

# Partners' relative incomes and fertility intentions

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## **Motivation**

Couples with women as the sole or main income provider today represent a non-negligible share of all couples in Europe (Vitali and Mendola 2014; Klesment and Van Bavel 2015). The changing role of women as main income providers for their families marks a gender revolution which is unprecedented and as such could have an impact on the couples' fertility decisions. However, the influence of gender-related factors in shaping reproductive decision-making has been so far under-investigated e.g. by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 1991) and the Traits-Desires-Intentions-Behaviour Theory (Miller 2011).

This paper aims at investigating whether there is an association between fertility intentions and the share of the household income provided by the female partner.

## **Background and Hypotheses**

Previous findings have shown that men who hold a conservative masculine ideology tend to suffer from depression symptoms, have a low wellbeing when out-earned by their partner (Coughlin and Wade 2012) and have a higher likelihood of cheating (Munsch 2015), all factors which may be negatively associated with fertility intentions. Also, female-breadwinner couples tend to have lower marital quality and higher risk of union dissolution with respect to couples in other earning arrangements (Brennan et al. 2001; Cooke 2006), again suggesting a negative association with fertility intentions. Finally, it is important to reflect on the drivers into the female-breadwinner arrangement. Women, in fact, can become the main income provider for their household because of their competitive advantage or higher earning potential with respect to their partner, or because of economic necessity driven e.g. by the partner's unemployment status (Drago et al. 2005). These two couple types may be characterized by different income profiles which, in turn can be associated with different fertility plans, with the first type of couple being more likely to intend having a child in the near future than the second type (direct income effect). Also, we expect the first couple type to be more likely to hold gender-egalitarian attitudes than the second type and hence to be more likely to intend having a child. On the basis of previous findings on female-breadwinner couples we expect the association between short-term fertility intentions and the share of the household income provided by the female partner to be negative.

European countries differ in terms of the woman's contribution to the household income and in terms of the drivers behind the emergence of female-breadwinners. Hence, we expect to find heterogeneity in the association between fertility intentions and couple types across countries.

## Data and Methods

We use data for 28 countries from the European Social Survey, round 2 (2004/05) and 5 (2010/11). We refer to the sub sample of women aged between 18 and 45 years, currently co-residing with a heterosexual spouse or partner and such that none of the partners is retired or disabled. The final sample is constituted of about 12,000 women. Our dependent variable is based on the survey question "Do you intend to have a child in the next three years?". Answers "Definitely yes" and "Probably yes" identify the intention to have a child. We use logistic regression model on the probability of intending to have a child in the next three years, our main independent variable being the couple's income arrangement. This variable measures the share the household income provided by the female partner and is based on the survey question: "Around how large a proportion of the household income do you provide yourself?". We identify three couple types: female breadwinners, i.e. she provides all, over a half or a very large share of household income; male breadwinners, i.e. she provides none, very small or under a half; equal earners, i.e. both partners provides about the same share.

## Preliminary Results

According to ESS data, female-breadwinner couples are especially widespread in Cyprus, Slovenia, Luxembourg, UK and Denmark, while they represent only less than 10% of all couples in Italy, Croatia, Ukraine, Czech Republic and Slovakia (Fig. 1).

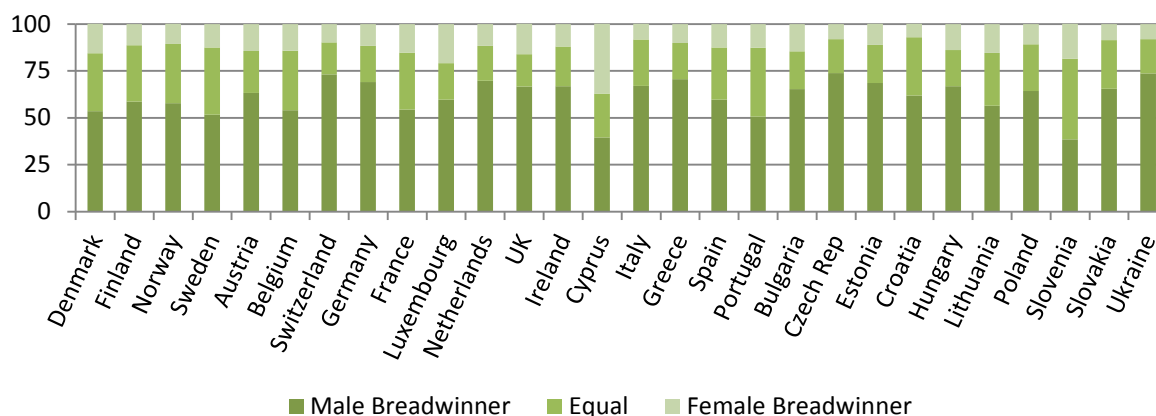
In the majority of countries, female-breadwinner women hold the most gender egalitarian attitudes among the three couple types. However, in several Eastern- and Southern-European countries, a high percentage of female breadwinners agree that men should have more right to jobs than women, when jobs are scarce (Fig. 2). This result suggests that being a female breadwinner is not necessarily a choice but may be driven by economic necessity. In fact, women in female-breadwinner couples are more likely to report experiencing financial difficulties with respect to other couple types in most Eastern-European countries. In the remaining countries, women in both female- and male-breadwinner couples tend to report experiencing financial difficulties more frequently than equal earners (Fig. 3).

