



**Centre for Gender Equality
Centre for Women's and Gender Studies**

**Culture, Custom and Caring:
Men's and Women's
Possibilities to Parental Leave**

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in collaboration with
Gyða Margrét Pétursdóttir

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Akureyri 2004

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This report is prepared for the European study Culture, Custom and Caring – Men's and Women's Possibilities to Parental Leave, managed by the Centre for Gender Equality in Iceland and funded by the European Commission's Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005) and by national partners. The Centre for Gender and Women's Research, University of Iceland, Reykjavík, is commissioned by the Centre for Gender Equality in Iceland to make a comparative study based on national studies from the four partner countries. A draft of the report has been presented for the national partners. The authors are, however, responsible for the final report.
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Summary

Culture, Custom and Caring – Men's and Women's Possibilities to Parental Leave is a transnational project on the issue of reconciliation of work and family life. CCC is funded by the European Commission's Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality and by national authorities. The project was conducted in 2002-2004 in four countries, Spain, Germany, Norway and Iceland. It aims at investigating the issues of time and gender in modern families with young children, with special emphasis on the time spent on care in different contexts. Focus is on the interplay between institutional settings and structural framework on the one hand, and the cultural representations and social roles of men and women on the other hand. Special attention is paid to how cultural traditions, attitudes and norms facilitate or hinder men's use of their parental rights. The project is a case study, based on statistics, public documents and in-depth interviews.

Different systems of maternity/paternity/parental leave

The systems of maternity/paternity leave and parental leave are highly divergent in the partner countries. The Norwegian system has been classified as a women friendly egalitarian model as it explicitly aims at leveling out of inequality between men and women. The Norwegian system is the most extensive of the partner countries and Norway was the first country in the world to introduce a specific "father quota" in 1993. Iceland belongs to the Nordic countries, but the gender situation in Iceland differs from them in many respects. Even if Iceland does not have the most generous parental leave system, it has the longest non-transferable parental leave for men. A new reform, adopted in 2000, guaranteed Icelandic men three months paternity leave, implemented in stages. Iceland and Norway follow the same path, with long paid parental leave rights for both parents, based on labor market participation. Spain is a part of "the Mediterranean family-based model", where mainly the family and the extended family are responsible for child care. In Spain rights are also associated with labor market situation, although with much less extensive rights than in Norway and Iceland. Germany belongs to the "three-phase model". The main principle behind it is that responsibility for welfare lies with individuals and their families. The system is based on the male breadwinner model, and three phases in women's employment. Germany has two years of family benefits for families under certain income.

The take up rate of men and women is still another diverging factor between the countries and they are related to labor market situation and gender relations in general. Female employment rate is high in Norway and Iceland while it is relatively low in Germany and very low in Spain. The unemployment rates are very low in Iceland and Norway for both men and women, whereas they are considerably higher in Germany and Spain. Part time work is much more common for women than men in all four countries. Working hours both for men and women are highest in Iceland. Spain and Germany have the lowest fertility rates, with Norway in a middle position and Iceland at the top.

Case studies

Utilization of parental leave and attitudes toward them

The take-up rate of men in Norway is high, as 85% of men take the one-month father quota and 14% of the men take more than that. This is reflected in the case study. In Germany only about 2% of men take parental leave. However, all the men in the German sample have taken some kind of parental leave and are more or less positive towards it. The German couples are not typical for German parents in general; rather, they are the cutting edge. In Spain, only 2% of men take maternity leave in general, but four out of six men in the Spanish sample had taken some form of parental leave. The Spanish men seem to take parental leave of mainly two reasons: Either they have a loose connection to the labor market, and much weaker labor market position than their wives, or they regard it as necessary because of specific circumstances (the mother in need of help etc.). In Iceland, the case study shows a system in transition. The use of the three-month father quota, implemented gradually from 2001 to 2003, is not unambiguous. Recent statistics reveal that 82% make use of the first two father-months, and 76% of the third month. Four of the men in the sample have made full or partial use of their respective rights, and their experiences are very different. Some are positive but others are skeptical and believe the father quota has been implemented at the mother's expense. This skepticism is expressed both by men and women.

Work relations

In a cross-country comparison, the Norwegian parents, both men and women, seem to have the easiest relationship to their jobs. Work and family life appear relatively harmonized and, with one exception, the work life does not infringe too much upon family life. Supervisors and managers appear understanding towards parent's requests for parental leave. For the German couples who take parental leave along with part-time work, the solutions become a complicated puzzle to be individually negotiated with the employers. This sometimes puts the parents in a vulnerable situation against employers, who in some cases reveal explicit resistance. German couples are often concerned that the employer not be harmed by their decision to take parental leave. In Spain, there is a lack of knowledge about rights and allowances reported by employers and employees alike. Accordingly, laws and regulations on maternity leave are not always respected or implemented. The work and the career of the Spanish fathers have priority over the mother's career, seemingly regardless of the spouse's the labor market position. The Icelandic men's relationship to their work is characterized by extremely long working hours and blurred boundaries between work life and family live. The Icelandic interviews reflect tension and fear of abuse, both by employers and employees. An explicit resistance to paternity leave is found with some employers, even though there are positive signs as well.

Roles vis-à-vis children and couples' relationships

The overall impression of the Norwegian sample is that of reflexive fathers, and men and women who embrace a relatively equal and gender neutral parental role, even if reality often is more traditional than they would like to believe. In Germany, a tendency found in research is confirmed, revealing that it requires partners with strong labor market connections for men to share. The German couples, as the Norwegian, adopt an egalitarian parental role. The men are claiming their role as fathers, they are 'pioneers', but this is often linked to their

private labor market situation being unsatisfactory, sometimes in an interplay with a career oriented wife. We have to be aware that the sample does not represent the most typical pattern in Germany. Similar to Germany, the Spanish fathers take parental leave when they have loose connections to the labor market. The main rule among the Spanish couples is a highly distinct, i.e. 'different but complementary' parental role, nurturing mother vs. playmate father. The father's role is the authority of the family and the one who sets standards. The men's part in domestic chores is modest and domestic tasks are unevenly shared. The extended family and housekeepers fill the fathers' place in household tasks and caring responsibilities. In Iceland, the women are primary caregivers in all the cases except for one. Some hold the view that men are supposed to step in when the woman can not, for one reason or another, take care of the child. Hence, the fathers become substitute parents or replacements for the mother. Another notion is that of fatherhood as a special-task force, where men are responsible for particular tasks, either handed over to them by the mother, or that they take themselves. In Iceland the parents' relations are colored by a belief in different roles, and even innate abilities, for men and women. This does not, however, lead to consensus on their different tasks and roles.

Conclusions

The attempts to involve men in caring activities and parental leave follow different paths in the partner countries and they are classified into two categories. On the one hand, Norway and Iceland with specific, gender targeted measures (father quota) to involve men, and on the other hand Spain and Germany, which attempt to include men in an existing universal, supposedly gender neutral, framework. One conclusion is that flexibility within a universal but gender-biased system does not have a large potential for change. The four partner countries have different levels of ambitions in their system, based on different ideologies. Two structural trends can roughly be distinguished. In Germany and Spain a system that was created within the framework of highly gendered relations is being developed into a universal, gender-neutral system that also includes men. These systems are heavily imbued with the historical legacy of traditional gender roles and have limited potential for change. Against strong cultural norms underpinning gender difference and a division of men and women rather than equal sharing, these attempts appear ineffective. The structural settings are relatively unquestioned, but the capacity of the reforms within the system to accomplish changes is minimal, revealed by the small number of men taking parental leave. Iceland and Norway have developed structural settings along the same lines, i.e. specific, gender targeted system. However, they depart as regards the pace of the reforms and cultural norms as well. Whereas the parental leave system is settled in Norway in a climate of gender sameness and sharing, Iceland remains on the similar cultural path as Germany and Spain, with a climate that heralds gender division and differences.

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Preface

Culture, Custom and Caring – Men’s and Women’s Possibilities to Parental Leave is a transnational project on the issue of reconciliation of work and family life. CCC is conducted in 2002-2004 in four countries, Spain, Germany, Norway and Iceland. It is funded by the European Commission’s Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005) and by national authorities.

The project aims at investigating the issue of time and gender in modern families with young children, with special emphasis on the time spent on care in different contexts. More and more people are pressed between two time consuming institutions: family and work. Parents are experiencing increasing time conflicts in everyday life. The project will contribute to the knowledge of how to reconcile work and family life.

The main objectives of the project are:

- a) To collect and analyze existing data in the partner countries on labor force participation of men and women with caring responsibilities for young children. The purpose of this is to draw up a picture of how parents reconcile work and family life, while caring for newborn and very young children.
- b) To collect and analyze data on the forms of parental leave systems and care services in the partner countries. Provisions enabling parents to reconcile work and family life are described, as well as their impact on employment.
- c) To investigate in detail the legislation of parental leave and the take-up rates for different groups of men and women.
- d) To supplement existing data with case studies, consisting of in-depth interviews with parents with small children, and their employers.
- e) To stimulate discussion in Europe by making a documentary film based on the general ideas of the project.

The project consists of two separate parts, on the one hand a research part including a case study conducted in all partner countries, and on the other hand a documentary film. The Icelandic Centre for Gender Equality is responsible for the overall project leading, and Elín Antonsdóttir is the project leader. The Centre for Women’s and Gender Research at the University of Iceland has lead and conducted the research part, the case study and the comparative report. This report contains the results of the research part and the comparative study based on the national case studies.

Many people in the partner countries have contributed to this report. Þorgerður Einarsdóttir, Assistant Professor of Gender Studies is the principal investigator on behalf of the Centre for Women’s and Gender Research at the University of Iceland. Gyða Margrét Pétursdóttir, MA-student at the University of Iceland is the project’s Icelandic assistant. Irma Erlingsdóttir, director of the Center for Gender Studies at the University of Iceland, contributed largely to the preparations and the implementation of the project. Ingólfur V. Gíslason, senior researcher at the Centre for Gender Equality in Iceland has collected key statistics and prepared data for the quantitative comparison in Chapter 2. The Norwegian partner is the Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology Management at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, located in Trondheim. Professor Berit Brandth and Professor Elin Kvande are responsible for the Norwegian part, and their assistant is Elin Tveten Engan. The German partner is the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, situated in Berlin, where

Antonia Griese has been the responsible party. The Ministry has commissioned an independent research institute in Berlin, Empirica, to conduct the German case studies. Julia Kemper has carried out the German interviews on behalf of Empirica. The Spanish partner is the Department of Labor Law at the Faculty of Law of the University of Valencia. Professor Mariam Amparo Ballester Pastor is the responsible researcher and the Spanish assistant is Mercedes Lopez-Balaquer.

The documentary, which was filmed simultaneously, is based to some extent on the ideas in the project. The research questionnaire provided the frame of reference for the filmmakers conducting interviews, as the film is intended to stimulate discussions and debates on the issues at hand. The objective is to show the film in TV-stations in all European countries. The film crew Ágúst Ólafsson and Guðmundur Bergkvist, traveled along with the project leader, Elín Antonsdóttir, to the four participating countries for filming. In each country local partners in the project assisted them. The producer of the film is Samver Ltd. Akureyri, Iceland. Margrét Jónasdóttir, Reykjavík, Iceland, writes the manuscript.

The research group and the film team would like to thank all of the families who participated in the project as well as the fathers' employers, who also agreed to be interviewed. Their understanding and cooperation is greatly appreciated. Additionally, the staff of Centre for Gender Equality and the staff of the Centre for Women's and Gender Research at the University of Iceland, deserve acknowledgements for their support and assistance in seeing this project through. Finally, this endeavor would not have been possible without the support of Iceland's Ministry of Social Affairs and funding from the European Commission.

1. Culture, Custom and Caring

1.1 Introduction

The partner countries in this project, Norway, Germany, Spain and Iceland, represent different institutional arrangements regarding the reconciliation of work and family life. They differ widely on the issue of social policy, welfare provisions, tax systems and the extent to which, and how, family policy measures are adopted. They further reflect different labor market regulatory systems, as well as equal opportunities policies.

In the project, focus is on the interplay between institutional settings and structural framework on the one hand, and the cultural representations and social roles of men and women on the other hand. How does the legal framework affect men and women's allocation of time for child care and paid work? The project investigates how families with pre-school children in the partner countries arrange their lives, and how they reconcile work life and family life. This is explored against the external conditions they face in their daily lives, the parental leave systems and other public welfare schemes. Special attention is paid to how cultural traditions, attitudes and norms facilitate or hinder men's use of their parental rights. The ultimate goal is to expand and promote new attitudes that encourage men to increase their part in caring responsibilities.

The report is structured as follows. Chapter 1.2 introduces the methodology used in the project, the data used for analysis and the sample selected for a detailed study. Chapter 2 deals with the European context and the institutional frameworks of the partner countries. Chapter 2.1 provides a brief introduction of how the partner countries' welfare systems have been classified. In chapter 2.2 key statistics from the partner countries are presented on labor market participation, working hours, unemployment rates, fertility rates and use of public daycare. The overview is based on existing data, primarily from OECD, Eurostat, and from national statistical bodies. Chapter 2.3 gives a schematic overview on the systems of maternity/paternity/parental leave and allowances. The data includes type of regulation, coverage, maximum duration, leave period, flexibility, fractioning (the possibility of non-consecutive leave), transferability and protective rights. The take-up rates are mapped in those countries where data is available. Special attention is paid to the participation of men in childcare and their take-up of paternity leave. Chapter 2.4 is a detailed examination of the institutional arrangements and the reconciliation policies in the four partner countries.

Chapter 3 comprises the case study in the four partner countries. The case study serves the purpose of illuminating the data presented in the previous chapters. Six cases have been chosen for a more detailed analysis in all the partner countries. These consist of in-depth interviews with parents with pre-school children, and the men's employers or supervisors. The parents involved are chosen from different sectors and occupational levels. The groups are basically identical across the partner countries. The aim is to explore the interplay between structural settings and cultural norms, and to identify mechanisms that facilitate or hinder the participation of men in care work. This is done by comparing similarities and differences between the partner countries on the issue of childcare, gender relationships, the use of parental scheme provisions and division of paid and unpaid work. In Chapter 4, the results of the case studies are discussed in a comparative framework and put into a wider perspective. The chapter ends with summary and concluding remarks.

1.2 Method and sample

The methodology used in the project is one version of a "methodological triangulation", i.e. using multiple data collection methods to understand a social issue or problem from multiple angles and perspectives (Denzin 1970, Silverman 1997). The idea behind triangulation is that a weakness in one method can be avoided by using a second method that is strong in the area that the first is weak (Denzin 1970). Silverman defines triangulation as the combination of different sources of information in order to achieve a better understanding of the problem and reach more reliable conclusions (1997).

Methodological triangulation does not imply that findings from quantitative research and qualitative research are lumped together, but rather that they are interpreted in relation to each other. In this project, triangulation is applied in order to address research questions at different levels. Quantitative as well as qualitative methods are made use of. The quantitative part consists of statistical data and public documents and the aim is to identify long term trends and overall settings. The qualitative part is used to shed light on statistical data, and hence, enhance our understanding of the structural patterns. The main focus is on the interplay between structure and culture,

and how objective patterns and long term trends are reflected by subjective experiences.

The qualitative part consists of in-depth interviews of six couples, as previously mentioned, having at least one child of pre-school age (between 6 months to 3 years of age). Each case includes a mother, a father and the father's employer or supervisor. The mother and father live together, married or cohabiting. The fathers are chosen from three occupational sectors, i.e. the manufacturing sector, the service sector and the high tech industry or professionals. In each group, one father was chosen from the private sector and one from the public sector, where this was possible. The groups in question also reflect different educational backgrounds.

In general, fathers who had been on parental leave were chosen for participation, implying that they had taken some time off from work to care for their child/children, or they had made serious attempts to take leave. The selection of cases was successful, with two exceptions, both in the Spanish part.¹ The time the men were on leave differed greatly, from one hour a day, which is a part of the leave system in Spain, to several months, which some of the men in Norway took. Norway is the country where the total length of the leave is the longest. This pattern reflects not only cross-country differences, but also differences among various groups of men *within* countries.

Each interview lasted from one to two hours. In general they were taped and transcribed. The interviews were conducted according to an interview guide, which is found in the appendix. The interpretation and analytical elaboration of the interviews is thematic and holistic. This means that main themes are identified, and thereafter analyzed by content, such as underlying patterns of ideas, values and norms. This method is traced to the French thinker Michel Foucault, and is well suited to explore discourses connected with different institutions of the society (Foucault 1978:7–26). A common sense comprehension of the concept “discourse” is that of a “predominant language and practices” placed above the discussion of the issues at stake.

2. The European Context and Institutional Frameworks

2.1 Different reconciliation policies

In the European context, not least in the EU, the emphasis on equal opportunities legislation has been slowly moving from a focus on general and abstract equal opportunities, emphasizing equal pay and equal opportunities, to a framework stressing the reconciliation between work and family life. Underlying the change is the notion that equal opportunity can only be fully realized by an equal distribution of paid and unpaid work between men and women. This implies greater access by women to positions of responsibility outside the home and greater involvement of men in family life (Lohkamp-Himmighofen and Dienel 2000:50).

There are many different classifications on family and gender policy issues and welfare schemes. *Norway* has been classified as “the women-friendly egalitarian

¹ In one of the cases the father had applied for leave but was refused. In the other case, the father had not applied for a leave.

model”, which is based on equal parenthood and two breadwinners (Lohkamp-Himmighofen and Dienel 2000:60). The Nordic countries fit into that classification, by and large. Policy aims are to enhance egalitarian structures in social and economic life, equal distribution of paid and unpaid work. The model ensures individual rights and duties, and individual taxation system is adopted. Despite internal differences within the Nordic context, the Nordic countries appear to have gone furthest in achieving gender equality, illustrated by the high societal inclusion of women, such as high female employment rates, women’s access to decision making, political representation and a greater sharing between men and women of household tasks and family responsibilities (Lohkamp-Himmighofen and Dienel 2000:60).

Germany. Germany belongs to what has been called “the three-phase model” (Lohkamp-Himmighofen and Dienel 2000:63). The model builds on the male breadwinner, and phases in women’s employment, which is in general relatively low. The first phase implies that women are engaged in full-time employment prior to childbirth. The second phase, when women have children, they are encouraged to leave the labor market. In the third phase, when women have pre-school age children they gradually return to the labor market, if at all. The model is characterized by a non-individualized taxation system, which gives advantages to single-earner couples. Parental leaves are mainly in the form of long (up to 3 years) and relatively low-paid parental allowances. Childcare facilities and kindergarten places are poorly developed (Lohkamp-Himmighofen and Dienel 2000:63-64). Women’s policy was of minor importance, as were specific measures to involve fathers into family care. This has been changing in recent years. The 2001 legislation on parental leave aims to encourage mothers to work-part time during parental leave and fathers to take over family duties. At present, as a response to decreasing birth rates, the main priority in family policies is the extension of childcare facilities in the western Länder in Germany.

Spain. Spain is a part of “the Mediterranean family-based model” (Lohkamp-Himmighofen and Dienel 2000:64-65), in which, traditionally, the family and the extended family, has been responsible for childcare. According to this scheme, in the past state intervention has been minimal. However, as a consequence of the lowering of the Spanish birth rate, more institutional effort has been put in during the last decade (Ballester-Pastor, 2000:54). Female employment rates remain low, and in the case where women are active on the labor market, the reconciliation of work and family is mostly a private issue. Statutory provisions for parental leave include many regulations (since 1989 the volume of laws passed has been enormous) but these are neither developed nor implemented (Lohkamp-Himmighofen and Dienel 2000:64-65).

