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**MAMÁS TRABAJADORAS: AN EVALUATION OF POLICIES THAT INCITE
MATERNAL PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOR FORCE IN SPAIN AND THE
EUROPEAN UNION**

by
Anna Kate Ferrell

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion of the Bachelor of Arts degree in International Studies at the Croft Institute for International Studies and the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

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ABSTRACT

While the past few decades have seen women advance their labor force participation, formal work still remains less accessible to them—often as a result of their responsibilities to care for young children at home. This paper investigates the effect that Early Childhood Education and Care policies have on female labor force participation rates across Spain and the European Union through a mixed research design, with both quantitative and qualitative analysis. After a cross-national comparison of case studies, it concludes that these policies increase female labor force participation rates, allowing women to reconcile their identities as both mothers and career women.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	4
INTRODUCTION	5
RESEARCH DESIGN	7
Case Selection	7
Dependent Variable	8
Independent Variables	8
Hypothesis	12
Data & Method	12
GENDER & THE WELFARE STATE	13
Gender Roles	13
Policy Making	16
Welfare Regimes	19
SPECIFIC EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE POLICIES	22
ANALYSIS & FINDINGS	28
Female Labor Force Participation Rate	28
Comparison of Female and Male Labor Force Participation Rates	35
Other Demographic Independent Variables	44
Alternative Work-Family Reconciliation Policies	50
Questionnaire Evaluation	54
CONCLUSION	60
REFERENCES	64

INTRODUCTION

In the 20th century, the composition of the international labor force was marked by an impactful change: the increased participation of women in the economic sphere. This came to affect nearly all facets of life, from individual family units to national industry markets. In terms of the latter sphere, we know that there is considerable evidence that the increased participation of women in the labor force leads to increased economic realization (Esping-Andersen 2001; Goldin 2006; Jensen, Hagen, and Reddy 1988). The implementation of policies that aim to incite such an increased female participation has proven useful across various welfare states and democracies in Europe and elsewhere (Hegewisch & Gornick 2011). This is a particularly salient issue now, as we see more women than ever before take up work outside of their traditional place in the home. Yet, women do not want to concede their roles as mothers even as they work. To recognize their desires to be working moms, nations must begin to implement policies that are cognizant of the specific challenges that women face, both for the good of their families and their societies at large.

This investigation focuses on the implementation of what are known as early childhood education and care policies (Urban et al 2011). In nations across the globe, state-funded and/or -regulated programs allow children under the required school age (about six) to attend preschool. While nations emphasize their aim for education, these programs have another function as well: child care. It seems that this second function has the potential to equip more women to work outside the home, while their children are looked after at preschool facilities. During my time in Spain, I was struck by the manner in which women seemed able to embrace their roles as both mothers and full-time career women. It was not a matter of choice between the two for them, as it was even a

few decades ago. At its most basic foundation, this investigation stems from an interest in state capacities to help women reconcile these roles. It aims to examine this notion with the close evaluation of the various early childhood education and care policies that exist in Spain as well as the European Union. More explicitly, it hypothesizes that if policies that arrange for adequate early childhood education and care opportunities in a nation are set in place, then the rate of female labor force participation in that nation will increase. This in turn would indicate support for the implementation of these policies.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Case Selection

I focus this investigation on the European Union. Yet, this organization encompasses 27 Member States—a sum that is too numerous to evaluate within the time constraints of this investigation. As a result, I limit its scope to four Member States, which have different welfare regime types, but are all known to have implemented a series of early childhood education policies at some point during the period of evaluation (1980-2020). I aim to focus on the experiences of Spain, as well as Germany, Italy, and Sweden. I selected these Member States in an effort to forward the work of the WILCO project, an investigation financed by the European Commission.¹ The WILCO project (Welfare Innovations at the Local Level in Favor of Cohesion) evaluated the state of welfare in 10 nations to create individual policy briefs for each one. It has a specific section on the field of child care and education.

The four nations that I selected for evaluation were all included in the WILCO project. I focus this investigation on their cross-national comparison, and then assess them against the European Union as a whole. This unit will serve as a baseline indication. In total, this investigation thus evaluates five cases.

¹ The WILCO project aimed to “examine, through cross-national comparative research, how local welfare systems affect social inequalities and how they favour social cohesion, with a special focus on the missing link between innovations at the local level and their successful transfer to and implementation in other settings. The WILCO consortium covers ten European countries and is funded by the European Commission (FP7, Socio-economic Sciences & Humanities).”

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is female labor force participation. I operationalize this with the rate of female labor force participation. This is defined as the proportion of the female population ages 15+ that participates in economic work, or “supplies labor for the production of goods and services” (World Bank 2021). I take the rate of female labor force participation rate at the national level, and at the institutional level of the European Union. I selected this rate as opposed to the unemployment rate, etc. because it is considered to best operationalize the labor force, and its female participants (Psacharopoulos and Tzannatos 1989).

Overall, the rate serves to determine the number of women that work in a formal position in the labor force. Yet, this is not its only interpretation. It can also be thought of as the likelihood that a typical woman works in a formal position in the labor force, at some point in time (Psacharopoulos and Tzannatos 1989). While I focus on the first interpretation, I do use both throughout the course of the investigation.

Independent Variables

In an effort to explain the variation that exists within their rates of female labor force participation, I operationalize the provision of specific policies within the aforementioned Member States as the main independent variable of this investigation. More specifically, I evaluate early childhood education and care policies, and thus the relationship between their implementations and the female labor force participations in these nations, and in all of the European Union. Henceforth, these will be referred to as ECEC policies, in accordance with the official European Commission acronym (Urban et al 2011).

I measure this independent variable on an ordinal scale. This is based on the effectiveness of policies that mandate state education or care opportunities for children under three years of age (under-3s), in accordance with the Barcelona Objectives set forth in 2002. One aim of these objectives was that each Member State have at minimum 33% of its under-3s enrolled in an ECEC program before 2010. A nation is considered to have effective ECEC policies if it met this Barcelona Objective in 2010. It thus receives a score of 3. A nation is considered to have semi-effective ECEC policies if it met or almost met (within 2 points) this Barcelona Objective in 2020. It thus receives a score of 2. A nation is considered to have rather ineffective ECEC policies if it did not meet or almost meet (within 2 points) this Barcelona Objective in 2020. It thus receives a score of 1. Lastly, a nation that does not have ECEC policies in place is awarded a score of 0. This will be accompanied with qualitative evaluation as well.

Separately, I also measure the independent variable with a Pearson correlation statistical test. This is a measure of the strength of association between two variables. The Pearson correlation coefficient takes the form of r , a value that ranges from -1 to 1. A coefficient that is close to 0 reflects that the two variables have a weak correlation, while a coefficient that is close to -1 or 1 reflects that the two variables have a strong correlation (whether it be negative or positive). This coefficient allows us to better evaluate the relationship that exists between the variables, and thus proves useful to the investigation.

I also utilize a series of other independent variables, which act as controls within the investigation. These variables assess demographic information as well as the implementation of policies alternative to those on early childhood education and care. The other independent variables I use are:

- the female unemployment rate
- the male labor force participation rate

- the ratio of female to male labor force participation rate
- the fertility rate
- the life expectancy at birth
- the percentage of the labor force with advanced education
- the nature of paid leave for new parents
- the nature of cash transfer benefits

The **male labor force participation rate** is operationalized just like its female counterpart. It is defined as the proportion of the male population ages 15+ that participates in formal economic work, or “supplies labor for the production of goods and services” (World Bank 2021).

The **ratio of female to male labor force participation rate** compares these two rates as one. It is defined as the proportion of the female population aged 15+ that is economically active, divided by the proportion of the male population aged 15+ that is economically active, and multiplied by 100 (World Bank 2021).

Meanwhile, the **fertility rate** represents “the number of children that would be born to a woman if she were to live to the end of her childbearing years and bear children in accordance with age-specific fertility rates of the specified year” (World Bank 2021). This is more simply defined as the average number of births per woman. I utilize this independent variable in conjunction with the dependent variable in an effort to assess the figure of labor force workers that are also mothers.

I draw on **life expectancies at birth** as an independent variable as well. This measure indicates “the number of years a newborn infant would live if prevailing patterns of mortality at the time of its birth were to stay the same throughout its life” (World Bank 2021). In other words, it is how long a typical newborn is expected to live at its time of birth. This control variable serves as an indicator of modernization.

The last of these is the **percentage of the labor force with advanced education**. This is defined as the percentage of the population age 15+ with an advanced level of education who participate in the labor force. More specifically, advanced education is considered to be “short-cycle tertiary education, a bachelor’s degree or equivalent education level, a master’s degree or equivalent education level, or doctoral degree or equivalent education level” (World Bank 2021). I evaluate both the percentage of the entire labor force and of the more specific female labor force with advanced education as well. This serves as another indicator of modernization.

From here, we depart from variables that account for demographic changes. While the main independent variable is the provision of early childhood education and care policies, I find it vital to compare this to the provision of alternative policies that can affect female labor force participation as well.

The first of these variables is **the nature of paid leave for new parents**. This is defined as a state-mandated employment benefit that provides a new parent with paid time-off with their child for a designated period of time. It is evaluated on an ordinal scale, based on which (if any) of the parents it designates with paid leave. A nation that does not offer paid leave is awarded a score of 0. A nation that offers paid maternity leave, but not paid paternity leave, is awarded a score of 1. A nation that offers both maternity and paternity leave is awarded a score of 2. From there, the duration of the leave that is offered is also evaluated.

The second alternative variable is **the nature of cash transfer benefits**. It is defined as a direct transfer payment of a specified amount from the state to an eligible citizen. Who qualifies as an eligible citizen varies in each nation. Yet, most nations that use them in Europe require that recipients of cash transfers be working citizens, often with families to support. I thus evaluate the cash transfer policies based on how generous their benefits are to the average citizen. A nation that

does not offer cash transfers here is awarded a score of 0. From here, the cash transfer benefits in each nation are compared to one another, and awarded a score on a 1-4 scale—1 being the nation with the least generous benefits and 4 being the nation with the most generous benefits of the cases. This distinction is made based on an evaluation of cash transfer amounts and the duration of their payments, as well as the conditions required to be eligible for them.

Hypothesis

I anticipate that the implementation of early childhood education and care policies influences female participation in the labor force in each of the four nations selected for evaluation, as well as in the overall European Union. More specifically, I hypothesize that if policies that arrange for adequate early childhood education and care opportunities in a nation are set in place, then the rate of female labor force participation in that nation will increase.

Data & Method

I use World Bank data to assess the relationship between these variables. I determined the frame of time in the investigation (1980-2020) based on what data the World Bank had at its disposal, as well as when ECEC policies were first enacted in the units of evaluation. In addition to such quantitative indications, I also use information from a questionnaire I administered through Qualtrics. The questionnaire asked adult residents of Spain to answer guided multiple choice questions about their formal employment and parent statuses, and also collected their general demographic information. Finally, it asked respondents to rate various aspects of their experiences with the preschool system in their area.

GENDER & THE WELFARE STATE

Gender Roles

It is difficult to overstate the complexities of gender roles. In the patriarchal invention of specific differences in societal function that coincide with the differences in sexual function, we continue to rationalize sexual division—and, thus, stratification. Yet, we first have to define gender. In the simplest terms, gender refers to the manner in which we base the organization of our human activities and even societies on the differences that we have created between the traditional sexes (Acker 1992; Lorber 1994; Ridgeway 1991; West and Zimmerman 1987). This involves work to assign the members of each sex to their own separate identities, with their own separate duties. As a result, we find evidence of it in all facets of our lives.

We consent to this gendered differentiation in our actions (Acker 1992; Risman 2004; West and Zimmerman 1987). This acknowledgement of gendered differentiation seems to further its influence, allowing it to rationalize gendered stratification. It seems that the objective of this notion is “to construct women as a group to be subordinate to men as a group,” as is evident in the adoption of specific gender roles (Lorber 1994, p. 33). In other words, the creation of difference has led to a difference in expectations for the members of each sex.

Such implications are difficult to regard on their own. Conceptualizing gender as a social structure allows us to better evaluate the means in which the creation of gendered differences has come to impact the individual as well as the institutional dimensions of our societies (Risman 2004). It also recognizes the equal value of constraint and choice. While we are often coerced to assume separate roles as befits our identities as men or women, we also choose to assume them

ourselves. Here lies the hold that gender has on our lives. As long as men continue to see themselves as different from women (and vice versa), “women will be unlikely to compare their life options to those of men,” and thus will not deviate from the traditional roles that are set before them (Risman 2004, p. 432). It is as a result of the notion that conceptualizes gender as a structure that we can appreciate this significance.

