
15. Trajectories of modernization of parenting leave policies within continental Europe: similarities and unexpected differences

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INTRODUCTION

Continental European countries are traditionally viewed as family policy laggards (Morgan, 2012). In comparison to the Nordic countries, countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, France, and Austria, historically centred on protecting a male breadwinner (Lewis, 2001; Yerkes, 2009). Consequently, these countries were slow to develop policies to support families in their care responsibilities, including paternity leave, parental leave and early childhood education and care (ECEC). In recent decades, however, continental European countries have witnessed significant transformation in family policies, particularly around parenting leaves, including the creation of incentives for fathers to take leave in Germany (see e.g., Morgan, 2012), the creation of extensive leave for fathers and partners in the Netherlands (den Dulk & Yerkes, 2020), and the creation of a fully individualized and extensive career-break scheme in Belgium (Merla & Deven, 2019).

Various scholars have compared the modernization of family policies across countries (Björk Eydal & Rostgaard, 2018; Nieuwenhuis & Van Lancker, 2020) and continental European countries as well (Lewis et al., 2008; Morgan, 2012; Pfau-Effinger, 2018). A new look is warranted, however, because how these changes in parenting leave policies compare is unclear. Previous studies suggest that continental European countries, while sharing some similarities (e.g., promoting ‘free choice’ in family policy; Morel, 2007), also demonstrate considerable variation in family policies, often even within the same country (e.g., supporting non-familial forms of childcare while simultaneously promoting informal care by family members; Lohmann & Zagel, 2016). Building on the rich comparative family policy literature, we focus on the modernization (i.e., policy changes moving away from the male breadwinner model) of parenting leave policy in three neighbouring continental countries: Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands. The research questions addressed here are: To what extent have these continental European countries modernized their parenting leave policies between 2005 and 2020 and how does this frame what is expected of parents in their leave-taking behaviour? To what extent do these countries exhibit similarities and/or differences in their parenting leaves? In our analysis, we see parenting leave policies as parental leave, paternity leave, or other leave used to take time off following the birth of a child. We exclude maternity leave here for space reasons; however, we do mention the duration of maternity leave as it relates to when parenting leaves become relevant. Moreover, while not included here, clearly there is an interplay between parenting leave policies and other family policies such as the availability of high quality, affordable early childhood education and care.

ANALYTICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The analytical approach of our comparative study is based on an understanding of parenting leave schemes as institutions (e.g., North, 1990) that define what is expected regarding citizens' 'standard' behaviour. Parenting leaves are particularly related to the ways in which men and women are expected to behave in work and childcare in the period following childbirth (Pfau-Effinger, 2016).

We focus here on two forms of parenting leaves: parental leave (leave made available to either parent) and paternity leave (leave targeted to fathers or partners). For each of these leave types, we consider multiple elements of policy design consistently shown to be important for the uptake and impact of leave policies (den Dulk & Peper, 2016; Javornik & Kurowska, 2017; Koslowski et al., 2020). These include the duration of leave; the benefit level (generosity); the duration of payment (thus the duration of *paid* leave); the flexibility in take-up (to what age of child, taken part-time or full-time); eligibility (who can take it and under what conditions); the level of entitlement (whether this is an individual entitlement for each parent separately or a family entitlement, which treats parents as a unit); the gender entitlement (i.e., the extent to which fathers or partners are encouraged to take-up leave); the eligibility for funding (i.e., the conditions to be eligible for payment); and job protection regulations.¹ A cross-country comparison of these policy design elements is provided in Tables 15A.1 and 15A.2 in the Appendix. Note that when parenting leave starts (i.e., when paid maternity leave policies end) differs across the three countries. Comparatively, the Netherlands has the longest maternity leave, with 16 weeks paid leave (4–6 weeks before birth, 10–12 weeks post birth). This leave is shorter in Belgium (15 weeks, with minimum of 9 and maximum of 14 weeks post-partum) and Germany (14 weeks, 6 weeks pre- and 8 weeks post-partum). Maternity leave is fully paid in the Netherlands and Germany, and partially paid in Belgium (the first month at 82 per cent of gross wages, and 75 per cent of gross wage from the 31st day onwards).