Iceland has not been seen as a clear example of any system but a mix between the Nordic welfare system and a more liberal system (Ólafsson 1999). It can be classified with the family friendly Nordic countries in some aspects, even if it departs from the Nordic pattern on important points, mostly by the more parsimonious welfare system. According to recent data, Iceland spends considerably less on social welfare than the other countries, or 20% of GNP, as compared to 30% in Sweden and 25% in Norway (Nordic council of ministers 2003). Iceland has only partly individualized the taxation system. In most European countries, national reconciliation policies have developed gradually over a long time. As regards the parental leave system, and especially paternity leave, Iceland is an exception.

2.2. Key statistics

Large differences are reflected in the statistics regarding the issue of work and family life in the four partner countries. In order to provide a background for the further discussion, we present figures on some key issues in the following, such as labor force activity and unemployment rates, the proportion of part-time work and working hours, fertility rates and access to, and use of public and private daycare.

Labor force participation is highly different in the four countries, reflecting both North-South differences as well as differences between men and women.

Table 2.1 Total labor force (% of population from 15-64 years) (2002)

	Males	Females
Germany	79.5	65.0
Iceland	90.6	81.8
Norway	84.0	76.8
Spain	79.4	52.9

Source: OECD Labour Force Statistics 1982-2002

As can be seen from table 2.1 general labor market activity is much higher in Norway and Iceland than in Germany and Spain. The differences among women are even more conspicuous than among men. However, labor force participation includes both those who are *employed* and those who are *unemployed*. Unemployment rates are highly variable between the partner countries.

As can be seen from the table 2.2 below, the unemployment rates are very low in Iceland and Norway, or 2-4%, whereas they are considerably higher in Germany and Spain. It is worth noting that the gender differences are pronounced in Spain, where the unemployment rates are twice as high for women as for men (19% vs. 9%). In Germany the unemployment rates are at the same level for men and women, although higher than in the Nordic partner countries.

Table 2.2 Unemployment (2001)

	Male	Female
Germany	10.5	10.2
Iceland	1.8	1.9
Norway	3.7	3.4
Spain	9.2	18.8

Source: International Labour Office Geneva: Bulletin of Labour Statistics 2003 - 1

Figures for activity rates (employment and unemployment rates) reveal how many men and women are in the labor force. Statistics for working hours give more detailed information about the gendered patterns of paid work. The issue of working hours can be displayed either in terms of part-time work vs. full-time work, or in working hours. In the following, both indicators are presented. Table 2.3 reveals part-time employment among men and women.

Table 2.3. Part-time employment (male/female part-time as % of male/female employment) (2002)

	Male	Female
Germany	5.5	35.3
Iceland	10.2	31.2
Norway	9.2	33.4
Spain	2.4	16.3

Source: OECD Labour Force Statistics 1982-2002

Needless to say, part-time work is much more common for women than men. On average in OECD countries, 26% of women and less than 7% of men work part-time (OECD 2002:64). In all four countries women more often work part-time than men. As regards the men, Iceland and Norway are at the same level, with less than 10% of men working part-time, while both Germany and Spain are far below that. Spain is in a unique position when it comes to labor market participation. The figure for female part-time work in Spain is 16%, far below the partner countries, where 30-40% of the women work part-time. It is also below the OECD average of 26%. In table 2.4 weekly working hours are displayed.

Table 2.4. Average weekly working hours (2002)

	Males	Females
Germany	40.6 hours	31.3 hours
Iceland	48.8 hours	36.3 hours
Norway	37.9 hours	30.8 hours
Spain	n.a.	n.a.

Source: Data from Germany: Federal Statistic Office, Microcensus 2002; Iceland: Statistics Iceland, Landshagir 2003, table 3.14; Norway: Engan, Brandth and Kvande (2003:3).

Another important difference between the partner countries is the level of the fertility rates. Table 2.5 shows the fertility rates in the partner countries.

Table 2.5. Fertility rates (2000)

Germany	1.36
Iceland	2.10
Norway	1.85
Spain	1.23

Source: Eurostat yearbook (2003:89).

Spain and Germany have the lowest fertility rates, with Norway in a middle position and Iceland at the top as the only country with fertility rates above 2. Fertility rates have been declining in recent decades, but at a different pace in each country. This affects social policy measures within the countries although to a varying degree.

The development of daycare facilities varies considerably between the partner countries, and reflects highly divergent systems. When daycare facilities are looked into according to age groups, as in table 2.6, we can see the proportion of children in daycare correlates with differences in the systems.

Table 2.6. Children in daycare, per cent in age group (2002)

	Germany	Iceland	Norway	Spain
Below 1 year	2.0	9.7	1.9	1.7
1 years	8.2	49.2	27.6	7.4
2 years	19.5	83.9	47.8	17.3
3 years	56.3*	93.0	73.6	88.4
4 years	82.9*	93.7	81.4	88.6
5 years	89.8*	91.5	84.8	88.6

Sources: Nordic Statistical Yearbook 2003. Data for Spain: “Plan of Action for the employment in Spain 2002” (explaining to the European Commission the development in Spain of the European Employment Guidelines 2002). Data for Germany: Federal Statistical Office, Microcensus 2002 and 2000. The figures marked with * are for the year 2000.

In Germany, the system of parental leave in terms of emphasis on the family and family allowances explains that daycare facilities are rare for the youngest children. Hence, very few children under the age of 3 are in public daycare, as one of the parents is supposed to be at home with the child during that time. Iceland and Norway show somewhat similar trend, with increasing rates of children in daycare for each age group. The figures are, however, always considerably higher in Iceland. To some extent, this may reflect the higher labor market participation of women in Iceland, and further, that the system of parental leave is more extensive in Norway resulting in fewer children in daycare. In Spain, the big difference between the rate for 2 years and the rate for 3 years can be explained by the Spanish government subsidizing totally the education of children from the age of three.

2.3. Maternity/paternity leave, parental leave and allowances

In the following, the different arrangements of parental leave systems and reconciliation policies in the partner countries will be introduced. The chapter starts with an introduction of the existing systems and key statistics. Thereafter the institutional framework will be discussed in more detail for all the countries.

In tables 2.7 and 2.8 below, a schematic overview is provided between the system of maternity/paternity leave and parental leave in the four partner countries. As can be seen, the systems are highly divergent. Iceland and Norway are following the same path, with long paid parental leave for both parents, where rights are associated with labor market participation. Spain also follows that track, although with much less extensive rights. Germany on the other hand, has 2 years of family benefits for families under certain income and up to three years of parental leave. It has to be stated that there is no coherent use of concepts on this issue. The terms used differ from one country to another and they have somewhat different meanings. In this context, ‘maternity’ and ‘paternity’ leave are used when we are aiming at the leave around birth, usually paid leave. Parental leave, on the other hand, is used when the right is sharable, and in most cases this leave is unpaid (with the exception of Germany). The main rule in the report is to use “parental leave” and the form of it is usually apparent from the context.

Table 2.7 Maternity/paternity leave schemes in the four partner countries

	Germany	Iceland	Norway	Spain
Leave for the mother prior to birth	6 weeks (right)	1 month (right)	3 weeks (obligatory)	10 weeks (right)
Leave for the mother after the birth	8 weeks (obligatory)	3 months (2 weeks obligatory)	6 weeks (obligatory)	6 weeks (obligatory)
Leave for the father after the birth	None	3 months	2 weeks right after birth, 4 weeks later	2 days
Leave that the parents can share	None	3 months	29 or 39 weeks (see below)	10 weeks
Economic compensation	Full compensation (100% of prior salary)	80% of prior salary (no roof but a floor) for those in at least 25% job. Others receive flat rate benefit. Paid from a leave fund financed by insurance levy (% of wages) paid by the employers	100% of prior salary if the total number of weeks is 42, 80% of prior salary if 52 weeks are taken. The parents can not receive compensation at the same time	100% of prior salary paid by the social security system
Right to part-time leave/flexible leave	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Can the parents be on leave at the same time?	There is no specific paternity leave but the father can utilize parental leave and then both parents can be on leave at the same time	Yes	Yes but with economic loss	Yes
Total possible length of the leave	14 weeks	9 months to be used before the child is 18 months old	52 weeks	16 weeks

Table 2.8 Parental leave schemes in the four partner countries

	Germany	Iceland	Norway	Spain
Mothers exclusive right	None	Three months until the child reaches 8 years	One year	None
Fathers exclusive right	None	Three months until the child reaches 8 years	One year	None
Leave that the parents can share	3 years until the child is 3 years old, up to 12 months can be postponed, but has to be used before the child reaches 8 years	None	None	Until the child is 3 years old
Economic compensation	Flat rate benefit payment (up to 460 Euro) for all families under a specific annual income for 2 years	None	None	None
Right to part-time leave/flexible leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Can the parents be on leave at the same time?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

When it comes to the utilization, less data is available. Also, existing data is more complicated and difficult to compare between the countries. It is clear, however, that the take-up rate of men and women is yet another diverging factor between the countries. Table 2.9 shows the take-up rate for men in Norway.

Table 2.9 Fathers' use of parental leave in Norway (n. *fødselspermisjon*) (1988—2000)

	Proportion fathers who made use of leave	Number of weeks the father was entitled to*
1988	0.6	18 weeks
1989	1.0	18
1990	1.7	22
1991	2.0	24
1992	2.3	27
1993	4.1	29+4
1994	45	29+4
1995	57	29+4
1996	61	29+4
1997	75	29+4
1998	85	29+4
1999	85	29+4
2000**	85	29+4

*According to 100% of prior salary

** Estimation

Brandth and Kvande (2003:69).

Men's use of parental leave increased slowly from 1988 to 1993 in Norway. Thus, when the rights were relatively short and based on a voluntary sharing between men and women, the father's take-up rose from 1% to 4%. Since the father quota was introduced in 1993, there has been a dramatic increase, from 4% to 85% from 1993 to 1998/1999. On average, fathers take 25 days, whereas mothers take on average 108 days. Hence, the trend in Norway is that the more right men have, the more they use (Brandt and Kvande 2003:70).

In Iceland, the take-up for men has also been monitored from the introduction of the Act on Maternity/Paternity Leave and Parental Leave in 2000. The reform entitles men in Iceland to an independent, non-assignable father quota, implemented in three steps. In 2001 the right was one month, in 2002 it was two months, and in 2003, when the law was fully in place, the right was three months. Table 2.10 shows the trend in Iceland from 2001 to 2003.

Table 2.10 Use of maternity/paternity/parental leave in Iceland (2001-2003)

	2001 (1 month)	2002 (2 months)	2003 (Jan – Oct) (3 months)
Use by men ²	82.4%	82.5%	76%
Number of days (men) ³	39	67	83
Number of days (women)	186	187	182
Men using <i>more</i> than their basic rights ⁴	12.7%	13.6%	13.3%
Women using <i>more</i> than their basic rights ⁵	94.2%	93.2%	90.9%
Men using <i>less</i> than basic rights	4.8%	11.9%	32.4%
Women using <i>less</i> than basic rights	0.9%	0.8%	0.9%
Men's consecutive leave ⁶	45.1%	22.3%	28.4%
Women's consecutive leave	71%	64.1%	60%
Men's partial leave	54.9%	77.7%	71.6%
Women's partial leave	29%	35.9%	40%

(Gíslason 2003)

The new reform, introducing the father quota, has only been in place for a very short time in Iceland, and the table shows men's use of the parental leave during this period of transition. The table shows that the average number of days men take has increased from 39 to 83 from 2001 to October 2003. However, men's relative use decreased during the period from 82% to 76%.⁷ It is too early to interpret the trend in Iceland, but these figures raise the question whether Iceland is evolving in a different direction than Norway. The more right men have in Norway, the more they make use of it. A fundamental difference, which we return to in the final chapter, is the different forms and pace of these reforms in Iceland and Norway. The father quota in Norway, which has been labeled as a "soft coercion", has been fully "normalized" in the decade that it has been in place. An interesting question is whether the Icelandic counterpart is evolving into a "harsh coercion". Thus, in the year 2001, when men had one month father quota, 13% of men used more than that, and only 5% used less. In the first ten months of year 2003, when men had three months father quota, still only 13% of men used more than that and 32% use less. The third month is only partly used, and only increases the average number of days from 67 to 83, or 17 days.

Several factors have been suggested as possible explanations. First, three months are considered a too long time, despite surveys indicating wide endorsement in the society (see later). Secondly, an unfavorable labor market situation with increased unemployment,⁸ and thirdly, that the 80% reimbursement is too low for a three months absence (Gíslason 2003). The use by women is around six months in all the years that were considered, and their partial use of leave increases.

² This is based on men's applications as a proportion of women's applications.

³ Only those who are entitled to payments based on their wages, not those who only get a fixed amount maternity/paternity grant.

⁴ How many men use more than their non-assignable right, i.e. one month 2001, two months 2002, and three months 2003.

⁵ Women have, since 2001, had the right to three months non-assignable parental leave.

⁶ It is possible to split the leave up in different ways, as well as to take it consecutive.

⁷ In terms of men's applications as a proportion of women's applications.

⁸ The unemployment rate for men in Iceland increased from 1.8% in 2000 to 3.6% in 2002. It has not been higher than 6% in the last decade (Vinnumarkaðurinn 2002, table 3.1.2).

There is not much data on the use of parental leave in Spain. However, information is available about how large a proportion of the total working population that did not work during a certain week, and the proportion of those who were on maternity leave. Although the legislation is gender neutral, ensuring the same rights to men and women, less than 2% of those who take maternity leave are men, meaning that 98% and more are women, according to these figures (Institute of Women, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs).

The same applies in Germany. The family benefits are ensured to families, but figures on take-up rate show that a large majority of those who stay at home with their children are women. Data on take-up rates are scarce in Germany. In 1986, when both fathers and mothers were entitled to three years paid leave and means-tested flat-rate benefits, men were only 0.68% of those who took leave. During the 1990s, the proportion of fathers had increased to nearly 2% (Ostner 2002:159). Whether the proportion of men increases after the changes in the rights of parental leave in 2001 is not clear yet. The results of a research project will be available in July 2004.

2.4. Institutional arrangements in the partner countries

2.4.1. Norway

In the very beginning of maternity leave in Norway in early 19th Century, the main idea was the fighting of child mortality, a concern for the health of working mothers, and the importance of bringing working mothers closer to their children (see Brandt and Kvande 2003:62). Thus, the system from the beginning assumed that mothers were active on the labor market and that they should not suffer deprived job situations due to childbirth. Already in the 1970s, the system presumed a gender equal parenthood and sharing of the parental leave between the mother and the father. During the 1980s and the 1990s, the development of the system revolved around gender equality and the right of the father (Brandt and Kvande 2003:63).

Paid maternity leave was introduced in Norway as a part of universalizing the health insurance scheme. In 1956, working mothers were granted 10 weeks of paid maternity leave. In 1971, the leave was expanded to 12 weeks, and by 1977, when it was already available to both parents, the leave had expanded to 18 weeks. In 1987 the right to leave was expanded to 20 weeks, and expansion continued to until 1993.

Today, the Norwegian system consists of many different measures with somewhat different aims. Table 2.11 provides an overview of the current system.

Table 2.11. An overview of parental leave in Norway

Mothers' leave during pregnancy	Leave for mothers before the birth (3 weeks)
Mothers' birth leave	Leave for mothers after the birth (6 weeks)
Fathers' birth leave	Leave for fathers around the birth (2 weeks, payments negotiated between social partners)
Father quota	Fathers' non-transferable right (4 weeks)
Parents' leave	Leave that can be shared between the parents (29/39 weeks with 100% or 80% wages, respectively)
Time budget (both parents)	Part-time leave with a prolonged parents' leave. Combined with a part-time work
Total paid leave	The total paid leave, 42/52 weeks with 100% or 80 % payments
Unpaid leave	Unpaid leave, one year for each of the parents

(Brandth and Kvande 2003:65)

The parents' leave, which is the shared right of both parents to paid leave, is 29 or 39 weeks, depending on whether the parents choose 100% or 80% payments. The parents are free to divide this leave as they wish, and hence, one of them can take it all if they choose. With the introduction of the father quota in 1993, Norway was the first country in the world to bring into existence mandatory leave for men in order to increase their part in caring work. According to Brandt and Kvande, the reform paved the way for the Norwegian system as a "father friendly welfare system" (2003:66).

In 1977, men were, according to the labor law, entitled to a two weeks father's leave around the birth of a child. Payments during these weeks are a part of the collective agreement between the social partners, and research shows that a great majority of men receive reimbursement during this time (Brandt and Kvande 2003:65).

Another part of the Norwegian system is the time budget, announced as an "everyday revolution" by the responsible minister when it was adopted in 1994. The time budget further increases the flexibility of the parental leave. The system allows parents to combine reduced number of working hours with a prolonged paid parental leave. The main idea behind the reform is to meet the needs of the individual families, and it was considered to be especially attractive for men (Brandt and Kvande 2003:66).

Until 2000, the right of fathers was dependent on the mothers' labor market activity. Hence, the fathers' right to paid leave was the same as the mothers'. If the mother worked 75%, the father only got 75% of his wages, within a certain upper limit. This was modified in a reform in 2000, when the rights of fathers were strengthened and the connection to the mothers paid work was loosened. The precondition for the fathers' payments still depends on mothers' employment activities (Brandt and Kvande 2003:67). In addition to paid leave, the parents are entitled to unpaid leave, each of them one year. Thus, the total period of parental leave (paid and unpaid) is three years.

Still another measure in the Norwegian system is the so-called "cash for care" allowance, providing benefits for parents of children under three if their children are not placed in a daycare institution. This amount equals the state subsidy for a place in public kindergarten. This allowance is also eligible if the child attends part-time. The parents are entitled to a proportion of the benefits in accordance with the quantity of

hours the child is cared for in the institution (Lov om kontantstøtte til småbarnsforeldre nr. 73/1997-8).

The Norwegian system of parental leave is the most extensive and the most complex of all the partner countries. The Norwegian system reflects a political will and the state has been very proactive in activating fathers in care work. At the same time the Norwegian system attempts to provide flexibility with a huge variety of options, flexibility in wage replacement and time duration.

Even though men in Norway have had the right to parental leave from the 1970s, their use of it was very low until the 1990s. Thus, while the right of fathers was limited, and based on a voluntary sharing between the parents, its use by men was very low (Engan, Brandt and Kvande 2003:10). There was a dramatic increase of men's usage of parental leave with the introduction of the father's quota in 1993, from 4% in 1993 to 85% in 1998, as mentioned before. These are the men taking some kind of parental leave of all those eligible for it. The father's quota seems to be the most popular arrangement scheme among men in Norway, with 74% of the men making use of that. A somewhat smaller proportion or 68% make use of the 2 weeks father's leave. However, men still take much less parental leave than women, or 25 days on average, as compared to women's 108 days in 2001 (Brandth and Kvande 2003:70).

The "father quota" has been a success in terms of the increased number of men making use of parental leave. Research has revealed a connection between men's use of parental leave and the labor market situation of their spouses. Men's use of parental leave is positively linked to social position; the higher the man's education, the more likely he is to use the parental leave. (Brandth and Kvande 2003:72).

The father quota has not, however, had the desired effect of encouraging more men to take parental leave beyond the four "compulsory" weeks. In 2001 only 13.5% of the men receiving parental leave benefits did so for more than four weeks (Håvard Lismoen 2003). The Norwegian government has published a parliamentary white paper on family policy, where one of the goals is to increase the father's take of parental leave, by making it less dependent on the mother's employment activities both before and after birth (Håvard Lismoen 2003).

