ESA26

17th CONFERENCE

WARSAW

25-28 AUGUST 2026

PROGRAMME

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACIES:
SOCIAL ACTION, SOLIDARITY,
AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

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PTS POLISH SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

UKSW CARDINAL STEFAN WYSZYŃSKI UNIVERSITY IN WARSAW

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Decision-Making" Research Group. Her research within this project addresses key contemporary issues, including access to fertility treatments, contraceptive practices, and attitudes toward adoption by same-sex couples, as well as single motherhood by choice and pet parenting.

SP12 - The double paradox of work and care in times of transformation

28 Aug 2026 | 9:00 - 10:30| D0 A2
Organised by RN13 Sociology of Family and Intimate Lives and RN26 Sociology of Social Policy and Social Welfare
Coordination and Chairs: Martin Gurin (Bar-Ilan University, Israel), Pedro Manuel Romero Balsas (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain), Katarzyna Suwada (Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland)

One of the central tensions in contemporary gender relations is a "double paradox." Women's mass entry into the labour market marks a profound social shift, yet their disproportionate care responsibilities continue to push many into part-time or temporary withdrawal—an exit normalized but still devalued. Meanwhile, ideals of involved fatherhood have gained legitimacy, with more men wishing to take leave or reduce hours, yet their withdrawal from paid work is blocked by workplace norms, economic pressures and policy design. Thus, gender inequality persists on both fronts: women remain penalized in employment, while men's care involvement remains exceptional rather than routine.

This paradox is unfolding against a backdrop of broader societal transformations that may reconfigure its contours. Digitalisation, automation or remote work could open new avenues for paternal involvement but also threaten to displace women into precarious forms of employment. Demographic ageing intensifies the demand for care, potentially normalising men's role while simultaneously compounding women's cumulative burden. Ecological transitions may alter work rhythms in ways that redistribute family time, while global migration regimes displace inequalities onto migrant care workers.

This plenary will explore how sociology can critically engage with these developments. *How do current transformations in technology, demography, ecology and migration reshape the contradictions of work, care and gender? How prepared welfare states are to deal with the implications of these broader transformations?*By engaging these issues, this plenary invites reflection on the futures of work, care and gender equality in times of transformation.



Judy Wajcman (London School of Economics)

The Automation Charade: Work, Care, and Connectivity

At the core of every technological transformation is the promise that automation will save time. And temporality is, after all, key to discussions of work-life balance. Indeed, many economists and sociologists have argued that it is precisely the time-saving properties of domestic technologies that freed women to enter the labour force. Advances in technology have transformed the work that goes on in the household as well as the world of paid work. In both spheres, considerable optimism has attached to the possibility that technology will provide the solution to time-consuming drudgery.

While digitalisation has not delivered, will AI and robotics finally solve this dilemma? In this talk I will examine the cultural imaginaries around the digital home and the workplace, showing how they reflect the mindset of their designers for whom technology is the solution to all social problems. I will argue that software developers treat time as an individual resource that must be optimised, valorising efficiency over care, connectivity and other measures of impact.

As a result, matters of care and the affective tasks related to communication and the production of sociability are systematically excluded as forms of 'unproductive' work. This is not meant to imply that we should reject technology; but rather to acknowledge that the 'ethic' of care as performed in everyday embodied practices cannot be codified into procedural algorithms. The promise of AI assistants providing us all with a personalised servant-butler that solves work-life pressures is an automation charade.

Biography

Judy Wajcman is an Emeritus Professor at the London School of Economics, where she held the Anthony Giddens Chair in Sociology. At the Alan Turing Institute (2019-

2025) she led the Women in Data Science and Artificial Intelligence research project. Professor Wajcman's scholarly interests encompass the sociology of work and employment, science and technology studies, gender theory, temporality, and organisational analysis. She has held numerous visiting fellowships, including the 1212Mellon Fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University. For the 2025-2026 academic year she was a Fellow at the Institute of Advanced Study, Princeton. Her books include *The Social Shaping of Technology*, *TechnoFeminism*, and *Pressed for Time: The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism*, which was awarded Ludwik Fleck prize by the Society for the Social Studies of Science. Her most recent article is entitled: 'Venture capital as male-lens investing', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 2026.

