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The Inclusiveness of Social Rights: The Case of Parental Leave Policies

Editors

Sonja Blum and Ivana Dobrotić

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Editorial

The Inclusiveness of Social Rights: The Case of Leave Policies

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Abstract

This thematic issue aims to deepen the theoretical as well as empirical knowledge on the inclusiveness of social rights, focussing on the revelatory case of parenting-related leave policies. This editorial defines (leave) inclusiveness and discusses extant research on varying entitlements and eligibility criteria in the field of parenting leaves. It summarises the conceptual, methodological, and empirical contributions made by the articles in the thematic issue and closes with a research outlook.

Keywords

eligibility criteria; entitlement; inclusiveness; leave policy; parental leave; selectivity; universalism

Issue

This editorial is part of the issue “The Inclusiveness of Social Rights: The Case of Parental Leave Policies” edited by Sonja Blum (University of Hagen, Germany) and Ivana Dobrotić (University of Oxford, UK / University of Zagreb, Croatia).

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1. Introduction

As is widely recognized, welfare states may both reduce or reinforce existing inequalities to different extents, and social programmes may have stratifying and genderizing effects (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Orloff, 1993). This is primarily related to the design of welfare states and the differences in entitlement principles related to social rights, such as employment, citizenship, or marriage. Moreover, the conditions under which social rights may be exercised (eligibility criteria) can be more or less strict. The effect of various social programmes may thus relate to the extent to which countries rely on universal principles for granting social rights, making them more or less inclusive, as well as policy implementation. Parenting leaves are particularly telling regarding the inclusiveness of social rights, that is, the extent to which the rights are granted to *all* (see, e.g., Dobrotić & Blum, 2020; Wong, Jou, Raub, & Heymann, 2019). Yet the compara-

tive leave policy literature has usually analysed leave generosity (especially leave duration and leave benefits levels), while less was known about leave eligibility and corresponding inequalities.

With this thematic issue, we aim to deepen the theoretical as well as empirical knowledge on the inclusiveness of leave policies and strengthen new lines of research. The issue contains eleven articles, four of them focusing on conceptual and/or methodological contribution to the field, thinking through questions of inclusion in leave policy design and how to measure and conceptually grasp entitlements to social rights. Seven articles focus on empirical contributions, investigating the drivers, patterns, and outcomes of varying leave inclusiveness in individual countries or in a comparative perspective. Before outlining these contributions further, we first turn to definitions of (leave) inclusiveness and briefly address extant research on eligibility to parenting leaves.

2. The Inclusiveness of Leave Policies

2.1. Defining Inclusiveness of Social Rights

There are three key dimensions of social rights and respective policy design, namely entitlement principle, eligibility criteria, and benefit scope (Blank, 2011; Clasen & Clegg, 2007). Benefit scope denotes *what* social rights are available, especially their generosity. The first two dimensions—entitlement principles and eligibility criteria—come to the fore when we ask *who* is granted access to social rights and *when*. Those two dimensions are telling about the inclusiveness of social rights (cf. Dobrotić & Blum, 2019, 2020). Indeed, social rights may be available universally for all who are affected by a specific social risk (such as old-age, unemployment, parenthood), or eligibility may be restricted to certain groups (e.g., only employees) or conditions (e.g., excluding those with short-term contracts; cf. Anttonen, Haikio, Stefansson, & Sipila, 2012; Budowski & Künzler, 2020). Against this backdrop, and for the risk of parenthood, ‘inclusiveness’ relates to the degree to which rights are available to all parents irrespective of (forms or previous length of) their employment, citizenship, or other criteria based on family, gender, or further personal characteristics. The connections between inclusiveness and the scope (particularly generosity) of rights are also important, especially as different ‘status’ groups may be granted rights of differing generosity. Finally, the implementation of social rights can be relevant to consider, as ‘practice’ may bring about inequalities that do not exist ‘on paper.’

2.2. Inclusiveness and Leave Policies

There are different types of leave policies for carers. If we focus on leaves available for parents, an established distinction is between maternity, paternity, and parental leave, as well as leave for children who are ill (Kosłowski, Blum, Dobrotić, Kaufman, & Moss, 2020). Borders between these types can be fuzzy, and their design country-specific. Yet the distinctions are still useful for comparative purposes.

Research has shown that there are large differences within and between countries regarding who is eligible to take leave or receive (certain) leave benefits, varying between different family forms, mothers and fathers, or according to parents’ employment status. For example, studies pointed to gender inequalities in access to leave rights (e.g., O’Brien, 2009; Ray, Gornick, & Schmitt, 2010), while McKay, Mathieu, and Doucet (2016) showed that strict employment-related eligibility criteria in parts of Canada exclude a large share of mothers from access to maternity or parental benefits, especially those in atypical or less secure employment. Wong et al. (2019, p. 525) have demonstrated that “same-sex female and different-sex couples receive equal durations of leave in the majority of” (though not all) OECD countries,

yet “same-sex male couples often receive shorter durations of paid parental leave.” A recent report from the European Institute for Gender Equality (2020) concludes that only few European countries grant universal access to parental leave. In effect, (varyingly large) proportions of parents remain ineligible, especially those who are “economically inactive, in non-standard types of employment, such as self-employment, and [who] have been in their job for less than 12 months” (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020, p. 24).

In our recent work (Dobrotić & Blum, 2019, 2020) we investigated the inclusiveness of parental leave benefits by considering entitlement principles and eligibility criteria attached to them. We showed that entitlement principles in leave policies can rest on citizenship (and/or residency) or employment, while eligibility criteria can be selective or universal. On this basis, we distinguished four ideal-type approaches to how parental leave rights are granted (in-)dependent of parents’ labour market position: a universal parenthood model, a selective parenthood model, a universal adult-worker model, and a selective adult-worker model (Dobrotić & Blum, 2019). We then created an eligibility index to measure the inclusiveness of parental leave benefits, that is, the extent to which benefits are available to all parents (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020). By applying this index to parental leave benefits development in 21 European countries, we showed that the importance of employment-based benefits and gender-sensitive policies increased in recent years. However, eligibility criteria have remained stable, which—considering labour market trends such as increasing precariousness—indicates that “fewer parents may fulfil the conditions for employment-based benefits” (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020, p. 588). All this asks for a deeper look into the inclusiveness of leave rights, addressed by the contributions in this thematic issue.

3. Contributions to the Thematic Issue

The thematic issue opens with four articles that put the primary focus on conceptual and methodological issues. Doucet’s (2021) article ‘unthinks’ and ‘rethinks’ the binary care-and-work metanarrative that underlies parenting leaves, pointing at conceptual narratives that could provide the ‘scaffolding’ for more inclusive leave policies going beyond ‘employment policy’ towards care and work policy. Her suggested elements of a new conceptual narrative come timely for thinking through post-pandemic leave (re)conceptualization. Otto, Bartova, and Van Lancker (2021) focus on how generosity (and inclusiveness) of leave policies has been measured, including indicators of social spending, social rights, and benefit receipt. Their contribution illustrates “how the operationalisation of leave generosity by means of different indicators can lead to different rankings, interpretations and qualifications of countries,” pointing at the importance of well-thought choice

of indicators in policy studies or research (Otto et al., 2021, p. 238). Koslowski (2021) then focuses on how to capture—and quantify—the ‘gender gap’ in parenting leave entitlements. Focusing on well-paid individual leave entitlements to maternity, paternity and parental leave, she develops a ‘gender gap indicator’ aimed to contribute to a better understanding of leave inclusiveness for men as compared to women. Finally, Kurowska (2021) reflects on our inclusiveness operationalization and eligibility index, complementing it by the indicators of ‘contextualized’ inclusiveness, that is, inclusiveness embedded in the countries’ socio-economic contexts.

The next four contributions in the thematic issue put the concepts and theoretical considerations to the test empirically in a comparative perspective. Son and Böger (2021) investigate the inclusiveness of maternity leave rights over 120 years and across five continents. Thus, for the first time and based on new data, they provide an encompassing historical and comparative account of maternity leave’s beginnings and trajectories, focusing on eligibility and pointing at an important role of the political empowerment of women in increasing the paid maternity leave inclusiveness. Whitehouse and Nakazato (2021) compare Australia and Japan, representing distinctive manifestations of a selective, employment-based entitlement model. Their differences are illustrated focusing on three dimensions of social equality (inclusion, gender equality, redistribution) pointing at trade-offs between inclusion and gender differentiation and highlighting funding systems as drivers of policy difference within employment-based entitlement systems. Nygård and Duvander (2021) investigate political discourses on parental leave in a comparative case study of Finland and Sweden. They show that gender-equality ideas have been more influential in the Swedish discourse, whereas in Finland, social inclusion, and notably the rights of same-sex parents, became more prominent. Rostgaard and Ejrnæs (2021) study the Danish case—‘exceptional’ by its lack of a statutory father’s quota—in Nordic comparison. Exploring Danish fathers’ lower leave take-up comparatively, they conclude that attitudes in this case matter less than the institutional conditions, particularly for Danish fathers with lower education.

The final three articles provide an in-depth investigation of single cases of particular relevance regarding eligibility in leave policies. First, Marynissen, Wood, and Neels (2021) develop an individual-level indicator of leave eligibility in Belgium, using detailed register data. They show that a considerable share of mothers does not meet the eligibility criteria and are structurally excluded from parental leave in Belgium, and how a reconsideration of eligibility criteria may be crucial to improve the inclusiveness of parental leave policies. Moring and Lammi-Taskula (2021, p. X) focus on Finland, exploring reforms “questioning the hegemony of the birth mothers” and aiming to broaden eligibility for paid parental leave to go beyond biological parents. They show how

in a stepwise process, reforms have focused on promoting gender equality, equality between diverse families, and—most recently—equality between all children in the ‘right to leave.’ Uzunalioglu, Valentova, O’Brien, and Genevois (2021) investigate the conditions under which expanded eligibility translates into increased take-up. Studying Luxembourg’s parental-leave reform of 2016, which extended eligibility to marginal-part-time working parents, they demonstrate how mothers from this group increased take-up. Outreach to marginal-part-time employed fathers and parents with an immigrant background, however, remained very limited.

4. Outlook

While gender inequalities in access to parenting leaves have a more longstanding tradition and advanced state of knowledge, other inequalities—such as those related to employment history, citizenship, migration or family status—have only recently come to the fore. As Doucet (2021, p. X) highlighted, more and more parents around the globe cannot meet eligibility criteria for leave rights due to developments such as the rise of the platform economy and precarious employment, and the issue of inclusiveness has “become even more urgent since the COVID-19 pandemic.” Against this backdrop, this thematic issue aims to strengthen these new lines of research, focusing on conceptual, methodological and empirical contributions. Many silent cleavages remain embedded in leave policy design, which ask for further unpacking and elaboration in future research. Within-country (and not only cross-country) differences regarding unequal access to leave rights deserve attention as well as conceptual and methodological rethinking in the future.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Socially Inclusive Parenting Leaves and Parental Benefit Entitlements: Rethinking Care and Work Binaries

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Abstract

How can parental leave design be more socially inclusive? Should all parents be entitled to parental benefits or only those parents who are eligible based on a particular level of labour market participation? To think through questions of social inclusion in parental leave policy design, particularly issues related to entitlements to benefits, I make three arguments. First, aiming to extend Dobrotić and Blum's work on entitlements to parental benefits, I argue that 'mixed systems' that include both citizenship-based and employment-based benefits are just and socially inclusive approaches to parental leaves and citizenship. Second, to build a robust conceptual scaffolding for a 'mixed' benefits approach, I argue that that we need to attend to the histories and relationalities of the concepts and conceptual narratives that implicitly or explicitly inform parental leave policies and scholarship. Third, and more broadly, I argue that a metanarrative of care and work binaries underpins most scholarship and public and policy discourses on care work and paid work and on social policies, including parental leave policies. In this article, I outline revisioned conceptual narratives of care and work relationalities, arguing that they can begin to chip away at this metanarrative and that this kind of un-thinking and rethinking can help us to envision parental leave beyond employment policy—as care and work policy. Specifically, I focus on conceptual narratives that combine (1) care and work intra-connections, (2) ethics of care and justice, and (3) 'social care,' 'caring with,' transformative social protection, and social citizenship. Methodologically and epistemologically, this article is guided by my reading of Margaret Somers' genealogical and relational approach to concepts, conceptual narratives, and metanarratives, and it is written in a Global North socio-economic context marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and 21st century neoliberalism.

Keywords

care; care and justice; conceptual narratives; historical sociology of concept formation; parental leave; parenting leaves; social care; social citizenship; transformative social protection

Issue

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1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the 21st century, advanced capitalism's "current, financialized phase," with its growing "care deficits" and "care crises" (Fraser, 2016, p. 100) have profoundly affected how parents care and provide for their families and children and how policies are designed to support those care and provisioning practices. These matters have become even more urgent since the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a global impact on people's everyday care and work

lives through repeated lockdowns, social distancing protocols, closures of childcare centers and schools, and workplace disruptions and reconfigurations. Prior to the pandemic, it was already clear that because of the rise of gig economies and precarious employment, more and more parents around the globe were not meeting the entitlements and eligibility criteria needed to receive employment-based parental leave benefits (Dobrotić & Blum, 2019, 2020; McKay, Mathieu, & Doucet, 2016; Moss & Deven, 2015, 2019). The pandemic has thus deepened and extended processes of rethinking social

policy design that were already beginning throughout the Global North, and this includes questions about how to make parental leave policies more inclusive and responsive to rising employment precarity.

One fruitful way to address how employment-based benefits exclude growing numbers of parents, and to design parental leaves that are more socially inclusive can be found in Ivana Dobrotić and Sonja Blum's (2019, 2020) conceptual framework. In their assessment of social inclusion and exclusion in parental leave design and parental benefits, they discuss three types of benefits: employment-based benefits, citizenship based-benefits, and 'mixed benefits' systems. They also highlight three dimensions that need to be examined when analyzing parental benefits: (1) entitlement principles (e.g., citizenship vs. employment-based rights), (2) eligibility criteria (e.g., citizenship duration, employment history, means testing), and (3) benefit scope (e.g., benefit level/duration; see Dobrotić & Blum, 2020, p. 592). Analytically, this tri-partite focus facilitates "capturing at the analytical level which kind and amount of support may be claimed under which conditions" (Blank, 2007, p. 8, as cited in Dobrotić & Blum, 2020, p. 592). These authors assess whether eligibility criteria are selective or universal and identify four ideal approaches to granting parental leave-related benefits (in)dependent of parents' labour market position (a universal parenthood model, a selective parenthood model, a universal adult-worker model, and a selective adult-worker model). They also develop an eligibility index to measure the inclusiveness of parental-leave benefits, particularly the extent to which benefits are available to all parents.

Building on some of Dobrotić and Blum's significant contributions to parental leave design, my overarching question in this article is: How can parental leave design be more socially inclusive? My interest in social inclusion reveals an assumption that underpins this inquiry: that all infants should be entitled to receive care that has some financial support, regardless of whether and how their parents are employed in the formal labour market (or in ways that meet eligibility criteria for employment-based benefits).

The question of inclusivity in parental leave design reflects a wider conceptual problem that dominates parental leave scholarship and design in many countries, including Canada (from where I am writing). This problem is that parental leave is viewed, conceptualized, and operationalized predominantly as employment policy—as job-protected entitlements to leaves from paid work for care work, and as parental benefit payments to reimburse a portion of parents' labour market earnings while they take on that care work. The logics of legal entitlements to paid and unpaid leaves from employment varies vastly within and across countries and social welfare regimes, as does the issue of who pays for parental benefits (i.e., different levels of government, employers, individual contributions through taxes or employee deductions, or a combination of these). Yet, regard-

less of how policies are administered, the position that parental benefits *should* be attached to employment—rather than based on citizenship—continues to dominate at an *ideational* level. As Dobrotić and Blum write (2020, p. 604), in some countries citizenship-based benefits are "less generous in their scope (typically low, flat-rate benefits) and alone are hardly able to incorporate care into citizens' life without endangering their autonomy, independence, and self-development." Meanwhile, even in countries with employment-based benefits, policy design can be guided by the ideal of the full-time standard, formal employment relationship; that is, there can be differences in how employees are treated, and those who do not fulfill the requirements for a particular number of months or insurable hours or who have switched or lost an employer in the months or year before giving birth will receive lower benefits or no benefits at all (for international examples see Dobrotić & Blum, 2020; for a Canadian example see Mathieu, Doucet, & McKay, 2020; McKay et al., 2016).

Framing parental leave policy as mainly employment policy is not just about policy design and political will. It is also rooted in how we think about, speak about, and live within particular metanarratives—in this case a metanarrative of divisions between concepts and practices of care and work, and unpaid care work and paid work. Overall, I argue that most scholarship and public and policy discourses in the Global North on matters of care and work, including policy thinking on parental leave, is still informed by an enduring binary opposition of paid work—as an economic and productive activity—and unpaid care work—as a non-economic, non-productive activity outside of the formal economy. This metanarrative of paid work and unpaid care work binaries is perhaps most boldly apparent in how the GDP does not include unpaid work or unpaid care work in its measurement of economic productivity, prosperity, or wealth across the globe (e.g., Waring, 1988, 1999). It can also be seen in the widespread notion in public and policy discourses that the work people do to financially sustain their families is distinct and separate from the work they do to care for their families. It is further revealed in the systemic persistence of analytical categories such as *stay-at-home mother*, *stay-at-home father*, *working mother*, and *working father*, which indicate an assumption that people are either working *or* caring, when most people are actually engaging in both work and caring at any one point in time as well as in varied ways across the life course (see also Doucet, 2016, 2020). I argue that to unthink and rethink parental leave benefits as more than employment and labour market policies, and as socially inclusive care/work policies, we need a care-focused conceptual scaffolding that acknowledges the intra-actions of care work and paid work, care and justice, and care and social citizenship.

The aim of this article is twofold. First, it aims to challenge a dominant metanarrative of binaries of care and work, unpaid care work and paid work. Guided by

Margaret Somers' (1996, 2008, p. 209) historical sociology of concept formation, which is a "genealogical accounting of conceptual configurations," as well as her writing on narratives, conceptual narratives, and meta-narratives (Somers, 1994, 1995), this aim means "taking a look" at the "relational patterns" (Somers, 2008, p. 204) of concepts and conceptual narratives, while always being cognizant that any inquiry is a temporal and geo-political "activity that is irrevocably linked to its current uses" (Dean, 1994, p. 14, as cited in Somers, 2008, p. 10). The overall goal of such an exercise is to gain a "sense of *how we think and why we seem obliged to think in certain ways*" (Hacking, 1990, p. 362) while also figuring out "how to begin the process of unthinking" (Somers, 2008, p. 267).

Second, guided by the view that metanarratives change as other intertwining narratives change, including the stories people tell ("ontological narratives"), "social, public and cultural narratives," and "conceptual narratives" (Somers, 1994, p. 616), this article aims to rethink the conceptual narratives that undergird a meta-narrative of care and work separations and divisions. My focus here is on conceptual narratives, and, more specifically, on building conceptual narratives of care and work relationalities that support socially inclusive entitlements to parental benefits. I expand Dobrotić and Blum's conceptual frame, which is partly based on theories of social rights (e.g., Esping-Andersen, 1990; Marshall, 1964), and which attempts "to grasp the complex relationship between rights and obligations and... ongoing trends in social citizenship" (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020, p. 592). I complement these conceptual pathways with selected insights from scholarly literatures on relationalities of care and work as well as insights from the ethic of care, social care, social protection, and social citizenship. I argue that together, these revised conceptual narratives begin to generate a new metanarrative of care and work, and unpaid care work and paid work as intra-connections, rather than as binaries. In the case of parental leave policies and parental benefits, this kind of un-thinking and rethinking can help us to envision parental leave beyond employment policy, as care/work policy.

This article is organized in two parts. First, I briefly outline my approach to concepts and conceptual narratives. Second, I lay out one mapping of the concept of care by focusing on selected parts of the histories of care and related networks of concepts: (1) care and work intra-connections, (2) the ethics of care and of justice, and (3) 'social care,' 'caring with,' care and social protection, and social citizenship.

I also mention four notes that frame this article. To capture the breadth of what I am advocating, I borrow from O'Brien and Moss (2020, p. 204), who recently used the "summary term 'parenting leave'" to "encompass the full range of statutory leave policies." Parenting leave enables a discussion of leave to care for infants and young children without getting into the details of the par-

ticular policy measures defined by the terms 'maternity leave,' 'paternity leave,' and 'parental leave' and their differences within and between countries.

Furthermore, I *do not* engage with the specifics of eligibility criteria (citizenship duration, employment hours, or means testing) or with levels and durations of benefits. Drawing from Esping-Andersen (1990), I do, however, recognize that different welfare state models likely require different approaches to benefit entitlement criteria. For example, social democratic welfare states lean towards extending benefits based on citizenship, conservative welfare states tend to prioritize employment-based benefits, and in liberal welfare states, more emphasis is often placed on means-testing to determine eligibility for benefits (see Baird & O'Brien, 2015; Dobrotić & Blum, 2019).

A third note is about the concept of 'work,' which I use interchangeably with 'paid work' and 'employment' for ease and clarity in my writing. These and related concepts, such as provisioning (see Neysmith, Reitsma-Street, Baker-Collins, Porter, & Tam, 2010) and breadwinning (see Warren, 2007), each have their own conceptual histories that extend beyond the scope of this article.

Finally, the epistemological and methodological terrain that I travel in this article is wide and deep and in the short space of this article I am only able to provide a brief glimpse of its complexities. I do not undertake a full genealogy of the concepts of care and work nor enact a full genealogical excavation of a metanarrative of care and work binaries. Rather, my goals are to begin to map new conceptual narratives of care and work that can support socially inclusive parental benefits as care and work policies, and to challenge and ultimately to "undermine, dislodge, and replace a... dominant ideational regime" and metanarrative (Somers & Block, 2005, p. 265).

2. Epistemological and Methodological Approach to Concepts, Conceptual Narratives, and Metanarratives

Somers' genealogical approach to concepts is rooted in a wide array of intersecting theoretical resources, including the work of Michel Foucault, Ian Hacking, and Immanuel Wallerstein. It is also informed by her own earlier writing on narrative (e.g., Somers, 1994), which explores multiple and intersecting narrative forms (for an overview see Doucet, 2018a, 2018b, 2021). For Somers (2008, p. 2), metanarratives are, briefly put, "ideational regimes" that set "the parameters for what counts as worthwhile arguments in social and political debates." They are difficult to dislodge or replace because they have an "ideational embeddedness" (Somers, 2008, p. 23) that makes them largely invisible and taken for granted. Somers identifies similarities between metanarratives and Thomas Kuhn's (1962/1970) paradigms, writing that Kuhn "showed that what science has considered as confirming evidence has been influenced by what our *dominant paradigms allow us to see and, most especially,*

to care about” (Somers, 1998, p. 728, emphasis added). In a similar way, a metanarrative “not only provides the range of acceptable answers but has the gatekeeping power to define both the questions to be asked and the rules of procedure by which they can rationally be answered” (Somers, 2008, p. 265).

Like all metanarratives, the work/care binary is neither permanent nor universal, yet its ideational rootedness gives it the “capacity to ‘embed’ other ideas, events, institutions, and issues,” revealing “the constraining power of ideas and the role this power plays in—or, perhaps more appropriately, *against*—social and political economic change” (Foster, 2016, pp. 7–8). This raises the question: How, then, does systemic change occur?

Somers’ historical sociology of concept formation offers very complex explications of how to approach moving beyond existing metanarratives towards making or excavating other metanarratives. One pathway offered by Somers (1995, p. 243, emphasis added) is based on the recognition that “At the heart of every narrative is a problem—a *crisis or flash point*.” I maintain that a ‘flash point’ of the metanarrative of work and care divisions stems from “care deficits” and “care crises” (Fraser, 2016, p. 100) that have been brewing since at least the beginning of the 21st century and that have deepened throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. To address this problem and to “begin the process of unthinking” this metanarrative, (Somers, 2008, p. 267), we need a method for approaching concepts as “words in their historical sites” (Somers, 2008, p. 287)—not as singular objects, but as part of a conceptual network or a “relational matrix” (Somers, 2008, p. 203). Somers’ historical sociology of concept formation, which I employ briefly and selectively in this article, is composed of three dimensions: epistemic reflexivity, the relationality of concepts, and the historicity of concepts.

2.1. Epistemic Reflexivity

Somers’ approach to epistemic reflexivity is partly rooted in Bourdieu and Wacquant’s (1992, p. 41) writing, which describes epistemic reflexivity as a “constant questioning of the categories and techniques of sociological analysis and of the relationship to the world they presuppose.” In a similar way, Somers (2008, p. 172) describes it as a process of “turning social science back on itself to examine often taken-for-granted conceptual tools of research” and of moving from questions of ‘what’ to questions of ‘how,’ thus “radically shifting the context of discovery (at least initially) from the external world to the cognitive tools by which we analyze this world” (Somers, 2008, p. 265).

Although the dominant “Nietzschean/Foucauldian legacy or lineage” (Knauff, 2017, p. 1) of genealogical methodologies provides a foundation for her approach, Somers (1998, 2008) departs from its critical empiricism in several ways. She maintains “that the empirical and the normative are mutually interdependent” (Somers,

2008, p. xiii) and that the questions we pursue are partly “problem driven” (Somers, 1998, p. 772) in that they “are driven by [our] place and concerns in the world” (Somers, 2008, p. 9). She also argues that they are “inherently ontological” because they “contain a priori decisions about how we understand the social world to be constituted” (Somers, 1996, p. 71).

Somers’ (2011, p. 28) epistemic reflexivity is also evident in her view that all our research practices are historically and relationally contextual and contingent and that we work with “temporary analytic frames constructed... by the problem the researcher sets out to explain.” These temporary frames are built on the recognition that in any given research site at any given time, there are multiple conceptual possibilities. The conceptual narratives and temporary frames that I develop in this article are thus specifically connected to the problems I address: social exclusion in parental benefits when entitlement is based solely on employment criteria, and how parenting leaves are determined and designed in diverse national contexts with rising levels of employment precarity.

2.2. The Relationality of Concepts

Somers’ (1998, p. 767) discussion of the “relational configurations” of concepts builds on Hacking’s (1990, p. 24) insight that “concepts are ‘words in their sites.’” She writes that “All social science concepts lack natures or essences; instead, they have histories, networks, and narratives” (Somers, 2008, p. 257). The focus should thus be on what concepts *do*, especially in relation to other concepts, rather than on what concepts *are*. Acknowledging and working with the relationality of concepts shifts *what* we are studying. A concept “is not an isolated object but has a relational identity” and the “subject of research should be the entire conceptual network or the relational site in which it is embedded” (Somers, 2008, p. 268). In this article, I argue accordingly that care concepts, and what they *are* and what they *do* in any given site, can only be fully understood and applied from within their larger conceptual nets and their socio-economic and geopolitical contexts, as well as in relation to the questions that guide a researcher’s inquiry at any moment in time.

2.3. The Historicity of Concepts

Historical epistemologies are a set of philosophical and epistemological ideas about how “successful truth claims are historically contingent rather than confirmations of absolute and unchanging reality” (Somers, 2008, p. 257) and how “things we take as self-evident and necessary... simply take on the appearance of being the only possible reality” (Somers, 2008, p. 10). Somers argues that “understanding how concepts gain and lose their currency and legitimacy is the task of historical epistemology, which entails reconstructing their making, resonance, and connectedness over time” (Somers, 2008,

p. 268). This means looking at the historicity of concepts and recognizing not only how they came into being, but what keeps them in place. There are always “other competing conceptual networks” (Somers, 2008, p. 206).

The concepts and conceptual narratives I employ in this article about care and work, care and justice, and care and social citizenship lead me to tell a particular scholarly narrative about the conceptual scaffolding that can support the idea of socially inclusive parental leave benefits. Attending to epistemic reflexivity and the relationality and historicity of concepts, I investigate the concept of care in several ‘sites,’ signaling an approach that is not only about care, but about care in varied conceptual configurations. Specifically, I explore three conceptual narratives that help to dissolve boundaries and enact relationalities, between care and work: (1) care and work intra-connections, (2) the ethics of care and justice, and (3) care, social protection, and social citizenship.

3. Care and Work Intra-Connections

Mapping a new metanarrative of care and work requires “taking a look” at the “relational patterns” (Somers, 2008, p. 204) of the varied intersections between concepts of care and work, which have taken on varied guises throughout history. As genealogical work does not seek origins but, rather, relational conditions of possibility, I am not looking for a particular beginning of the dominant metanarrative of care and work binaries, although there are historical moments that indicate its increasing sedimentation. Nancy Folbre (1991, p. 464) highlights one such historical moment when she notes that while in population censuses from the 19th century, mothers and wives were “considered productive workers,” this view shifted in the early 20th century, when women were “formally relegated to the category of ‘dependents,’ a category that included infants, young children, the sick, and the elderly.” The ‘unproductive housewife’ and ‘productive male breadwinner’ concepts were constituted within a metanarrative of care and work divisions that they also helped to strengthen.

Since the mid 20th century, feminist scholars and activists have sought to both recognize and value women’s unpaid work, including housework and the care of children, and have challenged a metanarrative of care and work binaries through at least five unfolding conceptual counternarratives of care and work relationalities. The first is the view that care work is indeed ‘work’—an idea that gained traction on scholarly and activist agendas in the 1960s and 1970s. This perspective was instigated mainly by feminist scholars researching mothering and the meanings and practices of women’s daily caregiving and domestic tasks, both as forms of work and as subjects worthy of scholarly attention (e.g., Oakley, 1974/2018).

A second conceptual narrative relates to the inseparability of care and work as everyday practices. This can be seen in early sociological work that asserts that “car-

ing demands both love and labour, both identity and activity” (Graham, 1983, pp. 13–14). The inseparability of care and work is also apparent in research that entangles the concepts of care and provisioning, where the latter is defined as all work “whether paid or unpaid in the market, home, or community spheres” that is “performed to acquire material and intangible resources for meeting responsibilities that ensure the survival and well-being of people” (Neysmith et al., 2010, p. 152). This concept of provisioning emerged mainly from the research of feminist economists, who, in studying multiple forms of women’s unpaid care work and paid employment in the Global North and South, sought to avoid being “impeded by conceptual barriers of public and private spheres that interrupt and thus hide the extent of the work” (Neysmith et al., 2010, p. 164). It also resonates with scholarship on mothering outside of middle class, white, and Euro-western cultures. As Hill Collins (1994, p. 372) argued nearly thirty years ago, “examining racial ethnic women’s experiences reveals how these two spheres” of paid work and family are not only connected, but “actually are interwoven” (see also Dow, 2019).

A third point about intra-connections between care and work is the widely recognized idea that all societies and economies rely on and are only made possible by care labor. Initial versions of the feminist concept of social reproduction, a sister to the concept of care, made this point especially well as they attempted to integrate women’s domestic labor into broader Marxist analyses of production and capitalist relations (e.g., Molyneux, 1979). Feminist economics and ongoing work on social reproduction have continued to underline the strong intra-connections between concepts and practices of care work and economies, care work and paid work (e.g., Bezanson & Luxton, 2006; Fraser, 2016; Himmelweit, 2007). This is encapsulated in what Folbre (1994a, p. 16) called the “free rider” problem, where those “who devote relatively little time or energy to child-rearing are free-riding on parental labor.” As she puts it, while children are “public goods” (Folbre, 1994b, p. 86) whose proper care leads them to become productive adults who then contribute to the maintenance of strong economies, the overwhelming costs of this care are, nevertheless, borne by few—mainly women (see also Fraser, 2016; Tronto, 2013).

My fourth point about emerging conceptual narratives of care/work intra-connections is one that has deepened in recent years, owing in part to a growing field of research on *care economies* and to conceptual insights about an “*unpaid care work–paid work–paid care work circle*” (Addati et al., 2018, p. 10, emphasis added). Recognizing these interconnections is certainly not new (i.e., Duffy, Albelda, & Hammonds, 2014; Thomas, 1993), but the second decade of the 21st century and the COVID-19 pandemic have brought more attention to how unpaid care work supports paid work and to how paid care work is an intricate part of economic growth, gender and class equity, and social inclusion. Recent studies, for

example, have highlighted how investing in care workers and the physical infrastructure to support paid care work has multiple economic and GDP-connected benefits (e.g., De Henau & Himmelweit, 2020).

Finally, linking this care circle and care-work intra-connections to parenting leaves could lead to policy approaches that focus on the relationalities of care and work both for parents who are employed in the standard employment relationship and those who are not. This approach acknowledges that “for inactive or unemployed parents, parental leave benefits also include time off from actively looking for a job to focus on care” (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020, p. 589), while for employed parents, “paid parental leave gives not only the right to *take time off from work* to focus on care but also the duty, since parents are typically not allowed to work (full time) while on leave” (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020, p. 589). Put differently, when a new child enters the world, parents need job-protected paid leaves from employment or, if they are between jobs or not engaged in paid work, parents need respite from having to secure paid work in order to take on the socially valuable work of caring for their child.

This conceptual narrative of care and work intra-connections can be buttressed by a wider look at other related conceptual narratives, including one that seeks to entangle the ethics of care and justice.

4. Ethics of Care and Ethics of Justice

One mapping of the multiple histories of the concept of care and the ethic of care begins in the late 1970s, with Carol Gilligan’s (1982/1993; see also Gilligan, 1977) *In a Different Voice*, which has been called “one of most influential books of the 1980s” because it “revolutionized discussion of moral theory, feminism [and] theories of the subject” (Hekman, 1995, p. 1). Along with other well-known and related works (e.g., Ruddick, 1995; Sevenhuijsen, 1998), Gilligan’s book led to a massive cross-disciplinary field already characterized by the 1990s as “a small industry within academia and outside the academy” (Jaggar, 1991, p. 83). Since then, the field of care theories and care ethics has deepened and widened in response to changing historical, socio-economic, and political contexts. Yet two of its early interventions remain central to the field of care, and I draw on them here.

A first, lasting tenet from the ethic of care is the view that human subjectivities, or selves, are relational and interdependent. This assertion was initially meant to challenge and provide alternatives to dominant conceptions of human subjectivity that emphasized individuality, independence, autonomy, and rationality, which were part of liberal political and economic theory, highly influential work on moral and human development (e.g., Kohlberg, 1981), and theories of justice (e.g., Rawls, 1971). Discussions about the relationality and individuality of selves have offered contrasting and compet-

ing perspectives at varied points in the development of care theories. Taking a view of concepts as “words in their sites” means that particular contextual sites and problematics will lead to multiple ways of approaching human subjectivities.

For the problematic I take up in this article, relational and independent selves are *both* critical. A focus on relational selves recognizes that all people are dependent on the care of others at varied points in our lives—when we are very young, very old, during illness, and at many other times across the life course. Yet, people’s independence and autonomy can also be viewed as important aspects of their subjectivity. That is, parenting is about both caregiving and provisioning for that care, and thus it involves combinations of relational and autonomous subjectivities in both care work and paid work activities (see Doucet, 2016, 2020). This perspective embraces fluid, shifting, and varied degrees of dependence, independence, and interdependence as well as varied versions of ‘relational autonomy’ (Friedman, 2014). It can also inform a reconceptualization of parental benefits as both care and work policies that support people’s family identities and practices as simultaneously relational and autonomous, while also recognizing that early parenthood is a unique temporal site where relationality and interdependence is heightened for parents as well as for infants.

A second and related central argument from the ethic of care field concerns the relationship between the ethic of care and the ethic of justice. Whereas, put briefly, the ethic of care focuses on responsiveness and attentiveness (Ruddick, 1995; Tronto, 1993, 2013), the ethic of justice focuses on issues of equality, fairness, and individual rights (for an overview see Gilligan, 1982/1993; Held, 2006). Most care theorists follow Gilligan (1982/1993, 1986), who was clear that the ethics of both care and justice are important and indeed complementary (Tronto, 1993; see also Noddings, 1984). Yet despite long conversations about their possible interconnectedness, “how this complementarity should be articulated remains a terrain for debate” (Casalini, 2020, p. 59). As Virginia Held (2006, p. 66) writes: “How does the framework that structures justice, equality, rights, and liberty mesh with the network that delineates care, relatedness, and trust?”

My argument here is that the ethic of care and the ethic of justice are both important in families and in state and employment policies. Broadly speaking, they are critical for equitable gendered divisions of household labour and care and for fair wages to support caregivers working in care services (both childcare and eldercare). One articulation of the intersection between the ethics of care and of justice can be found in socially inclusive parental leave design, where attention is given both to relational conceptions of subjectivity as well as to intra-connections between care and justice. The work of feminist legal scholar Martha Fineman (2010, p. 267) is useful here as she combines care and justice concerns

while also widening the idea of relational subjectivities to argue that “human vulnerability must be at the heart of our ideas of social and state responsibility.” Although Fineman does not explicitly refer to the issue of parental benefits, her theoretical insights are useful for thinking through the limitations of employment-based parental benefits and how the work of caring for vulnerable others, such as infants, requires social and financial support. As she puts it: “Those who care... through essential care-taking work are themselves dependent on resources in order to undertake that care, and these resources must be supplied by society through its institutions” (Fineman, 2009, p. 445).

5. ‘Social Care,’ ‘Caring With,’ Transformative Social Protection, and Social Citizenship

In my conceptual mapping, conceptual narratives of care and justice, which include relational and interdependent conceptions of subjectivity, lead to other neighboring concepts, such as ‘social care,’ ‘caring with,’ transformative social protection, and social citizenship; these are all linked to how care is embedded (or not) in social welfare state policies. ‘Social care’ was developed with “the aim of clarifying and developing its analytic potential in relation to the study of welfare states and how they are changing” (Daly & Lewis, 2000, p. 281). Since the 1990s, there have been arguments about the need to widen the concept of care beyond its earlier focus on care and gendered work in the home (e.g., Tronto, 1993; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). Building on this, Daly and Lewis (2000, p. 285) have argued that in welfare state analysis, the concept of care should be reconceptualized to respond to the specificities of people’s care lives as well as “the societal arrangements around personal needs and welfare.” Their arguments, first made in 2000, remain salient today because they highlight welfare state “retrenchment” and “cut-backs” in the “state as provider (of cash and care)” (Daly & Lewis, 2000, p. 282), where cash could include, for example, parental benefits, and services could include childcare and early learning services. Rather than delegate the delivery of these benefits and services to families and the voluntary sector and to resist the move towards a stronger role for markets “either directly as a provider or indirectly as a purveyor of particular principles,” Daly and Lewis (2000, p. 282) call for a stronger role for the state.

The concept of social care, which reconceptualizes “care in such a way as to capture the social and political economy within which it is embedded,” underlines how responding to people’s care needs and their financial responsibilities to support that care should be at “the very center of welfare state activity” (Daly & Lewis, 2000, p. 282). Such an approach, where care is relatively central in state policies, is being used in some countries. As Dobrotić and Blum (2020, p. 608) point out, “it seems quite likely that the (EU-promoted) social investment perspective and the ‘Nordic model’ advocated in family

policies could serve as such exemplary models” of convergence between employment-based and citizenship-based benefits; these are “mixed models that try to *equally balance the inclusiveness of both leave entitlement types*” (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020, p. 603). On the other hand, they note that in spite of expansions in parental leave policies, for the 21 European countries in their study, “not much effort is made to install benefits, which are more inclusive to those inactive in the labor market or across different employment forms and sectors” (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020, p. 607).

The social care dimension of this conceptual narrative also connects to Joan Tronto’s (1993, 2013) decades of writing on the ethics of care and “processes of care” and, more recently, on “processes of democratic caring” (Tronto, 2013, p. 22). These processes include four stages of care: caring about someone’s unmet needs, caring for those needs, caregiving and making sure the work is done, and care-receiving or assessing the effectiveness of those care acts (Tronto, 2013). Tronto later broadened these care processes to include a fifth stage that weaves together the ethics of care and justice—‘caring with’—which “requires that caring needs and the ways in which they are met need to be consistent with democratic commitments to justice, equality, and freedom for all” (Tronto, 2013, p. 23). All five stages of care practices are “nested within one another” and aim “to ensure that all of the members of the society can live as well as possible by making the society as democratic as possible” (Tronto, 2013, p. 40). Tronto’s version of democratic caring positions all citizens (including infants) as equal in their roles as care receivers. In relation to parenting leaves and parental benefits, ‘caring with,’ like ‘social care,’ puts care, care giving, and care receiving at the center of social policy and positions it “as a central value for democracies” (Tronto, 2013, p. 29). On my reading, this endorses a mixed system of parental benefits that can provide some state support for all five stages of care.

If we widen this conceptual network of care and work relationalities, the concepts of social care and ‘caring with’ can connect to a ‘transformative social protection approach’ (e.g., Devereux, Roelen, & Ulrichs, 2015; ILO, 2014; Sabates-Wheeler & Devereux, 2007). This approach, arising from research from the Global South and North on issues of care, poverty reduction, social well-being, and rights-based dimensions, supports a shift from a narrower scope of economic protection (such as unemployment insurance) to a broader view of social protections. It is also founded on “an appreciation of structural inequalities” and attempts to address them through “a political approach to social protection, focusing on rights, duties, democracy and advocacy” (Sabates-Wheeler & Devereux, 2007, p. 1). A transformative approach to social protection has its own conceptual histories and relationalities, and this includes connections to rights-based approaches to citizenship (e.g., Kabeer, 2002). As stated by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD, 2016, p. 102):

“A rights-based approach to care recognizes both caregivers and care receivers as rights-holders, and positions the state as a duty-bearer.” A care and social protection approach can, in turn, “help realize the rights of caregivers and care receivers, and therefore contribute to multiple dimensions of equality, and at the same time can have positive macroeconomic effects” (UNRISD, 2016, p. 222). With regard to parenting leaves, a transformative social protection approach that combines care and work, care and justice, and conceptions of relational and relationally autonomous subjectivities, provides conceptual space to make a case for every child’s right—as a care receiver—to good care, for parents’ social rights to provide good care, and for the state to support these care-receiving and caregiving rights (see Doucet, McKay, & Mathieu, 2019; Haas & Hwang, 1999; Moss & Deven, 2015, 2019).

One remaining task in creating this conceptual configuration is to connect care with the neighboring concepts of transformative social protection and social citizenship. In Somers’ work across several decades (e.g., Block & Somers, 2014; Somers, 2008; Somers & Block, 2005), she demarcates a highly complex “cluster of rights at the heart of democratic and socially inclusive citizenship regimes” and argues that these rights must be “recognized to be public goods” (Somers, 2008, p. 5). One of these social rights is the “right to political membership,” including “the *de facto* right to *social* inclusion in civil society” (Somers, 2008, p. 6). Yet, it is also clear for Somers (2008, p. 117) that “in today’s culture of market fundamentalism,” markets can be “fundamentally threatening to human freedom and the collective good.” She thus maintains, with Block, that some dimensions of social life, *including caregiving and care receiving*, “have to be protected from the market by social and political institutions and recognized as rights rather than commodities, or human freedom will be endangered” (Block & Somers, 2014, p. 8).

In relation to parenting leave and parental benefits (and other social benefits), feminists have long argued that receiving benefits on the basis of citizenship can help address social inequalities of gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, and ability/disability. (e.g., Orloff, 1993). This is especially important now, with the current “juggernaut of neoliberalism” (Moss, 2014, p. 6), rising rates of immigration, racialized inequalities, and the long-overdue, urgent need for societies to address the social and political exclusion and marginalization of Indigenous populations (e.g., Benhabib, 2004; Jewell, Doucet, Falk, & Fyke, 2020; Tuck & Yang, 2012). As Somers and Curtis (2016, p. 15, emphasis added) express it:

Citizenship rights and full social inclusion, while always subject to the violence and violations of racial and gender exclusions, *have now more than ever* been converted from rights into a set of *contingent* privileges, ultimately dependent on one’s economic means and market exchange value.

6. Conclusion

In this article, I explored the question of how parental leave design can be more socially inclusive and responsive to rising employment precarity, neoliberalism, and more recent pandemic and post-pandemic socio-economic worlds. I did so by building on selected parts of Dobrotić and Blum’s (2019, 2020) conceptual and comparative work on entitlements to parental benefits and their view that a “mixed system that combines both logics in policy design” (i.e., both employment-based and citizenship-based parental leave benefits) “can be considered... an inclusive design of parental-leave benefits” (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020, p. 597). More broadly, I approached this problematic through the wider argument that most scholarship and public and policy discourses in the Global North on care and work, including policy thinking on parenting leaves, is underpinned by a binary opposition of paid work—as an economic and productive activity—and unpaid care work—as a non-economic, non-productive activity outside of the formal economy. I further argued that in order to think through inclusive parenting leave policies, we need to unthink and rethink this metanarrative of care and work binaries.

Chipping away at this metanarrative while working towards one that holds relationalities of care and work, my reading of Somers’ historical sociology of concept formation guided me to engage in a brief genealogical exercise. I attended to selected histories and relationalities of care and neighboring concepts, focusing mainly on considering the possibilities for revised conceptual narratives. I articulated parts of three conceptual narrative pillars—(1) care and work intra-connections, (2) the ethics of care and justice, and (3) ‘social care,’ ‘caring with,’ transformative social protection, and social citizenship—that could provide the scaffolding for more socially inclusive and just parenting leave policies.

The arguments made in this article call for wider thinking about parenting leaves, care, and work. In the face of growing informal and non-standard employment—issues that have only deepened through the COVID-19 pandemic—benefits allocated for parenting leaves (including parental leave, maternity leave, and paternity leave) clearly need to be disentangled, at least partially, from the labour market. Reconfiguring parenting leaves and entitlements to parental benefits will mean approaching them as both work and care policies, as matters of care and justice, as articulations of ‘caring with’ and ‘social care,’ as a complex set of social citizenship rights, and informed by a view of human subjectivity as both interdependent and relationally autonomous. Unthinking and rethinking a metanarrative of work and care binaries can create conceptual and political pathways that support entitlements to parental benefits that are conceptualized both as benefits *to care* as well as leaves *from paid work* to take on socially valuable care work.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

Measuring the Generosity of Parental Leave Policies

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Abstract

In order to investigate and compare welfare states or specific welfare programmes, scientists, opinion-makers and politicians rely on indicators. As many of the concepts or objects studied are somewhat abstract, these indicators can often only be approximations. In comparative welfare-state research, scholars have suggested several approximating indicators to quantitatively measure and compare the generosity of public welfare provision, with a special focus on cash benefits. These indicators include social spending, social rights and benefit receipt. We present these indicators systematically, and critically discuss how suitable they are for comparing the generosity of parenting leave policies in developed welfare states. Subsequently, we illustrate how the operationalisation of leave generosity by means of different indicators can lead to different rankings, interpretations and qualifications of countries. Hence, indicator choices have to be considered carefully and suitably justified, depending on the actual research interest.

Keywords

administrative data; benefit generosity; inclusiveness; leave policies; parental leave; social policy indicators; social rights; survey data

Issue

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1. Introduction

Leave policies for parents have not only emerged as an important subject in scientific research, but also increasingly feature in public debates. With the ambition to achieve more-equal access to employment-related social rights and to reconcile paid work and family responsibilities, parental leave in particular has been the subject of various policy reforms, both within and outside Europe. Together with maternity and paternity leave, these policies vary substantially across countries (Koslowski, Blum, Dobrotić, Kaufman, & Moss, 2020) but also share some common trends (Moss & Deven, 2019).

To be able to compare public welfare policies across space and time, and to inform policy-making, scholars have sought to develop adequate indicators. ‘Generosity’ can be considered a key concept behind most of these indicators. In comparative public policy research, the

concept is frequently used when comparing the budgetary volume of social programmes (e.g., Castles, 2002, 2009) or policy aspects such as the size of the population covered for a particular social risk by a specific public programme, the eligibility conditions of programmes, the duration of benefit payments and the amount of cash benefits (e.g., Kangas & Palme, 2007; Nelson et al., 2020; Scruggs, 2007). The first comparative social policy indicators focused on policies that protect against ‘old social risks’ (e.g., unemployment or illness). With emerging ‘new social risks’ (Bonoli, 2005) and policies such as parenting leave, a need for comparative quantitative indicators that can summarise the characteristics of these policies developed. In constructing these new indicators, researchers tended to build on the generosity concept as applied in the comparative study of policies such as unemployment protection programmes. When doing so, some researchers refer to benefit generosity exclusively

in terms of benefit amounts (e.g., Dobrotić & Blum, 2019; Ranci, Österle, Arlotti, & Parma, 2019) and others refer to it also in terms of the coverage rate and eligibility criteria of a benefit, and/or the duration for which it is granted (e.g., Nelson et al., 2020; Ray, Gornick, & Schmitt, 2010). However, this does not take into account the multidimensionality of parenting leave policies. The role of the ‘new social risk’ policies—and parental leave in particular—is not only to protect against income loss by generous benefits, but also to prevent the adverse effect of becoming a parent on women’s position on the labour market and consequently on gender equality.

The multidimensionality of leave policies challenges the suitability of the generosity concept. Further there is not yet a strong consensus among researchers about the actual meaning of ‘generosity’ in the context of parenting leave policies. For example, generous cash benefits may be beneficial in the short term, but if they are paid over an extended period of time, they may actually hinder women’s career progress and, in the long term, exacerbate gender income inequality and the risk of poverty (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999; Pronzato, 2009). Some scholars have tried to address this ambiguity in the generosity concept and have produced a comparative indicator that combines the duration of benefit payment with the level of benefit. This ‘full-time equivalent’ of leave indicates how long a leave would be paid if it was to compensate for 100 percent of foregone earnings (Ray et al., 2010; Thévenon, 2011). However, gender equality has been recognised as a dimension of leave policies that is distinct from generosity. For example, Ray et al. (2010) created a gender equality index based on the proportion of leave reserved for fathers and the benefit level. More recently, Dobrotić and Blum (2020) have challenged the ‘generosity’ concept by focusing on the access to leave benefits. This aspect has been largely overlooked in leave research literature which mostly compares the generosity of leave policies on the basis of leave duration, replacement rates (i.e., the proportion of labour income that is compensated for by a benefit) or a combination of these two aspects (Ray et al., 2010; Thévenon, 2011). In their novel approach to approximating leave accessibility, Dobrotić and Blum (2020) assess policies based on entitlement principles (citizenship-based versus employment-based benefits) and eligibility criteria, which they frame under the concept ‘inclusiveness’ of leave rights. Accordingly, their approach conceives accessibility to leave benefits as a separate and distinct dimension from the generosity concept, with the latter being instead referred to as benefit levels and the benefit payment duration.

In this article, we will map the development of indicators that seek to compare parenting leave policies in mature welfare states. We will also analyse their potential and pitfalls regarding the methodological approach as well as to their use in studies examining the socially stratifying and gendering effects of leave policies. Rather than adding to the multitude of existing indicators, the

original contribution of this article to existing literature is a critical overview of the different types of indicators, as well as outlining new avenues for future research on leave policies. We will follow the mainstream literature and use the term ‘generosity’ in its broad sense, including benefit accessibility, benefit duration and the level of benefit payments.

2. Studying Parenting Leave Policies: Operationalisations and Measurements

Parenting leave policies fall under umbrella terms that include policies enabling parents to provide care for their children. Most commonly, this includes maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, childcare leave and leave for sick children. In the current article, the focus is on the three most commonly discussed forms: maternity, paternity and parental leave. Maternity leave is typically available to working mothers as a health and welfare measure that is “taken just before, during and immediately after childbirth” (Kosłowski et al., 2020, p. 6). Paternity leave is targeted at fathers, and usually “taken soon after the birth of a child, and intended to enable the father to spend time with his partner, new child and [where this applies] older children” (Kosłowski et al., 2020, p. 6). Parental leave is available to both mothers and fathers. It can take different forms, including a non-transferable individual right, an individual right that can be transferred to the other parent, or a family right that parents can divide between themselves as they wish (OECD, n.d.-b). Parental leave is meant to provide time for childcare and working parents can make use of it after maternity or paternity leave, either on a full-time or a part-time basis and until the child reaches a specific age. In some countries, however, parental leave benefit is available to economically inactive or unemployed parents from the date of childbirth (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020).

The first parenting leave indicators were created of the blueprint designed for policies covering ‘old social risks.’ Therefore, we follow the main trends in the development of comparative social policy indicators and the way in which they have been used to compare parenting leave policies. In line with the literature, we distinguish between social expenditure, social rights and benefit reciprocity indicators, and classify them in two levels: macro and micro (see Figure 1). Whilst macro-level indicators are intended to compare policies across countries, micro-level indicators allow comparison between individuals and households. Where micro-level data is aggregated to the national level, it can nevertheless also serve to describe differences between countries. The following sections will elaborate on the different types of indicators at these two levels.

2.1. Macro-Level Indicators

Two main types of indicators have been used to compare the generosity of public welfare benefits: social

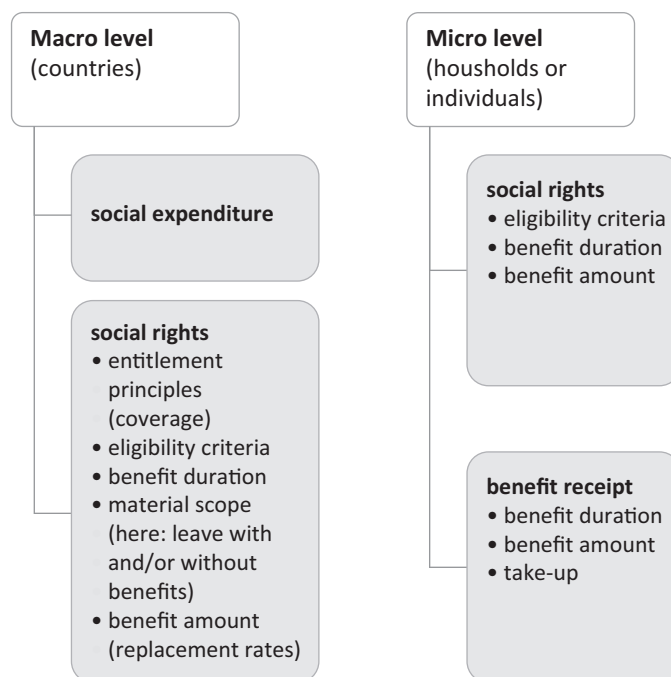


Figure 1. Indicators of leave generosity.

expenditure and social rights. These two types have also been adopted by researchers studying parenting leaves. In terms of conceptualisation, both indicators generally seek to approximate the extent of statutory leave benefits. However, there are considerable differences between them beyond this general analytical focus. Social expenditure is commonly represented by a single value, indicating either the actual public expenditure on a particular policy programme or a value relative to GDP. Although social rights can be represented by a single indicator (e.g., replacement rate), they are often compiled into a composite indicator, resulting in an index that captures the complex interplay between several aspects of a policy programme. Social expenditure and social rights indicators also differ in the scope of their research objectives. In contrast to social expenditure, many existing social rights-based indexes for leave policies also aim to capture the extent to which these rights are geared towards reducing gender inequality (Ciccia & Verloo, 2012; Dobrotić & Blum, 2020; Javornik, 2014; Javornik & Kurowska, 2017; Ray et al., 2010).

