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Family policies in Scandinavia

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- Denmark, Norway and Sweden have all invested heavily in the creation of generous welfare states and have managed over time to develop encompassing and generous family policies for child families.

- With the child care and leave benefits in mind, the aim is threefold: to enable parents to reconcile work and family, to ensure a more gender equal sharing of paid and unpaid work and to provide care solutions in the best interest of the child.

- The three countries have developed a dual earner-dual carer model, which facilitates high labour force participation for both men and women, including for mothers with smaller children. Also, despite high female labour force participation pattern, the fertility rate has remained relatively high, at least until recent years.

- Whereas Denmark has traditionally offered short parental leaves and in general has applied a more pragmatic approach to child care, where the aim was to enable women's labour force participation in particular, both Sweden and Norway has offered longer parental leaves, stretching well beyond the first year of the child's life.

- Acknowledging that child care is important for the intellectual and social development of children, all three countries have introduced a child care guarantee, which ensures that children can obtain a place in child care regardless of their parents' labour market status. Child care is in this way considered a right of the child. In combination with maximum parental fees, this ensures that regardless of parental economic background all children may benefit from attending child care.

Contents

1. Introduction

Within the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, family policy constitutes an important component of the welfare state policies. These countries are known for their extensive support for families with children through policies aiming to reconcile work and family life, to share paid and unpaid work more equally between men and women, and to provide solutions that reflect the interest of the child. Finally, family policies help to re-distribute economic resources and in this way alleviate child poverty.

The Scandinavian countries have all been economically efficient and politically stable, democratic states for many years and have been able to develop and implement far-reaching and encompassing social policies, including policies for children, such as parental leave, early-childhood education, and childcare. Sweden was the first country to introduce parental leave that entitled fathers as well as mothers to take time off work to care for their child. Realising that this policy was not sufficiently to ensure that also fathers take leave, all three Scandinavian countries have since the 1990s developed policies to encourage fathers' take-up of leave by giving them non-transferable leave entitlements, both for paternity leave and for earmarked parental leave – the so-called father's quota. Early childhood care and education are equally developed.

The Scandinavian countries have accordingly been labelled caring states (Leira, 1994), and it is argued that welfare is developed within a public service model (Anttonen & Sipilä, 1996). Family policies do, however, encompass cash benefits as well as services. Both services and cash benefits are developed according to the principle of universalism today so often associated with the Nordic welfare model (Anttonen et al, 2012). Access is based on citizenship, not contributions nor merit, and with no stigma attached. As argued by Vabø and Szebehely (2012), the Nordic service universalism applies to more than merely issues of eligibility and accessibility, in that it also encompasses services that are attractive, affordable and flexible enough to satisfy a diversity of needs and preferences.

Although there is a shared belief in the ideal of gender equality, there are nevertheless considerable differences between countries in the extent to which family policies integrate gender equality as an explicit political goal and implement it as an active component in policy development. There is also variation in the policies and benefits themselves. From the outside, these countries nevertheless share enough common features to be often labelled as sharing the egalitarian (Mahone, 2002), universalist (social democratic), (Esping-Andersen, 1989; Gauthier, 2002), or dual earner-dual caregiver welfare model (Gornick & Meyers, 2008). The latter characterization is used in this report.

2. Definition of family policies

Before embarking on an investigation of family policies, a definition is perhaps in order, as the area of family policy or state support for families is often an amalgam of policies, programmes, and legislation.

In general, family policy may include services, cash and fiscal benefits (Kamerman & Kahn, 1997). A broad definition may include family policy directly aimed at families with children, as well as services such as childcare, leave schemes, and income benefits such as family allowances. It would also address health care, labour market and social assistance policies, etc. that affect family life and children's opportunities later in life. It could also include support for family members outside the nuclear family, such as a carers' allowance to care for an older relative (Kamerman & Kahn, 1997).

In this report, a more narrow definition of family policies is applied (Kamerman & Kahn, 1997), referring specifically to support for pre-school childcare for families with young children. In addition – and in acknowledgement of the gender equality paradigm which underpins all Nordic policy making – policies and legislation supporting the equal sharing of paid labour and childcare (also after family break up) will be included, such as policies on joint taxation and joint custody.

The following family policies and legislation will be considered:

- provision of early childhood care and education (ECCE) services primarily through public institutions (such as public nurseries, pre-schools, and kindergartens)
- parental leave policy (maternity, paternity, parental and childcare)

- child benefit
- child maintenance
- individual tax assessment to support the dual earner-dual carer model
- joint custody after family break-up

3. The dual earner-dual carer model

The search for gender equality has been a fundamental element in the development of the Scandinavian and Nordic welfare state. According to Leira (2006: p. 7), gender equality is »integral to Scandinavian citizenship«. In the international welfare literature, the Scandinavian welfare model is often praised for having achieved the so-called dual earner-dual carer model, in providing for a gender model where men and women to a (more) equal degree share paid and unpaid work (e.g. Gornick & Meyers, 2009). This includes men and women's participation in the labour market – the paid work component – as well as their equal sharing of care work in the family – the unpaid work component.

3.1 Sharing paid work

In the Scandinavian countries women are usually active in the labour market. Like men, most women in Scandinavia work, also after having children. Compared to the EU27 average of 58 per cent female participation in the labour force in the age group 16–64 (2007), around 70 per cent of women in Scandinavia are active in the labour market (table 1). Even after having children, a similar proportion of mothers with children aged 0–6 years are active in the labour market across the Scandinavian countries. Many of them manage to do so by taking up part-time work. Every second woman with a child aged 0–6 years in Norway and Sweden, works part-time.

The prevalence of part-time work may contribute to the relative high degree of gendered occupational segregation and low proportion of women in top-positions in this region compared to other countries (Mandel & Semyonov, 2006). As Mandel and Semyonov argue, the generous family policies and flexible labour conditions found especially in the public sector, where many Scandinavian women find employment, also seem to work against women's occupational and economic achievements by failing to challenge the traditional division of work between men and women. Generous labour and family policies as found in the Scandinavian

Table 1: Scandinavian labour market participation by gender

	Denmark	Norway	Sweden	EU27
Men aged 16–64 in labour force %[a]	81.0	79.5	76.5	72.5
Women aged 16–64 in labour force %	73.2	74.0	71.8	58.3
– *of which part-time %*	*23.9*	*31.6*	*19.7*	*28.9*
Employed mothers with children 0–6[b]	74.0	75.0	76.6	n.a.
– *of which part-time, %*	*n.a.*	*49.0*	*44.2*	*n.a.*
Employed mothers with children 0–3[c]	71.4	:	71.9	50.5
– *Of which in work*	*51.4*	*:*	*45.1*	*42,4*
– *on maternity leave*	*20.0*	*:*	*45.1*	*42.4*
– *on parental leave*	–	–	–	*3.9*

a: 2007
b: Including women (and men) presently on maternity and parental leave.
c: 2000–2003

Sources: Men/Women aged overall 16–64 in labour force: Indicators for monitoring the Employment Guidelines 2008 Compendium (13/05/2008); for Norway: Eurostat Employment Statistics 2007. Part-time: OECD Employment Outlook 2008, Statistical Annex Table E. Employed mothers with children 0–6 approx. 2000; Figures from the information services of Statistics in the countries in question; most recent data. Employed mothers with children: OECD Family Database – Employed mothers with children zero to three years.

countries, with access to part-time work, flexible hours in the public sector and long parental leave, may contribute to increasing women's labour force participation and thus enhancing their economic independence. However, by creating sheltered labour rights for women, it also keeps women in their role as the main caregiver in the family: »The social-democratic regime promotes women's integration into the labour market by providing them with convenient and flexible working conditions. However, this goal is achieved at the cost of greater occupational segregation and restricted opportunities for women to enter the most desirable positions« (2006:1942).

3.2 Sharing care

As for the other side of the coin, the dual carer situation, Nordic men are known for their participation in childcare, indicating that this is an integral part of contemporary fatherhood. For instance, Danish studies on time use show that fathers in Denmark are spending more and more time playing with and caring for their small children (Bonke, 2009).

However, this is a general trend which we also see across a number of non-Scandinavian countries. Finch (2006), as one example, found a weakening over time of the male-breadwinner family model in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, but also in Germany, the UK, Italy and the Netherlands, in that men spend less time working and more time caring for children. But she also found that in countries where gender equality is a socially accepted norm and division of care work is affected by such norms, traditional patterns of division of care work still persist. For instance, in Norway mothers continued to provide the bulk of childcare even after returning to work.

There is not only a tendency for fathers to spend more time with their children; the same pattern is seen among mothers (Bonke, 2009), reflecting the higher cultural status of parenthood today among parents and generally in society.

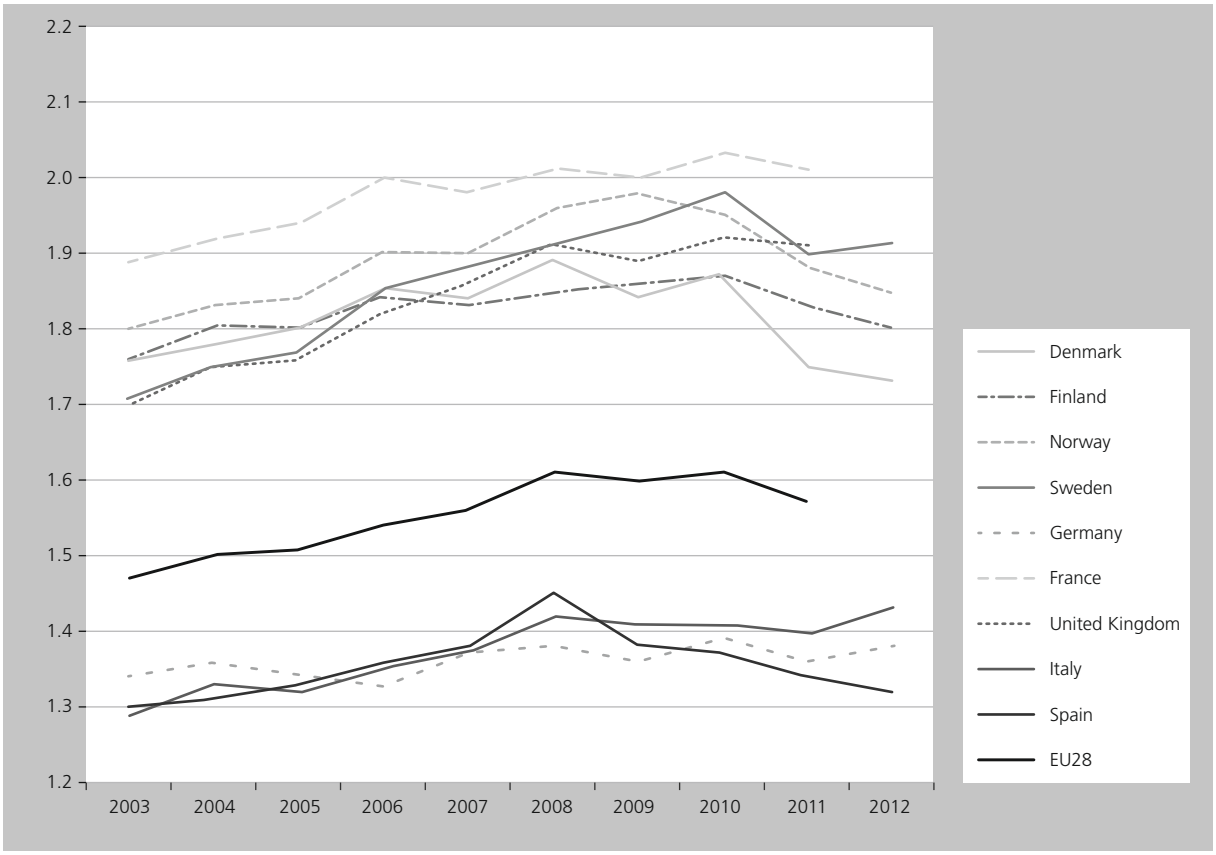
The uniqueness of Scandinavia may in fact be related more to men's more equal involvement in household work than in caring for their smaller children. A new study comparing fathers from countries in the northern and southern Europe concludes, somewhat controversially, that fathers in the northern countries spend more time on household chores than in the south, but not necessarily more time caring for children (Nordenmark, forthcoming). What seem to be the driving factors are whether fathers are gender-equality inclined and whether the female partner has a higher education. Across cultural and geographical borders, these seem to be the main factors. As the author suggests, family policy can play a major role in institutionalising gender equality: »If gender equality in family responsibilities is to be achieved, welfare policies are well invested in creating more egalitarian attitudes among fathers, and more indirectly perhaps in investing in women's education.«

3.2.1 Fertility

The Scandinavian countries have also stood out for a number of years with respect to their fertility rates, which have remained relative high compared to low-fertility countries such as Italy, Spain and Germany (see figure 1), and well above the EU28 overall rate of 1.57 children per woman. Generally, high fertility rates have been associated with generous family policies, and the Nordic countries have been highlighted as having a family policy set-up which stimulates having children (Crompton & Lyonette, 2007; McDonald & Meyers, 2009). The Nordic countries, like most Western countries, have a fertility rate below the replacement figure of 2.1 children per women, and have in recent years witnessed a decline that has caused some concern.

Denmark in particular has seen a decline in its fertility rate, which at 1.73 made 2012 the year with its lowest birth rate since 1998, and the lowest among the Nordic countries (see figure 1). As documented in the mid-2000s Eurobarometer survey on fertility preferences, Danish women have fewer children than they actually intend and wish. Among Danish women aged 25–39 years, the mean personal ideal number of children over the life course is 2.50 (2006 figures) and this figure has been increasing since 2001, when it was 2.33. Among the EU25 countries, Denmark in the mid-2000s had the highest proportion of women not fulfilling their childbearing desires as formulated at age 20. Nearly every second woman has fewer children than originally desired (Kesta, 2008). One possible cause of the decline in the fertility rate cited by certain commentators is recent changes in family benefit, which made it less economically attractive to have a third child (Andersen, 2013).

Figure 1: Total fertility rate, 2003–2012, average number of children per woman



Note: Germany including former GDR.

Source: Eurostat, Fertility indicators. Eurostat Database.

While child benefit reforms may have influenced families considering whether to have another child, childcare seems less immediate relevant to fertility in Denmark than in many other EU countries. In the Eurobarometer survey, 37 per cent of women and 25 per cent of men in Denmark mention childcare as a problem in deciding to have a(nother) child, compared with an average of 48 per cent of women and 43 per cent of men in the EU25. The figure in Sweden is 42 per cent for women and 48 per cent for men. In other words, compared to Sweden, there is less concern about childcare in Denmark, but the difference is much smaller for women, perhaps reflecting that in Denmark (more so than in the other Nordic countries) it is mainly women who take up parental leave (Kersta, 2008) (see also the section on leave for childcare p. 8.).

3.3 Objectives and motives behind the development of family policy

As already mentioned, gender equality has been one of the motivations behind the development of family policy in the Scandinavian countries. The first main step towards gender equality was marked by the women's right to vote, which was achieved in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, while the second step was women gaining access to the labour market and the public sphere in the late 1960s. The third step involves women and men sharing of both economic and care responsibilities, and is especially marked by »gender reconstructive political measures« (Kjeldstad, 2001).

All along, various actors and interest groups have contributed to the promotion of gender equality. These include the women's movements which were

especially influential in the early-twentieth century and later in the 1960s and 1970s and onwards (Wennemo 1994), and men's movements and committees which were influential especially in the late 1980s and 1990s (e.g. Brandt & Kvande 2009; Eydal & Gíslason 2008). Cooperation between the countries has taken place in the Nordic Council and especially through the Nordic Council of Ministers for Gender Equality. The European Union has also been an external influence, through various directives setting targets for day-care provision and frameworks for policies on parental leave, etc. (Moss & Kamerman 2009).

There are however, considerable differences in how the gender equality project has been addressed and implemented in family policy across the three countries. In Sweden, broad institutionalization of the gender equality principle has shaped the development of childcare and leave policies to a greater extent, with the major political actors since the late 1960s all supporting the development of family policy. Denmark, while being the first country to legislate on day care provision, in 1964, has taken a less ideological approach to the gender equality principle. As a result childcare policies in particular have developed as a more pragmatic response to the increase in women's labour market participation, with the important exception of the notion of the pedagogical needs of the child, which quickly came to frame the agenda. Furthermore, in Denmark, unlike all other Scandinavian countries, it has proven difficult to provide separate parental rights for the father (in the sense of a use-it-or-lose-it, non-transferable right for fathers to take parental leave). It was introduced in 1998 but abolished again in 2001. And in Norway, the facilitation of employment for mothers and gender equality has been a less dominant strand than in either Denmark or Sweden (Eydal & Rostgaard, 2012).

A common agenda in all three countries is concern for the child's best interest. This has generated debates about whether the child is best cared for in the home or outside the home in its early years. While there is agreement that it should be possible to care for a child at home at least in the first year, there is less agreement about the following year. All three countries now provide a cash-for-care benefit that extends the period where the family can care for the child at home after parental leave has ended, but very few families in Denmark make use of it. As it is mainly mothers who take up these cash-for-care benefits, concern has been expressed about how they affect gender equality. Women, and especially women in lower income groups and vulnerable work situations, are more likely to make use of cash-for-care-schemes with little monetary value and no labour market or pension rights (Eydal & Rostgaard, 2012b; Sipilä, et al 2010)

The tendency for it to be less privileged children who are cared for at home with the help of the cash-for-care benefit is another area of concern. Not least as all three countries – in line with the social investment paradigm – acknowledge that participation in day care from an early age contributes to the welfare of the child by enhancing its intellectual and social development. The national curriculums for childcare institutions in all three countries now stipulatethat they should help prepare children for the transition to school from an early age; this includes teaching the alphabet, numbers and simple arithmetic. In addition to ensuring that all children have equal chances when they start school, the day care institutions also have another integrative purpose, as participation is believed to promote the integration of children from different ethnic backgrounds and children with disabilities. All three countries have accordingly introduced childcare guarantees from various ages, guaranteeing day care places, and there is agreement across political party lines regarding the benefits to the child of being cared for outside the home from the age of two onwards. Likewise, in all three countries the administrative responsibility for childcare has been moved to the ministries of education, reflecting an increasing interest in early learning and investment in the child. Some critics have termed this development ›schoolification‹, arguing that it conflicts with the Nordic traditions of childcare, which to a greater extent than elsewhere emphasize free play and the integrity of the child (Eydal & Rostgaard, 2011).

In contrast, growing political and societal tension has been evident in the past decade over whether the state should actively intervene in men and women's division of care work within the family. This has been articulated as a debate between active fatherhood and free choice, or in other words, whether the state can legitimize introducing a non-transferable father's quota that regulates how parents share the parental leave (Eydal & Rostgaard, 2011). The argument is that if the father is prevented from turning over these weeks of parental leave to the mother, the state is intervening in a private negotiation. On the other hand, most research shows that women's career opportunities and lifespan incomes suffer from

their long absence from work (e.g. Gornick et al., 1997; Datta Gupta & Smith, 2002).

It is over the issue of the father's quota and cash-for-care that we find the biggest divide between political parties. Whereas the dual earner/carer model is an important element in the social democratic welfare state and thus in general supported by left-wing and social-democratic parties, parties on the centre-right often support more traditional family forms, both in Norway and Sweden, and are thus more in favour of the cash-for-care solution (Leira, 2006; Eydal & Rostgaard, 2012).

4. An overview of current Scandinavian family policies and measures

These sared aspects – and variation – in the approach to family life, gender equality, and the best interests of the child, are reflected in the ways policies have developed.

4.1 Maternity, paternity, and parental leave, and the father's quota

In all three countries, maternity leave was introduced in the mid-1950s to early 1960s, in the interests of protecting the mother and the child. In 1974, Sweden was the first country to introduce paid parental leave in order to give fathers the right to take leave too, and both Norway and Denmark have since introduced paid parental leave, although only after also introducing paid paternity leave for the period immediately after the birth. Sweden introduced paternity leave in 1980 (table 2).

As it was believed not enough fathers were making use of parental leave, in 1993 Norway introduced a use-it-or-lose-it, non-transferable father's quota of four weeks. Since then, the father's quota has been increased several times. For example, in 2011 the number of weeks was increased to 12 by taking one week from the sharable parental leave and adding an additional week to the overall parental leave period. The introduction of the quota appears to have affected men's take up of parental leave, which has risen from 1 per cent of parental leave days in 1993 to 17,8 per cent in 2011 (table 2), although, a 2010 poll suggested that electorial support for the quota was lacking. A majority of respondents

Table 2: Year of introduction of different forms of parental leave

	Denmark	Norway	Sweden
Maternity leave	1960	1956	1955
Parental leave	1984	1978	1974
Paternity leave	1984	1977	1980
Father's quota	1998	1993	1995
Length of father's quota (2014)	0 weeks	10 weeks	8 weeks
Fathers' share of parental leave, % (2011)	7.4	17.8	24.5

Sources: Eydal and Rostgaard, 2012, Duvander and Lammi-Taskula, 2012. NOSOSCO: Nordisk statistisk årsbog, 2013.

(68 per cent) wanted the quota abolished and only one third supported it (Aftenposten, n.d.). Sweden followed suit in 1995, introducing a four-week quota. The reform was met with much criticism, perhaps because the total leave period was not extended as it had been in Norway. In 2002, the quota was extended to eight weeks, but this time accompanied by an extra month of total leave, (so mothers did not lose out on their leave period), and there was much less opposition (Duvander & Johansson, forthcoming). In Sweden, too, there is a clear effect on fathers' take up of leave, from 10.9 per cent of parental leave time in 1994 to 24,5 per cent in 2011 (table 2). The quota still seems to be considered an efficient policy instrument; lately, the Folkpartiet party, part of Sweden's centre-right alliance coalition government, has announced that it will support the introduction of a third fathers' quota month to replace the gender equality bonus, as the latter seems ineffective from a gender perspective (Sveriges radio, n.d.). The gender equality bonus gives a tax credit to parents who share the leave equally.

In Denmark, a two-week father's quota was introduced in 1997. As in Sweden and Norway, the reserved weeks were supplemental to the existing leave. The father's quota had a very short span of life, however, and was abolished in 2002, when parental leave was instead extended by 22 weeks to a total of 32 weeks, leaving it now entirely up to the parents how they wanted to share leave (apart from the early weeks of maternity and paternity leave) (Rostgaard, 2002). This occurred despite the immediate effect the measure had had on fathers'

take-up of leave (Rostgaard & Lausten, forthcoming). The new government that took office in late 2011 proposed to re-introduce the father's quota, but in September 2013 changed its mind and instead discussed introducing a tax credit. The Danish credit was to be of equivalent size to a similar tax credit (jämställdhetsbonus) that exists in Sweden but has not had the desired effect of increasing the number of fathers taking leave (Duvander & Johansson, forthcoming). Since then, however, the Danish government has decided against introducing the credit, perhaps reflecting the heavy criticism from supporters of the father's quota.

Table 3 shows the length of the various types of leave available to mothers and fathers as of 2013.[1] In Denmark, the total leave is 52 weeks. Mothers have 18 weeks of maternity leave, of which four are to be taken before the due date, and fathers have two weeks of paternity leave. Thirty-two weeks of parental leave can be split between parents as they choose.

In Norway, the total length of leave depends on how much benefit the parents draw. With a 100 per cent compensation rate the total length is 47 weeks. The mother has usually three weeks of maternity leave before the due date and six weeks following the birth. The father has 10 weeks father's quota. Use of 20 weeks out of the 47 is pre-determined, 10 weeks each reserved for both the father and the mother, while parents can decide how to share the remaining weeks.

In Sweden the total leave is 69 weeks (of which only 390 days are with full benefit), with an eight-week quota for both father and mother, and including two weeks of paternity leave for the father directly after the birth.

As table 3 also illustrates, the size of the benefit varies across the countries. Different calculation principles apply, with the Danish benefit consisting of 100 per cent of the relatively low sickness benefit, the Norwegian 80 per cent of former wages if on part-time leave and 100 per cent if on full-time leave with a max. of 8,738 NOK weekly, and in Sweden 80 per cent of former wages with a weekly maximum of 8,127 SEK. Comparing Denmark and Sweden, where comparable information taking into account purchasing parity is available, the weekly benefit is considerably lower in Denmark (€354) than in Sweden (€552).

1. To be precise, the right to leave and the right to a financial benefit are separate entitlements, but for the sake of simplicity, the right to the benefit is discussed here.

Table 3: Length of parental leave

	Denmark	Norway	Sweden
Total weeks	52	47/(57[a])	69
Of which:			
Mother (maternity)	18	10	8
Father (father's quota in parental leave)	0	10	8
Father with mother (paternity leave)	2	2	2
Size of benefit, % of former income[b]	100[c]	80/100	80
Max. weekly benefit, PPP, euros	354	–	552

a: with 80 % compensation.
b: Max. amounts apply.
c: Of sickness benefit.

Source: Eydal and Rostgaard, 2013.

In addition to the rules described above, more extensive rights are available as part of collective agreements. Detailed comparative information is not available, but in Sweden, depending on the sectoral agreement, many employees are entitled to up to 90 per cent of former wages after a waiting period. In Denmark and Norway, public employees working for national or municipal entities are entitled to full wages during leave (Barselsudvalg, 2013).

In all three countries the right to benefits depends on prior labour market attachment; for example, in Norway, parents must have been in employment for six of the ten months prior to taking leave and also have had a yearly income exceeding a certain level. For a father to be entitled to both benefit and leave, the mother must be actively working, studying or too ill to take care of the child. The reason for this restriction is to avoid awarding fathers the parental leave benefit if the mother is otherwise at home and able to care for the child herself. 31 per cent of Norwegian fathers receive no parental benefit (Barselsudvalg, 2013).

4.2 Childcare

One of the policy areas where there are distinct differences between the countries is the development of childcare provision. There are also differences in take-up of childcare for pre-school children aged 0–3, while take up of childcare for children aged three to school age is more similar (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2013).

Denmark invested a lot of resources early on in the provision of childcare, and the trade union representing childcare staff successfully argued that childcare should take place in an institutional setting, not as family day care in the home of a child-minder (Kremer, 2007). Attending a day care institution is thus part of a normal childhood in Denmark. There is a right to childcare once the child is 26 weeks old, even though parental leave may continue until the it is 46 weeks old. The right is independent of the parents' employment situation. A significant number of children start in day care before they turn one (17 per cent), while as many as 90 per cent of one- to two-year-olds attend childcare (table 4). From the age of three until school age, nearly all children attend childcare (98 per cent).

Table 4: Take-up of childcare.

	Age group	1995	2000	2010
Denmark	<1 years	–	15	17
	1–2 years	48	77	90
	3–5 years	83	92	98
Norway	<1 years	–	2	4
	1–2 years	22	37	79
	3–5 years	61	78	96
Sweden	<1 years	–	0	0
	1–2 years	37	60	70
	3–5 years	74	86	97

Note: Includes both child-minders and nurseries.

Source: NOSOSKO, 2007, 2009, 2011.

In Sweden, the policy enables the child to start in childcare following the end of parental leave, but as this continues until the child is around eighteen months old, no children start in childcare before the age of one, as the statistics show. At the age of 1–2, 70 per cent of children were in childcare as of 2010, while here too nearly all children aged 3–5 attend child care (table 4). Since 2003, all children aged four and over have had a statutory and individual right to 15 hours of weekly childcare. Reflecting the view that childcare is considered to benefit the child, this right applies independently of the parental work situation (Eydal & Rostgaard, 2013).

In Norway, take-up lagged behind the other two countries for a number of years, but now 79 per cent of children aged 2–3 years attend child care, with nearly full coverage for the 3–5-year-olds (96 per cent) (table 4). Since 2009, children have had the statutory and individual right to childcare from the age of one, also regardless of parental work situation (Eydal & Rostgaard, 2013).

In all three countries, the contributions paid by parents as set nationally as a maximum level decided by the state, out of concern that the costs of childcare might deter some low-income parents from making use of it. Parental contributions depend on household earnings and the number of children attending childcare. In addition, there may be rules about maximum payment. For example, in Denmark parental contributions must not exceed 25 per cent of total running costs. However, as these differ across local authorities, there is some variation in the actual fee that parents must pay, with levels varying from €226 to €365 in Denmark. In Norway, the maximum payment is €209 monthly, in Sweden is €130 (2008 rates) (Eydal & Rostgaard, 2013).

4.3 Cash for care

Besides the childcare programs – and generally less noted in the international welfare literature – parents in the Scandinavian countries have the option of a cash-for-care benefit after parental leave. In Denmark the benefit can be taken up when the child is between 6 months and 3 years old, in Norway from the age of 1–3 and in Sweden when the child is 250 days to 3 years. Norway introduced this option in 1998, Denmark in 2002 and Sweden in 2008, but each with different intentions (table 5).

In Denmark and Sweden, the intention was primarily to allow the parents to decide whether the child should be cared for in the family or outside it. Especially in the case of Denmark, it was also introduced in order to take some pressure off the local authorities. In Norway, on the other

Table 5: Cash for care arrangements

	Denmark	Norway	Sweden
Age of child	6 months to 3 years	1–2 years	250 days to 3 years
Universal, for all parents regardless of type of income?	No	Yes	No
Paid by state or municipality	Municipality	State	Municipality
Cash for care benefits 2009 as % of AW 2007*	24.8	9.4	10.7

* AW: constructed average wage earner 2007 is calculated by NOSOSKO (*NOSOSKO 2008,* 2009, pp 212–213). For further information on NOSOSKO AW calculations please see http://nososco-eng.nom-nos.dk/filer/publikationer/tabeller/descrtyp07.pdf.

Source: Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011a

hand, the main purpose was to create equality between parents who make use of state-subsidized childcare and those who care for their child as home, and thus received no financial support.

In Norway it is a national scheme providing the same benefit for all parents across the country, while in Denmark and Sweden it is local (Eydal & Rostgaard, 2013). The monetary value is considerably higher in Denmark (24.8 per cent of an average wage earner income) than in Norway (9.4 per cent) or Sweden (10.7).

Few statistics on take-up are available, but the latest reports suggest that take-up is low in Denmark, where only around 700 families make use of it. In Norway, take-up has decreased over the years from 85,000 in 2003 to 36,000 in 2012, in a development that is also reflected in rising take-up of child care. In Sweden 11 per cent of children under age 2 were cared for under cash-for-care in 2010 (Eydal & Rostgaard, 2013).

4.4 Child support

In all the Scandinavian countries, parents with children receive child support to compensate them for the costs associated with having children. It is by tradition one of the most universal benefits and intended to be available to all families with children. In all the three counties the benefit is tax-free and independent of the parents' other sources of income.

In many other ways, the benefit rules vary considerably across the countries. One variation is whether the benefit size depends on whether there are one or two parents in the household, and thus how high the household income potentially is. Norway and Denmark award a higher benefit to single parents, while in Sweden the amount is the same regardless of the number of parents in the household (see table 6).

In Sweden, the benefit per child increases with the number of children in the family, while in Norway and Denmark, it decreases (see table 6).

Table 6 shows that the benefit for a family with one child is highest in Denmark and lowest in Norway, while a family with three children it is highest in Sweden and also lowest in Norway.

Only in Denmark does the amount depend on the age of the child, with a higher amount given for children aged 0–2 years (16,988 DKK per year), then decreasing to 13,448 DKK for the 3–6-year-olds and finally to

Table 6: Child benefit

	Denmark	Norway	Sweden
Couple with:	**€, PPP**	**€, PPP**	**€, PPP**
1 child	1,267	987	1,103
2 children	2,534	1,975	2,363
3 children	3,800	2,962	3,943
Single parent with:			
1 child	2,192	1,975	1,103
2 children	3,917	2,962	2,363
3 children	5,643	3,946	3,943

PPP: Purchasing power parity.

Source: NOSOSCO, 2011.

10,580 DKK for the 7–17-year-olds. In Norway, the benefit is higher for recipients living in the northern region and on Svalbard.

Regardless of variations in child benefit arrangements, the Scandinavian countries have managed to keep child poverty at a low level, in comparison to many other countries (see table 7). While the child benefit contributes to this, there can be no doubt that the dual earner structure makes the greatest contribution, with a higher earning potential for two parent families; children in single-parent families are persistently poorer than children in other family models.

Table 7: Child poverty

Country	Percentage of children under 18 living in poor households, 2010
Denmark	11
Norway	11
Sweden	13
United Kingdom	20
Germany	18
Italy	25
Spain	25
EU total	20

Source: Deding and Forssén, 2013.

4.5 Child maintenance

In all the Scandinavian countries both parents are considered responsible for the maintenance of the child, also following parental breakup. The conditions of payment between parents are usually settled when the marriage or co-habitation is terminated, either by the parents themselves, by the court or by the social welfare office.

In all three countries, the level of child maintenance depends on the earned income of both parents, and in Norway, the settlement also takes into account the custody arrangement. The more time with the child, the higher the maintenance.

If the liable parent fails to pay maintenance, the state will step in and pay out the maintenance, and later recover it from the liable parent. In Denmark, this advance maintenance benefit is a fixed benefit, while in Norway it is income-related (see table 8).

Table 8: Advanced child maintenance benefit, 2010

	Denmark	Norway	Sweden
Max. benefit per child, p.a., PPP	€1,171	€1,389*	€1,337

PPP: Purchasing power parity.

* Mean figure.

Source: NOSOSCO, 2011.

4.6 Individual income taxation

Individual tax assessment has been in place for a number of years in the Scandinavian countries, in line with the dual earner-dual carer model. In Norway it was introduced as an option in 1959, in Denmark it was introduced in 1970 for earned income and in 1983 also for wealth, while Sweden introduced individual tax assessment in 1971 (table 9).

Table 9: Year of introduction of individual tax assessment

Country	Individual taxation
Denmark	1970 (earned income) 1983
Norway	1959 (optional)
Sweden	1971

Source: Hakovirta et al, forthcoming.

Despite the system of individual income tax assessment, which is designed to ensure that the individual uses only his or her own personal allowances, there are a number of exceptions. In Denmark it is possible to transfer the personal allowance of tax-free income from a non-working person to working partner. As argued by Kremer (2007), this option contributes to what she calls ›citizenship rights to care‹, in that it gives a woman (or man) the possibility to opt out of the labour market without the family losing the personal allowance of tax-free income. However, critics would point out that it is mainly women who transfer their personal tax-free allowance to men, so this is not a gender-neutral benefit

and thus cannot be considered part of a dual earner-dual carer model – and is accordingly labelled the ›male breadwinner bonus‹ (Lewis, 1992; Sainsbury 1996).

Although used quite substantially (400,000 persons in 2000), the size of the tax-free allowance is rather negligible, around €400 a year, indicating that most of those who make use of it are students or people working few hours (Kremer, 2007).

Otherwise, fiscal benefits play little role in family policy and neither country offers any childcare tax credits as is the case in e.g. the United Kingdom and Germany.

4.7 Joint custody legislation

With the emphasis on gender equality and the father's active role in parenting, sharing of custody after separation or divorce is important in the Scandinavian countries. Legal reforms in recent decades have increasingly centred on co-parenting ideals, and joint legal custody has become the norm in divorce or separation in all of the Nordic countries (Eydal and Kröger, 2010). This arrangement is also preferred in the legislation and is believed to be the best option for the child (Friðriksdóttir, forthcoming). Since 1981 in Norway, 1986 in Denmark and 1992 in Sweden, it has been possibile for parents to decide to share custody after separation.

As Friðriksdóttir (forthcoming) notes, in Nordic family law, »tensions surrounding post-separation parenting have resulted in a growing number of legal provisions with the aim to guide, clarify and regulate various problematic issues«. The court may thus order parents to share custody; this has been possible in Norway since 1981, in Sweden since 1998 and Denmark since 2007. This may take place against the will of one or both the parents. Due to heavy criticism, the law in Norway was amended in 2006, now underlining that shared custody should be based on parental negotiation. In Denmark, the law was also amended in 2012, similarly placing greater emphasis on parental cooperation (Friðriksdóttir, forthcoming).

5. Conclusion

What are the main differences and similarities across the Scandinavian countries, and what may learned from the Scandinavian case?

The Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Norway and Sweden have all invested heavily in generous welfare states and have managed over time to develop encompassing and generous family policies for families with children. In terms of childcare and leave, the aim is three-fold: to enable parents to reconcile work and family, to ensure a more gender equal sharing of paid and unpaid work and to provide solutions in the best interest of the child. Simultaneous achievement of all three goals has not always been possible, however.

The three countries have developed a dual earner-dual carer model that facilitates high labour force participation for both men and women, including for mothers with younger children. Also, despite strong female labour force participation, the fertility rate has remained relatively high, at least until recent years.

The dual earner-dual carer model seems, however, to be achieved not only through the provision of family benefits, but also through a particular pattern of female labour force participation where women often work part-time during the first years of the child's life. Women tend to work in the public sector where part-time work is more available and acceptable. Critics of the Scandinavian model argue that, in combination with the generous family policies pursued in these countries, this unfortunately consolidates women in a weaker labour market-position where their lifetime earnings are smaller and career opportunities fewer, and in general reinforces occupational segregation.

As regards the dual carer situation, over time Scandinavian fathers have been spending more and more time with their children, but mothers have too. It also seems to be a general development in many countries that parents have and use the opportunity to spend more time with their children. This reflects how family and company policies have become more family-friendly but also that we today place a high value on parenthood. Scandinavian fathers do, however, tend to spend more time on household chores than fathers in southern Europe. Family policy, which is focused on an equal division of paid and unpaid

work, may serve a role in institutionalizing gender equality and thus creating more gender-egalitarian attitudes among fathers, which again serves to secure a more equal division of housework.

Within this group of countries though, there are differences in emphasis in gender equality especially, and to some degree differences concerening the best interest of the child. Whereas Denmark has traditionally offered short parental leave and applied a more pragmatic approach to childcare, where the aim was in particular to enable women's labour force participation, both Sweden and Norway have offered longer parental leave, stretching well beyond the first year of the child's life. In Norway, functions through the combination of parental leave and cash for care. This difference in leave options across the three countries has resulted in differences in take-up of childcare. It is thus not uncommon for Danish children to be cared for outside the home before they turn one year, and most 1–2-year-olds in Denmark are in childcare. Take-up of childcare among these age groups used to be considerably lower in Norway and Sweden. Over time, there has been some convergence, and particularly in Norway we now see that the cash-for-care solution is less favoured by parents, and more children aged 1–2 years consequently attend childcare.

In all three countries, it is possible to choose to remain at home and care for children after the end of parental leave, via cash-for-care. But few families make use of this option in Denmark, and it seems to have become a less popular solution for families in Norway too. There, cash-for-care was introduced as a way to compensate those parents who did not use publicly supported childcare and who accordingly did not receive any state subsidy for the care of their children. Here, as in Sweden, there has been criticism of the cash-for-care solution as it undermines the social investment paradigm, exacerbating social inequalities between children attending childcare and children cared for at home.

Acknowledging that childcare is important for the intellectual and social development of children, all three countries have introduced a childcare guarantee, which ensures that children can obtain a place in childcare regardless of their parents' labour market status. Childcare is considered a right of the child. In combination with maximum parental contributions, this ensures that all children may benefit from attending childcare, regardless of parental economic situation.

The countries differ on the other hand in their approach to gender equality, including how the principle should be reflected in family policy and in the leave schemes in particular. Whereas Sweden and Norway have managed to introduce – and lengthen – the father's quota several times, Denmark abandoned this policy in the early 2000s. Parties of the centre and left have expressed political interest in re-introducing the father's quota, but in general the gender equality project seems to have less favourable conditions in Denmark. As of mid-2013 it appears unlikely that the quota will be re-introduced, despite pronouncments made when the new government entered office. This despite the fact that the father's quota seems to be a most efficient policy tool for addressing gender equality in the division of leave between men and women. As a result, Denmark has not seen – and is unlikely to see in the near future – the increase in take-up of parental leave by fathers seen in Sweden and Norway.

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