Another way to frame the concept of gender roles is as a performance, something that we “do”—both in our personal interactions and in our institutions (West and Zimmerman 1987). In truth, “doing gender” involves a “complex of socially guided... activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine natures” (West and Zimmerman 1987, p. 126). This acknowledges the complex nature of gender production, and its manifestation in gender roles. Like the structure framework, this aims to encourage a closer evaluation of the creation of gendered difference, and its influence on both the individual and institutional areas of our societies. It also considers gender to be both a “product of social doings” as well as a “rationale” for these doings (West and Zimmerman 1987, p. 126).

Regardless of these two views, gender itself is a frame used to organize social relations. This notion aims to reconcile the above structural and interactional comprehensions of gender roles (Ridgeway 2009). It illustrates the way that we categorize others in accordance with the gender associated with a specific sex, thus perpetuating the notion that gender and sex coincide. It also notes the significance of cultural beliefs about those in each of the two categories. The gender frame “brings cultural beliefs about gender to bear on our expectations for self and others, on our behavior, and on our judgements,” which leads to gender inequalities (Ridgeway 2009, p. 151). It is this notion of gender as a frame that influences our social relations that serves as the foundation of this contribution to the literature.

In an attempt to further the discussion of gender inequalities, Einspahr (2010) claims that the notion of male domination is of more significance than that of female subordination. The premise is that male domination is its own structure, with the ability to “systematically interfere in the lives” of their female counterparts. Yet, its failure to regard the other half of the issue—female subordination—undermines its viability. In truth, the two are deeply intertwined. To focus on male domination thus discounts the female experience of subordination, reinforcing such inequalities. This serves as a flaw in the consideration Einspahr sets forth.

Nonetheless, the cultural expectations that further inequalities between the sexes have remained invulnerable (Risman 2004). The manner in which social interaction between the sexes continues to reproduce these inequalities has three explanations: subordinate adaptation, the creation of “others,” and status expectations (Schwalbe 2000). Subordinate adaptation allows women to acquire the “economic benefits” of male patronage—even as it implicates them in their own discrimination. Conversely, men “other,” or create a different sphere for women in an attempt to devalue their status in comparison to themselves. This is done almost subversively, often under the guise of polite mannerisms (Risman 2004). This in turn leads to the creation of status expectations, which are attached to each gender. In modern societies, women are “expected to have less to contribute to task performances... than men,” and thus deserve a lesser status to match their implied lesser capabilities (Risman 2004, p. 437).

This can also be interpreted in accordance with status value. Essentially, a nominal characteristic is considered to have status value when “cultural beliefs indicate that persons who have one state of the characteristic... are of more worth in the society than those with another state of the characteristic,” such as that of gender (Ridgeway 1991, p. 368). This elevates the notion of what it means to be a man, in comparison to what it means to be a woman.

Attitudes towards gender roles have begun to change. In highly developed nations, dual-earner families “are the frontrunners of egalitarian gender role attitudes,” as both husband and wife participate in the labor force (Boehnke 2011, p. 59). The new service economy favors women, and in turn the increase in female labor force participation—even as the median salaries of the professions that women enter decline upon their arrival (Esping-Andersen 2001; Goldin 2014). Still, the incompatibilities of work and motherhood persist, as do the traditional expectations that exist for women. There is still a gendered division of housework (i.e., women do more of it than men) even as women take up work in the formal labor force alongside their husbands, which becomes even more pronounced when a couple has children (Forste and Fox 2012). While our societies are slowly working to address the sexual division that has led to these roles, there is still much to be done.

Policy Making

In post-modern societies, most facets of life have come to be affected by the public policies that states and other governmental institutions have set in place. They are thus of vital significance. In the simplest of terms, public policies can be defined as “anything a government chooses to do or not to do” for the people it serves (Dye 1972, p. 2). This means that the primary agent of public policy making is government, as opposed to private business decisions. It also implies that the act of “non-decision,” such as that of a basic determination not to raise taxes, is “just as much a policy decision as a choice to alter it” (Howlett and Cashore, 2014, p. 18). Of course, some consider public policies to include “the result of decisions and actions of other actors,” such as the market (Almeida and Gomes 2018; Howlett, Ramesh and Perl 2013; Schabbach 2012). Yet these other actors still come second to our state governments, which reserve the final decision to implement

policies. Still, the act of policy making is significant in that it is the best way to formally effect change.

Policy making can be regarded as states developing and implementing public policies. The act of policy making is often thought to have stages. While their precise nature is often debated, it is agreed that these stages of policy making include problem identification, agenda-setting, consideration of potential actions, implementation of the agreed action, and evaluation (Hogwood and Gunn 1984; Smith and Katikireddi 2013). But this does not reflect the real nature of policy making—in practice, states do not enact policies in these recognizable stages. This proves to be a complication of policy making, as is the recognition that policy making takes place at various levels of government, all at once (Hogwood and Gunn 1984).

Regardless, other scholars argue that policy making can be regarded as social learning (Heclo 1976; Hall 1993; Stone 1988). For governments not only “power... they also puzzle,” wondering and considering options to enhance the lives of the people that they serve (Heclo 1976, p. 305). This line of thought sees policy making as “a form of collective puzzlement on society’s behalf,” an effort to address issues that present themselves as best that states can (Heclo 1976, p. 306). Still, it does not aim to address all issues that are of importance to its constituents, but rather privileges a few of their issues. The act of policy making “takes place within a context of a particular set of ideas that recognize some social interests as more legitimate than others,” even if it does not mean to do so (Hall 1993, p. 292).

An issue that policy makers have emphasized now is the advancement of women. The policies that aim to support women, specifically, are known as “woman-friendly policies.” In an ideal state, woman-friendly policies are those that “enable women to have a natural relationship [with] their children, their work and their public life” (Hernes 1987, p. 15). This means that women

continue to have children, yet also have “other roads to self-realization open to them... [for] in such a state, women will not have to choose futures that demand greater sacrifices from them than are expected of men” (Hernes 1987, p. 15). More specifically, “the state is woman-friendly to the extent that policies reduce the sexual division of labor by shifting the burden of domestic work to public services and to men” (Orloff 1993, p. 314). Both notions underline the significance of reproduction in the lives of women, an issue that policies can address in the provision of more support options for them (Borchost and Siim 2008; Esping-Andersen, Gallie, Hemerijck, and Myles 2001; Fraser 1997).

The notion of woman-friendly policies is not so one-size-fits-all as some like to think. After all, “different groups of women can have different interests” (Borchorst and Siim 2008). In terms of policies, there are three categories of women: family-centered women, career-centered women, and dual-role women (Esping-Andersen, et al 2001). While the first two are rather self-explanatory, the dual-role women are those that “do want to work, but are unwilling to sacrifice motherhood” (Esping-Andersen, et al 2001, p. 84)—and are thus the most significant group of women, policy-wise. The choices that these women, and all women, make are often the direct result of the options that policies make available to them.

In this way, woman-friendly policies are “win-win” solutions to all sorts of issues in modern societies, like those posed by globalization or the ageing populations we often have (Esping-Andersen, et al 2001; Borchorst and Siim 2008). For woman-friendly policies are also proven to be family-friendly policies, as well as society-friendly policies at large (Esping-Andersen, et al 2001; Hernes 1987). It is thus necessary for our states to design and implement them, and to do so well.

Welfare Regimes

The welfare state exists as we know it to serve its people. Of course, the manner in which it should do so is often a point of contention—but we can agree that it is meant to be of service to its citizens. It also involves the traditional reallocation of certain resources from those who do well to those who face difficulties, in an attempt to raise their qualities of life to a level that is deemed acceptable (Michalski and Mayes 2014). Yet in the wake of World War II, the welfare state took on even more responsibilities (Judt 2005). It now intends to alleviate the difficulties of the unfortunate, but also incite development to benefit all of its citizens (Michalski and Mayes 2014).

Of course, the best manner in which to incite such development is a matter of debate. This debate is often centered on the roles of the economic market and of the state. In the European Union, “different perceptions of an appropriate balance” of these roles led to the “emergence of distinct welfare systems,” each shaped by the synthesis of “economic, social, and political factors, and underlying values, norms, and traditions” (Michalski and Mayes 2014, p. 1-2). Esping-Andersen (1990) makes the now classic distinction between three individual types of welfare states: the liberal regime of Anglo-Saxon countries, the conservative regime of Continental countries, and the social democratic regime of Scandinavian countries.

The liberal welfare state is characterized by modest, means-tested assistance (Esping-Andersen 1990). It offers comparatively low levels of state intervention, with limited social insurance for its citizens (Stier, Lewin-Epstein and Braun 2001). In truth, what social insurance it does offer is targeted at low-income and often working-class members of the state. Overall, the liberal regime encourages market solutions to social problems, and thus does not provide a large number of social welfare programs (Esping-Andersen 1990). We see the liberal regime in Anglo-Saxon nations such as Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Meanwhile, the conservative welfare state is characterized by more state intervention. Yet, it does not provide social insurance opportunities to its citizens in accordance with egalitarian values, but rather traditional family values (Stier, Lewin-Epstein and Braun 2001). It thus offers state intervention that reinforces the male breadwinner model (Esping-Andersen 1990). Overall, the conservative regime encourages family-based assistance to relieve social problems, often stepping in only when the capacities of families themselves have been exhausted (Esping-Andersen 1990). The conservative regime characterizes Continental nations like France, Germany, Austria, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

The social democratic regime is distinguished in its universalistic approach to social rights. This means that it often includes the middle class in its social programs, and promotes a decommodification of welfare services that socializes the cost of caring for children and the older population. (Esping-Andersen 1990; Stier, Lewin-Epstein and Braun 2001). This relieves the burden that families have before it becomes too much of an issue. As such, the social democratic regime is considered to offer the most state intervention out of all the welfare states (Esping-Andersen 1990). We see the social democratic regime in Scandinavian nations such as Sweden and Denmark.

Yet, the notion that all European democracies could be categorized as one of these three welfare state regimes is not without critique. Not all welfare states fit into one of the prescribed types. While the Mediterranean nations were first lumped in with the Continental nations, it is now thought that their characteristics are different enough to constitute their own separate regime type (Leibfried 1992; Ferrera 1996; Bonoli 1997). The Mediterranean nations are known to have traditional family values that influence their welfarism. Yet, these values do not serve as the absolute basis of their state intervention, as is true for the Continental nations. The Mediterranean

nations offer comparatively more social insurance opportunities to their citizens (Michalski and Mayes 2014). This welfare regime type better characterizes Spain, Greece, and Portugal.

It should also be noted that the concept of three distinct welfare state archetypes is one that predates the fall of the Iron Curtain. In the coming decade, the EU absorbed more than ten former members of the USSR, none of which can be categorized in these regime types. While the notion of welfare regime types serve as a helpful foundation, it should not be regarded as the perfect conceptualization of the states in the European Union.

Regardless, all European welfare states do share certain traits. In a welfare state, employment is the unspoken “key to citizenship,” because it grants the economic independence that is the central to it (Pateman 1988, p. 238-239). This means that participation in the labor force is vital to be a real citizen (Hernes 1987; Orloff 1993; Pateman 1988). As the welfare state was built around the male breadwinner notion—with men outside and thus women inside the home—this resulted in the informal consideration of men as citizens, but not women (Orloff 1993). Of course, this has changed as more women have entered the labor force. Yet it remains significant in that it acknowledges the importance of female participation in that labor force, at least in a welfare state.

In all welfare states, women still bear most of the burden of childrearing, independent of policies or their participation in the labor force. When considering employment options, women are “compelled to weigh the costs and benefits of market activities against household responsibilities and obligations,” and are thus constrained by them (Stier, Lewin-Epstein and Braun 2001, p. 1734). Yet, the welfare state does have the capacities to relieve some of this burden if it so chooses. We see that various welfare states do this with various policies, which have mixed results. In this way, rates of female participation in the labor force differ across regime types.

