



The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

Instruments to foster long-term paternal involvement in family work

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Family policies in Lithuania: childcare leave, reconciliation of family and work and child benefits as instruments to foster traditional gender roles

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1. Introduction: Lithuanian context on gender equality in family policies

Family policies address gender relations by looking at their main functions such as parenting, caring, pooling resources, maintaining work and other (Verloo, Lombardo 2007). Some earlier research on gender equality in family policies in Lithuania showed the appropriation of gender equality concepts to articulate traditional gender regime regardless the recognition of gender differences and unequal statuses in the labour market (for overview see Ocnasova, Pilinkiate Sotirovic, 2015). Research findings suggested that the gendered imbalance of sharing unpaid duties is not problematised and inequality in the private sphere is not considered in family policy debates.

Recent research shows that regardless the progress of gender equality in Lithuania gender mainstreaming is poorly integrated in the policy-making process and institutional work culture (for overview Paulauskas, 2017). The Government of Lithuania, who makes constant efforts to improve the national and local governance with regard to gender advancement, has approved legislation on equality of women and men, transposed the regulations of the EU directives into the national legislation and implemented four National programmes on equal opportunities for women and men (2003-2004; 2005-2009; 2010-2014, 2015-2021). Nevertheless, many economic and social indicators show that the real situation of women and men in Lithuania is very different and no advancement of gender equality in Lithuania could be measured in the last decade. The European Gender Equality Index¹ indicates that gender equality in Lithuania increased only 1% from 55.8 to 56.8% in the period from 2005 to 2015.² Some research indicates that economic globalisation which favours a more flexible and mobile labour force has negative impact on women's situation. Women's employment rates are lower than men, poverty level is higher, and their economic dependence increases during parental leave (Paulauskas, 2017). EIGE's Gender Equality Index shows that the gap between women and men is the highest in the field of money (45,6) and time (22,8). These figures indicate women's economic dependence and their unpaid family work on the one hand, and men's limited engagement in care work, on the other (Andrikienė, Vaičiūnienė, 2016). Research on welfare state developments highlights that changes in men's behaviour are very slow.

¹ The Gender equality index measures women and men's situation in various fields such as work, money, power, knowledge, time and health.

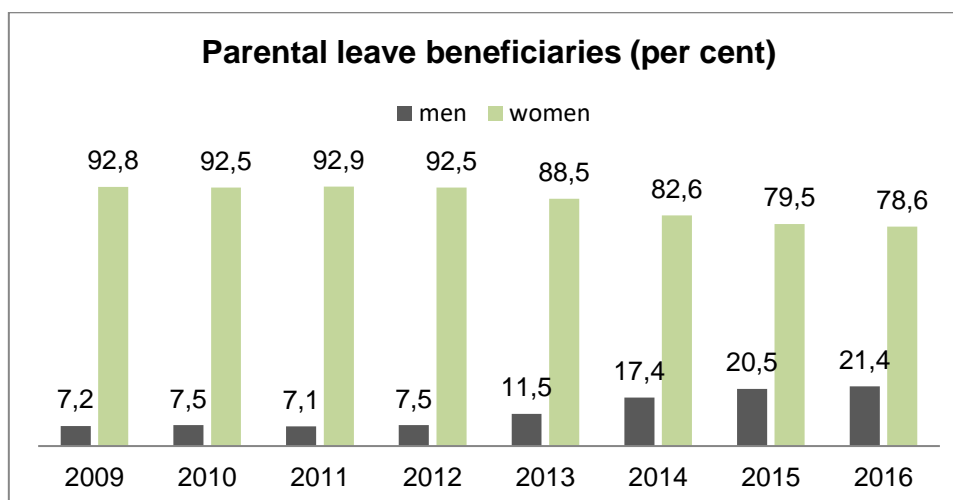
² European Gender Equality Institute. Gender Equality index, available at:
<http://eige.europa.eu/content/gender-equality-index>
<http://eige.europa.eu/content/gender-equality-index>

Men continue to bear their role of breadwinners and women's burden in care work remains very high. This hinders women's equal rights to access employment and makes pressures on them to reconcile between family obligations and work (Šarlauskas, Telešienė, 2014).

1.1. Childcare³ leave: regulations and practices

In Lithuania, child-care leave is fully institutionalised and aligned with workforce participation of women and men. Since 2011, the Law on Sickness and Maternity (Paternity) Social Insurance define the principles of paid child-care leave and provides the fixed duration for maternity leave (126 calendar days for mothers (70 days before child's birth and 56 after the child's birth), paternity leave (one month for a father from the birth of child within three months⁴, but this month usually provides a possibility for a father together with the child's mother to care of their child) and childcare (before 2017 parental) leave.⁵ Parental leave allows a parent to choose either one-year fully paid child care leave without possibility to work or two years leave with the possibility for part-time work during the second year of leave, distributing social benefits as to 70 percent of compensated salary in the first year, and 40 percent in the second year. The law also allows making shifts between mother and father in child-care leave and dividing it under their choice. Statistics⁶ in the Table 1 below demonstrates that the allocation of child-care leave between women and men remains very uneven. Women continue being the main carers in the family.

