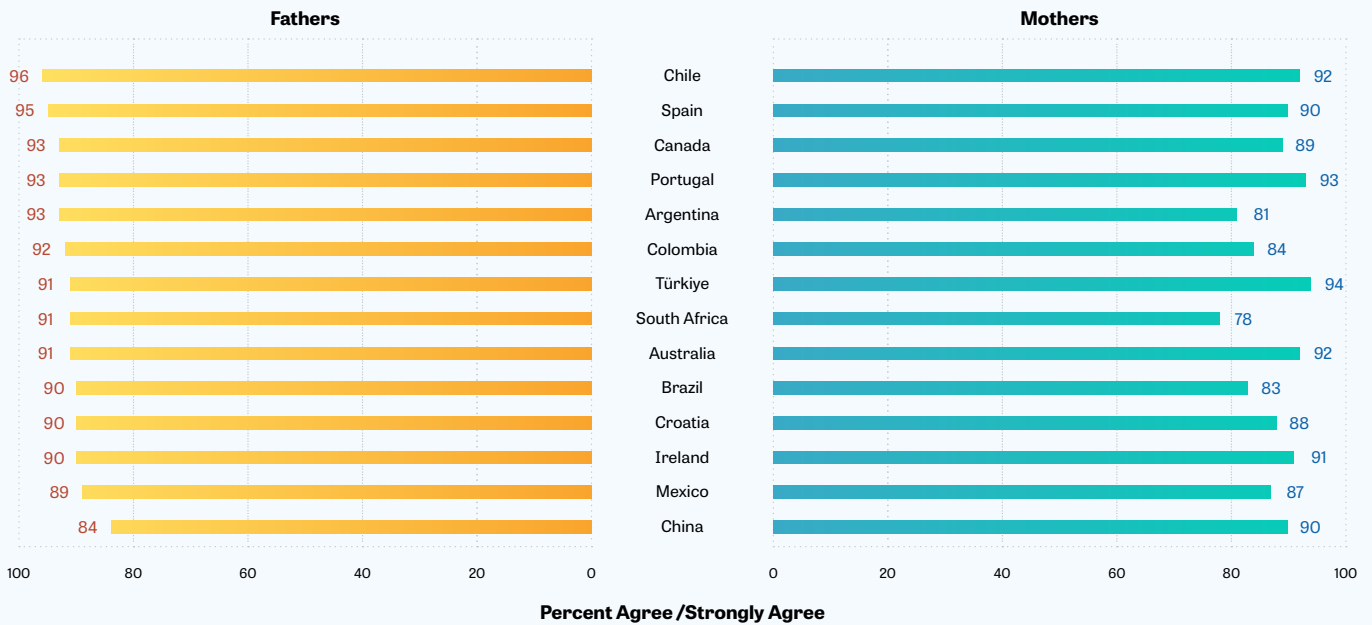
“The shoes represent everyday routines and small moments that make caring feel meaningful. They remind me that the person I care for is active, curious, and engaged with the world, even in ordinary ways.”

Why did you choose this picture?

“I chose this picture because joy for me is not about big achievements, but about seeing them able to go outside, explore, and come back safely. It captures quiet happiness rather than something dramatic.”

– FATHER, 34 YEARS OLD, IRELAND

Figure 7. Agreement That Men's Participation in Care Work Is More Normal Today, by Country and Gender



→ Percentage of fathers and mothers in each country who either agree or strongly agree that it is more normal for men to do care work today than in their fathers' generation. No data available for US and UK.

Figure 8. Agreement That Taking Care of Home Is as Important as Paid Work, by Country and Gender



→ Percentage of mothers and fathers who agree or strongly agree that care of the home is as important as paid work. Countries sorted by fathers' percent agreement.

These findings, taken together, challenge the discourse that fathers are absent, uncaring, or only showing up for financial provision. Indeed, because boys and men are generally not socialized to care in the same way as girls and women, that

fathers say they care nearly as much as mothers, means that dads are resisting the messages from their families, communities, and workplaces to code caregiving as only for women. **It is evidence of just how much dads really care about care.**

One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: How Care Equality is Under Threat

“People assume that the dad’s doing more of the work and the mum’s doing more of the care. I think it’s so strange that we’ve changed so much, but we also haven’t.”

– FATHER, 46 YEARS OLD, AUSTRALIA

The years since our last *State of the World’s Fathers* report in 2023 have seen **growing online and offline movements against gender equality in many countries** that are particularly targeting young men.³⁹ So, it is perhaps not surprising that **our data show some backsliding on gendered beliefs regarding caregiving, particularly among young fathers.**

We examined differences between data from *State of the World’s Fathers 2023*⁴⁰ and this 2026 report. Many of the same countries are included in both.

- ▶ **Forty percent of men and 29 percent of women agree with the statement “Boys should not be taught to cook, sew, cook, clean or take care of their siblings.”** In 2023, this was **25 percent of fathers and 18 percent of mothers.**

This shows a marked return to agreement with more traditional norms, especially among fathers.

- ▶ **Thirty-six percent of fathers and 23 percent of mothers agree that “Changing diapers, giving kids a bath and feeding kids are a mother’s responsibility.”** In 2023, **32 percent of fathers and 30 percent of mothers** agreed. This is a rise in the percentage of men, and a decline in the number of women.

Overall, we see a steep return to some more traditional attitudes, particularly among fathers, and a mixed picture among mothers, with backsliding in some contexts (see Figure 9). We see parallels in other studies.^{41 42 43}

Younger fathers are more likely to hold more regressive norms than older fathers, as shown in Figure 10. In nearly every country in our study, young fathers score lower than other age groups on care norms. **Agreement with equitable care norms increases from young adulthood**

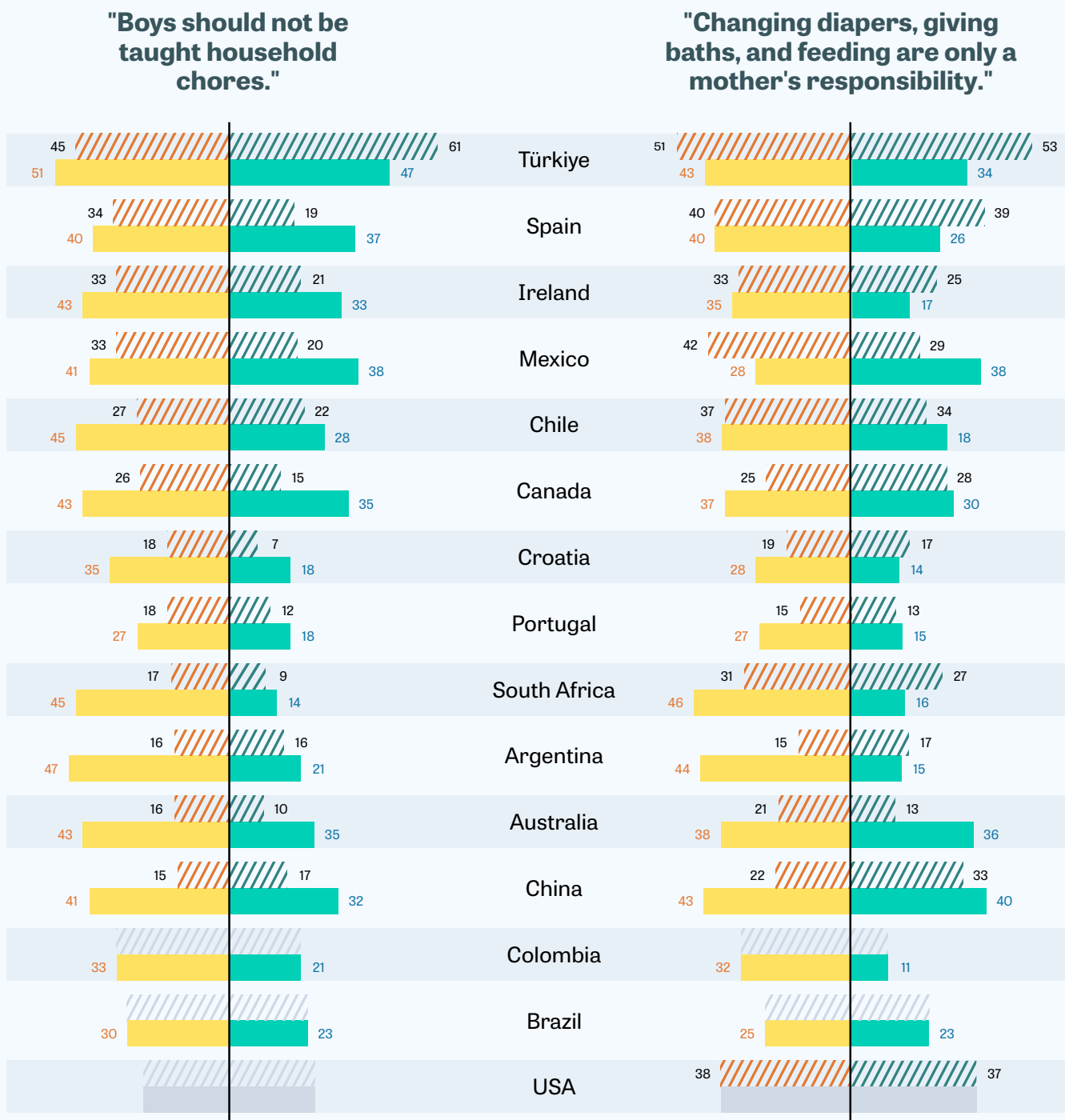
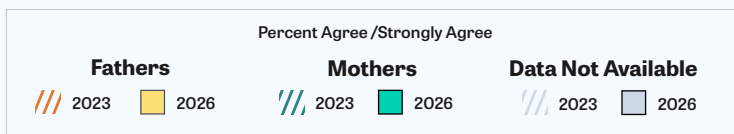
to midlife, then plateaus or dips slightly in later adulthood. In 14 countries with data in our study, apart from Colombia, young men have less equitable attitudes than either men aged 31 to 45, or those aged 46 to 65. In Australia, Brazil, Croatia, Ireland, and Spain, the older generation of men are more egalitarian than the two younger cohorts.

- ▶ **Young women aged 18 to 20 are more likely to support gender-equitable care norms than young men the same age.** We took the aggregate of several care statements for this comparison. Women are **more progressive in all statements** in every country. In some countries, the gaps are small, but they are consistent.

Other research has similar findings. A 2022 report from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey, drew on data from 67,202 respondents across 32 countries.⁴⁴ For three statements on gender norms, most young women held more equal norms than young men. Research by Kantar Media in several different countries found that the number of young men who agreed that “a woman’s place is in the home” had increased between 2021 and 2025, from 5 to 22 percent in Germany and by 50 percent in Brazil.⁴⁵

It is easy to simply attribute this finding to individual differences but applying a critical and analytical lens to the lives of young men can help to understand what may be driving this backsliding. There is a strong narrative directed at young men by social media influencers and others that feminism has gone too far. Its theory is that men, in particular young men, are under attack, and gender equality is at the root of any problems in their lives. Manosphere influencers constantly repeat this idea of a crisis in masculinity – and that women are to blame. Young men spend more time than young women online, and what they find there often fuels these narratives, and leads to misogyny

Figure 9. Agreement With Gendered Norms Around Caregiving, by Country and Gender



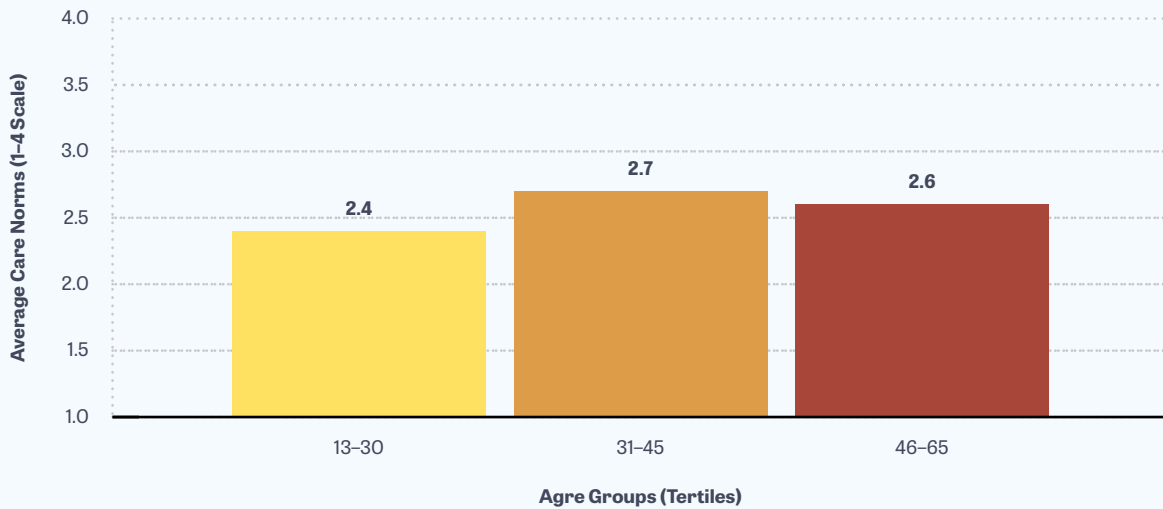
→ Countries presented in decreasing order of fathers' percent agreement to "Boys should not be taught household chores" in 2023. Data from 2023 not available for Brazil, Colombia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (for the first item reported only). Data from 2025 not available for the United Kingdom and the United States.

and sometimes violence (*State of American Men*,⁴⁶ *State of UK Men*,⁴⁷ *The Manosphere, Rewired*⁴⁸).