2.1.1. Social Expenditure

Social expenditure data approximates the budgetary ‘welfare effort’ or ‘welfare commitment’ that governments make to finance public social benefits. With this indicator, variation in policy generosity is an expression of differences in ‘how much’ is spent on a particular programme or on social welfare in general (Castles, 2002, 2009). The indicator has been widely used in research into public social benefit schemes. It has been used either as a dependent variable (Clasen & Siegel, 2007; Kittel & Obinger, 2003) or an independent variable, in the

latter case to study, for example, public attitudes, political participation or wellbeing (for a short overview see Kunißen, 2019). However, it has been less used in the context of leave policies (Luci-Greulich & Thévenon, 2013).

The size of social expenditure encompasses all dimensions of the generosity concept. The amount of social expenditure is affected by the extent of the population that receives the benefits, which is in turn determined by the eligibility conditions. For example, in two countries with identical leave benefit amounts per recipient, social expenditure will be higher in the country with citizenship-based entitlements to leave than in the one with employment-based entitlements. Social expenditure is also influenced by the duration of the benefit payment. As a similar example, social expenditure will be higher in the country with a longer benefit payment duration. Lastly, social expenditure is also influenced by the amount of the benefit per recipient. There are also other factors such as take-up that affect the total amount of social expenditure. However, these are not determined by the design of the policy, but by its attractiveness to potential recipients.

Consequently, social expenditure data provides a simple summary of the overall policy design and policy implementation within a specific context. Nonetheless, there are some shortcomings that researchers should be aware of when using this indicator in comparative studies. Since social expenditure is affected by the size of the population that receives the benefit, it should be corrected for the size of the eligible population (De Deken & Kittel, 2007; Kangas & Palme, 2007; Scruggs, 2007); for example, by dividing spending by the proportion of parents with dependent children of a given age. However, this approach is problematic, as it might be difficult to

find an appropriate variable to approximate the eligible population and to do so across different contexts (van Oorschot, 2013, p. 228).

Another shortcoming lies in the use of GDP as a factor used to adjust for national differences in wealth, as the comparability of the values may be compromised if GDP fluctuates. To compensate for this, spending can also be measured as absolute amounts expressed in purchasing power parities (PPP). In Figure 2, we display unadjusted social expenditure data expressed as a percentage of GDP. Using this indicator, countries such as Estonia, Hungary, Sweden, Finland and the Czech Republic are shown as having the most generous parental leave policies. By contrast, the United Kingdom, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Ireland and Spain stand out as having the least generous policies. In Figure 3, we show the amount of spending on leave policies, adjusted for the number of live births and expressed in PPP. Estonia, Sweden, Finland and the Czech

Republic are joined by Denmark at the top of the ranking, Hungary appears less generous, and Luxembourg shows the most generous system. At the bottom end of the ranking, the same countries appear to be the least generous: United Kingdom, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Ireland and Spain. Although adjusting for the eligible population does produce a more nuanced picture, the correlation between the two measurements is very strong ($r = 0.80$). Probably the most pressing issue with the social expenditure data is the fact that it does not provide information on who is supposed to receive or actually does receive a benefit. This can have implications for gender equality—something that is of particular interest in parental leave research.

2.1.2. Social Rights

Expenditure data has considerable limitations for the study of policy design and its effect on specific policy

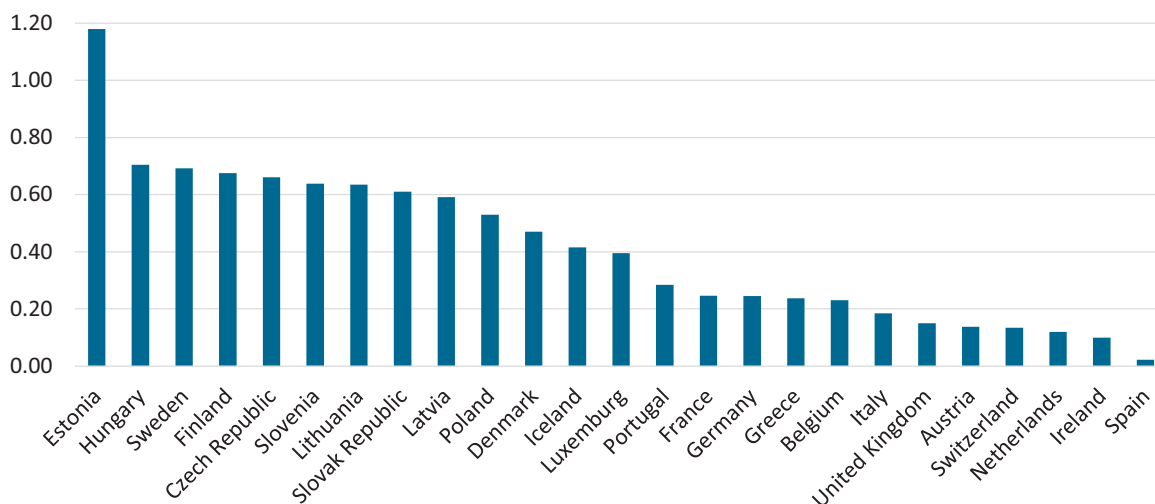


Figure 2. Total public expenditure on maternity and parental leave, as a percentage of GDP, 2015. Source: Authors’ calculations based on OECD (n.d.-a).

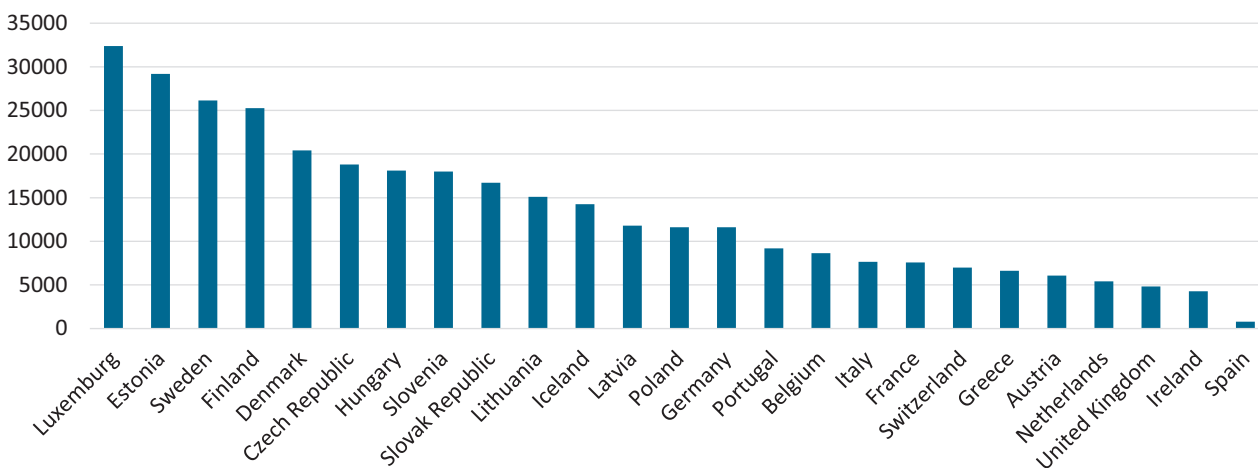


Figure 3. Public expenditure on maternity and parental leaves per live birth, in USD 2010 PPP, 2015. Data for Greece and Poland refer to 2012. Source: OECD (n.d.-b).

outcomes (e.g., stratification and gender equality). Social rights indicators were developed as an alternative measurement of the extent of ‘welfare commitment.’ Social rights data can be both quantitative and qualitative, but in this review, we only focus on the quantitative indicators. These social rights indicators are a result of quantification processes that combine legislative information on specific policy programmes with hypothetical or so-called model households. These model households assume specific values for wages (average or median) for a standard work contract in a particular sector. They also specify a particular intensity of employment for the household members and the household size. The model household is set for each database, although some databases calculate social rights indicators for several types of model households (e.g., the OECD Family Database). Since the model household is constant across countries, this approach provides a high degree of cross-country comparability between policy designs and their outcomes in terms of replacement rates.

The social rights data comprises several indicators. In the context of parenting leave, the most common indicators are the leave duration and the replacement rate. For example, the Parental Leave Benefit dataset (Nelson et al., 2020) provides data on maternity, paternity and parental leave duration, gross and net benefit levels, and replacement rates. The data covers 34 countries for the period between 1950 and 2015, with five-year data collection intervals. Another example with comparable information that is still being updated is the OECD Family Database (OECD, n.d.-c). Other databases are no longer kept up to date but still contain valuable data, such as the Multilinks Database on Intergenerational Policy Indicators (Multilinks, 2011), the Family Policy Database (Gornick, Meyers, & Ross, 1997), and the Comparative Maternity, Parental and Childcare Leave and Benefits Database (Gauthier, 2011). However, none of these databases have attempted to quantify the accessibility of parenting leave benefits as an important dimension of the generosity concept. This gap in the literature has

been recently pointed out by Dobrotić and Blum (2019, 2020). They addressed the issue by introducing an eligibility index that quantifies the accessibility of parental leave benefits on the basis of entitlement principles (citizenship-based or employment-based) and eligibility conditions (e.g., qualifying period).

Figures 4 and 5 provide examples of social rights data drawn from the OECD Family Database. They show, respectively, the number of weeks of total paid leave available to mothers and the average payment rate (as a percentage of gross earnings of a model family with two adult earners and two children) for OECD countries in 2018. These two indicators refer to benefit duration and benefit levels as two aspects of leave generosity. Examining leave duration in Figure 4, Estonia, Slovakia, Finland and Hungary are shown as having the most generous leave policies. By contrast, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Spain, Iceland and Ireland appear as the least generous. Again, most countries consistently rank high or low in terms of leave generosity, and the correlation of this indicator with spending on leave policies (Figure 2) is strong ($r = 0.75$). At the same time, the differences between this example of a social rights indicator and the social expenditure approach become clear. For instance, countries such as Sweden and especially Iceland score higher in terms of social expenditure, while Austria appears more generous in terms of the paid leave duration available to mothers. Figure 5 shows yet another ranking. In terms of average payment rates, Finland and France appear the least generous, while Lithuania, the Netherlands and Spain are shown as being the most generous. This is the result of the availability of 16 weeks of maternity benefits paid at 100 percent of the previous labour income in both Spain and the Netherlands, while parental leave is unpaid. In many other countries, average payment rates (calculated on the basis of paid maternity and parental leave rights) are lower, but in reality, women are entitled to benefits for a longer period of time. The correlation of average payment with public spending (Figure 2) is negligible

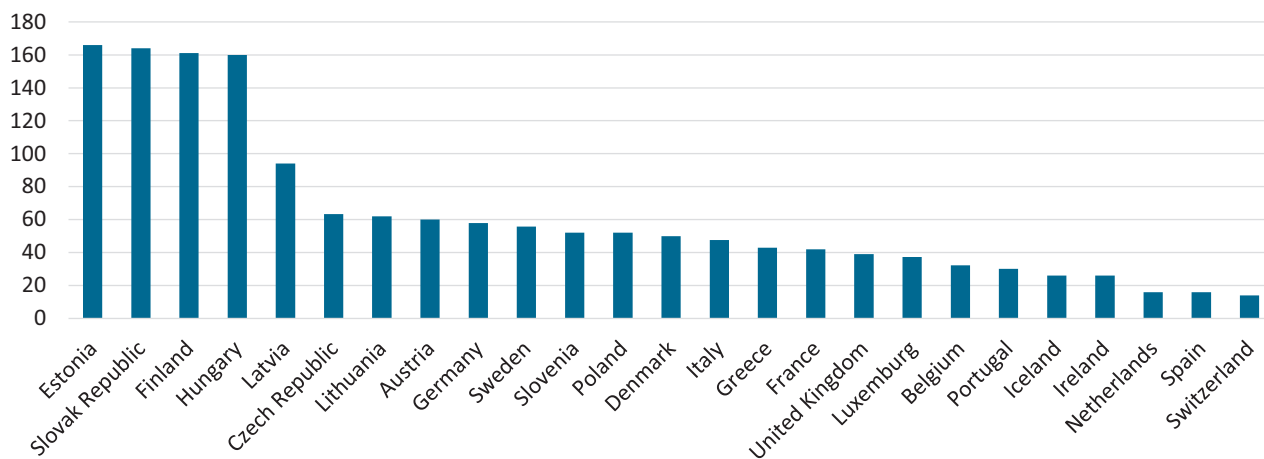


Figure 4. Number of weeks of total paid leave available to mothers. Source: OECD (n.d.-b) for 2018.

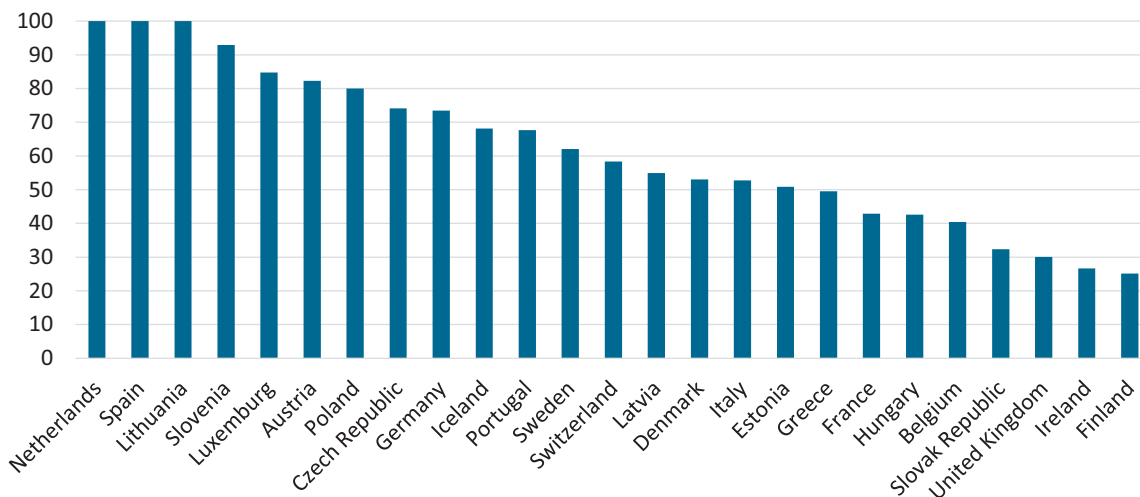


Figure 5. Average payment rates available to mothers as a percentage of previous wages. Source: OECD (n.d.-b) for 2018.

($r = -0.09$). This means that spending on leave policies appears to be associated more with the number of weeks of paid leave than with the level of the payment. Therefore, the high spending levels in Sweden or Iceland could be explained by high rates of take up, to which we turn further below.

The advantage of social rights indicators is that they provide a much more nuanced picture of public welfare provision with regard to policy design, and hence policy intension. Their use also offers more insight into who is supposed to receive the benefit. Additionally, where the indicators are linked to socio-economic and gender equality aspects (e.g., Ciccia & Verloo, 2012; Javornik, 2014; Javornik & Kurowska, 2017; Ray et al., 2010), social rights data also sheds light on the socially stratifying and gendered outcomes these policies can produce.

The limitation of social rights data mainly lies in the use of model households. The extent to which these are representative of real populations has been questioned, as has to what extent the prevalence of these model households varies across countries (Gallie & Paugam, 2000). Furthermore, where average net replacement rates are used to study trends in policies, wage developments and tax policies are ignored and the generosity of replacement rates can easily be misinterpreted. There is also a discrepancy between nominal entitlement, benefit administration and actual take-up rates. Social rights data is unable to reflect this; however, it can be expected to affect the actual realisation of social rights. Further, the social rights approach usually does not have the capacity to take income and benefit ceilings into account. This can lead to overestimating the generosity of the leave benefits. On top of this, the aspect of time is usually disregarded in such an approach. For example, a replacement rate that is initially relatively high but decreases shortly after or is only paid for a few weeks in a year may in the end be less generous than a benefit with a continuously paid lower replacement rate that is paid for an entire year or longer. Lastly, when qualitative information on benefit rights is quantified and included in com-

posite indicators (e.g., Dobrotić & Blum, 2020), coding and weighting the different components can be crucial. Hence, decisions about how to attribute scores to different qualitative information and how to weight one component relative to another not only have to be suitably justified, but also require sensitivity analyses and careful interpretation.

Two recent sources of social rights data attempt to deal with a number of these shortcomings. The OECD Family Support Calculator, for example, allows us to compare leave policy entitlements based on the characteristics of a wide range of individuals and households, taking the heterogeneity of the population into account (OECD, n.d.-d). A similar model-family approach termed the Hypothetical Household Tool (HHoT) is now also available in EUROMOD (Hufkens et al., 2019). This is a microsimulation tool that is based on the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) and allows the calculation and observation of the statutory leave entitlements for a wide array of hypothetical households that can be specified by the user. The HHoT also allows us to take into account the interaction with wage developments and tax policies. Such an approach is ideally suited for between-country comparisons and allows the computation of policy indicators for a wide range of households. Nevertheless, it does not solve the issue of representativeness of the population.

2.2. Micro-Level Indicators

To date, micro-level data has been a relatively underused source of information in assessing the generosity of leave benefits. Dominant examples of micro-level indicators are based on social rights and on benefit receipt data. Given the nature of the data, these indicators are not only suitable to study the generosity of parenting leave benefits but also their stratifying and gendering effects. They could be used to statistically model, for example, the association between benefit amounts and gender or education. This is a huge advantage over the approaches

we have discussed so far. Furthermore, the combination of microsimulation with benefit receipt data can estimate the degree of non-take-up with considerable precision. The use of micro-level data can therefore not only reveal the socio-economic profile of parents who miss out on support from child-related leave programmes, but also of parents who are targeted by these policies yet are not using them. Consequently, such data can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of policy designs and is an important source of information for policy reforms and policy learning.

2.2.1. Social Rights

Social rights are commonly accepted as macro-level indicators that capture the characteristics of policy designs in terms of legal provisions. Less attention is paid to their ability to link macro-level policy designs with micro-level social reality. This has only been possible in recent years with the increasing availability of comparative legislative data on policy design, such as the Mutual Information System on Social Protection (MISSOC) or the International Reviews on Leave Policies and Related Research produced by the International Network on Leave Policies & Research (LP&R), and rich comparative social survey data such as the EU-SILC. To overcome some of the shortcomings of the previously mentioned macro-level indicators, scholars have used imputation methods to assess who should—based on national leave policy regulations—receive a benefit, for how long and what amount. This data can either be aggregated to formulate a single-value parenting leave indicator or can be used at the individual level to analyse the variation in eligibility and entitlements, both within and across countries.

One of the earliest examples of the application of this method to parenting leave data is a study by Zabel (2008), who simulated maternity leave for women using the British Household Panel Survey. Comparable with this, EUROMOD introduced parenting leave policies in their tax-benefit simulation models mapping the position of eligible individuals in the EU-SILC sample (Immervoll, O'Donoghue, & Sutherland, 1999). More-recent attempts include the simulation of leave entitlements such as parental leave benefits for a few European countries (Avram & Popova, 2020; Popova & Navicke, 2020). EUROMOD is also modelling parenting leave entitlements for parents in the EU-SILC sample. This allows us to measure and compare the stability of leave benefits across the duration of the benefits (e.g., if the leave design provides more-generous payments for the first months of leave). This is unique and a distinct feature of the EUROMOD approach, nevertheless, some limitations are apparent. First, only leave entitlements that are part of the tax-benefit system can be included. In cases where leave is unpaid or payment is arranged through private insurance, it cannot be programmed into the model. Second, this particular microsimulation approach is subject to a selection effect. It does not

account for the possibility that some people may opt out of or postpone parenthood due to unfavourable economic conditions that are not alleviated by the support provided by the parenting leave programme. It also does not provide the distribution of social rights that are fully comparable across countries but where the profile of parents considerably differs.

Bártová and Emery (2018) used an approach similar to the one of EUROMOD by applying microsimulation methods for a population of women of childbearing age and therefore 'at risk' of giving birth. This approach allows us to observe the distribution of social rights to parenting leave across the whole population that is realistically subject to the possibility of experiencing the relevant social risk. By design, this microsimulation approach provides direct insight into the generosity of parenting leave policies as illustrated in Figure 6. This shows the proportion of women between the age of 20 and 40 who would be eligible either to maternity leave, parental leave or both, if they were to have a child in that particular year. Although the expenditure data presented in Figures 2 and 3 is influenced by the actual number of parents receiving the benefit in a given year, Figure 6 is based on a hypothetical situation of all women between the age of 20 and 40 giving birth in 2008. Therefore, the two types of data cannot be directly compared. Nonetheless, it points to some substantial differences in the country outcomes with respect to generosity. For instance, Austria appears as highly generous on the eligibility indicator, with maternity and/or parental benefits being available to all women who give birth. By contrast, when using expenditure data to evaluate leave generosity, Austria turns out to be among the least generous countries. The outcome is different even when using the indicator of the number of weeks of total paid parental leave, where it falls somewhere in the middle.

Microsimulation has also been applied to the amount of cash benefits, and thanks to its link with survey data, it can easily be broken down by socio-economic status and other characteristics (Bártová, 2017; Bártová & Emery, 2018). Another advantage of this approach is that it allows us to study the policy outcomes for populations that are at lower risk of becoming parents. Using these hypothetical parents among the population of teenagers, single women or single men enables us to understand the situation of teenage mothers or single fathers who may be overlooked when using conventional methods. Nonetheless, the microsimulation approaches also have their limitations. A key assumption underlying microsimulation benefit models is that of full take-up: It is assumed that anyone who is entitled to a benefit actually claims it. The approach therefore only approximates social rights to potential benefit recipients. In the field of family policies in general, and parental leave policies in particular, such an assumption is unrealistic. It is well documented that leave entitlements are underused, with strong gender and socio-economic cleavages in its uptake (Ghysels & Van Lancker, 2011; Ray et al., 2010).

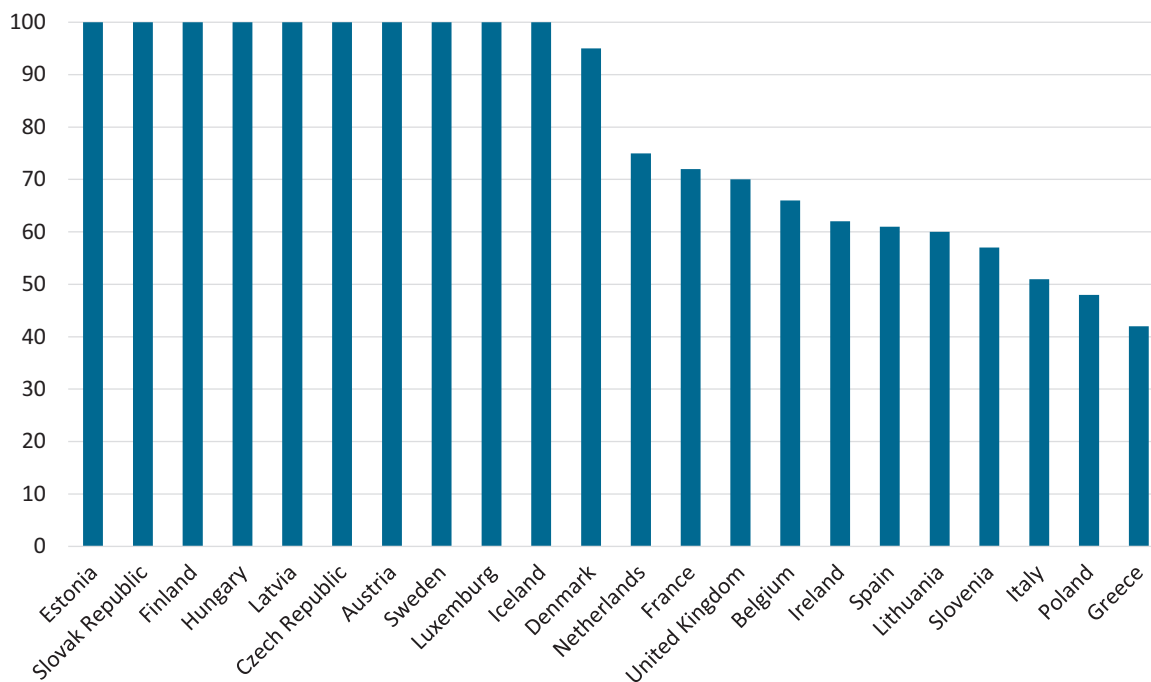


Figure 6. Percentage of women (20–40 years) who would be eligible for a parental leave benefit were they to give birth in 2008. Source: Bártová (2017).

2.2.2. Benefit Receipt

A last set of indicators draw on benefit receipt to compare the extent of public welfare provision across different target populations (individuals and households within a country, and different country populations) and over time (De Deken & Clasen, 2011, 2013; Otto, 2018; van Oorschot, 2013). Data on benefit receipt is usually sourced from administrative or survey data that is reported at an individual and/or household level. In contrast to social rights data, benefit access is not a hypothetical entitlement. Depending on the unit of analysis, more accessible benefits translate into a higher proportion of individuals or households receiving the benefit or taking up leave, relative to a specific target population. For example, in the case of parental leave, micro-level information on leave benefit receipt is put in relation to the number of people with young dependent children. These take-up rates can also be compared across countries. Likewise, benefit amounts are not hypothetical or case-typical replacement rates, but are expressed either through directly reported amounts, or as the proportion of a reported benefit relative to a reference income. The latter is more suitable for comparing regions or countries. Where the data is available, benefit receipt could also be operationalised as the duration for which a benefit is received.

Although some studies have already used administrative records to gauge the take-up of different types of leaves in particular countries (Kil, Wood, & Neels, 2018; Koslowski & Kadar-Satat, 2019; Marynissen, Mussino, Wood, & Duvander, 2019), comparative studies are scarce (for an exception see Karu & Tremblay, 2018).

The problem is that administrative records are not available in most countries, and where they are, the concepts of leave use are not always comparable. Administrative records are based on administrative definitions of policies and statutory entitlements, tied to the laws and (social security) programmes of the country under study. Accordingly, the need population can be different, the way of classifying and recording take-up can be different, and these categories can vary over time when policies change (De Deken & Clasen, 2013; Otto, 2018). In that sense, harmonised cross-country survey data offers better prospects to examine leave uptake across countries and over time. Comparing the take-up of leave of a particular household with the respective social rights entitlements would even allow us to estimate the amount of non-take up in leave use. However, cross-country harmonised surveys in which the use of leave is properly recorded are rare, as respondents are often asked to describe their labour market status during the past week or at the time of the survey, rather than in terms of labour market status in the period after birth. Furthermore, for many countries it is not possible to isolate maternity leave benefits from child benefits, or parental leave benefits from unemployment or sickness benefits (Zardo-Trindade & Goedemé, 2020). The EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) has so far included three ad hoc modules on the reconciliation of work and family life in 2005, 2010 and 2018. In this module, detailed questions are asked about childcare use, the use of leave and the use of career break schemes with regard to the youngest child living in the household. Unfortunately, the questions and the selection of the relevant population changed over time, which severely

hampers comparability. Moreover, it is not always clear how respondents interpreted the questions, in particular in systems in which there is no clear distinction between maternity and parental leave (e.g., the Nordic countries). As a result, only a few studies have used this data to examine social inequalities in leave take-up (Ghysels & Van Lancker, 2011; Van Lancker, 2017) or to model the probability to work by individual take-up of leave (Van Lancker, 2018).

Using the EU-LFS ad hoc module of 2018, Figure 7 shows the proportion of women between 18 and 64 years old taking care of children living in the household. It shows how different benefit design aspects can translate into actual use of these policies. According to this data, countries such as Austria, Sweden, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Estonia and Finland appear the most generous, while countries such as Switzerland, Portugal, Spain and the Netherlands appear the least generous. Again, the country ranking does not change substantially for most countries, and the correlation with public expenditure is strong ($r = 0.68$). In generous countries such as Sweden, Estonia, Slovakia and Czech Republic, spending on leave benefits is high (Figures 2 and 3), all women of child-bearing age are eligible (Figure 6) and social rights are usually generous as well (in terms of the number of paid weeks available and/or payment rates; see Figures 4 and 5). This translates into high levels of take-up. Vice versa, in countries such as Spain or the Netherlands, spending is low, fewer women of childbearing age are eligible for leave, parental leave is unpaid and take-up rates are low. Some countries, however, change ranks. In Austria, for example, spending on leave is relatively low whereas both eligibility and take-up rates are high. One reason could be the fact that in Austria, the class and gender inequalities in use are substantial, with only few fathers taking up leave, while in countries with comparable features such as Sweden such inequalities are more

modest (see Koslowski et al., 2020). Although beyond the scope of the present article, further analysis using micro-level social rights and benefit recipient indicators would allow such questions to be answered.

3. Conclusion

In this article, we have reviewed various approaches to the comparative study of the generosity of leave benefits based on social expenditure, social rights and benefit reciprocity data. These indicators enabled us to analyse and compare the degree to which parenting leave policies are generous in terms of their budgetary volume, their accessibility, the duration of leave, the (relative) amounts of leave benefits and leave benefit receipt.

We systematically separated the various indicators into two categories, depending on whether they were constructed on the macro or micro level, and we highlighted the many difficulties and pitfalls involved in measuring and operationalising the generosity of leave policies. Although some countries consistently rank high or low in terms of generosity, the devil is in the details. We showed how the operationalisation of leave policies at macro and micro levels according to different approaches can lead to different rankings, interpretations and qualifications of countries and leave systems. We found that most of the parenting leave indicators that are commonly used measure only the benefit duration and the amount of cash benefits. This is in line with previous criticism of the existing policy indicators (Dobrotić & Blum, 2019, 2020). It could be argued that social expenditure data provides information about generosity, because it constitutes the outcome of access to benefits, their duration and amount. However, it is very difficult to disentangle each component of the generosity concept and assign a specific value or a proportion of the total expenditure to each component. Social

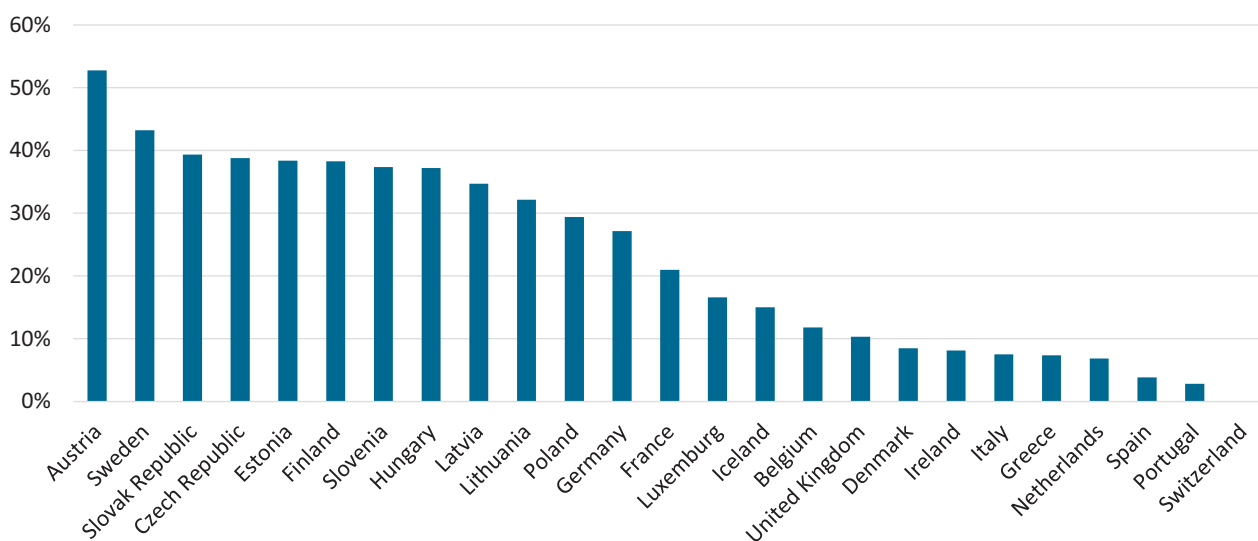


Figure 7. Proportion of respondents (18–64 years) having used parental leave for their youngest child. Source: Authors' own calculations based on the EU-LFS 2018 ad hoc module.

expenditure data also does not provide information on who actually receives the benefits, and consequently is not suitable for use in studies on the stratifying or gendering effects of leave policies. Social rights indicators constructed on the macro level provide a standardised and more detailed way to compare policy designs across countries and time. This is because they are built on the social rights of model households. Nonetheless, the use of model families is also the main reason why this approach has been criticised. It has raised questions about how representative they are in contemporary societies, and to what extent standardised model families equally prevail across countries. This criticism does not stem from the inability of social rights indicators to effectively measure varying social policy designs, but instead from its broad-brush approach that is not suitable for all research questions (Siegel, 2007).

We found that indicators based on data for benefit reciprocity and social rights that are measured on the micro-level can provide a much better opportunity for analysing the generosity of parenting leave benefits. In contrast to the macro-level indicators, micro-level indicators have the ability to provide policy indicators for each dimension of the generosity concept. The micro-level social rights indicators create a link between the national legislation on parenting leave and the individual characteristics of survey respondents by means of microsimulation. This offers an insight into the distribution of social rights in real populations and their effect on social stratification and gender inequality. However, the approach is limited because it does not offer any information about the actual use of leave policies. This limitation is addressed by benefit reciprocity data, which captures the actual take-up of benefits. Nevertheless, in this regard also, issues of comparability are important, as the operationalisation of benefit receipt or leave use is often linked to country-specific legislation. While headway can and must be made in terms of the availability and quality of data based upon harmonised cross-country databases, there is no one-size-fits-all indicator that adequately captures all the dimensions that are relevant to leave research.

Against this background, we would like to stress that the choice of the indicator very much depends on the exact research question one seeks to address, and how this choice can be theoretically underpinned. Where a more comprehensive understanding of leave policies in different national contexts and across time is needed, ideally different indicators should be combined.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Capturing the Gender Gap in the Scope of Parenting Related Leave Policies Across Nations

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Abstract

This article contributes to the conceptual and technical development of cross-national measurement and analysis of the gender gap in the scope of parenting related leave entitlements. That there is a gender gap in the scope of leave benefits is widely acknowledged, but it is rarely quantified. The nomenclature in use around leave policies is diverse and so a first step is to standardise categories and develop a unit of parenting related leave. There is considerable cross-national variation in the configuration of the scope of leave policies. As such, a second step is to consider how best to include the different dimensions of this scope (e.g., duration, payment level, individual parent versus family design) in an estimate of the gender gap in entitlement. Using data collated by the International Network on Leave Policies and Research, a gender gap indicator is created to contribute to our understanding of the inclusiveness of parenting related leave for men as compared to women. This indicator highlights that only two (Iceland and Norway) of 45 countries included in this analysis had achieved a zero-gender gap in terms of entitlement to ‘well-paid,’ individual parenting related leave during the first 18 months of a child’s life. The average gender gap for the countries in the analysis is between two to three months. Only seven countries offered more than two months leave to fathers as an individual entitlement. This is likely to be part of the explanation in many countries for lower leave taking practice by men compared to women.

Keywords

comparative analysis; inclusiveness; gender gap; leave policy; parenting; social rights

Issue

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1. Introduction

Much leave provision has its roots in a heteronormative and maternalistic political context. That is to say, a world which assumes that it is primarily mothers who ‘need’ leave policy provisions. These policy pathways can be highly resistant to substantial change (e.g., Boling, 2015; Moss & O’Brien, 2019). As such, it is perhaps not surprising that the difference, or gap, between the amount of days that men spend on leave compared to women, is considerable. This appears to be the case even in countries where much progress has been made towards equal entitlement for all parents to leave (Eydal & Rostgaard, 2016; Moss, Koslowski, & Duvander, 2019).

Whilst fathers are less likely than mothers to take parenting related leave, there is variation in leave tak-

ing by men across countries, linked to the extent of independent entitlement (Karu & Tremblay, 2018). Indeed, in some countries, parents may have equal—or near equal—entitlement to parenting related leave, which in this case is often referred to as parental leave (see, e.g., Bungum & Kvande, 2020, for Norway; Schober, Blum, Erler, & Reimer, 2020, for Germany). However, in many countries, the gender gap in parenting related leave taking is built into the system explicitly through gendered maternity and paternity leave entitlements (see, e.g., Addabbo, Cardinali, Giovannini, & Mazzucchelli, 2020, for Italy). That is to say, statutory leave may not be similarly available to (female) mothers and their (male) partners; there is a gender gap in entitlement to parenting related leave.

This article posits that in order to have an accurate picture of the cross-national variation in the gender gap

in parenting related leaves and take up of such leave, it is necessary to compare not only parental leaves, but all parenting related care leaves. A gender gap exists if there is a difference in a given indicator between women and men (e.g., European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020a). Arguably, equal entitlement to parenting related leaves is a first step in closing the gender gap in their use. As such, a cross-national indicator of this scope of entitlement gender gap can serve as a useful benchmark for scholars and policy makers. Both national governments and a growing number of international bodies have identified measures that can be taken to reduce gender gaps, and it is important to have data and indicators to benchmark and monitor progress towards this goal.

There are various dimensions in the scope of parenting related leave including: duration of leave (linked to the age of the child), payment of leave, whether it is an individual entitlement or a family entitlement and whether it is transferable. These dimensions are all related to gender equality in leave taking practice (Castro-Garcia & Pazos-Moran, 2015; Ciccina & Verloo, 2012; Ray, Gornick, & Schmitt, 2010). All these factors should be taken into account in the development of a unit of comparison for a gender gap in parenting related leave entitlement. Due to the gender focus as well as country level differences in entitlement for non-heterosexual biological and adoptive parents, the focus of this research is not on these groups. This article aims to contribute to leave scholarship by proposing a gender gap indicator of 'well-paid,' individual entitlement to parenting related leave during the first 18 months of a child's life.

2. Understanding the Gender Gap in Parenting Related Leave

With a few exceptions, much leave policy design presupposes a primary carer model, which whilst potentially couched in gender neutral terms, remains synonymous with a mother-centric approach to infant care (e.g., see discussion in Kaufman, 2020). A leave system which assumes a primary carer, presupposes the breadwinner/carer model, just without the explicit assumption that the carer is female. These systems may aim to enable mothers to remain in the labour market, but they do not seek to shift the division of caring work. Gender equality can potentially have different interpretations in terms of leave provision. Countries could maintain a primary carer model and still claim gender equality in the case that leave provision and take up (and corresponding breadwinners) were evenly distributed by gender (e.g., see discussion in Koslowski & Duvander, 2018). An even distribution of breadwinners and/or primary carers by gender has not yet been observed in any country. A more certain route towards gender equality in parenting is arguably to legislatively support co-parenting (Kaufman, 2020). Co-parenting sees reduced specialisation between parents, with both actively engaged as carers and actively engaged in paid work as required, when not on leave.

Thus, intended policy outcomes related to gender equality for leave policies vary. Some policy making bodies have promoted them as a key instrument for maintaining the presence of mothers in the labour market (as discussed in Ciccina & Verloo, 2012; Dearing, 2016; Pronzato, 2009). Other policy actors have also seen them as a key instrument for increasing the opportunities for fathers to spend more time caring for their young children in addition to maintaining mothers' labour market participation (Caracciolo di Torella, 2014; O'Brien, 2009). Leave policies can also be important policy instruments for supporting child health and well-being, maternal and paternal health and well-being, fertility rates, and for addressing gender pay gaps (Andersen, 2018; Thévenon, 2011).

2.1. Parenting Related Leave

Parents may be entitled to a range of different types of statutory leave (usually from their workplace), but the focus here is on leave dedicated to the care of infants. Different countries use a range of different terms to refer to the various leaves. There is not an entirely standard nomenclature. The most common terms for parenting-related leave are maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave and birth leave (see Koslowski, Blum, Dobrotić, Kaufman, & Moss, 2020). This list of terms is not exhaustive, there are other terms (e.g., family leave, primary carer leave, childcare leave). Annual leave and sickness leave are also sometimes used by parents in order to care for infants. Some countries also offer specific leaves to allow parents to care for children who are ill (Bartel, Rossin-Slater, Ruhm, Stearns, & Waldfogel, 2018; Koslowski et al., 2020), but these are not included in this analysis. Whilst these leaves can be an extremely important source of support for parents and linked to gender equality outcomes, the focus of this article is on the care leaves available to parents with infants in their first 18 months.

Maternity leave is usually specific to the birth mother, though in some cases can be transferred to another person, usually the father. Paternity leave is usually specific to the father or in some countries, also for another (e.g., same sex) co-parent, usually to be taken soon after the birth of a child. It is often quite short term (a couple of days to a few weeks duration). Parental leave is generally understood to be a longer term care measure for infants, intended to give both parents (and sometimes other parties) the opportunity to spend time caring for a young child (and for the infant to be cared for by its parents); it can usually only be taken at the end of maternity leave (see Koslowski et al., 2020). It is usual for the leave available to adoptive parents to be similar in configuration to the other leave provision available in a country.

Many studies choose to focus on either maternity, paternity or parental leave, but rarely all of these in the same article. Whilst this is often a sound approach for the research questions at hand, to only focus on parental

leave when the goal is to estimate the gender gap in entitlement to leave is likely to lead to an under-estimation of the size of the gender gap, particularly in countries with a longer gender-specific birth-related leave for mothers (usually referred to as maternity leave). For example, in Ireland, women may have access to 42 weeks maternity leave, compared to men having two weeks paternity leave, in addition to equal entitlement to 18 weeks of parental leave (Daly & Szelewa, 2020). In Hungary, women may have access to 24 weeks maternity leave, compared to men having five days paternity leave, in addition to equal (family) entitlement to parental leave after the maternity leave period (Gábos & Makay, 2020). A first step is to map the various leaves, noting their nomenclature, but also their characteristics, as sometimes similar terms can be used differently across countries, as seen in the annual reviews of the International Network of Leave Policies and Research (e.g., Koslowski et al., 2020). The next step is to operationalise a standardised unit of leave in order to estimate a gender gap in entitlement to leave. Is all leave to be considered equivalent, or is it that only well-paid leave to which an individual is entitled is leave that is likely to be accessible to (all) parents in practice (Ray et al., 2010).

Leave policies are particularly relevant to working parents with dependent children, though eligibility to them may extend beyond this more narrowly defined group, such as to grandparents (see, e.g., Dimitrova, Kotzeva, & Ilieva, 2020, for Bulgaria) or other close person if the second parent is unknown (see, e.g., Duvander & Löfgren, 2020, for Sweden). Much leave policy has been developed from a heteronormative and biological parenting assumption. However, in recent years, the legal possibilities to become a parent have become broader in some countries and this can change the population of people with entitlement to leave policies (Digoix, 2020). This article considers the gender gap in the population of parents of infants and the understanding of ‘parent’ rests with the legal definitions in a given country at the time of data collection, April 2020. In addition to any gender gap, there may also be many parents who are not eligible for leave provisions (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020) and this may add an additional element to the gender gap in entitlement to leave.

2.2. *What is Being Compared?*

No single country has designed the scope of its leave provisions in quite the same way as any other country (Koslowski et al., 2020), which creates challenges for the standardisation required for measurement. At their most basic, statutory leave policies usually provide job protection for a period of time so that a worker can be available to care for a dependant and after this period of time, return to employment with the same employer (and usually the same job). They can also include an element of wage replacement during this period (Ray et al., 2010). Indeed, much of the evidence suggests that leave being

‘well-paid’ is a crucial element of the scope of benefit for gender equal outcomes. ‘Well-paid’ is understood in various ways by different groups of scholars. Some would argue that for leave to be ‘well-paid’ and thus a viable option for many parents, it should be 100 percent wage replacement. In practice, a threshold that is often used in comparative literature is 66 percent wage replacement (e.g., Koslowski et al., 2020; Ray et al., 2010).

To further complicate matters for comparative analysis, some parents are eligible for ‘top ups’ to statutory entitlement from their employers (Koslowski & Kadar-Satat, 2019), as a result of collective agreements (e.g., Sweden, Netherlands; see den Dulk, Yerkes, & Peper, 2018), or as part of a package of occupational benefits (e.g., offered by international companies such as Aviva, Diageo, and Proctor & Gamble). Whilst such occupational or extra-statutory leave provision can play an important role for many parents, and in some cases may also be far more de-gendered than statutory provision (see, e.g., Kaufman, 2020), it can be very difficult to obtain sufficient data on such arrangements for cross-national or even national analysis (e.g., Koslowski & Kadar-Satat, 2019). As such, this article joins much of the literature by maintaining the focus on statutory leaves. In some countries (e.g., Greece, Malta, Uruguay), there are different statutory regimes for the public and private sectors (Koslowski et al., 2020), so a decision is required as to which regime to include in cross-national work. In addition, there may be regional differences to statutory legislation (e.g., Belgium, Canada). As such, the amount of leave (in terms of benefit payments and duration) available to (some) parents in a country is likely to be underestimated, but this does not negate the utility in mapping the baseline entitlements.

Parenting is not usually an aspect of life that is experienced solely at the level of the individual, rather at the level of the household (or family), and sometimes beyond the household, particularly in the case of lone parents. However, to elucidate the gender gaps, analysis at the individual level is needed. Leave can be ‘equally’ available to mothers and fathers in different constructs either as (1) a non-transferable individual right, (2) an individual right that can be transferred to the other parent, or (3) a family right that parents divide between themselves (or sometimes between themselves and other family members) as they choose. Of these, it is the former—a non-transferable individual right—that is associated with a reduction in gendered practice as fathers’ access to individual entitlement is strongly associated with increased take up of the leave (e.g., Duvander & Johansson, 2012; Haas & Rostgaard, 2011; Karu & Tremblay, 2018), though this design needs to be complemented by sustained political work and cultural change as well for this effect to be realised (e.g., Boling, 2015). In most countries, there are some gender specific elements of leave, but the proportion of total leave available to parents which is gender neutral varies considerably (as shown in Table 1).

As mentioned above, the various dimensions of leave policy benefit and scope have their own particular associations with gender equal outcomes. This article focuses on leaves relevant for the care of infants (from birth to 18 months) as the gender gap is particularly acute during this phase in the child's life when care is perhaps at its most intensive. (It is also common for mothers to have access to pre-birth leave, which is sometimes compulsory). Fathers spending time caring alone for children during this period for a certain duration is associated with their increased participation in childcare throughout childhood. Thus, as infant care is no longer seen as the sole domain of women, gender equality outcomes follow, such as increased female labour market participation, reduced gender pay gap, and increased male household work participation (Andersen, 2018; Doucet & McKay, 2020; O'Brien & Wall, 2017).

Duration of statutory leave periods vary considerably across countries, from periods of days or weeks to years. Moderate durations of leave for women have a large positive effect on women's employment outcomes and working hours, whereas very short and very long leaves are associated with reduced female labour market participation (e.g., Dearing, 2016). Extending durations of leave for men changes how they might negotiate and navigate care and domestic work (treated as a category distinct from care and paid work responsibilities; see Doucet & McKay, 2020; O'Brien & Wall, 2017). There is not absolute agreement in the literature about the optimal leave duration (from either parent or child perspective; see Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2017), but for the purposes of this analysis less than four months would generally be considered as short, from five months to 12 months as moderate, 12 months to two years as long, and more than two years as very long. Increased duration of leave taken by men could contribute to moderate duration leave taking by women (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). Duration of leaves impacts employers differently in terms of whether replacement cover is considered feasible, which can also impact on leave taking practice (Pettigrew, 2020). Some countries offer incentives to encourage take up of leave by fathers: For example, the parenting couple may be eligible for extended duration and the associated payment of leave if fathers take a certain amount of parental leave (e.g., in Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal; see Koslowski et al., 2020).

There is also considerable cross-national variation in levels of payment to parents during leave, also sometimes within a particular leave episode for an individual parent within a given country context (e.g., UK statutory maternity leave, which is 'well-paid' for six weeks and then drops to a very low flat rate, well below the minimum wage, before ending in an unpaid period; see Atkinson, O'Brien, & Koslowski, 2020). This UK example illustrates that leave can be unpaid, paid at a low flat rate similar to social assistance, or paid as a form of wage related maintenance. Sometimes a seemingly

wage related maintenance system becomes similar to a low flat rate if ceilings are not updated (e.g., in Croatia; see Dobrotić, 2020). Sometimes, the level of payment varies according to the duration of leave taken, with a number of options available (e.g., in Poland; see Kurowska, Michoń, & Godlewska-Bujok, 2020). Leave paid as wage-related maintenance is associated with increased uptake by all parents, but in particular by fathers (e.g., Ray et al., 2010).

Another problem for comparisons across countries is that not all parents, or even all working parents are eligible for leave provisions of any nature—or eligible for leave provisions with higher benefit levels. Thus, a crucial aspect of leave policy design is that of how eligibility is determined (e.g., is there a minimum qualifying period of employment, are the self-employed included, are same-sex parents included; see Dobrotić & Blum, 2020). The aim of this article is to develop an indicator for the gender gap in entitlement across all leaves relating to the first 18 months of a child's life, which can then be included in analysis of eligibility for leave to get the full picture.

3. Methodology: Operationalizing the Gender Gap in Entitlement to Parenting-Related Leave Benefits

In light of the discussion above, this article suggests a focus on access to (well) paid leave via an individual entitlement. This builds on the assumption that in addition to legislative entitlement, leave taking can only be realised by many parents when the entitlement is inclusive of compensation for the loss of income from paid work. There is disagreement over what might be considered sufficient compensation for the loss of income from paid work to render leave taking to be fully viable by both parents. As discussed, whilst the distinction between paid and unpaid leave is unambiguous, what constitutes 'well-paid' leave is less clear. For the purposes of this article, the current standard operationalisation of 66 percent for 'well-paid' is used, though it is noted when leave is at the 100 percent level.

As such, data are compiled in Table 1, using one of the cross-national tables in the 2020 Leave Review (Koslowski et al., 2020) so that column (a) indicates well-paid leave that is available to the family. Technically, this leave is available to either parent, not specifically to either the father or the mother. However, as discussed above, this leave is most often taken by the mother. In some cases, leave shown here can be transferred between parents where there is mutual agreement. This is exclusive of parent-specific leaves mentioned in columns (b) and (c). In some cases, leave is an individual entitlement, but the payment is a family entitlement and, so, this is considered as leave available to the family and not to a specific parent. Column (b) indicates the period of 'father-only' (including other non-birth parents) well-paid leave. This includes paternity leaves but also non-transferable individual entitlements to parental

leave, including sharing bonuses. Column (c) indicates the period of ‘mother-only’ well-paid leave, which is usually for the birth mother. This includes maternity leave and non-transferable elements of parental leave.

Data are all taken from the open access 45 country notes and cross-national tables in the International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2020 (Koslowski et al., 2020). The gap is estimated for all 45 countries included in the review, plus Québec, so 46 units of observation (see Table 1 for the full list). A limitation of this research is the reliance on a single data source compiled by multiple contributors.

Only post-birth leave is included in this table (so not pre-birth leave). As noted:

As parents may take some of this leave concurrently, the total amounts do not indicate the child’s precise age at the end of well-paid leave. In some countries, it may be possible to take longer leaves, but at a lower payment, and this is not indicated in this table. A month is calculated to be 4.3 weeks; while 4 weeks would be 0.9 months. # indicates a ceiling on

payments. Where there is 100 percent wage replacement rate, this is indicated. (Koslowski et al., 2020, pp. 71–72)

4. Results: The Gender Gap in Entitlement to Leave (April 2020 for 45 countries)

Table 1 presents data from a table in the 2020 Leave Review (Koslowski et al., 2020, p. 73) introducing a new column with the calculation of the gender gap indicator in entitlement. Scanning column (a) reveals the variation in availability of well-paid leave as a family entitlement, ranging from ‘zero months’ in many countries to 24 months in Hungary (though with a ceiling on the maximum payment). This variation is not currently reflected in the proposed gender gap indicator. Technically, this leave would be available to either mother or father, though it is rare in practice that fathers take the leave (Gábos & Makay, 2020).

Some countries do not have any well-paid leave available to parents, as such, there is technically no gender gap, but this is not considered a positive solution to the

Table 1. Total amount of ‘well-paid’ leave available to parents in first 18 months of a child’s life (April 2020 for 45 countries, plus Québec).