PARENTING LEAVES IN BELGIUM, GERMANY, AND THE NETHERLANDS

Paternity Leaves in 2005

Paternity leave policies in Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands showed little expectation of fathers being involved in the care of children after birth in 2005. The Netherlands offered only two days of paid leave, and Belgium ten. Germany offered no paternity leave, and parental leave (which acts as a proxy for paternity leave, see below) did not yet offer individual, non-transferable entitlements for fathers. Parental leave policies in Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands did not offer fathers or partners a suitable alternative, creating similarly gendered and classed expectations. The low parental leave payment in Belgium and absence of payment in the Netherlands made leave unattractive to low-income families, and to men, given existing gender wage gaps and the broader normative context (Van Lancker & Ghysels, 2014; Marynissen et al., 2019).

Modernization of Paternity Leaves

Since 2005, significant changes in paternity leave policies have developed. As shown in Table 15A.1 in the Appendix, modernization in the Netherlands primarily took the form of an extension of paternity leave duration through the introduction of *geboorteverlof* (birth leave). The further extension of this birth leave in the Netherlands in July 2020, beyond our timeline, provides fathers and partners with significantly longer duration than the paternity leave policy offered in Belgium. While the Netherlands modernized paternity leave by extending duration, modernization of paternity leave in Belgium was more modest, with an extension of eligibility to same-sex parents, although limited to female couples. Similarly, when we account for Germany's parental leave (see Table 15A.2 in the Appendix) being used as a form of paternity leave,² we see that Belgium and Germany show a similar shift towards accommodating diverse families. Between 2005 and 2020, German parental leave policy became more inclusive, making same-sex parents eligible for parental leave. Same-sex parents were already eligible for parental and paternity leave in the Netherlands (see also Kaufman et al., Chapter 23 in this *Handbook*).

While paternity leave has respectively become more extensive and inclusive, the generosity of paternity leave benefits is moderate and restricted to dependent employees in both Belgium and the Netherlands. Dutch fathers and partners are only eligible for 100 per cent payment during the first week of leave; the extension of birth leave provides 70 per cent remuneration. Full remuneration is similarly limited in Belgium; fathers and partners receive 100 per cent pay during the first three days followed by 82 per cent of earnings. The lower remuneration in both countries following the initial days of leave can create difficulty in take-up for fathers and partners from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Javornik & Kurowska, 2017).

Parental Leaves in 2005

At the start of our analysis, parental leave schemes in all three countries were embedded in the male breadwinner model (Lewis, 2001). They did not provide parents the opportunity to act as 'financially autonomous caregivers' (Orloff, 1993). Rather, leave policies were based on the expectation that childcare would be provided by the child's mother, who was married to a fully employed male breadwinner.

We do see cross-country variation in continental parental leave policies in relation to duration and pay, however. Thus, all three shared a male breadwinner tradition, but parental leave policies differed with regard to expectations of how long children would be cared for by their mother/parent. The Netherlands and Belgium shared similar duration (approximately three months) but parental leave in the Netherlands was unpaid, while in Belgium parents received 558 Euros per month. Remuneration was lower in Germany, at 300 Euros per month, but duration was considerably longer, with parents eligible for 36 months of parental leave, of which 24 months were paid. The German benefit was means-tested and full benefits were restricted to parents in lower-income households. Even if the pay was low and the third year of parental leave was unpaid, parents (in particular, mothers) were often on leave for a total of 36 months, much longer than either the Netherlands (16 weeks maternity leave) or Belgium (15 weeks maternity leave).

Modernization of Parental Leaves

We see some modernization of parental leave between 2005 and 2020 in all three countries, but Germany clearly goes the farthest. The comparison of our three countries, however, shows more differences than similarities, particularly in relation to the ways in which they frame the work–family behaviour of parents. Germany continues to differ from Belgium and the Netherlands in its generosity, duration, and breadth of eligibility: Parental leave benefit is 65–67 per cent of the preceding year’s net earnings, with 100 per cent income replacement for full-time employed parents with a low income. The possible duration of parental leave with job protection remains 36 months. However, to motivate parents to return to employment quickly, the duration of parental leave benefit with full pay was reduced to 12 months if both partners participate and 14 months for single parents. Germany is also the only country of the three countries compared here to provide an incentive for the partner to take leave.