Table 1. Distribution of parental leave between women and men, 2009-2016



Source: State Social Insurance Agency, 2017.

³ In this report childcare leave and parental leave have the same meaning and are used by the author as synonyms. The concept of childcare leave was introduced very recently since 1 January 2017, before that it was a parental leave.

⁴ <http://www.sodra.lt/lt/tevystes-ismokos-naujoves>

⁵ Parliament of Lithuania (2013) Ligos ir motinystės socialinio draudimo įstatymas (Law on Sickness and maternity Social Insurance) 2013-05-09, No. IX-110 available at http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=449689

⁶ Data provided by the State Social Insurance Agency of the Republic of Lithuania for the research in the EU Project „Boys-in care: promoting the boys to pursue care professions“ in 2017. For more details see Jankauskaite, M., Pilinkaite Sotirovic, 2018.

Though a gradual increase of fathers in parental leave could be noticed, some research suggests that the existing system of parental leave does not promote fathers to undertake caring responsibilities and become full-time carers. Interviews with the experts shows that financial rationality is the main driver in the couple to decide who will take parental leave and how they will distribute it. The most unpopular scheme is full-time care for one year with 100% compensated salary. Most often, couples choose the two-year scheme with the possibility to work in the second year and receive 40% parental allowance. Though women still dominate in taking parental leave under the two-year scheme, more men embark on parental leave in the second year. As analysis of experts' interviews shows, a couple decides that a father will take parental leave in the second year with 40% parental allowance because his salary is higher. He will continue working full time and will not take caring duties. A mother will complete all the child-caring commitments and move out from active employment in the second year (Šarlauskas, Telešienė, 2014). These practices strengthen women's economic dependency and release men from caring duties. As a result, traditional family roles of men as breadwinners and women as carers have been reproduced. (Bučaitė-Vilkė, Tereškinas, 2012; Tandzegolskienė et al, 2016).

1.2. Reconciliation of family and work

Reconciliation of family and work was one of the main gender equality tasks in the gender-equality policies till 2015, however, the latest Programme of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, 2015-2021 does not cover this policy field anymore. The above mentioned law on Sickness and Maternity Social Insurance in theory indicates the possibility for reconciliation of family and work but in practice, as research shows, women are trapped in care and unpaid work (Bučaitė-Vilkė, Tereškinas, 2012; Šarlauskas, Telešienė, 2014, for overview see Šumskaitė, 2014). Quantitative research identifies a remarkable gap in distribution of paid and unpaid work along gender lines. In Lithuania women spent 4 hours less than men for paid work per week, but 14 hours more for unpaid work. Almost twice more women (34%) than men (19%) spent time for child-care every day and three times more women (79%) than men (17%) undertake all household duties such as cleaning, preparing meals, caring and other (Paulauskas, 2017).

Some researchers critically address the family policy developments in Lithuania (Kavoliunaite-Ragauskienė, 2012, Mokslo Lietuva, 2018). They argue that current state policies concentrate on institutionalisation of family concept and prioritise child allowances for families with children without incorporating tasks to ensure welfare and gender equality, reduce poverty, increase employment and provide practical opportunities to reconcile family and work.

Most recent research on reconciliation of family and work shows that both young parents have expectations to work and care when their child is born. (Tandzegolskienė et al, 2016; Diversity Development Group, 2018). Most often the respondents indicated possibilities to do work at home (distance work), work part-time, have flexible working hours, get child-benefit, access to child-care services. Parents paid less attention to family-friendly environment at work such as care facilities at work and sharing child-care with the other relatives. (Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus tarnyba, 2018).

1.3. Child-care facilities

Child-care services and their quality is another important measure for family planning and maintaining economic independence for a parent in care work. In Lithuania, however, insufficient provision of child-care services in terms of availability, affordability and flexibility affects mothers and their active participation in the labour market. Currently only 23% of children in the age up to three years old and 79% of 3-6 years old children attend the kindergartens. These numbers show that Barcelona targets are not reached yet. (Paulauskas, 2017). Some other research showed that up to 20% women withdrew from the active labour market because were denied the access to kindergarten (Maslauskaite 2013).

