



Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe

New Fathers Wanted – How Father Involvement in Family Work is Promoted throughout Europe

New fathers wanted – fathers as the target group of current reconciliation policies

By Dr. Sören Hoyer, Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe

Words like equal sharing and reconciliation of family and work between partners are on everyone's lips these days. The OECD encourages people to "dare to share"¹ while the former German Federal Minister on Family Affairs Manuela Schwesig sees a trend towards equal partnership.² But what exactly is this all about, and what is the role played by fathers in this context?

Reconciling family and work is a double-edged issue that needs to be approached from two directions: family and work. Most people in Germany and Europe want the two to be compatible. Often, however, there is a gap between desire and reality.³ Policy-makers can and should help parents to bridge this gap. On the one hand, people want to have more time for their families and, at the same time, more time for gainful employment. The model of family work and employment being shared equally between the sexes is becoming an increasingly important ideal in the political debate.⁴

Both in Germany and in many other European countries, the provision of public child care has been significantly expanded in recent years in an effort to enable mothers with young children in particular to return to work at an early stage. New policies have gradually given mothers "more time for gainful employment" by reorganising the responsibility for family tasks between the state, the market and the family. As a result, the participation of women and men in gainful employment has also achieved a better balance.

However, the distribution of family work between the sexes has not yet reached the same level of balance as participation in gainful employment.⁵ The goal of giving especially fathers "more time for the family" has now found an increasingly important place on the political agenda. The issue here is redistributing family work between the partners: on the one hand, encouraging and supporting the active role of fathers in family work, and on the other, relieving mothers of family work and allowing them to more easily pursue employment commitments. This at least is the argument.⁶



Parental leave is one family policy instrument that allows more time for the family. It gives parents a legal right to time off from work with protection against dismissal and, in the ideal case, compensation for lost salary.

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- 1 OECD (2017a): *Dare to Share: Germany's Experience Promoting Equal Partnership in Families*. OECD Publishing, Paris.
- 2 „Partnerschaftlichkeit wird zum Trend“ [Equal partnership has become a trend], Guest Article by Manuela Schwesig in *Frankfurter Rundschau* on November 8, 2016.
- 3 German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (ed.) (2017): *Familienreport 2017. Leistungen, Wirkungen, Trends [Family Report 2017]: 7 ff* (in German); OECD (2017b): *The Pursuit of Gender Equality. An uphill battle: 73*.
- 4 Cf. Unterhofer, U./Welteke, C./Wrohlich, K. (2017): *Elterngeld hat soziale Normen verändert [the Law on parental leave has changed social norms]*. DIW Wochenbericht Nr. 34/2017 and German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (ed.) (2017): *Partnerschaftliche Arbeitszeiten aus Kinder- und Elternsicht [Equal sharing of working times from the perspective of children and parents]: 5* (both in German).
- 5 „Working women spend 22 hours per week in unpaid work, while working men spend fewer than 10 hours.“ (EU COM – European Commission (ed.) (2017a): *Report on equality between women and men in the EU: 12*.)
- 6 Cf. Hoyer, S./Reich, N./Reinschmidt, L. (2017): *Towards an Equal Partnership in Families. How European States Promote Father Involvement in Family Work: 2*.

The birth of a child as a door opener to more equal sharing

The birth of a first child causes a sudden spike in the amount of family work parents have to face. At first, while the father continues to work outside of the home, it is usually the mother who assumes responsibility for the childcare duties and family work. However, according to several studies, this pattern chosen by many partners to initially split employment and childcare duties often becomes a set pattern in the family's life. Starting a family therefore represents a crucial time in the life of many parents, a turning point that has a lasting effect on the distribution of family work.⁷ Involving fathers early on in childcare duties and family work has been shown to have a positive long-term effect, thus promoting a more equal sharing of gainful employment and family work.⁸ Parental leave is one of the policy instruments to achieve this.