Our most current data show clearly that men's provider identity remains rigid and restrictive and financial stress often drives many fathers into more traditional roles in the family, as providers and deciders.

- ▶ Old stereotypes still have a grip. Nearly half of fathers (48 percent) and over a third of mothers (38 percent) in our sample agree that "men who are full-time fathers are not really real men." **The message is mixed: we value care, but masculinity and caregiving remain at odds for many.**

Figure 10. Fathers' Average Gender-Equitable Care Norms Score, by Age Group



→ Scores reflect mean endorsement of a collection of six gendered norms around caregiving (higher values on the 1-4 scale indicate more gender-equitable views). Adults aged 31-45 report the highest average endorsement, with slightly lower scores among younger (18-30) and older (46-65) respondents. Age differences are highly statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

PhotoVoice 9. Hope in Future Heroes



"Seeing my son growing up gives me hope."

— FATHER, 29 YEARS OLD, SOUTH AFRICA

- ▶ **Both fathers and mothers see financial provision as a father's core role (70 percent of fathers and 62 percent of mothers).** Only a third of parents think that a father's most important role is doing unpaid care and domestic work (mothers: 30 percent, fathers: 35 percent). Not only this, but **58 percent of men in our study say: "I don't think I am man enough unless I can provide for my family."**
- ▶ **More than 50 percent of men in all countries except Spain (49 percent) and Portugal (42.5 percent) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "Things are better if men do paid work**

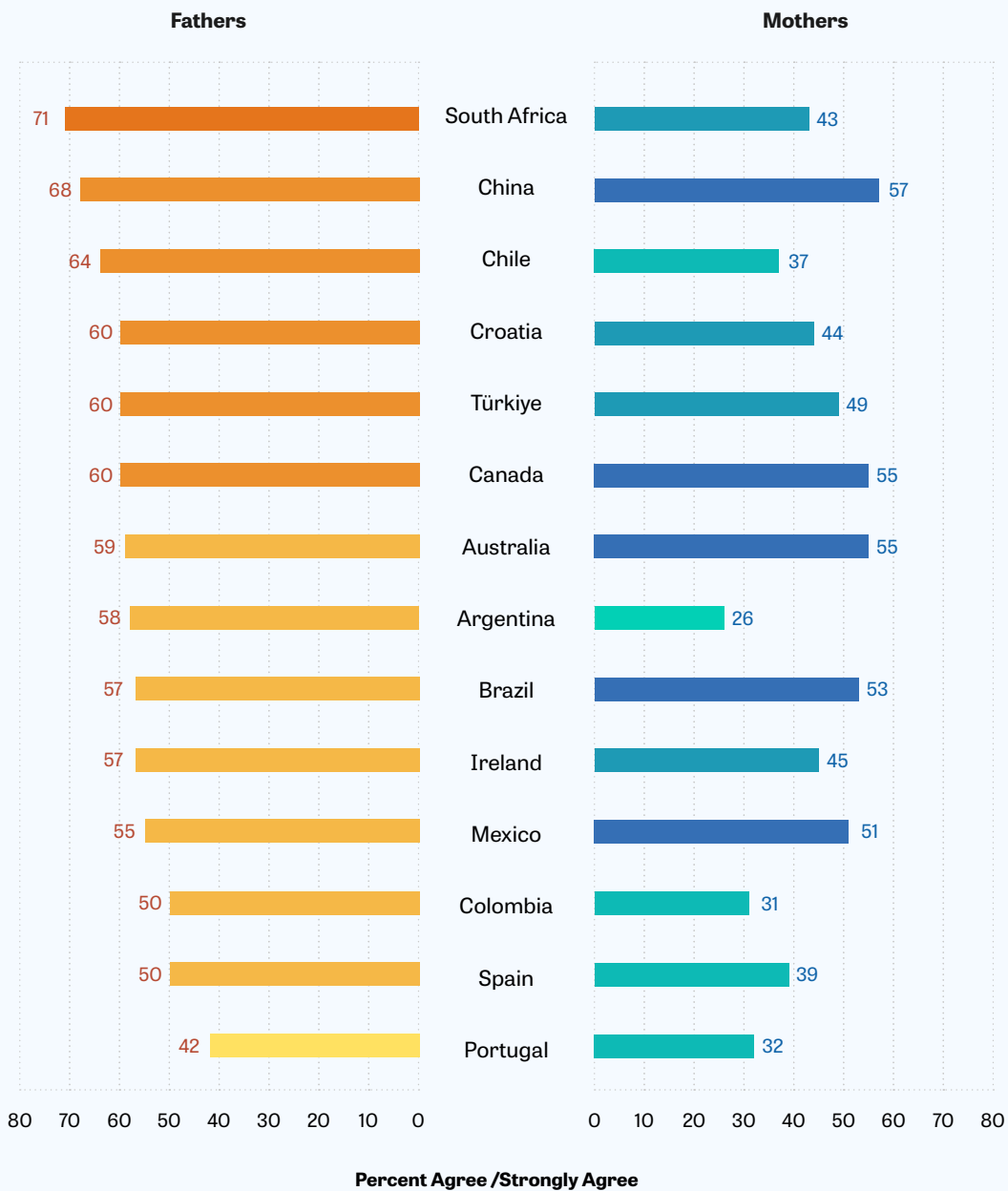
and women do care work in the home." Fewer women than men in all countries **agreed or strongly agreed**, although in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, and Mexico it was also more than 50 percent of women (see Figure 11).

The male financial provider/woman caregiver narrative runs deep. But there is an **interesting contrast between what people believe about gender roles in their own home and what they think society expects.** For example, a 29-country study of more than 23,000 people, conducted in early 2026 by Ipsos in the UK and the Global Institute for Women's Leadership at King's Business School, King's College London, found that more than a third (35 percent) of respondents said they thought **the majority of people in their country believed women were expected to take primary responsibility for childcare** and other household work, while four in 10 (40 percent) said the **majority of people in their country think men**

"If I couldn't provide for my family, I think that would hit me very hard. I would feel like I'm not enough ... for my child ... my family. In Croatia, especially in smaller places, it's still expected that men provide financially, and that's seen as a measure of success in society."

— FATHER, 40 YEARS OLD, CROATIA

Figure 11. Agreement That Things Are Better if Men Do Paid Work and Women Do Care Work, by Country and Gender



→ Data sorted by fathers' agreement.

are expected to be the main earners. However, when asked **what they thought personally, only one in six respondents said that women should take on most childcare (17 percent) or household chores (16 percent), and under a quarter (24 percent) believed that men should shoulder most responsibility for earning money.**⁴⁹

This points to a gap between what *is* and what *is desired*. This gap can only be addressed by understanding the systemic barriers to women's labor force participation and men's pressure to

be financial providers, and by changing norms that say men shouldn't provide care. Programs like those of our partners: AÇEV (the Mother-Child Education Foundation) longstanding Fatherhood Support Program in Türkiye, the Apapachar fatherhood training program in Colombia, Status M's work with young Roma fathers in Croatia, and campaigns for parental leave and Promoting Responsible Fatherhood in Spain (see Annex 2) are critical to supporting men in changing these norms and to pave the way to equal care.

How Partners Discuss Their Way to Equal Care

“I think that couples today have to come together to add value. I think growth has to be together, right? If you’re together, you’ll grow together. Everything has to be together, everything has to be shared, there’s no other way.”

– FATHER, 45 YEARS OLD, BRAZIL

Discussions about care equality – that men should do as much caregiving as women – often stop at measuring who does what. Our data and other research affirm that the **more co-parents communicate, regardless of other factors, the more everyone wins.** Men and women benefit almost equally from better couple communication, with men showing slightly greater benefits. This is corroborated by other studies on the importance of couple communication.⁵⁰

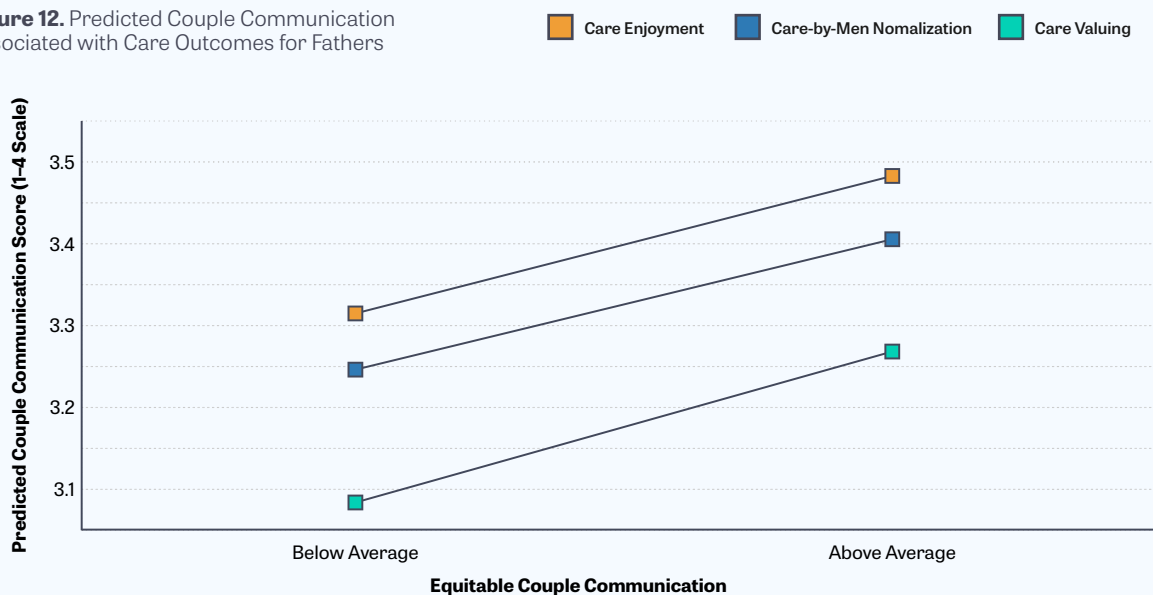
- ▶ **Equitable couple communication is related to stronger care enjoyment and normalization of men’s care, lesser**

well-being risk/distress, stronger care valuing, and much stronger support for care policies for both women and men, making it one of the most powerful and reliable predictors across all models in our survey.

Regression analysis shows that good communication has benefits in terms of lowering mental distress, including increasing enjoyment of care. It normalizes fathers’ care, and it leads to increased valuing of care as a necessary resource, as Figure 12 shows.