Brandt and Kvande have found that gender neutral arrangements do not include enough encouragement for men to take parental leave. The parental leave that the parents can share thus remains the mothers' leave to a large degree. The flexibility that the system allows for is used only to a limited extent. Hence, the flexibility reinforces existing patterns between the parents instead of triggering changes. Only 1.5% of the men use the time budget, the alleged "everyday revolution", and 3.5 % of the women. The proportion of men that do not take parental leave at all is 8% (Brandt and Kvande 2003:78).

Hitherto, the Norwegian policy of reconciling family and work life has explicitly aimed at leveling gender differences that lead to or reproduce inequality between men and women. The "cash for care" reform, which was introduced in 1998 is an exception to the rule in this sense (Bungum, Brandt and Kvande 2001). It was introduced for children between the age of one and two. The aim of the reform was threefold, 1) that parents should get more time with their children, 2) to increase the

families freedom of choice, and 3) to level out the situation of families with respect to state subsidies received for childcare, regardless of the form of care used (Håvard Lismoen 2003, Bungum, Brandth and Kvande 2001). What is new about the “cash for care” measure, is that it is not related to labor market participation of the parents, but to the usage of the public daycare. In 1999, only 63 % of the “cash for care” children had their parents as the main caretaker, and the remaining 37% were taken care of by others (Bungum, Brandth and Kvande, 2001). The first data also reveals that many receive the “cash for care” without reducing their working hours. Of those who receive “cash for care” 96% are women. The reform thus reinforces status quo, by reproducing traditional gendered patterns in the work place as well as in the family (Engan, Brandth and Kvande 2003:12-16).

2.4.2. Germany

The main principle behind the West German social welfare state is that responsibility for welfare lies with individuals and their families. The role of the state is only to intervene as a last resort. The ideology of the system is the principle of subsidiarity. It originates from the “Christlichen Soziallehre” (“Christian Social Theory/ Doctrine”) and has been mediated through the Christian Democratic Union, the CDU. It has served as a constraint on the expansion of public welfare services (Mósesdóttir 2001:63). The Basic Law, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany, places marriage and family under the special protection of the State. The family policy of the post-war period was primarily geared to affording the families’ economic security, but less to population policy aspects or the needs of individual family members (Wingen 1997:27).

Already in 1918 women in Germany got certain basic civil rights, such as the right to university education and the right to vote. The furthering of women’s issues was, however, slow during the first half of the 20th century. The umbrella organization, The German Women’s Council, fought for the inclusion of the Equal Rights Clause in the West German Basic Law that was adopted 1949. Nevertheless, the model of the traditional family with different roles of men and women persisted. Men were assumed to be the main breadwinners and women to be wives and mothers. Organization of the labor market aimed at wages high enough for men to support a wife, and state policies were in accordance with that (Mósesdóttir 2002:43).

This social protection system was mainly derived from the Bismarckian, corporatist model, where workers were guaranteed benefits in relation to previous income. Within this system, married women’s right to protection was basically derived from their spouse.

In the 1950s, the predominating model in West Germany was that of the “male breadwinner family” and policies pursued were in line with that ideal. The Civil Code stipulated that, automatically, the common name of husband and wife was that of the husband, that each and every legal representation of their children was the husband’s preserve and that the latter was entitled to terminate his wife’s gainful employment. The Equal Rights Act was enacted in West Germany in 1958. It brought about changes concerning the rights of married women; parental rights were equalized, with the exception of the husband’s prerogative to decide in conflicts over the education of

children, which was later abolished by the Federal Constitutional Court (Scheiwe 2000:92).

In the 1970s and 1980s some improvements were made in women's employment status, mainly in order to bring West German law into compliance with EU directives. In 1979 the federal parliament mandated equal treatment for women in paid employment. In the mid-1980s female employment started to increase, but it has always been relatively low in a cross-country comparison (Mósesdóttir 2001:52)

In the 1960s, the model of "male breadwinner" was slowly replaced by a so-called "three-phase-model", involving the wife being employed up to the birth of the first child, followed by a family phase and subsequent return to the world of work. An increasing number of mothers took up employment outside the house. This role change triggered a fierce debate throughout society over the roles of women and family.

In the wake of growing pressure and debates about women's roles, family and marriage law was completely reformed in 1976. Until that reform, the law said that women could only take paid work when this could be reconciled with their family duties. With the reform the ideal of "housewife marriage" was contested and policies came to focus more on the needs of the individual family members. Especially the issues of reconciliation of work and family life and equality increased in importance. 1979 saw the introduction of a six-months maternity leave, i.e. the three-months maternity protection for workers following the birth of a child was extended by another three months. During this time a maternity allowance was paid (about 380 Euro).

Finally, in 1986 the extended maternity leave was developed into a parental leave of 10-months (with protection against release) combined with a child-raising allowance (300 Euro), which also is given to all parents caring for their children in the first year after the birth. Step by step parental leave was extended to a period of three years in 1991. The family benefit was extended to two years. On the one hand, this move favorably responded to the growing number of working mothers who did not automatically give up their job as their children were born (Pettinger 2000:244; Vaskovic 2000:233) and, on the other, the child-raising allowance reflected the set of values championed by the conservative government, under which families were expected to take care of their children themselves throughout their first years of life (Pettinger 2000:244; Wingen 1997:214). As Germany was unified, the lack of appropriate childcare facilities became particularly evident, since the East of Germany had a far better infrastructure for families in place.

The most recent history of Germany is also influenced by unification of East and West Germany. The unification is a complicated process, reflecting the merging of two different family policies. Whereas gender relations in West Germany represented a strong, marriage-centered, male breadwinner ideal, with complementary roles of men and women, the East German gender roles meant a system of highly individualized dual-earner families (Ostner 2002:155). The wide selection of childcare facilities enabled women to participate in the labor market. Although nearly all mothers in the eastern part of Germany worked full-time, the family work wasn't

equally divided. The few existing data suggest that East German fathers did not equally share childcare and other domestic activities (Ostner 2002:221).

After the 1998 change of government, the social democratic government has endeavored, *inter alia*, to improve the material situation of families (child allowance rose to 154 Euros), help to reconcile family and work responsibilities and create stronger incentives for the simultaneous pursuit of work and family tasks (Dienel 2003:2). The parental leave was transformed into a far more flexible leave, which both parents can take at the same time. Additionally, since 2001, parents have a statutory right to work part-time during their parental leave. Fathers are explicitly encouraged to take parental leave. The permissible extent of part-time work during parental leave was raised from 19 to 30 hours per week for each parent. Under the new law, therefore, both parents together are entitled to work up to 60 hours (30 + 30) a week during a joint parental leave. Another important advance is the transferability, subject to the employer's approval, of up to one year of parental leave to the period between the third and eighth birthdays of the child. This shall widen the parents' career opportunities and create the statutory prerequisites for a stronger participation of the fathers in child-raising responsibilities.

Over and beyond that, the Federal Government has been systematically pursuing the extension of child daycare facilities, especially for children under the age of three years. These changes go with the "crumbling" of the traditional role model of the male breadwinner. Oberndorfer and Rost (2002) stated that the concepts of "new fathers" and "new men" show a changed attitude about gender roles today. As regards the concepts of fatherhood, Fthenakis and Minsel (2002) see a "soft revolution" in their research. 66 % of the men saw their role primarily in "upbringing of the child" and only 34 % saw their main role as "breadwinner". Vaskovic/Rost found that only one third of the fathers expressed a negative attitude towards parental leave in general (Vaskovic/Rost 1999:162). Nevertheless, after the birth of the first child a traditionalization of gender roles in the division of tasks takes into effect. The difference between the ideal and reality often leads to discontent of the couples. Also the attitude of the female partner is important. The more egalitarian her role concept and the more she emphasize the social function of the father the more likely is it that he will take part in the upbringing of the child. However, there is also a remarkable tenacity in the traditional division of labor in families. The fathers taking parental leave are still a small group of pioneers. The question whether the number of fathers taking parental leave has increased since the new legislation, is subject of a research project. The results will be available in July 2004.

2.4.3. Spain

The most recent history of Spain is influenced by the dictatorship from 1940 to 1975. Before the dictatorship, in the 2nd Republic, there was a broad recognition of civil rights, including women's rights, such as the right to work, to vote and to divorce. The 2nd Republic ended in 1936 as the civil war began. The issue of gender equality was again put on the political agenda in the mid-1970s (Ballester-Pastor 2003). Since the Falange party came to power, a coalition was made with the Catholic Church and the position of women became even worse than before 1930 (Bussy Genevois 1994).

Franco died in 1975 and a new Constitution was passed in 1978. Although no unitary act on gender equality has been adopted in Spain, Article 14 in the democratic constitution from 1978 includes a non-discrimination clause, where gender equality is explicitly stated. Many articles in Labor Law Statutes also refer to and describe the principle of non-discrimination by gender. The institutional arrangements on gender equality and reconciliation of family and work in Spain have proceeded gradually since 1975 and reforms have been made on family law (Ballester-Pastor 2003). This has been seen as a part of a democratic transition, closely linked to a deeper political, economic and social change (Municio-Larsson and Pujol Algans 2002:191-192).

These reforms were propelled by the underlying belief that the European integration required changes in the direction of more social welfare. Thus, the impetus for change came partly from outside, and strong motives were the democratization and Europeanization of Spain. There was an explicit ambition to break with tradition, and family relations became a symbol for new ways of viewing obligations and rights and new demands upon the welfare state (Municio-Larsson and Pujol Algans 2002:192).

Despite an increasing body of equal opportunities, few measures were introduced to implement family friendly policies (Valiente 2000:143). It has been claimed that the changes of the legal framework have been more symbolic than real, and that the lack of implementation mirrors that the consensus on the changes is lost when it comes to the actual fulfillment of the laws (Municio-Larsson and Pujol Algans 2002:192-193).

Several factors have been taken as an explanation for the reluctance to implement family friendly policies. First, there has been a persistent labor surplus in Spain since the beginning of the 1980s, with high unemployment rates. The average unemployment rate 1989-1990 was 16.2% (OECD 2002:18). For this reason, strong policies to encourage women to participate in paid work have therefore not been urged for (Valiente 2000:143-144). However, Spain is now experiencing the fastest employment growth of the OECD countries and the total unemployment rates were 10.5% in 2001 (OECD 2002:16). As we saw in table 2.1 above, 53% of women in Spain are active on the labor market (both employed and unemployed), and the employment rate is higher the higher women's education (Institute of Women 2003).

Secondly, the informal sector is large (Municio-Larsson and Pujol Algans 2002:199). The large informal sector has made it difficult to develop and implement family policy measures, as informal workers and other workers in a vulnerable situation are less prone to protest if their rights are infringed on. Furthermore, employers are not interested in costly family policy measures, which they do not regard as necessary. It has been documented that informal jobs are more prevalent among very young women, married women, and the least educated women (Valiente 2000:145).

Thirdly, commonly held views about gender roles and childcare have not promoted family friendly policies. Spain reflects traditional gender values, and the belief that mothers have natural maternal instincts that men are lacking, is commonly held. The value of care provided by mothers and other relatives is strongly emphasized, along with mistrust in public childcare. It is a widely held view that children suffer if their mother works outside the home (Valiente 2000:146). The mobilizing forces to challenge these goals, such as the feminist movement or women's policy machineries, have been too weak to have an influence (Valiente 2000:143). These partners have

also paid relatively little attention to the issue of family policies and the reconciliation of work and family life. It has been suggested that this is a part of a rejection of the doctrine of the past that defined motherhood as the main role of women (Valiente 2000:150-151).

However, the Spanish system has been changing in the last 15 years with several reforms phased in. The initiative has come from the authorities as a response to low fertility rates (Ballester-Pastor 2003). In 1989, all rights related to maternity and childcare could also be utilized by the father. Among these is the daily “feeding hour” (or the “nursing break”), which can be traced back to 1900. The parents can decide freely when to take the feeding hour, and they can take it until the child reaches the age of nine months (Valiente 2000:157).

The current welfare provisions on maternity and childcare in Spain refer to many measures (Ballester-Pastor, 2000:64-96). Paid maternity leave is relatively short (only sixteen weeks). During this time the mother or the father has the right to receive 100% of her/his salary. This measure was introduced in 1994 as a way to encourage the main family income earner (mostly the father) to ask for the maternity leave as well. Unfortunately, fathers are still reticent to it, reflected by the fact that only 2% of those taking parental leave are men. The sixteen weeks can be freely distributed by the parents, with the only exception that six weeks right after birth have to be taken by the mother. The maternity leave can be taken in any flexible way that parents decide, even alternating it with part-time work (in which case they have to reach an agreement with the employer/s). Special provisions exist for multiple births. The maternity leave has a very broad spectrum, since self employed and adoptive parents have the right to it too.

In 1998, some regulations were passed to compensate the cost that could, directly or indirectly, fall on the employer. These are in the form of reduced social security payments of employers when hiring a substitute for the parent on maternity leave and even during the first year after the parent comes back from maternity leave. Other measures are the right to long unpaid permissions until the child reaches age of three year. After that permission the parents have the right to the same place of work. The right to part time until the age of six years of the child, in which case the parents decide freely what time of the day the time reduction applies. In 1999 the dismissal of a person on a maternity leave was prohibited, and the possibility of part-time leave with prolonged period was allowed. In 2002, working mothers with a child under the age of three have the right to get 100 Euro monthly from the government (Ballester-Pastor 2003:3-4).

In general, public daycare is not provided, but educational pre-school programs for children between the age of 3 and 6 are common. The Spanish government subsidizes these programs. They are, however, accepted solely for educational reasons and not as a women-friendly employment policy (Valiente 2000:156).

2.4.4. Iceland

Iceland belongs to the Nordic countries, but the gender situation in Iceland is in many ways different from them, and in some cases paradoxical. The political participation of women in Iceland is somewhat lower than in the other Nordic countries, whereas

the female employment is among the highest in the world. In 1971 approximately 50% of Icelandic women were in the labor force, and in the year 2001 it was up to 79%. Approximately four out of ten women on the labor market work part-time, but despite that they have relatively long working hours, or about 36 hours on average in 2000. The high female labor market activity in Iceland is combined with a very high fertility rate, despite somewhat underdeveloped welfare schemes in a Nordic comparison, in terms of support to families with children (Einarsdóttir 2003).

In regard to gender roles, Icelandic families have been depicted as “modern traditionalists”. The values of Icelandic families have been related to the inherited socio-cultural values of the Saga Period. The myth of the “strong Icelandic woman” is assumed and reflected in the everyday life of modern women. The relatively weak public family support, and the rather unequal social position of men and women, has brought couples into coping strategies where the man takes on the male-breadwinner role and women the responsibility of caring, although often against her own will (Júlíusdóttir 1993).

Iceland had a strong women’s movement in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1975 the women’s “Day Off” in Iceland received international media coverage. Icelandic women also have had strong role models in the former female president and the former female mayor of the capital, Reykjavík. Nevertheless, the gender discourse in Iceland has been indifferent, or even hostile, with signs of backlash in the most recent years, for example in political representation (Einarsdóttir 2003).

Parental leave in Iceland has, until very recently, been a highly differentiated and complicated system, distinguishing between different groups of women depending on whether they are civil servants or employed in the private labor market. Moreover, the system covered certain groups of men while excluding others.⁹ The first clauses on payments in relation to birth in Iceland are found in the Act on Social Security from 1946, where women are ensured a certain amount of money. It is not known however, to what extent these laws were implemented. In 1954, female civil servants were entitled to 90 days fully paid maternity leave. In 1975 unionized working mothers in Iceland received the rights to three months paid maternity leave, according to a law on unemployment benefits.

In 1980, the Act on Maternity leave was adopted, leading to a change in the structural framework of maternity leave. From then on payments were no longer connected to unemployment benefits but to social security, and a dismissal of women on maternity leave was forbidden. The Act did not cover female civil servants, as their rights were ensured by another legislation. A proposal was put forward several times in the Icelandic parliament during the 1980s, aiming at the same amount of payments to all women, regardless of labor market situation, but without success.

In 1987, changes were made and maternity leave extended to six months for both female civil servants and employees on the private labor market. A distinction was made between two different types of birth allowances for women in the private labor

⁹ The following is based on Ingólfur V. Gíslason (2003) “Meginhreyfingarnar þrjár” Working Paper for the project Culture, Custom and Caring; and Elin Pálsdóttir Flygenring (1985) “Lög og aðrar réttarheimildir er varða konur” in *Konur hvað nú?* (ed. Jónína Margrét Guðnadóttir). 85’nefndin, samstarfsnefnd í lok kvennaáratugar SP and Jafnréttisráð. Reykjavík.

market; one type of payment was regardless of labor market situation, the other aimed at compensation for working parents in the private labor market. Both consisted of a fixed, relatively low amount, paid by the state. As regards female civil servants, the first three months were full compensation (gross wages), whereas the three last months were based on regular wage rates. The system was very complicated; it was a patchwork of different rights for different groups, covered by different laws and regulation.

The first steps towards a specific paternity leave were taken in Reykjanesbær, a municipality in the neighborhood of Reykjavík city in 1996. Male employers of the municipality were ensured two weeks paternity leave around the birth or adoption of a child. In 1997, this right was granted to all male employees of the Icelandic state and all males employed by the City of Reykjavík. The independent two weeks paternity leave was extended to all men in Iceland with a law on paternity leave, issued in 1998, but the forms for it and the payments were different depending on where they worked.

If the system was complicated for women, it was no less arbitrary for men. Until the late 1990s, men in the private labor market had certain rights, which nonetheless were contingent upon the right and the usage of their spouses. Men who were married to female civil servants had limited rights, basically unpaid, but men in civil service basically had no rights. This had been contested several times by the Complaints Committee on Equal Status and the case was confirmed by the Supreme Court of Iceland. However, the Icelandic government only recognized the right for male civil servants who were married to female civil servants, so men on the private market married to female civil servants were still excluded.

This reluctance on behalf of the state to expand the rights of parents to birth and parental leave was suddenly reversed by the Act on maternity/paternity and parental leave, which was passed in 2000. The leave was extended from 6 months to 9 in three phases, linking three non-transferable months to each of the parents and leaving three months for the parents to divide at their own discretion. However, the mother should be on leave for the first two weeks after the birth. Hence, in 2001, men in Iceland got the right to one month paternity leave, two months in 2002, and three months in 2003. The leave can be taken part-time within the limits of 18 months with a reduction in payments. The payments amount to 80% of gross wages, with a certain minimum amount fixed, without any upper limits. Those who are not active on the labor market, or work less than 25%, get certain compensation. In addition, parental leave is another scheme issued in the year 2000, allowing each parent a 13 week parental leave, total of 26 weeks, unpaid until the child is 8 years old. Those parents who have not been employed receive a fixed sum from the state.

Fathers' utilization of paternity/birth leave reveals a pattern that is difficult to interpret at this early stage. Statistics for the year 2001 show that 82.4% of those eligible applied for paternity/birth leave and spent on average 39 days on paternity/birth leave. Statistics for 2002 show that the same proportion of men is taking leave, but the number of days has gone up to 67. The statistics also show that approximately 13% of the fathers are using *more* than their non-transferable father quota in 2001, 2002 and 2003. Preliminary numbers for the first ten months of 2003 imply that there is a slight decrease in the use, or 76%. It is important to note that the final figures might change this picture.

Even if Iceland does not have the most generous parental leave system of the partner countries, it has the longest non-transferable parental leave for men. The Act from year 2000 has been implemented in three steps. One of the political arguments behind the new Act was that it was a fundamental step to promote gender equality even in other areas, such as level out gender differences at the labor market and reduce the gender wage gap. Icelandic men are now in the phase of coming to terms with the new system, which dramatically changes the framework for parental leave.