Country	(a) Well-paid leave available as family entitlement (months)	(b) Period of ‘father-only’ well-paid leave (months)	(c) Period of ‘mother-only’ well-paid leave (months)	Gender gap indicator in entitlement
Australia	0	0	0	n/a
Austria	12	2 (extra parental leave)	1.9 (100% earnings)	–0.1
Belgium	0	0.45 #	3.3	2.85
Brazil	0	0.2 or 0.9	4 or 6 (private or public)	3.8 or 5.1
Bulgaria	0	0.5 #	12 # (with possibility to transfer 6 months to father)	11.5
Canada	0	0	0	n/a
Québec	1.6 to 5.8 (7 to 25 weeks)	0.69 to 1.15 (3 to 5 weeks)	3.5 to 4.2 (15 to 18 weeks)	2.81 to 3.05
Chile	0	1.15	5.5	4.35
China	0	0.2 to 1	2.7	1.7 to 2.5
Croatia	4 (with both parents’ agreement) # (low; 100% earnings)	2 # (low; 100% earnings)	8 (6 with 100% earnings and no ceiling, then 2 with #; low)	6
Cyprus	0	0.45	3.7	3.25
Czech Republic	6 # (leave is an individual entitlement but only one parent at a time is entitled to the benefit)	0.2 #	5.1 #	4.9

Country	(a) Well-paid leave available as family entitlement (months)	(b) Period of 'father-only' well-paid leave (months)	(c) Period of 'mother-only' well-paid leave (months)	Gender gap indicator in entitlement
Denmark	7.4 # (leave is an individual entitlement, but the benefit is a family entitlement) (100% earnings)	0.45 # (100% earnings) Collective agreements do include provision for well-paid 'father-only' leave	3.3 # (100% earnings)	2.85
Estonia	14.5 # (100% earnings)	0.45 # (100% earnings)	3.7 (100% earnings)	3.25
Finland	6.2 #	2 #	2.9	0.9
France	0	0.45 (# in private sector; 100% earnings)	3.3 (# in private sector)	2.85
Germany (leave is paid at a replacement rate of between 65 and 67%)	12 #	2	1.9 (100% earnings)	-0.1
Greece	Private sector 3.6 (100% earnings) Public sector 9 (100% earnings) (childcare leave rather than parental leave)	0.1 (2 days; 100% earnings; both private and public)	private sector: 2 # (100% earnings) public sector: 3 (100% earnings)	1.9 or 2.9
Hungary	24 #	0.2 (100% earnings)	5.6	5.4
Iceland	2 #	4 #	4 #	0
Ireland	0	0	0	n/a
Israel	0	0.14 (3 days; 100% earnings)	3.5 # (100% earnings)	3.36
Italy	0	0.25 (7 days; (100% earnings)	4.7	4.45
Japan	0	6 #	7.9 #	1.9
Korea	6 (if 3 months taken by second parent)	3 months parental leave # (100% earnings) + 0.14 (3 days) paternity leave (100% earnings)	3 maternity # (100% earnings) + 3 parental #	2.86
Latvia	0	0.33	1.9	1.57
Lithuania	12 #	0.9 # (77.58% earnings)	1.9 (77.58% earnings)	1
Luxembourg	0	4	2.8 maternity # (high) 100% earnings + 4 parental	2.8
Malta	0	0.05 (1 day private/ 5 days public (both sectors 100% earnings)	3.3 (100% earnings)	3.25

Country	(a) Well-paid leave available as family entitlement (months)	(b) Period of 'father-only' well-paid leave (months)	(c) Period of 'mother-only' well-paid leave (months)	Gender gap indicator in entitlement
Mexico	0	0.2 (100% earnings)	2.3 (100% earnings)	2.1
Netherlands	0	0.2 (100% earnings)	2.8 # (100% earnings)	2.6
New Zealand	5.1 # (100% earnings)	0	0	n/a
Norway	4.2 (80% earnings; or 3.7 at 100%)	4.4 (80% earnings; or 3.4 at 100%)	4.4 (80% earnings; or 3.4 at 100%)	0
Poland	7.4 (80% earnings; may be lower if takes higher paid maternity leave option#)	0.5 (100% earnings)	4.6 (80% earnings; 100% earnings possible but lower parental leave payment #)	4.1
Portugal	4.6 (80% earnings; or 3.6 at 100%; includes sharing bonus#)	1.2 (100% earnings)	1.4 (100% earnings possible)	0.2
Romania	23	0.4 (100% earnings) plus 1 sharing bonus	4.2	3.8
Russia	0	0	2.3 (100% earnings)	2.3
Slovakia	0	0	6.5 #	6.5
Slovenia	7.6 # (100% earnings)	1 # (100% earnings)	3.6 (100% earnings)	2.6
South Africa	0	0.45	0	-0.45
Spain	0	2.8 # (100% earnings)	3.7 # (100% earnings)	0.9
Sweden	9.8 # (transferable parental leave)	3.3 #	3 #	-0.3
Switzerland	0	0	3.3 #	3.3
United Kingdom	0	0	1.4	1.4
USA	0	0	0	n/a
Uruguay	0	public sector, 0.45 months; private sector, 10–13 days (100% earnings)	public sector, 3.1 months; private sector, 3.3 months (100% earnings)	2.65

Notes: This table further develops the table in the 2020 Leave Review (Koslowski et al., 2020, p. 73). # indicates a ceiling.

gender gap in parenting leave entitlement and so, their gender gap is recorded as 'not available,' and these countries are not included in the analysis.

Table 2 shows that the average gender gap over the 41 countries included in the analysis is 2.72 months. The largest gender gap of 11.5 months is found in Bulgaria, which is driven by the long and relatively generous maternity leave duration (see Table 1).

Table 3 presents country groupings according to a gender gap indicator index from 1 to 8, with a score of 1 indicating the smallest gender gap and 8 the largest (a score of 9 indicates a lack of individual well-paid entitlement). The country groupings do not correspond to usual welfare regime groups, but they do make sense in terms of approach to leave policy design. The coun-

tries which score lowest on the gender gap indicator index (1 and 2), with the exception of South Africa are all countries which can be said to have given gender equality explicit consideration in the design of their leave policies. As can be seen from Table 1, only two countries can claim to have no gender gap in individual entitlement to well-paid leave: Iceland and Norway. Iceland has the same individual non-transferable entitlement of four months available for fathers and mothers. However, the Icelandic case still cannot be said to be entirely equal as the additional two months transferable element of the benefit entitlement is overwhelmingly taken by mothers. So, even a 0 by this measure does not indicate that the leave design delivers entirely gender equal outcomes.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the gender gap indicator in parenting related leave (months).

Mean	2.71
Standard deviation	2.22
Range	11.95
Minimum	-0.45
Maximum	11.5
Count	41

Notes: Five countries (Québec brings the total number of observations to 46) included in Table 1 did not have any individual well-paid leave. Where there were two possible estimates of the gender gap in Table 1 (e.g., Brazil), the lower estimate is included in these descriptive statistics. A negative gender gap indicates that fathers had more individual entitlement than mothers.

Four countries have small negative gender gaps of less than two weeks (Austria, Germany, Sweden, and South Africa), that is to say that fathers have more individual entitlement to well-paid leave. Portugal has a small positive gender gap of less than two weeks, with mothers having slightly more entitlement to leave. Portugal is not one of the usual 'nordic' countries associated with gender equal policy design, but has explicitly designed its parental leave scheme to encourage usage by the fathers (Wall, Correia, & Leitão, 2020). Similarly, Germany's parental leave design underwent an overhaul in the past decade, and this is reflected here (Bünning, 2015; Schober et al., 2020). The small gap in South Africa is an anomaly and reflects that only fathers have a two week well-paid leave, in contrast to mothers not having any well-paid leave at all. This anomaly highlights the need to ask how the gender gap indicator calculated here is related to the length of well-paid leave provided to fathers (see Figure 1).

Keys to index are as follows:

- 1 = No gender gap or one that is less than two weeks (resulting in either a negative or positive gender gap)
- 2 = The gender gap is between two weeks and less than one month
- 3 = The gender gap is between one and less than two months

- 4 = The gender gap is between two and less than three months
- 5 = The gender gap is between three and less than four months
- 6 = The gender gap is between four and less than five months
- 7 = The gender gap is between five and less than seven months
- 8 = The gender gap is longer than seven months
- 9 = In these countries, there is no individual entitlement to well-paid leave for either mothers or fathers. Thus, these countries are not included in analysis

Caution needs to be applied as we approach the score of 3. In this grouping of countries, the lower score is associated with a generally lower level of provision for well-paid leave for both mothers and fathers (for example in the UK, which only offers six weeks well-paid leave to mothers), and then mothers and fathers are only equal in terms of the lack of access to an individual entitlement to well-paid leave. Those countries with a score of 4 which represents the average gender gap of between two and three months have the most diverse policy stories. In some cases, there is relatively short entitlement for fathers but also a comparatively short entitlement for mothers (e.g., Uruguay), in others there is actually a comparatively generous duration of

Table 3. Gender gap indicator index in individual well-paid leave: Gap scores and country groupings.

Gender Gap Indicator Index	Countries
1	Austria, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Sweden
2	Finland, Spain
3	China, Greece, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, United Kingdom
4	Belgium, Denmark, France, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, Quebec, Russia, Slovenia, South Korea, Uruguay
5	Brazil, Cyprus, Estonia, Israel, Malta, Romania, Switzerland
6	Chile, Czech Republic, Italy, Poland
7	Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia
8	Bulgaria
9	Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, USA

entitlement for fathers, but still a slightly longer one for mothers (e.g., Luxembourg).

Those countries scoring above 5 can be said to be explicitly maternalistic regimes, not generally recognising fathers as carers needing state support, with countries explicitly seeking to support mothers in this role. As such, relatively generous provision for mothers, such as in the case of Bulgaria, drives a high score on the gender gap indicator index. It could be argued that it is better for a parental team to find themselves in Bulgaria, with at least well-paid leave for one parent being available, rather than in a country which is gender equal, but which represents a race to the bottom in doing so in terms of the total support available to a family.

Table 4 alternatively presents the gender gap in well-paid leave. Whilst some amount of well-paid leave is available to the family, mother or father in 42 of the 46 states under consideration, only seven of 46 have more than two months well-paid leave available for fathers. Some amount of well-paid leave is available to fathers in 37 of 46 states, but careful reading of Table 1 quickly reveals that this is often for a matter of days,

in contrast to the individual leave available for mothers (in 41 of 46 states) which is usually available for some months. In addition to well-paid leave available as an individual entitlement for either mothers or fathers, leave can also have a family component. This is captured by the indicator in column (a) in Table 1. This is leave that is in theory available to either parent, but in practice is most often taken by the mother, in all countries. Indeed, there is some indication that the gender gap is higher in countries with higher values on indicator in column (a) in Table 1. Only New Zealand has family entitlement (which is well-paid), without any individual component.

A weakness of the gender gap indicator index is that the same score can result when fathers are provided with shorter or longer periods of entitlement. As noted above, South Africa only scores a low gap as a result of there being no well-paid leave available to mothers at all. Figure 1 shows a scatter plot illustrating the correlation between a smaller gap and well-paid leave available (only) to fathers for longer time periods. All the countries with the lowest gender gap, with the exception of South Africa, offer fathers at least one month leave, and usually

Table 4. Prevalence of well-paid leave for fathers.

Well-paid leave	Number of states with well-paid leave of the 46 included in the analysis
Some amount of well-paid leave available to the family	42
Some amount of well-paid leave available to mothers only (typically at least 6 weeks)	41
Some amount of well-paid leave available to fathers only (this could only be a couple of days)	37
Some amount of well-paid leave available as a family entitlement (this could be in addition or not to individual leave)	20
At least one to two months of leave available to fathers only	15
More than two months available to fathers only	7

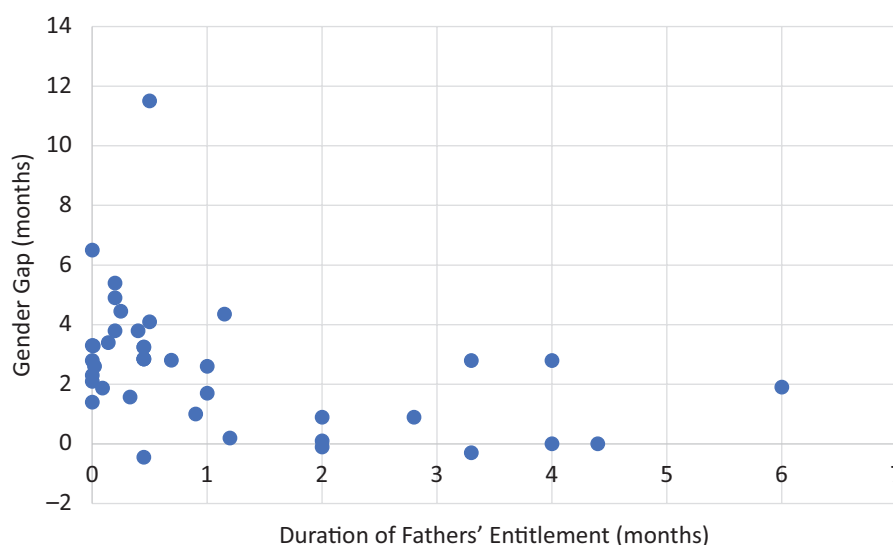


Figure 1. Gender gap (months) by fathers' individual entitlement to leave (months).

more. As such, it is clear that it is important to focus on the gender gap indicator in the context of the length of leave provided to fathers. As such, there might be an argument to simply use the amount of well-paid leave for fathers as a measure for improved gender equality in benefit scope.

5. Conclusion: Directions for Future Research

Building on work such as that by Ray et al. (2010) this article illustrates that it can be relevant to compare not only parental leaves (e.g., European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020b), but all parenting related care leaves, including also maternity and paternity leaves, despite the difficulties of comparison of different categories of leave. To not do so is likely to lead to an under-estimation of the size of the gender gap in leave rights for many countries. It is not a new finding that there are gender differences in leave policy design, rather the contribution of this article is to quantify the extent of this gap for these 45 countries in 2020 by considering the range of leaves available to parents of infants.

A key aspect where a gender gap in leave policy rights exists is the different durations of gender specific individual entitlement (typically maternity and paternity). In many countries, paternity leave is around two weeks, and maternity leave is rarely shorter than 14 weeks. Thus, it becomes clear that a central issue for leave provision in many countries with respect to gender equality is men's unequal access to leave. The gender gap indicator allows us to understand that on average for these countries, this gap is between two to three months, and can extend to 11.5 months. It also becomes clear that it is possible to eliminate a gender gap in entitlement to individual leave rights, for example in Iceland and Norway. However, it is also important to consider the limitation of this gender gap indicator which does not include the periods of family entitlement which exist in addition to the individual entitlement, which are most frequently used by women, as also seen in Iceland and Norway.

The importance of the combination of high benefit level and longer leave entitlement has also been highlighted by the analysis. Less than four months is generally considered too short as a leave duration for mothers, yet only seven of the countries in the analysis offer fathers more than two months well-paid individual entitlement to leave. The duration of well-paid leave for fathers is by itself a useful and seemingly robust indicator of a more gender equal system of parenting related leave entitlement. Future studies might more directly assess the relationship between benefit level, entitlements, eligibility and use.

This work only reflects the gender gap for those who are eligible to parenting related leave, which may not be evenly distributed by gender (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020b). The populations to which leave provisions may extend varies across countries most frequently by employment status. Scholars need to move

beyond the scope of leave rights and consider eligibility, but it is nonetheless important to capture the gender inequalities in scope.

Finally, it is helpful to consider that mapping provision is not equivalent to mapping practice. Even in the case that we see the gender gap in entitlement more or less equalised, this does not guarantee that parents will take similar amounts of leave, but it is an important first step.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

The Contextualized Inclusiveness of Parental Leave Benefits

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Abstract

This article builds on a recent operationalization of inclusiveness of parental leave benefits proposed by Ivana Dobrotić and Sonja Blum and complements it by developing indicators of contextualized inclusiveness. This contextualized approach sets the formal entitlement and eligibility rules of social rights to parental leave benefits in the relevant socio-economic context of the country to which these rules apply. The aim is to shed light on the extent to which parts of the country's population are actually excluded or are at risk of being excluded from access to parental leave at a given moment in time. This is strongly shaped by, among other factors, the structure of the population according to employment status, job tenure or type of contract. An important characteristic of the methodological approach adopted in this article is that the proposed contextualized indicators are based on easily and publicly available and internationally comparable data. This makes the approach easily applicable by wide audiences, academic and practice-oriented ones alike. The proposed indicators are then applied to sixteen European countries and show a much more diversified and nuanced landscape of contextualized inclusiveness of parental leave entitlements in Europe than the comparison of formal inclusiveness done by Dobrotić and Blum suggested. This study also shows that higher formal inclusiveness of employment-based parental leave benefits was more common in countries with higher shares of those social groups that, in case of less inclusive regulations, would not have access to parental benefits.

Keywords

access to leave; inclusive policy; parental benefits; socio-economic context; social indicators; social rights

Issue

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1. Introduction

Early research indicated that access to parenting-related leaves and benefits is particularly contingent on social and labor market inequalities as leave policies, and parental leave benefits in particular, often differently (dis-)advantage various social groups (Koslowski & Kadar-Satat, 2018; McKay, Mathieu, & Doucet, 2016). To better understand the potential of parental leave regulations to impact social inequalities in access to parental leave benefits in a comparative perspective, Dobrotić and Blum (2020) last year published a detailed insight into the inclusiveness of parental-leave benefits in Europe. The authors defined parental leave as a care-related right available to both mothers and fathers after the initial maternity/paternity leave (it is understood in the same way in this article). They opera-

tionalized the concept of inclusiveness by way of an eligibility index—an aggregated measure based on nine individual indicators (components) proposed by the authors. The index was then applied to a large group of European countries in two points in time (2006 and 2017). This enabled Dobrotić and Blum to show how parental leave regulations changed in time with respect to eligibility rules and how European countries differ by the level of inclusiveness of parental leave regulations. The authors considered both employment-based entitlements and citizenship-based entitlements to parental leave benefits. The criteria for the former entail, for example, minimal job tenure, stability of employment, sector of employment and minimal working-time/income requirements. The criteria for the latter encompass, for example, a minimal period of residency and means-testing.

Dobrotić and Blum (2020) offer an important contribution to the comparative literature on parental leave regulations since earlier studies were mostly confined to aspects of parental leave schemes such as the scope of leave rights (leave duration and benefits levels), leave transferability, leave flexibility or gender equality in parental leave systems (see, e.g., Ciccio & Verloo, 2012; Javornik, 2014; Ray, Gornick, & Schmitt, 2010; Saxonberg, 2013). Dobrotić and Blum (2020) were the first to thoroughly analyse the aspect of inclusiveness of parental leave benefits based on detailed entitlement and eligibility criteria.

However, the individual eligibility indicators and the aggregate index of inclusiveness Dobrotić and Blum propose are all based strictly on legal (formal) regulations of parental leave entitlements. Similarly, the majority of the aforementioned earlier comparative studies on parental leaves used indicators based solely on legal/formal parental leave regulations. Such an approach sets aside the country's socio-economic context, e.g., the employment structure of the population, which is crucial for assessing the size of the parts of the population that are in fact included/excluded from having the opportunity to take advantage of parental leave benefits in a given country at a given moment in time. When only formal regulations are taken into consideration, two countries with the same parental leave regulations—e.g., providing only employment-based benefits with similar eligibility criteria—would be assessed as having the same level of inclusiveness. But if they differ substantially in the structures of their populations by employment status, in one of these two countries the share of people that would in fact have access to parental leave benefits could be much larger than in the other. Furthermore, parental leave regulations in one country may be assessed as less inclusive than in another country due to stricter eligibility criterion, e.g., longer job tenure requirement. But if the employment structure of the population by job tenure in this country is much more 'favourable' than in the other country (i.e., there is a much larger share of employees with long job tenure), this may result in a similar or even larger share of people that would in fact have access to parental leave benefits. Thus, to better understand the inclusive/exclusive potential of a certain parental leave system in a given society (population) at a given moment in time, the socio-economic context must also be taken into account. This is particularly important when less inclusive (more restrictive) parental leave regulations are compared.

European countries differ considerably by socio-economic context, including not only their employment structures, but also other aspects that are relevant for diverse entitlement or eligibility criteria of parental leave architectures (such as share of non-citizens or the income structure of the population; see, e.g., Eurostat, 2020). Therefore, comparison of entitlement and eligibility criteria in parental leave regulations in European countries may not adequately reflect the differences in

the extent to which their parental leave systems actually include/exclude parts of the country's population from access to parental leaves in a given moment in time.

The first aim of this article is thus to modify/contextualize the indicators proposed by Dobrotić and Blum (2020) to bring the comparative assessment of inclusiveness of parental leave benefits in European countries closer to the assessment of contextualized inclusiveness. I contextualize the authors' original indicators by incorporating measures of the socio-economic context into the indicators (the details are explained in Section 3). I build directly on Dobrotić and Blum indicators to enable direct comparison between their results (i.e., comparative assessment of formal inclusiveness) with the contextualized assessment of the inclusiveness of parental leave benefits. This is also why I apply the proposed contextualized indicators to the same group of 16 European countries as Dobrotić and Blum (2020; the authors calculated the values of indicators of inclusiveness only for these 16 countries: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Chechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden). I also use data for the same reference year (2017).

Based on the comparison between the results from original and contextualized indicators I discuss the role of the crucial aspects of the socio-economic context of the 16 countries for the differences between the countries in contextualized inclusiveness of parental leave benefit schemes (the second aim of this article). I ask two research questions. First, within the group of countries that score the same (and rather low) at a particular dimension of formal inclusivity of parental leave benefits, do we observe (quite) similar or diverse socio-economic contexts? The second question is whether socio-economic context exacerbates or diminishes the differences between countries that already exist in formal inclusiveness? In other words, are less inclusive parental leave entitlements found in countries where social groups with certain characteristics that make them ineligible for parental leave benefits (in these countries), comprise a larger or smaller share of the population than social groups with the same characteristics in the countries with more inclusive regulations? The answers to these questions help me formulate conclusions about the importance of contextual analysis for the assessment of inclusiveness of parental leave schemes in Europe.

2. Contextualized Comparative Analysis of Parental Leave Systems: Earlier Studies

Few published studies have compared parental leave entitlements while acknowledging the differences in the socio-economic context in which the leave entitlements are implemented.

Using EU-SILC microdata, Bártová and Emery (2018) explored the heterogeneity in the actual financial support (i.e., generosity) of parental leave benefits within

European countries by applying parental-leave rules to the socio-economic structure of the populations in question. Their results reveal far greater heterogeneity in generosity (compensation rate) of leave policy entitlements in the analysed countries than existing indicators—based on formal regulations—had suggested. However, the study did not assess the *inclusiveness* of parental leave schemes.

Javornik and Kurowska (2017) proposed indicators for comparative analysis of parental leave entitlements (see also Kurowska & Javornik, 2019). They incorporated both formal features of parental leave regulations and the features of the socio-economic context in given countries (e.g., living standards, gender pay gap, average wages). The aim of the study was to compare the ‘real opportunities’ for equal parental involvement in the raising of children across gender and income lines in European countries (Javornik & Kurowska, 2017, p. 624). The authors argued that fathers are more sensitive to any income loss than mothers, and that the level of the potential income shock caused by the use of parental leave determines whether fathers take the leave at all. The negative effect of the income shock depends not only on the earnings replacement rate by parental leave benefit, but also on the living standards, i.e., a low replacement rate is financially more viable in a more affluent society than in a less affluent one. Therefore, according to the authors, in order to compare the ‘real opportunities’ the non-transferable parental leave (father quota) create for fathers in different countries, it is indispensable to include the living standards in these countries in the analysis. The authors also argued that, where the transferable parts of parental leave are concerned, not only living standards, but also gender pay gaps must be taken into consideration. This is because the higher the gender pay gap is, the higher the relative income loss will be if the father, instead of the mother, takes the leave. Javornik and Kurowska (2017) showed that including the socio-economic context in the analysis of parental leave benefits reveals a much more nuanced and diversified reality of opportunities that parental leave systems create for parents in Europe, than comparison of parental leave regulations suggests. However, Javornik and Kurowska (2017) and Kurowska and Javornik (2019) did not provide an assessment of the *inclusiveness* of parental leave schemes that would refer to the numerous eligibility criteria in parental leave schemes, which together with the socio-economic structure of the population may exclude large groups of people from access to parental leave benefits in the first place.

Using EU-LFS and EU-SILC microdata, O’Brien, Connolly, and Aldrich (2020) analysed eligibility for paid and unpaid statutory parental leave (jointly) across populations of ‘potential’ parents (people aged 20–49 years) in the EU-28. Applying the rules of parental leave entitlements to European populations, they showed that the share of eligible parents varied considerably across the EU member states—again, greater than the sole com-

parison of policy regulations had indicated. Their study brings the comparative analysis of parental leave systems very close to the idea of measuring the differences in contextualized inclusiveness, as it directly simulates the share of eligible population of ‘potential parents’ for parental leaves in each EU Member State. However, their study does not analyse the inclusiveness of parental leave benefits, as it considers paid and unpaid parental leaves jointly. Moreover, their simulation does not consider all nine aspects of formal inclusiveness identified by Dobrotić and Blum (2020). This means that their findings (on contextualized inclusiveness) and the results obtained by Dobrotić and Blum (on formal inclusiveness) cannot be directly compared. Furthermore, the authors do not analyse the relationships between the socio-economic context and the eligibility rules. Instead, they focus on comparing the importance of different reasons for ineligibility in different countries.

This article extends previous studies in the field by offering the first comparable methodology and empirical analysis of the contextualized inclusiveness of parental leave benefits, based on the nine detailed criteria of eligibility in parental leave entitlements applied in the analysis of formal regulations by Dobrotić and Blum (2020).

3. Contextualized Indicators of Inclusiveness of Parental Leave Benefit Schemes

Each indicator proposed by Dobrotić and Blum relates to one aspect/dimension of the eligibility rules with respect to the ‘obligations’ side of the social rights relationship (Clasen & Clegg, 2007) in the sphere of parental leave benefits. They are focused solely on statutory parental leave benefit entitlements at the state level (baseline leave provision of social rights related to paid leave) and consider both employed (employment-based entitlements) and parents as such, including unemployed/inactive parents (citizenship-based entitlements). Each indicator is given a range of scores that a particular country’s parental leave benefit regulations can achieve. The higher the score, the more inclusive the particular dimension is considered to be. The first six dimensions/indicators refer to eligibility conditions of employment-based criteria, and the other three to citizenship-based criteria (see Table A1 in the Supplementary File).

Below, I contextualize each individual indicator so it becomes sensitive to crucial aspects of the socio-economic context (structure) of the population. I do this by choosing the most relevant contextual reference in each case. In some cases, where no data is available to directly refer to the structure of the population according to the entitlement criteria of parental leave regulations, a relevant indirect indicator (a proxy) is proposed. These indirect indicators are employed to grasp the socio-economic or institutional conditions that impact the vulnerability of the respective population to non-compliance with particular criteria of parental leave

regulations. In other words, if there is no data available that would provide us with direct information on the share of population that does not meet the eligibility requirements set in parental leave regulations, I turn to the most relevant indirect indicators that shed light on the risk that substantive parts of the population do not meet these requirements.

Following the approach adopted in Javornik and Kurowska (2017) and Kurowska and Javornik (2019), an important characteristic of the proposed methodological approach in this article is the creation of indicators which use easily and publicly available and internationally comparable data (from OECD, Eurostat and ILOSTAT and MIPEX databases), making the approach easily applicable by a wide, not only academic audience.

3.1. Employment Tenure Requirement

The first basic criterion in employment-based entitlements is the previous length of employment needed to be eligible for parental leave benefit. In the original version of the relevant indicator by Dobrotić and Blum (2020), the highest score (5) is given to countries where, in order to be eligible, one must be employed just before the leave starts (i.e., there is no employment tenure required). Then, the longer the required term in employment, the lower the score, with 1 being assigned to countries demanding twelve or more months of employment tenure to be entitled to parental leave benefit. Zero is given to countries without employment-based benefits. The scores are in integer form only.

This indicator is contextualized based on insight into the structure of employment by job tenure in the country under assessment. Data on the share of the employed according to job tenure, with grouping resembling the categories identified by Dobrotić and Blum (2020), is readily accessible in the OECD database. The assumption behind the contextualization of this indicator is straightforward, following the logic adopted in O'Brien et al. (2020), Javornik and Kurowska (2017) and Kurowska and Javornik (2019) in their studies: The higher the share of employees that do not meet the eligibility criteria, the lower the contextualized inclusiveness of parental leave benefit in the country. The maximum value of 5 points (ideal situation) is given to two country types: those where there is no employment tenure required and those that have a tenure requirement but where there is no one among the employees who would not adhere to this requirement. For example, if in country X there is a requirement of at least 3 months of job tenure but the percentage of employed people in the country with shorter job tenure is equal to 0, this country would still score 5 on the contextualized inclusiveness. The number of points will decrease as the share of employed people that do not meet the tenure requirement in the population increases. Country where no employed person would adhere to the criterion of job tenure adopted in this country receives 0 points.

The formula for the indicator of the *contextualized employment tenure inclusivity* (CETI) is the following:

$$CETI_i = 5 - (5 \times SENE_i)$$

i denotes the country under assessment (this applies to all the formulas proposed in the article); $SENE_i$ denotes the share of employed persons with job tenure shorter than the tenure requirement to be eligible for parental benefit in country i (a *share* is expressed as a decimal fraction and this applies to all formulas in this article); $SENE_i = 0$ if there is no tenure requirement in the eligibility criteria for parental leave benefit in country i .

CETI ranges from 0 to 5. But in contrast to the original indicator, it may take all real numbers in that range as well as integer values. The construction of the indicator enables a nuanced assessment of the inclusiveness for two countries with the same job tenure requirement but different shares of employed persons that do not adhere to the job tenure eligibility criterion. But it also enables the more 'favourable' structure of the employed population (higher share of employees with long job tenure) to 'make up' for the stricter eligibility criteria. To illustrate, I will take two countries: X and Y. Country X has a minimum of 8 months of job tenure requirement while country Y has a minimum of 3 months. Country Y would score higher (3 points) than country X (2 points) on the original indicator proposed by Dobrotić and Blum (2020), as the requirement in country X is stricter than in country Y. However, if the share of employed persons with job tenure shorter than 8 months in country X is 10 percent and the share of the employed persons with job tenure shorter than 3 months in country Y is 20 percent, then a higher share of people that are not eligible for parental leave benefit due to not adhering to the job tenure criterion will be found in country Y than in country X. This would be mirrored in the value of CETI for these countries, as country X would score 4,5 and country Y would score 4. This is how CETI reflects the contextualized, rather than formal inclusiveness of parental leave benefit eligibility criterion related to job tenure.

3.2. Employment Non-Interruption Requirement

The second requirement in employment eligibility rules that can be observed in some countries is the inadmissibility of interruptions in the employment track. The original indicator proposed by Dobrotić and Blum (2020) relating to this requirement takes only two values: the value of 1 when the interruptions are allowed (or the condition is not applicable as in the case of countries that score 5 on the first indicator), and the value of 0, when interruptions are not allowed. In order to contextualize this indicator along the lines of the theoretical approach adopted in this study, insight into the actual situation of employed persons in the country according to continuity/interruptibility of their employment careers would be needed. Unfortunately, there is no data on this

aspect collected in the available databases with comparable information for European countries.

However, one's type of contract may be considered a reliable indirect indicator of the vulnerability of the individual employment situation to interruptions, with temporary contract indicating a much higher level of vulnerability to interruptions than a permanent contract (see, e.g., de la Porte & Emmenegger, 2017). Research shows that fixed-term contracts significantly increase the risk of finding another temporary job after termination of the contract often preceded by a period of unemployment (see, e.g., Gagliarducci, 2005; Giesecke & Groß, 2003; Sanz, 2011). Therefore, the information on the share of employees on temporary contracts, which is also readily available in the OECD and Eurostat databases, would be a reasonable indicator of vulnerability of the employed persons in the country to employment interruptions, and thus important when assessing the contextualized inclusiveness of parental leave benefit eligibility rules in this respect.

Like employees on temporary contracts, permanent employees can also experience employment interruptions (and are at some risk of dismissal). Thus, the assessment of the level of this risk (which may differ between countries) should be taken into consideration as well when constructing the contextualized indicator. There is, however, no data on the level of this risk in the available, internationally comparable databases. Nevertheless, it has been shown that the risk of contract termination for workers on permanent contracts highly depends on the strictness of standard employment protection in the country (see OECD, 2020). The higher the protection, the lower the risk of layoffs and worker flows (OECD, 2020; see also Boeri & Jimeno, 2005; Gielen & Tatsiramos, 2012; Haltiwanger, Scarpetta, & Schweiger, 2014; Pages & Micco, 2012). It has also been argued that more protective employment regulations enable smoother transition to the next job (OECD, 2020). Therefore, the index of regular employment protection—available in the OECD database—would be a reasonable indirect indicator of the vulnerability of permanent employees to employment interruptions. The OECD index of strictness of individual employment protection for regular contracts (hereafter IS) ranges from 0 to 6. The higher the value, the stricter the regulations on dismissals and the more difficult it is for the employer to lay off employees. Therefore, the higher the value of IS, the higher the stability of regular employment in the country will be (OECD, 2020).

The indicator *contextualized employment interruption inclusivity* (CEII) that I propose would be equal to 1 if the country does not have a non-interruption requirement; otherwise it is calculated according to the following formula:

$$CEII_i = 1 - \left(1 - \frac{IS_i}{6} + SET_i\right)$$

SET_i is the share of employees on temporary contracts in country i and IS_i is the OECD index of strictness of employment protection for individual employees on regular contracts in country i .

This indicator ranges between 0 and 1. The maximum value of CEII would go to two types of country: those without non-interruption requirement and those that have this requirement but where there are no employees on temporary contracts ($SET_i = 0$) and where protection of employment for employees on regular contracts is the highest possible ($IS_i = 6$). The higher the share of employees on temporary contracts (SET), the lower the value of the CEII. Furthermore, the higher the value of IS, the higher the CEII. As SET and IS relate to separate segments of the employed population, the values of SET and inversed relative IS value with reference to the maximum value of IS possible (6) are added together.

3.3. Employment Stability with Single-Employer Requirement

The third requirement in employment eligibility rules found in some countries is the provision that the employment period must be accumulated with the same employer. Here, the original indicator takes the value of 0 when that is the case and the value of 1 when the employment condition can be fulfilled with different employers (or the condition is not applicable as in case of countries that score 5 on the first indicator). The logic behind the contextualization of this indicator is identical to CEII, as 'non-interruption' and 'same employer' restrictions have a very similar meaning: They disadvantage those at risk of dismissal or change of job due to temporary contract. The indicator of *contextualized employment accumulation inclusivity* (CEAI) is thus constructed in the same way as CEII but differs in that the default value of 1 is assigned to countries without no single employer requirement. For those countries that do have this requirement, the value of CEAI is calculated based on the formula given below (which mirrors the formula of CEII and thus has the same properties):

$$CEAI_i = 1 - \left(1 - \frac{IS_i}{6} + SET_i\right)$$

SET_i is the share of employees on temporary contracts in country i and IS_i is the OECD index of strictness of employment protection for individual employees on regular contracts in country i .

3.4. Differentiation by Form of Employment

The fourth component of eligibility rules for employment-based benefits, considered by Dobrotić and Blum, was whether the parental leave benefit scheme was differentiated between employees and the self-employed. If both groups were included in the same scheme, the score was 2. If the self-employed had a separate scheme and were subject to stricter eligibility criteria or lower

benefits, the score was 1. If the self-employed were excluded from the parental leave benefit entitlements, the score was 0.

In line with the theoretical concept of contextualized inclusiveness proposed in this article, I propose to contextualize this indicator by looking at the structure of the employment in the countries that do have a separate scheme for self-employed or do not have a parental leave scheme for this group at all. The higher the share of the self-employed in working population in such countries, the lower the contextualized inclusiveness of the parental leave provisions in the eligibility dimension under discussion would be. The formula for the indicator of *contextualized inclusiveness in the form of employment* (CIFE) is thus the following:

$$CIFE_i = I_{4i} - SSE_i$$

I_{4i} is the original value of the fourth indicator from Dobrotić and Blum's list for country i ; SSE_i is the share of the self-employed in total employment in the country i , but $SSE_i = 0$ if in the country under assessment the self-employed are not treated differently than those employed by others.

3.5. Sectoral Differentiation

The fifth eligibility criterion considered by Dobrotić and Blum was the differentiation of parental leave benefit entitlement rules between sectors. The score was 1 if there was no differentiation, and 0 if there was. As with CIFE, the contextualization of the indicator I propose is straightforward and relies on the insight into the share of employment in the sectors of the economy that have separate schemes subject to stricter eligibility criteria/lower benefits. The formula for the indicator of *contextualized inclusiveness by sector of employment* (CISE) is the following:

$$CISE_i = 1 - SES_i$$

SES_i is the share of the employees in the sector, which is treated more strictly than other sectors in the country i (data on employment shares in different economic sectors are available for most countries in the ILOSTAT database). If there is no sector that is treated more strictly than other sectors in the parental leave regulations, or there are no employees in the sectors that are treated differently in the economy, then $SES_i = 0$.

3.6. Working-Time/Minimum Income Requirement

The sixth indicator of eligibility regulations proposed by Dobrotić and Blum pertained to the presence of the requirement of a certain level of working time/earnings needed to be eligible for parental leave benefit. If no conditions were present, the score was 1. Where there were requirements, the score was 0.

In order to contextualize this indicator in a straightforward manner, the share of workers that do not meet

the working-time/minimum income criteria in the relevant countries would have to be available. Unfortunately, there is no such data in publicly available and internationally comparable databases, so other contextual measures had to be used as relevant proxies.

According to the literature, part-time employees are the vulnerable to both not meeting the criteria of minimum working time and the minimum income requirement (see, e.g., Horemans, Marx, & Nolan, 2016). Part-time workers not only earn less because they work less, but also because they face wage penalty that is partially driven by occupational segregation (Bardasi & Gornick, 2008; O'Dorchai, Plasman, & Rycx, 2007). The advantage of using the share of part-time workers to contextualize the indicator of inclusiveness of parental leave benefits in the dimension pertaining to working-time/minimum income requirement, is that the data on the share of employees working part-time are publicly available in all major internationally comparable data sources, including Eurostat, OECD or ILOSTAT databases.

The formula for the indicator of *contextualized working-time/income inclusiveness* (CWTI) is the following:

$$CWTI_i = 1 - SPTE_i$$

$SPTE_i$ is the share of part-time workers in total employment in country i ; but if country i does not have the minimum working time/income requirement in parental leave regulations, then $SPTE_i = 0$.

3.7. Residency Period Requirement

The seventh indicator proposed by Dobrotić and Blum (2020) pertained to the citizenship/residency based parental leave benefit provisions. Its values ranged from 0 to 3. Countries without citizenship/residency-based benefits received a 0. Other values were assigned to countries with such benefits; and the shorter the period of residency required, the higher the value of the indicator. Three points were assigned to countries which required residency only at the time of the child's birth.

The straightforward contextualization of this indicator is hampered by the unavailability of internationally comparable data on the share of people not meeting the residency-period criteria. Therefore, other contextual measures had to be used as relevant proxies. As the only group vulnerable to potential non-eligibility for parental leave benefits due to lack of residency are non-citizens in the country, the first measure included in the contextualized indicator is the share of non-citizens in the population of the country under assessment (the data are available in Eurostat). Furthermore, as the residency policies of European countries tend to differ substantially (see Huddleston, Bilgili, Joki, & Vankova, 2015) and this may significantly impact the eligibility of non-residents for citizenship-based parental leave benefits, another element introduced into the contextualized indicator proposed is the MIPEX measure of permanent residency policy (available at www.mipex.eu). The MIPEX indicator of

permanent residency policy assesses how easy it is to gain access to permanent residency for migrants in a particular country (the higher the value, the easier the access; the values range from 0 to 100). The formula for the indicator of *contextualized residency inclusiveness* (CRI) is therefore the following:

$$CRI_i = I_{7i} - \left(1 - \frac{MPR_i}{100}\right) \times SM_i$$

I_{7i} denotes the original value for the seventh indicator from Dobrotić and Blum's list in country i ; MPR_i is the value of the MIPEX measure of permanent residency policy for country i ; and SM_i is the share of non-citizens to the total population in country i .

3.8. The Exclusion of Some Groups

The eighth indicator proposed by Dobrotić and Blum also referred to citizenship-based criteria and identified whether the parental leave regulations explicitly exclude some groups (e.g., long-term or not officially unemployed), as these entitlements may also be selective and bound to additional criteria (e.g., registration with an unemployment service). Those that do not exclude any groups received a score of 1, while those that do received a 0. The contextualization of this indicator is based on identification of the share of people that belong to the excluded group in a particular country (all data on the excluded groups—e.g., the long-term unemployed or non-registered unemployment—that can be identified in parental leave regulations in European countries is available in the Eurostat/LFS databases). The formula for the indicator of *contextualized group inclusiveness* (CGI) is the following:

$$CGI_i = 1 - SEG_i$$

SEG_i is the share of the excluded group in the population of country i ; and $SEG_i = 0$ if there is no means-testing applied in the eligibility criteria for parental leave benefit in country i .

3.9. Means Testing

The last indicator on Dobrotić and Blum's list was identifying the presence of means testing in parental leave benefit citizenship-based entitlements. Countries in which means test applies received 0 points, while those in which it does not received 4. The straightforward contextualization of this indicator is hampered by the unavailability of internationally comparable data on the shares of people with incomes higher than the national means-testing thresholds (i.e., ineligible for the benefits according to this criterion). Therefore, another contextual measure had to be chosen as a relevant proxy. The Eurostat database provides information on the levels of income thresholds for 40, 50, 60 and 70 percent of the median equivalized income in the country and poverty rates for each threshold. This makes it quite simple to calculate

the share of people in a country with income above the poverty threshold which has the closest value to the means-testing threshold applied for the citizenship-based parental leave benefit. The formula for the indicator of *contextualized means-testing inclusiveness* (CMT) is the following:

$$CMTI_i = 4 - (4 \times SPAT_i)$$

$SPAT_i$ is the share of people with income above the poverty threshold closest to the level of means-testing threshold applied for the citizenship-based parental leave benefit in country i but $SPAT_i = 0$ if country i does not apply a means-test and $SPAT_i = 1$ if it does not offer citizenship-based benefits.

4. Empirical Application: Comparative Assessment of Contextualized Inclusiveness of Parental Leaves in Europe

This section provides the calculations of the values of all contextualized indicators proposed above for the same group of countries and the same reference (the latter) year (2017) as Dobrotić and Blum (2020, p. 27) using relevant measures from OECD, Eurostat, ILOSTAT and MIPEX databases. It then compares them with original values for original indicators of formal inclusiveness. Table 1 provides the original results from Dobrotić and Blum (2020) and the results of my calculations. All the values of measures used to calculate the contextualized scores for each indicator are available upon request.

For nearly all dimensions of eligibility in employment-based parental leave entitlements, the homogenous groups of countries with a relatively low level of formal inclusiveness were highly diversified in terms of contextualized inclusiveness. This means that similar restrictions may in practice exclude smaller or larger parts of the population from access to parental leave benefits in a given country at a given time. I also found evidence that in some aspects of eligibility rules of employment-based entitlements (related to job tenure and self-employment status), higher formal inclusiveness of parental leave benefit entitlements was more common in countries with 'less favourable' socio-economic context, i.e., higher shares of those social groups that would not have access to parental benefits if the regulations were less inclusive.

This study has also revealed that in contrast to employment-based parental leave entitlements, the socio-economic context is much less important for assessing contextualized inclusiveness of citizenship-based entitlements.

Below, I offer a detailed comparison between formal and contextualized inclusiveness separately for each individual indicator as well as for the composite index.

4.1. Employment-Based Parental Leave Entitlements

In the original classification, according to the scores assigned by Dobrotić and Blum (2020), four groups of

Table 1. Original scores from Dobrotić and Blum (2020) and the scores for contextualized indicators for nine dimensions of inclusiveness of eligibility rules in parental leave benefits provisions in 16 European countries (data for 2017).

	Employment-based benefits requirements												Citizenship-based benefits requirements					
	Employment tenure		Employment interruption		Same employer		Form of employment		Sectoral differentiation		Working-time/income		Residency		Groups exclusion		Means-testing	
	I1	CETI	I2	CEII	I3	CEAI	I4	CIFE	I5	CISE	I6	CWTI	I7	CRI	I8	CGI	I9	CMTI
Austria	3	4.55	0	0.29	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	3	3	1	1	4	4
Belgium	1	4.41	1	1	0	0.24	0	-0.17	0	0.22	1	1	—*	—*	—*	—*	—*	0
Croatia	1	—*	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	≈ 1	0	0.99	4	4
Czechia	2	4.46	1	1	1	1	1	0.86	1	1	1	1	3	3	0	—*	4	4
Denmark	4	4.77	1	1	1	1	1	0.94	1	1	0	0.79	3	3	0	—*	4	4
Estonia	5	5.00	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	3	3	1	1	4	4
Finland	3	4.37	0	0.17	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	1.99	1	1	4	4
France	1	4.57	0	0.25	0	0.25	1	0.90	1	1	1	1	3	3	1	1	0	0.12
Germany	5	5.00	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	3	3	0	0.98	4	4
Hungary	1	4.33	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	3	3	1	1	4	4
Iceland	3	4.41	0	0.15	1	1	2	2	1	1	0	0.80	1	0.97	1	1	4	4
Italy	5	5.00	1	1	1	1	1	0.76	0	0.85	1	1	3	3	1	1	0	0.35
Norway	3	4.61	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	0	0.77	3	3	1	1	4	4
Portugal	3	4.55	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	3	3	0	—*	0	0.3
Slovenia	5	5.00	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	3	3	1	1	4	4
Sweden	2	3.95	0	-0.12	1	1	2	2	1	1	0	0.78	3	3	1	1	4	4

Notes: For each eligibility criterion/indicator (nine columns) for each country I provide the original score by Dobrotić and Blum (2020; symbols from I1 to I9) and the score from the contextualized indicator (symbols from CETI to CMTI); *data not available.

countries were characterized by levels of strictness of the required employment period needed to be eligible for parental leave. Within each group I found substantial differentiation of contextualized inclusiveness, as countries within each group differed in the shares of employees not adhering to the employment tenure criterion. What is more, I found a moderate linear negative correlation between formal inclusiveness of employment tenure requirements and the share of employees that do not meet the employment tenure requirements ($r = -0.518$; $p = 0.048$). This means that the employment structure by job tenure makes up, to some extent, for the stricter eligibility criterion of job tenure in parental leave regulations. To put it differently, more inclusive job tenure requirements in employment-based entitlements 'compensate' to some extent the 'less favourable' structure of the employees by tenure in the sixteen countries under analysis. Interestingly, Sweden, which originally scored 2 (thus higher than France, Croatia, Hungary and Belgium) achieved the lowest contextualized score among all the countries (see Table 1).

In the case of the second employment-related requirement (non-interruption of employment), Dobrotić and Blum identified five countries that got the same zero score. This group is again well diversified when it comes to contextual inclusiveness, but there is no clear relationship between the existence of this criterion in parental leave entitlements and the structure of the employed by type of contract. The average share of workers on temporary contracts in countries scoring 0 on the original indicator was slightly higher (13.7 percent) than for countries scoring 1 (12.84 percent), but this difference was not statistically significant. Again, Sweden got the lowest CEII score (-0.12), due foremost to the relative preponderance of employees its labour market had on temporary contracts.

According to the third employment-related criterion (accumulation of employment with the same employer) two countries were originally given a score of zero—Belgium and France. The contextualization of this result with the CEAI indicator brought only a small change—these two countries scored 0.24 and 0.25, respectively. Furthermore, I haven't found statistically significant differences in the average values of context variables between the two groups identified by Dobrotić and Blum (2020).

I found a highly diversified contextual inclusiveness among five countries that scored 1 on Dobrotić and Blum's criterion of different treatment of the self-employed. What is more, I found a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.38$; $p = 0.0003$) between the original score for this indicator (formal inclusiveness) and the share of self-employment in the country. It can therefore be concluded that lower inclusivity of formal regulations with respect to the self-employed is on average 'compensated' by a lower share of the self-employment in the economy.

When it comes to the sectoral differentiation in entitlement to parental leave benefits, Belgium and Italy

received a score of zero in the original scoring. In Belgium, workers in the private (for profit) sector were treated more restrictively than workers in the non-profit sector. In Italy, workers enrolled in *Gestione Separata* compared to other workers. According to the contextualized indicator (CISE), Belgium scored much lower (0.22) than Italy (0.85); While the share of workers in the less advantaged sector is higher in Belgium than in Italy, one must be very cautious when interpreting the absolute difference between the values of the indicator. This is because the share of *Gestione Separata* workers in total employment in Italy was proxied by the share of temporarily employed due to a lack of more direct data available in Eurostat OECD and ILOSTAT databases).

The CWTI indicator revealed minor differences in the contextualized inclusiveness of requirements pertaining to the minimum working-time/income achieved to be entitled to parental leave benefits in four countries that scored the same (zero) on Dobrotić and Blum's assessment. Interestingly, the average share of the part-time employed in countries that scored 1 on the original indicator was lower than the share of part-time employed in countries that scored 0 (28.2 vs 21.3; $p = 0.002$). This could mean that the exclusion of the marginally employed coincides with a higher presence of this type of employment in the working population in the 16 countries. However, as part-time employment is not an ideal indicator for marginal employment, this result should be interpreted with caution as well.

4.2. Citizenship-Based Parental Leave Entitlements

For the first two citizenship-based entitlement criteria, the differences found in the contextualized inclusiveness between countries (that scored the same on the original indicators) were much smaller than for the employment-based entitlements. Furthermore, in contrast to employment-based leave entitlements, I found no relationship between the formal inclusiveness of policy regulations with respect to citizenship-based criteria and the relevant socio-economic context.

For the residency criterion, two countries scored the same (1 point) in Dobrotić and Blum's study. The contextualized CRI indicator for these countries was nearly 1 (0.997 for Croatia and 0.97 for Iceland). Such a close result was driven by a similar and very low percent of non-citizens in total population in both countries (0.01 vs 0.09) and a very close score on the permanent residency policy dimension in the MIPEX indicator in both countries (65 vs 62). Furthermore, I found no statistically significant difference between the average values of the MIPEX indicator and the share of non-citizens between countries that scored 1 and those that scored 0 in Dobrotić and Blum's classifications. As concerns the exclusion of some groups from citizenship-based entitlements, Croatia, Chechia, Denmark, Germany and Portugal originally received the same score (zero). The comparable data on the share of the excluded group(s) in the population

was, unfortunately, available only for Germany (long-term unemployed) and Croatia (migrants). The CGI indicator was 0.99 and 0.98 for these countries, respectively, showing a marginal difference to formal inclusiveness for this citizenship-based criterion.

Among the countries that scored 0 points on the last original indicator by Dobrotić & Blum, who assessed the presence of means-testing in the entitlement rules for citizenship-based benefits, the share of people that would not adhere to the means-testing criterion was large, leading to rather low values for contextualized inclusiveness for all of these countries, too. However, no statistically significant difference was found in the share of people with incomes above the poverty threshold (closest to the level of means-testing threshold) between countries that apply means-testing in citizenship-based entitlements and those that do not.

4.3. Composite Index

Overall, the values of the composite contextualized eligibility index modify the assessment of inclusivity (contextualized vs formal) for nearly all countries (Figure 1). While the lowest score still belongs to France (12) and the highest to Iceland and Slovenia (19), there is an additional ‘winner’—Germany (19). The relative position of other countries in the ranking changes as the value of contextualized inclusiveness increases more strongly for some countries than for others.

5. The ‘Gender Dimension’ in the Analysis of Contextualized Inclusiveness of Parental Leave Designs

The original concept of the eligibility index and its nine dimensions of inclusiveness of parental leave benefits proposed by Dobrotić and Blum (2020) do not encompass the gender dimension. This was addressed sep-

arately by the authors through classification of the parental leave systems into four categories of policy design: (1) gendered access (individual mothers’ rights, which may be transferable to fathers in certain cases), (2) gender-neutral access (family rights or individual, fully transferable rights), (3) gender-sensitive access (family rights with less than one-third of non-transferable leave period and/or where a gender equality bonus is paid; individual, non-transferable rights with less than one third of the period being non-transferable) and (4) degendered access (individual, nontransferable rights or family rights with at least one-third of the leave period being non-transferable).

The first category was considered the least inclusive (for fathers/men), and the last one the most inclusive. However, the logic behind how these categories are identified (i.e., conceptualization of gender inclusiveness) is very different (and much more complex) than for other dimensions of inclusiveness. It is based not only on the (level of) strictness of the criteria for formal access to parental leave benefits for fathers (versus mothers), but also on the characteristics of leave regulations that ensure higher take-up of leaves by fathers or at least make it easier to exercise their rights to parental leaves (non-transferable individual rights for fathers and mothers are considered to be more inclusive than transferable rights). This approach to gender inclusiveness would therefore require a very different means of contextualization, one beyond the scope and space limitations of this article. On a positive note, this constitutes an avenue for future research.

Here, I only point out some ideas that could be considered. First, whenever access to parental benefits for fathers is conditioned by mothers fulfilling certain requirements (e.g., mothers having an employment contract, such as in the UK or formerly in Poland), the contextualization should take account of the share of partnered

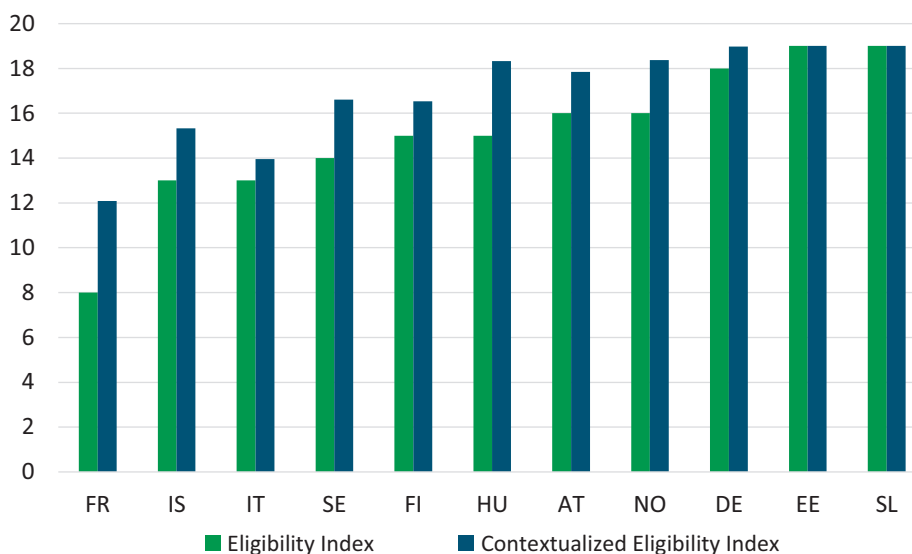


Figure 1. Formal and contextualized inclusiveness of parental leave benefits in eleven European countries—values for the Eligibility Index and Contextualized Eligibility Index (data for 2017).

women that do not meet these requirements. Secondly, as mothers and fathers differ in employment characteristics (e.g., contract type, occupation, sector of employment, job tenure, working hours), the gender dimension in the analysis of contextualized inclusiveness of parental benefits could also be applied by disaggregating the contextualized indicators proposed in this article by gender. Finally, as the way Dobrotić and Blum (2020) approach the gender dimension touches upon the issue of enabling the higher take-up of parental leaves by fathers, the contextualization of the gender dimension could also extend into this aspect, as Javornik and Kurowska (2017) and Kurowska and Javornik (2019) did.

6. Conclusion

In this article I have presented a contextualized version of the indicators of formal inclusiveness proposed by Dobrotić and Blum (2020). The contextualization was based on incorporating, into the original indicators (based solely on formal regulations), the most relevant features of the socio-economic context. That context encompassed, in particular, the labour market structure (according to job tenure, employment stability, contract type, sector or economic profession, as well as population structure by citizenship and income) and in some cases also the institutional context (labour market/migrant law). The aim was to bring the comparative assessment of inclusiveness of parental leave benefits in European countries closer to the assessment of contextualized inclusiveness that primarily refers to the share of people that, in case of parenthood, would have access to parental leave benefits.

Applying the contextualized version of the eligibility indicators, I uncovered a far more diversified and nuanced landscape of contextualized inclusiveness of parental leave entitlements in Europe than the comparison of formal inclusiveness by Dobrotić and Blum (2020) suggested was the case. For nearly all dimensions of eligibility in employment-based parental leave entitlements, the homogenous groups of countries identified by Dobrotić and Blum (2020), which collectively had a relatively low level of formal parental leave benefit inclusiveness, were highly diversified in terms of contextualized inclusiveness. This finding is in line with previous research that showed greater differences in contextualized generosity of parental leave benefits in Europe (see, e.g., Bártová & Emery, 2018).

This study has also shed light on the relationship between formal inclusiveness and the related country context. I found evidence, that in the case of two important aspects of eligibility rules of employment-based entitlements (related to job tenure and self-employment status), higher formal inclusiveness of parental leave benefit entitlements 'compensated,' to some extent, the 'less favourable' socio-economic context in these countries. In other words, higher formal inclusiveness of employment-based parental leave benefits was in these

two cases more common in countries with higher shares of those social groups that, in the case of less inclusive regulations, would not have access to parental benefits.