In contrast, Belgium and the Netherlands continue to do the minimum in relation to parental leave. While parental leave duration was extended in both the Netherlands and Belgium, the duration remains much shorter than in Germany, with around six months and four months respectively. The Netherlands in particular lags behind Belgium and Germany in relation to generosity of payments. Dutch parental leave remains unpaid and will only be paid at 50 per cent from 2022 onwards. Remuneration of parental leave in Belgium and Germany increased but remains relatively low in Belgium, whereas it is at a medium level in Germany according to international standards (Kosłowski et al., 2020). Lower levels of generosity like those in the Netherlands and Belgium, but to some extent also in Germany, can lead to gendered and classed effects in terms of take-up (Javornik & Kurowska, 2017). Germany, more so than Belgium, is attempting to address this class issue by providing low-income parents with 100 per cent remuneration. Therefore, a substantial share of parents in Germany are now able to act as ‘financially autonomous carers’ on the basis of parental leave benefits during paid parental leave (Reimer et al., 2019), whereas in the Netherlands and Belgium, parents must rely on their savings or financial dependency on their partners if they take parental leave and therefore take-up is low. All three countries offer parents the possibility to combine parental leave with part-time employment, prolonging the duration of pay accordingly (in the Netherlands, only where paid leave is available through collective bargaining; den Dulk & Yerkes, 2020).

We note two further differences among the continental countries investigated here in relation to collective bargaining agreements, which can complement national parenting leave policies (den Dulk, 2001; Yerkes & Tijdens, 2010; see also Daiger von Gleichen, Chapter 25 in this *Handbook*). Belgium takes an exceptional position with the existence of a time credit scheme by collective agreement. This scheme, available for employees in private and public sectors, provides a maximum of 51 months for specific types of ‘motivated’ career breaks (e.g., to participate in training programmes, care for children until the age of eight years, palliative care, care for sick or frail family members, care for children with disabilities until the age of 21 years, care for sick children). This scheme is independent of parental leave, maternity leave or paternity leave, and is often used to prolong the period of parental leave. In the Netherlands, collective agreements play an important role in the payment of parental leave. The most recent data available on the 100 largest collective agreements suggest 16 per cent provide partly paid leave (with payment varying between 25 and 75 per cent). Collective agreements supplementing parental leave policy are mostly found in public administration and the health sector (Torenvliet et al., 2018; den Dulk & Yerkes, 2020). This means that the avail-

ability of paid parental leave is mainly a privilege for employees in these sectors. Relying on collective agreements rather than nationally regulated leave provisions can therefore generate significant inequalities in access to paid leave.

SUMMARY

Our comparison of the modernization of parenting leave policies in Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands shows similarities and differences, as well as stasis and change. When we look at parenting leave legislation, it would at first appear that the historical similarity of continental European countries centred on a male breadwinner model changed. This change shows in modernized parental leave (Germany) and semi-modernized paternity leave (Belgium/the Netherlands), leading to more differences than similarities among our three countries. Modernization of parenting leave in Belgium takes the form of more inclusive paternity leave, and in the Netherlands, the development and extension of birth leave for fathers and partners. In Germany, modernization of parenting leave takes the form of more generous parental leave and incentives to include fathers in caregiving after childbirth.

