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Published in:

Advances in Life Course Research

Publication status and date:

Published: 01/01/2016

DOI (link to publisher):

[10.1016/j.alcr.2015.12.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2015.12.002)

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for the published version (APA):

Gauthier, A.H., Emery, T., & Bartova, A. (2016). The labour market intentions and behaviour of stay-at-home mothers in Western and Eastern Europe. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 30, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2015.12.002>

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The labour market intentions and behaviour of stay-at-home mothers in Western and Eastern Europe



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 26 February 2015

Received in revised form 15 December 2015

Accepted 17 December 2015

Available online 4 January 2016

Keywords:

Female employment

Homemaker

Work intention

Theory of planned behaviour

ABSTRACT

Despite recent increases in female labour force participation across Europe, a non-negligible proportion of women continue to remain out of the labour force for short or longer periods of time. Among the six countries included in this paper, stay-at-home mothers represent on average 33% of all mothers with children under the age of 12. Using two waves of data from the Generations and Gender Survey, we examine cross-national differences in the labour market intentions and behaviour of stay-at-home mothers. In particular, we ask the questions of what individual- and societal-level factors influence stay-at-home mothers' intention to join the labour force, and what factors allow (or prevent) them from realizing their intentions. The results reveal that traditional personal attitudes towards working mothers deter stay-at-home mothers from intending to join the labour force. Moreover, such traditional personal attitudes, combined with financial security, further boost mothers' realization of negative work intention (i.e. the intention to stay at home). We also found some evidence of the role of societal context but only in the realization of negative intention.

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1. Introduction

In all industrialized countries, the labour force participation rate of women has increased rapidly over the past decades. It nonetheless continues to stand below that of men: among adults aged 45–54 years old, the labour force participation rate of women was 72% in OECD countries in 2014, compared to 92% for men (OECD, 2015). Moreover, women in most countries continue to have a discontinuous pattern of employment over their life-course resulting in substantial income loss (Gash, 2009; Sigle-Rushton & Waldfogel, 2007). To support and encourage an increased participation of women in the labour market, governments in most countries have adopted various work-family reconciliation policies in recent decades. Despite these, major obstacles to maternal employment nonetheless persist (Mills et al., 2014).

The determinants of female employment forms a vast body of literature ranging from single-country studies to multi-country ones, some using a cross-sectional design others a longitudinal one (e.g. Fortin, 2005; Haas, Steiber, Hartel, & Wallace, 2006; Kangas & Rostgaard, 2007; Uunk, Kalmijn, & Muffels, 2005; Steiber & Haas,

2009, 2012). In general, these studies have been pointing to two broad explanations for female employment: individual-level factors (including age and number of children, education, and attitudes), and macro-level factors (including policies to support working parents) (Van der Lippe, 2002). For example, multi-country studies have revealed large differences across countries in women's labour force participation and have provided evidence regarding the determining influence of family policies and welfare regimes (e.g. Anxo, Fagan, Cebrian, & Moreno, 2007; Gustafsson, Wetzels, Vlasblom, & Dex, 1996; Del Boca, Pasqua, & Pronzato, 2009; Van Damme, Kalmijn, & Uunk, 2009).

This prior literature has examined the determinants of labour force participation of all women, or that of all mothers, or has focused on the specific case of the determinants of return to work after childbirth. In this paper, we instead focus on the case of stay-at-home mothers and focus on their dynamic labour market behaviour by analysing longitudinally their labour market intention (at wave 1) and the realization of these intentions (by wave 2). Our motivation for focusing on this subgroup of mothers is especially driven by the fact that by having been out of the labour market for the medium or long term, stay-at-home mothers have severed, to a great extent, their links with the labour market and may consequently face large difficulties when trying to re-enter employment. Moreover, and as shown in the paper, this is also a

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subgroup of mothers whose decision to remain out of the labour force is driven by deep personal views about working mothers and what is best for children. In turn, these views likely make them resilient, to a large degree, to various governmental measures aimed at increasing women's labour force participation.

Our definition of stay-at-home mothers takes a broad approach in capturing mothers who are currently not employed and have been in this situation for a minimum of 12 months. In contrast to the recent study by Cohn, Livingston, & Wang (2014) we however exclude from our sample mothers who self-declared being students or disabled in an attempt at capturing those who could potentially be able to go back to work. More precisely, we define our category of stay-at-home mothers as those who self-declared being a homemaker, or unemployed, or being on maternity or parental leave but without a job to go back to and whom – in all three cases – have been out of the labour market for a minimum of 12 months (further information on our definition is provided in Section 3). Instead of defining our sample by reference to a specific employment status (e.g. homemaker), we thus adopt a labour market perspective in focusing on a diverse population of mothers who find themselves outside of employment for extended periods of time (Andersson, Kreyenfeld, & Mika, 2014; Grose, 2013).

By using a longitudinal design and drawing from the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the main questions asked in this paper are two-fold: (a) what are the individual- and societal-level determinants of stay-at-home mothers' intentions to join (or not) the labour market in the near future? And (b) what factors appear to be allowing (or preventing) stay-at-home mothers from subsequently realizing their intentions? Our data come from the first two waves of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) for six countries: three Western European countries (Austria, France, Germany) and three Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, Georgia, and Hungary). In contrast to most cross-national studies of female employment, the GGS design allows us to examine prospective changes in the labour market situation of mothers during a three-year time period.

The paper is structured as follows. We first contextualize our study by providing a brief review of the literature on stay-at-home mothers followed by a presentation of our main theoretical framework and related hypotheses. We then move to a presentation of the data and methods, followed by the results of the data analysis. The paper concludes with a discussion of the results and their policy implications.

2. Background and theoretical perspectives

While being a stay-at-home mother was very common in Western Europe until the 1970s, the rapid increase in female labour force participation in the last decades of the 20th century has totally changed the situation (Ganguli, Hausman, & Viarengo, 2014). From a highly accepted and desirable 'choice', being a stay-at-home mother today has instead come to be perceived as going slightly against the grain although with large variations across countries (Grunow, Hofmeister, & Buchholz, 2006; Paré & Dillaway, 2005). For the majority of stay-at-home mothers in contemporary Western Europe, being out of the labour market is therefore a temporary situation while the children are young or are still in school (Anxo et al., 2007). The case of Eastern Europe differs considerably where under Communism the participation of women in the labour force was strongly encouraged (Pollert, 2003). Being a stay-at-home mother was therefore not in line with party politics and various governmental measures, including state-provided childcare, were instead in place to support the model of 'mother-worker' (Kocourková, 2002; Ferber, 1994; Macura, 1974). Since the end of the Communist era, women's financial need to be in paid employment has remained but the opportunities and

support to do so have faltered to a large extent (Pascall & Manning, 2000; Fodor & Kispeter, 2014). Some authors refer to this transition as a 'backlash' or re-familialisation process that is characterised mainly by the significant extension of parental leaves and closure of numerous daycare facilities particularly for children under the age of 3 (Ádnanes, 2001; Pascall & Manning, 2000; Saxonberg & Sirovátka, 2007; Saxonberg & Szelewa, 2007). In Eastern Europe, although still temporary, being a stay-at-home mother often takes a longer-term character (Thévenon & Solaz, 2013).