What is more, the results provided additional evidence for the heterogeneity of opportunities created by parental leaves in Nordic countries, which are commonly treated as a monolith in terms of parental leave systems. The contextualization highlighted that Sweden, which is known for offering among the most gender equal parental leave entitlements in Europe (Ciccia & Verloo, 2012; Dearing, 2016; Javornik & Kurowska, 2017; Korpi, Ferrarini, & Englund, 2013; Lohmann & Zagel, 2016; Saxonberg, 2013), at the same time, has the least inclusive parental leave benefit opportunities among all the analysed countries when it comes to contextualized eligibility requirements related to job tenure and the criterion of non-interruptability of employment.

Lastly, this study has also revealed that, in contrast to employment-based parental leave entitlements, the socio-economic context is much less important for assessing the contextualized inclusiveness of citizenship-based entitlements.

This study is not without limitations. First, the contextualized measures relate in some cases to the entire adult (in some cases working) population rather than to the population of potential parents only (i.e., men and women aged 20–49, as operationalized by O'Brien et al., 2020). Second, for some indicators, due to the unavailability of data, proxies for measuring the socio-economic context had to be chosen rather than direct measures. Both of these limitations, however, resulted from prioritizing the provision of easy-to-use indicators that can be calculated both for the past and in the future for all European countries by both academic and practice-oriented audiences.

The strength of the proposed approach lies in its applicability to other areas of care policy, including sick leave or ECEC entitlements. This is therefore an avenue for future research in the comparative analysis of contextualized inclusiveness of care policies in Europe. A desirable extension of the proposed approach to contextualized inclusiveness would be to incorporate a gender dimension into the analysis.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Article

The Inclusiveness of Maternity Leave Rights over 120 Years and across Five Continents

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Abstract

Even though paid maternity leave was the earliest form of social protection specifically aimed at women workers and is fundamental in securing their economic independence vis-à-vis employers and spouses, it has received scant scholarly attention. Neither the traditional historical accounts of welfare state emergence nor the more recent gendered analyses of developed welfare states have provided comparative accounts of its beginnings and trajectories. Employing the newly created historical database of maternity leave, we provide the first global and historical perspective on paid maternity leave policies covering 157 countries from the 1880s to 2018. Focusing on eligibility rather than generosity, we construct a measure of inclusiveness of paid maternity leaves to highlight how paid maternity leave has shaped not only gender but also social inequality, which has, until recently, largely been ignored by the literature on leave policies. The analyses of coverage expansion by sector and the development of eligibility rules reveal how paid maternity leave has historically stratified women workers by occupation and labor market position but is slowly evolving into a more universal social right across a broad range of countries. Potential drivers for this development are identified using multivariate analysis, suggesting a pivotal role for the political empowerment of women in the struggle for gender and social equality. However, the prevalence of informal labor combined with insufficient or non-existing maternity benefits outside the systems of social insurance still poses significant obstacles to the protection of women workers in some countries.

Keywords

family policy; global South; inequality; maternity leave; maternity protection; social rights

Issue

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1. Introduction

Paid maternity leave was the earliest social protection policy explicitly aimed at women workers, serving decommodification as well as defamilization (Bambra, 2007). To this day, it shapes women’s economic empowerment by enabling mothers to maintain paid employment (Htun, Jensenius, & Nelson-Nuñez, 2019). Despite this fundamental role in providing social protection for women workers, little is known about the historical development of paid maternity leave policies. It played

a negligible role in historical accounts of welfare state emergence, which mainly focused on social protection programs for the risks of old-age, unemployment, and sickness (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Flora & Heidenheimer, 1981). This blind spot is due not only to the comparatively small role paid maternity leave policies played in financial terms but reflects the fact that the unit of analysis in early comparative welfare research is an average production worker in the manufacturing industry with a dependent spouse and two children, assuming, if not reflecting, the gendered division of labor. While later

research launched forceful critiques against this male breadwinner-centered conceptualization and measurement of social rights, the expansion of paid maternity leave policies was associated with reinforcing the role of women as caregivers (Daly & Ferragina, 2018; Dobrotić & Stropnik, 2020), especially compared to more recent childcare and parental leave policies, which potentially could reshape gender relations (Leitner, 2003; Saraceno, 2011). Focusing on industrialized democracies after the 1970s, they inquired which countries went beyond this ‘maternalist minimum,’ taking the fundamental protection of women as workers and mothers for granted (Blofield & Franzoni, 2015). However, the development of paid maternity leave becomes salient once one broadens the historical and geographical scope of inquiry. The ‘maternalist minimum’ has been historically contentious in European welfare states (Jenson, 1986; Lewis, 1992) and is yet to be achieved in much of the global South (Addati, 2015). A deeper understanding of the developmental patterns of paid maternity leave policies throughout the world thus extends across existing accounts of the gendered development of established welfare states. It showcases the extent and limitations of social protection geared towards women workers in developing countries.

Comparative leave policy literature usually analyses the development of leave policies in the global North (Ciccia & Verloo, 2012; Gauthier, 1996) and the global South (Fallon, Mazar, & Swiss, 2017; Htun & Weldon, 2018) using measurements of benefit scope such as the duration of leave and the benefit amount. However, more recently, a growing number of authors have emphasized the significance asking who is eligible for leave rights. Given the recent changes in labor market structure in the global North toward an increase of precarious jobs and the diversification of contract forms (Moss, Duvander, & Koslowski, 2019), the current constellation of leave policies does not provide leave benefits equally among social strata as it tightly links access to leave rights to paid employment (Ghysels & Van Lancker, 2011). In the context of the global South, the generous welfare system provisions often benefit only the privileged classes, implying that the generosity level of welfare policies may not be correlated with the actual coverage of welfare policies (Haggard & Kaufman, 2008). The findings of recent publications support this line of reasoning, showing that the access to leave policies in the global South is significantly determined by stratification in the labor market as well (Lee & Baek, 2014; Sorj & Fraga, 2020; Stumbitz, Lewis, Kyei, & Lyon, 2018). While useful and important, these existing empirical studies cover only a small number of advanced economies or focus on regions or countries in the global South.

This article aims to provide the first global overview of women workers’ access to paid maternity leave policies over 120 years and explore its determinants based on newly collected data (Son et al., 2020). Our contribution presents the general expansionary patterns of

access to paid maternity leaves globally and identifies the drivers of long-term developments. The new historical database of maternity leave (HDML) policy measures entitlement principles, eligibility criteria, as well as benefit scope based on the major sources of information about the early development of leave policies (Gauthier & Koops, 2018, p. 12): the International Labour Organization (ILO) Legislative Series, the ILO reports to monitor implementation of the three ILO Maternity Protection Conventions (C003, C103, and C183), and the US Labor Department’s Social Security Programs Throughout the World reports.

Dobrotić and Blum’s (2020) index of parental leave eligibility in European countries provides a useful reference for building an index to measure access to paid maternity leaves. The authors conceptualize the inclusiveness of leave policies to consist of two dimensions: entitlement principles (i.e., to whom leave rights are granted) and eligibility criteria (i.e., under which conditions a person is qualified for the ‘granted’ leave rights). While their index focuses on the comparison of eligibility criteria of leave policies with identical entitlement principles, namely employment-based or citizenship-based benefits, we put more weight on the overall inclusiveness of leave policies. Thus, we first operationalize the entitlement index as a composition of the legal coverage of employment-based maternity benefits by employment sectors/forms and the existence of complementary programs for women who are not qualified for the employment-based program. Then, we develop an eligibility index that measures the strictness of employment-based benefits but unfortunately omits the features of complementary programs due to the ambitious scope of this research.

We begin by briefly reviewing the literature dealing with (maternity) leave policies and highlighting the relevance of a new and developing body of comparative leave policy literature that attends to the issue of social inequalities in access to leave benefits. We thus situate the expansion of paid maternity leave in the logic of both gender and social equality. We then present the details of the HDML and the operationalization of our inclusiveness indicator built on Dobrotić and Blum’s (2020) eligibility index. In the fourth section of the article, we trace the historical expansion of paid maternity leave in terms of entitlement and eligibility conditions using descriptive statistics by regions. In the fifth section, we employ multivariate models to explore potential drivers of expanding inclusiveness. Finally, we summarize the findings and present the limits of our article.

2. The Historical Development of Paid Maternity Leave as a Struggle for Gender and Social Equality

The institutionalization of paid maternity leave is the first and essential step to achieving gender equality in the labor market. Without paid maternity leave, women encounter the risk of losing their economic indepen-

dence during or after confinement (Htun et al., 2019). Contrary to other protective legislation such as the prohibition of night work, the diverse streams of the women's movement agreed on the necessity of paid maternity leave regardless of whether or not they believed that gender equality in the labor market could be achieved through women-specific labor laws or the enforcement of equal treatment (Boris, 2019). Women's movements struggled to introduce and extend the rights to maternity benefits by lobbying international organizations (e.g., the ILO) to adopt the Maternity Protection Convention (Berkovitch, 1999) as well as by pressuring trade unions and policymakers (Bock & Thane, 1991; Sainsbury, 2001). The increasing political representation of women also contributed significantly to promoting the expansion of family policies as female politicians tend to be more interested in family-related policies than male politicians (Atchison & Down, 2009; Kittilson, 2008).

At the same time, the establishment of paid maternity leave as a part of social protection policies exhibits a specific logic of class politics, which aims to promote social equality among women of different strata (Htun & Weldon, 2018). While middle-class feminists in the early twentieth century focused on the introduction of family allowances compensating for women's unpaid labor (Bock & Thane, 1991), female trade unionists encountered a more pressing necessity for paid maternity leave. Not only did policy preferences differ between strata of women but paid maternity leave policies themselves often entail social stratification as well. As Ghysels and Van Lancker (2011) have shown, leave policies in Europe are not redistributive, but rather reproduce social stratification. Scholars in the global South also find that access to leave policies is significantly determined by stratification in the labor market. Workers in Brazil have unequal access to the contributory leave insurance scheme among different strata, defined by an individual's position in the labor market, job category, gender, race, income, and educational level (Sorj & Fraga, 2020). African countries do not provide statutory maternity leave benefits to workers in the informal labor market, leaving a large proportion of female labor forces with no option other than to rely on the employer's discretionary support or kinship-based support (Stumbitz et al., 2018). The exclusion of women workers in non-standard employment from leave benefits in East Asian countries also limits the access of many women workers to leave rights (Lee & Baek, 2014).

The protection of economic independence for working women thus seems to hinge on two interrelated struggles: gender and social equality. However, this distinction also raises the question of whether the development of paid maternity leave can be understood as a result of a broader movement of social protection expansion, reflecting the struggle for social equality, and/or whether it needs to be traced back to the political empowerment of women. Thus, understanding the history and development of the inclusiveness of maternity

leave benefits also allows for the assessment of the historical progress of both struggles (for gender and social equality). The identification of its drivers, on the other hand, enables us to gauge how much these struggles are distinct from one another or can overlap.

3. Operationalization of the Inclusiveness of Paid Maternity Leave Policies

To systematically capture the patterns of the development of paid maternity leave entitlements, we introduce an inclusiveness indicator of paid maternity leave policies based on our new HDML, which covers paid maternity leave policies in 157 independent nation-states with a population of over 500,000 during the period from 1884 to 2018. Existing databases like the Social Policy and Law Shared Database (MEA, 2021), the Mutual Information System on Social Protection of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2021), the OECD Family Database (OECD, 2021), and the International Network on Leave Policies and Research (LP&R, 2021) are used for verifying the accuracy of the HDML. The HDML includes variables that help our understanding of the legal conditions of paid maternity leave policies across the world such as the benefit amount, benefit duration, legal coverage, eligibility conditions, and method of financing. Since the unit of the HDML is a country per year, in the case that multiple parallel maternity protection programs exist in a country (e.g., one for wage earners and the other for salaried employees), we coded the legal conditions of the program that presumably covers the largest share of the population. Also, we coded the coverage of maternity protection in that country as the aggregate coverage of all maternity protection programs.

The HDML defines paid maternity leave as a public paid leave program that is available to mothers during the period "before and after childbirth," functioning as social protection measure that guarantees the income to individuals during this period (Son et al., 2020). If a country combines maternity leave and childcare leave into one program without any additional maternity leave programs existing, we include these parental leave programs as a maternity leave program. We exclude corporate-based private paid maternity leave programs or public paid maternity leave programs at the sub-national level as in the US, the only country that has not introduced any public paid maternity leave policies at the federal level among the 157 countries included. Disagreements about the definition of maternity leave policy cause the divergence between the existing indicators and the HDML. Some databases do not acknowledge paid parental leave that provides benefits to both fathers and mothers as maternity leave. For instance, Gauthier (2011) codes only maternity leave programs that exclusively target women as maternity leave in her dataset. Her coding indicates that Sweden has not had paid maternity leave since 1974, while the OECD Family Database and the HDML recognize that the paid parental leave in Sweden functions

as paid maternity leave. The HDML opted for a more generous definition because we expect that without any comprehensive information on parental leave, a generous definition of maternity leave will provide a better overview of the historical development of maternity leave.

Borrowing from Dobrotić and Blum's (2020) conceptual framework, we score the institutional traits coded in the HDML regarding two dimensions: (1) entitlement principles (who is granted paid maternity leave benefits), and (2) eligibility criteria (under which conditions a person is qualified for the 'granted' leave rights). Since both dimensions are partly complementary and should be assessed together to fully capture the inclusiveness of paid maternity leave protection, we aggregate both dimensions through addition. For instance, Jordan

extended the coverage of maternity benefits in 1988 to all employed mothers including those in the industrial, commercial, and agricultural sectors as well as family workers and domestic servants, but kept the eligibility threshold high; a minimum of 180 days of contribution period in the last 12 months from the same employer in a workplace where at least five workers are employed. This stands in marked contrast to China, which provides maternity benefits only to female employees in urban areas, excluding workers in the agricultural sector and atypical employment, but provides easy access demanding no contribution period.

Table 1 shows the details of the operationalization of the index of inclusiveness of maternity leaves. To capture the entitlement principles, we constructed two variables: a categorical variable for the legal coverage

Table 1. Operationalization of index of inclusiveness of maternity leaves.

Sub-Index I	Sub-Index II	Score
Entitlement principles	Coverage of social insurance + the existence of complementary programs	0–6
	Coverage of social insurance programs for women in different employment forms and sectors (aggregated score)	
	No program	0
	Public sector/civil servants	1
	Industrial sector	1
	Non-industrial sector (commercial sector)	1
	Agricultural sector	1
	Atypical sector	1
	Existence of social assistance programs or citizenship-based benefits for women who are not qualified for social insurance programs	
	No	0
Yes	1	
Eligibility criteria	(Employment/contribution period needed + employment period can be accumulated with different employers + minimum number of workers to be obliged to provide maternity benefit)/2	0–5
	Employment/contribution period needed	
	12 or more months	0
	7–11 months	1
	3–6 months	2
	1–2 months	3
	0 months	4
	Employment period can be accumulated with different employers	
	Employment condition must be fulfilled with the same employer	0
	Employment condition can be fulfilled with different employers	1
	Minimum number of workers to be obliged to provide maternity benefit	
	100	0
	51–99	1
31–50	2	
11–30	3	
1–10	4	
No condition	5	

of employment-based programs by employment sector, and a dummy variable for the existence of social assistance/citizenship-based programs providing monetary benefits to mothers with newborn children. Following the ILO Maternity Protection Conventions (C003, C103, and C183), coverage is aggregated into five sectors: public, industrial, non-industrial (commercial), agricultural, and atypical. Final coverage scores are generated through addition yielding a variable ranging from 0 to 5, 0 indicating the absence of a maternity insurance program and 5 indicating full coverage of the five sectors. Since most national legislation mirrors the language of the ILO Maternity Protection Conventions, the classification of sectoral coverage by the ILO conventions helps to grasp an overview of legal coverage across the globe. However, a special problem arises when coding the coverage of atypical employment. While most legislation covers all employees in industrial, commercial, and agricultural sectors without disaggregating them into a detailed list of occupations, none of the legislation covers all types of atypical employment, because atypical employment is a complex terminology based on types of employment as well as a sectoral classification encompassing informal employees, casual and part-time workers, and homeworkers in disguised self-employed. Reforms expanding the coverage of atypical workers have always been very gradual, extending from one group (e.g., the self-employed) to another group (e.g., domestic workers). In this article, if a country covers at least one type of atypical employment, we treat it as an extension of maternity benefit to atypical employment. Citizens who are not eligible for the insurance scheme must rely on social assistance/citizenship-based programs that provide less generous benefits than typical social insurance programs. Thus, we added 1 to entitlement score if there are complementary programs that increase the accessibility of maternity benefit.

Regarding eligibility criteria, we differentiate between those that regulate the required employment/contribution history and those that restrict the size of firms obliged to provide maternity benefits. Nation-states use both to either reduce their financial burden or implicitly target privileged groups. The long employment/contribution period significantly hinders the access of most women workers to maternity benefits, whose access to regular jobs with high job stability is limited. In the 1950s, the ILO noted that a qualifying period excluded a large proportion of women from maternity benefits and demanded the introduction of social assistance schemes for women who are not qualified for social insurance benefits in the provisions of the second Maternity Protection Convention (C103; ILO, 1952). The increase of eligibility thresholds has also been a common strategy to reduce nation-states' financial burden in the retrenchment era (Clasen & Siegel, 2007; Pierson, 1996). Additionally, eligibility conditions can be restricted by imposing contribution requirements that must be achieved at the same employer.

The minimum number of employees in workplaces for employers to be obliged to provide maternity benefits is an additional component of eligibility criteria that Dobrotić and Blum (2020) did not include when studying the inclusiveness of parental leave in European countries since this type of eligibility criterion is much more prevalent in the global South than in the global North. In East Asian countries such as Japan and Korea, social insurance systems covered only large-scale firms for a long time. These so-called developmental states implemented a 'trickle-down' strategy in social protection policies and economic policies, expecting that the adoption of social protection measures in large-scale firms would be eventually expanded to smaller working places in an incremental fashion (Kwon, 1997). Latin American social insurance systems also targeted only large-scale firms at the initial stage due to low state capacity to regulate and inspect labor environment and relations (Bosch, Melguizo, & Pagés, 2013).

The aggregated eligibility measure includes the period of eligibility, whether the employment period could be accumulated with different employers, and the minimum number of employees to be obliged to provide maternity benefits. A paid maternity leave program that requires no employment/contribution period receives the highest score (4), while a paid maternity leave program with 12 or more months of eligibility period is coded as 0 following the thresholds of Dobrotić and Blum's (2020) index of parental leave eligibility, implying that a longer eligibility period would hinder the access to paid maternity leave policies for women workers. Since nation-states use contribution or/and employment periods as eligibility conditions, we used whichever of the two eligibility period conditions were stricter. If a paid maternity leave program allows for the accumulation of the employment or contribution periods from different employers, 1 is added to the eligibility period score. In a similar vein, the higher minimum number of employees in a workplace to be obliged to provide maternity benefits receives a lower score since the threshold of the scale of enterprise decreases the access to maternity benefits. To balance the weight of entitlement principles and eligibility criteria, we divided the aggregated scores of eligibility criteria by two. The inclusiveness index is the aggregation of entitlement principle scores and eligibility criteria scores, ranging from 0 to 11.

4. Descriptive Evidence: Patterns of the Historical Development of Maternity Protection Policies

Table 2 presents the sequence of coverage expansion by world region. Women employed in the industrial and commercial sectors gained access to maternity protection first with little time passing between the inclusions of both groups. Agricultural workers followed later. The length of the gap between the inclusion of commercial and agricultural workers varies between regions: While it took a relatively long time in Eastern

and Western Europe as well as Latin America, regions that introduced protection for industrial and commercial workers later took less time to extend provisions to the agricultural sector. Average introduction times of provisions for all three sectors are only three years apart in sub-Saharan Africa. The Middle East and North Africa stand out as laggards in this regard: Not only there are fewer countries with extended protection to agricultural workers in these areas, but it has also taken them considerably longer than sub-Saharan African countries to undertake this expansion.

While paid maternity leave is approaching universal ‘maternity insurance’ for working women in some

parts of the world, women in atypical employment and the agrarian sector are still largely excluded from social insurance schemes in others. These exclusions originate from two interrelated factors. First, they reflect the labor market structure. While countries in the global North had only minimal proportions of atypical employment left when they universalized coverage after World War II through the inclusion of the self-employed in social insurance (Flora & Heidenheimer, 1981), employment in the atypical sector still accounts for a large proportion of the labor force today in the global South (Bosch et al., 2013; van Ginneken, 1999; Yang, 2017). This renders the inclusion of atypical employment in maternity

Table 2. The sequence of coverage expansion of paid maternity leave.

	Industrial	Commercial	Agricultural	Atypical
Eastern Europe and (Post) Soviet Union (n = 26)				
Number of Adopters	26	26	25	23
Average Year	1919	1924	1943	1959
Regional Pioneer	Austria-Hungary (1891)	Austria-Hungary (1907)	Bulgaria (1924)	Poland (1920)
Latest Adopter	Albania (1947)	Albania (1947)	Yugoslavia (1971)	Belarus (2002)
Latin America and the Caribbean (n = 23)				
Number of Adopters	23	23	19	17
Average Year	1942	1944	1965	1978
Regional Pioneer	Mexico (1917)	El Salvador (1927)	Uruguay (1935)	Peru (1936)
Latest Adopter	Trinidad & Tobago (1971)	Trinidad & Tobago (1971)	Cuba (2009)	Cuba (2009)
North Africa and the Middle East (n = 20)				
Number of Adopters	20	20	12	7
Average Year	1967	1967	1978	1982
Regional Pioneer	Turkey (1936)	Turkey (1936)	Lebanon (1946)	Cyprus (1964)
Latest Adopter	Oman (2011)	Oman (2011)	Oman (2011)	Turkey (2008)
Sub-Saharan Africa (n = 43)				
Number of Adopters	43	43	41	6
Average Year	1969	1970	1972	1994
Regional Pioneer	South Africa (1920)	Guinea (1958)	Guinea (1958)	Djibouti (1977)
Latest Adopter	Sierra Leone (2015)	Sierra Leone (2015)	Sierra Leone (2015)	Tanzania (2013)
Western Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand (n = 22)				
Number of Adopters	20	20	20	20
Average Year	1928	1931	1941	1958
Regional Pioneer	Germany (1884)	Norway (1909)	Norway (1909)	Germany (1911)
Latest Adopter	New Zealand (2003)	New Zealand (2003)	New Zealand (2003)	New Zealand (2006)
Asia and the Pacific (n = 23)				
Number of Adopters	23	23	18	7
Average Year	1965	1972	1974	1981
Regional Pioneer	Japan (1922)	China (1930)	Philippines (1952)	Taiwan (1958)
Latest Adopter	Solomon Islands (1996)	Taiwan (2001)	Solomon Islands (1996)	Vanuatu (2016)

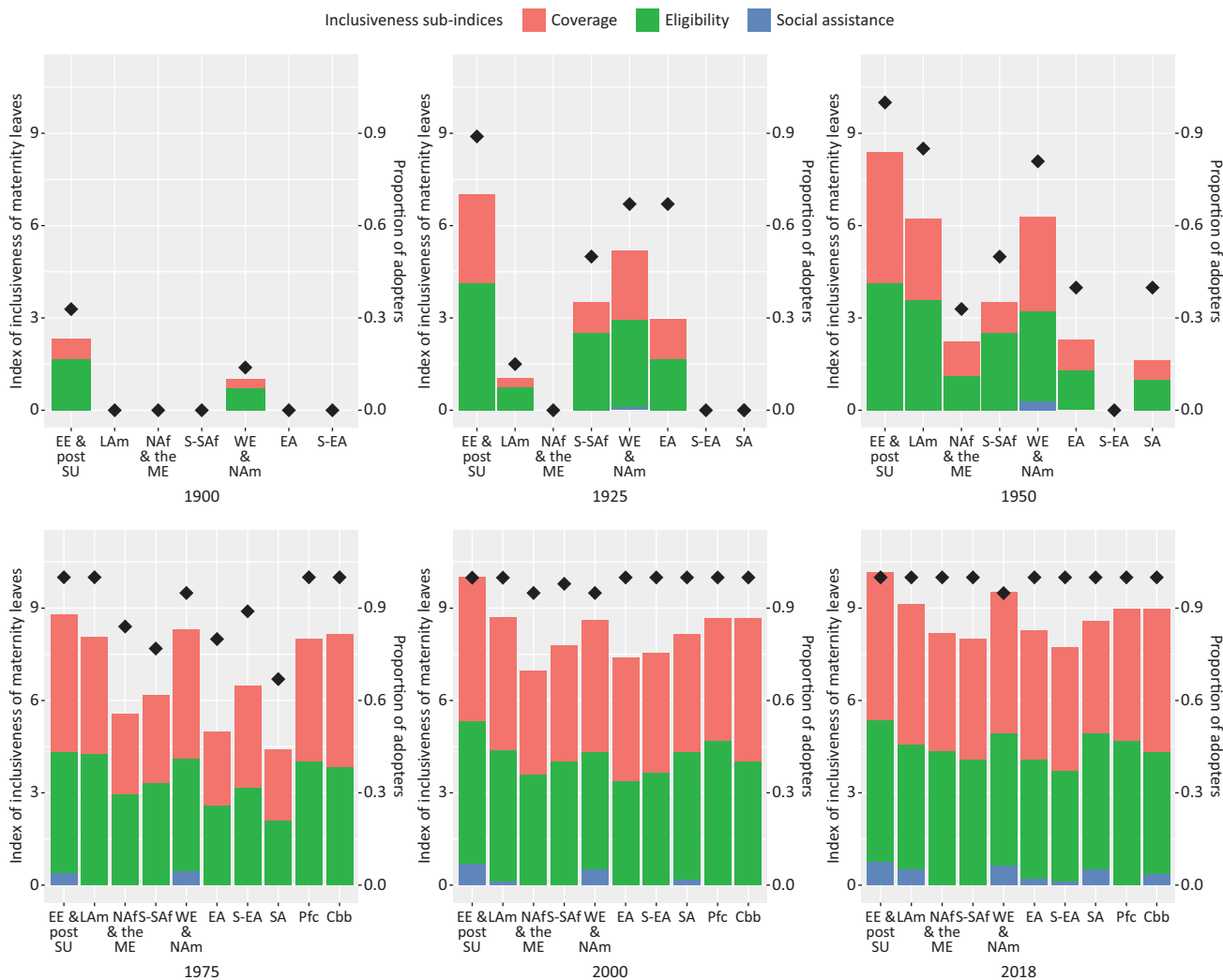
Source: Built based on the HDML (Son et al., 2020). Notes: The classification of countries is based on the politico-geographic classification of world regions by Hadenius and Teorell (2007), which reflects geographical proximity as well as political-economic factors. For instance, Australia and New Zealand are categorized as the same group as Western Europe and North America rather than their immediate neighbors.

protection insurance more salient and much harder to achieve in the global South. Second, the exclusion of atypical employment from maternity insurance schemes could also be seen as a highly path-dependent result of the history of political incorporation in many countries. Social protection privileges were first accorded only to certain occupational groups seen as vital to regime survival (Mares & Carnes, 2009). In any case, the existing institutions of paid maternity leave prevent access to large parts of the working female population.

The entitlement principles and the eligibility criteria, altogether, determine the inclusiveness of paid maternity leaves. Even if employment sectors have been included in paid maternity leave legislation, the high thresholds of eligibility criteria, such as long contribution periods or firms' size, restrict mothers' access to maternity protection benefits. Most countries aim to mitigate these restrictions by providing social assistance or citizenship-based benefits tied to confinement in

addition to paid maternity leave insurance. Although these likely provide only minimal benefits, they are often the only way to guarantee financial support to underprivileged mothers, especially in the context of the global South.

To gauge regional patterns and disaggregate the developmental patterns of the sub-indices, Figure 1 shows the regional pattern of adopters and inclusiveness of maternity benefits. Since the number of independent states varies over time from 35 (1884) to 155 (since 1993), to provide a better overview, we also present a relative measure of the number of adopters, whose denominator is the number of independent states (black dots). The inclusiveness scores provide an overview of how entitlement principles (i.e., coverage of employment-based maternity benefits and the existence of complementary programs) and eligibility criteria (i.e., the aggregated score of eligibility index) have changed over time in different regions. It shows that paid maternity leave



Notes: EE & post SU stands for Eastern Europe and Post-Soviet Union; LAm stands for Latin America; NAF & the ME stands for North Africa and the Middle East; S-Saf stands for sub-Saharan Africa; WE & NAm stands for West Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand; EA stands for East Asia; S-EA stands for South-East Asia; Pfc stands for the Pacific; and Cbb stands for the Caribbean.

Figure 1. Regional pattern of adoption and index of inclusiveness of maternity leaves.

programs emerged before 1900 in Europe, namely in Denmark, Germany, and Austria-Hungary. Other countries in Europe steadily followed the path of early adopters and, by 1925, all European countries except for Albania, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom had adopted paid maternity leave programs. Early adopters in other regions, such as China and Japan in East Asia, Chile, Peru, Mexico in Latin America, and South Africa in sub-Saharan Africa, also introduced their first paid maternity leave policies by 1925.

The proportion of countries that institutionalized maternity protection increased steadily between 1925 and 1950. Many Latin American countries began to offer maternity protection that coincided with the first phase of social protection expansion in these countries (Haggard & Kaufman, 2008). One outstanding regional trajectory can be observed in the Eastern European countries: Starting from the 1950s, all countries provided paid maternity leave to most of their populations as part of the ‘maternalist’ policy orientation (Mitsuyoshi, 2012) enacted by socialist regimes. Interestingly, in this initial phase of the extension of maternity benefits, the coverage of maternity protection was limited to industrial and commercial workers, but eligibility conditions were generous. For instance, 50 of 74 independent states provided paid maternity leave in 1950. Paid maternity leave programs in 32 of those 50 countries scored between 4 and 5 on the index for eligibility conditions (maximum 5), while 25 of 50 countries scored 3 or less on the entitlement index (maximum 6). In the early phases of development, the paid maternity leave programs tended to have generous eligibility conditions and limited legal coverage.

By 1975, a large majority of independent nation-states (116 among 134 countries) had completed the task of institutionalizing the provision of social protection to women workers before and after confinement as latecomer states, such as Nigeria and South Korea, introduced the maternity protection policies shortly after their independence. However, the degree of accessibility to maternity protection still varied widely among regions. European countries and a few Latin American countries extended the coverage of maternity benefits to female employees in atypical sectors, e.g., the self-employed. Some European countries also adopted social assistance programs to complement social insurance systems. Nearly half of the countries that introduced paid maternity leave policies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America provided maternity benefits to female employees in public, industrial, and commercial sectors, while excluding employees in the agricultural and atypical sectors. East Asia shows an interesting pattern regarding a balance between entitlement principles and eligibility criteria. While other regions tended to provide paid maternity leave without strict eligibility criteria in the early phase of paid maternity leave development, East Asian countries had employed strict eligibility criteria since the introduction of paid maternity leave. For instance, China

obliged workplaces that employed more than 100 workers to provide paid maternity leave benefits, and Taiwan required women workers to be insured for longer than 10 months to be eligible for the maternity protection provision. While Latin American and African countries have largely neglected employees in the atypical sectors, East Asian countries have neglected workers in small-scale firms that account for a large proportion of the labor force. Since social insurance contributions impose a huge financial burden on employers in small enterprises and nation-states lacked the capacity to enforce social protection policies in these places, the extension of legal coverage to small firms stalled in this region (Yang, 2017).

The extension of access to maternity benefits became stagnant after the year 2000 once all regions established a similar level of access to paid maternity leave. However, countries in the global South continued to converge toward universal coverage of maternity insurance, extending the coverage of maternity benefits to atypical workers, albeit at a slow pace and with considerable gaps.

5. Testing the Logic of Gender and Social Equality in the Historical Development of Paid Maternity Leave Policies

Section two highlighted how the inclusiveness of paid maternity leave relates to struggles for gender and social equality. Its global expansion should directly reflect the expanding organizational or institutional power resources of actors engaged in these struggles (Korpi, 1985). As previously discussed, earlier research has found support for both the influence of female political representation (Kittilson, 2008) and left-wing parties (Htun & Weldon, 2018), but these studies were limited in geographical and temporal scope as well as mostly focused on generosity rather than inclusiveness. To identify the drivers of paid maternity leave inclusiveness, we employ a random-effects model with between and within estimators as proposed by Bartels (2008) and Bell and Jones (2015). Compared to earlier approaches of dealing with time-series cross-sectional data in macro-comparative research, this approach allows for the separation of within-case effects that reflect variation over time and between-case effects that capture cross-sectional differences. Standard fixed-effect approaches control out all between-case variation and thus do not allow for making inferences about the substantive relationships that researchers are interested in, especially concerning slow-moving institutional variables (Plümpner, Troeger, & Manow, 2005). The between-country effects serve to elucidate long-lasting differences, such as the various economic and political trajectories over the twentieth century. Since our dependent variable captures institutional variation and thus exhibits a high degree of path dependency, we include a within estimator of the lagged dependent variable (Bartels, 2008) to account for the first-order autocorrelation. Overall, our analysis cov-

ers 157 distinct countries either since 1900 or since their independence until 2018, yielding 11,363 country-years.

5.1. *The Variables*

The broad geographical and historical scope of our analysis precludes measuring the logic of gender and social equality directly. Thus, we account for several domestic and international factors alongside our main variables.

First, we include an index of women's political empowerment (Sundström, Paxton, Wang, & Lindberg, 2017) that captures the degree to which women are guaranteed civil citizenship rights, organized within civil society, and participate in governmental decision-making to test the logic of gender equality. Second, we use two indirect measures that typically correlate with class politics, namely, democratization and social insurance development. We could not directly test the logic of class politics due to the lack of data on left-wing parties' strength around the world. We use the V-Dem polyarchy score (Teorell, Coppedge, Lindberg, & Skaaning, 2019), which measures the responsiveness to voter's needs and preferences as well as the extent of suffrage. The Social Policy around the World dataset (Knutsen & Rasmussen, 2018) is used to capture the scope of social risks, namely old-age, sickness, unemployment, work injury, and family poverty, already covered by social insurance.

Third, the degree of economic modernization, industrialization, is captured by a measure of gross domestic product per capita in constant international dollars (Gapminder, 2020). Industrialization and urbanization led to widespread fear of 'family decline' in early twentieth-century Europe, which triggered governmental responses, including, but not limited to, paid maternity leave (Gauthier, 1996). These fears were also compounded by falling birth rates (Gapminder, 2020). Lower fertility rates should be associated with more inclusive paid maternity leave policies either because governments try to reduce the economic burdens of childbearing to increase fertility, or because governments are unable to implement and finance inclusive paid maternity leave under conditions of high fertility. Finally, earlier literature has emphasized the role of global policy models (Schmitt, Lierse, Obinger, & Seelkopf, 2015). The ILO has consistently pushed for the expansion of maternity protection since its inception and has devoted multiple conventions and recommendations to it. We thus control for ILO membership.

To account for possible issues of reverse causality, we employ one-year lags for all political variables (women's political empowerment, polyarchy, insurance coverage of social risks, ILO membership) as well as the fertility rate.

5.2. *Analysis*

The first model in Table 3 includes only standard variables without accounting for women's political empow-

erment, while the second model includes it. We turn first to our indicators of economic development, societal modernization, regimes, and women's political empowerment because they display intriguing differences between models.

The results show that differences in the political empowerment of women are decisive for the inclusiveness of paid maternity leave. This relationship holds for the differences between our set of countries and the (within country) dynamics of inclusiveness expansion over nearly 120 years. It is thus unlikely to be driven by some unobserved characteristic. While the political empowerment of women has the expected effect on inclusiveness, the between-country effect of democracy defies expectations of standard welfare-state theory. Yet, our earlier descriptive analysis already hinted at cases that could be driving this result: The socialist countries in Eastern Europe combined political disenfranchisement with the establishment of generous social rights, especially for women workers. The effect of social insurance institutions is largely consistent across models. Countries that cover more social risks also feature more inclusive paid maternity leave coverage.

The first model supports classical functionalist accounts of social protection extension: The inclusiveness of paid maternity leave is driven by the within-country effect of economic development and the between-country effect of the fertility rate. Between-country differences in fertility reflect the relative timing of the demographic transition. Even though this effect is substantial, it becomes much weaker and insignificant once the index of women's political empowerment is included in our model, indicating that most of the effects of economic and societal modernization are, in fact, indirect. Regarding the effect of ILO membership, it is interesting that both between and within effects seem to operate, while the within effect represents the effect of joining the ILO, the between effect can be understood as the effect exerted by long-standing membership. Given that the ILO's main channel of influence besides adopting recommendations and conventions lies in its technical expertise and continuous dialogue with national governments, it seems natural that its effect unfolds slowly and accumulates over time.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Over the twentieth century, the inclusiveness of paid maternity leave has, with few exceptions (notably the US), increased across countries and regions. The timing and speed of expansion have differed, but the sequence and trajectory are surprisingly uniform and directed towards ever more inclusive 'maternity insurance.' Especially in the last 30 years, countries across the global South have converged toward the standards set in Eastern and Western Europe. Our analysis also indicated that this convergence is largely driven by a parallel trajectory of the political empowerment of women.

Table 3. Regression results.

	Inclusiveness	
	Model 1	Model 2
Lagged DV	0.922*** (0.00699)	0.921*** (0.00698)
Logged GDP/cap (i\$) (between)	-0.327 (0.189)	-0.0661 (0.179)
Logged GDP/cap (i\$) (within)	0.0402 (0.0211)	0.0254 (0.0226)
Total fertility rate (between)	-0.478** (0.154)	-0.182 (0.146)
Total fertility rate (within)	-0.00177 (0.00945)	0.00818 (0.0110)
Democracy (between)	-1.097 (1.009)	-3.986*** (1.010)
Democracy (within)	0.0683 (0.0543)	-0.0742 (0.0879)
Women's political empowerment (between)		6.339*** (1.123)
Women's political empowerment (within)		0.290* (0.132)
Social insurance risk coverage (between)	0.556*** (0.162)	0.444** (0.161)
Social insurance risk coverage (within)	0.0368* (0.0182)	0.0337 (0.0182)
ILO membership (between)	4.279*** (1.256)	3.509** (1.132)
ILO membership (within)	0.249*** (0.0478)	0.248*** (0.0478)
Constant	6.532* (2.603)	1.794 (2.272)
Observations	11,363	11,363
Number of groups	157	157

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. DV: Dependent variable. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

In this regard, it substantiates earlier research (Kittilson, 2008; Sainsbury, 2001), which consistently finds that the descriptive representation of women matters for the extension of policies, which allow women to combine labor market participation and motherhood. Given data constraints, our results are more ambiguous regarding the question of whether the extension of leave policies follows a specific pattern of 'class politics' driven by left-wing parties, as has been suggested (Htun & Weldon, 2018) by earlier research. However, typical correlates of 'class politics,' especially democratization, seem to have little bearing on the expansion of leave inclusiveness. More comprehensive data on the strength of left-wing parties around the world is needed to answer whether this is due to the logic of inclusiveness as opposed to generosity, or whether the 'class politics' of leave policies vary over time and place, not always aligning perfectly with economic cleavages.

In some circumstances, the extension of legal access to paid maternity leave policies as measured by our indicator may prove shallow due to limited state capacity, many countries of the global South struggle to put all regulations into practice; especially in contexts that are naturally hard to regulate, such as small enterprises, domestic servants, and the whole informal sector. For instance, India adopted the Beedi and Cigar Worker Act in 1966 and its supplementary act in 1974 to provide social insurance benefits, including maternity protection, to female employees. However, employers did not comply with the legislation and the courts also challenged the laws (Boris, 2019). The absence of strong trade unions makes it difficult to inspect and enforce labor protection laws in the middle—and low-income countries. This also increases the salience of alternative entitlements such as social assistance/citizenship-based benefits tied to confinement on which our data and analysis provided only

minimal information. Further development and analysis of the HDML data will help to close these gaps and identify and explain the remaining gaps in paid maternity leave coverage.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Dimensions of Social Equality in Paid Parental Leave Policy Design: Comparing Australia and Japan

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Abstract

Paid parental leave policies in both Australia and Japan fit within Dobrotić and Blum’s (2020) classification of a selective employment-based entitlement model, thus offering an extension of that category beyond Europe and illustrating the wide variation possible within it. In this article we develop indices for comparing employment-based parental leave policies on three dimensions of social equality: inclusion, gender equality and redistribution. This combination offers an extension of classificatory schemes for parental leave policies and a broader basis for comparative analysis. We compare Australia and Japan on these indices and present a qualitative exploration of the origins and implications of their similarities and differences. The analysis draws attention to tensions between the three indices, illustrating intersecting and conflicting influences on the potential for paid parental leave entitlements to contribute to the amelioration of social inequalities. Overall, the comparison highlights drivers of difference within employment-based entitlement systems and underlines the need for complementary measures to advance egalitarian outcomes.

Keywords

Australia; gender equality; inclusion; Japan; leave policy design; paid parental leave; redistribution; social equality

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1. Introduction

Social inequalities associated with parental leave policies continue to comprise a major theme in leave policy research, with divisions between the “parental-leave rich and parental-leave poor” (McKay, Mathieu, & Doucet, 2016) potentially widening within and between countries. This is particularly the case for employment-based entitlements in the context of widespread fragmentation of work and the expansion of non-standard and insecure forms of employment in what Palier (2018, p. 247) depicts as “a long-term dualisation trajectory.” Such trends clearly have the capacity to narrow the reach of employment entitlements such as paid parental

leave in ways that exacerbate social inequalities (see, e.g., Howcroft & Rubery, 2019; Whitehouse & Brady, 2019). In addition to concerns about access, it has long been recognised that parental leave policies may reinforce rather than ameliorate gendered divisions of paid and unpaid labour and adversely affect women’s employment trajectories (for an overview see Hegewisch & Gornick, 2011). A less frequently noted issue is that income inequality may also be consolidated among users of parental leave entitlements depending on the extent to which the distribution of payments is ‘regressive’ (i.e., delivering greater benefits to higher-earning parents) rather than ‘progressive’ (i.e., relatively advantageous to the lower paid). This adds to the impact of unequal

access, which has been shown to disproportionately benefit the social reproduction of higher social strata (see, e.g., Ghysels & Van Lancker, 2011; McKay et al., 2016; O'Brien, 2009).

In this article we compare employment-based paid parental leave provisions in Australia and Japan, assessing their implications for these three dimensions of social equality, which we label inclusion, gender equality and redistribution. The focus is thus on policy design rather than uptake and impact, for which there are insufficiently detailed cross-nationally comparable statistics. Our comparative analysis of social equality in policy design nevertheless offers contributions at two levels, first in extending classificatory schemes for cross-national comparison of parental leave policies and, second, in highlighting contrasting possibilities in practice through a comparison of Australia and Japan. As non-European countries that fall into the same broad parental-leave entitlement type in Dobrotić and Blum's (2020, p. 593) 2×2 matrix, both having primarily employment-based entitlement principles and selective rather than universal eligibility criteria, Australia and Japan illustrate the wide variation possible within this category, raising questions over the origins and implications of their policy differences. These are explored with the goal of extending understanding of the complexities of designing policy for social objectives within employment-based systems and the barriers that stand in the way of egalitarian outcomes.

In the following section we outline our framework for analysis, explaining our methodological approach and the indices we have constructed to represent the three dimensions of social equality. We present our comparative analysis of Australia and Japan in the subsequent section, identifying and interrogating differences in their performance. In conclusion, we reflect on the drivers of variations within and between these employment-based entitlement models, the contradictions they illustrate between our three indices, and the implications for future policy directions.

2. A Framework for Analysis

Cross-national comparison offers insights into the variety of policy possibilities and deeper understandings of extent to which national contexts shape policy framings and potential future directions. It has been widely applied in research on parental leave policy, informed by classifications ranging from Esping-Andersen's (1990) liberal, conservative and social democratic welfare regimes, through critical extensions of this typology in gendered family models and care regimes based on notions of (de)familialisation and maternalism (e.g., Crompton, 1999; Leitner, 2003; Lewis, 2001; Mathieu, 2016), to the development of classifications to represent the generosity and gender egalitarianism of parental leave policy provisions (e.g., Blofield & Martínez Franzoni, 2015; Castro-García & Pazod-Moran, 2016; Ciccia & Verloo, 2012; Dearing, 2016; Gornick & Meyers, 2003, 2008;

Javornik, 2014; Ray, Gornick, & Schmitt, 2010; Smith & Williams, 2007). More recently, Dobrotić and Blum (2020) have turned the focus explicitly to access to parental leave policies rather than measures of generosity in duration and payment, overlaying this with a gender dimension to provide an important addition to conceptualisations of social equality in policy design.

Our framework for comparing the social equality features of employment-based paid parental leave policies draws directly on Dobrotić and Blum's (2020, p. 599) eligibility index for a measure of 'inclusion.' However, unlike these authors, who address access to social rights more broadly, our focus is narrowly on employment-based systems and their capacity to support our three separate dimensions of social equality. Hence, we use the employment-based, but not the citizenship-based, component of their eligibility index. Our second index, gender-equality, amalgamates features from the extensive comparative literature on this topic, while our third index, 'redistribution,' requires development from basic principles. The indices, which we outline below, are conceptualised as equally important dimensions of social equality that could potentially require trade-offs in practice. Cross-national analysis provides a lens through which to assess not only the extent of, and reasons for, differences on the indices, but also how policy designs might balance or exacerbate tensions between them.

Although the indices are designed to be applicable in broader cross-national comparisons, they are suitable for our two-country comparison, which applies them quantitatively only to illustrate major contrasts before turning to a qualitative exploration of differences and their implications. This methodological approach is compatible with a study based on two cases—a comparative design that allows for an appropriate balance between "descriptive depth and analytical challenge" (Tarrow, 2010, p. 246).

Table 1 sets out the criteria used to score the three indices, with inclusion, gender equality and redistribution in panels A, B and C, respectively. In line with Dobrotić and Blum (2020) they are based solely on statutory provisions, on paid benefits rather than leave entitlements (which often have different eligibility and uptake provisions) and on 'parental' rather than gender-specific 'maternity' or 'paternity' entitlements. The selection of criteria and their weighting draws on prior research where available, but also involves judgements based on the application of theoretical and substantive knowledge (see also Dobrotić & Blum, 2020, p. 596).

Drawn from Dobrotić and Blum (2020, p. 599), the inclusion index (Table 1, panel A) appropriately recognises concerns over inequalities in access due to variation in labour force attachment and security while omitting eligibility criteria that are not employment-related (such as access to benefits for the non-birth parent in same sex couples and for adoptive parents). The duration of employment (or insurance payments) required prior to accessing benefits is an important criterion in

Table 1. Indices of inclusion, gender equality and redistribution in paid parental leave policy.

Criteria	Score
A: Inclusion ^a	
Employment history	
Employment period needed to qualify for benefits ^b	
Without employment-based benefits	0
≥ 12 months of employment	1
7–11 months of employment	2
3–6 months of employment	3
< 3 months of employment	4
Employment contract before leave starts	5
Employment period can be accumulated over longer time with interruptions	
Interruptions not allowed	0
Interruptions allowed; condition not applicable ^c	1
Employment period can be accumulated with different employers	
Must be fulfilled with same employer	0
Can be fulfilled with different employers; condition not applicable ^c	1
Different employment forms and sectors	
Self-employed	
Excluded	0
Access to separate scheme, can be subject to stricter eligibility criteria	1
Fully included in same scheme as employees	2
Different professions/sectors	
Some excluded	0
Some have access to separate scheme, can be subject to stricter eligibility criteria	1
All fully included under same scheme	2
Marginally-employed	
Certain level of earnings/working time is needed	0
No conditions related to previous earnings/working time	1
<i>Maximum inclusion score</i>	<i>12</i>
B: Gender equality	
Gendered allocation and transferability of leave ^d	
No entitlements for fathers	0
Entitlements primarily for mothers, transferable in special cases	1
Fully shared family, or fully transferable individual, entitlements	2
Family or individual entitlements with < 1/3 non-transferable	3
Family or individual entitlements with ≥ 1/3 non-transferable	4
Duration of well-paid non-transferable leave for fathers ^e	
No well-paid non-transferable leave	0
< 1 month well-paid	1
≥ 1 but < 3 months well-paid	2
≥ 3 but < 6 months well-paid	3
≥ 6 months well-paid	4
Duration of leave for mothers	
< 14 weeks, or ≥ 24 months	0
> 14 weeks and < 6 months, or > 12 and < 24 months	1
6 to 12 months	2
Incentives for fathers' uptake	
No	0
Yes	1
Flexibility permitted in usage	
Breaks in usage (into two or more separate blocks)	0.5
Part-time usage in combination with part-time return to work	0.5
<i>Maximum gender equality score</i>	<i>12</i>

Table 1. (Cont.) Indices of inclusion, gender equality and redistribution in paid parental leave policy.

Criteria	Score
C: Redistribution	
Minimum payment	
No set minimum	0
≤ 20% average wage	1
21–40% average wage	2
41–60% average wage	3
61–80% average wage	4
> 80% average wage	5
Maximum payment/cap	
> 200% average wage (or no set maximum)	0
181–200% average wage	1
161–180% average wage	2
≤ 160% average wage	3
Payments taxable	
No	0
Yes	2
<i>Maximum redistribution score</i>	<i>10</i>

Notes: ^a Panel A is based on the employment-based eligibility criteria in Dobrotić and Blum (2020, p. 599); ^b this may be specified as the period of contribution to employment insurance; ^c not applicable if score is 5 for ‘employment period needed’; ^d this component of panel B draws on Dobrotić and Blum’s (2020, pp. 598, 600) “gender dimension of leave policy design”; ^e ‘well-paid’ is defined as $\geq 66\%$ of earnings; for flat-rate and capped earnings-based payments, estimates are based on the flat-rate or earnings cap as a percentage of the average wage for full-time workers.

this context, with a qualifying period of 12 months or more widely seen as a restrictive barrier (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020, p. 598). The following two items add to this lens, capturing—respectively—whether employment (or insurance payment) interruptions and changes of employer are permitted during the qualifying period (concessions often made incrementally as countries seek to expand the coverage of entitlements). The last three items capture exclusions. The self-employed are at risk of exclusion in employment-based systems, where associated employment regulations and insurance arrangements are often focused primarily on employees. This situation might also be echoed for particular professions or sectors under different regulatory frameworks. The ‘marginally employed’ are similarly at risk under employment-based provisions, with exclusions likely to expand as labour markets become increasingly fragmented and the ‘standard employment’ model of permanent full-time work erodes. The measure captures requirements for a specified level of earnings or working hours (e.g., 20%) to qualify for benefits (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020, p. 598). The scores are weighted to reward short qualifying periods more heavily, with the index overall providing a summative measure of access. Inclusion in this sense, while clearly a crucial component of social equality, may conflict with other dimensions of as we note below.

Panel B (Table 1) presents a gender equality index that seeks to capture the extent to which policy design is oriented towards the transformation of gendered patterns of paid and unpaid work. In line with the dual

earner/dual caregiver model envisaged by writers such as Crompton (1999) and Gornick and Meyers (2008), which in turn echoes Fraser’s (1997, p. 61) utopian vision of a “Universal Caregiver welfare state,” this requires strategies that facilitate both mothers’ labour force attachment and fathers’ engagement in domestic and caring labour. A central element of this ‘transformative’ vision that has been incorporated into numerous gender equality indices is the availability and non-transferability of leave for fathers as critical influences on fathers’ leave uptake (see, e.g., Ciccia & Verloo, 2012; Dearing, 2016; Dobrotić & Blum, 2020; Gornick & Meyers, 2003, 2008; Haas & Rostgaard, 2011; Javornik, 2014; Ray et al., 2010; Smith & Williams, 2007). Such arrangements vary considerably between countries, with ‘individual’ entitlements for fathers sometimes fully or partially transferable to mothers and varying proportions of family entitlements reserved for fathers (see Koslowski, Blum, Dobrotić, Kaufman, & Moss, 2020, p. 32). The first set of items in panel B represents this element in a scale (based on Dobrotić & Blum, 2020, pp. 598, 600) that allocates 1 point for benefits that are primarily for mothers but may be transferred in specific circumstances, 2 for fully transferable family or individual entitlements, 3 for partially non-transferable ($< 1/3$) family or individual entitlements and 4 for arrangements with $\geq 1/3$ of the entitlement period reserved for fathers.

The second set of items in panel B represents another feature deemed crucial for fathers’ leave uptake and widely incorporated in gender equality indices: well-paid leave, defined here as $\geq 66\%$ of earnings (e.g., as in

Koslowski et al., 2020, p. 44; Ray et al., 2010, p. 202). We are specifically concerned with the availability of well-paid non-transferable leave for fathers, given the importance of this combination for leave uptake (e.g., Castro-García & Pazod-Moran, 2016). We also recognise that a very short leave period for fathers, even if well-paid, may provide minimal challenge to gendered patterns of work and care. We therefore allocate the highest score to well-paid non-transferable leave for at least six months (an ideal individual non-transferable leave period according to Gornick & Meyers, 2008), with lower scores for shorter durations. The third set of items allocates scores for mothers' leave duration, inclusive of transferable and non-transferable leave as well as less than well-paid leave (given the likelihood that most available leave will be taken by mothers; see, e.g., Castro-García & Pazod-Moran, 2016). While there is no consensus on optimal duration, risks such as entrenching maternalism with overly long leaves and exits from the labour market with very short periods are widely recognised, with a period of 6 to 12 months generally accepted as avoiding adverse consequences (see, e.g., Ciccio & Verloo, 2012; Dearing, 2016; Javornik, 2014). We therefore allocate the highest score to this duration, with lower scores both above and below it. This third set is weighted less heavily than those for fathers' leave allocation and payment given the primacy accorded to the latter in the literature.

Incentives for fathers to access leave (most commonly additional leave if both parents use some) are weighted less heavily again but included in the index as potential levers for changing gendered patterns of leave-taking. Similarly, flexibility options may facilitate leave-taking and career continuity for both mothers and fathers, in particular by allowing breaks in usage (in two or more separate blocks) and part-time uptake (enabling a graduated return to work while still receiving benefits; see, e.g., Gornick & Meyers, 2008; Haas & Rostgaard, 2011).

The index is primarily oriented to the goal of triggering change in gendered divisions of paid and unpaid labour within couple families. Extending gender equality more broadly, including redressing inequalities between single mother and single father families, or between couple and single parent families, may require a different constellation of items (see Jou, Wong, Franken, Raub, & Heymann, 2020). The composition of the index also raises questions about the complementarity of the three dimensions of social equality addressed in this article. Not only could lower requirements for employment continuity and labour force attachment (rewarded in the inclusion index) impede the dual earner/dual caregiver principle underpinning this gender equality index, there are also clear conflicts between this index and the one designed to represent redistribution, as outlined in the following.