Anna Matysiak (University of Warsaw)

The Care Paradox for Men: Fatherhood, Gender and Career Penalties

The "gender revolution" framework posited that rising female labour force participation would be followed by increasing male involvement in unpaid care, ultimately fostering gender equality both in the labour market and within the household. While the first phase has largely materialised, the second remains incomplete. Men's participation in childcare and housework has increased only slowly and unevenly, and recent evidence even suggests stagnation, or even a retraditionalisation of attitudes toward men's caregiving roles among younger cohorts.

In this talk, I argue that men's greater involvement in care remains low because it clashes with deeply ingrained social norms regarding gender-appropriate behaviours. These normative expectations make behavioural change difficult, even when policies formally encourage it. Drawing on recent experimental evidence, I demonstrate that men are penalised for even short care-related career interruptions. These penalties are not driven by human capital depreciation as the economic theory would predict; rather, they result from violations of the "ideal worker" norm and gender norms that demand uninterrupted availability and continue to frame care as primarily feminine.

This evidence reveals a critical paradox: while increased paternal involvement could reduce the "motherhood penalty" and eliminate barriers to childbearing by easing women's work-family conflict, it simultaneously exposes men to significant career penalties. I conclude by discussing how stigma and deeply ingrained norms—which diverge from the rational decision-making and human capital assumptions of

standard economic theory—suppress fertility and curtail opportunities for fathers' meaningful involvement in their children's lives.

Biography



Anna Matysiak is a family demographer and economist whose research focuses on family and fertility change, gender relations, and the interconnections between family dynamics and labour market transformations. Her work examines how the transformations in the labour market affect family behaviours, including childbearing, and how they are moderated by gender norms and family policies. She has also extensively studied gender inequalities in the labour market and how they are shaped by technological change. She is Full Professor at the Faculty of Economic Sciences, University of Warsaw, where she founded the Interdisciplinary Centre for Labour Market and Family Dynamics (LABFAM). She is currently Principal Investigator of the ERC Consolidator Grant Globalization- and Technology-Driven Labour Market Change and Fertility (LABFER), Vice-President of the European Association for Population Studies, and Editor-in-Chief of Demographic Research. Anna received her PhD in Economics in 2009 from the Warsaw School of Economics. She was also trained in demography at the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research and previously held research positions at the Warsaw School of Economics and the Vienna Institute of Demography. Her work has been recognised with the Dirk J. van de Kaa Award for Social Demography from the European Association for Population Studies in 2018 and the main Award of the Foundation for Polish Science in 2025.

Conference Agenda

Session

RN13_T05_03: Fatherhood II

Time: **Thursday, 27/Aug/2026: 2:30pm - 4:00pm** *Location:* **E2 01 | SGGW**
Session Chair: **Katarzyna Suwada**, Nicolaus Copernicus University

Presentations

From Cash to Care? Breadwinning, Welfare Familisation, and the Non-Linear Transformation of Fatherhood in China

Haoyue Tan
University College London, United Kingdom

This paper examines the puzzle of why a widely theorised shift from ‘cash to care’ has not been reflected in contemporary Chinese fatherhood. In Western scholarship, this shift has been associated with the receding breadwinner model and the rise of ‘new’ fatherhood. While 'involved' and 'intimate' fatherhood have progressively acquired normative salience, breadwinning consistently serves as a moral boundary of paternal adequacy across various social groups.

The analysis draws on qualitative fieldwork conducted in Chongqing, a megacity in southwest China, including semi-structured interviews with 23 cohabiting couples and supplementary interviews with parents from urban middle-class millennial families. The findings demonstrate an additive layering of paternal responsibilities: care, presence, and emotional involvement are increasingly expected, while economic provision persists. Fathers are enduringly held responsible for securing family well-being over time, with breadwinning extended as labour oriented towards both present family life and the anticipation and buffering of future risks related to children’s education, health, and housing availability.