When it comes to the demographic characteristics of stay-at-home mothers, what we know is that they tend to be younger, have a lower level of education, and a low income (Kitterød & Rønsen, 2013; Cohn et al., 2014). Beyond these averages, there is however much heterogeneity among this subgroup of mothers. In particular, recent studies have drawn attention to the so-called 'opting out mothers' which refers to professional and highly educated mothers withdrawing from the labour market for the sake of their children (Still, 2006). Studies on this particular group of stay-at-home mothers have however revealed that this is not only a very small phenomenon (Kitterød & Rønsen, 2013), but that these highly educated mothers experience a large ambivalence and highly emotional situation when deciding to withdraw from the labour market (Stone & Lovejoy, 2004; Rubin & Wooten, 2007). In general, stay-at-home mothers are also usually characterized as being more traditional in terms of their attitudes towards gender roles and as holding negative views regarding non-parental childcare (Reid Boyd, 2002; Crowley, 2014). These personal attitudes share in fact some similarity with the category of 'home-centred women' in Hakim's Preference Theory in which such women are assumed to prefer not to work and for whom family life and children are their main priority (Hakim, 2003). We will come back later in the paper to Preference Theory and its numerous criticisms. Suffice here to say that while Preference Theory singles out this subgroup of home-centred mothers solely on the basis of their attitudes, our subgroup of stay-at-home mothers is instead defined in terms of their absence from the labour market.

Whilst there is a solid body of descriptive literature on stay-at-home mothers, we know much less about their actual employment history and trajectory. We do know that a very small portion of mothers stay out of the labour market for their whole life. What we also know from the literature on the motherhood employment penalty is that children influence women's labour force participation mainly when they are very small and that the effect is especially persistent for women with 3 or more children (Kahn, García-Manglano, & Bianchi, 2014; Pacelli, Pasqua, & Villosio, 2013; Molina & Montuenga, 2009; Berghammer, 2014). Moreover, the effect seems to vary across countries and evidence suggests that it is moderated by leave policies, childcare, and opportunities for flexible employment (Gutierrez-Domenech, 2005; Janus, 2013; Nollenberger & Rodríguez-Planas, 2015; Formánková & Dobrotić, 2011). Our interest however in this paper is on the labour market intention and subsequent behaviour of mothers who have already left, and/or have never been in, the labour market. In particular, and as shown in a few studies, women who have been out of the labour market for extended periods tend to form a distinct category and to be influenced by specific personal, familial, and financial situations (Doorewaard, Hendricks, & Verschuren, 2004; Lovejoy & Stone, 2012).

In this study, we adopt a dynamic perspective to study the labour market intention of stay-at-home mothers and their subsequent realizations. In doing so, we view a women's decision to be a homemaker not as a one-time decision which is not changeable but instead as one that develops over time. And while we do not examine stay-at-home mothers' initial decision not to join the labour market (or to withdraw from it), we instead focus on the more dynamic perspective by examining their intention to

take up a job in the near future and the subsequent realization (or not) of these intentions. As explained below, we do so by using the framework provided by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Because of our focus on stay-at-home mothers, we however also draw from the Preference Theory as developed by Hakim (2003), or rather on the actual criticisms of this theory. In particular, this allows us to extend the posited role of personal attitudes by also examining their interaction with other micro- and macro-level enablers and constraints.

2.1. Theory of Planned Behaviour

TPB was originally developed for the field of social psychology (Ajzen, 1985) and has since been extended to a wide range of human intention and behaviour including in the field of health (e.g. Albarracín, Johnson, Fishbein, & Muellerleile, 2001), demography (e.g. Ajzen & Klobas, 2013; Liefbroer, 2011), and job-search (e.g. Van Hoof, Born, Taris, & van der Flier, 2004). In a nutshell, TPB posits that a person's intentions are formed by three sets of individual-level factors: personal attitudes towards the behaviour, perceived social pressures to engage or not in the behaviour, and perceived behavioural control, that is, the perceived ability to perform the behaviour. In addition, TPB also assumes the presence of macro-level determinants which are posited to be affecting intentions through their influence on background factors measured at the individual-level (Ajzen & Klobas, 2013: 222).

The theory has been shown to explain a relatively large variation of specific human behaviour (see the recent meta-analysis by Armitage & Conner, 2001; McEachan, Conner, Taylor, & Lawton, 2011). For instance, TPB has been shown to be a useful framework to analyse fertility intention and the subsequent realization or not of these intentions (Dommermuth, Klobas, & Lappegård, 2011; Kapitány & Spéder, 2013). Studies using this theoretical perspective have revealed that all elements of the TPB play a role in explaining fertility intentions (Billari, Philipov, & Testa, 2009; Mencarini, Vignoli, & Gottard, 2015), that the determinants of fertility intention tend to be the same across countries (Charton, Surkov, Baublyte, Stankuniene, 2009), but that there are also important differences across countries pointing to the role of macro-level institutional and economic factors in explaining subsequent realizations (Régnier-Loilier & Vignoli, 2011; Spéder & Kapitány, 2014). The literature has also pointed to the importance of distinguishing between positive and negative intentions when studying the links between intentions and subsequent behaviour (Kuhnt & Trappe, 2013). In particular, the literature has shown that while positive intentions are not always realized, negative intentions in contrast tend to be a good predictor of subsequent behaviour (Dommermuth, Klobas, & Lappegård 2015).

2.2. Personal attitude towards working mothers¹

As pointed out earlier, stay-at-home mothers tend to hold negative views towards working mothers, more specifically the belief being that participating in the labour force hurts children's emotional and cognitive development and that mothers are the best providers of care for their children. In TPB, this personal attitude towards working mothers is assumed to only influence intentions—and not their subsequent realization (Kuhnt & Trappe, 2013).

As mentioned earlier, personal attitude is also central to Preference Theory which posits that women have intrinsic lifestyle preferences for work or for the family and that these preferences

have deep and direct influences on their labour force participation (Hakim, 2003). The assumed link between attitudes and labour market participation, as stated in Preference Theory, has however been strongly criticized especially its assumption of women's genuine choice when it comes to paid employment. Instead, critiques have pointed to strong individual- and societal-level constraints that prevent women from acting on their preference alone. For example, studies have pointed to women with a family preference but having to take up paid employment for financial reasons and women with a work preference being kept out of the labour market for various normative, structural or institutional reasons (see also Leahy & Doughney, 2006; McRae, 2003; Crompton & Lyonette, 2005).² As discussed below, we take into account these criticisms by formulating additional hypotheses involving the interaction between personal attitudes and mothers' individual and societal context. Based on TPB:

H1. We expect a traditional personal attitude towards working mothers to reduce the likelihood of stay-at-home mothers to intend to take up work in the near future. On the other hand, we do not expect such a traditional attitude towards working mothers to influence the likelihood of subsequently realizing (or not) these intentions.