Panel C (Table 1) presents a redistribution index, which represents a less frequently analysed dimension

of social equality in relation to parental leave policies. Although redistribution is not a direct goal of parental leave policy, paid leave entitlements have the potential to be progressive or regressive in their impact. The extent to which they ameliorate or reproduce income inequalities among recipients depends in part on funding systems (with an earnings-based model tending to consolidate existing hierarchies) but importantly also on whether, and at what level, minimum and maximum payments are set. Under a generous minimum, low paid and marginally employed workers may receive higher payments than their usual wage during the benefit period, thus providing enhanced support for parenting. In the absence of empirical evidence on an optimally redistributive minimum payment, but with an aspiration for a minimum approaching the value of the average wage, we use a 'minimum payment' scale ranging from 0 to > 80% of the average wage for full-time employees. Based on quintiles to capture multiple levels of variation, it allocates scores from 0–5. For consistency, a quintile-based scale is also used (in reverse) for the maximum payment, starting from an upper limit of 200% of the average wage. This limit recognises Gornick and Meyers' (2008, pp. 324–325, 347) suggestion for a cap on paid leave entitlements of twice the national average wage, partly to contain costs but also as a constraint on highly regressive outcomes. A strongly redistributive policy design could, however, impose a lower maximum although again there is no empirical evidence for an optimal level. Given the relative importance of a high minimum (which would have the most impact on parental leave poverty) and the desirability of limiting only the highest earners rather than rewarding cost minimisation, we weight this item less heavily, allocating scores of 0–3 across successively lower income bands, with the lowest set at $\leq 160\%$ of the average wage for full-time workers. To preserve this balance between lower and upper limits, another means of restricting payments to high earners, an income test for access, is not included in the index.

An additional component of the redistribution index, accorded lower weighting again as its impact is less direct, is the taxation of benefits. Gornick and Meyers' (2008, p. 347) suggestion that, in the interests of progressivity, "a portion of high-income recipients' benefits could be taxed" is extended here to taxation of benefits for all recipients. While the impact of such a measure depends on the progressiveness of the income tax scale, it represents a principle consistent with redistribution.

Overall, the importance of this index lies in broadening the focus of social equality analyses of parental leave provisions. Although it requires further testing and refinement, it provides a starting point for such extension. It also draws attention to complementarities and conflicts with other dimensions of social equality—for example, the clear tension between limiting maximum payments here and the priority given to a high replacement wage in the interests of fathers' leave uptake in the gender equality index. These and related complexities

will be drawn out in the ensuing comparison of Australia and Japan and in our conclusion.

3. Comparing Paid Parental Leave Policies in Australia and Japan on Dimensions of Social Equality

3.1. Comparing Contexts and Outlining the Policies

Despite contrasting institutional and cultural traditions, Australia and Japan display similarities as well as differences in welfare state characteristics and gendered work/family models. Australia, while classified among the 'liberal welfare states' (following Esping-Andersen, 1990), retains some vestiges of its history of what Castles (1989) depicted as "social protection by other means"—i.e., the high wages and social protections delivered through a strongly regulated wage-setting system bolstered by industry protection and restricted immigration. An important legacy of this history is the lack of a contributory social insurance scheme, which never gained political support in this context (see, e.g., Whitehouse, 2004). Japan, while exhibiting aspects of both liberal residualism and conservative occupational segmentation and familialism (Esping-Andersen, 1997), also has a history of social protection by other means—in this case through lifelong and full employment as forms of occupational welfare (Hwang, 2016). In contrast with Australia, it maintains a contributory employment insurance scheme. While economic liberalisation has reshaped welfare systems in both countries, this has led in different directions: Australia's system has become increasingly residual while Japan's has expanded, at least partly in response to demographic pressures (Hwang, 2016; Peng, 2002).

Within these welfare state configurations, both countries retain versions of a male breadwinner model. Australia's was institutionalised early in a needs-based family wage for white men and persists in partially modified form in a "maternal part-time work/care regime" (Whitehouse & Brady, 2019, p. 258). Path dependencies associated with male breadwinner norms and liberal philosophies of governments have impeded Australia's move beyond maternalism in parental leave policy (Newsome, 2019), making it an extreme case even within Anglophone liberal welfare states, which—as Baird and O'Brien (2015) note—have made limited advancement on gender equality in leave policies. In Japan, strong male breadwinner norms have been deeply embedded in the lifetime employment and seniority wages system for men and the associated 'reproductive bargain' that allocates responsibility for family care to women (Gottfried, 2015). Although lifetime employment has been eroded to some extent, the male breadwinner model continues to be reflected in highly gender-segmented labour markets. Women are significantly overrepresented in peripheral insecure work (Gottfried & O'Reilly, 2002) and high levels of commitment and long hours are demanded from those in the core labour market (Boling, 2015;

Brinton & Mun, 2016). In this context, a significant proportion of women exit the labour market before the birth of a child (Nakazato, 2019, p. 106). Thus, while Japan has been able to extend its parental leave provisions, there are considerable pressures limiting uptake.

This contextual shaping of paid parental leave policy underpins a complex set of cross-national similarities and differences. A basic similarity is that both countries have 'parental' leave provisions consistent with the definition of "a care-related right available to both mothers and fathers" (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020, p. 589). Both extend these entitlements to birth and adoptive parents, although Japan's provisions do not include the non-birth parent in same-sex couples. However, neither country offers the combination of maternity, paternity and parental leave that is commonly observed in Europe, at least not formally under those terms. In Australia, 'parental leave' is the term used for the individual entitlement to unpaid leave of 12 months for each parent, with 'parental leave pay' used for the payment available under the Paid Parental Leave scheme that commenced operation in 2011. The latter provides up to 18 weeks payment for the child's primary carer. Despite the gender-neutral wording the payment is directed initially to the mother who may subsequently transfer all or part of it in specified circumstances. Since 2013, these arrangements have been supplemented with a 2-week 'dad and partner pay' benefit solely for fathers/partners. This is equivalent to a short paternity leave payment although the term 'paternity' is avoided in the interests of signalling availability to same-sex couples. Both schemes are paid at a flat rate aligned with the national minimum wage, funded through general revenue.

In Japan, the two forms of paid leave available are termed maternity (literally 'pre-natal and post-natal') leave and parental (literally 'childcare') leave. The former provides the birth mother with benefits for up to six weeks prior to and eight weeks after the birth; the latter (which is the focus of our analysis) is an individual 12-month entitlement available to both parents for use within the first 12 months of the child's life (a period that can be extended to a maximum of 14 months from the child's birth if the father takes some leave). While there is no paternity leave as such, the provision to allow fathers to take a portion of their parental leave entitlement during the first eight weeks after the birth can be seen as allowing a period of leave for fathers commensurate with a mother's 'maternity leave.' The parental leave scheme is funded through employment insurance, providing earnings-based payments set at 67% for the first 180 days of parental leave, then 50% for the remainder.

Further details on the policies under investigation are drawn out in the analysis that follows. We focus on policy design differences relating to inclusion, gender equality and redistribution, reflecting on the influence of the contextual factors we have outlined.

3.2. Comparing Policies on Inclusion, Gender Equality and Redistribution

Scores for Australia and Japan on each of the items that comprise the indices in Table 1 are given in Table A1 (see Supplementary File). Figure 1 presents the index scores as percentages, consistent with our depiction of the indices as representing equally important dimensions of social equality. As Figure 1 shows, the countries performed very differently on the three indices, most markedly on gender equality where Japan recorded a full score while Australia only achieved 21%. However, Australia scored more highly than Japan on the other two indices, particularly on redistribution. These differences are explored in the sub-sections below.

3.2.1. Inclusion

The contrast shown in Figure 1, with Australia scoring 67% and Japan 42% in the inclusion index, is due to variation on two components of the index: the employment period required to qualify for benefits and the inclusion of self-employed workers (for country scores on the items discussed here and in the following sub-sections see Table A1 in the Supplementary File). Examination of these differences, including some more subtle contrasts not captured by the index, suggests where barriers to inclusion lie in spite of attempts in both countries to develop broadly inclusive measures.

Australia’s marginally higher score on the ‘employment period needed to qualify for benefits’ criterion reflects the flexibility of its work test, which requires employment during 10 of the 13 months prior to the birth, for at least 330 hours (equivalent to around one day per week) in that 10-month period (Whitehouse, Baird, & Baxter, 2020, p. 83). The test was explicitly designed to be more inclusive than Australia’s unpaid parental leave, which (as an entitlement located in

the industrial relations regulatory framework) requires 12 months with the same employer prior to access. Funding of the payment scheme through general revenue, while introducing complexities by locating leave and payment in different regulatory arenas, allowed the flexibility to expand eligibility in ways that acknowledged the likely irregularity of women’s employment patterns. In Japan, eligibility requires a minimum of 12 months insurance contributions over the past two years, which places it in the more restrictive category of ≥ 12 months of employment for qualification. However, the benefit is available to employees with irregular working patterns, the lower limit being a work history of 11 or more days in each of those 12 months (Nakazato, Nishimura, & Takezawa, 2020, p. 356).

Both countries score points for allowing interruptions and changes of employer during the qualifying period for access to payments. In Australia, inclusiveness has been further widened recently with an extension of the permitted period of interruption between work days from eight to 12 weeks (Whitehouse et al., 2020, p. 88).

Turning to the criteria under ‘different employment forms and sectors,’ Japan’s exclusion of the self-employed reflects the scope of its employment insurance system, but neither country excludes particular professions or sectors, or those below a specified earnings level. As we have outlined above, both impose access limits based on working time: the equivalent of around one day per week in Australia and 11 days per month in Japan during the qualifying periods. Although beyond our focus on statutory provisions, we also note that employers in Japan are not obliged to have employees working < 20 hours/week covered by employment insurance, hence many of these workers may be ineligible for benefits. For employees on fixed-term contracts (i.e., those with a specified end date), there are no explicit restrictions in Australia other than to meet the work test, which may still exclude some depending on the timing

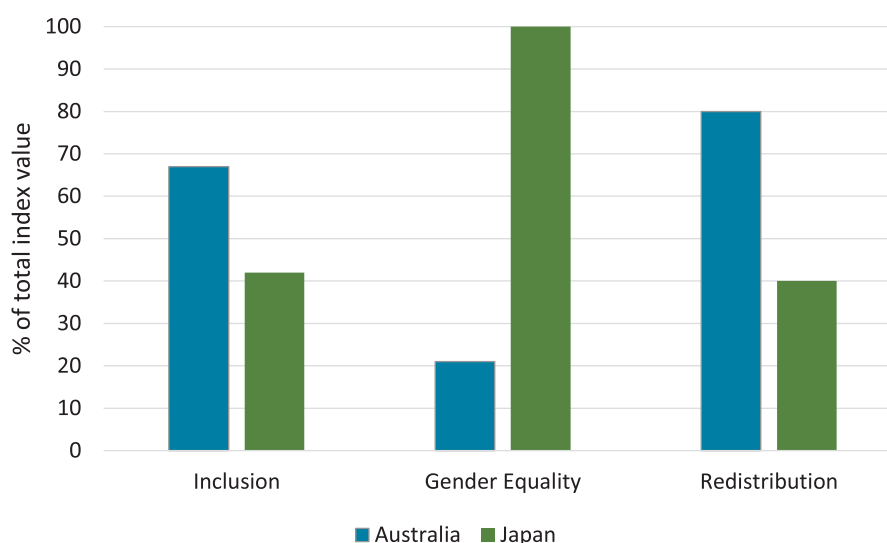


Figure 1. Inclusion, gender equality and redistribution in paid parental leave policy, Australia and Japan, 2020.

and duration of the employment term. In Japan, fixed-term employees can access leave (and thus payment, which cannot be received in the absence of the leave entitlement) provided the employee has been with the employer continuously for 12 months and it is not obvious that the contract will end before the child reaches 18 months and not be extended (Nakazato et al., 2020, p. 356). While differences in the classification of employment types in national statistics prevent meaningful comparison between the countries on the implications of these restrictions, we note that both countries have highly-divided labour markets, with a persistently high proportion of employees in non-standard ('non-regular' in Japan) employment (Cooke & Jiang, 2017; Whitehouse & Brady, 2019, p. 260).

Overall, differences in inclusiveness between the countries are at least partly attributable to funding arrangements, with Japan's employment insurance model requiring a higher level of workforce engagement than Australia's government-funded system. Additionally, while both countries have marked labour market divisions, the distinction between regular and non-regular status is particularly strong in Japan, with non-regular (including part-time) work providing limited access to employment and social welfare benefits (Boling, 2015, p. 152). In both cases there is a risk of the further erosion of access with increases in marginal forms of employment. While these pressures, and the current less than optimal performance of both countries on this index, raise concerns for inclusion, there are also questions over how inclusive employment-based systems can become without eroding other dimensions of social equality (an issue we return to in the conclusion).

3.2.2. Gender Equality

As Figure 1 shows, the countries differ most on the gender equality index, with Australia scoring only 21% compared with Japan's 100%. The discrepancy is greatest on the first two items. Australia's low score on 'gendered allocation and transferability of leave' reflects its direction of parental leave payments primarily to mothers. While there are provisions for its transfer to another carer in specified circumstances (see Whitehouse et al., 2020, pp. 82–83), the initial recipient is the mother. In contrast, Japan's fully non-transferable individual entitlements place it at the top of this scale.

On 'duration of well-paid non-transferable leave for fathers,' Australia scores 0, with none of the parental leave payment entitlement well-paid or reserved for fathers. While the limited benefit available under 'dad and partner pay' is non-transferable, it is in effect a short paternity rather than a parental leave entitlement and is not well-paid. In contrast, Japan receives the maximum score for its 12-month individual non-transferable entitlement for fathers paid at 67% of previous earnings for the first 180 days. Although capped, the maximum

monthly benefit for this period is 94% of the average monthly wage (based on 2019 figures).

Turning to 'duration of leave for mothers,' Australia scores one point for its 18-week entitlement but Japan scores 2 for the optimal category of '6–12 months.' While there is provision for an extension of parental leave in Japan when a childcare place is not available—circumstances in which Japan would score only 1 point (for > 12 but < 24 months)—we use the general rule rather than the exception for scoring.

Only Japan scores a point for 'incentives for fathers' uptake.' In 2010, an additional two months of leave was provided, extending the permissible leave-taking period from 12 to 14 months after the child's birth if the father takes at least two months' leave, or by a lesser amount if the father takes < 2 months (this does not, however, change the 12-months maximum for each parent.) On the 'flexibility' items, Australia scores a half-point for a recently introduced provision that allows the 18-week entitlement to be split into an initial 12-week block to be used in the first 12 months, with the remainder accessible any time during the first two years (for further details see Whitehouse et al., 2020, p. 89). Both of the listed flexibility items are available in Japan, where, since 2010, fathers can take some of their leave entitlement during the first eight weeks following a birth and a second block at a later stage within the permitted period of up to 14 months after the child's birth (Nakazato et al., 2020, p. 356). Mothers may also take a break between their maternity leave and parental leave, but each of those entitlements must be taken in a continuous block. Additionally, in Japan benefit recipients may return to work part-time for up to 80 hours during a monthly payment period, in which case the benefit is adjusted so that the sum of their earnings and benefit does not exceed 80% of their earnings prior to taking leave. These subtleties in comparison underline the complexity of national policy designs and the varying ways in which incremental changes can extend the capacity for gender equality, at least at the margins.

More fundamental changes are inevitably constrained by welfare state and gender norms, only rarely gaining political traction. Australia's poor overall performance on this index reflects path dependencies in funding arrangements and a residual and maternalist welfare state. Japan's capacity to innovate stems from the confluence of systemic factors (specifically the suitability of individual entitlements within an employment insurance system and the contributory funding arrangements that reduced the direct cost to government of successive increases towards the current generous benefit levels) and the expansion of its welfare state from the 1990s in response to "gender and demographic imperatives" (Peng, 2002, p. 412). These imperatives included the pressures of women's activism and the increasing attention to gender equality in public discourse following passage of the *Basic Act for a Gender Equal Society* in 1999 as well as persistent concerns over falling fertility rates

(see Nakazato, 2019). The frequency of references to fathers' low take-up rates in parliamentary discussions in the early 2000s, and the policy amendments subsequently designed to redress this problem, illustrate the political salience of the issue over a sustained period.

An important caveat is that, in spite of generous gender-egalitarian provisions, take-up rates among fathers are very low in Japan. A survey of private enterprises in 2019 showed that 7.48% of male workers whose spouse had given birth between 1 October 2017 and 30 September 2018 had started or applied for paid parental leave by 1 October 2019 (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2020, p. 22). Without change in the expectation of high levels of commitment and long working hours for full-time permanent workers that remain persistent features of Japanese corporate culture and shape managers' attitudes towards parental leave (see Brinton & Mun, 2016), this disjunction between gender egalitarian design and gender equality in practice is likely to persist (the different model of paid parental leave in Australia and lack of relevant statistics prevent comparison of the two countries on uptake levels).

Overall, differences between the countries on the gender equality index are again significantly shaped by the contrasting funding systems. Japan's contributory social insurance scheme (seen in the previous section as partially constraining the flexibility for widening inclusiveness) enables higher payments than those possible within Australia's general revenue arrangements. However, this contrast in payment systems has a different set of implications for our third index.

3.2.3. Redistribution

As indicated in Figure 1, Australia ranks considerably higher than Japan on the redistribution index, scoring 80% compared with Japan's 40%. Differences on the 'minimum payment' component reflect the contrast between Australia's flat-rate, and Japan's earnings-based, payment systems. Set at the national minimum wage, Australia's arrangements provide recipients with 44% of the full-time average weekly wage (based on 2019 figures for consistency of comparison between the two countries). The benefit is paid at the full-time rate, thus providing some recipients with higher payments during their leave period than in their pre-leave employment. In Japan, while there is a minimum monthly payment, it is set at a comparatively low level, varying in 2019 between 15% of average monthly earnings for full-time employees (for the first 180 days) and 12% (for the remainder of the entitlement). This wide discrepancy between the countries highlights the comparatively regressive effect of earnings-based funding arrangements, with Australia's high minimum wage further widening the gap between the two countries.

On the 'maximum payment/cap' item, both countries fall into the $\leq 160\%$ average wage category, hence both receive full scores. Under Australia's flat-rate system, the

maximum is the same as the minimum (44% of the average wage), while Japan's maximum payment (represented by a cap on its earnings-based benefit) is equivalent to 94% of the average wage for full-time employees for the first 180 days of the entitlement, reducing to 70% for the remainder. Although these are very different levels (and Australia also imposes an income test on access which is not captured in the index), even Japan's higher maximum is well below the cut-offs applied here for reduced scores due to 'regressive' levels of maximum payments.

On the final component of this index, 'payments taxable,' only Australia gains points. Taxation of benefits was adopted in Australia both as consistent with redistributive goals and as a means of distinguishing the benefit from a welfare payment (Productivity Commission, 2009, p. 27). In combination with a flat-rate payment, which was a clear disadvantage for the gender equality index but is advantageous here, this produces a wide gap in overall scores between the two countries. While Japan places caps on high payments, it also sets very low minimum payments, thus significantly limiting the capacity for redistributive benefits.

4. Conclusion

Australia and Japan represent distinctive manifestations of selective employment-based paid parental leave entitlement systems with differing capacities for advancing social equality within their policy designs. This is clearly illustrated in their disparities both within and between the three indices used in this analysis. While their provisions are continually being modified through incremental adjustments, these are unlikely to erode the main dissimilarities between them or produce optimal outcomes in either country in the near future. Although Japan's innovations on gender equality (which underpin the starkest difference between the two countries) are a reminder that radical policy changes can occur, they also indicate that complementary changes in social and labour market norms are essential if gender egalitarian policy design is to be translated into gender equality in outcomes.

Among the lessons from our comparison is the importance of funding systems as drivers of policy difference. A contributory employment insurance scheme has distinct advantages for the generosity of payments: Australia's general revenue funding model renders anything other than a flat-rate payment politically contentious, while Japan's insurance model presented less of a barrier to claims in that country for more generous entitlements. However, there is no consistent 'winner' between insurance-based and general revenue-based systems across the three dimensions of social equality under examination here. While gender equality is enhanced by the more generous payments available under an insurance scheme, Australia's higher score in relation to inclusion at least partly reflects its

government-funded benefit scheme which allowed for less restrictive eligibility criteria than those applying to its unpaid leave benefit under employment regulation. Although extensions of coverage are not impossible under a social insurance scheme, the requirement for contributions in return for benefits may place stronger limits on the extent to which eligibility can be expanded. Moreover, general revenue funding (to the extent that it predisposes to modest flat-rate benefits) has the capacity to enhance redistribution—essentially by avoiding the inbuilt regressivity in earnings-based systems that are more likely to be supported by insurance funding. As Blofield and Martínez Franzoni (2015) argue, contributory systems benefit higher earners and standard full-time workers disproportionately.

These tensions between our three dimensions highlight the complexities of social equality as a normative vision, raising questions over whether explicit trade-offs are needed between them. One strategy could be to prioritise building on complementary features. For example, high minimum benefits potentially enhance both class and gender equality through supporting the (disproportionately female) lower paid and marginally employed. Other tensions, such as the tendency of looser eligibility criteria to undermine the dual earner/dual caregiver family model that underpins gender equality goals, may require calculated trade-offs, although the measures noted in the following paragraph could significantly lessen this conflict.

Ultimately a more socially egalitarian context is needed to enable the translation of social equality in policy design into egalitarian outcomes—as Moss and Deven (1999) have perceptively noted in relation to gender equality. Rather than a disabling circularity, this observation underlines the importance of a complementary set of social equality policies, both in response to widening inequality generally (e.g., through increasingly progressive taxation) and particularly in relation to deepening labour market divisions (through employment regulation). Similarly, narrowing the gender pay gap would reduce the tension between conflicting pressures for high payments to encourage fathers' leave uptake and limiting regressive distribution of benefits. A more egalitarian labour market would reduce the likelihood that social equality provisions in policy design fail to translate into equality in outcomes or exacerbate tensions between gender equality and inclusion. While this broader regulatory framework is not on the agenda in Australia or Japan, it is the context in which employment-based paid parental leave policies have the greatest potential to contribute to a more egalitarian future.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Article

Social Inclusion or Gender Equality? Political Discourses on Parental Leave in Finland and Sweden

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Abstract

During the 2010s, both Finland and Sweden made advancements in their parental leave systems by widening the right to paid parental leave to a greater diversity of family constellations and investing in gender-equal leave distribution through longer leave periods reserved for the father. However, in the latter respect, Sweden has remained more successful than Finland. This article analyses government and political party discourses in Finland and Sweden during the 2010s in pursuit of an explanation to this difference and for understanding how ideas on social inclusion and gender equality have been used to drive, or block, policy reforms in the field of parental leave. The results show that the parental leave discourses have become influenced by ideas on social inclusion and gender equality in both countries, but in somewhat different ways. While gender equality has retained a stronger position in the Swedish discourse and its policy, social inclusion, and notably the rights of same-sex parents, have become more visible in the Finnish. However, the results also show that both ideas have remained contested on a party level, especially by confessional and nationalist-populist parties.

Keywords

2010s; Finland; gender equality; government; parental leave distribution; political discourse; political party; Sweden

Issue

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1. Introduction

From an international perspective, Finland and Sweden appear similar when it comes to parental leave policy. Both are Nordic dual earner/dual carer models with socially including and gender-equal parental leave systems that not only acknowledge leave rights for a diversity of families, but also seek to share leave more equally between mothers and fathers (Haataja & Nyberg, 2006). Parental benefits are income-related with relatively high replacement rates and a minimum flat-rate allowance for parents without prior incomes. In both countries, parental leaves are financed through contri-

butions mainly from the employer (Försäkringskassan, 2020a; Lammi-Taskula & Takala, 2009).

During the 2010s, both Finland and Sweden have conducted reforms that aimed towards higher social inclusion in their parental leave systems, for example, by strengthening the rights of single parents and same-sex parents (Wong, Jou, Raub, & Heymann, 2019). However, while Sweden has also simultaneously strengthened its already more gender-equal system, Finland has been less successful in this respect. The Swedish leave system is not only more generous and flexible than the Finnish, but it also grants parents longer periods of leave reserved for each parent. This, in turn, is linked

to a higher leave uptake rate of Swedish fathers (Eydal et al., 2015; Eydal, Rostgaard, & Hiilamo, 2018). For instance, in 2016, Swedish fathers used 28.2% of all leave, but Finnish fathers used only 10.5% (NOSOSCO, 2017, p. 56). Correspondingly, in 2015, the employment rate of Swedish mothers with children under three surpassed that of Finnish mothers (Statistics Finland, 2017). Previous research has explained this divergence in gender-equal leave policy by pointing at the more prominent role that trade unions and employers play in the Finnish policymaking process (Lammi-Taskula & Takala, 2009). It has also suggested that the principle of gender equality is stronger in Sweden while traditional family values and notions of freedom of choice remain more salient in Finland (Hiilamo & Kangas, 2009; Ylikännö, Hakovirta, & Salin, 2016). However, given the centrality of political parties in family policymaking (e.g., Cedstrand, 2011; Häusermann, Picot, & Geering, 2013; Nyby, 2020), there is surprisingly scant research on their role in recent developments of Finnish and Swedish parental leave policy.

This article contributes to the literature by analysing how governments and leading parties in both countries have politicised parental leave rights during the 2010s against the backdrop of ideas on social inclusion and gender equality. Both these ideas pertain to the fundamental question of who is to be considered a parent and who can claim parental leave. However, we define social inclusion as the idea of how this right is to be distributed between different family constellations (cf. Wong et al., 2019), while gender equality concerns how it is to be distributed between women and men within families (Auth & Martinek, 2017; Eydal et al., 2018; see also section three). Based on this, our aim is to analyse government and party programmes from both countries to discern how these ideas have been understood and used in discourses legitimating, or contesting, parental leave reforms. If there is discursive convergence, this may not only suggest a transfer of ideas and social learning (Hulme, 2005), but also indicate that policy convergence is likely to follow.

The article contributes to the literature in at least two ways. First, it sheds light upon the role of political parties, discourses and ideas for parental leave policy. Second, it helps to assess whether political discourses on parental leave have remained distinct or become more similar in Finland and Sweden during this period. Such knowledge will contribute to understanding policy transfers between neighbouring countries.

The rest of the article is structured in the following way. Next, we shortly present the development of the Finnish and Swedish parental leave systems to contextualise our analysis. The following theoretical section discusses the role of political parties and ideas in parental leave policy. Thereafter, our data and methods are presented. The penultimate section presents our findings, and the final section concludes and discussed the findings.

2. The Finnish and Swedish Parental Leave Systems: Historical Milestones and Current Outlooks

In both Finland and Sweden, the origins of parental leave can be traced to the early 1900s and the ambition to protect working mothers in relation to childbirth (Wennemo, 1994). Over time, both systems have developed into highly generous systems that acknowledge both a diversity of families and gendered rights to parental leave (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020; Eydal et al., 2018).

In Finland, the issue of maternity insurance was discussed already in the 1920s, but the introduction of such a social right was delayed until 1963 when mothers became eligible for a nine-week maternity allowance as a part of the National Health Insurance. Since then, the leave rights have been extended several times and become more socially including as well as more gender-equal. From the beginning, the parental leave system catered for a diversity of families, both working-class and rural families. During the following decades, also other family types, such as adoptive parents, were included in the system. A major step towards higher social inclusion was taken in 2014, when a government committee (STM, 2015) suggested leave rights also for ‘new’ types of families, such as same-sex parents (so-called rainbow families). In 2017, these families received leave rights, and in 2019 leave rights for single parents and transgender persons were expanded (see Moring & Lammi-Taskula, 2021).

Alongside parental leave, also universal public childcare saw daylight in Finland in 1973. The right to claim public childcare was expanded to all children under three in 1990 and to all children under school age in 1996. In order to relieve the pressure on public childcare services and support the home care of small children, a child home-care allowance (*Kotihoidon tuki*) was introduced in 1985 (Hiilamo, 2002). This benefit, which is mostly used directly after the parental leave period, has become quite popular, especially among mothers with lower education and more insecure labour market position (e.g., Salmi & Lammi-Taskula, 2014).

Since 1978, Finnish fathers have also been able to claim paid parental leave, first through a two-week paid paternity leave (dependent upon the mother’s permission) and since 1991 through a ‘daddy quota’ that could not be transferred to the mother without being forfeited. They have also for some time had the right to use the shareable period of parental leave, even if few fathers have used this option. The one-week quota was extended to three weeks in 1993, but at the expense of the total length of parental leave. In 2003, fathers received a two-week non-transferable leave bonus if they used two weeks of the transferable parental leave period. This combined leave became the ‘father’s month’ in 2007, but while it was more flexible than before, it was still tied to the usage of the transferable parental leave (Lammi-Taskula & Takala, 2009). In 2010, the leave bonus was extended to four weeks, which meant that

the father could be on leave for six weeks in total if he used two weeks of the transferable parental leave (Salmi & Lammi-Taskula, 2014). In 2011, the parental leave committee (STM, 2011) suggested an even more ambitious reform for increasing gender equality, and one alternative in this proposal was to introduce three-month non-transferable 'quotas' for both the mother and the father with a further three-month period that could be shared. However, this proposal failed to materialise and instead a nine-week quota called paternal leave was introduced in 2013, including a three-week part that could be used simultaneously with the mother (Salmi & Lammi-Taskula, 2014).

Since 2013, there have been no further changes in the gender structure of parental leave in Finland. In 2017, the centre-right government tried to reform the parental leave system in a more gender-equal way, but failed. However, in 2019, the left-centre coalition led by the Social Democrats once again placed the question of a more gender-equal parental leave on the agenda by suggesting longer quotas for both the father and the mother. The government's proposal including a 6.4-month reserved quota for each parent with a transferable period of 0–63 days was presented in February 2021 and is scheduled to take effect in August 2022 (STM, 2021).

Meanwhile, the existing system in Finland includes 17.5-week maternity leave, a nine-week paternity leave and a 26.3-week transferable parental leave, on top of which care leave and a home-care allowance can be used for children under three. The replacement rate of parental allowance is 70% and the basic amount approx. 29€/day for persons with yearly incomes under 11 943€ (Kela, 2020).

In Sweden, the protection of working women delivering a child has also been discussed since the beginning of the 1900s (Lundqvist, 2007). Maternity leave was introduced in the 1930s, but in the beginning mainly as a means-tested benefit. A major shift in debate and policy took place in the 1960s when the voices for gender equality through women's economic independence were combined with the increasing demand for female labour in the growing public sector (Stanfors, 2007). In 1974, as a consequence of the wide cross-party support for the dual-earner family, maternity leave was replaced by parental leave. A six-month-long parental leave now became available for parents to share as they wished, with allowances replacing 90% of their incomes.

When registered partnership for same-sex couples became recognised in Sweden in 1995, one consequence was that both partners in such unions received leave rights. In 2003, same-sex parenthood was recognised, which affected female partners of biological mothers (Evertsson, Jaspers, & Moberg, 2020). However, only in 2019 did it become possible for one parent to transfer his or her parental leave days to a partner (who is not the biological parent). This change facilitated the sharing of care among a greater number of adults and

also aimed to facilitate situations of a pending adoption (for example, when one partner was inseminated) (Försäkringskassan, 2020b).

As Swedish mothers' labour force participation increased during the 1970s, the focus of the parental leave debate turned to fathers' participation in child-care. A major change came with the introduction of the fathers' quota in 1995. This reform reserved one month of the 15-month long leave period for the other parent, which was the father in most cases. The reform led to a sharp increase in the share of fathers with children under two taking up leave. Overnight, this share increased from 44% to 77% (Duvander & Johansson, 2012). The reserved month was introduced together with a child home-care allowance (*Vårdnadsbidrag*) by the conservative-liberal government, but the home-care leave was later abolished by the Social-Democratic government (Ferrarini & Duvander, 2010). The reserved month was further extended to two months in 2002, together with a one-month extension of the parental leave. In 2008, the conservative-liberal coalition introduced the so-called gender equality bonus (*Jämställdhetsbonus*), a tax incentive for increasing fathers' childcare participation. It also reinstalled the child home-care allowance on the municipal level. However, the gender equality bonus did not lead to major changes in fathers' uptake, and the child home-care allowance never gained popularity (Duvander & Ellingsæter, 2016; Duvander & Johansson, 2012). In 2016, the Social-Democratic coalition abolished both the gender equality bonus and the child home-care allowance, but reserved the third month for each parent without much resistance or even attention. Since then, a further extension of leave rights suggesting a division of the total leave period into three parts, one to each parent and one to share according to wishes, has been discussed (SOU, 2017, p. 101) but has thus far not led to any reform.

During the 1900s, the demand for female labour and the rise of gender-equal ideas in Sweden led to voices demanding public childcare expansion. This expansion gained speed in the end of the 1970s resulting in an extension of publically financed childcare provision (Gustafsson & Stafford, 1992). However, not until the childcare guarantee and standardized fees were institutionalised at the end of the 1990s, could one speak of universal childcare (Nyberg, 2000).

Since 2002, the parental leave in Sweden is 16 months, or 8 months per each parent. The benefit is set at almost 80% of earlier income for the first 13 months, while the remaining months are replaced at a low flat rate. Parents with no prior income are entitled to a low flat-rate (today 25€ a day) benefit for the first 13 months (Försäkringskassan, 2020a).

3. Parties, Ideas and the Politics of Parental Leave

There are various theoretical explanations for the development of family policy, including parental leave (e.g.,

Wennemo, 1994). Some of these use a functional logic explaining family policy change as an outcome of structural factors and changing social needs. Another group of explanations focusses on the political struggle between ideologies and interests advocated by classes, political parties or other actors. A third group emanates from institutional theory emphasising, for example, lock-in effects and path dependency as well as policy diffusion and influential ideas (e.g., Kuebler, 2007). This article departs from the second and third of these strands suggesting that political parties play a vital role in parental leave policy development, but that these processes are influenced by institutional factors as well as ideas and policy recommendations emanating from supranational agencies, such as the European Union or the OECD.

Political parties fulfil several important functions. For instance, they formulate ideologies and programmes that provide voters with political alternatives necessary for democracy. Second, they seek enough electoral support for obtaining the parliamentary power needed for influencing legislation. In this process, they need strategies, but also compromises. This is especially true for countries with proportional voting systems and unicameral parliaments, where coalition governments are the rule (Häusermann et al., 2013; Lewin, 2020). For this article, the first of the abovementioned functions is central since it relates to how parties understand, construct and formulate propositions for policy and how they invoke influential ideas in this process (Nyby, 2020). Party programmes or election manifestos play an important role in this respect since they create identity, define core values, and provide cognitive frames for understanding and positioning themselves in relation to what is going on in the world (Freeden, 1996).

However, party ideologies do not exist in a vacuum; they evolve in tandem with the changing world. One such change is the emergence of 'new' family constellations and 'new' social needs (Nygård, Nyby, & Kuisma, 2019). Another is the globalisation process that has highlighted the role of supranational actors and influential ideas in politics, as well as in parental leave policy. Today, national governments and political parties operate in a more open world with higher uncertainty, which has made them more susceptible to supranational ideas, social learning and policy benchmarking as ways of dealing with uncertainty (Hulme, 2005).

An example of such an idea within parental leave policy is that of social inclusion, that is, the idea that parental leave policy needs to acknowledge a greater diversity of family constellations (Wong et al., 2019). Historically, this idea is closely related to the notion of social and citizen rights and the question of whether parental leave should be based on citizenship or employment history (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020). However, in today's globalised world, the meaning of 'inclusiveness' has become increasingly influenced by the greater variety of family constellations in need of social rights, such as same-sex parents, transgender parents or immigrant parents (cf. European

Commission, 2019; Wong et al., 2019). Consequently, the debate about social inclusion does not only concern whether the leave rights of parents in traditional, different-sex families should be based on citizenship or previous employment, but also whether such rights should pertain to other constellations of families, such as same-sex parents (see Moring & Lammi-Taskula, 2021). During the 2000s, this interpretation of social inclusion has become notably influential in relation to same-sex or transgender couples through international treaties, such as the 2007 Yogyakarta Principles outlining central human rights for LGBT persons or policy recommendations from the OECD supporting parenting regardless of partnership status (Wong et al., 2019). For the purpose of this article, though, we do not restrict the notion of social inclusion to same-sex or LGBT couples alone. Instead, it relates to how parental leave policy addresses family diversity in general, that is, how leave rights are to be distributed between different kinds of families and especially how leave policy addresses the rights of a greater diversity of family constellations, such as single-parent families, immigrant families, as well as same-sex and LGBT couples. Other kinds of social inclusion, such as rights for parents in atypical employment or without employment, have not been the focus of the politics in Sweden and Finland during this period, probably as both mothers' and fathers' work are taken for granted.

Another influential idea underpinning parental leave policy is that of gender equality. According to Auth and Martinek (2017), gender equality can be understood in many ways involving several and interrelated policy aims and instruments. However, one of its most central aims is to increase women's integration in the labour market while simultaneously increasing men's engagement in care work, for example, through regulations on shared leave, the combination of part-time work and care work, as well as reserved leave periods for fathers. Historically, the idea of gender equality stems from the women's movement and its struggle to improve the rights and living conditions of women (Eydal et al., 2018; Hiilamo, 2002). However, in the 1990s, it also became an integral part of the influential social investment paradigm, which not only advocated gender equality as a matter of right, but also set this in connection with the objective to raise parental, and notably maternal, employment across Europe and to increase fathers' involvement in care work (e.g., Auth & Martinek, 2017; Morel, Palier, & Palme, 2012). For the purpose of this article, we use this as our starting point and define gender equality narrowly as an ambition to distribute parental leave equally within the family, that is, between the mother and the father.

Political parties, as well as social partners and women's organisations, have played a central role in the shaping of the parental leave systems in Finland and Sweden. When it comes to parties, they have done so according to their ideological beliefs (e.g., Hiilamo, 2002), but also under the influence of dominant ideas,

such as social inclusion and gender equality. Although these ideas may come in many forms, and the ways they become adopted by parties may differ between countries, they play an important role in how parties understand policy problems, how they create solutions and what policy claims they make (Häusermann et al., 2013; Nyby, 2020). During the first decades of the post-war period, the Finnish and Swedish discussions regarding social inclusion mainly concerned whether parental leave should be employment-based or universal, residence-based, social rights (cf. Dobrotić & Blum, 2020). Whereas the former notion has been close to social democracy, residence-based rights have been close to parties representing farmers or conservatives. In both countries, these principles became combined in the post-war parental leave systems, with the former covering salaried parents and the latter providing minimum income protection for other parents (Hiilamo, 2002). In the 1990s and 2000s, however, the question of how to address diversity among families in Finnish and Swedish parental leave became increasingly highlighted by notably leftist and green parties. By contrast, conservatives and especially confessional parties remained reserved to such ambitions (Hiilamo & Kangas, 2009).

Since the 1960s, the idea of gender equality has also become increasingly important in both Finland and Sweden. This idea became endorsed by the Swedish Social Democrats already in the 1960 and later spread to other parties (Cedstrand, 2011). It became a central political objective in Swedish politics and has also influenced parental leave policy in many ways, not least through the introduction of the gender-neutral reserved months of parental leave, also known as daddy (and mommy) months (Ferrarini & Duvander, 2010). However, the use of state-sanctioned regulations to achieve more equal leave uptake has remained a controversial issue for some parties, notably confessional parties that saw such state-sanctioned regulations as infringements upon the freedom of families (Hiilamo & Kangas, 2009). This has also been the case in Finland, where the discussion regarding gender-equal parental leave surfaced in the 1970s and then started to grow in importance. However, due to the scepticism towards state-sanctioned regulation of leave between the mother and the father among the Centre Party, the Finns Party and the Christian Democrats, Finland has not thus far granted fathers the same rights to reserved leave as in Sweden (Lammi-Taskula & Takala, 2009).

In the 2000s, most of the leading parties in Finland and Sweden have endorsed the idea of gender equality as a general objective in parental leave policy, but there is still an ideological divide concerning how parental leave should be divided between the mother and the father, and whether this should be sanctioned by the state. While the political left has largely advocated equal sharing of parental leave with a high degree of state sanctioning, conservative and confessional parties have generally opposed such ideas (Hiilamo & Kangas, 2009).

This divide is also visible in the discussion about the child home-care allowance, which is a contested part of the Finnish family leave system. In general, though, Swedish parties seem to have been more positively disposed to the idea of gender-equal parental leave than their Finnish counterparts. This may be a result of longer periods of Social-Democratic rule (Cedstrand, 2011), but it may also relate to country differences in public opinion, for instance, when it comes to mothers' attitudes towards family roles (Weckström, 2014) or the idea of equal division of paid and unpaid work between spouses (Ylikännö et al., 2016).

To sum up, parties play an important role in the politics of parental leave. They participate in the policymaking process and do so according to different ideologies and ideas, such as social inclusion and gender equality. Based on this, we expect to find a growing influence of social inclusion and gender equality ideas on government and party discourses on parental leave in Finland and Sweden during the 2010s. Secondly, however, we expect these ideas to be aligned along ideological lines, with the political left advocating higher levels of social inclusion and state-regulated gender equality and conservative/confessional parties being more hesitant towards such ideas. In the next section, we describe how we investigated these hypotheses methodologically.

4. Data and Method

We conducted qualitative content analyses of government programmes and government declarations, party election programmes, as well as various reports from committees preparing reforms in this area. Documentary data of this kind provides rich and ample information concerning how preferences, interests and ideological values penetrate discourses influencing policy changes (Nygård et al., 2019). Government programmes (Finland) list the policies to be conducted during the government term as well as the motivations behind them. Since such programmes are not available in Sweden, we used government declarations given by the Prime Minister (PM) at the opening of the Swedish parliament. It should be noted, though, that government documents mostly reflect compromises between the governing parties and do not constitute the view of a single party. Therefore, we also analysed election programmes and programmes on family policy published by the seven largest parties in each country. For Finland, this group included the Social Democratic Party, the Conservatives, the Centre Party, the Finns Party, the Left Alliance, the Green Party and the Christian Democrats. For Sweden, it included the Social Democrats, the Conservatives, the Centre Party, the Sweden Democrats, the Left Party, the Christian Democrats and the Liberals. By studying such programmes, we can identify and follow discourses on parental leave on both a governmental and a party level and study how they have related to questions on social inclusion and gender equality.

In total, we analysed seven government programmes and 33 election manifestos and family policy programmes from Finland, as well as 11 government declarations and 21 election programmes from Sweden (see Supplementary File). Moreover, a number of committee reports and government bills were analysed for the sake of depth and context. In Finland, the political constellation during the 2010s has been characterised by broad coalitions, including the centre-right coalition of Kiviniemi (2010–2011), the right-left coalitions of Katainen and Stubb (2011–2014 and 2014–2015), the centre-right coalition of Sipilä (2015–2019), and the left-centre coalition of Rinne/Marin (from 2019). In Sweden, the political landscape has been more visibly characterised by ‘bloc politics,’ minority coalitions led by the Social Democrats and the strength of the populist Sweden Democrats (Lewin, 2020). We studied the right-centre “Alliance” coalition of Reinfeldt (2010–2014), the Löfven I coalition between the Social Democrats and the Greens (2014–2018) and the Löfven II coalition also led by the Social Democrats. Noteworthy is also that the studied period has been influenced by the economic recession (more so in Finland than in Sweden), an asylum crisis in 2015–2016 and a continuous fall in fertility in both countries. Due to limited space, our focus is restricted to the period prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The analytical two-step approach involved qualitative content analysis with a mix of ‘inductive’ and ‘deductive’ elements (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). First, we conducted general readings of the programmes to get a sense of the whole and locate text relating to parental leave. Second, we identified direct or indirect mentions of parental leave, which we then coded according to

whether they expressed a positive, negative or neutral position regarding ideas on social inclusion and gender equality. For instance, a mention supporting extended parental leave rights for a certain type of family, e.g., same-sex parents, was coded positively for social inclusion. Similarly, a mention supporting the introduction of reserved periods of parental leave was coded positively for gender equality. This analytical approach can be seen as a straightforward, but effective, procedure for analysing discursive patterns underpinning parental leave reform. Although we focus on discourses, we did not use discourse analysis since our interest related more to the categorisation of meaning rather than the revelation of underlying power constellations (Boréus & Bergström, 2017). A limitation is that this strategy says little about the actual policymaking process or the roles of other actors. In the following, we present our results using text excerpts (translated from Finnish and Swedish by the authors) to substantiate our interpretations.

5. Findings

5.1. Finland

In Finland, ideas on both social inclusion and gender equality were discussed in relation to parental leave policy during the 2010s (see Table 1).

However, the idea of social inclusion was addressed only sparsely in government programmes, with the 2013 structural-political programme by PM Katainen advocating the rights of adoptive parents and the 2019 government programme by PM Marin acknowledging the rights of ‘diverse’ families:

Table 1. Overview of government and party discourses regarding parental leave in Finland during the 2010s.

	2011–2014	2015–2018	2019–
Social inclusion			
Government discourse	GP (Katainen) 2013 + STM 2011: 12 +	STM 2015:45 +	GP (Rinne/Marin) 2019 (+)
Party discourse	SocDem/Left/Green + Cen (+)	Left/Cen (+)	SocDem/Left/Con + Green (+)
Gender equality			
Government discourse	GP (Kiviniemi) 2010 (+) GP (Katainen) 2011 + STM 2011:12 +	STM 2015:45 (+)	GP (Rinne/Marin) 2019 +
Party discourse	SocDem/Left/Green/Con + Cen (+)/– Finns/ChD–	SocDem/Left/Green + Cen/Finns (+)/– Con (+) ChD–	SocDem/Left/Green/ Con + Cen/ChD–

Notes: ‘Government discourse’ relates to government programmes (GP) or committee reports (STM). ‘Party discourse’ relates to party election manifestos or similar programmes. ‘+’ denotes a positive position and ‘–’ a negative position on social inclusion/gender equality. ‘SocDem’ is an abbreviation for Social Democrats., ‘Left’ for Left Alliance, ‘Cen’ for Centre Party, ‘Con’ for Conservatives, ‘Finns’ for Finns Party, ‘Green’ for Green League and ‘ChD’ for Christian Democrats. Parentheses indicate an indirect position. The data can be retrieved from the Supplementary File.

The [parental leave] reform will be conducted in a way that treats all families equally, including those representing diversity. (Finnish Government, 2019, p. 135)

Meanwhile, the question of equal parental leave rights for adoptive, single and same-sex families was discussed more extensively in the 2011 and the 2015 committee reports, which ultimately led to the 2017 and 2019 reforms improving leave rights for 'rainbow' parents, as well as single parents and transgender parents. On the party level, social inclusion, including rights for same-sex couples, was discussed most extensively by the Social Democrat and the Greens, but also the Left Alliance, while the Centre Party and the Conservatives mentioned the right of single mothers and the including of close relatives in the child home-care system. No claims relating to social inclusion were found in the programmes by the nationalist-populist Finns Party or the Christian Democrats.

As to the idea of gender equality, the ambitions to achieve higher gender equality in the form of higher levels of father's leave uptake was clearly stated in the 2011 committee report. Furthermore, both the Kiviniemi and the Katainen governments explicitly advocated this objective. However, while the former government, led by the Centre Party, did not say how this was supposed to be achieved, the latter was more specific by pinpointing the use of earmarked leave:

The intention is to increase the earmarked leave for fathers, and to make fathers' use of leave more flexible. (Finnish Government, 2011, p. 70)

Katainen's government, which also included the Social Democrats, thus championed higher paternal leave uptake and partly followed the recommendations given by the 2011 committee report by introducing a nine-week quota for fathers in 2013. It also criticised the child home-care leave for being detrimental to the government's objective to increase gender equality and maternal employment. However, it refrained from a reform of this benefit and instead chose to introduce a flexible care allowance for families with a child under three years of age. Subsequent governments in Finland have thus far refrained from reforming the child home-care allowance. In 2017, the question of a more gender-equal parental leave system resurfaced when the Sipilä centre-right government unexpectedly launched a reform of the system. This initiative was supported by the opposition as well as the major trade unions and the employers' central organisation, but was not mentioned in the 2015 government programme (Elomäki, Mustosmäki, & Koskinen Sandberg, 2020). That the Centre Party halted the reform in 2018 was probably strategically motivated. In the face of the incoming 2019 parliamentary election, it wanted to show its voters that it stood its ground on the preservation of the child home-care allowance. However, in the

programme of Marin's current left-centre coalition, the need to reform parental leave in a gender-equal direction through equal leave quotas for the mother and the father was put back on the table, however with the child home-care allowance untouched:

Together with social partners, we will achieve an ambitious parental leave reform that supports the wellbeing of families. The objective is for leave and care duties to become more evenly distributed between parents....The reform will give mothers and fathers an equal quota of leave months....The child home-care allowance continues in its current form. (Finnish Government, 2019, p. 135)

On the party level, gender-equal parental leave, and notably the question of the child home-care leave, has created a division between the Centre Party, the Finns Party and the Christian Democrats on one side, and the Leftist parties and the Conservatives on the other. While the former camp has supported the home-care leave, the latter has suggested a shortening or even removal of this benefit. As to the question of state-regulated gender equality through quotas, the Christian Democrats has been the only party explicitly opposing such an idea. The Centre Party and the Finns Party have taken a lukewarm position, while the Conservatives, as well as the parties on the left and the Greens, have all supported this idea. Already in 2010–2011, the Left Alliance and the Greens suggested a six-month-long quota for both the mother and the father with a six-month shareable period, extending the total leave period to 18 months. In 2014, the Social Democrats proposed a similar model, but with shorter parental quotas (three months) and a nine-month shareable leave period. In 2019, they suggested a shortening of the shareable leave to six months while simultaneously proposing a one-year leave period with a flat-rate parental allowance (that would substitute the home-care allowance). The Greens and the Social Democrats both referred to the Swedish system of individualised leave right as a best practice, but so did also the Christian Democrats in terms of flexible leave rights. The Conservatives suggested a similar parental leave reform as the Social Democrats, but with a shorter duration. The Finns Party suggested a three-month quota for each parent with a nine-month shareable period, while the Centre Party suggested an extension of the current daddy quota. By contrast, in the 2018 family policy programme by the Christian Democrats, leave quotas were seen as an infringement upon the family:

The Christian Democrats do not support leave quotas between parents, since this would infringe upon the freedom of choice and lead to unnecessary regulation. (Christian Democrats, 2018a, p. 20)

To sum up, while the Finnish discourse on parental leave has clearly been influenced by both ideas on social

inclusion and gender equality, it seems that the latter idea has received more attention than the former, even if no reforms increasing gender equality have been conducted since 2013, while policy advancements have been made regarding social inclusion. Moreover, both ideas seem to have divided parties, with the leftist parties openly supporting social inclusion while conservative and confessional parties have been more reserved, especially when it comes to the rights of 'rainbow' families. Somewhat surprisingly, the idea of state-regulated gender equality through leave quotas seems to have received increasing support over time, even among the Finns Party and the Centre Party. However, it should be noted that the Centre Party has been more ambivalent than the Finns Party in this respect and that both parties, together with the Christian Democrats, have connected this issue to the preservation of the child home-care leave.

5.2. Sweden

In Sweden, the government and party discourses on parental leave during the 2010s also related to both social inclusion and gender equality. While the latter has been in a dominant position, the former has gained more attention over time (see Table 2).

At the beginning of the 2010s, the idea of social inclusion was discussed mainly by the conservative-liberal coalition in relation to improved leave rights for single moms and student families:

For those [parents] that are single, the possibility to use all parental leave days needs to be introduced. (The Alliance, 2010, p. 33)

In the same vein, the Liberals advocated stronger rights to leave for unemployed and sick parents, while the Centre Party supported self-employed parents' rights to leave. However, the conservative-liberal government also framed the idea of social inclusion in a negative way. In 2010, it envisaged stricter entitlement rules for immigrants for the sake of more effective integration:

The parental allowance will be adjusted to improve the chances of newly arrived foreign-born women to get a job. (Swedish Government, 2010)

In 2016, the Social-Democratic government launched a committee to prepare a restriction of eligibility rules for immigrant families with older children (Swedish Government, 2016a). In its preliminary report (SOU, 2016), the committee suggested a restriction in leave days for immigrant parents arriving with foreign-born children. The argument was that it would enhance the integration of immigrants and prevent unfairness in terms of 'over-compensating' benefits for immigrant parents' (SOU, 2016, pp. 10-12). In 2017, this restriction was enacted as a part of the 'migration' deal struck between the Social-Democratic coalition and the opposition. Accordingly, parents who immigrated when their child was between 12 and 24 months received 200 days

Table 2. Overview of government and party discourses regarding parental leave in Sweden during the 2010s.

	2010–2014	2014–2017	2018–
Social inclusion			
Government discourse	GD (Reinfeldt) 2010 +/- GD (Reinfeldt) 2012 +	GD (Löfven) 2014 + GD (Löfven) 2015 + SOU 2016:73– SOU 2017:101 +	
Party discourse	Left (+) Lib/Con +	SocDem/Left + Cen +	SocDem + Lib +
Gender equality			
Government discourse	SOU 2011:51 +	GD (Löfven) 2014: +, 0 GD (Löfven) 2015 + SOU 2014:6 + SOU 2015:50 +/-	GD (Löfven) 2019 + SOU 2017 +
Party discourse	SocDem/Left/Lib/Cen + Con +/-(-) ChD/SwD–	SocDem/Left/Lib/Cen + Con + ChD/SwD–	SocDem (+) Left/Lib + Con 0 ChD/SwD–

Notes: 'Government discourse' relates to government declarations (GD) or committee reports (SOU). 'Party discourse' relates to party election manifestos or similar programmes. '+' denotes a positive position and '-' a negative position on social inclusion/gender equality, '0' denotes other mentions regarding parental leave. 'SocDem' is an abbreviation for Social Democrats. 'Left' for Left Party, 'Lib' for Liberal Party, 'Cen' for Centre Party, 'Con' for Conservatives, 'ChD' for Christian Democrats and 'SwD' for Sweden Democrats. Parentheses indicate an indirect position. The data can be retrieved from the Supplementary File.

of parental allowance in total, and parents who immigrated when the child was over 24 months received 100 days in total (Swedish Government, 2017).