But when we look more closely at these differences, we see that in varying configurations, these countries continue to share similarities and that change towards ‘modern’ parenting leave policies is actually quite moderate. In Belgium and the Netherlands, parenting leave policies remain focused on a short exit from the labour market. In the Netherlands, this is reflected in the duration and generosity of both paternity and parental leave. Parenting leave policies still offer minimal financial support for parents to care for their children at home after birth. Fathers and partners have access to minimal fully paid leave; the remainder of leave is only partially paid, making leave less accessible for low-income fathers and partners. The absence of paid parental leave suggests parents who want to care are expected to live on their savings or the income of their partner during the leave, and either return to their job within six months after birth or use parental leave to (temporarily) reduce working hours, which is common practice (den Dulk & Yerkes, 2020). In Belgium, parental leave benefits remain relatively low, so that they also must rely on savings or a partner’s income, and they have even less time for parental leave than in the Netherlands. Belgium offers very short paternity leave and, like the Netherlands, does not provide support targeted at the integration of fathers into parental leave.

In contrast, it would appear Germany modernized its parenting leave policies much more significantly than Belgium or the Netherlands. Germany’s modernized policies are based on the expectation that women take 12 months of leave following childbirth and fathers at least two months.³ But if we take a closer look, the ‘modernization’ of German parental leave is mostly on paper. In reality, the changes made to parental leave provide space for differing cultural interpretations of work and care in the formerly divided Germany. In the former Eastern Germany, the modernization of leave allows parents to follow their cultural model, emphasizing greater maternal employment and state involvement in care (Schiefer & Naderi, 2015). At the same time, the modernization of leave has no real consequences in West Germany when considering the impact of changes in relation to the labour force participation rate of mothers with young children, the duration of leave-taking and birth rates.

POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS FOR VARYING TRAJECTORIES OF MODERNIZATION

Our analysis of three continental European countries shows variation in the modernization of parenting leave policies, but suggests that change has been moderate, and all three countries continue to display remnants of the male breadwinner model historically evident in their leave policies. We have focused here on *how* these countries modernized their parenting leave policies rather than on *how and why*. While we lack the space to sufficiently answer why we see similarities *and* differences, stasis *and* change, we consider a number of explanatory approaches traditionally used, offering avenues for future research.

Cross-national differences in family policies, and parenting leave policies, in particular, are explained from multiple perspectives (for overviews, see Björk Eydal & Rostgaard, 2018; Nieuwenhuis & Van Lancker, 2020). A common approach is that of care regime frameworks, such as the male breadwinner model, universal breadwinner model or caregiver parity model (see, e.g., Fraser, 1994; Ostner & Lewis, 1995; Sainsbury, 1999; Ciccia & Verloo, 2012) as well as the family care model (Anttonen & Sipilä, 1996). From this perspective, cross-country differences in parents' rights are explained by the dominant model and path-dependent policy choices in line with this model. Family policies in continental countries pursuing a more traditional family form (like the male breadwinner model) provide a relatively low degree of rights to care leave for workers or target more extensive rights only towards women, whereas countries that support a universal breadwinner model tend to expand their leave arrangements for both parents (Bleijenbergh & Roggeband, 2007). On the basis of this approach, one would assume the generosity and duration of parental leave schemes is similar in countries with a similar care regime. This explanation might appear valid for Belgium and the Netherlands, where parenting leave policies remain of limited duration and generosity. But this explanation cannot account for the fact that countries of the same regime type also differ in the duration and generosity of parenting leave policies, with Germany offering much longer and more generous parental leave, and the Netherlands offering much longer paternity leave from mid-2020 onwards. Future care regime analysis needs to account for these nuanced differences within care regimes.

Another common argument used to explain cross-national differences in the generosity of family policies is the role of feminist movements (Randall, 2000; Morgan & Zippel, 2003; Bleijenbergh & Roggeband, 2007; see also Blome, Chapter 7 in this *Handbook*). Common indicators used in these approaches include the extent of women's representation in national parliaments (O'Connor, 1993), the active presence of women's movements, or the strength of feminist movements (Ferragina & Seeleib-Kaiser, 2015). It is plausible to assume that differences in the strength of feminist movements in society contribute to cross-national differences in family policies in continental European countries, particularly in relation to childcare. Publicly financed childcare is seen as the main road to gender equality in feminist thinking. However, the relationship between the pressure of feminists and parental leave policies appears to be more complicated. The role of parental leave in helping to achieve gender equality is a historically contested issue within feminist movements, with some movements divided in their opinion. Such division is a key reason for explaining why the German feminist movement had relatively little political impact on family policy, even though it was relatively strong until the 1980s. Moreover, despite the presence of a strong feminist movement in Germany, there was not necessarily feminist support for generously paid parental leave (Pfau-Effinger, 2016).