2.3. Perceived behavioural control

In TPB, perceived behavioural control corresponds to the individual's perceived ability to perform the behaviour. In the application of TPB to fertility decisions, this component is usually measured as the perceived influence of various factors (e.g. financial situation, housing) on the decision to have (or not) a child (Dommermuth, Klobas and Lappegård 2015). In our case, perceived behavioural control refers to stay-at-home mothers' perception of being able to afford financially or not to stay at home. Following TPB:

H2. We expect stay-at-home mothers' perceived financial ease to reduce their likelihood of intending to take up work. We also expect perceived financial ease to decrease the likelihood of realizing a positive intention to take up work but to increase the likelihood of realizing a negative intention.

Following the criticisms of Preference Theory, we however also expect an interaction between personal attitudes and perceived behavioural control in that we can expect a negative attitude towards working mothers to have an effect only when the family's financial circumstances allow it. Specifically, we expect this interaction to be significant for the realization of negative intentions in that the impact of negative personal attitudes towards working mothers should affect the realization of intending to stay out of the labour market to a larger extent amongst those who can afford to do so (in contrast to those who cannot afford it). In our analysis, we also test this interaction as a predictor of intention and the realization of positive intention but do not formulate specific hypotheses about it.

H3. We expect a significant interaction between personal attitude towards working mothers and mothers' perceived financial situation. More specifically, we expect a traditional attitude towards working mothers combined with financial ease to increase the likelihood of realizing a negative intention.

¹ Because of a lack of data, we cannot test the role of the other components of TPB, namely: perceived social pressures to engage or not in the behaviour as well as actual behavioural control.

² Other criticisms of Preference Theory include the assumed stability of preferences, its strict focus on paid work at the expense of unpaid work, and the centrality of preference over structural constraints in explaining female labour force participation (Crompton and Lyonette 2005).

2.4. Societal-level enablers and constraints

In its original formulation TPB was restricted to individual-level determinants and was in fact criticized for paying insufficient attention to macro-level influences (e.g. [Morgan & Bachrach, 2011](#); [Fahlén & Oláh, 2013](#)). In more recent formulations, TPB was however extended to societal-level factors to capture a broader set of external enablers and constraints ([Testa, 2014](#); [Philipov, Klobas, & Liefbroer, 2015](#)). As mentioned, these societal-level determinants are assumed to be affecting intentions through their influence on background factors measured at the individual-level ([Ajzen & Klobas, 2013: 222](#)).

A different perspective is to instead view the macro-level context as having a distinct influence on both intentions and their realizations. This alternative interpretation is in fact in line with the literature in having consistently shown the influence of national context on female labour force participation ([Kangas & Rostgaard, 2007](#); [Nieuwenhuis, Need, & van der Kolk, 2012](#)) and on the gender division of housework ([Hook, 2010](#)). For instance, numerous studies have shown a positive correlation between female labour force participation and various social and family policy measures ([Thévenon, 2011](#); [Mandel & Semyonov, 2006](#)) and especially with measures supportive of working parents ([Misra, Budig, & Boeckmann, 2011](#)). Similarly, studies have also shown the negative impact of some taxation policies on female labour force participation especially those derived from a male-breadwinner

model ([Jaumotte, 2003](#); [Schwarz, 2012](#)). In addition to the policy and institutional context, studies have also pointed to the impact of cultural norms regarding gender roles as major determinants of female employment (e.g. [Nordenmark, 2004](#); [Pfau-Effinger, 2004](#)) as well as the countries' labour market ([Thévenon, 2013](#)). For instance, the lack of employment opportunities in some Eastern European countries has been shown to have undeniable negative consequences on female employment and especially on women's return to work after childbirth ([Haas et al., 2006](#)). Similarly, a rigid labour market has been argued to reduce women's opportunities to return to the labour market ([Del Boca, Pasqua & Pronzato, 2004](#)).

The six countries included in our study differ widely in terms of their social, economic and institutional characteristics. In the welfare state and family policy literature, the three Western European countries (Austria, France, and Germany) belong to the Corporatist welfare state regime and are usually characterized as providing relatively high financial support for families but more limited support to working parents with young children ([Korpi, 2000](#); [Leitner, 2003](#); [Thévenon, 2011](#)). As such, they differ highly from Nordic countries which provide more extensive support for working parents. In particular, Germany and Austria have often been criticized for reinforcing traditional gender roles especially when the children are very young ([Adema, 2012](#); [Lewis, Knijn, Martin, & Ostner 2008](#)). Recent reforms have partly corrected the situation in Germany although the male breadwinner model continues to be a contested issue ([Fagnani, 2012](#); [Fleckenstein, 2011](#)).

Table 1
Characteristics of countries around the year 2005.^a

		Western Europe			Eastern Europe		
		Austria	France	Germany	Bulgaria	Georgia	Hungary
Economic context	GDP per capita (in PPP 2005 US\$) ^b	33,700	30,386	29,461	9,032	3,365	17,887
	Ranking on the Human Development Index (HDI) ^b	15	10	22	53	96	36
Normative context (gender)	Ranking on the Gender Inequality Index ^c	5	13	3	44	77	42
	Ranking on the Global Gender Gap Index ^d	27	70	5	37	54	55
	Ranking on the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) index ^e	13	18	9	42	79	50
	Views on Housewives (% strongly disagreeing that being a housewife is fulfilling) ^f	17.6	18.6	23.6	4.1	5.9	5.5
Institutional context (government support for families)	Maternity leave and benefits ^g	16 wks × 100%	16 wks × 100%	14 wks × 100%	135 days × 90%	See Parental leave	24 wks × 70%
	Parental leave and benefits ^g	Until the child's 2 nd birthday × FR	12 months × FR	24 months × FR	Until the child's 1 st birthday × FR	477 days × FR	Until the child's 2 nd or 3 rd birthday × FR or 70% ^h
	Provision of formal childcare (as % of children less than 3 years old) ^h	11	42	16	15	n/a	9

n/a: not available; FR: flat-rate benefits (with amount specific to each country, oftentimes means-tested).

^a The year 2005 was chosen because most of the survey data used in this paper were collected around 2005–2006.

^b GDP and HDI: data for the year 2005 from the United Nations Human Development Report 2007/2008 (Table 1).

^c Gender inequality index: data for the year 2014 from the United Nations Human Development Report 2015 (Annex Table 5).

^d Global Gender Gap Index: data for the year 2006 from Haussman et al. (2006). Online: <https://members.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/report2006.pdf>.

^e Gender Empowerment Measure: data for the year 2005 from the United Nations Human Development Report 2007/2008 (Table 29).

^f Views on housewives: data from the ISSP survey on the family in 2002. The question was: "Household satisfies as much as paid job" with possible answers ranging from agree strongly to strongly disagree, with the exception of Georgia which data come from the World Values Survey Wave 5 (2005–2009) where the question is "being a housewife is fulfilling".