In the middle of the 2010s, the idea of social inclusion turned more towards same-sex and transgender families, so-called 'star' or 'rainbow' families. The 2014 and 2015 government declarations, as well as the 2017 committee report, suggested improved leave rights for these family constellations:

The parental leave insurance will be overhauled in order to make it easier for families that identify themselves as star families. (Swedish Government, 2014, p. 9)

The Social Democrats and the Left Party supported this idea in their election programmes, but did not connect it explicitly to the question of equal rights to parental leave. For instance, in their 2018 election programme, the Social Democrats called for higher competence among social care personnel and modernised legislation as a way to ease the lives of "star families" (Social Democrats, 2018, p. 26). The Left Party, which acknowledged 'star families' already in its 2010 election programme, took this discourse a step further by including all families in this category:

We want to see a feminist family policy based on reality, that we are a country of star families where families look different and are formed differently. (The Left Party, 2014)

As to gender equality, both the Swedish government and party discourses in the 2010s related mainly to how to make an already gender-equal parental leave system even more equal. In the conservative-liberal government's discourse, this was something that could be achieved through the existing reserved months, more flexibility, and the so-called gender-equality bonus (The Alliance, 2010). However, when the Social Democrats came back to power in 2014, the government's discourse changed. The gender equality bonus and the child home-care allowance was now portrayed as inefficient tools for changing the uneven division of parental leave, which led to their termination a couple of years later (Swedish Government, 2015a, 2016b). Instead, the government accentuated an expansion of the state-regulated parental quotas as a more efficient way to change parental behaviour in a more gender-equal direction (SOU, 2014, 2015).

In 2015, the Löfven Government stated that it, as the "first feminist" government, was about to bring the Swedish parental leave policy back to the path of gender equality:

The world's first feminist government is now conducting policies that increase gender equality between men and women....A third month is to

be reserved for each parent. (Swedish Government, 2015b, p. 16)

Furthermore, in the 2017 committee report on gender-equal parenthood (SOU, 2017), the idea of gender equality was combined with higher flexibility in an ambition to introduce a "family week," which would be an extension of the current temporary leave for parents in order to increase parents' time together with their children (SOU, 2017; Swedish Government, 2020).

Even though the 2016 introduction of a third reserved month was approved without much discussion, the question of state-regulated leave quotas remained contested by some parties. While the Social Democrats, the Left Party and the Liberals explicitly supported quotas and criticised the child home-care allowance, the Christian Democrats and the nationalist-populist Sweden Democrats vehemently opposed state-regulated quotas and instead advocated more flexibility and freedom for parents to choose how children should be cared for, including the right to use child home-care allowance:

All families are unique and therefore parents themselves know best how they want to arrange the care of their children....Remove the compulsory quotas and make the parental insurance more flexible—The days are to be freely transferable between parents or other close persons. (Christian Democrats, 2018b)

Meanwhile, the Centre Party and the Conservatives took something of a middle position by supporting higher flexibility and freedom of choice in matters of childcare, but refraining from explicitly criticising state-regulated leave quotas.

To sum up, while both the policy development and political discourses in Sweden during the 2010s have shifted back to a more traditional Social-Democratic path based on state-regulated gender equality, there has also been a development in the discourse on social inclusion. This discourse has increasingly highlighted parental leave rights for 'new' family formations and 'star' families, but has also demanded restrictions of unintended benefits for foreign-born children.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this article was to investigate government and party discourses on parental leave in Finland and Sweden during the 2010s against the backdrop of ideas on social inclusion and gender equality. Based on our findings, we can draw the following conclusions.

First, while the focus of Finnish and Swedish government and party discourses during the 2010s has been more on gender equality than social inclusion, the latter idea received a more visible role over time, leading up to major reforms in Finland regarding the rights of single parents and 'rainbow' families. Also, in Sweden, this aspect of social inclusion became more visible over

time. As can be expected, the idea of gender equality has played a more visible role in the Swedish discourse than in the Finnish. Sweden has also made its already gender-equal parental leave more equal through the introduction of the third reserved month in 2016, while Finland has not (thus far) succeeded to conduct further reforms in this field since the 2013 reform. While the increasing role of social inclusion, notably the rights of ‘rainbow’ and ‘star families,’ reflects contemporary changes in the family institution and international agreements (cf. Wong et al., 2019), it also relates to the increasing importance of policy transfer and social learning (Hulme, 2005). Not only have ideas and policy imperatives from the EU and the OECD influenced Finnish and Swedish discourses, it is also clear that Sweden has served as a role model for politicians and civil servants in Finland, especially when it comes to the implementation of gender equality in parental leave policy.

Second, in both countries, the ideas on social inclusion and gender equality in parental leave policy have been understood and implemented differently depending on the ideological stance of governments and parties. Leftist governments and leftist parties in both countries have generally and more explicitly advocated higher social inclusion for a greater diversity of family constellations. They have also advocated higher gender equality in parental leave through state-regulated quotas, while governments and parties on the right have instead advocated higher flexibility and freedom of choice for parent (cf. Hiilamo & Kangas, 2009). However, in Finland, parties, except for the Christian Democrats, seem to have become more positively disposed towards the idea of gender-equal leave through longer and reserved months, which suggests that this particular version of the idea of gender equality is gaining acceptance across ideological lines.

Third, it seems that the Finnish and Swedish discourses on parental leave have become more similar during the 2010s, especially when it comes to the role that gender equality through individual parental quotas plays in the overall debate. Even if Sweden has been more successful in shaping its parental leave system in this direction, Finland has also locked in on this track. Also, the fact that Finland tried to reform its system in 2017–2018 and that the current government plans to introduce parental quotas that are even longer than those in Sweden (STM, 2021) shows that Finland is determined to close in on Sweden in this respect. The observed change in the Finnish party discourse towards a more positive disposition regarding gender equality may be of importance for the completion of a successful parental leave reform. However, although Finnish parties have become more positive towards leave quotas, they still differ in how to implement them, and notably what the role of the controversial child home-care leave should be. It is also noteworthy that even if Finnish discourse on gender-equal parental leave has become more similar to the Swedish, it still seems to be somewhat more ‘traditional’ than the

Swedish, with fewer mentions of gender equality or ‘feminist’ policy.

Since this article used only documentary data, we cannot say much about how ideas on social inclusion or gender equality have penetrated the deeper layers of governments or parties. For this, we need future research that employs also other data. Furthermore, the focus on governments and political parties is another limitation that could be rectified by studying also social partners and other major players. Nevertheless, this study shows that ideas play an important role for political discourse, and that such discourses are important drivers or blockers of reform. It seems not farfetched then that the observed convergence in parental leave discourse in Finland and Sweden may bring along higher convergence also in parental leave policy over time.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Article

How Different Parental Leave Schemes Create Different Take-Up Patterns: Denmark in Nordic Comparison

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Abstract

The prevailing gender ideologies in the Nordic countries generally support the equal division of work and family life between men and women, including the equal sharing of parental leave. Regardless, as the exceptional case in the Nordic region, Denmark currently has no father's quota, and this despite the strong impact such policy has effectively proven to have on gender equality in take-up of parental leave. While a quota intended for the father is instead implemented in Denmark via collective agreements, this is mainly available for fathers in more secure labour market positions. This situates Danish fathers, mothers and their children very unequally regarding parental leave entitlements, and the existing inequalities continue across gender, social class and labour market positions. This article explores to what extent institutional variables vis-à-vis cultural explanations such as gender attitudes provide an understanding of why Danish fathers take less parental leave than other Nordic fathers. We use data from the European Values Study (1990–2017) as well as administrative data for fathers' parental leave take-up in the same period, relative to the other Nordics and for specific education backgrounds. We conclude that Danish men and women are even more supportive of gender equality in terms of work–family life sharing compared to other Nordic countries. This indicates that institutional conditions such as parental leave entitlement matter for leave take-up, but in the Danish case attitudes do less so. Not having a father's quota seems to affect fathers disproportionately across the education divide, and the lower parental leave take-up among Danish men with little education is primarily ascribed to their labour market insecurity. The policy implication is clear: If we want mothers and fathers with different social backgrounds to share parental leave more equally, the policy must change—not attitudes.

Keywords

Denmark; European Values Study; father's quota; gender equality; leave take-up; parental leave; statistics

Issue

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1. Introduction

Gender equality in work and family life is one of the pillars of the Nordic welfare model. There are long historical traditions of public policies supporting both parents with the care for new-born children, either as childcare or parental leave schemes (Eydal et al., 2015; Eydal & Rostgaard, 2018). Parental leave policies divide the Nordic countries, however, particularly regarding the implementation of a father's quota: a separate, use-it-or-

lose-it period of time after the maternity leave intended specifically for fathers to spend time with and care for their child on their own. In this way, the father's quota as policy instrument allows fathers to establish their own childcare practices and routines, which also makes it easier for them to claim their part of the parental leave, both in terms of claims toward their partner but also at the workplace, as this period would otherwise be lost for the family (Haas & Rostgaard, 2011). The literature shows how these quota policies positively impact paternal leave

take-up and contribute to a more gender-equal division of childcare with derived long-term effects on women's labour market participation, career opportunities and life earnings, as well as the division of informal care work between men and women (Duvander et al., 2019).

Unlike its Nordic neighbours, however, Denmark currently has no father's quota and the window of opportunity to introduce such policy appears to have shut (Rostgaard & Lausten, 2014). Instead, the entitlement to a father's quota has increasingly been built into collective agreements and local work contracts. This situates fathers (and their partners and children) differently, as fathers in more vulnerable work positions and male-dominated sectors tend not to have the entitlement. This article investigates the gendered consequences of not having a father's quota for parental leave take-up in general, and more specifically between fathers with different social class backgrounds—here, using education as a proxy. We investigate the importance of institutional variables such as parental leave entitlements relative to attitudes. In particular, we are interested whether attitudes to gender equality are reflected in the parental leave take-up, drawing here on data from the European Values Study (EVS). Acknowledging that there is no simple or one-way relationship between values, attitudes and behaviour (see Bergman, 1998), the article asks whether the low parental leave uptake among Danish fathers reflects a lack of attitudinal support for gender equality in childcare and paid work, both generally and according to social class.

Vis-à-vis its Nordic neighbours, the article presents Danish attitudes and parental leave policies before investigating the differences in parental leave take-up in Denmark according to gender and education background. The article shows how the low proportion of Danish fathers taking parental leave relative to other Nordic fathers is not due to any lack of generalized attitudinal support in Denmark for gender equality in work and family life, but rather due to the lack of gender-equal parental leave policies. We conclude by arguing that gender-equal parental leave take-up has never been viewed in Denmark as a real or urgent policy problem and has therefore not led to substantial policy change with consequences for families across gender and the social divide.

2. Policies Matter; Or is it Rather Attitudes?

Is behaviour determined by attitudes or policies? This is a classic conundrum in political science. Hakim (2000, 2004), as part of her preference theory, argued that various attitudinal factors, including work—lifestyle preferences, motivations and aspirations—are more important than institutional factors for understanding human behaviour and, more specifically so in her study, women's employment take-up. According to Hakim, modern welfare states offer sufficient choices that allow individuals to choose their individual pathways, and this despite the large structural differences across countries in, for

example, their family policies. In contrast, authors with roots in historical institutionalism have argued that politics and policies matter. Esping-Andersen's (1990) seminal study on welfare regimes, for instance, has evaluated the institutional/structural impacts of various policy regimes on individual opinions on welfare policies (see also Arts & Gelissen, 2001; Boje & Ejrnæs, 2012; Esser, 2005; Korpi, 2000; Papadakis & Bean, 1993; Sjöberg, 2004). More specifically regarding childcare and leave policies, Kangas and Rostgaard (2007) have shown that attitudes on family and working life certainly matter, and other studies (e.g., Duvander, 2014) have found gender-equality orientation to matter for how fathers use parental leave. Highly educated men are argued to have more gender-equal attitudes and behaviour, not least regarding parental leave (Boll, Leppin, & Reich, 2013; Geisler & Kreyenfeld, 2011, 2019). However, gender-equal attitudes may be constrained by opportunity structures for women and men that are typically not alike across different countries or education divides; opportunities also depend on institutional factors, such as childcare availability and gender-equality-focused leave policies. This leaves the question of whether attitudes or institutional factors—in this case, parental leave entitlements—drive the variation in leave take-up across gender and social class.

3. Parental Leave and Childcare Policies in the Nordic Countries

The Nordics stand out regarding institutional factors. There is strong institutional and political support for the Adult worker model (Lewis, 1992, 1993) aimed at ensuring that men and women can participate on equal footing in the labour market and in the division of care at home. In her seminal book, Hernes (1987) states that the family has gone public as welfare state has taken over care and proclaimed that the Nordic welfare states were strongly characterized by their 'women friendliness.'

3.1. Childcare Policies in the Nordic Countries

Accordingly, the Nordics invested early on in providing care for children outside the home. In Denmark in particular, the social contract between parents and state prescribes the provision of generous and affordable childcare of reasonable quality from an early age in return for women's high and full-time labour market participation (Boje & Ejrnæs, 2013; Ejrnæs, 2011). Being cared for outside the family is regarded as being healthy and in the best interest of the child, and there is an individual right to childcare from the age of six months. Today, 57% of children up to two years of age and 89% of 3-year-olds are in public childcare (Bureau2000, 2018; figures from 2018). Characteristic of the Nordic countries is also that childcare is equally distributed. In most other OECD countries, children's participation in childcare differs with parental income and/or level of maternal

education, and especially among children under the age of three. In the Nordic countries, children under three participate in childcare regardless of parents' income and education level, which is partly due to the relatively low out-of-pocket cost (Rostgaard, 2014, 2018a, 2018b).

3.2. Nordic Leave Policy

The Nordics also stand out in the early emphasis on gender equality in the leave provision, with Sweden being the first country to introduce parental leave in 1974, and it continues to distinguish itself, now with the longest total leave period among the Nordics, i.e., 69 weeks in total. As seen in Table 1, Denmark is somewhere in the middle. The total length of the Danish maternity, paternity and parental leave is 50 weeks total, which can be extended if taken part-time. While this is somewhat shorter than in Sweden, it is longer than in Finland, Iceland and Norway. As Table 1 illustrates, there is slight variation in the paternity leave length, with fathers being provided with between 2–3 weeks after the birth of their child. Iceland here is the exception, with no paternity leave. Leave is paid, compensation levels varying between 70–100% of former income, and the conditionality of parental-leave benefits is higher in Denmark than, for instance, in Norway (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020). However, the real dividing line is the application of the policy tool of the father's quota. While Denmark does not apply this, other Nordic countries offer between 9–15 weeks.

The father's quota was introduced in the period between 1990 and the 2000s in Iceland, Norway and Sweden. In all three countries, the father's quota has proven to increase the percentage of father's taking parental leave considerably (Eydal & Rostgaard, 2018; Eydal, Rostgaard, & Hiilamo, 2018). Finland initially introduced gendered bonus, which became a father's quota in 2013, and Denmark also introduced a 2-week father's quota early on. It was in place from 1998–2002 and, in this period, the share of Danish fathers taking parental leave rose from 7 to 24% (Rostgaard & Lausten, 2014). In 2002, the father's quota was replaced by a longer parental leave (32 weeks), giving parents a total of up to 52 weeks of maternity, paternity and parental leave. Despite its earlier intentions, the current Social-Democratic government has not attempted to reinstall the father's quota, choosing instead to apply for an

exemption from the EU Work–Life Balance Directive of 2019, regarding a 2-month quota. The Danish government proposed giving parents 16 weeks of parental leave each, but has since abandoned this policy, as it would violate the EU directive.

In this way, Denmark has departed from the other Nordics, not because of any critical juncture caused by an exogenous shock, but rather as an incremental policy change (Thelen, 2004). It would also appear difficult to re-introduce a rhetorical frame that presents the lack of a father's quota as a policy problem, and the window of opportunity for (re-)introducing this as a policy instrument seems to have been lost somewhat (Beland & Howlett, 2016; Kingdon, 1984).

3.3. Father's Quota as a Labour Market Right: More for Some than Others

Instead, the labour market partners representing employers and wage earners have been pushing for the re-introduction of a father's quota. In Denmark, parental leave is not only regulated via national legislation, but also via collective agreements between labour market partners (company-specific local agreements also exist). These labour market rights ensure full wage compensation during leave, but may be contingent on certain conditions, including the father using his father's quota and taking certain weeks of the parental leave period (or instead loses the right to full pay during leave). The vast majority of the workforce is covered by such collective agreements (100% in the public sector, 73% in the private sector; figures from 2018). The state does not guarantee these entitlements, however; they depend on being in employment and in a job covered by the collective agreement.

Interestingly, the private financial sector was actually the first to introduce a father's quota in the Danish context: In 2003, a 4-week father's quota with full pay was introduced. The father's quota has also been included in collective agreements in traditionally male-dominated sectors, such as the industrial sector, where a paid 3-week father's quota with full pay was introduced in 2007. This sector represents 18,000 private sector employers encompassing more than 300,000 employees (two-thirds of whom are men) nationwide, mainly within production (Statistics Denmark, n.d.-a). The number of weeks has been prolonged on multiple occasions

Table 1. Paid leave in Nordic countries (percentage of income and covered weeks; 2020 or most recent year).

	Iceland	Finland	Norway	Denmark	Sweden
% of income	68	63	94	53	78
Total leave weeks	47	48	47	50	69
Of which only father (father's quota)	17	9	15	0	13
Of which father with mother (paternity leave)	0	3	2	2	2

Note: Full-time leave. Source: Based on data from Duvander et al. (2019) and Moss and Duvander (2019). Benefit level data from OECD (n.d.).

(five weeks at the time of our empirical investigation in 2017; at the renegotiation of the collective agreements in 2020, the father's quota was extended to eight weeks in the industrial sector). As regards the public sector, a 6-week father's quota was introduced in 2008, and an additional week was added in 2015. As of 2017, fathers employed in the public sector thus had the right to a 7-week father's quota, two more weeks than in the private, industrial sector.

This seems to position fathers differently across employment sectors, apparently benefitting fathers with higher education levels who are often already favoured by flexible working conditions. As this article investigates, the question becomes whether these institutional factors are mirrored in the actual take-up of parental leave or whether attitudinal factors are the main determinant.

4. Methodology

Our study combines high quality administrative data from Statistics Denmark and the Nordic Counsel with attitudinal survey data from the EVS, a large-scale, cross-national and longitudinal survey program that provides important insight into the attitudes, preferences and values in European countries. The survey data cover mainly 2017 (EVS, 2020), but one comparative analysis is supplemented with data from the 1990, 1999 and 2008 rounds. The administrative data is used to analyse the development in fathers' parental leave take-up in Denmark as well as the parental leave take-up levels among different education groups. To compare attitudes on gender roles in relation to work and care, we use EVS data.

The analysis applies EVS data from the whole sample to investigate general social norms rather than only including the attitudes of fathers (and mothers). Social norms refer to beliefs outside the individual that nevertheless function as a normative filter through which the individual father (and/or mother) may adjust their values and actions (Ajzen, 1988). In this sense, social norms are "concerned with the likelihood that important referent individuals or groups approve or disapprove of performing a given behavior" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 195). Culturally dominant attitudes, for instance about masculinity and fatherhood, may even outweigh individual- and household-level characteristics (Craig & Mullan, 2010). In order to investigate whether there are particular gendered social norms, we analyse the responses for each gender in some of the analysis of attitudes.

In this article, we use three items from the EVS (2020) related to attitudes toward gender roles, family and work. These are:

1. "When a mother works for pay, the children suffer."
2. "A job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children."
3. "A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family."

For all three questions, the response categories are "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree" and "strongly disagree."

We recode the three variables into three binary variables by collapsing "strongly agree" with "agree" and "strongly disagree" with "disagree." The analysis of the EVS data consists of a time series analysis of the development in attitudes over time focusing on item 1, "when a mother works for pay, the children suffer," and a more detailed analysis of all three questions.

The total sample size in the five Nordic countries was 9,384 in 2017 (see the Supplementary File for national sample sizes). A considerable limitation in using EVS data is that one of the questions varies between countries and rounds: In 2017, in Finland, Norway and Sweden, but not in Denmark, the item "A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works" was changed to a more general question: "When a mother works for pay, the children suffer." Regardless, the trend remains similar across the Nordic countries, which indicates that the change in the question has a limited impact on the Danish result.

To analyse the gendered consequences of attitudes regarding parental leave take-up, we use education as proxy for social class background in the analysis. Education is an important predictor of both values and attitudes that could influence parental leave take-up as well as the position in the labour market (Geisler & Kreyenfeld, 2011).

5. Gender Ideology in the Nordic Countries

Overall, gender ideology refers to the attitudes regarding the appropriate roles, rights and responsibilities of men and women in society. In the article, we are initially interested in investigating whether there is an indication of a particular gender ideology in Denmark that may have driven the policy development differently than in the other Nordic countries; and, more specifically, drives a division in parental leave take-up between men and women and according to education in Denmark. Gender ideology may act as a lens through which individuals see their social world and upon which they make decisions, such as whether and when to set up family and human capital investments in education and employment. Over time, and with cohort replacement, individual characteristics contribute less and less to explaining whether an individual holds an egalitarian gender ideology, although women continue to be more likely to hold egalitarian gender ideologies than men (Davis & Greenstein, 2009).

Likewise, support for gender equality may reflect the different institutional and cultural factors embedded in different policy and care regimes. In this way, there seems to be generally strong and increasing support for gender equality in the Nordic societies. This includes increasing support for equal sharing of paid and unpaid work in these societies, which is therefore at odds with the Danish policy development.

The central question for our analysis is whether the low parental leave take-up among Danish fathers reflects

a lack of attitudinal support in Denmark for a more gender-equal division of childcare and paid work, generally as well as according to education divide as a proxy for social class.

5.1. Changes over Time in Social Norms on Gender Roles in the Nordic Countries

We first present the EVS data for the general population level and over time. Figure 1 shows that, for all of the Nordic countries, the percentage in the sample agreeing that “when a mother works for pay, the children suffer” has been declining (EVS, 2015, 2020). This reflects how the opposition toward work-oriented mothers is waning. Although the Nordics all follow the same trend, there are marked differences: Denmark has the lowest support for more traditional gender roles in all survey rounds, whereas we see the most rapid decline in the percentage agreeing that “when a mother works for pay, the children suffer” in Sweden. And the attitudes toward stay-at-home moms are converging in the Nordic countries, with a decline in the home-centric attitudes. Aside from Sweden and Finland, the curve flattens from 2008 to 2017.

5.2. Social Norms on Gender Roles in the Nordic Countries

Moving on to investigate the most recent round of the EVS study from 2017, we focus on three questions relating to gender roles (Table 2), now showing the responses according to gender. On the “When a mother works for pay, the children suffer” question, we find a gender difference in all countries. Overall, men are more like-

ly to agree. Surprisingly, the gender difference is smallest among the Danish respondents (only 3 percentage points versus approx. 9 in Finland, Iceland and Sweden).

When it comes to gender-stereotypical attitudes toward the woman’s role in the family, we also find some marked country and gender differences: Denmark has the lowest proportion of men and women agreeing that “a job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children.” We find the highest proportion of respondents in Finland and Iceland agreeing that women want to stay at home; analysing how men and women respond to this question, we also find that Denmark has the lowest gender difference in gender stereotypical attitudes compared to the other Nordic countries. However, the proportion of gender-stereotypical attitudes is significantly higher among men than women throughout the Nordic region.

Finally, when it comes to the support for the male-breadwinner in a family, regarding the question “A man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family,” we find very little support in all of the countries, with the very least support in Denmark and the greatest support for a male-breadwinner model in Finland. Again, we also find that the support for a male-breadwinner family is significantly higher among men than women.

5.3. Social Norms on Gender Roles in the Nordic Countries According to Education

In the next figures, we investigate how education is associated with attitudes to gender and care. Figure 2 clearly shows that the proportion of respondents agreeing that

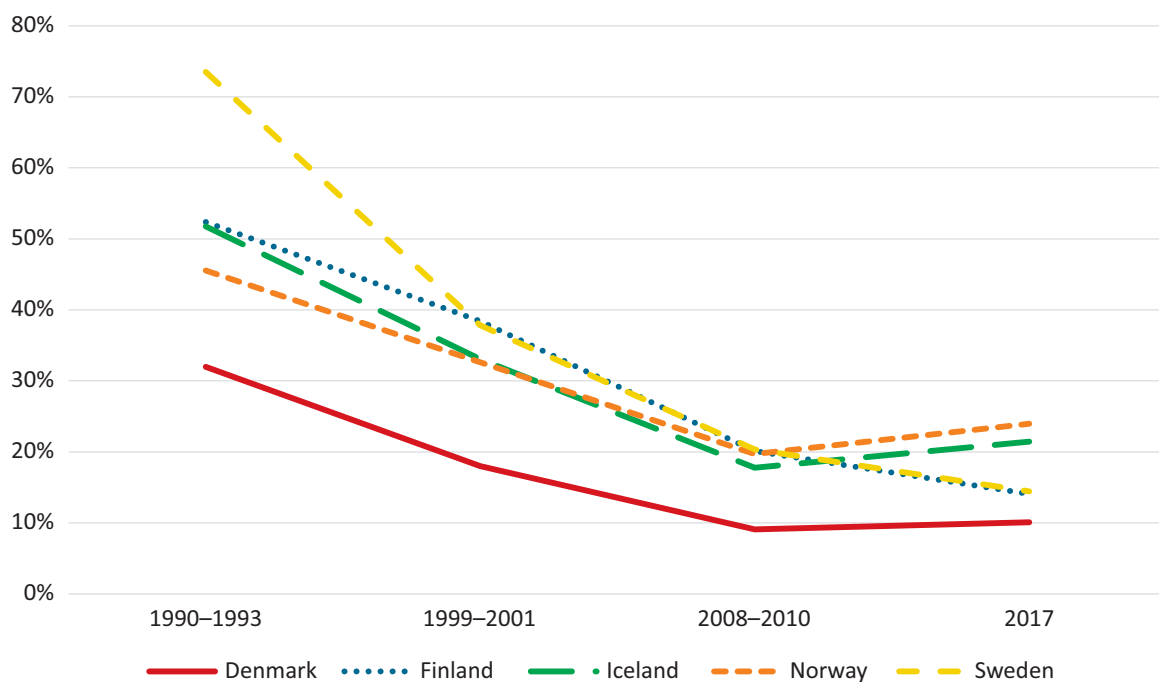


Figure 1. Percentage in sample agreeing that “when a mother works for pay, the children suffer” (all age groups, Nordic countries, 1990–2017). Note: **n = 23,112. Source: EVS (2015, 2020).

Table 2. Attitudes toward gender and care, percentage agreeing to the three items among men and women (all age groups, Nordic countries, 2017).

	Denmark			Finland			Iceland			Norway			Sweden		
	Male	Female	n, sig	Male	Female	n, sig	Male	Female	n, sig	Male	Female	n, sig	Male	Female	n, sig
When a mother works for pay, the children suffer	12	9	3,298 **	19	10	1,170 ***	26	17	2,004 ***	26	22	1,119	19	10	1,175 ***
A job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children	13	11	3,293 *	38	27	1,146 ***	46	37	1,996 ***	26	20	1,106 *	24	13	1,160 ***
A man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family	7	5	3,331 *	14	10	1,176 *	9	5	2,023 ***	12	6	1,123 ***	7	4	1,184 *

Notes: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

a child suffers with a working mother is significantly lower among those with the longest educations in all countries. A traditional care ideal is much more widespread among those with less education. The strong relationship between education level and attitude could explain a higher take-up of parental leave among well-educated parents. However, the figure also indicates that the association between education and gender attitudes differs. This correlation appears lowest in Denmark and Iceland.

We have also run some additional analysis only with men and women with children under 14 years of age living in the household; the results do not differ substantially from the analysis using the whole sample.

If we look at the gender-stereotype attitude that women really want to stay home, we find the same picture (Figure 3): Those with less education view gender roles more traditionally. Again, we see that education has less influence on gender attitudes in Denmark; only

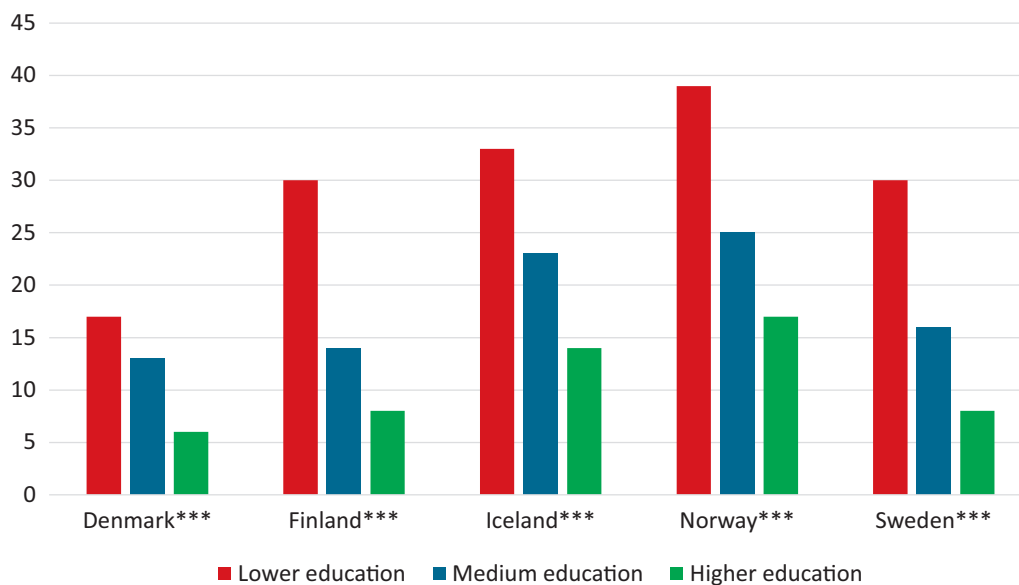


Figure 2. Percentage among different education groups agreeing that “when a mother works for pay, the children suffer” (all age groups, Nordic countries, 2017). Notes: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001; Denmark: n = 3,233, gamma = -0.38; Finland: n = 1,164, gamma = -0.45; Iceland: n = 1,997, gamma = -0.35; Norway: n = 1,098, gamma = -0.34; Sweden: n = 1,164, gamma = -0.43.

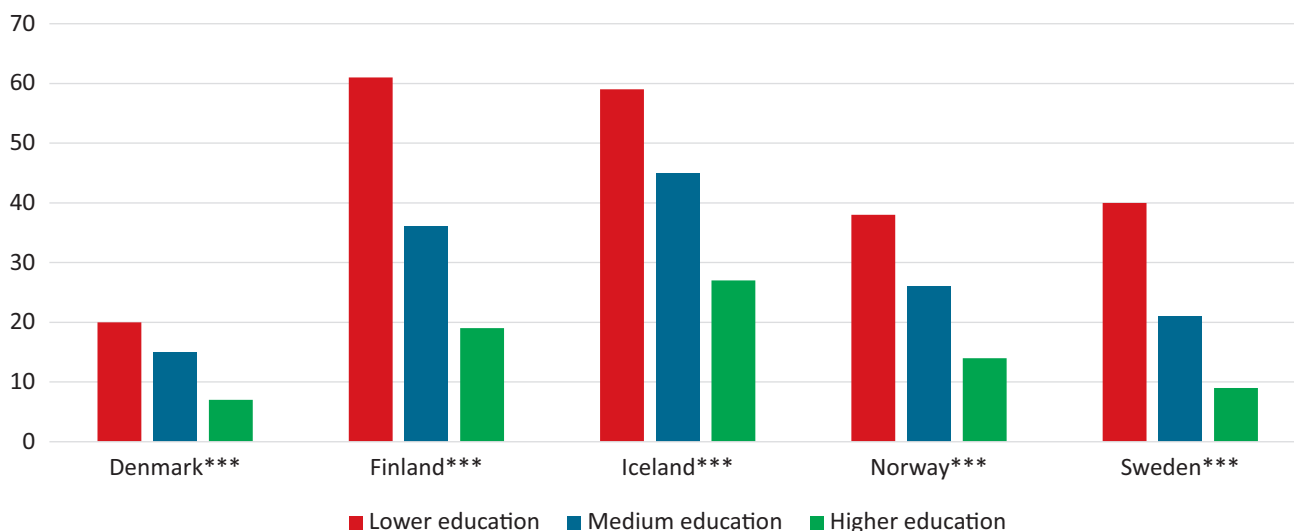


Figure 3. Percentage among different education groups agreeing that “a job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children” (all age groups, Nordic countries, 2017). Notes: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001; Denmark: n = 3,227, gamma = -0.38; Finland: n = 1,140, gamma = -0.51; Iceland: n = 1,986, gamma = -0.42; Norway: n = 1,086, gamma = -0.41; Sweden: n = 1,150, gamma = -0.51.

20% of the least educated respondents agree that “job alright, but women really want home and children,” compared to 58–60% in Finland and Iceland.

When it comes to attitudes in favour of a male-breadwinner family, there is a higher proportion of the least educated respondents agreeing that the man’s responsibility is to earn money while the woman’s responsibility is to look after home and family (Figure 4). However, in Denmark and Iceland the proportion is much lower. Again, the figure indicates that traditional gender-role attitudes are relatively uncommon in Denmark, even among the least educated.

A one-to-one causal relationship between attitudes and parental leave take-up is unlikely, as other structural and individual factors are involved (see, e.g., Lewis & Haas, 2005). Failing to include questions regarding the paternal role in childcare also seriously limits the EVS survey. As Grunow, Begall, and Buchler (2018) show, multiple gender ideologies may coexist, and support for working mothers does not necessarily indicate similar support for caring fathers; lack of the latter could be a cultural explanation for fathers not taking leave, even in Denmark.

However, the analysis indicates that parental leave take-up among Danish men is not necessarily associated

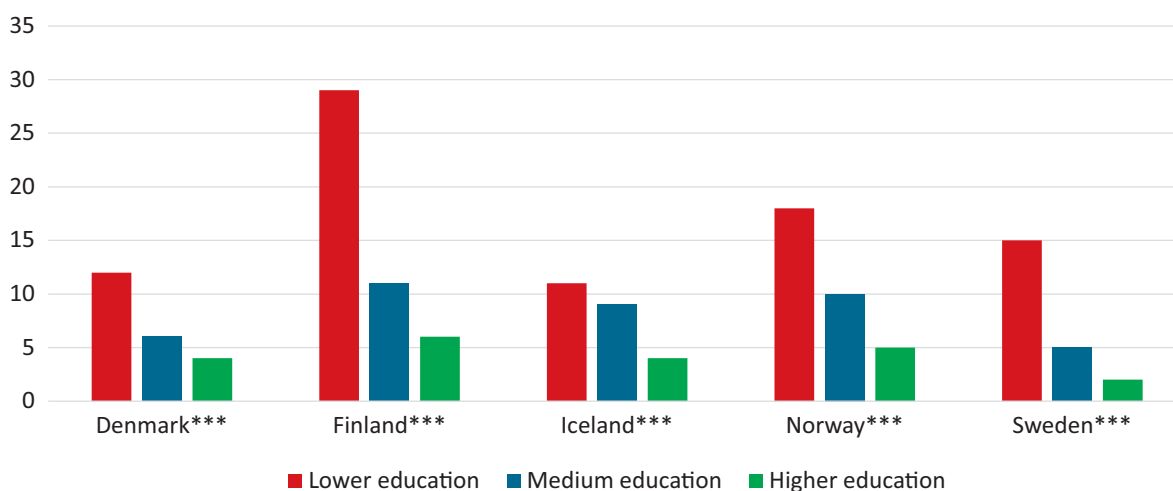


Figure 4. Percentage among different education groups agreeing that “a man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family.” Notes: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001; Denmark: n = 3,261, gamma = -0.37; Finland: n = 1,169, gamma = -0.49; Iceland: n = 2,016, gamma = -0.36; Norway: n = 1,102, gamma = -0.42; Sweden: n = 1,174, gamma = -0.56.

with more traditional attitudes toward the gendered division of care work. Denmark has both the lowest gender difference in attitudes toward gender role and the lowest education gaps in attitude. It is also remarkable that when looking specifically at the group with the least education, the support for traditional care ideals is lowest in Denmark.

6. Parental Leave Take-up: The Gender and Education Gradient

As we have seen, the Danish social norms heavily favour gender equality, and the smallest education gap is also found here. The question is if this is mirrored in parental leave take-up across gender and education levels. Do we find a higher proportion of fathers taking parental leave in Denmark in comparison to the other Nordic countries, and regardless of educational background?

If we first look across the Nordic countries, it is remarkable how the changes in parental leave policies seem to have affected fathers' parental leave take-up. As of 2017, Icelandic fathers take the highest proportion of parental leave (30%), Danish and Finnish fathers the lowest (both 11%).

Reflecting that Iceland in some cases seems to have the most gender-traditional attitudes and Denmark the least, this suggests that parental leave policies with gender-equality incentives are effective policy instruments, rather than it being attitudes that drive gendered practices in leave take-up. The increase in fathers' share of total leave after 2000 in Sweden, Norway and Iceland seems to reflect the introduction of a fathers' quota in the period between 1990–2000.

Considering Denmark more specifically, the two weeks of earmarked parental leave introduced in 1998 did have an immediate effect on fathers' take-up of leave subsequent years. The highest recorded percentage of fathers taking parental leave was 36% in 2002, a dramatic increase from the 12% in 1997. But abolishing the father's quota in 2002 resulted in only 22% of fathers taking parental leave the following year. Figure 5 also indicates a slight increase from 2007 onwards in the percentage of fathers taking leave, suggesting a combined effect of the introduction of the labour market quotas and an overall shift in gender culture (Rostgaard & Lausten, 2014).

More recently (due to a change in registration methods, only data from 2015 and onwards is comparable), we can see that Danish fathers have increased the average number of parental leave days taken over time, but only very gradually, from 29.3 days in 2015 to 31.9 in 2018 (only fathers entitled to a leave benefit, as this is considered the most correct way to account for leave take-up), which still leaves a long way to the two months proposed by the EU directive. In the same period, mothers' average number of days has decreased slightly from 275.5 days to 273.9 days (Figure 6). Since introducing parental leave in Denmark in 1984, mothers have traditionally taken the vast majority of parental leave days, and little seems to have changed. Therefore, the gendered division of parental leave seems to be constant in Denmark, with the likely risk of maintaining gendered inequalities in the division of paid and unpaid work, life-course income and the gender wage gap.

But does this development also maintain the divisions across the education divide? In fact, there was no

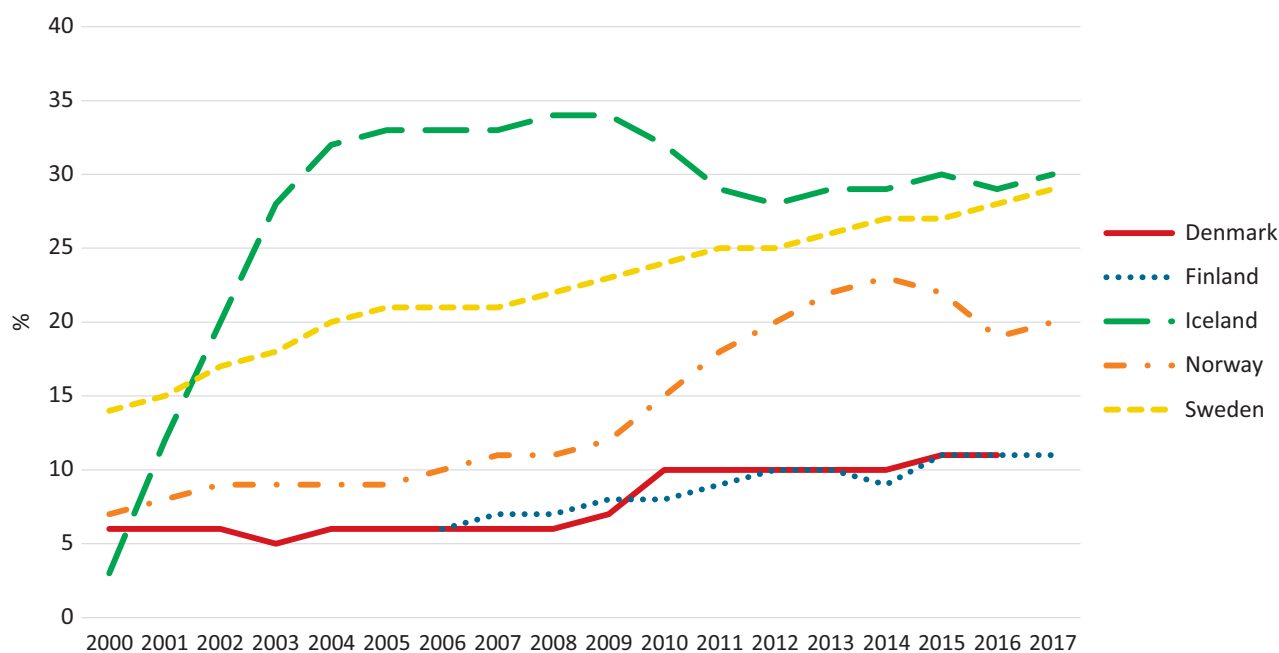


Figure 5. Fathers' parental leave take-up (share of total parental leave days; Nordic countries, 2000–2017). Source: NOSOSCO (n.d.)

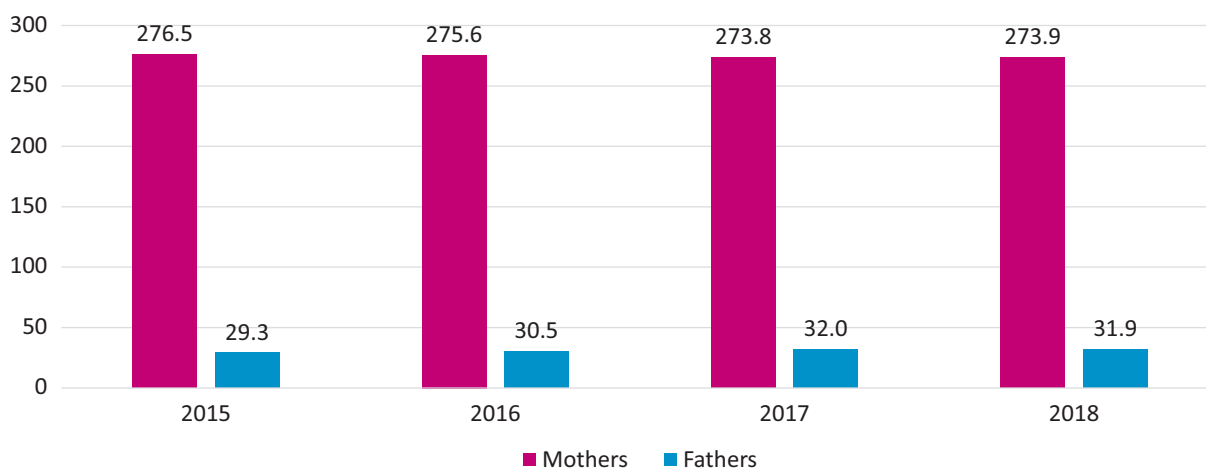


Figure 6. Number of parental leave days (average, fathers and mothers; Denmark, 2015–2018). Note: Cohabiting parents entitled to benefit. Source: Statistics Denmark (n.d.-b).

such division when parental leave was first introduced in Denmark in 1984. In the late 1980s, Christoffersen (1990) found that education level did not influence fathers’ parental leave uptake. This has since changed, as indicated in Figure 7, which shows the average parental leave according to father’s (and mother’s) education for cohabiting couples. Education background now appears highly influential, fathers with the longest educations now taking the most leave days, and the least-educated fathers taking the fewest: Those with only lower-secondary schooling take on average approximately 26 days leave, compared to 56 days in couples where fathers have a master’s degree. Other studies of parental leave among fathers document the same pattern (e.g., Duvander, 2014; Duvander & Viklund, 2019). The figure also shows a combined effect of mother’s education and father’s leave take-up; male partners of highly educated women take longer leave, perhaps because the mother in this case prefers to share the leave and return to work sooner.

The continuing importance of educational homogamy (i.e., men and women mainly find a partner from within their own social class; Brannen & Nilsen, 2006) situates fathers, mothers and their children in very unequal positions, where education background seems to be the influential factor. Parental leave take-up being closely associated with education levels is often seen as a matter of different gender values. In fact, parents’ education is often used to indirectly measure norms and attitudes toward gender equality, with higher education likely being associated with more gender-equal norms, which drives leave take-up (Duvander & Viklund, 2019). As shown in the section on gender attitudes, however, there is no such apparent association between education and gender equality attitudes in Denmark. This indicates that the development toward variation in fathers’ parental leave take-up according to education is an expression of a social inequality, with some fathers in Denmark having less opportunity to take leave. This

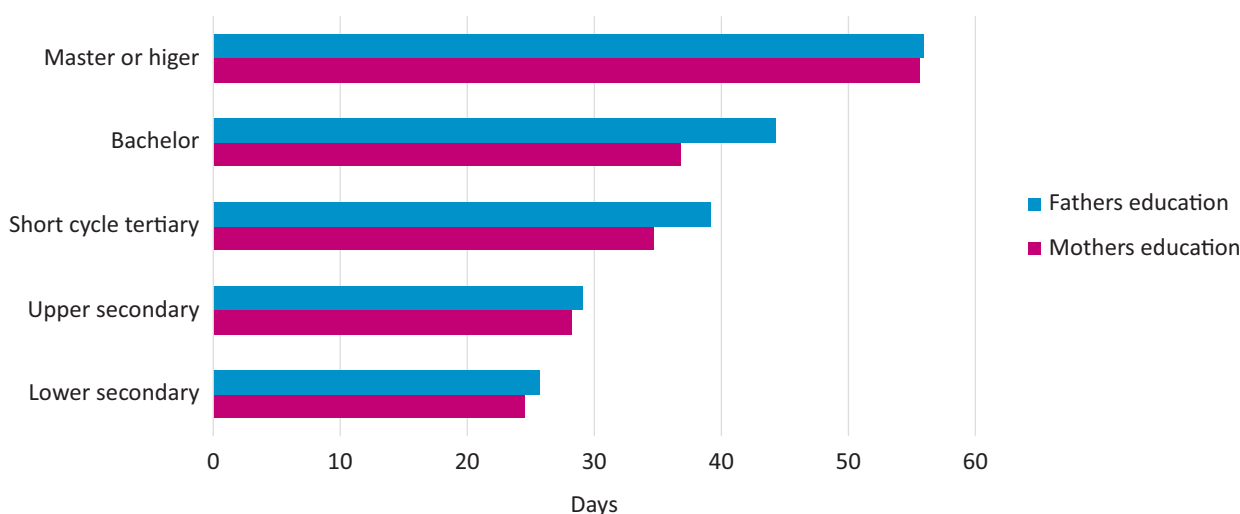


Figure 7. Fathers parental leave take-up (days) by education level (Denmark, 2018). Notes: Cohabiting couples only; both mother and father have taken parental leave. Source: Statistic Denmark (n.d.-c).

might indicate that the low parental leave take-up among the least educated fathers not only reflects a traditional gender role attitude but also a lack of institutional support, such as gender-equality-focused leave policies.

7. Conclusion

The Nordic countries pioneered gender incentives in leave schemes, including the introduction of parental leave, but first and foremost the father's quota. This leaves Denmark as the regional outlier, as there is no longer a statutory father's quota; instead, labour market partners have introduced the father's quota in some collective agreements, and the right to this quota is accordingly secured only for those in more stable employment. While Denmark has invested massively in childcare outside the home, gender (in)equality in parental leave take-up is not part of the policy agenda to a degree that makes the current Social Democratic government consider a re-introduction of the father's quota; rather, along with other parties across the political spectrum, it has been opposed to the EU directive for a 2-month parental leave quota. Gender inequality in parental leave take-up therefore does not seem to be perceived as a problem requiring public action and is not part of the current policy stream.

The lack of political attention is regardless of how there is consistent gender inequality in leave take-up, and more so than in the other Nordic countries. Our analysis has found inequalities across the education divide, suggesting that social class also mitigates leave take-up. This education divide is not consistent with attitudes toward how mothers and fathers should share paid and unpaid work. In fact, Denmark seems to be the country most favoring gender equality in the region. We acknowledge that the survey data only addresses the role of the mother regarding gender roles and therefore does not show the norms related to the father's role in raising children. We are also aware that the items in the EVS represent rather extreme statements when it comes to examining gender roles in a Nordic context. This could explain the relative low level of agreement. Future comparative studies of how gender attitudes impact fathers' parental leave take-up should include survey questions about father as caregiver as well more nuanced questions about mother's and father's role as caregiver, which could better grasp the differences in gender attitudes between the Nordic countries. Regardless, the differences in leave take-up across gender and the education divide seem to reflect institutional and organizational barriers more than variation in the cultural perception of who should take parental leave. Ultimately, Danish fathers (and their children and their partners) are situated differently across the education divide regarding their rights to parental leave and how this is used, and mothers continue to take most of the leave. The policy implication is clear: If the desire is for mothers and fathers with different social backgrounds to share parental leave

more equally, it is not the attitudes that must change, but rather the policy.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Article

Mothers and Parental Leave in Belgium: Social Inequalities in Eligibility and Uptake

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Abstract

In recent decades, many Western European countries introduced parental leave policies to support the work–family combination in families with young children. However, these parental leave schemes often exhibit employment-based eligibility criteria, so the question arises to which extent social inequalities emerge in the access to parental leave, and as a result thereof also in the uptake of parental leave. Although research on parental leave increasingly addresses the issue of inclusiveness, only a limited number of studies has yet examined individual-level differentials in parents', and especially mothers', eligibility. Using detailed register data, we develop an individual-level indicator of eligibility in Belgium and deploy it to document differentiation in mothers' eligibility by age at first birth, partnership status, migration background and education. In addition, we examine to what extent differential eligibility can explain inequalities in parental leave uptake. Our results show that a considerable share of mothers—specifically very young, single, low educated mothers and mothers with a migration background—do not meet the eligibility criteria and thus are structurally excluded from parental leave in Belgium. Furthermore, differential eligibility can account for a large part of the age and educational gradients in parental leave use, as well as differences by migration background. Eligibility cannot (fully) account for lower parental leave use by single mothers and mothers with a Moroccan or Turkish migration background. Our findings suggest that a reconsideration of eligibility criteria may be instrumental in increasing the inclusiveness of parental leave policies.

Keywords

Belgium; eligibility; inclusiveness; mothers; parental leave; social inequalities

Issue

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1. Introduction

Over the past decades, the focus of social policy has been widening from solely protecting against social risks to complementary ‘social investment’ policies aimed at reinforcing human capital and labour market integration, especially of mothers (Cantillon & Van Lancker, 2013; Hemerijck, 2015). Work–family reconciliation policies such as early childhood education and care and parental leave play an important part in these policy expansions. Concerning the latter, Belgium exhibits a parental

leave system where access to leave is conditional on strict employment-related criteria (Dobrotić & Blum, 2019a; Mortelmans & Fusulier, 2020). Only employed parents are entitled to parental leave. Whereas having an employment contract suffices to be eligible for parents employed in the public sector, more strict eligibility criteria related to seniority apply to parents employed in the private sector. As a result, many parents are excluded by design and especially parents with precarious labour market trajectories may find it difficult to meet the eligibility criteria for parental leave (Kil, Wood, & Neels,

2018; McKay, Mathieu, & Doucet, 2016; Rostgaard, 2005). Moreover, available research documents growing proportions of individuals with atypical and unstable employment biographies in both Belgium and other European countries (Schwander & Häusermann, 2013). This limited access to parental leave is symptomatic of social policies being related to employment positions and may lead to the adoption of alternative work–family reconciliation strategies that involve a (partial) retreat from the labour market, most often of mothers (Kühhirt, 2012; Morel, 2007). As a result, employment-related eligibility criteria may potentially reinforce existing disparities between parents with precarious labour market positions on the one hand and parents with stable labour market positions on the other (Schwander & Häusermann, 2013). In order to gain insight into such potential inequalities, it is essential to examine which groups of parents are excluded from parental leave.

Research on parental leave increasingly addresses the issue of inclusiveness, i.e., to which extent parental leave is available to all parents. In their overview paper, Dobrotić and Blum (2019a) construct an eligibility index to measure and compare the inclusiveness of parental leave benefits in twenty-one European countries and document the increasing importance of employment-based criteria for replacement benefits as well as gender-sensitive parental leave policies. Bártoová and Emery (2018) develop a new policy measure, the compensation rate, which represents the financial support an individual would receive if they were to have a child and take up the parental leave they are entitled to. This measure allows taking population heterogeneity into account in the evaluation of policy entitlements both within and between populations. Furthermore, a number of case studies scrutinise parental leave uptake by parents with a migration background and suggest that the inability to meet the eligibility criteria can at least partially explain their lower uptake (Ellingsæter, Kitterød, & Østbakken, 2020; Kil et al., 2018; Sainsbury, 2019). Also, socio-economic inequalities are increasingly being studied. McKay et al. (2016), who compare mothers' access to parental leave in two different leave programs in Canada, find that the eligibility criteria are a key explanation for differential access to parental leave between the two programs and between families by income. Lastly, Ghysels and Van Lancker (2011) examine the distribution of public spending on parental leave among different groups of parents and conclude that leave benefits disproportionately flow to higher-income households in Belgium. Available research has thus addressed the inclusiveness of policy design and public spending on the macro level (Dobrotić & Blum, 2019a; Ghysels & Van Lancker, 2011), or has examined patterns of leave uptake, referring to eligibility as a key explanatory factor (Ellingsæter et al., 2020; Kil et al., 2018). Except for the studies carried out by Bártoová and Emery (2018), McKay et al. (2016) and Kil et al. (2018), hitherto little research has addressed individual-level differentials in parents', and especially mothers', eligibility.

In response to this gap in knowledge, we construct an individual-level indicator of eligibility and examine the inclusiveness of Belgian parental leave policy. Descriptive analyses document which mothers are excluded by the strict employment-based eligibility criteria and examine differential eligibility by age at first birth, partnership status, migration background and level of education. Subsequently, multivariate analyses further examine to what extent differential eligibility can explain differences in the actual uptake of parental leave by age at first birth, partnership status, migration background and educational level. The contribution of this article is threefold. First, the use of unique register-based microdata enables the construction of an individual-level indicator of eligibility for parental leave. The construction of such an indicator is innovative and particularly informative as there is, hitherto, no official measurement of the share of parents that is eligible in Belgium (Mortelmans & Fusulier, 2020). Second, this indicator allows to empirically examine which groups of parents are excluded, and to which extent differential eligibility can account for variation in the actual uptake of parental leave. Hence, we contribute to social policy research on the intersection between policy design and social inequalities in access and uptake patterns (Dobrotić & Blum, 2019b), which may be of particular interest when reflecting on how to increase inclusiveness. To date, parental leave policy reforms most often involved benefit levels, length of leave or flexibility in uptake, rather than a relaxation of eligibility criteria (Dobrotić & Blum, 2019a; Geisler & Kreyenfeld, 2018). These reforms, however, only enable or stimulate higher leave uptake among those already included, thus potentially exacerbating the divide between 'parental leave rich' and 'parental leave poor' households (McKay et al., 2016; O'Brien, 2009). Third, among the countries with employment-related entitlement principles, Belgium is a particular case as it has a paid, purely employment-based parental leave system, which is, moreover, very selective because of its strict employment-related eligibility criteria (Dobrotić & Blum, 2019b). Today, most other Western European countries with paid parental leave systems rely on a mix of both employment- and citizenship-based rights (Dobrotić & Blum, 2019a). Hence, the Belgian setting may be of interest to policymakers in Belgium, in view of reflecting on and addressing social inequalities in access to and uptake of parental leave. Also, this case study may interest policymakers in other countries where employment-based eligibility criteria are gaining importance, as to what this may imply in terms of inclusiveness.