3. Case Studies in Four European Countries

3.1. Norway

Utilization of parental leave and attitudes toward it

Three stages from “compulsory” leave to “voluntary” leave

At first sight, the six Norwegian couples appear as a very heterogeneous group and the use of leave arrangements does not seem to reflect a rule. However, a closer look reveals a certain pattern. The Norwegian men’s rights and their use of those rights can be thought of in terms of stages. All of the men who are eligible took the first two weeks (“pappapermisjon”) which was introduced in 1977, and paid for by employers (Engan, Brandth and Kvande 2003:10). The only exception is a man who had adopted child, and therefore was not entitled to the two weeks leave.

The second stage, the four weeks long “compulsory” father quota, has been fully used by four of the six fathers. Statistics reveal that 85% of men in Norway use the father quota. One of the fathers in the sample did not make any use of the father quota, and another only used it partially. The third stage, the step of transcending the “obligatory” leave has been accomplished by one third of the group, i.e. two men. This can be seen against the background of statistical data that reveals that approximately 14% of all men in Norway make use of a ‘voluntary’ leave, as we saw above. In the following, we will take a closer look at these three steps.

I don’t need the quota

In two of the Norwegian cases the men did not take the “compulsory” father quota, or only took a part of it. These two couples gave different reasons for renouncing it. In one case the father works shifts at night and is at home every other week. Both he and his wife say he might have taken more if the couple would not miss out financially. At the same time they admit that the mother was not ready to step aside and make a space for the father. She really wanted to take the leave herself and both agree that there should not be any father quota “at the women’s cost”. The woman has more formal education than the man, but nonetheless they have relatively traditional gender roles. The woman has the “central position” in the family and voluntarily undertakes an all-inclusive position in the home, from which she hands over certain tasks to the father.¹⁰ Hence, her husband is involved a great deal in the caring, since both of them

¹⁰ For a theoretical discussion of the “central position” and mother’s place in the inner core of the family, see Einarsdóttir (1998:43-45) and Einarsdóttir (2002:204-206).

consider the relationship between father and children important; both of them think it is “important to share”, but they share according to the wishes of the woman.

In the case of the couple, in which the man did not utilize the father quota at all, there is a great discrepancy between the man and the woman, both regarding paid work and caring. Their family situation is imbued with imbalance with respect to work life and family life as well. The man is a real estate agent, who works 80 hours per week and his wages are exceptionally high. He has an overbearing attitude in general, and his expressions tend to be contradictory. For example, he says he doesn’t need leave because he can take time off when it suits him, while at the same time admitting that he doesn’t want to be away from the job. He is proud to tell that he doesn’t even know what his rights are and that he doesn’t mind:

It provokes me... when you spend so many hours at work, that you have to keep a list [over working hours]... I haven’t done it, I haven’t been into it. If you are working right now, then great. But when you are at the job so many hours – then it’s pedantry to keep a list.

His wife has not had a work career of her own. When their children, now 3 and 4 years old, were born, she took one year unpaid leave. She now works three days a week in a fashion shop for social reasons, “to come out a little bit and meet nice people”. The couple can be described as a “mother-centered family”, with Einarsdóttir’s formulation (2002:206-207). However, the woman’s attitude to her own central position is permeated with ambivalence and feelings of sacrifice, since the central position is to a certain extent forced upon her.

Father quota – different patterns

The families where the man used the whole father quota are different in many respects, regarding relations to the labor market, as well as the gender roles and the internal dynamic of the couple. They have one thing in common, though, and that is that both parents share the family responsibility. There is not necessarily fifty-fifty sharing in all cases, of paid and unpaid work or domestic responsibilities. However, the spouses have found some balance and sense of togetherness that fits them. They find solutions and compromises regarding the parental leave in which both have confidence.

Real sharing requires mutual understanding

In two of the cases where the man makes use of the father quota, the woman has weaker labor market position than the man. In one case, the woman is evolving from unemployment to paid work and does so with a contribution from the man who facilitates it by taking the father quota at that point. The other woman resigned from her earlier job, a demanding position as head of department due to the lack of part-time alternatives. She took a prolonged leave with 80% replacement and used the leave to change track and is now about to complete another education. It is important for her to share responsibilities and in order to contribute economically to the family she works as a newspaper carrier early in the morning. It is interesting to see how the internal dynamics of these families has developed. In both cases, structural restraints influence the negotiations of the spouses, such as the women’s unstable labor market

situation (unemployment), or transformation from one job to another through a new education.

In the two other couples that make use of the father quota, the woman has an equal or stronger labor market position than the man: In one couple both are professionals; in the second, the woman has markedly higher position than the man.

Only two of the couples in the Norwegian sample have taken the step from the “compulsory” father quota to a real sharing, implying the man voluntarily taking parental leave from the “sharable” part. This third stage is obviously imbued with further obstacles. If we look more closely at these two, we can see the women’s strong positions in the labor market, which is in accordance with other research (Brandt and Kvande 2003:78, Bekkengen 1996:56ff). They either have equal positions (even if the man earns more than the woman) or they have “reverse” gender roles, i.e. the woman has a stronger position than the man, even in relation to earnings. That man also had to fight against unsympathetic climate at his workplace, where the atmosphere was “tough”. This may be taken as a sign of his will power and ambitions. If he had not had the ambition, he might have used this as an excuse to give up the fight.

They haven’t really made any remarks... well, it’s the issue of “vacation”. It’s not really a vacation. I try to tell them...

“Cash for care” – a good thing or a last resort?

Four of the couples have received the “cash for care” measure. Two of them are happy with it and think it fits them well, whereas the other two use it as a last resort, and without any approval of it. The use of the “cash for care” goes along the same lines as the use of the father quota. The two families, who have taken the step from the “compulsory” to the “voluntary” paternity leave, don’t use it at all and don’t approve of it.

The couples that were satisfied with the “cash for care” measure, were on the one hand the family where the all-inclusive mother did not make space for the father and on the other hand the family with the dominant father. The two remaining “cash for care” users are the families in transition, and they make use of it despite their disapproval. Both would have chosen to have a longer leave instead of “cash for care”. Research has shown that the use is supposedly most among the women with the weakest labor market situation. Thus, Bungum, Brandth and Kvande report that 96% of the “cash for care” receivers are women, mostly in part-time jobs (2001).

Work relations

More facilities than restraints

The Norwegian parents have different relationship to their jobs, and that holds true for women and men alike. An overall impression is that work and family life is relatively easy, as compared with the Icelandic sample, to take an example. Work life does not infringe too much upon family life in terms of, for example, unreasonable working hours. Family responsibilities of men and women, and parental responsibility in particular, seems to be “normalized” and different arrangements and measures well

settled. It is, furthermore, a general trend that supervisors and managers are understanding towards needs and requests for parental leave. They not only respect the legal framework, they also seem to be in favor of parental leave in general. In that regard, there does not seem to be a difference between the men's and the women's supervisors. Neither is there a difference between different kinds of work places. It is common that supervisors attempt to reduce overtime at the work place, and against that background, they generally tend to be positive towards men's parental leave. In some of the cases, the supervisors explicitly and consciously make arrangements in order to facilitate the parental leave for the man as well as to make it as easy as possible for the work place, as the following expression reveals:

If you want to proceed and grow, and to recruit the best people and keep them, than you also have to work with the big things... Of course there is a link between all things. You can't recruit and keep the best if don't have a good policy regarding pregnancies and permissions.

In some cases the working culture operates as a restraint on the men's parental leave. In exceptional cases parental leave is rare among the colleagues at the workplace, for one reason or another. In one case, there is a low turnover at the workplace, and the average age is above 50 years. In that case, there is not much understanding of men's requests for parental leave. In another case, the working climate was rather hostile against men taking paternity leave.

The Norwegian sample comprises one interesting exception in this respect, a man working in the real estate branch. The man's job is without boundaries. The trend is well known in the research on high-tech corporations and knowledge based services (Sennett 1998, Hochschild 2001). When the wages are based on performance and outcome, the problems of the boundaries become urgent. Individualized performance is linked to competitive advantages and effectiveness, making the worker's relationship to the work and to the company more complicated than before. The formal contract that previously regulated work time has disappeared, leaving the worker vulnerable to norms demanding ever more work and commitment. The alleged autonomy of the worker turns pale against external pressure he has difficulties handling.

This case is especially interesting as it reveals a trend in the times of new work models in intensified international competition. The meaning of work and work culture has been subjected to a deep transformation in recent decades because of globalization and deregulation. The outcome of this process for the reconciliation of work and family life remains to be researched in detail. This particular Norwegian example shows where this trend might be taking us.

Roles vis-à-vis the children

Participating fathers vs. fathers as supporting players for mothers

The overarching theme regarding children is relatively active involvement of the fathers in caring activities, as compared to lesser interest in domestic tasks, which is a well known pattern (Einarsdóttir 1998). There seem to be a widespread myth of equal gender roles and parenthood. Distinct and separate roles for men and women are rarely expressed, although a flavor of male authority does appear in one exceptional

case. Almost all of the couples value highly that the father is brought into the caring activities and has a chance to experience the “slow time” with the child, as pointed out by Brandth and Kvande (2003).

It’s important that you have time [with the child]. You give the child priority whenever you can. You never get this time back... If there are some events in the evenings, I skip it. I’m very concerned about that.

The equal parental role evolves rather smoothly within the equal dual breadwinner families. Exceptions to that rule are the family of the all-inclusive mother and the family of the dominant male breadwinner father. The all-inclusive mother did not share the parental leave, and she made space for the man only on her own premises. It is important to involve the father in the childcare, because otherwise they cling to the mother: “That’s the most important, I suppose, that you can be at home without the child shouting at mommy all the time”.

The strong breadwinner father has a rather negative view on the children and the home, and he seems to share that with his wife. Both talk about it more in terms of a burden than joy. She remembers her time with the children as stressful and chaotic, where she was left without help. This is reflected in the following quote, where the wife talks about her husband’s family involvement: “He is spoiled; he has been spared the most!” The man has barely been alone with the children, and makes the somewhat peculiar comment that he wants the children to call him “daddy” and not the “real estate agent”. The spouses admit openly that they have had different opinions on the upbringing of the children.

The overall impression from the Norwegian sample is that of reflexive and devoted fathers. They describe an everyday life where being together with the child is an indispensable part of the day. However, even if both men and women adopt the notion of an equal and democratic parenthood, it can be read between the lines that some of the men pick and choose as from a buffet (Einarsdóttir 1998) - with or without the woman’s approval. The mother may be more at home with the children than the father due to part-time work; she may have looser connection to the work, less ambitious career plans, or “coincidences” of different kinds, such as career breaks, unemployment, etc. In these cases the father takes the children when he comes home from work, and the mother turns to the household tasks. Hence, the woman has to do it all, whereas the father takes the delicacy. This pattern hinders men from shouldering the overall responsibility and developing the holistic view that so often characterizes women (Einarsdóttir 2002).

Couples’ relationship

Haunted by the spirit of gender equality

As mentioned above, the Norwegian couples generally do have ideas about their parental role as relatively equal and gender neutral. There are but a few signs of specific male vs. female expectations about household tasks or the children. It is obvious though, that the women in most cases have more responsibility at home, whereas the men more often have the role of the main breadwinner - even in the cases where both parents are in paid work. The woman is usually described as being “in

charge” at home, even if the extent of her ruling authority differs, and can have both negative and positive overtones (Einarsdóttir 2002).

Brandth and Kvande have identified several obstacles regarding the involvement of men in parental leave. One is the general wage difference between men and women, which make many couples reject the option of paternity leave for economic reasons. Another obstacle is the extensive prevalence of women’s part-time work in Norway, which pulls in the same direction. This is strengthened by the Norwegian law, in which the men’s rights a derivate of the woman’s labor market participation (Brandth and Kvande 2003).

Brandth and Kvande also identified more cultural and subjective factors that hinder the take-up of parental leave by men, which we find especially present in the current context. We have already mentioned the mother who would not give up her “maternal” position and the reluctance of men to step from the role as breadwinners. An important theme in this respect is how the ethos of gender equality colors their expressions. The issue of gender equality has become the “right” way of arranging things, at the same time as the couples have a problematic relation to it. It is something that confuses, troubles and interrupts, without necessarily bringing about changes. No one is untouched by the notion of gender equality. The couples have a strong need to address it, either to emphasize how seriously they have taken it, how wonderfully equal they are; or they developed a discourse of justifications and excuses for not being equal enough. Thus, one father says in a somewhat excusing way:

If I had got 100% of my wages I’d definitely taken more.

The justifications may revolve around the notion of “free choice” or “easiest” or “most convenient” solution for the couple. The couples may have negotiated the most traditional arrangements, but as long as they make sense of it in terms of a “free choice”, they keep their feeling of agency and integrity intact. The discourse makes the decision feel rational. It may be “the best solution for the children”, or the structural arrangements may be “unfair”. This kind of excuse is reflected by a couple, which is painfully aware that their arrangements reinforce traditional patterns. The father “would have taken more if he had had to...” and the father quota is a nice form of “soft coercion”, but they still do not use it. These cases reveal the intricate interplay between cultural restrains and structural obstacles.

To sum up the Norwegian case study, the men seem to have rather easy relationship to the father quota, which to a large extent seem to be normalized. Family responsibilities of men and women are shared to a considerable extent. In general, supervisors and employers are understanding of needs for parental leave. In some cases the working culture operates as a restrain towards men’s parental leave and in exceptional cases there is a hostile atmosphere at the workplace. Despite general acceptance of the system, traditional patterns and the spirit of the male bread winner are looming under the surface, and some of the couples stick to traditional solutions.

3.3. Germany

Some features are characteristic for the German cases. The couples have known each other, cohabited or even been married for a very long time before parenting. They have been together from 6 up to nearly 20 years before they had their first child. All but one of the couples are married. They also have fewer children than the interviewees from the other countries. Four of the couples have one child, and the remaining couples have two and three children respectively.

According to the statistical data, the German case studies are not representative for couples with young children in Germany. The sample represents the small group of couples who try to share family and work responsibilities equally. It must be kept in mind in that respect, that the German sample is not typical for people in general, but represent the small fraction of male pioneers who take parental leave, as we return to later on.

The fathers in the German sample decided to take parental leave for quite a long time, from 6 months up to 3 years. This is quite representative for the small group of fathers who take parental leave at all. Three of the fathers stayed at home full-time, the other three couples chose an equal share of family work and paid work. These couples took advantage of the new legal modalities and both mother and father took parental leave at the same time in combination with part-time work during their leaves.

A conspicuous theme is the explicit hostility on behalf of some of the employers towards parental leave, even to the extent that they may refuse to comply with the law. The solutions of the German couples are a complicated puzzle made up of the different parental leave schemes. These are negotiated with the employers on individual bases, and, in fact, depend on the individual employer. This tends to translate parental leave into a private matter for the employees. It makes them vulnerable and they are, accordingly, often subjected to pressure from the employer:

Egoistically seen I would rather prefer, if my colleagues would be here from 8:00 to 17:00 and I have access to them so that I can supply them with work. On the other side if we would not have such regulation, or would not react flexible, we would run the risk that we lose our qualified colleagues. That would be a worse solution.”

The labor market situation of Germany may affect the possibilities of workers to negotiate with the employer. Female employment has been relatively low but is now 65 % in the age group 15 and 64 years and 32 % for mothers with children under the age of three. However, 35% of women work part-time. The unemployment rate is about 10% as we saw before. This might affect the solutions available to the couples, even if not explicitly stated in the interviews.

Utilization of parental leave and attitudes toward them

The cutting edge – few but committed fathers

All the men in the German sample have taken some kind of parental leave and are more or less positive towards it. Three of them have taken full parental leave, being totally released from the job from six months up to three years:

And I think, all in all, everything is easier because we've both done everything. At least that's the way I feel about it. You have a better understanding of things. Now my husband can really comprehend what I was saying back when I was at home, and I can, too. Because you're simply in a different situation. I just think it's a lot easier if you do it this way.

The remaining three fathers and their partners have taken parental leave in combination with a reduction of their working hours for a shorter or a longer period. These parents seem to appreciate the variation between family and paid work.

On the days at home, you can take in so much of what's going on, but it's also quite stressful. With three little kids you're feeling pretty groggy in the evening. But then you can get motivated at the thought of going back to work tomorrow or the next day for a day or two, and that's a welcome change. If you get home after ten hours working, you are exhausted as well, but that's something different as you had a change.

As we saw in the statistics above, existing data on men's parental leave shows a very low take-up rate. In 1987, only 0.68% of those on leave in Germany were fathers, and in the 1990 the proportion had increased to 2%. These were highly educated working fathers or partners of highly educated women. Very few combined part-time and partial parental leave in 1987, but these increased considerably in the 1990s (Ostner 2002:159).

Against this background, the couples in our sample are at the cutting edge, and not typical for German parents in general. Their experiences can therefore shed a light on what is needed to break the existing pattern, rather than explaining what hinders men's parental leave. The interviews thus provide a valuable insight into facilitating mechanisms.

Rather housefather than unhappy worker

The three men that had been full-time housefathers were at home between 6 months and 3 years. They all have a more or less uneasy relationship with their job and did not have any career ambitions at the moment, as this father who took 6 months full leave:

I joined them [the agency] only recently, and I will certainly not rise to the top and become head of department or something like that ... You know, all posts are filled with people in middle age, and unless something really out of the ordinary happens, they will stay until they retire. There are simply so many other people in line ahead of me for such a job. If I wanted to advance in my career, I would have to change employers, but I am a civil servant and I do not think that I will leave the agency in the near future.

One of the men who take full time leave is unhappy with his work situation, he is overqualified for his job and the parental leave is nicely timed as a break and an opportunity for considerations about career plans:

I wasn't really enjoying all that anymore. It would have been almost impossible to see my son with that job. I didn't want that. And also the job itself ... the pressure was enormous, being responsible for the turnover, the working hours ... it was my responsibility to see to it that business was good... It is true that I could return but I'm not yet sure ... no, to be pretty honest, I don't want to return. Something different... I have already considered teaching.

Another man is not really interested in the job he is trained for, and he also uses the parental leave to increase his capacity in computers, which is his big interest. He has, however, put aside thoughts about making a career out of his computer interest:

Over here you need a certificate for everything, or else they don't let you do it – even if you're good at it! And it's not easy to be self-employed when you've got kids [...] now we've got parental leave – afterwards, we'll see.

Also, the wives or partners of these men are particularly dedicated to their work, which is in accordance with research. They have the same or higher occupational situation as the men themselves. In two cases the women also have higher wages than the men. Following are two quotations from the mothers:

Altogether in all the years that I've been doing my job, what I enjoy the most is that it is really full of variety. It's this way: in the area that you are working in you have to do everything yourself. Starting with the budget up to the minister's speech, everything is included and that's what I like about my job. I've always enjoyed doing that... I like being at my job the most, I have to admit... You know, when you come home at six, you're pretty pooped. Of course I'm glad to see my daughter, but it's also a pretty exhausting time. She goes to bed at eight and she's starting to become a little cranky then. And I'm pretty exhausted, too. It really is different I've noticed myself, than on my free days or on the weekend. So if I'm talking about a regular day, I have to admit that I like my job better...

I do enjoy going back to work again. That's something I've always wanted. I never really saw myself as a housewife/mother. It's quite a lot of responsibility, my job and being employed and all, especially since it's not the job of my dreams, but it is more than just any old job...

The tendency also found for other countries is that it requires dedicated partners with strong labor market connections for men to share, also seems to apply here. Similar to Spain, we also have the tendency here of men sharing when they have loose connections to the labor market.