^g Maternity and parental leave: data for most countries from [Moss and O'Brien \(2006\)](#), with the exception of Georgia which data came from the GGP Contextual Database and Bulgaria which data came from the publication Social Security Program throughout the World 2006. In some cases, a longer unpaid leave is also available. In the case of Hungary a flat-rate benefit is paid to uninsured mothers, while a pay-related benefit to insured mothers.

^h Childcare: from the OECD Family Database. The data refer to the year 2007.

In contrast, the three Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, Georgia, and Hungary) all share a history of communism and as such are classified in some studies under the general label of the 'New Eastern European welfare model' characterized by a hybrid mix of liberal, social democratic, and conservative principles (Haggard & Kaufman, 2009).³ When it comes to the support for working parents, the model currently in place encourages long absences from work during the early years of children. Moreover, while in the majority of Western European countries eligibility to parental leave is dependent on prior employment (e.g. a minimum of two years), in many Eastern European countries mothers are entitled to long periods of parental leave which are not associated with a specific labour market status nor with a history of employment (Matysiak & Szalma, 2014; Moss, 2014). Eastern European countries, as compared to Western European ones, tend also to hold more traditional views regarding gender roles (Van der Lippe, Jager, & Kops, 2006). In this respect, Georgia has often been singled out in view of the persistence of very traditional values regarding family and gender roles (Blum et al., 2009). Studies have also pointed to the severe lack of job opportunities in Eastern European countries, such as Bulgaria, thus strongly constraining the employment of both men and women despite the economic necessity to actually work (Haas et al., 2006).

Table 1 provides an overview of the economic, normative, and institutional context in the six countries included in our study. Broadly speaking, these various indicators point to major differences between our Eastern and Western European countries. These differences are particularly salient in the case of the three Eastern European countries which rank on the Human Development Index and the gender-related indices well below that of the other countries—although with large variations. As mentioned above, our Eastern and Western European countries also differ in their support for working parents with Eastern European countries providing relatively long periods of parental leave with limited financial compensation. As to childcare provision, it has rapidly declined in the aftermath of the fall of the communist regime and nowadays all fall short of providing childcare places to the level observed in countries such as France (Kocourková, 2002; Robila, 2012).

Taken together, the indicators included in this Table thus broadly converge towards two distinct societal contexts: one represented by Western European countries and being more supportive of women's employment in terms of their policies, economic opportunities, and societal norms, and the other represented by Eastern Europe, being much less supportive of women's employment. Our fourth hypothesis thus makes explicit the role of societal context in influencing the labour market intention of stay-at-home mothers and their subsequent realization.

H4. We expect stay-at-home mothers in the Western region to have a greater likelihood of intending to join the labour market in the near future. We also expect stay-at-home mothers in the Western region to have a greater likelihood of realizing their positive intentions. In contrast, we expect stay-at-home mothers in the Eastern region to have a greater likelihood of realizing their negative intentions.

We however take a further step in positing an interaction between personal attitude and societal context, that is, in

expecting non-traditional attitudes towards working mothers to increase the realization of positive work intention only in a context that is supportive of women's employment. Thus, while H4 posits an independent impact of the societal context, H5 instead posits the presence of a compound effect of personal attitudes and societal context. In other words, we expect a boost effect when personal attitudes and the societal context align (McDonald, 2000). In this case, we would expect traditional personal attitudes towards working mothers combined with the Eastern Europe cultural and institutional support of mothers' caring role to increase the realization of negative work intention. In turn, we can expect non-traditional attitudes towards working mothers combined with Western countries' support for maternal employment to boost the realisation of positive intentions.

H5. We expect a significant interaction between societal context and personal attitudes towards working mothers. More specifically, we expect a traditional attitude towards working mothers combined with the societal context in Eastern Europe to increase the likelihood of realizing negative intentions, while we expect the reverse for the realization of positive intentions.

These hypotheses diverge to some extent from those formulated in Preference Theory—where the focus is on labour market outcome rather than the realization of work intention. In particular, Preference Theory assumes that women have a genuine choice when it comes to the labour market, but only in countries that have put in place the right institutional context. Specifically, Hakim argues that: "The United States, Britain, and probably also the Netherlands currently provide the prime examples of societies that have achieved the new scenario for women" (Hakim, 2003, p. 12). Such countries, she argues, provide women with a genuine choice and thus allows them to make labor market decisions in accordance to their lifestyle preference. Adapted to our case, this could mean that Preference theory would posit that traditional attitudes towards working mothers combined with Western countries' overall context is supportive of choice and would therefore increase the likelihood of realizing a negative intention (while we claim that traditional attitudes \times Eastern increase the likelihood of negative intention). In practice, Hakim's claim that women in countries such as Britain and North America have genuine and unconstrained choices have been highly disputed (see McRae, 2003).

3. Data and methods

This paper uses data from the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) which is a longitudinal survey part of a broader research programme initiated in 2000 under the umbrella of the UNECE (Vikat et al., 2007). It collects data on a wide range of demographic, social and economic issues using nationally representative samples of men and women. For this paper, we use data from six countries for which the first two waves were available: three Western European countries (Austria, France, Germany), and three Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, Georgia, and Hungary).⁴ In most countries, the data was collected around 2005–06 although it was collected slightly later in some countries (e.g. Austria). Overall the response rate for these surveys was around 60 percent. The attrition rate between waves was relatively high in some countries

³ In contrast, other studies instead draw a distinction between sub-clusters of countries. For instance, Fenger (2007) distinguishes the post-communist European type (represented in our study by Bulgaria and Hungary) and the developing welfare state type (Georgia). Fenger (2007) also distinguishes an additional cluster of countries represented by the former-USSR type (Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia and Ukraine).

⁴ At the time of writing this paper, data from two waves were also available for the Netherlands but not for the key variables of interest. For Germany, we used the national sample and not the supplementary sample of Turkish migrants. Data from waves 1 and 2 were also available for the Czech Republic and Lithuania but the longitudinal sample was too small to allow for analysis.