In the last 5 years the number of state kindergartens almost did not change, but private initiatives to open child-care facilities twice increased (Gruževskis, Čižauskaite, 2018). Limited access to kindergartens develops the milieu for private initiatives to fill-in the gap and adheres to parents' needs for care services. However, the private initiatives to provide caring services, as researchers have noticed, reproduce understanding that care is a private issue and family should solve it on their own (Gruževskis, Čižauskaite, 2018). Additionally, young parents noticed that limited accessibility and affordability of kindergartens prevent them to use child-care services. Most often access is limited due to inflexible working hours, bad geographical location of the kindergarten or denied access to the wanted kindergarten (Tandzegolskienė et al, 2016). This happens due to the absence in understanding by the government and municipal administrations that reconciliation of family and work is a gender equality target in education policies. (Gruževskis, Čižauskaite, 2018, Diversity development group, 2018). As a result, lack of child-care services affects twice more women's inactivity in labour market comparing to men.

2. Legal and policy developments

2.1. Labour Code on reconciliation of family and work

In the Sixth Periodic report to CEDAW, the Lithuanian government stated that there are all legal conditions for the reconciliation of family and work. These include: maternity (126 days) and paternity leave (30 days), child-leave (up to 3 years); the right of an employee to unpaid leave up to 14 days if brings up a child up to 14 years; flexibility in working hours, part time work, individual working time regime; an extra free day in a month for personal matters or reduced working time for two hours per week if an employee brings up either a disabled child up to 18 years old or two children up to 12 years old; or two days per month (4 hours reduced working time per week) if employee brings up three and more children. By applying these conditions for reduced working time per week or extra free day per month, an employee is entitled for his/her average wage (Ministry of Social Security and Labour, 2018). The Labour Code has the provisions to secure maternity/paternity leave and ensure the employee's right to return to the same or an equivalent job (position) after the leave. The conditions of work and wages should not be less favourable as before the leave (Ministry of Social Security and Labour, 2018).

Some earlier analysis on practical implementation of reconciliation of family and work shows that in general employers are following the provisions of the Labour Code, but

manifest certain passivity and expect that employees be active and initiate the discussions about their needs. (Tandzegolskienė et al, 2016).

2.2. Recent initiatives on child care leave

As mentioned above, from 1 July 2011 the Law on Social Insurance of Sickness and Maternity provided that the child-care leave benefit is paid after maternity leave (126 days) until the child reaches the age of one year or two years. If a parent chooses to receive this benefit until the child is one year old, then s/he is entitled to 100 percent of the recipient's compensated earnings. If a parent chooses to receive maternity (paternity) benefit until the child reaches the age of two years, the amount of this allowance is split. A parent will receive 70 percent of compensated earnings in the first year, and 40 percent in the second year. The amendment of the Law on Sickness and Maternity Social Insurance from 1 July 2014 provided that, if two or more children are born to an insured person or two or more children are adopted and the person is on the childcare leave, the maternity (paternity) benefit is increased taking into account the number of children born simultaneously or adopted. However, the total amount of benefits paid may not exceed 100 percent of the recipient's compensated earnings. From 1 January 2017, the maternity (paternity) benefit was renamed childcare benefit.

Under the current regulations a parent on childcare leave does not have a possibility to work and receive benefits in the first year of parental leave. In June 2018, the Parliament discussed the initiatives of some parliamentarians to allow a parent on childcare leave to work at least 20 hours per week in the first year of leave and simultaneously receive the childcare (parental) benefits. The parliamentarians argued that when a young couple decides to take two years scheme of child care, the first year they get only 70 percent of compensated salary without possibility to work. This means that a family loses income and faces more expenditure. Thus, the proposed amendments would provide possibilities for a parent to work part-time and receive childcare benefits and consequently improve conditions to reconcile family and work and cope with financial burdens. (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2018a).

The Parliament in Lithuania also discusses the possibilities for working grandparents to go on childcare leave and receive childcare benefits for their grandchildren. The parliamentarian who initiated this amendment argued that grandparents are better solution for young couple to take care of their child rather than a hired nanny. Additionally, the parliamentarian explained that the family ties will be strengthened if a grandparent will take care of a grandchild (Andrukaitytė, 2017). Some other parliamentarians criticise the initiative to employ grandparents in childcare work as discriminatory and not acceptable. One parliamentarian noticed that the childcare leave should be flexible to a young couple and equally shared between a mother and father, thus for Lithuanian context might fit models that work in Scandinavian countries where parents can flexible choose between each other how to divide the leave, work and better care of their child (Andrukaitytė, 2017).

Nevertheless, the Parliament of Lithuania approved the provision allowing the working grandparents to take child-care on 12 January 2018 and took effect since 1 April 2018 (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2018)

2.3. Child benefits

In 2017, the Parliament amended the Law on Benefits for Children and introduced a universal child benefit of 30 EUR per month for any child up to 18 years old (or until 21 if a child studies under the programme of general education) regardless of the income of parents. By this amendment, the government aims at strengthening solidarity between parents and reduce poverty in the country. The amendment entered into effect from 1 January 2018 (Lietuvos socialinės ir darbo ministerija, 2017). The law also provided supplementary child benefit if family income is very low and if a parent had a child in the period of studies.