Country context strongly shapes how couples talk about care work. Across countries, average

Figure 12. Predicted Couple Communication Associated with Care Outcomes for Fathers



→ Predicted mean scores (on a 1–4 scale) show that parents who report higher levels of couple communication and equity consistently report better care-related outcomes than those with lower communication. These estimates come from regression models that adjust for age, education, employment, relationship status, early caregiving experiences, economic precarity, and country. All differences between low- and high-communication groups are statistically significant ($p < .05$).

couple communication scores (made up of the responses to eight questions about the ways partnered respondents communicate about and arrange care in their relationship) **differ more between countries than between men and women within the same country.** Still, meaningful gender differences appear in some contexts: women report higher communication in Argentina, Ireland, and South Africa, while men report higher scores in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Mexico, and Portugal. In China, Colombia, Croatia, Spain, and Türkiye, men's and women's scores are similar. These findings reflect average responses from partnered men and partnered women separately – not matched couples – so they show overall patterns rather than agreement within specific relationships.

“*In the past, men only contributed money, and mothers took care of the rest: the children, the house, their education. I want my children to see that it can be different, that caregiving can be shared.*”

– FATHER, 30 YEARS OLD, CHILE

Fathers and mothers also differ in how other factors shape their experiences. For men, **education and economic precarity are powerful differentiators, while for women, country context and age matter far more.** These gender-specific findings highlight distinct pathways through which fathers and mothers achieve enjoyment in caregiving and interpret men's roles in care across generations.

- ▶ We also looked at the areas where **couples disagree.** Not surprisingly, one of these was around money and resources – **55.5 percent of mothers and 51 percent of fathers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “My partner doesn't understand the financial stress that I am under.”** There was also a difference in relation to mutual support in caregiving: **88 percent of fathers felt there was mutual support, compared with 76 percent of mothers.**
- ▶ Our research also investigated **how care work is shared between couples.** Our data show that **81 percent of fathers and 69 percent of mothers agree with the statement: “My partner and I split the care work equally”** – a 12-point perception gap, reflecting other data that reveal that men tend to overestimate or misperceive their level of involvement

in caregiving.^{51,52} In the 2023 *State of the World's Fathers*⁵³ report, this was **87 percent of men and 74 percent of women.** **This shows a decline for both genders in just a few years in the numbers believing that the care work is equally shared.**

- ▶ **When asked if they support each other with housework and caregiving, 88 percent of fathers say yes – but only 76 percent of mothers agree.** That 12-point gap matters. Both numbers are high, but they reveal something important: fathers feel like they are supporting more than mothers say they are.
- ▶ **Fathers say they want to do more care, and our data show that 93 percent of them believe they are competent in doing care work,** and 88 percent believe that their “partner (or former partner) believes that they are competent at caring for their children or loved ones.” Ninety-five percent of women think they are competent and 87 percent believe their partner thinks they are competent. **But just over 40 percent of fathers also say: “Whenever I do care work or housework at home, I never seem to get it right.”**
- ▶ And here we note something else important. **Couples who believe in traditional gender roles – men should work, women should care – argue about care division much more than couples who do not believe in those roles.** The split is dramatic:
 - **Reject traditional roles → 28 percent report conflict.**
 - **Embrace traditional roles → 68 percent report conflict.**

That's more than double. And for men, it is even worse – **men who believe in traditional roles are 45 percent more likely to experience conflict in a relationship.** Why? Because traditional beliefs collide with modern economic reality. Most families need two incomes now. But if both partners work and still believe women

“Everything is shared, there's no ‘you do this, I do that’. It all goes by agreement, everyone takes their part of the load.”

– FATHER, 53 YEARS OLD, CROATIA

should do all the care, they enter an impossible situation that breeds resentment and conflict. Even when controlling for everything else – age, employment, income, financial stress, and country – the pattern holds strong:

- **Women with traditional beliefs: 80 percent higher odds of care conflict.**
- **Men with traditional beliefs: four times higher odds of care conflict.**

Couple conflict *also* pushes people back toward traditional beliefs.

- **Women who experience couple conflict are two times more likely to hold traditional gender beliefs.**
- **Men who experience couple conflict are four times more likely to hold traditional gender beliefs.**

It's a vicious cycle: traditional beliefs create conflict, conflict pushes couples back into traditional beliefs, breeding more conflict, and so on. **Traditional gender roles do not create the peaceful, ordered households they promise.** In a world where economic survival often requires two incomes, entrenchment in traditional beliefs about care division is a recipe for constant conflict.

- ▶ Mothers and fathers think **time spent together is important (59 percent of mothers and 45 percent of fathers)**. This is encouraging. Mothers and fathers want more time together, as co-parents and partners, although once again we see a significant gap between men and women.

“There was a time when I had difficulty, because my [partner] didn't do much. ... I had a conversation with him, that we need to share things more, because I'm the one who wakes up in the middle of the night with [our son]. I said, 'This isn't working. It's exhausting. I need to have a moment to rest, to do my own things.' ... We talked and talked, and today it's more peaceful and [better] divided.”

– MOTHER, 37 YEARS OLD, BRAZIL

Analyses of care policies often omit the most important human reason that we live as families, that we form families to be together. Yet, families have to spend much of their psychological and physical energy on mere economic survival, to the detriment of themselves, their relationships, and their children and other family members. Structures must support families and partners in their communication, reduce the economic and social pressures of care, and ensure that systems bring parents together rather than driving them apart.

The Fertility Divide: Men Want More Children, Women Want Out

→ Photo: Kei Scampa via Pexels



We asked mothers and fathers if they wanted more children. Our study only included mothers and fathers, so we do not have data for those who do not already have children. We know that increasing numbers of women in many countries are choosing to remain single and to not have children. For example, in the European Union, the number of single-person households without children increased by 21 percent between 2013 and 2023.⁵⁴ In East Asia, the number of marriages are decreasing, along with fertility rates.⁵⁵ There are many reasons for this, but financial concerns are a key factor, as this 35-year old father in Croatia explains, “*The government invests too little in young people and families, everything from health care to kindergarten enrollment, difficult or expensive. That is why so few young people have children.*”

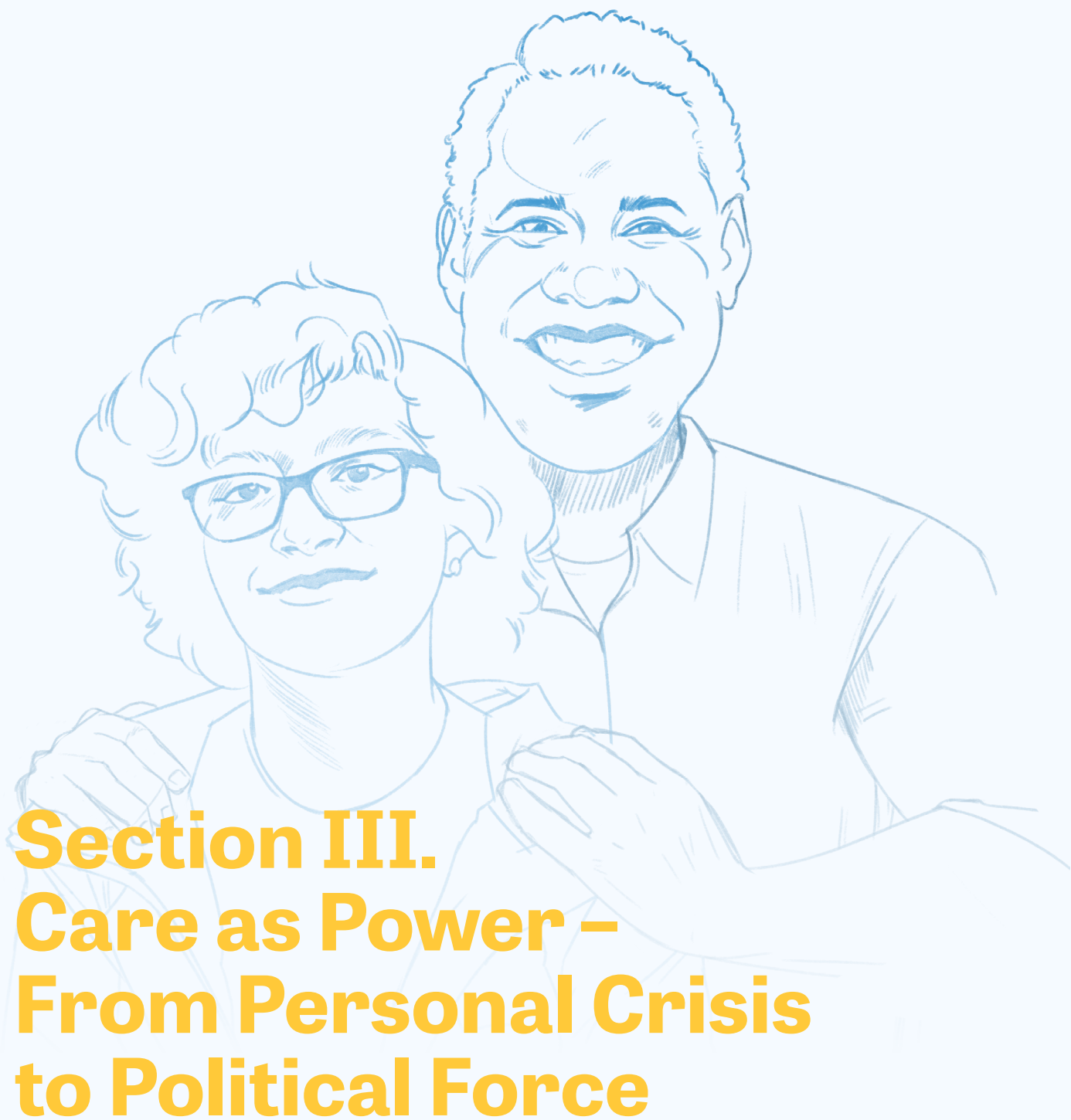
In our dataset, we found that **more mothers than fathers say they do not want any more children** (66 percent versus 60 percent). This correlates with other data. According to demographic and health surveys between 2000 and 2023, in Sub-Saharan Africa, women’s mean ideal number of children was about 4.8 while for men it was 5.7. In South-East Asia and South Asia, the mean ideal number of children for women was 3 and for men it was 3.3. In Latin America and the Caribbean, women say they want an average of 2.9 children while men desire 3, a smaller gender difference but consistent with the gender divide that indicates that women want fewer children than men.⁵⁶

Our data also show that a partner’s desire for children matters more for men, and societal expectations or norms are slightly more influential for men than women. Most of the reasons for wanting more children (or not) show statistically significant gender differences, even if small in magnitude. Financial concerns, cost of childcare, and uncertainty about the future are more influential for women than men in their considerations of future children. These reasons correlate with data from the latest *State of World Population* report, where financial concerns (39 percent) is by far the top reason why women and men said they had fewer children than they wanted, with unemployment and job security as the second highest (21 percent) and housing (19 percent) as the third.⁵⁷ Women are more likely to be single parents, in insecure work, and earning less, so it is not surprising that financial concerns come top of their list. Men are more concerned with expectations around family size and their partner’s desire for children. Unless systems address gender-specific barriers and weak incentives for having children, demographic decline will deepen the economic squeeze already felt in so many countries.

PORTUGAL

“Economic uncertainty, inflation, disparity and stagnation of wages, cause a lot of economic stress to all parents in this country, to the point that for many adults, having children is no longer a possibility, an unfulfilled dream.”

– FATHER, 34 YEARS OLD



Section III. Care as Power – From Personal Crisis to Political Force

Caregiving may be undervalued, but it is the one thing that holds our world in place. Feminists and women's organizations have been saying this for years.^{58 59 60} Universally, carers want stability and certainty in an unpredictable landscape. Care is a mobilizing and unifying issue that cuts across political ideologies. But because norms and systems are not set up to support care, we find that trust in the system delivering that care is low.

Nonetheless, fathers and mothers both say they are willing to support parties that invest in care. The bottom line is that men must not only do their share of the care work, but also be advocates and allies – alongside women – for the care policies everyone needs. Men must join women in this struggle, and our data suggest that most fathers are ready.

The Verdict Is In: Policy and Public Services Fall Short

“Parenting today feels like a full-time job on top of a full-time job – we need more affordable, accessible support systems like childcare, mental health services, and family leave so we can raise healthy kids without burning out.”