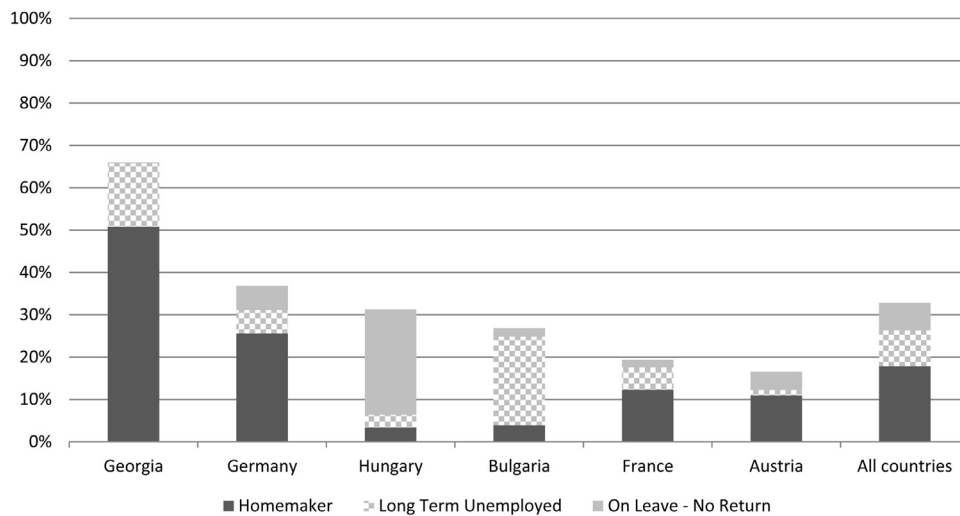


Fig. 1. Percentage of stay-at-home mothers whose youngest child is under 12 by employment status.

but sensitivity analysis and robustness checks were conducted to ensure that the attrition did not affect the results.⁵

3.1. Sample

Our sample is comprised of mothers in households with at least one resident child less than 12 years old and who were stay-at-home mothers at the time of the survey. One option when selecting this subsample would have been to restrict it to mothers who reported their current activity as "homemakers" (based on the question: "Which of the items on the card best describes what you are mainly doing at present"). This however turned out to be unsatisfactory for two reasons. First, it appeared that an unusually high percentage of mothers reported being 'unemployed' even though they were likely not looking for work. As argued by Hofacker, Stoilova and Riebling (2012) these mothers likely declared themselves as being unemployed rather than homemakers in order to be eligible for public social assistance (this was particularly the case in Bulgaria). Second, some mothers reported being on 'maternity or parental leave' even though they had never worked before and/or had no job to go back to. Technically, this is possible in countries where eligibility to parental leave is not based on prior work history. In other cases, however, the response category 'being on maternity or parental leave' appeared to have been used by mothers who were actually homemakers.

In order to deal with these ambiguities, we elected to expand our definition of stay-at-home mothers to mothers who self-declared being homemakers, or unemployed, or on maternity or parental leave but with no job to go back to—and in all cases who had been out of the labour market for at least 12 months. This cut-off point was taken as a way of capturing mothers who, to a large extent, had severed their links with the labour market. In

particular, when it comes to unemployment, a similar 12-month cut-off point is used by statistical and international agencies to differentiate the long-term unemployed from those temporarily out of work and thus reflecting a severe degree of labour detachment (see for example OECD, 2013).

As shown in Fig. 1, this broader definition encompasses 33 percent of all mothers with children under the age of 12 in the countries included in this paper. This ranges from a maximum of 66 percent in Georgia to a minimum of 17 percent in Austria. Moreover, the actual composition of stay-at-home mothers varies widely across countries. While the original self-declared category of "homemaker" dominates in Georgia, Germany and France, the category 'on leave' instead dominates in Hungary: a country with universalistic and very long parental leave schemes. Finally, and in line with the literature, the self-declared category 'unemployed' dominates in Bulgaria (and to a lesser extent in Georgia).

3.2. Work intention and realization of intention

For work intention, we used the answer to the question (at wave 1): "Do you intend to take a job or start a business within the next three years?". The same question was asked to homemakers and to those who declared being unemployed. For this question, women could answer: definitively not, probably not, probably yes, and definitively yes. The exception was Hungary where the possible answers were yes or no. For those on maternity or parental leave, the question on work intention was phrased differently. First, respondents were asked whether or not they could return to their previous work at the end of their leave. For those answering no, the subsequent question was "Would you like to resume your work after your leave has ended?" with yes or no as answers. In other words, while the work intention question for homemakers and unemployed referred to a three-year time frame, for those on maternity or parental leave it referred to a looser (end of your leave) time frame although no one in the sample would have been eligible for leave longer than the 3 years between waves. In view of these differences, we recoded all the data into one single dichotomous work intention variable and interpreted it as work intention in the near future.

For the variable tapping into the realization (or not) of work intention, we used the retrospective work history data collected at

⁵ The sensitivity analysis included running the intentions models with the full sample and resulted in little change in coefficient estimates. For the longitudinal analysis, longitudinal weights were used that adjusted for the probability of attrition. The models were run with and without these weights and the coefficient estimates did not change dramatically. Descriptives of the longitudinal weights also suggests that the attrition is not too problematic and the bias introduced is minimal. That is to say that the likelihood of being in wave 2 was low but it was largely random. This is because many of the problems leading to high attrition were structural and affected our sample broadly equally (Buber-Ennsner, 2013).

Table 2
Descriptive statistics.

Variable	Value	Mean or %	Obs
Intention to resume work?	No	33.5%	573
	Yes	66.5%	1,138
Realised intention	No	46.8%	800
	Yes	53.2%	911
Mean age of respondents	in years	32.1	1,711
Number of children	1	27%	463
	2	44%	757
	3 or more	29%	491
Age of youngest child	0–2 years old	36%	609
	3–5 years old	28%	478
	6–8 years old	21%	367
	9–11 years old	15%	257
Respondent has previously worked?	No	43%	743
	Yes	57%	968
Relationship status	Married	74%	1,268
	Cohabiting	18%	312
	Single	8%	131
Do young children suffer if their mum works?	No	26%	449
	Yes	74%	1,262
How hard is it for household to make ends meet?	Difficult	76%	1,303
	Easy	24%	408
Respondent had further children before Wave 2	No	79%	1,358
	Yes	21%	353
Country	Bulgaria	18%	316
	Georgia	29%	496
	Germany	18%	312
	France	9%	160
	Austria	8%	136
	Hungary	17%	291

wave 2. Thus instead of restricting ourselves to mothers' employment status at the time of the interview at wave 2, we instead considered whether or not they had returned to the labour market at any time between waves 1 and 2. Of those who did return at some point between the two waves, only 6.2% were no longer employed at the time of wave 2 which suggests that the decision to return is relatively concrete and not tentative.

3.3. Covariates

At the individual-level, our key covariate is the one tapping into personal attitude towards working mothers which we measured by mothers' answer to the statement "A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his/her mother works" which we re-coded as "1" if they answered strongly agree or agree, and "0" if they answered neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree. As such, a value of 1 on this item indicates a traditional view.⁶

⁶ One criticism of this item is that it is restricted to attitudes towards working mothers in the case of preschool children. Ideally, attitudes towards work under different family circumstance (i.e. age of children) would have been preferable (as used in Kangas and Rostgaard, 2007). On the other hand, the item 'a preschool child is likely to suffer' has been used in numerous other studies on female employment (e.g. Steiber and Haas 2009).

We operationalize respondents' perceived ability to perform the behaviour in terms of their perceived financial situation. This is measured by mothers' answer to the question "Thinking of your household's total monthly income, is your household able to make ends meet . . ." where we contrast those answering fairly easily, easily, and very easily (coded '1') to those answering with great difficulty, with difficulty, or with some difficulty (coded '0').