There were some debates on the introduction of the universal child benefits of 30 EUR per month. The previous practice was that working parents had income tax benefits for each child until 18 years old or 21 if a child still studied under the general school programme. The tax benefits were terminated after 1 January 2018 when the amendments of the Law on Child's Benefits entered into effect. Experts analysing population policies argue that the new amendments to the law might have a short term impact and is rather symbolic measure to demonstrate the government's declaration of state's care of a family. They suggest complex measures such as flexible work arrangements, reconciliation of family and work, tax benefits and subsidies, housing programmes, accessible and affordable child-care facilities which should complement each other in order to support young families to raise children. The experts criticise that public discourse in Lithuania favours traditional gender roles in family rather than gender equality goals and social justice. The public discourses favouring traditional gender roles hinder practical opportunities to reconcile family and work, engage men in care work and plan child-rearing (Mokslo Lietuva, 2018).

3. Transferability

The finding of the most recent survey on choices to reconcile family and work in Lithuania show that 63 percent female employees and 78 percent males in public sector and 82 percent female employees and 74 percent males in private sector would consider returning to active employment in the first year of childcare leave. For this they need flexible working hours, part-time work, distance work, secured child-care leave benefit, access to childcare facilities, family friendly environment, equal share of childcare duties between partners. However, as mentioned above, the family policies in Lithuania continue to support traditional family roles, do not encourage men to undertake longer child-care leave and do not invest in public infrastructure for families. Current debates in the Parliament show that engagement of grandparents in the childcare leave is the main issue rather than introducing non-transferable share of child-care equally between mother and father.

Thus, good practice of Germany in combining different measures and implementing them in a complex way could enhance family policy discourses and developments in Lithuania. Childcare allowance in Lithuania serves as to soften economic disadvantages for missing income due to childbirth but the state needs better policy design to ensure long-term economic independence of both parents. Thus, German practices of combining complex and flexible measures such as parental allowance, parental allowance plus and partner bonuses have great potential for transferability. The practice contributes to the public discourse and family policy practices to allow working parents to spend more time with the children while compensating a part of

the loss in income. As good practice of Germany shows those complex measures also address fathers to undertake childcare and stay full time carers in family. Thus, equal share of parental roles and engagement equally in care work contributes to rethinking traditional gender roles and gendered social norms.

Good practice on development and support of institutional childcare infrastructure is a very strong incentive for transferability. In Lithuania policies of development of childcare infrastructure is assigned to the educational policies and are not integrated into discourses and policies on reconciliation of family and work, women economic independence and gender equality in general. Thus, German good practice could contribute to the Lithuanian family policy discourse by highlighting the necessity of complementary measures in reconciliation of family and work and state's investment in public infrastructure for families.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Lithuania has favourable conditions for child-care leave accessible for working parents. The parents can choose between two available schemes. They can choose either one year leave with the 100 percent of compensated earnings or two-year leave with 70 percent compensated earning in the first year and 40 percent in the second year. Fathers in Lithuania have one month of paternity leave and can take it together with the child's mother any time within three first months after child's birth. Nevertheless, research demonstrates that regardless growth of number of fathers on childcare leave, mothers continue to be main carers in the family. Usually young couples decide to undertake two-year child care scheme. Financial incentives make impact on the couple's decision for a father to take the second year of the child leave and continue to be an active in employment. Then mothers usually stay full-time carers and fully economically dependent on their spouse/partner. These childcare conditions favour traditional gender roles in family and reproduce economic inequalities of women in both public and private sphere.

Reconciliation of family and work is on the agenda of Lithuania's state family policy, however, investment in the tax benefit system and public child-care infrastructure is very limited. Though the state introduced a universal child benefit system, the allowance is very small up to 30 EUR. The tax and income benefit system is underdeveloped. Parents, as research shows, face the problems of accessibility and affordability to child-care services and consequently experiences difficulties and inner conflicts to work and complete family duties.

Summarising the experts' insights several **recommendations** could be drawn for Lithuania:

- Family policy should be based on gender equality goals that favour equal share of care duties between mother and father rather than traditional gender roles in the family.
 - Non-transferable childcare leave should be equally distributed between a mother and father. This might facilitate fathers undertake childcare leave and invest full time in care work.
 - The state should invest in childcare facilities to support families in their efforts to reconcile family and work and introduce tax and income benefits rather than single compensation in the form of child benefits.
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- Flexibility and possibilities to work part-time for both parents and receive parental allowances allowing fathers to reduce and mothers to increase their working time could be provided (transferability aspect of the German good practice).

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