SPECIFIC EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE POLICIES

The European Union defines Early Childhood Education and Care as the “provision for children from birth through to compulsory primary education that falls within a national regulatory framework, i.e. which must comply with a set of rules, minimum standards and/or undergo accreditation procedures.” This section outlines the ECEC policies that have been set in place in each of the five case studies.

As it was not reunified until 1990, the German welfare state has a varied experience with the implementation of early childhood education policies. This comes as a result of different perceptions in the East and West German states, in regards to the role of women. In the socialist East, all women were considered to be workers that should be employed full-time, regardless of their children—while in the democratic West, women were expected to be at home with these children (Evers 2011). As a result, state childhood education was developed early-on in East Germany, while it was not in the West. The disparities this led to persist there even now.

Regardless, all German children are expected to begin their formal education at six, a standardized age that is the same across the nation. It does not require education before this age, but most parents still choose to enroll their children in kindergarten, a program that was once for five-year-olds but has now been expanded to include four- and even three-year-olds. The policies that allowed for such admission were not implemented until the mid 1990s, in the aftermath of German reunification. Yet, 92% of all children 3-6 attended a kindergarten in 2009, and the disparities between the East and West were of no significance (Evers 2011). The provision of such early childhood education for over-3s is in the hands of local municipalities, which charge a small

fee that is at their discretion, but cannot be more than 5% of families' annual income. In truth, the average wage-earner pays €814 for one child/year (Evers 2011). This is considered to be rather affordable for the value of its care and education.

Yet, the under-3s do not have the same kind of access to early childhood education—at least, in much of the nation. This is where the disparities exist between East and West Germany, with 48.1% of children enrolled in a crèche in the East compared to 17.4% in the West (Evers 2011, Husken 2010). Still, the state began to address this issue with the adoption of policies that aimed to increase the number of these crèches in 2004 and again in 2008. This was later accompanied with the official recognition that parents have a legal right to early care and education for their children in 2013, with target rates of education at $\frac{1}{3}$ of all German children 0-3 years of age, in each region. As a result, the access of care for under-3s has begun to improve.

Meanwhile, the Italian welfare state has adopted different policies—or rather, it did at one point in time. The national policies on early childhood education have not been updated since their implementation, in 1968 and 1971. This has resulted in low rates of Italian children who attend both courses of the two-part early childhood education system, but more so the first such course for those under three years of age. In 2008, public provision of places in care and education facilities for under-3s was just 10.4% in the entire nation (Costa and Sabatinelli 2010). This is not for a lack of need from Italian parents—it is estimated that the wait lists include an additional 25% of them. Yet, ECEC provision for these under-3s is so inadequate that 20% of them are thought to be cared for by their grandparents, while their parents work (Costa and Sabatinelli 2010). While the Extraordinary National Plan of 2006 aimed to create 65,000 more places in care facilities, little was done to ensure this aim was met. And so it appears that it was not.

Regardless of such inadequacies for under-3s, the Italian state does provide more appropriate education opportunities for over-3s. While children are not expected to begin their formal education until age six, 98.5% of three- to five-year-olds were enrolled in a kindergarten in 2008 (Costa and Sabatinelli 2010). This near-universal rate is one of promise. Yet, these programs are rooted in “readiness-for-school” approaches to early childhood education, rather than work-care reconciliation approaches. This in turn has led to shorter hours of provision and other concerns, which does little to help working parents.

In truth, ECEC policies are few and far between in Italy. It seems that the nation has opted to use parental leave options, tax reductions, and other such implementations to incite more female participation in its labor force. Yet, these do not have the same level of impact that early childhood education policies do in other nations. The access of proper care for both under- and over-3s needs to improve if the nation is to meet the benchmarks set forth by the EU.

As it is a fellow Mediterranean nation, it might seem that the policies of Spain have similarities. Yet, this is not the case. While the same two-part early childhood education system exists here as well, the extent of its provision is much broader in Spain—the result of intentional action on behalf of the state in its shift from authoritarianism. The LOGSE (Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo, or Law of General Organization of the Educational System) of 1990 has led to the renovation of preschools for over-3s and the introduction of preschools for under-3s, both of which are subsidized. Since 2000, early childhood education for over-3s is all but universal across the nation (Baizan 2009). The provision of care for under-3s is not so extensive, but it has come up from 5.2% in 1993 to 38% in 2008—which is 10 points higher than the proportion of children who attend preschools in the overall European Union (Aguilar, Escobedo, and Montagut 2011).

This marks a significant renovation in the Spanish early childhood education program, which is of special note in the context of its recent transition from a regime that left all care to mothers at home. Yet, the preschools that now exist do have their limitations. While the basic regulation of educational policies is done as a nation, the responsibilities that these policies create are in the hands of the various autonomous regions. This results in an uneven distribution of early childhood education services across the nation, in which regions like that of Pais Vasco have 48.1% of under-3s enrolled in preschools but others like Andalusia have just 6.6%, both in 2007 (Baizan 2009). We also see that preschools struggle to accommodate children with parents who work atypical hours, or do not have holiday breaks. Still, the nation continues to work hard to overcome these issues, and deserves recognition for doing so.

Regardless, the hallmark of early childhood education is that of Sweden. It has followed a dual-purpose approach to early childhood education since the National Commission on Child Care in 1968, when it established aims to “make it possible for parents to combine parenthood with employment” and “support and encourage children’s development” as well (Nordfeldt and Larsson 2010). This was further encouraged with the Education Act of 1995, which formally requires local authorities to provide care and education for all children who are in need of it, age 1-12. Now, 88% of children aged 1-5 are in preschool—and of those not here, 50% are at home with a parent on leave (Nordfeldt and Larsson 2010).

Yet, the most significant feature of early childhood education in Sweden is its perceived quality—as well as its accessibility. The preschools for both under- and over-3s are open year round, regardless of school holiday breaks, at flexible times. This equips them to accommodate the children of parents who work even more atypical jobs. While parents do have to pay a small fee to enroll their children in preschool, there is a ceiling on this fee as of 2002 which caps them

at 3% of a joint-parent income (Nodfeldt and Larsson 2010). This equips parents to lead dual-earner families. And it is for this reason that the early childhood education opportunities in Sweden are considered to be some of the best in the EU.

While it has existed as an economic cooperation since 1951, the EU was not constructed as it is now until 1993, after several of these welfare states had implemented their first early childhood education and other work-family reconciliation policies. The organization itself did not begin to offer concrete recommendations on such policies until 2002, when it set forth the Barcelona Objectives. This was a set of recommendations “on the development of early childhood education and care (ECEC) facilities for young children with a view to increase female labor force participation, strike a work-life balance for working parents, and bring about sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe” (Barcelona Objectives 2002). The Barcelona Objectives are revisited on a routine basis even now.

Ultimately, the Barcelona Objectives aimed for Member States to have 1) 90% of children from three years of age until school age and 2) 33% of children under three years of age enrolled in preschool facilities before the end of the decade. It also sought to improve three dimensions of ECEC facilities, in order: availability, accessibility, and affordability. In 2012, neither of these objectives had quite been achieved—but they had stimulated national ECEC policies. In 2016, 83.6% of children over and 32.9% of children under three years of age were enrolled in a preschool, more or less reaching the benchmarks set forth in 2002.

Yet, it should be noted that the EU expanded from 15 Member States in 2002, at the time of the Barcelona Objectives were set forth, to 28 in 2016. This almost doubled its size, encompassing nations that had a late start to implementing these policies and thus lowering these percentages. In truth, five of the original 15 Member States had reached both of the benchmarks

in 2010, with another seven reaching at least one of them (Barcelona Objectives, revisited 2018). This includes all of the aforementioned nations.

As is evident, we see a persistent divide in ECEC opportunities for children that occurs at three years of age in each of the aforementioned nations. This is a theme in most other Member States as well (Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe 2019, p. 27). It is a significant distinction—and as such, one that can be used to evaluate the success of the ECEC policies and thus opportunities set forth in a specific nation, as it is here.

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

This investigation draws on a mixed research design that synthesizes quantitative and qualitative evaluation to determine the effect that early childhood education and care policies have on female labor force participation in Spain and the other case studies in the European Union. It begins with a cross-national comparison of the correlation between the female labor force participation rate and ECEC policies implementation in each of the case studies. From here, I then examine the female labor force participation rate in relation to the male rate, as well as in relation to the other independent variables that were selected for investigation. This section concludes with an evaluation of the results from the questionnaire I administered in Spain.

I first evaluate the correlation between female labor force participation and the provision of ECEC policies, for each of the case studies. Figure 1 shows the relationship between the rate of female labor force participation of those aged 15+ in five selected units of evaluation. As I hypothesized, the implementation of these ECEC policies has a positive effect, increasing the rate of female labor force participation since 1980. This holds true throughout the course of the investigation.

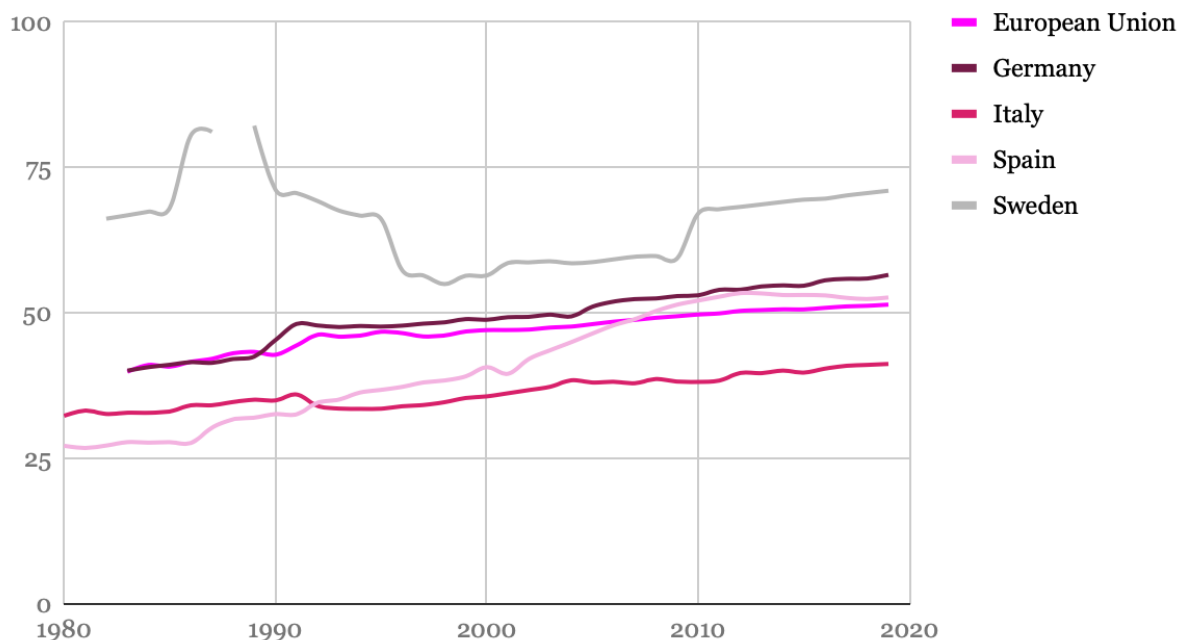
Female Labor Force Participation Rate

As expected of a baseline that represents 27 nations, the EU reflects the modest of changes. Of the five units of evaluation, it holds the most constant—and is seen in the middle of the others. More significantly, the EU is shown to experience an increase in its female labor force participation

rate over time, as seen in Figure 1. We see that this increase is rather steady, beginning at 39.9% in 1983 and continuing to rise until the present day, with a 51.5% rate in 2019. The official formation of the EU in 1993 lends to this increase as well, catalyzing the rate of female participation in the labor force across the continent in the first half of the decade. This was an expected influence.

FIGURE 1

Female Labor Force Participation Rate



The increase in the rate of female participation in the labor force over time seems to characterize the experiences of the selected cases as well. Yet, the nature of this increase is not quite as consistent over time in each nation. While each nation boasts a higher rate of female labor force participation in 2020 than in 1980, its time between these two bookends seems to experience more variation than that of the EU as a whole. We see this in Figure 1. Similarly, the Pearson

coefficients also offer insight into the character of the initial increase in the female labor force participation rates that we observe across each nation (Italy, $r = 0.8757$; Germany, $r = 0.9856$; Spain, $r = 0.9645$; Sweden, $r = -0.2437$). This reinforces the inference we make from Figure 1, which shows the positive correlation between female labor force participation rates in each nation and in the EU.