Work relations

Disapproval and resistance, individual negotiations

As mentioned above, an explicit resistance is apparent on behalf of the employers in the German cases. This resistance ranges from skepticism to open disapproval. These employers do not seem to hesitate to reveal their negative attitudes even when parents

are claiming rights they are entitled to by law. There is no difference between female-dominated and male-dominated branches in this respect; and neither seems to be a difference between public or private workplaces. One example of an employer who more or less openly refuses to respect the employee's legal rights to parental leave, is from a public daycare center. The employer disapproves both of the parental leave and reduction of working hours, and refers to the special circumstances of the particular case in question:

We were quite surprised and almost shocked when Mr. Wagner came and asked for shorter working hours. The head of the daycare center has been ill for very long and on top of it her deputy wanted to cut down his working hours... I wouldn't have thought it would work. For we are responsible for the smooth functioning and the pedagogic quality of the daycare center. But obviously Mr. Wagner is the person who will manage somehow.

The legal regulations of parental leave enabled the man in question to take parental leave. According to the law, parents have a right to parental leave. They also have the right to work part-time during the leave. The employer can only reject the part-time work, if there are "urgent operational reasons". (In these cases the father can still take full-time leave). For couples that decide to be on parental leave at the same time and to both work part-time the solutions are a complicated puzzle. The employees have to rely on employers' goodwill and often have to undertake individual negotiations with their employer. The distribution of the working hours during the leave of both men and women are to be negotiated individually with the employers and have to fit with the working hours of the other parent, which is not easy. The parents in the sample did not rely on any support in childcare from outside. Therefore every change in the working hours of one parent had to be compensated by a flexible change of the other parent to ensure a full-time care for the children.

Another finding is that of couples being very concerned that the employer will not be harmed by their decision to take parental leave. This applies to both to men and women. One of the men was on full-time parental leave for half a year, and he did so at a time point when he had just completed a project. He was not replaced during his leave, and thus, his leave did not cause any difficulties for the company, and furthermore, it saved costs:

We had just finished a large project and the six months (of parental leave) fit in quite nicely. A colleague was so kind to take over some of my smaller tasks.

An extreme example of this attitude is seen with the woman who has twice turned down an opportunity to advance to a career position because she wanted to have a child and a family. Obviously, there is no question of combining the two:

I thought about it, but I would have had to stay there for three years, otherwise it wouldn't have been worth it. Because it's time-consuming to become familiar with all the aspects of the job, and then when you tell the [employer] after a year, "oh, by the way, I'm pregnant", that's really

inappropriate...[...] a male colleague took the job, our age, and the other position was also filled with a man.”

Aside from the dependence on the employers’ good-will, understanding and willingness to make concessions, the take-up of part-time work during parental leave very often seems to be an issue of negotiations with colleagues, and extreme flexibility is necessary. This holds true for both men and women. So, in many cases, it is due to the flexibility and understanding of colleagues that the leave in combination with part-time work is possible.

One father had to firmly ask his right on parental leave (he did not work part-time). This man is overqualified for his job and has already decided not to return to it. Nevertheless he worked 15 hours a week for the first three months during the leave on the employer’s request in order to train his replacement. This he did even though he put in his application for parental leave as early as 12 weeks before the expected start of his leave time, and the legal deadline is only eight weeks:

I think if I inform them six months in advance, I also risk my job...Well, I’m really very loyal, I would say above average. I mean I continued to work for three months during my parental leave to train my successor ... But I don’t blame them, companies must act like this. I think I’ve been fair, that they see it differently and that our personal relationship has become quite cool, that’s something I regret."

An overall impression is that German companies and even public employers do not hesitate to show their disapproval of the legal rights of parents. Their resistance is often entirely undisguised, as shown in the following quote from one of the employers:

Thus, we have to let him go, that’s law. Normally it can be realized quite easy, but with Mr. Böger it didn’t work out well. To find a new store manager is not that easy. He has to be trained and so on. If you are in a leading function, like Mr. Böger as store manager, it’s not possible to tell me “by the way in a few weeks I leave, I take parental leave”. I honestly want to admit, that it was quite hard for us that he suddenly wanted to leave. Maybe he’s got another point of view ... with him it did not work out ideal” ...

The employees also seem to accept being put into the situation of individual negotiations with the employer concerning the distribution of part-time working hours during parental leave, and subjected to the employer’s personal understanding or good-will:

It’s really great here. When the third child was born, our son, I did not take regular leave but worked three weeks from home when there was time available. That was ideal because I could keep in touch with work, and I could also demonstrate that I was still there for my employer.

His employer also seems to be pleased with the situation:

Mr. Kuhn, you know, you can always call him at home. And then he helps you on the phone, or he takes the laptop, signs into our computer here and repairs

something ... I only have to know when he is here and when not. So we have a kind of mutual flexibility."

The negotiation between the employer and the employee brings up the issue of a mutual flexibility. For example one father managed to negotiate flexible working hours and permission to work from home, and in response he took over the on-call duty which is needed two or three times a year. After the on-call-duty the father takes time off in the framework of flextime.

It is important to note that there is also an example of an employer with a positive attitude. In one of the cases the parents work for cooperative employers so they can continue their work arrangement after the end of their parental leave: both partners work part-time.

Roles vis-à-vis the children

Since the social democratic government came to power in 1998, the state has played a more active role in helping parents to reconcile paid work and family life. Changes in the rights of parental leave are one example of the father's new role (Ostner 2002:222). The current discussions about the concepts "new fathers" and "new men" represent changed attitudes about gender roles today. However, at a behavioral level, there is still a remarkable tenacity for the traditional division of labor in families (Oberdorfer/Rost 2002:9). The fathers in the German case studies are part of the still small group of "new fathers".

There is an evolving research on German fathers and fatherhood that assumes a problematic father role for generations of German men. According to this view, the background of today's fathers is influenced by the history of East and West Germany. While West Germany strengthened women's personal dependence on a husband and a breadwinner, the East German regime encouraged paid employment and expected women to be both workers and mothers. The theoretical approaches on fathers range from the notion of strong husband breadwinners but marginalized fathers in West Germany, springing from the image of the father who blindly obeys the state's authority, to the East German father who was marginalized by the socialist state (see Ostner 2002:152-153). The images of the West German and East German fathers merge into one in the present Germany. Although nearly all mothers in the eastern part of Germany worked full-time, the family work wasn't equally divided. The few existing data suggest that East German fathers did not equally share childcare and other domestic activities (Ostner 2002:221).

One interpretation of the interviews on roles vis-à-vis the children is that we are seeing a mix of many influences. The German couples in the sample in general say they are equal when it comes to the sharing of paid and unpaid work. Accordingly, they give the same description of their roles vis-à-vis the children as rather similar. The German men do not reveal exaggerated manliness as we saw in one example from Norway, or the underlying concept of "different but complementary" gender roles as in Spain. Here we have to be aware that the sample represents the small group of "pioneers" of "new fathers" who seem to appreciate the time with their children:

Oh, I just love it when we go out bike riding, especially now in the summer. The other day we went canoeing. That was really great. It's really nice, I mean, there are more and more of those great moments. O.k., when he wakes up at night because he is sick, then he is not so wonderful, but that's normal.

...there is a whole lot of development, too. It's crazy what all can happen in one month. Right now language is really hot. We are jumping from simple words to simple sentences with two words and more.

We see fathers who are claiming their role as fathers, often linked to their private labor market situation as unsatisfactory, sometimes in interplay with a career oriented wife:

My wife always said she would not want to stay at home and become a little house-mommy right after we had a child. No, she never wanted to do that. And her job was always important to her.

If we relate this to the discussion above, this may be in accordance with the tendencies identified in other research. We do not see authoritarian men, but more of devoted fathers, able househusbands and equal partners. We have examples of the “playmate” father, whose time with the child requires fun and action, and is endowed with a gender-specific content referring to traditionally manly actions, documented in other research (Einarsdóttir 1998:26):

I took parental leave in order to look after my son. Of course I'm helping with the household, but my partner would like to see more commitment on my part, if I may put it like this. We do argue about the household chores and we quite often discuss who has to do what.

We have the fathers who enjoy the small things of every day life, and seem to have positive experience with the “slow time” (Brandth and Kvande 2003). However, we also see the men acting in their self-interest, such as those who spend a lot of time during the parental leave on their own interests and hobbies (computers, farming, etc). Fathers seem to pay more attention to their personal needs during parental leave than the mothers do. Mothers often put their personal needs on hold and prioritize the family's needs, while fathers use parental leave as a time-out for themselves. Hence, one of the men has combined work and leisure (works with computers); and the third one, a farmer, likes to be on leave to get more time for his farming.

Couples' relationships

Aimed at sustainable, independent nuclear family

The social policy of Germany has been depicted as a welfare state characterized by a system of strong, highly institutionalized marital and family obligations (Ostner 2002:155-156). The German couples in the sample have been particularly careful in building families. They stick to very private solutions, which almost exclusively involve only the small nuclear family unit: “My mother and my wife's parents and various aunts live in the same part of town but we take care of our children ourselves”. Two couples have hired a housekeeper once a week:

We've decided to employ a cleaning woman for the last few months, because housework was still the critical issue...where you always get the feeling, "I should, I should, I should." It upsets you but then you can't get around to it. Just when you start cleaning somewhere, something else happens with the children and then you just drop what you're doing and have the feeling you're never going to get finished. And even if you get something accomplished, it usually doesn't last long. And that is frustrating and nerve-racking for both of us. So we thought that time is just too precious to have those kinds of feelings all the time and to have a bad conscience, thinking, "I really should start cleaning" and not getting around to it anyway. So, we have allowed ourselves this little luxury and we think the investment is a good one.

There seems to be an ambition to be independent and to not involve others since "there is no need". The contacts with grandparents, for example, are in one case described as "just paying a visit". This is not representative, however, as especially grandparents and relatives are some of the most important resources concerning childcare. They are e.g. the ones who take over the child care when women work part-time during their parental leave (in families where the fathers continue working full-time) (Büchel/Spieß 2002:61).

There are some signs beneath the surface in the interviews of the women feeling uneasy for handing over the family responsibility to the man:

With Jan it [parental leave] was just too short (7 months). But because I wanted my employer to know that I was dedicated to my job and wanted to continue my employment, I felt I had to go back to work so soon. With Tim I wanted to be able to enjoy the time with my baby longer. That year was great; but then it was enough. In a way I'm quite ambitious, and after talking baby-talk all day long and playing with them the whole time, there comes a point when I just want to get out of there. I really need the career challenge.

This quote reflects the image of the good mother who withdraws from her own career for the child. Against the background of the situation in Germany, the strong male-breadwinner model; the low female employment; and conservative family values in general (Mósesdóttir 2001, Ostner 2002, Scheiwe 2000, Bock 1994), these signs may seem few. Let us therefore recall that the German cases are the cutting edge in this respect and not the most typical for parents in general.

One further point to make is that the ethos of gender equality subtly penetrates the expressions of the German couples. They make the impression of equal, well-balanced couples, living in consensus, agreement and harmony. The following quote from one of the mothers shows a way of not getting irritated by remarks made by others:

Recently a friend asked him: "What do you do all day long?" and I was really surprised how my husband reacted and said: "Why don't you ask your wife what she does all day long!!!" – The friend was really baffled until he realized just what he had said. "Oh, yes of course, you're right".

Some of the couples remark how demanding it can be when both parents work part-time in order to share the caring responsibilities. Everyday life solutions become complicated and the spouses are into intricate negotiations:

It's extremely demanding. We are constantly discussing how we organize our day-to-day business, not only here in the household. Both of us have engagements in the evenings now and again, or sometimes extra meetings in the afternoon. And when Tom falls ill, things get really complicated... then we are rushing around like mad [...]. It's not always easy, the way we do it. But it was important for us that both of us could continue to work and that my partner was not the only one to look after Tom. For us it's the ideal solution. And I totally enjoy the time I spend with Tom“.

Germany does not have a long tradition of childcare outside families and there is a lack of child care facilities for children under the age of three. Childcare facilities are not seen as a necessary form of outside care, but as an opportunity for regular contacts with other children of the same age, which are considered to be good for the child's development. 81.5% of children at the age of three to eight go to the kindergarten.¹¹

To sum up the German cases, the couples in the sample represent a small group of couples that share parental leave. There are two pronounced themes in the German interviews. One is the consensus of the interviewed parents who have to negotiate individually with the employers and each other in order to get things to work. The other theme is the resistance on behalf of some employers towards parental leave. However, the German parents give an impression of relatively equal couples in terms of sharing of paid and unpaid work and their roles vis-à-vis the children appear to be rather similar. The cases in the sample can be seen as the cutting edge. One conspicuous theme is that the men have loose connections to the labor market or the woman has stronger labor market position than the man.

3.4. Spain

In general, several features of the everyday life of the Spanish interviewees deserve special attention. One is the lunch break that splits the day into two. This makes the reconciliation of work life and family life a complicated patchwork, clearly visible in all of the cases. Another distinguishing feature is the supposedly gender neutral legislation, which nevertheless is imbued with traditional gender roles and a strong historical legacy. Thus, the maternity leave is accessible for both parents, as is the “feeding hour” (or nursing break), which can be traced back to 1900 - also accessible for fathers from 1989 (Valiente 2000:157). Still another feature in the Spanish interviews is the huge impact of the informal labor market.

Utilization of parental leave and attitudes toward them

Men's weak labor market position - or emergency aid

In spite of the traditional gender images in Spain, four out of six men in the Spanish interview material had taken some form of parental leave, and only two of the men

¹¹ Source: Federal Statistical Office Germany, Microcensus 2002 (excluding children who go to school).

had not taken any leave at all. However, the Spanish men seem to make use of parental arrangements of mainly two reasons: On the one hand there are fathers who have a loose connection to the labor market, and much weaker labor market position than their wives, and on the other hand fathers who do this solely out of necessity, they feel they have to do this because of the circumstances.

In the first group we have, for example, the father who took the feeding hour with both of his children, maximum time in both cases. He works as a janitor at a public institution and is overqualified for that job, contrary to his wife who has a demanding job as a special education teacher, a job that suits her educational background. The other example is the father who took one year unpaid. He works as a justice agent and has a very unstable labor market situation with long periods of unemployment.

The other group, i.e. the men who take parental leave because of very specific circumstances, can be illuminated by the father who took three months paid leave when the couple had twins, but did not take any leave with his older child. Another example is a professor who took ten weeks for economic reasons only, as his wife was not eligible for maternity leave. His wife was also at home during that time, and he worked almost as much as usual at his office.

The Spanish men can thus be said to make use of maternity leave either because they have loose connections to the labor market and definitely weaker than their wives; or they do this because they are forced into it by the circumstances. Most of the Spanish interviewees remarked that maternity leave is too short.

Work relations

Ignorance of legislation or lack of respect

One conspicuous aspect in the Spanish cases is that laws and regulations on maternity leave are not respected or not implemented. A recurring theme is the lack of knowledge about rights and allowances, reported both by the employers and sometimes also the employees. In many cases the employees hesitated to ask for maternity leave, since they would have been the first one at their work places and did not want to fight for it. This was especially prominent among the men. A few of them made comments on what they experienced as a dilemma, meaning that the rights to parental leave could be turned against women. In these cases, the parents often express the viewpoints of the company. Hence, one mother said that parental rights have to be developed in accordance with the employer's interests, because if the parental rights become too expensive for them, they would simply stop hiring women.

Some of the interviewees also described hostile climate on behalf of the employer or the company. The parents and the employers alike gave expression to this kind of attitudes. It could appear in the policy of the company of not hiring substitutes when someone went on maternity leave or took feeding hours. This is a sign of negative attitude towards maternity leave, which discourages people from claiming their rights. In these cases, parents with small children know that by taking maternity leave they are putting an extra pressure on their colleagues, who often are working to their limits already.

Another part of this problem was the reluctance to allow part-time work. A female teacher reports that no one at her work place has asked for part-time work, and that it would not be well considered because teacher's working hours are regarded as convenient enough already.

Despite that, some of the employers and supervisors were positive and flexible and attempted to solve problems of parents with small children. Much of this was on an informal basis though, and dependent on the goodwill and the understanding of the person in question.

The priority of men's work - except for the exceptional

In all the Spanish cases the work and the career of the father has priority over the mother's career. That seems to be regardless of the spouse's position on the labor market. In fact, all the Spanish couples are in a relatively equal position, or the woman can be regarded as having a higher position. Only in one of the cases does the man have a slightly stronger position on the labor market. One example of the father's priority over the mother's career is the case where both spouses are doctors. Both are specialized in the same medical field, and the woman is slightly older. She gave up on-call duties after they had their second child, even if she knew it would have negative consequences for her career. The man was not willing to make any renunciations or sacrifices for the family.

Roles vis-à-vis the children

The main rule among the Spanish couples is a highly distinct and complementary parental role. Even though almost no one admits to believe in biological difference between men and women, or in maternal instinct or innate competences of the sexes, the notion of Spanish parenthood is highly gender specific. Men and women seem to agree on certain matters, such as the importance of education and the right balance between "affection and discipline", but they interpret it very differently when turned into practice.

The most common pattern of fatherhood and motherhood in general, according to research, appears to be that mother provides the nurturing and affection aspects, while fathers are more likely to fulfill the role of the playmate (Lewis and O'Brian 1987; Hyvönen 1993). The Spanish fathers fall nicely into this picture and we see many glimpses of men bathing and playing with the children.

The father's role as the authority of the family and the one who sets standards is also present in the sample. Many of the Spanish parents are concerned about the children's education, as already mentioned. This can mean different things. One of the men, father to three small children, is rather typical on the matter. Education to him means teaching the children "to be good people and to behave properly". Education to him also means not to tolerate bad behavior, implying that parents have to learn to say "no" to certain things at certain moments. Included in this teaching is that the children are to eat everything. This father considers order and discipline to be very important, and sees his own role as crucial in that process, exemplified in the following expression: "It would not be fair that I tolerate everything from the children if afterwards they have to stay almost the whole day with their mother".

A few of the men are particularly reluctant in their role as fathers. One of them found it “particularly difficult” to be on maternity leave, even if the mother also was present. This man can hardly be alone with the child, not even for one or two hours. Another man, who is not very much involved in the care activities, describes how “particularly boring” it is when his children pester him and there’s no way of getting them to stop. Some of the men say the hardest thing with the children is that they have give up their free space and the time they can dedicate to themselves. Accordingly, some of them continue with their leisure activities.

Those of the Spanish’ man who come closest to overall caring activities and responsibility, seem to have the closest relationship with their child/children and enjoy it. These are the men with the weakest position at the labor market, and definitely weaker than their wives.

Couples’ relationships

House-keepers and extended family

The Spanish men’s part in domestic chores is particularly modest and the division of domestic tasks seems to be unevenly shared in general. Those who participate in it do so on tangible and detachable matters such as cooking or dish washing. Hence, they confirm a pattern found in other research of men picking and choosing among tasks as from a buffet (Einarsdóttir 1998).

Some of the couples have made an “agreement” on this uneven division of responsibilities. By and large, these agreements seem to favor men at the cost of the women. Even in case of the most active men, the women are the responsible organizers; they are the person “in charge”. The same holds true of the cases where the woman earns more, has a more demanding job and works longer hours in a paid work. Interestingly, in none of the cases has this lead to a tension between the spouses, let alone open conflicts.

The extended family has an important role in Spanish families’ reconciliation of work and family life. The assistance of relatives, grandparents, aunts and uncles, seems to be very common. The aid provided by these is considerable and on everyday basis. Hence, it is a rule rather than exception to have someone in the extended family to take care of the children a part of day.

Housekeepers are another prominent characteristic of the Spanish families. We saw in the discussion above that the informal sector is large in Spain, and that is clearly reflected in the housekeepers in our material. All except one family have a female housekeeper or a babysitter, coming up to three times a week, doing the hardest household chores. According to the data referred to above, workers in the informal market in general are young, married, poorly educated women.