Family policy conditions can have a decisive impact on social norms.⁹ And if we assume that social norms in connection with a family's economic framework have a lasting impact on the behaviour of individual parents, then we see that family policy measures can have a positive effect on the distribution of family work.¹⁰ Two of the measures at the top of the list to better meet the wishes of fathers for more time for the family are:

- Paid parental leave earmarked for fathers, and
- More flexibility in how parental leave is taken.¹¹

The proposal for an EU directive on work-life balance



The European Commission, with the work-life balance package it published in April 2017, is hoping to provide an impetus for the elaboration of Europe-wide standards in reconciliation policies. In its proposal, the Commission calls, amongst other things, for the introduction of at least four months of non-transferable parental leave for both parents. These earmarked months of parental leave would

be remunerated at the same level as sick leave, thus giving parents a certain amount of wage compensation. In addition, the proposal for a directive would also offer more flexibility in how parental leave can be taken – full-time, part-time or in some other flexible form. Both measures explicitly aim to encourage fathers in particular to take parental leave. Since men often earn more than women, wage compensation for them represents a greater incentive to take parental leave than a scheme of parental leave without financial support or with only lump-sum compensation. The non-transferability of parental leave would encourage men to take it, as these months would otherwise be forfeited altogether. Making the scheme more flexible would mean that fathers do not have to interrupt their employment completely and thus face perceived disadvantages on the employment market.

Father-specific leave options in the European policy debate

In May 2017, the **Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe**, together with the German **Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth**, held an international symposium on fathers' participation in family work.¹² Participants from seven European countries focused on how father-specific leave should be designed in order to promote equal sharing of family work and, thus, indirectly, also of gainful employment.

Two elements were of great importance:

1. How does father-specific parental leave affect the participation of fathers in family work when fathers are home alone and not taking leave at the same time as the mother?
2. What is the impact of flexible parental leave on the quality of parental leave?

Towards an Equal Partnership – Report of the Observatory

The goal of involving fathers more in family work and giving them “more time for the family” has now found an increasingly important place on the political agenda. The Observatory has elaborated a report that shows the following result:

In order to accomplish a more equal sharing of family work between the partners, several factors play a role: financial resources, norms and values as well as the family policy framework.

Father-specific leave may serve as a door opener as it addresses a very specific moment over the life-course: the birth of the (first) child that causes a sudden spike in the amount of family work parents have to face. At the same time, while the father continues to work outside of the home during the child's first months, it is mostly the mother who assumes responsibility for the childcare duties and family work.

Many European states have introduced father-specific leave policies with good results. Some earmark a certain amount of the leave individually to both the father and the mother. Whereas Sweden has tried financial incentives for a more equal sharing of parental leave, Austria has recently introduced such a policy. Germany is the only country that financially supports part-time parental leave in order to accomplish a near full-time employment of both parents.

Read and download the report here:

www.beobachtungsstelle-gesellschaftspolitik.de/en/keytopics/familyandreconciliation

- 7 Bühlmann, F./Elchereth, G./Tettamanti, M. (2010): *The Division of Labour Among European Couples: The Effects of Life Course and Welfare Policy on Value-Practice Configurations*. In: *European Sociological Review*, Vol. 26 (1): 49-66; Grunow, D./Schulz, F./Blossfeld, H. P. (2012): *What determines change in the division of housework over the course of marriage?* In: *International Sociology*, Vol. 27: 289-307.
- 8 Li, X./Zerle-Elsäßer, C./Entleitner-Phleps, C./Schier, M. (2015): *Väter 2015: Wie aktiv sind sie, wie geht es ihnen und was brauchen sie?* [Fathers in 2015. How active are they, how are they doing and what do they need?] (in German); Cf. also Hoyer/Reich/Reinschmidt (2017): *Towards an Equal Partnership in Families* (Fn 6).
- 9 Nitsche, N./Grunow, D. (2016): *Housework over the course of relationships: Gender ideology, resources, and the division of housework from a growth curve perspective*. In: *Advances in Life Course Research*, Vol. 29: 80-94.
- 10 Cf. Hoyer/Reich/Reinschmidt (2017): *Towards an Equal Partnership in Families* (Fn 6).
- 11 Cf. German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs (ed.): *Familienreport 2017 [Family Report 2017]: 85* (in German); EU COM - European Commission (2017b): *Proposal for a DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU – COM(2017) 253 final: 14*.
- 12 Hoyer, S. (forthcoming): *Documentation of the European Expert Meeting „Towards an Equal Partnership in Families. How European States Promote Father Involvement in Family Work“*.