Another possible explanation for the unexpected differences in parenting leave policies within the cluster of continental European countries might be found in gender cultures (Pfau-Effinger, 2005, 2012). Culture consists of cultural values, cultural models or ‘ideals’, and world views, i.e., cultural ideas at the macro level of society. Culture can be coherent or contradictory, fragmented and contested. The ‘gender culture’ consists of gender-related cultural ideas about ‘ideal’ ways to organize gender, childcare and the work–family relationship within the family and different family members, and it overlaps in specific ways with the ‘welfare culture’, which comprises cultural ideas related to the role of the welfare state vis-à-vis the market and the family in a society (Pfau-Effinger, 2005, 2016). Cultural ideas or attitudes at the macro level reflect these gender and welfare cultures and provide action-orientation to individuals at the micro level, without determining individual behaviour. And ideas matter for policies (Béland, 2005). Cultural ideas on what is expected of parents following childbirth are inherent within policies (Kremer, 2007), setting a ‘normative reference point’ for how individuals should behave (Goerne, 2010; Yerkes et al., 2019). There is often a reciprocal relationship between policies and attitudes (Sharp, 1999; Raven et al., 2011), but in less established policy areas, such as work–family policy, attitudes have previously been an important driver of policies (Raven et al., 2011). Changes in the gender culture, and differences in the development paths of the gender culture, can potentially contribute to explanations of changing family policies and differences in the development of family policies in conservative, continental European welfare states (Pfau-Effinger, 2016).

Data on cultural attitudes towards gender for our three countries suggest further research is needed on this particular mix of countries to understand the relationship between these attitudes and parenting leave policies as they raise many questions and provide few answers. Cultural attitudes towards mothers are in line with the differences in parental leave duration and generosity: The share of people who believe that a working mother can establish a similarly good relationship with her child as a mother who does not work remained lower in Germany than in Belgium or the Netherlands in the early 2000s (see Table 15A.3 in the Appendix). Also, while the share of people who believe that a child suffers when the mother works decreased in all three countries, it remains higher in Germany than in Belgium or the Netherlands in the same time period. These data show a strong cultural belief in Germany that it is better for young children to have maternal care at home (in comparison to a working mother), stronger than in Belgium or the Netherlands. These data are in line with Germany’s more extensive parental leave duration and generosity. However, 2017 data from the Eurobarometer suggest cultural attitudes in Belgium may be more traditional than either Germany or the Netherlands. Nearly two-fifths (38 per cent) of Belgians agree that the most important role of a woman is to take care of her home and family, whereas this percentage is only 28 per cent in Germany and 15 per cent in the Netherlands. A similar share of Belgians (40 per cent) agree that the most important role of a man is to earn money, compared to 37 per cent in Germany and 18 per cent in the Netherlands. A comparison with EVS data for 2017, while not available for Belgium, also suggests that the interpretation of cultural attitudes is dependent upon the wording of the question. Cultural attitude data on the role of fathers do not align with the presumed role of fathers evident in parenting leave policies.

In all three countries, a large share of the population supported fathers’ participation in the care of young children when the modernization of leave was taking place. However, Germany is the only country that targets fathers on parental leave. Belgium and the Netherlands do not have father-specific quotas for parental leave, and paternity leave measures remain moderate

(Belgium) or are only now starting to change (the Netherlands). Further research on the explanatory role of gender cultures could look more in-depth at the varying expectations for mothers and fathers, and the extent to which these attitudes are a reflection or driver of parenting leave policies. Such research is particularly welcome following the passage of the European work–life balance directive in 2019 (European Parliament, 2019), which will likely trigger further modernization of parenting leave policies in Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands in the years to come. Research focused on potential differences across age groups is also needed, to better understand the attitudes of generations who are eligible to use these policies in the coming years.

