

# ESA RN27- Mid-term Conference Catania

*Session:  
Gender and work in Southern Europe*

The gap between attitudes and behaviors of working mothers:  
the case of Spain and Portugal



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# Background: the expansion of female and maternal employment (OECD Statistics)

The incorporation of women into the labour market is a widespread trend in all OECD countries in recent decades. In last years it can be observed an increase in **maternal employment**.

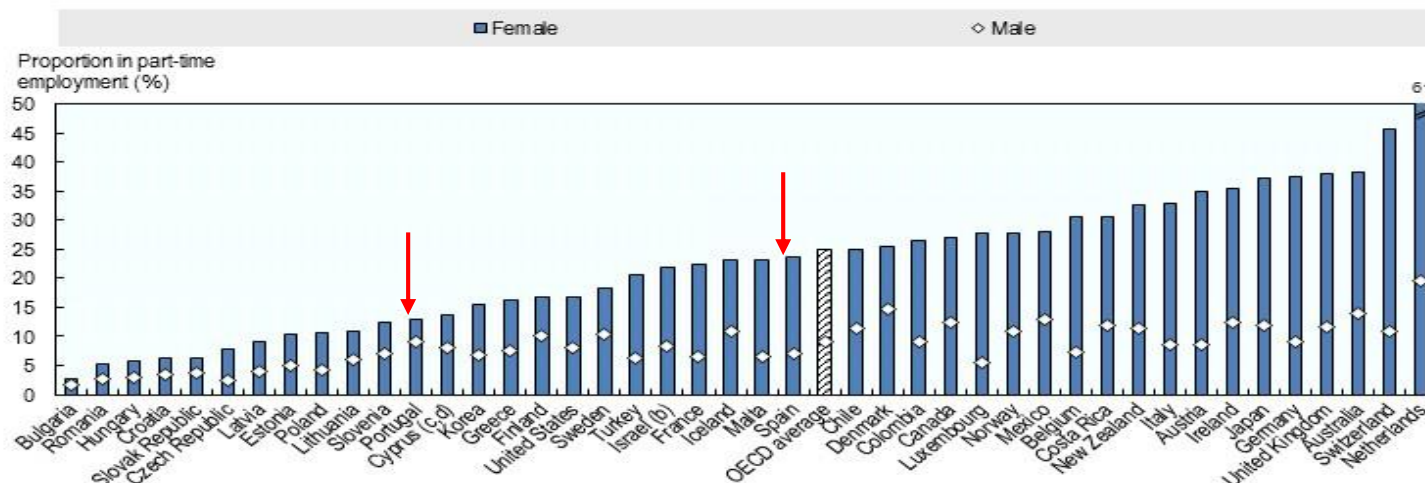


Figure 1. Proportion of part-time employment, by sex (2014)

## General trends:

- \* The proportion of women in **part-time employment** is higher than the proportion of men.

- \* **High-educated** women have higher levels of employment.