– FATHER, 28 YEARS OLD, AUSTRALIA

Our data show that public services designed to support parents are failing, leaving mothers and fathers in many countries to manage caregiving largely alone. Globally, only 28 percent of children have access to child or family benefits, leaving 1.4 billion children without basic government support.⁶¹ Childcare – essential for parents who do paid work – remains a major drain on finances for the families that use it. In Ireland, New Zealand, and Switzerland, a couple earning average wages would need to spend between one-third and half of a single salary just to pay for childcare for two children.⁶² For low-income single parents in Cyprus, Slovakia, and the United States, childcare still costs up to half their salary even with government subsidies.⁶³ Beyond money and childcare, parents lack access to information from public services, and are left to figure out child development, health concerns, and behavioral challenges on their own. Even in countries with established public services, confidence is low. In both Argentina and Spain, fewer than two-thirds of parents believe public care services are sufficient – with mothers more skeptical than fathers.

- ▶ Fathers aren't just unsupported – they lack access to information. **Fewer than half (47 percent) even know that parenting information, services, or support for fathers exists**, and only 39 percent have been offered any help. The result? A staggering **87 percent of fathers and 78 per cent of mothers say they do not get all the support they need**

“There should be a course, to prepare to be a father, to be a mother, come

on, one of the most important roles we have in life.”

– FATHER, 50 YEARS OLD, BRAZIL

What parents say they wanted as they were getting ready to become parents:

- **Prenatal support from health care providers:** Thirty-three percent of fathers and 30 percent of mothers wanted their doctors to help them prepare for parenthood, that is, prenatal support from health care systems.
- **A father's group and birth preparation:** A small percentage of men (17 percent) said they wished they had a father's group and 16 percent wished they had more birth preparation courses available to them.
- **Workplace backing:** Thirty-eight percent of fathers and 33 percent of mothers wished they had support from their workplaces.
- **Access to affordable childcare:** From a list of 15 supports, 34 percent of fathers and 31 percent of mothers picked “affordable childcare” as the top-ranked solution to making a difference to their caregiving responsibilities.

“Every penny for kindergarten goes away from the bread on the table.”

– FATHER, 24 YEARS OLD, CROATIA

Our data validate findings from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Across OECD countries, net childcare

costs – what families pay after subsidies and tax benefits – reveal a system pushing parents to their financial limits. The burden is highest in Switzerland, New Zealand (27 percent of household income), and the United States (23 percent for couples, 37 percent for single parents), while countries like Germany (1 percent) and Estonia (0 percent) demonstrate that accessible childcare is achievable (OECD, 2023). For low-income families, especially single parents, these costs can consume nearly half of take-home pay even with government support.⁶⁴

One key support for involved parenthood in the early years is parental leave. Over the past 10 years, the *State of the World's Fathers* reports have tracked progress on this. **Parental leave policies still vary significantly around the world**, with some countries offering extensive paid leave, particularly for mothers, while others provide minimal or even no paid leave. Overall, leave for fathers is much shorter than leave for mothers. There is a **difference of 22.5 weeks (five months) between leave for mothers (a global average of 24.7 paid weeks) and fathers (a global average of 2.2 weeks)**.⁶⁵

We are a long way from the gold standard of **at least 14 weeks of equal leave for both parents, paid at a minimum of 67 percent of salary, and fully funded by social security or public funds**, as stipulated in International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention No. 183.⁶⁶ In the European Union, the European Work-Life Directive mandates that **all member states must provide at least four months' parental leave per parent (two months of non-transferable, paid leave)**.⁶⁷

For parents **in the informal or gig economy**, who make up 60 percent of the world's workers, according to the ILO, **parental leave provision is much more limited**. Approximately half of self-employed women are covered by laws on maternity leave cash benefits, but **only four percent of self-employed men have access to parental leave cash benefits**.⁶⁸

Even in countries with benefits, a critical gap remains. Paid parental leave ends long before affordable childcare becomes available, forcing many parents – especially mothers – out of the workforce entirely. The ILO calls this the childcare policy gap.⁶⁹

Our data show clearly that parental leave matters to both mothers and fathers.

- ▶ The opportunity to bond and to **have time with their babies, is seen as a source of health and happiness by 92 percent of mothers and 87 percent of fathers** across the 16 countries in our study.
- ▶ However, **one in four fathers and mothers** say are **not fully informed about their parental leave** entitlements.

“We still live in a society where the responsibility for parenting falls on the mother. We need policies that promote active fatherhood, such as paternity leave that encourages equality in care.”

– FATHER, 65 YEARS OLD, CHILE

More mothers than fathers in our data say they took **all the time allowed for parental leave**, and that **fathers report slightly more barriers to taking leave than mothers** overall, with **those with the highest economic precarity reporting the most barriers**. Key barriers include the inability to take the most leave available because it is **not fully paid, worries about promotion or job stability, lack of flexible work, and unsupportive managers or workplaces** (see Table 3). They also included **internalized responsibility to continue working** – 56 percent of men versus 38 percent of mothers agreed, “I thought it was/should have been my responsibility to keep working,” while 53 percent of mothers and 47 percent of fathers feared **losing their job during parental leave** and 57 percent of mothers and 50 percent of fathers worried that it would **affect their chances of getting promoted** if they took their full parental leave entitlement.

“We have managed to make it a normal acceptable thing in the labor market for a father to take his paternity leave, and that is the key to success in our system.”

Pórunn Sveinbjarnardóttir
Speaker of the Althing (Parliament), Iceland,

From interviews for this study, July 2025.

Table 3. Barriers to Taking Parental Leave, by Gender

	Fathers	Mothers
My partner was already doing the care work at home	62%	43%
I thought it was/should have been my responsibility to keep working	56%	38%
I like doing paid work more than I like doing unpaid care work and housework	50%	49%
The entire duration of the leave was not 100% or fully paid	50%	50%
I worried that it would affect my chances of getting promoted in the future	46%	50%
I was afraid of losing my job	44%	47%
My manager was not supportive of me taking more parental leave	41%	36%
I didn't need as much time as was offered	33%	21%
My partner/The other parent was not supportive of me taking more parental leave	32%	26%
I was afraid of being judged poorly by my friends/colleagues	32%	28%

→ Fathers were significantly more likely to say they felt responsible for continuing paid work, that they did not need the full amount of leave, and that their partner was already handling care at home. Mothers were more likely to report worries about how taking leave might affect their career or job security. There were no meaningful gender differences in views about preferring paid work to care work, feeling unsupported by a manager, or fearing social judgment.

One study in 12 European countries by Make Mothers Matter found that **25 percent of fathers did not take any paternity leave**, the main reasons given being financial concerns (42 percent) and workload pressures (26 percent).⁷⁰ In six countries (Bulgaria, Chile, Denmark, Italy, Portugal, and Spain) it is obligatory for fathers to take some or all of their paternity leave.⁷¹

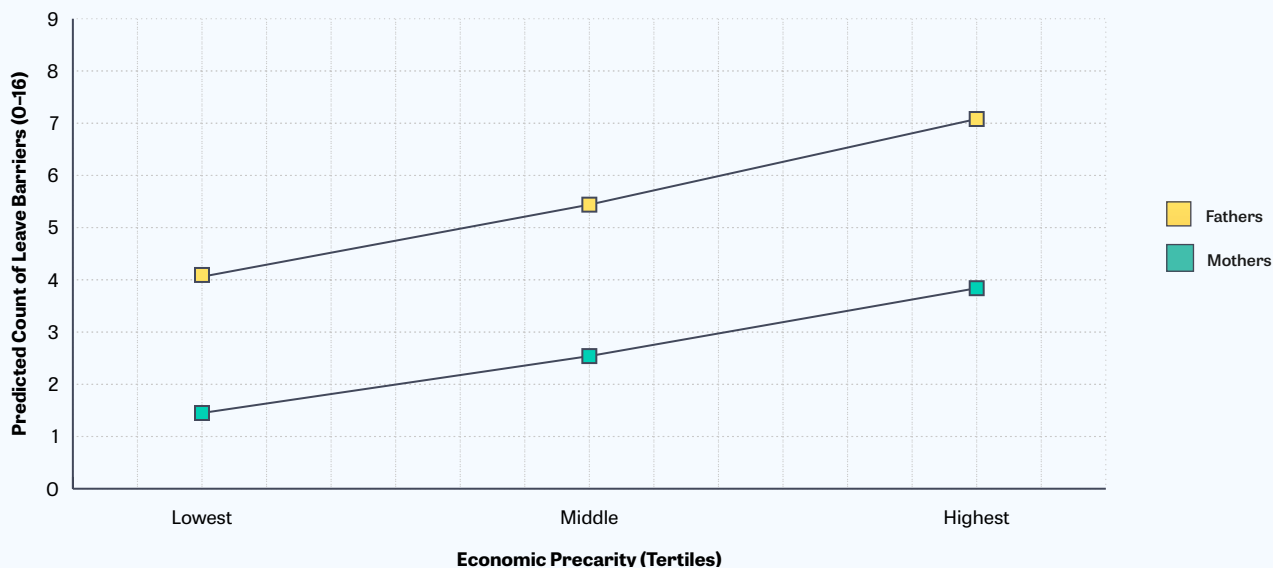
Data from the World Bank Group's Women, Business and the Law (WBL) 2026 project – which tracks laws, supporting policies, and their enforcement across 190 economies to assess how they shape women's economic opportunities – show that many economies have built meaningful foundations across three key areas: flexible work, childcare, and paid parental leave. Recent evidence points to an important insight: **policy design and enforcement – not just the existence of laws – are critical to ensuring impact. Together, they determine whether legal frameworks effectively close gender gaps and enable fathers to take on active caregiving roles.**⁷² Annex 3 highlights

the World Bank's WBL data and the complexities around flexible work.

Leave for fathers to support families to care must provide adequate compensation, and it needs to be **non-transferable**. Because, in general, men still earn more than women, if leave is not adequately paid, families can often not afford for the man to take leave. Non-transferable leave means that if fathers do not take the leave allotted to them, they lose it. The United Kingdom's attempt to implement transferable shared parental leave, where the mother can "gift" time to the father has simply not worked. Only a tiny percentage of fathers take this up, mainly among higher-income groups.⁷³

In addition, the kinds of barriers to taking parental leave **differ by gender, and parents with the highest levels of economic precarity also face the highest barriers**. Respondents in the highest economic precarity group reported up to 2.84 more leave barriers than those in the lowest precarity group, as shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13. Predicted Parental Leave Barriers by Economic Precarity Level and Gender



→ Predicted number of reported parental leave was drawn from OLS regression and are robust to differences in age, education, employment status, relationship status, whether or not parents are caring for young children, early childhood caregiving, and country. Shows difference between the levels of economic precarity for fathers and mothers, and between them, are statistically significant.

Box 8.

“Enough for pulling a tooth, not having a child”: What Fathers Say About Paternity Leave



→ Photo: Vantage Point Photographers via Unsplash

ARGENTINA

“The government should extend parental leave ... they only give us two working days. Enough for pulling a tooth, not having a child.”

– FATHER, 48 YEARS OLD

BRAZIL

“I didn’t stop working when he was born. I was absent from caring for him and interacting with him. [My partner] spent seven months straight with him. So then we got into this more divided dynamic.”

– FATHER, 42 YEARS OLD

AUSTRALIA

“I took a week’s (leave) because that’s all I could afford at the time because we had so much work coming in ... I didn’t want to lose my job because I was trying to look after my child.”

– SINGLE FATHER, 45 YEARS OLD

CANADA

“In Quebec, we get a lot of parental leave, so I took, six, eight weeks, and my wife took 50. I forget how many weeks, but she took the max, we both took the max.”

– FATHER, 46 YEARS OLD

CROATIA

“I negotiated with my employer to work part-time and stayed like that for almost eight months. We managed to arrange things so that one of us was always with our child. My employer was more than fair, and that human understanding meant more to me than a higher salary would have.”

– FATHER, 31 YEARS OLD

Parents Don't Trust Governments But They Will Vote for Care

"I don't think any political party really cares or wants to take on anything. I am so disillusioned with them I think they're just in it for themselves."