In Norway and Sweden, a large proportion of fathers are most of the time alone at home during their daddy months, and therefore their child's or children's main carer at this time. This is mostly due to the fact that parental leave schemes in Norway and Sweden do not, or only to a limited extent, allow both parents to take parental leave simultaneously. Research has shown that fathers develop more effectively as caregivers if they have to learn to interpret an infant's needs without being able to rely on the mother's help on a day-to-day basis. As a result, fathers tend to participate more in family work after the parental leave time (cf. following article by Brandth).

It is widely thought that fathers in particular want more flexibility in parental leave regulations. The argument is that there are less obstacles for fathers to take parental leave if they take it in several blocks or on a part-time basis. However, the effects of more flexible regulations on the quality of parental leave are hardly ever discussed. What does it mean for fathers and their childcare responsibilities if they take leave only for a few days a week to care for their child? What effect does it have on the father-child relationship when dads go out to work part of the day and relinquish their childcare responsibilities temporarily to the mother or to another person? Initial research results show that if parental leave is taken on a part-time basis, the job still dominates the day. Fathers find themselves torn between work and their time with the children, and the rhythm and tempo of their life are more often adapted to the working world. Fathers are then often unable to assume the role of main carer, and they do not have sole responsibility for the care of their child. This might also mean that in the long run they will tend to see themselves more in a supporting role, leaving the main responsibility for family work in the hands of the mother (cf. article by Berit Brandth). The discussions that took place on this subject at the international workshop therefore suggested that individual components of the flexibility concept should be re-examined and taken into account in designing father-specific leave times.

Conclusion and outlook

In conclusion, it should be stressed that father-specific leave is a useful instrument to encourage fathers to participate in family work. Daddy months come up at a critical time in a family's life, when patterns are being set for the long-term distribution of family work: at the time of the birth of a child, when on the one hand the amount of family work increases and, on the other, mothers often naturally assume a major part of childcare work. It is important to involve fathers at an early stage in order to promote a sustainable distribution of family work. This is where policy-makers can become active in trying to realise parents' wishes for a better reconciliation of family and work – and thus have a long-term impact on society's view of fathers as natural caregivers. This is an important step towards more equal partnerships in families. How father-specific leave times are designed is a decisive aspect of these efforts. Two elements of this issue – father-specific leave that cannot be taken at the same time as maternal leave and flexibility in how father-specific leave is taken – have been raised in this introductory article. The present Observatory newsletter publishes opinions by experts from Norway, Austria and Slovenia on these questions. Berit Brandth from Norway opens the discussion by reporting on her research on the mechanisms of these two aspects. Olaf Kapella from Austria and Nada Stropnik from Slovenia were asked in interview form how the debate is progressing in their respective countries.



Parental leave for fathers: Policy characteristics to watch out for

By Berit Brandth, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU),
Department of Sociology and Political Science

The Norwegian parental leave policies for fathers, particularly the so-called “father’s quota”, have proven to work well when it comes to getting fathers to take leave. Ninety per cent of eligible fathers in Norway use this measure, which consists of ten weeks of individual, non-transferable leave based in law and paid at 100 per cent of earnings. The objective of the quota is threefold:

1. To increase equal sharing of work and family time with the mother
2. To strengthen fatherhood and
3. The child’s right to care from both parents.

One thing, however, is to encourage most fathers to take leave; another thing is how fathers use the leave. In our research on fathers and parental leave, we have detected two leave practices that seem to work counter to these objectives.¹³

Flexible leave

One of these practices is flexible use of the leave in terms of part-time. This is a common type of flexibility where part-time leave is combined with part-time work, which normally means that the leave weeks can be distributed over a longer period, in Norway until the child is three years old. There is no upper or lower limit as to how much parents can work when they choose part-time leave. Leave can be as little as an hour now and then. A second form of time flexibility is ‘deferred’ or ‘piecemeal leave’, which means that all or part of the father’s quota may be split into separate blocks of time and taken over a longer period. The alternative to flexible timing of the leave is continuous leave on a full-time basis. Fathers’ part-time leave may be concurrent with mothers’ part-time leave and flexible working hours, and a block of the father’s quota may be taken and combined with the family holiday.