Among childless women, the female breadwinners are, on average, less likely to intend having a child in the near future compared to women in other couple types in the majority of countries, (Fig. 4, left panel). There are, however, some exceptions: childless female breadwinners are more likely to intend having a child in the Southern European countries (except for Greece), Switzerland, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Poland. Women in male-breadwinner couples are more likely to intend having a child in the Scandinavian countries, Luxembourg, Greece, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia and Ukraine. Among women with one or more children, instead, the pattern is very robust across countries: female breadwinners are more likely to intend having a child compared to women who contribute the same or a lower share of the household income with respect to their partners.

We conclude that, contrary to the expectations drawn from previous studies, women who contribute more income than their partners not necessarily have lower fertility intentions if compared to women who contribute an equal or a lower share, or do not contribute any income.

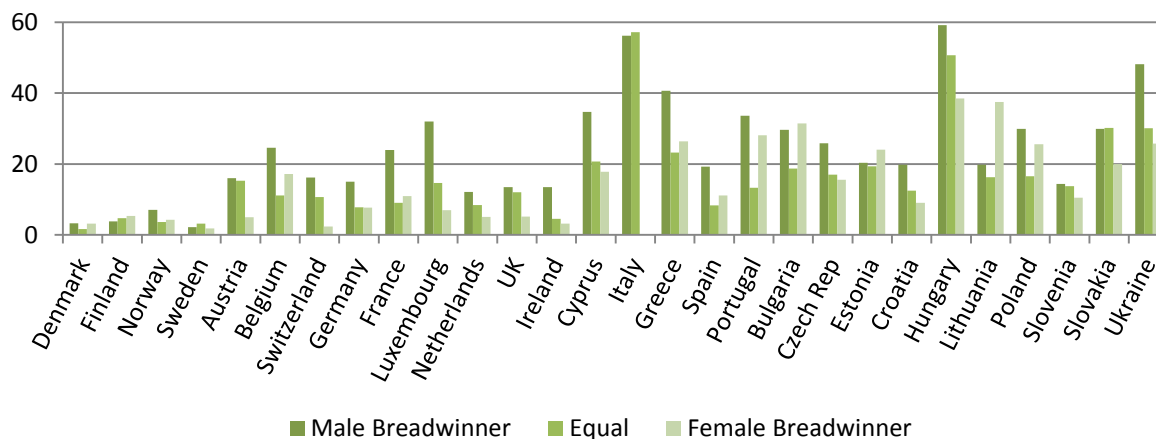
In the final version of the paper we will emphasize country differences in the association between couple types and fertility intentions in terms of social policies and country-specific gender-egalitarian norms.

