

Parental leave and fathers: a winning combination for improving job quality in the EU?

Dalila Ghailani

Observatoire social européen

ghailani@ose.be

SASE Annual Conference, Boston 28-30 June 2012

Network C: Gender, Work and Family

1. Parental leave in the EU

1.1 Setting up minimum standards: Directive 96/34/EC

■ A historical but disappointing agreement

■ Weaknesses:

- nothing regarding the income
- no guaranteed transferability
- no guaranteed flexibility
- exclusion of the UK

■ Relative impact on the Member States



1.2 Revised Directive 2010/18/EU

■ Main changes:

- Longer leave with one non-transferable month
- Temporary changes to work schedules
- Extension to atypical workers
- Provision for adapted children and children with disabilities

■ Main weakness

- All matters regarding the income of workers during parental leave continue to be left for Member States and/or national social partners

■ Assessment

- The reform increases the incentives for father to take parental leave but if no commitment to support leave with financial compensation, impact likely to be modest!

■ Impact on the MS?



2 Current parental leave schemes in the EU: a great diversity

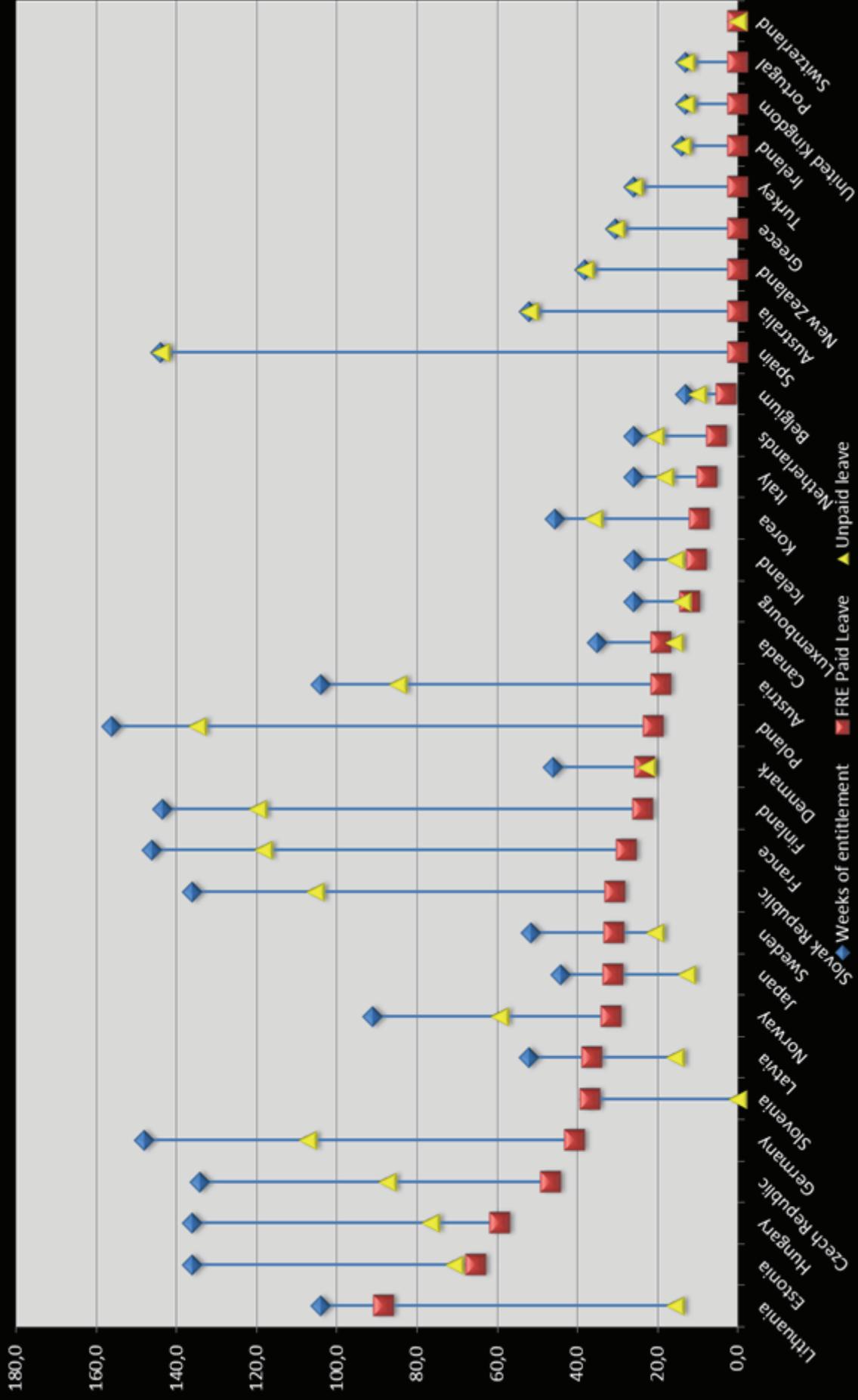
2.1 Availability of the right to parental leave

- key role through potential incentives for fathers' to take up leave
- Individual and non-transferable :
- Family-based right:
- Mix of individual and family-based right:

2.2 Length and benefits

- From the minimum required by the EC directive, three months (BE, CY, IE, MT, NL, PT, UK) to leaves up until the child's 3rd birthday (CZ, DE, EE, SP, FR, HU, LT, PL, SK)
- Any replacement rate (GR, IE, SP, NL, UK, CY, MT, PT)
- Flat-rate (AU, BE, CZ, DK, FR, HU, LU, PL, SK)
- Wage-related rate (DE, EE, ICE, LT, LV, NO, RO, SL, SE and FI)

Parental leave schemes in OECD countries, 2007-2008



2.3 Flexibility

- Parental leave becomes more flexible as the limit on the child's age before which leave must be taken increases : following childbirth (BU, CZ, EE,...) up to 8 years (SE, BE,IT, NL, IE, LV, MT)
- Parental leave becomes more flexible as the number of fraction in which it can be taken up grows: in all countries except MT, by day, by week, by month, by year
- Parental leave becomes more flexible as it can be taken at a part-time rate: in most countries except AU, BU, CY, HU, MT, GR, RO

2.4 Employment protection and safeguard of pension rights

- Parental leave cannot impact on future employment and pensions. Job and pension protection are safeguarded legally in most countries but are left to the discretion of the employer in some (NL, IE).