2. Theoretical Perspectives on Eligibility and Inclusiveness

Combining the Capability Approach and the life course perspective, we look into how policy design, as well as path-dependencies within life courses, may shape

individuals' work–family reconciliation strategies. The Capability Approach argues that individuals' capabilities (i.e., real, substantive freedoms to achieve certain doings, such as parental leave uptake) crucially depend on personal, social or environmental conditions, i.e., so-called conversion factors (such as parental leave policy; see Robeyns & Byskov, 2020; Sen, 1999). In this respect, design features of parental leave policy can either constrain or enable parents' agency (capability) in the development of work–family reconciliation strategies. Besides the length of leave, affordability (determined in part by the height of replacement benefits; see Patnaik, 2018), and normative aspects (such as workplace cultures and practices; see Koslowski & Kadar-Satat, 2019), accessibility is key in this respect (Koslowski, Duvander, & Moss, 2019). Different eligibility criteria, based on citizenship, employment, or a mix of both, may entail differential access for specific groups of parents. Whereas eligibility criteria such as duration of citizenship (e.g., 6 or more months, or just residency at the time of childbirth; see Dobrotić & Blum, 2019a) give access to parental leave to almost all parents, criteria based on employment history may result in a selective character of leave rights (Dobrotić & Blum, 2019a). Also, in line with Sen's Capability Approach, available research finds that the impact of family policies on parents' capabilities to reconcile work and childcare responsibilities differs considerably between population subgroups (Hobson, Fahlén, & Takács, 2011; Yerkes & Javornik, 2019).

From a life-course perspective, eligibility for parental leave—and according agency to use leave to organise the work–family combination—is path-dependent upon previous events and experiences in different life domains. Hence, in case of employment-based eligibility criteria, inherently interlinked migration histories, educational trajectories, and experiences such as union formation or dissolution, as well as the timing of the birth of a first or higher-order children, shape persons' labour market trajectories that eventually determine their access to parental leave. Previous research demonstrates that individuals (especially mothers) with a migration background, lower educated persons, and single parents more often find themselves in precarious employment positions (e.g., fixed-term contracts, temporary agency work, involuntary part-time work) or out of paid employment (Corluy & Verbist, 2014; Herremans, Vansteenkiste, & Sourbron, 2016; Kil, Neels, Wood, & de Valk, 2017; Maes, Wood, & Neels, 2018; Ruggieri & Bird, 2014). Moreover, characteristics associated with unstable employment trajectories often coincide. For example, research reports a double disadvantage for migrant women, both in terms of gender and ethnicity. They face more difficulties than migrant men but also compared to native women in securing stable labour market positions (Mussino & Duvander, 2016; Neels, De Wachter, & Peeters, 2018; OECD, 2017). Kil et al. (2017) and Maes et al. (2021) also document a larger

decrease in activity and employment levels after the transition to parenthood of women with a migration background than among native women in Belgium, which is related to the differential stability of employment trajectories of migrant and native women. Other Belgian research shows that individuals with a migration background are often lower educated, which also partially explains their difficult entry into stable employment (Maes et al., 2018). Hence, disadvantaged positions in several domains combine into so-called multiplicative or reinforcing disadvantages (Mussino & Duvander, 2016), precluding specific groups of parents from taking up parental leave.

When parental leave uptake is not an option due to the inability to meet the employment-based eligibility criteria, parents potentially have to develop alternative childcare solutions. Whereas some may have sufficient financial resources to outsource childcare or have access to informal care, others may face more difficulties with organising childcare. Alternative strategies such as reducing working hours, changing jobs, flex work, exiting the labour market, or continuing unemployment or inactivity may, in turn, hinder the transition into stable employment trajectories required to be eligible to take up parental leave. Hence, a vicious circle arises. Cumulative disadvantages over the life course may result in specific groups of parents not being eligible in the first place, but also not being able to become eligible in the future. As the (in)ability to take up parental leave potentially also impacts future events (e.g., parental employment, children's wellbeing, gender equality, etc.; see Duvander & Jans, 2009; Huerta et al., 2013; Patnaik, 2018), social inequalities in work–family reconciliation between low and high educated parents, parents with and without a migration background, single and partnered parents, and young and older parents may only grow larger.

3. The Belgian Context

Belgium's most common child-related leave schemes include maternity leave, paternity leave, and parental leave. Maternity leave applies to all (self-)employed and unemployed mothers and consists of a minimum of 10 (obliged) and a maximum of 15 weeks of leave at the time of childbirth during which mothers receive a relatively high income-related replacement benefit (a taxable benefit amounting 75% to 82% of the gross wage; see Mortelmans & Fusulier, 2020). Paternity leave only applies to fathers working as employees and allows them to take leave for 10 days within the first four months after the birth of a child, during which they receive high income-related replacement benefits (82% of the gross wage). Parental leave is an individual, non-transferable and gender-neutral entitlement that was introduced in 1997 as an offshoot of the system of Voluntary Career Breaks that was introduced in Belgium in the 1980s (Morel, 2007). Parental leave allows each parent to take up full-time leave for a maximum of four months (three

months during the observation period of this study, until 1 June 2012) at a low and flat-rate benefit (Mortelmans & Fusulier, 2020; RVA Dienst Studies, 2014). From its introduction onwards, parents were entitled to take up parental leave for each child younger than 4 years. The age limit was raised to 6 years in 2005 and subsequently to 12 years in 2009. Full-time employees can opt to reduce their working hours by 50% or 20% (recently also 10%) for a longer period, receiving a benefit that is reduced accordingly. The uptake of parental leave can be split over multiple periods depending on the sector of employment and previous work history, and periods of full-time and part-time leave can be combined (RVA Dienst Studies, 2014). Mothers and fathers can take up leave simultaneously. Furthermore, employment contracts remain unchanged during parental leave and there is protection against dismissal until three months following parental leave uptake. Finally, only parents working as employees exhibit parental leave rights, implying that the self-employed, unemployed, inactive, as well as parents enrolled in education, are excluded by design. Whereas parents employed in the public sector are eligible without any conditions in terms of working experience, parents employed in the private sector have to be working for their current employer for 12 out of 15 months before the application. Hence, parents with unstable employment trajectories are less likely to meet the eligibility criteria. These eligibility criteria have not changed since their introduction in 1997.

In addition to leave policies, which allow parents to take time to perform childcare and household tasks themselves, outsourcing policies take up a prominent role in Belgian work–family policies (Raz-Yurovich, 2014). Enrolment of 0–2.5-year-olds in (subsidised) formal childcare has exceeded the Barcelona childcare targets of 33% enrolment since the early 2000s and nearly all children aged 2.5–6 years attend pre-primary education (OECD, 2018; Population Council, 2006). After taking up maternity leave in the months after childbirth, parental leave uptake is far from a universal practice for Belgian mothers, and most mothers who do use parental leave adopt a part-time leave schedule. Consequently, employed parents often resort to (some degree of) services providing formal childcare (or informal care arrangements) from the moment the child is three months old. Furthermore, since 2004, a generously subsidised system of Service Vouchers has allowed outsourcing household work and has proven tremendously popular (Marx & Vandellannoote, 2015).

In conclusion, Belgian work–family reconciliation policies were introduced in the first place as ‘full employment’ policies, aimed at the full engagement of both men and women in the labour market, rather than to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life (Ciccia & Verloo, 2012; Merla & Deven, 2019). Outsourcing policies, and to a lesser extent, leave policies (as they preserve parents’ connection with the labour market), have proven instrumental in households’ work–family combination,

mostly enabling higher female labour force participation (Dujardin, Fonder, & Lejeune, 2018; Raz-Yurovich & Marx, 2019). However, the degree to which these work–family policies ‘work’ strongly depends on the population subgroup considered, their employment positions and related eligibility. Belgium still has a considerable gender gap in employment and particularly high female part-time employment compared to most other European countries (OECD, 2019). Despite the low employment gap between mothers and childless women (Cukrowska-Torzewska, 2016), a large educational gradient exists in maternal employment in Belgium (OECD, 2017; Wood, Neels, De Wachter, & Kil, 2016) as well as considerable migrant-native differentials in mothers’ employment after parenthood (Kil et al., 2017). Furthermore, as in many other European countries, women, migrants, low qualified and young people are disproportionately represented in precarious employment positions (Merla & Deven, 2019).

4. Data and Methods

4.1. Data

We use the Belgian Administrative Socio-Demographic Panel (BASD-Panel) that was constructed using detailed microdata from the National Register and the Crossroads Bank for Social Security on a representative sample of women aged 15–50 years, legally residing in Belgium between 1 January 1999 and 31 December 2010. In addition to sampled women, these data include all household members residing in sampled women’s households on January 1st of each observation year. The BASD-Panel provides detailed quarterly information on the labour market positions and income of all household members, as well as annual information on household composition. The analyses document eligibility and uptake of parental leave for 15,893 women who made the transition to parenthood between 2000 and 2010 and who were observed for at least five quarters before the birth of their first child (which is the period required to monitor eligibility). To obtain an overall view of the mothers’ parental leave uptake, we estimate whether women ever use parental leave in the period from the birth of their first child until their youngest (potentially second, or higher order) child reaches the age limit for parental leave (which is the age of 4, 6 or 12 years depending on the year of observation and concomitant leave regulations). The measurement window may prematurely end when the end of the observation period of the BASD-Panel has been reached (i.e., 31 December 2010, or the mother reaches the age of 50), or in case of emigration or death.

4.2. Variables

The dependent variable is a dummy-variable indicating whether a mother has ever taken up parental leave

within the measurement window (1) or not (0). The main covariates in this study are eligibility, age at the birth of the first child, whether mothers had a co-resident partner during the observation period, migration background, and level of education. A woman is considered to be eligible when the youngest child is younger than the age limit for leave uptake, and she is working in the public sector (the educational sector and public administration), or the private sector, where she is employed for her current employer for at least 12 out of the 15 preceding months. Individuals who are employed for an employer in the private sector for less than 12 out of the 15 preceding months, full-time self-employed, unemployed, or inactive are not considered eligible. The individual-level indicator of parental leave eligibility is included in the analyses as the proportion of time a mother was eligible for parental leave within the measurement window. This variable varies between 0% and 100% and is divided into deciles. Age at first birth is a categorical variable distinguishing between women aged (i) 20 or younger, (ii) 21–25, (iii) 26–30, (iv) 31–35, and (v) 36 or older at the birth of their first child. Partnership status is a dichotomous variable that distinguishes between (i) mothers who had a co-resident partner during at least one-quarter of the observation period and (ii) mothers who did not. Migration background is a categorical variable distinguishing between individuals with a Belgian, European, Turkish or Moroccan, or other non-European migration background. Also, this variable distinguishes between individuals with a first (i.e., the individual is born in a foreign country) and second (i.e., the individual is born in Belgium but at least one parent is born in a foreign country) generation migration background. Level of education is a categorical variable, measured at first birth, distinguishing between (i) no education, primary or lower secondary education (low), (ii) higher secondary education (middle), (iii) tertiary education or higher (high), and (iv) unknown.

Furthermore, we control for eligibility and leave uptake by the male partner, region, age of the youngest child at the end of the observation period, parity at the end of the observation period, year of birth of the first child, and length of the measurement window. Eligibility and leave uptake by the male partner are two dichotomous variables, distinguishing between ever (1) and never having been eligible (0) and ever (1) and never having taken up leave (0) during the observation period. Region is a categorical variable, measured at first birth, distinguishing between (i) the Capital Region of Brussels, (ii) Wallonia, and (iii) Flanders. The age of the youngest child at the end of the observation period is included both as a linear and a squared term as there is a nonlinear relationship between the age of the child and leave uptake. Parity at the end of the observation period provides information on women's fertility experience within the measurement window, which is likely to be associated with the odds of leave-taking during the period considered, and which is included as a categorical variable

distinguishing between (i) one child, (ii) two children, and (iii) three or more children. Finally, we include the year of birth of the first child as parental leave policy has changed and leave uptake has been rising throughout our observation period.

4.3. Analyses

The descriptive analyses consist of a detailed examination of mothers' eligibility in terms of the four covariates considered: age at first childbirth, partnership status, migration background and level of education. The multivariate analyses consist of two nested logit models of mothers' parental leave uptake. The first model (Model I) examines the association between leave uptake and the aforementioned four main covariates to document differential uptake of parental leave. Subsequently, the second model (Model II) includes the eligibility indicator to examine whether and to what extent differentials in eligibility can effectively explain the observed associations between leave uptake and the main covariates considered in the analysis. Both logit models include all control variables. To compare socio-economic differentials in leave uptake between models I and II (Mood, 2009), we calculate predicted probabilities in leave uptake across models assuming an average profile in terms of the other covariates included in the model, and report predicted probabilities as deviations from the grand mean of parental leave uptake to facilitate the comparison of gradients across covariates (Figure 3a to 3d; see Biegel, Wood, & Neels, 2021).

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive Results: Social Inequalities in Eligibility

Figure 1 represents the distribution of mothers over the categories of the eligibility indicator: 26.73% of the mothers in our sample are never eligible for parental leave, meaning that they never met the eligibility criteria within the measurement window. Hence, close to one-fourth of mothers are by default excluded from using parental leave. In contrast, 39.65% of the mothers were continuously eligible, while another 33.62% was eligible through a part of the observation window. Hence, in addition to the share of mothers that is never eligible, one third of all observed mothers were unable to meet the eligibility criteria for a least some time during the observation.

Table 1 displays the summary statistics, as well as socio-economic differentials concerning the distribution of eligibility. Table 1 shows that women who are older when entering parenthood meet the eligibility criteria more often than women who had their first child at a younger age. Furthermore, the large discrepancy between mothers that did and did not have a partner during the observation period is noteworthy: 49% of the single mothers are never eligible for parental leave. This contrasts sharply with mothers who had a partner,

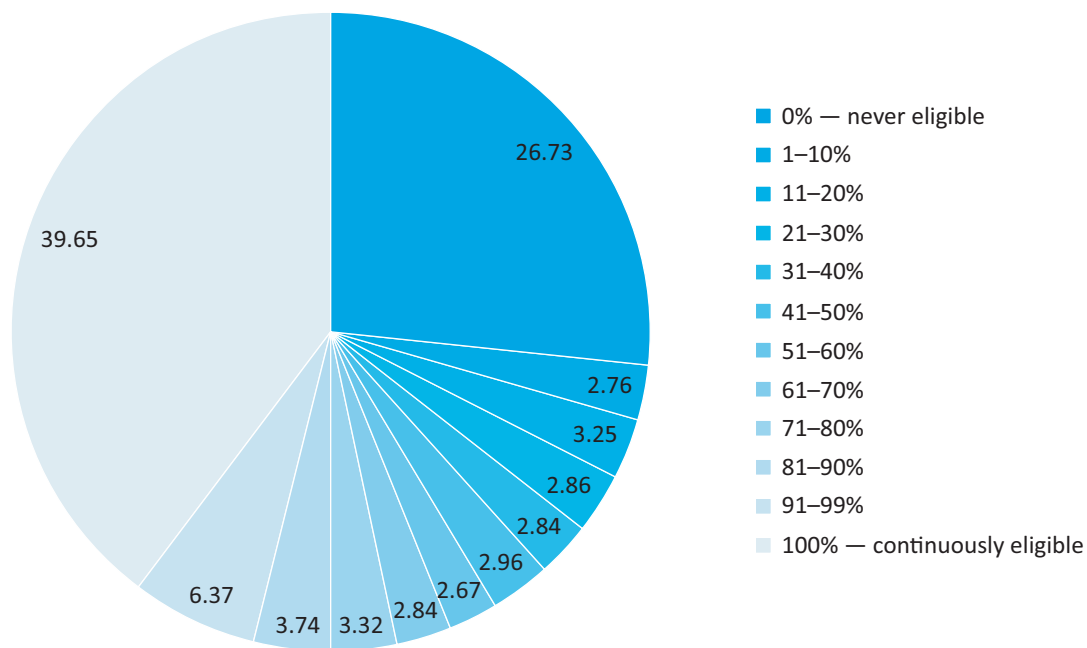


Figure 1. Distribution of the eligibility indicator 2000–2010 (proportion of time mothers were eligible for parental leave over the observation window; N = 15,893). Source: BASD-Panel, calculations by the authors.

of which only 24% never meets the eligibility criteria. Mothers with a non-Belgian migration background, particularly first-generation migrants and mothers originating from Turkey or Morocco, display lower levels of eligibility than mothers with no migration background. Also, an educational gradient can be discerned. Whereas 49% of the low educated mothers are never eligible, this is only 25% for middle educated mothers and 14% for high educated mothers.

In addition, mothers are less often eligible when they have two or more children compared to one, and at higher ages of the youngest child. These findings potentially reflect changes in mothers’ labour force participation after the transition to parenthood, as the adaptation of employment trajectories to the number and age of children in the household may also affect mothers’ eligibility for parental leave. Finally, eligibility and leave uptake of the male partner also seem to be positively correlated with mothers’ eligibility, suggesting that the social inequalities in eligibility and leave uptake are exacerbated when considered at the couple level.

5.2. Multivariate Analyses of Uptake

Figures 2 and 3a-d display the results of two nested logit models of mothers’ parental leave uptake. The weighted grand mean of parental leave uptake indicates that 37% of the mothers in our sample used parental leave. Model comparison points out that including the eligibility indicator significantly increases the model fit ($Df(9)$, LR $\chi^2 = 4025.15$, Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.000$), and the pseudo R^2 increases from 17.89% in Model I to 37.13% in Model II. The results of Model II show that concerning

mothers’ eligibility, a clear, almost linear pattern can be discerned (Figure 2). The higher the proportion of time a mother is eligible to take up parental leave, the higher the probability that she will also actually do so. This finding corroborates the premise that mothers with more stable employment trajectories are much more likely to use their leave entitlement than mothers with less stable or even precarious employment trajectories. However, the question remains to what extent this variation in eligibility can account for differences in parental leave uptake by mothers’ age at first birth, partnership status, migration background and level of education.

Concerning mothers’ age at first birth, Figure 3a (Model I) shows that deviations from the grand mean are negative at younger ages, while positive at older ages. Controlling for eligibility, differences between women with different ages at first birth become smaller and the age gradient becomes even clearer—with higher probabilities as the age at first birth increases (Figure 3a, Model II). This suggests that lower levels of eligibility of younger mothers can to a certain extent explain, though not fully, age differences in mothers’ parental leave uptake. The differential in leave use between single mothers and mothers who had a co-resident partner during the observation period increases from 4 percentage points before to 6 percentage points after controlling for eligibility (Figure 3d). Furthermore, the explanatory power of mothers’ eligibility is notable when considering the gradient in leave uptake by migration background and level of education. Whereas large differences in leave uptake exist between groups with different migration backgrounds in Model I, these differences disappear to a large extent when controlling for differential eligibility

Table 1. Summary statistics and the distribution of the eligibility indicator by all covariates.

	No. persons	%	0% Never eligible	> 0%, < 50% eligible	≥ 50%, < 100% eligible	100% Always eligible
Leave uptake						
No	10,032	63.12	42.34	18.46	14.40	24.79
Yes	5,861	36.88	0.00	5.99	28.92	65.09
Age at first birth						
≤ 20	1,031	6.49	58.97	27.16	11.83	2.04
21–25	3,966	24.95	33.08	20.57	22.62	23.73
26–30	6,539	41.14	18.38	10.34	20.42	50.86
31–35	3,250	20.45	23.60	9.66	18.83	47.91
≥ 36	1,107	6.97	32.43	10.57	15.72	41.28
Partnership status						
Single mother	1,661	10.45	49.25	16.98	11.08	22.70
Having a partner	14,232	89.55	24.10	13.50	20.77	41.63
Migration background						
Belgium	9,675	60.88	15.82	11.00	22.77	50.41
Europe, 1st gen	1,373	8.64	45.88	15.15	15.37	23.60
Europe, 2nd gen	1,407	8.85	21.75	17.20	21.54	39.52
Other non-Eu, 1st gen	1,347	8.48	50.63	21.46	11.95	15.96
Other non-Eu, 2nd gen	338	2.13	25.44	14.50	24.85	35.21
Turkey/Morocco, 1st gen	1,086	6.83	67.68	18.88	6.26	7.18
Turkey/Morocco, 2nd gen	667	4.20	41.68	21.89	16.49	19.94
Level of education						
Low	2,615	16.45	48.99	27.11	12.77	11.13
Middle	4,062	25.56	24.91	19.84	23.68	31.56
High	4,528	28.49	13.83	9.56	23.63	52.98
Unknown	4,688	29.50	28.35	5.44	16.51	49.70
Parity						
1 child	7,676	48.30	29.43	12.05	14.70	43.82
2 children	6,360	40.02	21.97	14.45	24.06	39.53
3 or more children	1,857	11.68	31.88	19.33	25.96	22.83
Age youngest child						
< 2,5 years	6,898	43.40	34.14	9.09	12.53	44.24
> 2,5 years, < 6 years	6,039	38.00	23.73	15.98	22.35	37.94
> 6 years	2,956	18.60	15.56	20.67	31.33	32.44
Eligibility partner						
Never eligible	4,725	29.73	45.80	15.39	12.72	26.10
Ever eligible	11,168	70.27	18.66	13.22	22.73	45.39
Leave uptake partner						
No uptake	14,729	92.68	28.15	14.39	19.32	38.15
Leave uptake	1,164	7.32	8.76	7.22	25.34	58.68
Region						
Brussels	2,333	14.68	42.99	18.00	14.70	24.30
Wallonia	4,990	31.40	30.26	15.91	19.18	34.65
Flanders	8,570	53.92	20.25	11.54	21.47	46.74
	Range	Mean				
Year	2000/2010	2005.30				
# quarters observed	1/47	20.34				
Total	15,893	100.00	26.73	13.86	19.76	39.65

Source: BASD-Panel, calculations by the authors.

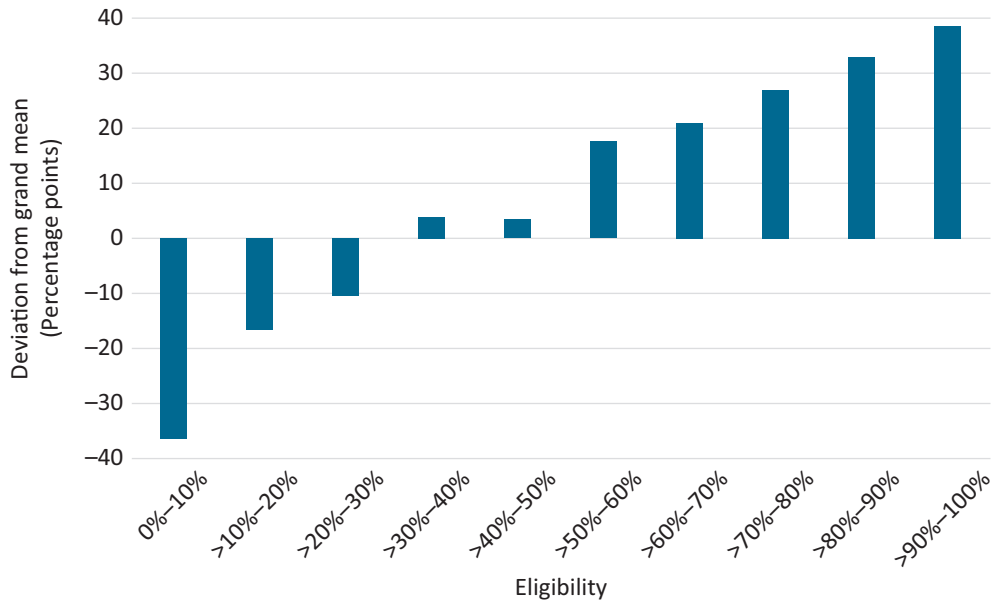


Figure 2. Predicted probabilities of leave uptake by eligibility status of the mother, expressed as deviations from the grand mean (assuming an average profile for other covariates; grand mean = 37%), Model II, 2000–2010. Source: BASD-Panel, calculations by the authors.

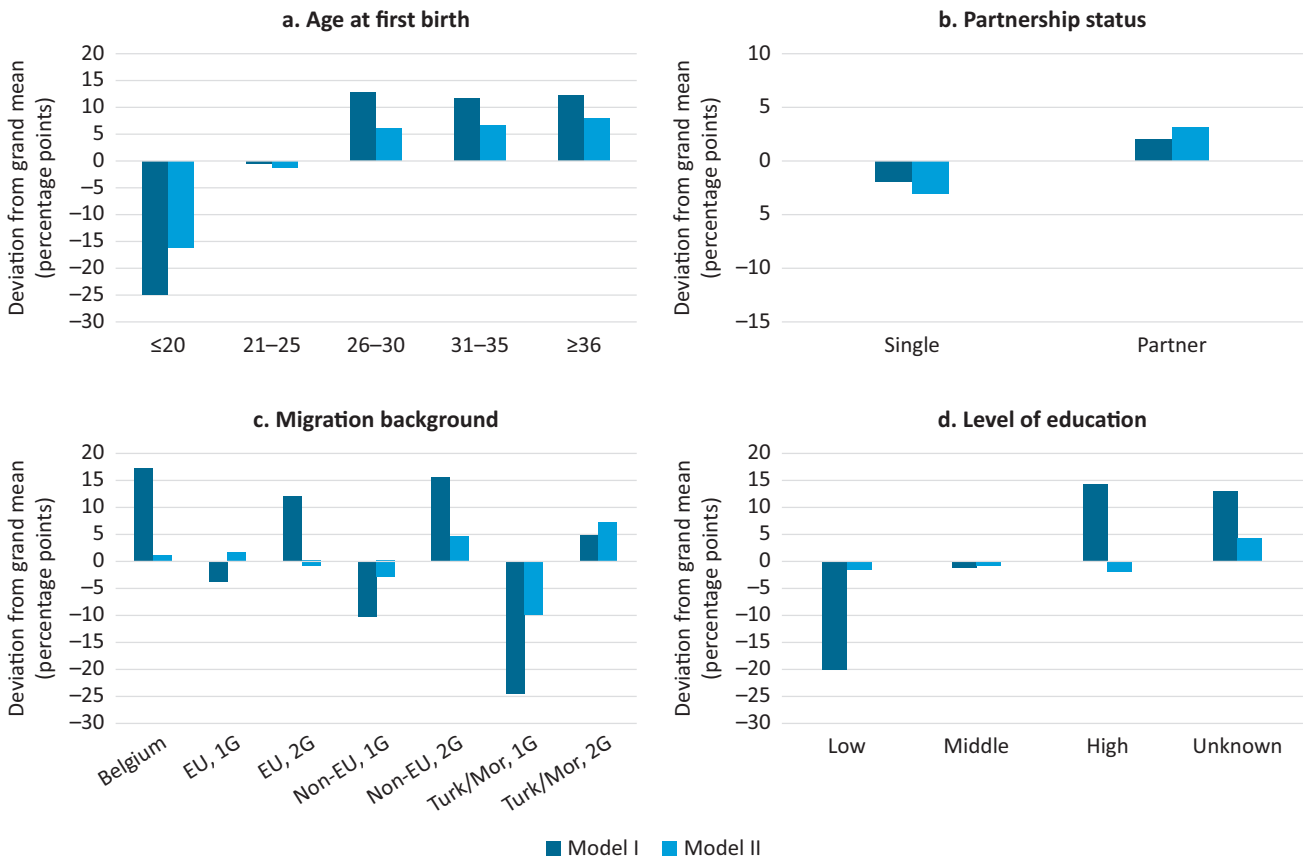


Figure 3. Predicted probabilities of leave uptake by age at first birth, parity, partnership status, migration background, and education before (Model I) and after (Model II) controlling for eligibility, expressed as deviations from the grand mean (assuming an average profile for other covariates; grand mean = 37%), 2000–2010. Source: BASD-Panel, calculations by the authors.

in Model II (Figure 3c). In Model I, higher probabilities of leave uptake are found among women with no migration background, as well as all second-generation mothers with a migration background. In contrast, lower than average probabilities are found for first-generation mothers with a migration background—particularly those originating from Turkey or Morocco. Controlling for eligibility in Model II, the predicted probabilities for all origin groups converge towards the grand mean. Only for first and second-generation mothers with a Turkish or Moroccan migration background do the probabilities still differ significantly from the grand mean. As a result, differential eligibility almost fully explains the lower uptake of parental leave by first and second generation mothers originating from European and non-European countries, and to a large extent also for first generation Turkish and Moroccan mothers. Finally, figure 3d displays the educational gradient in mothers' parental leave uptake. A clear positive gradient can be discerned in the results of Model I, with a 35-percentage-point difference between the probabilities of leave uptake of low and highly educated mothers. Controlling for eligibility, however, this difference almost completely disappears, suggesting that differences in parental leave uptake by level of education can largely be accounted for by differential access to parental leave.

6. Discussion

In the last decades of the 20th century, many Western European countries introduced parental leave schemes to foster work–family reconciliation in households with young children. However, little is known about whether these leave systems actually do so for all parents, or whether their inclusiveness is limited to specific groups of parents (Dobrotić & Blum, 2019a; Ellingsæter et al., 2020; Kil et al., 2018). Particularly when eligibility criteria are employment-based, social inequalities in the access to parental leave may be expected (McKay et al., 2016) and may provide a potential explanation for selective uptake of parental leave. Using detailed register-based microdata, we developed an individual-level indicator of eligibility in Belgium and deployed it to document differentiation in mothers' eligibility by age at first birth, partnership status, migration background and educational level. Also, this article examines the extent to which differential eligibility can explain observed patterns of differential leave uptake.

This article reaches two main conclusions. First, in Belgium, a considerable share of mothers is never eligible and thus by design structurally excluded from taking up parental leave. This group disproportionately consists of very young, single, and low educated mothers, as well as mothers with a migration background, and particularly first-generation migrants. From a life-course perspective, this finding is not surprising, given that young mothers have had less time to gain the necessary employment experience and that having a migration

background, and a low level of education or being a single parent have been shown to be associated with more precarious employment positions and lower labour force participation (Herremans et al., 2016; Kil et al., 2017; Maes et al., 2018; Ruggeri & Bird, 2014). These positions in turn hamper parents' ability to obtain access to parental leave. Furthermore, as many people find themselves at an intersection of disadvantaged positions (e.g., having a first-generation migration background and being low educated), the observed gradients in eligibility for parental leave are likely to work cumulatively and lead to the structural exclusion of a group of parents that is disadvantaged in multiple respects (Mussino & Duvander, 2016). This is especially problematic as available research shows that these groups also experience more difficulties in accessing other social policies that foster work–family reconciliation, such as subsidised formal childcare (Biegel et al., 2021; Vande Gaer, Gijssels, & Hedeboom, 2013) or subsidised outsourcing of household chores (Marx & Vandellannoote, 2015), leading to the near exclusion of these households from the entire work–family reconciliation policy package.

Second, differential access to parental leave can account for a large part of the inequalities in uptake of parental leave in Belgium. When taking eligibility into account, the negative association between younger ages at childbirth and leave uptake decreases, migrant-native differentials to a large extent disappear and the educational gradient is no longer observed. Hence, differential eligibility can partly explain differences in leave uptake by mothers' age at first childbirth, as older parents are more likely to have already established more solid labour market positions than very young parents. However, the age gradient also becomes clearer when taking eligibility into account, indicating that other factors that differ between young and older parents—such as the ability to take parental leave with low replacement benefits (affordability) or career prospects—determine mothers' parental leave uptake. The strong decrease or even disappearance of associations between migration background and leave use, and level of education and leave use indicate that precarious employment trajectories are a key explanatory factor in social inequalities in mothers' leave use in these respects. These findings are particularly relevant as they at least suggest that a reconsideration of the aspect of eligibility in Belgian parental leave policy may decrease social inequalities in parental leave uptake to a large extent. Research on the inclusiveness of parental leave in Sweden indeed demonstrates that differences in parental leave uptake between parents with and without a migration background are small in this context with universal eligibility (Sainsbury, 2019). Concerning partnership status, our findings indicate that eligibility cannot fully explain differences in leave uptake between single mothers and mothers who had a co-resident partner during the observation period. Despite the large disparities in eligibility between mothers with and without a co-resident partner documented in the descriptive

analyses (Table 1), the multivariate results indicate that differential eligibility does not account for the lower level of leave uptake by single mothers, suggesting that other factors are at play. In the Belgian context of low, flat rate replacement benefits, affordability may be a key factor in this respect, as there are no additional financial resources from a co-resident partner available which could mitigate the income loss associated with parental leave. Addressing such specific issues of affordability would be a fruitful path for future research. A similar conclusion can be made with respect to mothers with a Moroccan or Turkish migration background. In line with previous research, we find that although differential access to parental leave can explain part of the difference between, especially, first-generation mothers with a Moroccan or Turkish migration background and mothers without a migration background, they are still less likely to take up parental leave (Kil et al., 2018). These last findings suggest that, even when eligible, leave uptake may not be practically feasible for specific groups of parents, meaning that other factors such as benefit height, flexibility in the uptake of leave schemes, workplace cultures, or other normative factors may also shape the take-up of parental leave.

Our findings may be particularly informative as Western European countries increasingly exhibit parental leave schemes where access to replacement benefits is conditioned on employment-based criteria. In most of these countries, eligibility criteria have not been subject to reforms aimed at increasing inclusiveness since their introduction (Dobrotić & Blum, 2019a), which is problematic as this implies that parental leave policy reforms have hitherto predominantly benefitted those already included. This article demonstrates that employment-based eligibility criteria may lead to the structural exclusion of young parents, low educated parents, single parents and parents with a migration background. It provides insight into possible avenues for addressing parental leave policies' inclusiveness, starting with re-thinking the essential first aspect of entitlement. Citizenship-based eligibility criteria or mixed systems with both citizenship- and employment-based eligibility criteria with different benefit levels depending on which criteria were fulfilled may be a part of such reflections. However, less drastic changes such as uncoupling parental leave rights from strict conditions on seniority for the same employer or employment for a more limited number of consecutive months may well enable parents with more precarious employment trajectories to use these policies to their advantage. It should be noted that to date, parental leave is—at least in Belgium—often not the single or main ingredient in parents' reconciliation strategies as it is limited in time and often deployed in a flexible manner (i.e., part-time). It is, however, exemplary of broader challenges concerning inclusiveness when access to social policies is conditioned in terms of employment positions (Biegel et al., 2021). Complementary to Esping-Andersen's concepts of

decommodification and 'politics against markets,' social policies in contemporary welfare states increasingly display aspects of re-commodification by targeting labour market integration, in particular by stimulating female employment and work–family reconciliation (Cantillon & Van Lancker, 2013; Iversen & Soskice, 2015; Morel, 2007). However, in the context of increasing dualisation of European labour markets (Schwander & Häusermann, 2013), such policy design features are likely to reinforce social inequalities. This is problematic for female labour force participation and work–family reconciliation after the transition to parenthood in the first place, but also entails more long-term and inter-generational consequences (e.g., women's build-up of pension rights and children's later life outcomes respectively).

Finally, we identify a number of limitations and corresponding avenues for future research. First, concerning the development of individual-level eligibility indicators, the availability of detailed information on employment sectors is crucial in case of sectoral differences in legislation. In this article, we narrowed down the public sector to the educational sector and public administration due to limited information on public versus private employment. Hence, stricter eligibility criteria for the private sector were also applied to mothers working in 'undetected' public sectors. For some mothers, this may have led to a slight underestimation of the eligibility indicator. Second, detailed registration of the duration and the degree of reduction of employment in case of leave uptake (i.e., 100%, 50% or 20%) is essential to analyse duration and flexibility in uptake. Also, retrospective information of this type would allow to reconstruct whether and when exactly women have exhausted their parental leave and are for that reason no longer eligible. Given that this information is not fully available in the data at hand, for some mothers, this may have led to a slight overestimation of the eligibility indicator. Third, the analytical setup using cumulative or summary measures within a specific observation window does not allow addressing questions regarding the timing of leave uptake in relation to time-varying variables (e.g., eligibility, partnership), and potential bias could result when addressing such questions as variables measured at the time of the first birth may change throughout the measurement window. We consider this article to be an early contribution on social inequalities in eligibility for and uptake of parental leave and consider the further exploration of inequalities with respect to timing, duration and flexibility in leave uptake to constitute fruitful paths for future research.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Article

Parental Leave Reforms in Finland 1977–2019 from a Diversity Perspective

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Abstract

In Finland, all parents, regardless of gender, are eligible for parental leave and there are no restrictive eligibility criteria. In practice, however, the statutory leave options are not equally available to all parents. Since the 1970s, steps have been taken in redesigning the leave scheme to make it more inclusive. Several reforms have been made to promote equality, mainly between women and men, but also between diverse families, such as adoptive families, multiple-birth families or same-sex parent families. The ‘demotherisation’ of parental-leave rights has slowly shifted the focus from biological mothers to fathers and non-biological parents. In the most recent reforms, the focus has widened from equality between parents to include equality between children regardless of the form of the family that they are born or adopted into.

Keywords

demotherisation; family diversity; gender equality; non-biological parents; parental leave; reform

Issue

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1. Introduction

Finland is a Nordic welfare state where national policies and public responsibility aim to support parents of young children in the reconciliation of paid employment and childcare responsibilities. Statutory maternity, paternity and parental leave schemes with earnings-related benefits cover the last month of pregnancy and almost one year after childbirth. After the parental leave period, parents can choose between publicly supported early childhood education services or care leave with a flat-rate child-home-care allowance paid until the child is three years old. Parents also have the right to a temporary care leave to take care of a child less than ten years of age who has fallen ill, as well as part-time leave to reduce working hours (Miettinen, Salmi, Närvi, & Lammi-Taskula, 2020).

The eligibility for parental benefits is based on residence in the country, and leave rights are based on receiving the benefit. Finland is among the four EU Member States where there are no restrictive eligibili-

ty criteria regarding, for example, employment or a heterosexual partnership (EIGE, 2020). In 2019, Finland also introduced equal paid parental leave for single mothers, giving them eligibility to the father’s quota which was previously available only to single fathers and two-parent families. Finland could thus be seen as representing a universal parental leave model, where leave rights are inclusive for all parents. However, Dobrotić and Blum (2019) place Finland as a borderline case between the universal model and the selective mixed model, where some parents are excluded from the schemes. Even if the formal eligibility for leave is universal, in practice the statutory leave options are still not equally available to all parents.

During the past decades, several parental leave reforms have been made to promote equality in leave possibilities and take-up. The focus has mainly been on gender equality, i.e., the weaker position of women in the labour market and the more marginal position of men as parents (Hiilamo & Kangas, 2009; Lammi-Taskula, 2007; Sipilä, Repo, & Rissanen, 2010). The main tool

for promoting gender equality has been the father's leave quota that cannot be transferred to the mother. The non-transferable father's quota has resulted in higher take-up of leave by fathers (Duvander et al., 2019; Salmi & Lammi-Taskula, 2015). This development can be called 'demotherisation' (Mathieu, 2016), referring to the degree of independence mothers enjoy from the necessity of performing care work, and the extent to which they can offload childcare responsibilities onto other caregivers.

However, socio-economic inequalities produce variation in the conditions and consequences of leave take-up and sharing (Duvander & Johansson, 2016). For example, mothers with a lower education level and more precarious position in the labour market take longer leave periods with a relatively low benefit level, which is often detrimental to their labour market position as well as the socio-economic conditions of their children. The father's quota has been used more by two-parent families with higher socioeconomic status while those in more precarious positions have not been able to use it (Haataja, 2005; Lammi-Taskula, 2004; Salmi & Närvi, 2017).

In this article, we analyse parental leave reforms in Finland from the perspective of demotherisation (Mathieu, 2016) and inclusion of diverse families, i.e., families that differ structurally from a nuclear family form. We ask how the process of social inclusion has proceeded concerning the simultaneous process of demotherisation, and whether and how these two processes are interdependent. We show that the demotherisation process of parental leave in Finland from the early 1970s onwards has not only driven the system of parental leave schemes from supporting mainly biological mothers toward supporting biological fathers but also increased the parental leave eligibility and social inclusion of non-biological parents. We ask what the relationship is between promoting more active participation of fathers in childcare and the diversification of the parental leave eligibility. Based on our analysis of the Finnish leave policy development, we argue that what Sophie Mathieu (2016) has described as the demotherisation process has been a process of shifting the care responsibilities of the biological mother toward whomever else is there to care for the child, and that this form of biological demotherisation has been crucial for making the parental leave system more inclusive for parents and children living in diverse family forms.

We start with a conceptual part, defining our use of the concepts of family diversity and demotherisation. Then we introduce a brief history of parental leave reforms in Finland from a diversity perspective. Since the 1960s, several reforms have been introduced, usually designed in tripartite working groups with representatives from the central employers' and employee's unions and the state (Lammi-Taskula & Takala, 2009). Finally, we focus on the two most recent leave reform proposals, one proposed in 2016 (failed in 2018), and another proposed in 2019 (presently in process). We show that the

progress towards more social inclusion has been gradual and slow, and many aims and proposals to broaden eligibility have re-entered the negotiations again and again. We claim that the shift towards promoting fathercare, and simultaneous demotherisation, has paved the way to parental leave eligibility of non-biological parents and parents in diverse family situations.

2. Family Diversity and Demotherisation

In family research, a wide variety of meanings have been given to the concept of family diversity, including non-traditional families such as reconstituted families, adoptive families, single-parent families, and same-sex parent families as well as families belonging to ethnic or racial minorities, and addressing different parenting styles (Cygan-Rehm, Kuehnle, & Riphahn, 2018; Fine, 1993; Jou, Wong, Franken, Raub, & Heymann, 2020; Picken & Janta, 2019; Wong, Jou, Raub, & Heymann, 2019). In the context of parental leave policies, we use the concept to refer to families that differ structurally from the traditional nuclear family form. Specifically, we have looked at parental leave eligibility of single-parent families, stepfamilies, adoptive families, multiple-birth families, same-sex parent families, families who have lost a child, and foster families.

In Finland, family diversity has been recognised stepwise in parental leave reforms since the 1970s, starting with adoptive families and advancing to multiple birth families in the 1980s and same-sex parent families in the 2000s. The next section will give an outline of the development in more detail.

Parallel to the concept of family diversity, we use the concept of demotherisation presented by Mathieu (2016), defined as to which extent mothers can transfer part of their caregiving responsibilities to the state, grandparents, their partner or paid caregivers. Mathieu presents four types of maternalism promoted by social policies: implicit maternalism, state-funded dematernalism, traditional maternalism and familialised dematernalism. We locate the Finnish case to the borderline of state-funded dematernalism, where care work is shifted from the family unit to state-funded care institutions, and implicit maternalism, where mothers (sometimes referred to in gender-neutral terms as caregivers, as Mathieu points out) are offered time or money to look after dependents (Mathieu, 2016, pp. 582–583). On the one hand, the dualistic Finnish childcare policy (Sipilä et al., 2010) includes a subjective right for children to early childhood education and care after parental leave, but on the other hand, a flat-rate cash-for-care benefit is offered for a parent or other caregiver to stay at home until the child is three years old.

Evertsson, Jaspers, and Moberg (2020) use the concept of 'parentalisation' to refer to the legal and policy changes that make parenthood possible for parents in same-sex families. In their account of same-sex parents' eligibility for parental leave in five Nordic countries, they

name leave rights as crucial factors for parentalisation. Leave reforms that broaden the scope of parental leave eligibility can be seen as significant in the parentalisation of also other de-facto parents living in diverse families, for example, step-parents, or parents in foster families.

As we shall show, in the development of the Finnish parental leave scheme, demotherisation and the inclusion of diverse family forms are simultaneous processes that are entwined, but not always unilateral. The dimension of socio-economic equality is also at play (Cygan-Rehm et al., 2018; Kaufman, 2018). In the Finnish context, while the majority of parental leave days are gender-neutral and both parents are eligible to use them, mothers still use the vast majority of all parental leave days (Miettinen & Saarikallio-Torp, 2020). There is, however, a clear socioeconomic division in leave take-up among families, especially mothers. Those with a high education level and a more secure position in the labour market return to paid employment earlier with the help of early childhood education and care services, whereas those with a more precarious position use longer periods of the low cash-for-care benefit (Lammi-Taskula, 2004; Miettinen et al., 2020; Salmi & Närvi, 2017).

For the purpose of this study, we have systematically gone through the parental leave reforms in Finland from 1963 to the present day, both government proposals and actual legislation. We analyse this data through the concepts of demotherisation and family diversity in parental leave eligibility and scrutinise the tendencies at play in the development of these reforms.

3. Data and Analysis Method

The data in this section consist of revisions made to the *Act of Health Insurance* (The Finnish Government, 1963) concerning paid parental leave in Finland from 1963 until the end of 2020, reports of government task forces considering parental leave in 2005–2017, government proposals related to parental leave reforms of 2017 and 2019, and background material consisting of proposals of parental leave models by researchers, labour market organisations and other stakeholder organisations, as well as material from the on-going parental leave reform published by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

The revisions of the *Act of Health Insurance* are analysed to highlight the order, timeline and substance of changes that have been put into practice. The task force reports, government proposals and background material have been chosen as complementary data to analyse the debate related to the preparation of legal changes. Through this combination of data, we can grasp the logic behind the parental leave reforms, the competing political and stakeholder interests and the resulting practical policy measures.

Data of the legal revisions were gathered from the Finlex database (www.finlex.fi), which contains all acts of the Finnish legislation, previous versions of the acts and a history of revisions made to each specific act. Data of the

task forces and background data of the on-going reform were gathered from the website of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The task force reports were limited to the period of 2005–2017 when the discussion of family diversity became more central. After 2017, parental leave reforms were prepared without official task forces, so the background analysis is based on the government proposals on reforming the *Act of Health Insurance*.

The data were systematically gathered from the abovementioned sources, and analysed through qualitative content analysis, complemented with close reading, the concepts of family diversity and demotherisation as starting points (Herrnstein Smith, 2016; Schreier, Stamann, Janssen, Dahl, & Whittal, 2019). Qualitative content analysis is suitable for analysing conceivable amounts of specifically chosen data, whereas a close reading of selected documents, identified as significant, provides for a more detailed qualitative examination of the content, argumentation, and purpose of these documents.

The reforms to the *Act of Health Insurance* were first read through to select those that included changes in parental leave, looking for the specific paragraphs to which the changes were directed. The reforms that had to do with maternity, paternity or parental leave were then further analysed to see whether they were related to family diversity, as defined in the context of this article. The reforms containing this kind of substance were then sequenced by year and content, as presented in Table 1, and subjected to close reading. The task force reports, and government proposals, identified as crucial complementary data, were closely read from the perspective of family diversity and demotherisation. In the following sections, the data will be reported in chronological order, with an analytical focus on the more recent discussions from the perspective of the concept of demotherisation.

4. Findings

4.1. Early Family Leave Reforms in Finland from a Diversity Perspective

The first modern form of parental leave in Finland was directed to biological mothers as maternity leave was legislated in 1963. Maternity leave was nine weeks, one-third of which was to be taken before the due date and two-thirds after (364/1963). Maternity leave was gradually increased in 1977 to 7.5 months and further to 10.5 months in 1981.

Fathers got the right to two weeks of paternity leave in 1977 (The Finnish Government, 1977, 1981). From 1981 to 1985, married fathers had the right to use the last four months of maternity leave with the mother's permission. In 1985, parental leave that could be shared between the mother and the father was introduced, and eligibility was extended to unmarried fathers cohabiting with the mother and the child (The Finnish Government, 1985).

The first step towards broader eligibility among diverse families was made in the late 1970s, when parents of adopted children were given the right to parental leave in 1977 (1086/1977; see Table 1). Mothers of adopted children could take maternity leave up to 6.5 months from the birth of the child, or at least three months if the child was not a new-born when adopted. In 1981 this was increased to match the leave right of biological mothers, and the leave period was extended to 9.4 months from the birth of the child, or at least four months with older children (471/1981). The 1981 reform also included the possibility for adoptive fathers to use up to four months of maternity leave with the mother's consent.

Leave eligibility related to the death of a child or parent was reformed in the 1980s. In 1981, mothers to still-born children were given the right to take four months of maternity leave (The Finnish Government, 1981) and five years later fathers to stillborn children got the right to two weeks of paternity leave (The Finnish Government, 1986a). In 1985, fathers were explicitly given the right to take over the remaining period of maternity leave in case of death of the mother (The Finnish Government, 1985). If the father did not take care of the child after the mother's death, the leave could be granted to another person who took care of the child.

Soon after introducing gender-neutral parental leave, non-citizens were also included in the universal parental leave scheme. Parents who were not Finnish citizens but had been residing in Finland for more than 180 days were given the right to parental leave in 1986 (The Finnish Government, 1986b).

In 1994, a mother of a child taken into custody lost the right to parental leave during the time the child was not in her care (The Finnish Government, 1994). At the same time, the right to parental leave was extended to a father who did not live with the mother of the child but took care of the child, on the condition that the mother was not involved in caring for the child. This change strengthened the ethos that both parents are responsible for the child—if one is unable, then the other can take over.

The leave rights of multiple birth families were extended in the 1990s. They got a 2.5-month increase in parental leave in 1992 (The Finnish Government, 1992). Four years later, this increase was multiplied by the number of children born simultaneously (The Finnish Government, 1996), giving families with triplets, quadruplets etc. an even longer leave period. The need for both parents to stay at home together was recognised in 2002 as multiple birth families got the right to use the prolonged parental leave days simultaneously with the other parent's leave (The Finnish Government, 2002a).

A four-week father's quota for two-parent families where the parents lived together was introduced in 2003 (The Finnish Government, 2002b) and lengthened in 2010 by two weeks (The Finnish Government, 2009). In 2013, the father's quota and the 'old' paternity leave were merged into a nine-week paternity leave, of which three weeks can be taken simultaneously with the mother. The 'new' paternity leave can now be used until the child is two years old.

From a family diversity perspective, the lengthening of the father's quota was inadvertently increasing the inequality of single-mother families (Cygan-Rehm et al., 2018; Jou et al., 2020). Specifically, the increase of the father's quota that could be used after the maternity leave and parental leave periods would increase the length of paid parental leave only for two-parent families but not for single-mother families. Single fathers, however, were able to use the father's quota as well as the parental leave days.

Same-sex couples got the right to share parental leave in 2007 (The Finnish Government, 2006). In 2010, following the right to second-parent adoption of the partner's juridical child, the same-sex partner of a birth mother got the right to three weeks of paternity leave concerning the birth/adoption of the child (The Finnish Government, 2010). It was not until 2018, however, that same-sex unmarried cohabiting partners could share parental leave equally with their different-sex peers (The Finnish Government, 2016).

The development from the 1960s to the 2000s brings to light a demotherisation tendency of distancing

Table 1. Amendments of parental leave for diverse families in Finland, 1977–2019.

1997	Adoptive mothers gained the right to parental leave (1086/1977)
1981	Mother of a stillborn child gained the right to parental leave (471/1981)
1985	Unmarried fathers gained the right to share parental leave with the mother (32/1985)
1985	Parental leave possible for citizens of other countries than Finland based on residence in Finland (32/1985)
1986	Father of a stillborn child gained the right to parental leave (458/1986)
1992	Parents of multiple birth children gained a 60-day extension of parental leave (1653/1992)
1994	Mother whose child taken into custody no longer eligible for parental leave (1501/1994)
1994	Father who does not reside with mother eligible for parental leave (1501/1994)
2002	First individual quota for fathers (1075/2002)
2002–2019	As the quota for the father increases, single mothers have less leave than two-parent families

parental leave eligibility from what we call the hegemony of the birth mother. This development starts from the introduction of paternity leave in 1977 and continues through the inclusion of adoptive parents to removing the right of the birth mother to parental leave in case she is not involved in the care of the child. Simultaneously, the eligibility of fathers in different family formations to parental leave has been increased by giving non-resident or divorced fathers the right to leave, and fathers in multiple birth families the right to take parental leave simultaneously with the mother. Fathers have also been given a leave quota that cannot be transferred to the mother.

The leave rights of diverse families have been increased step by step, creating more social inclusion. However, from the perspective of gender equality, these reforms have not been radically successful. Although we see an increase in the number of parental leave days taken by the fathers, a majority of the gender-neutral parental leave that can be used by both parents is still taken by mothers (Miettinen & Saarikallio-Torp, 2020). Thus, the process of demotherisation, while impressive on paper, remains quite unimpressive in practice.

4.2. Foregrounding Family Diversity

The needs of diverse families have been addressed in several parental leave reforms since the early 1980s. However, the progress has been slow and gradual, and at the turn of the century, the leave rights were still far from equal. A systematic review of the whole parental leave scheme from a family diversity perspective was missing, and policy recommendations and proposals to change legislation would be only partial. During 2005–2017, several task forces were appointed to make proposals for a more inclusive leave scheme (for reports of the work of these task forces see, for example, STM, 2005, 2011, 2015a, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c).

In 2005, two Government reports on leave reforms were published, one containing proposals for achieving more effective equalisation of the leave costs between employers in female and male-dominated branches (STM, 2005), and the other proposing reforms of parental leave from the users' point of view (Työministeriö, 2005). The proposals for equalising leave costs included full salary compensation during the first months of the maternity leave in all branches as well as increasing the amount of parental benefit paid to the employer in case the parent receives full salary during leave, and compensation for the time spent caring for a sick child.

The proposals related to different groups of leave users included greater flexibility in the timing of the father's leave quota so that fathers could postpone their leave until the end of the mother's care leave or vacation. It was also proposed that parents (mostly fathers) who live apart from their child and have joint custody would have the right to temporary childcare leave to look after a sick child and that the rights of adoptive

parents should be improved by increasing their parental leave right to eight months and home care leave to two years, starting from when the child is placed in their care (Työministeriö, 2005). Furthermore, it was proposed that parental leave allowance would be payable also to a registered same-sex partner (Salmi & Lammi-Taskula, 2005; Työministeriö, 2005).

The social partners and political parties were quite unanimous on these proposals and most of them were soon actualised. Since 2006, a parent who does not live with the child but has joint custody is also entitled to temporary childcare leave to care for a sick child less than 10 years of age. In 2007, the percentage of earnings replaced by leave benefits was raised from 70% to 75% for the first 35 days of parental leave, and the parental leave period for adoptive parents was lengthened from 7.2 months to eight months (The Finnish Government, 2006). Same-sex parents in a registered relationship were given the right to share parental leave. Adoptive parents became entitled to home-care allowance (as an alternative to public day care) also for a child older than three years (Salmi & Lammi-Taskula, 2009; The Finnish Government, 2006).