If we bring together the themes apparent in the Spanish interviews, we see a considerable discrepancy between structural opportunities and cultural restrains. The legislation, although limited, developed rapidly after the mid-1970s. The consensus on the parental legislation was regarded as a necessary part of the democratization and Europeanization of the country. The implementation has, however, serious

shortcomings. First, there seems to be a marked resistance on behalf of the employers to recognize the laws, and in many cases the laws are violated. It is up to the individual worker to press for her or his rights, which must to put people in unreasonable situation.

Moreover, further progress in this field is counteracted by the high unemployment rates, which make it “unnecessary” and unfeasible for employers to promote family friendly policies. The low rate of female employment makes it still less urgent for the employers to respond to women’s needs, and to respect the laws. Secondly, the gender neutrality of the legislation is somewhat delusive. The sharing of familial responsibilities falls short on cultural hindrances in the Spanish gender roles and the traditional and unquestioned authority of Spanish men. Thirdly, absent fathers and limited welfare provisions are replaced by the extended family and informal labor force. Hence, the Spanish welfare system consists of a female support troop in the extended family and the housekeepers. The cutting edge, the front line where this pattern can possibly be broken, is the “exceptional” families, the families that break the rule. These are the families where the woman has stronger position on the labor market than the man, earns more or has more education.

3.4. Iceland

The Icelandic couples are different from all the others in that they are rather young when they have their first child. All the couples except for one had their first child around the age of twenty. They have also been together for a short time when they have their first child, three years or less. Three of the couples are married, and the remaining three are cohabiting partners. In this respect Iceland is the opposite of Germany with late children in mature relationships. The Icelandic interviewees also have more children in general than all the others. Hence, the men in the Icelandic sample have 12 children altogether, and are the sample where the largest number of children is found.

Long working hours are a well documented aspect of Icelandic society, especially for men, and this is highly present in the interviews. Another dominant theme in the interviews is a particularly specific and distinct gender role pattern. They are in accordance with a new survey showing that women are more often responsible for the household tasks than men. They are, for example, responsible for the laundry in 78% of the cases; 68% the cooking and 62% the cleaning. Men on the other hand are responsible for the maintenance of the car or the more incidental construction work in the home, or in 81% of the cases.¹² The expressions of the Icelandic interviewees are in accordance with this, and furthermore, highly colored by beliefs on different roles and nature of men and women. This applies equally to men and women.

Utilization of parental leave and attitudes toward it

A system in transformation

Parents in Iceland are in the process of settling with the new legislation that has been in development since 1998. Therefore, it is not easy to give a clear account of the

¹² The findings of the survey were presented at the Seminar “Views on gender equality” held by the Centre for Women’s and Gender Research in Reykjavík on January 30th 2004.

utilization, as the rights of interviewees have been different in different time periods. As regards the three months father quota, implemented gradually from 2001 to 2003, the utilization is not unambiguous. Four of the men have made full or partial use of their respective rights (from one month up to three months). One of the fathers who used all of his leave (three months) had a premature infant, and during that time he and his wife were on leave together. He plans to take three or four months more when his partner starts her education. He is very confident in his role as a father:

Like I told you the only thing I can't do is to breastfeed.
Regarding everything else I think we're equally capable.

Those who had a child *before* 1998 did not have the right to two weeks birth leave around the birth of a child. Of those who had the right, all except one made use of it. That man took vacation for one week around the birth of his child, he received the amount of money he had right to, but nevertheless stayed at work:

I took those two weeks, of course to get the money, but I worked the whole time then I just took my summer vacation. The reason I did this was because at the time we were living with my parents in law, I worked for them and there was a lot of work that needed to be done.

Haunted by spirit of the male breadwinner

The experience of the men who were entitled to a specific father quota is highly different, and it also varies heavily how they make use of it. Some have taken the month in connection to their vacation and use it to be together with an older child. The interviews reveal what previous research has shown that Icelandic men have difficulties in breaking the relations to the job during their leave (Einarsdóttir 1998). Only one man has been at home alone during his leave, all the other couples choose to be together in parental leave. This man has a very independent and flexible job. In one month, he chose to go to the workplace several times to do some work:

I just took her with me to work, just doing various small tasks.
This place was being renovated while I was on leave. So I came here ten times or so during that month.

Another man with a right to two months leave has a one year old child. He has, at the time of interview, taken three non-consecutive weeks. He plans to take more leave when his wife returns back to paid work.

The man quoted above, who received the payments of two week's birth leave, but stayed at his job, reveals openly what in other interviews is expressed in a more disguised manner, namely skepticism about the parental leave. This man thinks one month of leave as "long enough" for men and nine months is suitable for women. He is convinced that men who take six months leave do that because of the wages, because men earn more than women:

I don't know anyone who would take parental leave only for the baby – so to speak, most of the guys are like that, they simple think like that [...].

Most guys find another job during the time, mostly on the black market. It's just the way it is.

This skepticism is expressed both by men and women. One important theme in this is that the three months father quota is at the expense of women and their relationship with the child. One mother makes the following remark:

I mean, we are always told to breastfeed our children as long as we can and things like that, but at the same time we shall have equality that supposes men to be more with their children than we are.

This rather irritated quote from a young woman in the sample reveals views that many emphasize. As we saw in table 2.10 over 90% of the women use more than their basic rights (3 months). Five out of the six women in the sample were at home for a longer period than they were entitled by the law (6 month):

I found it excellent to be at home for a year. But naturally it draws you back financially receiving only half of my wages.

Still other parents criticize the payments, which amount 80% of gross wages, according to the 2000 Act. Those who made a remark on this said that the missing 20% really made a difference for them:

I would prefer to keep my full wages. I think it is necessary at least for those who receive minimum pay. Otherwise the system won't work, people really need their full pay...for many the budget is simply to tight, at the end of each month the account is empty, it's a matter of keeping things on zero.

Work relations

The men's relationship to their work is another interesting theme, characterized by blurred boundaries between work life and family life. Some of them do not have any demarcation against the work and seem to regard themselves as indispensable. This, alongside with their loyalty towards the workplace, suggests that work comes before the family, even if this is not stated explicitly. One of the fathers, who could barely take any of the two weeks birth leave, describes how he was torn between the work and the family during these weeks. Another man, who describes himself as relatively passive at home, is all the more active at his work. There he shows initiative and responsibility for the most diverse things, and accepts to be on informal 24 hours on-call duty.

A few of the men seem to work unpaid overtime without questioning it: "I'm not going to charge if it's only up to an hour or so". Some others are willing to be very flexible towards their employer, often at a cost to the family:

Even when you're at home some work can be done like in the case of staying at home with your sick child or something, you can keep track of the email or have the calls forwarded to your

home so you're still in contact to the workplace...thus the hours worked from home could reach up to twenty each month.

Two of the men have extra jobs, in addition to their ordinary work where both are working overtime on regular basis. Their work seems to be spun out of economic necessity:

I work a lot, and always have...naturally if the finances would allow it I would naturally cut back on work and not be stressed over extra jobs, but naturally I don't see that happening in the next ten years or so.

Nearly all of the men regard themselves to be primary breadwinners, and only in exceptional cases to they challenge that role. Hence, one man says he would like to work less than he does, but does not seem to see that as something he has control over, and blames on the "spirit of the society". Only one man in the sample earns less than his partner.

All the women are dedicated and ambitious in their work. They have a strong work identity, even if they put caring for the children in first place. They do not seem to identify themselves primarily as breadwinners in the same way as the men, and do not see themselves as indispensable.

Resistance and fear of abuse

One interesting feature in the Icelandic interviews is a strong resistance on behalf of the employers and their fear of abuse. In a new opinion poll 80% of both men and women express their approval of the new laws on parental leave. However, the opinions of men and women differ on many points. Half of the men think it is difficult for men to take six months parental leave, whereas 35% of the women are of that opinion. Employers depart from other groups and seem to be much more restrained. Almost half of the employers, or 46%, sees it as problematic for men to take 3 months parental leave, and 26% of them see it as problematic for women to take 6 months leave.¹³ These opinions are not quite as positive as reflected by a survey conducted in March 2003, i.e. only about seven months earlier. In that survey 85% express their approval of 3-6 months parental leave for men. This is somewhat lower among employers, but still 74% (Hið gullna jafnvægi, 2003).¹⁴

The employers' expressions in the case study are more consistent with the most recent survey, indicating certain skepticism against men's parental leave. One employer says that the paternity leave is "very positive" and "great", but at the same time he reveals his fear, and in fact expectations, of abuse. Some of the employers are against parental leave in general, regardless of whether men or women take it. One is keen to tell that he questions the existing arrangements:

Two adults dawdling over a child...both on leave at the same time, he playing golf and she at home with the kids...

¹³ The findings of the survey were presented at the Seminar "Views on gender equality" held by the Centre for Women's and Gender Research in Reykjavík on January 30th 2004.

¹⁴ <http://www.hidgullnajafnvaegi.is/Vidhorfskannanir/VidhorfskannanirGallup/nr/93>

He believes that there is a difference between men and women, “for some reason the women rear the children and not the men”, and he concludes by saying “...besides, men are not especially interested in parental leave”.

There are two important exceptions to this. The one is a female supervisor who recently had a parental leave herself and is very positive towards parental leave. The other is an employer in a high tech, knowledge based company, where parental leave fits well into the company’s policy. He wants the employees to share tasks, be open-minded and increase their general competence, and he sees parental leave as positive in that respect:

This really is one of our policies to have the employees switching roles, in this type of company there is always a tendency for employees to become experts...we are rather trying to get the employees to be more open minded and like I tell them it won’t be a problem for you to go on vacation.

Roles vis-à-vis the children

Men as substitute parents

An interesting aspect is that some men make sense of their parental leave rights as their individual right, not so much related to the children. They stay at home, or intend to do so, because they have the right to, and less to strengthen the relationship to the child. An example of this is the man who painted his parents’ house when he was on his one month quota leave: “That’s the way I am, somehow, I always have to do something, it’s very difficult to just sit and do nothing.” This man, however, also used his leave to be with his older child.

The women are primary caregivers in all the Icelandic cases except for one. In that case, the woman has higher education than the man, who does not regard himself as a breadwinner. In line with this, the women usually have the main responsibility for the upbringing of the children, and in some cases they allocate specific tasks to the men, as revealed by the following quote:

Then it becomes your role to take care of the older brothers...I try to keep them busy...I had more time with the oldest one when he was a baby. I assisted her [his wife] in taking care of him, now I’m taking care of the older ones.

In some of the men’s expressions we can discern the view that men are supposed to step in when the woman can not, for one reason or another, take care of the child. Hence, the father seems to be a substitute parent or replacement for the mother. These men seem to make sense of their fatherhood as “rescuers”; they enter the scene when something hinders the mother to fulfill her “natural mothering”. If nothing disturbs the natural process, they do not need to intervene or make connections with the child:

But naturally in most instances, while everything is going smoothly and no one really notices that you leave, it doesn’t matter, then naturally the work comes first.

Another notion apparent is that of fatherhood as a special-task force. These men are responsible for particular tasks, either tasks the mother has handed over to them, or they take themselves. These things may be the caring for certain things with their children:

I've been you know, a total assistant in this all, doing things the way she likes them done, dressing them in the right clothes and matching colors (giggles), changing diapers at the right time and feeding them at the right time and things like that...I think women are far more capable than men even though we try our best.

The image of the playmate is a frequent one and it is very often gender specific. The men say they like to play specific "boys' game" and teach them other manly activities. When asked what he did with his children, one of the men, a father of two daughters says he "plays" with them, but explains with a laugh that he doesn't really like "girls' plays". He also explains that he does not purchase clothes for them because he knows nothing about girls' clothes. Despite the distinct and different parental roles of men and women, there is basically consensus around the issue of childcare, contrary to the issue of the household chores, as we will return to later on.

Couples' relationships

One thing that characterizes the parent's relations in the Icelandic sample is the firm belief in different roles for men and women, even to the extent that people believe in the different nature of the sexes. This does not, however, lead to consensus over their different tasks and roles. In some of the couples, the relationship is imbued with marked tension and competition. One couple competes over competencies and knowledge. The man, who is reluctant in his father role, questions his wife's "overprotection" of the children. Still another couple reveals more conflict and tension than consensus. They seem to compete over who deserves caring from whom.

More competition than cooperation

The parent's consensus and cooperation around the children turn into competition when it comes to the household chores. Negotiations between the spouses are imbued with tension. They trade tasks, consciously or unconsciously. Division of household tasks is rather traditional, and follows well known patterns. The man is responsible for what the couples define as the "heavy" tasks that are done once in a while, whereas the woman does the everyday routine work:

He tells me he doesn't know how to operate the washing machine, that he doesn't know the colors, I don't recall the exact reason. After all it's fine, doesn't bother me.

The Icelandic interviewees are stuck in a time bind (Hoschild 2001), they complain about being fatigued. In some cases the men and the women seem to have adopted different "tacit agreements" for their division of work, their interaction is imbued with irritation and lack of understanding:

Then suddenly you reach a point of intolerance, you loose your temper and then he maybe he participates the next couple of times.

In other cases, the ‘agreement’ means complying with the wishes of one of them. Not always are things discussed openly, but the dirt-threshold of one of them tacitly accepted:

I think there is a fine line separating the apartment and the garage... Some just see things differently than others. That is simply a fact, so there is really nothing more to say about that. You don’t alter things like that, you just have to accept that.

To sum up the Icelandic situation we can state that the Icelandic system is in the phase of transformation, and the rights of the men are different depending on when their child/children were born. The main rule for Iceland couples in the sample is that the mother is the main care taker and the parents are together on parental leave. Only one man had been alone on leave. The men’s experiences vary heavily but skepticism and fear of abuse is conspicuous in the interviews, expressed by many interviewees, especially employers and even some fathers. The cultural context of Iceland, with long working hours culture, and distinct and separate gender roles, seems to be an obstacle when it comes to the take-up of paternity leave.

4. The European Dimension

4.1 Comparative analysis and conclusions

In the European context, and especially within in the EU, the emphasis on equal opportunities legislature has been moving from a focus on formal gender equality in terms of equal treatment, to a framework stressing the equal sharing of gender roles, both in paid work and family life. Underlying the change is the belief that equal opportunity can only be fully realized by an equal distribution of paid and unpaid work between men and women. This implies emphasis on the involvement of women into the labor market as well as the involvement of men in family life.

The four partner countries in this project represent different regimes of family and gender policy issues and welfare schemes, leading to widely different parental leave patterns. In all the countries, initially, the structural framework and legislation on maternity/paternity/parental leave revolved around the mothers. This is biologically conditioned and needs not be discussed in any detail. The interesting question is the development of the system as regards the relationship between the mother and the father, and how to accomplish more equal sharing.

In the introductory chapter we characterized the partner countries as follows: *Norway* was classified as belonging to the “women-friendly egalitarian model”, based on equal parenthood and dual-breadwinner model. Norway has a history of pro-active gender equality policy. The aim is to enhance egalitarian structures in social and economic life, and equal distribution of paid and unpaid work. Female employment rate is high and the model ensures individual rights and duties. Parental leave is long

and both women and men are assumed to combine paid work and family. The structural changes during the last decade have attempted to get men involved into family responsibilities. These changes have, with some minor exceptions, been targeted towards men especially. The Norwegian way can be characterized as a “soft coercion”.

Germany belongs to the “three-phase model”, based on the male breadwinner and a strong protection of the family. Three phases have been assumed in women’s employment as a way to combine child rearing and paid work. Female employment has been relatively low (is now 65 % the age group 15 and 64 years). The non-individualized approach of the German tax system gives advantages to single-earner couples. The system of low-paid parental leave schemes maintains traditional gender roles, despite its gender-neutral façade. Structural changes made in 2001 attempted to increase men’s involvement in parental leave by gradually bringing them into the existing universal system. The system thus aims at the combination of part-time work and parental leave for both parents. The successes of these measures have been limited so far, as very few men take parental leave. The question whether the number of fathers taking parental leave has been increasing since the new legislation, is the subject of a research project. The results will be available in July 2004.

Spain is a part of the “Mediterranean family-based model”, where the family and the extended family are responsible for childcare. Female employment is low, and reconciliation of work and family life is mostly a private issue. Historically, state intervention has been low. In recent decades the state has introduced certain measures, more or less as a response to decreasing birth rates. The development of public schemes has been impeded by a large informal labor market for women. The system has been developed as to make the previously exclusive maternal rights accessible for both sexes.

Iceland is a mix between the Nordic system and a more liberal system, following the Nordic countries in the existence of an inclusive welfare system, but departing from them by more parsimonious coverage. From a long period of resistance on behalf of the state, the parental leave system took a quick and dramatic change only a few years ago. The system is based on individualized rights, and the recent changes have been targeted towards men especially, as in Norway. If the Norwegian way can be thought of as a “soft coercion”, the Icelandic way can be characterized as a “hard coercion”, implying a jump from basically no rights of men to extensive rights.

Table 4.1 below gives a schematic overview of the different systems in terms of structural arrangements; how these relate to basic social background variables, take-up rates of men and women etc.

Table 4.1 Structural arrangements in the partner countries.

	Norway	Iceland	Spain	Germany
Background				
♀ Employment rate	High	High	Low	Relatively low
Unemploy. (≥10%)	Low	Low	High	High
Fertility rate 2000	1.85	2.10	1.23	1.36
Maternity/paternity leave (paid)				
Mat/pat leave	Long	Long	Short	Short
Compensation (% wages)	80-100%	80%	100%	100%
Sharing possibilities	+	+	+	-
Men's right	1 month	3 months	-	-
- " - (birth)	(2 weeks)	(2weeks)	(2 days)	-
Men's take-up rate	85%	76-83%	2%	-
Parental leave (unpaid)				
Mother's right	1 year	3 months	-	-3 years
Father's right	1 year	3 months	-	- 3 years
Other measures				
	Time budget		Feeding hour	2 year flat rate benefit (up to 300 Euro or up to 450 Euro for 1 year)
	Cash for care	-		
Men's take-up rate	1.5%, 4%		Low	2%
Type of system				
	Specific Gender targeted	Specific Gender targeted	Universal Gender neutral	Universal Gender neutral

We can see from the table that the attempts to involve men in caring activities and parental leave follow different paths. Based on the information in the table, the partner countries are classified into two categories. On the one hand, we have Norway and Iceland, with specific, gender targeted measures to involve men, and on the other hand, Spain and Germany, that attempt to include men into an existing universal, supposedly gender neutral, framework.

One conclusion that can be drawn from the table is that flexibility within a universal but gender-biased system does not have a large potential for change. We can see from Spain that flexibility that allows sharing of a very short maternity leave (16 weeks) is used by men only to a very limited extend. Only 2% of the Spanish men make use of it, and thus it tends to reproduce traditional gender relations. The same holds true for Germany. The flexibility brought into the gender neutral family allowances and parental leave system has only succeeded in getting 2% of the fathers to use parental leave. However, new data on the number of fathers in parental leave will be published in July 2004. The situation of both Spain and Germany is characterized by high unemployment, together with a very low female employment rate in Spain, and a relatively low rate in Germany. This may have a great impact on both the structural arrangements and how people make use of their rights.

As regards Norway and Iceland, we can see that the proactive approach of introducing strong political measures to involve men in childcare has resulted in a high take-up rate of men in paternity/parental leave. Contrary to Spain and Germany, female employment rates are high and unemployment rates low, which is likely to have an impact. But even if Norway and Iceland are on the same track, there are important differences, which we will return to later on.

If we relate these structural aspects to the content and the impression of the interview part of the project, we come closer to the interplay between structure and culture. The interviews focus on the everyday life of the parents, their negotiations with each other and with their employers.