In our analysis of part-time leave, the fathers interviewed reported a number of downsides of splitting the leave up in days, half-days and hours, and combining it with work. First, flexible timing of the leave creates fuzzy boundaries between work and home. This means the fathers have to handle both work and care at the same time, and very often the leave has to be adapted to the pressure at work. It thus stimulates nego-

tiations – not about taking leave – but about *when* the leave can be taken. Part-time leave means fathers in and out of care, where work often seems to gain priority. This causes considerable stress for fathers. One father explained that it was actually being at work at the same time as he was supposed to be on leave that caused the stress: “It wasn’t really leave because I never got into it as a routine. Then it wasn’t really work either, because I couldn’t go to work every day. So it was two things that both were sort of half-way.” From this perspective, neither work nor care benefitted from part-time leave as his job disturbed his focus on childcare and vice versa. “I needed to switch on and off all the time”. Many of the fathers on part-time quota said that it felt as if they were working full-time, while additionally having a one-year-old to care for.

Taking leave on a part-time basis seems to do something with the content of the leave days. The fathers miss the flow in the caring and believe that totally disregarding the job during the period of leave would have been much better. Part-time leave does not allow fathers to become fully immersed in the day-to-day chores with children and home. The chaotic life they describe, attempting to handle both work and care, undermines their chances to establish autonomous care routines independent of mothers’ supervision and monitoring.

¹³ Brandth, B.; Kvande, E. (2016a): **Fathers and flexible parental leave**. In: *Work, employment and society*, 30(2): 275 –290 and Brandth, B.; Kvande, E. (2016b): **Masculinity and fathering alone during parental leave**. In: *Men and Masculinities*. Prepublished as DOI: 10.1177/1097184X16652659.

Flexible leave policies support the idea of the *choice-making father who*, in contrast to mothers, has greater freedom to express choices in the area of work and care. Being able to choose the character of their caregiving by means of flexible use thus opens up the possibility of fathers avoiding childcare when the child is small. *Avoidant fathers* see this as a chance. Thus, part-time leave only partially changes the gendered division of care responsibility. It also works against fathers' improving their care competence, and it does not give children the concentrated time with their fathers that the leave could have provided. Consequently, designing the parental leave for fathers so that it is possible to take it as part-time leave and spread it over several years, works contrary to the objectives of the fathers' quota.

Home on leave alone and with the mother



The fathers' quota offers an opportunity for fathers to have sole responsibility for their children. But, according to the rules, fathers may use the quota regardless of what the mother does. In other words, when the father takes his quota, the mother may stay at home on a full or part-time basis. In a qualitative study, we compared fathers who stayed home on leave alone and fathers who were not home alone and found distinct differences in care practices.¹⁴

First of all, fathering alone allowed the men to develop their care competence and enhance their sensitivity to children and their confidence in 'reading' a small child. Consequently, they learned to carry out a "need-oriented" care practice. In the cases in which fathers did not stay home alone, the mother continued her caregiving and the father became her support person. The mothers' main responsibility for the child after having been home on leave for several months was not interrupted in these cases. These fathers needed the mothers to mediate the child's needs, and care practices based on them knowing the child were not well-developed.

Staying home alone, then, means taking greater responsibility for the child, something which helps facilitate a move from being the mother's helper to being a more equal co-parent. Being in charge of the children alone seems to be the cutting edge with respect to fathers' positive feelings of involvement and capability. Solo care is consequently a qualitatively different dimension of fathering than simply spending time with the mother present.

In a recent study¹⁵, the fathers connected increased self-confidence to being able to do the caregiving alone. Experiencing the children's responses to them and sometimes even taking preference towards them, over the mother, gave them a feeling of capability. Coping with new tasks that felt rewarding seemed to make caring an integrated part of fatherhood and masculine identity. Coping with the care work, one of the fathers said, "gives me a lot of pride and self-confidence - things you usually associate with masculinity. I feel strong!" It is interesting that he explicitly connected his acquired care competence to masculinity.

From having had a low confidence in their caregiving abilities, the fathers in this study reported a growth in experience, as they acquired confidence and increased feelings of self-esteem, thriving on being loved and appreciated by the child, all of which seemed to have provided their life with a new meaning and purpose. Findings indicate that the fathers did not measure self-worth against the acquisition of status and resources, but against building an intimate relationship with one's child, and being a person contributing love and security to the children.