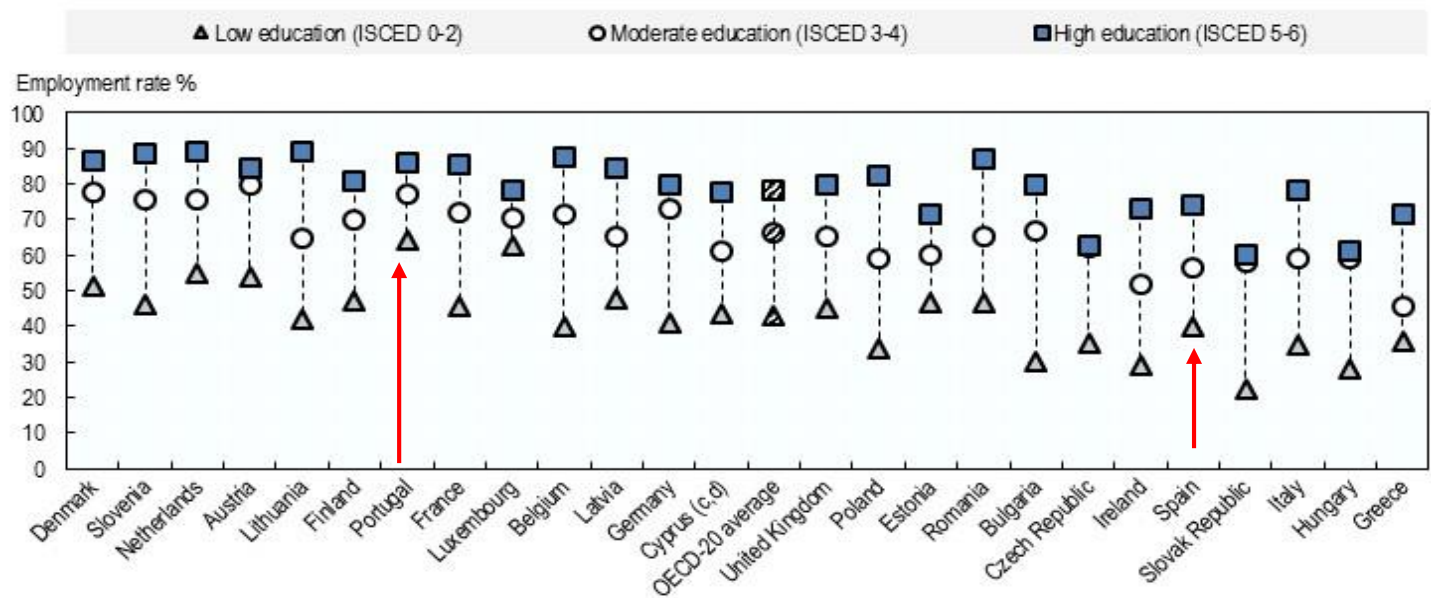


Figure 2 Employment rates (%) for women (15-64 years old) with children (aged 0-14) by level of education

# Background: decrease of fertility and expansion of family policies (OECD Statistics)

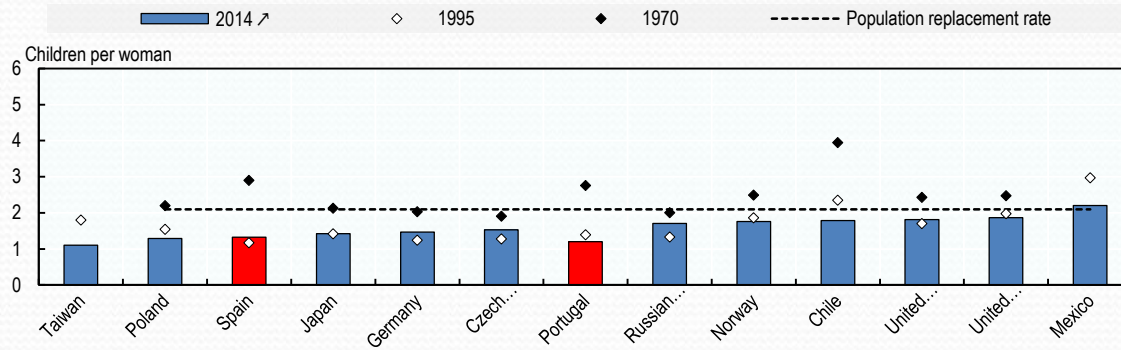
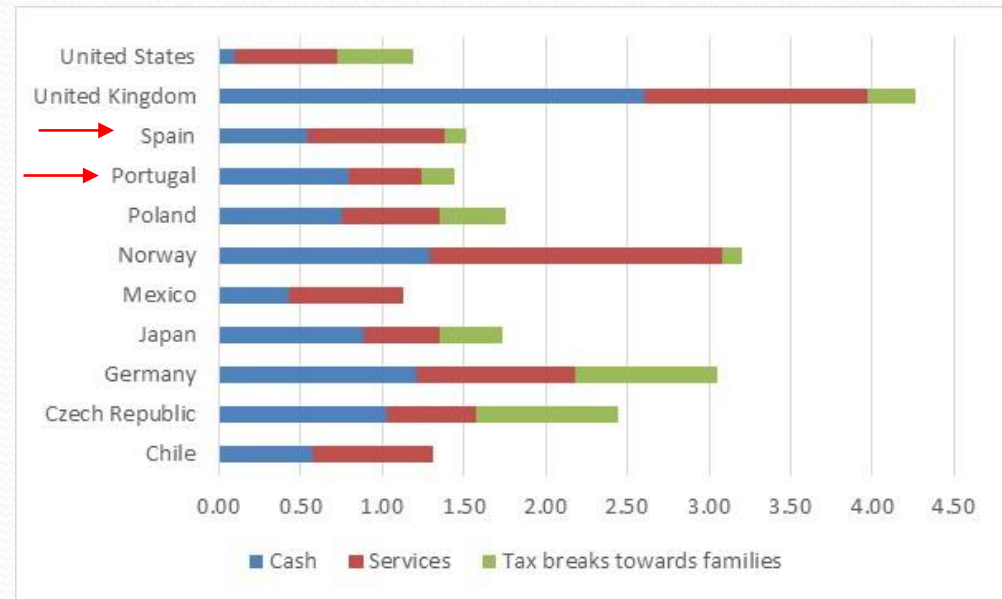


Figure 3. Total fertility rate (1970-2014)

Figure 4. Public spending on family benefits (2011)



Note: Data on cash transfers for the UK include spending on categorical income support benefits for sole parent families. Other countries also support sole parent families in need, but through general social assistance type payments. As a result, the spending on cash transfers is relatively high for the UK.

Other general trends:

\* The **decrease of the fertility rate** (below replacement rate)

\* The expansion of **family policies** since the late 1990s. These policies promote female employment and the reconciliation of work and family. Nevertheless, the total amount and the composition of public spending on families differ across countries.

# Background: change in attitudes towards maternal employment (ISSP)

Table 1. Do you think that women should work outside the home: full time, part time or not at all? 2012

	Work full time Child below 6	Work part time Child below 6	Stay at home Child below 6	Work full time Child in school	Work part time Child in school	Stay at home Child in school
Chile	7.0	61.6	31.4	20.2	64.6	15.2
Czech R.	16.5	44.4	39.1	42.3	44.9	12.8
Germany (East)	32.9	60.3	6.7	54	43.3	2.6
Germany (West)	4.8	68.9	26.9	18.7	74.4	6.9
Great Britain	6.6	52.8	40.6	34.0	63.6	2.4
Japan	6.1	25.2	68.7	17.1	65.1	17.8
Mexico	8.2	51.8	40	12.9	55.9	31.1
Norway	32.6	55.0	12.5	66.4	32.1	1.6
Poland	13.5	28.4	58.1	56.1	30.4	13.5
Portugal	23.9	56.5	19.5	72.4	23.3	4.3
Spain	13.9	60.1	26	54.0	41.5	4.4
United States	17.6	47.0	35.4	54.0	41.1	5.0

Source: ISSP "Family, Work and Gender Roles" (2012). Blue: maximum value. Red: minimum value.

International surveys have found **important changes in the attitudes towards maternal employment and gender roles**, although there exist significant variations across countries. **Support for maternal employment has increased**, although some countries prefer full-time employment and other part-time employment. **Few countries prefer mothers staying at home when children are below 6 and none when children begin school.**

# Background: change in attitudes towards maternal employment (ISSP)

Table 2. Attitudes towards maternal employment, by sex, in Portugal and Spain (2002-2012)

	Agreement: child suffers when mother works			Women should stay at home when preschool child			Women should stay at home when child in school		
	M	W	Total	M	W	Total	M	W	Total
<b>PT 2002</b>	80.2	76.6	78.4	47.7	40.8	44.1	20.4	12.3	16.2
<b>SP 2002</b>	56.4	48.4	52.2	39.8	34.5	37	18.8	14	16.3
<b>PT 2012</b>	60.1	55.4	57.5	23.6	16.3	19.5	5.4	3.5	4.3
<b>SP 2012</b>	56	49.5	52.5	30.6	22	26	5.7	3.3	4.4

Source: ISSP "Family, Work and Gender Roles" (2002 and 2012)..