Our analyses also control for the number of children under 15 living in the household, the age of the youngest child (0–2, 3–5, 6–8, 9–11), the mother's partnership status (married, cohabiting, or single), and whether or not the respondent gave birth to a child between waves 1 and 2. We also included a variable indicating whether or not the respondent has held a job at any point in the past.

3.4. Methods of analysis

Three sets of logistic regression results are presented in the paper: the likelihood of intending to take up a job in the future (measured at wave 1), the realization of positive work intention, and the realization of negative intention. The analysis is carried out as a fixed-effect model with a dummy indicator distinguishing between Eastern and Western Europe and observations clustered within countries (Model 1). We also extend the analysis by testing the interaction between personal attitudes towards working

mothers and perceived behaviour control (Model 2) and between personal attitudes and the region dummy (Model 3). In all cases, the analyses were performed using the longitudinal weights which were calibrated to ensure that each national sample contributed equally to the analyses. Version 4.2 of Wave 1 and Version 1.2 of Wave 2 of the GGS datasets were used for the analyses.

4. Results

Despite rapid increases in female labour force participation, stay-at-home mothers continue to represent a non-negligible proportion of mothers with pre- and school-age children. In terms of their demographic characteristics, these stay-at-home mothers have a relatively large number of children (44% have two children and 29% three or more), have in the large majority of cases a pre-school child at home (64% have a child age 0–5 years old), are married (74%), and tend to hold traditional views regarding working mothers (74% thinks that a child will suffer if his or her mother works) (see Table 2). Moreover, only a minority of stay-at-home mothers (24%) perceived no financial strain in that they answered that it was easy to make ends meet. As to their previous work experience, the majority of stay-at-home mothers (57%) held a job in the past. The percentages vary between a minimum of 32% in Georgia to a maximum of 93% in Austria (figures not shown).

4.1. Work intention

Perhaps surprisingly, the very large majority of stay-at-home mothers do intend to take up a job in the near future. Sixty-seven percent of them said so at wave 1 (see Fig. 2). Two of the Eastern European countries (Bulgaria and Hungary) display a higher percentage of stay-at-home mothers intending to take up a job than Western European countries although the differences are not exceedingly large.

Results from the regression analysis on work intention appear in Table 3. As expected, mothers holding more traditional views regarding working mothers have a lower likelihood of intending to take up a job in the near future (in Model 1). Similarly, mothers who report financial security (i.e. they answered that it was easy to make ends meet) have a lower likelihood of intending to take up a job. However, the interaction terms between the attitude towards

working mothers and respondents' perceived financial situation proved to be non-statistically significant (Model 2) suggesting that the determining influence of attitudes towards working mothers does not manifest itself only when the family's financial circumstances allow it. As to the contextual effect, and contrary to our expectations, we find that residing in the West decreases the likelihood of intending to take up work (in models 1 and 2). Moreover, and again contrary to expectations, the interaction term between the attitude towards working mothers and the regional dummy was found not to be statistically significant.

As to the other individual-level characteristics, the number of children does not have any statistically significant effect on work intention. Interestingly, having a child aged 3–5 years old does increase the likelihood of intending to take up a job in the near future (as compared to having a child aged 0–2 years old). This may suggest a possible anticipation effect in that stay-at-home mothers are more likely to intend to take up a job once they have children who are just about to start schooling. Being a single-mother also increases the likelihood of intending to take up work. This effect is independent of the mothers' perceived financial situation since the model already controls for this. Finally, we find that prior work experience makes a large difference with those having worked before having a much higher likelihood of intending to take up a job.

4.2. Realization of work intention

The descriptive results for the realization of work intention appear in Fig. 3 and distinguish between the realization of positive work intention (i.e. intending to take up a job at wave 1 and subsequently having taken one up) and the realization of negative intention (i.e. intending not to take up a job at wave 1 and subsequently not having taken one up). In all countries, the percentages for the realization of negative intention (70% on average across countries) exceed those for the realization of positive intention (49% on average). This can be interpreted as a form of inertia among stay-at-home mothers in that it is much easier for them to realize their intention not to take up a job than to realize their intention to take up a job. Furthermore, the cross-national variations are much smaller when it comes to the realization of negative intention (ranging from 62 to 79%) as

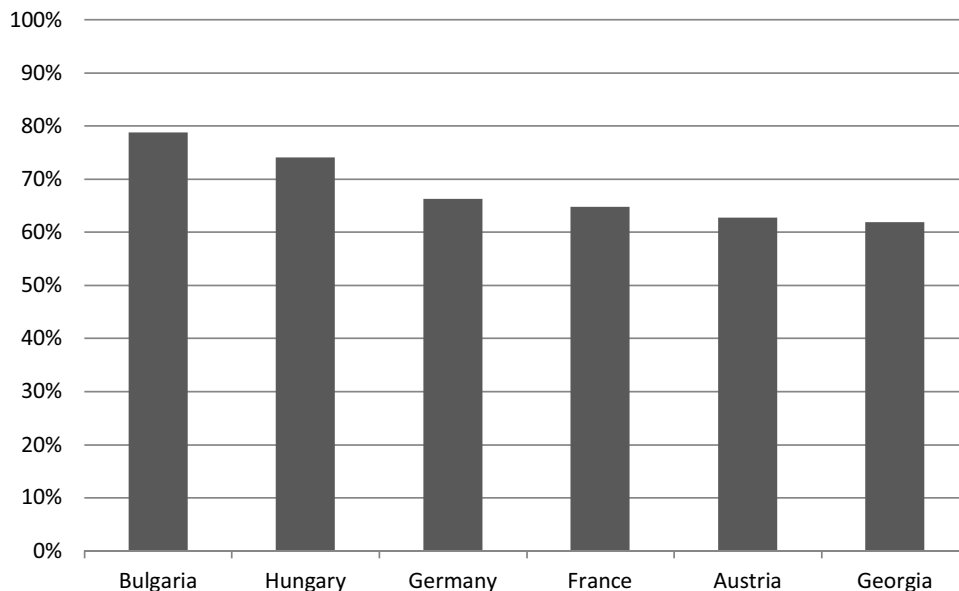


Fig. 2. Percentage of stay-at-home mothers intending to take up a job in the near future.

Table 3
Modelling of intentions (odds ratios and standard errors).