The results of this study highlight effects of a policy that makes employed men devote more time and priority to childcare. Thus, the study is an answer to the objective of the fathers' quota that it may promote change in fathering practices and gender equality, but that the effects for all the three objectives are greatest when fathers are home alone.

¹⁴ Brandth, B.; Kvande, E. (2003): **Father presence in childcare.** In: Jensen, A.-M.; McKee, L. (eds.) **Children and the Changing Family: Between transformation and negotiation.** London: Routledge Falmer.

¹⁵ Brandth, B.; Kvande, E. (2016b): **Masculinity and fathering alone during parental leave.** In: *Men and Masculinities.* Prepublished as DOI: 10.1177/1097184X16652659.

Interview about father-specific leave and challenges ahead in Slovenia and Austria

with **Nada Stropnik**, Institute for Economic Research, Ljubljana
and **Olaf Kapella**, Austrian Institute for Family Studies

Slovenian fathers are eligible to 25 days paid paternity leave¹⁶ in 2017, rising to 30 days in 2018. There is a 90 per cent income replacement. The regulation allows for a flexibility in use, e.g. as part-time leave. How do you see the role of fathers in Slovenia as caregivers and what effects does flexibility in use have on this role?

Stropnik: In fact, the normal income replacement is 100 per cent, but it was temporarily lowered in 2012 in the framework of the financial consolidation measures. The take-up of the first 15 days (which was the period of full income replacement by the end of 2015) has been around 80 per cent. These 15 days are usually taken when the mother and child come home from the hospital, but may be used any time during the child's first six months.

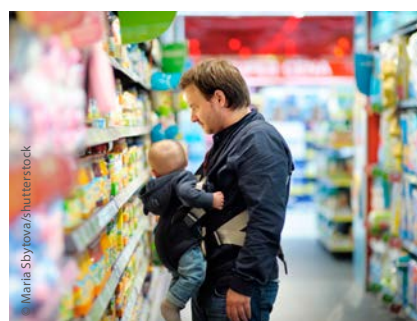
Less than one in five leave-takers take more than 15 days; these may be used until the child completes its first year in primary school. Research suggests that most fathers do not take more than 15 days of paternity leave because before 2016 their earnings were not (fully) compensated during the remaining leave.

There are also some obstacles from the side of the employer that are related to organisational problems in case of employee absence and the perception that men are replaceable at home, but not at work. This is even more stressed in the Slovenian environment where traditional attitudes about men's roles still persist, although the men in the surveys tend to express their egalitarian attitudes. The recent project on "Fathers and Employers in Action" has shown that male upper-managers do not take much paternity leave and do not support their male employees who have different preferences. Fearing to lose the job or be overlooked for promotion, even those men who wish to be active fathers succumb to the employer's expectations and limit their take-up of paternity leave.

Austria recently introduced a new family-time bonus scheme. Fathers now receive a lump sum of approximately EUR 700 if they take leave for one continuous month after the birth of a child. What are the objectives of this regulation?

Kapella: Both this family-time bonus and a partnership bonus were introduced as additional family benefits in March 2017. The primary objective of these additional benefits is to increase the participation of fathers in childcare and family work. The partnership bonus is a cash bonus parents receive if they share their take-up of the childcare benefit [Kinderbetreuungsgeld, KBG] almost equally (50/50 or 60/40). The family-time bonus is available during the first 91 days of a child's life. If the father (or the mother) takes a 28 to 31-day break in employment during this period, the family receives a bonus of approximately 700 EURO (22.60 EURO per day). This leave may not be interrupted or postponed, and during this time there is no protection against dismissal.

A key policy objective for the introduction of the childcare benefit in 2002 was to increase the involvement of fathers in childcare. This was put into focus during the recent reform. At the same time, however, it was intended to set positive impulses for women's employment and encourage their professional re-entry.¹⁷ Since its introduction in 2002, the childcare benefit has undergone several modifications. The different models have varied in terms of length of take-up and amount paid, starting from one model (30 months, plus 6 months if both parents applied for the payment) up to three and then later to five models in 2010. With the reform of the childcare benefit scheme in 2010, a new model was introduced (12 months, plus 2 months if both parents take leave) which was not designed as a lump-sum payment, but rather as an income replacement benefit. Above all the shorter models, and particularly the income replacement model, were the ones taken up much more actively by fathers. Evaluation studies on the child-



¹⁶ Note the difference between paternity and parental leave. Paternity leave is an individual right for fathers to take leave usually around the time of birth and generally consists of a few days or weeks. It should not be confused with parental leave, which is focused on in the second question about Slovenia.