I will explain the variation as it exists in each individual nation from here. Still, the fact that there is a shared increase in the rate of female labor force participation over time in each of the observed units of evaluation is of note to the investigation. It also serves as tentative support for the hypothesis of the investigation, showing that the implementation of ECEC policies has a positive effect on maternal participation in the labor force within the EU.

The nation with the rate of female labor force participation that seems to most correspond with that of the EU from 1980-2020 is Germany ($r = 0.9856$). It has an incredibly strong and positive correlation to it. In truth, it is almost a mirror of the EU in the 1980s, with an initial rate of 40.1%. Yet, the German female labor force participation rate seems to increase at a bit more rapid of a pace than the European one as a whole in the first half of the next decade. This seems to correspond with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the German reunification that was to follow. In truth, its female labor force participation rate was marked as 42.5% at that time—but it soon rose to 45.4% in 1990, and then to 48.1% in 1991. As the framework that provides for ECEC opportunities is considered to be more developed in eastern Germany, most of this increase—a tremendous 5.6% in a mere two years—seems to be the result of this post-Cold War reunification (Fagan 2006). This growth does not cease, but rather continues after the reunification of the nation as well. We see the rate of female labor force participation continue to increase without a marked interruption until the present day, recorded as 56.6% in 2019. This reflects an overall growth of

16.5% from the start of the investigation in 1980 until now, demonstrating that the implementation of ECEC policies during this time had a positive effect on maternal labor force participation.

The Italian experience is different. While this nation is also characterized by an increase in its rate of female participation in the labor force over the period of evaluation, it is not quite as significant as that of Germany, or any of the other units ($r = 0.8757$). It also started at a much lower rate than that of the other nations selected for evaluation, with a mere 32.3% of Italian women in the labor force in 1980—not even a third of them. Of course, this is largely the result of cultural norms within the nation that uphold traditional gender roles, even now. Of more note is the manner in which even such a nation still experiences a more or less constant rise in its rate of female labor force participation, without interruption. It is now exactly nine points higher than what it was forty years ago, at 41.3% in 2019. This implies that there might be a natural increase in the female labor force participation rate that takes place across the European Union, irrespective of policies. I come back to this notion when I address the other independent variables later on.

In contrast, the rate of female participation in the labor force in Spain is much more varied than it is in the overall European Union ($r = 0.9645$). We see that it is characterized with the lowest such rate at the onset of the evaluation, with 27.2% in 1980. This came as the result of authoritarian Francoism, which often confined women to their strict gender roles in accordance with tradition. Yet, it does not remain at this position. Since its transition to a democratic regime, the nation has experienced a rather swift increase in its rate of female labor force participation. This is especially true around the turn of the century, when it was marked with an 8.1% increase from 1990-2000, and then another 11.4% increase from 2000-2010. We also see the implementation of a number of policies that allow for ECEC opportunities, such as Laws 1/1990 and 39/1999, present themselves in Spain during this time, among others as well (Fagan 2006). This seems to provide evidence in

support of the hypothesis that the provision of such policies leads to an increase in the rate of female participation in the labor force. Overall, we see that Spain has experienced the most significant increase in this rate when compared to the other evaluated nations—so much so that it has earned 25.5% more female participation in the labor force over the last 40 years, with 52.7% in 2019. When coupled with the evaluation of the ECEC policies, this indicates support for the hypothesis of the investigation: the implementation of these policies lends to an increase in the female labor force participation rate, in some fashion.

Figure 1 also illustrates the experiences of Sweden, as reflected by its female labor force participation rate. We see that its rate is much higher than that of the other nations, as well as that of the EU ($r = -0.2437$). In truth, Sweden has consistently had the highest rate of female labor force participation in all of the EU, since its inception (Fagan 2006). This is certainly reflected here. Yet, it does not mean that its rate was without variation. While it begins with a rate of 66.2% in 1982 and sees this increase throughout the duration of the decade, it quickly drops from 82.2% in 1989 to 71.2% in 1990. This can be attributed to the economic crisis that so affected the nation from 1990 on for the next decade, which severely decreased the female labor force participation rate irrespective of its ECEC policies. We see a similar decrease in 2008, when another economic crisis hit the world. Yet, this did not take quite so much of a toll on Sweden, which has since continued to gradually increase its rate of female labor force participation once more. In 2019, it now has a 71.0% rate—still more than what it was in 1980, as well as more than that of the other Member States in the present day. It also has extensive work-family policies like those that provide early childhood education, providing these opportunities for children both over and under the age of 3—a sign of a robust ECEC system (Fagan 2006). This supports the notion that such ECEC policies serve to increase the rate of female labor force participation.

FIGURE 2

Early Childhood Education and Care Participation Rates of Under-3s

NATION	GERMANY	ITALY	SPAIN	SWEDEN
ECEC PART. RATE OF UNDER-3S IN 2010	20%	22%	39%	51%
ECEC PART. RATE OF UNDER-3S IN 2020	31.3%	28.6%	57.4%	53.1%
SCORE (0-3)	2	1	3	3

The reported participation rates of children under three years of age in ECEC opportunities in each nation. All data is from Eurostat, the exclusive database of the European Union. As the data for 2020 has not been reported yet, that information is substituted by data from 2019 and can be expected to be more or less the same.

With this information, I proceed with an evaluation of the specific ECEC policies that have been implemented in each nation. Figure 2 illustrates the ECEC participation rates of children under three years of age, in both 2010 and 2020. Information before this time proved to be unavailable. Regardless, we see a clear divide in the units of evaluation, with participation rates that exceed the Barcelona Objective of 33% in Spain and Sweden but fall short of it elsewhere. This better focuses the above discussion. Yet, we can make another distinction between the nations with inferior participation rates as well. We see in Figure 2 that the German participation rate of under-3s increases at a more rapid pace than the Italian rate over the decade, and is now less than two points from 33%. This means that the Barcelona Objective is all but satisfied here. Yet, this is not true of Italy. This indicates that while the German ECEC policies are not as effective as those in Spain and Sweden, their effectiveness is still of note compared to other nations. Still, the Pearson

correlation reveals that a strong and positive association exists between under-3 participation rates and female labor force participation rates over the decade, in both Germany and Italy, ($r = 0.941$ and $r = 0.512$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that ECEC policies do lend to an increase in female labor force participation.

It is evident in these participation rates that Spain and Sweden have implemented more effective ECEC policies than the other units of evaluation, in comparison. We also see in Figure 1 that these nations have experienced more of an increase in female labor force participation than their counterparts. This serves as evidence in support for the notion that the implementation of ECEC policies leads to an increase in female labor force participation. While the German and Italian female labor force participation increases as well, their rates are not characterized with the same level of increase as Spain and Sweden because their ECEC policies do not have the same effectiveness, for whatever reason that is. Inversely, this also contributes to the investigation.

Still, there are other conclusions we can deduce from these results. The first of these comes to be the importance of an individual state working to implement ECEC policies, in addition to the EU encouraging them to do so. While it seems rather obvious, it is worth stating that the above results show that nations in which such policies have been implemented of their own accord (i.e. Sweden) have experienced higher levels, or at least gains, of female participation in the labor force than those who have not (i.e. Italy). Of course, initiatives to encourage them to do so within the structure of the EU, such as the Barcelona objectives and their recommended benchmarks, have achieved their aims to incite more female participation in the labor force, at least on some level (Barcelona Objectives 2002). Still, the fact remains that individual nations also need to take matters into their own hands to really affect change in the rate of female labor force participation, as shown here. In this way, national-level policies seem to play a more significant role in the

stimulation of female labor force participation than does other advice, like these recommendations from the EU.

Yet, I do have a few reservations. First, it should be noted that not all nations do make these policies at the national level. As previously mentioned, there are discrepancies in the ECEC policies in western and eastern Germany that persist even now. There are similar discrepancies in northern and southern Italy, where these policies are made at the more regional or local level within the nation (Fagan 2006). This is not reflected in this investigation because the rates of female labor force participation were taken at the national level, the smallest unit of evaluation available in World Bank data. Yet, this should not affect the investigation to a considerable extent.

More significantly, it is difficult to separate the ECEC policies in a nation from other policies that have similar outcomes. It seems that a number of Member States, like those here, have implemented ECEC policies that coincide with others that seek to address female participation in the labor force in the same manner. This includes but is not limited to tax reductions for those with more children, parental leave options, and other work-family reconciliation measures that often come packaged as one to offer a multi-prong approach to the problem (Fagan 2006). While this is thoughtful of their policymakers, it does make it rather difficult to assess if it is the ECEC policies themselves, the other such policies, outside factors, or combinations therein that make a direct influence on the evident increase in female labor force participation. This is where the other independent variables come in.

Comparison of Female and Male Labor Force Participation Rates

The rate of female participation in the labor force deserves further attention. While the above evaluation illustrates the manner in which this dependent variable is affected in terms of the

implemented ECEC policies, it does not demonstrate what this means for women in comparison to the men in their lives. Of course, the increase in the rate of female participation in the labor force that is evident from the investigation thus far has its own significance—but it has more significance in relation to the rate of male participation over the same period of time. In offering a basis of comparison between the two, we can better assess the realities of female labor force participation across the EU.

This is depicted below, in two modes of comparison. In an effort to better illustrate the change in the actual proportion of women to men in the labor force from 1980 to now, I first operationalize the ratio of female to male labor force participation rate, taken at the level of the same individual nations with specific ECEC policies, as well as that of the EU. This is defined as the proportion of the female population aged 15+ that is economically active, divided by the proportion of the male population aged 15+ that is economically active, and multiplied by 100 (World Bank 2021). A high ratio signifies a more equal footing in the labor force, in which the work that women do is at least comparable to that of men. A low ratio serves as evidence that women do not participate in the labor force to the same degree that their male counterparts do.

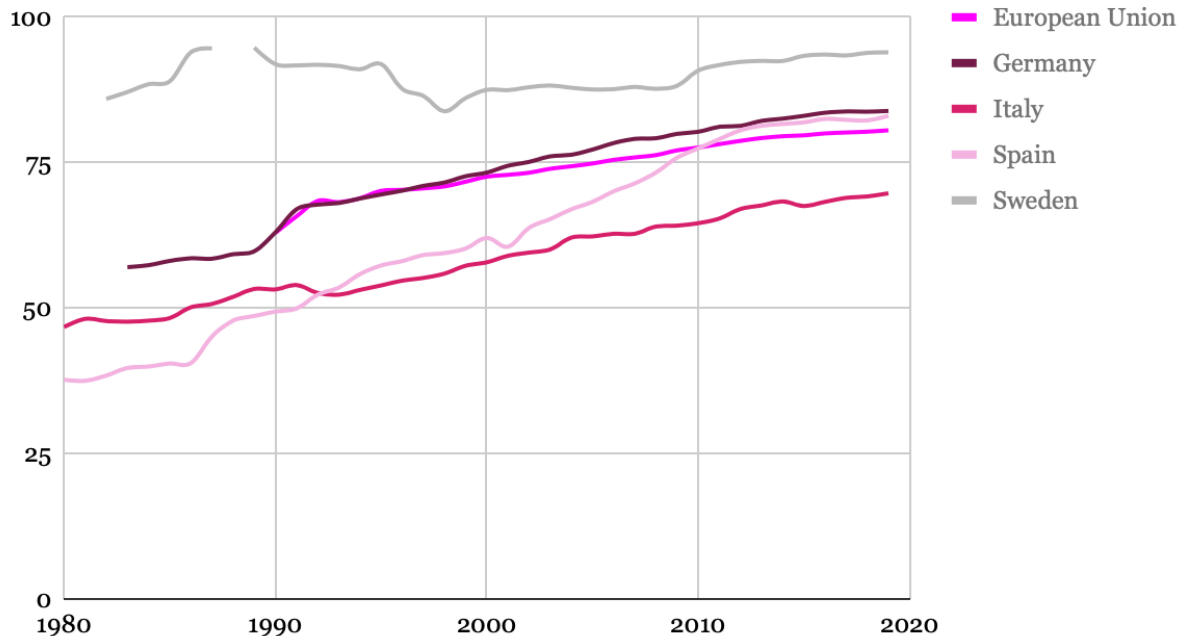
The first impression we have of Figure 3 is that it too reflects an increase over the evaluated period of time, as the female labor force participation rate did alone. As this additional variable corresponds to the original dependent variable, such parallelism is reasonable. In the same notion, other features remain characteristic here as well—like the consistent high ratio of the female to male labor force participation rate in Sweden, for one. It begins at 85.97%, to climb to 93.97% in 2020. This implies that Sweden has a more egalitarian labor force, as a result of policies that allow for women to participate at almost the same level as men. Essentially, the high ratio that Sweden continues to experience is the result of well-designed and well-implemented ECEC policies.