NOTES

1. We do not include take-up rates here. While take-up rates offer crucial information about actual leave-taking behaviour, there are also several difficulties in measuring take-up and comparing these rates across countries. See Otto et al. (Chapter 5 in this *Handbook*) for more details.
2. Germany, while lacking leave targeted specifically at fathers and partners in the form of paternity leave, has extensive parental leave. Fathers/partners often use parental leave entitlements directly after birth in a manner similar to paternity leave.
3. The German government also introduced a generous policy for public childcare in 2007, giving each child aged one to six years old an individual right to extra-familial childcare. This law was fully enacted in 2013.

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APPENDIX

Table 15A.1 *Paternity leaves in Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands, 2005 compared to 2020*

	NL		GER		BE	
	2005	2020	2005	2020	2005	2020
Duration	2 days	1 week of birth leave equivalent to the father's/partner's weekly working hours (extended 1 July 2020 by 5 weeks)	No statutory entitlement ^a	No statutory entitlement ^a	10 days	10 days
Generosity	Unpaid	100% of earnings, no benefit ceiling			100% paid by the employer for the first 3 days, the other 7 days at 82% of earnings	100% paid by the employer for the first 3 days, the other 7 days at 82% of earnings. For self-employed, €81,63/day; additional premium in the form of 'dienstencheques' (service vouchers) for self-employed parents taking maximum 8 days of paternity leave
Duration of payment	Not applicable	1 week			10 days	10 days
Flexibility of take-up	Leave can be taken within the first four weeks after birth	Leave can be taken within first four weeks after birth (extended leave of 5 weeks to be taken within the first 6 months after birth)			To be taken within first month after date of birth, seven days can be used at will	To be taken within four months after date of birth, 10 days can be used at will, full time or part-time (for instance 20 half days)

	NL		GER		BE	
	2005	2020	2005	2020	2005	2020
Eligibility	All male and female employees partnered with a woman giving birth, or who acknowledge the child	All male and female employees partnered with a woman giving birth, or who acknowledge the child. Same-sex fathers and partners are eligible; the self-employed are not.			All male employees	All male and female employees partnered with a woman giving birth
Level of entitlement	Individual	Individual			Individual	Individual
Gender entitlement	Specified for the partner of the mother, gender neutral	Specified for the partner of the mother, gender neutral			Specified for the father	Specified for partner or co-parent, specifically mentioned to be the female partner of the mother
Funding eligibility	Not applicable	Dependent employment			Dependent employment, specific rules apply for statutory civil servants	Dependent employment, specific rules apply for statutory civil servants
Job protection	No information	Job protection throughout duration of leave			Job protection until 3 months after start of the paternity leave	Job protection until 3 months after start of the paternity leave
Additional information	Collective agreements can provide additional leave	Collective agreements can provide additional leave			Specific rules for statutory civil servants	Specific rules for statutory civil servants

Note: ^a Many German fathers use some of their parental leave entitlements directly after birth, in a manner similar to paternity leave, as noted above.

		NL		GER		BE		
		2005	2020	2005	2020	2005	2020	
Duration of payment	Not applicable		Not applicable	Flexible: Monthly €300 for 24 months, or monthly €450 for 12 months	Duration of pay 12/14 months (full-time leave) or 24/28 months (part-time leave) after childbirth are paid. For 'Partner months' 2 bonus months if both parents take at least two months of leave or for single parents. Duration of pay for the mother is reduced by two months, if she took maternity leave after childbirth.	3 months full-time	4 months full-time	
Flexibility of take-up	Following agreement with employer can be spread out over shorter or longer periods; can be taken in 2–3 blocks of time. Must be used before the child turns 8.	Fully flexible in take-up; must be used before the child turns 8. Can be taken concurrently with the other parent.	Parents taking leave are entitled to work 15–30 hours a week; if they wish to work less than 15 hours a week, it is necessary to have the employer's agreement. The final year of leave may be taken up to a child's eighth birthday with the employer's agreement.	Options for full-time or part-time leave (up to 32 hours/week). In case of part-time leave, reduced monthly pay for 24 (plus four) subsequent months, for 25 to 30 hours per week.	Must be used before the child turns 4. Leave may be taken full-time, half-time for 6 months, or 1/5th (one day in the week) for 15 months.	Must be used before the child turns 12. Very flexible take-up for employees (specific regulations for statutory personnel/civil servants). Leave can be taken full-time for 4 months, part-time for 8 months, 1/5th for 20 months or 1/10th (half a day/week) for 40 months. If the employer agrees, specific arrangements are possible such as splitting the period in several smaller periods, which can then be taken up on a full-time, part-time, 1/5th or 1/10th basis. This usually requires the consent of employers.		