These changes did improve the leave possibilities of other carers than birth mothers, but still, the big picture of childcare practice remained gendered, heavily leaning toward birth mothers. As a reaction to the slow process toward more gender equality, a leave model with significantly longer father's quotas (the 6+6+6 model; six-month quotas for each parent, and six months of sharable leave) was presented in 2006 by researchers (Salmi & Lammi-Taskula, 2010). This model was soon adopted as a goal by the Council for Equality, the Green Party and the Left Alliance, and the Finnish Confederation of Salaried Employees. The model also faced criticism for being on the one hand too radical, and on the other hand not addressing family diversity—such as same-sex parents, single mothers, and stepfamilies.

In 2014, the Minister of Social Affairs and Health set up a task force to consider the situation of diverse families concerning parental leave legislation. This was the first comprehensive attempt in Finland to grasp the complexities of parental leave for diverse families. The task force consisted of representatives of NGOs specialising in diverse families, including LGBTIQ+ families, multiple birth families, adoptive families, single-parent families, as well as a representative from the Network of Family Diversity.

The task force report (STM, 2015a) included several proposals on how to change the parental leave legislation towards the greater inclusion of different family situations. These included, but were not limited to, giving same-sex unmarried parents the right to parental leave; extending the parental leave of single mothers to the same length as that of single fathers; giving multiple birth fathers three weeks of parental leave for each child born simultaneously; extending the leave right of single fathers who take care of the child, but do not reside with

the birth mother, to equal the length of maternity leave; and extending the parental leave of adoptive parents to match that of birth parents.

The systematic analysis of the leave scheme by the working group revealed that the system originally built on the logic of primacy of the birth mother was still based on an assumption that biological, legal, and actual parenthood coincide. The conclusion was that a large-scale parental leave reform was needed, built on a presumption of family diversity (STM, 2015b).

The timing of these different processes—the demotherisation of parental leave and the systematic attempt to include family diversity—indicates that the two are simultaneous and interdependent on an ideological level, but not necessarily intertwined on a practical level. We find that the demotherisation of leave rights is a precondition for the inclusion of diverse families, opening up space for non-biological and social parents even if the change of practice is slow. Thus, the outspoken ideal of equality, even if it takes the form of Mathieu's (2016) model of implicit maternalism, where mostly mothers take paid leave to take care of dependents, opens up for a diversification of the parental leave scheme. The slow crumbling of the hegemony of the birth mother shows in the increase of the father's quotas, but also in legal changes such as declining parental leave if the child is taken into custody or giving parental leave to adoptive parents. But further demotherisation was still needed to enhance the process of increasing family diversity.

4.3. Diversity and Demotherisation at Work: From 2016 to the Present Day

Unlike several previous governments, the conservative coalition government appointed in 2015 did not include a parental leave reform in its program (Elomäki, Mustosmäki, & Koskinen Sandberg, 2020). As a reaction, a lively public debate started, and many different leave models were suggested by various interest groups.

In 2016, inspired by the diversity workgroup from 2015, the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK, 2016) presented a parental leave model, followed soon by other labour market organisations and most political parties (Heinonen & Saarikallio-Torp, 2017; Keskusta, 2016; Kokoomus, 2017; Oksala, 2017; Social Democratic Party, 2017; Vihreät, 2016). The common feature in most models was a longer quota for fathers, and reductions of the home care allowance (Salmi, 2017). The majority of these models were also inclusive of a wide range of diverse family forms.

Pressured by the public debate, the government started a parental leave reform in the autumn of 2017 (resulting in the 2018 amendment; see The Finnish Government, 2018), aiming at increasing both gender equality and equality between children living in diverse families. Earlier that year, fathers who did not live with the mother of their child were given eligibility for paternity leave (Miettinen & Saarikallio-Torp, 2020), as they

were already eligible for temporary leave to care for a sick child and the administrative interpretation was adjusted to cover paternity leave with a similar logic.

The preconditions set by the government for the reform were strict and to some extent contradictory: The reform should be child and family-oriented, it should increase gender equality in work and family, the possibility to home care until the child is three years old should be kept intact, and public spending should not increase (STM, 2017a). The reform was framed as an employment policy reform, thus the labour market perspective was dominant while questions of care were not discussed much (Elomäki et al., 2020).

The contradictions in the preconditions are interesting from the demotherisation perspective. As we claimed earlier, Finland's dualistic family policy is, in terms of Mathieu's concepts, a mix of implicit maternalism and state-funded demotherisation. On the one hand, the explicit requirement for the reform was 'child and family orientation' together with taking family diversity and gender equality into account, in practice allowing for more paid parental leave for all two-parent families by lengthening the father's quota (also same-sex partners of the birth mother can use this quota). On the other hand, the reform was required to preserve the cash-for-care allowance until the child is three years of age. This benefit is used mainly by mothers (Miettinen et al., 2020) so, in practice, demotherisation was compromised with this restriction of the reform.

From the models presented by various political parties and organisations, two models were on the table in the final stage, both aiming at a longer, non-transferable father's quota and a shorter transferable leave period (STM, 2017c). Against the requirements, both models also included a considerable cut to the cash-for-care allowance. Preparations for the reform were broken off after six months in February 2018, based on calculations by the Ministry of Finance showing that there would be only a small increase in the employment rate for mothers, while the financial consequences would be hardest on families in a weaker socio-economic position (Salmi, Närvi, & Lammi-Taskula, 2018).

Despite the failure of the efforts to promote gender equality with a longer father's quota, preparations related to equality between children in diverse families continued. The government lengthened the parental benefit period for adoptive parents, multiple birth families and single mothers (Salmi et al., 2018; The Finnish Government, 2018). These changes were largely based on the proposals made by the Ministry of Social Affairs family diversity workgroup in 2015 (STM, 2015a). The main changes included giving single mothers the right to use the father's quota and thus get the same amount of leave as two-parent heterosexual families, giving multiple birth fathers three weeks of leave for each child born at the same time, and extending the parental leave for adoptive parents to match the leave of families with biological children.

These changes fixed some of the most acute inequalities related to the leave rights of diverse families, while many issues remained. It is evident, however, that in this specific political environment, with a conservative coalition in power, demotherisation did not prevail but family diversity did. The proposed restrictions to child home care failed, leaving Finland stuck in the apparently gender-neutral system that in practice adheres to Mathieu's concept of implicit maternalism. However, the measures to increase the social inclusion of diverse families were implemented as a partial reform of the existing policy, making the parental leave scheme more equal for single-parent, adoptive, multiple birth, same-sex and stepfamilies.

The progressive pro-gender equality tendencies were not completely thwarted and will get a new chance in the on-going parental leave reform. Next, we focus briefly on the prospects of parental leave rights through an account of a structural parental leave reform that is currently being prepared in Finland, involving radical demotherisation as well as the inclusion of family diversity on an even larger scale.

To address the gender equality challenges, the 2019 parental leave reform proposal includes a radical rethinking of gender neutrality toward a 1+7+7 system of parental leave, which would give both parents in a two-parent family equal shares of leave, part of which could then be transferred to the other parent (STM, 2020). This indicates that the goal is radical demotherisation, with an insistence on the inclusion of family diversity, as we shall proceed to show.

In 2019, a coalition government (Social Democrats, Centre Party, the Greens, the Left Alliance and the Swedish People's Party) included a parental leave reform in its program. The aim was to promote a more equal division of labour in childcare between parents as well as equality between children living in diverse families. The gender-specific names of leave periods (maternity leave, paternity leave) were changed into gender-neutral ones. Instead of 'mothers,' the proposal talks about 'pregnant parents' and instead of 'fathers,' 'other parents' are addressed (STM, 2020).

In the coming reform, the government wants to extend the earnings-related parental benefit period and divide it symmetrically so that each parent gets 6.4 months of leave. Single parents would have a right to both quotas. In families with two parents, each parent could transfer 2.5 months to the other parent. Thus, the non-transferable quota for each parent would be 3.9 months. This transfer could also be made to the spouse of the parent, thus including stepfamilies and same-sex parent families with more than two de-facto parents. The pregnant parent would be entitled to up to five weeks of leave before the birth of the child (STM, 2020). The reform would not include any changes in the home-care allowance. An unofficial tripartite group was called to support the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in preparing the reform (Miettinen et al., 2020).

With the gender-neutral terminology, the eligibility for parental leave would be the same for all legal parents, biological or non-biological and irrespective of gender. Thus, the focus is on the right of any child to be cared for by their parents. One of the premises of the reform is the inclusiveness of diverse families. There are, however, very little concrete facts available yet on what this means in practice.

5. Discussion

The focus of this article has been on the changes of the Finnish parental leave scheme from the perspectives of family diversity and demotherisation. Following the classification of Dobrotić and Blum (2019) that questions the Finnish parental leave scheme as a universal model, we have noted that not all parents have been equally eligible for parental leave during the past decades. However, Finland has advanced from a leave policy based on the hegemony of the birth mother towards a regime of explicit parental equality, and the equality of children regardless of their family form.

It is noteworthy that the starting point of the on-going reform is quite different from previous reforms. In the face of the hegemony of the birth mother, this reform promotes equality, at least formally, as it emphasises the inclusion of non-biological and/or non-resident parents. The reform also addresses gender-neutrality, which Mathieu (2016) says is indicative of the implicit maternity model of social policy, as it explicitly gives the other parent—in two-parent heterosexual nuclear families, the father—half of the leave. As the main perspective is that of the child, the reform aims at the equality of all children regardless of the family form in addition to increased gender equality in working life and family life.

Regardless of whether or not the reform will be passed, the proposed model is a step in a new direction that is not radically divergent from previous debates but does attempt a radical leap away from an institutionally reproduced hegemony of the birth mother. Thus, the on-going reform would move Finland toward what Dobrotić and Blum (2019) call a universal adult-worker model of parental leave policy. It is more difficult to determine what the new regime would mean in Mathieu's terms. It would still not be completely state-funded dematernalisation, but clearly a step away from implicit maternalism, toward something that could be classified as familialised dematernalism—a situation where other family members take more responsibility for care voluntarily. However, in Mathieu's conception, in familialised dematernalism care work occurs through kin solidarity or father's involvement but is *not* financed by taxpayers (Mathieu, 2016, p. 583). In the on-going Finnish reform, the policy measures of implicit maternalism are partly intact in the form of cash-for-care, while an explicit increase of parental leave days to the other parent (father) is made. Thus, this system would fall outside the four-concept model that Mathieu suggests. We might

refer to this as a model of explicit (parental) equality—one that contains the ideals of demotherisation and simultaneous familialisation while being state-funded and including a strong financial incentive for families to use both parents' parental leave quotas.

The ideal of equality in the proposed new model is not, however, limited to equality between parents. A significant element of the model is equality between children regardless of family form. In practice, this means positive discrimination of some parents, such as single parents of all genders, who would be eligible for longer parental leave than two-parent family parents have in case the other parent does not use their quota.

These two tendencies—demotherisation and inclusion of family diversity—have been present throughout the modern history of Finnish family leave reforms. Step by step, the hegemony of the birth mother has been deconstructed on the symbolic level of policies. In practice, however, it has still prevailed in the actual take-up of parental leave. This indicates that formal gender neutrality and formal equity do not necessarily lead to equality in practice (Mathieu, 2016). Simultaneously, we find that the deconstruction of the hegemony of the birth mother, while only on the level of formal equity, is a necessary precondition of the increased social inclusion of diverse families—an aspect that has not been addressed much in previous research on parental leave policies.

The hegemony of the birth mother was visible as a starting point when the first modern parental leave regimes were installed in the early 1960s. Several reforms have created gradual progress of distancing from this hegemony, which can be seen as a demotherisation process of parental leave. This progress took place through two different strands of development: the explicit increase of father's rights and responsibilities and making parental leave and benefits available to a wider range of diverse parenthood.

The main question in this tale of slow progress centres on the role of the birth mother. On the one hand, the physical needs of the birth mother, in the future to be known in the Finnish terminology as the birth giver, need to be met through securing a specific pregnancy-related leave period. At the moment, a four-month pregnancy-related leave is guaranteed to all birth givers whose pregnancy has lasted for more than 154 days, regardless of whether the child is given up for adoption, is being raised by its father(s), is taken into custody from birth or even dies at birth or is stillborn.

On the other hand, after this recovery period, the rest of the parental leave can be shared with the other parent—the father or the birth giver's spouse. This freedom of choice in itself marks a distancing from the hegemony of the birth mother—a movement from protecting the relationship of the child and the mother toward a more inclusive understanding of the family of the child. In terms of Mathieu's theory, this could be understood as a move toward greater demotherisation while still acknowledging the health needs of the birth giver after

childbirth. The birth giver is protected as a person whose physical wellbeing requires a period of rest after giving birth, but the focus of the parental leave system has turned toward the child and the right of the child to be cared for, as well as securing enough time for the child together with both parents.

It has been noted throughout this analysis that despite a long history of parental leave reforms questioning the hegemony of the birth mother, most parental leave is still used by them. As the father's quota has been made longer and more flexible, more fathers have used it. There are, however, clear socio-economic differences in the take-up, and a relatively large group of fathers do not use their quota. Inequalities between families may have grown, as mainly those with a higher education level and a better position in working life have used the possibility to share leave (Miettinen & Saarikallio-Torp, 2020). These inequalities are important to consider in further analyses of parental leave regimes, to understand the expected implications of different models. As Cygan-Rehm et al. (2018) point out in a German context, and Kaufman (2018) in a British one, a parental leave reform may be very effective for those who benefit from it, but careful consideration is in place to identify the situations where the reform is of minimal or no benefit—for example for families outside the labour market, or in situations where the statutory pay is not sufficient to cover for the salary loss during the parental leave.

The most recent changes in the leave scheme in Finland have focused on broadening the eligibility to parental leave and benefits to cover more than just the presumed two parents—the birth mother and the genetic father. This has been disrupting the logic of biological/genetic parenthood and foregrounding the social and psychological dimensions of parenthood. There is a will to make parental leave available to those who actually take care of the child, regardless of their biological or legal bonds to the child or its birth giver. This is a form of familialised dematernalism in Mathieu's terms, but the system less vulnerable and less dependent on voluntary care work as the Finnish parental leave system is based on tax-funded salary compensations.

We suggest that the more systematic discussion around diversity marked a turning point in the discourse on parental leave in Finland. After 2015, the focus was turned from a gradual increase in fathers' leave periods, and slight modifications to include diverse family situations, toward a larger-scale structural reform of the parental leave scheme. This change is marked by a shift of focus from the perspectives of the parents—which parent gets how much leave—to the perspective of the child. The increased inclusion in parental leave can also be seen to lead to broader parentalisation (Evertsson et al., 2020) in diverse families, and thus to the increased ability of families to share care work and responsibilities.

In the on-going reform, one of the aims is to secure the right of every child to an equal amount of time being cared for at home, regardless of the family type the child

is born or adopted into. Less weight is put on whether the person caring for the child is the mother, father or someone else. Based on our analysis, we claim that an analysis of social policies concerning demotherisation will benefit from a simultaneous analysis focusing on family diversity in a broad sense. Both of these processes are dependent on how strong an emphasis there is on the hegemony of the birth mother, and both are based on an explicit claim for equality—between parents of all genders, and between children regardless of family form.

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Conflict of Interests

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Article

When Does Expanded Eligibility Translate into Increased Take-Up? An Examination of Parental Leave Policy in Luxembourg

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Abstract

This article aims to explore the role of eligibility for parental leave as a determinant of access and as an enabler of leave take-up. To analyse the link between eligibility and take-up, we study a unique policy change in Luxembourg’s parental leave scheme. The country’s 2016 parental leave reform relaxed the eligibility criteria to enable marginal part-time working parents to access the parental leave scheme for the first time. We focus on this change and examine to what extent relaxing the eligibility criteria translated into increased take-up by the marginal part-time working parents who became eligible. To quantify this transition, we analyse trends in and patterns of eligibility for the scheme in Luxembourg between 2009 and 2018 among first-time parents working full-time, part-time, or marginal part-time hours. We use a subsample of Luxembourg-resident, cohabiting, first-time parents (N = 6,254) drawn from the social security data. Our analysis shows that as eligibility is dependent on individual factors, it has similarities among mothers and fathers, whereas take-up is notably greater for mothers. After the reform, we observe that marginal part-time working mothers started taking parental leave, but up to 2018, the reform’s outreach to marginal part-time working fathers remained limited. We also find that foreign national parents are less likely to be eligible for parental leave and have lower take-up rates. Despite the gendered parental leave take-up behaviours in parallel with international evidence, marginal part-time working mothers’ positive response to the reform indicates progress towards strengthening women’s labour market attachment in Luxembourg.

Keywords

eligibility; employment; leave take-up; Luxembourg; marginal part-time; parental leave

Issue

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1. Introduction

Eligibility criteria determine the extent of a policy’s potential beneficiaries. Restricting the access to welfare benefits by using eligibility criteria is common practice and respective non-take-up is well-studied in social policies (van Oorschot, 1991). Contrarily, research on the eligibility for work–life reconciliation policies, particularly access to parental leave, has been somewhat limited.

More recently, some investigation of eligibility has begun to emerge in parental leave research (see, for example, Dobrotić & Blum, 2020; EIGE, 2020; Twamley & Schober, 2019). Yet what determines eligibility in the first place, and once it has been attained, the extent to which it translates into take-up remain under-researched. To add to well-established parental leave take-up literature, we return to the foundations of parental leave take-up by analysing the determinants of eligibility in a

single-country setting. The eligibility criteria vary across countries and this variation affects the size of the eligible population, which is the denominator of the take-up calculations. Therefore, we focus on one country and this specification prevents us from overlooking disparities in take-up rates. Furthermore, when the change in eligibility criteria addresses a specific group of parents, their behaviours affect overall take-up rates in the country. The expansion in parental leave eligible population would increase the denominator for the take-up calculations, yet if newly-eligible parents do not take parental leave, then overall parental leave take-up rates for that country drops. Therefore, for an outside observer, it may not be entirely clear whether this decrease is due to a general population behaviour or it is due to the newly-eligible parents' parental leave take-up behaviour. With the 2016 parental leave reform, Luxembourg provides us with an excellent opportunity to study this.

In our understanding, parental leave eligibility conveys a real opportunity for parents to have (or to not have) access to leave. The opportunity for decision-making regarding whether to take parental leave contributes to an advantage. This advantage can be conceived as the capability to perform employee and parenting roles reciprocally (Javornik & Yerkes, 2020). By providing such leverage, the policy acts as an institutional means to offer an enabling environment for parents, children, and workplaces. This enabling environment allows parents to hold roles as employees and responsibilities as parents, children to have the opportunity to receive parental care, and workplaces to retain talent and avoid productivity losses. Paving the way toward equal access to parental leave would translate into an equal opportunity for young children to experience the benefits of parental-leave-rich households (O'Brien, 2009).

In the work–life reconciliation policies domain, parental leave policies differ from other childcare policies by explicitly addressing parents and protecting their employment throughout a leave period. By equally targeting mothers and fathers, such policies operate as a care and a gender equality measure (Koslowski, Blum, Dobrotić, Kaufman, & Moss, 2020). However, uneven access to parental leave seeds inequalities between parents who are eligible for leave and those who fail to meet the eligibility criteria (O'Brien, Aldrich, Connolly, Cook, & Speight, 2017). While this does not mean that all eligible people can afford to take parental leave, or prefer to do so, those who are not eligible lack the choice. Therefore, it is crucial to understand if any parent is left behind due to policy design. Additionally, it also becomes necessary to discover how the targeted group responds when a policy relaxes the eligibility criteria and focuses on a larger population. Whether the policy change can establish or transform behaviour remains an interesting question.

To this end, our aim in this article is to use social security records to assess the extent to which the expansion in eligibility criteria in Luxembourg's parental leave

reform could turn newly-eligible—i.e., those who work between 10 and 20 hours per week and are classified as marginal part-time workers—first-time parents into leave-takers. Our objective is to examine the evolution of eligibility and take-up over time, particularly for newly-eligible parents and across different parent groups. We first provide a descriptive picture of annual eligibility and take-up rates, and then discuss the main determinants of eligibility among first-time parents in Luxembourg. We display the characteristics of parents who are excluded from parental leave due to eligibility criteria and explore the factors affecting the probability of being eligible across full-time, part-time, and marginal part-time working parents. We then focus on marginal part-time working parents—who only became eligible for the leave after the reform—and examine the interplay between eligibility changes and the take-up behaviour among mothers and fathers. Before the analysis, we discuss parental leave eligibility and determinants of take-up based on existing evidence and summarize Luxembourg's leave system. We finish with discussion and conclusion sections.

2. Determinants of Eligibility and Take-Up of Parental Leave

Access to leave and its benefits (e.g., compensation), which are not necessarily mutually exclusive, are bound by policy designs that require parents to meet eligibility criteria. These criteria are likely to be based on factors such as length of residence, employment history, duration of contract, or household composition; framing parental leave as a right related to citizenship or employment (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020; EIGE, 2020; Koslowski et al., 2020). The degree of accessibility and policy designs vary among European countries (Koslowski et al., 2020). A recent comparative study documents that across the EU-28, 29% of women and 20% of men are ineligible for parental leave due to unemployment or inactivity, employment conditions, self-employment, or personal and household characteristics (EIGE, 2020).

Existing literature has documented associations between eligibility requirements and growing inequalities among parents (O'Brien et al., 2017; Twamley & Schober, 2019). Particularly when leave is defined as an employment right with eligibility rules, inequalities appear not only among those who are outside the labour force but also among the working population (Campbell, 2006; Ghysels & Van Lancker, 2011). The disparities in access based on employment conditions require attention to be paid to countries' labour force composition, the type of jobs available in the market, and any activation measures. This is particularly important for a country such as Luxembourg, where parental leave (as a paid entitlement) is contingent on employment and the labour force consists of a large share of foreign nationals.

In parallel, relevant literature also shows that when policies relax the eligibility criteria for a scheme and

expand its potential reach, specific targeted groups are likely to increase their take-up (Margolis, Hou, Haan, & Holm, 2019). When eligibility criteria are linked to traditional employment modalities, they become more prone to exclude parents working under non-standard contracts (Margolis et al., 2019; O'Brien, 2009; Patnaik, 2019). This may generate accessibility clusters and could turn parental leave into the property of only specific groups of parents, thereby excluding those in insecure or atypical employment (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020; Ghysels & Van Lancker, 2011).

Being eligible for parental leave establishes the basis for potential take-up. However, the decision of whether to take parental leave involves a more complex combination of factors. While the policy design is likely to establish norms and behaviours (Hobson, 2018; Kangas & Rostgaard, 2007), individual preferences, workplace characteristics, managerial and collegial attitudes and partners' characteristics are factors that have been documented as determinants of parental leave take-up. Relevant literature shows that the majority of people who take parental leave are mothers, but when the policy defines leave as an individual entitlement and specifies quotas on a 'use-it-or-lose-it' basis, it encourages fathers' take-up (Bergqvist & Saxonberg, 2017; O'Brien & Wall, 2017).

Research shows that parents with a higher level of education, higher income, and with more gender-equal attitudes toward sharing care responsibilities are more likely to be leave takers (Duvander & Johansson, 2012; Kaufman & Bernhardt, 2015; Twamley & Schober, 2019). This is also particularly apparent among men who have a higher-educated and high earning partner (Bygren & Duvander, 2006; Geisler & Kreyenfeld, 2011). The compensation level and potential income loss appear to be essential concerns of parents when deciding about taking parental leave (O'Brien, 2009; O'Brien, Brandth, & Kvande, 2007; Valentova, 2011). Further, research shows low take-up among disadvantaged fathers due to financial difficulties (Pragg & Knoester, 2017). The disadvantages and respective lower take-up might also be more prevalent among people with an immigrant background (Ma, Andersson, Duvander, & Evertsson, 2019). This may be related to the economic opportunities for foreign-born parents in their country of residence, and how long they have lived there. Regarding the latter, adapting to new norms might also take a long time.

In addition, some studies stress the crucial role of workplaces and how managerial and collegial attitudes and the composition of the workforce influence parents' leave take-up behaviour (Allard, Haas, & Hwang, 2011; Haas & Hwang, 2019). When fathers work in male-dominated workplaces, or mothers work in female-dominated workplaces, fathers are less likely to take-up parental leave (Bygren & Duvander, 2006). Working in the private sector is also associated with lower leave take-up for fathers (Bygren & Duvander, 2006; Lappegård, 2012).

3. The Case of Luxembourg

3.1. Labour Market

Located in continental Europe and having borders with Belgium, France, and Germany, Luxembourg is a country with 626,000 inhabitants, of whom 48% are foreign nationals (Le Gouvernement de Grand-Duché de Luxembourg, 2020a). Consequently, Luxembourg's labour force is highly multinational, and of the Luxembourg-resident population, about half of the labour force is non-native (STATEC, 2020).

Luxembourg has a long history of a corporatist welfare regime and traces of being a conservative society, with men holding the primary breadwinner role and women principally taking on caregiving responsibilities (Hartmann-Hirsch, 2010; Zhelyazkova & Ritschard, 2018). With the legacy of this traditionally gendered division of labour and low female employment, particularly after parenthood (Zhelyazkova & Ritschard, 2018), Luxembourg has enacted various policies to support families with young children and to address women's employment. Alongside, the employment rate for women with a youngest child aged 2 or under has increased over time, from 45.6% in 1998 to 71.6% in 2014 (OECD, 2018).

As is the case in many other European countries, most part-time employment is undertaken by women in Luxembourg. While the proportion of men in the labour force working part-time is consistently around the 2% level, 30% of women between the age of 25 and 54 work part-time in the country (Eurostat, 2020). Further, between 2009 and 2018, men between the ages of 25 and 54 and who work on average less than 20 hours per week correspond to less than 1% of Luxembourg's labour force (OECD, 2020). Of the same age group during the same observation window, women who work less than 20 hours per week comprise 6.1% of the labour force (OECD, 2020). The 2016 parental leave reform particularly associates with a notable proportion of women in part-time employment—including marginal part-time work—and a political agenda aiming to improve gender equality in the country.

3.2. Parental Leave

In 1999, following an EU Commission Directive, the Luxembourg government introduced a parental leave scheme. Before this, family-related leave policies had been limited to 20 weeks paid maternity leave and 10 days special leave for fathers, to be taken at the time of the childbirth or adoption. By providing job protection and remuneration, parental leave brought a promise of change in the division of labour within the household and in the labour market. Luxembourg's introduction of this policy can be considered a progressive step in its transformation to a more gender-equal society (Valentova, 2011).

Since 1999, parental leave in Luxembourg was 6 months duration (12 months in the case of part-time

take-up) for each parent for each new-born, and had three main features: a paid, individual, and non-transferable right. The scheme was available equally to all employed (i.e., self-employed as well as salaried) parents who had been contributing to the social security system for the 12 months before taking parental leave. Hence, with leave being reserved for all working parents but granted only after meeting the eligibility criteria, Luxembourg's parental leave policy can be categorized as a selective adult-worker model (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020) and described as an employment-related social investment mobilized by the state.

On 1 December 2016, the new parental leave reform (hereafter just termed reform) became effective in Luxembourg. Before this, parents who worked less than 20 hours per week did not have access to parental leave. With the reform, the eligibility criteria for weekly working hours were relaxed, with access expanded to include parents working for as little as 10 hours per week. This meant that parents working between 10 and 20 hours weekly (i.e., marginal part-time working parents) became eligible for parental leave. Parents working fewer than 10 hours per week remain ineligible. The criterion of continuous contribution to social security remained for the newly eligible marginal part-time workers.

There are other components of the reform that incentivize individuals, once eligible, to take parental leave: Parents have more flexibility regarding the mode of leave (full-time, part-time, or divided up, e.g., 1 day per week off over 20 months, or any 4 months over 20 months) and enhanced remuneration (increased from a monthly flat-rate payment (approximately €1,800) to a dynamic calculation of salary and the number of hours worked (between €2,100 and €3,500 per month). Additionally, with the reform, parents can take the period of leave up to the time their child turns six, whereas before this was only until the child turned five. It is also important to note that the reform date does not act as a cut-off point. Parents who had their child or children in the pre-reform period and who comply with the eligibility criteria can still benefit from the new policy.

We propose that with the increased flexibility, higher compensation, and expansion in the scope of potential beneficiaries, the reform could attract more people to take parental leave. We also acknowledge that because the reform brings changes to the policy's different elements concurrently, it is challenging to identify which factor or factors affect parents' leave take-up behaviour. However, because marginal part-time working parents had no access to parental leave before the reform, their post-reform leave take-up can be associated with it. While these parents were already loosely connected to the labour market and are likely to have more flexible arrangements in work-life reconciliation, having access to parental leave provides them with an assurance to stay in the labour market.

In this context, we first look how eligibility rates evolved over time among full-time, part-time, and

marginal part-time working parents, and then focus on marginal part-time working parents' leave take-up after the reform.

4. Data and Sample

Our analysis is based on social security data, known as the IGSS data set, provided by the Luxembourg government's General Inspectorate of Social Security. It is an administrative dataset containing monthly socio-demographic, social security, and employment records for each parent registered in the Luxembourg social security system.

Our sample, extracted from the IGSS data set, covers Luxembourg-resident, cohabiting, first-time parents of 6,254 children born between December 2009 and June 2017. This sample includes 331 mothers (5.29% of mothers in the full sample) and 223 fathers (3.57% of fathers) who worked marginal part-time jobs in the pre-birth period. Our choice to investigate first-time parents with an only child was driven by data limitations, as we are unable to link parental leave and children for the pre-2016 period. Hence, in the case of a parent with more than one child, we cannot identify which period of leave was taken for which child.

We have an observation period of 18 months after the childbirth, ending in December 2018; two years after the reform was enacted. At the time of writing this article, this was the most recent data available on parental leave in Luxembourg. Our selected pre-reform period goes back to 2009, enabling us to present a trend over the last decade. We also restrict our sample to parents who reside in Luxembourg. Although cross-border workers account for 46% of the Luxembourg labour force (Le Gouvernement de Grand-Duché de Luxembourg, 2020b) and are eligible for parental leave, we decided to exclude them from our analyses due to information asymmetry (i.e., key variables on partners of cross-border workers are missing). In addition, we exclude self-employed parents. In the IGSS dataset, the number of hours worked (an essential variable for calculating parental leave eligibility and take-up) is reported by the employer. Moreover, self-employed people represent only a small proportion in our sample, which does not suffice to analyse them as a distinct group. Our specific interest group comprises marginal part-time working parents who are employed in the private sector. Hence, excluding self-employed parents is appropriate for the scope of this article.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics, already profiling ineligibility for parental leave in Luxembourg. It is apparent that about 28% of mothers and 14% of fathers were not working 4–5 months before the birth of their child. As these parents do not meet the continuous social security contribution and employment criteria, they are not eligible for the parental leave scheme. Most of the parents who were not working are from other EU-28 countries (not the neighbouring countries or

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

	Mother		Father	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Age	30.5	5.30	32.8	6.00
Nationality				
Luxembourger	.37	.484	.388	.487
German	.025	.157	.022	.148
Belgian	.023	.150	.032	.177
French	.082	.274	.091	.288
Portuguese	.20	.400	.218	.413
Other EU-28	.15	.358	.14	.348
Other	.14	.346	.104	.306
Number of working hours				
Not working	.2812	.449	.147	.354
Marginal part-time	.0529	.223	.035	.185
Part-time	.069	.254	.041	.199
Full-time	.596	.490	.775	.417
Sector				
Not working	.302	.459	.141	.348
Private	.614	.486	.739	.438
Public	.083	.276	.118	.324
N	6,254		6,254	

Source: IGSS (2020). Authors' calculation.

Portugal) and non-European backgrounds. This finding is in line with Luxembourg's national statistics. We also know that the unemployment rate among foreign-born individuals is higher than the overall unemployment rate in Luxembourg. As of 2019, while the overall unemployment rate in Luxembourg was 5.4% (World Bank, 2020) the foreign-born unemployment rate was 6.7% (OECD, 2020).

Of the mothers who were not working, 34% are non-European, 25% are from other EU-28, and 14% are Portuguese. Similarly, of the fathers who were not working, 25% are non-European, 30% are from other EU-28, and 13% are Portuguese. Having to omit a large fraction of the parents at the initial stage can be taken as an indication of the variations in access to parental leave because of discrepancies in labour market behaviour among different groups of parents.

The descriptive statistics show that on average, fathers are slightly older than mothers (33 years of age vs 30). Our sample demographically mirrors Luxembourg's national statistics, with a large proportion of foreign nationals parents residing in the country. The majority of non-native Luxembourger parents are from Portugal (around 20%), followed by other EU-28—meaning not from neighbouring countries or Portugal; generally, from Italy (15%)—and non-Europeans (14%). Nearly 60% of mothers and 78% of fathers work full-time, and not working is more prevalent among mothers (28%) than fathers (14%). The majority are employed in the private sector. However, a considerable proportion of them (30% of mothers and 14% of fathers) did not report sector

information, because they were not working at the time of data collection.

Because marginal part-time working parents are the parental leave reform's specific concern, we present their characteristics below in Table 2. This subsample shows different characteristics than the overall sample. The subsample is more homogenous compared to full sample. They are younger, mostly employed in the private sector, and they come from non-Luxembourg backgrounds. Most of this group (both for mothers and fathers) are either from Portugal, other EU-28, or non-European countries.

5. Results

5.1. Eligibility for Parental Leave in Luxembourg

Eligibility for parental leave in Luxembourg is defined by parents' pre-leave employment characteristics, including social security contributions and the number of hours worked per week. Below, we detail the trends in eligibility rates for parental leave in Luxembourg for mothers and fathers according to their weekly working hours. To calculate eligibility rates, we follow Nelson and Nieuwenhuis (2019) proposed methodology. We divide the number of eligible people by the reference population (i.e., first-time parents whose children were born between December 2009 and June 2017) for each year in the observation period separately for fathers and mothers.

Because the expansion in eligibility specifically focuses on marginal part-time working parents, we present

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for marginal part-time working parents.

	Mother		Father	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Age	29.6	5.608	30.8	6.51
Nationality				
Luxembourger	.187	.390	.183	.388
German	.009	.094	.004	.066
Belgian	.018	.133	.035	.186
French	.051	.221	.062	.243
Portuguese	.477	.500	.372	.484
Other EU-28	.129	.336	.165	.372
Other	.126	.500	.174	.380
Sector				
Not working	.16	.367	.094	.292
Private	.839	.367	.906	.292
Public
N	331		223	

Source: IGSS (2020). Authors' calculation.

parents' eligibility rates in separate clusters according to their number of working hours (see Figure 1). It is important to note that the variable for the number of working hours represents the average number of hours worked per week 4–5 months before the childbirth. The eligibility variable shows if the parent became eligible at any point during the observation period. While the small sample size of marginal part-time working parents may be concerning, it is important to note that this is based on social security records for the population of interest. It summarizes the evolution of ineligibility rates over the

last decade, showing a gradual improvement in access to parental leave in Luxembourg. The biggest change is observed among those working marginal part-time hours. This confirms the expansion with the reform. However, the question remains of which group of parents have been affected by the change in eligibility. To tackle this, we used probit regressions for mothers and fathers across different employment categories.

Because of the policy's nature, we use variables concerning parents' employment characteristics (e.g., full-time, part-time, or marginal part-time employment;

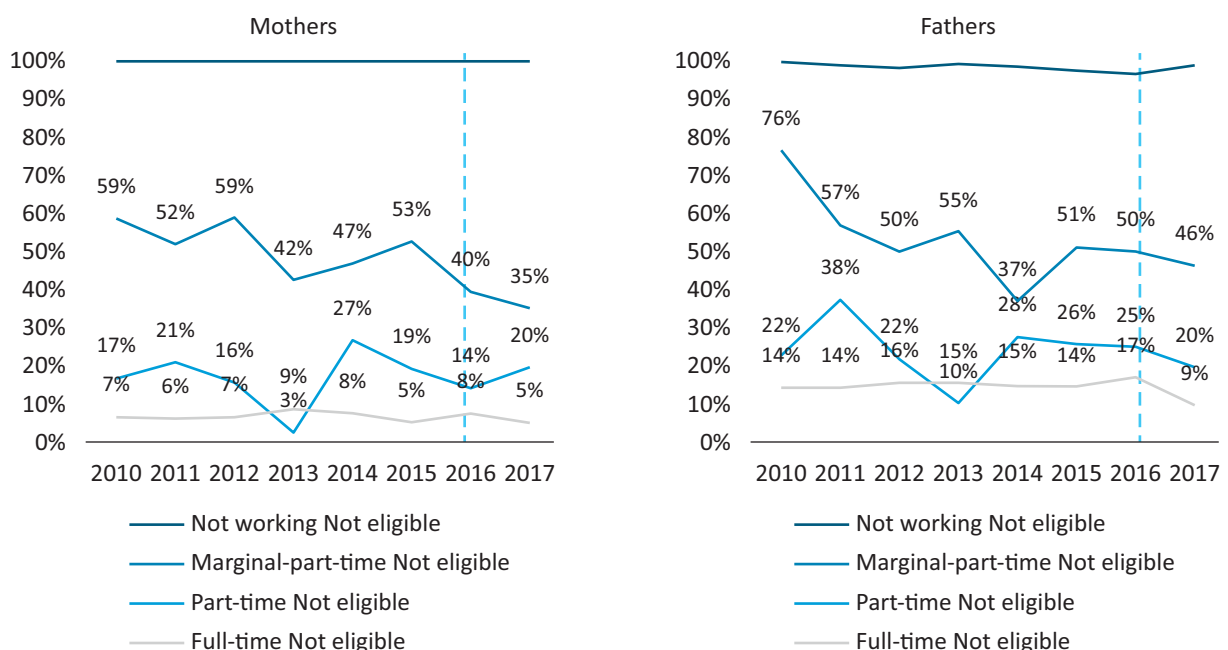


Figure 1. Trends in eligibility for parental leave in Luxembourg, 2009–2018. Source: IGSS (2020). Authors' calculation. Notes: Not working mothers = 1712, MPT mothers = 324, PT mothers = 422, FT mothers = 3611. Not working fathers = 897, MPT fathers = 217, PT mothers = 258, FT fathers = 4701.

private sector, public sector, or not working) in addition to their individual characteristics such as age and nationality as explanatory variables. We also add variables indicating the characteristics of the partner, including age, nationality, and sector. Because of data limitations, we lack potentially important information such as education level or any attitudinal variables. However, thanks to the data's precision and representativeness, we can still provide an accurate picture for Luxembourg. Additionally, including the partners' characteristics is important in the country context. In Luxembourg, each eligible parent is granted parental leave that can be used until the child turns six. However, one of the periods of leave has to be taken immediately after the maternity leave, or the other partner loses the opportunity to take parental leave (Valentova, 2011). Hence a person's access to parental leave and the use of it is likely to influence their partner's behaviour. With these variables, we define our outcome variable as eligibility for parental leave during the 18 months after the childbirth. This is a binary variable, with 0 representing ineligibility and 1 representing eligibility.

An analysis of the factors that influence parents' eligibility status by their full-time, part-time, or marginal

part-time working status indicates that eligibility is driven by individual characteristics. It is only when partnered with a man who is not working that mothers' probability of being eligible for parental leave is significantly lower than those who are partnered with a man working in the private sector. This suggests potential assortative mating (Esping-Andersen, 2007) in Luxembourg, where partner relationships tend to comprise either those who are eligible or those who are ineligible.

It is important to note that this clustering already displays limited within-group variations, particularly for variables related to the employment sector. Some 83% of marginal part-time working mothers and 91% of part-time working mothers are in the private sector. Consequently, we do not see these variables in their regression models (see Table 3). For the individual characteristics, we observe nationality as an important determinant of eligibility. For full-time working mothers, being from France, Portugal, other EU-28, or non-European countries are associated with lower probabilities of eligibility for parental leave compared with Luxembourg-native full-time working mothers. While we do not observe any significant differences based on nationalities among part-time working mothers, marginal

Table 3. Parental leave eligibility for mothers according to number of working hours.

	Full-time working mothers		Part-time working mothers		Marginal part-time working mothers	
	Coeff.	z	Coeff.	z	Coeff.	z
Age	.002*	2.36	.003	0.77	.018**	2.91
Nationality						
German	-.028	-1.19	-.051	-0.34	.	
Belgian	-.017	-0.76	-.131	-0.69	.055	0.27
French	-.036*	-2.35	.071	1.14	.020	0.15
Portuguese	-.052***	-3.35	-.051	.059	-.040	-0.42
Other EU-28	-.053**	-3.12	-.105	.090	-.206*	-1.96
Other	-.103***	-4.14	-.092	.082	.196	-1.93
Log of monthly hours of work	.014	0.24	.120	.097	.179***	4.61
Sector						
Public	.017	1.30				
Partner's age	.001	1.55	.005	1.34	-.001	-0.18
Partner's nationality						
German	-.057	-1.64	.063	0.50	.099	0.42
Belgian	-.010	-0.47	.008	0.07	-.122	-0.63
French	-.035*	-1.97	.029	0.28	-.159	-1.17
Portuguese	.0001	0.01	.019	0.33	-.027	-0.32
Other EU-28	-.008	-0.60	-.117	-1.20	-.200	-1.81
Other	-.040	-2.14	-.126	-1.33	-.090	-0.75
Partner's sector						
Public	-.006	-0.46	.069	1.16	.202	1.56
Not working	-.044**	-2.87	-.270**	-2.87	-.173*	-2.00
Reform	.021**	2.62	.024	0.51	.135	1.86
N	3667		434		328	

Source: IGSS (2020). Authors' calculation. Note: Average marginal effects.

part-time non-European working mothers appear 20 percentage points less likely to be eligible for parental leave. This is consistent with the descriptive picture, where we noted a high proportion of non-European parents in ineligible groups.

We include the log of the monthly number of working hours in our models. For the marginal part-time working mothers, an increase in their monthly working hours appears to increase their probability of being eligible. Mothers in this group are likely to have an irregular working schedule, hence an increase in their number of working hours may increase their attachment to the labour market and this may be reflected in their eligibility status.

When we look at the factors that influence fathers' eligibility for parental leave in Luxembourg (see Table 4), we observe some similarities with the mothers. However, this resemblance disappears among marginal part-time working fathers, which is likely to be related to the very small sample size. For marginal part-time working fathers, it is only an increase in the number of working hours in a month that boosts their probability of being eligible for parental leave. For full-time working fathers, being a non-native Luxembourger reduces their probability of eligibility for parental leave, as seen in the case

of mothers. Those who work in the public sector have a 4 percentage points higher likelihood of being eligible than private-sector workers. If they had their children in the post-reform period, their probability of being eligible also rises. However, if their partner is not working (i.e., not eligible for parental leave) their likelihood also diminishes compared with other fathers whose partners are working full-time.

5.2. Take-Up of Parental Leave in Luxembourg: The Case of Marginal part-time Working Parents

Marginal part-time working parents are the focus of the eligibility expansion of parental leave reform in Luxembourg. One of our goals in this article is to analyze the extent of which, after this expansion, marginal part-time working parents started taking parental leave. As before, we take the 18 months after the childbirth as our observation period. Since parents who are not eligible for parental leave are not of interest regarding leave take-up (i.e., their take-up status would always be zero), we limit our base sample to parental-leave-eligible parents. Consequently, the sample size is reduced to 142 marginal part-time working mothers and 56 marginal

Table 4. Parental leave eligibility for fathers according to the number of working hours.

	Full-time working fathers		Part-time working fathers		Marginal part-time working fathers	
	Coeff.	z	Coeff.	z	Coeff.	z
Fathers' age	.003**	2.86	.011	1.76	.005	0.76
Nationality						
German	-.114*	-2.51				
Belgian	-.071*	-2.09	.053	0.30	.109	0.48
French	-.077**	-3.45	-.101	-0.82	.163	1.01
Portuguese	-.052**	-2.97	.096	1.07	.106	0.87
Other EU-28	-.105***	-4.51	.006	0.05	.151	1.13
Other	-.137***	-5.39	-.044	-0.41	-.102	-0.95
Log of monthly working hours	.233**	2.63	.226	1.45	.211***	4.21
Sector						
Public	.043**	2.79				
Partner's age	.005***	3.90	.004	0.64	.005	0.71
Partner's nationality						
German	-.046	-1.19			.244	1.36
Belgian	.038	1.23	-.037	-0.15	-.207	-0.88
French	-.041	-1.71	-.035	-0.31	.035	0.24
Portuguese	.018	1.06	-.033	-0.34	-.116	-0.92
Other EU-28	-.024	-1.15	.061	0.65	-.071	-0.53
Other	.002	.018	-.124	-1.02	-0.37	.117
Partner's sector						
Public	-.011	-0.57	-.061	-0.46	.165	0.74
Not working	-.044**	-3.43	.016	0.26	-.022	-0.33
Reform	.046***	3.73	.052	0.79	.113	1.28
N	4823		253		222	

Source: IGSS (2020). Authors' calculation. Note: Average marginal effects.

part-time working fathers. To calculate take-up rates, using the eligible population base, we divide the number of leave-takers by the number of eligible parents in the same period.

Figure 2 shows an interesting picture regarding marginal part-time working parents' leave take-up behaviour. One immediately visible detail is that mothers and fathers in this group follow a different trajectory. It may be confusing at first to see how, before the reform, there were marginal part-time working parents who were leave-takers. This relates to the nature of the data. While the number of hours worked per week represents a point 4–5 months before the childbirth, the leave take-up variable shows parents' eligibility status during the 18 months subsequently. Hence, some of the parents working marginal part-time hours before the childbirth might have increased their working hours in the post-birth period and thus have qualified for the leave when they applied. Figure 2 also illustrates a notable increase in the leave take-up of marginal part-time working mothers who had their first child after 2015. This also coincides with the implementation of the reform. It is likely that some of the mothers who had their child in 2015 became eligible with the reform and then took parental leave.

We then employ a probit regression (see Table 5), as we did earlier, using leave take-up during the 18 months after the childbirth as the binary outcome variable. We find that an increase in the monthly number of working hours significantly increases the probability of marginal part-time working mothers' leave take-up. This may indicate that mothers who are closer to regular part-time work might have stronger attachment to the labour market, or alternatively, that those who worked as little as 10 hours per week might not have had the urge or need to take any leave. It might have been easier for them to keep their existing work schedules rather than disrupting them by taking parental leave. Moreover, they might have held positions where they could have easily been replaced; hence taking parental leave could have

jeopardized their career prospects. Although parental leave comes with job protection, there might be issues between employers and workers demanding to take parental leave. Being from Portugal, compared with native Luxembourgers, decreases the likelihood of taking parental leave by 33 percentage points. For the fathers in the same group, we do not observe an inclination to take parental leave. This is also likely to be related to the very small sample size. Of the 56 marginal part-time working fathers who were eligible to take parental leave, only six did so. This confirms the evidence from literature indicating a low rate of leave uptake by disadvantaged fathers and those not engaged in full-time stable employment (Geisler & Kreyenfeld, 2018). The gender differences also support the evidence of mothers shouldering the caregiving and leave-taking roles.

6. Discussion

Relaxing the eligibility criteria for parental leave comes with the presumption that the eligible population increases by the magnitude of those who become entitled to take parental leave. It can also be expected that number of parental-leave-takers will also increase accordingly. However, the reflection of this increase in the eligible population as the number of parental-leave-takers is likely to be smaller. The evidence from relevant literature extensively documents a gap between number of eligible parents and actual parental-leave-takers, and our analysis showed that Luxembourg also conforms this pattern. Luxembourg's parental leave reform relaxes eligibility criteria for a specific group, and this allows us to test the extent to which parents used their new entitlement to become parental-leave-takers, and for the newly-eligible parents the factors play a role driving their parental leave take-up behaviours.

The expansion of parental leave in Luxembourg only targets those who work on a marginal part-time basis, which comprises about 5% of the mothers and 3% of the fathers in our dataset. The specificity of the target

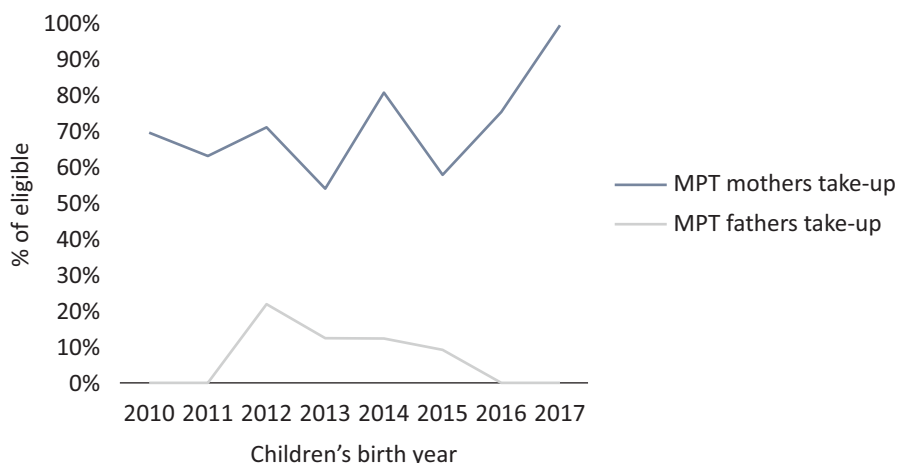


Figure 2. Leave take-up by marginal part-time workers, Luxembourg-resident first-time parents.

Table 5. Determinants of marginal part-time working mothers' leave take-up in the post-reform period.

Leave take-up	Marginal part-time working mothers	
	Coeff.	z
Age	.004	0.48
Nationality		
German		
Belgian	-.116	-0.50
French	-.056	-0.59
Portuguese	-.333**	-3.05
Other EU-28	-.223	-1.57
Other	-.222	-1.47
Log of monthly working hours	.211***	3.59
Fathers' age	.000	0.03
Fathers' nationality		
German		
Belgian	-.327	-1.29
French	-.002	-0.02
Portuguese	.110	1.06
Other EU-28	.113	0.58
Other	-.229	-1.24
Fathers' sector		
Public	.003	0.02
Not working		
N		142

Source: IGSS (2020). Authors' calculation. Note: Average marginal effects.

group and the small size may raise questions about the aim of this component in the reform, particularly for men. Alternatively, the more extensive involvement of women can be taken as a component of the country's progressive efforts toward strengthening women's labour market attachment over the last decade. By securing their jobs and providing compensation, parental leave operates to prevent parents' detachment from the labour market during the first years of parenthood. Hence, even though descriptively—due to our focused sample (i.e., Luxembourg-resident first-time parents) and the small proportion of marginal part-time working parents within the sample—we are able to show an increasing trend for leave take-up in this group of women.

Another concern might relate to the nature of marginal part-time employment and the characteristics of the parents in this group. It could be assumed that parents who work for few weekly hours already have more 'free time' for childcare or are less constrained by long hours of work. It could also be argued that leaving the labour market has fewer income penalties for marginal part-time working parents than for those working full-time hours. Given that their income would be lower than full-time workers and that most marginal part-time working mothers live with full-time working men, income loss in those households is likely to be lower than in others where mothers have stronger labour market attachment and higher salaried incomes. However, irre-

spective of the extent of the loss, the reform offers an opportunity to protect jobs and thus income. These parents' inclusion in the parental leave scheme conveys an explicit message that their labour is valued.

While it is promising to see that the reform established an inclination for its use among marginal part-time working mothers who became eligible for parental leave for the first time, it is worth discussing the type of parents who remained excluded from the leave scheme in Luxembourg. Our analysis reveals that many parents failed to meet the conditions, therefore remaining ineligible. These people are primarily foreign nationals, the majority either from non-European countries, or other EU-28, specifically Portugal (which makes up most of the foreign national population in Luxembourg). We also show that of those who are among the working population, these parents, i.e., non-native Luxembourgers, had significantly lower probabilities of eligibility for parental leave than Luxembourg natives. Foreign national parents' inadequate access to parental leave is widely seen in other country contexts (see, for example, Ellingsæter, Kitterød, & Østbakken, 2019; Tervola, Duvander, & Mussino, 2017). However, with half of its population being foreign nationals, non-native Luxembourgers' limited access to parental leave raises questions concerning the capacity of the policy to reach all parents in such a multinational society. It may indicate that foreign national parents are more likely to have a scarcity of resources

or lack an established community (Yerkes, Hoogenboom, & Javornik, 2020) to enable them to be in the labour market and provide care for their children concurrently. The arguable inclusivity of the parental leave policy in Luxembourg resonates with Sainsbury's examination of the Swedish case, "expansion of services does not necessarily benefit vulnerable groups" (Sainsbury, 2018, p. 223).

7. Conclusion

In this article, we examined the trends and determinants of parental leave eligibility and take-up in Luxembourg, and the extent to which an expansion in eligibility was followed by increased take-up. We concluded that the increase in take-up was small compared to enlargement in parental-leave-eligible sample. The take-up behaviours of the newly-eligible parents were gendered, and also the low take-up trend among non-native Luxembourgers persisted.

To explore eligibility and take-up, and their links in the case of marginal part-time working parents in Luxembourg, we used social security records. We looked at the trends and patterns of parental leave eligibility by groups of parents working full-time, part-time, and marginal part-time hours. The data revealed that there was a steady increase in mothers' and fathers' eligibility during the observation period, with a larger increase in the post-reform period. In line with the higher labour force participation of fathers, they tend to have more access to parental leave than mothers.

Did expanded eligibility translate into increased take-up? Our analysis showed that the probability of a parent's eligibility is defined by their individual characteristics, and age, number of working hours, and nationality seem to be important determinants. Our findings showed that once eligible, marginal part-time working mothers did indeed start opting into the parental leave program. In parallel with the existing international evidence, mothers composed the majority of leave-takers among marginal part-time working parents. However, eligibility expansion did not appear to be a strong enough factor for change in the case of marginal part-time working fathers, albeit our sample size for fathers was smaller than for mothers. The small sample size may also be taken as a sign of mothers being more flexible and adapting their shorter working hours more than fathers.

The increase in eligibility and its reflection in the take-up rate among marginal part-time working mothers in the post-reform period can be taken as a positive development toward strengthening female labour force participation in Luxembourg. Although the targeted group of parents was arguably only loosely connected to the labour market, the reform appeared to have been a successful initiative in terms of securing their position in the market and preventing them from dropping out.

Future observations over a longer time frame are needed to track and understand the intersection

between foreign national parents' employment behaviour, parents in irregular employment, and the effects of extending parental leave eligibility to those parents, particularly fathers. Similar to other countries (see, e.g., Bygren & Duvander, 2006; Sainsbury, 2018), Luxembourg reproduced the long-standing cultural and structural legacy of higher parental leave-taking by mothers and lower levels by fathers. In fact, it is not entirely surprising to observe that only six of the 56 marginal part-time working fathers who were eligible for parental leave in 2018 took it. This pattern convinced us to conclude, similarly to Heckman and Smith (2004), that eligibility is a necessary but never a sufficient condition for parental leave take-up.

This article was the first attempt to analyse the expanded eligibility of the relatively recent parental leave reform in Luxembourg. In view of the country's highly multinational labour force and innovative approach to parental leave, the reform requires further investigation once the data allows us to follow a full eligibility period for parents of all backgrounds.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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