The paper situates these discourses and practices within a familial welfare regime shaped by marketisation, privatisation, and welfare retrenchment. Drawing on Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s concept of institutionalised individualism, this analysis understands post-reform transformations as a systematic relocation of risks and responsibilities from state-led institutions and into the realm of families and individuals. This relocation gives rise to 'biographical solutions to systemic contradictions'. From a Polanyian perspective, post-reform socialist marketisation has disembedded individuals from institutional welfare protection while re-embedding social reproduction within families, rendering intimate and intergenerational relations the primary arena for managing risk and uncertainty. In this sense, welfare has not been replaced by the market but offloaded through it.

Within this structural context, the paper argues that Confucian masculinity constitutes one moral repertoire selectively mobilised to make sense of and legitimise intensified breadwinning responsibilities under conditions of welfare scarcity. By linking everyday fathering practices to institutionalised individualism and political–economic re-embedding, the paper rethinks intensive fatherhood as a non-linear transformation. Rather than a transition from breadwinning to caring, contemporary fatherhood is characterised by the moral intensification of economic provision alongside care, where earning becomes a central form of moral and relational labour.

Becoming Stay-at-Home Fathers in Urban China: Entry Pathways and Meaning-Making

Xu Wang
University of Glasgow, United Kingdom

A small but growing number of urban Chinese men have become stay-at-home fathers (SAHFs), yet existing research on fatherhood in China has focused largely on breadwinning expectations, shifting gender norms, or quantitative measures of father involvement. How men experience and make sense of full-time caregiving within everyday family life remains underexplored. This paper asks: through what pathways do men come to adopt caregiving roles, and how do they construct meaning around what they do?

Drawing on in-depth qualitative interviews with SAHFs and their spouses in urban China—conducted separately, with follow-up interviews three to four months later—this study adopts a multi-perspectival approach to examine how caregiving arrangements are negotiated within households. Informed by intersectionality scholarship (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000), the analysis traces both entry pathways and strategies of meaning-making, attending to how these are shaped by class position, employment trajectories, and intergenerational resources.

Findings reveal four distinct entry pathways: passive drift following industry decline, pragmatic response to household economics, pandemic-induced disruption, and deliberate choice enabled by financial security. Yet similar pathways do not produce uniform experiences. Fathers draw on inherited models, compensatory motivations, and life-stage narratives to render caregiving meaningful—though such resources are unequally distributed. Class shapes not only who can become a SAHF, but also which interpretive frameworks for meaning-making are available and which leave fathers struggling to articulate the value of what they do.

By showing how structural position shapes not only who becomes a caregiver but also who can make sense of caregiving as valuable, this study speaks to broader questions about the uneven cultural resources available for reimagining gender. It reveals care as a site where gender, class, and intergenerational relations are actively—and unequally—renegotiated. And it positions urban China as a critical site for understanding how masculinity and care are being reworked in rapidly changing societies.

Fathers' Involvement between Family Solidarity and Democratic Sustainability: A focus on Italian leave policies

Maria Letizia Bosoni[1], **Sara Mazzucchelli**[2]
1: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano, Italy; 2: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano, Italy

Men’s involvement as fathers constitutes a key indicator of changing gender norms, intergenerational solidarity, and the sustainability of family relationships. This contribution examines fathers' involvement, with particular attention to the impact of paternity leave on care practices and shared parental responsibility. The literature highlights that paternal involvement in childcare is associated with positive outcomes for children’s well-being, the quality of family relationships, and coparenting, contributing to a more equitable distribution of care within the family. In this context, paternity leave emerges as a fundamental institutional mechanism for supporting father’s involvement and strengthening family solidarity. However, the effectiveness of paternity leave policies is strongly shaped by cultural, organizational and symbolic factors, including the persistence of traditional models of masculinity and the limited social legitimation of fathers as caregivers. In recent years, Italy has made significant strides in its policies surrounding paternal leave, reflecting broader societal recognition of the importance of involving fathers in childcare. This presentation aims to briefly illustrate the path made in recent years by Italian leave policies as related to fathers, analyzing the impact of policies and interventions on the well-being of families through the FamILens® model, developed by the Family Studies and Research University Centre of the Catholic University of Milan on the basis of the Family Impact Lens,

elaborated by the Family Impact Institute in Us. Space will also be devoted to the analysis of utilization rates to better understand what may be hindering or facilitating factors. The presentation argues that inclusive and well-supported paternity leave policies should be understood not only as work–family reconciliation tools, but as central levers for building more resilient families and socially sustainable futures. In conclusion, fatherhood is conceptualized as a key arena for the democratization of family life, with direct implications for social cohesion and the strengthening of democratic societies.