**Fig. 1: Distribution of couple types across European countries**



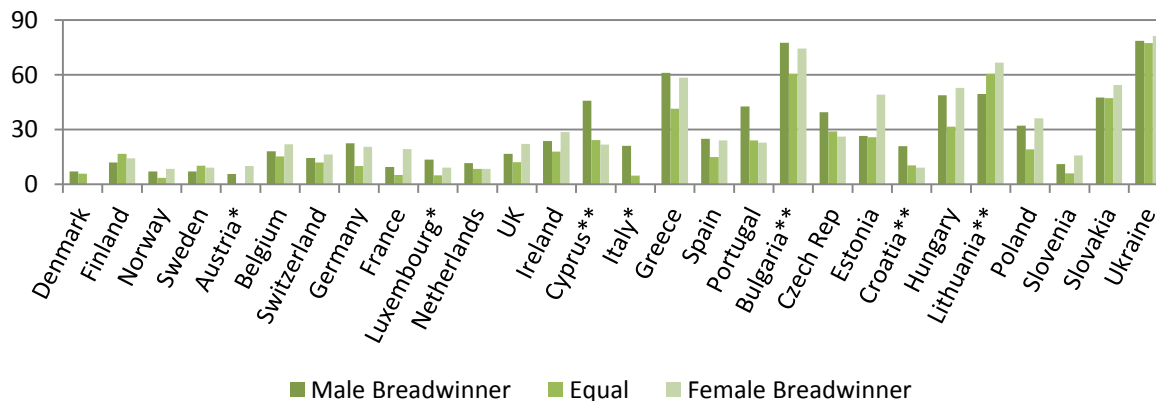
Note. ESS rounds 2004/2005 and 2010/2011.

**Fig. 2: % Agreeing/strongly agreeing that men should have more right to jobs when jobs are scarce**



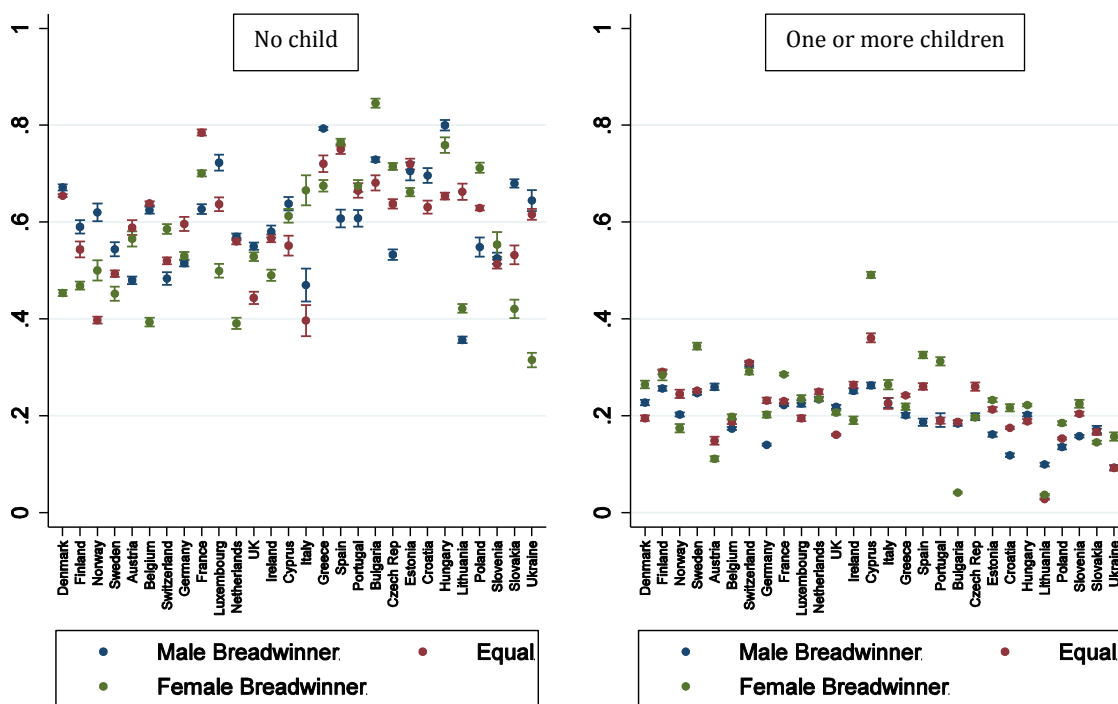
Note. ESS rounds 2004/2005 and 2010/2011.

**Fig. 3: % Finding it difficult/very difficult to manage on their household's income**



Note. ESS rounds 2004/2005 and 2010/2011. \* Data available only for 2004/2005.. \*\* Data available only for 2010/2011

**Fig. 4: Predicted Probabilities of intending to have a child by family type, with 95% CIs**



**Note.** Predicted probabilities from logistic regression models, separate models for childless women (left) and women with 1+ children (right). Pooled model for ESS rounds 2004/2005 and 2010/2011. Independent variables: couple type, country, couple type \* country, age, age<sup>2</sup>, woman’s education (low, medium, high).

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