– FATHER, 35 YEARS OLD, IRELAND

Trust in public institutions – the belief that governments, courts, health care systems, schools, and social services are legitimate, fair, and functioning in the public interest is collapsing.

As this report has shown so far, when parents look to public systems for support with childcare, health care, or economic security and find nothing, **institutional trust does not just decline, it disappears.** This collapse has consequences far beyond politics. If people do not trust institutions

to be fair or effective, why would they believe in collective solutions to shared problems? Why would they value social responsibility, including care for others, when the social contract feels broken?

Using the OECD trust in public institutions scale, we asked how much respondents trust each of the following. We present the findings here on percentage of respondents agreeing for the lowest scores possible (1 and 2) on a scale from 1 (“not at all”) to 5 (“completely”). All gender differences reported are statistically significant.

Figure 14. Mistrust in Public Institutions, by Country and Gender

- National Political Leadership
- Courts/Legal System
- Local Government
- Police
- Political Parties
- News Media

→ Percentages represent low trust: combined percentage of respondents who selected either values 1 or 2 on the 5-point trust sliding scale from 1 “not at all” to 5 “completely”. China excluded because this question was not asked.



- ▶ Our data show that **women have lower trust than men in every public institution. Men's trust overall is on the lower end of the scale, as well.** The OECD's 2023 survey on trust in public institutions finds that people who feel financially insecure, those with low levels of education, women, younger people, and those who report belonging to a group that is discriminated against report lower levels of trust in government.⁷⁴
- ▶ **Almost four out of 10 fathers in our study say they do not trust government representatives.** This matches the OECD's global statistic that only 39 percent of its sampled population trusts their national government.⁷⁵

Low trust is most pronounced when it comes to political leadership and political parties, but skepticism extends more broadly: in several contexts, sizable shares of parents also report low trust in courts, police, media, and even in "people overall." Levels vary sharply by country as shown in Figure 14. Countries such as Argentina, Chile, Croatia, South Africa, and Türkiye consistently

show some of the highest levels of mistrust across institutions, while Australia, Canada, Mexico, Spain, and the United Kingdom tend to report comparatively lower levels overall. Still, the overall pattern is consistent – trust in public institutions is fragile, and women report lower trust than men across every institution measured in almost every context. In some countries, the gender gaps are substantial, suggesting that experiences of insecurity, exclusion, or unmet needs may be shaping how institutions are perceived. These figures represent far more than a story of partisan discontent; they reflect a deeper and more widespread erosion of confidence in the systems meant to serve families.

So we raise this again: why would anyone support collective care solutions if they don't believe governments will deliver them? If institutions feel rigged, unreliable, or indifferent, why hand them more responsibility – especially for something as precious as caring for your children or aging parents? We analyzed how trust in public institutions shapes both care values and political behavior. What we found helps explain why care remains so politically divisive.

→ Figure 14. Cont'd

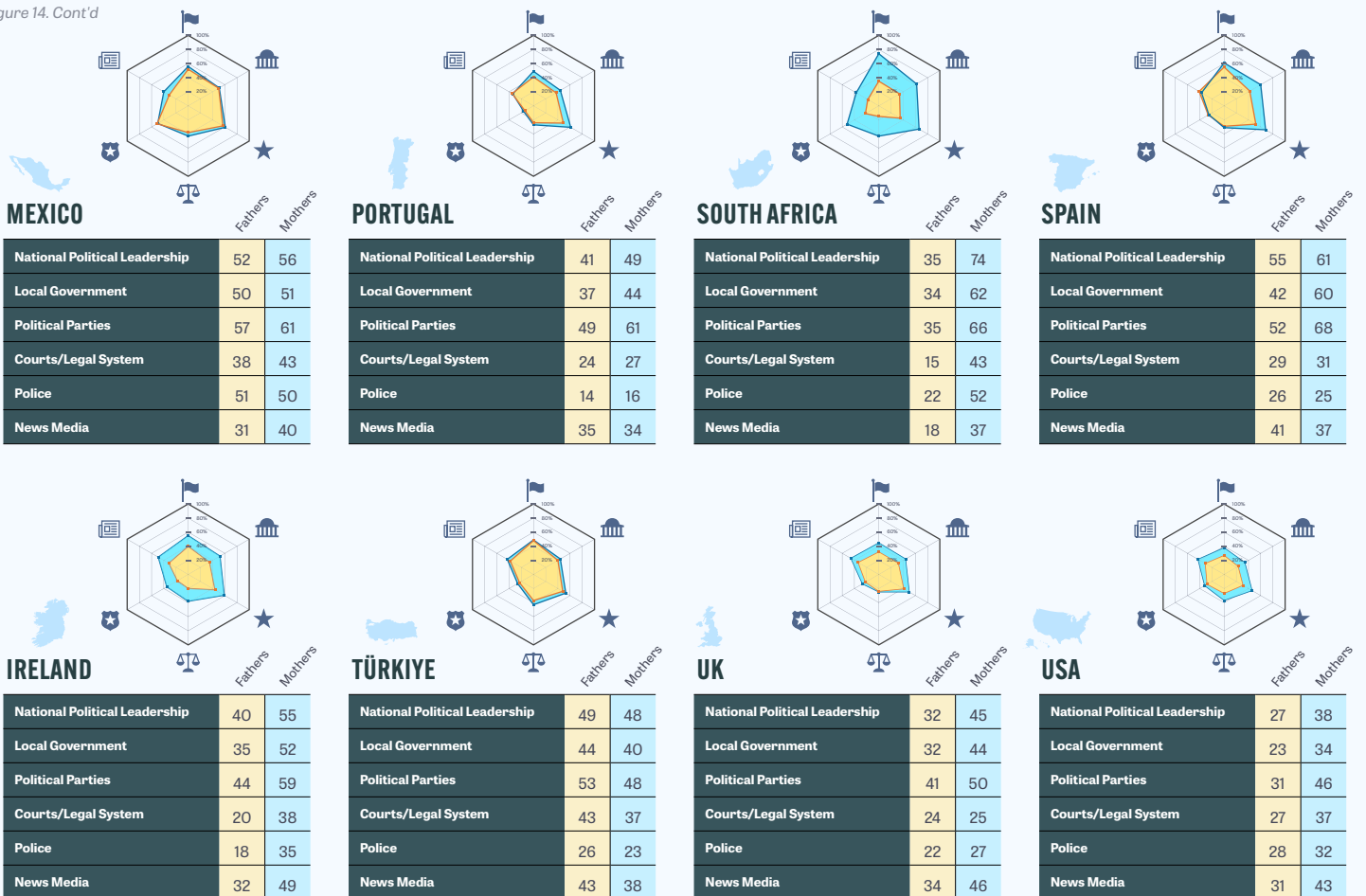


Figure 15. Voters' Reasons for Voting in Last Country Elections, by Gender

Fathers Mothers



→ Percent of fathers and mothers who attributed their vote in last election to each salient topic. Data sorted from most popular reason to least on average. Data includes 15 countries. This question was not asked in China.

- ▶ **Men and women trust differently – and those differences matter.** Despite mothers reporting higher overall mistrust in government institutions than fathers, **fathers' trust levels are more responsive to life circumstances.** Employment, marriage, and economic security boost men's trust far more than women's. Women's trust, by contrast, is shaped less by life circumstances, and more by country-level experiences with particular institutions. This means men's trust is more "liftable" through policy changes that improve economic conditions, while women's trust requires institutions to function well in practice.
- ▶ **Trust erodes with age, especially trust in politics.** Across institutions, trust declines slowly as people age. Political institutions suffer the steepest drops: trust in national political leadership, local government, and political parties all peak between ages 18 to 30, then decline and plateau after age 31. For men aged 31 to 45, trust in media and courts are particularly low compared to younger and older men. The

overall message is that **the longer people interact with political systems, the less they believe in them.**

- ▶ **Economic precarity destroys men's trust in government.** Fathers facing the highest economic precarity are the least likely to trust governments and institutions. This pattern does not hold for mothers.
- ▶ **Men need to believe care infrastructure will work before they value it.** Importantly, institutional trust directly shapes whether fathers see care as a valuable public good. Women value care as a basic good regardless of whether they trust institutions – care matters because it matters. But men are far more likely to value care when they believe systems will function, support caregivers, and deliver on promises. When **fathers experience economic precarity, they are more likely to value care – as we have shown. Twelve percent of their value for care in society is related to their trust in institutions.** Many fathers need to believe the infrastructure will support them before they

→ Photo: Su Casa Panamá via Pexels

**SOUTH AFRICA**

"I firmly believe that they promise one thing and they don't deliver. I don't vote, and that's why. I just don't believe that they can benefit me or anyone for that matter."

– FATHER, 25 YEARS OLD, SOUTH AFRICA

PORTUGAL

"I don't have great faith that a politician will achieve any major change in today's society."

– FATHER, 54 YEARS OLD, PORTUGAL

CHILE

"[Politicians should] fight for the people; they [should] stop filling their pockets with money without doing anything; they [should] not abandon us; they [should] fight for our country, for its people, for our children, who will be the future."

– FATHER, 47 YEARS OLD, CHILE

SOUTH AFRICA

"They don't deliver on their promises because when they win votes, they will just promise and promise and promise. Especially when it comes to the local government...They only think about themselves."

– MOTHER, 33 YEARS OLD, SOUTH AFRICA

ARGENTINA

"I think politicians forget about fathers and mothers because they have become so corrupt."

– MOTHER, 51 YEARS OLD, ARGENTINA

CROATIA

"Care policies would certainly be one of the more important things in a party's program and something I would definitely consider when deciding who to vote for. As for how realistic I think those promises are, that's a whole other story."

– FATHER, 31 YEARS OLD, CROATIA

will endorse care as collective responsibility.

- ▶ **Trust determines whether care values become political action.** Institutional trust strongly predicts whether people will vote for care policies – for both men and women. **Higher trust translates directly to higher willingness to support care at the ballot box**, even accounting for gender, age, education, economic precarity, and country. **Voting for care is not just a personal moral stance – it's a motion for**

collective action. People support care policies when they believe institutions can deliver them fairly, reliably, and reciprocally.

- ▶ **The gender gap on care voting closes when institutional trust is high.** Men have lower baseline support for voting for care policies than women. But **trust increases men's willingness to vote for care faster than it increases women's.** At the highest levels of institutional trust, the gender gap in care voting nearly disappears. For

men, trust is decisive – it has a very strong direct effect on their political behavior around care. **When fathers experience economic precarity, 41 percent of why they would vote for care policies is linked to whether they trust public institutions.**

In sum, trust in institutions is foundational to care policy. Trust matters somewhat for how men value care as necessary infrastructure, but it matters far more for whether those values translate into votes. **If care is going to function as a collective system rather than as a private burden shouldered by individuals, institutions must be trusted to deliver it fairly and reliably.** Rebuilding institutional trust – especially among men facing economic precarity, is the foundation for whether care will ever be valued as public infrastructure and supported at the ballot box.

The findings from this report indicate that **care is moving from private crisis to political force. Parents are ready to vote for change.**

We asked mothers and fathers about the **top five topics** that influenced their vote in the previous general election in their country, as shown in Figure 15.

- ▶ **Health care, housing, unemployment, and the cost-of-living crisis** were the most frequently cited voting influences followed by crime, public security and violence, and flexible working.

Gender differences appeared mainly in areas of social policy and equality – 19.6 percent of mothers prioritized gender equality compared to 13.5 percent of fathers, while 18.7 percent of fathers prioritized affordable care for the elderly compared with 14.5 percent of mothers.

- ▶ Across genders, we found a strong willingness **to support parties that invest in care, family benefits, and flexible work.**

Fathers were slightly more optimistic about government support, while mothers showed stronger pro-care voting intentions, for example, in care investments, wage increases, and gender-equal leave (see Figure 16). Both fathers and

mothers showed a broad pro-care consensus. More fathers (64.3 percent) than mothers (52.5 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that they would be willing to **pay higher taxes for more public care services** – though in both cases it was more than half. **More fathers (54.6 percent) than mothers (40.8 percent)** agreed or strongly agreed with the statement **“My government supports people like me who have to care for children or elderly parents and relatives.”** This gender gap may reflect that women feel a lack of support more acutely because they do still do the bulk of the caring.