Fathers' Use of Birth Leave in Spain After It Became Equal to and Non-Transferable with Mothers' Leave

Pedro Romero-Balsas, Gerardo Meil
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain

Since 2017, child-care leave policy in Spain has increasingly been framed as a gender-equality policy under the principle of "equal and non-transferable leave" for mothers and fathers. Birth and child-care leave for both parents was extended to 16 weeks in 2021 (19 weeks from August 2025), compared with just 2 weeks for fathers in 2016.

Given the rapid expansion of these labour rights, this study asks whether all fathers after 2021 have used their full legal entitlement and whether they have done so in ways that foster greater sharing of care.

We draw on the online survey QUIDAN 2, designed by the authors and administered by the polling company Netquest in June 2025. The survey aims to identify patterns in the use of child-care leave and other work–family balance measures. The sample includes 3,149 Spanish-speaking respondents with children under seven.

The survey shows that take-up of birth leave among fathers is widespread: 90% have used it, the same proportion as mothers. However, 20% did not take the full entitlement, mostly using only the compulsory period. Partial use is associated with self-employment, informal work, employment in the private sector, small firms (under 50 employees), and supervisory positions. Overall, the reform appears highly successful —especially compared with countries such as Germany and South Korea—reflecting both changing gender norms and policy design. Nevertheless, only 45% of fathers split their leave, and just 29% used part of it after mothers returned to paid work, limiting its transformative potential for gender relations.

Conference Agenda

Session

RN13_T01_01: Gender Roles in Parenting

Time: **Wednesday, 26/Aug/2026: 11:00am - 12:30pm** *Location:* **E0 01 | SGGW**
Session Chair: **Inga Lass**, The University of Melbourne

Presentations

Night-time Care as Gendered Work: Gender Roles and Responsibilities in Sleep Training Guidebooks

Jenny Säilävaara[1], Katherine Twamley[2], Petteri Eerola[1]
1: University of Jyväskylä, Finland; 2: University College London, United Kingdom

Night-time infant care represents a critical yet understudied dimension of gendered care work within families. While the gender division of household labour has received considerable scholarly attention, the invisible work of nocturnal caregiving remains largely unexamined. This paper explores how parental gender roles and responsibilities are constructed and reinforced through sleep training literature, focusing specifically on night-time care practices.

Drawing on discursive methods to analyse eight sleep training guides (four from Finland, four from Britain), this study asks: How are parental gender roles and responsibilities reflected in sleep training guides for parents of young children? Sleep training guides explicitly address the organisation of night-time care, work that disrupts sleep, affects employment capacity, and requires negotiation between partners.

The analysis examines whether these guides explicitly construct mothers and fathers as having different responsibilities, or whether gendered divisions emerge implicitly. While both Finnish and British guides increasingly employ gender-neutral language, implicit assumptions about maternal primary responsibility persist, particularly in relation to night-time soothing practices. Particular attention is paid to factors shaping gendered care arrangements, such as breastfeeding practices and family policies, which differ significantly between Finland and Britain.

This research contributes to understanding how expert and popular discourses may perpetuate or challenge gender inequalities in care work. The comparative approach reveals how different national contexts, with varying parental leave policies and gender equality norms, produce distinct patterns in the discursive construction of nocturnal care responsibilities.

Gendered Night-time Care: A Comparative Analysis of Parents' Narratives in Finland, the UK, and Spain

Erika Grigorjew[1], Katherine Twamley[2], Pedro Romero Balsas[3], Armi Mustosmäki[4], Petteri Eerola[1]
1: University of Jyväskylä, Finland; 2: University College London, United Kingdom; 3: Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain; 4: University of Eastern Finland, Finland

In this study, we explore the gendered nature of night-time care through a narrative analysis of parents' interviews conducted in Finland, the UK, and Spain. Our research question examines narratives of gendered night-time care produced by parents across three different national contexts characterised by different family policy regimes and parenting cultures. We are interested in both country-specific patterns and cross-national similarities in the parents' narratives. The paper relates to the theme Gender division of work within couples.