This is also true of the ratio in Italy, which resembles the slow increase of the rate of female participation in the labor force as well. It makes sense that these two variables move in the same direction, of course. Yet, the Italian ratio of the female to male participation rate experiences more of an increase than the simple female participation rate does, with a rise of almost 23 points between 1980 (46.75%) and 2019 (69.74%). The simple rate of female participation in the labor force saw an increase of a mere 9 points over the same period of time. In taking the ratio between the participation rates of the sexes, we see that the amount of women who have come to participate in the Italian labor force is more significant than we might otherwise have thought. For the 9% increase in their participation resulted in a 23% more egalitarian labor force between the sexes. This again speaks to the role that ECEC policies have on female participation in the labor force, inciting and more specifically increasing its rate.

Similarly, the ratio of female to male labor force participation rate mirrors the experiences of the female labor force participation rate of Germany. As it did earlier, the German ratio is that which most aligns with that of the EU. Both are within a tenth of each other at the start of the evaluation (62.94% and 63.02% in 1990, respectively), and continue to be so close. Of course, we see the ratio of the EU begin to increase with less vigor when it expands to include more of the former members of the USSR in Eastern Europe, such as in the early 2000s. These nations are known to have struggled to normalize the dual breadwinner model, resulting in less emphasis on childhood education and thus less female labor force participation. Yet, the ratio taken at the level of the European Union (80.57%) is still a mere three points less than that of the Germans (83.90%) in 2019, another nation with a fraught past as part of the USSR.

FIGURE 3

Ratio of Female to Male Labor Force Participation Rate



In a testament to the rapid expansion of the role of women in the economic sphere in the wake of ended Francoism, the ratio that sees the most inflation is that of Spain, which is tallied as a mere 37.68% in 1980 but reached 83.06% in 2020. This is more than a 45% increase over a 40-year span, a feat that might otherwise be unfathomable. Yet, the implementation of ECEC policies not only allowed for such an increase, but incited it. This is evident in the particular spikes in the ratio, which occur in the immediate aftermath of such implementations—like in 1990, when the LOGSE (Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo, or Law of General Organization of the Educational System) was established and remodeled the education system, and even more so when it was modified with the LOE 1993 (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional 2020). We see that the ratio increased from 49.38% in 1990, to 53.52% in 1993, to 58.08% in 1996, an almost 10% increase in just six years. This implies that these ECEC policies both

equipped more Spanish women to participate in the labor force and closed the gap between their participation and that of Spanish men.

As is evident, the ratio of female to male labor force participation rate further confirms the evidence of the simple female labor force participation rate, across each of the individual nations selected for close evaluation as well as the EU. This indicates support for the above conclusion. Yet, the ratio is not a variable that is simple. While it is helpful, it does not show the relationship between the participation rate of each sex, on their own. It is thus worthwhile to compare the female labor force participation rate to that of the male rate on the same graph. This serves as a simpler method to visualize the relationship that the two variables share, and then rationalize the significance of the increase of the female participation rate in comparison to the male. In other words, the male labor force participation rate serves as a control variable, or a basis of comparison for the real variable of interest to the investigation. The two variables are compared in five graphs below—one for each unit of evaluation (Figures 4-8).

FIGURE 4

Gender Labor Force Participation Rates in the European Union

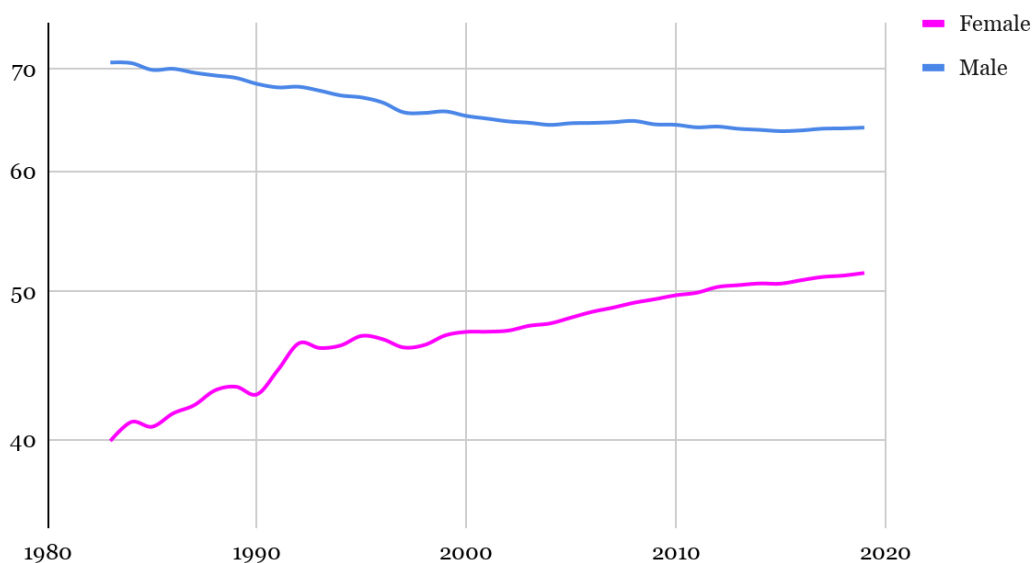


FIGURE 5

Gender Labor Force Participation Rates in Germany

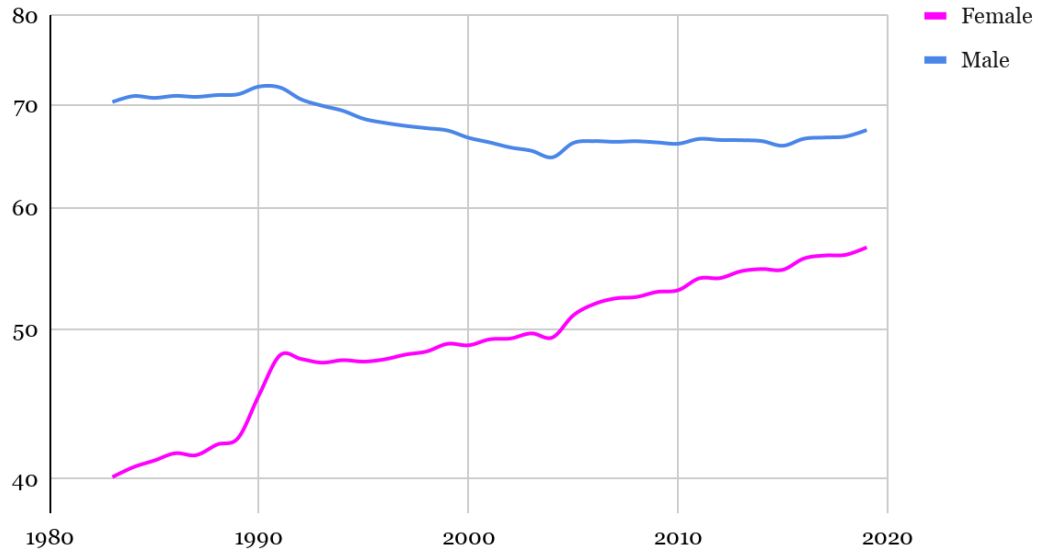


FIGURE 6

Gender Labor Force Participation Rates in Italy

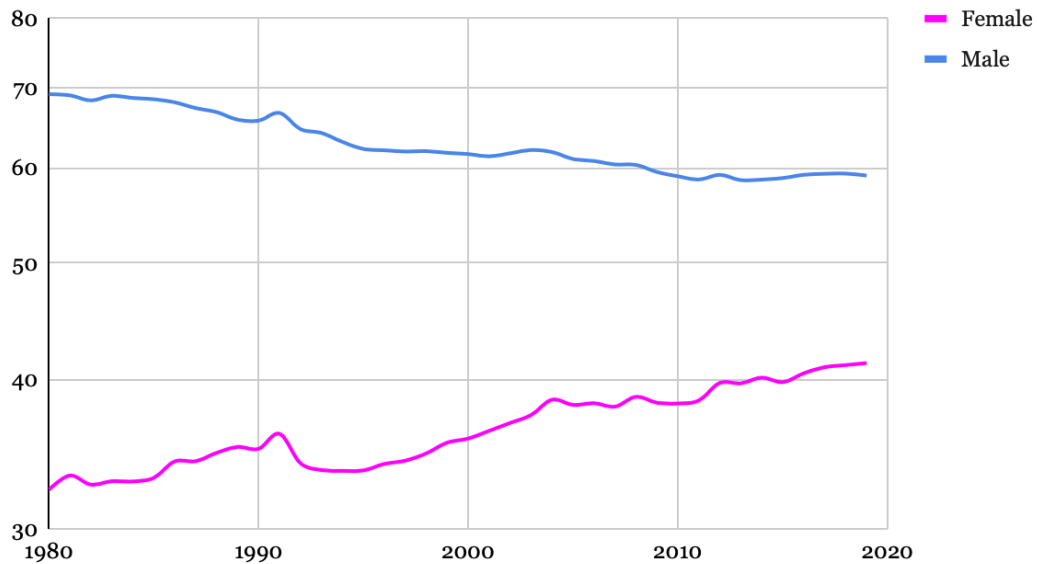


FIGURE 7

Gender Labor Force Participation Rates in Spain

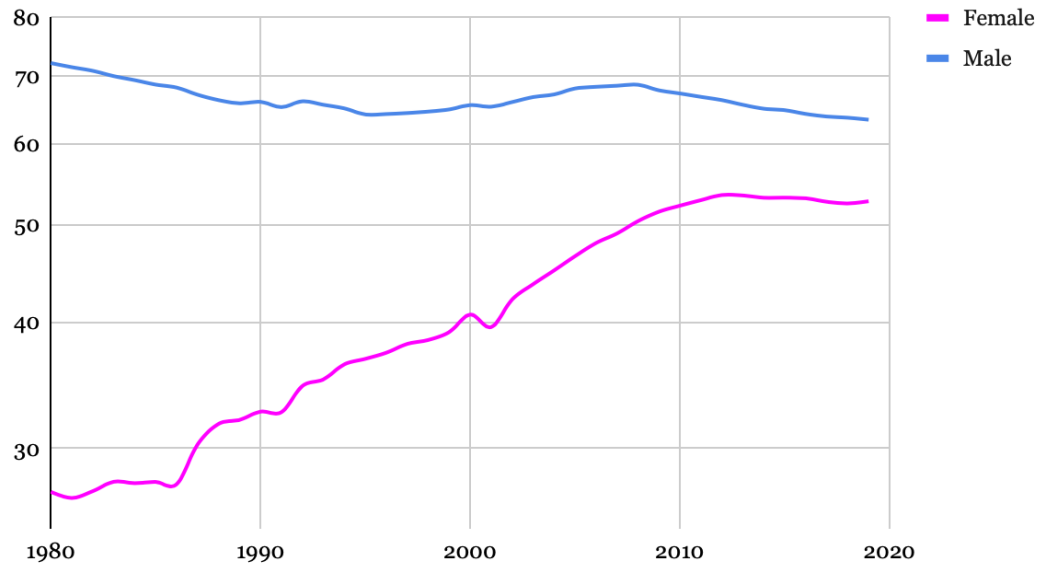
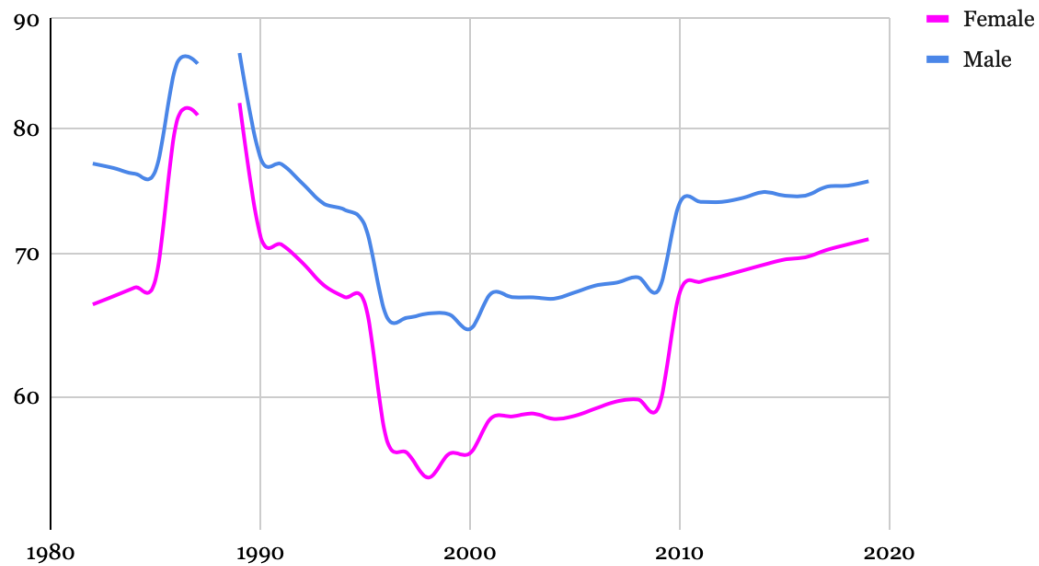