		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Main covariates				
Do young children suffer if their mum works?	No	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	Yes	0.654* (0.141)	0.728 (0.183)	0.86 (0.195)
How hard is it for household to make ends meet?	Difficult	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	Easy	0.583* (0.134)	0.716 (0.232)	0.581* (0.135)
Region	East	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	West	0.638** (0.101)	0.639** (0.103)	0.931 (0.289)
Interaction between traditional values and financial situation	Children do suffer * Easy		0.745 (0.289)	
Interaction between country and traditional values	Children do suffer * East			1.000 (.)
	Children do suffer * West			0.599 (0.157)
Control variables	Age	0.981 (0.012)	0.98 (0.013)	0.981 (0.012)
Number of children	1	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	2	1.176 (0.280)	1.178 (0.281)	1.17 (0.281)
	3 or more	0.87 (0.185)	0.864 (0.179)	0.855 (0.181)
Age of youngest child	0–2 years old	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	3–5 years old	1.392* (0.198)	1.403* (0.208)	1.402* (0.197)
	6–8 years old	0.832 (0.123)	0.834 (0.118)	0.835 (0.120)
	9–11 years old	1.64 (0.504)	1.650 (0.523)	1.646 (0.503)
Relationship status	Married	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	Cohabiting	1.304 (0.300)	1.301 (0.291)	1.31 (0.298)
	Single	1.853* (0.427)	1.877* (0.461)	1.848* (0.417)
Previous work experience	No	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	Yes	1.992*** (0.193)	2.001*** (0.184)	1.965*** (0.199)
	Constant	3.474* (1.994)	3.265* (1.856)	2.867* (1.527)
	N	1,711	1,711	1711
	Log likelihood	–721.7	–721.2	–720.235
	AIC	1453.4	1452.5	1450.469

* $p < .10$.** $p < .05$.*** $p < .01$.

compared to the realization of positive intention (ranging from 31 to 69%). However it is worth noting that the realization of positive intention is still relatively high in a country like Austria (and to a lesser extent in Hungary and Bulgaria) suggesting that in these countries positive intention is a good predictor for subsequent behaviour. In contrast, in France, and despite its relatively high

support for working mothers, a low percentage of stay-at-home mothers realize their positive work intention.

Starting with the realization of positive work intention, the results from the logistic regression (Table 4) indicate that personal attitudes towards working mothers are not statistically significant. This is thus in sharp contrast with the results for work intention but in line with TPB. In other words, personal attitudes matter

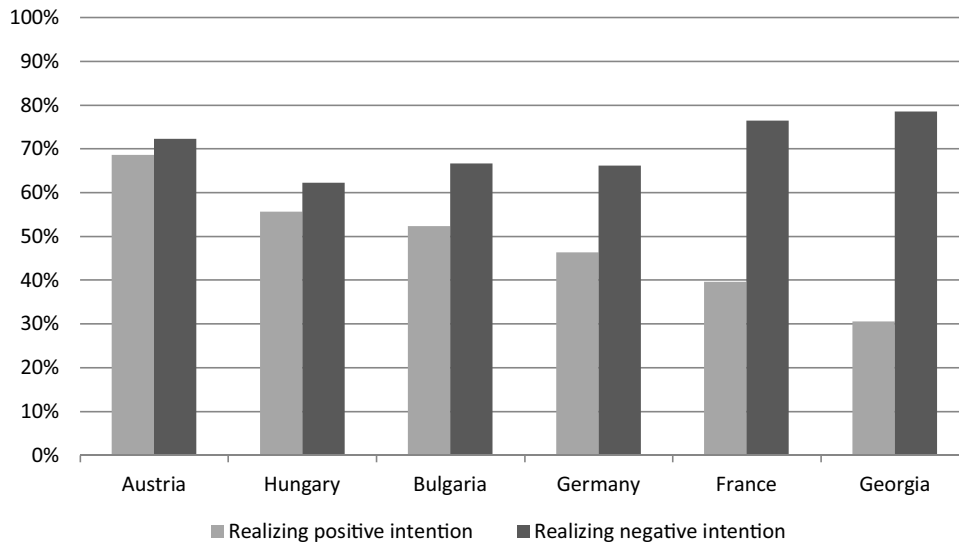


Fig. 3. Realisation of positive and negative intentions to take up a job in the near future (in percentage) by country.

when it came to work intention but not to the realization of positive work intention. Mothers' perceived financial security was found to increase the likelihood of realizing positive intention but the coefficient was statistically significant only in Model 2. However, personal attitudes toward working mothers were not found to be significantly interacting with one's perceived financial ease (Model 2). As to the contextual effect, the regional dummy was found not to be statistically significant, nor in its interaction with personal attitude (Model 3).

As to the other individual-level determinants, having three or more children significantly reduces the likelihood of realizing a positive intention. Having given birth to further children between waves also significantly reduces the likelihood of realizing the positive intention to take up a job. In contrast, having children aged 9–11 years old significantly increases the likelihood of realizing positive intentions. This seems to be capturing a life-course effect in that one is much more likely to realize positive work intention when children are older. Relationship status makes no difference when it comes to realizing positive work intention while having previous work experience strongly increases the likelihood of realizing positive work intention.

Finally, when it comes to the realization of negative work intention (Table 5), personal attitudes towards working mothers was found not to be statistically significant with the exception of Model 3. In line with TPB, the perception of financial ease was found to increase the likelihood of realizing one's negative work intention, that is, to remain out of the labour force. The interaction term between personal attitudes towards working mothers and perceived financial ease was also found to be statistically significant (Model 2) suggesting that the impact of a traditional attitude towards working mothers on the realization of negative intention is conditional on the household having sufficient financial means to afford it (i.e. to stay out of the labour market). As to the regional dummy, it was found not to be statistically significant in all three models. However, the interaction of the West regional dummy with personal attitude was found to be statistically significant meaning that traditional personal attitudes combined with the Western context increases – rather than decreases as we had expected – the realization of negative intention. As discussed in the next section, this result is more in line with Preference Theory which suggests that women holding traditional attitudes are more able to make a labour market

decision consistent with their preferences in a societal context that provides genuine choices—which could be argued to be truer of the Western European countries than the East European countries.

As to our control variables, the number and age of children were not found to influence the realization of negative intention, however having had a child between waves 1 and 2 significantly increases the likelihood of realizing one's negative work intention (in Models 2 and 3). Being in a cohabiting relationship was found to increase the likelihood of realizing a negative intention. In contrast, previous work experience reduces the likelihood of realizing a negative intention.

5. Discussion, conclusion, and policy implications

Across Europe, the labour force participation of women still lags behind that of men, especially when children are present. The employment rate of mothers has increased rapidly in all countries but barriers to the combination of work and family life still persist. The aim of this paper was to better understand some of these barriers by focusing on one specific subgroup of mothers: the stay-at-home mothers. Across the six countries analysed in this paper, stay-at-home mothers comprised around one-third of all mothers with children under the age of 12. The aim was thus to examine their intention to join the labour market and the realization of these intentions in order to better understand the related barriers to employment. In particular, we were interested in the role of individual characteristics, including views about working mothers, and the role of national context.

The results revealed the negative influence of traditional attitudes towards working mothers on stay-at-home mothers' intention to take up work in the near future. In line with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the results also showed that such traditional attitudes had however no effect on the realization of intention suggesting that the labour market outcomes are pre-filtered by work intentions. Perceived behavioural control, measured in our case by perceived financial ease, was also found to reduce the likelihood of intending to take up work and to increase the realization of negative intention (i.e. to remain a stay-at-home mother). Moreover, the combination of traditional attitudes towards working mothers and financial ease was also found to increase the likelihood of realizing negative work intention. This

Table 4
Modelling of Realising Positive Intentions (odds ratios and standard errors).

