

# CLOSING THE GAP: UK WORKING FATHERS' AND MOTHERS' USE OF TIME 2014-22

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FATHERHOOD INSTITUTE December 2022

## Summary

This report, *Closing the Gap*, presents our analysis of official figures released in July 2022, which show:

- big increases in the time spent by working fathers on unpaid childcare, other domestic work, and home-working, since before the Covid-19 pandemic; and
- a narrowing of gender gaps in time spent on childcare and paid work.

We believe the narrowing of the gender gaps between working mothers' and fathers' paid and unpaid work time – with fathers now spending **two-thirds** of the time mothers spend on unpaid childcare and domestic work, and mothers spending **three-quarters** of the time fathers spend on paid work – are significant for gender equality.

## Our analysis

Our analysis is based on [Office for National Statistics, July 2022: Families and the Labour Market, UK: 2021](#), comparing ONS time-use data from April 2020 and March 2022 with [data from the UK Centre for Time Use Research \(CTUR\) for 2014/15](#).

Please refer to the accompanying document, [Closing the Gap Tables](#), to see how we derived our figures.

## (A) Working fathers v. working mothers<sup>1</sup> - ratios: March 2022 v. 2014/15 (ONS, 2022)

From the mid-1970s to 2010 in the UK, the time working fathers spent on unpaid childcare (Fisher et al., 1999; Henz, 2017) and unpaid domestic work (Altintas & Sullivan, 2016) increased steadily. But between 2010 and 2014/15 the rates of increase slowed (Altintas & Sullivan, 2016). This was thought to be because fathers had been 'trimming' time off sleep and personal leisure to devote to unpaid work (Fox et al., 2011) and this strategy had reached its limit of possibilities.

Then came the main pandemic restrictions – and, following these, increased working from home for many employees.

**As shown in [Table 1](#), changes from 2014/15 were substantial:**

1. Whereas in 2014/15, for every 60 minutes spent by working mothers on childcare, working fathers spent **32 minutes** (ONS, 2022); in 2022<sup>2</sup>, for every 60 minutes spent by working mothers on childcare, working fathers spent **39 minutes** (ONS, 2022)
2. Whereas in 2014/15, for every 60 minutes spent by working mothers on other unpaid work<sup>3</sup>, working fathers spent **34 minutes** (ONS, 2022); in 2022, for every 60 minutes spent by working mothers on other unpaid work, working fathers spent **40 minutes** (ONS, 2022)
3. Whereas in 2014/15, for every 60 minutes spent by working fathers on paid work, working mothers spent **40 minutes** (ONS, 2022); in 2022, for every 60 minutes spent by working fathers on paid work, working mothers spent **45 minutes** (ONS, 2022)
4. Whereas in 2014/15, for every 60 minutes spent on travel<sup>4</sup> by working fathers, working mothers spent **50 minutes** (ONS, 2022); in 2022 - for every 60 minutes spent on travel by working fathers, working mothers spent **56 minutes** (ONS, 2022).

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<sup>1</sup> The working mothers and fathers in this dataset are restricted to those living with their dependent child/ren at the same sole/ main address – so the working mothers (i.e. mothers in paid work) include single-parent-household mothers, whereas the working fathers (i.e. fathers in paid work) will almost all be in couples. Preferable would be an analysis restricted to working fathers and mothers in couple households.

<sup>2</sup> The 2022 time-use data is for the period 20-30 March 2022 in Great Britain, by which time the main pandemic restrictions had ceased in England.

<sup>3</sup> This 'other unpaid work' (which we call 'domestic work' in this publication) includes household work, gardening/DIY, volunteering and caring for adults, but excludes childcare, and also excludes activities classified by diary respondents as travel (such as commuting time).

<sup>4</sup> The ONS 'travel' category used throughout this publication includes commuting to and from a workplace, and also travel related to unpaid childcare, domestic work, leisure etc. Travel *in the course of paid work* (e.g. travelling to clients and meetings) is split between the 'paid work' and 'travel' categories according to how diary respondents classified their primary activity. Being paid for travel as a main occupational activity (e.g. transport workers, and delivery, courier and taxi services) is classified as 'paid work'.

While we do not have data on working fathers' contributions to unpaid work from 2014/15 to 2019, there is no reason to believe that their contributions would have increased dramatically during those years, given that – as set out above – rates of increase had been slowing for some time (Burgess & Davies, 2017; de Grignon et al., 2022); and that, despite a continuing gradual decrease<sup>5</sup> in the proportion working very long hours (for pay), their engagement with the workplace had remained very strong<sup>6</sup>.

It therefore does seem<sup>7</sup> that pandemic restrictions have been the catalyst for change in working fathers' increased time spent with children and on domestic work by 2022.

Meanwhile, we cannot assume that the increased amount of time working mothers are spending on paid work is equally due to their pandemic-experiences: mothers of young children have been slowly moving from part-time to full-time paid work throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century (ONS, 2017)<sup>8</sup>. That said, mothers' increased paid work time by 2022 may also incorporate workplace changes (remote working and greater work flexibility) linked to pandemic restrictions (Brewer et al, 2021).

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<sup>5</sup> The Fatherhood Institute compiled data on long working hours for several time points (Aldrich et al., 2016; Burgess & Goldman, 2021; O'Brien & Shemilt, 2003; ONS, 2022a, 2022b).