Theoretically, our study draws on sociology of sleep, feminist care ethics and parenting culture studies. We understand night-time care as relational practices connected to and reflecting social, cultural and gendered structures. We conducted individual in-depth interviews in three socially, culturally and politically distinct countries: Finland (N=27), the UK (N=26) and Spain (N=21). Participants were mothers and fathers of young children with various backgrounds, having at least one child aged 2 or under. At the time of study, all participants were living either in a mixed-sex or same-sex couple relationship.

According to our preliminary findings, parents' narratives across all three country contexts were gendered: Mothers described carrying a greater share of care, particularly during periods of breastfeeding, as well as more emotional and cognitive labour during late evenings and nights. Yet, there was considerable variation in how night-time care was constructed and the ways that gender was mobilized to account for these differences, pointing to the gendered nature of night-time care intersecting with and going beyond national policy and cultural difference.

The Gendered Division of Labour in Childcare: Exploring the Myth of Paternal Involvement

Wiktoria Bachorek, Marta Bryzek
SGH Warsaw School of Economics, Poland

This study examines the division of childcare between men and women in modern relationships, exposing the persistent gap between the ideal of gender equality and the reality of traditional roles. Despite the growing discourse around involved fatherhood, research indicates that childcare remains highly gendered. While many fathers express willingness to be actively engaged, their participation often centres on play and leisure rather than the daily, time-intensive tasks associated with childcare. These patterns are not purely the result of personal choices but are shaped by deeply embedded societal expectations regarding gender roles.

Previous findings from the first round of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS-I) reveal that while fathers contribute to household labour, their involvement in direct childcare remains limited. Although some European countries exhibit progress towards more equal parenting, traditional norms continue to reinforce the caregiving burden placed on mothers.

Using GGS-II data from 13 European countries, this research highlights significant cross-national variation in childcare practices. The sample includes respondents aged 18-49 living with a different-sex partner and at least one child in the household. Women overwhelmingly take responsibility for essential caregiving duties, such as dressing children, putting them to bed, and caring for them when they are ill. Fathers, in contrast, are more likely to engage in recreational activities with their children rather than in the routine and often invisible labour of childcare.

Taken together, the data reveal a consistent pattern: although egalitarian ideals of parenting have advanced in discourse and policy, everyday childcare remains highly gendered, becoming even more unequal when children require physical or emotional care.

While policy initiatives encouraging paternal involvement have led to some improvements, they have yet to produce a fundamental cultural shift. Achieving genuine gender equality in childcare requires a deeper societal transformation that challenges entrenched norms and redistributes caregiving responsibilities more equitably.

Who Cares For A Sick Child? The Role Of Job Characteristics In Germany

Ayhan Adams, Anna Lotte Klennert, Katrin Golsch

Osnabrück University, Germany

This work examines how job characteristics determine the couple's division of sick child care. Thus far, research on the gendered division of domestic labour has predominantly focused on steady parenting chores (cf. Steinbach & Schulz 2022). Here, caring for a sick child is unique as it is both common and unpredictable. Furthermore, it can be emotionally taxing, cannot be deferred, and typically requires direct involvement from parents. The gender division of sick child care, therefore, highlights a relevant gap in the research. From a resource perspective, job characteristics can make it easier or harder to take on caregiving responsibilities. Therefore, the question arises as to whether and which characteristics influence how care for a sick child is distributed in two-parent households. Using dyadic survey data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (2010–2022), OLS and fixed-effects regression analyses examine how job characteristics shape mothers' relative share of absence days for sick child care. OLS models link mothers' income and working hours to lower shares, and fathers' income and working hours to higher shares. Fixed effects, however, point only to a negative association of fathers' income. Overall, the results indicate that between-couple differences and within-couple changes can yield different conclusions about how job characteristics relate to the division of sick child care.

References

Steinbach, A., & Schulz, F. (2022). Stability and change in German parents' childcare patterns across two decades. Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society, 29(2), 428-445. https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxab017