



**European Expert Group Meeting
“Confronting family poverty and social exclusion;
ensuring work-family balance;
advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity
in Europe”**

Convened as part of preparations for the
Twentieth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2014
(Cfr. Report of the Secretary-General ,
Preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the
International Year of the Family in 2014,
A/67/61-E/2012/3)

6-8 June 2011

Leave arrangements in Europe.
Major trends, challenges and policy issues

Fred Deven PhD*
Knowledge Center WVG
Dept. of Well Being, Health & Family
Belgium

Acknowledgments and Sources

International Network on Leave Policies and Research www.leavenetwork.org

Wall et al., 2009 www.coe.int/familypolicy

OECD Family Database
www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database

PF2.1 > PF2.4, Child-related leave

MISSOC www.europa.eu/social

EC funded research www.familyplatform.eu

Concepts - Definitions

Maternity leave

generally available to mothers only. Usually understood to be a health and welfare measure (> protect the health of the mother and new born child), to be taken just before, during and immediately after childbirth.

Paternity leave

generally available to fathers only. Usually to be taken soon after the birth of a child; intended to enable the father to spend time with his partner, new child / older children.

Parental leave available *equally* to mothers and fathers, either as:

- (i) a non-transferable individual right (i.e. both parents have an entitlement to an equal amount of leave); or
- (ii) an individual right that can be transferred to the other parent; or
- (iii) a family right that parents can divide between themselves as they choose.

Main characteristics

Maternity leave

- *not much flexibility
- *obligatory in numerous countries.
- *some choice about when women can start to take / how much of the leave period before and after birth.

Main characteristics

Paternity leave

*Enabling fathers to take a short period of leave immediately following the birth of a child, often associated with providing help and support to the mother.

*But parental leave sometimes includes a period of time that only fathers can take (cf. a 'father's quota'): distinction between paternity leave and father-only parental leave becomes unclear and confusing.

Main characteristics

Parental leave

*enabling men and women “to take care of (a) child until a given age”, so distinguishing this leave from Maternity leave

*specific situation for EU member states:

Directive 96/34/EC + Directive 2010/18/EU= at least 4 months per parent (“an individual right and in principle non-transferable”)

Parental leave varies > 4 main dimensions:
entitlement, length, flexibility, payment

Entitlement

**a family entitlement* e.g. Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Russia and Slovenia

***an individual entitlement** e.g. Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Spain, UK

***mixed** Iceland, Norway, Portugal, Sweden

Parental leave varies > length

- * Length. Broadly, countries divide into
 - * those where the total *length* of post-natal leave available around 9 to 15 months;
 - * e.g. Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Slovenia and the UK;
 - * those where continuous leave run for up to 3 years or >
 - * .e.g. Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia and Spain.
 - * in between > Sweden: paid leave roughly equivalent to 18 months + each parent entitled to unpaid leave until a child is 18 months.

Parental leave varies > flexibility

Flexibility.

- *most common option: able to choose when to take leave until a child reaches a certain age
- *common option: able to take leave in one block of time or several shorter blocks.
- *other forms:
 - > leave on a full-time or part-time basis
 - > longer period of leave with lower benefits or a shorter period with higher benefits

Parental leave varies > payment

Payment

- * varies considerably , but majority of countries have some *payment*.
- * some C. no payment cf. Greece, Ireland, Spain, UK
- * either: flat-rate or set at a low earnings-related rate; means-tested; or a high earnings-related rate (but < 6 months) e.g. Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland and Russia
- * an earnings-related benefit of more than two-thirds of normal earnings for 6 months or more (>Nordic countries) but *a ceiling on benefit payments*.
- * parents on leave receive a general 'childrearing' benefit that is paid to *all* parents with young children. Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, France and Germany

Related measures

- * **childcare leave** usually immediately after parental leave, creating a continuous period of leave
- * **leave in case of the illness of a child.** The EU Parental leave Directive > an entitlement to 'time off from work on grounds of *force majeure* for urgent family reasons in cases of sickness or accident making their immediate presence indispensable', (no minimum requirements for length of time or payment).
- * **additional leave entitlements**, covering a wider range of family members than children.
- * '**career break / time credit**'. a statutory entitlement break from employment for any reason, including (but not confined to) childcare
- * **reduce working hours to enable breastfeeding.** Women reducing their hours for this reason are usually entitled to earnings compensation.

Summing up various types of leave

European countries fall into 3 clusters related to the **provision of earnings-related post-natal leave** :

A. 9 months or more, at two-thirds or more replacement rate:

5 Nordic countries + Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Slovenia + Germany

B. 4 to 6 months, but confined to maternity leave:

various Continental Western European countries

take account of levels of ceilings in assessing the generosity of national schemes.

C. Up to 4 months at most of earnings-related post-natal leave:

e.g. Austria, Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Russian Federation, Switzerland, UK

Some policy issues

- * **ELIGIBILITY**
- * **TAKE UP RATES**
- * **FUNDING & BUDGETS**
- * **INCENTIVES**
- * **LA and ECEC**
- * **LA and FLEXIBLE WORKING OPTIONS**

suggested RECOMMENDATIONS

- * As the distinction between various types of leave arrangements begin to blur, public authorities could work towards a single, generic leave entitlement that makes no specific distinctions (but can designate periods for ‘mothers only’ and ‘fathers only’)
- * Using shorter periods of well paid leave at two-thirds or more of earnings provides better outcomes from the perspective of different goals and various stakeholders
- * Viewed from a life course perspective it is worthwhile to develop an entitlement for workers to short breaks from employment, including but not confined to childcare
- * **To read** Moss, P. (2012). International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research www.leavenetwork.org (forthcoming)