- ❑ Citizens have increased their **support towards working mothers**, particularly when children are in school. The belief that small children suffer when their mothers work has lost popularity.
- ❑ **In 2002**, Spain shows less traditional attitudes than Portugal. **In 2012**, the gap between both countries has narrowed. Curiously, Spanish have more traditional views regarding employment of mothers with preschool children and Portuguese consider more frequently that children suffer when mothers work.
- ❑ Portuguese and Spanish men hold more traditional views about gender roles than women.

# Theoretical framework: explanations of maternal employment

There exist many explanations of why mothers decide to work (or not):

- ❖ **Microeconomic approach:** a woman makes the decision to work or not depending on the costs and benefits involved in working versus staying at home. The costs are higher for educated and/or more experienced women. Economic need could also influence the decision.
- ❖ **Women preferences (Hakim):** in rich and modern societies (Western Europe, United States), preferences are the main determinant of women when deciding to work. Hakim divides women into three groups: work-centered women, home-centered women and adaptative women (the last is the largest and the most heterogenous group, composed by women who do not give priority to work or to care family members).
- ❖ **Attitudes towards gender roles:** egalitarian attitudes promote maternal employment. These attitudes are influenced by age, education and childhood experience (family socialization).
- ❖ **Cultural context:** women experience social constraints. Social norms can define that the appropriate role for a woman is caregiver (as in familistic countries), others cultures can promote the “adult worker model” and pressure them to work (as in the communist regime and in Nordic countries).
- ❖ **Institutional context:** family policies (childcare facilities, parental leave, etc.) and labour market policies (flexible working hours, quality of part-time work, etc.) can promote or discourage maternal employment.

**All these factors are important and interact with each other:** for example, cultural and institutional contexts affect attitudes, and public opinion influence family policies.

# Research questions and methodology

This work focuses on Portuguese and Spanish mothers. If we compare the preferences towards maternal employment (surveys) and the actual maternal employment rates, it is clear that **there exist a gap**.

We propose some **research questions** :

- 1: to what extent do women who become mothers match their preferences with their behaviours?**
- 2: what factors influence** the probability of experiencing a coherence or a discrepancy between preferences and behaviours?
- 3: has the gap** between preferences and behaviours decreased or increased in last decade?

The comparative literature about family policy considers Portugal and Spain examples of the **Mediterranean model** (Ferrera, 1996). This model (similar to the conservative one but with more modest provisions/services) shows some characteristics that reinforced the male breadwinner model (Boje and Erjnaes, 2012):

- ❖ Regarding family policies: parental leave is poorly paid, low provision of childcare facilities and low spending on family policy.
- ❖ Regarding labour market: not flexible working hours, low availability and low quality (precariousness) of part-time employment.
- ❖ Regarding cultural context: familistic culture, strong intergenerational support, the “ideal care” is inside the family (mainly the mother).

- 4: Our last research question is: to what extent Portugal and Spain show similar patterns?**

# 4. Conclusions

**We can answer the research questions:**

- 1: *to what extent do women who become mothers match their preferences with their behaviours?*** There are a high variation in OECD countries in the amount of coherence achieved by mothers, and it depends on the age of the child. In the case of Spain and Portugal, the levels of coherence are low, particularly in 2002 in the case of Portuguese mothers with preschool child (24% or coherence).
- 2: *what factors influence the probability of experiencing a coherence or a discrepancy between preferences and behaviours?*** Age, education, attitudes towards maternal employment and national context have shown to be relevant.
- 3: *has the gap between preferences and behaviours decreased or increased in last decade?*** In the case of Portugal, the situation has clearly improved. However, Spanish mothers have deteriorated their situation when children are below 6 and have only slightly improved when children are older.
- 4: *to what extent Portugal and Spain show similar patterns?*** Both countries are grouped in the Mediterranean model but they show both similarities and differences. **They have converged in 2012.** Nevertheless, they also show **diverging patterns**, as the different evolution of the total amount of coherence among mothers with children below 6.