¹⁷ Cf. Rille-Pfeiffer, C./Kapella, O. (eds.) (2007): *Kinderbetreuungsgeld. Evaluierung einer familienpolitischen Maßnahme*. ÖIF Schriftenreihe 15. Innsbruck: Studienverlag.

care benefit scheme have shown that the shorter models turned out to be the ones best suited to increase the proportion of fathers taking parental leave.¹⁸

Slovenia has a very generous parental leave system – with about 90 per cent income replacement. Nonetheless only seven per cent of fathers take up a share of parental leave. What reasons do you see for this low share of fathers getting involved in childcare and family work?

Stropnik: Let me first note that also for the parental leave the normal income replacement is 100 per cent. This means that the Slovenian fathers cannot use the major reason named by fathers in other countries for not taking parental leave in large numbers: larger foregone earnings because they usually earn more than their female partners.

The percentage of fathers taking some of the leave is shamefully low: 5–7 per cent in the last decade. Research shows that this is partly due to ignorance of the fathers' rights. In the case of paternity leave, some employers tend to discourage fathers from taking it, but it seems that men also do not show much interest in caring for very small children. When they do take paternity leave, the mothers are at home as well; however, when on parental leave, they are often alone with the child for several hours a day. Nonetheless, we should be careful in blaming the fathers for their very low take-up of the parental leave. There are indications that most mothers wish to take advantage of the entire leave period and do not stimulate their partners to take even a small share of it.

Unfortunately, the 2014 regulation revisions that introduced the parental leave as an individual right of both parents failed to introduce a strong motive for fathers to take their share. Namely, the father is allowed to transfer all 130 days of his leave to the mother. The first idea was to allocate 30 days of the parental leave exclusively to fathers, but the resistance was too strong, mainly by women who claimed that children would be deprived of a month of parental care since men are not likely to take that month of leave.

A frequent influence on the role of fathers in childcare has been whether they take parental leave alone or at the same time as the mother. This also affects the long-term involvement of fathers in childcare duties. How would you describe the role of fathers in Austria during parental leave?

Kapella: As I see it, the (long-term) involvement of fathers is often discussed from a unidimensional point of view. On the one hand, a distinction has to be made between the self-perception and the self-image of fathers – something we usually survey through studies of values and attitudes. On the other hand, in order to do justice to the complexity of the issue, the results of these surveys must be compared and contrasted with the actual involvement of fathers in family work and childcare. Quite fundamentally, I see fathers in Austria as active fathers – of course, with a significant potential for improvement, and this is where things turn out to be quite complex.

Values and attitudes studies show a very clear picture: fathers on the whole see themselves as active fathers. They know that they should be more involved in family work and caring responsibilities, and this is also something they themselves want.¹⁹ Active fathers are also happier fathers – compared to fathers who do not make long-term changes to their working lives after the birth of their child (for example, longer parental leave, real reduction in working hours).²⁰



On the other hand, typical studies on the use of time show that family work is still primarily done by mothers.²¹ The latest time budget survey (2008/2009), for instance, shows that amongst couples whose youngest child is below the age of six, mothers spend 3 hours 40 minutes per day doing childcare duties and fathers 1:37 hours.²² In international comparison, however, fathers in Austria are

18 Rille-Pfeiffer, C./Kapella, O. (2012): *Evaluierung Kinderbetreuungsgeld. Einkommensabhängige und pauschale Bezugsvariante 12 + 2 Monate*. ÖIF Forschungsbericht Nr. 9, Wien.

19 Cf. Zulehner, P. (2014): *Der Anstrengende Aufbruch. Ein Forschungsbericht*. Edited by the Ministry for Work, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection. Vienna; Kapella, O./Rille-Pfeiffer, C. (2007): *Einstellungen und Werthaltungen zu Themen der Vereinbarkeit von Familie und Erwerb. Deskriptive Ergebnisse einer Einstellungs- und Wertestudie zu Mutter- und Vaterrolle, Kinderbetreuung und Erwerbstätigkeit der Frau*. ÖIF Working Paper 66, Wien.