- ▶ Once again, economic precarity is the strongest predictor of intention to vote for care policies. **Those who face higher economic precarity are 1.7 times more likely to vote for care policies. This is significant – even though economic precarity erodes trust, those who feel the most helpless financially are also more likely to vote for policies that support their care needs.**
- ▶ The majority of fathers who say they vote are more likely to be conservative than not – **38 percent of fathers versus 31 percent of mothers say they lean conservative or right.** This reflects a growing global political trend toward the right and for populist leaders who promise change but advocate for a reversal in many of the hard-won gains in gender equality.

Almost four in 10 fathers say they vote conservative or right, and yet almost equally high numbers of mothers and fathers – and would vote for – candidates that champion care policies.

In the concluding section, we delve into the need to tap into fathers’ identities as nurturing caregivers and encourage them to see the importance of care policies to their own lived realities as parents and caregivers. Parents under pressure want care to move from the periphery to the center of policy, just as it is the center of their lives. It is time for a transformation. Fathers, mothers, and children deserve nothing less.

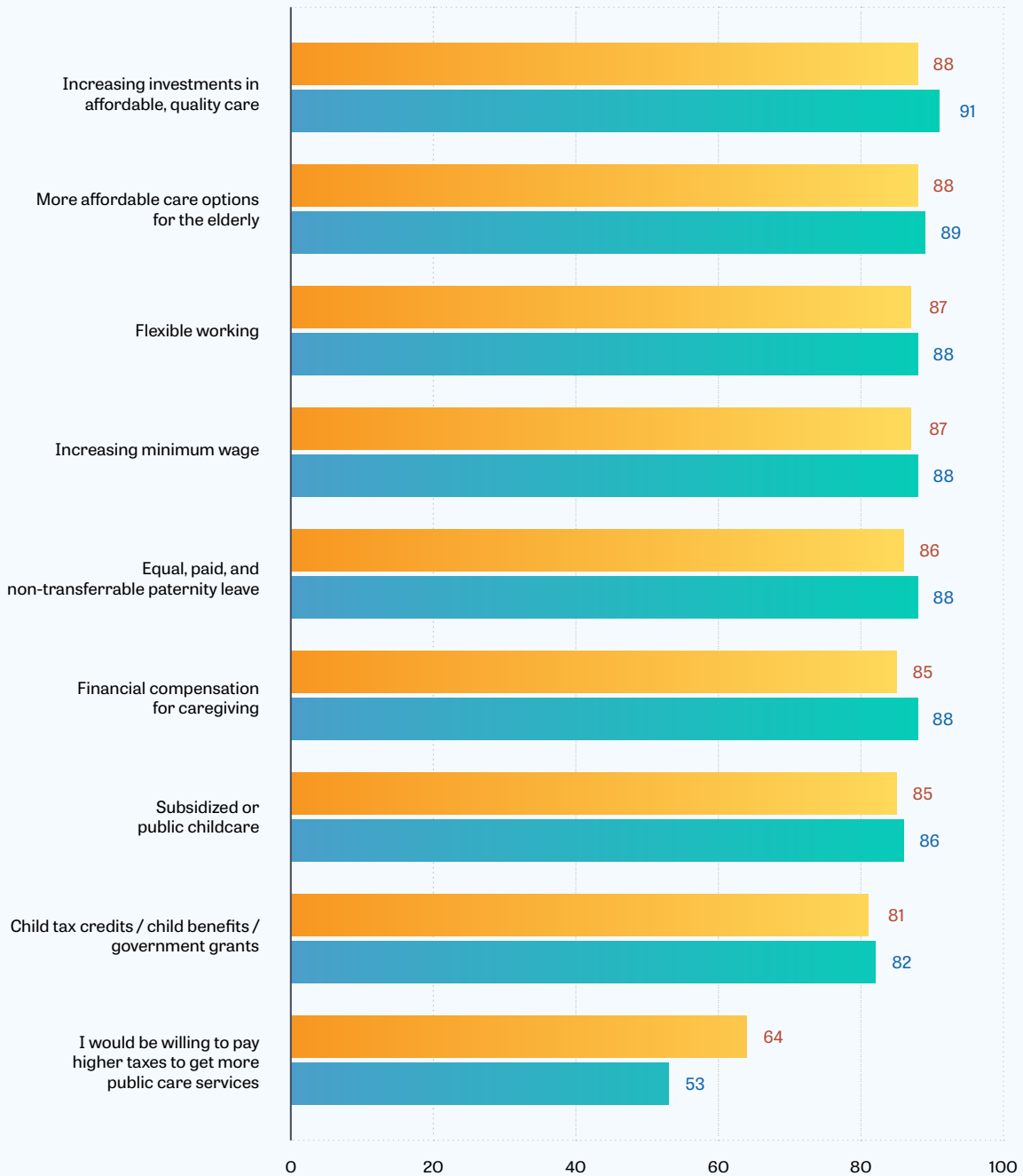


As a government, we rarely ask, “What is life like for you right now, and what would make your life easier as a couple and as a parent in 2026?” Let’s do that more.


Maya Ellis, UK Member of Parliament

Parliamentary Debate on Healthy Relationships, February 12, 2026.⁷⁶

Figure 16. Policy Asks: Percent Agreement with Intention of “Voting for a Political Party that Supports...”



→ Data available for 13 countries, excluding China, the UK and the US where the question was not asked. Note: 'Increasing investments in affordable quality care' includes child-care, elder care and care for people with disabilities. 'Equal, paid and non-transferrable leave' means parental leave is guaranteed for both parents in equal amounts, where each parent has their individual and dedicated leave entitlement that cannot be shared or transferred to the other parent. 'Tax credits or benefits' are government programs to support families with children.



Section IV. What Parents Want – Solutions in Their Own Words

“I would like politicians to come to my house and see day-by-day how hard it is to raise a child.”

– FATHER, 35 YEARS OLD, SPAIN

We asked parents – mothers and fathers – one simple question: “If you could tell a local political representative one thing about the challenges you face as a parent, what would it be?” Their overwhelmingly shared response was simple: parents are stretched to a breaking point, and they believe governments, policymakers, opinion makers, and employers are not doing enough to help.

Mothers and fathers are asking for the basic conditions to raise their children with dignity. They find joy in parenting – a deep belief that

children represent hope – and the future. But they also describe hitting a daily brick wall: stagnant wages, rising costs, inaccessible childcare, unsafe neighborhoods, poor education, inadequate health systems, and relentless time pressure. They speak of the many sacrifices they make each day to provide care, and their desperation that they do not have enough time for their children.

Their demands are clear – they are prepared to vote for change.

Support Parents to Care

“It is urgent to create more real and accessible support for families, from daycare centers to schools with schedules compatible with working life, to care services for the elderly. Without this network, parents and caregivers are exhausted and at risk.”

– MOTHER, 39 YEARS OLD, PORTUGAL

Parents describe daily impossible situations: the necessity of earning a living and the need to be present for their children, with almost nothing bridging the gap. Childcare costs exceed rent in many households. A 32-year-old mother from Argentina explains, “Within 20 blocks, I don’t have a single place that provides childcare... I think that’s a fundamental factor that could support people who have to return to the labor market.” Her comment also highlights how cities and municipalities shape the daily realities of families – from transport routes, to childcare access, to elder care, to safe public spaces. When local leaders invest in care, they strengthen economic participation, gender equality, and intergenerational well-being.

Another 63-year-old mother from Ireland said, “As a parent and a carer for elderly parents and in-laws and rearing children at the same time and with no government support, it’s unfair.” For single parents and those caring across generations, in particular, there is no slack. One 42-year-old father in Canada put it simply: the biggest challenge he faces is, “the lack of affordable childcare and support systems” that allow him to balance work and family. Parents in our study overwhelmingly support a four-day work week, though the majority note that flexible work is still denied to them.

As this 62-year-old father in Chile says, “Inflexible schedules and a lack of proper family leave make parenting very difficult. We need laws that favor work-life balance, such as paid parental leave and flexible working hours.” Flexible work and equal leave and other policies that support families are not just good politics – they are smart governance.

Keep Children Safe

[My worry is] “having to take care of our children because nowhere are they safe. We love our children, we just want a beautiful and healthy future for them.”

– MOTHER, 27 YEARS OLD, CHILE

Beyond financial strain, parents worry about their children’s physical security and about digital platforms pulling young people – particularly their sons – into harmful online spaces. One 28-year-old father in Mexico described the dread of knowing his son will grow up “surrounded by corruption and crime at very high levels.” Another 62-year-old father in Ireland asked bluntly, “The future for my child looks bleak. What can you tell me about the future healthcare/housing/climate policies your government will enact and how will they affect future generations?”

Local and regional governments are uniquely positioned to make communities safer for families. Urban planning, housing, transport, and social services can be designed to integrate caregiving and gender equality, making care visible and accessible while reducing risks. Technology companies, too, can do much more to protect children. And governments can introduce regulations to support children’s safety.

Creating safe spaces – both offline and online – is central to family well-being, child development, and community resilience. Governments that prioritize safety equip children to grow, learn, and thrive, while empowering parents to work, care, and participate fully in society. Safety is the foundation for building a caring world and a more sustainable future for us all.

Make Health and Education Systems Work for Families

Schools and health systems shape children’s lives more than almost any other public institution – yet parents tell us both are failing. Teachers can’t cope with crowded classrooms. One 49-year-old father in Chile called for education that reinforces “the skills of each child” rather than following a single common plan. Another 23-year-old father in Argentina said, “Navigating complex education systems and policies is confusing and often leaves parents feeling powerless.”

In clinics and hospitals, families say they queue for hours only to find services unavailable or unaffordable – particularly those raising children with disabilities, special needs, or mental health challenges. Parents are burning out from this effort, reminding us that “we are not machines.” They need support.

What parents want are education systems that teach empathy, collaboration, and critical thinking – all while preparing children for a century shaped by artificial intelligence. They want health systems

that are inclusive and accessible to every family member, including fathers, from pregnancy onward.

Acknowledge and Support Fathers' Caregiving

“Being a father is like fighting a war with a stick and an enemy with a rifle.”

– FATHER, 28 YEARS OLD, BRAZIL

Fathers face a paradox: they want to be present and active in the daily lives of their children – across every country in our study. Yet persistent norms that define men as “providers” and “strong” from an early age limit fathers' participation in caregiving, reinforce the idea that mothers are the only natural caregivers, and constrain women's full participation in the workforce. These norms are shaped from birth, so in school and out, boys' must learn to challenge to the ideas that men should not provide care.

Our data reveal strong support for gender-equitable caregiving: nine out of 10 fathers and mothers agreed that, “*Taking care of the home is just as important as paid work,*” and more than 90 percent agreed that, “*Men who do their fair share of housework and care work make good partners.*” Changing social norms is essential for families. When fathers are fully engaged, families thrive, gender equality advances, and children grow up in societies that value care, connection, and fairness.

“Help us to thrive, not just to survive”

Parents – fathers and mothers – are being stretched to breaking point as they face new threats, particularly online. Their needs are not met by workplaces and public services. And fathers, despite wanting to share the load, are held back by norms and policies that have not caught up with their intentions. The good news is that fathers are ready, along with mothers, to act for, demand, and vote for the care policies that all families need.

These demands come at a time when decades of women's movements are under threat, as restrictive notions of masculinity are promoted by politicians and influencers seeking profit and notoriety. Workplaces and economics must transform to support family life, not the other way around. The lack of policies to support families is one root of concerns of fertility decline. Finally, fathers must be

welcomed into caregiving – not as helpers, but as equals.

The simple but profound mandate driving these recommendations comes from one 64-year-old father in Chile who said, “*As a parent, the hardest thing is raising my children with dignity in an environment where safety, health, and quality education seem like privileges and not rights. We need policies that help us live, not just survive.*”

To act on parents' urgent call for change, Equimundo is leading a global initiative called the MenCare Changemaker Journey. This two-year effort is bringing together policymakers, media voices, the corporate sector, and funders to promote system changes across seven key topics where change is necessary to promote caring manhood: online spaces, education systems, workplaces, democracies, health systems, overall care policies, and municipalities and regions as a new locus for action on care policies. This initiative will produce new partnerships with the goal of shifting the needle on providing care, with a focus on promoting caring manhood and men's caregiving as the global norm.⁷⁷

Parents have spoken. Decision-makers must listen. Together they will build a more sustainable, equitable, and transformative world, so that all children, parents, and carers can flourish.

Annex 1.

How Did We Gather and Analyze Our Data?

Study Design

Survey Component

To understand the global state of caregiving and the shared responsibilities that make up the care economy, *State of the World's Fathers 2026* collected data in August and September 2025 from nationally representative samples of 500 parents and caregivers aged 18 to 65 in each of 14 countries: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Croatia, Ireland, Mexico, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, and Türkiye. A comparative random sample of 500 parents from the State of American Fathers and the State of UK Men studies conducted in March 2025 and August 2025, respectively, were also included, providing complementary data from the United States and the United Kingdom for a total global sample of 8,000 respondents.

Sampling included quotas to ensure the participation of individuals with multiple caregiving responsibilities – such as those caring for adults, older family members, or people with disabilities – reflecting the diversity of caregiving experiences within households and communities (approximately 200 per country).

For 14 countries, the data collection firm, Rep Data, relied on online panels to collect data, following a staggered approach in which the survey went live in different countries, one at a time. The Equimundo team regularly liaised with Rep Data to monitor the sample. Translations were double checked by each country partner to ensure quality. Data quality also was ensured with multiple rounds and layers of data verification – from testing pilot data after soft launch, to running various algorithms in Research Defender, the gold standard to detect fraud in online samples. Ethical considerations were considered for all countries and across all components of data collection.

Qualitative Component

To deepen and contextualize the quantitative findings, the 2026 study conducted semi-structured interviews in the fourth quarter of 2025 with approximately 20 fathers or caregivers – and, where possible, their partners – in each of the participating countries. The qualitative sample was drawn from survey respondents who, at the end of the questionnaire, expressed interest in participating in further research and voluntarily shared their contact information. Most interviews were conducted virtually, with some held in person depending on the local context.

Through these conversations, the study sought to understand caregivers' lived realities within the broader structures that shape care – examining daily practices, shared responsibilities, and the supports or barriers they encounter across policy and community environments. The interview guide covered four interconnected themes: (1) everyday caregiving practices and arrangements; (2) the rewards, challenges, and evolving meanings of fatherhood and care; (3) stressors and access to care-supportive policies such as parental leave, flexible work, and childcare; and (4) the role of governments, workplaces, and communities in enabling or constraining equitable caregiving. Participants reflected on how caregiving roles are negotiated, how norms have changed across generations, and how these experiences have shaped their relationships, stress, and sense of support and balance at home.

Photovoice Component

Building on these narratives, the study also integrated a photovoice activity – a participatory visual method used to document and interpret caregivers' experiences through images and reflection. Participants were invited to take two photographs: one representing their biggest

worry about their child or the person they care for, and another capturing what gives them hope as a parent or caregiver. To protect privacy, they were asked to avoid identifiable photos of people, focusing instead on objects, spaces, or symbols that carried meaning. Each image was discussed during the interview, allowing participants to explain its significance and connect personal

stories to broader social and structural realities. This approach encouraged participants to voice both the emotional and systemic dimensions of care, offering powerful insights into how hope, concern, and resilience coexist in the lives of caregivers globally. See Table 4 for our overall sample size broken down by gender identity.

Table 4. Gender of Survey Respondents by Country

	Women	Men	Other Gender Identities	TOTAL
Country				
Argentina	164	321	2	487
Australia	168	353	5	526
Brazil	168	302	3	473
Canada	204	277	2	483
Chile	167	338	5	510
China	167	335	1	503
Colombia	165	318	3	486
Croatia	153	374	1	528
Ireland	168	412	0	580
Mexico	172	321	0	493
Portugal	170	312	0	482
South Africa	172	321	2	495
Spain	179	310	1	490
Türkiye	169	324	0	493
United Kingdom	108	387	0	495
United States	121	366	6	493
TOTAL	2,615	5,371	31	8,017

Table 5. Total Number of Interviews Per Country

	Fathers	Partners	Total
Country			
Argentina	20	20	40
Australia	13	7	20
Brazil	17	7	24
Canada	19	10	29
Chile	19	3	22
China	24	10	34
Colombia	21	20	41
Croatia	18	7	25
Ireland	12	3	15
Mexico	20	16	36
Portugal	6	2	8
South Africa	30	10	40
Spain	20	10	30
Türkiye	20	20	40
United States	32	N/A	32
TOTAL	271	129	400

Constellations of Fatherhood

Fathers come in many different forms. They may be adoptive parents or stepfathers. They may or may not live with their partner or child. Men also provide care in many configurations beyond fatherhood – as brothers, uncles, grandfathers, teachers, mentors, coaches, or friends.

In our study:

- The majority of children under 18 live with one or both parents – 92 percent of mothers and 84 percent of fathers report they live with their children at least three days a week.
- Mothers are more likely to be single parents (18 percent of mothers versus 8

percent of fathers).

- Fathers are much more likely to see their children fewer days per week, or only part of the week, than mothers – 29 percent of fathers and 13 percent of mothers.
- Fathers are more likely to be in co-parenting arrangements with children living part-time across households (for example, living with former partner some of the week) – 13 percent of fathers versus 4 percent of mothers.
- Fathers more often raise adopted children (8 percent of men versus 3 percent of women) or live in stepfamily households – 5 percent of men versus 2 percent of women.

Annex 2. Promising Practices from Study Country Partners

“Men usually don’t do housework. I’m the first one who does. I clean the tiles and everything. Sometimes I cook too.”

– ROMA FATHER, 26 YEARS OLD

“They have to be equal.” Work with Young Roma Fathers in Croatia

In Međimurje County in northern Croatia, Status M, a local non-governmental organization, has been working with Roma fathers for more than 10 years to strengthen active, caring fatherhood. The county has a large Roma population, and many men become fathers at a young age. While this can present challenges, it also offers an important opportunity to support men early on to build positive relationships with their children and partners.

The program is based on Equipundo’s Program P,⁷⁸ but it has been adapted to fit the local Roma context. The content reflects everyday life in Roma communities and responds to the specific issues families face, including poverty, discrimination, and limited access to services. From the beginning, cooperation with local social services and kindergartens has been essential. These partners help identify and reach fathers, build trust, and connect the program to existing community support structures.

Through group workshops and discussions, fathers explore what it means to be a caring and involved parent. The focus is practical and concrete: spending time with children, supporting their learning, communicating with partners, and resolving conflicts without violence. The program also works to strengthen men’s confidence in their parenting skills and to promote more equal relationships within couples. Gender equality is addressed in ways that feel relevant to daily family life, rather than as an abstract idea. Children’s rights are a strong component of the work. Fathers are encouraged to support regular school attendance and early childhood education, and

to reflect on the consequences of early marriage for children’s futures, especially for girls. Over a decade of consistent engagement, this initiative has shown that when Roma fathers are given space, respect, and support, they step into their roles with commitment and care, benefiting their children, their partners, and their communities.

“You know how it is here – a son is seen as a bit higher, and a daughter a bit lower. But now this is changing. I think they should be equal. They have to be equal.”

– ROMA FATHER, 31 YEARS OLD

Status M (<https://status-m.hr/>)

“Cutting the head off the snake.” Digital Safety and Australia’s Social Media Ban.

Australia’s position as one of the first countries to legislate an online social media ban for children under 16 reflects the government’s willingness to act on an issue that, as the data from this report show, is a significant source of concern for parents. The Australian eSafety commissioner found that 95 percent of caregivers see safety as a significant parenting challenge (Australian Government 2024⁷⁹) and another survey found that 77 percent of Australians backed the ban (YouGov 2024).⁸⁰ In the Australian data for this report, approximately one quarter of parents ranked not knowing what their child is doing on the Internet among their top three caregiving concerns, and in open-text survey responses about their biggest worries for their child, approximately one in 10 parents spontaneously mentioned technology-related issues.

The prevalence of these concerns suggests that the legislation is responding to a genuine and widely felt parental need. Qualitative interviews revealed strong and, at times, varied views regarding children's digital lives and the new social media ban. Some parents framed technology as an immediate and tangible threat, including one father's account of his son's gaming addiction becoming severe enough to require hospitalization. Others described more everyday concerns about reduced attention spans, behavioral changes, and children becoming socially withdrawn due to screen use. As this 37-year-old mother said, *"On those days that they're out of the house for the whole day, they're much nicer to deal with because I feel like with the screen time, I'm not sure if it just zaps their energy, but it makes them tired."*

Parents frequently described digital platforms as deliberately designed to hold attention, with one father likening them to "online poker machines" and arguing that governments should "cut the head off the snake" by regulating technology companies directly. Another father similarly observed that platforms "aren't taking much responsibility" for harmful content, though he saw the ban as a necessary interim measure while better solutions are developed.

Even among parents who questioned the effectiveness of age-based restrictions, there was recognition that the legislation sends an important signal. One mother asserted that monitoring children's online access is fundamentally a parent's responsibility, yet the broader pattern of responses suggested that parents' welcome government action as a complement to – rather than replacement for – their own efforts. Others adopted a pragmatic middle ground, acknowledging that while age-based bans may not be fully effective, they can nevertheless "draw a line in the sand."

Contributed by the Australian research team for Western Sydney University on behalf of the Fathering Project, Home - The Fathering Project (<https://thefatheringproject.org/>) partners to the *State of the World's Fathers 2026*.

"The World Demands a Lot from Fathers." Responsible Fatherhood in Colombia.

Apapachar is a fatherhood training program in Bogotá and Soacha, Colombia. Bogotá has an innovative local care system, or "care blocks,"

which aims to reduce the imbalance in caregiving between women and men by offering care services and encouraging fathers to practice caring tasks (<https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/bogota-care-blocks/>). The care blocks are not designed to support fathers to think about their role in caregiving.

Apapachar aims to do just this. A creative partnership of Equimundo Fundación Centro Internacional de Educación y Desarrollo Humano, New York University, and Innovations for Poverty Action, Apapachar will blend elements of Apapacho (an effective and evaluated caregiver-focused strategy aimed at preventing violence against children) and Paternar (a program that supports fathers to be co-responsible for caregiving, teaches respectful parenting, and supports integral child development).

Recruiting fathers, and keeping them in the predecessor programs, has often been difficult due to social norms around care being a women's domain, as well as fathers' limited time availability, and, sometimes, distance from the workshops. To address this, Apapachar is using a flagship methodology that will be delivered via WhatsApp. Through extensive co-design, workshopping, and testing with fathers in Bogotá, the partners developed both hybrid and fully digital versions of the program, guided by a trained human facilitator. The adapted program, Apapachar (<https://www.equimundo.org/designing-gender-transformative-programs-for-the-digital-world/>), has been endorsed by Colombia's Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar and is being embedded in the Colombian early-childhood development system.

Fathers as Agents of Change in Türkiye

Since 1996, AÇEV (The Mother and Child Foundation) has reached more than 100,000 fathers through its Father Support Program (FSP), a group-based fatherhood intervention designed to strengthen fathers' active, nurturing involvement in their children's development and well-being. FSP's impact has extended beyond individual attitude change – it has become a catalyst for an emerging civil movement that is transforming how involved fatherhood is understood and practiced in Türkiye. In the last decade, alongside direct program delivery, AÇEV's advocacy work has shaped the discourse on workplace policies, advertising norms, media narratives, and legislation.

Inspired by this broader vision, FSP alumni began

amplifying involved fatherhood messages within their own communities. With AÇEV's support, these early informal initiatives evolved into community networks that continue operating independently across the country. Today, 13 involved fatherhood groups were formed across 10 provinces. These groups conducted local awareness campaigns, organized public events, and carried out advocacy on issues ranging from parental leave to child marriage and violence prevention. They have also started to attract men who want to take responsibility for gender equality more broadly. AÇEV supports these initiatives at arm's length, while deliberately building their independence every step of the way.