FIGURE 8

Gender Labor Force Participation Rates in Sweden



The graphs share a number of attributes. Above all, we see that one consistent theme emerges: the female labor force participation rate has come to converge with the male labor force participation rate over a period of time, to a certain degree. The female rate rapidly increases, while the male rate mildly decreases. Yet, the two do not have an indirect relationship, in which one decreases as the other increases. It is not quite so simple. While the female rate experiences a notable increase in participation, the male decrease in participation is not as notable of a variation. It is not the result of the female increase—women are not taking positions from men, or at least not enough. Rather, the decline of the male labor force participation rate is due to the new composition of the labor force as a whole, which looks different as the population ages (Esping-Andersen 2001). We know that the generation born in the immediate aftermath of World War II was known for its size, and younger generations cannot sustain it. As this older generation ages, it retires—resulting in more men that do not participate in the labor force, and thus decreasing the male rate.

Yet, it also underutilized female labor work (Psacharopoulos and Tzannatos 1989). As the post-World War II generation ages, women have come to fill positions in the labor force that men cannot on their own. To return to the objective of this investigation, this could not be done without the help of ECEC policies that are designed to incite such heightened female participation. This serves as an explanation for the nature of the overall convergence between the labor force participation rates of the two sexes, as is evident in the above graphs.

In doing so, it also further establishes the significance of the increase in the female rate of participation. While it still does not equate to that of the control variable, it does compete with it in several of the evaluated nations. We see in Figure 8 that 71.04% of Swedish women participate in the labor force alongside 75.60% of Swedish men at this time, shares that are on the precipice

of egalitarianism. Of course, most of the other nations selected for their implementation of ECEC policies still have rates that share a difference of a bit more than ten points, rather than under five points. The Spanish and German differences are a mere 10.74 and 10.85 points, apiece. Yet, this is still less of a difference in rates than that of the overall EU, which is almost 15 points. This once more confirms that the implementation of such ECEC policies lends to an increase in female labor force participation.

We have a clearer representation of these variables in their correlation, shown by their Pearson correlation coefficients. The female labor force participation rate has a negative correlation with the same male rate in all units of evaluation ($r = -0.9481$ in the EU, $r = -0.7791$ in Germany, $r = -0.8415$ in Italy, $r = -0.4528$, where $p < 0.001$)—that is, except in Sweden ($r = 0.9788$, $p < 0.001$). More importantly, this negative correlation is strong and significant in most cases. This confirms that the female rate increases as the male rate decreases across the EU, at least to some extent. Yet, it also begs the question: why does Sweden experience the opposite correlation, with a strong positive association between female and male labor force participation rates? This can be attributed to its advanced ECEC policies, but that is not an adequate explanation. In truth, this revelation emphasizes the need to separate these ECEC policies from others that also have an affect on female labor force participation, like state-mandated leave policies for new parents. These are just as advanced in Sweden as its ECEC policies are, as we will later discuss. Nonetheless, this demonstrates that the state promotion of the dual-earner model, through policymaking, contributes to the development of a labor force that is more egalitarian, with both men and women involved at equal rates.

Again, we see in Figure 6 that Italy has implemented ECEC policies but has not incited the same female participation that other nations have in their labor forces. As earlier mentioned, the

rate of female participation has seen a nine point increase since 1980—an impressive feat, but less of one than that of the other units of evaluation, even the EU. For we expect the EU to have a low rate in comparison, as it includes twenty-seven nations that do not all have such policies. Yet, it experienced an almost 11 point increase, 2 points more than that of this Mediterranean nation. The same is true of the discrepancies between the participation rates of the sexes, which is 14 points for the European Union but 18 for the Italians. This can be attributed to both the welfare regime of the nation, as well as its familialism. In truth, its people are known to adhere to traditional gender roles, even now. Still, further evaluation of the Italian case needs to be done to explain its outlier status. The next independent variables do just that and more.

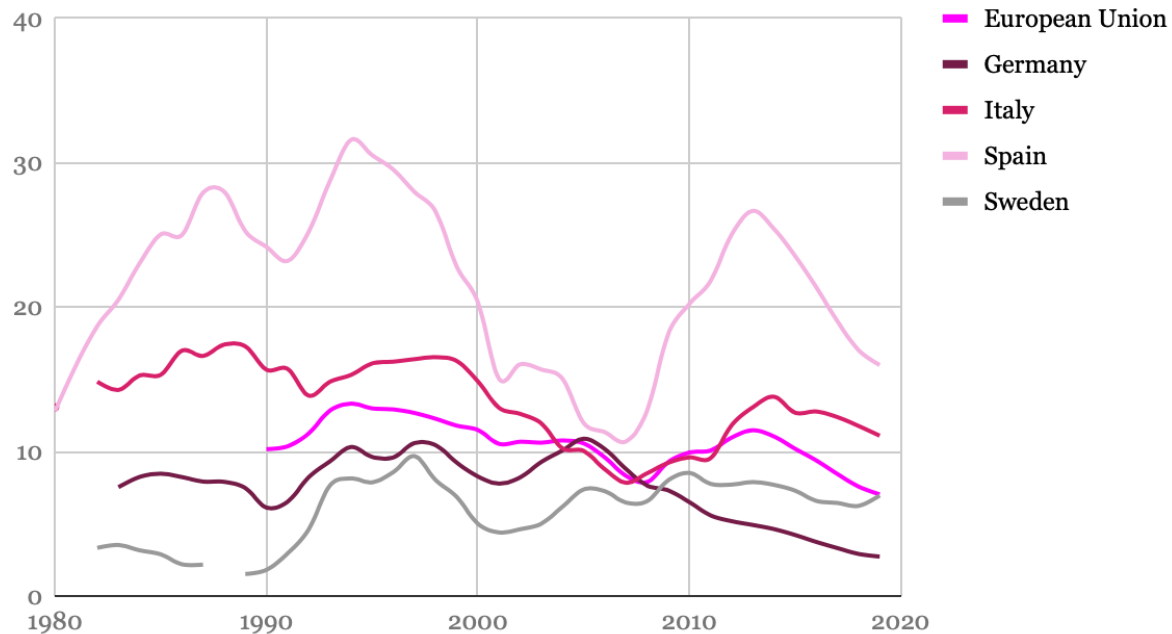
Other Demographic Independent Variables

I selected the female labor force participation rate as opposed to that of the female unemployment rate because it is a more accurate reflection of the amount of women that actively take part in their national labor force for a variety of reasons. Yet, I still think it significant to the investigation to show the discrepancies between these two variables, and why the one I selected is ultimately a better means of evaluation. Below, Figure 9 graphs data from the same five units of evaluation, but compares their female unemployment rates instead of their female labor force participation rate. The two are opposite, of course—here, we hope to see a decrease as opposed to an increase in the rates. Yet, we can note variation with even a mere glance at it. This is largely because female unemployment rates do no more than reflect the rate of women that are currently unemployed. It does not include women who choose not to work. This is evident in Italy, where it seems that the female unemployment rate is almost on par with that of the EU as a whole. However, we know that its female labor force participation rate is not at all. In this way, the female

unemployment rate is proved to be an inadequate measure by which to operationalize maternal participation in the labor force.

FIGURE 9

Female Unemployment Rate



Of course, the Pearson coefficients indicate that the female labor force participation rate and the female unemployment rate share a negative correlation in each unit of evaluation ($r = -0.5887$ in the EU, $r = -0.5264$ in Germany, $r = -0.6611$ in Italy, $r = -0.2849$ in Spain, and $r = -0.5103$ in Sweden, where $p < 0.001$). We expect this, as the two are inverse variables. Yet, the two are not as strongly correlated as one might think. At best, the variables are moderately correlated, and are certainly not exact opposites of each other as they might seem by definition. This once again demonstrates the inaccurate nature of the unemployment rate, particularly for women.

Regardless, life expectancies and the percentages of the labor force with advanced education are independent variables of more weight to this investigation. As we see in their Pearson

coefficients, their experiences are a bit more varied throughout the units of evaluation than the other variables have been to this point—a revelation that was not expected, as these variables were selected as little more than indicators of modernization and the like. We see that all but one nation have a strong positive correlation between their female labor force participation rates and their life expectancies ($r = 0.9590$ in the EU, $r = 0.9711$ in Germany, $r = 0.9347$ in Italy, and $r = 0.9844$ in Spain, where $p < 0.001$. In outlier Sweden, $r = -0.2503$. This is most likely due to their already very high rates of female labor force participation, since the 1980s). This is a positive influence, but it does undermine the extent of the positive influence that ECEC policies have on the female labor force participation rate to a degree.

The life expectancies variable shows that the female labor force participation rate experiences a natural increase over time, irrespective of policies that aim to incite it. This is more of a result of modernization than anything else. In simpler terms, a bit of an increase in the rate of female labor force participation is a sign of the times. This is evident in Italy, which does not have as extensive ECEC policies as its counterparts but still experiences a increase in its female labor force participation. Yet, we see that nations that have implemented extensive ECEC policies have much faster rates of growth in female labor force participation than do nations that have not (i.e. Spain or Sweden, in comparison to the Italian state). This indicates that ECEC policies still have a pronounced effect on female labor force participation, but perhaps that it is not the mere existence of these policies but the purpose and persistence behind them that is of more significance.

The results from the correlation between the female labor force participation rate and the percentage of the labor force with advanced education are also of note. We see that the experiences of each nation are more varied here, with strong negative correlations in the German and Italian units as well as in the EU ($r = -0.8197$, $r = -0.931$, and $r = -0.8844$ where $p < 0.001$, respectively).

The same is true of the same correlation with the female labor force with advanced education, exclusively ($r = -0.7371$ in Germany, $r = -0.8217$ in Italy). This is a bit of a surprise, as education is associated with women taking up formal work outside the home at higher rates. It also cannot be explained in the context of notable events in Europe. Perhaps ECEC policies have allowed women without an advanced degree that might otherwise remain at home, such as in nations with more traditional values, to find work that does not require one. This would serve as an explanation for the experience of German and Italian women here. Still, it is not a complete explanation.

Regardless, Swedish and Spanish women are shown to have more positive correlations between their labor force participation and education. In Sweden, this correlation is rather weak, for a reason that cannot be explained in the present investigation ($r = 0.0167$, $p < 0.001$). Yet, Spain experiences a strong positive correlation between its female labor force participation rate and its percentage of the female labor force with an advanced education ($r = 0.8692$, $p < 0.001$). This is a more expected result, as Spain has aimed to better education opportunities on both ends of the spectrum, at preschool and at post-secondary school ages (European Commission 2021). We also know that more educated women are better positioned to take up formal work outside the home. This could serve as an explanation for the notable increase in female labor force participation rate in the nation, but as it is the only nation that had a real positive correlation it is more of an outlier than a rule. As such, it seems that this control variable fails to serve as an alternative explanation for the increase in female labor force participation across the evaluated nations. This in turn strengthens the notion that it is ECEC policies that lend to such an increase, supporting the hypothesis of the investigation.