<sup>6</sup> In 2019, the vast majority (90% of working fathers aged 16-64) continued to work full-time (mainly outside their home), with around a fifth (21% of working fathers) working very long hours (45+ per week) (ONS, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Consistent with the interpretation by academics from the Centre for Time Use Research at University College London that an increase in fathers' time spent with children between 2016 and the summer of 2021 was due to the main pandemic restrictions (de Grignon et al., 2022). The Fatherhood Institute's summer 2020 survey of fathers showed fathers' appetite from their lockdown experiences for spending more time with their children and for flexible and home-working in future (Burgess and Goldman, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> There has been a trend for a greater proportion of mothers to work full-time (for pay), and a decreasing proportion to work part-time, since 2012 (ONS, 2017; 2022a).

## **(B) Working fathers v. working mothers - changes in time spent on unpaid and paid work pre- and post-Covid-restrictions (ONS, 2022)**

As shown in [Table 2](#), changes from 2014/15 were substantial:

### **Unpaid childcare<sup>9</sup>**

- The average number of minutes working fathers spent on unpaid childcare increased by 18% from pre- to post- pandemic<sup>10</sup>
- Conversely, the average number of minutes working mothers spent on unpaid childcare daily, decreased by 3% from pre- to post-pandemic
- This means that in 2022, working fathers spent almost two-thirds (65%) of the time working mothers spent on unpaid childcare, up from just over half (54%) in 2014/15.

### **Unpaid domestic work (excludes childcare; includes household work; volunteering and caring for adults; and gardening/DIY)<sup>11</sup>**

- The average number of minutes working fathers spent on unpaid domestic work increased by 14% from pre- to post-pandemic
- Conversely, the average number of minutes working mothers spent on unpaid domestic work decreased by 3% from pre- to post-pandemic
- This means that in 2022, working fathers spent two-thirds (66%) of the time working mothers spent on unpaid domestic work, up from just over half (56%) pre-pandemic restrictions.

### **Paid work (working outside the home, working from home, excludes commuting and also some travel in the course of paid work)**

- The time working fathers spent on paid work increased by 7% from pre- to post- pandemic restrictions
- The time working mothers spent on paid work increased by 20% over this same period
- This means that in 2022, working mothers spent three quarters (75%) of the time working fathers spent on paid work, up from two-thirds (67%) pre-pandemic restrictions.

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<sup>9</sup> NB this excludes travel related to childcare, which is included in the ONS 'travel' category. Travel is excluded from all the 'unpaid childcare' figures in this publication.

<sup>10</sup> The term 'post pandemic' is used as shorthand for the period when pandemic restrictions had ceased in England in March 2022.

<sup>11</sup> As above, travel (e.g. relating to household tasks) is excluded from all the 'domestic work' figures in this publication.

## Travel (including commuting to and from a workplace and also some travel in the course of paid work)

Both working mothers and working fathers gained time to spend on paid and unpaid work by spending less time travelling to and from work:

- Working mothers' travel time reduced by just over 30%, dropping from 91 minutes pre-pandemic to 60 minutes in 2022
- Working fathers' travel time reduced by an even greater 41%, dropping from 110 minutes pre-pandemic to 65 minutes in 2022
- This means that in 2022, working mothers spent more than nine-tenths (92%) of the time working fathers spent on travel, up from 83% pre-pandemic.

## Working from home

We hypothesise that much of this time saving in travel is likely to be due to increased time spent working from home

- Working fathers' time spent working from home, as a proportion of overall time spent on paid work (excluding commuting), rose from 6% in 2014/15 to 37% in 2022.
- Working mothers' time spent working from home, as a proportion of all time spent on paid work (excluding commuting), rose from 8% in 2014/15 to 27% in 2022.

## Discussion

- It seems that largely as a result of substantial increases in working from home, with decreased time spent commuting, **working fathers and mothers have gained time post-pandemic restrictions to spend on paid and unpaid work**
  - *Working fathers* increased their working-from-home time by a factor of 6.5 (2014/15 to-2022)
  - *Working mothers* increased their working-from-home time by a factor of 3.8 (2014/15 to 2022)
- It seems that **working fathers used this extra time to increase their engagement in unpaid childcare and domestic work**, while **working mothers used their extra time to increase their engagement in paid work**
- While there is still much further to go, these changes mean that **two important measures of gender equality (mothers' v. fathers' relative participation in paid and unpaid work) have seen the largest boosts in decades**

- When paid work, unpaid childcare, unpaid domestic work and travel time are added together, **working fathers and mothers now spend almost exactly the same amount of time** engaged in these activities: around 500 minutes per day.

## Implications for policy

These new figures add weight to the argument that giving fathers the chance to spend more time at home is absolutely key to achieving more gender-equal sharing of earning and caregiving.

For that reason, the Fatherhood Institute calls on the UK Government to develop employment and family policies aimed at extending fathers' and mothers' ability to share their earning and caregiving responsibilities more equitably. These should include:

- A more gender-equitable parenting leave system, including well-paid paternity leave and a period of well-paid, use-it-or-lose-it parental leave for all fathers
- Flexible working by default as a Day 1 right for all employees, with the onus on employers to advertise flexible options and justify when these are not possible
- Routine and systematic engagement with fathers in the perinatal period by NHS maternity and health visiting services to support their close attachment to, and involvement in caregiving for, their babies; and by other services (including Family Hubs) for families with older children.

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## Citation

Burgess, A., Goldman, R. and Davies, J. (2022) *Closing the Gap: UK working fathers' and mothers' use of time 2014-22* London: Fatherhood Institute.