20 Cf. Kapella, O./Rille-Pfeiffer, C. (eds.) (2011): *Papa geht arbeiten. Vereinbarkeit aus Sicht von Männern*. ÖIF Schriftenreihe 23. Opladen: Budrich UniPress.

21 Cf. Testa, M. R. (2013): *Aufteilung der Kinderbetreuung zwischen Partnern*. In: Buber-Ennser, I./Neuwirth, N./Testa, M. R. (eds.): *Familienentwicklung in Österreich 2009-2013. Partnerschaft, Kinderwunsch, Kinderbetreuung und ökonomische Situation*. Wien: 16.

22 Wernhart, G./Dörfler, S./Mazal, W./Neuwirth, N. (2017, forthcoming): *Familienzeit – Wie die Erwerbsarbeit den Takt vorgibt. Perspektiven zu einer Neugestaltung der Arbeitszeit*. ÖIF Forschungsbericht, Wien.

no worse than fathers in other countries in terms of their active participation in childcare. For example, international evidence shows that the active time fathers spend with their children is the same in Austria as it is in Sweden.²³

To do justice to the complexity of the issue of fathers' involvement in childcare, there is another aspect that should be addressed: the overall distribution of paid and unpaid work between mothers and fathers, something which is also referred to as "total workload". The issue here is the totality of paid and unpaid work that men and women do. For Austria, fathers with a child under six years of age are involved in a productive activity (paid and unpaid activities) 44 minutes per day more than mothers with a child under six.²⁴ Demands for a greater involvement of fathers in childcare can only be towards meaningfully and sustainably met if at the same time the distribution of paid and unpaid work between women and men is discussed and re-aligned.

To reduce the discussion of fathers' involvement to take-up of parental leave falls short. Especially with regard to Austria it is problematic that since the introduction of the childcare benefit in 2002, there have been no official statistics collected on the take-up of parental leave in Austria. The figures therefore primarily provide information merely about the take-up of a cash benefit.

From your point of view, what are the major challenges in Slovenia and Austria to achieving a greater involvement of fathers in family work and thereby coming closer to a more equal division of labour between both partners?

Stropnik: In Slovenia, most women with children are employed, and this is normally a full-time employment. It is true that a comprehensive family policy contributes to the work-life balance to a great extent. Childbirth-related leave is more than a year long and normally includes full income replacement, whilst early childhood education and care is available immediately after the end of the period of leave and is also affordable due to high subsidies. There are also other measures that protect parents with young children and provide them with flexible options at work. However, all these policies are in place for both mothers and fathers, so there is no reason for mothers to take over a much greater share of family work. Fathers are not very much involved in daily childcare tasks and responsibilities. Research indicates that they have a luxury to choose the kind and timing of childcare activities. Their mostly supportive role thus translates into less care work and responsibility. It is the mothers who enable such a division of tasks.

Furthermore, employers base their expectations towards female and male employees on traditional gender roles, so it is not normal for them for their male employees to take the paternity, parental or sick leave for children, or to have a desire to use flexible work arrangements in order to care for children. There is a need for change: employers should offer more flexibility and understanding for greater paternal involvement.

Kapella: The main challenge, as I see it, is having a more general social discussion on mothers' and fathers' working time arrangement. If the aim is a higher participation of fathers in family work and childcare tasks, from my point of view, this seems to be feasible in the long term and only sustainable if the "total workloads" of mothers and fathers are discussed together. For example, full-time work for men, something that is most generally expected, should be called into question, because otherwise there will always be limits to fathers' increased involvement in the family. An employment model oriented towards more part-time work for both fathers and mothers would give fathers more time to participate in family work and in care tasks. At the same time, we should certainly be looking at preventive measures aiming at the development of (male) identities as early as possible, in order to soften the ever strong linking of a "male" identity with performance, especially in the sense of paid work.

Another issue I see is in the social discussion of a so-called "Daddy month". So far no political consensus on the concept and introduction of a "Daddy month" has been established in Austria. In terms of the signal it sends, I see the term "Daddy month" as being



23 Dörfler, S./Wernhart, G. (2016): *Die Arbeit von Männern und Frauen. Eine Entwicklungsgeschichte der geschlechtsspezifischen Rollenverteilung in Frankreich, Schweden und Österreich*. ÖIF Forschungsbericht Nr. 19, Wien.