What distinguishes this approach is its dual framing of fatherhood: as a factor in child development and well-being, and to change ideas about manhood and promote equality. Change can be seen in messages connecting caring fatherhood to the prevention of violence against women and children in spaces typically resistant to gender equality messaging, such as barbershops, coffeehouses, industrial workplaces, and mosques. In one example, a group partnered with professional football players to deliver the message, "A father's first job is his children" at a major match. FSP participants become not just program beneficiaries, but autonomous advocates carrying change into their communities.

AÇEV FSP (<https://ilkisbabalik.acev.org/>)

Advocacy for Parental Leave and Promoting Responsible Fatherhood in Spain

Since a change in the law in 2025, Spain's parental leave is among the most generous in Europe, offering 19 weeks (133 days) of fully paid, flexible, non-transferable leave for both parents and including adoptive as well as birth and foster parents, with extra leave for single parents up to 32 weeks (<https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/serviciosdeprensa/notasprensa/inclusion/paginas/2025/solicitud-permiso-nacimiento-y-cuidado-menor.aspx>). To support the idea that fathers are equal carers with mothers, the Ministry of Equality created a campaign about the need for a cultural transformation toward more equal parenting and co-responsible masculinities. Starring actor Paco León, the short film made for this campaign "Por huevos" is a humorous take on what it means to be a man (<https://www.igualdad.gob.es/comunicacion/sala-de-prensa/el-ministerio-de-igualdad-lanza-la-campana-por->

[huevos-sobre-masculinidades/](https://www.igualdad.gob.es/comunicacion/sala-de-prensa/el-ministerio-de-igualdad-lanza-la-campana-por-huevos-sobre-masculinidades/)).

Funded by the Ministry of Equality, Men Engage Iberia devised a program called Co-responsible Masculinities with the hashtag #ActualízateMacho, which invites men to "download the best version of yourself, and discover how to update yourself in household tasks, self-care, parenting, or caring for others" (<https://corresponsabl.es/sensibilizacion/>). One clip on fatherhood shows a man in various situations at work and at home with a baby, arguing that a 'high-value man' is a good dad (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bNSxMyqUcU&t=34>

SOMOS - Masculinidades Corresponsables (<https://corresponsabl.es/somos/>)

Annex 3. Exclusive Contributions from Partners to SOWF 2026

“What I like most is sharing with [the children] and seeing their happiness... making them happy...when they are having a bad day.”

– STEPFATHER, 20 YEARS OLD, COLOMBIA

Changing the Way We Think About Stepfathers

Decades of research indicate that stepfathers play an important role in many children's lives.^{81,82} ⁸³ Today's stepfathers may be even more involved with their stepchildren than their counterparts were a generation ago. In the United States, about one in 10 children live with a stepfather.⁸⁴

The Future of Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS) is a contemporary longitudinal birth cohort study that has followed about 5,000 children since their births. It oversampled children born to unmarried parents, making it particularly useful for looking at stepfamilies. Using these data, researchers at Princeton University explored the relationships between stepfather-youth closeness and stepfathers' active engagement with the child and the child's internalizing and externalizing behaviors and school connectedness at two time points, when the child was age 9 and 15. They found that the quality of the stepfather-child relationship and level of active engagement between youth and their stepfathers are associated with reduced internalizing behaviors (for example, anxious and depressive behaviors) and higher school connectedness. These findings hold regardless of whether the mother was married to or simply living with the stepfather, suggesting that the stepfather-child relationship, not marital status, is salient for the child. The findings suggest that stepfathers' roles seem to have evolved in beneficial ways.

In other research using data from qualitative interviews with a subsample of the FFCWS youth,⁸⁵ the Princeton researchers found that it is often easier for stepfathers to earn the father role than it is for non-residential biological fathers, making them important figures in their stepchildren's lives. Non-residential fathers are often stripped

of their father label when they do not meet the child's expectations while it appears to be easier for stepfathers to meet and exceed their stepchildren's limited expectations of them. As a result, it may be easier for stepfathers to meet the fatherhood bar and enter a satisfying father role with their stepchildren.

Contributed by Dr. Sarah (Gold) Pachman and Prof. Kathy Edin, Princeton School of Public and International Affairs, United States.

Structural Support for Working Parents: Insights from Women, Business and the Law 2026

Fathers across 16 countries in this report are navigating the intersection of work and care – and the policy environment shaping their choices is rapidly evolving. Data from the World Bank Group's Women, Business and the Law (WBL) 2026 project – which tracks laws, supporting policies, and their enforcement across 190 economies to assess how they shape women's economic opportunities – show that many economies have built meaningful foundations across three key areas: flexible work, childcare, and paid parental leave. Recent evidence points to an important insight: policy design and enforcement – not just the existence of laws – are critical to ensuring impact. Together, they determine whether legal frameworks effectively close gender gaps and enable fathers to take on active caregiving roles.⁸⁶

1. Flexible Work – A Right for Some, Not All

















Flexible work is within reach for many workers on paper – but only a few economies fully deliver

in practice. Of the 16 economies studied, 13 recognize remote and telework rights – and of those, 11 also allow flexible working hours, with Spain, Portugal, and Ireland among those offering both (Figure 17, Panel A). Beyond legal recognition, 10 economies provide supportive instructional resources for the private sector to adopt flexible work arrangements. Yet enforcement remains a challenge: according to expert perceptions, only Spain and Ireland fully enforce existing legislation allowing employees to request flexible work arrangements in practice.

2. Childcare – The Missing Piece

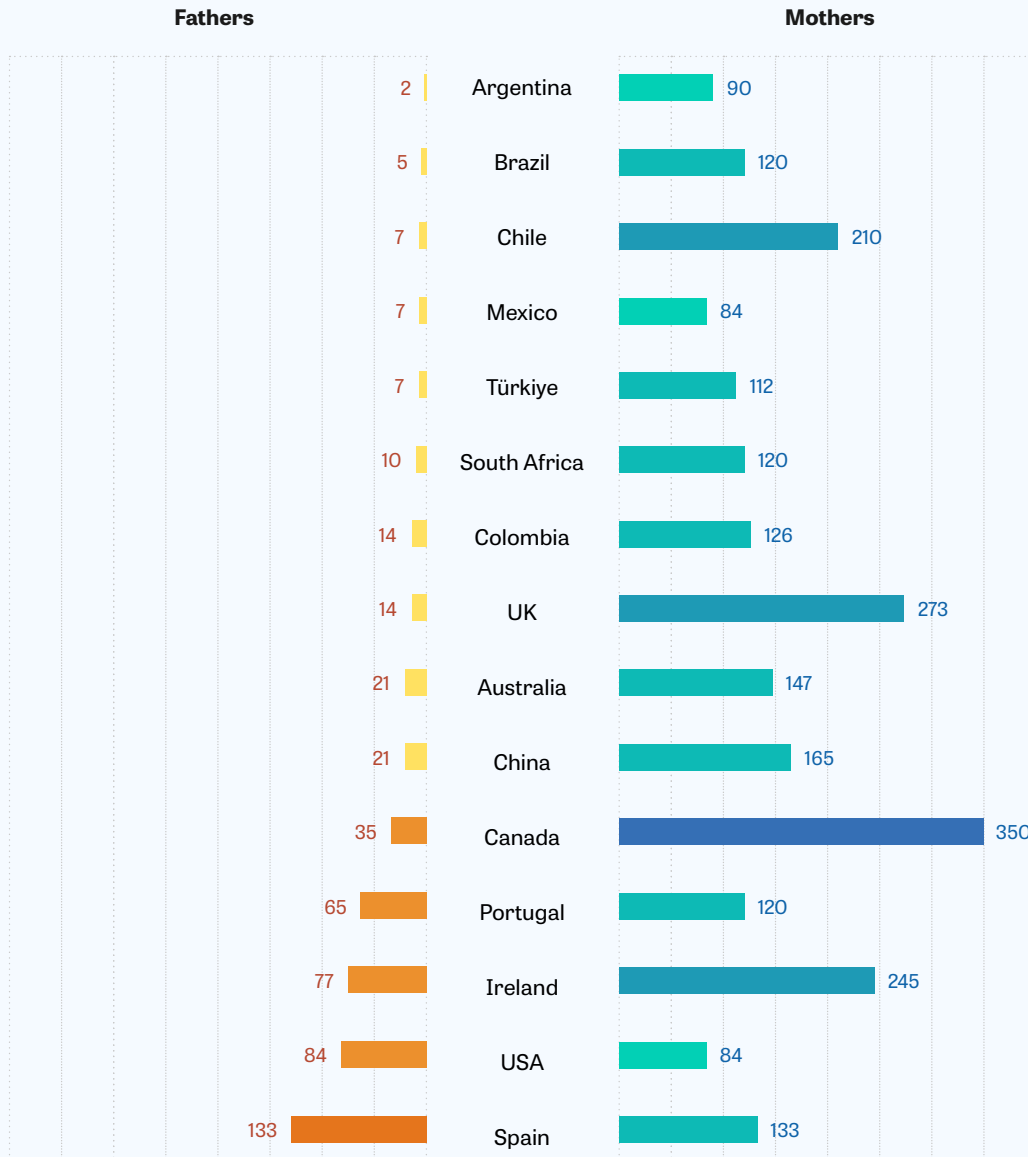
Publicly funded, center-based childcare is established in 9 of the 15 economies studied – including Argentina, Spain, and the United Kingdom, which combine public provision with financial support and tax incentives for families. Financial support for childcare is available in 14 economies and tax incentives in nine, suggesting a relatively strong foundation on paper (Figure

Figure 17. Cross-Country Policy Frameworks on Work Flexibility and Childcare Support

Economy	Panel A. Flexible Work Arrangements		Panel B. Economic Support for Childcare	
	Flexibility in time of work	Flexibility in place of work	Financial support	Tax incentives
 Argentina	X	X	X	X
 Australia	X	X	X	
 Brazil	X	X	X	X
 Canada			X	X
 Chile	X	X	X	X
 China				X
 Colombia	X	X	X	
 Croatia		X	X	
 Ireland	X	X	X	
 Mexico		X	X	
 Portugal	X	X	X	X
 South Africa				
 Spain	X	X	X	X
 Türkiye	X	X	X	
 UK	X	X	X	X
 USA	X	X	X	X

→ Measures reflect the existence of relevant policy provisions based on standardized cross-country coding under the WBL methodology.

Figure 18. Disparities in the Duration of Paid Parental Leave, Mothers Versus Fathers (days by law)



→ Source: WBL 2026 database. Note: Economies are ordered by the gap in paid parental leave between mothers and fathers.

71, Panel B). Yet access in practice tells a different story. Enforcement remains uneven across the sample, with only China fully enforcing existing childcare legislation, according to experts. For most economies, the gap between legislation and implementation remains a central challenge.

3. Parental Leave – A Tale of Two Parents

The gap between maternity and paternity leave for this group of countries averages 129 days. Maternity leave ranges from 84 days to 350 days across the sample; most European economies exceed the ILO-recommended 14-week (98-day) minimum. Paid leave for fathers varies widely – Spain stands out as the only country with a zero-gender gap in paid parental leave that also

exceeds this benchmark (133 days each). Although the United States has no federal paid parental leave mandate, New York – governed by state law – records a zero gap, though the duration of leave remains substantially shorter (84 days). Meanwhile, Croatia (148 days), Ireland (77 days), and Portugal (65 days) show that substantive paternal leave is achievable. Figure 18 shows the full picture. Significant room for improvement remains. Only six countries – Canada, Croatia, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom – offer incentives to encourage fathers to take paternity leave upon the birth of a child. Moreover, only five – Australia, China, Colombia, Croatia, and Spain – are perceived by legal experts to fully enforce existing legislation on paid leave for fathers in practice. Source: WBL 2026 database.

The Bottom Line

The data point to a genuine opportunity – and to proof that comprehensive support for fathers is achievable.

Contribution by Tea Trumbic, Ana Maria Tribin Uribe, Hikaru Yamagishi, Alejandra Rivera and Natalia Mazoni, World Bank WBL

Source: WBL 2026 database. Analysis covers 16 economies: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Croatia, Ireland, Mexico, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Türkiye, United Kingdom, and United States. WBL data are based on legislation applicable in the largest business city of each economy.

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