2.5 Take-up of leave across Europe

- Comparable data at the EU level: still an issue
- Overview of the take-up leave across Europe
 - Multiple evidence exist that almost all eligible mothers make use of their right to parental leave in all countries
 - If not entirely absent, men usually form at best a small minority among parental leave takers
 - Fathers' take-up of leave varies from 2,5% (PL) to 90% (SE) (Moss, 2011)

2.6 Conclusion

- Parental leave is still a mothers' affair
- Strengthening of women's traditional role as primary career
- Increasing the gender wage gap



3. Fathers-oriented leave policies implemented across Europe

3.1 Fathers' quota in the Nordic countries

- Nordic countries: pioneers in introducing and promoting fathers' parental rights
- Quotas aim at encouraging gender equality in the taking up of leave and at establishing a good-father-child relationship
- Fathers' quota is a real challenge to the traditional division of labour in families



■ Length and allowance

Table 1 Fathers' quota in the Nordic Countries

Country	Year of introduction	Length (weeks)	Allowance (% of previous income)
Denmark	1997	3 (industrial sector)/6 (public sector)	90% to 100%*
Finland	2003	Up to 6	70-75%
Iceland	2001	12	75-80%
Norway	1993	10	80-100%**
Sweden	1995	8	80%

*Full wages as per collective bargaining agreements

** Wages during leave can be negotiated with one's employer

▪ Impact on the fathers' take-up leave

- Daddy's quotas underwritten by financial compensation have a clear impact on raising fathers' take up of leave
- But fathers' take up of parental leave in Finland is lower than the other Nordic Countries
- The longer the daddy quota, the higher the fathers' share of the total days of leave



- **Factors influencing the use of the PL by Nordic fathers: some trends**

- **The labour market**

- ✓ The Swedish men who are not using parental leave are those outside the labour market or with a weak connection to it.

- **Economic factors**

- ✓ positive /negative correlation between income and use of parental leave was found;
 - ✓ low-income mothers take long leaves while fathers with low income take short leaves (SE, NO)
 - ✓ the more equal the parents' wages, the more parental leave the fathers uses (NO)
 - ✓ father's leave use is likely to increase when mothers earn more (SE)



■ Education

- ✓ A mother's level of education is a significant factor in father's leave use.
- ✓ Highly educated fathers are more likely to use parental leave and a greater portion of the leave while highly educated women are more likely to share the leave (DK).
- ✓ Less educated fathers are less likely to use parental leave (NO).

■ Work place

- ✓ Parents working in the public sector tend to go on leave for longer than those in the private sector.
- ✓ One parent's work situation affects the other's parental use: fathers with higher occupational qualifications (attorneys, engineers) take longer leaves than those with lower qualifications such as office workers, craftsmen (DK).



3.2 Bonus days and Equality bonus

- The **German *Elterngeld*** reform introduced the “**daddy months**” period to encourage fathers’ use of leave. Fathers’ take-up rate rose from 3.3 % in 2006 to 20% in 2010 but 2/3 of the fathers take up the Elterngeld transfer only for the exact 2 months than can be added to the mother’s 12 months.
- In Portugal, introduction of a **compulsory** five-day paternity leave and **two-daddy weeks of parental leave with 100%** compensation earnings plus **another 30 days to the initial parental leave** if the parents share the leave for at least 30 consecutive.
- In **Italy**, if the father takes at least three months, he is entitled to an additional month bringing his total leave right to 7 months but right to benefits limited to 6 months and is family-based.
- **The Swedish Gender Equality Bonus** translates into economic compensation in the form of a tax break that parents can cash in the year after their leave. The more equitably parents divide the leave days, the larger the bonus. Relative impact on fathers’ take-up leave,



4. Conclusive remarks

- Higher and longer levels of leave-taking are found in countries with father-targeted provisions and generous economic compensation. Gender-neutral parental leave schemes that implicitly, rather than explicitly, include fathers do not appear to promote greater father involvement : explicit labeling legitimizes paternal access to the care of children
- The evidence highlights the importance of a country policy framework, mostly financial incentives in shaping fathers' tendency to take parental leave.

- The length of leave taken by fathers rather than leave itself provides the conditions for promoting a more gender equal parenting and a more gender equal sharing of domestic roles after the leave
- Social policy offering fathers a paid leave to be home with children removes one structural or institutional constraint to gender equal parenting but OTHER CONSTRAINTS remain:
 - ✓ **the quality of mothers' employment** opportunities : where women 's jobs are less well remunerated and less fulfilling
 - this reinforces gender segregated roles and lower men's involvement in care.
 - ✓ **common discourse about fatherhood and motherhood:** social attitudes towards equal sharing of parenting are still mixed.



- Encouraging fathers to take longer leaves is the best way to bring about more change and to convince employers that fathers have the right to reconciliation measures but it is not sufficient!
- Policies supporting equal employment opportunities for women are necessary and have to be combined with policies encouraging fathers to take parental leave.