		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Main covariates				
Do young children suffer if their mum works?	No	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	Yes	0.933 (0.212)	1.147 (0.230)	1.024 (0.200)
How hard is it for household to make ends meet?	Difficult	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	Easy	1.4 (0.341)	2.146*** (0.440)	1.404 (0.332)
Region	East	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	West	0.924 (0.254)	0.928 (0.257)	1.201 (0.353)
Interaction between Traditional Values and Financial Situation	Children do suffer * Easy		0.504 (0.248)	
Interaction between Country and traditional values	Children do suffer * East			1.000 (.)
	Children do suffer * West			0.866 (0.317)
Control variables	Age	0.95 (0.027)	0.95 (0.027)	0.951 (0.026)
Number of children	1	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	2	0.79 (0.226)	0.797 (0.235)	0.788 (0.223)
	3 or more	0.547* (0.146)	0.532* (0.138)	0.542* (0.135)
Age of youngest child	0–2 years old	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	3–5 years old	1.253 (0.491)	1.298 (0.519)	1.249 (0.498)
	6–8 years old	1.061 (0.307)	1.048 (0.292)	1.049 (0.303)
	9–11 years old	1.817** (0.398)	1.811** (0.401)	1.802** (0.385)
Relationship status	Married	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	Cohabiting	0.596 (0.176)	0.605 (0.169)	0.597 (0.177)
	Single	0.533 (0.187)	0.534 (0.187)	0.534 (0.191)
Respondent had further children before Wave 2	No	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	Yes	0.192*** (0.033)	0.19*** (0.033)	0.192*** (0.033)
Previous work experience	No	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	Yes	1.945** (0.493)	1.929* (0.540)	1.929* (0.495)
	Constant	4.585 (3.888)	4.042 (3.054)	4.242 (3.437)
	N	1,138	1,138	1,138
	Log likelihood	-404.5	-403.0	-404.418
	AIC	819.0	816.0	818.836

* $p < .10$.

** $p < .05$.

*** $p < .01$.

result is not part of the TPB but was derived from criticisms of Preference Theory.

Where our results were more surprising was regarding the role of societal context. Specifically, we were expecting the support

provided to working parents in Western Europe to positively influence stay-at-home mothers' intention to join the labour market in the near future as well as the realization of mothers' positive intention. In contrast, we found that 'opting out' is an

Table 5
Modelling of realising negative intentions (odds ratios and standard errors).

		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Main covariates				
Do young children suffer if their mum works?	No	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	Yes	1.643 (0.451)	1.155 (0.396)	0.577* (0.156)
How hard is it for household to make ends meet?	Difficult	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	Easy	1.349* (0.188)	0.813 (0.261)	1.348* (0.188)
Region	East	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	West	1.731 (0.553)	1.710 (0.547)	0.552 (0.219)
Interaction between traditional values and financial situation	Children do suffer * Easy		2.08* (0.771)	
Interaction between country and traditional values	Children do suffer * East			1.000 (.)
	Children do suffer * West			4.105*** (1.164)
Control variables	Age	0.998 (0.023)	0.999 (0.021)	1.005 (0.020)
Number of children	1	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	2	1.511 (0.556)	1.435 (0.537)	1.553 (0.540)
	3 or more	1.163 (0.467)	1.143 (0.461)	1.219 (0.515)
Age of youngest child	0–2 years old	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	3–5 years old	1.617 (0.865)	1.533 (0.842)	1.531 (0.863)
	6–8 years old	1.287 (0.454)	1.278 (0.456)	1.216 (0.450)
	9–11 years old	1.635 (0.665)	1.551 (0.635)	1.526 (0.643)
Relationship status	Married	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	Cohabiting	2.85*** (0.756)	2.814*** (0.747)	2.902*** (0.720)
	Single	2.726 (2.271)	2.468 (1.999)	2.623 (2.113)
Respondent had further children before Wave 2	No	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	Yes	2.3 (1.028)	2.418* (1.056)	2.637* (1.122)
Previous work experience	No	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
	Yes	0.398** (0.141)	0.392** (0.141)	0.402* (0.144)
	Constant	1.13 (1.205)	1.516 (1.597)	2.132 (1.677)
	N	573	573	573
	Log likelihood	–197.936	–197.111	–195.791
	AIC	405.872	404.223	401.581

* $p < .10$.** $p < .05$.*** $p < .01$.

option only afforded to those who live in a context where a genuine choice regarding female employment is offered. As such, we found stay-at-home mothers in Western Europe to be more able to freely pursue their chosen role. This is based on two observations. Firstly, the sample of stay-at-home mothers in Western Europe are substantively different from its counterpart in Eastern European in that they are more likely to have elected to be self-defined 'Homemakers'. However mothers in Eastern Europe were less likely to have worked previously and were more likely to be unemployed or on extended parental leave without a job to return to, possibly resulting in an ambiguous labour market position. Long term and deeply engrained policy and contextual effects are therefore fed through an individual's circumstances and reflected in a selection effect of our initial sample whereby our Western European stay-at-home mothers are more likely to have already made some form of opting out decision. Secondly, Western European mothers are more likely to realise their negative intention when they hold traditional personal attitude toward working mothers, suggesting greater agency than in Eastern Europe. Having said this, the relatively low realization of positive intention in Germany and France could reflect the persistent ambiguities and ambivalence of policies when it comes to working mothers in these two countries (Betzelt & Bothfeld, 2011; Windebank, 2012).

There are two major policy implications of these findings. First, the findings pointed to the importance of difficulties faced by stay-at-home mothers in joining the labour force despite a positive intention to do so. While demographic events such as the birth of a child between waves 1 and 2 may have prevented mothers from joining the labour force, other likely obstacles remain such as labour market rigidity that may constrain mothers' intention to return to the labour market. Moreover, the strong negative impact of a lack of prior work experience (in all our models) points to a need to better support this particular subgroup of mothers in helping them (re-) integrate into the labour market. Second, the results clearly highlighted the importance of personal attitudes towards working mothers in influencing mothers' labour market decisions. In particular, the analyses suggested that while being a homemaker was a temporary situation for some women and in some countries, for others it was considered as a more permanent situation. This lends support to the Preference Theory in suggesting the presence of a subgroup of mothers with more traditional views and a lower inclination to join the labour market. And while it may be difficult to change personal and societal norms, the availability of quality and affordable childcare may be an important factor in influencing women's views regarding non-parental care.

The results presented in this paper were based on data from the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS). One of the main advantages of this source of data is the availability of recent information from a large number of countries including Central and Eastern European countries: a geographical area often neglected in the literature. On the other hand, the currently available data did not provide a good coverage of the different types of welfare state regimes. The analysis included no country belonging to the Liberal or Social-Democratic welfare regime, and no Southern European country. The addition of data from other countries in the years ahead can be expected to provide a better understanding of the labour market intention and realization of stay-at-home mothers and their possible country specificities.

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