24 Wernhart et al. (2017) (Fn 22).

problematic. It strongly suggests that being a dad can be reduced to a single month. Political and social interest should be oriented towards fathers taking long-term and sustainable responsibility for their children. I believe that emphasis on the fundamental and comprehensive involvement of fathers in family work is of great importance.

Unfortunately, there are still some social realities that stand in the way of a greater involvement of fathers. On the one hand, there are still income differences between men and women in Austria. Different arguments can be used to explain them, but none of them changes the reality of families: when planning for children, couples often decide to keep the higher (often male) income for the family. On the other hand, the continuing concerns and skepticism of many employers towards fathers taking parental leave are certainly a further hindrance. Giving fathers an individual right to parental leave could strengthen the position of fathers vis-à-vis their employers and would in addition be a signal to men that they should exercise their rights more often.²⁵ Fathers would not be dependent on their employer's goodwill, and this would reduce fathers' and families' worries about job security.

News from the Observatory

The Observatory analyses sociopolitical developments in Europe and considers their potential impact on Germany. It carries out research and studies – often comparative analyses of the general European context –, monitors European developments and organises international conferences. Its aim is to link stakeholders so as to promote European exchanges and encourage mutual learning.

Focus on family and reconciliation

One of the focal points of the Observatory's work in 2017 and 2018 will be how European countries help their populations to better reconcile work, elderly and child care

Involving fathers in family work

In May, the Observatory hosted the European Expert Meeting "Towards an Equal Partnership in Families. How European States Promote Father Involvement in Family Work". It was the beginning of a series of Expert Meetings on the subject of reconciliation policies. In addition to experts from the academic world, associations and politics, the event was also attended by Dr. Ralf Kleindiek, State Secretary in the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, and Tiina Astola, EU Director-General for Justice and Consumer Protection. The results of the Expert Meeting discussions will soon be published [here](#). An overview of how European countries hope to strengthen the involvement of fathers in family work can be found [here](#).

Improving the reconciliation of work and care

The second Expert Meeting in this series, held in early September, focused on support options for family carers. In addition to leave and financial support, the workshop also explored the opportunities offered by digitalisation. The documentation for this Expert Meeting will be available [here](#) shortly. A topical newsletter has already been published on this subject; you can find it [here](#).

Counselling services for persons in need of care as well as for their caregivers can also help family carers reconcile their work and their care duties. A study is currently being conducted to identify good practice examples in Sweden, Austria, Scotland and France.

U-turn – How Sweden wants to roll back the marketisation of social services

The Observatory has prepared a working paper (soon to be found [here](#)) on reform plans for a re-regulation of social services, currently being discussed in Sweden. The

²⁵ Cf. for instance the discussion on corporate culture in connection with the compatibility of family and work, also in relation to fathers, in Schiffbänker, H./Bergmann, N. (2016): **Work-life Balance and Fathers in Austria? – Empirical Evidence at the Company Level**. In: Ruspini, E./Crespi, I. (eds.): **Balancing Work and Family in a Changing Society. The Fathers' Perspective**. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

intention behind the proposals is that profits should be limited and in some form re-invested. At the same time, the range of providers should be increased. These reform proposals are of interest for the debate on welfare pluralism.

Participation I: Bringing migrant organisations into the political process

How can consulting structures and bodies help to involve migrants in integration issues? The Observatory will deal with the question of political participation of migrant organisations in Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Spain.

Participation II: Involving users in the design of social services

In its European Council conclusions, the Estonian Presidency of the EU Council is seeking to promote community-based support for independent living, especially for elderly people in need of care, people with disabilities or people with mental health problems. Getting users to participate in the design of these local communities can help find needs-based and innovative solutions to enable these users to live independently in the community. The Observatory will be organising a kick-off workshop on this topic and continue to follow it in 2018.

You can find all the results of our work here:

www.sociopolitical-observatory.eu/en

Stay tuned and subscribe to our mailing list. You will then receive our Newsletter regularly as well as additional information about our work. Register [here](#).

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