In an effort to assess the figure of women who fulfill roles as both mothers and workers that participate in the labor force, I also evaluate the female labor force participation rate in relation

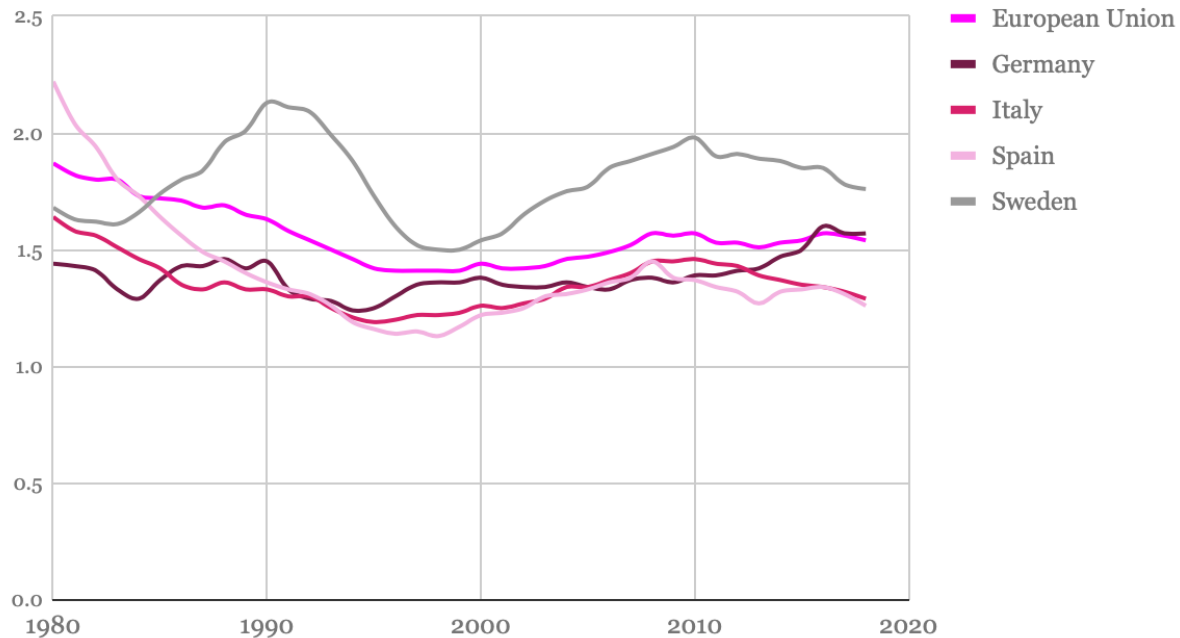
to the fertility rate of each unit of evaluation. We see in Figure 10 that the fertility rate itself is quite varied over time in most all of the units of evaluation, and to an extreme in Sweden and even Spain. Similarly, the Pearson correlation scores reveal that the relationship between the female labor force participation rates and fertility rates are varied over each unit of evaluation. While Spain experiences a moderate negative correlation between the two variables, Sweden has a similarly moderate positive correlation between them ($r = -0.5242$ and $r = 0.5541$, respectively, where $p < 0.001$). This proves to be of note, as Spain is characterized with the lowest fertilities and Sweden the highest fertilities of the present units of evaluation. The other nations fall in between them, and their coefficients do too ($r = -0.3727$ in EU, $r = 0.3959$ in Germany, and $r = -0.058$ in Italy, where $p < 0.001$). The fertility rate has a much weaker correlation with the female labor force participation rate in these nations. This is to be expected, as we know that the Germans and Italians still maintain a sense of familialism and reflect this in their policies. Of course, each nation has its own fraught experiences with fertility, and Europe as a whole struggles with falling rates of births per woman (Esping-Andersen, et al 2001). Spain in particular has been characterized with a declining rate since its transition from authoritarianism in the 1970s and 80s. While the rate has since come back, it is still precarious at times. Yet, we cannot be sure that women are not having children at the same rates because they are choosing to be career women rather than mothers, or because they simply do not want to be mothers, regardless of their careers. This complicates the investigation to a certain extent.

Regardless, it is notable that the German coefficient is still positive ($r = 0.3959$, $p < 0.001$). As it is a nation that preserves traditional values, it is remarkable that its moderate ECEC policies have led to an increase in female labor force participation that has a positive correlation with its

fertility rate. This serves as evidence of the manner in which ECEC policies allow for the reconciliation of motherhood and work, even in their more conservative manifestations.

FIGURE 10

Fertility Rate (Births/Woman)

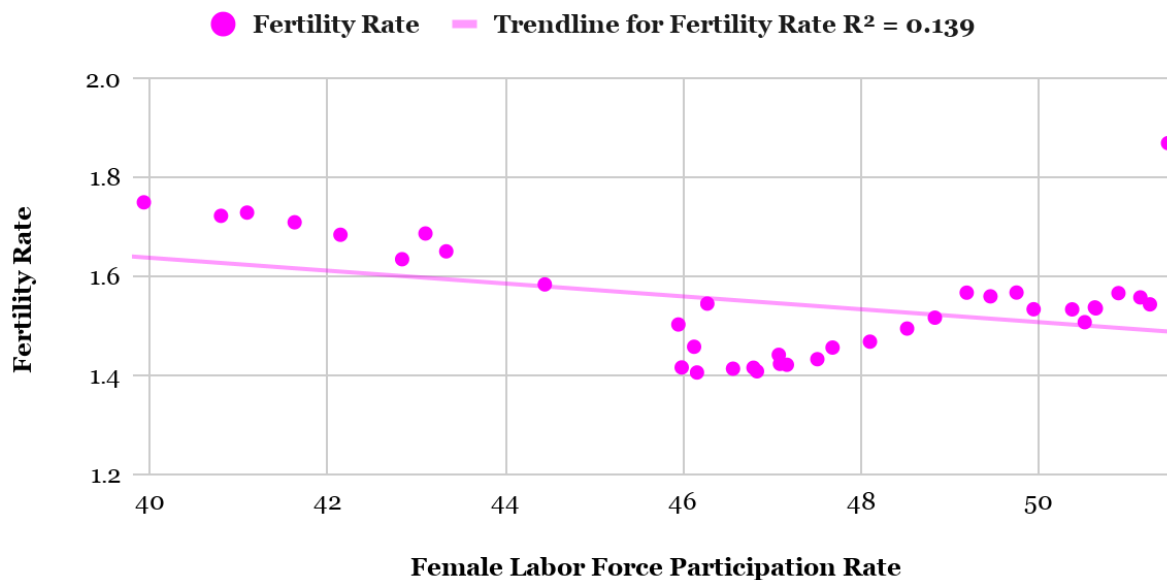


In the same vein, we find real promise in Sweden. The nation has some of the highest rates of female labor force participation in the European Union, as is evident in this cross-national evaluation. Yet, it also has some of the highest rates of fertility, as Figure 10 makes evident. This can be attributed in large part to the implementation of ECEC policies, and the Swedish dedication to providing accessible and affordable preschools to all of its young citizens. After all, it is also known to have some of the most progressive ECEC policies, all of which have high approval ratings in the nation. This indicates that the implementation of ECEC policies has the potential to

increase female labor force participation without lowering the fertility rate, because it allows women to feel at ease as working moms.

FIGURE 11

Correlation of Female Labor Force Participation and Fertility Rates in the European Union



Alternative Work-Family Reconciliation Policies

The above evaluation indicates that ECEC policies increase the female labor force participation rates in each nation as well as the European Union. Yet, it does not prove that these policies do so on their own, as opposed to in conjunction with other such instances. In an effort to isolate them, I thus evaluate two alternative policies that have also been implemented across the European Union in the time of this investigation: paid leave for new parents and cash transfer benefits. These are the final two independent variables.

We know that parental leave options emerged in the 1970s and 80s as a means to allow for the proper upbringing of young children in new dual-earner families (Escobedo, Flaquer, and Navarro-Varas 2012). A close evaluation of parental leave options reveals that the existence of paid leave for new parents is consistent in each nation. Yet, this is where the similarities end. As Figure 12 indicates, the duration of paid leave for mothers and fathers varies in each unit of evaluation. This results in a clear divide between the nations, based on the paid leave offered to new fathers at the time of childbirth. While Spain and Sweden both offer them about 12 weeks of paid leave, the other two nations offer them one week or no paid leave at all. This cannot be considered extensive parental leave.

FIGURE 12

Paid Leave Policies for New Parents

NATION	GERMANY	ITALY	SPAIN	SWEDEN
PAID LEAVE POLICIES	14 WEEKS FOR MOTHER. PAID \geq 80%	5 MONTHS FOR MOTHER, 7 DAYS FOR FATHER. + 10 MONTHS AT 30%	6 WEEKS MIN, 16 MAX FOR MOTHER. 12 FOR FATHER. PAID \geq 80%	480 DAYS, WITH 90 EXCLUSIVE TO EACH PARENT. PAID \geq 80%
SCORE (0-2)	1	1	2	2

The reported paid leave policies that exist in each nation for new parents, as of 2021. This information was gathered from the European Commission website, in a section detailing the rights that citizens in each Member State have to Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. The assigned scores are my own.

As both the Germans and Italians have welfare regimes that prioritize traditional families, it makes sense that their policies offer extensive paid leave to mothers but not to fathers, who are meant to fill the breadwinner role. It is designed in part to offer leave of such a duration to women that it encourages them to remain at home with their children even after it expires. In the absence of equal paid leave options for both parents, we cannot expect there to be equal labor force

participation. This indicates that high labor force participation rates among German women are not the result of the parental leave policies in the nation. The same can be said for Italian women as well.

Yet, we see that German women still report high rates of labor force participation. This implies that ECEC policies affect female labor force participation rates more than parental leave policies. While German policymakers frame preschool facilities as more about education than care to supplement mothers at home with their children, their ECEC policies are still an effective means to incite their labor force participation.

Regardless, we see in Figure 12 that new fathers have more paid leave options in Spain and Sweden. This also coincides with more thorough ECEC policies. This makes the two more difficult to separate in these units of evaluation. The leave policies in Sweden have been in place since the 1970s, and thus offer a skewed representation. Yet, we note that Spain did not implement such extensive leave options for new fathers until 2007, when it introduced a Gender Equality Law that committed to give them four weeks of paid leave. This was even postponed, as a result of the financial crisis of 2008. Prior to this time, fathers were only allotted 15 days of paid leave. While new fathers now have access to 12 weeks of paid leave upon childbirth as of 2018 (European Commission 2020), this is too late of an implementation to affect a female labor force participation rate that first began to climb in the mid-1990s. Spain has instead focused on the implementation of ECEC policies. As a result, we can deduce that it is these policies rather than paid leave policies that have contributed to the increase in female labor force participation over the past few decades. This is of special note in Spain, where the female labor force participation rate has increased at a rather high rate of change. This verifies the significance of the independent variable as a sole means of influence for the female labor force participation rate.

Similarly, we know that cash transfer policies have also been implemented in conjunction with parental leave and ECEC policies in several units of evaluation. Yet, cash transfer policies are notable in that their intended beneficiaries are often not all citizens, but low-income citizens. In this sense, cash transfer policies do not just function to accommodate mothers in the labor force, at least on the surface. Still, such benefits can have this effect even if it was not the main intention.

Once again, we see a divide that separates the more conservative Germans and Italians from the other units of evaluation, as comes to light in Figure 13. While Spain and Sweden both offer some sort of cash transfer benefit, neither does to a great extent. In Spain, the benefit is quite conditional, as it requires that a couple have multiple children. It is also just one lump sum. While the child allowance in Sweden is more prolonged, the amount is not much at all. This implies that these nations do not focus on the cash transfer approach in their policies (as their low scores of 1 and 2 indicate). As a result, the increased participation of Spanish and Swedish women in the labor force cannot be the product of cash transfer benefits.

FIGURE 13

Cash Transfer Policies

NATION	GERMANY	ITALY	SPAIN	SWEDEN
CASH TRANSFER POLICIES	CHILD ALLOWANCE; BASIC PARENTAL ALLOWANCE	BIRTH ALLOWANCE; FUTURE MOTHER VOUCHER	ONE TIME BENEFIT FOR MULTIPLE CHILDREN (2+)	CHILD ALLOWANCE
CASH TRANSFER AMOUNTS	EUR 204/MO MIN; EUR 1800/MO MAX	EUR 1920/MO MAX, 20% INCREASE FOR CHILD 2; LUMP SUM OF EUR 800	EUR 3800 MIN	LESS THAN EUR 12/MONTH PER CHILD
SCORE (0-4)	4	3	1	2

The reported cash transfer policies that exist in each nation, as of 2021. This information was gathered from the European Commission website, in a section detailing the rights that citizens in each Member State have to Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. The assigned scores are my own.