	NL		GER		BE	
	2005	2020	2005	2020	2005	2020
Eligibility	All employees with at least one year of tenure with their employer	All employees. Self-employed workers are not eligible	<p><i>Parental leave:</i> all parents gainfully employed at the date of birth</p> <p><i>Childrearing benefit:</i> all parents if not employed for more than 30 hours a week</p>	<p><i>Parental leave:</i> all parents gainfully employed at the date of birth. During parental leave, parents must not be employed more than 32 hours per week.</p>	All employees with at least one year's employment with their present employer (in the 15 months) before the start of the leave (including contractual personnel of government and statutory personnel, although for the latter specific regulations may apply).	All employees with a at least one year of employment with their present employer (in the 15 months) before the start of the leave (including contractual personnel of government and statutory personnel, although for the latter specific regulations may apply).

	NL		GER		BE	
	2005	2020	2005	2020	2005	2020
			<i>Parental leave benefit:</i>			
Level of entitlement	Individual	Individual	Individual	Individual	Individual	Individual
Gender entitlement	No incentives for take-up by fathers	No incentives for take-up by fathers	Both parents are entitled to take leave at the same time; both can take up to two periods of leave	For 'Partner months' 2 bonus months if both parents take at least two months of leave for single parents	Individual-based system for each parent with a legal bond with the child, but no specific incentives for fathers	Individual-based system, for all parents with a legal bond with the child, but no specific incentives for fathers
	<p>Parents who are not employed more than 32 hours per week; who live in the same household with the child (this includes separated parents with joint custody); other people who take over care when parents are ill, disabled, or deceased; adoptive parents and foster parents; self-employed parents; same-sex couples; parents with a net income equal to or less than €500,000 or a single parent with income equal to or less than €250,000; citizens of other EU countries according to EU legislation; citizens of other countries with a permanent residence permit or with a working contract in Germany. Asylum seekers are eligible after having lived in Germany for at least three years.</p>					

	NL		GER		BE	
	2005	2020	2005	2020	2005	2020
Funding eligibility	Not applicable	Not applicable	Same as eligibility for the parental leave	Same as eligibility for the parental leave	Same as eligibility for the parental leave benefit	Same as eligibility for the parental leave
Job protection	No data available	Illegal to dismiss employees intending to take-up parental leave	The individual parents have employment protection rights when they take the leave	The individual parents have employment protection rights when they take the leave		Job protection until 3 months after start of the parental leave

Table 15A.3 Cultural attitudes towards gender in the Netherlands, Germany, and Belgium

Items (Proportion of respondents who agree, in %)	The Netherlands			Germany			Belgium		
	1999	2008/10	2017	1999	2008/10	2017	1999	2008/10	2017
<i>A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.^a</i>	81	82	..	67	73	..	79	85	..
<i>A small child will suffer if its mother is working.^a</i>	46	39	20	66	58	32	51	38	..
<i>A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family.^a</i>	..	..	7	..	..	14	..	..	..
<i>The most important role of a woman is to take care of her home and family.^b</i>	..	..	15	..	..	28	..	..	38
<i>The most important role of a man is to earn money.^b</i>	..	..	18	..	..	37	..	..	40
<i>Men should take as much responsibility as women for the home and children.^a</i>	..	91	..	..	89	..	..	85	..

Note: .. No data available.

Sources: ^aEuropean Values Survey, 1999, 2008, and 2017; ^bEurobarometer, 2010, 2017.