Norway. The main impression of the Norwegian interviews is that the Norwegian parents have, in comparison to Iceland, a relatively easy relationship to their jobs, and that work and family life is more harmonized than it is stressful. With one interesting exception, work life does not infringe too much upon family life, for example in terms of unreasonably long working hours. Family responsibilities of men and women, and parental responsibility in particular, seems to be “normalized” and different arrangements and measures well settled.

In general, supervisors and employers are understanding of needs and requests for parental leave. They fully respect the legal framework, and furthermore, they seem to be in favor of parental leave in general. This appears to be a general trend and applies to men’s and women’s employers alike, and there is no difference between different kinds of work places.

A recurring theme is the attempt of supervisors to reduce overtime at the work place. This is often related to their general approval of men’s paternity leave. In some of the cases, the supervisors explicitly and consciously make arrangements in order to facilitate the parental leave for the man as well as to make it as easy as possible for the work place. In some cases the working culture operates as a restraint on men’s parental leave. In exceptional cases there is a hostile atmosphere against paternity leave among the colleagues at the workplace, causing difficulties for the fathers to use their rights.

The Norwegian way has been that of small steps in the direction of sharing within the framework of gender equality. The “cash for care” measure is an exception and a break of the trend. Every step in the development is thoroughly investigated before reform (again, with the exception of CFC). Political objectives are accomplished within a relatively coherent system. The use of Norwegian fathers is extensive as regards the father quota, and it is widely accepted. However, the stages from the “compulsory” quota to the “voluntary” months that can be shared by both parents are used only by 14% of the fathers. Hence, Norwegian fathers seem to need more of the “soft coercion” in order to proceed further.

The practical solutions of the Norwegian parents reflect this very well. Despite the acceptance of the system, traditional patterns and the spirit of the male bread winner are looming under the surface. There is not much discrepancy between the structural arrangements and the cultural dimension – but there are not many driving forces within the existing arrangements to accomplish further progress.

Germany. The couples in the sample represent a small group of couples, all of whom share paid and unpaid work in one way or another. All the men in the German sample had taken some kind of parental leave, and they were very positive towards it. This is in contrast to the statistics, revealing that only 2% of the men have taken parental leave. Thus, the couples are not typical for German parents in general, but clearly at the cutting edge. The men can be seen as pioneers of the “new fathers” in Germany.

They do not represent the general attitude of fathers to parental leave, but are examples of a best practice. Their experiences can therefore shed a light on what it needs to break the existing pattern.

Different from parental leave practice in the northern countries, being on parental leave for fathers in Germany means in practice to take care for a child for a longer period of time, in the samples at least 6 months. This is the reality although according to the German system there is no minimum time period of parental leave.

The low participation of fathers in parental leave in Germany may have many causes, as is the case in all countries. One may be uncontested traditional gender roles and a lack of role models in the society; another may be financial calculation as the public benefits (economic compensation) are not sufficient to compensate the lower income, if the father suspends his work or reduces working hours.

There are two pronounced themes in the German interviews. One is the resistance on behalf of some employers towards parental leave, and the other is the consensus of the interviewed parents. The structural conditions of the German labor market with high unemployment rates and relatively low female labor market activity (compared with Norway and Iceland) may affect the situation of the parents. It may, furthermore, affect the possibilities of workers to negotiate with the employer and how they make use of their rights.

For the couples that decide to be on parental leave at the same time and to both work part-time, the solutions of the parents interviewed are a complicated puzzle. The distribution of the working hours during the leave of both men and women were individually negotiated with the employers, and had to fit with the working hours of the other parent as they did not want to make use of childcare facilities or other help from outside. This can make the parental leave a private matter for the employees, putting them in a vulnerable situation, open to pressure from the employer. But in all the cases the fathers succeeded in exercising their parental leave in the form they wished to.

The German parents give an impression of relatively equal couples when it comes to gender relationships and sharing of paid and unpaid work. Their roles vis-à-vis the children appear to be rather similar. The men do not reveal exaggerated manliness or the attitude of “different but complementary” gender roles that often provide the man with unquestioned authority. The German men are rather claiming their role as fathers. Often this is linked to their situation on the labor market, which they may think of as unsatisfactory, or this is related to the mother’s stronger labor market position. In all the cases the father and the mother had a comparable income or the mother did earned more than the father.

Until recently, the German model could be characterized as a system with moderate ambitions and slow progress, as regards gender relations and gender equality, and parents more or less seem to have adapted to it. There is not much critique visible in the interviews, nor is there much discontent with the system. The couples in our sample, the cutting edge, has adapted to the conditions by individually breaking new grounds. There has not been much impetus within the system towards changes, as no forces have seemingly been claiming changes.

However, initiative has come from the federal government, which reflects that the view on gender roles in Germany is changing. The federal government makes efforts to improve the daycare for children less than three years old and to offer more full-day-care at the schools. An important step was also the change in the parental leave legislation in 2001, which made the system more flexible and encouraged fathers to work part-time. The measures taken hitherto have not proved to be very efficient yet, but a report on the effects of the new legislation will be available in July 2004.

Spain. There are several pronounced features in the Spanish interviews. One feature is the traditional and exaggerated gender roles. Another is the strong presence of the informal labor market and the extended family, and a third is the lack of respect for legal rights of the employees to parental leave.

It is conspicuous in the Spanish sample that laws and regulations on leave issues are not respected or not implemented. This may be due to lack of knowledge about rights and allowances, but also to resistance. Men and women alike revealed a submissive attitude, for example by hesitating to ask for leave, or complying with the needs of the company when organizing their leave. Even in one case a woman maintained that parental rights had to be in harmony with the company's need, or they could be turned against women. In many cases the parents were not replaced while on leave. They were discouraged by the fact that their absence put extra pressure on their colleagues, who often were working to their limits already. Another related issue, reported by some of the mothers, is the reluctance of employers to allow for part-time work.

There were, however, also examples of positive and flexible employers and supervisors, but they were exceptions. In these cases, the positive climate was usually negotiated informally, and depended on the goodwill and the understanding of that particular employer or supervisor.

A normal day among the Spanish parents is split into two parts by the lunch break, the siesta. This makes the reconciliation of work life and family life a complicated patchwork. Four of six men in the Spanish sample had taken some form of parental leave. As in the German case this is higher than extant statistics would suggest, and must therefore be interpreted along the same lines. As is the case with the German fathers, also the Spanish men seem to make use of parental leave for certain reasons. In some cases they had a loose connection to the labor market, and definitely weaker than the mother. In other cases they took parental leave because of necessity, i.e. unusual or extraordinary circumstances, for example as the parents who had a young child and then had twins.

The Spanish parents endorse highly distinct and traditional parental roles for the sexes, emphasizing the mothers' ability to care for children. The mothers usually are the nurturing and affective part, while the fathers were passive or in the role of a playmate. Some of the Spanish men were particularly reluctant in their role as fathers, exemplified by the man who stayed at home but had a babysitter taking care of the children. The most distinct feature of the Spanish men is the father's role as the authority of the family and the one who sets standards. The men especially emphasize their own role as in charge of the children's education, in terms of teaching the children "to be good people and to behave properly".

Gender relations in general were also traditional. Housekeepers (informal female workers) and the extended family shouldered the caring responsibilities with the mothers. Some of the couples have made an “agreement” on this uneven division of responsibilities. The reconciliation is to a large extent a private project. The Spanish father is reluctant like the state. Hence, the Spanish welfare system consists of a female support troop in the extended family and the informal workers, the housekeepers.

The gender-neutral legal framework is somewhat delusive in Spain, as it is imbued with historical legacy. The system allows for the sharing of familial responsibilities and the government attempts to encourage the sharing by men and women. Nevertheless, it falls short on cultural hindrances in the traditional Spanish gender relations and the unquestioned authority of men.

The cutting edge, the front line where this pattern can possibly be broken, are the “exceptional” families, the families that break the rule. These are the families where the woman has stronger position on the labor market than the man, earns more or has more education.

Similar to Germany, the Spanish couples do not seem to seriously question the structural framework, and had adapted to it to a large extent. No specific driving force is discernible within the system. The low activity rate of women and the high unemployment rates, together with the informal market, seem to retard any possible pressure on further proceedings. As in the case of Germany, it is most likely that the initiative comes from the state because of declining birth rates.

Iceland. Historically parental leave was very different for different groups of parents, with limited rights except for female civil servants. The reluctance on behalf of the state to expand the rights of parents to birth and parental leave was suddenly reversed by the Act on maternity/paternity and parental leave in 2000. The leave was extended from 6 months to 9 in three phases, linking three non-transferable months to each of the parents and leaving three months for the parents to divide at their own discretion. By this reform, Icelandic men have the longest individual right to parental leave in the world. The Icelandic interviews are marked by the fact that parents in Iceland are in the process of settling with the new legislation.

There are several salient aspects in the Icelandic sample. One is the demanding working culture and extremely long working hours, especially that of men. Another feature is skepticism of the new reform, and a third is distinct and in some cases exaggerated gender roles, accompanied with tensions between the parents.

The Icelandic parents are young, in comparison with the partner countries, and they have relatively many children. Four of the six men in the sample have made full or partial use of their rights to parental leave (from one up to three months father quota). They reveal very different father roles. The most conspicuous father role is that of the primary breadwinner, whose main responsibility is to support the family financially. Even if some of the women also have a strong work identity and are dedicated and ambitious in their work, they put the children in the first place and do not regard

themselves as breadwinners. The Icelandic sample also embraces examples of very caring and concerned fathers, however, these are exceptions.

The general rule for the Icelandic parents is to be together on parental leave. Only one man has been at home alone during his leave. This man, however, has difficulties to withdraw from his job and chooses to go several times the workplace in one month to get some minor work done.

The skepticism about the new reform appears in different ways. One of the men openly admits to have received the payments of his two week's birth leave, but nevertheless stayed at his job. He overtly expresses skepticism that in other interviews is somewhat more concealed. The skepticism about the parental leave of fathers is especially conspicuous among the employers. Their resistance is associated with a fear of abuse, which some of them express in a harsh way. Some of the employers are against parental leave in general, regardless of whether men or women take it. There are two important exceptions to this, exemplified by supervisors that regarded parental leave as an important resource for the workers and the work place. Hence, the views of the employers cover the whole range of attitudes.

The fathers' skepticism is, among other things, associated with the payment system implying that 80% of gross wages is not enough to get men into parental leave. Some of the fathers seem to regard the parental leave to be their personal right, which they do not really associate with the caring of their newborn child. Another part of the skepticism is the opinion that parental leave for fathers is being implemented at the expense of the mothers. In fact, most of the women in the Icelandic sample stayed at home for a longer period than they were entitled by the law, whereas the men did not make use of the leave they were entitled to. Hence, these arguments seem to be worth further consideration.

The skepticism in the Icelandic cases is in some way reflected in recent opinion polls. Even if 80-85% of the general public expresses their approval of parental leave for men, 46% of the employers saw it as problematic for men to take 3-6 months paternity leave.

Gender relations in Iceland are imbued with consensus as far as the children are concerned, with neither of the parents questioning the mothers' role as the main caretaker. When it comes to sharing of household chores, competition and irritation is more conspicuous than cooperation. The negotiations between the spouses are imbued with tension, and they are stuck in a time bind.

Greedy organizations and boundless workplaces

In all the countries we see interplay between work life and the family life that is imbued with gendered relations. In general, men's use of parental leave is positively linked to their social position, the higher their education the more use of parental leave. Furthermore, men's caring responsibilities are positively correlated to the mother's social position, the higher her education, the more involvement of the father in caring work.

As regards the relation to the work, a trend was found in all the countries except Germany, indicating strong connections of a certain group of men to their work. This is characteristic of men in the new knowledge-based economies. Work cultures and meaning of work are changing due to deregulations of the economy and increased international competition. High-tech corporations and knowledge based services rely to an increasing degree on highly educated, committed professionals. Individualized competencies, social skills and trust are seen as linking competitive advantages with social capital and effectiveness, making the worker's relationship to the work and to the company more complicated than before (Connell 1998; Sennett 1998). The formal contract that previously regulated work time has been replaced by ethical norms demanding commitment. These groups are subjected to the boundless nature of work, resulting in more time spent at work in "greedy organizations" (Flam 1993).

In all the countries, except Germany, we found examples of men in these branches having difficulties in creating boundaries against the work. The reason this particular trend was not found in Germany may be explained by the somewhat different sample. As previously noted, the German men in the sample are the cutting edge, the few who are involved in parental leave, and hence not typical for German men in general. The trend of the greedy organizations needs to be further investigated, and linked to work cultures, gender relations and family responsibilities.

The interplay between structure and culture

In figure 4 below we attempt to visualize the interplay between the structural trends of the partner countries and the cultural norms. Common for all the countries are endeavors to increase the involvement of fathers in childcare and family issues. The concept "structural trends" attempts to grasp the ways the partner countries have chosen.

The figure attempts to reveal the intricate interplay between "structure" and "culture", i.e. interrelationship between the institutional frameworks of rights, possibilities and allowances - and the norms, values, attitudes, visions, wishes and ideas of the parents. The four partner countries have different levels of ambitions in their system, based on different ideologies. We can roughly distinguish between two structural trends, in accordance with table 4.1 above. On the one hand we have Germany and Spain and on the other hand we have Iceland and Norway, although with important differences.

In Germany and Spain a system that was created within the framework of highly gendered relations is being developed into a universal, gender neutral system. A system that is heavily imbued with traditional gender roles is extended to include men. This project indicates that there are not enough driving forces within the system to break the already existing gendered patterns. The impetus for change is limited or absent. The cultural norms underpin and maintain gender difference and a division of men and women, rather than promote equal sharing. The structural settings are relatively harmonized, but the capacity of the reforms to accomplish changes is minimal, revealed by the small number of men taking parental leave.

Iceland and Norway have in common a structure aiming at equal sharing between men and women, regarding both paid and unpaid work. However, there are important differences. We see in figure 4 that Iceland and Norway have the same location

regarding the structural settings, i.e. with specific, gender targeted system. However, they depart as regards the cultural norms. Whereas the parental leave system is settled in Norway in a climate of gender sameness and equal sharing, Iceland remains on the same cultural path as Germany and Spain, with a climate that prefigures and maintains gender division and differences.

Figure 4. The interplay between cultural norms and structural trends.

Cultural norms	<i>Gender Sameness (sharing)</i>		Norway
	<i>Gender Difference (division)</i>	Germany Spain	Iceland
		<i>Universal Gender neutral</i>	<i>Specific Gender targeted</i>
		Structural trends	

In Norway, the system has been slowly developing with a one month father quota introduced in 1993, after years of a system which provided the parents with a freedom of choice. The father quota was put in place because men did not make use the leave the parents had to share. The Norwegian father quota is widely accepted, and it is relatively normalized. In general, each new step in Norway is preceded by research and experience, with the exception of the “cash for care” reform. That is the only reform that breaks the rule of the leveling out of gender differences.

The Icelandic way, on the other hand, was introduced abruptly. By the new father quota, Icelandic men were overnight provided with extensive rights (or in fact obligations), from having practically no rights. Thus, the reform symbolizes a bold action accomplished by the use of conscious effort. There are also differences in the utmost objectives of the father quota. In Norway the aim is to increase the caring responsibilities of the fathers, whereas the justification in Iceland was much more far-reaching. Thus, it was repeatedly expressed in the preparation phase and in the wake of the legislation that the reform was supposed not only to increase the caring responsibilities of fathers but also to eliminate the gender wage gap in a short time.

We can see from the interviews that there is a gap between the cultural norms in Iceland and the structural settings after the new reform. This discrepancy is the big challenge for the Icelandic authorities. Actions are needed on many levels, from dissemination of information and education to employers, to active promotion of new attitudes that challenge traditional gender relations and encourage men to increase their part in caring responsibilities.

This project reveals the intricate interplay between structural and cultural settings. In general, the structural framework provides opportunities and options. These can be in accordance with the cultural norms and settings, or they can be in conflict with it. The structural framework is a tool for changes, but the reforms have to be normalized since the cultural factors will have a decisive influence on how people make sense of their rights and how they make use of them.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

Centre for Women's and Gender studies, University of Iceland
Reykjavík, April 2003

Culture, custom and caring: Men's and women's possibilities to parental leave

The case study

First thing to consider

The purpose of the local level interviews is to illustrate the general and representative findings by examples, a way of supplementing existing data. The outcome of the comparative analyzes depends heavily on the general and representative information collected in each partner country.

Content of this document

The interview guide

1. Purpose and theoretical background
2. Design
3. Field work
4. Interviews
5. The report
6. References

1. Purpose and theoretical background

As a part of a European project on men's and women's possibilities to parental leave we are doing a case study. Aim of the project is to study the issue of time and gender in modern families with young children, with special emphasis on the time spent on care in different contexts. More and more people are pressed between time consuming institutions: Family and work. Corporations are farming out and subcontracting many tasks they once did permanently in-house. Jobs are being replaced by projects, leading to reduced security for employers, according to research. Parents are experiencing increasing time conflicts in everyday life (Hochschild, 2001). The project will contribute to the knowledge of how to reconcile work and family life.

The purpose of the case study is to analyze the interplay between welfare provisions, time for childcare and work, in these new and changing work arrangements. The objective then is to locate possible obstacles when it comes to reconciliation between work and family life in the sphere that is probably the most important one from the perspective of gender autonomy namely the caring of children. The project, and the dissemination of the results, will further promote new attitudes and provide encouragement for men to increase their caring responsibilities and their take-up of paternity leave.

The questions in the interview guide are based on a variety of theoretical sources. In recent years there has been a lot of activity in the field of qualitative studies. In research done by Ulla Björnberg and Anna-Karin Kollind (2002), the family is viewed as a playground for negotiations. Jo VanEvery (1995) has studied couples with in Britain. She has focused on women who reject the traditional role of wife and on the interplay between the spouses. Jean Duncombe and Dennis Marsden (1999) have studied gender division of emotion and what they call 'emotion work'.

In an Icelandic context, Þorgerður Einarsdóttir (1998, 2002) has done a qualitative study on fathers on paternity leave and their wives. She has also done a study based on interviews with Swedish doctors, nurses and assistant nurses and their spouses. Ingólfur Gíslason (1997) did a study on Icelandic fathers; beliefs and hopes of Icelandic men. Another Icelandic scholar, Rannveig Traustadóttir (1994) has studied families of children with disabilities. Her insight on different views on caring is of great help.

Inspiration has also been sought from other sources. Jessie Bernard's (1972) theory of his and hers marriage is of great help. In each marriage there are two marriages, his and hers. Men and women experience married life differently. Relations of ruling, is a term invented by Dorothy Smith (1987) to explain power and how access to power brings more power to the individual. Robert Connell's (1995) theoretical insights tells us that men are, just as women, in power and powerless; victims and doers. The aim is to de-gender social roles.

Are we mainly dealing with cultural barriers that can be eroded through campaigns? Or is it more a question of structural obstacles? If so, how can we overcome them?

Responsible for the project:

Europe Jafnréttisstofa/ Centre for gender equality, Akureyri, Iceland

Partners:

Spain University of Valencia

Germany Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Berlin

Iceland Centre for Women's and Gender studies, University of Iceland,

Reykjavík

Norway Department of Sociology and Political Science, Norwegian University of Science and Techology (NTNU), Trondheim

2. Design

2.1. Participants

Six cases will be chosen in each participating country. These consist of in-depth interviews with parents with children from the age of six months to 3 years (4 years being the maximum age if not possible to find fathers who have been on parental leave with smaller children). We will also talk to the fathers' employers (18 interviews in all).