Yet, the same cannot be said for the other nations. We see that both offer cash transfer benefits that have little conditions—except for the presence of children. The Italian government even offers future mothers a lump sum of 800 euros for the promise of children, in preparation for them. It has the most extensive of all the cash transfer policies here (with a score of 4). Still, some of these policies do have strings attached. The basic parental allowance requires that its German beneficiaries work no more than part-time, and also live in the same household as the other parent (European Commission 2020). This serves as a means to uphold traditional family values. In truth, this is characteristic of nations that take a transfers-based rather than a services-based approach to social issues, as it supports the male breadwinner model (Esping-Andersen, et al 2001). As career women are not part of this model, it does not seem that cash transfer benefits increase female labor force participation, at least on their own. More significantly, these allowances are not enough to compensate for the loss of income that a woman has if she works outside the home. The cash transfer policies are thus inadequate. This serves as evidence that the recent increase in female labor force participation rates is the result not of cash transfer policies, but of ECEC policies, thus reaffirming support for the hypothesis of this investigation.

Questionnaire Evaluation

In an effort to confirm this information, I complement it with a final qualitative evaluation. This takes the form of a questionnaire, which I circulated to and collected from Spanish residents using Qualtrics.² It was also confined to adults that were at least 18 years of age. I chose to limit

² IRB Protocol #21x-081.

the intended respondents of the questionnaire to residents of Spain, as opposed to those of the other nations that were selected for closer evaluation or the EU, because doing so allowed me to have more control over the questionnaire. For one, it was thus required to be circulated in just English and Spanish, rather than in the other 24 official languages of the EU. As I spent two months studying in the Basque Country of Spain, it also proved the easiest place to conduct a questionnaire because I have contacts that I felt confident would both complete it and share it with others, in the snowball technique. This was shown to be true.

I designed the questionnaire to ask respondents about their demographic information, such as their age and education level, but also their opinion on matters related to this investigation, such as the importance that a career has on their life satisfaction and the nature of the early childhood education and care opportunities that exist in their nation or local jurisdiction. The questions were all multiple choice, often designed in a manner that asked respondents to rank their beliefs about a particular issue on a certain scale.

I received 94 completed questionnaires over the course of almost five months, as much time as the course of this investigation allowed. While the bulk of these responses came from citizens of Bilbao and the Pais Vasco, the contacts that I have there shared the questionnaire with enough people for me to also collect responses from citizens in other regions of Spain, such as the larger cities of Madrid and Barcelona, but also smaller ones like those in Galicia. Ultimately, the questionnaire reached people in more than 15 different cities in Spain. This is by no means representative of the nation at large—it is far from it. Still, it proves to offer basic insight on the perception of women in the labor force and the implementation of policies that encourage it in Spain. As a result, it is of value to this investigation.

The ultimate divide in the information that I collected from the questionnaire is between respondents who have (44) and do not have (50) children. As most of the contacts that I made in Spain were fellow students at the university, it makes sense that more respondents do not have children than do. Similarly, the age of these respondents also served as a reflection of the people that I was able to reach to complete the questionnaire, with a median age bracket of 31-40.

Still, this divide does not hinder the success of the questionnaire. While it is of note, I designed the questionnaire in a manner that asked those who identified as parents to answer questions about their experiences with the ECEC opportunities as exist(ed) for their children, and those who identified as non-parents to answer the same questions about their own experiences as former children. This distinction works to offer more perspective, from different parents and former students but also from different points in time, when different policies were set in place.

The results indicate that 35/44 parents who submitted the questionnaire enrolled their children in the formal preschool system. All of these parents are content with the experiences that each of their children had there. On a scale from 1-10 (in which 1 is the lowest score and 10 is the highest score), only one respondent rated their satisfaction with the preschool system as a parent below a 7 (this parent rated it a 3, and 5 other parents indicated their preference not to respond). This implies that these parents are satisfied with the Spanish program. The same is true of its accessibility, which no parent considered to be less than a 6. This information is better depicted in Figure 14.

FIGURE 14
Survey Respondents & Key Results

Variables	Parents (44)	Non-Parents (50)	All Respondents (94)
Male to Female Ratio	3:41	22:28	25:69
Median Age Bracket	41-50	18-30	31-40
Median Rate of Satisfaction with the Preschool System	8	7	N/A
Median Rate of Preschool Accessibility	10	9	N/A
Median Rate of Career Importance to Life Satisfaction	8	8.5	N/A
Number Employed	35	18	53
Labor Force Participation Rate	0.795	0.367	0.570

It is of note that all but seven of these parents were employed at the time in which their children were of preschool age, whether that be in a full- (20) or part- (13) time role. As most of these respondents (all but three of the parents) were also women, this rather high rate of maternal participation in the labor force might come as a bit of a surprise—that is, if it were not for the provision of a state resource that allows for such participation. This indicates further support for the conclusion that the implementation of adequate ECEC opportunities will increase maternal participation in the labor force.

Of course, this is only part of the results. The respondents who do not have children answered the questionnaire in a manner that reflects a different perception. On the same scale from 1-10, this pool of respondents marked their satisfaction with the preschool system anywhere from 4-10. This reflects a more varied overall perception in this faction, which is even more true of its

accessibility (answers range from 3-10). Yet, the median rates of these variables are still quite high, as seen in Figure 14 (7 and 9, respectively). This value is of more significance to our investigation, as it demonstrates an overall satisfaction with the preschool system in Spain.

Yet, the results of the questionnaire are not without their other considerations. We see in the chart that the labor force participation rate of the parents who completed the questionnaire is rather high, at 0.795. Meanwhile, the same rate is a mere 0.367 for non-parents. This is a result of who my contacts in Spain are, which I have explained were mostly fellow students—and thus did not work. It can be assumed that this issue persists with the snowball method as well. Still, it cannot be confirmed because the question that asked for employment status was as follows:

6. How would you describe your status of employment?

- **Employed full-time**
- **Employed part-time**
- **Unemployed**
- **Retired**
- **Prefer not to answer**

6. ¿Cómo describiría su estado de empleo?

- **Empleado a tiempo completo**
- **Empleado a tiempo parcial**
- **Desempleado**
- **Retirado**
- **Prefiero no responder**

I did not include an option to indicate that one was a “student,” as I presume a number of the respondents are. This skews the number of unemployed respondents. Yet, as these same respondents also do not have children, it is not of too much concern. For only parents are relevant to our evaluation of labor force participation rates at the time in which their children are of preschool ages. Moreover, the overall labor force participation rate of the respondents was 0.570—quite close to the current national rate in Spain (0.579, as the World Bank reports in 2020). This strengthens the indications of the questionnaire as a whole, making it more valid.

It is also notable that most of my contacts in Bilbao and the Pais Vasco are known to be well-educated, at or above the college level. We know that education serves as a catalyst for female participation in the labor force, even when their children are at young ages. As a result, the

percentage of the female respondents that work (64.71%)—and more than that, the female parents who work (82.93%)—is rather high, and perhaps not a reflection of the true scenario in Spain.

Of course, I hoped to have more parents complete the questionnaire as well. The lack of their representation serves as a limitation to the results of this part of the investigation. Yet, it could have been addressed more if the questionnaire had asked non-parents who indicated their own preschool attendance in the past to note if their parents worked during that time. I recognize that these issues limit the results of the questionnaire. If I were to continue this investigation, these are basic issues that I would address. Still, I feel that the questionnaire can overall be viewed as a successful one.

CONCLUSION

As a result of this investigation, I conclude that the implementation of childhood education policies in a nation does lend to an increase in the female labor force participation rate over time. This confirms the original hypothesis set forth at the onset of this investigation. I also conclude that such policies function to fulfill the desire that dual-role women, the most common type of women in the European Union, have to be working moms. Still, I recommend that further work be done to separate early childhood education and care policies from other policies that can have similar outcomes in an effort to strengthen this conclusion.

I began the investigation with a close evaluation of the manner in which ECEC policies implemented in certain Member States have affected their individual female labor force participation rates since 1980. While the units of evaluation have their different experiences, this initial evaluation indicated that the two variables have a positive correlation. As a nation implements ECEC policies, its rate of female labor force participation increases. Yet, the existence of ECEC policies is not enough. It is rather the intention behind these policies that makes them successful enough to increase female labor force participation. This can be seen in the divide between ECEC opportunities under and over three years of age, as the Barcelona Objectives note as well. Ultimately, ECEC opportunities for under-3s are known to serve as evidence of a more thorough ECEC system. In nations that have at minimum 33% of under-3s enrolled in ECEC facilities—a percentage that reflects effective ECEC policies at work—there is a more notable increase in female labor force participation, as is true of Spain and Sweden. Meanwhile, nations that are within a few points of this benchmark have some effectiveness, but without the same

degree of positive influence on female labor force participation. This is characteristic of the German experience. The final set of nations are those that have ECEC policies, but do not have a percentage of under-3s that is close to the 33% benchmark, like Italy. In making this distinction, it became evident that nations with more access to ECEC opportunities for under-3s have experienced more increase in their rates of female labor force participation. As a result, this affirmed the hypothesis of the investigation.

In an effort to further confirm this notion, I then evaluated the dependent variable of the investigation in relation to a series of control variables. The first of these are the male labor force participation rate, the ratio of female to male labor force participation rate, the fertility rate, life expectancy at birth, and the percentage of the labor force with advanced education. For each variable, I determined the Pearson coefficient to better evaluate their correlation. While several did have strong correlations with the female labor force participation rate, such as their life expectancies at birth, none were significant enough to serve as an alternative explanation for the increase in female labor force participation that I first attributed to the implementation of ECEC policies. This served as further evidence of support for the hypothesis of the investigation, as no other demographic control variable contested it.

I then evaluated the dependent variable in relation to two alternative work-family reconciliation policies: paid leave for new parents and cash transfer benefits. Each unit of evaluation had implemented these policies in addition to ECEC policies. Yet, neither of these alternative policies proved to be adequate explanations for the increase in female labor force participation we saw in each nation. In Spain, for example, paid leave for new parents is a new phenomenon that does not explain the increase in female labor force participation the nation experienced prior to the 2000s. It also does not offer extensive cash transfer benefits, but this

increase in female labor force participation persists. For this and other reasons, these alternative policies were not shown to have the effectiveness that ECEC policies do. This again supported the hypothesis of the investigation.

To complement this information, I ended the investigation with a qualitative evaluation. I circulated and collected a multiple-choice questionnaire to Spanish residents, inquiring about their experiences with the state ECEC opportunities. Overall, the respondents were satisfied with the preschool there, and found it to be accessible as well. While the questionnaire respondents do not serve as a complete picture of the experience in Spain, it does seem that the ECEC opportunities available to them have allowed for increased female labor force participation in their lives. This confirms the results of the quantitative investigation, supporting the notion that the implementation of ECEC policies in a nation does increase its female labor force participation once more. I thus conclude that it holds true.

Still, the investigation is not without its limitations. This is true of the questionnaire, for one. As I used the snowball technique, I was not able to circulate the questionnaire as much as I would have liked. This resulted in a skewed number of students responding to it, rather than parents. It also gave me respondents that were more educated than the average 100 Spanish citizens. If I were to continue with the investigation, I would address this issue, as well as ask more questions.

Of more significance to the investigation were the difficulties that arose in efforts to isolate ECEC policies from other policies that can have similar outcomes, such as an increase in female labor force participation. While I evaluated alternative work-family reconciliation policies, the time constraints of the investigation did not allow me to explore them as much as I would have liked. In truth, further evaluation of these policies could only strengthen this investigation.

If I were to continue with this investigation, I would like to expand it to include more than the four Member States I selected for evaluation here. More specifically, I would evaluate the other six nations evaluated in the WILCO project, as financed by the European Union. These nations are: Croatia, France, the Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. With their inclusion, I believe this investigation could offer a more complete picture of the manner in which ECEC policies affect female labor force participation in the European Union. The evaluation of Poland and Croatia would be of particular note, as the current investigation does not reflect the scenario in eastern Europe at all. As a result, this continuation would offer more insight into the policies that help dual-role women step foot into the labor force. Nonetheless, the current investigation has still proven to execute its original aims. In doing so, it was overall a successful one.

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