The aim is to identify similarities and differences in the issue of time for childbirth and childcare. Time conflict, use of welfare provisions and flexible work

arrangements in different contexts on the labor market. Fathers in different occupation groups and branches reveal different configurations in the interplay between work and family life, especially regarding time and work arrangements, which are in focus in this study.

2.2. Cases

Each case includes a mother, a father and the father's employer. The mother and father should be living together, married or cohabiting. The fathers should be employed in small to medium sized firms (40-50 employees, preferably 15 employees or less) in the private and public sector (maybe more than fifty in the public sector if not possible to find a firm with fewer employees). The children should be between 6 months to 3 years of age (maximum age is 4 years old). We are not concerned if the couple has older children.

Small companies/firms (40-50 people, preferably 15 people or less)

	Public	Private
Manufacturing	X	X
Service	X	X
High tech/professionals	X	X

Find and interview one father in each company.

Companies/firms: Less than 50 people employed. Preferably 15 people or less employed.

Manufacturing: "The working class hero" – industrial worker. Traditional industry, male dominated. Examples: Food industry, construction work.

Service: Certain skill required – without a college/university degree. Mixed or female dominated. Examples: Elementary school teacher, shop assistant (examples apply to some participating countries. Educational requirements differ from country to country. Try to find companies/occupations that fit the description as closely as possible).

High tech/professionals: Knowledge work with a college/university degree. Male/female/mixed dominated workplace.

If it is not possible to find fathers that have been on parental leave (paternity or parental) then talk to those who haven't been on it and find out why. But since this is a practical research and our purpose is to make fathers, in general, excited about parental leave it is important to talk to those who have been on parental leave

Parental leave: Paternity and/or parental leave. The important thing for the purpose of our study is that the father has taken time from work to care for his child/children, paternity and/or parental.

Employer: The one who negotiates and issues the leave to the father.

Mother: Employed. No other requirements.

Before making appointments for interviews, be sure the selected parents meet the minimum requirements

If it is not possible to find cases that meet these minimum requirements, lower your standards regarding size of the firm, choose fathers that work for smaller or larger firms. If the child's/children's age is a "problem" choose an older child (maximum age four years). Try to find cases as close as possible to the description. Make a note on how and why the sample departs from the recommended design

2.3. Informants/ method

Snowballing: Look around you. Do you know anyone (fathers) who has been on parental leave? Find out if the work for those types of companies/firms we are interested in. Talk to them. Ask them if they know anyone who has been on parental leave. Let the word spread that you are looking for couples with young children, fathers who have been on parental leave.

Gain access to the companies through the fathers. Ask them to give the employer your name and briefly fill him or her in on the project. For example, they might tell the employer they are being interviewed about parenting and parental leave. Then contact the employer and set up an interview.

All interviews are personal, face-to-face, interviews. They should not be conducted through the telephone. The interviews are estimated to last for about an hour.

Ask if you can come to the parent's house and conduct the interviews. Interview the mother and father separately. Preferably in a quiet room where there are as few distractions as possible.

Conduct the employer interviews in the firm. Employer's office or a another place within the firm where there are few distractions

3. Field work

3.1. In the field

Make descriptive notes of everything: Is there anything in the field, at informants' homes and at firms, indicating particular way of doing things, particular way of thinking and conducting oneself that might be of importance? Be alert.

The people (informants etc.): How are they dressed, how do they conduct themselves during the interview? Are they defensive (arms crossed for example)? Are they authoritative, hostile? Describe

Conversations between people: Chances are we will witness some conversations, between the mother and father for example. Or between employer and employees. Are the conversations humorous, angry? Describe

The local: What does the home of the parents and children look like. Has everything been taken out of children's reach, for example. Does everything look clean and tidy or does it seem like a mess? Describe. The firm; is there anything indicating gendered

beliefs about men and women? Is there a large picture of a woman, almost naked, in the eating area, for example. Describe

Location: Rural area, small town, small city, large city or capital. Describe

(These guidelines are derived from Bogdan and Bilken, 1998).

3.2. Before and after the interview

Before the interview starts ask the informants if they have any questions. Inform them about discretion and anonymity. Ask permission to tape the interview.

Important:

-Ask all questions to everybody

-Only if the questions are completely irrelevant, or if the informant has answered the question before (maybe as an answer to another related question) then, don't ask.

After the interview ask if you may contact the informant again. There may be questions you forgot to ask or you may need to "clear" some details.

3.3. Concepts and terms

Figures: When we ask for number and percentages, mean age of employees etc. approximate figures are in order. Make a note if the informant is unsure, does not remember or does not know.

4. Interviews

This is a guide to semi-structured interviews. The top question in each section (for example, question 2 in section II) is intended to be very open ended to allow for a long answer that might hold an answer to other questions in that section. Make sure your tape recorder is in working order and that you don't run out of time. Each part of the interview is equally important.

The wording of the questions needs to be improved. The language should be simple, and the questions should remain as open ended as possible, we are not looking for yes or no answers. Some concepts need a more detailed explanation, specific for each country. When translating the interview make questions as simple and as intelligible as possible. Some explanations, definitions and examples are given in parentheses (...). Questions marked with # mean that there are two questions marked with the same number, one intended for fathers the other for the mothers.

Be alert, especially after you turn off the tape recorder. Any information given after that time might be vital. Is the person being interviewed reluctant to say certain things on the "record"?

4.1. Interview with mother or father

I. Background information.

(Basic information before we really get going! Note: See section 3.1 and 3.2 page 6).

(Note: The voice on the tape should reveal the informants biological sex, no need to ask the informants if he or she is a mother or a father.)

- 1.1) Age
- 1.2) Education
- 1.3) Occupation (job title)
- 1.4) How many children in the household/home and children's age

II. Work

(In this section we collect information on informants' connection to the labor market. Purpose: Do strong/loose ties to the labor market have any effect on care given to children, for example.)

2. Could you tell me your work history.

Examples: When did you first hold a paid job, work history connected to birth of children (full time vs. part time etc.).

(Purpose: To see how strongly people are tied to the labor market. Timeline. Ask the informant to give information dating back as long as necessary).

- 2.1) Describe the content of your work. What do you do on your job? (Describe a typical workday for example).
- 2.2) Describe how your work is organized (Examples: Hierarchy, team work, individual work).
- 2.3) Do you have management responsibility in your job? (Examples: Influence, power, autonomy).
- 2.4) What about your work is important to you?
- 2.5) How much enjoyment do you get out of work? / Do you get any enjoyment out of work?/ How joyous is your work?
- 2.6) How would you describe the morale at work? (Everyone friends, "we're just like one happy family" etc.).
- 2.7) How would you describe your relationship with your co-workers? (Friends, acquaintances. Are the co-workers like a second family? Are boundaries between home and workplace respected?).
- 2.8) Do you meet your colleagues outside work? / Is there any outside work activity among employees? Are spouses and/or children included?

III. Time use

- 3.) What are the normal working hours per week in your company?
 - 3.1) How many hours do you work per week (on average, are there any seasonal changes, etc.)?
 - 3.2) How much overtime do you work per month? What counts as overtime?
 - 3.3) If you work overtime, is it paid or unpaid?
 - 3.4) How do you experience the over-time culture at your firm? (Is there a norm that you should put in a lot of hours?).
 - 3.5) Does the firm do anything to prevent over-time?
 - 3.6) Do you expect working hours to increase in the near future?
 - 3.7) Are you content with your amount of working hours? (Work less, work more...).
 - 3.8) What are the possibilities for working part-time?
 - 3.9) What do you understand by flexibility at work? (Working hrs., work-tasks, etc.). What is positive and what is negative with flexibility?
 - 3.10) Do you work from home? How often?

- 3.11) Do you have to travel in your job? How often?
- 3.12) Do you feel you get paid accordingly/do you feel your work is valued accordingly to your effort?
- 3.13) What is your salary, what do you get paid each month? (Income before tax). (Important to find out if the couple have equal, similar incomes. Could be a stress factor in the relationship).
(Alternative question to 3.13): How is your salary compared to your partners salary? (Purpose: To get comparative figures).
- 3.14) In what ranking order would you place your work? (Note: Some informants might not even mention work but rank the family the highest. Are they being “politically correct” or is work just a way to provide for oneself and the family?).

IV. Parental leave

(In this section we collect information on the participants’ use of parental leave and beliefs about parental leave).

- 4.1) What are your rights to parental leave?
- 4.2) Did you use these rights (partly, fully)? If partly; which rights did you use? Why/why not?
- 4.3) How many days/months/years did you use?
- 4.4) How did you and your spouse negotiate when it came to use the rights to parental leave?
- 4.5) How was your leave paid for?
- 4.6) Would you choose parental leave or not in the future? (Collect information on beliefs about parental leave and find out if the mother/father plans to have more children in the future).
- 4.7) For what period of time? (Both for mothers and fathers).
- 4.8) What amount of money each month do you think is reasonable? (as a percentage of pay, for example).
- 4.9) Was your employer well informed about the parental leave rights?
- 4.10) How would you prefer the parental leave to be designed? (Both for mothers and fathers). (Examples: Pay, length, flexibility, freedom to divide more freely between partners).

V. Balancing work and family

(In this section the purpose is to collect information on how people manage daily life. Do people emphasize collective responsibility or personal responsibility for the well being of the family. Individual or societal solutions?)

- 5.) Would you describe your firm as family friendly? Why/why not?
- 5.1) How do you balance work outside the home and family life (Ask people to describe, give examples. Keywords: Flexible arrangements, shorter working hours, relatives, friends, neighbours help with children).
- 5.2) Have you chosen flexible working hours following the birth of your child/children?
- 5.3) Have you chosen shorter working hours following the birth of your child/children? (Part time work upon returning to work).
- 5.4) Is there an understanding at your workplace considering any special arrangements concerning children? (Leave of absent because children are sick, because the daycare center is closed, for example).

- 5.5) What do you think is the most fulfilling/pleasant part of the day? (Who is included-all family members or just some? Who is included/excluded?).
- 5.6) What part of the day do you feel your best? (Most relaxed, most content, happy...).
- 5.7) Are you content with the governments policies for balancing work and family? (Examples: Nursery, kindergarten, parental leave, cash for care, working time regulations, etc.).
- 5.8) What strategies would you like to see from the government in order to have a better work-family balance?

VI. Caring

(In this section we collect information on men's and women's participation in childcare. Keywords: Justice and equality, fun and boring).

- 6.) How do you care for your child; what do you do when you are with your child? (Note: Ask very concretely. Break the day into sections, ask for detailed description. Ask the informant to give you examples. Ask, for example, what did you do yesterday or today. Then ask if the day described was a typical day. Purpose: To get a precise description).
- 6.1) Before lunch?
- 6.2) After lunch?
- 6.3) In the evening?
- 6.4) #Was your spouse present when you gave birth? Were you present when your child/children were born? #
- 6.5) Can you describe the experience of caring for a child (is it a negative/positive experience)?
- 6.6) Did your life change following the birth of your child?
- 6.7) If, how? Socially – emotionally – physically - economically?
- 6.8) #Did you breastfeed your baby/babies? Did your spouse breastfeed the baby/babies? #
- 6.9) If, for how long? (Ask about all informants children, for how long each was breastfed).
- 6.10) Were you content with that amount of time? (#Did you want to breastfeed for a longer/shorter period of time? Did you want your child/children to be breastfed for a longer/shorter period(s) of time? #
- 6.11) What is caring, in your mind? (Does the informant use task-oriented phrases ore social/emotional ones? Example: Feeding and dressing vs. loving and giving attention to, etc.).
- 6.12) What is the most enjoyable thing/activity concerning your child/children? (Is the spouse also included? Are all children included? Purpose: To get idea of couples togetherness, for example).
- 6.13) What is the hardest thing/activity concerning your child/children? (Is the spouse also included? Are all children included? Purpose: To get idea of couples togetherness, for example).
- 6.14) What is the most boring thing/activity concerning your child/children? (Is the spouse also included? Are all children included? Purpose: To get idea of couples togetherness, for example).

VII. Self image

(In this section we collect information on informants self image. How does the informant see himself/herself. Is the self image based on being a parent, a spouse...If being a parent is the most important thing; that might affect relation between the spouses for example).

7.) Can you describe yourself?

7.1) As an individual (as a man/woman).

7.2) As a mother/father.

Alternative questions to 7.2

7.3) How is a good mother/father?

7.4) What do you do to be a good mother/father?

7.5) How do you experience yourself as a mother/father?

VIII. Couples' relationships

(In this section we collect information on relations between spouses. When did they become a family; when they started living together, got married, had a child. Did birth of child/children bear a significant change with it. Keywords: Justice, equality and fairness).

8.) Did it have any effect on you as a couple to have a child?/What effect did it have? (Describe, ask to give examples. Give informant some key phrases:

-Labor market participation

-Division of labor in the home/ Sharing of household tasks

-Money brought into the home

-Hours worked outside the home

-Different type of work).

8.1) If you, or your spouse, have to work overtime; how do you solve that? (Who goes home to take care of child/children? Mother, father, grandmother, grandfather...Bought help, babysitter).

8.2) Are you and your spouse married and how long have you been living together? (If married, ask when they got married, married for how many years, months).

8.3) How do you divide the household tasks between you? (Who does what, ask the informant to describe in detail who does what, to give examples. Purpose: To collect information about as many household tasks as possible).

8.4) Do you get any outside help, paid or unpaid? (Does the couple pay someone to take care of the home or do they get help from relatives, for example).

8.5) Do you think your division of domestic work is fair? (Both child care and housework).

8.6) Do you think your division of non domestic work/paid employment is fair?

8.7) Do you think that men and women are equally capable to care for young children/babies/newborns?

Is there anything I have forgotten to ask you about that you think is important?

Is there anything you would like to add or comment on?

4.2. Interview with employers

I. Background information

(Basic information before we really get going! Note: See section 3.1 and 3.2, page 6).

(Note: The voice on the tape should reveal the informants biological sex, no need to ask the informants if he or she is a man or a woman).

1.1) Position within firm (Purpose: To locate the individual within the firm, is the person being interviewed the highest ranking one within the firm or the fathers supervisor, head of a particular department in the firm).

1.2) Age

II. The firm

(In this section we collect information about the firm that might give us a good “picture” of the mothers/ fathers working environment).

2.) Can you describe the firm/company? (Purpose: To situate firm within a certain branch among other things).

2.1) What is the total number of employees at this firm?

2.2) How many men and women? (Approximately, numbers or percentages).

2.3) What positions do men hold?

2.4) What positions do women hold? (Purpose: To see if there is a vertical/horizontal segregation by gender).

2.5) Does the company have a family friendly policy?

2.6) Does the company have any strategy or program for equal opportunities between men and women?

2.7) Is there any outside work activity among the employees? / Do employees meet outside work? (Does the employer participate in those activities? Does he/she say “we do” ? Ask the informant if he/she participates. Is there a sense of togetherness? Is the employer isolated from the employees?).

2.8) If so, are the spouses included? (Is the firm family oriented?).

2.9) Are children included? (Is the firm oriented towards children? Are children welcome?).

III. Employees

(In this section we collect information on employees working conditions. Working conditions might affect possibilities to parental leave).

3.1) Is there any mandatory overtime/ opportunity to work overtime?

3.2) If so, how many hours per week? (Men – women).

3.3) Are employees on stand by? (Purpose: To see if the employees are on duty even if not at the firm, weekends, nights).

3.4) If so, how many hours per week? (Men – women).

3.5) What are the normal working hours? (Men – women).

3.6) Part time? (Men – women).

3.7) What kind of employment contracts do they have? (Describe various types of contracts. For example; time unlimited contracts, temporary contracts, fixed term contracts etc. – describe all kinds of non-standard contracts).

3.8) If any on temporary contracts – or similar contracts, how many employees are on temporary contracts (or other non-standard contracts mentioned by the informant in 3.7)?

- 3.9) If any, are there more men or women on such temporary contracts?
- 3.10) How long have the employees been with the firm, on average? (Purpose: Collect information on turnover which might give information about workers loyalty).
- 3.11) Is there a difference between men and women when it comes to turnover? (Describe the level, the pattern – and any differences between men and women).
- 3.12) What is the mean age of the employees? (Purpose: To collect information on the likelihood employees might have children/go on parental leave. Are people hired that might have children soon or who already have children?).

IV. Family status among employees within firm

(In this section we collect information about how well the employer is in the know about his employees family status in general. This information, how well aware the employer is, might affect his or her attitude towards employees).

- 4.) What is the family status/situation among employees? (Ask the informant to describe, give examples).
- 4.1) Do the employees have children?
- 4.2) How many per employee?
- 4.3) Are they married?
- 4.4) If they are, how many?
- 4.5) Are they cohabiting?
- 4.6) If they are, how many?
- 4.7) Average number of children per employee?

V. Parental leave

(In this section the purpose is to collect information about employers beliefs/attitudes on parental leave. Gendered or non-gendered beliefs. Collect general information about employees parental leave. Don't ask specifically about the mother/father in the case study).

- 5.) Can you tell me about the companies experience with parental leave? (Purpose: Is the employer negative or positive? (Note: How many employees have gone on parental leave in last years, 2, 5, 7 years, for example).
- 5.1) Has there been a time before the birth of the child/children that the employed mothers had to work less/ fewer hours?
- 5.2) If so, how do you usually solve that? (Were projects split between other employees, were projects were put on hold... ?).
- 5.3) How has the timing of the parental leaves fitted in with the firms schedules? (Fit well.... fit badly.... Please explain).
- 5.4) Who takes on the work? (Someone hired temporarily instead, were projects split between other employees, were projects were put on hold... ?).
- 5.5) If someone is hired temporarily, do you have to lay that person off?
- 5.6) If so, reason for laying off? (Purpose: What is employers attitude about laying people off, does he or she seem to have a hard time laying people off, is there regret, "it is a dirty job but somebody has to do it" attitude or some other attitude).
- 5.7) Has employees parental leave caused any problems for the firm? (Does it matter who goes on leave? Are some employees more important than others? Are there some indispensable people working for the firm?).
- 5.8) Does the company have to cover any expenses because of the parental leave?
- 5.9) If so, wage expenses?

- 5.10) Other expenses?
- 5.11) Is there a difference if it is a man or a woman who goes on parental leave? (Is it more “natural” for a woman, for example, but please don’t ask that. Collect attitudes towards absence from work).
- 5.12) Do employees that go on parental leave hold the same positions within the firm upon returning from the leave?
- 5.13) Do they ask for part time work?
- 5.14) Is there a difference if the employee goes on sick leave or parental leave?
- 5.15) Is there anything particularly positive about parental leave (mothers/fathers)?
- 5.16) Is there anything particularly negative about parental leave (mothers/fathers)?
- 5.17) Do you have any preferences when employing new people, set aside the skills required for the job? (Purpose: Does the employer prefer employing men since they don’t take as long a leave as a woman might do, for example?).

VI. Employer

(In this section the purpose is to collect information on employers self image and family status that might affect his beliefs/attitudes towards employees. Has the employer experienced caring for a child? Is the employer self assured as a leader in the firm? Does he or she “demand” loyalty from the employees?).

- 6.1) Do you have children, how many?
- 6.2) Have you gone on parental leave?
- 6.3) Education?
- 6.4) Can you describe yourself as an employer?
- 6.5) In what ranking order do you want your employees to place the firm?

Is there anything I have forgotten to ask you about that you think is important?
Is there anything you would like to add ore comment on?

5. Reports

Report (write down) what you observed in the field. Make transcripts of the taped interviews. Add observer’s comments.

So we can obtain anonymity it is very important to give each individual a synthetic name. Both given name and last name. We are trying to put individuals experiences in perspective with official statistics. So it is highly important that people will be seen as someone of flesh and blood, not a number in a report. The workplaces are also be given synthetic names.

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